

VOLUMES

1-5

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AFRICA  
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Worldmark  
Encyclopedia of  
Cultures *and*  
Daily Life

TIMOTHY L. GALL



Worldmark  
Encyclopedia of  
**Cultures and  
Daily Life**

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VOLUME 1 Africa  
Second Edition

Editors

Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby



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Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life, Second Edition

Editors: Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby

Product Management: Julia Furtaw and Carol Nagel

Manufacturing: Rita Wimberley

Gale  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

ISBN 978-1-4144-4882-4 (set)  
ISBN 978-1-4144-4883-1 (vol. 1)  
ISBN 978-1-4144-4890-9 (vol. 2)  
ISBN 978-1-4144-4891-6 (vol. 3)  
ISBN 978-1-4144-4892-3 (vol. 4)  
ISBN 978-1-4144-6430-5 (vol. 5)

ISSN 0196-2809

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Worldmark encyclopedia of cultures and daily life / Timothy L. Gall,  
editor. -- 2nd ed.  
p. cm.  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 978-1-4144-4882-4 (set) -- ISBN 978-1-4144-4883-1 (vol. 1) -- ISBN  
978-1-4144-4890-9 (vol. 2) -- ISBN 978-1-4144-4891-6 (vol. 3) -- ISBN  
978-1-4144-4892-3 (vol. 4) -- ISBN 978-1-4144-6430-5 (vol. 5)  
1. Ethnology--Encyclopedias, Juvenile. 2. Manners and  
customs--Encyclopedias, Juvenile. [1. Ethnology--Encyclopedias. 2. Manners  
and customs--Encyclopedias.] I. Gall, Timothy L. II. Title: Encyclopedia  
of cultures and daily life.  
GN333.W67 2009  
305.8003--dc22  
2009004744

This title is also available as an e-book.

ISBN: 978-1-4144-4893-0

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# PREFACE

*The Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life, Second Edition*, contains over 500 articles exploring the ways of life of peoples of the world. Arranged in five volumes by geographic regions—*Africa, Americas, Asia & Oceania* (two volumes), and *Europe*—the volumes of this encyclopedia parallel the organization of its sister set, the *Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations*. Whereas the primary purpose of *Nations* is to provide information on the world's nation states, this encyclopedia focuses on the traditions, living conditions, and personalities of many of the world's culture groups. Entries emphasize how people live today, rather than how they lived in the past.

Defining groups for inclusion was not an easy task. Cultural identity can be shaped by such factors as geography, nationality, ethnicity, race, language, and religion. Many people, in fact, legitimately belong in two or more classifications, each as valid as the other. For example, the citizens of the United States all share traits that make them distinctly American. However, few would deny the need for separate articles on Native Americans or African Americans. Even the category Native American denies the individuality of separate tribes like the Navajo and Paiute. Consequently, this encyclopedia contains an article on the Americans as well as separate articles on the Native Americans and the Navajo. Closely related articles such as these are cross-referenced to each other to help provide a more complete picture of the group being profiled. Included in this encyclopedia are articles on groups as large as the Han of China, with over one billion members, and as small as the Jews of Cochin, with only a few dozen members. Unfortunately, although the vast majority of the world's peoples are represented in this encyclopedia, time and space constraints prevented many important groups from being included in the first edition. Twenty-three new groups have been added to this second edition, and the editors look forward to including many more culture groups in future editions of this work.

New entries include in Americas: Sudanese Americans ("Lost Boys"); in Africa: Afar, Berbers, Ewe, Guineas of Guinea Bissau, Jola, Maldivians, San (Bushmen), Sao Tomeans, and Twa; in Asia and Oceania: Brunei, Coptic Christians, Kashmiris, Moro, Rajasthanis, and Timorese; and in Europe: Alsations, Kosovars, Maltese, Montenegrins, Serbs, Tyrolese, and Vlachs.

Over 175 contributors and reviewers participated in the creation of this encyclopedia. Drawn from universities, consultancies, and the press, their in-depth knowledge and first-hand experience of the profiled groups added significantly to the content of the articles. A complete listing of the contributors and reviewers together with their affiliations appears in the front of each volume.

## ORGANIZATION

Each volume begins with an introduction that traces the cultural developments of the region from prehistoric times to the present. Following the introduction are articles devoted to the peoples of the region. Within each volume the articles are ar-

anged alphabetically. A comprehensive table cross referencing the articles by country follows the table of contents to each volume.

The individual articles are of two types. The vast majority follow a standard 20-heading outline explained in more detail below. This structure allows for easy comparison of the articles and enhances the accessibility of the information. A smaller number do not follow the 20-heading format, but rather present simply an overview of the group. This structure is used when the primary purpose of an article is to supplement a fully rubriced article appearing elsewhere in the set.

Whenever appropriate, articles begin with the **pronunciation** of the group's name, a listing of **alternate names** by which the group is known, the group's **location** in the world, its **population**, the **languages** spoken, the **religions** practiced, and a listing of **related articles** in the five volumes of this encyclopedia. Most articles are illustrated with a map showing the primary location of the group and photographs of the people being profiled. The twenty standard headings by which most articles are organized are presented below.

**INTRODUCTION:** A description of the group's historical origins provides a useful background for understanding its contemporary affairs. Information relating to migration helps explain how the group arrived at its present location. Political conditions and governmental structure(s) that typically affect members of the profiled ethnic group are also discussed.

**LOCATION AND HOMELAND:** The population size of the group is listed. This information may include official census data from various countries and/or estimates. Information on the size of a group's population located outside the traditional homeland may also be included, especially for certain groups with large diaspora populations. A description of the homeland includes information on location, topography, and climate.

**LANGUAGE:** Each article lists the name(s) of the primary language(s) spoken by members. Descriptions of linguistic origins, grammar, and similarities to other languages may also be included. Examples of common words, phrases, and proverbs are listed for many of the profiled groups, and some include examples of common personal names and forms of address.

**FOLKLORE:** Common themes, settings, and characters in the profiled group's traditional oral and/or literary mythology are highlighted. Many entries include a short excerpt or synopsis of one of the group's most noteworthy myths, fables, or legends. Some entries describe the accomplishments of famous heroes and heroines or other prominent historical figures.

**RELIGION:** The origins of traditional religious beliefs are profiled. Contemporary religious beliefs, customs, and practices are also discussed. Some groups may be closely associated with one particular faith (especially if religious and ethnic identification are interlinked), while others may have members of diverse faiths.

**MAJOR HOLIDAYS:** Celebrations and commemorations typically recognized by the group's members are described. These holidays commonly fall into two categories: secular and religious. Secular holidays often include an independence day and/or other days of observance recognizing important dates in history that affected the group as a whole. Religious holidays are typically the same as those honored by other peoples of the same faith. Some secular and religious holidays are linked to the lunar cycle or to the change of seasons. Some articles describe unique customs practiced by members of the group on certain holidays.

**rites of passage:** Formal and informal episodic events that mark an individual's procession through the stages of life are profiled. These events typically involve rituals, ceremonies, observances, and procedures associated with birth, childhood, the coming of age, adulthood, and death. The impact of twenty-first century communications and global media on customs are addressed here.

**interpersonal relations:** Information on greetings, body language, gestures, visiting customs, and dating practices is included. The extent of formality to which members of a certain ethnic group treat others is also addressed, as some groups may adhere to customs governing interpersonal relationships more/less strictly than others.

**living conditions:** General health conditions typical of the group's members are cited. Such information includes life expectancy, the prevalence of various diseases, and access to medical care. Information on urbanization, housing, and access to utilities is also included. Transportation methods typically utilized by the group's members are also discussed.

**family life:** The size and composition of the family unit is profiled. Gender roles common to the group are also discussed, including the division of rights and responsibilities relegated to male and female group members. The roles that children, adults, and the elderly have within the group as a whole may also be addressed.

**clothing:** Many entries include descriptive information (size, shape, color, fabric, etc.) regarding traditional clothing (or a national costume), and indicate the frequency of its use in contemporary life. A description of clothing typically worn in the present is also provided, especially if traditional clothing is no longer the usual form of dress. Distinctions between formal, informal, and work clothes are made in many articles, along with clothing differences between men, women, and children.

**food:** Descriptions of items commonly consumed by members of the group are listed. The frequency and occasion for meals is also described, as are any unique customs regarding eating and drinking, special utensils and furniture, and the role of food and beverages in ritual ceremonies. Many entries include a sample recipe for a favorite dish.

**education:** The structure of formal education in the country or countries of residence is discussed, including information on primary, secondary, and higher education. For some groups, the role of informal education is also highlighted. Some articles may include information regarding the relevance and importance of education among the group as a

whole, along with parental expectations for children. In addition, literacy levels are described where appropriate.

**cultural heritage:** Since many groups express their sense of identity through art, music, literature, and dance, a description of prominent styles is included. Some articles also cite the contributions of famous individual artists, writers, and musicians.

**work:** The type of labor that typically engages members of the profiled group is discussed. For some groups, the formal wage economy is the primary source of earnings, but for other groups, informal agriculture or trade may be the usual way to earn a living. Working conditions are also highlighted.

**sports:** Popular sports that children and adults play are listed, as are typical spectator sports. Some articles include a description and/or rules to a unique type of sport or game.

**entertainment and recreation:** Listed activities that people enjoy in their spare time may include carrying out either structured pastimes (such as public musical and dance performances) or informal get-togethers (such as meeting for conversation). The role of popular culture, movies, theater, and television in everyday life is also discussed.

**folk arts, crafts, and hobbies:** Entries describe arts and crafts commonly fabricated according to traditional methods, materials, and style. Such objects may often have a functional utility for everyday tasks.

**social problems:** Internal and external issues that confront members of the profiled group are described. Such concerns often deal with fundamental problems like war, famine, disease, and poverty. A lack of human rights, civil rights, and political freedom may also adversely affect a group as a whole. Other problems may include crime, unemployment, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

**gender issues:** New to this edition is a section focusing on women's issues including cultural attitudes, discrimination, status, health, sexual issues, education, and work and employment. Some discussion on the group's attitudes toward homosexuality may be included in this section, where relevant.

**bibliography:** References cited include works used to compile the article, as well as benchmark publications often recognized as authoritative by scholars. Citations for materials published in foreign languages are frequently listed when there are few existing sources available in English.

A glossary of terms and a comprehensive index appears at the end of each volume.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors express appreciation to the members of the Cengage Gale staff who were involved in a number of ways at various stages of development of the *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life, Second Edition*: Christine Nasso, Barbara Beach, and Leah Knight, who helped the initial concept of the work take form; and Larry Baker and Allison McNeill, who supported the editorial development of the profiles for the first edition. Carol Nagel and Ellen McGeagh were instrumental in the planning and scheduling of the second edition of this work. Anne Marie Hacht selected the photo illustrations and provided valuable review of the entries. Marybeth Trimper,

Evi Seoud, and Shanna Heilveil oversaw the printing and binding process.

In addition, the editors acknowledge with warm gratitude the contributions of the staff of Eastword Publications—Debby Baron, Dan Lucas, Brian Rajewski, Kira Silverbird, Maggie Lyall, Karen Seyboldt, Tajana G. Roehl, Janet Fenn, Cheryl Montagna, Jeneen Hobby, Dan Mehling, Karen Ellicott, Alexander Barnes, and Elizabeth Gall—who managed interactions with contributors; edited, organized, reviewed, and indexed the articles; and turned the manuscripts into the illustrated typeset pages of these five volumes.

SUGGESTIONS ARE WELCOME: Maintenance of a work the size and scope of *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life, Second Edition*, is a daunting undertaking; we appreciate any suggestions that will enhance future editions. Please send comments to:

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# INTRODUCTION

by  
James L. Newman

Counts vary, but a conservative one for Africa would enumerate at least 1500 distinct ethnolinguistic groups, by which is meant peoples who speak recognizably different languages and identify themselves as having their own special cultural historical traditions. Since current evidence suggests humanity took its first steps in Africa, an account of how this diversity came to be could begin over four million years ago. Space, however, prohibits such a long temporal journey, and thus our starting point will be between 10,000 and 5000 years ago when the first glimmers of today's languages can be detected. Despite their large numbers, all the indigenous languages can be placed within four classifications that are termed Khoisan, Nilosaharan, Afroasiatic, and Niger Congo. Each arose within a particular regional setting, and over time went through branchings and re-branchings, often in association with migrations, that altered population distributions in substantial ways. Fueling these migrations were changes in food economies, the development of new technologies, especially iron-making, opportunities for trade, and sometimes religious affiliation.

Joining diversity and fluidity as hallmarks of Africa's peoples is complexity. Most have arisen from multiple influences, the forces and intensities of which have varied with time and place. And while some identities have hundreds of years of history to them, others have come about more recently. European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was especially important to identity formation, and the colonial era was when many of these identities crystallized. Administrators of colonies needed boundaries and they drew them, usually according to what they called tribes, which were thought to be entities rooted in some unchanging past. About this the colonialists were clearly mistaken. Nevertheless the boundaries that were drawn and the names that were employed became realities that continue to define the peoples of Africa to this day. We, therefore, cannot avoid using them in our portrayal. In a few instances, errors often involving names with derogatory connotations that were given to a group by others, have been corrected. In those instances where the changes made are generally agreed upon, the old name is noted in parentheses.

## KHOISAN

The Khoisan languages are best known for their clicks, which are implisively as opposed to explosively formed consonant sounds. The prototype of this language appears to have originated somewhere south of the Zambezi River, and then branched into others that spread throughout the region as well as into the savanna lands of eastern Africa, perhaps to as far north as the Tana River in Kenya. The peoples speaking Khoisan languages gathered, hunted, and fished for their sustenance, and fashioned tools out of stone, wood, and bone. They lived in bands that moved seasonally in response to changes in food availability and were comprised of 30–50 individuals.

Around 2000 years ago, groups residing near the Zambezi River in the vicinity of today's border between Zambia and Zimbabwe acquired sheep and goats and with them they migrated southward. Some eventually settled the rich grazing lands between the Vaal and Orange Rivers in South Africa, while others chose the equally productive lands in and around the Cape of Good Hope peninsula. Still others occupied the less fertile Karoo bush lands. Organized into loosely knit kinship alliances, these herders would become known as Khoikhoi (formerly Hottentot), while those who continued as hunters and gatherers are now referred to as San (Bushmen).

Both Khoikhoi and San were soon challenged by others with superior technologies. In the first centuries AD, Iron Age Bantu-speaking farmers began arriving from the north, claiming most of the better agricultural lands of the Transvaal and Natal. Then in the 1650s, Europeans took up residence at the Cape, from where they expanded inland, staking out huge land claims to support the pastoral economy they had developed. Displacement, conquest, and disease all took their tolls on the Khoisan peoples, and today only a few groups in southern Africa, such as the well known !kung San of Botswana, survive as distinct cultures. In eastern Africa, the Sandawe and Hadza of Tanzania attest to the once widespread Khoisan presence there.

## NILOSAHARAN

Ten thousand years ago, the climate of northern Africa was much wetter than it is today and the area we now call the Sahara Desert contained numerous large lakes and river valleys. The rich and varied aquatic resources these provided supported growing populations, that included the ancestors of Nilosaharan speakers. During the course of the next several thousand years, their economies were enriched by the addition of livestock, especially cattle, and then shortly thereafter the cultivation of sorghums and millets. This allowed them to expand southward into the savannas bordering the equatorial rainforest, the region of Central Sudanic language family formation. Nilosaharans also occupied the grasslands and marshlands surrounding the White Nile River valley of the southern Sudan, where the Nilotic peoples, including the Nuer and Dinka, came into being. Cattle had high economic and cultural value, and competition between groups for grazing grounds and water led some groups to move southward and into the savannas of eastern Africa. The migrations began as early as 500 BC and continued into the nineteenth century, giving rise to, among others, the Samburu, Masaai, Karamajong, and Luo, and adding to the composite that would become the Tutsi.

Other Nilosaharan migrations produced today's Nubians of the Nile Valley between Aswan and Khartoum. These migrations took place in several stages during the first centuries AD, with earlier residents being either absorbed or displaced.



Another series of Nilosaharan migrations led to the formation of the Kanuri peoples of the Lake Chad region, who founded the state of Kanem-Bornu about AD 1000. Using profits derived from trans-Saharan trade, the state remained a regional power for more than 800 years.

Within and around the Sahara, however, the Nilosaharans lost ground. From the east came Afroasiatic-speaking peoples, while those of Niger Congo affiliation encroached from the west. Notable survivors include the Songhai along the bend of the Niger River, who formed the core of the extensive 16th century state of the same name, and the Tibbu of the Tibesti Mountains in Chad.

## AFROASIATIC

The Afroasiatic languages most likely originated in northeastern Africa somewhere between the Red Sea and Nile River. From there they have spread across a roughly crescent-shaped area extending from Kenya northward, and then westward to Morocco. One of the languages was Ancient Egyptian as seen in the hieroglyphics left behind by Pharonic Egypt. Already a highly populated area during Stone Age times, densities along the banks of the Nile River north of Aswan rose rapidly after the adoption of agricultural methods of food production some 7000 years ago. These were introduced from sources in the adjacent Levant, and included wheat and barley, as well as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs. About 2000 years later, the many agricultural villages that dotted the landscape were politically united under the First Dynasty, beginning a span of Pharonic rule, culture, and technological achievements that would last nearly 3000 years.

South of Egypt was Nubia, an enigmatic land about which far less is known. It clearly absorbed many influences from the north and was raided regularly by Egyptians for its gold and other precious commodities. This sometimes produced considerable dislocation, including the nearly complete abandonment of sections of land from time to time. A high point was reached early in the second millennium BC with the founding of the Kingdom of Kush centered on the Dongola region of the Nile between the third and fourth cataracts. Who the founders were is unclear. The surviving inscriptions are in Egyptian, but it is unlikely that this was the everyday language of the people. Given the location, though, some branch of Afroasiatic seems most probable.

Farther south still, Ethiopia became home to the Cushitic languages. A central branch emerged in the highlands among grain cultivators who domesticated teff (a cereal grass) and finger millet (eleusine). Between 4000 and 3500 years ago, Semitic speaking immigrants from south Arabia started settling among them. One result was the introduction of Judaism, which came to distinguish people who today call themselves Beta Israel (Falasha). A broader cultural synthesis also took place and produced the peoples who founded the kingdom of Aksum. These were the ancestors of the Tigrinya, who, during the first half of the first millennium AD, built one of the world's great powers. They did so by controlling the eastern end of a lucrative Indian Ocean trade in precious commodities that included gold, ivory, and, so it seems, the biblically famous frankincense and myrrh. At its height, Aksum's territorial control extended from the confluence of the White and Blue Niles across the Red Sea to south Arabia. In the fourth century AD, the Monophysite version of Christianity became Aksum's

official religion, thus making Ethiopia one of the world's oldest and longest enduring Christian strongholds. The kingdom began to decline in the sixth century, but it left a tradition that had spread throughout the highlands and would be revived by succeeding dynasties, the last being that formed in the nineteenth century under Amhara rule.

Other branches of Cushitic developed in the lowlands among herding peoples such as the Beja, Somali, and Oromo. Beginning in the eighth century, they took Islam as their predominant religion, setting in motion a regional contest between the two universal faiths that has persisted to this day.

The area west from the Egyptian Nile to the Atlantic coast became home to a multitude of Berber-speaking groups. They were initially grain farmers and herders of sheep and goats who found the fertile valleys and slopes of the Atlas Mountains a conducive environment. Others, however, developed economies more dependent on cattle and camels, the latter of which allowed them to extend into desert oases, often at the expense of pre-existing Nilosaharan communities. The most expansionary were the Tuareg, who established themselves in the Ahaggar Mountains and Air Highlands. From these bases, they controlled many trans-Saharan trade routes and also regularly raided settled communities south of the desert for slaves and other goods.

The impetus of Afroasiatic expansion carried some groups beyond the desert and into northern Nigeria. These would form into the Chadic peoples, with the Hausa attaining predominance. They lived in nucleated villages, with the most successful growing into fortified towns that exercised control over the surrounding countryside in a feudal-like arrangement of lords and their dependents. The largest towns were Gobir, Katsina, Zaria, and Kano, which by the thirteenth century had become major centers of both intra- and interregional trade. Each had its own area of influence and remained independent of the others. Hausa specialties were trade and skilled craft work, especially in leather, metals, and textiles. Many Hausa migrated beyond their homeland, seeking opportunities to practice their skills.

Arabic belongs to the Semitic family of Afroasiatic, and its speakers first entered Africa in large numbers with the Islamic armies that conquered the northern coastal region of the continent in the seventh century. Attacks were focused on the major cities, such as Alexandria, Cyrene, and Carthage, that had become largely Christian during Roman and Byzantine times. By this time, both empires were crumbling and the Islamic armies met little organized resistance. The soldiers were followed by holy men who went inland making converts among the Berbers. Later, other Muslim Arabs entered as nomads (Bedouin), with the major migrations occurring between the ninth and eleventh centuries. These appear to have been prompted by worsening drought conditions that had hit the Arabian peninsula. Considered by civil officials as a destabilizing factor to local economies, the nomads were forced to keep moving westward. As they did so, the Berbers lost ground, except in the mountains, where they remained dominant. In the lowlands of Morocco, an Arab/Berbers synthesis took place, creating the Maures. From here they moved southward to as far as the Senegal River valley. Also losing ground were followers of Christianity, who all but disappeared from northern Africa. The Monophysite Copts of Egypt were the exception. Though

Arabic-speaking, they resisted Islam and have continued as an important minority even to this day.

The creation of northern Africa as a region of Arab peoples dates from these events. In point of fact, however, the numbers of immigrant Arabs were never that great relative to Egyptians, Berbers, and others. Instead, many people consciously changed their identities. Arabic had become the language of political and economic opportunity and not to speak it would put one at a disadvantage. Similarly, adopting Islam was beneficial. It often was synonymous with being Arab and also linked a person to a wider and usually ascendant world of culture and commerce. The advantages continue attracting new adherents to Islam to this very day.

## NIGER CONGO

The Niger Congo languages currently are more numerous and cover a larger area than all others combined. They have achieved this status as a result of migrations and subsequent divergences from a nuclear area north of the savanna/rain forest boundary in what is now Nigeria and Cameroon. A westward expansion took these peoples to the upper reaches of the Niger and Senegal rivers, where they developed agricultural systems based on fonio (a grass) and African rice. Here they seem to have encountered Nilosaharan communities, who they eventually displaced, except for the Songhai. They were proto-Mande speakers who in the late centuries BC created a series of small trading-based states based upon occupational specialties in farming, fishing, and livestock herding. The best known site is that of Jenne-jeno located within the agriculturally rich inland delta of the Niger River. It was part of a larger regional trading network that included manufactured items in stone, iron, and copper.

Jenne-jeno and others centers like it were the direct fore-runners of a series of kingdoms and empires that would flourish within the region. The first that we know of was Ghana. Founded by speakers of the Soninke branch of Mande, it was already well established when described by a Muslim visitor near the end of the eighth century. Ghana grew to prominence by controlling trade in salt and gold. The salt came from mines in the western Sahara and was in demand throughout the salt-poor savanna and forest regions of western Africa. Gold, on the other hand, came from an area along the upper Senegal River known as Bambuk. It was traded across the Sahara following routes that had existed since Carthaginian and Roman times and was used by the Ghanaian royalty as symbols of their status. Accompanying gold across the Sahara were slaves, the demand for which rose following the Arab conquest of northern Africa. Used primarily as domestics and soldiers, they were valued both here and throughout southwestern Asia.

Ghana's successor was Mali. Founded by another Mande people, the Malinke, Mali reached its apogee during the middle of the fourteenth century. Prior to this Mali's leaders had become Muslims, and they made centers such as Timbuktu and Djenne famous throughout the Islamic world for their mosques, holy men, and scholars. From these and other towns, merchants traveled throughout western Africa. Many settled permanently beyond Mali's borders, creating in the process groups that would be known as Wangara, Dyula, Marka, and Yarre.

An expansionary state, at its height Mali stretched from the headwaters of the Senegal and Niger rivers, eastward to be-

yond the bend of the Niger, and northward into the Sahara. As a result of this great size, it incorporated many non-Malinke, which toward the end of the fourteenth century resulted in the eruption of serious factionalism. Unable to control these forces, Mali lost provinces one by one, until it finally disappeared in the sixteenth century. Taking its place as the preeminent regional power was Songhai, mentioned earlier. Its wealth and Islamic fame were even greater than Mali's, but it too was soon plagued by internal factionalism. Then in the 1590s, Songhai was invaded by forces of the Sultan of Morocco, who was seeking to control the sources of gold supplying the trans-Saharan trade. The Songhai armies were routed, despite their superior numbers. Songhai arrows and spears were no match for the Moroccan's harquebuses (early type of firearm) and muskets. With the army gone as protection, the Songhai state collapsed.

There was no immediate successor to Songhai. Instead, this portion of Africa would now be characterized by smaller, more ethnically homogeneous polities. One was Takrur, which developed along the lower and middle reaches of the Senegal River valley. It was founded by Tukolor-speakers of the Atlantic branch of Niger Congo sometime during the latter half of the first millennium AD, when it also became the first polity south of the Sahara to embrace Islam as the state religion. This served as a powerful force to preserving its unity, as did ethnic homogeneity resulting from a lack of imperial ambitions.

From Tukolor origins sprang the Fulbe or Fulani. They had adopted a cattle-oriented way of life, probably as a result of contacts with Berber-speaking nomads who had reached the area of the Senegal River valley sometime prior to AD 1000. Initially a part of Takrur, the Fulbe began moving out in search of grazing lands to support their growing herds. One route took them into the Fouta Djallon highlands, where they settled among resident Dyalonke farmers, providing livestock products in exchange for grazing rights and agricultural produce. Another route taken was along the Niger River, which brought them into the orbits of Mali and Songhai. Here they also established exchange relationships with farmers, a pattern that would be repeated many times over as they continued moving eastward, eventually reaching Hausaland. While on their moves, some Fulbe took up residence in towns and adopted Islam. They then converted the herders and the Hausa as well, it seems. The two would form a powerful alliance and help spread Islam throughout the savanna zone of western Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Other important local polities that had formed early on and became locally important after the fall of Songhai were those of the Mossi, Mampruli, Dagomba, Woloff, and Serer. Each has served as a source of continuing ethnic identity.

Another area of Niger Congo consolidation and expansion took place in the savanna/rain forests borderlands near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. Between 5000 and 4000 years ago, the people living here began to grow yams and oil palm to supplement gathering, hunting, and fishing. Population growth followed, leading to the formation of the Kwa and Benue Congo languages. Members of the Kwa family moved westward, eventually reaching the Bandama River, where a boundary with Mande speakers was formed. Once again under the impetus of trade, certain areas emerged as population centers. Several were close to the original Kwa hearth in Nigeria. One is represented by the archeological site of Igbo-Ukwu, located near the present city of Onitsha. It shows a relatively

large population having existed by the ninth century AD, plus artifacts that came from as far away as the Mediterranean. From all accounts, this was the homeland of the Igbo (Ibo) peoples, who, over the course of the next centuries, would colonize much of the area of what is now southeastern Nigeria.

The present-day Yoruba trace their ancestry to Ife, a town-like settlement also dated to the late first millennium AD. It apparently developed at a highly strategic location that allowed Yoruba population numbers to grow and support the founding of other towns both to its north and south. That the Yoruba were highly prosperous during these times is evidenced by the large number of towns that served as centers for local kingdoms and by the quality products that were manufactured from ivory, bronze, copper, iron, and leather.

Roughly contemporaneous with Igbo-Ukwu and Ife was Benin, founded by Edo-speaking peoples. Unlike, the others, however, it grew to dominate surrounding settlements, creating a wider Benin state by early in the fifteenth century. With trade routes that reached the Hausa city states and even Songhai, Benin achieved a regional military and economic dominance that continued for several centuries to come.

Farther west, a fourth Kwa cluster developed in north central Ghana. By the eleventh century there is evidence of the existence of a substantial farming population that is thought to be associated with the origins of the Akan family of Kwa. They were connected by trade in gold and kola nuts to Ghana and Mali and this led them to expand southward into the rain forest seeking sources. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a number of small, localized states had formed, but they were soon superseded in importance by Asante. Centered on Kumasi, the Asante developed a powerful kingdom whose expansion triggered the relocation of smaller groups throughout the region.

From the sixteenth through early nineteenth centuries, population developments throughout western Africa were influenced in many ways by the transatlantic slave trade. It began modestly enough with the Portuguese bartering for slaves along the Senegambia coast with the resident Woloff, Serer, and Malinke. A favorite holding point was Gorée Island. The Portuguese also traded with Akan merchants, using the fort they had built at Elmina for the storage of gold as a base of operation. The Portuguese attempted to interest Benin in supplying slaves, but its rulers showed little interest, preferring instead to keep captives for their own labor supply needs.

Demand began to accelerate toward the end of the sixteenth century, when the Dutch, French, British and others entered to supply the new plantation-based economies of the Caribbean and Brazil. It continued to grow during the seventeenth century and then reached its peak in the eighteenth century when on average 40,000 slaves were removed per year. A decline in the value of slaves due to a shift away from plantations in the Caribbean and rising abolitionist sentiments, particularly in Great Britain, caused the numbers to begin falling in the first decades of the nineteenth century and by mid-century the trade in slaves from western Africa was all but over.

Disagreements about the total number of Africans taken across the Atlantic as slaves continue to exist. It was certainly more than ten and maybe closer to fifteen million, with more than half having been obtained from sources in western Africa. The area that experienced the biggest loss by far ran from what is now the coast of Benin to Calbar, east of the Niger

River delta. A secondary area was the Gold Coast. Somewhat less debatable are impacts of the slave trade. Overall, during its existence, population growth seems to have stagnated, but this hides a pattern of winners and losers. The winners, at least in population numbers and regional influence, were the better organized and militarily more powerful polities. Among these were the Igbo, Yoruba, and Asante. Rising to prominence largely as a result of slave-trading activities was the Fon state of Dahomey, which by the end of the eighteenth century contended with the Yoruba state of Oyo for regional dominance.

The losers were smaller communities, some of which completely disappeared as distinct entities. A particularly hard-hit area was the so-called “middle belt” that lay between the coastal powers and those in the interior such as the Hausa and Mossi. Even today, the area is characterized by comparatively low population densities.

Politics and economics were other spheres to feel the slave trade’s impacts. More authoritarian regimes emerged, backed by the guns and armies they now possessed, and agriculture and manufacturing both declined. They did so because of dislocations that those being raided experienced and because the profits from selling slaves proved far greater than those that could be earned in any other way.

Developments within Benue Congo would have even more far ranging repercussions. These were mostly due to Bantu migrations, which carried its speakers east and south to reside in virtually half of the continent. Their migrations began about 5000 years ago from the vicinity of the Cross River valley. Skilled as fisher folk and hunters, they had begun cultivating yams and other crops, and this combination of activities seems to have stimulated population growth and a need for new lands. Some groups moved east through the moist woodlands that bordered the northern margins of the equatorial rain forest. By 3000 years ago, vanguards had reached the rich agricultural lands between lakes Albert and Edward and Victoria. Here a new Bantu population nucleus formed that would serve as a source for numerous and highly complex migrations. Some led elsewhere in eastern Africa, while others took Bantu speakers to South Africa in the first centuries AD.

Apparently, what kept the Bantu moving east was a concurrent expansion of another Niger Congo linguistic group, the Ubangians. They started off with a food economy similar to the one practiced by Bantu, but enriched it with grains and livestock gained from contacts with Central Sudanic groups living to their north. The early Ubangians consolidated their position north of the equator and later branched into such modern groups as the Zande, Mangbetu, and Nzakara.

Meanwhile, other Bantu migrants had taken more southerly routes that led into the equatorial rainforest. Following river valleys, they established villages wherever the right combination of fertile soils for their crops, rich fishing grounds, and hunting opportunities could be found. This brought them into contacts with pygmoid gatherer/hunters who had entered the forests thousands of years earlier. The contacts, for the most part, do not seem to have been hostile ones. Instead, cooperative relationships were established in which the pygmoids supplied the villagers with products from the forest in exchange for agricultural commodities and manufactured goods. So close did these contacts become that whatever languages the pygmoids spoke were replaced by those spoken by the villagers with whom they associated. In time, the growth of Bantu

numbers resulted in a decline in forest lands available to the pygmoids and today only a few groups such as the Mbuti and Twi remain as distinctive populations.

An important key to Bantu success was their use of iron tools. With them in hand, they could clear and cultivate more land and fashion superior arrow points and spearheads. Two sources for their adoption of iron making technologies can be identified. One is Taruga near the margins of the Jos Plateau in Nigeria. Furnaces and slag deposits have been dated to between 700–400 BC and the technologies of iron making seem to have spread from here in all directions, including to the Bantu. The second is in Buhaya in the interlacustrine region, with dates that are only a couple of hundred years later. No direct links to Taruga have been established, so developments are thought to have been independent.

Once through the rainforest, the routes followed by Bantu migrants headed in many directions and interconnected with those coming from eastern Africa. Eventually particular areas emerged as centers of population concentration. One was in the interlacustrine region, where agricultural productivity was greatly enhanced by the adoption of plantains and bananas. These had been domesticated in southeast Asia and reached the Bantu here from still unknown sources some 2000 years ago. Populations grew and by 600 to 700 years ago kingdoms had begun to form, the most prominent becoming those of Bunyoro, Buganda, Nkore, Rwanda, and Burundi. In the latter two, a cattle-based aristocracy developed from a synthesis of migrant Nilotic herders and Bantu. They would become known as Tutsi, while the vast majority of the people took on the identity of Hutu.

Other Bantu clusters in eastern Africa emerged in the highlands, especially around Mt. Kenya, producing the closely related Kikuyu-Meru-Embu peoples. Mt. Kilimanjaro became home to the Chaga, the Usambara Mountains to the Shambaa, while the uplands north of Lake Malawi were settled by the Nyakyusa. Later migrations into less fertile lowlands would produce such peoples as the Hehe, Gogo, Turu, and Nyamwezi. From the rift valley of Kenya to central Tanzania, contacts between Bantu and Nilotes were common. These contacts sometimes erupted into conflict, but for the most part, relations were peaceful and based on exchanges of livestock products for grains and other produce of Bantu fields.

Beyond eastern Africa, Bantu migrations also led them first to the most productive agricultural lands. This explains their early presence on the Transvaal, where numerous Sotho-Tswana groups developed, and along the coast and hills of Natal, which is where the Nguni settled. The polities among both remained small and basically self sufficient until the end of the eighteenth century when the Nguni Zulu began to expand. Their *impi*, or army, developed new means of warfare that allowed them to expand at the expense of neighboring groups during the first half of the next century. Destruction and dislocations often followed Zulu victories, producing what became known as the *mfecane* (scattering). Some groups completely disappeared from history, while in other instances, new ones, such as the Mfengu and Basotho, formed from the survivors.

Good quality agricultural land also accounts for the initial prosperity of the Shona of Zimbabwe. Their rise to regional prominence, however, had more to do with trade, particularly in gold. The ability to monopolize it led to the formation of the city state of Great Zimbabwe, which prospered from the

twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. Thick stone walls were built to house a nobility that shipped the gold to Arab and Swahili merchants at the ports of Sofala and Kilwa in exchange for luxury items such as silks, carpets, and porcelain wares. When Great Zimbabwe lost its trade centrality to other Shona states, notably Mutapa and Batua, it went into decline and was eventually abandoned.

Another people who took advantage of the combination of productive agriculture and trade were the Kongo who resided along the banks of the lower Congo River. The kingdom they formed was already a regional power when visited by the Portuguese near the end of the fifteenth century. Commercial relations were established and the two nations even exchanged diplomatic personnel. Ivory and beeswax were traded at the outset, but early in the next century the Kongo had turned to selling slaves. Initially, this enhanced their position, but soon led to internal and external competition that resulted in the kingdom's demise in the seventeenth century.

The slave trade would continue to impact central Africa until after the middle of the nineteenth century. It fueled both the transatlantic trade, which from here supplied mainly Brazil, and a growing domestic demand for slaves by those powerful enough to secure them, such as the Ovimbundu, Lunda, Chokwe, and Lozi. By the nineteenth century it was closely tied to the ivory trade, which not only reached the Atlantic coast, but the Indian Ocean one as well. The disruptions caused by the slave trade were far greater than those experienced in West Africa and produced considerable population loss among those preyed upon. Among the hardest hit were Ubangians whose isolation kept them secluded until the middle of the nineteenth century when they were the targets of slavers coming from Khartoum.

## OTHERS

There are other African peoples who derive either completely or partially from non-indigenous sources. Among those who became regionally prominent are Afrikaners, Coloureds, Swahili, Creoles, and Americo-Liberians.

Afrikaner (language Afrikaans) origins are traceable to the employees sent out by the Dutch East India Company in 1652 to establish a supply station at Cape Town for ships on their ways to and from southeast Asia. Small numbers of Dutch and other Europeans, mostly French Huguenots, continued to arrive for the next several decades, but by the turn of the century, immigration had pretty much come to an end. Those who took up farming were called Boers, and as land became increasingly scarce around Cape Town, they began moving inland, at the expense, as noted, of Khoikhoi and San. Continuing expansion led them finally to contacts with Xhosa early in the eighteenth century, initiating a series of border wars that would continue for more than 100 years.

Meanwhile, the British had superseded the Dutch at the Cape. Seeking to escape what they perceived as alien and hostile rule, thousands of Afrikaners began leaving in the early 1830s in what became known as The Great Trek. Joined by others who had wearied of constant strife with the Xhosa, they headed north across the Orange River and into the Transvaal. Here they found ideal grazing lands for their herds, much of which had been depopulated as a result of the *mfecane*.

The so-called Coloured people of South Africa also have their origins in policies initiated by the Dutch East India Com-

pany. To augment the labor force at Cape Town, it imported some slaves from elsewhere in Africa and then turned to sources on the Indian sub-continent and the islands of Indonesia. Sexual liaisons among them produced mixed children, as did those between Europeans and slaves, Europeans and Khoikhoi, and slaves and Khoikhoi. Some formed new groupings, such as the Rehoboth and Griqua, and most became self-consciously Afrikaner in culture, speaking Afrikaans, following the Dutch Reformed religion, and taking Afrikaner names. Eventually, all of these peoples of mixed backgrounds would be grouped together as Coloureds.

Swahili is a Bantu language, the origin of which can be traced to people who lived in small villages centered on the lower Tana River of Kenya during the first centuries AD. Some of these villages began to trade with merchants from the Arabian peninsula, who had for centuries beforehand taken advantage of the seasonal monsoons to sail between there and the Persian Gulf. The most successful grew into towns that between the ninth and twelfth centuries had produced a class of mercantile rulers who fashioned an urban culture to distinguish them from others. Included were Islam and a new language that would soon become known as Swahili. The name comes from Arabic, which had begun adding vocabulary to the language, and translates as "people of the coast."

Towns such as Pate, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, and Rhapsa flourished from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, but then went into decline as a result of Portuguese interventions and unstable conditions in their hinterlands that disrupted trading activities. They were revived when the Sultan of Oman decided to relocate his capital to Zanzibar in 1832 in order to better control the sources of ivory and slaves that had become so important to Oman's prosperity. The now substantial Arab presence led to considerable cultural borrowing by the Swahili that included claims of direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad, the incorporation of many more Arabic words, the

use of Arabic script, and styles of dress and building. From their coastal locations, Swahili now traveled inland for the first time, establishing small communities at key commercial locations and with them went their language as a commercial lingua franca.

The Creoles of Sierra Leone are the result of population relocations that took place at the site of Freetown. The first wave landed in 1787. They were black loyalists who had fled to England at the time of the American War of Independence. Following were other refugees, such as Maroons (escaped slaves) from Jamaica, but the largest contribution came from slaves who had been freed from ships captured by the British. (The British had made slavery illegal throughout the empire in 1833 and established an anti-slavery squadron to patrol the coast of West Africa.) This new population from many diverse backgrounds created its own language called Krio and took on a strong British-based culture. They specialized in trade and from Freetown moved along the coast to wherever they could find profitable opportunities to exploit.

A second people who owe their existence to anti-slavery sentiments and activities are the Americo-Liberians. With support from an organization known as the American Colonization Society, a small number of freed American slaves was landed at Cape Mesurado in 1822, and they called their new settlement Monrovia. It grew slowly but surely and in 1839, Monrovia along with several other settlements that had formed, united to create the Commonwealth of Liberia, which secured its political independence in 1848. The Americo-Liberians modeled their constitution after that of the United States and developed a very strongly Americanized culture under the influence of Baptist missionaries.

# AFAR

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Danakil or Adal (older sources)

**LOCATION:** The Afar Triangle or Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia)

**POPULATION:** Between 3 to 5 million (accurate census figures do not exist)

**LANGUAGE:** Afar (Qafar Af)

**RELIGION:** Sunni Muslims, Traditional Animism, few Christians<sup>333</sup>

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Djiboutians; Eritreans; Ethiopians; Oromos; Somalis

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Afar are an ethnic group who reside principally in the the Horn of Africa in the countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. The name Afar means “The Best” or “First” in the Afar language. Northern Afars are sometimes referred to by the Arabs as the Danakil, which refers to Danakil Desert near the Red Sea in Ethiopia and Eritrea, Southern Afars are sometimes called the Adel or Adal, a reference to the historic Adal Sultanate, which existed until the mid-1500s in the region occupied today by southern Ethiopia and Djibouti. Afars regard the name Danakil as negative and preferred it not be used to describe them.

Little is known for certain about the origins of the Afar. According to traditional accounts, there are two divisions of the Afar: *Asayahamara* (The Red Ones) and *Adoyahmara* (The White Ones). It may be that the Asayahamara are descended from a group that originally invaded from the Ethiopian highlands and who imposed their rule on the Adoyahmara.

The Afar make up about a third of the population of Djibouti and are a recognized ethnic group in Ethiopia. The Afar language (Cushitic) is spoken in the Afar region of Ethiopia, eastern Eritrea, and Djibouti. Since the Afar were traditionally nomadic herders, Afar-speakers may be further south.

The language and culture of the Afar are related to those of the Somalis and Oromos, although the Afar are a distinct ethnic group. The Afar continue to preserve and practice their traditional culture and beliefs. They have retained many ancient animistic practices.

The Afars’ skin tone is generally dark brown and their facial features are similar to those of the Somalis and Oromos, although generally members of both of those groups have darker skin. The Afar are probably related to the ancient Egyptian race.

Little has been confirmed about the history of the Afar people. J. S. Trimingham, author of *Islam in Ethiopia*, offered this explanation: “Little is known about the the Afar because of their aversion to strangers. They didn’t let outsiders in, so outsiders didn’t learn much about them.”

The ancestors of the Afar seem to have settled in farmland in the Ethiopian highlands some time before AD 1000 and primarily raised livestock. Shortly after they began a gradual transition to a more nomadic lifestyle and moved to the area they currently occupy. Since then they have been involved in many conflicts with bordering tribes and peoples.

Arab writer Ibn Sa’id writing in the 13th century, mentioned the Afar. This is the earliest known reference to the

group. The Afar are also mentioned occasionally in Ethiopian history. Records include mention of Afar assisting 14th-century Ethiopian emperor Amda Seyon in a campaign. Afar are also described as assisting Emperor Baeda Maryam more than 100 years later in the 15th century.

The Afar themselves claim to be descended from Arabs, through a mythic Yemeni ancestor. This myth of origin seems unlikely, since the two groups do not share a common race, language, or culture.

The Afar language, however, and their traditional religious practice of animism points to a common history with neighboring peoples in the Horn of Africa. No written Afar records exist from previous eras.

Historically, the territory occupied by the Afar was organized into sultanates, semi-independent regions ruled by sultans. In each sultanate, the group’s unique culture and customs thrived. Traditionally each sultanate was made up of several villages.

The Afar maintained a loose confederation of four sultanates. The sultans did not gain their position through heredity, but were appointed by the people.

Each Afar sultan was the religious and political leader of his clan. The Afar generally do not become involved in central political governments. They are not interested in pursuing opportunities presented to them by outsiders, although in recent years they have been cautiously open to offers of aid in such areas as medical care and to programs to improve the safety of drinking water. Throughout history, the Afar have strongly resisted domination by others, and this tradition continues into the 21st century.

The Afar have been active in Muslim-led military campaigns against the Christians who inhabited the highland regions of Ethiopia. In the 16th century, Afars fought in support of Ahmad Gran, the emir of Harar, who was attempting to establish a Muslim empire in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia).

In the 19th century, the Afar also fought with the Muslim forces of the Adal kingdom, which stretched across what is now northeastern Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia. The Muslims were battling with the Amhara.

The Afar were also active in the Arab slave trade, serving as guides to Arab slave traders. A major slave route to Arabia crossed Afar territory. Afars continued to participate in the lucrative slave trade until 1928 (or later according to some accounts).

Since the mid-1800s and especially in the 20th and 21st centuries, interaction with external political and economic systems has caused the breakdown of the sultanates and the traditional values they represented.

The leadership of the Afar National Regional State in Ethiopia has faced many challenges as the traditional customs and culture of the Afar come under the influence of Western groups and other African cultures. During the early years of European colonization in Africa, the Afar coastal regions (part of present-day Eritrea) witnessed several battles. The Afars demonstrated tenacity and bravery in resisting the advancements of foreign forces.

The presence of foreign forces in the coastal regions of their territory threatened the sovereignty of the entire Afar nation. However, the Afars were no match for the Europeans equipped with high technology weapons. Despite persistent resistance from Afar fighters, Europeans succeeded in occupying the



coastal territory. As a result of the European presence, the Afar people were divided. The modern-day nations of Djibouti and Ethiopia (and later Eritrea) resulted.

In 1967, the territory colonized by the French changed its name from “French Somaliland” to the “French Territory of the Afars and Issas.” In 1977, it became the independent nation of Djibouti.

In 1975 after an Afar sultan led an unsuccessful attempt to restore sovereignty, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) was born in Ethiopia. In Djibouti, a similar movement simmered throughout the 1980s, eventually culminating in an Afar insurgency in 1991.

Groups of modern-day Afar may be seen camped just outside Djibouti, the capital and largest city in Djibouti. The Afar may travel to Djibouti to engage in trade or to seek medical care.

In Djibouti, where they account for almost half the population, the Afar remain under Somali domination and suffer in the ongoing struggle between Somalia and Ethiopia over the coastal territories.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Afar live in a region often referred to as the “Afar Triangle.” A large part of this triangular area is made up of the Danakil Desert, one of the earth’s hottest, driest, and most inhospitable spots. The terrain is characterized by desert flatlands. There is little vegetation and limited wildlife. The Afar are among the only people who have survived life in this difficult terrain.

The Danakil Desert is a deep depression, reaching a depth of nearly 400 feet (120 meters) below sea level. One of the lowest elevations on earth, daytime temperatures may reach 50°C (145°F) in the sun. Much of the desert territory is made up of salt flats, cut by deep cracks from the sun’s heat.

There are isolated mountain groups, interrupted by valleys where the thorny acacia, also known as the thorn tree, grow.

The desert region is occasionally dotted with green oases of doum palm trees. The large oval yellow fruit of the doum palm tastes similar to gingerbread, giving the tree its common name, gingerbread tree. The fruit may reach two to three feet in length.

There are between 3 and 5 million Afar spread across the three countries: Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Afar language belongs to an Eastern Cushite group. Linguists generally identify four distinct dialects of Afar: Northern, Central, Aussa, and Baadu. Arabic is widely used with neighbors and trading partners.

The Afar language (Qafar Af), like Somali and Oromo, uses the Roman alphabet. The Afar language follows the subject-verb structure. While there is little written history, the Afar language is rich in oral traditions. There are many Afar proverbs, narratives, songs, and riddles. In addition, the Afar have a very comprehensive plant and animal nomenclature system.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Afar culture is oral in tradition. Afar oral literature reveals a high esteem for military prowess, with a whole repertoire of war chants. Today, Afar songs tend to extol the virtues of the camel. The Afar have a myth of origin that describes Arab ancestors traced to ancient Yemen.

Afars also think their color designations (*Asayahamara* or Red Ones and *Adoyahmara* or White Ones) came from the reddish soil of inland deserts and the white saline coastal areas.

Many Afar proverbs relate to their hot, arid environment. For example, a proverb for the salt flats worker is “As rain falls from morning clouds, so should a man cut salt early in the day.”

## 5 RELIGION

The Afar began to convert to Islam in the 10th century after contact with Arabs. Afars adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam, but also follow many traditional animistic practices and concepts. The unique style of Islam they practice incorporates pre-Islamic beliefs, such as belief in the sky-father god, Wak. They also believe that the spirits of the dead possess power to influence the living. In addition, some Afars believe that certain trees have sacred powers.

Rituals that persist from ancient Afar animism include anointing one’s body with butter or ghee (clarified butter) and the annual celebration of *Rabena*, a holiday to honor the dead.

In general, religious and community activities are governed by Shariah (Islamic law) as put forth in the Muslim holy book, the Quran. The Afars observe special days for sacrificing animals and for rainmaking ceremonies.

A small percentage of the Afar practice Orthodoxy. Christian mission sources report that Afar Christians are now engaged in producing radio broadcasts in the Afar language. The radio broadcasts use a storytelling format to recount the tales of the Old Testament.

In recent years, Christian agencies have been active in various economic, medical, educational, or cultural assistance work among the Afar.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Afar observe the Muslim holy days.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Marriage is an important rite to the Afar. A first cousin is preferred as a spouse. In terms of geneology and marriage, the lines are patrilineal, that is, they follow the father's clan rather than matrilineal, that is, following the mother's clan. Divorce rates are high.

Rituals involving the genitals are practiced for both boys and controversially girls. The Afar practice infibulation, the sewing together of the female vulva, in an effort to ensure virginity. Boys are circumcised upon coming of age and are judged for their ability to endure the pain of this procedure. Following circumcision, a boy may select the bride of his choice, although he is strongly encouraged to select a first cousin.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Afar have traditionally kept to themselves, maintaining an isolated but mobile society.

Among the Afar, when a host offers a guest a drink of milk and the guest accepts, a bond is formed. The tradition of the bond requires that the host protect the guest if trouble arises and for avenging his death if he is killed.

The Afar people are known for their fierceness and fearlessness. They are hostile toward anyone who crossed their lands without permission. Because of the nomadic lifestyle of the Afar, any who visits Afar territory will find himself trespassing on tribal or family territory. Roads and pathways are not regarded as public walkways, since the Afar regard the territory as their own property.

Travelers may carry an official warrant from the government designed to allow travel through Afar territory. The warrant is not always honored by the Afar, however. Tradition dictates that the Afar are responsible for anything that happens on their land. Thus, they are unenthusiastic about unknown visitors. Travelers must seek permission for the Afar leaders before traveling through their territory. If permission is granted, Afar hospitality will be extended to the traveler.

The Afar maintain self-segregation from neighboring peoples. They are suspicious and antagonistic to their neighbors, especially the Somalis and other people of Ethiopia.

While the Afar are suspicious of humans who invade their land, they feel protective of all wildlife. The Afar respect and preserve their physical environment and try not to harm the meager plant and animal life sharing their hostile territory. The Afar may be largely responsible for the protection of the endangered African wild ass (*Equus africanus*), which has become extinct elsewhere in Africa.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Afar lead a nomadic lifestyle, moving from highland to lowlands depending on the flood seasons. They carry their tent-style houses with them, packed on the backs of camels. The dome-shaped tents are made from palm ribs covered with palm mats. The tents provide shelter at night and a respite from the blistering sun during the day. The tents are erected, usually by the women, usually near water spots.

The Afar people in this area are usually found to be malnourished. Since there are few natural sources of water for the

Afar people, water must be tanked in. Water is an expensive necessity for the Afar and scarcity of water often leads to conflicts. It is not uncommon for the Afar to be anemic or afflicted with malaria. Each community has a small group of men assigned to guard their herds and water. The guards are not reluctant to use violence to protect these precious resources.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Afar people generally live in groups isolated from mainstream society. The clan, a group of extended families, is the most important political and social unit of Afar culture.

Descent is patrilineal. The Afar believe that men inherit strength of character from their fathers, but their physical characteristics from their mothers. Spirituality is also inherited from the mother. Afar men typically marry just one wife. Traditionally girls were eligible for marriage at age 10.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Afar culture includes unique items of clothing. Men and women generally wear the same article of clothing, the *sanafil*, which is a length of fabric wrapped around and tied at the waist. The woman's sanafil was traditionally dyed brown, but modern Afar women have adopted multicolored sanafil. The man's sanafil was traditionally undyed, and that preference persists to the modern day.

Married women traditionally wear a black headscarf called a *shash*. Afar men are also known for wearing the *jile*, a long, double-edged curved dagger, at their waists.

## 12 FOOD

The diet of the Afar consists of fish, meat, and sour milk. They also enjoy a porridge made from wheat flour and heavy round pancakes made of wheat topped with red pepper and ghee (clarified butter). Milk is so important to the Afar that it is also used as a social offering, given to visitors to establish a proper guest-host relationship.

Reflecting Muslim practice, food must be handled with the right hand. The left hand is used for impure purposes. Using the left hand for food, to accept a present, or for shaking hands is considered a serious affront.

The Afar enjoy a type of palm wine made from the doum palm.

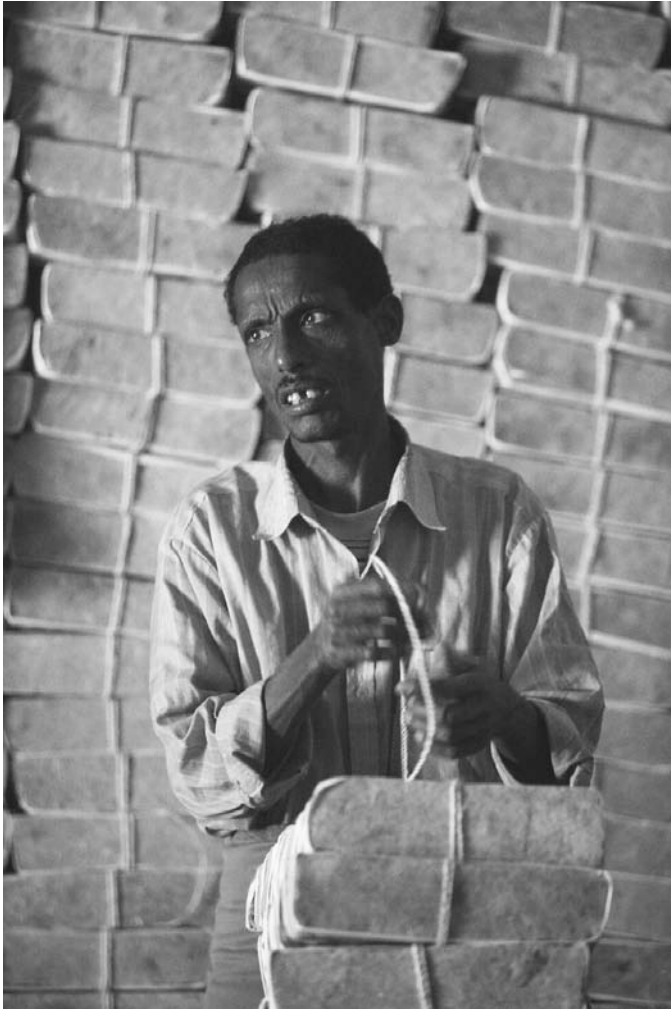
## 13 EDUCATION

Literacy levels are low among the Afar people. Education in the Afar language is still inaccessible to the majority of the rural population in the Horn of Africa. There are some schools in the more densely settled areas and in communities along the main roads. However, courses are taught in Amharic, an official language in Ethiopia. Afar families are more likely to send boys away to study than girls.

What schools do exist are overcrowded, poorly equipped, and understaffed. For children of Afar, the school year and the location of the schools does not match well with the migratory cycles of the nomadic families. Since boys and young men are likely to be among those who must travel to tend the family herds of goats and sheep, it is nearly impossible for Afar children to participate in traditional schooling.

Literacy campaigns have been undertaken by international organizations. In addition, the Afar cultural and political lead-





A man packing salt in Mekele in the remote Ethiopian region of Afar. (Jose Condon/AFP/Getty Images)

ers in Ethiopia have focused their efforts on improving educational opportunities, access to healthcare, and transportation. Reflecting their fiercely independent tradition, the Afar believe that they will be able to solve their own problems if these tools are in place.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Afar have a traditional type of dance, called *jenile*, which is associated with their ancient religion.

#### 15 WORK

The Afar nomads have a unique culture. They tend their livestock, primarily sheep and goats. Sheep are raised for Islamic holiday meals and celebrations. The Afar herd their animals to find water and land for grazing. Camels are used as pack animals, but the Afar do not ride them. To maintain this nomadic lifestyle, labor is divided along gender lines.

Women are responsible for setting up the *burra* (or camp). The *burra* includes two or more tents. Women manage the day-to-day running of the family's life, and when it is time to move, women repack the household goods on camel's backs for transportation. Women also milk the goats and make butter or ghee

(clarified butter). Music-making also falls to the women of the tribe.

Many Afar work at Lake Assal in the Danakil Desert mining salt. They trade the valuable salt with the Yemenis across the Red Sea, or with Ethiopians for grain. At one time, salt was cut into blocks and wrapped in palm leaves for transport. Modern miners shovel salt into large plastic bags. The Afar sell the salt that they dig from the desert, along with milk and animal hides, at markets in Senbete, Ethiopia, among other marketplaces.

The Afar living near the Red Sea are more settled. They engage in fishing and trading for a living. Governments in Ethiopia and Djibouti have urged the Afar to establish permanent settlements, but the Afar persist in sustaining their nomadic lifestyle. The Afar have not responded positively to the efforts of the Ethiopian government to encourage them to resettle in areas where irrigation systems support the enterprise of cotton farming. Only a small minority of Afars has migrated to urban areas.

In the early 20th century, the development of railroads made it possible for the Afar to transport their goods—meat, butter, milk, and hides—to new markets. This brought more Afar into contact with other ethnic groups and the urban economies of the region.

#### 16 SPORTS

A traditional game among the Afar is *kwosso*. *Kwosso* is played by two teams. Each team tries to keep a ball made of rolled goatskin away from their opponents.

Few Afars engage in Western-style games or sports activities. The majority of them are nomadic pastoralists and so have little leisure time.

Among the few who enjoy sports, however, soccer is the most popular.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment media, such as television and radio broadcasts, are accessible to the small number of educated Afar living in urban areas. The majority of Afar do not participate in recreational activities in the Western sense.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Afar traditionally engage in various kinds of skills such as wood and metal working, weaving, pottery, and tanning.

They weave fabric to be made into traditional clothing, including the man's *sanafil*, a white cloth wrapped at the waist and tied at the right hip. The woman's *sanafil* is wrapped the same way, but the fabric is dyed brown. Fabric is also woven for the optional *shash*, a black cloth that married women may choose to wear on their heads.

The Afar do some metalworking to produce tools and instruments, such as the *jile*, a curved, double-edged dagger.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Afar are a pastoral people with a fearless reputation. Coping with the modern development of the installation of irrigation systems in the lowlands is one of the many challenges facing the Afar. The national governments, especially in Ethiopia, are attempting to displace the nomadic communities by encouraging them to establish permanent settlements and

cultivate cotton, made possible by the supply of water for irrigation.

The basic necessities of life which include water, health services, education, and means of communication are largely inaccessible to the Afar people. Their nomadic lifestyle that requires them to travel long distances in search for water and pasture puts the lives of the Afar and their herds at the risk of perishing in the Danakil.

In addition, persistent border conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea, coupled with drought conditions, compound the problems faced by the Afar. The ongoing conflict has displaced some Afars and have made cross-border animal trading less reliable. Many Afar are malnourished and do not receive adequate medical care.

The Afar region of Ethiopia is one of the areas where the people are to a very large extent illiterate. This exacerbates the Afar's difficulty in dealing with natural catastrophes, malnutrition, war, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Afar are a predominantly patrilineal community. There are deep-rooted traditions that have a negative impact on women's lives. The Afar customs pertaining to marriage, paternity, and dress are skewed in favor of men.

Afar believe men inherit traits such as strength of character from their fathers, but physical characteristics like height from the mother.

The division of labor is largely unequal, with women assigned more manual work than their male counterparts.

Afar families are more likely to send boys to school than girls. The fact that educational materials are lacking in the Afar language makes it even more difficult for the average person to gain access to vital information in his/her own language. According to the United Nations (UN), illiteracy severely affects Afar women more than men.

The Afar practice infibulation, a type of female circumcision, to control the virginity and sexuality of women.

Other challenges faced by Afar women include poverty, homelessness, and lack of fresh water, disease (HIV/AIDS and others), food shortages, refugee camps requiring resettlement, political instability, and neglect.

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—by M. Njoroge

# AFRIKANERS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ahf-rih-KAHN-ers

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Boers

**LOCATION:** Republic of South Africa

**POPULATION:** About 3,500,000

**LANGUAGE:** Afrikaans

**RELIGION:** Protestantism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 5: Netherlanders

## 1 INTRODUCTION

During the 17th century, Dutch colonists (to become known as Boers) settled at the southern point of the African continent. Over the next 200 years, British, French, and German settlers joined indigenous Africans and imported Malays to produce a unique genetic blend. In time settlers moved inland, developing their own language, Afrikaans (first as a spoken dialect and later in written form), cultural identity, and worldview. Thus, emerged the Afrikaners.

Over the next 300 years, the Afrikaners battled indigenous African peoples, established independent republics in the interior, and fought the British in two wars known as the Anglo-Boer Wars (the second is now known as the South African War). All territories were finally united on 31 May 1910 in the Union of South Africa. At this time there was a clear division between the Afrikaners (who belonged to Afrikaner political parties, spoke Afrikaans, supported Afrikaner cultural and linguistic endeavors, and belonged to one of the Dutch Reformed Churches) and British-oriented, English-speaking South Africans. In 1948 the Afrikaner-based National Party came to power and, under a strong Calvinistic religious philosophy and racist social policy, started to implement the system of *apartheid*, which separated the peoples of South Africa along color lines. To their credit, there were many Afrikaner academics, church spokespersons, and business leaders among those who finally pressured the politicians to do away with apartheid and to introduce a new South Africa. As a result, political prisoners (including Nelson Mandela) were released and majority rule was established.

The Afrikaners are a numerical, ethnic, and political minority living in South Africa. Increasingly “Afrikaner” is being defined along linguistic-cultural lines, resulting in the inclusion of persons other than whites only. This discussion aims at representing traditional Afrikaner culture and thus assumes a historical setting prior to the transition to a new democracy represented by majority rule.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Afrikaners are concentrated in the Republic of South Africa, located at the southern tip of the African continent. Geographically this includes the region between 22° to 35°S, and 15° to 33°E. This means that a large part of the country experiences summer rains. The southern tip, however, falls in the winter rainfall zone. The country is divided into a narrow coastal zone below 450 m (1,500 ft) in altitude, while the largest part is on a plateau with an altitude of more than 900 m (3,000 ft). The country actually consists of four plateaus: the coastal zone, averaging 150 m (500 ft) above sea level; the Little Karoo, averaging 450 m (1,500 ft); the Great Karoo, averaging

760 m (2,500 ft); and the High Veld, which averages 1,200 m (4,000 ft) and rises to 1,800 m (6,000 ft) in the northeast. Temperatures are remarkably uniform due to the increased altitude as one moves north. Johannesburg, the largest city, has an annual mean temperature of 15.6°C (60°F), and this varies only slightly by altitude and latitude (e.g., coastal Durban is about 6°C or 10°F warmer but is also marked by coastal winds). Rainfall (which is so critical for farming and ranching) decreases as one moves from east to west, and while South Africa enjoys a sparse average rainfall of 44.5 cm (17.5 in), this represents a relatively well-watered eastern coastal zone and a western veld tapering into the Kalahari desert (75% of the country receives less than 63.5 cm or 25 in of rain per year). The highest rainfall is in the mountain region of the southern winter rainfall zone, which receives up to 508 cm (200 in) per year.

For more than four decades the white Afrikaners (as a numerical minority) governed the country. Originally concentrated in rural areas, they have since been involved in a major process of urbanization and have become distributed over most of the country. Population figures show Afrikaans as the home language of approximately 3.5 million whites, 400,000 Coloreds, and 15,000 persons of Asian extraction. The country's total population is 47.4 million (2006 estimates).

## 3 LANGUAGE

Afrikaans, the language spoken by Afrikaners, evolved as a dialect spoken by pioneers on the frontier during the 18th and 19th centuries. The root stock was 17th-century Dutch, but as various linguistic groups settled in the new colonies of those days, they contributed to the emerging language. These included French, German, and English speakers. The Dutch colonial authorities brought slaves from their holdings in southeast Asia, especially Malays, and in time these people contributed to the linguistic (also the cultural, religious, and genetic) mix that was emerging. Early contact had also occurred between settlers and the indigenous Khoekhoen (herders) and San or Bushmen (hunter-gatherers), from whom vocabulary (and cultural) elements were incorporated. On the frontiers more intimate contact developed with the Bantu-speaking peoples, and once again linguistic and cultural transfers took place. The new spoken language, Afrikaans, first appeared in print during the early 19th century and since then has produced material in a wealth of literary and scientific forms. Among the unique features of the language is the double negative: *Hy wil nie speel nie* (literally, “He does not want to play not”).

Personal names derive, in most cases, from a European tradition, usually given a Germanic (Afrikaans) form. It is the custom for married couples to name their first son after the husband's father and their first daughter after the wife's mother.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Early Afrikaner beliefs and traditions come from two major sources: those derived from their European ancestry, and those acquired locally due to intimate contact with indigenous peoples (Khoekhoen, San, and Bantu-speaking) and eastern immigrants (Malay and Indian). This includes childhood beliefs in mythical figures like *tikoloshe*, a diminutive urchin. As is true among many peoples, heroes and myths became intertwined as oral traditions were recounted or selected aspects re-

corded. As is also quite common, heroes frequently are from the political or religious realm.

Much of Afrikaner tradition recounts the exploits of pioneer leaders who with faith and fortitude “tamed” the interior of South Africa, wrestling the land from wild animals and warring native tribes. Thus, school children grew up with the names of Charl Celliers, Andries Potgieter, Piet Retief, and Gert Maritz. Much of the national folklore revolved around *Oom* (Uncle) Paul Kruger (the erstwhile president of the Afrikaner republic), for instance, recounting his experiences when he visited Queen Victoria. In the immediate past, sports heroes have emerged, particularly in the field of rugby where great physical prowess, fleetness of foot, and an accurate kicking boot have created modern heroes—often of mythical proportions.

## 5 RELIGION

The religion of the Afrikaner derives from Protestantism as practiced by the 17th-century Reformed Church of Holland. However, in 1685 when the French government repealed the Edict of Nantes (which guaranteed religious freedom in a heavily Roman Catholic-dominated France), Protestants fled, some going to Switzerland and others to Holland. These French Huguenots then emigrated from Holland to the Cape in 1688 to assure their religious freedom, and they added a special anti-Papist strain of Protestantism to the Afrikaner religion. They also brought a rich tradition of viniculture. After the British took over administration of the Cape in 1806, they brought English-speaking (especially Scottish Presbyterian) ministers to South Africa. Under the influence of the Swiss reformer John Calvin (and others) regarding church and state, the status of women, purity of the race, and related doctrines, a rather unique blend of Protestantism emerged in South Africa expressed by the three varieties of the Dutch Reformed Church.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Days and dates of special significance to Afrikaners are those that are associated with their religion and their national history. Many of these are no longer recognized in the new constitutional dispensation, while new holidays have been added to recognize the cultures of other ethnic groups.

Historically, religious holidays in South Africa have been tied to the Christian calendar. Christmas and Good Friday are still recognized as public holidays. Ascension Day (40 days after Easter) was once recognized as a public holiday, but was removed from the list by the Public Holidays Act of 1994. In the same act, the secular holiday of Family Day was created to replace Easter Monday and the Day of Goodwill, on December 26, replaced Boxing Day. December 16 was once celebrated as the Day of the Covenant, commemorating the day when Afrikaner pioneers beat back an attack of Zulu warriors in 1838. Since 1994, December 16 has been celebrated as the Day of Reconciliation. Other public holidays in contemporary South Africa include New Year's Day (January 1), Human Rights Day (March 21), Freedom Day (April 27), Worker's Day (1 May), Youth Day (June 16), National Women's Day (August 9), and Heritage Day (September 24).

Partly due to the Calvinistic overtones in Afrikaner society, Sundays were days of rest. Stores were closed, movie theaters were locked, organized sports were not permitted, and very



little activity took place. People were expected to attend church services. None of this applies any longer.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birthdays are almost universally celebrated, usually with a party accompanied by the giving of gifts. It is expected that all infants should be baptized. Afrikaner children grow up attending Sunday school, where Biblical texts have to be memorized and simple religious instruction occurs. When young people are about 16 years old, they study catechism, learning the tenets of the Reformation and the Biblical basis of Calvinistic Protestantism. This allows for confirmation as a church member and First Communion. In many families this age also permits individual dating. To this day, the twenty-first birthday is a major celebration in which a son or daughter might ceremonially receive a key.

Adults celebrate birthdays, frequently with a *braai*—the equivalent of the American barbecue, where meat is roasted on hot coals and other dishes are prepared. Death is marked at the family level by mourning and the wearing of black dresses by women, and black ties or a black arm band by men. However, these latter practices are becoming less common. The Dutch Reformed Churches celebrate the passing of the old year and the coming of the New Year with a midnight service on 31 December. The front pew is draped in black or purple to remember those who have passed away during that year, and their names are read aloud.



*Days and dates of special significance to Afrikaners are those that are associated with their religion and their national history. Many of these are no longer recognized in the new constitutional dispensation, while new holidays have been added to recognize the cultures of other ethnic groups in South Africa. The Afrikaners shown here at Voortrekker Monument are celebrating the Day of the Covenant, which commemorates the day when Afrikaner pioneers beat back an attack of Zulu warriors on December 16, 1838. (Jason Laure)*

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

When meeting people it is customary to greet each person, including children, with a handshake. Friends and relatives of both genders greet each other with a kiss on the lips (this practice does not generally apply to males greeting males), accompanied by a standard question, "How are you?" Taking leave involves the same actions and the standard "*Totsiens*" ("Till we see [each other] again"). Afrikaners used to practice informal gender separation in that men would visit with men, would move aside after a meal to smoke and talk together, or would discuss national affairs with each other. Women were supposed to stay with women and talk about "womanly" affairs, such as homemaking, the servants, and the children. More recently, as women have become better educated and moved into the professions, and as men have lost some of the macho image, a more equitable relationship has developed.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

South Africa, under Afrikaner administration, was an anomaly as had been true in many colonial and neocolonial situations. Whites lived in First World luxury, represented by housing, swimming pools, schools, hospitals, and clinics, while the same was only incidentally true for individual members of politically unrepresented groups. Afrikaners there-

fore were almost universally in a favored situation with civil service and other jobs, dependable salaries, automobiles, and electricity in their homes. Thus, they joined the consumer race to acquire the accoutrements of comfort and luxury, including televisions, videos, and computers. Because of a well-developed infrastructure, airplanes, trains and buses could deliver passengers to their destinations, while telephones served as a link for friends and people in business. There are a significant number of indigent Afrikaners.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The traditional Afrikaner family involved a young man courting his girlfriend and then formally requesting permission from her parents (especially her father) to become engaged. For three Sundays prior to the wedding, the couples' names were read in church and, if there were no objections (e.g., that one was already married or for some other legal or moral reason), the marriage was performed in church, followed by a reception. Historically, on the frontier and among farming families, Afrikaner families were large because children represented wealth and support. There also was a literal interpretation of the Biblical injunction to "go forth and be fruitful." Some Afrikaner politicians advocated a policy of large families to counter the number of non-whites and to assure the position of whites in South Africa. Today, Afrikaner families average two or three

children per family. Essentially the Afrikaner family is an example of the Germanic patriarchal extended family, but under conditions of urbanization and modernization they have moved toward the individual nuclear family unit occupying a single family home or apartment. Dogs and cats are favored as pets, while the former are also bred to protect home and property. The status of women has improved over the years and today is approaching equity as regards opportunity and salary.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The everyday clothing of Afrikaners is no different from that of any modern Western urbanite. Reaching back to frontier days when women wore long dresses and bonnets, this dress has been retained for formal folk dancing called *volkspele*. It is a pleasing sight, though becoming less common, to see the women in their multicolored long dresses and colored bonnets swirling around, accompanied by their male partners, who are also uniformly dressed in shirts, vests, and pants.

### **12 FOOD**

The everyday meal of the Afrikaner is characterized by an emphasis on meat, starch, and cooked vegetables, and the near absence of green or fresh salads. This is particularly true of the Sunday midday meal, where it is customary to have more than one kind of meat, rice, and potatoes, at least two cooked vegetables, and dessert. The breakfast staple is some kind of porridge. In the interior, Afrikaners learned from the native peoples to make a gruel called *stywe pap* or *putu pap* ("stiff porridge" or "putu porridge"). It is common to have this porridge for breakfast with milk and sugar and also to eat it with meat or *boerewors* ("boer sausage," made of beef and pork) at a barbecue. *Braaivleis* ("roasted meat") is traditional and very common, like the barbecue. Some years ago one would only find mutton, usually ribs and chops, at a *braai*, but today all kinds of meat are cooked, and a prawn *braai* is particularly enjoyed.

Traditional foods frequently have Eastern origins, emphasizing the mixed cultural traditions. One of these is *sosaties* (marinated meat much like shish kebab), frequently included in a *braai*. Another is *bobotie*, which contains ground meat with a curry spice flavor. Deriving from the same southeast Asian origins is a twisted doughnut that is fried in hot oil and then submerged in cold sweet syrup. This *koeksister* ("cruller") is a popular delicacy. Venison has always formed part of Afrikaner dishes, as grazing animals could be hunted or culled from national parks. Fish has become very popular for those living close to the ocean, and dishes containing *snoek* (a type of fish native to the South African Cape region) are famous. Two food items that trace back to pioneer days are very common among Afrikaners: *beskuit* and *biltong*. The first is translated as "rusks" in English and comes in different varieties but essentially is a biscuit that has been oven-dried. It is usually dunked and enjoyed with coffee. *Biltong* consists of strips of dried meat, from beef or venison (and also from ostrich), which are treated with salt, pepper, and spices prior to drying. Dried fruits, either in individual pieces or in the form of a ground paste, are delicacies.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Children go to school at age 6 and are obliged to stay in school through age 16. Most of the Afrikaans medium schools require a school uniform: girls wear the same color dress or skirt and

blouse, while boys wear the same color shirt and pants. During most of the year boys wear shorts with long stockings. Each school has its own colors, and girls and boys wear blazers that display the crest of the school. Among whites (thus including Afrikaners), school attendance and literacy are nearly universal. It is common for Afrikaans students who have completed high school by successfully passing the national matriculation examination to go to one of the four primarily Afrikaans medium universities, or to a "technicon," which is more technically oriented. Since the Constitution of the Union of South Africa (1910) recognized Afrikaans and English as official languages, students have been bilingual, and many have attended one of the four English medium universities. In contemporary democratic South Africa there are now 11 official languages, recognizing each of the major ethnic groups. English, however, has established itself as the common language of commerce and of politics.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

A great deal of the Afrikaners' heritage is derived from and reinforced by European cultural traditions. Thus, the great number and diversity of the performing arts, musical compositions, literary creations, and expressions in ballet and dance all follow the Western European model. Obviously, South African themes have been included in many of these, as is true of the visual arts.

### **15 WORK**

Most Afrikaners are formally employed. Coming from a rural tradition, they moved haltingly into urban forms of employment, first into civil service and education, and then into mining, industry, and business. Today they are firmly established in the urban industrial world. Among whites in the rural areas, Afrikaners predominate. Afrikaners are characterized by a Calvinistic work ethic that requires hard, industrious work. Children are raised with statements like, "Idleness is Satan's pillow," implying that idleness is the parent of vice.

### **16 SPORTS**

Afrikaners are active sports participants. TV was not permitted in South Africa until the 1960s, then for a number of years it was only shown at night. The emphasis was on *playing* sports. Afrikaner children play a variety of games in an informal manner. Organized sports start early as boys go out for rugby, cricket, or "athletics" (which means track-and-field). Girls play netball (similar to basketball), field hockey, and participate in athletics. Sports like golf, swimming, soccer and tennis also feature. It is common to see a group of boys on an open field with a tennis or rubber ball playing single wicket cricket, or tossing a ball in a variation of touch football. Girls are more likely to be at home and to participate only in school or club sports. Intramural and league competitions are well developed in many sports, allowing students to battle for the honor of their class or their school. A dwindling number of people, particularly the older generation, engage in a competition called *jukskei*, which traces back to pioneer days. In the game, carved pieces of wood, resembling the yoke pin used on draft animals, are tossed in an attempt to knock over a stake. The game is similar to the American game of horseshoes.

Spectators flock to venues where high school, college, club, provincial, or national teams compete in all of these sports.

Traditionally Afrikaners excelled more in rugby and athletics but increasingly they have made their mark in other sports, producing world and Olympic champions.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular culture used to be alien and was frowned on by the elders. Thus, young people entertained themselves in folk dances, church-sponsored youth activities, and the bioscope (movies). It is now common for a group of young people to rent videos, gather at a bar or a dance, or go to a disco. Increasingly too, it has become acceptable to mix socially, and even intimately, with English-speaking persons and even members of other communities. There is a variety of theaters, lectures, and other expressions of the performing arts that are widely attended.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In the days of frontier living, and later on farms and ranches, there existed a clear sexual division of labor. Certain things were in the man's realm, while the woman dominated domestic activities. These divisions are still sometimes carried over to the present. Women are known for quilting, crocheting, and knitting; and a beautiful doily with a circle of shells or beads covers every jug of milk. In rural areas it is common for women to make soap, bottled jellies, jams, and preserves, and do all the baking of breads, *beskuit*, and cakes. Men used to be adept at woodworking, delicate leatherworking, and the making of chairs with seats of interwoven strips of leather.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Modern Afrikaners bear a heavy, and in some cases unfair, cultural burden. That burden was created by their ancestors who accepted and reinterpreted a Calvinist Protestantism, developed a racist-based philosophy that led to the policy of apartheid, and in the process became the pariahs of the world. Not all Afrikaners agreed with the policy of their government, not all Afrikaners were racists, and not all Afrikaners accepted the social or political conditions. Yet, being Afrikaners, they are uniformly labeled. Afrikaners had been in a very favorable situation, and for some this created concern and guilt. In contemporary South Africa, also referred to as the "Rainbow Nation," a great number of legal and other actions are being implemented to correct earlier wrongs in the fields of civil rights, economic conditions, housing, etc. Today, Afrikaners are effectively facing the challenge to create a niche for themselves and to become a vital part of South African society.

South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 brought equal rights and new opportunities to the disadvantaged sectors of the population. Unfortunately, it also sparked a dramatic increase in the rate of crime and violence—an inevitable by-product of poverty and high unemployment in the context of a new political system where social expectations are unrealistically high. Burglaries, muggings, car-jackings, rapes, and murders have all increased since the late 1990s. Afrikaners are as much the victims of this crime rate as any other sector of the population. High levels of crime have led to demands for tough action by the government as well as a return to capital punishment, which is banned in South Africa. One result has been a growing rate of emigration. Another has been the growth of private security-related services and the development of gated communities.

HIV/AIDS is a major problem in South Africa, with the adult prevalence rate at 21.5% (2003 est). The number of people living with HIV/AIDS stood at about 5.3 million in 2003, with 370 000 related deaths that year. The Afrikaners however, comprise one of the communities least affected by the pandemic.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) guarantees many individual rights. Chapter 2[9(3)] specifically indicates that "The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender ... etc." In 2003, the Department of Education launched the Girls Education Movement (GEM) as one of the government's key gender focus programs, implemented in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund. This program aims to ensure that girls will have access education and that their retention and achievement rates will increase. It is founded on three pillars, namely career mentorship, skills development, and advocacy.

As opposed to many communities in South Africa, particularly in the rural, patriarchal communities, Afrikaners in the country are much further along the road of gender parity. Much like other industrialized nations, Afrikaner women in South Africa are increasingly career-oriented and fill prominent positions in virtually every sector of society.

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—by M. de Jongh

# AKA

**PRONUNCIATION:** AH-kah

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Pygmies; tropical forest foragers; Biaka; Bayaka; Bambenzele

**LOCATION:** Tropical forests of southern Central African Republic and northern Congo

**POPULATION:** 30,000

**LANGUAGE:** Diaka

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol 1: Central Africans; Congolese; Efe and Mbuti

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., the Aka are better known as “pygmies.” The term *pygmy* refers to a person of short stature (usually under 1.5 meters [4 ft 9 in]) who hunts and gathers and has a strong identity with the tropical forest. It is generally a derogatory term that emphasizes their physical characteristics. Among Central African farmers, the term carries a connotation of beings closer to animals than to “civilization” (i.e., people who farm), so anthropologists currently use the term *tropical forest forager* instead. By comparison, in the United States there are the Hopi, Navajo, Lakota, Cheyenne and many other indigenous peoples, but when referring to them as a group, they prefer to be called “Native Americans” rather than “redskins.” In Central Africa, the Aka, Baka, Efe, Mbuti, and other indigenous forest hunter-gatherers have generally been referred to by outsiders as “pygmies.” Researchers suggest replacing the term with “tropical forest foragers” until such time that these forest people become politically organized and decide for themselves what they would like to be called as a group.

Why are the Aka short? Medical exams of children and adults indicate that their health is generally better than that of most peoples in the developing world, so their small stature is not due to lack of food. Aka children’s growth is slightly slower than U.S. children’s growth (as is the growth of most children in the developing world), but the biggest difference occurs when Aka children reach 14 years of age. Aka do not experience the dramatic growth spurt during the teenage years that is common in most human populations. This diminished adolescent growth is due to a lack of receptors for a particular growth hormone (IGF-I). It is also true that most mammals living in tropical forests are shorter than their savanna relatives (e.g., forest elephants are smaller than savanna elephants), which suggests that smaller size may be adaptive to the humid tropical forest.

The Aka are just one of at least 10 ethnically and linguistically distinct groups of tropical forest foragers (“pygmies”) who occupy the tropical forests throughout Central Africa. Tropical forest foragers have been living in the tropical forests for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Consequently, the Aka are referred to as the “first citizens” of the Central African Republic and Congo (much like Native Americans in the United States).

The farming peoples of Central Africa moved into the tropical forest area about 2,000 years ago and slowly established regular trading relationships with tropical forest foragers. Farmers needed game meat, honey and other forest products,

and forest foragers liked the cultivated foods of farmers. Today, Aka-farmer relations are very complex, and they attend each other’s funerals, births, and marriages as well as having regular economic exchanges. The farmers see themselves as superior to Aka and talk about “their” Aka. Even though Aka-farmer trading relationships may have lasted for trading generations, Aka can (and do) leave any time they feel a “patron” is not treating them well.

The Aka generally live in areas that do not have roads, but this does not mean they do not know what is going on in the world or that they have not been influenced by colonialism. At the turn of the century, the French colonizers of the Central African Republic and Congo wanted ivory, rubber, and antelope skins, and it was often the Aka who provided these items through their village trading partners. The European desire for antelope skins increased the frequency of net hunting, and the desire for ivory increased the status position of *tuma*, great elephant hunters who could communicate with the supernatural forest spirits. Because ivory trade is now banned in Central Africa, the position of *tuma* is not as important as it was 40 years ago.

There are few Aka status positions. There is no chief in the sense of a person commanding ultimate authority, yet there is the *kombeti*, who is generally more influential in subsistence and camp movement discussions. The *nganga* is the traditional healer and provides a wide range of services to the community—such as divination on hunts, curing of witchcraft, and herbal healing. The *tuma* is the great hunter who has often killed several elephants on his own. He leads spear hunts and important hunting and seasonal rituals, and organizes the training of young boys in the men’s secret society. The status positions are usually held by males.

The Aka are fiercely egalitarian and independent. No individual has the right to coerce or order another individual to perform an activity against his/her will. Aka have a number of informal non-institutional methods for maintaining their egalitarianism. For instance, they practice prestige avoidance; one does not draw attention to his or her activities. There are certainly exceptional hunters, dancers, and drummers, but individuals do not brag to others about their abilities.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

About 30,000 Aka live in the tropical forests of southern Central African Republic and northern Congo, generally between 1° and 4°n latitude. Their east and western limits are the Oubangui River in the east and the Sangha River, respectively.

Most Aka live in remote areas of the tropical forest where the population density is less than one person per square mile. Aka women average six live births during their lifetime. About 20% of Aka children do not live to their first birthday, and many die before they reach age 15. Infectious and parasitic diseases are the most common causes of death. Approximately half of the population is under age 15, and there are approximately equal numbers of males and females.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

There are approximately 15 ethnic groups that speak 15 languages and live in association with the approximately 30,000 Aka in the Equatorial region. The Aka language is a distinct Bantu language and classified in the C-10 Bantu language group. It belongs to the Benue-Congo group of the Niger Con-





go. In addition to their own language the Aka speak the languages of their neighbors.

The Aka speak a Bantu language called *diaka*, which is characterized by three tones. The language often sounds musical, and different tones can dramatically change the meaning of a word (e.g., *mbongo* can mean “cup,” “a type of bee,” or “panther”). Most Aka speak at least two other languages—the Bantu or Oubanguian language of their village trading partners and some Sango, the national language in the Central African Republic.

Aka are given personal names a week or so after birth. Personal names have meanings attached to them—for example, *Bimba* (“flea”), *Madjembe* (“intestinal worms”), *Ngunda Oti* (“without hospitality”). In the last case, a boy’s mother gave him the name because, at the time of his birth, the boy’s father’s family did not provide her with much food. Sometimes Aka simply like the sounds of new words and use them as names. For example, Aka now use the following as personal names: *Boutros Boutros Ghali*, *Konvocation* (convocation from missionaries), and *Bonannee* (from “happy new year” in French). Personal names often change as one gets older, or a person may be known by several different names. Names are informal, similar to nicknames in the United States. If someone has a particular physical characteristic, or personality trait (e.g., a person with big ears, a quiet person, someone who is always sick, or a good rat trapper), people start to call the person by that name. There are no last names, but both men and women inherit a clan name from their fathers. Clan names refer to particular plants or animals that have supernatural abilities, and people who belong to a particular clan cannot eat that

plant or animal. Trails in the forest are associated with particular clans, and after marriage a couple eventually lives with members of the husband’s clan.

In addition to personal and clan names, a person can also be called by a kinship term. In the United States, we are familiar with the kinship terms *mother*, *father*, *brother*, *sister*, and so on. Aka kinship terms are quite different in that almost everyone in the same generation has the same kinship term. For example, if you were Aka, you would call your natural father, your father’s older brother, and the husband of your mother’s sister by the same term—*tao*. You would refer to your brothers and sisters and all of your first cousins by the same term—*kadi*. You could refer to your grandparents and all your great aunts and great uncles by the same term—*koko*. If you had children and your brothers and sisters had children, you would use the same kinship term for all of them—*mona*. So when an Aka parent is asked, “Who are your children?” he or she recites the long list of people who in the United States would be considered nieces and nephews. Aka would feel right at home with the African-American who uses the term *bro* to refer to any man in the same generation.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Aka say that long ago they lived in villages and farmed, but one day a woman heard bees in the sky and a group of people decided to go into the forest to see where they were going. They found the bees’ hive, loved the honey and, finding plenty of food in the forest, decided to stay. This is how Aka describe the origin of their life in the forest. In 2003 the oral traditions of the Aka were proclaimed one of the “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

#### 5 RELIGION

Aka religious beliefs are best characterized by their regional and individual variation rather than by a standardized pattern. The Aka occupy a large territory, and religious beliefs vary by area. Some Aka believe in *bembe*, a creator of all living things, but those who believe in *bembe* indicate that he/she retired soon after creation. *Djengi* is the most consistently mentioned, powerful, and generally benevolent forest spirit. *Djengi* has supernatural abilities, but in many ways he/she is not much different from Aka. *Djengi*, a spirit, can be thought of as another member of the camp whom one sees and shares with on a regular basis. *Djengi* shares resources with people, people visit and socialize with *djengi*, and there is a general trust in (if not love for) *Djengi*. *Djengi* comes into the camp in the form of a raffia mask and encourages people to have a party and celebrate in the forest spirit. *Djengi* asks for cigarettes, water, and other items while in camp and likes it when people dance and sing well. *Djengi* is a spectacular dancer, especially when the Aka are singing well. Communication with *djengi* takes place through a traditional healer or *tuma* who has the ability to translate the supernatural language.

Most Aka camps have a traditional healer (*nganga*). *Ngangas* cure all forms of illness (e.g., malaria, worms, bad luck, attack by witchcraft); see into the future to help one make decisions about travel, marriage, or friendships; and can see game animals deep in the forest while on the net hunt. The majority of *ngangas* are part-time and hunt and gather most of the day.

*Ngangas* acquire their knowledge through training and initiation. During initiation, the insides of their eyelids are cut, and medicine is placed in the cuts to help the *ngangas* see those things most others cannot.

Aka also believe that family members do not entirely leave this earth after they die. An ancestor's spirit (*edjo*) stays around, visits with the family, and often wants things. (One woman said that the *edjo* of her father knocked her down while she was walking through the forest.) Many Aka believe in witchcraft (*gundu*), especially to explain unexpected adult deaths. Witches send poison darts (*ndoki*) into the body of a victim, and the person eventually dies from the poison unless the *nganga* can extract the dart, usually by sucking it out. If someone is accused of witchcraft, he/she may have to take a drink made from special roots. The root is believed to have supernatural power so that if a person is guilty, he/she will go into convulsions and possibly die (the root contains strychnine).

Many Aka rituals are linked to hunting and gathering, and Aka engage in a number of individual and group hunting rituals to ensure a successful hunt. To assist hunting efficiency, the net can be ritually washed of bad spirits (*kose*) or a variety of medicines (*bouanga*) can be placed on them to increase good luck. The number and types of rituals increase as hunting success decreases.

Many Aka have been contacted by missionaries, but it is difficult for missionaries to convert Aka to Christianity because the Aka move around often, and it is not possible to drive a car to most of their camps. Missionaries generally tell the Aka to stop dancing to *djengi*, and they are generally the only group that is trying to provide formal education and Western health care to Aka.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Aka do not use a numerical calendar, so they do not have specific dates that are celebrated each year, but there are holidays in the sense that there are days off to relax and party. Such holidays occur after good hunts or when large game animals, such as elephant or wild pig, have been captured. Holidays also occur during the honey, caterpillar, and termite seasons.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Aka do not have much in the way of group ritual activities. At birth, parents place protective cords made from forest vines around a baby's neck, wrists, and ankles to provide protection from bad spirits and help connect the newborn to the forest. At five or six years of age, boys are circumcised in a very informal manner. A man who is good at this comes into camp early in the morning, and the boy often runs into the forest. Everyone laughs, eventually the boy comes back, his father holds him, and the whole thing is over in five minutes. Aka are not teased if they cry and there is plenty of social and emotional support.

During the teenage years, boys and girls get their top four incisors pointed. This is done when the teenager feels ready and is conducted in a very informal atmosphere. Aka believe that pointed teeth make one look handsome or more beautiful. Some Aka, primarily teenage girls, get the bottom four incisors pointed as well. Teenagers bring in new fads from other areas. Current fads include coloring teeth with a purple dye from a forest vine, piercing the nasal septum with a small twig (girls only), and shaving stripes into one's eyebrows.

The only large, group-level ritual occurs at death. Relatives travel long distances and sing and dance for days. Camp sizes more than triple during funeral ceremonies. Teenagers go to as many funerals as possible because they are fun, and it is an opportunity to develop relationships with teenagers from other areas.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

There are no formal greetings among the Aka, and people do not say good-bye, in part, because they are likely to see each other again. Aka are very warm and hospitable.

Relationships between men and women are egalitarian: men and women both contribute to the household diet, a husband or wife can initiate divorce, and violence against women is very rare. Women have their own dances and songs in which they ridicule men. Spouses can and do ridicule each other with rather crude joking, including uncomplimentary remarks about the size and shape of a partner's genitals, but for the most part the partner does not pay much attention to such ridicule.

Relations between young and old are also egalitarian in that there is minimal deference towards the elderly. Aka elders are expected to hunt and gather as long as they can, and grandparent-grandchild relations are playful and relaxed.

The Aka are fiercely egalitarian and independent. No individual has the right to coerce or order another individual to perform an activity against his/her will. Even when parents give instructions to their children to collect water or firewood, there are no sanctions if they do not do so. Aka have a number of informal methods for maintaining their egalitarianism. First, they practice prestige avoidance; one does not draw attention to his or her abilities. There are exceptional hunters, dancers, and drummers, but individuals do not brag to others about their abilities. If a man kills an elephant, he says someone else did all the work and talks about the small size of the elephant. Second, Aka practice rough joking with those who start to accumulate, do not share, or who act egotistically. For instance, if a teenager eats most of the honey before returning to camp, others will joke about the size and shape of his genitals. And third, Aka practice "demand sharing." This means that whatever one has will be given up if requested. If I like the shirt you are wearing, I ask for it and you say you really did not need it. This way most material items circulate around the camp. This is one reason Aka have been slow to take up farming. An Aka who spends three to four months farming must give everything away at harvest time when all the relatives come to visit and request food.

Sharing, cooperation, and autonomy are but a few others of the Aka core values. The community cooperates daily in the net hunt (described in the section on Work), food hunted is shared with members of the camp, and decision-making is the reserved prerogative of the individual; if one is not content with living conditions, one moves to another camp, which is easy and acceptable.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Aka are extremely poor in terms of Western socioeconomic status and material wealth. They seldom have money and do not attend formal schools because they would be teased by the villagers and do not have money to buy books. They do not obtain Western medical care because they do not have money to

purchase medicines, and clinic doctors usually discriminate against them.

Aka camps consist of 25–35 people living in five to seven dome-shaped houses. Houses are close to each other and all of them occupy an area the size of a large living room. Houses are three feet high so one cannot stand up in a house. Each family has their own house and everyone in that house sleeps together in the same bed. The house is big enough for one bed and a campfire for warmth during the night. The two or three adolescent boys in the camp share one house (the bachelor pad) while teenage girls each make their own small house. Houses are made by women, with the exception of the bachelor pads (which are often poorly constructed and leak water all the time), and are constructed from saplings and large leaves. The beds are made from logs, animal skins or leaves.

Aka move their camps about eight times a year and there are daily changes in camp composition as visitors (e.g., relatives, friends, traders) come and go, and members leave to join other camps.

Water sources are generally not contaminated because the Aka do not live in one place very long. Aka do not brush their teeth or use streams for washing. It rains frequently, so Aka simply wash off as they walk through the forest.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family (husband, wife, and children) is extremely important as this is the unit of production and reproduction: The family works as an economic unit on the net hunt and in a variety of other subsistence activities (e.g., collecting caterpillars and mushrooms). Additionally, the conjugal family is where most cultural skills are transmitted and acquired. The camp (*lango*) consists of 1 to 15 nuclear families, but averages around 25 to 35 individuals. Aka children grow up in an environment of trust, love, and indulgence. Infants are held throughout the day (even while sleeping), nursed on demand (four times an hour), and caregivers attend immediately to any fuss or cry. Although Aka are very indulgent and intimate with their infants, they are not a child-focused society. Parents seldom stop activities to pay undivided attention to their children.

Although the mother is the primary caregiver, Aka fathers provide more care to young children than fathers in any other society. Numerous others also help out with infant care. While in camp, infants are held by their mothers less than 40% of the time. Rather, they are transferred to other caregivers an average of seven times per hour, and they have seven different caregivers holding them during a single day.

Aka childhood lacks negative forces and violence. Seldom does one hear a parent tell a child not to touch or do something. If a child hits another child, the parent will simply move the child to another area. Corporal punishment for a child who misbehaves seldom occurs. In fact, if a parent hits a child, it is reason enough for the other parent to ask for divorce.

Generally, it is difficult for parents to get their older children to do much. When older children (7–11 years old) are asked to collect water or firewood, they often simply ignore their parents' requests. Parents may sometimes shout at their children but, more often than not, they simply go and get what they need themselves. During the teenage years, same-sex friends seem to be inseparable—they go everywhere together. Girls collect water, nuts, or fruit together, and boys take trips to the village or go on small game hunts together (hunting mice with

small nets is a favorite pastime for boys.) Teenagers often travel to visit relatives and explore territories other than their own, so they may be absent from the camp for long periods.

The teenage years are a time of social and sexual exploration and teenagers are key members of the camp. They provide new and fresh energy to the camp. For example, they bring in new dances from other camps and are often the first to start dancing at night (the adults join in later). They are many times the ones to initiate changes in Aka culture (e.g., nose-piercing, breaking of relationships with villagers). In many ways, Aka parents seem similar to U.S. parents: they complain that teenagers are smoking more and having sex earlier than in the past.

First marriages occur between 17 and 21 years of age. Once a man moves his traps and spear into the house of a woman the two are considered married; there is no formal marriage ceremony. The husband must stay at the camp of his wife for two years or so, or until the first child is born and walking well. After this, “bride service,” the family moves to the camp of the father's brothers. About 25% of marriages end in divorce, the majority of these being first marriages. Divorce takes place by one partner simply moving out of the house. If divorce occurs, children go with the parent they prefer.

## 11 CLOTHING

The temperature never drops below 21°C (70°F) during the day. Men and women wear loincloths made of commercial fabric obtained in trade with villagers. When Aka visit the village, they put on any Western or “villager” clothes they might have. Men wear T-shirts and shorts, and women wear a cloth that they wrap around their waist.

## 12 FOOD

The Aka know more about the tropical forest than do most botanists and zoologists. The Aka know hundreds of forest plants and animals, but they subsist primarily on some 60 plant species, 20 insect species, honey from 8 species of bees, and around 30 species of game. The Aka collect roots and leaves, nuts, and fruits. They collect mushrooms, termites, crickets, grubs, and caterpillars. The Aka hunt large game (primarily hog and elephant) with spears, antelope with nets, monkeys with crossbows, and rat, mongoose, and porcupine with a variety of small snare and net traps.

Although there is enormous diversity in the Aka diet, their favorite game animal by far is porcupine. Forest porcupines have fat throughout their bodies, and so are very tasty. Honey is another favorite food (the “candy” of the forest) and people spend large parts of the day looking for just a handful of honey. Aka do not hesitate to cut down an entire mahogany tree in order to get a pound of honey from its top.

Aka obtain metal pots, pans, and cooking utensils by trading game meat and other forest products with farmers. Aka do not use plates and utensils to eat. Everyone in a family eats out of two or three shared bowls of food, and they use their hands to eat. A typical meal consists of a bowl with boiled game meat in nut sauce and a bowl of some carbohydrate, usually manioc obtained through trade with farmers. The piece of manioc is picked up with one's fingers and dipped into the meat sauce.

Because the Aka live near the equator, the sun comes up at 6 am and sets at 6 pm throughout the year. Most people get up at sunrise and prepare a hot meal of leftovers from the previ-

ous evening meal. Aka then snack throughout the day as they hunt and gather. If they find fruits or nuts, they eat some immediately and save some for back at camp. The largest meal occurs after families have returned from hunting, gathering, and trading—usually at about 7 pm.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Aka do not usually attend formal schools, but they begin learning about hunting and gathering when they are infants. Parents teach their 8-to-12-month-old infants how to use small, pointed digging sticks, throw small spears, use miniature axes with sharp metal blades, and carry small baskets. One- and two-year-olds use knives, axes, and digging sticks. They build play houses and imitate the dances and songs of adult life. By three or four years of age, children can cook themselves a meal on a fire; by age 10, Aka children can live alone in the forest if necessary. By age 10, they can identify hundreds of plants and animals and know all the important subsistence skills, with the exception of elephant hunting. Aka do not read or write, but they are very interested in acquiring these skills.

Catholic missionaries have started schools for Aka in a few locations, so some Aka speak French.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Aka have a reputation as being the best dancers in the Central African Republic and Congo. They are frequently invited to the capital city by the president to dance at national festivals. Aka music is unique; it has yodeling, hocketing, and polyphonic harmonies and is often heard on the national radio station.

### **15 WORK**

The Aka are one of the last groups of people on earth to spend most of their days hunting and gathering. The tropical forest is not known for its abundance of wild edible foods, but if one has extensive knowledge of the forest it can be a land of plenty. Aka actually work fewer hours per week than do middle-class Americans, although Aka do not clearly distinguish work versus playtime: they regularly play and joke during net hunts and other subsistence activities.

Net hunting is the most important hunting technique, and it is unique among hunting techniques in that it involves the whole family—men, women, and children—and focuses on making noise rather than stalking and being quiet. Each family has a net that measures about 45 meters (150 feet) long and 2.2 meters (4 feet) high. The hunt takes place at night and begins by connecting all the families' nets together so they make a semi-circle or circle around an area about half the size of a football field. Men go to the center of the nets, women stay next to the net, and children go wherever they want. Once a sound is given to start the hunt, the men yell, scream, and pound logs on the ground to make as much noise as possible in order to wake up and scare the antelopes (most of which are nocturnal). If an animal is scared into the net, the nearest woman tackles it, grabs it behind its hind legs, and smashes its head against a nearby tree. If it is a large antelope, other women will assist in tackling and killing it. Game animals are shared with everyone in camp.

Over the course of a year, the Aka spend about 50% of their time hunting, 30% in gathering, and 20% in village work for farmers. The relative importance of hunting and gathering ac-

tivities fluctuates from season to season. For example, the Aka spend up to 90% of their time net hunting during the dry season (January to May), but during part of the rainy season (August to September) 60% of their time is spent collecting food, especially caterpillars. August is caterpillar season, and caterpillars are eaten at every meal. They can be roasted, boiled, or fried and taste like french fries. Much of the vegetable food in the Aka diet is obtained by trading game meat to farmers for manioc, corn, or other village foods.

### **16 SPORTS**

Forest people do not play sports in the Western sense. They do, however, learn basic skills through mock hunts and other games. Children play games similar to sports that teach them about group dynamics and personal achievement. Elders teach children the strategies and techniques of hunting by pretending to be animals and showing children how to drive them into a piece of old net. The adults also play a game (more ritual than sport) resembling our tug-of-war. The purpose is to remind the community that cooperation can solve conflicts between the sexes. The tug-of-war begins with all the men on one side and the women on the other. If the women begin to prevail, one of them leaves to help out the men and assumes a deep male voice to ridicule manhood. As the men begin to win, one of them joins the women and mocks them in high-pitched tones. The battle continues in this way until the participants have switched sides and have had an opportunity to both help and ridicule the opposition. Then both sides collapse, laughing over the point that neither side gains in beating the other.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Aka do not have televisions, radios, or books. They do not have electricity, so after it gets dark they sit around fires to socialize, gossip, tell stories (often about gorillas or chimps having affairs with humans) and dance and sing. Dances usually occur about twice a week, but they are held every night during caterpillar season or when hunting is especially good.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Aka do not have paper and pencils so their art often takes the form of body modifications—painting, scarification, haircuts, and so on. The dark juice from a fruit is used to draw designs on the face and the body that represent the sounds and sights of the forest. Scarification often takes place before a dance. Teenagers get together and cut various designs into their bodies, often around the navel. Aka use razor blades traded from villagers to cut their hair and shave their heads into some very original designs—triangles, lightning bolts, caterpillars, and so on.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Today the Aka continue to be affected by the world economy in several ways. In Bokoka, for instance, the Aka move into the village for part of the dry season, at the expense of missing the best net hunting of the year, to help the farmers with their coffee plantations. The coffee, destined for the European market, is the primary means by which villagers acquire money. Some Aka help villagers hunt elephant for ivory, while other Aka work for lumber companies in the region.

European logging companies are building roads and mills to extract mahogany and other hardwood trees (most caterpil-

lars come from these trees). Europeans and Africans are going deeper into the forest to dig for gold and diamonds. And Western conservation groups are trying to establish national parks and reserves to save tropical forests, but this means that Aka often lose their lands.

The farmers who are the Aka's trading partners are trying to grow more and more cash crops (e.g., coffee) to buy commercial goods (e.g., radios, VCRs), and so they try to get "their" Aka to work in the fields with little or no remuneration. Consequently, traditional trading relations are breaking down and Aka now say that villagers turn into chimpanzees when they die. There is little question that both African farmers and European investors exploit Aka. Aka are quiet and self-assured, and they often respond to outside pressures by fleeing deeper into the forest. Aka are not politically organized, nor do they have the literacy skills to try and mitigate these threats to their existence.

Alcoholism and drugs are not major problems for the Aka, except in logging towns where some Aka are paid for locating hardwoods. Aka, used to immediate consumption of collected or captured foods, do not store for the future. When they are paid for their labor, they spend all their money within a day or two, often on alcohol or cannabis.

Aka do not currently have AIDS, but they know about it from all the deaths among villagers. In the past, Aka seldom had sexual relations with villagers; now they say that if they sleep with a villager, they will die from AIDS. Their hunter-gatherer lifestyle exposes them to blood of jungle fauna, thus they have among the highest rates of seropositivity for Ebola virus in the world.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Aka male-female relations are extremely egalitarian by cross-cultural standards. Both males and females are regular contributors to the diet. Aka husbands and wives are together often and cooperate in a wide variety of subsistence tasks such as to net hunt, collect caterpillars, termites, honey, fruit, and sometimes fish. But wives are less likely to participate in cross-bow hunting for monkeys and trap-line hunting for medium size game, and never participate in spear hunts for wild pig and elephants. It is also clear that Aka men and women like to be with members of the same sex at least as much as being with their spouses. Men enjoy hunting game together, and women enjoy collecting nuts and fruit away from the men.

The political power and social prestige of Aka women is pronounced, but is not as structurally salient as that of Aka men. Aka men hold all the named positions of status—*kombeti*, *tuma*, and *nganga*—but as mentioned already, these men hold no absolute power. They influence people through their hospitality, persuasiveness, humor, and knowledge, not by their position. Aka women challenge men's authority on a regular basis and are influential actors in all kinds of decision-making. Women participate in decisions about camp movement, extra-marital affairs, bad luck on the hunt, and sorcery accusations.

Autonomy within the context of group interdependence is a vital feature of Aka gender relations. Husbands and wives cooperate in a wide range of activities, but there is respect for each other's feelings and peculiarities. Husbands cannot force their wives to come on the hunt, and the wives cannot force their husbands to look for honey. Spouses can and do ridicule each other with rather crude joking (e.g., uncomplimentary re-

marks about the size and shape of their partner's genitals), but for the most part the partner does not pay much attention to the ridicule. If the couple does not get along, divorce is a matter of one partner simply moving out of the house. While men and women have clearly defined subsistence and social roles, one is not ridiculed for trying a role usually assigned to the other gender. Women carry the nets, spears, and crossbows of the men and men carry the baskets and digging sticks of the women. This sex role flexibility is seen in the different types of net hunt. On most net hunts, men go to the center of the nets and chase the game into the nets while women stand nearby to jump on and kill the captured game. But for social or environmental reasons (getting tired of doing one type of net hunt or trying to capture especially large game) the roles are sometimes reversed, and women go to the center of the nets while men stay next to the net.

Physical violence in general is infrequent and violence against women is especially rare. The lack of violence enhances female autonomy and encourages husband-wife cooperation and trust. Husband-wife conflicts do of course occur but they are usually resolved through talking, rough joking, leaving camp for awhile, or mediated assistance from other camp members.

It is essential to understand Aka gender relations, particularly husband-wife relations, if one is to understand the Aka father-infant relationship. A 2005 UNESCO report named Aka men as the "Best Dads in the World." Aka fathers have their infant within arms' reach 47% of the time. Husband and wife are together often, know each other exceptionally well, and cooperate on a regular basis in a diversity of tasks. Men and women have distinct tasks, but there are few underlying beliefs that one sex is naturally inclined to perform certain tasks. The capabilities of men and women are very similar, and therefore tasks can be reversed easily. Male and female experiences and socialization are different, but men and women know the tasks of the opposite sex. Women are also valued and respected members of the group. Aka men, however, though are similar to men cross-culturally in that men predominate in the named status positions, only men hunt large game, and polygyny is relatively common. In summary, Aka male-female relations have commonalities with male-female relations cross-culturally, but the Aka are probably as egalitarian as human societies get.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# ALGERIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** al-JIR-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Western North Africa (the Maghrib)

**POPULATION:** 33,333,216

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; Berber; French

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Tuaregs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Algeria is one of several countries forming the Maghrib, a region in the western part of North Africa that borders the Mediterranean Sea. (Maghrib is the Arabic word referring to the direction of the sunset.) Algeria's history has been turbulent, involving repeated conquests and a particularly bitter resistance to modern European colonialism. This history has left its mark on contemporary Algeria, which from 1992 to 1998 experienced a violent civil war between the military junta running the country and a coalition of Islamist opposition parties known as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Ferocious fighting killed between 100,000 and 300,000 people—the exact figures are in dispute and likely will never be known. The conflict erupted following a December 1991 election in which the FIS won by a landslide; the government quickly annulled the results, spurring outrage.

Algeria's known history can be traced as far back as 30,000 BC. Cave paintings found at Tassili-n-Ajjer and elsewhere in Algeria, dated to between 8000 BC and 4000 BC, show how ancient hunters shared a savannah region with giant buffalo, elephants, rhinoceroses, and hippopotamuses. Neolithic civilization, which is characterized by animal domestication and agriculture, developed in the area between 6000 BC and 2000 BC. Today, this area is primarily desert.

The various peoples who eventually settled in the area came to be called Berbers. Roman, Greek, Byzantine, and Arab conquerors all attempted to defeat or assimilate the Berbers into their cultures, with varying degrees of success. Phoenician traders arrived in the area around 900 BC and established the city of Carthage in approximately 800 BC in what is today neighboring Tunisia. From there, the Phoenicians established towns along the coast and in the area that would become Algeria. The Berbers were either enslaved by the Phoenicians or forced to pay tribute. By the 4th century BC, the Berbers formed the largest part of the Phoenician slave army and began to revolt as the power of Carthage weakened. In time, several Berber kingdoms were created that vied for power until the arrival of the Romans in AD 24.

The Roman conquest was disastrous for the Berbers. Tribes were forced to become settled or leave the area. For this reason, the Berbers resisted Roman rule. The Romans began their occupation by controlling the coastal lands and cultivating the area. It is estimated that North Africa produced 1 million tons of cereal each year for the Roman Empire, in addition to fruits, figs, grapes, beans, and olive oil.

Along with the Roman presence, Judaism and Christianity began to influence the Berbers. Many Jews who had been expelled from Palestine by the Romans settled in the area, and some Berber tribes converted to Judaism. Christianity arrived in the 2nd century AD and was especially attractive to slaves.

By the end of the 4th century AD, much of the settled areas had become Christian along with some Berber tribes.

In AD 429, the German king Gaiseric, backed by 80,000 Vandals (a German tribe), invaded North Africa from Spain, eventually weakening Roman control. With the decline of Roman power, Berber tribes began to return to their old lands. Meanwhile, the Byzantine emperor Justinian sent his army to North Africa in AD 533 and within a year conquered the German forces, although the Byzantines never established as firm a hold on the area as the Romans had.

The most influential conquest in the area was the invasion of Arab Muslims between AD 642 and AD 669. Nomadic Berbers quickly converted to Islam en masse and joined the Arab forces. Christian Berber tribes in Algeria converted to Islam, and in AD 711, the Muslims established firmer control in the region.

The ruling Arab view of Islam at the time was that Islam was primarily a religion for Arabs, and therefore non-Arab converts were treated as second-class citizens. Political sentiment developed among Muslims on the Arabian Peninsula, however, that rejected the Arabism of the ruling Umayyad dynasty in favor of strict equality for all Muslims. Followers of this movement, called Kharijites, spread to North Africa, and many Berbers became attracted to their message of Islamic equality and strict piety. They eventually rebelled against the Arab caliphate's control of the area and established a number of independent kingdoms.

In AD 750, the Abbasids, successors to the Umayyad dynasty, spread their rule to the area and appointed Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab as governor in al-Qayrawan, in Tunisia. By the end of the 9th century AD, Ismaili Muslims (Shi'a Muslims who followed a more esoteric and mystical interpretation of Islam) converted the Kutama Berber tribes from Algeria and led them against the established rulers. In AD 909, the Ismaili forces established the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa.

The Fatimids were more interested in the lands to the east and left Algeria and neighboring Tunisia to Berber rule. However, considering the diverse loyalties of the different tribes, conflict became inevitable. In the 11th century, the Fatimids sent Arab bedouins to North Africa to assist their forces against other Berbers. Eventually, the influx of Arabs promoted the arabization of the entire area.

Nevertheless, independent kingdoms did manage to establish themselves in the area. The greatest of these were the Almoravids, the Almohads, the Hafsids, and the Zayanids. These kingdoms were all led by Muslim leaders who greatly encouraged learning and the arts.

Meanwhile, the Catholics of Spain were set on reclaiming southern Spain from the Muslims. Spain had become a cosmopolitan and pluralistic center of learning under Muslim rule. The Spanish conquest in 1492, however, fundamentally changed the character of the area. The new rulers forced all Muslims and Jews to convert to Christianity. Many fled to North Africa, and a sizable community of Jews settled in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

Between 1560 and 1620, Algeria became a base for privateers, or pirates. Because Muslim vessels were not allowed to enter European ports, Muslim pirates began raiding European ships. The most famous of these pirates was Khayr ad-Din, known to Europeans as Barbarossa, or Red Beard. Thanks in part to Khayr ad-Din, the Muslim Ottoman Empire (based in



what is today Turkey) managed to spread its rule over North Africa and form a buffer against European expansion.

Many European states paid tribute to the rulers in Algeria in order to ensure the safety of their ships. Once the United States became independent of England, its ships were no longer protected by British payments and were subsequently attacked. In 1797, the United States signed a treaty with rulers in Algiers, Algeria's capital, paying tribute in exchange for safe passage.

By 1815, however, the European states were in a temporary state of peace and decided to combine forces against the North African states. Spain, the Netherlands, Prussia, Denmark, Russia, and Naples declared war against Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. The United States also joined the battle, which eventually ended the practice of privateering.

In 1827, politics in France prompted the French to establish a blockade against Algiers that would persist for three years. The French monarch, Charles X, was politically weak and thought that strong action against Algiers would strengthen his popularity at home. In 1830, he decided to invade Algeria on a self-proclaimed "civilizing mission." In June of that year, 34,000 French soldiers invaded Algiers and, after a three-week battle, took the city. French troops raped women, looted the treasury, desecrated mosques, and destroyed cemeteries. Their actions set the tone for the next century of French rule.

By 1834, a new liberal government had been established in Paris. Although the government was initially opposed to the occupation of Algeria, it annexed the country and its 3 million Muslim inhabitants as a colony for the sake of national pres-

tige. All occupied areas were seized from their inhabitants and sold at extremely low prices to poor immigrants from France and other European countries. The colonists were called *colons* or *pied noirs* (black feet). Many were prisoners from France who had been exiled to Algeria.

France still had many battles to fight, however. 'Abd al-Qadir, a 25-year-old Muslim, united the tribes throughout Algeria to resist the French occupation. By 1839, he controlled more than two-thirds of Algeria, creating a government, collecting taxes, supporting education, and promoting the economy. The French sent 108,000 soldiers—one-third of the French army—to defeat 'Abd al-Qadir's forces. They starved the Muslim population by destroying their crops, orchards, and herds. 'Abd al-Qadir was finally forced to surrender in 1847.

In 1871, another insurrection against the French broke out as a result of French economic policies, which had led Muslim areas to famine. Between 1868 and 1871, 20% of the Muslim population of the city of Constantine alone died of starvation. As a result of the revolt, France confiscated even more land.

By the time of World War I (1914–1918), a new class of European nationalists had emerged among the Algerian Muslims. Almost 200,000 Algerians fought for France during the war, and many now wanted full rights as French citizens. Some, however, wanted national independence for Algeria. The French denied both. Muslims were forbidden to become citizens in most cases unless they renounced Islam, and France considered Algeria an integral part of its nation.

During World War II (1939–1945), the Muslim opposition to France nevertheless joined the Free French forces in opposing the German Nazi invasion. Following the defeat of France by Adolf Hitler's forces, the local French government in Algeria joined the Nazi troops. At one point, they ordered that all Jews in Algeria be shipped to concentration camps in Europe. The Jews in Algeria hid in Muslim homes.

Upon the defeat of the French and German Nazi forces, the Algerians—along with Tunisians and Moroccans—asked France and the United States for independence as a reward for their support throughout the war. Their request was refused, and many of the same French leaders who had supported Hitler were reinstated in Algeria.

These events led to the Algerian War of Independence in 1954, in which Algerian Muslim nationalist parties launched a series of bombings on French military positions around the country. In August 1955, the Algerians attacked French civilians for the first time, killing 123 people in an attack in the city of Phillippeville. The French army responded by massacring as many as 12,000 Muslims. Between 1957 and 1960, the French—in what today would be called "ethnic cleansing"—forcibly removed more than 2 million Algerians from their villages to concentration camps in the plains, where tens of thousands died.

Nearly a million people—one-tenth of the Algerian population at the time—were killed between 1956 and 1962. It was one of the worst genocides in modern history. France eventually decided that the price of occupation was too high, and French president Charles De Gaulle negotiated a French withdrawal from Algeria. On 1 July 1962, Algerians voted nearly unanimously for independence, and Algeria was declared an independent country on 5 July 1962—exactly 132 years after the French invasion.

After independence, Algeria became a one-party socialist state ruled by the National Liberation Front, which had led the War of Independence. Many European companies were nationalized. French law was maintained on many civil issues, although Islamic traditions were also given representation in the law of the land. Algeria announced a strict policy of non-alignment, allying with neither the Soviet Union nor the United States.

The stagnation of oil prices on the world market negatively affected all Middle Eastern and North African states, including Algeria, which relies on oil for the majority of its revenues. Riots erupted in 1988 to protest the price of food, very high unemployment, and corruption among government officials. The riots were put down with bloody force, and hundreds were killed.

In response, the government rewrote the constitution to allow new parties to form and to liberalize the economy. The most popular of the new parties was the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which preached a return to traditional Islamic values and strict morality in public service. Its message had great appeal for the millions of unemployed Algerian young people. In the 1990 local elections, the FIS made substantial gains in all the major cities. In the first round of national elections in December 1991, the FIS also won large-scale victories despite the fact that the government had arrested its leaders. Fearing an FIS victory, the army took over, canceled elections, and sent 10,000 FIS activists to concentration camps in the desert; many were simply killed.

In response, civil war erupted. The exact number of dead in perhaps the most vicious civil war in North Africa will likely be never known. Estimates range from 100,000 to 300,000. Many of these deaths resulted from unprovoked raids by marauding militias attacking villages, often hacking their victims to death with hatchets.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Algeria has a population of almost 34 million, 60%–70% of whom are under the age of 30. Some 100,000 Algerians live in France, mainly for economic reasons but also because of deep historical ties. Many of these Algerians lead marginalized lives outside the mainstream of French culture, although they are third- or fourth-generation French residents. In 2006, French president Nicolas Sarkozy, for example, wondered aloud why there are no “French” players on the French national football team. The team’s most famous player, Zinedine Zidane, was born in the French town of Marseille but is of Algerian descent.

Algeria is located in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea. It is situated to the west of Libya and Tunisia and east of Morocco. The north is relatively fertile and mountainous. The south includes part of the Sahara desert. In all, more than four-fifths of the country is desert.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Arabic is the national language of Algeria. Before the Arab conquests, Berber was the chief spoken language. Today, Berber is still spoken in very rural areas.

Arabic, a highly evolved Semitic language that is related to Hebrew and Aramaic, is spoken by the majority of people in Algeria. Written Arabic has two forms: the first is classical Arabic, which is derived from the Quran. Modern Standard

Arabic is the language of the written media throughout the Arab-speaking world. Algerians also speak many dialects of Arabic. The Algerian dialect includes many slang terms from French. The dialect also includes many Berber words, including the names for plants and areas.

The literacy rate among Algerians over 15 years of age is 70%–79% for men and 60% for women. French is widely spoken, English less so. As in all Arabic countries, the Algerians take great pride in the Arabic language, as they believe it is the language in which Allah narrated the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad.

Some of the more common Arabic words used in Algeria (as in most Arabic) are religious in nature. When pledging to do something, an Algerian Muslim says, *Insha’ Allah* (If God wills it). Prior to any action, a Muslim should say, *Bismillah* (in the name of God).

Common Algerian female names are *Nafisa*, *’Aysha*, and *Farida*. Common male names are *’Abd al-Haq*, *Hamid*, and *’Abd al-Latif*.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Algeria has many legends based on the exploits of Muslim leaders who resisted the Crusaders or the French colonizers. These leaders often come from highly religious backgrounds and are considered well learned. They are called *marabouts*, or holy men, and they are believed to have *baraka*, a blessing or divine grace that allows them to perform miracles. Their burial sites are often destinations of pilgrimage, and some have become saints in the popular mind. Many people visit their graves to ask for intercession.

Most folklore in Muslim countries tells stories of important figures in religious history. One such story, which is commemorated annually throughout the Islamic world, tells of *al-Isra’ wa al-Mi’raj*. According to legend, on the 26th day of the Islamic month of Rajab, the Prophet Muhammad traveled at night from Mecca, Saudi Arabia (then Hijaz) to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he rode his wondrous horse, al-Burak, on a nocturnal visit to heaven.

## 5 RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of Algerians are Muslims. The practice of Islam, however, varies from individual to individual. For example, the secular revolutionaries who fought against France in the War of Independence called themselves *mujahideen*, or “those who struggle in the cause of God.” Once victorious, however, the Algerian revolutionaries created a secular state. Most Algerians belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, which was introduced by the conquering Arabs. There are still remnants, however, of the Kharijite influence, which espouses a stricter egalitarianism.

Islam teaches that God regularly sent guidance to humans in the form of prophets and accepts the earlier Semitic prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets who were sent with the message that there is only one God. Muslims also believe in heaven and hell, the Day of Judgment, and angels.

The Quran is the holy book of Muslims, and it teaches that in order to get to heaven, men and women must believe in God, do good works, and follow the dictates of Allah, as spelled out in the five pillars of Islam: (1) Muslims must pray five times a day; (2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; (3)





*A man overlooks the capital city of Algiers. (AP Images)*

Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; (4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca; and (5) each Muslim must recite the shahada—*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashhadu in Muhammadu rasul Allah*—which means, “I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.”

There are about 25,000 Roman Catholics in Algeria who remained after the French evacuation. Although there were about 140,000 Algerian Jews before the revolution, most moved to France. Today, there are only 1,000 Jews in Algeria.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Algeria commemorates both secular and Muslim religious holidays. One major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the month of fasting called Ramadan. During the month, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sex during the daytime in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate who do not have enough food. At the end of the month, Muslims celebrate for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of Abraham, as well as his son, to obey God’s command in all things, even as Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son. This holiday falls on the last day of the *hajj* (pilgrimage to

Mecca), and pilgrims are expected to sacrifice a goat or sheep and to offer the meat to the poor.

Religious holidays are celebrated by going to the mosque for group prayers and then coming home to large meals with the family and visiting relatives. Muslims exchange gifts on religious holidays. Part of the feast is normally given to relatives and to the poor.

Secular holidays include New Year’s Day (1 January); the socialist Labor Day (1 May), which commemorates worker solidarity around the world; and Independence Day (5 July). Most businesses, banks, and government offices close on these holidays.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Children between the ages of 5 and 15 are required by law to attend school. After that, they choose their preference for secondary education from a general, technical, or vocational track. Exams taken at the end of their studies decide whether students qualify for continuing education in a university, a technical institute, or a vocational training center.

Major personal events that cause Algerian families to celebrate together include births, baby-naming ceremonies, male circumcisions, and weddings. Weddings are very joyous affairs and feature customs particular to the different regions of the

country. In general, marriage celebrations last for several days; the groom is responsible for the cost of the festivities. After days of singing and eating, the bride is carried off to her groom, and the union is followed by another week of celebrations.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Algerians shake hands when greeting one another, and kissing on the cheek between two good friends of the same sex is common. Religious men and women do not shake hands with persons of the opposite sex.

Most socialization revolves around the family. Guests are treated with great hospitality and are served pastries and sweets. Visitors to Algeria frequently find themselves invited to join strangers in tea shops and even in private homes.

Algerian men and women do very little private socializing together. The sexes are separated at most gatherings. Dating is not allowed, and marriages are therefore arranged by well-meaning families or matchmakers.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Upon the evacuation of the French forces, Algeria's health care system suffered. Many hospitals were destroyed by the departing French. Because of poor education, there were only 300 doctors in all of Algeria at the end of the war.

Since independence, Algeria has made great improvements in health care. After 1975, the government provided free national health care for everyone. In 1984, the government began shifting the focus of medical care to preventing disease. Instead of building large hospitals, clinics and health centers were built in many areas, and these provided free immunizations and health care. In 2007, Algeria spent 3.6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health care. The government spent \$104 per capita on health care in 2004. In 2002, Algeria had 2002 physicians, equivalent to 1.13 per 1,000 persons; there were 62,000 nurses, or 1.99 per 1000 persons.

Housing, on the other hand, has become a greater problem than it was at the time of independence. Initially, as hundreds of thousands of French left Algeria for France, many poor Algerians were able to move into vacant properties. Other poor Algerians began building shantytowns near the cities. Unfortunately, the government did not pay much attention to the need for housing. As Algeria's population grew, the number of homes remained relatively stagnant. Today, Algeria has an acute housing shortage, and many families live together in the same home.

Algerian houses and gardens are surrounded by high walls for privacy. Inside, most homes have a central open area or patio, which is surrounded by the rooms of the house. Homes have a receiving room, bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, and, if the family is wealthy, a second patio. The outside of the house is usually whitewashed brick or stone.

In the 1980s, Algeria began investing heavily in transportation, though these investments were seriously derailed by the years of vicious violence. In 2004, there were 108,302 km of roadways, of which 70% were paved. There are approximately 4,000 km of railways. A rail line connects major cities and links Algeria with Morocco and Tunisia. Algeria has eight international airports, and its national airline, Air Algérie, links major Algerian cities and serves foreign destinations. There is frequent discussion of privatizing air travel in Algeria, but as of 2008, there were no private domestic carriers.

The Internet and mobile telephony are widely available in Algeria. In 2006, there were 21 mobile phone subscribers, 2.8 million land lines, 25 AM radio stations, 1 FM radio station, and 46 broadcast television stations. Algeria's Internet domain is .dz. In 2007, the country had 2,077 Internet hosts and 2.5 million regular Internet users.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Before the French occupation, Algerian family life was very traditional. Algerians lived with their extended families in tightly knit communities. A mother and father would live with their children in one home. The grandparents of the father would usually live with them. As male children married, they would bring their wives into the family as well. If a daughter became divorced or widowed, she, too, would live with the family. Children were raised by the entire extended family, and people in a town would pay close attention to the children of others in case they needed anything. Marriages were conducted by negotiation between the families of a bride and groom.

With the destruction of so many towns and villages by the French forces, extended family units broke down. Instead, Algerians developed loyalties to people who shared their particular predicament. A group of families living in a concentration camp, for example, developed loyalties to each other, similar to the blood ties of earlier times. In cities, the nuclear family started to predominate as more well-off Algerians began to imitate the French colons. The creation of modern, capitalist industry also turned most Algerians into hourly wage earners. Men and women alike worked in order to provide a minimum standard of living for their families.

In traditional Algerian society, women had generally been segregated in public life. Their primary responsibilities were raising children and taking care of home and husband. During the War of Independence, all this changed. Women were often involved in military battles, and some became commanders. Housewives became involved in planning resistance activities and hiding revolutionaries. The active participation of women led to a greater feeling of self-worth and greater self-empowerment among women. Men, too, began to change their perspectives as they learned to appreciate the contributions that women were making in all fields.

After independence, women were removed from the spotlight but continued to hold on to many of the gains they had earned during the war. As Algerian society has become more conservative in the face of economic deterioration, women's battle to maintain rights already won has taken on a greater urgency. In the last 10 years, women have become particularly politicized, engaging in demonstrations and more vocally expressing their interests.

## 11 CLOTHING

Two trends in clothing are currently visible in Algeria. Many Algerians, especially in the cities, dress in Western-style clothing. Many others, however, dress in traditional attire. Village men wear a *burnous* (a long hooded robe) and baggy pants, and women wear a *haik* (a long piece of cloth draped over the entire body and head). The *hijab* (a long, loose dress and hair covering) is an Islamic garment worn by many women.

During the civil war, traditional Algerian dress became politicized. The French banned women from wearing the hijab, but the prohibition had little practical effect. Women contin-

ued to dress traditionally, both as a sign of resistance to colonialism and because many Muslim women believe that their religion requires the modesty afforded by the hijab. Once independence was achieved, many women continued to wear hijab in public in order to gain greater public access. The hijab, it was felt, allowed them to interact with society as humans, not specifically as women. Recently, armed groups from the government and the opposition have begun assassinating women for dressing either in Western dress or in hijab, as they are viewed as expressing loyalty to either the military junta or to the Islamist opposition parties.

## 12 FOOD

Couscous is Algeria's national dish. It is steamed semolina wheat formed into tiny granular particles that are combined with other ingredients to make a main course. Couscous can be accompanied by meat, such as lamb or chicken, and/or mixed with a variety of vegetables. Algerians enjoy combining meat and fruit, and this combination is often served with couscous. The following is a Berber dish that combines all three North African favorites.

### Chicken Stuffed with Dried Fruit

3-1/2 pound chicken  
5 tablespoons olive oil  
1 onion, chopped  
1/4 cup pine nuts or chopped almonds  
1 cup mixed dried fruit (apricots, apples, pears, prunes, and raisins), soaked, drained, and chopped  
salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 325°F. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a pan, and cook the onion until pale gold. Stir in the nuts and cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the dried fruits and seasoning. Let cool. Stuff the chicken with the dried fruit mixture and truss. In a large, heavy, flame-proof casserole, brown the chicken in the remaining oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, and lay the chicken on one side. Cover the dish and cook in the oven for 1-1/2 hours, turning the chicken every 30 minutes. Leave chicken breast-side up for the last 30 minutes. Serve the chicken and stuffing with couscous.

(from *North African Cooking: Exotic Delights from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt*, by Hilaire Walden)

Spices are used in abundance in Algerian cooking, especially cumin, coriander, and cinnamon. Couscous can be mixed with honey, cinnamon, and almonds to make a pudding-like dessert.

Pork and alcoholic beverages are forbidden by the Islamic faith. Algeria does, however, produce wine, which it exports to Europe.

## 13 EDUCATION

Algeria has made great advances in education. At the time of independence, fewer than 1 million children were enrolled in school. The government sent many teachers to be trained abroad and hired many teachers from other countries to help make up the shortfall. Schools were built and enlarged. By 1975, 1.5 million children were in school, and by 2004, 12.5 million were enrolled. The seriousness with which the government viewed education is evidenced by the country's expenditures in the area. In 2003, Algeria spent 40% of its budget on

schooling. The results can be seen in improved literacy rates. At the time of independence, only 10% of Algerians were literate. By 2007, fully 70% of the population had achieved literacy.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Algerian literature stresses themes of nationalism, land, and tradition—elements that are considered vital to the decolonization process that Algeria has undergone. Perhaps the most famous French-language Algerian writer is Albert Camus, an essayist, playwright, and novelist. In 1957, Camus won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Another great Algerian French writer was Frantz Fanon, author of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which is considered one of the great works of postcolonial literature. Algerian-produced films have gained acclaim worldwide. The 1982 Cannes Film Festival award was won by an Algerian, Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, for his film *Desert Wind*, about the lives of Algerian women within traditional society. By far the most famous Algerian film is the 1966 black-and-white classic *The Battle of Algiers*, directed by the world-renowned Algerian director Gillo Pontecorvo. It tells the story of the Algerian War of Independence against the French and features some of the actual guerrilla fighters in the film. It won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival and was nominated for three Academy Awards in the United States: best screenplay, best director, and best foreign-language film.

## 15 WORK

Since independence, Algeria has worked hard to industrialize its economy. The costs of industrialization and social welfare have been met by oil and natural gas production. In 2007, oil and gas made up approximately 60% of Algeria's budget revenues, 30% of GDP, and 96% of export earnings. The country has the eighth largest natural gas reserves in the world and is the fourth largest gas exporter. Algerians have recently begun mining and exporting nonfuel minerals such as mercury, phosphate, and iron ore. Algeria's GDP growth rate in 2006 was 4.6%, outpacing most of Europe and the United States. In addition to these sources of employment, Algerian laborers manufacture electronics, building materials, plastics, fertilizer, paper, clothing, leather goods, and food products. About one-third of workers are employed in the industrial sector. Although in the 1980s and 1990s, many Algerians worked in the farm sector, in 2004, only 8.1% did. In all, 61% worked in industry. Algerians who do not find work at home are often successful at finding employment across the Mediterranean in Europe. Algerian workers are commonplace in Europe, especially in France.

## 16 SPORTS

Algeria's national sport is football, known as soccer in the United States. Football is popular both as a spectator sport and as a participation sport played by boys and men. In the city, boys play outside housing developments. Algeria has a national team that participates in matches organized by the African Football Confederation. In 2008, FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) ranked Algeria's national team 17th among the teams in Africa and 78th in the world. Algerians also enjoy horseback riding and swimming. Clubs that specialize in water activities are found along the Mediterranean coast.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Algeria's newspapers are published in both Arabic and French, and television shows are also produced in both languages. There are three radio networks, and each broadcasts in a different Algerian language—Arabic, French, and Berber.

Although Algeria has movie theaters, there are not enough for Algeria's population. Swimming pools in most cities and villages are very limited in number, and Western-style dance halls are almost nonexistent. Algerians are beachgoers. Summer resorts along the Mediterranean coast are popular with the middle class and are centers for swimming, water skiing, and tennis.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Algerian handicrafts include rugs, pottery, embroidery, jewelry, and brass. Handwoven baskets are sold at *suqs* (markets) and used by customers to carry the goods they purchase.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The greatest problems facing Algeria today stem from the bitterness engendered by the long, vicious civil war. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of civilians massacred by both sides, the infrastructure of the country suffered great deterioration. The capital, Algiers, became an armed camp, with certain districts controlled by the military and the remainder run by the resistance. Both sides targeted civilians in order to spread fear and hatred.

Life has slowly returned to normal, but in 2007, several European tourists were kidnapped, some of whom died in captivity. Violence has returned to parts of Algeria since a lull in the late 1990s; though crime rates are significantly reduced, the trend is troubling for the country.

In 2007, the unemployment rate was 14%, and the percentage of the population living below the poverty rate was 25%.

The government is also faced with the question of what to do with the refugees from the disputed Western Sahara. According to 2006 estimates, 90,000 were living in squalid conditions in the southwestern part of the country. Additionally, there are approximately half a million internally displaced persons as a result of continued internal violence.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Human trafficking is a significant problem, particularly among sub-Saharan women, who are often promised transit through Algeria to the European Union but find themselves instead sold into brothels in Algeria or other destinations. Slavery is also a concern, particularly among orphaned children. During the bloody civil war, many urban, educated women sided with the moderates against the Islamists, fearing the imposition of strict Islamic laws. Still, as in many Islamic countries, many Algerian women gladly wear the abaya and the hijab, believing it to be a marker of modesty, a highly valued attribute in both Arab and Muslim culture, as well as a symbol of adherence to the teachings in the Quran.

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—revised by J. Henry

# AMHARA

**PRONUNCIATION:** ahm-HAH-rah

**LOCATION:** Ethiopia

**POPULATION:** About 14 million

**LANGUAGE:** Amharic

**RELIGION:** Coptic Monophysite Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Ethiopians; Tigray

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Among the many ethnic groups in Ethiopia, the Amhara are the most populous, representing about one-fourth of the population. Their language, Amharic, is the official language of Ethiopia. From the time when modern Ethiopia was the realm of Abyssinia, the Amhara and the Tigray filled the ranks of the political elite of the country, except when the Italians controlled Ethiopia as a colony from 1936–1942. Until 1974, all Ethiopian emperors were either Amhara or Tigray. In the 2000s, Tigray dominate the Ethiopian government. Amhara remain a dominant social force, however.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The traditional homeland of the Amhara people is the central highland plateau of Ethiopia. For over 2,000 years they have inhabited this region. Walled by high mountains and cleaved by great gorges, the ancient realm of Abyssinia has been relatively isolated from the influences of the rest of the world. Situated at altitudes ranging from roughly 2,100–4,300 m (7,000–14,000 ft) and at latitudes roughly between 9° to 14° north of the equator, the rich volcanic soil together with a generous rainfall and cool, brisk climate offers its population a stable agricultural and pastoral existence. However, because the Amhara were an expansionist, militaristic people who ruled their country through a line of emperors, the Amhara people can now be found all over Ethiopia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language of the Amhara people is Amharic. It is a Semitic language somewhat related to Arabic and Hebrew. Its origins derive from a Sabeian language spoken by merchants and traders who migrated into Ethiopia from the Yemen region of South Arabia about 3,000 years ago. This South Arabian population settled in the highlands of Ethiopia as farmers and traders mixed with those inhabitants already present. These earlier residents are known as the Agau people. Borrowing occurred from the Agau language and Amharic emerged as it is spoken today.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Amhara culture has a wealth of folklore in the form of proverbs, legends, myths, and religious parables and anecdotes. This folklore often teaches moral lessons to children and reminds adults of proper conduct. It also provides explanations for phenomena that are otherwise unexplainable to the average Amhara peasant farmer, since scientific explanations are most often outside the realm of Amhara knowledge. A good example which shows how a story weaves explanation into a cultural institution and reinforces that institution is the phenomenon

of menstruation. How does one account for this regular emission of blood when modern knowledge of reproductive biology is outside the realm of one's culture?

The Amhara culture is patriarchal and authoritarian, emphasizing the superiority of the male over the female. The Amhara people historically had an imperialistic, militant, and expansionist government led by highly capable emperors directing armies with superior military strategies. There is much in Amhara folklore idealizing the image of the Amhara warrior who vanquishes the enemy through the shedding of the enemies' blood. In the same way that a warrior sheds the blood of his enemy, according to Amhara folklore, so God has "cursed" woman, shedding her blood each month to remind her that she is the vanquished, the servant of her father and her husband. In return for her loyalty, she will be rewarded with healthy children, a large family, and a strong man to keep her family safe. There are also stories that teach that the enemy is not to be hated but is rather to be appreciated, because without an enemy, how is a warrior to prove his worth and establish his identity and status in his community and society?

## 5 RELIGION

The Amhara people are Coptic Monophysite Christians. The population was converted to Christianity in the 4th century AD and their form of the religion has changed very little, if at all, since its beginnings in Ethiopia. Ancient Amhara culture had a writing system, and there exists a wealth of texts that have preserved the ancient teachings of Christianity in a language that is not spoken by living communities today but remains the language of the Church, something like Latin does within the Catholic religion. This is the language of Geez.

Amhara Christianity is very unlike what Westerners recognize as Christianity. Ethiopian Christianity is loaded with Old Testament religion and folklore, as well as material often considered a part of so-called "pagan" religion. Hence, we can say that Amhara religion consists of four separate but interwoven realms of religious belief. First, there is the dominant Monophysite Christian religion, including the Almighty God, the Devil, and the saints and angels in Heaven. Second, there are the *zar* and *adbar* protector spirits who exact tribute in return for physical and emotional security and who may punish, in the case of the former, or neglect, in the case of the latter, for failure to recognize them through the practice of the appropriate rituals. Third is the belief in *buda*, a class of people who possess the evil eye and exert a deadly power over the descendants of God's "chosen children." The fourth category of beliefs includes the ghouls and devils that prowl the countryside, creating danger for unsuspecting persons who cross their path. Although the Christian beliefs have been practiced since nearly the beginning of Christianity, the "pagan" elements probably go back much further.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Each and every Amhara person has a patron saint who is recognized on that saint's day. The celebration involves the host throwing a party for relatives and friends at his or her homestead, serving coffee and small treats, and having hours of conversation. There are major saints' days that everyone will celebrate. Sts. Mary (Mariam), Michael (Mikaeyl), Gabriel (Gahbrieyl), and George (Giyorgis). On these days chickens, sheep, or goats may be slaughtered for feasting. But there are

also over 200 days of the year in the Coptic Christian calendar which prescribe fasting, such as Easter. There are also secular holidays such as Battle of Adwa Day, celebrating the victory over the Italians in 1896, and Freedom Day, celebrating the driving out of the previous communist dictatorship in 1991.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Marriage and death mark two major rites of passage in Amhara society. In a society where the virginity of the girl is highly valued, she is very often married very young, normally shortly after her first menstruation, but sometimes even earlier. Marriage is an elaborate celebration involving gift-giving negotiations and reciprocities, feasting, date-planning, new house-building for the couple, and so on. The day of the actual wedding is an all-day, all-night party involving feasting, drinking, and intense conversation. The bride's virginity must be proven after consummation of the marriage by a show of blood on a cloth. In the Amhara warrior tradition, the men in the wedding party wave the cloth like a flag of victory, put it on their heads, and dance and sing and drink to celebrate the victory and the consummation of the marriage. If the bride does not shed blood, implying that she is not a virgin, she risks the punishment of being hung upside down in a tree and semiasphyxiated over a smoky *qoso* fire. The groom may take a piece of glass or a razor blade to bed with him to assure that blood is on that cloth in order to preserve his honor (marrying a woman who is not a virgin is considered dishonorable).

The ritual of death is a very quiet affair. Upon the passing of an aged person the body is washed, wrapped in new funerary clothing, and, within 24 hours after death, is carried in a woven straw mat to the church, where it is buried, accompanied by the prayers of the priest. The death of a person who is younger, by accident or disease, is a time of great shock and sadness and often involves much more community activity. For a period of time after the burial, relatives and friends will come to the house of the deceased and sit for a time in quietude. The host will serve coffee, bread, and small snacks to the visitors, who offer their prayers and condolences and depart.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Amhara espouse an ancient feudal culture with a considerable elaboration of outward formalities. There are prescribed behaviors of deference to persons of higher status, and a rich inventory of proverbs and parables that teach proper conduct in numerous types of situations: public behavior of children with parents and older relatives; women with their husbands; or men with older or more powerful men. But among status equals—children among themselves; men together in informal situations, such as in beer houses; women enjoying coffee together; men and the women they are with privately—here there is informality and the free expression of feeling.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional peasant Amhara lead a life that has not changed much in the past few thousand years, because they practice an ancient form of agriculture which involves ox-drawn plow, simple irrigation techniques or complete dependency on rainfall, and simple tools for harvesting their crops of wheat, barley, hops, beans, and an Ethiopian grain called *teff*. In times past, the cool, temperate highland plateau was blessed with a fertile volcanic soil and ample rainfall to make possible three



harvests per year. In recent times, the drought and famine of the 1980s, which continues in parts of the highlands to this day, has affected other regions of Amharaland. Because the new government, which took over in 1991, is unsympathetic to the Amhara people, they continue to suffer hardships from the climatic disaster, as well as from political discrimination.

In the city, the Amhara live among peoples from many other cultural groups in tightly clustered contiguous villages. Their houses are built of mud, with corrugated iron roofs. Some travelers have called Addis Ababa “the city of iron roofs.” Families most often have either latrine-type toilets or no human waste disposal system at all. In most cases water is acquired from a public pipe located amid these settlements of crowded communities.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Both peasant farmers and city residents value large families. Married couples seek to have many children. Parents who have seven living children are considered to be blessed by God. Children represent a source of economic support when they are grown, a form of social security for the parents in their old age. Many children in a family promise many grandchildren who are a joy to be with, and a promise of carrying on family traditions. A family lives and works together. The day begins at dawn. The woman boils the water, roasts the coffee beans, and pounds them into the grounds that are brewed for the morning coffee. She prepares the breakfast, which is often the leftovers from dinner the night before. The children eat first



An Amhara woman with her child in Ethiopia.  
(Robert Caputo/Aurora/Getty Images)

and are sent on their errands that contribute to the tasks of the household. Then the husband eats his breakfast. In the city the husband will go off to work, if he has work, while the wife remains in the village caring for hers and other children of relatives and friends. Often women have their own jobs to go to; many women own coffee or beer houses or work in hair salons. One commonly sees an unrelated child working in the house, taking care of a baby and doing simple household chores. This child may be an orphan or one who was abandoned in the streets of Addis Ababa because of extreme poverty.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The Amhara live at cold, high altitudes. Even the capital city of Addis Ababa lies at about 2,300 m (7,500 ft). Therefore, Amhara clothing is designed to conserve body heat. The Amhara of the city today commonly wear familiar Western-type clothing made in China, Singapore, and the Philippines. But many still prefer the native dress which consists of jodhpur trousers and long shirt, covered by a soft, sheet-sized cotton wrap called a *gabi*. This is worn by both men and women, but the style of these clothes varies according to the gender of the person. In the countryside, the Amhara do not wear shoes, but in

the towns and the city shoes are generally worn to protect the feet against the sharp debris of the streets.

### **12 FOOD**

The range of altitude in Ethiopia allows for a great variety of food crops to be grown. In the highlands the Amhara grow barley, wheat, hops, and a variety of beans. In the mid-range altitudes the farmer can grow millet and *teff*, another variety of wheat. The major export cash crop, coffee, is grown in this mid-range ecology. Coffee is an integral part of the Ethiopian cuisine as well as a major national cash crop for both internal consumption and export. In the lowlands, the Amhara grow the staple spice that is central to the cuisine of Ethiopia—cayenne pepper, which, together with a dozen other spices ground together, makes up the *berbere* sauce that is key to Ethiopian cuisine. Sugar cane is a major lowland crop the people cannot do without. Although Amhara cuisine is known to be very spicy, much of the vegetable fare need not be hot and spicy and may be favored by people with sensitive stomachs. The rate of coffee consumption is one of the highest in the world, although tea is also a very popular beverage. The eating of pork is forbidden by the Christian Amhara.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Amhara have traditionally seen formal education as under the authority of the Ethiopian Coptic Christian Church. In modern times, encouraged by the last emperor, Haile Selassie I, secular education has become a dominant institution in the urban areas, and to a lesser extent in the countryside as well. Although in the towns and countryside secular education would appear slow compared to the Western view, in the city and in some towns Western-sponsored educational institutions provide a decent enough education to allow their students to enter the Addis Ababa University. This university provides good training in political science, economics, history, and anthropology. Many students today may attend institutions for graduate education in Europe and America, studying medicine as well as the above subjects.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Some 3,000 years ago, Semitic-speaking people (very likely including Jews) from South Arabia crossed the straits of Babel-Mendab into the highlands of Ethiopia. Discovery of the fertile soils there then brought farmers as well as traders and merchants. They brought with them agricultural skills which included terracing, irrigation, canals, hydraulic devices, the plow, and the camel. They were also skilled in weaving and making incense. They brought a writing system consisting of a 256-character syllabary, and they practiced sophisticated techniques of construction which included stone-masonry. They also were familiar with and established a large-scale political system which enabled them eventually to evolve a centralized empire. The earliest and most notable example of this was the city-state of Axum where, in the mid-4th century, the emperor Ezana converted his people to Christianity.

### **15 WORK**

In the countryside, work roles and specific tasks are segregated according to age and sex. Children collect cow dung from the fields, throw it into a hole, mix it with water, and make cow

pie batter which is then shaped into round, flat pies and dried to use as fuel for the hearthfires. Women carry water back to their homesteads in large, round, narrow-necked clay jugs that can weigh over 45 kg (100 lbs). They also grind the grain, make bread from the flour, prepare the meals, and make the beer and liquor. Men plow the fields, cut the grain, litigate in court, and serve in the local militia. Both men and women look forward to the weekly market day when goods are bartered, bought, and sold, and a good deal of social activity is enjoyed. In the towns and city, numerous small businesses flourish, selling everything imaginable, and other forms of wage-labor can be found, if one is fortunate. Beggars are a very common sight in the city, and include ex-soldiers from the losing side of the recent civil war; mothers with their infant children in their arms; old men and women with no means of support; and children whose families have been lost in the war, from disease, or who have simply abandoned them because of extreme poverty.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer, known as “football,” is a passion among most Ethiopians. Running is also a very popular sport, as well as a mode of physical conditioning. Amhara and other Ethiopian individuals are prime marathon runners because the high altitude prepares them well for competition in other countries. There is also the traditional sport of *ganna*, which is somewhat like hockey. The whipping contest carried out on the holiday of *Buhe* is a test of Amhara endurance and toughness. In this contest, two teams come together on a “battlefield” and whip each other until one team flees or is so badly beaten that the elders proclaim the other team the victors. This is a true test of Amhara masculinity and warrior abilities, traits which are emphasized in Amhara culture.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the countryside, children make their own toys such as dolls, animals, weapons, cars, etc., out of mud, sticks, rocks, rags, tin cans, and the like. Male youth engage in competitive sports. Adults drink in the drinking houses, sing, dance, gossip, and patronize the minstrels who travel from village to village singing of the news and gossip in other villages and in the city and towns. The city offers much more in the form of movie houses, electronic game parlors, drinking houses and night clubs, television videos (a booming business in Addis Ababa), and organized sports.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Amhara painting is a dominant art form in Ethiopia. It is usually oil on canvas or hide, and it normally involves religious themes. Paintings from the Middle Ages are known by art historians from Europe and America as distinct treasures of human civilization. The Amhara are also weavers of beautiful patterns embellished with embroidery. They are also fine gold- and silversmiths and produce delicate works of filigree jewelry and religious emblems.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Haile Sellassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, was the last in the line of Amhara kings who ruled Ethiopia for almost 2,000 years, with the exception in the Middle Ages of a few incursions from the Falasha Black Jews of the Simien mountains, led by the zeal-

ous Queen Gudit, and Islamic invaders, led by Ahmed Gragn. There were also Italian incursions at the end of the 19th century and again just prior to World War II. The bloody so-called “communist” revolution of 1973 ended the Amhara reign and, with drought and famine raging in the north, threw much of Amhara society into chaos. The overthrow in 1991 put an end to both the brutal dictatorship and the 30-year civil war, but it also left large segments of the Amhara people dispossessed of their land, split from their families, and more impoverished than ever before. Many thousands of Amhara, individually or with families, migrated to towns and the city of Addis Ababa to find a source of food to stay alive, and to try to establish a life until their land could be regained, if at all possible. Because people from many other cultural groups were also migrating to the city, Addis Ababa became overpopulated. Once a lovely city supporting a population of about 600,000 in the mid-1960s, by the 2000s it had swelled to nearly 4 million people.

Amhara men, farmers without city-adapted skills, could only look for day labor or go begging in the streets. Women could cook or sell beer and soft drinks in little mud huts or kiosks. If they were young and attractive, they could work in bars and prostitute themselves making much more money than domestic work could bring. Poverty has driven a preponderance of Amhara women to engage in prostitution either part- or full-time, their ages ranging from around 9 or 10 to 25 or 30 years old. The diseases of poverty accentuate the problems: HIV, tuberculosis, a variety of intestinal bacterial infections, internal and external parasites, leprosy, elephantiasis, schistosomiasis, roundworms, and tapeworms are all widespread. Current efforts to solve these problems have been too few and too weak to make any significant impact on the poverty in one of the poorest nations in the world.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Sexuality and gender have always been issues to be worked out in traditional societies the world over. The underlying motivations include: a) explaining bodily functions, mainly of women, b) creating symbolic distinctions between the sexes through ritual and genital excision, c) maintaining male domination over reproductive females, and very importantly, d) to create a level of efficiency in work roles—who can do what work best.

Amhara organization of gender roles and the issues that arise from this, especially in modern times, are no exception to these general categories. Amhara women, as in all living species, conceive, gestate, and birth their young. The mother nurses her infant with the milk in her breasts. If she bears twins or if she hasn't enough milk for her child she may seek a lactating woman, a “wet nurse” who has either lost her child or is still lactating shortly after weaning her own child. The most fundamental bond of humans, that of mother and child, prepares the mother to nurture the child through infancy. During infancy the Amhara child is not given its Christian name until it is five years old and strong enough to survive. Until then it is called a pet name which may have no gender reference, such as “pretty little one” or “my lovely.”

At forty days the male infant is circumcised. This is performed by a specialist who is expert in this operation and it is relatively simple with very little incidence of complications. After eighty days the female infant has an excision ceremony. This has some variation depending on what part of Amharaland one is in. In the central highlands of Manz the labia mi-



nor are excised with a scissors or razor blade. In the region of Gojjam, to the northeast of Manz, the clitoral hood is excised, leaving the clitoral organ exposed. These genital operations are relatively mild compared to those performed in other regions of Ethiopia and Africa. In modern times we see these customs disappearing in the capital city of Addis Ababa and the larger towns, but in the remote rural regions ancient customs prevail.

Amhara women are therefore much more closely tied to their children and the nurturance-based work roles of the homestead. Mothers teach and discipline their young children relative to their age. The work of girls and women include carrying water in large clay vessels on their back, fetching firewood and dung for fuel. When children are available they will retrieve dung and make dried cakes preparing it for fuel. Women clean, separate, and grind grain for either flour or fermentation in making beer or for distillation in making liquor. Women's work begins often before dawn and ends near midnight.

The work of men includes preparing the soil with ox-drawn plow, seeding their apportioned land with the start of the light rains. Then he has little to do until his crops are ready for harvesting. He normally enjoys life at the bars, traveling to see relatives, litigating in the court. But plowing is very hard work. Cutting the barley or wheat or bean crops is tedious. It is his work to slaughter the chickens, sheep, goats, and cattle when the occasion arises. The man is also the hunter when opportunity allows. Certain game on the highland plateau of Ethiopia are endangered species such as the Walia Ibex, Gelada Baboon, Lammergeier Vulture—a majestic bird with a ten foot wingspan, and Semien Wolf. There is protection for these animals yet, the meat of the Ibex, a species of mountain goat, is highly valued and the luxurious main of the Gelada Baboon is worn as a headdress on certain ceremonial occasions.

These gender-defined roles have been fixed by three thousand years of tradition. They have served to adapt and survive these highland populations. But in times of culture change in the more urbanized areas, who are now more in touch with world media and modern technology, culture change is evident. An amendment to the constitution of the present government has a section devoted to the rights of women. Where traditionally girls were frustrated from or directly prevented from going to school, today a girl has the right to an education. A girl's work in the home was important and much needed, but parents are realizing that a girl's education may create opportunities for her to contribute to the family in other ways. Health facilities are becoming more available to women who have had complications in birth or gynecological problems stemming from excision or infection. The Fistula Hospital was the first in the world to treat and surgically repair women torn from birthing through excision adhesions. Oprah Winfrey publicized this hospital in her drive to abolish female genital excision. Women now have greater access to legal services to address problems with husbands or to argue for higher wages or to litigate her fair share of inheritance. And today it is easier for women to enter into the political arena and serve in office. Women's Affairs Offices, called setoch guday in Amharic, are evident in many towns in the Amhara region and serve the women who seek them out. The Women's Affairs Agency is aggressively promoting the education of sex-workers in how to prevent HIV/AIDS or seek help after infection.

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—by R. Reminick

# ANGOLANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ang-GOH-luhns

**LOCATION:** Angola

**POPULATION:** 15 million

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese, Ovimbundu, Mbundu, Kongo, Chokwe, and other Bantu languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Catholic and Protestant); indigenous religious beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Bakongo

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The territory within the boundaries of the Republic of Angola has had over 500 years of contact with the Portuguese, much of it conflictual. In 1482 the Portuguese established forts and missions along the coast and converted King Alphonso of the Kongo to Christianity. His kingdom maintained perhaps the most harmonious and equal relations with Portugal, engaging in cultural and economic exchanges.

This relationship changed dramatically with the demand for slaves. Beginning in 1483 slave trading began along the coast, penetrated to the interior in the 1700s, and subsequently passed through a series of bans. The first of the bans was in 1836, and although the Portuguese formally abolished slavery in 1875, it was not until 1911 that the slave trade ended.

Portuguese settlement in Angola began earnestly in 1575 with the founding of Luanda, originally a settlement of convicts. However, Angola's great economic potential beckoned Portuguese colonists who in the 1840s arrived in considerable numbers and began cultivating cotton, sugar, sisal and coffee. They also engaged in fishing. With the consent of the European powers, Portugal determined Angola's borders in 1891. In the early 1900s newly developed cacao and palm oil plantations were soon followed by diamond mining. Economic prosperity led to the designation of Angola as a Portuguese overseas territory in 1951. A year later, Portuguese immigrants began to flood the first *colonatos*, planned settlement projects. The Portuguese had a policy of "whitening" the population, and it became state policy for Portuguese men to go out and impregnate Angolan women. Further efforts were directed at culturally assimilating these and other Angolans under the *assimilado* policy. By 1960, only 80,000 of a population of 4.5 million people enjoyed the privileges of Portuguese citizenship, and the policy was abandoned.

Angolan resistance movements pushed back against Portuguese colonization. The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) led by Agostinho Neto, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) led by Bakongo leader Holden Roberto, and the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Ovimbundu leader Jonas Savimbi engaged in armed resistance. The 1974 coup in Portugal, which brought down the government, ended Portugal's colonial wars in Angola as well as in Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. After a protracted struggle and two separate declarations of independence by the MPLA and UNITA, Angola gained its independence from Portugal on 11 November, 1975.

Shortly after independence, the coalition government of the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA collapsed. Civil war followed, lasting nearly 15 years. With the Cold War in full swing, the

Soviet Union backed the ruling MPLA with the assistance of Cuban troops. The United States, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and China supported the UNITA-FNLA coalition, and South Africa made periodic incursions in support of UNITA. José Eduardo dos Santos succeeded Neto upon his death in 1979. In 1989, dos Santos and Savimbi agreed to elections and foreign withdrawal, completed in 1991. In the first round of the 1992 elections, UNITA perceived that electoral fraud was underway and launched simultaneous attacks around the country. In 1994, the two sides signed a peace treaty guaranteeing UNITA a share in the government and providing for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force. Nonetheless, heavy fighting resumed intermittently up to Jonas Savimbi's death in a gun battle with government troops in 2002, which also ended UNITA's bid to overthrow the MPLA.

In the post-Savimbi era, the MPLA with international assistance disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated some 80,000 UNITA ex-combatants and thousands more of their family members into civilian life. However, head of state President José Eduardo dos Santos repeatedly postponed elections and manipulated political processes to forestall the promised transition to representative democracy.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Angola is bordered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the north, Zambia to the east, and Namibia to the south. Cabinda, to the north, is physically separated from the rest of Angola by the Congo River and a narrow corridor of land belonging to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To the west lies the Atlantic Ocean. The total area is 481,354 sq mi (1,246,700 sq km). The capital is Luanda. Two types of terrain characterize the country: a narrow coastal plain borders the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and an interior plateau covers the rest of the country. The climate is semiarid in the south and along the coast; in the north it varies from cool and dry to hot and rainy.

Several major rivers find their sources in the centrally located Bié Plateau, including the Cunene River flowing to the south and west, the Kuanza River flowing northwest to the Atlantic, the Kwango River, flowing northward, which joins the Congo River to the north, and the Zambeze to the east, far below Victoria Falls. The Cunene River has four hydroelectric dams.

The tallest mountains are found in the region of the Bié Plateau. To the southwest, in the Serra Xilengue, Mt. Moco rises to a majestic height of 8,594 ft. While some areas are prone to flooding, others are threatened by desertification. Oil is the main natural resource, but Angola is also rich in diamonds, gold, copper, iron ore, zinc, and manganese. Only 2.65% of the land is arable; much of it is forest and woodland (43%), and 23% is meadow and pasture. Other uses account for 32%.

A network of roads connects most of the country, although it is least developed in the southeast. Three rail lines terminating at ocean ports run approximately east to west from the interior. The longest and most important of these originates in the Katanga copperbelt of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since 1928 the Benguela Railroad carried the bulk of Zaire's minerals to Lobito port until rebels sabotaged the line in the 1980s. In 2008 work to reopen the line was nearing completion.



In 2000 the population was estimated to be around 15 million and was projected to reach over 20 million by 2015. The largest city was Luanda with a population of 500,000. The majority ethnic group was the Ovimbundu, comprising 37.2% of the population. The Mbundu were second at 21.6%, followed by the Kongo at 13.2%, and the Luimbe-Nganguela and the Nyaneka-Humbe at 5.4% each. Smaller groups account for the remaining 17.2% of the population. Scattered in the arid lower third of Angola are seminomadic peoples, who until the 20th century hunted and gathered. They since have adopted more sedentary lifestyles such as herding and planting.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Portuguese is the official language, although 95% of Angolans speak Ovimbundu, Mbundu, Kongo, Chokwe, and other Bantu languages. Portuguese remains important because it is the language of government, national media, and international relations. However, since independence, African languages have been introduced into the primary school classroom. Literacy in African languages is being encouraged and regional radio broadcasts occur in local languages.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Kongo ethnic group to the north claims descent from the ancient Christian kingdom founded by Alfonso I in the early 16th century. Alfonso I has assumed a great importance both to Kongo identity and to Portuguese international relations history.

The first president of Angola is also its greatest hero. Agostinho Neto was both a physician and an accomplished poet. He made many contributions to *Mensagem*, a literary review with anti-colonial goals. He belonged to a group of young intellectuals responsible for shaping the country politically and culturally. Their battle cry in the early 1950s was, "Let us discover Angola." They also coined the term, *angolidade* (Angolity), Angola's equivalent of *negritude* or "Africanization." In 1955 he published nationalist poetry. He was the founding father of the resistance movement, MPLA.

### 5 RELIGION

Angolans are extremely Christianized with as many as half of the population identifying themselves as Catholic and at least 15% as Protestant. Estimates of traditional religious practices vary, but it is likely that close to half of the population also believes or subscribes to some form of indigenous religion. The Catholic Church has at times been identified with colonialism, and therefore has gone through periods of conflict with the government. In 1949 Simon Mtoko, a Protestant, founded a Christian sect patterned after the Kimbanguists of Lower Congo (DRC). Kimbanguism, an African offshoot of Protestant Christianity, is practiced by an undetermined number of Bakongo in the northwest region of the country (see **Bakongo**).

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Independence Day, November 11, is the national holiday. On this day the president usually makes a national address, and celebratory events such as wheelchair races are held. Other public holidays include the Day of the Martyrs in January to commemorate a huge massacre of Angolans committed by the Portuguese; *Inicio de Luta Armada* (Commencement of Armed Struggle Day) on February 4 (1961); National Hero's Day (anniversary of the birth of President Neto) on September 17; and Foundation of the MPLA Workers' Party Day on December 10 (1956). Victory Day is on March 27, Youth Day on April 14, Armed Forces Day on August 1, and Pioneers' Day on December 1. The most recent holiday is Reconciliation Day on April 4 to mark the anniversary of the end of the war approximately two months after the death of Jonas Savimbi.

Christian holy days and New Year's Day are widely celebrated. On Christmas and New Year's Day friends assume godmother (*madrinha*) and godfather (*padrinho*) relationships. They take turns giving gifts to each other; one offers the other a gift on Christmas and the other returns the gesture on New Year's. In the capital, young people are likely to spend New Year's Eve with their families until midnight, just long enough to taste some champagne, and then head for the night clubs with friends until early morning. Angolans celebrate *carnival*, (Mardi Gras) the Tuesday immediately preceding Ash Wednesday.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Indigenous traditions revolving around birth, puberty, and death still persist despite acculturation to Christianity and Western customs. For example, the Mbwela people hold masked festivals during the *mukanda* circumcision rite. In the ceremony, the *ndzingi* (masked anthropomorphic giants) dance for the young boys. Christianity has influenced the rites of passage for a majority of the population. Birth, baptism, marriage, and funeral ceremonies are marked by church rites.



*Classroom in Luanda, Angola. Schools continue to struggle against social instability, low investment, and teacher shortages. (Jason Laure)*

People drink champagne and give gifts to celebrate the birth of a child. Some funeral celebrations last for days and are accompanied by feasts and drink. They can move quickly from sadness to festivity where it is fitting to celebrate a life fully lived (as opposed to mourning the loss of a child or young person).

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

High value is placed on personal relationships and greetings are essential to making and maintaining good relations. The most common greeting is the Portuguese *Ola* (Hello) followed by *Como esta?* or *Como vai?* (How are you?). Depending on the time of the day, one might hear *Bom dia* (Good morning), *Boa tarde* (Good afternoon), or *Boa noite* (Good night). Handshaking is common. A kiss on each cheek is becoming an accepted greeting among friends in urban life, although older people prefer to shake hands. Pointing is considered rude.

Young people usually choose their own spouses, but it is viewed as risky to wed someone who may not be able to bear children, and it has become customary for a serious boyfriend to wait until his girlfriend becomes pregnant before proposing marriage. In fact, the end of budding love relationships is seldom formally declared so that at some future point the boy can return and resume a sexual relationship with a former girlfriend. Once engaged, the boy brings his family and a small delegation of friends to visit the family of his girlfriend. It is common practice for the boy to bring enough cloth for his girlfriend's mother to make a dress, a western suit and tie

for the father (or ranking father figure), drinks for the family and friends, and perhaps an envelope with money and a written note explaining intentions to be read before all gathered.

As sexual intercourse is considered a normal part of life, straight men and women may have occasional interludes with members of the same sex, and such encounters do not lead to anxious self-questioning about sexual orientation.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions deteriorated dramatically, especially for the Ovibundu over the course of the civil war, and have not returned to pre-war levels. The majority of Angolans still do not have access to clean water, health care and medical facilities, and a dependable food supply. Some 10 million people live on less than \$1 a day, over 40% of children under the age of five are underweight for age, and life expectancy for the average adult is 45 years. On the Human Development Index, which measures general well-being (life expectancy, education, and standard of living), Angola ranks 162nd out of 177 countries.

Houses are typically made out of local materials, with mud or cinderblock walls and thatched or galvanized iron roofs. In Luanda, where space is limited, apartment living is becoming more common. However, since 2002 more than 50,000 people have been evicted from their houses to make room for luxury housing in Luanda.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families tend to be close-knit nuclear units with strong extended kin relationships. Until the war, there was little need for orphanages or hospices as working family members took in those needing special care. However, the large number of casualties and land mine victims in the prime of life has meant that children, elderly people and kin have had to assume greater responsibility for their families, which has raised tension and stress in family life.

Most ethnic groups are both matrilineal and patriarchal, meaning that males inherit from their mother's brother. In the Mbundu ethnic group, a daughter would join her husband in his village, and a son would join his mother's brother's village. The Ovimbundu ethnic group has a double inheritance system, both matrilineal and patrilineal.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the towns and cities, Western-style clothing is common and urban Angolans go to great lengths to be in sync with the latest fashions in clothing, accessories, cell phones, and sunglasses—much of which is imported from Brazil. Angolan youth prefer casual jeans and T-shirts, except for special occasions. The villages remain more traditional, where women wear *panos*, African wrap-around batik garments. Body tattoos on young people are catching on, but are rare in rural areas. Some groups such as the Mukubao in the southern province of Kuando Kubango are very traditional and do not wear clothing.

## 12 FOOD

Those who can, eat three meals a day. A good breakfast consists of bread, eggs, tea, or coffee. On occasion, mothers may prepare a special breakfast treat of sweet rice (*arroz doce*), which is a mixture of rice, milk, eggs, sugar, and a twist of orange or lemon rind for flavoring. If the noon-day meal is heavy, something light like soup will be served for supper.

The staple foods include cassava, corn, millet, sorghum, beans, sweet potatoes, rice, wheat, and bananas. Typical noon-day meals in the north consist of a ball of manioc dough called “fungue bombó” (cassava flour mixed with boiling water) with fish, chicken, or meat. People everywhere enjoy pounded cassava leaves (*kizaka*). In the south a maize meal dough ball is preferred called “fungue” or “pirao” in Portuguese.

Specialty dishes include *mwamba de galinha*, a palm-nut paste sauce in which chicken, spices, and peanut butter are cooked, creating a delightful aroma. The abundance of fresh and saltwater fish provides the opportunity for an unusual combination of fresh and dried fish in a unique dish, *kalulu*, the key ingredients of which are African eggplant, gumbo, and red palm oil. Beans cooked in palm oil also are popular. However, *cabidela*, chicken cooked in chicken's blood sauce and eaten with rice and cassava dough, stands out as one of Angola's mouthwatering delights.

Angolans also drink a lightly fermented corn beverage called “kissangua.” A version of this drink is made from sprouted whole sorghum grains. It is lacto-fermented, slightly alcoholic, fizzy, and highly nutritious.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 15 years, and is provided free. However, at the primary level education

tends to be of low quality, and high schools are rather elite. For both girls and boys, primary enrollment is 37% while secondary enrollment is 18%. Overall, 56% of males are literate compared with 28% of females. Schools continue to struggle against social instability, low investment, and teacher shortages. Private schooling exists, but is costly.

Angola has two well-established universities: The Catholic University of Angola (CUA) and Agostinho Neto University, the public university in Luanda. However, the three campuses of Agostinho Neto have been devastated by poor economic conditions resulting from the war. Other universities include the Universidade das Lusiadas with a campus in Benguela and one in Lobito. Parents who can manage it, send their children to study abroad in Cuba, Russia, and more popularly, the United States.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

As in most of sub-Saharan Africa, orality has characterized literature in Angola since time immemorial. It is generally agreed that written literature began in 1850 with a book of verse by José da Silva Maia Ferreira. Since 1945 and the liberation struggle, strong links developed between literature and political activism. Many MPLA leaders and members, including Agostinho Neto, took part in this movement. From 1975 until the early 1990s, Angolan writers had to be affiliated with a quasi-governmental organization in order to be published.

Music is closely linked to African oral history. Angolan musicians made their own instruments such as *clochas* (double-bell) and marimbas. Percussion, wind, and string instruments are found throughout the regions. The bow lute (*chilhumba*) is played in the south during long journeys; the lamellophone (*likembe*) is popular in the east. Musical performances often include dancing. Members of the Ngangela ethnic group in the east dance masked. The choreography is distinguished by a young woman catching a man on her shoulders.

Traditional music has strongly influenced popular music. While older people may enjoy Angolan music from the 1970s, young people prefer upbeat rhythmic Angolan *kizomba* music, danced closely together by couples. Cape Verdian music is also considered *kizomba* and is popular. Angolans love their own “semba” music, which has complex secondary and tertiary rhythms that accompany the main beat. Couples dance *semba* much like *kizomba*, but the steps are authentically Angolan. Much of the internationally known Angolan music goes by the name “bonga,” but really is *semba* music. Because many Angolan professionals were educated in Cuba, the older crowd also appreciates Cuban and “bachata” music from the Dominican Republic. In the late 1990s, techno music, “kuduru” (literally “hard ass”), became the rage among young Angolans. Kuduru is strongly syncopated, uses rap lyrics, and provides a break from close dancing.

Angola's cultural heritage is tied to the Portuguese language and to a colonial past shared by four other African countries. Along with Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Cape Verde, Angola is a member of “The Five,” meaning the African Lusophone countries. They meet regularly to promote culture, trade, and political relations among themselves. Many new buildings in Angola reflect influences of 15th-century Portuguese architecture, some of which still stands. For example, ancient forts, churches, and homes built by Portuguese colonists are found around Luanda.

## 15 WORK

Labor and productivity in Angola suffered immensely from the abrupt departure of 90% of the white settlers in 1975. Before leaving, however, the colonials destroyed factories, plantations, and transportation infrastructure. Owing to the subsequent insurgency, the labor force never fully recovered. Today some 71% of Angolans are engaged in agriculture, but mostly in subsistence, which produces only 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP). By contrast, only 10% of the population is engaged in industry, which accounts for 62.6% of the GDP. Angola's cash cow is petroleum, and provides 89.9% of Angola's exports while diamonds provide 5.5%. However, with the exception of artisanal diamond mining, neither is a major provider of jobs. Recently, many young people have found jobs in teaching and in health services. Many Angolans living on the coast supplement their income by fixing up and renting out their homes.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular participant and spectator sport, played by both girls and boys. In 2006 Angola was one of only four sub-Saharan countries to qualify for the World Cup. The "Citadel" in Luanda is one of Africa's largest stadiums. A new spin on soccer is "fustal," which is played indoors or outdoors on smaller courts in urban areas. Competitions often are organized between members of the television and radio stations for special entertainment. Basketball is also popular. Since winning its first-ever basketball medal at the Nairobi University Games, the Angola national team won three consecutive All-African championships. Backboards and baskets have sprung up on street corners everywhere. Handball, volleyball, and track and field round out the most popular sports. Angola also has nearly a dozen international chess masters. Children enjoy a traditional game, *ware*, which is played by moving stones around a board either carved from wood, or dug out of the clay soil.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The advent of the satellite dish has made television an increasingly popular form of entertainment in Luanda and other urban centers. The dishes are status symbols and allow Angolans to supplement the government-run station with an array of channels from all over the world. Angolans connect with world popular culture by watching Brazilian shows (in Portuguese), MTV, and American movies with Portuguese subtitles. Residents in apartment buildings lower their costs by sharing the same satellite dish. While cinemas remain a more popular form of entertainment up-country, video rental stores are mushrooming in Luanda, and home video is part of an urban trend toward home entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Luanda's three museums, including the Museum of Anthropology, contain a fine collection of African art and handicrafts. Non-commercial masks and sculptures vary according to ethnic group, and symbolize rites of passage or changes in seasons, and play important roles in cultural rituals. Artisans work with wood, bronze, ivory, malachite, and ceramics. The Lunda-Chokwe in the northeast provinces are uniquely known for their superior plastic arts.

Ten years ago, the Ministry of Culture stifled art by monopolizing control over art production and marketing. Recent deregulation has made handicraft production a blossoming cottage industry. Stylized masks, statuettes, and trinkets (airport art) now flood the popular Futungo tourist market on the outskirts of Luanda. This art may not reflect the deep cultural beliefs of the people, but it provides work and a source of income for people with artistic skills. Shoppers at Futungo market are treated to musicians playing traditional instruments such as *marimbas*, *kissanges*, *xingufos* (big antelope horns), and drums, giving the feeling of a village festival.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Angola's social ills are myriad. The country still has between 2 to 10 million land mines buried in roads, trails and fields. At least 80,000 people have suffered injuries from those mines and are in need of psycho-social counseling and healing. Ex-combatants are especially susceptible to lawlessness and vice, and they risk returning to the bush as a way of life. The Kimberley Process, launched in 2003, has helped to curb trade in "blood diamonds," but thousands of artisanal miners dig and pan for diamonds in alluvial pits. Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are still without homes, land, and a dependable source of food. Poor governance and corruption are also rife. It is estimated that \$4.2 billion in oil revenues disappeared from government coffers between 1997 and 2002. If these revenues had been invested in Angola's social sector, poor health access, lack of shelter, unemployment, and low productivity could be things of the past.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As in many parts of Africa women work as hard as or harder than men, but enjoy fewer rights and privileges. Women cultivate the fields, gather wood and water, and do domestic chores. In the village, women typically raise between 6 and 12 children. Because abortion is legal only to save a woman's life, many abortions are performed in secret and under unsafe conditions.

The gap between women's rights in towns as compared to rural villages is quite pronounced. In urban areas, women have fewer children and compete for male-dominated jobs. They drive cars, study at university, vote, occupy non-combatative positions in the army, and serve as traffic policewomen. In recent history, five women ministers have led government ministries including oil, fisheries, and culture. Five women are Public Ministry magistrates, and there are three women judges. After the 1992 elections, women won 9.5% of the seats in the legislature, although 5% fewer than in the First Republic. One woman heads a political party and was a candidate in the 1992 elections.

Women's rights groups such as the Organization of Angolan Women are helping to establish literacy programs and health units for women, and ensure that polygynous families have sufficient wealth to support more than one wife.

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—by R. Groelsema

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## AZANDE

**PRONUNCIATION:** uh-ZAHN-day

**LOCATION:** From upper Nile basin in the southern Sudan to the borders of semitropical rain forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

**POPULATION:** 3.8 million in all countries

**LANGUAGE:** Azande (Niger-Congo group)

**RELIGION:** Beliefs revolving around ideas associated with *mangu* (witchcraft); Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Sudanese; Central Africans; Congolese; Zairians

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The ethnic term *Azande* refers to a culturally diverse group of peoples who, over the past 200 years, have been brought together under the governance of a number of distinct kingdoms. They call themselves Azande but others call them simply *Zande*. Other alternate names are Azande, Zandi, Pazande, Sande, and Badjande. Little is known of their history prior to this period and reliable first-hand accounts of the Azande only began to appear toward the middle of the 19th century. By the 1950s, however, the Azande had become well-known to anthropologists through the ethnographic monographs written about them by British anthropologist Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard. Indeed, one of the lasting classics of modern anthropology, his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, is still cited in contemporary textbooks. It is widely accepted that the ancestors of Azande society migrated from the west, from what is now the Central African Republic, into the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the southern region of the Sudan, beginning perhaps 300 years ago. Because of their relative physical isolation from colonial centers of governance, the Azande practiced many traditional beliefs and customs well into the 20th century. Azande now live across the borders of three modern nation-states, and in recent decades they have been more exposed to the effects of market economies, missionary education, and related phenomena, so generalizations about the Azande as a whole are difficult to make.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Reliable estimates of population figures for the Azande are not available. As of 2008 it was estimated that some 3.8 million people considered themselves ethnically Azande. Azande territory covers a vast expanse of land—some 500 miles from east to west—from the fringes of the upper Nile basin in the southern Sudan to the borders of semitropical rain forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Azande are found in the Maridi, Yambio, and Tambura districts in the tropical rain forest belt of Western Equatoria (a state in southwestern Sudan) and in Bahr el Ghazal (a region in southwestern Sudan). The Azande are also found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic; areas, which originally constituted part of the great Azande Kingdom destroyed by the Belgian, French, Mahdists of Sudan, and finally the British in the context of the European scramble for Africa.

The open savannah forest laced with streams that comprise the Nile/Congo divide marks most of Azande country. Changes in micro-environmental zones have a direct impact on modes

of production, principle subsistence crops and modes of settlement of the Azande. Throughout this region of Africa, there is a season of intermittent rain (roughly from April to October), followed by a dry season (from November to March) when rain seldom falls. In pre-colonial times, Azande homesteads were typically dispersed. A common pattern was for men who shared patrilineal ancestry to live in the same general area. A circular hut was the primary living space, and this was surrounded by gardens of one to two acres where a man and one or more of his wives cultivated staple crops, from sorghum to cassava. Footpaths through the savannah forest interconnected homesteads of closely related relatives. An expanse of uninhabited terrain separated one such cluster of homesteads from the next. Homestead clusters were typically located near one of the many streams transecting the countryside, as streams provided fishing and other resources. During the colonial period, many Azande were forced to move from this type of settlement in an alleged effort to eradicate sleeping sickness. The result was that many Azande found themselves living in European-style villages of parallel straight streets, often living next to people who were strangers rather than kinsmen. This change had a significant impact on Azande culture in general, and particularly on Azande notions of witchcraft (see **Religion and Interpersonal Relations**).

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Azande were an expanding secondary series of kingdoms at the time of European domination in Africa. The Azande speak Zande language. The linguist Greenberg (1963) classified the Azande language as one of the Niger-Congo group. The Azande are a Bantu group and their language is similar to the other Bantu languages. Approximately five dialects of Azande are spoken throughout the area they occupy. Dialects include Sango in Central African Republic and Dio and Makaraka (Oodio) in Sudan. The speech of the Azande in Sudan is fairly uniform, with a few exceptions (Mbomu, Sueh-Meridi, Bile, Bandiya, Bamboy, Bomokandi, and Anunga). In the contemporary world, most Azande also speak rural dialects of Arabic, French, or English. The Azande language is a tonal tongue, so that significant semiotic usages result from different pitches used in pronouncing identical lexical units.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Traditional Azande culture was rich and highly developed as is common in non-literate societies. The anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard collected hundreds of Azande folktales and legends and published as many as he could in the Azande language with English translations. Probably the most important and comprehensive collections of this genre are found in Evans-Pritchard's book, *The Zande Trickster*.

The most famous Zande tales all center on the imagined activities of the trickster Ture. The character of a trickster is common to folklore throughout the world. Typically, the trickster is an animal or human protagonist who inverts the standards of expected behavior, who flaunts and ridicules the accepted order of things by doing the inverse. In Evans-Pritchard's understanding, Ture could be regarded as a collective manifestation of Azande personality. The animals act and talk like persons because people are animals behind the masks social convention makes them wear. What Ture does is the opposite of all that is moral and all us can see ourselves in Ture. The



Azande character of Ture is also closely related to an important element of traditional Azande folklore known as *sanza*, or “double-speak.” Evans-Pritchard wrote that *sanza* “includes any remark or action which is intended to be oblique, opaque, ambiguous, any words or gestures which are intended to suggest a meaning other than they have in themselves, which have, that is, a double meaning, a manifest meaning and a hidden one.” Azande use *sanza* in conversations between princes and commoners, husbands and wives, at beer parties, and in the language of love.

There is no one single myth that describes the origin of the Azande people. The general Azande belief is that people return to life after death, reincarnated as an animal (often a lion). The most important royal chiefs may be reincarnated as leopards, pythons, snakes, warthogs, or rats. Some believe that lightning is the reincarnated spirit of a royal clan chief. When an animal dies, it signifies the end of that specific life force. Thus, Azande man will only kill an animal in self-defense.

### 5 RELIGION

Historically, the Azande practiced animism. Modern Azande are more likely to practice Christianity. Their traditional beliefs revolve around magic, oracles, and witchcraft. The Azande term *mboli* might be translated as “divinity” or “god.” In explaining misfortune, death, and the complications of life, Azande more typically assigned the responsibility to *mangu* or “witchcraft” rather than to *mboli*. Witchcraft is believed to be an inherited substance in the belly that lives a fairly au-



tonomous life, performing bad magic on the person's enemies. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard, the best-known ethnographer of Azande custom and belief, suggested that a Western notion of divinity was largely a consequence of foreign ideas in Azande discourse, the result of Islamic and Christian influences. During the period of British colonial rule in this part of Africa, policy dictated that formal education was to be provided by practitioners of various Christian faiths. Thus, becoming Christian was often a consequence of becoming literate. At the present time some Azande profess faith in Islamic principles and others profess Christianity, but beliefs about causation, death, and misfortune still revolve around *mangu*.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Azande clans, which consist of several families with a common ancestor or ancestors, gather for important occasions, including weddings and funerals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When an Azande woman becomes pregnant, tradition and superstition dictates that she avoid certain foods, including water buck meat and mene, a type of sweet potato. These foods are believed to cause miscarriage.

When the child is born, there is no special ceremony. When the infant is four days old, a fire of green leaves is made at the threshold of the house. The green leaves create a smoky fire and the mother, with the infant in her arms, sits in the smoke for a short period. The smoke is believed to give the newborn infant strength. After the fire dies out, the ashes and any remaining leaves are strewn on a path leading to the village. This action is believed to protect the infant from illness and disease.

Before colonization, boys were often initiated into manhood by serving the Azande nobility. Later, a ritual circumcision, held in the forest, became common, although this practice has also been discontinued. Modern Azande perform circumcision on their boys when they reach the age of nineteen. This circumcision ritual is unrelated to Islamic practices.

The Azande do not circumcise girls. Rather, girls are initiated into their gender role by observing and assisting their mothers. Traditionally, in order to marry, an Azande male had to present the bride's family with a ritualized payment (called "bride-wealth"), often consisting of a number of iron spears. As of the 21st century, the bride-wealth is more commonly paid in cash or in the form of material goods, such as cloth, cassava, or goats.

The Azande have no special ceremonies connected with marriage.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social identity was largely established by membership in a specific kinship group, by the division of labor, by an over-arching patriarchal social order, and by the hierarchical order of Azande political life. Thus, one was either born a commoner or a member of the royalty, or was incorporated into one or the other through warfare or slavery.

One of the central facets of life among the Azande is their belief in witchcraft, which is used to explain and cope with all kinds of adversity, both great and small. Rather than singling out particular individuals as witches, the Azande believe that anyone is capable of causing the misfortunes of another person by ill will toward that person—even if he is unaware of do-

ing so. (Women are excluded from the tradition surrounding witchcraft.) When something bad happens to an Azande, he must first find out who caused it. For minor problems, an Azande consults an oracle that he reaches by rubbing two pieces of wood together as he tries out the names of different suspects. The perpetrator is identified when the pieces stick together instead of rubbing smoothly against each other. For major misfortunes, the "chicken oracle" is consulted. In one version of this procedure, poison is placed on the beak of a chicken. If the chicken dies when a certain individual is named, then that is the guilty party. Once the perpetrator of misfortune has been pinpointed, the aggrieved party confronts him and asks him to stop his witchcraft. On hearing of his misdeeds, the "witch" has no trouble believing that he is indeed the cause of his tribesman's misfortunes and makes amends by expressing his goodwill toward the victim and spitting on the wing of the dead chicken.

Azande witchcraft encompasses every conceivable adverse occurrence, from tripping over a tree root to adultery and murder (for which the oracles were traditionally submitted to a type of court). Witchcraft practices are also associated with social standing within the tribe because they give an added measure of status and control to wealthy householders, who often use their chickens to consult the oracle for a less fortunate kinsman or neighbor who doesn't have enough chickens of his own.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In pre-colonial times, Azande lived in dispersed settlements where patrilineal relatives tended to live in close proximity. In colonial times, efforts were made to relocate Azande into European-designed towns. Traditionally huts were made of wood and mud, and each individual homestead was surrounded by gardens tended largely by women. In polygynous marriages (marriages in which one man had more than one wife), each wife had her own hut where she lived with her minor children. In the past, hamlets such as these were interconnected by footpaths through forest and open savannah. The introduction of bicycles and automobiles during the colonial period had a dramatic impact on inter-hamlet relations, especially in terms of the introduction of cash crops and a market economy.

In the past, when Azande lived in dispersed settlements, communal diseases were rare. Personal health was largely affected by bacterial diseases typical to subtropical environments. Malaria, sleeping sickness, and schistosomiasis (a waterborne disease) were common causes of death in pre-colonial Azande country. Many Azande have gained Western knowledge of medicine in recent decades.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Azande society is divided into the royal clans and commoners. The royal clans, known as the Avungara are descended from Gbudwe, a strong leader, and his two sons, Yambio and Tambura. Most commoners were incorporated into the Azande through wars, conquest, and other means of assimilation. Azande settlements consist of single households made up of a man and his wife (or wives).

Azande follow certain social norms. Children are reared but by their birth mother and all the patrilineal kin living in nearby homesteads. Children are taught how to cultivate do-

mesticated plants at an early age. Young boys are taught about hunting and fishing.

### 11 CLOTHING

Azande women wear cloth skirts. Infants and children wear necklaces made from chains of metal rings. Some Azande also have their heads wrapped in cord, which is thought to protect their brains from malevolent spirits. In the past, Azande musicians wore costumes consisting of a cloth skirt, an elaborate headdress, and beads and bangles on the arms and around the ankles.

### 12 FOOD

The traditional dietary staple of the Azande is a type of millet called *eleusine*. In the western portion of the group's territory, this has been replaced by cassava. Other crops include rice, maize, sorghum, squash, legumes, okra, peanuts, greens, and bananas. To supplement their diet, the men hunt game and the women catch fish. Chicken and eggs are considered delicacies, as are termites during the dry season. Beverages include palm wine and spirits made from cassava.

### 13 EDUCATION

Some Azande live in towns with modern educational facilities. Access to Western-style education has had both social and political effects. In some areas, power traditionally held by the royal elite has passed to educated commoners.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Both vocal and instrumental music, as well as dance, play a significant role in Azande culture. The most common traditional musical instrument of the Azande is a small, bow-shaped, harplike instrument, often decorated with a small carved human head at one end. The Azande also make a variety of other instruments, many with designs that incorporate human or animal forms. One is a mandolin-like stringed instrument modeled on the human figure, with a peg approximating a head perched atop an arched neck and legs and feet at the base. Another is the *sanza*, made of wood or hollowed gourds, which is similar to a xylophone but in the shape of a dancing woman, with arms and legs jutting out from the body of the instrument. Other typical instruments include a bell in the shape of a stylized human figure with the arms used as handles and various drums shaped like cattle.

In addition to a variety of functional items, Azande artwork includes carved wooden sculptures thought to have been given as gifts by tribal chiefs.

### 15 WORK

The Azande have developed an agrarian lifestyle in response to their physical environment. They engage in subsistence farming because their homesteads are typically established a long distance from the markets. Food crops produced include maize, cassava, telebun (millet), yams, fruits: mangoes, citrus, pineapples, palm trees (from which they extract ombiro—palm oil), and coffee. They also have exotic and economically important hardwood trees such as mahogany and teak. The Azande hunt, using traps, nets, and heavy spears, and fish in the streams that flow through the countryside.

In 1948 the Equatoria Project Board (EPB) was established to develop the economic potential of the Zandeland. The Azande were encouraged to grow cotton as a cash crop. Enterprises were established to gin cotton and weave cloth and to produce edible oils, soap, and other products from cotton. This project helped link the Azande economy to other markets in south Sudan.

### 16 SPORTS

Typical sports among the Azande include sparring (one-on-one fighting), which serves as a way for males to practice their combat skills.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Singing and dancing are major forms of entertainment among the Azande, especially at feasts and other celebrations. Storytelling is another popular form of recreation.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Functional artwork includes wood, bark, and pottery storage boxes. The distinctive Azande throwing knife, the multi-bladed *shongo*, is used in combat. It is made of copper or steel and adorned with elaborate patterns. Some of these knives are also used as bride-wealth (payment a man makes to acquire his wife). Other folk art includes pots, wooden utensils, and woven mats and baskets.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Although relative calm was restored to Sudan by the 2005 pact between the SPLA and the Khartoum government to end the civil war, at the time of this writing in 2008, the Azande, along with hundreds of thousands of the people living in the southern Sudan, had fled the Sudan to live in neighboring countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and the Central African Republic. As a result, much of traditional Azande culture and custom is endangered or has ceased to exist.

Still, security is an issue among the Azande. There have long been tensions between the Azande and the Dinka. From across the Congo border there were accounts of abuses of Azande refugees by armed groups and returning refugees returning to Sudan have been accompanied by Congolese refugees.

Infectious and parasitic diseases like malaria, diarrhea, HIV-AIDS, and sleeping sickness pose a grave danger to the Azande population.

### 21 GENDER ISSUES

Traditional Azande society was highly patriarchal. Women's roles were limited to the domestic sphere. Women were responsible for raising the children, farming, preparing food, and completing the household chores. Men held all positions of public authority, with women being subservient (in a lesser, obedient position) to their husbands. A marriage was arranged by contract between two families and involved the exchange of goods, known as bride-wealth. Commoner men typically had just one wife, but nobles, and in particular kings, had many wives.

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—Reviewed by M. Njoroge

# BAGANDA

**PRONUNCIATION:** bah-GAHN-dah

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** The King's Men

**LOCATION:** Uganda

**POPULATION:** About 3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Luganda

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Protestantism and Roman Catholicism); Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Ugandans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Baganda of Uganda are sometimes referred to as "The King's Men" because of the significance of the role of the *Kabaka* (King) in their political, social, and cultural institutions. Until 1967, the Baganda were organized into a tightly centralized, bureaucratized kingdom. From 1967 until 1993, there were no kingdoms in Uganda due to their abolishment by the national government. In 1993, the national government reinstated the Kabakaship by permitting the coronation of Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II as the 36th king of the Baganda in a line of succession extending back to AD 1400 to the first king known as Kintu. In the middle of the 19th century, the Kabaka ruled an area extending about 150 miles around the northwestern shores of Lake Victoria in what is now the nation of Uganda. He ruled over a hierarchy of chiefs including village, parish, subcounty, and county levels of stratification. Chiefs collected taxes in the form of food and livestock, and distributed portions on up the hierarchy, which eventually reached the Kabaka's palace in the form of tribute. Chiefs were also responsible for settling disputes and maintaining roads in their respective jurisdictions. The Kabaka made direct political appointment of all chiefs so as to maintain control over their loyalty to him. Kabakas were chosen from the Lion clan, whereas commoners from the other 40 clans were eligible to become chiefs or even rise to the position of *Katikkiro* (prime minister).

Another category of powerful men known as *Batongole* were commoners who were given land throughout the kingdom so they could serve as spies and informers for the Kabaka in case a *Katikkiro* sought to foster a rebellion, which they sometimes did. Commoner families hoped to enhance their fortunes by providing wives to powerful men, especially the Kabaka, who in some cases had hundreds of wives. These wives were then in a position to obtain "favors" for their families. Young boys were sent regularly to live with chiefs, or to the King's palace where they served as pages in the hope of being eventually rewarded by political appointments. The Baganda have many stories and songs that sing the praises of their Kabaka, as well as honoring commoners who have risen to the rank of *Katikkiro*.

The King's Palace was generally located on a hill, which on the occasion of his death served as his burial ground, with his successor choosing another hill for his palace. The King's Palace contained hundreds of household compounds that were occupied by his many wives, pages, and chiefs, all of whom were expected to reside in the Kabaka's palace for significant periods of time in order to demonstrate their loyalty to him. Chiefs served as military commanders of the army and navy, which provided a powerful defensive force as well as a mecha-

nism for invasion of neighboring kingdoms to steal slaves, ivory, and women.

Many rituals surrounded the person of the king. For example, commoners had to lie face down on the ground in his presence. The Kabaka's only direct social interaction was with the Katikkiro, and he generally ate alone. His hairstyle sometimes resembled that of a rooster to symbolize his virility, and he has been described as walking like a lion to further symbolize his power. The mother of the Kabaka had the title of *Namasole* (Queen Mother). One sister was selected to be his *Nalinnya* (Queen Sister). Each of these women had her own palace and chiefs while remaining distinctly inferior to the Kabaka. Nevertheless, the *Namasole* could often exercise much influence over her son.

Today, the Kabaka has only ritual functions and no political power. He was removed of his power so that tribal differences would not interfere with the formation of a nation state. Baganda are presently divided on their beliefs about the role of the Kabaka in the nation state. All Baganda participate in the Ugandan governmental system, which has 39 districts and a national president. These districts contain separate units that were formerly part of the Kingdom of Buganda. Formal education in schools and a national university have replaced the old system of informal education embodied in the page system as a means of upward mobility. Nevertheless, the kingdom and associated institutions remain a strong force in the cultural practices and values of the Baganda.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Baganda, who number about 3 million people, are located along the northern and western shores of Lake Victoria in the East African nation of Uganda. The former Kingdom of *Buganda* is bounded on the north by the former Kingdom of Bunyoro, on the east by the Nile River, and on the west by the former kingdoms of Ankole and Toro. To the south of Buganda is the present country of Tanzania. The Baganda are the largest tribe in Uganda, and the Kingdom of Buganda is the largest of the former kingdoms. Kingdoms were abolished as political institutions in the 1960s by the national government of Uganda. The Baganda are located 2° north of the equator to 1° south of the equator, but the temperature is moderate because the altitude varies throughout the region from 900 to 1,500 m (3,000–5,000 ft) above sea level. The former Kingdom of Buganda, with a total area of about 65,000 sq km (25,096 sq mi) comprises slightly more than one-fourth of Uganda's total land mass. Kampala, the largest city in Buganda and Uganda, has a mean temperature of 21°C (69°F), ranging from a high monthly mean of 28°C (83°F) to a low monthly mean of 17°C (62°F). Rainfall averages 114 to 127 cm (45–50 in) per year, and it comes reliably each year in a heavier rainy season lasting from March–May and a lighter season that lasts from August–December. Most Baganda are peasant cultivators who live in rural villages, where the homes are strung out along hills that are themselves usually about 150 m (500 ft) above valley floors consisting of papyrus swamps or forests. Rich red clay on the hills, a moderate temperature, and plentiful rainfall combine to afford the Baganda a generous environment for the year-round availability of plantain, the staple crop, as well as the seasonal production of coffee, cotton, and tea as cash crops. Some Baganda reside in towns and in Kampala, working in a variety of white-collar and nonprofessional occupations; nevertheless,



these Baganda maintain close ties with their agrarian roots in villages, while also frequently practicing “urban agriculture” in town homesteads by growing crops in small available areas and by keeping goats, chickens, and, occasionally, cows.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Baganda speak a Bantu language called Luganda, which is a member of the Niger-Congo family of languages. In these languages, nouns are made up of modifiers known as prefixes, infixes, and suffixes. These modifiers vary depending on noun classes, such that word stems alone have no grammatical meanings. The stem *ganda*, for example, has no meaning in Luganda, but the term *Buganda* means the location or kingdom where the *Baganda* people live. Objects belonging to Baganda people, or to an individual *Muganda* person, are referred to as *kiganda* things. Like many other African languages, Luganda is tonal so that some words are differentiated by their pitch. For example, the word for excrement and the word for water (*amazzi*), while spelled the same, carry different meanings according to their pitch. Luganda is very rich in metaphor and in verbal genres, such as proverbs and folktales.

Children learn speech skills early in childhood that prepare them for adult life in a verbally rich culture. The clever child is one who can masterfully engage his or her peers in a game of *ludikya*, or “talking backwards.” For example, *omusajja* (“man”) becomes *jja-sa-mu-o*. Words in sentences appear in their same order. Another version of this game involves inserting the letter *z* after each syllable containing a vowel, followed

by the vowel in that syllable. In this version, *omusajja* would become *o-zo-mu-zu-sa-za-jja-za*. Both boys and girls play *ludikya*, which they claim is frequently done to conceal secrets from adults. Many homes participate in the evenings in collective riddling games (*okukokkya*) involving men and women of all ages. A person who successfully solves riddles is awarded villages to rule and becomes a chief. Some examples of common riddles are:

I have a wife who looks where she is coming from and where she is going at the same time (a bundle of firewood, since the two ends are similar).

I have a razor blade which I use to shave hills (fire which is used to burn the grass for planting).

When my friend went to get food for his children, he never came back (water in a river).

My man is always surrounded by spears (the tongue which is surrounded by teeth)

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The content of riddles, myths, legends, and proverbs all combine to provide for the Baganda an account of their ethnic origin and history, as well as explanations for the workings of the everyday world of people and objects that make up their culture and environment. Speech-making is especially valued and adaptive in a highly stratified society like Buganda where upward mobility was traditionally achieved by an aggressive, verbal manipulation of others through such means as cleverly turned compliments, exaggerated humility, or what the Baganda refer to as *kufukibwa*, the art of being ruled.

The most significant legend involves Kintu, the first Kabaka, who is believed to have married a woman called Nambi. First Nambi had to return to heaven where Gulu, her father, objected to her marriage because Kintu did not know how to farm but only how to obtain food from cattle. Nambi's relatives, therefore, tested Kintu in order to determine his suitability as a spouse. In one test Kintu was asked to identify his own cow from a herd, a difficult task given that there were many cows like his own. By chance, a bee told Kintu to choose the cow on whose horns he would alight. After several large herds were brought to him, Kintu reported that his cow was not among them, while continuing to watch the bee that remained on the tree. Eventually, Kintu, with the help of the bee, identified his cow, along with several calves that had been born to his cow. The amazed father eagerly gave his daughter's hand in marriage, prodding them to hurry to leave for Kintu's home before *Walumbe* (Death) would come and want to go with them. Gulu warned that they should not come back even if they forgot something for fear that Death would follow them. They left carrying with them cows, a goat, fowl, sheep, and a plantain tree. Unfortunately, over the protests of Kintu, Nambi went back to obtain grain that had been forgotten. Although she tried to run away without Death, she was unsuccessful. After many years of happiness on earth, *Walumbe* began to bring illness and death to children and then adults. Up to the present day, Death has lived upon the earth with no one knowing when or whom he will strike.

We see in this legend an account of the origin of the Baganda people, as well as answers to fundamental questions about the origins of such things as crops and livestock. Death is im-

plicated in this account as an unfortunate happenstance resulting from disobedience to king or parents. Obedience is a prime value of Kiganda morality. Kintu's partnership with the bee is one example of a common motif in Kiganda folklore where animals are the subject of numerous folktales that illustrate moral themes. Animal pairs, such as "the Leopard and the Hare," "the Lion and the Crocodile," and the "Cat and the Fowl," are familiar subjects to all Baganda. Proverbs, which are abundant, are prime sources of moral instruction for young people. Some examples of Kiganda proverbs are:

He who has not suffered does not know how to pity.

The stick which is at your neighbor's house will not drive away the leopard.

An only child is like a drop of rain in the dry season.  
He who likes his mother's cooking has not traveled.

He who passes you in the morning, you will pass him in the evening.

You have many friends as long as you are prosperous.  
That which is bent at the outset of its growth is almost impossible to straighten at a later age.

#### 5 RELIGION

The majority of present-day Baganda are Christian, about evenly divided between Catholic and Protestant. Approximately 15% are Muslim. Each of these major denominations is headquartered on a major hill in the Kampala area, reflecting the past practice of each major institution being constructed on a specific hill, a practice originated by the Kabakas. In the latter half of the 19th century, most Baganda were practicing an indigenous religion known as the *Balubaale* cult. This cult consisted of national gods who had temples identified with them. Each temple had priests who served as oracles on behalf of their respective god. Similar to the Greek pantheon, these gods were each concerned with specific problems. For example, there was a god of fertility, a god of warfare, and a god of the lake. The Supreme God known as *Katonda* had created everything, and the Baganda paid homage to him upon awakening each morning. *Katonda's* power was seen in proverbs. The following are some examples:

What God put in store for someone never goes rotten.

*Katonda* gives his gifts to whomsoever he favors.

God's favors should not be refused.

*Katonda* was also known by other names, such as *Mukama* (the Master), *Lugaba* (the Giver), and *Liisoddene* (the Great Eye). The Baganda also believed in spiritual forces, particularly the action of witches, which were thought to cause illness and other misfortune. People often wore amulets to ward off their evil powers. The most significant spirits were the *Muzimu* or ancestors who visited the living in dreams and sometimes warned of impending dangers. These spirits resided in the vicinity of the homestead and could be reincarnated if their names were bestowed on an infant, for which there was a special ceremony.

Christianity and Islam, both monotheistic religions, were not incompatible with the Kiganda belief in a High God. Nevertheless, throughout the second half of the 19th century, bitter rivalries and bloodshed prevailed as Kabakas, chiefs, and



Ugandan high school students, all members of the Baganda tribe, wait for their turn to parade before their monarch during a day of tribal celebration. Three of Uganda's four traditional monarchies, Baganda, Batoro, and Banyoro, were restored in 1993. (AP Images/Brennan Linsley)

Katikkeros became variously aligned with Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Balubaale believers. During this period, a number of Baganda pages were put to death for allegiance to their Christian faith and are recognized today as martyrs and saints by the Roman Catholic tradition. Contemporary Baganda are considered to be extremely religious, whatever their faith, although the Balubaale cult no longer exists. Beliefs in ancestors and the power of witches are still, however, quite common.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Religious holidays are very significant in Buganda, especially Christmas for Christians and Ramadan for Muslims. Attendance at funerals is a major ceremonial and social event. People travel from all parts of the nation to attend funerals, which last many days.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the indigenous life cycle, the Muganda person passes through stages, such as *omwana* (child), *omuvubuka* (youth), and *omusajja* or *omukazi* (man, woman), until at death one becomes an *omuzima* (spirit) and, therefore, a candidate for reincarnation. Although there is no Luganda word for fetus, the being inside the mother is nevertheless considered to be living and separate from the mother. Thus, if a pregnant woman dies, her fetus is extracted and buried separately. During preg-

nancy, the woman remains physically active, often working on her farm or *shamba* (garden) until the time of delivery. The pregnant woman is typically seen carrying food or water on her head, while often carrying her previous baby on her back. Birth is attended by midwives and female relatives. The umbilical cord is retained for later use in a ceremony called *Kwalula Abaana*, in which the child is seated on a mat along with other members of the father's clan (being a patrilineal society) who are to receive their clan names. The new infant is a source of considerable joy and is passed around to visitors for their pleasure. Should twins be born, special rituals are performed and the parents receive names indicating that they are the mother and father of twins. Each twin is given a special name in accordance with his or her gender and birth order.

The childhood years, beginning at about the age of seven, are characterized by the expectation that both boys and girls will conform in their behavior to what the Baganda refer to as *mpisa* (manners). This includes such things as being obedient to adults, greeting visitors properly, and sitting correctly (for girls). Tasks are assigned to boys and girls, although girls have more consistent work expectations than do boys. Girls are charged with the care of their younger siblings, whom they carry on their backs and to whom they sing lullabies, especially when their mothers are working in their *shambas* (gardens) or

marketing. Boys are frequently asked to run errands for family members or to babysit.

Nowadays, children as well as teenagers pursue educational opportunities to enhance their career objectives in the modern nation state. Traditionally, teenage boys and girls were occupied with their political careers or marital prospects, respectively. Sex education for females was and is more systematic than it is for males. The father's sister (*Ssenga*) is for girls the most significant moral authority, as she represents the patrilineal extended family of which the girl is a member. Grandmothers instruct girls soon after their menstruation, during a period of seclusion, about sexual matters and future domestic responsibilities. The Baganda are quite prudish about public displays of sexuality, and affection between the sexes is reserved for private occasions. Kissing is a recent innovation. Traditionally, tickling of the hand, breast, or stomach area by either sex was considered sensuous. A common complaint of young school girls today is that their elders did not teach them anything about sex so they must now seek advice and sexual instruction from popular pamphlets and the mass media.

Among the Baganda, marriage and the birth of children are generally still prerequisites for adult status. Today, most Baganda men and women no longer live out their lives only in the context of the Buganda Kingdom. Baganda can be found in all of the modern occupations and live throughout the world from where they regularly return or seek to return to their homeland, especially for burial. The old person (*mukadde*) is happy if he or she has achieved success in the world and if they have grandchildren, who are a particular source of joy for them and their clan.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Baganda place paramount emphasis on being sociable, often in a clever and assertive way so as to achieve upward mobility. Verbal skills and manipulative styles are seen in the daily life of work, school, courtship, and marriage. Individualism and being alone are not valued. In fact, a person who spends too much time alone may be thought to be a spy or a witch. Elaborate greeting rituals best symbolize the importance attached to being sociable. One of the first things that a child learns is how to greet others properly in the high-pitched voice that is considered to be respectful. Propriety requires that neighbors exchange lengthy greetings when meeting along the road. Greetings vary according to the time of day, age of participants, and length of time since previous encounters. When city folk return to their villages, formal greetings may take upwards of 15 minutes.

In Kampala, greetings are far less frequent and shorter in duration than in rural areas. Also, women in Kampala are much less likely to kneel while greeting men or other social superiors, a custom still prevalent in rural areas. Sociability is at a premium during social events, especially at burials and funerals when villages can seem deserted because their members are away, staying in temporary shelters constructed to accommodate guests who have amassed for several days of feasting, drumming, and dancing.

Dating and courtship are significant in the lives of most Baganda in their younger years. Both men and women value men who are able to flatter through verbal expertise and their power of persuasion. Common phrases of endearment include: "Your eyes are big and shiny like a light"; "Your teeth are as

white as elephant tusks"; "You are as slender as a bee"; "You are my twin"; and a recent addition to a man's repertoire, "You are worth a million dollars." Women, too, are verbally adroit. Although she should not flatter a man, a woman is expected to deceive him (*okulimba*) into thinking that he is her only suitor. In physical features, there are numerous preferences that include moderation in height, weight, and skin color. Eyes should not be too large, "like a fish," nor too small, "like a hole in the cow's skin." In girls, a small space between upper front teeth (*muzigo*) and horizontal lines in the neck (*ebiseera*) are especially desirable. Baganda of all ages are very well dressed and admire those who dress well.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Rural homes located among banana groves or *shambas* (gardens) are usually made of wattle and daub and have thatched or corrugated iron roofs. More affluent farmers live in homes constructed of cement, with tile roofs. Some homes have electricity and running water, but for many water must be fetched from a well or collected when it rains. There commonly is a separate cooking house where cooking is done on an open wood fire. A latrine is located behind the house in the shamba. Household furniture usually consists of a wooden platform bed with a mattress, a table, and wooden chairs. Woven straw mats are used for sitting by women and children, although some homes have sofas and arm chairs. Urban homes, by contrast, are typically of concrete with corrugated iron or tile roofs and glass windows. Indoor plumbing, indoor kitchens, electricity, and toilet facilities are common in the city. Radios are frequent in both rural and urban homes. Photographs and other pictures are typically on display on the walls to commemorate family members, political figures, or religious personages.

On the whole, Baganda enjoy a fairly high standard of living in Uganda through income obtained from land rentals, agricultural produce sold for cash, and wage labor as clerks, teachers, and craftspeople, often combined with agriculture. Some Baganda in rural areas are fishermen, carpenters, mechanics, or conveyors of produce to market via bicycles, a more common vehicle than the automobile. All Baganda have daily access to a plentiful food supply, given their year-round growing season. On the other hand, Baganda suffer from malaria, given the presence of swampy areas harboring the malarial-infected mosquitoes. A particular form of childhood protein-calorie malnutrition known as kwashiorkor is frequently seen as a result of early weaning and a protein-deficient diet of matooke (plantain staple).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, the term for marriage, *jangu enfumbire* ("come cook for me"), symbolized the authority patterns that prevailed in the typical household. The husband/father was supreme, and in the domestic sphere emulated the authority of the Kabaka in the wider political system. Children and women knelt to the husband in deference to his authority, and he was served his food first. Baganda children frequently describe feelings of fear and respect for their fathers and warm attachment for their mothers. One should never marry a person from one's own clan lest clan sanction and sickness result. Marriage is, therefore, exogamous in terms of clans, although Baganda tend to marry within their own tribe.

After marriage a new household is established, usually in the village of the husband. Most marriages are monogamous, although polygamy was not uncommon in the past. Co-wives lived in separate, but adjacent, houses while the husband had his own house in front of the women's quarters. Affinal relatives (*Bako* or in-laws) are afforded great respect, and Baganda avoid physical contact with one's mother- or father-in-law. Brothers- or sisters-in-law are often close and affectionate. Children's surnames are taken from the father and easily identify the clan from which they come. In addition to not marrying within one's own clan, it is taboo to eat the clan totem. Some common totems are: leopard, civet cat, anteater, otter, dog, cow, buffalo, bush buck, sheep, crow, and elephant, as well as yam, bean, and mushroom.

### 11 CLOTHING

The rural Muganda woman typically wears a *Busuuti*, a floor-length, brightly colored cloth dress with a square neckline and short, puffed sleeves. The garment is fastened with a sash placed just below the waist over the hips, and by two buttons on the left side of the neckline. It can be worn throughout pregnancy by simply loosening the sash, since the skirt portion consists of several yards of material. Traditionally, the busuuti was strapless and made from bark-cloth. The busuuti is worn on all festive and ceremonial occasions, even in Kampala where Western-style clothing predominates on a daily basis. The indigenous dress of the Baganda man is a *kanzu*, a long, white cotton robe. On special occasions, it is worn over trousers with a Western-style suit jacket over it. Younger people wear Western-style clothing. T-shirts with international celebrities on them are particularly popular. Slacks, jeans, skirts, suits, and ties also prevail.

### 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Baganda is *matooke*, a plantain that is steamed or boiled and commonly served with groundnut sauce or meat soups. Sources of protein include eggs, fish, beans, groundnuts, beef, chicken, and goats, as well as termites and grasshoppers in season. Common vegetables are cabbage, beans, mushrooms, carrots, cassava, sweet potatoes, onions, and various types of greens. Fruits include sweet bananas, pineapples, passion fruit, and papaya. Before eating, a bowl of boiled water and soap are passed around for each person to wash his or her hands. Steaming matooke is mashed and placed upon banana leaves in a basket, then covered by more leaves in order to keep the food hot. Portions of matooke are mixed in with the soup or sauce and eaten together. Although Baganda have cutlery, most prefer to eat with their hands, especially when at home. Drinks include indigenous fermented beverages made from bananas (*mwenge*), pineapples (*munansi*), and maize (*musoli*). Bottled beers fermented in national breweries are especially popular in the cities and towns, as are soft drinks. Coffee and tea are common hot drinks, and many homes recognize "tea time" in the afternoon as a special heritage from the British colonial days. Traditionally, women did not eat eggs or chicken, but this custom is very rare at present. Women also traditionally ate separately from men on mats on the floor. Nowadays, the urban family tends to eat at the table together. Baganda women take great pride in their cooking, and for most it is considered inappropriate for a man to enter the cooking area. Knowledge of the over 40 varieties of plan-

tain used in cooking is a special domain in which women excel. They also have a working knowledge of agriculture. Two or three meals of plantains per day are customary. Metal cooking pots and pans, cutlery, dishes, and glassware are now ubiquitous, although in rural areas bottled gourds and ceramic containers are not uncommon.

### 13 EDUCATION

Missionaries introduced literacy and formal education into Uganda in the 19th century, going on to establish in subsequent years a large number of schools and hospitals throughout Uganda. Baganda were among the first converts and, therefore, among the first literate population in Uganda. The Baganda value modern educational opportunity and will often sacrifice a great deal to obtain schooling for further advancement. Members of a family will combine resources to support a particularly promising student, who upon the completion of that education is expected to help his or her relatives. Rural areas contain primary schools often made of wattle and daub. Secondary schools vary in quality, and there is tremendous competition to get into the better ones. Kings College Budu, for example, a secondary school where Baganda royalty have studied, also accepts commoners. Accordingly, schooling serves as a leveling mechanism in modern society, much as the old page system did previously. Fostering of children in advantageous homes such as those of a chief. Today, the modern boarding school is a favorite mechanism of upward mobility. Currently, both boys and girls attend school in large numbers, making formal education an important means of mobility for women also. The Baganda value literacy highly and have long maintained a vernacular press with a rich tradition of publishing books, pamphlets, songs, stories, and poems in Luganda and English, the national language. Makerere University in Kampala attracted many Baganda in the 20th century who went on to outstanding careers in law, medicine, and other professions.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Today, Baganda are among the best songwriters, playwrights, poets, novelists, artists, and musicians in Uganda. Performing arts have a long history of development in music and dance. The Kabaka's Palace was a special place where royal dances and drummers regularly performed. Each clan had its own particular drum beat. Most Baganda households contained at least a small drum for regular use in family singing and dancing. Drums were used to announce special events such as the birth of a child or the death of a person. The most significant drums, however, were the royal drums, called the *mujaguzo*, which numbered 93. Drums varied in size and each had its own name and specific drum beat. Drums were made from hollowed-out tree trunks and cowhide or zebra skin. Other musical instruments included stringed instruments, such as fiddles and harps, and woodwind instruments, such as flutes and fifes.

Dancing is frequently practiced by all Baganda, beginning in early childhood, and the best dancers and musicians are renowned for their skills. Baganda dancers are remarkable for their ability to move their hips swiftly to the beat of alternating drums playing simultaneously. Today, Uganda dancers and musicians are frequently seen performing abroad. In Kampala,



they can be seen entertaining regularly in night clubs, bars, and other public locations.

Basketry is still a widespread art, especially mat-making by women. These mats are colorful and intricately designed. In addition to creating useful household containers, woven basketry and coiled basketry are also widespread arts that serve as the foundation for stockades, enclosure fences, and houses.

### **15 WORK**

Most Baganda are peasant farmers, but others live in towns and in the city of Kampala and work at various white-collar and nonprofessional jobs.

### **16 SPORTS**

Football (soccer), rugby, and track and field are common, popular sports in Uganda. Baganda boys participate in all these sports, while girls participate in track and field. Traditionally, the Baganda were renowned for their skills in wrestling, which was considered to be their national game. Males of all ages participated in this sport. Wrestling events were accompanied by beer-drinking, singing, and drumming. It was, however, considered inappropriate to defeat the Kabaka. Other traditional outdoor games by boys include the competitive throwing of sticks and a kicking game in which boys stand side by side and attempt to knock over the other boy.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Children play games involving a chief for boys or a mother role for girls. *Okwesa*, played by both boys and girls, is a game of strategy involving a wooden board and stones or beans that are placed in pockets in the board. Verbal games are played frequently, especially at night and in the company of grandparents.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

In addition to basketry and musical instruments, the manufacture of products from bark-cloth was and continues to be significant. The bark from a species of fig tree called *mutuba* is soaked in water, then beaten with a wooden mallet. This yields a soft material that is decorated with paint and then cut into strips of various sizes. Larger strips traditionally were used for partitions in homes, while smaller pieces were decorated with black dye and worn as clothing by women of royalty. Later, bark-cloth dress, particularly reddish tan-colored bark-cloth, became the national dress. Today, one rarely sees bark-cloth dresses, which have been replaced by the cotton cloth Busuuti. Bark-cloth is found today as decorative placemats, coasters, and designs on cards of various sorts. It is also rare to find traditional pipes, pots, and other ceramics, which in the past were elaborately decorated functional objects, in use today.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Baganda have had some problems integrating their political culture into the nation state of Uganda. The first president of independent Uganda (1962) was Sir Edward Mutesa, who was also King of Buganda. The first prime minister, with whom he shared power, was Milton Obote, who was from a district outside of Buganda. Within four years, Obote had abolished the kingdoms, and Mutesa fled Uganda and eventually died in exile. In 1971, Obote was overthrown by Dictator Idi Amin,

under whose presidency all Ugandans, including the Baganda, suffered greatly from political and social oppression, death, and the loss of personal property. Currently, the Baganda participate in what is widely considered to be a national recovery from the havoc and dissension of the Obote and Amin years.

Since the mid-1980s, AIDS has resulted in many deaths among friends and family members and is a source of great grief for Baganda. Caring for the children of parents who have died of AIDS is an especially serious problem. Nevertheless, this disease has been the subject of a spirited public education effort through mass media and theatrical productions, as part of a broad public educational effort toward prevention. These efforts led to the first substantial declines in HIV prevalence in Uganda. Nevertheless, the epidemic remains serious in, with infection levels highest among women (7.5% compared to 5.0% among men) and urban residents (10% compared to 5.7% among rural residents).

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In terms of gender relations, patriarchy is central to Baganda culture. In pre-colonial times there was a strict division of labor among the Baganda, where women did most of the agricultural work, while men often engaged in commerce, politics, and warfare. In recent times, the Museveni government has taken steps to elevate the plight of women as a major development issue. The Museveni administration has encouraged women to participate in politics and other aspects of public life. In 2008, each of Uganda's districts had a female member of parliament. One-third of all local council seats are reserved for women. As a result, women make up about 24% of the legislature. There are active women's rights groups, including the Uganda Women Lawyers Association (FIDA-U), Action for Development, and the National Association of Women Judges. However, in spite of these advancements, women are often targets of violence and sexual abuse. Women who reveal their HIV-positive status to their spouses are often beaten and sometimes murdered by their husbands.

In terms of human rights, Uganda's past has been checkered with torture and abuse, and according to some human rights organizations, these abuses continue in present-day Uganda. The army has been accused of committing atrocities against the populations in northern Uganda, and security forces are alleged to routinely torture suspects and members of the opposition. Homosexuality is illegal under Victorian-era legislation still in force in Uganda and many other English-speaking countries in Africa. The laws reflect a deep aversion among many Africans to homosexuality. But, the truth remains that gays and lesbians exist in Uganda, although they pay a high price for their sexual orientation, often facing discrimination, and even torture and imprisonment.

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— revised by E. Kalipeni

## BAKONGO

**PRONUNCIATION:** buh-KAHN-go

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kongo

**LOCATION:** Congo River region (Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo)

**POPULATION:** 5.45 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kikongo

**RELIGION:** Christianity, Kimbanguism, and indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Angolans; Congolese

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The solidarity of the Bakongo people has a long history based on the splendor of the ancient Kongo kingdom and the cultural unity of the Kikongo language. Founded in the 15th century AD, the kingdom was discovered by the Portuguese explorer Diego Cao when he landed at the mouth of the Congo River in 1484. As trade developed with the Portuguese, Mbanza Bata, located south of the Congo, became the capital, later known as San Salvador. Portuguese missionaries baptized King Nzinga, who adopted the Christian name Alfonso I. Within a few years, the kingdom was exchanging ambassadors with Portugal and the Vatican.

By the end of the 16th century, the Kongo kingdom had virtually ceased to exist. Incursions by neighboring groups from the east severely weakened it, and it became subservient to Portugal. In the 17th century, British, Dutch, and French slave ships reportedly carried 13 million persons from the Kongo kingdom to the New World. Ironically, the monarch and his vassals profited financially from the trade as their kingdom crumbled beneath them. In 1884–85 at the Conference of Berlin, the European powers divided the kingdom among the French, Belgian, and Portuguese. By the end of the 19th century, little remained of the once great Kongo civilization.

The 20th century witnessed a resurgence of Kongo nationalism and culture. Inspired by the prophetic teachings of Simon Kimbangu, thousands of Bakongo and other Congolese joined his initial followers. Belgian persecution of Kimbangu encouraged anticolonial sentiment and eventually Kimbanguism became a springboard for Congolese independence. In addition, the zeal for the past of European historians and missionaries such as Georges Ballandier and Father Van Wing, spurred Bakongo intellectuals to demand immediate independence in 1956. They founded a political party, whose candidates won the vast majority of municipal seats in 1959, leading to the election of President Joseph Kasavubu, a Mukongo, as the Congo's first president.

While Kongo secessionist movements have come and gone, the early 21st century marks an upsurge in revivalist fervor, which at times has been violent. A movement to establish a Kongo federal state composed of five provinces would bring together Bakongo living in the southern Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, the lower province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, Congo-Kinshasa), and northern Angola. Its name would be *Kongo Dia Ntotela* (the United States of the Kongo). In January and February 2007 Bunda Dia Kongo (BDK—Kingdom of Kongo) protested alleged corruption during the 2006 gubernatorial elections within Bas-Congo province of DRC. The pro-



tests resulted in government forces shooting and killing more than 100 persons—mostly civilians. In February and March 2008 government soldiers shot and killed scores more and burned their houses in an effort to restore state authority. The BDK has called for the establishment of an “ethnically pure” kingdom for the Bakongo.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Bakongo are a composite of peoples who assimilated the Kongo culture and language over time. The kingdom consisted of some 30 groups at its inception. Its original inhabitants occupied a narrow corridor south of the Congo River from present-day Kinshasa to the port city of Matadi in the lower Congo. Through conflict, conquest, and treaties, they came to dominate neighboring tribes, including the Bambata, the Mayumbe, the Basolongu, the Kakongo, the Basundi, and the Babuende. These peoples gradually acculturated and through intermarriage became indistinguishable from the Bakongo.

At its apex, the nuclear kingdom covered about 300 sq km (116 sq mi). Its boundaries extended as far as the Nkisi River to the east, the Dande River to the south, the Congo (Zaire) River to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The greater kingdom of the 16th century extended another 100 km (62 mi) east to the Kwango River and 200 km (124 mi) further north to the Kwilu River. Today, the Bakongo peoples still live in their ancestral homeland. It is quite mountainous and subject to a dry season lasting from May to August/September. Of the three ecological zones to the south of the Congo River, the hilly

middle zone receives the most annual rainfall (1,400 mm/55 in) and has relatively fertile soils and moderately warm temperatures. Consequently, it is more densely populated than the dry, sandy coastal region and the infertile arid plateau to the east.

There are about 5.45 million Bakongo. They are the largest ethnic grouping of the Republic of the Congo accounting for nearly half of the population (1.9 million). In Angola, they are the third largest group, making up 13% of the population (1.9 million) and in DRC they number about 1.65 million.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Bakongo speak various dialects of Kikongo, similar to the Kikongo spoken in the ancient kingdom. These dialects differ widely across the region; some are almost mutually unintelligible. To further its nation-building efforts after independence, the government of the former Zaire created a standardized version of the language, which incorporated elements of the many variants. Standard Kikongo is used in elementary schools throughout the Lower Province and Bandundu, and is called Mono Kotuba or Kikongo ya Leta (State Kikongo).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Legends trace Bakongo ancestry to Ne Kongo Nimi, who is said to have had three children, whose descendants, grouped into three clans, form the Kongo nation. The children of Ne Kongo Nimi were called Bana ba Ne Kongo, literally the children of Ne Kongo. The abbreviation became Bakongo. Proverbs, fables, legends, and tales occupy an important place in daily life. Some popular legends are only recognizable by their core content, since storytellers add their own spice and take great liberties in embellishing the traditional legends. One popular character, Monimambu, is known to the Bakongo and other peoples through oral and written literature. He is not a hero—rather he is a fictional figure with human foibles and feelings who has some successes but makes mistakes, too. His adventures are entertaining, but the stories not only amuse, they instruct as well. A favorite animal figure in Bakongo tales is the leopard.

The Bakongo recognize Dona Beatrice as a Kongolese heroine. Born Kimpa Vita, she became a Christian martyr, and later a symbol of Congolese nationhood. She lived in a time of great crisis. Rivalries had torn apart the kingdom, and the capital of San Salvador had lain in ruins since 1678. In 1703, at the age of 22, Beatrice sought to restore the grandeur of the Kongo. She warned of divine chastisement if the capital were not reoccupied. Within two years she established a new dogma and teaching and renewed the church. But her opposition to foreign missionaries led to her demise. Beholden to the Portuguese, King Pedro IV arrested her. She was tried by a church tribunal for heresy, condemned, and burned at the stake. Her idealism and sacrifice inspired a tradition of mysticism among the Bakongo, and she is considered a precursor to the 20th-century prophet Simon Kimbangu (see **Religion**).

## 5 RELIGION

The Bakongo were among the first sub-Saharan African peoples to adopt Christianity, and, as a kingdom, had diplomatic ties with the Vatican. In the colonial period, Belgian missionaries established Catholic seminaries in the villages of Lemfu

and Mayidi and built mission churches and schools throughout Lower Congo.

Many Bakongo overlay their Christianity with traditional beliefs. According to the traditional religion of the Bakongo, the creator of the universe, called Nzambe, resides above a world of ancestor spirits. Many people believe that when a family member dies a normal death, he or she joins this spirit world, or village, of the ancestors, who look after the living and protect the descendants to whom they have bequeathed their lands. Spirits of those dying violent and untimely deaths are thought to be without rest until their deaths have been avenged. Sorcerers are employed to divine the agent responsible for the death through the use of fetishes or charms called *nkisi*. In addition, healing practices and traditional religion go hand in hand. Traditional healers called *nganga* may be consulted for herbal treatments or to root out *kindoki* (witches practicing black magic, who are thought to cause illness through malice, and to eat the souls of their victims by night).

In the 1920s, Simon Kimbangu, a member of the English Baptist Mission Church, claimed to have received a vision from God, calling him to preach the Word, and to heal the sick. He taught the law of Moses and repudiated sorcery, fetishes, charms, and polygamy. When his ministry acquired anti-clerical anti-colonial overtones, the Belgians arrested him and sentenced him to death. Later his sentence was commuted to life in prison, where he died in 1951. Kimbanguism gained legal recognition from Belgian authorities in 1959, and through cooptation of its leaders, the Kimbanguist church became a staunch supporter of President Mobutu after independence. Officially known as "The Church of Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu," believers number somewhere between 1 and 3 million.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Bakongo celebrate the national political holidays of their respective countries as well as Christmas and Easter. Those who are Kimbanguists make an annual pilgrimage to the Kamba River to honor their prophet. At the river they offer sacrifices, pray, ask for blessings, and take some of the water, which is considered holy. Kimbanguists believe in Jesus as the son of God and therefore commemorate Christmas and Easter. In addition, they celebrate April 6, which marks the beginning of Kimbangu's healing ministry; October 12, which marks his death; and May 25, which marks the birthday of Papa Dialungana, their spiritual leader.

In the DRC, the Bakongo celebrate Parents Day, August 1, along with their fellow citizens. On this holiday people go to the cemeteries in the morning to spruce up the family graves. The grave sites may be overgrown with tall dry elephant grass, which is burned away, creating an Armageddon-like atmosphere. In the evenings, families get together to share a festive meal with the extended family.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Bakongo believe in a close relationship between the unborn, the living, and the dead. If they are Christian, they baptize their children. At birth, there is a ritual called a *ko-bota elingi* (which literally means "what a pleasure it is to give birth"), a party to which friends and relatives come to share in the parents' joy and to celebrate the continuity of the family.

Until recently, initiation (*Longo*) held a critical place among the rites of passage. *Longo* teaches children the secrets of Bakongo traditions essential to assuming the responsibilities of adulthood. During *Longo*, children learn adult behavior, including control of their physical and emotional reactions to evil, suffering, and death. The ceremonies differ in form, duration, and name among the different Bakongo subgroups. In the past they lasted up to two months. Gradual westernization and rigid school calendars mean that fewer children undergo the rite.

Death is a passage to the next dimension, the spirit village of the ancestors (see **Religion**). In the past, Kongo tombs were remarkably large, built of wood or stone, and resembled small homes into which the family of the deceased placed furniture and personal objects. The corpse was dressed in fine apparel and placed in a position recalling his trade. Graves these days are often marked with no more than concrete crosses. But some are works of art that still reflect Portuguese influence and display statues of friends and family mounted on and around the tomb.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Bakongo are friendly people who typically greet each other both verbally and by shaking hands. The familiar greeting in Kikongo is *Mbote, Tata/Mama. Kolele?* ("Hello, Sir/Madam. What news?"). Respect for authority figures and the elderly is shown by holding the left hand to the right wrist when shaking hands. Men commonly hold hands in public as a sign of friendship. Children are always supposed to receive objects with two hands.

Although young people may initiate courtship, marriage is often the product of family intervention, with older siblings or extended family members suggesting prospective mates.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions are austere for most Bakongo. Rural families typically live in one- or two-room mud brick huts with thatch or tin roofs, and without electricity. Cooking is done mostly outside. Windows are unscreened, allowing access to flies and mosquitoes. Water sources are mostly unprotected and subject to contamination. Infectious and parasitic diseases in the DRC cause more than 50% of all deaths. Children under five, who make up 20% of the DRC population, account for 80% of deaths. Their daily diets are generally deficient in vitamins, minerals, and protein. Despite poor road networks, much of the produce of the Lower Congo region feeds urban populations in Brazzaville, Kinshasa, and Luanda.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Bakongo family lives as a nuclear unit and is rarely polygamous. Although women typically give birth to as many as 10 children, diseases and other illnesses claim the lives of many while they are still infants or toddlers. Nevertheless, children are a sign of wealth, and parents consider themselves blessed to have many children.

The Bakongo are matriarchal. Children belong to their mother's lineage, and the maternal uncle exercises jurisdiction over them even while their father is alive, wielding great power but also carrying great responsibility. The maternal uncle decides where his sister's children will study and what vocation they will pursue. If a man succeeds in life but refuses



A wooden figure with nails, belonging to the Bakongo, dates to around the 16th–20th century. (Getty Images)

to help the family, he may be censured by his uncle. On the other hand, in the case of certain misfortunes, the uncle himself may be blamed—uncles have been stoned when they were suspected of wrongdoing. The European patriarchal tradition has weakened this once monolithic system.

### **11 CLOTHING**

In ancient times, the Bakongo wore clothing made from bark softened by pounding. However, through their long association with the West, the Bakongo adopted Western apparel at an early date. Photographs from the late 1880s show them wearing suits over their sarongs. They generally are considered very proper dressers by other Congolese. Women adopt the latest local fashions and hair styles, which change every few months. The mainstay is the African sarong (*pagne*). Many families are forced to buy used clothing at the markets; children typically sport T-shirts, shorts, and cotton smocks for everyday wear.

### **12 FOOD**

The Bakongo typically eat three meals a day. For breakfast, a village family eats a pasty dough-like ball made from cassava flour (*fufu*) with yesterday's sauce. More urbanized peo-

ple drink coffee and eat French bread, which is baked locally throughout the region.

The midday meal is the largest of the day. Bakongo enjoy one of several sauces, eaten with *fufu* or with rice. Cassava leaves (*saka saka*), pounded and cooked, are always a favorite. Dried salted fish (*makayabu*) or pilchards are added to make a rich *saka saka*. Another local favorite is pounded sesame seeds (*wangila*), to which small dried shrimp are added. Pounded squash seeds (*mbika*) seasoned with lots of hot pepper and wrapped in banana leaves are sold at roadside stands, and are a popular snack for travelers. The most common dish is white beans cooked in a palm oil sauce of tomatoes, onions, garlic, and hot pepper. The beans are eaten with rice, *fufu*, or *chikwange* (a cassava loaf prepared in banana leaves).

Supper generally consists of leftovers, but *chikwange* with a piece of *makayabu* covered in hot pepper sauce may be found at local markets in the evening, and is very satisfying with beer. “Kin sept jours” (meaning Kinshasa seven-day loaf) is a giant *chikwange* so large that it purportedly takes a whole family a week to eat it.

The Bakongo are fond of palm wine. Palm juice is tapped from the top of the coconut palm trunk. It ferments within hours and must be drunk the next day. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, people sit under mango trees, enjoying the milky, tangy substance. They also make sugar cane wine (*nguilala*), fruit wines, and homemade gin (cinq cents). It is customary to pour a small amount on the ground for the ancestors before imbibing.

### **13 EDUCATION**

By virtue of their close and sustained contact with European missionaries, the Bakongo have enjoyed relatively high levels of literacy and education. Currently, most parents want to send their children to high school and beyond, but many children from average families are obliged to drop out, at least temporarily, for financial reasons. Thus it is not uncommon to find 20-year-olds in some high schools.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Kongo court art ranks with that of the Bakuba of Kasai and the Baluba of Katanga, tribes of the southeastern DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo). One type of statue—the *mintadi*, or “chief”—was a large piece of sculpture designed to “replace” the chief at court while he was at war or visiting the king in San Salvador. These statues, of which few remain, were sculpted of stone or wood and showed the chief's rank. Another type—“maternity”—depicted a mother and child. In their resemblance to portrayals of the virgin Mary, these show a Catholic influence and are notable for both their non-stylized realism and their serenity.

Besides its reservoir of oral literature, Kikongo has a centuries-old written tradition. Kikongo verse is rich in proverbs, fables, riddles, and folktales. Parts of the Bible were translated into Kikongo in the latter part of the 19th century.

### **15 WORK**

Except for the urban migrant, most Bakongo are subsistence farmers with small patches of cassava, beans, and vegetables. Fruit tree plantations are abundant in some areas. Generally, crop cultivation is only moderately productive because of the dry climate and infertile soils along the coast and into the

plateau regions. Along the coast, however, fishing provides a livelihood for many people. Despite the building of the large Inga dams, the promise of industry touted in the 1970s never fully materialized. Recent protests in Bas-Congo DRC have carried overtones of refusing employment to outsiders, and to restricting work and business opportunities to residents of the province.

## 16 SPORTS

In all three countries home to the Bakongo, soccer is the national participant and spectator sport. Boys and young men play it wherever and whenever possible. As a rule, though, people find much less time to play sports than in the West. Even on Sundays, they may cultivate their fields or tend fruit trees in order to ensure a good harvest.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Besides playing and watching soccer, people love to tell stories. In rural areas people grow up listening to and learning to narrate tales. In addition, nearly everyone enjoys music and dancing. Kinshasa and Brazzaville are centers for African music, which is enjoyed throughout the continent. The larger cities are famous for their live music and nightclubs. Young people, especially, are continually learning the latest dances. In recent years the advent of satellite TV has made it possible for the more affluent to be entertained in their homes. But affordable video houses have become a popular means for the general public to enjoy movies and music videos.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditionally, Bakongo artisans have excelled in wood carving, sculpting, painting, and stone work. An example of their intricate carving is found in their wooden bowl covers that have protruding human busts for handles. They also specialize in scepters, ankle bells, cow-tail fly swatters, and bottles for medicinal and magical powders, often displaying images of people and animals. Masks, on the other hand, have been less important to the Bakongo than to other people, such as the Luba.

One unique type of folk art is the fetish, which is an animal carved from wood and driven full of nails. The Mayumbe near the coast paint calabashes (gourds), embellishing them with hunting scenes and colorful geometric designs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Bakongo face many of the same problems as their fellow citizens in their countries. They must cope with uncontrolled urbanization, collapsing state health infrastructure, lack of well-paid jobs, economic instability, and discontent among youth for lack of opportunities. In DRC, Bakongo have long-standing grievances with the national government that their farm produce, natural resources and other sources of revenues to the national treasury far exceed the benefits they receive in state services.

Social problems are not entirely separable from political issues. As noted, Kongo nationalists have never accepted the division of their ancient kingdom at the conference of Berlin in 1884–85. They argue that the partition was a unilateral European decision in which no Congolese participated. Consequently, since the 1950s in Angola, Holden Roberto and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) opposed

first the Portuguese and then the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) regime; their goal was the reunification of the Bakongo spread across three countries. Tragically, their protests and uprisings resulted in repression and massacres, including “Bloody Friday” on January 1993 when between 4,000 and 6,000 Bakongo were killed. In Angola, Bakongo still are viewed with suspicion by the regime because of their support during the civil war for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). It would be difficult to estimate the cost of these allegiances in terms of lost social and economic development, but Bakongo clearly have paid and continue to pay dearly for their separatist ideas.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women have not benefitted equally from development, and traditionally they have had to take a subservient role to men in political, social, and economic affairs. Women and girls still perform the majority of household chores including fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking and caring for children. They also plant, weed and harvest crops, and tend household gardens. Most girls, because they are expected to help their mothers with this workload, do not complete primary and secondary school. While women produce around 60% of the food, they receive only a fraction of agriculture extension services and generally do not own land. Some are subject to sexual violence though not nearly on the scale as experienced by women in eastern Congo. Nevertheless, initiatives like schooling for girls and women’s savings and credit cooperatives have gone a long way to empowering women.

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—by R. Groelsema

# BAMANA

**PRONUNCIATION:** bah-MAH-nah

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bambara

**LOCATION:** Republic of Mali

**POPULATION:** 4–5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Bamanankan

**RELIGION:** Islam; indigenous religion

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Malians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Bamana live in the Republic of Mali. The development of a Bamana ethnic identity dates back to the pre-colonial states of Segu and Kaarta. According to oral tradition, Biton (Mamari) Kulubali founded the Segu kingdom (named after its capital) in about 1712 when he was banned from his own village after a dispute. His age mates followed him, and together they organized raids on surrounding communities. Their ranks were swelled by men whose freedom they purchased (e.g., men who had committed crimes or fallen into debt bondage) and by others who joined voluntarily. Extending his raids over an ever-larger territory, Biton gradually came to control the entire Middle Niger region. Some members of the Kulubali clan resisted his authority and migrated westward into the area of Kaarta where they founded a second Bamana state.

Biton Kulubali died in 1755. His sons quarreled over his succession and ultimately lost the throne to the military commander Ngolo Jara. Ngolo brought back stability and expanded the boundaries of the kingdom. The state was at its largest and strongest during the reigns of Ngolo's son Monzon and his grandson Da Monzon. The Scottish explorer Mungo Park, the first European to travel in this part of West Africa, visited Segu during the reign of Monzon in 1796 and again in 1805. Internal strife began again after the death of Da Monzon in 1827, and central rule became weaker. Al Hajj Umar Tal, a Muslim cleric from the Futa Toro (now Senegal), took control of Kaarta in 1855 and conquered Segu in 1860 in the course of a *ji-had* (military struggle). He was succeeded by his son Amadu, who retained power in Segu until the French conquest in 1890. Bamana villages in Kaarta and in the former Segu kingdom resisted the imposition of colonial rule but finally succumbed to superior military power. The French established an administrative center in Segu and reinstalled a descendent of the Jara dynasty as a local figurehead but soon accused him of fomenting a revolt and executed him. A French administrator then governed the territory until Mali gained its independence from France in 1960. Segu has been the capital of Mali's fourth region since then.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Bamana compose the largest of Mali's ethnic groups, numbering more than 4 million. They predominate on both sides of the Niger River between Bamako and Kè-Macina, northwest of Bamako, and between the Niger and Bani rivers southeast of Segu. Bamana families and groups of families also live among other ethnic groups elsewhere in the country. Large numbers of rural men and women move to Mali's cities, especially to the capital Bamako, to earn money during the long dry season or to establish themselves permanently. Others seek work outside

the country. Côte d'Ivoire was a favorite destination until the eruption of the civil war in 2002.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Bamana language (*Bamanankan*) belongs to the Mande group of languages, which are a branch of the Niger-Congo family of African languages. A national orthography for Bamana was developed after independence but the spelling of most personal and place names still reflect French writing conventions; for example "Ségou" rather than "Segu." The language is tonal so that the meaning of words changes depending on the tone of a particular syllable. (*So* with a low tone, for example, means "horse," whereas *so* with a high tone means "house.") Definite and indefinite articles are also marked by raising or lowering the tone. The language is semantically rich. Bamana convey this when they say "*Bamankan kònò ka dun*" ("The Bamana language is profound").

Since Segu is considered the Bamana heartland, the dialect of Bamana spoken in and around Segu is said to be the most authentic form of the language.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The foremost Bamana heroes are the king Da Monzon Jara, the king's bard Tinyetigiba Dante, and his warrior chief Bakari Jan Koné, whose deeds are celebrated in the epic of Da Monzon. This epic telescopes certain historical figures and events before and after Da Monzon's reign. In recent memory, Da Monzon's popularity even overshadows that of the kingdom's founder Biton Kulubali, although the popular Segu band Super Biton, which has represented the region at the biennial National Arts Festival, is named after the latter.

## 5 RELIGION

Al Hajj Umar Tal (see **Introduction**) and his successors tried to eliminate Bamana religious practices but they did not convert people by force. Bamana men and women embraced Islam of their own volition over the course of the 20th century. The vast majority are Muslims today.

Indigenous Bamana religion was anchored in respect for the ancestors, village protective spirits, and several secret societies. The abode (*dasiri*) of the village protective spirits is in a grove near the village where the villagers would collectively make annual sacrifices. Individuals and households could obtain blessings through sacrifices to ancestors at household shrines as well as to village protective spirits at the *dasiri*. Six major secret societies (*ndòmò*, *kòmò*, *kònò*, *koré*, *ciwara*, and *nya*) were instrumental in social and religious life. Only men could become members. Historical evidence suggests that there were also some female societies in the past. Not all of the six societies were represented in each village or area occupied by Bamana. All young boys were once initiated into the *ndòmò* society, where they participated in annual rituals and learned self-discipline. Once circumcised, a boy could join one or more of the other societies in his area. Members were required to participate in meetings and rituals and refrain from discussing the knowledge they acquired with non-members. Non-members were unable to approach the area where rituals were held; sometimes they even had to remain in their houses when rituals were taking place in the village. In such instances, a bell signaled the beginning and end of the curfew. Although the societies differed in the scope and content of their

esoteric knowledge, rituals, symbols, and practices, they all upheld community values and sought to protect the community against misfortune and harm by individuals (e.g., through sorcery). Divination through procedures such as geomancy, throwing cowries, or animal sacrifice was used widely when important decisions had to be taken.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Traditionally, Bamana observed either Monday or Thursday as a day of rest. During the agricultural season, they suspended work in the fields on that day and relaxed around pots of home-brewed beer. Very few observe these days any longer due to labor migration and widespread conversion to Islam. The Bamana New Year, the first day of the lunar month *jominé*, is still recognized by some, but everyone now celebrates the national holidays (see **Malians**).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Ethnic differences in the celebration of rites of passage in Mali have diminished as a result of conversion to Islam and increased urbanization. Many Bamana women in rural areas still give birth at home with the assistance of a midwife. New mothers stay home and rest with the baby for seven days until a naming ceremony is held. The household elder chooses the name in consultation with the infant's father. If the family is Muslim and has no preference, the local *imam* (religious leader) will select a name and say prayers. In the rural areas outside Segou, village men assemble for the name-giving ceremony and make a small monetary contribution, but women do not bring gifts of cloth for the mother as in the city.

Village boys of roughly the same age are circumcised together and remain secluded until their wounds are healed. The same holds for girls who are excised (i.e., have part of their clitoris removed). Whether or not excision should continue is increasingly being debated. Excision is a pre-Islamic practice which many Bamana retained when they became Muslims. It was considered parallel to circumcision, and each was seen as playing a vital role in the unfolding of female and male sexuality respectively. Celebrations at the end of seclusion have also diminished considerably. In the past, when boys and girls were teenagers by the time of circumcision/excision, these rituals signaled the end of childhood and the "coming out" of the new adults was a joyous affair with much feasting, visiting, and dancing. Young women were considered marriageable thereafter and young men ready to court women. The future in-laws of girls who were already betrothed would come bearing gifts.

Weddings follow the transfer of gifts from the groom's to the bride's family (bride wealth) and are held in the home of the groom. In rural areas, entire villages or neighborhoods participate in the festivities and help the groom's family feed the guests by bringing cooked food. Friends and acquaintances of the groom come from near and far, offering their best wishes and monetary contributions. The bride is accompanied by a throng of female relatives, and her trousseau is opened and displayed for the village women. Some of the cloth she brings with her is distributed among her husband's female relatives. After the wedding, the bride spends only a few days with her husband and returns home for several weeks before joining him permanently. In the past weddings were held during the dry season, but they are now often celebrated during the rainy season when young people return from labor migration. Wed-



dings are equally important social occasions in the cities. Since space is more limited than in the rural areas, some of the festivities take place in the street in front of the groom's home. Families block off part of the street and erect tents to accommodate guests and musicians.

Muslim Bamana funerals are simple and differ little from others in Mali. Among non-Muslims, the death of an old woman or man gives rise to festivities celebrating the person's life, especially if (s)he has numerous children and grandchildren.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Learning the etiquette of greeting and hospitality is part of the socialization process of any Bamana child. The greeting ritual involves a rhythmic exchange of inquiries and responses concerning the interlocutors' well-being and establishes their membership in social groups. If the two people know each other, they inquire about family members and friends. If they are strangers, the host seeks to locate the guest socially through questions posed in greeting. During the greeting, the interlocutors lower their eyes. A younger person always shows respect by not looking an elder in the eye while greeting. Following the greeting, a visitor is offered a drink of water and a place to sit. Depending on the nature and length of the visit, a guest may also be offered food and a parting gift (e.g., a chicken or other local product). A visitor (relative, friend, neighbor, or stranger) who arrives at mealtime is always invited to join in the meal. One way to honor a guest is to offer him or her a kola nut. Most visiting takes place on the veranda or in the courtyard, but if a



visitor is invited to enter someone's house, he or she traditionally removes his or her shoes.

Even among people who see each other daily, greetings are very important. There are greetings for virtually all occasions and activities. Someone returning from the market, for example, is hailed, "*I ni dògò*" (literally: "You and the market").

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

As is the case with rural Malians of other ethnic groups, rural Bamana have few material comforts. Their houses are generally made of mud bricks and have no electricity or running water. Women and young girls carry all water for drinking, cooking, and bathing home from the nearest well. They cook over an open fire in the courtyard or, during the rainy season, in a kitchen house. Each married woman is entitled to her own house with an attached bathing area and toilet. If a man has more than one wife, he must provide this for each one. A man with multiple wives frequently also has a small house of his own where he keeps his personal belongings and entertains guests. The most prevalent consumer goods include clothing, enamel bowls, garden chairs, kerosene lamps, flashlights, transistor radios, bicycles, and motor bikes. Those who do not own or have access to a bicycle or motor bike generally travel by foot or donkey-cart between rural villages.

Health problems and treatment options are generally the same as for other Malians. Because the majority of rural Bamana engage in agriculture, they are prone to work-related injuries and infected wounds.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The households of Bamana cultivators are usually multi-generational, including a man and his wife or wives, and their sons with their respective wives and children. Social relations are governed by an age and gender hierarchy. Men are ranked according to their biological age and women on the basis of their marriage into the household. Those who are older have more authority than their juniors and men have more authority than women. This principle is mitigated by various factors including earning capacity and personal dynamism. Moreover, elder women are an important force within the household by virtue of having worked and born children for their husband's family. Decisions concerning the household are made by the eldest male in consultation with his brothers or grown sons. Women are now often consulted in decisions regarding the marriage of daughters and sons, and they are able to influence decisions even when they have no direct input.

Family members cooperate in the cultivation of household fields and the crops, and/or the proceeds from their sale, provide food for the household meals and resources for agricultural improvements, marriage expenses, and other household needs. The wives of the men in the family are responsible for meal preparation. They cooperate in pounding grain unless they are able to pay for having it ground by machine, and they take turns cooking. Elder women are freed of these duties once daughters-in-law can assume them. Family members eat together, usually in same-gender groups. Since meals are taken in the courtyard for most of the year women can often overhear conversation among men and vice versa. There may also be conversation and banter back and forth. Married women host friends, visiting relatives, or their husband and his guests at their own house.

In order to generate income that is under their personal control, both men and women can grow specialty crops, produce handicrafts, or engage in small trade during the off-season or during leisure hours. Individual women and men also have the right to own chickens, goats, sheep, or cattle in addition to any animals which all members of the household may own jointly. If conflict arises and cannot be managed, jointly owned land and animals are divided, and the household breaks up into smaller units.

## 11 CLOTHING

Contemporary Bamana women and men dress like other Malians. Traditionally, women spun cotton and men wove it into strips that were sewn together into clothing for young and old of both genders. In the early part of the 20th century, adult male attire consisted of a tunic and ample knee-length pants that closed with a drawstring, both often dyed a rust brown by a man's wife or mother. Women traditionally wore a hand woven wrap skirt in multi-colored patterns or designs done in a mud-dye technique. They wore a piece of similar cloth around the upper part of their bodies. Basic jewelry included gold ear and nose rings for women and a single gold earring for men.

## 12 FOOD

The basis of the diet in rural areas continues to be millet and, to a lesser extent, sorghum and fonio. Rice is increasingly popular but not eaten every day. Millet (or sorghum and fonio) is pounded by hand or machine-ground and then prepared as a gruel (for breakfast or as a light meal) or as a stiff porridge or couscous. Both porridge and couscous are eaten with various sauces made of hot pepper and ground baobab leaf or peanut paste. Dried fish is often used for flavoring the sauce because most people cannot afford meat or chicken every day. Smoked or fresh fish is more commonly eaten than either chicken or meat. Apart from okra and sorrel, vegetables are only gradually entering the rural Bamana diet. *Ngòmi* is a millet pancake fried in shea butter oil (from the shea tree) and eaten with sauce or sugar water. Finally, a traditional Bamana liquid food, often eaten between meals, is *dègè*, which is made of finely ground millet flour and cream that are allowed to sour. At the time of consumption, it is diluted with water and sweetened with sugar. Young women who have been on labor migration occasionally prepare foods they have learned to cook in the city (e.g. pasta) as special treats.

## 13 EDUCATION

Educational statistics are not broken down by ethnic group. Bamana children and youths are represented in the secular schools as well as in the *madrasas* and Quranic schools prevalent in Mali. Many rural villages still do not have any school and children have to walk to the nearest village or town to attend. Secondary schools are located mainly in cities and in administrative centers such as county seats. This means that students from outlying areas must board if they want to continue their educations beyond elementary school.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The tomb of Biton Kulubali, founder of the Segu kingdom, is located on the banks of the Niger in Sikoro, a few kilometers from Segu. Nearby is the reconstructed room from where Bi-

ton is said to have conducted the affairs of state. The symbol of Segou is the *balanzan* tree (*acacia albida*), which loses its fine leaves during the rainy season. In 2005 Segou hotel owners joined with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and city representatives to organize the first Festival on the Niger in order to showcase regional cultural traditions and promote cultural tourism. The festival has been held every February since then and also brings national musical talent to the city.

Music is an integral part of all Bamana rituals and celebrations, with drums providing the major musical accompaniment. Young men who have the talent and interest learn drumming by working with accomplished drummers. Bands usually consist of three drummers who play in a neighborhood or village. Bands that gain a reputation have the opportunity to perform for a fee on special occasions. Women and men dance in same-sex groups. Hunters' associations have bards who make music with a lute (*donso ngoni*) that is accompanied by a scraper (a baton-like metal instrument). Another type of lute was used during secret society rituals. Women have their own musical instrument, the *gita*, used as an accompaniment to singing. The *gita* of married women consists of a calabash (gourd) turned upside down on a piece of heavy cloth and is struck with two wooden batons (similar to chopsticks). The *gita* used by unmarried girls is a calabash decorated with an incised pattern and cowry shells; it is tossed shoulder-high with both hands and turned at the same time to make a percussive sound.

Although Bamana figure among Mali's writers, oral literature has the widest audience and includes a variety of genres. Apart from the epic, there are tales, proverbs, and riddles. Children in particular exercise their intellect by telling riddles.

Puppet theater and mud cloth, discussed below, are part of the Bamana cultural heritage.

## 15 WORK

Agriculture continues to employ most Bamana but it is rarely the only source of income. Those who remain in the rural areas combine it with other income-generating activities, ranging from market gardening to craft production, small trade, and construction. Bamana women work in the fields alongside men, but households with enough male labor may free them from planting and weeding to pursue other activities. In the past, Bamana prided themselves on being accomplished cultivators. Young men could show prowess by excelling during collective work parties in the fields. When the village youth group worked in someone's field, it was accompanied by drummers and adolescent girls who sang to urge the men on in their work.

Seasonal or longer-term labor migration is a widespread means of supplementing rural incomes. The majority of male migrants pursue a variety of occupations in the urban informal sector while young women work as domestic servants in urban households. Like other Malians, Bamana also seek work outside the country. Women and men who complete their schooling enter a variety of occupations appropriate to their educational achievement.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is a popular sport introduced by Europeans. There are no traditional sports, although male dancing involves acrobatics such as somersaults.



A *N'domo* mask with wood, shells, and seeds, from the Bamana culture, Mali. (Bridgeman Art Library/Getty Images)

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Theater has long been popular among the Bamana, in small villages as well as in urban neighborhoods. In the rural areas, it is generally organized by the local youth association. One type of theater, known as *kotèba*, satirizes local practices and individuals. A favorite entertainment related to *kotèba* is comedy whereby a man or woman dressed outrageously acts the part of a buffoon known as *koréduga*. A second type of theater, *sògòbò*, may involve either puppetry or costumes made of reeds, cloth, and masks worn by men. The puppets represent animals, spirits, and human characters, including white colonial officials. They are commissioned from a blacksmith-carver. Performances involving reed costumes are generally held

only at night at the beginning of the harvest season. Villages vie with each other for the best performances and some reach national acclaim. Both *kotèba* and *sògòbò* are done with live drumming and a male chorus.

The departure of young men and women during the long dry season has greatly diminished rural entertainment during this time of year. Weddings animate villages at the beginning of the rainy season with visitors and musical entertainment. Village youth groups invest in microphones and amplifiers since they are now considered a requirement for successful musical performances. In the absence of live performances, people of all ages listen to the radio or to music on cassettes. Socializing with friends, neighbors, and relatives remains a primary form of recreation.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Weaving was once a widespread dry season occupation for Bamana men but it has declined considerably since the 1990s. Some men still weave blankets of home- or machine-spun cotton in red and white or black and white checks and stripes. Mud cloth (*bògòlan fini*), a cotton textile for ritual purposes and everyday wear, was traditionally painted by and for women in black- or brown-white geometric patterns using vegetable dyes and fermented clay. Over a decade ago it was adapted for fashionable wear, bags, and wall hangings and marketed nationally and internationally. Malians embraced it as an emblem of national identity and African Americans began wearing it as a symbol of pride. Malian artists played an important role in this transformation. Since its production for the national and international market place, men have also become involved in painting mud cloth.

Blacksmiths have historically not only made iron objects but also carved masks used in rituals, including the famous antelope headdresses seen in many museums. Wives and mothers of blacksmiths are skilled potters.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are no social problems that are unique to the Bamana as an ethnic group. The consumption of fermented drinks, especially millet beer, on ritual occasions was common in the past but is now limited to those who continue to practice their indigenous religion. As Malian citizens, the Bamana are covered by the human and civil rights observed at the national level.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The discussion of family life above provides a glimpse into Bamana gender relations and shows that they are cross-cut by age and other forms of social status. Gender ideology places men above women but daily life allows for considerable ambiguity and flexibility. Since family land is inherited through the male line, women have to integrate their husband's home upon marriage. Rural married men who work in Bamako for extended periods of time increasingly take their wives with them during the early years of marriage. Once they have children however, women generally have to stay in the village unless the husband decides to relocate permanently to the city. A man with two wives may have one accompany him to the city while leaving one behind in the village. In sum, couples are often separated for months at a time because families cannot earn an adequate income in the rural areas. The revision of the

Malian family law code, once passed, will improve women's juridical status.

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—by M. Grosz-Ngaté

# BANYANKOLE

**PRONUNCIATION:** bahn-yahn-KOH-lay

**LOCATION:** Ankole in southwestern Uganda

Population: 400,000

**LANGUAGE:** Runyankole; English, KiSwahili (two national languages)

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Church of Uganda—Anglican, Fundamental Christianity); indigenous Kinyankole religion

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Ugandans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Banyankole, who numbered about 400,000 people at the turn of the century in 2000, are located in southwestern Uganda. This former kingdom is well known for its long-horned cattle, which were objects of economic significance as well as prestige. The *Mugabe* (King) was an absolute ruler. He claimed all the cattle throughout the country as his own. Chiefs were ranked not by the land that they owned but by the number of cattle that they possessed. Chiefs ruled over pasture lands. Although both chiefs and herdsmen possessed cattle, the ultimate ownership of all cattle was in the hands of the *Mugabe*. Cows were exchanged by chiefs or herdsmen for wives but could not be killed, except for a small number of bulls for sacrifice or food. The Banyankole conform to a pattern of social stratification famous in Uganda and its neighboring countries of Rwanda and Burundi, which is namely, the division of society into a high-ranked pastoral caste and a lower-ranked agricultural caste. The *Bahima* are cattle herders who despise farming and do not marry the *Bairu* farmers who reside on a chief's estates and provide the chief with vegetable foods. The *Bairu* also care for goats and sheep for themselves and for the *Bahima*.

The *Mugabe* regularly held court where he resolved disputes involving more than 50 cows, or cases of wives deserting their husbands. The *Nganzi* was the favorite chief who decided which disputes would be heard by the *Mugabe*. The *Nganzi* alone had the right to enter the *Mugabe*'s rooms at any time. The kingdom was divided into 16 districts headed by a chief appointed directly by the *Mugabe*. At his appointment, a district chief was given several hundred cows as a gift from the *Mugabe*. Ordinary cattle herders were free to settle wherever they chose in search of good pastures and wise leadership. Chiefs regularly held courts to resolve minor conflicts. Every year agents from the *Mugabe* traveled throughout the kingdom in search of taxation in the form of 1 cow per 50 cows in a homestead. Chiefs had no right to levy taxes on those in their districts.

In 1967, the government of Milton Obote, prime minister of Uganda, abolished kingdoms in Uganda, including the Kingdom of Ankole. This policy was intended to promote individualism and socialism in opposition to traditional forms of social stratification. A cash economy and private ownership of land promoted in the colonial era, set in motion by the British in the early 20th century, had earlier served to diminish the authority of chiefs in favor of wealthy farmers or herders. By World War II, the *Bairu* owned as many cattle as the *Bahima*. Nevertheless, cattle are still highly valued among the Banyankole, and the *Bahima* are still held in high regard.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Ankole lies to the southwest of Lake Victoria in southwestern Uganda. Its area equals about 15,540 sq km (6,000 sq mi). It appears that sometime during the 17th century or before, cattle-keeping people migrated from the north into central and western Uganda and mingled with indigenous farming peoples. These migrants adopted the language of the farmers but maintained their separate identity and authority, most notably in the Kingdom of Ankole. The Kingdom of Buganda bordered Ankole on the east, and the Kingdom of Bunyoro constituted its northern border. Lake Edward was a natural border to the west.

The country was well suited for pastoralism, given its large areas of rolling plains covered with abundant grass. The land lies about 1,370 m (4,500 ft) above sea level, with some hills rising to as high as 2,740 m (9,000 ft). Valleys sometimes have papyrus grass or are wooded. Today, nomadic herders prefer to move to those areas of Ankole where fresh grazing land and water supplies are available, although these lands are diminishing because of a high rate of population growth.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Banyankole speak a Bantu language called Runyankole, which is a member of the Niger-Kordofanian group of language families. In many of these languages, nouns are composed of modifiers known as prefixes, infixes, and suffixes. Word stems alone have no grammatical meaning. For example, the prefix *ba-* signifies plurality; thus, the ethnic group carries the name *Banyankole*. An individual person is a *Munyankole*, with the prefix *mu-* carrying the idea of singularity. Things pertaining to or belonging to the Banyankole are referred to as *Kinyankole*, taking the prefix *ki-*. The pastoral Banyankole are known as *Bahima*; an individual of this group is referred to as a *Muhima*. The agricultural Banyankole are known as *Bairu*; the individual is a *Muiru*.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Morality is primarily a communal concern, for which folklore provides a repertoire of legends and tales constructed to impress upon the young standards for proper behavior through contradictions and dilemmas contained in the stories. Storytelling is a common means of entertainment, with both men and women excelling in this verbal art form. Riddles and proverbs are also emphasized among the Banyankole. Of special significance are legends surrounding the institution of the kingship, details of which provide a historical framework for the Banyankole. The perhaps legendary *Bachwezi*, thought to be forebears to 20th-century kingdoms in central and western Uganda, are credited by the Banyankole for pastoralism, religious cults, and social distinctions found among them. They also established the Banyankole, in Kinyankole terms, as the successors of this large, regional empire. Neighboring societies, such as the Banyoro, have traditions that contest this view in favor of legends more favorable to their own claim to succession.

Folk tales concerning morality contain many examples drawn from royalty, cattle, hunting, and other central concerns of the Banyankole. After work in the evening, parents and grandparents socialize children into the community through stories (*ebyevugo*), proverbs (*efumu*), and riddles (*ebiito*). Animals figure prominently in Kinyankole tales. For example,



one well-known tale concerns the Hare and the Leopard. The Hare and the Leopard were once great friends. When the Hare went to his garden for farming, he rubbed his legs with soil and then went home without doing any work, even though he told Leopard that he was always tired from digging. Hare also stole beans from Leopard's plot and said that they were his own. Eventually, Leopard realized that his crops were being stolen, and he set a trap in which Hare was caught in the act of stealing. While stuck in the trap, Hare called to Fox, who came and set him free. Conniving Hare told Fox to put his own leg into the trap to see how it functioned. Hare then called Leopard, who came and killed Fox, the assumed thief, without asking any questions. The Banyankole recite this story to illustrate that you should not trust easily, as Leopard trusted Hare, nor should you act quickly before contemplation, as Leopard did in killing the innocent Fox.

Folk tales are recounted to teenage Banyankole during the time of courtship in order to provide a moral context for gender relations. The story of the King and the Hyena, for example, illustrates what might be told to young girls who are wasting their time chasing boys instead of learning to resist temptations for future rewards, especially the attainment of a successful marriage. In this story, the King sent a chief to find people or animals who were starving so that he could give from his own abundance. The Hyena accepted the invitation to the King's palace in order to get meat, butter, and milk, although he was warned that he must overcome four temptations on the way there. After resisting other tempting foods along the way, Hyena could not resist big bones and fat meat. When told that

he could not visit the king, Hyena did not worry since he expected to return to eat the foods that he had resisted previously. Unfortunately, the river of milk, the valley full of soup and fat meat, and another valley full of roast beef had all dried up. Hyena, therefore, sadly returned to his cave, where he starved to death.

Another tale for those young people contemplating marriage, called "The Woman Who Stole Locusts," involves a man who went to a far-off country to find a wife. He chose a very beautiful girl, even though he was warned by his friends that she had a reputation for bad manners. Sure enough, while back home, food began to disappear mysteriously, especially the delicacy, cooked locusts. After it was discovered that his new bride was the cause, she was returned home, and he reclaimed the bride-wealth he had given for her.

## 5 RELIGION

The majority of Banyankole today are Christians who belong to major world denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, or the Church of Uganda that is Anglican. Fundamental Christianity, such as Evangelicalism, is also common. For example, the Balokole are self-identified as "saved" through a rejection of personal sin and an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Public confessions of such sins as adultery and drunkenness are common, as well as rejection of many traditional secular and religious practices. The Balokole, for instance, no longer practice extensive milking or bloodletting from cows. They believe that this "sin of greed" deprives the calf of its mother's strength and milk. The Bahima Balokole have, therefore, taken up agriculture to supplement their diet. Bride-wealth and the old customs of blood-brotherhood have been rejected in favor of Christian marriage and unity in the blood of Christ. All indigenous forms of religion are rejected outright.

The element of indigenous Kinyankole religion that survives most directly today is the belief in ancestor spirits. It is still believed that many illnesses result from bad behavior to a dead relative, especially paternal relatives. Through divination it is determined which ancestor has been neglected so that presents of meat or milk and/or changes in behavior can appease the ancestor's spirit in order to address the misfortune spiritually. Banyankole respect ancestors, name children after them, and believe that ancestors communicate with the living in dreams.

Prior to the Christian missionary movement in the 19th century, Banyankole believed that God, known as Ruhanga, lived in the sky. Ruhanga created humanity in the form of a man called Rugabe and his wife Nyamate. Rugabe and Nyamate gave birth to a long line of kings who became deified. These gods had special temples and priests often in the royal compound, and tended to be concerned with helping people to solve special problems. There were, for instance, a god of fertility, a god of thunder, a god concerned with earthquakes, and deities for specific clans and their affairs. The present dynasty of kings is believed to be descendants of previous kings who have become gods. There was a strong belief in the spiritual power of the royal drum, which symbolized the benevolent tendencies of the Mugabe ("The Bountiful"). Requests made to the drum for food were never refused, making hunger quite rare in the old economy.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As the majority of Banyankole are now Christian, they celebrate Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

After the birth of a child, the placenta and umbilical cord were traditionally treated with elaborate ritual by the midwife who had assisted in the birth. This was thought necessary to protect the mother and her child from harm. The midwife was also skilled in herbal medicines that were used to lessen the pains of birth and to ease difficult deliveries. The birth of twins was considered catastrophic. Members of the family were confined to the homestead and could not leave until rituals, including the slaughter of a sheep, had been performed. Naming also involved a ritual in which relatives gathered together to "call one of them." Names depended on the alleged wishes of one of the ancestors, the day or season of the child's birth, or other special circumstances.

At about the age of four months, among the Bahima, a boy was placed by his father on the backs of two cows that were dedicated to the boy. After this, a hole was scraped in the floor of the hut into which the child was made to sit while he was given the name of one of his ancestors. Among the Bairu, the naming ritual for boys was similar but did not involve cows. Many East African societies train infants to sit in association with naming ceremonies and may even have special sitting ceremonies once the child has achieved this milestone. The training results in children learning to sit unassisted about one month earlier than Western children do.

In early childhood, children began to learn the colors of cows and how to differentiate their families' cows from those of other homesteads. During this time, boys and girls played together. Young boys built small models of huts; girls made head coverings out of grass. Boys were taught how to make water buckets and knives. Girls were taught how to make milk-pot covers and small clay pots. By later childhood, around seven or eight years of age, boys were expected to be useful and were taught how to water cattle and calves. Girls helped by carrying and feeding babies; they were also expected to learn to wash milk-pots and to churn butter.

Among the Bahima, girls began to prepare for marriage as early as eight years of age. They were kept at home and given large quantities of milk in order to grow fat. They were also encouraged not to exercise and to spend most of their time sitting, talking, and making bead ornaments. Today, heaviness is still valued. Teenage eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, are not evident. Among the Banyankole, the father's sister (paternal aunt) was (and still is) responsible for the sexual morality of the adolescent girl. Girls were expected to be virgins before marriage, and this aunt attended the rituals and was required to verify the virginity of the bride. Today, schools, peer groups, popular magazines, and other mass media are rapidly replacing family members as sources of moral and family education for teenagers.

Traditionally, adulthood was initially recognized through the establishment of a family by marriage, the acquisition of large herds of cows for Bahima, and of abundant crops for Bairu. Happiness, and also full adult status, was achieved by both men and women through the rearing of a large family. Special occupations, crafts, storytelling, and musical expression in song and dance were some of the pastimes enjoyed.

Presently, death and burial are experienced largely through the ideology of Christian religions. Nevertheless, public weeping and wailing are still practiced, and members of the extended family are expected to attend the burial. People are expected to shave their heads as a symbol of mourning. Among the Bahima, cows are slaughtered for the funeral meal. In the past, all the full-grown bulls of the dead man's herd were slaughtered for consumption at the funeral. Occasionally, widows of a dead man committed suicide by hanging or by poison to express their grief. The Mugabe, too, ended his life by poison if he thought that his powers were waning. At his death, fires in the royal compound were extinguished, and the royal drum was covered. All work stopped throughout the kingdom, and all people had their heads shaved. The Mugabe's dead body was put on a cowskin and later transported to a forest where the royal tombs are located.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social relations among the Banyankole cannot be understood apart from rank. In the wider society, the Mugabe and chiefs had authority over less wealthy herders (Bahima). The Bahima had authority over the Bairu. Within the family, husbands had authority over wives, and older children had authority over younger ones. Brothers were held in higher regard than were their sisters, although siblings of the opposite sex were frequently very close.

The death of the Mugabe symbolically illustrates his power over the kingdom. All work ceased, and any couples engaged to be married had to marry on the day of the Mugabe's death or else the man had to look for another wife. All princes and princesses wore bark-cloth clothing instead of their regular cowhide robes. Accession involved a son (usually the eldest) who had been selected by the Mugabe before his death. This prince was given a royal stool upon which he sat for his installation ceremonies. Not infrequently, however, some of his brothers chose to fight him, and civil war resulted. When the new Mugabe was determined through battle, fires would be lit once again throughout the kingdom. New chiefs were then named to oversee his cattle. The new Mugabe's mother was elevated to the rank of queen mother. She appointed her own chiefs and had her own royal homesteads throughout the kingdom. The Mugabe chose his favorite sister to be the "Munyanya Mukama," and she, too, ruled over royal estates. She frequently married royalty from neighboring kingdoms in order to create political ties with them.

In the ordinary households of both Bahima and Bairu, social relations mirrored the royal social organization. Inheritance typically involved the eldest son of a man's first wife, who succeeded to his office and property. A man might, however, choose a favorite son to be his successor. Thus, relations between fathers and sons and between brothers were formal and not infrequently strained. Mothers and their children, and brothers and their sisters, were often close. Because women could not officially own property, mothers generally expected their sons to care for them in old age. Husbands might have multiple wives, given that polygyny was not uncommon. Daughters were valued because they attracted bride-wealth upon their marriages, and sons were important for carrying on the family name. Brothers respected their sisters who brought wealth into the family when they married and left home. The most marginal person in this system of social relations was the

childless woman because she could not inherit property because of her gender, nor did she have any sons to support her in old age.

Social relations in the community centered around exchanges of wealth, such as cows and agricultural produce, through the system of ranked authority and kinship. Marriage and bride-wealth were, and continue to be, significant also. The ideal person was one who was intensely involved in matters of family and community welfare. A person who was a loner and, therefore, did not involve himself or herself in the ongoing social life of the community was held in ill repute. The most significant way that community solidarity was and still is expressed is through the elaborate exchange of formalized greetings. Not to engage in these rituals is a sign of non-membership in the community. Greetings vary by the age of the participants, the time of day, the relative rank of the participants, and many other factors. Anyone, even the Mugabe, meeting an elder has to wait until the elder acknowledges that person first.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Mugabe's homestead was usually constructed on a hill and measured about 0.40 km (0.25 mi) at its broadest part. It was surrounded by a large fence made from basketry. A large space inside the compound was set aside for cattle. There were special places for the houses of the king's wives, and for his numerous palace officials. There was a main gate through which visitors could enter, with several smaller gates for the entrance of family members. Waiting rooms were housed near the main gate, and visitors were announced by a gatekeeper. Covered passages connected houses inside the compound. Special names were given to the homes of the king's pages and to those of his favorite wives. There was also a special home used by the Mugabe before he went to war. Occasionally, the king's compound had over 100 homes reserved for the royal wives and their attendants. A fence set off space for his wives from areas used by servants, pages, and other residents. The royal palace was set among other dwellings occupied by prominent chiefs, brewers of the royal beer, and specialists such as woodcutters and drummers. The Mugabe moved his palace every other year in order to provide for the cows a clean environment that was free of insects. Bahima maintained homes much smaller than the king's, but modeled after it in appearance.

The Bairu traditionally built homes about 4.25 to 5.5 m (14–18 ft) in diameter, 2.75 or 3 m (9 or 10 ft) tall, and in the shape of a beehive. Poles of timber had woven over them a framework of basketry made of millet stems and chords of papyrus fiber. A thick layer of grass frequently covered the entire structure. The ground that served as a floor had on it a fireplace made from large stones. Household possessions included cowskin bedding, water pots, iron hoes, and iron knives. Sometimes goats and sheep were tied inside near the walls of the hut.

Today, housing makes use of indigenous materials such as papyrus, grass, and wood, but homes are now primarily rectangular. Such homes usually are made from wattle and daub with thatched roofs. Cement, brick, and corrugated iron are now common in the construction of homes, particularly by those Banyankole who can afford these relatively expensive materials. Currently, household possessions typically include Western-style chairs, tables, couches, and beds. Radios are commonly present, and a growing number of the affluent pos-

sess televisions. Photographs are especially valued and can be seen displayed prominently inside the house, along with calendars, magazine cutouts, and posters. Teenagers enjoy keeping personal albums containing photographs of themselves and their friends taken on special occasions and trips. The family photo album is kept by the parents. These albums are often shared with visitors as a means of socializing on an initial visit.

In the past, Banyankole traveled primarily by foot. With the exception of married Bahima women, most Banyankole could and did walk distances of many miles on a regular basis. Today, the bicycle is a popular means of transportation used for visiting and for transporting goods to market. In the past, paths through the countryside were maintained by chiefs for ease of portage of materials to the Mugabe's palace and for military security. Today, in addition to dirt roads, tarmac roads are available for public vehicles and private automobiles. Speed taxis are popular as a means for travel between towns such as Mbarara and the major city of Uganda, Kampala.

The Banyankole have enjoyed a relatively high standard of living with a rich food base. Nevertheless, diseases such as sleeping sickness and malaria have been problematic historically. Currently, HIV has inflicted many families in Ankole, but government-sponsored HIV prevention programs are in place. Teenage girls do not suffer from eating disorders that are common in the West, most likely because the culture values plumpness rather than thinness.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Among the Bahima, a young girl was prepared for marriage beginning at about the age of 10, though sometimes as early as 8, when she was prevented from having any interaction with men. She was expected to consume much milk and beef so that she could attain a desired plumpness. She was encouraged to give up all forms of exercise, resulting in her having difficulty walking. In contrast to Bahima men, girls were considered attractive by becoming as fat as possible. Marriages often occurred before a girl was sexually mature, or soon after her initial menstruation. For this reason, teenage pregnancies before marriage were uncommon. Polygyny was associated with rank and wealth. Bahima pastoralists who were chiefs typically had more than one wife, and the Mugabe sometimes had over 100. Marriages were alliances between clans and large extended families. On occasion, poor herdsmen, often brothers, pooled their resources so as to share a wife. This practice known as polyandry, or fraternal polyandry when brothers are involved, enabled a poor man not only to pay cows as a marriage fee for his wife, but with his co-husband's help he was in a position to maintain her after marriage as well. The eldest brother went through the marriage ceremony, and all the children were considered to be his for purposes of inheritance. Levirate marriage occurred when a woman became the wife of her deceased husband's brother. This custom served to keep women who had married into the family, and their children, as integral parts of the extended family.

The Bahima and the Bairu did not, as a rule, intermarry. Among both groups, premarital virginity was valued. A marriage fee was required among the Bairu, but this was not as elaborate as among the Bahima. Commonly, 14 goats were given by the prospective groom to his future father-in-law. The goats were then distributed by the father-in-law to his brothers

and to a favorite sister, all members of his extended patrilineal family, as well as to his wife's brother from the extended family from which he had obtained his own wife. The 14 goats were in actuality an exchange for rights to the children who would belong to the prospective husband's family and not to their mother or to her family. Among the Bahima, marriage exchanges were much more elaborate, but the same principals operated. When the bride came to take up residence with her husband, she was received by her future father- and mother-in-law by sitting on their laps. Later, while sitting on a mat, the couple sprinkled each other with grain, then stirred millet flour in boiling water to symbolically illustrate that a new domestic unit had been established. Exchanges of food and gifts occurred thereafter for several days between the two families, to the accompaniment of music, dancing, eating, and beer-drinking.

Today, Christian marriages are common. What has persisted is the value attached to extended families and the importance of having children as a measure of a successful marriage. Polyandry and polygyny have been replaced largely by monogamy, the prescribed form of marriage of Christian religions. Marriages have been delayed, given the attendance at school of both girls and boys. One consequence of this delay has been a rise in teenage pregnancies out of wedlock. Girls who become pregnant are severely punished by being dismissed from school or disciplined by parents; for this reason, infanticide, now more common than in the past, is sometimes practiced by schoolgirls, given that abortion is not legal in Uganda.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Dress differentiates Banyankole by rank and gender. Chiefs traditionally wore long robes of cowskins, compared to ordinary citizens who commonly were attired in a small portion of cowskin over their shoulders. Women of all classes wore cowskins wrapped around their bodies and covered their faces in public also. On a journey or when traveling to visit friends, Bahima women were carried in a cowskin-covered litter for fear that walking would tire them. In more modern times, cotton cloth has come to replace cowskins as a means of draping the body. For special occasions, a man might wear a long white cotton robe with a Western-style sports coat over it. A hat resembling a fez may also be worn. Women cover their bodies, heads, and partially their faces with dark-colored cotton cloth. Today, Banyankole wear Western-style clothing. Dress suitable for agriculture, such as overalls, shirts, and boots, is popular. Teenagers are attracted to international fashions popular in the capital city of Kampala. International business, travel, and education enable the introduction of the latest fashions from abroad, as well as the dissemination of Ugandan clothing, jewelry, handbags, and other crafts to other countries.

### **12 FOOD**

Bahima herders consume milk and butter and drink fresh blood from their cattle. Cereals domesticated in Africa—millet, sorghum, and eleusine—dominate the agricultural Bairu sector. Milking is done by men, while butter-making among the Bahima and the majority of the farming among the Bairu are the responsibility of women. The staple food of a herder is milk. Beef is also very important. When milk or meat are scarce, millet porridge is made from grains obtained from the Bairu. Buttermilk is drunk by women and children only.

When used as a sauce, butter is mixed with salt, and meat or millet porridge is dipped into it. Children can eat rabbit, but men can eat only the meat of the cow or the buffalo. Women consume mainly milk, preferring it to all other foods. The agricultural Bairu keep sheep and goats, which are used primarily by the pastoralists for trade and sacrifice. Unlike the farmers, herders never eat chickens or eggs.

The Mugabe had established times for consuming milk, which was obtained from royal herds and given to him by his pages. He drank milk four times in the morning and four times in the evening. For example, the Mugabe drank milk before going to bed and also was awakened throughout the night to drink milk. He was regularly smeared with fresh butter, especially in the morning, by one of his wives. A bull or fatted cow was killed daily to serve to visitors at the royal compound. Some of these visitors were chiefs who ate at the same time as the Mugabe after sitting with him in court. On these and other occasions, the Mugabe ate alone. Beer made from millet was regularly consumed by the Mugabe, and he commonly had a meal of beef and beer before his nightcap of milk. Beer was also popular throughout the population as an indispensable part of ceremonies such as weddings and funerals.

Today, land and cattle are privately owned in those areas known formerly as the Kingdom of Ankole. This has resulted in migration and resettlement locally and to areas elsewhere in Uganda. Herders have moved to areas where population density is still low and where grazing lands are available. Population growth has also contributed to migration and changes in traditional patterns of subsistence. A cash economy now complicates further the old system of barter and exchange between farmers and herders.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Formal education was introduced into Uganda in the latter part of the 19th century. Today, Ankole has many primary and secondary schools maintained by missionaries or the government. In Uganda, among those aged 15 years and over, about 50% are illiterate. Illiteracy is noticeably higher among girls than among boys. There is a problem of teenage pregnancy among girls that forces them to leave formal education. Schools in Ankole are a significant source of the transmission of national and international values and skills needed for life in modern-day Uganda. At the same time, schools seek to maintain indigenous Ankole cultural values. Runyankole is taught in primary schools.

In the past, girls and boys learned cultural values, household duties, agricultural and pastoral skills, and craft specialization through the process of observation and participation. Instruction was given where necessary by parents, fathers instructing sons, and mothers instructing daughters. Elders, by means of recitation of stories, tales, and legends, were significant teachers also. A girl was instructed by her father's sister on matters of household responsibility and sexual morality.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

All schools have regular performances and competitions involving dances, music, and plays that make use of traditional Ankole materials. Where appropriate, instruction also makes use of Ankole folklore and artistic expression through a long-standing process of Africanization of the curriculum.



## 15 WORK

Traditionally, among the Bahima, the major occupation was looking after cattle. Every day, the herder traveled great distances in search of pasture. Young boys were responsible for watering the herd. Teenage boys were expected to milk the cows before they were taken to pasture. Women cooked food, predominantly meat, to be taken daily to their husbands. Girls helped by gathering firewood, caring for babies, and doing household work. Men were responsible for building homes for their families and pens for their cattle.

Among the Bairu, both men and women were involved in agricultural labor, although men cleared the land. Since land was very plentiful, a piece of land could be farmed for several years, then abandoned for a time so it could be replenished. Millet was the main food crop. Secondary crops were plantains, sweet potatoes, beans, and groundnuts. Maize was considered a treat by the children. Children participated in agriculture by chasing birds away from the fields. Frequently, they made scarecrows that resembled people from grass and sticks. On some occasions, they shouted or banged flat boards together. At times, husband and wife slept in a small hut in their fields in order to protect their crops from wild animals. Reaping was done by men and women, and winnowing was done by women. The harvest season was a time in which there was little work and a great deal of free time for parties and marriage ceremonies. Surpluses of food were given to the pastoral chief as a form of taxation.

A notable difference in labor distinguished Bahima women from Bairu women. The former did very little physical labor apart from everyday household routines. They took care of the milk-pots and churned butter. They also spent a great deal of time caring for their personal appearance and were expected to be plump as a sign of beauty. Bairu women worked hard and, in many homes, performed the bulk of agricultural labor. They also spent much labor grinding grain into flour using stone implements.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports, such as track and field and soccer, are very popular in primary and secondary schools. Children play an assortment of games including hide-and-seek, house, farming, wrestling, and ball games such as soccer. Ugandan national sporting events are followed with great interest in Ankole, as are international sporting events.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Radio and television are important means of entertainment in Ankole. Most homes contain radios that have broadcasts in English, KiSwahili (the two national languages), and Runyankole. Programming includes educational themes involving topics such as nutrition, livestock management, health, and language instruction. Stories, plays, and news are popular. Teens, especially, enjoy musical shows that offer a variety of sounds from Uganda, elsewhere in Africa, and overseas. Books, newspapers, and magazines also are enjoyed by the people. Birthday parties for children are a regular form of entertainment involving birthday cakes, cards, and gifts.

Social events, such as weddings, funerals, and birthday parties, typically involve music and dance. This form of entertainment includes not only modern music, but also traditional forms of songs, dances, and instruments. Drums used to ac-

company dances are water-pots filled with different levels of water. Drumsticks are made of reeds and fiber. Men commonly beat on the drums, and women use rattles about 30 cm (1 ft) long, made from hollow reeds filled with seeds. In one popular dance form, the dancers hold their arms high above their heads in imitation of cattle horns, while hissing and stomping their feet in a rhythmic fashion. Both men and women, particularly among the Bairu, enjoy dancing. It is not uncommon for older Banyankole to congregate together at ceremonies to engage in traditional dance and song. Younger people often gravitate towards the radio or "boom box" to listen to popular, often international, music.

The drinking of alcoholic and nonalcoholic bottled beverages is common at festivities. In the past, the brewing of beer was a major home industry in Ankole, which provided beer for drinking in ceremonies, especially at harvest time. Traditional beer was made from millet, and wine was made from plantains. A large wooden trough was used for fermenting.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Mugabe assembled at his palace, or arranged for their residence elsewhere, the best artisans in his kingdom. Carpenters, ironworkers, potters, musicians, and others were permanent features of the royal homestead or were in constant contact with it. Carpenters came from the Bairu who had inherited knowledge of their crafts from their fathers. Wooden artifacts commonly used were: stools, milk-pots, meat-dishes, water-pots, and troughs for fermenting beer. Among the commoners, it took as many as six carpenters and dozens of friends to fell a tree and to prepare it for making beer. Ironsmiths also belonged to the Bairu. Smiths obtained their materials locally for the manufacture of spears, knives, and hammers.

Potters obtained clay from swamps that were abundantly distributed throughout the region. The clay was coiled into shape, then fired to become permanent. Every family had a member who specialized in making pots. Some pots were considered very beautiful, particularly those with long, slender necks. Pipes for smoking, however, displayed the finest artistic creativity. All Banyankole of both sexes enjoyed smoking tobacco, and young women particularly enjoyed chewing it. Most homes grew tobacco somewhere near the house. The tobacco leaves were dried in the sun, then rubbed into small pieces for smoking. Small colored beads were used to decorate clay pipes, which came in various shapes and sizes, and walking sticks. There were special guardians at the Mugabe's palace who watched over his tobacco pipes, along with other royal possessions such as spears, stools, and drums. Only the king had wooden drums made from cowhide; others used clay water-pots as a percussion instrument. Graphic art was not common, although rectangular designs did appear on the interior walls of some homes, especially those of royalty.

Traditional industries are not nearly as significant as in the past. Household possessions and artifacts show the many social changes that have occurred in Ankole; nevertheless, one can still observe the use of traditional pipes, water-pots for music, decorated walking sticks exchanged at marriage, and the use of gourds and pottery.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The political culture of Uganda continues to balance tribal, regional, and national interests. The prime minister of Uganda

in 1962 at independence from England was Milton Obote from Northern Uganda. He was hostile to kingdoms in Uganda, considering them to be outdated and incompatible with socialism. In 1966, all kingdoms, including Ankole and the Mugabe, were outlawed. Obote was overthrown by dictator Idi Amin in 1971. During Amin's reign in the 1970s, all Ugandans suffered from political oppression and the loss of life and property. Obote took over once again in 1980 after the overthrow of Amin and ruled oppressively. Currently, Yoweri Museveni, who was elected president in 1986, is credited with leading Uganda in an economic recovery and toward democratic reform. Banyankole take special pride in Museveni's birthplace, which is in Ankole. Nevertheless, resistance to Amin and Obote has resulted in the destruction of towns and villages in Ankole and neighboring villages.

Since the mid-1980s, AIDS has been a source of great sorrow for numerous families who have lost relatives, friends, and other loved ones to this dreaded disease. In Uganda, there has been a strong national effort to educate the public through mass media about AIDS prevention. Orphaned children continue, however, to be a serious problem for those families stricken by AIDS, as well as for the greater society.

Population pressure, in spite of AIDS, remains a threat to adequate pasturage and a pastoral way of life. Warfare in neighboring countries such as Rwanda has contributed to population growth, as refugees have regularly come into the region. Many Rwandans are now fully integrated into the Ankole society and are full citizens of the nation of Uganda.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As in all patriarchal societies, gender roles were strictly defined among the Banyankole. These roles were defined to reinforce and perpetuate the relationship of male dominance and female subordination. While women were supposed to do all the agricultural and domestic household chores, they were not allowed to sell the produce of their labor, reserving that right for men. Women were also not allowed to own cattle or land. Even today, through socialization within the family, in educational institutions, and in other social spheres, boys and girls are conditioned to behave in certain ways and to play different roles in society.

In male-headed households, men determine the amount of land to access for farming and type of crops to be grown. Women are not supposed to speak in public. They are supposed to take care of domestic issues, such as raising children and preparing and cooking food, while men dominate the public sphere. Men control the major sources of household income, such as livestock, land, and the sale of crops produced by women. Men control the household budget, dictating what can be bought and how money is to be spent. Rules of inheritance are guided by the cultural context in which land, livestock, and important assets are passed down to men from one generation to the next. However, the fact that the Banyankole continue to recognize sisters and mothers as important people within the family, is an indication that originally they had a matrilineal succession, in which women wielded considerable political and economic power. Also, the importance of princesses among the Banyankole attests to the fact that their societies might have initially been matrilineal.

In recent times, the Museveni government has encouraged women to participate in politics and other aspects of public

life. Today, each of Uganda's districts has a female member of parliament, and one-third of all local council seats are reserved for women. As a result, women make up about 24% of the legislature. There are active women's rights groups, including the Uganda Women Lawyers Association (FIDA-U), Action for Development, and the National Association of Women Judges. However, in spite of these advancements, women are often targets of violence and sexual abuse. Women who reveal their HIV positive status to their spouses are often beaten and sometimes murdered by their husbands.

In terms of human rights, Uganda's past has been checkered with torture and human rights abuses, and, according to some human rights organizations, these abuses continue in present day Uganda. The army has been accused of committing atrocities against the populations in northern Uganda, and security forces allegedly torture suspects and members of the opposition on a routine basis. Homosexuality is illegal under Victorian-era legislation still in force in Uganda and many other English-speaking countries in Africa. The laws reflect a deep aversion among many Africans to homosexuality. But, the truth remains that gays and lesbians exist in Uganda, although they pay a high price for their sexual orientation often facing discrimination, and even torture and imprisonment.

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— revised by E. Kalipeni

# BEMBA

**PRONUNCIATION:** BEM-bah

**LOCATION:** Northeastern Zambia

**POPULATION:** 3,600,000 Bemba or Bemba-speaking

**LANGUAGE:** Bemba; English

**RELIGION:** Protestantism; traditional beliefs; Roman Catholicism; African Christianity; Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Chewa; Tonga; Zambians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Bemba are a matrilineal group that occupy the northeastern part of Zambia, an area of about 51,800 sq km (20,000 sq mi). The language and culture of the Bemba are very similar to those of other ethnic groups that live around them, for example, the Bisa, the Aushi, the Tabwa, and various subgroups in Luapula Province. The Bemba and the related peoples belong to the wider group usually referred to as the Central Bantu. The Bemba came to their present location from west of the Luapula River in the Congo as offshoots of the great Luba peoples during the great Bantu migrations of the 16th and 17th centuries. Once they were well established in their present habitat, the Bemba organized themselves into an expansive but loosely united state under a paramount chief, known as Chitimukulu (the Great Tree), and subchiefs belonging to the royal Crocodile clan. They were characterized as a warlike and fearsome people by early European travelers and explorers, such as David Livingstone. Zambia was colonized by the British in the early 1890s when the British South African Company, under the direction of the British-born South African business tycoon and politician Cecil Rhodes, began to expand into the area. The former name of Zambia was Northern Rhodesia, named after Cecil Rhodes and his company that won concessions by signing treaties with local chiefs to mine the rich copperbelt area.

Zambia obtained independence in 1964 under the leadership of President Kenneth Kaunda, who ruled Zambia for 27 years under a one-party state. After unrest in 1990, multiparty politics were instituted. President Kenneth Kaunda lost the presidential elections held in 1991 to Frederick Chiluba, a former trade unionist and leader of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). By the end of Chiluba's first term as president (1996), the MMD's commitment to political reform had faded in the face of re-election demands. In the presidential and parliamentary elections held in November 1996, Chiluba was re-elected. Kaunda had been barred from running in these elections and his United National Independence Party (UNIP) boycotted them; the elections were also deemed neither fair nor free by non-governmental organizations and international observers. In the elections held in 2001, Chiluba was constitutionally barred from running again although he attempted to change the constitution to allow him to run again for a third term but this failed under pressure from the electorate. The 2001 elections saw the MMD presidential candidate Levy Mwanawasa declared the victor by a narrow margin. During his rule Levy Mwanawasa has been credited with attempting to root out corruption unlike the Chiluba's government, which was largely seen as corrupt. Under Mwanawasa's leadership, Chiluba was arrested and charged with several counts of embezzlement and

corruption, crimes he was said to have committed during his tenure in office as president of Zambia.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Bemba and related groups live in the northeastern high plateau of Zambia, an area with elevations ranging from 1,200 to 1,500 m (4,000–5,000 ft) above sea level. Although the area is well watered, the soils are generally poor and are covered by bush, scrub, and low trees typical of an African savannah environment. Lakes Mweru and Bangweulu are prominent geographical features on the plateau. Tall grass grows around the lakes, mixed with remarkable patches of dense evergreen thickets, which are eventually replaced by savannah woodlands as one moves away from the lake basins. Because of the presence of dense tree cover and unbroken savannah forest, the Bemba have been described as a forest people. The climate on the central plateau is quite pleasant with temperatures ranging from 13°C to 29°C (55°–84°F), and the area gets an adequate rainfall of about 114 cm (45 in) per year. Although the Bemba proper are a small group, their influence is visible in the numbers that speak the Bemba language and thus make the Bemba appear to be a dominant ethnic group in Zambia. Chibemba is used as a lingua franca in Zambian cities. It is estimated that of the 11.3 million people in Zambia, 32% (or 3,600,000 people) are Bemba or Bemba-speaking, 18% (2,034,000) are Maravi, 15% (1,695,000) are Tonga, 8% (904,000) are Barotze, and the remainder are ethnic groups such as the Mambwe, Tumbuka, and Northwestern peoples.

## 3 LANGUAGE

In Zambia, as in many southern and central African countries, there is a multiplicity of languages belonging mostly to the Bantu family of languages. For example, the name for elephant in Bemba is *nsofu*, in Tonga it is *ndopu*, while in Luyana it is *muzovu*. "To die" in all three languages is *kufwa*, and a child in all three languages is *mwana*. In short, these languages share a similar vocabulary. But in spite of their common origin, many of these languages are distinct from each other, characterized by a loss of mutual comprehensibility. It is therefore quite common for a modern-day Zambian to be multilingual, speaking a maternal or first language as well as several other languages such as Bemba and English. As noted in the preceding section, the Bemba group is the most dominant ethnic group in Zambia, and Bemba as a language is the most commonly spoken maternal language, with 32% of the population (or 3,600,000 people) speaking this language. One of the Bemba dialects has become the lingua franca of the cosmopolitan urban population of major Zambian cities such as Kitwe and Ndola. The prominence of Bemba can be traced back to the days of the powerful paramount chief Chitimukulu and his kingdom that presided over an expansive area. However, in today's Zambia, English plays an important role as the national language, the language of prestige and power spoken by an influential bureaucratic elite. Education from secondary school to university is also taught in English. While English is good as a unifying language since no ethnic group can identify with it, it has its disadvantages in that the majority of the population who are not fluent in English are excluded from the modern economy and development.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

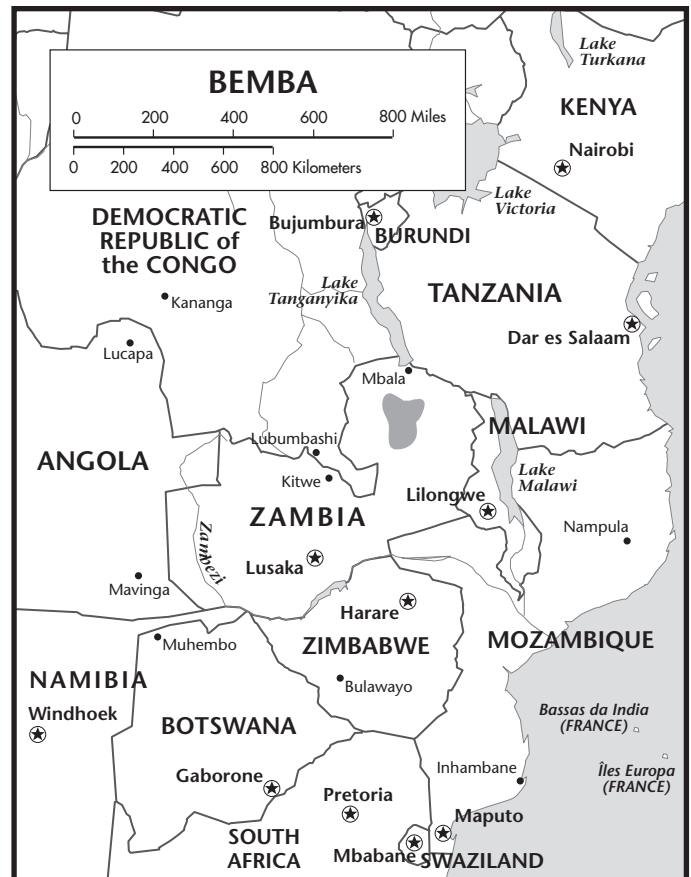
There is one interesting myth in Bemba oral tradition that deals with the origins of the Bemba group. There are many partial and varying oral renditions to this myth. The myth begins by noting that long ago in the land of Kola, there lived White and Black people, but after a quarrel the White people sailed away to get rich in Europe, while the Black people remained under their chief Mukulumpe Mubemba. The name Bemba comes directly from this chief's last name. The chief then had sons with Mumbi Mukasa Liulu, a heavenly queen who had fallen from the sky and who belonged to the "Crocodile clan" *Ng'andu*. Due to internal quarrels within the royal family, the sons fled, taking with them a group of loyal followers. After much traveling and many conquests, the surviving sons and followers settled in present-day Bemba territory and established a centralized form of government with a paramount chief, named Chitimukulu, "The Great Tree," in reference to their original ruler, from whose heavenly mother they all trace descent. By war, they expanded the Bemba control over conquered territories, and internally the Crocodile clan consolidated control and political authority over other rival clans. The full narration and interpretation of the myth, also called the Bemba Charter Myth, reveals a story that is rich in its oral, political, religious, and ritual dimensions. In general, the Bemba rely heavily on folklore, myths, and the oral tradition to pass on vital information about beliefs, customs, and culture from one generation to the next.

#### 5 RELIGION

Similar to other peoples of the Bantu family, the Bemba have their own form of traditional religion in which they believe in the existence of a single high god, Leza, who is far removed from everyday life and lives in the sky. He is omnipotent and controls things such as thunder and both women's and men's fertility, and he is the source of magic power. Christian missionaries of various denominations came to Zambia during the era of colonization in the late 19th century and converted many of the peoples of Zambia, including the Bemba, to Christianity. However, few Zambians as of today have totally abandoned all aspects of traditional belief systems, so much so that the religion of most people in Zambia and among the Bemba can be considered to be a transition from traditional systems to Christianity. Those who strictly adhere to traditional religion have been greatly influenced by Christian teachings and its trappings as well. Due to the similarities in the overall structure of Christianity and indigenous religions, most people do not see any contradictions between the two and are likely to practice both religions simultaneously. In general it is estimated that 34% of Zambia's population are Protestant, 27% hold to traditional beliefs, 26% are Roman Catholic, 8% are African Christian, and the rest follow other Christian sects, Islam, and other faiths.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major national holiday in Zambia is Independence Day on 24 October. Zambia obtained its independence from Great Britain in 1964 on 24 October. During this day every year there are celebrations arranged in major urban areas and throughout the country. There is much drinking, dancing, and singing. In the afternoon, people congregate in stadiums to watch a game of soccer between major leagues, or to see the national



team play a friendly match with a national team from a nearby country such as Malawi.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Among the Bemba, there is no initiation ceremony for boys. Girls go through an initiation ceremony called *Chisungu*, a puberty rite that initiates girls through the symbols of life and death in order to give social form and meaning to their sexuality. A girl whose breasts have started to develop is secluded for anywhere from six weeks to three months to undergo the *Chisungu* ceremony. A series of rites representing the duties of the girl as cook, gardener, hostess, and mother are carried out in an initiation hut, as well as in the surrounding bush. During the ceremony there is much drumming, dancing, singing, and drama symbolic of the acoustic uproar which the Bemba associate with the whole of cosmic and human forces. One of the worst things that could happen to a girl is to bear a child before she has been initiated. Her child would then be considered a creature of ill-omen and both the father and the mother could be banished. Although still practiced in rural and urban areas, the *Chisungu* ceremony is slowly disappearing because most girls grow up in Christian families and go to modern schools, which have become a new rite of passage. School teachings and subjects such as biology are at variance with the teachings of *Chisungu*, which perpetuates male dominance and the acceptance of rigid inferior sex roles for women. Nevertheless, many people in Zambia in general, and among the Bemba in particular, believe that initiation ceremonies are part of their cultural

and moral heritage and that such initiation ceremonies should continue, or even be incorporated into the school curriculum.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Seniority is important among the Bemba and largely determines interpersonal relations. Shaking hands is the normal way of greeting, particularly among members of the same age set. There also exists a joking relationship between members of different clans. Among the Bemba a clan is defined as a descent group whose members trace their descent from a common ancestress, i.e., a grouping of several matrilineal lineages. The Bemba people have about 40 clans, and most clans have a partner clan with which they joke and can intermarry. Marriage of individuals from the same clan is not usually permissible. Most clans are named after living things such as plants and animals. Two clans in partnership usually have names that are associated and show the type of joking relationship. For example, the Crocodile clan is the partner of the Fish clan, because crocodiles eat fish. A member of the Crocodile clan can tease or ridicule a member of the Fish clan by saying, "You are my meal today." A member of the Fish clan can answer back that if it had not been for the fish, the crocodile wouldn't have seen the light of day, and it would have starved to death.

At beer parties it is common for men and women to drink from the same container, usually an earthenware pot with a wide mouth. The beer is poured into the pot and everybody takes a few sips from the pot as it is passed around. It is bad manners to refuse a sip.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Bemba live in rural villages built up around a number of matrilineal extended families. Their main occupation is subsistence agriculture in the form of shifting cultivation. Each family grows its own food and is largely self-sufficient. *Chitemene* shifting cultivation is the main agricultural system, a system where crops are grown in the ash from burning the collected, stacked branches that have been lopped and chopped. Early in the dry season, a family selects an area to be cut. The cutting of the trees is solely a man's job; the women and children collect the chopped branches and pile them into heaps which are then burnt. The women are also responsible for selecting the seeds and sowing them on the ash beds, as well as digging and sowing garden mounds around the villages on which vegetables are grown. Finger millet and cassava are the main crops, but sorghum, maize, beans, and peas are also grown. Due to the poor condition of the soils, the field is abandoned after a few years and new gardens are opened. As the population has increased, the system is beginning to break down and vegetation is chopped down before it has fully regenerated. Bemba territory is not urbanized so that many people still live a rural way of life. Disease is very much a part of Bemba society. Tropical diseases such as malaria and bilharzia, as well as malnutrition, are quite common and tend to be very debilitating and sometimes lethal. On average, life expectancy at birth is about 40.3 years for males and 40.6 years for females. Life expectancy has declined during the past decade due to HIV and AIDS which has resulted in increased adult mortality. It is estimated that 16.5% of Zambia's population is HIV positive.

Most people in the Bemba heartland still live in villages of 30–50 huts made of wattle and daub with a grass thatched roof. The village also serves as the basic political unit and is ad-

ministered by a headman to whom the majority of the villagers are related. Once the fertility of the soil around the village has been exhausted, the village may be relocated to some other suitable location. This is a direct consequence of the *chitemene* system of shifting cultivation and necessitates the building of impermanent structures. Material possessions also tend to be minimal. A household might own a bicycle, a radio, and a few other trinkets of modern life. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Bemba had no form of storable wealth. Today most households are characterized by a limited cash flow to cover basic needs. Consumer goods are rarely bought, and cash income is earned only when there is need for it. There are some households that are progressive and earn a substantial amount of cash through poaching, fishing, and casual labor to enable them to buy goods exceeding basic needs. Transportation is largely by foot, although long-distance travel is by buses that occasionally visit the remotest parts of the rural areas.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

"Family" among the Bemba refers to the extended family that includes several generations, much like a clan. The extended family serves as the corporate property-holding unit and a cooperative work group that in most instances shares food, gifts, money, and other amenities of life. It is a form of social security for those having less access to wealth. Within the extended family system of classificatory kinship ties, an individual generally has several "mothers," several "fathers," and a host of "sons" and "daughters." Polygamy was permissible and quite common among the Bemba, but statistics to show its current levels are not available. Chiefs once needed additional wives because of their obligations of hospitality which entailed the preparation of large amounts of food, brewing beer, and the cultivation of large fields. But the coming of Christianity and modernization has weakened the practice of polygamy.

Since the Bemba are a matrilineal society, large payments in money or goods are not required at the time of marriage, as is commonly done in patrilineal societies. In order to become engaged to a girl, a young man is expected to offer a small betrothal present to the parents of the girl, in the form of a piece of cloth, a rooster, or something of small value. Once married, the young son-in-law moves to the wife's village and performs tasks for his parents-in-law. In the past, girls were often engaged before puberty and performed chores for their future husband such as sweeping the hut and drawing water. Before puberty, boys and girls are encouraged to play together and can indulge in "puppy love" without any sanctions. However, as soon as girls reach puberty, sexual contacts with men are prohibited until marriage. These days, boys and girls find their own mates either at school or in surrounding villages and then inform their parents about their love. Marriages can be carried out either under modern statutory law patterned along the British system, or under Bemba customary law.

## 11 CLOTHING

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the most common type of cloth was that made from bark, which was worn around the waist by women as a loincloth. Today most Zambians, including the Bemba, wear modern dress. Although the clothing for men is Western (shorts, pants, and shirts), the designs and fashion for women's dresses are typically of Zambian or African origin.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food for the Bemba is finger millet which is ground into flour. A thick porridge is made from the flour and is eaten with a relish, a side dish of vegetables or meat. Two other important staple crops are cassava and maize. Cassava is poor in nutrients but is easy to grow and can stay underground for a number of years before it is harvested. The importance of maize has increased over time, and it is likely to take the place of finger millet as the main staple. Other important crops that comprise the Bemba diet include peanuts, beans, edible gourds or squash, pumpkins, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, bananas, and cowpeas. Due to the presence of the tsetse fly, large livestock such as cattle and goats are not kept. However, the Bemba supplement their diet in numerous ways by hunting small game, fishing, and gathering wild fruits. These activities provide much needed food during certain months and years of famine when food becomes scarce. Honey, insects such as caterpillars and grasshoppers, fruits, and wild plants are collected throughout the year. Fishing also adds much needed protein to the diet. Fishing using fish traps and fish poison is conducted during the months of February, March, and April when the rivers are full of water. Dogs are usually kept not as pets but for hunting purposes, particularly for small game such as bush pig and duiker (a small antelope). All kinds of implements are used for hunting purposes, ranging from old-fashioned guns to spears, nets, pits, traps, and axes.

Food prohibitions and taboos are not common among the Bemba, except in certain circumstances, such as soon after marriage when a son-in-law might be prohibited from eating the food cooked by his mother-in-law, or when a girl undergoing the *chisungu* initiation ceremony might be restricted from eating certain foods.

## 13 EDUCATION

At the time of independence in 1964, the educational infrastructure was underdeveloped in many parts of Zambia due to colonial neglect. Very few people were literate prior to 1964. Since independence, the government of Zambia has devoted substantial amounts of funds to educational development. The educational system in Zambia is similar to the British system in which students spend eight years in primary school, four years in secondary school, and another four years in college. The University of Zambia has a limited capacity of about 4,000 students, and entry into the university is very competitive. Because fees are not charged at any level of the educational system, the only obstacle to education is the availability of schools, particularly in rural areas where full primary schools are rare. The national literacy rate in Zambia has increased dramatically from a low of about 10% in 1964 to a high of 70% today. However, since the Bemba live far from the main centers of development, their literacy rates could be much lower than this.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Like many peoples of Africa, the Bemba have a rich cultural heritage that is centered around an oral tradition of conveying information from one generation to the next. Very little of the Bemba's folklore has been written down. Traditional music is part of daily life from initiation rites and marriage ceremonies to hunting parties.

## 15 WORK

In traditional Bemba society, although males are heavily involved in clearing new fields, they are primarily occupied with political affairs and trade. Agriculture is largely the domain of women, who are responsible for most of the food. With the introduction of the modern economy during the era of colonization, men began to migrate for wage opportunities in the copper mines of the copperbelt of Zambia, and further afield to South Africa. As a result of large-scale migration of young men to the mines, the rural areas contain a large proportion of women; agriculture is therefore stagnant because of the lack of male labor to clear trees. Census statistics indicate that Bemba areas are second only to the Eastern Province of Zambia in their shortage of men. The absence of men in rural areas has had a major negative impact on agricultural productivity, the economic standing of women and children, marriage, and family life. In most cases, women have become poorer than in the past when men were present.

## 16 SPORTS

Throughout Zambia, the most popular sport played by children and young men is soccer. The national team of Zambia has had some prominent Bemba soccer players.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In trading centers throughout the Bemba region, beer pubs are a common part of the landscape, where people gather to drink both traditional and bottled beer. Television is available in Zambia, but few people in rural areas can afford to buy a television set. Like among the Chewa of Malawi, children in Bemba territory keep themselves busy through the many traditional games they have developed. Among the popular games and activities are mice hunting expeditions, hide and seek at night, tug-of-war and the nguli game (which is essentially a spinning top a carved cylindrical piece of wood, about three inches long, with a sharp pin on the bottom). Men often play nsolo, a more demanding game, much like chess, often played under a shady tree at the edge of a village, or at the mphala or insaka (men's meetinghouse). Village children make their own toys such as cars made from dry cornstalks, scrap materials, and discarded wires as well as other innovative playthings. As such children become responsible, self-reliant, and creative given the fact that parents and children rarely have money to spend on expensive (or even cheap) toys. Many of these activities help to improve children's learning and social skills.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Bemba people are not generally known for having developed a complex folk art culture, although iron-smelting was practiced until the 1940s. A Bemba man has four basic implements: an axe used for clearing the bush and cutting wood; a hoe for farming; a spear for hunting; and, in the past, a bow. Woodcarving is less developed compared to other peoples in the region, and weaving is unknown among the Bemba. Perhaps the best crafts among the Bemba are pottery and baskets, although these also tend to be simple and fragile.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Zambia has been relatively stable during the post-independence era, and inter-ethnic fighting has not been a major prob-

lem. However, due to economic difficulties during the 1970s and 1980s, the government has faced internal unrest from time to time. Shortages and unemployment in the cities, and widespread misery in rural areas, triggered discontent among the top-ranking leaders in government, the political party, the business community, and university students, which culminated in multiparty democracy in the early 1990s and the peaceful removal from power of President Kenneth Kaunda in 1991. Apart from the economic malaise of the rural areas, the Bemba were far removed from the centers of these conflicts, with the exception of those living in the major urban areas.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

There are pervasive inequalities between women and men in Zambia today, more so among the Bemba where women are supposed to traditionally be subservient to men. These inequalities can be traced to pre-colonial indigenous traditions, the colonial and post-independence eras. During the colonial era the introduction of the labor migration economy where men were allowed to migrate to mining and large scale plantation agricultural areas left women and old people in rural villages in charge of subsistence agriculture. Among the Bemba and other groups in Zambia women are prized for marriage and their access to secondary and tertiary education is much lower than for men and boys. Thus, wage employment in urban centers is regarded as suitable for men. Women tend to be confined to jobs related to their roles as care givers and nurturers—nurses, teachers and secretaries—low wage jobs.

In rural areas women are the backbone of subsistence agriculture producing most of the food while men are away in urban areas. Women take care of child-rearing and house-running. In Bemba subsistence society women do the weeding, sowing, and harvesting. Male activities in rural areas are fewer than female, more spaced out and less repetitive.

Recent statistics from the Human Development Report indicate that women in Zambia are more likely to be poor than men: 65% of women are poor, compared to 52% of men, and child poverty has also increased. In particular, women heads of household were more likely to be poor: 70% of female-headed households are extremely poor compared to 57% of male-headed households. Thus gender inequality in rural and urban areas is well entrenched in Zambia.

Human rights are enshrined in the Zambian constitution. However, with reference to homosexuality, Zambians are divided in how to approach it. Currently Chapter 87 of Zambia's Penal Code Act describes homosexuality as an "offense against morality." The issue of homosexuality in Zambia came to the forefront in 1998 when for the first time in the country's history, the Zambian homosexual community decided to come out in the open, and form an organization called Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender Association (LEGATRA) to champion their cause. This led to an uproar by the Zambian community, both in support and against it with the majority vowing to reject it at all costs. The political and Christian establishments in Zambia have condemned homosexuality as unbiblical and against human nature and pointed out that this abnormality has no right to exist in society or ask for support from the government.

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—by E. Kalipeni

# BENINESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** ben-uh-NEEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** (former) Dahomey

**LOCATION:** Benin

**POPULATION:** 8.3 million

**LANGUAGE:** French (official language); Fon and Yoruba in the south; Bariba and Fulani in the north; over 40 other languages

**RELIGION:** Animism; Christianity (Catholicism); Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Songhay; Yoruba

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The name Benin comes from an ancient West African kingdom located in present-day southern Nigeria. Until 1972, Benin was called Dahomey, named for the pre-colonial Kingdom of Dan Homey. Benin's history is most easily thought of as pre-colonial, colonial, and independent. Until the French and Portuguese developed ports at Ouidah in 1752 and at Porto Novo in 1894, a succession of kings contested and ruled Benin. European contact consisted mostly of intense slave trading, in which Dahomey's kings engaged for 300 years until it was abolished in 1885.

French domination of the area began in 1863 when France made Porto Novo a protectorate. International pressure had been mounting to end slave traffic from this port, and the French also wanted to counter British influence in neighboring Nigeria. Thus, in the 1880s the French fought a series of battles with the Dahomians, and within 15 years overthrew the last of Dahomey's kings. French missions and schools were less successful in converting Beninese to Christianity, than in graduating thousands of highly qualified students, including several well-known writers and scholars.

Benin gained its independence on 1 August 1960. Ethnic conflict and army insurrections followed leading to six military coups, a socialist revolution, a state-run economy, and near economic disaster. In 1990 however, pro-democracy demonstrations and a national conference ended General Kérékou's 18-year rule. In 1991, Nicéphore Soglo became president through competitive elections, marking Africa's first democratic transfer of power from a dictator. In 1996 and 2001 Kérékou was returned to power at the ballot box, although there were irregularities in the latter election. Student demonstrations and strikes also signaled growing impatience with delayed prosperity. Thomas Boni Yayi succeeded Kérékou in 2006 and earned international attention for his high-profile fight against corruption and his staunch support of free markets.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Benin is a small West African country about the size of Pennsylvania. It is flanked to the north by Niger and Burkina Faso, by Nigeria to the east, and by Togo to the west. It has an Atlantic coastline of 125 km, where the principal cities of Cotonou and the capital of Porto Novo are situated. Benin is about 700 km in length, and 325 km in breadth at its widest point. The flat and sandy coastal plain is interspersed by lagoons. Its warm temperatures (70–85°F) and two rainy seasons contrast with the northern, thinly wooded savannah where there is only one short rainy season and temperatures reach over 110°F.

An important hilly region in the northwest has elevations of up to 2,500 ft, providing Benin with a water reservoir.

In 2008 estimates placed Benin's population at 8.3 million, growing at about 2.6% a year. The population is young, with nearly half of all Beninese under 15 years old, and only 2.4% over 65. If not for the large number of exiles who left the country in the 1970s, the population would be much higher. The semi-desert north is sparsely populated with 12 persons per sq km, while the coastal south supports as many as 240 persons per sq km in urbanized areas. In just 32 years the rate of urbanization increased from 7% in 1960 to 38% in 1992. Nevertheless, three out of four Beninese live in villages. Of the more than 42 ethnic groups, the Fon make up 40%, and four other groups—the Adja, Bariba, Yoruba, and Aizo/Houjda—account for another 40%. The remaining 20% is spread across the Fulani, Kotokoli, Dendi, and other groups.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The peoples of Benin speak 51 languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world for its size. French is the official language, and has served to unify Benin. The two major vernaculars in the south are Fon and Yoruba, while in the north Bariba and Fulani dominate. As many as 18 languages are used in education, adult literacy, the media, and broadcasting. High schools teach English as one of the two foreign languages.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Benin's nickname, "Land of Songs," testifies to the role of singing in daily life. Through singing, people express their feelings and narrate their history. Songs are melodious, controversial, satirical, or dramatic to convey the proper emotion. Each ethnic group has its own songs and dances.

Behanzin, king of Dahomey in the late 19th century, towers above the landscape as a national hero. He became king during a period of challenge and intrigue, and went to war with France over a tributary state, Porto Novo, which France had made a protectorate. His kingdom was no match for the superior firepower of the French, and after many battles—some of them victories—he escaped to the bush. Eventually he surrendered and was exiled, and he died in Algeria of pneumonia in 1906. In 1928 his remains were brought back to Benin, where he was reburied with full military honors.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

The majority of Beninese practice animist religion. Some 42% are considered Christian, with about 27% of these Catholic. Pope John Paul II's first trip to Africa included a visit to Benin in 1980. About 24% of the population subscribes to Islam, introduced by Arab, Hausa, and Songhai-Dendi traders from the north.

Beninese animists recognize some 5,000–6,000 deities among the Fon, Yoruba, Mina and other coastal groups. Cult leaders are fetishers, diviners, and venerated of spirits. One of the most famous cults, the Python Cult, or the Cult of the Great Serpent, reveres a deity native to the pre-colonial kingdom of Ouidah in the south. The main temple is an unprepossessing structure across from the cathedral, but it houses huge defanged pythons. Churchgoers typically worship at both places on Sundays. In earlier times, Catholic priests attempted to eradicate the cult, but the local population resisted, burn-





ing down missions and chasing out the priests. Kérékou also tried to disgrace, imprison, and brand the fetishers as national traitors. The government has since adopted a collaborative approach, and enlisted fetish priests in national development.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Beninese celebrate 12 national holidays, which are an eclectic mix of animist, Muslim, Christian, and secular holidays. The Muslim Tabaski feast and the month long fast of Ramadan, as well as the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, have become ecumenical holidays. Formerly, Independence Day, August 1, was celebrated with parades, folkloric dances, and gala evening balls, but 18 years of Kérékou's revolutionary rule gave a certain ambiguity to patriotic celebrations. Difficult financial times also have made it harder to celebrate, and most Beninese spend national holidays quietly with their families, enjoying a good meal.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Beninese family life, social stability, and tradition depend on rites of passage. The rites are festive occasions and opportunities to restore balance when death occurs. Baptisms are community celebrations. Seven days after birth, a baby's head is shaved completely, the baby receives a name, and family and friends offer prayers for the parents and the child. Friends bring gifts, usually small sums of money, a sheep is butchered, and eating and dancing follow until early in the morning.

Relatives often help choose mates for their nieces and nephews, cousins, and younger sisters and brothers. After a period of engagement, a young man offers gifts of jewelry, clothing, shoes, suitcases, and if his wealth permits, a refrigerator, to his fiancée. This secures the bride-price. Then, a small delegation of the groom's uncles and aunts visits the representatives of the future bride to propose marriage. The groom's side brings money and 40 cola nuts, symbolic of respect and harmony. If their proposal is accepted, the cola nuts are divided among the bride's family and friends, and the date is set.

Weddings are festive and cause for much feasting and celebration. Traditional weddings can last for weeks. The bride is secluded with a few friends and taken care of by elderly women. They apply *enje*, a stain, to the palm of the hands and soles of the feet, which eventually turns black. The night before the wedding, the bride sits upon a wooden mortar and is washed by the women. In the morning prayers are offered, and the groom brings additional gifts of shoes and African cloth. Traditional strips of cloth woven together serve to make the wedding gown. The bride wears special sandals, and sometimes the groom's clothing will match that of the bride.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As in much of Africa, people typically greet each other even if they are strangers passing on the street. Upon waking in the morning, children wash their faces, brush their teeth, and then directly greet their parents good morning. In Fon, one greets another person with "Good morning" (AH-FON Ghan-Jee-Ah), "How are you?" (Ah-Doh Ghan-Jee-Ah), "Thank you" (Ah-Wah-Nou), and "Good bye" (OH-Dah-Boh). The Muslim form of greeting involves asking about another's family's well-being, and shaking hands is interrupted each time by touching the right hand to the breast. Visitors always are offered a glass of water and, if it is meal time, are expected to join in sharing some food. In the north, people traditionally do not shake hands, though this is changing. When visiting an older family member or a distinguished member of the community, one kneels before the elder in respect.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living standards remain low. Benin ranks 163rd out of 177 countries in human development. In rural areas, one of two households does not have a safe water supply, and only one in three has access to proper toilet facilities. Malaria, acute respiratory infections, diarrhea, measles, and malnutrition are common. Life expectancy is 55.4 years, and 76 of 1,000 children born will not live to reach their first birthday. Many Beninese are food insecure, especially in the north where insufficient rains and locust infestations devastate crops. About one in four children under five are moderately malnourished and approximately 40% of pregnant women are anemic. Nearly half of all Beninese women still give birth at home without professional assistance.

Despite these serious problems, Benin is improving the health and living environment of its youthful population. The constitution of 1990 made special provisions for the survival, protection, and development of children, which included guarantees for their education. Benin ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in August 1990, one of the first 22 countries to do so. Benin participates in a comprehensive health plan known as the Bamako Health Initiative, which is

bringing medicines to the vast majority of the approximately 400 rural health clinics. Of all children under one, 73% are fully immunized against diphtheria, polio and tetanus (1992).

The main roads in Benin are paved, and travel from the coast to the north by bush taxi or minivan is easy. Secondary roads can be rugged and cause considerable wear and tear on vehicles. Together, Benin has 600 miles of paved roads and another 5,000 miles of unpaved roads.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Beninese place a high value on family and are close-knit. Nuclear families composed of the parents and children may often include a niece or nephew, cousin, grandchild or grandparent. The sense of extended family builds out from this core to include cousins and more distant kin within the clan or lineage. Even these relatives may be referred to as brother and sister.

On average, Beninese women will be expected to have seven pregnancies in their lifetime, but families of 4–6 children are becoming the norm. Typically, the village family—including children if they are not in school—leaves the hut early in the morning only to return late in the day after working the fields, which may be at quite a distance. After the evening meal there may be storytelling around a fire. The institution of family remains resistant to social pressures and most often, if a child is born out of wedlock, the parents will marry so that the child receives a proper upbringing. In polygamous relationships, wives have their own huts in the village, or if in town, apartments in the same house, and share common kitchen and living facilities. Nonetheless, polygamous relationships can lead to quarreling and often add tensions to family life.

## 11 CLOTHING

On the coast, women typically wear African *pagnes* of striking colors and patterns, often with a matching head scarf. Muslim women wear a three-piece cloth outfit, with one piece wrapped around the waist and falling to the ankle, a second wrapped around the chest and reaching around the knee, and a third covering the head. Once married, Muslim women always cover their heads in public. Men traditionally wear *boubou*-style cotton shirts over pants, which may or may not be of matching patterns. Increasing in popularity is the West African embroidered *boubou* for men and women, which requires many hours of skill to sew and embroider. *Boubous* of this quality are very expensive, costing into the hundreds of dollars, and are reserved for special occasions. A cheaper substitute for many people is used clothing (*frippe*) shipped in large bales on container ships from Europe and the United States.

## 12 FOOD

Despite pockets of food scarcity and insecurity, a great variety of foods exist in Benin and diets vary considerably from south to north. Taboos, handed down in the family, may prohibit the consumption of fish, goat, and beef, depending on the taboo. The staple food is *la pate*, made by adding boiling water to corn, millet, cassava, or sorghum flour. The accompanying sauces are cooked for a long time and seasoned with onions, tomatoes, garlic, and peppers. Sauces may be based on vegetables or pounded leaves, and may include fish or meat. As elsewhere in Africa, *la pate* is dipped into the sauce, and is eaten with the right hand. Traditional households eat porridge for breakfast, made from millet, corn, yams, or manioc.



A mother and her two sons at a well. (AP Images)

Other specialties in Benin include *gari*, which is grated manioc, soaked and pressed to remove the natural traces of cyanide, and then cooked in a pot until dried, making a very fine semolina. *Gari* is enjoyed with peanut-cake snacks. To make peanut cakes, the oil is pressed from the peanuts, and then sugar or salt is added depending on the desired taste. Then the paste is fried. If in need of a quick snack, merchants on street corners in southern towns offer deep-fried dumplings made from pounded bananas or beans. Many Beninese enjoy soft drinks and beer, but these require spare cash. Local drinks include natural lemonade and limeade, palm wine (*sodabi*), and beer and gin made from millet (*chapalo*).

## 13 EDUCATION

Benin's former reputation as Africa's "Latin Quarter" was earned for the high number of Beninese college graduates. Today, its education system faces major challenges. High unemployment has led to a reevaluation of the sacrifices required for Western schooling and young women are pressured to marry rather than finish school. Combined primary, secondary, and tertiary school enrollment was only 50% in 2004, but Beninese were making gains in adult literacy. In 2005 the government estimated that about 35% of all adults could read and write, compared with 23% in 1989.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Beninese animism, dance, and music have a long and rich history. Perhaps the best known of the traditional dances belong



*The great challenge currently facing Beninese is finding work. Because of the scarcity of decent jobs, as many as 75% of city dwellers work in the informal sector as peddlers, pushcart operators, and the like. In the villages, most Beninese work in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. The current scarcity of work means that men may spend more time away from the home. (Cory Langley)*

to the Fon people of the southern region. These dances may be performed specifically for a ritual, such as the *rada* rite, which is one of the three principal cults of Vodou from the ancient Allada kingdom. Fon dance is becoming modernized, and musical accompaniment is played on a mix of traditional drums and modern instruments such as electric guitars and synthesizers. Beninese musicians depend on skilled craftspeople to produce traditional instruments of high quality, and villages like Adjarra produce over 50 kinds of tam-tams.

Many cultural traditions have roots that can be traced to former kingdoms. In the northeast, Nikki is the capital of a former kingdom whose origins go back to the 15th century. The Baribas, who are wonderful riders, inhabit the area and organize diabolical displays of horsemanship announced by long trumpets that produce unusual noises.

### **15 WORK**

A great challenge facing Beninese is finding gainful employment at a living wage. Because of the scarcity of decent jobs, as many as 75% of city dwellers work in the informal sector as peddlers, hawkers, and pushcart operators. In the villages, most Beninese (62%) work in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. About 60% of women work in agriculture alone. The principal subsistence crops are manioc, maize and yams, and cash crops include oil, coconut palms, and cotton. Fishing, textiles, a soap

factory, and breweries employ less than 7% of the labor force. Nearly a quarter of all children between the ages of 5 and 14 in Benin work. In total, these children number about half a million workers.

Beninese are counting on a recently completed hydroelectric dam on the Mono River to provide power for future industrial projects that will lead to quality jobs. There is some hope that unexplored mineral deposits and offshore oil field development, now underway, will provide additional well-paying jobs.

### **16 SPORTS**

The Beninese national sport of soccer is played and watched by Beninese everywhere the competitive urge strikes. It is played mainly by boys and young men. The national team is nicknamed "The Squirrels," and has qualified once for the Africa Nations Cup (2008), but never the World Cup. There also are national teams for tennis and rugby. While not a sport in the western sense, traditional dancing is also extremely popular. Teamwork is an essential ingredient, and Beninese compare and rate dancers and musicians for their agility, creativity, technical skill, and stamina.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment preferences and possibilities vary greatly from urban to rural areas. In the towns and cities where electricity is available, Beninese have the option of watching state-run television. However, many people with the means or savvy are buying and hooking up to satellite dishes. A small proportion of the population has video cassette recorders. Cinemas are always popular. By contrast, electricity has yet to arrive in most villages. There, people make their own fun. Ceremonies, holidays, and traditional feasts constitute the bulk of community recreation. Baptisms, in particular, occur frequently and provide one of the most common forms of entertainment. A village of between 300–400 people may have up to 30 baptisms a year.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The royal history of ancient Dahomey is visible in the work of Beninese artists. The palace museum, which contains royal sepulchres and bas-relief sculpture of great intricacy, offers models of this ancient tradition. Beninese artists produce highly refined weaving and sculptures reminiscent of their ancestors' tradition. Tapestries are woven that use symbols and totems of the royal family. Sculptors fashion masks, tables, boxes, scepters, and armchairs. Much Beninese art is inspired by Benin's royal past, and carries on ancient traditions.

Crafts reflect artistic and practical needs. For example, craftswomen make pots of all sizes for carrying and storing water. Blacksmiths not only produce works of art, but are in great demand as bicycle, motorcycle, and automobile repairmen.

In the north, one finds a wide range of handmade instruments, from twin drums to calabashes that produce various tones and pitches to small Beninese guitars. One unique Beninese creation that mirrors life is the Sombas Dwellings. These are miniature round-tiered huts with turrets, resembling fortified castles. Artists have built these realistic models upon escarpments with deep valleys, waterfalls, lawns, and trees.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Benin's major social problems revolve around lack of economic opportunity, poor law enforcement, and the need for public services. High unemployment, low wages, and overdependence on the informal sector are driving educated people to take manual jobs such as driving motorcycle-taxis. Worse however, is the large number of street children, some of whom become prostitutes to support themselves, and others who are subject to trafficking. While the law prohibits human smuggling, Benin is a source, transit point, and destination for trafficked persons, mostly children who are forced into labor or sexually exploited. Some trafficking occurs as "vidomegon," a form of servitude in which children are forced to work under an arrangement between two families. Benin's central location in West Africa has made it a transshipment point for illicit drugs from Nigeria to Western Europe and the United States.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Serious gender issues include discrimination against women, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation (FGM). About 17% of women have undergone FGM. Rape and underage marriage (under 14 years of age) are prohibited, but weakly enforced. In rural areas, a tradition of abduction and rape by a

groom of his prospective bride persists despite efforts by government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to eradicate it. Though not as prevalent as in Ghana, *trokosi* ("wives of the deity") is practiced. *Trokosi* involves sending a young virgin to work at a shrine in hopes that her servitude will atone for a past sin or crime of a family member. These young women are often exploited as sex slaves by traditional priests.

For some time Beninese women have played leading roles in the home and they continue to make many decisions regarding home economics and child care. The husband's job has been to act as the main supporter of the family. Nowadays, the scarcity of work means that men may spend more time away from the home. The consequent demands on Beninese women have forced them to find work outside the home tending small gardens or engaging in small businesses all the while caring for the family. Although women outlive men by 5%, only half as many women can read and write as men, and only about three quarters as many women as men are enrolled in primary, secondary, and university-level schools.

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—by R. Groelsema and M. C. Groelsema

# BERBERS

**PRONUNCIATION:** BUR–bur

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Imazighen (plural; singular, Amazigh)

**LOCATION:** North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania)

**POPULATION:** 25–36 million (exact statistics are unavailable)

**LANGUAGE:** Berber (also called Tamazight)

**RELIGION:** Sunni Muslim, Ibadite

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The name Berber may have originated with the Romans. The details of the origins of the Berber people are not known for certain, but the Berbers are generally considered the original population of North Africa. It is likely that the Berbers descended, perhaps thousands of years ago, from people who expanded west from an eastern origin along the southern rim of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Berbers, who inhabit regions across North Africa, have witnessed numerous invasions and occupations. Invaders have included Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Spanish, Turks, and the French. Despite many attempts by colonizing people to eradicate or absorb the Berbers, their culture survived.

The Berber population is distributed across the countries of North Africa. Generally speaking, it is likely that most north-west African Arabs are of Berber origin. While precise statistics are not available, experts estimate that 35–80% of the all Berbers live in Morocco, with the remainder distributed throughout Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. In Tunisia, Berbers comprise about 15–33% of the population.

Berber groups inhabiting coastal North Africa identify themselves by the terms Kabyles and Rifs. Others living further inland identify themselves as Chaouis, Siwis, Chleuhs, Mozabites, and Tuaregs.

The Berbers of northern Algeria number approximately 4 million. They have kept their original language and culture. The Berbers of northern Morocco are sometimes called the Rifs or Riffis. In southern Morocco, the Berbers, with a population of about 8 million, are sometimes known as the Chleuhs. Other groups include the Tuareg of the Sahara and the Chaouis of Algeria. There are also about 4 million Berbers living in Europe. Some inhabitants of the Canary Islands are also considered Berber.

Between 642 and 669, the Arabs sent their first military expeditions into the Maghrib region of North Africa, which resulted in the spread of Islam. In 711, Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Berber governor of Tangier, Morocco, crossed into Spain. Later Islamic Spain (Al Andalus) was under the leadership of the caliph of Damascus, Syria. Nevertheless, the largest group of Moors (a general term used to describe Muslim people in Spain and Portugal) was made up of North African Berbers.

The countries of North Africa gained their independence in the 20th century. Tunisia and Morocco became independent in 1956 and Algeria in 1962. The countries then established Arabic as their official language, replacing French and/or Spanish. As a result, most Berbers had to study and know Arabic, with no opportunity to use their own language at schools.

North African states identified themselves as Arab nations, ignoring the existence and the culture of the Berbers. Political tensions arose between Berber groups and governments in North Africa over linguistic and cultural issues in the decades following independence. Berber culture was discriminated against in some cases. For example, giving children Berber names was once prohibited in Morocco.

In response to the demands of the Berbers, Morocco and Algeria modified their policies. Algeria defined itself in the constitution as an Arab, Berber, and Muslim nation. As of 2008, Berber is a national language in Algeria and is taught as a non-compulsory language in the Berber-speaking areas. In Morocco, Berber is now taught as a compulsory language regardless the ethnicity.

The Berbers are ethnically—but far from politically—the dominant part of the populations of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania. Isolated Berber-speaking groups are found all over North Africa, from along the Atlantic in the west to Egypt in the east. A colorful nomadic Berber tribe, the Tuaregs, whose male warriors wear blue dresses and indigo-colored veils, still roam the Sahara desert.

Berber authors, from ancient times until today, have gained world recognition. An Oregon State University web site dedicated to Berber studies lists Berber authors Saint Augustine, Tertullian, Apuleius, Arnobius, Franto, Saint Cyprian, Lactantius, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, Jean Amrouche, Kateb Yacine, and Mouloud Mammeri. The site notes that, through history, these authors have been identified as Roman, Arab, or French. Many of the authors wrote in a language other than Berber. The Berber language is only recently winning recognition as an official language.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Berber culture is centered in North Africa and the Mediterranean region, although Berber influence is felt as far east as Egypt and even stretches to the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean. The sphere of Berber influence includes the countries of Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger, with large pockets in Morocco and smaller ones in Tunisia along the Mediterranean shores of North Africa. Berbers tend to live in desert regions like the Sahara and in the Atlas Mountains. Berbers comprise a clear majority of the population of North Africa in terms of race, but many Berbers deny their identity, choosing to describe themselves as Arab.

The Berbers, whose total population is estimated at 36 million, are principally concentrated in Morocco and Algeria, with significant communities also living in Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. In addition there are about 4 million Berbers living in Europe, primarily in France. An estimated half of the ethnic Berbers living in Europe describe themselves as Berbers. In terms of race, Berbers represent the majority of the population in Morocco and Algeria and more than half the population in Tunisia and Libya. As Arabization has swept away the indigenous language and the Berber identity from many regions, many people with Berber ancestry are now claiming to be Arabs. In terms of identity, Berbers represent 40% of all Moroccans, 30% of all Algerians, 15–33% of all Tunisians, 10% of all Libyans, and 0.5% of all Egyptians, making up more than 20 million people. Genetic evidence appears to indicate that most North Africans (whether they consider themselves Berber or Arab) are predominantly of Berber ori-

gin and that populations ancestral to the Berbers have been in the area since the Upper Paleolithic era.

Although stereotyped in the West as nomads, most Berbers were traditional farmers, living in the mountains relatively close to the Mediterranean coast or dwelling in the oases found in the desert. The Tuareg of the southern Sahara, however, were nomadic. Some groups, such as the Chaouis, were herders who moved with their herds seasonally. Their various dwelling places included deserts, areas near rivers, plains, and mountain ranges.

Most rivers are not navigable, but they have been a major source of water for irrigation. The plains are cultivated with a variety of crops, such as oranges, figs, olives, almonds, barley, and wheat. The homelands of the Berbers experience a wide variety of weather conditions. The desert is hot and dry, while the coastal plains have mild temperatures. In the summer the mountains are hot and dry, but in the winter they are cold, rainy, and often snowy.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Berber is primarily a spoken language. The Berber languages are mainly spoken in Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Libya. The primary Berber language is known as Berber to Europeans and as Shilha to Arabs. The Berbers themselves call the primary language Amazigh or Tamazight. The language forms a branch of the Afro-Asiatic linguistic family. The wide dispersion geographically of the Berber people has led to the development of as many as 300 different dialects. A number of tribes, including the largest ones (the Rif, Kabyle, and Tuareg) have their own dialects.

Modern Berbers are engaged in ongoing efforts to develop and gain acceptance of a written form of their language. A Berber alphabet has existed several thousand years, but has not enjoyed widespread use.

Berber languages and dialects include Central Atlas Amazigh (Tamazight) and Riffi (in northern Morocco), Kabyle (Algeria), and Tachelhit (or Tashelhiyt, central Morocco). There is a strong movement among speakers of the closely related northern Berber languages to unite them into a single standard language.

Although an alphabet for the Berber language has existed for a few thousand years, the written language has been disrupted through history by invaders and conquests in North Africa. The language was first written in an alphabet still used by the Tuareg; the oldest dated inscription is from about 200 BC. Later, between about AD 1000 and 1500, Berbers, especially those living in Morocco, wrote their language using the Arabic alphabet. Since the 20th century, Berbers, especially the Kabyle, have begun using the Latin alphabet.

In Morocco, approximately 3–4 million speak Tachelhit, a form of Berber; another 3 million speak another Berber dialect known as Central Atlas Amazigh (Tamazight).

After independence, all the North African Maghrib countries pursued a policy of Arabization and tried to eliminate French as the language of education, literacy, and power. A side-effect of these policies was to suppress the use of Berber languages.

In the early 2000s, Berbers were becoming more vocal in their protests over the loss of their language and culture. In Morocco and Algeria—especially Kabyle—the issues was being addressed by the government. Both Morocco and Algeria



are introducing Berber language instruction in some schools. In its 2007 report on Algeria, the US State Department noted that “Access to print and broadcast media for Tamazight and Amazigh culture continued to grow. Tamazight programming also increased on the non-Berber language channels, as did advertisements in Tamazight on all television and radio channels. Beginning in the 2006–2007 scholastic year, the Tamazight language was officially taught in primary schools, starting in the fourth grade in 17 predominantly Berber provinces.”

### 4 FOLKLORE

The folklore traditions of northern Africa have been deeply influenced by Islamic cultural traditions. Most folklore in Muslim countries concerns important figures in religious history, such as the prophet Muhammad. According to the tale, *al-Isra wa al-Mi'raj*, on the 26th day of the Islamic month of Rajab, the Muhammad traveled at night from Mecca (a city in what is now Saudi Arabia, then known as Hijaz) to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he rode his wondrous horse, al-Burak, on a nighttime visit to heaven. This legend is celebrated every year throughout the Islamic world.

Berbers have many legends based on the exploits of Muslim leaders known as marabouts. The marabouts resisted the religious Crusaders and the French colonizers of North Africa. They are believed to have had *baraka*, a blessing or divine grace, that allowed them to perform miracles. The burial sites of marabouts are destinations of pilgrimages, and many Berbers regard marabouts as saints.

Other Berbers believe in spiritual beings called *jinn*. Jinn are said to take on the forms of animals. To ward off these spirits, Berber Muslims wear a charm, known as an amulet, with verses from the Quran printed on it, as protection. They also wear the “hand of Fatima,” a charm in the shape of the right hand, to protect against the evil eye.

Often, women in the countryside believe in (and might practice) *sihr*, a type of witchcraft primarily involving the use of potions. A potion might make someone fall in love or it might invoke a curse as revenge.

## 5 RELIGION

Prior to conversion to Islam in the 8th century the Berbers had polytheistic and animistic religious practices. The beliefs of the indigenous Berber people of North Africa were influenced primarily by the beliefs of their Egyptian neighbors, as well as by other people who lived in the area, such as the Phoenicians, Jews, Greeks, and Romans.

Berbers who adhere to a specific religion are outnumbered by those who profess no religion. However, many Berbers are Muslim (mostly of the Sunni sect), but there is also a Christian community (mainly Roman Catholic) and an even smaller Jewish community. Muslim Berbers’ beliefs are exactly the same as those of Sunni Muslims elsewhere. However, Islam practiced in rural North Africa places a strong emphasis on *baraka* (“blessing”) and on a belief that descendants of Muhammad can perform miracles. Shrines to these important figures are scattered throughout the countryside. Living representatives are turned to for mediation of conflicts.

There is no Islamic intermediary between man and God. However, every rural community has a teacher, called a *fqih* who trains boys and young men to recite the Quran. The community hires the *fqih* to lead the prayers in the mosque and to deliver a sermon each Friday.

The *fqih* also prepares the charms that carry verses from the Quran, which many Berbers wear in the belief that the charm will cure disease and prevent bad luck. Elements of witchcraft and sorcery that require Arabic writing are the responsibility of men; any such activities that do not involve writing are believed to be the responsibility of women.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Berbers observe both secular holidays and the Muslim religious festivals of the lunar year. The two major Muslim holidays are Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Eid al-Fitr is a three-day celebration that takes place after the month of fasting called Ramadan. Eid al-Adha commemorates the willingness of Abraham to obey God’s command and sacrifice his son, Isaac. This Eid al-Adha feast, where every householder must sacrifice a sheep, occurs in the last month of the Islamic year and coincides with the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. People making a pilgrimage are expected to sacrifice a goat or sheep and offer the meat to the poor. Every Muslim must make this pilgrimage at least once during his or her lifetime.

Muslims celebrate their religious holidays by going to the mosque for group prayers. Afterward, they return home to large meals with family and visiting relatives. They also exchange gifts on religious holidays.

The secular holidays include New Year’s Day (January 1) and Labor Day (May 1). Labor Day commemorates worker solidar-

ity around the world. Berbers might also observe the holidays of their native countries.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major Berber ceremonies are related to birth, marriage, and death. In addition, the first haircut and circumcision are rites of passage for boys. Circumcision is practiced by all Muslims. Most Berbers circumcise boys at around two years of age, but a sect that lives in south-central Morocco waits until boys are five or six to perform circumcision. There is no female circumcision.

Marriage ceremonies are the most important and elaborate Berber rituals. Marriage between first cousins is permitted. (This is typically a son marrying his father’s brother’s daughter.) Most marriages are between members of families within the same tribe section. Polygynous marriages are permitted with each co-wife having her separate dwelling or household.

Widows are often considered an inheritance by a male family member. It is not uncommon for two brothers to marry two sisters. Normally only a husband can initiate divorce (except in cases of impotence). A frequent cause for divorce is childlessness.

When death occurs, Berbers may attribute the cause as either natural or supernatural. If the deceased person is a man, his body is washed and enshrouded by a ranking Muslim man. If the deceased person is a woman, the body is attended to by another woman. Every community has a cemetery.

Burial takes place soon after death. A person who dies early in the day is buried later that day; a person who dies during the night is buried the next morning.

For burial, the body is laid with its face turned toward Mecca. An Islamic leader recites from the Quran as the body is placed in the grave. Attendance at funerals is restricted to men. The relatives of the deceased host a feast seven days after the death. Among the Rif group of Berbers, a widow hosts a feast forty days after her husband’s death. Forty days theoretically marks the end of the mourning period for all Berbers, but most widows observe a three-month mourning period. This extended mourning period between widowhood and remarriage helps remove any question of paternity in case of pregnancy.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

All close relatives, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, are typically addressed by the appropriate kin term. Alternative, they may be addressed by name. If the relative is especially close, he or she may be addressed by the kin term plus the name. The same form of address is also used for elders.

Berbers shake hands during greetings and farewells. It is common for close friends of the same sex to hug and exchange kisses on the cheeks. People of the opposite sex, if they are not religious, may shake hands; religious men and women avoid shaking hands with persons of the opposite sex. The most common greeting is the phrase *Al-salamu alaykum*, which means “May peace be upon you.” The response is *Wa alaykum al-salam*, or “May peace be upon you also.”

Most socializing revolves around the family. Guests are treated with warm hospitality and are served pastries and sweets. At most social gatherings, men socialize with each other and the women socialize with each other; the two groups remain separate. Boys and girls are kept apart through most of childhood. Dating is never permitted, and it is considered

inappropriate and shameful for unmarried males and females to socialize; premarital sex is strictly forbidden. Premarital sex carries especially strong stigma for girls. A girl who loses her virginity outside of marriage brings great shame to her family's reputation. Marriages are arranged, either by the families or with the help of a matchmaker.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

For centuries, Berbers have struggled for power with other Arab groups in North Africa. The Barbary Coast of North Africa was known as a place where Arab and Berber pirates would prey on ships on the Mediterranean Sea.

Many traditional Berbers raise sheep and cattle. However, some Berbers subsist by working at menial jobs, such as grinding flour at a mill, doing woodcarving, quarrying millstones, and making pottery or jewelry. Berber women generally carried out housework and handicrafts, such as weaving and making pottery.

Berbers live a rural lifestyle. Housing is typically a dwelling made of clay or a tent made of goatskin. In some larger Berber settlements, houses may be constructed of stone. Many modern Berbers perform migrant work in Spain or France.

For nomadic peoples, a number of factors, including colonialism, population pressure, and environmental change, has led them to develop permanent settlements. Very few Berber groups still move freely around the desert. Most have created permanent homes, with only some members moving with the herds for seasonal grazing. Permanent settlements have more access to health care and education.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Everywhere in North Africa, except among some of the Tuareg groups of the Central Sahara, descent is patrilineal and residence is patrilocal. Over a century of French rule and the long wars for independence led to a breakdown of the traditional extended family unit. A mother and father would live in one home with their children, including grown sons and their wives. The grandparents would usually live with them. All members of the family would take their meals together.

If a daughter became divorced or widowed, she would return home to live with her family. In modern times, many Berber men have traveled to Europe to find work, so their wives are now filling the role of head of the household in rural areas.

In Berber households, it is common for older children to help care for their younger siblings while their mothers do household work. In most families, the grandparents also take an active role in childrearing. Thus grandparents and grandchildren develop a close bond. Segregation of boys and girls begins when children reach six or seven years of age and the boys begin to help manage the family's herd of goats. By the time they reach puberty, which traditionally is not long before the age to marry, the practice of socializing exclusively with others of the same gender is fully ingrained. Land is passed on from father to son.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional attire is a one-piece, floor-length, hooded dress, known as a jellaba. It is worn by both men and women. Western attire is often worn under the jellaba. In cold weather, many men cover their jellabas with a hooded cloak called a

burnus. Religious and/or conservative women cover their hair in public.

Berber women wear long, colorful dresses, often covering their heads with straw hats. Berber women historically had tattoos on their foreheads, cheeks, or necks. However, this custom is slowly fading away. Rural men often wear turbans, which they replace with a knitted skullcap when going to a mosque.

## 12 FOOD

Berber cuisine differs from one area to another within North Africa. However, most Berber diets include corn, barley, sheep's milk, goat cheese, butter, honey, meat, and wild game.

The best known and most common food among all Berbers is couscous. In fact, some historians credit the Berbers with inventing couscous, which is made from semolina flour. Couscous has been known as a North African dish since the 11th or 12th century. Berbers have different names for couscous, including *shekshu* and *sishtu*.

In Algeria, couscous is called *kisksu* or *ta'am*, meaning "food" or "nourishment." This gives an indication of the importance of couscous as a daily staple. In Tunisia, couscous may be called *kiskisi* or *kuskisi*. Couscous grains may be large (and are then called *muhammas* or *burkukis*) or very fine. The fine-grained couscous is generally reserved for use in making sweet dishes, often involving almonds, raisins, or apricots.

Couscous and tagine (a type of stew) is the principal dish for special feasts and celebrations. Tagine is prepared in a single pot and requires few utensils for its preparation. The traditional tagine pot is ceramic, with a pointed dome-shaped lid. The tagine is typically simmered for hours, and is based on inexpensive cuts of meat, seasoned with spices. Thus, it is well-suited for preparation by both nomadic and rural cooks.

Preparing and serving couscous symbolizes happiness and abundance. Besides tagine, couscous may be served with meat, fish, vegetables, and spices. For a simple meal, couscous was cooked with sour milk and melted butter. This traditional food of the nomadic Berbers has found many variations among modern, more settled Berbers.

## 13 EDUCATION

After the countries of North Africa gained independence in 1950s and 1960s, most were clear in their language policy: Arabic became the exclusive official language of the country and the role of the languages of previous colonization, namely French and Spanish, was minimized. There was no mention of Berber as a national language or minority language and no prospect for making any room for this language in the national official landscape.

Berber had no place in the educational system in Morocco, especially at the primary and secondary school levels. This forced a whole generation of children to enter school in a language they had never spoken before, contributing to a higher dropout rate among Berber children.

Challenges faced by those who spoke only Tamazight extended from the education system to other official spheres, such as the healthcare system and the legal system. Arabic and French dominated in hospitals and official government agencies.

Berber activists blame Arabization for the high illiteracy rate in Morocco—an estimated 48% of its citizens cannot read—because Berber children often drop out when confront-





*Sheep pack a street in a Berber village in Morocco. The mountain Berbers, isolated in Morocco's High Atlas Range, are proud of their traditional culture, now largely lost to their urban kin. (AP Images/Alexandra Boulat/VII)*

ed with teachers who speak only Arabic. In state schools, the first language taught is standard Arabic, followed by French. At the secondary school level, English, Spanish, or German is introduced. At the university level, a growing number of students are choosing to study the Berber language and culture.

By 1994, the Berber movement had grown strong enough to persuade King Hassan II of Morocco to encourage integration of the Berber language into the public education system. His son, Mohammed IV, succeeded him in July 1999, and continued to support the use and preservation of the Berber language.

Mohammed IV established the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in 2001. (IRCAM is commonly called the Royal Institute of Berber Culture when referred to in English.) In September 2003 teaching Berber in public schools became a reality. However, this was not a simple undertaking. Teaching Berber involved learning the Tifinagh script, in addition to the Roman and the Arabic scripts already being taught.

In the past Berber children had been educated in the mosque, where they focused on religion and some rudimentary math. This was seen as important work and the *fqih* (religious instructor) is a highly respected member of the community.

However, religious education along was not adequately preparing Berber children for life in contemporary society. Berber activists succeeded in convincing the government of Morocco

to support the preservation of the Berber language and culture through the primary schools.

With improved health care and widespread availability of immunizations, more Berber children survive to adulthood. It is important that they receive an education that prepares them to function as citizens in North African society. It is clear that more a formalized, urban, and modern style of education is needed.

Berber parents acknowledge that their children will not be able to support themselves by herding and farming. It is inevitable that Berber children will give up the rural or nomadic life to find employment in urban areas. Life in the city requires a sort of training beyond what is available through the mosque. Many Berber and especially Tashelhit students move through the traditional (mosque-based) educational system to become religious teachers. Berber students are enrolling in increasing numbers in the religious universities in Morocco, and some eventually join the faculty.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Berber culture has its typical art and symbols, as well as its unique music that provides continuity through history. The ancient Berber culture is extraordinarily rich and diverse, with a variety of musical styles. These range from bagpipes and oboe (Celtic style) to pentatonic music (reminiscent of Chi-

nese music)—all combined with African rhythms and a very important stock of authentic oral literature. These traditions have been kept alive by small bands of musicians who travel from village to village, as they have for centuries, to entertain at weddings and other social occasions with their songs, tales, and poetry.

Berber mothers have been largely responsible for the survival of the Berber language and cultural identity. Mothers share traditional stories and beliefs with their children. Women also preserve cultural traditions through the handicrafts such as tapestry, jewelry, tattoos, and pottery. In October 2001, the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) was established in Morocco to preserve Amazigh culture and language.

### 15 WORK

Important traditional Berber crafts were blacksmithing, basketry, and utilitarian woodwork, such as the making of plow handles and yokes. However, blacksmithing was typically considered a low-status occupation for men.

Berber women produced handmade pottery. In some areas, men also produced pottery, but it was considered low-status work. There is strikingly little economic specialization by Berber men. Silversmithing and saddle-making, occupations formerly practiced by rural Jews, were skills learned by some Berbers. Most Jews migrated to Israel when that country became an independent state in 1948, leaving silversmithing and leatherwork to Berbers and Arabs who remained in North Africa.

In pre-colonial times, Berber men were occupied with feuding and warfare. Modern Berber men are occupied with agriculture, herding animals, and, occasionally hunting. Berber women manage the household and perform all housework. However, preparing tea for guests is a special task reserved for the men of the household.

The management of the household engages the entire family. Women do the housework and are called on to help the men with the grain harvest. In addition, women are responsible for carrying the harvested grain in baskets to be threshed.

Men build the houses but women whitewash the walls. Women also smooth and clean the floors. Women are also frequently the ones to haul animal manure to the collective manure pile. Women milk the animals and fetch water for the animals and the household. Gathering firewood also falls to the women.

If a Berber household includes poultry and rabbits, the women care for them. Marketing the family's goods was traditionally the responsibility of the men, but sometimes elderly women, especially in poor families, would work the family's stall at the market. In modern markets, women are as numerous as men, due in part to the absence of some adult men who have migrated to Europe for work.

By around age six, boys (and some girls) herded goats on the slopes. Older girls helped care for the family's younger children. As emphasis on schooling has increased, many boys (and to a lesser degree, girls) enroll in school and are no longer available for household chores.

### 16 SPORTS

Before the French colonized North Africa, some traditional sports were played in the village communities or in the nomadic settlements. After the introduction of modern sports in

accordance with French colonial policy, the traditional sports were threatened.

Modern sports, particularly football (soccer), spread rapidly throughout North Africa. North Africans in general, and Berbers in particular, relished the opportunity to contest against European teams. As a result of the introduction of modern sports, national sports organizations were established. These helped contribute to a sense of national identity among the countries of North Africa.

After independence from France, North African nations introduced policies of modernization and centralization. Through the modern educational system and the process of establishing an independent government, the playing of traditional sports was discouraged. These sports were viewed as primitive and backward and threatening to the development of the modern nation. Along with traditional religious practices, traditional games were criticized for being filled with superstition.

Modern sports, however, were encouraged as the newly-independent nations worked to form a national identity and to find ways to compete internationally.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Ritual ceremonies serve partly as recreation and entertainment and often include music and dance. Storytelling is another favorite traditional pastime. Small bands of musicians travel from village to village, as they have for centuries, to entertain at weddings and other social occasions with their songs, tales, and poetry.

A traditional equestrian performance is practiced during cultural festivals. A performance on horseback often ends a traditional Berber wedding celebration. This performance is considered a form of martial art, symbolizing the strong bond between men and horses. Groups made up of hundreds or thousands of riders perform during festivals. Sports, television, and radio provide recreation for increasing numbers, especially in the cities.

Nomadic people traditionally enjoyed games involving sticks, stones, and drawing on the sandy desert ground around their settlements. These games are similar to tic-tac-toe, hopscotch, or mancala.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Much Berber art is in the form of jewelry, leather, and finely woven carpets. The forms of Berber artistic expression, at least in the modern period, are primarily linked to utilitarian objects—pottery, weaving, and architecture—and to jewelry. All are characterized by predominantly geometrical, nonrepresentational patterns. Neither the forms and patterns nor the techniques appear to have changed significantly since ancient times, and they can be related directly to forms found in the Mediterranean basin from as early as the Iron Age. These art forms are not original or exclusive to Berbers. Still, the Berber culture has consistently produced artistic works for centuries.

Examples of Berber artistic expression include the massive earth and adobe structures, known as *ksars*, in southern Morocco. These architectural fortifications were constructed from packed earth, with towers and facades decorated with inscribed patterns.

Berbers are also known for Kabyle and Chawia pottery, which are unique in their variety. Designed with elegant forms

and elaborate applied patterns, this style of pottery is easily recognizable.

Berbers are also well known for their silver jewelry, which is embossed with intricate patterns and inlaid with stones. Some examples feature enameled cloisonné as well.

Berbers are also known for textiles produced throughout North Africa, but particularly in southern Tunisia and in central and southern Morocco.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Politicians in North Africa who take strong political stands in support of the Berber cause rarely reach high positions in their governments. Arabization is blamed for the continued poverty of most Berbers. Fifty percent of Moroccans live on less than \$50 a month, and most of the poor are Berbers.

Government jobs are off-limits to those who speak only Berber, and Berber is prohibited in the courts; all legal documents must be translated into Arabic. One government-affiliated channel, 2M, broadcasts a mix of Arabic and French. The other, RTM, broadcasts predominantly in Arabic, with only 5 to 10 minutes a day of news in Berber.

Political tensions have risen between Berber groups and governments in North Africa during the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s. Berber activists argue that the Arabic education system, the lack of programs in Berber on state radio and television, and the absence of an entity in charge of preserving the Berber cultural heritage is threatening what is left of it.

In response to the demands of the Berbers, Morocco and Algeria have modified their policies. Algeria included language in its constitution declaring that the country is an Arab, Berber, and Muslim nation. Currently in Algeria, Berber is a national language and is taught as a non-compulsory language in the Berber speaking areas.

In Morocco, Berber is now taught. Nevertheless, Berber organizations have denounced the Moroccan education charter dealing with language and culture as insufficient. They point out that only two of its 100 articles deal with the question of Berber in school. The first said Berber could be used in primary school only to “facilitate the learning of the official language”—Arabic. The second said that certain universities would have the means to study the Berber language and culture.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Islam at its foundation was a liberator of women. For the first time in recorded Arab (and Western) history, women gained part of their father’s inheritance and were given rights in both marriage and divorce—it took centuries for European Christian societies to grant women rights to property, especially in marriage where a woman was considered to be owned by her husband.

Berber women’s lives are changing and dynamic. In urban areas, women are quite similar to Western women in their political rights and economic behaviors. They have more access to education and so tend to have fewer children than rural women and also to work in more formal economic sectors. In rural areas, labor is often divided with women responsible for childcare, food production, and domestic tasks, while men are involved in herding and agricultural production for sale. However, as men migrate to urban areas to look for jobs, more women have to take responsibility for traditionally men’s tasks, as well as their own. This has many implications as women gain access and ex-

perience in public affairs and daughters become more crucial to fulfilling domestic responsibilities. Whether urban or rural, women and girls are usually responsible for bringing water to the house for bathing, cooking, and cleaning.

Berber women, like other Muslim women, are said to live in a male-dominated society with rigid sexual stratification. The seclusion and control of the sexual practices of a woman increase a man’s status and power. This view has become more prevalent with the process of Islamization in Morocco, as elsewhere.

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—by M. Njoroge

# BURKINABE

**PRONUNCIATION:** bur-kin-ah-BAY

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** (former) Upper Voltans

**LOCATION:** Burkina Faso

**POPULATION:** 15,264,735

**LANGUAGE:** French, Gur Group (Niger-Congo family of languages), Bobo-Dioulasso

**RELIGION:** Islam, traditional religions, Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Dyula; Mossi; Tuaregs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Burkina Faso is one of the economically poorest countries in Africa, and one of the least known to Americans. Known as Upper Volta until 1984, the former French colony has struggled against drought, isolation with respect to transportation for exports, and a general lack of money for development. The new name, Burkina Faso, was adopted as part of the Revolution of 1983 to signify a fresh start for the country, and is a name created from words of three languages in the country to mean “country of upright or incorruptible men.” The shorter form Burkina is commonly used; Burkinabe is the adjectival form of the name and is the singular and plural term for the country’s citizens.

Burkina Faso was one of the last parts of Africa to be conquered by Europeans. The French conquered it in 1896–97, just ahead of expeditions of the British from what is now Ghana and Germans from Togo. The French, much more than the British, intended to assimilate the peoples they ruled to French values and institutions. However, the lack of money to support the colonial regime in Burkina Faso meant that the French had to rely upon the traditional rulers, especially the kings and chiefs of the Mossi, the largest ethnic group, to administer the colony.

The colony went bankrupt during the Great Depression, and from 1933 until 1947 Upper Volta was divided between Soudan (now Mali), Niger, and Côte d’Ivoire. The restoration of the colony was due in part to the postwar alliance of pro-independence African political leaders like Félix Houphouët-Boigny in the latter colony with the French communist party, the only French party willing to even consider such a step. Upper Volta was recreated in order to reduce Houphouët-Boigny’s territory and to reward the leading Mossi king, the Mogho Naba, for his support in turning out unpaid labor to extend the Abidjan railroad, the country’s link to the outside world, from the Western city of Bobo-Dioulasso to the capital, Ouagadougou.

Burkina Faso became independent in 1960, but it remains closely linked to France. In the 1960s and 1970s, three civilian governments were overthrown by the military in bloodless coups-d’état, but series of coups in the 1980s turned Upper Volta from a major recipient of Western foreign aid to a revolutionary government and back again to a country cooperating with the World Bank’s “Structural Adjustment” program to increase free-market economies.

By the early 1900s the French had imposed taxation on the new colony, taxes required to be paid in French francs. This required Burkinabe peoples, who previously had used cowry shells from the Indian Ocean as money, to grow, mine, make, or do something that French were willing to pay for, which was

the intent of the tax program. Because little could be grown for sale in Burkina, many people worked as migrant laborers in the coffee and cocoa farms and mines of the British Gold Coast Colony and the Côte d’Ivoire. For the first two-thirds of the century this migration was largely seasonal, as the agriculturally dead dry season at home in Burkina coincided with the peak demand for farm labor in the coastal countries’ farms.

Since the 1960s, the original, seasonal migration has given way to longer-term settlement in these countries. Burkinabe were 11% of the population of Côte d’Ivoire in the 1988 census. There the Mossi are said to be the second-largest ethnic group. Burkinabe who once worked as laborers on Ivoirien farms now have cocoa or coffee farms of their own, or work in urban trades and professions.

Many Burkinabe, especially Mossi, served the French colonial army. The famous troops known as the “Senegalese Sharpshooters” (*Tirailleurs Sénégalais*) were in fact recruited all over French West Africa, and Burkinabe were especially heavily represented. Mossi and others from Burkina Faso fought for France in both world wars, in Indo-China, and in Algeria. For many years the pensions of these veterans were such an important source of foreign currency to the Burkinabe government that the president would personally hold the cabinet post for veterans’ affairs.

The country gained independence from France in 1960, and Maurice Yameogo became the first president. Yameogo was overthrown in a military coup in 1966 because of rampant corruption in his administration. For two decades, the country continued to experience political instability. In 1983 Thomas Sankara took control of the government and conducted a nationalist and socialist policy that placed priority on the rural population. He came to be seen as a champion of the people. However, he remained unpopular with tribal chiefs and the government elite. In 1987, he was ousted and assassinated by his second in command, Blaise Compaore, who has remained in power since then, in spite of adopting a constitution in 1991 that allows multi-party elections.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Burkina Faso is located in West Africa, in the interior savanna north of Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. It is bounded to the west and north by Mali and by Niger to the east and north. It is slightly larger than Colorado. Most of the country is gently rolling savanna, with grasslands dotted with trees and areas of scrub brush. The country is infrequently broken by rock outcroppings or small mesas.

The population of Burkina Faso was estimated to be 15.3 million people in 2008. A French sample survey of 10% of the national population in the early 1960s estimated that 48% of the population was Mossi and 10.4% Fulani (Peulh). Other ethnic groups made up 4–7% each; these included the Bisa, who were the original inhabitants of the southern part of the country where the Mossi states formed; Gourmantche, who are related to the Mossi and have traditional states east of them; and Gourounsi, Lobi, and Dagari, peoples on the southern and western edges of the Mossi kingdoms who share a similar way of life and speak related languages, but who do not have political organizations larger than clans defined by kinship relations. The Bobo and Senoufo in western and southwestern Burkina are culturally and linguistically related to the Mandespeaking peoples of Mali.



The 48% figure for the Mossi has been suspected of being a deliberate undercount in order to deny a demographic majority to the people who already dominated the new nation's government. Because ethnicity remained a sensitive subject, the national censuses of 1975 and 1985 did not publish ethnic totals for the whole population. Current estimates are based on those 35 year-old figures. On that basis, roughly 5 million Burkinabe are Mossi. A 1996 United States government figure estimates only 24% for the Mossi, while a 1995 linguistic reference book estimates Mossi at 53% of the population.

### 3 LANGUAGE

French is the official language of the country, of schools, and official publications. Except for the Mande-related languages of Bobo-Dioulasso and the west of the country, most Burkinabe speak languages of the Gur group within the large Niger-Congo family of languages. Gur-speaking peoples in Burkina and adjacent parts of Benin, Togo, and Ghana share a generally similar way of life as millet farmers, with some (like the Mossi and the Dagomba and Mamprussi in Ghana) having kingdoms and chieftaincies, while others are organized only along kinship principles.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Mossi and Gourmantche peoples of Burkina are notable in the history of the West African savanna in that their ruling elites did not convert to Islam when others did. While there always have been Muslims in Burkina who were literate in

Arabic, the bulk of Burkinabe history, law, and tradition was passed down orally.

### 5 RELIGION

The resistance of the Mossi and Gourmantche to the widespread introduction of Islam to the West African savanna during the 10th–11th centuries was a consequence of the close connection between political power and its validation by traditional religion. For a man to rule others, he must have received the religious right to do so, the *nam*, conferred only on one chosen and installed as a chief or king according to religious tradition. Occasional Mossi kings did convert as individuals but without lasting consequences. Mossi and other Burkinabe cultures, however, have many elements of Islamic origin.

The traditional religion of the peoples of Burkina is similar to that of many African peoples. There is a three-part view of the supernatural. An all-powerful god created the world and remains a force, but is too distant and important to have much interest in the activities of human beings. Less powerful, but more important, are spirits of earth and air that govern rainfall and soil fertility; these are tied to local places and affect local conditions. Offerings and prayers to them are made at natural features like rock outcrops or sacred trees.

Third, and most important in the success of daily life, is the influence of one's ancestors. Burkinabe peoples, again like many African societies, see the family as extending across time, from founding ancestors through those members alive now, to unborn future generations. Living members have a responsibility to their ancestors to maintain family land and to marry and have children to carry the family into the future. The ancestors watch over their living descendents and can reward or punish their behavior.

There has always been Muslim Mossi, especially long-distance traders for whom Islam was a common bond with traders elsewhere in the savanna. There are Mossi farmers who are descended from traders, however, who remained Muslim. The peoples closer to the great Muslim societies north, east, and west of Burkina have experienced proportionately greater Muslim influence. Moreover, when the French conquest suggested that the traditional supernatural powers were insufficient to protect people, there was greater conversion to Islam and Christianity.

Current figures estimate the Muslim population at 50%, with 40% following traditional religions and 10% Christian; the latter are mainly Roman Catholic due to the French colonial history. The first African cardinal, Paul Zoungrana, was the archbishop of Ouagadougou and a Mossi. The Protestant population is around 1% and represents the work of American missionaries.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Originally, the national holidays were December 11, the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Upper Volta in 1958, and August 5, anniversary of the date of full independence in 1960. After the 1983 revolution led by Thomas Sankara, the national holiday became its anniversary, August 4. The government and schools also observe all the major Christian and Muslim holidays, including Easter, Christmas, *'id al-Fitr*, the end of the month's fast of Ramadan, and the festival of Tabaski (*'id al-Kabir*), when Muslim households sacrifice a

ram to honor God's testing of Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There are no rites of passage at the national level, except for universal events like school graduations. The ethnic groups in Burkina Faso do mark the various transitions in a person's life with public rituals. These include the formal naming of a baby and its announcement to the community at a set time after its birth, the circumcision and instruction of pre-adolescent boys and (separately) girls, marriage as the assumption of full adult status, and funerals, which mark the moving of the deceased from living elder to watching ancestor. Burials, necessarily soon after death in a tropical country, are distinct from funerals, although both are public ceremonies. Funerals may come years after a death, when the next of kin (usually the eldest son) is able to be present and to afford the cost of the ceremony and associated feast.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

While cities and towns always have existed in Burkina, the vast majority of the population has lived in rural farming communities. The 1985 national census showed 12.7% of the population living in towns of 10,000 or greater, up from 4.7% just after independence in 1960. The two biggest cities, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, had estimated populations in 1991 of 634,479 and 268,926; the next largest town in the 1985 census had a population of 38,902. Recent estimates indicate that the two biggest cities, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, had populations of 1,181,702 and 435,543 respectively. The bulk of the population, then, lives in villages surrounded by neighbors who usually are also relatives, since land is allocated by kinship ties. That in turn reinforces a society in which people are conscious of the ongoing family to which they belong, for whose well-being they are responsible, and whose land they farm and live on, but do not individually own and cannot sell. Respect for those older than oneself is a cornerstone of Burkinabe (and most African) societies.

A poor country with limited resources, Burkina offers little in the way of social security payments. This means that even urban wage-earners maintain links to their rural families, where they have an absolute right to land and support in their old age.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

For those who live in rural villages, life has changed little over the centuries, although some modern conveniences have been introduced. Most people live in adobe houses with thatched roofs. Electricity is available only in towns and cities; therefore, radios are battery-powered and lanterns are kerosene or battery-powered. As the population has increased, firewood for cooking is increasingly difficult to find and women must walk greater distances for it. In rural areas water for drinking, cooking, animals, and washing comes from wells; the building of deeper, cement-lined wells has increased the number that do not go dry during the dry season, and made hauling water easier. Water is carried from the well to the house in large pottery containers carried on the heads of women.

Health issues remain significant. Malaria is chronic and widespread; anyone falling ill with another disease most likely already has malarial parasites and is weakened. The cost of im-

ported malaria-suppressing medicines puts them out of reach for most Burkinabe. Measles remains a significant cause of death for children, even though it could be prevented if the resources were available.

During the 1970s, the world's largest public health project was launched by the World Bank and other aid agencies in Burkina to reclaim fertile river-edge land from "river blindness," or onchocerciasis. This disease, caused by a parasite transmitted by black-fly bites, can lead to blindness after heavy exposure and has caused people to abandon villages and fields along the few year-round rivers. The "oncho" project has succeeded in reclaiming the land, but helicopter spraying must continue in order to suppress the black flies.

Major roads increasingly are being paved, which makes van and truck transport faster and less wearing on the imported vehicles. The single railroad, which runs from the sea at Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire through Bobo-Dioulasso to Ouagadougou, has been extended north to Kaya and eventually will reach another 200 km to valuable manganese deposits. Most individuals cannot afford a private car, but there is a widespread network of vans linking rural communities with cities and towns. There are international airports at Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, with flights to other cities in West Africa and to Europe, particularly to France.

Bicycles and motorbikes are the most widely owned transport. Donkeys traditionally were used as pack animals and now are also used to draw carts to haul goods and firewood.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most Burkinabe societies are patrilineally based; communities of men linked through their fathers live with the wives and children on land that in principle their ancestors cleared from uninhabited brush. In the past, married sons and younger brothers were likely to live with their father or older brother; there is a tendency to smaller households as more men have a wider range of economic options beyond the joint sharing of family farming. In the southwestern part of the country where Burkina, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire come together, ethnic groups transfer some rights and goods through the male line of kinship, and others through the female. That is, a man's tools, for example, might be inherited by his sons, but his cattle would go to his sister's sons.

Marriage in Burkina, as in much of Africa, is a matter of paramount concern to families because it is the means by which the entire family is perpetuated. The incest taboo means that women to bear children must come from outside the patrilineal family, so bringing in "strangers" is a necessity for the family. Marriages are arranged, therefore, and involve group meetings between both families. While there always have been ways for couples who wanted to marry to do so, by and large most marriages are not the result of individual emotions and desires, but are part of the overall family's way of making the connections needed to bear a next generation.

## 11 CLOTHING

Pre-colonial Burkina grew cotton, which was spun into thread by women and woven into strips of cloth by men; the cloth was exported by donkey caravan in large rolls to other parts of West Africa and was sewn into broader panels to make clothing in Burkina and elsewhere.



*Donkeys traditionally were used as pack animals and now are also used to draw carts to haul goods and firewood. (Corel Corporation)*

Modern Burkina grow increasing amounts of cotton, which is still an important export. It is made into printed cloth panels 1 by 2 m (about 3¼ by 6½ ft) in size in a Burkinabe factory. The factory-made and imported cloth is what most Burkinabe wear. Shoes also are manufactured in Burkina.

Traditionally, women wore a long cotton skirt wrapped around their waists; recently, tops have been added in rural as well as urban areas. Men wore cotton shirts and trousers, or Muslim-influenced embroidered robes. Sewing machines now are used for the intricate embroidery formerly done by hand. Urban residents tend to wear variations on an increasingly worldwide style of dress. Used American cut-off jeans have become the everyday working dress of farmers.

## **12 FOOD**

Throughout Burkina, millet and sorghum are the staple foods. Porridge made from millet flour, called *tô* in West African French, is the main food. A cider-like beer brewed from sorghum is the main drink for all except Muslims and Protestant Christians, who do not drink alcohol.

Millet porridge is boiled to a loaf-like firmness, and pieces are broken off with the right hand, dipped in sauce, and eaten. The stew-like sauce is made from vegetables, leaves, and spices, and also may contain meat, which provides most of the flavor and vitamins to the meal. Meat, especially mutton and beef, is

a luxury item not frequently eaten and even less often eaten by itself as a meal. Chickens and guinea fowl are the main sources of meat. Dried fish is traded down from the Niger River in Mali and Niger; as the lack of lakes and rivers in Burkina limits local fishing.

Corn (maize) is increasingly grown to be roasted and eaten, but it remains a secondary crop because it exhausts soil nutrients more quickly and requires more water than millet. Peanuts are grown and are eaten fresh, boiled, roasted, and ground into sauces. Rice was domesticated long ago in West Africa as well as in Asia and is grown in western Burkina. Rice tends to be a luxury food, served for special events like weddings. Even in rural areas, French-style bread is increasingly available and is, like leftover porridge, a breakfast food. High-quality wheat bread (for which flour must be imported) is eaten daily by everyone in the larger cities and towns.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Except for Muslim Koranic schools and the three-month initiation schools that accompanied the circumcision of pre-adolescent boys, traditional Burkina education came from living with, watching, and assisting one's older family members and neighbors.

The French colonial government, anxious to save money, left education in the hands of Roman Catholic missionaries, who

did not have many schools. Around 1970, only 7% of Burkinabe children of elementary school age attended school. That figure has increased, but access to education is far from universal. A 1995 estimate for the population over age 15 reported an overall literacy rate of 19.2%, 29.5% of men, and 9.2% of women.

Access to post-elementary education is competitive and limited by the smaller number of schools; there is one university, in Ouagadougou. There are a few job opportunities for those who do get a Western education.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Besides the renowned tradition of wood carving, Burkinabe society has a rich heritage of folk tales and oral tradition. Their music consists of drums, flutes, and stringed instruments. In the western part of the country there are many players of the balophon, a xylophone-like instrument with dried gourds serving as resonators for the vibrating pieces. FESTPACO, the Ouagadougou film festival, is the leading film festival in all of Africa, and one of the major cultural events of any kind for the entire continent.

#### **15 WORK**

Burkina Faso only recently has begun to integrate more modern occupations into its farming tradition. While no one is without exposure to modern conveniences and new technologies, most people still live the sort of lives, doing the same sort of work, as their ancestors have done for centuries.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Soccer and bicycle racing are the major sports; no urban holiday is complete without a bicycle race. Beyond that, there is little in the way of sports. There is a national basketball team, but few are involved in the sport. Hunting is work more than sport, involving either food-seeking or control of agricultural pests.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Radio is the important means of linking people in Burkina to the outside world. Personal, as well as local, national, and world, news is broadcast. Television is minimally present; there is one station each in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, broadcasting only two hours per weekday and five hours on weekends to 12 sets for every 1,000 people in 2000.

Movies are important, although theaters are limited to the larger towns and cities. More importantly, relatively few movies are made in Africa, or in African languages, so that the movies people see usually are from foreign cultures and in foreign languages without dubbing into local languages. Films from India are widely screened in Africa. This is changing, however, and Burkinabe filmmakers are playing a major role. The main film festival in Africa is FESTPACO, the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma d'Ouagadougou. Burkinabe filmmakers like Gaston Kaboré and Idrissa Ouédraogo are making feature-length films that increasingly are seen in Europe and North America, but also, because they are in Moré, are fully accessible to at least half the Burkinabe population.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Societies in Burkina, especially in the western part of the country, produce some of the most famous African art, which is carved wooden masks worn by ritual dancers who personify animal or other spirits. Patterned cloth is both woven and tie-dyed, and leather bags, cushions, and hats are widely known.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Burkina shares with other countries the problems that come with increasing urbanization and a greater output of students than there are jobs for them to fill. In relative terms, however, neither problem is as advanced as in many other African countries. The overall lack of economic infrastructure also means that Burkina is heavily influenced by economic decisions elsewhere. The country's money is the CFA (African Financial Community) Franc, the currency of most of formerly French West Africa. In 1994 the value of the CFA franc was cut in half relative to the French franc and other currencies. This had a major effect on those earning wages or salaries paid in CFA, but it affected as well the price everyone pays for increasingly necessary imported products like tires or radios or wheat flour for bread.

Burkina Faso was long noted in modern Africa as having more political freedom than most countries, even when (paradoxically) there was a military government. African governments face the task of meeting many demands with few resources, which can lead to an inability to accomplish much, in turn leading to a military seizure of power in the name of honesty and efficiency. Burkina had the distinction of two bloodless military coups, eventually returning power to civilian rule. When younger officers led by Thomas Sankara seized power in 1983, however, there were casualties from fighting and from executions of political rivals. Sankara himself made a strong effort to break the country from its dependence on foreign aid, but in 1987 was killed by his associates, who continue to rule the country. Burkina has multiparty elections, but they have been extensively boycotted by parties that argue that the government is manipulating the political system.

Alcohol and drugs are not major problems. While there is a brewery in the country, the cost of commercially produced alcohol is too expensive for most people to consume in quantity. The traditional millet beer is alcoholic, but it is an established part of both traditional society and household organization and is therefore a culturally controlled substance. Kola nuts, rich in caffeine and the basic ingredient in cola drinks, are widely chewed and are a routine gift to a host. Imported from Ghana to the south, they are the preferred stimulant for Muslims, who do not drink alcohol.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

As in most African countries, traditional practices have kept women in a subordinate position. In the traditional setting, a woman is considered to be property that can be inherited upon the death of her husband. As such, traditional law does not recognize inheritance rights for women. Women suffer from frequent domestic sexual abuse and violence, and no specific laws have been put in place to protect women. Abusive husbands go free, since there are no legal channels to investigate or prosecute their actions. Another problem for girls is that they are married early in life. It is estimated that about 52% of women are married before the age of 18.



However, female excision (commonly known as female genital mutilation) was abolished in 1996. A committee known as The National Committee for the Fight Against Excision was also established in 1996 to work toward the complete eradication of this practice in Burkina Faso. Estimates indicate that up to 70% of girls and women had undergone the procedure before it was abolished in 1996. Since then, incidences of excision have declined by about 40% and more than 400 people have been sentenced for performing the practice.

Women are responsible for subsistence agriculture, and few are involved in the more lucrative private sector. In terms of their representation in parliament, women held only 11.7% of the seats and formed about 25% of the government workforce in 2008. Many of the women in government earn low wages, as they generally hold low paying jobs. In terms of human rights, excessive poverty has many Burkinabe living deplorable lives with no access to basic human rights. Child labor, child trafficking, violence, and discrimination against women and children are quite rampant in the country. People have also been arrested without charge or trial. Excessive force is often used against civilians with official impunity.

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— revised by E. Kalipeni

# BURUNDIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** buh-ROON-dee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Burundi

**POPULATION:** 8.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kirundi, French, Swahili

**RELIGION:** Christianity, indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Hutu; Tutsi

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Rwanda and Burundi are two African countries whose borders were not arbitrary creations of 19th-century European powers. Both had centuries-old kingdoms before European rule. However, colonial rule did bring separate and competing kingdoms under a central government. Formerly the Tutsi *mwami* (king) occupied the apex of rulership, followed by the princely class. A lower stratum consisted of Tutsi and Hutu masses where much intermarriage occurred. Hutu serfs, obligated to work for the Tutsi elite, were the lowest social class. As of the early 2000s, the Hutu comprised 85% of the population, the Tutsi 14%, and the Twa, a pygmoid group, 1%.

German rule began in 1899, but the victors of World War I gave the colony to the Belgians under a League of Nations mandate in 1916. The Belgians reinforced growing Tutsi political and economic domination by ruling indirectly through them. Since independence in 1962, Hutus have rebelled against exploitation. The Tutsi elite have strongly resisted change in the balance of power. The resulting cleavage has created recurring ethnic violence on a horrendous scale.

Since 1962, some 300,000 Burundians, mostly Hutus, have been killed and nearly a million more displaced. Massacres of thousands of people occurred in April 1972, August 1988, January 1992, and in late 1993. Presidents and prime ministers have come and gone, as if by a revolving door. Though Ndadaye, a Hutu, was elected democratically in June 1993, he was overthrown in an army coup and killed along with several prominent Hutu officials and politicians in October 1993. In 1994 the death of his successor (along with Rwanda's president) in a mysterious airplane crash over Rwanda unleashed renewed fighting that lasted for 12 years.

In late 2000, the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, brokered by Nelson Mandela, ushered in a transitional period of power-sharing between Tutsis and Hutus that culminated in free and fair elections in 2005. A new constitution was also adopted that year, and in 2006 the majority Hutu government (under President Pierre Nkurunziza) concluded a cease-fire with a Hutu liberation force, which ended major fighting. In the meantime some 25,000 combatants and child soldiers were demobilized, disarmed, and reintegrated into Burundian society.

Burundi still faces many challenges, not the least of which is to make its unique ethnically-balanced bicameral Parliament consisting of a National Assembly and a Senate work for peace. In the 100+ seat Parliament, 60% of the seats are reserved for Hutus and 40% for Tutsis (with at least 30% being women overall). A National Independent Electoral Commission appoints additional seats to ensure ethnic representation. In the 54-seat Senate, 34 members are elected by indirect vote with the re-

maining seats assigned to ethnic groups and former chiefs of state, all of whom serve five-year terms.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Burundi is somewhat larger than Maryland, but has 8.7 million people (estimate 2008), making it one of Africa's most densely populated countries. Rwanda borders Burundi to the north, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire) to the west, and Tanzania to the south and east. Lake Tanganyika and the Ruzizi river on the floor of the Western Rift valley form a stunningly beautiful natural border with the Congo. A breathtaking escarpment towers over the Ruzizi to the west.

Most of Burundi is high plateau of 1,400–1,800 m (4,600–5,900 ft). A range to the east rises to above 1,800 m. In the uplands, temperatures are mild with an occasional frost. The average temperature in the valley is near 27°C (80°F). Most of the population is concentrated on the fertile soils at 1,500–1,800 m (4,900–5,900 ft), which increases competition for scarce lands. The Twa are thought to be the first to inhabit the area. Hutus arrived between the 7th and 14th centuries, while the Tutsi migrated to the region beginning in the 15th century. A few thousand Europeans, Indians, and Pakistanis live in the capital of Bujumbura. The kingdoms of Urundi and Ruanda historically had been adversarial, and their successor republics remain rivals.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Two official languages are spoken in Burundi—Kirundi and French. Many Burundians along the western shore and in Bujumbura also speak the East African trade language of Swahili. A traditional greeting in Kirundi is *Amashyo* (May you have herds [of cattle]). The reply is *Amashongore*, meaning, “I wish you herds of females.” The language is full of references to the virtues of cattle and wishing one herds is metaphoric for health and good fortune.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Folklore is expressed through music, dance, and storytelling. Literature, for example, is passed down to younger generations in spoken forms of poetry, fables, legends, riddles, and proverbs. Many epic poems concern peasants, kings, ancestors, and cattle. In telling these tales, a skilled narrator transforms ordinary Kirundi into very poetic forms. “Whispered singing” transcends simple spoken and musical renditions. Men sing quietly along with the traditional instruments, *inanga*, a zither-like instrument, and *idono*, which resembles a stringed hunting bow (see **Cultural heritage and Folk art, crafts, and hobbies**).

## 5 RELIGION

Most Burundians profess Christianity, with 62% subscribing to the Roman Catholic faith, and 5% to Protestant faiths. Less than 10% of the population is Muslim. Those holding indigenous beliefs account for 28% of the population, though aspects of African traditional religion overlay the non-indigenous faiths. Former Pope John Paul II visited Burundi in September 1990 to support the constitutional transition.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The national holiday of Burundi is Independence Day, July 1 (1962). Hard times have dampened enthusiasm for lavish celebrations. Moreover, Burundi's endemic coups have rendered political holidays meaningless.

Being a predominantly Roman Catholic country, Burundians celebrate the Christian holidays including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. Beginning in 2005, the government also recognized the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr (end of Ramadan), and Eid al-Adha (end of Hadj). On the traditional holiday calendar, *umuco* (or *akaranga*) used to be an occasion for traditional gamesmanship. Men would compete in archery and spear-throwing competitions. Soccer and other imported sports replaced these after the arrival of the Europeans. However, Burundians still enjoy dancing, drinking, and feasting on traditional foods on this day.

Of all the holidays, the most celebrated is Christmas. Christmas is an occasion for buying new clothes and wearing them to church. Women and children especially look forward to showing off their latest acquisitions. After church, people return home to spend the day with family and friends, enjoying a good meal and beer.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As in much of Africa, rites of passage are important markers in the life cycle. Six days after birth, babies are presented to the family in the *ujusohor* ceremony. The mother receives flowers for her hair and gifts of money and beer are customary. Christian parents and their families generally baptize their children one month after birth. After the child begins to toddle, it receives a name in the *kuvamukiriri* ceremony. The paternal grandfather gives the child a proper name, a clan name, nicknames, and if not already baptized, the child receives baptism if the parents so choose. From an early age to adolescence, children learn family and community values and are expected to assume responsibility in their teenage years. As a result, Burundian children show a maturity rare in American children of the same age.

Initiation rites were once extremely important in Burundian society. Today few Burundian children are initiated, although most of their grandparents were. European missionaries taught that the practice was heathen and pagan and all but eradicated it. The Roman Catholic Church has replaced the initiation rite with the Christian rite of First Communion where groups of children follow a lengthy period of religious instruction that culminates in their induction into the church as adults.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Burundians generally are gregarious people and visit each other without announcing it ahead of time. Typically, they greet each other by shaking hands with the right hand. Among friends of the opposite sex, it is acceptable to greet by touching cheeks three times. Friends of the same sex also may greet this way and may offer each other a firm hug, grasping each other's shoulders. In former times, it was common for someone of lesser status to shake hands with a person of higher status by holding his or her right arm with the left hand while shaking hands. This was to show respect for social status. This custom is dying out with the disappearance of servitude.

People have a set of gestures for pointing and calling people that is particular to Central Africa. They point to someone by



holding the arm out with the palm open and upward. Pointing at someone with one's index finger is very rude. Similarly, calling someone to come near is done by extending the arm with the palm turned down and bringing the fingers toward oneself. People, especially women, may give directions by pointing with lips pursed and the face extending toward the direction indicated.

Burundians have proper ways of giving and receiving things. Children learn to offer both hands when receiving an object, especially from an adult. This is a sign of respect and good upbringing.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

After 12 years of civil war (1994–2006), living conditions are showing improvement. Nevertheless by African and world standards, life is extremely difficult for the average person. On the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures chances for good health and longevity, educational opportunities, and decent standard of living, Burundi ranked 167 out of 177 countries worldwide in 2007/08. Twenty-one percent of the population does not have access to clean water; 45% of children aged 0–5 were underweight (2002); 68% of the population lived below the poverty line (2002); and there is a 38% chance of not living past the age of 40. A high population growth rate (3.4% est. 2008) placed additional stress on job creation and basic services.

Bujumbura, the capital, formerly was a jewel-like town on the northeastern tip of Lake Tanganyika. However, like other

towns, its infrastructure deteriorated during the war, leaving many without water, electric, and sanitation systems. Many rural houses are mud brick with thatch or tin roofs. Traditional huts formerly were made from reeds and canes. Some are cylindrical in shape, and mud walls may be whitewashed. In towns, concrete hollow block houses with galvanized iron or clay tile roofs are common. Burundi has many good masons and carpenters, but they tend to be under-paid and under-employed.

About 93% of Burundi's roads are unpaved. Some villages are reached only after hours of bouncing over dirt roads, which are prone to flooding and washing out. Bicycles and motor scooters provide human transportation and carry heavy loads of produce, such as bananas. The Catholic Church often supplies outlying areas with consumable goods through member cooperatives.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In Burundian society, the man of the household holds the authority. Women do the housework, raise the children, fetch water, collect firewood, cook the meals, and wash the clothes. They also tend gardens of cassava and sweet potatoes and raise produce for sale at the weekly market. A Kirundi expression says that women are revered for their childbearing and, as such, also make good planters. The girls help with domestic chores and with tending their younger siblings.

Some men have more than one wife, but polygamy is disappearing in modern Burundian life. Christianity and economics have changed attitudes about matrimony. The church strongly discourages polygamous behavior through sanctions and peer pressure. Weddings, bride prices, and wife maintenance are costly. Moreover, land pressures and the costs of educating children have led to smaller families. About 9% of women take modern contraceptives, and most practice traditional methods of family planning.

Correcting children in Burundi is not only the responsibility of parents, but also that of the extended family, friends, and acquaintances. If they do not correct bad behavior, they may be accused of shirking their communal duty.

Burundians rarely keep pets, but their cattle are prized possessions and occupy much of their time. Boys, for example, are often given the responsibility for tending the family's cows and goats. Because cattle give status, wealth, and security, buying a cow puts money in the bank. Some wealthy elites have accumulated as many as 2,000 head.

## 11 CLOTHING

Burundian traditional apparel consists of cloth wraparounds (*pagnes*), which women, girls, and elderly men still wear in the rural areas. The male pastoralists wear two pieces of cloth tied on opposite shoulders with a cord tied around the waist. The shoulders are bare and the cloth reaches the knees. Women wear shirts or blouses, *pagnes*, and scarves over their heads. In cool weather, they wear sweaters over their blouses. When women go out in public they wear a dress with a *pagne* over the top tied around the shoulder and one tied around the waist. Many people go barefoot in the village. Older women might wear a large colorful piece of cloth tied in front, which reaches the feet.

People place great importance on looking their best. Even on low budgets, they keep their clothing washed and pressed. If they wear shoes, they must be shined. Bujumbura at night

or on Sundays has a cosmopolitan feel. Men and women who take great pride in their appearance, known as *sapeurs*, wear the latest fashions with great flair. The men dress up in suits and ties and the women in Western dresses and pumps. Young people are fond of stonewashed jeans and T-shirts.

## 12 FOOD

The staple foods in Burundi are tubers, plantains (*matoke*), and beans. Burundians are most fond of sweet potatoes and cassava served with different types of beans, greens, and cabbage. They also enjoy cassava pounded into flour, boiled in water, and stirred until it produces a thick paste (*ugali*). *Ugali* is sometimes made from maize. Burundians enjoy fresh, dried, and smoked fish from Lake Tanganyika and from rivers such as the Ruzizi.

People occasionally eat meat, though given their reverence for cattle, it should not be their own animal and not a cow. It is taboo to heat or boil milk because that might interfere with their cows' milk production. People also are not supposed to drink milk on the same day that peas or peanuts are eaten. Cattle and people live so close together that the health and fertility of the animals are thought to reflect on that of their owners.

Villagers typically rise early and forego breakfast. They return for a large noonday meal. At night they may eat leftovers or have tea, but tea requires extra cash. Children eat porridge and drink milk in the morning. In the cities, French bread is very popular, and European beverages such as coffee and tea have become common fare.

Burundians produce their own traditional drinks, including banana beer (*urwarwa*) and sorghum beer. Although they are fond of these in the villages, in Bujumbura Primus German-style beer is favored. Anytime someone has extra money, they invite their friends to go out to a streetside or neighborhood bar (*buvette*) for a round. Thus, if you are invited, you do not pay for even one round of drinks, but when you invite, you pay all the rounds until your pockets are empty.

## 13 EDUCATION

Burundians place a high importance on formal schooling, although informal home schooling begins when a child first understands right from wrong. Until 1954, church missions ran all the primary schools, and some of the best schools still are faith-based. The University of Burundi in Bujumbura founded in the 1960s is the only institution of higher learning.

A typical school day begins as early as 7:00 a.m. and finishes at 1:00 p.m. In some cases overcrowding has forced schools to hold two sessions a day, even in the evenings, so that more pupils can be accommodated. Because of the war, however, enrollment rates declined over at least a ten-year period. In 2004, the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary school enrollment was 38% those eligible, with only 83% as many girls as boys enrolled. Most children dropped out of school after reaching grade five. The literacy rate in 2004 was 41% and only 78% as many girls as boys (older than 15) could read and write. In 2005 President Nkurunziza made primary schooling free, and efforts were underway to equalize educational opportunities between Tutsi and Hutu and between the traditionally neglected north and the south, where two-thirds of the schools are located.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Burundi maintains its rich cultural heritage based in part upon its past royal families. An example of how people perpetuate tradition in new forms is seen in the "tambourinaires," a folkloric drumming and dance troupe of Gishora, in Gitega province east of Bujumbura. In the past, the king initiated a group of boys from select families whose privilege it was to beat sacred drums. The drums could only be played under specific conditions, mainly for ceremonial purposes.

Today, the drums have become a popular attraction as an incarnation of this sacred heritage. As many as 25 men of all ages play huge drums carved from tree trunks, about three feet tall. They beat the drums with two sticks about 18 inches long. Even boys play. They wear red and white cloths tied in the traditional way, one over each shoulder with a cord around the waist. Dancing is very athletic. It consists of leaping high into the air and spinning around. They tell legends and folktales during the performance. Some dancers use wooden shields and spears and wear headbands and armbands of beads.

Burundians make several traditional instruments that they play during family get togethers (see **Folk Art, Crafts, and Hobbies**).

## 15 WORK

The vast majority of people (93%) work in subsistence agriculture and cattle herding. Subsisting means they produce staple crops such as sweet potatoes, bananas, corn, sorghum and manioc on small plots for their own consumption. A small percentage of the population grows coffee, cotton, and tea or works on larger plantations. The government employs 4% of the population in the civil service. Industry and commerce account for 1.5%, and services account for 1.5%. Those who fall between occupational cracks earn their living in whatever way possible. Some, for example, repair anything from watches to shoes. They set up their repair stands on sidewalks and take them down at the end of the day. Unfortunately, these jobs pay as little as \$1.50 per day, which is not enough for a living wage. Because of underemployment, about 85% of the rural population and 55% of town folk live below the absolute poverty level.

## 16 SPORTS

Burundians are soccer fanatics. Soccer is played wherever space permits and where people have the leisure time to do it. Any kind of ball suffices, and makeshift goals mark parking lots, fields, streets, and any relatively horizontal surface. Schools have introduced other sports, such as basketball, volleyball, and European handball. In villages, the churchyard and adjacent school usually serve as a meeting place for school and community sports. Burundians love their national team, The Swallows, but the team continues to disappoint as it has never reached the World Cup or African Nations' Cup finals.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment and recreation are far more modest pursuits in Burundi than in Western countries. Socializing at home or sharing a beer and a meal with friends often passes for entertainment. Most people own portable radios and tune into their favorite FM stations for news, music, and radio dramas. Where electricity is available, people enjoy watching television. How-



*In Burundian society, women are revered for their childbearing and girls help with domestic chores and with tending their younger siblings. (Cynthia Bassett)*

ever, only a small percentage have satellite dishes (which are expensive) and the rest tune into the government station, Burundi's only TV outlet. On weekends, programming generally includes soccer matches. Television is increasingly available in rural areas thanks to solar power. But if one has a large herd to care for, watching the cows may be entertainment enough.

Bujumburans really enjoy nightlife and are fond of a variety of popular music. They dance to all kinds of music—Congolese, Malinke, Zuluka, American, rap, reggae, funk, and other styles. The Internet is gaining popularity. In 2006 it was estimated that some 60,000 people got information, news, and entertainment from this source.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Burundians produce many crafts of excellent quality. Among the best of these are mats and baskets serving many different purposes. Papyrus roots, banana leaves, and bast (a strong woody fiber) are the raw materials for the baskets. Historically, a well-made basket was a symbol of status, not for sale, although baskets were traded occasionally for cows. Nowadays, skilled women are paid to teach young women the trade. The Twa people are skilled in making pots for their own use and for the tourist market. Wood carving has a long tradition and carvers produce highly intricate bas-relief drums and mortars for the tourist market. While drums formerly were part of religious ceremonies and provided music for social occasions, they now are produced as works of art for sale.

Burundian craftsmen make fine instruments such as the thumb piano (*ikembe*). The *ikembe* has 11 metal bands and the sounding box may have designs burned into the top for decoration. The *indingiti* is a traditional banjo or violin with a single string played with a bow. The *inanga* is an eight-stringed instrument with a large sounding board, played on its side. The musician plays it by crouching behind the instrument and plucking the strings like a harp. The *umuduri* is a musical bow with one string with three calabashes attached to the bow for amplification. Musicians use two sticks with a small calabash on the end to stroke the string.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Burundi faces several serious environmental and health threats, among them HIV/AIDS, which nationally runs at about 6% of the population. Infection rates are highest in urban areas. Other issues include poverty, school drop-out rates, weak rule of law, public corruption, large refugee populations (31,000 in 2007), and human trafficking. The minority Batwa people are deprived of land, although the government has instituted programs to provide them with free school books, health care, and two acres of land.

The most urgent matter is to find and develop lasting peace between the Hutu and Tutsi. The recent civil war resulted in more than 200,000 deaths, forced more than 48,000 refugees into neighboring Tanzania, and displaced 140,000 people internally. Some 3,000 children were pressed into combat by the

various armed groups. Burundians must continue to redress political imbalance, skewed land ownership, and the disparity in economic wealth between these two ethnic groups. Land pressure, population growth, and a deteriorating environment make conflict resolution even more urgent.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender presents a mixed picture in Burundi. On the one hand, women face legal and societal discrimination in inheritance laws, property rights, access to credit, jobs, and equal pay for equal work. Traditional practice encourages wife-beating, and it is culturally taboo to discuss it in public. A survey conducted in 2007 indicated that as many as one-third of women in Bujumbura were beaten at home. As a form of terror during the war, rape was widespread. Although it is illegal, prostitution is widely practiced. Many fewer girls attend and complete school than boys. Thus, to be growing up female in Burundi carries with it many serious challenges.

On the other hand, a strong women's voice is emerging for the first time in Burundi. This is exemplified by Marguerite Barankitse, who has given refuge to more than 10,000 orphan children. She affectionately refers to these children—who come from all three ethnicities—as Hutsitwa (a combination of Hutu, Tutsi, and Batwa). Burundian women gained world attention in 2000 when they utilized the Arusha Peace process as a popular public forum to advocate for their interests and rights. Although they fell short in achieving all their goals (for example, the UN refused to declare sex crimes as “crimes against humanity”), they nonetheless won more than 30% of the seats in Parliament in 2005. Women also occupy 17 of 54 Senate seats; the vice president of the republic and president of the Parliament are women. Some 400–500 women's self-help groups now participate in rotating credit schemes, lobby the Parliament to change laws, and help solve women's problems.

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—by R. Groelsema

# CAMEROONIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** kam-uh-ROON-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Cameroon

**POPULATION:** 18.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** English, French, 24 African languages

**RELIGION:** Islam, Christianity, indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Fulani

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Cameroon's present borders tell the history of European great powers' competition and the results on the battlefields of World War I. What began as a German colony in 1885 was surrendered to the British and French in 1916. These colonizers partitioned the country in 1919 and obtained protectorship of their respective portions from the League of Nations in 1922. Protectorate status changed to official trusteeships in 1946 by the vote of the United Nations. The British administered West Cameroon as part of Nigeria, while the French made East Cameroon part of French Equatorial Africa (along with Chad, Gabon, and Congo).

In 1955 Cameroonian insurgency movements led to internal self-governance, which became full independence in 1960. The UN-sponsored plebiscite in 1961 resulted in northern British Cameroon voting to become part of Nigeria, while southern British Cameroon joined with East Cameroon in a bilingual federal republic. Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, declared a one-party state in 1966. In 1972 a unitary constitution and a strong presidential government replaced the Federal Republic, and the country's name became United Republic of Cameroon. In 1982, Ahidjo handed power over to his prime minister, Paul Biya. Biya dropped “United” from the country's name in 1983. He remains in power despite allegations that his party rigged the multiparty elections of 1992, and that in the presidential elections of 2004 his party erected substantial barriers to registering voters and allowed fraudulent balloting.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Larger than California, Cameroon is one of Africa's most diverse countries, physically and culturally. Its crossroads location at the lobe of West Africa earned it the nickname, “the hinge of Africa.” When Portuguese explorers first went up the Wouri River in 1472, they found the estuary teeming with shrimp. The *Rio dos Camaroes* (River of Shrimp) as they named it, became “Cameroon.” From Lake Chad at 13°n latitude, Cameroon extends southward to 2°N of the equator. Cameroon borders Nigeria to the west and north, Chad and the Central African Republic to the east, and Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Congo to the south.

The climate varies markedly with the latitude and the terrain, from humidly tropical along the coastal plain, to cool in the mountainous west, to semi-arid and hot on the flat and sometimes rolling northern savannah. The vegetation also changes from tropical rain forest in the southwest to semi-desert in the northern reaches. Buttes, inselbergs, and ancient volcanic cores offer picturesque landscapes in the north. To the west lies a long line of rounded mountains of volcanic origin. Mt. Cameroon, an extinct volcano, is the highest point in West Africa at 13,500 ft.



Cameroon's 18.5 million people come from seven major ethnic groups, primarily Fang, Bamiléké, Bamum, Duala, Luanda, Basa, Fulani. However, by some counts, as many as 200 ethnic groups exist within Cameroon's borders. One way of thinking about an ethnic group is to see it as the most extended level of the family. People of the same group usually have origins, history, homeland, language, customs, and name in common. Africans most anywhere identify with their "home" villages, though they may never have lived there.

Since independence, Cameroon has experienced a great rural exodus to the cities. Currently more than 30% of the population is urban. The population is densely concentrated in the south, near the port city of Douala, and in the north-west province around Bamenda. The north, which is primarily land for grazing and cotton production, is sparsely populated. Like most African countries, Cameroon is a country of youth, where 41% of the population is younger than 15 years old.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Cameroonians speak some 24 African languages. In the north, people speak Saharan and Chadic languages, and Bantu languages are spoken in the south. Cameroon is unique in that it has adopted both English and French as its official languages. Though French is dominant and a movement to make French the only official language is alive, northwest and southwest provinces hold tenaciously to English and are unlikely to give in without a major fight.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Cameroonian folklore consists of many intriguing myths and legends from the diverse cultural groups. However, one example from Bamoun recalls how traditional society once treated twins. In former times when a woman gave birth to twins, she presented them directly to the Sultan. A chicken was sacrificed to safeguard them and to ensure their good behavior. The mother then returned home with them and fed them meat. It is said that Bamoun twins have an extraordinary capacity for chewing meat even before teething. At age five, they returned to the palace to stay. The Sultan raised them as his own children, giving them a good education. As they grew older, the Sultan consulted them as his advisors on important decisions. Today, twins still are called *Nji* (chief), but the Sultan no longer raises them and their former power has diminished greatly.

One of Cameroon's foremost heroes of near mythical status is Douala Manga Bell. The people living near Douala chose him to protect their property from German colonizers. The Germans were attempting to expropriate the city of Douala and its surrounding lands, an explicit violation of an 1884 treaty. The Germans responded to organized resistance with armed force and arbitrary arrests. Finally, they captured Douala Manga Bell and tried him for high treason. They condemned him and a companion to death by hanging in 1914. Douala Manga Bell thus became a martyr-king. Cameroonians remember his heroics and the bravery of his companions in songs and theatrical performances, passed down from generation to generation.

### 5 RELIGION

Cameroon is evenly divided between Christians and Muslims each accounting for about 40% of the population. Whereas Christians predominate in the south, Muslims comprise the majority of the population in the north (roughly north of Garoua). As elsewhere in Africa, many people combine aspects of traditional African religion and animist beliefs with their Christian and Muslim faiths. One example of this overlay involves healing. A *marabout* (teacher and diviner) may advise a sick person to write texts from the holy Quran on a prayer board. The patient then prays by reciting the texts. Next, he dilutes the ink from the board and drinks it, in effect, ingesting the holy words.

If Cameroonians are divided by regional differences and language, there is much harmony and little religious strife amongst people of different faiths. Indeed, communal celebration of Muslim and Christian holidays has resulted in much crossing over from one faith to the other (see **Major Holidays**).

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holidays elicit various forms and degrees of celebration, mainly depending on one's region and religious faith. For example, May 20 (National Day), which commemorates the change from a federal to a unitary government in 1972, inspires much greater celebration from Francophones than from Anglophones. The residents of the western provinces increasingly see this holiday as a reminder of the power they gave away to the French-speaking majority when their regional assembly was abolished. The inverse is true of Youth Day, which Anglophones (especially before unification) celebrated for three days. The championship finals for soccer and track and field events highlighted this holiday, formerly called "Empire Day."



*Typical housing in Cameroon. In the villages, most homes are made of mud and thatch, but these gradually are being replaced by concrete hollow block and galvanized iron roofing. Migration and squatting are common near the cities, resulting in shantytowns where people live without basic conveniences. (AP Images)*

Similarly, traditions vary for Christmas and New Year's. The Francophones hold great celebrations for New Year's Day, while Christmas for the Anglophones means pageantry, feasting, and best behavior. On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, for example, people wear new clothes and go to church. Children put on costumed reenactments of Christ's birth and give poetry recitals. They are judged and the winners perform later at the chief's palace. Near Wum, people form large groups and go from village to village eating, drinking, dancing, and socializing. The feasting is so joyous that Muslims join in the celebrations and go to church. Likewise, for the Ramadan feast, Muslims invite their Christian friends to help them celebrate their main religious holiday.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional rites of passage are losing the significance they once had in Cameroonian society, especially where communities westernize or Western schooling is becoming dominant. Formerly, circumcision was one of the most important rites. It represented the shedding of youth and embracing of man- or womanhood. The transition occurred swiftly within the time frame of the initiation, which lasted from a few weeks to a few months. Upon completion of the rite, a "new" man would build a home, marry, and start a family. A "new" woman would no longer play as a girl, but she would assume the responsibilities of wife and mother.

Nowadays, Christian beliefs, especially from the Protestant faith, are replacing traditional ways. The strict application of Protestant catechism may not distinguish between the cultural and religious forms of initiation. Dancing with masks, for example, may be mistaken for idolatry. Schooling also interrupts the initiation schedules. Consequently, baptisms, First Communion, and weddings may outshine initiation, even though church ceremonies do not entirely replace traditional ways of celebrating passage.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The language of greeting depends on the region, but in French one typically says, *Bonjour, comment ça va?* (Hello, how are you?), and in Pidgin English one says "How na?" People shake hands and some kiss on the cheek according to the French custom, especially younger people in urban areas. People call someone by extending their arms, palm facing down, and bringing the fingers in and out. Pointing is rude, as is crossing legs at the knees or in the presence of someone with higher authority. The right hand is used to pass or accept objects.

Dating between couples is more commonly seen in the capital and big cities, and marriages are still arranged by family and relatives throughout the country. Visitors appear frequently and unannounced, and relatives commonly stay and are fed for lengthy periods.





Two teenage boys standing beside their homemade bikes in Cameroon. (David Johnson)

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Despite favorable agricultural conditions and offshore oil, Cameroon ranks 144th out of 177 countries in terms of human development. Cameroonians face many of the same challenges as other Africans. Almost 7 children out of 100 do not live until their first birthday. Life expectancy at birth is 53.3 years. Unsanitary practices make waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, dysentery, and parasites very common. Rural health is improving as fewer village women and young people haul water from streams and springs. Instead, thanks to newly developed sealed wells, they can pump water by a foot pedal. In the villages, most homes are still made of mud and thatch, but these gradually are being replaced by concrete hollow block and galvanized iron roofing. In the capital and other cities, electrical power reaches many neighborhoods. Still, migration and squatting are common, resulting in shantytowns where people go without basic conveniences. Bathing and washing clothes in local streams are common.

Most of the main national roads are paved, two-lane highways. An incomplete stretch from east of Yaoundé to Ngaoundéré in the northeast is easily traversed by train. Good train service is also available from Yaoundé to the port of Douala. However, once off the main roads, the terrain can be rugged and some roads are blocked in the rainy season. Most people still travel by taxi bus and bush taxis, which are usually crowded and packed high on top with plastic water containers, sacks of charcoal, and chickens.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Cameroonians typically have large families with at least six children. Families are larger if the head of household has more than one wife. Grandparents and great grandparents generally live in the same compound as their offspring. The elderly command great respect and influence decisions, but the male family head usually leads in important matters. Women shoulder much of the work, tending fields, gathering firewood, and hauling water besides taking care of the children and doing the housework. One practical reason why families are large is that children help at a very early age. As soon as they are old enough, they tend fields with their mothers and siblings. It is common to see a four-year-old girl carrying a baby brother or sister on her back or doing chores around the house.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional dress is found mostly in villages. In the north, Muslim men wear boubous, which are cotton pants over which a waist-, knee- or ankle-length robe is worn. Boubous typically are white, but also are made of other colors. Women wear multicolored flowing robes and cover their heads in public. Although women wear *pagnes* (sarongs) in the north, they are more popular in the south. The *pagne* is multipurpose. Not only does it serve as a wraparound skirt, but a second piece can be used to hold a baby to one's back, provide shade for the head, or give warmth on chilly mornings. A turban, usually from the same fabric, covers the head. Cameroon's high-quality

ity cotton makes excellent cloth of traditional African patterns and designs.

In the towns, people wear these clothes too, but are also likely to wear Western pants and shirts. The younger generation wears jeans and T-shirts. Women typically wear blouses over their sarongs. As in many African countries, market traders also sell used clothing from Europe and the United States, which has been shipped by the bale. Children are likely to wear these as everyday clothes.

## 12 FOOD

The staples are corn, millet, cassava, groundnuts, plantains, and yams. These are made into *fufu*, a stiff paste, which is rolled into small balls and dipped into stews. A favorite is *Jamma Jamma*, spicy greens, served at the large noon meal. Women and the younger children typically eat together near the cooking fire. People eat out of communal bowls with their right hands, taking care to wash their hands before eating. In the cities or among the more “modernized” Cameroonians, people eat with kitchen utensils much like in the United States. Breakfast for the urbanite might include locally grown coffee, cocoa, or tea with milk and lots of sugar, and some freshly baked hot French bread.

Fruit abounds in Cameroon. Because of seasonal climate variation, one finds oranges, grapefruit, limes, bananas, pineapples, and coconuts in abundance. Common beverages include coffee, tea, palm wine, soft drinks, and beer, all of which are produced locally. Cameroonians love beer as evidenced by the number of breweries, the many brands, and the important role that beer plays in social encounters, parties, ceremonies and feasts.

## 13 EDUCATION

In Cameroon, education is bilingual, provided by government, missionary, and private schools. At state schools, education is free of charge. The government subsidizes other schools. Primary school begins at six years of age. Children begin high school at the age of 12 or 13, and continue until 19 or 20. High school has two cycles, which vary from the Anglophone to the Francophone region. In 2005 the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollments were 62%, a fairly high ratio for Africa. Similarly, more than two-thirds of adults were literate. The government has established five regional campuses of the University of Yaoundé, each with a different area of specialization. Approximately one of three adults cannot read or write.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The current popularity of Cameroonian modern written literature, film, and *makossa* and *bikutsi* music owes its success to an extremely rich and diverse cultural past. In 1974 the Cameroon government decided to protect this heritage by organizing a national culture festival. For Cameroonians, traditional culture expresses beliefs and tells stories about the physical and supernatural worlds. Therefore, it is impossible completely to separate culture, religion, and art from each other.

In traditional society, people still perform ancient rites with music, dance, masks, and statuettes. Among the Mouktélé in the north, music and dance are closely linked to farming and growing cycles. Young women play flutes (*madij*) when the millet sprouts from the earth. As harvest approaches in October, they are joined by young people playing bark flutes (*talok-*

*wai*). Others stamp rhythmic beats on the earth with their feet. The neighboring Toupouri dance to tam tams, cover their bodies with butter, and apply a red mineral powder to their chests.

The Bamoun of Foumban play dirge music at night to accuse a person of a serious crime. Fortunately, this gruesome procedure occurs rarely. With lifeless voices, singers march deliberately, hitting iron bells, and tapping on buffalo-skin bags. Fang musicians and storytellers dance and play the *mvvet*, a harp-sitar that uses calabashes as acoustical amplifiers. They tell fables and legends, and narrate heroic events. The Pygmies all sing, improvising many parts and hitting sticks together to celebrate after a successful hunt (see **Folk art, crafts, and hobbies**).

## 15 WORK

Most Cameroonians (70%) work in agriculture as subsistence farmers, herders, and plantation workers. The remaining 30% are divided fairly equally between services (17%) and industry (13%). Like much of Africa, formal jobs with regular salaries and benefits in Cameroon are scarce, and tend to be in the public sector. With an unemployment rate of about 30%, most Cameroonians in the service sector make their livings doing informal jobs such as peddling goods on the street, tending market stalls, or providing the odd service. For example, one 70-year-old Cameroonian woman, Noubissi, is a traditional healer. Her profession is semi-formal in that it is protected by a Cameroonian labor union. She casts out evil spirits while burning herbs that she uses to treat her patients. She specializes in gynecology, pediatrics, female sterility, birthing, and infant health. She only prescribes natural medicines made from herbs that she herself gathers in the forest. Her unfading clientele suggests her efficacy. When asked how she cures people she answers, “Only God knows. He guides my hands.”

## 16 SPORTS

Cameroonians are soccer fanatics, and rightly so. Cameroon’s national team, “The Lions,” qualified for the 1982, 1990, 1994, 1998 and 2002 World Cups, and went to the 1990 World Cup quarterfinals. In the 2008 Africa’s Cup of Nations, Cameroon was defeated by Egypt in the championship match. Young men and boys play soccer with any kind of ball on nearly any kind of field, giving Cameroonians a constant source of entertainment. In 2008 Cameroon and China signed agreements to construct multi-million dollar soccer stadiums, Olympic-sized swimming pools and other world-class sports infrastructure in Doula, Yaoundé, Bafoussam, and Limbe. Other popular sports include basketball, tennis, and handball. Some men are fond of chess and checkers.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Socializing at baptisms, weddings, and parties or going out to night spots where music is played and people dance often passes as entertainment; and at these venues Cameroonian *makossa* music defines much of the popular culture. People play it everywhere: on their transistor radios, at truck stops and taxi stands, in pubs and restaurants, and in nightclubs. Musicians such as Manu Dibango and Sam Fan Thomas became international celebrities. A blind Bamiléké singer, André-Marie Tala, nicknamed Ray Charles, topped the charts in the 1970s. The music is hard-hitting with a tight, fast-paced rhythm that has spawned a number of rivals among them the extremely popu-

lar *bikutsi*. *Bikutsi* comes from the Beti people around Yaoundé and means “to beat the earth.” It is danced at parties, weddings and funerals and has generated controversy for the sexual content of its lyrics and suggestive dancing styles. Current top artists are Patou Bass and Ovasho Bens.

Cameroonian television consists of the government station, which has limited broadcast hours. However, with the coming of satellite dishes, Cameroonian audiences increasingly tune into world culture beamed from outer space.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Cameroonian art is rich and meaningful. Through art, people tell their history, or express their beliefs about nature, procreation, leadership, divinity, and the afterlife. Artists use their natural materials to sculpt, carve, shape, and fashion objects to help them express their understanding of the world to younger generations. Art objects include “elephant” masks; wooden, bronze, and bead-covered statuettes; carved pillars and bed posts; woven baskets; and pottery. The *Tso* dancers of the Kuosi (one Bamiléké community) wear fabulous, intricately beaded elephant masks when a chief or an important dignitary dies. Statuettes with fat cheeks symbolize good eating, while protruding bellies represent fecundity.

Many other crafts have cultural, practical, or monetary value. Craftspeople fashion tam tams and various kinds of flutes. Contemporary artists copy ancient forms and sell their art to tourists who come to visit Cameroon for its cultural heritage, natural beauty, and national parks.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Cameroon’s social problems—unemployment, crime, government corruption, human trafficking, forced child labor and money laundering—are in part due to a stalled political transition from authoritarian one-party rule to multiparty democracy. Newspapers regularly carry stories alleging civil rights abuses, beatings, and even fatalities related to government crackdowns on public protests, demonstrations and strikes. Some of the violence stems from the rivalry between the Anglophone west and the Francophone east. In the 1990s the government sent troops into the western provinces to quell demonstrations.

Cameroonians also face serious economic and social challenges. The population growth rate is nearly 3%, which means by the year 2015 Cameroon will have a population of almost 23 million, most of it younger than 20 years old. The demand for education, health, and jobs will be very great. Moreover, intensive and unsustainable land uses are contributing to deforestation, overgrazing, desertification, poaching, and over fishing. Some reports indicate that Cameroon has become a transshipment point for drugs that formerly transited through Nigeria.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Cameroon is a male-dominated society where women face unequal treatment under customary and statutory law, and discrimination in private sector employment, the civil service, political appointments, and in the country’s social hierarchy. Women are expected to raise children, cook and do household chores, work in the fields, fetch water and firewood, and generally do not go out on their own to socialize in public unless it is at the market or running errands. About 20% fewer girls than boys enroll in primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions,

and about 30% fewer women than men are literate. Considered property of their husbands, women generally do not own land or inherit property when their husbands die. Girls are subject to trafficking, early forced marriage, and rape.

Female *Bikutsi* musicians and performing artists like K-Tino, who sees herself as a Cameroonian suffragette, use their music to liberate and emancipate Cameroonian women.

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—by R. Groelsema

# CAPE VERDEANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** kayp VUHRD-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Cape Verde; United States

**POPULATION:** 300,000

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese (official language), Crioulo

**RELIGION:** Catholicism with *Crioulo* aspects

## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is not improbable that Phoenician sailors sailing from Carthage in the 5th century BC were the first to see the volcano of Fogo as they navigated along the African continent. There is some reason to believe that Arab sailors were aware of the islands by the 10th or 11th centuries. Certainly for seven centuries before Columbus, Arabs and Jews had occupied large regions of Iberia and had made seminal contributions to the related sciences of navigation, astronomy, cartography, and naval design. This was critical input for the Portuguese navigators.

It was sea captains sailing for Prince Henry “The Navigator” during Portugal’s Golden Era of Maritime Exploration who began to sail along the upper West African coast in the early 15th century. Looking for new trade routes, African gold, and a way around the Arab world, they reached modern Senegal in the 1440s, and it was between 1455 and 1462 that the Cape Verdean islands were reached. The Cape Verdean archipelago had no known precolonial inhabitants; its entire history, from 1455 until its independence in 1975, was as a colony of Portugal.

While sailing for the Portuguese, before his New World voyages, Christopher Columbus sailed down the West African coast to Al Mina in coastal Ghana. Because Cape Verde was a normal Portuguese port of call, we may safely assume that he stopped in the islands in the late 1480s. It is certain that he was in Cape Verde on his third trans-Atlantic voyage. Queen Isabella of Spain also wanted him to investigate reports of African ships from the empire of Mali deep in that region of the Atlantic; nothing was found.

Vasco da Gama, hurrying back from his raids in East Africa and India, was also in Cape Verde, but his preoccupation was with his dying brother and avoiding Muslim sailors whom he feared would seize his ships, which he deliberately sank in Cape Verdean waters. Sir Francis Drake, famed for circumnavigating the globe and defeating the Spanish armada, was no friend to Cape Verde after looting and burning its main towns.

Charles Darwin and his ship, the *Beagle*, stopped in Cape Verde on the epic and scientifically pioneering voyage that led to the proof of evolution. Darwin’s voluminous notes and drawings done in Cape Verde record an amazing diversity of animal and plant life and the unique aspects of Cape Verdean volcanic geology. Even the Lindberghs made a brief Cape Verdean stop during their famed air flight around the Atlantic rim.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Although there are tens of thousands of Cape Verdeans residing in New England, many Americans have heard little of Cape Verde and its deep roots in the lands of West Africa. The Republic of Cape Verde is an archipelago nation of nine main

islands, found about 300 mi off the west coast of Senegal. The horseshoe-shaped archipelago has two island groups: The Barlavento (northern, windward) islands include Santo Antão, São Vicente, Santa Luzia (uninhabited), São Nicolau, Sal and Boa Vista. The Sotavento (southern, leeward) islands are composed of Maio, São Tiago, Fogo, and Brava. Some islands are flat and sandy (Boa Vista and Sal), others provide a moonscape terrain (São Nicolau and Santo Antão) and mountains (Fogo) that tower over 9,000 ft above the sea. The capital of Praia is located on the largest island of São Tiago, while Mindelo is the main town of the north on São Vicente.

Located at the same latitude as the Sahara desert, Cape Verde suffers from severe ecological conditions. The hot and dry climate and periodic droughts have made agriculture always marginal. Cape Verdeans long have had to turn to the sea for support from fishing, whaling, and sea salt production. Perhaps above all, Cape Verdeans have a very long pattern of labor emigration to Europe, Brazil, and North America to escape the difficult conditions in the islands and send economic support back home. The Cape Verdean diaspora continues to be critical to the islands’ remittance-based economy, but there has been a great growth in tourism and foreign investment that has brought in considerable funds and important economic development on which the nation now relies.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Although Portuguese is the official language and many other languages are also known, it is *Crioulo* that is most widely spoken in Cape Verdean homes and clubs. Like other Creole languages, the Cape Verdean tongue is unique and follows its own grammar, lexicon, and style. Telephones, televisions, literature, films, press, poetry, and radios all enrich and strengthen *Crioulo* communication. Women often are considered the bedrock of Cape Verdean society, especially when it comes to preserving *Crioulo* linguistic skills.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Cape Verdean folklore is very rich in its intermingling of Portuguese and African sources as well as its own traditions. One popular set of tales relates to *Nho Lobo*, the clever wolf whose folksy wisdom can play an important role in teaching life’s lessons and basic values.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Cape Verdeans are devout Catholics, and very active church life provides for core values and stability in the community. Important saint days are widely recognized; in fact, many of the islands are named for the saint days on which they were discovered. There also are unique *Crioulo* aspects of religion. For example, the *mastro* ceremony involves a post or mast that is colorfully decorated with fruits to honor a saint. Religious carnivals and parades in the islands or in the United States also are common. Aside from floats and marchers, one also may see a Cape Verdean man “wearing” a man-sized boat model in the line of march as his feet provide the locomotion and he appears to be the captain and crew. In recent years, revivalist Protestant sects have made inroads in Cape Verde.



## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Important holidays include 20 January (the assassination of President Amílcar Cabral) and 5 July (Independence Day). Other religious holidays surround Christmas, Easter, Carnival, and various saints' festivals. The *tabanka* festival incorporates African types of shrines with a Portuguese religious parade, particularly during the celebration of Saint John.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The main transitions in life are noted after birth with the First Communion, at marriage, and by cemetery burial at death. Farewell parties for migrants and for returning visitors have become so established that they approximate a rite of passage.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Within the family and within the wider Cape Verdean community, social networks are reinforced continually. These ties are critical when job-hunting, obtaining loans, seeking marriage partners, and conducting general social life. Cape Verdeans are highly involved in social clubs, voluntary and service associations, and community affairs. The warmth, caring, and sharing within Cape Verdean families and among friends is widely recognized. National and ethnic pride provide a strong social cement for these relations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Generally, Cape Verde is strongly influenced by Portuguese culture and architectural styles and is similar to coastal Brazil

in general atmosphere. Piped water and electricity are common in the main towns, but in rural areas may be lacking. Houses showing an African influence feature the round *funco* style from West Africa. They are built with Cape Verdean stone, but still may have an African-style conical thatch roof.

Modern technology now includes water desalinization and even wind-powered generation of electricity, as well as widespread use of televisions and telephones. Most main roads are paved with cobblestones and, although quite narrow, they do allow for a reasonable flow of motor traffic. The main towns have intra-urban bus transport and are connected to other towns by vans and taxis. Inter-island communication is maintained by ferryboats and frequent airplane connections. Relative to Europe or America, the living conditions in Cape Verde have numerous deficiencies. Compared with neighboring West Africa, however, living conditions are far advanced.

A substantial process of urbanization is unfolding in Cape Verde, especially to the cities of Praia and Mindelo. Traffic and parking are sometimes problems along with the high cost of imported fuel for public and private transportation.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The warmth and generosity of Cape Verdean family life is deeply rooted in culture and history. Sharing a pot of *cachupa* (stew) with family, neighbors, and drop-ins is normal. A great deal of sacrifice is made to educate children, and academic achievement and employment success are sources of great family pride.

## 11 CLOTHING

Western-style clothing is standard, especially for men and children. Women sometimes incorporate their unique *panos* (a cloth woven on the West African narrow loom). These *panos* are used as sashes for dancing and also can be used as a wrap for carrying babies. At times in early Cape Verdean history, the *panos* were used as currency in a barter economy. Women also have unique styles of tying headcloths. Used clothing from Europe and New England sometimes arrives in metal barrels (*bidon*) to be sorted and resold to meet domestic needs.

## 12 FOOD

Cape Verdean foods include *cachupa* (stew), *conj* (soup), *djagacida* (chicken with rice), *gufong* (cornbread), and other *Crioulo* favorites. Recipes often involve corn, rice, and couscous as a starch base and, if meats are included, the most common are pork, chicken, and fish (especially tuna). A wide variety of tropical fruits is readily available, including mangoes and bananas. Several islands produce Cape Verdean rum (*grog*) from distilled sugar cane. Cape Verde is not self-sufficient in food production and must rely on imported corn and wheat. Historically, droughts have caused famines that have starved 15%–20% of the population and caused others to flee.

## 13 EDUCATION

Cape Verdeans long have prided themselves on a relatively high standard of formal education, especially relative to other West African nations. This is due, in part, to the tradition of seminary education at the seminary in São Nicolau and because of the high degree of out-migration, which gave Cape Verdeans additional access to education. There are higher secondary



*Fishermen drag a small boat up onto the shore on the island of Sao Vicente. The islands of Cape Verde offer visitors mountains for hiking, pristine beaches, and lots of water sports, like wind surfing and scuba diving. (AP Images/Armando Franca)*

schools in the major towns, and elementary schools throughout the islands. Teacher-training and technical schools are also present. Post-secondary and university level education is now advancing in Cape Verde with the foundation of the University of Cape Verde as well as the Jean Piaget University, both in Praia. In Mindelo private colleges are also underway to meet the great demand for modern training and research.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The roots of Cape Verde's population are found among mainland Portuguese, Azoreans, Sephardic Jews, Moors, political exiles like the *degradados*, and African peoples such as Fula, Balante, Wolof, Mandingo, Manjaco, Papeis, and Bissagos. The diversity of these origins has resulted in a *Crioulo* amalgam of Luso-African traditions. In this sense, one may say that Cape Verde is not only the westernmost extension of Africa, but also the easternmost extension of the Caribbean, and a southern extension of Europe.

Slavery helped to build Cape Verde. It was largely from the islands that the Portuguese crown monopolies based their slave trading economy from the 17th–19th centuries. Coastal middlemen called *lançados* traded with the victorious kingdoms in the slave wars required by the trade. Slaves were not only part of an important economy, but were used on Cape Verdean plantations of sugar cane and tropical products, as well as for general labor and household services.

It was quite ordinary for slave owners to have children with their servants. In fact, that is the original source of the evolution of the *Crioulo* population. Other slaves such as the *badius* fled to remote and interior portions of the larger islands

and developed their communities there. Still other slaves were “seasoned” in Cape Verde and exported to the New World, especially to regions in northern Brazil. While slavery is an undeniable part of Cape Verdean history, the sustained patterns of brutality and racism clearly are more muted than elsewhere, in large measure because of the synthesis of the Luso-African population.

Today, more Cape Verdeans live in faraway diaspora communities than in the homeland. Cape Verdeans are found throughout Africa, Brazil, and Portugal, as well as in Senegal, Italy and Holland, and in southeastern New England. In these places, Cape Verdeans long have been involved in maritime trades, such as fishing, sealing, whaling, and docking, and more recently, as agricultural and industrial workers. Financial assistance from Cape Verdeans living overseas are a critical factor in the present island economy.

The crews of the famed American whaling and sealing ships were heavily represented by Cape Verdeans. As a consequence, American consular interests are among the oldest in Africa. American naval presence in Cape Verde was significant.

#### **15 WORK**

Agriculture and fishing in Cape Verde are conducted at subsistence level or for small scale exports. The most significant export is its workforce, often as contract laborers. Remittances from Cape Verdeans around the world continue to be a very important source of financial stability.

Historically, thousands of Cape Verdeans have found work on ships devoted to whaling, sealing, slaving, and fishing, but it was in the 19th century that more regular numbers began

to arrive in America with the intention of permanent immigration. During these times, a chief source of employment was as longshoremen, or in agricultural work, especially the cranberry industries of Cape Cod. The seasonal nature of this work made factory jobs more attractive and through the 20th century, when not limited by immigration quotas, they arrived seeking jobs in textiles and other manufacturing. Today, Cape Verdeans are found in every walk of life, including education, major sports, medicine, the arts, banking, commerce, and construction.

Youthful unemployment and marginal work is a serious problem in Cape Verde. This is particularly difficult among those Cape Verdeans who have been deported from the US and Europe and arrived with more liabilities than assets to themselves and Cape Verdean society.

## 16 SPORTS

Many sports are popular in Cape Verde, especially soccer. Basketball has shown increasing popularity. Swimming, surfboarding, scuba diving, track and field, and long-distance running also are growing. There is even a golf course and horseback riding stable on São Vicente. A very popular game in Cape Verde is *ouri*, a “pit and capture” game board that can be dated directly back to ancient Egypt.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Cape Verdean entertainment is centered around the home, where dances, parties, and receptions are very popular. Inside and outside the home there are rich varieties of popular music, both imported from the diaspora communities and synthesized in the Crioulo traditions. These forms range from the European-origin *mazurkas* and *valzas*, to the polyrhythmic *batuko*, and modern popular music of *funana* and *finçon*. Perhaps most famed of all are the *coladeiras* and *mornas*, which capture the painful burdens of the Cape Verdean soul or *saudade*.

Lively post-colonial literature includes poetry, short stories, and novels. Cape Verde even boasts of its own neoclassical *Claridade* literary movement, much of it written in Portuguese and *Crioulo* and increasingly translated to English and French.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

A wide array of folk arts are found in Cape Verde, including sewing and crocheting for women and a revived interest in the production of *panos*. Men enjoy building ship models, carving of wood and cow horn, making shell horns, and carving pipes. Modern arts can be found in exhibitions and galleries that show textiles, pottery, wood carving, sculpture, painting, drawing, and photography.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Cape Verde increasingly is suffering from a rising use of illegal drugs and alcohol and an increased incidence of HIV/AIDS. Struggles with self-identity also are common. Apparently the personal use of drugs and alcohol is also linked to a rise in the overseas illicit drug trade and other smuggling activities. With the rise in tourism there are also more reports of the sex trade that could cause increased incidence of HIV/AIDS.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The national liberation parties of Cape Verde (the PAIGC and PAICV) had long put forth the full liberation of women as one of their central goals. A number of women were incorporated into leadership positions within the PAIGC’s fighting forces during the nationalist armed struggle. The Party insisted that at least two of the members of *tabanka* (village) committees be women. The Uniao Democratica das Mulheres (UDEMU) was formed by the PAIGC in the mid-1960s. During the armed struggle period (1963–1974) fought in the mainland but led by Cape Verdeans, UDEMU assisted in the mobilization of women for the war effort. UDEMU was replaced by the Comissão Feminina (Women’s Commission) toward the close of the war, and while it has been replaced it belongs in the historical evolution of female empowerment in Cape Verde.

After the 1981 coup in Bissau, the PAIGC changed its name to the PAICV. Similarly, the UDEMU which had represented women in both nations was changed to the Organização de Mulheres de Cabo Verde (OMCV). The OMCV is organized by sectors which contain all “base groups” in a district as well as an administrative body. The OMCV continued much of the work of the former organization, and it functioned as a women’s auxiliary of the single party. The position of women in Cape Verde remains hard with relatively high levels of illiteracy, hard physical work, a high level of machismo, and a relatively low level of participation.

While educational opportunities for women have been expanded since independence, the male-dominated nature of the social and familial structure is in need of further changes in various ways. Certainly the position of women has improved markedly given the traditions based in colonial patriarchy and male supremacy. Now the rights of women are legally protected. For example, children born out of wedlock must legally be supported by their fathers and the status of “illegitimacy” has been abolished.

The numbers of women in industry and tourism are increasing even though the overall numbers of industrial jobs are few. There are now women members in the Assembleia Nacional Popular. Women are commonly found in the health and educational services where such possibilities were limited during colonial rule.

Of particular importance is the male “brain drain” away from Cape Verde leaving the population composed disproportionately of women. Ironically, while their income is thereby reduced or reliant on remittances from absentee husbands, it has made the remaining women more self-reliant and codependent. It is impossible to overlook the hardships that women face, however, the spirit of liberation, social mobility and empowerment is now very significant in Cape Verde. Women are rapidly expanding into new roles and occupations and probably greater numbers of women more than men are seeking higher education that is now available in Cape Verde.

Similarly, new issues such as family planning, birth control, domestic violence, poverty and prostitution, abortion, and AIDS have also entered the picture. OMCV sectors sometimes help to organize *jardins* and pre-school teachers to provide day care and pre-school training for children. There are a number of Cape Verdean women writers, perhaps best known are Orlanda Amarilis and Yolanda Morazzo. The literary works of A. A. Goncalves reveal many of the complexities of the lives of

Cape Verdean women. Since independence, March 8, International Women's Day, has been observed in Cape Verde.

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—by R. A. Lobban, Jr

# CENTRAL AFRICANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** CAR

**LOCATION:** Central African Republic

**POPULATION:** 4.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** French and Sango (official languages), Ubangian group (Niger-Congo family of languages)

**RELIGION:** Islam, Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous religious beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Aka

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a landlocked country the size of Texas in central Africa. The CAR was a French colony (Ubangi-Shari) from 1899 until independence in 1960. Prior to the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century, the peoples of the CAR were divided among numerous small kingdoms and sultanates. Trade in ivory, slaves, iron, and agricultural products along the Upper Ubangi River and across the Sahara to North Africa and the Mediterranean.

While the arrival of colonial forces put an end to the slave trade, the economic system they imposed brought further hardship and misery to the Central African people. Most of what is now the CAR was divided up into “concessions,” large parcels of land turned over to private companies for exploitation. All of the natural wealth of the land—including the rights to the labor of the people—was considered the property of the various concession owners. Rubber, coffee, cotton, diamonds, and labor were among the primary products these companies sought to exploit. Forced labor and relocation along newly built roads caused many people to flee the European colonists just as they had fled Arab slave raiders engaged in the trans-Saharan trade in previous centuries. Famine and disease were the most immediate outcomes of this migration. It was only as the result of a highly publicized visit to the Ubangi-Shari by the famous French novelist André Gide in 1921 that the practice of forced labor and the concession system finally was abolished.

Under the leadership of Barthélemy Boganda, a former priest, schoolteacher, and member of the French National Assembly, Central Africans were finally able to throw off the bonds of French colonial rule in 1960. Unfortunately, Boganda never would see the fruits of his labor, for he died under mysterious circumstances in a plane crash shortly before independence from France was granted. His nephew, David Dacko, became the first president of the CAR but lost power to Jean-Bidel Bokassa after a coup d'état in 1964. Bokassa brought initial prosperity to the CAR, but he quickly became obsessed with power and grew increasingly autocratic. In 1976 he crowned himself emperor of the Central African Empire in a ceremony that cost one-third of the entire annual budget for that year. Embarrassed by the lavish lifestyle and increasingly despotic habits of Bokassa, the French intervened in 1979 and returned Dacko to power. As of 2008 the CAR had a democratically elected president, Ange Félix Patassé. However, the stability of the CAR is threatened by increasing involvement in conflicts in neighboring Chad and Sudan.





## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The CAR is home to approximately 40 different ethnic groups, most of which speak languages belonging to the Ubangian branch of the Niger-Congo language family. The primary ethnic groups of the CAR are Banda, Gbaya, Ngbaka, Ngbandi, and Zande. A number of smaller Bantu-speaking groups are found along the southern border of the CAR, and a handful of Sahelian groups are found along the northern border. With a population of just 4.5 million in an area of 240,535 sq mi, the CAR is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. From east to west, the CAR measures 900 miles; from north to south it varies from 260 to 475 miles. The CAR shares its 2,700-mile border with five countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Congo to the south, the Sudan to the northeast, Chad to the north, and Cameroon to the west. The CAR was called Ubangi-Shari in the colonial period since its landmass falls primarily in the watershed of these two rivers.

In terms of geography, the CAR spans all three of Africa's major types of landscape. To the extreme south is the dense equatorial tropical rain forest, which is home to the CAR's earliest inhabitants, the pygmies. The middle portion of the country, where the bulk of the population lives, is woodland savanna. In the northern part of the country the savanna gives way to the Sahel, a semidesert band that separates the Sahara desert from the grasslands. The terrain of the CAR consists primarily of gentle rolling hills with a few small mountains in the northwest and the northeast. In the middle portion of the

country, the savanna is occasionally broken up by rocky outcroppings called *kagas*. As in the rest of the region, there are two seasons: dry and rainy. In the rain forest band, the rainy season lasts nine months, from March until December, tapering off to just three to four months of rain in the northern Sahel region.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The 40 ethnic groups of the CAR are unified by the national lingua franca, Sango. This language is a variety of Ngbandi, which was used along the Ubangi river and into the interior for trading purposes before French colonization. Sango was then spread throughout the colony by the soldiers and workers employed by the colonial government. These hired forces were recruited from the coastal regions of Africa and themselves spoke a variety of African languages. Upon arrival in Ubangi-Shari they adopted Sango, both for communicating with the local population and for speaking among themselves. By the time Protestant missionaries arrived in the colony in the 1920s, Sango was already so widely spoken that Protestant and later Christian missionaries began using it in their work. The association between Christianity and the use of Sango has strongly contributed to its ongoing spread. Today 98% of the population of the CAR speaks Sango at least as a second language. In Bangui, the capital, and other major cities, young people who are not ethnically Sango increasingly learn Sango as their first language.

Another important language spoken in the CAR is French, which is the official language along with Sango. While Sango is the language that most Central Africans speak on a daily basis, French is the language of government and education. Many Central Africans are trilingual: They speak their ethnic language with other members of their ethnic group, especially within the family; they speak Sango in church, the marketplace, and whenever they meet someone from a different ethnic group; and they speak French at school, when dealing with the government, or when speaking to foreigners.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Since each ethnic group has its own language, each also has its own oral tradition, including mythical heroes and storytelling formulas. With the emergence of national identity and culture associated with the common national language, Sango, there has emerged a body of folklore known to Central Africans from all ethnicities. The central figure in this national folklore is *Tere*, a clever and witty man of supernatural powers who outsmarts his opponents with tricks and guile. Though originally a figure from Banda mythology, *Tere* has become such a central figure in Central African oral tradition that in Sango his name is now synonymous with the act of storytelling itself.

Oral tradition plays a very important role in the education of children in the CAR, for it is through these stories that they learn important lessons about the origins of the natural world, morality, traditional healing, and hunting. In days gone by, such stories would be told by the older generation to the younger while sitting around a fire in the evening. Today this tradition continues, with these stories being told over the radio and on television. The storyteller frequently incorporates a song into his story, which the entire audience will sing along with him. The refrain of these songs is frequently the moral of

the story. The catchy tune and clever lyrics help the listener remember the main point of the lesson.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Central Africans are Christian, with 35% of the population being Protestant and 18% being Catholic. The remainder are Muslim or practice indigenous religions. In addition, many Central Africans incorporate indigenous practices of ancestor worship, or animism alongside Christianity or Islam. In local religious systems, each person is assigned a *totem*, which is an animal spirit that is passed on from generation to generation. Some *totems* are sacred to an entire ethnic group, while others are specific to individuals. In both cases, one may never eat the animal associated with one's *totem*. If possible, when a person is dying, he or she will pass on his or her *totem* to a young child, usually a son or grandson. In this way some Central Africans may end up with several *totems* that they believe give them special insights, characteristics, and protection.

Traditional priests, or witch doctors, are called *nganga*. The priest is in communication with the spirits of the ancestors who indicate to him their pleasure and displeasure. If a Central African has a problem, for example a series of bad harvests or poor luck in hunting, he or she may go to the *nganga* if it is suspected that displeased spirits are at the root of the problem. The *nganga* serves as a medium to the spirits and frequently will order a ritual sacrifice (usually a chicken) to placate them. He will bless the fishing nets and hunting spears and may order additional offerings, such as eggs and white chickens, to be left in the sacred spot of the ancestors. These sacred spots usually include an altar on which a figurine of the spirit has been placed.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Independence Day, celebrated December 1 and known locally as *Premier Décembre*, is the major important holiday in the CAR. It honors the day that Barthélemy Boganda declared the independence of the country and is celebrated with parades and much official pomp and circumstance. In many respects this is a day of remembrance of Boganda himself, who is rightfully considered to be the father of the CAR nation. On this day Central Africans show their patriotism and respect by dressing in their finest attire and participating in the activities. Schoolchildren and social organizations of every type assemble to march before local and national dignitaries. Afterwards they feast on roast goat, gazelle, or pork, which few Central Africans can afford to eat on a daily basis. The adults may drink beer or wine, while the children are given the rare treat of soda.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The most important rite of passage among Central Africans is circumcision, which serves as a symbol of initiation to both adulthood and the various ethnic groups. Many ethnic groups, particularly those in the northern part of the CAR, practice circumcision on both boys and girls just as they are entering puberty, around the age of 13. Historically in rural areas, circumcision takes place over a three-month period when groups of up to 30 boys or girls are taken from the village to live in a secret camp in the forest or savanna. Here they are given intensive training and education in the spiritual beliefs and practices of their ethnic group. They also are taught about sexual reproduction and the responsibilities they will bear as full-

fledged members of society. Young women are instructed to be faithful and obedient to their husbands and young men are instructed to provide for their wives and children. When the initiation period is over, they are marched back into the village where they are greeted with much celebration, dance, and fanfare. The newest members of society are given presents of money and clothing, and special feasts are held in their honor. Once they have completed this rite of passage, they have the right to take a spouse.

With urbanization, male circumcision increasingly takes place in a hospital and the practice of female circumcision is discouraged by the government. Even if circumcision does not actually take place, the removal from society for educational purposes and initiation still takes place, though the period increasingly is only a matter of a few weeks rather than months. Many young people, particularly in the larger urban areas, no longer speak the language of their ethnicity and it is only during circumcision, when they are sent to their ancestral village, that they learn something of their ethnic language and customs.

Honoring the deceased also plays a very important role in Central African society, for it symbolizes the transition from the living to the spiritual world, when a living person passes on to become a venerated ancestor. Depending on the social status of the deceased, periods of mourning may last anywhere from a few days to years. In the first few hours after the death of a close relative, male family members are expected to display their grief by shaving their hair off, and women are expected to abstain from any type of personal grooming and adornment. An all night vigil around the corpse will be held the first night, with much singing and dancing to help coax the spirit into the other world. The body is promptly buried at sunrise the next day, with the head pointing north for men and south for women. Depending on the wealth and status of the deceased, the vigil may continue for up to two weeks. During the mourning period the immediate family maintains proper decorum by refusing to wear brightly colored clothing and to participate in any pleasurable activities. At the end of the mourning period, there is a celebration with dancing, good food, and much gaiety. The day after this celebration the family will symbolize the return to normal life by putting on a new set of clothing.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greeting and leave-taking are very important in Central African society because they are considered not just acts of politeness but also indicators of respect. Central Africans begin each day by greeting the members of their family with a handshake and an inquiry into how they slept. Whenever a new person enters a group of people, the newcomer is expected to first greet the most important person (e.g., oldest person, honored guest, or chief, etc.) with a handshake and then greet each and every person assembled in the same way. Failure to do so would be construed as a great insult. When leaving a group, a second handshake is required of each person. Among close friends, particularly men, a sign of intimacy and friendship is the following of the handshake with a snap of the fingers, produced jointly by both parties. Women and men both shake hands, but increasingly women are adopting the French practice of kissing on both cheeks.

Central Africans have many hand gestures that mean very specific things. For example, the gesture for calling someone

over is very similar to a wave good-bye in the West and is done by outstretching the hand palm toward the person and clasp- ing the hand. Also, when indicating the height of a person, the hand is held vertically at the level of the face, for animals the palm is held horizontally to indicate the top of the head. To refer to a person using the gesture of an animal would be construed as a great insult.

Visiting friends and family play a prominent role in Central African society, with Sunday afternoons and holidays being given over to this practice. On these days many Central Africans will put on their finest clothing and set out to go calling on friends either at home or in public places. Most visits to homes are spontaneous and unannounced, but when a visitor arrives—even a stranger—at the very least a chair in the shade and a drink of cool water is offered. Frequently, a small meal will be offered, which the host and guest will eat together. Sharing food, even if it is just a few boiled peanuts, is an important aspect of Central African culture because it symbolizes the strong emphasis placed on togetherness and community. Even if one is not hungry, in Central African society it is looked down upon to refuse a meal when offered. Instead, one should eat at least a few bites out of politeness.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The CAR is one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and, as a result, it is plagued with a low standard of living and high death rate from disease and malnutrition. Life is particularly difficult for children who are the most vulnerable to disease and parasites. Most Central Africans live in mud-brick huts with grass roofs and without running water and electricity. While such homes are in general clean and comfortable, they offer little protection from malaria-carrying mosquitoes. In addition, most children go barefoot and are thus susceptible to other parasites that are spread through the waste of animals, particularly pigs. In large villages, each home or group of homes has a latrine and children are instructed to use it, which helps ensure that the drinking supply will not be contaminated. All too often, however, these latrines are built too close to the well or stream that supplies the drinking water.

Transportation is a major problem in the CAR. There are few paved roads, most of which are in poor condition. Few Central Africans own cars and most must depend on *trafiques*, or bush taxis, to get from one place to another. These bush taxis are almost always filled well beyond the designed capacity of the vehicle. The roof of the bus or van is piled high with passengers' luggage and goods. On buses heading toward the cities are sacks of food and live goats and chickens; on buses heading out of the city and toward the countryside are new pots and pans and other consumer goods such as soap and cloth. During the rainy season, when many roads turn to mud, it can take weeks to get from one end of the country to the other. All passengers must be prepared to sleep on the ground wherever the bus stops for the night or breaks down.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Though there are not normally formal marriage ceremonies, certain social customs are strictly followed to recognize new unions. Before a man and a woman can live together as husband and wife, the family of the man must pay a bride-price to the family of the bride. This payment is viewed as a form of marriage license or as a token of sincerity. The exact sum

and terms of payment are worked out between the families of the two parties and may range anywhere from a few goats and chickens to large sums of money. If the marriage fails due to infertility or infidelity of the woman, the family of the man can demand a return of the money. No marriage is official until a child has been born.

Once a couple starts to produce children, frequently a younger sister or cousin of the wife will come and live with them to help relieve the mother's burden. The young assistant is in many respects an apprentice, learning how to keep house and to care for babies and children. The size of the household also may be further augmented by the temporary adoption of a sibling's children, either so that these children may attend better schools or so that their parents can spend more time working to make a living. It is rare to find a child being raised alone or with just one sibling. The more typical scenario is for five or six children of varying degrees of blood relatedness being raised as brothers and sisters.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Central African cloth is made out of the bark of a certain tree that grows in the rain forest and that becomes soft and pliable when beaten. In the precolonial period, most clothing consisted of a loincloth made out of this barkcloth or of a skirt made from braided raffia, which comes from a type of palm tree. Colonization and trade with Europe brought about the introduction of cotton cloth, which is frequently dyed in bright and colorful patterns. Most women today wear such cloth in a form of dress known as *pagne*, which is tied about the waste like a skirt and worn together with a matching blouse made of the same material. Clothing is a potent symbol of wealth, and genuine European prints from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands are the most sought after.

For casual wear, men may also wear matching shirt and pants made from colorful printed cloth, but for important occasions they wear European-style clothing. Central African men never would wear shorts in public, because they are the attire of children and reminiscent of the clothing of the European colonists. Increasingly, men and women alike are adopting the West African custom of wearing outfits known as *shada* made of colorful batik cloth that has a design in the weave. Outfits made out of this cloth are embellished with elaborate embroidery and may cost hundreds of dollars apiece. Less fortunate Central Africans wear secondhand European and American clothing bought for a few cents apiece at local markets.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Central African diet is cassava, which is a starchy root that originated in Brazil and was introduced in Africa by the Portuguese. Unlike millet, the traditional Central African staple, cassava is a hardy plant that can be grown easily in a variety of climates and even in very poor soil. To prepare the cassava for consumption, it first must be soaked in water for three days to leach out the traces of cyanide that occurs naturally in the plant. After soaking, the roots are peeled and broken into pieces to be dried in the sun. Just before eating, the dried cassava is ground into a fine flour that is used to make the mainstay of Central African cuisine called *gozo*. This is a firm paste made by adding the cassava flour to boiling water.

Most Central African meals consist of *gozo* served with a sauce made with meat, fish, and/or vegetables. One favorite everyday dish, called *ngunja*, is made with the dark green leaves of the cassava plant. Most sauces, including *ngunja*, are thickened with peanut butter, which gives them added protein and flavor. Onions, garlic, tomatoes, and mushrooms are also basic elements of Central African cuisine and are found in many national dishes. On special occasions, goat and chicken are the dishes of choice. In rural areas many people continue to enjoy wild game such as snake, monkey, and elephant.

The communal aspect of eating is reinforced by the fact that everyone eats with their fingers from a central common dish. Men and women, however, do not eat together unless they are related and in private. Women do all the cooking and they serve the food. A Central African meal consists of one bowl of sauce accompanied by one ball of *gozo*, both of which are served covered with intricately decorated gourd shells to keep them warm. Before eating, everyone washes their hands in a basin that is passed from person to person and waits for the oldest person or honored guest to begin. Also, no one may take a piece of meat until this person has done so.

Depending on the size of the household and their financial resources, usually only one meal is cooked per day and served at the noon hour. In the evening and for breakfast the next day, leftovers are eaten. The diet is supplemented with fresh fruit such as oranges, bananas, pineapples, guava, mangoes, and avocados, which grow in abundance in the CAR. French-style bread is available in the larger towns and cities where it is eaten for breakfast or in place of *gozo* with a meal. The CAR produces coffee, which Central Africans of all ages drink sweetened with ample quantities of sugar and softened with condensed or powdered milk.

### 13 EDUCATION

Most Central Africans born since independence in 1960 have attended at least some primary school, but very few have received further education. Only one eighth of all children go on to high school and of these only 1 in 10 will actually finish. To earn a high school diploma, students must take an exam called a *baccalaureate* which very few people are able to pass. All those who pass, and who have the money, are then able to go on to the one university in the country, the Université de Bangui. At all levels, parents are expected to pay a fee for the education of their children. Failure to pay is one of the major reasons why many children leave school at a young age.

In government-sponsored schools, the official language is French and, as a result, most young people today have learned at least a small amount of French. Typically, children begin their education in Sango and gradually make the transition to French so that by the time they reach high school, classes are conducted entirely in French. The ability to read and write in French is directly linked to one's educational level. Because the orthographic system of Sango is closely related to that of French, young people who learn to read and write in French, by virtue of being native speakers of Sango, know how to read and write in this language as well. Older people who never have attended school are often able to at least read Sango, thanks to the many years of literacy projects conducted by the various Christian missionary societies. Recently, the CAR government has begun a secular literacy program aimed at farmers in rural areas.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The CAR has a rich tradition in music and dance, which is expressed as part of the celebration of every major holiday and event. In traditional society, music and dance were believed to facilitate communication with the spiritual world and played an important role in the belief system of the people. The primary musical instrument is the conga drum, which is made by stretching a piece of wet leather over a hollowed-out length of log. While these drums come in all shapes and sizes, some stand up to a yard tall and can be heard several miles away. In the early and pre-colonial period, a special type of drum called a *linga* was used for communicating between villages in a specially devised code. Xylophones made with wood and gourds are another common musical instrument. In traditional society, specific songs and dances were associated with different events and would only be performed at this time. For example, certain songs are performed only at funerals and others only during circumcision.

Though music and dance have changed considerably with modernization and exposure to Western culture, they retain great significance in modern Central African society. Music and dance have been incorporated into Christian worship, where services are often punctuated with lively singing and elaborately choreographed dance. Conga drums and xylophones are still popular in rural areas, but today electric guitars, keyboards, and snare drums are increasingly common in urban areas. Popular recorded music sung in Sango is heard all over the country and is very pervasive. In buses, taxis, restaurants, and bars, either the radio or a cassette player is almost always providing background music. Increasingly, African American music such as rap, reggae, and hip hop are also becoming popular.

### 15 WORK

There is, for all intents and purposes, no manufacturing in the CAR. At one time in the 1970s, Central Africans produced their own cloth, shoes, beer, and soap, and even assembled cars. Today only the soap factory and one of the two breweries remain in operation. Timber and diamonds are the most important industries in the CAR, generating between them 75% of the CAR's export earnings. Unfortunately, these industries employ few people. Most Central Africans are subsistence farmers, growing most of the food they consume and just a bit more that they sell to get money to buy the things they cannot grow, such as soap and cloth. A limited number grow cash crops such as coffee or cotton, but demand for these exports on the world market has been falling for the past several years as competition from other parts of the world has increased.

### 16 SPORTS

Central Africans are avid sports enthusiasts, with soccer and basketball among their greatest passions. Athletic clubs in virtually every city and town sponsor soccer teams that compete for regional and national championships. On Saturdays throughout the CAR, makeshift soccer stadiums become a major focus of social life as fans of all ages come together to watch back-to-back matches. Here young men come to court young women, old men come to gather and chat, and children come to frolic on the sidelines. The mayor of the town or chief of the village is usually in attendance, as are all the other local dignitaries. The presence of vendors selling grilled meat, peanuts,

and bananas add a festive air to the occasion. Particularly good soccer players enjoy considerable status and prestige in their hometowns, especially if they go on to play in the national soccer league. Basketball was introduced in the 1970s by American Peace Corps workers, who built courts at high schools throughout the country. There is a national basketball training center in Bangui, and in 1988 the CAR national team astounded the continent by winning the African championship.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In Bangui, the capital, there is locally produced television in Sango and French. These shows are very popular and in the evening those rare individuals who have both electricity and a television will place the set outside so that all the neighbors can watch. It is not unusual to find 40 or 50 people gathered around a television in the evening watching storytellers, the local news, or an old French movie. In rural areas, where there generally is neither electricity nor television, some people will improvise with generators and video recorders. Usually, such events are by paid admission only and feature American action films or Chinese karate films. There is only one national radio station in the CAR, Radio Centrafrique, which broadcasts news, information, stories, and music. Radio is a major source of entertainment for those fortunate enough to have shortwave radios and batteries to operate them.

One of the most popular activities for Central Africans of all ages is dancing. In even the smallest towns there is usually at least one gathering place with a cemented dance floor and a cassette player. In the evening such places are popular with young adults who come to listen to the latest music from Bangui and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to dance. In villages and cities of all sizes, there are frequent occasions when drumming and dancing take place. Most notably, funerals and circumcision celebrations typically involve several days of singing and dancing.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional art in the CAR takes a variety of forms including ebony carvings, pottery, weaving, and hair braiding. In the southern part of the country, near the rain forest, skilled artisans produce a host of ebony products that are popular with Central Africans and tourists alike. Statuettes, figurines, and animal carvings are the most common, though they also produce a number of household items such as combs, plates, and pestles. In the past, each ethnic group produced distinctive pottery that could be identified by the patterns and designs found on the outside. Today, however, only a few ethnic groups continue this tradition because most people have switched to aluminum and steel pots which are more durable and last longer. Traditionally, however, all cooking was done in clay earthenware pots that also were used for storing water, grain, or oil.

In the savanna region of the CAR, where the grass can grow 12 feet high and a variety of reeds may be found, the weaving of mats and baskets is a common activity. By dyeing the grasses and reeds different colors, elaborate patterns may be woven into the mats and baskets, giving them greater aesthetic appeal and increasing their value.

Hair braiding and tying is one of the principal social activities of women as well as a major outlet for their artistic talents. Some hair designs are so complex and intricate that they may take up to eight hours to complete. Central Africans are

best known for the “sputnik” design, which involves winding strands of hair very tightly with string so that they stand straight out in all directions.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The post-colonial history of the CAR, like so many African countries, has been characterized by autocratic rule and restriction of basic civil liberties. The first president, David Dacko, was overthrown by his cousin, Jean-Bidel Bokassa, in a coup d'état. Bokassa became infamous for crowning himself emperor and rumors that he killed children. He fashioned himself to be a modern-day Napoleon who had absolute power—including life and death—over his subjects. He was driven from power in 1979, and Dacko was brought back only to be deposed once again in another coup, this time by André Kolingba. Kolingba ruled the CAR with a tight grip until 1993, when the first democratic elections brought Ange Félix Patassé to power. Patassé was Bokassa's prime minister and has proven himself to share many of his former boss's autocratic tendencies. Successive Central African governments have paid lip service to human and civil rights, at the behest of Western donors, but have done very little to ensure that these rights are guaranteed.

Corruption and AIDS are the biggest social problems facing the CAR today. In a country where governmental favors are routinely bought and sold and only the ethnic group associated with the president can succeed in society, it is no wonder that development of the country has been so slow in coming. AIDS is having the effect of wiping out a significant portion of the generation aged 20–40, which is putting a strain on older people who are being forced to care for children orphaned by this tragedy. Further exacerbating this problem is ongoing urbanization and rapid population growth, both of which contribute to declining living standards.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Intense poverty has made life difficult for many Central African women. Maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world and the average life expectancy for women is only 44 years. Nonetheless, women are highly valued in Central African society, particularly for their work as mothers. Mother's Day has grown into a celebration of women in general and it serves to recognize the labor and sacrifice that all women make in CAR society. On this day men do all the cooking and cleaning, while the women sit in the shade and are served by men. Some men add humor and a festive touch to the occasion by wearing women's clothing as they go to the market and carry out other duties normally assumed by women. Often, a few days before the celebration, a son will buy his mother a chicken and some beer, which will assure her that she is loved and appreciated. On Mother's Day, the son will prepare the chicken himself and serve it to his mother.

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—revised by C. Breedlove

## CHADIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** CHAD-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Chad

**POPULATION:** 10.1 million

**LANGUAGE:** French, Arabic (official languages); more than 100 local languages

**RELIGION:** traditional African religion, Islam, Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Fulani

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The peoples of Chad possess a rich, ancient past dating to pre-historic times. If the mysterious Anasasis of the southwestern United States immortalized themselves in their 14th century rock art at Canyon de Chelly, so too have the unknown peoples of the northern Chadian desert (Ennedi Region), whose rock paintings date to 7,000 BC. This region's claim to be humanity's cradle recently was supported by linguistic research indicating that three of the four sub-Saharan language groups originated between Lake Chad and the Nile Valley. Many more discoveries undoubtedly will be made, because Chadian archeological sites of great potential remain unmapped and unexplored.

An era of empires marked the central Sahelian zone of Chad from around AD 900–1900. Their economic basis was the control of the trans-Saharan trade routes passing through the region. The survival of kingdoms depended on their ability to fight, which they did with cavalry. Two of the strongest and most durable of these were the Kanem-Borno and the Baguirmi and Wadai. The Kanem-Borno was situated to the northeast of Lake Chad and was formed from a confederation of nomadic peoples, who regarded their leaders as divine kings. The influence of Islam in the 10th century caused dissension and factionalism among those who saw the advantages of conversion and those who resisted in favor of their traditional beliefs. Strategically-spaced wells and oases favored the south-to-north trade of natron (sodium carbonate), cotton, kola nuts, ivory, ostrich feathers, perfume, wax, and hides, and foremost, slaves. From the north came salt, horses, silks, glass, muskets, and copper. The kingdom succumbed to invasions from eastern Sudan in the late 19th century.

The demise of Kanem-Borno coincided with the arrival of French dominance in the region, which was secured after considerable effort at the Battle of Kousseri in 1900. Chad was the lowest colonial priority for the French, and they made only halfhearted attempts to unify, administer, or develop it. In fact, the French ruled through sultanates in much of eastern Chad. In the south, where the French established missions and schools, the Sara peoples resisted forced labor, resettlements, and French-imposed prices for cotton. Under lieutenant-governor Félix Eboué, Chad supported the Free French under Charles de Gaulle in World War II. This act gave Chad greater, though still very limited, recognition and resources from France.

Since independence in 1960, ethnic, political, and religious factionalism, mainly between forces of the Muslim north against the Christian and animist south, has created much political and economic turmoil. Under authoritarian President Tombalbaye (1960–75), Chad experienced a general economic downturn and repressive government. Labor policies favored



the more Westernized southerners, leading to ethnic conflict and rebellions in eastern and northern Chad. Mutineers killed Tombalbaye in 1975, which ushered in a period of civil war lasting until 1982. Two of the rebel leaders, Goukouni and Habré, came from competing Toubou clans in the north, and were bitter rivals. In 1980, under the transitional government of national unity (GUNT), units of five separate Chadian armies patrolled the capital of N'Djamena. Habré gained power in 1982, but his government was subjected to Libyan attacks in support of Goukouni. In 1990 a former military commander in chief, Idriss Déby, invaded from Sudan and took tenuous control, fending off several coup attempts and military insurrections. Lawlessness, strikes, and civil disorder have characterized the constitutional transition begun in 1992 and dragging on throughout 1994. In July 1996, Déby was elected president under the new constitution, and formed a government that included several opposition members.

In June 2005, a controversial national referendum removed constitutional term limits and paved the way for a third five-year term for Déby. Subsequently, Déby abolished the "future generations" provision in the oil law, which had been imposed by donors to set aside a percentage of oil revenues for future Chadians. Since 1998, Déby and his ethnic minority have continuously had to stave off rebellions, the most recent of which laid siege to the capital in early 2008.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Nation-building in this country of about 10.1 million has been complicated by factors of geography, religion, ethnicity, and linguistic differences in Chad's diverse population. Some 200 ethnic groups speak more than 100 distinct languages, which has enriched Chad culturally, but made the creation of a national identity and unity virtually impossible. The mainly Muslim populations of the north are nomadic or semisedentary herders and livestock breeders. The sedentary Sara groups in the south traditionally practice animism, but some have adopted Christianity. Population density is extremely low, from 0.15 per sq km in the Saharan zone, to 13 in the southern zone, where 45% of the total population lives. Only 22% of the population lives in towns and cities. N'Djamena, the capital, is by the far the largest city with a population estimated at 721,000 in 2005.

The colonial borders created a landlocked country, far from oceans and seas. Chad borders Libya to the north, Sudan to the east, the Central African Republic to the south, and Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger to the west. With an area roughly equal to Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona combined, Chad stretches over 1,100 miles from north to south, and covers three climate and vegetation zones. Rainfall diminishes from 1,200 millimeters in the south to negligible amounts in the northern Sahara. In the middle lies a semidesert band called the Sahel, which has a long dry season and is subject to creeping desertification. Temperatures here regularly exceed 100°F in April and May, the hot season. From Lake Chad, an inland delta and the fourth-largest lake in Africa, the land gradually rises. Magnificent sand dunes cover the land in the north, and great, isolated piles of rocks interrupt the landscape in the eastern and southern regions. Oases with their date palms dot the northern desert. Mountain ranges cover stretches of the southwest, east, and far northwest. Emi Koussi, a dormant volcano, crowns the Sahara, reaching over 10,000 feet in elevation.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

French and Arabic are Chad's official languages, but more than 100 local languages are spoken. These fall into 10 major groups belonging to three of Africa's four major language families. Chadian Arabic includes more than 30 dialects, which people throughout the country use to communicate with each other. For example, in a radius of 10 miles around Lake Fianga in the Mayo-Kebbi Region, people speak Toupouri, Moundang, and Fulfulde, which requires them to find a common language of communication.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Given the plethora of ethnic identities in Chad, it is difficult to name a specific national hero or myth without neglecting another. However, many Chadians revere Félix Eboué, in whose memory a magnificent monument in N'Djamena was erected. Many Chadians are familiar with the Sao, the earliest people known to have inhabited the region surrounding N'Djamena. Legends held that the Sao were giants possessing great strength. They could run long distances in just hours, and pull up trees like blades of grass. Sao women could lift huge ceramic granaries holding an entire year's harvest with a single hand. At independence, French history was parodied, when a famous speaker, André Malraux, supposedly declared, "Mister the President, the Saos are your Gauls."

## 5 RELIGION

In Chad, the religious and social spheres are closely intertwined. Nominally, Chadians profess one of three religious traditions: traditional African religion (35%), Islam (55%), or Christianity (10%). In fact, percentages can be misleading because religion seldom exists in pure form. Muslims and Christians tend to incorporate a number of traditional beliefs into their faiths.

Traditional religion, referred to as animism because all things are thought to have life force, focuses on ancestors and place, but is specific to ethnic group. In general, animism holds that a supreme being created the world, then retired from active intervention in it. In order to maintain harmony in the world, recently departed ancestors intervene between the living and their earliest forebears. When misfortune strikes, ritual acts that include prayers, sacrifices, and libations are performed in order to restore balance. Two examples illustrate this concept in Chad. Among the more centralized societies, such as the Moundang, rulers are associated with divine power and therefore intercede with supernatural forces to maintain equilibrium in society. The Mbaye, a Sara cultural group, believes that spirits inhabit places and natural phenomena such as water, lightning, and the sun. Because the sun spirit can render good or cause harm, it must be pacified. Diviners and sorcerers are thought to possess the ability to communicate with spirits, for good and evil purposes respectively.

Islam came to Chad well before the 1300s, and spread throughout the two northern tiers. Islam mixed with traditional African religion, but in some beliefs, Chadian Muslims are very strict. For example, during the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast and do not swallow their saliva from sunrise to sunset.

Catholic missionaries arrived in the 1920s and 1930s, and because of French and Italian political differences, the Vatican delayed establishment of a vicariate within Chad. Catholics are mostly concentrated around the Pala diocese in Mayo-Kebbi, whereas Protestants are spread more generally throughout the south.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Secular holidays such as Independence Day hold less interest in general for Chadians than Muslim and Christian holidays. Traditional holidays having to do with seasons and harvesting are festive occasions, too. For example, in the Mayo-Kebbi region, the millet harvest in September–November and the New Year in December are marked by the coming out of the Toupouri chief who, prior to that, is confined to his lodge for an entire month. In his royal dress, the chief marches slowly and regally, accompanied by dignitaries. Musicians playing long calabash horns salute him, as do dancers and a line of bare-breasted maidens. Afterwards, the local hosts serve a sumptuous meal of grilled goat meat, rice and stew, and *boule* to visitors who come from great distances (with cassette recorders and video cameras) to witness this annual event.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Knowledge of the world and its processes is passed to successive generations by males in Chad's predominantly patrilineal societies. The greatest transformation occurs from childhood to adulthood, and requires that children be prepared to assume social responsibilities. In the south, the Sara *yondo*, a

male initiation ceremony, illustrates the significance of passage rites in Chadian society. Elders gather with boys in designated sites every six or seven years for several weeks during school vacations. Prior to Western schooling, the ritual lasted several months. During the initiation, the elders transfer authority. Having thus assumed manhood, the sons and brothers no longer associate with their mothers and sisters as before, and must eat and live separately. Similar ceremonies for girls teach them household responsibilities and respect for male authority.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As in other regions of Africa, greeting and leave-taking are important parts of human relations. Muslims exchange a series of greetings, asking about the other person's well-being, and that of his wife and family, too. After each exchange, one touches a hand to the breast to signal gratitude that it is so. It is an honor to receive visitors and customary to offer a glass of water if not something to eat as a sign of hospitality. In the dusty Sahel, hosts usually offer their visitors water to wash their faces, hands, and feet. In the south, visitors may find themselves welcomed by a large calabash of millet beer, which they must finish before leaving.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Chad ranks near the bottom (170th out of 177 countries) on the human development index (HDI), which measures living standards, education, and life expectancy. In 2008, life expectancy was estimated to be 47 years. Living conditions are very harsh and rudimentary in most rural areas of the country. Travel is difficult and precarious. In the desert-like regions, sand and dirt tracks crisscross in the thorn trees and scrub brush. Overloaded trucks, sometimes with flatbed trailers, move along these tracks at about 20 miles an hour, carrying passengers and goods to remote areas of the country. Trucks often bog down in mud holes during the rainy season. In 2008, Chad had only about 160 miles of paved roads in the entire country.

Medical care is spotty, especially in the northern zones, and patients must travel great distances for treatment. For lack of transportation or familiarity with modern medical care, many simply do not seek treatment in clinics or hospitals. Many Chadians depend on rain-fed agriculture, but civil war, successive droughts, and infestations of locusts render a large portion of the population food insecure. As a result of these factors, about 37% of children between 0–5 years old are underweight for their age. For every 10 children born, one dies in infancy.

In Sahelian towns, Chadian homes typically are built inside walled compounds and abut to the compound walls. Mud bricks held together with straw and camel dung are used to make the walls and the roofs. Houses consist of one or two rooms and are dark, with one or two small windows. Their primary use is for sleeping in the cooler and rainy seasons, and for storage of household belongings. Kitchen rooms are often separate, although meals often are cooked outside in the compound. In the hot dry season, Chadians sleep outdoors. People enjoy sitting under hangars made of reed mats hung upon tree limb frames. Dry pit latrines are typically located in the remotest corners of the compounds. Huts in small villages are round, and less permanent and consist of stick walls and thatched roofs. In the desert, nomads' homes may be no more than temporary frames covered with tarps.





*The sun, heat, and blowing sand in the north require clothing that covers the entire body except for the face. Men often wear light cotton pants under white cotton robes, and a white or red-and-white scarf, which they wrap around their heads in the form of a turban.*  
(United Nations)

Throughout the Sahel, water must be drawn by ropes and rubber buckets from communal wells over 125 feet deep. In larger villages, water service may be available through local entrepreneurs. Donkeys carry several water buckets per trip in leather saddle bags, one on each side of the donkey's back. The bags open from the bottom to release the water into receptacles in the compound. Unfortunately, about 58% of the population lives without access to an improved water source. Untreated drinking water is a major source of disease and parasites afflicting children and adults.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

In Chad, nomadic, semisedentary, and sedentary ways of life affect family life and structure. For example, the main social unit of the nomadic Toubou and Daza of the Sahara is the clan. However, individuals often live with people from other clans in groups of around 100 people. In Toubou families, one often finds a male head of household with one or two wives, the children, and a couple of relatives. Women participate in making decisions. In their husbands' absence they manage household operations, including changing pastures, moving tents, and cattle trading. Camps of families form and disband seasonally. Clan relatives are scattered over the region; therefore, individuals usually find kinsmen in most settlements. Families and clans influence, but do not overrule, individual preference for marriage partners. Marriages between blood relatives fewer than four generations apart are forbidden. By contrast, the semisedentary Arabs of the Sahel identify with the *kashimbet*, a unit composed of an elder male or group of males, their wives,

and descendants. Unlike the nomads, Arabs usually remain with their group of kin.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Clothing styles vary according to climate zone and ethnic group. The sun, heat, and blowing sand in the north require clothing that covers the entire body except for the face. Men often wear light cotton pants under white cotton robes, and a white or red-and-white scarf, which they wrap around their heads in the form of a turban. Women wear robes that cover the entire body except face, hands, and feet. Boys wear simply cut cloth shirts and pants, while girls may wear cotton shirts with wraparound cloth skirts. Everyday clothing becomes extremely worn from hard use and washing. Many nomads and Arabs wear sandals or go barefoot. In the south, people dress like Central Africans in colorful cotton print shirts and pants for men, and wraparound skirts and tailored shirts for women. Chadian cotton is renowned for its long strands of high quality and can be bought from the local factory.

Chadian women adorn themselves with interesting jewelry. Toubou women wear silver nose rings, while Arab women wear copper and bronze wrist and ankle bracelets, and heavy earrings that cause large openings in the lobes. Many ethnic groups distinguish themselves with decorative facial and body tattoos. Women commonly wear leather amulets to ward off evil spirits. Others wear necklaces containing colonial coins. Among the older Toupourri and Massa women in the south, one finds lip adornments. These are metal or wood plugs that pierce the upper and lower lips to indicate marital status.



Students studying to be instructors at Koukou Angarana in Bahr Azoum, Chad. To get a diploma, students must pass a state exam that has a 36% pass rate. Future elementary-school teachers take four years of general subjects, followed by two years of teacher training. (International Labour Office)

## 12 FOOD

Despite the harsh climate, Chadians grow a large variety of food. The staples are sorghum and millet. They are harvested and stored in huge ceramic or round thatched granaries, with conical thatched roofs, raised a few feet above the ground. The grains are put to versatile culinary uses, including the noon-day meal. The millet is pounded to flour by using a mortar and pestle. Often two girls will share the task, taking alternating strokes. From the flour they make a round, ball-like dough (*boule*) by adding boiling water. It is similar to *gozo* in the Central African Republic and *fufu* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is eaten with the right hand. In the Sahel, Chadians are fond of okra and meat sauce. Sauces are flavored with onions, tomatoes, garlic, salt, and hot pepper. Men and women typically eat separately, and men are served first. Millet also makes a delicious porridge, which is sweetened and eaten to break the fast during Ramadan. A fermented version of millet (*bili-bili*) is the most popular item on market days in the south. It is served from large calabash gourds and poured into calabash bowls. The sudsy brew has a sour, smokey flavor. Calabashes must be emptied completely before the drinkers retire. As proof that no beer remains, the calabash is tipped over on its side.

Chadians supplement their diets with many other foods such as squash, beans, peanuts, sesame seeds, and cucumbers. In the north, fruits include limes and dates, whereas one finds guavas, bananas, and mangoes in the south. Travelers find grilled goat meat with dried hot pepper, and freshly squeezed lime at “truck stop” eateries in Sahelian roadside vil-

lages. It is especially delicious when fresh-baked French bread is available. Chadians also enjoy many kinds of fish. Huge river perch, known as *capitain*, are taken from the Chari and Log-one Rivers. They are so named because French officers always demanded the largest of the catch, so naturally they went to the captain.

## 13 EDUCATION

Formal Western schooling only recently came to Chad. Protestant missions began establishing primary schools in the 1920s, followed by Roman Catholic and state schools. Until 1942 Chadian children had to go to Brazzaville (Congo) to attend high school. Nowadays, primary school is compulsory, although only one in four children actually attends. There are far more elementary and high schools in the south than in the north. Students who make it to high school attend either a four-year program (*collège*) or a seven-year program (*lycée*). To get a diploma, students must pass a state exam, the bac, which has a 36% pass rate. Future elementary-school teachers take four years of general subjects, followed by two years of teacher training.

Ten years after independence, Chad opened its first university for the 1971–72 academic year. In 1983–84, the university had an enrollment of 1,643 students with 141 teachers. Unfortunately, civil war disrupted education at all levels, and university archives were looted during battles in N’Djamena in 1979 and 1980. Besides the effects of the war, limited financing, overcrowding, and the classical French curriculum have made it difficult for Chadian children to excel in school. Model schools

now are switching to teaching French as a foreign language. A surprising statistic is that despite a combined primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment of only 37.5%, almost half of the population can read and write in French or Arabic. This result may be attributed to high attendance at Quranic schools where children learn basic Arabic and recite the Quran.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Many Chadians express their cultural heritage through ceremonial dress, music, and dance, which link the material and supernatural worlds. The Chadian national folkloric ballet is particularly famous. Chadian craftsmen produce instruments of extremely high quality using materials such as wood, animal gut and horns, and calabashes. Among the principle instruments are tam-tams, pottery drums, goat-horn whistles and flutes, and gourd-calabash horns. The latter often are stained, burned with intricate designs, and decorated with animal hair. Chadians also excel at making five-stringed harps and *balafons*, which are similar to xylophones, and consist of a several resonant wood bars, each sized and sculpted to give the desired pitch, and lashed to a frame. Beneath the wood keys are gourds, which amplify the sound. Village headmen still maintain specially designed drums in their compounds, used to send urgent messages, such as announcing the death of an important person, to the people of the local and neighboring communities.

#### **15 WORK**

By world standards, Chad is one of the most undeveloped countries. More than 80% of Chadians are engaged in subsistence farming, herding, and fishing. Prior to exporting oil, cotton, the biggest cash crop, provided more than 50% of the country's foreign earnings. Most industrial jobs are found in light industries including textiles, meatpacking, beer brewing, and the manufacture of natron, soap, cigarettes, and construction materials. In late 2003, ExxonMobil's consortium began pumping oil in the southern region of Eastern Logone via a 650-mile pipeline through Cameroon to the port of Kribi on the Gulf of Guinea. But owing to corruption and diversion of proceeds to arms instead of infrastructure, Chadians have yet to benefit from the jobs and economic growth that the oil boom was expected to generate. In the foreseeable future, Chadians likely will continue to make their livelihoods mainly in the subsistence sector.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Coping with natural hazards and political upheaval has not given Chadians much time for recreational sports. While hunting and fishing may provide leisure sport activity for foreigners, Chadians hunt and fish out of necessity. Children and young people do play organized soccer, European handball, and basketball. In the cities, soccer club teams compete with one another, and the game is played wherever space permits. Apart from these, horse racing is practiced in makeshift hippodromes in the Sahel, northeast of N'Djamena. Arabs and certain other groups are excellent riders, have fine race horses, and organize races each Sunday throughout the dry season.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In contrast to American teenagers, most Chadian young people never have gone to the movies or watched a movie on a video cassette recorder or DVD player. Many have never seen television. In 2008 there were only six radio stations and one (government) television station in the country. The total number of Internet users was well under 100,000. It is safe to say that with the exception of a small urban elite, Chad remains one of the few places in the world insulated from American and Western pop culture. To the extent that Chadian entertainment exists, it consists of social and cultural events and ceremonies, which include dancing, drumming, and musical performance (see **Cultural heritage**).

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Traditional folk art in Chad serves aesthetic as well as functional purposes and has a long history dating to the iron age. Artists and craftsmen belong to castes, which are select groups of people who once married only among themselves. They have learned, mastered, and passed on the traditions and techniques of their manual craft to sons and daughters. In ancient times, a mystical, religious quality characterized blacksmithing. Kings wanted to monopolize the magical process of producing weapons such as arrow tips, spears, and daggers. They also recognized the usefulness of iron household, farming, and hunting tools such as knives and hoes. Having descended from this heritage, Chadian artists still produce a wide range of articles of genuine artistic merit and practical utility. These include musical instruments, masks, jewelry, ceramic pots, and bronze statuettes and figurines. Craftspersons spin cotton fabrics and weave strips of cloth that are sewn together to make durable garments. They also fashion leather goods from sandals to amulets. Of particular note are the practical and attractive gourds and pyroengraved calabashes, whose designs can be traced to ancient Babylonia. The gourds serve as kitchen utensils, measures, and food and drink receptacles.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Chadians have endured political anarchy, lawlessness, rebellions, and civil war since independence. They now live with the oil resource curse. In 2005, Transparency International ranked Chad along with Bangladesh as the world's most corrupt country. The southern oil fields produce more than 160,000 barrels of oil a day, yet four out of five Chadians live below the poverty line (less than \$2/day).

In addition to coping with poverty, Chadians along the eastern border with Sudan have been subjected to cross-border raids. Refugee children are recruited to fight in rebel groups from both Chad and Sudan, and some 200,000 internally displaced people have been forcibly moved several times owing to inter-ethnic attacks. The violence and disruption have increased the number of orphans and caused additional stress on caregivers. The hosting of some 230,000 refugees from Darfur and more than 40,000 refugees from Central African Republic also has increased pressure on land and local communities, speeding the pace of environmental degradation. Competition with local people for wood, water, grazing land, and goods and services has led to anti-refugee sentiment. Prostitution has become particularly rampant in the southern Dabo oil fields area.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

While the law prohibits discrimination based on gender, and prohibits rape, prostitution, and domestic violence against women, Chadian customary law and society inherently favors men. Wives traditionally have been considered property of their husbands, and have limited recourse to justice under the law. Husbands may also at any time enter into a polygynous relationship without their wives' consent. Although the first wife has the right to request that her marriage be dissolved, she must pay back the brideprice and other marriage costs. While French code provides for the right of women to own and inherit property, in practice most inheritance cases are adjudicated in favor of men. In rural areas women do most of the agricultural labor, household chores, raise the children, and enjoy little free time. Gender bias will continue to be an issue in the future as only 31% as many females as males are literate, and only 60% as many females as males attend primary, secondary, and tertiary schools.

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—by R. Groelsema and M. C. Groelsema

# CHAGGA

**PRONUNCIATION:** CHAH-guh

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Chaga, Waschagga, Jagga, or Dschagga

**LOCATION:** Kilimanjaro region in northern Tanzania

**POPULATION:** 1,500,000

**LANGUAGE:** Kichagga, Swahili

**RELIGION:** Christianity, Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Tanzanians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

On the southern slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, live the Chagga people, also called Chaga, Waschagga, Jagga, or Dschagga. Administratively, the area lies in the Kilimanjaro region in northern Tanzania, south of the border with Kenya. The region is further divided into three districts—Hai to the west, Rombo to the east, and Vunjo in the center.

Traditionally the Chagga people belonged to different clan groups ruled by *mangis* (chiefs). Examples of clan group names include *Moshi*, *Swai*, *Marealle*, *Lvimo*, and *Mrema*. The area was thus divided into independent chiefdoms. The chiefs were known to wage wars against each other and at times to form alliances between themselves in their struggle for power. Thus, the number of chiefdoms declined over the years. By 1968, there existed 17 chiefdoms, namely Machame, Kibosho, Mamba, Mwika, Kibongoto, Uru, Ussemi, Kirua Vunjo, Mkuu, Marangu, Mashati, Arusha Chini, Masama, Kahe, Old Moshi, Kilema, and Keni-Mriti-Mwengwe. The chiefdoms were further divided into subunits called *mitaa*.

After independence, through Nyerere's socialism and integration policies, the rule of Chiefs was diminished and later the system of chiefdoms was abolished in Tanzania. Tanzania obtained independence in December 1961 and Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922–1999), a socialist leader who led Tanganyika from colonial rule, was elected president in 1962. One of Africa's most respected figures, Julius Nyerere was a politician of principle and intelligence. Known as Mwalimu (teacher), he had a vision of education that was rich with possibility. Nyerere voluntarily relinquished power in 1985, but the legacy of his nation building efforts can be found throughout the country. Beginning in the mid-1980s, under the administration of President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, Tanzania undertook a number of political and economic reforms. In January and February 1992, the government decided to adopt multiparty democracy from single party rule. Legal and constitutional changes led to the registration of 11 political parties. Two parliamentary by-elections (won by the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi [CCM] party) in early 1994 were the first-ever multiparty elections in Tanzanian history. In October 2000 Tanzania held its second multi-party general elections. The ruling CCM party's candidate, Benjamin W. Mkapa, defeated his three main rivals, winning the presidential election with 71% of the vote. In 2005 Benjamin Mkapa retired after 10 years in power. During the elections of December 2005 ruling party candidate Jakaya Kikwete was elected president by a decisive margin.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Mount Kilimanjaro has two peaks. Kibo is the main snow-capped peak. Mawenzi is the jagged second peak connected to

Kibo by a saddle. Vegetation on the mountain is varied. The lowest plains form the bushland, and maize, thatch grass, and fodder are grown there. Next lies the coffee and banana belt, where the Chagga have their homesteads. The Chagga people do not live in villages in the rural areas. Instead, each family has its own homestead in the middle of a banana grove. This is known as a *kihamba* (plural *vihamba*). Household plots are next to those of the same clan. With increased population density and division of land holdings, there are hardly any unoccupied areas between the various lineage territories.

The Chagga population has risen steadily from 128,000 in 1921 to 832,420 in 1988 to 1.5 million people in 2003. Overpopulation has forced some Chagga people to move to the lowlands and migrate to urban areas such as Dar es Salaam and Arusha.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The main language spoken by the Chagga people is Kichagga, which differs in dialect between the different Chagga regions. Despite these differences in dialect, the Chagga people can understand one another. The dialectic differences help an individual detect which region another person is from.

Almost all Chagga people also speak Swahili, the national language in Tanzania. Swahili is the medium of instruction in primary schools and is used in the workplace. English is the medium of instruction in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Those persons fortunate enough to obtain advanced education have some understanding of English.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Chagga legends center on *Ruwa* and his power and assistance. *Ruwa* is the Chagga name for their god, as well as the Chagga word for "sun." *Ruwa* is not looked upon as the creator of humankind, but rather as a liberator and provider of sustenance. He is known for his mercy and tolerance when sought by his people. He has provided bananas, sweet potatoes, and yams. Some Chagga myths concerning *Ruwa* resemble biblical stories of the Old Testament.

The various chiefdoms have chiefs who have risen to power through war and trading. Some famous past chiefs include Orombo from Kishigonyi, Sina of Kibosho, and Marealle of Marangu.

### 5 RELIGION

Christianity was introduced to the Chagga people about the middle of the 19th century. By the end of the 19th century, both Protestants and Catholics had established missions in the region. Today those regions where the Catholics had established themselves, such as Kilema and Kibosho, are predominantly Catholic, and those regions where Protestants were established, such as Machame, are mainly Protestant. The Christian influence spread both through preaching and through the provision of education. With the adoption of Western religions, traditional Chagga beliefs and practices have been reduced and synchronized to the new Christian beliefs. Prayer books and hymnals have been translated into Kichagga.

Islam was introduced to the Chagga people by early Swahili caravan traders. Islam brought a sense of fellowship not only with the Chagga of different regions, but also with Muslims of other ethnic groups.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major holidays celebrated by the Chagga people are both secular and religious. The main government holidays presently celebrated are New Year's Day (January 1), Union Day (April 26), Workers Day (May 1), Peasants Day (August 8), and Independence Day (December 9). On government holidays, the public rests and offices and shops are closed. Government rallies are held around the country, with military parades and speeches made by government officials.

The major religious holidays of both Christianity and Islam are celebrated. The major Christian holidays are Easter weekend and Christmas. The major Muslim holidays are *Id-el-Fitre*, *Id-el-Hajji*, and *Maulid*. Religious holidays are a time when family members make an effort to gather. People in urban areas try during these times to visit the rural areas for family gatherings. After the religious ceremonies are over, families gather for celebration and merrymaking. They feast on goat, chickens, and cattle, and drink both local and traditional brews.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

For the Chagga, dying without children means the end of the lineage. A Chagga proverb—"He who leaves a child lives eternally"—illustrates the Chagga belief that people live through their descendents. It is used as a blessing or in congratulation on the birth of a child. After the birth of a child, a Chagga mother remains inactive and indoors for three months, during which time she is taken care of by her husband and in-laws. It is the duty of a woman's husband and family to supply her with milk, fat, blood, and other nourishing food. After three months, a mother may appear in public and resume normal life.

A child may be considered unlucky for several reasons. If a child cut its upper teeth first, it is considered unlucky. A child conceived too soon after the death of another child is also considered unlucky, as are twins. In the past, an unlucky male child was killed; an unlucky female child and her mother were returned to the woman's parents.

Children are taught to do small chores around the homestead as soon as they can walk. Girls' duties include grinding corn and cleaning out cattle stalls. The boys' main duty is to herd cattle. A rite called *Kisusa* is carried out when a child is about 12 years old. This rite is performed to curb unruliness in a child. The youth's relatives attend the ceremony, which is conducted by a female elder and a young man who has already undergone the rite. A goat is slaughtered and divided into portions for consumption and sacrifice. The elder woman and initiated youth sing songs of good morals and talk to the initiate about good behavior. For a month, the youth's behavior is closely watched, and he is often corrected. When the elder woman is satisfied with the initiate's behavior, friends and relatives are invited for a purification ceremony of singing and offering prayers to the ancestors. The same ceremony is repeated a month later.

In the past, both young men and young women were circumcised. *Maseka* is the term used for uncircumcised boys. There was a general circumcision that would take place corresponding with the circumcision of the chief's son. There was no particular age for circumcision, but youth were generally circumcised during the cooler months from June to August. The circumcised youth are called *Mangati*, and they now form a *rika* (generation group) and are given a name referring to

the specific circumcision age group. Examples of *rikas* include *Kimakamaka* (youth), *Mbarinoti* (elders), and *Merisho* (old men). The age classes ended with the German occupation of Tanzania. The circumcision of boys now usually takes place in a hospital, where the conditions are more sterile. Female circumcision is now discouraged.

Traditionally, before young males were allowed to marry, the *Ngasi*, or initiation ceremony, took place. The youth would reside in the forest to keep the initiation process a secret from young women and children. There the youth received instruction on manhood, went hunting and endured various ordeals, especially the cold weather. The female equivalent of the initiation ceremony was called *Shija* and was performed after the young women were circumcised. All initiated young women underwent two months of instruction together in a banana grove, returning to their homes at dusk each day. They were instructed in Chagga rituals, sexuality, procreation, and menstruation. Initiation ceremonies no longer take place, as they were abolished by the Germans.

At death, the old Chagga custom was to bury only those corpses of married persons in huts. Husbands were buried inside their senior wives' huts, under the milk store. After viewing in the cattle stall, the corpse is buried seated or lying facing Kibo (Mount Kilimanjaro). Relatives were chosen to keep watch over the grave until the ceremony of shaving took place. Family members usually shaved their heads on the third day after burial. This was followed by the distribution of the deceased's property. About two years after the burial, amid ceremony, the bones were removed from the hut and moved to a sacred spot in the banana grove. It was against Chagga law to bury childless persons, unmarried persons, and children. Childless adults were deposited in the bush with their belongings. Youth and children were placed in the banana grove. The banana grove is viewed by the Chagga people as the family graveyard. Currently all corpses are buried according to either Christian or Muslim rituals. Wealthier Chagga living in the urban areas may decide to transport a corpse back to the homestead for burial. Most families wear black or drab clothing as a sign of mourning.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings are important in Chagga culture. There are different greetings depending upon the time of day. The Machame may greet each other in the morning with *nesindisa*, while the Kibosho use *shimboni*. Greetings are exchanged before any other exchange of words or actions. When joining a group of people, it is customary to greet each person in the group. Elders are usually greeted first by the younger generation; younger people are required to show respect to the older generations. It is believed that the more senior a person is, the closer his or her contact with ancestors. Even when passing a person on the road, greetings are exchanged inquiring after one's journey, with the visitors usually initiating the greetings.

Specific behavioral norms are maintained between various persons in Chagga society. These are based on a show of respect, non-hostility, or distance. A newlywed woman would cover her head and squat in the presence of her father-in-law, thereby showing respect to and distance from him. The father-in-law is similarly required to avoid the daughter-in-law. A friendship ritual is held after the birth of a first child to remove some conditionalities of behavior between the in-laws. A wife

is required to always face her husband on approach lest she be accused of cursing him.

Relationships between men and women were based on social segregation. Publicly, male and female couples do not hold hands. Public show of affection through bodily contact is considered highly inappropriate between the sexes. It is considered acceptable, however, for male companions and female companions to hold hands out of affectionate camaraderie. Traditionally, men and women were socially segregated. Couples did not eat together at home; mothers usually ate with their children, while the father ate by himself. At social gatherings, men and women kept to themselves in separate clusters. Currently, men and women still sit separately at social functions and even in churches.

During celebrations, guests generally drink and dance in separate groups, according to generation. The older, married people make one group, while the younger people make up the other. This is because the older group may get quite rowdy. They prefer to be able to speak freely among themselves without having to worry whether the conversation is appropriate for the younger generation. Married couples, especially of the younger generation, may eat and socialize together at smaller gatherings.

When visiting, one is expected to arrive with a gift for the host family. A visitor staying for some time is expected to help with the family work. Visiting family and friends usually takes place during the late afternoon hours when most of the farm work is done. If a visitor arrives at mealtimes, he or she is invited to partake of the meal. It is considered an insult to refuse; one must at least pretend to eat a little. When departing, a visitor is escorted part of the way by the host and family. Even in urban areas, a visitor may drop in anytime and is always warmly welcomed.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Chagga house was conical and grass-thatched. Alternatively, a flatter, curved, banana-leaf-roofed house could be built. Because these houses tended to be large, up to 7.5 meters (25 feet) round and over 6 meters (20 feet) high, they were built with the assistance of other villagers. The doorway formed the only opening in the house's walls.

By the end of the 19th century, Swahili houses were introduced, initially constructed by chiefs. These houses were rectangular, with walls made of wattle (interwoven sticks) and mud, and thatched roofs. Today, these houses are more commonly built with cement walls and corrugated metal roofs. Wealthier Chagga families have built elaborate houses on their property.

The infrastructure in the region is more developed than in most other regions in Tanzania. The major roads are either tarmacked or all-season dirt roads. Buses transport villagers daily to and from Moshi town and other regional locations. Wealthier individuals may even own small trucks and pickups. These provide rides to villagers who may agree to ride in the back in exchange for a small fare. Most villagers, though, prefer to walk when visiting neighboring areas and villages. Piped water is provided through village taps and water pumps. Electricity is provided throughout the Kilimanjaro region at low cost from the 'Nyumba ya Mungu' dam. Phone lines may be seen crisscrossing the area, providing this service to those able to afford it. Many villagers have access to such facilities. Today,

the landlines are being replaced by the ever proliferating cell phone.

The Chagga people are adapting to modern life within a rural setting. Their child mortality rate has fallen due to access to mother and child health services, health education, and immunization services. Small health facilities are available in rural areas, with larger hospital facilities in urban areas.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, the Chagga marriage ceremony was a long process, starting with the initiation of betrothal proceedings and continuing long after the couple was married. In the past, parents initiated their children's betrothal, subject to the children's agreement. The groom assured himself that the bride consented to the marriage by inviting her and her friends to visit him. A married male relative of the groom was chosen to be the *mkara*, the person who oversaw the marriage transactions and the marriage itself. This man and his wife, also called a *mkara*, were like the best man and matron of honor to the couple. In times of marital conflict, they became mediators and advisors to the couple. Bridal payments were made over the wife's lifetime.

Today, Christian couples are married in churches. In Christian weddings, the young woman is brought to the church by her family and friends, and there she meets the groom. Following the ceremony is a reception given by the groom's family. Later, the couple may leave for a short honeymoon if they reside in an urban area. In rural areas, the couple leaves for the father-in-law's homestead, where a second celebration will take place a few days later. Throughout the marriage negotiations and celebrations, there is much drinking and feasting.

The groom is required to build his own house in which the couple lives together after marriage. After the birth of the first child, the husband moves into a *tenge* (hut), and the mother lives with her children.

Due to the Christian influence, marriages are now often monogamous. Chagga couples have an average of six children. Great importance is placed on having a son to continue the lineage. The first male child and female child are considered to be of the father's side and are named accordingly. The second male child and female child are considered to be of the mother's side and are also named accordingly, and so on with the other children.

Chagga families sometimes keep dogs and cats, but they are not inclined to keep other kinds of animals.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditionally, Chagga clothing was made of cowhide. With contact with the outside world, the Chagga started to wear imported bead ornaments and imported cloth wraparound garments. These colorful pieces of cloth are used as wrappers around the body and are called *kangas* and *kitenges*. The cloths may be worn over a dress, or may be used to carry babies on the back or hip. Women may purchase cloth from the marketplace or shops and sew their dresses and skirts. Men may also purchase cloth and take it to a tailor to make trousers or a shirt. Elder women still prefer to wrap long cloths over their clothes.

Women and girls do not wear short clothes in public except during sports. Men generally do not wear shorts in public either. Shorts are considered for sports and schoolboys. Sec-

ondhand clothing from overseas (*mitumba*) is sold at the marketplace and is in great demand by the low-income people.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Chagga people is bananas. It is also their main source of drink; they produce beer with the addition of eleusine, a grain. The Chagga plant a variety of food crops, including a variety of bananas, millet, maize (corn), beans, and cassava. They also keep cattle for meat and milk, as well as goats and sheep. Due to limited land holdings and grazing areas, most Chagga people today are forced to purchase meat from butcher shops.

Pregnant women are fed on milk, sweet potatoes, fat, yams, and butter; these are considered female foods. Bananas and beer are considered male and not to be eaten by pregnant women. During the three months after delivery, a lactating mother is fed with a special dish made up of blood and butter, called *mlaso*. *Kitawa*, a special dish of bananas and beans is also prepared for her. *Mtori*, a soup dish prepared from bananas and meat, has spread in popularity in other parts of Tanzania.

## 13 EDUCATION

The initial classroom education available to the Chagga was in the Christian missions. Many Chagga wished for their children to receive this education and paid for it through the sale of their coffee crop. Chagga who could obtain some training rose in status in their local areas. Boys often outnumbered girls in the education facilities, because education was not considered as important for girls as for boys. Many parents also believed that it was a waste of money to educate daughters who would move to other households at marriage.

After Tanzania's independence, all Chagga people were encouraged to attend at least primary level education. By 1971 primary education was provided free by the government, and all children seven years of age and older were required to attend primary level education for at least seven years. This was followed by four years of secondary education for those who passed the national examination at the end of the first seven years. Today many private secondary schools are available in the Kilimanjaro region, providing an alternative for those not lucky enough to continue in government schools. There are also alternative trade and business schools for those students wishing to acquire skills.

Older people are involved in adult literacy programs. Many Chagga can read and write Swahili or Chagga.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Wooden flutes, bells, and drums make up traditional Chagga instruments. Dancing and singing are part of almost every celebration. The Chagga have different types of dances depending on the occasion. *Rosi*, the war dance, is performed by males only. The *irirui* dance was danced by everyone at various occasions. With exposure to other ethnic groups and Western culture, the Chagga have shown a liking for various types of music. Swahili songs produced by various Tanzanian bands may be heard frequently over the airwaves in public places such as shops and buses. West and Central African music and dance forms are also gaining in popularity, and it is not uncommon to hear such songs at celebrations such as wedding feasts. Western music and dance such as reggae, pop, and rap are also popular with the youth.

The Chagga have rich oral traditions and have managed to record most of their history. They have many legends and songs, and proverbs are used to guide youth and convey wisdom. "A snail cannot destroy the grove," for example, refers to the fact that a person should aid others in distress without fear of being harmed.

### 15 WORK

Traditionally, Chagga work has been centered on the farm and is divided into men's work and women's work. Men's work includes feeding goats, building and maintaining canals, preparing fields, slaughtering animals, and building houses. Women's work includes firewood and water collection, fodder cutting, cooking, and cleaning of the homestead and stalls. Women are also in charge of trading in the marketplace.

In Kilimanjaro, coffee is still the principal cash crop. With ever diminishing land holdings, Chagga men are forced to seek employment in the urban areas. The wife is usually left to tend the homestead and children, and her husband visits only periodically. Eventually, his wife and family may join him in the urban area.

The more educated a person is, the better his or her chances of finding employment. Many Chagga young people work as clerks, teachers, and administrators, and many engage in small-scale business activities. Quite a few shop owners and street corner vendors all over the country are Chagga. The Chagga are known for their sense of enterprise and strong work ethic.

Women in rural areas are also forming income-generating groups involved in activities such as crafts and tailoring. These groups—promoted by churches, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, donor agencies, and political parties—help to increase their members' respectability and prestige in their communities. The groups offer an additional source of income for women outside their farming activities.

### 16 SPORTS

Chagga children first encounter sporting events at school. Primary school children are encouraged to participate in inter-school competitions that often lead to inter-regional and national championships. Favorite sports at school are soccer, netball, and athletics. At secondary schools, Chagga youth may be exposed to more sports such as basketball, table tennis, and volleyball.

Following the national soccer league is a national pastime greatly enjoyed by the Chagga. On the weekends, proper and makeshift soccer fields are crowded with both spectators and players alike.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For many years there were no television stations in Tanzania, so radio broadcasts were a major source of entertainment. Many households have transistor radios, and a favorite pastime is listening to radio plays and sports programs. On occasions of major broadcasts and matches, the Chagga often gather around a radio in a public meeting place, usually with a local brew on hand.

In the past, only the wealthy Chagga could afford television sets. They would tune in programs broadcast by neighboring Kenyan stations. Now many Chagga people own televisions and VCRs. This has led to the opening of many video lend-

ing libraries in the town of Moshi. Action movies are the most popular. On weekends, some public meeting places offer video shows for a small fee.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditionally, the Chagga made their own utensils, mainly from wood. These items included small bowls, huge beer tubs, spoons, and ladles. Iron items included bells, ornaments, hoes, and spears. The Chagga made their own weapons and animal traps. Chagga musical instruments include wooden flutes, bells, and drums. Basket weaving was also common, although this art is now dying out as more items are bought at local stores.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Like other Tanzanians, the Chagga face the problem of declining standards of living. Tanzania has faced a period of economic hardship that has severely affected the government's ability to provide adequate social services. Schools and health facilities are run down, which affects the quality of service provided. It is not uncommon to find children sitting on a school floor, and hospitalized patients without medicine. The government has been forced to charge nominal fees for some services that were once free; it has also encouraged the establishment of private facilities to provide similar services. In response, many private schools and health facilities have opened in the Kilimanjaro region. The region now has the highest number of private secondary schools in Tanzania, attracting students from around the country.

Lack of adequate farm land is forcing Chagga youth to seek work away from the *kihamba*. Many are now involved in business and trading, which takes them out of the region to places such as Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and even into Kenya. Sellers come to local markets such as Ndishi with goods such as cooking oil, soap, and sandals. Other traders transport goods such as bananas to outside markets. All this upheaval has led to a breakdown in social values and an increase in sexual promiscuity. This in turn has brought about an increase in the number of children born out of wedlock and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, especially AIDS. The increase in AIDS cases is believed to be related to this migration to urban areas. AIDS awareness programs have been initiated to help deal with the problem.

Loss of Chagga culture is another consequence of outside contact. Some youth are dropping their Chagga names, and are using Christian or Muslim names that hide their cultural identity. Inter-marriage with other tribal groups is causing the Chagga to bury their cultural identity and adopt a more generalized Tanzanian one that is easily influenced by Western cultures.

The political scene has changed in Tanzania from a single party in 1965 to multi-party politics in 1992. This has encouraged more Chagga to be politically active by forming and joining new political parties. There is an increasing cohesion of the Chagga people along party lines and a renewed sense of cultural identity. However, multi-party politics are still in their infancy, and it is hoped that the country can steer clear of the political confrontation that has plagued neighboring countries.



## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Tanzania, as in many other African countries, women seeking more rights and gender equity face problems created by traditions and customary laws which often discriminate, oppress, and exploit women. Most often women are deprived of their rights to education, information, technology, the means of production such as land, as well as owning property even where the constitution and some laws provide room for gender equality. In Tanzania for example, inheritance laws marginalize women and girls where women are often seen as less equal in status and stature than men. Most institutions and organizations are structured hierarchically and dominated by males. Women's specific needs and interests are often taken less seriously with little regard for gender equality in spite of the constitution guaranteeing such rights for everyone irrespective of gender. It is in this context that we need to understand and place the rights of women in Chagga society.

In the present-day modernizing cultural context, Chagga women have slowly begun to change their roles in society. The increasing participation of Chagga females in modern secondary school and higher education has resulted in dramatic changes with regard to Chagga women's participation in cultural, social, and economic activities. A common saying among educated Chagga women is "education is my husband." An educated Chagga woman empowered with her western style education might go on to have children without marrying. She can have a modern job as a secretary or a bank clerk to sustain her household without a man being present. Even in traditional Chagga society, married women maintain close ties with their natal families and have a reputation for being strong-willed and stubborn and having "excessive power." There is no question that the growing power Chagga women enjoy in the modern world is a direct result of their schooling, which is used as cultural capital. Today more than half of the graduates of local secondary schools in Chaggaland are girls and a disproportionate number of Chagga women are found in national universities. Thus modern education has become a form of female inheritance, bestowing upon them independence from the male dominated culture. In short, Chagga women have shown that in modernizing society, it is possible for women to wield some power through education, a factor which opens the door to female empowerment.

With reference to homosexuality, sexual acts between males are illegal in Tanzania. Sections 154 to 157 of the Tanzanian penal code criminalize sexual relationships between men. The penalty for a person who is convicted with this offence is a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison. Sexual acts between women are not mentioned in the penal code. This does not mean that female homosexuality was unknown when the laws were enacted. Rather, that it was not considered a threat to society and was thus largely accepted and tolerated. The penal code is applicable on the Tanzanian mainland but not on the semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar. In 2004 Zanzibar enacted a law criminalizing female homosexual acts. In Zanzibar, sexual acts between women are punishable by a maximum prison term of five years; the same prison term also applies to gay men. Gays or lesbians who celebrate their union in a manner that approximates a marriage ceremony or who live together as spouses in Zanzibar can be subjected to seven years imprisonment if convicted. However, with more activism it is

hoped that in the near future restrictions on homosexuality will be eased.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# CHEWA

**PRONUNCIATION:** CHAY-wah

**LOCATION:** Malawi; Zambia; Mozambique

**POPULATION:** 9,300,000 in Maravi group

**LANGUAGE:** Chichewa; English

**RELIGION:** Protestant; Roman Catholic; traditional beliefs; Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Mozambicans; Zambians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Chewa, one of the Bantu peoples, live in central Malawi and spill over into parts of Zambia and Mozambique. Related groups such as the Nyanja and Mang'anja are found in southern Malawi. Together, the Chewa and related peoples are known as the Maravi group. Pushed by wars, disease, and other maladies from their original homeland around the Congo area, the Maravi were the first group of Bantu peoples to move into present-day Malawi during the early part of the 16th century. As a matter of fact, the name Malawi is derived directly from the term Maravi. The Maravi found fertile lands for settlement in the plains and valleys of central Malawi. Other Bantu groups such as the Tumbuka, Tonga, Yao, Lomwe, and Ngoni moved into Malawi long after the Maravi group had successfully established itself.

From their initial settlement at the southern tip of Lake Malawi, the Maravi began to disperse to different parts of the country. The group that migrated westwards into central Malawi and eastern parts of Zambia came to be known as the Chewa. Another splinter group moved into the Lower Shire valley of southern Malawi and became known as the Mang'anja. The era of the European and Arab slave trade during the 18th and 19th centuries ravaged the Mang'anja and the Chewa. Some areas in southern Malawi were completely depopulated. In the latter half of the 19th century, Malawi was colonized by the British and became known as Nyasaland. Malawi gained its independence from the British in 1964 under the leadership of Dr. Kamuzu Banda, a Chewa from central Malawi. Dr. Banda ruled Malawi as a dictator from 1964 to 1994, when democracy was finally restored in a dramatic but peaceful transition. Dr. Banda and his Malawi Congress Party lost the elections to the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by Bakili Muluzi, a former protégé of Dr. Banda.

President Bakili Muluzi ruled Malawi from 1994 until 2004 after two consecutive terms in office when he was replaced by his handpicked successor, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, in the general elections that were held in 2004. In 2002 he proposed an unpopular amendment to Malawi's constitution that would have allowed him to run for a third term, but this was abandoned due to demonstrations against him. During Muluzi's tenure as president, his administration was marred by scandal and corruption, particularly due to the sale of Malawi's reserves of maize to other countries shortly before the onset of a drought, which resulted in famine throughout the country. The millions of dollars realized from the sale of Malawi's food reserves have never been turned over, and it is widely suspected that it wound up in foreign accounts belonging to Muluzi and his supporters. Even after relinquishing power as president, Muluzi remains the head of the UDF. Soon after the take-

over of government by Bingu wa Mutharika in 2004 a dispute between Muluzi and Mutharika arose. This resulted in Mutharika leaving the UDF and forming his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party, in February 2005. In contravention of the two term limit as stipulated in the constitution, Muluzi announced in March 2007 that he would seek the party's nomination as its presidential candidate in 2009. The constitution refers to a limit of two consecutive terms of five years per term. Muluzi and his supporters believe that this enables him to run again after being out of office for a term while the majority of the population believe he is barred from running as president for the rest of his life after serving the two consecutive terms. Sentiments are rife in Malawi to amend the constitution so the word "consecutive" is removed.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

About the size of North Carolina, Malawi, an elongated landlocked country, is located in east-central Africa. It stretches for about 900 km (560 mi) from north to south and varies in width from 15 km to 160 km (9–100 mi) from east to west. The prominent geographical features include the spectacular Rift Valley occupied by Lake Malawi, Lake Malombe, and the Shire River; high mountains and plateaus; and high plains such as the Lilongwe Plains—the heartland of the Chewa people. Lake Malawi takes up nearly 20% of Malawi's land area.

The presence of mountains, plains, valleys, and plateaus in close proximity results in dramatic variations in climate, soils, rainfall, flora, and fauna. Because of the varied topography, the country experiences moderate and relatively comfortable temperatures throughout the year, ranging from a low of  $-9^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $15^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) during the cold season in June, to a high of  $29^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $85^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) during the dry, hot season in October. The highest temperatures are found along Lake Malawi and in the Lower Shire Valley, which is only 70 m (230 ft) above sea level. In these areas temperatures can get as high as  $38^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $100^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Climate in the plateaus and high plains such as the Lilongwe Plains is mostly temperate.

Lilongwe, the post-independence capital city of Malawi, is located in Chewa-dominated central Malawi. Established in the early 1970s, Lilongwe has grown rapidly and boasts a population of about 744,400 people. In terms of ethnic composition, Malawi is a conglomeration of 15 different ethnic groups, with the Maravi complex (Chewa and Mang'anja) as the most dominant group. The Maravi account for 58% (or 7,540,000 people) of the total population of Malawi, currently estimated at 13 million people. Other significant ethnic groups include the Lomwe (18% or 2,340,000), the Yao (13% or 1,690,000), and Ngoni (7% or 910,000). However, Chichewa is also spoken in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania (where it is known as Nyanja or Chinyanja). It is estimated that the total population that speaks this language in these four countries numbers upwards of 9,500,000 with the majority (7.5 million) resident in Malawi. The presence of this language in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Mozambique is testament to the migration of the peoples of Malawi both during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence era. During the pre-colonial era as Malawi began to fill up with people there was a Chewa diaspora into surrounding areas of Zambia and Mozambique. Once colonial rule was established, young Malawian men were encouraged by the British to migrate to Zambia and Zimbabwe to work in the mines and plantations there. The presence of



a sizable population of Chewa or Nyanja speakers in the surrounding countries can be explained by these migrations.

### 3 LANGUAGE

During the colonial era, Nyanja was the unified and standardized language for government and educational purposes in Malawi (then called Nyasaland). It was and remains the main language of all the peoples who have been grouped together as the Maravi for historical and cultural reasons. Two main dialects of Nyanja are clearly identifiable: Chichewa, spoken in the central region of Malawi and extending into Zambia; and Mang'anja, spoken in southern Malawi. Chichewa has risen to become the alternate name for Nyanja; it is understood widely throughout the country and hence qualifies as the lingua franca. English and Chichewa were decreed the national languages of Malawi during Dr. Banda's dictatorial rule. Although few Malawians speak English, it is the main business language and is used for official purposes in government offices and the private sector. English is also taught in schools as a second language. The persistence of English as one of the official languages of Malawi is largely due to the legacy of British colonial rule. In the post-Banda era, other ethnic groups are calling for the promotion of their languages, particularly Tumbuka, Yao, and Lomwe. These languages were suppressed and could not be aired on the only national radio during Dr. Banda's dictatorial rule in favor of Chichewa.

The pre-colonial dispersal of the Chewa peoples in various habitats and environments resulted in several dialects of the

language. The Chewa people who settled along the shores of Lake Malawi and the banks of its outlet, the Shire River, referred to themselves as aNyanja, the "lake people", and their particular variety of Chichewa came to be called Chi-Nyanja, or simply Nyanja, the language of the lake people. The Chichewa word for a large expanse of water is Nyanja. Those who moved into the interior, the area of tall grass, called themselves aChipeta, the dwellers of the savanna land. The word for tall grass (savanna) in Chichewa is chipeta.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Chewa have a rich set of beliefs, customs, and practices, all of which are central to group cohesion and survival. Much of the folklore among the Chewa dates back to the era before the arrival of European settlers, missionaries, and Christianity, and the stories have survived the pressure from Westernization and Christianity. Central to the customs and beliefs is the rich oral narrative expressed in the form of storytelling and songs about daily conditions of life such as birth, death, growing up, gender roles, polygamy, and marriage. Given the fact that the Chewa are mostly rural and engage in subsistence agriculture for their livelihood, it is no surprise that their folklore also dwells on issues of drought, fire, famine, and rainmaking.

Perhaps one of the central figures in Chewa myths is Mbona, a rainmaker among the Mang'anja of Southern Malawi. The story of this mythical hero runs much like that of Jesus Christ. He was the only son of his mother, conceived without a man, and was persecuted and eventually killed by his own people after performing miracles in the form of successful rainmaking dances in times of persistent drought. The story of Mbona has developed into the Mbona cult, a sacred oral text.

### 5 RELIGION

The main religion among the Chewa is Christianity, which was introduced by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the latter half of the 19th century. It is estimated that 34% of Malawi's population is Protestant, while 27% are Catholic, 19% hold to traditional beliefs, and 16% are Muslim. Although many of the Chewa people were converted to Christianity, most concurrently adhere to both traditional beliefs and Christianity. Indigenous religion among the Chewa revolves around a single supreme being, called by various names such as Chiuta, Mphambe, Leza, Mulungu, etc., and the veneration of departed spirits of ancestors, generally termed Mizimu. It was therefore easy for the Chewa and Mang'anja to adopt Christianity, which seemed to have a similar structure to their traditional beliefs.

Traditionally, in times of calamity, the chief would offer sacrifices of beer, goats, fowl, and flour to the spirits of his ancestors at a special shrine, with all his subjects in attendance. It is not uncommon today for a Chewa to consult a traditional diviner, who might order the offering of a sacrifice in the form of a pot of beer or a chicken to avert personal calamity. One key aspect of traditional religion that has survived colonial and Christian prohibition is the all-male Nyau secret society, which performs traditional rites of passage.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

One of the major holidays in Malawi is Independence Day on 6 July. Malawi obtained its independence from Great Britain in 1964 after almost 70 years of British rule. On 6 July each year, roads in urban areas are decorated with the Malawian flag.

During the day, political rallies are held with speeches made by prominent politicians. Women are encouraged to wear either the colorful Malawi Congress Party uniform or the current ruling party's colors (blue for the Democratic Progressive Party or yellow of the United Democratic Front), and to perform traditional dances in stadiums for political dignitaries and all to see. It is indeed a joyous occasion followed by a night of feasting and dancing. One other significant secular holiday is 3 March, in remembrance of those who died during the struggle for independence. On this day prayers are offered in churches throughout Malawi and somber music is broadcast on the radio.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Devout Roman Catholics and/or Protestant Christians follow the Christian code of conduct in terms of baptism, marriage, and death. However, in much of Chewa society, traditional rites of passage are still an integral part of growing up. Generally, Chewa and Mang'anja boys between the ages of 12 and 16 are initiated into a semisecret society called Nyau, "The Great Dance." It is literally an association of masked dancers whose masks come in all types, from wooden masks to basketry-manufactured animal likenesses, and who parade in the villages. The masked dancers portray the spirits of the dead who have returned from the grave to conduct initiation and funeral rituals. If a Chewa man has not been initiated into the all-male Nyau society, he does not command full adult male status. During initiation, boys are secluded in the bush for instruction and discipline for about three days. Each village has its own association, but membership gained at one village is acceptable at other villages.

Girls from age 9 to 16 undergo a series of puberty and initiation rites known as *chinamwali*, which are administered by elderly women instructors called *anankungwi*. In present-day Chewaland, one finds two types of girls' initiation, one that is church-sponsored and the other that is purely traditional. The church-sponsored initiation ceremony instructs girls in a Christian way. The traditional initiation ceremony, which can last as long as two to three weeks, teaches young girls traditional customs as they relate to issues of sexuality and reproduction. Usually the women of the village accompany the young girls into the bush and put them through a course of teasing and instruction, returning each evening to the village for dancing and feasting. Drums are used to create a rhythm for dancing and singing songs, some of which illustratively teach the girls the body movements performed during sexual intercourse. In the bush, the young girls are given advice about cleanliness and politeness. They are admonished not to enter their parents' bedrooms and to avoid their male friends because sexual relationships out of wedlock result in pregnancy and might lead to diseases such as gonorrhea and AIDS. It is only after the initiation that a girl becomes a woman. In traditional Chewa society, women are in charge of issues of reproduction and make a secret of it; men are never allowed to witness births and are never told how a child is born. On the other hand, men make a secret of death through their all-male Nyau secret cult.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

To greet each other, men and women of the same age group will shake hands vigorously. Hugging is not common in Ma-

lawi. When a man greets his mother-in-law, he has to stay at a distance from her and greet her verbally; no handshaking between the two is allowed since they are in an avoidance relationship. A daughter-in-law, however, has a close relationship with her mother-in-law. When one receives a guest it is customary to prepare food, preferably a chicken, and it is considered rude manners for the guest to decline any food that might be served, even if he or she has already eaten. When an older person is talking to a younger person, it is considered rude for the younger person to look directly into the face of the older person. A younger person is supposed to bow or look to the side, or even squat on the ground, when being addressed by an elder. Kissing in public is frowned upon. It is considered an offense for boys and girls that have gone through initiation ceremonies to enter their parents' bedrooms or huts. When growing up, boys are discouraged from performing tasks that are considered women's business such as entering the kitchen, washing pots and dishes, drawing water from the well, or fetching firewood. Before initiation, girls and boys are encouraged to play together, but after initiation they should stay apart until married. However, in urban areas modern forms of dating are quite common.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Only 17% of Malawi's population is urban and very few of the urban population are Chewa. The majority of the Chewa live in rural areas in nucleated villages where subsistence farming is the primary economic activity. In rural areas there is little access to modern amenities of life such as health care facilities, schools, and electricity. Among the major debilitating diseases are malaria during the rainy season, bilharzia, intestinal worm infections, tuberculosis, measles, and, recently, the proliferation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is estimated that over 16% of the adult population in Malawi is HIV positive. The general health of the population is poor, and the time spent being sick, attending curative services, looking after the sick, or attending funerals is very great for most of the people. Malnutrition of all forms and anaemia are also quite common. The primary cause of malnutrition is not a lack of food as such, but rather the prevalence of certain traditional customs and beliefs about foods, patterns of eating, food distribution within the family, sources of food for the household, methods of processing, and the general customs and value systems. The result of the poor state of health is manifested in the high rates of early childhood mortality. The mortality rate for children under the age of five currently stands at 178 deaths per 1,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is estimated at 113 deaths per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy is low, only 46 years for men and 46.7 years for women.

There does not seem to be a particular pattern in the arrangement of huts in any given village. The arrangement of huts and the type of domestic architecture is determined largely by location and the availability of building materials. Generally, the Chewa and Mang'anja live in compact villages, which in the past were essential for defense against attack from other ethnic groups, such as the Ngoni and Yao, and occasionally from lions. The huts are either circular or oblong with wattle walls, plastered outside and inside with mud and roofed with thatch. It is not unusual to find a modern type of house in rural areas, built in a rectangular fashion using bricks, cement, and corrugated iron sheets for the roof, with sawn timber doors

and glass windows. In urban areas such as Lilongwe, housing is in short supply and the majority of people are forced to live in shanty towns and other low-income areas. In the city of Lilongwe, journey to work for the low-income groups is mostly on foot, by minibus, or by bicycle. It is quite common for people to walk 10 miles round-trip to and from work every day.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Chewa and Mang'anja are matrilineal in their kinship system. Descent and inheritance are passed through the female line. The marriage process is simple and involves the appointment of marriage sureties, called *ankhoswe*, with the maternal uncle as the principal sponsor. Although boys and girls choose their own partners, a marriage cannot be recognized as valid without the approval of maternal uncles. Residence is matrilineal and the husband establishes the household in the wife's village. A father has no control over children born in a marriage, since such children are considered to be members of the mother's matrilineage and are therefore under the guidance of the maternal uncle.

Divorce is also relatively simple and quite common. A man can be divorced on a number of grounds such as failing to perform marital tasks, e.g., hoeing for his mother-in-law. Although rarely practiced these days, a successful son-in-law can be given a second wife if his first dies, or even while the first wife is still alive, as a gesture of gratitude for his satisfactory services. Polygamy, the practice of having more than one wife, used to be common, but its extent is hard to determine in contemporary Chewa society. National-level census estimates indicate that about 33% of Malawi males over the age of 40 have more than one wife.

Girls enter into marriage at a median age of about 17 years. Fertility rates are very high and a woman can expect to bear seven children by the time she goes through the 15–44 year reproductive age range. Having many children is considered to be very desirable since a man or woman with many children is considered rich, as are his relatives both by birth and marriage. More children serve as a means of social security in old age, and they provide much needed labor in herding livestock and farming.

In urban areas and even in rural areas, weddings are increasingly being conducted in churches and receptions usually follow soon thereafter, similar to marriage ceremonies in industrialized countries. For those who can afford it, the bridegroom wears a Western-style suit while the bride wears the typical Western white wedding dress with a veil.

### **11 CLOTHING**

In urban areas, women usually wear a skirt and a blouse or a modern colorful dress. The most common form of dress for women in rural areas is a loincloth tied around the waist, and a blouse. Men wear pants, shirts, shorts, and occasionally a suit. Middle-income professionals are always nicely dressed in Western-style suits. During Dr. Banda's dictatorial rule, there was a strict dress code where women could not wear slacks, shorts, or miniskirts, while men could not wear long hair. This dress code was repealed in 1994 under the democratically elected government of Bakili Muluzi. In spite of the repeal of the dress code, Malawi's clothing continues to be conservative. For women, this means skirts that do not show knees and do

not fit too tightly. Malawians consider women's thighs to be suggestive, therefore they must be covered at all times.

### **12 FOOD**

The Chewa diet consists mainly of *nsima* (thick porridge) made from maize flour that is rich in carbohydrates and poor in protein. To compensate for the lack of protein in maize flour, *nsima* is eaten with a side dish called *ndiwo* made from a variety of leafy vegetables, beans, poultry, eggs, game, meat from livestock, fish, insects, etc. There are a number of beliefs, customs, and taboos that restrict certain categories of people, such as pregnant women and children, from eating certain side dishes. Because of these beliefs, diets may be unbalanced for certain segments of society, resulting in malnutrition. For example, pregnant women are forbidden to eat eggs for fear of bearing bald-headed babies. Like women, children are forbidden to eat eggs and rabbits lest they develop bald heads and twitching noses like rabbits. In most cases, children are fed on gravy and salt water with *nsima*, while the father and other males are given top priority—the best side dishes such as eggs and poultry. Whatever remains goes to the women. The wife is expected to look after her husband first, the children next, and herself last.

*Nsima* with *ndiwo* is sometimes eaten twice a day, at lunch time and at dinner time, but most of the time this main dish is offered only at dinner time since the mother is busy with other chores during the day such as farming, drawing water from the well, fetching firewood, and so on. In the interim, children have to make do with snacks such as roasted cassava, roasted maize, sweet potatoes, sugarcane, wild fruits, or wild insects such as roasted grasshoppers, flying termites, etc. Men, too, sometimes experience food restrictions such as not eating *thelele*, a slimy liquid-like vegetable, since it is believed that they can lose their virility. In urban centers such as Lilongwe, the high-income groups tend to have a diversified diet, while the low-income groups tend to be restricted in what they can afford.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In Malawi there are two major systems of education, namely, the formal and the informal. The informal or traditional system of education (see **Rites of passage**), which is still very much a part of rural society, is encouraged by the government on the basis that it instills respect for tradition and culture. The formal education system is patterned along the British system, which consists of three tiers: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The students who do extremely well in the Malawi Certificate Examination at the end of the four-year secondary school program (and these are few in number) are then selected to attend the five constituent colleges of the University of Malawi. In recent years, adult literacy rates have seen dramatic improvements rising to 54% for females and 75% for males aged 15 years and over who are able to read and write Chichewa, English, or both languages. There is no national service for students in Malawi. Census data in Malawi indicate large gender differentials as well as regional disparities in educational attainment. For example, in 1987, for every 100 females in school there were 152 males. School attendance rates for all age groups are higher for males than for females.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

There is a rich musical and dance heritage among the Chewa and the Mang'anja of central and southern Malawi. In traditional settings, songs are sung at initiation rites, rituals, marriage ceremonies, or during post-harvest celebrations. There are puberty songs, praise songs, funeral songs, work songs, beer-drinking songs, coronation songs for chiefs, etc. It is not uncommon to see women sing as they go about their daily chores. Women employ sung poetry as a strategy in defining and interpreting gender roles, especially as they concern a negotiation of their standing in society. Several traditional dances are also popular among the Chewa, especially during weddings and other festivals. For example, *mganda* is an all-male dance from central Malawi in which about 15 men form a troupe. Each of the dancers uses some kind of a local saxophone made from a gourd, and they sing and dance in unison following a complex series of steps. The female counterpart of *mganda* is *chimtali*, usually performed at weddings. A group of women dance in a circle with a drum in the center and seductively gyrate their hips, bosoms, and the like. There is also the all-male Nyau masquerade dance at initiation and funerary rituals. The masked dancers are accompanied by several drummers and a women's chorus.

In addition to the traditional dances, there is also the modern popular culture imported from abroad or from regional music centers such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa. This type of music includes reggae music, disco, breakdance, rap, etc., currently popular in bars and beer- and dance-halls.

During the post-independence era, Malawi in general has also seen the rise of a few internationally recognized literary scholars such as the famous poet, Jack Mapanje, the veteran historian and fiction writer, Paul Zeleza, and others who include Steve Chimombo, Legson Kayira, Chipasula, Rubadiri, and Felix Munthali.

## 15 WORK

Approximately 90% of the people in Malawi live in rural areas where subsistence farming is the primary economic activity, growing a variety of crops such as maize (the staple food crop), beans, sorghum, peanuts, rice, pumpkins, cassava, and tobacco (the main cash crop). The formal and informal sectors in the major urban centers of Malawi employ only a quarter of the labor force population. Evidently, as population continues to grow rapidly, land resources are becoming scarce and it is unlikely that the subsistence sector will continue to meet the needs of each household.

## 16 SPORTS

During the colonial era, the British introduced soccer to Malawi, and it is still the main sport throughout the country, especially in the urban areas of Lilongwe, Mzuzu, Zomba, and Blantyre. The Malawi national team is quite a force in southern Africa's soccer competitions and has on occasion won a number of regional championships. Soccer clubs compete for a number of prized trophies throughout the year. Every Saturday and Sunday, thousands of people converge on Civo Stadium in Lilongwe, and Chichiri Stadium in Blantyre, to watch various clubs play skillful soccer. Even in rural areas, soccer is the most common sport among school children. Basketball is also a growing major sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In terms of entertainment and other recreation activities, young professionals in urban areas flock to Western-style clubs and bars. In rural areas, girls and boys may perform traditional and modern dances in the moonlight to entertain themselves and other spectators. There is no television in Malawi, but upper- and middle-income families may own a TV and VCR. Individual families may thus be able to treat themselves to a rental movie.

For young boys and girls in rural areas there is a rich repertoire of games which keeps them busy all day and in the evenings. Among the most popular games for rural children are hunting small game such as mice and rabbits, hide-and-seek at night, tug of war, and many others. As one of the most cherished activities, hunting mice is usually a daylong group expedition for boys. This activity provides important skills for the future in terms of instilling hunting skills, building team cooperation, and providing a little food for each boy's household in addition to being fun and exciting. In rural villages hide-and-seek is played at night under bright moonlight. Rules prohibit hiding inside a house, and this adds extra excitement. Outdoors in the dim light offered by the moon, boys and girls in teams scurry and scamper around the village darting from place to place seeking better hiding spots, adding mystery, challenge, and enjoyment to the game for both hidiers and seekers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In spite of the fact that the Chewa of central Malawi are not known for their art and are rarely mentioned in art history literature, they do exhibit a rich tradition of basketry and carved masks, which includes two large and intricate basketry masks known as *Kasiyamaliro* and *Chimkoko*. These masks are used in initiation rituals for the men's Nyau secret society. In urban areas, one also tends to find a rich variety of wood carvings, oil paintings, and other beautiful works of art depicting various indigenous village scenes and daily ways of living, for sale to tourists.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Malawi has 15 different ethnic groups which live in relative peace and harmony with each other. Inter-ethnic warfare is rare and uncommon. During Dr. Banda's dictatorial rule, human rights violations were quite common. Persons suspected of being critical to Dr. Banda's rule were detained without charge or trial, tortured, and sometimes assassinated. Under the previous government of Bakili Muluzi and the current government of Bingu wa Mutharika, human rights conditions have improved somewhat and people seem to be freer in expressing themselves and in openly criticizing government policies. However, the economic conditions, particularly inflation, have gotten worse because of drought that hit the country hard between 1999 and 2003, economic mismanagement and corruption in government circles under Muluzi's government, and worsening terms of trade. During 2006–2008 the country experienced a bumper crop of maize due to good rains and government subsidized fertilizer distributed to needy small-holder farmers in rural areas.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional matrilineal Chewa society women play a central role in cultural and economic activities. The land and the village belong to women. When a man gets married, he traditionally has to leave his village to reside in his wife's village, farm his wife's fields and beget children for his wife's lineage rather than his own. Should the marriage end in divorce or should the woman be widowed the property and children automatically go to the wife and her people and the man leaves his wife's village empty handed. However, since the advent of colonial rule many Chewa traditions with regard to gender issues have undergone transformation resulting in the lowering of women's status. It can be argued that the deterioration in the status of women among the Chewa is not a reflection of "traditional Chewa society" but rather something that came to Malawi via the contact with Europeans in the 16th century and subsequent colonization. The status and power of women during the pre-colonial period was far much healthier than it is today. There is a saying in Malawi that men among the matrilineal societies are forever grateful to the British for liberating them from the tyranny of the matrilineal code of conduct that was often in favor of women than men. In pre-colonial times, women played significant roles in economic, political and spiritual spheres of their communities. Women were often the most powerful spiritual figures, some became very powerful rulers of their territories as queens and paramount chiefs, and even today, they continue to play significant roles in producing food and propelling the Malawian economy.

Modernization and the ensuing social and economic transformation has brought about the erosion of the high status women used to enjoy in traditional settings. In the modernized society of today, they have been relegated to the position of "second class citizens." In an era of HIV/AIDS women have experienced the brunt of the epidemic due in large measure to their deteriorating and unequal status to men. Today, women are often married off early without regard to their potential or actual educational achievement, and are generally not allowed to partake in economically gainful activities that might lend them a semblance of empowerment. Their economic and social vulnerability is often made worse by the lack of formal educational investment in them, which leaves them without access to information vital to their reproductive health and to knowledge and prevention of diseases such as AIDS. The sad truth is that women in Malawi tend to have smaller entitlement bundles than do men because they have lower wages and are not as likely to be highly educated, or to receive government assistance, or benefit from international aid programs. Women are frequently denied education beyond primary levels because they are primed for marriage rather than careers. They are subsequently constrained in their choices of occupation, and the areas of employment offering livable wages are especially scarce.

With reference to sexual activities, the Chewa had a detailed code of conduct that regulated sexual relations between men and women and sex between those of the same gender. Homosexuality, adultery, and bestiality (i.e. sex with animals) were forbidden and sometimes punishable by death. In present day Malawi, homosexuality is illegal under the penal code and considered an "act against the order of nature." Foreigners caught in homosexual acts have been deported. Malawi na-

tionals engaging in homosexual activities can and have been imprisoned or detained without charge or trial.

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—by E. Kalipeni

# COLORED PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Coloureds, Coloreds, Brown People

**LOCATION:** South Africa (especially Western Cape and Northern Cape Provinces, urban areas)

**POPULATION:** 4.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Afrikaans, English

**RELIGION:** Christianity, Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The word *colored* in a racial context is considered by many to be pejorative or disparaging, but it is widely used to this day in serious discussions of South Africa's social and economic issues because it describes an important population entity and because nobody has been able to come up with a better or more accurate term for this purpose. It is fairly common for the term *colored* to be preceded by the phrase "so-called" as a demonstration of the speaker's ambiguous feelings. They were categorized as such by means of the Population Registration Act, No 30 of 1950. They number approximately 4.2 million and are the descendants of European settlers from the Netherlands, Germany, France, indigenous people of South Africa, especially the San and Khoekhoen, and slaves from the Dutch East Indies who were brought to the country during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The "Colored" population suffered many indignities under apartheid in terms of education, health care, and basic exclusion of other privileges, like marrying a person of another race. When apartheid laws were introduced after 1948, many communities were forcibly removed from their original residential areas. District Six in Cape Town is an example of such an area where forced eviction of "Colored" families took place because it was earmarked for urban restoration. Many of these families were moved to the Cape Flats areas with its associated problems of gangsterism, vigilante groups, etc. Since democracy in 1994, however, all the people of South Africa have the right to live wherever their economic position and preference permit.

Most coloreds tended to work as domestic servants, farm laborers, and fisher folk, but large numbers were also involved in the skilled trades like masons, tailors, and seamstresses with which craftsmanship they are associated to this day.

Culturally and economically, coloreds were always more closely associated with the dominant white population than were Africans. They spoke the same languages (English and Afrikaans), worshiped in the same churches (mostly Christian Protestant, but also some Catholic), enjoyed the same foods, wore the same kind of clothes and—especially in later years—enjoyed the same sports and pastimes. In spite of this common heritage, they were never fully integrated into white society. Today there is still a fairly widespread sense among coloreds that they continue to be victims of discrimination in South Africa, but this time at the hands of the black majority government. In a recent news report, a colored South African was quoted as protesting: "We weren't white enough in the old regime and now we're not black enough." This perception is based on allegations that, in narrowing the economic gap between whites and blacks, the government is willing to remove many of the

gains achieved by coloreds through their own hard work and sacrifice. It is but one delicate problem among the many difficulties facing the young democracy.

Subgroups were and, often still today, are recognized among the coloreds. The dominant subgroup is the so-called Cape Coloreds who are, as was indicated, descended from various indigenous people and European settlers and are mainly to be found in the Western Cape region and in the Northern Cape. The 1950 Population Registration Act in fact made allowance for six sub-categories of coloreds, and some of these still self-identify as distinct communities. Examples of such communities are the Griquas, Malays, Rehoboth Basters (of Namibia), and the Nama.

The Griqua and Nama, together with people like the Korana, more properly can be identified as Khoekhoen (previously Khoikhoen), who were conventionally grouped with the San (Bushmen) under the term Khoesan (Khoisan) due to the similarity in their click languages. Contemporary identity for communities such as these is a complex matter. The Griqua for example, are still regarded as "Colored"—even the identity documents of many still carry this designation. However, they have a strong sense of identity and number approximately 300,000. As descendants of mostly Khoekhoen and Afrikaner communities, they formed a distinct group as early as the 17th century.

For some Griqua people it has been possible to register as Griqua while others who legitimately trace Griqua descent prefer not to be identified as such. It is also possible to "become" Griqua by, for example, marrying into the Griqua community or by joining the Griqua movement through membership in the Griqua Independent Church. As a group however, they have obtained international recognition and in 1998 already, the United Nations awarded them, one of South Africa's oldest peoples, First Nation status.

The Cape Malay is also a large subgroup, primarily centered in particular neighborhoods of the Western Cape Province and number about 180,000. They are descended from the indigenous Khoekhoen, slaves brought to South Africa by the Dutch East India Company and European settlers. They have retained many cultural elements from their diverse origin but they are recognized as a distinct and close-knit community, mostly because of their Islam religion and location.

The same Act in fact also made allowance for a category "Other Colored" for those who did not obviously qualify for the sub-categories mentioned above. An example of such a group is the Buys community at Buysdorp near Louis Trichardt (Makhado) in Limpopo Province. The settlement has approximately 400 permanent residents, all of whom are related to one another, but many more live and work elsewhere in South Africa. They are the descendants of the well-known Coenraad de Buys (grandson of French Huguenot Jean du Bois) who had married several indigenous women and settled in the area even before the Voortrekkers (Boer pioneers) had established the first settlement of white people in the Limpopo Province at the town of Schoemansdal. They, too, have a fierce sense of identity and prefer not to be categorized as belonging to the general "Brown"/"Colored" grouping.

Those first few of the Karretjie People (see elsewhere in this volume) who eventually obtained identity documents were also classified "Colored," but as itinerant people of the Great Karoo region of South Africa, they also regarded themselves as





distinct, as descendants of a First People of South Africa, the Xam Bushmen.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Most of South Africa's colored people live in both the urban and rural areas of the Western Cape (main city: Cape Town) and Northern Cape Provinces, where they have numerical superiority and constitute influential political and cultural groups. However, they have also migrated to other major centers and significant concentrations can be found around the cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Durban. There are also important groups in the neighboring nations of Namibia (see elsewhere in this volume) and Zimbabwe.

In the Western Cape Province—regarded as their traditional homeland—colored people play a vital role in the economically important agriculture industry (fruit, wine, wheat and dairy products), not only as farm laborers but also as managers, skilled artisans, and increasingly as property-owning entrepreneurs. They are also a dominant group in the fishing industry that has grown up in the rich cold waters of the country's west coast, where the Benguella Current has helped to create excellent trawling and line-fishing conditions. In the cities, many members of the colored community are engaged in trades such as carpentry, plumbing, auto repair, and construction, but they are also prominent in professions such as health care, accounting, law, and education.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Colored South Africans speak two languages, mainly Afrikaans, but also English. Afrikaans is a language found only in South Africa that evolved from the Dutch spoken by the early white settlers with influences from other groups who settled in the country. In an informal setting, such as day-to-day life at home, it is not unusual for coloreds—and to a lesser extent other groups—to combine the two languages in a distinctive local dialect that is very colorful and expressive. This local dialect has little formal written literature, but it is widely popular and accepted as a phenomenon that has given Cape Town its special character. It is particularly effective when used in a humorous context and in the light-hearted songs known as “moppies.” In formal settings, however, colored speakers use either formal English or Afrikaans.

Among the Griqua for example, who were also formally classified colored and are still generally regarded as such, there is a concerted effort to revive their original Khoekhoen/click language. Khoekhoen is a surviving dialect and is taught in a school in the Richtersveld area. Researchers in the Great Karoo region have also found individual Karretjie People who could still speak a “southern” Griqua/Korana dialect.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Because of their historical association with whites, coloreds share the general folklore heritage common to the Western world. However, there are also some (dwindling) legacies that apparently came from the early mingling with slaves from the Dutch East Indies—notably the telling of *goël* (literally, to practice magic) or ghost stories, which are frequently as amusing as they are alarming. One of the features of Cape Town in summer is the strong southeast wind known as the “Cape Doctor.” Sometimes it blows so hard that people can hardly walk in the city and the harbor closes to shipping. Southeaster time, when windows are rattling and doors are creaking, is ideal for the telling of *goël* stories.

## 5 RELIGION

The colored people of Cape Town observe two main religions—Christianity (mostly Protestant, but also some Catholicism) and Islam, which plays an influential role in a large sector of the population. In urban areas where colored people live in large numbers, it is common to hear the faithful being summoned to prayer from mosques. Local leaders of both major religions were prominent during the struggle against apartheid. Some, such as the Reverend Allan Boesak, became familiar figures on the international stage as pressure built up against apartheid. Boesak is still active as a public commentator. Because of the powerful influence of Islam, many colored people take an intense interest in events in the Middle East and other parts of the world where the interests of their fellow Muslims are at stake. Both Christianity and Islam are seen as factors in the emergence of a strong conservative element in the colored community.

Amongst the Griqua, their “Independent Church” has been an important mechanism for mobilization and cultural revival.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

For more than 100 years, Cape Town's colored community was associated with an annual New Year's Day "minstrel" parade through the streets of the city and along the main roads leading into town. Neighborhoods formed troops that dressed in colorful satin costumes and marched or danced behind guitar and banjo bands. Each troop had its own combination of colors. When they all arrived at central sports fields, they competed for trophies to the delight of large crowds of spectators. According to historians, the tradition began in the 19th century, when a local baker dressed up a group of people to advertise his breads and cakes. But, it was largely abandoned during the latter days of apartheid because many members of the community felt the name "Coon Carnival," by which it became known, was derogatory. Since democracy the tradition was revived and the citizens of Cape Town are again enjoying the minstrel bands and their humorous songs.

A traditional song is "January, February." Its words consist only of the 12 months of the year, sung to a catchy tune and rhythm. Everyone knows this song, and spectators often join in when the band marches by. There are many other songs—some funny, some sad—but all are unique to the spirit of the Cape and its people. Another well-known traditional song describes the arrival off the Cape of the Confederate raider Alabama during the American Civil War. Thousands of people climbed to the top of Signal Hill overlooking Cape Town to see the warship and witness any battles that might take place with Yankee enemies. The event is remembered in a universally known song called *Daar Kom Die Alabama* ("There Comes The Alabama").

More serious is the annual competition between Malay choirs—choirs made up of the descendants of workers who were brought to the Cape during the days of the Dutch East India Company, which established a replenishment station and vegetable garden at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Their songs range from localized versions of modern tunes to traditional ballads and joke songs called "moppies." An especially delightful moppie tells the story of a baboon trying to learn how to swim. He learns very quickly when he sees a crocodile in front of him and a shark behind.

The official public holidays of South Africa of course apply to the coloreds as well and these are: New Year's Day, January 1; Human Rights Day, March 21; Good Friday and Family Day, which vary; Freedom Day, April 27; Worker's Day, May 1; Youth Day, June 16; National Women's Day, August 9; Heritage Day, September 24; Day of Reconciliation, December 16; Christmas Day, December 25; Day of Goodwill, December 26.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birthdays are celebrated by parties where the guests bring gifts. Baptism of infants, confirmation, and first communion are celebrated among Christian colored people. On their 21st birthday, many young adults in South Africa receive a symbolic key to adulthood.

However, as part of the revival of Khoekhoen/Griqua culture and a renewed awareness of an own identity, a number of "Kaptyns" or Chiefs are again recognized. The *nâu* inauguration ceremony for such chiefs has been resurrected in some quarters. It involves slaughtering a sheep, the use of its blood for purification, the slow circular movement of the participants whose feet are bathed in the blood, the tasting of bitter *boegoe*

and sweet honey—symbolic of both bad and good times—and finally, an oath of loyalty is taken.

A few other traditions and rituals that still persist include (in Griquastad, an important Griqua town): the *hokmeisie* or girls' initiation ceremony; the *mokwele* or betrothal ceremony; and the marriage ceremony involving a special dance, *stapdans*.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Even though there was legal separation of races in South Africa for most of the 20th century, there was always contact between whites and coloreds. Culturally, the two groups shared similar interests and background. They listened to the same music and saw the same movies (even though theaters were segregated), used the same school textbooks and lived in close proximity (although residential areas were largely separate). They met in the workplace, stores, and the street. As a result, close friendships were formed and feelings of mutual respect developed, even though the previous regime did everything possible to keep racial and ethnic groups separate. Until 1986 it was illegal for members of different race groups to have sexual relations, for example, and people were actually prosecuted for breaking this law. Thus, the removal of all race laws has been easy for whites and colored to adjust to in terms of their relations with each other. Relations between coloreds and members of the black majority are tenuous in the new system. There have been some tensions based on the perception by coloreds that the majority regime may not always have colored interests in mind.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Under apartheid, whites enjoyed most of the advantages and privileges in terms of education, health care, land allocation, and so forth. Next in the pecking order were coloreds, followed by blacks. For example, when the transition to non-racial democracy took place in 1994, the student-to-teacher ratio in white schools was 18 to 1; in colored schools, it was 22 to 1 and in black schools it was 50 to 1. Coloreds lived in close proximity to their white neighbors even though there was a large income gap between the two groups. When most of the apartheid laws were introduced after 1948, many colored people were forcibly moved from their traditional residential areas to segregated suburbs and townships. This development was bitterly resented and resisted, and it resulted in the destruction not only of well-established communities but of families themselves. Forced removals remain one of the worst memories of the old South Africa. It created problems that are still beyond solution in many cases. One of the most resented examples occurred in the center of Cape Town, where an area known as District Six was earmarked for urban renewal. District Six was the traditional home of many colored families, and it certainly needed renewal. But, it was renewed for whites and the original inhabitants were moved to bleak townships on the sandy Cape Flats, where crime, alcoholism, and other social ills soon became rampant. These townships and suburbs still exist (as do many of the problems they created) but colored people can now live wherever their economic status allows and they have increasingly moved into formerly exclusive white suburbs. Some communities of coloreds like the Buyses and the Dunns have preferred to stay in and hang on to their own exclusive pockets of the land—in the far northern Soutpansberg of the Limpopo Province and the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, respectively.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Colored families tend to be extended, conservative, and mutually supportive. In fact, it was largely these qualities that enabled the community to survive the difficult earlier years. The sense of interdependence is inclined to translate to neighborhood and community as well.

## 11 CLOTHING

Colored South Africans wear clothing, both formal and casual, similar to that worn by people in major industrial nations anywhere in the world. Young people wear jeans, sneakers, and T-shirts just like their counterparts in the United States and Canada, and baseball caps have become popular too. Jackets and ties are becoming less common in more formal venues, such as the workplace, largely following the trends elsewhere in the world.

## 12 FOOD

Colored people are renowned for their culinary skills and have contributed more to South Africa's heritage in this area than any other group. They are especially famous for wonderful stews—known as *bredies*—which are traditionally made with mutton and lamb and prepared with a base of tomatoes, cabbage, or local plants known as *waterblommetjies*. Also popular are small, triangular pies known as *samoesas*, which contain a curried mince mixture. *Samoesas* are ideal for snacks or lunch and are often served as appetizers or at cocktail parties. The influence of the Dutch East Indies is strong, especially in the lasting popularity of curries that can be served warm or cold, strong or mild. A special favorite is curried fish, which is prepared with local *hake* (known as stock fish) or a local deep-sea fish called *kingklip*, or *snoek*, which looks rather like the familiar barracuda. Among working men, it is common for the mid-day meal to consist of a loaf of bread with the inside hollowed out and the hole filled up with a *bredie*. This substantial meal gives a worker plenty of energy for the rest of the day's labor.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education has long been seized upon as the road to self-improvement among the members of South Africa's colored community. As a result, families will save and sacrifice to send their children to the best available schools and colleges. In the past, colored people were allowed to attend only those institutions designated for their use. While these schools were better equipped than those allocated to black Africans, they were nevertheless inferior to the schools for whites. In the present open society with free access to facilities and institutions, colored students increasingly feature prominently in the best schools and foremost universities.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In spite of disadvantages in educational opportunities, the so-called "colored schools" and the University of the Western Cape (originally exclusively for coloreds) have produced notable figures in the fields of medicine, law, government, diplomacy, the arts, engineering, commerce and industry and education itself. Some of South Africa's finest writers and poets, such as the internationally acclaimed Adam Small, come from the colored community. The cultural revival amongst particularly the Griqua people has been instrumental in both a renewed empha-

sis on a nearly forgotten heritage and a revitalized awareness of identity. An important focus of this cultural revival and identity is personified by two women. Krotoa ("mother" of the Khoekhoen) had special musical and linguistic skills but was adopted by Jan and Maria van Riebeeck (who established the first Dutch settlement at the Cape). They changed Krotoa's name to Eva and "polluted" her lifestyle. The other is Saartjie Baardman, who was taken to Europe in 1810 and paraded in front of the British and French public. Her remains were repatriated to South Africa in 2002 and ceremonially buried in the Eastern Cape where she grew up.

In keeping with the above, the Griqua recognize their own *Volksimbole* (National symbols). In addition to their Independent Church, they have a *Volksvlag* (National Flag) with the colors, bottle green (fruitful life), red (Blood of Christ), white (peace), blue (the color of heaven, pure love) and sea green (derived from the Karoo *kanniedood vetplant*—succulent), a *sinnebeeld* (symbol), which is the *kanniedood* (ad finem) because it is so hardy and durable; and finally a *Volkslied* (National Anthem) *God Eewig, Groot en Goed* (God Eternal, Great and Good), which is sung in Dutch.

## 15 WORK

During apartheid coloreds were kept by law out of the best jobs and the best schools and forced to travel long distances each day to low-paying jobs. The result has been a high incidence of crime, alcoholism, and other social ills. Remarkable leaders, however, have emerged from the community to address these problems and turn them around. A focus on education has produced doctors, scientists, lawyers, industrialists, and artists in record numbers for such a small community. Many members of the colored community are now anxious about current government trends, which they fear will lead to their becoming victims of affirmative action for Africans. They do not want to lose what they have gained over the years at such great cost. The community's leaders do recognize, however, the unfairness of the old system, a system in which, as recently as 1990, a colored child was 24 times more likely to be helped by a welfare grant than a black child.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular sports are soccer, cricket, rugby, and track and field. Now that the community has the opportunity to develop socially and economically, there is increasing interest in the sports of tennis, swimming, golf, yachting, wind- and wave-surfing, and individuals are excelling and gaining national colors in these sports. South Africa has an ideal climate for all outdoor sports and the colored community is as active as any other in the country. Hiking and mountaineering are also extremely popular, especially in the Western Cape, where there are interesting climbs that are easily accessible and the weather is mild for much of the year. On weekends, it is common for families and friends to get together for picnics and barbecues at the beach, alongside a river, or in a backyard.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For the most part, the colored community's entertainment is the same as that of people in any other industrialized society—pop and classical music, the movies, dances and nightclubs, and radio and television. Some members of the community

have gone on to become entertainers with international reputations as singers and musicians.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES

Colored people enjoy varied hobby activities typical of citizens of an industrialized society.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many of the community's problems can be directly attributed to the treatment it received when South Africa was governed by a system that separated people according to race. The result was a relatively poor education because schools were not given the same facilities afforded to "white" schools and because many people had to abandon schooling at an early age to help support the family. Compounding this situation were the breakups of communities and even families as people were moved into townships and suburbs defined by the race of their inhabitants. In addition, many coloreds were kept in low-paying jobs because of job-discrimination laws.

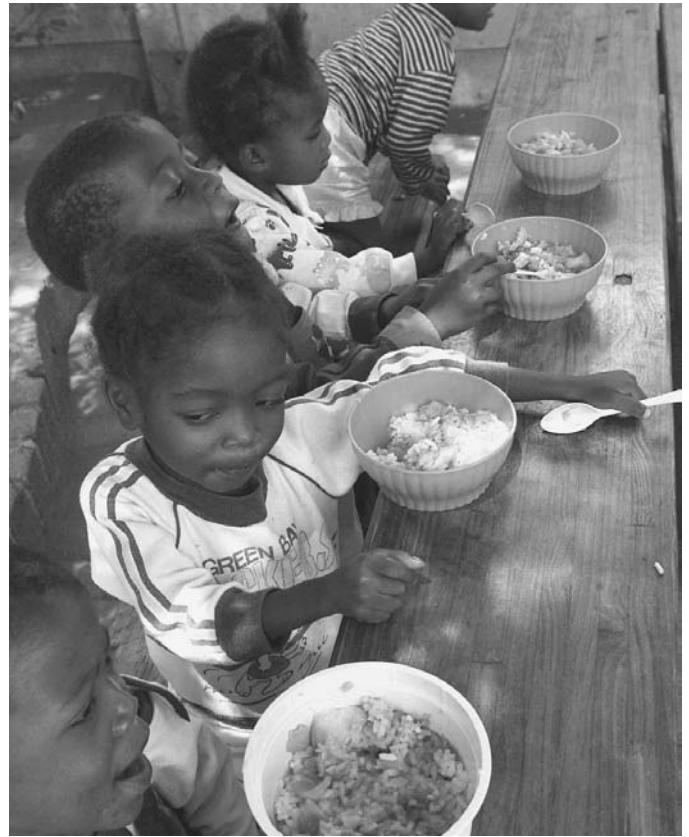
It was inevitable that social ills, such as alcoholism, poor health care and a rising crime rate, would result. Not all of these negative factors have been eradicated yet, but under the new democratic system all South Africans—regardless of race—have an equal opportunity to live a better life. The colored community has shown the resilience and character through the years to take full advantage of their new hard-won rights. Some of the community's leaders are anxious to ensure that its people will not be abandoned by the black majority in the effort to provide a completely level playing field; this concern is a hotly debated political issue in South Africa today.

South Africa no longer conventionally issues birth rate, health, mortality rate, and other statistics by community or race, but the HIV/AIDS figures for the country as a whole are much worse for certain sections of the nation, including for example, the colored townships. For South Africa, the HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate was 21.5% in 2003. That year there were 5.3 million people living with HIV/AIDS. In 2003, HIV/AIDS deaths totaled more than 370,000.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) entrenches individual rights and protection. Chapter 2 [9(3)] specifically indicates that "The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender [and other categories]." But the reality is, particularly in the erstwhile exclusively colored townships and mainly due to social and domestic problems still experienced there, women still bear the brunt of discrimination, particularly alcohol-induced verbal and physical abuse.

For those coloreds who have "graduated" out of such depressed and repressing circumstances gender roles are increasingly changing, as is the case for other South African communities. The leader of one of the prominent opposition political parties, Patricia De Lille, is a case in point. Similar trends are apparent in the academic, arts, and economic spheres of life.



*A group of children enjoy their lunch at the Sparrows Nest, a home run by Sparrow Ministeries, in Roodepoort, South Africa. Sparrow Ministeries cares for adults and children with HIV/AIDS. Researchers have released reports estimating that AIDS could kill as many as 7 million South Africans by 2010. (AP Images/Denis Farrell)*

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—revised by M. de Jongh

# COMORIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-MAWR-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Comoros Islands

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mauri or the Mahorais

**POPULATION:** 798,000

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic, French, Comorian (Shikomori)

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni), Catholicism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Comoros Archipelago—comprising Grande Comore (Njazidja), Anjouan (Nzwani), Mayotte (Mahore), and Mohéli (Mwali)—was originally named by Arab sailors who visited the islands in the late 6th century. They called them *Juzu el Kumar* (“islands of the moon” in Arabic) because of their brightness during the full moon. Before the arrival of the Arabs, Africans of the Wamakuwa and Bantu tribes had been living on the islands, organized in clans, and had originated the Comorian language, which is still spoken today. The Comoros was also visited by sailors from East Asia, Persia, and Israel. More Arabs arrived on the islands between the 12th and 17th centuries, transforming their social structures and introducing sultanates. The Comorians are a blend of settlers from the past: Iranian traders, mainland Africans, Arabs, and Malagasy.

In the early 15th century, Portuguese visited the region. (In 1527, the Comoros islands appeared on a world map designed by Portuguese cartographer Diego Roberso.) Sailors from the Netherlands, France, and other European countries, all attracted by the islands’ geographically strategic position eventually followed them. In the early 17th century, pirates used the Comoros as a base from which to attack and rob merchant vessels. In 1841, King Andrianantsuli of Madagascar, having previously declared himself sultan of Mayotte, sold the island to the French. Later in the 19th century, Ramonetaka, another Malagasy king, formed a relationship with the local authorities on Mohéli, modifying its system of local rule and establishing another sultanate. The Comoros became a French protectorate in 1886. They were placed under the authority of the French governor general of Madagascar in 1908 and given their own internal administration in 1912.

In 1958, the political status of the islands was modified by a referendum, which gave them the status of a self-governing French overseas territory. Said Mohammed Cheik became the president of the Council of Government. In a December 1974 referendum, a majority of the Comorians of the four islands voted for independence from France. Dissatisfied with the prospect of losing all four islands, the French scheduled another election in July 1975 that permitted each island to choose its own political status.

Opposing this French move to divide the islands, Ahmed Abdallah, president of the Council of Government, unilaterally declared independence for all the islands on 6 July 1975 and was installed as the nation’s first president. Less than a month after the Comoros’ independence, France established a military presence on Mayotte, and while the former colonial power was affirming its control of Mayotte, European mercenaries, led by the notorious French soldier of fortune Bob Denard, destabilized the other three independent islands by overthrowing the governments and killing the presidents. Since its indepen-

dence, Comorians have requested the reintegration of the island of Mayotte through a United Nations resolution.

A state-owned newspaper, *Al Watwany*, began operations in July 1985, first as a monthly and soon afterward as a weekly. An independent weekly, *L’Archipel*, began publishing in 1988. A news agency, *Agence Comores Presse*, is now based in Moroni, and France has provided funds for establishing a national television service. In 1989 Comoros had an estimated 61,000 radios and 200 television sets.

In addition to national broadcasts on FM in Comoran Swahili and French, Radio Comoros in 1993 broadcast internationally on the shortwave band in Swahili, Arabic, and French. An independent commercial FM radio station, Radio Tropique FM, began broadcasting in 1991, although it and its director, political activist Ali Bakar Cassim, were both the object of government ire over the station’s readiness to criticize the Djohar regime.

On 3 August 1975 Ali Soilihi, assisted by French mercenaries, overthrew Abdallah’s government, implementing a socialist-inspired self-sufficiency policy that boosted the Comorian economy. On 12 November 1975 the Comoros was admitted to the United Nations as a nation composed of four islands—Grande Comore, Anjouan, Mohéli, and Mayotte. In May 1978 European mercenaries once again led by Denard, who had placed Soilihi in power, overthrew the government and assassinated him. Denard took control of the Comoros and restored Ahmed Abdallah to power. For more than a decade Abdallah ruled the country, backed by Denard and his mercenaries. He changed the name of the country to the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros.

In November 1989, when President Abdallah anticipated negotiating with France on the question of the Comorian island of Mayotte and planned to expel the mercenaries, they assassinated him and seized control of the country for several weeks. France and South Africa arranged their surrender and subsequent departure. Five months later, Said Mohammed Djohar the former head of the supreme court, was elected president. A few months before the end of President Djohar’s five-year term, history repeated itself when Bob Denard, supposedly on parole in France, seized President Djohar and forced him into exile to Réunion, a French Overseas Department island. Once again Denard took control of the country for several weeks. Pressured by the Comorian government and the international community, France sent its marines to withdraw Denard and his mercenaries.

In March 1996 Mohammed Taki Abdoukarim was elected president. A year later, because of the incomplete independence of the Comoros and chronic political instabilities conceived by some Europeans, on 3 August 1997 the residents of Anjouan and Mohéli declared an unrecognized independence and requested to return under French administration, which France denied.

In 1997, the islands of Anjouan and Mohéli declared their independence from the Union of Comoros. However, the islands were reunified as the Comoros again in 2002, a new constitution mandated the election of a president of Anjouan along with presidents for the other two islands and a federal president. Mohamed Bacar, who had led the separatist government since 2001, was elected for a five-year term as President of Anjouan. His term expired on 14 April 2007, and the President

of the Assembly, Houmadi Caambi, became acting president from April 2007 to 10 May 2007.

Comorian federal troops tried unsuccessfully to take control of buildings in Anjouan and install a replacement president as mandated by a court in May 2007. The Union government delayed the holding of an election on Anjouan due to alleged irregularities and intimidation, but Bacar nevertheless printed ballots and held a sham election in June, claiming a landslide victory of 90%.

In October 2007, the African Union (AU) imposed travel sanctions on Anjouan's President Mohamed Bacar and other government officials and froze their foreign assets while calling for fresh elections. In February 2008 the Comoros rejected the AU's extended sanctions against Anjouan and instead opted for a military solution.

In March 2008 hundreds of Union government troops began assembling on Mohéli, which is closer to Anjouan than the larger island, Grande Comore. Foreign troops from Sudan, Senegal, Libya, Tanzania, and France arrived to offer support for the operation to invade and secure the Comoros. Anjouan promised to hold new elections in May 2008, which the South African president supported as a way to resolve the crisis. The proposal and the invasion went ahead.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Comoros Islands, located between Madagascar and the east coast of Africa, cover 2,170 sq km (838 sq mi). The national capital, Moroni, located on Grande Comore, has over 30,000 inhabitants. The climate of the Comoros is tropical, with a warm rainy season from November to April and a mild dry season from April to October. The total population is approximately 530,000 people, of whom more than 30% live in urban areas. The population increases about 3.5% per year, with an annual birthrate of 50 births per 1,000 population and an annual death rate of more than 10 per 1,000 population. The age structure of the population of Comoros is similar to that of many developing countries, in that the republic has a very large proportion of young people.

Grande Comore (Njazidja) covers a total area of 1,145 sq km (442 sq mi). Geologically speaking, it is the youngest island in the archipelago and is dominated by an active volcano, Mt. Khartala (7,900 ft/2,408 m), with the world's largest crater. Its last eruption was in 1977. The island of Anjouan (Nzwani) is triangular, roughly 97 km (60 mi) on each side, and a total area of 424 sq km (164 sq mi). It is the most densely populated island in the archipelago, with 210,000 people. Mayotte (Mahore) is the westernmost island in the archipelago, with an area of 374 sq km (144 sq mi). As the first island to be settled by Europeans, Mayotte was the most resistant to the establishment of a strong Islamic culture by Arab inhabitants. Mohéli (Mwali) is the smallest of the four islands, with an area of 290 sq km (112 sq mi).

## 3 LANGUAGE

Arabic, French, and Comorian are the official languages of Comoros. The Comorian language, *Shikomori*, is derived from the Bantu culture and related to Swahili and Arabic. A different dialect of *Shikomori* is spoken on each of the four islands of the Comoros: *Shinjazidja* on Grande Comore, *Shindzuani* on Anjouan, *Shimwali* on Mwali, and *Shimaore* on Mayotte. De-



spite some phonetic and semantic differences among the dialects, its speakers understand each other.

Comorians do not have surnames in the Western sense. Instead their proper names are followed by those of their fathers, as in Sofia Muhammad-Sofia, the daughter of Muhammad. Most Comorian proper names have specific meanings. For example, the name *Mdahoma* means "long life," *Karihila* means "fearless," and *Shujai* means "hero." Departing from the traditional Comorian names, some Comorians today use Arabic or Christian names. The Comoran people are a blend of African, Arab, and MalayoIndonesian elements. A few small communities, primarily in Mahoré, speak Kibushi, a Malagasy dialect. The principal Comoran Swahili dialect, written in Arabic script, is related to the Swahili spoken in East Africa but is not easily intelligible to East African Swahili speakers. Classical Arabic is significant for religious reasons, and French remains the principal language with which the Republic of the Comoros communicates with the rest of the world.

Comorian, or *Shikomor* is a descendant of Swahili with Arabic influences. About 57% of the population is literate in the Latin alphabet, more with the Arabic alphabet; total literacy is estimated at 62.5%. Comorian has no native script, but both Arabic and Latin scripts have been used.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Comorian folklore is dominated by both African and Islamic traditions. Like some other Muslims, there is a widespread belief among Comorians that events occur according to Al-

lah's will, and that human beings cannot control their destinies. Certain local myths are related to Islam. In the north of Grande Comore, for example, it is believed that at the present site of Lac Salé ("salted lake"), a village was flooded because its inhabitants refused to give water to a sharif (supposedly a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad).

Some widespread beliefs are related to African divinities, such as the belief that a diviner (*mwalmim*) or *jinn* (spirits) should be consulted before any social activity or ceremony. Such consultations may require special rites, financial outlays, and animal sacrifices.

Mt. Khartala on Grande Comore is said to have been created by the shock that occurred when King Solomon's ring fell on the island while he was being chased by *jinn*s from Saba (present-day Ethiopia). It is said that when the ring sank in the Indian Ocean, it was eaten by a fish.

## 5 RELIGION

Islam is the state religion; some 98% of Comorians are Sunni Muslims. About 2% are Catholic, and evangelical believers represent only 0.1% of the population. There is at least one Catholic church in the capital of each island. Surprisingly, however, mosque attendance is very low. Mixed with their Islamic practices, there is a strong involvement in occultism and spirit possession.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Comoros have two types of holidays: religious and national holidays, the latter include New Year's Day (January 1); a holiday commemorating the death of President Said Mohammed Cheik, the first president of the self-governing Council government (March 16); Labor Day (May 1); and Independence Day (July 6). Religious holidays include the celebration of the prophet Mohammed's birth; *Miraj*, the day when the latter went to visit paradise; *Idd el Fitri*, which marks the end of Ramadan; and *Idd el Adha*, primarily a day to remember one's ancestors. Religious holidays conform to a lunar calendar.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the Comoros, each stage of human life is celebrated by a specific ceremony. Newborn babies and their mothers are kept secluded to avoid the "evil eye" of possible enemies for the first seven days after birth. During this period several religious rituals take place, and only very close relatives are permitted to visit them. After the seven days, friends can see them. Some bring gifts, which may range from a ring to a cow to a tree.

At the age of six, children are sent to a Quranic school, where they learn the Islamic code of conduct, and later to a Western-style primary school. Four to five years later, when they are able to read the entire Quran, a special ceremony called the *Hitimiya* is organized. This ritual is simultaneously a ceremony of a personal recognition and a rite of passage to adolescence. At this time, boys are circumcised.

Traditionally, the eldest daughter in a family does not leave her house after the *Hitimiya* unless she is escorted by a member of her family and covered with a *shirmani* or *lesso* (colorful local shawls). At present, this tradition is only practiced in some rural areas.

At the age of 15, boys traditionally leave their families and build huts where they sleep and socialize with their friends. Yet they still participate in family activities and play a role in

public events in their villages. When this phase is over, they are ready to marry, once they have the approval of their families. They can celebrate with either a simple marriage or the *anda* (grand marriage).

For Grand Comorians, the *anda* is not only a wedding festivity; it is also a social, economic, and cultural rite. Several stages and ceremonies should be accomplished before a man becomes a "respectful man." The grand marriage is cost prohibitive and associates the whole community. On the other islands, the structure is similar but less expensive.

*Anda* promotes a man to a personal social achievement and hierarchy and/or validates his political status. It also provides prestigious status to a woman and her family. In order to access the highest social hierarchy grade and personal prestige, one should celebrate one's own *anda* and also have one for a daughter or niece. Thus, it is not uncommon for someone to marry at the age of 20 and celebrate a grand marriage 30 years later.

Depending upon the family (either rich or socially well-integrated), the grand marriage can begin at the day of someone's birth, reach its peak during the marriage celebration, and continue even after the person's death. However, a simple marriage is reserved for marginal families and those who choose not to celebrate a grand marriage.

Birthday parties are celebrated only in urban areas, yet those born during the month of Maulid (the month corresponding to the Prophet Mohammad's birth) celebrate with a religious ceremony.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Comorians are known for their politeness, humor, hospitality, and harmony. Sharing and helping others are considered mandatory in all circumstances, to the point where the very notion of thanking someone is considered odd, because help is always expected and even taken for granted.

The Comorian greeting is very lengthy and may even include inquiries about one's neighbors, pets, or cattle. In public, men shake hands, and some young people slap each others' hands. Older women greet each other verbally or grasp each others' hands. *Kwezi*, either preceding or succeeding a sentence, is a common term of respect used when addressing a person older than oneself. It is considered impolite to address people by their family names. When addressing an older person with whom one is not familiar, proper forms of address are *mjomba* (uncle), *mbaba* (father), or *mdzade* (mother). If one knows the person's child, niece, or nephew, these appellations are followed by the name of the younger relative (e.g. *mbaba* Ali if the son's name is Ali, or *mjomba* Nema if the nephew's name is Nema).

It is considered rude to lose contact with close family or friends, and regular visits are the norm. When someone intends to travel abroad, everyone in the community is informed, and gifts are given by friends and close family members before a trip. The traveler is also expected to bring gifts for those at home upon returning.

Officially, dating is forbidden, as Islam forbids relationships between unmarried couples.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Comoros is among the world's least developed countries, with high birth and death rates, and a population growth rate that

is roughly twice the world average. In the 1980s, a large proportion of all housing still consisted of the traditional straw huts with roofs made from cocoa leaves, although there were also dwellings made from brick, stone, or concrete.

About 60% of the Comorians live in cities; but whether in rural or urban areas, housing on the island is generally poor. The average life expectancy was 56 years in 1992, when it was estimated that nearly one-third of all children died before the age of five. Leading health problems include malaria, tuberculosis, and leprosy. By 2005, life expectancy was 62.2 years.

There is a ring road on each island. Many of the smaller roads are usable only for part of the year. Grande Comore has an international airport at Hahaia, and there are airfields on the other islands.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Despite the intrusion of foreign customs, Comorian culture retains a strong traditional concept of the family, whose members are linked by blood, marriage, or adoption. Friends may also be considered family. The coherence provided by this tradition has played a tremendous role in social and daily life, fostering solidarity and preventing delinquency and crime. Polygamy is an acceptable practice among the Comorians. Among men who can afford it, the preferred form of marriage appears to be polygyny with matrilineal residence. The first marriage is formally initiated with the grand marriage when possible, subsequent unions involve much simpler ceremonies. The result is that a man will establish two or even more households and will alternate residence between them, a reflection, most likely, of the trading origins of the Shirazi elite who maintained wives at different trading posts. Said Mohamed Djohar, elected president in 1990, had two wives, one in Njazidja and the other in Nzwani, an arrangement said to have broadened his appeal to voters. For men, divorce is easy, although by custom a divorced wife retains the family home. Children are expected to help with family duties such as farming, fishing, and caring for the animals. Each family is affiliated with a political party, a bond based on personal relationships rather than on the party's policies or actions.

## 11 CLOTHING

French colonization modified the Comorian mode of dress. Although young people wear Western style clothing, traditional clothing is still common among the adults. Traditional clothing, still worn by older women, is very colorful. They either wear a long dress and cover themselves with a *lesso* or *shiromani* (traditional shawls), or they wear a *chador*, a combination head covering, veil, and shawl worn by women in many Muslim countries. Younger women wear Western clothes but still cover themselves with a *lesso*. Only women in cities wear pants. While in town, a Comorian man will typically wear a white cotton garment and a knee-length shirt, sometimes with a white jacket and white skull cap. Out of town, a long cloth sarong (colorful skirt) is worn. Most women wear long, colorful cotton dresses with bright shawls as face coverings. Others prefer wearing black robes that cover their heads. Older men wear a traditional cloth called an *ikoi* covering their lower body, a long white robe called a *kandu*, and a *kofia*, an embroidered hat.

## 12 FOOD

Comorian food reflects a combination of influences, mostly African but also Arab and Indian. The main fare in the Comorian diet consists of products cultivated on the islands, except rice, which is imported from Asia. Most Comorian cuisine is spicy. The basic diet of the Comorians consists of rice, potatoes, corn, fish, coconuts, and bananas. Other crops that are grown are sweet potatoes, citrus fruits, and pineapples.

Breakfast varies from one island to the next. On Grande Comore, people drink hot tea with bread, grilled breadfruit, or leftovers. On Anjouan and Mayotte they drink a hot soup made from leftover rice. The residents of Mohéli drink hot tea and eat grilled cassava or breadfruit with fish. Lunch is similar on all four islands and may include cassava, tarot, green bananas, potatoes, breadfruit (grilled, fried, or boiled) or rice with *madaba* (cassava leaves), fish, and imported meat. Rice is the main dish for dinner. The most common beverages are fresh water and fruit juice. Alcohol and pork are forbidden by the Muslim religion. On Anjouan and Mayotte, a local beer, *trembo*, made from coconut juice is tolerated. The Comoros islands have an abundance of fruit, including mangoes, papayas, oranges, coconuts, and pineapples, varying with the specific season and region.

Before exposure to Western influences, Comorians ate on a mat placed on the floor using their right hands, a practice still followed in rural areas. In urban areas, people eat at tables with Western utensils.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Comorian educational system is based on both Islamic teachings and the French model. All education is free. Each village has several Quranic schools and at least one French primary school. However, due to economic problems, the majority of students find it hard to finish primary school.

There is a *collège* (junior primary) and three to five *lycées* (secondary schools) on each island, as well as a couple of technical training schools and a teacher training college. For higher education, since the 1990s many private primary and secondary schools have emerged.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Comorian music and dance are based on African, Arabic, Malagasy, European, and southern Indian traditions. Comorian society and culture reflect the influences of Islam and the traditions of East Africa. The former provides the basis for religion and law; the East African influence is evident in the language, a Swahili dialect, and in a number of pre-Islamic customs. Western, primarily French, influences are also prevalent, particularly in the modern educational sector, the civil service, and cultural affairs. Lavish wedding ceremonies are common and highly regarded. This wedding ceremony, which can cost as much as the equivalent of \$20,000 to \$30,000, involves an exchange of expensive gifts between the couple's families and feasts for an entire village. The gift giving and dancing that accompany the grand marriage have helped perpetuate indigenous arts in silversmithing, goldsmithing, folk song, and folk dance.



## 15 WORK

Subsistence agriculture and fishing are the Comorians' chief sources of income, employing roughly 80% of the labor force, with a smaller number engaged in trade. In families engaged in farming or fishing, children generally work alongside their parents, although the legal minimum age for employment is 15. In the 1990s, teachers and other government employees, as well as dock workers, began to unionize. Most of the islanders work as farmers or fishermen, while a few breed cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys. A small number work in industry or in jobs relating to tourism. The island of Mayotte is very poor and undeveloped. Due to the shortage of good farmland, much of the food must be imported.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer (known as football) is a popular male sport in the Comoros. Each village has at least two football teams. Women only participate as spectators. Volleyball and basketball are also common in urban areas, where some women are involved in sports. Comoros participated in its first Olympic games in Atlanta in 1996.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Public conversation is a very common form of male entertainment in the Comoros. Each village has several public places called *bangwe* where men of the same generation or social and cultural background meet every day, particularly from 4 to 6 pm and from 8 pm until midnight. All social games and activities take place at the *bangwe*. *Mrengé*, a mixture of boxing and wrestling, was once a popular game on the islands and is still occasionally played on Anjouan and Mayotte. The influence of Western culture has dominated Comorian society, and some Comorian games are unfortunately now disappearing or are considered uncivilized, such as *mbio za ngalawa* (boat racing) and *ngome za ngombe* (cattle wrestling). For recreation they enjoy dancing, singing, and playing instruments, especially horns and drums.

Older men enjoy playing dominoes, cards, and *mraha*, a seed-and-board game well known in Africa and the Pacific Islands. Movie theaters have declined since the introduction of the VCR. On weekends, young people organize picnics or barbecues on the beach. In each major city there are a couple of nightclubs. Young people also commonly surf the Internet.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Comoros, especially Anjouan, are known for their woodcarvings and dolls. Other traditional crafts include the brightly colored red and orange cloth worn by Comorian women, as well as jewelry and embroidered Muslim hats.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Comorians have no real ethnic or racial divisions. Nevertheless, there are traditional hostilities between urban and rural dwellers and between fishermen and peasants. Yet since the illegal occupation of Mayotte by France in 1975, divisions have emerged between residents of Mayotte and other Comorians of the independent three islands. Political instability is a major problem facing the Comorians. More than a dozen coups d'état conducted by Western mercenaries in the years since 1975 have led to political instability on the islands.

The physical needs of the Comorians are numerous. Major problems in Mayotte include poverty, disease, and hunger. Educational levels are low and only 68% of the population is literate. The economy is struggling and unemployment levels are very high. There is a shortage of hospitals and doctors, and many suffer from illnesses and chronic malnutrition. Hygiene is poor due to the fact that the Comorians have a poor water supply. Such problems contribute to a high death rate, especially among young children.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Among the men who can afford it, the preferred form of marriage appears to be polygyny with matrilocal residence. The result is that a man will establish two or even more households and will alternate residence between them, a reflection, most likely, of the trading origins of the Shirazi elite who maintained wives at different trading posts. Women have to contend with an alternating husband. For men, divorce is easy, although by custom a divorced wife retains the family home.

Although women play a limited role in Comorian culture, in which polygamy is legal, their matriarchal tradition gives Comorian women the last word on important issues pertaining to household affairs. Also, atypically for an Islamic society, they may leave their husbands without any official notice or legal decision.

Despite their lower economic status, women married to farmers or laborers often move about more freely than their counterparts among the social elite, managing market stands or working in the fields. On Mwali, where traditional Islamic values are less dominant, women generally are not as strictly secluded.

Islamic law recognizes only male ownership and inheritance of land. In Comoros, however, certain landholdings called *magnahouli* are controlled by women and inherited through the female line, apparently in observance of a surviving matriarchal African tradition.

Girls are somewhat less likely than boys to attend school in Comoros.

Although the 1992 constitution recognizes their right to suffrage, as did the 1978 constitution, women otherwise play a limited role in politics in Comoros. By contrast, in Mahoré female merchants sparked the movement for continued association with France, and later, for continued separation from the Republic of the Comoros.

Due to restricted religious and political beliefs, women cannot plan their own families. The use of contraceptives is irreligious in the largely Islamic community.

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—revised by M. Njoroge.

## CONGOLESE (BRAZZAVILLANS)

**PRONUNCIATION:** kahn-go-LEEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Congo-Brazzavillans

**LOCATION:** Republic of the Congo

Population: 3,903,318

**LANGUAGE:** French, Lingala, Kikongo, Sangha, Bateke, 60 others

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Catholic), animism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Bakongo

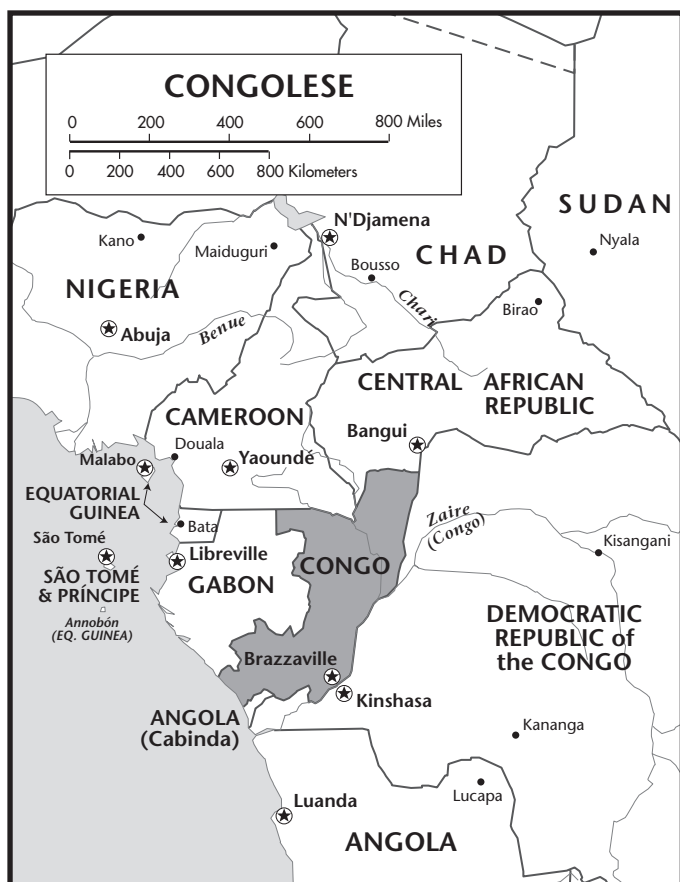
### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

In October 1997, the Republic of the Congo swore in a new president after waging a four-month civil war that killed thousands and left Brazzaville, once one of the most peaceful and smoothly run capitals in Central Africa, in ruins. Five years after the first democratic elections, private militias installed an unelected government. The civil war was partially fueled by the prize of the country's offshore oil wealth, which motivated many of the warlords. The army split along ethnic lines, with most northern officers joining President Denis Sassou-Nguesso's side and most southerners backing the rebels. By the end of 1999, the government, which was backed by Angolan forces, had taken most of the key positions, and the rebels agreed to a ceasefire. However, remnants of the civil war militias, known as Ninjas, have remained active in the southern Pool region.

The Republic of Congo is one of sub-Saharan Africa's main oil producers, though 70% of the total population of about 3.9 million lives in poverty. In 2004 the country was expelled from the Kimberley Process, which is supposed to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the world supply market. This followed investigations that found that the Republic of Congo could not account for the origin of large quantities of rough diamonds that it was officially exporting. However, reports of battle and corruption do not do justice to the Republic of the Congo. It has long been the education and banking center of the Central African region. During World War II, it was the capital of the Free French movement led by Charles de Gaulle against the Nazis and France's Vichy government. Its leaders were unabashedly Communist during the latter half of the Cold War, trading vigorously with China and the Soviet Union.

Mention "The Congo," and many people think of the jungles made famous by the writings of Joseph Conrad in *The Heart of Darkness*. The Republic of the Congo is located directly across the Congo (or Zaire) River from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (known as Zaire until mid-1997), the setting for Conrad's novel. The river that divides the two Congos is the second longest in Africa, after the Nile, and carries the largest potential supply of hydroelectric power in the world.

Brazzaville is Congo's capital, sitting directly across the great river from Zaire's pulsating capital, Kinshasa. But, Kinshasa seems a world away from the sleepier city on the opposite bank. Brazzaville is calm and orderly, boasting relatively reliable transportation links and utilities, and a crime rate significantly lower than that of Kinshasa and indeed many other African cities. Pointe-Noire, the Congo's industrial and



petroleum center, is located on the Atlantic coast and boasts a dredged harbor that can accommodate oil tankers from around the world.

The Portuguese discovered the mouth of the Congo River in 1482 and began trading with the Kongo kingdom, which had been consolidated in the 14th century. Slaves and ivory attracted the interest of other European countries, and in 1883, explorer Savorgnan de Brazza signed treaties with the Bateke, a tribe located to the north, ceding the entire region to France.

Today, the Congo continues its close relationship with France, despite achieving independence in 1960. Its currency is tied directly to the French franc, and France remains its chief trading partner.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Congo straddles the equator, most of the land covered by dense tropical forest. It is hot, very humid, and rains an average of 178 cm (70 in) per year. Wooded savanna, river valleys, and a small coastal plain make up less than half of the total land area, which is 342,000 sq km (132,000 sq mi), about the size of Montana. The Congo's entire eastern and southern borders are washed by the Congo River. The magnitude of this river in the lives of Congolese, past and present, cannot be underestimated. Over 1,600 km (1,000 mi) of unbroken navigable water serves as a veritable highway for huge barges and dugout canoes, carting people and produce through Central Africa. People eat from it, live on it in houses built high on stilts, take

electric power from it, and hand pieces of it down through the generations, in the form of inheritable fishing rights.

Inland, there are many lakes and marshes, one of which is the legendary home of a water-dwelling dinosaur known locally as Mokele-Mbembe, considered somewhat of a national treasure, and hunted, but never seen, by groups of eccentric Western scientists. Better documented are elephant, hippo, lowland gorilla, lion, chimpanzee, pangolin, bushpig, dozens of ungulates, crocodile, and tropical birds. The two major environments that comprise the Congo, forest and savanna, are pure contrasts. In most of the forest, one cannot see more than a few yards. On the savanna-covered plateaus, one can see for miles. In the dry season, miles of fire, set by lightning or the game-hunter, ring the horizons.

## 3 LANGUAGE

French is the administrative language of the Congo, with Lingala, Kikongo, Sangha, and Bateke the most widely spoken native languages. There are 60 other languages in the Congo, crisscrossing national boundaries. There is another kind of Congolese language though, and that is the language of the talking drum. For generations, messages have been sent from village to village by the regulated beat of special drums, usually situated near the compound of the village chief. In the past, everyone within earshot understood the meaning of the various rhythms. There were rhythms for death, birth, marriage, or the impending arrival of a dignitary. Talking drums still are used, but they are losing their original relevancy in lieu of radio, shortwave, and television.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Congo is rich in folkloric tradition, and generalizations are difficult in a country with dozens of ethnic groups. Typically, however, heroes and personalities tend to take the form of animals. Each family, or sometimes an entire village or clan, will have its own totem, an animal whose spirit and characteristics represent the group's unity. These animals are imbued with mystical powers, are responsible for the creation of the ancestral lineage, and revered through storytelling and surrounding ritual and taboo.

## 5 RELIGION

The vast majority of the population identifies itself as Christian, primarily Catholic. Many continue to hold animist beliefs and do not consider them contrary to monotheism. Local animists long believed in one supreme god before the arrival of European missionaries. Its name is Nzambi and can best be described as the omnipotent spirit of nature. One of the Congo's creation myths tells of Nzambi's great illness, back when the Earth was still completely covered with water. In his fits of coughing, he spat up the sun, moon, stars, animals, and people. So, the world was born by opportune accident.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Congo's national holiday is celebrated on August 15 and commemorates the country's independence from France begun on that day in 1960. Independence Day is celebrated in streets, courtyards, houses, and bars. Beer and palm wine are consumed in large quantities, and the preferred dish on this special occasion is chicken and rice. Chicken, or any form of

animal protein, for that matter, often marks a special occasion. Less than 1% of the land in the Congo is used for animal husbandry, and most meat is either hunted or imported at great expense.

Other holidays include Christmas and New Year's, Easter, All Saints Day, and June 10 (National Reconciliation Day).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Because many Africans believe in the spirit life of their ancestors after death, funeral and mourning rituals are accorded great importance. But, the ritual life of the Congo is changing quickly with urban migration fueled by wage labor. For traditionalists, the period of mourning can be very involved and intensely onerous. Widows typically shave their heads, dress in rags, and bathe infrequently. They sometimes are required to live by themselves in a house far removed from the center of the village, forbidden to talk with anyone or look a person in the eye. Their only food might be leftovers from their in-laws' table, never to include meat or fish. This state of affairs can last anywhere from one month to the rest of a widow's life, depending on the ethnic group, village, and piety of the family. Widowers, understood to have important work to do outside the home, including fathering more children, might be expected to wait a year before remarrying, as a sign of respect to the dead wife.

A ritual surrounding marriage, practiced less now than in the past, attests to the traditional importance of premarital virginity for girls. It is interesting to note that this ritual appears in different forms throughout the world, particularly the Near East.

Once a couple has decided to marry, both the man and the woman undergo a course in "domestic education," taught by the elders of their own gender within the family. It is assumed that the woman is a virgin, and she must receive some sexual instruction in order to contribute to a successful union. On the morning after the wedding night, the women from both sides of the family arrive early, while the couple is still in bed, to inquire pointedly about the previous night's events. Was consummation successful? Were all parties satisfied? Was there blood evident to prove the virginity of the bride? If the answer to any of these questions is no, then the husband has the right to ask for his bride-price back and annul the marriage.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Different cultures express greetings in different ways and so it is in the Congo, with its many cultural heritages. Common for some groups is to greet close relatives not seen for a long time with a bear hug. Among friends and acquaintances, there is the two-handed shake. While in neighboring Gabon, kissing alternate cheeks three to four times is prevalent even in the villages, it is a Western custom seen in the Congo almost exclusively in the modern cities.

There is a marked formality in communication among Congolese, a style that is shared throughout Central Africa. Even a business meeting should begin with a polite inquiry into the other person's well-being, that of their family, and an indication of the honor that their presence bestows. Public recognition of social hierarchy is very important, and agreement with an elder, boss, or anyone of higher status is valued above directness.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Congo is a poor country by Western standards. It is far from the poorest country in Africa, however. It currently ranks 16 out of 52 on the United Nations Human Development Index for Africa, which ranks countries according to quality of life based on income levels, literacy, and other criteria. This relative wealth is primarily due to the existence of petroleum.

Outside of the cities, houses commonly are built out of mud brick and are in constant need of repair. Many can afford corrugated zinc roofs on their homes, and those who cannot use thatch. Buildings in urban areas are usually made out of concrete blocks, and there are several steel and glass office towers in Brazzaville, though they have been severely damaged by the war.

Whether poor or wealthy, Congolese take immense pride in their homes. Mud-brick houses are ringed with handmade, well-maintained fencing. Decorative flowers and bushes are planted in a front yard that is scrupulously cleared of weeds and grasses in an effort to keep away snakes, rats, and insects. Cooking often takes place in the front of the house over an open fire, where the women prepare the food, and everyone else gathers. Small villages are arranged with straight, perpendicular streets of dirt and a wide boulevard through the center.

Larger towns and cities are relatively clean and well-planned. Utilities, such as electricity and water, are available, if not affordable to everyone. This is not the case throughout the interior. Villages not on the power grid often use gas powered generators for communal purposes during restricted hours. Watching a wrestling match on a television placed in front of the local bar is but one example.

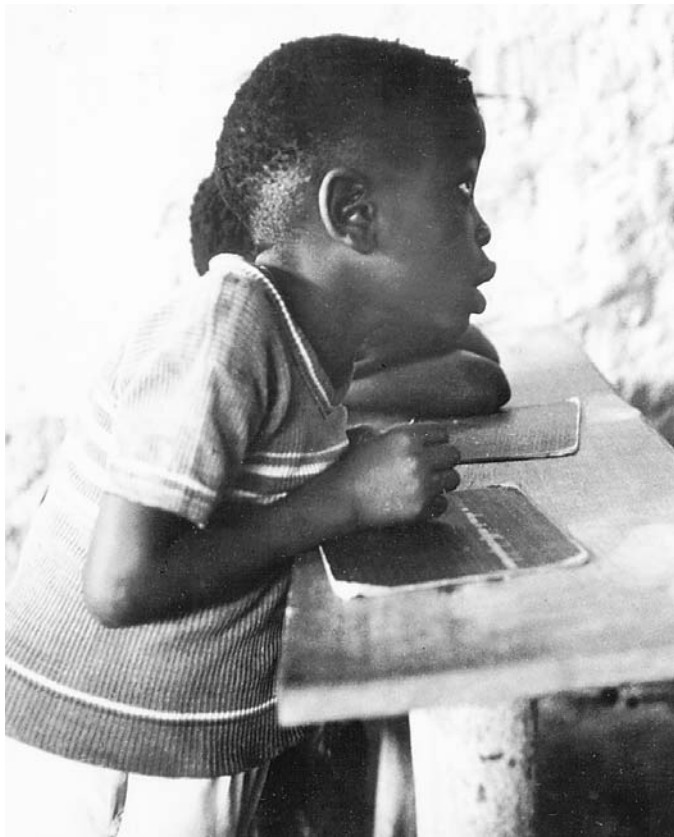
Although nearly two-thirds of the Congo's citizens live in or between the two major cities of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, making it one of the most urbanized populations in Africa, there is ample room for small farms and gardens, and most Congolese are engaged in some type of subsistence farming. They know how to farm and produce just enough food to feed their families and perhaps fill a stall at the vegetable market.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The average Congolese woman bears six children during her lifetime. Still, the Congo has one of the lowest population densities on the continent. In the past, most marriages were arranged by family members. Today, this is much less common. Often, a man proposes to a woman with a gift of money. Then, once both families are in agreement, a "dot," or bride-price, is paid by the groom to the bride's parents. While this custom has no legal status, it is ancient and taken quite seriously. If a couple divorces, in many instances, the husband can demand his money back.

A visitor to the Congo might remark that women do most of the work it takes to run a family and a household. They are responsible for planting, harvesting, food preparation, water fetching, child care, and housework (which can include putting on a new roof or erecting a fence). Men traditionally are responsible for hunting, clearing the forest for gardens, or, in the city, engaging in wage-labor.

The word "family" has a somewhat different meaning in the Congo than in the West. The nuclear family is not necessarily the standard unit. Family means an extensive network of relatives, including aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents,



*While the government, by its own admission, has ignored the rural economy for decades, there is, in spite of this, a relatively high density of rural primary schools.  
(International Labour Office)*

nieces, and nephews. Matrilineal cultures, such as many in the Congo, identify the older brother of one's mother as the prime male role model and caretaker. Cousins on one's mother's side are considered brothers and sisters. If each woman has six children, there are many siblings.

The extended family plays the role in society that the state has taken over in many Western countries. Indigent, sick, or disabled people are rarely sent to institutions, such as nursing homes, left to live on the street, or live on welfare. Their care is the family's responsibility, and the burdens of this responsibility can be spread among the dozens of people that constitute a family.

### 11 CLOTHING

Central Africans take care in their dress in general, and Congolese are no exception. Whether a person has means or not, people in the street, the market, and in offices can be seen in pressed, colorful, hand-tailored garb. *Bous-Bous*, the colorful strips of cotton cloth essential to any Central or West African wardrobe, can be dressed up or down. They also are used as head wraps and turbans by Congolese women. Office workers and bureaucrats dress much the same as they do in the West.

### 12 FOOD

While a visitor to the Congo will marvel at the abundance of greenery, this does not mean that agriculture is flourishing.

Rain forest soil is very nutrient-poor and, despite additional areas of savanna and river valley, only 2.5% of the Congo's soil is under cultivation. Foodstuffs commonly grown on this percentage include bananas, manioc, peanuts, coffee, cocoa, taro, and pineapples. Some livestock is raised, but over 90% of the country's meat is imported.

Congolese cultures abound with food taboos, many related to village, family, or even individual totemistic beliefs. It is strictly taboo for anyone to eat the meat from an animal that is his or her totem.

### 13 EDUCATION

For a long time, Brazzaville was considered the educational capital of Central Africa. Many educated people over the age of 50 in neighboring Gabon, for instance, who did not study in Europe, went to school in the Congo. While the government, by its own admission, has ignored the rural economy for decades, there is, in spite of this, a relatively high density of rural primary schools. Brazzaville has one university and a regionally famous painting school called L'École de Poto-Poto. Murals by Poto-Poto students can be found throughout the streets of Brazzaville. The literacy rate is estimated at 75% for adults.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

"Every Congolese learns to sing," so it is said. Singing has long been used to alleviate the tedium of work. There are songs about fishing, planting, and how to use a hoe, paddle a canoe, or pound manioc with a giant mortar and pestle. Musical instruments include myriad drums, guitar, and the *sanzi*, a small wooden box with metal teeth that are plucked by the thumbs, like a hand-held piano.

Congolese are also prolific storytellers. Passing tradition to other generations orally kept ethnic histories and the arts alive before the advent of literacy. Since the introduction of French and written language, however, the Congolese penchant for storytelling has found a new outlet, and its novelists, playwrights, and poets have gained celebrity throughout Francophone Africa. Jean Malonga, Henri Lopes, Soni Laboue Tansi, Marie Leontine Tsibinda, and Guy Menga are some of the best known.

There is a pre-modern pharmacological wisdom of rain forest-dwellers that now is beginning to be tapped by modern scientists. A deep knowledge of the forest is a rich, yet vanishing part of the Congo's cultural heritage, and while the average life expectancy of a Congolese has never been over 54 years, people in this region long have found local solutions to their health problems.

### 15 WORK

During the Communist regime, all land was officially state-owned, meaning by extension that all work on it was work for the state. This may have had something to do with the resulting underdevelopment of the agricultural sector over the decades. Conversely, the urban bureaucratic class exploded during this time. Between independence and 1970, after seven years of Communist rule, the civil service grew by 636%. Salaries for state workers ate up almost 75% of the national budget. These expenditures were paid for by oil revenues and foreign subsidies. With the change of governments, and the pressing need to reduce foreign debt, the Congo has significantly reduced the size of its bureaucracy.

## 16 SPORTS

As all over Africa, soccer is the most passionately followed sport. Also popular are karate, handball, basketball, and volleyball, as both participant and spectator sports. Television devotes a lot of time to sports coverage. Now, with satellite capability, one can follow the French Open tennis tournament in a thatched bar deep in the bush.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Sports, singing, dancing, music, storytelling, and visiting relatives are pastimes everywhere in the Congo. In the city, there are movies, some theater, and discotheques. Fishing is also considered recreational, as well as work. There is always sitting down to a cold Primus beer or glass of palm wine to pass the afternoon in gossip.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditionally, Congolesse art was created to serve religious or ceremonial functions, rather than for pure aesthetic reasons. Masks, weaving, pottery, and ironwork were often abstract, depicting the human head or animals. Much of the local expertise in crafts has been lost, although a government agency and an ethnicity museum in Brazzaville are trying to preserve what knowledge and artifacts are left. With an active painting and literary community in the Congo, new forms continue to emerge.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Congo suffered four months of war in a battle to overthrow the president of its very tenuous democracy. Violent death, dislocation, and general social breakdown are among the immediate problems the Congolesse face. HIV and AIDS are also a major worry for the people of the Congo. Although infection rates are not as bad as elsewhere in eastern and southern Africa, it is estimated that at least 5.3% of the population between the ages of 15 and 49 years is HIV-positive. The prevalence rates range from 1.3% in the north to 10.3% in the south, where civil unrest still lingers.

There are tens of thousands of indigenous Pygmies in the Congo, considered to be the first inhabitants in the area. While equal rights are officially protected in the Congolesse constitution, Pygmies are heavily discriminated against. They have been turned away from public hospitals when seeking medical care and are not represented in government. Those working in the formal sector, such as the logging industry, do not receive equal pay for equal work. Pygmy slavery used to be institutionalized in what is now the Congo, and while it is technically illegal, a form of indentured servitude is said to still exist. Discrimination against Pygmies is not exclusive to the Congo, but it exists all over Central Africa.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in the Republic of the Congo are underrepresented in positions of influence. For example, they control only 11.1% of the seats in parliament, attaining this figure in 2005 when President Sassou-Nguesso increased the number of women in the cabinet to 5 from an original 2 out of 35. The insecurity and displacement that occurred because of the fighting in the southern parts of the country have increased the vulnerability of women and adolescent girls to HIV/AIDS. Women under

the age of 35 are twice as affected as men, with 61,000 women over the age of 15 living with HIV, out of about 100,000 adults aged 15 and above who are living with HIV. Human rights violations are quite common. Opponents to the government are routinely arrested and remain in custody without charge or trial.

There is no law against homosexual behavior in the penal code. However, there is no legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, nor is there legal recognition of same-sex couples. The government stand on homosexuality is that it does not exist in the Congo.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# CONGOLESE (ZAIRIANS)

**PRONUNCIATION:** kahn-go-LEEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Congo-Kinshasans

**LOCATION:** Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC—the former Zaire)

**POPULATION:** 66 million

**LANGUAGE:** Lingala; Swahili; Ciluba; Kikongo; French (language of government)

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism, African Christianity)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Azande; Bakongo; Efe and Mbuti

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC—the former Zaire) is Africa's third-largest country roughly equal in size to the United States east of the Mississippi River. Its boundaries were drawn arbitrarily at the Conference of Berlin in 1884–85. More than 300 ethnic groups, who speak between 300–600 dialects and languages live within those boundaries.

Archeological evidence from the Shaba, Kasai, and the Lower Congo regions indicates that this part of the world is one of the oldest cradles of human habitation. Prior to European colonization, the peoples of the DRC were part of empires, kingdoms, and small forest village communities. Perhaps the most renowned kingdom was the Kongo, established as early as the 15th century. This Christian kingdom had diplomatic relations with Portugal, Spain, and the Vatican. To the east, the emperor of the Lunda Empire maintained relations with the Portuguese and traded with Arabs on the coast of the Indian Ocean. The legendary prosperity of the Kongo Kingdom and the Luba Empire was cut short by slave trafficking, which eventually caused them to collapse.

The DRC has gone through several name changes, from "The Independent State of the Congo," to "The Belgian Congo," to "The Democratic Republic of the Congo" in 1960, to "Zaire" in 1971, and back to "The Democratic Republic of the Congo" in 1997. At the Berlin Conference, the European powers gave King Leopold II of Belgium sole proprietorship of the territory. Leopold ruled it as his personal fief through ruthless agents, who coerced local populations to meet quotas for red rubber and ivory. Those failing to meet quotas had their hands chopped off. Forced labor killed some 10 million Congolese between 1880 and 1910. When these atrocities became public, the Belgian state took over the colony to avoid further embarrassment. However, oppression and exploitation continued.

In the 1960s and 1970s, rebellions and secessions threatened the sovereignty of the country, but were beaten back with the assistance of the United Nations and foreign troops. Imminent revolt forced the Belgians to grant independence to the territory in 1960. Prime Minister Lumumba, who had socialist tendencies, was killed in February 1961. CIA and Belgian involvement brought Mobutu to power in 1965. Mobutu Sese Seko, whose name means "the one who will last forever," plundered the country's resources and impoverished his fellow citizens. His fortune, once estimated at over \$8 billion, made him one of the richest men in the world. Mobutu had been Africa's longest-ruling leader when he was forced into exile in May 1997. He died in Morocco in September 1997.

In April 1997, with the backing of Rwanda and Uganda, rebel forces under Laurent Kabila marched on and captured Kinshasa, the capital. Laurent Kabila was assassinated in January 2001 and succeeded by his son, Joseph, who headed a transitional government in 2003, and was elected president in 2006. An elected national assembly was installed in September 2006, and provincial assemblies in early 2007, which in turn elected senators as well as provincial governors.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The DRC extends from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the snow-capped Ruwenzori Mountains (the "Mountains of the Moon") in the east. Straddling the equator, the DROC shares borders with nine states: the Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Angola. The mostly highland plateau is broken up by hilly and mountainous terrain, and a vast central basin drains into the Congo River. A chain of deep-water lakes formed by the Great Rift Valley fault line lie on the eastern border. Moving away from the equator, a rainy and a dry season begin to alternate. In the drier highlands, temperatures can drop to 5°C (40°F) at night.

The DRC claims the second-largest remaining rain forest in the world, and some of the world's largest deposits of minerals and precious metals. It is rich in copper, tin, manganese, coltan, and cobalt. Industrial diamonds abound in the Kasai Regions. Gold deposits have been identified in Orientale Province. The Inga Dam on the lower Congo River harnesses energy from the world's second-largest flowing volume of water. However, commercial logging threatens fragile ecosystems in the central basin and along the fertile eastern corridor.

The DRC's population is growing at about 3.2% yearly. By the year 2020, it is expected to reach 90 million people. Population density varies greatly from extremely dense urban centers to the sparsely populated central basin. The rural eastern corridor, bordering on Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi contains about 29 persons per sq km (76 persons per sq mi). Six ethnic groups account for more than 69% of the population, but no single group dominates the others numerically or politically. The Luba make up 18%; the Kongo, 16%; the Mongo, 13.5%; Rwandese, 10%; Azande, 6%; and Bangi and Ngale, 6%.

## 3 LANGUAGE

In spite of the many dialects spoken throughout the DRC, four national languages predominate. Foremost among these is Lingala, which is spoken in the equatorial region, in the capital, and along the Congo River. Lingala is the main lingua franca (common language) thanks in part to former President Mobutu, who made speeches in Lingala and popularized it in the civil service. It also became the language of preference in the army and in Congolese music.

Swahili is the second lingua franca, spoken throughout the northeast, eastern, and southeast parts of the country. Tshiluba is spoken in the two Kasai regions, and Kikongo is spoken in Bas-Congo. French is officially used in government, and in education at university and high school levels. In public elementary schools, French is often taught as a second language. It is common to find people speaking a national language at the market, French in school, and their mother tongue at home.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Folklore is communicated in many ways, including literature, art, music, and dance. It is a means of carrying on tradition from generation to generation. Each ethnic group has its own legends and folk tales, though similarities exist. Animals figure importantly in these. For example, the rabbit is identified with intelligence and cunning, while the crocodile is associated with something bad, such as an unforgiving traffic cop, or an overzealous ticket-taker on the bus.

A deep appreciation for Congo's rich past is seen through a former popular television figure, *Grandpère* (grandfather), who told folk tales in a village setting, recalling former times when this tradition took place around an evening fire. Since the purpose of the tales was to teach while entertaining, Grandpère frequently expounded on the morals of these stories and of their application to daily life. Children, as well as adults, now watch a similar program in four of the national languages. In Swahili the program is called, "Hadisi Njo," and in Lingala "Lisapo Nge." These titles are actually the way storytelling begins with the storyteller saying "Lisapo Nge!" and the audience replying "Onge!" Children considered it a great honor to appear on the Grandpère show.

#### 5 RELIGION

Nearly half of all Congolese practice Catholicism, and another third are Protestant, yet Christian and traditional beliefs are blended together. For example, at holy Mass, protection of the ancestors is often implored. People also dance in the liturgy and offer in-kind gifts, including goat, cassava, fish, fruits, and vegetables. In 1921, Simon Kimbangu, claiming to be a prophet of Jesus Christ, led a religious revival against colonialism. Some 17% of the population now profess a form of African Christianity. In recent years Protestant sects led by charismatic preachers have gained large followings in towns and cities. The popularity of these churches is based in part on the hope they hold out to their parishioners, for whom survival has become a daily challenge. It also reflects the failure of institutionalized churches to respond to people's everyday needs.

Traditional belief holds that all things have life and deserve respect, even inanimate objects like rocks. Life never ends, and no separation exists between the living and the dead. Offering the ancestors a drink by pouring some beer on the ground is symbolic of this belief. Nzambe, assisted by the spirits of ancestors, is the supreme being from whom all things derive. The *Nganga-Nzambe*, the "doctor of God," is called upon in times of need to intercede with sacrifices and prayers. When evil befalls someone, it is assumed that a person or a bad spirit is responsible. It is up to the *Nganga* to find the cause and appease the person or spirit who is displeased.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The increasingly difficult political and economic climate in the DRC has dampened popular celebrations of secular holidays. June 30, Independence Day, is celebrated in the capital with speeches, parades and folk dancing, but political holidays such as May 20, the day that Mobutu's Popular Revolutionary Movement Party (MPR) was founded, have been taken off the calendar. Christmas, New Year's Day, and Easter are festive occasions for family visiting, and if means permit, are celebrated with roast goat or cow.



Parent's Day, August 1, is a unique holiday. In the morning Congolese celebrate the dead, and in the afternoon, the living. Residents of Kinshasa, for example, go to the cemeteries early to clear and spruce up family graves. Fires are set to burn away the tall weeds and elephant grass, which at the end of the rainy season are very dry but so thick as to be impenetrable. As the grasses burn, tomb stones, grave markers, and crosses appear through the smoke and flames. Visitors dodge these uncontrolled fires to sweep off their ancestors' graves and perhaps enjoy a meal at the site with them. Adults then return home to eat again together with the children.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the DRC, children are a symbol of wealth, and all births are celebrated with joy. However, in the dominant patriarchal system, boys are more desired because they perpetuate the family name. *Kobota elingi*, the joy of giving birth, is celebrated with friends, who bring gifts, food, and drinks to the parents. They also help out with household chores and caring for the baby. The more respected the parents are, the more help they are likely to receive.

Prior to colonization, boys and girls passed to adulthood through initiation rites. Boys were circumcised and taught the elders' wisdom and the values of their culture. Girls were never circumcised, but they were brought to a secret place and taught how to succeed in marriage and to raise a family. Nowadays, male circumcision occurs soon after birth. Because of social changes in the cities, young men and women are usually





*Zairian families traditionally tended to be large, with 10 or more children. The number of children per family is shrinking, especially in urban centers. (Jason Laure)*

taught about life and their culture by a family member such as an uncle or aunt.

Congolese believe in life after death, but death still remains a mystery, especially in the case of a child, young person, or young adult. Blame or responsibility must be assigned so that their spirits may rest. When an elderly person dies, however, it is believed that their spirits watch over family members. Funeral ceremonies, *matanga*, vary according to ethnic group. In the villages, the corpse is washed and kept in the house until burial. In the cities, it is taken out and laid in a bed underneath a canopy of palm branches. Mourners comfort the family by bringing gifts, and by sitting on the ground with the family and praying.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Congolese are extremely gregarious and commonly stop to greet friends, and even strangers, on the street. When socializing, they typically walk around in small groups of two or three. It is customary to shake hands when meeting people, and when taking leave of them. When greeting an older person, one waits for the elder person to offer his or her hand. If the hand is not offered, one gives a slight bow with the head. If the hand is offered, the younger person reaches out with the right hand and rests the left hand on the right arm near the wrist. Children should receive objects from adults, even from each other, with both hands.

During the Mobutu era, strangers greeted each other with the title, "Citoyen" (Citizen). They now use the French "Monsieur," "Madame," or "Mademoiselle." However, a less formal and popular address is simply "Papa" or "Mama." There are several ways to greet people depending on time of day and the

nature of the relationship. In the morning a Lingala-speaker greets by asking, "Hello, is that you? (*Mbote, Yo wana?*), Are you awake? (*Olamuki?*), How did you sleep?" (*Olalaki malamu?*). Asking someone how they are consists of literally asking, "What news?" (*Sango nini?*). The typical reply would be, "No news!" (*Sango te*) meaning, "Fine." It is not considered impolite to drop in on someone without giving prior notice. In fact, announcing a visit signals something important, like a marriage request, in which case the visitor brings along a sack of rice, a goat, and several cases of beer.

Congolese place great importance on family and social relations. A grandparent affectionately refers to his or her grandchild as "little husband or wife," and the grandchild refers to the grandparent in the same way. A woman light-heartedly addresses a neighbor as "father-in-law" (*bokilo*) because she likes his young son, whom she calls her "little husband." Many people call friends and even strangers "brother-in-law" or "sister-in-law," which is a way of building friendships and avoiding conflict.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The majority of Congolese find it challenging to send their children to school, pay for health care, and even to eat one or two meals a day. Many middle-class urbanites who once had dependable salaries and were people of means now eat once a day or less. Half-finished houses take years to complete. Many goods are priced in US dollars to hedge against inflation. The Human Development Index (HDI), which measures general well-being according to life expectancy, education, and standard of living rates the DRC 168 out of 177 countries.

Health care is generally available in cities and town centers, but unless patients can afford to pay for bandages, medications, and other basic supplies, they will not receive treatment. Before the outbreak of AIDS, clinics and hospitals routinely reused needles. Some 54% of the population does not have access to improved water sources, 31% of children aged 0–5 are underweight for their age, and the probability of not surviving past age 40 is about 41%.

Homes in the village are often made from mud brick, and thatch or galvanized-iron roofing. They are clean, but not mosquito-proof. People use kerosene lamps, and women and children haul water from nearby springs, rivers, or common wells. It is difficult in these conditions to avoid bacteria and children often suffer from a variety of air- and water-borne diseases such as diarrhea and dysentery. In the towns, some houses have electricity, running water, and flush toilets. However, large sections of Kinshasa that once enjoyed 24-hour electricity now receive on average six hours of power a day.

The most common form of transportation in the DRC is on foot. People walk everywhere, and women and girls balance huge loads on their heads—anything from wash basins full of fruit to buckets of water. The extremely poor condition of DRC's once vast road network makes it impossible to travel easily from one region to another. Air travel, which is risky and expensive, is practically the only way to travel from Kinshasa to Lumbumbashi or to Goma and Bukavu in the east. River travel is the other most dependable means of reaching the hinterlands. River boats and dug-out canoes are perhaps the best way to bring goods to market and to travel especially in the central Congo basin.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Children are a blessing, a sign of wealth and a social safety net for parents in their old age. Families of 10 or more children are not unusual though family size shrinks with education and affluence. The financial difficulties associated with paying bride prices, housing, and other costs delays marriage. Many couples now either co-habit or marry in their thirties. Polygyny is practiced, but since second wives are not recognized by church or state, men tend to keep a second wife or girlfriend (*deuxième bureau*—second office) at another location.

In the extended family, marriages may be seen as alliances among families, clans, and ethnic groups with similar interests, and therefore parents and older siblings will search for a suitable spouse for their children and younger brothers and sisters from among members of the same ethnic group. A couple often participates in separate traditional, civil, and religious ceremonies. The traditional ceremony consists of exchanging gifts between the two families. The bride-price, which includes money, clothing, a Coleman lantern, or cattle, has been paid long before the wedding. The bride-price creates an alliance between the two families and the couple, and it represents the wealth that women bring to African society as mothers and workers. The civil ceremony consists of exchanging wedding vows before a government representative. The official reminds the couple of their family and civic responsibilities, and also confirms that the bride-price has been accepted. The bride and groom are expected to furnish cases of beer and soft drinks for the official. Finally, at the church, the bride might wear a Western-style wedding dress. In rural areas, wedding celebrations can last weeks, punctuated with singing, dancing, and feasting.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the DRC, people dress up in public. If they cannot afford fancy clothes, they wear washed and neatly pressed second-hand clothing. Sloppiness is not considered a virtue. In the 1970s, under Mobutu's "authenticity program," the government banned westernized business suits for men, and replaced them with collarless suits, or *abacost*, meaning "down with suits." Neckties and bow ties were also replaced by scarves and matching handkerchiefs in the front pockets.

Similarly, women were not permitted to wear wigs, Western pants, jeans, or miniskirts. Even today as those rules no longer apply, women prefer African wraparounds (*pagnes*), tailored in creative styles with bright, colorful African patterns. Highly trained and skilled tailors and dressmakers have made an art form of styling the *pagne* and blouse, and many fabrics are given names. In addition, made-to-order bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces of ivory, malachite, gold, silver, copper, and diamonds are prized. In inflationary times, quality fashionable clothing and jewelry are investments that hold value. Congolesse styles have caught on elsewhere in Africa, and have given the DRC a leading reputation for African dress.

## 12 FOOD

Congolesse love to eat, but have increasingly had to tighten their belts because of the economy. Breakfast may be no more than sweet *café au lait* (coffee with milk) with a baguette of French bread that can be dunked in the coffee. The noon meal is the most important and requires considerable time to prepare, including a trip to the market to buy ingredients. The staples are

cassava, rice, potatoes, plantains, and sweet potatoes or yams, accompanied by a sauce of greens, fish, or meat depending on the region. Typically, a family eats from the same bowl of sauce, and from a large dough-like ball of cassava flour or corn flour (*fufu*) or a mixture of the two. Before eating, hands are washed (a basin of warm water, a bar of soap, and a towel may be passed around). Supper consists of leftovers or tea and bread. In rural areas men and women tend to eat separately, particularly at parties and ceremonies. People eat with one hand, usually the right. Congolesse would normally cook more than they can eat because one never knows when visitors might drop in. Under normal circumstances it would be extremely rude not to offer, or not to accept, food and drink.

A favorite sauce is made from cassava leaves (*saka saka*), which are pounded and cooked. Fish is often added to *saka saka*. Other traditional foods include pounded sesame seeds (*wangila*), squash seeds (*mbika*), steamed chicken or fish (*maboke*), shiskabobs (*kamundele*), and plantain dough (*lituma*). In some regions, people consider caterpillars, grubs, roasted crickets, and termites to be delicacies. In the Equatorial region, wild game such as elephant, monkey, hippopotamus, and crocodile are enjoyed. The DRC is perhaps best known for *mwamba*, a sauce made of palm-nut paste, in which chicken, meat, and fish are cooked. *Mwamba* is cooked over a low fire, and is eaten with rice, *fufu*, or *chikwange* (cassava prepared in banana leaves).

As for drink, fondness for beer is legendary, but in the village, palm-wine is the favorite. This drink is fermented after being tapped from the top of the coconut palm, drawn into a gourd overnight, and collected early the next morning. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, people sit in the shade of a mango tree, consuming the milky, tangy substance. Bananabeer, sugarcane-wine, fruit wines, homemade gin, and passion fruit juice are some of the other drinks produced throughout the country. Pouring a small amount of drink on the ground for the thirsty ancestors is customary before drinking.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is not required by law, and many children drop out of school to work when parents are unable to pay fees, book rentals, and buy school uniforms, copybooks, pencils, and other supplies. In 2005 the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrolment ratio was 33.7%. The adult literacy rate for people aged 15 years and older was 67%.

Secondary school begins with a two-year middle school program (*cycle d'orientation*). The main goal is to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses, and orient students for future study and career choices. The four-year high school program includes the following general options, depending on the school: Literature, Science, Business, Nursing, and Education. A high school diploma must be earned by passing a rigorous state exam, and for many it becomes the final degree. Public university, plagued by strikes and overcrowding, closes frequently. Consequently, many private universities have opened over the past few years. Parents with means or connections send their children to private boarding schools for high school, and to university in South Africa or Europe.

Because pay is low and erratic, teaching is no longer a prestigious vocation. Teachers supplement their income by working on the side. Inability to make a living wage has also led to bribes for grades. Many public school classrooms lack basic supplies

such as blackboards and chalk. In some schools, children must take their own stools. A unique Congolese institution that puts responsibility on the pupils to keep up their schools is *salongo*. *Salongo* brings the students together to spruce up school buildings, clean school yards, and remove overgrowth from school grounds and sports fields.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Congolese dance music, referred to as “Sukus” in the United States, has been popular throughout sub-Saharan Africa since the 1950s and continues to gain international popularity. It is a combination of jazz, traditional music, and Latin-influenced rhythms. The instrumentation consists of electric guitars, keyboards, trumpets, saxophones, conga drums, and Western-style drum sets. Lyrics in Lingala comment on society, give advice, make political statements, criticize behavior, or simply relate love stories. Songs typically are divided in half. They begin with a slow section, and end with a fast-paced beat. One song can last for as long as 20 minutes.

Congolese are imaginative dancers, constantly inventing new dances which come and go almost monthly. Colorful names depict the dance movements and gestures, such as *dindon* (the turkey), *caneton* (the duckling), *volant* (the steering wheel), and Apollo (astronauts’ space-walking on the moon). Music is heard just about anywhere even on domestic flights. Drumming and dancing are part of any festive occasion, be it greeting the president at the airport, frolicking in the village under a full moon, or performing at a cultural event. The national folkloric ballet has gained an international reputation.

From ancient times, Congolese peoples have used their oral literature to carry on traditions, customs, and social values. Modern written literature has been built on this oral foundation. It varies widely from classical to popular forms and is written in French as well as in national languages. Drama is one of the most popular forms of literature today.

#### 15 WORK

One of the greatest challenges facing the Congo is to create work opportunities for its citizens. Industry employs only 10% of the work force, mainly in mining, timber extraction, oil palm processing, textiles, chemicals, and food processing. Services employ about 12% of the labor force. The rest of the work force is either without work or employed in the informal sector in subsistence agriculture and petty trades. Informal work provides no regular salary, health insurance, pensions, or other benefits. Since the closure of Gecamines, the national mining company, some 20,000 skilled jobs with benefit packages have been lost. The impact of these closures on mining cities like Kolwezi has been devastating to infrastructure and the local economy. While industrial mining is beginning to return, some 2 million miners labor under harsh conditions panning for diamonds, copper, gold, and coltan, which is used in making cell phones, DVD players, and computers.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the national pastime, played or watched virtually throughout the country. Competition with African national teams is so intense that when the national team defeated the Moroccans for the Africa Cup in the 1970s, the returning players were welcomed like royalty and given houses, cars, and

large sums of money. Congolese (then Zairians) were treated to a national holiday.

People love playing cards, chess, checkers, and board games. A traditional board game called *Mangula* is played mainly in rural areas by men. One version consists of a carved wooden board with two rows of shallow pockets separated by a divider. The game begins with some small stones in each pocket. Player One moves and continues according to the number of stones he picks up. Each time he lands, he picks up his opponent’s stones in the pocket opposite him across the divider, and uses these stones to continue his play. When he fails to pick up any stones, his opponent takes his turn. The first person to displace all his opponent’s stones to his side of the board wins.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most people do not have disposable income to go to cinemas, to eat out, to go to night clubs, or to pay for entertainment. Their entertainment is restricted to socializing with family and friends, watching TV (in towns and cities), and telling stories or dancing in the village square on special occasions. Video houses hooked to satellite TV have gained in popularity for watching soccer tournaments and movies. In the cities young people and adults enjoy going out on Saturday night to socialize, listen to music at outdoor pubs, dance at night clubs, and watch theatrical events.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The DRC is famous for its traditional folk arts and crafts. Artists and craftspeople produce ceramic pots, reed mats, woven baskets, woodcarvings, chess games, sand paintings, hand-made clothing, and jewelry. Children are very inventive, recycling tomato cans and metal hangers to design cars that are steerable, and airplanes with hatches that open.

In general, African art is functional, but increasingly tourist art generates income. Formerly, masks were assigned power to intercede with the divine. Some are still only brought out on very specific occasions for initiations and for solving community problems. The Bakuba people from the Kasai regions still produce wood sculptures, masks, and statuettes that may be used to enhance fertility, and to chase away evil spirits. In recent times, a distinct genre of oil paintings, found in many Zairian homes, wryly reflects the magnitude of contemporary social challenges. In these paintings, snakes or lions within striking distance of unsuspecting human prey depict impending doom.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Congolese must conquer hunger, political repression, and political and economic instability, and meet their basic daily needs. People work hard for very little. Many people resort to “*Article 15*” or “*debrouillez-vous*,” which means, “make do in whatever way possible.” Kids leave school early, girls prostitute themselves, civil servants steal, police officers extort, and military personnel loot and pillage. Enormous human losses caused by HIV/AIDS and the Ebola virus challenge Congolese to care for the sick and orphaned. A hidden tragedy is that generations of Congolese children may be growing up undernourished on a basic diet of cassava, which is extremely poor in nutrition.

Nonetheless, Congolese are learning to cope with these scourges. Compared to the United States, drug use is uncommon, and serious crimes as Americans know them are rare.

For all their problems, Congolese are resilient people, who are making do with “*Article 15.*”

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The value of women and girls to Congolese society is recognized through the bride price (*la dotte*), which is payable by the groom’s family to the bride’s family in order for marriage to proceed, and it can be quite considerable involving both in-kind and cash payments. However, women and girls are subservient to men and boys in social, economic and political spheres of life, and under the law women do not possess the same rights as men. For example, a woman must obtain her husband’s permission before opening a bank account, conducting a real estate transaction, and applying for a passport.

A woman found guilty of adultery could be sentenced up to one year in prison while a man would unlikely be subject to a penalty. Women are not permitted by law to work at night or to accept employment without their husband’s consent. They typically do most of the household work, fetch water and firewood in the village, and in the public and private workplace they receive less pay for doing the same job. They rarely occupy political posts or positions of high authority and responsibility. As noted (see **Social Problems**) women and girls are subjected to trafficking, forced labor, prostitution, and rape, but the government is either unable or unwilling to protect them and to provide justice for them under the law.

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—revised by R. Groelsema and M. C. Groelsema

# COPTIC CHRISTIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Copts

**LOCATION:** Egypt

**POPULATION:** 6.8 million-8.3 million (2007 estimate/includes 1.2 million Coptic Christians who reside outside Egypt)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic, Coptic

**RELIGION:** Coptic Orthodox Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Coptic Christians are a distinct religious community in Egypt and the Coptic Orthodox Church is the largest Christian institution in the Middle East. The origin of the community dates to the childhood of Jesus, who was said to have traveled to Egypt with his father, Joseph, and mother, Mary. The apostle Mark, a follower of Jesus, brought Christianity to Egypt during the rule of the Roman emperor Nero in the 1st century AD, and Copts regard Mark as the first patriarch of their church. Mark’s proselytizing helped spread Christianity from the city of Alexandria throughout Egypt. Writings from the New Testament that date to AD 200 have been found in Bahnasa. A fragment of a document found in upper Egypt contains a portion of the Gospel of St. John in the Coptic language.

Copt scholars and writers played an important role in the formation of early Christian theology. The Catechetical School of Alexandria was founded in AD 190 and soon became the most important site for religious instruction among Christians. The school also taught science, mathematics, and the humanities. Monasticism, or the practice of renouncing worldly pursuits in order to pursue a spiritual path, began in Egypt in AD 300 and influenced Coptic beliefs in submission and humbleness. A Copt known as St. Anthony was the world’s first Christian monk. By the end of the 4th century AD, hundreds of monasteries had formed in the hills of Egypt.

Coptic Christians were part of the Byzantine family of Christians until the universal Christian church split following the Council of Chalcedon (the Fourth Ecumenical Council) in AD 451. The council, based in Rome, ruled that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, or of two complete natures. This ruling diverged from beliefs of the Coptic Christians and other followers of what has come to be known as the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Eastern Orthodox followers believe that the humanity and divinity of Jesus are united and that the son of God has one, not two, natures. As the universal church split, Copts suffered a great deal of persecution from other Christians, and their strength as a religious community weakened. Arabs invaded Egypt in AD 649 and were able to use the weakness in the community to convince hundreds of thousands of former Christians to convert to Islam. By the end of the 12th century, Egypt had become a predominantly Muslim country. Muhammad the Prophet, the founder of Islam, however, had an Egyptian wife and emphasized the need for new converts to practice kindness toward Copts. Coptic Christians were allowed to practice their faith freely and suffered little discrimination as long as they paid a special tax to the Arab regime. The Copts suffered periodically from Muslim hostility and were at times prohibited from building new churches, testifying in court, or practicing their religion in public.

The position of Copts improved in the early 19th century under the rule of Muhammad Ali. The Egyptian state lifted tax rules imposed on the community and no longer separated Copts from Muslims administratively. By 1855 Copts were serving the Egyptian army and joined with Muslims in asserting a sense of a national Egyptian identity during the 1919 revolution in Egypt. The Coptic church has enjoyed a remarkable revival since the middle of the 20th century. The church is strongest in Egypt, with approximately 9 million followers. However, missionary efforts and the emigration of Copts from Egypt have led to the establishment of Coptic Christian communities throughout the world.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Copts live throughout Egypt, and traces of their cultural, historical, and spiritual influence can be found in every province. Egypt is located in northern Africa. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, between Libya and the Gaza Strip, and the Red Sea north of Sudan. Egypt's land also includes the Sinai Peninsula.

With an area of 1,001,447 sq km (686,622 sq mi), Egypt is slightly bigger than the states of New Mexico and Texas combined. That land area is largely desert, with small oases scattered throughout the land. All but about 5% of the country's land is uninhabitable. More than 97% of the population lives in the Nile Valley, which runs the length of the country. The Nile faced seasonal flooding until the Aswan Dam was built in southeastern Egypt. The dam has allowed for a small agricultural area to thrive. Most residents, however, live in cities along the Nile, particularly around Cairo. Overcrowding has prompted the government to reclaim desert areas through the pumping of water from Lake Nasser. Southern Egypt is largely rural and Copts who inhabit these areas are generally poorer and less well educated than those who reside in the more prosperous north.

Part of the Sahara Desert lies in Egypt. Coptic monasticism historically has brought men to Egypt's deserts to practice asceticism for periods of time. As a result, a rich array of Coptic culture can be found near the Khargo oasis. Living conditions in the deserts are extremely harsh. The climate throughout Egypt is generally hot and dry in the summer with temperatures reaching 21 to 36°C (69 to 97°F) in July and more moderate in the winters. Temperatures in December average from 8 to 18°C (46 to 64°F). Egypt receives only 5 mm (0.20 in) of rainfall per year on average although as much as 203 mm (8 in) might fall in the Nile Delta. A hot, dusty wind known as *khamasiin* blows in Egypt through the spring.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The word Copt is derived from *Gibt*, which was an Arabic form of the Greek term of *Agyptos*. The Greek term was derived from *Hikaptah*, which was the ancient Egyptian name for the first capital city of Memphis. The Coptic language shares a philological affinity with the ancient tongue of Egypt's pharaohs and continues to be used in liturgical rituals. However, most Copts speak Egypt's official language of Arabic. Some also use English and French for business or social affairs. Coptic language and literature courses are offered at a few European universities, a Coptic Studies program at American University–Cairo, and some Coptic Orthodox Churches.

Coptic Christians often define their affiliation to their religion through the naming of babies. It is customary to choose a Coptic name over a more common Egyptian name that might be associated with Islam.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Copt stories from the medieval period remind humans of the importance of prayer, fasting, and doing good works in the name of God. Many of the stories contain both Coptic Christian and Egyptian Muslim influences. Some were first written in Arabic, but used in Christian homilies throughout Egypt.

One such story relates to a figure named Luqman the Wise, a Christian preacher. In one story, Luqman the Wise chastises those who neglect such practices by telling them that they risk allowing a rooster to become better than them.

Luqman the Wise says:

“O my son, don't let the rooster be better than you!

For it, when the night is half spent, beats

its wings and cries out to God in praise.

So if a lowly bird that has no value praises God, how can it be that a

noble human being, whom God has set above all the creatures, does not

praise God and ascribe him holiness at all times?”

In another story, Luqman the Wise's words emphasize the freedom and strength of the Copts in preserving their religious practice amid the threat of persecution from Muslims:

Also, Luqman the Wise says:

“God has humbled the people of the world

with two traits: death and poverty.

Were it not for death, no stubborn tyrant would submit.

Were it not for poverty, no free people would serve slaves.”

## 5 RELIGION

The Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament contains a prophecy of the formation of a Christian community in Egypt. In chapter 19, verse 19, Isaiah writes, “In that day there will be an altar to the lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the lord at its border.” In line with that prophecy, many Biblical figures saw Egypt as a refuge from famine and persecution. Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, also are believed to have spent time in Egypt when Jesus was a small child. Many churches have been built at sites where the Holy Family was believed to have sought shelter, and other landscape features, such as caves and trees, are known as resting points for the family.

Coptic Christianity leans toward the mystic and spiritual. Religious instruction continues at the Catechetical School of Alexandria, where scholars use allegorical and spiritual methods to interpret and teach scripture. Numerous saints and ascetics are associated with the Coptic Orthodox Church. Many of these individuals attained martyrdom during the centuries of persecution that Copts suffered under Byzantine rule.



*A young Coptic Christian boy at church services in the St. Maximus Church, Alexandria, Egypt. (AP Images/Ben Curtis)*

One of the most prominent symbols of the Coptic Church is the Coptic cross. The most common Coptic cross consists of two bars of equal length that are crossed perpendicularly at the center. There are three points at the end of each bar, symbolizing the Trinity. The total of 12 points on the cross further symbolizes the 12 Apostles. In some forms, the cross will contain a circle, either at the center or at the top. Copts adapted the cross soon after the apostle Mark brought Christianity to Egypt. The Copt use of this cross continues a belief among pre-Christian Egyptians that the symbol represented eternal life.

Many Coptic Christians regard asceticism as a way of life. The level to which asceticism is practiced among Coptic Christians varies considerably. Nevertheless, most believe that the path to enjoyment of the divine spirit lies in a minimizing or full renouncing of worldly pursuits. This belief leads some to practice celibacy. Women traditionally would live together in a single house in the cities to assist each other spiritually, while men who chose to be celibate would live in simple huts in villages. Others would go to Egypt's deserts. Nearly a dozen monasteries still exist in Egypt's deserts, and at least six convents for Copts are still operating in Egyptian cities.

The Coptic Christian worship service is lengthy and rich with ritual. Worship includes the singing of hymns, the reciting of liturgies, fasting, and numerous feasts throughout the

year. The full congregation, including children, participate in the service.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Egypt established Coptic Christmas as a national holiday in 2003. The celebration of Christmas generally falls around January 6 or 7 and ends with a 45-day fast that some Copts observe. Shops and government services for both Muslims and Christians are closed in Egypt on that day. Other major holidays include Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension, and Annunciation. These holidays, along with Christmas, are known in the Coptic Christian world as the Seven Major Feasts. A series of fasts precede the major feasts. The church also celebrates what are known as the Seven Minor Feasts: the Circumcision of the Lord, Entrance into the Temple, Entrance into Egypt, Transfiguration, Holy Thursday, Thomas Sunday, and Great Lent.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Copt babies are traditionally washed during a special service eight days after their birth and baptized in the church. A special liturgy is recited in the new child's honor. The death of a congregation member results in two services—a funeral that takes place at the church and a special prayer three days after the death at the home of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Most Egyptians take a relaxed, patient approach to life. The term *ma'alesh* translates to mean “don't worry” or “never mind.” The phrase is used when conflicts arise, as a way of pointing out that the concerns are not serious and will soon pass. A sense of community and the importance of generosity are emphasized among all Egyptians and personal needs at times are dismissed as secondary to community needs. Social relationships between Coptic Christians and Muslims are generally cordial, and Copts in Egypt follow the prevailing Egyptian attitude toward life.

Copt families historically lived separately from Muslims in Egypt. Cities contained certain quarters where Copts would congregate, and some villages were inhabited entirely by Copts. That practice of separation has declined considerably since the modern Egyptian nationalistic movement of the early twentieth century, and most Copts are fully integrated into modern Egypt's Islamic-based society. The Coptic Orthodox Church, however, bans marriage between Coptic Christians and Muslims and will excommunicate those who marry outside the church. The church also prohibits intermarriage between Copts and Jehovah's Witnesses, although Copts are allowed to marry people of other Christian denominations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions have been improving in Egypt since the mid 1960s. The death rate has fallen from 19 deaths for every 1,000 births in 1965 to approximately 5 deaths for every 1,000 births as of mid-2007. Life expectancy in mid-2007 was estimated at 74.2 years for women and 69 years for men.

Medical facilities still are limited in rural areas. As a result, diseases such as typhoid and bilharzia continue to be problems. Doctors and volunteers visit villages with medical caravans, and the government has established a daily four-hour satellite television program on health topics. Although every city has a hospital, it is only the private, most expensive hospitals that are equipped with state-of-the-art technology.

A large gap between the wealthy and poor continues to exist in Egypt. This is reflected in housing found in the country. Housing conditions range from the spacious, elegant villas for the wealthy to dirty, slum-like dwellings for the poor. Many people live in apartment buildings in Egypt's crowded cities. While the buildings are often unattractive and dirty on the outside, the interiors are well maintained and clean. As more people crowd into cities, shanty towns have sprung up. Conditions in these areas are unclean and unsafe. Huge cemeteries surround Cairo, and some of the poorest residents have begun to inhabit old tombs illegally.

Rural homes tend to be small and built as closely to each other as possible so that Egypt's sparse agricultural land can be used for farming.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Egyptians value both the nuclear and extended family. Brothers are required to protect their sisters and often accompany them in public. While extended families traditionally lived in one household, the increased urbanization in Egypt's cities is making the nuclear household more common. Marriages often are arranged between cousins, and many young adults will care for their parents in old age. Coptic Christians share similar family values.

Coptic life also centers around the church. An entire family customarily will choose a priest as a family counselor and will make regular personal confessions to that priest. Worship is family oriented, with both male and female adults as well as children participating actively in the service.

## 11 CLOTHING

Copt weavers developed many fabrics that contained ornately designed patterns in pre-Islamic Egypt. The patterns often contained images of landscape scenery, animals, and religious iconography. Long, loose-fitting tunics displayed the intricate, colorful work.

Today, most Coptic Christians dress as Muslims and others in Egypt do. The traditional dress of men in Egypt is the *gallabeyya*, which is a long robe. Males continue to wear the traditional dress in cities but also will wear Western business suits and more casual Western attire. Copt women usually follow the tradition in Islamic countries of covering the body in public, although they will wear Western styles of clothing occasionally in cities. Copt women in rural areas particularly will wear black headscarves and long, loose-fitting dresses that drape the entire body. In churches, it is common for worshippers to remove their shoes before entering.

## 12 FOOD

Foods among Coptic Christians are flavored with spices such as cumin, garlic, onion, and allspice, and many vegetarian dishes have emerged in the Coptic Christian cuisine because of the fasting rules that the church observes. In the Coptic tradition, a partial fast and abstinence from meat are recommended on nearly 200 days out of each year. Meals during these fasting periods often include fava beans, lentils, grape leaves, tomatoes, and potatoes.

During non-fasting periods, Copts, like other Egyptians, eat rice, bread, fish, lamb, chicken, and turkey.

It also is customary to pray before and after a meal. Even when the meal does not contain meat, menus are quite elaborate. It is customary throughout Egypt not to eat everything placed on a plate as a way of complimenting the host for providing such an abundance of food. Foods are generally eaten with the fingers of the right hand, although Western utensils are used for eating occasionally in cities.

## 13 EDUCATION

Copt children attend schools in Egypt, which are free through the university level. The UN Development Program estimated that 91% of all Egyptian children were enrolled in primary schools in 2003 and that 88% were enrolled in secondary schools. In addition, Egypt has twelve public universities and 8,674 privately funded schools and universities. The country also has 125 technical and vocational schools. As of 2005, about 1.76 million students were enrolled in higher educational institutions. Class sizes in Egypt are quite large with as many as forty-three to sixty-two students being taught by a single instructor. The government plans to build 2,000 additional schools by 2012 and has initiated a program for teacher training.

Instruction in Egyptian schools is primarily in Arabic, although English and French also are taught. The role of the Coptic Christian community in Egypt is largely ignored in primary and secondary schools. As a result, Copt children learn

about their language and culture primarily at home or through the church. Some steps are being taken to change that situation. The American University-Cairo recently established a Coptic Studies program in which the language, literature, and culture of the Copt community is taught.

The Copt's ancient school, the Catechetical School of Alexandria, was destroyed in the early Islamic era. It was re-established, however, in 1893 and currently has campuses in Alexandria and Cairo in Egypt and in New Jersey and California in the United States.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

There is a rich heritage of Coptic Christian chants, music, iconography, and tapestry associated with the Coptic Orthodox Church. Much of this heritage has been ignored by Egypt's Muslim-majority community until recently. Now, efforts are underway to revive and restore Coptic arts. Many churches are receiving money from the government and international aid groups to restore the distinctive architecture of their sites. Paintings on the walls of the churches and in monasteries in Egypt's deserts also are being restored. A Coptic museum in Cairo also is being renovated, and religious sites have been added to a governmental list for restorations.

Much of the cultural revival of Coptic arts, language, and literature has resulted from the growth of Copt communities overseas.

#### **15 WORK**

Egypt's educational system emphasizes rote learning over critical thinking. That style of education, coupled with a lack of trained teachers, has not prepared young Egyptian adults well for the labor market of the early 21st century. The adult literacy rate was 55.6% in 2003, which is extremely high relative to other countries.

Most Egyptians work in the government, and many, including many Coptic Christian men, are conscripted to complete a term of service in Egypt's military. Approximately one-third of Egyptians works in agriculture and grows corn, wheat, cotton, rice, barley, and fruits. Others work in tourism or at ports along the Suez Canal, an important source of income for Egypt. Much of the population lives below the poverty line. Women account for only one-fourth of Egypt's income.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Soccer is Egypt's national sport. Besides playing soccer, Egyptians enjoy playing tennis, swimming and horseback riding. Although a tradition of playing sports does not exist in Copt communities, Coptic Christians also take part in similar activities.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Egyptian cities have a number of cinemas where Egyptian and foreign films are shown. Egypt's film-making and television programming have received acclaim throughout the Middle East. Television plays a big part in daily leisure lives, even in the rural areas. Men often gather at coffee shops to play backgammon and dominoes and to converse with friends. Women tend to socialize primarily in the home or at places such as markets.

For Copts, the church is a center of social life. Churches organize summer camps for youth, pilgrimages to holy sites within Egypt as well as the rest of the Middle East, and offer many opportunities for socializing before or after services. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt and resulting attacks on Copts has prompted many Copts to turn inward and isolate themselves from the Muslim mainstream. Many have turned to their churches for protection and solace.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Coptic tradition of pattern weaving in the early Christian era led to the creation of many elaborately designed bed sheets and covers, towels, napkins, tablecloths, curtains, and wall hangings. Much of this textile work continues today, and is marketed in tourist centers. An "s-twist" of thread characterizes the Coptic textiles. Flax fibers used to make thread are washed and then spun into thread in a counter-clockwise direction. Many Coptic crafts developed in monasteries, and practices of weaving, leather binding, painting, and woodwork continue into the present day.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Egypt revised its constitution in 1981 so that legislative principles would draw their source from the Islamic Sharia. About 90% of Egyptians are Sunni Muslim and look to Islam to govern decisions on marriage, divorce and inheritance. However, tensions are growing between secularists and fundamentalist Muslims in Egypt. While secularists support a state that allows for religious difference, a free press, and cultural diversity to flourish, some religious fundamentalists within Islam would like the government to enforce a great adherence to Islamic principles in schools, public policies, and the arts. Egypt's growing population, limited natural resources, and reliance on the Nile River for water are straining the country's resources. Nearly one out of five Egyptians lives below the poverty line, and even though less than 3% of the country's land is usable for agriculture, nearly one-third of the people draw their income from agriculture. Islamic fundamentalists believe that more compliance with Islamic law could help alleviate Egypt's problems.

The fight over secularism has generated some hostilities against Coptic Christians since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. president George W. Bush has referred to the war against terror as a "crusade." The term "crusade" evoked memories of the centuries of bitter warfare between Muslims and Christians for some fundamentalists who have responded by looting Copt businesses, attacking churches, and harassing Copt individuals. Coptic Church leaders have tried to quell the hostility by appealing to the Quran and its calls for compassion. Pope Shenouda III is the present head of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He frequently infuses his prayers with references to Arab poetry and Muslim religious messages. His goal is to press for national unity in which Copts will remain free to practice their faith under a benevolent Islamic state.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Egypt enacted a family reform law in 2000 that allowed for women to initiate divorce from a spouse. Although the law made it possible for a woman to leave an abusive spouse, it does not allow for the woman to collect alimony and requires



that she return any money that was given to her or her family at the time of her marriage.

Rules against divorce are even more prohibitive in the Coptic Christian community. The Coptic Orthodox Church prohibits divorce and strictly forbids women to have abortions. In recent years, some women have converted to Islam in order to divorce their husbands. These conversions have presented difficulties in the Coptic community because Egypt's Islamic code often forces children of a parent who converts to Islam to abandon the church and become Muslim. The Coptic Orthodox Church also has condemned marriage between gays and lesbians.

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—by H. Gupta-Carlson

# CREOLES OF SIERRA LEONE

**PRONUNCIATION:** CREE-uhls of see-AIR-a lee-OWN

**LOCATION:** Sierra Leone

**POPULATION:** 150,000–190,000

**LANGUAGE:** Krio

**RELIGION:** Christianity with remnants of traditional African religion

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Creoles are a culturally distinct people of Sierra Leone. Their ancestors were liberated slaves from London, Nova Scotia, Jamaica, and parts of West Africa. They were brought as immigrants to the coast of Sierra Leone, where Britain established a haven for liberated slaves in 1787 and a colony in 1807. After passage of the Anti-Slavery Act in 1807, the British navy patrolled the West African coast, intercepted slave ships bound for the Americas, and released their captives in Freetown. From 1808 to 1863 thousands of liberated Africans came to Freetown, and by 1830 the crown colony had become home to more than 10,000 people, who by virtue of adoption and intermarriage became the Creoles.

By the late 1800s, the Creoles had become prosperous through trade and aspired to emulate the culture and manners of Victorian England. Trade grew between the Creoles and the peoples of the interior. In 1895, the British and French signed a treaty, establishing the current boundaries of present-day Sierra Leone, and the following year the British proclaimed the interior a protectorate.

In the 20th century, the racial stratification of the British Empire hurt the Creoles. Many were restricted to low-level civil service posts. Political reform in 1951 created new opportunities for the Creoles. In 1967, Dr. Siaka Stevens, a Creole and former Freetown mayor, was elected prime minister, a post he held until 1985, when violent strikes and demonstrations forced him to step down in favor of General Joseph Saidu Momoh, a Limbe. Overall, Creole political dominance diminished in the post-independence period as elections based on one-man one vote took root and new parties favored the numerically superior Temne and Mende peoples.

Momoh's rule ushered in twenty years of great political and social upheaval. The period was marked by four coups, brutal executions, and 11 years of rebellion and civil war fueled mainly by illegal diamond trading (1991–2002). Foreign troops and UN peacekeepers eventually restored peace and order, but not before thousands were killed and maimed, and more than two million people left homeless.

In 1999 the assault on Freetown by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and its campaign "operation no living thing" targeted the Creoles. Importantly, it made clear for all to see the dangers of long-term privilege and the horrific power of envy and discontent. By the end of 2005, most of the peacekeepers had left the country, and free and fair presidential elections occurred in 2007. As of the mid-2000s, a fresh urgency for balanced and equitable development throughout the country seemed to be prevailing.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Creole homeland is a mountainous, narrow peninsula on the coast of West Africa, about 32 km (20 mi) long and 16 km (10 mi) wide. At its northern tip lies Freetown, the Sierra Leonean capital. The mountains towering above Freetown and its harbor inspired the Portuguese explorer Pedro de Cinta to name them “*Sierra Lyoa*” (“Lion Mountains”), which later became Sierra Leone. The local African name was “Romaron”—“place of the mountain.” Town and location names such as Aberdeen Bay, Murray Town, Hill Station, Gloucester, Wellington, Hastings, York, and Kent testify to subsequent British influence.

The whole of Sierra Leone covers some 72,500 sq km (28,000 sq mi), roughly the size of South Carolina. The nation is bounded by Guinea to the north and east, and Liberia to the south. At 10° to 13° north latitude, Sierra Leone lies roughly at the same latitude as Panama.

The peninsula’s mountain range is covered by tropical rain forests split by deep valleys and adorned with impressive waterfalls. White sand beaches line the Atlantic coast. During the rainy months, from May to November, monsoons dump as much as 15 cm (6 in) of rain in one hour. The mountains receive more than 500 cm (200 in) of rain annually.

All together, Sierra Leone is home to at least a dozen major ethnic groups, including the Koranko, the Mende, the Temne, the Fula (Peul), and the non-Muslim Vai. Groups that arrived before the end of the 18th century are known as “early settlers”; all others, including the Creoles, are the “later settlers.”

## 3 LANGUAGE

Krio, a language distinct from West African pidgin, is the mother tongue of the Creoles, less than 15% of whom are literate in English. It is widely spoken throughout the country at markets and in the workplace where it is understood by as much as 95% of the population. However, it is only the first language of about 10% of the population. The fear that Krio is becoming polluted by English (which is popular among youth) has prompted a movement to teach it more systematically in the schools.

In addition to adapting many English words into its vocabulary, Krio incorporates syntactic, semantic, and phonologic elements of West African languages and bears similarities to Gullah and Jamaican Creole. But Krio also has been influenced by other European languages. For example, “sabi” is of Portuguese origin, and “boku” is of French origin. In its pure form, Krio is practically unintelligible to the outsider.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Creoles have inherited a diverse array of tales from their ancestors. Especially popular with children, they amuse and provide instruction in Creole morals, values, and traditions. Among the best loved are stories about the spider. Children delight in his cleverness and grow nervous when his tricks get him into trouble. The following is a typical spider tale:

Once the spider was fat. He loved eating, but detested work and had not planted or fished all season. One day the villagers were preparing a feast. From his forest web, he could smell the mouth-watering cooking. He knew that if he visited friends, they would feed him as was the custom. So he called his two sons and told both of them

to tie a rope around his waist and set off in opposite directions for the two closest villages, each holding one end of the rope. They were to pull on the rope when the food was ready. But both villages began eating at the same time, and when the sons began pulling the rope, it grew tighter and tighter, squeezing the greedy spider. When the feasting was over and the sons came to look for him, they found a big head, a big body, and a very thin waist!

## 5 RELIGION

While most Sierra Leoneans (60%) subscribe to Islam, Creoles are deeply proud of their Christianity, which blends with remnants of traditional African religion (see **Rites of Passage**). The early immigrants either brought their Christian faith with them or were schooled by missionaries. In 1827, the English Church Missionary Society established the first college in West Africa, Fourah Bay College (now the University College of Sierra Leone), to train missionaries. Samuel Ajai Crowther, a liberated African and the first pupil to attend the college, became the first African bishop of the Church of England in 1864. Presently, there are some 15 different faiths and more than 70 churches in Freetown.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Coups, dictatorial rule, war, and financially hard times have dampened enthusiasm for Independence Day and other secular holidays. However, Creoles celebrate Christmas and Easter with much feasting. Children receive new clothes and gifts of money from their parents and relatives on these occasions. One popular holiday in Freetown is the end of the Muslim Ramadan fast. On this night, young boys carry thin paper lanterns attached to wooden frames. The parade begins at 11:00 pm, and parties with singing and dancing are held throughout the night.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Despite their outwardly Western ways, Creoles practice certain African rituals in connection with rites of passage. One such ceremony is the *awujoh* feast. Of Yoruba origin, *awujoh* is held to win the protection of ancestral spirits for newborns and newlyweds and gain wisdom regarding death. *Awujoh* is believed to appease angry ancestors and attain their guidance when someone dies.

At death, the pillows and blankets of the deceased are stripped off the bed because they are associated with the death struggle. Pictures are turned toward the wall. At the wake, relatives and friends sing spirituals and church hymns. (Aku Creoles sing songs in Yoruba: “This world, this world, is not ours.”) People clap loudly to make sure the corpse is not merely in a trance. The next day the body is washed, placed in expensive shrouds, and laid on a bed for a final viewing. Then, it is placed in a coffin and taken to the church for the service and then to the cemetery for burial.

The mourning period lasts one year. On the third, seventh, and fortieth day, *awujoh* feasts are held. The feast on the fortieth day marks the spirit’s last day on earth. The family and guests eat a big meal. At a certain point, everyone is called to witness as portions of the meal, including beverages and kola nuts, are placed into a hole for the dead. The family and friends may talk into the hole to discuss their problems with the dead. They throw kola nuts on the ground to determine whether they

have been heard and to see whether foul play was involved in the death. At the end of the year, the family holds another awujoh followed by the *pull mohning* day—the end of mourning. The mourners wear white, visit the cemetery, and then return home for refreshments.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Creoles are a sociable people, given to joking and teasing. Their gregarious nature is often expressed in gestures, such as hand slapping and handshaking. A common greeting in the morning is “Ow de body?” Historically Creoles have been united by their privileged social status, enjoying membership in many elite social clubs. In Sierra Leone, the Masons have traditionally been dominated by Creole men.

Traditional attitudes are still noticeable in Creole dating and marriage customs. For example, marriage is still viewed as a contract between two families. Therefore, parents or other family members seek out prospective mates for their kin from hardworking, well-to-do families. Dating ends when a mate has been chosen and the groom’s parents set a “put stop” day, after which the girl can no longer entertain other beaux. “Put stop” has a scripted ceremony in which each family plays a part. Out of several possibilities, the groom’s family indicates the young lady of its choice, who is always the last to enter the room. On the evening before the wedding, the groom’s friends treat him to “bachelor’s eve,” a rowdy last fling before marriage.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Creole families typically live in two-story wooden houses reminiscent of those found in the West Indies or Louisiana. Despite their dilapidated appearance, they have a distinctive air, with dormers, box windows, shutters, glass panes, and balconies. Several of them were burned or destroyed during the war, yet it is surprising how many of them have survived for over 200 years. The elite live in attractive neighborhoods like Hill Station, above Freetown. A large dam in the mountains once supplied reliable water and electricity, but in the aftermath of the war tanker trucks and pickups with makeshift tanks deliver water to the neighborhoods. People light their houses with kerosene lamps and cook on gas- or wood-fired stoves.

At rush hour, downtown Freetown is congested with Landcruisers, Volkswagens, and Japanese cars. Broken-down cars are abandoned and left to rust in the “car cemeteries” of Freetown’s back streets. Most people travel by taxi. Fares are negotiated before the ride, with the passenger usually offering half of what the driver demands. Pickup trucks (lorries) with wooden benches in the back provide rural transportation. These are efficient but overcrowded and carry rice bags, cassava, bushels of fruit, and chickens, as well as people, and sport a variety of colorful graffiti. Buses ply the main roads between provincial cities but are more expensive.

Freetown once had a reputation for being the “white man’s grave” because of its endemic malaria. Large, deep drainage canals now carry off much of the monsoon rain, reducing the number of flies and mosquitoes. But social and physical infrastructure destroyed during the war will take many years to restore. Health care is still not available to many Sierra Leoneans, the HIV/AIDS rate hovers around 7%, and life expectancy is 41 years. In 2007 Sierra Leone received the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) rating in the world, placing 177th

out of 177 countries (measuring standard of living, health, and education).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Creoles live in exogamous nuclear families, but the extended family is important to them. Family members who do well are expected to help those who are less fortunate, assisting poorer relatives with school fees and business or job opportunities. Women typically shoulder the greatest domestic burdens, unless the family has hired helpers. In families with limited means, the women care for the children, clean house, do the marketing, cook meals, wash dishes and clothes, and carry wood and water.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the 19th century, Creoles wore European dress to imitate upper-class English manners and find acceptance in the higher ranks of society. Early settlers arrived dressed in European clothes, and the liberated slaves who came later were given English clothing. Woolen suits, bowler hats, stiff upright collars, white gloves, and cigars were the most obvious outward signs of a gentleman’s acculturation. For her part, the civilized lady spent lavishly on the fashions of the day, usually imitating styles seen in magazines. Manual laborers acquired suits, which they wore on Sundays and holidays, and for weddings and funerals. In the fields, men wore pantaloons and vests, while at home women wore the traditional African wrap-arounds (*lappa*). Children often ran naked in the streets.

Today, pop fashions—jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers—are very much de rigueur for young people. However, the older set still dresses conservatively in European suits and dresses. On Sunday mornings, the Anglican and Catholic elites of Freetown turn out in their Sunday finery at the Regent Church service high above the capital. For every day, women wear simpler Western dresses, skirts and blouses, or the *lappa* with an African blouse.

## 12 FOOD

Creoles typically eat three meals a day, the largest enjoyed in the morning or near midday. The staple noonday meal is *foo-foo*, a dough-like paste made of cassava tubers pounded into flour. Foo-foo is always eaten with a “palaver sauce” or “*pl-assas*,” which is a spicy dish consisting of leafy greens embellished with tripe, fish, beef, salt pork, and chicken. Red palm oil heated to a near boil forms the base of the sauce. Foo-foo and sauce must be eaten with the fingers of the right hand. A West African specialty, jollof rice, is also popular. This is a one-pot meal, most likely of Wolof origin. Other favorites include rice with various sauces, rice bread, and salad. Unless they are teetotalers, Creoles enjoy alcoholic drinks such as beer, gin, and palm wine. Fruit juices are made from pineapples, mangoes, and oranges.

## 13 EDUCATION

In the 19th century, the European notion of “bringing civilization to the heathen” provided a rationale to educate Creoles and hold them up as models for their pagan brethren. Indeed, the British made more public funds available per capita in Sierra Leone than in Britain itself in the early part of the century. Since a proper education assured upward mobility, Creoles

sent their children to Fourah Bay College or to a British university. Now the University of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College, founded by missionaries in 1827, was once the “Athens of West Africa.” Based on this educational privilege, Creoles supplied the colony with lawyers, doctors, clergy, upper-level civil servants, and businessmen.

In the 20th century, schooling in Sierra Leone became universal. In 1987, tuition fees were abolished for government-funded primary and secondary schools making schooling more accessible than before. However, the war forced many schools outside Freetown to close. Though Creole children—by virtue of living in Freetown—fared better than most during the war, they also suffered school closures, teacher shortages, and substandard facilities. Sierra Leone lags behind much of the world with a literacy rate of 35% and a combined school enrollment of 45%.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In the late 1800s, the Creole upper class was far more concerned with literary societies, public lectures, piano recitals, and dignity balls than with African drumming and dancing. They thought that Gumbay and Shakee-shakee dances were unseemly and unfit for civilized people. Creole attitudes toward indigenous dance have changed, and Creoles participate in Sierra Leone’s internationally famous National Dance Troupe, which has members from all ethnic groups. In 1992, the troupe included sixty singers, dancers, and musicians.

The Creoles are still known for their intellectual and literary contributions. Creole educators, theologians, authors, dramatists, and poets have pioneered a burgeoning literature in the Krio language. The following stanza from a poem by Thomas Decker offers a glimpse into this body of work:

“Slip Gud”

Slip gud, o, bedi-gial!	Sleep well, my “baby-girl!”
opin yai lilibit	Open your eyes a little bit
en luk mi wan minit	Look, just for one minute
bifo you slip.	Ere you fall asleep.

#### 15 WORK

Creoles are found in all occupations and vocations. They farm, fish, trade, teach, and sell artwork and handicrafts. Many have left manual jobs for office work and other status jobs, only to find that these do not pay enough to support large families. Both men and women operate small businesses, such as food stands and restaurants. A growing number of Creoles have found employment in start-up non-governmental organizations (NGOs) many of which provide social and civil rights services in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

#### 16 SPORTS

The favorite Sierra Leonean sport is soccer, called football in West Africa. Schools of all sizes have teams, and in even the smallest villages, games are played every evening. Although children may play without soccer shoes, they usually have uniforms. Though inspiring, the Leone Stars—the national team—have never qualified for World Cup finals.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Creoles enjoy going to movies, watching television, listening to the radio, and following soccer. Radio Sierra Leone was estab-

lished in 1934 and is the oldest broadcasting service in English-speaking West Africa. Now transistor radios with shortwave and FM capabilities are found in even the smallest villages. With the growth of satellite television, the number of channels and the service area have expanded dramatically from Freetown to the hinterlands. Programs from the United States and England are very popular.

Recreational opportunities abound in and around Freetown. On weekends, especially Sundays, the beaches at Aberdeen are filled with soccer players, swimmers, joggers and casual strollers who come to see the fisherman bring in their catches, or who simply enjoy people-watching. Kabobs and cold drinks can be found in the many beach cabanas, seaside restaurants, and informal refreshment stands.

A favorite pastime for girls is hair braiding, which can take an entire weekend. Boys enjoy checkers and other games, while adults like to exchange visits with their friends. One of the regular forms of entertainment both in Freetown and in rural areas is the central market. In the villages of Kent, Sussex, and York, there is a designated market day every week. People come from miles around not only to buy and sell, but to dress up and exchange the latest news and gossip, with the added stimulation of fresh palm wine or beer.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In the 19th century, the Creole elites favored “high-brow” hobbies, such as reading, playing instruments, and writing poetry, over crafts and folk art. Nowadays, small-scale arts and crafts centers flourish in Freetown, catering mainly to foreign tourists. Miranda Burney Nicol (Olayinka) and Phoebe Ageh Jones are two artists whose works have been distributed internationally. Cloth dyeing (*batik*) is a traditional craft that has recently been revived.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Creoles’ problems are inseparable from those of other Sierra Leoneans. There are few jobs for school graduates and dropouts alike, which has increased the number of beggars and hawkers. The weak economy has encouraged other social problems like prostitution. Families that have taken in relatives must deal with the added stress that comes from belt-tightening and overcrowding. In Freetown, relentless migration from the provinces has increased congestion, pollution, and crime. Basic services barely function, and the government, businesses, and civil society need to do a much better job of controlling corruption. There is a genuine concern about the effects of almost a generation that has largely missed formal education.

While these problems seem daunting, the country is now in an intensive rebuilding phase, as is its neighbor to the south and east, Liberia. If handled properly, the next decade could present Creoles and their neighbors new opportunities to put the past behind and to find a common way forward. Young Creoles and their friends face a difficult future, but they also represent a generation with new ideas and potential solutions to old problems.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Creole women are the backbone of their families and of society. They manage the household and rear the children; many work outside the home. Virtually all Creole girls receive at least primary formal schooling, and the vast majority complete

secondary school and beyond. The first Creole girl graduated from Fourah Bay College in 1938. The Church Mission Society founded the Annie Walsh Memorial School for girls in 1849, and many of its graduates in turn founded schools of their own. Hannah Benka-Coker has had a statue erected in her honor at the Freetown Secondary School for girls.

As a result of educational opportunity, many Creole women became influential in the women's movement in the early 1900s that culminated in the right to vote (for women of status) in 1930. Constance Horton, later Mrs. Cummings-Jones, became the first woman elected to a municipal council in Africa in 1938. Having been active in church associations, Creole women used their organizing skills to advocate for women's rights in the 1950s. Subsequently, many of them attained high positions in their respective professions. For example, Mrs. Constance Cummings-John was mayor of Freetown in 1966. In 2008 the executive directors of the Sierra Leone NGO association and of the Center for Good Governance were Creole women.

Nonetheless, Creoles and Sierra Leonean women face gender discrimination in the workplace. They also face inheritance laws and property rights laws that favor men over women. Rape and domestic violence are not uncommon, but are surrounded by a culture of silence. Although it is difficult to know how many of the victims are Creole, it is safe to assume that Creoles are affected. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is poorly funded, relies mainly on donor assistance, and has few programs to support efforts to further the rights and progress of women in Sierra Leone.

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—by R. Groelsema

# DINKA

**PRONUNCIATION:** DEEN-kuh

**LOCATION:** Sudan

**POPULATION:** 500,000 to 1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dinka

**RELIGION:** Monotheistic-worship of Nhialic

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Nuer; Shilluk; Sudanese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Numbering between 500,000 and 1 million people, the Dinka are one of the largest ethnic groups in the republic of Sudan. Their presence in this region of Africa was noted thousands of years ago by Egyptian and later Greek travelers and geographers. The Dinka belong to a larger group of historically related cultures that anthropologists have referred to as the Nilotic peoples of Africa—Dinka, Nuer, Atuot, Shilluk, and Anuak—all of whom live in the upper Nile region of southern Sudan. General observations about the Dinka and related Nilotic peoples figure in the narratives written by Arab slave traders who entered their country in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Perhaps their reputation as fierce warriors was earned during this period, as the Dinka successfully resisted Arab presence. In the middle of the last century (c. 1840–1880), the Dinka also resisted efforts on the part of a Turkish administration in the northern Sudan to administer, tax, and otherwise harass them. In 1898, a condominium (joint) form of government was created between Egypt and Great Britain, and from this time until the Sudan gained independence from Great Britain in 1956, the Dinka were only marginally affected by British colonial presence. In 1983, a civil war erupted in the Sudan, pitting the largely Arab and Muslim northern Sudan against the black African peoples of the south. Lasting into the 1990s, the war has had dire consequences for the Dinka and other Nilotic peoples. Tens of thousands of Dinka have died, and countless others have become refugees in either the northern Sudan or the many countries bordering the Sudan. Rebel groups and international human rights organizations have accused the Sudanese government of attempting genocide against the Dinka.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

A careful census of the Dinka has not been attempted since the mid 1950s, at which time it was estimated that the Dinka numbered more than 1 million; in 2008 estimates place the Dinka population at somewhere between 500,000 and 1 million. Dinka country extends from 6° to 10°N latitude and from 26° to 32°E longitude. This vast region forms a seasonal swampland as the Nile floods from its high ground in Uganda into the flat, saucer-like geography of the southern Sudan. The extreme differences between the wet and dry seasons have a dramatic effect on many aspects of Dinka life. During the season of rains, human population densities increase as people are forced to settle in areas that are higher than the Nile floodwaters.

Because of civil war, large numbers of Dinka have migrated from southern Sudan to the northern Sudanese capital of Khartoum, as well as to Kenya, Uganda, Europe, and the United States. There are no precise data on the actual number of Dinka now living elsewhere. As of the mid-2000s, thousands

of internally displaced Dinka were beginning to return to their home villages in southern Sudan.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Linguists classify Dinka as a major language family in the Nilotic category of African languages. Historically, it is most closely related to Nuer and Atuot, languages spoken by peoples living in close proximity to the Dinka. The Nuer and Atuot languages, however, are more closely related to each other than they are to Dinka.

ENGLISH TERM	ATUOT /NUER	DINKA
cow	<i>yang</i>	<i>weng</i>
beer	<i>kung</i>	<i>mou</i>
incest	<i>rual</i>	<i>akeeth</i>
husband	<i>cou</i>	<i>nwc</i>
wife	<i>cek</i>	<i>tieng</i>
child	<i>gat</i>	<i>mieth</i>
war spear	<i>mut</i>	<i>tong</i>

The Dinka have a diverse lexicon with which to describe their world. It is estimated that the Dinka language has more than 400 words to refer to cattle alone—their movements, their diseases, and their variety in color and form. The Dinka's very perception of color, light, and shade in the world around them is in these ways inextricably connected with their recognition of the color configurations in their cattle. Without their cattle color vocabulary, they would have scarcely any way of describing visual experience in terms of color, light, and darkness.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Dinka tradition of oral literature is extensive and a considerable amount has been recorded. In this tradition, two figures stand out prominently, a legendary figure known as Col Muong, and another known as Awiel Longar. Col Muong figures in many stories as a man who has an enormous appetite for all things in life. When he is hungry, he is said to eat an entire herd of cattle or an entire field of grain. Stories about him seem to indicate that people should do the best they can with what they have rather than focus on their own individual needs. Awiel Longar figures as the common ancestor of all Dinka peoples. Awiel is thought of as a culture hero who showed people how to live and, indeed, brought them life. Dinka folklore is also rich in “just so” stories about the origins of customs, the behavior of animals, and everyday life.

### 5 RELIGION

Dinka religious beliefs have been described and analyzed in detail by the late British anthropologist R. G. Lienhardt in his book, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*. The Dinka term *Nhialic*, Lienhardt suggests, is best translated as “creator” and in this regard Dinka religion may be regarded as monotheistic. Ultimately, *Nhialic* is thought to be the source of all life and death. Mediating this distant, though approachable, image are a series of lesser manifestations of the creator's power. These are known to the Dinka by a series of “refractions” or manifestations of divinity to which Dinka dedicate ritual sacrifices and libations. Rituals are performed at births, deaths, to cure disease, and in times of crises.



### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Celebrations take place in the autumn, when the whole tribe is together. Religious sacrifices may be made on special occasions. To honor their traditional spiritual and political leaders—called “masters of the fishing spear”—the Dinka enacted day-long ceremonies marked by large public gatherings and the sacrifice of many cattle. By ritually “killing” these men, Dinka collectively asserted their power to control the spiritual powers governing human life.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Like other cattle-keeping people of southern Sudan and eastern Africa, the Dinka mark significant life-passage events with informal but significant ritual occasions. Thus, birth, marriage, and death are all marked by standardized customs involving public ceremonies, and are typically accompanied by animal sacrifice. In the passage to adult status, young men, rather more than young women, are publicly recognized. Adult males decorate initiates' heads with a series of deep gashes that form scars that last a lifetime, publicly proclaiming their newly attained adult status.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When men become adults, they no longer refer to themselves by their birth names, but instead adopt “ox-names”—derived from characteristics of their favorite cattle, typically with complex metaphorical reference. Thus, a man may be known as Thiecdeng (“club of divinity”) or Acinbaai (“a man who never



*Sudanese refugees from the Ngok Dinka tribe wait in the village of Dokra in central Sudan. (AP Images/Alfred de Montesquiou)*

leaves his herd of cattle”). Children’s names are often chosen to reflect circumstances of their birth. Thus, one may be called Kueric (“born in the middle of a path in the forest”), Amoum (“the one who survives his dead brothers”), or Ayumpuo (“the one who cools the heart”).

Meals are generally eaten in an informal manner. The only explicit strictures involving eating are that unmarried people of similar age who have no close kinship cannot eat in each other’s company.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Round huts, approximately 4.5 m (15 ft) in diameter, were formed with clay, with 1.5- to 2-m (5- to 6-ft) walls, covered with conical thatched roofs. Homesteads such as these were typically surrounded by a garden and separated one from another by an open expanse of savannah forest. Garden soil would typically maintain its fertility for 10 to 12 years. Following this, the area would be set afire and a new homestead erected nearby, in a manner anthropologists call “slash and burn” horticulture.

Because the Dinka population is fairly dispersed (though less so in the season of rains), communicable diseases have traditionally been uncommon. On the other hand, given its subtropical location, Dinkaland is subject to a fair number of

endemic diseases, including malaria, dysentery, and other waterborne diseases.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Polygamy (the practice of marrying more than one person) is common among the Dinka, although many marriages are monogamous. Men of high social standing may have as many as 50 to 100 wives. In polygamous marriages, wives cooperate in performing household duties, although each is responsible for rearing her own children. Upon marriage, a man pays his wife’s family a certain number of cattle, usually between 30 and 40. The Dinka consider it extremely important to have children, which they regard as assuring their immortality.

Traditionally, following marriage a man established a homestead near his father. Around her homestead, a woman would cultivate a garden in a plot ranging from one to two acres, raising sufficient food to feed her family throughout the year. Cash was not a factor in traditional food production, so kinship relations provided a means to assure that if some relatives’ gardens failed in a particular year, food could be shared by all.

Even though much of Dinka public life is dominated by men (e.g., ritual and political leaders are male; sacrifices are always led by men), women play a very significant and even powerful

role in local life. Many important myths and rituals have powerful feminine symbolism.

### 11 CLOTHING

The Dinka wear very little clothing and no shoes. The men go naked, and the women may wear goatskin skirts. Both men and women wear strings of beads around their necks. Women also wear bangles on their arms and legs, and they may also wear elaborate jewelry in their ears.

### 12 FOOD

In the rainy season, milk from cows is plentiful, and this supplements the horticultural diet based primarily on millet. During the dry season, Dinka subsist mainly on fish and other freshwater resources, supplemented by reserves of millet.

Dinka have traditionally produced all the material resources needed to sustain their livelihood via a mode of production that combined horticulture with pastoralism, fishing and occasional hunting. The staple horticultural crop was millet. Ground nuts were introduced in the 1930s and added an additional source of protein to the Dinka diet. Women usually provide a morning meal of millet, sometimes mixed with milk or beef broth. A second meal is prepared as evening approaches. Depending on the season, the millet staple will be supplemented with fish, meat, or other domesticated crops such as beans, tomatoes or rice (now purchased from small rural markets). Cooking oil is produced by crushing the nuts of shea trees and pounding the pulp into oil. A number of species of chili peppers provide condiments. Women cook all meals with the help of their daughters. Women grow a variety of gourds to make containers for cooking and preparing food, and they also use earthenware pots for storing and boiling water.

On ritual occasions, cattle were sacrificed and slaughtered, although cattle (cows) were kept mostly for their milk rather than meat. In the dry season, cattle were occasionally bled by tying a cord around the animal's neck, pulling it tight, then piercing a vein in the animal's neck. The blood was collected in a gourd, mixed with milk, and then boiled, producing a high-protein "pudding." When milk was plentiful, particularly in the rainy season, it was also preserved in a cheese form by mixing a quantity of fresh milk with a smaller portion of hot cow urine. Milk prepared in this form could be stored for as long as three months.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Dinka lacked any formal system of education until literacy was introduced via mission schools beginning in the late 1930s. Even today, most Dinka lack literacy skills. Indeed, to some, writing is suspected to be a form of political control, and thus many people have never sought to become literate. During the Colonial period in the southern Sudan, English was the only acknowledged language of mission education and administration. During the course of the first civil war in Sudan, in 1964 the government expelled missionaries from the southern Sudan and declared Arabic to be the national language. Regional dialects of Arabic have since emerged in Dinka country. At the time of this writing, very few Dinka have received a formal education because the educational system, along with the majority of social services, has disappeared due to war.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Like many other semi-nomadic peoples throughout the world, the Dinka do not have a substantial heritage of plastic arts; song and dance, however, play an important role in their culture. A set of drums for dancing is found in every Dinka settlement. Like many other aspects of Dinka life, artistic expression is associated with cattle, which they often imitate in their songs and dances. Because the Dinka identify so closely with their herds, when a tribesman sings a song praising his cattle, he is, in effect, praising himself. Songs serve many other functions as well. There are battle songs, songs of initiation, and songs celebrating the tribe's ancestors. In symbolic "song battles," singing can also defuse tensions and avert bloodshed among this highly volatile people.

Following is a typical Dinka song:

O Creator who created me in my mother's womb  
Do not confront me with a bad thing  
Show me the place of cattle,  
So that I may grow my crops  
And keep my herd.

### 15 WORK

Tending herds of cattle and growing millet form the basis of the livelihood and economy of the Dinka. As the main channel and hundreds of tributaries of the Nile begin to flood during the season of rains (roughly April to September), people move with their herds of cattle to higher ground. Here, during the season of rains, the millet and other crops are planted. With the coming of the dry season and abating flood waters, people drive their herds back toward rivers and tributaries where the cattle are pastured. Labor among the Dinka is clearly divided along gender lines, with men in their 20s and 30s devoting their time to cattle-herding. Women are responsible for growing crops (although men perform the heavy work of clearing new fields for planting). Women also cook and draw water from wells and rivers. Each homestead normally plants two millet crops every year, as well as okra, sesame, pumpkins, and cassava. One of the ways that Dinka boys are prepared for adulthood is by being given a small flock of sheep and goats to tend.

Although many Dinka want to preserve their traditional way of life, they find that, because of the consequences of civil war and the need to participate in "modern" as well as "traditional" society, the past they once knew may be gone forever.

### 16 SPORTS

Dinka men engage in mock sparring, using spears or sticks and shields, in order to develop their fighting skills.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Because much of the Dinka population disperses to follow the herds during the dry season, important social events such as marriages are more common during the rainy season. People live in more compact settlements at that time, and milk and millet are plentiful. Seasons during which there are droughts or unusually heavy rains likewise have a dramatic impact on local social life. Dinka social life is also closely tied to religion.



## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Dinka men make spears and fishing hooks. The women make cooking pots using coils of clay, which are formed into the desired shape and then smoothed over. Sharp tools are used to etch patterns in the clay, and color is applied with a stone, after which the pot is fired in a hole in the ground that is covered with burning straw and dung. Besides making pots, which are also essential for carrying water, Dinka women weave baskets and sleeping mats.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since the civil war that began in the 1980s pitting the northern and southern regions of Sudan against each other, numerous Dinka villages have been destroyed by burning or bombing. Thousands of Dinka women have been raped and their husbands castrated in their presence. Young girls have been found brutally murdered. Many Dinka have been abducted and sold as slaves in the northern Sudan. Violence against the Dinka is now on a level that has no precedent in their remembered past.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As the late Godfrey Lienhardt noted in an article he wrote on the relations between the sexes among the Dinka, vis-à-vis many other African cultures, Dinka women and men have equivalent status. Indeed, early on in their socialization, young boys recognize their utter dependence on their sisters and mothers, who provide for their basic subsistence. As adults, men likewise recognize that their aspirations to become founders of lineages are entirely dependent on the birth careers of their wives. In the contemporary world and in the aftermath of two civil wars and immigration to a wide variety of countries, much has changed in all of Dinka culture, including gender relations.

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—by J. W. Burton

# DJIBOUTIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** juh-BOOT-ee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Jibouti

**LOCATION:** Djibouti (Horn of Africa)

**POPULATION:** approximately 833,000

**LANGUAGE:** Afar, Somali

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Eritreans; Somalis

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Djibouti (also Jibouti) is the name of both a small country and its seaport capital. This land's former name was the French Territory of the Afars and Issas and, before that, French Somaliland. Occupying an area roughly the size of New Jersey, tiny Djibouti, sandwiched between Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea on the east coast of Africa, was the last French colony in Africa.

The area that today is Djibouti was populated for centuries by two groups of once entirely nomadic herders, the Afar and a branch of the Somali people known as the Issa. The French opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and later British control of this strategic artery of global commerce resulted in intervention across the Horn of Africa by European powers, changing this area from a global backwater to a strategic point in world commercial and naval movements. The canal became the pivot for European domination of most of Asia, the eastern half of Africa, and the Indo-Pacific seas. As European powers competed for strategic advantage, coaling stations for merchant and war fleets became essential. In 1892 France abandoned its commercial center in the city of Obock and transferred it southward, across the Gulf of Tadjoura, to the city of Djibouti, which possessed a better harbor. By 1899 the newly prosperous port city had 10,000 inhabitants, as it drained trade from nearby older ports. Planning began for a French railroad to Addis Abeba, capital of Ethiopia, recently unified and expanded under the Amhara. Meanwhile, in 1894, France had merged its protectorates in the area into French Somaliland (present-day Djibouti). Djibouti's strategic global location remains its chief commercial and military importance.

Commerce grew in the city during the early part of the 20th century, while in the colony's hinterland, the Afars and Issas, the two main ethnic groups, engaged in continued fighting. By 1935 France had ended most open fighting between the two peoples and, occasionally, against French troops. France proclaimed its neutrality during the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1935–1936, but tilted toward the Ethiopians, eventually using its base in Djibouti to aid the Ethiopian resistance against their fascist occupiers. On 23 December 1942 Vichy forces in French Somaliland surrendered to British and Free French forces.

French Somaliland became an Overseas Territory of France in 1946. In part because of pressures from pan-Somali nationalists, President Charles de Gaulle of France in 1966 announced a referendum, held in 1967, to determine the future of the colony. This referendum reaffirmed the desire of the majority of the population to remain part of the French community. The colony was renamed the French Territory of the Afars and Issas. Movements for independence continued, nevertheless,

and the territory became independent, as Djibouti, on 27 June 1977. The Issa control the government.

President Hassan Gouled Aptidon became and remains head of state. In 1981 Djibouti formally became a one-party state headed by a directly elected president. Aptidon was re-elected in 1981 and 1987. The Afar minority felt excluded in this political process. In 1991 an Afar-based armed rebellion began with the Afar gaining control of much of the countryside. Accordingly, in 1992, President Aptidon presented a multiparty constitution that was ratified by the citizenry. However, Aptidon's dominant political party, the People's Rally for Progress, has no effective opposition. In 1993 Aptidon achieved a fourth term, in Djibouti's first "multiparty" presidential election. The Afar opposition largely boycotted the election, and unrest continues. Some fighting continued through 2000. Ismael Omar Guelleh won his first term as president in 1999 and his second term in 2005, with 100% of the vote. The legal code is based on French civil law, with local Islamic additions.

During the first Gulf War, the French military used Djibouti as its staging base of operations and continues a presence in that country, with ships, aircraft, and armored vehicles. In 2001 Djibouti leased a former French Foreign Legion base to the U.S. It is now shared with France and is part of the U.S. Central Command. Since 2002 a U.S. task force combining all of the armed services and the State Department provides, from the base, humanitarian and development aid to Djibouti. Besides the French military presence, which contributes to the Djibouti economy, the U.S. bases several hundred troops as part of its campaign against regional "terrorism." Djibouti is America's sole base in Africa. From there the U.S. launched its attacks during 2007–2008 against fundamentalist Islamic forces in Somalia. The Djibouti economy centers mainly on the country's strategic location for transshipment of freight and refueling of ships. Ethiopian exports and imports comprise about 85% of port enterprise.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

With a territory of some 23,200 sq km (8,950 sq mi), Djibouti has a population, in 2007, estimated by the UN at 833,000 but the real number could be nearer half as many. About two-thirds of Djiboutians live in Djibouti city, the capital. The country of Djibouti extends inland about 88 km (55 mi), from the north and south shores of the Gulf of Tadjoura, a narrow inlet of the Gulf of Aden. It lies on the western shore of the Bab el-Mandeb (Arabic for "gate of tears"), a strategic strait 27-km (17-mi) wide joining the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, and thus, via Suez, Atlantic to Indo-Pacific commerce. Besides the sea, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea border Djibouti. The country's Red Sea coast stretches some 800 km (500 mi).

The land of Djibouti comprises arid, rugged highlands often 900 m (3,000 ft) or more in elevation, with peaks at 1,620 m (5,400 ft) and 1,980 m (6,600 ft), and basaltic steppe and desert plains having salt lakes and normally dry streams. Lake Assal is the lowest point in Africa, at 155 m (508 ft) below sea level. Once called by Europeans "the valley of hell," Djibouti is a land of permanent intense heat and drought. The Somalis call the terrain *guban* (burnt land). In its northeastern third, the land is tropical desert; the remainder is tropical steppe with a coastal desert fringe. Grass and herbaceous plants, such as thornbush, grow singly and in patches, awaiting seasonal rainfall, about 50 cm (20 in) in the mountain heights and 13 cm (5



in) in the deserts. Only a few mountain peaks sport continuous vegetative cover. When the briefly seasonal flow in watercourses ends, herds of livestock depend on permanent wells. No surface streams from the Ethiopian highlands penetrate as far as Djibouti.

Djibouti contains two indigenous ethno-linguistic groups, the Afar (sometimes also called the Danakil) and the Somali. (Djibouti Somalis primarily belong to the Issa clan of the Dir clan-family, which covers two-thirds of Djibouti and extends into adjacent Somalia and Ethiopia.) Each group's links of language, culture, patrilineal kinship, and Islam provides internal unity. Such multiple bonds do not prevent intra-ethnic strife, especially among the Somalis. Besides the Afar, who make up perhaps 35% of the population, and Somalis, who account for as much as 65%, there are also small Arab, French, Ethiopian, and Italian minorities. Periodically, large numbers of refugees displaced by warfare have crossed the border into Djibouti from Ethiopia and Somalia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official languages of Djibouti are French and Arabic, but the everyday languages of most of the people are the Eastern Cushitic languages, Afar and Somali, of the two main ethnic groups. Educated Afars and Somalis speak French. The Somali tongue of Djibouti belongs to the "common dialect" group, found in much of Somalia and used in broadcasts.



A young Djiboutian woman and her father. City dwellers wear Western-style clothing, while those in rural areas wear the loose clothing typical of desert dwellers. (Jason Laure)

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Somali Issa have a myth of origin that portrays their common ancestor—named 'Aqil Abuu Taalib—as a holy man from Arabia. They have hymns (*qasiidas*) in his honor, and his shrine (*maqam*) is in Djibouti, where he is said to have appeared miraculously. The Somali's oral tradition also includes storytelling and poetry. Poetry traditionally recited in the villages by special readers called *gabaye* was a way of recording the community's history and customs, as well as current events. The Somali tradition of oral poetry may be in danger as nomadic Somalis have begun learning to read and write.

The Afar maintain some lore that dates back to their original, pre-Islam religion, including a belief in the powers retained by the spirits of the dead, and a belief in the existence of groves and trees with sacred powers. One traditional practice part of this belief system is anointing one's body with butter or *ghee* (a clarified butter commonly used for food and other purposes). Another is the annual celebration of a feast of the dead called *Rabena*.

#### 5 RELIGION

Whether among the Afars, Somalis, or Arabs, the religion of Djibouti is Islam. Somalis generally follow the Sunni sect, while Afars are Sufi Muslims, with the former people more devout than the latter. As elsewhere in the world, Islam accommodates local practices. For the orthodox, religious and

community activities are governed by the *shari'a*, the canon law of Islam. The greater the orthodoxy, the more the control of women by men. Pilgrimage and scheduled prayer and fasting, such as during Ramadan, are expected. Islam does not transcend ethnicity and thus does not impose a unity on different Muslim peoples, such as the Afars and Somalis. Among the Afars, survivals from the pre-Islamic cosmology of their sky-father deity, Wak, are evident, including days for animal sacrifice and rainmaking ceremonies. (For more about religion in the Horn of Africa, see Eritreans section 5.)

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Local Muslim saints' days associated with the Afar and the Issa are popular among their respective groups. Among the Somalis, various devout dervish orders have their own particular and universal observances, such as the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Many Afars and Somalis are uninformed about the symbolic, mystical content of their own holidays. In Djibouti most urbanites and town residents attend Friday prayer at their mosque.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As among most of the peoples of the Horn, adult status for the Afars and Somalis requires a genital operation, with or without ceremony, usually in childhood. For Afars and Somalis,

boys are circumcised and girls undergo clitoridectomy, a practice intended to ensure their chastity. See section 20.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Djiboutians show great respect to their elders and, in general, for the dignity of others. With their nomadic tradition, Djiboutians historically have not had the chance to forge strong relationships with neighbors, and clan membership plays a prominent role in an individual's social relationships and social standing, which is also determined (for men) by courage in combat. Clan solidarity is reflected in the following Somali saying: "I against my brother; I and my brother against my cousin; I, my brother, and my cousin against the world." (In recent decades, the Somali clans of Djibouti and neighboring Somaliland have been dormant from time to time. However, Somali clan solidarity is important in warfare, both against other clans and against the U.S.)

Among the pastoral Afar, accepting a drink of milk signifies the formation of a bond between a guest and host that includes a responsibility to protect the guest should trouble arise and to avenge his death if he is killed.

Djiboutis, Eritreans, and most Ethiopians share a strong taboo, common among Islamic peoples, involving the left side. The left hand is regarded as unclean and is supposed to be used only for personal hygiene purposes and never for such activities as eating, accepting a present, or shaking another person's hand (which would be considered an unforgivable insult).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions vary greatly, from affluent upper-class Arab businessmen and the educated Afars and Somalis of the country's elite, to undernourished herders with scant possessions and scrawny livestock. Government and Catholic organizations provide some humanitarian aid to the impoverished. Life for women is arduous, as it is generally among nomadic peoples across Africa. Major health threats include severe malnutrition, malaria, and tuberculosis. In 2003 the estimated number of people having an HIV infection was 9,100. Estimated in 2007 as having one of the world's lowest average life expectancies, of 55 years, and an infant mortality rate of 100 per 1,000 live births, Djibouti has a health crisis.

A paved road links Djibouti to the heavy-duty Aseb-Addis Abeba highway, but the road into Northern Somalia is barely usable. A meter-gauge railroad operates to Addis Abeba. Djibouti city has international airline and ship services to the outside world. The city has contained a free port, since 1949. The harbor is enclosed by land, dredged to depths of 12–20 m (40–65 ft). Modern fueling facilities and a floating dry dock round out the facilities of this strategic port.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Djiboutian family averages six or seven children. A marriage is considered as much a union of two families as of two individuals. Divorce is an accepted and common part of the culture. Practicing polygyny, Muslim men traditionally can marry as many as four women. Each wife raises her own children, and her household is in charge of a specific task, such as agricultural work or tending to livestock. Although polygyny is common among the Somali people, Afar men usually have only one wife. Among the Afar, girls were traditionally eligible for marriage when they turned ten; boys when they had killed

their first man (a feat often attested to by the castration of the victim).

## 11 CLOTHING

Unlike women in many other Muslim countries, women in Djibouti do not wear veils, although married Afar women wear a black head scarf. City dwellers wear Western-style clothing, while those in rural areas wear the loose clothing typical of desert dwellers. The traditional outfit of the Afar is a garment called a *sanafil*, consisting of a cloth tied around the waist and reaching to the calves (with a knot at the right hip for men and at the left for women). The wealthier Afar wear another piece of cloth, the *harayto*, slung over their shoulders. Afar men are known for the long, sharp, double-edged dagger, called a *jile*, which they wear at their waists. Among the nomadic Somali in rural areas, the men wear a garment similar to the *sanafil* of the Afar, while the women wear a long, brightly colored cloth called a *guntina*, wound around their torsos and knotted at the right shoulder.

## 12 FOOD

Among the nomadic herders of Djibouti, their livestock (goats, sheep, camels, and cattle) provides the main dietary staples—milk and meat. They also may obtain grain or vegetables through barter. Sheep and goats provide common fare, while beef is reserved for special occasions. Grain is typically roasted and eaten one grain at a time. A favorite delicacy is a thick flatbread made from wheat and eaten with a sauce made from *ghee* (clarified butter) and red pepper. A papyrus root called *burri*, which grows in some areas, is combined with milk to make porridge.

Most Djiboutians observe Islamic dietary laws, which include a ban on eating pork and consuming alcohol. Smoking hashish and chewing chat leaves, both narcotics, are as moral as alcohol is immoral.

## 13 EDUCATION

Until after World War II, Catholic missions provided the infrequent formal education, outside of Koranic schools. A French-style curriculum is used in the growing number of government schools. Practical training of a limited kind is given to many pastoralists, who frequently must round out earning a livelihood with seasonal work in the city or on the railroad. The estimated literacy rate in 2003 for those 15 and older was 68%.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Afar have a traditional type of dance, called *jenile*, which is associated with their ancient pre-Islamic religion.

The Somali have a venerable tradition of oral poetry and song. Their poetry makes heavy use of alliteration.

The visual fine arts of the Somalis have been strongly influenced by Islam, which, for example, does not allow humans or animals to be represented in artwork. Popular motifs are flowers and imaginary creatures.

## 15 WORK

Labor other than the traditional herding of the nomads in rural areas is concentrated in the city of Djibouti. Major employers include the food and beverage industry, shipping, con-

struction, and shipbuilding, as well as the national railway. High rates of unemployment and underemployment exist.

## 16 SPORTS

Few Djiboutians engage in games or sports activities in the Western sense. Some enjoy playing and watching soccer games.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In rural areas, Djiboutian women enjoy spending their free time visiting with each other. Often, they engage in crafts such as weaving or needlework during these social sessions. Men enjoy congregating and drinking coffee. In villages, towns, and cities, the market serves as an important place for people to socialize. City dwellers enjoy movies and other urban pursuits. Television and radio broadcasts are in French, Afar, Somali, and Arabic. The government owns the television station and the principal newspaper. Voice of America and BBC transmitters supplement the state controlled radio.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Somali women use natural fibers to weave rugs, mats, and other objects. Ornamental jewelry, popular with both men and women, is made from silver, and glass, stone, or wooden beads. Pottery is made without a wheel by hollowing out a ball of clay and molding it into the desired shape. Other popular craft items include decorative wooden cups and spoons.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Three of the five points of the single star of nationalism on the flag of Somalia symbolize the Somali-inhabited territories in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. This star signifies that all Somalis should be unified under one flag. Such reunification may never be realized in the Horn of Africa, but the view continues to cause strife. Pan-Somaliism has been especially curtailed following the protracted civil wars in Somalia, and the breaking away of (formerly British) Somaliland in the north from the warring south. At the base of broad social problems are almost no cultivable land and scant freshwater resources.

The Afars were almost continuously in arms against the government of President Aptidon, and have sought greater autonomy. This so-called Afar problem crosses state boundaries into Eritrea. If the Afars of Djibouti succeed in their quest for greater autonomy, some observers speculate that the next step would be a drive for unification with the Afars of Eritrea. So long as the French military remains in Djibouti, the partitioning of the country along ethnic lines remains unlikely.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Throughout the Horn of Africa and across a wider span of the continent, male and female "circumcision" is part of gender socialization and reinforced in the core aspects of a cosmology. The "circumcision" operation on females does a permanent anatomical and physiological damage and a psychological limiting of natural human development. Regarding the female circumcision only, from their own socialization, Westerners report mutilation and barbarous treatment. However, a relativistic native view also exists. (For more about cosmologies of the Horn, see Eritreans, sections 5 and 20.)

In the Horn—as among the Somalis, Afar, Tigrayans, Amhara, Kunama, Nara, Beja, and variably among the Oromo, etc.—values and norms regarding women include that their sensuality must be controlled and diminished, permanently. To this end, the clitoris of a female infant or child is unsanctarily excised (amputated), thus insuring, it is said, that she will not be overly active sexually. Among the Afar, this rite is marked with song. No men are present during or may in any way observe the operation, performed by an old, experienced woman. By the operation, which a few do not survive, the female will make a good and true wife for one of god's chosen, a male. No male would marry a female not having undergone this clitoridectomy. For that matter, no woman desires to marry a man "uncircumcised like a dog." Female "circumcision" is not a communal rite of intensification but an individual rite of passage in society. For a male, circumcision can be either, depending on the particular culture.

Among the Somali, Afar, and other peoples of northeastern Africa, especially Muslims, the surgery for clitoridectomy is extended to include excision of part or all of the labia majora and labia minora of the vulva and, then, infibulation. Infibulation has the paired wounds from the surgery fastened for healing together as one unbroken line of flesh. A slender reed or stick is placed in the wound to allow a small opening for urination and menses. Upon the happy day of marriage, the young bride is "uninfibulated" by an experienced woman but the inexperienced groom could do so. Some reports of "reinfibulation" of a wife given particular circumstances exist. The practice of infibulation goes back at least to Pharaonic Egypt.

Infibulation controls that a female is a virgin before marriage to her husband, preventing consensual and forced coitus. In the Horn, both female clitoridectomy (and any infibulation) and ordinary male circumcision are marks of gender membership, and usually eligibility for marriage, in a particular society.

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—by F. C. Gamst

## DYULA

**PRONUNCIATION:** Joo-lah

**LOCATION:** Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

**POPULATION:** 300,000

**LANGUAGE:** Mande; Arabic; French

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Burkinabe; Ivoirians; Malians

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

In many dialects of the Mande language, the word *dyula* means “trader.” Most Dyula people trace their origins back to the land of Manden, the heartland of the great medieval empire of Mali, along what is now the border of the modern nations of Guinea and Mali. Gold from Mali was transported across the Sahara Desert in exchange for rock salt mined in the Sahara. It was the search for new sources of gold that first led traders from Mali to what is now northern Ghana. Along with gold, they also began exporting kola nuts, which only grow in the rain forest region along the Atlantic Coast, but which became a prized item of luxury consumption in the interior of West Africa. Even after the decline of the Mali empire, these trade links between the desert, the grasslands, and the forest were maintained. Traders continued to move southwards towards the forest, settling in communities along the trade routes.

Some of these trading communities established themselves as minority groups among peoples such as the Senufo, the Kulango, and the Abron, with very different languages and cultures from their own. These minority groups came to call themselves, very simply, *Dyula*—“traders.” Here, they continued to participate in the long-distance trade between the forest and the desert. Indeed, their words for “north” and “south” are *kogodugu*, literally, “the land of salt,” and *worodugu*, “the land of kola nuts.” However, they also specialized in producing and selling various luxury items, especially woven cloths, to their neighbors. Even nowadays, a Dyula village or neighborhood is easily identified by the number of its looms.

For the most part, the Dyula lived peacefully under the rule of kings or chiefs from other groups. However, around AD 1700, a Dyula named Sekou Wattara seized power in the large trading town of Kong, in northern Ivory Coast. Under Sekou's rule, Kong became a major military power, sending out raiding parties as far north as the Niger River, and staving off the armies of the mighty empire of Asante to the southeast. Kong's military might was short-lived, but it continued to be a major trading center until its destruction at the end of the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, most Dyula communities were incorporated into various parts of French West Africa. Many Dyula were active in the movement for independence, rallying to the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) party.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Dyula homelands are now divided between several African nations: Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast, between roughly 8° and 12° north latitudes and 2° and 7° west longitudes. This is an area of savanna, with one annual rainy season. Since



this is in the southern stretches of the grasslands, towards the tropical rain forests to the south, rainfall is relatively plentiful compared to drier regions of the Sahel, to the north. In any case, from their arrival in their present homeland, migration has been a fundamental feature of the existence of this people of traders. Consequently, during the colonial period, Dyula readily migrated to the large towns and cities that sprang up in southern Ivory Coast, in search of better prospects. Nowadays, there are at least as many Dyula living in southern Ivory Coast as there are in their home communities. It is very difficult to estimate their total population, not least because many migrants from other regions to the cities of Ivory Coast are also now called “Dyula.” The total Dyula population probably numbers about 300,000 people.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Dyula speak a dialect of the Mande language, which is very widely spoken over much of West Africa, in Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. The Dyula can easily understand many other dialects (Bamana, Malinke) of the language. Mande is a tone language, though there are only two tones. As traders, the Dyula are quite skillful at understanding others—Africans as well as Europeans—who mispronounce their language. Perhaps because this is a trade language, which many Africans speak as a second language, the grammar is relatively simple. There are no genders or noun classes, plurals are formed regularly, verbs are not conjugated, and verb tenses are easy to learn. However, the Dyula dialect has a rich and idiomatic vocabu-

lary, augmented by numerous loan words, both from French (e.g., *mobilis* for “automobile”; *montoro* for “watch”; and *setadir*, “that’s to say”) and from Arabic (e.g., *hakili*, “intelligence”; *wakati*, “time”; and the days of the week).

Because the Dyula are Muslim, many given names (*togo*) are also of Arabic origin: Mammadou, Saidou, Khadija, Fatoumata. Dyula often give their first-born children the name of their own father or mother. Often a man will not, for example, call a son he has named after his own father by the child’s proper name, just as many Americans hesitate to call their own parents by their first names; rather, he will call him *ba*, “father,” *gbema*, “grandfather,” *cekoroba*, “old man,” or some equivalent term.

Many Dyula clan or family names (*jamu*)—Coulibaly, Kone, Wattara, Cisse, Saganogo, Toure—are widespread throughout much of West Africa, linking Dyula families with distant “cousins” far away.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Women and children sometimes recite folk tales in the evening. Speakers will vie with one another to see who can recite stories the most dramatically and rapidly, without hesitating. Typically, such stories are about clever heroes who use their wits to escape danger, or about jealousy within the polygynous family between co-wives and between children of different mothers.

Dyula men will more likely tell religious stories; since they are Muslim, these are typically about prophets—not only Muhammad, but also Jesus as well as Old Testament prophets. They also have a deep concern for their own history and relate accounts of events in their communities or about the deeds of their family ancestors.

### 5 RELIGION

The Dyula are all Muslim and have been ever since their arrival in their present location. Indeed, Islam and trade were (and still are) closely associated throughout much of West Africa, especially in the savanna. However, in the past, Dyula communities included two different hereditary categories of Muslims: “Scholars” (*mori*) and “Warriors” (*tun tigi*, or *sonongi* in Kong). Members of “Scholar” clans were expected to conform fairly rigorously to Muslim codes of religious behavior: praying five times a day; fasting in the daytime during the month of Ramadan; and abstaining from alcoholic beverages. “Warriors,” on the other hand, might drink beer, and pray and fast irregularly. Adolescent “Warrior” boys were initiated into secret societies called *lo*. The initiation process took seven years, during which the boys underwent various ordeals and were taught the *lo* secrets, for example, about powerful spirits embodied in the *lo* masks, some of which were considered so dangerous that only initiates were allowed to see them. Certain “Scholar” families, on the other hand, were known far and wide for their Islamic learning. Kong, for example, was widely known as a center for scholarship as well as trade. About 50 years ago, the initiation societies were abolished, as many Dyula came to feel that such practices were not proper for Muslims.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Dyula holidays are all associated with the Muslim ritual calendar. Because the Muslim year is lunar and not solar, these holidays take place at a different time each year according to

Western reckoning and cannot be associated with any particular season. *Tabaski* celebrates the annual time of the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Everyone dresses in their best finery, and all men pray together at the mosque. When they come home, each family that can afford it sacrifices a ram and distributes part of its meat to friends and relatives. *Sunkalo* (the Dyula name for Ramadan) is a month of fasting, but only during the daytime. Throughout the month, at sundown, people prepare elaborate meals. While older men observe the month with additional prayer, young girls perform special dances (*kurubi don*) where they beat the rhythm on special long, thin gourds painted for the occasion. *Donba* (literally “big dance”) is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, and, as its name suggests, is a particularly joyous occasion.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Seven days after the birth of a child, there is a relatively informal naming ceremony, where the infant is given its Muslim name. In the past, there were elaborate rituals to mark the passage into adolescence: initiation into *lo* societies for “Warrior” boys, excision (female circumcision) for girls. Both of these rituals have been abolished on the grounds that they are improper for Muslims.

Weddings are very elaborate affairs, involving several types of ceremonies. Older men formalize the marriage arrangements in the *furu* ceremony, in which a bundle of kola nuts previously wrapped in string is ceremonially untied, marriage gifts are officially presented, and all present witness the transaction and bless the marriage. During this time, in the *konyo mina* ceremony, the bride dances around the village, proud to be the center of attention but also sad to renounce the freedom of adolescence. The festivities often last a week, while the bride and groom remain secluded in a hut. Usually, in any year, all weddings in a single village take place on the same day, so that this is a festival for the entire community and not just the families of the bride and groom.

Funerals are more or less elaborate depending on the age and status of the deceased. The corpse is washed and buried as quickly as possible in an unmarked grave, after it has been prayed over, in accordance with strict Islamic rules. However, commemorative ceremonies may be held on the third, seventh, and fortieth days after burial, as well as one year afterwards. Such ceremonies may involve the reading of prayers, sermons delivered by local scholars, and the distribution of ritual gifts (*saraka*) to a wide variety of individuals and groups. Funerals of very old and important people may indeed be festive occasions, marked with singing and dancing, to commemorate the rich and full life of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As traders, the Dyula were always accustomed to traveling far and wide. When visiting any community, an individual always needed an established host (*diatigi*), who was responsible for taking proper care of the “stranger” (*lunan*) for as long as he or she chose to stay. Indeed, a “stranger” might decide, or even be asked, to stay for life, settling down in the new community.

The Dyula, as also befits traders, are very sociable, and elaborate greetings are an important part of everyday life. People will routinely inquire about each others’ health and about their family. Greetings also include Muslim blessings (*duaw*), which

are usually fairly routine but, in some circumstances, can be quite elaborate.

In the past, young unmarried men and women were allowed to take official boy- or girlfriends (*teri*) with the knowledge and consent of their parents. Sex play, but not full sexual intercourse, was permitted for such lovers. Marriages, however, were arranged by parents, and it was very rare that boy- and girlfriends would marry one another. This practice of taking an official, publicly recognized lover before marriage has been discontinued.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Because of their involvement in trade, the Dyula have always enjoyed a relatively high standard of living compared to many of their neighbors. They enjoy dressing well, eating well, and, when they can afford them, owning luxuries such as radios, cassette recorders, televisions, and automobiles. Old-fashioned mud huts with thatched roofs have been almost everywhere replaced by concrete houses with corrugated iron roofing. These modern houses are less likely to burn down and are easier to maintain, though in fact they are less comfortable than thatched huts. In larger towns, modern houses often also have running water; electricity is available, not only in town, but in many villages nowadays.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

All the families in any village who belong to one clan and who descend from a common ancestor live together in a neighborhood called a *kabila*. A large village can contain as many as 20 such neighborhoods. The group has a chief and resolves disputes in a meeting where all adult men in the clan can air their grievances. Traditionally, Dyula preferred to marry cousins within their own clan neighborhood. The proportion of such marriages is declining, but they are still common, especially in rural areas.

As Muslims, Dyula men are allowed up to four wives. Indeed, about half of all married men have more than one wife—a very high proportion, even for West Africa. However, some of these wives are widows who have remarried men their own age late in life. Islam dictates that husbands should treat all wives equally. Indeed, Dyula women enjoy considerable freedom. The stereotypical notion that Islam inevitably leads to the oppression of women certainly does not hold true with the Dyula. Women often actively earn money of their own outside the home, for example, by trading in the market.

## 11 CLOTHING

As weavers and traders, the Dyula enjoy fine clothing. Cloths are traditionally woven in narrow strips, which are then sewn together to make a rectangular blanket. Elaborate patterns require great skill. For example, weavers have to be very careful when weaving a checkerboard pattern that the squares on each strip of cloth will match with those on the next strip. Women would tie one such blanket around their waist, and another over their shoulders, with a third used to carry a baby. Men would dress in elaborate robes, often delicately embroidered.

Nowadays, men usually wear Western-style clothing on ordinary occasions, reserving fine robes for special occasions. Women generally buy machine-produced cloths, which are much cheaper than the handwoven variety, and so the Dyula tradition of weaving is in decline.



## 12 FOOD

Dyula usually eat three meals a day, supplemented by snacks, which can be obtained from street vendors. Breakfast consists of porridge made from corn, rice, or millet. The midday meal is usually the most elaborate. Rice or pounded yams are supplemented with a sauce or a stew, such as meat cooked in peanut sauce. These sauces are generally quite spicy. The evening meal often consists of a spongy pudding called *to*, made from corn or millet flour, typically accompanied by an okra sauce.

Eating is invariably a social activity. Any friend or relative, even a casual acquaintance, who happens to drop by when a person is eating will be asked to partake of the meal. It is extremely rude not to invite someone to share one's meal, although the invitation can be politely declined by saying, "I'm full."

## 13 EDUCATION

As Muslims, the Dyula have a long tradition of literacy in Arabic. Boys from "Scholar" families would begin from the age of seven to learn to read and write Arabic script. Initially, such education stressed the ability to be able to recite any written passage, without necessarily understanding its meaning. A special ceremony called *Kurana jigi*, "putting down the Quran," was held when a boy was able to recite the entire Quran. Some boys, and indeed adult men, would decide to pursue their studies further, and most communities contained individuals with considerable skill at reading and writing Arabic. Large Dyula towns like Kong were great centers of learning, attracting students from far and wide.

Dyula parents were initially reluctant to allow their children to pursue a Western-style education, which they feared would undermine their religious values. Nowadays, however, most boys and girls are sent to school, where they learn to read and write French. Recently, modern Muslim schools have been established in larger towns, where Dyula children can follow a combined curriculum in Arabic and in French; however, such schools are not always officially recognized by the government.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Unlike some other Mande peoples, the Dyula have no professional "bards" or *griots* as they are sometimes called (*jeli* in Dyula). Singing and music-making are not in any way professional occupations. On holidays, at weddings, or on other special occasions, groups of young men and women, as well as older women, will sing (sometimes improvising as they go along) and dance through the community. Such activities, however, are generally considered improper for older men.

## 15 WORK

As traders, the Dyula have always valued occupations linked in one way or another to the marketplace. Even as farmers, they tend to treat agriculture as a business, growing cash crops like tobacco (in the past) or (nowadays) cotton, or planting coffee and cocoa in southern Ivory Coast, rather than simply growing food to feed their own family. Weaving was formerly the most widespread occupation. When sewing machines were introduced, many Dyula eagerly adopted the profession of tailor.

In the past, work was intimately tied to the family. Sons would work under the authority of their father, and young-

er brothers would work for their older brothers, at least until they were married and had families of their own. In this way, a group of weavers in the same family would be able to pool their work and sell it more profitably. Nowadays, work is more individualized. Parents, uncles, or older brothers no longer control the salaries of their younger relatives. Tailors, for example, rely on the labor of apprentices, rather than on family members.

## 16 SPORTS

Until about 40 years ago, wrestling was the most popular sport among Dyula boys. Individuals and teams from each clan neighborhood would regularly compete with one another. However, the sport has lapsed. Now, soccer is undoubtedly the favorite sport, as is true in much of Africa.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Radios are very common among the Dyula. Radio Mali regularly broadcasts in the Bamana language, which Dyula can understand effortlessly, although young people often listen to other stations that broadcast in French. Cassette recorders are also very popular. Young people listen to tapes of pop stars, sometimes from America but also from Africa: Alpha Blondy, a leading reggae musician from Ivory Coast, sings in English and French as well as Dyula. Homemade cassettes of traditional African music are also available in the marketplace, alongside cassettes of Muslim sermons, to which pious Muslims will listen for entertainment as well as for their religious content. In larger towns, televisions are commonplace, even in comparatively modest homes. In the evening, television is particularly popular with women and adolescents, who will cluster around the set of a relative, friend, or neighbor if they have none of their own.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Although the demand for elaborate, handwoven cloths has fallen off a great deal, there are still many Dyula weavers. A few Dyula villages have developed successful cooperatives, where they produce tablecloths and napkins and other items explicitly aimed at the tourist market.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Handwoven cloth, once the mainstay of the Dyula economy, can no longer compete with machine-produced textiles. It remains a luxury item, but its value and the size of the market have plummeted. Finding employment or a source of dependable income is a problem for the Dyula, as it is with all other peoples in the region. The recent devaluation of the CFA, the unit of currency in much of French-speaking West Africa, has made prospects for young people even bleaker, at least in the short run.

These economic strains have put increasing pressure on family units. Extended families no longer pool their resources, and fathers no longer can rely on the labor of their sons, or older brothers on their younger brothers. This increased independence expresses itself in other ways, too; young men and women now generally marry partners of their own choice, and women are not married off in early adolescence. However, such freedom has also led to rapidly rising rates of childbirth outside of wedlock.

During the colonial period and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, many Dyula settled in the southern part of Côte

d'Ivoire, one of the most prosperous regions in West Africa due to coffee and cocoa plantations. Beginning in the 1980s, the economic bubble began to burst, and immigrant Dyula became the targets of increasing xenophobic sentiments. The situation deteriorated after the death in 1993 of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who had ruled the country for over thirty years. The political turmoil led to riots in which Dyula and other Muslims were often targeted. After a failed military coup, a rebel government established itself in the north of the country, in the heart of the Dyula homeland. By 2008, the two sides had come to an agreement, although the situation remains tense in much of the country.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In principle, Dyula women were supposed to remain under the authority of men—fathers, brothers, or husbands. However, they were never secluded, and in fact, enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy. In particular, women were often allowed (if not encouraged) to engage in independent economic activities, such as trading produce in the market. While wives had a claim on their husbands' income and could sue for divorce for lack of support, men had no right to any of their wives' earnings.

As Muslims, Dyula men could marry up to four wives, although it was unusual for men to have more than two wives. In the past, Dyula women were married in early adolescence while men married much later. Adolescent girls had little or no say in their choice of husbands. However, once they were widowed or divorced, they were relatively free to marry whom they pleased. As of the 21st century, young women are usually allowed to choose their husbands and are not pressured to marry so young. According to Islamic law, men do not have to specify their reasons for divorce, whereas women have to sue for divorce on specified grounds. In fact, women are far more likely than men to seek divorce.

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—by R. Launay

# EFE AND MBUTI

**PRONUNCIATION:** AY-fay and mm-BOO-tee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bambuti

**LOCATION:** Ituri forest in northeast Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire)

**POPULATION:** Approximately 35,000

**LANGUAGE:** Bambuti languages

**RELIGION:** Traditional tribal beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: ?

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Researchers believe that hunters and gatherers have lived in the rainforests of central Africa for more than 6,000 years. Because of their relative isolation, misconceptions about them abound. Their small stature has led to the use of the term "pygmy," and in some instances they are mistakenly referred to as dwarfs. Indeed, some of their African neighbors thought of them (and still do) as less than human.

The name *pygmy* itself inadequately describes these peoples, as it emphasizes physical size to the detriment of other characteristics. Pygmies are indeed short of stature: men are about four and half feet tall and women are about an inch shorter. More importantly, however, pygmies are forest dwellers who share cultural traits with similar peoples living in the forests of equatorial Africa. They have a unique culture, set of values, and lifestyle that are all undergoing great change. Their adaptation to change may teach other cultures how to cope with radical disruptions to their societies.

In many respects, pygmies represent the antithesis of modernity. Just 30 years ago they possessed only the bare essentials for their livelihoods. They did not seek to create surpluses in goods, and they had no use for money. Government was simple: decisions for a particular band were made by common consent, and dissenters were free to leave and join another community if they wished. The forest, their "mother," had the capacity to supply their every need.

Traditional values of interdependence and sociality are being replaced by independence and individuality. Today, under environmental challenges and pressures to acculturate, pygmy society is changing rapidly. Political rebellions in the Ituri area following Congolese independence in 1960 hastened some of these changes. But efforts by former President Mobutu's government to remove pygmies from their forest habitat and to assimilate them into Congolese society wreaked the greatest physical and social havoc on them. The experiment with "emancipation" nearly drove them to extinction and had to be called off.

Since 1997, pygmy survival has been threatened further by wars, which have drawn as many as eight countries into conflict in Eastern Congo. Of the more than five million people that have died of war-related and humanitarian causes in the east, thousands have been pygmies. They have been the primary victims of the scramble for 'conflict' and 'blood' diamonds, gold, and other resources. By 2008, peace in the forested region was not yet guaranteed, as major armed groups had yet to disarm.

In spite of the political and natural threats to their survival, pygmies have proven resilient to adversity. They currently en-



gage in more sustained and deeper contacts than before with African village communities on the fringes of the forest. A long-time student of the Mbuti pygmies, Colin Turnbull, believes that should the equatorial forest be destroyed, the pygmy devotion to “forestness” will help them adapt “and find a new source of sanctity in the here and now.” Turnbull feels that by studying the pygmies, Western populations can learn to rethink what is “backward” and what is “advanced.” Seeing how the pygmies adapt to change may help us reassess our own social contexts.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Pygmy peoples live in scattered groups throughout the equatorial band of Africa, primarily in an area within five degrees on either side of the equator. However, pygmy units range as far north and west as Benin and as far east as the Great Lakes of the Rift Valley. This discussion focuses on the groups of the Ituri forest in northeast Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), including the Efe and their close relations to the south. Although they differ by language and hunting strategies, they share a core culture. Collectively, the Efe and three other groups of the Ituri are called the *Bambuti*. While there are as many as 35,000 Bambuti, researchers estimate that no more than 20,000 pure-blooded Bambuti remain in the world.

The Bambuti live within a 130,000-sq-km (50,000-sq-mi) tract of the huge 648,000-sq-km (250,000-sq-mi) Ituri forest. The Ituri lies on the equator in the northeastern part of the Congo River basin, between 0° to 3°N, and 27° to 30°E. Elevations in this area range from 700 to 1,000 m (2,300 to 3,300 ft). The terrain is rolling, covered by primary rainforest.

Trees reach heights of 30–60 m (100–200 ft) before their canopies spread out, allowing only filtered sunlight to reach the understory below. In areas where the forest has been cleared and allowed to grow back, thick tangled underbrush impedes movement. Rain falls nearly every afternoon except during the dry season of January and February. Many small streams only a few miles apart run continuously, and several large, fast rivers intersect the forest. Temperatures are fairly constant, ranging from 20°C (70°F) at night to highs of 27°C (80°F) during the day, unless the sky is overcast.

The pygmy populations of the Ituri occupy specific territories within the forest, and they generally do not hunt or gather on another’s territory. Each unit also trades with various African ethnic groups (referred to as “Negroes” or “villagers”) living on the fringes of the forest. Although not the most numerous, the Efe occupy the largest territory across the northern and eastern parts of the Ituri. Their trading partners are the Sudanic-speaking Mamvu and Walese Africans. Pygmies trade forest products such as honey, meat, rattan, and thatch leaves in exchange for the Walese’s plantains (see *Interpersonal Relations*).

## 3 LANGUAGE

Sustained contact with African groups over long periods has all but led to the extinction of Bambuti languages. Nevertheless, researchers distinguish three linguistic groups that speak dialects of three major African languages. Some tonal patterns remain as well. Efe pygmies have retained their language to a recognizable extent.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Pygmies anthropomorphize animals, meaning that they give forest animals attributes of people. Certain animals represent clans, sexes, and individuals and they become very real people. Both pygmies and their village hosts have invented stories about these animals, and they assign special attributes to Mr. Turtle, Mr. Gray Antelope, or Mr. Chimpanzee. For example, Mr. Turtle is a wise and tricky individual, whereas the smallest antelope is king of the beasts. Animal stories thus serve to teach about human behavior and relationships.

## 5 RELIGION

Religion in pygmy life increasingly reflects borrowings from neighboring African groups. The Bambuti attribute the wealth and goodness of the forest to Muungu, a high deity, the greatest of forest gods, who supplies all of their needs. The forest is like a mother and father to them, providing food, clothing, shelter, warmth, and affection. Pygmies believe in totemic spirits (*sitana*), who live in rock piles, hollow trees, and holes in the ground, and they stay clear of these places if possible. They also believe in a water animal called *nyama ya mai* in Swahili, who is responsible for any serious water mishaps. If someone drowns or a canoe tips over, they will say the water animal did it. If sickness strikes that cannot be cured by pygmy remedies, pygmies will seek treatment from a village witch doctor to suck out “disease objects” with herbs or by cupping with animal horns.

Pygmies also practice certain magical rituals called *anjo* to help control the weather and enhance hunting. Their main concern is to delay rain and storms until the hunt is over. For example, the Efe may burn leaves of the wild pepper plant to



Mbuti pygmies at a forest hunting camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (National Geographic/Getty Images)

stop storms. Other weather superstitions have to do with picking certain flowers or dropping stones into streams, which they see as causes of rain. Before hunting, Bambuti groups light fires in the morning during hunting season to “warm the forest” for good luck. Efe women sometimes light smoky fires at mid-day to keep the weather clear for hunting. Mbuti children light smoky fires to purify the hunters who will cause bloodshed in the sacred forest. Pygmies tie the leaves of the species that their prey enjoys on their bows, and they sometimes burn these leaves and rub the ashes on their bodies. When dividing the catch, the elder cuts a small piece off of the heart of an animal and tosses it into the forest for good luck.

The most important ritual ceremony is the *molimo*, which is held whenever hunting becomes unproductive or a special problem demands resolution within the band. Traditionally, this ritual was very secret and kept hidden from women and children, although more recently the *molimo* has been performed in villages. The ceremony begins with a long, mournful cry from the forest, goes to a birdcall, then to a growl, and back to a birdcall again. The men at the campfire answer the call, which is made with a wooden trumpet, but represents the voice of the forest. After the main ceremony is over, the women and children join the men, circling the campfire in one direction, while the men circle in the other. The ceremony may last several days, until it is felt that the *molimo* has answered their request.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holidays hold little meaning for the Bambuti other than as opportunities for parties. The end of *Nkumbi*, the honey feast dance, and other ceremonial activities may be thought of as

traditional pygmy holidays (see *Rites of Passage and Cultural Heritage*).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Bambuti have gradually been assimilating village rituals, but birth in pygmy society is treated without any ritual. In former times, girls went through initiation, the *elima*, but this practice has fallen away. Boys increasingly attend a village circumcision school (*nkumbi*), which is held every three or four years depending on the number of boys between the ages of 9 and 14 who are ready for circumcision. The boys leave their parents for several months and live in close association with the village boys, who are their hosts. They learn the secrets and are circumcised together. At the end of the ceremonies, their parents come to dance and get drunk with the village boys' parents. Thus, each group of boys belongs to an age-grade, much as American high school students identify with their graduating class or college students identify with a fraternity. When strangers meet, they ask, “What class do you belong to?” Because each class acquires a name from a significant event during its initiation, they reply, “I’m a hurricane,” or “I’m a great army worm,” or something similar. These ceremonies bond boys of the same age together and also cement relationships between villagers and pygmies.

Marriage takes place soon after puberty, leaving little time for courtship. Nevertheless, at puberty, youthful chivalry at the hunt gets publicized, and much flirtation back in the camps occurs. Inter-band visits offer occasions for youth to get acquainted and to engage in marital prospecting.

When a Mbuti dies, members of the deceased's family mourn by covering themselves with white clay. The women organize weeping and wailing sessions, which last for several

days. Funerals also offer occasions for wine drinking. Once a wake is over, the band usually moves camp.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Pygmies place great importance on respect for each other, and children learn this early. In principle, children of the same age group remain on equal footing throughout their lives and call each other *apua'i*. Their games teach them to be social, interdependent, and synergistic in problem-solving. Evening campfires offer adults daily opportunities to discuss and resolve disputes. Anyone who speaks from the center of the camp must be listened to. Members of a band gang up on wayward members to enforce rules and maintain harmony in the group. Individuals and families visit other pygmy camps for months at a time to socialize with family members and to prospect for marriage. These visits break up the monotony of daily life.

Relations between the Bambuti and villagers are also very important. Researchers have disagreed on whether this relationship is essentially dependent, independent, or interdependent. The first view sees pygmies as vassals of the villager overlords. The second sees them as fully independent if they so choose because the forest supplies them with everything they need. Contact with villagers offers an agreeable change of pace, but is voluntary and temporary. The third view finds a mutual interdependence between pygmies and villagers with neither side holding an advantage. Each has something the other wants and needs.

Villager-Pygmy relationships are based on the claim of villagers to about 100 square miles of forest. Villagers thus act as hosts to pygmy families living within their territory. Each supplies the other with necessities the other is unable to get on his own. For the pygmy in pre-colonial days, this included scouting in the forest for enemies of a village. A visitor to a village will often see bunches of plantains lying on the ground waiting to be picked up by pygmies at their convenience. The relationship is interfamilial and is inherited on both sides from father to son. If a pygmy leaves a villager to ally with someone else, it is regarded as "divorce." In former times, inter-village warfare sometimes erupted when villagers attempted to woo pygmies away from each other.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions have deteriorated dramatically since 1998 due to the fighting. Traditionally, material comfort, wealth, and security were the least of the pygmies' concerns. They trusted the forest to provide their needs, which, by most standards, were extremely minimal. The Bambuti needed spears, bows and arrows, and nets for hunting; pots to cook in; huts to sleep under; and loin cloths to wear. They traded forest products to villagers for items difficult to obtain such as salt, knives, and metal tips for their weapons. However, at the dawn of the 21st century, the forest people were very much engaged in a struggle for survival.

Pygmy settlements are rustic, temporary camps situated within 50 yards of a stream suitable for drinking. Their igloo-shaped huts have open doors. Huts are made of bent saplings that form a frame onto which large *mongongo* leaves are tied. Mats or leaves generally serve as beds and cooking is done on open fires near the huts. People simply relieve themselves in the forest near the camp.

After one to three months in one place, animals, fruit, and honey become scarce, and the stench of refuse and human waste becomes unbearable. The community packs up and moves to another site, but never to an abandoned camp site. The women pack their pots, axes, and whatever they own into baskets, which they strap to their backs; babies travel on top of the packs. The men carry their weapons, elephant spears, and bows and arrows.

From April to June, if the rainy season is particularly severe, preventing hunting, widespread hunger may sometimes occur, as it did in 1980. People's resistance to infectious diseases lowers, and conflicts over food are more frequent. When pygmies fall ill, they treat themselves with medicinal herbs and bark. They give each other enemas for diarrhea and intestinal disorders, which are frequent. Dysentery is common; pneumonia is less common, but deadly. Pygmies are quite resistant to disease overall, and the most frequent cause of premature death is falling from trees or being hit by a falling tree limb during a storm. Pygmies go everywhere on foot and cover great distances in little time. Their size allows them to pass under low limbs and tangles. Villagers and other outsiders seem very clumsy in the forest by comparison. The Bambuti use their hands to grasp branches and remove fallen clutter and tangles from trails as they go, tossing dead wood into the nearby understory. The noise created by this tactic also serves to mislead and distract game during a hunt.

National Park set-asides like that of Kahuzi-Biega in South Kivu pose new threats to way of life. Bambuti increasingly live near or alongside a forest area they can no longer access because it has been designated as a protected area or a national park. In one case, Pygmies confined to living on an island in miserable circumstances have complained that they are dying of hunger while they are not allowed to fish, which is one of their traditional sources of food.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family life among the Bambuti is much different from that in the West. The Bambuti learn the value of interdependence and sociality as children. Children call all women in the camp *Em*a (mother) because they are all mothers to pygmy children. Nursing goes on long after a child can walk and talk, and mothers often swap and adopt children of their sisters and close friends.

Efe pygmies live in small camps of fewer than 50 residents. Mbuti pygmy camps usually have two to three times as many people because net-hunting requires communal participation. Individual households are nuclear families (*endu*) consisting of a husband, a wife, and their children. Families are patrilineal, meaning that they trace their lineage through the male line to a common male ancestor. Pygmies are exogamous and may not marry anyone to whom they know they are related.

Marriages are exchanges between families. Mutual affection and chivalry can play a part, but generally a man offers a sister, niece, or cousin to his wife's brother or male relative. Divorce is common, and if a marriage does not last, this often also causes the divorce of the couple who arranged the marriage. A woman often initiates divorce simply by packing her things (including small children) and moving back to her family's camp. If she has boys, they return to their father when they are old enough to hunt. The typical marriage is monogamous because pygmy women are scarce.

## 11 CLOTHING

Villagers like to joke that when they first encountered pygmies, the pygmies wore no clothes at all. Pygmies deny this and insist that they have always worn loin cloths. Traditional cloth is made from the inner bark of vines. Men generally process it, which involves pounding, wetting, and working it until it is soft and pliable. Acculturation has increased the use of cotton fabrics in pygmy dress. Used clothing has also become more common. The Bambuti enhance their appearance by scarification (scarring) on the face. Some women also wear bead necklaces. Both men and women improve their appearance by filing their teeth to a point.

## 12 FOOD

The Efe diet is seasonal depending on the rains. From late June to mid-September, honey, fruits, and nuts are most abundant in the forest. At this time, pygmies move their camps into the forest, but they return to the villages often to trade for peanuts, plantains, and other foods. By late September, rivers have overflowed, and forest conditions are extremely wet for hunting. The Efe move back to the edge of the forest, where the women help with village gardens while the men hunt. During the dry months up to February, men spend time helping villagers clear garden areas, while women assist with rice harvesting. In February and March, the forest has dried sufficiently to permit good hunting conditions. The Efe move back into the forest and then emerge again in April or May to forage in abandoned gardens for cassava and sweet potato tubers. Pygmies feel obliged to hand over all honey and elephant meat to their hosts, but they will eat all they can first. They do not store or preserve game.

Pygmies typically eat two to three meals a day, one in the morning before the hunt, possibly one at noon, and one in the late afternoon after the hunt. They enjoy many forest delicacies, ranging from *pangolins* (an armadillo-like animal) to reptiles and insects. They have a favorite recipe for fried caterpillars. They wrap a caterpillar in a piece of leaf and place it next to the fire. Toasting it as one would a marshmallow, it is then dropped into a pot of boiling palm oil and cooked. When finished, the caterpillars look something like fried shrimp.

Food taboos are associated with clan, sex, or individuals. Pygmy clans identify with animals that performed a kind deed or may have helped an ancestor through a crisis. They make these animals their totems and are not allowed to hunt, eat, or even be around them. If they encounter one in the forest, they will run the other way. For men, the taboo will usually be a species of a hunted animal such as an antelope or monkey; for women, the totem is usually a slow-moving animal such as a porcupine or snake. Women and children may eat frogs and toads, but men abstain from these. Chimpanzees and leopards are rarely hunted and eaten, and they may be totems for some clans. The totems are not their ancestors, but they do represent very real people. To violate the taboo would bring sickness, misfortune, and even death. To respect it binds the clan members sharing the totem, even though they may be separated by great distances.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Bambuti have evaded formal education. In camp, children learn basic skills, such as tree-climbing, before they walk. Boys practice shooting bows and arrows at the age of three. As they

grow older, boys accompany men on the hunt, while girls learn to gather food, cook, and make huts. This basic education is complete by the age of six or seven.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Bambuti have not developed a written literature and do not create graphic arts. Perhaps their most important cultural legacy is their sense of family, their community reliance, and their belief in the forest. Some pygmies are accomplished storytellers and tell folktales about forest spirits and legends about ancestors. Pygmies enjoy singing and dancing, especially on moonlit nights. They stamp on the ground or on hollow logs and, if they can, they borrow drums from their villager hosts.

One of the gayest and happiest dances occurs during the honey feast. Pygmies celebrate the honey dance after days of feasting on honey. Women form an inner ring and circle around a bonfire, while men form an outer ring and circle in the opposite direction. The men pretend to seek honey and come near the women. The women play the role of bees, humming and droning. They pick up burning branches from the fire, with which they menace the men to remind them of the dangers of bee stings.

## 15 WORK

Formerly, pygmies worked just enough to supply their basic needs. Principally the men hunted and the women gathered. When they had surpluses, they traded them for articles and food from African villagers. The forest products they traded were generally meat, honey, fruits, and building materials. In exchange, they received plantains, yams, corn, cloth, and iron tools. Women also tended villager gardens and men occasionally helped villagers clear land. While the Bambuti continue to trade, today they are more concerned with having cash, so they seek surpluses in their hunting and have become more competitive with each other. The unfortunate reality, however, is that exposure to villagers has increased their visibility and therefore their vulnerability to exploitation by combatants, who rape the women and utilize the men as free labor.

Hunting and gathering still form the core of the Bambuti's livelihood in the forest. Mbuti hunting is a group affair done with nets. Each net is owned by one to four men, and a minimum of seven nets are required for a successful hunt. Women and children scream, shout, and beat bushes to frighten animals toward the nets, which are strung over bushes about four feet high. The animals become entangled in the nets behind which the men are hiding. Once netted, large game such as hogs, bushbucks, and an occasional okapi must be killed with spears. The Efe men often hunt alone either for monkeys with poison-tipped arrows or for duikers, small African antelope, by perching in fruiting trees. They obtain the poison from the juice of the kilabo plant. A mere scratch with this poison can cause death.

## 16 SPORTS

Forest people do not play sports in the Western sense. They do, however, learn basic skills through mock hunts and other games. For example, every camp has a designated play area for children next to streams (*bopi*) that is off limits to adults. Here children play games similar to sports that teach them about group dynamics and personal achievement. Of similar importance, the elders teach children the strategies and techniques

of hunting by pretending to be animals and by showing children how to drive them into a piece of old net.

The adults also play a game (more ritual than sport) resembling our tug-of-war. The purpose is to remind the community that cooperation can solve conflicts between the sexes. The tug-of-war begins with all the men on one side and the women on the other. If the women begin to prevail, one of them leaves to help out the men and assumes a deep male voice to ridicule manhood. As the men begin to win, one of them joins the women and mocks them in high-pitched tones. The battle continues in this way until the participants have switched sides and have had an opportunity to both help and ridicule the opposition. Then both sides collapse, laughing over the point that neither side gains in beating the other.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Ituri forest is one of the world's last refuges from cinemas, televisions, videos, IPODs and internet. The Bambuti relax after a day's hunt by sitting on home-made four-legged stools in front of their huts, talking and smoking. Conversation may be directed at everybody or may be between two people, but it is audible to all. People talk about what they did that day or what they are going to do the next. They may joke about someone's clumsiness, and they often get up in the night to urinate or smoke and continue their conversations. Pygmies also celebrate a good hunt, especially an elephant kill, with feasting and dancing. An elephant kill is an act of courage, and they know the meat and ivory will trade well.

When they move to village outskirts, pygmies socialize with villagers while bartering their game. On moonlit nights, they stay late to drink wine and dance. The pygmies put on outlandish performances to entertain villagers in exchange for beverages. A few elderly men stay behind in the camp to smoke hashish and stand guard against thieves.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pygmies have little time and interest for crafts and hobbies. If they need a tool such as a mortar and pestle to prepare food or medicine, they often wheedle it from their villager hosts. Pygmies fashion their own nets from *lianas* (vines) and make belt pouches, baskets, and mats from grasses. They craft stools and chairs from sticks and branches.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Prior to independence, pygmies remained outside the mainstream of society and politics. An internal system of camp debate and consensus allowed every adult to express his or her opinion. No chief or formal council imposed rules. Instead, an informal oligarchy of leaders led decision-making and maintenance of law and order.

However, post-independence wars, nation-building, and national park set-asides have disrupted customary ways. Logging, illegal mining, road-building, and commerce have further eroded the isolation of the forest peoples. Indeed, the plunder and smuggling of coltan into Rwanda has wreaked havoc on the environment and has been the cause of many pygmy deaths in Ituri. Ironically, coltan is a natural resource for chips used in cell phones, computers and other electronics. Pygmy values, beliefs, and way of life are increasingly jeopardized by uncontrolled illegal exploitation of resources for which they have no use.

Even more devastating to the pygmies is the presence of various armed groups all of which have exploited the forest people as cheap (or free) labor, raped pygmy women, and retaliated against pygmy communities for allegedly cooperating with enemy groups. The armies and militias have used them as hunters and guides for their special knowledge of forest trails. In addition to rape, one human rights group found evidence of mass killings and cannibalism by armed combatants against the forest people. Sexual exploitation has resulted in a high rate of gonorrhoea among Bambuti, which researchers believe accounts for a low birth rate among pygmy women.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Pygmy society is relatively egalitarian for its lack of the typical gender issues stemming from societal discrimination, marginalization of girls, unfair inheritance laws, disputed abortion rights, and workplace inequality. The critical role women play in survival no doubt accounts for this consideration. However, one of the forest people's key gender problems is inter-clan disputes over women and children. Pygmies lose about 14% of their women to marriage with villagers. Reciprocal marriage exchanges are therefore difficult to fulfill because families often have uneven numbers of females. Patricians and younger males harass, capture, and come into armed conflict with each other over "sister exchange." Thus, many males must live well past puberty while waiting for a wife. These bachelors can cause serious problems when they tryst with married women or with girls in their endogamous clan.

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—by R. Groelsema

# EGYPTIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ih-JIP-shuhns

**LOCATION:** Egypt (northeastern Africa)

**POPULATION:** 80 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam (Primarily Sunni; minorities of Shia and Sufi); Coptic Christian; other Christian denominations. [Fewer than 1,000 Jews.]

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Arab Republic of Egypt is more commonly known as Egypt. Throughout Egypt's 6,000-year history, it was the focus of ambitions of many foreign powers, who wished to dominate this country that occupies a strategic position linking the continents of Africa and Asia. Conquerors of Egypt have included the Ptolemies, Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Fatimids, Mamluks, Ottomans, French, and British. Britain was the last colonial power to conquer Egypt. British forces withdrew in 1954, leaving Egypt independent under the leadership of President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir.

A key event in the ancient history of Egypt was the unification of Upper (southern) and Lower (northern) Egypt, by the legendary King Menes, in the third millennium BC. This began the famous Pharaonic Age, in which a god-king, or pharaoh, held power over all of Egypt. The legacy of the pharaohs is preserved in the pyramids and in the stories etched in stone in hieroglyphic symbols across the face of Egypt.

A second key event, one of the most influential in the development of modern Egypt, was the Arab Muslim conquest in AD 641 by 'Amr Ibn al-'As. This conquest led to the spread of the Arabic language and Islamic religion across Egypt. This was not affected by the absorption of Egypt into the Ottoman Empire in 1517, since the Ottomans were themselves also Muslim, and Islamic institutions were maintained. An attempt to free Egypt from Ottoman rule, led by Muhammad 'Ali in the first half of the 19th century, failed. The British occupied Egypt in 1882 in order to control the Suez Canal and safeguard the British route to India. Egypt never became a British colony, but it did become part of the British Empire, with Egyptian King Faruk as ruler.

In 1952, a group of Egyptians called the Free Officers, led by Lieutenant Colonel Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, overthrew King Faruk. 'Abd al-Nasir became President of Egypt in 1954 and immediately began a series of nationalizations, including the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, a move that infuriated the countries that depended on safe passage through the canal. This led to the 1956 Tripartite Invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel. Following threats that the Soviet Union would attack Britain and France if they did not withdraw from Egypt and pressure by the United States on Britain and France, by the end of the year, the three forces had all withdrawn. As Israel withdrew from the Sinai, it destroyed roads, railroads, and military installations. During Nasir's presidency, Egypt was also embroiled in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, in which Israel occupied Egypt's Sinai peninsula.

Upon Nasir's death in 1970, Anwar Sadat became president of Egypt. During his term, Egypt launched the 1973 Arab-Israeli War across the Suez Canal, hoping to recapture the Si-

nai from Israel and liberate Palestinian territories that had also been occupied by Israel in 1967. Although the goals of the war were not achieved, Sadat nevertheless felt victorious because his forces had inflicted heavy damage on the Israeli forces.

In 1977, in a move that took the world by surprise, Sadat visited Israel in preparation for peace negotiations. By 1979, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel had signed the Camp David Peace Accords, ending the progression of Egyptian-Israeli wars and returning the Sinai to Egyptian sovereignty in 1982. There have been no Egyptian-Israeli wars since Camp David and, following a period in which Egypt was shunned by the Arab world for forging a separate peace with Israel, Egypt now plays the role of mediator between Israel and other Arab nations, working to promote a comprehensive peace in the region.

President Sadat was criticized in some domestic circles for his peace overtures toward Israel. He was also increasingly criticized for the economic program he introduced in 1974, known as *Infitah*, or "the opening." Infitah focused on cutting back the size of the huge public sector by reducing government spending and restricting the hiring of new employees by the government. Previously, every university graduate was guaranteed a job in the public sector. Under Sadat, this promise of employment was curtailed, leaving thousands of university graduates without jobs. Infitah also had an adverse effect on the cost of living, by removing many subsidies on food and thus leading to rampant inflation. Sadat grew increasingly frustrated as he tried to deal with increasing opposition to his political and economic reforms, and he enacted new laws meant to give himself more power and curtail public criticism. As the opposition became more intense, Sadat reacted by arresting at least 1,500 opponents in September 1981. One month later, on 6 October 1981, Sadat was assassinated by a member of an Islamic opposition group, known as the *Jihad* (holy struggle) organization.

Husni Mubarak succeeded Sadat and has been president of Egypt since October 1981. Mubarak has followed Sadat's lead by continuing to pursue Infitah and by upholding the peace with Israel. He has allowed political parties to operate but maintains a ban on Islamic parties and the state of emergency imposed after the death of Sadat remains in force more than one-quarter century later. When the Islamic opposition gets out of line, as it has increasingly done in the 1980s and 1990s, Mubarak authorizes hundreds and thousands of arrests. There are at least three Islamic trends in Egypt. Many in the general population tend to be religiously observant—fasting, praying, and dressing conservatively, but seeing no need to make Islam into a political force. Second, a mainstream, politically active Islamic opposition group, known as the Muslim Brotherhood, seeks to change the Egyptian legal system by basing it on Islamic *shari'a*, or law. The Brotherhood, or *Ikhwan* as they are known in Egypt, have renounced the use of violence against the government and seek to impose Islamic law by working from within the political system. The third Islamic trend is militant and is represented by the Jihad organization. This group seeks to impose Islamic law on the country by overthrowing the current government. Battles between Jihad members and Egyptian security forces have become frequent, causing President Mubarak to crack down on Islamic political opposition, even against members of the Ikhwan.





## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Egypt has a population of about 80 million, with 99% of its people living along the banks of the Nile River. Population density in the Nile Valley is one of the highest in the world, exceeding 1,500 persons per sq km. The population grows by 1.7% per year. Sixty percent of Egypt's population is under the age of 25.

The country occupies approximately 1 million sq km in north-eastern Africa. Of this, only 35,000 sq km (the Nile Valley and Delta) are cultivated. The rest of the land consists of the Western (Libyan) Desert, the Eastern (Arabian) Desert, and the Sinai Peninsula. Egypt is bordered on the west by Libya, on the south by the Sudan, on the east by the Red Sea, on the northeast by southern Israel, and on the north by the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile River runs through Egypt from Sudan, flowing from south to north and ending at the Mediterranean Sea. Three central African rivers flow into the Nile. These are the White Nile, originating in Uganda; the Blue Nile, originating in Ethiopia; and the Atbarah, also originating in Ethiopia. Along the banks of the Nile lies the Nile Valley and Delta, an extensive oasis on which 99% of Egypt's population lives.

## 3 LANGUAGE

All Egyptians speak Arabic, the national language. Arabic is a highly evolved Semitic language related to Hebrew and Aramaic. Written Arabic is in the form of classical Arabic or a simpler version called "modern standard," which is the form taught in schools throughout the Arab world and originally

based on the Quran. This Arabic is used in the media, government, and literature throughout the Arab world, tying the Arab world together culturally. Egyptians speak two major dialects of Arabic. In Cairo and most other urban centers, to mention just one of the many differences between colloquial Egyptian Arabic and the Arabic spoken in most of the rest of the Arab world, the sound *j* is pronounced as *g* (as in the word "girl"). Thus, a boy whose name is pronounced "Jalal" in most of the Arab world is known as "Galal" in Cairo. In most of the countryside, however, the *j* sound is maintained. In Cairo, the word for carrot is *gazar*. In the countryside, and in most of the Arab world, it is *जार*. A mountain in Cairo is *gabal*, and in the countryside and most of the Arab world it is *jabal*.

Common boys' names are *Ramadan* and *Sha'ban*, which are also the names of Islamic months. Other common names are *Gamal*, *Mohammad*, and *Ahmad*. Common girls' names are *Mona*, *Su'ad*, *Magda*, *Fatima*, and *Lobna*. Egyptians often use nicknames for friends and relatives. Very common nicknames are *Mimi* for Mohammad, and *Fifi* for Fatima.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Some of Egypt's most popular legends are stories of liberation from foreign rule and domination. Ahmad Arabi is famous for his opposition to British and French interference in Egypt's finances in the late 19th century, and Sa'ad Zaghlul is famous for his opposition to British domination during the early 20th century.

Most folklore in Muslim countries tells stories of important figures in religious history. One such story that is also cause for annual commemoration throughout the Islamic world is that of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*. According to legend, on the 26th day of the Islamic month of Rajab, the Prophet Muhammad traveled at night from Mecca, Saudi Arabia (then Hijaz) to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he rode his wondrous horse, al-Burak, on a nocturnal visit to heaven.

Another item of folklore commonly believed in some Islamic communities, including Egypt, is that evil spirits, called *jinn*s, live in haunted places. Jinn are demons that are believed to take on the form of an animal or human. Some Egyptians also believe in the "evil eye" and take measures to prevent being inflicted by it.

## 5 RELIGION

About 90% of Egyptians are Sunni Muslims, 8.5% are Coptic Christians, and 1.5% are other Christian denominations—Greek Orthodox, Eastern and Latin Rite Catholics, and Protestants. There are fewer than 1,000 Jews in Egypt. Christianity came to Egypt during Roman rule in the 1st century AD. The Copts have been a significant minority in Egypt since medieval times. They are led by a patriarch based in Alexandria, Egypt—Pope Shenudah III—and he is known as the pope of the Coptic Church worldwide.

Islam, Egypt's national religion, teaches that Allah (the Arabic word for God) regularly sent guidance to humans in the form of prophets. Islam accepts the earlier Semitic prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims also believe that Muhammad was the last in the line of prophets sent with the message and that there is only one God. Muslims believe in heaven and hell, the day of Judgment, and angels. The Quran is the holy book of Muslims, and it teaches that, in order to get to heaven, men and women must believe in God and do good

works by struggling in God's way. Belief and good deeds are tightly bound together in Muslim literature.

The Islamic religion has five pillars: (1) Muslims must pray five times a day; (2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; (3) Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; (4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca; and (5) each Muslim must recite the *shahada*—*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashhadu an Muhammadu rasul Allah*—which means “I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.”

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Egypt commemorates Muslim religious, secular, Coptic, and Roman Catholic holidays. One major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the month of fasting, *Ramadan*. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sex during daylight hours, in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate who do not have enough food. At the end of the month, Muslims celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham, as well as his son, to obey God's command in all things, even when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son.

It is traditional to buy new clothing for these two holidays, and the shops of Cairo and other urban centers stay open later than usual before the holidays. Swarms of people fill the streets, shopping for clothing for these exciting events. The religious holidays are celebrated by going to the mosque for group morning prayers and then coming home to large meals with family and visiting relatives. Part of the feast is normally given to relatives and to the poor. Egyptian children are given small amounts of money by visiting relatives. Other Islamic holidays that are celebrated to a lesser degree are the Islamic New Year, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, and the Tenth of Muharram. The latter is the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, commemorated because Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery on this day. The Prophet Muhammad instructed all Muslims to fast on this day.

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on 7 January and Easter on a different date each year. All Egyptians celebrate *Sham al-Nisim*, a Coptic holiday with Pharaonic origins, on the first Monday after Easter.

Secular holidays include New Year's Day (1 January); Sinai Liberation Day (25 April); Labor Day (1 May); Mother's Day (31 March); Evacuation Day, commemorating the withdrawal of the British (18 June); Revolution Day (23 July); National Day (6 October); and Victory Day (23 December).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Egyptian boys are circumcised, usually at birth, but often later in the child's youth. The birth of a baby is an important event, and the baby's first week of life is commemorated on the seventh day with a celebration called the *subu'*. Graduation from high school is also important, although many of Egypt's children do not finish 12 years of school because they drop out to help their families earn a living. A 2005 study by UNICEF reports that primary school attendance is above 90% for both boys and girls.

Marriage is an important rite of passage, but increasingly Egyptian men and women are getting married in their late 20s and 30s. This is based more on financial ability to sup-

port a family than on a preference for delayed marriage. In order to get married, a man must typically provide a furnished apartment at the very least and also have an expensive wedding ceremony. Millions of Egyptian men simply cannot afford this considerable expense. Some charitable organizations are attempting to help by providing weddings free of charge, but this serious social issue is a cause of great concern to the government.

All adults hope to conduct the Islamic *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, sometime before their death. Those who do so are thereafter given the title *Hajj* preceding their name, such as *Hajj Mustafa* (man) or *Hajjah Fatima* (woman). Upon a loved one's death, the burial is carried out as soon as possible, preferably on the same day. The condolence period lasts for three days, during which mourners recite passages from the Quran. If the deceased was a public-sector employee, his or her family receives a death benefit from the government to help it deal with the loss.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Egyptians are very friendly people, and even the poorest among them will show hospitality to a stranger. The Egyptian greeting is typically “*as-salamu `alaykum*,” or “peace be with you,” and the response is “*wa `alaykum as-salam*,” or “and peace be with you as well.” Egyptians shake hands upon greeting, although two men or two women who have not seen each other for a while might kiss on the cheek. An unmarried man and woman, however, would not kiss due to Muslim and social mores, and a very pious man and woman might not even shake hands. In formal situations, a man is referred to as *sayyid* (Mr.), a married woman as *sayyida* (Mrs.), and a single woman as *anisa* (Miss). Anyone with a doctorate or Ph.D. or a medical degree is referred to respectfully as “Doctor,” even in informal settings. Children must show respect for their elders and can never refer to an adult by his or her first name without attaching “aunt” or “uncle” to the name. Thus, a child would address a female adult acquaintance as “*Amti* (Aunt) Fatima,” and a male adult acquaintance as “*Amo* (Uncle) Muhammad.” The same words are used to address a child's actual aunt and uncle.

Dating in the Western sense between the sexes is a social taboo because Islamic values prohibit an unmarried man and woman to be alone together. Public ritualized socializing is widespread, however, and the parklands built along the Nile are crowded with young couples sitting on benches, sharing meals or tea, and even exchanging flowers. Marriage tends to be arranged by matchmakers, although a man and woman who are interested in each other may declare their intentions to their families, formally (publicly) announce their intention, and then see each other in the presence of a third party, usually a family member. Such careful measures are the society's way of preserving the dignity and honor of their children and making sure that girls remain virgins until they are married. Premarital and extramarital sex are strictly forbidden.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The government increased spending on health care after the 1952 Revolution, and the result has been a decrease in the infant mortality rate and an increase in life expectancy. Diarrhea and the dehydration that sometimes accompanies it account for many deaths among infants and children. One reason for this is the lack of safe water for drinking and cooking among



*Egyptian children are taught to show respect for their parents and other adults, and children are given responsibilities at a young age.*  
(Cory Langley)

25% of the population. Among adults, the main causes of death are respiratory and digestive ailments. In 2003, there was about one physician per 835 inhabitants, and almost as many certified nurses. The country has public, government-run hospitals and clinics as well as more expensive, private hospitals and clinics. There are also numerous low-cost clinics located in neighborhood mosques and run by Islamic charitable organizations. These are frequented by both Christian and Muslim patients and are often considered to be better providers of health care than government clinics.

The rapidly growing population of Egypt is a challenge to authorities responsible for meeting the housing needs of the country. Population size, coupled with a shortage of skilled laborers and construction materials, has resulted in a shortage of affordable housing. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mausoleums of Cairo's cemeteries, where more than 500,000 poor people have set up their homes. The cemeteries are so populated that they are now called "The City of the Dead." One fifth of all Egyptians live in the 400 slums that surround Cairo. The majority of Egyptians live in crowded apartment buildings in very densely populated communities. Some people have built semi-legal housing of wood, cardboard, and metal on the flat rooftops of apartment buildings. There is little space for single-family houses, although these can be found in a few areas. The government has been trying to deal with the urban crowding by building new cities on the outskirts of Cairo. These include *Madinat Nasr* and *The Tenth of Ramadan* towns. While some families have been eager to move to these new towns, Cairo is

still more attractive to most people because of the lack of employment in the new areas.

One of the most prosperous established sections of Cairo is Zamalek, a small island in the Nile River, where the per-capita income is \$15,000 per year, in contrast to the \$150 per-capita income in some of the slums.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is the center of social organization. Every Egyptian is expected to get married and produce children in order to continue the family lineage. When a child is born, the parents' new roles are acknowledged with new titles: The father becomes *Abu* ("father of") the new child, and the mother becomes *Ummu* ("mother of") the new child. Thus, the parents of a child named *Ahmad* are known as *Abu Ahmad* and *Ummu Ahmad*. The father is the head of the household, and he is responsible for providing for the family. The mother manages the household and is the primary caregiver and child rearer. Many wives now work to help support the family, but they are still responsible for maintenance of the home. Today's families tend to be primarily nuclear (parents and their unmarried children), whereas not long ago most Egyptians lived in extended families. Urbanization and migration in search of employment have split up extended families. Upon marriage, a son tries to arrange for housing near his parents, and it is common to find a family trying to add apartment units to its dwelling in order to prepare housing for its sons. Sons who cannot afford to live independently might bring their brides to their parents' home and live with the family until independent living arrangements

can be made. A daughter who gets married moves into her new husband's home, and the best "catch" is a man who already has his own apartment and doesn't have to rely on his parents. Single sons and daughters, for the most part, stay at home until they are married.

Children are taught to show respect for their parents and other adults, and children are given responsibilities at a young age. Girls help their mothers with housework and take care of their younger siblings. Boys in poorer families are expected to learn a trade early on, often interrupting their chances to attend school. It is not uncommon to find poor children selling merchandise on street corners in order to contribute to the family income. Children of wealthier families have the luxury of focusing most of their attention on school. Enrollment of girls in rural areas lags behind that of boys, and girls drop out of primary school more frequently than boys.

## 11 CLOTHING

Walking through Egypt's cities, one finds a myriad of clothing types, ranging from the traditional *galabiyya* worn by men and *milaya* worn by women to the Islamic *shari'a* worn by women to Western-style business suits and dresses. The *galabiyya*, Egypt's national attire for men, is a long, robe-like garment with long sleeves and trim around the neckline. The *galabiyya* tends to be light in color, with gray, beige, and white being the most common colors. The *galabiyya* is worn over a shirt and slacks, and is worn mainly by traditional older Egyptian men. The *milaya*, worn by Egypt's traditional older women, is usually black, and is also a long robe-like garment with long sleeves. It is worn over a light dress. Women wearing the *milaya* also wrap their heads in a black scarf or shawl.

The Islamic *shari'a* attire is worn by religious women, usually women who are younger than those who wear the *milaya*. *Shari'a* dresses are common in university settings and in the work place. This dress is also long, with long sleeves and buttons down the front, resembling a long jacket. Some religious women also wear long skirts and dresses that differ from Western wear only by virtue of their length and full-body coverage. Any woman wearing the *shari'a* dress or the long dress-like religious attire will also don a long scarf that she wraps around her head. Some of these scarves are quite beautiful, with hand-stitched sequins and/or beads. Fashion-conscious religious women might also wear fancy little hats over their scarves. Scarves, hats, and religious attire are color-coordinated, with the long dresses and skirts being much more brightly colored than the *shari'a* attire, which usually has a solid neutral tone.

Many Egyptians wear typical Western attire, and Western clothing shops abound in the city. Women wear dresses and skirts—usually below the knee in length. Women also wear slacks and suits. These women generally do not cover their heads. Men wear Western business suits, slacks, jeans, and so on. In the cities, the Western look is the most common, although Islamic attire is becoming increasingly popular for women, particularly in universities.

## 12 FOOD

Most of the population consumes bread, rice, beans, fruits, and vegetables on a daily basis. Those who can afford to also eat red meat, poultry, and fish.

The typical Egyptian breakfast consists of *ful mudammas* (fava bean dip) with pita bread, hard-boiled or scrambled eggs,

and a cup of hot tea with boiled milk. There are two major variations of *ful mudammas*, and recipes for them follow.

### Ful mudammas with tomato

1 15-ounce-can cooked fava beans  
 ¼ cup olive oil  
 1 small onion, chopped  
 4 ounces tomato sauce  
 ½ teaspoon salt  
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper  
 ¼ teaspoon paprika  
 A few sprigs of fresh parsley  
 pita bread

In a skillet, sauté the chopped onion in the olive oil until the onion is transparent. Add salt, pepper, and tomato sauce. Drain and rinse the fava beans, and add to the tomato mixture. Cook over medium heat 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour into serving dish, and garnish with paprika, parsley, and olive oil. Eat with pita bread.

### Ful mudammas with lemon and garlic

1 15-ounce-can cooked fava beans  
 ½ cup water  
 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice  
 ¼ teaspoon garlic powder  
 ¼ teaspoon salt  
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper  
 ¼ cup olive oil  
 ¼ teaspoon paprika  
 a few sprigs of fresh parsley  
 pita bread

Drain and rinse fava beans. Place beans in a skillet, and add 1/2 cup water. Heat over medium heat, allowing water to evaporate. Add lemon juice, garlic, salt, and pepper and cook 3 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour into serving dish, and garnish with paprika, parsley, and olive oil. Eat with pita bread.

*Ful mudammas* is available in carryout restaurants in almost every neighborhood in Egypt and is an inexpensive yet nutritious meal. The same restaurants that serve *ful* also serve *ta'miyya*, known as *falafil* in most of the Arab world and in the West. *Ta'miyya* is a deep-fried patty made of a dough-like paste that consists of fava beans, onions, garlic, cumin, coriander and parsley. The patties are served in sandwiches with pickles, and are often a quick meal at lunch time.

Egypt's national dinner is a spinach-like vegetable known as *mulukhiyya*. This leafy vegetable is a member of the hibiscus family and is grown in abundance in Egypt. When in season, Egyptians pick the leaves off the stems and cook them fresh. Out of season, *mulukhiyya* is available dried. Middle Eastern and Greek stores in the United States sell dried and/or frozen *mulukhiyya*. A recipe for *mulukhiyya* follows.

### Mulukhiyya

1/3 pound dried *mulukhiyya*  
 1 whole chicken, cut into pieces  
 1 quart water  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper



Egyptian social worker Sahar Rabie gives a demonstration about bird flu at the Community Development Association in the village of Tawfiqiya at the outskirts of Fayyoun, Egypt. In an area where chickens used to roam freely, as the local population has become aware of, and frightened by, the disease, chickens have been slaughtered or locked away. (AP Images/Nasser Nasser)

6 to 7 cloves of garlic, mashed or finely chopped  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 tablespoon dried coriander

Boil the chicken pieces in water, skimming off and discarding the froth that appears during the boiling process. Add salt and pepper, and cook chicken until tender (about 30 minutes). Add mulukhiyya and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, sauté garlic in olive oil. Add coriander to garlic and stir well. When mulukhiyya soup is finished cooking, pour garlic mixture into soup and simmer another 2 minutes. Serve mulukhiyya over a bed of rice or eat with pita bread.

Ful, ta'miyya, and mulukhiyya are Egypt's most popular foods. Other common foods include stuffed cabbage leaves, stuffed grape leaves, *musaqqa'a* (eggplant and tomato casserole), macaroni baked with béchamel sauce, shish kebab, and *shawirma* (gyro) sandwiches.

Common desserts include *kunafa*, a baked pastry made of layers of shredded wheat dough and nuts and covered with syrup; *baqlawa* (baklava), a baked pastry made of layers of filo dough and nuts and covered with syrup; and *basbusa*, a baked cake made of semolina flour and soaked in syrup.

Common drinks include hot tea with mint, Turkish coffee, a licorice root drink known as *'irk sus*, and fresh fruit juice—including carrot juice and sugar cane juice squeezed fresh by street-side vendors.

Because they are predominantly Muslim, Egyptians do not consume pork and are prohibited from drinking alcoholic beverages. The latter, however, are served in expensive restaurants, hotels, and a few pubs and drinking establishments, even in relatively poorer areas of Cairo.

### 13 EDUCATION

Before the 19th century, most education in Egypt was religious and for boys only. Theological seminaries, mosques, and churches taught males to read and write Arabic and to memorize religious texts. Secular education was established in the early 19th century by Egypt's ruler, Muhammad 'Ali. In 1873, the first school for girls was built. When Egypt was under British administration, between 1882 and 1922, public education was not expanded, but many private schools were established. And, although education for all children was proclaimed a national goal after the British withdrawal from Egypt, by 1952 some 75% of the population over 10 years of age was still illiterate, with 90% of females over 10 years of age were illiterate.

After the Free Officers Revolution in 1952, educational opportunity was expanded, and government spending on education increased. Enrollment in schools doubled in the first decade after the revolution and doubled again in the following decade. Enrollment rates continued to increase after 1975, although not at such dramatic rates. In 1981, the government decreed that all children must complete the first 9 years of school—6 years of compulsory primary school and 3 years of

compulsory preparatory school. By 2005, 88% of children between the ages of 7 and 12 were enrolled in primary school. Attendance rates in secondary schools dropped off dramatically in rural areas, where in 2005 only 6% were in regular attendance. Despite these disparities in educational opportunities 2005 reports from the US government say 71% of the population above 15 is literate.

Education at all levels is free, from primary school through university education. The school system, however, is greatly overpopulated with students and has a chronic shortage of teachers. In 2005 the ratio of students to teachers was 86 to 1 and 99 to 1 for female teachers. In recent years, some schools have operated two shifts per day to cut down on class size. Many teachers find it more lucrative to work abroad in other Arab countries, where class sizes are much smaller and the salaries are much higher. Many teachers offer private tutoring in order to bring home extra income. This means that many children spend time outside school trying to improve their education. The cost of tutoring is often too high for the poor, who frequently complain that their children are being forced, by an inadequate educational system, into private lessons which they cannot afford.

Students are required to pass a series of end-of-the-year exams in order to make it from one level in the school system to the next. This is particularly important at the end of middle school, when grades determine the type of high school a student will attend. Those who do well in middle school attend an academic, college-prep secondary school. Others might attend a technical or vocational school or, if their grades are very discouraging, they might simply drop out.

At the end of high school, students take another set of exams. Secondary school students whose grades merit have the option of enrolling in a university. Egypt's leading universities are Cairo University, Alexandria University, 'Ein Shams University, Asyut University, and the American University at Cairo. The first four of these are public universities, and the last is private. In addition, there are a number of smaller universities throughout the country. There are a variety of technical institutes of higher learning available for those who do not make it into college. These schools offer training in such fields as hotel management and secretarial services.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Ancient Egyptians left behind a rich artistic heritage in the form of pyramids, pharaonic painting and sculpture, hieroglyphics, and architecture. The Egyptian pharaohs believed in life after death and built 75 pyramids that would serve as their dwellings after death. The best known of these, The Great Pyramid, was built about 2690 BC at Giza. (Earlier pyramids were constructed in Saqara) It contains more than 2 million blocks of limestone, some weighing up to 15 tons. Pyramids and wall sculptures are found in Giza, in Upper Egypt (the south), in the Valley of the Kings, in Luxor and Karnak, and on Philae Island. The Cairo Museum houses a large collection of antiquities. The museum displays about 100,000 exhibits, including some of the coffins excavated from the pyramids and treasures from the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun (King Tut).

Literature is greatly enjoyed in Egypt, and Cairo's publishing companies generate an abundant supply and variety of literary works. The Cairo Book Fair is a major annual event in which recent international publications are featured with great

fanfare. A variety of literary forms are enjoyed in Egypt, with short stories, poetry, and novels being quite popular.

One of Egypt's most famous authors was a blind essayist named Taha Husayn (d.1973), whose literary output was immense. Some of his writing has been translated into English, including *Tales from Egyptian Life* and *An Egyptian Childhood* (an autobiography). The modern Egyptian novelist best known in the Western world is probably Naguib Mahfouz, (d. 2006) winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. Virtually of his Mahfouz's work has now been translated, the better known of which include such classics as *Midaq Alley* and *The Cairo Trilogy*. Mahfouz had a penchant for writing about the lives of ordinary Egyptians, particularly the poor and middle classes. His stories feature observations of the socio-economic and political conditions of Egyptian society, with direct and indirect commentary on issues such as women's emancipation, polygamy, the British occupation of Egypt, and the Egyptian response to that occupation.

#### 15 WORK

Agriculture is the largest source of employment in Egypt—32 percent of Egyptians work in this sector. Farmers plant *berseem* (clover) for livestock feed, as well as corn, wheat, vegetables, rice, cotton, and fruit. Since 1974, when the government announced economic reforms that would include industrialization, rural residents have flocked to greater Cairo in search of employment. Cairo's population grew from 7 million in 1976 to 20 million in 2006. Those who find work with the manufacturing sector work in industries such as iron and steel, aluminum, and cement. Some work in oil production, and others produce consumer goods.

Despite the industrialization that has taken place, Egypt's cities do not offer enough employment opportunities to the migrant masses. Urban residents thus end up depending on the government for jobs, and the waiting period can be as long as 10 years. When attempts to find work fail, the unemployed migrate to neighboring countries in search of employment. From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, 90% of new jobs were either provided by the public sector or were in neighboring oil states. In 2005 the government introduced some free market reforms, taking tentative steps away from the state dominated economic model championed by Egypt's still revered President Nasir. As a result of these reforms there was a large rise in the stock market, GDP grew at approximately 6–7% a year for 2005–2007. Little of this increased wealth saw its way to the poor of the Cairo or the rural areas.

The unemployment rate in 2007 was 10.1%. After agriculture, Egypt's major employment sectors are industry (17%) and services (51%). Twenty percent of Egyptians live below the poverty line. The per capita GDP is 5,400 US dollars per year.

Many who do work hold more than one job to make ends meet. This is particularly true for public sector employees. It is common to find a man (seldom a woman) working at a government-run factory during the day and moonlighting in a second job at night.

#### 16 SPORTS

Egyptians take soccer, which they, like the rest of the non-American the world, call football, very seriously. Competitions are held among the many teams nationwide and are broadcast on radio and television with great enthusiasm. National soc-

cer teams also compete in regional soccer competitions with other Arab and African states. The national team has won the African Cup of Nations a record six times and won its second consecutive title in 2008 in an upset victory over favored Cameroon. FIFA currently ranks the team as the 29th best in the world. Swimming and scuba diving are enjoyed along the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The Red Sea in particular is considered one of the great diving locations in the world. Indoor swimming pools and tennis courts are located in sports clubs, but generally only the middle class and wealthy can afford these.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are more than 100 cinemas in Cairo, some run by the government and others privately owned. There are also many cinemas in Port Sa'id and Alexandria. Egyptian-made movies range from comedy to drama and often attempt to convey a political message relevant to contemporary political and economic conditions. One famous actor, 'Adil Imam, is renowned for his comedic movies, but has recently ventured onto political turf in his movies, *Terrorism and Kebab* and *The Terrorist*. In both films, Imam plays the lead role of a young Egyptian inadvertently caught in a web of poverty and anti-state terrorism.

Cairo has about 17 theaters, and Alexandria has about 6. Egyptian theaters host a variety of shows, including opera, orchestra, folk art, and choral troupe performances.

Egypt has been the home of many musical performers known throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Solo singers Um Kalthum, Farid al-Atrash, and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz (all now deceased) were classical performers whose songs were known to last up to two hours each. While the classical style is still popular, there is now a new style of Egyptian music that blends the classical with more Western-sounding music. Muhammad Munir and "Four M" are samples of this new sound, which is very popular with the younger generation. Music cassettes are sold by street vendors. These are very popular and cost about \$1 to \$2 each.

Television entered the lives of Egyptians in the mid-1960s, and by the 1980s had become quite common. Televisions are even common among the residents of the cemeteries. Egyptian TV has a wide variety of programming, including comedy, music and dance shows, cartoons, and soap operas. Families are glued to their TV sets in the evening when the nightly soap operas come on. With the proliferation of satellite television, Egyptians can now watch American and European television entertainment and news channels as well.

Egyptian children generally play in the many open fields in their neighborhoods, but new parks have also been built. There are a limited number of amusement parks, the main one called "Sinbad" and located in Cairo. Toys are not very common and did not arrive in Egypt in significant number until the mid-1980s, when fathers returned from jobs in the oil countries, gifts in hand. Although many stores now have ample supplies of toys for children, most people do not spend their money on such luxuries. Children who are fortunate enough to get toys often go out of their way to take care of them, even if this means placing the toy out of reach to keep it from being damaged.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The stores of Khan al-Khalili in Cairo cater predominantly to tourists and feature the hand-made crafts of local artisans. Me-

dia such as wood, brass, copper, glass, mother-of-pearl, leather, silver, and gold are cut, shaped, and engraved to form a multitude of items. Some of the most creative handicrafts for which the Egyptians are noted include wooden jewelry boxes covered with mother-of-pearl, engraved silver and hand-painted serving trays, and leather ottomans with intricate designs. Jewelry stores sell handcrafted bracelets, necklaces, rings, and earrings made of silver and gold. In the small village of Kirdasa, in addition to these handicrafts, the stores specialize in hand-made women's dresses that feature embroidery, sequins, and beads.

One of the most unique forms of folk art in Egypt is *hajj* painting. As a Muslim completes his or her pilgrimage to Mecca, a local artist paints the new pilgrim's front door with a mural symbolizing the hajj. Most hajj paintings are found in the villages.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One of Egypt's biggest problems is socio-economic frustration. Unemployment and underemployment have resulted in a high level of poverty and despair. Among the many effects of this situation is a growing attraction to religion: in 1986, according to government accounting, there was one mosque for every 6,000 Egyptians; by 2005 there was one mosque for every 745 people. A lack of affordable housing has forced hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to live in the mausoleums of Cairo's cemeteries. There are now 400 slums around the capital city. Shanty towns and slums continue to appear all over the metropolitan Cairo area. Housing is poorly constructed, services are few, and basic needs such as drinkable water and sewage are non-existent. The growth of slums has correlated with an increase in crime, violence, and religious militancy. Thefts such as pickpocketing and purse-snatching are common in metropolitan Cairo. Although violence rarely accompanies thefts, there are acts of violence within families and between religious militants and state security forces. White-collar crime is commonplace and includes embezzlement, diversion of subsidized goods, tax evasion, and bribes to officials. Another major problem is the illegal use of drugs. Although hashish has been smoked in Egypt for centuries, recently there has been an increase in the use of "hard" drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

Egyptian prisons are overcrowded. This is due in part to the arrest of criminals, but also to an ongoing political conflict between the government and the opposition. Clashes between government forces and religious opponents to the government periodically take place, sometimes resulting in hundreds of political opponents being arrested. The casualty list during clashes is sometimes quite high. One study found that total casualties (killed and wounded) during state-militants confrontations in the periods of heaviest demonstration in the late 1980s and 1990s went from 322 in 1992 to 1,106 in 1993. (The 1994 figure was 659, and the 1995 figure was 620.) International human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have been critical of the Egyptian government's handling of militant opponents to the regime. The major criticism is that not only violent opponents, but also nonviolent political opponents, are being denied their political and civil rights in the state's attempt to maintain control over opposition forces. Political protests of even the most benign sort are regularly put down with brutality and overwhelming force. Human Rights Watch also reports regular, arbitrary arrest of street children in Cairo and Alexandria. The authorities

subject them to beatings, sexual abuse, and deny them access to basic human amenities.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Egyptian society is marked with sexual inequality in myriad forms. The streets of Cairo are world renowned among female travelers as being rife with sexual harassing behavior. Men routinely follow, whistle at, and in other ways humiliate women, both Egyptians and tourists. Human Rights Watch reports that both family and criminal law continue to discriminate against women. Criminal law is lax in legislating against violence against women and where laws do exist, they are routinely ignored. A well documented incident occurred in October 2006 in a busy downtown area in which gangs of men, celebrating the end of holy month of Ramadan, attacked scores of women on the streets as police looked on doing nothing. Several women were set upon by dozens of crazed men who stripped them naked. Much of this violence was captured on mobile phone videos and distributed around the world via the Internet.

Small steps in improving the rights of women have been taken in very recent times. In 2007, the Egyptian judiciary received its first female judges and in June 2007, the government banned female genital mutilation.

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—revised by J. Henry

# EMBU

**PRONUNCIATION:** EM-bo

**LOCATION:** Embu in the Eastern Province of Kenya

**POPULATION:** About 450,000

**LANGUAGE:** Kiembu

**RELIGION:** Christianity; indigenous Embu religion

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Embu are a Bantu-speaking people who are closely related to the Gikuyu of Ndia and Gicugu to the west, the Mbeere and the Kamba to the southeast, and the Chuka and the Meru to the north. As the Embu proverb goes, *Mwana ti wa mucuari umwe*—a child does not belong to one parent. These communities share common ancestry and origins. Despite speaking a Bantu language (Bantu came from central Africa), the agricultural Embu and Mbeere are one of the few Kenyan peoples whose oral traditions seem to locate their origins within Kenya, in fact very close to their present location to the southeast of Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya). Tradition also speaks of a time when they were hunter-gatherers and used to live in "caves," meaning rock shelters or hollow trees in forests, much as the indigenous Kenyan groups of hunter-gathers such as the Okiek ("Ndorobo") did until the 20th century. Tradition further states that the Ndorobo interacted with the Embu a long time ago before the Ndorobo were either displaced or left when the forests began to be converted to farmland.

The origin of the Embu is still unclear, but there are two explanations. From historical accounts, the Embu are believed to have migrated from the Congo Basin together with their close relatives, the Kikuyu and Meru People. This migration was perhaps due to conflicts like slavery. It is believed that they migrated as far as the Kenyan Coast, since the Meru elders refer to Mpwa (Pwani or Coast) as their origin. The conflicts there, perhaps slave trade by Arabs, forced them to retreat northeast to the interior of Kenya, and they settled by the slopes of Mt. Kenya. They refer to this location as the place of the Lord, the owner of the snow ("Nyaga") or ("Njeru" meaning white)—hence the name "Mwenenyaga" or "Mwenenjeru."

Oral history on the other hand traces the Embu to the Northeastern Bantu who came from a dispersed area in the Taita hills near Mount Kilimanjaro. From here, this Bantu group migrated to the coast, then turned northward to a mythical place called Shungwaya between the Tana and Juba rivers in Somalia. Shungwaya became the second dispersal area from which various Bantu groups started moving out about AD 1200-1300. One such group, known as the Nyika, migrated northeast and then southward to the region of Mount Kenya. During the migration, the Nyika broke up into other smaller groups that are now known as the Kamba, Gikuyu, Meru, Chuka, Embu, and Mbeere. It is likely that the Embu arrived in their present home by AD 1425. They fought and expelled a people known as the Gumba, who were the original inhabitants of the territory.

On the contrary, the Embu ancestral origin myth goes on to indicate that the Embu have been on their land since the beginning of time. Embu mythology claims that the Embu people originated from Mbue Njeru in the interior of Embu, close





to Runyenjes town. The mythology claims that God (Ngai) created Mwenendega and gave him a beautiful wife by the famous Mbui Njeru waterfall—hence her name “Ciurunji.” The couple was blessed with wealth, and their descendants populated the rest of Embu. The Embu believe that they descended from Mwenendega who lived in a small grove, which now bears his name, near the present location of the town of Runyenjes. This grove is still protected as a sacred place. One day Mwenendega saw a very beautiful woman bathing in a stream nearby. Her name was Nveta, and it is said that she was not an earthly woman. After much persuasion and praises of her beauty, she agreed to live with him and not return to her people. They had many children. Their first two children were a boy called Kembu and a girl called Werimba. When Kembu impregnated Werimba, the two were expelled from home. They founded their new home elsewhere and bore children who also married each other and bore more children. All these children came to be known popularly as “children of Kembu,” and later, Embu, in short.

Since Mount Kenya lies within the lands of this cluster, these groups collectively are known as the Mount Kenya Bantu. Although over the years they have traded with each other, there are also many accounts of the wars that they have fought with each other either to capture livestock (cattle, sheep, and goats) or gain territory belonging to the other. Two of the more famous battles occurred around 1870 and 1890 when the celebrated war hero, Njeru Karuku, led the Embu successfully against the Chuka. In 1900 the Embu defeated the attacking Kamba and drove them back across the Tana River into their

own territory. The Embu also fought with the Maasai, who came from the south to raid for cattle, and the British, who colonized Kenya in 1920.

The battles against the British were ideologically different from the previous ones. In 1900, the British built the first administrative post at Fort Hall to control the rebellious Gikuyu. By 1904, the Gikuyu of Ndia and Gicugu, Embu’s neighbors, had been conquered by the British. From here, the British organized military expeditions against the Embu who had refused to accept British rule peacefully. With the help of the Mbeere and the Gikuyu of Ndia, the British conquered the Embu around 1906. However, Embu resistance against foreign rule continued, more in the form of passive rather than armed resistance. To maintain order, Embu Station was established, first as a military station, and then as an administrative center. The last time the Embu fought against British rule was in the 1950s during the Mau Mau rebellion, which lasted for almost 10 years. This time the Embu and the Meru joined the Gikuyu to fight for Kenya’s independence, which came on 12 December 1963.

The Embu were traditionally organized into a patrilineal system through which descent was traced and inheritance handed down. Embu society was first divided into moieties (two major social groups), which consisted of numerous clans. In turn, each clan was made up of various lineages, with a lineage consisting of a number of minor lineages or extended families. Within this system of social organization, Embu males were also divided into age-groups which represented different levels of authority, status, and responsibility. Along with the age-group system existed an administrative ruling structure with the father as the senior authority within a household, above which came the ridge council serving as a minor lineage in a particular area. Above the ridge council were the clan council and the warrior leaders’ council. The warrior council executed the decisions or rules made by the clan council. The warrior leaders’ council also made and executed decisions regarding war, the protection of people and property, and the execution of justice. Above all was a council known as Kiama Kia Ngome, a type of supreme court which dealt with civil and criminal justice for the entire Embu country. It heard and made decisions on the most serious cases such as murder and sorcery. All of these (mostly judicial) councils were made up of elders who were highly regarded for their wisdom, fairness, and religious/medical knowledge. These elders, regardless of the council level, were known as *athamaki* (rulers), and they ruled the Embu. There were no chiefs in Embu until the British “invented” them.

Today, the Embu participate in the democratic political process. Initially, the Embu people never aligned themselves with a single political outfit. They spread out across the ruling party (for instance KANU) and even the opposition (for instance the Democratic Party and FORD-Asili) in the 1990s. Embu politics would not be complete without the mention of the Nyaga family that has dominated local politics since pre-colonial Kenya. However, in the 2000s the Embu have largely aligned with and overwhelmingly voted alongside their Agikuyu cousins in what is commonly known as the Mt. Kenya caucus or otherwise the Gikuyu, Embu, Meru Association (GEMA or MEGA). Most of the Embu as of 2008 belonged to the Party of National Unity (PNU) which was one of the partners in Kenya’s Grand Coalition government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Embu is located on the southeastern slopes of Mount Kenya, where the altitude ranges from 1,100 m to 2,100 m (3,500–7,000 ft) above sea level. It is situated between longitudes 37°E and 38°E and latitudes 0°s. The most important geographical feature is Mount Kenya, which stands at 5,199 m (17,058 ft) above sea level. On a clear day, the permanent ice on the mountain shines very brightly, projecting unimaginable beauty and power, while the twin peaks, Lenana and Batian, stand out majestically. The total area is about 714 sq km (276 sq mi). Embu is part of the Eastern Province of Kenya. The capital town is also called Embu and serves as the district and provincial administrative center. To the south of Embu are to be found their cousins, the Mbeere people, in Mbeere District. Previously, the Embu and Mbeere were in one district, Embu District, and just referred to as the Embu people. To the west, Embu neighbors are the Kikuyu in Kirinyaga and Nyeri districts. The Meru people in Meru South District border Embu to the Southeast.

The numerically smaller Mbeere (around 100,000, as compared with an Embu population of around 450,000) live to the south of the Embu in the lower Kiangombe Hills. Despite their proximity to the British during the colonial period (Embu town was a major colonial center), the Mbeere have always kept themselves apart (and have been kept apart) from the Kenyan mainstream. The Kiangombe Hills are only barely fertile and poorly watered, dominated by thorn scrub and dust, which meant that the British had little interest in the area or the tribe, who were consequently left to themselves. As a result, some aspects of traditional culture lingered longer in Mbeere than they did in Embu, although nowadays they are both pretty much part of modern Kenya.

In 1918, the population of the Embu was estimated at 53,000 people. This population reached 85,177 people by 1962; 101,770 by 1969; and 180,400 by 1979. The Embu constitute roughly 2% of the Kenyan population. Some 17% of the Embu live in major urban centers like Nairobi, Mombasa, and Nakuru. By 1989, the population of Embu was projected to reach 228,144 people, increasing to 265,769 by 1993. In 2008 the Embu population was about 450,000. The population estimate may include Chuka and Mwimbi-Muthambi. Between 1969 and 1993, the Embu population growth rate ranged from 4.1% to 3.1% per year. This, coupled with a lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas, is causing many people, especially males, to migrate to the urban centers. However, most Embu, like many Africans, are culturally and economically tied to the land, and most of those who move to the cities maintain strong links to the rural homeland to which they eventually return, die, and are buried. The urban residents are also the ones who introduce elements of modernization to the rural areas.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Kiembu (the language of the Embu) belongs to a large cluster of languages known as Bantu. It is a language that is rich with proverbs and idioms. Although not emphasized today, mastery of proverbs and idioms once demonstrated intelligence and brought a person honor and respect. By using proverbs, people could talk about a particular subject or person without being specific or openly ridiculing a person, thereby avoiding social antagonism. But the greatest mastery in the use of proverbs and idioms was the choice of context in which the intended message was conveyed without ambiguity. For instance, the

proverb, “Hungry stomachs have no ears,” can mean many things, but if it is invoked in the context of a case hearing, it means the council needs a fee from both parties, usually in the form of a goat, to be eaten by the elders as they continue to listen to the case. In the context of widespread civil disobedience, the meaning is that hungry people are poor listeners to the advice or rule of their rulers.

One can also learn a great deal about the Embu traditions, social norms, and individual behavior from the names given to people. Traditionally the Embu derived most of their names from animals, such as Njiru or Mbogo (buffalo), Nthia (antelope), Njoka (snake), Ndwiga (giraffe), Njuki (bee), Njogu (elephant), Nyaga or Kivuti (ostrich), Ngoroi (columbus monkey), or Munyi (rhinoceros). The reason for this is unclear, but one explanation is that Embu parents, who lost many children in infancy, wanted to ensure that their children would grow to maturity, just as the young of wild animals did, without much care. Other Embu names came from natural phenomena such as Mbura (rain), Riua (sun), Nduma (darkness), etc. Some other names were, and still are, derived from behaviors associated with certain well-known individuals. For instance, a mother might name her son Kinyua (one who drinks much) after a grandfather who drank too much porridge or beer. A daughter may be named Marigu after a female relative who had the habit of carrying food wherever she went, or Maitha if she were a cruel or harsh woman.

Kiembu or Kimbeere are dialects of the same language, with 85% lexical similarity between them. Also closely related are the languages of their geographical neighbors, the Kikuyu and Chuka (73% similarity), Kamba (66%), and Meru (63–65%). Up to 70% also speak Swahili.

## 4 FOLKLORE

To the Embu, the myth about their origins from Mwenendega and Nveta remains the most important of all their myths and folk tales. However, the most fascinating part of the myth, and one that draws fear and reverence, concerns Nveta's real identity and clan membership. One day, as Nveta and Mwenendega were drinking beer, the latter asked her why no beer or any other gift had ever been sent to them from her people. Mwenendega also wanted to know who her people really were and where they resided. All of a sudden, Nveta became very angry and ordered the children into the house. She looked up to heaven as if she were praying and within a short moment there was lightning and thunder that had not been heard before in the land of the Embu. Very heavy rain fell that completely flooded their home, covering their house and their livestock. After that, Mwenendega and Nveta disappeared and could only be seen by good fortune.

Other heroes of the Embu include famous prophets, medicine men, and warriors. Ireri wa Irugi (*wa* stands for “son of”) was perhaps the most famous of all the prophets. It is said that he was able to communicate with Mwene Njeru (God), and that is why he was able to prophecy future events. One such event, and the most famous, was the coming of the white people. He warned people that he had seen strangers coming from the east towards Kirinyaga (Mt. Kenya). They had with them an iron-mouthed animal that would be used to collect all nations (ethnic groups) to one place where they would be helpless. The coming of the British soldiers from the eastern side of

Embu land, and the subsequent conquest of the Embu, is seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Gacogo wa Karaini was regarded as the highest religious leader of the Embu. He was also a skilled medicine man and circumciser. Being a religious leader, people from all over Embu and beyond sought his blessings and advice. His medicine and charms had the reputation of being very effective in curing various ailments and in protecting one from any harm, such as sorcery. He was so revered that people addressed him as Mutia, or “the respected one.”

Mwoca wa Minano is remembered as one of the greatest Embu warriors ever to live. His courage and skill in planning war tactics and raids won him much respect among all the people. He is credited for maintaining a very strong defense on the eastern border with the Gikuyu. He is most remembered for leading Embu warriors in a fierce battle against the British in about 1903. During this battle he killed a white soldier and took away his gun. When it was realized that the dead white soldier was uncircumcised, Mwoca was very disappointed because he thought all along he had fought with a “man,” and not a “child.”

## 5 RELIGION

The origins of the Embu religion are not known, but by the time the white people came, the Embu had a very well-established religion.

The Embu worshipped one God whom they called Mwene Njeru, meaning “the owner of the sun.” Despite the spread of Christianity, some people, particularly very old men and women, still believe in Mwene Njeru, who is omnipresent. When Mwene Njeru visits Embu, he has favorite places, of which the most important is Kirinyaga. From the mountaintop he can see the whole of Embu and what the people are doing. Other places include all the sacred groves, *matiiri* (sacred places of age-groups), and very big trees. Mwene Njeru is believed to be the source of all goodness, but he also punishes the people when they disobey him or do wrong to one another. People, led by the most sacred elders, sacrifice a goat that is all one color to Mwene Njeru to ask or thank him for his blessings, to end a catastrophe (e.g., drought, epidemics), and for his protection. The concern for long life is at the heart of the Embu religion. To live into very old age, and therefore to enjoy the respect and privileges accorded to the elders, is a clear demonstration of how much one is blessed by Mwene Njeru.

The Embu also believe in the spirits or *ngoma*. However, they distinguish between two kinds of spirits: the “evil spirits,” and the “ancestral spirits.” Evil spirits are malevolent—they bring misery to the people without provocation. Even when seen, they are not easily recognizable, and sometimes they may be heard singings but are not visible. They are not offered sacrifices but rather are bribed with some meat or animal blood. Ancestral spirits, on the other hand, are good spirits who protect people from evil spirits and other misfortune. But they also discipline people when they are disobedient. People appease them with sacrifices but do not worship them as they worship Mwene Njeru. When seen, they are easily recognizable as deceased relatives. It is believed that they form families, raise children, cultivate, and keep animals, just as they used to when they were alive.

The Embu have a saying that “no one dies a natural death.” Death is always attributed to some evil magic or sorcery.

Events that are beyond human explanation are often attributed to the power of magic and sorcery. For instance, why should a tree fall and kill only one of the two people standing by it? To the Embu, this is not a question of chance but rather of somebody using magic to kill another person. There is also the belief that some people have the skill to use magic and sorcery to turn others into “fools,” cats, dogs, snakes, etc. Faced by such powerful forces, people turn to diviners and medicine men for protection.

No accurate figures are available on Embu subscription to the Christian and other foreign religions: a recent estimate was two-thirds traditional religion, one-third Christian, though it seems much more likely that the reverse is true, and that Christians are in the majority.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The only holidays that the Embu celebrate are the national holidays such as Independence Day, Labor Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. These holidays are marked by celebrations, which involve eating and beer-drinking, and of course, those formally employed do not have to show up for work. The most important national holiday is Independence Day, which is celebrated on December 12 every year. This is the day on which Kenya gained its independence from Britain in 1963, ending nearly 100 years of colonial rule. There are marches in major urban centers by school children, administrative police, and various other organized groups. In the capital city of Nairobi, celebrations include parades by various units of armed forces, an air show by the Kenyan Air Force, traditional dances by various ethnic groups, performances by school choirs, and lastly, a speech by the president of Kenya. Various dignitaries from overseas and from other African countries are also invited to attend.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the old days among the Embu, the birth of a child was celebrated as a special event because a child was viewed as the “wealth” of a lineage or clan and also brought recognition and respect to both parents. Failure to bear a child was, and still is, viewed as a misfortune on both parents or as the result of a curse or sorcery. This could result in a man either marrying a second wife or the dissolution of the marriage. The birth of a boy was announced with five ululations (*ngemi*) and the birth of a girl with four. After ululations, the baby was given a name. Four days (for a girl) or five days (for a boy) after birth, a ritual known as *kuumagarua*, or “to be taken out” (to be introduced to the outside world), was performed. An older girl presented the baby girl with a tiny bundle of firewood, similar to that carried by adult women, and an older boy presented the baby boy with a small bow and arrow. This symbolized the lifetime chores, and the different worlds, of the two sexes. Today this ritual is not performed. Most children are born in hospitals and, instead of going through the ritual of being “taken out,” they are baptized in church in accordance with the teachings of the parents’ denomination. Immediately after birth, the mother gives the baby an Embu name and during baptism the baby receives a Christian name.

After birth, circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls were the most crucial rituals in a person’s life-cycle. A boy’s first instruction in tribal knowledge came from his father around the homestead’s fireplace, but a man’s life as a

full member of the tribe began in earnest at his circumcision shortly after puberty. His readiness to be circumcised was indicated by the payment of a goat called *mburi ya nduo*, the “goat of circumcision.” Another goat was paid when the time for circumcision came, which entitled him to get married. This goat was called *mburi ya nthumbi* (the “goat of the cap”), and was named after a cap made for him by recently circumcised men to indicate his newly acquired status. Traditionally, boys were circumcised between the ages of 18 and 22, while the girls underwent clitoridectomy between the ages of 14 and 18. The ritual initiated both girls and boys into adulthood. The girls had to be initiated before their first menstruation; otherwise, they could only marry a married man.

During the ceremony both boys and girls were expected to prove their courage, and thereby their readiness to accept adult responsibilities, by withstanding much pain without crying or moving. In Kenya, clitoridectomy is now illegal and the practice has almost disappeared. However, the circumcision of boys is still viewed as very important among the Embu. Currently, the circumcision ritual has been transformed from that of a public ceremony to a very private affair carried out in the hospital with the initiate under general anesthesia. But regardless, it is still associated with courage and responsibility. Today, one does not immediately assume the responsibilities of marriage but may go on with schooling, get a job, and then prepare to marry. Marriage, whether in the old days or at present, is considered very important and everybody is expected to marry and have children. It is by bearing children that the Embu think of a person as “complete.”

On matters of death, the Embu did not bury their dead before the 1920s. They believed that the burying of the dead body was like burying “fertility.” Rather, they left the dead bodies in the forest under a tree. Those who handled the dead body underwent a cleansing ritual to rid them of “pollution.” But most significantly, the Embu believed in life after death, that the body’s spirit did not die but lived on and, depending on the behavior of the living relatives, could be benevolent or malevolent. Today, the Embu inter their dead through a religious burial. There are no public cemeteries. A person is buried on the land owned by the family. Usually only the members of the family know where the grave is because it is marked with just a few stones or some planted flowers. The relatives of the deceased are exempted from work on the day of death, and this custom is still observed today. Death, as the last stage in the life cycle, is one event that the Embu do not celebrate.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Greetings, as a sign of politeness, well-wishing, and good behavior, constitute one of the most important aspects of Embu culture. Failing to greet somebody is always taken as an insult, immediately creates tension between the parties involved, and almost always results in a harsh criticism or rebuke by the person not greeted. The common and formal greeting begins by asking a person about his or her health. After the appropriate response, the two parties shake hands. One should not, under any circumstance, refuse to shake another person’s hand. People of generally the same age or status let their eyes meet as they greet each other and shake hands. Young people greeting elderly people usually avoid eye contact, as a sign of respect, by looking either down or sideways. Among the Embu there is no such thing as times for visiting or not visiting. A household not

visited regularly is said to lack hospitality. A visitor is always offered food or something to drink, like tea. If it is during a mealtime, a visitor joins in sharing whatever food is available. There is an Embu saying that “a mother cooks more than her family can finish” so that there is always some for a visitor. Refusing an offer of food, without an appropriate explanation, is considered an insult to the person offering the food. More seriously, the refusal may be taken to imply that the food is poisoned or bewitched.

Dating practice has changed from a very strict code of behavior to a more relaxed and less culturally structured practice. When a boy meets a girl that he likes, he may straight away express his love for her, or send another boy or girl to convey his love message. He may also write to the girl asking her to be his girlfriend. If the girl’s response is favorable, then the two start seeing each other regularly and in public. The boy may also start visiting her in her home more openly. However, dating is not expected to lead to marriage until the boy’s father goes to visit (at the son’s request) the girl’s father to seek permission for marriage and to initiate marriage plans.

For a long time men from neighboring communities like the Gikuyu, Meru, and Kamba have come to get brides from the Embu, while the Embu men enjoy high regard from marriageable girls in the same tribes. With the advent of Kenya nationalism, this high regard has permeated to the entire nation, and now the Embu form one respected unit of the Kenyan social fabric.

Value is also attached to the extended family and Embu nomenclature enhances this relationship. Embu parents name each of their children after one of their relatives on either side, but never after themselves. Those relatives, to use Western terms, may be the child’s grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even distant relatives. The main significance of this naming practice is that: (1) it gives honor or recognition to the person after whom the child is named; (2) it creates a special relationship between the child and the person she or he is named after; and (3) creates a particular bond between the parents and the child and the person after whom the child is named. All this influences and dictates the behavior between all the individuals involved.

On intercommunity relations, the Mbeere are closely allied to the Embu, to whom they are related. In times of famine—which strikes the Mbeere more frequently than the Embu—the Embu would supply staple food like maize and beans in return for goats, skins, sorghum, and pigeon peas. Historically, the Embu also fought for the Mbeere, on a famous occasion in which the Kamba tried to oust the Mbeere from their land. The Embu and Mbeere jointly own sacred groves (*matiiri*) in Mwea, which is one of their traditional places of origin.

The Embu were fierce warriors who, although rarely raiding other tribes, always stood firm in defense of their territory and people. Many occasions are on record where the Embu had to fiercely repulse Kamba and even the dreaded Maasai invasions. They also rose against the British in the Mau Mau fight for Kenya’s independence. The fact that the tribe was and continues to be considerably small explains the relatively small impact on the history of Kenya.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The standard of living is very low because of very low income and lack of economic opportunities. Like many other people

in the rural areas of Kenya, the Embu live under very difficult health conditions. Most families use pit latrines, obtain water from the rivers, and very rarely get good medical care. The Ruvingazi and Kapingazi Rivers border Embu town to the west and the east respectively and are a key source of domestic water to many Embu families. Health services, mostly provided by the government, are inadequate and very poor. In order to treat less serious ailments, people buy medicine from retail shops or rely on herbalists.

Until the "Emergency" of the 1950s, when the Mau Mau began their fight for freedom, five or six family homesteads constituted a typical settlement. The "Emergency" however led to the creation of larger villages, both for protection, and under pressure from the British who wanted tighter control over the area. People built their own houses using locally available materials. Houses were traditionally the classic thatched cone roofs on a circular base, but are nowadays mostly rectangular buildings covered with corrugated or flat metal sheets, although the traditional round houses are more common among the Mbeere. The walls are generally still constructed in the traditional way, with narrow spaces between upright poles stuffed with leaves and mud. Apart from the family house, the other homestead structures were a kitchen (sometimes part of the family house), the man's house, a grain store, and millet store. However, some wealthier people are beginning to build stone houses with ceramic tile roofs. In most houses there is no electricity or telephone. Fire and kerosene lamps are the primary source of light.

Most families make their living through small-scale agriculture. Coffee and tea are the main cash crops. Traveling is mainly by *matatu* (privately operated small van/truck-like vehicles), bicycles, and walking. People walk as much as 32 km (20 mi) in a single day.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Embu are a patrilineal society in which women are subordinate to men. Women are assigned all the domestic chores of child care, food preparation and storage, family care, firewood collection, fetching water, and growing food. Women are also involved in the marketing and buying of small amounts of food crops. This labor burden increases if the husband is away on wage employment. Women who have attained higher education and have formal employment are able to escape this labor burden.

Families generally live on small farms in compounds. Family size among the Embu varies widely depending on the family type. Families are predominantly nuclear. On average there are about seven people per household. There is also the extended family consisting of parents, married sons and their families, and unmarried daughters. In this type of family, there may be as many as over 25 people living together. Polygyny is common. A man can take several wives if he can afford it, although nowadays this is becoming rare.

The Embu people practice exogamous marriage. Marrying within one's clan is taboo as incest because all clan members are relatives. However, with the breakdown of the clan system, clan affiliation is becoming less significant and the rule of exogamy is almost forgotten. Consequently, marriages are taking place between clan relatives. Marriage involves the payment of bride-wealth to the bride's family. In the old days, bride-wealth used to be in the form of livestock, i.e., cattle and goats, but at

present, it is paid in the form of money. Contrary to popular misconception, people do not think of the bride-wealth practice as "buying" a wife. It is thought of as a way to thank the parents for bearing and bringing up a daughter to maturity and thereby making it possible for a man to have a wife. Bride-wealth payment is also a measure of a man's commitment to his wife and responsibility for his family. However, like many other traditional practices, bride-wealth is also disappearing, especially among the highly educated. A mother and her children lived in the main family house where the household goods were stored. Marriageable girls lived with their mothers, and suitors were entertained there. The father would sometimes share his house with his uncircumcised sons, but once circumcised but not yet married they would build their own dwelling or live in the grain store.

Family size was an indicator of a man's social and economic success. A man's riches were formerly judged by how many wives and children he had; that is, family size was an indicator of the social and economic status of a person. For example, Senior Chief Muruatetu, probably one of the most famous Embuans, not only had 16 wives and many children, but he was also a respected administration officer for the colonial government and independent Kenya. An entire village bears his name, and a school is named after him.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The Embu used to wear clothes made of animal (sheep, goat, cattle) skins. These clothes gave way to cotton clothes and Western-style clothing introduced in the early 1900s. Today, clothing is just as modern as in any other modern society. Women's clothing is more colorful than men's, which is usually one solid color. Women do not wear pants, as men do. Very little jewelry is worn (e.g., earrings), and only young women wear it. Before the changes brought by modernization, both men and women wore jewelry (necklaces, bracelets, earrings, ankle and knee bracelets), though women wore more than men. Both men and women also decorated their bodies in the same fashion, e.g., scarification, filed teeth, V-shaped fillings between the upper two incisors, and pierced and extended ear lobes. The youth of both sexes wore long hair, while the elderly had clean-shaven heads. Because of all these changes, there is really no traditional dress. The dress code now tends towards the Western mode.

## **12 FOOD**

A wide variety of food crops are cultivated in Embu. These include maize, beans, bananas, potatoes, yams, arrowroots, cassava, and sugar cane. In addition, a few animals, e.g., cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens, are raised. It is primarily from these food sources that the Embu make their dishes. There are three main foods that are made: *nyenyi*, *kithere*, and *ngima*. *Nyenyi* is the most traditional of the Embu dishes. It is a mixture of maize, beans, bananas, and green vegetables. It is cooked in a big clay pot. Once cooked, the ingredients are mashed together until well mixed. *Kithere* is basically a mixture of maize and beans. Today, people add to this mixture some vegetables, potatoes, and meat, but the ingredients are not mashed together. *Ngima*, popularly known as *ugali* in Kiswahili (also described as thick porridge), has become very popular, especially in urban centers. It is simply a mixture of white corn flour (*mutu wa mbembe*) and water. Water is boiled in a pot, then corn flour

is added until the thickness required is reached. The mixture is cooked for 10–15 minutes while turning it with a wooden spatula (*mwiko*). It is then eaten with meat stew, bean stew, or even roasted meat.

Today the most special foods are *mucere* (rice) and *chapati* (unleavened flat bread). These are expensive foods that have to be purchased from shops and are therefore only served on special occasions, such as when entertaining important guests, or on holidays such as Christmas. The traditional special food that is still popular is roasted goat meat. The slaughter of a goat and the roasting of the meat is a practice done on very special occasions. To slaughter a goat for a person is a demonstration of high respect for that person or the importance of the friendship that exists between the two people. Tea has replaced millet and sorghum porridge as the common daily beverage. It is taken any time of the day, unlike other foods that are eaten as midday and evening meals.

Household utensils are rare in most homes. The most important are modern cooking pots, plates, cups, and silverware. Although clay pots are still in use, they are not regularly used. The wooden *mwiko* has remained unchanged and has actually grown in popularity. Most of the utensils in many households are imports and have for the most part replaced the traditional ones.

Also gone are most of the food taboos that were once observed by the people. For instance, it was taboo for: (1) men and women who had drunk cattle blood to eat the meat of wild game; (2) circumcised men and women to eat chicken, for it was considered children's food; (3) women to eat eggs; (4) men to drink milk after eating the meat of wild game; and (5) women to eat the meat of a cow that had died in labor. The only taboos that are still observed are those that prohibit the eating of monkeys, clawed animals, and snakes.

Food is very central to Embu customs, particularly those that govern people's behaviors and attitudes towards others. Food is something to be shared, and to be accused of being a selfish person (*mundu muthunu*) is not only a terrible insult but also labels a person as unworthy to receive other people's assistance, including food. When there is no food to be offered to a visitor or a person passing by, an explanation is usually offered. The Embu have many stories and proverbs that teach the morality of food-sharing. Also related to the moral significance of sharing is the belief that it is very bad manners to try to eat more than others, particularly if the people are eating from the same bowl.

### 13 EDUCATION

With the free primary and secondary education programs undertaken by the Kenyan government since 2003, the literacy rate in Kenya in 2008 stood at about 49%. Among the Embu, literacy is very high because of an overwhelming enthusiasm by parents to send their children to school. Good education is viewed as the path to a better life both for the children and the parents. Children are the social security of their parents in old age, and as such, parents invest as much as they can in the education of their children.

Under the current educational system, children start school at the age of six. They spend eight years in primary education, four in secondary (high school) education, and four in university education. Most children now finish primary and secondary levels, but few get into the university. It is the dream of

every parent to have a child go to the university because of the increased opportunities for a better-paying job upon graduation. The cost of education and the rate of unemployment are both increasing, and these factors could lower the level of literacy in Kenya.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among the Embu, as in many African cultures, music and dancing are inseparable. Once the musical instruments set the rhythm, people begin to sing and dance. Today, most of the dancing and singing is performed in churches and in elementary and secondary schools. School children practice various traditional dances for competition with other schools. There are also dance troupes that entertain visiting leaders and dignitaries with traditional songs and dances. Through traditional dances and songs, as well as stories, riddles, and proverbs, the Embu traditions, folklore, social norms, and history are passed from one generation to the next. The publication of the book *Ndai, Nthimo, Na Ng'ano Iri Ukua Wa Aembu* in Kiambu has become an invaluable record of Embu riddles, proverbs, and stories for future generations.

The rich local cultural and natural heritage also feeds the tourism industry. Much abounds to entertain tourists and visitors, not least the Embu people themselves who carry about their daily life with a deep sense of filial attachment to each other. They are a hospitable people, almost always welcoming visitors and eager to help. This has endeared them to their neighbors and to strangers from afar. The district plays host to the renowned Mt. Kenya to the north. Mountaineering therefore preoccupies most locals and visitors. Mt. Kenya remains a unique tourist attraction with hordes of foreigners and local people flocking to its slopes to savor the allure of its beauty and majesty. Numerous expeditions set out each year to scale the slopes to the mountain top. It is an enthralling experience, especially watching the sun rise in the horizons in the early morning from the highest Batian mountain peak. This climb is a real achievement; it calls for great stamina and resilience.

Other attractions in the region are the huge Karue hill towering high along the Embu-Meru highway. It is a magnificent view, made of a huge crested rock, at the top of which has grown two unique eucalyptus trees. From such a bird's eye view, one can see the entire of Embu. Nearby this hill are two magnificent waterfalls in close proximity which color the sky in white as their waters fall down, then converge to form one big Ena river that then meanders downstream to encircle the Karue hill. Completing the scenery is the Kirimiri hill nearby. Though not open for tourism, it is home to a diverse array of wildlife.

Generally, it seems likely that the last hallmarks of Embu culture may disappear over the next few decades as Western culture and Christianity continue to erode traditional values. Already, much if not all of the traditional music has vanished, and the relevance of traditional forms of government, such as the Nthuke Age-Sets, are becoming increasingly obscure.

### 15 WORK

The Embu are an industrious lot regarding the wide variety of economic activities they are engaged in. They value hard work and scorn laziness. Hard work, as the Embu say, builds character and prosperity. Hard work also makes a person highly eligible for marriage. Every healthy person is expected to work

to benefit oneself and others. There is a very clear division of labor by gender. The Embu have successfully taken up modern lifestyles, as shown by excellence both in academia and the overall national growth. Numerous schools and colleges train hundreds of youth each year to become well equipped not just for agricultural work but also for formal employment and entrepreneurship.

The Embu traditionally rely on agriculture, though a large number have become traders. The Embu are farmers who also rear cows, goats, and sheep. With the advent of colonialism, many cash crops were introduced. For long these have offered a lucrative alternative source of livelihood for the people. The most widespread cash crops to date are coffee, tea, and macadamia nuts. These are mainly grown for sale with little being processed for domestic consumption.

In the formal sector there are areas of employment that tend to be dominated by males (e.g., administration and management) and by females (e.g., nursing, secretarial work, and primary-level teaching). The same work ethic is expected of students by their parents. A man's riches were formerly judged by how many wives and children he had.

## 16 SPORTS

For almost everybody, both children and adults, soccer is the most important sport. To boys, anything that is round, regardless of size, is a soccer ball. One of the most popular radio programs is the broadcast of national and international soccer tournaments. Although soccer is mostly a school-organized sport, the spectators are local people. For girls, netball (somewhat similar to basketball) is very popular and is also a school-organized sport. Track and field sports, or "athletics," are also very popular in schools at every level and are highly encouraged by the government. In addition to all these popular sports, there are many other games that children play, such as jumping rope, to entertain themselves.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the whole of Embu there is only one movie theater, in Embu town. This provides entertainment mostly to urban residents and people with higher incomes. Once in a while there is a mobile cinema vehicle which moves through the rural areas showing films, most of which are educational documentaries. Wealthy families with access to electricity have television sets. Others who can afford television sets but have no electricity run them using solar-energy panels or car batteries. Until recently, people could only see one channel, which was government-controlled. Now there are over eight channels, one of which is CNN. Television shows include those produced locally and those imported from various countries. Old and young men would normally congregate in pubs and homes where DSTV is connected, to watch European soccer and other games.

As mentioned earlier, church choirs and dancing, in some religious sects, also provide some entertainment. Spectator sports such as soccer and athletics provide much needed entertainment. Pop music by Kenyan, African (especially Zairian), and Western artists is very popular with young people.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Embu are known for bee-keeping. Beehives are made from a tree trunk and are then hung on a tree for the bees to build honeycombs inside. Women are skilled weavers, particularly

using fiber strings to make baskets (*ciondo*). Fiber strings are stained with vegetable dyes to produce multicolored bands on the baskets. Today, commercially produced strings of different colors are also being used to make very beautifully decorated baskets. Following the reform of the education system, other Embu arts and crafts, such as leatherwork and woodcarving, are being reintroduced to Embu children.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Over the years, Embu society has experienced rapid population growth. This has resulted in widespread land fragmentation whereby a man has to subdivide his land among his sons. Taken to the third generation, this has resulted in land ownership being fragmented to small strips of land not conducive to economic activity. In lieu of this, landlessness and the subdivision of family land into small plots for the purpose of inheritance are already major social and economic problems. This is creating much tension among family members as well as within the whole society. It has also resulted in food shortages and the inability to raise livestock because of the lack of grazing lands.

Alcoholism, a national problem, is not yet a serious problem in Embu, but conditions are developing that could turn it into a very serious socioeconomic and health problem soon. Following the liberalization of the economy, new and cheap alcoholic drinks commonly known as *Keg*, high in alcohol content, have been introduced to Embu. They are very popular compared to the high-priced, low-alcohol, bottled beers. The fact that there is very little social stigma attached to alcoholism, and that alcoholism is not viewed as a health problem or disease but rather as an indication of personal weakness and lack of control, may help to increase the problem. There is also a complete absence of any education regarding the consequences of alcoholism. The drinking of alcohol in the rural areas of Embu is primarily a male activity. Women who drink alcohol in public places are looked down upon. But in general, alcoholism among women is also increasing.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although it appears that Embu society was originally matriarchal, a woman's role today is largely restricted to her functions as wife, mother, and farm worker. There was one woman at the time of the colonial conquest who managed to become chief, but was subsequently betrayed by jealous men. Her name is Cierume. Among the Embu, a woman's life is literally marked by her circumcision at adolescence, which allows her to become married and bear children. It is during this initiation that she begins to acquire knowledge about the realities and responsibilities of life, and the cultural values that surround her. The practice of clitoridectomy is becoming rarer today.

Nonetheless, uncircumcised girls still face stigmatization, and women in that position will usually have to leave their homeland (through choice or by force), for an uncertain future in the slum towns of Nairobi and elsewhere. Change, however, may be in the offing if a recent nongovernmental organization (NGO) report on gender roles among the Embu is correct: as a response to rapid population growth and overcrowding, many respondents declared that roles were no longer gender-based since changing circumstances had led to the disintegration of the indigenous social matrix.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

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## THE ENGLISH IN SOUTH AFRICA

**LOCATION:** South Africa  
**POPULATION:** About 3.6 million  
**LANGUAGE:** English  
**RELIGION:** Christianity; Judaism  
**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 5: English

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Though whites of English-speaking descent make up only about 8% of South Africa's population of 44 million, their culture and their language are powerful influences in a country where more than three-quarters of the people are blacks. English is one of 11 official languages in South Africa (the others are Afrikaans, Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu) but it is one of the most widely spoken. A foreign visitor to South Africa who speaks only English will have no difficulties at all getting about and being understood. English is the principal language of business and tourism, English-language newspapers are published daily and can be obtained everywhere. Public signs and notices are always posted in English.

With South Africa's economy expanding rapidly into the global market place and with computerized personal communications becoming a feature of the workplace as well as schools and colleges, a good working knowledge of English is regarded as an essential requirement for young South Africans of all communities who want successful careers in business and the professions. English is taught in all the schools, is the medium of instruction (sometimes in addition to Afrikaans) in all universities, and is continuing to be a dominant force in South Africa's young democracy even though the constitution requires recognition of all the official languages.

The international status of English as the language of many of the world's leading countries is one of the reasons for its continued dominance in South Africa. Books, magazines, movies, TV shows and musical recordings flood into the country from the English-speaking world—mostly from the United States and Britain but also to a lesser extent from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—and are popular and influential. The pop stars and cultural icons of America and England are popular in South Africa too and going to the movies is a regular pastime. South Africa has vibrant media and entertainment industries of its own and, while a local African flavor often adds spice and a special character to these activities and Afrikaans music is undergoing a popular resurgence, the impact of the international English-speaking world is seen clearly in tastes and trends.

Throughout most of the 20th century, South Africa's political life was dominated largely by white Afrikaners, descendants of settlers who began to arrive in the 17th century, mostly from the Netherlands but also from France and Germany. After April 1994, when South Africa became a non-racial democracy and Nelson Mandela was elected the first black president, control of the country passed into the hands of the black majority and apartheid was finally abandoned. Although they were never in political control in the 20th century, Eng-





lish-speaking South Africans were prominent in commerce and industry and the professions throughout much of this period—and remain influential as one of the best-educated and most affluent sectors of the population.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

White English-speaking South Africans have historic and language ties to Britain but they do not regard themselves as British expatriates. They see themselves as South Africans, an important sector of a racially and culturally diverse nation. They live throughout the country but are concentrated mostly in and around the cities and urban areas—the coastal cities of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban, and the inland cities and towns of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Grahamstown, and Kimberley.

South Africa has an estimated 44 million people and about 9.6%, or 4.2 million, are whites. English South Africans make up less than half of that group. Their presence in the country goes back to the end of the 18th century when Britain seized control of the Cape of Good Hope, the first white settlement area in Cape Town, during the Napoleonic Wars. The British government encouraged its citizens to emigrate to the Cape—mostly to establish a buffer between African tribesmen and farming colonists on the eastern frontier—and the first sizable group of 4,000 began to arrive in 1820. These 1820 settlers faced enormous day-to-day difficulties in making their new lives in the wilderness, but they prevailed and brought much needed skills to the colony. Their legacy is still strong, espe-

cially in the eastern Cape around Port Elizabeth, East London, and the university town of Grahamstown.

Their presence also contributed to a major event in South African history—the Great Trek during which Afrikaner farmers migrated inland to escape British rule. The Great Trek, roughly equivalent to America's western migration of the 19th century, brought the Afrikaners (known as the Boers) into conflict with African tribes, notably the Zulus in what is today the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Eventually, the British government went to war with the Zulus, defeating them after a number of bloody battles and establishing the British colony of Natal. At the turn of the century, British forces defeated two republics founded by the migrating Boers in the Anglo-Boer War (now known as the South African War) and the whole of the country was incorporated into the British Empire. In 1910 South Africa became a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. Throughout this turbulent history, English-speaking South Africans settled widely.

## 3 LANGUAGE

English was established as a mother tongue in South Africa in the 19th century. It is little different from the English spoken elsewhere in the world but has a distinct flavor, accent, and character and has absorbed, informally, a number of words and sentence structures from other ethnic and racial groups. Some of these words have crept into usage abroad—such as “trek” for a journey and “veld” for the prairie. In an analysis of South African English pronunciation, the *Collins English Dictionary* cites the words “yes,” “kettle,” and “axle,” which are commonly pronounced “yis,” “kittle,” and “eksel.” South African English slang has borrowed some structures from Afrikaans, such as: “She threw him with a stone” and “I am going to the shop, will you come with?” It has also taken some words from African languages, such as “indaba,” which means a gathering. Some phrases are unique to South African English, such as “just now,” which means “soon but not right at this time.”

## 4 FOLKLORE

Since they share their language with English-speaking peoples around the world, English South Africans also share in the special anniversaries, legends, and myths that are part of the international culture of the language. They celebrate Christmas in the traditional way with gifts, family gatherings, and dinner and get together for parties and celebrations on New Year's Eve when the midnight hour is greeted with hugs and kisses and the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*—a familiar scene around the world. In coastal ports like Cape Town it is common for ships to sound their sirens to greet the New Year.

The community has nothing like Halloween but, until fairly recently, they marked Guy Fawkes Day (November 5) with fireworks and bonfires. Guy Fawkes Day recalls an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the British Houses of Parliament. Today, however, private use of fireworks is banned in many areas because of the danger to lives and property and the event is rapidly passing out of memory. Apart from that, there is little folklore uniquely associated with English South Africans.

## 5 RELIGION

Religious beliefs are an important part of the daily life of many South Africans. The major faiths are Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Religion has played a key role in the his-

tory of the country, especially in its opposition to racial discrimination known as apartheid. Religious leaders, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church in South Africa, became politically prominent in their campaigns for equality and democracy. Nearly all of the denominations were involved in the anti-apartheid struggle—Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians and others. Most English South Africans belong to protestant Christian denominations with a lesser number but significant number adhering to the Catholic Church.

A small number—about 200,000—are Jews who tend to live mainly in the affluent areas of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Jewish influence in South Africa is much larger than the community's numbers would indicate. English-speaking Jewish South Africans have leadership positions in medicine and law, commerce and industry, and education and politics, and many have excelled in sport and the arts. The first South African to be posted to Washington as the country's ambassador during the transition away from apartheid was Jewish.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The English of South Africa observe the country's national and religious holidays. These include Human Rights Day (March 21), Good Friday (changes yearly), Family Day (changes yearly), Freedom Day (April 27), Worker's Day (May 1), Day of Reconciliation (December 16) and Christmas Day (December 25).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage for English South Africans would be familiar to their counterparts in other parts of the world. One of the earliest events is kindergarten at age five or younger, followed by primary school at age six. Junior school starts at age eight and high school at age 13. After graduation from high school—known as matriculation in South Africa—it is common to go on to a technical college or to a university. Colleges and universities are seldom referred to as “schools” in South Africa, except in some instances as “school of medicine” or “school of law.”

Reaching the age of 18 when it becomes legal to drive, to vote, and to drink alcohol is an important rite of passage. The 21st birthday is the most important rite of passage when it is usual to present the celebrant with a silver key to adulthood.

After university graduation—and sometimes before—it is common for young English South Africans to travel abroad. Typically, they travel to Britain and the European continent (11 or 12 hours away by air) but increasing numbers are traveling to the United States, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Because of the expense involved, many try to get work during their travels, and it is not uncommon to find them working as farm laborers, maids, nannies and in other casual jobs before moving on to the next stage of their journey. There are currently for example, thousands of young South Africans working in London and this has become a kind of rite of passage in itself.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In the past, English South Africans—like other communities in the country—tended to keep to themselves with most social contacts confined to members of their own group. Several social and political trends have changed that situation. The most dramatic change was the transition to democratic government,

which began by stages in the 1980s and was consummated in 1994. This has brought whites and blacks together in schools, colleges, the workplace, and on sports fields with an intimacy that did not exist before. As a result, different communities are being exposed to customs and personal practices that may be different from their own. For instance, in some rural African areas it is still considered polite to sit down and not to speak first when a prominent person or someone elderly enters a room. English South Africans have been taught traditionally that younger people should stand up as a mark of respect and greet a more senior person first. They are learning that their own way is not necessarily the only or correct way for everyone. All communities serve in a volunteer defense force and this development has further demolished past barriers. Previously, this was by conscription for white and “coloured” 18 year old males only.

Another major influence was the introduction of television in South Africa in 1975. Before that time, there was only radio with separate language channels. TV programs sometimes alternate the languages or have subtitles, which means that, for the first time, English-speaking South Africans were being exposed to other tongues and cultures, also from abroad, under the powerful influence of entertainment.

All these trends have tended to break down the barriers between social groups in South Africa. One of the most memorable examples of this was the nationwide celebration when South Africa won the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and again in 2007. Rugby is still played mainly by whites and particularly by Afrikaans-speakers. However, the whole nation reacted joyously when the national team won these tournaments. All the games had been broadcast live. In 2010 South Africa is hosting the FIFA World Cup (soccer/football), which is also providing South Africans with a common focus.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Transition to democracy has opened up equal opportunities for everyone, and there are no longer legal barriers to communities living in each other's previously restricted areas. However, political change has come much faster than economic change and many blacks still live in poverty while many English South Africans continue to live the relatively privileged life-style that was once considered their right. The typical successful white South African lives in a style similar to his or her counterpart in the United States—in single-family houses on wide suburban streets or in apartments or semidetached row houses with neighborhood playgrounds, shopping centers, and cinemas. As the economy grows and blacks take advantage of new employment and educational opportunities, they are increasingly achieving a similar comfortable standard of living. There is some concern, however, that this applies mostly to a new black elite.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The social stability provided by the family unit is recognized by the government, which has a policy of supporting family cohesion. In English South African families it is not unusual for both parents to work during the day and for younger schoolchildren to be cared for by live-in domestic workers when they come home in the afternoon. Marriage nowadays usually occurs in the late twenties to early thirties. With high interest rates and sharply rising property prices, it has become

more common for older children to continue to live at home for longer than they would have in the past and even—if the property is large enough—for families to build separate structures that allow either the children or the elderly parents to live nearby but separately for privacy. It is a case, perhaps, of a tight economy contributing to family cohesion. English South African families celebrate the traditional events such as birthdays, anniversaries, special achievements in school or in sports, and often take vacations together, renting cottages or apartments at the seaside. These days it is common for family members who live apart to communicate daily with each other by computer e-mail or cellular/mobile telephone. Family pets are popular with one or two dogs and cats being the norm.

### 11 CLOTHING

Day-to-day clothing is similar to that worn by middle-class people throughout the world. Increasingly, however, it is common to find men shedding jackets and ties in the work environment, following a trend set by the previous president Nelson Mandela who made colorful open-neck shirts fashionable, even at formal meetings. Schoolchildren are required at most schools to wear school uniforms. Sometimes, these uniforms are still the traditional blazer and tie for both boys and girls, which can be hot and uncomfortable during the summer, but many schools have opted for open-neck clothes. Jeans, shorts, and T-shirts are popular on weekends. Young English South Africans spend much of their money on leisure clothes. They strive to conform to current fashion trends.

### 12 FOOD

The meal associated traditionally with English South Africans is the English-style roast beef or lamb with roast potatoes and Yorkshire pudding prepared on Sunday morning and eaten at a family lunch—followed by a nap. That may be turning into a myth, or at least a memory, as life-styles permit less time in the kitchen and a desire to eat lighter and less costly food. Similarly, the traditional breakfast of bacon and eggs often gives way today to coffee or tea and toast or one of the many breakfast cereals familiar to Americans. Fruit is also a popular first meal of the day. There are usually three meals each day—breakfast, a sandwich at lunch, and dinner in the evenings. Dinner could consist of grilled steak with fried or baked potatoes, or fried or baked fish, which is especially popular in coastal cities, washed down with beer or wine or plain water. In winter, stews are popular. Known as *bredies*, they can be made with mutton or beef and any kind of vegetable. English South Africans like to garnish their food with a pickled relish called chutney, and many enjoy a bread spread called Marmite, a dark-colored yeast extract with a salty taste. Fast foods are gaining in popularity, and hamburgers are frequently eaten—to the concern of some diet specialists.

### 13 EDUCATION

South Africa has a literacy rate of some 86.4 percent for those over 15 in the nation at large, but for the English-speaking community the rate is almost universal. Education is compulsory to the age of 16 and it generally takes 12 years to obtain a high school diploma or senior certificate, which is required to continue studies at a technical college or university. University undergraduate degrees generally take three years to complete with longer academic years than are usual in the United States.

An additional year of study after a bachelor's degree can lead to an honors degree, followed by further work for master's degrees or doctorates. These days, it is becoming more difficult to get a good job without at least a bachelor's degree or a technical college diploma. Many families devote a great deal of time, energy and resources to education and will sacrifice to ensure that their children are well prepared for a future in which advanced technology will play a key role in everyday life. In a tight economy many find it hard to keep their children in the classroom for extended periods.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

English South Africans have inherited a rich local cultural heritage, mostly in the area of literature in which writers have achieved international renown for their depiction of dramatic events against a South African background. Probably the best-known such writer is Alan Paton whose novel *Cry the Beloved Country* explores the impact of racism on whites as well as blacks. It has been made twice into American movies. An extremely popular author is Herman Charles Bosman who, writing in English with an Afrikaans flavor, takes a humorous look at daily life in a rural community. Other writers who have achieved international fame include Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee while other South African writers, such as André Brink (Afrikaans) and Njabulo Ndebele, have made major contributions to English literature in South Africa. Playwright Athol Fugard has also achieved international fame with his dramatic portrayals of life through South Africa's race-tinged prism. Western classical and pop music is popular but many English South Africans have developed a taste for African music, such as the close harmonies found in the singing of groups like Ladysmith Black Mambazo. American musician and entertainer, Paul Simon, has done much to bring the charms of this kind of music to an international audience.

### 15 WORK

A typical work week ranges from 40–46 hours, and a legally mandated minimum wage is adjusted from time to time. Until 1979, special classes of labor were reserved for workers by race. However, in the late 1990s, this situation started changing. Some English-speaking South Africans expressed concern over black economic empowerment (BEE) programs, in which special consideration is given to employing and promoting blacks. Some claim now that this has led to a new kind of apartheid in which whites are unable to get jobs and promotions because of their skin color. Few disagree with the need for affirmative action, but many argue with the way in which it has been implemented, given that South Africa is some 14 years into democracy with a post-apartheid generation now at school. Policymakers hope that the problem will ease and disappear eventually as a growing economy opens up job opportunities for all.

### 16 SPORTS

Because of the country's generally benign climate throughout the year, outdoor sports are very popular. The most popular sports are rugby, soccer, and field hockey played in winter, and cricket in summer. Tennis, golf, track and field athletics, competitive cycling, and swimming are also extremely popular. Lawn bowls, played mostly by older folk but also by a growing number of young people, has a large following. American-

style baseball has a few adherents but is not nearly as popular as cricket, which—in the view of some—has joined rugby as a national obsession. Wind-surfing, surfboard riding, and both fresh- and salt-water yachting are enjoyed all year long while hiking and mountaineering have many adherents. Sports events that attract the largest crowds in the country's many fine stadiums are rugby, soccer, and cricket. Events that attract thousands of spectators as well as participants include annual road marathon races in Cape Town and Natal. Professional horse racing also has a large following and two races in particular—the Cape Metropolitan handicap and the Durban July—are major media events where the fashions worn by the race goers get as much attention as the horses. South Africa has produced world and Olympic champion individuals and teams in many of its sports.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular recreation attractions in South Africa include Kruger National Park and several game reserves. Entertainment facilities include symphony halls, theaters, movies, nightclubs, and discos. The annual National Arts Festival held in Grahamstown is a major event featuring mainly English plays, music, and arts, and also crafts stalls.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The English in South Africa enjoy the varied hobbies of citizens of an industrialized nation.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 brought equal rights and new opportunities to the disadvantaged sectors of the population. Unfortunately, it also sparked a dramatic increase in the rate of crime and violence—an inevitable by-product of poverty and high unemployment in the context of a new political system where social expectations are unrealistically high. Burglaries, muggings, car-jackings, rapes, and murders all increased since the late 1990s. English-speaking South Africans are as much the victims of this crime rate as any other sector of the population and it has led to demands for tough action by the government as well as a return to capital punishment, which is banned in South Africa. One result has been a growing rate of emigration. Another has been the growth of private security-related services and the development of gated communities.

South Africa's transition also made it a target for foreign narcotics traffickers who saw the opportunities in newly opened borders for a major international transshipment point. Illicit drugs are now being shipped through South Africa to North America and Europe in a network that has made it hard to trace their origins. Nations with more experience in dealing with this cruel trade are helping South Africa address the problem, but drug trafficking has boosted crime within the country and is a major societal concern.

HIV/AIDS is also a major problem, with the adult prevalence rate at 21.5% (2003 est.). The number of people living with HIV/AIDS was estimated at 5.3 million (2003) and the number of deaths caused by the disease was estimated at 370,000 deaths in 2003.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) specifies individual rights and their protection. Chapter 2[9(3)] specifically indicates that “the State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender,...etc.”. This is observed in practice by all government agencies. For example, the Department of Education runs a program, the Girls Education Movement (GEM), launched in 2003. It is a key program supporting and fostering education for girls and was implemented in partnership with the United Nations' (UN) Children's Fund.

This program aims to ensure that girls not only have access to education, but that they stay in school and succeed. GEM was founded on three pillars: career mentorship, skills development, and advocacy.

Through GEM, girls are placed in partner companies during their Easter, winter, and spring school breaks, to discover first-hand how skills acquired in school and the skills-development program relate to the workplace.

They are exposed to a structured job-shadowing program and to new and exciting career paths in the fields of mathematics, science, and commerce. The GEM Skills Development Program aims to address gender disparities through education and advocacy.

Compared to many other communities in South Africa, the English in the country, even in rural areas, are much farther along the road of gender parity. Much like their counterparts in other industrialized nations, English women in South Africa are career-oriented and fill prominent positions in virtually every sector of society.

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—by M de Jongh

# EQUATORIAL GUINEANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ee-kwuh-TOR-ee-uhl GHIN-ee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Equatoguineans

**LOCATION:** Equatorial Guinea (island of Bioko, mainland of Rio Muni, several small islands)

**POPULATION:** 616,000

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish (official); Fang; languages of the coastal peoples; Bubi, pidgin English and Ibo (from Nigeria); Portuguese Creole.

**RELIGION:** Christianity, African-based sects and cults

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Equatorial Guinea has recently gained prominence around the world as one of the smallest African states now awash in oil. Prior to this discovery, it was one of the least-known African countries comprising the rectangular-shaped island of Bioko (formerly Fernando Po) and the mainland, Rio Muni. Portuguese explorers landed on Fernando Po in 1471–72 and made it part of the commercial sphere of Sao Tomé. The islanders strongly resisted the slave trade and attempts to occupy their homeland. The Portuguese gave the island and parts of the mainland to Spain in a treaty in 1787. However, Spanish administration of Fernando Po only began in 1858. Nevertheless, Equatorial Guinea is the only sub-Saharan country that uses Spanish as its official language.

In the latter 19th century, European missionaries and descendants of Liberians, Sierra Leonians, Nigerians, and liberated slaves (Fernandinos) developed large cacao, coffee, and tobacco plantations on Fernando Po. Cameroonians, Fang (from Rio Muni), more Nigerians, and Liberians immigrated to the island to work the plantations. However, in 1976, the island was greatly depopulated when the government expelled 25,000 Nigerians. After the coup in 1979, Obiang Nguema renamed the island, Bioko, but the residents have resisted this name. Since 1979, Nguema has resided as head of state on the island, protected by his praetorian guard of 600 Moroccan soldiers.

Since independence in 1968, the country has been ruled by the despotic Nguema family. Equatorial Guinea's first head of state, Francisco Macias Nguema, Obiang's uncle, was Africa's worst despot. A Fang from the Esangui clan on the mainland, he dissolved the country's multiparty system in 1970 and replaced it with a single party, the *Partido Unico Nacional de los Trabajadores* (PUNT). Macias murdered politicians and government administrators, executed members of the opposition, and exiled most of Equatorial Guinea's educated and skilled workforce. One-quarter to one-third of the population was murdered or exiled during his tenure.

In 1979 defense minister Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, Macias' nephew, overthrew his uncle in a coup and eventually executed him. Obiang has ruled since with members of the Esangui clan dominating the government. He has won a series of fraudulent elections, the last in 2002. Legislative elections in 1999 and 2004 also were dismissed as highly flawed, and in May 2008 legislative and local elections of a similar ilk confirmed Obiang's firm grip on power.

Since 1981 at least seven real or imagined coups have been attempted. The most recent occurred in 2004, implicating Mark

Thatcher, son of the former British Prime Minister, for having bankrolled the coup attempt. Rumors in 2008 reported Obiang as suffering from cancer and perhaps willing to step down in favor of his son Teodorín, who served as Forestry Minister. Despite a thriving economy fueled by oil, Equatorial Guinean exiles have been hesitant to return to the country because of persistent human rights abuses, corruption, and crime.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Besides Bioko island and the mainland, Equatorial Guinea comprises several small islands. A cluster of small islands—Elobeyes and de Corisco—lies just south of the mainland. Rio Muni is situated between Gabon to the south and east and Cameroon to the north. Bioko is part of a geologic fault line extending from the island of Annobon (Equatorial Guinea), some 700 miles to the southwest, all the way to Tibesti in northern Chad. A range of volcanic relief is apparent along this line including Mt. Cameroon (13,000 feet), only 32 kilometers from Bioko and visible from there on a clear day.

Both the mainland and the islands receive abundant rainfall—more than eight ft annually. Three extinct volcanoes form the backbone of Bioko, giving the island fertile soils and lush vegetation. The Pico de Basile rises to more than 10,000 feet above sea level. The mainland coast is a long beach with no natural harbor. A narrow coastal plain rises sharply to a forested plateau, and small ranges of low mountains reach nearly 4,000 feet in elevation.

Equatorial Guinea's population is about 616,000 (est. 2008), one-fourth of which lives on Bioko. For its physical size, the ethnic composition of Equatorial Guinea is unusually complex. The Ntumu Fang occupy the mainland north of the Mbini river and the Okak Fang live to the south of it. Together, the Fang peoples form the majority (80–90%) of Mbini, and the Kombe, Balengue, and Bujeba tribes occupy the coastal areas. Bioko's population is a mixture of the Bubi, its original inhabitants, the Fernandino, long-settled immigrants from nearby West Africa, and Fang migrants, who now dominate the military and civil service. Malabo (formerly Sta. Isabel) on the island of Bioko is the administrative capital for the entire country. Bata is an important regional capital on the mainland and was periodically the site of the national government for three or four months each year in the 1980s.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language. Well-educated Equatorial Guineans speak Spanish Castilian with a proper lisp. Inhabitants of Rio Muni speak Fang and languages of the coastal peoples. On Bioko, the islanders speak mainly Bubi, although many island people use pidgin English and Ibo (from Nigeria). The 1,500 residents of the island of Annobon speak Portuguese Creole.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Fang tell many stories and folktales through the personage of animals. These tales serve to illustrate lessons of life. One animal in these fables is as clever as the fox, wise as the owl, and diplomatic as the rabbit. The islanders call him *ku* or *kulu*, the turtle. One tale concerns a divorce and child custody case between a tiger and a tigress. Each animal of the forest opines on who should get possession of the child. In the tradition of male dominance, they believe the tiger deserves parentage, but

before rendering a verdict, they want to consult the *ku*. The *ku* hears each side of the case and asks them to return the following day at lunchtime. When they are assembled the next day, he appears in no hurry to give his opinion and instead bathes in a large mud puddle. Then he cries as if overcome with grief. The animals are mystified and ask him to explain. He replies, "My father-in-law died while giving birth." The tiger finally interrupts with disgust, "Why listen to such rubbish? We all know a man cannot give birth. Only a woman has that ability. A man's relationship to a child is different." The *ku* replies, "Aha! You yourself have determined her relationship with the child to be special. Custody should be with the tigress." The tiger was unsatisfied, but the other animals agreed that the *ku* ruled correctly.

## 5 RELIGION

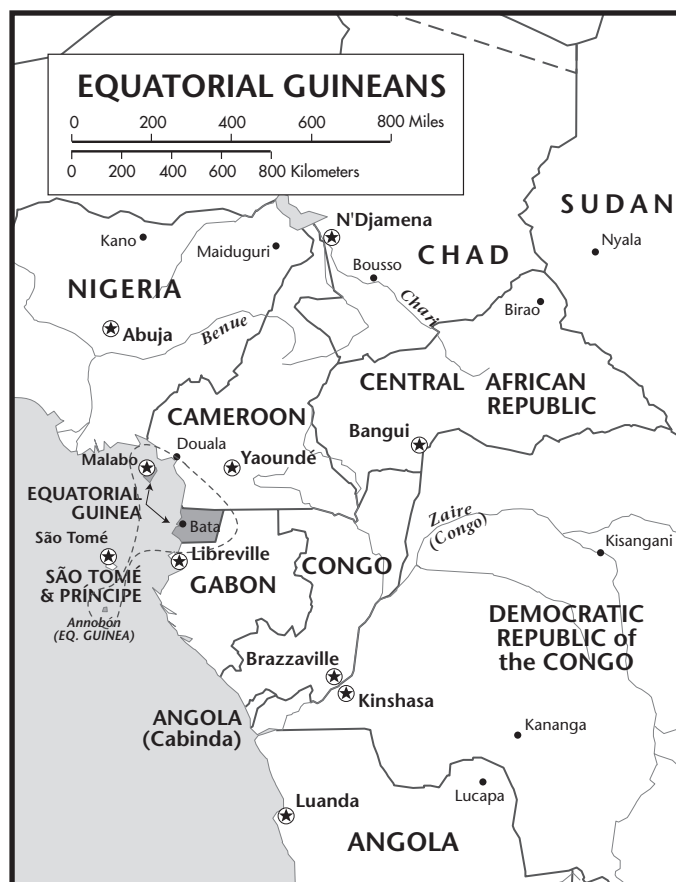
Most Equatorial Guineans profess some form of Christianity, but many African-based sects and cults persist. For example, the Bubi practice a syncretic religion where indigenous beliefs and Christianity have been joined in a monotheistic religion.

Though not a religion per se, Macias invented his own personality cult, which he attempted to inculcate through the Catholic church. In 1974 he ordered priests to read the following message during the mass: "Never without Macias, always with Macias. Down with colonialism and with ambition." He decreed that churches hang his portrait in their sanctuaries. Inscribed was the message: "Only and unceasing miracle of Equatorial Guinea. God created Equatorial Guinea thanks to Macias. Without Macias, Equatorial Guinea would not exist." He recruited youth spies to report on "subversive" clergy and expelled, imprisoned, and executed bishops, priests, and pastors suspected of resisting. In 1975, he closed all mission schools. Obiang has permitted freedom of worship, but surveillance and repression of the clergy continues.

Equatorial Guinean religions are similar to African religions elsewhere in that they revolve around a supreme being and lower-level deities in the spirit world that may assist or bring misfortune to people. To guard against misfortune, the Fang invoke guidance and protection from ancestors who held leadership positions when they were living. The Fang carry their skulls and bones with them as relics for communicating with the ancestors' spirits.

Equatorial Guinean sects are infamous for their alleged human sacrifices and necrophagy. A report in 1926 claims that the Fang tore out the hearts and genitals of their victims, sometimes eating them. In 1946 one observer claimed that Fang sorcerers practiced cannibalism during ceremonies. Reports on one sect claimed that members had to take turns bringing in cadavers, or if one was not available, to kill a victim or otherwise be killed. The rationale for necrophagy is that one acquires the attributes and the power of the person ingested.

The earliest European accounts of necrophagy date from the mid-19th century. It is not clear however, the extent to which the slaving middle men, the Ndowe, invented stories to scare the Fang and the Europeans, both of whom came to depend on the Ndowe for slaves. Moreover, European explorers may have misunderstood the significance of human skulls and body parts found stored in and near Fang homes. It is possible that what Europeans saw was earlier evidence of a modern Fang cult. The Fang still conserve skulls and body parts as relics to which prayers are addressed and transmitted by the ancestor



to God. The remains also scare away evil spirits, but they are now hidden in secret places out of public view.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Equatorial Guineans recognize 12 public holidays. Independence Day is October 12, but a special celebration is reserved for Armed Forces Day, August 3, which also is known as the *golpe de libertad* (the freedom coup that overthrew President Macias). On that day, in the main square of Malabo, the president's motorcade passes flanked by motorcycles and elite Moroccan guards on foot. They run to keep pace carrying walkie-talkies as they go. After the government ministers have passed, delegations of singers, dancers, and musicians from the barrios of Malabo and the villages take their turn. Guitarists, drummers, and women in grass skirts are among them. Perhaps the most outrageous characters in the parade are the "lucifers," dancers in tennis shoes wearing looping horns, colored streamers, pompons, leopard-skin cloth, a pillow stuffed in the pants, and seven rear-view mirrors taped to the nape of the neck. Cuban laborers of African descent from the 19th century imported the costume and the tradition.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Equatorial Guineans of various ethnic groups mark life's passages—birth, puberty, marriage, and death with rites and rituals because these bridge present generations to the ancestors, who may be invoked for assistance, guidance in decision-making, and protection. The Fang communicate with ancestors via

rites performed in secret societies. Elders initiate new members into secret societies to which outsiders may never belong, nor even observe. The Bubi of Bioko offer sacrifices of buffaloes, sheep, goats, chickens, and ducks and sometimes saltwater fish on rites of passage occasions.

The elaborate funeral rites of Bubi show their belief in the hereafter and in reincarnation. Villagers announce a death by drumming on a hollow log. The drums at dawn and at dusk sound while the community observes a moment of silence. Someone reads the most important acts of the defunct. Only the most basic tasks such as digging yams for the daily meal may be performed until the funeral is over. A designated elder of the village chooses women who will wash the corpse and embalm it with a red creme, *Ntola*. All community members except pregnant women and children participate in ceremonies of singing and dancing and accompany the corpse to the grave site. Before taking the corpse from the house to the cemetery, the mourners sacrifice a male goat and pour its blood over the corpse. This is repeated several times on the way to the cemetery. The corpse is then placed in the fetal position in the grave so that it may be born again. Family members leave personal objects with the defunct, which will serve in the hereafter for daily labor. Grave robbery is punished by amputation of hands. After burial, mourners plant a branch of the sacred tree, *Iko*, on the tomb.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Equatorial Guineans love to tell stories and to joke around, but they also show respect for people of a certain status. For example, they reserve the title of “Don” or “Dona” for people of high education, wealth, and class. This might be a government minister, a plantation owner, or an important businessman. Equatorial Guineans are very ebullient people. They readily shake hands and greet each other. The typical morning greeting is the Spanish, *buenos dias*.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions in Equatorial Guinea have fluctuated greatly over the years. Prior to independence in 1968, the country was a showcase for exports of cocoa, coffee, timber foodstuffs, palm oil, and fish. Then President Macias’ corrupt regime systematically impoverished the country through political repression and neglect. By 1990 the country had to import staple foods such as palm oil and fish. About four-fifths of the population reverted to making its living in subsistence agriculture in the jungles and highland forests. Average income by the late 1990s was less than \$300 per year, and life expectancy was only 45 years. Many children died of preventable diseases like measles.

All this began to change in the mid-1990s with the discovery of off-shore oil. In 2008 with a current daily production of some 400,000 barrels a day, Equatorial Guinea boasted the fourth-highest per capita income in the world. Its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was \$44,000, putting it ahead of Switzerland, Canada, and Britain. Life expectancy rose to over 60 years. However, because a few senior government officials own most of the businesses and control most of the country’s wealth, oil dividends do not reach the vast majority of Equatorial Guineans.

About 50% of the population lives in poverty without access to potable water and sanitation. On the main island, small rectangular wood plank or palm thatch houses lack electricity

and indoor plumbing. Simple beds are made out of polished bamboo slats lashed together and mounted on larger bamboo posts. On the mainland, huts are made of cane and mud walls with tin or thatch roofs. In some villages, the cane walls are only chest high so that the men can watch the goings-on of the village. Women and girls wash clothes at streams or wells and usually hang them up or lay them out on a clean section of the yard to dry. Children are expected to help carry water, collect firewood, and run errands for their mothers.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family and the clan are critical institutions in Equatorial Guinean life. It is important that people know their ancestry and family life is geared toward perpetuating the lineage. Marriage in Fang society is exogamous and descentance is patrilinear. Families are polygynous and men may have several wives, mainly for prestige and for economic reasons. Bubi society is primarily endogamous, meaning that people marry within the same lineage. Bubi society also is matriarchal—people trace their lineage by their mother’s line. In ancient times, Bubi were allowed to marry a sibling as long as he or she did not have the same mother. Bubi therefore place great importance on having girls because they perpetuate the family. A family without girls would risk extinction. Thus, Bubi consider girls to be the eyes of the home, *que nobo e chobo*, the paper that perpetuates the family. The boys are thought of as the pillars of the house because they sustain the household.

No reliable statistics exist on the percentage of households headed by women or how many women work in different sectors of the workforce. Nonetheless, women typically do the housework and bear five to six children. Men customarily assume authority in the household because, as one Bubi proverb says, “a chicken never will crow at dawn.”

## 11 CLOTHING

Equatorial Guineans do their best to look sharp in public. For those who can afford them, Western-style suits and dresses are de rigueur for any professional or business activities. Businessmen wear three-piece pinstriped suits with vests and neckties, even in the extremely hot, muggy weather of the island. Women and girls go out neatly dressed, wearing pleated skirts, starched blouses, and polished shoes.

Children in the villages wear shorts, jeans, and T-shirts, though tailored cloth dresses are popular for girls. The women wear bright, colorful loose-fitting sarongs with African patterns. They usually wear head scarves too. Older women may wear a large, simply cut piece of cotton cloth over a blouse and sarong. People with little money often make do with secondhand American T-shirts and other clothing. The wearer is usually oblivious to what a T-shirt says, including sometimes very bawdy messages. Many people go barefoot, or wear flip-flops and plastic sandals.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of Equatorial Guinea is coco yams (*malanga*), plantains, and rice. The island coco yams are among the tastiest in Africa and grow well in Bioko’s rich soils where rainfall is plentiful. People eat little meat other than porcupine and forest antelope, a large rodent-like animal with small antlers. Equatorial Guineans typically supplement their diets with vegetables from their home gardens and with eggs or an occa-

sional chicken or duck on special occasions. Fish are abundant in the coastal waters and provide an important protein source in an otherwise starchy diet. Many people cook on open wood fires, either on the floor of their houses or in the open yard.

### 13 EDUCATION

Formal education at all levels has suffered much under the Nguemas. In the 1970s, many teachers and administrators were liquidated. Many Spanish teachers, most of them priests, left the country in 1978 to return later. Cuban and UNESCO-funded teachers also left the country because of assassinations and ministerial paralysis. In the 1980s, only two public high schools existed, one in Malabo and the other in Bata. In 1987, a UNESCO mission found that of 17 schools visited on Bioko, not one had blackboards, pencils, or textbooks. Children learned by rote hearing and repetition. In 1990 the World Bank estimated that 50% of the population was illiterate. But in 1993, no one could provide statistics on basic indicators such as primary-school enrollment and number of schoolteachers. Fortunately, there has been some windfall from oil revenues, and modest investments in education have improved school infrastructure, teacher capacity, and quality of curricula.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The cultural heritage of Bioko dates to Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. Archaeologists have discovered stone tools such as axes and hoes. At this time, stone mortars and pestles also were in use. People made jewelry from snake vertebrae woven with raffia to make armbands and bracelets. The precolonial period was unproductive in cultural growth because of the severe depopulation of Rio Muni and the islands during the slave trade.

Fang art and magical beliefs are closely linked. The main traditional instrument of the Fang, the Mvett, typifies this relationship. The name "Mvett" also applies to the Fang sagas. The religious-mystic order of the Bebom-Mvett is the caretaker of the "Cycle of Legends of Engong." The "Cycle" is for the Fang nation what the Old Testament is for Christians and Jews. The Mvett instrument is a harp-zither made of three gourds, the stem of a leaf of the raffia plant, and cord of vegetable fibers. Mvett players are highly respected by Equatorial Guineans of Fang background.

### 15 WORK

Bubi society is divided by function: farmers, hunters, fishermen, palm-wine collectors, and, in former times, the royal police of the supreme chief. A supreme priest blessed the yam plantations and protected the sacred fire. Bubis traditionally refused contact with Europeans and refused forced plantation labor in coffee and cocoa.

In rural areas, most Equatorial Guineans still practice subsistence farming. They grow tubers, bush peppers, cola nuts, and fruits. Women do four-fifths of the work. Men clear the land, and women do the rest, including carrying 187-pound baskets of yams on their backs to market. Along with the oil industry has come a variety of new jobs at the ports and in services such as bars, restaurants, and domestic work. However, because oil production is off-shore, the number and types of good-paying jobs are limited, and most of job creation has been in low-paying unskilled work.



*Equatorial Guinean children in the villages wear shorts, jeans, and T-shirts, though tailored cloth dresses are popular for girls.*  
(United Nations)

### 16 SPORTS

Equatorial Guineans are avid soccer players. They also maintain a keen interest in table tennis which they got from Chinese aid workers. The assassination of the minister of youth and sports in 1976 greatly paralyzed organized sports in Equatorial Guinea. At independence, there were some 40 soccer fields in the country, which were rebuilt in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the Spanish. The Spanish also sent professionals to retrain players at a level required for international competition. Equatorial Guinea participated for the first time in the Olympics in 1984 at the Los Angeles games.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like Africans on the continent, Equatorial Guineans enjoy socializing with family and friends and do not need invitations to visit each other. It is common to see them playing cards, checkers, and chess with friends. Almost any occasion will spark dancing and singing. No formal party is needed. Men especially go to pubs to socialize and drink. Various African musical styles from Makossa of Cameroon to Congolese music are popular with youth.



Part of the reason for this vibrant socializing had to do with restrictions on electronic media. Until 1981 the country had only two radio stations, one on the mainland and the other on Bioko that broadcasted propaganda and personality cultism for the Nguemas. Since then, the Chinese built new installations that include broadcasting in Spanish and local languages. The stations also play music from Cameroon and Nigeria. Today, the BBC and Radio France International are available on FM broadcasts from Malabo and are popular.

Television has remained under strict government control for fear that it could become a democracy tool. In 1982 most of the 200 color televisions in the country were owned by Spanish technical assistants. By 1984 the number of televisions had risen to 1,500. In the late 1980s, Malabo had two non-functioning movie theaters used for government events. In 1990, the entire island of Bioko had no functioning cinemas, bookstores, or newsstands. Today, to get information and entertainment that otherwise would be available on TV, Equatoguineans spend hours in dozens of Internet cafés in Bata and Malabo listening to music, reading news and opinions on websites of exiles (which are critical of the government), and generally accessing a window on the outside world.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk art is rich and varies according to ethnic group. On Bioko, the Bubi people are known for their colorful wooden bells. The makers of the bells embellish them with intricate designs, engravings, and shapes. Musicians ring these bells by turn or in combinations during the folkloric dances of the *Kacha*.

In Ebolova, women weave baskets more than two feet high and two feet across to which they attach straps. They use these to haul produce from their fields and garden tools. Equatorial Guineans make many hats and other objects, especially baskets of all kinds, from raffia and palm leaves. Some baskets are so finely woven that they hold liquids such as palm oil.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The oil boom has created new jobs, but along with the influx of wealth has come a number of social problems. Equatorial Guinea is ranked as the tenth-most corrupt country in the world and is a staging point for drug trafficking between South America and Europe and a destination for trafficked children. Trafficked persons come from neighboring Benin, Nigeria, Gabon, and Cameroon, and work as farmhands and household servants. Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation either as domestic servants or in the commercial sex trade. By 2008 the government had taken steps to get children off the streets and to control trafficking, but the lack of hard data made it impossible to determine the extent of the problem.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The status of women is improving gradually. However, in rural areas women still perform most of the household and agricultural work, and excessive drinking by men, wife beating, and female sexual abuse are reported frequently with little will on the part of the police and courts to prosecute the perpetrators. These problems have reached the attention of the president's wife, who led a campaign in 2007 to raise public awareness on spouse abuse. The government also launched a major crackdown against prostitution to curb trafficking.

Progress in education for girls is being made. By 2008 women and girls had a literacy rate of 78% (compared to 93% of males), and girls' enrollment rates were climbing with 81% as many girls as boys enrolled in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Also in 2008 there were 20 women in the 100-member parliament and six women in the cabinet including the Ministers of Labor and Women's Issues.

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—by R. Groelsema

# ERITREANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** eh-rih-TRAY-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ertra

**LOCATION:** Eritrea (Horn of Africa)

**POPULATION:** 4.9 million

**LANGUAGE:** Ethio-Semitic Tigrinya, Tigre, and Amharic (Amharinya); Eastern Cushitic Afar and Saho; Central Cushitic Bilin Agaw; Nilo-Saharan, Kunama, Nara; Beja (Bedawi); Indo-European English and Italian, spoken by some; Arabic, spoken in the coastal cities and by the Rashaida.

**RELIGION:** Sunni Islam, Orthodox Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Tigray; Djiboutians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Modern Eritrea was born in the crucible of a large-scale, devastating, 30-year civil war during which more ammunition was exploded than in all of the North African campaigns of World War II. A number of separate Eritrean guerrilla movements, nearly destroyed from feuding with each other, gradually united. By 1991, they had won a war against combined Ethiopian, Cuban, and Soviet forces. These forces at times numbered 150,000–200,000 troops backed by at least \$5 billion in direct Soviet and inadvertent U. S. military aid.

Eritrea's history intertwines with that of Ethiopia of which it had long been a northern frontier. Italians established a commercial foothold in Mitsiwa (Massawa) and Aseb in 1869, and took control of the ports from the Egyptians during the period 1882–85. Thus, Italy gained its first bases in the strategic Horn of Africa. In 1887 at Dogali, Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes, a Tigrayan, turned back Italian thrusts into the interior of Eritrea from Mitsiwa but the Italian army eventually took control of Eritrea. To facilitate Italy's expansion in the Horn, construction of the Eritrean Railway began at Mitsiwa in 1888 as a military line for the planned enlargement of what became the colony of Eritrea on 1 January 1890.

A little known continental catastrophe of the Italian invasion of Eritrea began in 1889 when the Italian army imported Indian cattle into the colony. The cattle carried the virus for rinderpest (from the German cattle-plague), then unknown in Africa. By 1897 the plague had spread to South Africa, killing about 90% of all African cattle, while decimating populations of buffalo, giraffe, wildebeest, and other wild herbivore game. Mass starvation began for humans across Africa. Without plow oxen, about a third of the Eritreans died.

In March 1896, the Ethiopian's decisively defeated at Adwa the Italian army, pushing it back into Eritrea and forcing Italy to turn its resources to developing this colony. From Eritrea, Italy successfully invaded Ethiopia in 1935–36. In 1941, British forces from Sudan quickly defeated the long-entrenched Italians in Eritrea. Through 1952, a British military administration controlled Eritrea, while the government in London considered whether to annex the western part of Eritrea to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. In 1952 the United Nations voted to make Eritrea a semi-autonomous federated unit of Ethiopia. In 1953, a former Italian communications base just west of Asmara, Eritrea became one of the largest U.S.-intelligence-gathering facilities, monitoring communications from the Eastern

Bloc and Middle East. During the 1950s, then strategic Ethiopia was the largest recipient in Africa of U.S. economic and military aid.

In 1962, Emperor Haile Selassie I, an Amhara, forcibly annexed Eritrea as a province in his Ethiopian empire, thereby kindling rebellion. During this period, U.S.-supplied planes buzzed low over Asmara and the countryside to monitor the terrain and to stifle Eritrean insurgency. By the 1970s, U.S. intelligence turned to satellites to gather global electronic transmissions and no longer required land facilities. Ethiopia thus gradually became less strategic, and U.S. aid to the country declined. Suppression of the Eritrean insurgency became increasingly less acceptable to the Americans. The U.S. began to rebuff Haile Selassie's requests for more arms to counter Communist influences in the Horn and Red Sea regions.

In 1974, Haile Selassie was overthrown by a faction known as the *Derg* (Amharic for committee). A provisional government was formed under Lt. General Aman Andom, an Eritrean who was later executed by the *Derg*. Next, Brigadier General Teferi Benti headed a new government, and the *Derg* proclaimed a socialist state of Ethiopia. In 1975, the rival Eritrean Liberation Front and Eritrean People's Liberation Front ended most of their differences and overran all of Eritrea, except for Asmara, Mitsiwa, and Berentu. In 1976, socialist Ethiopia broke ties with the U.S. and signed a military compact with the USSR. The next year, the *Derg* executed General Teferi and his colleagues and installed Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam as head of state. With Soviet support, in 1977, Cuban and Ethiopian forces repelled a Somali invasion of the Ogaden in southeastern Ethiopia. During 1978–1981, the civil war against the *Derg* raged in Eritrea province and a parallel insurgency grew in Tegré province on the southern border of Eritrea. In both provinces, the insurgent fronts espoused Marxist ideas and were dominated by the Tigrayan ethnic group. It is not often remembered that Marxist ideology fired the Eritrean rebel groups. In 1978, additional Ethiopian forces, now freed from combat in the Ogaden, entered Eritrea and retook most of the countryside.

To secure Eritrea politically and economically, the Communist government of Ethiopia in 1982 mounted large-scale military campaigns against both the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Trained by the Eritreans, the Tigrayans eventually formed the core of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, which eventually defeated Ethiopia's Communist government.

From 1983–84, the all-important rains failed and a drought ensued. With climatic aridity across northeastern Africa, the military policies and Stalinist central planning of Ethiopia's *Derg* created catastrophic famine in 1984–85. Western nations sent massive food aid to the beleaguered Communist government in Ethiopia, thereby aiding some seven million under the threat of starvation. At the same time, with this food, the West helped the *Derg* implement its plan of forced resettlement of peasants out of the north and away from the influence of the liberation fronts.

During 1985, the *Derg's* offensives against the Eritreans and Tigrayans continued. Owing to poor economic planning, the famine persisted in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. The insurgent fronts gradually captured large amounts of Soviet tanks, artillery, other ordnance, and even Soviet advisors.



By 1989, the Ethiopian government's largely conscripted military forces lost battles across Eritrea and Tigre provinces, died by the thousands, and surrendered in droves. Ethiopia, accordingly, began peace negotiations with the Eritreans. During 1991, the peace talks continued in Washington, while the insurgents' hold on Eritrea broadened. With U.S. prodding, on 21 May 1991 President Mengistu Haile Mariam resigned and fled Ethiopia, while the victorious Tigrayans, under Meles Zenawi, encircled the country's capital, Addis Abeba. The Stalinist Marxist government of Ethiopia surrendered on 27 May 1991. The Eritreans now completely controlled Eritrea, under Issaias Afwerki, who received military training in China during 1966. Outside of Asmara, near Kagnaw, a Soviet "elephants' graveyard" grew: many hundreds of T-54 tanks, armored personnel carriers, and army trucks. De facto independence now existed for Eritrea.

Sovereignty became a reality for Eritrea on 27 April 1993, when virtually everyone in this land voted in a UN-certified referendum calling for independence from Ethiopia. On 24 May 1993 the Tigrayans controlling Ethiopia granted independence to the Tigrayans controlling Eritrea. Eritrea became the 52nd independent state in Africa and joined the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) within the same week. Consequently landlocked Ethiopia, then a country of about 54 million, had its two seaports, Aseb and Mitsiwa, inside the sovereign country of Eritrea. At first, Eritrea was a friendly ally but then became a warring enemy and now is a hostile neighbor of Ethiopia. The same can be said of Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea.

During 1998–2000, Eritrea and Ethiopia fought another war with each other having heavy casualties and great loss of treasure for the two impoverished countries. After a truce, the United Nations has peace-keeping forces along the border of the two hostile countries, in a seemingly permanent Temporary Security Zone. In December 2006, Ethiopia invaded Somalia as a U.S. surrogate to suppress the Islamic Courts Union then controlling and stabilizing Somalia and befriended by Eritrea. In 2007 Ethiopia accused Eritrea of aiding militarily the fundamentalist Somalis opposing Ethiopia and the U.S. The Bush administration contemplated labeling Eritrea a rogue state, along with North Korea and Iran. In September 2007 the Eritrean government denied accusations that it aids terrorists in the Horn of Africa. The Eritrean Mufti (Jurist of Islamic Law), Sheik Al Amin Osman, announced in March 2008 that the peaceful relations among Eritrean Christians and Muslims were commendable.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front reorganized into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Habte Selassie Bereket headed a Constitutional Commission providing a constitution in 1997, in time for national elections for a permanent government, but it is a charter still not fully implemented. Eritrea thereby became a presidential republic with a unicameral parliament. Issaias Afwerki became Eritrea's president and head of state. Eritrea is a one-party state governed by the PFDJ. Nongovernmental publishing ceased in September 2001. The government controls TV and radio stations. A private press is forbidden for matters of national security. In 2007 the activist organization Reporters without Borders placed Eritrea last on their world list regarding freedom of the press. Eritrea's legal system is based on the imperial Ethiopian legal code of 1957, with amendments and additions.

Fundamentalist Islamic groups in Sudan, a former ally of the Eritreans, aiding the fundamentalist Eritrean Islamic Jihad, strove to overthrow the secular government of Eritrea, which guarantees the freedom of all religions. Consequently, in 1995, Eritrea announced that it would support opposition groups bent on overthrowing the government of President Omar Hassan al Bashir in Sudan. Eritrea's undemarcated border with Sudan has been a concern of tension between the two countries but the tension now subsides.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Eritrea (official name, Ertra) is named for the Red Sea (Latin, *Mare Erythraeum*). About the size of Pennsylvania, some 117,600 sq km (45,400 sq mi), Eritrea had a population, in 2007, of about 4.9 million people. Nine ethnic groups make up Eritrea. Almost a million Eritreans are scattered across the globe, because they fled the ravishes of civil war. The highland capital of Asmara (pop. about 400,000) is a pleasant, Italianate city, with broad, palm-lined boulevards as well as narrower, packed streets, and sunny, mild weather year-round. Using the Ethiopian calendar, the city boasts thirteen months of springtime.

Just north of the strait of Bab el-Mandeb, Eritrea's Red Sea coast stretches 1,014 km (630 mi), from Ras Kasar to Ras Dumeira. Besides the sea, Sudan, Djibouti, and Ethiopia bound Eritrea. The country comprises savanna, rugged highlands, and semidesert and desert plains. Scattered acacias and junipers dot the savanna, and almost all original forest cover long has been cleared, after some 3,000 years of plow agriculture. From east to west, topographically, Eritrea consists of a low

coastal desert plain, some 16 to 89 km (10 to 55 mi) wide and including the Kobar Depression, descending to 116 m (380 ft) below sea level. A steep ascent of the northeastern escarpment of the Abyssinian Plateau reaches a level of almost 2,440 m (8,000 ft); descends gradually through Asmara, at 2,345 m (7,694 ft); slopes to Keren, at 1,390 m (4,560 ft); declines to Akordat, at 621 m (2,038 ft); and ends, as a steppe plain, on the Sudan border, at about 430 m (1,400 ft). Aridity increases the further west one travels from Asmara, which has 53 cm (21 in) of rain per year and an annual average temperature of 16.7°C (62°F).

### 3 LANGUAGE

Eritrea contains at least nine indigenous ethnic-linguistic groups. Native Eritrean languages include Ethio-Semitic—of the South Semitic branch of the Semitic family—Tigrinya and Tigre; Beja (Bedawi); Eastern Cushitic Afar and Saho; Central Cushitic Bilin Agaw; and Chari-Nile—of the Nilo-Saharan superfamily—Kunama and Nara. The related Eritrean languages, Tigrinya, and Tigre, the last of which is the language of no single ethnic group, are often confused. Perhaps 200,000 people largely in semi-pastoral groups, in the lower plains and on islands off the coast north of the Tigrayans, speak Tigre. Tigre-speakers include the eastern Beni Amirs; the western Beni Amirs speak Beja. Ethio-Semitic Amharic (Amharinya); Central Semitic modern Arabic; and Indo-European English and Italian are also spoken by some Eritreans. Arabic, a local language, is spoken in the coastal cities, along the Sudan border, and by the Rashaida pastoralists; English is the language of instruction in the secondary schools and higher education; and Italian is known by some in Asmara and other cities. The Semitic, Cushitic, and Omotic language families found in the Horn of Africa all belong to the Afro-Asiatic superfamily, including also Chadic, Berber, and ancient Egyptian families.

### 4 FOLKLORE

There is no folklore common to all nine ethnic groups of Eritrea. Religious folklore—Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and various pagan faiths—is shared among the respective adherents of each faith and is part of the cosmology of each of the nine cultures. (For cosmology, see sections 5 and 20 and section 20 of Djiboutians.)

### 5 RELIGION

Eritreans are, roughly, half Christians and half Sunni Muslims. Some Protestantism is found and Roman Catholicism exists, centering on Our Lady of the Rosary Cathedral in downtown Asmara. Enda Mariam is the principal Orthodox house of worship in Asmara, and the impressive Jamie el-Khulafa'e el-Rashidin Mosque is near the city hall. Roman Catholicism was introduced with Italian colonialism. Tigrayans who are Muslim have the designation Jebarti, thus setting them apart from Christians.

The native Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is often mistakenly labeled as Coptic; however, it has the Alexandrian rite under the aegis of the Patriarch of Alexandria. Adherents of this Ethiopian Christianity consider themselves the legitimate heirs of the Israelites of the Old Testament. According to the traditional *Kebra Nagast*, written in the ancient Ethio-Semitic liturgical language, Ge'ez, the God of Israel transferred His abode on earth from Jerusalem to Aksum, Ethiopia. Indeed,

the religion of the Ethiopian Christianity is *be-orit* (by the Old Testament), and the central room of every church, the holy of holies, contains not an altar with the host, but a replica of the Ark of the Covenant (*tabot*). According to local beliefs, the original ark and the remnants of the true cross are hidden under separate mountains in Eritrea-Ethiopia, considered the holiest of lands. Another belief has the Ark secluded in a church of Aksum, Ethiopia.

Orthodox Christian priests both sing and dance in their ceremonies. Services are in Ge'ez, ancestral to Tigrinya, Tigre, and Amharic. The monarchs, of which Haile Selassie (whose name means "Power of the Holy Trinity" in Amharic) was the last, purportedly descend from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Ethiopian Orthodox believers are monophy-site Christians, that is, they do not subscribe to the creed that Christ has two natures, human and divine. Rather, they believe that Christ has only a unified nature.

Religion is more than a body of rituals and creeds. For most of the world's peoples it is the core of their particular cosmology. Religious cosmology is a worldview providing the unifying, overarching ethos of a society and its culture, for example, of Tigrayans, Kunama, Afar, Beja, Bilin, etc. Such cosmology is grounded in supernaturalism and human social relations with a spirit realm. It has values and practices fostered by supernaturalistic interpretations of the world, as it is concomitantly conceived. The ever-changing religious cosmology of each Eritrean society is a body of socially learned belief collectively carried by the members of that people. It is handed down from generation to generation. The cosmology of a society provides satisfying answers to the underlying "how's," "why's," "where's" questions of life. It is a people's conceptualization about how their universe functions; why it functions in particular ways; and where their conceived universe is situated in space and time. A religious cosmology, then, answers humankind's age-old questions of existence. (See **Gender Issues** below and **Djibouti Gender Issues** for further discussion of cosmology in the Horn of Africa.)

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The religious holidays of Eritrea are those of Islam and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Ethiopian Orthodox holidays, *Fasika* and *Timkat*, and the Muslim holidays are geared to a lunar rather than solar calendar; thus, their dates vary. Major Muslim holidays include Eid el-Fitr in the spring, Eid el-Fahta in the summer, and Eid el-Nabi (the Prophet's birthday) in the summer.

Religious days of the Orthodox Church accord with the Ethiopian Calendar, which differs from the Gregorian one commonly used in Western countries (and now Eritrea's standard calendar as well). Thus, for example, Christmas falls on 7 January. Easter (*Fasika*), Epiphany (*Timkat*), and *Meskel* (Finding of the True Cross on 27 September), are the major Christian holidays. Christian congregations also have their own localized holidays, for a particular saint or angel.

Secular Eritrean holidays exist as well. These include New Year's Day on January 1, Women's Day on March 8, Labor Day on May 1, Independence Day on May 24, Martyrs' Day on June 20, Beginning of Armed Resistance Day on September 1, and (Western) Christmas on December 25.

Officially, nowadays, a 24-hour clock exists; Eritrean Time is GMT plus 3 hours. Traditional folk in the country and many

townspeople, however, keep the ancient mode of time reckoning, with a cosmology reflecting nature. They determine approximate time from the position of the sun during daytime. Here the first hour of the day begins at dawn and the twelfth hour ends at dusk. A second 12-hour demi-cycle follows, until dawn.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Eritreans mark major life events within the religious traditions of either Christianity or Islam. Major Christian rituals include baptism, weddings, funerals, and second funerals forty days after death. As among most of the peoples of the Horn, adult status for the various Eritrean ethnic groups requires a genital operation, with or without ceremony, usually in childhood. Boys are circumcised and girls undergo clitoridectomy, a practice controlling their sexuality. The vast majority of women of Eritrea have undergone this ritual. (For more on clitoridectomy, see Djiboutians section 20.)

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

There are no common greetings shared by all nine Eritrean ethnic groups. However, it is not uncommon for people to hold hands while talking, and to kiss twice on each cheek when greeting. Respect for one's elders is paramount in all behavior.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Eritrea is one of the world's poorest countries. During 1993 per capita per year income was estimated at between \$70 and \$150, compared to \$330 for most of sub-Saharan Africa. For 2007 this income was questionably estimated at about \$1,000. During the devastating civil war perhaps 200,000 Eritreans were killed; facilities for wage employment—factories, mines, and plantations—were destroyed; and roads, railroads, and port structures were torn apart. At the end of the war, 80% of Eritreans were dependent on foreign food aid. Thus jobs for the multitudes of displaced persons are necessary, but the required development capital is almost nonexistent. Until 1995 the former guerrilla fighters working for the new government collected only a basic living allowance rather than a salary. Additionally, with tens of thousands of returning refugees and the war's desolation, an acute housing shortage exists.

The average life expectancy of Eritreans at birth is 60 years. In 2007 the infant mortality rate was estimated at 45 deaths for every 1,000 live births. In 2003, the incidence of adult HIV infection was an estimated 2.7%

A highway network connects all the cities of Eritrea with Ethiopia and Sudan. The 95-cm-gauge Eritrean Railway, destroyed during the civil war, is reconstructed from Mitsiwa (Massawa) to Asmara, but not yet from Asmara to Akordat. Asmara and Aseb provide air service to the outside world. Both Mitsiwa and Aseb have recently improved deep-water ports with cargo-hoisting capabilities and covered storage but which Ethiopia no longer uses. A rebuilt highway from Mitsiwa to Asmara and a new coastal one from Mitsiwa to Aseb enhance foreign trade.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Arranged marriages are the rule in Eritrea. Among the Tigray, the contracts governing arranged marriages included provisions for divorce, and it is not unusual for both men and wom-

en to marry more than once. Women in Eritrea have formed the National Union of Eritrean Women, which has some 200,000 members.

## 11 CLOTHING

Eritreans in urban areas wear Western-style clothing. A common traditional costume of men and women in both Eritrea and Ethiopia is the *shamma*, which consists of a large piece of cotton cloth wrapped around the body to form a dress-like garment, with a smaller piece of the same fabric used for headgear, either a scarf or hood. The cloth has a brightly colored, decorated border, sometimes including silk in the weave, which is arranged at the hemline. Plastic sandals are the most common footwear among Eritreans. In some areas of Eritrea, men and women wrap a piece of cloth around their waists and knot it to form a skirt-like garment; this may be worn with or without a shirt or other top. In the torrid Danakil region of the Afar, women are nude from the waist up. A typical hairstyle among Eritrean women is the *shiburba*, in which the hair is worn braided across the top and sides of the head and loose at the back. Many Christian Eritreans have crosses tattooed on their foreheads. In rural areas, some married women wear gold bands in their noses.

## 12 FOOD

Among the main dietary staples in Eritrea is a flatbread made from a native cereal grain (called *teff* in Amharic and Tigrinya) and eaten with a spicy pepper-laden stew. Other grain staples include barley and wheat. There are many varieties of barley and wheat cultivated, with different ethnic groups growing different types. Tigrayan varieties of wheat include *desaleny* and *ayiquertem*, and of barley, *saida* and *saisa*. Sorghum and coffee are both common ancient crops; safflower, a native oil seed, and an ancient form of flax are both cultivated for oil and food. Chick peas (known as *shimbra* to Tigrayans) are an important food staple. Goats, sheep, cattle, and even camel meats are relished, depending on the ethnic group. Coffee is drunk, with a pinch of salt, often in elaborate ceremonies of coffee preparation for honored guests. During the course of a fragrant half-hour, red coffee berries could be plucked from the tree and roasted on a griddle. The blackened beans are then ground in a mortar, and the grounds are boiled in a pot. Finally, the black liquid is poured into cups and enjoyed as a social occasion.

## 13 EDUCATION

The estimated literacy rate in 2003 for Eritreans was about 59%. Islamic Koranic and church schools traditionally have instructed a few males in literacy. Those becoming Islamic or Christian clergymen received advanced education in religious schools. Some of the monastery sites of higher education date to the beginnings of Christianity. Since 1941, secular government schools were developed somewhat and then curtailed by the civil war. By 1964, as the civil war began its intensity, about 200 elementary and 9 secondary schools had some 44,000 pupils. In 1973 Eritrea possessed 17 secondary schools. As of 1994, about 42% of children were enrolled in elementary school. There were 37 pupils for every teacher and 68 for every textbook. In the early 21st century, over 800 schools provide instruction, with a university and a technical institute providing post-secondary education.



*A common traditional costume of men and women in both Eritrea and Ethiopia is the shamma, which consists of a large piece of cotton cloth wrapped around the body to form a dress-like garment, with a smaller piece of the same fabric used for head-gear, either a scarf or hood. (Cory Langley)*

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Tigrayans have a 3,000-year-old literary tradition, and have practiced iron metallurgy for over 2,500 years. Traditional musical instruments of the Eritreans include pipes, harmonicas, and the *kirir*, which resembles a guitar. The Tigre people have a sacred artistic tradition within Christianity that includes music (directed by monastically trained men) as well as Biblical illumination, scroll making, and icon painting.

#### **15 WORK**

About 85% of all work resides in the traditional agricultural sector, comprising cultivation of crops and husbandry of livestock. The average Eritrean remains a ruralist, unaccustomed to the demands of working in the modern cash economy. A few large-scale commercial farming enterprises exist, producing cattle, cotton, sisal, tomatoes for canning, and garden vegetables. Modern industries providing wage employment include textiles, tanning, leather and plastic shoes, fishing, and salt production. In addition, small enterprises abound, such as oil-seed pressing, flour milling, soap making, plastic container fabricating, and tire retreading. Eritrea smelts steel from the many Soviet military vehicles littering the countryside, thus beating swords into plowshares.

The rebuilding of the Eritrean Railway is developing groups of skilled craftspeople—machinists, boilermakers, black-

smiths, pipe fitters, sheet-metal workers, welders, electricians, timber sawyers, stone masons, and carpenters. These skilled workers comprise a body of instructors for training the unskilled, unemployed segment of the workforce. Additionally, the schedule and safety demands of railroading help workers develop discipline and work habits they need to be successful in industrial settings.

#### **16 SPORTS**

The majority of Eritreans are traditional rural cultivators and pastoralists with little opportunity for sports. Among those who enjoy sports, soccer is the most popular. During the war for independence, rebel fighters would gather to watch matches. A traditional game among the Afar is *kwosso*, in which the goal is to keep a ball made of rolled goatskins (resembling a soccer ball) away from the opposing team. Eritrean athletes compete in international track and field events and become national heroes. Bicycle racing is a popular spectator sport centering on the killing Tour of Eritrea, from the coastal desert up the steep escarpment almost 2,440 m (8,000 ft) to the summit and, then, downgrade to Asmara.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Urban dwellers, especially teens, enjoy dancing at clubs. Today the main boulevard of the capital city, Asmara, is lined with



*The Tigrayan people weave coarse grasses into baskets. (Cory Langley)*

open-air cafes, bars, and patisseries. Television is available in Eritrea, with broadcasting in Tigrinya and Arabic. There are also radio broadcasts, as well as government controlled newspapers. These print media are mainly enjoyed by the educated elite, however. The majority of Eritreans do not participate in recreational activities in the Western sense.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Among the typical Tigrayans, little exists in the way of arts and crafts, except for weaving coarse grass mats. Church art and written music among priests and monks are exceptions. The concept of a hobby is unknown and not applicable to these people.

The Tigrayans practice *Qene*, an intellectually challenging spoken duel using especially composed poetry verses. At wedding and other occasions, Tigrayan men perform a dance that includes jumping rhythmically up and down while singing. Songs may be traditional, or newer, such as “Addis Abeba” (“New Flower”), after the capital of Ethiopia founded in the 1880s.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

To minimize ethnic divisiveness, the Organization of African Unity resisted all separatist movements on the continent until the 1990s. The separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia marks the first redrawing of borders in Africa, a continent with over 1,300 ethnic groups, some of which at times are fratricidal. The leadership of Eritrea faces the challenge of marshalling the

country’s diverse peoples to build an economically viable and politically secure state, with almost no financial and material resources.

In the wake of its devastating civil war and the war of 1998–2000, Eritrea faces the challenges of continuing to repair its damaged infrastructure, finding employment for the former rebel fighters, and providing services for the many thousands of people disabled in the fighting. Other social problems include a low per capita income, lack of medical facilities, a housing shortage, and a large part of the population in the armed forces.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Cosmology is a view of the ordering of the world, a blueprint of the way things are. With their religious cosmologies, humans reduce the seeming chaos in the experiential world to a purported, often logically circular, meaningfulness. Cosmology allows an apparent certainty for action and thought and an apparent guide for rational behavior, including gender relations. Throughout the Horn of Africa, socialization into the male and female genders is reinforced in the core aspects of a cosmology such as its values, norms, statuses and roles, and etiquette. Gender is the socially learned cultural overlay a society places on biological sex, either of the two categories in which humans are divided regarding reproductive functions. In other words, gender means what it is to be male or female and just how “male” or “female” one should be.

For Eritreans of various ethnic groups, the creator god of each people is a male. For the Christian Tigrayans and Muslims, he is the God of Abraham (named, respectively, Egziabher [Lord of the Sky] and Allah [the God]); for the Afar, he is Wak; and for the Kunama, he is Anna.) In each religious cosmology, he intends males to dominate women, deemed to be the lesser of the two sexes. Women were created by god for the purposes of obeying and serving their husbands, including by rendering domestic services and bearing and nurturing children for them. Males have a monopoly on controlling religious knowledge. Men alone become religious practitioners who interpret the cosmology providing the matrix of a culture.

In Islamic societies the low status of women stems largely from pre-Islamic patriarchal (control by males) traditions rather than directly from the more recent Quran. However, in Islam and Eritrea’s pre-Islamic religions, blood from menses is believed ritually polluted. Whatever the root source, in Islam women’s rights are constricted. Accordingly, in these cosmologies, women are viewed as potential ritual polluters of humans and nature. Such views help rationalize the holding of religious and political power exclusively by men.

Religious cosmology contains myth, or an explanatory “history” of supernatural and human beings who were or are important actors in a particular cosmic concept of the universe. Myths are sacred tales, passed from generation to generation, with dogmatic rather than verifiable content. Myth not only explains cosmological states and processes, it justifies the orders of things in the world. For example, Eve is the originator of sin; therefore, women are punished in childbirth by labor pains. In some accounts Eve (woman) is a mere derivative of Adam (man). Especially in its mythic aspect, cosmology supports and either realistically or symbolically exemplifies the core values and norms in a culture. In turn, cosmology and its

related values are reflected in and reinforced by ritual, for example, a father giving a bride to the groom.

As they relate to values and norms, most cosmologies contain moralisms, or ideals of conformities with generally accepted standards of goodness in character and behavior. Myths often reinforce charters or explanatory rationales for the reason why things are the way they are. In this way the institutions and social order of a society are vindicated. Given the existence of a particular background cosmology for a society, a monocultural person rarely looks beyond the “proofs” engendered by the elements of this worldview, including for gender. Socialized to a particular cosmology, a person consciously and unconsciously selects, rejects, and fits information to fashion a satisfying consistency regarding his or her world vision. Accordingly, males and females in patriarchal and other societies, such as those in Eritrea, do not believe but, instead, know the social and ritual superiority of men over women. (For some thought-provoking gender issues, see Djibouti, section 20.)

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—by F. C. Gamst



# ETHIOPIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ee-thee-OH-pee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Abyssinians

**LOCATION:** Ethiopia

**POPULATION:** 52 million

**LANGUAGE:** Amharic; English; French; Italian; Arabic; various tribal dialects

**RELIGION:** Coptic Monophysite Christianity; Islam; indigenous religions

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Afar; Amhara; Fulani; Oromos; Tigray

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Evidence of Ethiopia's past reaches back to the dawn of human existence. The 1974 discoveries of paleoanthropologist Dr. Donald Johanson and his team first revealed an ancient female ancestor of humanity that he named Lucy. She was found in the northeast quadrant of Ethiopia in the Awash river valley at a site called Hadar. She was dated at about 3.5 million years old and was a member of a prehuman species called *Australopithecus*. The casts of her bones now reside in the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Her actual bones are locked in a large vault in the National Museum in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. Subsequently, many other bones were found of the same age and were called Lucy's family. In 1992–94, paleoanthropologist Dr. Tim White and his team found even older bones, discovered 45 miles southwest of Hadar, which now has brought our ancestry back to possibly 4.5 million years ago. More recently, paleoanthropologist Dr. Yohannis Haile Sellassie and his team, also working in the Afar region discovered remains that reach back more than 5 million years to the chimpanzee-hominid species boundary. These exciting discoveries teach us much about not only how old our prehuman ancestors are, but also that we all emerged from a common ancestral family. Ethiopia is the homeland of us all.

For millennia primitive peoples hunted and gathered their subsistence in the resourceful valleys and highlands of what we now know as Ethiopia. The word "Etyopya" is from the ancient Greek meaning "The land of people with burnt faces." It was an area of continuous population movement. Peoples from the Saudi Arabian mainland crossed the narrow straits of the Bab el Mandeb at the southeastern extremity of the Red Sea bringing their culture and technology with them and settled into the northern reaches of Ethiopia. Peoples of the Sudan to the west and the peoples of the desert to the east were also in a state of migration and many found Ethiopia to be hospitable and they settled among and mixed with populations who originally came from other lands. A major factor encouraging these movements and settlement was trade. Food items and spices, salt bars used as currency, gold and precious stones, domestic animals and wild animal skins, and slaves; material goods found in one area and not in other areas became sought after and stimulated the migrations of traders and their families and the growth of market towns. This activity has persisted for 2,000 years and continues into the present.

Peoples of the vast rolling highland plateau, commonly known as Abyssinia, found rich volcanic soils to grow their crops in an abundance that permitted large aggregates of peo-

ple to live together. With such large groups of people complex political organizations formed. Centralized kingships became a dominant type of institution, which to the observer, looked something like the feudal systems of the European middle ages. Until the 19th century these autonomous fiefdoms were dominant in the highlands. Then in the mid-19th century, Emperor Menelik consolidated these fiefdoms and many other tribal groups into one empire. This consolidated empire was a continuation of a long line of Abyssinian emperors that lasted until 1974, when Emperor Haile Sellassie I was overthrown in a bloody revolution that persisted until 1991, when two major northern peoples swept down and took power and formed what the new government calls a "democratic" revolution.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Ethiopia is situated on the eastern "horn" of the African continent. It is bound by the Red Sea to the northeast, Sudan to the west, Kenya to the south, and Somalia to the east. A great cleavage in the African continental plate runs south from the Red Sea all the way into the Indian Ocean. This major geological formation is known as the Great Rift Valley. In Ethiopia, the Great Rift Escarpment forms what is considered to be one of the more spectacular regions on earth—at 14,000 ft one can look straight down into an abyss of fog and clouds and hear the eagles, hawks, antelope, ibex, monkeys, and hyenas calling in the distance below. Looking out onto the valley's lowlands, when the afternoon winds have blown the fog and clouds away and before the rains come in the late afternoon, one can see the desert lowlands with vast, steep-walled mountains rising from the valley floor some 3,000–6,000 ft. These are called *amba* and are the remains of extinct volcanoes that accumulated gradually over a period of thousands of years.

To the south in the Great Rift Valley, one finds steaming thermal lakes where underground water broke free with quaking earth and came to the surface, creating a series of lakes extending down through sub-Saharan east Africa. The lush forests of southern Ethiopia, its rich alluvial river and lake soils, and the plentitude of fish and land animals and birds, provided ample food resources for numerous tribal peoples who still inhabit this region and sustain cultural traditions that reach back 10,000 years. Today, within the national boundaries of Ethiopia some 52 million people reside, comprising more than 80 separate cultures and languages.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Since it was the Amhara people who dominated vast regions of Ethiopia for some 2,000 years and maintained a line of kings governing Abyssinia, their language, Amharic, has become the dominant language of the country. It is a Semitic language, having similarities to both Arabic and Hebrew. Because of the significant influence of Great Britain from the 19th century onward, and because of the presence and influence of America in the 20th century, English has become the second dominant language of this country. Generally, both Amharic and English are the languages of business, medicine, and the academic disciplines. But language and culture in Ethiopia are very complex because of the many other linguistic and cultural influences. One finds a family of northern languages in Eritrea. The Cushitic family of languages are spoken by a majority population of Oromo peoples in the central regions of Ethiopia. The desert-dwelling peoples of the southeast speak dialects of

Somali. In the south and southwest we find the Omotic family of languages spoken by numerous smaller tribal groups. Many of these languages, especially those spoken by the minority tribal groups, have no written traditions, and the cultures of these peoples are carried on by oral traditions. They are called nonliterate cultures, but there is no devaluing of these peoples because they exist without writing. One language of Ethiopia is not spoken by any cultural population at all. It is called Geez, an ancient Ethiopic language used in Coptic Christian religious contexts by the clergy. Scriptures are written in Geez, and prayers, chants, and songs are uttered in Geez within the Ethiopian Christian Church. Geez functions something like Latin in the Catholic religion.

Languages from the West are also well recognized: French because of French enterprises in the early part of the 20th century, building a railroad and establishing schools, and Italian because of the Italian occupation during World War II. Today most automobile and refrigerator parts have Italian names. Arabic is a dominant language of business among people dealing in commerce with Arabia and the Middle East.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Every culture has its own body of folklore, myths, legends, song, poetry, stories, and parables, all revealing the identity of the culture and the common sense of morality and tradition among the people of that culture. It would take an encyclopedia of folklore to illustrate the examples from the many cultures of Ethiopia. Here, one myth, the Abyssinian story of Solomon and Sheba, may serve as an example of the usefulness and significance of myth and folklore in one particular culture.

Meqdes, Queen of the land of Sheba (in Amharic she is also known as Saba), knew of King Solomon's great wisdom and wished to visit him in the land of Israel. So she summoned a businessman, a trader who traveled far and wide and knew the paths to Israel. She gave him delicate perfumes and scents from a variety of barks and flowers and sent him to offer these to King Solomon, who accepted them with curiosity and anticipation, wondering about this new queen from the land of Ethiopia. The trader returned with the good news that King Solomon would be interested in meeting her. She gathered her retinue of handmaidens, cooks, body guards, and slaves and set off to the land of Israel by boat up the Nile and by camel across the great deserts.

King Solomon personally greeted Saba at his gate and they introduced themselves. Solomon invited Saba and her retinue to a great feast. Then the King invited Saba to sleep with him. The Queen refused politely but with resolution. That night, King Solomon took Saba's maidservant to bed with him and they sleep together. The next evening King Solomon and Saba dined together. The King had instructed his cooks to make the food very spicy and salty. Then that night, the King invited Saba to sleep with him, promising not to touch her so long as she does not take anything belonging to the King—if she did, he could have her. Saba agreed to this and went to bed with King Solomon. That night Saba awoke with a great thirst and drank some of Solomon's water. He caught her and reminded her of their agreement. They slept together and he impregnated her with new life.

The Queen of Sheba returns to her land and in time bears a child, whom she names Menelik. As Menelik grows through



childhood, Saba, also known as Meqdes, teaches him about his father, King Solomon, and he draws a picture of his father to keep near as a remembrance. As a young man, Menelik travels back to the land of Israel to meet and know his father. Menelik, who will succeed his mother to the throne of Sheba in the land of Abyssinia, remembers the great ark and the tablets that were handed down by God to Moses on Sinai. He arranges with his retinue to have the Ark of the Covenant taken from its place and brought back to the land of Sheba without the knowledge or consent of the Israelites. Back in his native land, Menelik installs the Great Ark in the Church of St. Mary at Axum, thereby sanctifying the land of Sheba and legitimating the origin and royal line of the Solomonic dynasty.

This myth exists to this day. It is a very important myth because it gives the Abyssinian peoples a sense of historical identity. It also legitimated or justified the emperor's right to rule by linking the Abyssinian people with God, Moses, and the Holy Ark of the Covenant—the critical link being Menelik, sired by King Solomon, who was of the royal line of kings sanctioned and blessed by God. And, if you read closely, you can get a bit of the flavor of Abyssinian culture: the sending of sentient gifts to beg an invitation, Solomon's craftiness at having conjugal relations with Meqdes, the Queen of Sheba, and Menelik's absconding with the Ark from Israel and installing it at Axum, thereby transferring that great power to his own land. And, as with any culture one studies, folklore is an expression of a people about themselves and how they see and feel about the world in which they live.

## 5 RELIGION

Religious belief and ritual vary with each culture existing within the boundaries of Ethiopia. With over 80 languages spoken, one can find over 80 cultures and over 80 religions. Yet one finds commonalities and overlaps in religious belief and ritual. In general, there are three major religions practiced by Ethiopian populations: Coptic Monophysite Christianity, Islam, and indigenous (or what some people used to call pagan) religion. Ethiopian Coptic Christianity was adopted by the Abyssinian peoples (north central highland populations) in the 4th century. This religion has not changed very much in the almost 2,000 years it has been practiced by Ethiopians of the highlands. This form of Christianity still contains many of the Hebraic and pagan elements that one would expect to find during the time when Christ's disciples were preaching to the villagers of Galilee. If you traveled into the highland countryside today and mingled with the peasantry and came to know their way of life, you would feel as though you were walking into the times of the Old Testament. Ethiopian Christianity is a museum of early Christian life, and for that reason is a very important area of study.

Whereas Ethiopian Christianity is practiced by a minority of the total Ethiopian population, Islam is practiced by the great majority of the Ethiopian population. It must be stressed that each culture practices their religion in their own way and makes many distinctive interpretations that other cultures do not share. So one finds many different cultures of Ethiopia practicing Islam, each interpreting the Koran a bit differently, and each with a slightly different nuance of practice from the other. One notable ritual practice is the chewing of *qat*, or *tchat*. This is a plant that grows in proliferation and is a multi-million dollar industry in Ethiopia with exports to several Middle Eastern countries. The leaves are most often bitter to the taste and provide a mild stimulant that can keep one awake through the night. Often these people will work very hard at their jobs of trading or farming through the morning, and then at noon they will cease their work and chew for the rest of the day, socializing, praying, and attending to nonessential business.

The third major category of Ethiopian religion is indigenous religion. This is a generic term for the ancient religions practiced often by tribal peoples who live by 10,000 year old traditions. Sometimes one finds the overlay of a Protestant religion taught by missionaries living amongst a particular people, or a thin appearance of Islam which came as an outside influence. But, these ancient religions have served the people well, adapting them to the world and allowing them to survive with vitality and spirit to this day.

One cannot leave issues of religion without mention of the Falasha, or Bete Yisroel, the Hebraic people of Ethiopia who practice an ancient, pre-Talmudic form of Judaism. From the 11th through the 13th centuries these people formed a powerful political entity in the very high reaches of the Semien Mountains and for a period of time controlled the Abyssinian population. Because they were vanquished by the Abyssinians at the end of the 13th century, they became landless and made their living working in metal, clay, cloth, and tanning hides. They existed as a despised caste group that other peoples were, nevertheless, dependent upon because of their fine crafting skills. Because of the upheavals of famine and civil war—at one point they were caught in the crossfire of that war—and

because of high-level political manipulations, two massive Israeli airlifts brought the majority of these people to Israel, their promised land.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Although the majority of holidays are of a religious nature—and they are numerous—there are some secular holidays recognized by all Ethiopians alike. The Ethiopian New Year is celebrated in September because they use the Julian calendar, which contains 12 months of 30 days, plus a 6-day “month” which ends their year. New Year's Day is a time of celebration, during which the people slaughter chickens, goats, and sheep, and sometimes a steer. They welcome the New Year with singing and dancing. The other major holiday today can be translated as “Freedom Day” or “Independence Day,” and celebrates the northern fighters sweeping down into Addis Ababa and ousting the former dictatorship after a 30-year civil war. During both holidays there are parades, feasts, and dancing to the traditional Ethiopian music.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth is not a very significant time for rites of passage in Ethiopia, because the family is anxious about the survival of the newborn and does not know whether their god will take the infant or let it gain strength through childhood. Infant mortality may vary between 20% and 40% depending on the particular people and where they live. For the Christian and Islamic groups, genital cutting marks a rite of passage into the religious world and provides cultural identity for the boys and girls involved. For the boys it is a simple circumcision ceremony. For the girls, depending on the cultural group, her operation may vary from an excision of the labia minor or clitoral hood, to a more radical clitoridectomy. For many groups in Ethiopia, marriage is a significant event in which the couple assumes the full responsibilities which include work roles and the rearing of children who will carry on the family name and maintain the family estate.

Among the highland Ethiopians, the virginity of a bride is considered extremely important, and her virginal blood must be in evidence upon the marital bed sheets before this first marriage is legitimated. The funeral ritual is the other major rite of passage in which the community grieves and celebrates the passing of the spiritual body into the realm of God.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Throughout Ethiopia one finds both formal and informal ways of relating to others. The formal method of communication and relation lubricates the busy comings and goings and business of everyday living, prevents potential conflicts from coming to the surface, and provides a threshold through which people may enter into more informal conversation if they wish. Among the Amharic speakers in Ethiopia (most people speak Amharic even if it isn't their mother tongue, because it is the national language), when greeting an acquaintance, one will say *tenayistilign* (“may God give you health for me”), and the other will answer in kind. Then the first speaker will say *dehna neh?* (“you are fine?”) if he or she is speaking to someone familiar. The other will answer, *awon, dehna negn* (“Yes I am fine”). They will question each other about their wives, children, and other close relatives. This can be repeated over and over again several times before they lapse into conversation.

Then, if they are close and wish more of each others' company, there will be an invitation to one's home. It is an honor to be invited because it means you will feast with them and drink beer and liquor, spending hours in warm conversation telling all the news one can remember. Normally, if one is invited to another's home, one should bring a gift. The traditional visiting gifts in Ethiopia include coffee or sugar, a bottle of liquor or honey wine, or fruit or eggs. The giving of food and drink is practically a sacred act.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Many Americans and Europeans have learned of the drought and famine in Ethiopia which has left parts of that country devastated. However, this is just one part of Ethiopia—the north central region—that has been affected, aggravated by a civil war that persisted until 1991. There are really four major ecological zones that determine particular living conditions for Ethiopians. To the east are the desert nomads, whom *National Geographic* considers to be one of the toughest and most ferocious peoples on earth. They live with their camel and cattle herds in one of the most hostile places on earth, the Afar Desert and Danakil Depression, where temperatures can climb to 140°F. Salt bars are still mined here and sold as currency. In contrast, the great highland plateau rises from 9,000 to 14,000 ft, with fertile soils allowing rich harvests for large populations of Abyssinians living in a fairly complex political system.

Work roles are distinctive among men and women. Women start the day at dawn, get the water, make the coffee, prepare the grains for the day's meals, and care for the children. Men get up a bit later and, depending on the season, will till the soil with plowshare and oxen, allow the animals to fertilize it with dung, harvest the grain crops, and defend the homestead in times of strife. Men usually have much more leisure time than the women. But through the day there is always time for coffee parties and much gossip and lively conversation. Adults and children tell stories by the hearth fires at night and retire between 10:00 pm and midnight. To the south, one finds tribal peoples living in a horticultural ecology, cultivating food-giving plants around the homestead, and whose daily rounds are not too different from the peasant farmers in the highland. The fourth way of life is the urban life, mostly in small towns. Even Addis Ababa, the capital city, is more a conglomeration of villages or neighborhoods with straight-sided, mud-walled houses topped by corrugated iron roofs. The city is teeming with automobiles and large Italian trucks. The presence of preformed concrete buildings marks the establishment of government and big business and a few palaces mark the royalty of an earlier era.

Health is the major problem in the cities, where many diseases flourish in a dense population with very little access to modern medicine because of the poverty and shortage of cash to purchase antibiotics. By World Bank standards, Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, yet one finds traces of a growing middle class. What is striking to the observer is the contrast between the majority of very poor, many living on the street under plastic, and a noticeable chosen few living sumptuous lives in palatial homes with satellite dishes on their roof tops.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Among the Christian population monogamy is the rule, allowing one spouse. Among the Muslim population a man may have up to four wives if he can afford them, but normally one finds men with one wife. Ethiopians love to have large families because children are considered wealth: they are a source of labor; they are social and emotional support; and they are an old couple's social security. Peasant farmer families often live in large extended families in homesteads where each house serves as a room with a special function, such as the kitchen house, the bedroom house, the party house, the toilet house (although most rural people go in the trees), and the guest house; all are surrounded by walls of stone and thornbush to keep out the wild animals, such as leopard, hyena, and wild dog. One will normally find three generations of family living together, sharing the work and the pleasures of family life. Most families have one or more dogs that they keep tied on a short rope (to make them vicious) in order to intimidate intruders who might consider stealing a goat or a chicken or two.

Grandparents are highly valued because they are the teachers of the young. They tell their grandchildren stories of their history, their religion, and the best way to gain power and influence in the community. Women are considered inferior to men, as both men and women will attest. Women are reminded of their inferiority by the physical superiority of their husbands and by God, who has cursed them by shedding their blood every month—shedding their blood the way a warrior vanquishes his enemy.

## 11 CLOTHING

A great variety of clothing can be found in Ethiopia, from the elaborate and colorfully embroidered white dresses of women and the tailored white shirts and jodhpur trousers of men, to the naked tribal peoples of the southwest whose only clothing in the past was iron bracelets, beads, gypsum and ocher paints, and elaborate designs of scars. Today more and more of these peoples have donned clothing, but only as a decoration.

## 12 FOOD

The traditional Abyssinian cuisine is a complex of a variety of foods. The *berebere* is a hot sauce primarily of cayenne pepper but which also includes 12 other spices. It is heavy and rich, cooked with a good deal of butter. The meat that goes with this sauce includes chicken, sheep meat, goat meat, and beef. Pigs are not eaten anywhere in Ethiopia except by the Europeans and Americans. Pork is considered disgusting and is taboo, according to the ancient Hebraic custom. No meal is complete without a variety of fresh vegetables, both cooked and raw. Cheese, like a dry cottage cheese, is eaten, but not to a great extent. Fish is also eaten, though it is not a popular dish among the native Ethiopians. People sit around a tall circular basket (*mesob*) with a flat top, where the large round sourdough bread is laid and the various foods put down upon it. Food is eaten with the fingers—no finger-licking please! At the beginning and at the end of the meal, the hostess will come around with hot steaming towlettes to clean one's fingers. The meal is finished with coffee brewed from locally grown beans. Some of the richest coffee beans found anywhere in the world are produced in Ethiopia and, while some are exported, much are grown for one's own personal consumption and enjoyment.



*In traditional Abyssinian cuisine, people sit around a tall circular basket (mesob) with a flat top, where a large disk of flat sourdough bread is laid and the various foods put down upon it. Food is eaten with the fingers by pinching it and picking it up with a piece of the bread. (Camille Killens)*

### 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, in the rural regions, which is most of Ethiopia, education was primarily for boys and young men and was accomplished within the domain of the church. Today, government schools dot the countryside and teachers from the capital city and the larger towns go out and take up their professional roles in these schools. In the city and larger towns, schools have always played an important role in the secular education of the children. Today in the city, girls and young women are fighting to be educated. More and more opportunities are opening up for women with the help of international enterprises which are boosting the faltering economy.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional Ethiopia boasts distinctive genres of music, dance, and among the Abyssinians, a literature predominantly religious in nature. Its millennia of relative isolation has allowed a unique tradition of music, similar to Indian or Arabic styles, as well as painting which is largely religious and akin to the Byzantine, where we find highly stylized features of people with very large eyes. But today, a growing number of artists are creating powerful images of their times with oil and watercolor and in sculptural forms.

### 15 WORK

In the rural countryside the traditional work of boys and girls and men and women has continued relatively unchanged for 1,000 years. It is the work of farming in the highlands. In the deserts it is nomadic herding of camels, goats, and cattle, traveling from water place to water place in an annual circuit. In the Rift Valley and the surrounding regions of the south and southwest, it is the gardening of horticulturalists, cultivating the *ensete* plant that looks like a banana tree, but whose trunk pulp is prepared and eaten. It is only in the towns and the city that industry and business have proliferated. Most work involves independent shops selling fabric goods, hardware, food, drinks, and numerous coffee and pastry shops, mostly run by women.

### 16 SPORTS

Many Ethiopians are crazy about soccer, normally called “football” as the American version of football is unknown. Ethiopians of the towns and cities are also very conscious of the great talents of Ethiopian athletes in the Olympic sports. The marathon is the forte of Ethiopians. Long-distance running is a very popular sport even at the local level, and Ethiopians, both men and women, are very health- and sport-conscious. But, of course, there are numerous traditional sports that persist: the wrestlers and stick fighters in the tribal south, the whipping battles of the northern would-be warriors, and a variety of children’s ball and stick games found among most peoples of Ethiopia. But, the women are the dancers. They rarely compete in sports. Sport is the arena of young men. Women cheer the men and encourage them to be fierce so they can be proud of them and consider them worthy partners in marriage.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the rural countryside children play spontaneously, making animals, dolls, balls, toy weapons, automobiles, and such out of the available resources at their disposal—mud, clay, rags, sticks, tin can scraps, and the like. Male youth engage in competitive sports. Adults drink and talk and dance, especially during holiday celebrations which occur almost weekly in Abyssinian culture.

There are also traveling minstrels—men and women who travel from village to village, town to town, singing bawdy songs and the gossip of the day or week. With their music they invite spectators to sing with them and dance and joke. And in return they “beg” for money, which they receive un begrudgingly, especially from their slightly inebriated audience. In the city of Addis Ababa and a few northern towns one can find movie houses showing B-grade films from America, Italy, and India. Bars and night clubs proliferate, complete with music and dance. Although there is only one television station, video tape rental and VCRs are a booming business.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Throughout Ethiopia, artisans ply their trades, serving both the aesthetic and practical interests of their customers. Workers in clay make biblical figurines, coffee and cooking pots, water jugs, and plates to set food on (but not to eat off). Blacksmiths forge plowshares, iron rings for bracelets, neck ornaments, and items to attach leather thongs to—bullets, cartridge casings, spear heads and knives. Woodcarvers craft chairs, tables,



*Crowded marketplace in Harrar, Ethiopia. Most urban work involves independent shops selling fabric goods, hardware, food, drinks, and numerous coffee and pastry shops. (United Nations)*

goblets, and statuary. Painters paint oil on canvas, traditionally religious images for which Ethiopians are widely known. Modern painters incorporate the traditional art of their culture with their own interpretations of their world today, sometimes with spectacular results. Weavers hand-spin their own cotton thread and weave it into intricately designed cloth and embellish it with highly detailed and colorful embroidery. This is then used in clothing, including scarves, shirts, dresses, and capes.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Of social problems there are many, so numerous it can be daunting and discouraging for those European national agencies who wish to help. Many Westerners know of the thirty years of civil war in the north, unrelenting drought, widespread famine, and massive loss of life. Add to this the inaccessibility of modern medicine, except for the urban upper class, rampant diseases like tuberculosis, intestinal bacterial infections, and HIV in an overcrowded capital city, unrelieving and ubiquitous urban poverty, widespread prostitution, and homelessness. Crack cocaine has found its way into the capital city. Corruption is present in the commercial bank and other major national institutions. There are uncontrolled violations of human rights in the countryside and in the capital city including politically motivated arbitrary imprisonment without trial, detention and torture, and summary executions.

The Derg regime, which overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1974, was itself overthrown in 1991 after a 17 year reign ending a 30 year war waged by the northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigray. In 1993 the new ruling government of Ethiopia recognized the sovereignty of Eritrea, sanctioned by the United Nations. Henceforth, a series of military confrontations occurred setting off the Ethiopian-Eritrean War whose precipitating circumstances were disputes over the Ethiopian-Eritrean boundaries in an area of barren, noncultivable land around a few remote towns. Skirmishes continued into 2008 and this continuous warfare is compounded by the Ethiopian Army's incursions into Somalia attempting to bolster the existing government against Islamic rebel fighters. The fighting over national boundaries in the eastern desert Ogaden has strained the Ethiopian Army's forces on all fronts.

As military campaigns continue other agencies are beginning to address these massive social problems. A small group of American Peace Corps volunteers have been installed, small private clinics, funded by Ethiopians, staffed often by doctors from Europe and America, are springing up like mushrooms in the capital city and in larger towns. Faint incursions of foreign businesses are being established and developed in the capital city, which could help pump the Ethiopian economy to some degree. Several reservoirs are planned, some are now being built, and many small dam projects are under construction, especially in the drought-ravaged north. There are several

tree-planting projects under way to begin addressing the problem of a thousand years of wanton tree cutting. There are only faint glimmerings of hope in a country which has been all but forgotten by the wealthiest nations in the world. But the Ethiopian spirit is strong and the children of Ethiopia are vibrant and enthusiastic, nurtured by loving relatives who do what they can to engender promise for the next generation.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Since the establishment and stabilization of the new government in 1994 and the subsequent writing of a new constitution, women's rights has been a target issue of government and nongovernmental agencies at all levels. At present there are no less than 15 government agencies dedicated to addressing women's rights issues. There are eight United Nations agencies focused on gender issues and women's affairs. There are 37 international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) whose projects include the rights of women and the securing of economic stability in women's affairs. Furthermore, there are 47 local NGOs around the country addressing a variety of gender issues involved with economic development, political participation, and health problems which include female genital excision customs.

A group of locally organized agencies under the umbrella title HUNDEE is dedicated to a variety of local concerns including female empowerment, women's rights, food shortage vulnerability, and the integration of a number of agencies for a greater efficiency of operation. A notable influence in Ethiopian affairs is the Women's Affairs Association, or Setoch Guday in Amharic. These women are dedicated to actualizing the newly established Articles of the Constitution declaring equality and empowerment of women in modern Ethiopian society. Their general objectives are to raise the consciousness of women regarding their rights, to inform a variety of agencies as to women's rights, conduct research into the status of women, conduct training groups teaching strategies for asserting the rights of women, build economic cooperatives to provide economic independence in the hopes of diminishing the incidence of prostitution, and to extend the reach of women's associations in order to implement women's constitutional rights.

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—by R. A. Reminick

# EWE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Eibe, Ebwe, Ehwe, Efe, Eve, Eue, Gbe, Vhe, Krepe, Krepi, Popo

**LOCATION:** Ghana, Togo, Benin

**POPULATION:** 3.1 million people

**LANGUAGE:** Ewe

**DIALECTS:** Anglo (Anlo, Awlan), Awuna, Hudu, Kotafoa,

Adan, Agu, Aveno, Be, Gbin, Ho, Kpelen, Togo, Vlin, Vo.

**RELIGION:** Christian and traditional religion

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Ewe are a people found primarily in three countries of West Africa, namely Ghana, Togo, and Benin. They are concentrated in southeastern Ghana east of the Volta River, in southern Togo and the southwestern portion of Benin. They are a collection of a group of people who speak Ewe as the main language, but with different dialects. Each group is also known by a different name, such as Anglo (Anlo, Awlan), Awuna, Hudu, Kotafoa, Adan, Agu, Aveno, Be, Gbin, Ho, Kpelen, Togo, Vlin, Vo, and so on. Other slightly different cultures that are closely related to the Ewe include the Adja, Oatchi, Peda, and Fon. Even though these other groups speak languages that are incomprehensible to Ewe, they are considered to be part of the Ewe cultural group.

Although the Ewe people are said to have originated from present-day southern Togo in the Tado region, it is thought that the original group of Ewe migrated south from Nigeria to their present area at some time in the 13th century. The Adja Kingdom of Tado in southern Togo, situated along the Mono River, is an area that has been constantly populated since prehistory and is well known for its metalworking and other crafts. Most Adja people today still live in and around Tado. The Ewe and Fon are considered to be the descendants of the Adja people who migrated from Tado and intermarried with other groups as they moved in different directions towards southeastern Ghana and Benin.

In the 18th century, as Europeans began to explore West Africa, the Ewe came into contact with this new group, who instituted a new type of trade: slavery. The Ewe homeland was strategically located for the Atlantic slave trade. The Dutch, English, and the Danes all traded in slaves from this region, making it a center for the Atlantic slave trade. Some Ewe groups were middlemen in capturing other unfortunate ethnic groups, including some of their own, to be sold into slavery to the Europeans, who transported them to the New World in North America. Once slavery came to an end, the Ewe people fell under British colonial rule in Ghana and German rule in Togoland, on the Togolese side. When the Germans lost World War I, Togoland was given over to the French as a protectorate. Thus, the Ewe people, as is the case in most African countries, find themselves split into two: the Ewe of Ghana and the Ewe of Togo. The Ewe people of Ghana are aligned with the British while those of Togo are aligned with the French.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

As noted above, the Ewe people are located in three different countries, with the majority found in Ghana and Togo and a few in Benin. They are located between the Volta River in

Ghana and the Mono River (to the east) in Togo. The Atlantic Ocean forms the southern boundary. The northern boundary is just past Ho in Ghana and Danyi on the western Togolese border all the way to Tado on the eastern Togolese border. The Fon and other related ethnic groups are concentrated in the southeastern part of Benin. As such, extended families may find themselves in two different countries.

In terms of climate and geography, the Ewe homeland has several distinct features as one moves from the coast into the interior of these three countries. The coastal zone is generally flat with many palm trees, from which palm oil and palm wine are obtained. Immediately inland there is swampland, lagoons, and small lakes, which provide much needed aquatic resources, such as fish. Immediately after this zone of lagoons there is a rolling plain, characterized by red lateritic and sandy soils, followed by the forest zone at an elevation of about 700 meters above sea level. Temperatures are quite high along the coastal zone as well as inland, ranging from 20–35° C (68–95° F) throughout the year. There are mainly two seasons: the dry and rainy season. The dry season runs through November to March while April through May and September through October are characterized by heavy rains.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The language of the Ewe people is also known by the name Ewe. It is a Niger-Congo language spoken in Ghana, Togo, and Benin by approximately five million people. It is a national language in Togo and Ghana. Ewe is an umbrella term of a collection of dialects and/or related languages referred to as Gbe languages, which are spoken from the eastern portion of Ghana all the way to the western part of Nigeria. In addition to Ewe, Fon and Aja are two other principal languages of the Gbe cluster. There is no question that the Ewe, Adja, Guin, and Fon languages are very closely related, all originating centuries ago with the people of the royal city of Tado. Numerous dialects exist inside the family of Ewe proper, such as Anlo, Kpelle, Danyi, and Be. Adja dialects include Tado, Hweno, and Dogbo. Fon, the language of the Kingdom of Dahomey, includes the Abomey, Xweda, and Wemenu dialects.

In linguistic terms, Ewe is a tone language much like other Gbe languages. When the first missionaries came to Ewe homeland during the 18th century, they transformed Ewe into a written language, using the Latin alphabet with some extra letters derived from the International Phonetic Alphabet to represent certain sounds. In terms of tone and nasalization, an *n* is placed after vowels. Tone is generally unmarked, except in some common cases, which require disambiguation, e.g. the first person plural pronoun *mi*, “we,” is marked high to distinguish it from the second person plural *mi*, “you,” and the second person singular pronoun *wò*, “you” is marked low to distinguish it from the third person plural pronoun *wo*, “they/them.”

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Ewe culture and tradition is rich in folklore, poetry, myths, and songs. The Ewe groups in present day Ghana note of their escape from their original homeland in Togo to establish themselves in their present location. The escape, which happened in the 15th century, is commemorated in an annual festival known as the Hogbetsotso Za. Today, many of the stories told in folklore recite the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on their





society. The frequent raids for slaves by European slave traders, who would navigate their ships easily to the shores of the ocean for their human cargos, left an indelible mark on the memory of the Ewe people. Thus, oral tradition, such as folklore, myths, and songs, recant the loss of entire settlement populations.

Folklore and poems teach society about the virtues of valor, hard work, and a common purpose and destiny. For example, a poet or storyteller might refer to the leopard, an animal used throughout Africa to symbolize skill, cunning, and physical strength. It may also be used to indicate royal, political, and spiritual power. Another story talks of the headless crab, a narrative that establishes the crab's origin and its moral significance for the present. Narrated to children, it is a cautionary story that suggests to the children the need to know how to manage relationships with friends. The story of the jealous twins shows the perils of competition within the family and, more specifically, betrayal among brothers. It explores the contradiction inherent to peer-relationships in the family. Siblings from the same mother/parentage (here epitomized by twins) are expected to feel the strongest bond and to take care of each other and their family, but at the same time, each brother has to assert himself individually.

Other stories use the omnipresent *kente* textile, a specialty weaving skill of the Ewe people. Furthermore, names of settlements in Ewe folklore might refer to the rich natural resource base and beauty of the landscape in the Ewe homeland. For example, Keta, one of the early settlements of the Ewe in Ghana, means "the head of the sand," referring to the fertile, sandy soils around the settlement. Denu, which means "the begin-

ning of palm trees," is an important plant that provides palm oil and palm wine.

## 5 RELIGION

In their traditional religion, the Ewe believe in the existence of a supreme being called Mawu, who created everything in the world. Associated with the sky, Mawu is remote from the daily affairs of man, leaving that to lesser deities. For example, one of the lesser gods is Torgbi-nyigbla, the head of the nature gods (*tro*) associated with war and thunder. They also practice Afa divination and the Legba cult, which include deities such as *dulegba* (settlement protector) and *alegba* (individual protective deity). There are other deities who come from outside Eweland, such as *vodu* and *dzo* (amulets). More importantly, the Ewe people denote Se as the word for law, order, and harmony, and see the deity Se as the maker and keeper of human souls. Se is also considered to embody destiny.

As noted earlier, Eweland was at the heart of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, in which thousands of Ewe and Fon people were taken to the New World. The slaves took many aspects of their religion with them, so much so that they have transformed Catholicism to reflect this heritage. For example, aspects of Fon and Ewe religion are imbedded in Christian cults in Haiti, Brazil, Cuba, and Jamaica, where voodoo (vodoun) and the cult of Shango are practiced, just to mention a couple of examples. In Eweland itself, the arrival of Christian missionaries introduced a new religion: Christianity. Today, the majority of Ewe people declare themselves to be Christian, although most Ewe are concurrently involved in both Christian and traditional religious practices.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to national and/or Christian holidays, the Ewe people have had their own traditional holidays, some of which are still observed today. Examples of these holidays include the Yam Festival, their own New Year celebration that falls in September, and other remembrance days for the dead. The annual festival of Hogbetsotso Za commemorates the day the Ewe fled from their homeland in Togo because of the harsh rule they endured at the hand of one of the kings. Government sanctioned national holidays in Ghana include January 1 (New Year's Day), March 6 (Independence Day), May 1 (Workers' Day), July 1 (Republic Day), December 25 (Christmas Day), and December 26 (Boxing Day). There are other Christian and Muslim holidays that are also observed by the adherents of each religion.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Many African cultures have initiation ceremonies that mark the rite of passage into adulthood. The Ewe people are no exception in this regard. Among the Ewe, initiation ceremonies for men and women or boys and girls are in line with their beliefs in a supreme being and lesser deities. Boys are circumcised and named on the seventh day after birth, while infant girls are named and welcomed into society by having their ears pierced on the seventh day after birth. Men and women are initiated into the many traditional cults (the most famous of which is voodoo or vodoun) as members or as priests and priestesses of the many deities in Ewe religion. Some individuals are initiated into the various guilds, for example, the weaver's guild.

The pantheon of lesser deities in Ewe religion includes Yewe, Afa, Eda, Nana, and Mamiwota, with the first two as the most popular. Individuals are also initiated into a specific cult under a specific deity, to whom they will then direct their worship. If one is initiated under Yewe (the god of thunder and lightning), that individual is given a new Yewe name, and the old name is discarded and can never be used again. However, those who pledge their allegiance to Afa (the god of divination) keep their original names after being initiated into the Afa cult. Music and dance are at the heart of all the initiation ceremonies, with much jubilation and festivities at the end of the initiation. Some of the initiation rituals of Ewe cults are elaborate and extremely painful. For example, an initiate into the voodoo cult can be isolated for a minimum of two months and a maximum of nine months. The initiate is sequestered in an initiation hut, where he or she remains physically, socially, and psychologically isolated from the community at large. During the period of seclusion, they learn the culture of their cult, including its songs and dances while speaking only the language of the cult. Scarification is another aspect of the initiation process, where detailed cuts are made on the initiate's back, as well as on the forehead and cheeks.

There are several ways in which an individual can be selected for initiation into some of these cults. In many instances, young females are given to the cult by their families. Should an individual be unwilling to be initiated, she can forcibly be abducted into the cult as directed by the deities and/or spirits of the dead. The view is that the young female initiate is an incarnation of a deceased member of the cult. Women have also been abducted into the cult as a result of transgressions committed against the cult, such as breaking into a cult house or insulting a cult member. Often these cases are resolved through the payment of a fine, but if the person is unable to pay the fine, the cult will sometimes forcibly take the person into the cult. Sometimes individuals are initiated into the cult when they fall ill and are diagnosed as "wanted by the cult." In order to cure the sickness, the person must submit himself or herself to the cult.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Interpersonal relations are an important aspect of Ewe society. These are geared toward maintaining a level of communal solidarity and general stability in the village. Conflicts, although sometimes violent, can be resolved peacefully between two feuding groups without the intervention of a third party. Dance and drumming are seen as the fabric that ties the community together in the pursuit of a collective destiny and in the essence of their shared experience. Every member of society is expected to participate in the dance and drumming. Those who refuse to participate in the festivities of music and dance are viewed as excommunicating themselves from society. Punishment of such noncompliance behavior may come in the form of denial for a proper burial.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Ewe people live mostly in villages and towns and survive on subsistence agriculture and trading activities. Many of the houses are built of mud bricks in a rectangular fashion with grass-thatched walls and roofs. Some houses are built of concrete brick with corrugated iron sheets for roofing material. Along the coastal zone there are numerous huts built of palm-

fronds, with grass or palm-thatch for the roofs. Members of an extended family often live in one compound with a cluster of huts surrounded by a mud wall or palm-frond fence. In both Ghana and Togo, some Ewe people live in large towns and cities, such as Tema and Aflao in Ghana and Lome, Kpalime, and Tsévié in Togo. In rural areas, a large village may have a central market, where on certain designated days people from surrounding settlements may come to trade agricultural produce and other goods.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Ewe people follow the patrilineal system of tracing descent. Members of a clan can trace their descent to a male ancestor. Furthermore, clans can be divided into lineages that are branches in which individuals can trace their descent back to a common male ancestor. Each lineage is led by a male head, who is usually the oldest surviving member of the group. He is in charge of the lineage and its affairs, often having a final say in all decisions and settling any disputes that might arise among the members of the lineage. He is also responsible for the maintenance of ancestral shrines, often acting as the chief priest for the lineage with duties of leading ceremonies, acting as the link between the living and the dead, pouring libations and lifting prayers to the ancestors, and managing common property for the benefit of all members.

The nuclear family, composed of husband, wife, and children, is an integral part of the Ewe lineage even though it is the smallest part. Marriage is considered to be an extended family affair rather than simply between man and woman. Polygamy, the act of a man marrying several wives, is also allowed, although many men prefer to have only one wife. Elders are given a lot of respect and power in Ewe culture, so much so that sons, even when married and occupying the position of head of their respective households, are expected to abide by the decrees of their fathers.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Ewe people are master weavers of the cloths known worldwide as *kente*. The Ewe have a long history of weaving Kente cloth and legend has it that in the Asante wars against the Kpetoe area, weavers were captured who as prisoners of war taught the Asante how to weave. On the other hand the Asante people have their own legend that holds that they learned weaving from a spider.

Kente is the main form of clothing for the Ewe. It can be made into dresses for women or shirts and pants for men. The chiefs often wrap themselves in a large and beautifully embroidered kente cloth. In modern times, Ewe weavers make kente cloth primarily for sale through markets drawing buyers from all over Ghana and surrounding countries. Some of their cloth finds its way to markets in North America and Europe.

Ewe weavers utilize the narrow-strip loom, similar to that used by the Asante, which serves as evidence of mutual influence between the weavers of the two groups. One distinctive type of Ewe cloth features a rich variety of weft float inlaid pictures (in a zig-zag pattern across the width of the fabric) on a cotton background. Often a rich variety of objects, ranging from animals such as cows, sheep, and horses to human figures, ceremonial stools, hats, trees, and flowers, and household objects such as dining forks, are depicted on these cloths.



*Ewe women perform a traditional dance during a funeral in Woe, Ghana. (AP Images/Madison J. Gray)*

## **12 FOOD**

Among the Ewe, forest crops, such as plantain, cassava, cocoyam, and tropical yams, form the basis of the staple food. The starchy foods are pounded into flour to make the staple *akple*, a thick porridge that is taken with okra soup or stew made of common vegetables and some animal protein, such as fish, chicken, and goat meat with palm oil and hot peppers. Palm nut and peanut soups are considered a delicacy. Corn is increasingly becoming an important food crop among the Ewe. In urban areas, rice and bread have become the foods of choice for those who can afford them. Palm wine made from the fermented sap of the oil palm is the preferred drink among the Ewe while those who reside in urban areas feast on bottled European-style beer.

## **13 EDUCATION**

In traditional Ewe society, children are socialized according to the customs and culture of the Ewe as they grow up. The cultural emphasis is on community and individual destiny as dictated by the gods and the spirits. Moral values through stories, myths, and legends are inculcated in the children by storytellers. The arrival of the German missionaries in the 1840s, and later the British and French, added a new layer of modern education among the Ewe. Over the years, Western education has been well entrenched in Ewe society with over 60% of eligible school aged children attending schools from primary through secondary school education to college or university level.

Today, Ewe people are among the highest educated groups in both Ghana and Togo. They consider themselves to be the human resource basket of these countries providing intellectual material at the University level as well as white collar jobs in the civil and private sectors of the economy. In addition to obtaining a modern education, many are naturally gifted in handicrafts, such as tinsmithing, iron smelting, building and construction, carpentry and joinery, weaving kente textiles, and so on. They also pride themselves on their music and for adhering to certain core values, such as honesty and hard work. These skills are a testament to their high levels of attainment of a modern and western oriented education with literacy rates of as high as 60% of the population with the ability to read and write a language.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music and dance is one of the most enduring aspects of Ewe cultural heritage. The Ewe express their emotions through songs, drumming, and dancing. Songs are an integral part of funerals, festivals, weddings, storytelling, and other happy or sad occasions. When women are pounding yams or cassava into flour to make *fufu* (a hard porridge), they will often sing songs. Fishermen pull their nets with music and farmers will sing while tending to their gardens. Weaving of kente cloth is also an important aspect of Ewe culture that dates back to their origins in this region.

## 15 WORK

Ewe who still reside in rural areas or on the coast and the many lagoons immediately after the Atlantic Ocean still practice a subsistence form of livelihood. Many are still peasant farmers who cultivate crops such as corn, cassava, and yams with some livestock, such as goats and chickens. Those on the coast and in the inland lagoons and lakes engage in artisanal fishing. There is also a great deal of trading that goes on in rural areas largely carried out by women. The highly educated Ewe residing in the big towns and cities, such as Accra and Lome, are employed in the modern as well as the informal economy.

## 16 SPORTS

One of the most enduring sports in traditional Ewe society was wrestling between men. In the modern era, soccer has become the premier sports for the peoples of Ghana, in addition to other European introduced sports, such as tennis, cricket, and basketball.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

To pass time, the Ewe people devised all kinds of activities, which included an assortment of games, dances, and music. The games were and still are enacted with songs, which make them interesting and enjoyable. Many of these games are done during a full moon at night.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Ewe people have a long-standing tradition of arts and crafts. The most important is the weaving of kente cloth, mostly done by men. Pottery is another craft that is done by women. The beautiful pots are used for storing water and cooking purposes. They also have the tradition of iron smelting and smithing to produce various implements.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems among the Ewe are similar to the ones prevalent throughout Ghana. Although the government established the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to promote the welfare and rights of children and protect them from defilement, incest, underage marriage, and sexual abuse against minors, violations of these rights continue to take place throughout the Ewe region in Ghana and Togo. The most widespread problem is the use of child labor. Children are used in market centers, for fishing, stone quarrying, and food vending. Female child laborers are particularly vulnerable, as they are sometimes forced into prostitution or are sexually exploited. Underage and forced marriage for girls continues to be a main human rights abuse in some parts of Ghana. HIV/AIDS is another intractable problem for the country of Ghana as a whole in spite of the fact that HIV/AIDS rates have stabilized at 2.7%.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Among the Ewe, traditional patriarchal views continue to hinder the advancement of women's rights. Traditional religion, culture, and marriage customs continue to reinforce the low status of women in Ewe society. Women are often denied the right to inherit property or land and many become destitute once the husband dies or once they are divorced. Early and forced marriages for girls are often justified by parents claim-

ing that the girl had been promised to the man when she was young and that the man had spent money looking after her while she was growing up. Women also frequently experience domestic violence. The custom of *trokosi* among the Ewe puts young girls in a constant vulnerable position. Among the Ewe cult system young girls, usually virgins, are offered to shrines to atone for a crime committed by a family member. While in bondage, the girls become not only free labor, but also sex objects for the fetish priest. If the *trokosi* bears a child while enslaved, the child becomes the property of the shrine.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# FULANI

**PRONUNCIATION:** foo-LAH-nee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Fulbe; Peuls, Fula, Fulah, Foulah and Fellata (Sudan) and Futa Toro, Futa Jallon or Fulas Pretos (in Guinea and Senegambia), or Bororo in some parts of Nigeria.

**LOCATION:** From the western part of West Africa (Senegambia) to Chad in the east (some groups reaching as far as the Nile river in the countries of Sudan and Ethiopia); largest concentrations in Nigeria, Senegal, and Guinea

**POPULATION:** 12 million

**LANGUAGE:** Fulfulde, Arabic, French, or English

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Beninese; Chadians; Ethiopians; Guineans; Nigerians; Senegalese; Sudanese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Fulani peoples (also known as *Fulbe* or *Peuls*) of West Africa are among the most widely dispersed and culturally diverse peoples in all of Africa. They have a population of more than six million. Many Fulani trace their beginnings to the Senegambia area where, as early as 1000 years ago, they adopted a pastoral livelihood and began moving about with their herds of cattle. By the eighteenth century some had migrated as far east as the Niger and Benue Rivers (now in Nigeria). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some Fulani populations, which had become devoted to Islam, initiated *jihads* (Islamic holy wars) in several West Africa locales, seeking to spread or purify the Islamic religion. These events figure prominently in the histories of most Fulani groups, especially among those who emerged as religious and political leaders in the new kingdoms that resulted from the wars.

Fulani, a name that originated in northern Nigeria, is the most popular name currently used for these people. The terminology and sayings included in this section are from the Adamawa dialect, spoken in northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon.

Today, one finds both nomadic, pastoral Fulani (*mbororo'en*) and settled Fulani (*Fulbe wuro*). The pastoral Fulani (full-time cattle keepers) move about with their cattle for much of the year, while the settled Fulani live permanently in villages and cities. Although these two “types” of Fulani share a common language, origin, and some cultural features, they regard themselves as only distantly related. The settled Fulani are mostly concerned with the Islamic religion, whereas the pastoralists’ concerns are more with their cattle.

The present population of Fulani might be about 12 million, with another wider regional population of various bilingual speakers of Fulani and other local languages. The Kano Chronicle provides a significant historical record to the Fulani and Hausa people they came to dominate in the 18th and 19th centuries during the Fulani jihads. This is most particularly the case of the Fulani jihad of Uthman dan Fodio as well as regional jihads in the Guinea highlands.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Questions of Fulani origins are disputed by scholars, but a solution is that a primordial intrusion took place from the east and then a westward spread, but during the time of the greatest Fulani jihads, return migrations from Senegal also took place. This was especially true with their horse cavalry for conquest periods and with extensive trade networks in periods of consolidation.

The Fulani populations are now found all over the savanna and semi-arid zones of West Africa to the south of the Sahara desert. This area, which has only a short rainy season, is particularly suitable for pastoralism or a combination of pastoralism and agriculture. The general distribution of these people ranges from the western part of West Africa (Senegambia) to Chad in the east, with some groups reaching as far as the Nile River in the countries of Sudan and Ethiopia. The dispersal across the continent occurred while herdsman and their families sought to find better pasture land, to escape conflicts with settled peoples in several West African kingdoms, or to visit the Islamic holy land in the Arabian Peninsula. The largest concentrations of Fulani are in the countries of Nigeria, Senegal, and Guinea, where Fulani were involved in the holy wars and settled down, became the ruling class, and intermarried with the local populations.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Fulani belongs to the sub-branch of Atlantic language family, but there are many loan words from Berber and Arabic. Despite their wide geographical distribution, the Fulani peoples believe they generally belong to the same ethnic group, but with sub-groups and different dialects. The language is known as Fulfulde (or Fula or Pulaar). There are similarities in the grammar and vocabulary of the different groups, but communication among Fulani from different regions is difficult (although not impossible). There are at least five major dialects of this language (Futa Toro, Futa Jallon, and Masina in the west and Central Nigeria; and Sokoto and Adamawa in the east). Thus, for example, a Fulani from Adamawa in Nigeria would only understand a few words when speaking with a Fulani from Senegal. As Muslims, many Fulani can read and write Arabic. Nowadays, many can also speak either French or English, depending on which European country colonized their region.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Because most Fulani are Muslims, much of their history and worldview derives from Islam. Local groups recognize important historical figures who helped spread Islam in their land and acquired additional spiritual and magical powers due to their religious devotion. Moreover, as many communities have lengthy genealogies, recollections (sometimes exaggerated) of important religious and historical figures abound in terms of their wealth, success in battle, devotion to Islam, and superhuman deeds. Despite the significance of Islam, some modern-day Fulani recount traditions of the pre-Islamic origin of the Fulani. These traditions state that cattle, as well as the first Fulani family, emerged from a river, began the migrations across Africa, and gave birth to children who founded the various Fulani groups.

Fictional stories or folktales (*taali*) are popular among all Fulani. Adults or storytellers gather children before bedtime



to recite the stories, which usually have a moral. Among the pastoralists are many stories pertaining to their cattle and migrations. Among all Fulani, stories discuss the adventures of animals such as squirrels, snakes, hyenas, and rabbits, some of which are extremely clever. Some discuss men and women, Islamic teachers, and children. All Fulani groups have riddles, proverbs, and sayings which, together with the stories, are used to help educate children about the culture and practices of the society as well as to entertain them.

An example of a saying in Fulfulde is: *Tid' d'o yod'ad' d'o* ("Work hard and succeed"). An example of a Fulani proverb is: *Hab'b'ere buri ginawol* ("Actions should be judged according to intention" or literally, "Deliberate acts could be worse than insanity").

## 5 RELIGION

As the Fulani adopted Islam, they acquired a set of beliefs about the world and their new faith. They also have obligations as Muslims, such as praying five times a day, learning to recite the holy scriptures (*Quran*) by heart, fasting in the daytime for one lunar month each year, making the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the Islamic holy land in Mecca, and giving alms to the needy. The most important duty is to declare one's true faith in Islam and that Mohammed was a prophet sent by Allah.

One should note that the Fulani are Sunni Muslims, but are also influenced by the Muslim brotherhoods that are widespread across the Sahel as well as other syncretic beliefs and practices. The intensity of religious belief among the Fulani

varies by membership in those who are more actively engaged in pastoralism and less inclined to be devout and are more syncretic versus those settled Fulani who are more devout and more inclined to be engaged in religious activism and jihads.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

All Fulani participate in Islamic holidays (*Id*), namely the feast after the fasting period and the feast of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. On these days, people pray in thanksgiving to Allah, visit their relatives, prepare special meals, and exchange gifts such as gowns or cloth. Fulani also observe the national holidays of various African nations in which they reside.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Islam has influenced many Fulani holidays and ceremonies. Shortly after a child is born, a naming ceremony is held in which the child is given a name following Islamic law and practice. Around the age of seven, boys are circumcised, followed by a small ceremony or gathering in their household. Shortly after this time, they begin performing herding or farming activities, sometimes on their own. At this age, girls help their mothers. Also around this time, most children begin attending school. When they are close to puberty, the children socialize in the markets or other communities. Girls are usually betrothed in marriage during their early to mid-teens, while boys remain as *sukaa'be* (handsome young men) until around the age of 20. At that time, they start a herd or obtain a farm and marry with the intent to start a family. Following ceremo-

nies in which the bride and groom are prepared for marriage, the families of the betrothed contract the marriage under Islam. By middle age, a man may be known as a *ndottijo* (elder, old man) who has acquired wisdom over the years.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

All Fulani have an elaborate code for interacting among themselves and with other people. The code, known as *pulaaku*, prescribes certain morals and etiquette which the Fulani believe distinguish them from other people; some regard it as sacred. *Pulaaku* prescribes *semteende* (modesty and reserve), together with *munyaal* (patience) and *hakkiilo* (common sense, care), which must be shown in public, among one's in-laws, and with one's spouse, all as a sign of respect for the others and for one's own dignity. Fulani thus tend to avoid showing off with people outside their group, although they are supposed to demonstrate kindness (*end'am*) among their kin. The pastoral Fulani may have developed *pulaaku* to help them preserve their economic independence and their identity and to avoid being assimilated into other groups. Nowadays, all Fulani throughout West Africa strongly adhere to this code of behavior. Islam, which also prescribes modesty and reserve, has tended to reinforce this code.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Among the pastoral Fulani, life can be extremely harsh. They often live in small, temporary camps, which they quickly dismantle as they often move in search of pasture and water. Some move mainly between wet and dry season camps or small villages. Transportation is often on foot, although some families have donkeys, horses, and camels. Because of the settlements' distance from towns, modern health care is not readily available. Traditional healers, whose medicines and practices have been perfected over the centuries, are more commonly consulted.

Fulani who have settled in towns are more inclined to visit modern health-care facilities such as clinics and hospitals than are the pastoral Fulani. In the cities they also have access to modern transportation, including cars and buses, and they usually reside in large family houses or compounds.

The Sahel in general is relatively underdeveloped so that Fulani are facing various difficulties of finding adequate employment in the modern sectors of the economy that require new educational and technical skills.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Among the Fulani, life centers around the family. This includes one's immediate kin, such as parents and siblings, but it also includes the extended family (cousins, aunts and uncles, and distant relatives), whose members are all treated as close kin. In the rural areas, these groups tend to live close together and join in work efforts; in the towns and cities, they tend to be more dispersed. Each kin group (*lenyol*) normally recognizes a common male ancestor who lived several generations ago and founded the family.

In the towns, women manage the very large Fulani households and families. Many women are in seclusion due to the Islamic prescription for the extreme modesty of women. Among the pastoralists, the women help support their families through the trade or sale of milk, and they often walk miles each day to the markets or towns to do so.

Marriage is a very important institution among the Fulani. Male family members usually choose a spouse for a child, usually among relatives (particularly cousins) and social equals. This practice helps to keep wealth (cattle and land) in the family and to maintain the moral and physical purity of each group. Polygyny (multiple wives) is not uncommon in Fulani society, as a man's wives all help with domestic work and can bear him many children. They also bring him prestige, particularly if they are modest in behavior and dress.

All Fulani communities have leaders of sorts, known as *ardo'en*, who influence or guide their peoples in an informal manner. Beginning with the holy wars and the settlement of Fulani populations, some individuals have acquired formal power and authority over their peoples and have become chiefs (*laamb'e*). Some of the larger Fulani communities have had emirs (*laamiib'e*) who reigned over their court and subjects in royal fashion.

Fulani traditionally prefer endogamous marriage with parallel cousins, especially patrilineal and they follow patrilineal descent with patrilocal post-marital residence.

## 11 CLOTHING

There are a great variety of dress codes and styles among the different Fulani groups, but all are proud of their beauty and physical features, which in some respects resemble those of North Africans. Typical Fulani features include tall stature, long limbs, light skin, and relatively long and soft hair. In a broad sense, the married men and women follow the Islamic dress code in which modesty is prescribed. The men wear large gowns and trousers and caps, and women wear wrappers and blouses. As a sign of modesty, married Muslim women wear veils when they leave their household.

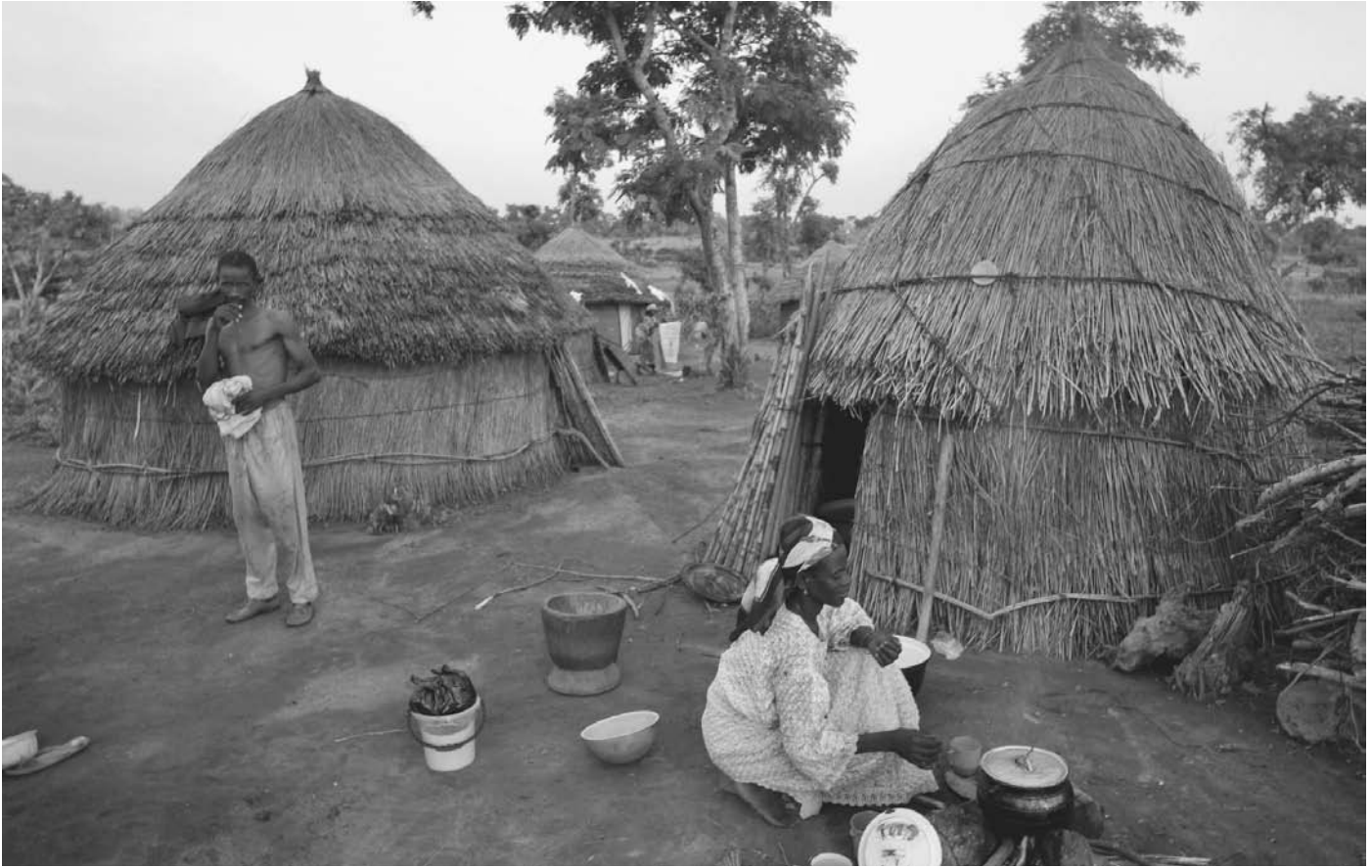
Pastoral men also wear Islamic dress, but it is not as elaborate as among the settled Fulani men. Women wear blouses and wrappers but not veils. Among the pastoralists, younger men and women adorn themselves with jewelry and headdresses, and they plait their hair. During certain festivals, young pastoral men wear makeup to accentuate their features, including their eyes, their pointed noses, and their lips, which they line with white paint. They dance for the women and sometimes choose a marital partner.

## 12 FOOD

Most Fulani value cattle and their diet usually includes milk products such as yogurt, milk, and butter. They prefer not to slaughter their cattle for food, but purchase basic foodstuffs, including meat, in the market. Each morning they drink milk or gruel (*gari*) made with sorghum. Their main meals consist of a staple food or heavy porridge (*nyiiri*), made of flour from such grains as millet, sorghum, or corn, which they eat with soup (*takai, haako*) made from tomatoes, onions, spices, and peppers, and other vegetables such as okra, spinach, or baobab leaves.

## 13 EDUCATION

From birth, Fulani children receive a rigid education to socialize them into the customs and identity of their society and prepare them for the harsh environment in which they live. All adults and senior children help educate the younger children through scolding, reciting sayings and proverbs, and telling them stories. Children also learn through imitation. In many



A Fulani woman cooks outside her house in the village of Daruga, Nigeria. (AP Images/George Osodi)

communities, children from about the age of six attend Islamic (*Qu'ranic*) school, where they study and recite the scriptures and learn about the practices, teachings, and morals of Islam. Nowadays, settled Fulani children attend primary and secondary school, and some eventually enroll in universities. It is more difficult for the children of pastoral families to attend school, as they are often on the move. In some countries, however, special efforts are being made to place these children in school or to build mobile schools that follow them during their migrations.

#### 14 CULTURE

Among the Fulani, music and art are part of daily life. Work music—with song, drums, or flutes—is found among those in rural areas working in the pasture, the fields, or the market. Court music (drumming, horns, flutes) and praise-singing are found among those in towns, especially in the palace or during festivals. The praise singers discuss community histories, leaders, and prominent individuals, whereas religious singers may cite Islamic scriptures. Most commonly, art occurs in the form of personal adornments such as jewelry, hats, and clothing, and of architecture.

For many Fulani, however, their most important cultural feature is their character or *pulaaku* (as discussed in the section on interpersonal relations). Fulani should be reserved and demonstrate a strong sense of shame (*semteende*) in all their dealings outside their household, with strangers, and with cer-

tain kinds of kin. For example, it is considered shameful if a Fulani eats outside his household. A proverb thus states, *Pullo nastan luumo wade, nastatta luumo semteende* (“It is better to die than be shamed in public”). These behavioral norms, in the Fulani view, distinguish them from members of other tribes or ethnic groups. Among the pastoral Fulani, herdsmanship (*ngainaaka*) is also a very important aspect of their culture. The settled Fulani still value cattle, and many of them own herds, but they lack the extreme enthusiasm for cattle as found among the true pastoralists.

With such an extensive multinational African distribution of the Fulani, they are found in all walks of life, in sports, military, commerce, arts, and politics. Among the most prominent personages of Fulani origin are three heads of state of Nigeria, including the President Umaru Yar'Adua. In Guinea-Conakry those with family names such as Balde and Diallo, or Alfa Yaya, or Alfa Molo were prominent leaders of Fulani origin, and the first president of Cameroon, Ahmadu Ahidjo, also shares this ethnicity.

#### 15 WORK

All Fulani communities have a relatively rigid division of labor according to age and sex. Men's and women's domains are highly segregated, and children assist their parents, but they also have their own chores around the house, on the farm, or in the pasture.



Men tend the cattle, work in the fields, or have formal employment in the city. They also play an important part in decision-making about farming, herding, migrating, and other family matters. Many men are either full or part-time Islamic scholars or teachers. In the settled communities, Fulani men pursue a variety of occupations such as work in the government, as Islamic teachers and scholars, in education, in business, or, to a lesser extent, as traders.

Women's primary role is managing the household (cooking, cleaning) and caring for the children. Among the pastoralists, the women also set up and dismantle camps, tend the small animals (sheep and goats), and trade or exchange milk products in nearby towns and markets to obtain the foodstuffs they themselves do not produce. Most married women in the towns are housewives, but a few work as teachers, nurses, or secretaries. A few supplement their own or their husband's income with trading items such as jewelry, clothing, spices, cigarettes, or beverages—often from within their own household.

## 16 SPORTS

Young pastoral men participate in a kind of sport known as *sharro*. This is a test of endurance and bravery in which young men lash each other to the point of intolerance. They do so as they enter manhood, but some continue to participate in the practice until they become elders. Among the settled Fulani, there are a great variety of traditional local sports and games, including wrestling and boxing. Western sports such as soccer and track and field are now found in communities and schools. Wealthy Fulani also participate in horseracing and polo.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Among the pastoral Fulani, children participate in different kinds of dances—among their immediate friends and kin, when they meet in the market, or when kin groups gather during the rainy season. Among the settled people, musicians and praise-singers perform at festivities such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and parties and Islamic holidays. Today, most Fulani appreciate Western music and own radios. Among the settled Fulani, one commonly finds stereos, televisions, and VCRs.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Fulani women make handicrafts in their spare time, including engraved calabashes or gourds, weavings, knitting, and baskets. Some of these items are used or displayed in the household, and many are given as gifts to other women or kept as part of a woman's or her daughter's dowry for marriage. In contrast with some of their neighboring peoples, Fulani men are less involved in the production of crafts such as pottery, iron-working, and dyeing. They believe that these activities, which are undertaken in the public, may bring shame upon them, and they prefer to purchase such wares from the craftsmen among other peoples.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The pastoral Fulani are currently facing many problems. Drought often reduces their water supply and pasture, and disease may also strike the herds. As the population of West Africa has grown, there is less land available for herding, and conflicts with settled people have increased. The modern gov-

ernments are also curtailing the Fulanis' movements or trying to force them to settle down. The result is that Fulani herds have declined dramatically, seriously threatening the pastoral Fulani livelihood, although many still find a way to survive. Some settled Fulani are also faced with relative poverty, as most of the countries they live in simply do not have enough resources and funds. Nevertheless, all Fulani find comfort in the fact that their kin are always willing to help those facing hardship. In addition to regional drought, desertification and unemployment are severe issues faced by modern Fulani.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Common with African Islamic societies in general the social position of women is structured with the culture-religious organization of society in which patriarchy, patrilineality, possible but limited polygyny, and patrilocal residence provides for specific domestic roles for women. Within the domestic framework there are some options open to women in the informal economy, particularly in gendered spaces that focus on food and clothing production. At the same time, this is being contested by new social movements and forces that empower women in terms of legal, economic, and human rights, as well as the necessity to bring more women into economic production along with more males moving out of the traditional compounds in search of work and opportunity. Thus, gender roles in modern Fulani society are both steadfast and traditional, while being contested by the powerful forces of change. This gender contestation is particularly acute in Nigeria whereby the federal state seeks centralization on one hand, while empowering the various states to solve their own problems. For Fulani regions which are seeking a post-colonial strengthening of Islamic law the torque between these counterforces has been problematic.

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—revised by R. Lobban

# GABONESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** gab-uh-NEEZ

**LOCATION:** Gabon (western Central Africa)

**POPULATION:** About 1,485,832

**LANGUAGE:** French; 45 local Niger-Congo languages

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; Islam; animism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Gabon's stability keeps it in the shadows. An African country that has not been afflicted by wars, drought, or chronic uprisings, it tends to stay out of the press and has long held an unchallenged position in the "French sphere of influence."

The peopling of what is now Gabon was a slow and steady process. Pygmies and other forest dwellers have been living there for millennia. Around 1500 bc, Bantu people from the northwest began to migrate into the area, slowly spreading out over the next 2,500 years, differentiating into the more than 40 ethno-linguistic groups that exist today. Later migrations during the period of the slave trade, and again in the 19th century, have further enriched the mix. The southern kingdom of Loango grew in the years before European contact, but most people led simple lives of autonomy, living in villages among extended family. For many centuries, people kept small plots where they grew yams, greens, and later, bananas. Horticulture was supplemented, and often overshadowed, by hunting meat and gathering wild plants from the forests or savannas. Archaeological evidence suggests the existence of iron smelting in Gabon since the 4th century bc.

Europeans arrived in the 15th century. First came the Portuguese, then the Dutch, British, and French. Rarely did they venture beyond the coast. Their interests were slaves and ivory, and trade increased dramatically in the 18th century. Loango became a center for a vigorous trade in slaves, who were captured farther inland and sold to Europeans at the coast by members of more powerful tribes. It is estimated that by 1840, 2.5 million slaves had been taken from West Central Africa.

In the late 19th century, France became the colonial power in Gabon and continued to be heavily involved in political and economic affairs after Gabon's independence in 1960. There are more French expatriates living in Gabon now than during the colonial period.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Gabon covers 103,347 square kilometers. It is slightly smaller than the state of Colorado. Gabon is on the West Coast of Africa, centered on the Equator. It borders Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon to the North, and the Republic of Congo to the East and South. The capital, Libreville, is on the West Coast in the North. Libreville ("Free town") was the landing place for a ship of freed slaves in the 1800s and later became the capital.

Over 80% of Gabon is tropical rain forest, with a plateau region in the South. There are nine provinces named after the rivers that separate them. There are roughly 1,485,832 Gabonese (2008). There are equal numbers of men and women. The original inhabitants were the Pygmies, but only a few thousand remain. Of the total population, 60% live in the cities while 40% inhabit the villages. There is also a large population of Africans from other countries who have come to Gabon to

find work. Gabon retains its colonial frontiers as drawn by the Europeans in 1885.

Tropical forest covers 80% of the country, the rest consisting of grassy savannah and high plateau. There are two dry seasons and two rainy seasons, but the equatorial climate is very hot and humid year-round. The major geographical feature is the Ogooue River, which flows east to west, splitting the country into two. It is the largest river between the great Niger and Congo rivers, and its watershed drains the whole of Gabon.

Gabon is becoming a country of urbanites. The major cities besides Libreville are Port Gentil, with its oil reserves; Oyem, with its vital trade with Cameroon to the north; Franceville, gateway to the Bateke Plateau; and Lambarene, made famous by Albert Schweitzer and his hospital. This riverine port, 125 miles from the capital, accessible by paved road only in 1996, still has one of the best hospitals in Central Africa.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The national language is French, mandatory in school. It is spoken by the majority of the population under the age of 50. The use of a common language is extremely helpful in the cities, where Gabonese from all of the different ethnic groups come together to live. Most Gabonese speak at least two languages, as each ethnic group has its own language as well. The educated Gabonese speak Parisian French, while the rest of the country speaks a version of French that has absorbed the rhythm and accent of their local language.

There are 45 local languages in Gabon, many of them shared with neighboring countries. Some of the larger ethno-linguistic groups are Fang, Punu, Nzebi, Myene, and Obambe/Teke. These languages are mutually unintelligible—but as with other languages in the Niger-Congo family, deploy consonant groupings, like in *Ndjole* (*n-jolay*), as well as open, rounded vowel pairs, as in *antsia ama* (*anchiama*). Because of this linguistic diversity, French has become the true lingua franca (common language) and is the official national language. The business of government, education, marketing, publishing, and socializing is conducted in French. Unfortunately, as a result, many young Gabonese cannot speak the language of their grandparents.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Because Gabonese languages were not written down until the 19th century, storytelling has long been the way to teach children and to transmit tradition to people of all ages. Each ethnic group has its own stories, but common are morality tales involving animals like the wasp that loses the affections of a mate due to excessive pride in his slim waist and lovely striped coat.

With nationalization have come national folk heroes. One is Charles Tchorere, a soldier who fought as a captain in the French army against the Germans in World War II. He is remembered for bravery in distant battles and for the honor he bestowed upon his nation.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

There are several different belief systems in Gabon. About 75% of Gabonese identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 20% as Protestants, less than 1% as Muslim, and the rest as animist. In reality, however, many Gabonese hold animist beliefs while at the same time practicing Christianity or Islam. Animism, a body of beliefs held by tribal and pre-industrial people the



world over for thousands of years, generally does not identify a human-like god that is concerned with activities on Earth. Animist gods are abstract and amorphous, and inanimate objects can hold spiritual power. It is the spirits of ancestors who aid or obstruct human endeavor. These beliefs are simultaneously held with Bwiti, an ancestral worship. There are also several thousand Muslims, most of whom have immigrated from other African countries.

Several rituals and holy places exist. The Bwiti ceremonies, performed to worship the ancestors, are led by *ngangas* (medicine men). There are special wooden temples for these ceremonies, and participants dress in bright costumes, paint their faces white, remove their shoes, and cover their heads.

Witchcraft is also an element of animism which exists in Gabon; belief in evil spirits and sorcerers who can conjure them is quite common. Among traditionalists, death itself is not a natural phenomenon, but can only be explained as the work of a malevolent spirit or the malfesance of a neighbor skilled in casting spells.

Wines are made from palm trees and sugarcane. The palm wine, in conjunction with a hallucinogenic root called *iboga*, is used during ceremonies for death, healing, and initiation. In small doses, *iboga* acts as a stimulant, making it useful for all-night ceremonies. In larger quantities, it is hallucinogenic, allowing participants to “see their ancestors.” Food and wine are offered to the ancestors during the ceremonies, and both men and women partake in these rituals, which are full of drumming, singing and dancing

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Because of the ethnic diversity of such a small population, national holidays take on universal significance. The most important is August 17, commemorating Gabonese independence from France. Towns, large and small, have a central square called “Place de l’Independence” where the Gabonese flag is flown, and speeches and traditional dancing take place. In the capital there is a military parade. While most Gabonese are Christian, New Year’s Day sees more celebration than Christmas or Easter.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The passage from life to death is considered the most important rite of passage in Africa due to the importance of spirit ancestors. In Gabon, funerals are elaborate affairs at which mourners close to the deceased stay awake for days, attending to the body. What used to be quite common in the past, though much less so now, is the remarriage of a widow to a close relative of her departed husband, usually a younger brother. This custom is logical when one considers the traditional practice of paying *dot* (bride-price), wherein a husband or his family pay a woman’s family for the privilege of marrying her. After *dot* is paid, the marriage and resulting children are considered legitimate, and the woman’s labor then belongs directly to her husband’s family. If the husband dies, it is his family who still has rights to her labor and future fertility, and hence the responsibility for her welfare and that of her children.

There are few universal rituals in multi-ethnic Gabon, but those surrounding *Bwiti* are remarkable for their adoption from the Fang by other groups. The *Bwiti* cult grew out of a demographic crisis at the turn of the last century, when sexually transmitted disease caused infertility among women and a declining birth rate throughout the country. *Bwiti* began as a set of rituals performed by women to ensure fertility. It is now described by Gabonese as a secret society of both men and women who perform these rites in an attempt to purify the body and spirit for many reasons. While the *Bwiti* rituals combine dancing, singing, and drinking, as in many Gabonese celebrations, the central element is the ingestion of *iboga*, a wild plant found only in Gabon. *iboga* is a hallucinogen, and if enough is taken, subjects will go into a trance, perhaps entering a spirit world where the ancestors reign. Once in this world, questions are asked of the dead about how to arrange matters here in the world of human habitation. After death, bodies are rubbed and embalmed to remove rigor mortis. Because of the tropical climate, the bodies are interred within two days. They are buried in a wooden coffin. The deceased then joins the ancestors who are to be worshipped in *Bwiti* ceremonies. They can be asked for advice, about remedies to diseases, etc. There is a *retraite de deuil* ceremony one year after death to end the mourning period.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Gabonese greetings among strangers are reserved, and a quick handshake is standard for both social and business occasions. A foreigner visiting a private home for the first time will be offered beer, but conversation may not begin immediately. It is often said by Gabonese that chattering too much with a new guest assumes a familiarity that may be disrespectful. It does not take long, however, to get to know people, and those introduced through family are soon greeted with flourish. Friends

meet each other with a series of four kisses, two on each cheek, as in parts of France. Sometimes just a touching of cheeks will do. Men often walk holding hands, a sign of filial affection. Among older Gabonese, separation of the sexes is the norm at social gatherings.

The expression of young love has changed over the years. Young couples in the city go to movies, dance, and visit as in the West. But traditionally, marriages were often arranged, usually between a young girl and older man, so the opportunity for dating within one's age group was limited.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions in Gabon are generally better than in the rest of Africa. Two reasons for this are the abundance of oil and exportable timber and the low population.

While there are no Gabonese starving from drought or living in squalid refugee camps across borders, there are many who live in impermanent huts, lack electricity and plumbing, don't have access to schools or medical facilities, and have little hope of entering the formal economy.

Health facilities are inadequate. Hospitals are ill-equipped, and patients buy their own medications from pharmacies before treatment can begin. Malaria, tuberculosis, syphilis, AIDS, and other infectious diseases are widespread and virtually untreated. Many villagers also turn to the *ngangas* for remedies, as modern health care is expensive and far from their residences.

As in the rest of Africa, there is a drastic difference between rural and urban living conditions. Downtown Libreville and Port Gentil boast luxury apartments with satellite dishes, Mercedes, and supermarkets. Cities are then ringed by shanties, filled with immigrant workers from other African countries. Rural areas are decidedly poorer. There are few jobs and little farming beyond what can feed a family. One reason for this is the lack of investment by the Gabonese government, like many African governments, in agriculture-related infrastructure. Although most Gabonese know how to farm, almost all of the nation's food is imported.

As a building material, cement is seen as a sign of wealth. All of the government buildings are constructed in cement. In the capital, it is easy to differentiate between buildings that were styled by Gabonese and those done by outside architects. In the villages, the architecture is different. The structures are impermanent. The most economical houses are made from mud and covered in palm fronds. There are houses built from wood, bark, and brick. The brick houses are often plastered with a thin layer of cement with roofs made from corrugated tin. A wealthy family might build with cinder blocks. In addition to the houses, both men and women have distinctive gathering places. The women each have a *cuisine*, a kitchen hut filled with pots and pans, wood for fire, and bamboo beds set against the walls for sitting and resting. The men have open structures called *corps de guards*, or gatherings of men. The walls are waist high and open to the roof. They are lined in benches with a central fire.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families in Gabon tend to be large, and women have an average of five children. Some ethnic groups are matrilineal; immediate family includes not only parents and siblings, but also the mother's parents and siblings. The government is actively

encouraging births due to a belief that the population is simply too small. As a result of this policy, as well as a generally lax cultural attitude toward sex, many young Gabonese women become pregnant with no husband. Families stay together. When a couple is wed, they move to the husband's village which holds his extended family including brothers, sisters, parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, children, nieces, and nephews. It is common for families to share a home with their parents and extended relatives. Everyone is welcome and there is always room for one more.

Polygyny—the taking of more than one wife—is legal in Gabon, although it is required for couples entering state-sanctioned marriage contracts to register as either “polygamous” or “monogamous.”

Women's property rights are difficult to protect without a legal marriage certificate, but there are many couples that don't have this. Interestingly, the French word for “woman” is also used to signify “wife.” *Ma femme* is how many women in couples are identified. This may or may not imply legal marriage, but her betrothal to a man is understood—she will often already have his children and will consider his family her in-laws.

## 11 CLOTHING

Today, most Gabonese wear Western-style clothing. Men wear suits and ties to the office, and blue jeans and T-shirts during the weekend. Women wear dresses and skirts of a Western cut, with material of a colorful African print and the detailed embroidery work done by tailors all over West and Central Africa. A more traditional item is the *boubou*, a flowing top that varies in length from knee to floor. Ceremonial occasions call for elaborate boubous with loose-fitting matching pants underneath for men and double-wrapped *pagnes* for women. A *pagne* is a colorful strip of African cloth used for everything from casual wraparounds to slings for tying a baby to its mother's back. Earlier, raffia was the most commonly used cloth. It is made out of a kind of grass, woven tightly to form a stiff but malleable material.

## 12 FOOD

The cat is eaten on special occasions among the Fang. It is traditionally eaten by men and is reputed to bestow longevity, as the cat is notoriously hard to kill. The staple of most Gabonese, however, is manioc root. It is ground, soaked, and fermented in a labor-intensive process that can take weeks and appears in the markets resembling a block of cheese wrapped in a banana leaf. Manioc leaves are also eaten and look like spinach when cooked. Another common source of carbohydrates is the banana. These are not small, sweet bananas, which also exist, but larger, harder bananas known in the Americas as plantains.

The staples vary little among the groups in Gabon. The groups share a landscape and climate and thus are able to produce the same kinds of things. Bananas, papayas, pineapples, guavas, mangoes, bushbutter, avocado, and coconuts are the fruits. Eggplants, bitter eggplants, feed corn, sugarcane, peanuts, plantains, and tomatoes are also found. Cassava is the main starch. It is a tuber with little nutritional value, but fills the stomach. Its young leaves are picked and used as a vegetable. Protein comes from the sea and rivers, as well as from bush meat hunted by the men.



*Dancers from a traditional Gabonese dance group perform during the Fete des Cultures in Franceville, Gabon. (Desirey Minkoh/AFP/Getty Images)*

Favorite meats include wild monkey, bushpig, pangolin (a small armored mammal resembling an armadillo), and gazelle. Shrimp, crab, and a variety of fish are harvested from the ocean, carp from the Ogooue River, and tilapia from rural fish farms. Most rural households keep chickens, and while there are a few pig and cattle enterprises in Gabon, most domesticated meat is imported from countries with less humid environments more conducive to stockraising. With a year-round growing season, trees produce a vast array of fruit and nuts. The palm nut is used to make palm oil, a necessity in every kitchen. Coconuts, pineapples, mangos, and lemons are sold on practically every street corner.

The Gabonese habit is to eat the largest meal in the middle of the day. Schools, offices, and businesses shut down between noon and 3:00 pm, and people can go home for lunch. Leftovers are usually served in the evening, unless there is a special occasion, when the main meal is eaten later, accompanied by lots of beer, palm wine, and Coca-Cola.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In theory, Gabon offers free universal education. In reality, many villages don't have schools, and some children have to travel long distances or relocate to attend. The adult literacy rate is 63%. Schools use the French system, which allows for 13 years of formal education, and a final state exam called the

*Baccalaureate*. Public schools tend to be crowded, with 30–100 students to a classroom. In rural areas, schools often lack essential materials like books and chalkboards. The children begin school at age five or six. When there is no money for books and supplies the children will not attend school. Sometimes a wealthy relative will be called upon to provide these essentials. Both boys and girls attend school until they are 16 by law. Girls may drop out of school due to pregnancy and the boys continue with school or begin to work.

The Omar Bongo University in Libreville offers two to three year programs in many subjects, as well as advanced studies in select fields. The University of Science and Technology in the south is relatively new and diversifies the options. These schools are dominated by upper-class men. Women have a difficult time excelling in academics, as the subjects and standards are structured for men. Some Gabonese study abroad in other African countries or in France, at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

With over 40 distinct cultures in Gabon, national heritage becomes important. While Gabon has changed more rapidly than perhaps any other African country, there is an acute sense of an ancestral "Africanness" that spans ethnicities. The first stanza from the Gabonese national anthem is suggestive:

United in concord and brotherhood  
 Wake up, Gabon, dawn is upon us.  
 Stir up the spirit that thrills and inspires us!  
 At last we rise up to attain happiness.

The International Center for Bantu Civilizations was created in Libreville in 1983, and there is a Gabonese Museum featuring Gabon's history and artistic relics. There is also a French Cultural Center in the capital that displays artistic creations and features dance groups and chorales. There is an annual cultural celebration as well, with performances by musicians and dancers from many different groups in celebration of Gabon's diversity.

Much of Gabon's literature is strongly influenced by France, as many authors received their schooling there. Writers use French, newspapers are in French, and television is broadcast in French. Radio programs use both French and local languages, however, and there is mounting interest in the history of Gabon's peoples.

The Fang make masks, baskets, carvings, and sculptures. Organized clarity and distinct lines and shapes characterize Fang art. *Bieri*, boxes to hold the remains of ancestors, are carved with protective figures. Masks are worn in ceremonies and during hunting sessions. The faces are painted with white and black features. Myene art centers around Myene rituals for death. The female ancestors are represented by white painted masks, which are worn by their male relatives. The Bexota on the other hand use brass and copper to cover their carvings. They use baskets to hold ancestral remains.

## 15 WORK

A relatively large percentage of the Gabonese population works directly for the state, living in a provincial capital or a large town. One salaried worker will support several to dozens of other people on his or her salary. Many more work in the informal sector selling produce, driving unregistered taxis, or tailoring. Income is supplemented by family plantations, often kept by members living in rural areas, but also kept in small plots around the cities.

Work in Gabon stops between the hours of noon and 3:00 pm because of the heat. Most buildings outside of downtown Libreville are not air conditioned.

## 16 SPORTS

As in most of Africa, soccer is the national sport. Basketball, for both men and women, and martial arts are very popular. The most common game played by all ages is checkers—every bar and café has a board and pieces fashioned out of soda pop or beer bottle tops.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Gabon borrows heavily from Western popular culture. Traditional pastimes fight an uphill battle with American and French television, music, and the antics of sports heroes. Central African music is also very popular.

The most common form of entertainment, for old and young alike, is visiting. Neighbors, friends, and relatives from the same village stroll in the evening, make unannounced social calls, and gossip. While television and radio have made inroads into even the most remote villages, oral culture and

face-to-face interaction is an integral part of Gabonese life to a much greater extent than in the West.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Gabon is known for some of the world's most outstanding masks and statuary, particularly those produced by the Fang in the north, where a high level of artistic abstraction of the human face and figure influenced artists such as Pablo Picasso. Particular to southern Gabon are soapstone carvings of female heads called *Pierre de M'bigou*. These heads are now considered somewhat of a national symbol and can be seen on stamps and business logos. However, with the drastic changes brought by modernity, most of Gabon's craft traditions have been lost.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In 1990 Gabon made the transition from a one-party state to multi-party democracy. People on the street, in bars, and in the classroom feel freer now to criticize their government and the president. Gabonese like politics, and spirited debates often ensue. Labor, student, and women's groups request permits to hold rallies and protest marches, and usually receive them.

Women's rights are of particular interest in Africa, where traditional gender roles are quite strong. In Gabon women can own property, sue for divorce, and hold public office, but family law recognizes only female—not male—infidelity as grounds for divorce. Domestic violence and absentee fatherhood is prevalent, and, as in America, they are problems that often remain behind closed doors.

A problem that doesn't remain behind closed doors is alcoholism. With a bar on nearly every corner, no regulation of consumption, and a traditional taste for homemade beer and wine, Gabonese are copious drinkers. While many Gabonese believe that drugs are a serious problem in their country, it is nothing compared to the alcoholism.

Despite these problems most Gabonese are proud of their country, with its abundant natural resources, relative wealth, and incredible natural beauty. The PNL (National Program to Fight Against AIDS) has an office in every major city. It sells condoms and educates women on family planning and pregnancy. There is also a Forests and Waters office in every city, working to protect the environment and wildlife from exploitation, though its effectiveness is questioned. The World Wildlife Fund has ecological and sociological research and wildlife preservation projects in the north and on the coast, and the United Nations supports agricultural advancements in the north by sponsoring extensionists and providing training and mopeds. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is also present, working against child prostitution and infant mortality. A German organization, GTZ, funds the organization of the Gabonese National Forestry School. The Peace Corps is active in Gabon as well, with programs in construction, health, agriculture, fisheries, women in development, and environmental education.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In general Gabonese men assume a dominant role over Gabonese women. Men make the financial decisions and control the activities of the family; however, Gabonese women are known to be outspoken and frequently influence family decisions. In the government, the military, and the schools, men hold the vast majority of positions of responsibility and power. Alterna-

tively, women do the majority of the manual labor for the family. Gabonese women typically assume a role of homemaker; few work or engage in activities outside the home.

Gabonese families are generally large. Women are responsible for raising their many children, farming, preparing food, and carrying out various household chores.

Men assume responsibility for housing. Most men build a house for the family and construct a separate area for each wife to use for food preparation. Men also handle the business transactions related to any cash crops the family may produce. In addition, men may fish, work in construction, or take menial office jobs in the cities. Women may also work in the cities, typically in the service sector. A few exceptional women have risen to positions of responsibility, but most positions of power in the workplace are held by men. Children may help with such chores as laundry, kitchen clean-up, and housecleaning.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# GAMBIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** GAM-bee-uhns

**LOCATION:** The Gambia

**POPULATION:** 1.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** English, Wolof, Mandinka, Jola, Fula

**RELIGION:** Christianity, Islam, traditional African beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Malinke

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Gambia (the name is written with a capital T) is a country of about 4,000 sq mi (10,000 sq km) occupying both banks of the River Gambia for a distance of about 200 mi (320 km). It is surrounded, except for the coastal region, by Senegal.

Around AD 750, a people who made stone circles and who were associated with iron working came from the north and occupied the middle zone of the north bank.

In later centuries, the most important migrants were the Mandinka from Mali in the east, coming as hunters, warriors, and farmers. From the north came the Wolof with their powerful cavalry forces, who conquered the Serer on the north bank. South of the Bintang Creek and in the Kombo region were the Jola and the Bainunka, the latter now largely absorbed into other groups. Later groups of cattle-keeping Fulbe (known in Nigeria as Fulani) arrived. They came from the north on the Senegal River, from Masina in the east, and Firdu in the south. Sometimes they lived beside Mandinka communities, at other times they remained separate, moving frequently in search of water and pasture. The most recent migration is that of the Serahuli (known as Soninke in Senegal), though some families had undoubtedly come centuries earlier. Their major migration took place at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. They are agriculturalists who also specialize in long distance trade.

The river was visited by early Portuguese explorers, such as Cadamosto in 1455, whose traders gradually settled at various points on the river, seeking gold, ivory, and hides. The English began exploration in the early 17th century, searching for sources of gold, especially in the upper river. An early attempt at colonization in the lower river was made by the small Baltic state of Kurland in 1651. But they were dispossessed by the English who captured a fort they had built on what is now James Island. The French, moving along the coast, claimed the right to trade at Albreda on the north bank.

The accounts of early writers show that the present-day peoples had already settled in the areas they occupy today prior to colonization. After the establishment of colonies in the West Indies and in America, slaves began to be exported from the region. Some were criminals being sold as a form of punishment, but most were war captives brought from the interior. Occasionally individuals were kidnapped by the slave traders trying to fill up their cargo. With the English law against international slave trading in 1807, the town of Bathurst was built on the island of Banjul (later renamed St. Mary's) to control the mouth of the river. Wolof from Gorée in Senegal, who were traders and artisans, formed a major part of the new town. People freed from slave ships captured at sea and refugees from local wars were also settled in the area. Bathurst was renamed Banjul after independence. Another island, MacCarthy Island,

was acquired upriver in 1823 as a base from which to protect traders and as a refuge for escaped slaves.

In the middle of the 19th century it was realized that groundnuts (peanuts), which grew well, provided an oil much in demand in Europe. These became the major export of the country. The land, however, was torn apart by religious wars set off by a militant Muslim element known as the Marabouts, who sought to convert nonbelievers (locally known as Soninkes). From time to time, the English tried to bring about peace, as constant warfare destroyed both trade and agriculture. Sometimes they reached an accommodation with the Muslims, while at other times they supported the non-Muslims.

While British possessions were limited to land near the mouth of the river and a few upriver sites used for trading, the French began moving south in Senegal. The Treaty of Versailles of 1783 had granted the British exclusive rights to the river but said nothing about land. Eventually, in 1888 an agreement was reached with France, granting the British 10 kilometers on each bank. The boundary did not take into account natural features or existing political divisions. Surveying to determine the boundaries took place from 1891 to 1896.

Once the boundary was established, the English created a protectorate system of government, signing agreements and governing through local rulers supervised by British "Traveling Commissioners." Many of the traditional ruling families had, however, been wiped out during the Soninke/Marabout wars, and Muslim rulers had taken their place. Tension between the groups was still strong, and many small districts had to be created to relieve the tensions. But local warfare ceased, slave trading was abolished, and a system of local government developed.

The Gambia became independent in 1965 under D. K. Jawara. A republic was declared in 1970, Jawara becoming the nation's first president. He continued to be reelected, surviving an attempted coup in 1981 led by a left-wing extremist. Senegalese forces helped restore him to power. As a result, a Senegambian Confederation was created to bring the countries closer together, but the agreement had collapsed by 1989. The main cause of friction was the fact that Gambians imported vast quantities of goods for sale across the border, often managing to avoid paying customs duties.

Gambia currently has a multiparty political system. The Constitution of the Second Republic of Gambia provides for elections by universal suffrage for adults 18 and older. The ballot is a secret one, and elections must be held every five years. The country's National Assembly includes 45 elected members and four nominated members. The president, popularly elected for a five-year term, is both the chief of state and head of government.

The country's administration is divided into the capital territory (the seat of government), the adjoining Kombo Saint Mary area, and the provinces. Each province has five divisions, each one headed by a commissioner. These divisions are further subdivided into districts locally administered by head chiefs.

The judicial system resembles that of other common law jurisdictions. There is a single system of courts, forming a hierarchy. The subordinate courts consist of Khadis courts, district tribunals, and magistrate courts. At the higher level are the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, and the Privy Council. The latter is the highest court of appeal for The Gambia.



In 1994 a military coup was led by four army lieutenants headed by Lt. Yayha A. J. Jammeh. President Jawara fled the country. The coup was said to be prompted by the widespread corruption of politicians. The constitution was suspended, political activity forbidden, and the press restricted. A period of rule by decree followed. In 1996 a new constitution, largely determined by the military, was written. Lt. Jammeh, then at the rank of colonel, resigned to stand in presidential elections, all former politicians being prohibited from taking part. Consequently, he was elected in September 1996. Jammeh was reelected in 2006, and the next elections were scheduled for 2011.

With the exception of the Fulani, ethnic groups are highly stratified. This stratification is a remnant of the great empires that once ruled the country. In each group, status was essentially inherited from the father. The rulers also inherited their status and administered a feudal domain.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Gambia is a multiethnic country; major ethnic groups include the Fula, Jola, Mandinka, Serahule, and Wolof. There is no part of The Gambia that is inhabited by one single ethnic group. This close dwelling has led to a sharing of many cultural traits among the groups, which has led to a movement toward a Gambian national culture. There has been a concentrated effort to represent the various minority ethnic groups in government. In addition to indigenous ethnic groups, there has also been an annual migration from Senegal, Guinea, and Mali.



Many people from those countries come to trade in groundnuts (peanuts) and stay to settle.

The Wolof and the Mandinka are the major ethnic groups. The Wolof live mainly in the capital, Banjul. The Mandinka are the largest single ethnic group in the country. These groups represent the former Empire of the Wolof in the Senegambian region and the Mandingo Empires of Mali and Songhai. Creoles form a large element within the local elite. Additionally, there are Mauritians, Moroccans, and Lebanese in the country. These groups are mainly traders and shopkeepers. English is commonly spoken by members of all ethnic groups since it is the official language of the country. Each ethnic group speaks its own language as well. Harmony among ethnic groups is the general rule, so much so that The Gambia is considered to be a melting pot of West African ethnic groups.

With a population growth rate of 2.72% per year and fertility rate of 5.13 children per woman, the population in 2008 was estimated at more than 1.7 million, making it the most densely populated country in West Africa. The majority of the country's population belongs to eight indigenous tribes. These are: the Mandinka (about 41% of the population); the Wolof (15%); the Fula (19%); the Jola (10%); the Serahuli (8%); the Serer (2.5%); the Aku (0.8%); and the Manjago (1.7%). The ethnic groups were all affected by the Atlantic slave trade and domestic slavery.

The River Gambia is affected by tides on its eastern boundary. Owing to low rainfall in recent years, the intrusion of salt water has now extended far upriver, hindering rice cultivation in areas previously used for agriculture. In its lower section the river is broad and bordered by extensive mangroves. Inland is a low sandy plateau where the villages are built and farm land cultivated. In the middle section the mangroves fade out, and the banks are bordered by grasslands and palms. Ocean-going vessels, which once went as far as Kuntaur (150 mi upstream), now stop at Kau-ur (120 mi upstream) due to increasing silting. In the past, silting created many islands in the middle section, but only one is inhabited—MacCarthy Island. In the upper river the banks become higher and are backed by low-lying land, which floods during the rainy season. The largest town is Basse, a major trade center and administrative headquarters for the Upper River Division.

Beyond the boundary, in Senegal, the Barrakunda Falls are found—really a rocky ledge, which hinders navigation. The river continues in a southeasterly direction, with much twisting and turning, another 400 miles to its source in Guinea. Owing to rocks, sandbanks, and narrow channels, the river cannot be used except for an occasional canoe.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Mandinka is spoken throughout the country. Wolof is the language of the capital, Banjul, and the middle river area, though the dialects differ. Wolof is also the language of commerce. Because the Fulbe people migrated from different regions, a number of dialects can be heard.

The most common variety of Jola spoken is that of Fonyi (Foñi). The language of government and education is English, though local languages may be used in the lower grades of provincial schools.

All the languages have rich vocabularies. There are numerous proverbs and a wide range of traditional idioms. Children

have word games, such as riddles, tongue twisters, and sometimes secret languages of their own.

There are grammars and dictionaries for Wolof, Mandinka, and Fula. Religious and instructional materials have been translated into these languages. Traditional tales and legends have been recorded and translated into written form.

### 4 FOLKLORE

All groups have rich heritages. Legends, mostly relating to events in Mali, Guinea, and Senegal, are related by professional entertainers, who are known locally as *griots*. The Wolof call them *gewel*, and the Mandinka, *jalolu*. The narration is accompanied by a musical instrument and the listeners are expected to respond to the narrator with appropriate interjections.

Folktales are abundant. One group tells of the adventures of Hare and Hyena, the precursor to the Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox tales in English. Hare is seen by the Wolof as a *gewel*, who is able to talk his way out of any trouble. Non-*gewel* regard Hare as a trickster. Usually tales are told after dark by mothers to small children. A common folktale is one in which an unjust situation occurs. The situation is remedied by a son or daughter, often with the help of a spirit or an old woman who has been courteously treated. Those who caused the trouble are punished, and the sufferers end up rich and happy again. A whole series of family values is reinforced in the tales. Trouble comes to those who break taboos—for example, a daughter should be obedient and polite, a son should be brave, the old should be treated courteously, strangers should be received hospitably, etc.

Proverbs are used in everyday speech; for example, “However long a stick is in the river, it cannot become a crocodile,” means that a stranger can never become a true native, and “The best medicine for a person is another person,” stresses the importance of human relations.

### 5 RELIGION

The majority of people are Muslim (90%). Christians (9%) are found mainly in the urban areas. Only a few hold on to traditional beliefs. In the Jola area there are still a few shrines where offerings are made to spirits believed to influence human destiny.

From an early age, children are taught to recite and copy verses from the Quran. Discipline in Quranic schools is strict. Most stop after learning the essentials, but a few go on to more advanced Arabic studies. The main tenets of Islam are the observation of the month of fasting (Ramadan), when food and drink are prohibited during daylight hours; saying the five daily prayers; if possible, going on the pilgrimage to Mecca; giving alms to the needy; and belief in Allah as the only God. The major religious festivals are occasions of celebrations—the Muslim New Year, Muhammad's birthday, the feast at the end of Ramadan, and *Tabaski* (*Id el kabir*), commemorating Abraham's sacrifice of a sheep in place of his son.

Christian missions—the Roman Catholic Mission, the Methodist Mission, and the Anglican Church—established churches, built schools, and played a major part in education. Mission work outside the capital is limited and is primarily associated with education and social development.

There are a number of traditional religious practitioners as well as Muslim imams, Catholic priests, and Protestant ministers. Each traditional group has its own practitioners.

There are no places that are sacred to all peoples; each ethnic group has its own particular local shrines. Muslims go to Mecca on pilgrimage, and Catholics increasingly travel to Rome and other Catholic holy places.

Each group has its own particular beliefs concerning the afterlife and death. Catholics and Muslims tend to combine the particular traditional beliefs of their ethnic group with more universal Catholic or Muslim beliefs.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Official holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), Independence Day (February 18), and Liberation Day (July 22), commemorating the military coup. Christmas is also observed by all. It is marked by special watchnight services at the Christian church and children singing carols. From Christmas week to the New Year, large lanterns (*fanal*) in the form of ships and houses, lit by candles or batteries, are paraded around the streets, accompanied by drumming. During this period many traditional masked figures—the *kankurang*, with a dress of leaves and red bark (Mandinka), and *kumpo* (Jola), like a revolving haystack—join in the festivities.

Christians in Sanjul celebrate the feast of St. Mary (August 15), the patron saint of the island. Easter is also observed. The Muslim festivals, listed in the section on religion, depend on the lunar calendar, so dates vary from year to year when judged by the Western calendar.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The major stages of life are marked by special rites. After birth a child remains indoors for seven days, and various protective devices are made. Then, the baby is brought out for naming. Its head is shaved, which marks a change in status. The name is bestowed, prayers said, and an animal, usually a fowl but sometimes a sheep, is sacrificed. The meat is eaten later in the day. The child is then regarded as a Muslim.

In childhood there are initiation ceremonies for boys, which involve circumcision and a period of training "in the bush." They learn to endure hardship, obey orders, respect their elders, and understand traditional wisdom. Some boys are circumcised early in life at hospitals or clinics, but still have to undergo the training later. Girls, except for the Wolof, have a similar period of training. Wolof girls often have a ceremony of lip tattooing, which is regarded as a test of courage.

Marriage for women also represents a rite of passage—separation from their family of birth and incorporation into their husband's community. Marriage is a long process. An engagement may take place while the girl is still young. The husband performs services for his in-laws and has visiting rights. At a later date the marriage is formally arranged at a mosque ceremony attended by representatives of the families concerned. Marriage money to be paid is discussed. Later ceremonies involve the formal transfer of the bride to her husband.

Death also represents a transition. A service is held at the mosque before the body is taken to the burial ground. A "charity" (alms) is made on the third and the 40th day, the last marking the final separation when the deceased is considered to have joined the ancestors. Traditional Jola ceremonies involve the slaughter of many cattle and the firing of guns.

Food is important at ceremonial occasions, such as naming ceremonies, betrothals, marriages, and deaths. At these occa-

sions, meat is served along with Jollof rice and fruit. The more food, the more successful the occasion.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In general, Gambian ethnic groups prize tranquility of life, and their manners tend to ease the attainment of that goal. Gambians tend to be soft-spoken and gentle in demeanor, seeking to avoid noisy conflicts and striving toward quiet settlement of disputes. People ask about one another's families.

The exchange of greetings is an important social skill. Greetings differ according to the time of day, the place, whether within the family or in a formal social occasion or a passing situation, and on the age and relative social status of the participants.

The initial greeting is the Arabic *salaam aleekum* ("Peace unto you"), to which the reply is *maleekum salaam*. The general greetings follow, such as "Have you spent the day in peace?" or "Have you spent the night in peace?" depending on the time. The reply is always "Peace only." Surnames are exchanged. If one does not know a person's surname it is appropriate to ask. This is to honor the clan of the person spoken to. One can ask where the person has come from, so that one can ask about the people there too, either in general terms ("How is your father?," or "How is your wife?") or by name. Upon leaving one says "I am going," and one is asked to convey information about their destination.

When visiting, the person who arrives initiates the greetings. If one reaches a door where knocking would not make a sound one says "*kong, kong*" instead. A person should greet one of higher rank, or superior position, such as a village head, chief, or religious teacher. People of equal rank often address each other at the same time. The code of greetings must be followed before any other business is raised.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Gambia is beset by a host of diseases, of which malaria is the most prevalent. Because of the vast areas of swamp it is impossible to control the mosquitoes that carry the disease. On the other hand, smallpox has been eradicated, sleeping sickness has become rare, and polio and leprosy are under control. But infant mortality is high. Diseases, such as measles, whooping cough, and pneumonia, are often fatal to small children. A program of immunization is helping matters. Poor waste disposal and contaminated water lead to intestinal infections. HIV/AIDS has also increased in recent years.

Modern health care is found in urban centers and sporadically in villages. Medicines are in short supply and are expensive. Hospitals and clinics are unable to meet the needs of the people. To receive attention requires a wait of many hours. In 2008 the ratio of doctors to the population was 1:15,000. The infant mortality rate was 65.24 deaths/1,000 live births. The death rate was 11.81 deaths/1,000 population. Life expectancy at birth was about 55.64 years. The HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate was 1.2% and the number of people living with HIV/AIDS was 6,800.

Supermarkets and stores have a wide range of products, but most are too expensive for the ordinary person to afford. Among young people there is a great demand for cassette players and transistor radios. Businessmen, politicians, senior civil servants, professionals, such as lawyers and doctors, and those

employed by international bodies maintain a high standard of living with cars and Western-style furnishings.

In rural areas most houses are built with mud walls. The outside and floors may be cemented. The roof is thatched when circular houses are made, but corrugated sheeting is used with square and rectangular houses. In some villages bamboo matting and reeds are used to form walls. In the hot climate these are quite comfortable.

An inadequate water supply now presents problems. With a shortage of rain in recent years, and with the intensive clearing of vegetation for cultivation, streams have dried up and the general water table has fallen. Deeper wells have had to be dug. Where pumps have been installed, their maintenance has often proven difficult.

At one time there were river steamers, which went up and down the river. Now there are only a few small vessels used by tourists for short trips. People generally travel by road, using converted trucks, which carry goods and passengers, small buses, "bush taxis" (ramshackle old vehicles), and a few large government buses, which are always extremely overcrowded. Crossing the river is a slow business. Most vehicle owners prefer not to cross, but let their passengers off at the ferries to find alternative transport on the other side.

In Banjul, a large influx of motor vehicle traffic conveys people from suburban areas to work and school. In the evening there is a rush hour out of town. With heavy road traffic and overloaded vehicles roads rapidly deteriorate and are difficult to maintain. Where earth roads still exist they become corrugated and develop potholes from the rains.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

In rural communities people live in compounds consisting of a series of houses around an open courtyard. These are inhabited by a group tracing descent in the male line. There are distinct men's and women's sections. Small children stay in their mother's house. Adolescent boys have a house of their own. At night a woman goes to join her husband.

The oldest man of the lineage settles disputes and allocates land. Each man farms on his own land and contributes to a common millet farm. Women have their own rice fields and cultivate gardens in the dry season. An enormous amount of labor, cooking, drawing water, washing clothes, caring for small children, gathering wild products, farming, and gardening falls on their shoulders, though daughters are expected to help as much as they can. A man can marry up to four wives. Most marriages tend to be arrangements between families, but a young man may state a preference that he would like his family to follow. If a girl has her mother's support, she may refuse a marriage she dislikes. In urban situations there is greater freedom of choice. A husband can divorce his wife by pronouncement in front of witnesses; a woman must go to the chief's court. A divorced woman can marry again by her own choice. A widow may also remarry after a period of mourning, though if she has children, she normally marries someone in her husband's lineage so that the children continue to be brought up in the same compound. In the villages, age groups unite people. The young men perform communal labor and organize entertainment. There are corresponding groups for youths and girls.

All societies except for the Jola and some Fulbe have a strongly stratified social system that includes an old-ruling

family from which the chief was chosen, high-ranking powerful families, and ordinary peasant farmers. Smiths, musicians, and leatherworkers formed special castes, each marrying within their own category. In the old days there were also slaves, those born as slaves, and more recent captives. Consciousness of social status is still important when it comes to marriage, but the drift of people to urban centers and education have tended to obscure many of the old distinctions.

Each ethnic group has its own marriage, residence, and kinship patterns. Additionally, Islam and Christianity have their own regulations. Any particular marriage pattern, kinship system, or residence pattern depends upon a confluence of variables.

Marriage in The Gambia is regulated by either customary, Shariah (Muslim), or general law. Customary law is reserved for all non-Muslims and covers inheritance, land tenure, tribal, and clan leadership, as well as other relationships. Shariah law is primarily for Muslims and covers marriage and divorce. General law is based on British law. Rape is illegal in the case of both married and unmarried women and, along with assault, is a crime. The law does not differentiate between married and unmarried women in this regard. Any person who has carnal knowledge of a girl under the age of 16 is guilty of a felony (except in the case of marriage); incest is also illegal. These laws are generally enforced.

Infant care generally follows West African patterns. Women have general responsibility for child care. Young girls carry their siblings around with them.

There are variations in the domestic units of the various ethnic groups of The Gambia. The social structure of the pastoral Fulani is egalitarian, in marked contrast to that of other Muslim groups, such as the Hausa, and to most sedentary Fulani. The influence of Islam on kinship patterns is evident in the general preference for cousin and other intralineaage marriages. Most men are polygynous, the typical household unit comprising the family head, his wives, and unmarried children. Other Islamic groups, such as the Soninke, follow the same general pattern. The Wolof are noted for their double descent kinship system. A household unit usually has a nuclear family or a polygynous unit. There may also be other close kin living together. The vast majority of The Gambia's ethnic groups are patrilineal and patrilocal. This tendency toward male groups is strengthened through Islamic affiliation, as 90% of the population is Muslim. Even the Soninke, who practice double descent, have developed a bias toward the patriline.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Clothing of locally made cloth is worn by rural people when working on their farms. Herdsmen also wear the traditional type of dress. Children who go to school wear uniforms made of imported cloth, each school having its own colors. Boys wear shorts and shirts, and girls wear skirts and tops.

Women wear a long skirt, generally of local cloth, with a loose upper garment of imported cloth. Another cloth is used to carry a child on the back. Women always wear "a head tie," a large square of material that can be tied in a variety of fashions. Hairstyles are elaborate and show both age differences and changing trends in fashion. On festive occasions women, particularly the Wolof, wear many layers of clothing.

Males wear elaborate robes for religious ceremonies and special festivals. In offices Western-style clothing is generally

worn. There is a large trade in second-hand clothes from the United States. Young men like to copy American fashions with jeans, T-shirts, and baseball caps.

## 12 FOOD

Two hundred years of British colonialism added Western food to the diet available in The Gambia. In addition, each ethnic group has its own cuisine.

The Jola prepare a dish, *caldu*, that is made from fish (typically rock bass) and served with rice. Because the Jola live in a forested zone, they make use of many leaves and fruits in their diet. They are skilled at collecting, processing, and preserving plant materials for cooking.

Some people in Banjul are fond of dishes prepared with palm oil, such as *fufu*, which is made from mashed cassava. The Mandika have a dish called *domoda*, which is rice served with a rich sauce of vegetables (sometimes supplemented with meat or chicken) stewed in groundnut (peanut) paste. Sauce ingredients may include tomato puree, peppers, onions, limes, and okra.

The Wolof use *chere* (steamed millet flour), which requires skillful preparation. Dried baobab leaf powder is added to the millet flour, and the mixture is formed into balls that are served with sauce. A favorite dish is *benachin* (literally “one pot”), which requires much attention to prepare. Ingredients must be added in the proper order and cooked for the right length of time, before adding them all to rice for the final stage. *Yassa* is grilled chicken that has been marinated in lemon juice, vinegar, onions, pepper, and oil. The marinade then becomes the sauce for serving with rice. In urban areas a popular dish is fish with rice (*cheb u jen*), flavored with garlic, lemon, bay leaf, pepper, and tomatoes.

The Mandinka eat rice as their main food, though some millet is used. The Jola are also rice cultivators. The upriver Wolof depend on millet and sorghum, but urban Wolof use rice. The Fulbe and Serahuli use millet and sorghum. Roots crops, like cassava and yams, are used sparingly.

In general, a small snack is taken in the morning, such as pap, fruit, or leftovers from the previous day. A light meal is taken in the middle of the day, and the main meal eaten in the evening. Men eat from a common calabash, or bowl. If several families are present in a compound, each household may contribute a dish. Women and children eat separately. When a boy matures and develops good manners he joins the adult men. Eating is done with the right hand, the hands being washed before a meal. The left hand is used only for unclean tasks.

The staple food, boiled or steamed, is served with a sauce of leaves, flavored with dried fish or shellfish, and vegetables. In the rainy season many varieties of leaf are available. In the dry season garden products, such as tomatoes, eggplant, okra, bitter tomato, shallots, onions, are grown. Children eat wild fruits. Mango trees are abundant in most villages, as are papaya (pawpaw). In the western zone, oranges, limes, and bananas are cultivated.

Meat is rarely eaten except for major festivals, though boys sometimes hunt small animals. Chickens are kept for such occasions as naming or marriage celebrations, or to honor an important visitor. Near the coast there is always fresh fish, but most fish consumed is sun-dried or smoked. Where cattle are kept, curdled milk is used with millet.



Gambian women wear a long skirt, generally of local cloth, with a loose upper garment of imported cloth. Another cloth is used to carry a child on the back. (AP Images)

## 13 EDUCATION

In 1990 the literacy rate for adults (aged 15 and over) was estimated at 27%. But there was a marked difference between men and women, the rate for men being 39%, for women 16%. School enrollment has been increasing. In 1991–92 the rate of enrollment in primary schools (the first 6 years) was 59% for boys and 48% for girls. For secondary schools the rate was 16% in 1987. Literacy in Gambia is defined as those 15 and older who can read and write. In the total population, the literacy rate was 40.1% in 2003; 47.8% for males and 32.8% for females.

Socialization is generally through imitation and proverbs. Older children, especially girls, care for their younger siblings. Generally, male children accompany their fathers, while girls follow their mothers. Segregation by sex is common, and children tend to follow their parents' example and occupations. Males tend to be dominant over females. Religion plays its role in supporting the established order. European missionaries have helped bring in Western ideas and modern employment options to the country.

Any community member can correct any child. Folktales and proverbs illustrate moral ideas.

Education, in theory, is free and universal for primary school. In practice, that is not always the case. Urban areas tend to have better schools and more reliable attendance.

In urban areas a higher proportion of children attend school. In rural areas children are expected to help their parents in daily work, so they are reluctant to send their children



About 75% of Gambians are engaged in agricultural crop pro-

off to school. In some communities there is a conflict between Islamic schools and Western schools. Islamic instruction is generally held in the very early morning, or by firelight after dark, and does not conflict with daytime work.

Relatively few of The Gambia's people advance to higher education. In fact, there are no universities in The Gambia, but in the late 1990s, university extension programs were offered for the first time. There is a teachers' training college where instruction is provided in the fields of education, agriculture, health, and domestic science, but there is no university. For advanced level instruction Gambians go overseas to universities in Europe or America. Once they have obtained a degree they may be reluctant to return to low-paying jobs in The Gambia. Many have found work with international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and have gone to work elsewhere in Africa.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music and song are important in Gambian culture and can be divided into two types: personal music and group music. First, there is personal (individual) music. A man sings as he weeds or paddles a canoe. A Fula plays a one-stringed fiddle when herding cattle and sings to sooth restless animals at night. A

woman or girl sings a lullaby to a small child. A young man plays a flute when guarding a millet field. A watchman plays a musical bow at night. Blacksmith's apprentices play rhythms as they pump their bellows.

Second, there is group music. In many cases dancing is also involved. The group repeats a chorus or claps hands while a lead singer or drummer sets the pace. Children play singing games. There is singing when groups work in the fields, so that they hoe in unison. Traditional warriors' songs are sung to give boys courage as they go for circumcision. Wedding ceremonies have a variety of songs sung at different stages.

Finally there is music performed by professionals to an audience, either to patron families or at a formal concert. The Mandinka *kora*, a 21-stringed instrument, the xylophone, and the Wolof *xalam* (an ancestor of the guitar), are played by professionals who undergo a long apprenticeship and belong to a special caste.

Songs are also sung for special ceremonies, to bring rain, or to effect a cure. Historical songs about former kings and wars and many praise songs are sung mainly in the context of honoring rulers. Praise songs may be sung when a griot feels he can demand a reward and at naming or wedding ceremonies. There are special hunters' songs (now rare) played on a stringed instrument known as the *simbongo*, designed to attract and charm dangerous animals and commemorate major hunting achievements. Challenge songs are sung at wrestling matches.

Broadcasting has provided a new outlet for musicians, and traditional music of all types can be found on records, cassettes, and compact discs.

Dancing takes place at most ceremonies and also serves as general recreation in the evening. In the latter instance it is young people who participate. Girls and young women dance as individuals in response to a drummer. In urban situations a variety of dances derived from elsewhere in Africa, the West Indies, and America may be found.

There are a variety of works in English by Gambian authors, including plays by Gabriel Roberts; poetry by Lenrie Peters, Malick Faal, Tijan Sallah, Swaebou Conateh, and Kahadija Saho; novels by Lenrie Peters and Ebou Diba, and short stories by Tijan Sallah and Nana Humasi (Nana Grey-Johnson).

There is some government support but The Gambia is a poor country and can spare little for the arts. Increasingly, there are collections of folk tales, poetry accompanied by the Kora, a lute-like instrument, and novels. No Gambian novelist has reached the stature of other Africans, such as Chinua Achebe or Wole Soyinka, but there are promising young Gambian authors.

In Graphic arts, the masks of The Gambia are well known and appreciated. In performing arts, the Kora, a lute-like instrument, accompanies much singing and dancing. There are many collections of these performances on audio and videotape.

#### **15 WORK**

About three-quarters of the people are engaged in agricultural crop production and livestock raising. About 80% of the population is comprised of subsistence farmers. A majority of these subsistence farmers are women. Groundnuts make up the majority of export products. Millet is also grown widely in the country. There is very little manufacturing in the country. The

Fulani specialize in dairy products and trade them for grain and other products.

There is limited small-scale manufacturing, such as processing groundnuts, smoking fish, and preparing hides. The fact that there is very little manufacturing in The Gambia has resulted in liberal trade policies and the encouragement of tourism. The rapidly growing population of 1.7 million is divided between a rural majority and a growing urban minority. The private sector of the economy is led by tourism, trading, and fishing. The Gambia's high population growth rate has diluted the positive effects of economic expansion. The Gambia's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was about \$1,300 in 2007.

A number of people are employed in service occupations, such as house building and furniture making. Many are engaged in trade, both full-time in shops and markets in urban centers, and others part-time, when farming has ceased. Smuggling constitutes a substantial economic activity. A number of people are engaged in the tourist industry in hotels, as guides, selling arts and crafts, transportation, etc.

In agriculture there is a division of labor, the women being concerned with rice cultivation and dry-season gardening, the men with millet and groundnut farming. Farm work using traditional hoes for ridging and weeding was extremely arduous, but the introduction of animal traction—ox plows, weeding machines pulled by donkeys, and carts for transportation of crops—has eased the burden. At the same time, it has necessitated more thorough clearing of the land, resulting in soil depletion.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the main field sport. International matches are played in a major stadium built by the Chinese. Basketball is becoming an increasingly popular activity among teenagers. Tennis and golf are played mainly by those who have lived abroad or by expatriates.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Radio Gambia broadcasts the early morning call to prayer, followed by readings from the Quran. News is broadcast in English and the major Gambian languages (Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Jola, and Serahuli). There are occasional programs in other tongues. There are broadcasts for schools in the mornings and early afternoons.

A television station was opened in 1995. Video cassettes are available. Businessmen run a number of small movie theaters, many films coming from India.

The National Dance Troupe performs primarily for tourists. Wrestling competitions are popular during the weekends.

Board games include a form of checkers played with black and white counters on a board, *ludo* (Parcheesi), and *wori*, in which counters are moved around a board with six cups on each side, the aim being to outnumber and capture the opponent's counters at the end of each move. Among young men card games are popular.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Wood carving, traditionally limited to the making of implements and utensils, such as bowls, mortars, pestles, and canoes, is now geared towards the tourist market. Carvings of animals,

decorative masks, model canoes, and drums are made for sale to tourists.

Goldsmiths and silversmiths make earrings, brooches, bracelets, etc., and are especially noted for their filigree work.

Pottery is primarily utilitarian. Water jars, cooking pots, and bowls are made, the best work coming from the upper river region.

Leatherworkers make sandals and covers for charms, which are worn by nearly everybody.

Weaving is a traditional art, the cloth being woven on narrow looms. The strips are sewn together to make cloths worn by women as skirts. Locally made cloth is worn in most traditional ceremonies. Formerly *pagnes* were dyed with indigo, but now imported dyes are used.

Dyeing has reached a high standard, Serahuli women being noted for their skill. Imported textiles are often used as a base, and artistic batik works are produced for the tourist market. Tie-dye and "resist" techniques are used to make a great variety of designs.

Basket work such as winnowing and storage baskets is primarily utilitarian.

A special art is the making of lanterns in the shape of ships or houses from paper fastened to a wooden framework, which are lit by candles or batteries and paraded around town during Christmas week.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In the constitution of 1970 a major section was devoted to human rights. The Gambia became the location of the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies. Various local support groups were formed. Discussions on the rights of women, the rights of children, and police procedures were free and open. This was changed by the military government in 1994. The old constitution was abolished, and it was held that human rights were now irrelevant. Political activity was forbidden, freedom of the press restricted, and criticism of the government forbidden. Arrests for political reasons became common. The death penalty, abolished in 1993, was reinstated. The official party line that was expressed was that health, education, and improved agriculture were all that mattered. Democracy could not be expected to flourish under conditions of poverty. The right to development was placed above civil and political rights.

Though the country is Muslim, alcohol has always been freely available. In urban areas there are some cases of alcoholism. Marijuana grows easily in the country, and a number of youths have become addicted. Severe drug laws are now in effect.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Most women are engaged in subsistence farming. As in much of West Africa, men clear the land for cultivation and women do the work of planting, tending, and harvesting the crops. Men control tree crops in The Gambia, while women control subsistence gardens.

Women's income from subsistence farming at one time exceeded men's incomes from other activities. Landowners, most of whom were men, felt their authority was undermined by this circumstance and began to try to curtail women's farming activity. They used the county's new interest in environmental

preservation to restrict women's ability to farm (and therefore limited women's earning power).

Traditionally Gambian women are subordinate to men. Polygyny is prevalent, even in groups without traditional patrilineal descent. The growth of Islam has strengthened men's roles and their ability to control women in their family.

According to law, women have equal rights in employment. However, most Gambian women are engaged in subsistence farming where the laws are neither relevant nor observed.

All ethnic groups have traditional patterns of inheritance in which priority is given to the male survivors. Islam, however, under Shariah law, provides a portion of a men's estates for widows.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# GHANA IANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** gah-NAY-uhns

**LOCATION:** Ghana

**POPULATION:** About 23 million

**LANGUAGE:** English, Akan, Hausa, more than 25 African languages

**RELIGION:** Islam, Christianity

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Modern Ghana was established in 1957, when colonial subjects of the Gold Coast ended more than 75 years of British rule. Ten years prior to independence, these colonial subjects conducted a non-violent movement consisting of boycotts, demonstrations, and mass strikes against the British. One of the leaders of this anti-colonial movement, Kwame Nkrumah, became the first elected head of state. As the first independent nation south of the Sahara, the country was named for the ancient empire of Ghana, a thriving commercial center known to Arabs and Europeans in the 10th century as the "land of gold." Ethnic groups in the northern part of modern Ghana such as the Mamprussi claim a historical connection to ancient Ghana, which was located in present-day Mali.

In the 50 years since independence, Ghana has witnessed four military coups, the first in 1966 and the most recent in 1981. Presently, Ghana is a constitutional democracy with a multi-party system. The executive branch of government consists of 20 cabinet-level ministers and 10 regional ministers. The legislative branch of government, the National Parliament, consists of 230 members. Ghana is divided into 10 administrative units referred to as regions, which are subdivided into districts. Thus, members of parliament are elected representatives from these districts. National elections for the presidency and the parliament are held every four years. Women hold 10% percent of the seats in parliament.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Today about 23 million Ghanaians inhabit a rectangular shaped country consisting of 239,460 sq km. Roughly the size of the state of Oregon, Ghana is bound to the south by the Atlantic Ocean and has a coastline stretching more than 350 mi. Otherwise Ghana is surrounded by French-speaking countries: Burkina Faso on its northern border, on the east by the Republic of Togo, and on the West by La Cote d'Ivoire. Major rivers of Ghana include the Ankobra, the Ofin, the Pra, the Tano, and the famous Black and White Volta.

Although it is a small tropical country located just north of the equator, the geographical terrain and climatic zones of Ghana are varied. The humid southern regions, marked by coastal plains and rain forest, receive upward of 200 cm of rainfall annually. Faced with harmattan (dust-laden) winds four months out of the year, the savannah lands of the northern regions only receive about 100 cm of rainfall annually. The country's central regions are marked by plateaus and escarpments which extend for over 200 km and where the annual rainfall is about 150 cm. As is the case with all tropical countries, Ghana has two seasons: the wet season begins in April and ends in October, and the dry season lasts from November to March.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Horatio Bridge, captain of an American ship, was so impressed with the city of Accra that he declared, “My impressions of Accra are more favorable than of any other place which I have seen in Africa...Accra is the land of plenty in Africa. Beef, mutton, turkey, and chickens abound; and its supply of European necessities and luxuries is unequalled.” Currently the nation’s capital, Accra is still a bustling international city with a population just over two million. A cultural center for the Asante, Kumasi is another large historical city, with a population of 1.5 million. Four other cities in Ghana have populations ranging between 200,000 and 300,000. The larger cities tend to be the capitals of Ghana’s 10 administrative regions. For instance, Tamale, a city of 300,000, is the capital of the Northern Region. However, the majority of Ghanaians, about 60%, live in small towns and villages.

While there are distinct regional differences in the architectural styles of Ghanaian houses, this is not the case in the urban centers. Most urban houses are single- or two-story family units made of cement. Apartment buildings over 10 stories are rare in most urban centers. However, towering office buildings dot the landscape in cities such as Accra and Kumasi. The pre-colonial central city is often composed of mud and cement houses with corrugated zinc roofs. Exclusive suburbs have the large two-story houses surrounded by compound walls and shaded by palm and fruit trees.

The indigenous architectural styles are found in the rural communities. In the southern and central regions of Ghana, one finds the rectangular-shaped adobe or wattle house with a thatched roof. In the northern regions, one finds the circular adobe house with a concentric thatched roof or the rectangular adobe houses with the flat roof. Among the Gurensi of northern Ghana, women paint the beautiful geometric designs found in their circular adobe homes.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Although English is the official language of government and business, Ghanaians speak more than 25 distinct African languages belonging to the Niger-Kongo language family. Akan is the first language of more than 50% of Ghanaians; speakers of this language include the well known Asante and Fante, as well as eight other ethnic groups. Other languages spoken by large numbers of Ghanaians include Ewe, Ga, Guan, and Gur. Most Ghanaian speak two or more African languages. Multilingualism has always been a feature of African societies, stimulated to a large degree by regional and long distance trade. About 200 years ago Muslim merchants introduced Hausa, a Nigerian language, into commercial centers such as Accra. Today, Hausa has become a lingua franca facilitating intergroup communication throughout Ghana. A weekly show is broadcast in Hausa on the national radio station.

Upon arriving at the international airport in Accra, travelers may observe colorful billboards with the word “Akwaaba,” or *welcome*, written in bold letters. To welcome passengers in the Akan language seems reasonable since it is the first language of half of Ghana’s population. Below are typical Akan greetings one may hear in southern Ghana:

Eti Sen	Hello!
Wo ho ti sen	How are you?
Me ho ye	I am fine.
Me ho wo ekylene	See you later!



As a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Ghanaian personal names are found in various parts of the Americas. Among the Fante and most ethnic groups in the southern regions of Ghana, at least one of the names given to a newborn designates the day of birth. In the Carolinas, for example, “Esie” and “Effie” are the shortened forms of Fante “day names” given to females born on Wednesday and Friday. The Akan day name “Kudjoe” is commonly given to males among the people of Jamaica, Surinam, and the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia.

### 4 FOLKLORE

In pre-colonial times, the history of most Ghanaians was preserved by oral historians. In the case of the highly centralized Akan kingdoms, trained court historians preserved the history. The oral traditions of a state society are “fixed texts” and must be recited in a precise manner, word for word. In addition to preserving group history, among the Tallensi of northern Ghana, the legend of Mosuor serves as a charter for the political and ceremonial relationships which exist between chiefs. Today, many of the great leaders of Ghana’s different ethnic groups are also included in school history books. A grade-school pupil does not have to be Asante to learn of Yaa Asantewa, the queen mother who declared war on the British in 1900.

Storytelling is one of the most important recreational activities found among Ghanaians, especially in rural villages. While stories are used to teach children morals, social norms,



and history, they are also used as a form of social control among the adults. Such stories may allude to the improper behavior of local adults without revealing their names. Just as storytelling is a crucial element of primary curriculum in the American school system, Friday afternoons are set aside as a time for storytelling in Ghanaian schools. Students are encouraged to share with the class stories which they have been told by their parents and grandparents.

Among the Akan- and Guan-speaking peoples, folktale characters include the tortoise, hare, vulture, and crow. However, Anansi the spider is the most popular animal character. Anansi defeats his larger foes through intelligence, humor, and cunning rather than through the use of physical force. Some of these spider tales, referred to as "Anancy tales" by Jamaicans, were introduced into the Caribbean by enslaved Akans forced to work on plantations in the 18th century.

## 5 RELIGION

Prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity in Ghana, the concept of a supreme being was common in the majority of the indigenous religious systems. It was a belief in the power of intermediary mystical beings such as ancestral spirits and lesser deities that made these religions the target of 19th-century Christian missionaries. Islam was introduced into northern regions of Ghana as early as the 14th century among people such as the Mossi. The Larabanga Mosque south of Tamale was built as early as the 15th century.

Whether an individual is Christian or Muslim, he or she is reluctant to totally divorce themselves from certain aspects of the indigenous religions, especially community-wide festivals commemorating the ancestors. In Cape Coast, each August the Fante sponsor the Oguaa-Afahye Festival, an agricultural festival. It attracts Fante from all over the Central Region and family and friends from various parts of the country. Although ancestral reverence is central to this festival, the participants may represent a variety of Christian denominations including Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, A.M.E. Zion, and members of various independent churches.

During the 1930s, some African Christians became dissatisfied with mission churches controlled by white missionaries. They left to create independent Christian sects, sensitive to both the spiritual needs and cultural values of Africans. For instance, the Harrist Church, which was founded in La Cote d'Ivoire in 1913, spread to southwestern Ghana within a few years. The first Harrist church was established in Ghana by Maame Tani, a healer, and Papa Kwesi Nackabah, a preacher. Not only does the Harrist Church give women a greater role in religious affairs, it sanctions polygyny. The Harrist Church also incorporates African dance and song into devotional services.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Ghanaians celebrate Independence Day on March 6 and Republic Day on July 1. The government often sponsors major parades in the large cities on national holidays. On such occasions, teenagers and young adults enjoy beach parties. The two religious holidays recognized by all are Christmas and Damba, which marks the birth of the Islamic prophet Mohammed.

Every month of the year, one or more festivals are held in some part of Ghana. For instance, during the month of August, while people of the Northern Region celebrate the Damba Festival, the Ga people of Accra sponsor the Homowo Festival,

a celebration of female puberty rites. While most festivals may have political or economic significance, Ghanaians use festivals to express their appreciation to the divinities for good health, prosperity, and a bountiful harvest.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The cycle of life from birth to death is marked by some type of celebration in Ghana. Throughout southern Ghana, ethnic groups carry out special naming ceremonies for the newborn. The Ga host a naming ceremony for the newborn infant eight days after birth. Family members and friends may sponsor numerous small ceremonies to mark the child's growth. For instance, among the Adkye-Ga, a newborn's mother or female relatives will dress the infant in waist beads, believed to protect the baby from disease and evil spirits. On a practical level, this string of beads adorning the baby's waist holds the diaper. Once a boy is toilet trained he no longer wears waist beads. A female, however, may wear her waist beads for the duration of her life, simply lengthening the string and adding beads to accommodate changes in her body.

Many ethnic groups in Ghana sponsor events which mark adolescence. Among the Ashanti and other Akan groups, nubility rites are held for a female once her menstrual cycle is regularized. The nubility rite lasts for several days and is conducted by the Queen Mother and elderly members of the girl's matrilineage. As a series of life-affirming spiritual and religious activities, this ritual does not involve any type of genital mutilation. The adolescent female is educated in the moral standard and behavior necessary for her to become a successful mother, wife, and member of her community.

The nubility rite includes activities such as a stool ceremony, a ritual bath, dancing, and pouring libation to thank God, the earth, the ancestors, and the community for having protected the girl. Other ceremonial activities include the presentation of gifts from guests, distribution of food on behalf of the girl, a hair-cutting ceremony, the ceremonial dressing of the girl, and the eating of a ritual meal.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Among Ghana's diverse groups, custom stipulates how greetings should be delivered and received. Among the Akan peoples, one can not initiate a conversation without first extending the proper greeting. To do otherwise, one risks being labeled as rude and uncivilized.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There is an average of five people living in each house in Ghana. In towns and cities, some housing has been built by the government or by organizations and companies to provide housing for their employees.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The dominant family structure in Ghana is the extended family, and the influence of descent groups is still very strong. From birth to death, Ghanaians are members of either a matrilineal or patrilineal descent group. The Fante of the Central Region, like all Akan-speaking groups, trace descent through the female line; children belong to their mother's lineage. The Talensi of the Northern Region reckon descent through the male line and children are members of their father's lineages. These



*A Ghanaian rural family compound. The dominant family structure in Ghana is the extended family, and the influence of descent groups is still very strong. From birth to death, Ghanians are members of either a matrilineal or patrilineal descent group.*  
(Corel Corporation)

unilineal descent groups regulate marriage, hold property jointly, perform important religious activities, and provide members with the security of a mutual aid system. Members of a Tallensi patrilineage are obliged to participate in certain ceremonies which revere and pacify their ancestors. Adult members of a Fante matrilineage will be expected to offer financial assistance to children other than their offspring.

Most Ghanaians believe that marriage is a family matter rather than a contract between two individuals. In both urban and rural communities, marriage requires the approval of the family and involves some type of bridal payment (a prescribed set of gifts given by the potential groom to his fiancée's family). Today, young adults wishing to marry may choose one or a combination of wedding ceremonies: the traditional, civil, Christian, or Islamic wedding ceremony.

## **11 CLOTHING**

On a daily basis Ghanaians may choose to dress in either African or Western-style clothes. A woman who chooses to wear the "kaba and slit," a matching blouse and long skirt made from African cloth, is considered to be as appropriately dressed as one wearing a Western business suit.

While certain types of woven cloth and clothing designs may be associated with a specific ethnic group, they are becoming a part of the national dress. For instance, although the

*fugu* is a shirt worn traditionally by elderly men on ceremonial occasions, among the northern peoples such as the Dagomba and the Kasena, it is now worn by men all over the country. In fact, this striped cotton shirt was often worn by the former head of state President Rawlings.

All students attending elementary, secondary schools and college wear uniforms; however, it is not uncommon to see urban teenage boys dressed in the fashionable blue jeans worn in American cities. On special occasions, custom dictates that people wear traditional clothing. For instance, the Ashanti must wear the hand-stamped *Adrinkra* cloth at funerals. Throughout Ghana, men and women holding traditional political titles have specific clothes worn only on ceremonial events. Among the Ga, on ceremonial occasions chiefs must wear the expensive machine-made *bazin* cloth, draped in the toga style. In addition to dictating clothing to be worn by nobility, there are rules regarding hairstyles, makeup, jewelry, and footwear. The Fante Queen Mother must wear a natural hairstyle and the traditional hand-made sandals associated with nobility at all public ceremonies.

## **12 FOOD**

Ghanaian cuisine is very savory, and the use of cayenne, all-spice, curry, ginger, garlic, and onions is common in most dishes. Stews are some of the nation's most popular dishes;

the national dish is groundnut peanut stew, which may include chicken or beef. Another common dish is *palava* sauce, a spinach stew which may use fish or chicken. A spicy rice dish cooked in tomato sauce and meat, Jollof Rice, is eaten by many Ghanaians, and is the antecedent to the red rice dish eaten by African-Americans in the coastal Carolinas. Ghanaians also eat black-eyed peas; the dish "red-red" is black-eyed peas cooked in palm oil and served with rice and fish.

While urban dwellers may include bread, oatmeal, and ice cream in their diet, most rural folk rarely eat Western food. For breakfast, Fante villagers may eat fish and kenkey, a fermented corn dish. The first meal of the day for an Ewe family living in Accra may include an egg and large bowl of oatmeal sweetened with local honey. The main staples served with Ghanaian meals are rice, millet, corn, cassava, yams, and plantains. The latter four may be fried, roasted, or boiled.

Some of the fast foods sold by urban street vendors include roasted plantain or peanuts, corn on the cob with pieces of coco nuts, and beef kebabs. In all of the cities, there are hundreds of small restaurants, referred to as *chop bars*, serving indigenous cuisine at reasonable prices. Women tend to be the owners and employees of these small chop bars.

### 13 EDUCATION

After independence in 1957, the Ghanaian government introduced free education, assuming all educational expenses for students from the time they entered primary school until they completed university. Still today, after introducing nominal tuition fees in the 1980s, educational expenditures represent more than 25% of the national budget. Unlike Western countries, the Ghanaian government assumes the bulk of the operational cost for secondary boarding schools, both public and private. While public boarding schools are located in all 10 regions of the country, private institutions tend to be located in or near the major urban centers. Achimota School is an example of a public coeducational facility located in Accra and Sammo Secondary Technical School, located in Cape Coast, is an example of a private boarding school.

Competition to the nation's secondary schools and institutions of higher education is very intense. Two entrance examinations, one for secondary school and the other for the university, weed out all but the most exceptional students. As is the case throughout the continent, the number of female students decreases drastically at the upper levels of the educational system.

Government guaranteed loans have been introduced to help students finance their education at public universities and professional and technical colleges. Four of Ghana's public universities are located in the southern and central areas of the nation: the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast, the University of Science and Technology, and the University College of Education. More recently, the government established the University of Development Studies at Tamale in the Northern Region. In the past 10 years, several private universities have been established. Several of the private universities were established by religious bodies such as the Seventh Day Adventists who own the Valley View University in Accra, and Central University College which was established by the Central Gospel Church. The first tertiary institution in Ghana modeled on the American liberal arts college is Ashesi University. There are also several public institutions of higher

education similar to American community colleges which offer training in fields such as nursing, teaching, fashion design, and computer programming. Such institutions include polytechnics and nursing training and teacher training colleges which are located in all the country's regions.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance are intimately interwoven in most parts of African. Ghanaian choreographer A. M. Ipoku asserts, "...one can see the music and hear the dance." When attending night clubs or house parties, Ghanaians dance to high life, reggae, or rhythm and blues. When attending Christian churches, Ghanaians sing Western-style hymns or gospel music. It is not unusual to hear gospel music at the funeral of some Christians.

Traditional music and dance are performed at all coronations, festivals, and the funerals of high-ranking members of a community. Among the Ga of southern Ghana, during the Homowo Festival which introduces adolescent girls to the public, musicians play the traditional drum music, *Kpanlogo*. In the north, the final funeral ceremony of a beloved person of high status among the Dagomba may include musical performances by more than six groups, each playing a distinct musical style. The dances performed also vary, the most important dance being the *Baamaya*. These dancers have bells tied to their feet and waists, wear headdresses, and wave fans while they perform fascinating and strenuous movements.

The drum is by far the most important musical instrument among southern ethnic groups; however, the xylophone dominates the music of northern groups. Both instruments are made in a variety of sizes. Other traditional instruments include various types of rattles such as the *shekere*; clapperless bells; and wind instruments such as the bamboo flute and single-note trumpet made from animal horns, ivory, or wood. Popular music using Western instruments does not pose a threat to Ghana's rich musical heritage. For instance, the installation ceremony of a new paramount Asante chief requires a new pair of *atumpan drum*, also known as the talking drum. As is the case with many African languages, the Ashanti language is tonal. Following the high-low pitches of the Akan language, the *atumpan* recites proverbs and poems recounting the valor of warriors and singing the praises of chiefs. Presently, the *atumpan* is played at the opening session of the National Assembly in Accra and is used in radio broadcasts to announce the news.

One of West Africa's most renowned composers and ethnomusicologists is the Ghanaian J. H. Kwabena Nketia, a professor at the University of Ghana. He translates the traditional elements of Ghanaian music into contemporary idioms, and some of his best known compositions include *Bolga Sonata for Violin and Piano* and *Canzona for the Flute, Oboe, and Piano*.

Prior to independence from the British, the literary arts were very limited. For instance, the works of only two playwrights were published prior to independence. The first Ghanaian to publish a play was Kobina Sekyi in 1913; Sekyi's *The Blinkards* is a satirical comedy that questions the increasing Anglicization of indigenous culture. Also during the colonial period, Ferdinand Kwasi Fiwoo, an Ewe of eastern Ghana, wrote three plays in Ewe which were well received by readers and audiences.

The first Ghanaian to publish a novel was Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford, *Ethiopian Unbound* in 1911. It was over 30

years later before another Ghanaian writer would be published—*Eighteenpence* by R. E. Obeng in 1943.

After independence, the literary arts began to flourish; literary journals such as *Drum* and *Okyeame* published the short stories and poetry of such writers as Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, Kwesi Brew, and Kojo Kyei. Unfortunately, during the nine years that Kwame Nkrumah served as head of state, the creativity of Ghanaian writers was seriously censored. In 1960, Nkrumah shut down the *Drum*. Only poets concerned with patriotic or nationalist issues, such as Michael Dei-Anang and Yaw Warren, escaped the scrutiny of the government.

After the overthrow of Nkrumah's government in 1966, an impressive group of writers emerged. Well known playwrights include Kofi Awoonor, Efua Sutherland, and Joe Graft. Novelists include Kofi Awoonor, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Ama Ata Aidoo. Ghanaian poets who are recognized by an international audience include Atukwei Okai, Kofi Awoonor, and Vincent Odamtten. Poets as well as other creative writers do recognize the impact of their respective oral heritage on the literary arts. Ewe oral poetry, *halo*, has been a major influence on the poetry of Kofi Awoonor in terms of structure and rhythm.

## 15 WORK

Ghana has a diversified economy consisting of light manufacturing, mineral production, and agricultural production. Gold is one of the country's most abundant mineral resources, and in recent years it has superseded cocoa as the leading foreign exchange earner. Other minerals mined and exported include diamonds, manganese, and bauxite. In 2008 offshore oil was discovered in commercial quantities in Cape Three Points, which is located in the Western Region. It is expected that this discovery will boost the economy and provide more jobs.

In the last 25 years there has been a boom in the timber industry. Although tracks of virgin rain forest such as the Kakum National Park in the Central Region are protected by the government, community groups throughout the country are concerned about the adverse effects of deforestation. Various women's and youth groups sponsor tree-planting projects. Ghanaian farmers are keenly aware that deforestation causes erosion, gradually decreasing agricultural yields.

A large proportion of the population is engaged in subsistence farming. In most groups, men carry out the heavy work associated with preparing the fields, but women and children plant, weed, and harvest most food crops. Principal food crops produced for domestic consumption include cassava, maize, millet, plantains, peanuts, rice, yams, leafy vegetables, beans, and fruits. Many women sell their surplus food crops to urban traders in order to earn cash.

Introduced during the colonial era, cocoa is still Ghana's leading export crop and is processed by Europeans to make chocolate. In most farm communities cocoa cultivation is dominated by the men. Among the Ewe, women own only 4% of the total cocoa acreage. Women farm the food crops and must be involved in the petty retail trade, food processing, or artisan work in order to earn money.

Although farmers raise chickens, cows, goats, sheep, and pigs, fish is indeed the staple protein food among Ghanaians. Fishing is an important economic activity, connecting communities from the farthest extremes of the country. There are hundreds of fishing villages located along the Atlantic coastline. During the fishing season, small crews of men in brightly



*Ghanaians drying peanuts. Ghana's national dish is peanut stew, which may include chicken or beef. (Corel Corporation)*

painted canoes cast their nets into the Atlantic Ocean. Most fishermen have mastered both lagoon and deep sea fishing. The fish they catch is processed and marketed by their wives or female relatives. Women are responsible for the selling of fresh, smoked, salted, and fried fish in the Makola Market and other smaller markets in Accra. Some Ga women travel hundreds of miles to sell their product in the markets of cities such as Kumasi, Ho, and Tamale. Historically, and still today, the fish trade is a major economic resource open to Ga women.

Processing foods for Western markets is a slowly developing but lucrative business venture in Ghana. Commercial fishing companies with expensive boats and high-tech equipment supply an increasingly large number of American and European supermarkets and restaurants with tuna and lobster. Some women's cooperatives have begun raising and processing snails, known as escargots in metropolitan restaurants in European cities.

Women are well represented in the labor force, but also tend to work in the informal sector of the economy, mainly as petty traders in sales and retail. Professional women cluster in occupations such as nursing and teaching. In the corporate world, women are underrepresented in managerial positions and dominate the clerical positions. Lack of capital is the main reason why few women have been able to establish independent businesses; banks and loaning institutions discriminate against them.

The manufacturing sector of the economy is growing at a slower pace and includes wood processing, food processing, textile, brewing, and distilling. Few of these products are exported outside of the African continent. However, the handicraft industry is thriving and exports are increasing. Traditionally woven clothes, leather bags, bead necklaces, and beautifully carved masks and stools are sold in many large American cities. Currently, many African-American secondary and college graduates adorn their robes with *kente* scarves produced by Asante weavers.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular spectator sport in Ghana is soccer. Every major city supports one or more professional teams and a stadium—Asante Kotoko in Kumasi, the Venomous Vipers in Cape Coast, and the Hearts of Oak in Accra. The Black Stars, Ghana's national team, is made up of the best players from these various teams. Ghanaians playing abroad, such as Michael Essien, who plays for the English soccer team Chelsea, return home to play with the Black Stars during international matches such as the Africa Cup or the World Cup. On any given weekend it is not uncommon to find teenage boys or men competing in soccer matches. Soccer for females is gaining in importance, and a female soccer league was launched in April 2008.

While soccer is the sport of the masses, basketball and tennis are replacing cricket in popularity among the elite. Females attending secondary schools and institutions of higher education tend to excel in sports such as track and handball.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

After World War II, the concert party, a type of comic opera performed in the Akan language, became the most popular form of entertainment in the coastal towns. This folk theater is a fusion of Akan performing arts, especially masquerade and Anansi stories, influenced by Western musical and dramatic traditions. While the theatrical form used is similar to slapstick humor, there are both moral and political overtones in the performance. Today, there are over 50 concert party troupes who perform in both urban and rural areas. The events open at nine o'clock with a dance and live band playing popular tunes. Two hours later, the troupe performs a comical play which lasts until two or three o'clock in the morning. Generally, the band ends the concert with a selection of music.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Although the British manufactured goods introduced during the colonial period decreased certain cottage industries, Ghana has maintained a rich art and craft tradition. While certain crafts such as batik were introduced in the 1960s, others such as pottery have been practiced for thousands of years. In pre-colonial times, those ethnic groups that were organized in kingdoms boasted many full-time artisans. Weavers and smiths were full-time artisans in Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti kingdom. Today, Asante smiths still produce the incredible beautiful gold jewelry for the monarch, and the weavers produce the *kente* clothe worn by royalty.

Pottery, the country's oldest craft, dates back to 4000 bc, and women still throw pots of various sizes without the wheel. The perfectly round clay pots produced by Shai women, known throughout southern and central Ghana, are used for stor-

age and cooking. Akan women are some of the few female sculptors in Africa; their clay figures are idealized portraits of deceased chiefs or important elders in their society. Beads commonly found in markets throughout Ghana are also produced by women. Among the Krobo people in the eastern part of Ghana, beads are used in several socio-religious ceremonies, including puberty rites for adolescent girls.

As mentioned above, many Ghanaian groups continue to use traditionally woven cloth for special occasions. Throughout Ghana, men are the weavers. Men in northern societies such as the Dagomba make leather products and weave the fugu shirt described earlier.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The minimum working age is 15, but custom and economic necessities often force children to work at a younger age. The government has established agencies to help protect children. Ethnic tensions in the northern parts of Ghana eased somewhat in the 1990s, although they have not completely disappeared.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Any visitor to Ghana will notice the high visibility and dynamism of women in commercial and social life. They are found on the streets carrying their wares on their heads, selling in shops, in the markets, or from tables set up on pavements. Women in Ghana also play important roles managing church, home, and community activities. Among the matrilineal communities, some royal women become queen-mothers, and perform political and ritual functions. However, despite their high visibility in daily life, few women occupy positions of authority in formal power structures. After elections in 2000, only 19 women were elected to a parliament of 200. In 2004, although 100 women contested the parliamentary elections, only 25 were elected.

Women in Ghana are faced by constraints such as a lack of education, training and skills, low rates of utilization of productive resources such as land, and poor literacy rates in comparison with men. According to a major social survey, the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 4) for 2000, 44.1% of women as compared to 21.1% of men had no formal education.

This has a direct effect on women's capacity to take up formal sector jobs and leadership positions. Thus the majority of women in Ghana are self-employed. Their main activities are petty trading, food processing, and marketing food crops. Although this makes them highly visible, their businesses tend to be small-scale, home-based and loosely structured with limited management expertise and weak infrastructural support.

Due to their low levels of literacy and skills, women tend not to be able to improve their opportunities, and they remain in low-skilled, low-status and low-paid jobs.

The underlying causes of the constraints are deep-seated traditional social attitudes and socio-cultural practices and beliefs which are slow to change. Also, the Judeo-Christian traditions tend to reinforce patriarchal cultural practices and beliefs, and this makes Ghanaians adopt conservative attitudes toward issues such as homosexuality and fashions and fads which are thought to be "Western."

Efforts have been made by both the state as well as civil society organizations to bridge the inequalities that persist between men and women. In 1975 the National Council for Women and Development was established as the national

machinery to promote the advancement of women, following from the first United Nations Conference on Women. Since January 2001 the national machinery has been transformed and elevated to a full ministry, the Ministry for Women's and Children's Affairs (MOWAC), headed by a minister of state who has cabinet status. MOWAC has worked with academia, NGOs and members of legislative bodies to research and review aspects of Ghanaian laws which do not promote the advancement of women. Ghanaian women have a long history of organization and association and many belong to groups with a variety of interests. Such groups could have any of the following interests: religious, professional or occupational, micro-finance, self-help, politics, women's rights, or charity.

Feminist groups such as Abantu for Development and Ne-tright have been at the forefront of activities to support the empowerment of women, and also to support them when they venture into formal power structures and take up public office. Since the 1980s, the collective efforts of the state and civil society have brought about a number of achievements for gender issues in Ghana. Notable examples are the establishment of the passing of PNDC Law 111 or the Intestate Succession Law, the establishment of the Girls' Education Unit of the Ministry of Education, the passing of The Children's Act, the amendment of the Criminal Code to suppress trafficking in women, the establishment of a Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit within the Ghana Police Service, and the passing of a Domestic Violence Bill. Particularly since 2000 some women's rights groups have begun to form networks. One such network was very instrumental in mobilizing the public to support the passing of the Domestic Violence Bill in 2007. Another network had earlier mobilized the public to support a Women's Manifesto which was presented to President Kufour in 2005.

In spite of the activities by both the state and civil society to improve the status of women in Ghana, and the increasing levels of awareness of women's and gender issues in the country, challenges to women's empowerment and leadership still persist. Although the status of women in Ghana has improved greatly during the last 25 years, there is still room for more progress.

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—revised by M. Prah

# GIKUYU

**PRONUNCIATION:** kee-KOO-yoo

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kikuyu; Gekoyo

**LOCATION:** Kenya

**POPULATION:** 6.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Gikuyu; English and KiSwahili (national languages)

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, fundamentalist groups, African Separatist Churches); ancestor spirits (Mungiki etc)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Gikuyu, like the white settlers in the early 20th century, were attracted to the highlands because of cool temperatures, fertile soils, and abundant rainfall. Prior to the arrival of the Gikuyu, hunters and gatherers known as the Dorobo occupied the area. Although the exact date when the Gikuyu began to occupy the central highlands is not known, their oral history refers to a cycle of famines, which helps to tie their presence to a point in history. For example, the “Famine of Sweeping the Courtyard” occurred probably before 1637 and the “Famine of Small Bones” occurred later, sometime in the mid-18th century. It is known, therefore, that by the early 1600s (well before the arrival of Europeans), the Gikuyu were concentrated at Ithanga, 80 km (50 mi) southeast of the mountains that rise near the confluence of the Thika and Sagana rivers.

Oral traditions of all the tribes of Kenya agree that people began to migrate in different directions, eventually becoming the separate groups that exist today. The Gikuyu themselves moved west, from where the Gikuyu creation myth picks up the story.

The history of the Gikuyu becomes further complicated for historians and anthropologists with the inevitable intermarriage and interaction that occurred (and still occurs) between the various tribes and groups.

Having migrated to their current location about four centuries ago (in the 1600s), the Gikuyu make up Kenya’s largest ethnic group. The Gikuyu attribute their origins to sacred intervention by their god Ngai who sometimes resides on Mt. Kenya, which, for the Gikuyu, is a sacred place.

The Gikuyu have featured very significantly in the development of contemporary Kenyan political, cultural, and social life. The Land and Freedom Movement (referred to pejoratively as the “Mau Mau” Movement) during the 1950s was primarily a Gikuyu guerrilla war in response to British imperialism, which had alienated Gikuyu from their farming lands in favor of white settlers. Many of these settlers owned farms bigger than the states of Rhode Island or Delaware. On these farms Gikuyu were required to do forced labor, especially providing labor for cash crops such as coffee and tea. A “hut tax” in 1901 was imposed on every Gikuyu household so that men were forced to migrate into the growing city of Nairobi or on to the white-owned farms to earn money so as to pay taxes. The Gikuyu nationalist Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of Kenya at its independence in 1963. He is revered amongst the Gikuyu for his leadership against colonialism and for his status as the father of his country.

Today, the Gikuyu, like other Kenyan ethnic groups, participate in a democratic political system. Political participation is primarily through election to a parliamentary seat (of which there are 210 in Kenya) or through direct election to the national presidency. Most of the Gikuyu belong to one major political party, the Party of National Unity (PNU), one of the major partners in Kenya’s “Grand Coalition” government as of 2008. The other major partner in the coalition government is the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

The Grand Coalition government was the culmination of a peace deal brokered by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan when violence broke out among Kenya’s ethnic groups following the announcement of the disputed December 2007 presidential election results. Members of the Gikuyu community (from which the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki hailed) suffered most of the violence where over 1,000 people were killed and over 500,000 displaced from their own homes.

As of 2008 the Gikuyu were as much part of the ruling coalition government as other Kenyan citizens. Mwai Kibaki was the second Gikuyu to become the president of Kenya since 1964 when Kenya became a republic. He was elected for a renewable five-year term in 2002 after former African strongman Daniel Moi retired from office and active politics. Other outstanding Gikuyu personalities in history include Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya; Dedan Kimathi, the celebrated leader of the “Mau Mau” Movement; and Wangu wa Makeri, a legendary woman who ruled Gikuyuland.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Official figures released in January 2007 estimated the population of Kenya at 36.1 million. The Gikuyu are the largest ethnic group in Kenya numbering about 6.8 million of this population. The overall population growth rate for Kenya, however, dropped from 2.82% in 2005 to 2.75% in 2006. This drop can be attributed to disease and to more effective methods of family planning.

Although the Gikuyu live throughout Kenya, they are primarily located in two of Kenya’s eight provinces. These two provinces, Nairobi Province and the Central Province, are in the central area of the country. Due to their numerical superiority and early 20th century colonial association with British settlers in the highlands, the Gikuyu have been well positioned to occupy a central position in Kenyan social life.

The capital city of Nairobi lies just on the southern boundary of the area traditionally occupied by the Gikuyu people. Thus, many Gikuyu now are counted among this city’s inhabitants of about 3 million people. Ancestral homes are to the north of Nairobi in the towns of Murang’a, Nyeri, and Kiambu. Gikuyuland is a dissected plateau of about 160 km (100 mi) from north to south and 48 km (30 mi) from east to west. Its elevation ranges from about 900 m (3,000 ft) to over 2,300 m (7,500 ft) above sea level. The plateau features deep gorges and parallel ridges. Rainfall due to the high altitude is very plentiful. On the eastern side of the plateau, the ecology is comparatively arid dominated by a grassland zone. To the west of this area, the elevation increases giving rise to more rainfall and woodlands with good potential for agriculture. The largest ecological area is characterized by high altitude and rainfall where foliage is abundant and population is heaviest. Since the Gikuyu rely heavily on agriculture, this is the area of significant cash crops such as pyrethrum, coffee, and tea. Soils are

deep and red here providing a fertile ecology for the growth of traditional crops such as sweet potatoes, bananas, millet, sorghum, arum lily, yams, cowpeas, and maize, which is the staple throughout Gikuyuland.

Gikuyu also raise cattle, sheep, and goats. They use the hides from the cattle to make bedding, sandals, and carrying straps and they raise the goats and sheep to use for religious sacrifices and purification.

### 3 LANGUAGE

“Kikuyu” is the Anglicized form of the proper name and pronunciation of Gikuyu. The Gikuyu refer to themselves as the Agikuyu people. The Gikuyu are generally fluent in three languages: Gikuyu, Kiswahili, and English. The official language and the medium of instruction at all education tiers in Kenya is English. All children receive instruction in this language in school beginning with primary school and continuing through university. Kiswahili is a national language that is widely used as a language of trade and commerce especially by those for whom formal education has not been possible. Kiswahili is also taught in the schools from primary through secondary school. When traveling outside the central highlands, the Gikuyu use either English or Kiswahili. Radio, television and mass media publications are richly available in these two languages throughout Kenya.

The Gikuyu language, however, can be thought of as the language of preference in home and community and is spoken by, and passed on to, children at home. Gikuyu is taught in primary schools throughout Gikuyuland. Gikuyu is classified as a member of the Benue-Congo family of languages. It is grouped among the Bantu languages within this system of classification. These languages are widespread throughout central and southern Africa, which indicates a common culture history stretching over and uniting ethnic groups over a vast geographical area. Bantu languages have a common grammatical structure and cognate words shared as a language heritage. For example, in Gikuyu, as in other Bantu languages, nouns are grouped into classes and are modified by variations in prefixes, infixes, and suffixes to signify attributes such as plurality, singularity, size, human versus non-human status, and tense to name but a few. For instance, the stem “ndo” has no meaning except when modified. For example, the word “mondo” means man and the word “ando” means men. In Kiswahili, also a Bantu language, the stem “tu” is modified in the word man as “mtu” and “watu” as men or people. The term Bantu, which is used for the language family of which Gikuyu is a member, therefore, means “the people” while “muntu” means “a person.”

There are varieties within the Gikuyu language. There is the Southern Gikuyu (Kiambu, Southern Murang’a), Ndia (Southern Kirinyaga), Gichugu (Northern Kirinyaga), Mathira (Karatina), Northern Gikuyu (Northern Murang’a, Nyeri) dialects. Lexical similarity of Gikuyu is about 73% with Embu language, 70% with Chuka language, 67% with Kamba language and 63% with Meru.

If technological advancement is any guide, the Gikuyu language has a bright future. With the liberalization and growth of technology in Kenya, the Gikuyu language is claiming its place on the airwaves through such FM stations as Kameme FM, Inooro FM, and Coro FM. It is also establishing itself on the Internet where members interact in the Gikuyu language. Various writers, including Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the celebrat-



ed Kenyan novelist, have come out to promote the Gikuyu language.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The origin myth of the Gikuyu teaches that Ngai (“God”) carried the first man, Gikuyu, atop Mt. Kenya, also known as *Kiri-nyaga*, which is translated as the “Shining Mountain” or “Mountain of the Light.” Ngai showed him the bountiful land spread out below the mountain. He was told that his sons and daughters would inherit the land and multiply. They would enjoy all of the abundance provided by the land. Gikuyu was given a wife named Mumbi meaning “Creator” or “Molder,” and together they had nine daughters. Ngai said that whenever problems arose, the people should make a sacrifice and gaze at Mt. Kenya so as to be assisted. One day, Gikuyu was unhappy at not having a male heir so he pleaded with Ngai to provide a son for him. After appropriate rituals, Gikuyu went to a sacred tree where he found nine men waiting to greet him. He arranged for these men to marry his daughters provided they agreed to live under his roof and abide by a matrilineal system of inheritance. In time, many grand and great-grandchildren were born. Still later, each daughter came to head her own clan, thus giving rise to the nine clans of the Gikuyu people. The legend continues that in time the kinship system changed from a matrilineal to a patrilineal one. It is believed this happened because the women became excessive in their domination over men. Polygyny (one man and several wives) from then on replaced polyandry (one woman and several hus-



bands) as a marital practice. Nevertheless, the women were able to maintain their names for the main clans. There was actually a 10th daughter but the Gikuyu considered it to be bad luck to say the number 10. When counting they used to say “full nine” instead of 10. To this day, most women carry one of these names. The names are Wanjiru, Wambui, Wanjiku, Wangari, Waceera, Wairimu, Wangui, Wangechi, Wambura, and Wamuyu.

The Gikuyu origin myth validates their system of kinship and gender relations. Spiritual life centered around belief in a high god and sacred places such as Mt. Kenya. Solidarity for family and community in naming practices and family inheritance is made sacred. Above all, land which continues to be the primary value for Gikuyu and which was contested during the colonial era against the British settlers can be understood to have far more than economic utility. Land is indeed a gift from God.

There are a number of other important legends that provide “cultural heroes” who performed great feats in the past. Among these are Karuri who was a past ruler of legendary proportions. Another is Wamugumo who was a noted giant believed to have been able to eat an entire goat by himself. He could clear land that took many men a long time to accomplish, and he was able to kill lions, buffalo, and leopards with ease. A famous woman called Wangu wa Makeri ruled during the period of the matriarchy. During this time, it is believed that women were allowed to have many husbands, especially young men, and the old men did all of the work.

Folktales and riddles combined with myths to provide for young people a strong sense of values recognized by the community as making up Gikuyu culture. Grandmothers were excellent storytellers and devoted a great deal of time to the telling of stories. Some common riddles include “A man who never sleeps hungry?”=fire (which is lit throughout the night); “My son lives between spears”=the tongue; and “My child travels without rest”=the river (always flowing). Proverbs are numerous and constantly changing to reflect current times. For example, one proverb teaches that “A good mortar does not correspond to a good pestle,” to show that successfully matching a husband and a wife may be difficult. Another proverb widely heard is “When the hyenas come, nobody will give shelter” which shows that in periods of panic, “it is every man for himself.” Common sense is taught by most proverbs such as “When one goes on a journey, he does not leave his bananas cooking in the fire.”

Children enjoy telling and listening to a wide assortment of folktales all of which serve to instill values in them. These tales involve stories about animals and people with such titles as “The Hyena at the Crossroads,” “The Poor Woman and the Hog,” “Two Girls and Their Gourds,” and “The Woman and the Bird.” Games are played involving speech acts such as competitive riddling and tongue twisters. One tongue twister refers to a child who saw a tadpole and ran away and when the tadpole saw the child, it also ran away. In Gikuyu, one says “Kaana ka Nikora kona kora kora, nako kora kona kaana ka Nikora kora.”

## 5 RELIGION

The Gikuyu today are prominently represented in a variety of Christian churches which include Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, fundamentalist groups, and African Separat-

ist Churches. The significance of belief in a high god, Ngai, is maintained or was transferred to the Christian-centered belief in monotheism. Ngai created everything. He lives in the sky and is invisible. Sometimes he lives on Mt. Kenya which in Gikuyu is called *Kiri-nyaga* meaning the “Mountain of the Light” or “Shining Mountain.” He should only be approached when problems are serious such as involving life and death questions. During periods of famine or epidemic diseases, the elders on behalf of the entire community approached him.

Other spiritual realms in addition to monotheism have also persisted into contemporary life. Important among these are the ancestors. These departed relatives were concerned with all matters especially those considered to be not important enough to seek Ngai’s attention. Matters of everyday health, for example, deeply involve the ancestors who intervened to cause sickness when their interests were not upheld. “Traditional doctors” were popular as resources for diagnosing which ancestor had been responsible for a particular disease and for information as to how the ancestor may be appeased.

Religious ceremonies were commonly included in public prayer. Invoking through prayer the blessings of Ngai or the ancestors generally started these ceremonies. One common prayer includes the following supplications: “Praise ye Ngai. Peace be with us. Say ye, that the elders may have wisdom and speak with one voice. Say ye, that the people may continue to increase. Say ye, that sheep and cattle may be free of illness. Say ye, peace be with us.” Significantly, the elders led public prayers that served to validate their authority over affairs of the community by establishing a direct line to the high god that ran directly through them. Renowned elders stood out as prophets who were in a position to provide insights as to the wishes of Ngai. Some prophets are venerated in tribal history as most helpful during community crises concerning epidemics and drought. Currently, one can observe on occasion farmers thanking Ngai at harvest time for a plentiful bounty.

Prophets and seers cut a significant niche in Gikuyu religion. Examples included Mwathi wa Mugo and Mugo wa Kibiru. These prophets are believed to have predicted the coming of the White settlers, the struggle for freedom and the role of the Gikuyu in the political leadership of postcolonial Kenya. They gave religious and political guidance to the community.

In the past, religious values emphasized community solidarity and discouraged what may be referred to as “rugged individualism.” Gikuyu learned that family and community welfare was paramount over their individual interests. Authority was vested in those individuals such as elders and prophets who were believed to know what was best for all people. Expressions of individuality and solitary life were not encouraged. Someone perceived to be outside the group might be accused of being a witch and could be killed by the elders. At the same time, considerable security and important meaning in life was provided in this Gikuyu system of social/spiritual culture. That was so because all human life was spiritual and communal. The landscape itself that made up the environment was composed of “sacred” places and objects. For example, the fig tree still has important symbolic significance harkening back to the period when Ngai sent Gikuyu forth to take up residence near Mt. Kenya. Many rituals were performed in the vicinity of a fig tree.

It is clear that the Gikuyu religious system provided a set of answers and solutions to problems of everyday life and mis-

fortune. At the same time, successful experiences were also accounted for by emphasizing conformity to religious values. The ancestors as both kinsmen and spiritual entities are especially well positioned to give a strong sense of family values as reinforced by religious belief. They can be reincarnated in the form of names so that as long as there is a Gikuyu society, the ancestors will live on. The body itself was far less significant than the name or memory of a dead person. In fact, frequently bodies after death were simply discarded in the bush perhaps to be eaten by wild animals such as the hyena.

Today members of the outlawed, quasi-political/religious Mungiki sect are attempting to bring back traditional rituals. Their members claim they are a group of traditionalists interested in re-introducing and promoting traditional way of life among the Gikuyu ethnic group. They pray as they face Mount Kenya, which they believe to be the home of their god Ngai. The Mungiki have adopted the dreadlocks worn in the 1950s by members of the Mau Mau Movement.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Gikuyu are well known for the emphasis that they placed on rituals, which occurred at the time of adolescence. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, there was a custom known as Ngweko. Periodically, elders supervised, in a special location, occasions where young people would gather together and spend private time with each other for the purpose of getting to know members of the opposite sex. At this time, young people paired off according to mutual attraction and, for most couples, experimental lovemaking was practiced. Such lovemaking did not always result in sexual intercourse. Should a young girl become pregnant however, the boy responsible was held accountable and was expected, in time, to marry the girl that he had impregnated. The Gikuyu considered Ngweko to be a form of indigenous education in sexual knowledge. It is said that Ngweko (fondling), since it was associated with sexual reproduction, was considered by the society to be a sacred act of carrying out the orders of their God to reproduce. Many elder Gikuyu believe that the missionaries made a mistake when they labeled Ngweko as sinful. The schools that were established to educate the people in modern culture did not include anything about sexual education. Perhaps for this reason, since the co-educational boarding school became a common place where young people often experimented with their sexuality without any education, teenage pregnancies have become a major social problem in Kenya including the Gikuyu. It is important to note that in the Ngweko system, supervised sex was permitted but self-control for both boys and girls was emphasized.

Both boys and girls, prior to participating in Ngweko, undergo numerous rituals including operations on their genital organs. The purpose of these rituals is to enable young people to bond into groups and to develop a sense of peer group solidarity with those people with whom they have undergone painful experiences together. Clitoridectomy was, and to some extent still is, practiced by the Gikuyu and is the topic of much debate by Africans and others. A middle ground position appears to be emerging that grants the social significance of adolescent ritual while wanting to eliminate clitoridectomy even under hospital conditions where it still occurs. The boys continue to be circumcised, a practice widespread in Africa (unlike clitoridectomy) and commonly found in many other parts

of the world as well. Supporters of initiation note that the Gikuyu recognize the equal significance of boys and girls by subjecting each to initiation ceremonies together.

The Gikuyu word for circumcision of either sex is *irua*. There are many dances and songs which take place during initiation ceremonies and these are called *mambura* (rituals or divine services). During initiation ceremonies, the Gikuyu history is publicly rehearsed so as to impart a sense of community solidarity. Each *irua* group is given its own special name according to events of the day, such as war or famine. Initiation ceremonies involve special foods, and the selection of a sponsor to impart knowledge and to supervise the young person. After several days of instruction, boys and girls are taken together to a compound for their circumcision. Numerous friends and relatives gather for singing and dancing throughout the night. A special feast is made for the parents of the children. The day before the operation, there is a ceremonial dance known as *matuuro*. The girl has her head shaved, but does not participate in a race undertaken by boys. The winner is thought to have been favored by Ngai (God). In another ceremony, boys and girls are organized into lines according to seniority. They take an oath never to reveal Gikuyu secrets to outsiders. Senior warriors then take boys and girls to a special place where they participate in more ceremonies involving being sprayed with medicines that are thought to enhance bravery and endurance. Songs sung on these occasions emphasize community solidarity and bravery.

The next day the physical operations occur. The girls are operated on by a woman considered to be an expert and the boys by a man also considered to be experienced in these matters. In the operation, the girls sit together on a cowhide rug. Female friends and relatives cluster around in a circle. Males are not permitted anywhere near this event. The girls are held by their sponsors and are doused with cold water to reduce pain. While the *moruitha* performs the clitoridectomy, each girl is expected to remain stoic so as not to be seen a coward by the onlookers. After the girl is covered with a new dress, applause and cheering burst forth from the onlookers. The girls retire to a special place for several days where their wounds heal. During this time, close relatives and friends bring special foods and treats for the girls. For several months, the girls do not do any work. Their parents now may wear brass earrings as a sign of their seniority. This symbolizes that their child has now been reborn, not as their child, but as a child of the whole community. Boys' circumcisions mirror that of girls' clitoridectomy ceremonies in most details.

The Gikuyu organized their experience of adolescence very differently from modern life in Kenya. While many elder Gikuyu people still maintain strong relationships with others with whom they were initiated, younger teens are not receiving community socialization comparable to their parental and grandparental generations. While mandatory painful initiation ceremonies may well be best thought of as a vestige of the past, many Kenyans lament what they perceive to be a rising tide of individualism and lack of peer group solidarity among the young. One of the most interesting challenges for young people in Kenya is to work out for themselves what is most appropriate for them to emphasize in choosing to combine old customs with modern ones. This issue is a prominent theme among Kenyan intellectuals and the mass media and is the

subject of stories, plays, and other programs on Kenyan radio and television.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social relations in contemporary Gikuyu society are played out primarily in the context of the local community, school, and church. Dating, courtship, friendship, and family life are significant concerns around which people construct their social lives. There is more evidence today for individual choice in these matters than in the past where very strong principles of age stratification and gender distinction dominated social life.

In the past, boys were organized into sets consisting of groupings of local boys initiating at one time. These sets were grouped into larger groupings, called regiments, made up of boys from elsewhere and from one's local area that had been initiated at the same time. Boys in a common set or regiment proceeded through life together and exercised authority over sets and regiments coming after them. Tribal political authority was vested in one of two older generations that were responsible for governmental decisions involving war and peace and daily conflict resolution. Every generation inherits the name of that generation to which the grandfather belongs. Thus, there is a constant alternating of two generational names, an older and younger. The principle of age determined whom a man or a woman might marry or have sexual relationships with. For instance, a man could have no sexual relations with a girl who was a member of his own set generation. They were considered to be initiation "brothers" and "sisters." The men's regimental organization served as a police force. The older regiments basically interpreted tribal law and made significant decisions while the younger regiments enforced their decisions. Warrior regiments were active in defending communities from raids from neighboring societies or for carrying out raids elsewhere. Thus, the structure of Gikuyu age stratification provided a workable framework for the functioning of society around social needs for procreation, defense, and social regulation.

Within this framework, every Gikuyu knew precisely how best to relate to other people. Social relations such as dating, visiting, and greeting others properly were all prescribed by age (and gender) according to an ubiquitous principle of stratification.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Gikuyu enjoy an abundant resource base arising from their vantage position in the central highlands of Kenya. Much of the region was, therefore, free of malarial mosquitoes and the tse tse and other flies as sources for human and animal disease. Gikuyuland was in the past, and many ways still is, a granary for the Gikuyu and their neighbors. The Gikuyu have experienced success in commercial farming and many other businesses that have been a significant source of revenue for those Gikuyu now in a position to own and maintain large estates and an affluent life-style. Still, many other Gikuyu reside in slums that have grown rapidly in urban areas, especially Nairobi. In this city, many of the thousands of street children, now homeless, come from Gikuyu towns where they have suffered from family dislocation and poverty due, in part, to the uneven income distribution in Kenya. The globalization of the world's economy has been particularly hard on poorer nations such as Kenya. Additionally, many Gikuyu, like some other Kenyans, have lost their sense of community responsibility so

cherished in the past. This is a constant theme in the writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o as well as other Kenyan writers.

In the past, all Gikuyu had sufficient access to food, housing, and other materials even though successful people had more than others. Gikuyu houses were round with wooden walls and grass thatched roofs. Neighbors generally helped in the construction of a home in exchange for beer and meat. Building materials were collected from local materials. Women were considered responsible for thatching, and a carefully thatched house was highly valued. Good thatching provided protection from the rains and the sun during the dry season. Homes were made according to plan with the man's home being much simpler than the woman's. A husband and wife typically lived in separate houses although the woman's house had spaces for her children and her sheep and goats. The better-built homes sometimes lasted for more than 10 years, but re-thatching was an annual event.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage and family life revealed the Gikuyu preference for large families and big compounds. It was considered a religious obligation to have children in response to the command of God to multiply. Four children, two boys and two girls, was the ideal. Boys were desirable because they carried on the family name, which was passed on through the male line. Girls were desired to attract bride wealth in cows and goats which could be, in turn, used to obtain wives for their brothers, and later to have children for those families in which they married. When a girl married and bore children for her new family, she began a family journey that saw her become more powerful as she bore children affiliated to her husband's family. Her children stayed with her in her home separate from their father. Polygyny (one man and more than one wife at a time) was valued as a means to provide large families. Women, too, often preferred polygyny to monogamy (one man and one woman) and, not infrequently, assisted their husbands in finding younger wives. Elder wives had clear lines of authority over younger wives and supervised them in affairs of the compound. Given the importance of age stratification in Gikuyu social organization, it may be said, too, that a woman actually married into an age set as well as the extended family of her husband. When her husband entertained his age set friends, it was considered appropriate for them to sleep with his own wife. This was not considered adultery unlike clandestine affairs held in secrecy, a practice that was severely punished. Thus, in married life, one also sees the basic value of sharing and communalism so significant in all areas of Gikuyu life.

The marriage ceremonies were lengthy and involved stages of progression which first included the initial meeting of the aspiring son-in-law with his prospective parents-in-law. The girl's assent was needed at this meeting before events could proceed to later stages. These events included parental visits, exchanges of goods as bride price spread out over time, and eventual movement of the girl herself into the home of her husband. The marriage itself is finalized when, prior to her movement to her new family, the boy and his relatives come to the girl's house bearing numerous gifts all specifically earmarked for her relatives who were most responsible for her upbringing. The actual movement, not infrequently, took on a rather dramatic public capturing of the girl at some point when she was unaware. Girls arrived in their new homes quite willingly on

the whole even though they might have been “captured” to get there. For a period of many weeks after establishing residence in her new compound, rituals and exchanges continued to occur to symbolize the girl’s transitional stage between her old and new families. She was frequently visited by her girlfriends, and had her own special places in the compound where she could retire alone for private reflection.

Nowadays, marriage no longer involves all of the rituals and exchanges previously emphasized. Nevertheless, there is still bride wealth, significant involvement of parents in the choice of their children’s spouses, and the very high value attached to having children. Marital ceremonies no longer involve Gikuyu religious beliefs which have given way to Christianity, both mainstream and independent churches, and Islam.

Gikuyu family identity is carried on through nomenclature. This is executed by naming the first boy after the father’s father and the second after the mother’s father. The same goes for the girls; the first is named after the father’s mother and the second after the mother’s mother. Following children are named after the brothers and sisters of the grandparents, starting with the oldest and working to the youngest. Along with the naming of the children was the belief that the deceased grandparent’s spirit that the child was named after, would come in to the new child. This belief was lost with the increase in life-span because generally the grandparents are now still alive when the children are born.

### **11 CLOTHING**

In the past, Gikuyu adults dressed in animal skins, especially sheep and goatskins. Skin tanning was a vital industry for which many men were renowned as specialists. Women’s attire includes three pieces, an upper garment, a skirt, and an apron. Men wore a single garment covering the entire body. Young men preferred bare legs made possible by wearing short skirts, especially those made from a kid because of its smooth hairs. Elders wore more elaborate skins often made of fur and, sometimes, aprons worn in ceremonial dances. European clothing is now commonplace throughout Gikuyuland.

Although in rural areas women nowadays wear multi-colored cotton dresses and skirts and blouses, it is common to find girls wearing Western style trousers and even miniskirts. Men generally wear Western style trousers and shirts with jackets and ties for formal occasions. Casual and trendy clothes like jeans and T-shirts are common on weekends and holidays across the gender divide. Women who wish to emphasize an African look can be seen wearing long pieces of colorful cloth worn in skirt-like fashion wrapped around a shorter dress.

### **12 FOOD**

Farm produce and meat were abundant in the past and presently provide Gikuyu with an excellent nutritional resource. Maize, made into a thick porridge called *ugali*, is the national dish of Kenya. *Ugali* is eaten with meat, stews, *mandondo*, *njaha* or traditional greens known as *sukuma wiki*. *Ugali* and *irio* are popular on a daily basis in Gikuyuland. *Irio*, a specifically Gikuyu dish, is a mixture of the kernels from cooked green corn boiled with beans, potatoes, and chopped greens. In the past, the Gikuyu had a regular and intense ceremonial calendar involving considerable feasting. Boiled and roasted meat were constantly being consumed along with beer on these occasions. In the past, the brewing of beer was a cooperative

activity between men and women. Beer was made from sugar cane, maize, and millet. Gourds were used to contain the strained juices for fermenting.

Today, bottled beverages have generally replaced traditional beer on daily and social occasions. Distilleries in Kenya provide an assortment of beer and soft drinks. Eating meat is a mainstay today on all ceremonial occasions. A major form of recreation, especially on Sundays, is visiting special places for *nyama choma* (roast meat). Goat meat is the most popular choice although it is more expensive than beef. Chicken, as in the past, is also a regular treat. Bottled beverages and meat are integral parts of the *nyama choma* recreational event. Although the traditional ceremonial calendar is largely a thing of the past, Gikuyu maintain an intensely social existence involving regular attendance at funerals and weddings. These events would be unthinkable without an abundant supply of meat and bottled beverages.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Traditionally, Children were imparted knowledge through a socialization process that began very early in the life cycle. Infants were sung lullabies emphasizing tribal values and, as the child grew, he listened intently to tales, riddles, and proverbs, which had moral messages. Even after the coming of formal schools in the colonial era, a special time was set aside for the telling of folktales to test students’ memories and knowledge. In the past, boys, prior to initiation, played games that emphasized leadership roles and involved bows and arrows, spears, and slings to instill skills in marksmanship. Little girls cooked imaginary dishes and played at making pots and grinding grains. Dolls were also made with local clay and grass. As children matured, boys were trained by their adult male relatives, and girls by their mothers, grandmothers, and older sisters. For example, boys were taught how to differentiate large herds of cattle or goats by their color, size, and horn texture. Fathers and grandfathers also taught youngsters boundaries of their land, clearing techniques for land prior to farming, and extensive information about the family genealogy. In a society where kinship operated as a principle for the exchange of food and labor, family genealogy was as crucial to know as knowledge about plants and animals. Mothers taught girls knowledge of crops, soils, weather and other significant details of food production.

Today, the traditional informal educational system has been, by and large, replaced by formal education. In Kenya, including Gikuyuland, there has been an attempt to make formal education more sensitive to traditional values and knowledge than was the case during the pre-independence colonial era. One of the disadvantages of emphasizing only knowledge relevant for life in the modern world, such as literacy and world geography, is that, for example, elder women who were the “teachers” no longer teach knowledge about wild plants potentially edible during famine as it was in the past. Sex education is no longer taught as in the past. Reaching a reasonable balance between the old and the new in the current school curriculum is a constant challenge faced by Gikuyu educators. The idea that education is closely linked to the community still persists. Harambee (“let’s pull together”) primary and secondary schools are constantly being built throughout Gikuyuland and elsewhere in Kenya. Nevertheless, young people now have excellent opportunities for schooling even though it is too costly

for many families. Money is raised for these schools by individual donations, but those wishing to show solidarity with the community often give it publicly at feasts. The illiteracy rate in Kenya is approaching 50%, but it is lower in Gikuyuland.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music and dance, along with storytelling, were all emphasized in the past. Dancing by men and women was mandatory at initiation ceremonies, weddings, and other public events. People of all ages enjoyed dancing. There were three basic kinds of musical instruments in the past: drums, flutes, and rattles. The last were used for private pleasure while drums and flutes were significant at dances. Song was woven into the fabric of everyday life. There were songs for babies; songs sung by girls while threshing millet and by boys while practicing archery; songs sung by families and community members during weddings and funerals; songs sung by community members and initiates during initiation ceremonies; songs concerning everyday problems of life and love that were sung around the campfire; songs for drinking; songs that concerned cultural heroes both past and present; and songs sung in praise of ancestors and the high god, Ngai. In brief, Gikuyu life was unthinkable without the joy of singing, dancing, and musical expression, participated in by all members of the community.

Much remains of the older patterns of musical and dance appreciation. Although the traditional instruments and dance steps are now rarely seen, attendance at school dances and nightclubs is a major form of recreation by old and young alike. Gikuyu songs composed to meet everyday challenges can still be heard on the radio. Storytelling is now supplemented by a very impressive written literature. This printed material includes children's literature where tribal stories and tales are made available to youngsters. One such book entitled *Nyumba ya Mumbi* graphically illustrates the Gikuyu creation myth. Novelists, journalists, poets, and other writers are numerous in Kenya including many from Gikuyuland. Perhaps the most famous of these writers is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose many stories, plays, and novels have catalogued the Gikuyu struggle for national identity throughout the 20th century. His work includes material about the land and freedom movement, the impact of Europeanization on traditional Kenya society, and increasingly the alienation experienced by many Kenyans as the traditional ethic of communalism gives way to modern forms of excessive capitalism and greed. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has written world famous literature in both English and Gikuyu. Some of his work is performed in theater in rural areas in Gikuyuland.

#### **15 WORK**

There was, in the past, a very strong division of labor by gender. Nevertheless, men and women worked together as well as separately in tasks that complemented each other. Gikuyu parents raise boys and girls very differently. The girls are raised to work in farming and the boys usually work with the animals. The girls also have the responsibility of taking care of a baby brother or sister and also helping the mother out with household chores.

Each woman had her own plots of land where she cultivated the crops such as sweet potatoes, millet, maize, and beans. A woman cultivated her land and had the freedom to do as she pleased with its produce beyond providing food for her chil-

dren and husband. Men were responsible for heavy labor such as clearing the land and cutting down trees. Household tasks for women involved maintaining her own granary and supervising the feeding of sheep, goats, and cows that were kept at the homestead. A polygamous husband had his own hut apart from his wives where he ate with friends or his children and was served food by his wives. On a daily basis, women, together with their children, collected firewood, water, and produce from the garden. There was also a division of labor by gender concerning industries. Some men were ironsmiths, manufacturing for the community such things as knives, arrowheads, bracelets, axes, hammers, spears, and other utilitarian tools. Only women were potters. Pottery provided for household needs and, for the better potters, was the source of marketing exchanges to obtain foods and material objects. There is a well-known proverb that characterizes the best potters who may be in a good position for valued exchanges as "the good potter cooks with broken pots." Women also excelled in making baskets, and men tended to specialize in skin tanning.

The informal educational system of the Gikuyu involved children and young people learning economic tasks from adults and specialists through direct observation and often apprenticeship. Work-related education frequently involved storytelling that highlighted environmental factors such as crops, weather, and ecology. Elder women sometimes told these stories as a form of entertainment. In one story entitled "Ngiciri and Madam," a man wants to get married to a girl who is being pursued by many other men. To help him, he enlists the assistance of birds to which he gives millet. Doves are given sorghum so as to enlist their aid in his competitive strategies to get the girl. They help him pass a test given to him by the girl's family. In this test, he must demonstrate his knowledge by separating into piles millet, sorghum, maize, and castor oil seeds that have been mixed together. His other test requires that he eat an entire bull in one night to show his power. Because he knows not only what seeds birds enjoy, but that hyenas like cattle bones, his friend, the hyena, helps him secretly to consume the bull just as the birds had helped him separate the seeds into separate piles. The hero of this story wins because he knows his environment and understands that animals and humankind have fates that are intertwined.

The Gikuyu remain intensely agricultural and devoted to their land. Cash crops are now significant, but still the traditional division of agricultural labor is very much in place. Modernization of the economy has made social and class differences more evident than in the past. Though they are traditionally agricultural people and have a reputation as industrious people, many Gikuyus are now involved in business. Most Gikuyu still live on small family plots but many of them have also seen the opportunities in business and have moved to cities and different areas to work. They have a desire for knowledge and they believe that all children should receive a full education. Gikuyu have a strong reputation for money management and it is common for them to have many enterprises at one time. The majority of those in hawking businesses in urban centers in Kenya are the Gikuyu.

Since they also practice animal husbandry, the Gikuyu use the hides from the cattle to make bedding, sandals, and carrying straps and they raise the goats and sheep to use for religious sacrifices and purification

Through formal education and accumulation of private capital, many Gikuyu are now very wealthy and enjoy affluent lifestyles. Professional occupations, as well as employment in factories and other working class jobs, now differentiate the Gikuyu into social categories based upon income. Nevertheless, among most Gikuyu, there is still a strong sense of ethnic solidarity and heritage in cultural values. In Kenya's multi-party democratic system, for example, Gikuyu of various economic classes primarily belong to one of two political parties, both of which are overwhelmingly Gikuyu in membership.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports are popular throughout Gikuyuland where schools sponsor competitive games for boys and girls. Spectators enjoy soccer (football) and track and field events. One can see people of all ages playing a board game known as *bao* in which players attempt to capture the seeds of their opponents. The game involves a wooden board containing holes in which seeds are placed. A player seeks to capture his opponent's seeds using a complex strategy whereby his opponent's seeds end up on his side of the board. This indigenous African game of strategy known as *bao* in Kiswahili is widespread in Africa and is now played elsewhere in the world. In the past, the Gikuyu boys enjoyed games such as wrestling, weightlifting, and club throwing. There were district mock fights pitting young boys from each area against their counterparts from elsewhere. Wrestling produced stars who were widely praised throughout the country. Girls played hide and seek and jumping games while still young, but became increasingly more involved with household responsibilities and marriage as they approached mid-teen age.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Bomas of Kenya is a prominent, national dance troupe in which Gikuyu dances are prominently featured. Schools have regular dance and singing competitions where traditional art forms are preserved.

Gikuyu, like other Kenyans, enjoy watching television, listening to the radio, and going to movie theatres. Radio and television regularly feature content derived from Gikuyu tradition. As mentioned above, there are radio stations and internet communication that offer a wide range of entertainment in Gikuyu genre. Such entertainment includes comedies, folk music and oral narratives to name a few. The radio stations that broadcast their entertainment content exclusively in Gikuyu language include: Inooro FM, Kameme FM, and Coro FM among others. There are books and magazines published in Gikuyu language e.g. *Matigari*, by Wa Thion'go. There are also comedies, music, and movies produced in Gikuyu and available in tape, video, and Internet formats.

Traditionally, Gikuyu would also attend dances as a form of entertainment. There were dances for men alone, women alone, and men and women together.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional industries and crafts have been largely replaced by tourist and commercial markets. The most notable persistence is in basket making, which is in the hands of women. The Gikuyu *keondo* (basket) is now popular in Europe and America where it is a widely used handbag or bookbag used by students. The keondo is a knitted basket made in various shapes, col-

ors and sizes. These baskets are knitted from strings gathered from shrubs and sometimes have Gikuyu geometric designs. The folk arts promoted basketry and the manufacture of clay figurines. The figurines are made from local materials such as clay, discarded wire, and grass. Manufactured objects depict solitary or communal daily life such as children playing, elders in various kinds of clothing, people dancing, bicycling, singing, and so on. Adornment, hairstyles, and clothing are featured on figurines to describe various mixtures of the old and new stylistic preferences.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Perhaps the primary social problem of the Gikuyu is how best to manage their comparative success in the context of Kenyan commerce and politics. The political opposition sometimes focuses on the Gikuyu, aiming at offsetting their numerical and commercial power. The Gikuyu have expanded into regions outside of their central highlands homeland. Many Gikuyu, therefore, are now wealthy immigrants, as it were, who are often seen by local groups elsewhere in Kenya as interlopers and landgrabbers. Hence, the Gikuyu have Gikuyophobia as a major challenge to contend within the modern Kenya. As mentioned previously, members of the Gikuyu in the diaspora bore most of the brunt of post-election violence in 2007–2008, and in politically-instigated clashes in 2002, 1997, and 1992.

Management of current social problems in Kenya, such as alcoholism and HIV, sometimes poses difficult challenges for Gikuyu families. On alcoholism, it is noteworthy that prior to the arrival of the Europeans, distilling was unknown. In the past, traditional beers and wines were made by fermentation only. Such drinks were not likely to produce alcoholism and often had nutritional value. Today, consumption of distilled beverages is common, and driving of automobiles on poorly maintained roads has contributed to what is among the highest rate of accidental death due to driving anywhere in the world.

The issue of land ownership is still a thorn in the flesh for most members of the Gikuyu. They have to reckon with displacement in the diaspora due to political violence and tribal hatred. Most of the land in the Gikuyu ancestral area is in the hands of the few, leaving many others to live as squatters.

There is also the security issue posed by the Mungiki sect (see section one, *Introduction*). The activities of the sect involving groups of suspicious looking youths, many donning dreadlocks, assaulting women, taking unusual oaths, and engaging in strange prayers and ritual beheadings among other practices have led to violent confrontations with authorities. In the wake of such a confrontation, many youth have been killed, arrested, or have been forced to flee their homes and villages.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Through the process of socialization within the family, in educational institutions and other social spheres, boys and girls are conditioned to behave in certain ways and to play different roles in society. They are encouraged to conform to established cultural norms through a reward-punishment system.

The role and status of women in Gikuyu society is changing for the better compared to many other Kenyan or African societies. There is a tendency towards a matrilineal system of family among the Gikuyu. Clearly, the Gikuyu were originally a matriarchal society. This could be traced back to the Gikuyu leadership, folk literature, and the Gikuyu nomenclature sys-

tems among others. It was rare in traditional Africa to have women as rulers in society.

Gikuyu folklore acknowledges women's leadership in their history. A notable legendary figure is Wangu wa Makeri, a woman famous for her cruelty. She would literally sit on men at public functions, which caused Gikuyu men to plot her overthrow. According to folklore, the men conspired to impregnate all Gikuyu women on one night. The resulting pregnancies would incapacitate the women, allowing the men to assume power easily.

Gikuyu clans are named to honor the legendary nine daughters of Mumbi, reflecting the importance of women's influence in Gikuyu history.

Indeed, in Gikuyu nomenclature, it is possible to find a son of a single mother bearing the maiden name of his mother as his surname. This underlines the significance that the Gikuyu society attaches to the mother.

Among the Gikuyu, in the case of divorce or separation, children typically stay with their mother, and not their father, as would be expected in most patriarchal societies.

Modern Gikuyu women in the 21st century are not restricted to the functions of wife, mother, and farm worker. Many Gikuyu families secure formal education for their girls starting from the kindergarten through post-high school. Thus, women in Gikuyuland have been able to compete successfully with men in the workforce. Modern Gikuyu women have found careers in politics, law, religion, and healthcare, spheres traditionally dominated by men.

Although in many subsistence economies women work on the farm and are intricately connected with their land, they do not have ownership over the land they work. Traditionally among the Gikuyu, if a man had more than one wife, he was responsible for clearing bushes to create a farm plot for each wife. Each wife's plot was close to her own hut, away from the other co-wives. The woman's younger son would inherit this plot after his mother's death. They usually allowed an unmarried daughter to have a plot of her own on which she could build a house. It is significant that daughters could hope to have the right to land ownership.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# GUINEANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** GHIN-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Guinea

**POPULATION:** 10.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** French, Pulaar (Fulfulde), Susu, 30 African languages

**RELIGION:** Islam, Christianity, traditional religions

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Fulani; Malinke

## 1 INTRODUCTION

People have inhabited the territory now known as Guinea since the stone age. Ancestors of the coastal and forest peoples lived in Guinea before the birth of Christ. They hunted and gathered or grew rice in small communities. Early peoples of the savannah and central plateau were part of larger empires and kingdoms. The Malinkes of Upper Guinea trace their ancestry to the founders of the great Mali Empire (AD 1200–1350). Songhay rulers transformed Mali into a still greater empire which flourished into the 16th century. Ancestors of the Peuhl group began migrating to the central plateau in AD 600.

Portuguese explorers first visited the Guinean coast in the 15th century, but sustained European contact came from slave traders. In the early 1800s the French moved south from Senegal to establish trading posts along the coastal estuaries. These inlets and estuaries offered hiding places for slavers, allowing trade to continue until the end of the American civil war. European powers fixed Guinea's modern political boundaries during the scramble for Africa in the 1880s. From 1850–1900, the Peul and the Malinke fought a series of battles with the French. Eventually, Samory Touré, now a national hero, surrendered to the French in 1898. For the next 60 years, the French ruled Guinea through canton chiefs who collected taxes, maintained order, and raised armies for the colonizer.

Guinea set a precedent for many African countries when it rejected President DeGaulle's offer in 1958 to become part of a greater French world community. Led by Sékou Touré, the Guinean "revolution" deteriorated into totalitarian rule and dictatorship. A period of isolation and persecution reigned during which two million Guineans fled their country for personal safety and economic survival. In 1984, Sékou Touré died during heart surgery in Cleveland. A 10-year period of free market liberalization and democratic change led by General Lansana Conté followed.

In 1993 General Conté entered civilian life and won Guinea's first multi-party presidential elections. However, widespread manipulation and vote-rigging occurred, raising questions of Conté's legitimacy. Flawed presidential elections in 1998 and again in 2003 (which were boycotted) consolidated his power even if they did not legitimate it in the eyes of his opposition. A contentious national referendum in 2003 cleared the way for Conté to run for a third consecutive term, removing age restraints on the presidency, and essentially making him "president for life." But an attempt on his life in 2005 signaled his widespread unpopularity.

In 2006–7, national strikes led by trade union and civil society activists turned violent, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. However, the protests forced major political concessions, including one that reestablished the post of prime

minister with extensive powers, and the right of civil society to approve the designee to that position.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Guinea is somewhat smaller than the state of Oregon. It shares borders with Guinea-Bissau and Senegal to the north; with Mali and Cote d'Ivoire to the east; and with Liberia and Sierra Leone to the south. In all, Guinea spans 450 miles from east to west, and about 350 miles from north to south, curving southeast from the Atlantic. Guinea's population is young—44% is 14 years old or younger—but it is growing slower than most African countries at just under 2%. Estimates place the total population over 10 million. Another 2 million Guineans live abroad having fled persecution under Sékou Touré. Density is highest in the capital of Conakry, in parts of the Fouta Djallon plateau, and in areas of the Forest Region.

Guinea has four distinct geographical regions: Maritime Guinea, Middle Guinea, Upper Guinea, and the Forest Region. Each of these regions is home to one of four major ethnic groups. On the monsoonal coastal plain live the Susu (15%). This region receives up to 4 meters of rain yearly, two-thirds of it in July and August. During those months it rains hard nearly every night and sometimes for days on end. Brackish estuaries reaching many miles inland make rich fishing grounds. The region produces rice and many fruits, including pineapples.

To the east on the Fouta Djallon plateau live the Peul (36%). Also called Fulani, these people make their livelihoods herding cattle on the sandy highlands and farming in the fertile valleys that wind far below. This picturesque region includes buttes, escarpments, waterfalls, and rock faces 2,000–5,000 feet in elevation. Some forested portions are home to antelopes and monkeys. Further east and southeast lies the western frontier of a great savannah, which spreads eastward at 1,000 feet in elevation into the Ivory Coast and Mali. This is the home of the Malinke (23%) and the headwaters of the Niger River. The region is sparsely wooded and interrupted by rocky spurs. Farmers grow wet rice, *fonio*, peanuts, and sweet potatoes in the river valleys, and herders raise cattle on the high plains.

To the south is the humid Forest Region, which ranges from 1,500 to over 4,000 feet. Mt. Nimba, Guinea's tallest point (5,748 feet) lies in the extreme southeast. The rainfall is more balanced, and the highlands produce rice, maize, cassava, kola, oil palms, bananas, and coffee. The major ethnic groups are the Guérézé, Kissi, Toma, and Mano. They also have members living in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). These groups share some cultural characteristics and together make up 15% of the national population.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The peoples of Guinea speak 30 languages, including the colonial language, French. French is used widely in government and is the language of instruction in high schools and universities. Aside from French, the languages in widest use are Pulaar (Fulfulde), which is spoken by the largest ethnic group, the Peul. Susu is gaining converts because it is the lingua franca (common language) of the capital.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Each ethnic group has its own myths, legends, and folktales. Of these, the Sundiata epic of the Malinke group has had a great impact on Malinke cultural, social, and political iden-





tity. It also has gained international literary fame as an epic poem. In 1960, a history professor published the poem in written form for the first time. The epic tells the story of a crippled boy, Sundiata, who rises to lead armies and saves his people from an evil warrior-king, Soumaro Kanté. Sundiata wins the Battle of Karina in AD 1206 and establishes the Mali Empire. Historically, we know that the battle occurred and that the victors drew up a charter to govern the kingdoms of the new empire. The charter has codified behavior and social relations for 800 years.

## 5 RELIGION

The vast majority of Guineans (80%) profess Islam. Christians, mainly Catholic, make up 10% of the population. Traditional indigenous African religion overlays these outside faiths and accounts for the rest. Islam came into West Africa via North African Muslim traders beginning in the 8th century AD. By AD 1000 ruling groups had adopted it as their faith too. The Peul established Islam in Guinea through a series of jihads (holy wars), notably that of El Hadj Oumar around 1850. Samory Touré, an anticolonial warrior and empire ruler, also imposed Islam by jihad around 1880 in Upper Guinea. Islam sustained itself because of its compatibility with traditional customs and family structure. It also allowed former slaves or their descendants in the Fouta Djallon to improve their social and economic standing in Peul society. The Friday work day ends at 1:00 pm so that Guineans may pray at the mosque.

Guineans rely strongly upon their traditional spirit beliefs and resort to marabouts (dervishes believed to have supernatural powers) and fetishers in times of trouble. The least Islamicized region is the Forest Region, where males continue to practice secret rites in the “sacred forest.” The Coastal Region has the largest number of Christians, where the missionary presence since the 19th century was strongest.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Besides the month-long Ramadan fast, one of the most celebrated holidays in the country is the Muslim feast of *Tabaski*. Tabaski celebrates the sparing of Abraham’s son, who was saved when God provided a lamb for sacrifice. Trucks bring thousands of sheep and goats from upcountry to the capital for sale. By Islamic custom, butchers must slaughter animals by cutting the throat and allowing the blood to flow. On the morning of the feast, people colorfully dressed in their new clothes fill the streets and carry their prayer mats to mosque. The remainder of the day is spent greeting friends and feasting with the family.

On August 17, people remember the day in 1977 when women protested the market police and the laws that forbade private trade. Sékou Touré gave in to the demands and abolished the restrictions. Nowadays, everybody celebrates the day as a national holiday. Government officials honor women in ceremonies throughout the week. On the morning of the holiday, women sweep the streets of the capital.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Whatever their commitment to Islam, most Guineans still hold to some traditional beliefs and combine the two in everyday life and ritual. One example is circumcision. In both religions circumcision is a necessary rite. In Islam it suggests purification, while in traditional beliefs it has a supernatural quality. Islam advises that circumcision take place on the seventh day, the fortieth day, or when a child reaches the age of seven. Mystery cults and secret societies that worship animal or nature spirits initiate new members at puberty. In both cases, circumcision takes place and satisfies both religions.

Rites of passage remain important to Guineans of all ethnic groups and are cause for family and community celebration or observance. At baptisms, the father whispers the baby’s name into its ear so that the child alone knows its name. Names tell about the family, its caste, and ancestors. Weddings, too, are cause for celebration. After the ceremony at the mosque, couples are married civilly at a government office. When the magistrate asks if anyone objects to the marriage, a friend accuses the couple in jest of having broken their vows. The accusation lightens the ceremony with humor and amusement. Then the groom offers a symbolic sum of about 50 cents to the magistrate. In the evening, the family closes off the street where the reception of music and dancing take place. Women come up to the musicians in small groups, waving the equivalent of \$5 and \$10 bills high above their heads and putting these on the musicians’ heads.

Muslims bury their dead on the day after death and hold eulogy ceremonies 40 days after death. At Malinke ceremonies, family and friends gather to pray and recite the Quran. Mourners help the family pay expenses by giving offerings to the prayer leaders. They throw wadded up bills into the circle where the reciters are sitting. A praise-singer and his assistant,

masters of ceremony, mention by name those who contribute and the amount they give.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings are an important part of everyday life. Guineans call this custom *salaam alekum*, meaning offering the “peace of God.” People would consider it rude not to greet their friends, officemates, or co-workers first before assuming the tasks of the day. Greetings involve asking each other questions about the well-being of the family. People touch their right hand to their heart to show respect, sincerity, and thanks to God. Men and women usually do not shake hands with the opposite sex. Friends who have not seen each other recently place their hands on the other’s shoulders and touch cheeks three times.

In urban settings, Western-style dating is common. In rural areas, a young man might come to visit a fiancée at her home. Friends go out together to parties in towns or meet at community gatherings in the villages. Visiting is usually spontaneous, and it is customary to offer a glass of water to the visitor.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Nearly half of the population lives below the official poverty line, but living standards are gradually improving. Since the 1990s, life expectancy at birth has increased from 45 to 50 years, and the infant mortality rate declined from 13.4 (1996) to 8.7 babies out of 100 (2008 est.) that did not live to reach their first birthday.

Houses typically are made of mud brick with thatched roofs in round or rectangular form. Those who can afford more durable structures build with concrete and galvanized iron roofing. Running water is uncommon, even in the cities, where several families might share a common stand pipe. Latrines are usually dry pits, but as many as one-third of households in Conakry lack toilet facilities. Inadequate garbage collection in the capital allows enormous trash piles to litter the streets. Despite the construction of two major dams on the Konkouré River, electricity remains sporadic in the capital, with neighborhoods taking turns to receive power under “load-shedding” arrangements.

To compensate for poor landline telephones, most urbanites use cell phones while in rural areas messages are still commonly sent via friends and family by word of mouth. People are used to walking great distances, whether in the country or city. In the cities, most people commute to work and travel to market in crowded minivans. The fare costs about 10 cents. Conakry also has many taxis, usually worn-out Toyotas that fit two passengers up front and squeeze four into the back.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

If they have the means, men may take up to four wives by Muslim law. Among the Peul, it is not unusual to find men aged 60 and above who have wives in their teens. Their wives may be younger than their children and even their grandchildren. Such families often number well over 20 children, with ages varying 40 or more years. Wives of the same husband usually live in separate houses apart from each other, or in separate huts within the same compound. Children refer to their “step mothers” as co-mothers (*co-mères*). Women play important income-generating roles in some families by trading, selling at the market, and working small businesses.

Among some groups, endogamy is widespread, meaning that individuals marry within their own clan. In these cases, family members may be related in two or three ways, as cousins and as nieces or nephews, or aunts and uncles simultaneously.

## 11 CLOTHING

Guineans have made an artform of *boubous*, which they slip over their heads and wear over matching pants. Their color and quality speak about the owner’s wealth. Tailors make stylish boubous from *bazin* cloth, which has intricate designs in the weave. Women’s outfits may be white or a single bright color, upon which tailors sew elaborate embroidered designs. The embroidery thread comes in all colors. If a tailor is unfamiliar with a design, Guineans bring a picture or a model to copy. Both men and women’s boubous are open at the side for style and to allow air circulation in hot and humid climates. Women generally wear matching turbans or head scarves, while men often wear a Muslim skull cap or stylish white or blue wool cap. Guineans usually reserve these for special occasions or Friday prayers, as the complete outfit costs a few hundred dollars. Cheaper versions feature simpler designs and less expensive cloth for use at home and work. The Peul are famous for their indigo dyes and batik patterns. Women, especially of the Forest and Coastal regions, also wear African-style wrap-arounds (*pagnes*) with matching blouses or European blouses. European shirts and trousers are popular too, but it is less common to see men in Western suits and ties.

## 12 FOOD

The menu boards of local Guinean restaurants in towns and cities typically announce three offerings: greens, peanut, and meat stews. Invariably, white rice accompanies the stew. Some coastal people enjoy palm nut stew, which is eaten like soup. Most Guineans eat these sauces for the midday meal between 10:00 and 1:00. At night families eat leftovers or may have porridge, bread, and tea.

Ethnic groups usually have their own specialties. The Peul, for example, are fond of thick sour milk poured over a fine grain, called *fonio*. Families and friends may share this mixture together, each with a soup spoon, reaching into the calabash bowl. For supper, the Susu prepare an Ivorian dish called *achecké*, which is finely graded manioc cooked briefly in oil and eaten with grilled fish or chicken. A popular dish from Senegal is *riz gras*, literally “fat rice.” People order this dish with fish or meat mixed with cabbage, carrots, squash, and cassava heaped over rice cooked in oil. In the Fouta Djallon, people drink a beverage similar to coffee which comes from the forest and contains antimalarial properties. In the Forest Region, palm wine is a favorite drink. Fruits are abundant in Guinea; citrus, pineapples, bananas, and mangoes are common. Guinea’s variable climate allows for oranges the year-round.

Some taboos exist. Certain coastal peoples do not eat monkeys because they believe them to be people who once did not observe Friday prayers. Most Muslims refuse to eat pork, and if strict in their practice, do not drink alcohol or smoke.

## 13 EDUCATION

Literacy rates are improving, but only 30% of the population over 15 years old is literate in French. Parents want their children to attend school, but high levels of unemployed graduates raise questions about the usefulness of schooling. Many

obstacles prevent children from completing primary school. In the rural areas, parents often need extra help in the fields or with household chores. School fees are high for many families, and sometimes children must walk distances up to six miles to attend school. Crowding and low standards are common in public elementary and high schools; therefore, parents with the means usually send their children to private schools. Drop-out rates are high, and less than 25% of children go on to high school. In the 1970s the government “Africanized” the textbooks and the curricula to make learning more relevant. The government used civics classes to teach students party propaganda and doctrine.

In the 1970s and 80s, technical schools with low standards graduated thousands of agricultural extension agents, to whom the government guaranteed employment. These guarantees no longer exist leaving most university graduates unemployed and looking for work. Through technical assistance, foreign donors help the government build schools, train teachers, develop curricula, and manage education, but enormous challenges remain especially in rural areas.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Guineans have a rich cultural heritage. Performances of music and dance mark special occasions and holidays. Traditionally, music and dance served ritual purposes at birth, initiation, and death, or seasonal cycles of planting and harvesting. People danced on their way to harvest a field. Peul musicians typically play handcrafted flutes, drums, and stringed instruments, and use calabashes to beat out rhythms. Malinke traditional music currently is blending with traditional forms. The men drum and play *balafons* (xylophones) while women wearing elaborate boubous dance with graceful arm movements, suggesting butterflies. In the Forest, one popular hunter’s dance consists of masked dancers in bark, raffia, and animal skin costumes walking swiftly on stilts. Forester drummers are highly accomplished and send messages with their drum beats to neighboring communities. Drumming is a major Guinean art form, and apprentices learn from the masters over a period of years. During Sékou Touré’s time, the government supported the arts, and Guineans produced some of Africa’s finest theater and folkloric ballets in international competitions.

Guineans excel in literature. Malinke and Peul traditional *griots*, or praise-singers, are bards who narrate past traditions through story and song, often with musical accompaniment. They are skilled professionals trained in their art by members of their family and profession. Authors such as the Malinke Camara Laye have produced written work of international acclaim in French. His novel, *The African Child (L’Enfant Noir)* tells of a child growing up in the Malinke homeland. The child’s father is a goldsmith, and he learns about spirits and taboos from his parents. The novel is often used in the American university classroom in French and literature courses.

#### 15 WORK

The lack of jobs continues to plague the country. Following structural adjustment in 1984, more than 50,000 Guineans lost their civil service jobs, and since then the ranks of university graduates and skilled workers looking for work has continued to swell. Guinea’s economy is dependent on bauxite exports for 85% of its foreign earnings, but almost no processing of the ore occurs in the country. Therefore, few Guineans benefit from

this major industry, and of the nearly 3.7 million people in the labor force, approximately three out of four work in subsistence or plantation agriculture, which accounts for only 24% of the gross domestic product.

#### 16 SPORTS

Guineans are avid soccer players and during the 1970s produced some of Africa’s most competitive teams. Basketball is also popular, and schools arrange competitions. In the towns, children and young men play soccer wherever space allows. In Conakry, this means placing four large rocks as goal posts in the street. Since few people own cars, streets make convenient playing fields. Girls play versions of hopscotch. A less popular game that men play is the French game of “bocci ball.”

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment and recreation revolve mostly around socializing, rites of passage, and sporting events. The few city parks found in Conakry like Ignace Deen and the 2nd of October are not well kept, are unsafe at night, and aside from joggers, are not generally frequented. Conakryites wishing to get away from it all on weekends may spend Sundays at small resorts outside of town such as the *Chien qui Fume*, named for its rock formations resembling Snoopy the Dog lying on his doghouse smoking his pipe. Marriages often are held on weekends and the wedding parties provide entertainment and recreation at hotels or in the street.

Few Guineans can afford televisions or satellite dishes, and those who do must cope with electrical outages. When the power is on, neighbors gather round on the sidewalk to watch popular regional theatrical productions broadcast on Guinea’s government station. Similar to American serials, these plays in the local languages are about daily life and teach about human foibles, solving community problems, and coping with social challenges.

Guineans also go to the movies and to musical performances featuring musicians from around Africa. Miriam Makeba, who once was married to the late Kwamé Touré (Stokely Carmichael), lived in Guinea and gives performances on her return visits. The discos play a variety of Guinean, Cuban, Zairian, Senegalese, and American music. In rural areas, teenagers are no longer shut off from international popular culture. It is becoming more common to find generators, solar panels, and satellite dishes in remote villages where a night’s entertainment can be had for a small admission fee.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Besides modern tourist art, Guineans still produce significant folk art and crafts. Some ethnic groups excel in painting pottery, masks, house walls, and tombs. The Kissi people have made stone sculpture statuettes for 500 years for rituals and to communicate with ancestors. The Baga people on the coast make wooden busts of females, the *Nimba*. These fecund images have become the national symbol of art.

Guineans are reviving their handicrafts industries. For example, the Peul make leather sandals of very high quality, and women weave decorative raffia place mats and baskets. In cooperatives, women dye fabric for making clothing, tablecloths, and napkins. Local weavers still produce cloth strips for traditional garments, and tailoring and embroidery have remarkable artistic merit.



*Young Guinean children play soccer on a dirt pitch by railroad tracks in the capital of Conakry. (AP Images/Ben Curtis)*

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Guinea has not fully recovered from the persecutions, tortures, and starvation of thousands of political prisoners in the 1960s and 70s. Reforms in the political system have improved civil and human rights, but the government remains highly intolerant of dissent. In 1985, 50 Malinke officers were shot after an alleged coup attempt, and more than 100 people died in ethnic-related conflict during the 1993 elections. In 2006–07, nationwide strikes and protests over depressed wages, the lack of jobs, and a growing discontent with pace of political reform turned violent and resulted in the deaths and injuries of hundreds of youths. In Guinea, people aged 15–40 are considered to be the youth of the country. It is this group that is becoming especially impatient with the lack of services, poor governance, and few work opportunities. Corruption is seemingly everywhere and has widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Gender presents a paradox in Guinea. On the one hand women are strong and assertive, but on the other they are subject to societal discrimination, prostitution, and female genital mutilation. In 1977 it was a women's march that forced Sékou Touré to abandon his failed economic policies. Yet in 2008 women are weakly represented in politics with 20 of 114 parliamen-

tary seats, 1 governor and 2 prefects, 3 cabinet members, and 5 of 26 Supreme Court justices. Though the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women's and Children's Issues has created greater awareness of gender discrimination, in general women have fewer rights than men, are easily divorced under Muslim law, are disadvantaged by inheritance laws, and in rural areas are subject to the heavy demands of childbearing, childrearing, and subsistence farming. There is a national women's empowerment plan (2007–11), but it is slow to get off the ground.

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—by R. Groelsema

# GUINEANS OF GUINEA-BISSAU

**PRONUNCIATION:** GHIN-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Guinea-Bissau

**POPULATION:** 1.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese, Crioulo, Balanta, Pulaar, Malinke

**RELIGION:** Indigenous African religion, Islam, Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Guineans; Fulani; Malinke

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Guinea-Bissau has been inhabited since the Stone Age. Early peoples in this coastal area hunted and gathered or grew rice in small communities. These communities were swept into the kingdom of Gabu, which became part of the great Mali Empire in AD 1200–1350, and then within the orbit of the Songhay Empire that flourished into the 16th century. In 1546, as the unifying power of Songhay declined, Gabu exerted its independence and gradually became semi-autonomous. Portions of this ancient kingdom existed until 1867.

Portuguese explorers first visited the coastal islands and mainland in the 15th century. Nuno Tristao is credited with exploring and mapping the area in 1446. Portuguese colonists soon followed and gained trading rights from the Portuguese government. The most valuable commodity soon became human slaves, and Guinea-Bissau became a center for the Portuguese slave trade in Africa. In the early 1800s, the French moved south from Senegal to establish trading posts along the coastal estuaries. These estuaries and other inlets offered hiding places for slave traders, allowing the trade to continue until the end of the American civil war. In 1879, Portugal changed Guinea-Bissau's status from a possession to a separate colony, which provided greater autonomy for the European settler community. Soon after, the Conference of Berlin (1885–86) reaffirmed the colonial boundaries in West Africa, giving the Portuguese undisputed control over the Cape Verde islands, the offshore islands of Bissagos, and the Guinea-Bissau mainland between the French possessions of Senegal and Guinea.

In 1951, Portugal attempted to reassert control from the metropole by designating its African colonies, including Guinea-Bissau, as overseas provinces. Five years later, dissidents founded the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and began to wage a guerrilla war against the Portuguese. Its leader, Amilcar Cabral, was assassinated in 1973, but the overthrow of the Salazar government in Portugal paved the way for independence of Portuguese Africa. An agreement in August 1974 led to independence on September 10 with Cabral's brother, Luis de Almeida Cabral, as president. Cape Verde gained its independence a year later, and for five years the two countries shared the PAIGC as a common party. However, Guinea-Bissau remained a single party state because of fears of a return to Portuguese rule.

Nearly 30 years of political upheaval followed. Joao Bernardo Veira deposed Cabral in a military coup in November 1980 and established a government of crony capitalists. Agricultural production increased overall, but Veira's government was deposed by rebels in May 1999. Malam Bacai Sanha, the former

head of the parliament, became the interim president. In 2000, Kumba Yala, a former teacher and populist leader of the independence movement, was elected president in the country's first multi-party elections. However, an army rebellion that year threatened the fledgling democracy and led to the death of General Ansumane Mane. In September 2003, Yala was deposed in a military coup, and Henrique Rosa was appointed president of a transitional government. In March 2004, parliamentary elections returned a plurality to the PAIGC and Carlos Gomes Junior became prime minister. However, in October the chief of the armed forces was killed in a mutiny over back pay. In 2005 Veira returned from exile in Portugal to stand for elections. The second national round of multi-party elections was held in June 2005 and returned Veira to the presidency. The contest was fought bitterly by Uala and Sanha resulting in a run-off between Sanha and Veira. Veira eventually was declared the winner, but Sanha and his PAIGC party alleged fraud. Sanha finally accepted the results in September. In April 2007, Prime Minister Aristides Gomes resigned after being censured by parliament. A no confidence vote for his government paved the way for Martinho N'dafa Kabi to be appointed his successor.

Internationally, Guinea-Bissau has maintained good relations with Senegal and Guinea. Both neighbors sent troops to support Veira in the late 1990s to repel insurgents. In return, Veira's government attempted to dislodge Casamance rebels who established bases in Guinea-Bissau in order to launch cross-border attacks on Senegalese government troops.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Guinea-Bissau is one of Africa's smallest countries. It is approximately the size of Switzerland or slightly under three times the size of Connecticut. It is wedged between Guinea to the south and east and Senegal to the north. Its coastline spans 299 km (186 mi), and it encompasses an archipelago of islands about 48 km (30 mi) off the coast. In all, Guinea-Bissau counts 36,120 sq km (13, 946 sq mi).

Guinea's eight regions reach from a swampy coast to gradually rising savanna in the east. Mangroves and winding estuaries provide rich fishing grounds along the highly indented coastline. Sparsely wooded savanna dominates the eastern reaches. The highest point of the country is in the northeast about 305 m (1,000 ft) above sea level. This area joins the northern reaches of the Guinean Fouta Djallon plateau. From June to November, monsoonal rains pound the coast, where up to 4 m (13 ft) of water falls annually. Two-thirds of this rain falls in July and August. The reverse is true for the rest of the year when cooler dry winds blow off the deserts of north central Africa.

Guinea-Bissau's population is young. About 41% is 14 years old or younger and population growth is at about 2% per year. The population consists of four main ethnic groups and several smaller groups. The largest group is the Balanta (30%), followed by the Fula (20%), Manjaca (14%), Mandinga (13%), and the Pepel (7%). The Balanta occupy the central region and the Fula the north, while the Manjaca, Mandinga, and Pepel have settled mostly in the coastal areas. In addition, Cape Verdean expatriates, Syrian Lebanese, and some Portuguese are found in the capital of Bissau and in secondary towns. Two of the groups—the Fula and the Mandinga—form part of greater

transboundary ethnic groups living in Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and beyond. The Mandinga trace their ancestry directly to the founders and rulers of the Mali Empire.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The peoples of Guinea-Bissau speak Portuguese, Crioulo, and several African languages. Portuguese is used widely in government and is the language of instruction in high schools and universities. Aside from Portuguese, the languages spoke regionally are Pulaar (Fulfulde), which is spoken by the Fula, and Mandinka, which is spoken by the Mandinga group. Guinea-Bissau is a member of the Lusophone states of Africa, which include Mozambique, Angola, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Cape Verde.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Guinea-Bissau, like most African countries is rich in folklore. Elders and professional storytellers recall myths, legends, and tales handed down over generations. Their stories often feature animals whose cleverness, foibles, and personalities illustrate human character and experience. The glories of past empires, such as the Mali and Songhai Empires of the 13th and the 15th centuries AD, also serve as backdrops for folkloric exposition. In the retelling of such stories, Guineans become part of the peoples of greater West Africa who share ancient cultural traditions.

Some folklore, having emerged from the decolonization period, is more recent. It recalls a colonial past of repression, servitude, and humiliation broken by revolutionary struggle. For Guinea-Bissau's youthful population, the revolutionary war of the 1950s seems like ancient history. Leaders of the liberation struggle, like Amílcar Cabral, born in 1924, are now revered national heroes and have entered the pantheon of national folklore. Through their poems, speeches, and armed struggle, they have become larger than life.

### 5 RELIGION

Nearly half (45%) of the population is Muslim. The Muslim community dominates the commercial sector and, increasingly, the government. Despite centuries of Catholic missions, dating to the Portuguese explorations along the Atlantic coast, Christians account for only 5% of the population. African indigenous religion overlays these faiths with at least 50% of the population practicing some form of African traditional religion.

In African traditional religion, ancestors exercise power over their living descendants through spirits. Spirits may be evoked through offerings at household shrines or at shrines staffed by priests, witches, and traditional doctors. In coastal villages, one finds many such shrines, to which animals are sacrificed, and local alcohol and food are offered. People mainly visit the shrines to seek advice and protection or to make special requests. Guineans abroad often return to visit the shrines. However, if they are unable to do so in person, they send remittances to relatives to make sacrifices and say prayers on their behalf.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Guineans celebrate nine holidays per year, including Christmas, New Year's, International Women's Day, and Labor Day. Two holidays are dedicated to Muslim feasts: Korité, which celebrates the end of Ramadan, and Tabaski, the Feast of the Sacrifice (of Abraham's son). The Anniversary of the Killing of Pidjiguoiti, National Day or Independence Day (September 24), and the Anniversary of the Movement of Readjustment (November 14) are also commemorated.

The biggest holidays are faith-related. Carnival was once identified with Catholic Crioulo culture, but is now a popular multi-ethnic festival. In a sense, the entire month of Ramadan has become a holiday, as fasting during the day and feasting at night slow the pace of work. Korité celebrations of special meals and gatherings with family and friends may last from two to ten days. Tabaski begins with prayer at the mosque, followed by feasting and gift giving among families and friends.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage vary by ethnic group and by religion, but uniformly celebrate birth, puberty, adulthood (marriage), old age, and death. Muslims traditionally name their children at baptisms, when the father whispers the baby's name into its ear. Names are significant because they normally have meanings that tell about the family, its caste, and its ancestors.

Circumcision marks the attainment of puberty, suggesting purification in Islam, and also a mystical supernatural dimension for traditionalists. For girls and boys, this ritual is the most important because it is the gateway to adulthood and full participation in society. In some cases, a child may be circumcised at a younger age. Islam advises that circumcision take place on the seventh day, the fortieth day, or when a child reaches the age of seven, but depending on the beliefs of the family, it may be carried out in peer groups and conducted as part of a week-long rite of initiation. Girls, however, may be circumcised as infants.

Weddings are cause for festive celebrations. For Muslims, after the religious celebration at the mosque, couples will also need to be officially married by a civil administrator at a government office. These ceremonies may be held on the same day. In some areas, the passage to death is the most celebrated event as it marks the afterlife, and still more importantly, ancestorhood (see Religion). At funerals, wealthy families may have hundreds of people in attendance and will slaughter several cattle for feasting. Non-Muslims may make gifts of food and local palm wine as ritual offerings. The deceased will be wrapped in several layers of expensive cloth. Muslims bury their dead on the day after death and hold eulogy ceremonies 40 days after death.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Guineans are extremely social people and spend considerable time greeting friends and maintaining relationships. The Muslim greeting, *salaam alekum*, meaning the "peace of God," is commonly shared not only among practicing Muslims, but also by people who may be greeting each other in a Muslim neighborhood or region. The common reply is *alekum salaam*, meaning "and peace with you." It is considered rude not to acknowledge someone by offering a verbal greeting, by bringing

one's right hand to one's chest, or by shaking hands (only with the right hand) in most company. However, it is unusual for men and women to shake hands with each other, especially in the village. Greetings often involve asking questions about one's well-being and that of their family.

Guinea-Bissau is an affective society where relationships largely are determined by birth. The strongest link is to the nuclear family, which may include mother, father, and siblings, and in polygamous households, a co-mother and her children. Cousins usually are thought of as brothers and sisters. The strength of this bond gradually weakens as the relationship widens to the clan or lineage and ethnic group. But, the power of these relations is seen in the importance people attach to membership in various associations that include peer groups, hometown associations, secret societies, and intertribal relationships.

In rural areas, rights to land are determined locally. Rules vary according to tribe, but generally land is passed down in the family through males. Among the Manjaco and Papel, rice fields are inherited by a sister's sons, who as caretakers and custodians of the trust, determine which family members receive which portion of land. In any case, it is expected that members of a kinship group help each other till and harvest their fields. Not to do so would be to invite ostracism, a punishment of the worst kind.

Affective relationships are often hierarchical and demand proper respect. A child must show deference to his parents and older siblings, while adults and young adults must defer to their elders. Again, not to do so would be seen as disrespectful. Because of the hierarchy of these relationships, people are used to authority figures, secrecy, and limited decision-making.

Affective relationships have economic dimensions. The Mandingo are born into castes, which historically have promoted skills, trades, and vocations. Blacksmiths, storytellers, pastoralists, agriculturalists, doctors, and herbalists are determined by caste, and these societies have established long traditions and rules that govern relations between members of different castes. The Fula know who among them descended from a slave or free family. Social mores are changing, but it is a gradual process.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions for most people are difficult. On the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures chances to live long, be educated, and have a decent standard of living, Guinea-Bissau ranks third to the last out of 177 countries. Wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few elites distinguished by their Mercedes Benz cars, fancy suits, and the latest electronic gadgets.

In contrast, most people live in small rectangular houses with galvanized iron roofs, or cylindrical huts made of dried mud and thatched roofs. These homes typically have no windows or chimneys to vent smoke. Cooking may be done outside with firewood and large stones, on which a kettle is placed. Malaria, tuberculosis, and other life-threatening diseases are rampant. Most people cannot afford western medicines, and those that can, may find them beyond their expiration date. Affordable health care means seeking out local healers and diviners and making sacrifices at shrines. Fewer than 60% of people have

access to potable water and 40% will not live past the age of 40.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

For the subsistence farmer, family life revolves around seasonal work in the fields, supplemented with weekly markets and punctuated by visiting with family and friends. Families rise early, usually at dawn, have a meal of porridge or stew, and walk long distances to their fields. If the children are not in school, they will accompany the adults to help with weeding, harvesting, or tending babies and small children. Girls help their mothers fetch water, carry firewood, and wash clothes at the river or stream. Despite the heavy work, children find time to play, and boys will be seen kicking a soccer ball in the village squares. Evenings are a time for eating the large meal of the day. Depending on the tribe, men may eat separately from the rest of the family. Evenings also are a time for relaxing and storytelling, and during full moons, dancing and drumming may take place. In town and country, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and holidays are times for getting together to celebrate, to grieve, and to share experiences. City children may have better chances for schooling, but many of them must peddle wares and do domestic chores to help generate income for the family.

## 11 CLOTHING

By and large, Guineans have little discretionary income for expensive clothing. Hence, everyday work clothing consists of hand-me-downs and used clothing purchased at local markets. Western clothes, t-shirts, and sports jerseys from American universities and professional sports teams have found their way to Africa in bulk shipments of used clothing. People are conscientious about how they look though, and if at all possible, they dress up to go out in public.

In coastal areas it is common to see women wearing brightly colored pieces of cloth (wraps or lappas) with matching blouses and headscarves, although these are found throughout the country. Men may wear eye-catching prints that have been made into shirts and trousers. Children wear these as well. Many men wear *boubous*, which are flowing cotton robes with open sides, worn over matching pants. Their color and quality speak to the owner's wealth. The higher the quality of cloth and the more exquisite the tailoring, the greater one's wealth. They may wear matching skullcaps. Women wear a version of these that comes in three pieces: a wrap that ties around the waist and a matching blouse and headscarf. Friday prayers and holidays are the best times to observe and appreciate fine clothing.

## 12 FOOD

Guineans are fond of white rice, which is a staple for coastal people and also imported to feed urbanites. In the interior, millet is the staple crop. Both are enjoyed with a variety of sauces typically cooked in a base of palm oil, onions, and tomatoes, supplemented with meat, fish, chicken, pounded seeds, greens, or peanut pastes. These stews vary somewhat by tribe and region, but they are cooked in large kettles over wood fires. For lack of refrigeration, mothers or their helpers will buy produce daily at the local market. Millet, peanuts, seeds, and other ingredients are pounded in a mortar and pestle. The coast

is known for its fresh fish, while upcountry, guinea hens, and beef are popular. On ceremonial occasions, people eat large quantities of meat and, unless proscribed by religion, consume large quantities of palm wine, rum, or other local beverages.

### 13 EDUCATION

The government has made education universal, but in practice only one in three children actually attends school. Schools are often built in or near villages in three- to five-classroom structures. Children are not unaccustomed to walking a few miles to school. Pencils, textbooks, and chalk—materials taken for granted elsewhere—are in short supply, and families may need to pay extra for them. But, the greatest challenge at the primary and secondary levels is teachers. Teachers prefer to live and teach in towns where quality of life is higher. Low pay and erratic salaries hurt motivation.

At the university level, the few Guineans who obtain scholarships study abroad. In colonial times, only a few students—primarily of Cape Verdean ancestry—received higher education. They went to Portugal. In the 1970s, those with the right connections went to East Germany, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China for their degrees. During the revolutionary era, the government embarked upon an ambitious literacy program led by the well-known educator-activist, Paolo Freire. The program was meant to be universal, but given the extreme challenges facing the country, it failed to have lasting effect.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Like most of Africa, Guinea-Bissau's cultural heritage is embodied in sculpture, music, dance, and theater. The national media support the performing arts in telecasts and radio broadcasts, which are extremely popular. Guineans have passed down their history and literature orally through storytelling and song. Only recently have these been the subject of written accounts. One notable example is the writings of Amílcar Cabral, who led the armed struggle for independence. Cabral's influence is still felt through his masterful speeches on national liberation. Crioulo fiction has also gained popularity thanks to Guinean writers of Cape Verdean ancestry, such as Fausto Duarte and Joao Alves da Neves. Duarte, a government employee educated in the Portuguese *assimilação* (assimilation) program, distinguished himself as one of the earliest African novelists, first writing in Portuguese and later in Crioulo. He died in 1953.

### 15 WORK

Guineans start working early in their lives as children. Many of them are subsistence farmers and artisanal fisher folk, living off their own produce. Women and children also perform domestic tasks. Children herd goats and cattle. Market trade is usually conducted by women. Those lucky enough to find employment in the public sector have steady work, but barely make a living wage. As elsewhere in Africa, many people count on remittances from friends and relatives abroad. Trade and commerce are mostly of the petty variety and relatively unimportant for the GDP. In Bissau, men drive taxis or load and unload ships at the docks. *Pontas*, former colonial concessions now owned by members of government, are worked by landless peasants who receive farm implements from the landowners

so they can grow cash crops. However, the sharecroppers must give a portion of their harvests or profits to the landowner.

### 16 SPORTS

Either as spectators or players, Guineans love soccer. All other sports, such as basketball, though played by schoolchildren, pale in comparison. One bi-annual tournament in West Africa is named for Guinea-Bissau's national hero, Amílcar Cabral. The Amílcar Cabral Cup has never been won by, but has been hosted by, Guinea-Bissau three times since it began in 1979.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most forms of entertainment and recreation are fairly simple and do not depend on electricity. In the village, swapping tales around a fire in the evening, a boys' game of soccer with an undersized plastic ball, or a game of checkers in front of a market stall may be all there is for entertainment. One popular game that is played throughout West Africa is *Ouri* (also called *Wari*), which is played on a wooden board with seeds and six pockets. The object of the game is to capture more seeds than one's opponent. Since the game has only 48 seeds, capturing 25 is sufficient to win. Ceremonies and feasts provide opportunities to socialize and to meet members of the opposite sex.

In the towns, small bars and coffee shops, internet cafés, TV, and DVDs provide ready forms of entertainment. Soccer fans watch matches on TV, at clubs with satellite dishes, or at the national stadium. At night, discotheques attract people of all stripes. Guineans love to dance the *passada*, a highly suggestive Portuguese-African dance with lots of pelvic motion and rhythm. The local music beat is called *gumbe*. Men tap out the rhythms to *gumbe* on giant gourds cut in half, which they float upside down in a basin of water. Lyrics to *gumbe* music are in Crioulo and are sung throughout the country. *Gumbe* artists from the 1980s and 1990s used their songs to protest against the dictator-president, Joao Bernardo Vieira. *Gumbe* has borrowed heavily from Congolese soukous, French Antillean zouk, and rap, reggae, and salsa. Cover charges at most discos are high, but in reality almost anyone can get in to forget about their problems in their music and dance.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Art generally has a religious, mystical, and otherworldly significance. Each ethnic group has its own arts and crafts, and some, like the Baga of the southwestern coast, have achieved world recognition for their woodcarvings. The Baga, who number perhaps only 60,000 people, are divided between Guinea-Bissau and the Republic of Guinea to the south. They make wooden busts of females, the *Nimba*, which are fecund images. Owing to their distinctiveness, *Nimba* have become internationally renowned as superior works of art. In addition to finer forms of art, Guineans also make tourist art and crafts, such as animal carvings, rattan baskets, jewelry, and toys made from tin cans, but there is limited demand for such items.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Guinea-Bissau has many social problems stemming from cultural, social, economic, and political causes. Women face discrimination, and most children do not finish primary school. Schoolgirls often face sexual advances from teachers and older



students. Extreme poverty has forced many girls and women into prostitution, and a growing number of boys living on the streets of Bissau have become part of gangs. Some children are trafficked, especially to Senegal, where boys are sold to work for religious leaders (marabouts), and forced to beg on the streets to pay for their upkeep and schooling. Buying and selling of child brides is a reality, and child labor is common.

Government corruption and neglect is part of the problem. Government posts are seen as opportunities for self-enrichment, and officials do little to enforce laws or regulate behavior. Judges and policemen are poorly trained and paid and commonly take bribes, and prisons fail to measure up to minimum standards of decency. While the personal use of illicit drugs is not the problem it is in Westernized countries, Guinea-Bissau has become a transit point for international narco-traffickers smuggling Columbian cocaine to European markets. Journalists who report on the drug trade have received death threats. In the absence of strong checks and balances, Guinea-Bissau has a powerful executive and a system that has encouraged military coups and counter coups. Political instability, coupled with crime and unemployment, has encouraged many of the best-educated Guineans, who are most needed in leadership positions, to leave the country. This brain drain has deepened poverty and social injustice for most people.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

As elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, gender issues are prominent on the social agenda, and a number of human rights organizations have mobilized—usually with foreign donor assistance—to defend women's rights and bring balance to gender roles in Guinea-Bissau. Women and girls have less job mobility, complete fewer years of schooling, do most of the subsistence farming, and enjoy far less protection under the law than men. There is, for example, no law against wife beating, and many women are subjected to violence as a means of settling disputes in the home. While the law prohibits rape and prostitution, the government provides little enforcement, and women are harassed sexually. Certain ethnic groups do not allow women to own or inherit property.

Girls are also subject to female genital mutilation (FGM), which is practiced widely throughout the country. Known as *Fanado*, it is estimated that 45% of women aged 15–49 are excised. As many as 2,000 girls (including infants) undergo this procedure annually, often under unhygienic conditions. *Fanado* is steeped in religious and cultural tradition, and the cutters, who are women, often learn the practice from their mothers and grandmothers, and earn their livelihoods from it. Families pay between \$10–\$15, not including gifts, to have their girls circumcised. Even non-Muslim women who marry Muslim men will undergo *Fanado*, because during the holy month of Ramadan, Muslim men will refuse to take food from an uncircumcised woman. Uncircumcised women are also not allowed to pray in the mosque. In June 2008, government launched a program to ban the practice, but it is likely to take years before it is stopped.

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—by Robert J. Groelsema

# GUSII

**PRONUNCIATION:** goo-SEE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kisii, Kosova, Guzii, Ekegusii Gisii,

Abagusii, Kissii, Kisi

**LOCATION:** Western Kenya

**POPULATION:** 2.1 Million

**LANGUAGE:** Ekegusii

**RELIGION:** Christianity mixed with ancestor cult beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1700s, Bantu-speaking populations were dispersed in small pockets at the northern, southern, and eastern margins of the Kisii highlands and in the Lake Victoria basin. Around 1800, the highlands above 1,515 meters (4,970 feet) were probably uninhabited from the northern part of the Manga escarpment south to the river Kuja. At that time, the lowland savanna was being settled by large numbers of agropastoralist peoples ancestral to present-day Luo and Kipsigis, dislodging the smaller Bantu groups from their territories on the savanna. The Gusii settled in the Kisii highlands, while other culturally and linguistically related groups remained along the Lake Victoria Basin or, as the Kuria, settled in the lower savanna region at the Kenya-Tanzania border. The establishment of British colonial administration in 1907 was initially met by armed resistance that ceased after World War I.

Contrary to other highland areas in Kenya, the Gusii were not subject to land alienation. The seven subdivisions of Gusiiland were converted into administrative units under government-appointed chiefs. The first missions established were Roman Catholic in 1911 and the Seventh Day Adventist in 1913. The mission activity was not initially very successful, and several stations were looted. After Kenyan independence in 1963, schools were built throughout the area; roads were improved; and electricity, piped water, and telephones were extended to many areas. By the 1970s, the land shortage had begun to make farming unprofitable, and education of children for off-farm employment has since become important.

The Gusii's strong clan affiliations began to break down in the mid-1800s. As of the 21st century, Gusii chiefs represent clans in the local Kenyan administration and participate actively in Kenya's multiparty politics. In the 2007 general elections Gusii voters supported both the opposition and the ruling party. As a result, Gusii representatives are divided between the two major political parties that make up Kenya's ruling "Grand Coalition" government. Many members of the Gusii community were victims of the post election violence that swept through Kenya in January 2008. Thousands were displaced and hundreds killed.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Gusiiland is located in western Kenya, 50 kilometers (31 miles) east of Lake Victoria. Since pre-colonial times, abundant rainfall and very fertile soils have made Gusiiland one of the most productive agricultural areas in Kenya. Between 70% and 80% of the land is arable. The region is bounded by latitudes 0°30' and 1°00's and longitudes 34°30' and 35°00'E. Since 1989, the Gusii have occupied as a single ethnic group Kisii and Nyami-

ra Districts. The area is a rolling, hilly landscape on a deeply dissected plain at altitudes of 1,190 m (3,900 ft) in the far northwestern corner of the territory to 2,130 m (6,990 ft) in the central highlands.

The mean maximum temperatures range from 28.4°C (83°F) at the lowest altitudes to 22.8°C (73°F) at the highest elevations. The mean minimum temperatures are 16.4°C (61.5°F) and 9.8°C (50°F) respectively. Rain falls throughout the year with an annual average of 1,500 to 2,000 millimeters (60 to 80 inches). There are two peak seasons of rainfall: March to May is the major rainy season; September to November is the minor rainy season. In the 19th century, much of present-day Gusiiland was covered by moist montane forest. Today, all forest has been cleared, very little indigenous vegetation remains, and no large mammals are found.

The Gusii population is estimated at 1.65 million as of 2007, up from 1.3 million in 1989. The Gusii are among the most rapidly growing populations in the world, increasing by 3% to 4% per year. The region where the Gusii live is one of the most densely populated in Kenya. The Gusii population is also young, with around 50% of the population being under the age of 15 years. The high population growth rate is due to the cultural attitude that having many children ensures security in old age. This has led to low use of family planning methods.

The average woman bears approximately nine children; infant mortality is relatively low (about 80 per 1,000 live births), especially in comparison to other areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

Most Gusii live in rural areas, although many have left the traditional tribal lands for urban centers (in Kenya and elsewhere around the world) to seek education, employment opportunities. Outside the tribal area, the group's language, Ekegusii (and materials in Ekegusii), is little used and may be in danger of being lost.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Ekegusii is a Western Bantu language. Naming customs include naming a child after a recent event such as the weather at the time of the child's birth. Most common is to use the name of a dead person from the father's clan for the first name and one from the mother's clan for the second name. Some common names refer to the time of migrations. For example, the woman's name *Kwamboka* means "crossing a river." Another aspect of the language is its close relationship to Gusii culture, where talking about personal emotional states is not condoned. Hence, questions about a person's mental state are answered with statements about physical health or economic situation.

There is little literature available for teaching Ekegusii, except for some elementary works in form of folktales, short stories, songs, and proverbs. To date, the Holy Bible and Christian hymnals remain the major translations and only rich source of written Ekegusii. Ekegusii is dependent on tone differentiation. Ekegusii has not developed specialized vocabulary and everyday words for new and emerging globalized experiences, such as hip hop music, information technology, commerce, communications, and travel. This makes the language ill-equipped for modern communication. Ekegusii speakers find that their language lacks words for such everyday items in modern society as radio, television, video, and computer. To the disadvantage of would-be speakers and learners of Ekegusii, Kenya's country's education system does not place much emphasis on the learning of various tribal languages and tribal languages



are not included in national examinations. Therefore, young people have little motivation to develop proficiency in tribal languages.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Gusii oral traditions contain a number of prominent persons who are linked to historical events, notably the period of migrations into the current homeland and the coming of the British. These figures are usually men, but a few women are also remembered. There are two historical figures linked to the establishment of the most populous section, the Kitutu. These are Nyakanethi and her stepson Nyakundi, who fortified themselves in the highland to the north and gave shelter to families who fled from attacks by neighboring peoples. These people were given a home in Kitutu with Nyakundi as their chief.

Other “heroes” are related to the establishment of the colonial administration. The prophet Sakawa, who was born in the 1840s and died around 1902, is reputed to have foretold the arrival of the British in 1907 and the building of the district capital Kisii Town.

In 1907–08, a prophetess called Mora a tried to incite rebellion against the British. In 1908 she gave her stepson, Otenyo, magical medicines that would protect him from bullets and sent him to kill the British officer, G.A.S. Northcote. Although Otenyo wounded Northcote with his spear, the British District Officer survived and later became the governor of Hong Kong.

#### 5 RELIGION

Before the advent of Christianity, the Gusii believed in the existence of one God who was the originator of the world but did not directly interfere in human affairs. Instead, it was the ancestor cult, together with ideas about witchcraft, sorcery, and impersonal forces that provided a complex of belief in supra-human agency. The ancestor spirits (*ebirecha*) existed both as a collective and as ancestors and ancestresses of the living members of a lineage. They were not appropriated until there was tangible evidence of their displeasure such as disease, death of people and livestock, and the destruction of crops.

The community is about 82% Christian and 18% traditional religion. Most Gusii today claim to be adherents of some Christian church. There are four major denominations in Gusiiland: Roman Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist, Swedish Lutheran, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God. Active Seventh-Day Adventist members are oriented toward European family ideals and practice a form of protestant ethic. Although churches are very active, aspects of non-Christian beliefs continue to permeate the life of most Gusii. Afflicted by misfortune, many Gusii visit a diviner (*omoragori*) who may point to displeased spirits of the dead and prescribe sacrifice.

Diviners (*abaragori*), who are usually women, determine the cause of various misfortunes. A variety of healers also exist. *Abanyamoriogi* (herbalists) use a variety of mixtures of plants for medicines. Indigenous surgeons (*ababari*) set fractures and treat backaches and headaches through trepanation (needles). Professional sorcerers (*abanyamosira*) are normally hired to protect against witchcraft and to retaliate against witches. *Omori*, the witch smeller, ferrets out witchcraft articles buried in a house. Witches (*omorogi*) can be men or women but are usually the latter. They are believed to operate in groups who dig up recently buried corpses and use body parts as magical paraphernalia and eat the inner organs. Witches usually kill their victims through the use of poisons, parts of corpses, and people’s exuvia (skin). Witchcraft among the Gusii is believed to be an acquired art handed down from parent to child.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Only the national holidays of Kenya are celebrated.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Mothers have the ultimate responsibility for the care and socialization of children, but they delegate a great deal of care taking and training to other children in the homestead. Mothers seldom show physical or verbal affection for children and fathers take very little part in child rearing. Gusii infants are raised to understand and behave according to the codes of shame and respect that apply to their relationships to persons in adjacent generations. Children cease sleeping in their mother’s house when they are still very young. Grandparents play a supportive role and are supposed to inform grandchildren about proper behavior and sexual matters.

The most elaborate and socially important ceremonies are associated with initiation and marriage. Initiation involves clitoridectomy for girls and circumcision for boys. The ceremony is supposed to prepare children as social beings who know rules of shame (*chinsoni*) and respect (*ogosika*). Girls are initiated at the age of seven or eight, and boys a few years later. Initiations are gender-segregated, and female and male specialists

perform the operations. Afterward, there is a period of seclusion for both genders.

The traditional Gusii wedding is no longer performed. It was an extremely elaborate ritual that lasted several days. The rituals emphasized the incorporation of the bride into the groom's lineage and the primacy of male fertility. Among wealthier people, it has been replaced by a wedding in a church or before an administration official.

Funerals take place at the deceased's homestead, and a large gathering is a sign of prestige. Women are buried beyond the yard on the left side of the house, and men are buried beyond the cattle pen on the right side of the house. Christian elements such as catechism-reading and hymn-singing are combined with the traditional practices of wailing, head-shaving, and animal sacrifices to the dead. The preferred person to dig the grave is the deceased's son's son. Before burial, the corpse is dissected in order to ascertain whether death was caused by witchcraft. After burial, the widow or widower is restricted to the homestead for a few weeks to two months, when ritual activities, including a sacrifice, are performed. One basic funeral theme is fear of the dead person's spirit. The deceased, enraged for having died, may blame the survivors and must therefore be placated with sacrifices.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Daily interactions follow strict rules of polite behavior, which can be translated as rules for avoiding sexual shame (*chinsoni*) and rules governing respect (*ogosika*). These rules are many and complicated. They regulate proper behavior between women and men, between generations, and between different kinds of kin. For example, although brothers and sisters and anyone within the same generation may joke with each other and talk about sexual matters, this is prohibited between adjacent generations. A father may not set foot in his son's house; a son-in-law has to avoid his mother-in-law; a daughter-in-law must not come too close to her father-in-law (she cannot even cook a meal for him). In everyday interaction, the expected behavior is one of respect and deference by young people toward older people as well as by women toward men. The Gusii are very decorous and careful about personal appearance and avoid showing themselves even partially naked. Similarly, bodily functions must not be mentioned or implied between adjacent generations or between women and men. Going to the lavatory is a laborious undertaking because one must avoid being seen on the way there.

A Gusii person distinguishes her or his own father and mother by specific terms: *tata* ("own father") and *baba* ("own mother"). Likewise, parents distinguish their children as *momura one* ("own son") and *mosubati one* ("own daughter"). However, all women and men of the same generation are considered "brothers" and "sisters." All women and men in one's parents' generation are called *tatamoke* ("small father") and *makomoke* (small mother). All members of the next generation are *omwana one* ("my child"), grandchildren's generation are *omochokoro* ("my grandchild"), and grandparents' generation are *sokoro* ("grandfather") and *magokoro* ("grandmother").

Hospitality and respectful treatment toward strangers is common, but the Gusii are also very reserved, polite, and in many ways suspicious about others' intentions. Although interpersonal conflicts are common, people should not show outwards signs of anger. Instead, aggression emerges as witch-

craft accusations and attempts at sorcery toward enemies. The strong emphasis on outward peace and emotional control results in explosions of violent behavior under the influence of alcohol.

One always greets strangers met on the footpaths between the farms, as well as acquaintances of one's own generation, with a simple phrase similar to our "Hi, how are you?" ("*Naki ogendererete*"). However, if one visits a homestead or meets a relative, a more complete greeting ritual is necessary, which includes inquiring about each other's homes, children, and spouses. Unannounced visiting is not considered polite; a message should be delivered beforehand. A visitor enters a reception area, and a child comes and gives him or her a chair and takes anything he or she may be carrying. Neighbors or other visitors may come and engage in casual conversation, but the hosts usually do not appear until something to drink, usually tea, has been brought forward.

Body language is reserved and gesturing is kept to a minimum. Between persons of unequal status, such as young and old or man and woman, the person of lower status should not look directly into the other's eyes.

Interactions between unmarried youth were once strictly regulated, but young men and women today meet and socialize in many places outside the home. Premarital sex is common, and many girls end up as single mothers. Western ideas of love are common, and youth write love letters to each other and visit friends' houses where they dance and talk.

Today, intermarriage does occur between Gusii and people of other ethnic groups.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before colonialism, the extended polygynous family was spatially divided into two components: the homestead (*omochie*), where married men and women and their unmarried daughters and uncircumcised sons lived, and the cattle camps (*ebisarate*) in the grazing areas where resident male warriors protected most of the cattle. The British abolished the cattle camps in 1913. In the late 19th century, most Gusii were settled in dispersed farmsteads, although in North Mugirango fortified villages were built for protection against Kipsigis raids. A homestead consisted of wives' houses, houses for circumcised boys, and possibly a small day hut for the husband. Married men did not have any separate houses for sleeping but alternated between their wives' houses. A compound had several elevated granaries for millet. The traditional Gusii house (*enyomba*) was a round, windowless structure made of a framework of thin branches with dried mud walls and a conical thatched roof. Today, the Gusii continue to live in dispersed homesteads in the middle of farm holdings. Modern houses are rectangular, with thatched or corrugated iron roofs, and cooking has been moved from the house to a separate kitchen structure.

The hilly nature of the district leads to serious soil erosion and makes road communication difficult, especially in the rainy season when many roads (only 10% of which are paved) become impassable.

Health facilities are inadequate, unevenly distributed and lacking in essential medicines. There are a number of hospitals—including the government-run facility in Kisii town and the Mission Hospital in Tabaka—but the bed occupancy rate is 160.3%. The major diseases in Kisii are malaria, anemia, pneu-

monia, meningitis, tuberculosis, measles, and gastroenteritis. The first AIDS cases in Kenya were recognized in 1984 (1987 in Kisii district), but it is now believed that 1 in every 18 adults is infected with HIV in all areas. Over 70% of AIDS cases are aged 20–49 years, the most economically active age group and also the best educated and skilled.

Infant mortality has been declining for several years and the acceptance of immunization programs is increasing, but a large proportion of children are believed stunted due to poor nutrition. Water is easily available from rivers, wells, springs, roof catchments and boreholes, although the only treated water supply is found in Kisii Municipality. In recent years Kisii highland has had new water treatment stations among others one at Birongo serving parts of Nyaribari central and Chache and also Kitutu Masaba.

Intensive farming in hilly regions has increased the rate of soil degradation and erosion, while the application of farm chemicals has polluted surface and groundwater sources. More than 90% of rural household energy needs come from wood, but the district is no longer self-reliant and other sources such as biogas are being encouraged.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

During the pre-colonial period, the exogamous, patrilineal clan (*eamaate*) provided the largest unit for cooperation. Clans were part of clan clusters with a bird or a mammal as totem but without any common organization. At the lineage level (*riiga*), patrilineal descent and marriage defined commonly recognized access to land and provided the rationale for corporate action. During the colonial period, indigenous political and social organization became conceptualized as a segmentary lineage system where units from the clan cluster, clans, and clan segments became defined according to a genealogical grid with an eponymous ancestor at the top.

Today, all land is registered in individual men's names, but the land market is still limited, and sales are uncommon. Men have ultimate rights to the management and use of land through inheritance. Women still have no birthrights to their parents' land. The vast majority of women can only obtain access to land through marriage. However, a few employed women buy land in other districts. Since the initial registration in the 1960s, land has not been surveyed, and much land is still registered in the name of dead fathers or grandfathers. A man usually transfers land to his wife and sons when the eldest son marries. Land is ideally divided equally between wives under the supervision and witness of local male elders. After division, the husband often retains a small plot (*emonga*) for personal use.

Marriage can be established through the payment of bride wealth, in the form of livestock and money, by the husband to the wife's family. This act establishes a socially sanctioned marriage through which a woman and a man become defined mothers and fathers. Residence is at the husband's home. Divorce is rare and entails the return of the bride wealth. At the death of a husband, a widow chooses a husband among the deceased's brothers. Until the 1960s, everyone got married as soon as possible after puberty. However, at the end of the 1960s, elopements started to increase in number, and the period between the inception of a cohabiting union and payment of bride wealth has become progressively more and more extended. In 1985 at least 75% of all new unions between women

and men were established without the payment of bride wealth. The lack of bride wealth means that a union is without social and legal sanction, and this has resulted in the formation of a socially and economically marginalized stratum of single mothers without access to land. This has been accompanied by a decline in the value of bride wealth payments for peasant women from about 13 adult Zebu cows in the first half of the 1950s to about three adult Zebu cows in 1985. Employed women, such as nurses and lawyers, fetch high bridewealth—15 to 45 Zebu cows (although their bride wealth is frequently paid in cash and European cows).

Households are based on nuclear or polygynous (multiple-wife) families. Each wife maintains her own household and there is little cooperation between co-wives. With the decline in polygyny, a domestic unit typically consists of a wife and husband and their unmarried children. It may also include the husband's mother, and for shorter periods, younger siblings of the wife. Until the birth of the first or second child, a wife and her mother-in-law may cook together and cooperate in farming. Married sons and their wives and children usually maintain their own households and resources.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Western-style clothing is always worn.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple vegetable food is corn, which is ground into flour. Corn flour is mixed into boiling water to form a thick dough-like paste (*obokima*) that is eaten with all meals. A meal usually consists of fried cabbage, tomatoes, and some potatoes. Depending on how well-off the family is, meat in the form of chicken or goat may be served. The meat is eaten with one's fingers, forming the *obokima* into a spoon, with which other food is scooped up and eaten. Other popular foods are sour milk, goat intestines, and millet porridge. Finger millet was the traditional staple before the introduction of corn and is considered an extremely nourishing food, which is necessary for pregnant women. It is a kind of "power food" that is believed to strengthen a person's physical and mental power and increase a man's sexual prowess.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education is in high demand, and there are about 200 high schools, the majority of which are community-supported. There are also a number of private schools. With the introduction of free primary and free secondary education in Kenya, enrollment at these levels has shot up. Most well-to-do families, however, send their children to private schools, where the cost is prohibitive for many but quality of learning is high. Although primary and now secondary schools are free, there are other costs involved such as books, building fees, and so on. A majority of Gusii between 6 and 24 years old have attended school. By the 1980s, fewer than 50% of all Gusii children attended secondary school, but all attended primary school. Female enrollment in secondary school is at 45%, while adult literacy is 56% (high in relation to much of Kenya). However, fees for secondary school are in excess of KSh5000 per year. The government has only scrapped the tuition fees for public secondary schools, for most children primary school is the highest level of education open to them. Private schools have

grown in number in the district. They often do better in the region.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Older people know many traditional songs, and the favorite instrument is a lyre (*obokhano*). Most cultural rites and practices such as the naming of children, rites of passage, traditional marriage, dance, burial customs, and cultural institutions have been ignored with many adopting aspects of foreign cultures largely due to lack of understanding and knowledge. This unfortunate scenario has resulted in a generation that shuns Ekegusii and Abagusii culture.

#### 15 WORK

The pre-colonial staple crop was finger millet, which was grown together with sorghum, beans, and sweet potatoes. Plant food was complemented by meat and milk from livestock and wild vegetables. At the end of the 19th century, the cultivation period was two years, with a fallow period of three to six years. By the 1920s maize had overtaken finger millet as a staple food crop and cash crop. Other important contemporary crops include cassava, pigeon peas, onions, bananas, potatoes, and tomatoes. In the 1930s, coffee was already being grown on a limited basis, and by the 1950s Gusiiland had become established as a producer of coffee and tea. Cultivation takes place with iron hoes and ox-drawn plows. Livestock was formerly more numerous, but farmers still keep cattle (both local Zebu and European stock), goats, sheep, and chickens. High population density has forced the Gusii to utilize every available space for agriculture, and families today are unable to produce enough food for subsistence needs. In addition to farming, many Gusii engage in outside employment, either locally or in the large urban centers.

In the late 19th century, women were primarily responsible for cultivation, food processing, cooking, brewing, fetching water and fuel, and housecleaning. Population density has led to pressure on land as almost all land in Kisii district is put to maximum agricultural use. Tea and coffee processing and soda bottling constitute Kisii area's manufacturing industry, but retail and wholesale businesses exist in market centers despite the lack of cooling facilities for preserving perishables. Men were concerned with warfare, house- and fence-building, clearing of new fields, and herding. Although women performed most of the cultivation, men participated to a much higher degree than is the case today. Young unmarried men and boys undertook herding in the cattle villages. Initiated, unmarried daughters assisted in cultivation. Since the early colonial period, the division of labor has gradually changed to the detriment of women. As men have withdrawn from cultivation, women are obliged to perform most of the same tasks as they did in the precolonial era in addition to most tasks involving men's cash crops.

The annual growth rate in paid employment is 3.5%, but this is barely keeping up with the current population growth rate. There are many societies such as savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOS) concentrated in Kisii Town according to members' occupations or primary cash crop as well. The informal sector is involved in repair, metal fabrication, furniture making, and the sale of secondhand clothes, while the soapstone that is found in the area of Tabaka provides a reasonable resource for the carving industry.

Income is largely unevenly distributed, with an average income per capita of KSh2000 (approximately us\$30 in 2006), although most appear to earn KSh1000–1500. Many are severely impoverished.

#### 16 SPORTS

Wrestling used to be a popular sport for men but has declined. Various Western athletic activities have been introduced. The most popular sport among boys is soccer, and most schools have a soccer field. Other sports include table tennis, netball, and cycling.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional dancing and music were once popular, but there exist few outlets in the countryside today for such entertainments. Much recreation, especially among men, consists of drinking beer, either indigenous or bottled. Watching soccer on television and listening to the Gusii FM Radio station also form large part of modern Abagusii entertainment.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In pre-colonial Gusiiland, a variety of goods were manufactured—iron tools, weapons, decorations, wooden implements, small baskets for porridge, and poisons. Pottery-making was limited, and most ware was imported from the Luo. The most notable in terms of technical complexity and product value among the Gusii industries was the smelting of locally obtained ore and the manufacture of iron implements. Blacksmiths did not form a special caste as is so often the case in African societies. Smithing was a remunerative industry reserved for men, and blacksmiths became wealthy and influential.

The Gusii soapstone carvings have received international distribution and fame. The stone is mined and carved in Tabaka, South Mugirango, where several families specialize in this art. The craft is bringing a sizable income to the area through the tourist trade. In 2007 the master carvers and classic soapstone carvers of Kisii Tabaka were awarded an exclusive license to produce hand carved stone caricatures of characters from "The Simpsons" cartoon, via 20th Century Fox and Craft Village UK.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Alcoholism and violence toward women are the most severe social problems. Traditionally, only older people were allowed to drink large amounts of indigenous beer (*amarua*). Today, social control over drinking has broken down, and traditional beer and home-distilled spirits are served in huts all over the district. Probably close to 50% of the young adult and middle age population are regular drinkers, with a larger proportion of men than women. This heavy drinking leads to violence, neglect of children, and poverty. The Gusii also have high murder rates compared to the rest of Kenya. Although violence toward women (such as rape and regular beating) has been part of Gusii culture since earlier in this century, alcohol-influenced behavior is probably involved in its increase.

Until the ravages of AIDS hit western Kenya, the Gusii also had one of the fastest growing populations in the world. The effect of all this, not surprisingly, has been far from pacific. Kisii town is now Kenya's second most violent place, after Nairobi; instances of mob justice in the form of lynching suspected

witches, for example, surged in the 1990s, and the unemployment rate remains one of the country's highest. Witchcraft and perception of witchcraft has also been a major problem among the Gusii lately. In a recent incident about 15 people suspected to be sorcerers were lynched.

The Gusii have long fled from stronger and more aggressive enemies such as the Luo and Maasai. Yet somehow, despite centuries of having been scattered about western Kenya through force of arms, their identity and their social cohesion has remained intact. There have been many disputes with other ethnic groups over the years. Land is the main reason tensions have existed between various ethnic groups, such as the Maasai, Kalenjin and Kipsigis. Shifting boundaries between ethnic groups have created tensions.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The exploitation of women in Gusii society is a serious human-rights problem. According to customary law, which is usually followed in the countryside, women cannot inherit or own land, cattle, or other resources. This makes them completely dependent on men for survival and attainment of any future security. Until a woman has adult sons, she is under the authority of her husband and has to ask permission from him to leave the homestead.

Women do most of the work in feeding their families, and many husbands spend time drinking and visiting friends while their wives work in the fields and take care of the household. Although not all husbands beat their wives, such behavior is considered acceptable and is not uncommon.

Finally, the Gusii practice female genital mutilation, which, although prohibited by national law, still flourishes. At the age of 8 or 9, girls are brought together by their mothers in August for collective circumcision ceremonies. The practice is almost universal among the Kisii. However, according to one source there has been a shift from "traditional" to "sanitized" methods, whereby parents are now paying large sums of money to medical professionals to perform the rite on their daughters.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# HAUSA

**PRONUNCIATION:** HOW-suh

**LOCATION:** Hausaland in West Africa (northwestern Nigeria and in adjoining southern Niger)

**POPULATION:** 22 million

**LANGUAGE:** Hausa, Arabic, French or English

**RELIGION:** Islam, small native cults

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Nigerians; Nigeriens

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Hausa are the largest ethnic group of West Africa, with a population of some 22 million, with another wider regional 15 million bilingual speakers of Hausa from northern Cameroon to northern Ivory Coast. Because of their wide geographical distribution and intermarriage and interaction with different peoples, the Hausa are a heterogeneous people, with a variety of cultural and physical features as well as diverse histories.

The Hausa generally recognize a common origin. They acknowledge a common mythical ancestor (Bayajidda) who, according to tradition, migrated from Baghdad in the 9th or 10th century ad. Along the way, he stopped at the kingdom of Bornu (now in northeast Nigeria) and married the daughter of the king, but was forced to leave her behind. He then fled west and helped the king of Daura slay a snake that was depriving his people of water, and he was given the Queen of Daura in marriage as a reward. Bayajidda succeeded as the king of Daura, and his son, Bawo, who founded the city of Biram, had six sons who became the rulers of other Hausa city-states. Collectively, these are known as the *Hausa bakwai* ("Hausa seven") and include Kano, Katsina, Rano, Zazzau, Daura, Gobir, and Biram. Bayajidda is said to have borne another son with a concubine, and this son fathered seven other children. Each established city-states far away from Daura, which became known as the *banza bakwai* ("bastard seven"). They include Kebbi, Zamfara, Gwari, Jukun, Yoruba, Nupe, and Yauri. Thus, by the 15th century, a number of relatively independent city states had emerged, which competed with each other for control of trans-Saharan trade, slaves, and natural resources. From that point, the various city-states trace their history independently of each other, each with its lists of kings who have ruled since that time.

During the 19th century, Hausaland was unified during an Islamic holy war (*jihad*) led by a Fulani scholar, Usman d'an Fodio. (Islam had arrived in the area by the 14th century.) The *jihad* sought to correct the impure ways of the Hausa Muslims and convert those who were still "pagans." All of the land of the Hausa (*k'asar Hausa*) and some other territories were united under the rule of d'an Fodio, and later his sons. They directed political and religious affairs in the land from the capital at Sokoto until the British arrived and colonized the area in about 1900. Even during colonial times, the city-states and their leaders maintained some authority and autonomy, and many Hausa traditions and customs have been preserved until recently.

Among the Hausa origin myths, the snake, water, and western migration themes have been alleged to link the Hausa with ancient Meroe on the Nile. Hausa communities outside of Hausaland are commonly known as zongos. Hausa communities in

the 15th and 16th centuries found themselves in a regional power vacuum with the decline of Bornu-Kanem to the east, Songhai to the west, and being restrained by the northerly Berbers and the long-standing southward migration of the Sahara. The Kano Chronicle provides a significant historical record to the Hausa and Fulani people. While there are important aspects of collaboration between these two groups, generally one can say that the 18th century Fulani jihads put the Hausa in a relatively subordinate position.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Hausa peoples are concentrated mainly in north central Nigeria and in adjoining southern Niger, an area that is predominantly semi-arid grassland or savanna. Hausaland consists of a number of large cities surrounded by rural agrarian communities that grow mainly millet, maize, and sorghum during the region's 4- to 5-month rainy season. The cities are among the greatest commercial centers of sub-Saharan Africa. Hausa peoples are found dispersed throughout West Africa, Cameroon, Togo, Chad, Benin, Burkina Fasso, and Ghana. Some are found as far away as Sudan and Congo Republic. They have settled permanently or temporarily in these locations as traders.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Hausa is the most widely spoken language in West Africa. It is spoken by an estimated 22 million native speakers, plus an additional 17 million second-language speakers. The Hausa language, from which these people take their name, belongs to the Chadic sub-branch of Afro-Asiatic language family of Africa, which has strong affinities to Arabic in the north. Perhaps one-fourth of the Hausa vocabulary derives from Arabic, and more recently terms from Fulfulde (see **Fulani**) and Kanuri languages, as well as English, have been incorporated. Many Hausa can read and write Arabic, and many can also speak either French or English. There are five main dialects of Hausa in northern Nigeria, in addition to variations on the language in the Hausa diaspora in such places as Ghana, Benin, and Togo.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Hausa have a rich system of folklore, some of which has been influenced by the Islamic religion. The system includes stories (*tatsunya*)—of animals, men and women, young men and maidens, and heroes and villains—which usually have a moral. Many include proverbs and riddles to help convey a message to the audience, which is often comprised of children. The stories sometimes involve a trickster who appears as a spider and demonstrates both cunning and greed. Hausa folklore also includes exaggerated stories or traditions (*labaru*) of important figures or events in the Hausa past (such as battles or notable rulers). In these, folklore merges with history. The Hausa origin myth includes Bayajidda the serpent slayer who was rewarded by marriage the Queen of Daura, who, in turn, had the founding sons of the Hausa's seven original towns.

## 5 RELIGION

Since the penetration of Islam into Hausaland in the mid-14th century, most Hausa have become extremely devoted to the Islamic faith. Muslims believe in Allah and Mohammed as his prophet. They pray five times each day, read the holy scriptures, fast during the month of Ramadan, give alms to the poor, and



aspire to make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the Muslim holyland in Mecca. The religion affects nearly all aspects of Hausa behavior, including their dress, art, house types, rites of passage, and laws. In the rural areas, there are still a few communities of peoples who do not follow Islam. These people are referred to as *Maguzawa*, and they worship nature spirits known as *bori* or *iskoki*.

The Hausa are Sunni Muslims, but are also influenced by the Muslim brotherhoods that are widespread across the Sahel as well as other syncretic African beliefs and practices. Some Hausa, known as *maguzawa*, tend more toward non-Islamic African beliefs. *Bori* cults are built around spirit possession and exorcism and are especially attractive to women and marginalized peoples.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Hausa annual cycle follows the Islamic calendar. Feast days (*Id*) take place following the month of fasting (*Ramadan*), following the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), and on the birthday of the prophet Mohammed. At this time, families usually sacrifice a ram in thanksgiving, celebrate with their relatives and friends, and give each other gifts. Hausa also observe the national holidays of Nigeria.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

About a week after a child is born, it achieves personhood when it is given a name during an Islamic naming ceremony. Boys are usually circumcised at around the age of seven, although



there is no rite of passage associated with this. At around this same age, both boys and girls study the Qu'ranic scripture, which they must learn by the age of 13.

In their mid- to late teens, young men and women may become betrothed in marriage. The marriage ceremony may take place over several days, first among the bride and her family and friends, when she is prepared for marriage. Male representatives of the bride's and the groom's families contract the marriage according to Islamic law, usually at the mosque. Shortly thereafter, the couple will be brought together, often with a small celebration.

Upon the death of an individual, Islamic principles for burial are always followed. The deceased is washed, prepared for burial, wrapped in a shroud, and buried facing eastward toward the Islamic holyland of Mecca. Prayers are recited, and family members receive condolences. Wives mourn their deceased husbands for about three months.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In contrast to some other Nigerian peoples, Hausa tend to be quiet and reserved. This may be due to the influence of Islam and their close association with Fulani (Fulbe) peoples, who are known for extreme reserve and shyness. Thus, when Hausa interact with other, unrelated peoples or strangers, they tend to exercise restraint and not show emotions. Likewise, when a Hausa interacts with certain kin (such as senior siblings, in-laws, or one's spouse or parents), reserve and respect must be shown. This may entail, for instance, not uttering the name of one's spouse or parents or talking quietly. In-laws or co-wives may be avoided altogether. To the Hausa, this is a demonstration of respect. By contrast, relaxed, lively, affectionate, and at times playful relations exist among certain other kin such as junior siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren, or among cousins.

There are no formal age groups among the Hausa. From an early age, however, children develop friendships with their neighbors that may last a lifetime. In some towns, youths may form associations whose members play or dance together until they marry.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Hausa reside in both rural and urban areas. In the rural villages, they usually live in large households (*gidaje*), which are inhabited by a man, his wives, his sons, and their wives and children.

In large cities, such as Kano or Katsina, most Hausa live in the old sections of town or in newer quarters built for civil servants. Many non-Hausa (particularly Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, and Kanuri) have moved to these cities and occupy what are called "stranger quarters" (*sabon gari*). Hausa housing ranges from traditional extended family compounds (inhabited by a male, his wives, and his sons and their families) to relatively modern, single-family houses in new sections of cities or government residential areas.

In rural areas, most people get around on foot or bicycle, but they use public transport (buses, taxis) when traveling long distances. Hausa cities have public transportation, and many residents have cars.

Modern health care is available throughout Hausaland, except in remote villages. People can seek medical help in clinics and hospitals, although there is sometimes a shortage of

medicine. Some people also consult traditional healers who administer local remedies (*magani*), many of which prove very effective.

Northern Nigeria is relatively underdeveloped; the Hausa are facing various difficulties of finding adequate employment in the modern sectors of the economy that require new educational and technical skills.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

As throughout Africa, family life is extremely important among the Hausa. Ties of kinship are elaborate, particularly through the male line, and relatives cooperate in economic activities such as farming and trading in the rural areas or in business activities in the urban areas. Kin aspire to live near each other to socialize and provide mutual support. They also contract marriages for junior members, who ideally are related (i.e., cousins). Under Islamic law, a man may marry up to four wives. Principles of kinship and descent are most elaborate among the aristocratic Hausa of Fulani descent, who trace their ancestry back to the time of the *jihad* in the 19th century. These people are known as Hausa-Fulani.

Most married Hausa women observe seclusion; they stay in the home and only go out for ceremonies or to seek medical treatment. A few can go out to their place of work. When they do go out, they should be modestly dressed (i.e., with a veil) and are often escorted by children.

Hausa generally do not recognize themselves politically as one unit but rather identify with the individual Hausa "states" that have persisted from earlier times. Each state has an emir (*Sarki*) who is flanked by a council (*majalisa*). States as territories are divided into districts, which are administered by government and local officials. Lastly, village chiefs and ward heads control affairs of villages or sections of cities.

## 11 CLOTHING

Hausa men are recognizable throughout West Africa by their elaborate dress. Many wear large, flowing gowns (*gare*, *babban gida*) with elaborate embroidery around the neck and sometimes down the front. They also wear colorful embroidered caps (*huluna*). Hausa women, like women of neighboring groups, wear a wrapper made of colorful cloth with a matching blouse, head tie, and shawl. Some of these cloths are extremely expensive, and women collect them, together with gold jewelry, as a sign of status and wealth.

## 12 FOOD

The Hausa eat a variety of foods that derive from their predominantly agricultural livelihood. Their staples consist of grains, namely sorghum and millet, together with maize, which are ground into flour for a variety of foods. Rice may also be used as a staple. Breakfast often consists of porridge and sometimes cakes made of fried beans (*kosai*) or wheat flour (*funkaso*). Lunch and dinner usually include a heavy porridge (*tuwo*) that is served with a soup or stew (*miya*), and dinner is the main meal. Most soups are made with a base of ground or chopped tomatoes, onions, and peppers. To this are added other vegetables such as spinach, pumpkin, okra, and other leafy vegetables, and spices that are found locally. Small quantities of meat are used, and beans, peanuts, and milk may also add protein to Hausa diets. Milk products are obtained from the pastoral Fulani (Fulbe) peoples. Nowadays, as many Hausa women engage



A Hausa father and son in their work clothes. Many Hausa men have more than one occupation. In rural areas, they farm and also engage in trade or craftsmanship. In the towns and cities, they may have formal jobs that they may supplement with trade. (Jason Laure)

in the trade of cooked foodstuff, many families or individuals purchase snacks or meals outside the household as needed.

### 13 EDUCATION

From birth, Hausa children are socialized in the household by their relatives, especially women, through imitation, scolding, reciting sayings and proverbs, and storytelling. From about the age of six, they attend Islamic (*Qu'ranic*) school and learn to recite the scriptures and learn about the practices, teachings, and morals of Islam. By the time they reach adulthood, many achieve high levels of Islamic scholarship.

Western education was established in Hausaland during the early 20th century. Children began attending schools built by the British Colonial government, first at the primary level, and then at the secondary level. One of the first and finest universities in all of Africa, Ahmadu Bello University, was founded in Zaria in the 1940s. Since Nigeria received its independence in 1960, many schools and universities have been built by the Nigerian government, and a majority of Hausa children, especially in urban areas, are now able to attend school, at least to the primary level.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Culture (*al-ada*) is one of several features that distinguish a Hausa person from members of other ethnic groups, in addition to his origin (*asali*), his adherence to the Islamic religion (*addini*), and his mastering the Hausa tongue (*yare*). Hausa culture includes the Hausa mode of dressing, particularly the

big gown and cap, along with several other customs, such as dancing and marriage ceremonies. The Hausa also identify closely with their music, particularly that of the praise-singers who sing about community histories, leaders, and prominent individuals. Hausa culture also includes individual character, known as *mutumci* or *hali*. In their personal dealings, Hausa seek to strike a balance between being assertive and being thrifty, which benefits them in their business dealings, and having a strong sense of shame (*kunya*) and respect among strangers as well as kin.

### 15 WORK

Hausa society has a strong division of labor according to age and sex. The predominant activities are trade, especially in the towns, and agriculture in the rural areas. Hausa women, although they are usually secluded (except at harvest time in the rural areas), have occupational specialties, including processing, cooking, and selling foods. They also sell cloth weavings, pots, medicines, vegetable oils, and other small items. They do so with the help of their children or servants, who go to other houses or the market on their behalf.

Male children help their fathers with farming; young girls help their mothers around the house, care for the younger children, or go out and trade. Recently, some of the women's trading activities have declined as children have been enrolling in school during the hours their mothers need help.

Many Hausa men have more than one occupation. In rural areas, they farm and also engage in trade or craftsmanship.

They grow food crops and cash crops such as cotton and peanuts. In the towns and cities, they may have formal jobs, such as teaching or government work, which they may supplement with trade. Some individuals are full-time traders with shops or market stalls, while others engage in long-distance trade of cattle and skins to other parts of Nigeria or to neighboring countries. Many Hausa are full-time Islamic scholars.

## 16 SPORTS

Both wrestling (*kokawa*) and boxing (*dambe*) have been popular sports among the Hausa. Wrestlers and boxers form distinct groups in Hausa communities, until recently being defined by distinctive dress and hairstyles. Children at a young age become apprentices of more experienced individuals. Eventually they participate in the competitions. For entertainment or on religious holidays, people are summoned to arenas or markets for the matches. Music, particularly drumming, accompanies the competition. Magical potions or charms (*magani*) are used to enhance the performance. Both boxers and wrestlers wear special loincloths during the competitions, and the boxers also wear special bracelets and a cloth wrapped around one hand, which serves as a boxing glove. During a match, a wrestler will choose an opponent and the two will wrestle until one is thrown to the ground. Boxers fight until one is either brought to his knees or falls flat on the ground.

More recently, other sports have been introduced into Hausaland. In particular, horseracing and polo are found among the nobility. Soccer is popular among practically everyone, and it is now considered Nigeria's national sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

From a young age, Hausa children participate in dances, particularly when they meet in the market. Storytelling, local dramas, and musical performances have also been common forms of entertainment until recently. Musicians perform at various festivities such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and parties, as well as during Islamic holidays. Today, Western forms of entertainment are popular. Western music, including rap and reggae, are common, as are television programs imported from the United States and England. Nowadays, one often finds stereos, televisions, and VCRs in the homes of Hausa people, airing a mix of traditional Hausa entertainment and that of the West.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Among the Hausa, music and art form an important part of culture and everyday life. Work songs often accompany activities in the rural areas or in the markets. Court music (drumming, horns, flutes) and praise-singing are found among those in towns, especially among the nobility. Some of the Hausa praise-singers (*marok'i*) have achieved national prominence.

Hausa are well-known for their craftsmanship. There are tanners, leatherworkers, weavers, carvers and sculptors, ironworkers and blacksmiths, silver workers, potters, tailors, embroiderers, and so on. Their wares (such as jewelry, hats, cloth, and utensils) are sold in the markets throughout Hausaland and in much of West Africa. North African, Islamic forms and motifs have influenced much of Hausa art, design, and architecture, which includes Arabic characters and geometric designs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Problems and hardships among the Hausa today are caused by the physical and political environment in which they live. Geographically, most of Hausaland is in the northern savanna and Sahel zones near the Sahara desert, which are prone to drought. Crops fail if rainfall is not timely or sufficient. Most people do not have the means to purchase the necessary foodstuffs and may suffer during harsh weather. Some must migrate to the cities in search of work.

Since gaining its independence, Nigeria has also witnessed a host of problems associated with managing the new country and its government. Political instability, military dictatorships, corruption, and lack of unity among Nigeria's more than 200 ethnic groups are among the many problems that have plagued the country. Even though Nigeria is one of the world's largest suppliers of oil, much of the wealth has not been properly invested in economic and social development.

Consequently, among the Hausa, as among all other peoples of Nigeria, poverty is widespread. Its manifestations include poor nutrition and diet, illness and insufficient health care, inadequate educational opportunities, and a relatively low standard of living in contrast with much of the Western world. Nevertheless, the richness of Hausa culture and society offsets many of these hardships, and there is reason for optimism that living conditions will gradually improve as the people of Nigeria gain more experience as citizens of the new nation.

In short, the central problems in Hausaland remain practical issues of employment and social services, while the main cultural and religious issues rest in the torque between conservative Islamic values in a modern federal African nation.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In all Islamic societies the position of women has certain specific cultural and religious expectations requiring modesty and domestic functions. In this context the stresses of modern life have caused both changes and threats to this long established cultural order. In northern Nigeria in particular the tension between a secular federal state and local provincial autonomy has been very contentious at times. Among the issues was the case of Amina Lawal who was charged with adultery and was sentenced to death by stoning according to a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. This was never carried out but was a difficult issue of the federal government along with parallel cultural issues regarding a Nigerian beauty contest. On the other hand the legendary Hausa Queen Aminatu is noted for her military prowess and is much celebrated, but even her role is disputed by some theologians and historians.

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—revised by R. Lobban

# HUTU

**PRONUNCIATION:** HOO-too

**LOCATION:** Rwanda, Burundi

**POPULATION:** Approximately 16–17 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, French, English  
Christianity with aspects of traditional belief, spirit cults

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Burundians; Rwandans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The term *Hutu* refers to the majority of people who live in the African countries of Rwanda and Burundi. The Hutu people share cultural traditions with the other inhabitants of these countries, the Tutsi and the Twa, and all three groups speak the same Bantu language. The contemporary social situation in Rwanda and Burundi is the result of a complex history that brought these diverse peoples together.

Scholars, as well as the people of the two countries themselves, disagree over the precise meaning of the label *Hutu*. In practice, there are two senses of the name. First, *Hutu* may be used to refer to ethnic origins. In this sense, it refers to people of Bantu origins who share a common history as farmers. In its second sense, it indicates social status, referring to the fact that the Hutu traditionally belonged to a low-ranking social category, similar to a caste, and were subordinate to the higher-ranking Tutsi, who formed an aristocracy. Lowest in the status system were the Twa, a group of hunters and foragers known more commonly as “pygmies.”

Like the two different meanings of the name *Hutu*, there are two prevalent interpretations of the group’s history, both of which have assumed mythic proportions and are often used for political purposes.

The first myth of history has the effect of justifying Hutu hatred of the Tutsi. It overemphasizes the ethnic divisions of the past. It suggests that the Tutsi are a distinct race of conquerors who have enslaved the Hutu and Twa for hundreds of years, making use of the widely accepted belief that the Hutu and the Twa were the first settlers of the region, only later to be followed by the Tutsi in the 15th or 16th century.

The second mythical version of history has been used to deny the legitimacy of Hutu claims to political representation. It depicts the inhabitants of Rwanda and Burundi as a single ethnic group whose divisions have arisen solely as a result of economics and colonialism. This version de-emphasizes the physical differences among these groups, claiming they are too ambiguous to matter. The peaceful and cooperative quality of Hutu-Tutsi relations are overemphasized, and any contemporary ethnic problems are blamed on foreigners. This myth, at its most extreme, rules out any mention whatsoever of ethnicity.

Both these versions of history are oversimplifications, but they are made believable because they have some evidence in their support. For example, the first version’s emphasis on ethnic divisions is supported by studies that have found the Tutsi to be on average four to five inches taller than the Hutu. This ethnic emphasis is also supported by the fact that many Tutsi can also drink large quantities of milk without suffering the indigestion associated with the genetic condition called lactose intolerance, a finding in accord with the view that the

Tutsi were at one time nomadic cattle herders related to other tall and lean people of East Africa such as the Maasai and the Nuer.

In spite of such support, the mythical features of these contrasting historical accounts can be countered by considering the historical record, whose details are much more complex and ambiguous than the myths allow. For example, the *mwami*, the Tutsi king who ruled over Rwanda-Burundi, enjoyed some popular support from both the Hutu and the Twa. Furthermore, even in central Rwanda, where the king was strongest and most identified with Tutsi control, royal power was only solidified in the 19th century. In fact, Hutu regions of northern Rwanda remained free of his rule until the 20th century. As for the situation in Burundi, Hutu leaders were able to rise to positions of power and influence within the king’s court while some whose roots were Tutsi were quite poor.

The history of the Hutu and the Tutsi is complicated still further by the fact that social relations in Rwanda and Burundi were modified by European rule. Both countries were occupied by foreign powers in the period from 1890 to 1962. Germany clearly favored the Tutsi elites during their period of military occupation, from 1890 until the end of World War I. The Belgian administrators who followed the Germans also favored the Tutsi initially, but their position became more ambiguous over time. By the 1950s, Belgian administrators and missionaries were actively encouraging Hutu leaders in their attempts to gain political control.

Rwanda and Burundi took dramatically different paths to independence in 1962. During the local run-off elections in Rwanda in 1959, open rebellion against the Tutsi broke out. Ultimately, this led Hutu leaders to abolish the kingship and take power by force. In Burundi, there was a more peaceful transition to independence, with the *mwami* initially acting as an intermediary between Tutsi and Hutu sides. This peace, however, was fragile, and Hutu efforts to gain power by force were crushed, culminating in a ruthless campaign of repression against them in 1972.

The end result of the independence process was that opposite sides controlled the two countries. In Rwanda, the Hutu established a period of rule that was to last until 1994. In Burundi, the state came to be controlled by a branch of the Tutsi. More recently, there have been attempts to reconcile the two groups, but conflicts over political power continue.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Rwanda and Burundi are mountainous countries in east-central Africa. They share a common border, with Rwanda located to the north. Rwanda’s northern border is with Uganda. Both countries are bounded by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) to the west and Tanzania to the east. Rwanda and Burundi are both quite small. Their total area combined is approximately 54,100 sq km (20,900 sq mi), or roughly the combined size of Maryland and New Jersey.

Population densities in the region are among the highest in Africa and have been high for many years. Burundi had an estimated 312 people per square kilometer of land in 2008, and Rwanda an estimated 407 people per square kilometer of land. The combined total population of Rwanda and Burundi was approximately 19 million in 2008. Crises in Burundi and Rwanda have produced large numbers of refugees, including thousands of Tutsis fleeing Rwanda in the early 1960s and thousands of



Hutu fleeing Burundi in 1972, as well as the refugees generated in Rwanda in 1994. Many people of both groups have lived in refugee camps in neighboring countries, although many Tutsi have returned to Rwanda since 1994. The traditional ethnic distribution figures are usually given as 85% Hutu, 14% Tutsi, and 1% Twa. However, given the history of conflict in the region, ethnic census data should be treated with caution.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa speak variants of a language called *Kinyarwanda* in Rwanda and *Kirundi* in Burundi. These are best thought of as two dialects of a single language that falls into the Central Bantu family. They are mutually intelligible but vary in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary.

Because of the long association of Rwanda and Burundi with Belgium, and the use of French in schools, many Rwandese and Burundians speak French and have French first names. Swahili is also spoken in the region, especially along the border with Tanzania and among those who have been refugees there. English is increasingly important in Rwanda.

Personal names seem lengthy, but their meanings make them simple to native speakers. For example, the name *Mutarambirwa* means “the one who never gets tired.” Individual names can also be derived from well-known events or borrowed from praise poetry.

Traditionally, the ability to express oneself well orally was highly valued. Metaphorical references to cattle and crop cultivation were commonly used in everyday speech. In re-

gions where social relations were most caste-like, with farmers expected to act deferentially toward aristocrats, status was marked in language by polite forms of address. For example, *murakoze* is the respectful form for “thank you” while *urakoze* is the informal form.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Verbal arts of the region include praise poetry, proverbs, folktales, riddles, and myths. Traditionally, these were vibrant parts of everyday life. For example, riddle-like descriptions could be worked into everyday speech: a poor person wearing a pair of ragged shoes held roughly together with a safety pin might evoke empathy by describing his shoes as a “poor broken-down old man with a spear stuck in his body.” Similarly, proverbs were used in defense of an opinion or to provide a moral lesson.

Tales of the legendary figure Samadari were popular among Hutu and lower-ranking Tutsi. Samadari is a kind of trickster who was free to violate the ordinary rules of social conduct. He could openly mock the rich and the powerful and heap scorn upon wealthy cattle owners.

### 5 RELIGION

Today most Hutu are Christians, particularly Catholics, with a small percentage of Muslims. Nonetheless, African religion continues to be important for the majority as well. In the Hutus’ traditional religion, the creator is envisioned as having many human characteristics. The word for creator, *Imaana*, signifies both God and God’s power to create and ensure prosperity and fertility. *Imaana* was essentially benevolent but somewhat removed from the affairs of ordinary people. Perhaps because of his remoteness, elaborate tales of the creation of the universe are lacking.

Non-Christian religious expression is not uniform but one unifying factor is belief in the power of the *abazima*. These are the spirits of the dead, particularly ancestral spirits. They may bring misfortune to those who do not respect them but they may also provide spiritual aid. Offerings are made to *abazima*, and diviners may be consulted to interpret their wishes. Two of the most important spirits among the Hutu are Ryangombe and Nyabingi. In northern Rwanda, Nyabingi is associated with fertility. During ritual occasions individuals may feel they are possessed by the spirit of Ryangombe.

One mythical account of the origin of the Burundians and Rwandans—promoted by the Tutsi elites and rejected by most contemporary Hutu—legitimizes the rule of the Tutsi over the Hutu and Twa by cloaking it in the authority of religious tradition. According to this account, the first inhabitants of the region were said to be the three sons of a king: Little Twa, Little Hutu, and Little Tutsi. The story tells how the king appointed Little Tutsi (“Gatutsi”) to rule over the other two as a result of their personal failings.

A variety of distinct spirit cults exist, with separate forms of worship, some including elaborate initiation procedures.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holidays observed by the Hutu include the Rwandan and Burundian independence days, May Day, New Year’s Day, and the major Christian holidays. Royal rituals—now no longer observed—were elaborate national affairs that included specially trained dancers and the use of giant sacred drums. Rwanda has

several new holidays. These include February 1 (National Heroes Day); April 7 (Genocide Memorial Day); July 4 (National Liberation Day); and October 1 (Patriotism Day).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An individual's first rite of passage is the naming ceremony, which takes place seven days after a child's birth. For the first week, both the baby and the mother are secluded inside the house, but on the seventh day the child is brought out for the first time. Food and drink are prepared, and children from the area are invited to participate in the ceremony.

Marriages are legitimated by the transfer of bridewealth, a kind of compensation for the loss of the woman's labor paid by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. Bridewealth is paid in cattle, goats, and homebrewed beer. The traditional marriage ceremony itself is complex, and the details vary from region to region. Commonly, the bride's body is purified by being smeared with herbs and milk.

Upon marriage, the bride may be secluded at the father-in-law's house for several days. Her transition to full marital status is signified by the end of this seclusion. Except for marriage, there is no formal initiation process to mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Death is marked by prayers, speeches, purification rituals, and restrictions on many everyday activities. Close family members are expected to refrain from sexual relations and to avoid working in the fields during the period of mourning. At the end of the mourning period, the family hosts a ritual feast.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Differences in social status, traditionally conveyed by posture, body language, and speaking style, figured prominently in social relations among the Hutu. Individuals of lower status were expected to show deference to those superior in rank by kneeling. However, a certain casualness of bearing and emotional expression was permissible among lower-status Hutu when they were among equals. Women were expected to defer to men, and idle conversation was frowned upon.

Customarily, relationships in Rwanda and Burundi were regulated by the movement of cattle. In a system similar to sharecropping, patrons (*bashebuja*), who were frequently Tutsi, lent cattle to clients, who were often Hutu. In exchange, the client (*bagerewa* or *bagaragu*) owed allegiance to the patron. Such relationships were called *buhake* in Rwanda and *bugabire* in Burundi.

The Hutu have separate greetings for morning, afternoon, and evening. The morning greeting—"Warumutse ho?"—is answered "Waaramutse." The afternoon greeting—"Wiiriwe ho?"—is met by the return, "Wiiriwe." Men take leave at the end of a visit by directly offering thanks for the hospitality provided them. Women are often expected to be less direct in ending a visit, perhaps making excuses about household obligations.

Traditionally, romantic relationships between young men and women were expected to occur within the same caste group. Socializing through such group activities as dances and church events was common, as opposed to individual dating. Today, Western-style dating is practiced in urban areas among some of the elite.



Anita Nizigama, a Tutsi, poses for a portrait with her husband, a Hutu, and their child. Nizigama's mother initially protested the marriage. In 1994, Hutu murdered about one million Tutsis. (Melanie Stetson Freeman/Christian Science Monitor/Getty Images)

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Despite the high population density in Rwanda and Burundi, the population remains rural. Society is organized not in villages, but as family housing units spread across the terrain. Houses were traditionally beehive-shaped huts of wood, reeds, and straw, surrounded by a high hedge that served as a fence. More recently, modern building materials and styles have been introduced.

High rates of disease and malnutrition make life difficult for the Hutu. Even before the political violence of the 1990s, the average life expectancy of a person in Rwanda and Burundi was only about 40 to 50 years. In 2008, roughly 5% of Hutu and Tutsi adults were said to be living with AIDS, with the percentage of those living with HIV much higher. Rwanda and Burundi have in the past been healthy and prosperous places, benefitting from the high elevation that offered protection from tropical maladies. Life expectancy is low not only because of extreme levels of political violence but also because of inadequate nutrition, health care, and the spread of diseases

of crowding. Particularly problematic diseases include bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever.

Although Rwanda in particular has experienced economic growth since 1994, the infrastructure in the region is not well developed. Roads are often unpaved or poorly maintained. There is no railway service.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Historically, the women of the family are responsible for the maintenance of the home and for planting, hoeing, and weeding the crops. Men and boys are responsible for pasturing the livestock and for clearing the fields; women of reproductive age are forbidden to take care of cattle.

Although love matches were not unknown, and elopements occurred, marriage in Rwanda and Burundi was often about power and relationships between families. These days, however, marriage is more often a matter of personal choice. The goal for both Hutu and Tutsi men was to have a large family with many children. Men, therefore, frequently sought to have more than one wife. Although the majority of men could not afford to be polygynous, a substantial minority did succeed in marrying more than once. Because the society was patrilineal, a woman's children belonged to the father's lineage. Hutu men were not forbidden to court Tutsi women, but marriages were rare. More common in the modern period, but still rare, are marriages between urban Tutsi and Hutu. Twa men and women were traditionally looked down upon by both Hutu and Tutsi and not generally considered acceptable mates.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Among Hutu in rural areas of Rwanda and Burundi, modesty was traditionally not considered an issue until late childhood, so children were permitted to go about without clothing until sometime between the ages of eight and eleven years. For adults, the handmade bark-cloth skirts and hide cloaks of the past have long since given way to Western-style clothing. Handmade beaded necklaces and bracelets continue to be worn, however.

### **12 FOOD**

The staple foods of the Hutu include beans, corn, millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes, and cassava. Milk is highly valued as a food source, as is cattle meat. Because of the social and religious value of cattle, however, people do not often butcher a cow without some ritual justification. Goat meat and goat milk are consumed as well, but they are considered proper food only for persons of low social status. Meal times are flexible, often revolving around work obligations.

Bananas and sorghum grain are fermented to make alcoholic drinks, which are consumed on social occasions and during ritual events such as ceremonies in honor of the dead.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Literacy rates have been at times lower than 50% in Rwanda and Burundi in the vernacular (native language), and still lower in French, but seem to be improving. Rwanda currently reports a literacy rate of about 70%. In Burundi, literate Hutu were targeted for death in 1972, but education began to be encouraged again in the 1980s. There are teacher-training schools and at least one university in both Rwanda and Burundi. How-

ever, Rwanda's educational structures were disrupted by the 1994 genocide. Prior to that time, the Rwandese school system was moving toward an emphasis on education in French, but there is now a new emphasis on English, with a goal of trilingual education. The government also has the goal of providing free primary and secondary school education for all.

Quality education continues to be associated with the ability to speak a European language.

Perhaps because it is so difficult to attain, education is highly valued among the Hutu. Education, especially quality education, is considered a matter of central importance.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The kings of Rwanda and Burundi maintained elaborate dance and drum ensembles, which were associated with royal power. On ritual occasions in Burundi two dozen drums were arranged in a semicircle around a large central drum. The musicians moved in a circle around the drums, each taking a turn beating the central drum. This style of drumming has survived the demise of the kingship, and the music has been recorded commercially.

Music, dancing, and drumming are still important in rural life. There are separate men's and women's dances, and both groups' styles are highly expressive. Dance movements often include rapid movements of the upper arms and body, leaping, and rhythmic foot stomping. Vocal music may be performed solo or in choral groups. Many different types of popular song are composed, including hunting songs, lullabies, and songs in praise of cattle (*ibicuba*). In some areas, in the past, a minstrel traveled from area to area singing the news and accompanying himself with a seven-stringed zither.

Rural literature takes the form of legendary tales, myths, and praise-poetry. At one time the Hutu composed poetry for the king and nobility, but praises were also sung to honor the everyday aspects of agricultural life.

### **15 WORK**

Agricultural labor was traditionally predominant among the Hutu, with work related to cattle raising and herding more highly valued than cultivation of the soil. People of Tutsi background who cultivated the soil were often considered poor and could lose their status as nobles. In this way some Tutsi "became" Hutu. Today, a majority of Hutu are still farmers. Coffee and tea are the primary cash crops. People also seek opportunities for cash employment. In major cities industrial development has been hampered by the years of political conflict.

### **16 SPORTS**

One of the most popular traditional forms of entertainment for both young people and adults is a variant of the game known as *mancala* in other parts of Africa and played with a wooden board that has rows of hollowed-out holes for holding beans. The beans are moved rapidly from hole to hole; the object of the game is to line up one's pieces in rows in such a way as to systematically eliminate the pieces of one's opponent. The main spectator sport in Burundi is soccer.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The capital cities of Rwanda and Burundi have movie theaters that show European and American films. The television indus-

try itself is still under development. Television in Rwanda fosters multilingualism by broadcasting in many languages. This is in stark contrast to the genocide period during which one radio and television station used locally produced music and entertainment to broadcast hateful anti-Tutsi messages.

Music similar in style to that of the Congo and other neighboring countries is popular. Communities may also form neo-traditional drum and dance troupes for local people. Today a number of musicians from Rwanda and Burundi have achieved international recognition. Burundian musician Khadja Nin is particularly well-known for her multicultural style.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Hutu have traditions of basketwork, pottery, woodwork, metal work, and jewelry making. Traditionally, wood carving was not highly developed, consisting mainly of drums, quivers, shields, and stools. Metal work included such objects as copper bracelets and rings, and iron spear points. The Gisaka region of Rwanda was also known for its elaborately painted house interiors. Today, many handicrafts are being produced for the international market. In Rwanda, reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi women has been facilitated by groups who work together to weave "peace baskets." These have been offered for sale in the United States by a major department store.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

An estimated 100,000 educated Hutu in Burundi were hunted down and killed in 1972, following an invasion by rebel Tutsis. In 1993, violence at that level was once again reported. This was followed by more than a decade of intermittent conflict between the Tutsi dominated army and Hutu rebels. There was no major progress toward peace until an agreement was made in 2003. Areas of conflict and dispute continue, although a democratically elected government with a Hutu president was established in 2005.

In Rwanda, the opposite situation has occurred: the Tutsi have suffered at the hands of the Hutu. In 1962, Hutus massacred thousands of people they defined as Tutsi. Victimization of Tutsis began again in the 1990s after Tutsi rebels launched an invasion from neighboring Uganda. More than 800,000 people labeled Tutsi or Tutsi supporters were killed in the 1994 genocide. Many Hutu opposition leaders were also victims.

It cannot be stressed enough that labeling political violence in Rwanda and Burundi simply as Hutu versus Tutsi is an oversimplification. In practice the killings are not so well defined. Victims have frequently been targeted because of their political beliefs regardless of their purported ethnic classification.

In 1996 thousands of Hutu civilians who had fled to the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) in the wake of the 1994 genocide were caught up in a civil war. This was mainly due to the fact that the civilians had fled Rwanda together with a mass of armed Hutu soldiers. The fleeing Hutu military forces from Rwanda in turn got involved in clashes with the ethnic Tutsi of Zaire (*Banyamulenge*). Subsequently, the Banyamulenge allied with the rebel leader Laurent Kabila and helped depose Zaire's infamous dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

According to custom, women were expected to be subordinate to their husbands; those who disobeyed could be punished se-

verely. The use of violence was considered an acceptable way for a man to discipline his wife. However, a woman might also find support from her kin to prevent the severest of abuses. While the Hutu woman might suffer indignities from an abusive husband, her status was even lower in relationship to elite Tutsi men. A Tutsi man could take a Hutu woman as a concubine, for example, and refuse her the status of a wife, depriving her and her children of legitimacy in the kinship system. The man's wives also had authority over the concubine.

More recently, moves toward gender equality have been promoted. Both Burundi and Rwanda now require that a significant percentage of its elected representatives be women. In Rwanda, the government has enacted other legislation to support women's economic and political rights as well.

Violence against women remains a problem in the area. In the lead up to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, propaganda was particularly directed against Tutsi women, and they were frequently raped before being killed. One harmful stereotype was that Tutsi women were dangerous because they beguiled Hutu men with their beauty and seductive charms. Particularly as a consequence of the ongoing civil conflict in Burundi, women continue to be subjected to high rates of sexual violence there.

Homosexuality is rarely openly acknowledged by Tutsi or Hutu. This is also something that many people find sinful according to the doctrines of the Catholic church. In 2007 the government of Rwanda began considering a provision to the penal code that that would penalize homosexual behavior. It is already illegal in Burundi.

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—by R. Shanafelt



# IGBO

**PRONUNCIATION:** EE-bo

**LOCATION:** Igboland (Southern Nigeria)

**POPULATION:** 18 million

**LANGUAGE:** Igbo (Kwa subfamily of the Niger-Congo language family)

**RELIGION:** Tribal religion

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Nigerians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Igbo make up the second largest group of people in southern Nigeria. They are a socially and culturally diverse population, living in the southeastern part of the country. The Igbo consist of many subgroups, all speaking one language, and live in scattered groups of villages, lacking the cities and centralized kingdoms that characterize other major groups in Nigeria, such as the Yoruba and the Hausa.

When, and from what area, the Igbo came into their present territory is not known. Their origin is a subject of much speculation. The people have no common traditional story of their origins. Nor do the local traditions of the various Igbo groups provide clues. It is for this reason that some Western writers on the colonial era treated the Igbo as “a people without history.” While this view is no longer considered valid, the Igbo culture historian is handicapped because there is little archaeological data from which to draw. On the basis of cultural data and fragmentary oral traditions, historians have proposed two interrelated hypotheses of Igbo origins: one, that there exists a core area that may be called the “nuclear” Igboland, and two, that waves of immigrant communities from the north and the west planted themselves on the border of this nucleus as early as the 14th and 15th centuries.

The belt formed by the Owerri, Awka, Orlu and Okigwi divisions constitutes the “nuclear” area: its people have no tradition of coming from anywhere else. It is a densely populated area, from which people migrated to the Nsukka area in the north, and into Ikwerri, Etche, Asa, and Ndokki in the south. From these areas, a secondary wave of migration took people farther to the north, south, east, and west. This was a movement that tended to homogenize Igbo culture. The main reasons for migration were population pressure in certain areas and natural disasters.

In addition to this pattern of migration from the nuclear area, there are traditions, confirmed by culture traits, of peoples that entered Igbo territory in about the 14th or 15th century. Of these, three are the Nri, the Nzam, and Anam. Some of these people claim descent from the Bini people of the Benin Kingdom to the west.

European contact with the Igbo-speaking peoples dates back to the arrival of the Portuguese in the middle of the 15th century. For nearly four centuries, the Niger Coast formed a “contact community” between European and African traders. It was a period of trade on the coast rather than one of conquest or empire building in the hinterland, or interior. The main item of commerce provided by the Igbo was slaves, many of whom came to the New World. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, a new trading epoch opened, with a shift to traffic in raw materials for industry: palm products, timber,

elephant tusks, and spices. With this shift, the European traders could no longer be confined to the coast. In the struggle to establish a “free trade” hinterland between 1807 and 1885, the British companies played a decisive role for Britain through their joint program, combining aggressive trading with aggressive imperialism. When, in 1900, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was created from the former British Niger Company’s administrative area and the Niger Coast Protectorate, Igboland was already being treated as a British colony. Between 1902 and 1914, there were 21 British military expeditions into Igboland. Until 1960, Nigeria was a British colony and the Igbo were British subjects. On 1 October 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation with the political structure of a federation of states.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

An accurate census has been difficult to achieve in Nigeria, and the same is true for the Igbo. According to the 1963 census, the Igbo number about five and a half million. This population is very unevenly distributed, with most of it concentrated in a line, or axis, formed by Onitsha, Orlu, Okigwi, and Mbaise areas. Along this line, the density of population exceeds 1,000 persons per sq mi in many places, resulting in one of the world’s most densely populated rural areas where people subsist on root crops raised through hoe cultivation. In all directions from this main population axis, the density of the population falls below the Igbo average of 350 per sq mi but remains well above Nigeria’s average of 85 per sq mi.

Igboland is located in southeastern Nigeria between 5° and 6° N latitude and between 6° and 8° E longitude. The total land area is about 41,000 sq km (about 15,800 sq mi). Before it enters the Atlantic Ocean through a network of tributaries that make up its delta, the Niger River divides Igbo country into two unequal parts. The greater portion lies east of the river, the smaller one to the west. The western Igbo are territorially marked off from the Bini and Warri, their non-Igbo neighbors. On the left bank of the Niger, the eastern Igbo extend from the Niger Delta, where the Ijo and the Ogoni are their southern neighbors, to the north, where the Igala and the Tiv mark the boundary. On the eastern boundary are the Ibibio. Although separated by the Niger, the western and eastern Igbo have retained their cultural and ethnic unity. In modern times, their attitude toward political questions and their identification with their own leaders have revealed the solidarity between the Igbo on both sides of the Niger.

The Igbo country exhibits a wide variety of physical features. The Niger River contributes to this diversity. The most important rivers—Niger, Imo, Anambra, and Urasí—flow from north to south, indicating a steep northward gradient. Four distinct areas may be distinguished: the riverine, delta, central, and northeastern belts. The riverine and delta belts are low-lying, are heavily inundated during the rainy season, and are very fertile. The headwaters of the Imo and Urasí rivers serve the central belt, a relatively high plain that gradually fades into the Okigwi-Awgu plateau. The Udi highlands, which contain coal deposits, are the only coal-mining area in West Africa.

Igboland has a tropical climate. The average annual temperature is about 27°C (80°F), with an annual range of 5 to 10 degrees. The rainy and dry seasons are well marked. The former begins in April and lasts until October, when the dry season starts. Rainfall is heavier in the south than in the north. Im-

portant in the seasonal cycle are the southwest monsoon winds that bring rain and the northeast winds that are dry, dusty, and cold. These dry winds are known as the “harmattan.”

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Igbo language is one of the speech communities in the Kwa subfamily of the Niger-Congo language family. It is marked by a complicated system of high and low tones that are used to indicate differences in meaning and grammatical relationships and a wide range of dialectal variations. Using a longitudinal dialectal profile, communities at the center and those at the poles can understand one another’s dialects; but between communities at the poles, mutual understanding varies from partial to almost none. These polar dialects are the result of greater isolation.

Here are a few Igbo expressions:

English	Igbo
Hello, how are you?	Keku ka imelo?
What is your name?	Kedu ahagi?
Thank you.	Ndewo

### 4 FOLKLORE

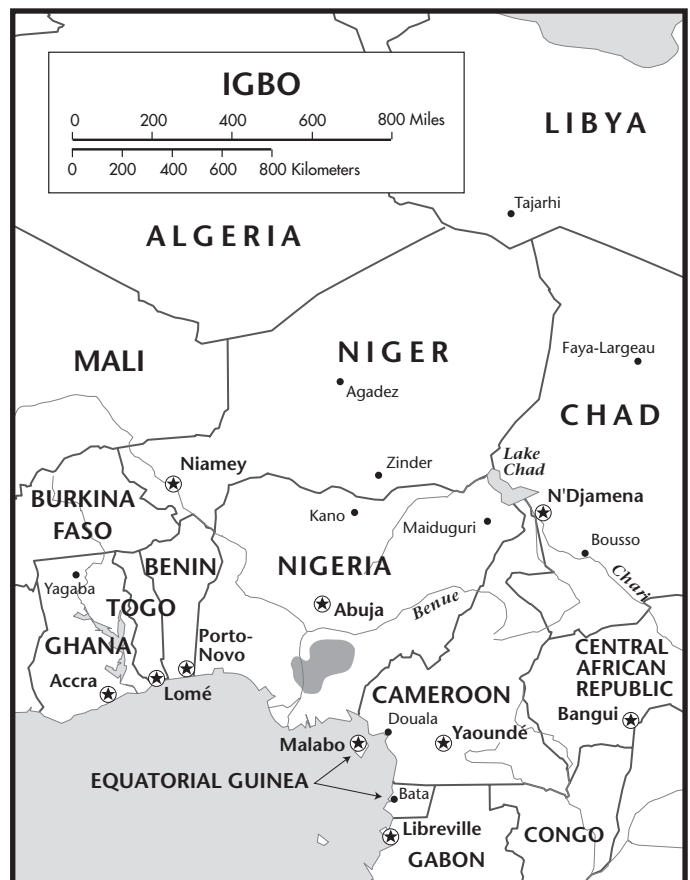
The Igbo world in all its aspects is made comprehensible to the people by their cosmology, which explains how everything in the world, including material, spiritual, and social entities, came into being. Through it, the Igbo know what functions the heavenly and earthly bodies have and how to behave with reference to the gods, the spirits, and their ancestors. In their conception, not only is cosmology an explanatory device and a guide to conduct or ethics; it is also an action system that defines what they should do.

The Igbo world is a world peopled by invisible and visible forces, by the living, the dead, and those yet to be born. All these forces interact and affect and modify behavior. The survival of this world requires some form of cooperation among its members, although this cooperation may be hostile in nature. It is a world in which others can be manipulated for the sake of an individual’s advancement in status, which is the goal of Igbo life. Reincarnation is seen as not only the bridge between the living and the dead, but a necessary factor in the transaction and transfer of social status from the world of the living to the world of the dead. It is a world of constant struggle that recognizes that conflicts exist and requires that people be able to adjust to changes in their lives—being “good citizens” and cooperating for the good of the group. The leader in this world is given minimal power and yet is expected to give maximum service in return, to fulfill the common goal of progress and “making the town get up.”

### 5 RELIGION

Igbo religion is a tribal religion in the sense that its major tenets are shared by all Igbo-speaking people, but in matters of participation, it remains locally organized, with the most effective unit of religious worship being the extended family. Periodic rituals and ceremonies may activate the lineage (larger kinship unit) or the village, which is the widest political community.

While the Igbo religion is polytheistic—having many gods—the idea of a creator of all things is basic to Igbo theology. The Igbo believe in a supreme god, a high god who is all good. This god is a “withdrawn” god, who has finished all ac-



tive works of creation and keeps watch over his creatures from a distance. He is not worshiped directly: there is no shrine or priest dedicated to his service. He gets no direct sacrifice from the living but is seen as the ultimate receiver of all sacrifices made to the minor gods. He seldom interferes in the affairs of human beings, a characteristic that sets him apart from all the other deities, spirits, and ancestors. Although he may be distant and withdrawn, he is not completely separated from human affairs. He is still the great father, the source of all good. The high god is conceived of in different roles. In his creative role, he is called Chinook or Chi-Okike. To distinguish him from the minor gods he is called Chukwu—the great or the high god. As the creator of everything, he is called Chukwu Abiama.

Besides the high god, there are other minor gods called nature gods, sometimes described as kind, hospitable, and industrious; at other times they are conceived of as fraudulent, treacherous, unmerciful, and envious. They are, in general, subject to human passions and weaknesses. But, they can be controlled, manipulated, and used to further human interests. Of these minor gods, Ala, the earth goddess, is considered nearest to the people. She is a great mother, the spirit of fertility of both human beings and the land. Anyanwu is the sun god. He makes crops and trees grow. Igwe is the sky god, the source of rain.

The organization and power structure of these nature gods mirror Igbo social structure. Like the latter, the gods are seen as forming a hierarchy. But, it is usual Igbo practice to appeal

to one god or to a number of gods simultaneously without any consideration of their rank or status.

In addition to the important deities, the Igbo believe in other spirits that may be either personal or impersonal, benevolent or wicked, according to the circumstances. People can keep their goodwill by treating them well. Only the wicked need fear them. Among the principal spirits are Agbara and Alosi. Forests and rivers lying on the fringes of cultivated land are said to be occupied by these spirits. Important personal spirits include Mbataku and Agwo (both of whom are spirits of wealth), Aha njoku (the yam spirit), and Ikoro (the drum spirit).

These deities and spirits have anthropomorphic characteristics (human traits). The Igbo attitude toward them is not one of fear but one of friendship, a friendship that lasts as long as the reciprocal obligations are kept.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Igbo celebrate the major national holidays of Nigeria, including the following: New Year's Day (January 1), Easter (March or April), Nigerian Independence Day (October 1), and Christmas (December 24–26).

In addition, each town has its own local festivals. Those in the spring or summer are held to welcome the new agricultural cycle. In the fall, harvest festivals are held to mark the end of the cycle. The timing of these festivals varies from town to town.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Circumcision takes place about eight days after the birth of a boy and is performed by a skilled woman in the village. At this time the umbilical cord is buried. This is not marked by an elaborate ritual but its social significance is great: a child whose navel cord is not buried is denied citizenship. The child's mother selects the most fruitful oil palm tree from those that her husband shows her; the umbilical cord is buried at the foot of this tree.

Receiving a name is an important event in a child's life, for the child is socially accepted as soon as he or she is given a name. The name-giving ceremony is a formal occasion celebrated by feasting and drinking. A child may be given many names. The parents' choice of names may be dictated by the kind of birthmarks on the child's skin and by the opinion of the diviner, or seer. *Njoku* and *Mmaji*, the male and female figures of the yam deity, are conferred by divination. Other names may be given to indicate the market day on which the child was born, or a preference for male children, or a certain concern for the future of the child. The name *Nwanyimeole* ("What can a woman do?") means that a father is in need of a male child. *Onwubiko* ("May death forgive") expresses the fact that parents have lost many of their children by death and pray that this child may survive. *Chukwuemeka* ("God has done well") is a thanksgiving name for the favor received.

Before the advent of Western schooling, adolescent boys passed through a formal initiation known as *ima agwo*. Girls passed through *mgbede*, a ceremonial seclusion known as the "fat house." In southern Igbo communities this was followed by clitoridectomy, or female circumcision.

The process of betrothing and marrying an Igbo young woman is a long, ceremonious one that often takes years and is rarely accomplished in less than a year. Marriage is so impor-

tant to the Igbo that nothing concerned with it is taken lightly. The process falls into four interrelated stages: asking the young woman's consent, working through a middleman, testing the bride's character, and paying the bridewealth, a kind of dowry.

Death in old age is accepted as a blessing. It is the desire of every Igbo man and woman to die in his or her own town or to be buried within its boundaries. If death occurs at a distance, the relatives bring the body home for burial. After death, the body is clothed in its finest garments, and the corpse is placed on a stool in a sitting posture, propped against the wall. In front of the corpse are placed the deceased's special treasures and the implements of his or her work. Lying or sitting in state lasts for a few hours, during which old friends and relatives come and pay their last respects to the dead. When due time has elapsed, young men wrap the corpse in grass mats, carry it out to the burial ground, and bury it. When the head of a family dies, he is buried in a deep grave beneath the floor of his house. As a general rule, burial follows within 24 hours of death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Igbo are often depicted as an egalitarian society in which almost everybody is equal. This obscures some of the regional differences in Igbo social structure. But, in spite of these differences, all Igbo share the same egalitarian ideology: the right of the individual to climb to the top and faith in the individual's ability to do so.

Within this egalitarian ideology, two criteria shape interpersonal relations: age and gender. Precedence is given to males and to seniors by birth order. This latter is the normal basis for headship of an extended family. The behavior between kinsmen and nonkinsmen is similarly regulated by this senior-junior principle. Seniors are considered the moral agents of the young. It is the duty of the children to greet their seniors first in the morning or whenever they meet. In children's play groups, leadership and authority are informally given to the older boys and girls.

The women members of an Igbo village are of two categories: the women who belong to the village by descent, who may be unmarried, married, divorced, or widowed and the women who belong to it by marriage. The Igbo woman in general enjoys a high socioeconomic and legal status. She can leave her husband at will and summon him to a tribunal where she will get a fair hearing. She marries in her own right and manages her trading capital and her profits herself. Although land rights do not normally descend through the female line, and although living in their husband's compounds makes it impossible for them to play important social and ritual roles in their own family's natal village, women can take titles and can practice medicine.

Social stratification is based on wealth. It does not matter what occupation a person engages in to provide for his old age and for his family. With this ideological approach, the Igbo distinguish between *obgenye* or *mbi*, the poor, from *dinkpa*, the moderately prosperous, and the latter from *nukwu madu* or *ogaranya*, the rich.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Igbo live in compact villages, each built around a central square, which is a clearing with a thatch-roofed mud resthouse of the village men's society and a large open space where meet-

ings and ceremonies are held. Extending from the village, sometimes for several miles, is a wide band of farmland, divided into sections, one or two of which are cultivated each year while the others lie fallow. At the edges of the villages and along the roads and bush paths connecting them are scattered groves of oil and raffia palms.

Most villages are divided into wards, and each ward is divided into compounds. The physical structure of the compounds consists of houses crowded wall-to-wall along narrow alleyways. The entrance to a compound is usually through an ornamental gateway leading from the square. The back of the compound, at the edge of the village, is devoted to garden land where certain crops not planted on the farms are grown.

Village life has changed considerably since the discovery of oil in Nigeria. Villages became connected by roadways to urban centers, which exerted considerable influence even on the most remote areas. The government has also supported development in the rural areas. Electricity was introduced; television sets and radios are now commonplace. The houses, which were formerly made of mud walls and thatched roofs, are now constructed of cement blocks with corrugated iron roofs. Villages have running water, although it is not connected to every house.

Another important development is the network of health centers and hospitals that now dot the rural areas. Almost all villages have a health center and a nurse practitioner or a resident doctor.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

There is no Igbo word for “family.” The term “family” as used by English-speaking Igbo may apply to several different sorts of groups. On the simplest level is the elementary family, composed of a father and a mother and their children, that is, the nuclear family in the usual Western sense of the word. But, under the practice of polygyny, many Igbo men have more than one wife, so there is also the polygynous family, made up of a father and his wives and all their children—father, mothers, and a group of full and half-siblings. Residence is patrilocal; a woman goes to live with her husband when she marries, and sons, when they marry, do not traditionally leave home and set up separate homes their own. Thus, there is, in addition, the extended family: a father and his sons—or a group of brothers if the father is dead—their wives, sons, and unmarried daughters. The extended family usually has about 5 to 30 members.

Ideally, all of the members of the extended family live in one large compound. The ideal of Igbo family life is a big compound. Establishing a big compound depends on the abilities of the head of the compound. It is the demonstration of his personal achievement and his social status. A successful man marries as many wives as he can support, which involves providing farm plots to help the women and their dependents make a living. Polygyny is seen as imposing social and economic obligations that can be fulfilled only by a man of substantial wealth.

The compound consists of a number of economically independent households, each with a man or a woman as the head. All the heads and their dependents recognize the authority of the compound head and would not make a major political decision without first consulting with him. The compound head has numerous ritual, moral, and legal rights and obligations. In Igbo idiom, he is the “eyes of his compound members as they

are his ears.” In return, he receives respect, obedience, and material tokens of goodwill.

In recent years, many changes have taken place that contradicts this ideal. Christian marriage and marriage by ordinance (law) are important innovations. Both have given women legal protection and property rights not recognized by the traditional system. This has not, however, completely eliminated polygyny. A legal limit has also been imposed on the amount of bride-price a woman’s family may demand. There has been an opposite trend, however. As more women have become educated, their families have raised their expectations of bride-wealth, demanding higher and higher amounts.

Among Igbo professional people, the trend is toward a nuclear family, establishment of a separate residence, and marriage based on love. Tension still exists around the issue of the amount of support that should be given to the members of the extended family, creating conflict between generations.

## 11 CLOTHING

The everyday clothing in urban areas is not different from that of Westerners. Traditional clothing is still worn on important occasions in the cities and every day in rural areas. There are both formal and informal attire for both men and women. For everyday use men wear a cotton wrapper, a shirt, and sandals. For formal occasions they wear a long shirt, often decorated with tucks and embroidery, over a better-quality wrapper, shoes, and a hat. Women wear wrappers for both informal and formal occasions; the major difference between these is the quality of fabric. For everyday use, the preferred material is cheap cotton that is dyed locally. For formal wear, the wrapper is either woven or batik-dyed, often imported from Holland.

The blouse for formal wear is made of lace or is embroidered. Women also wear a head tie, a rectangular piece of cloth that can be tied around the head in a number of different ways.

Both men and women have distinctive facial markings, although this is becoming less common. For women, the marking is performed as a preliminary to marriage and is called *mbubu*. The *mbubu* consists of a series of small slits made in the flesh with a pointed razor. Into these slits, pellets of tightly compressed cotton or palm leaf are inserted, and the whole is smeared with charcoal. The end result is a regular pattern of black oval blobs that stand out on the skin.

The tribal markings of the men, called *ichi*, are more elaborate and diverse. Some of the Igbo groups use them only on the face, others on the body as well. The latter is often part of the initiation ceremony. The work is done by women; the flesh is cut in a series of lines and soot from a cooking pot is rubbed into them to produce an intensely black effect.

## 12 FOOD

The yam is the staple food of the Igbo. To be deprived of yams creates a condition of acute distress. Whatever substitute may be offered, it cannot satisfy the Igbo palate. There are many varieties, which differ greatly in size, appearance, and flavor. Other starchy foods include rice, cassava, taro, maize and plantains.

Traditionally, the yam was the choice of food for ceremonial occasions. Nowadays, it has been replaced by rice.

A usual meal includes a starch and a soup or stew, prepared with a vegetable, such as okra or bitter leaves, to which piec-



An Igbo Maiden Spirit mask, which men would wear to mimic activities of women for magical purposes. The masks would be worn during certain rituals, especially at funerals and festivities. (*The Image Works*)

es of fish, chicken, beef, or goat meat are added. The following recipes are very popular.

### Shrimp Jollof Rice

Jollof rice of various types is popular throughout Nigeria, and among the Igbo who live near waterways it is often prepared with shrimp. Elsewhere, the protein may be chicken.

The dish is cooked until the rice grains are soft and separate, but never until they become mushy.

Ingredients:

500 g (17.5 oz) shrimp  
 300 g (10.5 oz) fresh tomato  
 20 g (0.7 oz) tomato paste  
 75 g (2.6 oz) onion  
 fresh red pepper  
 dry ground pepper  
 peanut oil  
 200 g (7 oz) rice  
 salt  
 300 ml (11 oz) water

Shell the shrimp. Grind the tomato, peppers, onion, and 6 to 8 shrimp together. Wash, clean, and drain the rice. Heat

the oil until it smokes slightly. Add the ground ingredients and cook for 5 minutes. Add 300 ml water and tomato paste. Bring to a boil, and add the rice, salt, and remaining shrimp. Replace cover and bring back to a boil. Heat oven to 120°C (250°F), pour rice mixture into an ovenproof dish, and place in oven. Cook until the liquid is absorbed completely. Stir to loosen the rice grains, replace the cover and allow to sit in warm oven for a few hours with the heat off and door ajar to blend the flavors.

### Thin Goat Meat Pepper Soup

This dish may be served with simple shrimp stew and a salad.

480 g (17 oz) goat meat  
 salt  
 dry ground red pepper  
 100 g (3.5 oz) onion  
 20 g (0.7 oz) tea leaves  
 enge, crushed  
 20 g (0.7 oz) dried crayfish, ground  
 100 g (3.5 oz) dried fish (optional)

Wash the goat meat and cut into pieces. Place in a pot and add water to cover. Add salt, pepper, thinly sliced onion and crushed enge. Boil on low heat until the meat is tender. Top up water to cover and add coarsely chopped tea leaves, ground dried crayfish and dried fish. Boil for 10 minutes. Allow to stand for 30 minutes for flavors to blend well.

## 13 EDUCATION

When Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, its new parliamentary government immediately set out to transform the country into a highly developed, modern nation. It set a priority on education and poured its resources into schooling its people. Universal primary education soon became the norm in southern Nigeria, where the Igbo live. Secondary education also developed rapidly. The Igbo were much involved in these efforts since education had had a long tradition among them, and they saw it as a way of moving forward. One of the first universities in the country, modeled on the American system, was established in Nsukka. This university serves the population of the entire country; however, the majority of students at Nsukka are Igbo. A sign of enthusiasm for education is the fact that in any major city of the country, the majority of civil servants are of Igbo origin.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In addition to the visual arts, the Igbo cultural heritage includes music and dancing. For music making there are a number of wind and stringed instruments. These include the *ugene*, a kind of whistle made of baked clay, round in form, and about the size of a billiard ball. Chiefs are entitled to carry an ivory horn for sending out messages by powerful blasts of dot-and-dash notes. The horn is blown like a flute, and the note can be varied in length but not in pitch. Probably the most interesting of the Igbo instruments is the *ubaw-akwala*, a sort of guitar. It has a triangular body formed by three pieces of soft wood sewn together. This instrument is the favorite for accompanying songs and chants and is used by strolling singers in the evenings. Singers are much appreciated, and they must possess not only a gift for music, but poetic ability as well. They impro-

wise their themes as the song proceeds and show great ingenuity in fitting words to tempo and tune.

Dancing is a great Igbo pastime, and it is practiced by everybody capable of movement. There are many forms—for boys, for girls, for men, for women, and for mixed groups, group dancing is associated with religious observances and festivals.

## 15 WORK

The traditional Igbo economy depends on root-crop farming. Yams, cassava, and many varieties of cocoyam (taro) are the chief staples and provide the majority of the population with its subsistence needs. There are other occupations besides farming, but land is considered the most important asset.

The Igbo system of land tenure is based on four principles:

1. All land is owned. There is no concept of abandonment of land or unowned land. Whether the land is cultivated or not, it belongs to somebody.

2. Land ultimately belongs to the lineage, or kinship group, and cannot be separated from it.

3. Within his lineage, the individual has security of tenure for the land he needs for his house and his farm.

4. No member of the lineage is without land.

There is a division of labor according to gender. Men clear all bushes and plant the yams with the help of the women and the children, collectively. Following the planting of yams, the main crop, plots are allocated to the women individually. Each woman plants crops, such as maize, melon, and okra, on the slopes of the hills, and plants pumpkins, beans, cassava, and taro in the spaces between the yam hills.

Trading has become an important source of livelihood for the Igbo. It is no longer possible for them to maintain the desired standard of living by depending entirely on agriculture. There are some Igbo communities where trading has surpassed farming in importance. Trading is an old occupation among the Igbo, and the marketplace has occupied an important place in their economy and life for a long time.

Many Igbo are now engaged in wage labor, with the number of people increasing constantly. The incidence of migrant labor is heaviest in the most densely populated areas. Migration is of three types: villagers seeking paid labor in more urbanized areas within Igboland, those who work in Nigeria but outside Igboland, and those who work outside Nigeria. The opportunities offered to labor, skilled and unskilled, by the economic developments of Nigeria in the past few decades have been grasped by the Igbo. The growing cities, expanding road construction, building boom, new industries, and oil explorations are creating job opportunities demanding varying kinds and degrees of skill; the Igbo are found at every level.

## 16 SPORTS

Wrestling is universal among boys and young men, and it is the most popular sport. Every youth who is physically capable practices it and continues to do so until he marries. There are great yearly contests in every part of Igbo country.

The other popular sport is soccer, played traditionally only by boys, but more recently introduced through the school system to girls.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to rituals, dances, and traditional music, modern forms of entertainment include watching television and going

to the movies and discos. Most households own radios, and there are several television sets in each village. The tradition of storytelling continues. As in the past, the Igbo also play games, including card games and checkers. Among the younger people American youth culture is popular, and most young people listen to rap and rock music.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Igbo practice a number of crafts, some engaged in by men only and some by women.

Carving is a skilled occupation and is confined to professional men. They manufacture doors and panels for houses, as well as stools, dancing masks, and boxes for kola and snuff. Tom-toms, or drums, are also the work of specialists. These are hollow blocks of wood and mostly intended not as musical instruments but for spreading information about ceremonies, festivals, and meetings. Another valued craft is that of the blacksmith. It is only practiced by people in certain towns, who are able to control production. The Awka smiths hold the leading place in the profession throughout Igbo country and beyond. They also travel to such distant parts as Bonny, Calabar, and even Lagos, plying their craft. They manufacture items of personal adornment as well as practical items such as hoes and axes. Nowadays, manufactured goods are replacing these implements.

The arts and crafts in the hands of the women include pottery making, spinning, weaving, basketry, and grass plaiting. Earthen pottery is manufactured by women skilled in the art throughout Igbo country. The pottery is limited to vessels designed for utilitarian purposes, and decoration is not developed to any great extent. Spinning of cotton is done by means of a bobbin that revolves by its own weight. Since this equipment is portable, a woman can do her spinning while trading in the market or sitting in her compound. The thread is then woven on hand looms into strips of cloth from 12 in to 15 in wide. The strips are then sewn together and can be used for a variety of purposes. Mat weaving is another of the women's crafts. The craft work of each area is distinguished by its own regional characteristics. One other art practiced by women is artistic abilities in the adornment of their persons by means of stains.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The problems that beset the state of Nigeria in postcolonial times, ranging from a civil war in which the Igbo were principal players to a series of military coups, have affected the Igbo profoundly. Among them there is a continuing distrust of the peoples of the North (primarily the Hausa) and the West (primarily the Yoruba). Although Nigeria is party to several international human rights treaties, the current government's human-rights record is poor.

The crime rate in Nigeria is high, especially in larger urban centers, but rural areas are also affected. Crimes against property generally account for more than half of the offenses. The crime wave was exacerbated by the worsening economic conditions of the 1980s.

Drug-related crime emerged as a major problem in the 1980s. Igboland has so far escaped the worst of this, but young people even here are reputedly now smoking marijuana.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

A woman in modern Igbo culture is no longer just a consumer of wealth; she is also a maker of wealth. The traditional values and expectations of the patriarchal Igbo society have changed with the breakdown of the traditional norms, the influence of other cultures, and formal education for women. Igbo women now occupy senior positions in the society just like their male counterparts.

In the past, there were a number of clear-cut expectations for both men and women exerted on the members of the community. For example in the traditional Igbo culture, a boy was expected to display masculinity and stiffness. Femininity in a boy was scorned and a boy would be scolded and beaten to discourage womanish traits. Boys were groomed by their fathers to be brave, bold, adventurous, and audacious. Girls on the other hand were brought up to be soft, subservient, and gentle. Both men and women played their gender roles in a complementary manner. These roles were so deeply indoctrinated into their everyday lives that there was little conflict between the sexes. The gender roles were so clear that a member of either gender doing the opposite of what was expected of him or her would be considered as an abomination. For example, if a girl held her father's gun, that would be an abomination. On the other hand, a girl could stay with the older women in the kitchen as they cooked and told jokes, but the same behavior would be considered unacceptable for a boy.

In traditional Igbo society, the birth of a boy was considered a more joyful occasion than the birth of a girl. For the father, the birth of a son meant the continuation of the family line and a clear path of inheritance. For a mother, the birth of a son brought acceptance in society and a sense of greater acceptance into the husband's family. The birth of a daughter, however, would be welcomed with mixed feelings, especially if she was coming after a line of other girls without a son in-between. Without a son, the father would lose hope of having someone to continue with his lineage, since the girls would grow and be married off, thus leaving the home.

In traditional Igbo society, there was clear division of labor based on one's gender. From an early age, the boy, for example, knew that his duties would include staying close to his father, washing his father's clothing, taking care of the livestock, maintaining farming implements, and gathering yam seedlings for planting. He was expected to protect the girls of the community. He would be allowed to participate in "manly" sports, such as wrestling, and he would accompany his father to social meetings and ceremonies. He was expected to establish himself as a skilled member of the society, perhaps as a farmer, blacksmith, or a shepherd. The man's movements were not restricted.

Girls, however, were taught from childhood that their world began and ended with marriage, childbirth, and caring for the needs of her husband. She was taught that the kitchen would be her primary domain and headquarters.

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—reviewed by M. Njoroge

# IJO

**PRONUNCIATION:** EE-jo

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ijaw, Izo

**LOCATION:** Niger River delta (coastal region of southern Nigeria)

**POPULATION:** 2 million or more

**LANGUAGE:** Ijo; other African languages; English for traveling, trading

**RELIGION:** Traditional tribal religion and Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ijo, the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, are a socially and culturally diverse people, living in the coastal region of southern Nigeria, principally in the states of Bayelsa and Rivers. Linguistic and archaeological analysis indicates that they migrated to the Niger Delta as long as 7,000 years ago. It is not known whether they were seeking refuge from mainland attackers or were attracted by the abundance of fish and the supply of salt.

The delta at first must have seemed like an isolated and easily protected area, with its maze of waterways, but later it became a major point of contact with European travelers and traders. Beginning with the Portuguese explorers in the 15th century, the region became more and more closely tied to the world economy as demands for its resources increased: first human resources—slaves—then palm oil, and most recently, petroleum. European missionaries also had a major impact as the Ijo were converted to Christianity, became missionaries themselves, and introduced schools to villages throughout the delta.

The effects of these changes varied widely, however. The Ijo were divided into 43 *ibe*, an Ijo word roughly translated as “clan(s),” and were never politically unified in the form of a kingdom or state. Those living on islands in the eastern delta formed “city-states” and monopolized the trade for slaves and palm oil; the political organization of the central delta was primarily village-based. In fact, when speaking of the Ijo it is important to keep in mind that the Ijo, like many other African peoples, never formed a neatly bounded society. For each general statement, there is usually an exception. For example, the Ijo and their language have the same name (*Ijo*, often spelled *Ijaw*), but the great range of dialects prevents Ijo speakers in the eastern and western fringes of the region from understanding one another. Only the Ijo living in the central part of the delta can understand both. But the Ijo now see themselves as a distinct people with reference to their mainland neighbors (the Igbo, Yoruba, Isoko, Beni, and others), even though the cultural differences within the Ijo-speaking population are sometimes greater than those between Ijo and non-Ijo.

The Ijo political identity took shape during the colonial period, as early as the 1940s as part of nationalist movements throughout the continent. Later, the creation of the Delta state in the 1960s responded to Ijo demands for recognition, and 30 years later the Bayelsa state was carved away from the Delta state. Political identity has been sharpened both through conflicts with the federal government and with neighboring peoples, particularly the Itsekiri and Urhobo living in the Warri area.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

An accurate census has been difficult to achieve in Nigeria as a whole. Estimates range from two million Ijo speakers to more than seven million of Ijo descent. The communities they occupy in the Niger Delta vary in size from several thousand to a few hundred persons, or fewer. The population size is tied closely to the topography of the delta.

There are three broad ecological zones in the delta of the Niger River. The first is fairly narrow, only a few hundred yards in places, and consists of a sandy stretch of land that marks the edge of the delta as it meets the Bight of Benin. The villages located here are small. The second zone is the area of mangrove trees and tidal floods that lies behind the beaches. Mostly seasonal fishing camps are found here, although in the eastern delta the trading organizations formed by the Ijo middlemen developed into communities with denser populations. The third zone includes the dry land that rises above the mangroves. The communities here are located along the banks of the rivers that crisscross the delta.

The waterways were the only means of transportation in the delta until a highway and bridges were built in the 1980s that crossed the northern part of the delta connecting Lagos in the east (the former capital of Nigeria) with Port Harcourt, a major city in the west. In the past the Ijo traveled extensively along the coastal waterways that extend from Cameroon to Ghana, and settled along them to work as fishermen, government employees, missionaries, and tradesmen. The Ijo are found today living throughout Nigeria and have entered numerous other occupations. During the Christmas holiday, many Ijo return to their delta communities. The high-speed motorboats that have replaced canoes reduce the trip home to a few hours' journey from the mainland, when formerly it took several days.

## 3 LANGUAGE

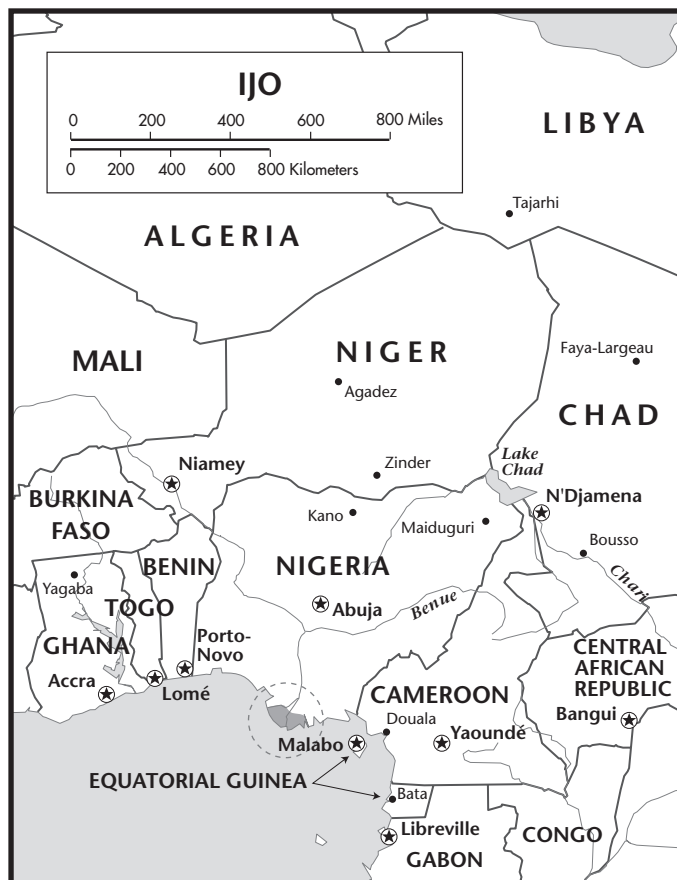
The languages spoken by the Ijo belong to the Ijoid or Benue-Congo subgroups of the Niger-Congo language family. The Igbo and Yoruba languages are also members of the latter subgroup. Because of the demands of travel and trading, it is not unusual for an Ijo to speak several African languages, as well as English or pidgin English. Beginning in primary school, English is the official language of instruction.

Ijo names usually involve a personality trait or an event. A girl might be named Oweizighe (“a male has not yet been born”) because her parents had wanted a boy. The process of naming is as fluid as the names themselves. Anyone can name a newly born child, or no name will be assigned until it seems clear that the infant will survive beyond the first few months. A young person can decide to change his or her own name. For family names people use their father's first name, or his father's name, depending on factors such as the social standing of the grandfather or the place where the person lives while growing up.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Ijo do not have a category of beliefs that can easily be called folklore. At best they have some unproven stories of how they came to move from one place to another, or how a particular custom was started. In one frequently told example, disputes among brothers over the distribution of wild game led to the splitting up of a community and the formation of a new *ibe*. In another example, some Ijo claimed that a water spirit con-





vinced them to stop female circumcision in their *ibe* after seven young women died.

Similarly, with regard to religious beliefs, those who converted to Christianity came to see traditional Ijo notions about spirits and magical powers as examples of superstitious beliefs. In contrast, they believe their own faith in a major world religion is based only on truth.

## 5 RELIGION

The traditional Ijo believe in a High God, called Wonyingi (“our mother”), who created and controls the destiny of everything on earth. An individual’s spirit is believed to meet with Wonyingi before birth to make an agreement or contract for the person to live a particular life. This belief is tied in with a philosophy that requires each person to work hard to achieve the good fortune that may be in his or her contract. When the person’s best efforts come to nothing and a person is beset by misfortune, the Ijo rationalize that it must have been part of the contract. There are several kinds of spiritual agents, however, who can help to shape a person’s destiny: spirits of the dead, spirits of the bush and water, and witches.

Although the spirits of the dead are believed to go back to their own villages, it is necessary to bury the dead properly and to appease the spirits with food and drink. Before consuming a beverage, an Ijo will pour a little of it onto the ground for dead relatives to “drink.” It is believed that if the spirits are unhappy, they will make a person ill, infertile, or even cause that person’s death.

Spirits of the bush and water are believed to be the most common and conspicuous supernatural agents influencing the course of daily life. The Ijo appeal to the water spirits in particular by wearing elaborately carved wooden masks, decorated with chalk and feathers, on their heads. When a particularly powerful spirit is thought to be residing in a mask, people will travel long distances to ask the spirit for help with their economic, health, or other problems. Spirits may also be asked to punish a thief or protect a person from evil witches. Spirits can respond to these requests through supernatural messages (perhaps explaining why a person died) interpreted by dancers who, with shielded faces, imitate the dances the spirits were said to have performed on the sand banks. In the eastern part of the delta, elaborate masquerade dances are performed on a cyclical basis to honor village heroes.

Not all witches are thought to be bad, but they are believed to be dangerous. They may even be children, who might just as easily kill a clan member as a neighbor. At the same time, if a witch chooses to do so, he or she can protect family members from the attacks of others. The most direct way of identifying a witch comes during funerals, when the spirit of a dead person sometimes confesses to having been one. A witch discovered in this way is buried quickly, without a coffin, at the side of the river.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In recent times, the period from Christmas to New Year’s Day has become a time of celebration as many Ijo working on the mainland try to return to their home villages for their annual vacations at that time. The Ijo in the western delta also have a spring festival that lasts 12 days. They welcome the new agricultural cycle with special dances for women who have been circumcised and with libations for the ancestral spirits. They also perform rituals to cast out evil spirits to symbolically cleanse the community.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The central Ijo have relatively few rituals to mark a person’s milestones. Differing from those areas where female circumcision is practiced, the females of the central Ijo go from birth to death without any ritual to signify their first menstrual period, marriage, pregnancy, or menopause.

Similarly, rituals rarely are attached to the development of males, even at the time when they are circumcised, usually within a week after birth. In the past, when the main male occupation was collecting palm berries to produce palm oil, a boy was pelted with berries after he had climbed his first tree and cut down his first bunch of berries.

For both men and women, the most significant rite of passage is at the time of death. The status of a person is measured by the type of funeral he or she receives. The more generations of living descendants a person has, the more elaborate the funeral will be. In general, elderly persons with grandchildren would be honored with an all-night wake, a masquerade dance, drumming and dancing, and food for visitors. Those who died a “bad death”—the result of an accident, or if the person was revealed to be a witch, are buried quickly, without ceremony or coffin, on the river bank.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Two main criteria influence interpersonal relations among the Ijo: age and gender. Otherwise, they are remarkably egalitarian in their economic and political outlook and activities. Everyone is expected to work, even young children (from the time they are able to clean up around the compound), as well as, the most elderly members of the group. Priests of the cult houses and chiefs are also expected to help with the work, which includes farming, fishing, canoe carving, and weaving thatch for roof repairs.

The standard greeting is *noaho* ("hello"). Although the Ijo do not celebrate birthdays, they are very conscious of relative age distinctions. Younger people are expected to bow slightly at the knee when meeting someone older, and to express their respect by offering the oldest person present the opportunity to speak or to eat and drink first. Women, however, usually defer to men unless they are considerably older than the men.

At political gatherings, whether family or village meetings, men make decisions based on consensus. Although people defer to the oldest men, agreement is reached through the ability of a speaker, regardless of age, to persuade the others to accept his views.

Another form of greeting is to ask anyone passing by to "come and eat." Since Ijo villages are not subdivided by walled compounds, the open space allows people to see all those who pass by. As with the American greeting, "How are you?", the offer to join in the meal is not taken literally and is not usually accepted.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Village life changed considerably after oil exports became a major source of income to the Nigerian government. Closer ties to international markets created more opportunities for paid work on the mainland and in government-supported developments in the delta. Health clinics became more common, and some illnesses, such as yaws, which afflicted many children, were almost eliminated. Malaria, however, and other illnesses endemic to the tropics remain prevalent.

Since the introduction of electricity, television sets can now be found even in the most isolated of villages. The houses of thatched roofs and mud walls typical in the past have been mainly replaced by cement-block houses, some having two stories.

The change to more permanent housing is perceived by the Ijo as an improvement in their standard of living, and not simply as a status marker. Those who cannot afford to build a cement-block house are seen as being very poor. The old-style houses require constant maintenance, and thatched roofs let in both rain and snakes.

It is much more difficult to assess the benefits of the new economy to households generally. While the Ijo had been relatively independent in their ability to produce most of what they used and consumed, the post-oil era placed them in the position of having to purchase most of their household needs.

Because of the topology of the delta, villages are essentially located on islands. In the past, canoes were the main form of transportation to work on farms, to fish, and to visit neighbors on the mainland. At one time, outboard motors were used to power large canoes to ferry passengers and goods throughout the delta. More recently, high-powered motor boats have become the main means of transportation. Despite the topology,

a highway was constructed across the delta, linking Warri in the west and Port Harcourt in the east, via Yenagoa. The maintenance of this highway and bridges in this tropical environment has been a major challenge.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women are considered to be equal to men. They provide the food for the household, by farming or fishing, and many engage in business activities to earn money to buy what they cannot produce. Although husbands are expected to contribute as well, especially in paying school expenses for their children, it is not unusual for women to pay household expenses. Women who become wage earners, working in the schools or on palm oil plantations, still maintain farms.

The Ijo family is an extended family type. Polygyny, in which one man has two or more wives, is the preferred form of marriage. Each wife has her own bedroom and kitchen, usually in a single house. Since women are expected to live near their husbands' families, and men to live near their fathers, the number of persons residing near each other in an extended family can typically be 15 or even more.

The Ijo practice two forms of marriage, both involving "bridewealth," or what the Ijo colloquially call "dowry." The small-dowry marriage requires the husband to pay a certain amount to his wife's parents and kinspeople. In the past, the payment was made in cases of gin; later it was in cash. The large-dowry marriage involves a larger payment, and only a few marriages are of this type; usually wives in these cases are not local women.

The essential difference between the two types of marriage, especially for the central Ijo, is in the lines of inheritance. The children of a small-dowry marriage trace their line of inheritance through their mother to her brother and other kinsmen. In the large-dowry marriage, the children "belong" to the father. What this means in practice is that small-dowry children have more choices of places to live when they reach adulthood: they can continue to live in their father's residence or they can move to any place where they can trace a connection through their mother's line of descent. In practice, however, other factors sometimes intervene to restrict such choices. Children are often sent to live with relatives, either because of divorce or a parent's death, or to help care for an infant when there is no older sibling in, for instance, the mother's sister's family.

Unlike many other African societies, among the Ijo, wives are not ranked within a marriage. Each is treated equally and each has equal access to her husband. This does not prevent women from becoming jealous if they see their husband favoring one of their co-wives. For some women, this is enough of a reason to make them want to be a single wife. Others claim there are advantages to having co-wives, in that they provide companionship to each other, help in feeding the husband, and aid in caring for sick children.

The inability of co-wives to live peacefully together can lead to chronic conflicts and divorce. However, the most important and acceptable reason for divorce is infertility. If a woman does not become pregnant within a reasonable time after marriage, she can divorce her husband and return the dowry. On the other hand, if the man has children with other wives and it appears that the woman is barren, the husband does not have grounds for divorcing her. If she commits adultery or refus-

es to fulfill a wife's role, such as cooking for him, then he can send her away and still claim a repayment of the dowry.

The Ijo do not have pets as such. Dogs have to forage for food, and rarely are petted.

### **11 CLOTHING**

There is both formal and informal clothing for men and women. During the work day men wear shorts, often under a cloth sarong, a shirt, and sandals (some also go barefoot). For formal occasions they wear a long shirt covering a good-quality sarong, a hat, and shoes, and they often carry canes. Women also wear cloth sarongs with blouses when working during the day, and sandals (some also go barefoot). Their formal clothes consist of expensive, colorful sarongs, blouses, and head wraps. They wear shoes or sandals, and strands of beads around their waists under their sarongs and around their necks.

If clothing is seen as decorative art for the body, it should also be noted that Ijo women spend much time weaving their hair into attractive forms, and tattooing their bodies and faces by cutting designs with a razor and then rubbing charcoal into them.

### **12 FOOD**

Fish and cassava are the "meat and potatoes" of the Ijo diet. When fish is plentiful, it is eaten at every meal. When fresh fish is expensive and scarce, so-called "ice fish"—imported frozen fish—is substituted. The Ijo plant maize (corn), plantains, and bananas, as well as many leafy vegetables and peppers. In some areas they also grow yams. Varying with the seasons, clams are found in the river, and fruits such as mangoes grow in the forest. Because of disease spread by the tsetse fly, there are few large animals in the delta. Chickens and goats are the main domesticated animals and are usually reserved for special meals when visitors arrive or a ceremony is performed. Men sometimes hunt for animals, such as deer or wild pigs. Palm wine, tapped from palm trees, offers a nutritious drink at meals and on special occasions.

Ijo generally eat three meals a day. The morning and noon meals are small; the main one is in the evening after work. Men eat together, rolling cassava into a ball—with the right hand only—and dipping it into a shared pot containing a stew of fish and vegetables. Cooked plantains or yams are added when available. Women and children eat in the same fashion from their own plate.

The Ijo wash their hands before eating, but no one eats with the left hand, which they consider "unclean." The left hand is used to wash oneself after using the toilet, and to engage in sexual activity. By holding a drink in the left hand, a person signifies that he or she has killed someone in the past.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Two forms of education have been closely related since the advent of missionary schools in the last century: formal schooling and informal instruction in culture and livelihood. The schools themselves are accessible to Ijo throughout the delta, eventually through college level. Girls now attend school in equal numbers with boys, and the literacy rate has increased steadily. Schooling is seen as a necessary step to finding a job, and the spectacular increase in the number of schools following Nigerian independence has made teaching positions the primary kind of job available. With the advent of schooling,

however, came a rising expectation—on the part of both parents and students—that literacy would bring with it higher wages. This expectation affects the other form of education, the cultural learning that defines being an Ijo. Learning to farm and fish is still part of growing up, but these jobs are often rejected as not being suitable occupations for graduates of secondary schools. The alternative is to migrate to urban areas to look for employment, especially since teaching assignments have become more competitive because of the increasing number of graduates. Since employment opportunities are often no better in the city than in the countryside, the government has established oil palm plantations, rice farms, and other development projects to encourage Ijo people to seek jobs in their home areas.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Ijo dance and music are typical of the rhythmic complexity generally found in West African music. Drums of various sorts provide music at all events. Special dances are performed to distinguish, for example, between a funeral for a person of high status and a masquerade dance honoring a water spirit. The Ijo readily add songs and dances from other ethnic groups to their own repertoire. This has continued with youths forming bands using electric guitars and other Western instruments to blast out the latest Nigerian popular songs.

Although the Ijo have no tradition of literacy, they tell stories in the evenings or when receiving guests, for instance, after a funeral. These stories often have a moral lesson and, while seemingly of a mythical nature, they are told as though they had actually happened.

### **15 WORK**

Like the Western concept of the "Protestant Ethic," which emphasizes the inherent value of work, the Ijo similarly stress the importance of everyone's engaging in productive work. In practice, this ideological emphasis means that the Ijo do not recognize a hierarchy based on occupational status in which a political leader or religious dignitary might expect to be supported by the community. Instead, they, too, must engage in some form of productive work. With widespread education, however, as noted above, the introduction of white-collar jobs has broadened the definition of work to include more than physical labor alone.

### **16 SPORTS**

Wrestling and soccer are two of the most popular sports for boys and young men. Soccer, also for girls, has been introduced as part of the school program, but is no longer confined to the school day.

Men's wrestling appears to have a long history. Preparations for a wrestling match in the villages against a team from another village often take on the appearance of preparations for war. In a village, a particular bush spirit that has been associated with protection in battle can be approached for similar protection in a wrestling match. In other places, wrestling matches are just a sport, and like soccer games, they draw large audiences.

Since Ijo villages are usually located near a river, most Ijo can swim. Children often compete with each other in swimming races.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

With electricity came the radio and, much more recently, television. The main forms of entertainment, however, remain similar—in form, if not in content—to the way children and adults occupied their leisure time in the past. Storytelling now includes events, real or imagined, that resemble the sensationalistic “news” in Western tabloid newspapers. As in the past, the Ijo also play games, such as card games and checkers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Ijo masks and woodcarvings, usually depicting fish and made to be worn on top of the head, are found in museums throughout the world, and are treated as serious art by viewers and scholars. While the Ijo are not unconcerned with the beauty of their carvings, their main concern is with the utility of the object: whether a spirit is satisfied to reside there. Wood carvers, like those who carve canoes, see themselves as craftsmen, possessing a certain talent, whose aim was to satisfy public needs.

Similarly, women weave colorful and decorative sleeping mats. While their main aim is to sell the mats, like craftspeople everywhere, the Ijo recognize and appreciate the difference in quality and beauty between one mat and another.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The problems that beset the state of Nigeria in postcolonial times, ranging from a civil war to a series of military coups, affected even the most isolated villages in the Niger Delta. Nigeria's national regimes' reputation for allowing bribery to become a way of life and for abusing human rights has been well publicized. There is an irony in seeing the Ijo tradition of democratic relations at the local level being frustrated by a modernized national government that has voiced much enthusiasm for achieving democracy but appears, at times, to evolve in the opposite direction.

The pollution caused by oil extraction eliminated, for the most part, fresh fish, the most fundamental part of the Ijo diet. By the early 1990s this ecological degradation was compounded by a general loss of economic well being, lack of employment, and a growing frustration over the inequitable distribution of wealth. Ijo attacks on the oil facilities and theft of the oil itself have caused problems worldwide, particularly in the United States, which relies on Nigeria as one of its top five importing countries for most of its oil needs.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender has been touched upon in several sections above, and, as with the other topics, emphasis must be placed on the variations found among the Ijo. From the women in the central delta whose associations extend no further than the extended family to those living on the delta borders who belong to powerful female marketing organizations, the differences are profound. At the same time, the division of labor marked by age and gender is recognized by the Ijo themselves as being inherently balanced. Consistent with a general ethos of egalitarianism, Ijo ideology does not hold one sex to be innately superior to another. Although women never occupied political roles, this did not mean they were not political. A wife could, on occasion, rely on women in her community to forcefully punish a man who repeatedly and without reason mistreated her. Men claimed, not entirely joking, that it was prudent to marry an

odd number of women to avoid them pairing up against him. In their view the odd numbered one could be counted on to cook when the others went on strike.

As in many other African societies, women play a major role in the trading economy, whether in the market place or in moving provisions and goods between markets. Their ability to accumulate wealth was not seen as unusual.

In a reflection of the role women played at critical times in the past, as when there was resistance to colonial tax impositions, Ijo women have attempted to impose their own presence by holding sit-ins at oil facilities to make the oil companies more responsive to demands for jobs and local community development.

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—by P. E. Leis

# IVOIRIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ih-VWAHR-ee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ivorians

**LOCATION:** West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire)

**POPULATION:** 18,373,600 (2008)

**LANGUAGE:** Approximately 60 ethnic languages, including Akan; Mandé; Gur (Voltaic); Kru; Dioula (the most widely spoken); Baoulé (Akan); Sénoufo (Voltaic); Yacouba (south Mandé); French (official language)

**RELIGION:** Islam; Christianity (both incorporate traditional indigenous beliefs)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol 1: Aka; Dyula; Malinke

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Côte d'Ivoire is a French-speaking country in West Africa. A number of important kingdoms existed in the area from early times. In the 14th century the Mali empire extended into part of Côte d'Ivoire; later empires included the Kong and the Baoulé kingdom of Sakasso. Many different ethnic groups migrated over the centuries into what became known as Côte d'Ivoire.

Early trade with Europe was based on ivory, which gave the country its name—Ivory Coast (although in 1986 the government decided that the country should be known only by its French name, Côte d'Ivoire). However, the trade in ivory led to such a decline in the elephant population that the trade virtually disappeared by the beginning of the 18th century. An elephant's head, however, still is portrayed on the country's crest. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the coast of Côte d'Ivoire. The earliest recorded French voyage took place in 1483, but it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the French firmly established themselves in the region. At first, trade was governed by treaties; later, French exploration and occupation intensified. In 1893, Côte d'Ivoire became a French colony.

The best known recent figure is the first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Houphouët-Boigny came from a wealthy Baoulé chief's family. Born around 1905, he grew up to study medicine in Dakar (Senegal) and became a medical assistant, a prosperous cocoa farmer, and a local chief. He campaigned for fairer cocoa prices for African farmers and founded the country's first agricultural trade union for African planters. This trade union was quickly converted into the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire, which is still the dominant political party. Houphouët-Boigny became a deputy to the French National Assembly (parliament) in Paris, and the first African to serve as a cabinet minister in a European government. At independence in 1960, he became the country's first president, favoring a continued close relationship with France. He promoted agriculture and led Côte d'Ivoire's economy to great success until the beginning of the 1980s, when prices for Côte d'Ivoire's two major export crops, cocoa and coffee, crashed. The drought of 1983–84 compounded the problem, as did excessive borrowing and the steep rise in oil prices. Côte d'Ivoire's economy declined dramatically as its per capita income fell from \$1,290 in 1978 to \$510 in 1995. Despite good harvests in 1985–86, a fall in coffee and cocoa prices, the outflow of capital, and too much government spending led to serious indebtedness. Re-

sulting austerity measures were met with protests, strikes, and riots. However, despite charges of corruption and a lavish lifestyle, Houphouët-Boigny still was revered and honored until his death in December 1993, when he was succeeded by Henri Konan Bedié.

Côte d'Ivoire was the richest of the French colonies by the late 1940s, based on the export of timber and forest products, such as palm oil and cocoa. Since independence, the strength of the economy has varied considerably, attaining average annual growth rates of 6.7% in the first two decades, then declining significantly between the beginning of the 1980s and 1994; it finally began to improve again after a 50% devaluation of the French-backed Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) franc in January 1994.

In December 1999, a military coup—the first ever in Cote d'Ivoire's history—overthrew the government. Junta leader Robert Guei blatantly rigged elections held in late 2000 and declared himself the winner. Popular protest forced him to step aside and brought Laurent Gbagbo into power. Ivorian dissidents and disaffected members of the military launched a failed coup attempt in September 2002. Rebel forces claimed the northern half of the country, and in January 2003 were granted ministerial positions in a unity government under the auspices of the Linas-Marcoussis Peace Accord. President Gbagbo and rebel forces resumed implementation of the peace accord in December 2003 after a three-month stalemate, but issues that sparked the civil war, such as land reform and grounds for citizenship, remained unresolved. In March 2007 President Gbagbo and former New Force rebel leader Guillaume Soro signed the Ouagadougou Political Agreement. As a result of the agreement, Soro joined Gbagbo's government as prime minister and the two agreed to reunite the country by dismantling the zone of confidence separating North from South, integrate rebel forces into the national armed forces, and hold elections. Several thousand French and United Nations (UN) troops remain in Cote d'Ivoire to help the parties implement their commitments and to support the peace process.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Côte d'Ivoire, a roughly square-shaped country, is located on the Gulf of Guinea. It is bordered by Liberia and Guinea to the west, by Ghana to the east, and by Mali and Burkina Faso to the north. It lies between 4° to 11°N and 3° to 8°W and covers 322,000 sq km (124,500 sq mi—slightly larger than New Mexico) and has a 530-km (330-mi) coastline along the Gulf of Guinea.

Most of the country consists of a low plateau, sloping gradually southward to the Gulf of Guinea. The plateau is broken by hills in the north and by the Man Mountains in the west, which are about 4000 ft in altitude. Much of the landscape is monotonous, although in places granite domes (inselbergs) rise out of the otherwise flat surface. The heavy surf and strong currents along the coastline have deterred traders throughout history; only in the eastern half of the country was access easier because of a narrow belt of lagoons, sandy islands, and sandbars. Côte d'Ivoire has no natural, sheltered deepwater harbors; Abidjan became the largest port in West Africa only after 1950, when the Vridi Canal was constructed to give Abidjan deepwater access from the ocean.

Climate differences have led to different types of vegetation. The southern part of the country has an equatorial climate with high temperatures and humidity. Tropical rain forest traditionally occupied this region; although much now has been cut down to provide timber for export and land for plantations of cocoa, coffee, oil palms, bananas, rubber, and other crops. In the north it is drier, with almost all the rain falling within a three-month period in the late summer. The rain forest changes into savanna woodlands characterized by increasingly shorter grasses and isolated stands of trees. Vegetation becomes increasingly sparse toward the Burkina Faso border where there is less rainfall. Four rivers, the Cavally, Sassandra, Bandama, and Comoé flow from the north into the Gulf of Guinea to the south. None of the rivers is fully navigable because of rapids and large differences in the levels of the water between the seasons.

The population of Côte d'Ivoire in 2008 was estimated at 18,373,600; it has been growing very quickly since 1975 when it was 6.7 million. The population growth rate in 2008 was 1.96%. About 40.4% are under 15 years of age; and life expectancy is a low 49 years. Abidjan's population is about 3 million and has been growing very rapidly. Grand-Bassam was the original capital of Côte d'Ivoire; it was replaced by Bingerville in 1900 and by Abidjan in 1934. Since 1983, Yamoussoukro, Houphouët-Boigny's village, has been the official administrative capital, although the government has remained in Abidjan and that city remains by far the largest and most dynamic economically.

More than 60 ethnic groups make up the population of Côte d'Ivoire, each with its own distinct language or dialect and customs. The four largest ethnic groups all have their major centers outside Côte d'Ivoire—the Akan to the east, the Mandé and Voltaic to the north, and the Kru to the west. Thus Côte d'Ivoire does not have a single dominant culture. In the past people had more in common with the people of surrounding countries than with their fellow Ivoirians. Indeed, one of the challenges of the country has been to develop a national identity, so that people consider themselves Ivoirians first and members of their particular ethnic group second. The Akan and Voltaic groups form matrilineal societies while the Mandé and Kru are patrilineal. The largest group, the Akan, includes the Abron, Agni, and Baoulé people. The Mandé are among the oldest settlers of Côte d'Ivoire and are found in the forest region; this group includes the Dan or Yacouba, the Malinké, and the Dioula. The most important peoples in the Voltaic group are the Sénoufo. The Kru or Krou group consists of a number of small ethnic groups, including the Godié, Bété, and Wè. Most live in small farming villages or as fishers along the coast.

Although these ethnic groups existed as distinct entities in the past, especially in rural areas, modernization and urbanization have led to mixing, so that ethnic lines have become far less distinct, especially in the towns and cities in the south, which are more cosmopolitan. A large percentage of the population living in the country are non-Ivoirians, having come to seek work. Most are from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea, with smaller numbers from Mauritania and Senegal. In addition, there are significant Lebanese and French populations.



### 3 LANGUAGE

Although all of its approximately 60 ethnic languages belong to the Niger-Congo family, no one language is spoken by more than about a quarter of the population. Four of the eight major branches of the Niger-Congo language family are represented in Côte d'Ivoire: Akan, Mandé, Gur or Voltaic, and Kru. Dioula (pronounced Jou-lah), a north Mandé language, is the most widely spoken African language in Côte d'Ivoire, used all over the country as a market language. Other major African languages are Baoulé (Akan), Sénoufo (Voltaic), and Yacouba (south Mandé).

The official language of the country is French, which is spoken especially in the urban areas and in higher education. However, it is not spoken by the masses of the people, who prefer popular (pidgin) French or Dioula.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Each ethnic group has its own traditions and heroes. One of the most famous legends tells the story of how the Baoulé people arrived in Côte d'Ivoire. In their original homeland, Ghana, they wisely had stored grain in case of famine, but then were attacked by other groups when famine came. Rather than forfeit their food, their queen, Abla Pokou, led her people west into Côte d'Ivoire. Finding it impossible to cross the Comoé river, the queen sacrificed her own child to the genies of the river; they in turn, in recognition of the gift, caused the trees to bend over the river and form a bridge to a land of peace and safety. The word *baoulé* means "the little one dies."

## 5 RELIGION

Most people in Côte d'Ivoire follow traditional religions, revering the ancestors and believing in the spirits of nature. Even those who profess to follow one of the two major universal religions, Islam and Christianity, generally incorporate traditional practices into their religious observances and daily lives. Many follow syncretic cults loosely based on Islam or Christianity. Sorcery and witchcraft have a strong impact on people, especially in the rural areas but even in the cities. Belief in fetishes is widespread. Traditional ceremonies, dances, and funerals are all related to religious beliefs; they often involve wearing masks. Animal and other sacrifices also may play an important role.

Islam was brought to Côte d'Ivoire by Malinké immigrants from the Mali Empire of the 13th to 18th centuries and is particularly strong in the northern savannah area of the country, although the spiritual center is Abidjan, where one-third of the population is Muslim. About 40% of the population is currently considered Muslim.

Christianity was brought by the Europeans. The French established their first missionary work in the 17th century. About one-fourth of the population, mostly in southern cities, belongs to either the Roman Catholic (the majority) or Protestant churches. Some Ivoirians are followers of the Liberian prophet, William Wade Harris, who spread his version of Christianity along the coast in the early part of the 20th century; the Harist church continues to gain adherents in urban areas.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

August 7 is Independence Day. Both Christian and Muslim holidays are celebrated: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost; and Idul Fitri (the feast at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan) and Labaski, 70 days after the end of Ramadan. The Ivoirian government recognizes the following holidays: New Year's Day (January 1), Labor Day (May 1), Assumption (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Ascension Day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Each ethnic group has its own traditions (*see Aka, Malinke, and Dyula*). The major transitions of life—birth, puberty, marriage, and death—all are marked with ceremonies and rituals. Among the most important are initiation rites. The Sénoufo, for example, pass their values and traditions down the generations through *poro*, an ethnic educational system that spans twenty-one years. During the initiation participants undergo endurance tests and other secret ceremonies in the sacred forest adjacent to the village. Traditionally excision festivals occurred, but these have been severely limited by the government, as have some other initiation practices.

Marriage is basically family, not individually, based. Many marriages are arranged, although in the towns and cities more young people now choose their own spouse. Marriage generally takes place early, particularly for women and especially for those in rural areas. Motherhood thus starts young. By age 14 almost one-half of the girls are married. Divorce and separation are uncommon.

Funerals are central to several ethnic groups. Among the Akan, all villagers shaving their heads mark death in a village. Among the Baoulé, burial is secret, even for someone as illustrious as the first president, Houphouët-Boigny.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Men clearly dominate relationships. Much respect is traditionally accorded to the elders in the village.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions vary enormously according to whether people live in urban or rural surroundings and according to their wealth.

More than 40% of the population lives in towns and cities. Those who are well off live in nice two- or three-story homes or in air-conditioned skyscrapers, with all the modern conveniences of electricity, running water, sanitation, paved roads, etc. They shop in well-stocked stores and at sophisticated malls. The majority who are poor, however, live mostly in overcrowded slums with none of these facilities and obtain their necessities from open-air markets and roadside stalls.

Most people still live in villages, generally with dirt roads. Although increasing numbers have electricity, many still live in simple, traditional ways, in conical, thatched roof homes, collecting their own water and firewood. Frequently children have to walk to a neighboring village to go to school or to find a clinic staffed by a nurse. Official figures indicate that there is only one doctor for about every 10,000 people in the country and they are overwhelmingly located in the cities. Most land tenure systems are based on the concept of communal ownership. Each family is granted the right to cultivate particular areas, rights that can be handed down through the generations. Almost all city office workers keep alive their ties with their agricultural villages and their links with their native ethnic group.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Households characteristically are made up of the extended family, with parents and children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins all sharing the same facilities. The family is very strong and children are much wanted. Indeed, the average Ivoirian woman has more than seven children. Women have the responsibility for taking care of the children. Babies are carried on their mothers' backs while the women work in the fields, fetch firewood or water, cook, and undertake other household chores.

This extended family system, together with ethnic and village loyalties, provides a form of social security. It also provides a mechanism for income to be redistributed. Hospitality and solidarity are a way of life; this spirit of hospitality and brotherhood is expressed clearly in these lines from the Ivoirian national anthem: "land of hospitality.... the homeland of genuine brotherhood."

Customs regarding family life vary from one ethnic group to another. For example, among the Beng (one of the south Mandé group) menstruating women may not work in the forests or the fields, touch a corpse, or cook for their husbands.

Although the law in Côte d'Ivoire allows only one wife, in practice almost one-fourth of men in the country have two or more.

## 11 CLOTHING

As in most of the developing world, both traditional and Western clothes are worn. Particularly in the urban areas, most people wear Western clothing—pants, or blue jeans, and shirts,

although many women wear traditional brightly colored dresses (*pagnes*) with matching head scarves. In the rural areas, traditional clothing is most common. Women wear *pagnes* or blouses with long pieces of cloth that wrap around. Men wear shorts or wrap short pieces of cloth around their bodies. Many men have long, beautiful robes for ceremonial occasions.

## 12 FOOD

Yams, plantains, rice, millet, corn, and peanuts are staple foods in Côte d'Ivoire, although each region has its specialties. For example, in the northern savanna area, a common dish is rice with a peppery peanut sauce. Closer to the coast, fish with fried plantain is popular.

The national dish is *fufu*, made by pounding plantains, cassava, or yams into a sticky dough that then is served with a highly seasoned meat or vegetable sauce, called *kedjenou*. *Fufu* is eaten by hand with each person taking a fingerful of dough and dipping it in the sauce. The sauce, prepared from different bases, such as peanut, eggplant, okra, or tomato, can be made with chicken, beef, fish, or other meats; it is simmered like a stew in a *canari* or oven or over a wood fire. Wood is still the most common fuel except in the towns and cities.

Traditionally people grew their own food and sold the surplus. As in almost all of West Africa, markets play an important role in people's lives. In the cities and large towns, markets are periodic, held every 3, 4, 5, 8 or even 16 days. Merchants are clustered according to the product sold—kola nuts, salt, cloth, animals, leather, baskets, etc. Women are very active in the markets, selling their produce, and purchasing needed goods.

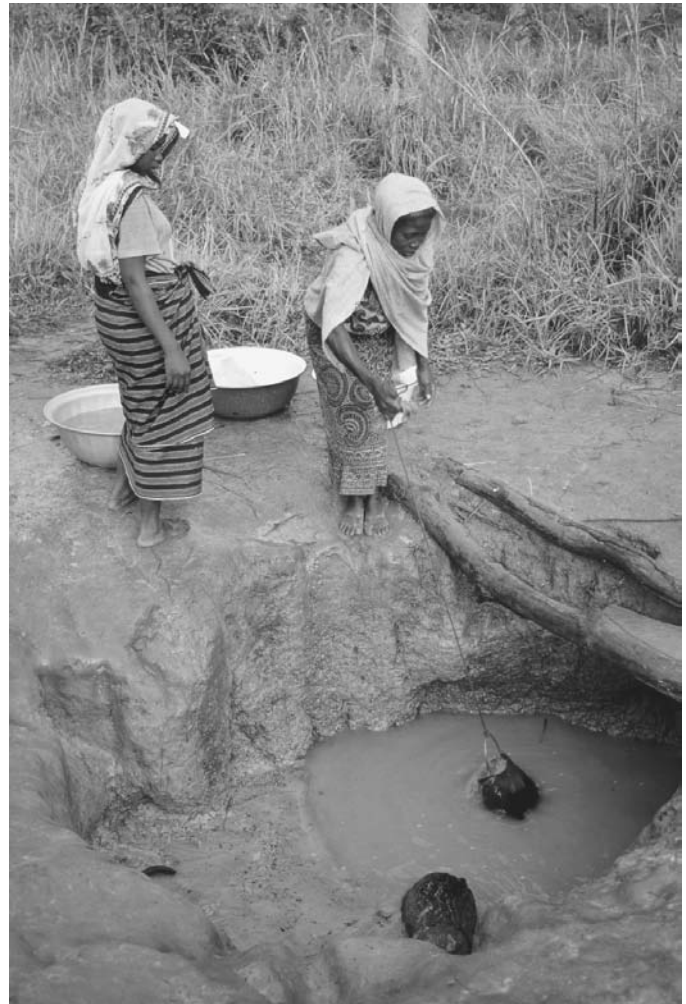
## 13 EDUCATION

The Ivoirian educational system is an adaptation of the French system. Very few received an education during colonial days, but after independence far more children had the opportunity to attend school. By 2008 Côte d'Ivoire had a literacy rate of about 50.9% , with 57.9% literate males and 43.6% literate females.

Primary school, which is officially compulsory, lasts for six years and secondary school for seven. Children start school generally at age seven. Secondary education is divided into two cycles, the first four years, which culminate in a certificate of the lower cycle of secondary study (the *brevet d'étude du premier cycle*—the *BEPC*), and the second cycle, whose graduates earn the *baccalauréat*, a level of learning roughly equivalent to one or two years of university study in the United States. About two-thirds of primary-school-age children attend school. About 20% continue on to secondary school. Higher education includes the university in Abidjan and a large number of technical and teacher-training institutes. School is free, although students pay an entrance fee at public schools. The public school system is supplemented by Catholic and Quranic schools. However, lack of trained teachers and inadequate equipment and supplies make it hard for most children to obtain a good education.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music, dance, and storytelling are all important in the lives of Ivoirians. Rhythm is an important part of music in Côte d'Ivoire as in almost all of West Africa. Songs are about typi-



Two women in Côte d'Ivoire stand at a well to fill buckets with water. Government education efforts, supported by the World Health Organization and Global 2000, teach villagers how to protect themselves from Guinea worm and other water-borne diseases. (*The Image Works*)

cal topics—love, money, friendship, peace, death, and national heroes.

There is great variety in dance in the different regions of the country. It is associated with physical, spiritual, and social benefits. In Côte d'Ivoire there are three types of traditional dancing: the royal dance performed only by a king or tribal chief; the fetish dance, danced by male initiates who have undergone initiation rites in the sacred forest; and the popular dance, open to all, including women. Mask dancing, which belongs to the second category, includes performing a wide variety of twists, turns, twirls, and handstands, sometimes on tall stilts; the dancer's identity remains unknown throughout the ceremony.

## 15 WORK

In 2007 close to 68% of the population worked in agriculture, far less than the 84% who were farmers in 1960. In general, men clear the land and also take most of the responsibility for the cash or export crops that are grown, such as cocoa, coffee,



and pineapples. Women frequently plant and tend the crops and also have the responsibility for growing food crops, such as yams, cassava, plantains, corn, and rice.

A much smaller proportion of the labor force works in industry, concerned largely with processing foods and other raw materials, and producing items such as textiles and machinery. About one-third of the population works in the service sector—more than double the proportion in 1960. Non-Africans dominate the managerial and professional ranks, and work also as mechanics, technicians, and storekeepers. Non-Ivoirian Africans mostly are employed as rural unskilled labor.

## 16 SPORTS

By far the most important sport in Côte d'Ivoire is football (soccer), which is played throughout the country.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Ritual ceremonies serve partly as recreation and entertainment and often include music and dance. Storytelling is another favorite traditional pastime. Griots, or bards, may sing or tell folk stories, riddles, and proverbs way into the night. Several ethnic groups have stories that revolve around a scoundrel or trickster, who is always ready to pull a fast one on his partners. Many stories relate to family relationships, such as those between son-in-law and mother-in-law.

Cinema and theater are also important. Movies are made in Côte d'Ivoire for both the cinema and television. Theater includes works by playwrights such as Bernard Dadié, Côte d'Ivoire's most famous writer, and François-Joseph Amon d'Aby. Television and radio provide recreation for increasing numbers, especially in the cities.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The art of Côte d'Ivoire is among the most outstanding in West Africa. Weaving, woodworking, and sculpture flourish. The wooden carvings, and especially the masks, of the Dan and Baoulé people are particularly famous for their beauty and intricate designs. The masks vary considerably from region to region in their designs and purposes. Dan (Yacouba) masks, for example, generally have a somewhat abstract human face while Baoulé masks typically represent an animal or stylized human face. Some may represent antelope or buffalo with large open mouths, intended to represent evil spirits; others may be humorous as with a *kplekple*, or horned mask, representing a disobedient child. The most famous mask is often considered to be the "fire-spitter" helmet mask, said to represent the chaotic state of things in primeval times; it is a combination of hyena, warthog, and antelope.

Art works are produced not only for ceremonies, but also for enjoyment in non-ceremonial environments; carved doors and furniture, statues, and other decorative objects form an integral part of people's lives. Painted, tie-dyed, and woven textiles, pottery, worked gold and brass, and beautiful jewelry all form a vital part of Côte d'Ivoire's rich artistic heritage. Musical instruments, such as percussion instruments, drums, stringed instruments, and various transverse horns in wood, metal, or animal horn also are made. Images are made of bush spirits, pythons, chameleons, in Sénoufo art, in cast brass ornaments and in mudcloth paintings.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Côte d'Ivoire is a country of great social contrasts. Many of its current social problems arise from its difficult economic conditions. The declining standard of living and the economic austerity that occurred between 1980 and 1994 led to social upheavals, political dissension, and repression.

Poverty, exacerbated by fast population growth and rapid urbanization, underlies the lack of adequate facilities, ranging from inadequate schools and housing to inadequate access to health care, clean water, electricity, and other important elements of infrastructure. Poverty also underlies the increasing amount of crime, including violent crime, found especially in swollen urban areas like Abidjan. Urban unemployment is acute, by 2008 registering at some 40% to 50% as a result of the civil war. Yet along with the decline of real per capita income, there are those who are rich—some commercial farmers, landowners, business executives, and others whose extravagance stands in stark contrast to the misery and squalor the poor experience. Growing inequality between rich and poor exacerbates social tensions. Corruption among government officials reduces the effectiveness of government and its ability to help the country develop, and causes deep resentment among ordinary people. It is widely felt that government officials do what is good for themselves and not what is best for the country.

Côte d'Ivoire also suffers from having one of the highest incidences of AIDS and HIV infection in the continent.

Tensions also exist among ethnic groups and between political parties, tensions that become particularly apparent at election time.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In rural areas, women and men divide the labor, with men clearing the land and harvesting cash crops like cocoa and coffee, while women grow vegetables and other staples and perform most household tasks. Women also collect water and fuel, care for their families, spin and weave, and produce handicrafts and pottery to sell. In general, men hold most prominent civic and government positions, as well as the role of tribal chief in the villages. Religious roles, from shamans to Catholic priests to Muslim imams, are dominated by men.

Men dominate inheritance practices in traditional societies. Both Baoule and Senufo people belong to their mother's family group; power and land are passed down through a mother's family line to her sister's sons. In the Bete and Nyula groups, inheritance is passed down through the father's line to the sons. In most traditional societies in Côte d'Ivoire, women do not have the right to inherit land, but only to use that of their husbands or families. Legislation was enacted in 1983 to allow women greater control of their property after marriage.

Government policy encourages full participation by women in business, but generally there is a bias among employers to hiring women, whom they consider less dependable because of their potential pregnancy. Women are underrepresented in most professions and in the managerial sector as a whole. Some women also encounter difficulty in obtaining loans, as they cannot meet the lending criteria mandated by banks, including title to a house and production of profitable cash crops, specifically coffee and cocoa. However, women are paid on an equal scale with men in the formal business sector. Men continue to dominate managerial positions and enjoy the most ca-

reer mobility, usually due to a higher level of education and connections with other businessmen.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# JOLA

**ALTERNATIVE NAMES:** Jola-Fogny, Jola-Fonyi, Diola (French)

**LOCATION:** Casamance Region of Southern Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea Bissau

**POPULATION:** 702,000

**LANGUAGE:** Jola or Diola; dialects: Banjaal, Bayot, Ejamat, Fonyi, Gusilay, Karon, Kasa, Kuwatay and Mlomp

**RELIGION:** Islam (primary), Traditional (Indigenous) Religions and Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Jola (also known as Diola in French) are a heterogenous ethnic group found in Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. They comprise 10% of the population in The Gambia and 6% of the population in Senegal. In The Gambia they are concentrated in the Foni area of southwest The Gambia; hence, another name for them is Jola-Foni. In Senegal they are concentrated in the southern region of Casamance. The Casamance region is separated from the rest of Senegal by the territory of the former British colony of The Gambia. Jola people have long claimed that they are marginalized by their government that is dominated by ethnic Wolof, a majority group in Senegal. In 1982, a few years after Senegal obtained independence from France, Jola people, who form the majority in Casamance, rose up against their government demanding independence from Senegal on the basis that they were isolated geographically from Senegal proper. Since then, there have been sporadic fights between the rebel movement in the Jola homeland and the government of Senegal.

Although little is known about the origins of the Jola, it is believed that the ancestors of the present Jola people settled this region long before the 13th century, predating other groups, such as the Mande and Fula peoples. Archeology of the mouth of the Casamance River shows evidence that by AD 200 there were groups of people who were well-adapted to coastal habitats and who had spread out to the islands bordering the mouth of the Casamance River. There were advanced hunter-gatherers, as well as groups who subsisted on shellfish from the mangrove flats and fish from the ocean. Some of them practiced advanced agriculture and raised livestock, notably cattle. They also worked metal, from which they forged spears and agricultural implements.

By the time the Portuguese arrived in the middle of the 15th century, the Jola were well established and largely isolated from other groups, with very few contacts with other people in the region. When the Europeans came to the region, they instituted slavery. While the Jola fiercely resisted both enslavement and participation as middle men in the trade, other groups, such as the Manding, located along the Lower and Upper Gambia River and inland along the Middle Casamance and Geba Rivers, were involved in trade with the Europeans in slaves and gold. The Jola, located on the coastal zone, did not engage in any trade with outsiders, nor did they have any chiefs to rule, preferring rather to be acephalous societies (those without a ruling chief or head). They resisted any intrusions into the homeland by their neighbors and the new arrivals, the Europeans. As such they were considered to be a dangerous group and were bypassed by the Portuguese, who sailed past them at the



mouth of the Casamance and Cacheu rivers in order to trade with other people further upriver.

Even when colonial rule was imposed by the British in The Gambia and the French in Senegal, the colonial rulers had great difficulty in subjugating them. Although the Jola had appeared weak and fragmented, they maintained strong stockades and an attitude of fierce independence. Over time, however, the Jola began to accept the new reality of colonialism; by 1905 they had begun to pay taxes to the new European masters.

## **2** LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Jola are found mainly in Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau although a small number exist in other countries in this region of West Africa. The largest numbers are located in the Casamance region of Southern Senegal. It is a strip of forested and river bottom land between The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. A substantial number of Jola live along the south bank of the Gambia River, where they farm different types of crops, particularly rice. While Senegal was colonized by the French, the British claimed the area around the Gambia River as their territory. Awkwardly, The Gambia, a small sliver of territory on both sides of the Gambia River, sticks deep into Senegal, cutting off the Casamance region from the rest of Senegal. The Jola thus feel isolated from the rest of Senegal and have, since 1982, demanded independence from Senegal. The Casamance region has seen fighting since then, between a breakaway rebel movement and government forces, making the region unstable and dangerous. A smaller number of Jola are found in the

northern part of Guinea-Bissau, just to the south of the Casamance region of Senegal.

The Casamance region is regarded as the most beautiful area of Senegal. The region receives a greater amount of rainfall than the rest of Senegal. It is characterized by hot temperatures with a low-lying geography and a few hills to the southeast. It is well endowed with fertile soils that are suitable for agriculture, but it does not have high-value minerals. The regional economy is heavily dependent on the cultivation of rice and other crops. Pristine beaches along its coastline have seen an increase in the tourist industry.

Close to the coast there are thick mangroves and forests that are very compact and difficult to access. They offered protection to the Jola during times of slavery and colonization. There are a few large deer and several species of monkeys. But, what the region lacks in fauna, it makes up for in the rich variety of bird species. The turtle-doves with their characteristic songs, the francolins that fly away as soon as they see you, the calaas perched at the top of the large cheesemonger trees, the black-birds with their shiny plumes and pretty bluish reflections, the black and white corbels, vultures, and many others are all present in the Casamance region.

## **3** LANGUAGE

The language for the Jola is referred to as Jola or Diola. There are many dialects of this language, some of which are unintelligible to each other. Jola belongs to the Bak group of the Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Banjaal is spoken in a small area south of the Casamance River, while Bayot is spoken around Ziguinchor, the capital city of Casamance. Other dialects are spoken in a handful of villages, such as Ejabat, Fonyi, Gusilay, Karon, Kasa, Kuwatay, and Mlomp. The multiplicity of dialects in the Jola homeland is testament to the isolation of the Jola from the rest of the peoples in this region and often from each other.

## **4** FOLKLORE

Like most African societies, the Jola have a rich tradition of legends, folktales, and myths, which serve as a means of handing down traditions and customs from one generation to the next. Folktales impart moral values and prepare young people for life, as there are many lessons to be learned from the tales. There are many stories of legendary heroes who led their people into battle against other hostile ethnic groups and races. Other legends trace the origins of the Jola. For example, one folktale talks about two sisters traveling on the Senegal River. Their boat hit an object and was split in half. One sister, Ague, drifted south to become the mother of the Jola, while the other sister, Anecho, drifted north to become the mother of the Serer people.

The use of natural surroundings and the animals that abound in these environments are omnipresent in African folktales, and the Jola are no exception to this rule. Consequently, the monkey, the hare, the lizard, the bird, the deer, the snake, the hyena, and other animals take on human characteristics of greed, jealousy, honesty, loneliness, and so on. It is through the behavior of these animals that important lessons are imparted to children. For example, one folktale tells of the adventures of Hare and Hyena. Hare is seen by the Jola as a cunning individual that is able to talk his way out of any trouble. Others see Hare as a trickster.

Many of the folktales feature an unjust situation that is remedied by a child, often with the help of a benevolent spirit or some old woman who has been treated courteously. The troublemakers end up being severely punished, while the victims end up rich and live happily thereafter. It is through folklore that family values and interpersonal relations are reinforced. If one breaks a tradition or any of the prescribed taboos, then one can expect to be punished by the supernatural world. It is expected that sons and daughters should be obedient and subservient to their elders, treating them with dignity. Strangers from afar should be treated with hospitality, and sons should be brave and help protect their homeland.

There is also a rich tradition of proverbs among the Jola and related ethnic groups. For example, "However long a stick is in the river, it cannot become a crocodile." This proverb implies that a stranger can never become a true citizen of Jola homeland. Another proverb talks about the importance of interpersonal relations and the interdependent nature of Jola people: "The best medicine for a person is another person." On nurturing independence in children: "A tree that grows in the shade of another one will die small." On learning to occupy one's position of humility and lie low when necessary: "If the dog is not at home, he barks not."

## 5 RELIGION

The traditional Jola believe in the existence of a supreme being called Emit, or Ata Emit, the one who resides in the sky. They associate this entity with natural phenomena of the sky, rain, and the seasons. Similar to other indigenous religions in Africa, the Jola have shrines, charms, sacred forests, sacred lands, and secret masquerades, all of which play a central role in Jola cosmology. They worship and pray to these entities to protect their families and villages and to offer generous providence for the well-being of Jola society.

Christianity came among the Jola with the arrival of the Portuguese and other European powers, who introduced Catholicism to many converts. However, during the 20th century, there has been a shift from Christianity to Islam, because of strong influences from the northern part of the country, which is largely Muslim. Today, over 90% claim to be Muslim, with about 3% claiming to be Christians. However, the majority practice their traditional beliefs concurrently with Islam or Christianity. It is not unusual for a Jola individual to seek Western medical help for treatment and, at the same time, consult the traditional healer for herbs and amulets.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In traditional Jola society there were indigenous celebrations for the initiation ceremonies of boys and girls. Other holidays included a celebration immediately after the rice harvest. Today, the Jola also celebrate holidays that are mandated by the modern government and those that are associated with Islam and Christianity. Official holidays in Senegal include New Year's Day (January 1), Independence Day (February 18), and Liberation Day (July 22). Christmas is also observed by all. It is marked by special watch night services at the Christian church, with children singing carols. Easter is also observed. In The Gambia, the major state holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), Independence Day (4 April), and International Workers' Day (1 May). During the holidays, people cook ceremonial food and dress up in bright traditional outfits. Other

religious holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, and Muhammad's birthday.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Jola have several initiation ceremonies for boys and girls; however, in the modern era, the introduction of Islam and Christianity has brought modifications in these traditions. Initiation ceremonies are secret affairs not to be divulged to the opposite sex. Male initiation ceremonies take place in the sacred forests. The boys undergoing initiation (which includes circumcision) are secluded for substantial periods of time, undergoing tests of endurance and training sessions in the morals and customs of Jola society. Circumcision for boys generally occurs at some time between the ages of 6 and 8. Girls also undergo an initiation ceremony at some time between the ages of 13 and 25. Girls are secluded in an initiation hut. Men are not allowed in the female initiation ceremony just as the females are not allowed in the boys' ceremony. However, in both ceremonies, boys and girls learn to endure hardship, obey orders, respect their elders, be courageous, and understand traditional wisdom.

When a baby boy is born, it is secluded for up to seven days and then brought out for naming according to the dictates of the Islamic religion. There is an animal sacrifice, usually a chicken or a goat. At this ceremony, the child becomes a Muslim. For women, marriage is an important rite of passage.

Among the Jola, death is considered a rite of passage into the afterworld. Every Jola wishes for a good funeral, which is often accompanied by rituals and rites. Traditional funeral ceremonies among the Jola require a huge feast in which many cattle are slaughtered and offered as a send off sacrifice for the dead. In addition, guns are fired to honor the departed.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Jola pride themselves on their fierce loyalty to their group. They prefer an acephalous, rather than a hierarchical, political system. With a classless system in their social institutions, they are unlike their neighbors, who have *griots* (history keepers and tellers), slaves, nobles, leather workers, and so on. Because they are a classless society, all individuals are considered to be equals, although elders are to be respected by the young people. The old are respected as the repository of traditional wisdom. Extended families are loyal to one another, which results in a sense of community and interdependence.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Jola live in large villages and depend on the cultivation of crops, such as rice, peanuts, millet, some vegetables, as well as the tapping of palm wine. Peanuts (known as groundnuts) are grown as a cash crop. Usually, a village is composed of two large extended families, which intermarry as a tightly integrated community. Within the villages, the Jola live in simple homes made of mud walls and grass thatched roofs. Sometimes, bamboo matting and reeds are used to form the walls. This type of construction offers great relief in the hot climate. Those who are well off are able to construct modern rectangular homes, with corrugated iron sheets as roofing material and cement for outside and inside floors.

The village is often organized in the form of a series of compounds. A compound consists of a series of houses around an



*About 75% of Gambians are engaged in agricultural crop production and raising livestock. (United Nations)*

open courtyard. A grass or reed fence might enclose the houses from the outside. Members of a compound might all be related, tracing their descent to a common male ancestor. Men and women have their own huts and separate sections within the compound. At night, women may go to join their husbands in the husband's huts. Within the compound disputes are settled by the oldest man of the lineage.

The Casamance region, the homeland of the Jola, has fertile soils, which offer an excellent opportunity for subsistence farming. As a hardworking people, they produce enough food for themselves, with the excess sold to others. However, malaria is an ever-present threat because it is hard to control mosquitoes in such a swampy environment. Other diseases, such as measles, whooping cough, and pneumonia, result in high infant deaths. HIV/AIDS also poses a new threat to the Jola way of life.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

For women, marriage is a second rite of passage as they often have to leave their homes to join that of their husband. Polygamy is allowed, and one can have as many as four wives. Co-wives often share household chores and responsibilities for gardening, cultivating rice, food preparation, and care of the

children. Men are responsible for cash crops, such as peanuts, citrus fruits, and mangoes, which are sold to provide resources for the family. Families help each other economically and otherwise. A son might be educated by the extended family. In turn, he is expected to contribute to the extended family, should he become gainfully employed in one of the distant cities, such as Dakar. Thus, each relative is seen as a form of social safety valve in times of trouble. The entire community is also expected to gather at times of important life events, such as birth, circumcision, weddings, and funerals.

Marriage itself is a family affair, rather than an individual affair between two people. It is often a protracted process, in which girls are betrothed to a future husband while they are still young and the future husband is expected to work for his in-laws while waiting for the girl to become of age. Marriages are often blessed in a mosque, following the Islamic tradition. The marriage celebration generally involves the entire village.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The Jola wear colorful dresses, shirts, and pants fashioned from locally made cloth. Women generally wear long skirts with a loose blouse. For religious festivals, men wear long robes of different colors, as dictated by Islam. For those who work in urban areas, suits, ties, and other Western fashioned clothes are often worn by both men and women.

### **12 FOOD**

The main staple food for the Jola is rice. Fishing communities will usually take their rice with fish. Those in more forested areas gather and preserve various edible leaves and fruits. The Jola also like to prepare their dishes with palm oil. Cassava is another important food crop, which is pounded into flour to make a hard porridge called fufu. Fufu is usually served with stew made from beef, goat, sheep, or chicken. Yassa is a favorite dish from Casamance. It is made of chicken or fish marinated in lemon juice, pepper, and onions, and then baked. It is usually served with plain rice.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In rural areas, modern education is not seen as important. It is often considered a nuisance that hinders children from fully participating in the daily chores of farming and raising livestock. Parents prefer to send their children to Islamic schools, where instruction takes place either very early in the morning or late in the evening leaving the children to help out with farming and raising livestock during the day. It is mostly in urban areas and towns that a modern education is valued.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Jola have a rich cultural heritage and love their many festivals throughout the year. Perhaps their most enduring legacy is their famous musical instrument, the *akonting* (or *ekonting*) or folk lute. It is a banjo-like instrument with a skin-headed gourd body, two long melody strings, and one short drone string. Some believe that it was a precursor to the Western banjo. Thus, music, song, and dance are an important aspect of Jola culture. Men and women sing as they go about their daily chores of gardening or while paddling canoes. During festivals, there is much drumming, singing, and dancing. At night or during the day, children may sing and dance in groups.

When boys are taken into the secret forest for circumcision, they are accompanied by the singing of war songs to give them courage.

### 15 WORK

Most Jola are engaged in agricultural production and the raising of livestock. They are a very hardworking people. Women tend to the rice fields and vegetable cultivation while men concentrate on millet and peanut farms. They use traditional implements, such as hoes for ridging and weeding. Those who can afford ox plows use donkeys or cattle to do the cultivation. Occupations among the Jola include rice cultivation, honey collecting, palm wine tapping, fishing, oyster collecting, and other agricultural activities. Some of the women may be employed as housemaids in the households of rich Gambians. Wealth among the Jola, particularly for women, is measured in terms of how much rice she owns.

### 16 SPORTS

Traditionally, wrestling was an important part of Jola society. It prepared young men for the prowess of war and other conflicts. Today, the most important sporting activity is soccer. In urban areas basketball and tennis are also played.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The most common form of entertainment among the Jola is music and dancing. The Jola enjoy listening to music and dancing to the *ankonting*, as well as drumming. The many festivals and ceremonies are often accompanied by much feasting and dancing.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Jola have a secret society of masked dancers that often play at important events, such as funerals and initiation ceremonies. Elaborate masks are made in the form of animals, such as the large deer found in their environment. They also carve from wood many implements used in their day-to-day lives, such as drums, bowls, mortars, pestles, and canoes for fishing. With the budding tourist industry in the Casamance region, some Jola have begun to specialize in the carving of animals, drums, and decorative masks for sale to visitors.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since the early 1980s, the Casamance region has witnessed political instability. Some factions among the Jola took up arms to free the region from Senegal and obtain independence or autonomous rule. Over three thousand people have been killed in the skirmishes between the rebel groups and government forces since 1982. However, in recent years tensions between the two forces appear to have eased somewhat.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

There is a clear division of labor by gender in Jola society. Women are expected to do household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and child rearing. Furthermore, women have a lower status in comparison to men as they are considered to be dependent on male relatives. Men have the rights to what their women produce. Islamic and traditional customs, including the custom of polygamy, place women in an inferior role. Women are discriminated against when it comes to issues con-

cerning marriage, divorce, and devolution of property upon the death of a husband.

In the modern legal systems of The Gambia and Senegal, there exist policies that attempt to promote gender equality; however, disparities by gender continue to widen. It has also been noted that female genital mutilation/cutting is practiced by about 15% of Jola. Although many programs, policies, projects, and plans have been geared towards the elimination of all forms of harmful traditional practices, especially female genital mutilation, the lack of general commitment and will on the part of government authorities has hindered their successful implementation. Domestic violence against women is also an ever-present problem, as there are no specific laws against it.

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—by E. Kalipeni

# KALENJIN

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAH-len-jeen

**LOCATION:** Kenya

**POPULATION:** About 4.4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kalenjin; Swahili; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Africa Inland Church [AIC], the Church of the Province of Kenya [CPK], Roman Catholic Church); Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Keiyo; Kenyans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Kalenjin live primarily in Kenya, East Africa. A living illustration of the complex nature of ethnic identity in Sub-Saharan Africa, they are not a tribe. Rather, the Kalenjin are an ethnic grouping of eight culturally and linguistically related groups or “tribes”: the Kipsigis, Nandi, Tugen, Keiyo, Marakwet, Pokot (sometimes called the Suk), Sabaot (who live in the Mount Elgon region, overlapping the Kenya/Uganda border), and the Terik.

Earlier, the Kalenjin were known collectively as the “Nandi-Speaking Peoples” or, alternatively, the “Southern Nilo-Hamites.” The name “*Kalenjin*” translates roughly as “I tell you.” It has played a crucial role in the construction of this relatively new ethnic identity among these formerly autonomous, but culturally and linguistically similar, tribes. The origin of the name “*Kalenjin*” and the Kalenjin ethnic identity can be traced to the 1940s. It represents a clear desire to draw political strength from the greater numbers of such an association.

Beginning in the 1940s, individuals from these groups who were going off to fight in World War II used the term *kale* or *kole* (the process of scarring the breast or arm of a warrior who had killed an enemy in battle) to refer to themselves. During wartime radio broadcasts, an announcer, John Chemallan, used the phrase *kalenjok* (“I tell you,” plural). Later, individuals from these groups who were attending Alliance High School formed a “Kalenjin” club. Fourteen in number, they constituted a distinct minority in this prestigious school in a Kikuyu area. This affected their desire for some sort of outward manifestation of identity and solidarity, as the Kikuyu are not only much more numerous but also culturally and linguistically very different from the Kalenjin. These young high school students would form the future Kalenjin elite. The next step in the consolidation of Kalenjin identity was the founding of a Kalenjin Union in Eldoret in 1948, and the publication of a monthly magazine called *Kalenjin* in the 1950s.

However, throughout this process the growing sense of pan-Kalenjin identity was not forming in a vacuum; instead, it should be seen in relation to colonialism and to anti-Kikuyu feelings. The British colonial government sponsored the *Kalenjin* monthly magazine out of a desire to foster anti-Kikuyu sentiments during the Mau Mau Emergency. The latter was a mostly Kikuyu-led, anti-colonial insurgency that provoked an official state of emergency lasting from October 1952 to January 1960. Clouded in emotional arguments coming from both sides, the causes of this movement have been reanalyzed. One of the most striking elements is the tension that existed between the numerically dominant Bantu Kikuyu and the less numerous Nilotic and Nilo-Hamitic Maasai and Kalenjin.

Considering this, and the desire of the colonial government to suppress the Mau Mau movement, a policy of encouraging pan-Kalenjin identity, which was still local in character rather than a truly nationalistic movement, made sense. Benjamin Kipkorir, a prominent Kenyan scholar, stated that “the term *Kalenjin* and the concept of ethnic solidarity that later came to be associated with it . . . had its roots in the Mau Mau emergency. It may thus be said to have been a by-product of Mau Mau” (Kipkorir 1973, 74).

Kalenjin language and culture probably began forming 1,000 years ago as a result of the intermingling of Highland Nilotic migrants with ancestral Southern Cushitic speakers. The length of time the Kalenjin have been living in Kenya’s Western Highlands and the Rift Valley, their homeland, is open for debate. While an earlier view claimed that these peoples have only been living in western Kenya for about 400 years, more recently a number of others have argued that the Kalenjin have occupied these parts of Kenya for 2,000 years or more.

One of the most famous aspects of Kalenjin history involves the *Sirikwa* holes. These are hollows that measure from 4.5 m to 9 m (15–30 ft) in diameter made in hillsides. Kalenjin legend has it that the Sirikwa people used these as cattle pens to guard their animals at night. Archaeological excavation at several Sirikwa holes reinforces this image: houses were built on the outside fence with the door facing inward toward the stock enclosure. There would have been only one way to enter the entire complex, and that would have been closely watched and heavily guarded.

The basic unit of indigenous political organization among the Kalenjin was the *koret* (“chor-ette”) or parish. This was not a nucleated village in any sense but rather a collection of anywhere from 20 to 100 scattered homesteads. It was administered by a council of adult males known collectively as the *kokwet* (“coke-wet”) and was led by a spokesman called *poi-yot ap kokwet* (“poy-ought ab coke-wet”). This spokesman was not a hereditary or elected leader in the sense of a chief. He was, rather, someone who was recognized for his knowledge of tribal laws, oratorical abilities, forceful personality, wealth, and social position. At public proceedings, although the *poi-yot ap kokwet* was the first to speak, all of the elders were given the opportunity to state their opinions. Rather than making decisions himself, the *poi-yot ap kokwet* expressed the consensus of opinion, always phrased in terms of a group decision.

A number of *koret* formed the next level of political organization, the *pororiet* (“poor-or-e-et”). Each was led by a council, the *kiruokwet ap pororiet* (“kee-roo-oh-kwet ab poor-or-e-et”). This council consisted of the spokesmen of the individual *koret*, over whom presided two reasonably active old men called *kiruokik* (“kee-roo-oh-keek”), the “councillors.” In addition, among the Nandi, there were two representatives of the *orkoiyot* (“or-coe-ee-yot”); a Nandi prophet, called *maotik* (“mah-oh-teek”); and two senior military commanders of the *pororiet’s* warriors, *kiptaienik ap murenik* (“kip-ta-eneek ab mur-eh-neeek”).

Today, traditional Kalenjin political/territorial organization has been largely replaced with one based upon the units imposed by the British colonial structure—villages are included in sublocations, which are included in locations, which are included in divisions, districts, and provinces. Each village has a village elder, who may be seen as the equivalent of a modern *poi-yot ap kokwet* and who tries to settle minor disputes and

handle routine affairs. Assistant chiefs are in charge of sub-locations, while chiefs administer locations. District officers oversee divisions, and district commissioners are the highest authority in each district. Finally, provincial commissioners are the highest authorities in each of Kenya's eight provinces and are directly under the president's authority.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Figures released in January 2007 estimated the population of Kenya to be 36,913,721. Of that 12% are thought to be Kalenjin, approximately 4.4 million people. Together, the Kalenjin peoples comprise Kenya's fourth-largest ethnic group. Most Kalenjin are concentrated in the Western Rift Valley and the Western Highlands.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The first language of the Kalenjin peoples is Kalenjin, a language of the southern section of the Nilotic branch, and part of the Chari-Nile language group of Africa. Three Kalenjin dialect clusters have been identified: one consists of the Sabaot, along with the Sebei and Kony; another is made up of Pokot, northern Marakwet, and northern Tugen; while the third dialect includes the Nandi, Kipsigis, Keiyo, Terik, and southern Tugen and Marakwet. Although these dialects are all supposedly mutually intelligible, speakers of one dialect often have difficulty understanding speakers of another. In addition to Kalenjin, most people speak Swahili and English, since both are official national languages and are taught in school, beginning with primary school education. Today it is only very old persons who do not speak at least some English.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Oral tradition was, and still is to some degree, very important among the Kalenjin. Prior to the introduction of writing, folk tales served to convey a sense of cultural history. Kalenjin oral tradition has four main genres: narratives (stories), songs, proverbs, and riddles. Stories usually contain both people and animals, and certain animals have acquired attributes that are concrete representations of character traits, e.g., hare is a trickster figure whose cleverness can be self-defeating; lion is courageous and wise; and hyena is greedy and destructive. Songs accompany both work and play, as well as ceremonial occasions such as births, initiations, and weddings. Proverbs convey important messages in very concise ways and are often used when elders settle disputes or advise younger persons. Riddles involve word play and are especially popular with children.

## 5 RELIGION

Traditional Kalenjin religion is based upon a concept of a supreme god, *Asis* ("Ah-sees") or *Cheptalel* ("Chep-ta-lell"), who is represented in the form of the sun, although this is not God himself. Beneath *Asis* is *Elat* ("Ay-lot"), who controls thunder and lightning. Spirits of the dead, *oyik* ("oh-yeek"), can also intervene in the affairs of humans, and sacrifices of meat and/or beer, *koros* ("chorus"), can be made to placate them. Diviners, *orkoik* ("or-coe-eeek") have magical powers and help in appeals for rain or to end floods.

Currently, nearly everyone professes to being a member of some organized religion—either Christianity or Islam. Major Christian sects include the Africa Inland Church (AIC), the



Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK), and the Roman Catholic Church. Muslims are relatively few in number among the Kalenjin. Generally speaking, only older people can recall details of traditional religious beliefs.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays observed by the Kalenjin are mostly those associated with Christianity (i.e., Christmas and Easter), and national holidays such as Jamhuri (Republic) Day, Madaraka (Responsibility) Day, Moi (the second president) Day, and Kenyatta (the first president) Day. At Christmas it is common for people who still live in traditional mud-walled houses with thatched roofs to give the outer walls a new coat of clay white-wash and paint them with holiday greetings (such as "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year").

Three one-month-long school holidays occur in April, August, and December. The first two coincide with peak periods in the agricultural cycle and allow children of various ages to assist their families during these busy times. The December holiday corresponds with both Christmas and the traditional initiation ceremonies, *tumdo* ("toom-doe").

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Age is a fundamental organizing principle in all Kalenjin societies, as it across much of Africa. The status a person occupies and the roles he or she performs are still to a large degree ordained by age. For both males and females, becoming an adult in Kalenjin society is a matter of undergoing an ini-



tiation ceremony. Traditionally, these were held about every seven years. Everyone undergoing initiation, or *tumdo* (“toom-doe”), thereby becomes a member of a named age-set, or *ip-inda* (“e-pin-da”). Age-sets were traditionally “open” for about 15 years. There are eight male age-sets and they are cyclical, repeating approximately every 100 years. The *sakobei* (“sah-coe-bay”) ceremony marked the closing of an age-set about every 15 years, and the elevation of a new age-set to the warrior age-grade.

These age-sets and the age-grades (e.g., warrior, junior elder, senior elder) through which individuals passed provided an important basis for traditional social structure. Among the Kalenjin, indigenous political organization was based upon the combination of cross-cutting principles of age-sets and small territorial units called *korotinwek* (singular *koret*) and larger ones called *pororisiek* (singular *pororiet*). No Kalenjin societies possessed any kind of centralized leaders such as chiefs; instead, councils of elders made all decisions.

After male youths were circumcised, they were secluded for lengthy periods of time during which they were instructed in the skills necessary for adulthood. Afterwards, they would begin a phase of warriorhood during which they acted as the military force of the tribe. Elders provided guidance and wisdom. Today age-sets have lost their politico-military function, but this principle still creates bonds between men who are members of the same set, and feelings of respect for those who are older. Female age-sets have long since lost much of their importance, and most people are hard-pressed even to remember the names of the age-sets.

In the past, only people who had borne children would be buried after death; the others would be taken out to the bush and left to be eaten by hyenas. Today at every person's death, he or she is buried, but not in a cemetery as in the United States. People are returned to their farm, or *shamba* (“sha-mbaa”), for burial. There is usually no grave marker, but invariably family members, friends, and neighbors know where people are laid to rest.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

*Chamge* (“chaam-gay”) or *chamuge* (“chaam-moo-gay”) is the standard greeting among Kalenjin. If the encounter is face-to-face, the spoken greeting is almost always accompanied by a hearty handshake, and people often clasp their own right elbow with their left hand. The response is the same—*chamge*, sometimes repeated several times. It may be emphasized with *missing* (“me-sing”), which can mean either “very much” or “close friend,” depending upon the context. As a sign of respect, a younger person will greet someone of their grandparents' generation by saying, *chamge kogo* (grandmother—“chaam-gay coe-go”) or *chamge kugo* (grandfather—“chaam-gay coo-go”).

Americans are likely to find several aspects of Kalenjin body language to be unusual. First, holding hands after greeting is very common for people of the same sex. Even when walking, these people may hold hands or lock little fingers. But it is readily apparent that there is absolutely no sexual connotation to this behavior. Furthermore, people of opposite sexes are strongly discouraged from these and other public displays of affection. Second, in their conversations Kalenjin do not point out objects or people with their fingers. Instead, they point by turning their head in the proper direction and then puckering their lips briefly.

Taking leave of someone is accompanied by the farewell, *sait sere* (“sah-eat sarey”—meaning literally, “blessing time”), and hearty handshakes. Often people will walk with their visitor(s) a distance in order to continue the conversation and to give their friend(s) “a push.” Once again, these people often hold hands, especially if they are members of the same sex.

In the past, dating and courtship were almost entirely matters of family concern. Clans were usually exogamous, i.e., one had to marry outside of one's own (and father's) clan. Today young men and women are more free to exercise their own free will, especially those who live away from home at boarding schools. They will meet and socialize at dances in town, discos, and in cafes called *hoteli* (“hotel-e”) in KiSwahili. Still, when a young man decides on a wife, he and his father's family must gather together a suitable bride-price payment (often erroneously referred to as a “dowry”) to be given to the bride's family. In the past this consisted almost entirely of livestock, but today it is becoming more and more common to use money in place of, or in addition to, livestock.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Considerable variation exists in the way that members of various Kalenjin groups make a living. For most groups, subsistence is agropastoral in orientation, based upon a combination of cultivation of grains such as sorghum and millet (and more recently maize), and livestock husbandry of cattle, goats, and sheep. Typical of East African groups, there tends to be little integration between the two activities since grazing land is usually located some distance from the fields and homesteads. Livestock are not used for traction, nor are they fed on the stubble of grain or other crop products. Often, such groups live on the face of a hillside or escarpment and cultivate nearby, as do the Keiyo and Marakwet. Among the Pokot there are two different subsistence patterns: one consists of pastoralism, involving the keeping of, and primary dependence upon, cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, and a few camels; the other consists of agricultural production, mostly of corn today, but in the past, indigenous grains such as sorghum and millet. The pastoralists comprise approximately 75% of the Pokot.

Previously, when game populations were at higher levels and before the government ban, hunting sometimes supplemented the diet, but only among the so-called “Dorobo” or “Okiek” did it provide a major staple. The latter were forest hunter-gatherers who often resided near the Kalenjin groups.

Traditionally Kalenjin houses were round, with walls constructed of bent saplings anchored to larger posts and covered with a mixture of mud and cow dung, while roofs were thatched with local grasses. While these kinds of houses are still common, there is a growing trend towards the construction of square or rectangular houses that are built with timber walls and roofs of corrugated sheet metal, *mabati* (“ma-baatee”).

Most Kalenjin are rural dwellers and do not have electricity or indoor plumbing in their houses. Radio/cassette players; kerosene lamps and stoves; charcoal stoves; aluminum cooking pots; plastic dishes, plates, and cups; and bicycles are the most common consumer items. Those people who do not have electricity but who do have televisions use car batteries for power.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, like in most African societies, the family was central in the daily life of the Kalenjin. But by family what

was meant was the extended family, not the nuclear family in the Western sense. Kalenjin residence patterns were, and still are, mostly patrilocal. That is, typically after marriage a man brings his wife to live with him in, or very near to, his father's homestead. Marriage of one man to multiple wives (polygyny) was and is permitted, although most men cannot afford the expense of such unions because of the burden of bride-price. Regardless of the type of marriage, children were traditionally seen as a blessing from God and, as a result of this, until very recently Kenya had the highest population growth rate in the world.

Slowly these patterns are changing as monogamous marriages now prevail and nuclear families are becoming more frequent. Moreover, younger people are now expressing a desire to have fewer children when they get married. This is due to the increasing expense of having large numbers of children who not only must be fed but also educated to cope in today's world. To some degree, young women are also changing their aspirations to go beyond motherhood alone and include a career as well.

### 11 CLOTHING

The Kalenjin were not renowned for their traditional clothing, which essentially consisted of animal skins, either domesticated or wild. Earrings were common for both sexes in the past, including heavy brass coils that tended to make the earlobe stretch downward almost to the shoulder. This is generally not practiced today, when the Western-style dress of most Kalenjin, even in rural areas, is scarcely different from that of people in nearby towns. The buying of secondhand clothes is quite common. Thus, men wear trousers and shirts, usually along with a suit jacket or sport coat, while women wear skirts and blouses, dresses, and/or *khangas* ("khan-gaaz")—locally made commercial textiles that are used as wraps (one for the top and one for the bottom). Youths of both sexes covet T-shirts with logos, especially those of American sports teams or bearing the likeness of famous entertainers.

### 12 FOOD

The staple Kalenjin food is *ugali* ("oo-golly"). This is a cake-like, starchy food that is made from white cornmeal mixed with boiling water and stirred vigorously while cooking. It is eaten with the hands and is often served with cooked green vegetables such as kale, called *sukuma wiki* ("sue-cooma weekly") in KiSwahili, meaning literally, "to push the week." Less frequently it is served with roasted goat meat, beef, or chicken. Before the introduction and widespread diffusion of corn in recent times, millet and sorghum—indigenous African grains—were staple cereals. All of these grains were, and still are, used to make a very thick beer that has a relatively low alcohol content. Another popular Keiyo beverage is *mursik* ("more-seek"). This consists of fermented whole milk that has been stored in a special gourd called a *sotet* (pronounced just as it appears, with the accent on the second syllable) that has been cleaned using a burning stick. The result is that the milk is infused with tiny bits of charcoal.

Lunch and dinner are the big meals of the day. Breakfast usually consists of tea (made with a lot of milk and sugar) and remains from the previous night's meal, or perhaps some store-bought bread. Mealtimes, as well as the habit of tea-drinking, were adopted from the British colonial period. Lunch is eaten

at 1:00 pm rather than at noon, and dinner is often eaten later in the evening at 8:00 or 9:00 pm. In addition to bread, people routinely buy foodstuffs such as sugar, tea leaves, cooking fat, sodas (most often Orange Fanta and Coca-Cola), and other items they do not produce themselves.

### 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, education among the Kalenjin was provided during the seclusion of initiates following circumcision. This transitional phase of the rite of passage provided an opportunity to instill in young men and women all the requisite knowledge necessary to be a functioning and productive adult member of society. It was, in essence, a "crash" course in the intricacies of their culture. Nowadays, after initiation young men and women are still secluded but for shorter periods of time (one month as compared with three months in the past). The timing of the December school holiday coincides with the practice of initiation and seclusion.

In 2003 free primary school education became universal in Kenya. "Free" must be qualified however, because parents must provide their children with uniforms, books, pens and pencils, and paper, as well as contribute to frequent fund raising activities for their children's school(s). This constitutes a tremendous financial burden for families in a country where the average per capita income is about \$360 per year. Post-primary school education is relatively expensive, even at the cheaper secondary schools, and entry is competitive. Tuition at the more prestigious high schools, where students must board, is very expensive. Typically, parents rely on contributions from a wide range of family, neighbors, and friends to meet the high tuition costs. Tuition at Kenya's universities is rather nominal, but the selection process is grueling and relatively few students who want to attend can do so.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional music and dance had many different functions. Songs would accompany many work-related activities, including, for men, herding livestock and digging the fields, and, for women, grinding corn, washing clothes, and putting babies to sleep (with lullabies). Music would also be an integral part of ceremonial occasions such as births, initiations, and weddings. Dances to punctuate these occasions would be performed while wearing ankle bells and would be accompanied by traditional instruments such as flutes, horns, and drums. Oral stories, proverbs, and riddles all convey important messages to be passed from generation to generation.

### 15 WORK

In Kalenjin societies, much of the work, at least traditionally speaking, is divided along gender lines. Men are expected to do the heavy work of initially clearing the fields that are to be used for planting, as well as turning over the soil. Women take over the bulk of the farming work from there on, including planting, several weeding, harvesting (although here men tend to pitch in), and processing crops. Among the Kalenjin, tradition holds that men are supposedly more concerned with herding livestock than with other pursuits. Recent evidence suggests that women, children (especially boys), and even older people are equally as likely to be engaged in animal care as men, especially in those situations where men are likely to be away from home engaged in wage work.



*A leader of the Kalenjin tribe speaks to a group of warriors near the western Kenyan town of Chebilat. (Roberto Schmidt/AFP/Getty Images)*

In addition to all of their other tasks, women are expected to perform nearly all of the domestic work that is involved in keeping a household running. In doing so, they often enlist the help of young girls, who are expected to assist their mothers and other female relatives in chores such as fetching water from wells or streams, and collecting the firewood that most families use for cooking. Young boys will sometimes perform these same tasks but more often do things such as grazing and/or watering livestock.

### **16 SPORTS**

Soccer is a major sports interest of the Kalenjin, especially the youth, as it is with many other Kenyans. Nonetheless, running (especially middle and longer distances) is the sport that made the Kalenjin peoples famous in world athletic circles. St. Patrick's High School in Iten has turned out a phenomenal number of world-class runners.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In rural areas without electricity, the radio is still the main form of entertainment. KBC (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) programs are attentively monitored, as are shortwave radio transmissions by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and the VOA (Voice of America). A small number of

people have televisions, and the only programming available is from KBC. In towns and trading centers, video parlors are becoming common, and action films are especially popular.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

In other parts of Kenya, the famous sisal bags (called *kiondo* in KiSwahili and pronounced "key-on-doe") are manufactured and marketed worldwide. Although the Kalenjin are not well known for their handicrafts, women do make and locally sell decorated calabashes (*sotet* in Kalenjin and pronounced just as it appears) from gourds. These are rubbed with oil and adorned with small colored beads and are essentially the same type of calabashes that are used for storing fermented milk.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Politically, Kalenjin fared extremely well under the presidency of Daniel arap Moi, from 1978 to 2002. Moi, a Tugen, was very generous with resource distribution in Kalenjin areas during his rule. In 2002 Moi was constitutionally obligated to step down. However he did select a successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, in hopes of continuing his influence in the ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Unfortunately for Moi the various opposition parties united behind Mwai Kibaki, who won the presidency with approximately 65% of the vote.

Since that time KANU's influence has waned but Moi has remained an active, albeit backstage, political force. The return of the presidency to a member of the Kikuyu ethnic group resurrected a great deal of animosity among Kalenjin.

In the election of December 2007, Kalenjin overwhelmingly sided with the opposition candidate, Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Sadly, the disputed results of that election saw a great deal of violence, considerable loss of life and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Although most of the international attention was on Nairobi, regrettably many of these actions took place in the Rift Valley Province, Kalenjin heartland, especially in and around the highlands town of Eldoret and to some extent in the Rift Valley town of Nakuru. Unsavory elements of society used the occasion to once again resurrect the idea that this part of Kenya is only for Kalenjin and that others, particularly Kikuyu, must leave. Approximately 1,500 people died in the post election violence and at least 350,000 internally displaced people are living in camps around the country.

Tobacco usage and alcohol consumption continue to be common among men but not women. For decades the Kenyan government has banned the brewing and distillation of traditional homemade alcoholic beverages, including *busaa* ("boosaah"), a beer made from fried, fermented corn and millet, and *chang'aa* ("chaan-gah"), a liquor distilled from *busaa*. Nevertheless, these beverages continue to be popular with people, especially men, and provide some individuals, mostly women, with supplementary income. *Chang'aa* especially can be lethal since there is no way to control the high alcohol content (unlike that of *busaa*, which tends to have a very low alcohol content), and there are many opportunities for contamination. It is not uncommon to read stories of men dying after attending drinking parties in the Kenyan daily newspapers.

Raiding for livestock has always been part of Kalenjin culture and this continues to be true, especially among the Pokot. Now, instead of spears and bows and arrows, raiders use semiautomatic weapons like AK 47 rifles. The Marakwet in particular have continued to suffer at the hands of armed cattle rustlers, often from the Pokot. Because of their marginal status both geographically and politically Marakwet complaints to the government do very little. Poverty and a general lack of concern on the part of government continue to fuel the situation.

As is true all over Africa and Kenya, HIV/AIDS is arguably the major issue confronting Kalenjin today. Fortunately, prevalence rates in the country as a whole have dropped dramatically from 14% in 2002 to 5.1% in 2008. Moreover the HIV prevalence rate in urban areas is much higher, at 9.6% whereas in rural areas it is 4.6%. Most Kalenjin live in rural areas. Also, a link between male circumcision and susceptibility to HIV infection has been posited, whereby circumcision significantly decreases the risk of HIV infection. One study among agricultural employees in Rift Valley Province found that Luo men, from a tribe that does not circumcise, had a significantly higher HIV prevalence (24.8%) than Kalenjin men (4.5%).

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditionally Kalenjin culture is, like most others in Africa, heavily divided on gender lines. Along with age, gender is a fundamental organizing principle in African societies. In the past leadership was always the prerogative of adult males but

recently this has begun to change. With the growth of multiparty politics Kenyan women have increasingly entered the political sphere. However, unlike other ethnic groups, such as Kikuyu or Kamba, Kalenjin women have not participated in politics to the same degree.

As part of traditional rites of passage, circumcision of both boys and girls was practiced. In the academic world the female variant has come to be known female genital mutilation (FGM) and is a very controversial subject. Although technically illegal in Kenya since 1990 it is still widely practiced by members of many ethnic groups. Among the Kalenjin its prevalence rate has recently been estimated at 47% compared with rates as high as 97% for the Somali. In several areas of Kenya, some especially progressive women have recently been promoting alternatives to traditional circumcision and instead advocating what has come to be known as "circumcision with words." An example from Keiyo District is the Tumndo Ne Leel Support Group, which started in 2003 as a community based organization. One of the unique features of this approach is that it retains the very important ceremonial and symbolic role of a rite of passage while doing away with the act of "cutting." In the process this community based organization addresses the larger issue of female empowerment in this traditionally male-dominated society.

Homosexuality is not a subject of open discussion in Kalenjin society, nor in most other Kenyan societies. Reliable data on prevalence would be nearly impossible to elicit. An institution in which two women would marry was traditionally found among the Nandi. It was usually found in circumstances where an older woman had no male heirs and thus needed a son because women cannot inherit property. The older woman became the "husband" of the younger woman and was treated for all intents and purposes as a man. The younger "wife" may have already had children with other men who had left her or died or she may already be pregnant with the child of a man who did not want to marry her. Both parties benefited from the union, which was domestic and economic rather than sexual in nature. The female husband gains descendants and promotion to male status, after spending years in the unenviable status of a barren or sonless wife. The wife is likely to be a girl for whom getting married has been difficult. If she already has children, she gains inheritance and clan status for them (Oboler 1980).

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—by B. Roberts

## KARRETJIE PEOPLE

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAH-ri-ki

**LOCATION:** The Great Karoo in South Africa

**POPULATION:** Several thousand

**LANGUAGE:** Afrikaans

**RELIGION:** None

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Travelers who journey between the interior of South Africa and the coast cross the vast arid scrublands of the central plateau. This is the Great Karoo (derived from a Khoekhoen or "Hottentot"—a pejorative term—word for desert), and this is where the Karretjie People (*karretjie* means "donkey cart"), can usually be seen criss-crossing the plains in their donkey carts.

Most of the Karretjie People are descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the area, the hunting-gathering Xam San (also known as "Bushmen," a term that in some quarters is regarded as pejorative but is still sometimes used by such people themselves) and the nomadic-pastoral Khoekhoen ("Hottentots"). Archaeological evidence, DNA analyses, the historical record, local folklore, and oral tradition not only confirm the early presence of the Xam San and Khoekhoen in the area, but also the changing nature of their interaction with the more recently arrived pioneer white farming community from the south. The first sporadic contacts in the 1770s were followed by extended periods of conflict, intermittent times of peace, increased competition for resources, and eventually the powerful impact of a burgeoning agricultural economy and commercialization in the rapidly developing towns. The competition for resources, at least initially, centered around two issues. First, the farmers hunted the game in the hunting grounds that the Xam San regarded as their own. When they then began slaughtering the more easily accessible domesticated stock of the farmers, they themselves became the hunted. Second, the farmers and the Khoekhoen were in competition for the same grazing lands for their stock.

Eventually though, the lifestyle of both the Xam San and the Khoekhoen were transformed. In the case of the Xam San, for example, they changed from nomadic hunters to become so-called "tame Bushmen" farm laborers. They retained, at least initially, their nomadic ways, first on foot, later with the help of pack animals, and eventually with donkey carts. A few of those who were not hunted or who had not died of some foreign disease, like the smallpox epidemic early in the 18th century, still sought refuge in remote areas or rock shelters. Finally, though, most of the Xam San squatted near towns or were drawn into the agricultural economy by becoming laborers on the white farms. Like their parents and grandparents, most of the adult Karretjie People were born on a farm and, in spite of their present truly nomadic existence, many of them have a history of having lived at least semipermanently on a farm. It was on the farms that their ancestors first learned the skill of shearing. When wool-farming as an enterprise expanded, the Karretjie People, with the help of the mobility afforded by the donkey cart, developed an itinerant lifestyle in order to exploit shearing opportunities on farms spread over a wide area.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Great Karoo, the region frequented by the Karretjie People, is a semidesert some 260,000 sq km (100,000 sq mi) in extent and 900 m to 1,200 m (3,000–4,000 ft) above sea level. It is a summer-rainfall area with extreme temperatures in both the summer and the winter. Strong winds and dust storms characterize the months of August and September and occasionally blow for the duration of the summer. The summer rains begin with light showers in October, but temperatures remain quite low. In fact, light snowfalls are known to have occurred as late as September. Temperatures increase quite dramatically during November, and temperatures above 40°C (105°F), during the summer months until February are not unusual. Rain during the summer is sporadic and often occurs in the form of thunderstorms, when 2.5 cm (1 in) or more of rain may fall in a short time, only to be followed by a long dry period. Temperatures decrease by April, and this usually also marks the end of the rainy season.

Topographically the region consists of vast plains dotted with flat-topped hills. In the valleys and on the plains the soil layer is thin, resulting in vegetation consisting mainly of Karoo scrub and grasses, much favored by both sheep and the remaining wild game, mainly a variety of antelope and smaller animals. The Karoo has become famous for Merino sheep and, hence, wool-farming, although Angora goats for mohair, and cattle and horse-breeding, and more recently game-farming, are also to be found. None of this land is owned by the Karretjie People, but as itinerant sheep-shearers this is the area that they roam, and they certainly regard these open spaces as their domain. It is difficult to obtain accurate census figures on a moving population, but Great Karoo-wide the Karretjie People probably number several thousand although many of them have recently become sedentary and hence no longer truly itinerant Karretjie People.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Virtually all the Karretjie People are unilingually Afrikaans-speaking. The few exceptions include isolated elderly individuals who still speak a Khoesan dialect or a language like Griqua or Korana, the language of their forbears. The Afrikaans that most of them speak was brought to the Great Karoo by the 18th-century Afrikaner hunters and pioneer farmers. Because most of the ancestors of the Karretjie People became farm laborers and were often, at least relatively and temporarily, isolated from their own wider social network and intensively exposed to Afrikaner culture, their own language gradually lost its currency.

While mostly intelligible to Afrikaans-speakers in general, the Afrikaans that the Karretjie People speak is peculiar to them and is enriched by characteristic words and sayings, such as *skêrbestuurdere*, literally, “sheep-shear managers or drivers,” i.e., sheep-shearers; *klipbrille*, literally, “with stone spectacles” or “glasses,” i.e., being illiterate; and *hulle regeer al weer*, literally, “they are governing again,” i.e., they are arguing again.

Most personal names derive from an Afrikaner tradition, although many are peculiar to the Karretjie People. Some names follow the names of animals that are, or were, found in the area. Some common names are Mieta Arnoster (the last name is from the Afrikaans *renoster*, “rhinoceros”); Hendrik Sors, Katjie Geduld, Plaatjie Januarie (the last name literally means “January”); Meitjies Verrooi (the first name literally



means “little maid,” the “little” indicated by the diminutive “-tjie”); and Struis Maneswil (the first name is an abbreviation of the Afrikaans *volstruis*, “ostrich”). Karretjie children also have what is known as a *kleinnaampie* (literally, “small name” or nickname). For instance, the little girl Marie Jacobs is also known as Rökkies (literally, “little dress”), and her twin brother Simon Jacobs is known as Outjie (literally, “little guy”).

## 4 FOLKLORE

The relative isolation, as individuals on farms, of the forbears of the Karretjie People resulted in them “losing” much of their early traditions and beliefs. Their relative isolation today as a community has prevented them from significantly adopting the myths and folklore of the sedentary communities in their area. Thus, there is only a vague awareness of being descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the region, and many of the few stories and folktales that the Karretjie adults do relate to their children are derived from the Afrikaners or from the teachers at the farm schools that a few of these children started attending.

A story that is told, and which serves to discipline young girls, is that of the Oranatan (probably derived from *Orang-oetang*, Afrikaans for “orangutan”). The Oranatan lives in a cave and moves around at night. He captures any young girl who ventures outside her *karretjie* shelter at night, takes her to his cave, and keeps her there for himself forever.

## 5 RELIGION

Although some of the Karretjie People were married in a church or by a magistrate, it is more common for such a union to be sanctioned simply by virtue of its recognition by the Karretjie community. Children from the former type of marriage take the last name of the father, while in the case of the latter type of union, they take the last name of the mother.

Very few of the Karretjie People are members of a church or a religious organization or have ever, for that matter, been exposed to religious activities. A few have been baptized by a minister of the Dutch Reformed Mission church, either in a church or by virtue of a minister visiting the farm where their parents worked. Those couples who have had a church marriage (*referred to as ge-eg, "properly" married*) are the exception, and those who live together are regarded as having an appropriately sanctioned union.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Neither religious nor secular holidays have any particular significance for the Karretjie People. The unpredictability of their employment as itinerant shearers is such that they are idle almost as many days as they are shearing. The selective observance of the national holidays of South Africa by the farmers for whom they work in large part guides the activities of the Karretjie People on such days. The Christmas–New Year period, when there is no shearing activity in any event, is a time for celebration and efforts are made to have more to eat and drink available, their meager resources permitting.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The passage of a Karretjie person from one social role to another is marked by very little ceremony. The transformation of a person from childhood to adulthood is probably the most significant. Boys, for example, learn to shear by helping their fathers from an early age. They “graduate” from at first shearing the less important wool from the same sheep to eventually, when they are strong and skilled enough, shearing independently. Birthdays are not marked by any ceremony, but when boys are old enough and are shearing on their own, they obtain their own *karretjie* (cart) and donkeys and are no longer regarded as children.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Even after a long absence, greetings between spouses, siblings, and between parents and children are often noticeably unemotional, undemonstrative, and occasionally even totally absent. When they do greet each other or others, it might be by means of a handshake. When asked, “Hoe gaan dit?” (“How are things going?”), the response may be, “Darem opgestaan” (“At least I got up [this morning]”) or “Nee, die oë blink” (“No, the eyes are shining”).

The small Karretjie family may share meals together and may ride together in the donkey cart to visit family or friends at a neighboring farm or another outspan (a “neutral” site or place next to the road where they erect their overnight shelters and unyoke or outspan the donkeys), but the adult males are then inclined to drink, chat, and joke with each other in a group. The women drink and socialize in their own group while the children play together. Such visiting takes place over

weekends and often results in long drinking sessions, which sometimes result in arguing and even fighting.

Karretjie children play together as a group well into adolescence, although there is an increasing tendency for girls’ and boys’ activities to separate as they become older. A special relationship between a boy and a girl is not always clearly apparent in the sense of them sharing time and activities apart from the rest. The itinerant lifestyle, and the small and close-knit Karretjie community at a particular outspan, precludes this.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

It is a useful rule of thumb to regard a *karretjie* (cart) as the focus for a Karretjie unit because it provides transport for each family and becomes part of the overnight shelter. A Karretjie unit does not necessarily replicate a household, however. For domestic purposes like cooking, eating, and child care the *karretjies* of parents and married children, or of married siblings, may function together as a unit. Each Karretjie family constructs its own shelter, normally in the *gang* (corridor) next to the road. Sheets of corrugated iron, plastic, and hessian are normally used to construct such a shelter, which consists of a single space with no divisions. The number of people at an outspan is relatively small, and an average of 2 to 14 Karretjie units occupy a particular outspan.

The Karretjie People suffer from the harsh extremes of temperature in this part of South Africa during winter and summer. During winter they are constantly suffering from coughs and colds. They are, however, generally in relatively good health. Adults normally seek medical treatment only in absolute emergencies, such as in the case of a difficult childbirth, chronic illness, or serious accident. In case of illness, people far from town are largely dependent on the compassion of neighboring farmers, although a mobile clinic is now reaching some of those on the outspans and farms. Although pregnant women are now advised to go to town to give birth at a hospital, most are still assisted by older women at the outspan because of the practical difficulties involved in getting to town, especially in case of an emergency.

Most of the outspans have neither clean water nor toilet facilities, and this creates extremely unhealthy conditions for the people living there. Water has to be fetched from nearby taps, windmills, or a river in one instance. The Karretjie People’s health is closely related to their environmental conditions and circumstances. High infant mortality rates, low birth weight, poor diet, undernutrition, and diarrhea are significant factors that determine the quality of these people’s state of health.

Although the Karretjie People tend to use plants from the natural environment for the treatment of common ailments such as colds, a mobile medical unit nowadays alleviates some of these problems. Its activities are mostly directed to preventive care, in particular family planning, and curative tasks. Mobile clinics have a regular visiting schedule and consist of medical teams with separate units. The medicines provided are fairly inexpensive, but children under six years old receive free medical treatment. In some areas, feeding schemes have been initiated by social workers, and teams try to reach people at outspans twice a week.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Karretjie families on the outspans are relatively small. Although there are a few single-parent families, most families

consist of a mother, father, and from one to six children, with three children being roughly the average. Some of the families are extended by virtue of a grandchild, grandparent, or a sibling of one of the parents living with them. As soon as boys are skilled enough, they start shearing independently and, as a result, often form an independent Karretjie unit. The composition of the Karretjie unit also frequently changes by virtue of children or grandparents temporarily joining other units in order to take advantage of available resources.

Women play a significant role in the family structure but remain in a subordinate position because decision-making is done mostly by the head of the Karretjie unit, in this case the senior male and shearer. Adult women and older girls assist in packing and unpacking the donkey cart before and after traveling, they wash clothes and prepare food for the family, and they are the primary caretakers of young children.

Most Karretjie families keep pets, of which dogs and cats are the most popular. Dogs are also used for hunting purposes. When the Karretjie moves as a unit, the dogs are tied behind the cart and run along, while cats are placed on top of the load of the cart together with the old people, children, chickens, and accessories.

### 11 CLOTHING

The Karretjie People seldom have money to buy items such as clothes. The clothing that they own is mostly secondhand. Men wear shirts and trousers and are fond of caps, while women wear dresses and sometimes head cloths. The decorations that the Karretjie People wear are not of much value and are usually used handouts from the surrounding sedentary communities. Rings of copper and safety pins are popular.

### 12 FOOD

The staple ingredient of the Karretjie diet is mealie-meal (cornmeal), at least when times are "good." When shearing on a farm they buy supplies, mainly mealie-meal, sugar, coffee, and tobacco, "on the book" (on credit) from the farmer's store. With any extra money from a shearing assignment, the Karretjie People may undertake a pilgrimage to town before returning to their "home" outspan. At other times, the "not-so-good" or "in between shearing" times, the *krummelpap* (crumbly-thick porridge) becomes *slappap* (soft porridge) and eventually *dunpap* (thin or watery porridge).

The Karretjie people do not eat at regular times. Depending on the availability of food, they normally have two meals a day, i.e., breakfast and supper. They own only the necessary utensils, such as a pot for cooking porridge, a few cans to fetch water, and sometimes only two or three spoons that a family shares during a meal.

Found on the fringe of a gravel road, the occasional carcass of a rabbit is a welcome addition to the usually depleted Karretjie menu. Snare traps are also set in the veld for rabbits, or antelope like steenbok and duiker. Young boys also set traps and try to entice birds into them by sprinkling a trail of porridge crumbs. The environment does not present much in terms of edible wild roots and berries, although some use is made of the Karoo vegetation for medicinal purposes. Some of the outspans offer alternative resources, such as a river for fish, including yellowfish, carp, and modderbek (literally, "muddy mouth," this fish feeds on the river bed), or prickly pears, which ensure

a juicy, vitamin-rich option during their brief bearing season in the summer.

### 13 EDUCATION

Until 1992 almost all the Karretjie People were illiterate, having never had the benefit of schooling or even access to a school. Since then the children have started attending farm schools in the area. The farmers or farmers' wives who run these schools fetch the children at the outspans, provide board and lodging for them by means of a government subsidy, and return them to their Karretjie homes on Friday afternoons or, depending on the particular school, only for school holidays.

Because of an adult education program, which was started in 1995, adults at some of the outspans received literacy training, as well as practical and skills training. Some of the children drop out of the farm schools for practical reasons (or because other children discriminate against them) but then participated in this adult education program.

As formal education is a recent and limited development for these communities, the process through which children are prepared for full participation in their community is still an essential function of the Karretjie unit. Informal education is part of everyday life, and the children learn by observing and imitating their parents, other adults, and siblings' activities. The experience of moving to an outspan or farm in itself is educational because they cover vast distances and frequently encounter new regions and different sets of people.

Most of the parents are anxious for their children to attend school and want them especially to learn the skills of reading and writing so that they can get a *sit* job (sitting down, e.g., clerical work) instead of a *staan* job (standing up, e.g., shearing). Some, however, admit that the schooling of their children may interfere with their mobile way of life, and that the children who do attend school are changed by the experience and often become critical of certain aspects of the nomadic way of life, and even of their own parents' behavior.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

With their long history of illiteracy, the Karretjie People have no recorded cultural heritage and, obviously, no literature. The Karretjie People have also lost virtually all of their oral tradition, and that which they have is quite "shallow," or relatively recent. The songs that they sing, and the music with which they identify, have all been taken over from surrounding sedentary peoples. This also applies to dancing, although here there is some measure of innovation, much of which is apparent during weekends of socializing.

### 15 WORK

Virtually all the males of the Karretjie People are, or will eventually become, sheep-shearers. To supplement their meager income, or to tide them over from one shearing season or assignment to another, they do odd jobs on the farms: they hoe burweed, dig irrigation furrows, erect or repair fencing, and build windbreaks for sheep *kraals* (corrals). They may also get temporary employment in a town as painters or gardeners. When the men are shearing, the women may get part-time work at the farmhouse as assistants to the domestic workers or in the garden. They may also help in the shearing shed, sorting the wool locks, extracting foreign matter like burrs from



the wool, or sweeping up the wool off-cuts on the floor (young children also do this) where the shearing is in progress.

The Karretjie People are generally recognized as the best shearers in the region. Although as hand-shearers they are slower (a shearer averages approximately 30 sheep a day) than the professional teams shearing with electric machines, many farmers prefer to use them because: (1) unlike the other teams they are not unionized and hence do not drive as hard a bargain; (2) their shearing is neater; (3) the farmers claim to get along better with them because they can converse with them in Afrikaans (as opposed to many of the organized shearers, who are Xhosa-speaking); and (4) farmers do not want or have to have them permanently, or even semipermanently, on the farm.

A farmer intending to shear stops at an outspan (often one with which he has a long-standing arrangement) and informs the spokesperson of the Karretjie shearing team that he intends to start shearing on a given day. He tells them how many sheep or goats there are to shear and how many shearers he needs. A price is tentatively negotiated, and the shearers either get a prepayment there and then or receive it as soon as they arrive on the farm. This confirms the arrangement, although the contract remains verbal at all times.

The price paid per sheep shorn depends largely on the farmer, from as little as R1.00 (approximately \$0.13) for the short-wooled Dorper sheep (mainly kept for the meat), to perhaps starting at R2.00 (about \$0.26) for Merino sheep. Additionally, each shearing team is given one sheep for slaughter for every 1,000 sheep shorn. The shearers buy their shears, which last them for “three or four farms,” from the farmer for about R40.00 (\$5.10). Rations are usually bought on credit from the farmer’s food store—these prices are often higher than those in town. After shearing for two to three weeks, and after deductions, the shearers may receive a net payment of as little as R40.00 (\$5.10). Odd jobs pay R10.00 to R20.00 (\$1.28–2.56), and women who work as temporary domestics in town have been known to be paid only R5.00 (\$0.65) a day. Some farmers allow the whole Karretjie unit, i.e., not just the shearers, onto their property and occasionally even make housing available for the shearers, but most shearers claim that they do not want to stay in a proper house and prefer their own Karretjie shacks.

Outside observers often perceive the Karretjie People as trekking around haphazardly because of an eager desire or fondness for traveling. Their movements are directed, however, by an intricate interplay of seasonal, social, economic, and ideological factors that result in discernible, though flexible, regularities. Geographical mobility is a reaction to adapt to the scarcity of resources and to optimize the precarious access to available resources. The key to such survival strategies has been the ingenuity of the Karretjie People and the mobility that their donkey carts afford them.

## 16 SPORTS

The strenuous itinerant lifestyle of the Karretjie People, the fact that they hardly ever find themselves in the same location for any length of time, and the fact that they have been removed from the mainstream of the surrounding society for so long have together resulted in a complete lack of participation, and even an awareness of, or an interest in, organized sports activities. It is only much more recently, with the advent of limited

schooling, that some of the Karretjie children have become exposed to such activities. The small boys do however kick a ball around, if they managed to get hold of one, otherwise an empty plastic bottle serves the purpose.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Karretjie People mostly entertain themselves. They have no access to electricity and hence have no television, but a few have decrepit portable radios, to which they listen when they have enough money for batteries. For the most part, they socialize, go visiting, go hunting (illegally) with their dogs or with snares, and, when near a river, they fish.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Karretjie women can usually be seen mending or altering clothes and making *lappies komberse* (patchwork blankets). Men busy themselves fixing donkey harnesses and carts and repairing shoes. Little boys make *ketties* (slingshots) for hunting birds, and clay animals when their overnight shelters are near water. Little girls make their own *stokpoppe* (stick and rag dolls).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The farmers who employ the Karretjie People as shearers are not contractually bound, as the undertaking to shear and the price are both determined by verbal arrangement. These shearers are the most unprotected source of labor in one of the most protected economic sectors in South Africa. A shearer can be quite arbitrarily dismissed, often works long hours or not at all, has no insurance or guarantee of assistance in unemployment, disability, old age, or on leave, and has extremely tenuous access to medical and educational facilities.

South Africa’s first democratic election on 27 April 1994 provided the Karretjie People with their first-ever opportunity to cast a vote. Although most of them were not in possession of the required identity documents or voter cards, temporary arrangements were made for many of them. But the ability to vote and the new government now in power have not changed their lives and circumstances at all. Subsequent elections have come and gone, but if anything, the Karretjie People are worse off now than they were before the first. They have, through a series of historical external interventions, progressively been denied access to the resources of the area, most significantly the main resource, land. The process that was set in motion with the arrival in the area of the first white farmers in the 1700s has produced a hierarchical and rigidly ordered social system. The process has furthermore produced in most of the residents in the area (not least of whom, the Karretjie People themselves) a collective, conditioned mind-set of tacit acceptance of the status quo—a status quo of inequity and intolerance, and a monopoly of resources that transcends the statutory transformations brought about by the election of a democratic government. The advent and expansion of game farming in the Merino-wool farming districts frequented by the Karretjie People, increased professional sheep-shearing competition and general changes in the agricultural economy of the area, have resulted in dwindling shearing opportunities. This has further forced the Karretjie People into a downward spiral of poverty. Sooner or later they have to sell their donkeys and *karretjie*, hence lose their mobility and have even less access to shearing assignments. They end up in informal settle-

ments or squatting on the fringes of the towns in their region, scrounging to keep life and limb together.

Although in going about their daily activities the Karretjie People are cheerful, humorous, and ostensibly even optimistic, they are realistically aware of the hardships of their way of life and only too mindful of how little the future seems to hold for them. As marginal people, they not only occupy the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder, but in a wider community of divisions and opposition, the particular sociocultural, political, and economic niche in which they find themselves is now even more precarious and vulnerable in the extreme. The hardship and uncertainty tends to translate into feelings of helplessness and frustration, which are regularly manifested in weekend-long bouts of drinking and fighting that, on some occasions, resulted in the deaths of family members and friends.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The pattern of gender roles and relations amongst the Karretjie People have been transmitted and enculturated over generations. This is a matter both of a conditioned continuation of an inherent value system and practical considerations. The foraging Xam San, forbears of the Karretjie People, roamed the Great Karoo for centuries, the men hunting the game and fending off intruders or aggressors, the women collecting wild roots and berries and taking responsibility for the small children and domestic chores. When the Xam San themselves became the hunted with the arrival of European farmers, many of them became “tame Bushmen” on the farms. The physically stronger males became farmhands learning the requisite skills, including shearing when Merino sheep were introduced into the area. The females were employed as domestic help in the homestead. The descendants of these people retained their mobility, first on foot, then by means of pack animals and finally with the donkey cart. They adapted to the niche livelihood of becoming a floating community of shearers providing this specialist service in a burgeoning wool-farming economy. The male, as shearer was, and still is, the provider for the Karretjie domestic unit and he controls the finances. The female, as mother, generally stayed at their shelter tending to their offspring and domestic matters. Although all the Karretjie People are of small stature, the males are physically stronger and even should the possibility of females, as shearers, have been contemplated by the farmers and the Karretjie People themselves, they would have been hard put to master and sustain such strenuous activity over continuous 12-hour working days.

Although Karretjie children play together at an early age, their play and other activities separate as they become older. They learn by observing and imitating their parents' roles and responsibilities. The boys make slingshots to shoot birds, help with the donkeys and aspire to become shearers as soon as they are old, and strong, enough—in fact they join their fathers in the shearing shed at an early age and are gradually initiated into shearing. The girls make and play with dolls and help their mothers with domestic duties, fetch water and tend to those children even smaller than themselves.

So the Karretjie male as main wage-earner is also the decision-maker e.g. in terms of when to break camp, what the next destination is to be, etc. This also translates into the domestic context and husband/wife interpersonal relations. Despite the fact that women play a significant role in the family and domestic organization and situation, they remain in a sub-

ordinate position in every respect—even to the extent that a husband would reprimand, castigate, and even manhandle his partner or wife if, according to him, she has been disobedient. This is of course, exacerbated when there is drinking involved over weekends.

All of this flies in the face of the fact that individual rights and particularly discrimination on the grounds of gender are protected in the Bill of Rights of the South African constitution. The circumstances of the Karretjie People are such though, that much as the benefits of citizenship are not accorded them, so too are they often essentially beyond the reach of the cornerstones of democracy.

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—by M. De Jongh

# KEIYO

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAY-oh

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kalenjin

**LOCATION:** Kenya

**POPULATION:** 110,000

**LANGUAGE:** Dialect of Kalenjin; Swahili; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Africa Inland Church [AIC], the Church of the Province of Kenya [CPK], Roman Catholic Church); Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kalenjin; Kenyans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Keiyo live in the Republic of Kenya, East Africa. One of Kenya's lesser-known groups, they were known earlier as Elgeyo ("El-gay-o"), a Maasai term. The Keiyo are part of a larger ethnic grouping of eight culturally and linguistically related tribes known as the Kalenjin. The length of time the Keiyo and other Kalenjin groups have been living in the Western Highlands and the Rift Valley, their homeland, is open for debate. Some scholars claim that these peoples have only been living in western Kenya for about 400 years, while others argue that such groups have occupied these parts for 2,000 years or more.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Figures released in January 2007 estimated the population of Kenya to be 36,913,721. Of that 12% are thought to be Kalenjin, approximately 4.4 million people. Collectively the Kalenjin comprise Kenya's fourth-largest ethnic group, with the Keiyo numbering about 144,000 people.

The Keiyo live in the western section of Africa's Great Rift Valley in an administrative district bearing the same name—Keiyo District. Until recently, most Keiyo lived along the slopes of the Elgeyo Escarpment, a spectacular geological feature that drops in elevation from 2,590 m (8,500 ft) in the highlands to 1,070 m (3,500 ft) in the Kerio River Valley. Shortly before, and continuing after, the end of British colonial rule in 1963, many Keiyo moved up into the highlands of the fertile Uasin Gishu plateau to take up farming of cash crops.

## 3 LANGUAGE

As their first language, or mother tongue, the Keiyo speak a dialect of Kalenjin, a language of the southern section of the Nilotic branch, which is part of the Chari-Nile language group of Africa. There are three Kalenjin dialect clusters: one consists of the Sabaot, along with the Sebei and Kony; another is made up of Pokot, northern Marakwet, and northern Tugen; and the third includes the Nandi, Kipsigis, Keiyo, Terik, and southern Tugen and Marakwet. Although these dialects are all supposedly mutually intelligible, speakers of one dialect often have difficulty understanding speakers of another. In addition to Kalenjin, most people speak Swahili and English, since both are official national languages and are taught in school, beginning with primary school education. Today it is only very old persons who do not speak at least some English.

Most young people today have a Western or Biblical name (for example, Mary, Rose, David, or Paul) as well as a traditional Kalenjin name (for example, Kipkemoi, Kipchoge, Che-

mutai, or Jebet). Traditionally, names for males begin with the prefix "Ki," while those for females begin with "Che" or "Je." In addition, traditional names often refer to some circumstance when the child was born. For example: Kipchoge (a boy born near the granary), Kibet (a boy born during the day), Cherutich (a girl born as the cows were coming back home), and Jepkemoi (a girl born at night).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Oral tradition was, and still is to some degree, very important among the Keiyo. Prior to the introduction of writing, folk tales served to convey a sense of cultural history. Keiyo oral tradition has four main genres: narratives (stories), songs, proverbs, and riddles. Stories usually contain both people and animals, and certain animals have acquired attributes that are concrete representations of character traits, e.g., hare is a trickster figure whose cleverness can be self-defeating; lion is courageous and wise; and hyena is greedy and destructive. Songs accompany both work and play, as well as ceremonial occasions such as births, initiations, and weddings. Proverbs convey important messages in very concise ways and are often used when elders settle disputes or advise younger persons. Riddles involve word play and are especially popular with children.

## 5 RELIGION

Traditional Keiyo religion is based upon a concept of a supreme god, *Asis* ("Ah-sees"), who is represented in the form of the sun, although this is not God himself. Beneath *Asis* is *Elat* ("Ay-lot"), who controls thunder and lightning. Spirits of the dead, *oyik* ("oh-yeek"), can also intervene in the affairs of humans, and sacrifices of meat and/or beer, *koros* ("chorus"), can be made to placate them. Diviners, *orkoik* ("or-coe-eek"), have magical powers and help in appeals for rain or to end floods.

Currently, nearly everyone professes membership in some organized religion—either Christianity or Islam. Major Christian sects include the Africa Inland Church (AIC), the Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK), and the Roman Catholic Church. Muslims are relatively few in number among the Keiyo. Generally speaking, today only older people can recall details of traditional religious beliefs.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays observed by the Keiyo are mostly those associated with Christianity (i.e., Christmas and Easter), and national holidays such as Jamhuri (Republic) Day, Madaraka (Responsibility) Day, Moi (the current president) Day, and Kenyatta (the first president) Day. At Christmas it is common for people who still live in traditional mud-walled houses with thatched roofs to give the outer walls a new coat of clay white-wash and paint them with holiday greetings (such as "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year").

There are three month-long school holidays in April, August, and December. The first two coincide with peak periods in the agricultural cycle and allow children of various ages to assist their families during these busy times. The December holiday corresponds with both Christmas and the traditional initiation ceremonies, *tumdo* ("toom-doe").

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Age is a fundamental organizing principle in Keiyo society, as it is across much of Africa. Thus, the status occupied and the roles performed by a Keiyo individual are still to a large degree ordained by age. Shortly after a child is born, it is given a name. Friends and family are invited for a ceremony called *chai ya mtoto* (“cha-eye ya m toto”), meaning literally, “the child’s tea.” This designation derives from the slang use of the KiSwahili word for tea, *chai* (“cha-eye”), to mean payment, often in the form of bribes paid to government officials. Guests give presents and contribute money to the parents to help defer the costs of the party. In the past, the two lower incisor teeth of both boys and girls would be removed at a later age both for cosmetic reasons and to toughen the children for later initiation rites.

For both males and females, becoming an adult involves undergoing an initiation ceremony. Traditionally, these were held about every seven years. Everyone undergoing initiation, or *tumdo* (“toom-doe”), becomes a member of a named age-set, or *ipinda* (“e-pin-da”). Age-sets were traditionally “open” for about 15 years. There are eight male age-sets and they are cyclical, repeating approximately every 100 years. The *sakobei* (“sah-coe-bay”) ceremony marked the closing of an age-set about every 15 years, and the elevation of a new age-set to the warrior age-grade. These age-sets and the age-grades (e.g., warrior, junior elder, senior elder) through which individuals passed provided part of the basis for traditional social structure.

After circumcision, male youths were secluded for lengthy periods of time during which they were instructed in the skills necessary for adulthood. Afterwards, they began a phase of warriorhood during which they acted as the military force of the tribe. Elders provided guidance and wisdom. Today age-sets have lost their military function, but this principle still creates bonds between men who are members of the same set, and feelings of respect for those who are older. Female age-sets have long since lost much of their importance. Among the Keiyo today, females are known by the age-set of their husband, and very few women can even recall the names of the female age-sets.

In the past, only people who had borne children would be buried after death; the others would be taken out to the bush and left to be eaten by hyenas. Today at every person’s death, he or she is buried, but not in a cemetery as in the United States. People are returned to their farm, or *shamba* (“sha-mbaa”), for burial. There is usually no grave marker, but invariably family members, friends, and neighbors know where people are laid to rest.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

*Chamge* (“chaam-gay”) or *chamuge* (“chaa-moo-gay”) is the standard greeting among the Keiyo. If the encounter is face-to-face, the spoken greeting is almost always accompanied by a hearty handshake, and people often clasp their own right elbow with their left hand. The response is the same—*chamge*, sometimes repeated several times. It may be emphasized with *mis-ing* (“me-sing”), which can mean either “very much” or “close friend,” depending upon the context. As a sign of respect, a younger person will greet someone of their grandparents’ generation by saying, *chamge kogo* (grandmother—“chaam-gay coe-go”) or *chamge kugo* (grandfather—“chaam-gay coo-go”).



Americans are likely to find several aspects of Keiyo body language to be unusual. First, holding hands after greeting is very common for people of the same sex. Even when walking, these people may hold hands or lock little fingers. But it is readily apparent that there is absolutely no sexual connotation to this behavior. Furthermore, people of opposite sexes are strongly discouraged from these and other public displays of affection. Second, in their conversations Keiyo do not point out objects or people with their fingers. Instead, they point by turning their head in the proper direction and then puckering their lips briefly.

Taking leave of someone is accompanied by the farewell, *sait sere* (“sah-eat sarey”—meaning literally, “blessing time”), and hearty handshakes. Often people will walk with their visitor(s) a distance in order to continue the conversation and to give their friend(s) “a push.” Once again, these people often hold hands, especially if they are members of the same sex.

In the past, dating and courtship were almost entirely matters of family concern. Clans were exogamous, i.e., one had to marry outside of one’s own (and father’s) clan. Today young men and women are more free to exercise their own free will, especially those who live away from home at boarding schools. They will meet and socialize at dances in town discos and in cafes called *hoteli* (“hotel-e”) in KiSwahili. Still, when a young man decides on a wife, he and his father’s family must gather together a suitable bride-price payment (often erroneously referred to as a “dowry”) to be given to the bride’s family. In the past this consisted almost entirely of livestock, but today it is

becoming more and more common to use money in place of, or in addition to, livestock.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Keiyo live on relatively small family farms averaging less than 2 hectares (5 acres). They grow many different staple food crops such as corn, beans, millet, sorghum, kale, and cowpeas, as well as a variety of cash crops like coffee (small amounts), pyrethrum (related to the chrysanthemum and used in manufacture of insecticides), potatoes, and tomatoes. Most people also keep livestock in the form of cattle, sheep, and goats, and a few donkeys that are used for transport.

Before the British arrived, the Keiyo lived on the face of the Elgeyo Escarpment, while grazing their cattle in the forests at the top of the escarpment and cultivating on the escarpment shelf around their homes. Disease-resistant goats would be sent to the valley during the day, and hunting would also be carried out there. Residence on the Elgeyo Escarpment enabled productive use of multiple ecological zones and protected the Keiyo from diseases like malaria in the valley and, in the past, raids by Maasai and Nandi warriors on the Uasin Gishu plateau. Furthermore, the climate on the escarpment shelf is very moderate. The highlands can become extremely wet and cool during the rainy season, while the valley becomes devastatingly hot in the dry season. However, the escarpment provides relief from both extremes for most of the year.

Traditionally, Keiyo houses were round, with walls constructed of bent saplings anchored to larger posts and covered with a mixture of mud and cow dung, while roofs were thatched with local grasses. While these kinds of houses are still common, there is a growing trend towards the construction of square or rectangular houses that are built with timber walls and roofs of corrugated sheet metal, *mabati* (“ma-baatee”).

Most Keiyo people still do not have electricity or indoor plumbing in their houses. Radios and/or cassette players; kerosene lamps and stoves; charcoal stoves; aluminum cooking pots; plastic dishes, plates, and cups; and bicycles are the most common consumer items. Those few people who do not have electricity but who do have televisions use car batteries for power.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, like in most African societies, the family was central in the daily life of the Keiyo people. But by family what was meant was the extended family, not the nuclear family in the Western sense. Keiyo residence patterns were, and still are, largely patrilocal. That is, typically after marriage a man brings his wife to live with him in, or very near to, his father's homestead. Marriage of one man to multiple wives (polygyny) was and is permitted, although most men cannot afford the expense of such unions because of the burden of bride-price. Regardless of the type of marriage, children were traditionally seen as a blessing from God and, as a result of this, until very recently Kenya had the highest population growth rate in the world.

Slowly these patterns are changing as monogamous marriages now prevail and nuclear families are becoming more frequent. Moreover, younger people are now expressing a desire to have fewer children when they get married. This is due to the increasing expense of having large numbers of children who not only must be fed but also educated to cope in today's

world. To some degree, young women are also changing their aspirations to go beyond motherhood alone and include a career as well.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Keiyo were not renowned for their traditional clothing, which essentially consisted of animal skins, either domesticated or wild. Earrings were common for both sexes in the past, including heavy brass coils which tended to make the earlobe stretch downward almost to the shoulder. This is generally not practiced today, when the Western-style dress of most Keiyo, even in rural areas, is scarcely different from that of people in nearby towns. The buying of secondhand clothes is quite common. Thus, men wear trousers and shirts, usually along with a suit jacket or sport coat, while women wear skirts and blouses, dresses, and/or *khangas* (“khan-gaaz”)—locally made commercial textiles that are used as wraps (one for the top and one for the bottom). Youths of both sexes covet tee-shirts with logos, especially those of American sports teams or bearing the likeness of popular American entertainers.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Keiyo is *ugali* (“oo-golly”). This is a cake-like, starchy food that is made from white cornmeal mixed with boiling water and stirred vigorously while cooking. It is eaten with the hands and is often served with cooked green vegetables such as kale, called *sukuma wiki* (“sue-cooma weeky”) in KiSwahili, and meaning literally, “to push the week.” Less frequently it is served with roasted goat meat, beef, or chicken. Before the introduction and widespread diffusion of corn in recent times, millet and sorghum—indigenous African grains—were staple cereals. All of these grains were, and still are, used to make a very thick beer that has a relatively low alcohol content. Another popular Keiyo beverage is *mursik* (“more-seek”). This consists of fermented whole milk that has been stored in a special gourd called a *sotet* (pronounced just as it appears, with the accent on the second syllable) that has been cleaned using a burning stick. The result is that the milk is infused with tiny bits of charcoal.

Lunch and dinner are the big meals of the day. Breakfast usually consists of tea (made with a lot of milk and sugar) and any leftovers from the previous night's meal, or perhaps some store-bought bread. Mealtimes, as well as the habit of tea-drinking, were adopted from the British colonial period. Lunch is eaten at 1:00 pm rather than at noon, and dinner is often eaten later in the evening at 8:00 or 9:00 pm. In addition to bread, people routinely buy foodstuffs such as sugar, tea leaves, cooking fat, sodas (most often Orange Fanta and Coca-Cola), and other items they do not produce themselves.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, Keiyo education was provided during the seclusion of initiates following circumcision. This transitional phase of the rite of passage provided an opportunity to instill in these young men and women all the requisite knowledge necessary to be a functioning and productive adult member of their society. It was, in essence, a “crash” course in the intricacies of their own culture. Nowadays, after initiation young men and women are still secluded but for briefer periods of time (one month as compared with three months in the past). The timing

of the December school holiday coincides with the practice of initiation and seclusion.

In 2003 free primary school education became universal in Kenya. "Free" must be qualified however, because parents must provide their children with uniforms, books, pens and pencils, and paper, as well as contribute to frequent fund raising activities for their children's school(s). This constitutes a tremendous financial burden for families in a country where the average per capita income is about \$360 per year. Post-primary school education is relatively expensive, even at the cheaper secondary schools, and entry is competitive. Tuition at the more prestigious high schools, where students must board, is very expensive. Typically, parents rely on contributions from a wide range of family, neighbors, and friends to meet the high tuition costs. Tuition at Kenya's universities is rather nominal, but the selection process is grueling and relatively few students who want to attend can do so.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional music and dance had many different functions. Songs would accompany many work-related activities, including, for men, herding livestock and digging the fields, and, for women, grinding corn, washing clothes, and putting babies to sleep (with lullabies). Music would also be an integral part of ceremonial occasions such as births, initiations, and weddings. Dances to punctuate these occasions would be performed while wearing ankle bells and would be accompanied by traditional instruments such as flutes, horns, and drums. Oral stories, proverbs, and riddles all convey important messages to be passed from generation to generation.

#### 15 WORK

In Keiyo society, much of the work, at least traditionally speaking, is divided along gender lines. Men are expected to do the heavy work of initially clearing the fields that are to be used for planting, as well as turning over the soil. Women take over the bulk of the farming work from there on, including planting, several weeding, harvesting (although here men tend to pitch in), and processing crops. Among the Keiyo, tradition holds that men are supposedly more concerned with herding livestock than with other pursuits. Recent evidence suggests that women, children (especially boys), and even older people are equally as likely to be engaged in animal care as men, especially in those situations where men are likely to be away from home engaged in wage work.

In addition to all of their other tasks, women are expected to perform nearly all of the domestic work that is involved in keeping a household running. In doing so, they often enlist the help of young girls, who are expected to assist their mothers and other female relatives in chores such as fetching water from wells or streams, and collecting the firewood that most families use for cooking. Young boys will sometimes perform these same tasks but more often do things such as grazing and/or watering livestock.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is a major sports interest of the Keiyo as it is with other Kenyans. Nonetheless, running (especially middle and longer distances) is the sport that has made the Keiyo and other Kalenjin peoples famous in world athletic circles. St. Patrick's

High School in Iten has turned out a phenomenal number of world-class runners.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In rural areas, the radio is still the main form of entertainment. KBC (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) programs are attentively monitored, as are shortwave radio transmissions by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and the VOA (Voice of America). A relatively small number of people have televisions, and the only programming available is from KBC. In towns and trading centers, video parlors are becoming common, and action films (e.g., those starring Chuck Norris, Sylvester Stallone, Bruce and Brandon Lee) are especially popular.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In other parts of Kenya, the famous sisal bags (called *kiondo* in Kiswahili and pronounced "key-on-doe") are manufactured and marketed worldwide. Although the Keiyo are not well known for their handicrafts, women do make and locally sell decorated calabashes (*sotet* in Kalenjin and pronounced just as it appears) from gourds. These are rubbed with oil and adorned with small colored beads and are essentially the same type of calabashes that are used for storing fermented milk.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Tobacco usage and alcohol consumption continue to be common among men but not women. For decades the Kenyan government has banned the brewing and distillation of traditional homemade alcoholic beverages, including *busaa* ("boosaah"), a beer made from fried, fermented corn and millet, and *chang'aa* ("chaan-gah"), a liquor distilled from *busaa*. Nevertheless, these beverages continue to be popular with people, especially men, and provide some individuals, mostly women, with supplementary income. *Chang'aa* especially can be lethal since there is no way to control the high alcohol content (unlike that of *busaa* which tends to have a very low alcohol content), and there are many opportunities for contamination. It is not uncommon to read stories of men dying after attending drinking parties in the Kenyan daily newspapers.

Considerable variation in levels of economic and social development exists in Keiyo District. The Kenyan government estimates the percentage of people living in absolute poverty is 47.82%, or about 75,000 persons. For various reasons, some of which are geographic in nature, there is much more poverty in the valley and much less on the escarpment and even less in the highlands. Considerable food insecurity exists especially in the lower areas of Keiyo, where people are being supported through famine relief. Cattle-raiding is also a major security concern in the valley area of the district. Paved (tarmac) roads are still in short supply and during the rainy season the earth roads become virtually impassable. This problem is true in all three regions of the district.

As is true all over Africa and Kenya, HIV/AIDS is arguably the major issue confronting Keiyo today. Fortunately, prevalence rates in the country as a whole have dropped dramatically from 14% in 2002 to 5.1% in 2008. Moreover the HIV prevalence rate in urban areas is much higher, at 9.6% whereas in rural areas it is 4.6%. Most Keiyo live in rural areas. Also, a link between male circumcision and susceptibility to HIV infection has been posited, whereby circumcision significantly

decreases the risk of HIV infection. One study among agricultural employees in Rift Valley Province found that Luo men, from a tribe that does not circumcise, had a significantly higher HIV prevalence (24.8%) than Kalenjin men (4.5%).

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditionally Keiyo culture, like most others in Africa, is heavily divided on gender lines. Along with age gender is a fundamental organizing principle in African societies. In the past leadership was always the prerogative of adult males but recently this has begun to change. With the growth of multiparty politics Kenyan women have increasingly entered the political sphere. However, unlike other ethnic groups, such as Kikuyu or Kamba, Keiyo women have not participated in politics to the same degree. One exception is Tabitha Seii, who, since 1992, has repeatedly and bravely challenged the strongman of Keiyo politics, Nicholas Biwott. Although Mrs. Seii, a former headmistress, has never succeeded, she was appointed Kenya's High Commissioner to South Africa in 2003. In 2007 she resigned in protest and joined the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Mrs. Seii was also a founding member of the Education Center for Women in Democracy (ECWD), a group whose mission is to increase the presence of women in leadership and decision-making positions

As part of traditional rites of passage, circumcision of both boys and girls was practiced. In the academic world the female variant has come to be known female genital mutilation (FGM) and is a very controversial subject. Although technically illegal in Kenya since 1990 it is still widely practiced by members of many ethnic groups. Among the Kalenjin its prevalence rate has recently been estimated at 47% compared with rates as high as 97% for the Somali. In several areas of Kenya, some especially progressive women have recently been promoting alternatives to traditional circumcision and instead advocating what has come to be known as "circumcision with words." An example from Keiyo District is the Tumndo Ne Leel Support Group which started in 2003 as a community based organization. One of the unique features of this approach is that it retains the very important ceremonial and symbolic role of a rite of passage while doing away with the act of "cutting." In the process this community based organization addresses the larger issue of female empowerment in this traditionally male dominated society.

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—by B. Roberts

# KENYANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KEN-yuhns

**LOCATION:** Kenya

**POPULATION:** 36.9 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kiswahili; English; regional ethnic languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Muslim; traditional indigenous beliefs; independent Christian churches; small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, Bahais, followers of Judaism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Embu; Gikuyu; Gusii; Kalenjin; Keiyo; Luhya; Maasai; Oromos

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Kenya is a multi-racial society of about 36.9 million people, the overwhelming majority comprising indigenous ethnic groups with the rest being Asian, Arab, and European. Arabs have, for many centuries, had historical connections with coastal Kenya, where the dominant language is Kiswahili and the major religion is Islam. Asians, mainly of Indian descent, who are significant in the professional and commercial sectors, were originally railway construction workers taken from India to Kenya by the British colonialists about 100 years ago. Europeans are primarily of British origin, having come to Kenya in search of commercial and agricultural opportunities. The “White Highlands” commonly included large, commercial farms so that indigenous Africans were displaced from their own extremely fertile land. The Land and Freedom Movement (Mau Mau) contributed, through armed resistance in the 1950s, to eventual independence from Britain. Under the leadership of President Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya became a republic in 1964, a year after winning its independence. Kenya currently is a multi-party democracy. Its government consists of a president and a legislative assembly composed of 12 members nominated by the president, 210 elected members, the attorney general, and a speaker. Kenya is divided into eight provinces under the authority of the president.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Republic of Kenya, which is 583,000 sq km, is located in East Africa on and near the Equator. The Indian Ocean is on its east coast; the neighboring countries of Ethiopia and Sudan are to the north; Somalia is to the northeast; Tanzania is to the south; and Uganda is to the west. There is considerable landform variation, ranging from the permanent snow of Mts. Kenya and Kilimanjaro, to palm-treed, tropical shores. Some areas are desert, but most land is forested or composed of rolling grassland. The major geological feature, the Rift Valley, stretches from Zimbabwe to the south to the Red Sea to the north, and is 50 mi wide and 9000 ft above sea level in some places. Numerous lakes are found along its base. Kenya's Lake Victoria is the second largest fresh water lake in the world.

Because of altitude extremes and seasonal rainfall, Kenya has regional climatic variation. Typically, there are two rainy seasons, with highest rainfall in April and lowest rainfall in January. Evenings can become quite chilly in the Central Highlands, and the coastal areas are characteristically hot and humid. Kenya's capital, Nairobi, although close to the Equator, is almost 1700 m above sea level, making it comfortably warm or cool most of the year.

Location and geological and climatic conditions combine to make Kenya a diverse and attractive place for everyday life as well as for visiting. Tourism is a major industry. Large numbers of international visitors come to witness spectacular game parks, the beautiful Rift Valley, and elaborate ocean resorts. One unforgettable sight is that of Lake Nakuru, covered with an unimaginable number of pink flamingoes. For even more excitement, one can visit the Masai Mara National Reserve with its varied wild life including thousands of wildebeest running over the land.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official national languages of Kenya are Kiswahili and English. English is spoken in government, courts, universities, and secondary schools. National mass media such as newspapers and magazines, as well as radio and television, are overwhelmingly in English. Nevertheless, Kiswahili is widely spoken in everyday life as a lingua franca (common language), especially in commerce and by those who do not know English. It is the dominant language along the coast, particularly in the major port city of Mombasa. Nowadays, Kiswahili is usually taught along with English in schools throughout Kenya. Regional ethnic languages spoken at home are typically used for elementary school teaching along with English and Kiswahili. Major ethnic languages in Kenya include Kikuyu, Luo, Kiluyia, Kikamba, Samburu, and Masai, although there are numerous others. Major Asian languages are Hindi and Gujarati. A pronounced linguistic characteristic of Kenya is the multilingualism of its residents.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Prior to the modern era and before the introduction of literacy in English and Kiswahili, indigenous ethnic groups had developed a sophisticated folklore that embodied their ethnic history, as well as wisdom concerning everyday mysteries and dilemmas. In legends, the movements of people throughout East Africa, from river and lake to highland and plain, and the exploits of past leaders, were recounted in oratory. Riddles, proverbs, and sayings are still richly represented in daily speech to indicate morality and proper behavior for young and old alike. Puzzling questions such as, “Why do cats like to stay by the fireplace? Why do hyenas limp? How did circumcision come to be practiced? What is the origin of death?” are answered in folktales. Proverbs contain much wisdom, as the following examples from the Luo attest: “The eye you have treated will look at you contemptuously”; “A cowardly hyena lives for many years”; “The swimmer who races alone, praises the winner.” Riddles are also commonly heard. For example: “A lake with reeds all around? The eye.” Another is: “A snake that breathes out smoke? A train.”

The Gikuyu people account for the origins of their customary way of life as farmers and herders in the following way. The first tribal parents, Gikuyu and Mumbi, begot their own children, who then begot children who dispersed around Mt. Kenya. These children began diverse economic activities. The story goes as follows: One grandchild's knee started swelling one day. When he opened his knee, three little boys emerged, who became his sons. In time, one of them became a hunter; one enjoyed collecting fruits and plants; and the third made fire for cooking. In time, the hunter domesticated some animals, and the collector grew some crops such as bananas, cas-





sava, and sweet potatoes. The third son applied fire to stones and metals and became a blacksmith. In this way, Gikuyu culture originated.

Traditionally, word games were commonly played by children who spent a great deal of time in the evenings listening to grandparents telling stories and legends. Tongue twisters such as the following might be heard among the Gikuyu: *Kaanaka Nikora kona kora kora, nako kora kona kaanaka Nikora kora* (refers to a child and a tadpole scaring each other when they come upon the other suddenly).

Coastal Kenya, particularly the city of Mombasa, had a rich Kiswahili folklore tradition, especially tales, legends, and stories of Islamic origin. The 19th century had a number of poets renowned for their popular Kiswahili poetry. Topics included advice about not being tempted by present fortune, in that misfortune could come at any time and the inability to explain strange events, such as a hyena and a goat walking arm in arm. There is also praise as well as scorn for public figures.

Although indigenous folklore is still plentiful throughout Kenya, it has been supplemented with English literary traditions in schools and universities. Modern movies, television, and radio, with their global subject matters, are popular forms of entertainment among young Kenyans. Nevertheless, radio and television regularly feature traditional folklore as part of their programming.

## 5 RELIGION

Kenya's religious heritage mirrors its ethnic history described previously. The majority religion is Christianity, with about 37% Protestant (including Quakers) and 25% Roman Catholic; about 4% are Muslim. The remainder practice traditional indigenous beliefs or are members of independent Christian churches that have broken away from Protestant and Catholic denominations, often over indigenous beliefs that are found incompatible with European dogma. Smaller numbers of Kenyans are Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, Bahais, and followers of Judaism. Traditional religions generally believed in a high God, spiritual forces such as venerated ancestors, and malevolent forces such as witches. The creator God was known by different names, but was everywhere thought to be benevolent and forgiving. For example, the Abaluyia people believed that God was known as Were when he created Heaven first, then the earth. He created mankind so that the sun could have someone on whom to shine. Animals, plants, and birds were created by Were as food for mankind.

The first independent church in Kenya, and currently one of Kenya's largest, was called the Nomiya Luo Church. Its founder, Johana Owalo, was one of the early converts to Christianity around the year 1900. In 1906, he was baptized a Roman Catholic. In 1907, he had a vision and was taken to Heaven by the Angel Gabriel. Although he could enter Heaven, Europeans and Asians could not, suggesting that he was rebelling against colonialism. The Pope had also been banished because he permitted adoration of Mary and the saints. After this and other instructional visions, he left Catholicism for Anglicanism. Subsequent to this, he learned to speak Arabic and converted to the Islamic faith. In time, he began to teach that mission churches were contrary to African traditions and began to attract many followers. His beliefs are a mixture of Anglican and Catholic practices; in addition, they include a preference for traditional marital customs such as inheritance of widows by their deceased brothers, which was accepted in the Old Testament but not by Christians.

Missionary churches, while still present, are now largely in the control of a Kenyan hierarchy. For example, there is a Kenyan Roman Catholic Cardinal and a Church Province of Kenya (Anglican) Archbishop, each with numerous subordinate Kenyan bishops. Kenyan languages, music, and dance are integral aspects of religious ritual in these and other Christian communities.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Kenya celebrates as public holidays the religious holidays of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day, and the Muslim festival *Idd-ul-fitr* (which depends on the sighting of the new moon after Ramadan). Secular holidays include New Year's Day and Labor Day (May 1). The most significant secular holidays unique to Kenya are related to their colonial struggle and subsequent independence. *Madaraka* (June 1) celebrates internal self government day, and independence day is celebrated on December 12. Jomo Kenyatta, a major leader during the struggle for independence, was detained on 20 October 1952 for a period of seven years by the colonial government; Kenyatta Day (October 20) is celebrated annually in honor of Kenya's first president and patriot. During all holidays in Kenya, schools and businesses are closed. Many residents of cities return home to rural areas for family gatherings and visiting.

Celebrations include festivities such as eating, drinking, and dancing in homes, bars, and night clubs. On such occasions, *Nyama Choma* (roasted meat) is a common treat. Goat or beef are consumed, although goat is considered the greater delicacy. On secular holidays, the Kenyan military is on parade, and politicians give speeches in public and on radio and television. Newspapers typically carry honorific testimonials to past and present political leaders.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Kenyans generally are raised in the context of a strong family and community ideology. Birth is typically a welcome event in all the ethnic groups of Kenya. Most births take place in hospitals or small rural clinics under the care of a midwife. Infants are commonly breast-fed and carried on the back or side in a sling of cloth. Mothers are assisted in the care of their infants and toddlers by young caretakers, who are often older siblings. For this reason, a special bond prevails between a caretaker and his “follower” in the birth order. If no girl is available, a boy can also be a caretaker. Parents desire to have both boys and girls. Boys are valued because in most societies in Kenya descent is traced through males (patrilineal), who then inherit land. The families of girls receive gifts from their future in-laws on the occasion of marriage into their family, a custom known as bride wealth. Although women may now own land, bride wealth is still common and a sign of prestige for highly educated women.

Puberty is marked in many societies by initiation rites such as male circumcision or female clitoridectomy. Circumcision serves to tie together young males into a common social group who will bond for life as they make the transition from childhood to manhood. Among the Bukusu, for example, circumcision ceremonies are held every four years. Young initiates of 12 or 13 years of age are carried on the shoulders of their male and female relatives in celebration of their new public identity. It is considered shameful to express pain while being publicly circumcised. Bukusu men from all walks of life and from all over the world return to Bukusu land to witness the circumcision of their relatives. There are, however, many societies in Kenya that do not circumcise such as the Luo, Kenya’s second largest ethnic group. Most ethnic groups do not practice clitoridectomy, although it is found among the Gusii, Pokot, Kikuyu, and a few other societies. Unlike circumcision, this practice is very controversial and the subject of considerable national and international debate, even when it is undertaken with modern medical precautions. Many folk explanations for its existence, such as the control of female sexuality or the enhancement of female solidarity, are now largely discredited in contemporary Kenya.

Marriage and parenthood are still very significant events in the life cycle. Kenyans of all ethnic groups live out their lives with a strong sense of identity to their families and to their ethnic groups. Land is a strong symbol in this ideology, so that regardless of where a person lives in Kenya, there is a strong pull to return “home” whenever possible. Burial of a person of any age is a matter for not only the individual and his family and church, but not uncommonly for the person’s ethnic group as well. The continued importance of being buried in one’s homeland came to a dramatic conclusion in a much publicized case in Kenya known as the Otieno affair. Mr. Otieno, a Luo lawyer, had been married to a Kikuyu woman. They lived in Nairo-

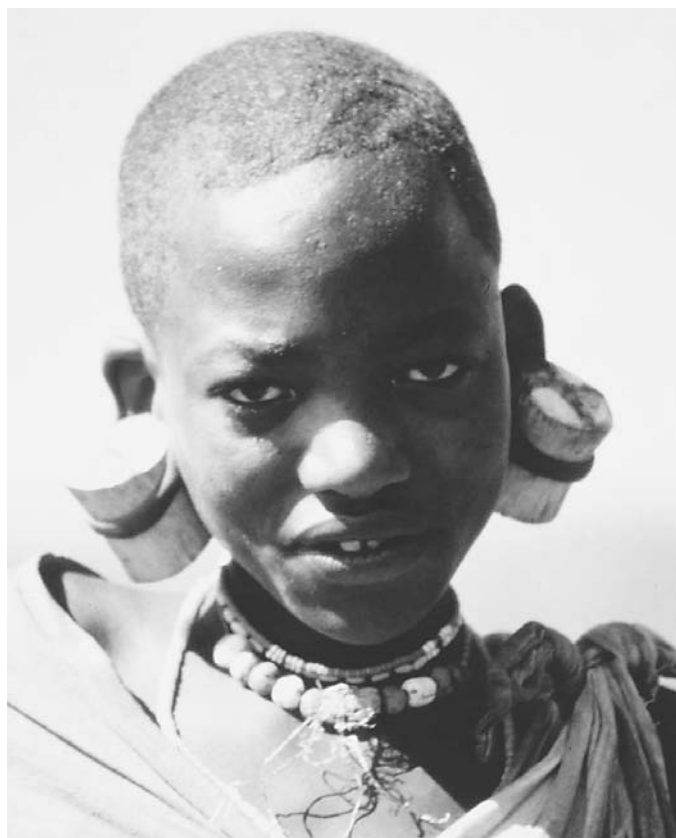
bi. Mrs. Otieno, on the occasion of his death, ordered that her husband be buried in that city. Members of Mr. Otieno’s clan, however, insisted that he be buried in the Western Province, the homeland of his clan. This would insure that he would be buried properly in communal clan land, according to rituals necessary to the respectful repose of his body and spirit. Public cemeteries with individual grave sites are rare in Kenya. After many months of agonizing public debate throughout Kenya by all social strata over individual rights vs. clan rights, it was determined in the High Court of Kenya that he would be buried in the clan lands.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Kenyans can be characterized as very gregarious and very much involved in the social lives of their families, in such a way that “rugged individualism” is not valued. Ethnic groups contain very elaborate greeting patterns that are extended ritualistically and vigorously in rural areas. The simplest and most common Kiswahili greeting is *Jambo* (“hello”) to which a person replies likewise. *Jambo* or *Hujambo*, *Bwana* is said to a man (“You have nothing the matter, Sir?”) while a woman is addressed *Jambo, mama*. If addressing more than one person, the greeting would become *Hamjambo*. The reply to this is *Sijambo*, or *Hatujambo* if with others. These greetings are usually followed by additional salutations depending on social context, time of day, weather, and so forth.

Politicians frequently seek to mobilize Kenyans for development projects by encouraging a national slogan that has interpersonal content. The late President Kenyatta initiated *Harambee* (“Let’s pull together”) as a national symbol, around which individuals and communities mobilized to raise money for such things as the construction of schools, hospitals, and other public works. Individuals are sponsored to attend school or to obtain medical treatment or other necessities through harambee. Today, political leaders and other prominent people attend harambee functions and give large sums of money, which are sometimes announced in newspapers or on the radio. Many Kenyans carry on their person a harambee card on which to note the amount given by a donor. Some Kenyans do not approve of this custom, although it is difficult to say no since requests may be made in public. Also, it is thought that some unscrupulous politicians may misuse the system for their own gain as a way to purchase votes.

Young people have many opportunities for social interaction, especially in the cities. Rural areas tend to have dating patterns that are supervised by family members. Attendance at funerals, where several days of rituals culminate in feasting and dancing, is a favorite venue for courtship. Secondary schools and churches in the town and country also sponsor social events where teenagers may interact. Dating in Nairobi is more elaborate and may involve nightclubs, restaurants, movie theaters, malls, and drive-in movie theaters. One club known as “The Carnivore” is very popular among secondary and university students, especially those returning from schooling in Europe and America during their holidays. The Carnivore, which is located in a Nairobi suburb, is a disco but also has an attached restaurant frequented by tourists in pursuit of zebra, antelope, and other meats.



Various ethnic groups in Kenya have their own traditional dress. (Cory Langley)

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The majority of Kenyans live in rural areas where electricity and running water are often not available, and roads are not paved. Homes are constructed of wattle and daub and thatch, although wealthier people do have access to more elaborately constructed homes of stone or brick and live near towns where electricity and running water are available. A growing number of Kenyans (about 25%) live in cities. Large cities in Kenya include Naivasha, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu, although Nairobi is by far the largest city. Nairobi originated at the time of the construction of the Uganda Railway in 1899. Population grew to 250,000 at the time of independence. By 1990, there were 1.5 million inhabitants residing in numerous estates and suburban areas around the city center, where businesses are clustered. In 2007 Nairobi boasted a total population of 2.8 million people in comparison to Mombasa, the second largest city with a total population of 828,500 people. A significant portion of Kenyans are middle class or richer and live in comfortable houses or even mansions in suburban areas. Nevertheless, Nairobi has many shanty towns such as Kibera or Mathare Valley, in which homes are little more than shacks built out of wood packing cases, flattened tin cans, cardboard, or other discarded items. Many who reside in these shanty towns are squatters with no ownership rights, so they can be forcibly evicted at a moment's notice. Many residents do pay rent to local landlords. Very small-scale commercial activities such as vegetable stalls, food stores, carpentry, and tailoring abound in these shanty towns. Numerous illegal activities such as ille-

gal brewing of beer, prostitution, and petty theft are common. Notwithstanding, fear of entry into the shanty towns is greatly exaggerated in more affluent parts of town where homes are fenced or walled in and typically have house guards known as *Askaris*. Their fear of robbery is not always without foundation, in that it appears to be rising in these suburban areas. The majority of residents in these shanty towns are, however, hard-working people who must face difficult obstacles to survive in situations of meager resources.

Health problems in shanty towns are generally more severe and include gastrointestinal problems and diarrhea for children, and for all people respiratory infections, occasionally cholera, typhoid, and typhus, and a growing problem of HIV infection. Most Kenyans experience periodic bouts with malaria, although this disease is generally contracted when visiting areas outside of Nairobi where malaria-carrying mosquitoes are common. Hospitals are both public and private throughout the country. No fees are charged for visits to public hospitals and for medication, although extended waiting is required and medicines are often not available.

Transportation in Nairobi includes a Kenya bus service for the city and its environs. The *matatu* (van) is an alternative form of transportation operated along bus routes and frequently in competition with them. These vans, like the buses, are severely overcrowded, especially during rush hour, so that passengers are oppressively cramped and may even get injured. The *matatu* driver employs a "tout," a teenager or young adult male, to yell out for passengers to board the van, to pack in as many as possible, and to collect the fare. These touts can be seen leaning from speeding *matatus* in a show of bravado matched only by their quick-witted tongues. *Matatus* are a frequent source of accidents in cities and in rural areas, where they are also common. Taxis are available for those who can afford this expensive means of transportation. The affluent frequently have their Mercedes as a show of prestige. More Kenyans now own cars than ever before, although the bicycle is a popular means of transportation in rural areas. For those traveling between cities or between town and country, Kenya rail service, Kenya airways, and a growing number of bus companies provide excellent service. International travel is available from many international carriers including Kenya Airways, from airports in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Eldoret. Those wishing to travel by sea can do so from the seaport of Mombasa.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage and family are closely associated in all ethnic groups. The extended family is more important than the nuclear, monogamous family. It is not uncommon to see several generations living in the same compound or neighborhood. Nevertheless, national marriage laws recognize cultural variation. The European heritage is recognized in one legal code that privileges conjugal marriage, while prohibiting plural marriages such as polygyny and wife inheritance. These and other practices are permissible under customary law, where recognition is given to indigenous marital customs. Religiously contracted marriages are recognized for Muslim and Hindu unions under separate codes. Wife inheritance is very controversial, with traditionalists arguing that this practice ensures that widows and their children will be cared for within their husbands' extended families. The new husband assumes all of the rights and obligations of his deceased brother. National Christian churches,

unlike some independent Christian churches, are generally opposed to this practice.

Bride-price, unlike widow inheritance, still continues to be a common practice and has been augmented by premarital rituals such as the engagement party, where members of the extended families of the future bride and groom formally meet each other. Families are quite large. Kenya's current total fertility rate of 4.82 children born per woman is among the highest in the world. A significant feature of family life is the obligation of extended family members to assist their kinsmen. Homes will typically have an extended family member in residence. School fees and other necessities are expected to be offered with the understanding that reciprocity will be forthcoming. Many Kenyans, even a majority in some parts of the country, experience their family life within the home of a relative. This practice occurs, in part, because it is thought unfortunate for any home not to have children, and because children are placed whenever possible in the home of a prosperous relative. Kinship terminology is also routinely extended so that one's mother's sister is called "mother," and one's father's brother is called "father." The term brother or sister is often extended to what would be called "cousin" elsewhere.

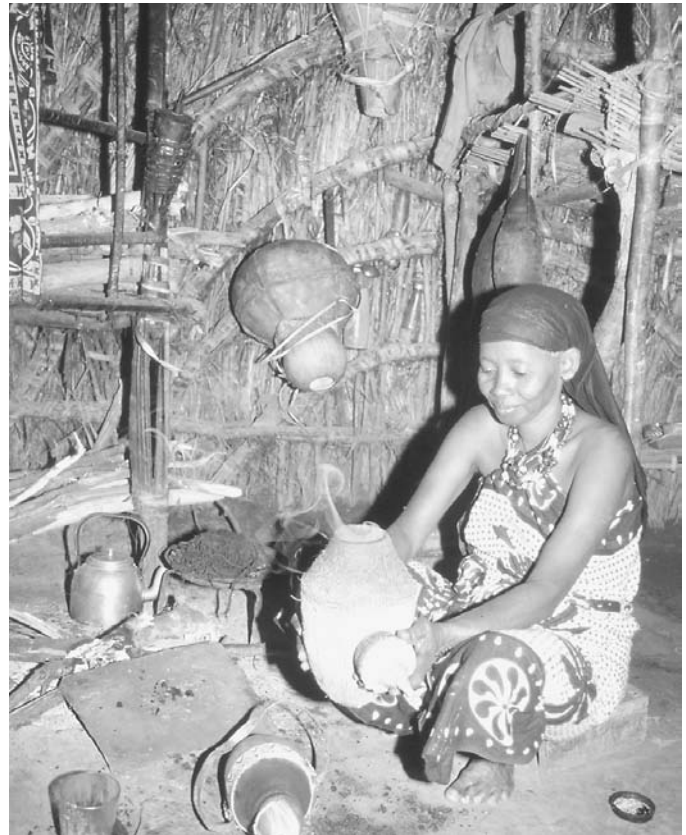
## **11 CLOTHING**

Various ethnic groups in Kenya have their own traditional dress. Maasai men, for instance, can be seen wearing red tunics and sandals as well as elaborate bracelets, necklaces, and large earrings dangling from their much-elongated earlobes. Their hair may be shaved or elaborately braided and covered with red ochre. Feathers may be worn on certain occasions. Women wear long, plain cotton dresses decorated with elaborate belts, huge necklaces, and wear long earrings. On their arms are many copper bangles. Their hair is typically shaved or quite short. A person's status in Maasai society is indicated by the size and various combinations of adornment.

European and Arabic garb are now commonplace throughout the country, even among urban Maasai. In rural areas, for example, women wear multicolored cotton dresses or skirts and blouses. Large shawl-like cloths are worn commonly as protection from rain, sun, and cold. Babies can be seen carried on the back or on the side in a sling. Scarves are worn on the head. Flat shoes or bare feet are standard. Men generally wear Western-style trousers and shirts with jackets and ties for special occasions. Dress in urban areas reflects social class differences. The most stylish and expensive clothes in the latest international styles are available for those who can afford them. Long pieces of colorful cloth are often worn as skirts, wrapped around shorter dresses or by themselves along with matching headpieces. Arabic influences are strong, especially along the coast where the fez and turban are commonplace. Asian dress is the sari for women, and white cotton shirts and pants are prevalent for men. Secondary school children usually wear uniforms to school, but dress very much like American and European youth at home and for leisure. Nevertheless, ethnic or religious variations are also apparent.

## **12 FOOD**

Pre-colonial food production included both agriculture and animal husbandry. Archaeological research has demonstrated that indigenous African crops included sorghum and finger millet. Later, some 2,000 years ago, crops such as bananas,



*The major staple throughout much of Kenya is maize, which is made into a thick porridge and eaten with meat, stews, or indigenous greens. (David Johnson)*

yams, rice, and coconuts reached East Africa from Southeast Asia. About 400 years ago, crops from the Americas such as maize and cassava spread to East Africa from West Africa. Today, the major staple throughout Kenya is maize, which is also an important cash crop as well. Pastoralism, or cattle keeping, has a long history in Kenya. By the 17th century, for example, groups like the Maasai and Turkana subsisted exclusively on cattle, which were originally domesticated and developed through breeding in the Horn of Africa and East Africa. Cattle provide meat, milk, butter, and blood. Livestock includes poultry, sheep, and goats. Many societies in Kenya combine agriculture with livestock raising.

Currently, crops and livestock raised in Kenya also include those imported from Europe during the colonial era. Examples of crops are white potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, and many others. Indigenous fruits such as papaya and mangoes are especially favored throughout the country. Agriculture is the major component of Kenya's economy, employing about three-fourths of the population and generating a significant amount of export earnings. Coffee and tea are the main exports. A major staple throughout much of Kenya is maize, which is made into a thick porridge called *Ugali* and is eaten with meat, stews, or indigenous greens (*sukuma wiki*). Many Kenyans eat this combination on a daily basis. It takes much practice to cook the mixture of maize meal and boiling water to the right consistency without burning it. *Sukuma wiki* is a combination of chopped spinach or kale that is fried with onions, tomatoes,

perhaps a green pepper, and any leftover meat if it is available. This is seasoned with a good bit of salt and some pepper. The main staple for the Gikuyu is *Irio*, a mixture of kernels from cooked green corn and beans, potatoes, and chopped greens.

Present-day Kenyans enjoy eating in a variety of international restaurants and fast food chains. Asian restaurants are also very popular. In rural areas, children can be seen snacking on roasted maize and sugar cane. Manufactured candy and bottled drinks such as Fanta (orange soda) and colas are very popular at birthday parties and other festive occasions. Bottled beer brewed in Kenya has largely replaced traditional beers made from millet, or maize, although coconut wine is popular on the coast. Modern eating utensils are common; nevertheless, most Kenyans prefer eating their *Ugali* with their right hand.

### **13 EDUCATION**

There are many schools throughout the country servicing young people from nursery school through university and professional training. Primary and secondary schools vary in size and quality, and education can be costly. Both secular and religious schools operate on a daily or boarding basis. Harambee schools often do not have the same resources as those with international connections through church or the state. Scholarships are available on a competitive basis for both boys and girls. Competitive sports such as football (soccer), swimming, and track and field are common. A system similar to that in the United States (8 years of elementary school, 4 years of secondary school, and 4 years of university) recently replaced a British system based on Ordinary and Advanced levels of secondary and advanced education following the primary years. The American system now includes more attention to practical subjects and local culture than did the British system, which emphasized comparatively more European historical and literary content.

Post-secondary education includes a wide variety of vocational and technical schools and a growing number of national universities and teacher training institutions. Post-graduate education includes academic subjects, law school, and medical school. There is much competition in Kenya for limited places in educational institutions, requiring many students to go abroad to the United States, Europe, and Asia for their education.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

A cultural mosaic characterizes Kenya's rich cultural heritage. The Muslim tradition is embodied in archaeological and written sources from the coastal region. The historical monument at Gedi, located between Malindi and Mombasa, was founded in the late 13th century. From a study of its tombs, monuments, and shards, it is clear that an urban Muslim civilization, combining indigenous African practices with those from Arabia and India, prevailed for many centuries at Gedi and elsewhere along the coast. Music, dance, and literature were associated here with a literate civilization.

The European (primarily British) heritage in Kenya is notable in Nairobi and some of its suburban areas such as Karen. The Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi opened in 1904 and was soon after nicknamed "The House of Lords" because of its predominantly European, titled visitors. President Theodore Roosevelt, among other prominent Americans, visited there also, espe-

cially to hunt big game. During the colonial era, Africans were not allowed to stay there. Today, the Norfolk retains some of its original architecture and caters to wealthy Kenyans and an international clientele. Movie viewers may remember seeing this hotel in the film *Out of Africa*, an account of the life of its author, Isak Dinesen, on a coffee farm in Kenya during the colonial period. Elspeth Huxley in her books (e.g., *Flame Trees of Thika*) gives another account of Kenya's social life and customs from the perspective of a European living at that time.

Kenya's greatest contemporary writers are world-renowned for their short stories and novels. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the author of such books as *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, writes in his traditional Gikuyu language rather than English to stress the importance of communicating with all members of his society in a language that the colonialists had suppressed. His novels contain a continuing critique of social inequality in Kenya today. Grace Ogot, in books such as *The Other Woman*, has developed the short story to a high standard.

Music and dance competitions are held frequently in the schools. These cultural expressions are heavily influenced by indigenous forms. Regularly, the National Theatre hosts final competitions among students who come from all over Kenya to display their skills in indigenous dance and song. The Bomas of Kenya is a professional dance troupe that holds regular performances of traditional dance, primarily for tourists. Radio and television shows commonly have programs that feature ethnic music and songs as a popular form of entertainment. Music from the United States is popular today, especially among teenagers. Zairian music is popular among Kenyans of all ages.

### **15 WORK**

Although Kenya has a very significant industrial base that includes processed foods, textiles, glass, and chemicals, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Women are engaged as subsistence farmers in those ethnic groups where agriculture is significant. Typically, men, however, clear the land and help in harvesting. In the rural economy, women also collect wood for charcoal, attend markets, and carry heavy loads. Men and women work on coffee and tea estates, these being important cash crops. Tourism is the principal source of foreign exchange and provides jobs for men and women in the hotel and game park industries. Men work as bus drivers, taxi drivers, and factory workers and play important roles in agriculture, primarily with cash crops.

Graduates of secondary schools in Kenya who do not go on to university or teacher training colleges seek technical or secretarial schooling. Training in computer technology is of growing importance, although use of e-mail and the Internet are still quite rare. All young people, however, experience difficulty in gaining employment because Kenya's infrastructure and industrial base is not large compared to its agricultural base. This is not attractive to many students, because young people do not wish to live in rural areas where social life is less varied. Government and industry have not successfully developed rural areas to guard against urban migration and a strong preference by young people to live in cities rather than in small towns or the countryside.

## 16 SPORTS

Clubs where sports can be practiced by members and their guests are very important in the urban areas. These clubs commonly have billiards, squash, swimming, and tennis available. Golf is available at some clubs and hotels. Cricket is also a popular sport. Automobile races are common. Over the Easter weekend, the Malboro/Epson Safari Rally attracts an international audience. At the Ngong Road Race Course, on many Sunday afternoons, horse racing is held with legalized gambling. Football (soccer) is a national pastime, with some ethnic groups comprising teams that compete against teams from industries, armed forces, and the police. Boxing is another spectator sport enjoyed periodically. Schools sponsor competitive sports for boys and girls, including soccer and track and field. In rural areas, there is a widespread game of strategy known as *Bao* in Kiswahili. This game involves a wooden board containing a varying number of holes or divisions and seeds. A player attempts to capture the seeds of an opponent through a series of complex plays whereby the opponent's seeds end up on his side of the board. National *Bao* competitions are held to determine the best players. Children play a simplified version of this game, much to the amusement of adult spectators.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Sports, theater, television, and cultural activities such as reading, dancing, and music are popular forms of entertainment and recreation. Going to movie theaters is a particularly popular amusement for younger people. International films can be seen in theaters in Nairobi and other cities. Popular films include adventure stories, martial arts, and romances. Asian moviegoers also have the choice of seeing the latest Asian films in their own languages.

Sunday is a special day, particularly for Asian families, to dine out, buy treats such as ice cream, and to walk throughout the city. Jamhuri Park, a large open area with a lake for boating and places to purchase ice cream and candy treats, is popular with other ethnic groups. On weekends and in the evenings, walking, window shopping, and shopping in malls is a frequent pastime for all Kenyans. The most popular form of entertainment, however, is visiting with friends and relatives. Much food, drink, news, and joviality are exchanged, mixing people of all ages. Visiting between rural and urban relatives is an occasion for the exchange of food from the rural area for money and material goods from the urban area.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Carvings, batiks, basketry, jewelry, ceramics, and other indigenous crafts are made largely for tourist consumption. Masai artifacts are very popular with tourists. Development projects stimulate local cooperative groups by encouraging them to manufacture baskets, women's purses, and mats for sale. *Kiondos* are particularly popular in the United States among college students for carrying books. These are multicolored, tightly woven straw bags with leather straps. Soap stone bowls, carved animals, and other artifacts from western Kenya are also popular abroad.

Until recently, craft objects were made of various animal products, including skins and hides from zebras, giraffes, bushbuck, civet cats, and crocodiles. Such articles as shoes, purses, wallets, and musical instruments were sources of ma-

ior international attraction. Jewelry, carvings, and other products made from ivory were especially valued.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Wildlife management and conservation are major concerns of the Kenya government and tourist industry. For this reason, commercial artifacts made from wild animals that are considered endangered or are living on game reserves have been banned. Tourists are now limited to photographic rather than hunting safaris. In spite of these limitations, poaching continues to be a problem. Some conservationists have expressed concerns that the elephant population (the source of valuable ivory) has grown too large in certain regions, where farmers have been killed by elephants on rampage rummaging for food in their gardens. Meeting a happy balance between animal and human environmental needs remains an elusive goal at present.

Street children can be seen in cities and large towns of Kenya. These children come from poor families in rural areas where the alcoholism of one or both parents is a contributing factor. They earn money by begging, collecting waste products for sale to wholesalers, who resell them to recyclers. Street girls often earn money through prostitution or begging. Glue-sniffing is a widespread addiction among the younger street children.

Because of the large volume of tourists and the relatively poor quality of Kenya's highways, death by motor vehicle accidents has become a major problem in the country. Alcohol use is a contributing factor, although also significant are the unavailability of spare parts and the age of most vehicles in a country where all vehicles and parts are imported. Crashes with wild and domesticated animals are not uncommon in rural areas.

From its independence until the early 1990s, Kenya had a one-party democratic system. It is now experiencing a transition to multi-party democracy, where members of the opposition parties feel that their political rights are not respected. Members of the ruling party, however, claim that political parties tend to be coterminous with ethnic groups, and that multi-party democracy promotes tribalism. Young people commonly complain that all political parties are led by primarily very old men, leaving little visible leadership by the young or by women. Patriarchal leadership (at least in public) was a strong value in traditional political systems within Kenya. Nevertheless, there are now women judges and members of parliament in the Kenya government.

In 2007 and 2008 political turmoil in Kenya testified to the tensions and mistrust brought about by a long history of a one party system followed by a multiparty system of government that is seen as being controlled by a few greedy politicians. The country erupted in violence when the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was controversially declared the winner of the presidential election held on 27 December 2007, which was widely believed to have been won by Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement. Hon. Raila Odinga had led in most opinion polls prior to the elections and was leading by significant margins in the earlier presidential vote returns, until the surprise announcement of Kibaki as the eventual winner. Many Kenyans were angered by allegations of electoral manipulation and went on a violent rampage in many parts of the country. Police fatally shot hundreds of civilian demon-

strators, causing more violence directed toward the police and eventually degenerating into inter-ethnic conflicts. Initial targets of violence included some Kikuyu people—the community of which Kibaki is a member—living outside their traditional settlement areas, especially in the Rift Valley Province. Some of the Kikuyu also engaged in retributive violence against groups supportive of Odinga, primarily Luos and Kalenjin.

Many deaths were recorded with large numbers of homes and private properties destroyed, resulting in significant internal displacement of people. By 28 January 2008 the death toll from the violence was around 800 and by the end of March 2008 it had reached 1,600. The largest single loss of life occurred when a church providing shelter from the violence to 200 people was set alight by rioters, burning 35 people to death. The people who were sheltering there were members of President Kibaki's tribe, the Kikuyu. Another 16 people from Odinga's tribe, the Luo, were also burned to death by Kibaki supporters while sheltering in a house in Naivasha. As of April 2008, up to 600,000 people were internally displaced in Kenya due to the political turmoil.

The violence in Kenya has had serious economic ramifications not only for Kenya, but throughout East Africa, particularly for the landlocked countries of the Great Lakes region (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo). These countries depend upon Kenyan infrastructure links (particularly the port at Mombasa) for important import and export routes. Significant shortages of gasoline were reported in Uganda as well as Zanzibar following the 2007 elections. Kenya's tourism industry came to a standstill that resulted in a loss of millions of dollars to the Kenyan economy. As of 28 February 2008 Kibaki and Odinga had signed a power-sharing and peace deal called the National Accord and Reconciliation Act, which constitutionally establishes the office of prime minister and creates a coalition government with Raila Odinga designated to be prime minister.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The recent riots and violence following the December 2007 presidential elections brought to the fore the widening gender gap in Kenya. Numerous instances of women being raped and sexual violence against women were reported in the 2008 post-election period. The gender gap can easily be illustrated in the political arena. With respect to political representation, 2.7% of elected representatives on country, urban, and municipal councils are women. In the judicial service establishment, women only account for 17.6%. Indeed, gender representation statistics from the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index for the year 2007 for Kenya are abysmal. Out of 128 countries Kenya is ranked 83 in terms of inequality between the sexes, and is scored at 0.651 on the gender gap index, where 0.00 equals inequality and 1.00 equals equality. On the same scale, the existence of legislation punishing acts of violence against women is scored at 0.17. In other words, violence against women largely goes unpunished. Women and girls continue to suffer from violence in the home, the community and in state custody.

During the Moi regime violations against human rights were commonplace. People were imprisoned or detained without charge or trial. Political assassinations were also a common occurrence. However, when Mwai Kibaki replaced Moi some progress was made in addressing human rights. With the recent post-election violence the little progress that had

been made in fostering human rights seems to have been shattered. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has charged that the government in 2008 was implementing a "shoot-to-kill" policy. Evidence indicates the excessive use of force, torture, and arbitrary shootings by the police. Prison conditions are also deplorable and life threatening.

With reference to homosexuality, it remains illegal in Kenya. However, lifestyles are a slowly changing in Kenya. Male homosexuality is becoming fashionable among young men and is practiced in prisons, boarding schools, colleges, and in tourist resorts along the coast. In spite of its illegality nobody gets imprisoned for homosexual acts in Kenya. Many homosexuals adopt heterosexual lifestyles in an attempt to fit into a society that finds homosexuality repugnant.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# LIBYANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** LIB-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Northern Africa

**POPULATION:** 6.1 million (includes 166,510 non-nationals)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; English

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Tuaregs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Libya is located in a region of North Africa known as the Maghrib (the Arabic word referring to the direction of the sunset). It is bordered to the east by Egypt, to the west by Algeria and Tunisia, and to the south by Chad, Niger, and Sudan. The name “*Libya*” comes from an ancient Egyptian name for a Berber tribe that was applied by the Greeks to most of North Africa, and the term “*Libyan*” to all of its Berber inhabitants. It was not until Libya achieved independence in 1951 that its history changed from one of cities and regions to that of a modern nation-state.

Geography was the principal determinant in the separate historical development of Libya’s three traditional regions: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. Until the late 1960s, each of these regions held on to its own identity, as they were separated by formidable deserts.

The history of Libya can be traced as far back as the eighth millennium bc. Archeological evidence indicates that Libya’s coastal plain was home to a Neolithic culture whose peoples were skilled in the domestication of cattle and the cultivation of crops. Farther to the south, nomadic hunters and herders roamed a vast savannah rich in game. This civilization flourished until 2000 bc, when the land began to desiccate, eventually becoming what is today the Sahara desert.

The peoples who settled in the area were called Berbers. Although the origins of these nomadic tribes remain largely a mystery, evidence suggests that they migrated from the steppe regions of southwest Asia. Roman, Greek, Phoenician, and Arab conquerors all attempted to defeat or assimilate the Berbers into their cultures, with varying degrees of success. Phoenician traders arrived in the area around 900 bc and established the city of Carthage in approximately 800 bc in what is today neighboring Tunisia. The Carthaginians spread Phoenician hegemony across most of North Africa, where a distinctive “Punic” civilization came into being, and established several towns along the Libyan coast. The Berbers were either enslaved by the Phoenicians or forced to pay tribute.

While the Phoenicians were busy on the western coast of Libya, the Greeks established control in the east. By 631 bc, Greek settlers had established the city of Cyrene on a fertile highland about 32 km (20 mi) inland. Within 200 years, four more Greek cities had been established, constantly resisting encroachments by the Egyptians to the east and the Carthaginians to the west. Eventually, the Greek settlement was overrun by Persia, later to be returned to Greek control by Alexander the Great in 331 bc. However, the city-states constantly vied with each other for power, leaving them vulnerable to the expanding Roman Empire. In 74 bc, Ptolemy Apion, the last Greek ruler, bequeathed the area, collectively known as Cyrenaica, to Rome, which formally annexed the area by ad 74.

In spite of the political strife, there was much cultural and economic development in the area. The region grew rich from grain, wine, wool, and stock breeding and from the cultivation of silphium, an herb widely regarded as an aphrodisiac. A school of intellectuals known as the Cyrenaics, who expounded a doctrine that defined happiness as the sum of all human pleasures, developed in the area.

The Roman conquest of the region would prove disastrous for the Berbers. Tribes were forced to become settled or leave the area. For this reason, the Berbers resisted Roman rule. The Romans began their occupation by controlling the coastal lands and cultivating the area. It is estimated that North Africa produced 1 million tons of cereal each year for the Roman Empire, as well as fruits, figs, grapes, beans, and olive oil.

Along with the Roman presence, Judaism and Christianity began to influence the Berbers. Many Jews who had been expelled from Palestine by the Romans settled in the area, and some of the Berber tribes converted to Judaism. Christianity arrived in the area in the 2nd century ad and was especially attractive to slaves. By the end of the 4th century, many of the settled areas had become Christian, along with some of the Berber tribes.

In ad 429, the German king Gaiseric, backed by 80,000 Vandals (a German tribe), invaded North Africa from Spain, eventually weakening Roman control. With the decline of Roman power, the Berber tribes began to return to their traditional lands. Meanwhile, the Byzantine emperor Justinian sent his army to North Africa in ad 533 and within a year conquered the German forces.

The most influential conquest of the area was the invasion of Arab Muslims beginning in ad 642. By ad 644, the Muslims had established control over Cyrenaica in the east and Tripolitania in the west. The nomadic Berbers quickly converted en masse to Islam and joined the Arab forces. By ad 663, the Arabs had spread their influence to the south in Fezzan with the help of Berber troops. The Arabs used the region as a launching pad for operations against Carthage. In ad 670, the Arabs established the town of al-Qayrawan, south of modern-day Tunis, and continued to spread their influence to the west.

The ruling Arabs viewed Islam primarily as a religion for Arabs and therefore treated non-Arab converts as second-class citizens. Political sentiment developed among Muslims on the Arabian Peninsula, however, that rejected the Arabism of the ruling Umayyid dynasty in favor of strict equality for all Muslims. Followers of this movement, called Kharajites, spread to North Africa, and many Berbers became attracted to their message of Islamic equality. They eventually rebelled against the Arab caliphate’s control of the area and established a number of independent kingdoms.

In ad 750, the Abbasids, successors to the Umayyid dynasty, spread their rule to the area and appointed Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab as governor in al-Qayrawan.

In the last decade of the 9th century, missionaries from the Ismaili sect (Shia Muslims with a more esoteric and mystical interpretation of Islam) converted the Kutama Berbers to Islam and led them in opposition against the established Aghlabi kingdom. Al-Qayrawan fell in ad 909, and the next year the Kutama installed the Ismaili grandmaster from Syria, ‘Ubaidallah Sa’id, as *imam* (leader) of their movement and ruler of the territory they had conquered, which included Tripolitania, the



northwestern section of Libya. This imam founded the Fatimid dynasty.

The Fatimids turned their attention to the east, and by ad 969 they had conquered Egypt and moved its capital to the new city of Cairo. From there, the Fatimid dynasty established a caliphate rivaling that of Baghdad. Tripolitania was left to Berber rule, and considering the diverse loyalties of the different tribes, conflict became inevitable. In the 11th century, the Fatimids sent Arab Bedouins to North Africa to assist their forces against other Berbers. Eventually, the influx of Arabs into the region promoted the arabization of the entire area.

Nevertheless, independent kingdoms managed to establish themselves. The greatest of these were the Almoravids, the Almohads, the Hafsiids, and the Zayanids. The kingdoms were all led by Muslim leaders who greatly encouraged learning and arts.

Meanwhile, the Catholics of Spain sought to reclaim southern Spain from the Muslims. Spain had become a cosmopolitan and pluralistic center of learning under Muslim rule. The Spanish conquest in 1492, however, fundamentally changed the character of the area. The new rulers forced all Muslims and Jews to convert to Christianity. Many fled to North Africa, and a sizable community of Jews settled in the area from Morocco to Libya.

As Europe experienced a slow economic revival and Spanish power began to increase, the Mediterranean became a battleground for supremacy among the Hapsburg Empire, the Spanish, and the Ottoman Turks. By 1510, Spanish forces had captured Tripoli, but Spain was more concerned with lands further west and entrusted the protection of Tripoli to Malta.

By this time, piracy had become prevalent along the North African coast. Because Muslim vessels were not allowed to enter European ports, Muslim pirates began raiding European ships. The most famous of these pirates was Khayr ad-Din, known to Europeans as Barbarossa, or Red Beard. Khayr ad-Din captured several European ports, recognizing the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan over the territory he had conquered. In 1551, the Maltese were driven out of Tripoli by the Turks. It took until the 1580s, however, for the Turks to extend their power south into Fezzan. In actuality, however, they exercised little control there.

By 1815, the European states combined forces against the North African states. Spain, the Netherlands, Prussia, Denmark, Russia, and Naples declared war on Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli.

Deprived of the basis of its economy, Tripoli was unable to pay for basic imports or service its foreign debt. When France and Britain pressed for payment on behalf of Tripoli's creditors, the regional ruler authorized extraordinary taxes to provide the needed revenue. The imposition of these taxes led to an outcry in the town and among the tribes that quickly developed into civil war. Eventually, the sultan sent troops from Turkey and regained control of the region.

By the early 1800s, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Sanusi had begun to have a profound influence on the region. Largely influenced by Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam, he incorporated teachings from both orthodox Sunni Islam and Sufism to create an austere reform movement that proved very popular among the Berbers. In Tripolitania and Fezzan, al-Sanusi gained such popularity that he was called the "Grand Sanusi." The Bedouins revered him as a saint. After his death in 1859,

his son, Muhammad, brought the Sanusi order to its peak of influence, and he was widely regarded as the *Mahdi* (a popular messianic leader in Islamic tradition).

Meanwhile, Italy turned its attention to North Africa. Becoming a unified state only in 1860, Italy had a late start in the European race for colonies, and it viewed Libya as compensation for its acquiescence to the establishment of a French colony in Tunisia. Toward this end, Italy engineered a crisis with Turkey in 1911. When Turkey refused to allow Italian military occupation, Italy declared war on Turkey. With Turkey facing troubles in the Balkans, it was forced to sue for peace with Italy, essentially turning over control of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in October 1912.

Italian control over the area, however, was slow to consolidate because of organized resistance among the remaining Sanusi orders, especially in the south. When Italy joined the Allied powers in 1915, the first Italo-Sanusi war became a battle of World War I. At war's end, the Allied powers recognized Italy's sovereignty in Libya.

Several nationalist movements began to take shape in Libya, although there was little cooperation among them. A pan-Arabian nationalist, 'Abd ar-Rahman 'Azzam, persuaded local leaders to demand Italian recognition of the region as an independent republic. After this attempt failed, Tripolitanian nationalists met with the Sanusis in 1922 and offered to accept Idris as emir of Tripolitania. Although initially hesitant to draw the anger of the Italians, Idris accepted the emirate over all of Libya and then fled to Egypt to avoid capture, sparking the second Italo-Sanusi war.

With the ascension of Benito Mussolini's Fascist government in 1922, Italy's position on Libya quickly changed to one of brutal military pacification. The final dissolution of the Ottoman Empire by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne opened the door for Italy's annexation of Libya.

The greatest resistance to the Italian occupation in the early 1920s was led by a religious leader, 'Umar al-Mukhtar. A veteran of many campaigns, Mukhtar was a master of desert guerrilla tactics. Leading small, mobile bands, he attacked outposts, ambushed troop columns, and cut supply and communication lines before fading back into the desert. Unable to defeat Mukhtar in a direct confrontation, the Italians resorted to a war of attrition, herding people into concentration camps, burning crops, blocking wells, and slaughtering livestock throughout Libya. Mukhtar, however, held out until his capture at al-Kufrah, the last Sanusi stronghold, in 1931. He was hanged before a crowd of 20,000 Arabs assembled to witness the event. With his death, the pacification of Libya was complete.

Libya became known as the "fourth shore" of Italy. Its annexation was seen as a way to provide resources for and to relieve overcrowding in Italy. To this end, the infrastructure of Libya was greatly improved, but only to the benefit of the Italian settlers. Most arable land was confiscated from the local tribes and given to Italian colonists, who by 1940 numbered about 110,000, or 10% of the population. Education for the Arabs during this time was completely ignored, as evidenced by a literacy rate of less than 10%. This lack of education created a dearth of skilled workers and professionals, a problem that would plague Libya for decades.

Most Libyan leaders realized that their best hope for independence lay in the defeat of Italy in a larger conflict, and

World War II (1939–45) provided them with such an opportunity. When Italy officially entered the war on the side of Germany, the Libyan leaders, including Idris, immediately threw their support, both physical and verbal, behind Great Britain. Although Britain welcomed the Sanusi support, it made no coherent statement or promise to secure Libyan independence.

In late October 1942, British troops broke through Axis lines at Alamein in a massive offensive that sent the Germans and Italians into retreat. Cyrenaica was taken in November, followed by Tripolitania in January 1943. The road to Libyan independence was long and protracted. Britain took control of Libya until the end of the war. Italy's claim to Libya was officially renounced in 1947. During this time, nationalist movements formed in Libya, and in November 1950, Idris was accepted as the leader of a unified Libya. A constitution was drafted and adopted in October 1951. On 24 December 1951, King Idris I proclaimed the independence of the United Kingdom of Libya as a sovereign state.

The vast majority of power in the Libyan government lay in the hands of the newly appointed monarch, and after the first general election in February 1952, Idris abolished all political parties. In his foreign policy, Idris maintained a strongly pro-Western stance, even agreeing to allow the United States to maintain a military base there. Although diplomatic relations were established with the Soviet Union in 1955, economic aid was refused in deference to the United States and Britain.

In spite of foreign aid, Libya remained a relatively poor and underdeveloped country until the discovery of oil in 1959, which turned Libya into an independently wealthy country in short order. The vast majority of Libyans, however, did not see much improvement in their standard of living as a result of the corruption and inefficiency of the monarchy and the unfavorable contracts of the Western oil companies. This fact, along with Libya's continued pro-Western foreign policy, led to an increasingly volatile situation among the populace and, more importantly, among an increasingly pan-Arabist army.

On 1 September 1969, in a daring coup d'état, a group of about 70 young army officers and enlisted men seized control of the government and abolished the monarchy. The army quickly rallied behind the coup and, within a few days, had control of the entire country. Popular reception of the coup, especially among young urbanites, was enthusiastic. The coup was headed by the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), of which Captain Muammar Qadhafi was a member.

The RCC adopted a socialist philosophy but rejected communism because of its atheistic stance. The council reaffirmed Libya as an independent Arab and Muslim nation and enacted many social, economic, and political reforms. Overnight, Libya shifted from a traditionalist Arab state to an idealistic nationalist state.

As the RCC fought off initial challenges to its power, more and more authority was transferred to the RCC and, ultimately, to the hands of Qadhafi. However, Qadhafi was a highly idealistic pan-Arabist influenced by Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir of Egypt. In this light, Qadhafi turned his attention to foreign affairs, leaving administrative tasks to Major Abdel Salam Jallud.

The change that Qadhafi envisioned for Libyan society began in 1973 with the so-called Cultural Revolution. The idea was to combat inefficiency and apathy in the government bureaucracy by involving large numbers of the populace in political affairs. On the economic front, the main task was the

redistribution of wealth from oil revenues. A property law was passed that forbade ownership of more than one private dwelling per family. Retail and wholesale trade operations were replaced by "people's supermarkets" that were heavily subsidized by the government. While these moves were popular among poor Libyans, they created resentment among the traditional aristocracy, which led an attempt at sedition from abroad. As retaliation, a series of opposition figures were assassinated.

Libya continued to increase the amount of revenue it obtained from the sale of petroleum. Toward this end, Qadhafi suggested that the production of oil be controlled, and he strongly supported the establishment of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). There, he expounded his policy of using oil as leverage against the Western states and Israel. As a consequence of these policies, oil production in Libya dropped by half between 1970 and 1974, even as revenues from the sale of oil quadrupled.

On the political front, Qadhafi continued to agitate for Arab unity. While many Arab leaders gave lip service to the idea of a pan-Arab state at some "time in the future," Qadhafi considered it an achievable goal in the immediate future. As such, Qadhafi eventually tried to form a federation with Egypt and Syria. Egypt, however, proved quite apathetic on this front, and the federation was struck a fatal blow in 1973 when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel without informing Qadhafi.

Relations with Western states remained troubled for some time. The major Western powers accused Libya of sponsoring terrorism in support of the Palestine Liberation Organization's aspirations to statehood. Libya was also accused of supporting the Irish Republican Army (though no credible evidence of this has ever been produced), Lebanese leftists, and left-wing movements in Europe and Japan. As a result, relations with the United States and Britain steadily deteriorated. The low point in these relations occurred in 1988, when a Pan Am airliner was blown up in mid-flight over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, killing 270 people. Libyan operatives were widely believed to be behind the attack, a fact the country officially acknowledged in 2003. After an investigation and trial lasting until 2001, a Libyan intelligence agent was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the attack. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Libya began a process of greater cooperation with Western powers and declared an end to what was then a secret nuclear weapons program.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Libya has a population of about 6.1 million people, more than half of whom are under the age of 22. The population grows by approximately 2.3% per year, partly a result of general improvement in health conditions, which has led to a decrease in both the infant mortality rate and the death rate. More than 90% of the population identifies itself as Arab; most of the remaining minority is composed of Berbers and black Africans. Approximately 76% of the population now lives in urban areas concentrated along the coast. There are also small numbers of Greeks, Maltese, Pakistanis, Indians, and Egyptians.

Libya is located in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea. It has an area of 1,760,000 sq km (679,536 sq mi) and a coastline of 1,800 km (1,119 mi), making it the fifteenth largest country in the world. There are some fertile highlands in the north but no true mountain ranges except in the largely empty southern desert. In all, more than 80% of Libya is covered by



the Sahara desert. There are no rivers; a few saltwater lakes are located near the Mediterranean coast.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Arabic is the national language of Libya. Although the government officially discourages the use of other languages, English is the most popular second language, and it is regularly taught in school. Because the Italians failed to assimilate or educate the population during its occupation, the Italian language never caught on in Libya as French did in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Arabic, a highly evolved Semitic language related to Hebrew and Aramaic, is spoken by nearly the entire population of Libya. Written Arabic has two forms: Modern Standard Arabic is taught in schools throughout the Arab world, while classical Arabic is an older version of the language derived from the Quran. Libyans also speak their own dialectical Arabic, which includes many slang terms, some from Berber and Italian.

In greeting, a Libyan says *as-salamu 'alaykum*, which means "peace be with you." The response is *wa 'alaykum as-salam*, which means "and peace be with you as well."

Common Libyan female names include *'Aysha*, *Fatima*, *Amna*, *Khadija*, and *Asma*. Male names are *Muhammad*, *'Ali*, *Yusif*, *Ibrahim*, and *Mukhtar*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Libya has many legends based on the exploits of Muslim leaders who resisted the Crusaders or the Italian colonizers. These

leaders, such as 'Umar al-Mukhtar, often come from highly religious backgrounds and are considered well learned. They are called *marabouts*, or holy men, and they are believed to have *baraka*, or divine grace, which allows them to perform miracles. Though the government discourages such practice, their burial sites are often destinations for pilgrimages, and some of these leaders have become saints in the popular mind. Many people visit their graves to ask for intercession.

Most folklore in Muslim countries tells stories of important figures in religious history. One such story, which is commemorated annually throughout the Islamic world, is that of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*. According to legend, on the twenty-sixth day of the Islamic month of Rajab, the Prophet Muhammad traveled at night from Mecca, Saudi Arabia (then Hijaz), to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he rode his wondrous horse, al-Burak, on a nocturnal visit to heaven. This legend partly explains the importance of Jerusalem to people of the Islamic faith.

Another folk belief that is common in Islamic communities, including Libya, is that evil spirits, called *jinn*s, live in haunted places. Jinn are demons that are believed to take on animal or human form.

### 5 RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of Libyans (97%) are Muslims, although a Catholic church has been built in Benghazi, Libya's second largest city. The practice of Islam varies from individual to individual. Civil law is based on religious code, or *Shari'a*. Most Libyans belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, which was introduced by the conquering Arabs. However, there are still remnants of the Sanusi order, which was influenced by Shia doctrine through the Fatimids.

Islam teaches that God (Allah) sends guidance to humans in the form of prophets, and it accepts the earlier Semitic prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets who were sent with the message that there is only one God. Muslims believe in heaven and hell, the Day of Judgment, and angels. The Quran is the holy book of Muslims; it teaches that in order to get to heaven, men and women must believe in God and do good works by struggling in God's way. Belief and action are tightly bound together in Muslim literature.

The Islamic religion has five pillars: (1) Muslims must pray five times a day; (2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; (3) Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; (4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca; and (5) each Muslim must recite the *shahada*—*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashadu in Muhammadu rasul Allah*—which means, "I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah."

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Libya commemorates both secular and Muslim religious holidays. One major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the month of fasting called Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sex during daylight hours in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate who do not have enough food. At the end of the month, Muslims celebrate for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of Abraham, as well as his son, to obey God's

command in all things, even when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son.

Religious holidays are celebrated by going to the mosque for group prayers and then returning home to share large meals with family and visiting relatives. Part of the feast is normally given to relatives and part to the poor. Libyan children enjoy visiting carnivals on holidays. Other Islamic holidays, celebrated to a lesser degree, are the Islamic New Year, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, and the Tenth of *Muharram* (the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, commemorated because Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery on this day; the Prophet Muhammad instructed all Muslims to fast on this day).

Secular holidays include Independence Day (December 24) and Evacuation Day (June 11), a commemoration of the U.S. withdrawal from Wheeling Air Force base in Libya in 1970. Army Day is celebrated on August 9 and Proclamation Day on November 21.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Male babies are usually circumcised at birth, although some families wait until the boy reaches the age of 10 or 11. Children of both sexes are expected to help with household chores.

All children between the ages of 6 and 15 are required to attend nine years of school or vocational training. Afterward, they may attend three years of secondary school. Young boys and girls attend school together, but beginning at age 10 or 11, they attend separate schools. After school, young boys may attend schools specializing in religious training, where they learn to recite the Quran from memory.

Desert Bedouins are expected to marry and produce children in order to increase the size and power of the extended family and/or tribe. The majority of Libyan marriages are arranged by families, and even those who marry for love must have the approval of their families. Weddings take place either in a mosque or in the bride's home, with the ceremony administered by an *imam* (Muslim prayer leader). A marriage contract is signed during the wedding ceremony.

Elderly family members are cared for by their children, and none are put in retirement or old-age homes. Upon death, the deceased's body is washed, clothed in clean linen, and buried with his or her right side facing Mecca. Only men attend the funeral; women express their grief at the deceased's home by wailing.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Islam is central to the Libyan way of life, and this fact is reflected in Libyans' social mores and use of language. Daily life revolves around the five daily prayers that Muslims are obliged to perform. Many Libyan men attend the mosque regularly, in keeping with the five prayer times; Libyan women predominantly pray in the home. As in all Muslim countries, Friday is Libya's holy day, and the noon prayer is almost always attended at the local mosque.

The practice of Islam has also influenced the Libyan use of language. The typical Libyan greeting is an Islamic one: *as-salamu 'alaykum*, which means "peace be with you." The response is *wa 'alaykum as-salam*, "and peace be with you as well." God's name is always invoked in conversation. A Libyan will usually say *in-sha' Allah*, which means "if God wills it," when asked whether he or she plans to do something. This might appear

to be indecisive, but it is actually an acknowledgment of God's role in everything one does.

A Libyan always greets guests with a cup of coffee or tea, and desert tradition requires that a guest be offered food. Hospitality is part of the Libyan code of honor. Travelers often find it difficult to navigate cities without being repeatedly asked into strangers' homes for tea and cakes.

Libya has no bars or night clubs, but there are many sidewalk cafés where men drink coffee or tea and socialize. In the evenings, most Libyans can be found at home. In keeping with Islamic teaching, alcohol is illegal in Libya, even at high-end hotels in the major cities.

It is considered disrespectful to openly criticize anyone, and courtesy must always be shown when in public. Children must respect adults. Libyans of tribal background give great importance to tribal loyalty, and strangers arouse tribal suspicion—not surprising in light of the country's history of foreign colonization. Urban dwellers, particularly in larger cities such as Tripoli and Benghazi, are more open to outside influences and ideas. Most Libyans treasure their privacy. This has been particularly true since the 1980s, when outspoken political opposition to the current regime became a punishable offense. Thus, Libyans avoid making any public comments that might be interpreted as political criticism.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions for most Libyans improved dramatically in the years following the 1969 coup. By the 1980s, the welfare system provided work injury and sickness compensation, as well as disability, retirement, and survivors' pensions. Workers employed by foreign firms were also guaranteed the same social security benefits as workers employed by Libyan firms. The government subsidized the underemployed and the unemployed and provided nurseries to care for the children of working mothers. As oil production in the country increased in the 1990s and 2000s, such government subsidized health care greatly improved.

A major problem for Libyans during the 1970s was the country's health care system. The Italian colonization left little infrastructure, and the lack of education provided to the Libyans meant there were few trained health care professionals, a problem that went largely unaddressed by the Idris monarchy. The RCC socialized health care in 1970, making it free for all Libyans. The first medical and dental schools were established in 1970 and 1974, respectively. Health care expenditures increased tremendously beginning in 1970. In 2001, the government spent \$343 per capita on health care. From 1990 to 2004, the number of hospital beds increased from 3.5 to 5.8 per 1,000 citizens. Life expectancy at birth is 77 years, a figure similar to or higher than that of many developed nations.

Housing has proved to be a more intractable problem for the Libyan government. A 1969 survey indicated that there was a shortage of nearly 180,000 dwellings. As a consequence, the revolutionary regime invested several million dollars between 1970 and 1995, building some 277,000 houses and apartments. There is still, however, a housing shortage caused by a continued influx of population into the cities from the countryside and by a high birth rate. As a result of the growing population, shantytowns can be found on the outskirts of major metropolitan centers. These are in stark contrast to the European-style villas inhabited by the urban middle class.

The typical Libyan family lives in a state-built apartment building. Those who can afford them hang Persian carpets on the walls for decor. It is common to have at least one sofa and a few embroidered floor cushions for seating. In 2006, there were 4 million mobile phones in use. Combined land line and mobile phones provide telecommunications service to 75% of the population. There were 16 AM radio, 3 FM radio, and 3 short-wave radio stations in operation in 2005. That year, there were 12 broadcast television stations and 24 Internet hosts. Libya's internet code is .ly.

In 2002, Libya had about 83,200 km (51,670 mi) of roadways, of which more than half were paved. The main road is a 1,769-km (1,100-mi) coastal highway running from Tunisia to Egypt. An old railway, the Benghazi line, was abandoned in 1964. There are plans for a new railway system, and a railroad between Benghazi and Egypt began construction in 1993, with plans for service to begin in 2010. Tripoli and Benghazi (a city on the Mediterranean coast) both have international airports, and Libya has a national airline, Jamahiriyya Libyan Arab Airlines. A private airline, Afriqiyah Airways, connects Libya with much of Europe and Africa.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Libyan family life operated along traditional tribal, or *qabilah*, lines, until well after independence. Libyans live with their extended families in tightly knit communities. A typical household consists of a man, his wife, his sons and their wives and children, his unmarried daughters, and perhaps other relatives, such as a widowed or divorced mother or sister. At the death of the father, each son establishes his own household and repeats the cycle. Marriages are typically arranged by negotiation between the families of the bride and groom, as men and women generally are not allowed to mix socially.

The traditional roles of men and women changed noticeably after the coup in 1969. Women were granted the right to vote in the early 1960s, but they were actively encouraged to vote after 1970, in part because of the regime's hope for an expanded political base. The new regime encouraged women to pursue education and provided them with incentives to work. Working mothers were offered cash bonuses, and day care was institutionalized in the 1970s. The retirement age for women was set at 55, and laws were passed ensuring equal pay for equal work.

In spite of the government's efforts, some traditional views have been slow to change. For example, women were disproportionately represented in jobs as secretaries or clerks because of deep-seated cultural biases against the intermingling of men and women. However, by the mid-1980s, women had broken into several professional fields, most notably health care. Since 2001, the government has tried to further redefine the role of women and expand its armed forces by making military service mandatory for both sexes.

## 11 CLOTHING

Two styles of clothing are visible in Libya. In the cities, there is a mixture of Western and traditional garb. Girls commonly wear brightly colored dresses, and boys wear jeans and shirts. Young men and women wear predominantly modern clothing, though most women continue to cover their hair, in keeping with Islamic tradition. The traditional attire for men is a long white gown worn over a shirt and pants. Some men wear

a black or white Muslim hat on their heads. Traditional women also wear long gowns and hair coverings. Most women's gowns cover both the head and body.

In rural areas, traditional dress predominates. Men of the Tuareg tribe in the Libyan desert wear black or dark blue cloaks. Tuareg men also cover their faces and hair with blue veils historically dyed with indigo, leaving only their eyes visible. The latter attire has earned them the title "People of the Blue Veil." This practice developed out of the need for protection from the desert sun and sand. Styles of dress in the cities often fall along generational lines, and it is not unusual to see people walking side by side wearing different styles of garments. Unlike in other parts of North Africa, in Libya, traditional versus modern dress has not become a charged political issue.

## 12 FOOD

Before every meal, a Libyan recites the Muslim expression *bismillah*, or "in the name of God." After finishing the meal, he or she then says *al-hamdu lillah*, which means "thank God."

As in other regions of North Africa, couscous is a very popular food. Couscous is semolina wheat sprinkled with oil and water and rolled into tiny grains. The grains are then steamed and ready for use in a favorite recipe. The couscous can be mixed with a number of sauces and then combined with a variety of meats and/or vegetables. Couscous is also combined with honey and milk and served for breakfast. The main meat eaten by Libyans is lamb.

Most Libyan meals are eaten with *kasrah*, a flat, round, non-yeast bread. *Kasrah* is often eaten with dips, such as *babaghannuj*, a dip made of mashed, roasted eggplant mixed with lemon, tahina (sesame seed) paste, and a pinch of salt.

Dates are a favorite snack, known for their abundance. Palm trees are hardy plants that grow in groups by the sea and in oases. Dates from palm trees are used in many forms by Libyans. The fruit can be eaten fresh or squeezed to make juice or date honey. Dried dates can be ground into date flour. And date pits can be roasted and ground to make date coffee.

Coffee and mint tea are popular drinks, served throughout the day. Alcoholic beverages and pork are forbidden by Islamic law.

## 13 EDUCATION

Before World War II (1939–45), few schools existed in Libya, resulting in a literacy rate of less than 10%. After the discovery of oil in the country in 1959, Libya invested in new schools, vocational training centers, and universities. Another education boom took place in the 1970s, following the installation of the new regime in 1969. Libya adopted a Western-style system that includes six years of primary school, three years of preparatory school, and three years of secondary school. Schooling is mandatory for both boys and girls until the age of 15. After completion of secondary school, Libyans may attend either vocational schools or universities. Libya's first university was established in 1955 in Benghazi. This was followed by universities in Tripoli, Mersa Brega, and Sabha. All schooling, including that at the university level, is free. This includes books, school supplies, uniforms, and meals. As a result of these educational programs, the literacy rate in Libya rose from an abysmal 10% during the Italian occupation to more than 92% as of early 2003.



*A family walks through the Roman ruins of Leptis Magna, the largest city of the ancient region of Tripolitania. Leptis was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1982 and contains some of the world's best preserved remains of Roman architecture.*  
(Reza/Getty Images)

Problems facing the educational system stem from a lack of qualified teachers. As a result, the vast majority of teachers in Libya are expatriates. In addition, some confusion resulted when the government tried to integrate secular and religious schooling. Military training is a mandatory part of education in the school system, for both men and women, from the secondary through the university level.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Traditional Libyan folk dance is a strenuous and lively form of entertainment. Music and dance troupes often perform together at festivals. Line dancing is popular, with dancers linking arms while swaying, hopping, and gliding across the stage. Singers are often accompanied by musicians who play the violin, the tambourines, the *'ud* (a windpipe made of cane), the *tablah* (a hand-beaten drum), and the lyre.

The Libyan government maintains strict control over the production and distribution of printed matter, and all printing presses are government owned. Libraries, also government owned, have abundant collections of old religious writings but far less modern literature. Printed material that is critical of the regime or of Islam is censored.

Muammar Qadhafi spelled out the goals and ideals of his 1969 revolution in a three-volume collection, *The Green Book*,

which he produced between 1976 and 1979. The books emphasize the centrality of Islamic values to the governing of the Libyan nation, but they also stress the importance of the then-fashionable socialist ideologies of the emerging postcolonial countries, and for that they have been criticized by Muslim leaders.

Libya has produced few internationally renowned artists, though Ali Omar Ermes is a notable exception. He lives in the United Kingdom and produces paintings featuring Arabic calligraphy done with a modernist, Western sensibility. His works are in the permanent collection of the British Museum in London and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and are collected by world-renowned private collectors such as the Prince of Wales.

#### **15 WORK**

Most workers are employed in the oil industry, the largest sector of the Libyan economy. Others work in the state-owned manufacturing firms that produce machinery, appliances, cement and construction equipment, cigarettes, clothing, leather goods, textiles, shoes, fertilizers, and industrial chemicals, as well as processed foods such as olive oil, citrus fruits, tomato paste, tuna, and beverages. Many people who were once employed in agriculture moved to the cities during the oil boom

and subsequent industrial development. Agricultural workers made up about 17% of the workforce in 2004. These workers grow citrus fruits, barley, wheat, millet, olives, almonds, dates, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco. Many farmers raise sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and poultry and produce dairy products and honey. Fishermen operating out of Tripoli bring in tuna, sardines, and mullet.

There is a shortage of unskilled laborers, attributable in large part to a high military conscription rate, but also to the increased education level of Libya's young people, which makes them look down on menial jobs. Thus, Libya has many unskilled foreign workers from neighboring countries. Libya also has hundreds of thousands of foreign technical workers, who are needed to advise on petroleum extraction and design and to construct irrigation projects.

## 16 SPORTS

Libyan sporting events tend to be very strenuous and spirited. Popular spectator sports are camel racing and horse racing, with competitions held on racetracks in rural areas. Football—known to Americans as soccer—is also a popular spectator sport. In 2008, Libya's national football team was ranked eighty-fifth by FIFA (International Federation of Association Football), the world football governing body. Although the Libyan team has never played in the World Cup, it came within one game of qualifying in 1986 in Mexico City. Other popular sports are basketball and track and field events.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Radio and television, with state-sponsored news, religious, and musical programming, are popular forms of entertainment in Libya. In 2004, there were 18 AM radio stations, 3 FM radio stations, and 3 shortwave stations. There are 16 officially sanctioned broadcast television stations, but satellite receivers are as ubiquitous in Libya as they are in most developing countries. In 2007, al-Libiyah, the nation's first officially sanctioned nongovernment television station, began broadcasting. There are stations in Benghazi and Tripoli that broadcast in French, English, and Italian. The movie theaters show imported foreign films. The news media is tightly controlled, and government censorship is widespread. In the Worldwide Press Freedom Index of 2007, Libya was ranked the one-hundred-fifty-fifth least free media in the world.

Libya has nine museums housing archeological, religious, and historical exhibits. Chess and dominoes are enthusiastically played, both in cafés and in homes. The country is also home to some of the best preserved archeological sites of the classical world, including the Phoenician ruins of Leptis Magna and world-famous Greek ruins at Cyrene.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Libyan art, in keeping with Islamic beliefs, refrains from realistic depictions of people or animals. Instead, artists have a unique style known as *arabesque*, in which designs are complex, geometric, and abstract. Libyan artisans use intricate lines and geometric shapes in their carpets, embroidered goods, jewelry, leather goods, tiles, and pottery. Islamic words and passages from the Quran are often etched in elaborate calligraphy. Libyan architecture has the same restrictions, and therefore lifelike statues and adornments are not found on buildings.

Small craft shops once sold domestic artwork such as metalwork, pottery, tiles, leatherwork, and handwoven and embroidered goods, but many such shops have closed down because of the nationalization of businesses under Qadhafi, which discouraged artisans from practicing their crafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The greatest problems facing Libya today stem from the lack of political freedom and fluctuations in economic well-being. In the 1970s, the average income of Libyans was twice that of their Italian colonizers. Since then, however, fluctuations in oil prices have led to variations in economic well-being in Libya, causing some social distress. The steep rise in oil prices since 2003, however, has brought renewed prosperity. Seeking a share of this new wealth, workers from impoverished Asian and African countries have migrated to Libya, where they often face exploitation. Libya is also a transit country for the trafficking of humans and narcotics.

Islam in Libya has not experienced the sort of radicalization seen in neighboring Egypt and Algeria, for example. It remains, among the nations of the Maghrib (the western part of North Africa bordering the Mediterranean), a moderately religious nation, although there were relatively short-lived Islamist uprisings in the late 1990s in the nation's eastern provinces.

In 2003, Libya officially announced that its intelligence services had planned and carried out the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. Since then, many Western nations have resumed diplomatic and economic relations with the once-isolated country. United Nation sanctions against the country were lifted in 2003. The country also announced that year that it was abandoning its nuclear weapons program, which until then had only been suspected.

It is widely believed that Qadhafi's son—and, many believe, heir apparent—Sayf al-Islam Qadhafi, is the force behind Libya's recent reconciliation with the Western powers and its reintegration into the world community.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Libya is one of only a few Islamic nations that have signed and ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It did so, however, subject to reservations made in deference to its interpretations of Shari'a (Quranic law).

Human Rights Watch reports that Libya maintains prisons for women and girls who have committed no crime, who have served their sentences for crimes committed, or, in some cases, who are simply seeking refuge from domestic abuse, as there are no shelters for such victims in the country. The government of Libya has rejected the report, saying these are not prisons or detention facilities but are instead "social rehabilitation facilities." Documented testimonials from women held in such facilities question this assertion.

Libya has no domestic violence laws. Rape cases of extreme violence can be and sometimes are prosecuted, but judges are given the discretion to force the woman to marry her rapist as a form of social remedy. Rape victims can also be prosecuted for adultery if they are married at the time of their rape.

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—revised by J. Henry

## LUHYA

**PRONUNCIATION:** LOO-ee-ah

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Luyia, Abaluhya

**LOCATION:** Western Kenya

**POPULATION:** 5.3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Several Bantu dialects

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism); Islam; some indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Luhya, Luyia, or Abaluhya, as they are interchangeably called, are the second-largest ethnic group in Kenya, after the Kikuyu. The Luhya belong to the larger linguistic stock known as the Bantu. The Luhya comprise several subgroups with different but mutually intelligible linguistic dialects. Some of these subgroups are Ababukusu, Abanyala, Abatachoni, Avalogoli, Abamarama, Abaidakho, Abaisukha, Abatiriki, Abakisa, Abamarachi, and Abasamia.

Migration into their present Western Kenya location goes back to as early as the second half of the 15th century ad. Immigrants into present-day Luhyaland came mainly from eastern and western Uganda and trace their ancestry mainly to several Bantu groups, and to other non-Bantu groups such as the Kalenjin, Luo, and Maasai. Early migration was probably due to the search for more and better land, and escape from local conflicts, tsetse flies, and mosquitoes. By about 1850, migration into Luhyaland was largely complete, and only minor internal movements took place after that due to food shortages, disease, and domestic conflicts. Despite their diverse ethnic ancestry, a history of intermarriage, local trade, and shared social and cultural practices have combined to form the present Luhya ethnic group, which still displays variations in dialects and customs reflecting this diverse ancestry.

The Luhya have been subjected to the political forces that have affected most of the other ethnic groups in Kenya. Colonization of Kenya by the British from the 1890s to 1963 forced many communities, including the Luhya, into migrant labor on settler plantations and in urban centers. Because of their numeric strength, the Luhya are considered a potent political force and have always been active in political activities in Kenya. For example, veteran politicians Michael Wamalwa Kijana and Musalia Mudavadi rose to become vice presidents of the Kenyan Government though for brief periods of time. Others have gone on to become influential members of the Kenyan society such as medical doctors, professors, educators, economists, lawyers and so on.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Luhya people make their home mainly in the western part of Kenya. Administratively, they occupy mostly Western Province, and the west-central part of Rift Valley Province. Luhya migration into the Rift Valley is relatively recent, only dating back to the first few years after independence in 1963, when farms formerly occupied by colonial white settlers were bought by, or given back to, indigenous Africans.

According to the latest population estimates of Kenya, the Luhya people number 5.3 million people, making up 14% of





Kenya's total population of 36.9 million people. The Luhya are the second-largest ethnic group in Kenya, after the Kikuyu. Whereas the majority of the Luhya live in western Kenya, especially in the rural areas, there is an increasingly large number of Luhya who have migrated into major urban centers such as Nairobi in search of employment and educational opportunities. About 1,500,000 Luhya people live outside of Western Province. This is about 28.3% of the total Luhya population.

### 3 LANGUAGE

There is no single Luhya language as such. Rather, there are several mutually intelligible dialects which are principally Bantu. Perhaps the most identifying linguistic feature of the different Luhya dialects is the use of the prefix *aba-* or *ava-*, meaning "of" or "belonging to." Thus, for example, *Abalogoli* or *Avalogoli* means "people of *logoli*."

Luhya names have specific meanings or connotations. Children are named after natural climatic seasons, and also after their ancestors, normally their deceased grandparents or great-grandparents. Among the Ababukusu, the name Wafula (for a boy) and Nafula (for a girl) would mean "born during heavy rains," while Wekesa (for a boy) and Nekesa (for a girl) would mean "born in the harvest season." With European contact and the introduction of Christianity at the turn of the 20th century, Christian and Western European names began to be given as first names, followed by traditional Luhya names. Thus, for example, a boy might be named Joseph Wafula, and a girl, Grace Nekesa.

### 4 FOLKLORE

One of the most common myths among the Luhya group is the one regarding the origin of the earth and human beings. The myth holds that *Were* (God) first created heaven, then earth. The earth created by *Were* had three types of soil: top soil, which was black; intermediate soil, which was red; and bottom soil, which was white. From the black soil, *Were* created a black man; from the red soil, he created a brown man; and from the white soil, he created a white man.

### 5 RELIGION

The Luhya people traditionally believed in and worshipped one God, *Were* (also known as *Nyasaye*). *Were* was worshipped through intermediaries, usually spirits of dead relatives. The spirits had a lot of benevolent as well as malevolent power and thus had to be appeased through animal sacrifices, such as goats, chickens, and cattle.

At the turn of the 20th century, Christianity was introduced to Luhya land as it was to the rest of the country. An extensive spread of Christianity occurred during the colonial period. The overwhelming majority of Luhya people now consider themselves Christians. Both Catholicism and Protestantism are practiced. Among the Abawanga, Islam is also practiced.

Despite conversion to Christianity, belief in spirits and witchcraft is still common, and it is not unusual to find people offering prayers in church and at the same time consulting witch doctors or medicine men for the same or different problems.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are no specific holidays that are uniquely Luhya, or that celebrate Luhya achievements or culture. Rather, the Luhya people celebrate the national holidays of Kenya with the rest of the nation. Among the Abalogoli and Abanyole, an annual cultural festival has recently been initiated, but it is not yet widely adopted. The festival is held on December 31.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As is true in many African societies, having many children is considered a virtue, and childlessness is a great misfortune. Many births take place in the home, but increasingly women are urged to give birth in hospitals or other health facilities. Deliveries that take place at home are managed by older neighboring women who have experience in assisting in deliveries. Men are normally not expected at the place of delivery. The placenta (*engori*) and the umbilical cord (*olulera*) are buried behind the hut at a secret spot so they will not be found and tampered with by a witch (*omulogi*). For births that take place in hospitals or other places outside of home, these rituals are not observed.

Until the last 10 to 20 years, initiation ceremonies to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood were elaborately performed for both boys and girls. Among other things, these rites included circumcision for boys. Uncircumcised boys (*avasinde*) would not be allowed to marry or join in many other adult activities. Nowadays circumcision still takes place, but only among the Ababukusu and the Abatiriki are the ceremonies still elaborate and largely public.

Death and funeral rites involve not only the bereaved family, but also the community and other kin. While it is known

that many deaths occur through illnesses like malaria and tuberculosis, as well as road accidents, quite a few deaths are still believed to occur from witchcraft. Burial often takes place in the homestead of the deceased. Among the Luhya, funerals and burials are public and open events. Animals are slaughtered and food and drinks brought to feed the mourners. Because many people nowadays profess Christianity, many burial ceremonies, even though largely traditional in terms of observance of certain rites, do involve prayers in church and at the deceased's home. Music and dance also take place, mostly at night. Music and dance are a mixture of both traditional Luhya performances and contemporary Western-style music involving modern stereos and "boom boxes."

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings among the Luhya take various forms. The essence of any form of greeting is not just to salute the person, but to inquire of their well-being and that of their families. People take a keen interest in one another's affairs, and people are often willing to share their concerns with others. Shaking hands is a very common form of greeting, and for people who are meeting for the first time in a long while, the handshake will involve not just the clasping of hands, but also a vigorous jerking of the arm. Shaking hands between a man and his mother-in-law is not allowed among some Luhya communities. Hugging is not very common. Women may hug each other, but cross-gender hugging is rare.

Women are expected to defer to men, especially to their husbands, fathers-in-law, and the older brothers of their husband. Thus, in a conversation with any of these men, women will tend (or are expected) to lower their heads, fold their hands, and look down.

Visits are very common among the Luhya people. Most visits are casual and unannounced. Families strive to provide food for their visitors, especially tea. Dating among the Luhya is informal and is often not publicly displayed, especially among teenagers. Unless a marriage is seriously intended and planned, a man or a woman may not formally invite their date to their parents' home and introduce him or her as such.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of the Luhya are not much different from those of other communities in Kenya. Major health concerns among the Luhya include the prevalence of diseases such as scabies, diarrhea, malaria, malnutrition, and, lately, AIDS. These illnesses are prevalent mainly due to poor sanitation and inadequate access to clean water and health facilities, and also because they frequently do not practice safe sex.

In the rural areas, the Luhya live in homesteads called *mugitsi* by the Avalogoli, comprising an extended family. The houses are mostly made of grass-thatched roofs and mud walls, but increasingly people construct houses with corrugated iron roofs, and in some cases, walls made of concrete blocks. The houses tend to be round or square. Because of the general poverty in rural areas, people own very few material goods, and items such as transistor radios and bicycles are considered prime possessions. Items like cars and TVs are largely lacking among the majority of these people.

People rely on public transportation, consisting of buses and vans, but travel on foot and on bicycles is also very com-

mon. Roads in the rural hinterland are not paved and tend to be impassable during heavy rains.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In the rural areas among the Luhya, people live in homesteads or compounds, with each homestead comprising several houses. In one homestead may live an old man (the patriarch), his married sons and their wives and children, his unmarried sons and daughters, and sometimes other relatives. Even though each household may independently run its own affairs, there is a lot of obligatory sharing within the homestead. Family sizes tend to be large, with the average number of children per woman reaching eight.

Women are expected to defer to men in this patriarchal society. Acts of supposed lack of deference or insubordination by women towards their husbands, father-in-laws, or other senior male relatives can result in beatings from the male relatives, especially the husband. Women do most of the domestic chores such as fetching firewood, cooking, taking care of children, and also farm work.

Marriage among the Luhya is exogamous. One cannot marry those belonging to his or her parents' clans or lineages. Polygyny (the act of a man marrying more than one wife) is not as widely practiced these days among the Luhya, but it is still fairly common among the Ababukusu subgroup. Traditionally, a request for marriage is made between the parents of the man and the woman. If the marriage is agreed upon, bride-wealth of cattle and cash, called *uvukwi* among the Avalogoli subgroup, is paid. Nowadays, however, young people increasingly get married on their own accord with little parental input. Civil and church (Christian) marriages are also becoming common. Bride-wealth is still being paid, but amounts differ widely, and payment schedules are not strictly adhered to.

Pets are kept, especially dogs and cats. Often, however, these pets are kept for utilitarian purposes. Dogs provide security, while cats catch mice. Often the dogs will have their kennels outside of the house, but cats may sleep in the house.

## 11 CLOTHING

Ordinarily the Luhya people wear clothes just like those of their fellow Kenyans—locally manufactured and imported dresses, pants, shirts, shoes, etc. Elementary and high school students wear uniforms to school as a national policy. Women almost never wear either short or long pants. Those who dare to do so are considered aberrant and may even be verbally assaulted by men. It is particularly inappropriate for a married woman to wear pants or a short skirt or dress in the presence of her father-in-law. Earrings, necklaces, and bangles are commonly worn by women. Men generally do not wear earrings.

Traditional clothing is worn mostly during specific occasions by certain people. In cultural dances, performers may put on feathered hats and skirts made of sisal strands. For the Luhya groups that still maintain the traditional circumcision rites (especially the Ababukusu), the initiates will often put on clothing made of skins and paint themselves with red ochre or ash.

## 12 FOOD

The meal regime among the Luhya involves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Breakfast mainly consists of tea. The preferred tea is made with plenty of milk and sugar. However, milk may



*Itionyi, a five-year old bull, walks through the streets of Khayega, Kenya, after defeating another bull at the Ilala ground in Kakamega. Bullfighting is a traditional pastime of the Luhya people and features heavily in their festivities. (AP Images/Sayyid Azim)*

not be available all the time, and tea may very often be taken without it. Tea without milk is called *itulungi*. For those that can afford it, wheat bread bought from the stores is consumed with tea. Tea and bread, however, are too expensive for many families to eat on a regular basis, so porridge, made of maize, millet, or finger millet flour, is consumed instead. Lunch and supper often consist of *ovukima*—maize flour added to boiling water and thoroughly mixed until cooked into a thick paste more or less like grits in the US. *Ovukima* is eaten with various vegetables like kale and collard greens, and for those who can afford it, beef or chicken. Chicken is a delicacy and is the food prepared for important guests or on important occasions.

Other foods that are consumed include traditional vegetables like *mrera* and *nderema*. Many traditional food taboos have broken down. Women, for example, were not allowed to eat chicken and eggs in the past, but this taboo has largely been abandoned. The chicken gizzard, however, is still for the most part considered men's food (particularly the male head of the household), and in many homes women will not eat it.

The main cooking utensils are pots made of steel or other metals. These are mass-manufactured in the country, as well as imported, and are bought from the stores. Clay pots are also still used by many families for preparing and storing traditional beer, and also for cooking traditional vegetables. Plates

and cups are made of either metals, plastic, or china, and are bought from the stores, as are spoons, knives, and forks.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The literacy level among the Luhya is close to that of the country as a whole. The literacy level for the total population of Western Province where the majority of the Luhya live is 67.3%. This is slightly lower than the national average of 69.4%. Literacy among women is slightly lower than among men. Typically, most people (about 75% of the population) drop out of school after primary school education, which (since the mid-1980s) lasts eight years. The main reasons for the high drop-out rates are the stringent qualifying examinations to enter high school, and the very expensive school fees required in high school.

Parents spend a large portion of their income on their children's education in school fees, uniforms, school supplies, transportation to and from school, and pocket money. Often the family will deny itself many of life's necessities and comforts, like better housing, food, and clothing, in order to put the children through school. Expectations are consequently placed on those going to school to finish and assist with the education of their younger siblings, and to care for their parents in old age. Because very few students are able to get a university education, parents and the community are very proud of those that manage to attain this level of education.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance are an integral part of the life of the Luhya people. There is a wide variety of songs and dances. Children sing songs and dance for play and (especially boys) when herding livestock. Occasions like weddings, funerals, and circumcision ceremonies all call for singing and dancing. Musical instruments include drums, jingles, flutes, and accordions. The Luhya are nationally renowned for their very energetic and vibrant *isukuti* dance, a celebratory performance involving rapid squatting and rising accompanied by thunderous, rhythmic drumbeats.

Proverbs, stories, and songs are commonly used not only for entertainment, but also for education (especially of the young), conflict resolution, and adding flavor or weight to conversations.

## 15 WORK

The majority of Luhya families are agriculturalists. Because of the high population density (about 900 people per sq km, or 2,450 people per sq mi) in Luyaland, most families own only very small pieces of land of less than 0.4 hectares (1 acre) which are very intensively cultivated. Crops grown include various species of vegetables such as kale, collard greens, carrots, maize, beans, potatoes, bananas, and cassava. Beverage crops like tea, coffee, and sugarcane are grown in some parts of Luyaland. Livestock, especially cattle and sheep, are also kept. Tending the farm is often a family affair. Because the family farm is rarely sufficient to meet all of the family's needs for food, school fees and supplies, clothing, and medical care, often some members of the family will seek employment opportunities in various urban centers in the country and remit money back to the rural homes.

## 16 SPORTS

There are numerous games and sports played by children among the Luhya. For girls, jumping rope is very common. The jumping is counted and sometimes accompanied by rhythmic songs. Hide-and-seek games are common among both boys and girls. Soccer is the most popular game with boys. Any open ground can serve as a playing field. Adult sports include soccer for men, and to a lesser extent, netball for women. Netball is somewhat like basketball, only the ball is not bounced on the ground. School-based sports also include track-and-field events.

The most popular spectator sport is soccer, and the Luhya are known for producing some of the best soccer players in the country. The AFC Leopards soccer team, largely comprised of Luhya players, is one of the best teams in the country. Bullfighting is also a popular spectator sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Television sets are too expensive for the majority of Luhya families to afford, especially in the rural areas. This is further hampered by the lack of electricity in many of the rural areas. Radios and cassette players, however, are affordable, and these provide musical entertainment for many people. Local bars and shops also have radios, cassette players, juke boxes, and other music systems, and thus many men congregate in these places to drink, play games, and listen and dance to music. Music is mainly of local, Swahili, and Lingala (Democratic Re-

public of the Congo) origin, but western European and American music are also common.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pottery and basket-weaving are quite common among the Luhya, especially in the rural areas. Most of these are either used in the home or sold in the markets for cash. Pots are often used for brewing local beer, cooking food, and storing water. The pots are made of clay. Baskets are made from the leaves of date palms (called *kamakhendu* among the Ababukusu) that grow on river banks. Increasingly, sisal is used. The baskets are sold and are also used at home for carrying and keeping foodstuffs. Body ornaments like bangles, necklaces, and earrings are commercially mass-produced in the country or imported, and thus are not in any way uniquely Luhya in form. Among the Ababukusu subgroup, however, parents of twins wear a traditional bangle called *imwana*.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are no human and civil rights problems that are unique to the Luhya people. Violations of human rights and civil liberties that the Kenya government has been accused of generally apply across most ethnic groups. Problems of alcoholism exist among the Luhya, but problems that are considered particularly pressing are those to do with the high population density and high population growth rate. Health problems arising from diseases endemic in Luhya areas is also of concern. The drug problem has not caught up with the Luhya to any significant degree.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Among the Luhya gender roles are assigned to men and women culturally in ways which create, reinforce, and perpetuate relationships in which males are viewed as superior and women are in a subordinate position. As already noted earlier, women are supposed to be in deference to men. When talking to her husband or male in-laws, a wife is supposed to kneel down with her head bowed and arms folded on her chest in deference to the man. Luhya boys and girls are conditioned to behave in certain ways and to play different roles in society. For example, women are supposed to do most of the domestic chores such as fetching firewood, cooking, taking care of children, and also farm work. As such the Luhya people have distinct cultural practices, especially governing the gender division of labor, marriage and women's access to resources. Due to the high rate of male out-migration, an estimated 30–60% of households are female-headed and they have to single-handedly farm their fields in the absence of men. Thus gender empowerment and equality constitute the major gender issues among the Luhya.

With reference to homosexuality, certain types of same-sex activity were tolerated in tribal tradition, but only as childish behaviors unworthy of an initiate. But in general homosexuality is not tolerated in Luhya society. In the larger Kenyan society, homosexuality continues to be illegal as a "crime against nature" under the Kenyan penal code inherited from the British colonial legal system. Homosexuality is regarded with disdain and disgust by the majority of the population, and persons arrested for homosexual activity are treated harshly by the police. In some ethnic groups of Kenya, homosexuality can be punished by death. All religious groups abhor ho-

mosexuality and condone its complete suppression. In spite of this suppression, Kenyan male prostitutes are readily available on the streets of Nairobi and Mombasa, usually catering to international tourists. They are well dressed in order to be able to enter international hotels. In most instances the prostitutes themselves are probably bisexual, many having girlfriends or wives, and consider themselves heterosexual.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# LUO

**PRONUNCIATION:** luh-WO

**LOCATION:** Western Province and Nyanza Province in Kenya; Tanzania

**POPULATION:** Over 3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dholuo; English (official); KiSwahili

**RELIGION:** Christianity combined with indigenous practices (Anglican church [CPK], Roman Catholicism, and independent Christian churches)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans; Tanzanians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 19th century, the Luo undertook the last phase in their migrations into their present area in Kenya, moving slowly out of lower savanna grasslands into higher and cooler regions with reliable rainfall. In this migration, cattle, while still valued, were supplemented by farming and an ever increasing importance of crops in their economy. Bantu agriculturalists, with whom the Nilotic Luo began to interact, exchanged many customs with them. Some Bantu borrowed the Luo practice of knocking out the lower incisor teeth as a sign of beauty. The Luo, however, did not adopt circumcision for men, as practiced in some neighboring Bantu groups. The Luo are now found throughout Kenya, especially in Nairobi where they live in large numbers. Nevertheless, most Luo maintain strong economic, cultural, and social links to Western Kenya, which is considered by them to be their "home."

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Luo number over 3 million people, or about 13% of the total population of Kenya (nearly 25 million people). They are, along with the Luhya, the second-largest ethnic group in the country, behind the Gikuyu. Most Luo live in western Kenya in Western Province or adjacent Nyanza Province, two of the eight provinces in Kenya. Some Luo live in Tanzania to the south of Kenya. Over the past 500 years, the Luo have migrated slowly from the Sudan to their present location around the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. This area changes from low, dry landscape around the lake to more lush, hilly areas to the east. The provincial capital of Kisumu is the third-largest city in Kenya and is a major center for Luo activities and interests.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Luo, like other Kenyans, are typically conversant in at least three languages. The two national languages of Kenya are English and KiSwahili. English, derived from the British colonial era before Kenya's independence in 1963, is the official language of government, international business, university instruction, banks, and commerce. It is taught throughout Kenya in primary and secondary schools. KiSwahili is the primary language of many coastal populations in Kenya and has spread from there throughout East Africa, including Luoland. Today, this language serves as a significant means of communication across ethnic boundaries and is most evident as a language of trade and commerce in urban markets and rural towns. Nowadays, KiSwahili is also taught in Kenyan primary and secondary schools. Both English and KiSwahili, therefore,

are widely available to the Luo as a means of communication and for consumption of radio, television, and newspaper materials available in these two languages. Nevertheless, the indigenous language of the Luo, referred to as Dholuo, is for most people their language of preference in the home and daily conversation. Dholuo is taught in the primary schools throughout Luoland such that these days Luo young people are fluent in at least three languages. This is impressive when one takes into account that English, KiSwahili, and Dholuo are from three very different language families with drastically different grammatical principles and vocabulary.

Dholuo is a Nilotic language classified as a Nilo-Saharan language. This language family is spoken by Africans living in an area between the western Sudan and the middle Niger River area to the north and west of Kenya and also in Uganda where the Nilotes most closely related to the Kenya Luo reside. Dholuo is a tonal language: words differ by their pitch, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing musical quality.

Children enjoy playing language games in Dholuo. Among these is a “tongue twister” game. For example, children try to say without difficulty, “*Atud tond atonga, tond atonga chodi,*” which means, “I tie the rope of the basket, the rope of the basket breaks.” “*Acham tap chotna malando chotna cham tapa malando*” means, “I eat from the red dish of my lover and my lover eats from my red dish.” Most Luo, irrespective of educational attainment and occupation, prefer to speak Dholuo at home and continue to teach this language to their children. Even young Luo teenagers, who nowadays live in Nairobi and rarely visit Luoland, nevertheless have learned to speak excellent Dholuo among Luo.

Names are given corresponding to places where an individual is born, the time of day, or the day of the week. Even the kind of weather that prevailed at the time of a child’s birth is noted. For example, one born during a rain storm is called Akoth (male) or Okoth (female). Cold days or those with strong winds are also significant for naming. Just about every Luo also has a “praise name,” which is used among close friends.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The spoken word is richly elaborated among the Luo. Stories, legends, riddles, and proverbs are traditionally recited in the *siwindhe*, which is the home of a widowed grandmother. In this place, Luo boys and girls gather in the evenings to be taught the traditions of their culture. Boys, by their teens, sleep in the *siwindhe* lest they be teased as one who still sleeps in his mother’s house. In the evening after people have returned from their gardens, they gather around the hearth to tell stories and to listen to them. In the *siwindhe*, however, grandmothers preside over storytelling and verbal games. Riddles, for instance, take the form of competitive exchanges where winners are rewarded by “marrying” girls in a kind of mock marriage situation. Often, friendly arguments erupt over interpretations of riddles. One riddle, for example, asks the question, “My house has no door,” which is answered by “an egg.” Another riddle is, “What is a lake with reeds all around?” The answer is, “an eye.” Clever answers are frequently given as alternatives to these standard answers. Proverbs also enter prominently into the *siwindhe* discussions and are common in everyday use as well. Some examples are, “The eye you have treated will look at you contemptuously,” “A hare is small but gives birth to twins,” and “A cowardly hyena lives for many years.”



Morality tales are told both in the *siwindhe* and in other homes not only for entertainment but also to impress upon all listeners the proper way to cope with life’s circumstances. Such questions as, “Why do people die?”, “What is the value of a deformed child?”, “What qualities make an appropriate spouse?”, “What is friendship?”, “Who is responsible for a bad child?”, “Why do some people suffer?”, and many others are the subject of folklore. For example, the story known as “Opondo’s Children” is about a man called Opondo whose wife continuously gave birth to monitor lizards instead of human babies. These lizard babies were thrown away to die because they were hideous. Once, however, the parents decided to keep such a child, and he grew to adolescence. This child, as a teenager, loved to bathe alone in a river. Before swimming he would take off his monitor skin, and while swimming he mysteriously became a normal human being. His skin was in fact only a superficial covering. One day a passerby saw him swimming and told his parents that he was a normal human being. Secretly, his parents went to watch him swim and discovered that he was in fact normal. They destroyed his skin and thereafter, as the Luo say when measuring time, “when days more numerous than hairs on a sheep” had passed, the boy became accepted and loved by all in his community. For this reason, Opondo and his wife deeply regretted that they had thrown away all of their many monitor children. This tale constitutes a lesson teaching that compassion should be displayed towards children with physical defects.

An origin tale concerns the origin of Lake Victoria, entitled “Victoria Nyanza.” For the Luo, Lake Victoria is the most

significant feature of their landscape. Women are known as “daughters of the lake,” and a man is known as “a lake man.” In the tale there was once a time when a giant called Lowle (Lake Victoria) lived in the sky, and whenever he urinated great ponds of water were formed. This is how Lake Victoria came to be.

In another origin tale concerning death, it is told that humans and chameleons are responsible for this calamity. *Were* (God) wanted to put an end to death, which strikes “young and old, boys and girls, men and women, strangers and kinsmen, and the wise and the foolish.” He requested that an offering be made to him of white fat from a goat. A chameleon was commissioned to carry the offering up to the sky where *Were* lives. Along the way, the fat became dirty and was angrily rejected by *Were*. He declared that death would continue because of this insult. The chameleon became cursed by the Luo, and ever since it must always walk on all fours and take slow steps.

Suicide and the love between brother and sister are emphasized in a tale concerning orphans. Obong’o was killed in battle with a neighboring society. This happened after his sister, Awuor, a fellow orphan, had pleaded with him not to risk his life. In her deep sorrow, after burying her brother, she committed suicide by setting her house on fire with herself and all their possessions inside. This tale reinforces the theme of love between a brother and sister, a sentiment enhanced by a system of bride-wealth. It is commonly the case that when a young man’s family gives cattle and other goods to another family in exchange for his wife (and her future children who will be members of his family), it is wealth acquired from his sister’s marriage that contributes to his own bride-wealth. After marriage, throughout life, brothers and sisters remain very close.

## 5 RELIGION

Christianity has had a major impact on Luo religious beliefs and practices. Today, there are a variety of religious communities drawing on beliefs from indigenous practices and Christianity. The Anglican Church, known as the CPK, and the Roman Catholic Church are very significant among the Luo. The offices of bishops from these two faiths are located in Kisumu. Many people, however, do not draw sharp distinctions between religious practices that have European origins and those with African origins. Mainstream churches draw on a rich Luo musical and dance tradition in their liturgies. For many Christians, the ancestors continue to play a significant role in their lives. In traditional belief, the ancestors reside in the sky or underground, from where they may be reincarnated in human or animal form. Ritual ceremonies are sometimes performed when naming a baby to determine if a particular spirit has been reincarnated. The spirits of ancestors communicate with the living in their dreams.

In the Luo religion, troublesome spirits may cause misfortunes if they are not remembered or revered. Luo refer to spirits by the term *juok*, or “shadow.” Spirits in the male line are especially venerated. The Luo high god has now fused with the Judeo-Christian god. The Luo refer to God by many names that reveal his power and Christian influence. For example, *Were* means “one certain to grant requests”; *Nyasaye*, “he who is begged”; *Ruoth*, “the king”; *Jachwech*, “the molder”; *Wuon koth*, “the rain-giver”; and *Nyakalaga*, “the one who flows ev-

erywhere.” Prayers and petitions are addressed to God by those in need of his assistance.

Christianity has fused most notably with traditional religious notions and customs in “independent Christian churches,” which have attracted large followings. For example, the Nomiya Luo Church, which started in 1912, was the first independent church in Kenya. The founder of this church, Johanwa Owalo, is believed to be a prophet like Jesus Christ and Mohammed. Owalo was originally a student at a Roman Catholic Mission Station where he was baptized. Soon after, he began to have visions. In one of these, he was taken to heaven by the angel Gabriel. He began to question Catholic doctrine when he observed that Europeans were not permitted to enter heaven. Owalo then began to question the colonial order of his day in which the British controlled Kenya. Later, he joined with a Catholic priest and began to teach a new theology that included rejection of the pope and the doctrine of the trinity. Owalo eventually joined the Anglican church, so that presently the Nomiya Hymnal contains both Catholic and Anglican hymns. Some traditional practices rejected by some mainstream Christian churches are retained by the Nomiya church, such as levirate marriage, in which a widow marries the brother of her deceased husband. The Legio Maria is another prominent Luo independent church, with 250,000 members. This church practices the Latin Roman Catholic Mass. The Legio Maria is also tolerant of the levirate. Compared to mainstream churches, women play an important role in this church, and there is a pronounced devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Luo recognize national holidays of Kenya and Tanzania, depending on the country where they reside. In addition, Luo celebrate the Christian religious holidays.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

People are discouraged from noting when someone is pregnant for fear that problems might result from jealous ancestors or neighbors. Older women and midwives assist the woman throughout her pregnancy and in childbirth. The birth of twins is treated with special attention, requiring taboos on the part of the parents. Only obscene dancing and foul language by neighbors lifts the burden of giving birth to twins, which is believed to be the result of evil spirits. Babies and children are considered to be vulnerable to the “evil eye” and frequently wear amulets to protect them from evil glances.

Adolescence is a time of preparation for marriage and family life. Traditionally, girls obtained tattoos for their backs and had their ears pierced for earrings. Adornment also included armlets and bands for the waist, wrist, and ankles. Girls spent time in peer groups where considerable conversation was centered around boys and their personal attributes. Sex education was in the hands of older women, who gave advice in a communal sleeping hut used by teenage girls. Lovers sometimes made secret arrangements to meet near these huts, although premarital pregnancy was strictly forbidden. Nowadays, for education, neighborhood and boarding schools have replaced communal sleeping huts and elders, although sex education is not taught in these schools. Perhaps for this reason, teenage pregnancies are thought to be a major social problem in contemporary Luoland by most elder Luo. Now, as previously, adolescent boys enjoy more freedom from adult supervision than

girls. Consequently, responsibility for teenage pregnancy falls entirely on the shoulders of girls, who generally leave school should they become pregnant.

Adults wishing to contribute to the continuation of Luo traditions maintain a rigorous involvement in the social life of their communities. For this reason, there is hearty attendance at ritual occasions, such as weddings or funerals of members of the family. Since there are no initiation ceremonies in earlier stages of the life cycle, the funeral serves as the most important symbol for family and community identity. Burials must take place in Luoland, irrespective of where a person may have lived during his or her adult years. Several years ago, a national event in Kenya centered around the death and burial of a prominent Luo man. Although he was an attorney and was married to a non-Luo woman in Nairobi, Mr. Otieno was buried in his home area against the wishes of his wife. She wanted him to be buried in Nairobi where they had lived. Mr. Otieno's clan elders, however, claimed his body for burial in Luoland because it was believed that only there could the proper rituals be performed so that his ancestor spirit could rest in peace. For example, the directional orientation of the body in the grave pertains to clan origins and migrations. The grave must be dug by a male adult related to the deceased by blood. The Otieno matter received serious discussion in the Kenya national media as it worked its way through the court system. The Kenya Supreme Court decided that the clan elders had prior rights over Mr. Otieno's body and ruled that he must be buried in Luoland. This case symbolizes the significance of sacred land, community membership, and spiritual continuity after death with clan and family.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social relations among the Luo indicate a number of underlying principles from the past that continue to be very strong in present-day social life. These principles revolve around kinship, gender, and age. The Luo have what can be called a "segmentary lineage" form of social organization. This means that Luo are organized into more or less maximal and minimal kinship groups that are like the branches of a vine. Descent is traced through only the male sex (one's father) to reckon relatives from near to distant kinsfolk, who align themselves with and against other such groupings for purposes of exchange, marriage, and political alliance. There is a strong emphasis in this system on the male gender, through which both men and women are placed within the kinship system. Names are received through the male line, and after marriage women go to reside in the homesteads of their husbands. Nevertheless, women are not without power and influence in this "segmentary patrilineal" system. For example, as a wife of a patrilineage, a woman builds up alliances over time for her husband's family by maintaining strong relationships after her marriage with her brothers and sisters who live at her birthplace or elsewhere. It is expected that after marriage a woman will bear children for her husband's patrilineage. It is for this reason that bride-wealth is given by her husband and his lineage mates to her family in exchange for her hand in marriage. It is this bride-wealth that has contributed to the woman's capacity to maintain warm ties throughout her life in her own birth family, which she left behind after marriage.

By having children, a woman greatly enhances her power and influence within the lineage of her husband. As the chil-

dren grow older, they take special care of her interests. Perhaps as many as 30% of Luo homesteads are polygynous (in which a man has more than one wife). This contributes to solidarity between a mother and her children, and between children born of the same mother, within the context of polygynous extended families. In such families children have different mothers and a common father. Nevertheless, polygyny is commonly accepted by both men and women, provided traditional ideas and regulations are maintained. This includes, for example, a special recognition for the first wife or "great wife," whose house and granary are located prominently at the back of the homestead opposite the main gate. Subsequent wives have homes alternatively to her right and left in the order of their marriage. Sons are provided with homes adjacent to the main gate of the compound in the order of their birth. The common father for the polygynous extended family maintains a homestead for himself near the center of the compound. His own brothers, if they have not yet formed their own homesteads, reside on the edge of the compound near its center. As Luo become wealthy in Luoland or elsewhere, it is common for them to build a large house for their mother. This is especially necessary if she is a "great wife," as it is considered improper for younger wives to have larger homes than wives more senior to themselves.

The spatial ecology of the polygynous homestead symbolizes the significance of age-grading in social relations. Brothers are ranked in the homestead, and co-wives are differentiated by their age. Children are commonly reared by their older siblings who are nurses to them, carrying them about and singing lullabies to them. Male elders have a prominent place in the community. They are significant players in the politics of marriage and family alliances. This is enhanced by their control over cattle, land, and other resources. Elders are indispensable for rituals that center around important community events, such as weddings and funerals.

Visiting and being visited is the major source of pleasure for the Luo. The social principles of age, kinship, and gender obligations impose a heavy schedule of ritual obligations on Luo, irrespective of their residence. Rituals center around sickness and death, stages in the life of children, marriages, and succession to leadership in lineage and clan groupings. Attendance at funerals is a significant obligation for all Luo. There is a constant movement between Nairobi and Luoland for attendance at funerals. A powerful, prominent man or woman, for example, in Nairobi may be but a child while visiting home, where he or she behaves with great deference to Luo senior in age or to families where there is a relationship of respect based on marriage ties. At funerals, Luo consume large amounts of meat, beer, and soft drinks and socialize with friends, relatives, and members of the opposite sex. Funerals last for four days for a male and three days for a female. After the burial and expression of grief through orations and viewing of the body, there is a period of feasting and celebration. Visitors come from far and wide and are housed around the compound of the deceased where he or she will be buried. This location and the duration of the ritual is an excellent opportunity for young people to meet and observe members of the opposite sex, or for elders to discuss marriage alliances that they might wish to promote. Dating may well follow initial meetings or deliberations at the funeral.



## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In rural areas, houses are of several types, based on wealth and degree of permanence. A common house is made of mud and wattle walls and thatched with grass. Another style includes mud and wattle walls, but its roof is made of corrugated sheets of metal. A more elaborate and permanent type of house is built of brick walls and a roof covered with iron sheets or tiles. Bricks, iron sheets, and tiles are all items of prestige, and their ownership symbolizes success in farming, animal husbandry, or some modern occupation, such as teaching, the ministry, or shop keeping. Homes vary in shape as well as size. Some homes of the old variety made of wattle and mud are circular. Those with more permanent materials tend to be rectangular. A prosperous man who is the head of a large extended family may have several wives whose homes are situated by their rank within a large circular homestead.

Luo living in Kisumu, the regional capital, or Nairobi have homes that vary according to their relative social status. Some Luo are numbered among the very elite Kenyans whose homes are very elaborate, with facilities for automobiles, sleeping accommodations for visiting relatives, and servant's quarters. Other less fortunate Luo are numbered among those who live in Nairobi's crowded slums where homes are quite temporary, made of wattle and mud and short-lived materials such as tin, paper, and plastic.

In Kisumu, a city of about 323,000 people, the bicycle is a very important means of transportation. Bikemen serve as taxis and carry traders and passengers throughout the town and region. Some of the bicycles have hoods on them. The *matatu*, or communal taxi, and public buses are other significant conveyances seen throughout the region. For those traveling the 500 km (310 mi) between Nairobi and Kisumu, there is daily train and air service, as well as frequent buses and taxis.

Because of their marginal position in the national economy, the Luo do not have a great deal of access to medical services. Moreover, their environment is hot and humid throughout much of the year, and they live in the low-elevation malarial zone in Kenya. Malaria is a major killer in Luoland. Children's diseases, such as *kwashiorkor* (a form of protein malnutrition), are a threat in those families without access to a balanced diet or knowledge about nutrition and health standards. Medical services are a mixture of socialist and capitalist principles. Kisumu, for example, has a large public hospital where services and medicine are free. In these hospitals, there is a frequent shortage of medicine and a perception that services are not as good as those in private hospitals where patients must pay to see a doctor or to purchase drugs. There is an emphasis on preventive medicine in villages, so that most rural communities have clinics with medical health workers who place a great deal of emphasis on sanitation, prenatal care, nutrition, and other practices known to reduce the risk of disease. There is some blending of indigenous and medical ideas about the origins of illness arising from spiritual causes, such as ancestors and witchcraft, and the more recent "germ theory of disease." Many Luo participate in a dual medical belief system for any particular ailment or other misfortune.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage was traditionally considered to be the most significant event in the lives of both men and women. It was thought inappropriate for anyone to remain unmarried. This was so

because of the significance of the value of community and communalism over the needs and rights of individuals considered apart from family concerns. In a society without industrial technology, where subsistence depended on human labor, it can be understood why large families were adaptive for the Luo. The system of polygyny worked to ensure that all people achieved a marital status. After the death of a woman's husband, she was "inherited" by her dead husband's brother. This custom, known as the *levirate*, guaranteed that a woman remained within the extended family of her husband. Her new husband took over all of the domestic roles of his dead brother. This custom is still widely practiced in Luoland and is the subject of heated debate between those favoring autonomy and individualism over and against those more traditionally inclined. Generally, churches with international ties, such as the Anglican CPK and the Roman Catholic Church, frown on the levirate, as do women with considerable formal education. The levirate receives support from independent churches and those men and women for whom traditional values take priority in their lives. They note, for example, that in Dholuo the term for wife is "our wife," symbolizing that her marriage involves an entire family, not just herself.

The significance of bride-wealth is increasing, even among the educated. In this custom, members of the groom's family initiate a process of negotiation with the bride's family that may unfold over many years. Negotiations can be intense, and for this reason a "go-between," thought to be neutral to the interests of each family, is used. Luo believe that divorce cannot occur after bride-wealth has been exchanged and children have been born. Even if separation happens, the couple is still ideally considered to be married. Failure to have children, however, is thought to be the fault of the bride and, for this, she will be divorced or replaced by another wife. Cattle are the primary object of wealth given in bride-wealth. In determining the value of a prospective bride, her family takes into account her health, looks, and, nowadays, her level of formal education. Women with university degrees are expected to draw many cattle and they frequently, in spite of their high formal education and outward acceptance of nontraditional ideas, are offended if their suitor does not offer a big bride-wealth. Failure of men to raise a high bride-wealth presses many of them to propose elopement, a practice that is on the increase today.

A marriage custom that is now rarely practiced is referred to as *meko* ("catching"). In this practice, a woman is "dragged" by her husband's male relatives to his home, where the marriage ceremony occurs and the marriage is consummated. The timing of the *meko* depended on how much of the bride-price had been paid, such that it could be assumed that the marriage would, in fact, occur. Members of the girl's family, particularly her brothers, kept guard to "protect" her from being dragged. It is said that the bride was often secretly pleased with all of the attention from her brothers and her new husband and brothers-in-law. The last would thereafter refer to her as "our wife." There was, nevertheless, outward screaming and resistance on the part of the girl while being dragged.

Young people in Kenya still tend to marry within their own ethnic groups. Tribal elders frequently caution against "intertribal marriages." The more distant the ethnic group in space and customs from the Luo, the greater the cautionary warnings. For this reason, Luo intertribal marriage is most likely to occur with members from neighboring Baluya societies,

which are Bantu. However, most Luo marry within their ethnic group.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditionally, the Luo wore minimal clothing. Animal hides were used to cover private parts, but there was no stigma associated with nudity. Today, clothing styles are largely European in origin and varies according to a person's social class and lifestyle preferences. It is not uncommon to see in remote rural areas people fashionably attired according to some of the latest tastes. In the past, for example, when platform shoes were common for women, or today when jeans are popular among teenagers, these fashions were and are popular in remote areas. Nevertheless, for those Luo living in Nairobi, for example, there is a tendency for their apparel to be very cosmopolitan by rural standards and no different from clothing styles as seen in New York or Paris.

In rural areas, most people dress according to their work routines. For example, women while farming or attending market wear loose-fitting dresses made of solid or printed cotton fabric. Wearing sandals or going barefoot is typical while working. Men wear jeans as work pants while farming. During the rainy season, the roads can become very muddy. Boots and umbrellas are especially prized by both men and women. These days, there is a strong market in second-hand clothing, making available to even the poorer families slacks, dresses, coats, undergarments, sweaters, shoes, handbags, belts, and other items. Luo enjoy dressing up for funerals and weddings and are considered to be very fashionable throughout Kenya.

### **12 FOOD**

Agriculture is very significant and is a primary responsibility of women. They tend to use hand hoes while men use ox plows. The primary crops are maize, millet, and sorghum. While coffee, tobacco, cotton, and sugarcane are important cash crops, cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens are also very significant, especially cattle, which are used for bride-wealth. Fish from Lake Victoria and streams are important, especially tilapia. Many foods are purchased, such as sugar, bread, and butter, which are consumed with tea on a daily basis, a custom known as "tea time" and derived from the British colonial era that ended in 1963. Tea may also be taken with cakes and occurs in mid-morning and late afternoon.

The staple food eaten several times per day is *ugali*. This is made from maize meal stirred in boiling water until it becomes a thick and smooth porridge. *Ugali* is always taken with an accompanying sauce, such as meats and stews. Greens (*sukumawiki*) are also frequently eaten with *ugali*. Maize, popular throughout Kenya, is frequently sold for money. This has led many families, when pressed economically for money for school fees or clothes, to sell their maize. For this reason, there is a periodic famine throughout Luoland that occurs every year during the long, dry season prior to harvest.

The Luo had no ideas about private ownership of land prior to the colonial period, which spans the 20th century. They followed communal principles that guaranteed that everyone was assured access to land for cultivation. Women did not inherit land but had access to the land of their husband and their own unmarried sons. Explorers who arrived in western Kenya before colonialism noted that food was very abundant throughout Luoland. With private property, however, it be-

came increasingly impossible for the land to be made available to those without money. Land alienation and a rise in population, which in Kenya is one of the highest in the world, have caused periodic hunger for many people. Presently, there is a stigma associated with selling land; for this reason, money obtained through its sale is considered by many Luo to be "bitter"; that is, it is money that is obtained through some injustice. This money must be kept apart from transactions involving livestock and bride-wealth. Also considered taboo is money obtained through the selling of roosters. Luo homes are considered incomplete without a rooster, which symbolizes "maleness," especially fertility. After the funeral of a man, a rooster is taken from his house and eaten by his relatives. This signifies the end of his homestead. When a new homestead is founded, a man is given a rooster from his father's home.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Kenya introduced a new system of education in the 1980s known as the "8-4-4 system," modeled after the American system. Luo now go eight years to primary school, four years to secondary school, and four years to college. There is the desire to make secondary school more practical than it was under the British system in which students attended primary school, followed by high school with stressful and consequential 0-level and A-level exams that determined a student's vocational placement for life. Only those with the highest scores on the A-level could proceed on to the university. The British system emphasized performance on exams that often had questions reflecting European rather than African content. The new system places more emphasis on school performance and subject matter that is more African.

Luo attend technical, secretarial, nursing, computer, teacher training, and business schools after high school as alternatives to the university. There is a new university at Maseno near Kisumu that will provide easy access for those wishing to attend university. Education is highly valued among the Luo, and they are well represented in the professions, especially university and higher-educational institutions. Nevertheless, there still remains a high level of illiteracy, especially among females. For example, in polygynous marriages there is a strong tendency for younger wives to be more educated than their older counterparts. This pattern reflects recent changes where more Luo are now recognizing the importance of sending girls to school.

The Luo success in academic pursuits may well be related to the value given to "wisdom" in their culture. Modern philosophers have applied the term "sage philosophy" to describe individuals among the Luo who, in the past and present, excel in teachings and reflections on the human condition. The Luo society is an open one. All individuals are encouraged to express themselves publicly. "Truth" (*adier*) is expressed through songs and folklore by respected elder men and women who are acknowledged as wise. Most respected, however, is the *japaro*, a term that translates into English as "thinker," who is consulted on all matters of interest to community welfare. The most famous sage until his death in the mid-1990s was Mr. Oginga Odinga, a widely respected elder and former vice-president of Kenya. He spoke out publicly during colonialism and in post-colonial politics against what he considered to be injustices. In his writings he emphasized Luo values for communal welfare

and concern for preservation of traditional values. His death was deeply felt by most Luo and many other Kenyans as well.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Luo consider their entire traditional way of life to be an important community resource. There is a great deal of disagreement over what should be preserved and what should change. Customs centering around marriage and gender relations are hotly debated. It is felt that many practices should be retained from this area of life as well as from music, dance, and folklore. The Luo, however, did not develop an elaborate material culture given that they were, for much of their history, primarily a pastoral population and therefore on the move in search of pasture. They did, however, excel in the verbal arts and philosophical arts associated with successful communal life.

Songs are very popular today as in the past. Musicians nowadays praise and lament political, generational, economic, and cultural contradictions in contemporary life. Luo devote much time to listening to music and purchasing records, tapes, and CDs. Christian church music is also a form of entertainment. It is said that the short story was a well-developed art among the Luo in traditional times. Such stories were often accompanied by music. Perhaps because of the importance given to the short story in Luo culture, the most important short-story writer in Kenya today is the Luo woman, Ms. Grace Ogot. In her stories she includes many traditional themes as well as modern dilemmas, such as an educated woman living in a polygynous arrangement. Some of her best-known stories are, "The Other Woman," "The Fisherman," and "The Honorable Minister."

#### 15 WORK

The most notable fact about the Luo agrarian economy is that women play the primary role in subsistence farming. Before the introduction of the modern money economy, the garden was the centerpiece of the women's world of work. Industrious women could amass considerable wealth by exchanging their garden produce for animals, handicrafts, pots, and baskets. Presently, there continues to be a very strong vocabulary involving farming in the Dholuo language. For example, terms distinguish the relative size of gardens, the conditions of the soil, and the quality of the landscape. There is also a rich vocabulary of farm activities. These include terms for clearing, digging, planting by scattering or placing seeds into holes, weeding, reweeding, and harvesting. Each of these terms has many constituent terms to cover fine points of variation. A complicated vocabulary also exists for farm instruments. The crops themselves are described in great detail, as are troublesome weeds. For example, concerning maize, some of the terms are: *oduma* (white maize), *nyamula* (yellow maize), *oking* (fine grain maize), and *obabari* (bigger, not-so-shapely maize grain and cobs).

A young girl is expected to assist her mother and her mother's co-wives in farming land owned by her father, brothers, and paternal uncles. Even though a girl may go to school and rise to a prominent position in society, there is often still a strong association with the land and digging. Many Luo living in Nairobi, for example, practice "urban agriculture." When returning home to the rural areas on vacation, women frequently "dig" to get vegetables to bring with them back to the city.

Men are preoccupied with livestock and have mastered an impressive vocabulary to differentiate among them. It is said that men spend a great deal of their time in "social labor" concerned with placing their cattle in good social contexts, such as bride-wealth exchanges, trading partnerships, and commercial sales. In the modern economy, cattle and goats have taken on monetary value as well as being items of social prestige in and of themselves. Men, as compared to women, have the major control over animals and those crops that are primarily cash crops. In sum, the Luo idea that work should be divided according to the principles of age and gender are still evident.

#### 16 SPORTS

The Luo are participants in all of the major national sports currently played in Kenya. One sport, however, that receives a great deal of support is soccer. The soccer club known as Gor Mahia (Gor Mahia, like Ramogi and Lwanda Magere, was a great ancestor in Luo history) is Luo and symbolizes success for the ethnic group when they are victorious on the field. Some other ethnic groups support their own soccer teams, too. Secondary schools provide an assortment of sports for young people, giving them an opportunity to engage in competitive games such as track-and-field and soccer. Children enjoy games in the village, such as racing, wrestling, and soccer. Some boys who live near the lake are good swimmers.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Childhood play activities for girls include grinding soil on a flattened stone in imitation of adults who grind grains. Girls play "babies" with dolls made from clay or maize cobs in imitation of their mothers or child nurses who care for them. Female names are given to the dolls. Girls and boys imitate funeral ceremonies by mourning over the "death" of a playmate. Boys and girls play hide-and-seek together, and "house" by constructing small domiciles modeled after adult huts. Girls play *kora* with pieces of broken pottery or stones. In this game, stones are collected in the palm then thrown into the air. The main purpose is that more than one of the stones thrown into the air must come to rest on the back of the hand. As children reach middle childhood, between 6 and 10 years of age, separate play groups are formed by gender. Now girls spend more time at home caring for younger siblings and assisting in household duties and gardening. Boys have more freedom and combine play activities with responsibilities for herding and care of animals. One game in particular played by children and adults is *bao*, the name of a board game played widely throughout Africa. This game involves trying to place seeds on the opponent's side of the board while he or she attempts to defend against this.

Entertainment is now available through radio and television. In Luoland, programs are provided in KiSwahili, English, and Dholuo on the radio. Virtually all homes have radios, which are a significant source not only of entertainment in stories and music but also of education for health and national development. Books and printed media have now largely replaced public oratory as a means of entertainment. Nevertheless, visiting is a special joy that can be characterized as socially lively with lots of animated discussion. The verbally adroit person is still widely admired and respected.

Birthday parties are now much more important than they were in the past, when individuals did not reckon their age in years. Parents try to make their children's birthdays special

with a birthday cake, cards, and gifts. Weddings and funerals, as in the past, are still major forms of entertainment for old and young alike. Church groups, clubs, women's organizations, and schools are important organizations for their members' social calendars.

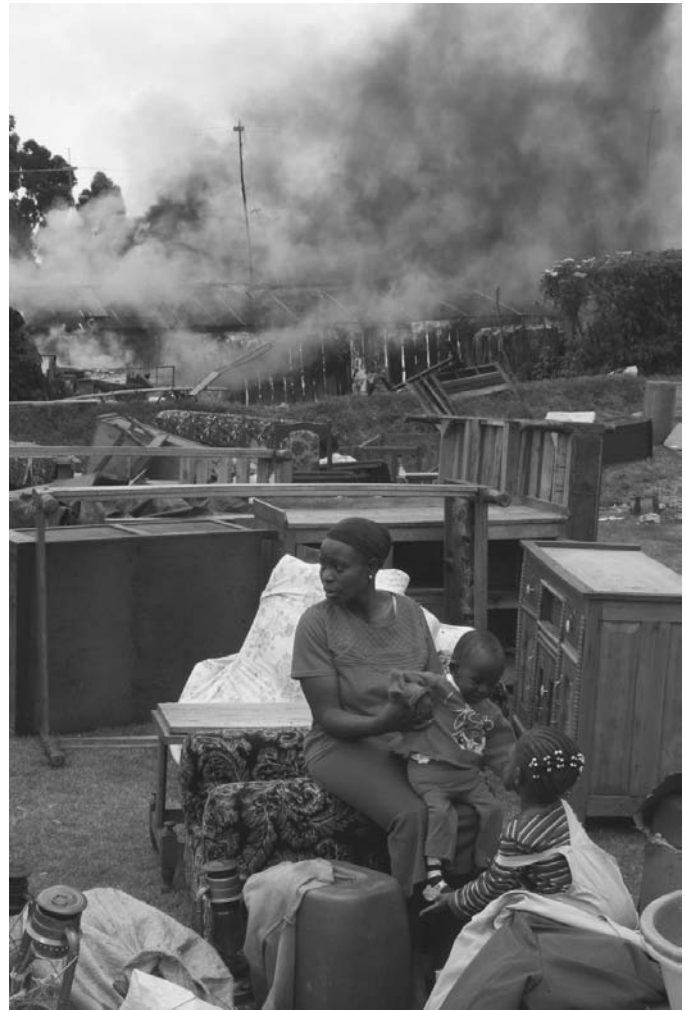
## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

See "Entertainment and Recreation."

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Luo consider their most pressing social problem to be their perceived isolation from Kenya national politics. Kenya today is characterized by a multi-party democracy. One of the consequences of the multiparty system in Kenya is that there is a tendency for members of a specific ethnic group to align themselves with a given party. This relationship between ethnicity and politics is, of course, not unique to Kenya and is found in most multi-ethnic nation-states practicing democracy. The Luo dominate within the Ford-Kenya party, one of the several opposition parties presently in Kenya. Within the Ford-Kenya party, there are Luo factions that vie for party leadership. During the colonial era and since independence, the Luo have been somewhat isolated from national leadership even though they are the second-largest ethnic group in the country. The first vice-president of Kenya, and the most significant politician in post-colonial Luo politics, was Oginga Odinga. He was instrumental in initiating the multi-party movement in Kenya in the early 1990s, after his isolation (since independence) from participation in national governments by those in power. It is felt that his isolation was intentional by those seeking to keep the Luo out of power. Another prominent Luo politician was Tom Mboya, widely admired around the world. He was killed by an assassin's bullet in 1969 while serving as the Minister of Economic Planning and Development and Secretary General of the Ruling KANU Party. His death prevented him from succeeding President Kenyatta as the president along the lines felt likely to have occurred by his numerous supporters. His death was considered by many Luo to have been politically motivated.

Specific social problems follow from what the Luo consider to be marginal political participation in Kenya. It is believed that economic development in Western Kenya is low as part of a concerted effort to isolate them from development projects. It is, in fact, true that the districts where Luo live in the west are marginal on most indicators of development. Roads are usually badly in need of repair, rates of HIV infection are comparatively high, food shortages are frequent, and infant mortality is among the highest in the country. Typical of this situation is that, although Kisumu is on the shores of Lake Victoria, nevertheless it suffers from an acute water shortage. Moreover, the municipal water supply is so badly treated that residents suffer from water-borne diseases, such as typhoid fever, amoebic dysentery, common dysentery, and diarrhea. Typically, tourism has bypassed Luoland and Lake Victoria in favor of Nairobi and the coastal area of Kenya. This is so even though Lake Victoria has many features of interest to tourists such as hippopotami, freshwater fish, and cultural attractions. All in all, there is little doubt that the facts of marginalization are difficult to deny, in spite of differences of opinion over their causes.



*A woman from the Luo tribe sits with two children on some of the belongings they salvaged from their home. Members of the Luo tribe set fire to homes alleging they were owned by a Kikuyu. At least ten lives were lost in renewed political and ethnic clashes in western Kenya in early 2008. (Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images)*

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Just like their neighboring Luhya, the Luo people follow a patrilineal system of kinship. Gender roles are assigned to men and women in ways that create, reinforce, and perpetuate the relationships in which males are viewed as superior and women are viewed as subordinate. Patriarchy in the Luo context has traditionally ensured that women cannot pose a challenge to male dominance. Luo boys and girls are conditioned to behave in certain ways and to play different roles in society. The Luo people have distinct cultural practices governing the gender division of labor, marriage, and women's access to resources. For example, women are supposed to do most of the domestic chores, such as fetching firewood, cooking, taking care of children, and also farm work. Because of the high rate of male out-migration, an estimated 30–60% of households are headed by females, who have to single-handedly farm their fields in the absence of men.

Kenya as a whole ranks poorly in the Gender Gap Index in terms of women's economic participation, educational attainment, health, political empowerment, maternity and child-bearing, earnings, and basic rights. The AIDS epidemic has also taken a toll among both men and women in Luoland, especially in the main urban center, Kisumu. In short, gender empowerment and equality constitute the major gender issues among the Luo.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni)

# MAASAI

**PRONUNCIATION:** MAH-sigh

**LOCATION:** Kenya, Tanzania

**POPULATION:** Approximately 880,000

**LANGUAGE:** Maa (Olmaa)

**RELIGION:** Traditional beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans; Tanzanians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Maasai are thought of as the quintessential cattle herders of Africa, yet they have not always been herders, nor are they all today. Because of population growth, development schemes, and land shortages, cattle raising is in decline. However, cattle still represent "the breath of life" for many Maasai. When given the chance, they choose herding above all other livelihoods. For many Westerners, the Maasai are Hollywood's noble savage—fierce, proud, handsome, graceful of bearing, and elegantly tall. Hair smeared red with ochre, they either carry spears or stand on one foot tending cattle. These depictions oversimplify the changes in Maasai life during the 20th century. Today, Maasai cattle herders may also be growing maize or wheat, rearing Guinea fowl, raising ostriches, or may be involved in tourism and ecosystem management.

In precolonial times, Africans, Arabs, and European explorers considered the Maasai formidable warriors for their conquests of neighboring peoples and their resistance to slavery. Caravan traders traveling from the coast to Uganda crossed Maasailand with trepidation. However, in 1880–81, when the British inadvertently introduced rinderpest (a cattle disease), the Maasai lost 80% of their stock. The colonizers further disrupted the life of the Maasai by moving them to a reserve in southern Kenya. While the British encouraged them to adopt European ways, they also advised them to retain their traditions. These contradictions resulted in benign neglect and allowed the Maasai to develop almost on their own. However, drought, famine, cattle diseases, and intratribal warfare in the 19th century greatly weakened the Maasai and nearly annihilated certain tribes.

Since Kenyan and Tanzanian independence in the 1960s, land tenure has changed dramatically. Modern ranching, wheat schemes, and demarcated grazing boundaries in the Maasai district are becoming common. Wage and cash economies are replacing barter. Consequently, the Maasai have begun to integrate themselves into the modern economies and mainstream societies of Kenya and Tanzania, albeit with considerable reluctance.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Maasai are thought to have originated in the Upper Nile Valley. Their myths speak of ascending from a broad and deep crater bounded on all sides by a steep escarpment. By the 1600s they had begun migrating with their herds into the vast arid, savannah-like region of East Africa straddling the Kenya-Tanzania border. Presently, their homeland is bounded by Lake Victoria to the west and Mt. Kilimanjaro to the east. Maasailand extends some 500 km (310 mi) from north to south and about 300 km (186 mi) at its widest point.

In 1994 estimates placed the Maasai population inside Kenya's borders at 450,000 inhabitants, and 430,000 Maasai living in Tanzania (1993 estimate). The greater Maasai nation comprises several cultural groups, which the Maasai have absorbed through conquest or assimilation. Besides their rural lifestyle, their language—Olmaa—unites them.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Maasai are speakers of the Maa language, which is spoken as well by the Samburu and the Chamus living in central Kenya. Maa is a Nilotic language whose origins have been traced to the east of present-day Juba in southern Sudan. More than 20 variants of Maa exist, grouped into a northern cluster and a southern cluster. The Maasai belong to the southern group and refer to their tongue as Olmaa.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Maasai legends and folktales tell much about the origin of present-day Maasai beliefs, including their ascent from a crater, the emergence of the first Maasai prophet-magician (Lai-bon), the killing of an evil giant (Oltatuani) who raided Maasai herds, and the deception by Olonana of his father to obtain the blessing reserved for his older brother, Senteu (a legend similar to the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau).

One myth of origin reveals much about present-day Maasai relations between the sexes. It holds that the Maasai are descended from two equal and complementary tribes, one consisting strictly of females, and the other of males. The women's tribe, the Moroyok, raised antelopes, including the eland, which the Maasai claim to have been the first species of cattle. Instead of cattle, sheep, and goats, the women had herds of gazelles. Zebras transported their goods during migrations, and elephants were their devoted friends, tearing down branches and bringing them to the women for home and corral building. The elephants also swept the antelope corrals clean. However, while the women bickered and quarreled, their herds escaped. Even the elephants left them because they could not satisfy the women with their work.

According to the same myth, the Morwak—the men's tribe—raised cattle, sheep, and goats. The men occasionally met women in the forest for trysts. The children from these unions would live with their mothers, but the boys would join their fathers when they grew up. When the women lost their herds, they went to live with the men, and, in doing so, gave up their freedom and their equal status. From that time, they depended on men, had to work for them, and were subject to their authority.

### 5 RELIGION

In contrast to the predominantly Christian populations of Kenya and Tanzania, the Maasai traditionally place themselves at the center of their universe as God's chosen people. Like other African religions, that of the Maasai holds that one high God (Enkai) created the world, forming three groups of people. The first were the Torrobo (Okiek pygmies), a hunting and gathering people of small stature to whom God gave honey and wild animals for sustenance. The second were the neighboring Kikuyu, cultivators to whom God gave seed and grain. The third were the Maasai, to whom He gave cattle, which came to earth sliding down a long rope linking heaven and earth. While the pygmies were destined to endure bee stings, and the Kikuyu



famines and floods, the Maasai received the noble gift of raising cattle. A Torrobo, jealous of the Maasai's gift of cattle, cut the "umbilical cord" between heaven and earth. For many Maasai, the center of their world remains their cattle, which furnish food, clothing, and shelter.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The traditional Maasai calendar has no designated holidays. It is divided into 12 months belonging to three main seasons: *Nkokua* (the long rains), *Oloirurujujuj* (the drizzling season), and *Oltumuret* (the short rains). The names of the months are very descriptive. For example, the second month of the drizzling season is *Kujorok*, meaning "The whole countryside is beautifully green, and the pasture lands are likened to a hairy caterpillar."

Maasai ceremonial feasts for circumcision, excision, and marriage offer occasions for festive community celebrations, which may be considered holidays. As the Maasai are integrated into modern Kenyan and Tanzanian life, they also participate in secular state holidays.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Life for the Maasai is a series of conquests and tests involving the endurance of pain. For men, there is a progression from childhood to warriorhood to elderhood. At the age of four, a child's lower incisors are taken out with a knife. Young boys test their will by burning themselves on their arms and legs with hot coals. As they grow older, they submit to tattooing on

the stomach and the arms, enduring hundreds of small cuts into the skin.

Ear piercing for both boys and girls comes next. The cartilage of the upper ear is pierced with hot iron. When this heals, a hole is cut in the ear lobe and gradually enlarged by inserting rolls of leaves or balls made of wood or mud. Nowadays plastic film canisters may serve this purpose. The bigger the hole in the lobe, the better. Those dangling to the shoulders are considered ideal.

Circumcision (for boys) and excision (for girls) is the next stage, and the most important event in a young Maasai's life. It is a father's ultimate duty to ensure that his children undergo this rite. The family invites relatives and friends to witness the ceremonies, which may be held in special ceremonial villages called *imanyat*. The *imanyat* dedicated to circumcision of boys are called *nkang oo ntaritik* ("villages of little birds"). After completing the prerequisite requirements, the young warriors establish a village camp some miles away, called a *manyata*, where they will live with their mothers and sisters.

Circumcision itself involves much physical pain and tests a youth's courage. If they flinch during the act, boys will bring shame and dishonor to themselves and their family. At a minimum, the members of their age group will ridicule them and they will pay a fine of one head of cattle. However, if a boy shows great bravery, he receives gifts of cattle and sheep.

Girls must endure an even longer and more painful ritual, which prepares them for childbearing. (Girls who become pregnant before excision are banished from the village and stigmatized throughout their lives.) After passing this test of courage, women say they are afraid of nothing. The guests celebrate the successful completion of these rites by drinking great quantities of mead and dancing. The boys are now ready to become warriors, and the girls ready to bear a new generation of warriors. In a few months, the young woman's future husband will come to pick her up and bring her with him to live with his family.

After passing the tests of childhood and circumcision, boys become young warriors and must fulfill a civic requirement similar to military service. They live for periods of up to several months in the bush, where they learn to overcome pride, egotism, and selfishness. They share their most prized possessions, their cattle, with other members of the community. However, they must also spend time in the village, where they sacrifice their cattle for ceremonies and offer gifts of cattle to new households. This stage of development matures a warrior and teaches him *nkaniet* (respect for others), and he learns how to contribute to the welfare of his community. The stage of "young warriorhood" ends with the *eunoto* rite, with which a man ends his periodic sojourns in the bush and returns to his village, putting his acquired wisdom to use for the good of the community.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

To control the vices of pride, jealousy, and selfishness, each child belongs to an "age set" from birth and must obey the rules governing relationships within the set, between sets, and between the sexes. Warriors, for example, must share a girlfriend with at least one of their age-group companions. All Maasai of the same sex are considered equal within their age group.

Many tensions exist between children and adults, elders and warriors, and men and women, but the Maasai control these with taboos. A daughter, for example, must not be present while her father is eating. Only non-excised girls may accompany warriors into their forest havens, where they partake of meat (see Food). Though the younger warriors may wish to dominate their communities, they must follow rules and respect their elders' advice.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Maasai living conditions may seem primitive, but the Maasai are generally proud of their unencumbered lifestyle and do not seek to replace it with urban amenities. Nevertheless, the old ways are undergoing transformation. Formerly, cattle hides were used to make walls and roofs of temporary homes during migrations. They were also used to sleep on. Permanent and semi-permanent homes resembling igloos were built of sticks and supple branches plastered with mud, and with cow dung on the roofs. They were windowless and leaked considerably. Nowadays, tin roofs and other amenities are fairly common replacements for these Spartan dwellings.

Generally, the Maasai are remarkably healthy people. Their resistance to disease stems in part from their use of medicinal herbs and bark and their dietary discipline, which includes judicious use of cattle fat. Babies receive a spoon of beef or sheep's fat daily from birth to weaning, which strengthens them and immunizes them from deadly diseases. In some Maasai groups, when a cow dies of anthrax, husbands of pregnant women give their wives a piece of the infected animal's tumor, which inoculates the fetus. The mother is likely to survive because she also was inoculated before birth. This allows the Maasai to eat the meat of sick cattle, including those that have died of anthrax, which is normally fatal to humans. Warriors regularly consume a soup made of medicinal bark to thwart common ailments.

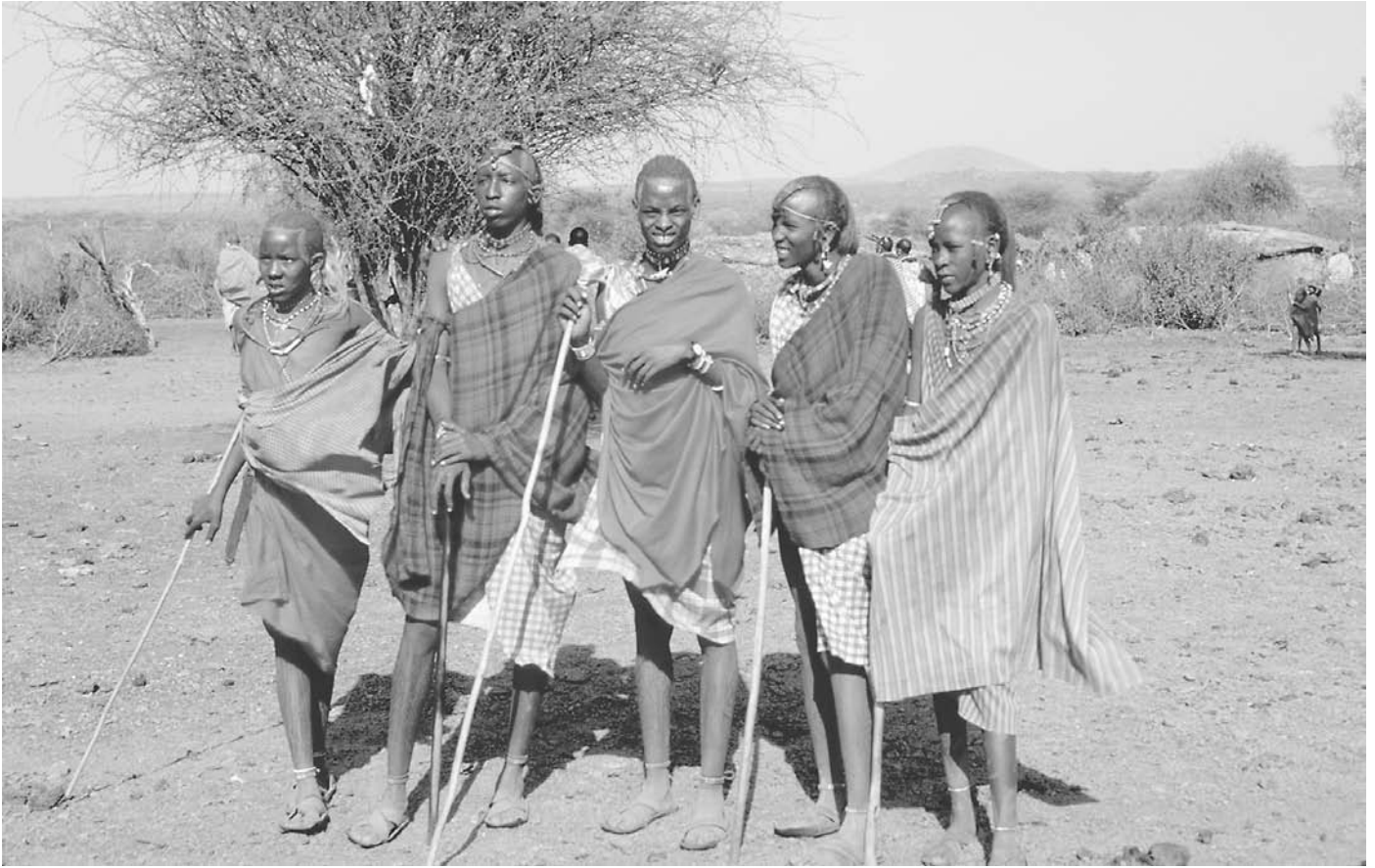
Today a few paved trunk roads and many passable dirt roads make Maasailand accessible. The Maasai travel by bus and bush taxi much like their fellow citizens when they need to cover sizable distances.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Maasai are a patriarchal society. Men typically speak for women and make decisions in the family. Male elders decide community matters. Until the age of seven, boys and girls are raised together. Mothers remain close to their children, especially their sons, throughout life. Once circumcised, sons usually move away from their father's village, but they still heed his advice. Girls learn to fear and respect their fathers and must never be near them when they eat.

One's age-mates are considered extended family and required to help each other. Agemates share nearly everything, even their wives. Girls are often promised in marriage long before they are of age. However, even long-term arrangements are subject to veto by male family members.

Once married, a woman leaves her family to live with her husband, automatically becoming the wife of her husband's age-mates, too. Thus, a warrior may arrive in a village, ask for a man of his age group, and oblige him to find other lodgings for the night. The wife receives the stranger with hospitality, takes care of his staff, knife, and other effects, and offers him milk and the bed across from hers. She may agree to sleep with him,



*Maasai at a wedding in Kenya. (David Johnson)*

but she has the right to refuse. Children from these unions belong to the woman and her husband.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Maasai apparel varies by period, age, sex, and place. Traditionally, shepherds wore capes made from calf hides, and women wore capes of sheepskin. The Maasai decorated these with glass beads. In the 1960s, the Maasai began to replace animal-skin capes with bolts of commercial cotton cloth. Women tied these around their shoulders in different ways as capes (*shuka*) and perhaps over a dress or tied around the waist. The Maasai color of preference is red, although black, blue, striped, and red checkered cloth is also worn, as are multicolored African designs. Elderly women still prefer red, dyeing their own cloth with ocher. Until recently, men and women wore sandals cut from cow hides, which now are increasingly replaced by tire-strip sandals and plastic sandals and shoes.

Young women and girls, and especially young warriors, spend much time primping, and styles change with successive age groups. The Maasai excel in designing jewelry, and they decorate their bodies through such practices as tattooing, head shaving, and hair styling with ocher and sheep's fat, which they also smear on their bodies. A variety of colors are used to create body art. Women and girls wear elaborate bib-like bead necklaces, as well as headbands, and earrings, which are both colorful and strikingly intricate. When ivory was plentiful, warriors wore ivory bands on their upper arms much

like the ancient Egyptians. Jewelry plays an important role in courtship.

### **12 FOOD**

As with shelter and clothing, the Maasai depend on cattle for both food and cooking utensils. Cattle ribs make stirring sticks, spatulas, and spoons. The horns are used as butter dishes and the large horns as cups for drinking mead.

The traditional Maasai diet consists of six basic foods: meat, blood, milk, fat, honey, and tree bark. Wild game (except the eland), chicken, fish, and salt are ritually forbidden. Allowable meats include roasted and boiled beef, goat, and mutton. Both fresh and curdled milk are drunk, and blood is drunk at special times: after giving birth, after circumcision and excision, or while recovering from an accident. It may be tapped warm from the throat of a cow, or drunk in its coagulated form. It can also be mixed with fresh or soured milk or drunk with therapeutic bark soups (*motori*). It is from blood that the Maasai obtain salt, a necessary ingredient in the human diet. People of delicate health and babies eat liquid sheep's fat to gain strength.

Honey is obtained from the Torrobo tribe and is a prime ingredient in mead, a fermented beverage that only the elders may drink. In recent times, fermented maize with millet yeast or a mixture of fermented sugar and baking powder have become the primary ingredients of mead.



The Maasai generally take two meals a day, in the morning and at night, following an unusual pattern dictated by the dietary prohibition on mixing milk and meat. They drink milk for ten days—as much as they want morning and night—and eat meat and bark soup for several days in between. Some exceptions to this regime exist. Children and old people may eat corn meal or rice porridge and drink tea with sugar. For warriors, however, the sole source of true nourishment is cattle. They consume meat in their forest hideaways (*olpul*), usually near a shady stream far from the observation of women. Their preferred meal is a mixture of meat, blood, and fat (*munono*), which is thought to give great strength.

Many taboos govern Maasai eating habits. Men must not eat meat that has in any way been in contact with women or handled by an uncircumcised boy after it has been cooked. Older members do not eat meat belonging to younger ones unless they are “bribed” for the honor. A new husband does not eat his bride’s food until she “bribes” him by giving him a heifer.

### 13 EDUCATION

There is a wide gap between Western schooling and Maasai traditional education, by which children and young adults learned to overcome fear, endure pain, and assume adult tasks. For example, despite the dangers of predators, snakes, and rogue elephants, boys would herd cattle alone with the blessing of their fathers. If they encountered a buffalo or lion, they were supposed to call for help. However, they sometimes reached the pinnacle of honor by killing lions on their own. Following such a display of courage, they became models for the other boys, and their heroics were likely to become immortalized in the songs of the women and girls.

Prior to independence, school participation gradually increased among the Maasai, but there were few practical rewards for formal education and therefore little incentive to send a child to school. Formal schooling was primarily of use to those involved in religion, agriculture, or politics. Since independence, as the traditional livelihood of the Maasai became less secure, school participation rates climbed dramatically.

More recently, there has been a concerted push by government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to enroll Maasai children in schools and assimilate the Maasai into mainstream Kenyan and Tanzanian society. The elders, who have been at the forefront of resistance to change, fear that schools have become tools to strip the Maasai of traditional respect for and unity of their culture. Those who embrace modern education argue that the Maasai must adapt quickly or die.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Maasai have a rich collection of oral literature that includes myths, legends, folktales, riddles, and proverbs. These are passed down through the generations (*see* Folklore and Entertainment and recreation). The Maasai are also prolific composers. Women are seldom found at a loss for melodies and words when some heroic action by a warrior inspires praise. They also improvise teasing songs, work songs for milking and for plastering roofs, and songs with which to entreat their traditional god (Enkai) for rain and other needs.

### 15 WORK

Labor among traditional pastoral Maasai is clearly divided. The man’s duty is to his cattle. He must protect them and find them the best pasturage possible and the best watering holes. Women raise children, maintain the home, cook, and do the milking. They also take care of calves and clean, sterilize and decorate calabashes (gourds). It is the women’s prerogative to offer milk to the men and to visitors.

Children help parents with their tasks. A boy begins herding at the age of four by looking after lambs and young calves, and by the time he is 12, he may be able to care for cows and bulls and move sheep and cattle to new pastures. Similarly, the girls help their mothers with domestic chores such as drawing water, gathering firewood, and patching roofs. Nowadays, many Maasai perform a mixture of traditional and modern workforce labor, including ranching, conducting tourists to Maasai villages, and limited agriculture.

### 16 SPORTS

While Maasai may take part in soccer, volleyball, and basketball in school or in nontraditional settings, their own culture has little that resembles Western organized sports. Young children find time to join in games such as playing tag, but adults find little time for sports, or “horsing around.” Warding off enemies and killing lions are sports in their own right.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Ceremonies such as the *eunoto*, when warriors return to their villages as mature men, offer occasions for sustained partying and much merriment. Ordinarily, however, recreation is much more subdued. After the men return to their camp from a day’s herding, they typically tell stories of their exploits. Young girls sing and dance for the men. In the villages, elders enjoy inviting their age-mates to their houses or to rustic pubs (*muratina manyatta*) for a drink of beer.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Maasai make decorative bead jewelry for necklaces, earrings, head bands, and wrist and ankle bracelets. These are always fashionable, though styles change as age-groups invent new designs. It is possible for the astute observer to detect the year of a given piece by its age-group design. Maasai also excel in wood carvings, and increasingly produce tourist art as a supplementary source of income.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In the recent past, cattle theft and intertribal warfare were major social problems for the Maasai. Today, the main dilemma they face concerns adaptation to economic and social change. Key issues include land encroachment, formal schooling for children, jobs and skills development, and conserving traditional ways. Threats to their pastoral way of life have created a great deal of tension within the Maasai community, and in the foreseeable future, Maasai will struggle with the challenges of acculturation and assimilation. The Maasai may fear losing their children to Western schooling, but a modern education has increasingly become a necessity for the Maasai in order to remain competitive with their neighbors.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Male dominance in Maasai culture is enshrined in myths and folktales (see Folklore). The more benign aspects of this phenomenon are manifested in a traditional division of labor: women raise children, tend house, gather firewood, carry water, do the milking, cook (most foods) and serve guests. The taboos regarding what women can eat and do (see *Food*) are further indications of this subservience, while the woman's role in early marriage and her relationship to her husband's cohorts reveal how female submissiveness is embedded in Maasai thinking. Nonetheless, there is an abiding respect between men and women and boys and girls in Maasai culture, which has held the society together for centuries. As more Maasai children attend formal schools, and are exposed to ideas from outside the traditional sphere, gender relations will change. Whether they will reflect those of the broader Kenyan and Tanzanian societies around them, or whether they will take a different tack remains to be seen.

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—by R. Groelsema

# MALAGASY

**PRONUNCIATION:** mahl-uh-GAH-see

**LOCATION:** Madagascar

**POPULATION:** 20 million

**LANGUAGE:** Malagasy (Merina); French

**RELIGION:** Traditional beliefs; Christianity; Islam; animism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The origins of the Malagasy people remain a mystery. Scholars believe the Malagasy are a kaleidoscopic mix of Indonesian, Malayo-Polynesian, and African descendants. It is not known where the original people, the *Vazimba*, came from, nor where they are today.

Supposedly, the Indonesians were the first arrivals. Then came the Arabs, the Southern Indians, and merchants from the Persian Gulf. South and East Africans followed, and eventually Europeans, starting with the Portuguese, then the Spanish, the British, and finally the French, who conquered the island in 1895.

Today, the Malagasy population of 20 million people is divided into 18 identifiable ethnic groups in addition to the Comorans, the Karane (Indo-Pakistan), and the Chinese. The white people are either *zanathan*, a French term, local-born, or *vazaha* (newcomers).

Merina live in the central highlands of the island's capital, Antananarivo or Tanananrivo. Their home region is called Imerina. They are thought to have come from the east of Mangoro or from the northeast, pushing back, intermarrying with, and finally conquering the original inhabitants, Vazimba.

The Merina society is hierarchical and extremely structured. Previously they were divided into three main castes: the *Andriana*, the nobles; the *Hova*, freemen who are the commoners; and the *Andevo*, slaves descended from former slaves. Today, the caste division is no longer practiced or is not obvious.

The Merina ruled Madagascar before the French assumed control in 1895. They are usually highly educated and represent the modern middle class and the intellectual elite. They can be found scattered around the island, except in the extreme north or south and a portion of the west coast, as businessmen, doctors, ministers, managers of plantations, technicians, and government officials.

Betsimisaraka, "the many inseparables" or "the many who do not want to separate," are the second-largest ethnic group, found in the east. They are cultivators. They reside in isolated villages because of differences in dialect, in ritual or local political office, in cultural practice, and in material culture. Their political organization is village-based.

Betsileo, "the numberless invincibles," are a peaceful and hardworking peasant tribe of the central highlands around Fianarantsoa or the east coast of Madagascar. They are skilled craftsmen known for their mastery at managing water for their irrigated and terraced rice and cassava fields on poor soil. They share customs, beliefs, and historical traditions similar to the Merina, but are less warlike and less well organized.

Tsimihety are "the people who do not cut their hair"—a phrase that could be a sign of mourning or a sign that they did not observe hierarchy. It may also be derived from the fact that during the 19th century, facing Marofelana bandits, Tsimihety



men let their hair grow long so that they might be mistaken for women and would not be attacked. They reside in the north of Madagascar. They have 40 localized kinship groups, the largest being the Antandrona, the Maromena, and the Maromainty.

The Tsimihety are often referred to as mobile semi-nomadic people because it is their custom to move around for freedom. Peter J. Wilson, in his book *Freedom by Hair's Breadth: Tsimihety in Madagascar*, observes: "Through this mobility they could express their sense of freedom and defiance of outside authority because they could always exercise what Albert O. Hirshman has called the "exit option." They are egalitarians who do not believe in the ownership or transmission of land; rather they believe that individuals are stewards with a responsibility to manage the land on behalf of their ancestors. Land belonged to those who cultivated it or to those who have ancestors buried in a particular area."

Sakalava, "dwellers in long valleys," are a tall tribe of dark brown people, formerly the most powerful of the tribes. Majunga, now called Mahajunga, is their most important city. They are associated with the Islamic groups of Madagascar's southeast. Europeans from around the coast, communities already established in the southwest, and migrant people from the eastern seaboard form the Volamena (literally, "red silver" or "gold") royal lineage.

Anteifsy, "people of the sands," lived originally on the African continent and live in the southern end of the east coast of Farafangana, in Fianarantsoa Province. They live in three strata:

nobles, commoners, and descendants of slaves. Members of each stratum marry solely within their own group.

Antandroy, "the people of the thorny brambles," are a dark-skinned, primitive, and attractive tribe who live in the arid south around Ambovombe in the east. They are a branch of the Sakalava of the west coast and worked readily for colonists all over the island. They are a large, cohesive group with a uniform set of customs.

Tanala, "the people of the forests," live in areas where forests have been cut down on the slopes inland from Manakara on the east coast. They are divided into two subgroups—the Tanala Menabe and the Tanala Ikongo—with the Menabe living in less desirable areas. The Tanala lack political organization but are skilled hunters, food gatherers, and woodsmen.

Anteimoro, "the people of the coast," live in the region of Vohipeno and Manakara on the east coast, south of the center of the island. Some have Arab blood, and traces of an Arab culture exist. They are the only group that knew how to write before the London Missionary Society arrived in Madagascar in 1818. Unique contributions from the Anteimoro include manuscripts dealing with history and religious matters, written in the Malagasy language using Arabic script. They claim to be descended from Arabs who arrived by boats from Mecca in the 13th century, married local women, and founded a kingdom.

Their society is divided into castes, with the upper level claiming to be direct descendants of Arab settlers. Their culture also is divided by age, with each group being assigned specific functions and a particular status for a given number of years. They are known for the *ombiasy* (divine healers) and *sikidy* (fortune tellers).

Bara is a name with no certain meaning. The Bara are nomads of the southern highlands around Ihoisy and Betroka. They are artists, sculptors, dancers, cattle rustlers, and athletes. They are divided into four kinship groups living in different areas: Bara-Be, Bara-Iantsantsa, Bara-Vinda, and the Bara-Antevondro. They once considered agriculture degrading work; however, one can find some Baras working as sharecroppers on tobacco plantations in Miandrivazo or Malaimbandy.

Sihanaka, "those who wandered in the marshes," are found around Lake Alaotra, the largest fresh water lake on the island north of Antananarivo, west of Tamatave in Tamatave Province. They work as farmers, cattle herders, and fisherman, and are known to drain swamps to make rich agricultural land. They have features similar to the Merina and live next to them; however, they refuse to mix.

Antanosy, "the people of the island," are dark-skinned, flat-nosed, thick-lipped people. They were the first to drive the French settlers out of Fort Dauphin, in and after 1643. The Antanosy were divided by chiefdoms belonging to the noble class.

Mahafaly, "those who put taboos on things," are a dark-skinned, primitive tribe living around Ampanihy. Their kings were related to the kings of the Sakalava tribe before Madagascar was conquered. They are known for their mastery in carving the long wood staffs used to garnish their tombs.

Maka or Masombiky, "people of Mozambique," live on the west coast across from Africa, and are the only truly African descendants of the imported slaves, perhaps brought from the Mozambique Channel by Arabs from Zanzibar.

Bezanozano means "many little braids"—a name referring to their traditional hairstyle. In many ways, they resemble the

Betsimisaraka, with whom they live intermingled in the subprefecture Moramanga. They are herders and woodsmen.

Antakarana “people of the rocks,” lived in the northern tip on Diego-Suarez, now Antsiranana (Cap d’Ambre to Sambirano River). They are a heterogeneous group with mixed Sakalava, Betsimisaraka, and Arab ancestry. During Merina conquests, part of the group settled on the northwest coast, where they managed to preserve considerable independence. This group became Muslim, but they still maintained traditional customs dealing with family relations and burial practices. They raise cattle and also grow maize, rice, cassava, and other crops.

Antambahoako, “the descendants of Rabevahoaka,” are the smallest of the tribes. They live near Mananjary, south of the center of the east coast. They are the only ethnic group with a single common genealogy, being descended from King Raminia, who came from Mecca in the 14th century. They are no longer in contact with the Islamic world, but they retain fairly strong Muslim influences. They are divided into eight kinship groups and resemble the Betsimisaraka, whose homeland surrounds them. They are known as good fishermen and boatmen.

The Vezo are a small group of people living in the southwest part of Madagascar who, as John Mack notes in *Madagascar: Island of the Ancestors*, “do not practice circumcision, which is a central ritual elsewhere on the island, circumcision often being for men a crucial condition of access to ancestral tombs. This in itself argues for a strong African rather than Southeast Asian element in Vezo culture, and to this day they retain strong contacts with coastal peoples in Mozambique.”

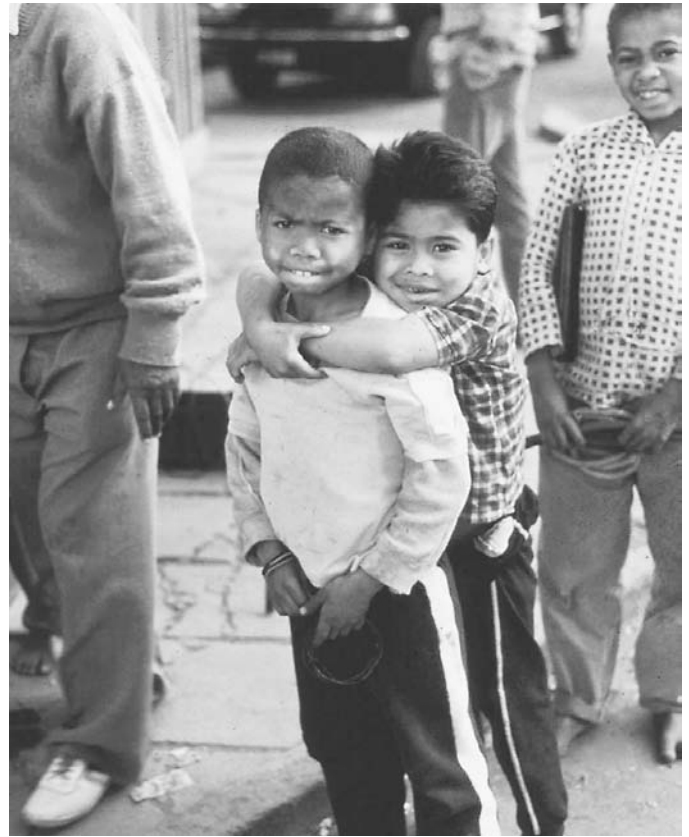
In the 1800s, three major movements among the Sakalava, the Betsimisaraka, and the Merina created an alliance. Nevertheless, tension was constant, particularly among the different ethnic groups who were “ultimate masters of adaptation.”

On 26 June 1960 Madagascar gained independence from France.

In 1993 the government changed from a Communist dictatorship to a still-adapting free market democracy. Madagascar is being pressured by economic and environmental forces on all fronts. The economy and infrastructure continue to decay due to constant corruption and political instability. Economic reforms have been erratic. Other nations seem more interested in preserving the endangered species rather than the people.

Overall, Madagascar is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, suffering from chronic malnutrition, underfunded health and education facilities, a 3% annual population growth rate, and a severe loss of forest lands accompanied by erosion.

Madagascar has six governmental administrative divisions: Antananarivo or Tananarive, Antsiranana, Fianarantsoa, Mahajanga, Toamasina, and Toliary. Elections were held in February 1997. Following those elections, President Didier Ratsiraka was reinstated chief of state. (President Ratsiraka was the president of Madagascar from mid-1975 until the end of the 1980s.) However, in the 2001 presidential elections, Marc Ravalomanana shocked most outside observers when he claimed outright victory, supplanting veteran politician and longtime president of 27 years, Ratsiraka. In the elections of May 2006, Marc Ravalomanana was once again declared the winner of the presidential elections. In April of 2007 voters in a referen-



*The Malagasy population is divided into 18 identifiable ethnic groups in addition to the Comorans, the Karane (Indo-Pakistan), and the Chinese. (Cory Langley)*

dum endorsed constitutional reforms to increase presidential powers and make English an official language. The consolidation of power by Ravalomanana has raised questions about his authoritarian tendencies.

The legislative branch of government is a bicameral Parliament which consists of a National Assembly or Assemblée Nationale and a Senate. The National Assembly consists of 127 seats, reduced from 160 seats by an April 2007 national referendum. Members are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The Senate or Senat has 100 seats; two-thirds of the seats are filled by regional assemblies and the remaining one-third of seats appointed by the president to serve four-year terms. The decentralized regional assemblies were elected in February 1997 and in the May 2006 elections.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

One billion years ago a piece of land broke away from Africa and moved southeast to become an island continent in the Indian Ocean—Madagascar. Many of the species of plants and animals found on the island became extinct or pursued separate evolutionary courses. As a result, 90% of all species on Madagascar are unique, found nowhere else in the world. Some of the unusual species that evolved are the lemurs, the tortoises, the *Aepyornis* (elephant birds), the tenrec, the chameleons, and other strange and exotic insects and birds.

Madagascar, located 250 miles off the east coast of Africa, is the fourth largest island in the world, after Greenland,

New Guinea, and Borneo. It is approximately 1,000 miles long and 360 miles wide, nearly the size of California, Oregon, and Washington combined.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Malagasy, French, and English are the country's official languages. The Malagasy language is rich in metaphor and poetic imagery and belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian family of languages. Although the Malagasy language includes many dialects, the Merina language is the official language of the state and is universally understood. The basic Malagasy vocabulary is 93% Malayo-Polynesian in origin and there is evidence of borrowings from Arabic, Bantu, Sanskrit, and Swahili.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Malagasy ancestor worship includes a celebration known as the *famadihana* (turning over the dead). Each year, ancestors' bodies are removed from the family tomb and the corpses are rewrapped in a fresh shroud cloth. Family members make special offerings to the dead ancestors on this occasion, which is accompanied by music, singing, and dancing. Malagasy do not consider death to be the absolute end to life. In fact, Malagasy believe that after death, they will continue to be interested and involved in the affairs of their family. Malagasy believe that dead family members continue to influence family decisions and are thus honored. For this reason, Malagasy tombs are usually far more substantial in construction and luxurious than the homes of the living."

Many Malagasy believe that spirits are present in nature, in trees, caves, or rock formations, on mountains, or in rivers or streams. Some also fear the *tromba*, when the spirits of the unknown dead put people into a trance and make them dance. The one who is possessed must be treated in a ritual by an *ombiasy* (a divine healer). These ombiasis are known to have supernatural forces, particularly in the area of constellations. This is why, quite often, people consult or rely on the ombiasis to look over the ill or the dying, or to decide the proper date to have a marriage, a circumcision or a *famadihana* (turning of the dead).

### 5 RELIGION

Traditional religion in Madagascar is identical with traditional culture; ancestral civilization determines values and behavior. All Malagasy believe that there is one supreme being called Zanahary (God) or Andriamanitra (Rakotozoa). There is no dogma or clergy. "Men who die 'leave to become God,' having powers with the rank they held in life," and "prayers are always asked for blessing with both Zanahary and the ancestors," observes Harold D. Nelson in his *Area Handbook for the Malagasy Republic*. He goes on: "about [half] of the population are Christians, divided almost evenly between Roman Catholics and Protestants; [there is a] small Muslim element; [the] rest [of the] population adheres to indigenous beliefs and practices in which [an] ancestor cult is [a] primary feature."

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The government of Madagascar's official holidays include the following:

January 1	New Year's Day
March 29	Memorial Day
Movable	Monday Easter
May 1	Labor Day
May 8	Ascension Day
Movable	Monday Pentecost Holiday
May 25	Unity African Organization Day (UAO)
June 26	National Day
August 15	Assumption
November 1	All Saints' Day
December 25	Christmas Day

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An important celebration of Malagasy culture is circumcision or *mamora raza*. Once a young boy is circumcised, the eldest male in the family is expected to eat the foreskin with a banana.

However, circumcision in the Tsimihety culture is a "hit or miss" situation which the circumciser, or *tsimijoro*, performs with or without parental consent. The term for this is *kiso le-hifitra*. Tsimihety do not have a celebration or feast after the procedure, but celebrate before if the ceremony is formalized. Formalization takes place when and if the boy's father invites the *tsimijoro* and his wife's brother; both males contribute a cow to the proceedings. Then, meat is distributed to the family or close affinities. At night, before the circumcision, both families sing for the happiness of the child. The operation is performed before dawn. Special powerful water, or *rano mala-za*, is poured over the penis, after which the prepuce is marked with white earth. The foreskin is then given to the wife's brother, who has to swallow it, or he might throw it over the roof of the house. The *tsimijoro* spits salted water onto the wound. After six days, the boy is thrown into a river or pond where he is bathed.

The *Vezo* do not practice circumcision, nor is female circumcision practiced in the Malagasy cultures.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

On a personal level or in one-to-one relationships, the Malagasy people are hospitable, very warm, and amicable. However, in unfamiliar surroundings with unfamiliar people, they appear to be reserved, somewhat distant, or unassertive. They are not likely to be the first to initiate a conversation and are not likely to continue a conversation.

A single handshake and a "hello" is the proper greeting when people are introduced. A handshake is also used when saying goodbye. Among family and close friends, a kiss on both cheeks is exchanged at every meeting, regardless of the number of people present or how often they have met during the preceding days. The custom is for women and the young to initiate greetings when they meet elders.

A polite but simple refusal of an offering, especially food or a dance from an invited guest, is considered rude and pompous. It is better to fabricate excuses than to simply refuse politely. It is also considered embarrassing if a host does not offer a visitor a chance to sit and have something to eat and drink.

Regardless of the situation, elders and seniors are always right, and women are expected to take the modest position, particularly in public.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The high incidence of disease in Madagascar is a result of a nutritionally inadequate diet and insufficient medical care and sanitation practices. Malaria, schistosomiasis, and tuberculosis are common diseases, along with leprosy, bubonic plague, diphtheria, typhoid, venereal infections, tetanus, hepatitis, and gastroenteric parasites.

Madagascar is considered a third world country, and basic essential necessities such as electricity, clean water, stable housing, and transportation are hard to come by for the average citizen.

When walking the streets of Madagascar, it is evident that the people are sharply divided between an upper class and a lower class. A middle class virtually does not exist. Many upper-class homes are fenced and guarded 24 hours a day and filled with maids who work at the beck and call of their owners.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The strong and significant social value of Malagasy culture is summed up in the word *fiavanana*, which refers to both kinship and solidarity. As Nelson observes, "Family loyalties override all others, and help with expenses occasioned by marriages, funerals, and sickness continues to be a moral imperative." Help is never regarded as an exchange of economic services but, instead, as the demonstration of a moral link between kin, related or not, especially in times of death.

Most Malagasy social activities revolve around family—which usually consists of three generations—whether family members may live in one household or in a number of households. The head of the local family is usually the oldest male or father, who makes major decisions that affect the family interests, represents the family in dealings with the outside world, and reprimands those who act counter to the welfare and reputation of the family. In some instances, the oldest female plays these roles.

But the powers of the eldest male have diminished in the cities, where he can no longer protect family members as he would have in the past, or where the young can escape his control. Nevertheless, parental control remains stronger in Madagascar than in Western countries. If a father is deceased, then the eldest son assumes the role of the father and is often referred to as "father" or *dada* by the younger siblings. Daughters are required to perform household duties and to care for younger siblings, while sons go to school or are allowed to play.

In general, women are expected to care for family and domestic affairs. They are less educated than men and are hardly consulted in the decisions which affect the future of the society. They are discouraged from taking jobs away from men and are rejected from traditional male-dominated occupations. In a nutshell, women are subordinate to men, and younger Malagasy are subordinate to their elders.

An ancient ideal of having seven boys and seven girls per household is now regarded as a joke—a common thing to say

to a couple who has just married. A more modern expectation nowadays is four children per household.

Most communities are represented by a *fokon'olona*, a village council in which older generations always take precedence over younger generations. They lead meetings and make final decisions. In short, the senior male is the final authority.

In many ethnic groups, there is a tendency to marry within one's kinship group and within one's social rank. Other groups, such as the Tsimihety and the southeastern groups, insist on marrying outside the kinship group to forge stronger links with other villages. Merina marriages between close kinsmen keep land inheritance by both sons and daughters continuous.

A ceremony of purification is performed in cases of marriage between close kin. Marriage between the children of two sisters is considered most incestuous of all, because it is the mother, not the father, who gives *ra* (blood) to the child according to Malagasy beliefs.

Nelson tells us, "Polygamy, which formerly was frequent, has almost disappeared except for the Muslim Comorians and some people in the south and southwest, such as the Antandroy, Antanosy, Mahafaly, and Antaisaka." However, in Tsimihety culture, marriage is either expanded or not, and trial marriages are practiced because of their belief in partnership. Adolescents are free to have sexual relations in hopes of finding someone they would like to marry. Once the adolescents have chosen, the parents are informed, and the parents inform senior kin. Then discrete inquiry by relatives on both sides begins. First, as Peter Wilson describes in *Freedom by Hair's Breadth*, they "try to find whether there already existed a kinship relationship between the two individuals, and, second, whether the households and extended family were diligent or slovenly and whether the prospective spouse was likely to have been brought up well to perform his or her role. The usual method was to contact a kinsperson who was likely to know if the person was fit or not."

Malagasy marriages are preceded by lengthy discussions, or *kabary*, by a representative from both families. As a gesture, the groom's family will give a few thousand Malagasy francs or perhaps one head of cattle, which is called a *vody ondry*, to pay for the bride. This gesture also serves as a reimbursement for the expenses and hardship incurred for raising her.

Women are expected to obey their husbands, but in practice they have a great deal of independence and influence. They manage, inherit, and bequeath property and often hold the family purse strings.

## 11 CLOTHING

Many of the Malagasy have come to regard anything Western as desirable and fashionable. Therefore, the markets are full of poor-quality imported clothes and imitation Western outfits. However, traditional clothing varies throughout the island.

Common clothing items include the *lamba*, which is worn somewhat like a toga, with or without additional clothing underneath. Lambas are made of bright, multicolored Malagasy patterns that usually have a proverb printed at the bottom. In some cases, lambas are used to carry a child on the woman's back. Elder women wear white lamba made of fine silk, or raphia from the leaves of a tropical plant over their dress



A Malagasy family prepares food in Antanetikely, Madagascar. Medical teams visit this village, south of the capital, twice a year to treat children and give them measles vaccinations, doses of Vitamin A, and de-worming tablets. The government hopes this will save thousands of children a year. (AP Images/Jerome Delay)

or blouse and skirt. It is not common for the women to wear pants.

In rural areas, men wear *malabars*, dress-like shirts made of cotton woven fiber. They are usually colored in earth tones.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

In Madagascar, rice is synonymous with food. If you have not eaten rice during the day, then you have not eaten, as rice is eaten two or three times a day.

Nevertheless, the Malagasy diet varies. It is common to have leftover or fresh rice for breakfast, sometimes served with condensed milk. Lunch and dinner consists of often heaping mounds of rice topped with beef, pork, or chicken with a vegetable relish. However, beef is usually served only for a celebration or an offering. The Tsimihety eat with disinterest; the cooking is bland, unimaginative, and aesthetically impoverished.

The coffee and vanilla that Madagascar supplies to the world is hardly part of the Malagasy diet. Candy, ice cream, and cake make up a small part of part of their daily or holiday diet.

It is common for a visitor or someone important to be given a basket of uncooked rice and a live chicken. Chicken is usually served to guests rather than beef. In some of the more rural areas, the Malagasy also eat fruit bats, civet cat, and lemurs. Or, like the Tsimihety, they may snack on roasted corn, roasted in-

sects, guinea fowl, and fruit. Children in particular eat roasted beetles, grasshoppers, and grubs.

A national snack called *koba* is a paté of rice, banana, and peanut.

A typical drink is *ranompango*, which is water added to a pot after all the rice but the crust has been removed and then allowed to boil, so as to take the flavor of burnt rice. Some villages produce sugar cane fermentation for rum (*betsabetsa*) or distilled rum (*laoka*), which are mostly used for bartering or for addressing ancestors, by pouring it on the ground.

Dessert usually consists of fruit, sometimes flavored with vanilla.

Some typical Malagasy dishes include:

### *Akoho sy voanio*—Chicken and Coconut

- 1 chicken
- 1 coconut
- 2 tomatoes
- 2 onions
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 20 g of ginger
- Oil, salt, pepper

Cooking Instructions:

Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper to taste. Slice tomatoes into small cubes. Set aside.

Shred the coconut into a clean cloth. Fold the cloth around the shredded coconut. Wet the cloth using a glass of warm water. Squeeze the cloth and the shredded coconut to extract coconut milk. Discard the shredded coconut. (If obtaining a fresh coconut is not possible, you may substitute a can of unsweetened coconut milk instead.)

Add a small amount of oil to a frying pan. Sauté chicken over medium heat until cooked thoroughly.

Add onions to the pan. Continue stirring over medium heat until the onions are brown.

Add ginger, tomatoes, and garlic to pan. Sauté together briefly over medium heat.

Add coconut milk. Mix well. Reduce heat.

Simmer over low heat for 30 minutes.

Serve with rice and salad.

Serves four.

#### *Lasary Voatabia*—Tomato and Scallion Salad

In a 1-quart bowl, combine:

1 cup scallions, finely diced  
2 cups tomatoes, finely diced  
2 tablespoons water  
1 teaspoon salt  
Several drops Tabasco sauce

Stir lightly and chill.

Serve approximately 1/3 cup per portion in small dishes.

#### *Kitoza*

A popular delicacy in Madagascar in which beef is cut into strips and broiled over a charcoal fire:

Cut round steak to ¼-in thick.

Cut meat into pieces about 4 in by 2 in. Thread the strips on a fine strong cord, and hang the cord as you would a small clothesline. The meat will become quite dry in a few hours.

Put the strips over a charcoal brazier so that the meat dries to a crispness but does not burn. Remove meat immediately from the fire when it crisps.

This dish is usually eaten with a watery cornmeal mush for breakfast.

#### *Vary Amin Anana*—rice and greens

In a 4-quart saucepan:

Sauté ½ pound boneless chuck cut into ½-in cubes in 2 teaspoons oil until meat is brown on all sides.

Add 1 tomato cut into ½-in chunks.

Cook with the beef for 10 minutes.

Add 1 bunch of scallions cut into 1-in pieces

½ pound mustard greens cut into small pieces

1 bunch watercress cut into small pieces

Sauté, stirring occasionally with cover on until vegetables soften.

Add 2 cups water (or enough to cover vegetables)

1 cup rice

1 tablespoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper

Cover tightly and simmer slowly until rice is thoroughly cooked and all the liquid is absorbed.

Correct the seasoning to your taste.

*Sakay*, a hot red pepper, is usually served on the side with all Malagasy dishes.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005 over 70% of Madagascar's population ages 15 and over could read and write. The level of education achieved typically depends upon geographic area and an individual's rank and status. However, parents expect their children to reach the highest level of education possible, including a master's degree or a Ph.D. Parents commonly send their children to France or elsewhere overseas for higher education because the quality of education in Madagascar is poor.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

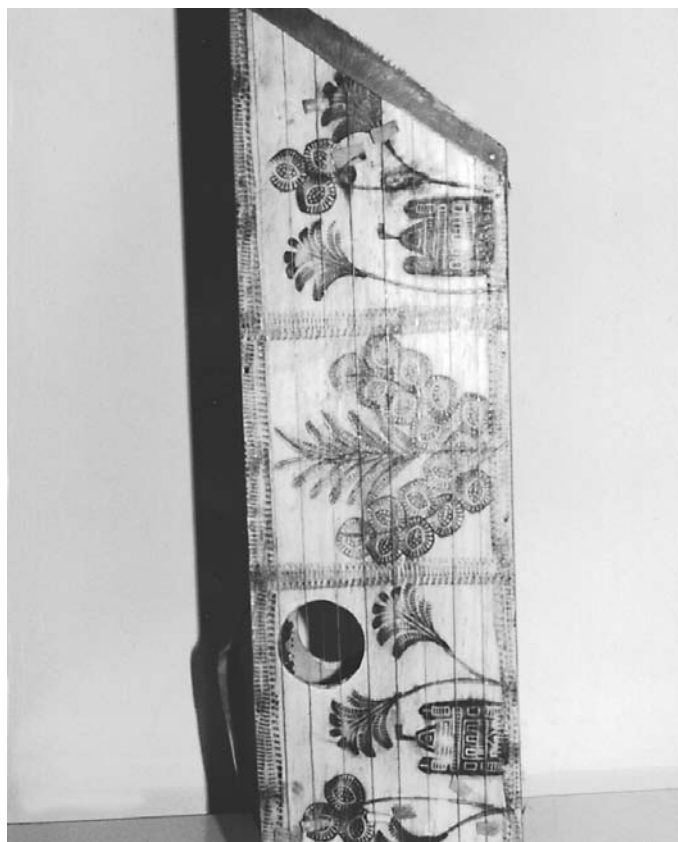
In the liner notes to the recording *Music from Madagascar*, D'Gary proclaims, "Musically speaking, Madagascar is a liberated heaven with no closed doors!" Stephane De Comarmond goes on: "Music in Madagascar can be divided in two extremes: melodic and rhythmic! The capital and High Plains of the center—most oriental-oriented—are packed with melodies and harmonies, whereas the coastal regions, which have been in regular contact with Africa, are the home of the beats." One musical form, *Salegy*, which in the 1960s was evident on the northern coast, has become widespread on the island with the introduction of non-traditional instruments such as the electric guitar, bass, and drums. Most Malagasy music and lyrics are about daily life.

Internationally recognized Malagasy musicians include: Earnest Randrianasolo, known as D'Gary, a Malagasy guitarist of the Bara culture. He is an original guitarist and musical visionary. He has been successful in transferring the music of many unique, traditional Malagasy instruments to a finger-picked acoustic guitar. One D'Gary song, "Betepotepo" (the name of a town) is about the desire to return to the home village. His themes include nostalgia for children, family, and village life. Other musicians include Dama Mahaleo, a Malagasy folk-pop superstar; Paul Bert Rahasimanana, known as Rossy, a group of 12 musicians; Jaojoby; Justin Vali, "the master player of the valiha"; Mama Sana, a 70 year-old valiha master; Poopy; Jean Emilien; Rakotofrah; and Kaolibera, a well-known guitarist. Another group is Tarika Sammy. Tarika means group, specifically referring to a performing ensemble. The Tarika Sammy group plays tradition-based music. The lead group is Sammy, or Samoela Andriamalalaharijaona. One song produced by Sammy is called "Mila Namana" ("I Need a Friend"); it is about feeling lonely and needing a friend. Another song is called "Eh Zalahy" ("Hi there!").

Classical music, such as music by Mozart and Dell, is played in the churches.

Some of Madagascar's unique melody instruments include: the vahila, a tubular harp; the marovany, a box zither; the kabosy, a cross between a guitar, mandolin, and dulcimer; the lokanag, a solid-bodied, Malagasy fiddle; Sodina-b, a flute made from bamboo ("B" indicates "big flute"); and Tahitahi, tiny flutes, usually of wood, gourd, or bamboo, used by Tarika





One of Madagascar's unique musical instruments is the vahila, a tubular harp. (Camille Killens)

Sammy as bird call sounds. Percussion instruments include: Ambio, a pair of resonant wood sticks that are struck together; and Kaimbarambo, a bundle of resonant grasses played many ways—sometimes called a kefafa, which literally means “broom.”

### 15 WORK

In *The Great Red Island*, Arthur Stratton writes: “The Malagasy laborer has none of his European or American counterpart’s inducements to work for fixed wages during certain hours of the day or the night, and regular days of the week, throughout the year—not even with a paid holiday in summer. The Malagasy needs are simple and his wants are easily satisfied. He is not concerned with climbing any sort of social, spiritual, or economic ladder to get within reach of any real or illusory goal on top. His concept of success does not goad him along to ‘improve’ himself, to keep up with the Joneses, or to buy himself some status symbols like a Cadillac or a mink coat. . . . They have no drive to occupy their minds or their hands; they like to do nothing serious at all; they have no sort of compulsion to steady occupation; they do not live from payday to payday. A Malagasy man and his family can get by very happily with highly irregular working hours amounting to no more than three or four wage-earning months of the year. The rest of the time they spend in resting up after enjoying themselves. Thus there is a chronic labor shortage in Madagascar while there is also a chronic unemployment.”

Today, the French, the Creoles from Réunion, the Chinese, the Indians, and the Merina highlanders dominate in business in Madagascar.

The Chinese are known for their integrity and are appreciated in Madagascar because, when they migrated to Madagascar, they chose to live among the Malagasy on the same footing. However, they keep to themselves and operate in a different manner.

The Indians, or *karana* on the other hand, are thought to be “slippery and an unpopular lot.” A marriage between a *karana* and a Malagasy virtually never happens; however, marriage between a Chinese person and a Malagasy is highly possible.

Women’s role in agricultural work is often more arduous than the men’s, including water carrying, wood gathering, and rice pounding, much of it to compensate for inadequate technical services in the economy. Special roles in planting and cultivation, marketing surplus crops, preparing food, and domestic crafts keep women occupied throughout the day and the year; men insist on conventional periods of repose.

### 16 SPORTS

Typical sports played in Madagascar are soccer, volleyball, and basketball. Other activities include martial arts, boxing, wrestling or *tolona*, swimming, and tennis.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Because most social activities center around the family, recreation and entertainment consist of family members and relatives meeting to play typical sports and to dine together.

Unique Malagasy games include games with stones, board games such as Solitarie and Fanorona, cock-fights, singing games, and hide-and-seek.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In *Madagascar: Conflicts of Authority in the Great Island*, Philip M. Allen writes: “Malagasy artistic creativity finds itself in crisis today. In the past, Madagascar excelled in traditional architecture and sculpture—seen especially in tombs of the west and the south—as well as in oral and literary poetry, in textile design, and especially in music. Paintings remain servile to French academic styles, including determination of palette choices to render typical scenes of Malagasy life, the most popular subject for oil painters and water colorists. The imitative process results in waves of local-color celebrations for the tourist market rather than a true expression of the Malagasy creative spirit.”

Madagascar is known for its basket weaving and painting on silk.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The primary social problem is poverty, and *quatre-amie*, or street children, who beg for food or search for it in the garbage. Rapid population growth over the recent past threatens biodiversity because every year nearly one-third of the island’s former scrub forest and desert is set afire to keep land arable. The Human Development Report indicates that between 1990 and 2004, over 70% of the population was living below the national poverty line. Although mortality rates have declined dramatically, fertility rates are extremely high in Madagascar. Other

demographic indicators such as infant mortality rates are also relatively high. Malnutrition is also rampant.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As already noted above, women are expected to care for family and domestic affairs and be subservient to men. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2006, in 2004 the literacy rate for men was 76.5% and 65.3% for women. The primary-school enrolment ratio for male and female students had climbed to 1:1, but girls leave school more often than boys because of the burden of household chores, parents' views on the importance of girls' education, concern for girls' safety, and a lack of gender-sensitive school environments. Women are conspicuous by their absence from gainful employment and public life in Madagascar. The position of women is weakest in the political sphere: women received the right to vote and to stand in elections in 1959, yet in 2004 only 8.4% of seats in parliament were held by women. In a nutshell, women are subordinate to men, and younger Malagasy are subordinate to their elders.

In terms of human rights, Madagascar has signed or ratified five of the six principal international human rights treaties. Since 1993, human rights have been generally respected and although the death penalty remains in force, it has not been applied for more than 40 years. However, despite government commitment to human rights, judicial proceedings against people associated with the Ratsiraka government, including those suspected of human rights abuses during the 2002 crisis, were often unfair. There are reports of police brutality against prisoners and political detainees, as well as instances of arbitrary arrest and detention. Quite often prison conditions are deplorable and life threatening. Women prisoners are routinely subjected to violence and abuse including rape.

Generally, homosexuality is not condoned in rural and urban Madagascar. However, homosexuality appears to be legal in Madagascar with 21 years as the age of consent. Neither homosexuality nor sodomy are mentioned in the criminal laws of Madagascar. Nevertheless the government is actively engaged in curbing sex tourism with punishment for prostitution and pornography.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# MALDIVIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mal-DEEV-ee-ans

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Divehi

**LOCATION:** Maldives, an island nation in the Indian Ocean southwest of Sri Lanka

**POPULATION:** 385,925 (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Divehi or Dhivehi

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni)

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Maldivians are known as Divehi. They reside primarily on Maldives, an island-nation southwest of Sri Lanka. In the Divehi language, Maldives is known as Divehi Rāje, which translates as “island kingdom.” Maldivians link much of their identity to islands, and the Republic of Maldives itself consists of 1,190 tiny islands that are organized into approximately 26 coral atolls. The word “dives,” which is found both in the nation of the Maldivian people and in their geographic home, comes from a Sanskrit word, *dvīp*, for island. The word “dives” also is used to identify many of the other islands within the Maldives archipelago.

Maldivian society is relatively small in size. Its people draw a shared sense of identity through their history, the Divehi language they speak, and their belief in Islam. Individuals value strong community ties, loyalty to their national president, and family obligations. Modern-day Maldives earns much of its revenue through tourism, and the Maldivians are known as tolerant and respectful of those who visit their island-nation.

The Maldivian society is among the world’s oldest. However, the origins of the Maldivians themselves are not entirely known. Some scholars believe the first people to arrive in the islands were sailors from Sri Lanka and southern India as early as 2000 BC. Others trace the origins to Aryans who had migrated into northern India at about the same time and continued to journey southward. Archeological evidence indicates that the earliest inhabitants practiced Hinduism and Buddhism, which also were practiced widely in southern India and Sri Lanka.

Arab and Persian sailors who began traveling trade routes through the Indian Ocean in AD 900 brought Islam to Maldives. The first recorded arrival was in AD 947, and by 1153 most Maldivians had converted to Islam. However, Maldivian culture is derived from many other sources as well. Inhabitants of some of its islands are descendents of former slaves while others claim lineage to members of Arabian nobility who arrived in Maldives while making the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, that is a vital component of Islam. Inter-marriage between these different peoples has made the Maldivian community rich with traditions from many cultures. The Maldivian language, Divehi, also reflects this mixing. Divehi’s roots are Sinhalese and Sanskritic, which reflects the migration of people from present-day Sri Lanka and the Indian subcontinent. However, the spoken language contains many words that are of Persian, Arabian, and Portuguese influence. A fusion of several cultural traditions also is seen in traditional Maldivian medicinal practices, which include uses of Chakra, Ayurveda, and Unani.

Portuguese traders arrived in Maldives in the 16th century, invading the capital of Malé in 1558. Maldivians reacted to the Portuguese with hostility. A local uprising led by Maldivian hero Muhammed Thakurufaanu drove out the Portuguese in 1573. Thakurufaanu established Maldives as a sultanate, which remained in place until 1887 when the sultan at the time signed an agreement with British forces and made the Maldives a British protectorate.

Maldives remained under British control until 1965, first as a protectorate, then as a republic. On 26 July 1965, however, a new nation-state was formed and Maldives became independent. The modern-day country elected its first president, Ibrahim Nasir, in 1968. Nasir remained in power until 1973. Nasir was replaced by Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Gayoom held the position until 2008 despite three armed attempts to unseat him in the 1980s and riots in 2004. Gayoom managed to stay in power largely because there was only one political party until 2005, when the government introduced more democratic reforms and legalized political parties. A new constitution was ratified in August 2008 and elections took place in October of that year. The elections resulted in a new president, Muhammad Nasheed.

In the years since independence, Maldivians have benefited from a relatively stable economy based largely on tourism, which the government introduced in 1972. Its worst economic disaster occurred in December 2004 when a devastating tsunami swept through the Indian Ocean. More than 80 people were killed in Maldives, and thousands of other residents lost their homes. The country’s infrastructure also suffered heavy damage. A rebound in tourism, however, has helped the country recover. Despite growing problems of poverty and drug abuse, the close interdependent community and kinship ties that Maldivians have nurtured for centuries keep the country and its people vibrant today. Even as the country shifts to a more democratic political structure, families who are at the top of Maldives’ social structure retain power. Village administrators deal with disputes at the local level by reporting them to the national government and waiting for instructions on how to proceed. More than 70,000 foreign workers also reside in Maldives. Most are from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal, and work in the tourism industry.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The archipelago that makes up Maldives is in the Indian Ocean southwest of Sri Lanka. The land mass consists of 1,190 coral islands. Those islands are then grouped into 26 atolls. About 200 of the islands are inhabited by local Maldivians. An additional 80 islands maintain tourist resorts. Although the archipelago stretches in a north-south direction for 820 km (509.5 mi), the total land-mass of Maldives is fairly small, about 300 sq km (186 sq mi). That mass is roughly 1.7 times the size of Washington, D.C. Most of the islands are no more than 8 km (5 mi) in length, and the main vegetation is palm trees. About 80% of the islands’ land has a very low elevations of about 1 m (3 feet). These low elevations have made Maldives quite vulnerable to rising sea levels that are being produced through global warming. Although a sea wall protects Malé, the nation’s capital, many geographers predict that the archipelago may eventually become completely submerged.

Lagoons, deep blue waters, coral reefs, white sandy beaches, and palm trees characterize the appearance of the Maldiv-

ian islands. That natural beauty along with year-round balmy temperatures has helped in developing the archipelago's tourist economy. Some islands also have fresh water lakes, as well as swamplands and clusters of mangroves. The overall climate is typical of a tropical monsoon area. The weather is generally warm and quite dry from December through March, which is the northeast monsoon season. From May to October, during the southwest monsoon season, Maldives receive a great deal of rainfall. Temperatures remain relatively constant throughout the year, ranging between 25 and 30°C (77 and 86°F).

The Maldives lies along major maritime travel routes in the Indian Ocean. Winds that accompany the yearly monsoons historically made Maldives favorable to trade, and many Maldivian sailors traditionally planned trading expeditions to the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka around the seasonal schedule. Today, most Maldivians live in small villages and earn their living through fishing and tourism. Dolphins, manta rays, whale sharks, basking sharks, and sea turtles all inhabit the waters around the archipelago. About 13% of the land is useful for agriculture, but most agricultural activities are of a subsistence nature. Maldivian villagers plant coconut, breadfruit, taro, cassava, millet, sorghum, bananas, papaya, and drumstick (a long tough stem vegetable that tastes a little like a cross between asparagus and green beans). Maldivians also raise goats and chickens. Most homes include a small vegetable garden that provides for the needs of family members.

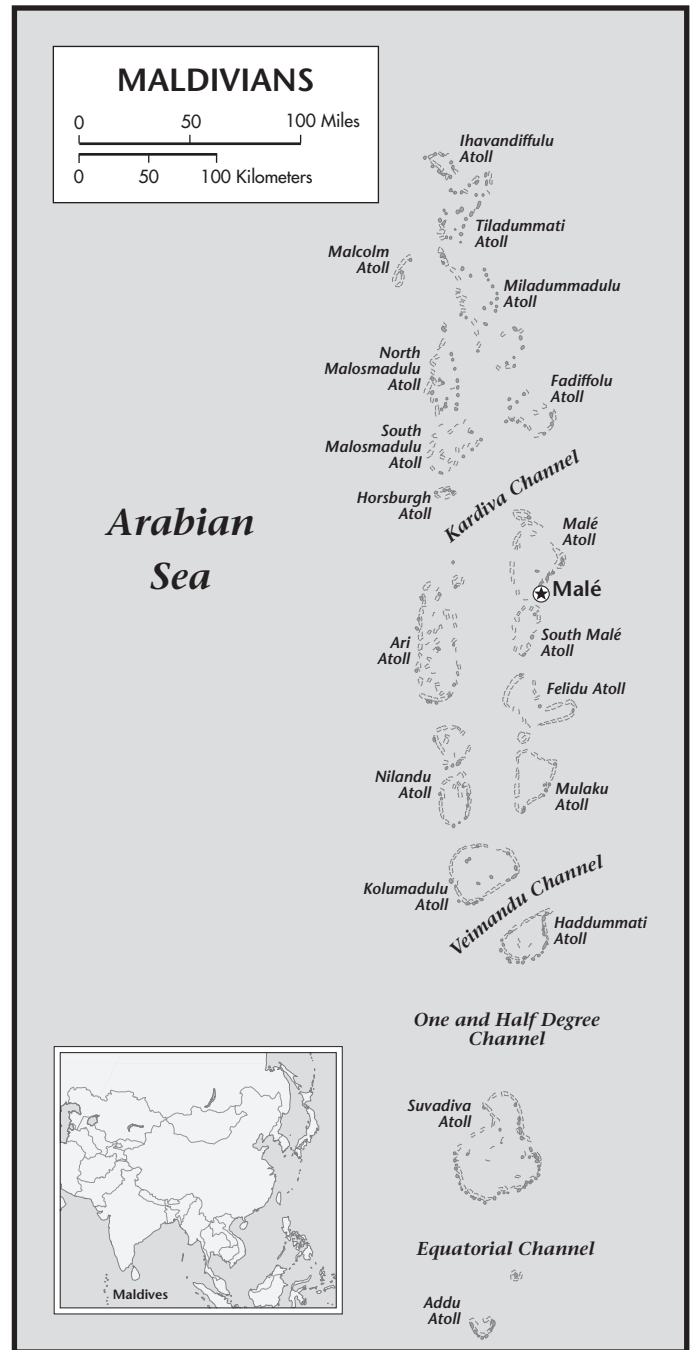
Maldivians obtain drinking water by sinking shallow wells into the sand. Rain percolates through the sand, which creates a series of fresh water aquifers that the islanders long have taken advantage of. These aquifers, however, are growing depleted and a loss of fresh water supplies is one major threat facing Maldivians.

The geography of the archipelago has influenced the character of the Divehi people. Generally, they consist of three ethnically distinct groups. A central group of Maldivians, who make up about three-fourths of the population, are the main group and live between an island known as Ihavandippu (Haa Alif) and an island known as Haddummati (Laamu). A southern group occupies the atolls closest to the equator and makes up about 20% of the total population. The final group, the people of Minicoy, live on one long island (10 km or 6.2 mi in length) at the northern end of the archipelago. Their island is administered by India, and the Minicoy make up about 4% of the total population. The Minicoy community is both geographically and politically isolated from the rest of Maldives.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Maldives is Divehi (Dhivehi). It is part of the Indo-Aryan language group and grew out of Sinhala (the main language spoken in Sri Lanka) and Sanskrit (the language from which many of the languages of the Indian subcontinent including Hindi were derived). Divehi is spoken only in the Maldives. On Minicoy, the area under Indian administration, the language is known as Mahl. Divehi also contains words borrowed from Arabic, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi, French, Persian, Portuguese, and English.

Regional variants in pronunciation and vocabulary have developed across the archipelago. Malé Bas, which is the form of Divehi spoken in the nation's capitol, is considered to be the most mainstream form of the land. The language sounds distinctly different, however, in some of the southern atolls such



as Huvadu, Fua Mulaku, and Addu. Variants also have developed in Haddummati and on Minicoy. Malé Bas is the main form used in writing. However, popular songs and poetry often draw on the richness of the regional variants. Divehi uses a written script, Thaana, which, like Arabic, is read from right to left.

The use of Divehi is primarily local. In business settings, English is widely used and is taught in schools. The tourist industry also has brought Maldivians into contact with numerous Europeans, and it is not unusual for those who work in the tourism industry to speak several languages in order to communicate with the Europeans who visit the islands.



*A young Maldivian girl wearing traditional finery waits outside her house to bid goodbye to leaders and dignitaries of the 9th annual South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Summit. (AP Images/Sherwin Crasto)*

#### **<sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE**

Much of Maldivian folklore appears to have come from Buddhist culture, and features an emphasis on the superstitious and supernatural. Many of the myths that survive today are based on the islanders' dependence on coconut trees and fish for survival. One story holds that many Maldivians died until a *fanditha* (sorcerer) created coconut trees from the skulls of the deceased settlers. In a different story, the tuna fish, a major fish eaten by Maldivians, is said to have been brought to the seas around the archipelago by Bodu Niyami Kali fanu, a mythical sea traveler who voyaged to the end of the world and found the fish at Dagas, a mythical tree.

A story about a prince from the Indian subcontinent known as Koimala is associated with the founding of the present day capital of Malé. In this story, Koimala was welcomed by Maldivians and invited to settle on a sandy bank that had been stained with fish blood. Koimala planted trees in the bank and from them, the first papaya fruit was harvested. Eventually, Maldivians accepted Koimala as their ruler. Koimala ordered a palace to be built and to name the island Maa-le Malé.

The arrival of Islam to Maldivian society also has come to be associated with a folk tale. In this story, a visiting Muslim named Abu al Barakat ul Barbari triumphed in battle with a sea demon known as Ranna Maari. That act convinced the Maldivian king to convert to Islam. The story persists, even though other versions of the story describe the visitor as a saint from Persia whose tomb occupies a central site in today's capital.

Myths of extinction preoccupy Maldivians, with some predicting that a great catastrophe will cause the islands to be submerged by the ocean. Other stories warn of evil spirits, sea monsters, and heroic sea creatures such as fishes, crabs, and seabirds. Folk tales also have arisen around local plants and trees. Some stories that came to the islands through interactions with foreigners have been adapted to fit the needs of island living.

#### **<sup>5</sup>RELIGION**

Maldives is an Islamic society. The Maldives government follows the Sharia (laws and practices based on the Quran), and

businesses generally close for 15 minutes each time that Muslims are called to perform their five daily rounds of prayer. Nearly all Maldivian locals are Sunni Muslim, although Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity are practiced by expatriates and foreign workers. These practices are allowed by the government as long as they remain confined to private homes.

The government limits contact between natives and tourists, partly to protect its Muslim traditions from outside influences. As a result, most resorts have been built on previously uninhabited islands and locals generally were not allowed to spend extended amounts of time in the tourist areas. These rules are beginning to be relaxed, but contact between tourists and natives remains fairly limited.

Despite the adherence to Islamic law, Maldivians continue to use charms and spells to protect themselves from evil spirits. Most of these practices, which are related to the magical-religious system of *fanditha*, continue mainly in remote, rural areas. Traces of mother-goddess worship practiced by Dravidians and of Buddhism also remain a part of life within these rural settings.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Maldivians observe all of the major Islamic holidays. Ramadan is a 30-day fasting period that occurs in the ninth month in the Muslim calendar. The observance of Ramadan greatly affects the Maldives daily way of life. Government offices close after 1:30 p.m. during that month, and businesses generally shut down at 3 p.m. The end of Ramadan is known as *Kuda Eidh* or *Eid al Fitr* and is celebrated with three days of festivities. Maldivians traditionally go back to their home islands for this festival and take part in such activities as a traditional tug-of-war game. During *Bodu Eidh*, the Feast of the Sacrifice, Maldivians celebrate with a week of dances, plays, sporting events, and other cultural activities. It is common during this period for Muslims who can afford to do so to travel to Mecca for the hajj pilgrimage. Maldivians also celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Secular holidays include Independence Day on July 26; New Year's Day on January 1, Republic Day on November 11, the day that Muhammed Thakurufaanu defeated the Portuguese in 1573.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Maldivians traditionally celebrate the birth of a child with a naming ceremony seven days after the child is born. *Bondibai*, a sweet dish made of rice, is served. Spiced meats or chicken are given to family and friends, and the newborn receives his or her formal name. Boys undergo circumcision at age six.

Dating remains uncommon among Maldivians. Many Maldivian young men and women meet each other through group picnics to uninhabited islands that family groups arrange. It is typical to marry someone from one's own island or atoll. When a marriage is set to occur, families of the bride and groom notify their island's chief. Ceremonies are civil services with large celebrations afterwards. Most Maldivian women are in their early 20s when they marry. New couples often live in the home of the man's parents.

Upon death, family members bury the deceased within 24 hours. Memorial ceremonies honor the deceased on the third and fortieth days after the burial occurs, and on the anniversaries of the death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Maldivian culture is Islamic based. As a result, children learn at an early age to respect their elders. Greetings are relatively formal, consisting of a handshake and a smile. Women typically do not take the last names of their husbands but retain their own last names, which they inherit from their fathers.

Unarranged visits are common in Maldives. Visitors are welcomed, and both hosts and guests sit together to converse. Tea, cool drinks, and pastries typically are served. The atmosphere is casual.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional island home in Maldives is a one-storey compound that includes several rooms, a courtyard, and an open-air bathroom. Homes may be built of concrete or coral, and roofs are made of either coconut thatch or corrugated iron. Many homes receive electricity through generators. More and more Maldivians are abandoning the traditional way of life to seek work on resort islands. Those who work in the tourist industry often are away from their homes and families for up to eleven months out of the year. They live in cramped apartments that are located mostly in Malé. Many tourism workers save money to build dream homes on their home islands. They often spend their vacations working on these homes. Much of this construction was ravaged during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and families were relocated, often against their will.

Fishing, water-gathering, and household duties were traditional practices on rural islands. These practices continue even though work in the tourist industry is breaking up many Maldivian families. More industrial businesses also are being developed on the islands, such as fish-canning and shipbuilding.

The birth rate in Maldives is among the world's highest, with 14.84 births recorded annually for every 1,000 persons, according to 2008 statistics. Many infants do not survive; about 30.63 infant deaths are recorded for every 1,000 live births. The average life expectancy for Maldivians is approximately 74 years. Overpopulation is a threat, in that the islands are becoming less self-sufficient and more reliant on imported goods. Water supplies are growing brackish, and many islands face the prospect of overflowing solid waste and sewage disposal systems.

The government of Maldives has developed excellent health care facilities, with a regional hospital placed in each group of atolls and clinics on every island. However, the government does not provide much financial assistance to families in need of urgent medical care. As a result, many Maldivians prefer to first use a more traditional method of healing. Uses of herbal remedies and sand massages are common. One of the more serious health issues facing Maldivians is a blood condition known as *thalassemia*. The condition requires frequent transfusions, and it can be passed from one generation to the next.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The tourist economy upon which Maldivian families rely makes it difficult for families to spend much time together. It is not uncommon for spouses to be separated from each other for several months or for a parent not to see children more than once or twice a year. Nevertheless, the government emphasizes the importance of the family unit in Maldivian society and encourages the nurturing of family ties during extended holiday periods in the islands.

Men who do not work in tourism may carry out small-scale fishing enterprises. Many women also work in tourism. Those who do not work in tourism take responsibility for childrearing, cooking, cleaning, and collecting water. Women are expected to run their households even if they work outside the home. Salaries earned by resort workers typically are sent home and divided among family members. The lure of steady income that jobs in tourism offers drives some families to put education and other matters on hold so that at least one family member can take a tourism position.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Temperatures in Maldives range between highs of 30°C (86°F) and lows of 25°C (77°F). As a result, most Maldivians dress casually. Men wear T-shirts with shorts, lightweight trousers, or sarongs. Women might wear a long-sleeved dress. However, many also dress quite simply in a blouse or tunic worn over a skirt or slacks. T-shirts and jeans also are common, as well as a head covering in accordance with Muslim customs.

Women generally follow Islamic dress codes and keep their thighs and shoulders covered. Women also tend to avoid wearing swim suits or bikinis, even when visiting the beach or swimming.

### **12 FOOD**

Traders and visitors from the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and Europe have influenced many aspects of Maldivian culture, including the Maldivian diet. Traces of Arabic, Indian, Sri Lankan, and East Asian spices, ingredients, and cooking methods can be found in Maldivian meals.

The staple diet consists primarily of rice and fish. Tuna is the most widely consumed fish. Maldivians also eat pumpkin, coconuts, papaya, pineapple, and sweet potatoes. To these basic foods are added chilis and other spices. Many Maldivians will eat betel nuts with cinnamon or cloves after meals to cleanse the digestive system and the breath. Most abstain from alcohol in accordance with Islamic codes. The most widely consumed drink is tea. During Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, Maldivians typically drink fruit juices and eat dates to break the fast at the end of each day.

Maldivians traditionally have eaten with their fingers, a custom also practiced in the neighboring nations of India and Sri Lanka. The right hand is generally used for eating, and it is believed that the practice of eating with the fingers completes the cooking of the food. In the past, families would eat together. Now, the practice of sharing meals is less common. Men often are gone for long periods of time on fishing trips, and many Maldivians—both male and female—are away from their families for several months working in the tourist industry. Restaurants in the tourist areas serve Indian and Sri Lankan foods as well as many European dishes. Many Maldivians working in these areas eat at such restaurants, as well.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Although education is not compulsory, Maldives has a highly literate population. Approximately 96% of all Maldivians over age 15 can read and write. Most attend primary schools on their home islands, although some will attend private, religious-based schools. After five years of primary school, Maldivians can attend up to seven years of secondary school.

Schools emphasize basic mathematics as well as reading and writing in Divehi and English.

At age 16, students take “O” or Ordinary Level exams. These are followed by “A” or Advanced Level exams taken at age 18. To qualify for “A” level courses, Maldivians often must leave their home islands and reside in the nation’s capitol. That dislocation often prompts Maldivians to end their education after age 16 and begin working in the tourist industry to help support their families.

Maldives has one university and several colleges. Still, some Maldivians choose to attend university abroad. The government and several private organizations have set up sponsorship programs to help students who leave the country for educational purposes.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Maldivian cultural traditions reflect their ancient ties to southern India and Sri Lanka, as well as their contact with Arabic and African peoples who settled on their shores. The popular film industry in India, based in Mumbai and known as Bollywood, has also influenced Maldivian culture. North Indian dances, such as kathak, are widely enjoyed. Many elderly Maldivians enjoy Hindi songs from the 1950s and 1960s.

A local form of music and dance is known as bodu beru. The term translates as “big drum” and refers to an instrument made from the trunk of a coconut tree that has been hollowed out. Men will play the drum while others sing and dance. Any celebration is likely to feature the bodu beru, but the drum also is brought out for everyday entertainment. The bodu beru is said to have originated in the northern atolls in the 11th century, and some scholars trace the drum to African settlers in Maldives. The dance and music practice begins with a slow, rhythmic beating of the drum. The beat gradually gets faster and louder. Along with the bodu beru are other instruments including the bulbul, which resembles an accordion, and a form of music that is said to have Arabic roots known as thaara.

Culturally, Maldivians also have a rich tradition in calligraphy and stone-carving. Many art pieces reflect these works, including tombstones in older cemeteries, stonework at mosques, and verses from the Quran that are on display at the country’s Islamic Center.

### **15 WORK**

Most Maldivians work in tourism and the industry makes up nearly one-third of the gross domestic product of Maldives. Fishing, agriculture, and manufacturing also employ Maldivians. It is not unusual for families to send one or more members to resort islands to work and earn income to support the rest of the family.

Maldivians who remain on their home islands tend to work in fishing or subsistence farming.

### **16 SPORTS**

The deep blue waters of the Indian Ocean that surround Maldives and its year-round tropical climate have made swimming a favorite sport. Most Maldivian men are excellent swimmers and many free-dive long distances for pleasure. Islamic codes discourage women from revealing their bodies. However, many women enjoy the ocean waters by swimming fully clothed.

Maldivian men also enjoy playing soccer and volleyball. Early evening matches take place frequently on the non-resort

islands. Women enjoy the game of bashi, which is similar to softball but is played with a tennis ball and racquets.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Watching Hindi films from India and listening to Hindi songs is a favorite pastime among Maldivians, particularly those of older generations. Younger people enjoy playing sports such as football and tennis, and making day trips to resort islands. Evening walks along the beaches and marinas are extremely popular as well.

Nearly all Maldivians engage in fishing, either for work or pleasure. Night fishing is a particularly unique form of entertainment in the archipelago. Maldivians will anchor a boat to a reef just before sunset, prepare their fishing lines, and drop them into the water. Through the evening, they will sit under the stars quietly, relaxing and feeling the gentle rock of sea waves. The hope is to catch a red snapper, but many find the experience of being out on the water satisfying enough.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Maldivians are known for weaving, ceramics-making, wood-carving and painting. The rise of tourism has helped revive many traditional crafts, and beautiful, bright-colored, intricate reed mats are a favorite souvenir item for visitors. Vases made from local woods and painted in bright colors also have found a tourist following, as have large pots and jars.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A rapidly increasing population, overcrowding, and the threat of rising sea levels produced by global warming are major problems that face Maldives. The tiny island-nation's birth rate has long been one of the highest in the Asia Pacific region. As a result, more than 50% of the local resident population in the state capitol is under the age of 15, according to a report on the Maldives prepared by the United Nations' Ministry of Planning, Human Resources, and the Environment for the Asia Pacific region. The report also notes that housing in the capital is so tight that many dwellings are literally jammed together side-by-side along the one-kilometer (0.6-mile) length of the island. The high rate of births and a correspondingly high number of infant deaths have made issues of malnutrition and poverty serious concerns among Maldivians. The government has taken steps in recent years to launch a population control program and is developing an information campaign that is aimed at educating Maldivians on the uses of contraception and on the importance of reducing the size of families.

The low elevation of Maldives makes it quite vulnerable to rising sea levels. Former president Mamoun Abdul Gayoom warned of the threat in 1992, stating that scientists had predicted that the archipelago could disappear altogether within the next century if steps were not taken to reduce global warming. When the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami occurred, ocean waters submerged the islands for several minutes. Only nine islands did not experience flooding. Fifty-seven islands experience serious damage, and fourteen islands were completely evacuated. Six islands were destroyed forever. The tsunami left more than 100 people dead, and displaced 12,000 others from their homes. Damage estimates exceeded \$300 million. Although the economy has since rebounded, the experience of seeing islands that are no more than three feet in elevation submerged

by waves that were reached fourteen feet illustrated the threat that a rising sea level poses for Maldivians.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Maldives had one of the world's highest divorce rates until recently, when the government instituted laws that required the person requesting a divorce to pay child support to the other. Males typically had requested divorce, but the financial obligation has lessened that likelihood.

The change in divorce laws has been accompanied by a general improvement in the status of women. Women used to marry as early as age 14. Now, they wait until their early 20s. Males used to engage widely in the practice of polygamy. Today, even though Maldivian laws allow men to have up to four wives, most have only one.

More than 25% of Maldivian women work outside the home. Some work for the government and while others work in the tourism industry. In more rural areas, women tend crops and make handicrafts. Maldivian laws allow both men and women to inherit property.

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—by M. Njoroge

# MALIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** MAHL-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Mali

**POPULATION:** 12–13 million

**LANGUAGE:** French (official); national languages: Bamana, Bobo, Bozo, Dogon, Fulfulde, Hassaniyya, Khassonke, Maninka, Minyanka, Senufo, Soninke (or Sarakolle), Songhai (or Sonrhay), and Tamasheq.

**RELIGION:** Islam, Christianity, indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Bamana; Dyula; Malinke; Songhay; Tuaregs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Mali has a very long and rich history. Although economic indicators place the country among the poorest in the world today, the empires of Ghana, Mali (see **Malinke**), and Songhai (see **Songhay**) developed and flourished in different parts of its territory long before the arrival of Europeans. The Mali Empire had the most enduring influence on various peoples of the region and has given the country its name. In addition to the early empires, other states of variable size existed at different points in time.

The area of contemporary Mali captured the European imagination ever since the medieval trans-Saharan gold trade and Emperor Musa I's famous pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324–25. Europeans began to explore the territory in 1795 in search of new markets and raw materials, followed by territorial conquest in the latter part of the 19th century. Advancing from their colony of Senegal in the west, French troops created a post at Bamako in 1883 and from there pushed north and eastward. In spite of resistance from the leaders of then-existing states and from autonomous villages and nomads, the French had consolidated their conquest into the colony of "Soudan Français" by the turn of the century. Administered from Bamako, the name was changed to Haut-Sénégal-Niger from 1900–1920 and the boundaries were altered several times during the period of French colonial rule. Following the struggle for independence and a short-lived federation with Senegal (known as the Mali Federation), the colony became the Republic of Mali on 22 September 1960.

The first government under President Modibo Keita had a socialist orientation. It was overthrown by a group of military officers in 1968 that made Moussa Traoré the new president. Traoré was able to maintain himself in power until 1991 when he was removed by some of his officers after ordering the army to put down demonstrations with brutal force. A transitional government was formed and elections were held within a year. Alpha Oumar Konaré became the new president in 1992. He was reelected for a second five-year term in 1997. His successor Amadou Toumani Touré also was elected for a second term (2007–2012).

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in the interior of West Africa, the Republic of Mali shares borders with seven countries: Algeria in the north; Mauritania and Senegal in the west; Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in the south; and Burkina Faso and Niger in the east. In 2008 the country's population was estimated at more than 12 mil-

lion with over one million living in the Bamako metropolitan area. Over 2 million Malians are said to live and work elsewhere in Africa, Europe, North America, and other parts of the world. Although the territory of the republic extends over 1.24 million sq km (478,767 sq mi), a large part of it is covered by the Sahara Desert and receives less than 30 cm (12 in) of rain a year. As a result, most of the population is concentrated in the southern half of the country. The Niger, one of the major rivers in Africa, traverses Mali for 1,700 km (1,050 mi) of its course. It flows in a northeasterly direction, joined by the Bani River in the city of Mopti to form a vast interior delta before making a wide bend to continue southeastward into the neighboring Republic of Niger. Mali is divided into eight administrative regions, each headed by a governor, with capitals at Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Segou, Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal, respectively. The national capital of Bamako is a separate administrative district. In early 1991 groups of Tuareg people in the northern desert regions began a rebellion to protest their marginalization in the national power structure and the distribution of resources. Following extended negotiations, the Konaré government brought about a political solution but isolated incidents of violence continue to occur from time to time.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official language of Mali is French but national languages remain the preferred mode of communication. The Bamana language has become the lingua franca and is mutually intelligible with Maninka. Bobo, Bozo, Dogon (several dialects), Fulfulde, Hassaniyya, Khassonke, Minyanka, Senufo, Soninke, Songhai, and Tamasheq have variable numbers of speakers and dominate in different parts of the country. Most television programs are in French, but many radio stations broadcast news and other programs in the different national languages.

Tamasheq has a script (*tifinagh*) dating back to the early centuries of the common era. A Guinean Maninka speaker created N'ko, an alphabet for Bamana/Maninka, in the late 1940s. Starting in 1967 a newly created national linguistic institute began developing writing conventions for Maninka/Bamana, Fulfulde, Songhai, and Tamasheq. By 1972 the first newspaper was published in the Bamana language. N'ko has gained some proponents but most Malians who are literate in any of the national languages use the orthographies developed by the national linguistic institute.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

For many Malians, the ancestors who actively resisted French colonization (e.g., Babemba Traoré of Sikasso) hold the status of national heroes. Otherwise, heroes and myths vary from one ethnic group to another. Sunjata Keita occupies a special place as the founder of the empire that gave the country its name; the recitation of his epic to musical accompaniment can arouse strong emotions among the Maninka people in the southern parts of the country. Only specially trained *griots* (praise-singers and oral historians) from certain families are permitted to perform the epic. All of Mali's ethnic groups have a rich store of proverbs, riddles, and tales that communicate and transmit cultural norms and moral values.



## 5 RELIGION

About 90% of Malians identify as Muslims. Trans-Saharan traders first introduced Islam to their local hosts and members of the political elite. Islam spread gradually among different populations beginning in the 11th century but it did not become a majority religion until the 20th century. The ways in which Islam is practiced across Mali today reflects the historical legacy of different Muslim leaders and movements, trans-regional connections, the recent influx of funds from Arab countries as well as the use of broadcast media in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge.

Christians constitute less than 2% of the population. The overwhelming majority are Catholics because Christianity was introduced by Catholic missionaries during French colonialism. Protestant Christian churches have thus far had only limited success in their search for converts. The remainder of the population continues to follow indigenous religious practices which may involve sacrifices to the ancestors and to community spirits, divination, spirit possession, and membership in initiation societies.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Public offices and some private businesses (e.g., banks) are closed on Sundays. Offices close at midday on Friday to allow the faithful to participate in Friday prayer at the mosque. Muslim holidays, as well as Christmas and Easter, are officially recognized. The two most important Islamic holidays are *'Id al-fitr*, at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and *'Id al-adha*

(also known as *Tabaski*), on the tenth day of the last month in the Muslim calendar. Each lasts three days and is celebrated with public prayers, new clothes for family members, festive meals and visiting with family and friends. Families commemorate Abraham's sacrifice by slaughtering a sheep on Tabaski.

Secular holidays include September 22, Independence Day (see above), and March 26, Democracy Day. The latter memorializes the end of the three-day uprising that brought down the Traoré regime.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Special ceremonies mark birth, marriage, and death throughout the country. The way they are celebrated varies somewhat between ethnic groups, urban and rural areas, and according to religious affiliation and economic status. However, they commonly bring together the extended family and larger social networks, with men and women congregating in different parts of the home. In urban areas, women relatives and friends come to the name giving ceremony with a gift of cloth or soap for the mother of the baby. The mother of a bride also receives cloth from her relatives and friends on behalf of her daughter. Men give money to a bridegroom on his wedding day to help him defray expenses, since it is the husband and his family who are responsible for the wedding festivities. When someone dies, male and female relatives, neighbors, and friends visit the bereaved family to offer condolences as soon as they receive the news. Among Muslims, only men accompany the body to the cemetery.

Most of Mali's ethnic groups practiced circumcision for boys and excision for girls. In the past, the highly ritualized procedure took place during the teenage years, but it is now often done much earlier. Many urban parents currently have their infant boys circumcised in the hospital shortly after birth, and an increasing number no longer excise girls. Women's groups have been engaging in educational campaigns to discourage excision nationwide.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Maintaining personal dignity, one's own and that of others, is extremely important and requires proper greeting and hospitality. Upon entering a household, a visitor initiates a short greeting. If the visitor is a stranger or someone who visits only irregularly, the host responds with a longer greeting, inquiring about the person's well-being and that of his or her relatives; the visitor then does the same in turn. Young people visiting a friend show their respect by greeting the head of household and/or the friend's mother. A visitor who arrives at meal time is invited to share the food. Greetings may be exchanged without physical contact, or by taking the interlocutor's right hand. Shaking hands is common among coworkers in offices. Late afternoon, before sundown, is the preferred time for paying social calls.

Young women and men usually socialize in groups, either same- or mixed-sex. Dating occurs more often in the company of others than as a couple. Although many young people in urban areas now choose their spouses themselves, a young man must still send a family representative to the family of the woman he wishes to marry. The woman's family must give their consent and stipulate the gift exchanges to take place before the wedding can be celebrated.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Successive governments elected since 1992 have sought to improve the basic infrastructure of the country. Nonetheless, life remains difficult for the majority of Malians. Those with an income must support not only their nuclear families, but also aged relatives and members of the extended family who are unemployed. Households rarely encompass only a nuclear family, and even well-to-do Malians have numerous obligations toward less fortunate relatives. The most commonly owned consumer goods are transistor radios, cell phones, and motor bikes or bicycles. In Bamako, car ownership has increased significantly since the 1990s. A growing number of households with access to electricity own television sets and, to a lesser extent, VCRs. Many urban families aspire to a living room furnished with a couch, table, chairs, and a china cabinet, but the interiors of most rural and urban homes are more modest. Given the climate, much of daily life takes place in the courtyard or in the shade of the veranda. A substantial part of income is spent on food, clothing, and health care. The majority of physicians practice in urban areas while nurses and midwives are the primary healthcare providers in rural areas. Aspirin and malaria medication are readily available and relatively inexpensive, but the cost of prescription drugs is high. For this reason, and because some herbal remedies are very effective, people may resort to indigenous pharmacopeia or seek out a healer before going to a clinic.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Malian law allows men to have more than one wife. A substantial number have two wives but only a small percentage has three or four, as permitted by Islam. Each wife is entitled to her own house or apartment. Women in polygamous households take turns preparing family meals. Many urban households with a regular income employ live-in domestic servants, generally young unmarried women from the rural areas. Household size and composition vary between rural and urban areas and, though more restricted in the latter, are usually not limited to a man and his wife (or wives) and their children. Visitors are also common for varying lengths of time.

Women work in all sectors of the rural and urban economy; only a minority is not involved in income-generating activities. Even women designated as "housewife" in the national census frequently engage in activities that range from small trade in cooked food to craft production, market gardening, and rain-fed agriculture. Women, like men, dispose of their own income, though spouses have different responsibilities for the maintenance of the family.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional dress varies for Mali's different ethnic groups, though what is considered "traditional" has also changed over time. Conversion to Islam and integration into a commodity economy has brought about greater uniformity in clothing styles throughout the country. For married women to be well-dressed means wearing an ample, full-length tunic (called *boubou*) combined with a matching wraparound skirt (*pagne*) and headdress. Men wear the *boubou* over matching pants and a loose-fitting shirt. Type and quality of material, design details, and embroidery create distinctions and signal a person's means. Unique colors are often achieved through hand dyeing. Women complement their attire with gold jewelry, especially

on festive occasions. Some men wear the *jellabiya* common in the Middle East. A minority of Malian women cover themselves in a black *burka* when they leave the home and a growing number express their piety by wearing a thin veil over their clothing since the end of the 1990s, particularly in the urban areas.

Teenage girls and young women in their twenties dress in wraparound or narrow tailored skirts and matching tops made of colorful cotton prints. The tops are done in a variety of styles with innovative details which change with the fashions. A small number of teenage girls in urban areas wear pants, mainly when they go out in the evening.

When working, many men wear Western-style pants and shirts or short (waist- or hip-length) tunics. Women put on wraparound skirts and tunics or tailored tops made of less expensive cottons while working at home. Imported second-hand clothing from Europe or North America, especially blouses, shirts, T-shirts, and (for men) pants, is also common during manual labor. Young people often have good second-hand clothing refitted and restyled for regular everyday wear.

## 12 FOOD

Traditional foods are regionally specific. The food and eating habits discussed here are those of the capital city. They show some uniformity in spite of the population's ethnic diversity. The two staples throughout most of the country are boiled rice and a stiff porridge or a couscous made of millet. Millet is the more traditional food, but rice is preferred and has almost replaced millet for those who can afford it daily. Both are served with a sauce which may include fresh vegetables, fish, meat, or chicken. Those who are able return home at midday for their main meal and then eat something lighter, or some leftover food, in the evening. Others make do with a snack (e.g., some fried plantain or a skewer of beef with French bread) until the early evening. A light meal may be a cream of rice, liquid enough to be eaten like a soup. Salad is also gaining in popularity among those born since the mid-1950s. A typical breakfast food is gruel made with millet flour, tamarind, and sugar or, for variety, small leavened pancakes made with millet. French bread and coffee with milk and sugar are popular with many in the cities, but too expensive for the vast majority.

Western-style kitchens are rare, and most cooking is done on a brazier in the courtyard or in a detached kitchen house. Food is served in bowls, and family members gather around a common bowl and eat with their hands or with a spoon. Children are taught at an early age to wash their hands before eating, to eat with their right hand, and to wash again after eating. In large families, women and men generally eat separately.

## 13 EDUCATION

Estimates of the percentage of children enrolled in formal education range from 30–50%. This includes children in *madrasas* but not in Quranic schools because the Malian state does not recognize Quranic schools as formal education. Created in the 1940s, madrasas are private Islamic schools where Arabic is the primary language of instruction for religious and secular subjects and French is taught for several hours a week beginning in the third grade. About 30–40% of all school-going children today are said to be in madrasas.

Public schools consist of two main types: schools whose entire curriculum is in French and bi-lingual schools where a na-

tional language is the medium of instruction during the first four years. Mother tongue instruction in the Bamana language began on an experimental basis in a few schools in 1979. It was expanded gradually and other languages were added over time. By 2006, 2550 schools across Mali hosted bi-lingual programs in one of eleven national languages. In spite of this increase, the percentage of children in bi-lingual programs compared to the classical French programs has actually declined (less than 10% in 2005) due to demographic growth and the expansion of schooling.

Many new madrasas and secular schools (funded by the state or by local communities) were created after the democratic opening in 1991. Universal primary education however remains a challenge since about 50% of Mali's population is under the age of 15. Many parents cannot afford to send or keep their children in school even where schools exist. Enrollment varies across regions. Bamako has the highest enrollment rates in primary and secondary education. The national university, created in 1996, is located in Bamako. Numerous private institutions provide professional and some university-level education.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The old towns of Djenne and Timbuktu and the tomb of Askia Mohamed in Gao are world heritage sites. The Ahmed Baba Center and the Kati Foundation in Timbuktu house rich collections of Arabic manuscripts from the period when the city was a flourishing center of Islamic scholarship (13th to 16th centuries).

Music, theater, dance, and oral literature particular to the different cultural traditions of the country continue to be practiced in rural villages as well as in urban neighborhoods. They also evolve as they address new themes and incorporate new technologies. Musical performances are a regular feature on Malian television. Successive governments have made the promotion and development of Mali's cultural heritage an integral aspect of national politics since independence. Beginning in the 1960s, youths in the various regions were encouraged to develop theater, music, or dance performances and the best groups were selected to represent their region at a biennial festival in Bamako. Since the late 1990s, regional festivals (e.g. in the north of Mali) are also organized through local initiatives. The National Institute of Arts, a professional secondary school in Bamako, has long promoted the cultural heritage through training in several artistic genres and professions (e.g. music, theatre, jewelry making, etc.). A Conservatory of the Arts and Media was recently created to provide advanced training in the plastic arts, theater, dance, and multi-media. It is directed by the internationally acclaimed painter Abdoulaye Konaté. The National Museum has a permanent arts and crafts collection from different periods and cultural traditions and also hosts excellent temporary exhibits.

The male and female Malian musicians who have become household names on the world music scene are too numerous to mention. The films of Souleymane Cissé and Cheik Oumar Cissoko and the photography of Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé are internationally recognized. Mali has also produced a number of literary figures writing in French such as Amadou Hampaté Ba, Massa Makan Diabaté, Moussa Konaté, Ibrahima Ly, Yambo Ouologuem, and Fily Dabo Sissoko, to name only a few.

#### 15 WORK

The majority of Malians are self-employed, making a living in agriculture, herding, fishing, trade, craft production, small-scale enterprises, and services. Profit margins are generally small. Most of the salaried positions are in the civil service or in international organizations. Beginning in the 1980s, structural adjustment policies imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund compelled the government to reduce the civil service and thus to hire fewer secondary school and higher-education graduates. This has resulted in greater unemployment and underemployment because the private formal sector, though growing, is still limited. Many Malians, single men as well as entire families, emigrate in search of work and better opportunities on a short- or long-term basis.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is by far the most popular sport and is played recreationally as well as in national and international competitions. Mali hosted the Africa Cup in 2002. Basketball is played by some male and female teams. Athletics has gained wider attention through the Grand Prix de Bamako since Mali began hosting the Pan African Athletics meeting in 2000.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Private radio stations have mushroomed since the 1990s and people of all ages tune in for their favorite programs. Many urban residents relax in the evening by watching Brazilian or North American soap operas or other programs on television, often in the company of neighbors or friends. Young people enjoy listening to Malian, other African, and international popular music. Concerts by well-known performers draw large crowds. While rural youths dance mostly at local festivals, urban youths also frequent discotheques and other dance events on weekends. Socializing with relatives, friends, and neighbors remains the most popular pastime for young and old, men and women, in urban and rural areas. In the cities, many men belong to a *grin*, a circle of friends with whom they meet regularly to talk or play cards while brewing a strong sweet tea. The importance of movies as a form of entertainment has diminished in recent years and a number of theaters have closed.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk arts and crafts are alive, and some flourish, as a stroll through the open-air markets of Bamako will reveal. Different regions and ethnic groups specialize and excel in particular products: Fulbe men in the Mopti region, for example, weave wool blankets with a variety of geometric designs, Tuareg women in the north of Mali make dyed leather goods (pillow covers, bags, knife sheaths, etc.), and women from Kayes are known for their indigo dyed cloth. Although the bulk of wool blankets and leather goods are now intended for the tourist market, they and other products are also made for home consumption. These include gold and silver jewelry, pottery (e.g., water jars), spoons and ladles made of squashes, and a range of mats and basketry. Hand woven cotton cloth in various colors and patterns is still sewn into blankets for use during the winter months but its production for women's wrappers and men's tunics has declined considerably. The tie-dyed damask cloth produced by urban women in innovative designs and colors,

especially in Bamako, is prized for elegant wear not only in Mali but also in neighboring countries.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

From 1960 to the overthrow of the Traoré government in 1991, political prisoners were frequently banished to the salt mines of the Sahara desert. Since the democratic opening of 1991, local human rights activists and the dynamic press keep the spotlight on the government and don't hesitate to discuss social, political, and economic problems openly. Most social problems result from the inability of many Malians to find employment and/or to earn an adequate income. Theft, prostitution, and homelessness are most prevalent in the cities. Drug use exists in some youth circles but is discouraged by the government and by Islam. Alcoholism is not widespread.

Malaria diminishes the quality of life and economic productivity of many individuals during the rainy season and, in the south of the country, at other times of the year as well. Lack of refrigeration often leads to gastrointestinal problems. Respiratory illnesses, parasites, and infections of various kinds are also common among children and adults. In 2003 HIV/AIDS prevalence in adults was estimated at 1.9%. Internationally funded initiatives seek to mobilize youths in the fight against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmissible diseases.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women's and men's rights and responsibilities within the family, and their contributions to the household economy, vary in accordance with age, marital status, position within the household, as well as between ethnic groups and between urban and rural areas. Male and female legislators have worked for years to revise the national family law code to bring about greater equality between men and women in the areas of marital status, parental rights, ownership of land and inheritance, wages and pensions, employment laws, and education. Opposition from conservative groups has led to repeated compromises and has delayed passage.

In several regions of the country a majority of girls are married before the age of eighteen. As with excision, women's associations carry out educational campaigns with strong financial support from international donors.

Awa Keita (b. 1912), a trained midwife who lived and worked in different parts of the country, was active in the struggle for independence and in the organization of the women's branch of the USRDA nationalist party. In spite of this example, only small numbers of women have sought political office. The major political parties have attempted to change this pattern by setting quotas for female representation to encourage women to run for elective office.

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—by M. Grosz-Ngaté

# MALINKE

**PRONUNCIATION:** mah-LING-kay

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mandinka, Maninka, Manding, Mandingo, Mandin, Mande

**LOCATION:** Territory covering The Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

**POPULATION:** 7.75 million

**LANGUAGE:** Variations of Mande languages

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Gambians; Guineans; Ivoirians; Malians; Senegalese

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The name Malinke is just one of many similar names used for a large group of closely related peoples in West Africa. They are also commonly referred to as Mandinka, Maninka, Manding, Mandingo, Mandin, and Mande. The areas that they occupy are among the earliest places of Neolithic agricultural settlements in sub-Saharan Africa, dating as far back as 7,000 years.

The Malinke have the distinction of being heirs to the great Mali Empire, a medieval merchant empire that flourished from the 13th to the 16th centuries and greatly influenced the course of West African history. Much of the northern region of Africa, of which the Malinke territories were a part, was incorporated into the world of Islam in the 11th century, and most of the West African chieftains adopted the Islamic religion. One of the famous kings of the Mali Empire, Kankan Musa (r.1312–37), made a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 with a tremendous entourage of camels laden with gold, and some 60,000 men, including 500 slaves carrying golden staffs. The renowned city of Islamic teaching, Timbuctu, was also part of the vast and prosperous Mali Empire. The empire declined in the 15th century and was gradually absorbed and usurped by the Songhai Kingdom, which extended to the 17th century.

As early as 1444, Portuguese traders had enslaved the first Malinke people, and in the next three and a half centuries, thousands of Malinke and other peoples were transported by Portuguese, British, French, and Dutch merchants to the Caribbean and the Americas to work as slaves on plantations.

Interesting descriptions of the areas inhabited by the Malinke were gathered in the late 18th century by Scottish explorer Mungo Park, who led two expeditions exploring the Gambia and Niger Rivers. During the first expedition, between 1795 and 1797, he was imprisoned by an Arab chieftain for four months before escaping, and later lay ill in a Malinke town for seven months. Park wrote a book about this expedition, called *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1797). Park was drowned during an attack by natives on the Niger River in 1806.

During the 19th century the kingdoms of the Malinke peoples were subjugated by the British, French, and Portuguese and were incorporated into their colonial systems. It would take over a century for them to gradually gain autonomy in independent African nations whose boundaries crossed their tribal territories.

The Malinke people gained some popular attention when Alex Haley published his best-selling book, *Roots* (1974), later made into a television series. The story of Haley's ances-



tral family and the book's main character, Kunta Kinte of the Mandinka (Malinke) people, personalized the terrible plight of African slaves and their families who were sold into slavery. Indeed, a great many slaves were taken from the areas around the present countries of The Gambia and Senegal, particularly in the 16th century. By the mid-18th century, when Kunta Kinte was captured into slavery, regions to the south mostly supplied the slave trade.

The Malinke were not only victims of the slave trade, but they were also perpetrators of the trade themselves, having had a long history of owning and maintaining slaves. The explorer Mungo Park, during his first journey through the area of Senegal and The Gambia, estimated that three-quarters of the population were hereditary slaves. There were two distinct kinds of slaves to be found: those that had been captured in battle or purchased; and those that had been born into the slave families of their village. The first had no rights and were treated like objects to be bought and sold. The second kind had a number of rights and privileges and could sometimes even buy their freedom. These hereditary slaves might be sold out of the village as punishment for a crime. Mungo Park documented how some free people, during a severe drought, would voluntarily give themselves as slaves to relatively wealthy Malinke farmers in order to save themselves from starvation.

The indigenous slave trade persisted into the 19th century, somewhat beyond the time that the British, French, and American slave trade had been declared illegal. Even today the lowest caste in the Malinke system of social structure comprises descendants of former slaves.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Today there are more than 7.75 million Malinke distributed over several African nations within a wide arc that extends 1,300 km (800 mi). It starts at the mouth of the Gambia River in the northwest and circles around in a bow form, ending in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in the southeast. The territory includes areas in the nations of The Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire. There are numerous other African ethnic groups sharing these areas. Of the 7.75 million Malinke scattered throughout West Africa, there are 2.8 million in Guinea; 1.1 million in Mali; 1 million in the Ivory Coast; 1 million in Senegal; 600,000 in The Gambia; 400,000 in Sierra Leone; 400,000 in Burkina Faso; 200,000 in Guinea-Bissau; 100,000 in Liberia; and 100,000 in Ghana. They do not form a majority group in any of the above countries. In The Gambia they represent approximately 39% of the country's total population, in Guinea 32%, and in Guinea-Bissau 14%.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Malinke peoples speak slight variations of the broad Mande branch of the Niger-Congo family of languages. The term "Mande" frequently refers to a group of closely related languages spoken by the Malinke and other West African peoples, such as the Bambara, the Soninke, and the Dyula. The Mandinka language, sometimes referred to as Mandingo, is a Mande language spoken by millions of Mandinka people in Mali, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Chad; it is the main language of The Gambia. It belongs to the Manding branch of Mande, and is thus fairly similar to Bambara and Maninka or Malinke. It is a tonal language with two tones: low and high.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Details of the early days of the Mali Empire and the lifestyles of the people have been kept alive for centuries through the epic poem, "Sonjara" (or "Sundiata"; also "Sunjata"), which has been sung and resung through many generations by the *griots*, bards or praise-singers of West Africa. In over 3,000 lines of poetry in the oral tradition, it tells the story of Sonjara, a legendary leader who, after countless obstacles and trials, unites the Malinke clans and chiefdoms at the beginning of the 13th century. As a young child he was hexed and made into a cripple by his father's jealous second wife, who wanted her own son to be king. He finally learns to walk and decides to become a hunter, giving up his claim to the throne and starting on a long exile with his mother and siblings. After many adventures, a delegation from Mali pleads with him to come back and save them from an evil sorcerer-king, Sumanguru, who has put calabashes (gourds) over the mouths of their heroes. Sonjara organizes an army to return and regain his rightful throne. With help from his sister, who seduces the evil sorcerer-king to discover his vulnerable points and, after long and bloody battles, he triumphs over Sumanguru, liberating and uniting the surrounding chiefdoms. "Sonjara" is now considered one of the famous epics of world history, and it is still being performed by griots for the Malinke.

## 5 RELIGION

The majority of the Malinke are Muslim and have adapted the tenets of Islam into their native beliefs, resulting in a wide range of syncretic variations. Most Malinke villages have a mosque, often a large cylindrical structure with a thatched roof that contains a hole through which the call to prayer can be shouted; some village mosques have a minaret, and most mosques are enclosed by a palisade fence. Women sit separate from the men, both in the mosque and during outside religious services. Those villagers who have made a pilgrimage to Mecca, or even descendants of those who have made the journey, are highly respected. They may have the word for the sacred pilgrimage, *Hadj*, as part of their name.

The principal religious leader is the elected *imam*, an elder who leads prayers at the mosques and has great religious knowledge. The other Islamic clerics who play a major role as healers and religious counselors are the *marabouts*. They are respected as preservers of morality through oral tradition and as teachers of the Quran. These specialists have many talents, being able to foretell the future, interpret natural signs, and make herbal concoctions for curing illnesses. They are experts at preventing and healing ailments or injuries inflicted by evil spirits or by mortals.

Prevention and cure is frequently done by means of *gri-gris*, or charms. The most common ones are written charms. The marabout copies selected lines in Arabic script from a master copy—either from the Quran or from a book with medicinal messages. These lines written on a piece of paper comprise a charm that can be folded in any shape—rectangle, triangle, square—and taken to the leatherworker to be covered in a leather pouch with a string and worn around the neck, waist, or arm. Charms can be obtained for protection from illness, from bullets or weapons, for help in finding employment, or even for making oneself attractive to the opposite sex. Another type of charm is the water charm, in which some lines from the master copy are written in washable ink onto a writing board. The ink is washed into a bowl. The recipient can drink a bit of the solution every day or rinse the body with it, for example, to help gain success in school.

A marabout can also provide a blessed string to be placed on the wrist of an infant hours after birth to protect it from evil spirits, or on the tails of cattle if there is fear of an epidemic caused by evil spirits. A personal blessing of the marabout is considered helpful for healing; he will spit lightly on the forehead of a patient and press the area with the palm of his hand. Children in particular may be seen with several charms around their neck, waist, or wrist. The common use of charms is an indication that the Malinke are fearful of many evil spirits, which can bring death or misfortune.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Malinke look forward to the important Islamic holidays. The favorite is Tabaski, which usually falls in the spring or summer, the day being determined according to the Islamic lunar calendar. Tabaski commemorates the moment when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God's command, when God interceded and a ram was substituted. The Malinke start saving months ahead of time for the celebration to purchase new clothes and to have an abundant supply of food. The most expensive item is the ram or sheep to be slaughtered at the precise moment determined by the lunar

calendar. It is prestigious to have a very large and fat ram to slaughter. Households that can only afford a goat or chicken are rather embarrassed. On this day people attend the mosque, and there is much eating (especially roasted mutton) and visiting of friends. Other religious holidays include the Feast of Ramadan celebrated at the end of the annual 30-day Muslim fast, and Muhammad's birthday.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A week after the birth of an infant, the Malinke hold a name-giving ceremony. A marabout leads prayers during a ceremony, shaves the infant's head, and announces the name of the child for the first time. If the parents can afford it, a goat or sheep will be killed, and the meat will be served along with balls of dough blessed by the marabout.

Puberty rites and circumcision are very significant in the lives of the Malinke, both male and female. Children are teased about the status of being uncircumcised, and from an early age they are curious as well as fearful. It is the most important rite of passage, for one cannot attain adulthood or marry without it. For boys the rite is held about once every five years and includes novices from 6 to 13 years old, who may be in a group of 30 to 45 boys. There are variations in the ceremony, but the following is typical. A circumcision lodge is built with millet stalks after the harvest in December or January. At dawn the novice is carried to the place of circumcision on the shoulders of an "older brother" or guardian who has already been circumcised. The village men proceed to the lodge. Each boy is circumcised, after waiting reflectively, by a circumciser or elder; the boy sits at the edge of a hole with his legs around it, and the foreskin is buried in the hole. Either indigenous herbs or Western ointment may be used to help heal the wound. Just after the circumcision the guardians race back to the village to spread the news, waving branches in the leaf dance.

In the evening the novices, draped in white clothing with hoods, enter the lodge to begin a period of six to eight weeks of seclusion. They carry large square charms to ward off evil spirits. They undergo an education in a fearful atmosphere by the lodge chief and guardians who teach them to act as a collective group. The frightening sounds of a bull-roarer (a flat board whirled around on a string) are heard, and they are threatened that evil demons will be called in. They learn circumcision songs that reflect the values of society, for example, respect for elders. The novices undergo four stages of education, including a feast prepared by their mothers. When they return home with a new status there will be a polite distance between mother and son. The boys who were circumcised in one ceremony form an age-set, which is given a name; they will have a close bond for life.

The girls' circumcision is organized and convened by the "circumcision queen," a village woman leader who is a respected midwife and supervises rituals concerning women. Girls are circumcised in smaller groups, and the ceremonies occur more frequently. The girls are carried on the backs of their "older sisters," their guardians, just as mothers carry infants on their backs. They are blindfolded and taken to a symbolic women's tree used to make women's tools or mortars and pestles. Each novice in turn sits on the edge of a hole, supported by an elder woman behind her. The clitoridectomy is done by an elder woman specialist. Boiled bandages and ointments are applied, and the girls stay secluded for ten days to two weeks. During



this time they are taught Malinke values and how to work together as a group. The stages of seclusion are similar to those of the boys. In recent years there is pressure to have circumcision in clinics. In general, however, the older generation is very reluctant to let go of these traditional rituals, and circumcision is still an important prerequisite to marriage.

Marriage ties are important for creating and cementing bonds between families. Marriage for a Malinke girl may begin with her betrothal at birth to a boy who may be 12 years old or less. The preferred marriage partner is the matrilineal cross-cousin: the boy is betrothed to his mother's brother's daughter. Prior to marriage, several steps in the payment of a bride-price by the suitor to the parents of the prospective bride are made, taking from three to seven years. The installments include money, kola nuts (bitter, mildly hallucinogenic nuts), salt, and some livestock. Although the girl can sleep intermittently with her future husband, she cannot go to live in his compound until the full payment is made, amounting to what is a large sum in Malinke economy. Additional gifts are made to the bride's mother-in-law before the actual marriage ceremony can take place.

The typical Malinke wedding, called a "bride transfer," takes place on a Thursday or Friday—the two holiest days of the week. The bride is dressed in dark blue with a white smock, a blue turban, and a dark blue shawl over her head with just the eyes showing. She wears anklets and bracelets of silver beads and ties a silver coin in her hair. The "circumcision queen" comes to the bride's house and performs a dance. The bride walks behind the queen with her hands on the queen's hips; this is called "carrying the bride." The two are followed by a throng of women, symbolically weeping because the bride will be leaving her parents' home. The bride goes to her husband's house and sits on his bed. A period of seclusion lasting up to three days begins, a period in which the bride is considered very vulnerable to an evil spirit. The seclusion ends when the husband unveils the wife. The village women give gifts of cooking utensils and hold a dance.

The Malinke practice polygyny (plural wives), and Islam permits men to take up to four wives. Only prosperous men can afford several wives due to the expensive bride-price and the fact that all wives should be provided for equally.

The final rite of passage, death, is not seen as a natural event for the Malinke. Their word "to die" also means "to kill," and death is seen to be caused by some evil force. At the same time, the person is believed to rise again to one of three regions in an afterlife: heaven, hell, or purgatory (somewhere in between). The corpse is ritually bathed and the water collected so it cannot cause sickness. The men conduct the funeral while the women gather nearby. A senior marabout gives the eulogy and the imam says the final prayers. Men carry the body on a mat to the burial place with the women wailing. It is buried on its right side, head facing east, feet to the north. A fence is built around the grave to protect it from animals; sticks are put over the hole to provide a "breathing space." The corpse is said to be interviewed by the angel Malika during a 45-day judgment period. In that time three mortuary ceremonies are held at which oil cakes and kola nuts are distributed to those attending.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When the Malinke encounter a family member or friend, the greetings they have for one another are very important, as they

are for other West Africans. An extensive ritual exchange of rather formal greeting questions ensues, that can take up to a minute. They might say, "Peace be with you," "Is your life peaceful?," "How is everything going?," "Are your family members in good health?," "How is your father?," or "Is the weather treating your crops well?" The questions go back and forth and may end with, "Thanks be to Allah." Even if one is not feeling well or if things are not going well, the answers are usually positive. It is considered very bad manners not to engage in the lengthy greeting exchange.

The Malinke people in general are very warm and hospitable. If a guest drops by at mealtime, he or she will surely be invited to share the meal. Giving gifts and sharing are very important values in the Malinke culture. Richer people especially are expected to be generous. The idea is that those who have been blessed by Allah should be willing to share some of their wealth. If not forthcoming with generosity, a person might be asked outright to give something.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Malinke who live in the cities have adapted to an urban lifestyle. Most, however, still live in traditional villages of anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand people. The villages are rather compact, consisting of groups of compounds enclosed by millet-stalk fences. A compound contains several cylindrical houses built of sun-baked bricks or wattle and daub, with a thatched roof; there will also be a granary and a separate cylindrical kitchen with low half-walls and a thatched roof. Behind each house in a traditional compound is a small enclosure containing a pit latrine. This enclosure is also used as a private place for bathing with a bucket of water.

As the residence pattern after marriage is patrilocal, those living in the compound will be the brothers of a family with their wives and unmarried children. If a man has more than one wife, each will have her own house in the compound. The houses are grouped around a center courtyard that may contain a well. Much activity will be going on in the courtyard: children playing, women engaged in activities, such as washing clothes, shelling peanuts, or cooking (a very lengthy and laborious task). The houses, which may have a couple of small windows, are very sparsely furnished; they may just have a bed consisting of a frame with thin poles across the width, covered by a mat; a small table; and a chair or two. Possessions may include a transistor radio and a suitcase with diverse mementos and valuables. Most of the living and socializing goes on outside in the courtyard, where the beds may be placed to sit on, or to sleep on when it is too warm inside.

An average village may have a small shop selling a few items. The most popular local consumer goods are refined sugar, tea, kola nuts, salt, cooking oil, tobacco, cigarettes, matches, and batteries. For transportation, a bicycle, an occasional motorbike, an ox cart, or a horse cart are the means used by those who can afford these items. More frequently, villagers walk to a road where there is a bus or perhaps a "collective taxi," or they simply walk to their destination. Women do not have much opportunity to leave their villages because travel for women is discouraged by the Malinke culture.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Malinke consider large families to be important. Children are one's wealth in an agrarian society. A large compound with

brothers and their plural wives will always be bustling with family members of several generations and children of many ages. Young girls who are old enough to carry an infant will usually be seen with one strapped to their back or carrying one on their hip. Infants are coddled and indulged, never lacking attention. Mothers carry their infants on their backs wherever they go and breastfeed them whenever they cry. Young children have certain chores to do, but in general they lead a wholesome and carefree life with plenty of playmates around.

For men and women there is a division of agricultural labor. The men do the plowing, sowing, planting, and a major part of the harvesting work. Some also engage in hunting and fishing. Women do weeding and tend vegetable plots. Women are always busy with some kind of work, while it is common to see men sitting under a tree in the village square, chatting with other men and having a smoke and some tea that the women have brought them. The women are responsible for cooking, which involves many labor-intensive steps. They gather the firewood and bring it back on their heads in large bundles. They draw water at the well. They pound the millet, sorghum, or corn for hours with a mortar and pestle and then sift it to prepare the staple food of couscous. Cooking the meal involves hours of squatting in intense heat, tending earthenware pots propped on three stones around an open wood fire. Usually the women of a compound share the many tasks of cooking and take turns being responsible for meals. The women also wash the clothes and do much maintenance and cleaning work in the compound. While tending the children they are usually doing some income-generating activity, such as shelling peanuts.

The male head of the household is responsible for food procurement for his family, for buying clothes, and for providing agricultural tools and seeds for planting. The household heads have the authority to make all important decisions, although women wield a significant amount of power behind the scenes.

The social organization of the Malinke is based on an ancient caste system into which members are born. A Malinke can never change the caste-status into which he or she is born. There is rarely intercaste marriage. In an average village, however, the difference in wealth or status among the castes is barely visible. There is more of a feeling of egalitarianism, and all people have an agrarian lifestyle, cultivating crops and tending small herds of livestock. The size of the family is often more of an indication of wealth; small families with few children and few extended family members are thought of as poor and unfortunate. The caste system is comprised of nobles at the top, artisans and griots in the middle, and the descendants of slaves at the bottom. It is an elder from among the nobles who serves as headman or chief. All castes may provide marabouts, but certain other functions are caste-specific.

The artisans are divided into two main occupations: blacksmiths and leatherworkers. The blacksmiths are considered to be the most important of the middle caste. They make iron tools and implements, such as plow points and axe heads, as well as wooden furniture, mortars, and pestles. Some Malinke smiths have gained excellent reputations as sculptors and artists in iron objects or woodcarvings. They are usually the bicycle repairmen of the village as well. Smiths have a reputation for truthfulness and hospitality. They have the important function of male circumciser and chief of the lodge in circumcision

ceremonies. There are many leatherworkers who are just farmers and do not do much work in leather. Some, however, have a good additional income from making the leather pouches or cases to cover the *gri-gri* charms.

The griots are the traditional bards or storytellers, providing entertainment and singing songs that keep alive the oral tradition of the people. Some just chant praise and recite honorific names and parables from the Quran. Others recite rhymed phrases accompanied by a drummer. They are paid for their skills at various ceremonies. Many griots are musicians who know how to play the *kora*, a stringed instrument made from half a large gourd covered with leather as a resonator. Some griots play the *balaphon*, a wooden xylophone with a row of gourd resonators. They teach all these skills to their children from an early age. Often the musicians will migrate from village to village to market their talents.

In addition to the castes, the Malinke have groupings in age-sets consisting of men or women who were circumcised at the same time and who maintain a strong egalitarian bond throughout life. Sometimes particular age-sets are called on to perform community tasks. The male age-sets pass through three age-grades, which are an important aspect of social control. The “boys” are those from about 10 to 20 years of age, who are the focus of enculturation, learning the proper norms and values of the Malinke culture. The “young men” include those from about 20 to 40 years old who are either unmarried or who have just formed their own nuclear family unit; they are responsible for carrying out decisions made in village meetings. The “elders” are those over 40 years old who are heads of extended family household units; they are the most influential in making decisions and settling disputes.

Malinke villages have secular leaders and religious leaders, whose roles sometimes overlap. The secular leader is the chief, who is typically a descendant of the noble caste and the village founders. The chief presides over a council of elder men who may convene to settle disputes, for example, if there is a theft or a question of someone’s livestock damaging crops, or if a decision must be made about the return of the bride-price if an abused wife goes back to live in her father’s compound.

The imam is the principal religious leader who may serve several small villages. Unlike the chief, the imam is elected; the position is open to elders with Quranic wisdom, who are not descendants of slaves. His main duty is to lead prayers at the mosque. Sometimes the chief is also a marabout, an Islamic healer and counselor, who can rival the imam in performing religious duties.

Many Malinke villages have an additional influential person who could be said to be a leader: the *kanda*. A *kanda* is a self-made man, who with his large family, strong personality, organizational abilities, and hard work has amassed considerable wealth. He has no formal power, and he does not refer to himself as a *kanda* for fear of jealousy and alienation. He wields a great deal of authority at meetings and when important decisions must be made. Because of the deep respect for elders, both men and women, it can be said that they are also village leaders. Their status grows as they age, and younger people are instilled with the value of respecting their elders.

In addition to the council of elder men who settle disputes, the Malinke have a fascinating means of social control—through the powerful demon-spirit called a *kangkura*, portrayed by a mask-wearer who covers his body with blood-red

bark, making an awesome and frightful figure. The kangkuraao must be summoned by the chief, the imam, or the circumcision lodge chief, who gives the demon-spirit a benevolent mission to carry out. The spirit figure can demand that people participate in public works, such as digging a well or weeding for fire prevention; he can enforce taboos against eating fruit until it is ripe; and he can discipline novices at circumcision ceremonies. Moreover, he can exact fines for those who do not obey. Even though the Islamic religion prohibits graven images, the kangkuraao has survived as part of the Malinke tradition.

### 11 CLOTHING

Malinke who live today in urban centers, especially the men, may have adopted Western-style clothes. Villagers, on the other hand, take pride in their traditional clothing, which is important to them. In fact, one of the obligations of a husband is to give each wife the cloth for at least two new outfits every year.

Women generally wear a loose, scoop-necked smock over a long skirt made by a wrap-around piece of cloth. They often tie a matching piece of cloth around their head in an informal turban, each woman's turban having its own special flair. They use brightly colored cotton prints with splashy, large designs; some also wear tie-dyed, wood-block, or batik prints. The traditional casual dress for men is made with the same bright prints fashioned in an outfit that resembles pajamas.

For formal occasions men and women may wear the *grand boubou*. For women this is a loose dress that extends to ground level and may be trimmed in lace or embroidery. For men it is a long robe-like garment covering long pants and a shirt. Many middle-aged or elder men wear knit caps. Shoes are leather or rubber thongs.

### 12 FOOD

Traditional Malinke are cultivators who grow varieties of millet, sorghum, rice (in the swampy areas), and corn as staple crops. As cash crops they grow peanuts and cotton and, to supplement their diet and gain a bit of income at weekly markets, grow diverse vegetables in garden plots. Some villages have a bakery where small loaves of French-style bread are baked.

The wealthier Malinke own some livestock—cattle, goats, chickens, and perhaps a horse for plowing. The cattle are used for milk and for the prestige of owning them; they are rarely slaughtered. There is little meat in the diet. Those who live near rivers or lakes may supplement their meals with fish.

A typical breakfast might consist of corn porridge eaten with a spoon made of a small, elongated calabash (gourd) split in half. The midday and evening meals may consist of rice or couscous with sauce and/or vegetables. Couscous can be made of pounded and steamed millet, sorghum, or cornmeal. A substantial quantity of rice or couscous is placed in a plastic or enamel basin around which those sharing the meal sit. Small bowls of sauce—often peanut sauce—or vegetable mixtures are distributed over the rice or couscous. Those sharing the meal take portions of it with the right hand, forming a bite-sized ball.

Tea-time is an important break for the Malinke. Tea is made by filling a small pot with dried tea leaves and covering these with boiling water. The brewed tea is extremely strong and is served with several small spoons of sugar in tiny glasses. After the first round of tea, the pot is filled with boiling water a sec-

ond and third time, thus the second and third rounds of tea are a bit diminished in strength.

### 13 EDUCATION

Many villages today have a government school and a Quranic school for learning to recite verses from the Quran. The educational models of the government schools, as well as the medium of instruction, are based on those of the ex-colonial masters, either French or British. As the nations where the Malinke are found today have many tribal peoples in addition to the Malinke, it is likely that the teachers posted to the school will be of a different ethnic group and will not speak the Malinke language.

It is difficult for a child to start first grade in a school that teaches only in French or English, languages totally different from his or her native Malinke. Poor attendance and high drop-out rates are common in the village schools. There are few instructional materials, and the teaching methods are very formal: rote recitation, "chalk and talk," and copying exercises. As the Islamic parents do not think it is as important for their daughters to get an education as it is for their sons, the enrollment of boys is much higher than that of girls. Only a small percentage of the village pupils can pass the state examination at the end of sixth grade in order to go on to high school. The countries in which the Malinke are found have generally low literacy rates, around 40%, with literacy for males much higher than for females.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Much of the cultural heritage of the Malinke is embedded in the great Mali merchant empire of the 13th to the 16th centuries and the Islamic religion that was adopted by the chieftains. There was a flourishing trade in gold, and many ornate ornaments, jewelry, and staffs of gold date from that period, documenting a wealthy and proud past. Additionally, the cultural heritage has been immortalized in the famous epic poem "Sonjara," sung by *griots* (minstrels) since the 13th century (see Folklore).

### 15 WORK

Farming is a respected occupation, and all members of society are given farming tasks. The children, too, guard the fields against wild boar, monkeys, and birds. The Malinke use natural fertilizer, allowing livestock to graze on the fields lying fallow. Children are often seen tending the livestock.

### 16 SPORTS

The Malinke of today have some traditional sports in their school curriculum that were introduced with the French model of education. Many of the village schools are too poor to have good quality balls or much sports equipment. Boys might be seen playing soccer with a homemade ball. They enjoy listening to soccer matches, both national and international, on the radio or watching these on television in town; many Malinke men and boys can recite the names of international soccer stars.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to the storytelling and music provided by the *griots*, the Malinke like to listen to the radio, a typical possession

in most households. If they live in a village with electricity, a television set is a prized item. It is common for large groups of villagers to gather in the compound of the television's owner, who will position his set on a high platform outside so large numbers of people can watch.

"Woaley" is a board game similar to backgammon. It is a major pastime for the Malinke as well as other West Africans. The board is in the form of a rectangle with twelve indentations to hold beans and two larger indentations at the ends to hold the captured beans. Both spectators and players of all ages enjoy woaley matches. (The game is referred to by many other names as well.)

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Some of the most important art of the Malinke is the oral art, songs, and epic poems sung by the griots playing a kora musical instrument. In former times it was common for the blacksmiths to forge ornamental oil lamps from iron and large iron door locks, as well as fanciful iron figures of spirits or animals to crown the staffs; the blacksmiths also carved wooden figures and masks. These artistic endeavors are less common today.

Present day hobbies of Malinke young men may include collecting cassette tapes of their favorite singers, which could be reggae singers from Jamaica or American rock stars. Something that young women enjoy doing and might consider a hobby is braiding each other's hair, making decorative rows or braiding in long strands of synthetic hair.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As the Malinke people are socialized with a strong sense of responsibility to their family and lineage, many of the kinds of social problems that might be prevalent in an industrialized society are not encountered. AIDS and the spread of venereal diseases by men who have brought these back from urban areas is a problem in some places. Since the society is Muslim, alcoholism is not found. At the same time, malnutrition and a lack of understanding of its causes is a subject that needs attention. From a Western perspective, the situation of women, including fewer opportunities for education, fewer rights, and having to share a husband with co-wives, may be seen as a social problem.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Malinke society is patrilineal (male-dominated) and the smallest social unit is the family. The oldest male serves as the head of the lineage. A "minor lineage" consists of a man and his immediate family. A "major lineage" consists of households of relatives and their families. The majority of the Malinke men are farmers. The men do all of the fieldwork by hand with no help from machinery or fertilizers. The staple crops native to this area are rice, millet, sorghum, and peanuts. There are also many men who raise livestock. Cattle are rare and are used mainly to show prestige or used as a bridal dowry. Only men are allowed to hold positions of high respect in a Malinke village. Among the Malinke, men do the heavy farm work, hunt, and fish. They also hold leadership positions, such as village elders and *imams*. The women help with the farming, as well as cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children.

Traditionally, parents arranged their daughters' marriages while the girls were still infants. Today, marriages are still arranged, but not as early. The groom is required to work for the

bride's family both before and after the wedding. He must also pay the girl's family a "bride price." Polygamy is commonly practiced, but the men rarely have more than three wives.

Malinke believe the crowning glory of any woman is the ability to produce children, especially sons. The first wife has authority over any subsequent wives. The husband has complete control over his wives and is responsible for feeding and clothing them. He also helps the wives' parents when necessary. Wives are expected to live together in harmony, at least superficially. They share work responsibilities of the compound, cooking, laundry, etc.

While farming is the predominant profession among the Malinke, men also work as tailors, butchers, taxi drivers, woodworkers, metal workers, soldiers, nurses, and extension workers for aid agencies. However, most women, probably 95%, remain in the home as wives and mothers.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# MAURITANIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mawr-uh-TAY-nee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Mauritania

**POPULATION:** 3.3 million (2007 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Hassaniyya Arabic; French; Azayr; Fulfulde; Mande-kan; Wolof

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Wolof

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Mauritania is located in the western Sahara region of Africa, which also includes Algeria, Mali, and Morocco. Archaeological evidence, oral history, and legends indicate that the western Sahara supported a flourishing culture during the millennia preceding Christianity. There is archaeological evidence of copper mining and refining in west-central Mauritania dating back to 500 bc to 1000 bc. An early Berber group called the Bafour inhabited the area that is now known as Mauritania. The Bafour engaged in fishing, hunting, and rural livestock herding. The ancestors of two modern-day ethnic groups—the Toucouleur and the Wolof black Africans—engaged in valley cultivation. Changes in Mauritania's climate and the desertification of the Sahara caused these early Mauritians to move southward.

Waves of immigrants began to flow into Mauritania from both the north and south during the 3rd century ad. The first group to immigrate to the country were the Berbers of North Africa. Berbers first settled in Mauritania during the 3rd and 4th centuries; a second wave of immigrants settled there during the 7th and 8th centuries. Some indigenous Mauritians became vassals to the Berbers; others migrated to the south.

Between the 8th and 10th centuries, a loose association of states known as the Sanhadja Confederation served as a decentralized political system linking the major Berber groups. The Sanhadja Confederation was controlled by the politically dominant Berber group, the Lemtuna. During this time, caravan trade routes linked Mauritania with neighboring peoples in North Africa, the empire of Ghana (which included all of present-day southeastern Mauritania in its territory), and the empire of Mali. Gold, ivory, slaves, salt, copper, and cloth were carried by caravan. Important towns developed along the trade routes, becoming commercial and political centers.

By the 11th century ad, Berber and Arab traders had spread the Islamic religion throughout the western Sahara. Early in that century, the Sanhadja Confederation broke up, and a group known as the Almoravids conquered the entire region of the western Sahara. The group was established around 1041 when 'Abdallah ibn Yassin, a Sanhadja theologian, and his followers built a religious center known as a *ribat*. The men of the *ribat* were called *marabouts*, or *murabitun*, and they became known as the Almoravids. In 1042, the Almoravids launched a war to establish a purer form of Islam in the western Sahara region. The Almoravid empire spread from Spain to Senegal and replaced Ghana's hegemony over southeastern Mauritania. The Almoravids ruled Mauritania until the 12th century.

Between the 12th and 17th centuries, black Africans from Ghana, Mali, and Songhai immigrated to Mauritania. By the late 17th century, a wave of Yemeni Arabs had penetrated Mau-

ritania from the north, and a Yemeni group known as the Bani Hassan dominated the area. As the Arabs moved southward, the Berbers and blacks migrated further south as well. The Berbers tried to fight Arab domination during the unsuccessful Thirty Years' War of 1644–74. When they failed to achieve liberation from the Arab forces, the Berbers became vassals to the Arabs.

By the late 17th century, Mauritanian society comprised four social groups. Three of these—the Arabs, the Berbers, and the black slaves—spoke Hassaniyya Arabic and became known as the *Maures*. The fourth social group was composed of free black Africans who settled in the Senegal River basin in the south.

Early European interest in Mauritania was limited. In the mid-15th century, about 1,000 slaves per year were exported to Europe. The Dutch and French purchased gum arabic from producers in southern Mauritania during the second half of the 16th century. Interest became more intense in the mid-19th century, when French forces briefly occupied two of Mauritania's southern regions—Brakna and Trarza. Early in the 20th century, French forces occupied and set up a colonial administration in Mauritania. France ruled Mauritania indirectly through its existing institutions and made little attempt to develop the region's economy. After World War II (1939–45), France granted some administrative and political freedoms to Mauritania, touching off disputes between the Maures (Arabs and Berbers) and the black Africans. Some Arabs and Berbers wanted to unite with Morocco to the north, whereas many southern (non-Maure) black Africans wanted to join with Senegal and Mali.

Mauritania became fully independent on 28 November 1960. The nation's first president, Moktar Ould Daddah, ruled until a coup ousted him from power in 1978. Divisions between the Maures and the non-Maure black Africans continued after independence, as the non-Maure blacks resented Maure domination of the Mauritanian political system and armed forces.

By 1975, Mauritania had become embroiled in a military conflict over the Western Sahara—territory then known as the Spanish Sahara—with the Polisario guerrillas of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The Polisario is a group seeking national self-determination for the people of the Western Sahara, Mauritania's neighbor to the northwest. It is the military wing of the SADR, the government in exile of the Western Sahara. Mauritania occupied a southern province in the Western Sahara, partly to prevent Morocco (which also had claims to the country) from occupying the entire territory. In 1976, Spain relinquished control of the Western Sahara, dividing the territory between Morocco and Mauritania. The Polisario guerrillas then waged a war against Morocco, and Mauritania allied itself with Morocco against them. The result was a costly war and resentment of the ruling Maures among black Mauritians.

Rising political dissension led to a military coup in July 1978 that made Colonel Mustafa Ould Salek the prime minister. Salek was replaced in April 1979 by Colonel Ahmed Ould Bouceif and Colonel Muhammad Khouna Ould Haidalla. Bouceif died soon afterward in an airplane crash, and Haidalla became Mauritania's prime minister. Haidalla ended Mauritania's military involvement in the Western Sahara and gave diplomatic recognition to the SADR. In 1984, Haidalla was replaced in yet another coup by Colonel Ma'ouya Ould Sidi Ahmad Taya, who

established a military government. Taya began to reform the political system, holding local elections and releasing some political prisoners. In the area of foreign relations, Taya strengthened relations with the Soviet Union and China and with the wealthy Middle Eastern states. His objectives were to gain access to trade and financial assistance and to rid Mauritania of its dependence on the West. In May 1987, Taya named three women to cabinet-level positions in the government. One was appointed minister of mines and industries; another became associate director of the presidential cabinet; and a third was named general secretary of the health and social affairs ministry. In July 1991, Mauritania drafted a new constitution, which, importantly, legalized a multiparty system in place of the former one-party system. As soon as the restrictions were lifted, 16 political parties were formed. The constitution stresses equality and individual freedoms (article 10). It makes Islam the state religion (article 5) and decrees that the president must be a Muslim (article 23).

A bloodless coup in 2005 ended Taya's 21-year autocratic rule. A council of military leaders took control of the country, promising democratic reforms. The 2007 elections, deemed free and fair by observers from both the United States and the European Union, brought to power Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdullahi, a former finance minister in the Taya government. He won 52.8% of the vote. Abdullahi campaigned on promises to redress Mauritania's serious problems of human trafficking and slavery. Although slavery was explicitly outlawed in 1981, many black Maures continue to serve their former masters as household servants and farmhands. In 2008, Human Rights Watch reported that slavery continued to be a serious problem.

Mauritania's government comprises three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The president, who is elected to a five-year term, heads the executive branch. The prime minister (Zeine Ould Zeidane since 2007) is appointed by the president. The legislative branch has two houses: a National Assembly consisting of 95 members who are elected by the people to five-year terms, and a Senate consisting of 56 members who are elected by municipal councilors to six-year terms. The judicial branch safeguards individual freedoms and ensures enforcement of the laws of the country.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

Mauritania is located in Africa at the intersection of North Africa (a region known as *the Maghrib*) and West Africa. Its neighbors to the north are Morocco and Algeria; to the northwest lies the Western Sahara; to the east and southeast lies Mali; and to the southwest lies Senegal. The Atlantic Ocean borders Mauritania to the west.

Mauritania's official name is the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Its capital is Nouakchott. The country is roughly 1.5 times the size of Texas. It spans an area of 1,031,000 sq km (398,069 sq mi), about two-thirds of which is desert, with an occasional oasis. The topography is generally flat, arid plains, and only 400 sq km (150 sq mi) of the area is water. There is very little rain in the northern 75% of the country, which is desert or semidesert, and in the far south, the yearly rainfall averages 40–60 cm (16–24 in). Most of this falls between the months of July and September.

About 40% of the country is covered with sand. Some of the sand sits in fixed dunes; other dunes are carried about by the wind. Mauritania has four geographic zones: the Saharan, the



Sahelian, the Senegal River valley, and the coastal zone. The Saharan zone covers the northern two-thirds of the country. Temperatures in this zone fluctuate widely between the morning and afternoon. It has very little vegetation. The Sahelian zone, south of the Saharan zone, extends to within 30 km (20 mi) of the Senegal River to the south. Temperatures here have much smaller daily variations. More vegetation grows in the Sahelian zone, including grasslands, acacia trees, and date palm trees. The Senegal River valley is a belt of land extending north of the Senegal River. It is vital to Mauritania's agricultural production, though it has suffered much desertification during severe and prolonged droughts since the 1960s and into the 21st century. Nevertheless, it experiences more rainfall than the rest of the country, and the river floods annually. The coastal zone is made up of the western section of the country along the Atlantic coast. It has minimal rainfall and moderate temperatures.

The census of 2007 determined that Mauritania had a population of about 3.3 million people. The annual population growth rate is almost 2.9%. The number of Mauritanians who can be considered urban dwellers is difficult to calculate because of the country's nomadic culture and sporadic industry. Among Mauritanian urban migrants, by far the most live in the capital city of Nouakchott and in Nouadhibou. The remainder live on farms or in small towns. Almost half of the population, more than 45%, is under the age of 15.

The Maures, descendants of both the Arabs and Berbers, are the largest ethnic group in Mauritania. They live mainly in the northern and central regions. Over the centuries, there has

been much intermarriage between those of Arab-Berber origin and the black African population. The Maures are thus a group that includes both blacks and whites. The other major ethnic groups are racially black African; these are the Bambara, Fulbe, Soninke, Toucouleur, and Wolof groups. Black Mauritanians are traditionally farmers, livestock herders, and fishers and live mainly in the south. According to government figures, Maures constitute 70% of the population. This figure is disputed by black Africans, who argue that the Maures manipulate the figures to maintain dominance over the blacks.

Mauritania's largest city is the capital, Nouakchott, now home to thousands of former farmers and livestock herders who lost their farms and herds after drought and desertification began to plague the country in the 1970s. These Mauritanians flocked to Nouakchott and other cities in search of new jobs. The result was overcrowded living conditions and difficulty finding enough jobs for the influx of migrants. In 1960, Nouakchott had 5,000 inhabitants. By 1985, the number had reached 500,000. In 2005, the population was reported to be between 900,000 and 1.1 million. The discrepancy can be attributed to the migratory nature of Mauritanian culture and traditions.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Since 1968, Mauritania's official language has been Hassaniyya Arabic, which is spoken mainly by the Maures. The study of Hassaniyya in secondary schools was made compulsory in 1966. Hassaniyya is a largely Arabic language with many Berber loan words, and it reflects the both Arab and Berber ancestry of the Maures. Many people in the larger cities and villages speak French, which is also an official language. Mauritania's other official languages are Arabic, Poular, Soninke, and Wolof. These have many similarities, and most are rooted in the Niger-Congo language family.

Common boys' names are *Ahmad*, *Hamadi*, *Muhammad*, and *'Uthman*. Common girls' names are *Fatima*, *Bana*, *Hadia*, and *Safiya*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

It is common in Mauritania to believe in divination and supernatural powers associated with holy men who lead Islamic Sufi brotherhoods (mystical associations). These religious leaders are venerated among West Africans and North Africans and are considered well educated. They are called *marabouts*, or *murabitun*, and it is believed that their *baraka*, or divine grace, allows them to perform miracles. They make and administer amulets and talismans. These are believed to have mystical powers that give them protection from illness and injury.

### 5 RELIGION

Most Mauritanians are Sunni Muslims. The region's inhabitants have adhered to Islam since the 9th century ad. Mauritania's Constitution Charter of 1991 declared Islam to be the state religion and requires that the president be a Muslim.

In Mauritania, as in much of West Africa, Islamic Sufi brotherhoods known as *tariqas* gained importance around the 13th century. Sufism is a religious movement that stresses mysticism and the needs of the human spirit. The brotherhoods transcended ethnic and tribal lines, thus helping to develop a broad national identity going beyond that of individual clans and ethnic groups. Mauritania has two major and

several minor brotherhoods. The major brotherhoods are the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders. The Qadiriyya brotherhood stresses Islamic learning, humility, generosity, and respect for one's neighbors. The Tijaniyya brotherhood places less stress on learning. It is a missionary order that denounces theft, lying, cheating, and killing and emphasizes continual reflection on God.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Mauritania's major national holiday is Independence Day (November 28). It is celebrated with a military exhibition in which soldiers, tanks, and citizens parade in front of a stage on which the president and his entourage sit. The president delivers a speech to the nation addressing political and economic developments. The secular New Year (as opposed to the New Year on the Islamic calendar) is celebrated among the younger generation. They organize parties and have a New Year's Eve countdown, though without the traditional champagne, as Islamic countries forbid the consumption of alcohol.

Two major Islamic holidays are observed in Mauritania. One is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the holy month of fasting called Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, or having sexual relations during the daytime in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate who do not have enough food. At the end of the month, Muslims celebrate for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) and his son to obey God's command in all things, even as Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son. The holiday signals the end of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or *hajj*, which every Muslim must undertake at least once during his or her lifetime. Traditionally, Islamic holidays are celebrated by wearing new clothes and cooking grilled meat. Girls color their hands with henna.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Every Mauritanian is expected to marry and have children. A wedding ceremony consists of an *'aqd*, the Islamic contractual commitment in which the bride and groom pledge themselves to the marriage. This ceremony is followed by a party. The next step in the wedding is the *marwah* party, which is a reception to see the bride off to her new family. The *marwah* is bigger, noisier, and has more entertainment and dancing than the *'aqd* party.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Like most Arabs, Mauritanians are known to be friendly people. Even in the capital city of Nouakchott, which suffers from poverty and overpopulation as a result of urbanization, people are friendly. Elders, even outside one's family, are respected by the young. This practice, known as *essahwa*, requires the young to respect social customs in the presence of an elderly person. For example, a young Mauritanian would not smoke in front of an elderly Mauritanian. Also, the young must be careful to use appropriate language (no swearing), to avoid displays of affection (e.g., kissing) with an intimate friend, and to avoid talking too loudly in the presence of the elderly.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Mauritanians, for the most part, are very poor. Those who are wealthy have incomes comparable to those of middle-class Europeans. The unemployment rate is 24%. The per capita gross national product in 2007 was estimated at \$1,800, although income derived from barter is not reflected in this estimate. The capital, though a desperately poor city by most measures, has modern appliances such as mobile phones, televisions with DVD players, and Internet cafés. Estimates suggest that the country has about 100,000 Internet users; its domain is .mr. There were two satellite television providers as of 2008. The national telecommunications company was privatized in 2001. Mobile phone penetration was 35 per 100 persons in 2008.

In the desert valleys of the countryside, known as the *badiya*, people live in tents made of cotton. These are light-colored on the outside so that they do not absorb sunlight and have brightly colored fabrics draping the inside of the tent walls. The floor of the tent is sandy, but it is covered with large woven mats known as *hasiras*. Furniture in the tents is made of wood and leather, and it can be folded to be transported on camels through the desert. Because they have no plumbing, desert dwellers get their water from an outside well. Containers made of animal skins, called *guerbas*, are used to carry water from the well to the tent. Cooking is done over an outdoor fire.

In the southern regions, homes are built of cement. They are rectangular with flat roofs and small windows. City homes are furnished with carpets, mattresses, and floor pillows. The villages have public faucets, from which people fill large buckets or tubs with water to carry back to their homes. There, the water is poured into a clay pot to keep it cool and clean. Stoves fueled by gas tanks are used for cooking in the villages.

The drought that has afflicted Mauritania since the 1970s has forced the northern population to migrate southward. The result has been a major housing crisis in the towns of southern Mauritania. Shantytowns, known as *kebes*, were erected around the towns and along the major streets. The migrants set up homes of wood and scrap metal, sun-dried bricks, or tents. In the capital of Nouakchott, more than half of the population lived in shantytowns and slums in the early years of the 21st century.

Health care and medical facilities do not meet the needs of the population, especially in rural areas. In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported a life expectancy among Mauritanians of 55 for males and 60 for females. In all, 125 Mauritanian children per 1,000 can expect to die before the age of five. In 2004, total expenditures on health care totaled 2.9% of gross domestic product. In that year, the WHO also reported that there were 0.11 physicians for every 1,000 people. Many diseases are common, such as measles, tuberculosis, and cholera in the north and malaria and schistosomiasis in the south. Hepatitis, bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, and Rift Valley fever also are problems. It is reported that child malnutrition is a major problem. For example, in rural areas, 38% of children under five suffer to such an extent their development is stunted. The figure for urban areas, 30.2%, is hardly better. In 2008, HIV/AIDS prevalence was low at 0.6%.

Mauritania has two major airports—at Nouakchott and Nouadhibou—that are capable of handling international air traffic. In 2008, the country also had 25 smaller airports (8 with paved runways, 17 without) for internal domestic flights between Mauritania's cities. Nouakchott and Nouadhibou are

also major seaports. Although some roads are paved, most are not, especially in the desert, where roads consist simply of tracks in the sand.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Mauritania's traditional social unit is the family and its descent, or lineage, group. A family's lineage is traced back five or six generations. The lineage serves as a basis of socialization for the young, with elder members of the lineage guiding younger members to conform to social norms. A group of related lineages that maintain social ties is known as a clan. The smallest unit within the clan is the extended family, which consists of related males with their wives, sons, and unmarried daughters. Marriage within the clan is preferred. First cousins are traditional marriage partners.

There is great emphasis on homemaking skills for girls, and so most daughters are given training in raising a family and taking care of the house. Often, girls are educated at home instead of at school. Mothers are expected to prepare their daughters for their future careers as homemakers, and fathers are expected to provide well for their daughters so that they can grow up to be healthy and physically attractive. Thin girls are not considered beautiful, and preteen girls are encouraged to eat well, and especially to drink milk, in order to ensure their physical beauty. Traditionally, girls became engaged or married by the time they were 8 or 10 years of age, but today many girls wait until they graduate from high school or college.

Mauritanian men are permitted to marry more than one wife. Though some choose to do so, most do not. Often, however, they marry in succession, divorcing one wife and then marrying a second. In 2008, the country had a very high fertility rate of 5.78.

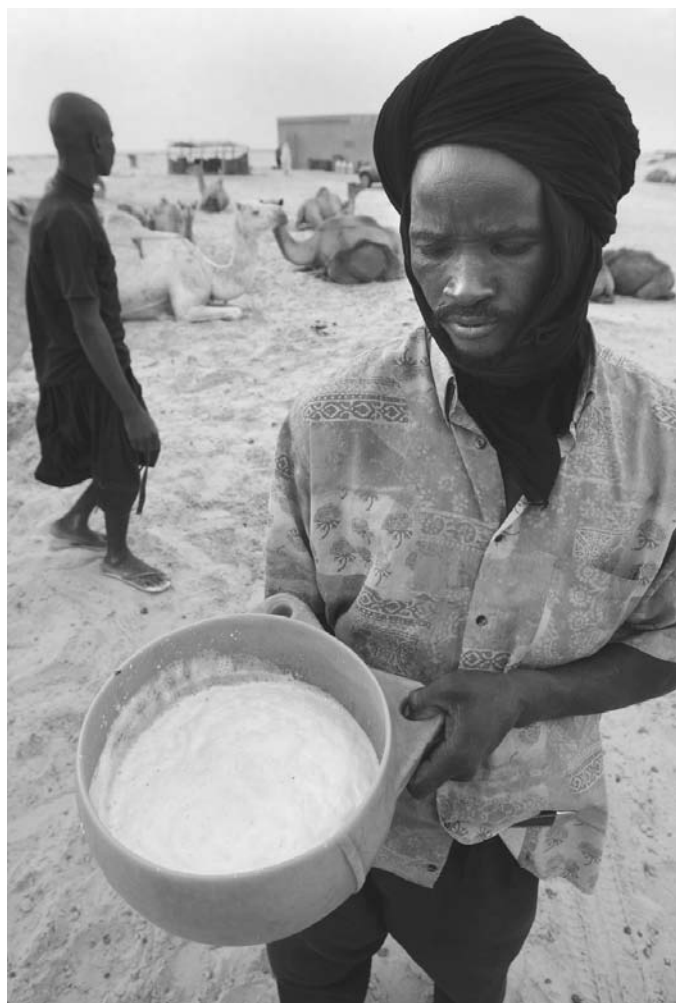
## 11 CLOTHING

Mauritanian attire is influenced by the desert heat and Islamic practice. Islam dictates that women should cover all the body except the hands and face, and men should cover the area from the navel to the knees. Both men and women in Mauritania often wear attire that covers the entire body, commonly with the face, hands, feet, and arms showing. Women wear a *malaffa*, which is a long cloak wrapped loosely around the body from head to toe. The men wear a *dar'a*, which is a long, loose robe worn over baggy pants known as *sirwal*. Some men wear head coverings, predominantly turbans or *hawli*, for protection from the winter cold and summer heat. Typical office attire for men is Western-style pants and shirts. Southern women wear dresses or skirts and blouses. They also wear long robes called *boubous*.

## 12 FOOD

Lunch is the largest meal of the day in Mauritania. Commonly, villagers eat a spicy fish and vegetable stew with rice for lunch. Another popular Mauritanian lunch that is common in the northern desert is spicy rice mixed with *tishtar*, or small pieces of dried meat. A common dish served at dinnertime is *couscous*; it is semolina wheat sprinkled with oil and water and rolled into tiny grains. The grains are then steamed and ready for use in a favorite recipe. The couscous can be mixed with a number of sauces and vegetables. In some parts of Mauritania, couscous is known as *lachiri*.





*Babi, a camel milker near the Mauritanian capital of Nouakchott, shows the milk collected from a camel, which will be made into camel cheese. Camel cheese exports would put cash into the hands of this nation's nomads if international regulations could be overcome. (AP Images/Ben Curtis)*

After washing their hands, members of the family gather around a large platter of food placed on the floor. They scoop up small portions of food from the platter with either their hands or utensils. Each person eats only from his or her side of the platter. Many households use a central serving platter but provide diners with individual plates. In some households, men and women eat separately.

A favorite drink is *zrig*, a cool beverage made from goat's milk, water, and sugar. Despite the heat of the desert, tea is consumed throughout the country. Mauritanians drink imported green tea (from China). It is made with fresh mint and served in small glasses a few times per day. Alcoholic beverages are forbidden in Islam, and in 1986 the government banned their import, purchase, and consumption.

### 13 EDUCATION

It is not mandatory that children attend school, and attendance is far from universal. Only 35% of young children attend elementary schools, while even fewer older children—only 8% to 19%—attend secondary school. Though girls often attend

elementary school (25% of girls under the age of 11 attended elementary school in 2003), once this education is complete, it is common for girls to stay home. The French colonial administration established public schools, mainly in the Senegal River valley, where black Africans constituted most of the population. Black Africans thus came to have a primarily secular education. After independence from colonial rule, the Mauritanian government also stressed secular education. Elementary school lasts for six years, followed by two cycles of secondary school. The lower secondary cycle lasts for four years, and the upper secondary cycle lasts for three years.

Schools that provide Islamic education are common throughout the country. These traditional schools are often centered around a learned Islamic leader known as a *marabout*. Parents encourage their children to learn from these men. Boys generally attend religious schools for seven years, and girls attend for two years. Though emphasis is placed on religious learning—that is, memorizing passages from the Quran—language, arithmetic, logic, and other subjects are also taught.

Mauritania has one major secular university, one Islamic institute of higher education, and some vocational institutes. The Mauritania Institute for Scientific Research (founded in 1974) and the Advanced Center for Technical Education (founded in 1980) are perhaps the nation's oldest. According to the nation's 2005 census, the literacy rate was 52%, though this figure is believed to be inflated.

Arabic is taught in all schools. Other local ethnic languages are also taught in elementary schools. French is taught throughout the public school system.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Much of the literary work of Mauritanian writers focuses on Islamic and legal affairs. Islamic jurists pen elaborate discussions of Islamic norms. In addition to the focus on religion, there is also a love of literature and poetry. Stories and poems are passed down through the generations in musical form, recited by storytellers known as *ighyuwn*. As the *ighyuwn* tells his tale, he is accompanied by a drum, by the music of the Mauritanian guitar (*tidinit*), or by women playing a harplike instrument (*ardin*). The stories told are often short fables. Poetry is sung by minstrels and ballad singers. At social events, poetry praising the host or the guests is commonly sung.

### 15 WORK

Until a devastating drought struck Mauritania beginning in the 1970s, 80% to 90% of Mauritanians led a nomadic or seminomadic lifestyle, raising cattle, sheep, and goats. Tens of thousands of animals have died in the drought, which encroaches on previously fertile land by about 6.5 km (4 mi) per year. By the early 21st century, about 85% of herders had moved to the cities to find other employment.

The largest employer of Mauritanians outside the public sector is the mining industry. Iron and copper ores, both discovered in the 1950s, together accounted for 40% of the nation's exports in 2007. Another major employer is the fishing and fish-processing industry; the country's national waters are some of the richest in the world. Unfortunately, although some Mauritanians are employed by the fishing companies, Koreans, Japanese, and Russians have attained major fishing rights off the Atlantic coast, depriving Mauritanians of income that could improve the economy.

## 16 SPORTS

Football (called soccer in the United States) is by far the most popular sport in Mauritania. In 2008, the national team was ranked one-hundred-fourteenth in the world by FIFA (International Federation of Association Football).

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Because of the desert heat during the afternoon, desert dwellers rest after lunch, waiting for the sun to descend. In the evenings, families gather outside the tent, sitting on a light mat called a *hasira*.

Children are creative and make many of their toys, such as cars and airplanes made of wire and tin cans. They also play games requiring no toys. One of these games is a variation of tug-of-war known as *ligum*.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The products of skilled craftspeople and artisans are valued among the elite in Mauritanian society. They are known for their woodwork, jewelry, leatherwork, pottery, weaving, tailoring, and ironwork. Handwoven rugs and handcrafted silver and gold jewelry and cutlery are popular with tourists.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One of the major problems facing Mauritania is the extent of desertification of the land. By 2006, more than 90% of once-arable land had become desert. Other major problems are low standards of health care and shortages of medical equipment and professionals. Infectious diseases such as malaria are prevalent.

A political problem has arisen as a result of the low social status accorded to non-Maure black Africans in Mauritania. The Maures, who comprise both black and white members, dominate the political and social system, government bureaucracy, education, and land ownership. They openly discriminate against the non-Maure black Africans. The non-Maure black population has been a source of slaves, a problem that continued into the early 21st century. Maure domination of the country has spurred opposition among some black groups. The requirement that all secondary school students learn Arabic has also created dissent among the black Africans. The Toucouleur, also called the Halpularen, are the largest black African ethnic group in Mauritania, and it has challenged the domination of the Maures. The Toucouleur lead an illegal antigovernment organization based south of Mauritania, in Senegal—the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania, or the Forces de Libération Africaine de Mauritanie (FLAM). Antigovernment activities by the FLAM have, according to the government, included attempts to overthrow the government. The government has executed some FLAM members for these activities, resulting in demonstrations against racism and violent clashes between supporters and opponents of the government. Following the 2005 coup, a FLAM splinter group renounced violence for political ends and engaged in tentative political negotiations with the government of President Abdullahi. As of 2008, few outstanding issues had been resolved.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Of the total Mauritanian workforce, the United Nations has calculated that 44% are female and, of these women, 53% work

in agriculture. Human slavery and the trafficking of women remain serious concerns.

In response to these issues, the government enacted several laws and policies regarding the rights of women and children. The United Nations reports that in the early 21st century, the president issued decrees that changed domestic laws to bring them into line with international norms. The minimum age for marriage, for example, was raised to 18—high for a Muslim country. In 2003, the country implemented the Act on the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons, prohibiting all forms of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Additionally, Mauritania initiated reforms to increase female access to education beginning in 2002.

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—revised by J. Henry

# MOROCCANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** muh-RAHK-uhns

**LOCATION:** Morocco

**POPULATION:** 33.7 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; French; English; Berber; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Islam; Christianity; Judaism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Morocco is located in an area called the Maghrib, a region in the western part of North Africa that borders the Mediterranean Sea. (Maghrib is the Arabic word referring to the direction of the sunset.) Morocco is known as *al-Maghrib al-Aqsa*, the furthest west, or simply *al-Maghrib*, a fitting name for this country that is located at the extreme western corner of North Africa. Morocco is ruled by a king who claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad, the 7th-century messenger of Islam.

Morocco has endured a series of foreign intrusions throughout its history. The inhabitants of Morocco were called *Barbari* by the Romans—a broad, derogatory term for peoples outside the purview of the Roman Empire—and in time, they came to be called Berbers. During the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage (located in present-day Tunisia) in the 2nd and 3rd centuries bc, the Berbers sided with the Carthaginians. In 149 bc, the Carthaginians were defeated, and the Romans began to settle in North Africa. The Roman emperor Claudius divided the empire's possessions in ad 42 and established a series of provinces across the northern coast of Africa, naming what is now known as Morocco *Mauretania Tingitana*. Roman control of the region was never extensive, and the Berber tribes periodically rebelled against the invaders. As a result, Rome abandoned most of Mauretania Tingitana in the period ad 286–304, though it retained control of strategic locations in the north to oversee the Strait of Gibraltar.

In ad 429, the German king Gaiseric, backed by 80,000 Vandals (a German tribe), invaded North Africa from Spain. The Vandals' influence in North Africa was relatively short-lived. Like the Romans, they found that they could not suppress the Berber uprisings and either abandoned the region or were absorbed by the remaining Roman elites. The Byzantine emperor Justinian sent his army to North Africa in 533 and, for a time, regained at least tenuous control over Morocco.

The next invaders were Arab Muslims. Beginning in ad 662, the Arabs, led by Uqba bin Nafi, were by far the most influential conquerors of Morocco. At the time, many Berbers were Jewish, animist, or polytheistic in their religion, and there was strong resistance on the part of the Berber tribes to the new invaders. Eventually, however, the majority of Berbers adopted the Islamic religion. The ruling Arab view of Islam at the time was that Islam was primarily a religion for Arabs, and therefore non-Arab converts were treated as second-class citizens—a practice that fostered tensions between the Arabs and the Berbers. The tensions persisted until 786, when the Arab Moulay Idris, a self-proclaimed descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, followed by his son, Idris II, established a dynasty that would control large sections of the Maghrib for nearly 200 years.

Following the decline of the Isdrisids, Morocco was ruled for almost 500 years by dynasties of Berber origin. The first of these were the Almoravids, who spread Islam further north into southern Spain. Under the Almoravids, Andalusian culture, art, and architecture were brought from Spain to Morocco, marking the beginning of a cross-cultural flowering that would continue until the late 15th century. By 1140, another tribal dynasty, the Almohads, had seized control of Morocco. Under the Almohad caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min, the country became a center of learning, and under Almohad patronage, the study of philosophy, mathematics, and Islamic law, as well as Islamic mysticism (known as Sufism), flourished.

Spain, Portugal, England, and France all had a strong interest in their neighbor to the south, and during the 15th century, each set out to control various coastal areas of Morocco. By this time, small Christian communities from Europe had settled in Morocco. Direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad became the chief source of political authority, replacing the tribal systems that had dominated Moroccan political leadership for centuries. The Sa'adi rulers brought great unity and prosperity to Morocco. They were succeeded in the middle of the 17th century by the 'Alawis, who, despite substantial colonial interference from the European states, continue to rule Morocco as of 2008.

By the 19th century, Europeans had gained many concessions from the 'Alawi rulers and virtually controlled Morocco, though they stopped short of political governance. This changed during the early 20th century, when Spain gained control of a northern strip of Morocco, which it would hold until 1956. In 1912, France established a protectorate over the rest of Morocco. The 'Alawi sultan, Moulay Hafid, authorized the protectorate by signing the Treaty of Fez, which gave France the power to establish civil order in Morocco. The result went beyond mere civil authority—France took over Morocco's foreign and economic policy as well. The European presence expanded in Morocco, and by the mid-1930s, 200,000 Europeans, 75% of them French, were living in Morocco. They built new towns and roads, expanded the existing railroads, modernized agriculture, and built ports.

Anti-French Moroccan nationalism began to grow in the 1920s and strengthened during World War II (1939–45). During the war, the Vichy government that supplanted the French government insisted on the persecution of Jews in Morocco. The Moroccans were unwilling to cooperate in this persecution, and tensions mounted between the colonial French rulers and the Moroccans. Moroccans fought on the side of the Allied powers during the war, and Morocco was liberated by Allied troops in 1942. When Sultan Muhammad V met with the Allied powers at Casablanca in 1943, he expressed his desire for independence from France, but it would be more than a decade before this desire was realized.

In 1947, a national campaign for self-government was launched, and in 1949, Sultan Muhammad V gave the campaign his official backing. In 1953, the sultan was deposed by the French, with some Berber assistance. He was exiled to Madagascar, an action that precipitated a number of anti-French disturbances in Morocco. In 1955, Berbers killed every French person in the town of Oued Zem. In the aftermath of the violence, the French restored Sultan Muhammad V to power. Independence was finally granted to Morocco on 2 March 1956. In the same year, the northern territory under Spanish rule

was granted independence as well. In 1957, the sultan adopted the title of king and named his son, Hasan, crown prince. The prince became King Hasan II after his father's death in 1961. Hasan II survived attempted coups in the early 1970s and confronted, in the course of his reign, a number of critical economic and political challenges, notably the emergence of an increasingly influential Islamist movement.

In 1971, Hasan II began a battle to establish sovereignty over the resource-rich Western Sahara, a territory then known as the Spanish Sahara, to Morocco's south. He encountered resistance from Algeria and Libya. In April 1976, an agreement was reached whereby Morocco would retain a section of the disputed territory. Mauritania would control another section, and the remainder of the Spanish Sahara would become independent under the name Western Sahara. Mauritania later relinquished its claim, and Morocco annexed the freed territory. Conflict between Morocco and the Algerian-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of the Sahara and the Rio de Oro (Polisario) continued throughout the 1980s. A cease-fire was brokered in 1991, although sporadic fighting continued. For many years, the international community has sought a resolution to this long-running dispute, but with little success. Formal talks between Morocco and the Polisario resumed in 2007 and continued as of March 2008.

Muhammad VI took the throne upon his father's death in 1999. The early years of his reign were characterized by cautious liberalization—politically, economically, and socially. Generally enjoying broad popular support, Muhammad VI became part of new generation of Arab leaders attempting to maintain a viable balance between tradition and modernization, continuity and change.

The king is head of state and, by virtue of his descent from the Prophet Muhammad, he is known as *amir al-mu'minin*, or "Commander of the Faithful." The king appoints a cabinet, known as the Council of Ministers. He also appoints a prime minister as head of the government. A *Majlis al-Nuab*, or Council of Representatives, is made up of legislators elected by the people. The council is referred to as the Parliament, but it legislates only criminal, civil, and commercial matters and can be disbanded by royal decree.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Morocco, a country divided into 43 provinces, has an area of 446,550 sq km (172,368 sq mi) covering the northwest corner of Africa. It lies 13 km (8 mi) to the south of Spain, separated by the Strait of Gibraltar. The Mediterranean Sea separates Morocco from Europe. Morocco is bordered on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east and southeast by Algeria, and on the south by the Western Sahara. The Moroccan coastline is more than 1,600 km (1,000 mi) long, allowing for a thriving fishing industry (mackerels, anchovies, and sardines) and a tourism industry that features beach resorts on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts. The population of Morocco was estimated to be 33,757,175 in 2007.

The Moroccan landscape consists of mountains, rivers, desert, and plains. It has four major mountain ranges. In the north, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, are the Rif Mountains. While the Rif themselves rise only to 2,100 m (6,890 ft), their cliffs drop off sharply to the sea and thus make access by modern transportation difficult. The Rif area has few coastal towns or beaches. South of the Rif are three ranges that make



up the Atlas Mountains. From north to south, these are the Middle Atlas, which rise only to 3,000 m (9,850 ft); the High Atlas, rising to more than 4,000 m (13,130 ft); and the Anti-Atlas, rising only to 2,400 m (7,880 ft). Morocco's highest mountain is Mount Toubkal in the High Atlas range. Mount Toubkal is 4,165 m (13,670 ft).

The northwestern part of the Sahara covers Morocco from the foothills of the Anti-Atlas Mountains to the east. Most of the habitation consists of small groups of people living in the oases.

Morocco's rivers are not navigable, but they are a significant source of irrigation and provide water for 20% of the arable land. Three rivers rise in the Middle Atlas and empty into the Atlantic Ocean. These are the Sebou, Morocco's largest river; the Bou Regreg; and the Oum al-Rabi'. The Moulouya also rises in the Middle Atlas and flows northward into the Mediterranean. To the south are the Tensift, the Sous, and the Dra'a rivers, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean, and the Ziz and Rheris rivers, which flow into the desert.

Several flat, featureless plains lie between the mountain ranges and between the Atlantic coast and the mountains. A variety of crops are cultivated, some of which are processed for export. The most fertile region lies between the Atlas Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean. Here, oranges, figs, olives, almonds, barley, and wheat are grown in abundance. The west-central plain boasts the largest phosphate reserves in the world, and Morocco is responsible for nearly 20% of the world's phosphate extraction.

Morocco has a variety of weather patterns. The desert is hot and dry, cooling off precipitously during winter nights. The coastal plains and coastline enjoy a Mediterranean climate, with mild temperatures attributable to the proximity of the sea. In the low mountain elevations, summers are hot and dry, and winters are cold and rainy. In the higher mountain elevations, summer days are hot and nights are cool. Winters are cold there, and snow is common.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Both Arabic and French are taught in Moroccan schools. English is also taught in some schools. Modern Standard Arabic is the official state language, and it is used in most forms of public discourse. Moroccans speak their own dialect of Arabic, which displays slight regional variations. This dialect is increasingly used in formal contexts such as advertising and public awareness campaigns. Some of the more common Arabic words used in Morocco are religious in nature. When pledging to do something, a Moroccan Muslim often says *insha' Allah*, or "if God wills it." Prior to any action, a Muslim will often say *bismillah*, or "in the name of God." Common female Arabic names are *Fatima*, *'Aisha*, and *Khadija*. Common male Arabic names are *Muhammad* (and variants such as *Ahmed* or *Hamid*), *Hasan*, and *'Ali*. All of these are also the names of famous people in Islamic history.

Educated Moroccans are expected to speak French, and French vocabulary words have entered the Moroccan language as a result of years of French colonization. French is commonly used in business transactions and in hotels and resort areas where foreigners congregate. Fluency in French helps Moroccans to climb the social ladder. Spanish is spoken in the northern region of Morocco, which was formerly under Spanish rule.

Berber, among the oldest languages in Africa, is spoken almost exclusively by the Berbers, although some Berber words have made their way into Moroccan Arabic. Berbers speak three distinct dialects: Tarifit in the north, Tamazight in the Middle Atlas region, and Tashelhit in the south. Approximately 55% of Berbers speak both their native dialect and Arabic. In 2001, the Royal Institute of Amazigh (Berber) Culture was founded, and Berber was recognized as an official language. On 11 February 2003, King Muhammad VI declared that Tifnagh would be the official alphabet of written Berber. The language has since been used in computers and word processing programs.

Titles of respect are often attached to names. Thus, an older woman may be referred to as *Lalla*, which is comparable to "Ma'am." A man may be referred to as *Sidi*, or *Si* for short, which is comparable to "Mr." A more respectful title, reserved for men of high political status, is *Moulay*. A man who has undergone the pilgrimage to Mecca is called *Hajj*, and a woman who has done so is called *Hajja*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Morocco has many legends based on the exploits of Muslim leaders who acted as mediators in disputes between families and tribal groups. These leaders often came from religious backgrounds and were considered well educated. These holy men, or *murabitin* in Arabic, are somewhat analogous to the Christian saints, and they were believed to possess *baraka*, or divine grace, which allowed them to perform miracles. Their

burial sites, small domed structures surrounded by a walled courtyard, are often sites of pilgrimage. Many people visit the *murabitin* to ask for intercession and hope that they will receive blessings and favors from the popular saints. The burial sites have also become unofficial centers for the collection of alms for the needy. The *murabitin* are more commonly found in the countryside than in the urban areas.

Some Moroccans believe in spiritual beings called *jinn*—often translated in English as "genies"—who are said to assume the guise of animals so as not to be recognized. They are thought to frequent public baths and other areas associated with water. To ward off these spirits and to prevent them from meddling in human affairs, Moroccans wear verses from the Quran on an amulet. They also wear the "hand of Fatima," a charm in the shape of the right hand that protects against the evil eye. In the years following the 2003 terrorist bombings in Casablanca, the hand of Fatima was used as a symbol for anti-terrorism campaigns.

Often, women in the Moroccan countryside believe in (and might practice) *sihr*, or witchcraft. *Sihr* is administered orally, usually as a potion mixed with food or drink, with the intention of influencing the behavior of another person. This might involve casting a spell to make someone fall in love or administering a curse to take revenge on someone for hurtful behavior. The victim of such a curse might seek the advice of a religious teacher to undo the spell.

Most folklore in Muslim countries tells stories of important figures in religious history, many of which are found in or derived from material found in the Quran or in later forms of Islamic literature.

### 5 RELIGION

The overwhelming majority (99%) of Moroccans are Sunni Muslim, about 69,000 are Christian (mainly Roman Catholic), and a minority of 6,000–7,000 are Jewish. Islam is the state religion, and although many Moroccans do not outwardly practice all of the pillars of Islam, most profess adherence to the religion. The Malaki school of Islamic law, or *Shari'a*, has traditionally predominated in Morocco. Sufism has historically been an important dimension of Moroccan Islam, and Sufi groups continue to play an important role in both official and popular forms of the religion. The Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca is the second largest mosque in the world (second only to the Great Mosque in Mecca) and can accommodate 25,000 inside and a further 80,000 in its courtyard.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Moroccans commemorate both secular and Muslim religious holidays. One major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the month of fasting called Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sexual relations during the daytime in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the less fortunate. At the end of the month, Muslims celebrate for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham, as well as his son, to obey God. This holiday signals the end of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or *hajj*, which every Muslim is obliged to undertake at least once during his or her lifetime. Traditionally, each family slaughters a lamb to feast on during Eid al-Adha. Today, because of the high cost of purchasing a sheep, it is not uncom-

mon for poorer families to pool their resources and purchase an animal to share.

Secular holidays include King Hassan II's Coronation Day (March 3), Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (November 18), and New Year's Day (January 1). Festivals are also held to commemorate anniversaries of the birth or death of saints.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Marriage is the norm in Moroccan society. Weddings are conducted over a period of several days, during which the families of the bride and groom might hold separate parties. These are elaborate affairs featuring food, music, and dancing. Child-bearing is expected of every wife. When the newborn baby is seven days old, a celebration known as the *subu'* is held. It is common for a lamb to be roasted for the party, and guests bring gifts for the baby and the mother. Circumcision of males is an obligation within Islam. In Morocco, it is usually undertaken while the boy is young, before his sixth birthday.

Upon the death of a relative or a neighbor, the deceased is buried within 24 hours, and family and friends gather together to mourn for a period of three days. This involves ritual recitations from the Quran. Close friends prepare food for the bereaved family during the mourning period. Another mourning period occurs on the fortieth day after the death. Again, friends and relatives gather together to recite the Quran in memory of the deceased. At this time a large meal, known as *sadaqa*, is offered to guests who join in the mourning.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Moroccans shake with the right hand during greetings and farewells, and they will often touch the hand to the heart to show respect or affection. Close friends of the same sex commonly hug and exchange kisses on the cheek. It is appropriate for persons of the opposite sex to simply shake hands without intimate physical contact. Some very religious women prefer not to shake hands with men, believing that any physical contact is inappropriate. In the home, men and women often sit and converse in separate sections of the room or house. A common greeting among Moroccans is the phrase *al-salamu 'alaykum*, which means, "May peace be upon you." The response is *wa 'alaykum al-salam*, or "May peace be upon you also." During greetings, Moroccans often exchange a great number of pleasantries and inquiries about one another's families before beginning the conversation.

Homes are shelters against public intrusion, and windows are usually shaded to preserve a family's privacy. Family members are generally courteous to one another, and guests in a Moroccan home characteristically receive gracious attention and respect. Though a Moroccan will show the utmost hospitality to a guest in his or her home, the street or marketplace is a public space in which no such courtesies are necessary. Thus, in public, each person hopes to advance his or her own interests and therefore may show little regard for the interests of others.

Boys and girls are typically kept apart until they are old enough to understand sexuality. Intermingling of the sexes outside marriage is generally considered inappropriate, and perhaps even shameful. Premarital sex is strictly forbidden, and a girl who loses her virginity outside marriage is stigmatized and brings great shame to her family's reputation. Moroccan men are free to socialize outside the home; the café is



Moroccan women have more freedom in the cities, while more restrictions are placed on rural women. (Cory Langley)

a common gathering place. Women are rarely (never, in rural areas) seen at cafés. Homosexuality is illegal in Morocco.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

A majority of Moroccans live in urban areas, most of which comprise a precolonial district, or *medina*, and a colonial or postcolonial area, sometimes called the *ville nouvelle*. The medina is usually surrounded by high, thick walls that enclose houses ranging in age from medieval to modern. Many Moroccans live in *bidonvilles*, shantytowns that are erected on the periphery of urban areas. Originally built as temporary settlements for migrant workers, these bidonvilles, in many cases, have become permanent slums with little infrastructure and few public services, if any. The range and quality of the public services available in Moroccan homes varies widely. Houses in the north are frequently white, whereas those in the south are often reddish brown. In the newer, postcolonial towns, houses are built with Western amenities. These may be either single-family detached dwellings or rows of townhouses attached at the sides or rear. Many homes, especially in the city of Marrakech, feature an open courtyard surrounded by several stories of rooms. Most rooftops are flat, and they are used for washing and hanging out laundry, as well as a variety of social purposes. In areas of high elevation, such as in the mountainous Middle Atlas village of Ifrane, roofs are slanted to allow the snow to slide off.

Moroccans generally have access to clean water and to cooking and heating fuel. Cooking stoves range from a com-

mon three-burner cooking top to full ovens and ranges. These may be fueled by bottled propane or butane gas. The majority of residential toilets are porcelain-covered holes in the ground. Modern homes have Western-style toilets with seats. Most homes also have electricity, with at least one outlet per room. Some homes, though by no means most, have central heating and telephones. Nearly half of all Moroccans own cellular phones, and approximately 6 million people are connected to the Internet.

Streets are well maintained, and most cities are connected by two-lane roads. As of 2007, there were 507 km (315 mi) of new, multilane expressways, or *autoroutes*, linking the major cities. At present, there are autoroutes linking Casablanca to Al-Jadida, Tangier, Marrakech, and Fes. Those connecting Tangier to Ceuta in the north, and Agadir to Marrakech in the south, were still under construction as of 2008. Railroads built during the era of French colonization continue to operate today. Approximately 1,907 km (1,185 mi) of rail runs east to west and north to south, connecting most of Morocco's major cities and connecting Morocco with Algeria. Cities that cannot be reached by train are serviced by buses, which offer extensive coverage. The country has four major seaports and more than a dozen smaller ones. Morocco is linked to the rest of the world by its seven international airports. There are more than 50 civil airports as well.

Moroccans' median age is 24.3 years; approximately 31% of the population is under the age of 14. Casablanca is the most populous city, with more than 3 million inhabitants. The next most populated city is the capital, Rabat, with approximately 1.7 million people. Morocco's population growth rate is 1.528%, and its life expectancy is 68 years for males and 73 for females. Morocco has an infant mortality of 39 deaths per 1,000 live births.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is central to the vast majority of Moroccans' lives. Children live with their families until they marry or go away to school. After a Moroccan man is married, it is common for the husband to bring his wife to his family's home, where they live together with the extended family. The elderly are highly respected, and when they are too old to take care of themselves, they are cared for by their families. Both men and women may play a strong role in decision making, but females are taught early on that they are expected to take care of the home and their siblings. Women generally have more freedom in the cities, whereas more restrictions are placed on rural women.

Marriage is expected of every Moroccan, both men and women. For many women, marriage and childbearing are the ultimate goals in life. Ideally, most women seek to be married before their mid-20s, and most men before they turn 30. Though not all marriages are arranged, parents have great influence over the spousal choices made by their children. Marriage is thus a family decision, not merely an individual one. Generally, the family seeks to make sure that the prospective spouse will bring prosperity and virtue to the family, so that the family's good name and reputation are enhanced. Divorce is seen in a very negative light, but it is not forbidden. Both men and women can initiate divorce proceedings.

## 11 CLOTHING

The national attire of the Moroccans is a one-piece, floor-length, hooded garment known as a *jellaba*. It is commonly worn by men and women of every social class, both urban and rural. The wealthy often have their jellabas tailor made, whereas many simply purchase them from a ready-to-wear rack. Western attire is often worn under the jellaba. Western-style—often very fashionable—attire for women and suits and slacks for men are also common, especially in cities. Religious or conservative women cover their hair in public. Berber women wear long, colorful dresses, often covering their heads with straw hats. They often have tattoos on their forehead, cheek, or neck; this custom is slowly fading away, however. Rural men often wear turbans, and a knitted skullcap is common attire for men going to a mosque. The maroon-colored *fez*, once a ubiquitous sign of respect and wealth, is declining in popularity, especially among younger men. In cold weather, many men cover their jellabas with a hooded cloak called a *burnus*.

## 12 FOOD

Moroccans generally eat three meals per day. Breakfast consists of bread, olive oil, butter, and preserves. It may also include eggs, croissants, a pancake-like food known as *baghrir*, and a number of other pastries and breads. Coffee or tea usually accompanies the meal. Lunch, the largest meal of the day, is a time-consuming affair. Dinner may be a light or a heavy meal, with soup and bread being common. Moroccans are avid tea drinkers. Sweet green tea flavored with mint is served all day long. Coffee, usually with much milk and sugar, is also very popular. Moroccans, being Muslim, are prohibited from consuming pork and alcoholic beverages. The latter, however, are served in bars and cafés throughout the country. Despite the Islamic prohibition, Morocco produces its own domestic wines.

Moroccans eat at a low, round table, and they are often served from one platter. Bread is commonly served with every meal; it is used to scoop up food. Berbers bake bread virtually every day. Morocco's national dish is *couscous*. This is steamed semolina wheat formed into tiny granular particles that are combined with other ingredients to make a main course. Couscous can be accompanied by meat, such as lamb or chicken, or mixed with a variety of vegetables. It is generally served on Friday, the Muslim day of rest. Another favorite Moroccan dish is *tajin*, which is a stew of vegetables and meat baked in an earthenware pot. *Harira*, Moroccan soup, is made in many different styles, each often associated with a particular ritual. For example, during Eid al-Fitr, it consists of semolina flavored with anise. After a woman gives birth, she is given harira flavored with wild mint and thyme. Harira is also consumed to break the fast during the month of Ramadan.

## 13 EDUCATION

Public schools are free and, since 1963, compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 13. The Moroccan government spends approximately 20% of its budget on education. As of 2005, 85% of girls and 90% of boys attended primary school. Participation in education is markedly higher in urban areas. In 2004, an average of 52.3% of adults were literate—65.7% of men and 39.6% of women. Although the country's schools teach Arabic-language curricula, public schools are modeled on the French system. French is taught in all public schools from the



A man walks past Berber carpets on display in Marrakesh, Morocco. (Tim Graham/Getty Images)

third grade through the completion of secondary school. English is taught in public schools at the secondary level. Morocco has many institutions of higher learning, the largest and most prestigious of which is Muhammad V University in Rabat. An English-language university—Al-Akhawayn—opened in the Middle Atlas region in 1995. Private American schools in Casablanca, Rabat, and Tangier offer courses in English from elementary through secondary school. Private French schools are found in every city. The school year is similar to that in Western countries: Classes begin in September and end in June.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Moroccans enjoy rhythmic music and dancing. Though most music on the radio and television is traditional Arab entertainment, an increasing amount of Western music is being broadcast, with a great variety of music channels now available by satellite on television. Traditional Arabic music is dominated by string instruments, such as the *rebec*, *lotar*, *'ud*, and *kamanja*. Hand-held drums of different shapes and sizes are played at parties. It is common to see girls and women dancing at informal gatherings. Sometimes, dancers enter a trance-like state that may culminate in fainting. *Gnawa* music, which is of Berber, Arab, or African origin, is very popular; it features a

three-stringed bass-like instrument called the *gimbri* with percussion accompaniment.

Much dancing and musical entertainment takes place at festivals held in honor of local saints. The festivals often feature horsemen, wearing white robes and white turbans, who gallop toward the audience and then fire their guns into the air.

#### **15 WORK**

Morocco's upper class is made up primarily of wealthy merchants and wholesalers or of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, known as the *Sherfa*. The latter group includes the royal family. The middle class is made up of educated professionals such as university professors, civil servants, doctors, lawyers, and high school teachers. The less educated tend to fall into a lower socioeconomic status. These Moroccans are employed predominantly in factories and farms. In 2007, the urban unemployment rate was 15%. In 2005, a plan was initiated to reduce poverty and unemployment in Morocco's slums. Many of the unemployed take odd jobs as they become available, find work as day laborers, or beg on the streets. Many Moroccans also seek employment outside Morocco and join the emigrant workforce, or *mujahirin*. Most of these people find work in France, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Libya, and the Nether-



lands. The remittances they send to their families in Morocco are a significant source of foreign currency in the country.

The service sector accounts for nearly half of Morocco's gross domestic product. As of 2003, 45% of Moroccans worked in the service sector, 40% in agriculture, and 15% in the industrial sector. Many of Morocco's industries are centered around the city of Casablanca. Berbers in particular engage in small-scale livestock farming, most commonly sheep and goats. Farming methods are not highly developed, although modern equipment and irrigation technology are increasingly being used. The plains of Morocco are cultivated with barley, corn, wheat, tobacco, citrus fruits, olives, tomatoes, and other fruits and vegetables. Though some of these crops are processed for export, Morocco's chief source of export income is phosphate mining and processing. Morocco has the largest phosphate reserves in the world. Other minerals in the country, though not fully exploited, are iron ore, coal, cobalt, copper, lead, manganese, and zinc. The presence there of key resources is one reason for the ongoing conflict over the status of neighboring Western Sahara. Fishing and tourism are also key sources of revenue.

## 16 SPORTS

Football (known as soccer in the United States) is popular in Morocco, as it is throughout the Middle East and North Africa. It is both a spectator sport viewed on television and a field sport engaged in by men and boys throughout the country.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Moroccan men spend much of their leisure time socializing at outdoor cafés. Women in rural areas do not go to cafés, although women in urban areas have begun to frequent them. Most socialization among women is done in the home or on the rooftop. There, they might knit, crochet, or embroider in the company of other women. Women also socialize in public baths. Large cinemas and shopping malls are increasingly found in Morocco's cities, and they are frequented by both men and women.

Morocco has several television stations, with programming in both Arabic and French. Arabic programs come predominantly from Egypt. Satellite transmission has brought a wide range of programming to the country, with tens of thousands of channels to choose from. Even the relatively poor may have access to satellite channels.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Moroccan crafts include rugs, pottery, woodworking, textiles and leatherwork. Rugs and carpets are often woven by hand using a loom; the work is frequently done by women. These rugs have intricate patterns and can take months to complete. Handbags and clothing are crafted from animal skins, which are first prepared and dyed at a leather tannery. Tattooing is an art learned by many women, especially Berbers. Henna, a nonpermanent natural dye that tints the skin a reddish-orange color, is often used to adorn the hands and feet in very detailed, ornate patterns. The construction of the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca utilized skilled craftsmen from throughout Morocco and features a rich variety of indigenous Moroccan styles and techniques.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The government uses strong tactics against people and groups it considers threats to internal security. Members of political opposition movements have thus become targets of arrest campaigns. Morocco has many political prisoners, drawing criticism from human rights organizations. These include both left-wing and Islamist activists, such as members of movements known as the Islamic Youth, the *mujahideen*, and Justice and Charity (al-'Adl wa al-Ihsan). International attention prompted the government to release 2,163 political prisoners between June 1989 and April 1990, despite denial of their existence. A 2003 Human Rights Watch report criticized article 489 of the Moroccan penal code, which criminalizes consensual homosexual acts.

Many claim that Morocco's most pressing problem is the lack of socioeconomic opportunities available to the population. Several riots have taken place to protest the rising cost of food and education. Unemployment is widespread, particularly in rural areas. The current unemployment rate is about 15%, but underemployment is much more prevalent. The government discourages people from moving from the countryside to the urban areas in search of job opportunities. These and other socioeconomic concerns have prompted increased numbers of young Moroccan men to join Islamist movements such as al-Qaeda and other groups operating in Iraq and Central Asia.

Crime is common in Morocco, but very little of it is violent. Thefts and burglary are perhaps the most common crimes. Though hard drugs are a rarity, hashish and marijuana are common but illegal.

In the past, the Moroccan government has spent a large proportion of its foreign reserves fighting a war against the Western Sahara's independence movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Sahara and the Rio de Oro (Polisario).

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Morocco has historically been a patriarchal society. Since the 1980s, however, women have begun to play a more prominent role in Moroccan public life. In the early years of that decade, approximately 20% of families had female heads as a result of rising divorce rates. By 1990, women constituted more than one-third of the workforce, working as judges, doctors, teachers, and university professors. In 1992, Morocco's constitution was amended to place greater emphasis on the equality of men and women in the political sphere and on human rights generally.

In the late 1990s, the Moroccan government began to draw up the Plan for Action to Integrate Women into Development, a document that proposed changes to the Moroccan *mudawwanah*, or family code, in order to improve women's legal rights, health, economic development, and education. The plan met with strong resistance from conservative and Islamist groups. On 12 March 2000, organized marches took place in both Rabat and Casablanca. In Rabat, the Moroccan March 2000 for Women demonstrated support for the objectives contained in the Plan for Action and called for banning polygamy, raising the legal marriage age for women from 14 to 18, and improving women's legal rights in cases of divorce. The Casablanca march, in which Islamist groups were the dominant actors, demonstrated in direct response to the Rabat march and in support of more traditional, Islamic roles for women. Accurate

numbers for the marches are not available, but large numbers of both women and men participated in both demonstrations.

In January 2004, the *mudawwanah* was reformed to ensure equality between men and women, particularly in family roles. The reforms abolished the principle of wifely obedience to one's husband, raised the legal marriage age for women to 18, granted wives the right to request a divorce and the right to property in the case of a divorce, granted women the right to retain child custody in the event of remarriage, and included several important items safeguarding the rights of children. Despite these advances, in 2007, the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report*, which measures inequality between men and women in terms of economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival, ranked Morocco one-hundred-twenty-eighth out of 132 countries studied.

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—revised by J. Henry

# MOSSI

**PRONUNCIATION:** MOH-say

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Moose, Moshi, Mosi

**LOCATION:** Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire

**POPULATION:** 5 to 6 million in Burkina Faso, 1.2 million in Côte d'Ivoire

**LANGUAGE:** Moré

**RELIGION:** traditional religion (3 main components: creator, fertility spirits, ancestors)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Burkinabe; Ivoirians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Mossi make up the largest ethnic group in Burkina Faso. Because of extensive migration to more prosperous neighboring countries, Mossi also are the second-largest ethnic group in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). The Mossi occupied the interior lands within the "*boucle de Niger*" ("great loop of the Niger River") and thus controlled trade between the empires along the great Niger River and the forest kingdoms to their south. The three Mossi kingdoms were known for their resistance to Islam in a region where all other kingdoms and empires were Muslim, at least in their ruling elites, after about the 10th century. Mossi culture nonetheless shows Muslim influences.

The Mossi's story of their origins involves the conquest of native farming peoples by immigrant cavalry soldiers from the northeast, toward what is now northern Nigeria. From the beginning, the Mossi people moved, and their idea of society included people moving in, out, and around.

Mossi migration increased notably after the French conquest of the Mossi in 1896–97; the Mossi were one of the last peoples in Africa to be brought under colonial rule. Like the other colonial powers, the French wanted their colonies to generate money for their European homeland. In less than 10 years after the first conquest, the French demanded that the Mossi pay taxes in French francs. Traditional Mossi taxes to chiefs and kings had been paid in goods, and cowrie shells had served as money. By making the Mossi pay in French money, the colonial government required them to grow, dig, make, or do something the French were willing to pay for. As little was grown or mined in Mossi country that the French wanted to buy, many Mossi were forced to migrate to the Ivory Coast (then a French colony) and the neighboring British Gold Coast (now Ghana) to earn money there. The demand for labor on the mainly African-owned coffee and cocoa farms in the coastal forest in those countries coincided with the dry season in the savanna of Burkina Faso, so Mossi men could migrate south between growing seasons and bring money back to their families. Mossi men also traveled widely as traders and as soldiers in the French army.

The Mossi were organized into three kingdoms, Tenkodogo, Wagadugu, and Yatenga, along with a number of buffer states around their edges. All of them together are sometimes described as "the Mossi empire," but there has never been a time when all the Mossi were unified under one ruler. Each kingdom was ruled by a king, with a court of officials who were responsible for various functions, such as defense, and who governed different areas of the kingdom. Within such areas, groups of up to 20 villages were ruled by a district chief, and



each village had its own chief. There is one word for all these rulers—kings, district chiefs, and village chiefs: *Naba*. A *Naba* is a man who has been properly installed as ruler by the community and thereby has been granted the *nam*, which is the religious power to rule other people. A person who seized power without being properly chosen and without the correct rituals of installation would not be regarded as a real ruler by the Mossi. The fact that the political system of the Mossi was so closely connected to their religion was the main reason that their rulers resisted conversion to Islam at the time when their counterparts to the east and west across the savanna were accepting Islam. Even when individual kings converted, as happened once or twice, the society as a whole did not. Not until the French conquest showed that divine protection of the traditional system was not absolutely guaranteed did Mossi people in any numbers convert to Islam or to Christianity.

Nabas were chosen by the court officials from among the sons of the previous *Naba*. While in principle the oldest son should succeed his father, the ministers tried to ensure that the new *Naba* was capable of ruling well. In the case of kings, who had many wives, the number of eligible sons might be large. One of the ways that the Mossi states expanded their territory was that sons who were not chosen to succeed their fathers founded new political units on the edges of the Mossi area, conquering (or persuading) local peoples who had the same general way of life, but lacked kingdoms, to become Mossi.

Exactly when the Mossi states were founded is still debated, but a Mossi raid on Timbuktu in 1329 is recorded in Arabic histories written in that city.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Mossi homeland is the central portion of Burkina Faso, known until 1984 as Upper Volta for its location on the three branches of what in Ghana becomes the Volta River.

Because the Mossi were the dominant people in the region before and during colonial rule, their population statistics in relation to the modern nation have been affected by political factors. In 1962, the French counted 10% of the population and estimated from that sample survey that 48% of the total population was Mossi. However, there has been suspicion that the number 48% was picked by the French so that the Mossi, who already were most of the leaders of the new country, would not have an outright majority as the Republic of Upper Volta became independent. The following censuses of 1975 and 1985 did not publish national totals for the country's ethnic groups, in order to avoid ethnic conflict. Therefore, estimating the Mossi population is a matter of dividing the national population roughly in half. In 1995, the estimated national population of Burkina Faso was 10,422,828, of whom some 5 to 6 million would be Mossi.

Burkina Faso is roughly the size of Colorado, with the Mossi area in the center running from Tenkodogo in the southeast to Ouagadougou in the northwest. The national capital, Ouagadougou, is also the capital of the largest and strongest Mossi kingdom, which has the same name. The importance of Ouagadougou as a kingdom was emphasized by the fact that its *Naba* was the only one whose title was not just the name of the kingdom, district, or village attached to the word *Naba*, but was *Mogho* (or *Moro*) *Naba*, meaning "ruler of the world." The country is mainly savanna, or grassland, with scattered trees; unfarmed land is brush and trees. The extreme north of the country is part of the true Sahel, the transition zone between the Sahara desert and the savanna grasslands. The few rivers and streams are seasonal, with only scattered pools keeping water through the dry season; most water used by the Mossi is drawn from wells.

As the economies of Ghana and the Ivory Coast improved, and as transportation became easier, more and more of the Mossi did not merely migrate seasonally to work as farm laborers, but settled and became farmers or city or town dwellers. As a result, there is a network of Mossi across all three countries, greatly expanding opportunities for relatives back home. The Mossi are the second-largest ethnic group in the Ivory Coast; they were the majority of the 1.2 million Burkinabe counted in the 1988 census.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Mossi language is Moré. It is a language of the Gur group within the larger Niger-Congo language family. Like many African languages, Moré uses tones (differences in pitch) as well as individual sounds to distinguish meanings; also, like many African and African-influenced languages, it indicates both tense and "aspect." That is, a verb indicates both whether an action is in the past, the present, or the future, and also whether it is an ongoing action or one happening only at one particular time. Mossi speech, both in everyday use and in formal political contexts, is rich in proverbs.

A person's name is not a random choice by his or her parents, but it also reflects circumstances of birth. Names can refer to events that happened during pregnancy or just before or during childbirth. A baby might be named *Gyelle* if his or

her mother accidentally broke an egg while she was pregnant. Many names refer to sacred places or forces whose protection was sought for the birth or the baby.

As with many other West African peoples, there are Mossi names indicating the day of the week when a person was born: *Arzuma* (boy) or *Zuma* (girl) signifies a child born on Friday, whereas *Hado* was born on Sunday and *Larba* on Wednesday.

Being born during a festival may also be reflected in a person's name. Festivals have one or more names associated with them, which are given to a baby born at that time; often the name is the same name as that of the event: *Basga*, for example, or *Tengande*. Such events might reflect Muslim rather than traditional Mossi holidays. *Lokre* is a name for someone born at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, while *Kibsa* names one born during the festival of Tabaski forty days later, when Muslims sacrifice a ram in honor of the biblical patriarch Abraham.

In much of Africa, high rates of infant mortality meant that twins (who were each usually smaller than other babies, and therefore weaker) were less likely to survive; twins therefore have a special religious significance (sometimes seen as a blessing, sometimes as the opposite, but almost always different) and have special names. For the Mossi, there are special names for twins, *Raogo* ("boy") and *Poko* ("girl"), with diminutive forms for a "younger" twin of the same gender, the younger being the *first* one born and therefore in the uterus for a shorter time. There are even special names for the second, third, and fourth children born after a set of twins.

Children who are born in Muslim or Christian families, or persons who convert to those religions, have names common to Muslims and Christians everywhere in the world, which are Arabic forms of Quranic and Biblical names for Muslims (Adama, Aminata, Binta, Azara, Fatimata, Issa, Issaka, Karim, Mariam, Moussa, Ousman, Saidou), and French forms of Biblical names and (for Roman Catholics) saints' names (Abel, Daniel, Elisabeth, Etienne, Jean, Marie, Moise, Pascal, Pauline, Philippe, Pierre).

#### 4 FOLKLORE

While there have always been some Mossi who were Muslim and literate in Arabic, in general there were no written records in Mossi society. Specialist praise singers, usually called *griots* across the West African savanna, were the keepers of royal traditions and genealogies, but the entire society relied upon folktales and proverbs to concentrate wisdom and experience and to pass them on to succeeding generations.

The Mossi's account of their founding is handed down through an oral tradition that nicely exemplifies important and necessary elements for such an origin myth. Long ago (over 40 generations), a king of the Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Nankana peoples in what is now northern Ghana, Naba Nedega, had a daughter whom he would not allow to marry because he valued her warrior skills so highly. Therefore, Princess Nyennega took a horse and fled north into what is now Mossi country, where she married a local man. Their son was named *Ouedraogo* ("stallion") and after growing up with his maternal grandfather, he returned with Dagomba cavalry and conquered Tenkodogo and its indigenous people, his father's ethnic group, the Bisa. The Mossi people came from the intermarriage of Ouedraogo and his cavalry with Bisa women. To this day the royal families of the two largest Mossi kingdoms,

Ouagadougou and Yatenga, are named *Ouedraogo*. There is a statue of Princess Nyennega on horseback in the city of Ouagadougou to commemorate the story.

The tale of Princess Nyennega and Ouedraogo highlights several important points that illustrate how such stories serve as the basis for organized society. Princess Nyennega is a woman, who marries a man she finds in what becomes Mossi country. This is important for two reasons. First, like most African peoples, Mossi do not believe land can be bought or sold; it is in trust from the ancestors to the living, who must maintain it for generations still to come. Land is owned by the family that originally "domesticated" it by clearing uninhabited wilderness. Secondly, Mossi, like about two-thirds of peoples in the world, trace family membership and family names through the lineage of fathers and their fathers.

For the Mossi to be legitimate owners of their land, then, they had to have a story tracing their ancestry back to the original inhabitants of the land, even though the kingdoms were founded by members of a cavalry (the dominant military technology of the West African savanna until this century) who were immigrants. By making the founding cavalry leader a son of a local man and an immigrant princess, the Mossi validate their claim to their kingdoms. That founder's name, and its perpetuation in the name of the royal clan, underlines the importance of horse soldiers in creating kingdoms where people previously had lived only in extended families.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Mossi are like many African peoples in having traditionally had a religion with three main components. There is a belief in an all-powerful creator, *Wende*, usually discussed as *Wennam*, "God's power." *Nam* is the power ritually granted to a *naba* to rule over humans. While *Wende* is all-powerful, he is also very distant and not concerned with the daily lives of people. More important in day-to-day religion are generalized spirits of rain and the earth, which govern fertility and crops, and the role of ancestors in the lives of their descendents.

The fertility spirits are worshiped as needed, by sacrifices of sheep or goats, or more often of chickens or guinea fowl, and of eggs by the poorest people, at sacred spots in the landscape, such as an outcropping of rocks or a notable baobab tree. Offerings of millet beer and millet flour in water also accompany prayers at such times when a whole village may gather, for example, to seek rain in time of drought.

The most immediate part of religion, however, is the part played by ancestors. Families are traced in the male line from founding ancestors through the living to future generations. The ancestors watch over their descendents, punishing them or rewarding them for their behavior. The cycle of rituals is mostly concerned with them. A household has a shrine, an inverted pottery bowl, with sacred plants and objects under it, which is honored once a year at the time of the harvest festival, when sacrifices and offerings are made to this shrine and to graves of male ancestors (which are located near where their houses stood); these offerings are like those given to the earth spirits.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The *Basega* festival comes in December, after the millet crop has been harvested. It is a festival of thanksgiving, thanking the ancestors for their part in bringing in a successful harvest

and asking their aid with the coming year's crops. It is a family-based ritual even though it takes place in a political context. That is, a family cannot sacrifice to its ancestors until the day when their district chief sacrifices to his, and the chief cannot do so until the king has done so. While the king's *Basega* is a very large and impressive ceremony (with the luxury of bulls being sacrificed), witnessed by many of his subjects who partake in feasts he offers, strictly speaking he is sacrificing to his ancestors for his harvest, not for the whole kingdom's. Sacrifices and food offerings are also made on special occasions, such as the threshing of a family's millet.

The Muslim community pays formal respects to the king at his *Basega* but celebrates its own holidays, as do the Christians. Most Mossi Christians are Roman Catholic; the first African Cardinal in that Church was a Mossi. About one percent of Mossi are Evangelical Christians, members of the Assemblies of God Church.

While most Mossi are not formally educated—because the nation's poverty limits the number of schools, and children are needed for farming, herding, and household work—those children who do attend school have frequent holidays, since the schools and the government observe secular holidays as well as Muslim and Christian ones. The anniversary of the date marking full independence from France, 5 August 1960, has long been a holiday, as has December 11, the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic in 1958. Since the revolution of 1983, its anniversary, August 4, has been the official national day. National holidays are celebrated with parades and, in towns and cities, bicycle races.

Besides the national and religious holidays, the need to mobilize people for special tasks makes some days special events in a given community. Until modern times, the Mossi used horses (for the rulers and the rich) and donkeys for transporting goods and people but not for pulling plows. Farming was, and mainly still is, done with short-handled iron hoes. Tasks, such as preparing fields for planting, weeding them, harvesting millet, and threshing it, as well as house-building jobs, such as making a thatched roof and lifting it onto an adobe (mud-brick) hut, requires more labor than an individual household can supply. So, for such occasions, the family whose fields are being hoed or whose millet is being threshed summons neighbors and relatives (more or less the same people), prepares millet beer and food and hires drummers to provide a rhythm for working. People gather, work for intervals, take breaks for food and conversations, and work some more. People have a good time, the work gets done, usually in a morning, and in return the family being helped owes similar labor to the people who have helped them. These are not formally holidays, but they are special days.

On a more regular cycle, and one going beyond individual villages, there is market day. In Mossi society almost everyone is a farmer, but some people are also merchants in a cycle of markets. Because buyers want as many choices as possible, and a merchant can be in only one place at a time, each region of Mossi country has an organized market system. Each day is a market day somewhere within a walkable distance, but only one place has a market on a particular day. Each market recurs every third day. When a market falls on a Friday, the Muslim Sabbath, which happens every 21 days, it is especially large and draws people from greater distances. This is so even though most Mossi are not Muslim.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

From birth until death (and, indeed, after death, in the ceremonies honoring ancestors), major transitions in a person's life are marked with formal rites of passage. In much of Africa, the number three is associated with males and four with females. A Mossi baby is formally presented to the community three days after birth for a boy and after four days for a girl. At that time, the baby's name is announced, and the child is formally welcomed into its lineage and becomes a bearer of the family name.

In the past, children at one or two years of age were given distinctive facial scars, but since children who are marked in this way may not be enrolled in school due to modern laws against the practice, markings have been eliminated.

Before puberty, both boys and girls, in separate groups, are circumcised. Boys go in groups of 15 to 30 to bush camps, where they stay for 90 to 100 days. This allows time for them to recover from the operation, to form a group that will be closely linked for the rest of their lives, and, not least, to be instructed by older men in what they need to learn to become members of society. Full adulthood is marked by marriage.

In a society with few or no written records, the cumulative experience of elders is crucial to everyone's life; for example, an elder might recognize a particular kind of crop blight that no younger person has ever seen before and could be the only one who would know what to do about it, or, at least, what to expect as a result. The great respect shown by all African societies toward elders is in part a recognition of this all-important store of wisdom they hold for the community and is at the same time, and for related reasons, a consequence of the fact that the elders are "almost ancestors" and will soon make the transition from living members of the community to (deceased) spiritual guardians of the community.

Therefore, Mossi funerals are important family and religious events. A funeral is different from a burial, although both are rituals. In a tropical country, burial must occur very soon after death. Men are buried at the edge of their home, just west of the patio area outside the walled family compound. Women are buried in fields; while they are buried in their husband's village, the burial ritual is done by members of their own family, symbolizing their continued membership in it even though they have borne children for, and lived among, their husband's family.

The funeral occurs ordinarily up to a year after a burial and may be very much later. It is the ritual that confirms the transition of the dead person to the ancestors. The next of kin is responsible for the funeral—the eldest son for his father's, for example. If the son were working in another country, in an extreme case a funeral might be held 20 or 30 years after the burial.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Mossi greetings are very elaborate, more so than in most African societies. The persons greeting each other shake hands while each asks how the other is. The questions extend to how each other's wives are, and their children, and their cows, and sheep, and so on. A full Mossi greeting of an honored elder can take half an hour. While the greeting is taking place, the person who is of lower status shows respect to the other by placing himself or herself in a lower position in relation to the other. If a commoner is formally greeting a chief, he will lie down in

front of him and symbolically throw dirt onto his head to show how much lower he is in status.

If two people of equal status meet, however, each tries to respect the other by slowly dropping from a standing posture to a crouching one. Since each person is simultaneously trying to show respect to the other one, two people start out standing shaking hands and finish up, still shaking hands, each crouched low and sitting on their heels.

When visiting a household, a guest stands outside the walls of the compound and claps his or her hands to announce his or her arrival. The head of the household then comes out of the walled compound to greet the visitor. Only a close friend or relative would go into the walled compound.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Mossi live in villages of extended families. The village boundaries may be streams or other natural features, but in general the village is a social unit more than a geographical one. This is because houses are 75 to 100 yards apart and surrounded by fields, so that when the main crop, millet, is fully grown to 10 to 12 feet in height, the houses are invisible to each other. Where one village stops and another begins may not be obvious from the landscape.

The traditional Mossi house is a number of round adobe huts with conical thatched roofs, all surrounded with an adobe wall. The household might include a man, his younger brothers, and their married sons. Each of them, and each wife, would have their own hut, and there would be other huts for kitchens, storage, and the sheep, goats, and chickens. There would also be granaries for storing the threshed millet. Houses face west, and the notion of the house is wider than just the walled compound; it includes a patio-like area of pounded, swept dirt with an awning, where people rest during the day and guests are greeted.

As the modern economy has involved increasingly greater numbers of Mossi, the rural standard of living has changed. Corrugated-aluminum roofs are sometimes seen; they are something of a status symbol although they are hotter and are noisier during rainstorms than the traditional thatched straw. Bicycles are common for transportation, with better-off people owning motorbikes. Transistor radios are also common. Radio programming includes "personal notices" programs that allow people in separate parts of the country to pass messages to each other. Vans have replaced trucks as the main form of long-distance transportation in Mossi country. Most people, even in cities, cannot afford an automobile.

Malaria remains a chronic health problem among the Mossi; the cost of importing malaria-suppressing drugs is so high that most people cannot afford them. The fact that most people are infected with malarial parasites makes them less able to fight off other diseases. Measles is a major health problem for children, for whom it is often fatal. Again, the cost of foreign-made vaccines and the staff and transportation to administer them means that this entirely preventable disease continues as a serious health problem.

The impact on the Mossi of the great Sahelian drought of the 1970s was compounded by the fact that some of the potentially most fertile land, along the larger rivers with year-round water, was uninhabitable due to onchocerciasis, or river blindness. This disease, whose parasite is transmitted by the bite of

the black fly, can eventually result in blindness. In the 1970s and 1980s, the world's largest public-health project attempted to eliminate this disease and allow people to resettle from crowded parts of the country into potentially fertile lands that had become infested. This has been done by suppressing the black flies that carry the parasite. But, since the flies can only be suppressed, not wiped out, the new, mostly Mossi, villages will be kept habitable only through regular helicopter spraying of the rivers for the foreseeable future.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

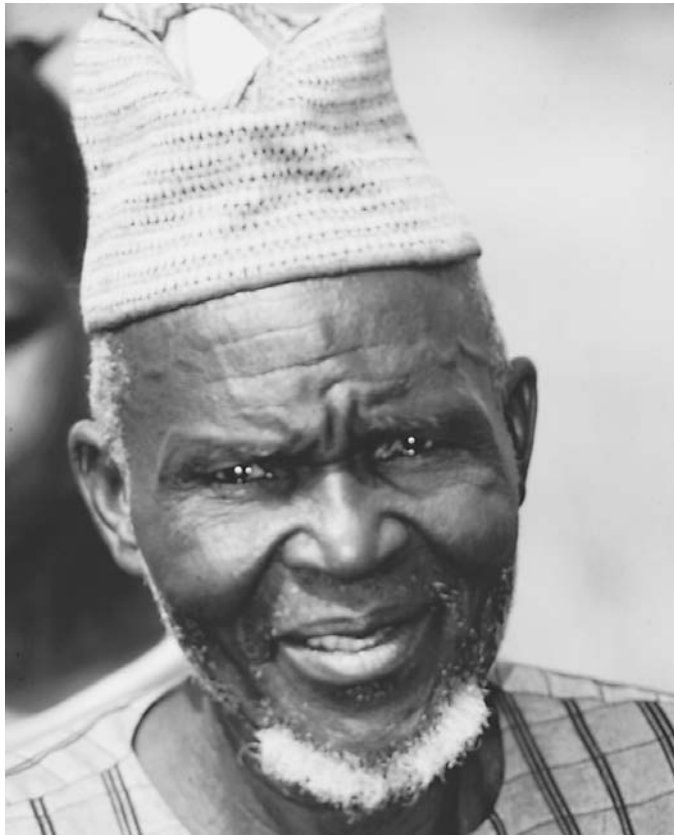
As noted above, traditional Mossi villages are groups of households surrounded by fields, where men related to each other through their fathers live with their wives and children. Because the incest taboo means that a man must marry a woman from another family, women ordinarily live in a village other than the one where they grew up, in a household of closely related men and the women from various other families who have married in. This makes life harder for women, who are outsiders in the household. While many Mossi men have only one wife, there are two reasons wives often want their husbands to have an additional wife or wives: the sheer drudgery of household work makes it useful to have another wife to help, and another wife is equally a stranger and someone to talk to when a husband is surrounded by his relatives for support and advice.

Marriage is ordinarily arranged between families. The idea that the family is a continuous set of kin from ancestors to as-yet-unborn descendants gives the whole lineage a stake in making sure there are children to carry on the family. Since the wives who will bear the children have to come from other families, the whole family is involved in arranging the marriage. Because the reproductive power of the woman is taken away to bear children for a different family, her own family is compensated upon the marriage by payments from her husband and his kin. Traditionally, this "bridewealth" was in the form of cattle and trade goods, but in the modern world there is a wider range of possibilities for payment.

Paying bridewealth is sometimes labeled "bride price" by writers describing societies, such as the Mossi, that practice it, but it does not mean "buying" a wife, any more than the European or Asian custom of dowry meant "buying" a husband. It does underline, though, the fact that marriage in many, if not most, societies is not based upon romantic attraction between two individuals, but instead is a much more complex relationship involving families' need to perpetuate themselves and individuals' need for both male and female skills and roles to make a household economy work. (For example, Mossi men weave cloth, but the women spin the cotton thread from which it is woven.)

In the modern era, with more Western-style education, more ways of earning a living than farming, and, especially, easier long-distance transportation, it is less rare for men and women who have fallen in love to elope if they cannot convince their families to agree to the marriage. It has never been true that all marriages were arranged.

The importance of complementary roles in the daily household routine extends to more than husbands and wives. Children have important roles to play in watching the family's sheep and goats, and in helping to haul water and gather fire-



*A Mossi man from Yakko, Burkina Faso, wearing traditional clothing. It is increasingly common for men to wear shirts and trousers, whether of Islamic or European style. (David Johnson)*

wood for cooking, both of which are major tasks. There is so much work to be done in the kitchen, for example, that if a household does not have a preadolescent girl to help with the cooking, it will foster one from another part of the extended family. Major modern improvements in rural life have been the digging of deeper, cement-lined, year-round wells to ease water hauling, and the acquisition of gasoline-powered mills to grind millet seeds into flour, previously done by hand with a grindstone.

It seems that household sizes are getting smaller in modern Mossi society as more people pursue more varied ways of earning a living and become more involved in a money economy, in which they are more interested in spending their cash on their own children and are less involved in the joint farming of a larger household. But, it is certainly not unusual for households to have more than one wife, or more than one set of husbands and wives. The high infant mortality rate and the lack of social security payments for most people still place a premium on having lots of children to ensure that some will survive to help in making a living and to support their parents in their old age. The infant mortality rate has dropped in the last 30 or so years from roughly 50% to an estimated 11%.

Within the walled compound of the Mossi house, each wife has her own hut for herself and her children and prepares meals for herself and for them, with her husband joining each in rotation if he has more than one wife.

Pets are not usual in Mossi society. Dogs are used for hunting and as watchdogs but are not treated with the affection and pampering that Europeans and Americans usually give them. A rural household will have chickens and guinea fowl, sheep and goats, and sometimes pigeons, as household animals, but they are raised for food, for market, and for sacrifices, and are not pets.

Wealthier Mossi may own cattle, but these are not kept at home. Instead, they are cared for by Fulani herders who live in the unfarmed lands among the Mossi. The Fulani, who live all across the West African savanna, are herders rather than farmers. For the Mossi, having cattle with the Fulani means both that the animals are in the care of specialists and that a man's wealth in the form of cattle may be kept hidden from government tax collectors and from his own relatives. Only in the last 20 or so years have some Mossi begun to use oxen or donkeys to pull plows, and donkey-drawn carts were also introduced only in the modern era.

Horses were the basis of the Mossi kingdoms and chieftaincies because cavalry was the basis of military power, even after guns began to be traded in from the Ashanti states to the south. The lack of wheeled transportation for hay made it difficult to concentrate horses, and the lack of pastures to keep them in have meant that horses were, and are, status symbols whose cost in care and feeding limits their possession to chiefs and other nobles and a few especially well-off commoners.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The Mossi grow cotton and weave it into cloth. The traditional loom wove a long strip of plain or patterned cloth about six inches wide. Strips were sewn together to make cloth for clothes or blankets. In pre-colonial times the Mossi exported large "wheels" of cotton strips, carried on donkeys, to other West African peoples. The French greatly encouraged the growing of cotton as a cash crop, as does the Burkinabe government.

While traditional strip-woven cloth is still available, and is still worn, most everyday clothing is made from factory-woven cotton cloth in one-by-two-meter panels. Such cloth is manufactured in Burkina Faso and is also imported.

Women wear a long skirt made of a cloth panel wrapped around the waist. It is now common to wear a top as well, but this is a recent change in rural areas. It is increasingly common for men to wear shirts and trousers, whether of Islamic or European style. Wealthy men and chiefs wore, and wear, richly embroidered robes in the Muslim-influenced style of the savanna. Modern sewing machines have made the embroidery easier to do, but it is still a luxury.

In the last 30 years or so, a major trade in used American clothing has reached into even rural Mossi markets, so that the everyday working outfit of a farmer is likely to be a strip-woven shirt and a pair of cutoff blue-jean shorts. Rubber shoes and sandals have been added to the leather ones Mossi have traditionally worn.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple of the Mossi diet is millet, along with its relative, sorghum. These crops require less rain, and less regular rain, than wheat. Millet is ground into flour and made into porridge by boiling in water. The result, a loaf-like bowl of somewhat doughy food, is called *sagabo* in Moré and *tô* in West African French. One eats it by breaking off a piece with the right hand

and dipping it into a sauce made of vegetables, spices, herbs, and, sometimes, meat. The sauce supplies the protein and most of the flavor. Sorghum is used to brew a cider-like beer that is drunk from calabashes, half-gourds, by all except Muslims and Protestant Christians.

Rice was domesticated in West Africa and has long been a luxury food for the Mossi; it is served for weddings and other special occasions. It is cooked to a very soft consistency and formed into balls the size of baseballs and is eaten in the same way as the millet porridge.

Corn (maize) is a recently introduced crop that is grown widely; since it depletes soil nutrients faster than millet and is less tolerant of irregular rain, millet remains the staple food.

Peanuts, also native to West Africa, are widely grown; they are eaten boiled, roasted, and ground into sauces.

The extended families to which people belong are grouped into larger clans. Except for chiefs' families, who must be able to show exactly how a claim to a position is justified, most families do not keep detailed genealogies, but just maintain enough sense of kinship to share lineage land, and in the wider community, to know who is an eligible marriage partner and who is not. Members of clans often cannot state exactly how they are related, but they will share a family name and a claim of common descent from some distant, usually heroic, ancestor. Each clan's story of its origin frequently includes an account of how its ancestor was saved at some point of danger by an animal, which then has a special relationship to the clan's members. One clan would not eat crocodile meat because a crocodile was said to have helped hide its ancestor from his enemies; but Mossi in other clans could, and would, eat that animal. Food taboos, then, tend to vary from clan to clan. Some families will eat dog meat, for example, and others will not.

In a farming society where most families do not have electricity, people rise early and go to bed soon after dark. Breakfast may be leftover millet porridge, or, today, French-style bread and coffee. The main meal is in the evening. Food is taken out to those family members working in the fields. Meat is enough of a luxury that it is usually added to sauces in small amounts; grilled meat is for special celebrations.

### 13 EDUCATION

In traditional Mossi society, most education came from living with, watching, and helping more experienced people older than oneself. The circumcision camps provided a few months of group instruction to boys. There have always been some Muslims among the Mossi, and especially among those who were long-distance traders for whom Islam was a key link to traders in other places. For them, there were Koranic schools where Arabic and the Koran were taught. On the other hand, even though most Mossi did not go to school, they often spoke other African languages besides their own, especially Fulbe (Fulfulbe), the Fulani language.

Modern education is becoming available, but it is not universally offered anywhere. Thirty years ago only 7% of Mossi children attended school. As of 1990, only 18% of the population over age 15 could read and write; they comprised 28% of men and 9% of women. Such education is given in French, the national language of Burkina Faso. The government has established standards for writing the Mossi language, but little beyond Christian religious texts and some agricultural information is written in it.

The rather small number of schools in existence during the French colonial period meant that independence brought job opportunities for Mossi and other Burkinabe who had even an elementary education. As more schools have reached more students, however, the limited number of jobs in one of the world's poorest countries has meant that today's students do not qualify for jobs that their parents or older siblings might have gotten in the past with the same educational qualifications.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music has been important to Mossi society for entertainment and also for work, in setting rhythms for tasks such as hoeing and threshing. The main instruments are drums. Some drums are large calabashes with leather drumheads and are played with the hands. There are also wooden drums played with sticks, whose pitch can be changed while it is played by a change in arm pressure on the strings tying the head to the drum. There are also flutes and stringed instruments. Drums are made and played only by members of a specific clan, which is also the only Mossi clan that makes pottery.

Some, but not all, Mossi, have traditions of masked dancing for rituals such as funerals. More secular dancing occurs at celebrations and festivals.

The Mossi have a rich literature of proverbs and folktales. Proverbs are not merely a means of transmitting traditional wisdom, but in political debate they provide a way to make the discussion less a contest between rivals and more a weighing of the collective wisdom and experience of the whole society.

### 15 WORK

Besides the drummers and potters just mentioned, ironworking among the Mossi (as in many African societies) has been restricted to only one clan, whose members were both feared and needed because of their skill. Smelting iron requires mining; and digging in the earth, the source of fertility, is considered supernaturally dangerous. Mossi smiths no longer smelt iron from ore, but work imported and recycled iron into hoes, knives, and axes.

Traditionally, Mossi were farmers, some of whom were part-time traders or soldiers (although wars tended to halt during the farming season), with a few specialist artisans and the chiefs and their courts who governed. Modern Mossi, of course, have all the occupations of a modern nation open to them, and have gone into all of them, but most are still farmers. Farming is nowadays a mix of subsistence farming and cash crops; cotton is grown, but so is the millet needed for city dwellers. Some farmers grow vegetables or fruit for urban markets and for export, and they increasingly use modern technologies, such as fertilizers and insecticides, as well as animal- or tractor-drawn plows.

### 16 SPORTS

Traditional Mossi society had little leisure time. There were games like *warri*, in which stone or seed counters are moved in pits on a board or in the dirt in a game of strategy aimed at capturing the opponent's pieces. Military training required practice with swords, spears, and bows and arrows.

As part of modern Burkina Faso, the Mossi participate in soccer and bicycle racing, the two major national sports. Towns and cities have bicycle races on most holidays. Basketball has a





*Mossi using traditional cultivating methods with oxen near Toma, Burkina Faso. Only recently have more modern occupations been integrated into the farming tradition. (David Johnson)*

small presence and a national team, but reaches few Mossi or other Burkinabe.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Aside from music, dance, and conversation, there were not many forms of entertainment or recreation in traditional Mossi society. Griots recited genealogies and traditions at weddings and other events. Radio is important to modern Mossi both for entertainment and for communication in a society with few telephones and relatively few people able to read or write letters.

Television is barely a factor in Mossi life. In 1992 (the most recent available figures), there were only two television stations in the country, one each in Ouagadougou and in Bobo-Dioulasso, the county's second-largest city, to the west of Mossi country. There were only some 41,500 TV sets in this country of some 10 million persons, and the TV stations broadcast only two hours a day during the week and five hours each on Saturday and Sunday.

Movies are important, although theaters are limited to the larger towns and cities. Relatively few movies are made in Africa, or in African languages, so that the movies people see are often from foreign cultures and in foreign languages (Films from India, for example, are widely viewed in Africa.). This is changing, however, and Burkinabe and Mossi filmmakers are playing a major role. The main film festival in Africa is FES-

PACO, the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma d'Ouagadougou. Mossi filmmakers, such as Gaston Kaboré and Idrissa Ouédraogo, are making feature-length films that are seen increasingly in Europe and North America, but also, because they are in Moré, are fully accessible to the Mossi themselves. As videotape makes it easier to bypass theaters, more and more Mossi will be able to participate in this modern expression of their culture.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Pottery is limited to the one clan of potters and drummers. For those Mossi communities that have masked dancing, the carving and painting of masks is a major art form; Mossi masks are in most major collections of African art. Unlike some other peoples sharing the same general culture and related languages, the Mossi do not paint designs on houses. Metal earrings and jewelry are produced. Hats, bags, and cushions are made from dyed leather. Cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean were once used as money by the Mossi and are still used as decorations for clothing and hats. Venetian glass trade beads have been worn by Mossi for centuries. Children often make toy cars and airplanes from wire; these are now sometimes seen in American museums and shops. Some craft techniques, such as batik dyeing of cloth, have recently been introduced into Mossi culture to produce craft items for export or for sale to the relatively few tourists who visit Burkina.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Mossi share the social problems that many African societies and peoples face in dealing with very rapid social change in some areas, and not enough change, not fast enough in others.

As more Mossi live in Ouagadougou and other cities and large towns and earn their living in an increasing variety of ways, traditional gender and family roles come under pressure. A man is supposed to grow his family's millet, but urban wage-earners cannot. So far, urban life for the Mossi is less dangerous than urban life in many other parts of the world. Ouagadougou is hundreds of years old, so cities as such are not new to the Mossi. At the same time, some of the most powerful films by Mossi filmmakers have dealt with the pressures of urban life and the pressures of traditional life upon women and young people.

Burkina Faso was long noted in modern Africa as having more political freedom than most countries, even (paradoxically) when there was a military government. African governments face the task of meeting many demands with few resources, which can result in few tangible accomplishments; in turn this can make way for the military to seize power in the name of honesty and efficiency. Burkina has the distinction of twice having the army seize power, without injuring anyone, and then eventually returning the government to civilian rule. When younger officers led by Thomas Sankara seized power in 1983, however, there were casualties in the fighting and from execution of political rivals. Sankara made a strong effort to break the country out of its dependence on foreign aid, but in 1987 he himself was killed by his associates, who continue to rule the country. Burkina has multiparty elections, but they have been extensively boycotted by parties that argue that the government is manipulating the political system.

Alcohol and drugs are not major problems. While there is a brewery in the country, and there have been complaints of French army veterans drinking their pensions instead of investing in development, the cost of commercially-produced alcohol is too expensive for many Mossi to consume in quantity. The traditional millet beer is alcoholic but is an established part of both traditional society and household organization and is therefore a culturally controlled substance. Kola nuts, rich in caffeine and the basic ingredient in cola drinks, are widely chewed and are a routine gift to a host, three or four (according to gender) being offered. They are imported from Ghana to the south. They are the preferred stimulant for Muslims, who do not drink alcohol.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As in most African countries, traditional practices have kept women in a subordinate position. In the traditional setting a woman is considered to be property that can be inherited upon the death of her husband. As such, traditional law does not recognize inheritance rights for women. Women suffer from frequent domestic sexual abuse and violence, and no specific laws have been put in place to protect women. Abusive husbands go free as there are no legal channels to investigate or prosecute such individuals. Another problem for girls is that they are married early in life. It is estimated that about 52% of women are married before the age of 18.

However, female excision (commonly known as female genital mutilation) was abolished in 1996. A committee known as The National Committee for the Fight Against Excision was

also established in 1996 to work toward complete eradication of this practice in Burkina Faso. Estimates indicate that up to 70% of girls and women had undergone the procedure before it was abolished in 1996. Since then, incidences of excision have declined by about 40%, and more than 400 people have been sentenced for performing the practice.

Women are responsible for subsistence agriculture, and few are involved in the more lucrative private sector. Women hold only about 11.7% of the seats in parliament and form about 25% of the government workforce. Many of the women in government earn low wages as they generally hold low paying jobs. In terms of human rights, excessive poverty has seen many Mossi living deplorable lives with no access to basic human rights. Child labor, child trafficking, violence, and discrimination against women and children are quite rampant in the country. People are also arrested without charge or trial and excessive force is often used against civilians with official impunity.

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—revised by Ezekiel Kalipeni)

# MOZAMBICANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mo-zam-BEE-kuhns

**LOCATION:** Mozambique

**POPULATION:** 20.9 million

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese (official); 33 African languages; English (trade)

**RELIGION:** traditional African religions; Islam; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Chewa; Swahili

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

As is the case with the vast majority of African countries, the boundaries of Mozambique resulted from the European “scramble for Africa” and are not reflective of a single distinct cultural group. Mozambicans are a people in transition, still recovering from two recent traumatic experiences. First, from 1962 until 1975 the country experienced guerrilla warfare led primarily by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) in opposition to Portuguese colonial rule; this eventually led to independence from the colonial power on 25 June 1975. From 1975 until the early 1990s, however, guerrilla forces continued to war in Mozambique as FRELIMO was challenged by the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO).

FRELIMO formed in 1962, and under the leadership of Eduardo Mondlane initiated an armed campaign against the Portuguese. When Mondlane was killed in an explosion in 1969, Samora Machel led FRELIMO and was appointed the first president of Mozambique after independence in 1975. Machel died in an air crash in 1986 and was succeeded by Joaquim Chissano. Since the ascendancy of Joaquim Chissano to the presidency, three multi-party general elections have been held. The ruling FRELIMO party has won each time. Just before the third election, Chissano voluntarily stepped down after almost two decades in power. Guebuza led FRELIMO to its third victory in February 2005. FRELIMO pursued Marxist-Leninist policies, envisioning a socialist country in Mozambique that would avoid the capitalist abuses of the colonial system. However, in recent years the FRELIMO government began to adopt free market enterprise with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. A progressive constitution is in place, which guarantees press freedom, gender equality and basic human rights.

Following independence from Portugal, the FRELIMO government of Mozambique supported the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. RENAMO was formed from neighboring Rhodesia (which became Zimbabwe in 1980) to discourage Mozambican support of the Zimbabwe nationalist movement. After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, South Africa continued to support RENAMO's terrorism of Mozambique in order to distract FRELIMO from supporting anti-apartheid forces in South Africa. The cause of the plane crash that killed President Machel was never determined, and the Mozambique government believed that South African involvement caused the crash. A General Peace Agreement was signed between RENAMO and FRELIMO on 4 October 1992, and a general ceasefire began. In 1994 Joaquim Chissano was democratically elected president of Mozambique.

The long-term war economy in Mozambique has meant that normal activities, like going to school, were not common until

recently, and that cultural identity in Mozambique is in transition. During the war years, many Mozambicans could not distinguish between RENAMO and FRELIMO forces; many could not identify the president of the country; and many did not realize that the world referred to them as Mozambicans. Part of FRELIMO's socialist strategy was to minimize ethnic and racial distinctions after independence, but most people in Mozambique continue to identify more with local and/or traditional African groups than with their nationality. The 10 major ethnic groups currently found in Mozambique include the Macua-Lomwe, Ajao, Nguni, Tonga, Choipe, Shona, Maconde, Maravi, Chicunda, and the Nyungwe.

Historically, the area of present-day Mozambique was populated by the Yao, Tumbuka, Batonga, and Makua peoples. The first inhabitants of the area were Bushmanoid hunters and gatherers, ancestors of the Khoisan peoples who are presently found in South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia. Around ad 1–4, Bantu-speaking farmers and ironworkers migrated from the north into the plateau and coastal areas of present-day Mozambique. The Zanj migrated east of Lake Nyasa by the 7th century. Islamic chiefs came to the Pemba/Zanzibar coast by the 9th century, and coastal trading forts were held by Arabs as far south as the island of Mozambique. Tsonga and Ronga (later known as Zulu) were in the south of the country from the 15th century, and at about the same time Caranga (also known as Shona) peoples moved to the north.

Since peace officially came to Mozambique in 1992, civil strife and natural disasters have continued to plague the country. The aftermath of nearly 30 years of war has been intensified by recurrent drought in the hinterlands; severe drought and floods in the central and southern provinces; cyclones in the coastal areas; and desertification and pollution of surface and coastal waters due to increased migration to urban and coastal areas. Mozambique remains one of Africa's poorest countries. Indeed, many sources name Mozambique as the world's poorest country.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Mozambique is located in southern Africa between South Africa and Tanzania. Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe all border Mozambique to the west, and the country's eastern coastline is separated from the island country of Madagascar by the Mozambique Channel. The country is slightly less than twice the size of California, with a total area of 303,037 sq mi. The climate is tropical to subtropical, and most of the country is coastal lowlands. Uplands in the center of the country rise to high plateaus in the northwest and mountains in the west. Mozambique is divided into 10 provinces. The capital, Maputo (formerly known as Lourenco Marques), has an estimated population of 2 million. The second and third largest cities are Nampula in the far north and the port city of Beira in central Zambezi Province.

With a population of nearly 20.9 million, Mozambique also has an estimated 100,000 refugees from the earlier years of civil war living in Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. By the end of 1994, 1.6 million refugees had returned to Mozambique. One million Mozambican refugees were in Malawi in 1991. In 1990, it was estimated that 3 million Mozambicans had been displaced by the war. Of the current population, 99% are indigenous ethnic groups such as Shangaan, Chokwe, Manyika,

Sena and Makua; 0.06% are European; 0.2% are Euro-African; and 0.08% are Indians from India.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language adopted by FRELIMO is Portuguese, though only an estimated 30,000 people in Mozambique speak the language, and 27% of those speak it as a second language. The *Ethnologue* lists 33 languages spoken in Mozambique. Those with more than one million speakers include Makhwua-Makhuwana (2.7 million speakers), Makhwua-Metto (1.5 million speakers), and Lomwe (1.3 million speakers). Makhwua-Shirima, Chopi, and Chwabo follow in popularity. In urban centers, particularly in Maputo, English is becoming popular because many neighboring countries use English as their official language.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The various ethnicities of Mozambique contribute to a rich and important presence of myths and legends in the country. Traditional African religions generally place great emphasis on the importance of ancestors. The long dependence on the use of oral tradition to pass histories from one generation to the next has resulted in a wealth of folk traditions and stories. One such legend from the Maconde people demonstrates the importance of folklore to present-day Mozambicans. The Maconde believe that they descended from one man who lived alone in the forest like a wild pig. The man wanted a family, so he carved a wife and eventually had children. The first two children were born near the river and both died. The third was born on the plateau and survived. This was taken as a sign that the Maconde should live on high ground. The Maconde, who are world-renowned for their wood carvings, believed that their carving abilities proved they could control the world of nature and communicate with ancestors and spirits. The Maconde word for woodcarving, *machinamu*, also means ancestors and carvers. They have traditionally produced human figures for family worship as well as masks for initiation ceremonies.

### 5 RELIGION

As indicated by the variety of ethnicities found and languages spoken in Mozambique, an array of religions are practiced. Roughly 60% of Mozambicans practice traditional African religions, 30% are Christian, and 10% are Muslim. Most traditional African religions believe in one supreme being who acts through spirits and ancestors. Traditional religions are not necessarily viewed as incompatible with “imported” religions such as Christianity and Islam. Many Mozambican Christians continue to practice the witchcraft, sorcery, spells, and magic associated with traditional religions. RENAMO used the traditional beliefs of Mozambicans to gain the respect of peasants and to influence soldiers. RENAMO commanders were often Ndua-speakers, among whom *espiritistas* (spirit mediums), *curandeiros* (healers), or *feiticeiros* (witch doctors) enjoyed great influence. Such mediums were believed to give fighters courage, and many practiced rites to make warriors “invisible” or “bulletproof.” While the Ndaus constitute less than 2% of the Mozambique population, they were well known for their use of magic.

At first, FRELIMO tried to ignore traditional African religion and discounted *curandeiros* and chiefs, preferring to emphasize “scientific socialism.” FRELIMO soon relaxed the



party's anti-religious policies, however, and traditional beliefs influenced peace as well. Spirit mediums were believed to have created “neutral zones” by harnessing supernatural powers. Both sides in the fighting respected such areas.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to the national holiday, Independence Day (June 25), many major religious holidays are celebrated in Mozambique. The Portuguese Catholic influence is very heavy among the 30% Christian population, and consequently, holidays such as Christmas and Easter are celebrated much as they are in Western cultures. Similarly, the Muslim population observes Islamic holy days.

During wartime, Independence Day was often marked by increased caution by the general public, as RENAMO often chose the holiday as a time to increase attacks.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As with most traditional African societies, rites of passage are very important to the peoples of Mozambique. Such practices, however, vary from one ethnic group to another. The Tsua, a sub-group of the Tonga, practice circumcision of boys aged 10 through 12, while the Shona (also called Caranga) do not practice initiation or circumcision for boys. The Maconde practice initiation ceremonies that integrate young people into the adult world through links with ancestors and supernatural beings. Circumcision is an important part of the Maconde



*Mozambican families taking the ferry to Catembe Island for a day on the beach. (Jason Laure)*

passage from boyhood to manhood, and the Maconde rites of passage ceremonies include the use of masks.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

As with rites of passage and religious practice, customs concerning greetings, visiting, body language, and dating vary from one ethnic group to another. Portuguese and English greetings are common in urban areas.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Life under civil war was devastating, and Mozambique has not yet truly emerged from the heavy influence of its more than 30-year struggle. The influence of colonialism also remains in many aspects of life, including housing. “Cement town” describes European-style settlements once occupied by colonists, and “cane towns” are the African settlements that surround them. Mozambican homes are often constructed of cane and mud. In the cities, high-rise apartments are crowded, with 20 people sometimes living in three-room apartments. Electricity and plumbing are often unreliable in the cities and are nonexistent in rural areas.

In 1995 there were only 3.8 radios per 100 inhabitants and in 2000 there were 0.5 television receivers per 100 inhabitants. Two television broadcasting organizations—the national state television network and another private organization—offer two television channels with an average of nine hours of programming per day. The city of Maputo contains 64% of tele-

communications lines. In 1995, 69 of the 142 administrative districts in the country had no lines at all. Mozambicans have a very low awareness of computer communications, though e-mail was introduced in 1995 at Centro de Informatica Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (CIUEM). Most Internet users, however, are members of international organizations located in the country.

The war left nearly half of the country’s primary healthcare network destroyed. Today, children continue to die of preventable diseases like measles and malnutrition. An estimated one million land mines remain in the country. Since 1995 in the Maputo province alone, scores of people have stepped on landmines—many of whom were children. The current death rate is 18.97 per 1,000, and life expectancy at birth is 41.6 years.

During the war years, airplanes provided the only safe transportation mode in Mozambique. RENAMO forces destroyed railways and attacked automobiles on roadways, even those autos protected by government convoys. Many roads still have not been repaired since the war ended, nor have industries necessary for automobile maintenance been developed. Most taxis now found in Mozambique cities are many years old and in disrepair.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

While Western cultures generally place equal importance on descent and kinship through both the mother’s and father’s side of the family (bilineal), most African cultures emphasize

one more heavily than the other. In matrilineal groups, for example, not only is the family tree traced through the mother's side of the family, but property passes from one generation to the next based on matrilineal descent. Kinship ties are more important in African societies than in Western societies, in part because land ownership is usually exercised by the extended family group rather than individuals.

Both matrilineal (the Maconde and the Macua-Lomwe, for example) and patrilineal descendant groups exist in Mozambique, although men usually have a decided advantage in terms of decision-making. Men generally control issues related to ownership and access to land. Polygamy is practiced in some areas, although economic pressures have reduced the number of families with multiple spouses. Families in Mozambique continue to practice subsistence farming as a means of survival. Men traditionally perform the initial plowing or hoeing to prepare the land for planting, but women maintain the farm and are responsible for most of the harvesting. Women are also responsible for the traditional roles of taking care of children, food preparation, and home making. During the war years, women were called on to do more than their traditional responsibilities, and as a new social structure emerges in Mozambique, the roles of women are expected to change and to become less subordinate.

Children are also expected to help with farming, and most children do not attend school past the primary years. The usual pets such as dogs and rabbits are popular in Mozambique.

### 11 CLOTHING

During the war, *deslacados*, people dislocated by the war, often had no clothes and covered themselves with tree bark. Clothing became a precious commodity and was often more valued than currency in many areas. In Maputo, guards were posted at clotheslines, and a shirt cost as much as a laborer could earn in a month. Western-style clothing is common, but traditional clothing such as *capulanas* and head scarves are still in use. *Capulanas* are squares of colorful cloth that can be worn as a wraparound skirt or on the upper body, where they double as baby slings.

### 12 FOOD

In parts of Mozambique meat is scarce, but pork and wild pig are favorite dishes and are usually prepared in a marinade. One marinade consists of Madeira (a type of wine) and wine vinegar, salt, pepper, garlic, cloves, red peppers, and bay leaf. Following as much as eight hours of marinating, the meat is fried. Just before serving it on a bed of rice, the meat is laced with orange juice and more wine. The Portuguese influence can be found in Mozambique cuisine in the use of spicy sauces such as *piri-piri*. *Piri-piri* is a sauce made of lemon juice, olive oil, red pepper, salt, and garlic. Products of the fishing industry, especially prawns and shellfish, are popular in the coastal region. The mainstay, however, in Mozambique as well as other parts of southern Africa, is maize. Mealie pie, for example, is a cornmeal mash that is a southern African staple. Many Mozambicans during the war depended on food from relief agencies, some scavenged for wild berries, nuts, and caterpillars, and many others starved.



*A young woman grinds grain in Nampula, Mozambique. Maize is the principal grain for Mozambicans and many other peoples living in southern Africa. Mozambican families continue to practice subsistence agriculture as a means of survival. (Corel Corporation)*

### 13 EDUCATION

By 1989, 52% of first-level primary schools in Mozambique had been destroyed or forced to close by RENAMO. War had so disrupted education that most students in Zambezia Province in 1988 were in the first grade, and *deslocados* were often too hungry to attend school. Teachers, also hungry, were targeted for attack by RENAMO.

A 1995 estimate qualified 33% of Mozambicans over the age of 15 as literate. In 1975, 97% were illiterate. A very small percentage of primary school students continue to secondary school, and the country has limited capacity for professional and academic education. Primary education is free of charge, and 40% of primary school age children enroll. Secondary education is not free. Based on 1992 statistics, of the 1.2 million enrolled in the first five-year phase of primary education, only 100,000 continue with the second, two-year phase. Of that 100,000, only 50,000 continue for secondary, professional, technical, or university education. The 1992 higher education enrollment in the country was 4,600.

During the war, school was often conducted under trees, without books or supplies. Many schools were destroyed during the war years. Mozambique has a very small educated population from which to draw teachers, and families often cannot afford the loss of labor in subsistence farming for children to attend school.

In recent years, the government has made efforts to decentralize its political and economic structures and improve social services. Schools have increased their enrollments dramatically. The net school attendance rate, only 43% in 1991, shot up to 71% in 2004, according to the *UNDP Human Development Report 2006*. However, the quality of education remains a challenge. Most classrooms are overcrowded with about 70 children to just one teacher, almost half of whom are unqualified. Repetition rates are high, reaching 21% in 2004. The proportion of girl pupils attending school remains lower than that of boys and literacy rates for men in 2006 were 67% compared with 38% for women.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mozambicans practice various forms of music, dance, and storytelling. As in most of Africa, African art is used to communicate spiritual messages, historical information, and other truths to society. Thus, cultural heritage plays an important role among the various ethnic groups in Mozambique. Various groups are known for different aspects of their cultural heritage. The Chope, for example, who were believed to have come from the Vilankulu, are masters of the African piano, the *mbila*. The Maconde are world renowned for their wood carvings.

Many writers and artists are natives of Mozambique, including the poet Albuquerque Freire; short-story writer and journalist Luis Bernardo Honwana (also known as Augusto Manuel); and poet and painter Malagatana Gowenha Valente. Poet and artist Rui de Noronha is considered to be the “father of modern Mozambican writers,” and Noemia Carolina Abranches de Sousa (also known as Vera Micaia) is considered to be the first Mozambican woman writer. Much Mozambique literature, like other African literature written in Portuguese, is anticolonial and promotes traditional African themes.

#### 15 WORK

Most Mozambicans rely on *machambas*, family garden plots, for survival. As much as 80%–90% of the population practice some agricultural activity, primarily subsistence farming. During the war, people sometimes had to walk one to two hours to farm their plots during the day, then return to settlements that were guarded against RENAMO bandits at night. The need for and demands of subsistence farming undermined FRELIMO's attempts to establish communal farms and villages in Mozambique following independence. The annual per capita income for Mozambicans is \$90 per year, and unemployment registers at about 21%.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular organized spectator sport in Mozambique. One of the leading soccer players for Portugal in the 1960s, in fact, was Eusobio from Mozambique. Many other Western sports are played by children and adults, particularly in the urban centers.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In Mozambique's urban centers, theater and television are popular. FRELIMO tried to promote rural village theater, but the effort was disrupted during the war years and has not been reestablished. Children enjoy playing games such as hopscotch and hide-and-seek.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

As previously noted, the various ethnic groups have rich cultural heritages that contribute to the art of Mozambique. For example, the Maconde, a matrilineal ethnic group of the Mueda Plateau in North of Pemba Province, are well known for their wood carvings. The carvings now reflect more recent styles. In the Shetani style, the carvings are tall and gracefully curved with stylized and abstracted faces and symbols, and most are carved in heavy ebony. “Shetani” is a Swahili word meaning “devil.” The carvings are used to translate a spirit or group of spirits. The Ujamaa-style carvings are totem-type structures showing lifelike people and faces, huts, and everyday articles like pots and agricultural tools. These carvings are representative of family. The Maconde are also known for their water pots as well as masks used in initiation ceremonies.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A vast array of social problems obviously afflict a country so recently traumatized by war. While Mozambique adopted a democratic constitution in 1990, human rights violations continue to be reported, including a pattern of abusive behavior by security forces and an ineffective judicial system. Mozambique is facing continuing uncertainty as a result of the war years, and the transition to better economic conditions, improved health care and education, and the guarantee of human rights will take time.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Mozambican constitution enshrines gender equality and legislation has been passed to support women's rights. Unlike in other African countries, women are well represented in parliament. As of 2008 30% of members of parliament (MPs) were women, as was the prime minister and the foreign minister. But in the home women often have little negotiating power. They continue to be subservient to men. Despite the government's efforts to eliminate gender disparities in access to education, the proportion of girls attending school is significantly lower than for boys. In secondary schools only 40.7% of the students are girls. In terms of human rights, Mozambique's constitution and legal framework establish safeguards for all citizens' civil rights and liberties, but the treatment of individuals who are arrested or detained remains a concern. In addition, prison conditions are substandard, and trafficking of children and women has increased.

Homosexuality is illegal in Mozambique. Laws covering homosexual activity criminalize male homosexuality with a penalty of up to three years imprisonment in a “re-education institution” where hard labor is used to alter the prisoners “aberrant behavior.” However, the decision in South Africa to legalize same-sex marriages has had an impact on the way Mozambique looks at homosexuality. Following South Africa's decision, homosexuality got a very positive discussion in the national press in Mozambique.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

## NAMIBIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** nuh-MIB-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Namibia

**POPULATION:** 2.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Afrikaans (most widely used); English (official); Diriku; Herero; Kwangali; Kwanyama; Lozi; Mbukushu; Nama; Ndonga; Tswana; Ju|'hoan; Subiya; Zemba and also German

**RELIGION:** Christianity (80–90%); indigenous beliefs (10–20%); Muslim and Hindu also occur

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck proclaimed South West Africa (now Namibia) a German protectorate in 1884. The conquest of German South West Africa by South African forces during World War I resulted in its subsequent administration by that country, from 1917 to 1990, under a League of Nations mandate. A war (1966–1989) between the occupying South African forces and the SWAPO (South-West African People's Organization) liberation movement finally led to the implementation of United Nations Resolution 435 on 1 April 1989. This made provision for free and fair elections, which resulted in SWAPO coming to power. On 21 March 1990, Dr. Sam Nujoma was instated as the country's first president. Namibia has been governed by SWAPO since independence and in November 2004 Hifikepunye Pohamba was elected to replace Nujoma as president.

The last African country to become independent, Namibia is not as well known as some of its neighbors, but is truly a land of remarkable contrasts. Situated along the southwestern coast of the African continent it has a land surface of 824 269 square kilometers, nearly four times the size of Great Britain. Situated south of Angola, north of South Africa, and west of Botswana, Namibia has 1,500 kilometers of Atlantic coastline. The cold waters off this coast ensure that deep-sea fishing represents Namibia's third largest industry and export. The Atlantic also spits diamonds onto the sands of the coastal Namib Desert, which earn Namibia, along with smaller quantities of gold, copper, uranium and other metals, over one billion dollars per year.

Namibia was furthermore the first country in the world to incorporate the protection of the environment into its constitution and some 14% of the land is protected, including virtually the entire Namib Desert coastal strip.

### <sup>2</sup> HOMELAND

Despite its size, Namibia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Africa with its estimated population of about 2.2 million people. The north-central part of the country is the most densely populated area with an average population density of 26 people per square kilometer, more than 10 times the national average.

Namibia boasts three distinct environments—the Namib Desert in the east, the more populous Central Plateau, and the Kalahari Desert in the west, famous for the San people (known as Bushmen) and majestic wildlife. The defining term for all three regions is *dry*. Namibia averages less than 28 cm (11 in) of rain per year, and most of that falls on the central Plateau,





supporting cattle, goat and sheep herding, and marginal subsistence agriculture. The borders are formed by the Kunene and Okavango rivers in the north and by the Orange in the south. Interior rivers become dry washes, called *oshana*, in the dry season, and most irrigation is provided by bore-holes. A severe drought in 1992 turned a precarious situation into a disaster, sending 30,000 farmers to live as squatters in the cities as their crops and animals died.

To the west, the icy Atlantic Ocean pounds the Namib desert shore with relentless fury, throwing up all manner of flotsam, including numerous shipwrecks. It is called the Skeleton Coast for obvious reasons.

In many ways Namibia is a startling country. It contains the world's second largest canyon, the highest dunes, the oldest desert, the largest existing meteorite, and the smallest antelope. Vast areas of the country are true wilderness, which is home to an array of wild animals.

For nearly two decades since independence, Namibia has enjoyed peace and stability. Economic development has recently been due to its productive mining, fishing, tourism, and agricultural industries.

Though for such a vast country, the population is small, yet it is home to a rich diversity of people. The ancestors of the San (Bushmen) arrived in Namibia 2,000 years ago as hunter-gatherers. They were followed by Bantu-speakers after AD 1500 and several other groups joined them subsequently.

The largest population group, the Ovambo, comprise some 50% of Namibians. Other significant communities are: the Kavango (9%); Herero (7%); Damara (7%); Whites (6.6%); Nama

(5%); Caprivan (4%); Bushmen (3%); Baster (2%); Tswana (0.5%); and so-called Coloreds.

The *Ovambo* are mainly found in the northern-most area of Namibia, previously known as Ovamboland. They comprise subgroups with different dialects: the Kwanyama (divided by an indiscriminate international border drawn by the colonial Portuguese and Germans between Angola and Namibia); the Ndonga; Kwambi; Ngandjera; Kwaluudhi; Mbalanthu; Nko-honkadhi; and the Eunda. The Ovambo are agriculturalists and cattle breeders and plant mahango, a kind of millet, their preferred staple diet.

The large *Kavango* community, a riverine people, lives along the banks of the Kavango River in northeast Namibia. They practice agriculture along the narrow strip of soil along the river. Cattle and goats are kept for their milk, meat, and hides. Funnel-shaped fishing baskets are used in the river and the men are renowned wood carvers.

The *Herero* people moved south into Namibia during the 16th century, probably from an area west of Lake Tanganyika. Some (the Ovahimba) stayed behind in Kaokoland in north western Namibia, and a large group moved on to settle in the central and southwestern regions but mainly in the district of Okahandja. The Herero are known for their vast herds of cattle. The Himba, who stayed behind, faced long spells of drought, which forced them to live off the land, collecting wild fruit and digging for roots. Because of this the proud southern Herero regarded them as inferior, thus calling them "Tjimba" from "ondjimba-ndjimba," meaning aardvark, or someone who digs food out of the ground. The Himba are characterized by their traditional loin cloth and the fact that they smear their bodies with red ochre mixed with animal fat.

Most of the *Damara* people live in the northwestern regions of the country but others are found widely across Namibia working in towns, on commercial farms, in mines, and at the coast. They are unrelated to any of the other communities and are believed to have their origin in northwestern Africa from where they migrated south long before the other migrations of African people to the southern parts of the continent. They were originally hunter-gatherers but due to domination and enslavement by the Nama and Herero, they lost their language and cultural traditions. When pursued by the dominant peoples they used to flee into inhospitable mountains and hence became known as "Bergdamara" or Mountain Damara.

The large *white* community is the result of the arrival of people of European descent in different stages. Explorers, hunters, adventurers, prospectors, and traders first travelled north from South Africa. The first missionaries from the Berlin Missionary Society settled in 1806. Soldiers (German) and administrative personnel arrived during the Herero Nama conflict and Boers/Afrikaners came to the country particularly as a result of the Anglo-Boer (South African) War of 1899–1902. The discovery of diamonds attracted more Europeans and after the First World War new white settlers increasingly bought property in Namibia.

A Khoekhoen ("Khoi") people, having initially moved south, and some of the *Nama* later migrated from South Africa back to Namibia. Originally nomadic pastoralists, the Nama still today keep stock. They are found in scattered communities all over Namibia, e.g. the Topnaars at Sesfontein in Kaokoland, the Bondelswarts at Warmbad, the Fransmanne, Kopers, Veld-

skoendraers, GootDoden, Swartboois, Witboois, etc. There are 15 distinct such communities.

The *Caprivians* are hunters and fishermen but they also till the soil, keep stock, and gather food. They live along the rivers of the Caprivi Strip in the far northeastern corner of Namibia. Two communities are distinguished, the Fwe in the west and the Subia in the east.

Essentially gatherers of food who also hunt for game, the *Bushmen (San)* are some of the earliest inhabitants of Namibia. One of the smallest communities in the country, they have become increasingly sedentary. Thus, the largest of their communities, the !Kung, are found in Okavango; the Mbarakwengo, or River Bushmen, are found along the eastern Kavango River region, the Heikom around the Etosha National Park, the Naro east of the towns of Grootfontein and Gobabis and in neighboring Botswana, and the very small, near-extinct Auni, in the lower Nossob district.

The progenitors of the *Baster* (“Bastard”) people were the early Dutch and other European men, who intermarried at the Cape in South Africa with local Khoekhoen and San (Bushmen), and later also Malays, brought there by the Dutch from the East Indies. Having first gathered around mission stations in South Africa, some eventually moved north to Namibia in 1868 and reached Rehoboth in 1870 where they settled. They adopted the language, Afrikaans, and culture of their forefathers and this included particularly the observance of Christian beliefs.

A relatively small community of *Tswana* people lives on the Namibian side of the border of Botswana (“Land of the Tswana”) to the east. Botswana is however where most of the Tswana live and the Namibian Tswana share affinities, including kinship relations, with them.

The small *Colored* community of Namibia also stems from early mixed marriages at the Cape (hence “colored” or mixed), and their antecedents moved from there due to discrimination denying them full participation in social and economic activities of the then South Africa. Afrikaans is their native language, and they are found centered mainly in the larger Namibian towns.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Although only 7% of the population speaks English as a mother tongue, it is the official language. Afrikaans is the most common language and the languages of Ovambo (Kwanyama, Ndonga, Kwambi, Ngandjera, etc.), together referred to as *Oshivambo*, are the most widely spoken. The languages of the San (Bushmen) and Khoekhoen (Nama) are characterized by click sounds. The other Namibian languages were earlier referred to in Section 2. “Hello” in some of these languages is: *Hallo*—Afrikaans; *Nawa*—Ovambo; *Matisa*—Damara; *Koree*—Herero; and *Mazwara*—Okavango.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Through oral tradition most of the Namibian communities have their legends and beliefs handed down over generations. Likewise certain customs are still practiced by people in rural areas, given that Namibia is a country with a population that is still 68% rural.

Many Namibian folk heroes achieved their status through stories of more recent battles. One 19th century Ovambo sub chief, named Madume Ndemufayo, fought the Angolan Por-

tuguese from the north and the Germans from the south, only to be captured and killed by the Germans. His exploits were passed on through oral tradition, as indigenous languages had never been written. The Herero, too, have their stories of resistance and military exploits. Many Herero feel, in fact, that they are not given the same recognition in national lore and policy as the earliest victims and resisters of the Germans. The 1904 German-Herero War ultimately resulted in genocide: over 75% of the Herero population was massacred or banished to die in the Kalahari.

## 5 RELIGION

Namibians describe themselves as very spiritual. European missionaries saw early success here, and today 90% are Christians, mostly Lutheran. While it is common for Africans to incorporate traditional beliefs and practices into their religious life, less than 20% of Namibians claim to do so. Western churches hold great influence in Namibia, which may account for some traditional practices like polygyny (marrying more than one wife) not being accommodated in the country’s legal code.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Two important Namibian holidays fall on August 26. This day was first established in the 19th century as Red Day by the Herero in remembrance of their fallen chiefs and is still marked by the wearing of dark red costumes. After independence, August 26 also became Heroes Day, an official holiday celebrating SWAPO’s first armed battle with the South African military. Many Herero feel that the honor of Red Day is being challenged by Namibia’s ruling party government. Independence Day, March 21, bears the characteristics of Independence Days celebrated throughout the world: military parades, speeches by politicians, plenty of food, alcohol, and reverie.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Much of Namibian ritual life involves cattle. Cattle have provided the economic cornerstone for most of Namibia’s ethnic groups for centuries. A gift is presented by a man to his future father-in-law before marriage can be sanctioned, in the case of the Ovambo this is an ox or *oyonda*. Cows in general play a particularly important role in funerary ritual. The passage from life to death for a man of an Ovambo household is a case in point: His body must remain in the house for at least one day before burial, during which time all his pets must be killed. Traditional Ovambo compounds, called *kraals*, have gates that regulate the comings and goings of both cattle and humans. But at death, the owner may not pass through this gate, or the cattle will die and the kraal will come to ruin. A new hole is cut for him to pass through. A bull is slaughtered, cooked without oil or flavoring of any kind, and a portion is eaten by everyone in the village. Then the kraal and all its contents must be moved at least 15 meters (50 feet). The cattle are not permitted to rest on the same earth that witnessed the death of their owner.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Namibia is one of the most peaceful nations in Africa. Due both to its increasing prosperity and the friendly demeanor of its inhabitants, the people generally go about their ways.



*The average Namibian household has five to seven members. One-third of all dwellings have electricity, and slightly fewer have plumbing. Those that do not have plumbing typically have lime-pit outhouses. In the rural areas, children can walk miles to school, and the donkey is often the best form of transportation. (Cory Langley)*

Namibia is ruled by a multiparty parliament with a democratic constitution. The government's policy of national reconciliation and unity embraces the concepts of tolerance and respect for each other.

The friendly way people, even strangers, greet each other seems to bear witness to this. The sparsely populated and rural nature of much of the country probably has much to do with this and also with the various ways different communities show respect. Among some groups, women and youth bend at the knees as a sign of respect to older men. When greeting or agreeing, Caprivians clap their hands. Basters may kiss close friends and relatives on the lips. But, the handshake is the most common form of personal introduction.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The Namibian economy is heavily dependent on the extraction and processing of mineral for export, yet this sector only employs about 3% of the population while nearly half of the population depends on subsistence agriculture for its livelihood. Namibia normally imports about 50% of its cereal requirements and in times of drought food shortages are a major problem in the rural areas. A high per capita gross domestic product (GDP—estimated at \$5,200 in 2007), relative to the region, hides one of the world's most unequal income distributions. The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP)

2005 Human Development Report for example, indicated that 34.9% of the population lives on \$1.00 per day and 55.8% lives on \$2.00 per day.

Life expectancy is 43.1 years (2007 estimate); the infant mortality rate is 47 deaths per 1,000 live births (birth rate: 34.17/1,000 population—or 23.19/1,000, 2008 estimate); and the literacy rate has been variously put at 65% (Namibia Tourism Board, 2008) and 85.4% (Namibia Facts and Figures, 2001 census, counting literacy as those aged 15 and over being able to read and write). Some of the estimates are now beginning to take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS. The adult prevalence rate for HIV/AIDS was 21.3% in 2003, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS was 210,000 in 2001, and HIV/AIDS deaths totaled 16,000 in 2003.

Although medical services in Namibia are of a relatively high standard, the availability of most services is restricted to the main towns.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Africa has been thrust into modern life more suddenly than any other continent, and Namibia is no exception. As a result, family life has changed drastically and sometimes painfully. One of the most obvious changes regards the role of women in society. Polygyny had been the traditional ideal for men in many ethnic groups and the practice is still significant, al-



*Namibian men mining diamonds. Namibia is among the world's leading producers of gem-quality diamonds, and the mining industry is the largest private sector area of employment. (Jason Laure)*

though not accommodated in legislation. Virginity before marriage had been the traditional ideal for women and errant women could even be banished. Today, one-third of all girls by the age of 18 have had at least one child, while 21 is the average age for first conception, and 25 is the average age for marriage among women. A related trend is the number of households run by women. In Ovamboland, a matrilineal society where men had always been the heads of households and the only owners of property, 45% of all households are headed by women, many of whom are single parents to their children. Namibian women have legal access to birth control, as well as rights to demand child support for their children. More and more women are exercising these rights. Modern birth control is used by 25% of all women, far more than in most of Africa.

Despite women's gains in reproductive choice, their rights to family property are still precarious. In most Namibian cultures, when a man dies his property often accrues to his parents and siblings.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Most Namibian city-dwellers dress in modern fashions, as in the West. Several examples of customary dress stand out, however. Herero women, both rural and urban, have adopted the German Victorian fashions of the 19th century colonists, wearing long petticoated gowns, shawls, and adding extravagant headdresses. The Himba, as was mentioned, a cattle-herding

people from the extreme northwest, whose traditional culture has not changed extensively, typically wear leather thongs or skirts, smearing their bodies with ochre—a reddish pigment extracted from iron ore. The women wear elaborate braids and copper or leather bands around their necks, making them appear elongated.

### **12 FOOD**

Fish is Namibia's largest non-mineral export, yet Namibians do not eat much fish as most of them are not a coastal people. Canned pilchards and dried horse mackerel are available in the towns, but are not a traditional staple. Ostrich farming has become big business in Namibia, but nearly all ostrich meat is exported to northern Europe. Beef, mutton, milk products, millet, sorghum, peanuts, pumpkins, and melons are common subsistence crops. Mealie, a dish similar to hominy grits, is the most common and inexpensive staple grain. While game hunting was traditionally practiced all over Namibia, it tended to take a back seat to livestock raising, and often marked special occasions. Today, private game parks abound to serve the Western tourist interested in hunting.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Namibia's adult literacy rate has been improving rapidly over the last number of years (see *Section 9: Living Conditions*, above). Namibia also has one of the most highly skilled bu-

reaucratic classes on the continent. One reason for this is the policy of reconciliation that the SWAPO government adopted in order to keep the white, educated business owners and civil servants in the country after independence. As of 1993, 20% of the population had never been to school, and only 1% went on to university. Those that do get a higher education can go to the university in Windhoek, though some go to South Africa or Germany. In addition, several ministries have internal training colleges to better prepare their new class of African civil servants for work.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Namibian government has established a team of cultural preservationists to encourage the continuation or resuscitation of cultural traditions and heritage. The job of this group of performers, artists, historians, and researchers is to record and then bring to life the cultural heritage of Namibia's people before it is irrevocably lost. Given the largely rural population of Namibia and the remote dispersal of many communities, there is still a significant adherence to such practices.

#### 15 WORK

Namibians have a strong work ethic. While the state provides pension and social security plans, many elderly people expect to feed themselves from their own agricultural labor until they are physically unable to do so. Urban government workers can invest in savings plans or the local stock market. Still, two-thirds of all Namibians are rural dwellers, and most of them describe themselves as subsistence farmers or herders. The government is currently trying to convince some communities to abandon their conception of cattle as the highest form of saved wealth and to turn their skills toward commercial ranching and beef export. Among some traditionalists this is inconceivable, because selling off the herd for mere cash is like selling the legacy of the ancestors. Namibians consider themselves very self-reliant and in many of the outlying areas this is what they became accustomed to over generations.

#### 16 SPORTS

As everywhere in Africa, soccer, or football as it is known in Namibia, is the national sport with the most passionate followers. Even Himba children grow up playing it, maybe making do with a ball made of twine. Track and field, called "athletics" locally, is becoming more popular, especially with the silver medal win of compatriot Frankie Fredricks in the 100- and 200-meter dash at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. Schools and clubs in towns have well-supported rugby teams and Namibia has fielded a national team at the Rugby World Cup. Most Namibians get their physical exercise through daily chores. Many rural children must walk or run five kilometers a day to school and hoeing and harvesting is the lot of most adults.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

American popular culture is so pervasive globally, it is almost unavoidable. Most popular music tends to come from South Africa, with its rich history of local performers. Namibia has produced a number of popular performers but more often than not they seek the more lucrative market to the south, in South

Africa. Pockets of more traditional music are found in the more remote rural areas.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional arts and crafts in Namibia cater to daily living. Wood carving, despite the relative dearth of trees, has a long history, and beautiful utensils, knife handles and sheaths, masks, musical drums, beer strainers, and sleeping mats continue to be made and sold. Baskets for holding everything from fish to grain to water are made out of the palm leaf, or out of reeds along the northern rivers.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Unemployment reached 35% in urban areas after the 1992 drought but by 2006 the unemployment rate was 5.3%. After independence, the government did not nationalize all industries nor did it confiscate land and equipment from the white ruling class. As a result the economy remained stable by 2008. The international investment community has more confidence in Namibia than it does in many African countries that have experienced undisciplined governments and crumbling infrastructures. Interpersonal and intergroup relations are positive, and the Namibian economy is growing steadily and significantly—which all augers well for the future.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The constitution of Namibia, underpinned by appropriate legislation, provides for the protection of individual rights. In the urban centers and other public domains there is also an increasing awareness and recognition of the position of women and their rights as citizens of Namibia. However, in many of the rural areas (see *Section 2: Homeland* and *Section 10: Family Life*, above) women still function in patriarchal societies where the males as husbands or leaders hold sway in terms of authority and privilege. This even applies to the matrilineal Ovambo, bilineal Herero, and the bilateral/cognatic San-Bushmen—all kinship systems where a certain acknowledgement or emphasis is accorded to females.

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—revised by M. de Jongh

# NDEBELE

**PRONUNCIATION:** nn-deh-BEH leh

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Amandebele; Ndzundza; Manala

**LOCATION:** The Mpumalanga and the Northern provinces of South Africa

**POPULATION:** 403,700

**LANGUAGE:** Ndebele (IsiNdebele); Sepedi; Afrikaans; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity; African Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ndebele of South Africa refer to themselves as “Amandebele,” or “Ndzundza” and “Manala”—denoting two main sections or tribal groupings. Early writers used the term “Transvaal Ndebele” to distinguish them from the “Zimbabwean Ndebele” (or “Matebele”). On geographical grounds, the Transvaal Ndebele was subdivided into the “Southern” (Ndzundza and Manala sections) and “Northern” Ndebele. Oral tradition points to a possible common origin for both the Southern and Northern groups, although the latter, as the numerically smaller group, became absorbed into their Northern-Sotho-speaking neighbors.

After a succession struggle, the Ndzundza section migrated to KwaSimkhulu (“Place of Large Fields”), approximately 260 km (160 mi) east of the present Pretoria, in the Mpumalanga province. The numerically smaller Manala section occupied settlements such as Ezotshaneni, KoNonduna, and Embilane-ni, which include the present eastern suburbs of Pretoria in the Gauteng Province.

The Ndzundza chieftaincy is believed to have extended its boundaries along the Steelpoort (Indubazi) river catchment area between the 1600s and early 1800s. Several of these settlement sites (KwaSimkhulu, KwaMaza, and Esikhunjini) are known through oral history and are currently under archaeological investigation.

Both the Ndzundza and Manala chiefdoms were almost annihilated by the armies of Mzilikazi’s Matebele (Zimbabwean Ndebele) around 1820. The Manala in particular suffered serious losses, while the Ndzundza recovered significantly under the legendary Mabhoko during the 1840s. He revolutionized Ndzundza settlement patterns by building a number of impenetrable stone fortresses and renamed the tribal capital: Ko-Nomtjharhelo (later popularly known as Mapoch’s Caves). The Ndzundza developed into a significant regional political and military force during the middle 1800s. During the colonial era, white settlers derogatively referred to the Ndzundza-Ndebele as “Mapoggers” after their ruler Mabhoko, called Mapog or Mapoch by whites.

The Ndzundza-Ndebele soon had to face the threat of these white colonials, against whom they fought in 1849, 1863, and finally in 1883 during the lengthy Mapoch War against the ZAR forces. The latter’s tactic of besiegement forced the famine-stricken Ndzundza to capitulate. They lost their independence, their land was expropriated, the leaders were imprisoned (Chief Nyabela to life imprisonment), and the Ndebele were displaced and indentured as laborers for a five-year (1883–1888) period among white farmers. (The Manala chiefdom was not involved in the war and had previously (1873) settled on land provided by the Berlin Mission some 32 km (20 mi) north of Preto-

ria, at a place the Manala named KoMjekejeke, also known as Wallmannsthal.)

Chief Nyabela Mahlangu of the Ndzundza was released in 1903 after the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and died soon afterwards. His successor tried fruitlessly in 1916 and 1918 to regain the tribal land. Instead, the royal house and a growing number of followers privately bought land in 1922, around which the Ndzundza-Ndebele reassembled. They have never gained permission to reoccupy their original land.

Within the framework of the bantustan or homeland system in South Africa, the Ndebele (both Manala and Ndzundza) were only during the late 1970s allowed to settle in a homeland called KwaNdebele.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The majority of Ndebele live in the Mpumalanga and the Limpopo provinces) of South Africa between 24°53’ to 25°43’ south latitude and 28°22’ to 29°50’ east longitude, and approximately 65 km to 130 km (40–80 mi) northeast of Pretoria, South Africa. The total area amounts to 350,000 hectares (865,000 acres), including the Moutse and Nebo areas. Temperatures range from a high of 36°C (97°F) in the northern parts to a low of –5°C (23°F) in the south. Rainfall in the north averages 5 cm (2 in) per year and 8 cm (3 in) per year in the south. Almost two-thirds of the entire former KwaNdebele lies within a vegetational zone known as Mixed Bushveld (Savanna-type) in the north. The southern parts fall within the Bankenveld (False Grassland-type) zone.

Population figures are based on the 1991 census figures for the former KwaNdebele homeland (now part of Mpumalanga Province), updated for the April 1994 general elections. The total population for the area was estimated at more than 403,700 people. A minority of labor tenants and farm workers outside the former homeland are not included.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Ndebele language, called IsiNdebele by its users, is one of nine official languages recognized by the interim South African constitution. It forms part of the Nguni language group (including Zulu, Swazi, and Xhosa), which comprises 43% of mother-tongue languages in South Africa. It is estimated that Ndebele comprises 1.55% of African languages in South Africa. Mother-tongue speakers seldom distinguish between the dialects of IsiNdzundza and IsiNala. A written orthography was only recently published, in 1982. Most Ndebele are fluent in the neighboring Northern Sotho language called Sepedi, as well as in Afrikaans (mostly elderly people) and English (the younger generation).

IsiNdebele, like other Nguni-type languages, contains a variety of click sounds. The Ndebele have also absorbed a proportionate amount of Afrikaans words in their vocabulary. These assimilated terms were probably adopted during the period of indenture on Afrikaner-owned farms. The everyday greeting term is, “Lotjani!” (“Good day”), followed by “Kunjani?” (“How are you?”), etc. The departing person will end the conversation with: “Salani kuhleke!” (“Goodbye to all of you!”)

## 4 FOLKLORE

Among a rich collection of oral traditions, many relate and explain the founding history of the various clans or family names (called *izibongo*), most of all that of the ruling Mahlangu clan



among the Ndzundza. Praise poetry, as recited by praise poets (*iimbongi*), relates heroic escapes from captors, battle field tactics, treachery and revenge, and the introduction of new customs, by past rulers (i.e. circumcision by Mahlangu).

The most well known oral tradition concerns the founder of the Ndebele, a chief called Musi who lived at KwaMnyamane (“Place of the Black Hills”) near Pretoria. Musi had five sons and there was a succession struggle between Musi’s two eldest sons, which shows remarkable similarity to the Jacob and Esau myth in the Bible. While the eldest son Manala was on a hunting trip he was betrayed by his younger brother Ndzundza (the clever one), who disguised himself as Manala and received the royal regalia from his aged and blind father Musi. When Manala pledged revenge in pursuit of the already fleeing Ndzundza and his followers, the other three sons migrated northwards and one of them, Kekana, became the founder of the Northern Ndebele, among others.

Many past events and experiences, and even recent events, are handed down through generations via the media of song and dance. During the 1986–87 unrest in the former homeland, Ndebele women protested, through female initiation rituals and songs of protest, the atrocities committed by the infamous Imbokodo vigilante movement who terrorized the area. One such song mourned the death of a popular community leader (Somakatha), and another celebrated the death of the notorious vigilante leader (Maqhawe).

Even contemporary heroes of the struggle against apartheid are remembered: Prince James Mahlangu, leader of the comrades movement against the Imbokodo vigilantes in 1986–87;

and Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK) African National Congress (ANC) military-wing-martyr Solomon Mahlangu, who was reburied in Mamelodi in Pretoria and honored with a memorial that was unveiled by Nelson Mandela.

## 5 RELIGION

Traditionally, there is the belief in a creator god, Zimu, and in ancestral spirits (*abezimu*). Disgruntled ancestral spirits cause illness, misfortune, and death. The royal ancestral spirits are annually honored, while individuals may consult the family ancestral spirits before and during important rituals and even before the annual school examinations. Traditional practitioners (*iinyanga* and *izangoma*) act as mediators between the past and present world and are still frequently consulted. Sorcerers (*abathakathi* or *abaloyi*) are believed to use familiars such as the well-known “baboon” midget *utikoloshé*, especially in cases of jealousy towards achievers in the community in general. Both women and men become healers after a prolonged period of internship with existing practitioners.

Nineteenth-century missionary activities by the Berlin Mission did little to change traditional Ndebele religion, especially among the Ndzundza. Although the Manala lived on the Wallmannsthal mission station from 1873 on, they were in frequent conflict with local missionaries. Recent Christian and African Christian church influences spread rapidly, and most Ndebele are now members of these churches: ZCC (Zion Christian Church), a variety of (African) Apostolic churches, Roman Catholic, etc.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Apart from national holidays, the two Ndebele royal houses (of Ndzundza and Manala) honor their past heroes with celebrations at the respective historical settlements and graves. Since 1969 the Ndzundza have celebrated Nyabela day on December 19 at KoNomtjharhelo (Mabhoko’s caves), where they were forced to surrender during the 1883 war. The site has been declared a national monument and a statue of Nyabela was erected from funds contributed by the Ndzundza community. Several Manala-Ndebele chiefs (e.g., Silamba, Libangeni) are buried at the KoMjekejeke historical site at Wallmannsthal where the tribe holds their annual celebrations on Silamba day.

In recent years, apart from paying tribute to past heroes with praise poetry, song, dance, and music during these events, Ndebele politicians have used the occasions for political rallying and to air grievances on issues such as land restitution and better governance within the Mpumalanga Province.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Initiation at puberty dominates ritual life in Ndebele society. Girls’ initiation (*iqhude* or *ukuthombisa*) is organized on an individual basis within the homestead. It entails the isolation of a girl in an existing house in the homestead, which is prepared by her mother after the girl’s second or third menstruation. The week-long period of isolation ends over the weekend when often more than 200 relatives, friends, and neighbors attend the coming-out ritual. The occasion is marked by the slaughtering of cattle and goats, cooking and drinking of traditional beer (*unothabalala*), song and dance, and the large-scale presentation of gifts (clothing and toiletries) to the initiate’s mother and father. In return, the initiate’s mother presents large quan-

tities of bread and jam to attendants. The notion of reciprocity is prominent. During the girls' initiation, female activities (including song, dance, and the display of traditional costumes) dominate those of men who are spatially isolated from the courtyard in front of the homestead.

Male initiation (*ingoma* or *ukuwela*), which includes circumcision, is a collective and quadrennial ritual that lasts two months during the winter (April to June). The notion of cyclical regimentation is prominent as initiates receive a regimental name, with which Ndebele men identify themselves for life, from the paramount (chief). The Ndzundza-Ndebele have a system of 15 such names that run over a period of approximately 60 years, and the cycle repeats itself in strict chronological order. The Manala-Ndebele have 13 names.

The numerical dimension of Ndebele male initiation is unparalleled in South Africa. During the 2006 initiation, some 13,000 young men were initiated. The ritual is controlled, officiated, and administered by the royal house. It is decentralized over a wide area within the former KwaNdebele, in rural as well as urban (township) areas. Regional headmen are assigned to supervise the entire ritual process over the two-month period that involves nine sectional rituals at lodges in the field and the homestead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Three institutions pervade Ndebele daily life. Firstly, there is the lineage segment or family (the *ikoro*), which consists of three to four generations and is of functional value, especially in ritual and socioeconomic reciprocity. Secondly, this lineage is composed of various residential units (homesteads) called *imizi*. The third important unit is an economic one, the household, which may be composed of a man, his wife and children (including children of an unmarried daughter), wives and children of his sons, and his father's widowed sisters.

A Ndebele woman has a lifelong obligation to observe the custom of *ukuhlonipha* or "respect" for her father-in-law. The custom implies the physical avoidance of her father-in-law. While he has unlimited freedom of movement in and around the homestead, she will at all costs enter and exit the homestead bearing in mind her father-in-law's whereabouts in an effort to avoid him. In the event of accidental contact, she will turn her back on him and cover her face. She will furthermore never mention his first name.

Space in and around the Ndebele homestead is gender-specific. There is an abstract division between front (male) and back (female), and inside the house between left (female, *incabafazi*) and right (male, *incamadoda*). Male visitors on arrival at the homestead occupy the front courtyard (*isirhodlo*), while women visitors proceed to the "domestic" back courtyard (*isibuya*). During meals this spatial separation is maintained. Even in modern Western-style houses, men dine in the lounge/TV room while women eat in the kitchen.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions for rural and urban Ndebele are integrally part of the past and current political and economic conditions in South Africa. The Ndebele is probably numerically the single largest community that has never been allowed to reclaim the land they lost in 1883. When they were drawn into apartheid's homeland dispensation, the land they received was alien to them in more than one respect: it was far away from ances-

tors, climatologically harsh, and without infrastructure (e.g., transport).

Apart from a few examples in KwaNdebele and on White-owned farms, the three-generational homestead (*umuzi*) has almost disappeared. This type consists of a number of houses (*izindlu*) representing various households centered around a cattle enclosure (*isibaya*). Other structures in the homestead include the boys' hut (*ilawu*), various smaller huts for girls behind each house, and granaries. Each house complex is separated from the other by an enclosure wall called *isirhodlo*.

Pre-colonial Ndebele structures were of the thatched beehive dome-type. Since the late 1800s, they have adopted a cone-on-cylinder type of structure consisting of mud walls and a thatched roof, while simultaneously reverting to a linear outlay that has replaced the circular center cattle pattern. The present settlement pattern consists of a single house built on a square stand and occasionally providing for two or more extra buildings, as well as cattle and goat enclosures. A wide range of modern building material and house designs have been introduced.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Ndebele society is structured into approximately 80 patrilineal clans (*izibongo*), each subdivided into a variety of subclans or patrilineages (*inanazelo*). Each clan associates itself with a totem animal or object. Members of the same clan do not marry, and certain clans, such as the Nduli's and the Giyana's, will not intermarry because there is a saying, "Long ago, we were brothers!"

Polygyny (more than one wife) has almost disappeared. Bride-wealth (*ikhazi*) consists of cattle and/or money. Marital negotiations between the two sets of families are an extended process. These include the presentation in installments of six to eight heads of cattle, the last installment often given long after the birth of the first child. Fathers demand more bride-wealth for educated daughters. Nowadays wealthy women with children often marry very late or stay single.

Weddings often involve a customary as well as a Christian ceremony. The married couple settles at the husband's village for a few years, and the new bride (*umakhothi*) is involved in cooking and the rearing of other small children of various households in the homestead. The taking of a substitute wife (*umngenandlu* or *ihlanzi*), in cases of infertility, was still common in the 1960s. In case of divorce, witchcraft accusation, and even infidelity, a woman is forced to return to her natal homestead.

## 11 CLOTHING

Western-style dress is the norm among most South Africans. Traditional Ndebele attire such as beaded aprons and blankets, and beaded arm bands and anklets for women are worn during ritual performances as indicated in Rites of Passage above.

## 12 FOOD

The rural staple diet consists of maize, bread, vegetables, and, to a lesser extent, meat. Considering the climate and low rainfall in the rural area, very little maize is self-produced but is rather bought at stores, as is chicken, and if people can afford it, red meat. The only time when there is a relative abundance of meat is during rituals when cattle and goats are slaughtered. During the summer rain season (September to March), many





South African model Nonkululeko Sibisi dressed in a traditional Ndebele outfit for a fashion competition at the annual Canon Gold Cup horse race in Durban, South Africa. The high-profile event attracts socialites, racing enthusiasts, and celebrities, who dress up to watch the race. (Rajesh Jantilal/AFP/Getty Images)

Ndebele women seem to be able to produce their own vegetables (*umrorho*), such as two indigenous types of spinach (*imbuyane* and *irude*), and tomatoes. Spinach is often dehydrated, stored, and consumed during the winter months. Other popular vegetables include cabbage and pumpkin.

Maize porridge (*umratha*) accounts for more than 80% of the daily diet and is consumed during midmorning and during the evenings. Occasionally soft porridge (*umdogo*) is eaten with sour milk (*amasi*) during the day. Breakfast, in particular for school children, consists of sliced bread, often without any spread, and tea. Dinner as the main meal mostly consists of porridge, a piece of cooked chicken, tomato sauce, and spinach or cabbage.

A delicacy that is often consumed during rituals is “Ndebele beer” or *unothhabalala*. No social event is regarded as complete without this drink of which the main components are mealie (corn) and sorghum sprouts. Sprouts are ground with a grinding stone (*imbokodo*), cooked, sieved, and filtered, mixed with maize flour, and cooked again before being poured into large

container gourds called *amarhabha*, which are then sealed and stored away to ferment for three to four days. The opening of the containers is often publicly announced to boast the skills of the manufacturer, usually an old woman and her younger team.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Like most other Black South Africans, the Ndebele, in particular those in the former homeland, still suffer from the consequences of the Bantu education system. During the homeland period, teachers were grossly underqualified, classrooms were overcrowded, and text books were in perpetually short supply. Although school buildings and equipment were never damaged or destroyed, as was the case elsewhere in South Africa during the unrest periods (1976, 1986–87), the area experienced frequent school boycotts, student and teacher stayaways, and strikes. Another concern of parents during the late 1970s was the complete absence of mother-tongue education and the lack of Ndebele-speaking teachers. Teaching in IsiNdebele could only be gradually introduced after 1982.

The adult literacy rate in the area is low. The majority of female and male students have become early school drop-outs, mainly due to economic circumstances. It appears as if the tide is turning as many early dropouts, after spending some time earning a salary, are now reregistering either as full-time or part-time students. In the early 21st century, the education system is still hampered by lack of resources such as classrooms, textbooks, and qualified teachers.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Communal singing and dancing in Ndebele society is either related to tribal ritual activities (initiation, divination, and weddings) or of the congregational type practiced during church services. Women in particular are active participants in tribal singing and dancing since traditional costumes play an integral part. Musical instruments are limited, although a plastic tube (*iphalaphala*), replacing the antelope horn, and anklet rattles (*amahlwayi*) are used during the dance.

A royal praise poet (*imbongi*) always accompanies the paramount and guests on arrival at the royal capital. When the paramount attends official meetings outside the royal capital, he is always presented to his audience by this same poet. The poet, dressed in traditional costume, asks guests to rise, shouting, “Bayede!” “Ngwenyama!” and “Ndabezitha!” As the paramount enters the room, the *imbongi* recites the royal praises, which could last for half an hour if he wishes, depending on the historical depth of the recital.

Most Ndebele love listening to music of their choice on the regional Radio Ndebele (SABC) service that broadcasts from Pretoria. Young people attend discos at night, or the occasional music concert in the area. African jazz (Soweto String Quartet), local African bands (Mendoza and Ladysmith Black Mambazo), reggae (Lucky Dube), and Lionel Ritchie are among the favorites. Ndebele are particularly fond of local heroines such as Nothembi Mkhwebane.

### **15 WORK**

The majority of Ndebele are daily, weekly, or monthly migrants to urban Johannesburg and Pretoria, where most women are employed in the domestic sector and men in the building and

related industries. There are few employment opportunities inside their home area.

Elderly women engage in hawking fresh produce near shopping centers and taxi stands. Likewise, men in the former bantustan have few job opportunities, mostly in the heavily competitive taxi industry; low-income industries such as vehicle repairs; and private enterprise, including selling liquor privately or running a bar lounge and opening *spaza* shops (small-scale general stores) at home. Economically, rural Ndebele depend heavily on the resources of urban kin to support the household.

Most male urban Ndebele employees have over the past four decades carved a niche for themselves in the building industry, a skill it is believed they obtained during the arduous years of indenture and labor tenancy on farms. Many of these building artisans are private contractors—bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, pavers, and painters—especially in the Pretoria region, and are in great demand.

Many Ndebele women are domestic servants, and in certain suburbs in Pretoria they tend to “ethnically monopolize” the area. Others choose self employment and become street vendors in fresh produce or sell hot food (*vetkoek*, meat and maize porridge). The latter category cook food on paraffin or gas stoves, or on wood (referred to as *imbawula*) in open parking areas, on street corners, or alongside taxi ranks.

## 16 SPORTS

The sport of netball, introduced by the schools, is popular among girls, while soccer tops the list in terms of popularity among men and women. Bets are taken before most important matches in the South African Professional Soccer League itinerary. No particular club is favored, although the Orlando Pirates (Bucs), Kaizer Chiefs (Amakosi), and the Pretoria-based club Mamelodi Sundowns (Brazilians) are among the most popular.

The most-talked-about Ndebele sports star is the 1996 Atlanta Olympic gold medalist in the marathon, Josiah Tungalwane. Special honor was bestowed upon him when the late Paramount Mayisha presented him with a special Ndebele *iporiyana* (ritual cloth for males).

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

A variety of traditional games such as *umadlwandlwana* (freely translated as “to play house”) and *unomkhetwa* are still popular pastimes for children. *Unomkhwetwa* usually involves two players who try to outdo each other by tossing a collection of stones up in the air and catching it without losing any stones, almost like juggling.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

If anyone around the globe remembers the name Ndebele, it would most probably be in connection with the mural art and beadwork that has made them internationally famous, especially since the late 1950s. Mural painting (*ukugwala*) is done by women and their daughters and entails the multicolored application of acrylic paint on entire outer and inner courtyard and house walls. Earlier paints were manufactured and mixed from natural materials such as clay, plant pulp, ash, and cow dung. Since the 1950s, mural patterns show clear urban and Western influences. Consumer goods such as razor blades; urban architectural features, including gables and lamp posts;

and symbols of modern transportation such as airplanes and license plates act as inspiration for women artists.

Beadwork (*ukupothela*) also proliferated during the 1950s and shows similarity to murals in color and design. Ndebele beadwork is essentially part of female ceremonial costume. Beads are sewn on goatskins, canvas, and nowadays even cardboard, and worn as aprons. Beaded necklaces and arm and neck rings form part of the outfit, which is worn during rituals such as initiations and weddings.

As Ndebele beadwork became one of the most popular curio art commodities, women also started to bead glass bottles, gourds, animal horns, etc. The recent prolific trading in Ndebele beadwork concentrates on “antique” garments as pieces of art. Some women are privately commissioned to apply their painting to canvas, shopping center walls, and even cars. The first artist who won international fame was Esther Mahlangu (from KwaNdebele) who painted murals and canvasses in Paris, Japan, Australia, and Washington D.C. Others started to follow in her footsteps and apply their mural art on an international level e.g. by painting shopping center surfaces, automobiles, and aircraft carriers.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Except for the 1800s, the Ndebele as a political entity were not involved in any major regional conflicts, especially since 1883 when they lost their independence and had their land expropriated. In 1986, almost a century later, they experienced violent internal (and regional) conflict when a minority vigilante movement called Imbokodo (“Grinding Stone”) took over the local police and security system and terrorized the entire former homeland. In a surprising move, the whole population called on the royal house of Paramount Mabhoko for moral support, and within weeks the youth rid the area of that infamous organization. Human rights abuses relating to that period are heard by the national Truth and Reconciliation Committee.

Probably the most challenging problem for the Ndebele leadership at present is how to define and negotiate the former homeland’s residents’ needs in terms of the provincial dispensation. Large-scale discontent has emerged among the rank-and-file Ndebele on the authoritarian and ethnically chauvinist way in which the new Mpumalanga Provincial government in Nelspruit is handling the well-being of the residents in the area. There is widespread discontent with the lack of resources in the region, in particular hospitals and clinics, schools, electricity and pure water reticulation.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Ndebele society is a patriarchal one with male dominance in most socio-economic and socio-cultural sectors. Rural Ndebele women have found it difficult to cope with notions such as gender equality, which is regularly advocated in the South African Constitution and the Gender Commission. However, there were a few landmark events in the recent past that gave them a foothold on regional and national level. During the 1986 unrest it was the female vote that helped with the toppling of the Imbokodo vigilante regime in the homeland. Before that election (in 1988) Ndebele women did not have the franchise. They obtained this on the eve of election with an urgent court interdict, successfully brought by themselves. Ever since the 1970s Ndebele women use the female initiation ritual

(the iqhude) to mock and demean male dominance when they perform the so-termed “traffic cop” performance. During this rite they dress in traffic cop attire and “fine” male taxi drivers who transport participating female guests to these rituals. Although this is performed only over weekends, Ndebele argue that this opportunity empowers them to take control of the dominant male order.

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—by C. Van Vuuren

# NIGERIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** nigh-JIR-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Nigeria

**POPULATION:** 138.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** English; English Creole; Bantu; and Chadic languages

**RELIGION:** Traditional African religion; Islam; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Fulani; Hausa; Igbo; Ijo; Yoruba

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Beginning in ad 600, the territory that is now Nigeria witnessed the steady rise and decline of city-states, kingdoms, and empires. While states like Bornu became wealthy through interstate trade, others such as the Niger Delta states increased their power by slave trading. By 1862, the British had annexed Lagos, and they took control of the palm oil plantations of the Niger Delta in the 1880s. Following a series of struggles with individual states and with the French, the British united the colony of Nigeria and established a capital at Lagos in 1914. For the next half-century the British ruled the colony indirectly through local potentates and chiefs, strengthening regional differences and, after independence, encouraging regional rivalries. The most serious conflict occurred from 1967–70, when the Igbo fought unsuccessfully to secede as the Republic of Biafra. More than one million died in the war, with many dying from famine, illness, and starvation.

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has weathered a series of military coups. A succession of military and civilian governments have tried, not very effectively, to control corruption, nepotism, and regional favoritism in public affairs. Moshood Abiola, a southerner, won the democratic presidential election in 1993, but General Sani Abacha seized power. Pro-democracy strikes and regional strife followed. However, despite its domestic instability, Nigeria has demonstrated that it is the political and economic giant of West Africa. Nigeria led the Liberian peacekeeping effort in the 1990s, and in May 1997 sent troops to Sierra Leone to restore order following a military coup. Nigeria is the dominating member of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS).

A major challenge for Nigeria has been to unite a diverse group of peoples and to balance political rule with economic and social development among three major groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east. To hedge against ethnic rivalry and regional divisions, Nigeria experimented with federalism and expanded its number of states from 18 to 39. A change in electoral rules also required that national leaders win a minimum number of votes from each state. Since 1992, the capital has moved from Lagos to the more centrally located Abuja, which, like Washington, D.C., is a federal district.

A new constitution, adopted and made effective in May 1999, launched a new period of multi-party elections. Despite being marred by serious voting irregularities, violence and protests, the 1999 and 2003 presidential elections provided a measure of consensus among Nigerians for civilian rule—the longest period without military interference since independence. In the general elections of April 2007 Umaru Musa Yar’adua of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) succeeded President

Obasanjo. Although these elections also were criticized as seriously flawed, they marked the first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power in the country's history. The PDP kept its majority in the legislature winning 70 seats, and 75% of state governorships. Yar'adua has surprised many observers by exerting his independence from Obasanjo, dispelling predictions that he would be Obasanjo's rubber stamp.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and is the sixth most populous in the world (138.2 million est. 2008). Indeed, one in five Africans is Nigerian. At current growth rates, the population should reach nearly 191 million in 2015. It is also one of the world's most ethnically diverse countries, with more than 250 distinct groups. The largest of these is the Hausa and Fulani (29%), followed by the Yoruba (21%), the Igbo/Ibo (18.0%) and the Ijaw (10%). The Kanuri, Ibibio and lesser groups account for the remainder. Nigeria is very densely populated in the Niger Delta, where there are more than 1,000 persons per square mile. Four-fifths of the country has fewer than 200 persons per square mile.

Nigeria shares borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. From the Gulf of Guinea in the south, a series of plateaus and plains cover much of the country. To the east, the Gotele and the Mandara Mountains form a common border with Cameroon. With the equator just to the south, the climate becomes tropical in the central regions and arid in the north.

## 3 LANGUAGE

English is the official language, but English Creole is the lingua franca (common language). Besides these, many Bantu and Chadic languages are spoken in the regions.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Proverbs, chants, folk stories, and riddles are popular folkloric forms. Because of Nigeria's long and diverse past and its oral traditions, folklore constitutes an area for much research. In one unusual example, the people of the Ijo village of Toro Arua perform the *Ozidi* saga. Performances occur only once in a generation. Therefore, all village members attend. The saga tells the story of the mythological history of the people of this community. Lasting more than eight days, each morning a sacrifice to the water spirits is made to ask for their blessing. A poetic narrator, an orchestra of drums, a choir of singers, male and female dancers, and actors portray the heroes and foes of the community. The event reminds adults and instructs youth about their glorious past and their distinguished ancestral heritage.

## 5 RELIGION

Nigerians widely hold on to their traditional African religious beliefs in addition to subscribing to various branches of Islam and Christianity. The state maintains neutrality in religious issues, and the constitution guarantees freedom of worship. Islam is most firmly rooted in the north, where it was first a religion of rulers and courtiers in the 11th century ad. Muslims now constitute about 50% of the population with Christians comprising roughly the other half, thanks to strong missionary campaigns in the 19th century. Currently, Protestants outnumber Catholics by about two to one. Of note are the African



church movements and breakaway groups rooted in the 1920s and 1930s that established African versions of Christianity. About 11% of the population belongs to these distinctly African Christian churches.

Very much alive is traditional religion, which operates on three levels. Most ethnic groups have names for a supreme being whom they believe created the universe. The Yorubas call him Olorun (Lord of Heaven), the Hausas, Ubangiji (God), and the Efiks of Calabar, Abasi Ibom (The Great God). Lesser gods and deities are more accessible and act as intermediaries between people and the Creator. They possess special powers. People build shrines, make sacrifices, and offer prayers and libations to them. At the lowest levels are spirits of the dead, both good and evil, that have not yet found their rest. They may do the wishes and desires of persons who properly handle them. Sacred objects represent the lesser gods and spirits, and care must be taken not to offend them or the deities with which they are associated. Traditional religion has influenced Nigerian crafts, art, music, dance, agriculture, and language.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Secular holidays include National Day (October 1). Muslim and Christian holidays include *Tabaski* (commemorating Abraham's sacrifice) and the end of Ramadan and Easter and Good Friday.

Beside these non-indigenous holidays, Nigerians celebrate many cultural festivals throughout the year, such as the Arungu Fish and Cultural Festival on the banks of the Sokoto



Woman winnowing grain in Gumel, Nigeria. About 43% of Nigerians work in agriculture. (Corel Corporation)

River. During this celebration, hundreds of fishermen jump into the river at once, scaring the fish into the air and into their nets. Their yellow calabashes bob around on the water waiting to be filled with the catch.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Nigerians typically celebrate rites of passage with music, dance, and ceremony. These life-defining moments are critical for the individual within his or her community, and therefore are borne by all members of the community. At his or her naming ceremony a child becomes a member of the community; at initiation, an adolescent assumes the responsibilities of adulthood; a woman moves to her husband's family after marriage; an elder is bequeathed a title for lifelong service; and eventually, a community member joins the spirit world.

Nevertheless, modernity and urbanization are breaking down customary rituals. In a 1993 documentary film on initiation rites for girls (*Monday's Girls*), urban pressures and the weight of custom collide in the delta region. Here, Waikiriki girls participate in a five-week coming-of-age ceremony (*Iria*), which transforms them into marriageable women. A city girl who has returned to the village for the ceremony contrasts with the other girls. She and her cohorts are secluded in a house and "fattened up" for the ceremony. They are pampered and must do no work. Elderly women shear their hair, teach them how to be mothers and take care of their husbands. The old women paint the initiate's bodies before the young women appear in public with uncovered breasts to be scrutinized by the elders.

This act serves to verify the initiate's purity. Throughout, the city girl resists the process, allowing just a shock of her hair to be cut, and refusing to appear in public uncovered. She argues that she does not need anyone to teach her how to treat a husband. In the end, she greatly offends her father and disgraces her family. The other girls, though bored with their confinement toward the end, seem happy to have fulfilled this traditional rite.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Nigerians often use English in greeting strangers because of their linguistic diversity. In the Igbo language, *Isalachi*, and in Hausa *Yayadei*, mean "good morning." As elsewhere in Africa, two men may hold hands and stand near each other when talking because their sense of personal space is closer than that of Americans.

In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, passing an object with the left hand or with only one hand is impolite. Nigeria is the same. Children especially must learn to offer and accept objects with both hands. Some Nigerians consider waving an insult, particularly close to the face.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Despite being Africa's largest oil-producer (2.44 million barrels a day), half of all Nigerians live below the poverty line. The infant mortality rate is high even for Africa at 94 for every 1,000 live births, and life expectancy is under 50 years of age. The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is also high for West Africa at 5.4% and the number of people living with HIV/AIDS is 3.6 million (est. 2003). In terms of living standards and quality of life, Nigeria ranks near the bottom—158th out of 177 countries worldwide on the Human Development Index.

Depending on region and disposable income, Nigerians build simple rectangular or cylindrical houses of reed, mud brick, or cinder block. In urban areas, the federal and state governments have sometimes helped low-income people get affordable homes. Migrants often live in crowded conditions with several families sharing a few rooms, common cooking areas, and latrines. Lower- to middle-level income workers can afford small- to medium-sized houses with at least a standpipe in the courtyard, if not indoor plumbing. Middle- to upper-level groups have Western-style furniture, refrigerators, television sets, and motorcycles or cars. A small, very rich elite live in mansions and drive Mercedes.

Except urban squatter areas, conditions are generally more rudimentary in rural areas than in urban. About 70% of Nigerians live in villages and without indoor plumbing and electricity. Only half of all families have access to a potable water source, which means that many people—mostly women and children—have to walk great distances to draw water suitable for drinking. They may go further to scavenge wood for cooking in northern arid regions. Men and women often alternate bathing periods at a local stream or river. Laundering of clothes takes place near bathing sites so that long trips are reduced. Like many sub-Saharan people, Nigerians must cope with tropical and infectious diseases. Lack of window screens, refrigeration, mosquito nets, and hygienic water storage contribute to health problems.

One benefit of Nigeria's oil revenues is the extensive network of roads and rail lines. The major railways run from coastal port cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt to terminals up-

country as far as Nguru and Maiduguri. Many trunk roads are paved, and several interstate highways connect commercial centers and medium-sized towns. Nigeria even has toll plazas, and a four-lane expressway links Lagos with Ibadan. Secondary and tertiary roads may be bumpy, rocky, and unimproved. Vehicle life on these roads is usually shortened considerably, but Nigerians are good mechanics. Though car bodies may rattle and shake, every mile is squeezed out of them.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Typically Nigerian families live together in compounds where nuclear families share the same hut. The father and husband are generally the dominant heads of the household. Family members deeply respect their elders, and the mark of a well-reared child is quiet and respectful behavior in the presence of adults.

Nigerians practice polygyny, and under Islamic law, a Muslim man can have up to four wives if he can support them. Typically the groom will pay a bride-price to the family of his bride. In the cities one sees Western-style dating, but this is rare in the villages. Because weddings are expensive, many couples may live together without social stigma until they can afford to give a proper wedding feast.

Nigerian women hold distinction in international circles as leaders in academia and business. They spearheaded a national feminist movement that gained momentum in 1982. Traditionally, non-Muslim women have had independent economic status and have made their mark in interregional trade. Despite these advances, Nigerians still regard single women as an oddity, and men consider them sexually available. Abortion is legal only when the mother's life is threatened or in cases of rape or incest.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Western-style garments, makeup, hats, bags, shoes, and other accessories—symbols of the Western-educated elite—are increasingly replacing traditional apparel, especially in the cities. In the past, men dressed to show their acquired prestige. Women wore necklaces, earrings, bracelets, toe rings, finger rings and hair ornaments made from stone beads, ivory, leather, seeds, mother-of-pearl, iron, the teeth and claws of animals, and the vertebrae of snakes. Vestiges of the past are seen in rural areas, where many women and men wear long loose robes of either white or bright colors. Women often wear scarves or turbans. The Igbo traditional dress is a *danshiki*, a long loose-fitting top. Formerly Igbo women added pieces of cloth to show their status in marriage and number of children. Colors were also used to symbolize cultural status, royalty, or bloodline.

Nowadays special dress is losing its traditional functions. Men dress for status rather than prestige. Cheaper European cotton thread and commercial dyes have replaced the aesthetically superior hand-woven cloths. European makeup and cheap costume jewelry, too, are supplanting traditional cosmetics and ornaments. The former elaborate traditional hair-dressing is losing its symbolic meanings.

## **12 FOOD**

Nigerians rise early, and therefore may eat several times a day. Early breakfast begins at 5:00 am and late dinner comes at 9:00 pm. Breakfast may consist of rice and mango or fried plan-



*Vestiges of the past are seen in rural areas, where many women and men wear long loose robes of either white or bright colors. Women often wear scarves or turbans. Western-style garments are increasingly replacing traditional apparel, especially in the cities. (Jason Laure)*

tains. At around 11:00 people might eat *efo* (stew) or *moyinmoyin*, bean pudding made with steamed black-eyed peas.

Nigerians generally like their food hot and spicy. Therefore, cooks do not spare hot red peppers either in the dishes themselves or alongside as a relish. Typically, stews or sauces are made from greens or fish, and if one's means allow, from meat or chicken. These are eaten with rice or yams. Cassava and corn are popular too, and various flours, such as yam and cassava, may be mixed and cooked into a steaming ball of *fufu*. Nigerians in the coastal regions drink palm wine and locally brewed beer. Muslims are great tea drinkers. In the cities, coffee houses and pubs are very popular.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Nigerian formal educational system is patterned after the British public school system. At the age of six or seven, children begin primary school. Muslim children learn Arabic and religious teachings in informal Quranic schools, or private Quranic schools licensed by the government. Others in rural areas receive basic farming instruction and other skills through an apprenticeship system. Some preschool, special education, adult education, and classes for the gifted and talented exist, too.

Nigeria has one of Africa's most developed systems of higher education. At least 25 institutes of higher learning, including

several universities, exist. The largest of these is Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. Despite high school enrollments, many Nigerian children leave early because of economic hardship. A significant portion of the population still views advanced education as unnecessary for girls. This attitude is reflected in literacy rates—in 2005 the overall literacy rate was 69%, but only 44% of girls and women could read and write. The literacy trend for girls however, is positive; more than 60% of girls aged 15–19 are now literate.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nigerians have a long history of music, traditional dancing, visual art, and oral literature. Modern drama, opera, cinema, films, and written literature build on Nigeria's cultural heritage. Historically, culture has flourished in these various forms; it dates back 2,000 years in Nok figurines, Ife terra cottas and bronzes, Benin ivories, and Igbo Ukwu objects. The Yoruba are famous artists, making magnificent masks such as the ones used at the Ogen Festival. Sculptures served to comfort the bereaved. Benin bronzes depicted individuals and events at court and glorified the king, immortalized the dead, and served to worship the royal ancestors. The Yoruba traditionally sculpted wooden verandah posts, ceremonial masks, twin figures for the cult of the twins, and bowls and trays for Ifa divination. The Igbo make exquisite carvings of masks and the elephant spirit headdresses.

To many Nigerians, culture is synonymous with dance because traditional dancing at festivals combines music, artistic masks, costuming, body painting, drama, poetry, and storytelling. Much can be said of Nigerian dance and music because they are essential to the celebration of events connected with every aspect of life. People often celebrate child-naming, marriage, burial, house warming, chieftaincy installations, and harvesting with music and dance. At initiations, priests and initiates perform dramatic dances, and deities are represented by elaborate costumes and masquerades that conceal the identity of the wearer.

Nigerian authors are gaining international recognition for modern written works. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *A Man of the People*, harsh critiques of colonial days and contemporary Nigerian politics and society, now make regular appearances in American college classrooms.

#### 15 WORK

Because the petroleum industry has provided easy money, Nigeria has a relatively undiversified economy and undeveloped labor force of over 50 million workers. Most people remain in subsistence agriculture (nearly 70%). In the cities, people do whatever it takes to survive. They carry water, sell food on the street, wash clothes, peddle household items, haul lumber, and engage in prostitution. Many sleep where they work until they can afford to rent a room or share an apartment. Lagos has the world's sixth largest population (over 20 million) and draws thousands of migrants daily to its slums in search of work.

One of the more enterprising developments in recent times is Nigeria's burgeoning film industry, dubbed "Nollywood." Nollywood employs more than 20,000 workers and continues to grow. Its digital home video films are distributed around the world and are readily available in the United States.

#### 16 SPORTS

Nigerians enjoy several sports. Traditionally Nigerians have wrestled, performed archery, organized foot and horse races, and developed acrobatic displays. Soccer now tops the list of modern competitive sports. Schools at all levels, business, and industry organize matches throughout the country, which has been described as "football mad." Some 62 league clubs exist. Nigerians competed internationally in World Cup competition most recently in 2002. During the playoffs, people crowded in front of TV sets stacked on top of each other on sidewalks to view their Super Eagles. In professional boxing, Nigeria has produced at least three world champions. Other sports include table tennis, tennis, basketball, polo (especially in the north), cricket, and swimming.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Home visiting is popular, and now many middle-class people have home entertainment centers with sound systems and television. As a measure of television's popularity, the government estimates that some 40 million Nigerians watch it on about 40 stations. Over the past decade, the Nigerian home videos have become very popular. Western dating customs in the towns make these forms of recreation even more popular. For music and dancing, the older generation may still appreciate high life bands, but younger people prefer Afro-Beat and Juju music—styles that originated in the Lagos area.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Nigerian folk arts and crafts range from ivory carvings to body painting to painting of the interior and exterior walls in decorative motifs. Many arts and crafts traditionally owe their inspiration to religion and royalty. Colonial repression of indigenous religion and its artful expression led to its degeneration. Nowadays commercial motives have taken over as artists supply the tourist market.

Given the plentiful grasses on the northern plains, craft-people there make colorful and durable baskets, fans, tables, and floor mats. Wood carving has flourished in Benin and Awka. Carvers make figures for shrines, portraits, masks, and spirit representations of natural features such as fields, forests, streams, water, fire, and thunder. The thorn of the wild cotton tree serves to make delicate, but decorative sculptures giving the effect of dresses, caps or head ties, and shoes. Some of these works have become collectors' items. Artists also cast sculptures in bronze and brass, produce glass and metal work, and make quality leatherwork and calabash carvings in Kano and Oyo. Nigerian pottery has a long tradition and ranks among the most artistic in the world. Cloth weaving in the town of Akwete also has caught the fancy of many women. The designs are both colorful and imaginative, and the pieces are unusually wide, about 1,200 mm.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Nigeria suffers a plethora of social ills. Corruption has left the country more than \$37 billion in debt (2006). Dubbed as the "resource curse," oil has fueled greed and nepotism and turned the country into a showcase of embezzlement, fraud, and bribery. In the oil-rich delta region, gangs kidnap oil workers, abduct officials, and takeover oil installations. Bunkering—illegal tapping into oil pipelines—drains 10% or more of oil produc-

tion and has killed thousands of people in explosions and fires. Gang clashes in Port Harcourt resulted in at least 10 deaths in 2007.

Nigeria also has been a staging point for drug trafficking to Europe and the United States. Political instability, crime and lack of rule of law continue to plague the country. Government occasionally shuts down independent newspapers, and it harasses opposition journalists. In an internationally acclaimed case in 1995 the government hung human rights leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists in a trial that observers widely denounced as based on trumped-up charges. Many high-level officials and wealthy individuals are known to be involved in racketeering and scams of various types.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As elsewhere on the continent, women do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men and are subject to lower pay, unequal inheritance rights, and other societal discrimination. Polygamy is legal and one out of five girls and women undergoes female genital mutilation. The law permits husbands to chastise their wives, but owing to weak enforcement, domestic violence, rape, trafficking and other crimes against women and girls often go unpunished. In addition to raising children and keeping house, women in rural areas walk several miles a day to hoe fields, gather firewood, fetch water, and do the marketing. In some areas women are considered part of their husbands "property" to be inherited along with his other possessions. In 12 of the northern states, women's rights are subject to Shariah Law, which affects both Muslim and non-Muslim women. For example, in Zamfara women are obliged to take separate transportation and use separate health care facilities. Of the more than 500 high-level political posts in the country, women hold 6 cabinet, 9 senatorial, and 27 representative positions.

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—by R. Groelsema

# NIGERIENS

**PRONUNCIATION:** nee-zher-YEN

**LOCATION:** Niger

**POPULATION:** 13.3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Hausa; Zarma; Songhay; Fulfulde; Tamasheq; Kanuri; Arabic, Tubu; Gourmantche; French

**RELIGION:** Islam; small numbers of Catholics and Protestants; indigenous religious practices

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Fulani; Hausa; Songhay; Tuaregs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Niger was one of the world's least known countries until the severe drought of the 1970s brought the terrible predicament of Sahelian rural populations to the attention of Europe and North America. Today, still, a commonly made assumption is that "Niger" is simply a misspelled term for "Nigeria," the powerful, oil-producing southern neighbor of this thinly populated Sahelian nation. A landlocked, drought-ridden country in the heart of West Africa, Niger is composed of a variety of ethnically diverse populations who, despite their shared Sahelian traits, struggle to survive as a nation and to find common values and goals. Though this former French colony is presently situated in one of the globe's harshest ecological regions, it was not always so. When early inhabitants established themselves in the area 60,000 years ago, the northern territories of what is now the Republic of Niger were blessed with relatively abundant rainfall, and extensive human settlements were founded. People first relied on agriculture, and later engaged in cattle herding, besides developing complex stone tools.

As ecological conditions changed and the northern regions became drier, people were forced to relocate south and to develop mixed economies based on agriculture, farming, and long-distance trade. By the 7th century ad, the Western area was controlled by the powerful Songhay state, while the eastern regions were under the influence of the Kanem-Bornu Empire. As the authority of these states gradually waned in the 16th century, the Hausa states emerged as significant political and economic centers, thanks to their location at one of the terminus of trans-Saharan trade routes.

Meanwhile, the pastoralist Tuareg, always quick to impose their domination on sedentary communities whenever possible, were making incursions into southern territories and were becoming increasingly involved in trade and agriculture. By the 19th century, the dominant Hausa power in the eastern regions was Damagaram. Most of the central Hausa states were tributaries of the Sokoto caliphate, whose holy war against the un-Islamic practices of its neighbors had resulted in the creation of a vast Fulani empire. The French conquest of Niger culminated in the creation of the colony of Niger in 1922, after the Tuareg resistance was crushed.

Niger was granted independence from France in 1960. Except for a brief boom in the 1970s, however, the end of colonial rule has not translated into prosperity for this already economically marginal West African nation. Niger was governed by a single party civilian regime until 1974, when then-President Hamani Diori was ousted in a military coup led by Col. Seyni Kountché. Kountché's death in 1987 marked the beginning of a 12-year period in which power frequently changed hands





between civilian and military governments. From 1990–1995 there was an armed rebellion by Tuareg peoples from northern Niger, who sought an autonomous desert region and greater control over the country's uranium revenues. In 1999 Mamadou Tandja was elected president in a democratic election. He was reelected in 2004. In May 2007 a second Tuareg rebellion began.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The territory of Niger, two-thirds of which is located in the central Sahara, lies between 11°37' and 23°23'n. Surrounded by Algeria and Libya to the north, Chad to the east, Nigeria and Benin to the south, and Burkina Faso and Mali to the west, Niger is primarily desert. The southern part of the country, where the vast majority of the population lives, is semi-arid Sahel and receives between six and twenty inches of rain per year. In the Sahelian region, most people grow millet, sorghum, peanuts and peppers or herd cattle, goats, sheep or camels. Niger is a predominately rural country, and villages generally incorporate people of different ethnic identities. Over the last 50 years, dwindling resources and opportunities in the rural areas have forced many to migrate to the cities. Niamey, the capital, has thus grown with the influx of migrants from all parts of the country.

## 3 LANGUAGE

To downplay ethnic differences and prevent divisiveness, the people of Niger are usually classified according to ethno-linguistic categories.

Though over 30 distinct groups and 21 languages have been identified, the population is nevertheless divided into five major groups:

- the Hausa, who speak Hausa, constitute the largest group, with over 56% of the total population;

- the Zarma/Songhay/Dendi, who speak Zarma or closely related Songhay, make up about 21% of the population;

- the Fulani or Peul, who speak Fulfulde, are 8.5% of the population;

- the Tuareg, who speak Tamasheq, represent 9.3 % of the population;

- the Kanuri, who speak Kanuri, make up 4.7% of the population;

Arabs, Tubus, or Gourmantches, unrelated groups who speak Arab, Tubu, and Gourmantche, make up the remaining 1.2% of the total population.

Many Nigeriens speak more than one language. For instance, in Niamey, the capital, most native Zarma speakers also speak Hausa, which has become the lingua franca (common language) of Niger. Nigeriens who have attended Western-style schools (approximately one-third of the population) also speak French, the primary language of government and education.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The people of Niger believe they are surrounded by spiritual forces that regularly intervene, for better or for worse, in the lives of humans. In the pre-colonial era, some of these spirits protected communities from enemy attacks and were regularly propitiated to ensure the prosperity of one's land or herd. Today, spirits allegedly grant health, fame, protection, or fortune to those who obey their requests for sacrificial offerings or who become their mediums. Among the Zarma-Songhay, the Hausa, the Fulani, and the Tuareg, for instance, some individuals are chosen by the spirits to become their human vessels. A family strife, declining prosperity, or lengthy illnesses that cannot be cured by Western medicine, Islamic medicine, or herbal remedies alone may be diagnosed as being caused by spirits who are reminding their victims of their powers.

Among Hausa-speaking populations, a myth explains the presence of these powerful, but invisible, creatures as follows. Adamu, the first man, and Hawa, the first woman, had given birth to 50 sets of twins. One day, the supreme being and their creator told them that he wanted to see the children. Afraid that he would keep them for himself, the cunning Hawa told her husband they would hide the more beautiful siblings of each 50 pair of twins in a cave, and only show the supreme being the remaining ones. Seeing how they had deceived him, the omniscient god decided he would punish Adamu and Hawa by making the hidden twins invisible forever. The spirits who plague humans and are dependent on them for subsistence are nothing but the descendants of the beautiful twins condemned by God to remain invisible.

Witchcraft, experienced and expressed in various forms, is also thought to be a major cause of pain, illness, and misfortune. Mothers, for instance, cover their young children's bodies with amulets in the hope of warding off the nefarious

influence of human agents as much as the destructive powers of spiritual forces.

## 5 RELIGION

Islam first came to Niger through traders involved in trans-Saharan commerce in the 9th century. For nearly 1,000 years, Islam was primarily a religion of the governing elite, traders, and the educated. Widespread conversion to Islam began in the 19th century. Today, 95% of the Nigerien population is said to be Muslim, though in many cases being a follower of the prophet Muhammad is not antithetical to the propitiation of spirits or the use of divination. Thus, anyone may enlist the help of the spirits to pass an exam, to ensure one's safe return from a trip, or to protect oneself from jealous kin. Wherever it has taken roots in Niger, Islam has been influenced by local beliefs and practices. Today, children are given Muslim names, while most men (especially in the rural areas) wear Muslim flowing gowns and pray conspicuously five times a day.

Of late, reformist religious groups such as *Izala*, an anti-Sufi movement, have made numerous converts among the youth by preaching against an Islam that they see as tainted by local traditions. *Izala* members advocate frugality and Islamic education for all, challenge the authority of elders, and condemn the use of amulets.

During the colonial period, Christian missions were established throughout Niger. Today, they are still active but Catholics and Protestants make up less than 5% of Niger's population.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In Niger, a variety of Christian, Muslim and national holidays are celebrated. Legal holidays include January 1 (New Year's Day), April 24 (Concord Day, commemorating the coup that ousted Hamani Diori in 1974), May 1 (Labor Day), August 3 (Independence Day), December 18 (Republic Day), and December 25 (Christmas Day). Most Nigeriens celebrate also celebrate Muslim holidays, which fall on a different day each year because they are determined by the lunar calendar. Muslim holidays include *Tabaski* (a feast commemorating the sacrifices of Abraham), *Mouloud* (the prophet Muhammad's birthday), and *Eid al-Fitr* (a feast marking the end of Ramadan, a holy month of fasting). Nigeriens celebrate the *Tabaski* by slaughtering a ram, which they cook on an open fire and eat with friends and family. During *Eid al-Fitr* and *Mouloud*, people wear new clothes, enjoy feasts of meat, rice, and fruit, and men go to the mosque to pray.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When a Nigerien woman delivers her first child, she becomes an adult by virtue of having demonstrated that she is capable of giving life. Among the Tuareg, the new mother's coming of age is celebrated by a blessing of the mother's tent and a lively display of wrestling by the wealthiest and most prestigious women. On the sixth day after her baby's birth, female relatives perform the *kishakish* ritual, during which the newborn is brought out of the tent for the first time and later given a name. The Tuareg naming ceremony bears similarities to rituals performed among the Hausa and other populations of Niger. A ram is usually killed and the baby's head is shaved to signify the change of status.

Membership into the spirit possession troupe usually requires the holding of an initiation ritual, during which the medium's new status is officially recognized.

Marriage, especially to a first spouse, involves an important change of status for both men and women (in Hausa, for instance, there is no word for a woman who had reached adulthood but has never been married). But "tying the knot" involves more than anything the union between two lineages, and this is why it is so important to know the background of the person one marries.

Death, since the advent of Islam, no longer involves specific rituals intended to separate, once and for all, the dead from the living. Burial is a simple affair. The deceased is buried immediately after death. Kin, friends, and neighbors come to offer their condolences to the grieving family, but in most cases tears should not be part of the picture. Restraint and dignity are expected of everyone; women who visit a grieving mother, for example, should chat as if nothing special was going on so as to distract the mourner from her pain.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Nigeriens are warm and friendly, but, because of the influence of Islam on local life, there exists a strong segregation between the sexes. Muslim women are, by and large, constrained by their domestic duties, while men have access to more public spaces such as the market or the court. What goes on between men and women in public or in private varies, of course, with education, social status, and ethnic identity. Younger women are more daring, and they usually have a say in the choice of a husband. They must remain modest, and once married, it is improper for a Muslim wife to look at her husband directly in the eye or to confront him.

Proper behavior is characterized by restraint and modesty to such an extent that it is considered inappropriate, for instance, to complain about pain or to advertise one's hunger. Greetings, in Hausa for instance, involve asking about one's health, the health of one's children, and whether one has had a good night, morning, etc. To the question *Ina kwana?* ("how was the night?"), it is appropriate to answer *Lahiya lau* ("fine") even if one is at death's door.

Nigeriens are highly hospitable people who always have food available for guests and visitors. Generosity is valued regardless of one's degree of wealth. Among the Hausa, it is, in fact, primarily by redistributing one's wealth that one achieves prestige, visibility, and respectability.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Niger remains a very impoverished country struggling to become, with the aid of international partners, a stronger and more self-sufficient nation. Most rural communities have no electricity, and in many villages women still draw water daily from the communal well. With the spread of conservative Islam, an increasing number of wives are living in seclusion, which means that their mobility during the day is severely curtailed. Men who seclude their wives usually pay another woman to bring water to the household, while they themselves purchase the necessary ingredients for the family meals.

While free healthcare is available in towns and cities, most people in rural areas do not have access to a hospital or dispensary. Malnutrition among young children is prevalent, which



A Nigerien woman baking. In Niger, where drought is a constant threat to human survival, the staple food is millet.  
(Cory Langley)

explains the high rate of child mortality. In Niger, one third of children born do not reach the age of five.

Nigeriens travel a great deal to visit relatives or to search for seasonal work. While they may walk or ride a horse to visit a nearby village, they often use bush-taxis to cover large distances.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The concept of family among sedentary populations usually includes a host of extended kin who may or may not live in the same household. This has long meant that members of extended families pooled their resources together under the authority of the head of the household. Under the post-colonial pressures of increasingly individualist modes of farming, the extended family has splintered. Young men have become largely responsible for raising the money for bride-price and for paying taxes—expenses that had traditionally been the responsibility of the household head.

Women spend most of the day taking care of the children and preparing meals. According to Islam, men can marry up to four wives at a time; there is no limit to how many they can marry in their lifetime, as long as they keep divorcing their previous wives. Women who are divorced usually go back to their parents' homes until they remarry. Tension and competition between co-wives is not infrequent, but husbands are en-

couraged by Islam to minimize jealousy by not privileging one wife at the expense of another.

Among the Hausa, relations of avoidance prevent a woman from publicly showing her affection for the first two or three children she gives birth to. She cannot utter their names, nor can she call her husband by his name, tease him, or contradict him. A good wife should be humble and obedient. Grandparents, on the other hand, enjoy a joking relationship with their grandchildren, which means that they can be affectionate towards them, tease them, or be teased by them.

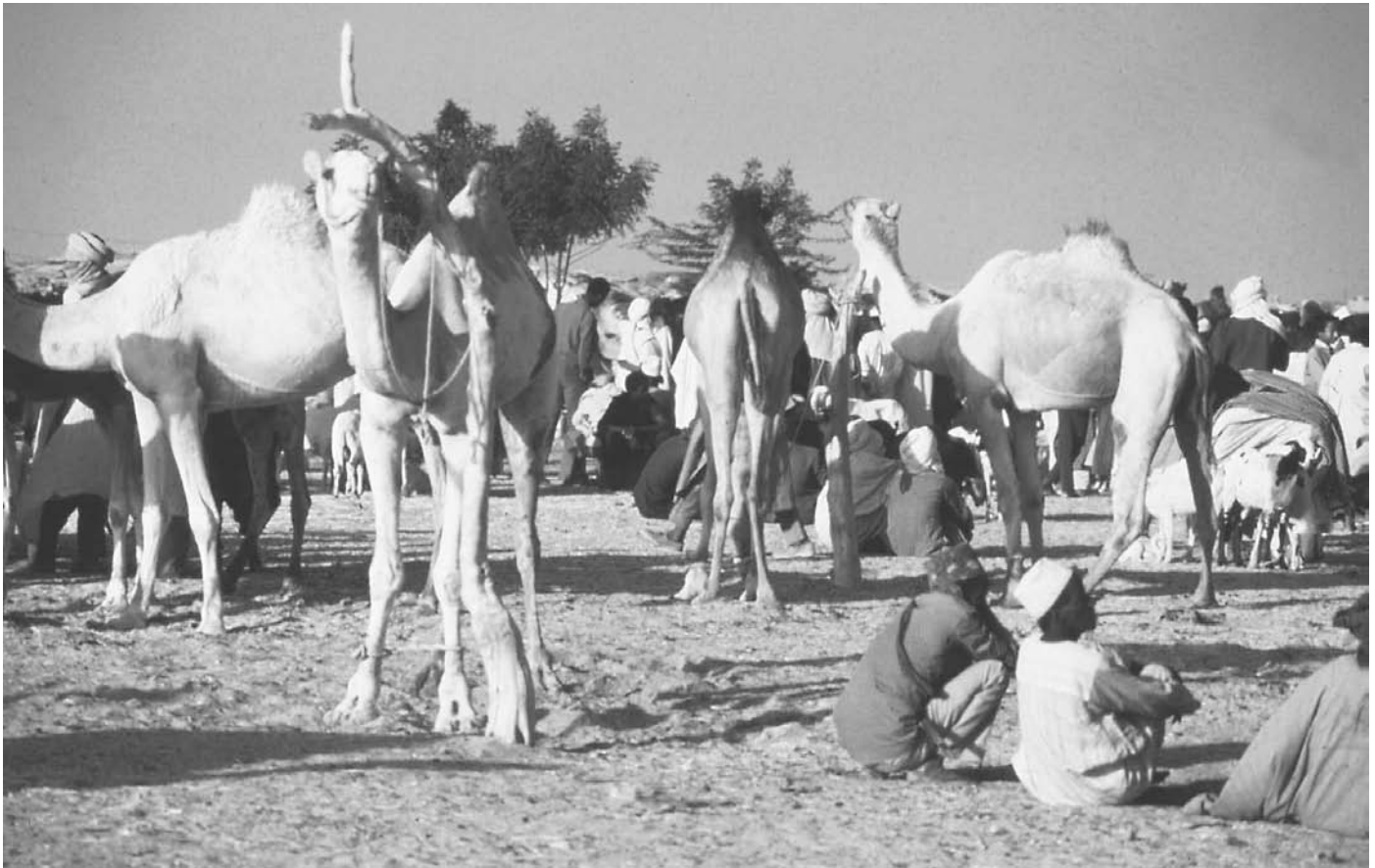
## **11 CLOTHING**

Through the style, lavishness, and color of their clothes, Nigeriens communicate a great deal about their ethnicity, religious identity, and educational and social status. While most Zarma, Songhay, and Hausa women wear gay, cotton, custom-made blouses with flounces, pleats, elaborate collars, and short-sleeves together with wrappers of the same fabric, women among the Tuareg or Fulani wear dark indigo-dyed clothes. In urban areas, professional women may wear Western clothes, but many are pressured by reformist Muslims to give up their revealing garments in favor of the more modest local attire that often includes a type of head-covering. While many women wear a small scarf or even a large veil that shrouds their shoulders, female Izala members are covered from head to ankle by a voluminous tent-like veil, the *hijabi*, whose bright color matches the rest of their outfit.

For many Nigerien men, the flowing, sleeveless gown of heavy brocade that is worn over a matching shirt and drawstring pants has become the garment of choice. Despite its cumbersome nature, it gives respectability to its wearer by advertising his or her Islamic status. When they do not wear a turban, men often sport an embroidered rimless hat. Among the Tuareg, it is not the women but the men who cover their faces with a veil. Among Bororo Fulani, men make up their faces and compete in beauty pageants, during which women designate the most handsome participants. Educated civil servants characteristically wear tight-fitting European pants and tailored shirts in dull colors and go hatless.

## **12 FOOD**

In Niger, where drought is a constant threat to human survival, the staple food is millet. Millet is the main ingredient in the traditional midday meal of *fura*, a porridge of water, spices, sometimes milk or sugar, and cooked flour. Pastoral Tuareg, who rely heavily on the consumption of dates, add crushed dates to their *fura*. Millet can be consumed during the evening meal as a thick paste having the consistency of polenta, onto which is spooned a spicy sauce that may contain tomato paste, onion, okra, sorrel, squash, pumpkin, eggplant, or meat. Along the Niger River, the Songhay prepare a thick paste of corn with a sauce made of baobab leaves, to which is added meat or smoked fish. When they do not eat millet or sorghum, Nigeriens enjoy beans or rice. For breakfast, they usually eat the leftovers of the previous meal, though in town, coffee and bread are becoming increasingly appreciated by those who can afford the expense. All enjoy snacks made of skewered meat, grilled tripe, fried bean meal beignets, or ground peanut cakes. The mango season brings ample supplies of these sweet delicacies to rural communities that have otherwise little opportu-



*Nigériens with their camels. (Cory Langley)*

nity to sample fruits. During the cricket season, women fry the insects for snacks.

Observant Muslims do not eat pork or consume alcohol; they eat only meat that has been slaughtered by a Muslim man in the proper Muslim fashion.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In Niger, where schooling is free but compulsory between the ages of 7 and 15, students can attend a Western-style school where all instruction is in French, or they can acquire an Islamic education in Arabic. Only a small minority of Nigériens are literate and can read either in French or Arabic. Even fewer finish secondary school to later pursue a higher education. An increasing number of children are attending Quranic schools thanks to the renewed Islamic fervor the country has been experiencing. There, they first learn by rote the entire Quran before moving on to the second stage of learning, which consists of understanding and interpreting each of the verses they have memorized.

In French private or public schools, the curriculum as established by the Ministry of National Education is designed to impart strictly secular knowledge. Local languages such as Hausa or Zarma are banished from the curriculum, and all instruction is in French. Children learn French grammar, math, science, civics, history, geography, drawing, music, and physical education.

Many parents believe that government schools are dangerous places because their children will forget their traditions and will be lost to their parents. Pious Muslims may send their sons, but keep their daughters home for fear of sexual promiscuity.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The history and tradition of Nigerien people is often evoked at social gatherings and celebrations by the *griots*, bards (most often male) who are simultaneously praise-singers, messengers, and historians. Men sing in Tuareg society, while in Hausa society women often use the medium of song to express themselves, whether they sing lullabies to their babies, work songs, or verses mocking their husbands.

Nigériens are very fond of listening to and reciting tales that explore traditional themes and values of the local culture and history, such as marital relations, virtue, generosity, or religious piety. Storytelling, like the recitation of song poems, praise-singing, or theater plays, is an important form of entertainment among children and adults alike. Today, the stories are often told by women, while men concentrate more on Islamic narratives and poems.

The Nigerien theater, in its present form, was introduced by French colonial administrators through schools and cultural associations. Nearly all comic, the plays, which reflect and promote popular concerns and aspirations, are improvised from a scenic outline arranged from a chosen theme. Performed in schools, village cultural centers, and on national radio and tele-

vision, plays enjoy a wide popularity and are often performed in Hausa (the most widely understood language in Niger).

Nigerien writers and poets are not well-known outside of Niger, except perhaps for Boubou Hama, the former president of the National Assembly, whose wonderfully rich autobiography, *Kotia Nima*, received the main literary prize of Sub-Saharan Africa in 1970.

### 15 WORK

A majority of Nigeriens remain farmers. They grow millet, sorghum, and beans as primary crops, but almost all of them are involved in secondary occupations such as petty trade, smithing, dyeing, tailoring, etc. Land is unfortunately becoming an increasingly scarce resource as parcels divided up between male children keep getting smaller. One-sixth of the work force is engaged in livestock production. Tuareg and Fulani, who were traditionally pastoralists, are progressively abandoning a precarious existence to settle in urban or semi-urban areas. Employed civil servants who are fortunate enough to receive a monthly salary are often faced with the predicament of having to support more relatives than their meager resources can bear.

### 16 SPORTS

Traditional wrestling has been promoted by the government as an activity that is distinctly part of the cultural heritage of Nigeriens. Wrestling tournaments draw large crowds. Each city now has a wrestling arena where people can come to follow the careers of their champions. Soccer is a popular source of entertainment for young boys and men. Given the fondness of Hausa and other Nigeriens for horses, horse races are also events that attract numerous onlookers.

Among pastoral Fulani, young men regularly engage in *soro*, a competitive game in which a man violently hits his partner with a large stick on the chest. The receiver pretends not to be hurt and simply smiles at the audience to demonstrate his control over pain.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Spirit possession ceremonies are public performances that can draw large crowds of onlookers in search of entertainment. Despite the Muslim prohibition on dancing and mixed-sex gatherings, many men and women enjoy stomping their feet to the sounds of the drums (calabashes) and the one-stringed violin during these events. The birth of a child is an occasion to rejoice and eat food. Wedding celebrations in urban areas also involve an evening of dancing to the sound of African pop music.

Though it remains a luxury that only salaried workers or wealthy traders can afford, television is becoming increasingly popular among Nigeriens. Parents and children enjoy American television series when they are not watching a Nigerian or Indian video at the house of a neighbor who is charging entrance fees to increase his earnings. In some rural communities, villagers can watch television even though they have no electricity. Thanks to solar-powered batteries, some neighborhoods share a television that is turned on every night after the evening meal.

Hausa and Hindu melodramas or karate films are popular among the younger generation who, in urban areas, can watch their idols on the big screen in open air cinemas. In the rural

areas, market days are occasions to meet friends or relatives and catch up on the latest news. The market is often the place to hear gossip, to learn about new fashions, or to discuss marriage plans.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Nigeriens are skilled craftsmen. Zarma women, for instance, are deft potters, known for their large earthenware water jars decorated with white geometrical motifs. Songhay pottery is decorated with ochre, black, or white triangular motifs. Hausa earthenware jars have a characteristically large opening.

Tuareg and Hausa craftsmen are famous for their elaborate leather work—beautiful boots, colorful sandals, and multi-pocketed bags in goatskin. Tuareg men manufacture leather boxes with intricate geometrical designs, as well as horse and camel saddles, sword sheaths, and multi-colored, fringed cushions and pouches.

Hand-woven, multi-colored cotton blankets made of thin bands that are sown together are part of women's most treasured possessions. Hausa women, for instance, keep their blankets in trunks and only display them on the day that their newborn child is given a name. The embroidery that enlivens the collars of the large Islamic robes worn by so many Nigerien men is also a local craft.

Smithing is a traditional activity among the Tuareg, who manufacture a wide range of jewelry: Agadez or Iférouane silver crosses, rings, wrist and ankle bracelets made of braided silver or copper strands, necklaces made of beads or agate set in silver, amulets, and locks worn around the neck. Fulani women wear numerous large silver earrings and heavy brass anklets.

The people of Niger enjoy music, whether they listen to Islamic chanting on the radio or attend a formal musical event honoring local authorities. They listen with great pleasure to the griots, the professional bards whose praise-singing is accompanied by drumming from a whole series of instruments, including the *ganga*, a medium size drum, and the *kalangu*, an hourglass drum held under the armpit. On formal occasions, one may hear the sound of the *algaita*, a reed instrument that requires of its player an elaborate breathing technique. Among the Tuareg, three women are needed to play the *tinde*, a type of drum that is often accompanied by a flute (*tassinsack*). Tuareg men enjoy singing about their exploits as warriors or lovers while women perform instrumental music.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

When Niger gained its independence in 1960, only 5% of the population lived in cities. Since the 1984–85 drought that displaced so many pastoralists, Niamey, the capital, has expanded by over 10% every year. This dramatic urbanization has introduced a variety of social ills that the successive regimes have failed to address seriously. There has been, for instance, a significant increase in violent crime, juvenile delinquency, and alcoholism. Drug use among workers is reportedly on the increase. Growing numbers of partially educated youths who cannot find work in the public or industrial sector either remain unemployed or are absorbed by the informal sector in petty trade, hustling, and smuggling when they do not turn to crime. Another drought and locust infestation in 2005 led to food shortages for as many as 2.5 million Nigeriens.

Infanticide, rape of young girls, forced early marriage, and teenage prostitution are becoming increasingly common. Faced with Niamey's demographic explosion, the state has been unable to supply the most basic services. This is why postal service, sewage system, and water supply are nonexistent in many neighborhoods of the capital.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Because of the influence of Islam on local life, there exists a strong segregation between the sexes. Muslim women are, by and large, constrained by their domestic duties, while men have access to more public spaces such as the market or the court. What goes on between men and women in public or in private varies, of course, with education, social status, and ethnic identity. Younger women are more daring, and they usually have a say in the choice of a husband. They must nonetheless remain modest. Once married, it is improper for a Muslim wife to look at her husband directly in the eye or to confront him.

Gender strongly affects access to education in Niger. While 43% of men are literate, only 15% of women can read and write. Many women are unable to attend school because of responsibilities within the home and early marriage (often between the ages of 14 and 20). The average Nigerien woman will have between seven and eight children in her lifetime, one of the highest fertility rates in the world.

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—revised by C. Breedlove

# NUER

**PRONUNCIATION:** NOO-uhr

**LOCATION:** Southern Sudan

**POPULATION:** 4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Nuer

**RELIGION:** Traditional faith (worship of Kuoth); Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Dinka; Shilluk; Sudanese

## 1 INTRODUCTION

To generations of anthropology students, the Nuer of southern Sudan have been one of the best-known peoples in Africa, thanks to the pioneering cultural studies of British social anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard.

Early in the 20th century, the Nuer were estimated to number about half a million. They occupied the swampy flood plain known as the Sudd region along the White Nile. These farmer-herders lived by raising cattle and cultivating crops, moving away from their permanent settlements in the dry season after the rains had tapered off and the floods had receded in order to take advantage of grazing in low-lying areas near rivers and streams. Fishing, hunting, and the gathering of wild fruits rounded out their diet.

When the British conquered Sudan and eventually brought the Nuer people under their control, they were surprised that the Nuer could have high population densities and broad, stable networks of social organization without any formal political organization or leadership. To account for this complexity of this relatively egalitarian organization based on kinship relations, as well as the legendary military successes the Nuer enjoyed, the famous British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard developed the concept of "segmentary lineages." These kinship groups, which traced descent in the male line, could mobilize in opposition to similar-level opponents in any social conflict among the Nuer or between them and outsiders. Thus, even without a centralized political leader, they could effectively unite against enemies, making them a formidable military foe. The theory of segmentary opposition and studies of the Nuer have fascinated anthropologists and their students ever since.

Thus the fame of the Nuer stems from their early notoriety as one of the most courageous and steadfast peoples of Africa in their resistance to colonial conquest and imperial domination. British and Egyptian forces conquered Sudan in 1898, and most Nuer communities had nominally submitted to British rule before the outbreak of World War I, but non-cooperation and resistance remained widespread. It was not until the 1920s that systematic efforts were made to extend effective British presence into some areas of Nuerland. The last large-scale armed uprising was not put down until the end of the 1920s, when Royal Air Force planes were deployed in an "experiment in the pacification of primitive peoples" to fire-bomb Nuer villages and the earthen mounds dedicated to their prophets. The invaders also strafed the fleeing people and confiscate their cattle.

Once armed resistance was finally crushed, the British colonizers had the difficult task of subjecting the proudly independent Nuer people to the principles of "indirect rule" and regularizing administration and taxation in spite of the lack of native institutions and structures for political control. The



British never truly accomplished this task; neither did the series of Sudanese governments that followed. In fact, by the time of Sudanese independence in 1956, civil war had broken out in the southern region, eventually pulling the entire Nuer area into armed conflicts that continue into the late 1990s, with only one short relatively peaceful period from 1972 to 1983. The Khartoum government brutally suppressed the African ethnic groups in an attempt to control the oil and water on their land.

The civil war between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) led by the late General Garang and the Government of the Sudan (GoS) raged from 1983 to 9 January 2005 when a Comprehensive Peace agreement was signed between the two parties. The war claimed millions of lives, forced many into exile and wasted livelihoods of millions of people, destroyed the physical infrastructure, hampered the economic base and caused the disintegration of social fabrics. This in turn has had a serious impact on traditional value systems, norms, and adaptation mechanisms. The treaty granted Southern Sudan a semi-autonomous status within the larger Sudan. Nevertheless, many Nuer still feel that they have been shortchanged in the composition of the Government of National Unity (GONU), headed by President Al Bashir and Salva Kiir Mayardit. They allege the government is dominated by the Dinka tribe and therefore misrepresents the Sudanese reality.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Nuerland is located in the southern Sudan between 7° and 10° north and 29° and 34° east. The main channel of the Nile River divides the country into western and eastern regions. The vast majority of the Nuer today live in their traditional homeland, located in the east Upper Nile Province around the junction of the Nile River with the Bahr el Ghazal and Sobat Rivers, and extending up the Sobat across the Ethiopian border. Nuer are geographically located in the heartland of the Upper Nile towards the Eastern Region of Jonglei state in Southern Sudan. They are bordered by the Gawaar of Ayod from the West, Dinka of Bor from the South West, Murle from the South, Anyuak from the East, Jikany of Nasir from the North East, Dinka of Ngok, and Luach from the North.

The region receives heavy rains—about 50 to 100 cm (20 to 40 in) per year—which falls almost entirely from May through October, with average daily maximum temperatures about 30° to 32°C (86° to 90°F). Dry winds blow from the north from November until April, bringing clear, sunny skies, with March and April being very hot months with high temperatures in the range of 38°C (100°F). The Nuer homeland is very flat, causing slow drainage and widespread flooding during the rainy season. Those same lands offer lush grazing for cattle during the dry season. The landscape also includes a few trees, such as small groves of thorny acacias and lalob trees, a very large shade tree, and a few palm trees.

While most Nuer still live in their home area, many have migrated to urban areas at various times to take advantage of job opportunities. During the civil wars in the period since 1955, and especially since 1983, thousands of Nuer have also fled north to the national capital, Khartoum, to other cities, or even to other countries to seek refuge from the fighting. Since the 1960s, thousands of rural Nuer have lived outside Sudan, particularly in western Ethiopia along the upper stretches of the Sobat river.

It is difficult to assess how life has changed in the traditional territories of the Nuer along the upper Nile and Sobat rivers because of the disruption of life in the region. However, in the time since the end of the colonial period, many Nuer have come to live outside their homeland, particularly in the cities of the north, where they have led very different lives. Taxes imposed by the British, as well as measures restricting Nuer raids on other groups for cattle, led to the first significant migrations of Nuer in search of work for pay. Most migrants intended to return home after a brief period, with enough money to buy a herd large enough to support a family in the traditional way of life; but the dislocations of the civil war and a devastating flood in 1964 that destroyed many herds have made returning increasingly difficult for many Nuer.

In seeking wage employment in the north, the Nuer men looked for work that they considered in keeping with their proud heritage as brave warriors. Much of the work available was in domestic service and other menial work that Dinka and other refugees from neighboring southern communities accepted, but which most Nuer rejected as demeaning. Instead, many Nuer found their way into construction labor, where they became the core labor of the labor force in many northern cities and on construction crews for irrigation dams and other structures. Women eventually began to accompany the men, and whole families would live on construction sites in shelters built from available scrap material. This reduced the

living costs of the workers, but it created problems because the conditions were not compatible with the standards of female modesty and seclusion common among Muslim northerners.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Nuer call themselves *Naath*, which means “human beings.” The Nuer, Dinka, and Atwot (Atuot) are sometimes considered one ethnic group. The Nuer language is a Nilotic language closely related to the speech of the Dinka and Atwot. The language is uniform with no definable dialects.

To the ears of English speakers, the Nuer language sounds airy, light, melodic, and breathy, with few hard consonants. It has several consonants that are not usually found at the beginning of English words, such as the sound *ng* (as in *sing*) or *ny* (as the Spanish *ñ* in *señor* or French *gn* in *Boulogne*). For example, most common names for Nuer women and girls begin with the latter sound: *Nyayoi*, *Nyawec* (the *c* at the end is pronounced *ch*). Because of these unusual sounds, the written form of the language developed by missionaries in the 1930s and 1940s includes several letters not used in writing European languages.

To identify a person, the given name is followed by the name of the father, since the Nuer consider kinship through the father's line very important. So if a man named Cuol names his son Gatkuoth and his daughter Nyaruol, they would be called Gatkuoth Cuol and Nyaruol Cuol. A child is usually named by the father or another member of the father's family and may have another name that the relatives on the mother's side use. Women do not change their names when they marry, but after a woman has a child (named *Wei*, for example), other women might often call her “mother-of-Wei.” People also have nicknames and ceremonial names. Among male friends of their own age groups, for example, boys and men are often called by the name of the bull they received at initiation or the name of their current favorite bull in their herd.

Most Nuer cannot read their language, but oral language is well developed. Nuer enjoy verbal wit, and are known as brilliant conversationalists. Major forms of entertainment include joking, creating and reciting poetry, and composing and performing original songs for one another. Sample Nuer expressions include *wut pany* (“a real man”), *male magua!* (“big hello!”), *jin athin?* (“Are you there?”=“How are you?”), and *nyang* (“crocodile”).

### 4 FOLKLORE

Nuer honor the memory of their famous prophets, known as *guk*, who are believed to be possessed by one of the sky spirits or lesser divinities. One such prophet was a man named Ngundeng, who died in 1906. He was said to be able to cure illnesses and infertility. During his lifetime he and his followers constructed a large earthen pyramid, approximately 12 m (40 ft) high, made of earth, ashes and cattle camp debris; they surrounded it with over a hundred upright elephant tusks. It was built in honor of the sky god Deng and for the glory of the prophet Ngundeng; people came from miles around to help with the building and later to sacrifice cattle there. The monument was blown up by the British in 1928. The songs and prophecies of Ngundeng and other prophets are passed down the generations through oral tradition and are still influential today. It is believed that the spirit that possesses a prophet later possesses one of his descendants.

### 5 RELIGION

The Nuer religion involves belief in a divine creator or high god, *Kuoth*, who sustains life and health, and in many lesser spirits. The Nuer honor both the high god and the spirits (or lesser divinities) through observance of moral rules (including observation of kinship duties and other social obligations) and sacrifices. The two kinds of leaders in the Nuer religious system are prophets, who are believed to be earthly representatives of some of the lesser divinities/spirits of the air, and “earth priests,” also known as “leopard-skin chiefs.” The latter name for these leaders comes from their traditional mark of office, a leopard skin cape, and their recognized leadership role; but they are not really political leaders, as the term “chief” seems to imply. Instead, they are considered sacred people who can intercede with spirits, conduct sacrifices to help cure illnesses that are believed to be spiritually based, and serve as intermediaries between feuding families, as when revenge is sought after a murder. There are still some active Nuer prophets today, including Wutnyang Gatakek (whose name means “man of crocodile, son of reputation”), a young man who encourages his followers to work hard, become self-reliant, and not succumb to the tendency to blame other ethnic groups for their problems (a practice known as “tribalism”). He does not consider his spiritual leadership to be in conflict with Christianity, and he encourages Christians to continue to follow their religion.

During periods of epidemics or even individual health crises, oracles are sought out to identify the offended spirits and determine the proper recourse. Frequently an offering is presented or an animal is sacrificed in order to appease or drive away the evil spirit. The Nuer pray for health and well-being, offering sacrifices to *Kuoth* so he will answer their petitions. There is no organized religious hierarchy or system, but many individuals serve as diviners and healers.

The Nuer own the Bieh State, a name which originated from the emerging days of Ngun-Deng Bong, the well known great prophet of Nuer. Bieh in the Nuer language means shrine of Nyun-Deng. It is a Holy place where Nuer people including the non-Nuer from all walks of life come periodically to Bieh for worship.

The Nuer do not believe in a place of after life for the spirit, and their religious concepts deal with concerns of this life. However, they do believe the spirits of the dead can affect their current life, with the more recently deceased having more influence. The Nuer honor and appease the spirits of their ancestors. Cattle are sacrificed to god and the spirits. As among the neighboring Dinka, religious thought and practice is a dialogue with *Kuoth*. The Nuer pray for health and well-being to *Kuoth*, offering sacrifices of cattle in hopeful expectation that their sentiments may be realized. Whereas many individuals become diviners and healers (*tiet*), there is no organized cult or hierarchy of religious functionaries. In most cases, other available medical resources are resorted to when spiritual healing does not bring about the desired outcome. Like other Nilotic peoples, the Nuer regard long-deceased ancestors with respect and veneration, but are concerned in their earthly lives with the power of the recently deceased to cause misfortune. Cattle play an important part in Nuer religion and ritual. Cows are dedicated to the ghosts of the owner's lineages and any personal spirits that may have possessed them at any time. The Nuer believe they establish contact with these ancestor ghosts



and spirits by rubbing ashes along the backs of oxen or cows dedicated to them, through the sacrifice of cattle. No important Nuer ceremony of any kind is complete without such a sacrifice. There is also a widespread belief in the concept of the “evil eye,” where a malevolent person possessing supernatural powers can cast a spell on someone just by gazing upon them.

Although Christian missionaries had worked in some Nuer areas for several decades, relatively few rural Nuer had converted before 1964, the year when all foreign church workers were expelled by the government. In the period of peace (1972–83), however, many new Christian congregations were formed and many Nuer, particularly in the east, converted to Christianity. The majority of Sudan’s people, living in central and northern Sudan, are Muslims, and although some southerners have converted to Islam, recent reports suggest that the Nuer prefer their traditional faith or Christianity. The government of Sudan, especially in the period after Islamic Law was declared in 1983, tried to pressure the non-Muslim peoples of the south to convert to Islam. Since the Islamic-led government has more respect for Christianity than for traditional African religions like the Nuer religion, many Nuer have preferred to become Christians. This has made for many interesting social dilemmas among the Nuer. For example, when Christian and non-Christian Nuer socialize together, as when an animal is sacrificed for religious reasons and later eaten, they try to avoid conflict over beliefs by not referring to the major Divinity or by asserting that “Divinity is one”; that is, they express the belief that there is only one god, even if different people use different names and worship differently.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Until recently, most Nuer did not use dates to calculate the passage of time. Even during the 1970s, most Nuer did not know in what year they were born or how old they were. A woman might tell you her daughter was born “the year of the measles epidemic” or the year of a flood when they had had to eat a lot of *lalob* fruit. So instead of specific dates for annual holidays, people hold rituals and celebrations whenever they seem appropriate. For example, if a group of boys is ready to be initiated, it can be done at any time of the year, although it is most likely to take place at the end of the rainy season, after harvest, when people have the time and plenty of food has been stored.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A woman in childbirth is attended to by another woman, usually a close relative, who must herself be a mother. People are careful to protect the mother and newborn child from any spiritual danger by making sure that pregnant women or their husbands do not enter the house.

The Nuer nomenclature is rather complex. In some groups the child is named along the male lineage, but traced either through the mother or father’s ancestry. A similar system gives the child the last name of the paternal grandfather’s first name, the middle name being the father’s first name, and the first or given name selected by the father. Christian children often have Biblical names and Sudanese names, used interchangeably. First names, when used, are commonly preceded by a title, like “Mr.”

Among the Nuer, puberty is seen as the passage into adulthood and its responsibilities and is a marked occasion for both sexes. The Nuer do not circumcise either boys or girls, but they

do practice certain other body modification rituals related to life transitions. For girls, passage from childhood to adulthood is marked by the first menstruation, at which time the mother prepares her for motherhood and home management.

For males, there is a complicated set of rituals which an entire village age-set progresses through, culminating in ritualized tattooings or scarifications across the forehead. In the past, nearly all boys (and, at least in some areas, girls, too) had their four lower incisors removed at about the age of eight. Aesthetically, this permanent loss of teeth was accompanied by efforts to force the top front teeth outward a little, so that the beautiful white teeth would be more visible in the smiling face. This “orthodontia” was for the purpose of making the children look more beautiful. More recently some families have refused to continue these practices.

Between the ages of 9 and 13, Nuer boys seek permission from their fathers to undergo a manhood initiation ritual. In the past, the boys were much older, about 14 to 16 during the 1930s and about 16 to 18 a century ago. They wait until a group grows to between 5 and 15 boys for mass initiation. The ritual requires extensive preparation of food, and the boys must be healthy and well fed prior to the ritual. On the chosen day, the boys’ heads are shaved and anointed. The climax of the ritual is a ceremony in which the boys lie down in a row. Each in turn is cut with a knife by the scarifier, who makes six horizontal lines across the entire forehead and above the ears, all the way down to the bone. Although it is extremely painful, the boys try to show courage and remain silent. Parents and friends gather to watch. Loss of blood is a risk, and the wounds are sometimes cauterized to stop the bleeding.

After the cutting, the young men stay secluded together in a house while the scars are healing, lying for a time on their backs to keep the forehead upward. They can have unmarried people, nursing mothers, and old people as visitors, and they have nothing to do but eat porridge and milk, sleep, and play. Once they are considered healed (after some weeks), the young men are released and lead a procession to the river to bathe. They then return home and declare themselves men, and they and their families and guests celebrate with feasting, games, singing, and dancing. Traditionally the father of each initiate presents him with a spear, a fishing spear, and a bull from which he takes his “bull name.” After this initiation, boys can begin to be sexually active and marry and they take on adult work roles. Those initiated in the same period of years have a very special friendship throughout life.

Some young men today do not want to undergo this ritual, under the influence of education and Christianity. Those who do not undergo the full manhood initiation are being called “bull boys,” indicating that people know they are grown up, but do not recognize them as fully adult men who have proven their courage and been scarred like other Nuer.

The next significant transition rite is marriage. This usually follows a period of courtship when visits, poetry recitations, and other intimate exchanges give a couple a chance to decide whether they love each other. Incest is a taboo. If the parents agree to the marriage, the man’s family must supply an agreed-upon number of cattle to the bride’s family as a bride-price payment. In the old days when cattle were plentiful, the payment might be as many as 40 cows, but today marriages require fewer cattle due to the difficulties of civil war and mi-

gration. Some other valuables, such as money, can be substituted for some of the cows.

When a person dies, the corpse is laid to rest in a fetal position on a cowhide in a grave about four feet deep, then covered with another cowhide and buried. Families mourn for a few months, during which time close relatives do not wear ornaments. They then hold a ceremony in which one or two cattle are killed (both to honor the dead and to provide meat for a feast), purification rites are performed, lengthy speeches are made, prayers are offered, and people wash themselves and the possessions of the deceased and shave their heads. (Since almost everyone wears their hair short for cleanliness, it is not unusual for both men and women to shave their heads.) After these ceremonies people again wear ornaments.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Nuer place great value on behaving in a respectful way toward others, offering greetings to strangers and friends alike, and offering hospitality to travelers. It is not considered necessary to offer every visitor a meal, especially if there is no woman around at the moment (since men are not expected to cook for guests), but offering something to drink is important.

Wit, joking, and animated conversation are common among friends and as part of courtship. People generally show respect for their elders. Although men are in a social position somewhat superior to that of women, women have much personal freedom and make most of their own decisions about work, possessions, and interpersonal relations. Relative age is of great importance in interpersonal relationships, determining not only the terms of address but also the manner of acting with others. For example, men of the same "age set" will call each other "brother" and will act informally with one another. Alternatively, someone older than you is accorded utmost respect, and is referred to as "uncle" or "aunt," or even "father" or "mother" if related by blood.

The sharing of food forms a common bond among people. Leaders who extend hospitality and do not rely excessively on others are admired. Relatives are always expected to share food with each other. Newlyweds do not eat together until after the birth of their first child, when their two families are then considered more solidly related.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In rural areas, Nuer build round, one-room houses out of poles, which are plastered with an adobe-like mixture of mud and dung that dries into solid brown walls. The tall, pointed roofs are thatched with straw. Sometimes the doorways are built very small, so that one has to crouch or even crawl to enter, making it easier to barricade the door at night as protection against wild animals. Similar construction methods are used for the large cattle barns. During the rainy season, the cattle sleep inside, and many of the young men sleep in the rafters of the barns. Since there are many insects—flies by day and mosquitoes by night—smoky fires are lit near the cattle at night; both people (especially children) and animals are often smeared with ashes to keep some of the insects off. While people may look rather strange when newly covered, this is the only insect repellent available in the villages.

Villages do not have electricity or running water, so people must draw water from wells, rivers, or pools, and they make good use of natural light, rising early, and enjoying the warmth

and glow of fires at night. Furniture is simple—mats, cowhides, logs for benches, and simple stools and headrests are common; and some people have wood-frame rope beds. For containers, pottery, aluminum pots, and bottles, as well as gourds and baskets, are ordinarily used.

The Nuer homeland is not hospitable for horses, camels, and donkeys, which are commonly ridden in other parts of Sudan, since they develop hoof problems during the rainy season. When people want to travel, they either walk or get a ride on top of the load carried by one of the large open trucks that travel the bumpy, rutted dirt roads of the region. During the rainy season, the roads cannot be used. Dugout canoes or rafts are used on the rivers.

The Nuer experience numerous difficulties in accessing medical care, although to different degrees depending on background factors like educational level exposure to biomedical care in Sudan. They routinely share over-the-counter medications or borrow prescription medicines from others to treat similar symptoms. This is a result of coping with chronic shortages of medicine and severely limited care facilities in Sudan, and of course it circumscribes expensive medical costs.

Herbal preventive and curative measures are particularly relied upon where there is no access to clinics. There are multiple herbal and traditional remedies used by Sudanese. For example, a widely used cure for migraine headaches is a certain chalky compound (clay, mixed with certain leaves and water), which is rubbed over the head. To relieve the symptoms of malaria, there is a certain root chewed like a stick. One common form is called *visi ri*, a bitter shrub that bends its shoot to follow the sun.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Each married woman has her own house where she and her young children live. The Nuer practice polygyny, so husbands can marry more than one wife if they can afford to. Husbands sleep in the houses of their wives (if they have more than one wife, they go to whichever they wish) or in the cattle barns with other men. Several married women's houses in an extended family may surround large family courtyards, or people can live separately. Houses are usually built near the fields where crops are grown, and often there are some good shade trees and a thicket or forest nearby which can provide firewood and other wild products.

Young children usually work with their parents, gradually learning skills such as milking, gardening, herding, spreading cow dung to dry for fuel, and caring for younger siblings. Fathers and mothers as well as grandparents and other relatives enjoy playing with children. The Nuer prefer to have large families with several children, but poor health conditions and the war have made it difficult for many of their children to survive. It is probably rare today for a mother to have more than three or four surviving children.

Families often have scrawny short-haired dogs that eat scraps and help protect the homestead. They usually do not receive much attention. In contrast, the cattle, although they are the main economic assets of a family, are treated in some ways like pets. People often try to make their cattle beautiful, as by working on their horns as they grow so as to give them interesting shapes, or by brushing the coats of the cattle or decorating their horns with tassels and beads. Sometimes people compose songs or poetry praising their beautiful cattle.

At the domestic level, a woman may, with luck, give birth to six children during her childbearing years. Co-wives do not necessarily reside in proximity. And when they do, the domestic unit can easily number more than a dozen individuals.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The Nuer homeland is a hot climate, and for much of the year people do not need to wear much. Thirty years ago, a simple leather skirt or loincloth was all that a person needed while in his or her own village, although women usually had at least one good dress and both men and women wore capes or blankets tied over one shoulder when they traveled away from home. Currently, men and boys prefer to wear loose-fitting cotton shirts and shorts, while women and girls prefer colorful cotton dresses with perhaps a cape or a head scarf in addition.

Body decoration has always been important to the Nuer. Not only do they remove the lower front teeth, as noted above, but they also make decorative scars on the body in dotted patterns, especially on women's torsos, faces, and other parts of the body. Earrings are popular with both men and women, and the Nuer were doing multiple piercings of the ear long before it became popular in the West. Some people like to stretch the ear piercing with progressively larger plugs, working their way up to film canisters. One style is to loop stiff black giraffe hairs through ear piercings to make macramé-like decorations. Lip piercings decorated with metal ornaments are popular with some girls. For men especially, hair dyeing (especially orange) and patterned head shaving are popular, as is hair sculpture, with some arrangements made to look like cattle horns. Beautiful white beads are made from broken ostrich eggshells (found in ostrich nests), and these are made into stunning white necklaces and waistbands. Some people are skilled at fashioning ivory bracelets that both men and women like to wear on the wrists or upper arms. Ivory is not so common any more as the elephants have become scarce and cannot be hunted, so bone, cowrie shells, and imported plastic and glass ornaments have become more commonly used as jewelry.

Since Nuer have very dark skin, there is no tradition of tattooing, but people often mark their bodies in patterns made with temporary colorings (especially chalky white) for celebrations.

## **12 FOOD**

The commonest daily foods for the Nuer are dairy products, especially milk for the young and soured milk, like yogurt, for adults. Liquid butter is also made from milk that is soured in long-necked gourds and shaken for an hour or so to separate out the fat. Since there are no refrigerators to chill the butter, it remains liquid and is used for cooking or poured onto cooked foods. Grains such as corn and sorghum are cooked and eaten with large spoons like hot cereal, with milk, yogurt, or butter. Apart from cow's milk, a soft porridge made from fermented sorghum, mixed with a sour fruit, is commonly used as a weaning food (as well as a food for the infirm or elderly). In the general diet, sorghum, prepared in many different ways, is the most common starch.

The Nuer do not eat meat very often; they prefer to keep their cattle alive, but on a special occasion one of the cattle may be sacrificed and then eaten. When a cow is killed, the meat is often shared with relatives and neighbors, and some of the extra meat is hung out to dry, like beef jerky, to preserve it for fu-

ture use. Men and older boys normally carry spears with them when they walk around the countryside, in case they have a chance to hunt an antelope, gazelle, or other animal. If they are lucky, this can mean a delicious meat meal without anyone having to give up a cow.

Fish are eaten often during the dry season when the herds are taken to pasturelands near the rivers or pools left in low places as the floods recede. River fish trapped in pools are easy to catch as the waters dry up, so that even very young children can catch them by throwing fishing spears in shallow water. Boys 8 to 10 years old can bring home dinner for the whole family while they are out playing in the water on a hot day. At times when fish are plentiful, people can catch more than they need and sun-dry the extras to sell or save for later in the year. Drying gives fish a sour, tangy, flavor that is an acquired taste.

Various vegetables—squash, tomatoes, chili peppers—are grown and cooked, generally in pots on outdoor fires. Vegetables and greens, both wild and cultivated, make up a large proportion of the traditional diet, with meats including freshwater fish, and chicken (although chickens are generally more valued for egg production).

Another very nourishing food that is an acquired taste is cooked cow blood. A small amount of blood can be taken from the neck of a healthy animal without harming it. When cooked, it becomes solid, like the blood sausage eaten by some Europeans, and eating it is somewhat like eating a hunk of bologna.

Wild fruits and nuts are favorite snacks. The most popular food is wild honey, but it is hard to find. A favorite of older people during the dry season—when there is not much work to do and plenty of grain has been harvested—is homemade beer. It looks more like a thin porridge and is very cool and filling, but only mildly alcoholic. Most younger people seem to consider beer drinking in the shade of a tree a rather boring way to spend an afternoon, and since they take pride in being healthier, stronger, and less decadent than their elders, they do not drink beer. Similarly, the pipe tobacco that is raised seems to be smoked mainly by older married men and women.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Most Nuer children today still do not have the opportunity to attend school, since the few rural schools that once existed were destroyed or disrupted by the civil war. However, concerted efforts are being made by both the Government of Southern Sudan and the international community ever since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2005, to improve the education sector as part of the reconstruction program. Many Nuer are still returning home from refugee status. As refugees go back home they have to reconstruct their individual and family lives and it is common for children to try to support themselves by selling things in the streets or looking for jobs.

Long before the civil war, some missionary schools taught children to read their own language; they also learned English, the language of their colonial power (Britain), and then Arabic. Thus among the educated Nuer in the older generation, many are able to speak, read, and write three languages. But the vast majority of Nuer men and women, although they speak Nuer and often also Arabic, are illiterate.

However most of the Nuer who were able to secure asylum in North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Kenya, for instance, have been able to access education in special programs.

For instance some of the Nuer refugees in Kenya were allowed to attend the same classrooms as other Kenyan children.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nuer music consists mainly of singing. People sing songs they have composed, sometimes accompanying themselves on a simple instrument like the so-called African thumb piano (a small, hollow wooden box with metal tines of different lengths that give different pitches when they are twanged). The *raba-ba*, a rural Sudanese stringed instrument, is also often used, in a homemade form made from simple materials: a gallon can, wooden rods, and wires for strings. Whistles and bells are also used in music and dance, but the human voice is the most popular musical instrument. Some songs are widely known and sung in unison, but most are solos. The Nuer do not sing in harmony. Some songs are very rhythmic, and others are more pensive and chantlike. Dancing is usually accompanied by singing and is mostly done for fun.

Written literature is rare, since a system for writing the Nuer language was not developed until the 1930s. But oral literature is well developed, with songs and poetic prophecies passed down through memorization from generation to generation.

#### 15 WORK

Nuer who live in the rural areas must know how to do many types of work just to survive, for they have only themselves to rely on. Children and young men and women herd the cattle. Adult men are responsible for many other tasks and decisions involved in caring for the cattle, as well as slaughtering and butchering. Women and children usually milk the cattle and goats, and women make dairy products. Both men and women grow crops, cultivating with hoes, and children help them. Women process grain, cook food, and brew beer. All adults participate in various aspects of building and repairing houses. Men hunt with spears and sometimes find honey, and everyone gathers wild fruits or nuts when they find them.

For Nuer men living in cities—as many do for at least part of their lives—the most common type of work for pay has been in the construction industry. Often the whole family may live at a construction site for a few months while Nuer workers put the wooden frames, bricks, and mortar of a high-rise building into place. The goal of this urban work is often to save money for buying more cattle when the family returns home.

#### 16 SPORTS

The popularity of soccer has spread to many areas, but children usually do not have real soccer balls and have to improvise with whatever they can find.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Children and young teenagers often play with small objects they have made from mud, which contains much clay. Because they are cattle herders, Nuer children often form the mud into cows and bulls. In the last several years, with their experience of war, many children have begun to mold rifles with the mud. Given the warm climate, squirt guns would probably be popular, but there are few plastic or other manufactured toys. In addition to the objects made from mud, there are carved wooden animals and rag dolls.

Older teenagers enjoy singing and dancing, especially around the evening campfires. In one particularly athletic dance style, young men repeatedly leap rhythmically straight up into the air as high as they can, trying to make their movements seem nonchalant and effortless. Girls and boys dance as individuals in a group or with partners. Young men and women sometimes sing personal songs to try to attract many dance partners of the opposite sex. In some areas, a popular dance style for young men is a mock duel, in which one dancer “accidentally” leaps backwards and bumps into a young woman whose attention he is trying to get.

People make themselves as attractive as possible for dances, often decorating themselves with flamboyantly colored leggings and beads and carrying special dance rods, flashlights, or other fancy portable trade goods, even including books. One popular type of dance skirt for women and girls is made with twisted grass ropes that hang from the waist to just above the knees and may be decorated with cattle tails or small bells. For dancing, men and boys wear tight shorts, especially ones with pockets, and go shirtless. Sometimes dancers use simple body paints that imitates cattle markings, and they may even decorate a cow or two for a special occasion.

Nuer also enjoy games, including the two-player game of distributing small stones or mud tokens in rows of pits hollowed in the ground, and attempting to win more pieces than the opponent. This game, which is played in many parts of Sudan and other parts of Africa, can be played by people from different cultures who cannot understand each other’s language.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Nuer in rural areas have always been fairly self-sufficient, making and decorating many of their own household items. The carved headrest is probably the most common piece of furniture for the Nuer, something that is light and easy to carry when they hike to the cattle camps but which makes it much more comfortable to lie on a mat or cowhide on the ground. Some people are very skilled at making decorated pottery and the bowls for pipes, while others make aesthetically pleasing and highly functional baskets. Smiths process scrap metals into beautiful spoons shaped like the old-fashioned cattle-horn spoons, make spear heads, decorate pipe stems with brass, and fashion bracelets.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The ongoing post-war resettlement and reconstruction is the main challenge facing the contemporary Nuer people. Many had lost their homes or had to escape the fighting by moving to other countries or to cities. Some had been captured by neighboring hostile groups and forced to work or become part of their captors’ families. Others had undergone military training at an early age, deepening the “culture of violence” that has led to small arms proliferation in Nuerland. Others have been psychologically scarred by the tragedies of war and displacement threatens to displace some of their more positive traditional values. Cultural erosion which condemns the immorality in Nuer ancestral life is now being replaced with the culture of unjust banditry and other similar activities. For the Nuer living in cities, poverty, sickness, and insecurity are daily problems. For all of these Nuer, a peaceful and just implementation of the January 2005 Peace Agreement are a major part of their hope for the future.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Nuer domestic groups are based on the ideals of patrilineal descent. Each Nuer village typically contained a patrilineage segment, some of the in-laws of the “ruling” males and an adopted Dinka lineage. The male elders are the “bulls” of the village. People named hamlets or villages after the numerically dominant patrilineal group.

During marriage, cattle and women are—and have always been—the central objects of reproductive exchange and hallmarks of the distinctive Nuer culture. This is seen in the transfer of cattle at the bride wealth exchange, which is considered crucial for the reproduction and survival of the agnatic line. Through the second half of the 20th century, the range of exchangeable objects expanded to include weapons and cash. For instance, bridewealth negotiations were traditionally settled with what Hutchinson refers to as “cattle of girls” (i.e., cattle collectively acquired through the agnatic line’s exchange of daughters).

Women, as expected by the society, take pride in the number of children they bear.

Polygyny and wife inheritance are practiced. A man may marry additional wives depending on his economic ability. Widows usually remarry one of their husband’s close relatives (such as a brother), without any additional bride wealth. Co-wives, however, do not necessarily reside in proximity; the bride is relocated in the husband’s natal family following her intermarriages. Patrilineal residence at marriage further consolidates the patrilineal structure of Nuer communities.

Childrearing is traditionally the responsibility of all the women in the village; while the father takes considerable pleasure in his children, discipline is the responsibility of the mother.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# NYAMWEZI

**PRONUNCIATION:** nyahm-WAY-zee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Wanyamwezi

**LOCATION:** Unyamwezi (Tanzania: Provinces of Tabora and Shinyunga, Northwest central, between Lake Victoria and Lake Rukwa)

**POPULATION:** 1.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kinyamwezi; Nyamwesi; Kiswahili (Tanzania's national language); English; languages of neighboring ethnic groups

**RELIGION:** spirituality shaped by traditional beliefs; Islam; and Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Tanzanians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Nyamwezi people, or the Wanyamwezi, live in the East African country of Tanzania. (The country of Tanzania was created when Tanganyika and the island of Zanzibar formed a union in 1964. Before German colonial occupation in the late 1890s there was no geographical entity known as Tanganyika.) They are the second largest of over 120 ethnic groups in Tanzania. Their home area, Unyamwezi, which means “the place of the Wanyamwezi,” is located in the western plateau area of the Tanzanian provinces of Tabora and Shinyanga, south of Lake Victoria and east of Lake Tanganyika. While this is considered the traditional homeland of the Wanyamwezi, many Wanyamwezi work in the commercial and agricultural centers of Tanzania.

In trying to understand Nyamwezi culture, it is important to remember that it is not static or insulated from broader political and economic changes that have affected the larger Tanzanian society. Nyamwezi society and culture have been dynamic, constantly evolving to meet the changing environment. Over the years, Nyamwezi culture has both influenced and been influenced by the cultures of neighboring African societies as well as the national Tanzanian culture. Islam and Christianity have also had a great impact on modern Nyamwezi cultural practices. According to oral tradition, the Nyamwezi are thought to have settled in west central Tanzania (their present location) sometime in the 1600s. The earliest evidence comes from the Galahansa and confirms their presence there in the late 1600s.

The notion held by many Europeans during the colonial era, that the Nyamwezi were an ethnically uniform tribe ruled by a chief, did not fit the realities of Nyamwezi life. Even though the Wanyamwezi shared a common language and culture, they did not see themselves as one people and they were never united into one political entity that corresponded with the boundaries of their cultural group. The Wanyamwezi speak three distinct dialects of their Kinyamwezi language and are made up of four distinct subgroups, the Wagalaganza, the Sagala, the Kahama, and the Iguluibi. Each group claims to descend from its own special ancestor. The largest group, the Wagalaganza, consisted of thirty states in the 1860s. Culturally and linguistically, there is very little that separates the Wanyamwezi from their neighbors, including the Wasukuma, who are the largest ethnic group in Tanzania (more than 5 million or 13% of the population). Before the onset of colonial rule, all people who

were part of the present day Sukuma, Sumbwa, and Nyamwezi ethnic groups were called Nyamwezi by outsiders to the region.

The term *Nyamwezi* probably meant either “people of the moon” or “path of the moon,” most likely referring to their location in the Western part of Tanzania. In the Nyamwezi language, *Sukuma* means “north,” and the Wasukuma were those who lived north of Unyamwezi. Perhaps the best way to characterize Nyamwezi identity before colonialism would be as an ethnic category, meaning that the people shared a common language and culture without a sense of self-identification.

The Wanyamwezi are believed to have migrated during the 16th and 17th centuries from various parts of east and central Africa to their homeland in western Tanzania. The first Nyamwezi settlers formed small communities that grew into larger kingdoms ruled by a *mtemi*, or king. Prior to the 1860s, Nyamwezi states tended to be small, usually numbering a few thousand persons. They had no standing armies and depended on the men of the society to defend their country from raids or to raid neighboring states. These raids and counter raids were aimed at capturing grain, cattle, and other goods or avenging a wrong done by one state or ruler to another. Prior to the 1860s, it was unusual for one state to use military power to impose its authority over another. However, in the years leading up to the 1860s Nyamwezi societies began to undergo important changes.

The Wanyamwezi were well-known traders in the pre-colonial era and played an important role in developing the region's trade. They pioneered caravan routes throughout east and central Africa, while Nyamwezi trading settlements spread throughout central Tanzania. It is the Nyamwezi who are said to have established the caravan routes to the coast that were later used by Swahili and Arab traders and European explorers, including Dr. David Livingstone, Henry Morton Stanley, Richard Burton, and John Hanning Speke. In the years leading up to the 1860s, trade with the coastal areas became increasingly important. As trade developed with the coast, one of the Nyamwezi states, Unyanyembe, became a prosperous trading center. Unyanyembe used its wealth to become the most powerful state in Unyamwezi. Soon after the rise of Unyanyembe, a rival state under the leadership of the famous *mtemi* Mirambo challenged Unyanyembe's control over the caravan routes. Unlike Unyanyembe, which used its control over trade to increase its military power, Mirambo was a great military tactician who used force to enhance his country's trading position. Mirambo can be thought of as a Nyamwezi nationalist with the vision of a unified Nyamwezi people. However, Mirambo was unable to conquer Unyanyembe and failed to build a united Nyamwezi nation-state. After Mirambo's death in 1884, Urambo split into a number of smaller kingdoms.

The onset of colonial rule brought many important changes for Nyamwezi society. For the first time the Wanyamwezi, along with the 140 other African ethnic groups in Tanzania, were united under one government. The German colonial occupation of Tanzania was very brutal. During the 1880s and 1890s Germany conducted a series of military operations throughout Tanzania with the aim of establishing a colony. Vicious reprisal raids against African areas that resisted German authority characterized German military campaigns. Often the Germans depended on local allies in their wars and raids. The first German military expedition arrived in Unyamwezi in

1890. Although it did not spark an immediate confrontation, it planted the seeds for a future German military conquest of Unyamwezi. Its commander, Emin Pasha, allied himself with the opponents of the *mtemi* Isike of Unyanyembe.

In 1892, another German expedition reached Unyanyembe and, acting on reports from Pasha and Isike's enemies, launched a series of attacks on Isike's headquarters, *Isiunula* (the "impregnable" fort). Isike's fortress proved to be well named, as the European attackers were defeated three times by Isike's troops. Later, in December of 1892, the Germans sent their best military officer, Lieutenant Tom von Prince, to fight Isike. Prince formed alliances with the son of Mirambo, Katukamoto, who ruled what was left of Urambo, and Bibi Nyaso, an internal opponent of Isike from Unyanyembe.

Using German African troops and the forces of Isike's enemies, Prince was able to capture Isiunula. Rather than being captured by the Germans, Isike unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide by blowing himself up with his ammunition dump. After the Germans stormed the fort, they hanged his nearly lifeless body from the closest tree and shot his young son. The Germans then made Bibi Nyaso the *mtemi* of Unyanyembe. The killing of Isike, however, did not bring Unyamwezi fully under German control; for two years after the attack on Isiunula, Isike's chief minister, Swetu, led a guerrilla war against the Germans. Swetu was eventually forced to retreat from Unyanyembe, bringing an end to Nyamwezi armed resistance to German colonial rule. Ironically, Mirambo's son, Katukamoto, who used the Germans to defeat his rival Isike, was later imprisoned by his onetime ally in 1898. The Germans then broke up the remaining parts of Urambo and appointed their own *mtemi* to rule it.

In many respects the European colonialists in Tanzania used the "take us to your king" approach to rule Tanzania, and where no king existed the Europeans created one. For example, in nearby Usandawe, Mtoro, the leader of a Nyamwezi trading settlement, was appointed chief of the Sandawe people. The Wasandawe had no supreme leader or king and authority was dispersed throughout society. These types of African societies were difficult for Europeans to understand and to incorporate into their colonial administration. In Usandawe, the Germans mistakenly thought that the Wanyamwezi settlers were an immigrant ruling class, much as the Germans saw themselves in Tanzania. However, the Nyamwezi trading center was more of an enclave that the Wasandawe tolerated but did not particularly like.

When the Germans appointed Mtoro the headman of the Wasandawe, the Wasandawe showed their displeasure by expelling the Wanyamwezi settlers from their territory and taking their cattle. In response, the Germans launched two punitive expeditions against the Wasandawe. The first force killed 800 Wasandawe without suffering any casualties, and the second confiscated over 1,000 head of cattle, most of which were given to the displaced Wanyamwezi settlers. Under German protection the Wanyamwezi returned to their settlement. But when the German soldiers left Usandawe, they were attacked by the Wasandawe, who also raided the Wanyamwezi settlers. The Germans responded by launching a bloody war against the Wasandawe that finally established their authority in the area.

Colonial rule in Unyamwezi and throughout Tanzania was based on physical violence and a racial hierarchy in which Africans were segregated into a rural and urban underclass.

Nyamwezi *watemi* (*watemi* is the plural of *mtemi*) were made responsible to German colonial authorities. Nyamwezi leaders who did not suit the Germans were removed. The Germans forced *watemi* to collect taxes and to supply men to labor on European plantations or public-works projects such as roads and railroads. These activities often made African leaders who cooperated with the Germans unpopular with their people, for the conditions for African laborers were very harsh, including whippings, beatings, and the withholding of food and wages. However, African leaders who resisted the Germans faced the threat of being deposed, arrested, or exiled, or possibly of exposing their societies to brutal retaliatory raids by the Germans. The goal of the Germans was to reduce the authority of the *watemi* and to administer Unyamwezi directly through German colonial officials.

German rule was deeply resented. One of the notable acts of resistance to colonial rule was the Maji-Maji rebellion, which engulfed Tanzania from 1905 to 1907. A prophet named Kinjikitile, who called on the African people to take up arms to expel the Germans, inspired the rebellion. Specially trained assistants who traveled throughout Tanzania spread Kinjikitile's message. While historians believe that many Wanyamwezi supported Kinjikitile, Unyamwezi did not erupt in violence against the colonialists, as did the southern and coastal regions.

After World War I, Britain replaced the defeated Germany in Tanzania. Britain inherited Tanzania as a League of Nations Trust Territory. As such, Tanzania was to be administered to the benefit of the African inhabitants, but in practice, British administration of the territory was characterized by racial segregation.

While the Germans aspired to administer Tanzania directly without going through traditional or indigenous leaders, the British strove to create a system of local government, called "indirect rule," which incorporated "tribal" units of government into the colonial administration. Like the Germans, British colonial authorities believed that all Africans belonged to a tribe, just as all Europeans belonged to a nation. They viewed the tribe as a cultural and political unit with a common language, a single social system, established customary law, hereditary membership, and a chief. But the realities of African social structures often did not match European conceptions, and African societies were restructured, and sometimes invented, by colonial authorities. In Unyamwezi, the British followed a policy of amalgamating smaller Nyamwezi states into larger ones to create larger administrative units. For example, the British subordinated a number of smaller Nyamwezi states into Unyanyembe. They also replaced the ruling line of Bibi Nyaso as *mtemi* of Unyanyembe with a descendant of Isike, in order to avenge Bibi Nyaso's collaboration with the Germans. Under British rule, Africans were denied the right to participate in politics or public administration outside of "tribal" government.

Conflicts between chiefs and Arab traders lasted through the last half of the 19th century. Chiefs such as Isike and Mirambo, no longer being purely ritual, had found that the arrival of firearms enabled them to establish standing armies and a new state organization. It was firearms and trade that transformed the region, for trade generated the wealth needed to obtain firearms. Chiefs were normally ritual figures who had no very rigid rules of succession. They lived very restrict-

ed lives, with the most significant duties being carried out by headmen. They were strangled when they became seriously ill (as probably happened to Mirambo while dying of cancer) for the well being of the state and its continuation was identified with chief and his subordinate administrators. A hierarchy of territorial offices came into being. There were sub-chiefs, assistant chiefs, headmen elders, ritual officials, etc., as each dynasty seized power from another. Greater Nyamwezi had become a war zone.

Colonialism brought about a fundamental change in the way the Wanyamwezi perceived themselves. Many Wanyamwezi, fighting against the racism associated with colonial rule, which portrayed Africans as primitive, culturally backward, and unfit for independence, directed their energies into promoting their cultural traditions, writing histories, and developing feelings of Nyamwezi identity. While a shared language and culture, which provided the foundation for building an ethnic group, had existed in Unyamwezi since the early 1800s, it was not until the onset of the colonial era that the Wanyamwezi began to see themselves as one people. In the towns, the Wanyamwezi formed ethnic associations to help their members find work, organize and conduct funerals, write letters for the illiterate, and help in other ways in times of need. One of the first Nyamwezi urban associations was "The New Wanyamwezi Association," formed in 1936 in Dar es Salaam. The organization reflected the loose sense of Nyamwezi identity and was open to all people from the western plateau, including the Sukuma and Sumbwa.

Many Wanyamwezi, like Tanzanians of other ethnic groups, played important roles in the struggle for independence. The brother of the chief of Unyamwezi, Abdallah Fundikira, was an early leader of the Tanzania National African Union (TANU), the political party that spearheaded the fight for Tanzanian independence. Many Wanyamwezi became labor leaders after workers gained the right to form labor unions during the midst of the independence struggle in the 1950s.

While numerous traditional leaders including Abdallah Fundikira supported TANU, many others did not and sided with colonial authorities. After independence the role of traditional leaders in local government was abolished by TANU, which was interested in developing a national culture that helped people to identify with the new nation, rather than promoting sub-national identities.

Tanzania like many modern African states embraces a democratic system of Government with multiparty competitive elections and a free-market economy. The Wanyamwezi participate actively in the political process of Tanzania. A number of Wanyamwezi have emerged as leaders of the opposition parties and have played important roles in the ruling party, CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi/Party of the Revolution, formerly known as TANU).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Nyamwezi make up about 4% of the Tanzanian population and number around 1,500,000. They live in the northwest central area of the country, between Lake Victoria and Lake Rukwa. Unyamwezi is located in a high plateau area with elevations ranging from about 900 to 1,375 meters (about 3,000 to 4,500 feet). Much of the land is covered by dry woodland with strings of ridges and numerous granite outcroppings. Most of Unyamwezi is not considered prime agricultural land. Water



is often scarce. From April to October, very little rain falls and the rivers often dry up. The rainy season lasts from October to April and is characterized by wide variations in yearly rainfall. Unlike some of the more fertile agricultural regions, which have two growing seasons, Unyamwezi has only one. The major city in Unyamwezi is Tabora, a famous pre-colonial trading center and former colonial administrative center. Tanzanians of various ethnic groups live in Unyamwezi. Many Wasukuma, Wasumbwa, and Watusi live throughout Unyamwezi, and even in some rural areas, non-Wanyamwezi may make up as much as 73% of the population. Many small shop owners in the rural areas are Arabs, as there are many people in Tabora. There are also a number of Asian Tanzanians, whose ancestors came from India and Pakistan, living in the larger commercial centers of Unyamwezi. About 30% of the Nyamwezi live and work outside Unyamwezi, mainly in neighboring areas and in the coastal regions.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Historically, there have been five tribal groups, all referring to themselves as Wanyamwezi to outsiders: Kimbu, Nyamwezi, Sukuma, and Sumbwa, who were never united. All groups normally merged have broadly similar cultures, although it is an oversimplification to view them as a single group. The Nyamwezi have close cultural ties with the Sukuma people. Their homeland is called Unyamwezi, and they speak the language Kinyamwezi, although many also speak Swahili or English. Many Wanyamwezi can speak at least three languages. Most



are also fluent in Kiswahili, Tanzania's national language. Many Wanyamwezi are also able to speak English and the languages of neighboring ethnic groups, such as Kisukuma, the language of the Sukuma people.

Kiswahili has borrowed many words from Kinyamwezi, and vice versa. For example, the Kiswahili term for the president's residence is *Ikulu*, which is the Kinyamwezi word for the mtemi's residence. Kinyamwezi has about 84% lexical similarity with Sukuma, 61% with Sumbwa, and 56% with Nilamba.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

One of the most important historical figures for the Wanyamwezi is the mtemi Mirambo. Mirambo was the mtemi of a small state in Nyamwezi called Uyowa. By the time of his death, he had created a central African empire that incorporated the greater part of Nyamwezi. Mirambo was a brilliant military tactician, known for his fierceness in battle. Ironically, the inspiration for the innovations that made Mirambo's army a powerful fighting force came from an early battlefield defeat. After failing to conquer a neighboring state, Mirambo decided to reorganize his army. Mirambo asked a neighboring chief to train his army in Ngoni fighting techniques, which were based on the style of warfare pioneered by Shaka Zulu of South Africa. It was said that Mirambo acquired his name, which means "corpses" in Kinyamwezi, from his Ngoni allies who marveled at the large number of people he killed in battle. Mirambo was so feared throughout Nyamwezi that mothers would stop their children from crying by telling them, "*Hulikaga, Limilambo likwiza*" ("Be quiet, Mirambo is coming").

Mirambo created a standing army called *rugaruga*, which was organized into regiments of similar-aged soldiers. Soldiers between 20 and 30 years of age formed the backbone of the *rugaruga*. They were not allowed to have wives, children, or houses and lived with Mirambo inside his fortress capital, Iselemagazi. These young *rugaruga* were used on campaigns to conquer other states and to raid for cattle, slaves, and property. The young *rugaruga* wore red cloth often decorated with feathers or human hair said to have been shaved off their fallen victims. The *rugaruga* were armed with pistols, muzzle-loading rifles, spears, bows and arrows, and shields. Before battle, Mirambo's soldiers would eat meat specially prepared by ritual experts and smoke *bhang'i* (Indian hemp, or marijuana). Older, more experienced soldiers were mainly used for defensive purposes and organized into units called *sinhu*. They were allowed to marry and have their own houses. A special king's guard, wearing black uniforms and turbans, was created to protect Mirambo during battle.

After reorganizing his army, Mirambo conquered and raided the other Nyamwezi states as well as nearby non-Nyamwezi states. Success on the battlefield led to a rapid expansion of Mirambo's *rugaruga*, which grew from a few hundred in the 1860s to 10,000 by the 1880s. The fear of Mirambo's *rugaruga* led many states to voluntarily accept Urambo rule. Leaders who aligned their states with Urambo were allowed to continue as leaders of their territory, but those who fought against Urambo were killed.

Mirambo used military force to take control of the caravan routes leading west to Lake Tanzania, over which ivory and slaves passed, as well as the caravan routes heading north to Lake Victoria and the markets in Buganda, Bunyoro and the other large kingdoms in the lakes region. Mirambo's kingdom

grew in size and power to the point of rivaling Unyanyembe, the dominant Nyamwezi state of the time. Urambo blocked Unyanyembe's access to important markets to the west and north. Feeling their position threatened by Mirambo, the merchants in Tabora and the leaders of Unyanyembe invited dissidents from Urambo to train their army in Mirambo's military tactics. The growing tension between Urambo and Unyanyembe caused Mirambo to close the caravan routes to traders from Unyanyembe. Hostilities broke into open warfare in 1871, when Unyanyembe attacked Urambo. After reaching far into Mirambo's territory, Unyanyembe's army was successfully ambushed by Mirambo's forces. Mirambo then attacked Tabora. Mirambo was unable to conquer Unyanyembe, however.

Mirambo's war with Unyanyembe interrupted trade and angered the large Arab and Indian commercial houses on the coast. In an effort to defeat Mirambo militarily, the Sultan of Zanzibar sent three thousand troops to help Unyanyembe. However, the Tabora Arabs refused to cooperate with the leader of the troops, and the troops were withdrawn. On the coast, the Sultan enforced sanctions against Mirambo, especially with regard to firearms and gunpowder. To evade sanctions, Mirambo entered into blood brotherhoods with European missionaries, traders, and explorers and asked them to trade his goods on the coast. Mirambo died in 1884 while on a campaign against the Nyamwezi state of Ukune. After Mirambo's death, the component states of Urambo reasserted their independence and his empire broke up.

The historical importance of Mirambo lies in the fact that he was a brilliant military leader and diplomat who was able to deal with Europeans from a position of strength and use Europeans to further his own interests. The example of Mirambo challenged the basic assumptions on which European colonial rule in Africa was built.

In honor of the important historical role played by Mirambo, his grave was made a national monument by the government after independence. A major street in the nation's capital, Dar es Salaam, and the military garrison at Tabora were also named after him. One of Mirambo's war songs, "*Ohoo Chuma chabela mitwe*" ("Iron has broken heads"), was adopted by Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, who changed the words and used it to inspire the young nation. However, one major difference existed between Mirambo and the nationalist movement. While Mirambo was dedicated to creating a great Nyamwezi kingdom through the force of arms, the nationalist movement was geared toward creating an independent Tanzania through peaceful means. The violence associated with Mirambo has lessened to some extent, his suitability as a hero for modern Tanzania.

#### 5 RELIGION

Traditional beliefs, Islam, and Christianity have shaped Nyamwezi spirituality. Most follow a traditional religion, despite conversion attempts by Islam and Christianity. They believe in a powerful god called Likube (High God), Limatunda (Creator), Limi (the Sun) and Liwelolo (the Universe), but ancestor worship is a more frequent daily practice. Traditional Nyamwezi spirituality centers on the connection between the living and their ancestors. Ancestors are seen as upholding the tradition, law, and values of society. The spirits of the ancestors are believed to be capable of intervening into the affairs of the living, either to show their pleasure or, more commonly, to show

their anger. Not honoring one's ancestors is a sign of disrespect for Nyamwezi culture and tradition and is bound to lead to adverse consequences, usually sickness.

Offerings of sheep or goats are made to ancestors, and the help of Likube is invoked beforehand. Spirits also play an active role in Nyamwezi religious life, with mfumu, witchdoctors, or diviners, playing the role of counselor and medical practitioner. Bulogi (witchcraft) is a powerful force in Nyamwezi culture, with cults forming around (for example) possession by certain types of spirit. The Baswezi society recruits people possessed by the Swezi spirit.

With the main exceptions of the villages around Tabora and of areas around some Christian missions, neither Islam nor Christianity has flourished strongly among villagers. Religion in the area, like society itself, is accretive rather than exclusive.

Beliefs in a High God are widely held but involve no special cult. Ancestor worship is the main element in the religious complex. Chiefs' ancestors are thought to influence the lives of the inhabitants of their domains, but ordinary ancestors only affect their own descendants. Belief in witchcraft is widespread and strong.

In addition to the High God and the ancestors, some non-ancestral spirits are believed to influence some people's lives. Spirit-possession societies, such as the Baswezi, deal with such attacks and recruit the victims into membership. As a link between belief and action, the diviner (mfumu) is a key figure in religious life; diviners interpret the belief system for individuals and groups. They decide which forces are active and help people to deal with them. Although it is not strictly an hereditary art, people often take up divination when a misfortune is diagnosed as having been induced by a diviner ancestor who wishes them to do so. There are often several diviners in a village, but only one or two are likely to attract a wide clientele. All diviners, like their neighbors, engage in farming and participate fully in village life.

Divination takes many forms, the most common being chicken divination, in which a young fowl is killed and readings are taken from its wings and other features. Sacrifices and libations, along with initiation into a spirit-possession or other society, may result from a divinatory séance. Divination and subsequent rituals may divide people, especially if witchcraft is diagnosed, but in many contexts the system allows villagers to express their solidarity with each other without loss of individual identity. In addition to ritual focused upon individuals and attended by their kin and neighbors, there is some public ceremonial at village and wider levels. Chiefly rituals are still sometimes performed, and there are ceremonies to cleanse a village of pollution when a member dies.

Likewise, the inability to live socially with family and friends is liable to cause the ancestors to intervene. Relations with the ancestors and respect for Nyamwezi traditions are maintained through ritual activity such as animal sacrifices and other ceremonies. These activities are overseen by diviners, who act as spiritual advisers for the Wanyamwezi, interpreting events and determining which spirits are involved and what rituals should be followed to restore balance in people's lives. Both men and women can become diviners, many of whom are self-taught, having worked through their own serious spiritual difficulties.

During pre-colonial times, spirituality underscored the mtemi's power. The mtemi was seen as the embodiment of the law of the ancestors on earth. He was mediator in the relation-

ship between the living and their ancestors and had an important ceremonial role. Each inhabitant of a Nyamwezi country was seen as the child of his or her own ancestors and a child of the royal ancestors. The mtemi would oversee royal spiritual ceremonies directed toward the former watemi, societal heroes, and legendary diviners. The relationship between a community and its ancestors was very important. Breaks in this relationship could lead to ancestors' showing their displeasure with the mtemi or society through some calamity such as drought or military defeat.

Nyamwezi spirituality fulfills two needs. First, it is practical in that rituals are designed to help people diagnose the source of their problems and offer solutions. For example, diviners will tell people the cause of their sickness and what ceremonies to perform to restore a balance in their lives. Secondly, Nyamwezi spirituality centers on giving a moral meaning to people's problems. It focuses on how people can live at peace with themselves and with those around them.

Although Nyamwezi religion emphasizes living in harmony with one's ancestors and community, witchcraft is a serious problem in Unyamwezi. It offers an outlet to built-up social tensions that are found in the intense interpersonal relations that develop in rural village society. Some people have moved from their homes to escape the power of witches, who are believed to be able to poison and bring misfortune to their victims.

The traditional Nyamwezi belief system has influenced the way many Wanyamwezi interpret Islam and Christianity. While many rural Wanyamwezi are not practicing Christians or Muslims, they do believe in one overarching god. However, unlike Christianity or Islam, which provide their followers with a personal religious code to be followed, Nyamwezi spirituality emphasizes personal spiritual development and the creation of personal behavioral taboos so that the individual can live in harmony with the community and ancestors. While many Wanyamwezi follow traditional practices in regard to healing, this does not preclude going to doctors or hospitals. Rather than competing with Christianity, Islam, and modern medicine, traditional Nyamwezi beliefs and diviners supplement the newer religions and practices.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays in Tanzania are Union Day (April 26), which celebrates the creation of the union between mainland Tanzania and the Islands of Zanzibar; May day/Workers Day (May 1); Independence Day (December 9); and New Year's Day (January 1). Major religious holidays are Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Id ul-Fitr (end of Ramadan), Id ul-Haj (Festival of Sacrifice), Islamic New Year, and the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday. Secular holidays such as Independence Day are characterized by military parades and speeches by the country's leaders, while religious holidays are usually celebrated by attendance at the mosque or church and visits with family and friends. Feasts on these days often feature pilau, a spicy rice dish.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

For the Wanyamwezi, the first major rite of passage is birth. It should be noted that with the introduction of Western medical practices and new values, many of the practices surrounding birth have changed. Traditionally, newborn babies were se-

cluded until their umbilical cords fell off. When the child was brought out of seclusion, he or she was presented to the village and given a name by the midwife. The child would often be named after her grandfather or grandmother. If the pregnancy had been difficult, the child was usually named Maganga, Misambwa, or Kalamata. If the mother or father had died before the child was born, the child would be called Mulekwa or Kalekwa, meaning “the one who is left behind.” For baby boys, their father would make them a small bow and arrow as a symbol of strength. The male child, together with his bow, was then taken before the male village elders. After a feast, the elders one by one would shell a peanut near the child’s ear in a ceremony called *bupatula matwi*, so that the child would be alert and attentive when he grew up. If the child was a girl she would be brought before a group of women elders.

Traditionally, twins, babies born with teeth, and those born legs first were considered a bad omen for their parents and the community. It was thought that if they lived, the parents would die and the community would experience disasters. Usually these children were killed and elaborate ceremonies involving the *mtemi* were needed to counter the effects of their birth. Not surprisingly, many of the early converts to Christianity in Unyamwezi were these outcast children and their families. Today, these practices are against the law, and new societal norms and practices have been adopted.

In precolonial times (and even today), long journeys were considered a rite of passage into manhood. Another rite of passage is the requirement that a man be capable of establishing his own household, meaning that he must be economically independent before he can get married.

Marriage is a very important Nyamwezi institution. As in the United States, the majority of marriages end in divorce. Nyamwezi men usually marry for the first time in their late teens or early twenties; women tend to marry at a slightly younger age. Polygyny is practiced in Nyamwezi society, but in many respects polygynous marriages tend to be unstable than single-partner marriages. The courtship process typically involves a young man’s search for a suitable young woman to marry. With one or two male friends, he visits her home and discusses the possibility of marriage. Usually this process goes on for a number of weeks. If, after consulting with her female elders, the young woman agrees, bride wealth negotiations begin. Male neighbors of the groom and bride, acting on instructions of the couple’s fathers, meet at the bride’s house to discuss bride wealth. Often negotiations are carried out for several days before an agreement can be reached. Typical payments consist of livestock for the bride’s paternal grandfather and maternal uncle. Other payments might also be required. Much, but not all, of the bride wealth would be returned in case of divorce. After the bride wealth is agreed upon, the groom’s father holds a large feast, during which a delegation from the bride’s family comes to collect the cattle and other goods. After the bride wealth has been paid, a wedding ceremony, usually lasting one to three days, is held; and amidst much feasting, dancing, and singing, the bride and groom receive blessings in public from their parents and relatives. Many of these traditional practices have been incorporated into Christian weddings, while Muslim weddings tend to mirror those found at the coast.

The last important rite of passage is death. After a person dies, close relatives have their heads shaved in mourning. The bereaved parents and spouse go into a period of seclusion.

When it is time for the actual burial, all the men in the village come together to help; the women and children must hide themselves until the body is buried. A special ritual is then performed to purify the village, followed by a divination to determine the cause of death. Finally, a ceremony is held to mark the end of mourning. Traditionally, witches and people with diseases such as leprosy would not be buried, and their bodies would be left in the bush. This practice is no longer followed. Funerals are important rituals for bereaved families and their kin and neighbors. Neighbors dig the grave and take news of the death to relatives of the deceased who live outside the village. The dead become ancestors who may continue to affect the lives of their descendants and demand appeasement. The idea that the dead live on in their descendants is expressed in terms of shared identity between alternate generations

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings are very important in Nyamwezi society. Greetings last for several minutes, and it would be considered rude just to pass a friend on the street and say, “Hi” as in the United States. As a form of respect, younger people usually initiate greetings with their elders; then the elder will take the lead in the ensuing conversation, inquiring how the person is doing, how work or studies are going, and whether the relatives are well. One greets very important people by bowing, clapping one’s hands, and averting one’s gaze before a handshake. Greetings among close friends are less formal and often incorporate some teasing and joking. Greeting is always accompanied by a handshake, as is leave-taking. After the greetings, it is considered impolite to “get straight to the point,” and the matter to be discussed is usually approached gradually in an indirect manner.

Visiting relatives and friends is a favorite activity on the weekends, on holidays, or after work. Hospitality is taken very seriously. It is customary for the visitor to be given some refreshments, usually soda, tea, coffee, or traditional beer, and a snack. If the person comes at mealtime, he or she will be invited to join the family for the meal. It is customary to cook more food than is usually eaten by the family, in case guests arrive. If an important visitor comes or someone comes from a long journey, it is customary to slaughter a chicken and have a large feast in the person’s honor. At parties or celebrations, it is the responsibility of the host to provide guests with a good meal, beverages, and entertainment. As some celebrations last all night, the host is often responsible for providing sleeping accommodations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world. Within Tanzania the most prosperous area is Dar es Salaam, the capital, while the poorest region is the southern coast. Unyamwezi falls between these two extremes. Although Tanzania is one of the poorest countries, its quality of life indicators such as literacy rates, life expectancy, and access to safe drinking water tend to be comparable with countries that have higher income levels.

Most people in Unyamwezi live in houses made of mud bricks with either thatched grass or corrugated iron roofs with dirt floors. Most houses do not have electricity or indoor plumbing. Since rural incomes are very low, most people have few material possessions; these consist mainly of radios,

bicycles, lanterns, secondhand clothes, shoes, and household goods.

One of the main problems affecting the Wanyamwezi is malaria. The disease is endemic in most parts of Tanzania, including Unyamwezi, and it is about as common as the flu is in North America. The disease, while not usually fatal for healthy adults, can be fatal for people in a weakened condition or for the very old or very young. Another major health problem in Unyamwezi is the tsetse fly. It is slightly larger than a housefly and has a stinging bite. The tsetse fly is a carrier of two diseases, which adversely affect humans. One disease, sleeping sickness, is lethal to humans. The other is lethal to cattle and is called trypanosomiasis. Tsetse flies thrive in areas where there are abundant wild animals, which are immune to the diseases that strike humans and their livestock.

Diviners and other local experts provide herbal and other forms of treatment for illness. Shops sell some Western medicines, including aspirin and liniments. Village dispensaries and state and mission hospitals also provide Western medicine. People commonly use both Western and indigenous treatments rather than trusting wholly in either.

Transportation is a major problem in Tanzania. Most roads are in terrible shape and filled with potholes, making long-distance travel very difficult. Currently a major project to repair the roads in Tanzania is under way, which has eased some of the difficulties in road transportation. Tabora, the main city in Unyamwezi, is at the crossroads of the central railway line and is easily reached from Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika, Mwanza on Lake Victoria, and Dar es Salaam. There is also an airport in Tabora, but the cost of tickets keeps most people from flying.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most families are made up of a mother, a father, and their children. Families often take care of relatives' children. Men have traditionally controlled most of the power within a household. For example, only men are able to inherit property. This pattern is changing, as the government has stressed equal rights for women. Within the household women are responsible for many of the daily chores, such as weeding crops and cooking, while the men are responsible for work such as building the house and clearing the fields. Children help their parents watch the fields to keep birds from eating the millet and sorghum. Girls also help their mothers with household work, while boys help with herding the livestock. It is not unusual for school enrollment rates in rural areas to fall during harvest and planting times as children help their parents with agricultural work.

Historically, villages were normally not kinship units and people found their relatives spread over wide areas. Spouses generally came from outside the Tembes and sons commonly moved away from their father's homestead. The core members of a domestic group consisted of the husband, his wife or wives, and any children who still lived with them. Sometimes relatives, such as a mother, younger unmarried brothers or sisters, and their children could be found together. The sexes usually ate separately. In general men did the heavy work, while women did the recurring tasks and much of the everyday agricultural work.

Ideally every adult person should be married, and every married woman should have her own household and bring her own household utensils. The husband is said to technically own his wife's hut, fields, and most of the household's food,

but a wise husband usually listened to the wife's advice. There was little ranking between co-wives, although seniority in terms of who was first married was at times recognized. Jealously and sorcery were common, much depending on how well co-wives got along. Unlike the Wagogo, divorce was common, a large majority of persons experiencing at least one divorce by the time they were 50 years of age, which included the return of bride wealth minus the number and sex of the children born. Divorce was most often accomplished by the separation of either party. Chieftdom courts found certain reasons to automatically justify divorce: a woman's desertion, being struck by a wife, the wife's adultery, sexual refusal of the wife, and having an abortion, were all adequate reasons. Grounds for a husband to claim divorce were failure of the wife to carry out household duties, visiting a doctor without permission, and possible infertility. A wife could divorce if the husband deserted for a period of time without supporting her; if the husband seriously injured her by, for example, breaking a limb, but not simply beating her; the husband's impotence or perversions; or if her husband generally failed to maintain her and her children properly. A husband's adultery would not be one of the grounds.

It was customary for the younger brother of her former husband to inherit a widow, (a kind of "widows and orphans" security system), although it was not done against her will. Among some, inheritance of a widow by her husband's sister's son was particularly favored.

## 11 CLOTHING

Wanyamwezi traditionally wore clothing made of bark cloth, but as trade grew in the 18th century, imported textiles became popular. Many women wear *khangas*, printed cloth adorned with Swahili sayings and vitenge, printed cloth with brightly colored and ornate designs. Dresses based on Arab, European, and Indian styles are also popular. Men wear trousers and shirts, and on special occasions Muslim men wear flowing white robes called *Kanzus*.

## 12 FOOD

A favorite food is *ugali*, a stiff porridge made from corn, millet, or sorghum meal and served with beef, chicken, and vegetables. Cassava, rice, bread, peanuts, spinach, cassava leaves and other vegetables are also eaten. Snacks often consist of fruits. When available, the meat from wild game is a special treat. *Ugali* a porridge made from hominy and served with meat and vegetables. Beer made from fermented corn, sorghum, or millet was also common. Goats were used for ancestor sacrifices, but the economic value of goats and sheep lay in their meat and skins. By tradition five goats or sheep equated one bull; two bulls were worth one cow. Their year is divided into two seasons, wet and dry, with considerable variation depending on time and place.

## 13 EDUCATION

Before the European colonial occupation of Unyamwezi, children were educated by their elders. They would learn how to farm, hunt, cook, herd cattle, and do other work from their parents. Stories told by parents or grandparents after the evening meal were an important way in which children were socialized into Nyamwezi society. Typically stories began with a

call and response, in which the story teller would tease the listeners as follows:

Listeners: Story!

Storyteller: A Story.

Listeners: There once was what?

Storyteller: Someone.

Listeners: Go on!

Storyteller: You know who.

Listeners: Go on!

Many children's stories in the United States are based on African folktales. For example, one Nyamwezi story closely resembles the tale of "Br'er Rabbit." It tells of some farmers who decided to catch a hare that was eating their crops by using a wood carving covered with glue. When the rabbit came to the field and saw the wood carving he tried to talk to it. When the carving did not respond the rabbit resorted to violence, kicking and punching the carving and becoming stuck in its glue. When the farmers returned to kill the rabbit he pleaded with them not to beat him to death on the sand. When the farmers tried to do this, the soft sand broke the rabbit's fall and he was able to run away.

Proverbs are another important way in which Nyamwezi culture is passed on from generation to generation. One Nyamwezi proverb states that "Hoes that are together don't stop scraping each other." What this proverb means is that when people live together, disagreements are going to occur. Unlike American society, where people place a high value on their privacy and are socialized to mind their own business, Nyamwezi culture stresses the importance of outside intervention in a conflict. When quarrels erupt it is expected that neighbors, friends, family members, and elders will help to calm the situation. After a disagreement it is customary for the people involved to tell their sides of the story to mediators and for a consensus to be reached on who is at fault. The guilty party is then asked to refrain from the same behavior in the future, and the parties shake hands to show they have made up.

While informal education is still important for teaching societal values, formal education plays an important role in equipping the Wanyamwezi with the basic skills needed for life in modern Tanzanian society. After independence the leaders decided to devote most of the educational resources to providing free elementary education for all Tanzanian children. Until about 1980, this policy was very successful in improving elementary attendance rates: from 45% before independence to around 90% by 1980. However, enrollment rates have dropped in recent years in response to deteriorating economic conditions and the poor quality of some elementary schools. Very few Tanzanian children (around 5%) have a chance to go to high school, and only a very small percentage of high school graduates are accepted for university studies. Until 1994, all students who finished high school were required to attend National Youth Service. However, economic difficulties have caused the suspension of this program.

Education is very important for most Tanzanian families. But their appreciation of education is mixed with practicality. The low quality of some elementary schools, rising costs associated with education, strong competition for the few spots available in secondary schools, and the difficulties many secondary and university graduates have in finding jobs have

caused some parents and students, especially in poorer families, to question the usefulness of elementary school.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Wanyamwezi have a rich cultural heritage. Perhaps the most important part of their heritage is their emphasis on harmonious and balanced social relations. Nyamwezi society has historically been open and placed a high value on tolerance. This has allowed many people from outside Unyamwezi to live peacefully in the area and has allowed the Wanyamwezi to live throughout Tanzania. One of the unique institutions governing the relations among different ethnic groups in Tanzania is *utani*, or what is often called a joking relationship. *Utani* involves a special bond that allows people from different ethnic groups to verbally abuse each other without taking offense. Usually these joking relationships also entail an exchange of services and mutual aid, such as helping with funerals or helping visitors with directions or getting settled. *Utani* allows people arriving from a distant place or coming as strangers into a community to seek and receive help. Historians speculate that *utani* developed as a way to manage previously hostile and sometimes violent relationships between people of different ethnic groups. In addition to creating a positive and peaceful relationship between groups whose relationships could otherwise be marked by tension, hostility, and unpredictability, *utani* provides amusement and elevates the insult to a high art form.

For the Wanyamwezi, music and dance are an important part of their cultural heritage and play an important part in wedding festivities and other ceremonies.

Hunting is also an important part of Nyamwezi culture, and many men belong to secret societies of hunters with special rituals to help them track various types of animals.

It had always been part of the Nyamwezi system for the chief to receive tribute, bring success and prosperity to the people, and play an active role in ceremonies. All land was said to have belonged to the chief and he had the right to expel witches and undesirables; abuse was checked by the general need to maintain a large population; and while no one had the right to sell land in a chiefdom, the people had considerable security in their rights to the land. Permission to clear land was not needed, but care was taken so as not to conflict with others in the area. If there was a shortage of land in an area to be inherited, a headman could insist upon other holdings. Water was free to all.

Representational art is not strongly developed; it has mainly ritual functions. Music and dancing are the main art forms, and drums are the main instruments, although the nailpiano (a box with metal prongs that twang at different pitches) and other instruments are also found. Traditional songs are sung at weddings and at dances, but new songs are also composed by dance leaders. Male dance teams are the most common, but some female and mixed teams perform. Ritual and other societies have their own dance styles. Transistor radios are now widespread. Local and visiting jazz and other bands play in the towns.

## 15 WORK

In the precolonial era the Wanyamwezi were known for their trading activities. From the beginning of the 19th century, Nyamwezi long-distance trading caravans dominated the cen-

tral routes through Tanzania, stretching from Mrima coast ports such as Bagamoyo and Saadani to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika. Despite the inroads of Omani Arab and Swahili trading enterprises from the middle of the century, the Nyamwezi maintained a position of strength. In the second half of the 19th century, market relations emerged as the dominant form of economic organization along the central routes, although the market for many commodities was clearly fractured by transport difficulties, and non-market relations frequently substituted for weakly developed commercial institutions and tools. Most caravan porters in 19th century Tanzania were free wage workers, and nearly all were clearly migrant or itinerant laborers. The development of a labor market for caravan porters was an early and significant stage in the transition to capitalism, which began in a period of violence and political upheaval. The argument that porters were mostly wage laborers rests on evidence that their labor was bought and sold according to fluctuating labor market conditions. Market conditions in the second half of the 19th century shows a broadly rising demand for porters, a demand that could only be met if caravan operators offered adequate wages and observed the customs established within porter work culture. Thus, market conditions along the central routes contributed to the development of a free wage labor, characterized by a unique labor culture. The Nyamwezi acted as middlemen for bringing goods plentiful in one area to areas where they were scarce. For example, salt was a scarce commodity throughout mainland Tanzania. However, high-quality salt was produced nearby at Uvinza, so the Nyamwezi traded it for iron goods in neighboring Usumbwa and Usukuma. The Nyamwezi would trade the salt and iron for cattle and skins from the Wagogo, who lived in central Tanzania (around the present day city of Dodoma). They would also trade grain, honey, bark cloth, and other forest products for cattle from the Wasukuma, Wahaya, and Waha. Nyamwezi traders traveled as far as present-day Zambia and southern Democratic Republic of the Congo and pioneered trade routes to the coast in the late 1700s. By the 1800s large Nyamwezi caravans consisting of thousands of people would head to the coast carrying ivory to trade for cloth, beads, firearms, ammunition, and gunpowder. From the early 1800s to the Civil War, the United States was one of eastern Africa's major trading partners, with ships from Salem, Massachusetts, trading American-produced cloth (called *marakani*) for ivory to make billiard balls and piano keys and gum copal, which was used in making varnish.

While the Nyamwezi had a reputation for trade before the colonial era, they gained a reputation as laborers during the European occupation. The transformation of the Nyamwezi from traders to workers had its origins in the years preceding the colonial occupation. Shortly after Nyamwezi caravans began to bring ivory to the coast, Arab and Swahili caravans launched from the ports of Bagamoyo, Pangani, Tanga, Sadani, and Dar es Salaam went into the interior and established trading centers. With support from the State of Zanzibar, coastal traders increasingly displaced their Nyamwezi counterparts. Many Nyamwezi porters were forced to work on contract or as slaves on coastal caravans.

After the Germans took power in Tanzania they used physical coercion and taxation to force the Nyamwezi into migrant labor while at the same time discouraging them from earning money through cash-crop production. As early as the

1890s, labor recruiters spread throughout the western plateau, trying to gain workers. Many Wanyamwezi went to work on European-owned plantations in order to pay their taxes. As work conditions on the plantations were very bad, characterized by flogging, poor housing, hunger, and disease, there were chronic shortages of labor. Areas of labor migration for the Wanyamwezi have included sisal plantations near Tanga, the clove plantations of Pemba, and more recently the cotton-growing areas of Usukuma. The Wanyamwezi became the backbone of mainland Tanzania's labor force, being employed in great numbers to construct and work on the railways; work on the docks in Mombasa, Kisumu, Tanga and Dar es Salaam; work on Kenyan farms and in the Kenyan police; work for British safari firms; and even work in South African gold mines.

Since independence, a number of Wanyamwezi have become politicians, civil servants, teachers, businesspeople, and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants. While many Wanyamwezi have become involved in the various aspects of the modern economy, most are agriculturalists relying on traditional farming techniques.

While trade and wage labor were important activities for the Wanyamwezi, the backbone of Nyamwezi society has been agriculture. Many Wanyamwezi men would farm for half the year and engage in trade for the other half. As in the past, most of the farming is done manually although some tractors and animals are now used. Since the Wanyamwezi live in areas where rainfall is often unreliable, they long ago developed techniques, such as ridging their fields, to conserve water. The major crops are sorghum, millet, maize (corn), rice, sweet potatoes, cassava, peanuts, beans, chickpeas, gourds, sunflowers, pumpkins, cotton, and tobacco.

Elephant hunters have historically been one of the most prestigious occupations among the Nyamwezi, since the elephant hunters could get very rich from ivory trade. The elephant hunters were organized in a guild, which only accepted those who could pass the apprenticeship and the tests that were associated with it. Hunting had a wide variety of forms. Guild members often used lethal poison, and when they used it, in a German sergeant's words, "it worked slowly but surely."

The guild members believed they possessed powerful hunting medicine acquired through rigorous apprenticeships, tracking game in all types of terrain and moving swiftly and silently through thorny underbrush. The elephant hunting led to a decrease in elephant population, which combined with the increased trade in slaves, led to large changes in the social and economic conditions.

In addition to agriculture, crafts were a part-time occupation and were not hereditary. Regionally traded products of importance were drums, ladles, stools, storage boxes for grain, and snuffboxes of horn. Iron and cloth were very important in regional networks, but the cloth industry in particular was ailing in 1857 because of severe competition from India, and over the next 60 years almost disappeared. Ironwork came from localized settlements whose products were then traded over wide areas: bows, arrows, spears, the payment of fines, and the extremely valuable hoes for bride wealth were all produced with considerable ritual by the smiths; and depending on the place that was blamed, for the heavy deforestation to obtain charcoal.

## 16 SPORTS

By far the most popular sport is soccer. The Tanzanian landscape is dotted with soccer fields, and children and teenagers enjoy playing the game, often in bare feet with homemade soccer balls. On weekends many people enjoy listening to soccer games on the radio. For those who can go to the stadium, Simba and Young Africans of Dar es Salaam are the most popular teams to watch. Many Wanyamwezi also support their local team, Mirambo, based in Tabora and named for the great pre-colonial leader Mirambo.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Besides soccer, many people like to play cards or play a board game called *bao*. *Bao*, sometimes called African chess, is a very complex game in which good players need to plan many turns in advance to capture their opponents' markers, or pieces. One plays by placing one's markers (usually large round seeds) into carved-out depressions on a large wooden board. More affluent families enjoy watching videos, especially action films, musicals, and Indian films—which usually combine a musical, an action film, and a love story into one movie. Perhaps the most important form of relaxation in Unyamwezi, especially in the rural areas, is visiting friends after work or on the weekends and drinking traditional homemade beer.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

A hobby for many children is making their own toys. Children in Unyamwezi have done this for many years. In the 1870s, children made toy guns and used ashes for gunpowder. More modern toys consist of wire cars with wheels cut out of old pieces of rubber from tires or flip-flops. Children also make their own soccer balls out of string tied around old plastic bags or socks.

Important crafts in Unyamwezi include iron-working, basket making, and making traditional stools. Some skills are closely guarded secrets that are passed down within a family or a close-knit secret society. For example, in the case of iron-working, most blacksmiths are non-Wanyamwezi, outsiders, whose work is cloaked in magic and spirits. In the case of stool making, this skill is more widely spread through Unyamwezi and is not particularly associated with any immigrant community or guild.

For adults, beer brewing is an important hobby. There are many types of traditional beer brewed by people in Unyamwezi. One of the more popular is called Kangala and is made from fermented corn bran. After the beer has been prepared, a process that takes several days, the brewer will have a party with much singing and dancing. Traditional beer is an important part of Nyamwezi life. It is used in numerous ceremonies, including weddings, funerals, feasts, and holidays. It is said that next to water, traditional beer is the most popular drink in Unyamwezi.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The most pressing problem facing the Wanyamwezi, as with most Tanzanians, is poverty. Malnutrition, along with lack of clean water, health care, and medicine allow opportunistic diseases to take their toll. As in most countries, poor people are often put at a severe disadvantage in dealing with more afflu-

ent groups and in protecting their rights and advocating their interests within official channels.

Tanzania was ruled from 1965 to 1992 by a one-party state that tended to restrict political rights and individual liberties. The implementation of a radical new societal development plan called ujamaa, or African socialism, in the 1960s and 1970s led to numerous economic problems including a shortage of basic goods, corruption, high rates of inflation, declining production, and a deterioration of the nation's physical infrastructure. However, these problems need to be considered within the context of a ruling regime that seemed committed to building a new egalitarian society and promoting a national culture that has so far avoided much of the ethnic animosity that has characterized numerous other multiethnic societies.

Malnutrition, the lack of clean water, and insufficient health care allow diseases to take their toll. As in most countries, poor people are often at a severe disadvantage in protecting their rights and advocating their interests through the official channels of government.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Nyamwezi society the roles of men and women were different. Women had an extremely important economic role as the food producers and in some cases held high political office. It is also suggested that at the village level, perceptions about correct gender roles have not changed greatly, and there is a willingness to accept women in authority, which is an indication of changing times and attitudes.

There is a strong gender division of labor. In general, men do shorter, heavy tasks, and women do more repetitive chores. Cattle are mainly men's concern, as are iron working and machine sewing. Only men hunt. Pottery is women's work. Some urgent tasks, such as harvesting, are done by both sexes. Most diviners are men. The state has been keen to draw women into politics, but only moderate progress has been made.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

## OROMOS

**PRONUNCIATION:** Oro-moo-s

**LOCATION:** Oromia in the Ethiopian Empire; Kenya; Somalia

**POPULATION:** 40 million

**LANGUAGE:** Afaan Oromoo

**RELIGION:** Waaqeffannaa (original Oromo religion); Islam; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Ethiopians

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Although Oromos have their own unique culture, history, language, and civilization, they are culturally related to Afars, Somalis, Sidamas, Agaws, Bilens, Bejas, Kunamas, and others. Oromos are best known for their former egalitarian social system known as *Gada*, and their military organization that enabled them to emerge as one of the strongest ethnations in the Horn of Africa between the 12th and mid-19th centuries. *Gada* was a form of constitutional government; it was also a social system. Politically it was practiced through the election of political leaders; corrupt or dictatorial leaders would be removed from power through *buqisu*, or recall before their official tenure. Oromo women had a parallel institution known as *Siqqee*. This institution promoted gender equality in Oromo society.

*Gada* closely connected social and political structures. Male Oromos were organized according to age and generation for both social and political activities. The *Gada* government was based on democratic principles: the *Abba Boku* was an elected “chairman” who presided over the assembly, and the *Abba Dula* (the defense minister) was one of the leading figures in the government. The *Abba Boku* presided over the assembly and proclaimed the laws, and the *Abba Dula* was the leader of the army. A council known as *Shanee* or *Salgee* and retired *Gada* officials also assisted the *Abba Boku* in running the government. *Gada* laws were passed by the *Chaffee* (assembly) and implemented by officials. This assembly is called *Gumi Gayo*, and held every eight years.

All *Gada* officials were elected for eight years by universal adult male suffrage; the main criteria for election to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability, and courage. The *Gada* government worked on local, regional, and central levels. The political philosophy of the *Gada* system was manifested in three main principles of checks and balances created to avoid subordination and exploitation: periodic succession of eight years, balanced opposition between different sectors, and power sharing between higher and lower political organs. The *Gada* government was based on popular democracy and equal representation for adult males. This government had independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches for balancing and checking the power of political leaders to avoid corruption and misuse of power. Some elements of *Gada* are still practiced in southern and other regions of Oromia.

The *Gada* system was the pillar of Oromo culture and civilization, and it helped Oromos develop democratic political, economic, social, and religious institutions for many centuries. The *Gada* political system and military organization enabled Oromos to defend themselves against enemies who were competing with them for land, water, and power for many





centuries. Today Oromos are engaged in a national liberation movement under the leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to achieve their national self-determination and to restore Oromo democracy. Most Oromos support this liberation organization and its army, the Oromo Liberation Army. There are many Oromo organizations in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa that support the Oromo national movement. Oromos are struggling for self-determination and the opportunity to reinvent an Oromian state that will reflect the Gada system of popular and representative democracy.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Oromos call their nation and country Oromia. They have been living in the Horn of Africa for all of their known history. They are one of the largest ethnonations in Africa with a population estimated at about 40 million people. Oromia is located mainly within the Ethiopian Empire and covers an area of 600,000 sq km (232,000 sq mi). The 3.5 million-year-old fossilized human skeleton known as “Lucy,” or “Chaltu” in Oromo, was found in Oromia. Oromos also live in Kenya and Somalia. During the last decades of the 19th century, Oromos were colonized and mainly incorporated to Ethiopia and lost their independent institutional and cultural development. Great Britain, France, and Italy supported the Ethiopian colonization of Oromos. Oromia is considered the richest region of the Horn of Africa because of its agricultural and natural resources. It is considered by many to be the “bread basket” of the Horn. Agricultural-

al resources including barley, wheat, sorghum, xxafii (a grain), maize, coffee, oil seeds, *chat*, oranges, and cattle are abundant in Oromia. Oromia is also rich in gold, silver, platinum, marble, uranium, nickel, natural gas, and other minerals. It has several large and small rivers that are necessary for agriculture and to produce hydroelectric power. Today the resources of Oromia are exploited by the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government and its domestic and international supporters. The nominal state of Oromia is still a colony of Ethiopia. There are millions of Oromo refugees in Africa, the Middle East, North America, Australia, Europe and other parts of the world. Particularly, the number of Oromo refugees has increased since 1992, when the Tigrayan government started its terrorism and genocidal massacres.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Oromo language is called Afaan Oromoo. Afaan Oromoo has more than 65 million speakers; ethno-national groups such as the Sidama, Berta, Adare, Annuak, Koma, Kulo, Kaficho, and Guraghe speak the Oromo language in addition to their respective languages. Afaan Oromoo is the third-most widely spread language next to Arabic and Hausa in Africa; it is the second-most widely spoken indigenous language in Africa south of the Sahara.

Despite the attempt by successive Ethiopian regimes to destroy the Oromoo language, it has continued to exist and flourish in rural areas. Until recently Oromos were denied the right to develop their language, literature, and alphabet. It was a crime to try to write in this language for almost a century. With the development of the Oromo national movement, Oromo intellectuals adopted the Latin script for this language in the early 1970s. The OLF adopted this script and began to introduce literacy in Afaan Oromoo. Today millions of Oromos write and read in their language although the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government banned independent Oromo institutions and organizations that are committed to develop this language. Every Oromo word has historical or contextual meanings.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Oromos believe that Waaqa Tokkicha (the one God) created the world and them. They call this Supreme Being Waaqa Guuracha (the Black God). Most Oromos still believe that it was this God that created heaven and earth and other living and nonliving things. Waaqa created *ayaana* (spiritual connection) to connect itself to its creatures. The Oromo idea of creation starts with the element of water, since it was the only element that existed before other elements.

Oromos believed that Waaqa created the sky and earth from water; he also created dry land out of water, and *bakkalcha* (star) to provide light. With the rise of *bakkalcha*, *ayaana* emerged. With this star, sunlight also appeared. The movement of this sunlight created day and night. Using the light of *bakkalcha*, Waaqa created all other stars, animals, plants, and other creatures that live on the land, in air, and in water. When an Oromo dies, he or she will become spirit. There are still Oromos who believe in the existence of ancestral spirits with whom they attempt to establish contact through ceremonies. These ancestral spirits appear to relatives in the form of flying animals. Original Oromo religion does not recognize the existence of hell and heaven. If a person commits sin by disturbing

the balance of nature or mistreating others, the society imposes appropriate punishment while the person is alive.

Oromo heroes and heroines are those individuals who excelled in doing something for the benefit of the community. Thinkers who invented the Gada system, *raagas* (prophets), military leaders, etc., are considered Oromo heroes and heroines. Currently, those individuals who are contributing to the Oromo national movement politically, militarily, intellectually, and in other ways are considered heroes and heroines.

## 5 RELIGION

Oromos recognize the existence of a Supreme Being or Creator that they call Waaqa. They have three major religions: original Oromo religion (Waaqeeffannqa), Islam, and Christianity. The original Oromo religion considers the organization of human, spiritual, and physical worlds to be interconnected phenomena whose existence and functions are regulated by their creator, God or Waaqa. Waaqa acts in the person's life through each person's *ayaana* (spiritual connection). There are three Oromo concepts that explain the organization and interconnection of human, spiritual, and physical worlds: *ayaana*, *uuma* (nature), and *saffu* (the ethical and moral code).

*Uma* includes everything created by Waaqa, including *ayaana*. *Saffu* is a moral and ethical code that Oromos use to differentiate bad from good and wrong from right. The Oromo religious institution is called the *qallu*; the *qallu* is the center of the Oromo religious view. *Qallu* leaders traditionally played important religious roles in Oromo society. The Ethiopian colonizing structure suppressed the Oromo system of thought and worldview by eliminating Oromo cultural experts such as the *raagas* (Oromo prophets), the *ayaantus* (time reckoners), and oral historians. Today Islam and Christianity play important religious roles in Oromo society. In some Oromo regions, Orthodox Christianity was imposed on the Oromos by the Ethiopian colonizing structure; in other areas, Oromos accepted Protestant Christianity to resist Orthodox Christianity. Some Oromos accepted Islam to resist Ethiopian colonialism and Orthodox Christianity. Islam was imposed on other Oromos by Turko-Egyptian colonialism. However, some Oromos have continued to practice their original religion. Both Christianity and Islam have been greatly influenced by the original Oromo religion.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Oromo original holidays, such as *Ireecha* or *buuta*, and Islamic and Christian holidays are celebrated in Oromo society. Recently Oromos have started to celebrate an Oromo national day to remember Oromo heroines and heroes who have sacrificed their lives to liberate their people from Ethiopian colonialism.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Since children are seen as assets, most Oromo families are large. The birth of a child is celebrated because each newborn child will become a potential worker. Marriage is also celebrated since it is the time at which boys and girls enter the stage of adulthood in the society. Death is also an important event that brings members of the community together to say goodbye to the deceased member.

Traditionally Oromos had five gada-grades; the names of these grades varied from place to place. In one area, these grades were *dabalee* (ages 1–8), *rogge* (ages 8–16), *follee* (ages

16–24), *qondaala* (ages 24–32), and *dorri* (ages 32–40). There were rites of passages when males passed from one gada-grade to another. These rites of passages were called *buuta* or *erreacha*. Between the ages of 1 and 8, Oromo male children did not participate in politics and had less responsibility. When they were between 8 and 16 years old, they were not allowed to take full responsibility and marry. Between ages 16 and 24, they took on the responsibilities of hard work, learning war tactics, politics, law and management, culture and history, and hunting big animals.

When young men reached between 24 and 32 years of age, they served as soldiers and prepared to take over the responsibilities of leadership, of peace and war. Those males between 32 and 40 years old played important roles and shared their knowledge with the *qondaala* group, and carried out their leadership responsibilities. Nowadays those who can afford it send their children to school. These children also complete their teenage years in school. Children and teenagers engage in agricultural and other activities to survive. Young boys and girls marry and start the life-cycle of adulthood.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Oromos are friendly people, and they express their feelings openly. Oromos greet one another when they meet by shaking hands; they talk to one another warmly. “*Asahama?*”—“*Atam?*”—“*Fayaadha?*”—and “*Matinkee atam?*” (“How are you?”—“Are you healthy?” and “Is your family o.k.?”) are common greeting phrases or questions. The respondent answers, “*Ani fayaadha*” (“I am fine”), “*Matinkos nagaadha*” (“My family is o.k.”), “*Ati fayaadha*” (“What about you, are you fine?”).

When people visit Oromo families, it is customary to be provided with something to drink or eat. It is expected that visitors will eat or drink what they are offered. Individuals can drop by and visit friends or relatives without informing them in advance.

Dating is an important interpersonal relation between a boy and a girl. Usually a young boy initiates this kind of relationship by expressing his love for a girl whom he wants to date. When a girl agrees that she loves him, too, they start dating each other. Premarital sex is not expected, but kissing and dancing are acceptable. Parents are not usually informed of a dating relationship. Dating may or may not lead to marriage. Having girlfriends and boyfriends provides social status and respect among peers.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Since Oromos are colonial subjects, their resources are mainly extracted by Ethiopian elites and their supporters. The majority of Oromos are rural people who lack social amenities, such as school and health services. They do not have basic services such as clean water, electricity, appropriate housing, transportation facilities, clinics, and hospitals. Electricity that is produced by Oromian rivers is mainly used by Amhara and Tigrayans.

Sometimes the Oromo people do not have enough food to eat because of the exploitation by the Ethiopian government. Since Oromos have been denied education by successive Ethiopian regimes, the size of the Oromo middle class is very small. The living condition of this class is better than that of the Oromo majority. Members of this class mainly live in urban areas.

Currently, because of the military conflict between the Oromo Liberation Army and the Ethiopian government militia, Oromo peasants are constantly harassed, murdered, or imprisoned by the government. The Ethiopian government robs their properties, claiming that they are harboring guerrilla fighters. Because of poverty, war, lack of modern agricultural technology, lack of education, and exploitation, the living standard of the Oromo people is very low. They live in overcrowded huts; most huts house large, extended families consisting of parents and grandparents, brothers and their wives, unmarried brothers and sisters, and other relatives. Oromos use human labor and animals such as donkeys and horses for transportation in rural areas. They use cars, wagons, buses, and trucks for transportation in cities. Oromos are probably one of the most impoverished societies in the world.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The basic unit of a household is the family. There are neighborhoods and communities that are important social networks connected to the extended family. A man, as head of the family, has authority over his wife (or wives) and unmarried sons and daughters. An Oromo man in general has one wife, but because of religious conversion to Islam and other cultural borrowing, some Oromo men marry more than one wife (a practice known as polygamy). Divorce is discouraged in Oromo society. Recently, Oromo women have begun to resist polygamy. Because of patriarchy and sexism, Oromo women are subordinate to men. Despite the fact that there are Oromo women fighters and military leaders who are engaged in the liberation struggle, the status of Oromo women is not yet changed.

### 11 CLOTHING

Some Oromo men wear *wooya* (toga-like robes), and some women wear *wandabiti* (skirts). Some Oromo men and women wear garments of leather or animal skin robes, and some women wear *qollo* and *sadetta* (women's cloth made of cotton). Oromo men and women also wear different kinds of modern garments made in different parts of the world. In cash-producing areas and cities, Oromos wear modern Western-style clothes. Oromos have special clothes for special days. They call clothes they wear on holidays or other important days' *kittii*, and clothes that they wear on working days *lago*.

### 12 FOOD

The main foods of Oromos are animal products including *foon* (meat), *anaan* (milk), *baadu* (cheese), *dhadha* (butter), and cereals eaten as *marqa* (porridge) and *bideena* (bread). Oromos drink coffee, *dhadhi* (honey-wine), and *faarso* (beer). There are Oromos who chew *chat* (a stimulant leaf).

The special dish of Oromos is called *itoo* (made with meat or chicken, spices, hot pepper, etc.) and *bideena* (made from xxafi or millet). Sometimes *marqa* or *qincee* (made from barley) is eaten for breakfast. All members of the family eat together. *Ancootee* (root food) is special food in some parts of western Oromia. Members of the family sit on stools, eat off wooden platters or dishes, use wooden spoons or other spoons for liquid foods, and use washed hands for nonliquid foods. The majority of Oromos eat twice, in the morning and at night. Muslim Oromos do not eat pork for religious reasons.

### 13 EDUCATION

Literacy is very low in Oromo society, probably less than 5%. Oromos mainly depend on family and community education to transmit knowledge to the younger generation since they do not have control over modern education. Older family and community members have a social responsibility to teach children about Oromo culture, history, tradition, values, etc. When some children go to colonial school to learn what the colonial government wants to teach them, oral historians and cultural experts make sure that these children properly learn about Oromo society.

Although their numbers are very limited, there are three kinds of schools in Oromia: missionary, *madarasa* (Islamic), and government schools. Islamic schools teach through sixth grade, and the other schools teach until twelfth grade. Oromos do not have control over these schools; hence, Oromo culture and values are constantly attacked by these schools. Despite all these problems, Oromo parents have very high expectations for education. If they can afford it, they do not hesitate to send their children to school.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Respect and social equality are expected among members of the Oromo community. These values are expressed in *geersara* or *mirisa* (singing), storytelling, poems, proverbs, etc. *Geersara* is used to praise good behavior and discourage behavior that is not approved by the community. Respect for elders, social responsibility for the community and individuals, helping others, bravery, hard work, and work excellence are all appreciated. Historical and cultural knowledge is admired. Oromos can count their family trees through 10 generations or more.

Oromo cultural heritages are expressed through *mirisa*, *weedu*, and different cultural activities. There are different kinds of *weedu*, such as *weedu fuudha* (marriage song), *weedu lola* (war song), and *weedu hoji* (work song). Oromo women have their own song called *helee* that they use to express their love for their country, children, husbands, etc. Young boys sing to call girls to marriage ceremonies by singing *hurmisu*. Men do *dhichisa* (a men's dance to celebrate the marriage ceremony) and girls do *shagayoo* (singing and dancing) during marriage ceremonies. There are prayer songs called *shubisu* and *deedisu*.

### 15 WORK

Oromos are mainly farmers and pastoralists. Young educated Oromos move to cities to look for job opportunities and other social amenities. There are also merchants in Oromo society, although their number is very small. There are also weavers, goldsmiths, potters, and woodworkers.

### 16 SPORTS

Hunting and military skills were important sports in pre-colonial Oromia. Oromo men used to hunt large animals for a test of manhood; they also used products of the game, such as hides, ivory, and horns. Hunting was seen as a school of warfare for young Oromos; it helped them learn how to handle their weapons and prepare themselves for difficult conditions.

Popular sports played by children and young adults in Oromo society include *gugssa* (horseback riding), *qillee* (field hockey), *darboo* (throwing spears), *waldhaansso* (wrestling), *utaalu* (jumping), and swimming. Oromo society has pro-



*Oromo women binding straw. (The Image Works)*

duced athletes who have competed and won in international sports events. Wami Biratu, an Oromo soldier serving in the Ethiopian colonial army, was the first Oromo athlete to participate in the Olympic Games, in 1956, and he became a source of inspiration for other Oromo athletes.

Ababa Biqila, another Oromo soldier, won the 1960 Rome Olympic Marathon and set a new world record by running barefoot. Another Oromo soldier, Mamo Wolde, became the 1968 Olympic Marathon Champion. Other Oromo soldiers had also succeeded in international competitions, including Mohammed Kedir, 10,000-meter bronze medalist, and Kebede Balcha, Bakala Daballe, Daraje Nadhi, Wadajo Bulti, Eshetu Tura, Adunya Lama, and Challa Urgeesa who were international cross-country champions. Their Oromo coach, Nugussie Roba, won three consecutive international cross-country titles.

In 1988, Ababa Makonnen, Ababa Biqila's nephew, won the Tokyo Marathon, and Wadajo Bulti and Kabada Balcha came in second and third. Daraje Nadhi and Kalacha Mataferia won first and second place, respectively, in the World Cup marathon in 1989. In 1992, Daraartu Tullu, an Oromo woman, won the gold medal for her victory in the 10,000-meter race in the Barcelona Olympic Games. In 1996, another Oromo woman, Fatuma Roba, became a women's marathon gold-medalist; she was the first from Africa to win this kind of victory, and she was the fastest marathon runner in the world. The successes of

these Oromo athletes demonstrate the rich cultural heritage of athleticism in Oromo society. Unfortunately, the victories of these athletes went to Ethiopia, not Oromia.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Oromos come together and enjoy themselves during ceremonies such as weddings, holidays, and harvest festivals. During these events they eat, drink, sing, dance, talk, etc. Jumping, running, swimming, wrestling, and other sports activities are used for recreation by boys and young adults. Oromo adults like to come together and sit and chat during weekends, after work, and on holidays.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

There are Oromos who specialize in making musical instruments such as the *kirar* (five-stringed bowl-lyre), *masanqo* (one-stringed fiddle), drums, etc. Iron tools, such as swords, spears, hoes, axes, and knives, have been important for farming, fighting, and hunting. Woodworking has been known for a long time in this society; carpenters make such objects as platters, stools, spades, tables, bows and arrows, wooden forks, honey barrels, etc.

Similarly, goldwork has been practiced in some parts of Oromia. Goldsmiths specialize in making earrings, necklaces, and other gold objects. There are Oromos who specialize in making other utensils from horn, pottery, and leather. Mugs,

spoons, and containers for honey-wine are made from horn. Basins, dishes, water jars, and vessels are made from pottery. Various kinds of milk vessels are made from leather. There are Oromos who specialize in making clothes.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Oromo human and civil rights have been violated by successive Ethiopian governments and their supporters. Oromos do not have control over their lives, lands, other properties, or their country. They do not have a voice in the government, and they are not allowed to support independent Oromo political organizations. Oromos have been systematically harassed, murdered, or imprisoned for sympathizing with the Oromo national movement, particularly the OLF. Oromos are not administered by the rule of law. Today the Tigrayan-led government engages in state terrorism and gross human rights violations because of two major reasons. The first reason is to destroy the Oromo national movement led by the OLF. The second reason is to loot the resources of the Oromo people and in order to enrich the Tigrayan elites and develop Tigray.

Today thousands of Oromos are kept in secret concentration camps and jails just for being Oromo or trying to determine their destiny as a people. Some Oromo activists or suspected activists are killed by Ethiopian soldiers, and their bodies are thrown on the streets to terrorize the Oromo people and to prevent them from supporting the Oromo national movement. Human rights organizations such as Africa Watch, Oromia Support Group, and Amnesty International have witnessed many human rights abuses inflicted on Oromos.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Before the colonization of Oromo society by Abyssinia/Ethiopia, the Oromo people had their own government and institutions such as Gada and Siqqee. These intuitions defended the interest of Oromo women on some level. The Ethiopian colonial system suppressed or destroyed both the Gada system and the Siqqee institutions and undermined the role and power of Oromo women in society. The emergence of class and gender stratification in some regions of Oromia also undermined the role of Oromo women in those regions.

The Habasha (Ethiopian) colonial government targeted Oromo women by cutting their breasts, raping, terrorizing, torturing and killing them. All of these crimes against humanity have been committed on Oromo women to commit genocide on Oromo society. Currently, the agents of the Meles regime are frequently raping Oromo women and young girls in an attempt to demoralize and destroy the Oromo people. The soldiers and officials of the Meles government have collected young Oromo girls and women into concentration camps and gang raped them in front of their relatives, fathers, and husbands to humiliate them and the Oromo people.

Because of Ethiopian colonialism and an oppressive cultural system, almost all Oromo women are part of the most impoverished sector of Oromo society. Today, the Oromo people in general and Oromo women in particular are exposed to state-terrorism and other forms of violence and poverty. They do not have personal and economic security. Since Oromo resources such as land are owned by the Tigrayan government, Oromo women cannot produce enough food and cash crops to feed their children. The Ethiopian government controls and owns most of Oromo economic resources, including the land.

In Oromo society, the remaining economic resources are mainly in the hands of Oromo men. As a result, Oromo women are denied access to education, business, health services and other opportunities. In addition, Oromo families usually use their meager economic resources to educate Oromo boys while limiting Oromo girls to engage in agricultural and domestic activities. The three forms of oppression—national, class and gender—are combined to force Oromo women to the bottom of Oromo society. Generally speaking, Oromo women have been also oppressed because of gender norms even by their parents, brothers, husbands and communities. Religious beliefs also do not promote equality of gender in Oromo society.

Oromo culture does not promote gender equality despite the claim of Gada democracy and the legacy of Siqqee institution. There are several ways in which the inferior position of women is expressed in Oromo society. Oromo families are happier when baby boys are born than when girls are born. Jeylan W. Hussein notes that “after a child is born the midwives declare the sex of the child, usually by ululating five times for the baby son and four times for a baby daughter.” This cultural practice demonstrates how society values boys more than girls. In addition, most Oromo families and communities send only boys to school. Consequently, there are only a few educated Oromo women today in Oromo society.

One way of maintaining the norms of gender inequality in Oromo society is proverb (mammakissa). For instance, let us consider the meaning of the following proverb: “Beerti qoon-qoo tolchiti malee dubbi hintolchitu.” Those who use this proverb limit the role of Oromo women to cooking and deny their capacity to engage in other roles such as education and administration. Another proverb says, “Beeraafi harreen ba’aa hin dhadhaban” (Women and donkeys do not complain about burden). This proverb claims that women should do difficult tasks without complaining in their society, such as cooking, fetching water, and rearing children. Some proverbs reflect that women are ignorant and are not capable of comprehending much. “Dhalaan akkuma harmaati ayliin rarraati” (Women’s hearts sway just like their breasts). Feminine body parts and brains are attacked by this kind of proverb to humiliate women and maintain gender stratification.

Oromo culture prepares women to be subservient to men. It victimizes them culturally, politically and psychologically. For example, one proverb states the following: “Niiti fii farda abbatu leenjifata” (The owner domesticates his horse and his wife). First of all this proverb reduces the status of a wife to that of a horse. This automatically violates her human rights. Second, if a husband treats his wife and his horse equally, the wife is not a free human being. Of course, there are proverbs that demonstrate Oromo women are very important in society. One of them is, “Dudaaf dubartin ka’u” (A man who has a strong and intelligent wife is successful in life). Yet, women have to work day and night to earn such praise. These oppressive gender values in Oromo culture have limited the development of the vision and potential of Oromo women as the Ethiopian colonial system has negatively affected both men and women. Both Islam and Christian beliefs enforce these oppressive values. Islam allows a man to be married to more than one wife. There are non-Muslim Oromo who get married to many wives. Such practices oppress Oromo women.

Today in the 21st century, very few Oromo women are formally educated because of the denial of access to education

both by the Ethiopian colonial system and Oromo cultural values. Almost all Oromo women are also denied economic opportunities, liberties, and social power. As the most oppressed and exploited sector of Oromo society, Oromo women struggle daily for the survival of their families and children by focusing on basic necessities such as food and shelter. Most of them suffer from absolute poverty, malnutrition, disease, and other social disabilities. Moreover, they do not have security and protection in their own communities because of the violence of the Ethiopian government that targets Oromo women to destroy the foundation of Oromo society.

In addition, they do not have adequate knowledge, skills, and time to organize themselves to represent their interest in society by being involved in decision-making processes on the political level. These conditions have also limited the involvement of women in the Oromo national struggle both in Oromia and the Diaspora. Since the population of Oromo women is equal to or more than Oromo men, without their vision and full participation, to think about the liberation of the Oromo people is an illusion. Therefore, the realization of the potential of Oromo women is required to fully mobilize the Oromo nation to struggle for liberation, freedom, economic development, and democratic governance and national security.

Although a serious attention is not given for the liberation of Oromo women from gender oppression by Oromo nationalists and Oromo liberation organizations, it is impossible to liberate the Oromo nation without the total mobilization of Oromo girls and women. The mobilization of Oromo girls and women requires to include their interest in the Oromo national struggle and to involve them in the decision-making process at all levels. While struggling against Ethiopian colonialism, it is very important to fight against gender inequality and the aspects of Oromo cultural values that degrade women. Furthermore, Oromo women need to organize themselves in order to fully participate in the ongoing Oromo national struggle and social revolution to liberate themselves from all forms oppression and exploitation.

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—by A. Jalata and Z. Kalil

# RWANDANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ruh-WAHN-duhns

**LOCATION:** Rwanda

**POPULATION:** 9 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kinyarwanda; French; Swahili; English

**RELIGION:** Catholicism (60%); Protestantism (20–30%); Islam (5%); small numbers of Baha'is

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Hutu; Tutsi

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since 1994, the country of Rwanda has become infamous for political upheaval and ethnic strife. This unfortunate image has obscured the fact that Rwanda in better times is a very pleasant country to live in or to visit, and its people are quite industrious. Rwanda is one of the few ancient African kingdoms to have survived colonialism as a viable political entity. However, it underwent profound changes during the colonial era that continue to have negative repercussions. The population is composed of three ethnic groups: the Hutu (approximately 85–90% of the total population), the Tutsi (10–15%), and the Twa (less than 1%). The two most numerous groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi, have often been pitted against one another in what appears to be an ancient tribalistic struggle, but really is a direct result of the way Rwanda was governed under colonialism (1895–1960).

When German colonialists first established contact with the Rwandan king in the 1890s and later signed a treaty with him that turned Rwanda into a colony, the Germans thought that, because the king was Tutsi, the entire Tutsi group was racially superior and more intelligent than the Hutu group. As a result, a small number of Rwandan Tutsi benefited from German colonial rule and became native chiefs. Later, when the Germans lost World War I (1914–1917), Rwanda came under Belgian colonial control. The Belgians did little to change the pattern in ethnic relations that had emerged under the Germans. A small number of Tutsi (though not the entire group) continued to benefit disproportionately from the colonial system. Naturally, this did much to foster resentment among the much more numerous Hutu. Despite these conflicts, the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa have spoken the same language, Kinyarwanda, for the past 500 or more years and have shared many cultural characteristics.

During the 1950s it began to appear that many Tutsi favored independence from Belgium (possibly inspired by anti-colonialist leaders in the neighboring Belgian Congo, such as the alleged “communist,” Patrice Lumumba). The Belgians, therefore, decided to change directions and favor the Hutu. Towards the end of the decade, Belgian colonial administrators began replacing Tutsi chiefs with Hutu ones, and encouraged the Hutu's animosity towards the Tutsi. Claiming that they were acting in the interests of Rwanda's majority and thus being “democratic,” the Belgians were actually creating a new system of ethnic favoritism. Events took a violent turn in 1959 after several Hutu political leaders were slain by Tutsi. Shortly afterward, large numbers of Hutu began to attack, kill, and/or drive Tutsi from their homes. Tens of thousands of Tutsi were slain, and many more fled to neighboring countries as refugees. In UN-monitored elections in 1962, Hutu political par-

ties won an overwhelming majority, and the Tutsi monarchy was abolished.

For the next three decades, Rwandan Tutsi were treated as second-class citizens. In 1990, however, a rebel group—the Rwandan Patriotic Front, composed largely, though not entirely, of Tutsi refugees—invaded Rwanda from Uganda. Fighting raged on and off for the next four years. The Rwandan government resorted increasingly to racist anti-Tutsi propaganda to assure its shaky support among Hutu. Finally, after the Rwandan president was killed in a mysterious rocket attack on his plane in April 1994, a genocide against Rwandan Tutsi was launched in which up to 1 million people were killed. Victims of this carnage were mostly Tutsi, although perhaps thousands of Hutu opponents of the regime also perished. In July 1994, the rebel group (the Rwandan Patriotic Front) defeated the former government's army. Since then, Rwanda has been governed by a group dominated by Tutsi, but in which there are several Hutu who occupy important positions. Many Rwandan Hutu, however, mistrust the present Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government.

Unity and reconciliation between Rwandan citizens is a high political priority for the present government, who vows to break completely with the past 100 years of Rwandan history and to construct a society in which ethnicity no longer plays a part. The government's national reconciliation discourse is based on a view that ethnicity in Rwanda was invented and politicized by colonial occupation. Consequently, in today's public discourse, all references to Hutu, Tutsi and Twa have been banned and replaced with the all-inclusive Rwandans. The Rwandan population is urged to reconcile with each other and to live with each other peacefully.

The local juridical court (known as Gacaca, which is translated as “justice on the grass”) and the solidarity camps (known as Ingando) are some of the initiatives that the government has taken in order to reach unity and reconciliation among its citizens. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, located in Tanzania, has concentrated on bringing the ringleaders of the genocide to account. However, tens of thousands of other genocide suspects still await trial in Rwanda's crowded prisons. Given Rwanda's shortage of judges and lawyers, the government has turned to the Gacaca, a traditional system of justice, in order to escape impunity (freedom from punishment). Over 250,000 community members have been trained to serve in Gacaca courts all over Rwanda. Gacaca hearings are held outdoors every week, and most villagers take part. The tribunals first identify victims, then suspects—and finally hold trials. Local residents give testimony on behalf of and against the suspects, who are tried in the communities where they are accused of committing crimes, and many of those who are tried become prisoners.

Ingando are civic education camps that the government runs to plant seeds of reconciliation. Rwandan citizens from diverse walk of life, including students, church leaders, ex-soldiers, ex-combatants, genocidaires (perpetrators of the genocide), and others, are encouraged or required to attend Ingando. The camps include lectures on the government program, Rwandan history, and unity and reconciliation. In spite of the governmental efforts to unite the Rwandans, many people still feel insecure and suspicion remains strong between different groups. Retribution and false accusations at the Gacaca courts constitute some of the fears. Witnesses also feel insecure, as many of

them have been attacked and even killed in connection with Gacaca. Coming to terms with the ethnic divisions of the past remains a major challenge.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Rwanda is a tiny country about the size of the US state of Massachusetts. It is located in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. To Rwanda's west lies one of Africa's largest countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), while to the east is Tanzania. Uganda is the country directly to the north, while Burundi is located to the south. Despite the country's proximity to the equator (about 2°s), high altitude keeps the climate temperate. Most Rwandans live at altitudes between 1,500 m (5,000 ft) and 2,100 m (7,000 ft) above sea level. Rwanda usually receives a fair amount of rain (about 100–150 cm or 40–60 in), but there are occasional droughts. During a typical year, there is one long rainy season (March to May), one long dry season (June to September), another wet season (October to December), and a short dry season (January and February), but these seasons are seldom regular.

Rwanda is Africa's most densely populated country and the population has increased with almost 2 million people since the genocide in 1994, currently reaching a total population of approximately 9 million people. Approximately 89% of Rwanda's population lives in rural areas and gains its livelihood from agriculture, but there are several cities. Kigali, the capital, is the largest city, with a population of about 800,000 people.

In 1994 over 3 million refugees, virtually all Hutu, scattered across the region, residing in refugee camps in Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Burundi. These refugees fled Rwanda in the late spring and summer of 1994 as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) gradually took control of the country. Some fled the country out of fear that the largely Tutsi RPF would take reprisals against them. Others fled simply because they were forced to do so by soldiers of the former Rwandan government's army and its allied militias. During the last months of 1996, the RPF invaded the DRC and destroyed refugee camps; thousands of Hutus were killed during those attacks while most others had to re-enter Rwanda, and began to return in large numbers. A high percentage of Tutsi, who fled to neighboring countries during the 1960s, have also returned to Rwanda since the RPF came to power. The government of Rwanda has encouraged all Rwandans who fled the country to come back. In 2007, 50,000 Rwandans still remained in exile, while all the rest had returned. Most of the returnees are re-integrated and accepted back into their communities. The majority of Rwandans who remain in exile do so due to disagreements with the present government, or out of fear of facing genocide charges upon their return.

## 3 LANGUAGE

All Rwandans speak Kinyarwanda, a Bantu language, that is rather difficult for most foreigners to master. One of its major sources of difficulty for Europeans and Americans is its vowel system. Vowels can differ in length and tone, and such changes entirely alter the meaning of a word or phrase. Another difficulty in Kinyarwanda is the fact that there are 20 different noun classes. English has only two basic noun classes: singular and plural.

Many educated Rwandans also speak French, the country's second official language and the language used by the Bel-



gian colonialists. Rwandans may also speak Swahili, which is something of a lingua franca (common language) in East and Central Africa. Finally, English is becoming increasingly common, especially in urban areas. This is partly because the new group of leaders in Rwanda (affiliated with the Rwandan Patriotic Front) were raised in English-speaking Uganda. But it is also because many people in recent years have decided to learn English at courses taught in Kigali and other cities.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Rwandan culture is rich in oral traditions, including legends, stories, and poetry. In fact, Rwandan art is much more devoted to literature, poetry, music, and dance than it is to painting or sculpture. Much of Rwandan folklore from the 19th and early 20th centuries had to do with Rwandan sacred kingship. Until 1931, the Rwandan king was non-Christian and was believed by many of his subjects to have sacred powers. Ritual specialists associated with the king possessed special knowledge of Rwandan history and ritual. Much of this enormous body of knowledge was kept in their memories in the form of poetry. Occasionally, the specialists were called upon to recite their allotted portions of the sacred texts.

In the early 20th century, Belgian colonial authorities and Catholic missionaries succeeded in deposing the non-Christian Rwandan king and replaced him with his Christian son. By the 1940s and 1950s, it became apparent that the sacred knowledge possessed by the ritual specialists would soon die with them, as they were growing old and no new specialists



were being trained. In order to prevent this, Rwandan and European scholars set about recording and transcribing the sacred and historical texts. For this reason there is a record of traditional Rwandan ritual, poetry, history, and literature that far surpasses most other sub-Saharan African societies. The rituals that were associated with Rwandan sacred kingship included rainmaking rituals, rituals to stop the rain in the event of flooding, rituals to assure that the cattle reproduced in abundance, rituals to assure that the bees produced honey in abundance, and rituals to assure victory in battle.

Where ordinary people were concerned, Rwandan culture was also quite rich in stories and legends for the moral instruction of children, or simply for entertainment and distraction. Many of these stories, or variants of them, are still recounted to this day.

## 5 RELIGION

Catholic and other Christian missionaries have extensively evangelized Rwanda since the colonial era. For that reason, about 60% of Rwandans today are Catholic, and another 20–30% are Protestants of various denominations. The number of Muslims has increased in recent years. Many that have converted to Islam are said to have done so because of mistrust towards the Christian church, as some Catholic and Protestant religious leaders played an active role in the genocide, while Muslims stayed neutral in the conflict. Still, the Muslims make up less than 5% of the population in Rwanda. In a few Rwandan cities such as the capital of Kigali, the Baha'i faith is gaining a foothold.

It is difficult to determine with precision how many Rwandans follow a traditional religion. Often Rwandans will follow both traditional religious practices and some form of Christianity at the same time. They see no contradiction in doing this, for they feel that Imaana (the supreme being) can only be reached through intermediaries. Whether these intermediaries are Christian or traditional in origin is of little importance. According to Rwandan conceptions, Imaana is both a benevolent, creative spirit responsible for all life, and at the same time a distant and indifferent god. The most common means of communicating with Imaana is through the spirits of deceased family members (*abazimu*), or through more important deities that are like “super” ancestors. Two of the most common deities of this latter sort are Ryangombe, who is quite commonly venerated in southern and central Rwanda, and Nyabingi, a goddess who is venerated in northern Rwanda. In both cases, people who venerate either Ryangombe or Nyabingi claim that these spirits are intermediaries to Imaana, not ultimate sources of power and beneficence.

With regard to ancestors, many Rwandans (Christian or not) believe that after death one's spirit joins other ancestral spirits. Usually these spirits are thought to exert a protective influence upon the living, as long as the living remember to honor the ancestors with occasional sacrifices. An ancestral spirit might afflict a living person with illness, if the living person “forgets” the ancestor, i.e., neglects to offer the occasional small sacrifice in the ancestor's honor. Ancestral spirits might also afflict one of their descendants because the latter has wronged another member of the extended family.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Rwandans today go by the Christian calendar and observe the major Christian holy days such as Christmas and Easter. Other Roman Catholic festivals are also observed, such as Ascension Day and All Saints' Day. National holidays also include Independence Day on the first of July, which marks independence from the Belgian colonizers, and Liberation Day the fourth of July, which marks the end of genocide. Liberation Day is celebrated throughout the country with music, dance and recitals. Moreover, the country observes a national day of mourning each year on April 7, the day on which the genocide started. Each year a new site is chosen from which bodies from the genocide are exhumed and given a formal burial. The president leads the ceremony, which is broadcast on state television and radio. The day is also commemorated all over the country at lower administrative levels. National television and radio channels devote their broadcasts to the theme of genocide. The month of April more generally is considered to be a month of mourning and parties or celebrations of any kind are discouraged.

Most of the traditional Rwandan festivals are no longer officially observed, with the exception of *Umuganura*, a harvest ritual that is celebrated in August.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rwandans mark major transitions in life by performing rituals that demonstrate to the community that an individual has changed her or his social status. These include birth, marriage, the joining of the cult of Ryangombe or Nyabingi, blood-brotherhood, and death. For those Rwandans who practice the traditional religions (the cult of Ryangombe, or the cult of Nyabingi), becoming a member of the cult also requires the performance of a rite of passage. For those Rwandans who are members of Christian sects, baptism and confirmation serve as rites of passage.

Birth is the first important rite of passage. When a woman gives birth to a child, she and the child are supposed to be kept in seclusion, traditionally for eight days, though today it is usually only for four days. Care is taken during this time to properly dispose of the umbilical cord and the placenta, which are usually buried near the house. On the day that the woman and her child leave their seclusion, friends and family members visit the household and share in a celebration. Many people bring gifts to the new mother and father. The parents of the new mother bring a gift to their daughter's husband, and a quantity of sorghum porridge to their daughter. It is also on this day that the baby is presented to the public for the first time, and that the child's name is announced.

In contrast to many other sub-Saharan African peoples, Rwandans do not celebrate any type of initiation at puberty for either boys or girls. After puberty, marriage is the most important rite of passage. Females marry by about age 18 and males by age 22 or later. Marriage is extremely important for Rwandans because a person is not considered fully adult until she or he has been married and had at least one child. Marriage is actually a series of rites of passage, beginning with the betrothal and continuing with the wedding and with the birth of each child. At each of these stages, gifts are exchanged between the families of the wife and the husband. The most important of these gifts is the bride-wealth cow that the husband gives his wife's father. Later, when this cow gives birth to a female

calf, the calf will be given to the husband. It is extremely important to have children in Rwandan culture because dying without leaving descendants means that no one will honor the deceased's spirit.

A funeral ceremony is the final rite of passage for a Rwandan. Although most Rwandans have a Christian funeral through their respective churches, many Rwandans also practice traditional rituals at this time. Because death is said to be "hot," it is not rare for a traditional ritualist to come to the home of a deceased person to "cool" the house and to aid the deceased's spirit in its transition to an ancestral spirit. It is also common to sacrifice a cow or bull as part of this ritual.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Under most circumstances, Rwandans are polite, warm, and helpful. Greetings are a central part of social etiquette. In rural areas, it is important to greet everyone that one passes in the fields and on pathways. Although this etiquette is not closely observed in large cities like Kigali, where one passes many people on the street, even in an urban environment it is considered rude not to acknowledge someone with whom one has some acquaintance. For certain people, a heartier form of greeting is in order. Here, the two parties "embrace" one another. In this type of greeting, the left hand reaches out to gently clasp the other person's hip, while the right hand reaches upward to touch the other person's shoulder.

To be a socially acceptable person, one must visit one's friends and relatives, as well as accept the visits of others. Rwandans spend much of their time visiting one another. This helps to maintain good social relations with others. Someone who rarely visits others is considered antisocial and would probably arouse the suspicions of his neighbors and relatives. Although Rwandans do not always offer a guest something to eat, it would be considered a breach of etiquette if the guest were not offered something to drink. Drinking is the foremost social activity among Rwandans, and drinks range from very mildly alcoholic to moderately so. The two most common forms of alcoholic beverage are a drink made from sorghum, and one made from fermented plantains. Whenever a visitor arrives, the good Rwandan host attempts to find him or her something to drink. If a guest is present at one's home while others are drinking and is not offered something to drink, it is considered an insult.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that all people are equal when it comes to social occasions where drinking or eating is involved. It is here that we see Rwanda's ethnic differences at work. When Tutsi and Hutu eat or drink together, they will often share the same cooking and drinking vessels. They may, for example, pass a calabash (gourd container) with a wooden straw in it from one person to another. Each person drinks in turn, pressing his or her lips to the straw. When Twa are present, though, they are not allowed to drink or eat from the same vessels. They will be served something to drink or eat, but their drinking and eating utensils will be separate from those of the others present.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions vary immensely between social classes and between urban and rural Rwandans. Affluent Rwandans who live in cities enjoy the amenities of running water, indoor plumbing, electricity, and phone service. Their houses resem-

ble those one would find in an affluent American suburb, and are usually made of brick and concrete. But the majority of urban Rwandans live more simply. Many have small mud-walled houses with corrugated iron roofs. Although some may have electricity in their dwellings, most have neither electricity, running water, nor indoor plumbing.

In rural areas, a variety of house types exist. One may occasionally find brick houses with tile roofs, but only wealthy rural notables occupy this type of house. More frequently, one finds houses of wattle-and-daub construction. The traditional shape of a house is circular, but since colonial times many Rwandans have built rectangular houses. The roofs of such houses are usually constructed from corrugated iron, but it is not uncommon to find thatched-roof houses as well. These houses almost never have indoor plumbing, electricity, or running water. To obtain water, one must usually walk some distance to a spring or stream, a difficult and time-consuming chore that men leave to women and children. A few years ago, many rural Rwandans had to travel a long way to access a phone. Today village phones, that are found in many areas where no telecommunication service previously existed, allow people to make phone calls near their homes. Thanks to an improved health care system, access to health care has also improved for the rural population. Approximately 85% of all Rwandans live within 10 km of a primary health care facility. However, medical care remains an economical barrier to many people, and geographic distance and mountain terrain still constrain access to health care for many rural Rwandans. Rwanda is characterized by what is known as a "dispersed settlement pattern." This means that individual homesteads are spread out all over the countryside, rather than being gathered together in hamlets or villages. When Rwandans speak of their local area, they talk about which hillside they come from, rather than which village.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The term for family in Kinyarwanda, *inzu*, can mean either "family," "household," or "house." This unit consists of a husband, a wife or wives (a small percentage—perhaps 10%—of Rwandan men have more than one wife), and their children. When a man has more than one wife, each one will have a "house" within the fenced-in enclosure that encircles the whole homestead. Sometimes other persons who are related to the man of the house by blood, adoption, or marriage will live within this unit as well, but this is not common.

People from several related *inzus* who trace their descent from a common male ancestor about five or six generations back comprise another kinship unit known as an *umuryango*. Usually the eldest or most influential male is considered the head of this unit. As descent through males is most important where one's social identity is concerned, Rwandan society is said to be patrilineal. The *umuryango* often controls a portion of land that it divides and allocates to its individual adult male members. Today, however, as a result of colonialism, much of Rwanda's land is owned by individuals as private property and can be bought and sold without seeking the approval of an *umuryango*.

When Rwandans marry, they must marry outside of their *umuryango*. A young man who is interested in marrying a particular young woman makes this wish known to his father. The father will then visit the young woman's father, bringing sorghum and plantain-beer as a gift, and the two fathers will



*Rwandan children begin primary school at age seven. According to Rwandan law, all children are guaranteed at least a sixth-grade education. (Jason Laure)*

discuss the issue. Very often, several visits will be necessary, which becomes costly for the prospective bridegroom's father as he must bring beer each time. Moreover, the bridegroom and his father will have to pay at least one bride-wealth cow to the bride's father in order for the marriage to take place. It is this payment of the bride-wealth cow that legitimizes any children that result from the marriage.

### **11 CLOTHING**

In precolonial and early colonial times, Rwandans wore clothing made from animal skins and from pounded bark-cloth. Today this type of clothing is seen only in museums. Today Rwandans wear clothing that is the same as that worn by people in Western countries. The only difference is that the clothing Rwandans wear is second-hand. Only some Rwandans can afford to buy new clothing made by tailors in Rwanda. Rwandans began wearing European clothing during the colonial era. Today there is an active import trade in used clothing. In the cities men often wear shirt and pants. Rwandan women often wear dresses and scarves made from the printed cloth, but in the last ten years urban women and girls have increasingly started to use pants.

### **12 FOOD**

The diet of the average Rwandan is high in starches, low in protein, and quite low in fat. The two most common foodstuffs are starchy plantains and beans. Often the two are boiled together.

Perhaps the next most common foodstuff is sorghum grain, which may be consumed as a cereal beverage, a porridge, or as sorghum meal. Sorghum and plantains are also used to prepare native Rwandan beers. Other commonly consumed vegetable foodstuffs include white potatoes, sweet potatoes, manioc, and maize (corn). Cabbage and carrots are also eaten occasionally. In certain areas of Rwanda, avocados are seasonally available, as are mangoes and pineapples.

Most Rwandans rarely eat meat, although the wealthy may consume it daily. The most commonly eaten meat is goat, which is usually barbecued over a charcoal burner. Beef is the most desired meat, but it is usually available only when a rural Rwandan has sacrificed a bull or cow on a ceremonial occasion. Urban Rwandans may consume beef more frequently. Cattle are valued for their prestige value and for their milk. Rwandans who can regularly drink milk count themselves as very fortunate. Mutton is also eaten, but most Tutsi, and many Hutu, spurn it because sheep are deemed to be peaceful animals whose presence is calming to cattle. In the past, only Twa ate mutton. When a sheep died, it was skinned. The skin was used to hold a baby on its mother's back, while the meat was given to Twa to eat. Today, though, many Rwandans eat mutton. Another new item in today's diet that was rarely eaten in the past is fish. Tilapia and catfish have become much more common as fish farming expands.

Only urban Rwandans eat three times a day. Rwandan farmers usually wake early, have something to drink, and work in the fields until about midday, at which time they eat something that they have brought with them. Often they cook the food right in the field. At the end of the day, after returning home, they eat again.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Rwandan children begin primary school at age six. According to Rwandan law, all children are guaranteed at least a sixth-grade education. In reality, this does not always occur because parents sometimes cannot afford the cost of school uniforms, school supplies, and other minor expenses that even a primary student needs, and some families need their children's support in the household or to generate income. After the sixth grade, attendance at a secondary school is dependent upon selection. Before 1994, admission to secondary school was supposedly based on grades and test results, but it was often a political matter. Until the change of government in 1994, Tutsi stood much less chance of being admitted to secondary school than did Hutu, and virtually no Twa attended secondary school. Today the selection is based on the national exam taken at the end of primary school. The transition to secondary school is however very low. The reason for this low transition rate include poor performance in primary examinations, high fees charged in secondary schools, and long distance to existing schools, especially in rural areas.

Kinyarwanda is taught in all schools in the lower grades, while French and English are used for instruction in secondary school. Education in Rwanda seeks to inculcate a culture of nationhood marked by tolerance, social cohesion, and conflict resolution, and to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS. Challenges met are how to include orphans and children from child-headed households into education, and how to teach about the modern history of Rwanda and the genocide, a subject that still remains excluded from the curriculum.



*Rwandans gather to watch dancers. Ritual occasions such as weddings include traditional music and dance, but there is also likely to be modern popular music as well. (Cynthia Bassett)*

Higher education is mainly provided by universities and specialized institutes. Beyond secondary school, it is possible to attend a university in Rwanda, to attend nursing school, or even to attend medical school. There are also many post-secondary institutions that offer a wide range of courses such as finance, management, computer studies, statistics, economics and secretarial studies. There are also a number of teacher training colleges. Rwandan students who complete secondary school are required to attend Ingando (see Introduction) before they commence their university studies.

Although the literacy rate in Rwanda is only 49%, with a high rate of illiteracy in the countryside, many other Rwandans are quite well educated. Some have also had the opportunity to study in Europe or the US. Because of the number of educated people in Rwanda, international organizations have little trouble filling positions that require a college education or better. In recent years, educated Rwandans have been experiencing difficulty in obtaining employment.

High educational attainment is respected in Rwanda, and families make sacrifices to educate their children. Although every family strives to educate all its children, this is rarely financially possible. Because of the great expense of education, some children are favored over others. For those who receive the privilege of an education, it is expected that they will financially assist their other siblings and their parents in old age.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Rwandans have a rich musical culture. Special dance groups known as *intore* perform dances that once had ritual significance in the context of war and sacred kingship. Dancers in the *intore* groups wear flowing headdresses made from dried grasses and carry small shields on their left arm. Variations of these dance styles are also performed by ordinary people at festive occasions such as weddings and other rites of passage. Several traditional musical instruments are played in Rwanda, and many among the Twa people are renowned as highly proficient musicians. Rwandans also possess a rich oral literature.

#### **15 WORK**

Rwandans are very industrious. In rural areas, men try to find paid employment wherever and whenever possible. They usually participate in some farming tasks as well. Women tend to farm the family land rather than work in wage-labor employment. In urban areas, though, many women have salaried jobs. In recent years, the number of women with salaried jobs has increased as the educational opportunities for women have improved.

#### **16 SPORTS**

The most popular sport in Rwanda is soccer. Numerous soccer clubs exist, competing in organized leagues. Rwandans attend soccer matches in droves, especially when the national team is

playing. If they cannot attend an important match in person, they listen to it on the radio. The sport has become so popular that from a very tender age boys can be seen kicking and running after a “ball” that is merely a spherical bundle of rolled-up banana leaves. Often young girls join in these games as well, and there are even a few soccer clubs for adult women in cities like Kigali. Perhaps the next-most-popular sport after soccer is running, an activity that also inspires competitive interest from a very young age. Very few Rwandans swim. Those that live near lakes may swim recreationally but do not engage in the activity as a sport. Finally, there are a few urban, affluent Rwandans who have taken up tennis.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Ritual occasions such as weddings serve an important recreational function. Although a good portion of a wedding ceremony is likely to consist of speeches made by both the groom’s and the bride’s sides of the family, food and Rwandan beers will also be served. Later, when the speeches have ended, there will be music and dancing. Some of this will consist of traditional music and dance, but there is also likely to be modern popular music as well. Although the custom of formally inviting people to weddings and other ceremonies is becoming more common, no one who shows up is turned away from a festival. In fact, a large crowd at such an occasion reflects positively on the prestige of the host.

Rwanda has had a national radio station for almost 30 years, and a number of private radio stations have arisen in recent years. In the past 15 years, a television station has also been operative. Virtually everyone in the country owns and listens to a radio. In urban areas, TV ownership is increasing but is still mostly confined to the more affluent. Watching videos on VCRs has also become so popular that video rental stores now exist in large cities. Popular music, particularly American rock music, has had tremendous success in Rwanda. In urban discotheques, one can hear American rock, Caribbean reggae, and Zairian and Kenyan pop music. American dances and clothing fashions are quite popular, but these are always given something of a Rwandan “twist.”

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Rwandans are known for their basket- and mat-weaving. Woven into these everyday utensils are elaborate geometric designs. One can also see these same designs painted on the large cooking vessels made by Twa potters. Occasionally these same motifs can be observed on the interior walls of traditional Rwandan houses, but today this is quite rare. In former times, Rwandans did not engage in woodcarving, sculpture, or artistic painting, but in recent years, these have become important craft activities. In cities, one can find many Rwandan artists who sell paintings, woodcarvings, and ceramic sculptures.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

After the genocide of the Tutsi in 1994, and the following massacres of Hutus by the RPF army, reconciliation among Rwandans is a great challenge. Many initiatives have been taken by the Rwandan government to bring Hutu and Tutsi along the road to reconciliation, but genocide still leaves its mark for the most part of society.

The genocide has left a profound sense of injustice, fear and distress among Rwandans. The survivors of the genocide

have complained that they have not received appropriate compensation for their suffering. A large part of the Hutu population also consider themselves to be victims of the war, refugee camps or post-genocide revenge killings, but feel that they are being silenced and disregarded in the recovering process, rendering distrust towards the government. This situation has engendered resentment and frustration among the population, as well as suspiciousness between the groups.

Truth telling and fulfillment of justice through Gacaca (see Introduction) helps reconciliation for some Rwandans, but also means fear for a lot of people. Internal immediate conflicts are centered on Gacaca; genocide suspects, witnesses, and survivors have been assaulted, threatened and even killed in connection to the trials. In July 2006 the Gacaca commenced the trials of over 700,000 people accused of genocide, and during 2007 close to 100,000 people were held in Rwanda’s overpopulated prisons, most of them accused of participation in the genocide. Groups of Hutus have left the country rather than to face the Gacaca courts, some out of fear of false accusations, which has already imprisoned several innocent Hutus and caused anger among them and their families. In spite of the government’s work to obtain unity and reconciliation, and the will of many citizens to do so, mistrust prevails in many places, and fear of the other group still exists. Security is generally a pressing problem for survivors.

Rwanda is, even by African standards, a very poor country. Food security is a problem for a large part of the population, and the growing economic disparities between urban and rural population has created tension in the country. Since the era of colonialism, some Rwandans have improved their economic condition significantly. Others, particularly those involved in agriculture, have not yet seen their circumstances improved. Having a family member in prison is a heavy burden for an impoverished Rwandan household to carry, since the absence of labor is detrimental to agriculture, reducing productivity and hence food availability. Survivors left without family or relatives are also unable to cultivate land effectively. Further, AIDS is keeping many adults out of work and unable to support their already vulnerable households. AIDS has also left thousands of children orphaned, and when combined with the large number of Rwandan children who lost their parents in the genocide, this has resulted in one of the world’s largest orphan populations (1.26 million). These children are extremely vulnerable to further neglect, abuse, and exploitation, and many are left to fend for themselves and their younger siblings.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Gender relations have changed in Rwanda since 1994. After the genocide, many women found themselves without a husband or male relatives to provide for them and were forced to handle tasks that they previously had not been considered suitable for. Furthermore, a strong political commitment to include women in the reconstruction of a country that was in shambles, has enabled women to enter the political arena. Rwanda’s new constitution, adopted in 2003, mandates a 30% quota for women in parliament and in government. Additionally, political parties have promoted female candidates, which resulted in the world’s highest ranking of women parliamentarians, 49%, in the elections in 2003. However, the commendable achievements in parliament and other decision-making positions have not yet translated into any major differences for the vast ma-

majority of women in Rwanda. At a grassroots level, women's unpaid household work, feelings of inferiority, lack of experience in politico-administrative activities, and the high level of illiteracy, are barriers to their political participation.

Female-headed households constitute more than a third of all the households in Rwanda (which is largely a legacy of the genocide as it left many women widowed, and many men in prison). Those households are generally more affected by poverty than households led by men. Moreover, Rwanda is a patriarchal society that influences women's social position and gender relations in practice: Boys are sent to school rather than girls, and women remain in inferior positions to men and their social roles are foremost as mothers and wives.

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—revised by A. Berglund

# SAN

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Khoi-San, Kung, Khwe, Juwasi, Basarwa, Bushmen

**LOCATION:** Botswana, Northern South Africa, Namibia

**POPULATION:** 100,000

**LANGUAGE:** Khoisan

**RELIGION:** San Religion

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The San trace their roots to the Kalahari Desert region of southern Africa. Several ethnic groups who historically survived through a hunter-gatherer lifestyle comprise the San people. The language of these groups is similar in origin. At one point in history, the San were known as "Bushmen," a term that most scholars today regard as racist. Controversy still surrounds the naming of these peoples. Other terms such as Khwe and Basarwa also have been used to describe these groups. The term San has been the preferred term by anthropologists since the 1970s, although the term Khoi-San also is commonly used. The Khoi (Hottentots) differ from the San in that they are taller and made their living through agriculture instead of foraging.

It is believed that San have lived in the area of the Kalahari Desert for thousands of years; they may be the first humans to have occupied this region before the appearance of the Nguni and other black peoples. Historians and anthropologists attribute the presence of the San in the Kalahari to animated paintings that appear on rocks, walls, and caves in areas as distant as Namaqualand, the Drakensberg, and the Southern Cape. These forms of painting are considered the oldest in Africa. Many San subgroups continue today to live nomadic lives among more sedentary peoples such as the Bantu. There are many different San peoples, who lack a collective name but are variously referred to as "Bushmen," "San," "Basarwa" (in Botswana), and so on. The individual groups identify by names such as Juhoansi and Kung, and most call themselves "Bushmen" when referring to themselves collectively.

As hunter-gatherers, San initially subsisted on animals they caught, as well as honey, roots, and fruits they would gather. What they ate and where they resided was dependant traditionally on the seasons and the movement of animals indigenous to the Kalahari. Many scholars regard their traditional way of life as being in harmony with nature. The San would take care to use only what they needed and would not overhunt or take too many plants. Their bodies are characterized as short and slight in build. Their hands and feet are small, and their yellow-brown skin would wrinkle early in life. Some San groups most likely kept cattle and sheep.

Two languages spoken by the San—Khoe and Zhu I ōasi—contain words referring to agricultural terms that date back 2,000 years. Further development of an agriculturalist way of life appears to have occurred 500 years later with the arrival of Bantu-speaking peoples to the region. The Bantu planted sorghum and millet, kept goats, and practiced metallurgy. Some linguistic evidence suggests that San peoples sold or traded cattle with Nguni and Sotho-Tswana Bantu speakers. These patterns suggest that while foraging remained important to the San people, it was combined with herding and farming over time.



The arrival of white colonists to the San's traditional hunting grounds in the 17th century changed the San way of life. While some San joined the white society in subservient roles, others migrated to the west and north in search of lands where they could continue their traditional way of life. Today the San live primarily in the northwestern Cape, the Kalahari, Namibia, and Botswana. While a few San, mainly those who continue to live in the desert, still practice their traditional way of life, the people as a whole are considerably less nomadic.

Most San groups maintain a practice of hereditary leadership. This tradition is seen in the term for "chief," which is *I xaiha* and comes from a root word for "wealth." The authority of these leaders is limited today, although some individuals who possess such leadership positions will be elected to state-created offices, such as heads of village development committees. Holders of such positions tend to be older and respected among their people.

Since the mid-1990s the central government of Botswana has promoted a relocation policy aimed at moving the San out of their ancestral land on the Central Kalahari Game Reserve into newly created settlements. Although the government categorically denies that relocation has been forced, a 2006 court ruling confirmed that the removal was unconstitutional and residents were forcibly removed. Opponents to the relocation policy claim that the government's intent is to clear the area—an area the size of Denmark—for the lucrative tourist trade and for diamond mining. As of the mid-2000s, many San were

poised to return to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, one of Africa's largest protected nature reserves.

Similarly, the San group as a whole has little voice in the national political process and none of the tribal groups is recognized in the constitution of Botswana. Over the generations, the Bushmen of South Africa have continued to be absorbed into the African population, particularly the Griqua sub-group, which are an Afrikaan-speaking people of predominantly Khoisan. Today, less than 5% of the approximately 100,000 San live as hunter-gatherers. Their cultural heritage is in danger of disappearing.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The San peoples occupy highly diverse geophysical regions that share a number of features: seasonal rains, falling mainly as localized thunderstorms during the hot months, October to May; high variation in average annual rainfall—around 45 centimeters (18 inches) in Ngamiland (some 50% higher in Angola and 50% lower in central Botswana); summer temperatures that often exceed 37°C (99°F); and cool winters, with night temperatures as low as -4°C (25°F) in Botswana and Namibia. The Zhu I *ōasi* live in northwestern Botswana, in a semi-arid savanna region known as Ngamiland and in surrounding regions of Namibia. The Xu group live in more tropical open woodlands in southern Angola that receive considerably more precipitation. Axoe occupy the banks of the Okavango River, in the Caprivi Strip of Namibia while the Hai I I om reside in north-central Namibia, between the Cunene River and the Etosha Pan. The Nharo live in the Ghansi District of Botswana, an area known for its limestone. The G I wi, G I I ana, and Koō live in central Botswana and Namibia in areas that are sandy and receive little rainfall. The I I Anikhoie live in a flood plain created by the Okavango Delta; the Deti live along the Boteti River. Several other peoples who are called San in the ethnographic literature speak Khoie languages and live in the hill, mopane (a type of tree) forest, and salt-pan environments of eastern Botswana.

Because the San groups are so diverse, estimating the population is difficult. In 1980, it was estimated that about 30,000 San-speaking peoples lived in Botswana, about 12,000 in Namibia, and about 8,000 in Angola—representing about 3% of the population of Botswana, 1.2% of that of Namibia, and 0.1% of Angola's people. As of 2008 the entire San population was estimated at about 100,000. That year, regions with significant San populations include Botswana (55,000), Namibia (27,000) and South Africa (10,000).

The Zhu I *ōasi*, who previously had a low birthrate and often waited years between births to conceive, now have one of the highest recorded birthrates in the world. In 1980, 6.7 live births were recorded for every 1,000 women of childbearing age. However, the infant mortality rate for the Zhu I *ōasi* is comparatively low among Africans; in 1980, it stood at 85 per 1,000 births. Life expectancy has been improving since the 1960s when it was 45 years for Zhu I *ōasi*. Now, demographers estimate that children who live to age 5 have a good chance of living into their 70s. Health ministry surveys done in Botswana suggest the Zhu I *ōasi* statistics are similar for other San groups.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The term “San” as an ethnographic term refers to both the contemporary and the pre-colonial southern African peoples who speak, or spoke, languages containing click consonants and who traditionally practiced a hunter-gatherer or forager way of life. They speak numerous dialects of a group of languages known for the characteristic “clicks” that can be heard in their pronunciation, all of which incorporate “click” sounds represented in writing by symbols such as ! or /.

Thus, San-speaking peoples do not constitute an ethnic group in the usual sense. The most widely known are those who call themselves “Zhu I òasi” (Kung or Juwasi in most ethnographies), although the other peoples mentioned above have also been extensively described; about 10 other groups have been well studied by linguists.

San languages are considered part of the Khoisan language family. Among the San languages are three sets. The first set is the Northern Khoisan Group. It consists of speakers of Zhu I oasi, Xu, and Au I I ei and was common to the area around Lake Ngami. This language today has few living speakers, and is distinct from other Khoisan languages in its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. The second set is known as the Central Khoisan Group. It includes speakers of G I wi, G I I ana, Kxoe, Nharo, and I I Anikhoë, plus several other dialects, Deti, Buga, Tshukhoë, and Kwa, among them. It is closely related to Nama (also known historically as Hottentots), and Hai I I om, a dialect of Nama. The languages within the Central Khoisan Group are generally quite similar to each other, though differences in vocabulary and sentence structure develop in regions that are further from the central area. The final group of languages is known as Southern Khoisan, and consists of languages spoken along the southern Kalahari area. The primary languages in this area are Koõ and Tsassi. All of the Khoisan languages are known for containing mostly mono- and bisyllabic words. They also are tonal in nature, and contain click consonants. In writing, symbols such as ! and | typically designate a click consonant, although Bantu orthography is starting to replace that practice by using c for | and q for !. The use of letters in place of symbols is occurring more frequently in eastern Botswana, and some of the Khoisan languages are being replaced altogether by Setswana. That replacement marks a further erosion of San culture.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

San stories grow out of an oral tradition in which dramas about natural phenomena, dancing, drumming, poetry, death, and struggles between justice and mercy provide insight into how the ancient San people lived. In one story, retained as part of an online collection of oral narratives, the sun and moon spar. Ultimately, however, the sun spares the backbone of the moon so that it may grow again. Other works capture feelings of sadness that come from separating from a friend, or a loss of community because of migration and a desire to return home.

### **5 RELIGION**

San religions are polytheistic. Many gods are worshipped; however, San people do acknowledge that one god is supreme. Religious rituals show respect for deities, wives and children of deities, and spirits of those who have died. Some San also refrain from tilling soil, believing that such an agricultur-

al practice would violate the world order established by god. San stories incorporate the role of gods in day-to-day life, with deities often serving as educators about good moral behavior. How gods are viewed varies with the different San peoples. The Zhu I òasi and the Koõ, for instance, regard the supreme god as playing the role of creator as well as administrator of earthly events. Lesser gods in many San groups are ancestors from their communities.

Many San practice a communal dance as a healing ritual for their community. The dance is believed to transform spiritual energy into medicine. During the dance, many participants go into a trance, and spiritual energy is called on to heal physical and psychological illnesses. Religious practitioners in San communities tend to be healers or shaman who will visit the world of spirits in order to create rain, ward off evil, and cure illness. Many San use blood, fat, and sweat from the eland (an African antelope) to generate spiritual energy, and images of the eland today often are made from the actual blood of the animal. The dancing that the San practice often involve performing in a circle around an animal carcass. As men and older women move their bodies in trance, young women clap and sing. The dancing occurs for hours, and leads often to an altered state of consciousness and hallucinations on the part of the shaman. The dances occur during occasional ceremonies or when the community is in crisis.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

No major holidays exist in indigenous San culture. San who have converted to Christianity or moved to more urban areas generally observe the same holidays as the dominant communities of those locales.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

The main ceremonies among San peoples are dance performances; these are usually attended by members of an extended family, but may include other relatives. The first menstruation of girls and the arrival of adolescence for boys traditionally were celebrated with dances initiating the youngsters into adulthood.

In the past, scar marks would be applied to the face, back, and chest of men and to the thighs of women to mark important life events, but these rituals are rarely performed today. Female genital mutilation also has not been recorded among the San people. Zhu I òasi, Nharo, and G I wi girls have a brief initiation at first menstruation, and Tshukhoë boys are circumcised.

Most San marriages are monogamous, although polygamous relationships are permitted for wealthier men. San parents generally arrange marriages of their children, in consultation with elders within their kinship groups. Some San groups—including the Zhu I òasi and Khoë—will allow cousins to marry. For others, the choice of more distant relatives as marital mates is preferred. If a child is not quickly born to a newly married couple, divorce is likely to occur.

The San treat death as a movement into a new spiritual realm. The Zhu I òasi understand death as a source of food for the supreme god. In this belief, humans are caused to die so the deity can eat. Some relatives of a newly deceased individual will believe that the god would try and cause the early deaths



of survivors out of a desire to eat them, as well. The worry of early death fades as time passes.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The San organize their households and their communities on the basis of kinship ties. The Zhu I *ōasi*, for instance, make use of what they call *hxaro* networks that link persons who are related through common great-grandparents. Sometimes, these networks create communal living arrangements. At other times, they create a sense of family among nomadic communities that span distances of 200 kilometers (125 miles) or more. Other San groups, including the Nharo and Khoe groups, have similar exchange networks. In the *hxaro* networks, marriages are arranged and certain familial obligations are imparted to participants. Gifts—called *kamasi* in Zhu I *ōasi* and *kamane* in Nharo—are given in separate exchanges. San peoples also create social networks based on individuals who might not be related by blood but are of a similar age, as well as name groups, which often were based on identification with particular clans.

San groups maintain order through the use of ridicule, verbal abuse, dispersal, and divination. These practices have replaced executions and murders that were communally sanctioned in the past. The communities use informal hearings to resolve minor disputes. More serious cases are referred to local and district courts.

San children often live in huts built next to those of their parents. Parents and elders teach children proper forms of behavior at an early age. As a result, children tend to be well behaved and are taught to play with each other and to treat members of the opposite sex with respect and kindness. The wisdom and knowledge about the past that elderly San possess also is greatly valued by the community.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Kalahari Desert makes living conditions for the San harsh. San shelters are made of sticks that are arranged in a circular form. Mats woven from reeds cover the sticks on top and along the sides. The idea behind such simple dwellings was to keep them simple and fast to take apart and re-assemble for when the San group was ready to move to a new locale. Such mat-covered huts are still used in Namaqualand.

Today, most San peoples live in or near villages that have small shops that provide for their needs. Groups in the central Kalahari, western Ngamiland, and at cattle posts, however, still rely on trades and itinerant visitors for goods. These groups often will travel several dozen kilometers by foot, donkey, or horseback for necessary supplies.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Each family resides in its own hut. As children reach adolescence, they often will move out of their parent's hut and build a separate dwelling nearby. If a family is polygynous, each wife will typically have her own hut. The extended family network remains important in San life and often families will live together in a homestead, where houses will be built close together and open up into a common area. Use of certain lands is often based on inherited rights that are based on past practices. However, to continue use of a particular area of land, one must reside on that area and participate in family affairs regularly. The current leader of a landholding group is generally re-

garded as the "owner" of the land and can grant permission to nonresidents to use the land. Permission generally is granted to family members but not to others.

A dozen homesteads, each one with a set of households for extended members, will make up a San settlement. Larger settlements often consist of 200 to 300 individuals. The homesteads typically will be located near seasonal rain pools where hunting and foraging of plants can take place, wells can be built, and livestock can be maintained. At times, many San groups, each speaking a different language, may reside in a single settlement, particularly in Ngamiland. Although homesteads are compactly built, a settlement may be more dispersed, with homesteads scattered apart by 2–3 kilometers (1–2 miles). Often, clients of a family or domestic help will live in huts adjacent to the families that employ them.

Both the arrangement of huts within homesteads and the collecting of homesteads into settlements reflects the interdependence that the San people regarded traditional as crucial to their survival. As foragers of food and hunters of meat, working in small groups who could quickly take down and build up an encampment was a means of living with little but always having enough. Rules based on names and age were frequently used to dispel confusion over relationships among family members. In recent years, many San have begun to settle into larger groups around water sources, and many have also settled into the communities of their neighbors.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional San clothing consists of a cloak known as a *kaross*, which is used to carry foods and supplies such as firewood, and loin cloths, sandals, and short aprons made of animal skin. All of the clothing is designed in a way that makes it easy to move quickly and carry basic household needs.

## 12 FOOD

Households within a San homestead may move apart during the winter when food supplies dwindle. The traditional San diet includes wild melons, roots, and berries that women gather. Men will use a bow and arrow to hunt wild animals. Arrowheads are covered with a poison made from an insect. San men are known for having great stamina. They are willing to follow an animal herd for days until they are close enough to use their bow and arrow to kill. A kill results in a feast. Families build a fire, and sing and dance in a trance-like ritual.

During hard times, women will chew on a tree bark that acts as a contraceptive to reduce the potential of having more children. San peoples also will eat snakes, lizards, and scorpions when necessary. They store water in ostrich shells, which they bury deep into the desert sands until the time comes to tap them for drinking.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditional San education occurred within families, with elders teaching children proper behavior. Today, many San children face challenges in learning how to balance a rapidly modernizing world against their community's traditional way of life.



*Jumanda Gakelebhone looks on while Roy Sesana is greeted by Kim Langbecker. The San (Bushmen) were locked in a legal battle over Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve and came to the United States for a month-long journey. (AP Images/Nick Ut)*

#### \*14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In 2006 archaeologists reported evidence of rituals practiced by the San around 70,000 years ago—the oldest indications of human rituals ever found. The ancient artwork and artifacts were discovered in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana in a cave that the San have traditionally used for rites associated with the python, an animal that plays a major role in their creation stories.

The long and rich cultural heritage that the San add to southern Africa has been exploited in recent years in an effort to promote tourism. Stereotypical depictions of the “Bushman hunter” that were first popularized in Western films such as “The Gods Must Be Crazy” have led to interest in developing more awareness and knowledge of San culture. However, the San people have drawn little benefit from these efforts. They suffer much poverty, social marginalization, and general indifference on the part of other Africans. A cultural center, known as !Khattu, was established north of Cape Town in 2006 in an effort to change the San situation. The center is run by San communities who use it to promote education of their people and entrepreneurship opportunities for members of their communities. The center also creates a place for scholars to help the San themselves learn more about their cultural background and past.

The center continues a legacy of San traditions. The community, for instance, has long valued modesty and egalitarianism.

Although elders within families and kinship groups do command some authority, there is economic or political differentiation among the San people themselves. The community has long valued cooperation between others. Material goods are usually shared communally. In many ways, that egalitarianism fits with the mobile nature of the San people. There is no point in accumulating wealth or material goods because the groups are always prepared to move when necessity arises. If they are burdened with material goods, that mobility is threatened.

#### 15 WORK

Traditionally the San have had a strong work ethic. Many continue that practice today and balance farming with traditional practices of hunting and foraging along with jobs in industry and trade. Other traditional work practices that the San engaged in included pottery making and metallurgy.

The hunter-gatherer nature of the San way of life continues to some extent. In the 1970s, for instance, hunting provided less than 20% of the diet of the Zhu I ǀasi and plants that were gathered by women contributed about 80% of the calories that were consumed by those who owned no livestock. San communities also fish along rivers, and hunt large antelope as well as giraffe. As communities have begun to rely more on farming, many families also create small products for sale or for trade, such as iron for arrow points and spears, metal containers,

glass beads, tobacco, sugar, coffee, and tea. Many San women also brew and sell beer.

Although some San men began working in South African gold and diamond mines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, those opportunities are no longer available to San speakers.

## 16 SPORTS

Few San people engage in games or sports activities in the Western sense.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Leisure activities include conversations, music, and gathering for ritual communal dances.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

San peoples are known for beads that they make from the ostrich eggshells. Many also create glass beadwork from glass beads obtained through trade. Three San artists (two Zhu I ōasi and one Nharo) have gained recognition as watercolorists, and San rock paintings remain famous as one of the world's oldest art forms.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The San have suffered displacement periodically over the centuries. Bantu tribes invaded their homelands around 500 AD and white colonists began fighting for control of the rich resources in southern Africa beginning in the 17th century. These invasions have caused the San to suffer discrimination, eviction from ancestral lands, murder, and oppression. Today, many San groups are perceived as backward and primitive, and face pressure to assimilate with more urban communities or to live more like sedentary agriculturalists. Governmental policies that restrict their movement and limit land-use rights continue to be implemented into the early twenty-first century.

Alcoholism and related social problems are said to be widespread and men have been imprisoned for unauthorized hunting.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although traditional responsibilities were gender based, the status of San women is relatively equal to that of San men. While men retain control over hunting, women determine when and where to gather traditional foods. Men tend to gain power and influence when they bring meat to their settlements. However, it is women who retain control over the daily life of the settlement when men go on hunting trips, often for days at a time.

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—by M. Njoroge

# SÃO TOMÉANS

**LOCATION:** São Tomé & Príncipe

**POPULATION:** 206,178

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese, Angolar, Príncipeense, São Toméense, Creole dialects

**RELIGION:** Christian (80% Roman Catholic, 15% Protestant, 3% Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

São Toméans live on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe off the Atlantic coast west of Equatorial Guinea and south of Cameroon and Nigeria. São Tomé is the Portuguese word for St. Thomas. Portuguese explorers stumbled upon São Tomé in the 1470s. The first wave of Portuguese settlers came to the island in the 1480s. It consisted of several thousand Jewish children forcibly taken from their parents and converted to Christianity. There were also exiled undesirables in Portuguese society, known as *degradados*, who were banished there, such as convicts and prostitutes. The new settlers soon brought African slaves to the islands to work on sugar plantations.

By decree of the king of Portugal, Jewish settlers and other *degradados* were allowed to marry slave women in order to increase the population of the island. Their offspring were promised freedom from slavery. The population increased dramatically, creating a large free African and mixed-race population. A new cultural entity was born from the intermixing and intermarriages between the Portuguese settlers and the African slaves. As such São Toméans are culturally a Luso-African creole people who trace their descent from Portuguese settlers and African slaves.

São Tomé and Príncipe remained a Portuguese colony until its independence in 1975. The Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP) took power from the Portuguese in 1975 and ruled the islands as a single-party state until in the elections of 1990 when the MLSTP was defeated in multi-party elections. During the post-independence era, there has been a substantial immigration of new arrivals from Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde.

Today, six different ethnic groups of São Toméans can be identified based on whom they descended from. The first group is the Mestico. These are mixed-blood descendants of African slaves brought to the islands from Benin, Gabon, and Congo during the early years of settlement. They are also known as “filhos da terra” or “sons of the land.” The second group is the Angolares, who are said to be descended from Angolan slaves who survived a 1540 shipwreck near the islands. Today, their main livelihood is fishing. The Forros form the third group and are descended from freed slaves after the abolishment of slavery. The fourth group is known by the name “Servicais.” These are contract laborers from Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde who have come to the island to make a living and hope to return home. Tongas, forming the fifth grouping, are the children of contract laborers who are born on the islands. The final group is the Europeans, largely of Portuguese origin. The São Toméans are thus made up of peoples with many different ethnic backgrounds.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The islands of São Tomé and Príncipe are located in central Africa about 200 miles west of the coast of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and south of Nigeria and Cameroon. They are located right on the equator in the Gulf of Guinea. They are two tiny volcanic islands with an area of about 400 square miles. The topography is mountainous with tropical climatic conditions and two distinct wet and dry seasons.

The mountainous topography of São Tomé rises to about 2,000 m (6,640 ft). This geography results in swift streams radiating down the mountains through lush forest and cropland on their way to the sea. Along the coastal areas the climate is hot and humid with average temperatures of up to 27°C (80°F). Given their tropical climate, the islands experience ample amounts of rainfall ranging from 101 cm to 508 cm (40 in to 200 in) per year, with the rainy season lasting from October through May. The volcanic soils are rich for the production of plantation crops such as sugar.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

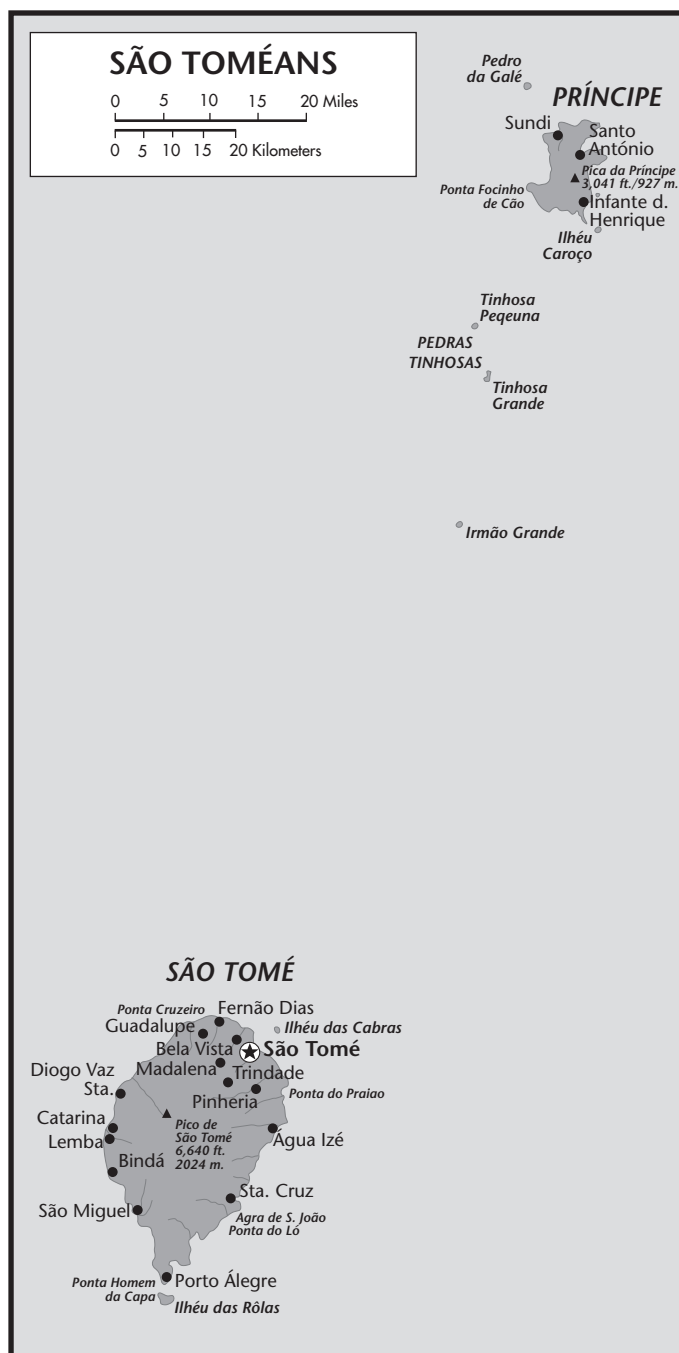
Portuguese is the official language and the language of education. However, there are several other dialects that are simply known as Luso-African creole spoken by Africans with quite a substantial number of words from Portuguese. São Tomeans refer to their creole language by different names, the most popular of which is Forro. Apart from Portuguese, there are three main creole dialects that are spoken by São Toméans on the two islands, namely Angolar, Príncipeense, and São Toméense. All three trace their origin from Kwa and Western Bantu languages. Angolar is spoken on the southern tip of São Tomé and has its origin in Kimbundu of Angola, Kongo, Bini, and Ndingi. Príncipeense is the creole spoken on the island of Príncipe, while São Toméense is the creole spoken on São Tomé.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Among the São Toméans, poetry has become a major vehicle for narrating historical events. Poetry and stories tell of the discovery of the islands by Portuguese explorers, early Portuguese settlements, and the slave trade that saw large numbers of Africans arriving on the islands to boost the islands' population. There is also a well developed set of plays and performances, all of which are designed to convey the rich history of the various ethnic groups that arrived on the islands in the 15th century. For example, masked performers in colorful attire accompanied by drums, flutes, and dancers entertain the audience with Portuguese historical plays.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

São Toméans are largely Christians, with the majority being Roman Catholics (80%). Protestant and evangelical churches account for 15% of the population and 3% are Muslim, with the rest having no religion or practicing some indigenous African traditional religion. Many of the African population still retain their beliefs in ancestral spirits that can be traced back to the homelands they were uprooted from during the slave trade era. It is, therefore, not surprising that while believing in Christianity, São Toméans of African descent also practice rituals that are not sanctioned by the Church. For example, the Forro ethnic group practice a communal ritual called *djambi* in which an entire neighborhood or village gathers to drum,



dance, and witness spirit possession. Traditional medicine men are also readily available to provide divination, healing, and protection from evil spirits.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

São Toméans celebrate a number of public and religious holidays throughout the year. The most important ones are New Year's Day on January 1, Martyrs' Day on February 3, Labor Day on May 1, Independence Day on July 12, Armed Forces Day on September 6, Agricultural Reform Day on September

30, All Saints Day on November 1, and Christmas Day on December 25.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage among São Toméans are largely determined by membership in the Roman Catholic Church. Soon after birth, the newborn is baptized as the first rite of passage. As one gets older, he or she goes through the Catholic Church rites of first Communion, confirmation, and so on. Children also attend the modern school system.

Some African traditions have survived the test of time as rites of passage. For example, the Forros believe that the spirits of the dead are never disconnected from the world of the living. They thus follow a strict form of funeral rites, similar to that practiced by Africans on the coastal zones of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. Once a death occurs, all adults except pregnant women are expected to participate in ceremonies of singing and dancing. A goat or a chicken is often sacrificed with the blood poured on the dead. At the cemetery, the corpse is buried in the grave in the fetal position to signify that it will rise and be reborn. Thus, the dead are considered to be part and parcel of society, necessitating the offering of sacrifices to placate the spirits of the dead until they are reborn.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Similar to other ethnic groups in Africa, São Toméans value good conduct. Age brings with it seniority and, therefore, respect from the community. Older men and women are considered to be the keepers of wisdom and are treated with great respect and deference. Men and women with many children and/or grandchildren are treated with great respect. When greeting each other, it is courteous for one to inquire about the health of an individual and his family.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Poverty is one of the major problems affecting the living conditions of São Toméans. Many live in abject poverty, but the rich oil finds off the waters of these two islands have great potential to raise wealth and, therefore, improve living conditions. However, corruption is another obstacle in translating the new-found wealth into something that benefits all.

Houses are typically made out of local materials, with brick or cinderblock walls and iron sheets as roofs. For the poor, the walls of houses are constructed either of mud or planks made from timber with the roofs covered by galvanized iron sheets. The poor live in shanty towns with few amenities and dilapidated buildings. Wealthy families live in modern houses or in old colonial bungalows. Run-down old colonial bungalows are often occupied by the poor.

Life expectancy in São Tomé is 63 years up from 56 years in 1970, a decent increase at a time when many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing declining life expectancies because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Almost all children receive vaccinations for tuberculosis, polio, measles, DPT, and Hepatitis B.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Given that almost 95% of São Toméans identify themselves as Christians, marriages are conducted in the Christian tradition

and are supposed to be monogamous. Polygamy is not an accepted norm, although it is practiced in rural areas to a lesser extent. In spite of this, many men and women have several partners concurrently or over the course of their lives. Poor women often have visiting relationships with several men. This affords them a little income to subsist on and take care of their children.

In rural areas, women are responsible for taking care of the household chores, such as farming, gathering wood and water, preparing food, and raising the children. Fertility rates in rural areas are quite high, with a total fertility rate of over four children per woman. In the city, women live better lives in comparison to their rural counterparts. They have fewer children and may compete for male-dominated jobs.

### **11 CLOTHING**

São Toméan dress is similar to Western forms of clothing. Men will normally wear pants, shirts, suits, neckties, shoes, and so on, depending on the occasion. Women also generally dress in Western fashions. Some women may dress in traditional garb, consisting of a blouse and a loin cloth that they wrap around their waists to below the knees. Boys and girls prefer to wear the omnipresent jeans and T-shirts. São Toméans will go to great lengths to wear colorful and descent clothing during religious ceremonies and holiday celebrations or festivals.

### **12 FOOD**

Given their location surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the main source of protein is fish. The fish is taken with carbohydrate rich tropical root crops, such as yams and cassava, as well as plantains and bananas. Tropical fruits, such as mangoes, guava, papaya, and citrus trees, are widespread and quite abundant. The favored national dish among the São Toméans is stew with traditional palm oil.

Spices are used to add taste and color to dishes. There is also a diversity of vegetables that are used in fixing delicious São Tomé dishes. Goat, lamb, beef, chicken, and wild monkey form the main meat dishes that are taken with rice, spices, raisins, almonds, and honey. One of the classic ways of preparing chicken is to stew it in a peanut and tomato sauce. Another tasty São Toméan meat dish is chicken marinated in an onion-mustard mixture. The Portuguese influence in food preparation can be seen during important occasions, such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals, when São Toméans prepare lavish tables with a large array of dishes for all to admire. For the wealthy families, the dishes may be served with bottled beverages and wines, while the poor have locally made palm wine and cane alcohol.

Most food needs to be imported. Many of the people are subsistence farmers, producing inadequate amounts for their families. As a result, a small proportion of the population suffers from malnutrition. Food insecurity is a direct result of the plantation system of agriculture that was introduced during the colonial era and continues to this very day, where cash crops, such as coffee and cocoa, take precedence over food production.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education is patterned after the Portuguese system of primary school, secondary school, and university, with Portuguese as the language of instruction. Although primary school is universal and compulsory, data shows that only 78% of chil-

dren are enrolled in school. One of the major challenges of the country's educational system is regional inequality between urban and rural areas. Urban schools enjoy higher standards of education in comparison to rural schools. For rural residents, secondary education is nonexistent. Some rural residents send their children to live with relatives in urban areas so they may continue their education. The country also faces a major challenge to rehabilitate its crumbling educational infrastructure.

Despite these difficulties, the country has a 79% literacy rate, one of the highest on the continent. Gender-parity in educational attainment is also near equal. The girls-to-boys ratio was 0.92 in 2000. Over 68% of children finish elementary school, but there is a high drop-out rate at the secondary level, due to their unavailability in rural areas. Up until 1996, there were no institutions of higher education on the islands. The only way for a high school graduate to receive university education was to go abroad, something many could not afford. However, since 1996 the Ministry of Education has established two institutions of higher learning in São Tomé and Príncipe. The first one, created in 1994, is private and the second one, established in 1997, is public.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Centuries of Portuguese colonialism makes the country a homogeneous cultural entity. The government has attempted to stress the country's African heritage with little success. Language, family structure, and religion are basically Portuguese. However, many African elements have been adopted in the cooking, customs, beliefs, and dress of the common people. The poorer individuals speak creole, a language that traces its origin from several Bantu languages, but with many Portuguese words.

São Tomé is a party to the World Heritage Convention, whose main aim is to preserve historic sites. For example, in the framework of the Slave Route Project, the country has participated in the implementation of the Tourism of Memory program. Storytelling reflects this heritage, with many of the stories recounting the slave trade experience. Poetry is the most highly developed form of literary expression, with historical events as the main subject. Folktales and short stories are also part of the cultural heritage of São Toméans.

The mixture of Portuguese and African heritage is clearly illustrated in dance and music. During festivals, masked dancers in colorful attire are accompanied by drums and flutes to entertain the audience. Drama is often conducted to portray Portuguese historical events. The young people prefer to dance to imported music, such as the samba from Brazil and popular music from the United States and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### **15 WORK**

Subsistence agriculture and fishing are the main activities for the majority of the people on the islands. Subsistence crops grown for local consumption include root crops, vegetables, plantains, and bananas. Industries are virtually nonexistent, except for a few processing plants for food, beverages, and soap. The timber industry through logging has contributed to the economy, but it has resulted in deforestation of pristine tropical rainforests. The two islands of São Tomé and Príncipe are endowed with natural beauty and a relatively safe environment. This could propel the country into a tourist haven, but it

still remains to be realized due to unreliable air transportation to the islands. The international community is also unaware of the existence of these two islands, as there is rarely any news about them, much less travel brochures. There has been some investment in hotels and other tourist facilities in recent years.

The country is heavily dependent on an export-oriented plantation economy of cash crops, such as cocoa and coffee. In turn it imports rice, beans, and salt fish to feed the plantation workers. Cocoa is the major export, accounting for over 90% of foreign exchange earnings. Other export crops grown on the plantations include coffee, coconuts, and palm kernels.

Recently the country has run into some fortune. Billions of barrels of oil are believed to be present off its shores. Should the oil reserves come to fruition, São Tomé's economy will certainly go through massive transformation overnight. Drilling of the oil reserves is under way and commercial production is expected to begin within a few years.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular sport in São Tomé. Although the country has a national soccer team, it has not been active in international sports and has recently been removed from the FIFA World Rankings list. There are several other popular sporting activities, such as basketball, handball, volleyball, and track.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are two television stations in São Tomé and Príncipe to provide entertainment to its citizens. Wealthy families may have access to a satellite dish that connects them to what is happening throughout the world.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Crafts are an area of interest for the government, which is trying to adapt local production to the demands of the international market. Many of the paintings by local artists depict important historical folk scenes. These paintings can be viewed at the Francisco Tenreiro Cultural Center or the National Museum.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Among the major challenges facing São Toméans in the 21st century are poverty, food insecurity, and the prevalence of malaria. Poverty is the major cause of petty theft on the islands. Consumer goods are also in short supply. Malaria remains one of the biggest health problems, although initiatives begun in 2000 have helped reduce the number of cases. There have also been recurrences of cholera.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In terms of education, São Tomé has achieved gender equality in primary school education. Nevertheless, women are still under-represented in the job and the political sectors. Although the country had a female prime minister, women are rarely represented in politics, with only 4 out of 55 deputies being women in the parliament in 2008. Data also shows that the labor participation rate was 39% for women against 80% for men. Traditional beliefs and a high rate of teenage pregnancies often reduce women's educational and economic opportunities.

Within the family, women exercise some control over their resources. Women are able to own businesses that are run independently of the husband or other male relatives. Some women have been able to accumulate a large amount of cash through the selling of produce and fish at markets. This cash is managed by the women independent of the men.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# SENEGALESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** sen-uh-guh-LEEZ

**LOCATION:** Senegal

**POPULATION:** 12.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** French; Wolof; 38 African languages

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni, with traditional aspects); Roman Catholicism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Fulani; Malinke

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Senegal has a rich precolonial history with a rare degree of unity. The lands now comprising Senegal once were part of three successive empires: Ghana, of which the Tekroun King was a vassal; Mali, which brought Muslim culture and letters, peace, and trade to the region until AD 1350; and Songhai, which reached its apex nearly 200 years later. In the 11th century, the Fulani and Tukolor ethnic groups converted to Islam and later waged jihads (religious wars) over a period of 225 years. Senegalese culture strongly reflects influences from these Islamic rulers and conquerors.

In 1444, Portuguese sailors became the first Europeans to visit the Senegalese coast. The French later founded the Senegal colony in 1637, making it the oldest and longest-lasting French colony in Africa. The slave trade, which flourished from the 1600s until 1848, devastated this area. Today one sees remnants of this tragic epoch in the island fortress of Gorée off the coast from the capital, Dakar. Gorée had served as one of West Africa's main slavery depots.

As the French advanced their territorial claims eastward, Wolof states resisted them in the 1880s, but eventually succumbed to superior military force. In 1889, an agreement with the British created The Gambia, a country along the valley of the navigable Gambia River that is almost entirely surrounded by Senegal. The location of The Gambia has had the negative effect of cutting off the southern Senegalese province of Casamance. Dakar acquired added importance when the French made it the capital of their West African territories in 1902. Under Léopold Senghor, who was a member of the Académie Française and a French parliamentarian, Senegal declared its independence in 1960. Senegal formed confederate governments twice, first with Mali (1958–60), and then with Gambia (1982–89).

In 1975 Senegal became one of Africa's first countries to allow a political opposition. For 40 years, however, a de facto government ruling party—the Socialist Party—dominated the competition. Then in 2000 President Abdoulaye Wade was elected, marking one of Africa's first civilian transfers of power to an opposition party. Wade was reelected in February 2007, but 12 opposition parties boycotted the June 2007 legislative polls alleging fraud. The boycott gave 131 of 150 seats in Parliament to the ruling coalition, SOPI, and in the 100-member Senate (a new legislative body), the opposition gained virtually no seats. In May 2008 press reports circulated that Wade (in his second and last term) was considering tampering with the two, five-year term limit rule, something other African leaders have done to prolong their hold on power.

Senegal has had mostly peaceful relations with its neighbors, although a brief border conflict (1989–90) with Mauri-

tania to the north resulted in the expulsion of nationals from both sides. However, the most serious threat to stability has been the low-level insurgency in the southern region of Casamance where rebels have been fighting a secessionist war with the government since 1984.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located at the westernmost point of Africa, Senegal has a total area of 196,713 sq km (75,951 sq mi), making it smaller than the US state of South Dakota. Senegal shares borders with Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia. Much of Senegal is very arid with scattered trees and scrub covering low, rolling plains that become foothills in the southeast that reach an altitude of 581 m (1,906 ft). Four main rivers run east to west to the Atlantic Ocean. Three of these—the Saloum, Gambia, and Casamance—form large estuaries inland. The Casamance runs through a marshy basin before reaching the ocean.

The climate varies greatly from north to south, but rains fall throughout the country from December to April. Hot, dry, Harmattan winds blow from the Sahara Desert during the summer. Natural resources include phosphates, iron ore, manganese, salt, and oil. However, seasonal flooding, overgrazing, and deforestation contribute to environmental erosion and desertification.

In 2008, estimates placed Senegal's population at 12.8 million, growing at a rate of 2.6%. Senegalese are members of more than 20 ethnic groups, which for the most part have managed to live harmoniously together. The largest is Wolof (43%), followed by Fulani (24%), Serer (15%), and lesser groups including Toucouleur, Diola, Malinke, and Soninke. Large numbers of Lebanese traders live in the cities.

## 3 LANGUAGE

French is the official language of Senegal, but most people speak Wolof. Besides French and Wolof, people speak the language of their ethnic group, such as Pulaar, Serer, and 38 different African languages.

## 4 FOLKLORE

In Senegalese society, the most accomplished storytellers are professional African bards, or *griots*. In a way, they are like the European minstrel of the Middle Ages. They are Africa's renaissance women and men, combining the historian, poet, musician, and entertainer all into one person. They must be familiar with history, know many people, and talk about them diplomatically, but honestly and critically. Griots use props, flutes, harps, and break into song as they perform. No ceremony or celebration of consequence is held without them.

Senegal's well-known modern statesman, Léopold Senghor, was also an accomplished poet. He was Senegal's first president and the founder of the negritude movement, a revival of the African cultural past. A poet, academic, and politician of great influence, Senghor left a lasting imprint on Senegal, Africa, and the African diaspora. Someday griots will recount his accomplishments much as they do the deeds of past heroes. Senegal's modern griot is Sembene Ousman, whose stories and films in French, Wolof, and Diola chronicle politics and social life in Senegal and France (see Cultural Heritage).





## 5 RELIGION

The Senegalese are overwhelmingly Muslim. More than 90% of the population belongs to the Sunni branch of Islam. Less than 10% is Christian, mainly Roman Catholic. Religious practice is highly tolerant, and clashes between members of different faiths for religious reasons are virtually unknown.

*Marabouts* play a unique role in Senegalese society. In orthodox Muslim communities, marabouts are teachers of the faith, and where indigenous beliefs mix with Islam, they are also diviners and fetishers. In Senegal, they became intermediaries between Allah and the faithful. Under the French, they assumed leadership of administrative units (*cantons*), replacing traditional ethnic chiefs. Their political influence remains strong, particularly in determining the outcomes of elections in the hinterlands.

As in many colonized cultures, people overlay their traditional beliefs with the imposed religion, such as Islam. The Wolof typically wear protective amulets or *gris-gris* to overpower evil spirits. Whereas the small leather pouches once contained herbs and medicines, they now hold verses of the Quran. The Bassari in the east and the Diolas to the south retain their animist beliefs more than the other groups.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Independence Day is April 4. Muslims celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan by feasting for three days. Catholics celebrate Easter and Christmas. Each region has its own secular and traditional folk feasts according to its own calendar. In

Casamance, Oussouye hosts an annual royal feast day, which occurs at the end of the agricultural season and before the beginning of the school year. It is announced in Dakar, and people from the region, as well as others who just want to see the spectacle, come. The highlight of the feast is a fight featuring young women, one of whom may be chosen by the king to spend the night in the sacred woods in the heart of the forest.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Senegalese today follow Islamic custom in their rites of passage, including baptism, circumcision, marriage, and death. Each passage marks a part of the cycle culminating in passage to the spirit world. To this end, people and communities constantly celebrate life events. Griots are an integral part of these occasions.

In ancient times, Senegalese peoples celebrated the arrival of puberty with initiation rites. The minority populations in the south still organize rites of initiation, lasting from one to three months during the long school vacations. The purpose of initiation is to build courage and endurance, communicate traditional and practical knowledge of life, and transfer responsibility to a younger generation. Some of the knowledge is known only to males, and therefore cannot be shared with females or with the uninitiated. The initiation begins with circumcision, binding the boys by blood. Elders initiate boys of the same age, dividing them into age sets or groups. These sets become "fraternities" for life. Members have both the duty to help each other and the right to reprimand each other for improper behavior. Girls pass through similar processes, and many also are circumcised. However, for girls, this practice is increasingly questioned for reasons of health and sexual fulfillment.

Initiation rites often mark occasions of great community celebration. The Bassari, for example, bring down sacred masks from the mountains that represent supernatural powers. Dancers wearing these masks engage the newly circumcised adolescents in a mock battle, which becomes dance, song, and feasting.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greeting is an extremely important custom and can last for several minutes. Indeed, it is quite possible that if you do not greet someone and inquire after their health, family, and well-being, he or she will not talk to you. The French custom where men and women kiss three times on the cheeks is common in Dakar and in towns but much less so in villages. Friends and strangers typically greet each other by offering a handshake with the right hand, sometimes touching the left hand to the right arm. However, men and women do not shake each other's hands. A common Wolof exchange (with 5–10 additional inquiries) would be as follows, with praise for Allah interspersed throughout the greetings:

"Nanga def?" (How does it go?)

"Mangi fii rekk." (I am here only.)

"Nunga Fe." (They are there.)

"Mbaa sa yaram jamm." (I hope your body is at peace.)

"Jamm rekk." (Peace only.)

"Alhumduillah." (Praise be to Allah.)

As in many African societies, Senegalese give much respect to age and status. It would be impolite to make eye contact



Senegalese fishermen. Senegal's national dish is *Tiebou Dienn*, a type of fish stew. (Carolyn Fischer)

with an elder, a person of higher status, or someone of the opposite sex. Traditional girls and women normally would curtsy to elders out of respect. In Muslim society, the right hand is used to pass and to take objects. Pointing is considered rude, but people may point with their tongues.

People are accustomed to visiting each other unannounced. They never consider impromptu visits to be rude or an inconvenience. Senegalese do not permit a visitor to leave without sharing a meal, having tea, or spending the night. The Senegalese refer to this hospitality as *Terranga*.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The government continues to make reforms to the economy, although jobs are hard to find leaving many young Senegalese to migrate out of Senegal in search of employment and a better life elsewhere. In 2006–07 Dakar experienced regular power outages, and urban centers around the country continued to struggle with inadequate water supply, poor sanitation, and environmental degradation. In general, high population growth outstrips the capacity of the government to provide basic services. Inflation and a high cost of living, especially in Dakar, also made life difficult for the average family.

Nonetheless, living conditions for the middle- and upper-middle class have reached very comfortable levels in some Dakar neighborhoods. In addition, many affluent Dakarais have beach houses on the *petite cote* (outside Dakar), and a mix of Senegalese and foreigners—mostly French—are buying condo-

miniums in resort areas on the coast. Their lifestyles, however, are not reflective of average living conditions. Most people in urban and peri-urban areas live in small, cramped cinder-block housing, which may have indoor plumbing, but might also depend on outdoor kitchens, standpipes, and latrines. In rural areas, many houses are made of local materials such as mud brick, millet stalks, or reeds, and roofs of thatch. Dirt floors are common, but are swept daily. As families acquire the means, they build more durable structures of concrete and galvanized iron. Partially finished houses are a common sight because people build them in stages as money comes in.

In arid rural areas, women and girls do the washing at wells. Few people have access to streams and rivers and still fewer to plumbing. A daily chore for women and girls is going to the well, which is traditionally hand-dug, to fetch water for the family. The well is often at the center of the village and serves as a social gathering place. The huge plastic tubs are filled with water and carried on top of the head to some sort of holding tank (or old oil drum) in the family compound. In the cities, people have access to indoor plumbing or may share a communal faucet.

Senegal has one of the best paved road networks in Africa, but it still only has four miles of expressway (in Dakar), and about 2,500 miles of paved roads overall. The most common form of transportation is by bush taxi—French Peugeot 504s—which take up to seven passengers just about anywhere in the country. Colorful pickup trucks painted with designs

and inscriptions, outfitted with truck caps and wooden plank benches, are also available. These carry as many as 14 to 24 passengers. Their roof racks hold suitcases, packages, and small livestock.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Senegalese live in compounds with their extended families. Nuclear families live in their own huts. The elders are highly respected. Besides hauling water, women gather firewood and cook the meals. Few women work outside the home, unless it is to cultivate family gardens and fields, or to sell goods at the market. Men increasingly leave their villages and homes during the dry season to look for work in the cities.

Western ideas take root more easily where traditional family influences are absent or less prevalent. This is noticeable in Dakar where more girls and women speak French, and where women hold political offices, practice law or medicine, and teach. As society changes, so also must laws. Senegal permits a couple to adopt an optional prenuptial agreement limiting the number of wives a husband will take during his marriage either to one or two. Divorce is consensual. Women have the right to initiate a divorce process, though in practice they seldom do.

## 11 CLOTHING

In Senegalese society, personal appearance is very important. Most urban men and women wear Western-style clothing. Men typically wear shirts and trousers and wear suits for dress occasions. Women wear dresses. One rarely sees women in jeans or pants. Similarly, shorts are reserved for children, unless they are worn for sports. In more traditional settings, people wear *boubous*, loose-fitting cotton tunics with large openings under the arm. Men wear cotton trousers underneath, while women wear sarongs. With much imagination, women tie matching headscarves or turbans to complement their boubous. For men, footwear includes open or closed and pointed leather sandals, according to the occasion. Women have a greater variety of footwear including colorful, decorated sandals. Depending on the purpose of the boubou, it may be elaborately embroidered and could cost \$200 to \$300.

## 12 FOOD

Senegal's staple foods include rice, corn, millet, sorghum, peanuts, and beans. These foods are typically found throughout Africa at this latitude. Milk and sugar also form an important part of the diet for some people and certain ethnic groups. The Senegalese generally eat three meals a day, with the main meal at about 1:00 pm, and the evening meal served late. In traditional households, men, women, and children usually eat separately. It is not polite to make eye contact while eating. Senegalese eat from a communal platter or large bowl with the right hand, as is the Muslim custom. Muslim adults, and children aged 12 and older, do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.

Senegal is famous for its national dish, *Tiébou Dienn* (pronounced "Cheb-oo Jen"). The dish can be made as simply or as elaborately as desired. Basically, it is a fish stew cooked in cilantro, scallions, garlic, pepper, onions, tomato paste, bouillon cubes, and oil. The stew is mixed with squash, sweet potatoes, okra, tamarind, and different kinds of peppers. People eat this on rice, which has been cooked in the fish broth. The Wolof

people are also known for their *Mbaxal-u-Saloum*, a spicy tomato, peanut, and dried fish sauce with rice. Another popular dish is *Menue*, cornmeal mush, served with *baloumbum*, a peanut sauce.

Meat is a sign of wealth, as is oil. Special occasions usually require a meat dish, but one might also serve Yassa chicken. The chicken is marinated in a sauce of red vinegar, lemon juice, red chili peppers, bouillon cubes, and soy sauce, and then grilled over charcoal. It is served with heaps of sliced browned onions over cooked rice, on a platter placed on a cloth spread on the ground. Guests sit or squat around the tray, after having washed their hands and removed their shoes. Using their right hands, they gather a morsel of chicken, sauce, and rice from the part of the tray in front of them, squeeze it gently into a compact ball, and eat.

## 13 EDUCATION

Senegalese place a high value on education, but the cost of living, school fees, and the need for children to help with family income deter most children from attending beyond the primary level. Literacy is about 40%, and only about 29% of women and girls can read and write in French. Many girls leave school to wed. Parents of means send their children away to live with relatives in a town where schools are better organized and commuting is easier. In addition to formal schooling, the majority of children attend Quranic (Muslim) schools in the afternoons or evenings where they learn Arabic and memorize portions of the Quran. Technical schools offer training in dyeing, hotel management, secretarial work, and other trades.

In the mandatory formal system, primary school begins with a two-year initiation class called *Ceci*. At the end of four more years, pupils take a high-school qualifying exam. In the French system, classes begin with Class Six, counting down to Class One. A final year follows, which prepares the student for the state baccalaureate exam. But few students reach this level, and an even smaller percentage of high school graduates continues at the University of Dakar, which in Africa is quite prestigious. Before independence, Africans from all over French West Africa came to study public administration at the famous William Ponty school.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Senegal has one of the richest bodies of written and film literature in all of Africa. Leopold Senghor was a leading poet and philosopher and the author of the *négritude* movement. Similar to the Harlem Renaissance school in the United States, *négritude* aimed to restore dignity and pride to African peoples through a revival of their cultural past. Senegalese filmmakers such as Sembene Ousman and Safi Faye are internationally famous.

Literature and film notwithstanding, the title of Senegal's national anthem offers a clue to Senegalese musical culture: "Pluck your Koras, Strike the Balafons." The traditional *kora*, a stringed calabash (gourd) instrument, symbolizes the bard tradition in the country. A unique percussion sound is made with a small drum held under the arm, which can be pressed against the body to produce different pitches. The goatskin drumhead is hit by a wooden stick with a curved end.

Senegalese musicians have adapted traditional music by using electric and acoustic guitars, keyboards, and a variety of drums. Several Senegalese rap groups in Dakar have evolved



Some 90% of Senegalese belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The remaining 10% are Roman Catholic. (David Johnson)

from the special blend of Western and African musical traditions. In particular, *griots* (bards) perform traditional Senegalese rap songs to tell stories about society, much like ancient griots narrated the lives of ancient kings.

One of the best known Senegalese performers is Youssou N'Dour. N'Dour is a leader in popular world music, and sings in English, French, Fulani, and Serer, besides his native Wolof. He has collaborated with Paul Simon (*Graceland*), Peter Gabriel (*So*), Neneh Cherry, and Branford Marsalis.

### **15 WORK**

Rural Senegalese typically work in subsistence agriculture or grow cash crops for export such as peanuts and cotton. Senegal is well known for its peanut production in the Kaolack region. Senegal has a small industrial sector (less than 10%), and because of its long dry season, limited amounts of arable land (27%). About one in four people works in the service sector, but half of the workforce is un- or underemployed. Tourism is important, accounting for about 60% of the gross domestic product. Most urban dwellers work in the informal sector as petty traders and small service providers. They peddle clothing, watches, and electronic goods; polish and repair shoes, tailor shirts, cut hair, and sell goods at market. In downtown areas, it is typical to be approached constantly by peddlers. Motorists caught in traffic can buy anything from apples to brooms from roadside hawkers.

### **16 SPORTS**

Soccer, basketball, track and field, and jogging all are popular sports in Senegal. The national soccer team, the Lions, has produced some world-class players, reaching the World Cup quarter-finals in 2002. Senegal is also known for its traditional wrestling—*Laamb* in Wolof. It is renowned especially among the Serer people. In ancient times, wrestlers competed before the king and queen in village squares. Singers, dancers, and storytellers embellished the match. Wrestlers wore amulets to ward off evil spirits and black magic from their opponents. Nowadays, the tradition remains strong. As in former times, *griots* (bards) praise the victors in song and dance. Drumming, dancing, singing, and a *marabout's jujū* (religious leader's fetish magic) are vital to the competition.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Dakar offers a variety of recreation from television to movies, to DVD rentals, night clubs, and sporting events. Foreign and national films are enjoyed, especially in the towns where technology is more advanced. Dakar popular music is enjoyed and danced to widely throughout the country by teenagers, and adults, too. Some 20 FM stations have emerged since the 1990s, with several Dakar stations playing hip-hop music. The Internet also has blossomed, and Internet cafés are now popular meeting spots in every town around the country.

The more traditional pastimes such as socializing and visiting people in their homes remain popular as well. Older men

enjoy playing checkers. *Griots* (bards) entertain at ceremonies such as baptisms and marriages. Cultural events such as folk ballets, theater productions, or local dance troupes also provide recreational outlets. However, in many rural areas, *marabouts* (religious leaders) frown upon dancing and sometimes do not allow drumming or dancing in their villages.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Each region of Senegal has its own traditional crafts. Senegal's many tourists have given a boost to folk art and crafts cottage industry. One finds jewelry, baskets, pottery, handwoven fabrics, glass paintings, and woodcarvings. Handcrafted jewelry includes gold, silver, and bronze. Bead and amber necklaces, which Fulani women traditionally wore, are also popular. Tourist items such as handbags, clothing, and footwear are made from locally printed fabrics and leather. Craftspeople fashion animal skins, such as iguana and crocodile, into belts and shoes.

Although tourists are attracted to the decorative quality of the *kora* (traditional gourd instrument), Senegalese artisans build professional instruments to meet local demand. Their exquisite koras are made from huge calabashes (gourds), through which a 1.5-m (5-ft) wooden pole is set. The strings are stretched from the calabash (the sound chamber) to the pole on which they are tied. The musician faces the instrument, grasps two wooden pegs that serve as handles, and plucks the strings mainly with the thumbs. The calabashes have eye-catching decorations of brass and silver buttons and traditional designs. A hole about 12 cm (5 in) across in the side of the calabash serves to project the sound, and also makes a convenient "hat" into which tips can be placed.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Senegal's most basic social problems are related to its economic constraints. The widespread use of marijuana among young men and migration to Europe are indications of the severity of the problem. Some villages are populated only by women, children, and old men. Another indication is the never-ending secessionist struggle in Casamance. On the one hand, Casamance has been the country's most distant and neglected province, but on the other is unable to develop as long as rebels and splinter groups kill civilians, commit robberies and harass local populations. Government forces now fight not only against rebels of the Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC), but also with the Movement of the Liberation of the People of the Casamance and with Atika, another separatist movement led by Salif Sadio.

Senegal does not incarcerate as many of its citizens as does the United States, but its jails hold twice the number of prisoners they were designed to hold. Because of corruption and weak law enforcement, traders administer mob justice on thieves, and there are reports of domestic violence, child abuse, child marriage, child trafficking, abusive child labor and male and female infanticide. While these practices may get reported to the authorities, the police often do nothing and the courts fail to prosecute perpetrators.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women face discrimination, especially in rural areas where traditional customs and polygynous relationships are the norm. Indeed, one in two marriages in the hinterlands are po-

lygynous, and unless agreed to beforehand, husbands do not need to notify or seek consent of their wives to enter into subsequent marriages. Even though the law proscribes marriages for girls under 16, it is not uncommon in rural areas for girls 13–15 years old to be married as they represent a means of income via the brideprice. Female genital mutilation (FMG) is also widespread, despite efforts by government officials to eradicate it. Programs implemented by NGOs such as TOSTAN to create more awareness of the health risks associated with it, have reduced the incidence of FMG, but the practice remains deeply ingrained in the culture. Since the man is the head of the household, women cannot take legal responsibility for children, and women have difficulty inheriting and purchasing property. In addition to running the household, they also do 85% of the agricultural work.

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—by R. Groelsema

# SEYCHELLOIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** say-shel-WAH

**LOCATION:** Seychelles Islands

**POPULATION:** 82,247

**LANGUAGE:** Creole, English, and French (official languages);  
Gurijati; Chinese; other European and Oriental languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholicism)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Seychelles Islands take their name from the Viconte Moreau de Seychelles, controller-general of finance in the reign of Louis XV of France. A French possession until 1814, the Seychelles then became a dependent of Mauritius under the British and then a British crown colony in 1903. Early European settlers cut down and sold the hardwood trees of the islands, altering the original ecology and replacing it with a plantation economy. After the abolition of slavery in 1834, Africans worked mainly as sharecroppers, traders, fisherfolk, artisans, and wage laborers. Seychelles gained its independence from Britain in 1976.

From 1977 to 1993, Seychelles was an authoritarian, one-party socialist state. The country's 1979 constitution failed to provide for basic human rights, including them instead in a preamble as a goal of the Seychellois people. France-Albert René took power in a coup in 1977, and intimidated dissidents and opponents by threatening indefinite imprisonment, exile, or confiscation of the property of his political opponents. Police brutality, though not widespread, occurred as a result of René's unchecked power. In June 1993, Seychellois voted for a new constitution, and in July 1993 they voted in the country's first free and fair multiparty elections since the coup. René emerged victorious and was re-elected in 2001. He later surprised many observers when he stepped down in favor of his vice president, James Michel, in 2004. In July 2006 Michel outpolled Wavel Ramkalawan and was elected to a five-year term. His government continues to maintain control over public sector jobs and contracts.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Republic of Seychelles is one of the world's smallest nations in size and population. It has a total land area of only 444 sq km (171 sq mi), about two-and-a-half times the size of Washington, D.C. The population measures only 82,247 (2008 estimate). The exact number of islands is unknown but has been estimated at 115, of which about 41 are granitic and the remainder coralline. The republic also includes numerous rocks and small cays. Hills up to 940 m (3,084 ft) high characterize the granite islands, with some narrow coastal plains. The granitic islands are of striking scenic beauty. Coral reefs are found on the east coast, but the coral islands are without fresh water. The tropical climate varies little, rainfall is balanced throughout the year, and temperature is tempered by monsoon ocean breezes.

Mahé, the main island, is the largest at 25 km (15.5 mi) long and 8 km (5 mi) wide, with an area of about 148 sq km (57 sq mi). About 90% of all Seychellois live on Mahé. It contains the capital and only city, Victoria, and the only port, with a population somewhat over 25,000 people (2008 estimate). Vic-

toria lies approximately 1,600 km (1,000 mi) east of Mombasa, Kenya; 2,750 km (1,700 mi) southwest of Bombay; 1,700 km (1,060 mi) north of Mauritius; and 885 km (550 mi) northeast of Madagascar. The only other important islands by virtue of size and population are Praslin and La Digue, situated about 50 km (30 mi) to the northeast of Mahé. The population of the outer coralline group is only about 500 people, mainly composed of plantation workers gathering coconuts for copra. To restrict population growth on Mahé, the government has encouraged people to move to Praslin and other islands where water is available. The population growth rate nationally is only 0.43%.

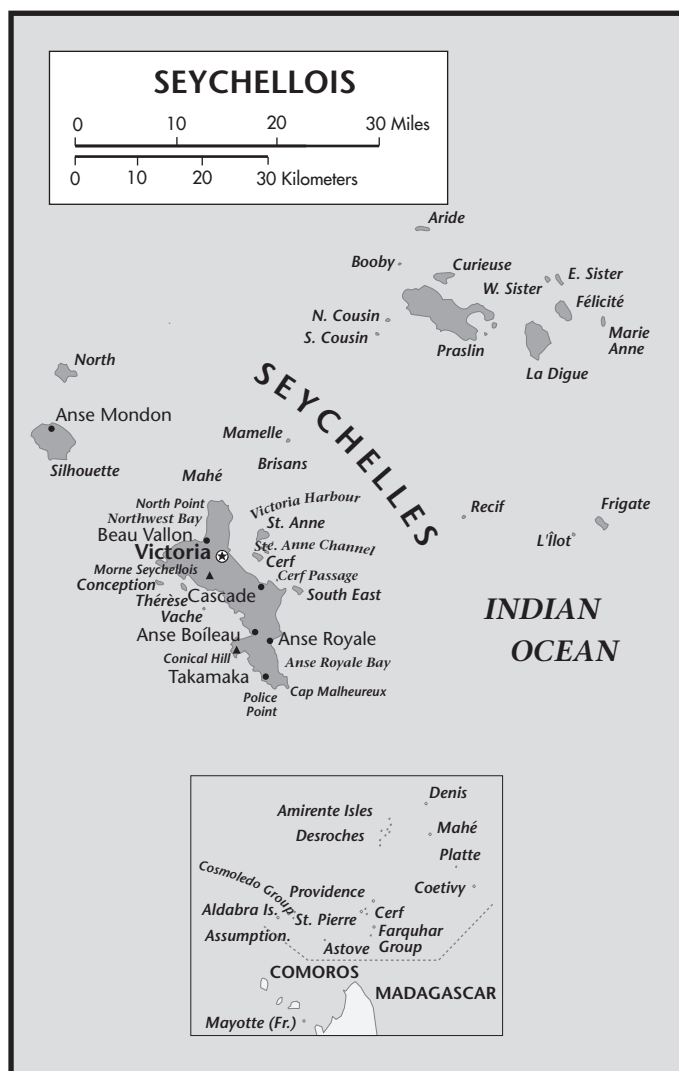
Most of the population is a relatively homogeneous mixture of African, European, Indian, and Chinese. The majority is Black, having Black African ancestors who arrived on the islands in the 18 and 19th centuries. Chinese were attracted to the islands by small trade. Then British and French colonials came. The Malabards from Maurice Islands and India arrived after the abolition of slavery. Over time, the groups have intermarried, creating an assortment of racial characteristics and numerous shades of complexion. The blending is such that it is impossible to define a typical Seychellois.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Seychellois have three official languages: Creole, English, and French. Ninety-six per cent of the population speaks Creole; 45%, English; 37%, French; 0.5%, Gurijati; 0.4%, Chinese; 0.9%, other Oriental languages; and 0.6%, other European languages. Creole was adopted as the first official language in 1981. English is the second official language, and French is the third. The government has emphasized Creole to facilitate reading among primary school pupils and to help establish a distinct culture and heritage. Opponents of the René government thought it a mistake to formalize Creole, which according to them had no standardized spelling system. They regarded it as a great advantage for Seychellois to be bilingual in French and English.

Creole in Seychelles developed from dialects of southwest France spoken by the original settlers. It consists basically of a French vocabulary with a few Malagasy, Bantu, English, and Hindi words and has a mixture of Bantu and French syntax. Very little Seychelles Creole literature exists. The development of an orthography (spelling system) of the language was completed in 1981. The government-backed Kreol Institute promotes the use of Creole by developing a dictionary, sponsoring literary competitions, giving instruction in translation, and preparing course materials to teach Creole to foreigners.

The great majority of younger Seychellois read English, which is the language of government and commerce. It is the language of the People's Assembly, although speakers may also use Creole or French. The principal newspapers carry articles in all three languages. Seychellois Radio and Television Broadcasting both offer programs in Creole, English, and French. Although discouraged by the René regime as a colonialist language, French continues to carry prestige. It is the language of the Roman Catholic Church, and it is used by older people in correspondence. Some 40% of television transmissions are in French—beamed by satellite to an earth station provided by the French government—and most Seychellois can speak and understand the language.



#### 4 FOLKLORE

Seychellois folklore is as rich as its people's cultural heritage. Accomplished storytellers and singers teach people their culture and social mores through fables, songs, and proverbs. The Creole proverbs are interesting also for the way they demonstrate linguistic derivation. For example, "Sak vid pa kapab debout" (One doesn't work on an empty stomach) translated literally reads "an empty bag will not stand up on its own."

Storytelling becomes more dramatic at night in the light of a bonfire or under a full moon. Moon shadows from the palm trees, and moonlight glinting from the palm fronds, create a natural theatrical atmosphere for the *moutia* performance. The *moutia* began as African slave dancing and improvisational storytelling, which provided a form of release after a long day of laboring for French colonial masters. Two men opened with dialogues on the hard labors of the day. Women then joined in the dance, to much singing and chanting. The pure form has rarely been seen by outsiders, but contemporary performances have become popularized. They still involve dancing with typical African rhythms and hip movements and musicians playing drums from hollowed-out coconut trunks covered with goatskins. The drums are heated by a palm frond fire before

the performance to give the desired tone. As in the past, drinks of palm-wine and sugarcane liquor lubricate the performance. The dance is still very personal in some outer islands, and performers often use satire and well-intentioned social critiques to entertain and to teach people of all ages.

#### 5 RELIGION

Almost all the inhabitants of Seychelles are Christian, and more than 90% are Roman Catholic. Seychelles comprises a single diocese, directly responsible to the Holy See. British efforts to establish Protestantism during the 19th century were not very effective. Sunday masses are well attended, and religious holidays are celebrated throughout the archipelago, as both religious and as social events. Practicing Catholicism, similarly to speaking French, confers a certain social status by its association with French culture.

About 7% of the population of Seychelles are Anglican, most coming from families converted by missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Evangelical Protestant churches are active and growing, among them Pentecostals and Seventh-Day Adventists. Some 3% of the population are adherents of other faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. A small group of Indian Muslims do not mix with the other groups. No restrictions are imposed on religious worship by any of the faiths.

Similar to other Africans, many Seychellois reconcile their Christian beliefs with traditional religious practices, such as magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. It is common for Christians, despite the disapproval of Church authorities, to consult a local seer known as a *bonhomme de bois* or a *bonne femme de bois* for fortunetelling. People want to influence the course of events in their love life, a court case, or a job interview. They may also wish to obtain protective amulets or charms, known as *gris-gris*, or to cause harm to enemies.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Seychellois have 10 public holidays, some of which reflect the strong Roman Catholic background of the Seychelles: New Year's Day, January 1; January 2; Good Friday; Easter Sunday; the Fête Dieu (Corpus Christi); Assumption Day, August 15; All Saints' Day, November 1; the Day of the Immaculate Conception, December 8; Christmas Day, December 25; and the Queen of England's official birthday. Families often take advantage of public holidays to picnic at the beach and swim. On these occasions, they may also find entertainment in the coconut groves, where local musicians and dancers put on a *moutia*-style performance (see "Folklore").

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Weddings and funerals are occasions for lavish spending. A family might spend half a year's income on a child's wedding because such displays confer status on the family. The guests may stay to party all night. Sometimes both families foot the bills, but sorting out who pays what and how much is tricky and often creates ill feelings when the accounts come due.

Funerals also make social statements about wealth and status. On Mahé, the Catholic Church offers three basic categories. The full treatment consists of bell-ringing three times, singing, organ music, and a sermon. The loud tolling should make the death known to everyone. The middle category involves ringing the bells twice, and everything is much less



A fisherman displays his catch to visitors at a roadside on the main island of Mahé in the Seychelles. Most visitors to the area spend time on this island for its beaches, larger hotels, and water sports facilities. (AP Images/Sayyid Azim)

showy. The lowest category provides only a single bell rung 11 times, but it is free. Islanders might not attend such a funeral, however, for fear of losing status.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Seychellois are extremely sociable as a rule and often gather in the evening to enjoy each other's company. While older people may share a game of cards or checkers, younger people prefer playing the guitar and singing together on the veranda. Western-style dating is fairly common in Victoria, but in the outer islands traditional forms of recreation usually bring couples together with other young people.

Officially no racism exists in the islands, but Seychellois associate higher social status with lighter skin shades. This norm derives from the formerly dominant Europeans who monopolized wealth and public authority. Thus property, plantation, and business owners, and higher civil servants—mainly Whites or near Whites—are called *Grand Blancs*. Some 20 planter families, for example, trace their heritage back to French settlers. Under the socialist government, they lost the power and social prestige they once had. The working-class White who works for the grand blanc bears the humorous label, *Blanc Coco* (white chocolate). *Blanc Rouille* or “Rusted White” refers to a plantation owner who has inherited a big fortune but is

lazy, without education, and needs an educated Black Seychellois to do the accounting. Whites whose cleanliness is doubtful are called *Blanc Pourri* (Rotten White). Lower-class landless people, mostly of African origin, are at the bottom of the status ladder and are called *Rouge* (Red) or *Noir* (Black), depending on the darkness of their skin.

Thus, skin color figures importantly in social relationships and in career opportunity. A *Grand Blanc* generally marries into a family of Whites and near Whites, but so might a person of darker skin color if he or she has the wealth. Since higher-paying prestige jobs usually go to near-White or light-skinned people before those of darker complexion, marrying someone with lighter skin also brings its economic rewards. It is said, jokingly, that after giving birth, a Seychellois mother asks first what the color of her child is and second whether it is a boy or girl.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Health and nutritional conditions are remarkably good in the Seychelles Islands, approaching those of a developed country. Seychelles ranks 36th out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index with the average life expectancy at birth in 2008 at 72.6 years overall. Many factors account for long life expectancy, including a healthy climate; the absence of infec-





A woman makes palm flowers to sell as souvenirs from the Seychelles. (Alison Wright/National Geographic/Getty Images)

tious diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, sleeping sickness, and cholera; and the availability of free medical and hospital services to all Seychellois. Improvements in prenatal and postnatal care since the late 1970s have brought the infant mortality rate down from more than 50 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1978 to an estimated 14.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008, a rate comparable to that of Western Europe. Some 90% of protein in the diet is derived from fish, which along with lentils, rice, and fruits, gives most people a reasonably nutritious diet. Nevertheless, poverty, limited education, poor housing, polluted water, and unbalanced diets adversely affect the health of children. Hookworms and tapeworms have become serious health threats to barefoot children, or to people who eat improperly cooked pork.

Traditional houses rise on stilts above the ground. The main room is used for eating and sleeping. The kitchen is separate to maintain cleanliness. Woven coconut leaves make naturally cool walls and roofs, although galvanized iron is gradually replacing them for roofing.

Buses and cars are the main form of ground transportation in Seychelles. No trains exist. People depend on a government ferry service, which links Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue. The airlines, serviced by 15 airports—six of them with unpaved runways, provide access to the outer islands.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

A unique feature of the Seychellois social and family system is the prevalence of sexual relationships without formal marriage. Most family units take the form of de facto unions known as living *en menage*. One result of this practice is that nearly three-fourths of all children born in the islands are born out of wedlock, but many are nonetheless legally acknowledged by their fathers.

The institutionalization of *en menage* unions as an alternative to legal marriage can be attributed to several factors. The expense of socially required wedding festivities, trousseaus, and household furnishings can exceed a year's income for a laborer. An extreme difference in economic status of partners, a mother's wish to retain the earning potential of her son, or a previous marriage by one partner may be impediments to marriage. The difficulty and expense of divorce also tend to discourage a legal relationship. Although frowned upon by the Church and civil authorities, *en menage* unions are generally stable and carry little stigma for either partner or for their children. Among women of higher status, prevailing standards of social respectability require that they be married to the men with whom they are living. Sexual fidelity is not as likely to be demanded of husbands, who often enter into liaisons with lower-class women.

The pig is a common sight around the Seychellois homestead, much like dogs or chickens. Outside town, 45% to 50%

of homes keep at least one pig—veritable “piggy banks.” Pigs are fattened up for sale at peak condition and are usually sold when the family needs cash.

## 11 CLOTHING

Dressing well is important for Seychellois, particularly to go to Mass and to special functions. Generally, whether formal or informal, clothing in the Seychelles is similar to that in the United States. For everyday use, people dress comfortably depending on their work. Women go to market in cotton smocks and sandals, wearing locally made straw hats for sun protection. They may also wear African sarongs. These are dressy when going out. Men wear hats too and loose-fitting, short-sleeved shirts and trousers. In the island environment, both men and women wear shorts when dressing casually. Some uniformed public servants, such as traffic police, also wear shorts.

## 12 FOOD

The Seychellois are splendid cooks and offer a wide variety of cooking styles, such as English, French, Chinese, and Indian. The diversity of all these cooking styles is combined to create Creole cuisine. Creole cooking is rich, hot, and spicy—a blend of fruit, fish, fresh vegetables, and spices. The basic ingredients include pork, chicken, fish, octopus, or shellfish. Coconut milk makes a good sauce for seafood meals. Seychellois cuisine includes crab, beef, lentil, and onion soups and a whole range of shellfish, fish, poultry, and meat dishes. People also enjoy salads and fruit desserts of mango, papaya, breadfruit, and pineapple.

Seychellois consume an average of 80 kg (176 lb) of fish a year. It is served in many ways: grilled on firewood, curried, in bullions, and as steak. Turtle meat was once easily found and is called “Seychelles beef.”

Typically, people eat three meals a day. Breakfast may include eggs and bacon, while lunch is the heaviest meal of the day and usually includes rice. The high consumption of rice means that much rice must be imported. The government subsidizes rice imports, but wines and imported fruits and drinks are expensive and out of reach for most budgets. Locally made alcoholic beverages include palm-wine (*calou*) and *bacca*, a powerful sugarcane liquor regulated by the government. People drink *bacca* on ceremonial occasions.

## 13 EDUCATION

Seychelles has a high literacy rate: more than 92% of school-aged children read and write. Although many older Seychellois did not learn to read or write in their childhood, thanks to adult education classes, 85% were literate by 1991. Until the mid-1800s, schooling in the islands was mainly informal. Both the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches opened mission schools in 1851. The missions continued to operate the schools (the teachers were monks and nuns from abroad) after the government took charge in 1944. After a technical college opened in 1970, a supply of locally trained teachers became available, and many new schools were established. In 1979, the government introduced free and compulsory primary education for children between 6 and 15 years of age. In 1980, the government initiated a program of educational reform based on the British comprehensive system. Since 1981, a system of free education has been in effect, requiring attendance by all children

in grades one to nine, beginning at age 5. Some 90% of all children also attend nursery school at age 4.

Children first learn to read and write in Creole. Beginning in grade three, English becomes the teaching language in certain subjects. In grade six, pupils begin learning French. After completing six years of primary school and three years of secondary school, students who wish to continue their education attend a National Youth Service (NYS) program. The NYS is a Seychellois hybrid of scouting and 4-H. Students live at an NYS village and wear special brown and beige uniforms. In addition to academic instruction, the students receive practical training in gardening, cooking, housekeeping, and livestock-raising. One of the purposes of this program is to reduce youth unemployment. Students produce much of their own food, cook their own meals, and do their own laundry. They learn the principles of self-government by holding group sessions and serving on committees.

After completing their NYS program, students may attend Seychelles Polytechnic, a technical trade school. The largest number of students are enrolled in teacher training, business studies, humanities and sciences, and hotels and tourism. Since no opportunities for higher education are available on the islands, students study abroad through British, US, and French scholarship programs.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The diversity of peoples has made Seychellois culture unique. African, European, and Asian influences are present in Seychellois music, dance, literature, and visual art. African rhythms are apparent in the *moutia* or *séga* dance performances, which include body-shaking and hip movements found on the continent. The *sokoué* dance resembles masked African dancing. Dancers portray birds, animals, and trees under the camouflage of coconut leaves and straw. The *contredanse* is a French import, with origins in the court of Louis XIV. The earliest French colonists introduced it to the islands. It synthesizes waltzing and polka, and is enjoyed at parties and weddings. Traditionally, Seychellois performed their music with drums, violins, accordions, and the triangle. Nowadays, the acoustic guitar typically accompanies these instruments.

Seychellois life is also told through poetry. Poems tell of the good old days, legends, superstitions, nature, and community. Seychelles’ most celebrated poet is Antoine Abe.

## 15 WORK

Seychelles’ economy is built upon tourism, fishing and offshore business and financial services. With a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) over more than \$18,000 in 2007, Seychelles ranked in the upper-middle income group of countries. However, given Seychelles’ dependence on imports and the consequent high cost of living, the minimum wage of \$290/month (2007) did not provide a living wage. To make ends meet, many households kept a home garden and a family pig (see “Family Life”).

Most jobs on the islands are created by tourism. Up to 180,000 annual visitors—the vast majority of whom are tourists—provide employment in services, hotel construction and other tourist industry activities. Thirty percent of the population is directly employed by this sector.

An unusual profession on the islands is *calou* (palm-wine) tapping. The government has licensed several thousand palm

trees for this purpose. A tapper may rent a tree from its owner for tapping, or may collect the sap for the owner or tree-renter. The tapper must climb the tree twice daily and collect the juice, which flows from a tap, which pierces the growing tip of the palm. The sap is collected in a bamboo or plastic receptacle. A palm cannot produce coconuts and *calou* simultaneously. Constant tapping, however, can kill a tree.

## 16 SPORTS

Seychellois play a variety of sports. The most popular participant and spectator sport is soccer, but basketball is also popular. Leisure sports such as diving, sailing, windsurfing, and waterskiing are mainly enjoyed by tourists.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Seychellois have moved into the age of modern communications and world culture through television, cell phones, and the Internet. The government reported that Seychellois had 13,000 television sets in 1994. The government television station reaches between 75% and 80% of the population via three relay stations. Videos, DVDs, and movies are popular, too. More than one-third of the population uses the Internet for news, entertainment, and messaging.

Traditional forms of recreation revolve around socializing, music and dancing. Families and friends enjoy a Sunday afternoon at the beach and gathering on their verandas in the evening for friendly games of checkers and cards. Seychellois also are fond of singing and often perform informally at night when visiting with friends. At parties they may dance the whole night through. They are quite uninhibited in this respect. Thousands of people listen to Seychellois music on the radio throughout the day. Two young performers, Patrick Victor and David Filoé, have transformed the traditional *moutia* and *séga* dances in their contemporary music.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Seychellois artisans have transformed traditional folk art and crafts into livelihoods. Seychellois are accomplished painters, drawing inspiration from the mountains, coves, palms, sun-streaked skies, and workers in the islands. Sculptors and carvers fashion chalices of teak, cigar, and jewelry boxes, and board games such as dominoes and backgammon. Jewelers make coral and shell bracelets, necklaces, and earrings. Batik-dyed cloth is becoming fashionable and is in high demand by tourists. Artisans use natural motifs such as birds and fish in their original designs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Although close to being an island paradise, the archipelago is not without its social problems. Since the 1970s, Seychelles has struggled with patronage, corruption, and human rights violations. Since the early 1990s, the record has improved—partly because the government has relaxed its attitude toward dissident and opposition groups. However, other social problems are emerging. Juvenile delinquency, associated with boredom and isolation, is a growing problem. Many adults suffer from alcoholism, and an alarming number of young people are beginning to use marijuana and heroin. Venereal diseases are widespread, and efforts to contain them have been ineffective. Wife-beating remains a problem, and reports indicate that a

significant number of girls under 15, usually from low-income families, are being raped and sexually abused. The police have not prosecuted these cases vigorously.

In addition, the financial benefits of Seychelles' tourist industry come with costs. After 11 September 2001, the number of tourists dropped sharply serving as a reminder to the country that its major industry was vulnerable to terrorist threats and outside shocks. Moreover, thousands of visitors stress the country's fragile eco-system, and along with indigenous population pressures, have an adverse impact on the environment. Further, efforts to accommodate tourists have increased illegal drug use and encouraged prostitution.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In principle, women enjoy the same legal, political, economic, and social rights as men. Women form nearly half of the enrollment at the prestigious Seychelles Polytechnic. In 2008 two women held cabinet posts, and there were 10 women in the 34-seat national assembly, seven of whom were directly elected and three of whom were chosen by proportional representation.

Female assertiveness is due partly to an essentially matriarchal society. Mothers are dominant in the household, controlling most daily expenditures and looking after the interests of the children. Men are breadwinners, but their domestic role is relatively peripheral. Older women can usually count on financial support from family members living at home, or from contributions of grown children. Family size is relatively small by African standards, largely because about one-third of all Seychellois women of reproductive age use some form of contraception (1980).

Nevertheless, women are not exempt from exploitation and they do suffer discrimination. In 2007 the police registered more than 50 rape cases, four sexual assaults, and there were reports of domestic violence and female prostitution.

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—by R. Groelsema

# SHAMBAA

**PRONUNCIATION:** shahm-BAH

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Shambala (Bantu people)

**LOCATION:** Shambaai (West Usambara mountain range—northeastern Tanzania)

**POPULATION:** 664,000

**LANGUAGE:** Shambala, Swahili

**RELIGION:** Traditional Shambaa beliefs (healing the land and the body), Mufika (ancestor worship), Christianity, Islam

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Shambaa, also referred to as the Shambala, are a Bantu people found mainly on the West Usambara mountain range in Tanzania. Their language is Shambala. The homeland of the Shambaa is called Shambaai (or Shambalai). Other Bantu ethnic groups in the area include the Bondei, the Zigua, the Nguu, and the Pare.

The Shambaa were traditionally ruled by kings. The Shambaa kingdom was made up of several descent groups with a common origin, but the kingdom was governed by a single descent group. The survival of the whole descent group and its steady increase in size were crucial. The king ruled over several chiefdoms. Growth of the kingdom led to growth in the number of chiefdoms. The chiefs were appointed by the king and received tribute from their chiefdoms as representatives of the king. All the wealth of the land was regarded as the king's. This gave him control over his subjects and the right to demand tribute from them. The king, in return, was expected to bring rain and food to his territory.

Peasants and slaves were the king's subjects. Peasants lived in village groups under a patriarchal system. The nuclear family's well-being was important for the whole village. The peasants were free to go about their daily work on the farm and homesteads. They paid tribute to the king in the form of food, livestock, and labor. Slaves lived in the king's household, where he was free to deal with them as he pleased. At times they were sold to the coastal slave traders or even killed at the king's command.

The system of chiefdoms no longer exists in Tanzania; it was abolished soon after independence. The country is now divided into regions, which are further subdivided into districts. A district commissioner (DC) is in charge of each district. Regional commissioners are appointed by the president to govern the regions.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Usambara range is located in Tanga province in northeastern Tanzania, south of the border with Kenya. The range rises out of a plain. Shambaai is divided into two administrative districts, Lushoto and Korogwe. Muheza and Handeni are the neighboring districts.

In 2001 the Shambaa population was estimated to number 664,000 persons. Most of the people in Lushoto are Shambaa, with some Pare and Ma'a speakers as well. Korogwe is shared by the Shambaa with the Zigua and Bondei from neighboring Handeni and Muheza districts. The Shambaa are also found in the neighboring districts of Same in the northwest and Muheza

in the southeast. Across the border in Kenya to the north live the Kamba, and to the east live the Wataita and the Wataweta.

The Shambaa are located in the mountain area accessible from the plains. This is an area of abundant rainfall, with thriving banana plants. The Shambaa regard the *nyika* (plains) as a dangerous place of disease and death, preferring instead the mountain area. Thus, the population density is high in the mountain area, where the villages are located near each other with nearly all arable land cultivated. Overpopulation is considered a problem as it affects traditional farming practices. Some Shambaa people have now moved to the *nyika* and to urban areas, such as Dar es Salaam and Tanga.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Shambala is the main language spoken by the Shambaa; it has three main dialect areas. Mlalo forms the center for the northern area, Korogwe for the southern area, and Lushoto for the central area. Despite these differences in dialect, the Shambaa can understand one another's speech. Shambala is mutually understandable also with the Bondei, Zigua, and Nguu languages. Lexical similarity is 75% with Bondei, 68% with Nguu and Zigula. While Shambala is the first language of most Shambaa, it is used mainly for oral communication. Only a few people can write in Shambala at this time.

The Shambaa also speak Swahili, the national language of Tanzania, which is now having an influence on the development of Shambala, especially its vocabulary. Young people prefer to speak Swahili, and they use Swahili words in Shambala. Swahili was initially spread to Shambaai by the coastal people. Other factors affecting Shambala and its use are urbanization, the mobility of speakers, ethnicity, and intermarriage between peoples. Many Shambala speakers can switch easily from one dialect to another and to Swahili.

Shambaa children are taught Swahili in primary school. It is used in business, communications, and other places of employment. Instruction in secondary schools and universities is in English.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The story of Mbegha (or Mbega) is the most famous of Shambaa myths. There are more than 26 versions of this myth. Mbegha was a hunter from Ngulu Hills to the south of Shambaai. He was forced to leave his homeland after a dispute with his kinsmen over his share of an inheritance. Mbegha fled to Kilindi, where he became a blood brother to the chief's son. The chief's son died accidentally while hunting with Mbegha. This caused Mbegha to flee again, into the bush, to escape punishment from the chief. He lived in caves and camps, hunting wild animals. After crossing the Pangani River, Mbegha arrived on the southern escarpment of the Usambaras. The Ziai people saw the smoke of his campfire and approached him. Upon learning that Mbegha was a skilled pig hunter, they asked him to rid their village of pigs. He was invited to live in Bumbuli, where he grew famous as an arbitrator, hunter, and storyteller. The grateful villagers gave Mbegha a wife. Mbegha also helped the people of Vugha and was known as a lion slayer after killing a lion on the way to their village. He was made the chief of Vugha. Mbegha's son Buge grew to be the chief of Bumbuli. When Mbegha died, Buge succeeded him as king of Shambaai.



## 5 RELIGION

Traditional Shambaa beliefs center on healing the land and the body. Rainmakers were important people in the society, for they were believed to have the power to prevent or cause rainfall.

*Mufika* (ancestor worship) was important since the Shambaa believed that ignoring one's ancestors, especially one's deceased father, was sure to lead to misfortune. A traditional medicine man was called in to perform the rites of ancestor worship, at which women were not allowed to be present. Even today, *waghanga* (local healers) are called in to treat illness.

The Protestant and Catholic faiths are both well established in Shambaa. The Christian influence in Shambaa was spread by missionaries through education and preaching. The missionaries learned Shambala in order to be able to communicate freely with the Shambaa; religious texts, including the New Testament and the Book of Psalms, were translated into Shambala. Congregations in all areas of Shambaa used these texts. Christianity was more influential in the northern area of Shambaa. It has brought changes to traditional Shambaa beliefs and practices, which have been weakened and adapted to the newer Christian beliefs.

Islam was spread in Shambaa by the Zigua, mainly in the trading towns.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Shambaa observe both secular and religious holidays. The main government holidays now celebrated are New Year's Day,

Union Day (April 26), Workers Day (May 1), Peasants Day (August 8), and Independence Day (December 9). Government holidays are public rest days when offices and shops remain closed. Nationwide public rallies are held in the urban areas, with military parades and speeches by government officials. Villagers generally continue with their farm work during these holidays.

Both Christian and Muslim holidays are celebrated with public observances. The major Christian holidays are Easter weekend and Christmas. The major Muslim holidays are Id-el-Fitre, Id-el-Hajji, and Maulid. Religious holidays are a very special time for family gatherings. Urban dwellers visit their families in rural areas. Special dishes cooked at this time include roast meat, *chapatis* (flat bread), and *pilau*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Shambaa consider it very important to have children. Before the birth of his children, the father is expected to complete all his marriage rituals and bride payments. Failure to do so will mean that his children will belong to their mother's clan. When his wife is pregnant, the husband gives his father-in-law a female goat. After the birth of his child, another goat is sent to the in-laws. A cow is sent after the second child is born. The children are then regarded as the husband's. A goat is also given to the in-laws with every subsequent birth. It is the custom for the pregnant wife to leave her home and go back to her father's house to give birth. The new father does not see his child until later when he visits his wife at his in-laws' home. Traditionally, a baby may be killed by the father for various reasons, including having deformities, cutting its upper incisors first, or having been conceived in adultery.

Traditionally, the Shambaa held initiation ceremonies for both young women and young men. Initiation for boys began with the *ngwaliko wa kava*, in which a boy was circumcised when he reached the age of three or four years and a *kungwi* (mentor) was chosen for him. After circumcision, a boy was considered a *wai* (initiate) until all ceremonies were complete; then he was regarded as an adult. At puberty, the initiate undergoes the *gao* ceremony, in which he is instructed in acceptable behavior.

Now, circumcision takes place in health facilities for sanitary reasons. The initiation ceremony has been shortened but is still required before the young man takes on adult responsibilities. Young women are not circumcised, but they also go through a *gao* ceremony of instruction that is required before a young woman can marry or become a mother. It is scandalous for a young woman to get pregnant before the *gao* ceremony. In the past, a baby so conceived before the ceremony would have been killed by its grandfather.

The final rite of passage for the Shambaa is death. A man keeps a banana garden near his homestead to serve as his burial place. After a man dies, his wealth (mainly livestock) is divided among his wives and their children, with the first wife's elder son receiving the largest share. Each child inherits wealth from his or her mother. Girls may inherit household items, ornaments, and clothes from their mother and sisters. Boys inherit the land and livestock given to their mother when she married their father.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings are important in Shambaa culture. When people meet for the first time, they exchange the particular greeting required for that time of day. In the morning one may say *onga mahundo* ("Good morning"), and may receive the reply *ni vedi*. *Hangize wako* ("Fine and yours"). *Onga mshi* is an afternoon or evening greeting. *Ikaa wedi* is said to wish someone well when leaving. Greetings may be prolonged, for it is customary to inquire after a person's family, health, and even work, and people exchange them before conducting any business, no matter how urgent or important. Younger people are expected to show respect and deference to their elders while greeting and conversing with them and to help them with their work without being asked.

Some taboos have developed from required polite behavior. These include pointing at someone, which may suggest a curse, and sitting with one's head between one's hands, which may make people think one is in mourning when no one has died.

Traditionally, men and women were socially segregated, and this has formed the basis for all their relationships. Couples do not eat together at home. Mothers usually eat with their children while the father eats alone. Persons of opposite sexes do not show any affection publicly through bodily contact; this is considered highly inappropriate. Male companions and female companions may hold hands out of friendship in public without fear of having the action misinterpreted. At social gatherings, women keep to themselves in their own clusters while eating and drinking, as do the men in theirs. This practice of segregation has extended to official gatherings and even to churches.

A person may drop in at any time for a visit and usually arrives with a gift for the host. If the person arrives at mealtime, he or she is expected to join in the meal. Refusal to eat may be considered an insult and distrust of one's host. The Shambaa normally cook an extra share so as to have food for any visitor who may drop in. Visits are normally made in the late afternoon or evening hours, when it is cooler and most of the farm work has been completed.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Shambaa live in large villages consisting of peoples of several lineages, or family groups. Villages are usually located on upper hillsides. Banana groves separate the homesteads and protect against famine. A traditional Shambaa house is round, with thatched roof and sides. Traditionally, when household members would go out to work on their farms, they would tie a rope to the front door to show visitors and passersby that no one was at home. There are also rectangular houses in Shambaa, with walls of wattle and mud and thatched roofs, modeled on what is called a Swahili design. Now, these houses commonly have cement walls and corrugated metal roofs.

Compared to most rural regions in Tanzania, the infrastructure network in Shambaa is better developed. Some major roads are blacktopped or all-season dirt roads. A major road-repair program is under way. Buses transport villagers to and from Tanga town, Dar es Salaam, and other regional centers. There is a railway line linking Dar es Salaam and Moshi and passing through the Korogwe district, providing a valuable link for passengers and products. Some people own small trucks and provide rides to villagers for a small fare.

The Shambaa child mortality rate has fallen, thanks to improved access to Mother and Child Health (MCH) services, which provide health education and immunization. Health centers and dispensaries are available in the rural areas, with larger hospital facilities available in the cities.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Polygamy was widely practiced by the Shambaa. A man married as many women as he could support. He also fathered as many children as possible. It was the father's duty to defend the family from all harm, including illness and hunger. Under the influence of Christianity, Christian marriages are now often monogamous.

Survival skills and material goods were handed down from father to son. The son's well-being, his family and prosperity, all depended on his father's pleasure. Incurring the father's displeasure was dreaded as it could lead to a curse (*ute*). It was believed that the curse could cause the son to lose all his possessions, wander about like a fool, and even die. A father had considerable authority while alive and was believed to retain some control as a ghost even after his death. Thus, all the sons are believed to share a common fate through their dependence on their father, both alive and as an ancestral ghost. The ghosts' influence over the daughters and their descendants ceased when the daughter died.

A father was required to pay the bridewealth for his sons' first wives. He was also required to pay the medicine man when any of his family members fell ill. He also provided his son with an additional garden when the son married for the first time. A Shambaa man cannot marry within his own lineage or marry a cousin from an outside lineage. He is often expected to marry within his neighborhood. Women are free to accept or reject a marriage proposal. It is the responsibility of the husband to allocate a garden to each wife as a source of food for her and her children. The children help their mother in her garden when they are old enough to do so. The garden is the sons' inheritance. For more affluent Shambaa, expectations for providing for wives and children were much higher. For example, a king provided each wife with chieftom for her children to rule.

The wife was responsible for the daily farm work. A husband was responsible for increasing his *mai* (wealth). Wealth was increased mainly through acquisition of more livestock in the form of goats, cattle, and sheep. Cattle were kept mainly for bridal payments and ceremonial purposes. A person increased his status and standing in the community by lending out his livestock. This enabled the person to build a network of supporters who could help in times of need. Those who were lent cattle used the milk and were sometimes allowed to keep the offspring to build up their own herds.

An adult son was given his own farm by his father. The son could buy livestock from the sale of his harvest, but he was still dependent on his father for bridewealth.

Traditionally Shambaa families have kept dogs as watchdogs and cats as rodent catchers. Today some animals may be kept as pets, especially in urban areas. Other animals are kept for food, transportation, or farmwork.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Shambaa dress code has been greatly influenced by the coastal people, who are mainly Muslim and who have been influenced, in turn, by their religion and by Arab traders.

Men wear *khanzus* (long, flowing white robes) and a small cap, or *barghashia*, on their heads. Women use lengths of colorful cloth as wrappers for the body; these are called *kangas* and *kitenges*. A wrapper may be worn over a dress or used to carry a baby on the back or hip. Young women after puberty are required to wrap a *kanga* around their waist when working or leaving the homestead. Married women cover their heads and clothes with two pieces of *kanga*. Women purchase these colorful pieces of cloth from the marketplace or shops and may also take them to tailors to have them sewn into dresses and skirts. Men may also have tailors sew trousers and shirts for them. Shambaa men may be seen wearing shirts and trousers especially in the urban areas; however, for ceremonies and important events they put on *khanzus*.

Traditionally, women do not wear short clothes in public. Short skirts with shorts may be worn for sporting events and in military camps. Secondhand clothing (*mitumba*) may be bought in the marketplace and is generally worn by the poorer people.

## 12 FOOD

The Shambaa plant many different food crops adapted to the climate of the area, including tubers, medicinal plants, tobacco, beans, and bananas. Banana plants are better suited to the Shambaai than to the *nyika* and used to be the main food crop of the Shambaa. This has changed with the introduction of maize and cassava to the area. Cassava is drought-resistant and is grown as a safeguard against famine. Maize is grown in both *nyika* and Shambaai in different planting and harvesting seasons. Many farmers plant maize during both seasons and are kept busy all year.

The Shambaa diet is composed of starchy foods, such as rice, maize, and sweet potatoes, usually accompanied by beans, meat, and vegetables. Dairy products are available, and sour milk is often drunk for breakfast. Meat consumption is on the increase.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, Shambaa children have received instruction from their parents. Youths receive further instruction during the *gao* ceremonies in the form of songs and stories. During this time the young men are taught the tribal norms and proper sexual conduct by a *shefaya* (ritual leader), the youths' mentors (*makungwi*), and other village adults. Young women are taught their responsibilities and proper conduct by women elders.

The Christian missionaries were the first to offer the Shambaa formal education. When the missionaries arrived, those Shambaa who were able to obtain some education rose in status in their local areas. Generally young men were sent to these schools while girls were kept at home. Those girls who went to school often dropped out earlier to get married because parents thought that it was a waste of money to educate daughters who would move to other households when they married.

The Shambaa, like other Tanzanian people, are encouraged to obtain at least primary-level education. Since 1971, the government has required that all children seven years of age and

older attend primary schools for at least seven years. Primary education has been provided free for all Tanzanians, but in the early 1990s the government reinstated school fees. Four years of secondary education are required before a student can continue to high school, after passing the national Ordinary Level examinations. High school is for two years; then the student sits for the Advanced Level examinations before applying for university admission. Alternative trade and business schools provide instruction for those students unable to continue with formal education and wishing to acquire skills. Parents now have to pay more for their children's education since the government is no longer able to provide fully subsidized education. Older people, especially in the rural areas, are involved in adult literacy programs.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Shambaa have a rich cultural heritage of songs and dances. Songs are used to instruct younger people on their history and expected behavior as adult members of the tribe. Drums were used to transmit messages of approaching danger as well as important news, such as the death of a king. Storytelling by the elder generation is a popular evening pastime with children. Storytelling serves to maintain oral history. Traditional dances are still popular, especially at wedding celebrations.

The Shambaa have shown a liking for the various types of music they have encountered through interaction with other cultures. Swahili songs produced by various Tanzanian bands may be heard frequently over the airwaves in public places. The Shambaa enjoy listening to *taarab* (ballads), a tradition introduced to the coastal people by the Arabs. *Kwasa kwasa* and other west and central African music and dance forms are also gaining popularity and may be heard during various celebrations. The younger generation of Shambaa prefers to listen and dance to Western music, including reggae, pop, and hip hop.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, for the Shambaa work centered on the farm and was divided between men and women. The whole household was responsible for the production of subsistence food crops. Farmwork and crop yields were divided between a husband and his wives. Men were responsible for planting and tilling on the farms while women were in charge of weeding and harvesting their own farms.

With the ever-diminishing size of the land holdings and declining yields and soil erosion, the Shambaa men are increasingly forced to seek outside employment. The Shambaa have been forced to change their farming patterns because of their increased population density. Women are usually left in the homestead to tend to the farm and children while the husband seeks employment in the urban areas and on plantations, visiting his family periodically.

Educated Shambaa have better chances of finding jobs in the cities as clerks, teachers, and administrators. Previously, all Tanzanians were guaranteed employment, on completion of postsecondary education, in the civil service or parastatals (government-owned companies). Now both men and women in the urban areas compete for jobs in the private sector, for the government is no longer able to hire everyone.

## 16 SPORTS

Like other Tanzanian children, the Shambaa children first come into contact with sports at school. Primary-school children are encouraged to participate in interschool competitions leading to interregional level and national level championships. Popular sports at school are soccer for boys and netball for girls. All children participate in athletics. At secondary schools Shambaa youth may be introduced to other sports, such as basketball, table tennis, and volleyball.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Tanzania. The national soccer league broadcasts games, which are greatly enjoyed by the Shambaa. There is a friendly rivalry between the supporters of the two major soccer teams in the league, Simba and Yanga. On weekends, standard and makeshift soccer fields are crowded with spectators and players.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Radio broadcasts by the state-owned radio station have been the major source of entertainment. Many households have transistor radios, and people enjoy listening to music, radio plays, and sports programs. The government uses the radio station to transmit major broadcasts and matches. Shambaa men gather around a radio in public meeting places, usually with a local brew in hand. Recently the government has allowed private TV and radio stations to operate, increasing the choice and quality of programs. Many people now own television and video sets, and they may tune in to broadcasting stations in Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, and Kenya. Television ownership has led to the opening of many video lending libraries in Tanga, where action movies are the most popular.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Shambaa are mainly agriculturists and prefer tilling the land to craftwork. They have been fortunate to be able to obtain their ornaments and tools through trade. There were blacksmiths forging iron tools and weapons. Toymaking was a favorite pastime for children who adapted pieces of wood into objects like small spears and cooking utensils. Children still make their own toys, especially boxcars and cloth dolls, as manufactured toys are expensive.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The greatest problem facing the Shambaa today is the gradual loss of cultural identity. Interest in the norms and culture of the Shambaa is declining in the younger generation. They now prefer to adopt a national identity of being simply Tanzanian as opposed to being a Shambaa first. This decline in cultural identity may be attributed to exposure to new religions espousing the unity of humankind and formal education leading the Shambaa to accept Western culture. The use of Swahili as a national language has led to a preference for it in daily use in Shambaa. Tribal intermarriages are on the increase, no longer seen as objectionable. The Shambaa are trying to reverse the erosion by recording their cultural values and history. Younger people in the urban areas are encouraged to regularly visit Shambaa, where they may learn their traditions and converse in Shambala.

Another serious problem facing the Shambaa is a shortage of land. The reasons for this are population increase and stability among the tribes. Formerly the Shambaa could obtain new

land by clearing the forests and engaging in warfare against neighboring tribes. Under colonial administration, the land to the north of Shambaa was declared a forest reserve and unavailable for cultivation. Plantation estates were also created around Shambaa for growing of sisal, further limiting land availability. This decrease in arable land in Shambaa has led to soil depletion since the land is not left to fallow. Soil erosion is also on the increase on the mountain slopes, further compounding the problem. The government is trying to introduce better crop types and farming practices into the area through its research center at Amani, Tanga. The Shambaa cannot rely on work in the sisal plantation estates, for the crop has declined sharply in value on the world market since the late 1960s. Younger people are seeking employment farther and farther from Shambaa.

Like all Tanzanians, the Shambaa face the problem of poverty. Tanzania has been experiencing economic problems since the late 1980s. By the early 1990s the government was no longer able to sustain its social services, especially in education and health. By 2002, 80% of the population was engaged in agriculture, and 36% of the population lived below the poverty line.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Shambaa culture is predominantly patrilineal, with the men controlling most aspects of the society. Although Christianity has brought about a monogamous influence on the modern Shambaa family, polygyny was widely practiced by the Shambaa, depending on how many wives and children the husband could raise and support.

Labor among the Shambaa was also slightly divisible by gender. While the men were responsible for planting and tilling the fields, weeding and harvesting was left to the women.

The husband was responsible for increasing his *mai* (wealth) by tightly controlling the lending of his livestock, a practice that would eventually help to increase his wealth and social status. However, now women are usually left in the homestead to tend the farm and children while the husbands seek wage employment in the urban areas and on plantations.

Whereas there was little control over what men should wear, women's dressing and even sexuality was largely tied to social taboos and customs such as women should wear clothes that cover their full-length bodies and married women in particular were to cover their heads as a sign of subjugation.

In terms of educational opportunities, while the boys were sent to school, the girl-child was left at home to be trained on house-bound tasks and eventually get married off.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

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## SHILLUK

**PRONUNCIATION:** shil-UK

**LOCATION:** Sudan

**POPULATION:** about 150,000

**LANGUAGE:** Shilluk

**RELIGION:** Animism; indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Dinka; Nuer; Sudanese

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Shilluk have long occupied a region along the White Nile in the modern Sudan. It is estimated that Prenilotes may have been present in the area from the 4th millennium BC. Arab travelers to the central Sudan in the 9th century AD recorded Prenilotic Barea and Kunama peoples in this area. During the Funj Sultanates from 1504 to 1821, it appears that slave raiders attacked Shilluk lands. Regional disturbances during the Funj Sultanates probably led to some southward migration of the Shilluk in the 16th century and to a more concentrated village pattern. Perhaps reflecting this time, the Shilluk mythology records that Nyakang (Nyikang) was the first *reth* or king to unify the Shilluk people in a proto-state formation.

The area was first reached by Europeans in the 18th century. The Ottoman slave raids of the early 19th century victimized the Shilluk. Ottoman administration reached them in 1867. Mahdist rule (1884–98) was generally resisted by the Shilluk as they were set upon by zealous and slave-raiding Arabs from the north. The Shilluk region was again inaccessible to Europeans at this time. It was not until the early 20th century that serious ethnographic and historical attention began to be paid to the Shilluk. Even then, the interest was focused on the concerns of the British colonial administration and missionaries who were in the Shilluk region. A new census is planned but not yet conducted.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Shilluk are concentrated along the western banks and islands of the White Nile, especially between the Renk-Malakal reach, as well as being located on the lower section of the Sobat River. In other terms, they live between 9° and 14° degrees north latitude, about 640 km (400 mi) south of Khartoum, the modern national capital of the Sudan. Malakal, the present provincial capital, is in the southern portion of Shilluk land, but on the east bank of the Nile.

The precise ancestral homeland of the Prenilotic Shilluk is unknown but is likely to be in the present vicinity of Shilluk concentration. Perhaps it was they who replaced the aboriginal hunting and gathering population. The Shilluk and Nilotic people are remarkably tall (179 cm or 5 ft 10 in on average) and lean and may be distinguished from other neighboring Africans for this reason. Blood samples of the Shilluk and other Nilotics show Rh-allele frequencies which are notably different from all their neighbors. Even though malaria is now present in Shilluk lands, they also have a very low frequency of sickle cell alleles. These facts add up to a picture of long-term isolation.

The ecosystem is mainly grasslands, swampy river banks, and islands, but some trees appear in places. There are something like 150 compacted hamlets (*myer*) constituting the Shil-

luk domain. They are divided into the Ger (northern) and Luak (southern) royal districts. Each of these has its own supreme chief and royal settlement at Golbany and Kwom, just north and south of the central capital at Fashoda (also known as Kodok) on the western bank. The royal heads of Ger and Luak must concur about the appointment of a new reth.

At Fashoda the reth usually makes his royal residence with his royal children, courtiers, bodyguards, and retainers (*bang reth*), and his wives. It is here that he receives the council of lineage elders, while he sits on his royal stool-throne. Fashoda was also the site of an historic meeting in 1898 of the military forces of the French (under Major Marchand) and the English (under General Kitchener) in determining the European partition of the Sudan. The French withdrew; the Sudan became an Anglo-Egyptian colony.

Neighboring the Shilluk to the east are the related Anuak people; to the immediate south are the Nuer and the vast Sudd papyrus swamplands which blocked exploration for millennia. In the 19th century the region supported large elephant herds, which have since been decimated for their ivory. Further to the southwest are large populations of Dinka. West of the Shilluk are diverse sedentary peoples of the Nuba mountains. To the northwest the Shilluk meet various nomadic Arab peoples from whom they must sometimes defend themselves.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Shilluk belong to the Eastern subfamily of the Sudanic linguistic stock. The Sudanic languages have only a few loan words from the Semitic languages to the north or Cushitic languages to the east. Within the Sudanic stock, the Shilluk are further identified with the Nilotic language speakers, which also include the Anuak and Meban peoples, who are collectively considered as Prenilotes. The Shilluk preceded, but are related to, other Nilotic groups, like the Nuer and Dinka, whose languages are understood by many Shilluk. The Shilluk are also self-known as the "Chollo." Gender, number, and case can be noted in the Shilluk language.

### 4 FOLKLORE

As with most animist or polytheist religious systems, the sacred and secular worlds of the Shilluk are linked. Spiritual forces abound in animals, elements, and places, and the folklore of the Shilluk serves to integrate the people with this worldview through storytelling, origin myths, sacrifices, and invocations. For example, the great creator, Jo-uk, is tied through four supernatural generations to Nyakang, the founder of the Shilluk rethship.

The father of Nyakang, U-kwa, has many folkloric expressions. He lived along the Nile, where he was attracted to women with half-crocodile bodies who lived in the water. Tempted by these women, U-kwa captured two of them (Nik-ki-yah and Ung-wahd). Their cries quickly drew their father (U-dil-jil), whose presence had been unknown. The father's left side was human, while his right side was a green crocodile. After some debate and negotiation, U-kwa married the women and from his wife Nik-ki-yah he had his son Nik-kang (likewise half-man and half-crocodile). From a third wife, U-kwa had three more sons, one of whom was Du-wad, who became Nyakang's rival as reth. The conflict escalated and was only resolved when Nyakang and his brothers, Omoi and Jew, created a new kingdom at the mouth of the Sobat River. There, Nyakang created



men and women from hippopotamuses, crocodiles, and wild animals to populate his kingdom. The animal ancestors died and the Shilluk people were thereby born.

Nevertheless, Nik-ki-yah lives forever, usually as a crocodile, and she is sometimes offered a goat as a sacrifice. Occasionally, in trials-by-ordeal, suspected people are forced into the river to be judged by Nik-ki-yah. Fear of crocodiles quickly has them confessing.

### 5 RELIGION

The complex animist religious beliefs of the Shilluk are held most devoutly. The most important spiritual force is that of Nyakang. Special annual sacrifices are made to Nyakang at the start of the rainy season. In addition to this ancestral spirit of all Shilluk, there is also the universal Shilluk creator god, Jo-uk, with whom deceased persons will reside eternally, if they are well-behaved during their lifetime. According to Shilluk origin myths, it was from the Nile that Jo-uk created D'ung Adduk (White Cow). In turn, D'ung Adduk gave birth to a son, Kola, whom she nursed. Kola had a son named U-mahra, whose son was Wad-maul, whose son was U-kwa, who was the father of Nyakang, ancestor of all reths. A few Shilluk have turned to Islam and Christianity, but traditional beliefs are still strongly held. As more Shilluk are educated more are turning toward Christian faiths.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Western concept of “holiday” is not really inherent to Shilluk life, but some note may be given to Sudanese national holidays such as Independence Day on 1 January. Those who are Muslim or Christian might follow those religious celebrations. For the Shilluk, the chief “holidays” would be the installation of a new reth, a marriage festivity, collective fishing and harvesting, and especially the celebration of Nyakang at the start of the rainy season, which involves the slaughtering of animals, dancing, and drinking fermented sorghum (*merisa*). Most villages have a shrine to Nyakang where amulets and charms may be placed to invoke ancestral spirits, often by a tree.

The election of a reth is considered the most significant event in Shilluk life. This integrates the society with its traditions, provides for political leadership and continuity, and presents the greatest opportunity for public oratory and group confirmation. A notable amount of the literature on the Shilluk is focused on the transfer of rethships.

The first stage in the appointment of a reth begins with a mock battle without real spears. This “battle” between the northern and southern Shilluk groups is mediated by a messenger who carries scornful retorts between the two “competing” groups. An effigy of the reth is symbolically paraded with an ostrich-feather fan shade which is placed on the royal stool. When the effigy is restored to its shrine, the new reth will be infused with the spirit of Nyakang, and he can then assume the official responsibilities by sitting on the royal stool.

The bipartite or moiety structure of the Shilluk is based on a model of segmentary opposition, similar to a modern monarchy with a bicameral parliament. The chiefs of each component settlement group (*podh*) of the Ger and Luak districts are consulted at a lower level. Typically a reth’s son does not inherit from his father, although the work of Evans-Pritchard presents the opposing view that he usually does. In any case, a new reth is found from a prince (*nyireth*) or close relative, or from a different natal village, often during an interregnum struggle. The ritual conflict preceding the appointment and purification of the reth is a central feature of Shilluk society.

Some early reports state that regicide was practiced by royal wives or close kinfolk when a reth was deemed to be too ill, old, or ineffective to continue in office. Evans-Pritchard (1962: 76, 82–83) considers that the reports of institutional regicide were a fiction but that violent ends for reths certainly did occur amidst the precarious balance in Shilluk political life. In any case, the persistent discussion of regicide, whether symbolic or real, is not only a warning to seated reths but is also a symbolic expression that the spirit of Nyakang is no longer at ease and needs transfer, since the spirit of Nyakang resides eternally with the reth, and the reth himself is mortal.

As the reth gains his position through the council of lineage elders (*jal dwong pac*), it seems evident that the council can also determine that a prince (*nyireth*) of the royal clan (*kwareth*) is justified in recognizing a failed rethship, and that regicide is appropriate so that intraethnic struggles can be avoided and the continuity of the Shilluk people thereby ensured. A certain measure of rotation between the royal lineages (*kwareth*) of the north and south also assists in reaching this political equilibrium.

Clearly the reth will be eternally nervous about his position and he will make public efforts to be responsive to the lineage elders. Alternatively he will make special provisions to be pro-

ected by armed attendants and to be aloof and reserved. The formal, mock battle between village groups symbolizes the actual power struggles for this prestigious appointment.

The Celebration of the January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Accord is observed nationally.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Unlike many Sudanese Arabs, few Shilluk girls are subject to female circumcision as a rite of prepubescence. The practice of removing the lower incisor teeth is common for Shilluk youths, as well as ethnic scarification which consists of making a series of raised bumps across the forehead just above the eyebrows. Other decorative scars are also known. The umbilicus of baby boys is buried to the right of the front door while Shilluk girls have their umbilicus buried to the left. Other gender-differentiated customs are seen with Shilluk boys who have noted puberty rites of passage while Shilluk girls have few special rites and are rarely subject to female circumcision. Likewise dancing, clothing, decoration and child names are gender specific.

The death of commoners is followed by burial in the ground, unlike other Nilotes who may use water burial. Upon the death of the reth, the corpse is walled in his royal house, which thereby becomes his temporary tomb. Later his bones are collected for interment in the hamlet of his birth.

Male or female commoners are washed and shaved at death and wrapped in a shroud. The body is rested on its right side with the head facing easterly. Post-mortem memorial services take place first at graveside, a few months later, and for higher status person a commemoration can take place a year or more later.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The interpersonal relations of Shilluk people are guided by kinship, social hierarchy, and gender. They follow a form of matrilineal descent, unlike their Arab neighbors to the north. The Shilluk follow a descriptive type of cousin terminology which implies specific role relationships within the kinship network. Lineage membership is a critical feature of interpersonal relations. Within lineage groups, solidarity is maintained by age-grade cohorts, which are common in societies requiring military defense for the nation and the reth. The position of the reth is also distinguished by deferential behavior, sociolinguistic markers, a hippo-hide whip and staffs, use of royal antelope skins for dress, ritual stepping over color-selected bulls, and the exclusion of children from the royal compound. The well-being of the bang reth (the reth’s retainers) rests upon their unquestioned loyalty, which is rewarded by the reth through provision of food and security.

Aside from the royal personnel (*bang reth*) surrounding the reth at Fashoda, the Shilluk have a second class of people who are high-ranking but without legitimate access to the rethship. An additional group of nobility are known, but these are the Shilluk who had access to authority in the past and are no longer associated with the reth. The largest group of Shilluk are commoners (*colo*) who belong to various lineages but are not high-ranking whatsoever and are expected to show deference to those who are. Last in the traditional hierarchy are slaves who have entered Shilluk society as war captives, for punishment, by purchase, or as refugees from famine and disorder.

The reth and the council of lineage elders are responsible for maintaining order in Shilluk society. If conflicts arise within

lineages, the elder or his council intervenes; if there are conflicts between lineages, such as raiding, adultery, or theft, the reth intervenes and, under his almost absolute authority, he can apply various punishments such as confiscation of property or enslavement with use of his royal bodyguard. Adultery with the daughter of a reth is punished by death. The reth also controls trade in ivory, giraffe tails, and slaves. Toniolo and Hill (1975: 251) estimate that in 1876, two-thirds of the slaves in the northern Sudanese town of Wad Medani were of Shilluk, Dinka, and “Fertit” origin.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Shilluk live in hamlets of compact villages made of round houses (*tukls*) of wattle and daub construction and with conical thatched roofs. The house of the lineage-head, especially if he is the reth, might be placed on a higher elevation indicative of higher status. Electricity, piped water, and other conveniences were not present until modern times in the provincial capital. Many Shilluk have moved from rural areas to Malakal, the largest regional center.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Shilluk marriage is a primary institution which requires the use of a considerable quantity of livestock to collect the bride-wealth payments for completing the marriage contract. Unlike Arabs, Shilluk usually avoid marrying first cousins, and they practice lineage exogamy. However, like Arabs, the Shilluk do allow for polygyny, in particular a man marrying sets of sisters (sororal marriage). Postmarital life follows a pattern of matrilocal (sometimes avunculocal) residence in a compound of houses. If the household is polygynous, then additional houses are built to accommodate the other family members with their mothers.

## 11 CLOTHING

Today most Shilluk men wear Western clothing or Arab *jellabiyas*, but traditional attire is still seen. For women, traditional clothing was either animal-hide wraps, skirts (*rahat*), or aprons. Women’s hair was usually shaven. Males were traditionally naked, but a reth or his noblemen could wear a toga-like garment. For men and women, armllets, breastplates, bracelets, beads, bells, necklaces, and body-painting were common. For men, hair sculpture (especially in a popular flared helmet shape, protected at night by a headrest) and ostrich feathers in the hair were widespread. For those young men with military functions, their dress would not be complete without their narrow hide-shields, clubs, spears with broad leaf-shaped points, drums, and leopard skins.

## 12 FOOD

The Shilluk are predominantly sedentary farmers of the fertile banks and islands in the White Nile. Their economy is based on the Sudanic food complex of millet (*durra*) or sorghum, but other foods such as corn, melons, okra, sesame, and beans are also known. The *durra* is fermented to make an alcoholic drink (*merisa*). As farmers they are endowed with livestock including sheep, goats, and especially cattle which play important roles in religion and kinship. However, cattle for the Shilluk are not nearly as significant as they are for the neighboring Nuer and Dinka. Shilluk men are in charge of milking the cows, and

they do not use fresh cattle blood, unlike the Dinka and Nuer. Because the Shilluk are riverfolk, their foods are diversified by hunting and fishing. Antelope-hunting on royal island preserves is restricted.

## 13 EDUCATION

Only under British colonialism and under post-independence Sudanese governments did the Shilluk receive a formal secular or missionary education. Traditional education was structured around acquiring the skills of an agricultural and military population. On the other hand, the transmission of oral history was very important, especially in maintaining the lineage system from which political leadership emerged for the council of elders and the reth.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The population of the Shilluk has not been properly counted for years, but early in the post-colonial period there were at least 110,000 Shilluk-speakers who shared a common cultural heritage. The Shilluk’s unique office of the reth and the role of Nyakang bond them closely together in their villages and region. The Shilluk traditions of the royal throne, semi-divine kingship, dynastic rule, social hierarchies, sororal marriage, oppositional division of the kingdom, the use of a water purification ritual, and origin myths are noted to be held in common with ancient Egyptians. The degree to which this may be true, and the direction of cultural borrowing, is not determined with precision, but the hypothesis that these two ancient Nile valley populations are related remains an important subject for research.

## 15 WORK

For the traditional Shilluk, work is assigned by gender, age-grade, and lineage rank. The reth, ranking princes, and lineage elders do very little physical work, while females are heavily engaged in domestic tasks, food production, and child care. Young males have cultivating, fishing, herding, and hunting tasks. Dugout canoes (2.5–6m or 8–20 ft long) and small reed floats (*ambatch*) are made for fishing and local transport.

## 16 SPORTS

Some modern Shilluk play soccer.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional recreation was usually aimed at improving military and hunting skills, such as at the mock battles that surrounded the election of a new reth. Songs, poetry, and call-and-response dancing are popular. Among the popular dances are a mock threat “war dance” with infantry spear charges; an amusing hyena dance-play in which hunters stalk and “kill” an enacted hyena threatening sleeping children; and a lion dance in which masked dancers appear with lion heads and are pursued by hunters until wounded and killed.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Like other Nilotes, the Shilluk entertain themselves with public and private discourse which can include folklore. Expressions of folk arts are in jewelry, clay sculpture, hairstyling, and hide-tanning.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The gravest structural challenge within traditional Shilluk society is the interregnum between reths. This potentially conflictful time can sometimes spill over into violence. Meanwhile, relations between Dinka and Nuer can involve mutual cattle-raiding which can evolve into wider conflicts. During the current war in the southern Sudan, these ethnic groups sometimes spend as much time quarreling among themselves as against their perceived common enemies in the Afro-Arab northern Sudan.

Among the greatest present social problems are regional development and security, as well as the prejudicial attitude of some northern Sudanese towards southerners. Many post-colonial governments in Khartoum have pursued military rather than political solutions for national integration, and the Shilluk have long occupied a main river route connecting these conflicting regions. The economic development of the Shilluk and their survival from famine, relocation, and military operations have been major concerns.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditionally Shilluk culture was markedly patriarchal and paternalistic as the ruling positions were dominated by men, although it is reputed that in the mid-17th century one reth, Abudok nya Bwoc, was a woman. Also, in such cases woman-to-woman marriage was rare but possible. However, at present after many years of regional civil war between Arab northerners and southern Nilotics there have been many instances of gender violence such as rape and assault. Generally the Shilluk managed to be somewhat less involved in the main battlefields and contests for power, with some important exceptions in contests for political and military leadership.

As a result of the historic Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2005, the southern Shilluk women were more empowered to address gender roles and improved the position of women in general and address some specific matters in education and in HIV/AIDS education. Thus traditional social values are intact, but are being negotiated more substantially than previously. The prominent Shilluk national leaders such as Pagan Amum Okech, Lam Akol Ajawin, and Peter Adwok Nyaba are also oriented to progressive and more secular models of cultural transformation that have helped to improve the position of Shilluk women.

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—by R. Lobban, Jr.

# SOMALIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** suh-MAH-leez

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Somalians

**LOCATION:** Somalia

**POPULATION:** More than 7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Maxaad tiri; Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Swahili

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Somalia was much in the news during the last two decades. Many people have therefore gained their knowledge of the country and the Somali people from brief television images of pick-up trucks fitted with large caliber weapons, American marines hitting the beach, tomahawk missile attacks on suspected terrorist enclaves, street fighting among different factions in Mogadishu and starving people in rural areas. This image of a country and people in distress does not convey the richness and complexity of Somali life and culture, a culture that stretches back hundreds of years with roots in Arabia and both North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Somalia, unlike the majority of nation-states in Africa, has only one ethnic group. That group does have, however, significant divisions based on membership in various clan-families. What unites the Somalis is a common language, a reliance on animal husbandry, a shared Islamic heritage, the long-term inhabitancy of the Horn of Africa, and a belief that all Somali speakers, whether they live within the boundaries of Somalia or not, are descended from a common ancestor. Thus, in addition to the approximately 7-8 million Somalis who inhabit Somalia proper, the Somali-speakers who live within the northern province of Kenya, the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia, and the country of Djibouti are all considered to be part of one Somali nation.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Somalia is located in eastern Africa on what is commonly termed the Horn of Africa. The Horn extends into the Indian Ocean to the east, and the Gulf of Aden to the north. As a result, Somalia has a coastline extending almost 3,200 km (2,000 mi). To the west, Somalia is bounded by Ethiopia; to the southwest, by Kenya; and to the northwest, by Djibouti. The total area of the country is about 647,500 sq km (250,000 sq mi). Two long, sandy coastal plains dominate the coastal areas of the country. The interior is characterized by a series of moderate mountain ranges in the north, and a large rugged plateau in the south. The major rivers in Somalia are the Jubba furthest south, and the Shabeelle in the south-central area. The climate can be described as ranging from semiarid to arid, with average rainfall being less than 28 cm (11 in) per year. Animal husbandry is the most common subsistence activity in Somalia, with the major animals kept being camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. Agriculture is possible between the country's two major rivers, with sorghum, maize (corn), and a variety of legumes being raised.

In the late 19th century, the northern half of Somalia became a British protectorate. The southern half of Somalia was an Italian colony until 1960 when it was united with the north-

ern half to become an independent republic. However, independence did not unite all Somali people. A unification that would bring Somalis living in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti into an expanded nation-state has remained a political goal for the last half century.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language spoken by the vast majority of the Somali people is referred to as Maxaad tiri, but various dialects are spoken by members of the major clans within the country. Maxaad tiri and Arabic are official languages in Somalia, and many older people in the south also speak Italian. Government officials in the cities often speak English. Names for both males and females follow the Islamic pattern of a given first name followed by one's father's name, then one's father's father's name, father's father's father's name, and so forth. It is therefore common for a Somali to have names stretching back 15 generations. Somalis take extreme pride in their patrilineal ancestry. The perpetuation of family names, and the ability to recite each of them, is an important way of maintaining a connection with these ancestors.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Ceremonial feasts among the Somali people always include the telling of heroic tales of ancestors, as well as stories of more recent events in the lives of the storytellers themselves. As patrilineal ancestors are held in such high esteem by the Somalis, much of their folklore revolves around these family "heroes" who have aggrandized the wealth or status of the clan through fighting or clever economic actions.

## 5 RELIGION

The official state religion of Somalia is Islam, and almost 100% of the Somali population is Sunni Muslim. Although the Somalis follow the practices associated with Islam—praying five times a day, not eating pork products, abstaining from alcohol, and males having up to four wives at one time—they are not as traditional as many Muslims. Women do not practice *pardah*, or seclusion. They do not wear veils or cover their entire bodies when outside the home. They are full participants in subsistence activities in the rural areas, and they frequently own shops and work in a variety of occupations in urban areas, as well. (See section on Gender issues for more detail.)

As is common in many parts of the Islamic world, Somalis incorporate a belief in a spirit world into their religious system. These spirits, or *jinnns*, can be good or evil and can affect the lives of individuals, families, and even large kinship groups. It is therefore necessary to placate them, and sometimes to metaphorically fight them, in order to avoid and overcome illness, loss of property, marital problems, infertility, and even death. There are specialists who "fight" *jinnns* through prayer, ceremonies resembling exorcisms, and the ritual killing of animals. In addition to providing remedies for a variety of misfortunes, these ceremonies serve as important mechanisms for both enhancing clan solidarity and linking different kinship groups.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holidays in Somalia are associated with Islam. Ramadan is a month-long fast during which Muslims, in order to exhibit their beliefs, do not eat or drink during daylight hours. Rama-



dan ends with the feast of Id Al-Atah. This is also the first day of the month of Haaj during which believers are expected, at least once in their lives, to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Muhammad's birthday, Mowlud, is also a holy day among the Somalis and is celebrated with feasting.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Life events among the Somali are celebrated by feasting. The type and number of animals killed, and the particular individuals invited to the feast, depend on the wealth of the family involved and the nature of the event. The feasting is both an announcement that an important event has occurred, and a validation of the role of the family in the life of the clan. Birth is always an important event. Although boys are more highly valued among the Somali than girls, one or more sheep or goats will be killed to celebrate the birth of either. Death also results in feasting. The type and number of animals killed varies directly with the status of the deceased: a goat for a young child, to one or more camels for the death of an old, wealthy male.

Marriage is viewed by Somalis as a bond between two kinship groups, rather than only between two individuals, and is marked by a series of exchanges and ceremonies. The opening exchange is termed *fad* and usually consists of a relatively small amount of sorghum, a sheep, or a goat that the potential groom's patrilineal kin group presents to the kin group of the family of the potential bride. If the *fad* is accepted, then negotiations over the much larger bride-price (*meher*) can begin.

The *meher* is gathered by the groom's patrilineal kinfolk and can consist of camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. These animals are given to the family of the bride and are further distributed to close kin of the bride's father. The bride's family prepares the items necessary for family life: the *aqal* (a portable house), a bed, cooking utensils, mats, ropes, and skins. These are given to the married couple. The groom's family is responsible for slaughtering a camel and/or cow, which is consumed by the two immediate families. The bride's family will slaughter one or more animals to feed all the other guests.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

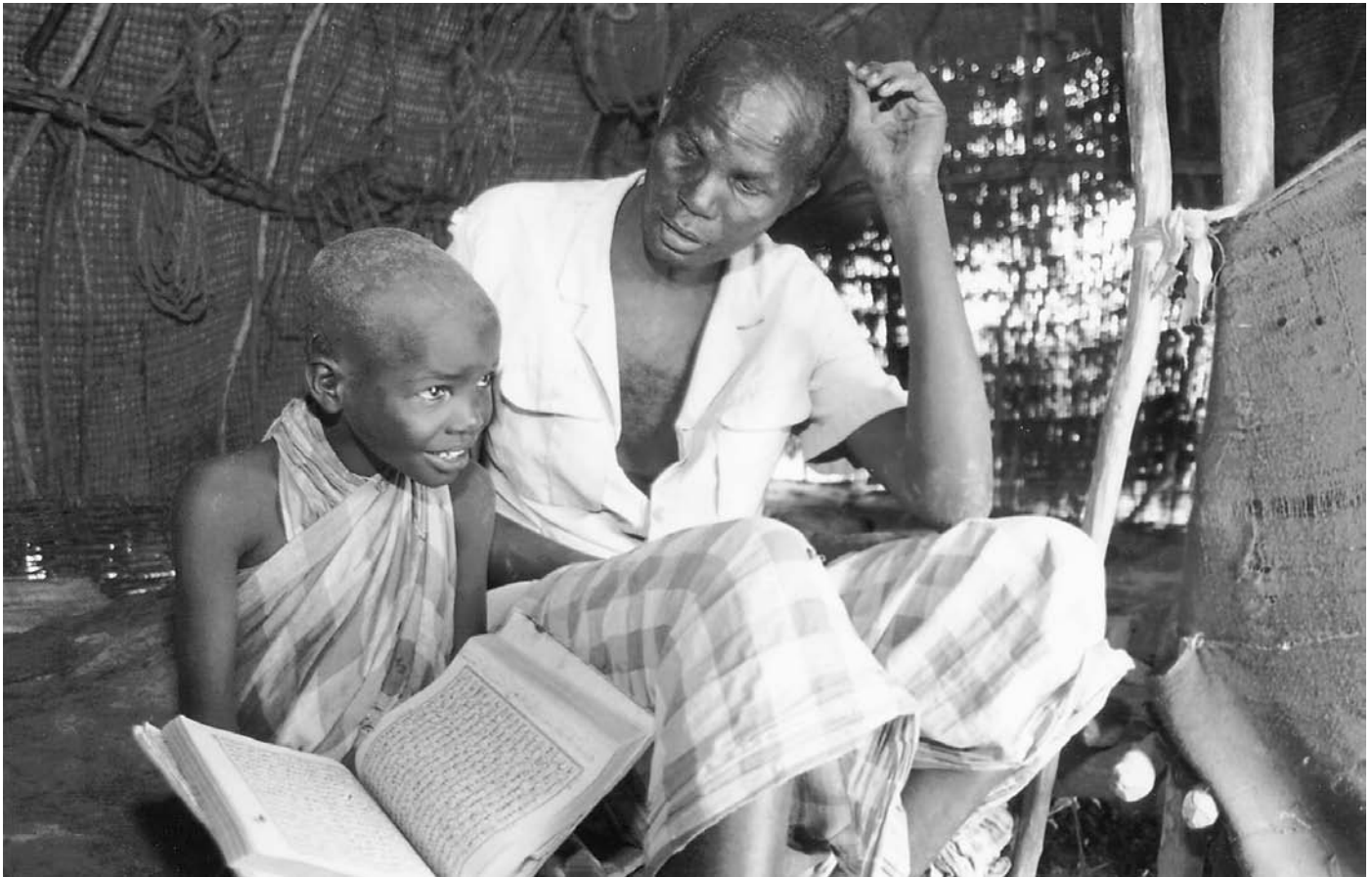
Contrary to their depiction on television over the last two decades as rampaging killers, the vast majority of Somalis are extremely friendly, warm, and peaceable. There is a strong tradition of hospitality that obligates individuals to welcome close kinfolk, clan members, and even strangers with tea and food. Because of the continual movement of people and animals throughout a large territory, and the precariousness of the arid environment, this type of hospitality is not uncommon among pastoralists, but the Somalis take special pride in providing it. The most common greetings are "Maalin wanaagsan" (Good day) and "Nabad myah?" (How are you?). For men, these greetings are followed by an extended shaking of hands, which is usually repeated with the same person even after a short absence. Women are less formal when greeting each other, and men and women who are not closely related by blood never shake hands or express other forms of intimacy.

There is nothing that could be construed as dating in the rural areas of Somalia. Even in urban areas, the contact between unmarried men and women is limited. Marriage is closely controlled by older men, and premarital sex is strongly forbidden. Unmarried men in their 20s will display their virility and prowess to women of marriageable age by dancing as a group, but older men do all they can to keep the young men far away from the unmarried women.

Although chronological age is not the sole marker of elder status, there is a general level of respect given to "older" men, especially when age is combined with success in other areas of Somali life. In particular, wealthy older men are accorded great respect, since wealth can only be gained by making wise decisions about animals, labor allocations, and marriages. It is expected that these older men use their status to increase the wellbeing of their immediate patrilineal kin and their clan.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

It is necessary to differentiate between the inhabitants of rural and urban areas when discussing the living conditions in Somalia. The vast majority (90%) of the Somali people live in small villages scattered throughout the rural areas of the country. Few of them have electricity, clean running water, paved roads, or public services. There are two types of housing utilized by people in the rural areas: *mundals* and *aqals*. *Mundals* are permanent structures made of a mud and dung mixture spread over a wooden frame and then topped with a thatched roof. These houses are occupied by a husband and wife, with their children. An *aqal* is a mobile house made of wooden sticks and hides, which can be transported on the back of a camel from one location to another. Every married woman owns an *aqal* and is responsible for erecting and dismantling it as animal camps are moved.



*Somali family structure is based on patrilineal descent. Men belong to the clan of their fathers and trace relationship through male lines back to the beginning of the clan, with the inheritance transferred from father to son. (AP Images)*

The approximately 10% of the Somali population who live in cities experience a life much different from those who live in the rural areas. Before the civil war began, the residents of Mogadishu, Baidoa, Hargeysa, Kismayu, Berbera, and Marka had access to electricity, running water, paved roads, hospitals, and large markets. Most urban dwellers lived in single-family houses and in the 1990s worked as shopkeepers, traders, or craftspeople, or for the government. Conditions brought about by continued civil-strife in several urban centers, especially Mogadishu and Baidoa, have made it impossible for normal life to function.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Since wealth is equated with the number of animals a man has, the goal for most men is to have more than one wife, and as many children as possible, in order to care for more animals. As Muslims, men are allowed as many as 4 wives at one time. It is not unusual for older wealthy men to have 3 or 4 wives. However, divorce is easy and common, and therefore some men may have had 10 or more wives during their lifetime. Likewise, many women will have been married to more than one man because of divorce or the death of a husband. Men do not usually marry until they are in their late 20s and have been able to accumulate some camels and cattle. Women, on the other hand, marry for the first time at 13 or 14 years of age.

After marriage, women live in the village or animal camp of their husband.

Family structure is based on patrilineal descent. Men belong to the clan of their fathers and trace relationship through male lines back to the beginning of the clan, with inheritance (*wahaad*) from father to son. There are six major patrilineally based "clan-families" in Somalia. The Daarood, the largest, live in an area from the tip of the Horn westward into Ethiopia. The Hawiyya are found primarily in the central plains and eastern coastal regions, and the Dir inhabit the most northern area of Somalia into Djibouti. The Isxaaq occupy the area between the Dir and Daarood in the northern plains. The Digil live along the southern coast between the Jubba and Shabeelle rivers; and the Rahanwiin inhabit the fertile area north of the Digil.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Clothing worn by Somalis is greatly influenced by the hot and dry climate of the Horn. Consequently, men have traditionally worn a long piece of lightweight cloth (*mawhees*) as a wrap-around skirt. A lightweight shirt is usually worn, and most men also use a long piece of cloth as a shawl at night when the temperature can drop to near freezing, and as a turban during the heat of the day when temperatures can reach above 38°C (100°F).





*Somali women dressed in traditional costumes perform at Mogadishu. Women traditionally wear dresses that cover their entire body from shoulders to ankles. It is also customary for women to wear shawls which they can use to cover their heads when in the presence of nonfamily males. (Jason Laure)*

Even though women do not keep *purdah* (seclusion), they still traditionally wear a dress that covers their entire body from shoulders to ankles. It is also customary for women to wear a shawl that they can use to cover their heads when in the presence of nonfamily males. This layering of clothing allows women to remove their shawl when indoors or when outside in the heat of the day, and yet have appropriate covering for modesty purposes and when temperatures fall.

Prior to puberty, young girls usually wear a simple dress made of a lightweight fabric. Young boys wear shorts and, most recently, imported tee-shirts with a variety of logos of American and European sports teams. Unmarried males in their late teens and early 20s are responsible for herding their family's camels and often spend months far away from their homes. They wear the traditional mawhees, but are almost always shirtless in order to show off their physiques. To further accentuate their virility, these young men cover their torsos and cake their hair with *ghee*—aged butterfat. This form of attire is worn to attract females and is abandoned immediately after marriage.

## 12 FOOD

Given that the main economic activity among Somalis is the raising of animals, it is not surprising that the most desired food is meat. Although camel, cattle, goat, sheep, and even

chickens are killed and eaten, camel meat is the most desired. Even though animals are plentiful and meat is the most desired food, it would be a mistake to think that meat is eaten every day. In rural areas, animals are generally only killed and meat eaten on special occasions. In urban areas, meat is available at markets, but once again it is not eaten daily. Instead, grains and vegetables are the everyday staple.

Sorghum, a grain crop widely grown in sub-Saharan Africa, is the most common food. Maize (corn), both locally grown and imported, began to be available in the 1970s in the urban areas of the country, as did imported rice. All the grains are cooked as a porridge and are traditionally eaten from a common bowl. Following Islamic practice, the porridge is eaten using only the right hand, without utensils. When meat is eaten, it is cooked separately from the porridge and then placed on top of the cooked grain. It is common, especially in rural areas, for men and women to eat separately.

Food delicacies include camel's hump, sheep's tail, goat's liver, and camel's milk. Camel's hump and sheep's tail (which are primarily fat stored by the animal in order to be reabsorbed during the dry season) and goat's liver are fried, and are only served on special occasions. Camel's milk is drunk more frequently, especially by unmarried males who are responsible for herding these animals. Although these traditional foods are available in markets, urban dwellers have access to a much

wider range of foods, including specialty foods imported from overseas.

### 13 EDUCATION

Although during the 1970s and 1980s education for all children was a high priority for the government of Somalia, few children in rural areas attended school. Even fewer of those who did completed more than the primary grades. Children in urban areas had a greater opportunity for education, and college attendance was increasing. However, the continuing civil strife has destroyed the educational infrastructure, and almost all government-run schools have been closed since the mid-1990s. The only schooling that exists today for the majority of children are Koran schools taught by Sheikhs, Muslim holy men. These schools are usually attended only by boys and emphasize the memorization of important portions of the Koran. However, since the factional fighting began, many of these schools have expanded their curriculum in order to provide a broader education.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

At feasts, usually associated with rites of passage, men recall past events affecting their animals and lives, tell heroic tales of patrilineal ancestors, and recite passages from the Koran. This feasting and storytelling promotes unity among members of a particular subclan, the larger clan family, and ultimately the entire Somali nation. Dancing, accompanied by singing, is usually only performed by unmarried males in their 20s. These sexually charged "dances" often involve the young men proving their bravery by slashing their arms and legs with large knives. Although leaving dramatic scars on their bodies, this expression of virility in most cases does not permanently harm the participants. Although "frowned upon" by married men, who themselves usually have numerous scars on their arms and legs, these ceremonies are an important activity.

### 15 WORK

Somalis practice a clear division of labor based on gender. Men and boys tend to the animals, and women and girls prepare meals and undertake other domestic tasks. Boys as young as 6 or 7 years old are responsible for the care of sheep and goats, which are kept close to the village or animal camp. Teenage boys and men care for the cattle, which are moved further from home in search of feed and therefore require more skill to handle. Camels are herded by young men in their late teens and 20s. The camels and their herders are often away from their homes for months at a time in search of grazing and water. Thus, the ability for these males to make decisions and protect this valuable asset is an important rite of passage. In rural areas, older men function as resource managers as they constantly adjust their labor force comprised of their wives and children to maximize production of animals and, in the southern part of the country, grain.

Women are primarily responsible for child-rearing, food preparation, and all other domestic tasks. Although at first glance these domestic roles appear far less dramatic, and perhaps even less important, than the care of the herds, without the completion of these tasks males would be unable to successfully care for the herd animals. One particularly important task undertaken by women is the preparation for moving the household from animal camp to animal camp. This involves

dismantling the family's *aqal* (portable house), packing it and all other domestic items on a camel, trekking to the next camp site and reassembling the *aqal*, reestablishing the homestead, and preparing the evening meal, all in less than 10 hours. In areas where domestic crops can be grown, women undertake an even greater work role, as they, and their children, are largely responsible for tending, weeding, and harvesting the crops. In urban areas, it is very common for women to own and run small shops selling a wide-range of products.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular and widely played sport in Somalia. However, its play is primarily restricted to the cities and larger towns and is not that prevalent in the villages. This is because children assume important roles within the pastoral society at an early age and particularly boys have little time for organized sport. Boys and girls play games, but the responsibilities assumed by children at an early age restrict the free time necessary for the organization and play of games.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most entertainment among rural Somalis is in the form of ceremonies associated with major life transitions: birth, puberty, marriage, and death. For these ceremonies, animals are killed and the meat distributed to all who are in attendance. Most patrilineal kinfolk will be invited to these ceremonies, as well as relatives through marriage and other members of a village or animal camp. The main object is to reinforce kinship and other relationships through feasting and talking. Storytelling, recitation of ancestral names, and recounting the accomplishments of kinfolk and ancestors is a form of entertainment that has been lost in Western society, but which provides hours of pleasure for the pastoral Somalis.

Television is nonexistent in Somalia, although before the civil war the government did provide a radio service. Many urban and rural Somalis listen regularly to BBC broadcasts on the radio and are consequently well-informed about world events. Movie theaters also operated in all major cities and towns before the outbreak of widespread fighting. Most movies shown were either produced in India or were adventure movies from Hollywood.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Somali have little activity that could be described as folk art or crafts, but this does not mean that they make few objects. Quite the contrary, the Somali are quite proficient in crafts, producing fine wooden utensils, leather goods, woven mats and ropes, knife blades, and arrow points. However, each of these products has a definite utilitarian function, rather than being a remnant of a previous folk art or craft. Just as there are religious specialists and healers, there are people who specialize in, for example, ironworking or woodcarving. Much of the craft work, however, is undertaken by ordinary inhabitants of villages who have need of a woven rope or a carved knife handle. Perhaps in the future these utilitarian crafts will become a folk art, but until then, these are skills that are necessary for the functioning of Somali society.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Because of the continuing civil strife, there has been a complete breakdown of civil government since the early 1990s, resulting in the cessation of most public services in many of the areas of the country. This civil strife is the culmination of a movement to depose General Muhammad Siad Barre, who seized power in a military coup in 1969 and ruled as a virtual dictator until 1991. Unfortunately, the united clans that drove Barre from the country could not agree on a governmental structure. Fighting among them began in late 1991 and in some form or another, has been going on ever since. During the fighting, agriculture and livestock-raising has been disrupted, and well over one-half million people died of starvation and at least another 100,000, mostly in Mogadishu and surrounding areas, died in the fighting. The United Nations and a variety of non-governmental relief organizations (NGOs) have launched relief efforts over the last two decades, but the lack of a central government has resulted in little actual help for the people who need it most. The lack of a central government that could control the various clan factions, eliminate fighting and provide basic services for the population resulted in the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2005. By 2006, the UIC had gained control of Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia and, through the imposition of Sharia courts (the application of traditional Islamic justice), had brought relative peace to much of Mogadishu and the south. However, splinter groups of the UIC, especially a group of young Islamist fighters known as al-Shabab, made alliances with other world-wide radical Islamists resulting, in 2006, with the United States placing the UIC on its list of "foreign terrorist organizations." In response to this action, Ethiopian troops invaded Somalia in late 2006 to aid Somalia's government in its fight against the UIC. Since Ethiopia is the traditional enemy of the Somali peoples, this action resulted in the formation of the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ALS) in late 2006 to launch both military and diplomatic actions to force the Ethiopians out of the country. In 2007 the African Union sent the first troops to Mogadishu in an attempt to reestablish civil order, but these efforts have had little positive impact. As of early 2008 over 250,000 Somali had been displaced from urban centers and were living in squalid refugee camps in rural areas of the country.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues among the Somali are largely dependent on the local interpretation of Islamic law and traditional practice. Although traditionally Somali women have had more rights and independence of actions than in many other Islamic countries, the rise of more fundamentalist factions has resulted in purdah being imposed, depending on which faction is in control, in Mogadishu and other urban areas.

Since traditionally marriage functions to unite kin groupings, most marriages are arranged by older males within the clan with neither groom nor bride having input in the marriage choice. Men dominate marriages and can easily initiate and be granted divorce, while women have only limited ability to initiate divorce. It is very common for men to not only have more than one wife at any given time, but to marry and divorce frequently. Women can remarry after divorce, but most frequently these marriages are less desirable. Because they have lost the ability to provide children to the clan of a potential husband, post-menopausal women have the most difficulty remarrying.

Within marriages, men dominate almost all economic matters and it is difficult, but not impossible, for women to own and control animals and land independent of their husbands. Children are members of their father's clan with the result that mothers, although having normal maternal responsibilities, have little say in the most important matters impacting their children, e.g., marriage partner and inheritance. This does not mean that children do not feel strong affection towards their mothers and it is not unusual for sons to support their mothers once widowed or divorced, but the patrilineal bond dominates all kin relationships. It is not an exaggeration to term traditional Somali society as patriarchal.

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—by A. P. Glascock

# SONGHAY

**PRONUNCIATION:** song-HIGH

**LOCATION:** Eastern Mali, western Niger, northern Benin

**POPULATION:** 3.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dialects of Songhay; French

**RELIGION:** Islam combined with indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Beninese; Malians; Nigeriens

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Songhay have one of the most glorious histories of any African people. Known throughout West Africa as great and fearless warriors, the Songhay established one of the three great medieval West African Empires in 1463. The first Songhay king, Sonni Ali Ber, who spent much of his 30-year reign engaged in war, extended the boundaries of the Songhay state far beyond its ancestral lands, which extended some 100 km (62 mi) from each bank of the upper bend of the Niger River in what is today eastern Mali and western Niger. His successor, Askia Mohammed Touré, who founded a new dynasty, the Askiad, ruled from the Songhay capital at Gao, still a town today along the banks of the upper Niger River in Mali. Askia Mohammed made Songhay a great empire by extending its control throughout much of West Africa.

The political skill of Askia Mohammed's sons, who succeeded him, paled in comparison to that of their father, who set up elaborate and efficient bureaucracies to govern the empire. During his sons' reigns, however, corruption weakened the structures of imperial bureaucracy and treachery compromised imperial power. Toward the end of the 16th century, imperial Songhay was little more than an empty shell. In 1591 a small column of Moroccan soldiers crossed the Sahara and routed the excessively large Songhay army at the battle of Tondibia. The Moroccans installed a pasha (civil and military official) and controlled the northern sectors of Songhay. The Songhay nobles, all descendants of Askia Mohammed, fled southward to present-day Niger, where they continued their much diminished imperial rule. In time, the southern empire splintered into independent principalities that were mutually hostile. These principalities remained independent until 1899 when they were subjected to French colonial authority, which continued until the founding of the Republic of Niger in 1960. In the first three governments of the Republic of Niger, Songhay played central political roles. Compared to other ethnic groups in the Republic of Niger, they have a disproportionately large representation in the officer corps of Niger's army.

<sup>2</sup> Location and homeland

The Songhay-speaking peoples live near the Niger River in eastern Mali, western Niger, and northern Benin. Key towns in Songhay country include Gao and Timbuktu in Mali, and Ayoru, Tillaberi, Niamey, and Tera in Niger. Songhay country is situated in the semiarid Sahel, which consists of flat rocky plains broken by rocky mesas in the south, and sandy dunes in the north.

The vast majority of Songhay are agriculturalists who grow millet and sorghum in sandy fields or cultivate rice in the shallows of the Niger River. This region features one of the harshest climates in the world. From October to May it does not rain. The dry period consists of two seasons: cool and hot. The cool

season is dry, windy, and dusty with daytime temperatures rising well above 27°C (80°F) and nighttime temperatures often plummeting below 10°C (50°F). By February, however, the daytime readings reach 38°C (100°F) or more. By April and May, afternoon temperatures sometimes exceed 46°C (115°F). At night, the mercury drops only to 30°C (85°F) or so. The rains come in late May or early June and break the heat. The rainy season lasts from June through September.

Songhay-speaking peoples have a more than 100-year history of migration from Niger and Mali to the Guinea Coast countries of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast. More recently Songhay traders have traveled to France as well as to the United States, where Songhay traders live and work in New York City. The vast majority of Songhay people, however, remain in Mali and Niger. Into the 21st century, in the US, most Songhay immigrants live in New York City, mostly in Harlem and the South Bronx and in a vibrant community in Greensboro, North Carolina.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Songhay is a language spoken by 3 million people in the Republics of Mali, Niger, and Benin. There are several dialects of Songhay. In Timbuktu, Songhay people speak *kwaara cini* (literally, "town talk"). The Songhay spoken between Gao and Tillaberi along the Niger River is called *issa cini* (literally, "river talk"). By contrast, people living in far western Niger in such towns as Tera, Dargol, and Wanzerbe are said to speak Songhay. Peoples living east of the Niger River from Tillaberi south to the town of Say speak the Zarma dialect. People living along the Niger River near the Niger-Benin border speak Dendi, yet another Songhay dialect. Because Mali, Niger, and Benin are all French-speaking nations, many Songhay people living in these states are conversant in French.

As in many African languages, greetings are important in Songhay. The first greeting is: "*Manti ni kaani*," "How did you sleep?" One usually replies, "*Baani sami, walla*," meaning, "I slept (implied) well, in health." The greetings in the morning focus upon work and the health of people in one's compound. The midday greetings ask after one's afternoon. Late afternoon greetings reference questions of health. In the dusk greeting, people exchange salutations of peace and health. At bedtime, one says: "*Iri me kaani baani*," which means "May we both sleep in health and peace."

## 4 FOLKLORE

Songhay trace their origins to the 8th century AD and the coming of Aliman Dia to the Niger River. Aliman Dia possessed iron weapons and with these he subdued the resident peoples, *sorko* (fishers) and *gow* (hunters). Aliman Dia brought these peoples together and founded the first Songhay dynasty, the Dia. Descendants of Aliman Dia governed Songhay until the 15th century when a dynasty, the Sonni, succeeded them.

The ancestor of the *sorko*, Faran Maka Bote, like Aliman Dia, is a Songhay culture hero. Faran Maka Bote's father, Nisili Bote, was a fisherman. His mother, Maka, was a river spirit. Faran grew to be a giant with vast magical powers. As an adult he battled a river spirit, Zinkibaru, for the control of the river spirits, which meant control of the Niger River. Faran won this battle and became master of the Niger River. But his confidence soon surpassed his capacities. Dongo, the deity of lightning and thunder, demonstrated his displeasure with Faran by



burning villages and killing people. He summoned Faran and demanded that the giant pay his humble respects to Dongo by offering music, praise-poems, and animal sacrifices. Dongo told Faran that if he organized festivals, Dongo would descend into the bodies of dancers and help the people along the Niger River. This event marked the first Songhay possession ceremony. These ceremonies are still performed today. One of the most important members of a Songhay possession troupe, moreover, is the *sorko*, praise-singer to the spirits and direct descendant of Faran Make Bote. In this way, myth in the Songhay world is connected to ongoing social and religious practices.

## 5 RELIGION

Although almost all Songhay are practicing Muslims, Islamic practices have not excluded pre-Islamic beliefs. Songhay see life as a series of paths (the life path or paths; in the Songhay language, the *fonda* or *fondey*) that constitute life in the world. Like paths in the Songhay bush, the metaphoric paths of life end when they meet two new paths that fork off in different directions. At these crossroads, points of potential danger where the spirit and social worlds meet, people are vulnerable to misfortune, sickness, and possibly death. Because life is seen as the continuous negotiation of dangerous crossroads, Songhay people regularly consult diviners, who read shells that indicate what precautions a person must take to move forward on her or his path.

The paths of Songhay religious specialists are steeped with learning and fraught with difficulties. There is *sohancitarey*,

the path of Songhay sorcerers, descendants of the Songhay king, Sonni Ali Ber. There is the path of *sorkotarey*, which is followed by praise-singers to the spirits, descendants of Faran Maka Bote. Healers descended from slaves, called *horso*, follow the path of their ancestors (*horsotarey*), practicing magic passed down from generation to generation. *Cerkowtarey* is the path of witches, who precipitate illness, misfortune, and death in Songhay villages. They are said to fly in the night and to be able to transform their appearance. Death results when witches steal and eat their victims' souls. There is also the path of *zimatarey* that is followed by spirit-possession priests, who work with the *sorko* to stage spirit-possession ceremonies. Except for witches, who receive their powers through ingesting their mothers' milk if their mothers are witches, these specialists must serve long apprenticeships to master the knowledge of history, plants, words, and practices. Along their paths, apprentices become vulnerable to the powers and rivalries of the spirit world, which the Songhay call "the world of war."

For most Songhay, whose contact with the spirit world may well be frightening but is generally infrequent, the path of Islam is well followed. They pray five times a day, avoid alcohol and pork, honor and respect their elders, give to the poor, observe the one-month fast of Ramadan, and try to the best of their ability to make the exceedingly expensive pilgrimage to Mecca. If they submit to these practices, they believe that they will ascend to heaven. These beliefs, however, do not preclude beliefs about the spirit world.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Songhay people, like other groups in the Republic of Niger, celebrate Nigerien Independence Day, and other state-related holidays. They also celebrate such major Islamic holidays as Muhammad's birthday, the end of the Ramadan fast, and *tabaski*, which commemorates Abraham's biblical sacrifice of a ram. For *tabaski*, people slaughter one or two sheep and roast them in their compound. They feast on the roasted mutton and offer raw and cooked meat to needier people who knock on their door seeking an offering.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Like all peoples throughout the world, the Songhay perform rituals to underscore the major events of the life-cycle. Most of these rituals follow Islamic prescriptions, though some practices related to birth, puberty, marriage, divorce, and death predate Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Birth, for example, is seen as a time of danger for both mothers and their children. During pregnancy, most Songhay women avoid certain foods. During and immediately following childbirth, men are kept from the mother and child. Mother and child are presented to family and neighbors for the first time at the *bon chebe* (literally, "showing the head"), at which the child is named. As children mature, they are educated by their fathers and mothers. Young boys learn to farm millet and sorghum, cultivate rice, fish, and hunt; young girls learn cooking, child care, and other domestic chores. In the past, young Songhay practiced a pre-Islamic female initiation called the *gosi*, during which young girls were ritually purified for marriage. This practice did not involve female genital mutilation. Young boys once underwent circumcision at a relatively late age. Circumcision specialists (*guunu*) would travel from village to village and circumcise

scores of boys in one afternoon. These days, circumcisions are performed on toddlers by physicians in hospital settings.

In adolescence, Songhay often forge life-long friendships. Groups of friends will work together and attend social events like drumming ceremonies or dances organized by the *samaryia*, which is a village-level young people's organization. Eventually women and men are ready to marry. In the recent past, there were many cousin marriages among the Songhay, especially among families of nobles, descendants of Askia Mohammed Touré. Young men and women were encouraged to marry the children of their father's siblings. Nowadays, cousin marriages are less frequent.

Once the groom asks the bride's father for permission to marry the latter's daughter, he is expected to pay his future father-in-law a bride-price, which today is a fixed sum of money. He is also expected to give his future wife many gifts: cloth, blankets, perfume, and soap. He will also give his in-laws gifts of rice, meat, and kola nuts. The significant expense of marriage makes it difficult for young men to afford to marry, which is why most Songhay grooms are significantly older than their wives. The marriage ceremony is marked by the presentation of gifts and the sanctification of an Islamic contract (*kitubi*) that binds husband to wife. Drummers play music and people eat and dance in the bride's compound.

Divorce, which is quite common among the Songhay, is not marked by ceremony. Men initiate formal divorce by consulting a Muslim cleric and proclaiming, "I divorce thee" three times. If there are children in the marriage, they live with the father after two years of age. This practice, too, follows Muslim law. Since there is no joint property held between husband and wife, divorces are easy to obtain and free of property disputes. Women informally initiate divorce by leaving their husbands, who then proclaim their divorce in the wife's absence.

Adulthood among the Songhay is spent working and raising families. As people age, they have fewer responsibilities. When they become elders, they spend much of their time conversing with their friends and imparting wisdom to the younger generations. When Songhay die, they are buried quickly and without fanfare. Mourning lasts for 40 days, during which the family receives regular visits from relatives and friends. During these visits people honor the person who died by talking about his or her life, his or her likes and dislikes, and perhaps his or her peculiar expressions.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Generosity, grace, and modesty are key ingredients of ideal Songhay interpersonal relations. One is supposed to direct one's social energies towards the other and the group. Self-absorption is looked down upon. The Songhay are, like many peoples in the West African Sahel, known for their generosity. When strangers arrive they are housed, well fed, and treated with great dignity—even if the hosts are poor. Such is the hallmark of Songhay graciousness, which may have developed in response to the harsh ecological and economic conditions in which they live.

Songhay are also modest people. If they are wealthy in comparison with their neighbors, they do not flaunt their material success. Dress is also modest. Men wear long flowing robes (*boubous*) over loose-fitting cotton trousers and shirts. Women wear long wrap-around skirts (*pagnes*) and tops. In both cases, people dress for comfort and avoid wearing clothes that show

off their bodies. Young men are supposed to be respectful of young women, who in turn are supposed to be shy around young men. This code is expressed in body language. Boys do make eye contact with girls. Girls, however, will often look at the ground when talking in public to boys. Whenever young men and women become involved with one another, they do so in private. Their public behavior maintains a socially sanctioned modesty.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Songhay people in rural areas live mostly in small villages, which are usually near a water source—a series of wells, a pond, or the Niger River. Families live within walled or fenced compounds, which usually consist of a main house for the husband, and smaller houses for each of his wives and their children. The houses are usually made of mud bricks and have thatched roofs. More traditional homes are circular huts with thatched roofs. New houses may be made of cement and feature tin roofs. Homes offer Songhay protection from heat, wind, and rain. Most social activity, however, is conducted out of doors in the compound, where food is prepared and eaten, and where people visit one another in the evenings.

Songhay who live in such urban areas as Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger, also live in compounds. Space in urban areas is, of course, limited, which means that people live in crowded conditions that tend to be less sanitary than in the countryside. In the Songhay Diaspora in France and in New York, families live in small apartments in neighborhoods in which other West African immigrants have settled. In New York City Songhay men and women live in Harlem, the South Bronx, and in Brooklyn.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Songhay families tend to be large. In rural areas, brothers live with their father, mothers, wives, and children in large communal compounds. In some cases, more than 100 people might live in a rural compound. In urban areas, families are a bit more scattered and smaller in size. In the family, women play central roles. They fetch water, buy and prepare food, clean the house and compound, and look after the children. As a woman ages, she expects younger wives (if the marriage is polygamous), daughters-in-law, or daughters to perform domestic chores. Men work in the fields and are often away from the family compound. When they return, women give them bathing water and feed them.

Men and women lead fairly separate lives. They do different kinds of work. They eat separately. They often talk exclusively to other people of their own gender. When a marriage occurs, a woman's primary allegiance is to her blood kin, for it is from them that she will inherit wealth. If husbands are abusive, the wife's brothers will often intervene to end the abuse. If a woman earns money, she will keep it for herself or share it with her blood kin. She rarely gives her husband money, for it is his responsibility to feed, clothe, and otherwise care for his wife. In the Diaspora, Songhay husbands spend long periods of time away from their wives and families. They meet their familial obligations by wiring money to their families in Niger.

## 11 CLOTHING

Rural as well as urban Songhay men today wear a combination of traditional and Western clothing. More often than not,



A Songhai bride from Mali adorns her hair with silver coins and gold filigree ornaments containing blessings. The remarkable hairstyles of the Songhai woman are reminders of the sophisticated Songhai Empire that held sway for 600 years until the end of the sixteenth century. (Carol Beckwith/Angela Fisher/Getty Images)

they wear tailored suits consisting of trousers and a loose-fitting shirt that they wear untucked. Younger men might wear used jeans and tee-shirts they buy at local or regional markets. There are some men, however, who prefer to wear traditional garb, which includes a damask cotton three-piece outfit, consisting of matching drawstring trousers, long-sleeved loose-fitting shirt with an open neck, and long billowy robe (*boubou*) with a deep chest pocket. These robes are sometimes covered with elaborate designs brocaded in silver and gold thread. The only Songhay women who wear Western fashions belong to the upper classes of Nigerien society. Most Songhay women rarely, if ever, wear Western clothing.

## 12 FOOD

The staple of the Songhay diet is millet, a highly nutritious grain that Westerners use principally as bird seed. Millet is consumed in three ways: as a pancake (*haini maasa*), as porridge (*doonu*), or as a paste (*howru*). No matter how it is consumed, the millet must first be pounded or milled into flour.

Millet flour can then be mixed with water to make a pancake batter, which is then fried on a griddle. This food is usually eaten at breakfast. Porridge, which is eaten at the noon meal, is mixture of millet flour that has been shaped into a doughy ball, milk, water, and sugar. Millet paste is made by mixing millet flour in a pot of boiling water until the mixture stiffens. This paste, which is consumed at the evening meal, is topped by a variety of usually meatless sauces made from okra, baobab leaf, or peanuts. Songhay season their sauces with ginger (*tofunua*), hot pepper (*tonka*), onion flour with sesame (*gebu*), sorrel paste (*maari bi*), and a variety of other ingredients that have no English-language equivalents.

Food is served in porcelain bowls that Songhay buy at markets. In rural areas, bowls are fashioned from large gourds and are decorated. Men and women eat separately. Food is served in a common bowl from which people eat with their right hands. The left hand, which people use to clean themselves, is considered impure.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education takes two forms among the Songhay: informal and formal. Mothers and fathers informally educate their children in matters of subsistence: farming, fishing, hunting, building huts and houses, cooking, weaving, and sewing. Even though thousands of Songhay children attend elementary school, illiteracy is common. In remote areas, some Songhay parents see formal schooling as a loss, for it often means that semieducated sons and daughters leave the countryside for towns and cities. Elementary school students must pass screening examinations to attend middle schools. Middle school students must pass the *brevet*, another screening exam, to advance to the *lycée*, or high school. After four years of high school, students must pass a baccalaureate exam in order to qualify for university education. In Niger there is one university, Université de Niamey; several normal schools, which train primary school teachers; and several advanced education centers where bureaucrats and technocrats acquire their respective training.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Songhay are proud of their imperial past and celebrate it with song, dance, and epic poetry. Singing, dancing, and praise-songs, performed by *griots* (both male and female), are central to the celebration of births, marriages, and secular and religious holidays. Epic poetry is also performed on secular and religious holidays. It recounts the heroic feats of cultural heroes like Sonni Ali Ber and Askia Mohammed Touré, the greatest of the Songhay kings. Poetry performances are frequently broadcast on national radio.

## 15 WORK

The principal activity of most Songhay men has been millet and rice farming. Since the tasks associated with farming do not consume an entire year, many Songhay men have developed secondary occupations: trading, transport, or tailoring. More than a few Songhay men spend the nonplanting season working for wages in Niamey, the capital of Niger, or in far-away coastal cities like Abidjan, Lome, or Lagos. Except in upper-class families, Songhay women remain wedded to domestic activities. In some cases, divorced women sell cooked foods or trade in cloth to make their way in the world. A small percentage of Songhay women work as civil servants for the

government of Niger. In the Diaspora, Songhay men in New York City work as street vendors, import-export businessmen, security guards, factory laborers and gas station attendants.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the major sport among Songhay boys and young men. No matter the size of the village, there is a space where young boys and men regularly play soccer. Larger villages support soccer clubs and teams that compete against other villages. The national team recruits its players from these local soccer clubs and competes against teams from other African nations. Boys and men also race horses both informally and formally. During secular holidays, villages sponsor horse races and present the winners with prizes.

Wrestling is the other major sport. The idea is not to pin one's opponent but merely to throw him to the ground. There are wrestling competitions in most larger villages as well as a prestigious national competition. Songhay girls are not encouraged to participate in sports, although those who attend school are required to take physical education and engage in intramural competition.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Such religious rituals as spirit-possession ceremonies are also occasions for group entertainment. When a spirit-possession ceremony is staged, vendors come to sell cigarettes, cooked foods, and candy to the audience. In many Songhay towns there is a local theater, in which young people stage plays about the social conflicts of growing up in a changing society. Sometimes these local theater troupes perform on national radio. Towns also sponsor local singing and dance groups, as well as gatherings for young people where they can dance and socialize.

Television has become an important medium of entertainment in many of the larger Songhay towns. Most people cannot afford electricity, let alone a television set. But neighborhood chiefs, who own televisions, will invite their neighbors into their compound for evenings of television viewing.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Songhay are well known for weaving blankets and mats. The elaborate cotton blankets woven by men in the town of Tera (*terabebe*) are highly prized throughout the Sahel. Women living along the Niger River weave palm frond mats that feature geometric designs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are two great social problems facing the Songhay. The first is the ever-present prospect of drought and famine. Songhay live in the Sahel, which throughout its history has been prone to drought and famine. In the past 35 years there have been many devastating droughts and famines that have prompted the widespread migration of rural Songhay to towns and cities. In any given year, even the slightest disruption of the cycle of rains can precipitate grain shortages, hunger, and famine.

The second principal social problem involves politics. At present the Republic of Niger is politically unstable. The first three governments of the Republic of Niger were led by Songhay-speaking peoples, which led to charges of ethnic favorit-

ism from the other ethnic groups (Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, and Tuareg) that constituted the majority of the population. Thirty years ago, the issue of tribalism was important. Today, the power and relevance of the state has diminished, especially in rural areas. While in the past people might have charged the government with ethnic favoritism toward the Songhay, people in the present must concentrate their energies on making their way in a politically and socially uncertain world. In the Diaspora, the principal social problem is the separation of families, which sometimes precipitates divorce. This same separation sometimes results in new marriages in the host country, meaning that some Songhay men have two families: one in Niger and one in a new home like New York City

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender is central to the flow of social relations. In rural Songhay villages, men and women have relatively distinct identities. These identities have been shaped by patterns of work and social obligation as well as by the influence of Islam. In general, women run household economies and, for the most part, participate directly in child-rearing. The man's domain is usually outside of the home—in the fields or at the market. These "roles" shift somewhat in urban areas in which women engage in economic activities outside the home. Indeed, some urban Songhay women are educated and have civil service positions. These women hire others to cook, clean, and look after their young children. The same can be said of Songhay women who live in places like Paris or New York City. Sometimes, the expanded roles that Songhay women enjoy in urban or diasporic communities precipitate domestic tension in the household.

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—by P. Stoller



# SOTHO

**PRONUNCIATION:** SOO-too

**LOCATION:** Lesotho, South Africa

**POPULATION:** 8.2 million in South Africa, 2.1 million in Lesotho

**LANGUAGE:** Sotho language (Sesotho or Sepedi)

**RELIGION:** Traditional beliefs (supreme being Modimo), Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Sotho people are an ethnic group living in Lesotho and South Africa. There are two major branches, the southern Sotho and the northern Sotho (also called the Pedi). Southern Sotho people make up about 99% of the population of Lesotho. The southern Sotho and the northern Sotho taken together are the second largest ethnic group in South Africa. Speakers of southern Sotho make up about 8% of the South African population while speakers of northern Sotho make up about 9.5%. Culturally and linguistically, both groups are also closely related to the Tswana people of Botswana.

Sotho society was traditionally organized in villages ruled by chiefs. The economy was based on the rearing of cattle and the cultivation of grains such as sorghum. In the early nineteenth century, several kingdoms developed as a result of a series of wars, the *difaqane*, which engulfed much of southern Africa. During this period, southern Sotho people as well as other ethnic groups sought refuge in the mountainous terrain of Lesotho. A local chief named Moshoeshoe emerged as a skillful diplomat and military leader who was able to keep his country from falling into the hands of Zulu and, later, white (Afrikaner) forces. After Moshoeshoe's death in 1870, this independence was weakened, and white (English) authorities from the Cape Colony tried to administer Lesotho as a conquered territory. The people resisted this attempt at control, however, leading to the Gun War of 1880-1881 in which the Cape Colony was defeated.

The northern Sotho suffered much devastation at the hands of African armies during the *difaqane*, but several chiefdoms were able to recover. After 1845, the Pedi also had to contend with an influx of white Afrikaner settlers, some of whom seized Pedi children and forced them to work as slaves whom they euphemistically labeled "servants" (*inboekseling*). The Pedi ruler Sekwati and, later, his son Sekhukhune, successfully resisted Afrikaner encroachment on their territory for a number of years, but the Pedi were finally conquered by a combined force of British, Afrikaner, and Swazi men in 1879. Thus the northern Sotho lost their independence and fell under the political control of white authorities. All of the land of the northern Sotho was fragmented and turned into the African "reserve" of Sekhukhuniland. Under apartheid, Sekhukhuniland and some surrounding lands occupied by other African peoples were made into the Bantustan of Lebowa. There were forced relocations of Sotho people to Lebowa, QwaQwa, and several other Bantustans, causing great hardship. These structures were disbanded with the end of apartheid.

In 1884, Lesotho became a British protectorate. Unlike the Pedi kingdom, therefore, Lesotho was not incorporated into South Africa. However, rich agricultural land once claimed

by Moshoeshoe (territory which included much of the South African Free State) was lost to Afrikaner control. Lesotho became an independent country in 1966, although because it was surrounded by apartheid South Africa, it was never completely free. The nation has also had trouble in establishing a democracy of its own. The first democratic elections after independence were voided by the government of Leabua Jonathan. Jonathan ruled Lesotho from 1970 until he was overthrown in a coup in 1986. Military rule came to an end in 1991, but the transition to democracy has been difficult. In 1998 and 1999 violence erupted in many parts of the country as a result of disputed election results. For several months during this period, the country was occupied by South African and other African forces who maintained they were there as invited peacekeepers. This period saw the destruction of much valuable property, particularly in urban areas. Although there are many opposition parties, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) has held power since this time.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to 2008 estimates, there were about 8 million people who identified themselves as southern or northern Sotho in South Africa. In Lesotho there were about 2.1 million southern Sotho.

The home of most of the southern Sotho is in Lesotho and in South Africa's Free State Province. There are also many Sotho who live in South Africa's major cities. Lesotho is a mountainous country that is completely landlocked within the borders of South Africa. It has an area of about 30,350 sq km (about 11,700 sq mi). The Free State is a highland plain, called a *highveld* in South Africa, bordering Lesotho to the west. The eastern section of Lesotho is also a highveld, punctuated by plateaus similar to those found in the American Southwest. The Maloti and Drakensberg mountains are in the central and western parts of the country. The Drakensberg Mountains form sharp cliffs that drop off dramatically to South Africa's KwaZulu/Natal Province. The climate of South Africa in general is temperate, but the mountains make for cold winters. In fact, winter snows are not uncommon in the Lesotho highlands.

The region considered a traditional home by many rural Pedi is between the Olifants and Steelpoort rivers in South Africa's Limpopo Province. It is bounded by the Leolo Mountains on the east and by dry plains to the west. This region and neighboring areas are also home to other ethnic groups, including the Lovedu, Tsonga, Ndebele, Venda, Zulu, and Afrikaners. Northern areas of South Africa are much warmer than Lesotho.

Although many people of northern Sotho background considered the territory that became Lebowa their homeland, this Bantustan was to a large extent an artificial creation. In the 1970s and 1980s, ethnic tensions developed as a result of the apartheid state's attempt to define peoples in terms of a simplistic notion of homeland and tribe. Other peoples defined by the apartheid state as southern Sotho were forced to move to the impoverished "homelands" of Bophuthatswana and QwaQwa. Conflict generally has intensified in rural areas because the lands of northern and southern Sotho people have been heavily eroded, overpopulated, and overgrazed for many years.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Sotho language, or Sesotho, is a Bantu language closely related to Setswana. Bantu languages are characterized by a system of organizing nouns by prefixes. For example, the “se” prefix is used in front of all languages while “ba” is used with nouns for people. To be polite it is most appropriate even in English to speak of the Sotho people as “Basotho” or, when referring to one person, as “Mosotho.” As in the South African languages Zulu and Xhosa, Sotho discourse is rich in proverbs, idioms, and special forms of address reserved for elders and in-laws.

The division between southern and northern Sotho people is based on the dialectal differences between the two groups. The southern form of Sotho is spoken in Lesotho, and the northern form is spoken by many in South Africa’s Limpopo Province. The northern form is called Sepedi. Southern Sotho utilizes click consonants in some words (although not so many as in Zulu and Xhosa), while Sepedi and Setswana do not have clicks. Currently, southern Sotho has two spelling systems, one in use in Lesotho and another in South Africa. For example, in Lesotho a common greeting is *Khotso, le phela joang?* (literally, “Peace, how are you?”). In South Africa, the word *joang* (how) is written *jwang*, and *khotso* is written *kgotso*.

Names in Sotho generally have meanings that express the values of the parents or of the community. Common personal names include *Lehlohonolo* (Good Fortune), *Mpho* (Gift), and *MmaThabo* (Mother of Joy). Names may also be given to refer to events. For example, a girl born during a rainstorm might be called *Puleng*, meaning “in the rain.” Individuals may also be named after clan heroes. Surnames are taken from relatives on the father’s side of the family.

In recent years, African languages have been undergoing rapid change due to the influence of European languages. There is also influence from multicultural urban slang. As a result, many Sotho speakers today readily mix words and phrases from other languages into their speech.

### 4 FOLKLORE

According to one Sotho tradition, the first human being emerged from a sea of reeds at a place called Ntswanatsatsi. However, little is known or said about the events of this person’s life.

Sotho has a rich tradition of folktales (*ditsomo* or *dinonwane*) and praise poems (*diboko*). These are told in dramatic and creative ways that may include audience participation. Folktales are adventure stories that occur in realistic and magical settings. One of the best known of the folktales is about a boy named Sankatana who saves the world from a giant monster.

Praise poems traditionally describe the heroic real-life adventures of ancestors or political leaders. Here is the opening verse of a long poem in praise of King Moshoeshoe:

“You who are fond of praising the ancestors,  
Your praises are poor when you leave out the warrior,  
When you leave out Thesele, the son of Mokhachane;  
For it’s he who’s the warrior of the wars,  
Thesele is brave and strong,  
That is Moshoeshoe-Moshaila.”

Such traditional forms of creative expression continue but they have also been incorporated into contemporary



music and art. One young performer notable for incorporating Sotho praise poetry into modern poetic and musical forms is Lesogo Rampolokeng. Modern or “urban” legends also circulate informally today about unusual events and circumstances that are said to have occurred recently.

### 5 RELIGION

The supreme being that the Sotho believe in is most commonly referred to as Modimo. Modimo is approached through ancestral intermediaries, the *balimo*, who are honored at ritual feasts. The ancestral spirits can bring sickness and misfortune to those who forget them or treat them disrespectfully. Among the North Sotho Kgakga clan, a drum cult centered around the figure of the paramount chief (king), who was venerated as a rainmaker and ensurer of fertility. Like some other South African peoples, the Sotho have traditionally believed that the evils of our world are the result of the malevolent actions of sorcerers and witches.

Today, Christianity in one form or another is professed by the majority of Sotho-speaking people, with rates as high as or more than 90% in many areas. In Lesotho Catholics make up about 45% of the population, with the largest Protestant group, the Lesotho Evangelical Church, representing about 26%.

In recent years, independent South African denominations founded by charismatic African preachers have been growing in popularity. The independent churches combine elements of African traditional religion with the doctrines of Christian-

ity. They also place a strong emphasis on healing and the Holy Spirit. One of the largest of these churches in South Africa, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), was founded by two brothers of Pedi background. This church has been very successful in attracting followers from all over South Africa, Swaziland, and Lesotho. Each spring the ZCC hosts an Easter ceremony that attracts tens of thousands of people to the church's rural headquarters at Moria City, in the Limpopo Province.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays among the Sotho of South Africa are the same as those of South Africa as a whole. These include the Christian holidays, plus Workers' Day (May 1), the Day of Reconciliation (December 16), Heritage Day (September 24), Youth Day (June 16), and Human Rights Day (March 21). Another important holiday recognizes April 27 as the day black South Africans first voted in a genuine national election.

Lesotho has a number of holidays that recognize its own history. These holidays include Moshoeshoe's Day (March 12) and Independence Day (October 4). Moshoeshoe's Day is marked by games and races for the nation's young people. Independence Day is celebrated by state ceremonies that often include performances by traditional dance groups.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Women give birth with the assistance of female birth attendants. Traditionally, relatives and friends soaked the father with water when his firstborn child was a girl. If the firstborn was a boy, the father was beaten with a stick. Among other things, this suggested that while the life of males is occupied by warfare, that of females is occupied by domestic duties such as fetching water. For two or three months after the birth, the child was kept secluded with the mother in a specially marked hut. The seclusion could be temporarily broken when the baby was brought outside to be introduced to the first rain. These traditions continue in modified form today, although they are practiced to different degrees in different areas.

There are elaborate rites of initiation into adulthood for boys and girls in Sotho tradition. For boys, initiation involves a lengthy stay in a lodge in a secluded area away from the village.

The lodge may be very large and house dozens of initiates (*bashemane*). During seclusion, the boys are circumcised, but they are also taught appropriate male conduct in marriage, special initiation traditions, code words and signs, and praise songs. In Lesotho, the end of initiation is marked by a community festival during which the new initiates (*makolwane*) sing the praises they have composed. In traditional belief, a man who has not been initiated is not considered a full adult. Changing elements of the initiation are particularly evident at the time of the *makolwane*. Here new elements of fashion may show up in the way the young men ornament themselves, particularly with eye wear and jewelry. Today some urban or Westernized youths may chose not to undergo the ritual but they are still looked down upon by traditionalists.

Initiation for girls (*bale*) also involves seclusion, but the ritual huts of the *bale* are generally located near the village. *Bale* wear masks and goat-skin skirts, and they smear their bodies with a chalky white substance. They sometimes may be seen as a group near the homes of relatives, singing, dancing, and making requests for presents. Among some clans, the girls are

subjected to tests of pain and endurance. After the period of seclusion, the initiates, now called *litswejane*, wear cowhide skirts and anoint themselves with red ocher. Initiation for girls does not involve any surgical operation. Today initiation seems less popular for girls than it is for boys although this may vary by local area.

When someone dies, the whole community takes part in the burial. Speeches are made at the graveside by friends and relatives, and the adult men take turns shoveling soil into the grave. Afterward, all those in attendance go as a group to wash their hands. There may also be a funeral feast.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In Sesotho, the words for father (*ntate*) and mother (*mme*) are used commonly as address forms of respect for one's elders. Politeness, good manners, and willingness to serve are values very strongly encouraged in children. The general attitude toward childhood is well summarized by the proverb *Lefura la ngwana ke ho rungwa*, which roughly translates as "Children benefit from serving their elders."

The standard greetings in Sotho reflect this attitude of respect towards age. When saying hello to an elder, one should always end with *ntate* (my father) or *mme* (my mother). Words for brother (*abuti*) and sister (*ausi*) are used when one talks to people of the same age. A child who answers an adult's question with a simple "Yes" is considered impolite. To be polite, the child needs to add "my father" or "my mother."

Good hospitality and generosity are expected of normal people. Even those who have very little will often share their food with visitors. Of course, those who share also expect the favor to be returned when it is their turn to visit.

Dating was not part of traditional Sotho life. Marriages were arranged between families, and a girl could be betrothed in childhood. Nowadays, most people pick their mates.

Traditionally, interpersonal relations were overseen by village headmen and chiefs. Today, although some are unsure of its place in the contemporary world, a modified system of chieftaincy continues. For example, 22 seats in the national senate of Lesotho are reserved for the country's principle hereditary chiefs.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Rural areas in South Africa and Lesotho are marked by high rates of poverty and inadequate access to health care. Diarrheal diseases and malnutrition are not infrequent. Malaria is also found in the low-lying regions of Limpopo Province. In recent years many people have moved to urban areas in search of employment. This has led to the development of urban shantytowns with little or no sewer, water, or electrical services. A number of development projects to improve these conditions are underway, but they are hampered by needs that are greater than resources.

There is a brighter side to this picture, however. Those with access to land and employment can enjoy a reasonable standard of living. Lesotho's capital city, Maseru, and most of South Africa's cities and towns, for example, include a well-developed service infrastructure. Sotho people enjoy going from shop to shop to get the best prices for consumer goods. In South Africa and Lesotho there are also a growing number of vendors who sell their goods in informal markets.



Many South Africans identify the Sotho of Lesotho with the brightly colored blankets that they often wear instead of coats. These blankets have designs picturing everything from airplanes to crowns to geometric patterns. Although these are appropriately identified with the Sotho, there is no tradition of local manufacture. The blankets are store-bought. (Jason Laurre)

The most common forms of transportation for black people in southern Africa are buses, trains, and “taxis.” “Taxis” are minivans that carry many individual riders at one time. Most such taxis are used for short distances in urban areas, but they are also used as a faster alternative to the long-distance routes of buses. Personal cars and trucks are also not uncommon, although in recent years high rates of inflation and skyrocketing oil prices have driven prices up considerably.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

In Sotho tradition, the man was considered the head of the household. Women were defined as farmers and bearers of children. Family duties were also organized into distinct domains based on gender for all Sotho, but the Pedi maintained a stricter separation of living space into male and female areas. Polygynous marriages were not uncommon among the elite, but they were rare among commoners. Marriages were arranged by transfer of *bohadi* (bridewealth) from the family of the groom to the family of the bride. Upon marriage, a woman was expected to leave her family to live with the family of her husband.

The Sotho have clans, many of which bear animal names, such as the *Koena* (crocodile). These clans stress descent through the male line, but there is considerable flexibility in defining clan membership. A unique feature of Sotho kinship

was that a person was allowed to marry a cousin (*ngwana wa rangoane*) who was a member of the same clan.

Family life for many rural Sotho has been disrupted for generations by migrant labor. Today, many Sotho men continue to live in all-male housing units provided by the gold-mining companies they work for. With the end of apartheid, some of the families previously separated by the old labor laws are leading new lives together in urban areas.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Much about Sotho apparel is the same as the apparel of people in Europe and the United States. However, the most acceptable form of clothing for a woman is still the dress, and her hair is expected to be covered with a scarf, head cloth, or hat. The *mokorotlo*, a conical hat topped with a complicated form, is the national symbol. A handicrafts shop located prominently in Lesotho’s capital is shaped in the form of this hat. Many South Africans identify the Sotho of Lesotho with the brightly colored blankets that they often wear instead of coats. These blankets have designs picturing everything from airplanes to crowns to geometric patterns. Although these are appropriately identified with the Sotho, there is no tradition of local manufacture. The blankets are store-bought.

## 12 FOOD

Sotho people share many food traditions with the other peoples of South Africa. Staple foods are corn (maize), eaten in the form of a thick paste, and bread. Beef, chicken, and mutton are popular meats, while milk is often drunk in soured form. The South African form of sorghum beer, brewed at home or store-bought, is more nutritious than Western beer.

Eggs were traditionally taboo for women, and a newly wedded wife was not allowed to eat certain types of meat.

The major mealtimes are breakfast and dinner (in the evening). Children may go without lunch, although there are some school lunch programs.

Sotho people enjoy food and drink from other cultural traditions, but typically retain a fondness for beef and mutton. Sotho-style food is not spiced with pepper or curries, but some today may use such spices as they are readily available in many areas.

## 13 EDUCATION

The first Western-style schools for Sotho-speakers were begun by missionaries. Religious institutions and missionaries continue to play a major role in education in Lesotho today. Many of Lesotho's high schools are boarding schools affiliated with churches. Discipline can be strict at these schools, but students may participate in entertainment such as school concerts, dances, and movies. In Lesotho, only a minority of students manage to graduate from high school because school fees are high and the work is very demanding. To graduate, one must pass the Cambridge Overseas Examination. Today, Lesotho claims an adult literacy rate in the Sotho language of nearly 85%.

Under apartheid, Africans' access to education in South Africa was restricted, and many of the best schools were closed. As a result, adult literacy rates dropped, in some areas to as low as 30%. Today, the goal is free education for everyone 7 to 17 years of age. Literacy and education are now seen as keys to success and are highly valued by most people in Lesotho and South Africa.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sotho traditional music places a strong emphasis on group singing, chanting, and hand clapping as an accompaniment to dance. Instruments used included drums, rattles, whistles, and handmade stringed instruments. One instrument, the *lesiba*, is made from a pole, a string, and a feather. When it is blown, the feather acts as a reed, producing a deep, resonant sound.

Dance groups are regularly featured during public celebrations. *Mokgibo* is a dance done by women who perform by moving their heads and shoulders in unison to the music while all sitting down on their knees and lower legs. *Mohobelo* is a men's line dance that is characterized by rhythmic marching and high stepping kicks.

Generations of mine labor have led to a distinct migrant-worker subculture in Lesotho. This subculture includes song and dance traditions. Some types of mine dances have synchronized high-kicking steps. One song tradition, *difela*, has lyrics relating the travels, loves, and viewpoints of the migrant workers. Other popular music in Sotho includes dance tunes played by small groups on drums, accordions, and guitars.

Sotho written literature was established in the nineteenth century by converts to Christianity. One of the first novels in a

South African language was *Chaka*, written in southern Sotho by Thomas Mofolo in the early years of the 20th century. It is still read today and has been translated into a number of languages. Oliver Kgadime "O.K" Matsepe is considered by many to be the "Sepedi Shakespeare." He wrote 14 books including the 1954 novel *Sebatakgomo*.

## 15 WORK

Wage labor for many rural Sotho has meant leaving home to find employment in the city. In Lesotho, a term of mine work was once considered a kind of rite of passage that marked one as a man, but increasingly in the 20th-century such work became necessary for supporting a family. However, as South Africans increasingly look to their own citizens for the country's labor, there have been increasing ethnic tensions. By 2003, the number of mine workers from Lesotho was said to be fewer than 60,000 compared to a high of more than 125,000 a decade earlier. This also remains a dangerous business. In 2006, some 200 miners were killed in various mining accidents.

In South Africa, Sotho people under white rule were most frequently hired as miners and farm laborers. Women also worked as farm laborers, but work in domestic service was more highly valued. For those with high school and college educations, the greatest opportunities were in health care, education, and government administration. Today, the Sotho seek degrees in all fields.

South Africa's migrant-labor system has dramatically altered Sotho social life. Besides putting strains on the family, migrant labor has led to the development of new social groups. For example, associations of young men called *Marussia* formed with values that combined urban and rural attitudes. Critics see the "Russians" as no better than the criminal gangs based on home ties.

In recent years Lesotho experienced a rapid growth in garment manufacture. However, this has suffered a serious downturn since 2005 due to the lifting of international quotas on China and the declining value of the American dollar.

## 16 SPORTS

Many of the games popular among Sotho children are found worldwide. These include skipping rope, racing, swimming, playing catch, dodgeball, and hopscotch. Boys also enjoy wrestling and fighting with sticks. A common pastime for rural boys is making clay animals, especially cattle. Young boys and girls enjoy playing make-believe house (*mantlwantlwane*). The most popular traditional game among young men and old men is a game of strategy called *morabaraba*. This is similar to the game played elsewhere in Africa known as mancala.

Today, the most popular sport in Lesotho and South Africa is soccer. This is played informally by neighbors as well as by amateur and professional teams. In South Africa, there are many professional teams as well as teams associated with schools and businesses. In Lesotho, every district has several amateur teams. In the schools, there are also organized races and field events.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Contemporary people enjoy modern entertainment in the form of movies, plays, music, and television. Most of the movies are imported from foreign countries, but there is a growing South African film industry as well. Director Teboho

Mahlatsi's 2006 short film set in Lesotho, *Meogho and the Stick Fighter*, received international critical acclaim. Televisions and videocassette recorders are becoming widespread, although listening to the radio is most common due to the lower cost. South Africa broadcasts some shows in Sotho as well as other African languages, with soap operas being the most popular shows. Music videos of popular South African musical groups are also seen. In rural areas, however, there can be little to do for entertainment.

South Africa has a well-developed music industry. Recorded music includes many forms, from choral music and the songs of migrant workers to pop tunes, jazz, and reggae. Since 1999, a large annual music festival has been held annually in the town of Morija, Lesotho. Some popular musicians and groups of recent decades include Puseletso Seema, Tau ea Linare, Ray Phiri, Stimela, and Amatso Makaota, Tau ya Matsega.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditions of folk art include beadwork, sewing, pottery making, house decoration, and weaving. Functional items such as sleeping mats, baskets, and beer strainers continue to be woven by hand from grass materials. Folk craft traditions have been revived and modified in response to the tourist trade. Popular items include tapestries and woven hats such as the *mokorotlo*, the national hat.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many of the social problems faced by Sotho people today stem to some degree from the apartheid past. They include high rates of poverty, malnutrition, crime, and broken homes. Competition for scarce resources in South Africa has also led to conflict with other ethnic groups. Recently, illegal immigrants in South African shantytowns, most of them from Zimbabwe, have been subjected to violent attacks. In Lesotho, the end of apartheid has not meant the end of dependence on the wages of migrants.

The Sotho community also has internal divisions that have led to social problems. Significant differences exist in the values and aspirations of the young and old, the rural and urban, the highly educated and illiterate, and men and women. In addition, there is potential for conflict between the old systems of rule through chiefs and the military, and the new forms of participatory democracy.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Sotho culture historically assumed that female status was subordinate to that of males. A woman was considered a junior member of society in that when she married, responsibilities for her were transferred from the father to the husband. Upon divorce, custom also indicated that children should remain with the husband's family.

Economic circumstances have contributed to changes in women's status and behavior. Because of the migrant labor system, many rural women were left in practice as household heads. Harsh economic conditions have also forced many women to fend for themselves. This also led to changes in sexual practices. Long periods of separation between husbands and wives led to problems of adultery and prostitution. Some men and women also engaged in homosexual practices, although the idea of a gay identity has not been widely accepted.

Because young men traditionally were expected to spend most of the day tending livestock, girls often had greater opportunity to receive schooling. Consequently, unlike in many countries of the world, in Lesotho women have a higher rate of literacy than men. This is estimated by the government to be about 75% for men and 95% for women.

Today, both the South African government and the Lesotho government have policies promoting gender equality.

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—by R. Shanafelt

# SUDANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** soo-duh-NEEZ

**LOCATION:** Sudan

**POPULATION:** 40 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; many distinct indigenous languages; English

**RELIGION:** Islam; Christianity; indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Azande; Dinka; Fulani; Nuer

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The history of the Sudan, “Land of the Blacks,” has been predominantly one of invasion and conquest. The earliest known events date back to 750 BC when Piankhy, king of Napata in northern Sudan, invaded Egypt and founded the 25th dynasty. A century later, his successors were forced back to Napata, and in c. 590 BC moved their capital south to Merowe, on the confluence of the Nile and Atbara rivers. The kingdom of Merowe was to be a major political power in the region for over 900 years. Remains of Meroitic culture can still be seen in the small pyramids beneath which their kings were buried. The culture was obviously influenced by Egypt, but also reflected contact with the wider classical world. A society of farmers and herders, its long prosperity was due primarily to trade and to ample supplies of iron ore. The art of ironworking may well have developed locally and spread from Merowe to other parts of Africa.

In AD 350 the kingdom of Merowe was destroyed, probably by invading armies from Ethiopia. The center of power then shifted to the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, which persisted till the late 14th century. In 1504, the remains of the Nubian forces were defeated by a powerful group known as the Funj, who had moved into the area from farther south. From their capital town, Sennar, on the Blue Nile, the Funj dynasty (also known as the Black Sultanate) ruled a vast area for over 300 years.

By 1820, the Funj dynasty was in decline and put up little resistance to the invading army of Muhammad 'Ali, viceroy of Egypt (then a province of the Ottoman Empire), who was seeking to control the trade in gold and slaves. For the next 60 years, the region was ruled by the Turkish-Egyptian administration in Cairo. During this period, Khartoum was developed as a capital, and much of the administrative infrastructure of modern Sudan was laid: the telegraph and rail systems, commercial agriculture, and international trade.

Turkish-Egyptian rule was already weakened by 1881 when Muhammad Ahmed, a holy man living on Aba Island on the White Nile, declared himself to be the *Mahdi* (Promised One) sent by God to return Islam to its original ideals. People from many different tribes rallied to his support as he declared a *ji-had* (holy war) and successfully repulsed an Anglo-Egyptian force sent to restrain him. In 1884, General Charles Gordon was sent from Cairo to Khartoum to assist in the withdrawal of the Egyptian forces. Gordon was killed when the Mahdi's forces captured the capital. For the next 14 years (the *Mahdiyya*), the Sudan was an independent Islamic state. It was led (after the Mahdi's untimely death in 1885) by the *Khalifa* Abdullahi. However by 1898, the region was again caught up in European politics. An Anglo-Egyptian army led by General

Herbert Kitchener routed the Khalifa's brave but poorly armed troops at Kerari (also known as the Battle of Omdurman). Though the pretext for the invasion was to avenge the death of Gordon, the real motive was to strengthen British interests in this part of the world. It ushered in the period of joint Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan known as the Condominium (1898–1956), in which real power rested with the British. The present boundaries of Sudan were only finalized in the early years of the Condominium, by agreements between the British and other European nations trying to establish their interests in the region. They largely disregarded local tribal, cultural, and linguistic boundaries and the history of slavery in central Africa. Herein lay the causes of much contemporary political upheaval and distress. The Sudan has been sharply divided between north and south, as people from the south and west have struggled to either secede or gain some autonomy, from those powerful northern elites who inherited power from the colonial state. In the process, the divisions are over-simplified between Arab and African, or Muslim and non-Muslim. The reality remains far more complex.

In the half century since independence (1956), three periods of parliamentary rule (1956–8, 1964–9, 1986–9), have alternated with three of army rule (1958–64, 1969–86, 1989–present). The longest period of stability and prosperity was during the administration of Jaafar Nimeri (1969–85). In the first 10 years of his presidency, Sudan's economy boomed, as oil was discovered in the southwestern region. Nimeri even succeeded in bringing peace to the south. By the early 1980s, however, Sudan faced recession, drought, and political instability caused partly by large numbers of refugees from neighboring countries. Nimeri himself became increasingly unpopular, and when he introduced a severe form of the *Shariah* (Islamic law), opposition to him quickly mounted. He was ousted in a peaceful coup in 1985, but after a brief period (1986–9) of democratic rule under Sadiq al-Mahdi (grandson of the Mahdi), the army once again seized power under General Omar al-Bashir, supported by the powerful National Islamic Front (NIF). The country has since become increasingly isolated from the west, both politically and economically, despite a shift towards civilian rule in 2001 and the cessation of the so-called “second” civil war (1983–2005) with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government of President al-Bashir and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The halting of hostilities led to the renewal of oil production in southwestern Sudan, and to a general economic recovery in the country as a whole.

Meanwhile in 2003 civil war erupted in the west, in Darfur, when opposition groups there sought similar government concessions, and government-supported militias (called *janjawid*) attacked “rebel” villages. In the intervening years, thousands of innocent bystanders have been killed, displaced or subject to terrible trauma and violation.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Republic of the Sudan (generally known simply as Sudan) is the largest country in Africa, encompassing nearly 2.6 million sq km (1 million sq mi) and stretching over 2,000 km (1,250 mi) from north to south, slightly more than a quarter the size of the US. It shares common boundaries with nine countries: Egypt, Libya, Chad, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia.

Its landscapes range from rocky desert in the north (almost a quarter of its total area), through savanna with increasing vegetation, to the mountainous rain land along the Uganda border in the south. Its most important physical feature is the Nile River, which traverses the whole length of the country. The Blue Nile (rising in Ethiopia) meets the White Nile (from Uganda) in the capital city of Khartoum, and they wind jointly north through a series of cataracts or falls to Lake Nubia (the “Aswan Dam”), the largest artificial lake in the world.

Sudan has an estimated population of approximately 40 million, with a new government census planned for 2008. The population includes a large number (almost 600) of distinct ethnic or tribal groups. The country remains predominantly rural, but towns have expanded rapidly since Sudan gained its independence from Britain in 1956.

As a result of the long civil wars, and opposition to political realities, there is now a very large Sudanese diaspora, scattered from the US to Australia, with large concentrations (of southern Sudanese) resident in neighboring Kenya and Uganda, and (largely of northern Sudanese) throughout the Middle East.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Arabic is the official language of Sudan, although many other languages continue to be used in the home. At independence, it was estimated that 100 distinct languages were spoken in the Sudan. Today, all educated people speak the local or colloquial form of Arabic—the language of government, schools, and of most northern Sudanese. This is reflected in the preponderance of Arabic names: Muhammad, Abdullah, and ‘Ali for men, for example, and Fatima, Aisha, or Muna for women.

In the south and west, English is spoken alongside the variety of indigenous languages, of which Dinka [see **Dinka**] is the most widespread. Common southern names such as Deng (Dinka) or Shull (Shillukh), sometimes coupled with Christian names, such as Maria Deng, reveal the bearer’s ethnic as well as religious background.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Sudanese have a rich and varied folklore that embodies much of their indigenous wisdom. It continues to be passed on orally, at least in the countryside, and is passing into the lyrics of popular music and culture, now widely enjoyed on television and radio. Certain older women are renowned for their storytelling, embroidering often brief tales with elaborate gestures and colorful description. Many of the stories reflect the rural way of life, the society and culture to which the Sudanese belong, and center on human rather than animal or supernatural themes. A favorite character in Muslim Sudan is Fatima the Beautiful, who outwits a variety of male relatives and rivals in a series of amazing feats. She usually ends up marrying the man of her choice, and often vindicates her whole family as well. A supernatural figure who figures large in warning stories told to small children is Umm Ba’ula, the mother of boogys, who carries a large basket in which she carries away disobedient children.

### 5 RELIGION

The majority of Sudan’s population (70%) is Sunni Muslim. Islam was introduced to the northern Sudan by Arab traders as early as the 7th century AD. For many centuries Islam coexisted with an earlier branch of Christianity (which had spread



here from Alexandria), though Islam ultimately absorbed it. From the beginning, Islam was spread largely by traders and wandering holy men (*faki*, pl. *fugara*) who preached a more mystical (*Sufi*) form of Islam. Many of these established a way (*tariga*, also called Brotherhood) that their followers observed. These Brotherhoods continue to be very important in the practice of Sudanese Islam, particularly the *Qadriyya* (the oldest Brotherhood), the *Sammaniya*, and the *Khatmiyya* (a more modern organization that grew out of 18th century reformist movements). Sufi practices also exert a considerable influence on popular culture, as the religious songs (*madih*) of the much beloved late Sammaniya Shaikh al-Bura’i attests.

Sudan is now an Islamist state, run by the National Congress Party (NCP), which replaced the National Islamic Front (NIF) and which in turn grew out of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood. This reformist movement reached Sudan from Egypt in the 1950s and became popular particularly with the emerging intellectual class. Other reformist trends known as Salafism (*al-salafiyya*) further contribute to the dynamic and diverse Islamic landscape of Sudan, with groups like the *Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya* also seeking to purify existing Islamic practices.

However, many peoples, particularly in southern and western Sudan, are not Muslim. Some (5%) are Christian, as various denominations of missionaries have been active outside the Sudanese Islamic areas since the mid-19th century. Many (25%) also continue to practice indigenous beliefs, particularly those concerned with various types of spirits. Such beliefs also infuse the practices of both Islam and Christianity in the



Sudan. One of the most widespread is known as *zar*, which is found throughout northern Africa.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays in the Sudan are religious holidays. In Muslim areas, the celebrations at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and to mark God's sparing of Ishmael (the *Eid* of Sacrifice) are most important, marked with special foods, new clothes, and family visits. The birthday of the Prophet (the *Moulid*) is also celebrated over several days, an occasion for the various Brotherhoods to perform their ritual prayers and recite their historical narratives.

In Christian areas, the major holidays are also religious events. Christmas is particularly important, celebrated with special church services, as well as new clothes and traditional foods.

The day independence was gained from Britain is officially recognized on January 1 but has little significance in everyday life for the Sudanese.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

"To the house, wealth, and children" is the customary congratulations given to newlyweds. Children are greatly desired and a birth is a significant event. An expectant mother tries to return to her parent's home to give birth, and is attended by some of her closest friends and the local midwife. After the birth, she and the baby may remain confined for 40 days, at the end of which a party is held to name the child and introduce it to outsiders.

The major rite of passage for most children in northern Sudan is circumcision, which is routinely performed on many girls and all boys between the ages of 4 and 8. The child is referred to as the bride or bridegroom, and much of the formal ritual of a marriage ceremony is foreshadowed in the practices that surround the operation and party. The use of brightly colored silk sheets (*jirtiq*), of cosmetics and perfumes, and the sacrifice of a sheep, as well as the foods served to guests, all anticipate rituals to be repeated with greater drama in the marriage ceremony.

After a child has been circumcised, gender segregation becomes marked. Young girls help their mothers and aunts, and care for younger siblings. Young boys begin to spend more time with their peers outside the home and away from the company of women. For boys, adolescence is often a time of irresponsibility and freedom, while adolescent girls are expected to carry out a large share of the domestic chores and at the same time observe strict rules of modesty, thus protecting both their own honor and the honor of their family.

In much of southern Sudan, initiation into age-sets (rather than circumcision) was formerly essential for entry into adult status. Ceremonies of initiation differed from tribe to tribe and for males and females, though they were less common for girls than boys [see **Dinka** and **Nuer**].

Marriage is the major event, of religious and social importance, in every Sudanese's life, celebrated with great ritual even in poor neighborhoods. It is at least partly arranged, seen as an alliance between families rather than simply between two individuals. In the Muslim North, marriage with a close relative is common: for a girl, usually with her *wad amm*, the son of her father's brother, a member of her own lineage. The legal basis of the marriage is the marriage contract, based on the

*Shariah* (Muslim law) and drawn up by a learned man together with (male) representatives of the bride and groom. In southern Sudan, marriages were arranged differently [see **Dinka** and **Nuer**]. The unwritten contract was traditionally arranged between male elders of both families, sometimes without the knowledge of either the bride or the groom. This revolved around the payment of bride-wealth—special cattle were reserved for this type of exchange, though by the early 1980s a small proportion might be paid in cash.

Payment of bride-wealth by the groom's family to the bride's family remains an essential part of the marriage process. In the north, it includes gifts and money for the bride's family to help finance the wedding, as well as gifts for the bride herself, particularly gold, which is the basis of the bride's own formal assets. With the rise in overseas employment, there has been a great inflation in bride-price and consequent delay in the time of marriage. Many men find they have to postpone marriage until they can save what are often exorbitant sums. Increasing numbers of women remain unmarried or have to accept a polygynous marriage. In much of the south, the old marriage currency in cattle has broken down because of the long wars, and weddings tend to be briefer and cheaper.

Formal religion surrounds many of the rites associated with death and burial. Because of the heat, the deceased is buried quickly, usually the same day. Formal mourning lasts for several days, during which all acquaintances of the family are expected to visit to offer condolences.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Sudanese are intensely social people, caring about family and neighbors in a very personal way. Although much social interaction is highly formalized, it is accompanied by great warmth. Visits from guests, for however long a period, are regarded as an honor to the host and his whole family, and take priority over other arrangements. Such visits should also be returned before too long, and need not be scheduled ahead of time. Refreshments are served to guests immediately—a cup of water to relieve them after their journey, followed by hot sweet tea and later by coffee and food, if the visit seems prolonged.

Greetings are warm and often effusive. Accompanied by handshaking, the Arabic greeting "*Izeyik*" is exchanged, followed by inquiries about each other's health, "*Qwayseen?*" (Are you well?), to which the standard reply is to thank God—"*Al-humdulillah.*" For older people especially, this is then an opportunity to proclaim their devoutness through a lengthy exchange of Quranic verses. Throughout the exchange, each person underscores their pleasure in meeting. When one person indicates they want to take their leave, the other urges them to stay a little longer. Finally, goodbyes are exchanged: "*Maasalam!*" followed by "*Al-iy-selimik,*" which may also be accompanied by warm handshakes.

People are more relaxed with friends of the same sex. Friendship is especially valued, and it is not uncommon to see two young men walking hand in hand, or with their arms draped across each others' shoulders.

The concept of "dating," as in the Western world, is still quite rare, at least in Muslim Sudan. Until the successful completion of the marriage ceremonies, bride and groom and their families are concerned to protect their honor. Thus, meetings between unrelated men and women are closely monitored and efforts are made in the work place to segregate men and

women, at least publicly. However young people now are given some input into their choice of marriage partner, in which class and education levels are becoming as important as family connections.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Early European visitors to Sudan found it a difficult and unhealthy place. They succumbed frequently to such tropical diseases as malaria, bilharzia, cholera, and dysentery, diseases that continue to plague many Sudanese. Health issues are further exacerbated by contemporary economic problems, food shortages caused by drought, and political instability. In addition, many disorders not known to Western physicians are recognized locally, such as those caused by the Evil Eye, by spirits, or by sorcery. For such conditions, the advice of local healers continues to be sought.

Although Sudan is regarded as one of the poorest countries in the world, its people have long found ways to accommodate their harsh environment. In the rural areas of the north, even without electricity and air conditioners the mud-baked flat-roofed houses remain cool in the hottest temperatures. In the south, the conical grass huts provide warmth and safety from heavy rains and more variable climates. In the towns and cities, there is a wider range of buildings and standards of living. In first-class districts occupied by senior officials, wealthy merchants, and families supported by expatriate relatives, European-style villas, cooled by air-conditioners and flaunting satellite technology, are surrounded by elegant lawns. In contrast, on the outskirts of towns and cities, squatter settlements of make-shift huts and lean-tos (*rakuba*) provide temporary homes for new migrants and their families, but offer little shelter from the heat, cold, or discomfort.

Markets have long been important centers in this region, and they continue to reflect the many faces of the Sudan. Goods imported from Libya or China are sold alongside craft articles produced locally, and foods and crops grown in the surrounding countryside. Bargaining is expected, and indeed the social ties developed through such trade are regarded as essential aspects of the economic transaction.

There is a wide range of public transportation within the Sudan, although few people own cars. Within settled communities, public cars (often small trucks with specially constructed passenger areas on the back) provide an effective network around town for a small fee. In recent years, large numbers of motorized rickshaws have been imported from India and provide a slightly more expensive, but more private option. Between communities, the more affluent travel by bus (which between major cities is now air-conditioned), though most people settle for a place on the back of a truck, which is often part of a commercial fleet of such vehicles. Train service connects the capital, Khartoum, with other major cities. Since compartments are usually packed, enterprising passengers also crowd onto the roof. Finally, many individual men own their own donkey, bicycle, or (occasionally) horse and cart (*caro*).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In Sudanese life, the family is highly valued and much protected. Large families are universally desired. Children are looked on with incomparable pride, welcomed as the only reliable insurance against old age, as well as their parents' natural heirs and assistants in business. For a woman, childbearing brings

esteem. Also, if her husband dies, she is secure in the knowledge that, at least under Islamic law she and her children will inherit favorably.

Women's roles are primarily those of homemaker and mother. In Muslim families, after the birth of her first son, a woman is henceforth known as *Umm 'Ali*, "Mother of 'Ali," for example, a practice known as teknonymy. This emphasis on male offspring and the male line is found throughout the country, as families are overwhelmingly patrilineal and patriarchal in nature.

While nuclear families are becoming common, extended families are still found and are often polygynous (more than one wife). Polygyny is acceptable in Islam as well as in Southern tribes [see *Dinka* and *Nuer*], and cuts across urban/rural and social differences. The levirate, whereby a man may marry his deceased brother's widow, is still practiced. This is believed to safeguard the welfare of a widow, for whom her husband's family, specifically her brother-in-law, is regarded as responsible. Among non-Muslim Sudanese, relationships between wives and their children are structured more according to seniority and age. Here children of a levirate union are regarded as belonging to the deceased man, a situation possible because of the cultural separation of concepts of physical and social parenthood. The sororate, whereby a man marries his deceased wife's sister, is found only when the dead woman has borne no children. So-called "ghost marriages" are also common among Nilotic peoples. Should a man die without children, his relatives are obliged to take a "ghost-wife" for him. The children she bears are his descendants. Finally, a Nuer or Dinka woman who is infertile may become, in effect, a social man. She may "marry" a wife who produces children for her.

With the imposition of the *Shariah* (Islamic law), it seems probable that ethnic variations in family forms will slowly disappear. Patrilineal, patriarchal families, with increasing limitations on women's roles and intolerance for alternative social practices, have been the trend since the early 1990s.

Attempts to control the birth rate in Sudan are slowly making progress. Modern contraception is expensive (in financial and social terms), and there has been a lack of investment in terms of training sensitive fieldworkers to determine individual and family needs, but the high costs of living, coupled with expanding education opportunities for women, is resulting in somewhat smaller families. The fertility rate in 2007 was 4.69 children born to one woman.

## 11 CLOTHING

Western-style clothing (long trousers, with a shirt) is commonly worn by Sudanese men in professional workplaces. However, elsewhere Muslim Sudanese prefer traditional dress: long pastel-colored robes (*jalabiya*), with a skullcap (*tagia*) and length of cloth (*'imma*) covering their head. Laborers wear baggy pants (*sirwal*) covered by a thigh length tunic (*ragi*). Women in public today are bound to wear Islamic dress. For much of the 20th century, this was simply a 9-m (30-ft) length of material (*tob*) wound round the body, leaving the wearer looking elegant and distinctive. Today some women choose instead to wear an Islamic shawl (*hijab*) folded tightly over their head, a loose long-sleeved shirt, and a long, plain skirt, a style of dress found throughout the Muslim world. Many women also wear the *abayah*, a black overcoat more common in the

Middle East. In the privacy of their own homes, women simply wear light dresses.

## 12 FOOD

For most Sudanese, the staple food is *durra*, sorghum, which is grown locally and used to make breads (both leavened and flat) and porridges. These are then eaten with various types of stew, beans, lentils, and salads. Sheep is the favorite meat, though beef and chicken are also consumed. Meat may be fried, stewed, or (occasionally) roasted. For desserts, seasonal fruit is sliced and served fresh, though *crème caramelle*, jelly, and sugared rice are also common. Meals are eaten communally and by hand from a round tray on which the various bowls of food are surrounded by breads used for dipping. After the Quranic injunction, only the right hand should be used for eating; and great care is taken before and after the meal to ensure its cleanliness. Meals are segregated by gender, younger children usually eating with the women or with each other.

Water is the preferred drink, generally protected in a large clay pot (*zir*) that keeps it cool. Favorite beverages for guests are tea and coffee. Both are served very sweet and often mixed with spices (known as medicine, *dowa*, but commonly either cinnamon or cardamom). Tea is served in small glasses, and coffee (roasted and ground fresh, and very strong) is served in thimble-like cups. Another delicious drink is made from freshly squeezed limes, and during the month of fasting either this or a sweet and nutritious drink made from sorghum (known as *abrit*) are commonly used to break the fast. Several types of homemade cakes, such as *ligimat* (a type of doughnut) or *cak* (which resembles shortcake) are served to guests or simply enjoyed for breakfast or supper.

Sudanese eat two, sometimes three meals a day. Sweet tea with milk (or water) is drunk when they awake in the morning, and breakfast is eaten several hours later, usually necessitating a break from work. Lunch, the main meal of the day, is served in mid-afternoon, after work or school is over. A light supper, not unlike breakfast, is sometimes eaten in the evening.

In the past two decades there has been a steady deterioration of the average daily diet, as traditional staples (beans, fruit, meat) become too expensive for poorer families, who are forced to rely on cheaper, less nutritious foods such as macaroni and sugar.

## 13 EDUCATION

Quranic schooling, based on memorizing the Quran, has a long history in the Sudan and remains popular. More secular forms of formal education go back only to the early years of the 20th century and are still not universal. Adult literacy (measured probably in terms of secular education) is now 61%, and there is intense competition among children for the limited places in schools, particularly higher education. For the most part, parents are anxious for both sons and daughters to receive formal education, seeing this as a path to a more successful future. Unfortunately, their expectations are not always realized, and opportunities for both higher education and jobs in the modern sector are still limited.

Occupations for women are especially limited. Until recently, high school diplomas were seen primarily as their path to a good marriage. Though this began to change as more women entered the professions (medicine, law, education), women

generally have fewer opportunities for employment and advancement than men.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The cultural heritage of contemporary Sudanese is particularly evident in their music. Singing, drumming, and dancing are popular, spontaneous activities for children, and are indispensable for any major celebration. Elaborate wedding parties include a group to sing and play, and a microphone to make sure the whole community can share in the festivities. Western, Arab, and Indian, as well as African performers have become popular through film, television, and radio. Their influence is evident in the dynamic and distinctive musical forms of Sudan. The best-known Sudanese singers today include Muhammad Wurdi, Gabli, and Muhammad el Amin, poets as well as musicians.

The favorite instrument of the Sudanese is the drum, and small children learn very early how to pound out a rhythm and to dance. For all ceremonies, the *daluka* (baked mud and cowhide drum) is used to accompany singing and dancing. Another favorite instrument is the *rababa*, a type of violin that points to an Arab link, as does the classical *lud*, used on more formal occasions.

In Muslim Sudan, men and women dance separately and have different dancing styles. Men use their arms more and take wider, firmer steps, while women remain stationary and stretch their necks, their feet, and their chests, at the same time demonstrating control of their bodies. Elsewhere, such distinctions are less apparent, and there are other popular styles of dancing such as the "Stomp Dancing" of the Nuba Mountains and further south.

Story telling has long been a popular and admired art form that underlies a rich tradition in poetry and fiction. Sudan's greatest novelist in Arabic is Tayeb Salih (b.1929). His novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1967), which draws on his country's colonial experience, set in a typical village context, has been translated into many languages. His short story "The Wedding of Zein" has been made into a film by that name. Popular Sudanese writers in English include Leila Aboulela (b.1964), author of several novels including *The Translator* and *Minaret*, and Jamal Mahjoub (b. 1960) whose novels include *The Drift Latitudes* and *Travelling with Djinnns*. Both draw on their own multi-cultural backgrounds in tales that are wide-ranging in time and space.

## 15 WORK

Despite massive migration to urban areas since independence, many Sudanese continue to work in agriculture. This includes pastoralism (dependence on large herds, particularly camels and cattle) and cultivation: both subsistence cultivation (where the staple crop is sorghum, mixed with vegetables, peanuts, and beans) and commercialized agriculture, particularly on irrigated agricultural schemes. The largest and oldest of these is the Gezira Scheme, between the Blue and White Niles, which produces the bulk of the country's major export crop, long-staple cotton. This has served as the model for other agricultural schemes set up since independence, in which tenant farmers grow export crops under the management of the state-owned company, as well as foods for their own use. These schemes have been less than successful, partly because there appears to be insufficient incentives to farmers to collaborate



South Sudanese army personnel keep vigil at Rikwangba near Garamba forest on April 10, 2008. The site was to host a peace agreement to be signed by elusive rebel leader Joseph Kony, Uganda's top rebel leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Kony requested further consultations before signing a peace agreement to end one of Africa's longest conflicts.  
(AFP Photo/Tonu Karumba/Getty Images)

with the company, and because deteriorating political and economic situations pushed many farmers into joining the exodus to seek alternative work in towns or outside the country, especially to the oil-rich Arab states. Labor migration throughout the Middle East, and to Europe and North America, has had a considerable impact on the Sudanese economy and overseas remittances are a major source of income.

Agricultural work in Muslim areas is also subject to gender segregation. In poorer families, females usually carry out tedious tasks such as picking cotton while males perform the heavier work of clearing the land, digging irrigation ditches, and planting. In families more comfortably situated, women are expected to work only inside the home, while men do the outside jobs, including marketing.

Family work is also very demanding in the Sudan. This includes not only taking care of the family and household, but also demonstrating concern for the wider family and community by a tireless round of visiting, caring for the sick, attending neighborhood ceremonies such as weddings, thanksgivings, and funerals; and providing labor and cash to support these ceremonies.

## 16 SPORTS

Sudan, like many African countries, has a love affair with soccer. Most small boys learn to play, even if they have to use a wooden ball, and identify with one of the leading national football teams. Among the educated, tennis and (to a lesser extent) volleyball are played in some of the clubs that continue to serve as reminders of the colonial past. Sudanese regularly compete against other African countries in most major sports but have yet to develop the resources for Olympic competition.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Television is popular throughout the country. Even in rural areas, the men's club usually owns a set that village children are able to watch. Among the most popular programs are the nightly soap operas (*musalsal*), often acquired from Egypt or Lebanon, though Sudan has begun to produce its own. Islamic programs are also widely enjoyed.

Open-air cinemas are found in all the towns and larger villages and are attended by mainly male audiences. They tend to show some of the worst exports from the East (especially India) and West (Italian gangster movies are popular). Most people, however, prefer to spend their spare time visiting with friends and family, attending neighbor celebrations such as

weddings or homecomings, or simply chatting quietly in the shelter of the night. Again this is largely divided by gender: men frequently gather in one of the men's clubs after supper, while women visit with their neighbors at home.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Various traditions reinforce the importance of large families and community closeness among Sudanese. Before marriage, a girl learns from her friends and relatives how to perform traditional dances and to use specific homemade cosmetics (incense, oils, smoke-baths, henna decoration, perfumes) that are believed to enhance sensuality and are very much a part of marital relationships. Throughout the country, people employ charms or amulets to stimulate fertility, as well as to decorate themselves.

The most elaborate folk craft is basketry. Some of the finest baskets come from the west of the country, from Darfur, in the form of large round food covers, used to protect the food tray from insects and dust. Even more common is the manufacture of rope beds and stools, staple items of furniture that appear to have changed little since Pharaonic times, and that are still widely used.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The 2005 peace agreement (CPA) between North and South has so far withstood the death of the former Southern leader Colonel John Garang and escalating hostilities in western Sudan. Peace and security remain elusive in much of southern Sudan, however, and provisions for a referendum for the south in 2011 make fragmentation of the present state seem likely. Meanwhile more than 2 million people have been displaced and at least 200,000 people have died as a result of the violence in Darfur, which in 2008 showed no sign of abating, despite the presence of African Union troops in the region. Indeed many innocent bystanders have lost their liberty and even their lives in the violence.

Ongoing environmental issues also present serious problems. Changing climatic patterns, including the inexorable movement of *al-Sahara* (the desert), declining forest and woodland, expanding urbanization and increasing pollution are all taking their toll on human life. Within the congested squatter settlements in the towns particularly, new and old diseases add to human difficulties: malaria and tuberculosis, diabetes and bilharzia, various gastro-intestinal and respiratory problems. Despite a much expanded medical profession, not everybody can afford help. The cost of living has risen so dramatically that even former staple food items have become luxuries that few can afford. The benefits of oil revenues have yet to trickle down to the poorer in society.

In addition, the massive relocations of people to larger villages, to towns (especially to the greater Khartoum area) and even outside the country, have led to breakdowns in many Sudanese families. The elderly are no longer automatically surrounded by their caring children, while the young may not have the support of their parents. The immediate future for the Sudanese, therefore, does not look bright, but most remain optimistic that better times lie ahead.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Many gender issues in Sudan today are part of a larger complex of problems associated with war, violence, and poverty that af-

fects society as a whole, though particularly those in the south and west. Women in Darfur have suffered disproportionately in recent years, from displacement, violence, rape, sickness, and hunger, as their male relatives have been killed or fled. A peace settlement, a return to their homes, and some measure of stability is desperately needed by women of all ages.

Women's roles have also been targeted by the reforms of the Islamist government. Their dress, their public appearance, and their occupations have all been variously subject to political scrutiny and censure. Invariably it is poor women and non-Muslims in particular who suffer most as Sudanese society is variously redefined by those in power.

Female circumcision (including excision and infibulations, and known locally as *fironi*, pharaonic circumcision) has long been practiced in Muslim Sudan, alongside male circumcision. In the past decade there are clear signs that this is now a contested tradition; many parents are either giving up the practice for their daughters or are preferring more moderate forms of cutting. It remains to be seen how far this trend will become lasting.

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—by S. M. Kenyon

# SWAHILI

**PRONUNCIATION:** swah-HEE-lee

**LOCATION:** Eastern Africa from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique

**POPULATION:** 772, 642

**LANGUAGE:** Kiswahili

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim); spirit cults

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Kenyans; Tanzanians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

For at least a thousand years, Swahili people, who call themselves Waswahili, have occupied a narrow strip of coastal land extending from the north coast of Kenya to Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, and also several nearby Indian Ocean islands (e.g., Zanzibar, Lamu, Pate). Legends claim that Swahili people migrated from a place in northeast Africa called Shungwaya; however, archeological studies and epic poems locate the earliest settlements on Kenya's north coast. Over the past few hundred years, the coastal area has been the site of extraordinary movements of people and goods and has been conquered and colonized several times: by Portuguese who captured Mombasa in the 16th century, by Middle Eastern Arabs who ran a slave trade in the 19th century, and by British colonizers in the 20th century. Thus, Swahili people are accustomed to living with strangers in their midst, and they have frequently acted as "middlemen" in trade relations. In addition, they have incorporated many people and practices into their vibrant social world.

Waswahili are all Muslims. They became Muslim through the influence of people coming from the north and also from across the Indian Ocean. They have forged extensive economic, political, and social ties with Middle Eastern Muslims. Since at least the 18th century, Muslim men from Oman and Saudi Arabia have married Swahili women. Waswahili are known for bringing people into their ethnic group, including slaves brought from the interior of Africa in the 19th century and members of nearby ethnic groups (e.g., Giriama). Scholars have long debated whether, given their tendency to embrace new people, Waswahili even constitute an ethnic group, like the Zulu or the Ashanti, but Swahili people themselves have no doubts that they are a culturally distinct group of Muslims with a mixed African and Arab ancestry.

In the early 19th century the Sultan of Oman moved his capital to the island of Zanzibar and, from there, governed the coastal region. Swahili people competed with Arabs for political and economic power, yet they were a strong community by the end of the last century. During the colonial period and since independence in the early 1960s, Swahili people have been a minority Muslim population in the secular states of Kenya and Tanzania.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Given the shifting nature of Swahili ethnicity, it is difficult to substantiate the general belief that Swahili people number about a half a million.

The deep harbors along the coast have long sustained a profitable fishing and shipping economy. The extensive coral reef several miles off the coast keeps these waters calm. The lush

coastal plain provides a fertile environment for growing coconut palms, fruit trees, spices, and mangrove in swamp areas. Today, Swahili people live primarily in the urban areas of Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, Tanga (mainland Tanzania), the island of Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam.

Hundreds of Swahili people left for the Middle East after the Zanzibar Revolution in 1964. Over the past several decades, thousands have migrated to the Middle East, Europe, and North America largely for economic reasons.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Kiswahili, the Swahili language, is widely spoken across East Africa. For most Kenyans and Tanzanians, Kiswahili is learned as a second language. Swahili people speak Kiswahili as their "mother tongue," and it reflects their mixed origins and complex history. The language includes many words borrowed from Arabic (and other languages), yet its grammar and syntax place it in the Bantu language family, which has roots on the African continent. Like many Kenyans, Swahili people also use English in their daily interactions, particularly in schools, government offices, and the tourist industry.

As in other Bantu languages, all Kiswahili nouns are organized into classes. A noun's class governs the formation of plurals and the agreement among subjects, verbs, and adjectives. The "person" class includes *mtu* (person) and *mwaliimu* (teacher). The "n" class includes many words that begin with the letter "n," such as *ndoa* (marriage) and also many borrowed words, for example, *televisheni* and *komputa*. Kwanzaa, the African American holiday, incorporates many Kiswahili terms from the "u" class of abstract nouns, including *ujamaa* (pulling together) and *umoja* (unity).

Most names are Arabic in origin and indicate a person's Muslim identity by linking him or her with a prophet or with a Muslim ideal. Common names for girls are Amina and Fatuma; for boys, Mohammed and Moussa. A person's first name is followed by their father's name: Mohammed bin (son of) Moussa or Amina binti (daughter of) Moussa. Clan names added to these reflect the relations among larger groups of people. Shortened forms of standard names (e.g., Tuma for Fatuma) are popular as nicknames.

Kiswahili has a wide population of speakers with records of as many as 50 million. Currently, it is the official language in Tanzania. In Kenya and Uganda, it is a national language, since official communication and the medium of instruction in the two countries is English. The language is also spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and South Africa.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Myths and heroes are generally from Islamic sources. For example, many people tell short, moralistic tales based on the Prophet Mohammed's life.

## 5 RELIGION

Being Swahili is inextricably connected to being Muslim. Excavations of mosques provide evidence that Islam flourished from at least the 12th century. Swahili Muslims recognize the five pillars of faith that are basic to Islamic practice worldwide: 1) belief in Allah as the Supreme Being and in Mohammed as the most important prophet; 2) praying five times a day; 3) fasting during the month of Ramadan; 4) giving charity; and



5) making a pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca, if feasible. For Swahili people, Islam encompasses more than just spiritual beliefs and practices; Islam is a way of life. The times for prayer organize each day, and Muslims pray at home or at mosques. On Friday, the holiest day of the week, men pray together. Both men and women attend religious lectures on Fridays and other days.

Like most African Muslims, Swahili people claim allegiance to the Sunni sect of Islam, yet their practices are distinctive in several ways. Some communities revere local religious figures from times past, paying them homage as “saints” on special holy days. Islam includes the belief in spirits (*jini*, singular; *majini*, plural). These beings are capable of possessing individuals for good or evil purposes. Those who are afflicted by bad spirits and, as well, people skilled in controlling them, participate in groups where, through prayers, trance, and ceremonies, spirits are called forth to account for their acts. Dangerous spirits can be driven away by a skillful practitioner of Islamic spiritual medicine. Such local practices are criticized as old fashioned by some who promote either more “modern” religion or a purer version of Islam. Although some young men in the cities are involved in political parties organized to promote Muslim causes, the influence of fundamentalism is low compared with other African contexts (e.g., Algeria, Sudan).

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Along with all other Kenyans, Swahili people celebrate the nation’s secular public holidays, including Jamhuri Day and

Madaraka Day, which mark the steps toward Kenya’s Independence in the early 1960s.

For Muslims, the most important holidays are religious. Idd il Fitr marks the end of the month of Ramadan. Idd il Hajj celebrates the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. Each Idd is celebrated by praying at a mosque or at home, visiting relatives and neighbors, eating special foods and sweets, and, on Idd il Hajj, slaughtering a goat and sharing the meat with family and neighbors. During the month of Ramadan, Swahili Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Even though Swahili people endure the hardships of going without food, water, or cigarettes for about 14 hours each day, Ramadan is a very festive time. After breaking the fast at the end of each day by eating a date and drinking strong coffee, families enjoy a meal of many different delicious foods. Then the evening and most of the night is spent visiting friends, watching videos, praying, playing cards, or, as Idd nears, going shopping at the stores, which stay open late. The last meal is eaten shortly before dawn. Maulidi, or the Prophet’s Birthday, is widely celebrated by Muslims; however, the largest celebration in all of East Africa is hosted by the island of Lamu. Thousands of Swahili and other Muslims come for the occasion that lasts several days and includes large gatherings for prayers at the main mosque and many cultural events. Older men dazzle the crowds with the subtle beauty of their “cane dance,” which they perform by holding canes as they sway slowly from side to side. Young people wander the island, and groups of religious school students march in a parade.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Prior to giving birth most women return to their parents’ homes to receive help from their female relatives. Once the newborn is washed, a relative whispers “*Allahu Akbar*” (“God is Great”) into each ear to call him or her into the Muslim faith. Seven days after birth, males are circumcised in a ceremony attended by family members. Newborns wear a string around the waist with charms, and black ink is painted on the forehead to ward off bad spirits. A new mother rests at her parents’ home for 40 days after giving birth. As she regains her strength, relatives help her to care for the new baby.

There are no specific rites of passage for children or teens. Birthday parties are increasingly popular, and these celebrations include eating cake, disco dancing, and opening presents. Ceremonies associated with secular and religious school, such as graduations, are occasions for marking a young person’s educational progress. For example, most religious and secular schools hold yearly performances where students recite lectures and poems.

Marriage marks a person’s transition to adulthood. Marriages are usually arranged by parents who try to find a kind, responsible, and appealing spouse for their child. A young woman cannot get married without her father’s permission, and at the same time she has the right to refuse someone chosen for her. Prior to the wedding, a female relative or family friend counsels the bride about her duties as a wife. Weddings can include several days of separate celebrations for men and women, such as dancing and drumming, musical performances, viewing the bride in all her finery, and eating lavish meals. Only men attend the actual marriage vows, which take place in a mosque. A male relative represents the bride. One of the women’s events, attended by only close relatives, is a purification

tion rite during which the bride's skin and hair are beautified with herbs.

Muslims are buried within 24 hours of dying. They are wrapped in a white cloth and carried to the graveyard by men who offer prayers. The female relatives of the deceased stay at the house wailing to express their sorrow. Women friends and family gather to comfort the bereaved and to pray. Relatives sponsor remembrance prayers forty days after the burial and again after one year.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Swahili people are as likely to greet one another with the Arabic greeting "*Asalaam Aleikhum*" as they are to say "*Jambo*," which is the common Kiswahili greeting in East Africa. People who know each other exchange a string of greetings enquiring about the health of family members and the latest news. Greetings can reflect the time of day ("*Habari za asubuhi?*"—"What's new this morning?") or the length of time since a previous encounter ("*Habari tangu jana?*"—"What's new since yesterday?"). Upon entering a Swahili house, a guest greets everyone present, shaking each person's hand. From a very young age children are taught to greet an elder with respect by kissing his or her hand. Friends who have not seen each other for a long time grasp hands warmly and kiss on both cheeks.

Swahili people greatly value modest behavior. To guard against romantic relationships developing outside of marriage, men and women are not permitted to mix freely. Most people pursue their daily activities with others of the same gender. Close relatives interact across gender lines, although women are encouraged to congregate at home, while men spend time in public places.

As in many parts of Africa and the Middle East, the right hand is considered "clean" and the left "dirty." Accordingly, most gestures between people—shaking hands, eating communally, or even handing something to someone—are done with the right hand. A polite way to accept a gift is to place the left hand under the upturned right palm. To indicate that something (e.g., a bus, a room, a cup) is full (of people, water, etc.) the left fist is clapped against the right palm striking the base of the thumb in several quick movements. It is considered rude to call someone over by using the index finger. Instead, the right hand is extended and the straight fingers bent to the palm in a sharp inward gesture repeated several times.

Because coastal culture is marked by frequent coming and going, visiting is a well-established custom. Visitors call out "*Hodi!*" to announce their arrival, and the response "*Karibu!*" welcomes them in. Many women either go visiting or receive visitors daily, usually in the late afternoon. Friends and relatives coming from far away are welcomed to spend the night.

Because marriages are usually arranged by family members, dating between men and women of any age is frowned on and generally non-existent. Also, gender segregation makes it difficult for people of the opposite sex to meet openly. But young people (and some older ones too) do manage to meet each other in school, at social events like weddings or parades, or even when traveling on the bus. They routinely succeed in striking up friendships and sometimes fall in love. Secret phone calls to boyfriends or girlfriends are a favorite pastime of young people brave enough to risk severe reprimands from disapproving parents.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Swahili people suffer the diseases of developing countries, such as malaria, yellow fever, and polio, and, because they eat a diet high in fat, they also experience the diseases of industrialized countries, such as cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Most people have access to rudimentary medical care in government and private hospitals, although treatment is sometimes expensive. Traditional Swahili medicine includes herbal remedies, massage, and bloodletting. Also, some practitioners treat emotional troubles through prayer, protective charms, or exorcising evil spirits.

As the longtime middlemen in a mercantile economy, Swahili people are avid consumers who, depending on their means, seek out new products. Radios, TVs, VCRs, watches, and cameras are obtained from relatives or friends returning from travel outside Kenya where such goods are cheaper. Women save to buy imported clothes and jewelry for themselves and their children. Teens have limited cash, but they try to keep up with the latest fashions, such as running shoes and track suits for boys and beaded veils from the Middle East for girls.

Houses vary depending on a family's means and the type of town in which they reside. "Stone towns," like Lamu and Mombasa, are characterized by large stone houses, some divided into apartments. Some Swahili people living in "country towns" still occupy houses made of hardened mud and stones, although these are less common than houses of stone or coral.

Most homes have electricity, indoor plumbing, several bedrooms, and a living room furnished with a couch and chairs. Access to water is critical for Muslims who must wash before prayers.

In comparison with many people in Kenya, Swahili people enjoy a relatively high standard of living. They are firmly in the cash economy, even though they are more likely to have limited commercial ventures rather than big businesses. Some own their own property.

Travel among the coastal towns is an important part of Swahili life, and many Swahili men work in the transportation industry. Buses, vans, and a small number of private cars are the main means of transport.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

In family matters, Swahili women are the partners of men, yet their partnership is unequal. Under Islam, husbands and fathers have authority in the home; they can make decisions for wives and daughters and compel them to behave properly to preserve the family's honor. But, Swahili women also wield considerable power in the daily life of the family, as they take charge of meals, marriage arrangements, and holiday celebrations.

The average number of children in each family has declined from 10–14 early in the 20th century to 5–8 at mid-century to 3–4 for young couples today. Women who have been educated and/or work outside the home tend to limit births. Entrusting a friend or relative to raise one's child is a common practice that draws the parents and caregivers closer together. Residents of an individual household might include many people beyond the immediate family, such as grandparents, nieces and nephews, and in-laws.

Marriages are generally arranged by family members, with preference made for marrying cousins. Most newlyweds are not well acquainted with one another; however, Waswahili be-



lieve that love grows as the marriage endures. Men are permitted to marry up to four wives, but the expectation that they must support each one equally means that most marriages are monogamous. Divorce is frequent, especially among young people who decide that the arranged choice is not working and among older couples if the husband marries another wife.

Arab heritage emphasizes relations through the father's family (patrilineal descent) as the primary form of kinship, but Swahili people also recognize close ties through their mother's relatives. Each Swahili family also identifies with a clan.

Cats live in many Swahili households, and, although children sometimes play with them, they are valued less as pets than for their service in warding off mice. Dogs are thought of as dirty and not allowed near homes.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the early 20th century in Swahili fishing villages, women wore brightly colored cotton cloths (*kanga* or *leso*) wrapped around their waists and upper bodies and draped over their shoulders and heads. Some women adorned themselves with plug earrings of up to an inch in diameter. Family status determined how a woman veiled. For example, wealthy women in Zanzibar Town walked unseen behind a cloth enclosure carried by servants. Men wore a striped cloth (*kikoi*) wrapped around the waist and hanging to the knees. As a mark of being Muslim some men sported small white caps with elaborate tan embroidery. Both men and women wore leather sandals, and wealthy families used wooden platform shoes when they entered the bathroom. Islam forbids men to wear precious metals, but women own gold necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. Gold, which many women receive at the time of marriage, is both an adornment and an investment that they might cash in if times become financially tough.

Clothing reflects a Swahili family's status and also an individual's personal style. Dressing well and dressing modestly are both highly valued. Women wear "Western style" dresses in many colors, patterns, and fabrics. At home, a woman might wrap a *kanga* around her waist, like an apron. Outside the house, she wears a long, wide, black, floor-length cloak with an attached veil, called a *buibui*. She pulls the veil tight against her cheeks and secures the fabric under her chin, leaving her face exposed. Women veil to show that they are proper Muslims from respectable families. Men wear Western-style trousers and shirts. On Fridays, or other religious occasions, they wear long, white caftans. Shorts are worn only by children.

## 12 FOOD

Swahili cuisine, which is highly spiced, has African, Middle Eastern, and Indian influences. Rice, the staple, is cooked with coconut milk and served with tomato-based meat, bean, or vegetable stews. Meals incorporate locally-available vegetables (eggplant, okra, and spinach), fruits (mangoes, coconuts, pineapples), and spices (cloves, cardamom, hot pepper). Fish—fried, grilled, or stewed in coconut sauce—is also central to the diet. Sweet tea with milk is served several times a day. It is prepared by placing loose, black tea (2 teaspoons) in a small saucepan with milk (1 cup) and water (1 cup). Bring to a boil, reduce heat and cook for about five minutes, stirring frequently. Bring to a boil again and cook longer if a creamier tea is desired. Stir in sugar (at least 2 teaspoons) and a pinch each of powdered ginger and powdered cardamom. Strain to serve.

Rice cooked with meat and spices (*pilau*) and served with a tart tomato and onion salad is a favorite dish for special occasions. Chicken and goat meat are popular for holiday meals. Special sweets include moist, rice flour cake flavored with coconut and *kaimati*, which resemble doughnut holes, and are soaked in rose water syrup. When Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, tasted *kaimati* for the first time, he enjoyed them so much that he asked the joking question: "Can I get the seeds that Waswahili use to grow these?"

Although increasingly people eat at tables, they often spread straw mats on the floor and sit around a large, metal tray on which is piled the rice to be shared. They pass bowls of stew, vegetables and fruit and eat either with their right hand or a spoon. Before the meal begins, food is protected from insects by brightly painted straw covers. Several utensils are needed to process coconut, which is a frequent addition to rice and stews. First, the coconut is cracked in half with a sharp blow from an iron bar. Then, the cook grates each half on a serrated blade attached to a low stool. The gratings are placed in a long straw tube, which is then soaked in water to release a thick white milk.

Waswahili, like all Muslims, are prohibited from eating pork or drinking alcohol. The members of one clan from northern Kenya observe a taboo on eating fish.

Guests are always offered something to eat or drink, and it is polite to accept. Gifts of meat or special sweets are routinely exchanged among neighbors and relatives. Even children are encouraged to share food.

A light breakfast of tea and bread is eaten early in the morning. Many people have more tea and snacks mid-morning, and the main meal is eaten in the early afternoon. Supper includes tea and leftovers or light fare, such as an omelette.

## 13 EDUCATION

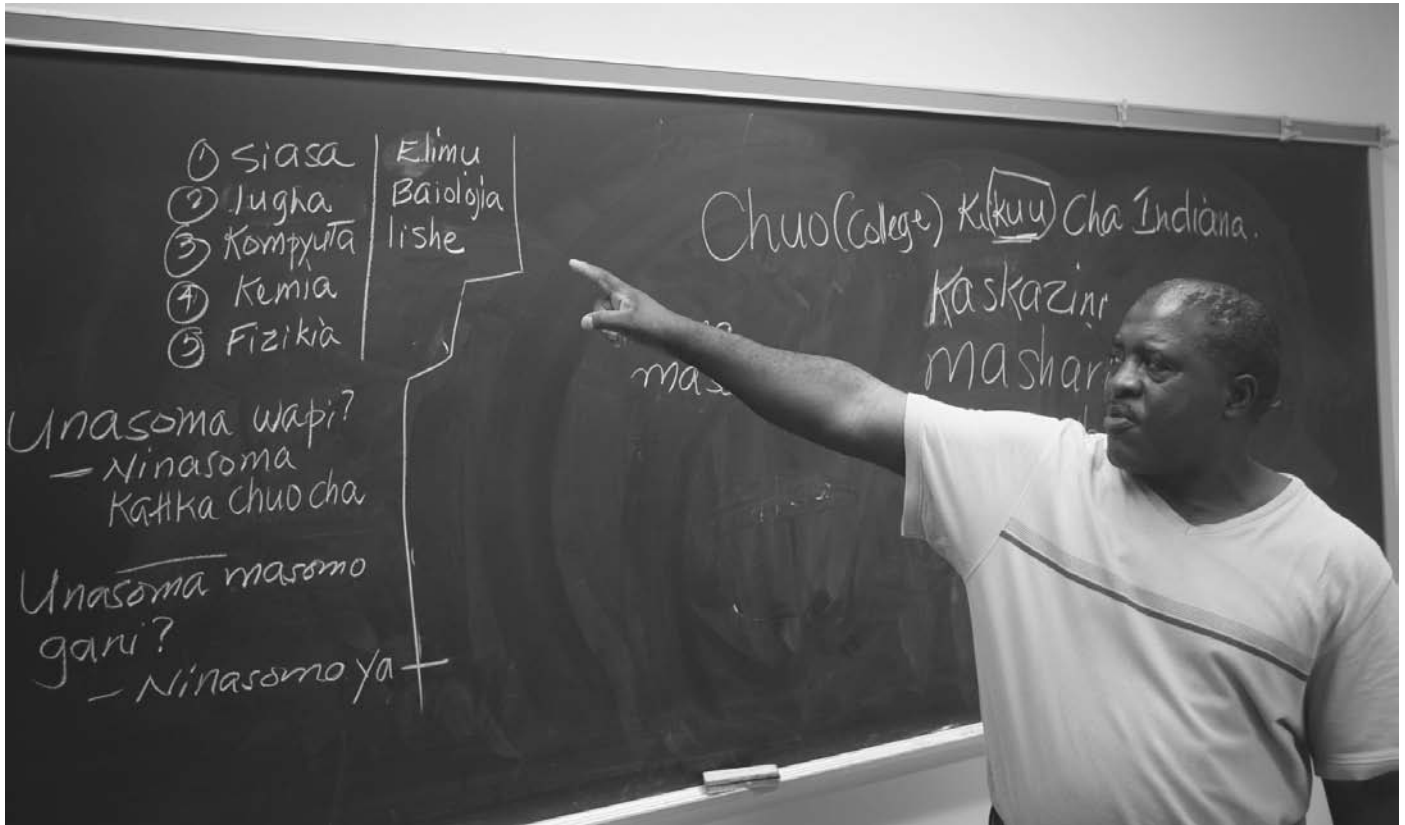
Through Islam, literacy came to the East African coast much earlier than to most other parts of the continent. Knowing how to read the Koran is religiously important, thus Swahili people have a high rate of literacy. Some people are literate in Arabic as well as Kiswahili. Those who have been to secular school are literate in English as well.

Many adults over fifty have had no secular education. Some adults in their forties had limited primary education, and only a very small number, mostly men, went on to secondary schools. Adults in their thirties tend to have at least several years of primary education. Young people today tend to finish primary school, and some go on to secondary school. Most Swahili young people attend religious school at least several times a week where they learn to read Arabic and to recite passages from the Koran.

Most parents, particularly those in urban areas, recognize the value of education in preparing their children for employment. Families vary as to whether they believe that girls should be educated as extensively as boys. The availability of single sex schools can affect this decision.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

*Taarab* music, which has distinctly Arabic origins, is performed at weddings and concerts. Band members play keyboards, flutes, brass instruments, and drums to accompany singers. Many of the Kiswahili lyrics are double entendres that hint at romantic love.



University of Kansas teacher Leonce Rushubirwa, from the United Republic of Tanzania in East Africa, helps students learn the African language of Swahili at the University of Indiana. About 80 students enrolled in a seven-week course at the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute. The goal of the course was to increase the number of competent African language speakers in the United States. (AP Images/Herald-Times, Jeremy Hogan)

Several women's dance groups perform at weddings for all-female audiences. They dance *chakacha*, which resembles belly dancing, and also *lelemama*, a very subtle dance with tiny hand movements. These groups used to engage in competitions, and they wore elaborate costumes, including military uniforms.

Kiswahili oral literature includes songs, sayings, stories, and riddles. The main written form is poetry. Kiswahili poems, which include long epics, prayers, and meditations on many subjects, conform to a complex rhyme and meter.

## 15 WORK

Some Swahili still fish, farm, and trade as they did in previous generations. But the difficult local economy has meant that many people are unemployed or dependent on the unpredictable tourist industry. Educated men and women enter the civil service and work in offices, shops, and schools. Although husbands are obligated to provide for their families, many wives earn money for their families through cooking food, sewing, or trading from their homes.

## 16 SPORTS

Few adults play sports. Many boys join soccer teams and play in hotly contested competitions. Soccer matches involving Kenyan regional teams or local boys' clubs provide rare, though exciting entertainment, mostly for men. In school, girls play

sports such as netball and track. Children are sometimes taken to swim at the ocean.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Weddings and holiday celebrations are the most important forms of entertainment. The main guests at weddings are adults; however, young people enjoy weddings too, especially the musical concerts at night. Groups of young women, using their veils as camouflage, watch the wedding festivities from the sidelines. Traveling to and from weddings, people sing songs and celebrate with vigor.

There are only a few theaters in the urban areas, and young men are the most likely to attend films. Watching videos is a favorite pastime, especially for women and young people. Although not every household has a television and VCR, people tend to know friends or relatives with whom they can watch videos, such as action films from Japan, romances from India, Islamic epics, and detective stories from the United States. If a video contains love scenes, an adult might fast-forward to protect the modesty of those present. Local and foreign soap operas, news, and sports are also popular. Young people enjoy music tapes and music videos from the United States, Europe, India, and the Middle East. Several local bands are also popular, although men are much more likely than women to see them perform. On the weekends, young people sometimes go

to discos, and women enjoy walking on the beach or going for a picnic.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Artisans on the island of Lamu are famous for their intricately carved wooden furniture and doors. They also construct miniature, painted replicas of the boats (*dhow*s) used for fishing. Young boys play with these at the shore. Women use brown colored henna to paint complex flower designs on their hands and feet (up to the knees) as preparation for attending a wedding. The color, which stains the skin and nails, lasts for several weeks.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Waswahili view the declining economy and erosion of their culture by tourism as significant social problems. Tourists who walk around in immodest clothing (e.g., shorts and bikinis), drink alcohol in public, and encourage loose behavior among young people have threatened the proper Islamic life that many Swahili people struggle to maintain.

Waswahili face some discrimination by Kenyans who have resented their connection to the slave trade and their ties to Middle Eastern wealth. Their role in Kenyan politics, though marginal, is increasing as Kenya moves forward in multiparty democracy.

Although some individuals drink alcohol, even to excess, the Islamic prohibition mentioned above guards against widespread alcoholism. A more worrisome problem is the growing prevalence of drug use (marijuana) among young men, which is condemned as anti-social. However, chewing *miraa*, a plant grown locally that contains a mild stimulant, is regarded as an acceptable social activity in which participants share stories and jokes as well as the bubble gum that must be chewed to hide *miraa*'s bitter taste.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although Swahili culture is generally a heavily patriarchal system, women did once play vital roles both socially and politically. There is recorded evidence that show that Swahili women held high political positions, some of the women ruled as queens while others as chiefs. Even while male rulers predominated, some women occupied positions of authority, such as Asha Binti Muhammad, Chief of Ngumi in AD 1686; Mwana Mkishi, the first ruler of Mombasa around AD 1500; Queen of Pemba in AD 1686; and other queens such as Mwana Fatuma binti Darhash, Mwana Aisha and Mwana Mize binti Mnaba. After the 17th century, however, tilted political positions remained the exclusive domain of men.

In the traditional Swahili society, women fully participated in familial and public festivities. They were not excluded from attending mosques alongside men and even went through literacy programs just like their male counterparts. Women became literate and studied formal Islamic sciences. They even enjoyed the rights to property and inheritance just as men did. However, Swahili women slowly lost control of economic resources and were increasingly denied access to education. Despite the strides made in education in East Africa, Swahili women still occupy subordinate roles to men in religious, economic, and political spheres.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

# SWAZIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SWAH-zeez

**LOCATION:** Swaziland

**POPULATION:** 1,100,000 (2006)

**LANGUAGE:** SiSwati

**RELIGION:** Christianity (various sects), traditional religious beliefs, and Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Swazi history dates back to the late 16th century when the first Swazi king, Ngwane II, settled southeast of modern-day Swaziland. His grandson, Sobhuza I, established a permanent capital and drew the resident Nguni and Sotho people within a centralized political system. During the mid-19th century, Sobhuza's heir, Mswati II, from whom the Swazis derive their name, expanded the Swazi nation to an area much larger than modern Swaziland. Mswati established contact with the British, who later made Swaziland a protectorate following the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. Swaziland became independent in 1968.

Today, Swaziland's government is headed by a dual monarchy, consisting of Mswati III, the hereditary king and head of state who is titled *Ingwenyama* (Lion), and the queen mother who is titled *Indlovukati* (Lady Elephant). This traditional structure operates parallel to a "modern" (post-European contact) structure, consisting of the administrative head of government, i.e., the prime minister, and statutory bodies including a cabinet and a bicameral parliament, which enacts legislation subject to approval by the king. Swaziland did not have a Constitution after 1973; a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) submitted proposals for a new Constitution to the King, and it was adopted in 2006.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Swazi reside primarily in Swaziland, a small landlocked country of 17,363 sq km (6,704 sq mi) which is perched on the edge of the southern African escarpment. It is bounded on three sides by South Africa and on the fourth side by Mozambique, both countries also housing many ethnic Swazis. Four distinctive topographic steps largely determine the characteristics of its natural environment: the highveld, middleveld, lowveld, and the Lubombo mountain range.

Swazi identity is based on allegiance to the dual monarchy, and ethnic Swazis living in the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique are not under its effective political control. In 2006, the World Bank estimated the total number of Swazis at about 1.1 million people. The population is growing at a rate of 2.9% per year, and nearly half (44.4%) of all Swazis are 14 years of age or younger. Swaziland is one of the few African countries with a homogeneous (sharing common descent) population. Most Swazis live in rural homesteads, but in the middleveld, where nearly one-half of the Swazi population resides, rural homesteads are interspersed with densely populated settlements around employment centers. The two major cities are Mbabane and Manzini.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

"Swazi" refers to the nation, tribe, or ethnic group. The language spoken is referred to as "siSwati." SiSwati speakers are found in Swaziland, South Africa, and Mozambique. SiSwati is a tonal Bantu language of the Nguni group, closely related to Zulu and, more distantly, to Xhosa. It is spoken in Swaziland and in the Eastern Transvaal province of the Republic of South Africa. Little has been published in SiSwati.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Swazi oral historical tradition is arguably the richest still existing in southern Africa. The reason largely lies in the fact that the Swazis' political structure was not disrupted following colonial rule to the same degree as were the structures of other southern African kingdoms. Elder Swazis still recount rich histories of their forebears—numerous conquering kings and chiefs—dating back several centuries. The first king, Ngwane II, who led his followers from their home on the east coast and moved inland, is commemorated in one of many royal praise-songs, "Nkosi Dlamini—You scourged the Lebombo in your flight."

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Adherents of traditional Swazi religion believe in an aloof supreme being known as *Mkhulumnqande*, who created the earth but who is not worshipped and is not associated with the ancestral spirits (*emadloti*). He demands no sacrifices. Swazis believe that ancestral spirits are ranked, as are humans. Men play important roles in traditional religious life, offering sacrifices for the spirits, but women, acting as diviners, also communicate with spirits. The Queen Mother serves as custodian of rain "medicines." Among the Swazi, spirits take many forms, sometimes possessing people and influencing their welfare, primarily their health.

The Methodists established the first Christian mission in Swaziland. Currently, many Christian sects are present in the country, ranging from the more eclectic Catholics to the more rigid Afrikaner Calvinists. Although the statistical breakdown of adherents to different religions varies in different accounts, it is probably reasonable to state that the population is approximately 35% Protestant, 25% Roman Catholic, 30% Zionist (indigenous Christianity), and 10% Islamic or other beliefs. The majority of Swazis are registered as Christian, but it should be noted that most Swazis also follow traditional beliefs. Moreover, as the statistics above indicate, a significant number of Christian converts belong to Zionist churches, which practice a flexible dogma and great tolerance of custom.

## <sup>6</sup> MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The annual ritual of kingship, the *Incwala*, is a traditional national holiday that is rich in Swazi symbolism and only understandable in terms of the social organization and major values of Swazi life. The central figure is the king, who alone can authorize its performance. The *Incwala* reflects the growth of the king, and his subjects play parts determined by their status, primarily rank and gender. Before this ceremony (which is sometimes described as a "first fruits ceremony" or a "ritual of rebellion") can be performed during a three-week period each year, considerable organizational and preparatory activities must be undertaken. For example, water and sacred plants are



collected at distant points to strengthen and purify the king. Thereafter, the oldest warrior regiment opens the *Incwala*. Sacred songs that are concerned with the important events of kingship (a king's marriage to his main ritual wife, the return of ancestral cattle from the royal grave, and the burial of kings) as well as dances are performed. Themes of fertility and potency predominate. Celebrants are adorned in striking clothing, including feathers of special birds and skins of wild animals. The *Incwala* symbolizes the unity of the state and attempts to reinforce it: it dramatizes power struggles between the king and the princes, or between the aristocrats and commoners, with the Swazi king ultimately triumphing. Other national royal rituals include the Reed Dance and rainmaking rites, while local rituals include funerals, marriages, and initiations.

A contemporary national holiday is Independence Day, which has been celebrated since the country's independence from Britain on 6 September 1968.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

During childhood, young Swazi boys play and run errands around rural homesteads until they are old enough to accompany their age-mates to the fields with the cattle herds. Young Swazi girls play and help their mothers with minor domestic chores and child care. Fathers may play a small role in child rearing—especially if they are employed at distant locations within Swaziland or in South Africa.

At puberty, a boy is tended by a traditional healer and eventually joins his age (warrior) regiment (*libutfo*), where he learns

about manhood and service to the king. A girl, upon having her first menstruation, is isolated in a hut for several days and instructed by her mother about observances and taboos. The Swazi have not circumcised males since King Mswati's reign in the mid-19th century, but both boys and girls traditionally had their ears cut (*ukusika tindlebe*).

Following puberty, a girl's and boy's families begin marriage negotiations. A man and his family acquire rights to children by transferring to the woman's family bride-wealth (*lobola*) valuables such as cattle and nowadays some cash. A new bride thereafter goes to live with her husband and in-laws. In contemporary Swaziland, a couple may contract one of several forms of marriage: a customary marriage, which may take the form of a "love" marriage, an arranged marriage (*ukwendzisa*), or a bride-capture marriage (the third form is uncommon and may not involve the exchange of bride-wealth), or a Christian marriage. In the past, a preferred form of customary marriage was the sororate, in which a woman married her sister's husband, thereby becoming the subsidiary wife (*inhlanti*). A customary marriage ceremony, particularly for high-ranking couples, tends to involve numerous and protracted ritual exchanges between the families (sometimes lasting decades), and brings into play singing, dancing, wailing, gift-giving, and feasting. In recent years, greater numbers of individuals have opted to elope or remain single.

Following death, the corpse of a deceased person undergoes a mortuary ritual that varies according to the deceased's status and his or her relationship with different categories of mourners. The more important a deceased person was the more elaborate are the funerary rites given his or her corpse—especially true in the case of a deceased king. The closer the blood or marital ties were between a deceased person and a mourner, the more elaborate is the mourner's ritualized display of grief. A widow may be expected to continue her husband's lineage through the levirate (*ngena*), in which she marries a brother or another male relative of her deceased husband; however, this practice is not practiced as frequently as in the past. Many Swazis believe that the spirit of a deceased person can manifest itself in illness and in various omens, occasionally materializing in the form of a snake.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Swazi, who like the Zulu were once feared as fierce warriors, display a multiplicity of traits in their daily interactions. They can be generous to a hungry stranger or receptive to a jovial comrade, but they can also be proud and arrogant to the unfortunate stranger who transgresses the rules of social propriety. In particular, the Swazi demand strict adherence to rules concerned with kingship and the associated sociopolitical hierarchy: forms of greetings; body language; and gestures. According to custom, youth must show deference to their elders, women to men, and low-ranking persons to high-ranking persons. People demonstrate respect by lowering their eyes, kneeling, and moving quietly.

An interesting symbolic representation of interpersonal relations among Swazis was once found—and to some extent is still found—in beads. In the past, a newborn baby was welcomed into the world with white "luck" beads placed around its waist, wrists, and/or ankles. An adult wore beads to designate his or her social status (i.e., commoner or royalty) and love or marital status. Regarding the latter, a young woman



Swazis participating in the Umhlanga (Reed Dance) in celebration of the Harvest Festival. (Jason Laure)

gave beadwork to her sweetheart as a token of love. In a sense, beadwork served as her “courting letter,” with different bead patterns representing different stages in the courtship. Within the beadwork pattern were symbols that represented letters and words that communicated ideas. In “reading” a beadwork love message, groups of girls noted the meaning of the bead color, its position in the pattern, the background on which it was fitted, and the sex or social status of the recipient.

## <sup>9</sup> LIVING CONDITIONS

Everyday concerns of Swazis relate to housing, transport, and the acquisition of basic household necessities. Many consumer items are available—particularly to people who reside in urban areas and receive an income through wage labor. In urban areas people have better access to public transport, medical services, and jobs, and they are also better situated to receive electricity and piped water. Most people buy manufactured blankets, clothing, and cookware; many people buy “prestige” items such as battery-operated radios; and a few people are able to purchase cars or trucks for transport. Most people satisfy their food requirements through their own or relatives’ labors in agriculture and animal husbandry, although nearly all people purchase processed foods such as bread, sugar, and tea. Most Swazis construct their own homes from rocks, logs, clay, and thatch; those persons with sufficient funds hire builders and buy corrugated iron roofs, glass windows, and solid wood doors.

A special concern of Swazis relates to health and general well-being. Swazis direct their health concerns to both Western-influenced, biomedical practitioners and traditional practitioners. Many Swazis believe that traditional practitioners, who serve a much larger segment of the population, identify and correct the imbalances between the human and spirit worlds that lead to misfortunes and illnesses. These practitioners are of three types: herbalists or *tinyanga* (about 50%), diviner-mediums or *tangoma* (about 40%), and Christian faith-healers (about 10%). Men are usually *tinyanga*, and women are usually *tangoma*. Most Swazis believe that serious diseases do not simply happen; rather, they are created and sent mystically by a person of ill-will. Swazis differentiate between conditions or diseases that are “African” and conditions or diseases that are foreign; they emphasize that a condition, such as madness caused by sorcery, is best treated by traditional medicine and practitioners, while a disease, such as cholera, is best treated by Western medicine and biomedical practitioners. In the current context of the AIDS pandemic, both biomedical and traditional practitioners are treating patients; importantly, the two types of practitioners are often working cooperatively in treating patients.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

In rural areas, the ordinary Swazi resides in a homestead, *umuti*, which is headed by a male homestead head, *umnumzana*, who is assisted by his wife (or main wife in a polygamous mar-



Swazi nuclear families typically are large by American standards, with six children or more. (Cory Langley)

riage). The head determines resource allocation such as land distribution, makes major decisions regarding both production (plowing and types of crops grown) and economic expenditures, and mobilizes homestead labor. Homestead residents have access as individuals to arable land, and as community members to communal pasturage.

Within a complex homestead are households; each household (*indlu*) generally consists of one nuclear family (a man, his wife, and their children) whose members share agricultural tasks and eat from one kitchen. Sometimes a wife has an attached co-wife, *inhlanti*, who, along with her children, forms part of the same “house.” A married son and his wife (wives) and dependents may form another house within the wider “house” of his mother.

Many Swazi homesteads have few or no chairs or beds, and people therefore sit and sleep on grass mats. If a homestead lacks a stove, women or girls will cook on an open fire in a hut or in the yard. Women’s and men’s utensils and tools may be limited and homemade. Homestead residents are resourceful in accomplishing tasks: for example, some women clean their earthen floors by smearing moistened cow dung over them—a process which leaves them smooth and sweet-smelling.

## 11 CLOTHING

Swazis wear either traditional or modern-day clothing in both towns and rural areas and for both everyday and ceremonial purposes. Men’s traditional clothing consists of a colorful cloth “skirt” covered by an *emajobo* (hide apron), further

adorned by various ornamental items on ceremonial occasions: the *ligcebesha* (neckband), *umgaco* (ties), *sagibo* (walking stick), *siphandle* (limb ornaments), and in the case of royals, the *ligwalagwala* (red feathers). Women’s traditional clothing consists of the *ilihhiya* (cloth). Married women cover their upper torso and sometimes wear traditional “beehive” hairstyles, whereas single women sometimes wear only beads over their upper torso—particularly at special ceremonies, such as the Reed Dance performed in honor of the Queen Mother.

## 12 FOOD

Swazis cultivate maize, sorghum, beans, groundnuts, and sweet potatoes for consumption. They also raise cattle, the traditional basis of wealth and status within their society, as well as smaller livestock. Mealie-meal (ground maize) serves as the primary food and is accompanied by cultivated or wild vegetables and meat—chicken on ordinary occasions and beef on festive occasions. Sometimes traditional Swazi beer is brewed.

Most people eat a breakfast consisting of tea, bread, and/or sour-milk porridge; a lunch consisting of bread or leftovers; and a dinner consisting of porridge, vegetables, and meat. Although most people eat from metal, plastic, or ceramic dishware, some people follow customary practice, thereby drinking beer from a black clay pot and eating meat from a carved, wooden bowl. Many people enjoy sharing food from the same plate or bowl with their friends and age-mates; each person scoops out food with his or her fingers.

## 13 EDUCATION

In the past, Swazi children were educated within their families and age-groups. Both boys and girls were taught domestic and agricultural tasks, and boys were instructed in warfare. Today, intertribal warfare no longer exists, but male members of the warrior age-classes (*emabutfo*) continue to learn how to perform ritual functions.

In contemporary Swaziland, children receive a secular education under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Many children attend mission schools which convey Christian values. Schoolchildren do their lessons from siSwati textbooks in the lower grades and English textbooks in the higher grades. SiSwati literary tradition is not highly developed as the language was not put into writing until the 20th century.

Only those children whose families can afford to pay their annual school fees receive a formal education. Mothers often assume primary responsibility for earning the money to educate their children; they prepare and sell crops, handicrafts, and other goods to pay the school fees and purchase uniforms. Children who complete school are expected to assist with the education of their younger siblings and to care for their parents in old age.

The ongoing AIDS pandemic has created many orphans—most of whom lack sufficient funds to pay for their education. When the government allocated money in 2003 to pay the school fees of orphans, the impoverished parents of other children complained about favoritism. In any case, the money proved to be vastly inadequate to assist all orphaned children. By 2006, UNICEF estimated that 80,000 children had been orphaned by AIDS in Swaziland.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Swazis have inherited a rich tradition of music and dance. Their ceremonial music has been unaffected by Western influence and retains a distinctive individual style which sets it apart from that of related ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the *siBhaca* recreational dance music has been adopted from the Xhosa-speaking people of South Africa.

Swazi women sing together as they work in groups on tasks such as digging or weeding, and men sing together as they pay tribute to their chiefs or past and present kings. Celebrants also perform special songs at weddings, royal rituals, coming-of-age ceremonies, and national Independence Day festivities. Swazi praise-poets have long been known throughout southern Africa. They compose praise-poems for kings, chiefs, and prominent persons.

Swazi specialists craft musical instruments to accompany popular singing and dancing activities: among those instruments used either in the past or present are the *luvene* (hunting horn), *impalampala* (kudu bull horn), *ligubhu* and *makhweyane* (a calabash attached to a wooden bow), and *livenge* (a wind instrument made from a plant). Some people play drums and European instruments.

## 15 WORK

Swazis divide work tasks according to sex, age, and pedigree. Men construct house frames and cattle *kraals* (corrals), plow, tend and milk cattle, sew skins, and cut shields; some men are particularly accomplished at warfare, animal husbandry, hunting, and governing. Women hoe, plant and harvest crops, tend small livestock, thatch, plait ropes, weave mats and baskets, grind grain, brew beer, cook foods, and care for children; some women also specialize in pot- and mat-making. Age is important in determining who will perform tasks associated with ritual performances. Rank is important in determining who will summon people for work parties in district and national enterprises and who will supervise the workers. Nowadays, some men migrate within Swaziland and to South Africa in search of work and income.

In contemporary Swaziland, people derive income from various agricultural and commercial activities. The country's main export crop is sugar, based on irrigated cane. Several other cash crops, including maize, rice, vegetables, cotton, tobacco, citrus fruits, and pineapples, are traded both within and outside the country. Swaziland's mineral wealth, which consists of iron ore, coal, diamonds, and asbestos, is mined for export. Meat and meat products are also exported. The industrial estate at Matsapha produces processed agricultural and forestry products, garments, textiles, and many light manufactured goods. According to government statistics from 2000, 63,598 people were employed in the private sector, and 28,554 people were employed in the public sector. As of 2004, the national unemployment rate was 31%.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer (i.e., football) is popular throughout the country and is played by boys and men. In rural areas, both boys and girls play games with various sorts of balls which are often home-made from twine or rubber.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the past, various ritual ceremonies, including weddings and funerals, provided the main opportunities for people within and across communities to gather and enjoy themselves. Feasts were held and traditional dances were performed. Some elder Swazis currently lament that young men no longer know the traditional warrior dance, the *umgubho*.

Nowadays, with family members living and working in distant locations, and with the advent of technological innovations, the occasions and forms of entertainment have changed. In urban areas, where electricity is more readily available, some households have televisions. In rural areas, many households have battery-operated radios and people enjoy musical, news, and sports programs. Rural Swazi children, as in many parts of Africa, usually do not have sufficient money to buy manufactured toys; nonetheless, they are adept at creating toys out of discarded items, such as tires, tin cans, wires, and maize cobs. Boys build intricate, moveable toy cars from rubber and metal scraps, and girls fashion dolls from maize cobs.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In the past, smithing, a task assigned to men, was a prestigious activity that produced iron hoes, knives, and various kinds of spears as weapons of war. Today, smithing is less important, but pottery-making and woodcarving continue. Pottery-making, using the coil technique, is a task assigned to women. Basket-weaving is also done by women. Woodcarving, a task performed by both men and women, results in functional, unornamented implements and utensils, such as meat dishes and spoons. Schools are encouraging the production of masks or sculptured figures for the tourist trade.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In present-day Swaziland, various social and economic changes, including altered sex roles, increased job competition, labor migration, and the growth of an educated elite class, have produced new problems. These problems include, for example, an increase in crime and alcoholism—particularly in the outskirts of urban areas. Some Swazis complain that they are no longer able to deal effectively with their problems because traditional “witchfinding” is legally prohibited, thus freeing perceived social miscreants to behave as they please.

Some Swazis argue that a significant social-political problem concerns the hierarchical ranking system, headed by the King and the royal family. In recent years, this system has been challenged by disaffected new elites who have achieved status through the acquisition of an education and wealth but who do not have hereditary position.

Most Swazis, as well as outside observers, argue that the country's most significant social problem concerns a health issue, the HIV prevalence rate, which at 38.8% of the country's adult population (2003 estimate), is the highest in the world. In 2007, life expectancy was less than 33 years. As indicated above, huge numbers of children who were orphaned by AIDS are not well cared for and face an uncertain future.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Swazi society is patriarchal, with men continuing to hold positions of power in both the private and public sectors. Before Swaziland's new constitution was adopted in 2006, women had



the legal status of minors and were unable to own property or open a bank account without the permission of a male relative or husband. Some observers have linked Swazi women's low status to their high HIV infection rates as well as to the high rates of sexual violence against them (a survey in 2007 indicated that one in three Swazi women experienced some form of sexual violence before turning 18). In addition, some observers attribute the high rate of sexual violence against Swazi women and girls to the belief by some HIV-positive men that sleeping with a virgin girl can prevent AIDS. It remains to be seen whether the new constitution, together with new legislation and policy—particularly as concern land and property rights—will eventually improve women's status in practice.

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—by L. Rose

# TANZANIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** tan-zuh-NEE-uhns

**LOCATION:** Tanzania

**POPULATION:** 39.3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Swahili; English; Arabic; 130 indigenous languages

**RELIGION:** Islam; Christianity; indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Chagga; Luo; Maasai; Nyamwezi

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The United Republic of Tanzania, or *Jamhuri ya Mwungano wa Tanzania*, includes the mainland of Tanganyika, Zanzibar, and some offshore islands. Zanzibar and the coast have a long history of lucrative trading, which Arabs, Europeans, and Africans each have attempted to control. In 1840 the Sultan of Omani established his capital in Zanzibar. From there the caravan trade brought the Swahili language and Islam into the hinterlands as far as what is now the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 1885, the Germans gained control and made Tanzania a protectorate, incorporating it into German East Africa along with Burundi and Rwanda. Dispossessed of its colonies after World War I, Germany ceded control to the British, who ruled until 1946 under a League of Nations mandate. The UN made Tanzania a trust territory under British rule after 1946.

Anti-colonial sentiment grew as the British administration favored white settlers and immigrant farmers. In 1929 Tanzanians formed the Tanganyika African Association. Julius Nyerere transformed it into the Tanganyika African National Union in 1954. Nyerere's party won 70 of 71 seats in the national assembly in 1960, and he became prime minister in May 1961. On 9 December 1961, Tanzania gained its full independence.

After independence, Tanzania embarked on an ambitious, large-scale project of national self-reliance. Led by Nyerere, the teacher (*mwalmu*), the government promoted *ujamaa* (family villages), whose aim was to bring scattered families together in village cooperatives. Simultaneously, under the Arusha Declaration of 1967, Nyerere's single-party government nationalized banks, industry, schools, and transport. The main goal was to promote an African-based form of development, where villages work together and people reach decisions through discussion and consensus.

Although *ujamaa* made it easier to organize rural development, it did not achieve the lofty economic goals envisioned. In the 1980s Tanzania joined many African countries undergoing structural adjustment and poverty reduction programs with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Disillusioned with his program's lack of success, Nyerere became one of Africa's first presidents to resign on his own accord in 1985. His vice-president, Mwinyi, replaced him. After serving two terms, Mwinyi was succeeded by Benjamin Mkapa, and in 2005, Jakaya Kikwete was elected president. Because of its extensive patronage networks, the ruling party has never been seriously threatened at the polls.

Post-independent Tanzania has had to make nation-building a top priority. Nyerere insisted that Swahili be the common unifying language for Tanzania, and unique electoral and representational rules kept Zanzibar and the mainland under one

Republic. For example, Zanzibar elects a president who is head of government for matters internal to Zanzibar, and while the National Assembly enacts laws that apply to the entire Republic and also only to the mainland, Zanzibar has its own House of Representatives that enacts laws pertaining solely to Zanzibar.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Tanzania covers 942,804 sq km (364,017 sq mi), about twice the size of the US state of California. Tanzania borders Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya. The mainland has 1,374 km (854 mi) of coastline on the Indian Ocean. Tanzania's climate and topography relief have much variety. The highest point in Africa is at the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro 5,883 m (or 19,300 ft above sea level) and the lowest point is at the floor of Lake Tanganyika 361 m (or 1,184 ft below sea level). Temperatures range from tropical to temperate and vary with elevation. Rainfall for much of the country comes from December to May, but the central third of the country is semiarid. Sporadic rainfall makes agricultural and livestock production unpredictable.

Tanzania's physical and climatic variation is rivaled by its ethnic and cultural diversity. Its peoples belong to more than 120 ethnic groups, none of which exceeds 10% of the population. The Sukuma and the Nyamwezi are the largest, together making up about 21% of the population. Many Indians and Pakistanis live in the urban centers.

At 39,300,000 people in 2008, Tanzania is one of Africa's most populous countries, but its growth rate has slowed from 4.3% in 1995 to 2.07% in 2008. Despite its size, the population remains quite rural. On the fertile slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, population densities reach 250 persons per sq km (402 persons per sq mi). The coastal city of Dar es Salaam had 2.5 million residents as of the 2002 census.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Tanzania, like most African countries, is composed of numerous ethnic groups each with its own language, culture, and traditions. Thanks to this diversity, the country has over 130 living languages, but successfully adopted a single African language—Swahili—for purposes of national unity. As a trade language, Swahili (or Kiswahili) belonged to no single ethnic group. It became the language of instruction in secondary education and in some university courses. It also became popular in literature. Unlike Congolese, who sing their national anthem in French, or Kenyans, who sing theirs in English, Tanzanians sing “Mungu ibariki Africa,” (“God Bless Africa”) in Swahili.

Swahili originated on the coast and became the lingua franca (common language) for much of East Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Though Swahili is a Bantu language in its origin and structure, it draws its vocabulary from a diversity of sources, such as English, Arabic, and other Bantu languages. The media use Swahili in television, radio, and newspapers. English is also the official primary language of administration, commerce, and higher education. Arabic is widely spoken on Zanzibar Island.



## 4 FOLKLORE

In many Tanzanian ethnic groups, heroes are illustrious ancestors who distinguished themselves in valor, intelligence, and generosity. Younger generations become aware of these ancestors through storytelling and wedding ceremonies. In the Bahaya group, for example, the groom must research his family history and choose an ancestor whose reputation will be recalled during the marriage ceremony. It is understood that the young man will be expected to measure up to this role model. By contrast, experts in ceremonial rituals in the Masai tribe believe themselves to be descended from a boy with magical powers. According to legend, Masai warriors found the young child naked and seemingly abandoned on a mountaintop, and they decided to adopt him. They observed that he had the power to make springs gush forth, grass to grow, and pools of water to appear. Even in times of famine, his cattle were always well fed and fat.

While Tanzanian folklore largely revolves around figures associated with individual ethnic groups, as time passes it becomes more likely that characters will emerge from a national stage. It will be interesting in this respect to observe how Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, will be extolled and mythologized in national folklore by future generations.

## 5 RELIGION

As a potentially divisive issue, religion has assumed great importance in Tanzania. Approximately 30-40% of the population identifies itself as Muslim with an equal percentage

subscribing to Christianity. Zanzibar is 99% Muslim. The remainder practices indigenous religion, although an overlay of indigenous beliefs characterizes much of the country. Islamic Law may apply to Muslims in cases of domestic issues and the president of Zanzibar appoints a Mufti, who is a public servant, to settle disputes and register Islamic groups on the archipelago. Christians include Roman Catholics, Protestants, Pentacostals, Seventh-day Adventists and others, while the vast majority of Muslims (more than 80%) are Sunni.

Though relations between Muslims and Christians have generally been peaceful, at times they have been tense and occasionally violent, owing to perceptions on both sides that government favors one faith over the other in hires, public benefits, and law enforcement. Tanzania therefore has had to balance relations carefully between the two major faiths. For example, in 2005 according to an unwritten rule of Tanzanian politics requiring alternating power between the two faiths, the ruling party nominated Jakaya Kikwete, a Muslim to succeed President Mkapa, who is Catholic. In 2007 Christian groups accused President Kikwete of favoring Muslims in his political appointments.

Indigenous religion usually blends the Muslim/Christian notion of a high god with African belief in lesser, intermediate gods. For example, children usually have a Christian or Muslim name, and in addition will be named for an ancestor whose name reflects a relationship with the spirit world. One such name in a local language means “demigod,” that is, a spirit of an intermediate level who intercedes with the high god. As is common in Africa, many people resort to diviners to detect the cause of misfortune, and in case of sickness, they consult traditional healers.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In the spirit of impartiality, Tanzanians celebrate eight religious holidays—four Christian and four Muslim. Among them are Christmas, Easter, the prophet Muhammad’s birthday, and the beginning and end of Ramadan. As a rule, Christian and Muslim friends invite each other to celebrate their religious holidays. On Christmas and Muhammad’s birthday, children receive gifts of clothing, and everybody hopes to wear something new.

Tanzanians remember President Mwinyi for restoring several holidays in the country. Should a holiday fall on a weekend, it is moved to the following Monday. Tuesday is then declared a holiday as well to allow for a long break. Among the secular holidays are Zanzibar Revolution Day; *Nane Nane* (formerly *Saba Saba*—Farmer’s Day, in August); Independence Day (9 December 1961); and Union Day (26 April 1964), which commemorates the unification of Zanzibar and the mainland.

People celebrate holidays differently depending on their occupation and location. In the village, secular holidays may offer an occasion simply to tend the fields as on most any other day. If the holiday falls on a long weekend, city people take advantage to travel to their home villages, if possible. Huge parades or party events at the stadium usually take place in the cities. On Labor Day (May 1) for example, office colleagues gather at their place of work to be ferried to government rallies at the stadium. Everyone with a radio at home just turns it on for the day, since the president may have a proclamation to make regarding pay raises or promotions. Shops close on all

holidays, but hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs are open for party-goers.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Tanzanians of all ethnic backgrounds participate in rites of passage. The form and content of the rites vary according to tribal group and religious faith, but they remain important as symbolic markers of growing up, assuming responsibility, exercising leadership, protecting loved ones, and commitment to a particular faith or worldview.

To the extent that people practice traditional ways, their rites reflect the accumulated wisdom of previous generations. In the example of the Masai, all of life is seen as a conquest. Young boys leave home early to watch the calves, then the cows and other cattle. Their mission is to learn to conquer fear. They soon are left on their own, protecting their herds from lions and other wild beasts. Children of both sexes voluntarily undergo body piercing and tattooing. Incisions are made with needles and knives. Large holes in the upper ear cartilage are first made with a hot iron. Then marvelous ornamental earrings adorn the ears of young girls.

Circumcision or excision follows. This most important rite decides the self-control and bravery of the child in becoming an adult. Flinching during the ceremony would bring dishonor and humiliation to the family. On the other hand, the successful male initiate receives gifts of cattle, and the female feels prepared to undergo whatever pain childbearing entails. From this level, both males and females must prove themselves productive and cooperative members of Masai society.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

People place much importance on greetings because they denote politeness, respect, and relationship in Tanzania. Therefore, greetings are usually more complex than a casual “Hi” or a simple wave of the hand, as is common in Western cultures. The type of greeting offered may depend on someone’s status. A special greeting used only between married men suggests their elder status. Similarly, a younger brother uses a particular form of greeting to address his older brother. A generic but common Swahili greeting among friends is “*Ujamba, habari gani?*” (“Good morning, what is your news?”).

Dating and marriage in Tanzania differ considerably from European and American customs. Western-style dating is uncommon, especially in the rural areas. In the village, young people choose their spouses but their families help arrange the marriage. For example, in Kagera Province on Lake Victoria, young men ask for the hands of their fiancées indirectly through designated representatives. The envoy generally is a family relative but might be a professional marriage intermediary. In any case, the ambassador must be articulate and eloquent and must be the first to visit the father of the fiancée on the day of the request. Since Africans begin their day early, it would be unsafe to arrive later than 6:00 am. The envoy then prostrates himself before the father and creatively implores the hand of the daughter for his master. The process usually takes several visits and many cases of beer. In rural areas, the finest local brew makes its appearance, and customarily is first refused as unfit for consumption. The repartee over the quality of the drink and the qualifications of the taster goes on until the fiancée’s family “gives in” and agrees to the marriage. Women dance and ululate (hoot or howl) to announce the joyous con-

clusion. Members of clans sharing the same totem (such as a certain animal) may not marry.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions qualify as among the most difficult in the world. The Human Development Index, which offers a broad comparison of well-being and standard of living worldwide, ranks Tanzania 159th out of 177 countries (2005). This low score reflects extremely low purchasing power (GDP per capita of \$744/year), and weak economic growth due in part to the impact of HIV/AIDS on working aged people. Because the majority of Tanzanians live on less than \$2 a day, there is no discretionary income to purchase extras.

Social indicators are alarming. Life expectancy at birth is 51 years, the infant mortality rate is 70 for every 1,000 live births, and the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is nearly 9%. As children grow, malnutrition and tropical diseases such as malaria, schistosomiasis, and sleeping sickness cause illness and fatalities. Preventable diseases thrive in open sewers and latrines and uncovered garbage piles. In the villages, many people draw their water from contaminated streams, lakes, and pools. While conditions have improved in some towns, urban migration has outpaced government capacity to plan for and provide basic services. Given lack of zoning and building code enforcement, houses tend to be poorly ventilated and overcrowded, thereby contributing to ill health and low productivity.

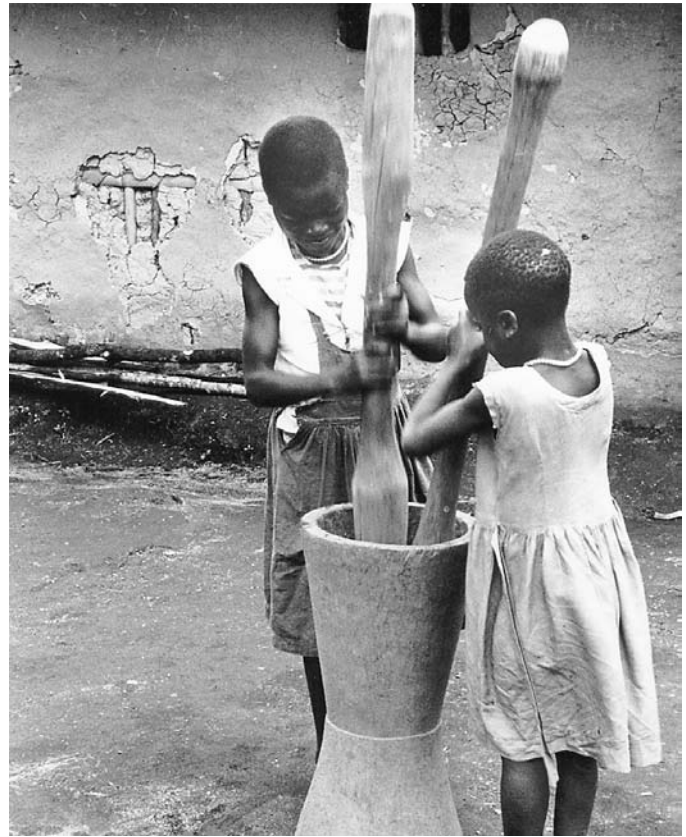
## 10 FAMILY LIFE

As in most of Africa, families tend to be large and extended, but socially cohesive. Cousins are considered brothers and sisters, and nieces and nephews as children. In towns and cities, nuclear families may absorb relatives for long periods, and given the absence of social safety nets, grandparents live with their adult children in the same household. In polygynous households mothers usually live separately with their children and in the village they occupy their own huts within the same compound. The women and girls perform the household chores, while all who work outside the home are expected to help cover family expenses. Although family members may go their own ways early in the day, they typically return home to eat an evening meal together. Among some ethnic groups, women and men eat separately.

Family members have special relationships that bind them intergenerationally. Grandchildren refer to their grandmothers as *bibi yangu* (my wife) while grandmothers refer to their grandsons as *bwana yangu* (my husband). Grandmothers may tease their actual husbands by calling their grandsons *banda*, "rivals" of their husbands' affection.

## 11 CLOTHING

In rural regions, Muslim men usually wear a long embroidered cotton gown, or *kanzu*, with a matching skull cap. Muslim women often wear a *kanga* consisting of two or three pieces of brightly colored fabric wrapped around them and covering their head. On the island of Zanzibar and along the mainland coast, Muslim women wear *buibui*, a black veiled shawl, and *chador* (veils), which allow them to go out while avoiding male scrutiny of their physical beauty. Few women wear more jewelry than the Masai, who adorn themselves with elaborate beaded earrings, necklace bands, rings, and headbands.



*The typical family meal in rural Tanzania is prepared by the mother with help from her daughters. The most popular staple is ugali, a stiff dough made of cassava flour, cornmeal, millet, or sorghum. (International Labour Office)*

In urban areas, Western-style clothing is common. Men wear suits and ties on formal occasions; otherwise, they wear shirts and trousers. Women wear dresses. Shorts, miniskirts, and revealing clothing, considered indecent, are avoided.

## 12 FOOD

The typical family meal in rural Tanzania is prepared by the mother with help from her daughters. They may cook it on a wood or charcoal fire in the open courtyard, or in a special kitchen either attached to the house or separate from it. People usually have two main meals a day, although tea is drunk throughout the day while socializing and visiting.

The most popular staple is *ugali*, a stiff dough made of cassava flour, cornmeal, millet, or sorghum. The coastal people prefer rice as a staple, while plantains are consumed daily in the north. *Ugali* is eaten with a stew of fish, vegetables, or meat from a communal bowl, using the right hand. People pass a basin of water for hand washing before and after meals.

Tastes in food vary greatly, but Tanzanians generally are fond of goat meat, chicken, and lamb. *Pilau* is a delicious dish of rice spiced with curry, cinnamon, cumin, hot peppers, and cloves. *Vitumbua* are sweet fried breads eaten between meals or accompanying tea. For breakfast, masala-spiced milk tea and freshly baked French-style bread are popular. The milk is brought to a boil, and then tea, masala, and sugar are add-



*A Tanzanian loads bananas onto his bicycle. About 90% of Tanzanians make their living in agriculture, though only 5% of the land is arable. Many people are subsistence farmers, meaning that small field plots of 2 hectares (5 acres) or less are cultivated.*  
(Cory Langley)

ed. The Masai diet is exceptional in that it consists of only six foods: meat, milk, blood, animal fat, tree bark, and honey.

While the marriage laws have made it more common for families to eat together, eating customs vary according to ethnic group and religious beliefs. In some groups, taboos forbid fathers-in-law from sitting to eat at the same table with their daughters-in-law. Taboos may also prohibit men from entering the kitchen. Women in some tribes abstain from eating eggs or chicken. In Muslim households, men and women usually eat separately. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset.

### 13 EDUCATION

Former President Nyerere, an educator by profession, placed great importance on learning for all Tanzanians. Nyerere's self-reliance and *ujamaa* (family village) programs promoted literacy in the Swahili language, increasing the literacy rate to over 70% (extremely high for Africa). Literacy programs also aimed to raise consciousness about hygiene, agriculture, crafts, basic math, and personal achievement.

School completion rates are high (for Africa). About 56% of school-eligible children graduate from primary school, and about 33% from secondary (high) school. Completion rates for boys and girls are the same, reflecting Tanzania's egalitarian approach to education. Although in principle schooling is

free, parents often pay for books, uniforms, and school lunches in addition to basic fees, especially beyond form two (second year of high school) where day students typically pay \$15 and boarding school children \$61 a year in fees. Extra-curricular activities such as art, music, and sports receive much less attention than in Europe or the U.S. and schools mostly concentrate on basic academic preparation.

To enter secondary school, students are required to pass an exam. Languages specific to ethnic groups are taught in the earlier years of schooling, then progressively Swahili and English are introduced in the educational system. The National University of Dar es Salaam has an international reputation and once belonged to the prestigious East African system, which included the Universities of Makerere (in Kampala, Uganda) and Nairobi.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Tanzania has a rich oral and written literature in Swahili. Film is less developed, but filmmaker Flora M'mbugu-Schelling's prize-winning films in Swahili portray significant social issues facing Tanzanian women. Tanzania's major music contribution is its Swahili, Arab-influenced classical music tradition. Many accomplished composers and musicians produce this unique blend of African-Arab-Indian sound.

In art, Tanzanians produce many fine pieces of jewelry and carved ivory, some for the tourist trade. Artists excel most, however, in refined wood sculpture. African art is much preoccupied with the human figure and with its moral and spiritual concerns. In particular, the Makonde people of the southeast are famous woodcarvers of statuettes and masks, which sell internationally. One of their pieces, probably produced for the European market, depicts a “tree of life” carved from ebony. The carver has surrounded an ancestor with present and past generations of people, one on top of the next, supporting each other throughout time. The motif shows the influence of traditional African thought in a modern sculpture.

### 15 WORK

Most Tanzanians are subsistence farmers, meaning that small field plots of two hectares (five acres) or less are cultivated with traditional African hoes, without the benefit of irrigation. Some of these farmers, and others—employed by large companies—produce crops for export. The slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Meru are extremely fertile coffee, tea, and pyrethrum (used in making insecticides) areas. Along with sisal, cotton, tobacco, cashews, fruits, and cloves (Zanzibar), they account for more than 50% of the gross domestic product.

Tanzania also has 23 export processing zones with economic free zones that provide employment in light manufacturing and assembly. More traditional industry consists of the processing of sugar, beer, cigarettes, sisal twine, and light consumer goods. Some diamond and gold mining exists as well.

Wages in the informal sector tend toward survival, but also are low in the formal sector. In 2006 the minimum wage for hotel workers was \$55 per month, while workers in the mining sector made \$300 per month. To pay for school fees and health care, many Tanzanians engage in side businesses such as tailoring and cooking and they send their children into the streets to peddle wares. Government employees are covered by the 40 hour per week work law, but the vast majority of people work at least 50 hours a week. Officially 35% of children ages 5–14 are in the work force, but in reality this number is far higher.

### 16 SPORTS

Few adults actively play sports, but men follow national African and professional European soccer teams religiously on television and radio. In rural areas it is common to see boys playing soccer on the village pitch near the school or the village square. Basketball, boxing, and running are popular, and though not as successful as Ethiopia and Kenya, Tanzania has produced several world-class long-distance runners. Although many westerners think of big game hunting on the Serengeti plains as sport, trophy hunting is reserved for foreign tourists and the locals depend on game for food and livelihood.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The daily grind of hauling water, tending herds, gathering firewood, cooking meals, caring for children, and mending huts leaves little time for leisure for most Tanzanians. Yet people find time in the evenings for the things they love, especially music and dancing, storytelling, and socializing. In cities and towns, people socialize at coffee houses and make home visits—typically unannounced. These visits are an important social custom and at the same time provide people with a low-

cost form of entertainment. On the coast, people play *mbao*, a board game that uses small stones. Women dance the *chaka-cha* at celebrations and marriages. Tanzanians are fond of action-packed martial arts and kung fu films. Movies made in India are also popular. In addition to AM and FM radio, many urban Tanzanians now get entertainment and news at Internet cafes.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Tanzanians produce many arts and crafts of high quality. The Zaramo on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam produce conventional figures of Masai warriors, elderly men, nude women, and carved walking sticks. They carve these using only hand tools. Meerscham pipe-carving is also one of Tanzania's international trademarks. Besides the tourist market, the Nyamwezi (in former times) carved thrones for their chiefs. The Masai make shields with intricate geometric designs. Zanzibar doorways with their geometric patterns offer a glimpse of the island's Arabic history and tradition.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many social ills are linked to poverty, weak law and order, discrimination, and cultural beliefs such as witchcraft. The scarcity of good jobs means that husbands look for work in South Africa, girls are vulnerable to early marriage and prostitution, and children often are forced to work in conditions of servitude. Men who have worked as migrants often return home with the AIDS virus and infect their partners. Corruption on grand and petty levels undermines economic growth. Nearly 20% of the national budget is lost each year to corruption, and because of corrupt and ineffective police, people turn to street justice. In 2006 a mob burned a man who was caught stealing two chickens.

Discrimination hurts marginalized members of society such as the handicapped. Albinos are deliberately killed for their body parts, which are trafficked for their presumed powers of witchcraft. Older women are subject to accusations of witchcraft and there is low tolerance for homosexuals. Tanzania has welcomed some 600,000 refugees from Congo and Burundi, but their presence has placed additional stress on land and has caused resentment owing to differential treatment from international aid agencies. The negative impact of HIV/AIDS cannot be overstated. The disease afflicts some 3.5 million persons. The absorption of more than 2 million AIDS orphans by family and relatives has strained family life and persons living with AIDS face societal discrimination in hiring and services.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women do most of the work, have fewer privileges under the law, and as many as 25% report physical and sexual violence since the age of 15. Wife beating is considered acceptable. Though illegal, as many as 15% of girls are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) often performed by *Ngaribas*, traditional practitioners. A concerted movement led by Tanzanian and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to end FGM has successfully reduced the practice from 18% to 15% during the period from 1995–2005.

In spite of these issues, Tanzanian women enjoy greater social status than in many neighboring countries. After the 2005 elections, women occupied 91 of 320 parliamentary seats (nearly reaching the 30% constitutional guarantee), 7 ministe-

rial and 10 deputy ministerial posts including Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Justice. Seven women serve as justices on the High Court and one on the Union Court of Appeal. Also, many women engage in trade and keep their earnings for themselves and their children. Girls must be at least 15 years old to marry, wives must register their official approval before their husbands take a second-wife, and Muslim husbands can no longer simply declare "I divorce thee" three times before a divorce occurs. Although many women are not aware of their rights, they have recourse to a marriage reconciliation board, and they are entitled to inheritance when their husbands die.

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—by R. Groelsema

# TIGRAY

**PRONUNCIATION:** TIH-gray

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Tigre, Tigray, or Tigrinya

**LOCATION:** Tigray state (Ethiopia), Eritrea

**POPULATION:** 4.3 million in Ethiopia, 2.3 million in Eritrea

**LANGUAGE:** Tigriñña, Amharic

**RELIGION:** Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Eritreans; Ethiopians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Tigray (Tigre, Tigray, or Tigrinya) have a history that goes back before the time of Jesus Christ. Over the past two thousand years, all the Ethiopian emperors have been either Tigray or Amharas (the ethnic group in Ethiopia most closely identified with the Tigray). According to Tigrayan, as well as Amharan, history, the Axumite empire, which later became the Ethiopian empire, was founded by Menilik, the son of King Solomon of Israel, and Queen Sheba (or Saba). According to this history, it was Menilik's men who captured the Ark of the Covenant from the Israelites and brought it to Axum (also spelled *Aksum*) in what is now the Tigray region in Ethiopia, where it remains to this day.

The seat of the Ethiopian empire has moved over the centuries. It has been located in a Tigriñña-speaking area (also spelled Tigrinya); in other times it has been in an Amharic-speaking area. In the 4th century, a Syrian named Fromentius was brought to Axum as a scribe in the royal court because he was literate in Greek. The court at Axum, like other courts of the ancient world, maintained an orientation toward Greek culture. Fromentius's influence went far beyond that of a scribe. He was a Christian, and his conversion of the court spread this religion to most of the Tigriñña, and later to the Amharic-speaking areas. After the collapse of the Mediterranean worlds of the Greeks and the Romans, the Ethiopian empire had less contact with outside centers of culture. During the Middle Ages in Europe, the Ethiopian empire was known as the home of legendary Christian ruler, Prester John of the Indies.

Between 1884 and 1891, Italy attempted to conquer Ethiopia, in an effort to become a colonial power but lost at the battle of Aduwa (a town near Axum). Emperor Yohannes did, however, cede the region that is now the heart of Eritrea to Italy as part of a strategy of solidifying Christian power in the south. In 1936, Italy added the remainder of Ethiopia to its holdings. With the expulsion of Italy in 1941, Eritrea was officially made a province of Ethiopia. A struggle for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia began in the 1960s and finally succeeded in 1991. Today Tigriñña is the dominant language of the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Tigriñña and Arabic dominate in neighboring Eritrea.

The Tigray and the Amhara (as co-inheritors of the Ethiopian empire) have represented the political elite of the country, except during a brief period of Italian colonial rule (1936–1942). Until the Empire ended with the Marxist revolution and Haile Selassie's death in 1974, all emperors were either Amharas or Tigrays. In the post-empire period, many Tigray became part of the Eritrean Liberation Front and Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, which for a time became the most powerful antigovernment force. Since the ouster of the socialist govern-

ment of Mengistu Haile Mariyam in 1991, Tigray have dominated the Ethiopian government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Today, Tigrinya speakers number about 6.6 million and are concentrated in Tigray state (Ethiopia) and in Eritrea. The regions of Ethiopia and Eritrea where most Tigrinya speakers live are high plateau, separated from the Red Sea by an escarpment (cliff-like ridge) and a desert. In good years, rainfall on the plateau is adequate for the plow agriculture engaged in by the majority of Tigray. However, when rainfall is low, the region is subject to disastrous droughts. Approximately 80 per cent of the Tigray live in a rural setting. It is these Tigray who are discussed here.

A significant number of Tigray still live in the Sudan, where they moved as refugees from the Ethiopian civil war and the Eritrean war of independence. Tigrinya speakers live in many urban centers of the United States and Europe, notably Washington, D.C. and Minneapolis.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Tigrinya, the language spoken in Tigray, is from the Semitic family of languages, and is related to Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic (the language spoken by Jesus Christ). To the north of the Tigrinya speakers live people who speak the closely related language known as Tigre. Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, is so closely related to Tigrinya that most Tigray have little difficulty communicating in Amharic. Tigrinya, Amharic, and the liturgical language Gi-iz are written with the same script. Many of the letters used in writing these languages derive from ancient Greek. Many young men learn to read and write while studying to become deacons and priests. Between World War II and 1991, public schools taught Amharic and English. After 1991 public schools put an emphasis on local languages. Only a minority of rural Tigray attend school.

Most Tigray names have specific meanings. Some examples appear in the accompanying table. Generally, people refer to one another by their first names. If one wished to distinguish between several people with that name, one would add the person's father's name. Abraha, for example, becomes Abraha Gebre Giyorgis, meaning, Abraha is the child of Gebre Giyorgis. If a further distinction must be made, the grandfather's name could be added, for example, Abraha-Gebre Giyorgis-Welede Mariyam. Men's and women's names follow the same rules, with the exception that wives are often given new names by their mothers-in-law when they first come to live with the husband's family. This applies only to the first name; distinguishing names (father's, father's father's, etc.) remain the same.

Some examples of Tigrinya names include:

NAME	MEANING
Abraha	the dawn
Atsbaha	the sunset
Gebre Giyorgis	granted by Saint George
Gebre Yesus	granted by Jesus
Gebre Selassie	granted by the Holy Trinity
Gidey	my share
Mitslal Muz	shadow as sweet as the banana
Haile Mariyam	the power of Mary
Welede Mariyam	child of Mary
Zenabu	rains



Most names represent things of high and positive value. In this context, a few names would appear to be strange. For example, a name such as Gidey (my share) is often given to a child if the family's earlier children have died. By naming a child Gidey, one could be seen as saying: "God, you have already taken your share: let this child be *my share*."

## 4 FOLKLORE

Most Tigray place a high value on verbal skills. Poetry, folktales, riddles, and puns are central to entertainment. A person who has returned from studying at a monastery and can display a facility with *qene*, the art of "poetic combat," is much sought after for public gatherings. One indicator of the value placed on verbal skills is that the heroic figures of folklore are often known for the cleverness of the poetic couplets they composed. At a wedding, a *qene* expert might give a greeting that on the surface complemented the guests, but by a small change in pronunciation state that they are sitting on a royal dunghill. Riddles are an endless source of pleasure. This value on verbal cleverness is also seen in royal figures and saints. The Ethiopian saint Tekle Haymanot ("sower of the faith") is depicted as having verbally outwitted the devil. Another Ethiopian saint represents a contrasting heroic quality. Gebre Memfis Qudus ("granted by the holy spirit") gained sainthood by showing extraordinary compassion. The future saint was a monk who wandered among the wild animals. During one of Ethiopia's droughts he came upon a bird that was dying of thirst. The monk was so moved by the bird's plight that a tear formed un-



der his eye. He allowed the bird to drink the tear. This bird was actually the Holy Spirit. These two heroic figures, Tekle Haymanot and Gebre Menfis Qudus, express two virtues—one of the mind, the other of the heart—highly prized by the Tigray.

## 5 RELIGION

Many people think of Christianity in Africa as a European import that arrived with colonialism, but this is not the case with the Tigray (or with the Amhara). The empire centered in Axum and Adowa was part of the Mediterranean world in which Christianity grew. Fromentius's 4th-century arrival in Axum was roughly contemporary with St. Patrick's arrival in Ireland and predated the arrival of Christianity in most of Europe by hundreds of years. Many Tigrayan churches were cut into cliffs or from single blocks of stone, as they were in houses of religion in Turkey and in parts of Greece, where Christianity had existed from its earliest years.

The church is a central feature of communities and of each family's daily life. Each community has a church with a patron saint. There is a close relationship between the community of worship and the community of citizenship. Until recent years, a town meeting was held just beyond the walls of the churchyard after Sunday mass. Members of the community moved from worship directly to the discussion of such topics of community governance as when to repair a village road or how to collect the taxes. Today's administrative structure retains the sense of community participation, but separates administrative and legislative meetings from the church.

Tigray, like members of other culture groups, often justify action on the basis of long-standing practice of belief. An example of a traditional Tigray explanation of an individual's symptoms of illness would be that he or she was possessed by a *zar* spirit. Another traditional belief is that some people—*Budda* and *Tebib*—have the capacity to unknowingly cause another person to have misfortune when they feel envy toward that person. Such beliefs are comparable to the “evil eye” in many Mediterranean cultures.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As in much of the rest of Ethiopia, most Tigray holidays are associated with the church calendar (Easter, Epiphany, etc.). The secular holidays include Ethiopian or Eritrean national holidays. The Ethiopian calendar runs on a different cycle from that originating in Europe. New Years entails a major holiday but comes on what in our calendar is September 11. There is also a difference in the calendar year and the clock. The Ethiopian millennium celebration fell in the European calendar year 2007. The sun rises at about 12 o'clock.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Births are attended by female friends and neighbors, and are private affairs. The infant is recognized as a member of the community in a naming ceremony held 40 days after birth for boys, and 80 days after birth for girls. Should a baby die after the naming ceremony, a funeral is required in recognition that a person has died; death in early infancy prior to the naming is not marked with a funeral.

Mothers have primary responsibility for children under age seven, who stay close to home. Boys older than seven begin accompanying their fathers to the fields. About the age of 12, children reach the “age of reason” and take on more responsi-

bility, such as helping care for younger brothers and sisters and for herding farm animals. Also at about this age, children are baptized and enter the community of religion.

Adolescence is a time when boys begin to prepare for a career. For most rural Tigray, this career will be secondary to farming. Boys often begin studying with a biblical master, known as *diakonin* or *deftera* (deacons), who have been ordained by the Bishop (*Abuna*). Many of these young men hope to become priests (*qashi*) or deacons themselves. Orthodox deacons and priests are not prohibited from marriage, so a priest is often also a husband and farmer.

Studying the Bible is not simply part of religious training; it is also a stepping stone to other forms of career advancement. Students learn to read and write Ethiopian script, traditionally a necessity for most political offices. The path through religious study toward literacy is becoming less important with the increased availability of government schools. Boys who are serious about becoming priests often become mendicants (religious beggars), and go door-to-door asking for food. Because religious roles are not available to women until late in life, religious study is not an avenue to literacy for girls. For boys, studying, begging, and becoming a deacon are also steps toward careers such as medicine. Most diagnosis of illness and prescription of cures is done by *deftera* (deacons or diviners) who have left formal religious work. Whether Bible students or not, adolescence is a time for young people to develop a reputation for competence, and to show that they are prepared to become good heads of households (for women, *ba-altigeza*, and men, *ba-algeza*). Young women demonstrate culinary skills and take care of their younger brothers and sisters. Young men are expected to accumulate a sum of money.

With adulthood come new responsibilities. One of the signs of adulthood is community citizenship, that is, attendance at village meetings after church on Sunday mornings. Other signs are marriage or becoming a deacon.

The death of a person requires a funeral. Funerals, with ceremonies in both the village and the church, normally take place before the sun sets on the day following death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Tigriñña uses an elaborate system of greetings to indicate honor, the closeness of the relationship, and gender. There are ten personal pronouns people use to address one another. The choice of greeting is important in establishing and maintaining good relations. When meeting a stranger whom one judges may deserve some special respect, one might decide to address him with *khamihaduru* (“How are you, my honored equal?”). After learning that a stranger is due a great deal of respect, one might address him with *khamihadirom* (“How are you, my honored superior?”).

The body language employed by Tigray is even more elaborate than the terms they use to address one another. Between any two people, there is always relative rank, referred to as a *azazi-tazazi* (“servant-master”) relationship. Every person is *azazi* (servant) in some relationships, but *tazazi* (master) in others. This relative rank is expressed in both greetings and body language. One may express deference by lowering the eyes when meeting a superior's gaze. Both men and women move to lower seats, stand back to allow others to pass at doorways, or bow to show respect to others. Draping of the toga is an important part of social interaction. The socially successful

person is adept at switching the arrangement of the cloth rapidly to go from indifference to respect when moving from one person to another in a social gathering. Used European clothing has replaced the toga for many rural Tigray, requiring a corresponding replacement of clothing's communication with other body language.

When a Tigray man or woman arrives at someone's house, he or she does not knock on the door to signify he or she has arrived at someone's house; rather, he clears his throat. On hearing this signal, the occupants of the house will come out to greet the arriving guest and invite him in. Guests are usually offered coffee. The way the coffee, *buna*, is served also expresses the relative status of relationships. If the host wishes to be polite, he or she will offer the first cup of coffee to the guest with the greatest *khibri* (honor). The guest is likely to refuse the offer, expressing humility, and the sentiment that the host is even more worthy, and should therefore drink the first cup. Similar interactions take place between the next most important guest and the host, and so forth, until all have been offered coffee. Finally, the most honored person will give in and accept the cup of coffee, signally that all guests can be served, in order, giving a clear picture of the honor each is accorded.

When *sewwa* (beer) is served, quite a different social dimension is expressed—for the moment, all present are equal members of a community, and the host makes sure that all glasses are always full. While coffee is used to reinforce the differences among people, beer is used to emphasize commonality.

For rural Tigray, there is no dating in the Western sense. Expressions of romantic interest between two people are not indicated by the couple going out together. Instead, parents of both create an agreement for a union between the two households, and a marriage takes place. Parents generally take the interests of their child into account. If a person becomes divorced, he or she may date prior to entering into a second marriage.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There are still few Western-trained physicians and life expectancy is low in Tigray. An increase in government clinics has not eliminated this problem. Chronic, parasitic diseases, such as malaria and schistosomiasis, are a problem in some regions. Many children die from communicable diseases such as measles and chicken pox. However, heart disease and lung cancer are rare, and people in their 50s are at the peak of their careers. By age 70 most people have retired from active farming.

In rural areas the main prestige items purchased are mules, often as status symbols for display to people outside the community. Generally speaking, status symbols have little importance. Within a community, people know one another well, and only deeds can add to a person's reputation.

A Tigray house provides shelter and contributes to the occupant's reputation in the community. A young couple's first house is usually a *gujji*, a practical, unimpressive house that the couple builds for itself. A *gujji* is a hut of wattle and daub—rods interwoven with twigs or branches—with a thatched roof. If the couple is successful, their next house will be more elaborate, with masonry walls and domed roofs supported by heavy wooden beams. Increasingly houses are roofed with sheetmetal. A very powerful family may later add stone walls around the yard.

Guests often bring stones with them as gifts of respect, to be added to the walls. One may view the walls as a concrete demonstration of one's friends' esteem.

Even the most elaborate rural houses have neither electricity nor running water. Candles or oil lamps provide light in the evening. The masonry walls and domed roofs provide good insulation and are comfortable in both cold and hot seasons. Fires for cooking and heating are fueled by wood or dried cow dung.

An average household in a farming community produces and consumes goods valued in hundreds of dollars per year; even small purchases by Western standards, such as soft drinks, represent substantial expenditures for rural Tigray.

Trucks and buses provide nearly all the road transportation, but many places people wish to go are not accessible by roads. Thus, many people travel by foot and carry loads on donkeys, mules, and camels. (Camels and mules also carry salt tablets from salt beds below sea-level in the Danakil depression up to the 8,000 ft plateaus of Tigray, where they are loaded onto trucks for transport to other parts of Ethiopia.)

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The people living in a Tigrayan household are a family. They are generally related to each other and have a moral responsibility for one another. A rural Tigray household can also be seen as an agricultural firm, consuming directly most of what it produces, but selling some to get cash to buy items like spices and needles. To function efficiently, each family farm needs all jobs to be filled, and relies on every member to perform her or his job effectively. If a family is large, a son or daughter may go to live with an aunt or an uncle to help operate that household's farm.

Tigray women and men both bring property into the marriage; should there be a divorce each takes out what she or he brought in, and either party may call for the divorce. Typically, domestic goods, pots and pans, etc., are claimed by the wife. Farming tools, plows, etc., are claimed by the husband. In the case of divorce, younger children tend to stay with their mother. Older children stay with their same sex parent. When a household has both a wife and a husband, the husband is expected to represent the household's views to the outside world. The wife will speak for the household if her husband is not available. When a household is headed by a single woman, she is the spokeswoman. Though women occasionally hold political office, most offices are held by men.

Women are responsible for food preparation and the care of small children. The husband is responsible for plowing, planting, and the care of animals. Older girls work beside their mothers, older boys beside their fathers. Men may help around the house, and woman may help in farming, especially in weeding and at the harvest. In the case of divorce or death of a spouse, the surviving spouse will hire the help he or she needs to keep the farm and household in operation.

Households vary widely in size, from one member (widow or widower) to twenty (extended over two or three generations). The average family has a husband, wife, and four children.

For most couples, the first marriage is arranged by a contract between the parents of the bride and the groom. After a divorce, second marriages involve contracts between the new husband and new wife. Except for priests and deacons, couples

typically do not go through a church marriage until later in life.

Tigray households go through changes as the occupants mature. A household is usually established by a new couple, with children added soon afterward. When young adults are old enough to marry, they may bring a spouse to live within the parental household. Whether the new couple joins the wife's or the husband's family's household is a matter of choice. In this manner, powerful families often add several subfamilies—the families of their married children. Most young couples leave their parents' household as soon as they can afford to farm on their own.

Families often keep dogs and occasionally keep a cat. However, these animals are generally regarded as working animals—watchdogs and mousers—and not companions.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Tigray clothing is white, which is regarded as Christian, with little adornment. For dressy occasions and church, women express piety—reverence for religious obligations—by wearing ankle-length dresses with long sleeves made of fine material. Men wear a form of jodhpur—ankle-length pants that are tight from the knee to the ankle and baggy in the upper legs and hips. A fitted, long-sleeved shirt covers the upper body. The shirt extends to just above the knee for laymen and to just below the knee for priests and deacons. Both men and women wear a *gabbi* or kutta (toga) draped around the shoulders; it can be draped in a complex set of patterns to express a person's relationship to others.

Until recently, everyday clothing was similar to dress clothes. Men wore a variety of shirts and pants under their togas. For women, everyday clothing was simply less fancy than church clothes. For many Tigrays, used clothing imported from Europe has replaced traditional clothing for day-to-day wear.

### **12 FOOD**

Probably the most important fact about food in Tigray is that there is not enough of it. Households must make up for food deficits with government subsidies. In Tigray, bread is one of the main foods. Two of the more common varieties are a thin, pancake-like bread preferred by most people, and a dense, disk-shaped loaf of baked whole wheat bread known as *kham-basha*. Pancakes are 30 to 45 cm (12 to 18 in) in diameter, and are made from many kinds of cereal grains (wheat, barley, etc.). The favorite pancake is made from a grain called *taff* that does not grow in all regions. Where *taff* cannot be grown, *kham-basha* is the everyday food. A variety of *tsebhi* (spicy stew) is eaten with the bread. Families and guests normally eat from a *messob* (shared food basket), with each person breaking off pieces of bread from the side nearest them and dipping it into *tsebhi* (stew) in the center of the basket.

Special occasion foods are similar to those eaten everyday, but use higher-quality ingredients. Festive breads are made of whiter flour, and stews are more likely to include meat. *Mies*, a honey wine or mead may replace *sewwa* (barley beer).

Eating utensils, such as silverware, are not used at most meals. One uses the right hand to tear off a piece of injera (pancake) or bread and dips it into the stew (or sauce), much like eating “dip.” On festive occasions like weddings, where a large piece of meat (sometimes uncooked) is served to each guest,

a knife is provided. Cups have a variety of shapes and meaning. One of the first investments a new couple makes is a set of *finjal*, small coffee cups resembling those used to serve tea in Chinese restaurants. Beer glasses come in three basic varieties: cow horn, unglazed pottery, and glass or plastic. The *mies* (honey wine) should be served in a *berile* (special glass flask) with a long narrow neck. A Tigray saying is “*Mies* served without a *berile* is just beer.”

In Tigray, using the left hand to touch food that others will have contact with is regarded as very bad manners. The same relationship between left and right can be seen in many settings. For example, sitting on the right side of someone important is better than having to sit on the left. The right side of the church, as viewed from the altar, is holier than the left.

Some foods—pork, shellfish, and rabbit—are believed to be unfit for Christian Tigray to eat. (Most are also considered non-kosher or prohibited foods by Jews.) The justification for these food prohibitions is found in the Christian Old Testament book of Leviticus. During the 40 days of Lent, plus a 14 day cleansing period before it, observant Tigray Christians do not eat animal products, including meat, milk, cheese, butter, or eggs.

The first meal of the day is eaten shortly after rising and usually consists of leftovers from the night before. On most days, both the midday meal and afternoon dinner consist of pancakes or bread and stew (or a sauce). When people are in the fields plowing, herding, winnowing, or weeding, they bring lunch in an *agelgil* (leather covered lunch basket). Snacks generally consist of toasted grains, and are eaten as one eats popcorn.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Traditionally, boys learn to read Tigriña, Gi-iz, and Amharic as Bible students. Today, some rural boys, and a few girls, attend public schools, with a percentage of them completing high school. Children living in town are much more likely to go to school than their rural counterparts. In larger towns, such as Makelle, Aduwa, or Aksum, public education is available through high school. There are universities in Addis Ababa and Makelle in Ethiopia and in Asmara in Eritrea.

Many rural parents encourage Bible study for literacy and the career opportunities it provides. Rural parents see advantages (in terms of a non-farming career) and some disadvantages to sending their children to school in town: although the student receives an education, he or she may not return to the family farm, and thus may not support their parents in old age.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

There are two main categories of music: church music and praise songs. Deacons sing and accompany the song with drums and a *tsinatsil* (sistrum, a rattle-like instrument) as part of the mass. Praise singers form a kind of caste—families of praise singers intermarry with other families of praise singers. Singers accompany themselves with a one-stringed instrument that is a little like a violin. Hosts often hire singers to entertain at parties, such as weddings. Guests give tips to the singers to sing, often humorously, about their friends.

Deacons dance as part of some church holidays. Women dance as entertainment on a few secular occasions. Rural men and women do not dance together in public.

Passages from the “Book of Psalms” are frequently brought into discussions of people’s behavior. Many priests and deacons carry the psalms called a *dawit* (for King David) in a leather pouch.

*Qene* is an admired form of poetry known for its use of double meanings, beautiful language, and cleverness. A couplet should have a surface meaning and a deeper one. *Qene* is described as being like “wax and gold,” an analogy that refers to the process of casting gold objects in wax molds pressed into sand. In *qene*, the listener “hears the wax” and must use thought to find the gold inside. Tigray kings and princes are often remembered for their *qene* compositions.

## 15 WORK

Until recently, most rural Tigray considered farming to be the most honorable work. Today’s food shortages have made many parents rethink this proposition. Trade and government employment are seen as providing better opportunities. Those who make their living as blacksmiths, weavers, potters, or musicians are looked upon with some disfavor and suspicion. Most families farm, including those of priests and deacons. Farmers need plow animals in the Tigray region. The plow used is similar to those of Egypt further north, with a main shaft made from olive wood for strength. The plow shear is tipped with steel provided by blacksmiths. Because all farmers need plow animals, most are considered herders as well. People who can’t afford animals must form partnerships with wealthier households. Since the 1974 revolution, Tigray farming has gone through several land redistributions, aimed at equalizing wealth. Nevertheless, shortages of oxen for plowing means that some households must form alliances with others who are better off than themselves.

The calculations that go into food production in the Tigray environment are complex and daunting. Nearly all parts of Tigray are subject to drought. Rainfall varies in timing and intensity. Different soil types perform differently. Tigray select from 17 varieties of cereal crops. Each household must choose the right seeds to maximize the amount of food and to minimize the chances of having too little food in years when rain is too heavy, too light, too early, or too late for any given field. An aggressive choice of mixes of seed might lead to wealth for the household or starvation if the rains and the seeds are a bad match that year. A conservative set of choices may lead to the household not getting ahead. The calculations are comparable to what is required to manage a stock portfolio and is taken at least as serious by Tigrayan farmers.

Men are responsible for crops and women for the house and young children. Both help in the other’s domain, and household decisions are made by mutual discussion. Teenage boys do much of the herding and help with plowing. Teenage girls work alongside their mothers.

## 16 SPORTS

A sport that seems to be unique to the Tigray and Amhara is a kind of cross-country field hockey. Those who are serious about the game grow their own hockey sticks, by training saplings to grow with the proper curve. When the sapling reaches the right stage of growth, they cut the tree and shape it into a hockey stick. The game is played running across the countryside, over cattle-yard fences, and through creeks. Hockey is associated with Easter.



A young Tigray girl in the Tigray state in Ethiopia. Tigray women wear their hair in braids and have tattoos on their faces and arms. (Travel Ink/Getty Images)

The game played most by the Tigray is *Timkhats*, sometimes described as chess. In the center of neighborhoods, men play it all year round, and boys play it while watching the herds. *Timkhats* is played on a grid usually scratched in the ground. Two players take turns placing markers on intersections of the grid in what might be thought of as a three-dimensional tick-tack-toe game. The rules are similar to those of the German game, *die müller*. Spectators offer advice on, and criticism of, the players’ moves.

While *Timkhats* is the most common spectator sport when measured in hours spent by the most people, soccer is the sport that captures people’s passions as they cheer for their favorite school teams and town teams.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

While film, television, and to a large extent radio, are more a part of life in town than in rural areas, storytelling and riddles are part of the popular culture in both.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Some of the most spectacular Tigray art is associated with the church. Tigray churches are famous for their architecture, with many cut into solid stone. The churches that are built of masonry are large and incorporate design features of the Par-

thenon in Athens, Greece. Icon painting—the creation of images of sacred people—is another art form associated with the church. Some deacons who have studied at *debri* (monasteries) return as icon painters. Icons are purchased by individuals and used to reinforce a relationship with a particular saint.

The major non-religious art forms are architecture and basketry. Masonry houses are meant to reflect the personality of the owner, and include details such as decorative borders below the roof line. Basketry, including the beautiful *messob* (shared-food baskets) that are the centerpieces of entertaining, are produced by women after their children have left home. Families specializing in weaving produce embroidered dresses. Some artisans and craftspeople—such as weavers, musicians, blacksmiths, and leather workers—are expected to marry within their group.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since the 1970s, Tigray and Eritrea have experienced powerful social upheaval. In these two areas of greatest Tigray concentration, people have experienced a civil war, a struggle for independence, and a number of famines. Many observers believe that the human rights situation, after improving, has taken a downturn. Many challenges remain for the governments and people of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Probably the most important social problems are associated with Tigray's food deficit and un- and underemployment. The government's attempt to combat these problems has taken two forms—relief efforts and public works—much of it in the form of terracing to improve the region's agricultural output.

Each government interprets civil rights in its own way, and government policy has gone through much transformation as it evolved from the imperial rule of Haile Selassie (1936–74), the Marxist-oriented government of Mengistu (1974–91), to the current, more democratic government. In 2008, Melles Zenawi, a Tigray, is the president

HIV-AIDS has become a significant public health issue, particularly in road towns.

Alcoholism is not widespread among rural Tigray. The *sewwa* (beer) brewed by each household is very low in alcohol content. *Mies* (honey wine) is somewhat higher in alcohol content, but is reserved for special occasions, such as weddings or entertaining political figures. *Araqi* (anise flavored brandy) is occasionally drunk to symbolize the finalizing of agreements, such as wedding contracts.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Under both traditional law and current law, men and women have equal rights. Under the pre-Mengistu land tenure systems rights to land were counted equally through male and female ancestral claims. On a mother's death, all of her children (male and female) had equal claim on shares of her land. The same was true in the event of a father's death. In other words, each household's holding were a mix of claims through combinations of male and female ancestors. Similarly, after a divorce each spouse kept his or her own land. Movable community property was divided equally. Nevertheless, in practice divorce often created more of a problem for women than for men. For practical reasons of sharing herding duties new households were often set up near the husband's parents. Thus a woman was more likely to have to move after a divorce.

In public life, men are usually the spokesmen for their households. As a matter of etiquette, a man will act as host. In the husband's absence, the wife will act as host. A woman and her husband are equally "owners" of the household. A woman will represent her household, before an adult son will. Ownership counts more than gender in representing the household.

There are two major settings in which men and women are seated separately. In church, men sit on the right half of the church and women on the left, from the perspective of the altar. In a community meeting people sit in three groupings. Married men, representing their households sit as a group. Female household heads sit in another. Adult men who have not yet established a household sit in yet another.

Male and female roles are quite separate. As mentioned in the Section 15, above, men have responsibility for agricultural production and women have responsibility for food preparation and childcare. While each may help in the other's domain, the responsibilities are defined.

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—by D. F. Bauer

# TONGA

**PRONUNCIATION:** TAWNG-guh

**LOCATION:** southern Zambia

**POPULATION:** 1,500,000

**LANGUAGE:** Chitonga

**RELIGION:** Christianity combined with indigenous religious beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Bemba; Chewa; Zambians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Tonga live in southern Zambia in a corridor along the Zambezi River. The name “Tonga” is apparently a Shona term which means “independent,” a reference to the fact that the Tonga people were a people without chiefs before the era of colonization. While many other ethnic groups in southern Africa had developed centralized forms of political organization, the Tonga recognized no political leaders as chiefs and preferred to live in dispersed homesteads rather than in villages. The Tonga belong to the Bantu group of peoples, and evidence seems to indicate that they are descendants of the earlier Iron Age Bantu peoples who migrated to the southern parts of Zambia during the 15th and 16th centuries from the Congo area. Due to the fact that the Tonga were a chiefless society, many scholars argue that this reduced their power and influence in comparison to the Bemba and Chewa. Indeed, upon the arrival of colonial rule, the colonial administration appointed individuals of influence as local chiefs whom the Tonga jokingly referred to as “Government Chiefs.”

Although the Tonga are generally known as a chiefless society, there were some important people within Tonga society that wielded influence, such as the *Sikatongo*, a priest who made sure that the spirits took care of the people and made the crops grow. He could also cause rain, cure all diseases, and protect the people from all kinds of calamity. In every neighborhood (a grouping of several villages), there was also a man called the *Ulanyika*, the owner of the land. The *Ulanyika* was usually the first person to settle and live in the neighborhood. He commanded some influence in his neighborhood, and hunters gave him parts of every animal they killed within the surroundings of the neighborhood. Like all the peoples of Zambia, the Tonga came under British colonial rule at the end of the 19th century. Zambia gained independence in 1979 under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, who ruled Zambia until 1991 when he lost the presidency to Frederick Chiluba. After a two-term stint of five years each as president of Zambia, Chiluba was succeeded by President Levy Mwanawasa in 2001. Mwanawasa attempted to steer Zambia away from corruption that had become well entrenched during Chiluba’s rule.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tonga are concentrated in southern Zambia along the Kafue and the middle Zambezi rivers. Most of the Tonga area has low-quality soil and erratic rainfall, which makes it less significant for agricultural purposes. The area is sparsely populated, except in the Gwembe Valley region of the middle Zambezi and areas along the Kafue River and the line of rail on the plateau. Most of the Tonga region is a plateau of high altitude ranging from 900 m to 1,500 m (3,000–5,000 ft) above sea level. Some

areas of the plateau provide favorable environments for agricultural and pastoral living. The agricultural cycle is centered around a single rainy season which begins in November and ends in April. While on average the region gets about 65 cm to 90 cm (25–35 in) of rainfall per year, there have also been years of drought and years of flooding, with rainfall as low as 25 cm (10 in) and as high as 125 cm (50 in). In terms of population, the Tonga account for 15% of Zambia’s total population, currently estimated at 11.5 million people.

## 3 LANGUAGE

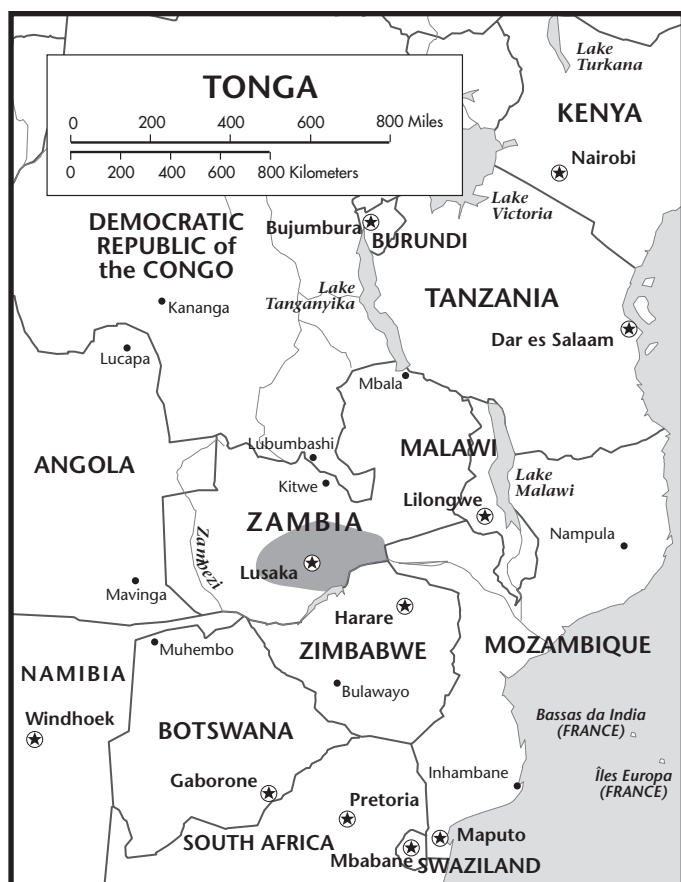
Linguistically, the Tonga people are part of the Bantu language family. The Tonga language is known as Chitonga and has a substantial number of words that are similar in many respects to other Bantu languages such as Bemba, Chichewa, and Luyana. For example, “to write” in all three languages is *kulemba*; a chicken is known as *a’nkoko* in Bemba, *nkuku* in Luyana, *nkhuku* in Chichewa, and *inkuku* in Tonga; a traditional doctor in all four languages is called *ng’anga*.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Tonga have no written history prior to their encounter with the British explorer David Livingstone in the early 1850s. Nevertheless, like many other peoples in Africa, they have a rich tradition of oral history and folklore. In almost all the villages, elders are the reservoirs of mythical stories. The stories, usually featuring animal characters, are narrated around a fire at night. They convey certain traditional principles, values and customs, and the origins of the Tonga people. One of the stories deals with the beginning of Tonga society. Contrary to popular belief that the Tonga are a chiefless society, local tradition suggests that there was once a powerful chief in the town of Monze before the arrival of the British. According to oral tradition, the first Monze chief descended from heaven and called the Tonga people, including those living outside of Tongaland proper, to join him and settle in his chiefdom centered around the present-day town of Monze. The chief was liked by most people because he had powers to heal, to cause rain, and to maintain peace by frustrating enemies through his communication with the ancestral spirits.

## 5 RELIGION

In traditional Tonga society, there is a well-developed cult of the “shades” or *muzimu*. It is believed that at death each person leaves a shade or spirit, a *muzimu*. The *muzimu* commutes between the spirit world and the world of humans. Usually the *muzimu* is integrated into society by selecting an individual within the lineage to inherit the *muzimu* at a special ritual. Witchcraft is also central to traditional beliefs in that there are some bad people and spirits in society who can cause great bodily harm to an individual through sorcery. However, many of the Tonga people have been converted to Christianity because of early mission influence and European settlement in Tongaland. Initially, there were only a few converts because the missionaries demanded complete renunciation of traditional beliefs such as polygamy, bride-wealth, ancestor worship, and witchcraft. Today, there are a substantial number of people who practice both Christianity and indigenous religious beliefs. Converts to Christianity merely add a new religion, while retaining their traditional beliefs.



## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major national holiday in Zambia is Independence Day on 24 October. Zambia obtained its independence from Great Britain in 1964 on 24 October. During this day every year there are celebrations arranged in major urban areas and throughout the country. There is much drinking, dancing, and singing. In the afternoon, people congregate in stadiums to watch a game of soccer between major leagues, or to see the national team play a friendly match with a national team from a nearby country such as Malawi. In addition to Independence Day, Zambia also observes several other holidays (both secular and religious) which include: January 1, New Year's Day; Second Monday in March, Youth Day; March or April, Good Friday and Easter Monday; May 1, Labor Day; May 25, African Freedom Day; First Monday in July, Heroes' Day; First Tuesday in July, Unity Day; First Monday in August, Farmers' Day; December 25, Christmas Day; and December 26, Boxing Day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Throughout Zambia today the law states that an individual becomes an adult at the age of 18. At this age an individual is allowed to vote and to drive a car. In most cases, no special ceremonies are performed to show that one has achieved adult status. In the past, most Zambian peoples had special initiation ceremonies and education for children as they attained puberty. The Tonga were no exception in this regard. However, the Tonga did not have an elaborate initiation ceremony such as *Chisungu* among the Bemba and *Chinamwali* among the

Chewa. In the traditional setting, as a girl approached puberty she was trained for her future role as a man's wife. Usually, there was a period of seclusion during which a short ceremony was observed to mark the girl's maturity, and she was given a new name to signify her adult status.

In terms of marriage, the prospective husband had to pay bride-wealth to the family of the girl, usually in the form of cattle. A man could pay two cattle or some clothing to marry a girl. Although the Tonga are a matrilineal society, the preferred form of residence is patrilocal; in other words, the husband goes to the wife's village, gives presents, and brings the wife back to his village where they set up their own household. Polygamy was encouraged, but this practice is on the wane because of the influence of Christianity and a modern economic system. Highly educated individuals feel that polygamy is uneconomic.

When a child is born it is given an ancestral as well as a Christian name, in the case of those who are Christians. A special naming ceremony may be held at which beer-drinking and dancing occur. In the old days, every baby was believed to be protected by one of its ancestral spirits. It was therefore necessary for the parents to give the baby the name of the right ancestor, which was divined by saying all the names of the ancestors to the baby until he or she cried. Whatever name the parents had spoken when the baby cried was that of the protecting ancestor, whose name the baby was then given.

Although the Tonga no longer have specific initiation ceremonies for boys and girls, there is a strong belief that children must be taught and trained for adult life, and that growing up is not a simple process of maturation. Throughout the process of growing up, children are taught proper manners by older people, including older children. During their teenage years, boys and girls are encouraged to do their separate chores according to sex roles; for example, girls' chores are to draw water from wells and fetch firewood, while boys hunt small game and fish. This is not to imply that these are always mutually exclusive tasks; there are instances when boys carry out girls' chores, and vice versa.

When death strikes, there are special rituals to be performed during burial and soon after burial to make sure that the "shade" or spirit of the dead person is reintegrated into society and does not cause harm to anybody. Devout Christians follow church dogma and sing Christian hymns and prayers at funerals.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Girls and boys who have not reached puberty are encouraged to play together. Since there is no specific instruction given on sexual matters, children are expected to acquire such information by casual observation and through experimentation on their own. People talk freely in the presence of children about sexual matters such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. In the village setting, children are even allowed to be present at childbirth during labor but are excused when the baby is about to be born. Most parents feel that sexual play between children of the same age is not a matter for concern. However, an older man and/or woman is not expected to have sexual liaisons with a girl or boy below the age of puberty since it is believed to be detrimental to the health of both parties.

When a boy who has reached puberty decides to marry, he can find his own mate, but he must inform his uncles and par-

ents to negotiate with the parents of the girl since bride-wealth must be paid. Cross-cousins of the same generation and age are in a joking relationship and may be addressed by spousal terms such as “my wife” or “my husband” and may cajole and harass each other without any recriminations. Boys sleep in the same room as their parents until age seven, when they move into their own hut. However, girls may continue to sleep in the same room as their parents until they reach puberty, or they may be allowed to sleep in the hut of an older woman, preferably a widow.

Generally, married women are expected to respect and cook for their husbands, and men are expected to take care of their wives. For example, when in the presence of men, a woman is expected to observe certain aspects of traditional female etiquette such as downcast eyes and servility. Women are also expected to dress modestly since any view of knees or thighs is thought to be an irresistible provocation. However, in urban areas many women have sought to retain their social autonomy and resist male dominance in numerous ways, such as staying single and earning a wage through a regular job or some type of home-based employment such as brewing beer.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The different circumstances of Tonga society such as short lineages, dispersed homesteads, the lack of chiefs, and their location along the line of rail from Zimbabwe to the copperbelt on soils suitable for agricultural production made it easy for the Tonga to participate fully in commercial agriculture during the colonial era. Due to the availability of a colonial market, the Tonga responded by intensifying and dramatically increasing their agricultural production. The Tonga were one of the few peoples to adopt agricultural innovations, such as ox-drawn plows and the use of fertilizer and hybrid seed, earlier on during the colonial period. Thus a relatively wealthy group of commercialized farmers among the Tonga emerged, and most Tonga chose to participate in agricultural activities rather than to migrate to the urban centers and the mines in the copperbelt. There also developed a series of smaller urban centers such as Monze, Livingstone, Makoli, Zimba, Kalomo, Mazabuka, etc., along the line of rail, which spawned a local urban elite in Tongaland. Today these urban Tonga consider themselves part of modern Zambia, the wealthy elite with modern consumption patterns such as a modern home and occasionally a car.

In rural areas, people live in isolated homesteads or villages with a few huts. In most cases, houses, granaries, and cattle *kraals* (corrals) are temporary structures which can be easily abandoned within a short period of 5 to 10 years. New sites can then be cleared and new structures raised. With the advent of commercial farming and a cash economy, some houses are of modern appearance, durable and nicely decorated. Roofing materials for such houses are corrugated iron sheets. Some of the Tonga live in small urban areas along the line of rail that passes through their territory. These are part of the sub-elite; they may own a well-stocked shop with modern goods such as sugar, tea, clothing, milk, etc. Just like in other parts of Zambia, tropical diseases such as malaria, bilharzia, intestinal worms, etc., are quite common among the Tonga.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Similar to many African societies, “family” among the Tonga refers to the wider extended unit rather than the nuclear family of wife, husband, and children. The extended family unit, much like a lineage or clan, cooperates in many ventures, such as farming and provision of food. In times of trouble, such as famine and drought, the extended family serves as a social safety net with members coming to each other’s rescue. In most instances, a village may be a large extended-family unit composed of members that can trace descent from a common ancestress.

Marriage is a negotiation process between two families rather than an affair of two individuals. Marriage involves the transfer of bride-wealth from the groom’s family to the bride’s family. As noted earlier, although the Tonga follow the matrilineal system of kinship arrangement, the preferred form of residence is patrilocal where, after the payment of bride-wealth, the wife moves to the husband’s village. In the traditional setting, bride-wealth is not considered a form of “buying” a wife; rather, it has three main functions. The first function is to serve as a legitimizing symbol of a marriage, much like a marriage certificate in the West. Secondly, it functions as insurance for the continued survival of the union. Both families have a vested interest in the survival of the marriage since, if divorce should occur and the wife is in the wrong, all the bride-wealth would have to be returned; or, in cases where the husband is at fault, his extended family would lose the bride-wealth after the breakup. The third function, common among patrilineal societies, is that bride-wealth serves as a mechanism to transfer any offspring from the union to the father’s lineage so that in times of divorce all the children remain with the father. Bride-wealth apparently does not serve this function among the Tonga since children remain with the mother’s lineage but are free to choose either to live with the father or the mother after divorce.

Bearing as many children as possible is the most important undertaking in a Tonga marriage since children are valued for their labor and social security in old age. While divorce is quite common among societies without bride-wealth, marriages in societies that pay bride-wealth are relatively stable. There is a general feeling these days that modern, urban life has brought increasing instability to the family and that the divorce rate is much higher than it used to be. As more girls spend more time in school, coupled with the breakdown of traditional morals in urban areas, many women are opting to be single, to break away from the shackles of traditionalism that put women in an inferior position, and to exercise their own autonomy. Polygamy, although still practiced in rural areas, is not as common as it used to be and is generally a thing of the past. However, there is a contemporary practice in urban areas where men keep mistresses or “girlfriends” outside the home, something which could easily be interpreted as men informally exercising their right to many wives. This kind of practice, however, only serves to increase the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

## 11 CLOTHING

Clothing among the Tonga is used to differentiate the sexes. As soon as the children begin to run about, girls are given a dress or a skirt, while boys are given a shirt and a pair of shorts. Children are taught that boys and girls wear different types



of clothes, girls in dresses and boys in shorts and shirts; thus, dress marks the beginning of sex identification. But women in urban areas do wear pants and shirts just like their male counterparts, although the majority of women still prefer traditional women's clothing.

## 12 FOOD

Most of the area in which the Tonga live is rural, and the majority follow a subsistence way of life, growing maize as the main staple. Other traditional staple crops are millet and sorghum. The diet consists of *inshima* (thick porridge), taken together with a relish in the form of either meat and gravy or vegetables such as beans and pumpkin leaves. Typically a group of relatives eat from the same dish, using their fingers to break off a piece of *inshima* from the common dish and dip it in gravy before eating it. This diet is taken twice a day during the slack season, i.e., for lunch and dinner, and once a day during the agricultural season since the women are busy tending the field and have very little time to cook.

## 13 EDUCATION

Most parents send their children to a nearby primary school. Boys and girls begin their day by helping out with household chores, such as taking the cattle for a short grazing trip and/or going to draw water for the parents, in the morning before going to school. At school they learn a few basic subjects such as English, biology, and arithmetic. After 8 years of primary school, it is possible to be selected to attend a secondary school with forms 1 through 4, modeled on the British Ordinary Level General Certificate of Education. The subjects may include mathematics, chemistry, physics, and biology, among others. The few lucky students who do extremely well in government exams are selected to attend the university, or different types of colleges.

In 1976, the government of Zambia made education free in the hopes that it would be accessible to the great majority of people. The end result has been a dramatic increase in literacy rates at the national level from a low of 10% at the time of independence in 1964 to 70% at present. Some parents, especially those living in urban areas, value education quite highly and have great aspirations for their children. This is not the case for people in rural areas where children's labor, rather than their education, is more critical to daily living.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music, dance, and literature are part and parcel of Tonga daily life. Stories that impart much-needed knowledge and principles to the young are narrated by grandfathers and grandmothers during the early hours of the evening around a fire. Each story might have several lessons for both the young and the old. The lessons could be as varied as how to act in a clever way, how to be imaginative, how to demonstrate intelligence to win the hand of a beautiful girl, the virtue of perseverance in bringing success, and appropriate behavior in certain situations. Drumming, singing, and dancing at beer parties, funerals, and naming ceremonies are a daily activity among the Tonga. At beer parties, men and women dance together in the open.

## 15 WORK

Urban elites in the few urban areas of Tongaland mostly find jobs in the government bureaucracy. Some find jobs as teachers, nurses, office clerks, or laborers on the railway. (During the colonial era, most of these positions were taken up by Europeans and Asians.) Others engage in petty trading such as selling fish, salt, sugar, and other basic commodities in open markets. But the majority of the Tonga people remain subsistence farmers who basically produce enough for the family and a little surplus to sell for money. Some of the local farmers who have adopted Western farming techniques have become relatively wealthy and are in a special class of their own. Livestock, such as cattle and goats, are another preoccupation for the Tonga. Such livestock provide a nutritious diet but are considered mainly to be a repository of wealth. Livestock such as cattle are also important in paying bride-wealth in times of marriage.

## 16 SPORTS

Even in the most remote parts of Tongaland, soccer (locally called football) is the favored sport for boys and young men. There is usually a makeshift soccer field in each village and whenever a ball is available, boys will play soccer continuously until they are very tired. School-going girls like to play netball, a game somewhat like basketball. In well-equipped secondary schools, boys and girls play games with which students in the West are familiar, such as tennis, badminton, and gymnastics. In rural areas, boys and girls will normally devise different games and play together when they have free time from household chores.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The most popular game among boys and girls that have not reached puberty is playing "house," especially during the slack season when agricultural work is completed. Children build themselves ramshackle playhouses at the edge of the village and pretend they are adults, with girls taking the sex-roles of women, and boys the roles of men. Girls do the cooking and boys come to eat the food. This is part of growing up and socialization within the traditional setting.

Although game is rare, men still like to go out for hunting and fishing in the nearby woodlands and rivers, such as the Kafue and the Zambezi and the numerous tributaries of these rivers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pottery, carvings, basketry, and mats are crafted by older men and women among the Tonga for use in their daily lives. For example, pots are made in different sizes to be used for drawing water, cooking, brewing beer, and storing grain and other foods.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

At the time when Zambians were demanding independence from British colonial rule, one of the most prominent politicians in Zambia was Harry Nkumbula, a school teacher from Tongaland. He opposed colonial rule alongside prominent leaders such as Simon Kapwepwe and Kenneth Kaunda, both from the Bemba-speaking group. In time, Nkumbula lost favor with Kenneth Kaunda and Simon Kapwepwe and was sidelined in the new independent Zambia. Naturally, the Tonga were not

pleased and Nkumbula continued to draw support from his ethnic group, which became a stronghold of anti-Kaunda sentiments. Although the government of Kaunda did not punish the Tonga openly, few of them were invited to join the national political establishment. Despite the ethnic animosities between the Tonga and the post-independence government leadership, however, human rights in Zambia have generally been better than in other African dictatorships.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Zambia, like in many African countries, the participation of women in government and other gainful economic activities is still extremely low. For example, in the 2006 poll, elected women candidates accounted for less than 15%, despite women constituting the majority of voters. Girls are also marginalized in the educational system, with 11% of girls aged 15 to 24 illiterate compared with 8% of boys. However, the Zambian government is slowly moving in the right direction in as far as gender issues are concerned in the sense that a National Gender Policy and a bill on gender-based violence have been approved. These efforts will somewhat assist in helping to empower women and bridge the gender gap.

In traditional Tonga society a man is considered to be the head of the household/family. This is a role assigned to men who are viewed as natural leaders and decision makers at the household level, even in cases where men may not be knowledgeable. When a wife makes a decision within the home she is supposed to keep such a deviation from the norm secret. The low position of women in Tonga society is in contradiction to their matrilineal traditions in which women are supposed to command the high ground. The mix of patrilineal and matrilineal traits among the Tonga has resulted in women being subject to the disadvantages of each system without the benefits of either.

Although human rights in Zambia are enshrined in the constitution, and the Mwanawasa government has been credited with respecting the rule of law with regard to human rights, Zambia has a poor human rights record. It has been reported that the security forces routinely carry out unlawful killings, torture, beatings, and abuse of criminal suspects and detainees. Prison conditions are often very poor and life-threatening. Rallies by the political opposition have often been obstructed and violence against women and/or homosexual groups is quite common. As a matter of fact the first ever homosexual association to be formed in Zambia in 1998 (the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender Association—LEGATRA) was immediately banned by the government soon after its formation.

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—by E. Kalipeni

# TUAREGS

**PRONUNCIATION:** TWAH-regs

**LOCATION:** Saharan and Sahelian Africa (mostly Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso)

**POPULATION:** Approximately 1.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Tamacheq

**RELIGION:** Islam, combined with traditional beliefs and practices

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Algerians; Burkinabe; Libyans; Malians; Nigeriens

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Tuareg, a seminomadic, Islamic African people, are best-known for their men's practice of veiling the face with a blue, indigo-dyed cloth. Hence, early travel accounts often referred to them as "the Blue Men" of the Sahara Desert, the region where many Tuareg live. Tuareg are believed to be descendants of the North African Berbers and to have originated in the Fezzan region of Libya. They later expanded into regions bordering the Sahara and assimilated settled farming peoples from regions south of the Sahara into their traditionally stratified, hierarchical society. Tuareg traded with these populations and also, in the past, raided them for slaves, absorbing the slaves into their families. Therefore, today Tuareg display diverse physical and cultural traits, ranging from North African Arabic influences to influences from Africa south of the Sahara.

The Tuareg came to prominence as livestock-breeders and caravanners in the Saharan and Sahelian regions at the beginning of the 14th century, when trade routes to the lucrative salt, gold, ivory, and slave markets in North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East sprang up across their territory. As early as the 17th century AD, there were extensive migrations of pastoral nomadic Berbers, including the two important groups related to contemporary Tuareg: Lemta and Zarawa. Invasions of Beni Hilal and Beni Sulaym Arabs into Tuareg Tripolitania and Fezzan pushed Tuareg southwards to the Air Mountains, located in contemporary Niger Republic. Among these was a group of seven clans, allegedly descending from daughters of the same mother. There are "matrilineal" or female-based forms of inheritance and descent, which trace property and family ties through women, and many myths and rituals emphasize founding female ancestors. These institutions counterbalance more recent "patrilineal" institutions introduced by Islam, which emphasize male-based family ties and inheritance of property from father to son.

By the late 19th century, most trade from the Saharan interior had been diverted to the coast of Africa by the ocean routes. European explorers and military expeditions in the Sahara and along the Niger River led to French domination and incorporation of the region into French West Africa. By the early 20th century, the French had brought the Tuareg under their colonial domination, abolished slavery, and deprived Tuareg of their rights to tariff collection and protection services for trans-Saharan camel caravans.

Since the early 1990s, Tuaregs in Niger and Mali have sought either autonomous desert states or independence. In both countries, Tuaregs have been disappointed with the responses of national governments to serious droughts in the 1970s and

1980s, when many Tuaregs lost all or most of their animals. In Niger, Tuaregs also sought a greater portion of uranium revenues, as uranium comes from the historic Tuareg homeland in the Air Mountains. Peace accords were signed in both countries in 1995, but sporadic fighting began again in 2007.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Most Tuareg today live in the contemporary nation-states of Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso, where they are ethnic minorities. For example, Tuaregs constitute about 8% of the population of Niger. The total population of Tamacheq-speakers who identify themselves culturally as Tuareg has been estimated to be about 1 million. The Saharan and Sahelian regions of southern Algeria, western Libya, eastern Mali, and northern Niger where most Tuaregs live includes flat desert plains; rugged savanna and desert-edge borderlands, where agriculture is possible only with daily irrigation; and volcanic mountains. The major mountain ranges are the Hoggar Mountains in Algeria, and the Air Mountains in Niger. Climatic features include extreme temperatures (up to 55°C or 130°F in the hot season), aridity and erratic rainfall (often less than 25 cm or 10 in of rainfall each year). Many herds of animals were decimated in the droughts of 1967–73 and 1984–85. During the brief cold season, there are high winds and sandstorms. Recently, many Tuareg have migrated to rural and urban areas farther south, due to natural disasters of drought and famine, and political tensions with the central state governments of Mali and Niger.

## 3 LANGUAGE

There are numerous dialects of Tamacheq, the major language, which is part of the Berber language family. A written script called Tifinagh is used in poetry and love messages and also appears in Saharan rock art and on some jewelry and musical instruments. Many contemporary Tamacheq-speakers also speak Songhay, Hausa, and French, and read Arabic.

Significant in Tuareg identity are names referring to the pre-colonial social categories based on descent and inherited occupational specialties, which remain important in rural communities. For example, *imajeghen* (nobles) refers to those of Tuareg of aristocratic origin. *Imghad* refers to those of tributary origins, similar to the European category "vassal," who in the past raided for nobles. *Inaden* refers to the smiths/artisans. *Iklan* and *ighawalen* refer, respectively, to peoples of various degrees of servile and client or "serf"-like origins, who in the past worked for and paid rent to nobles. In principle, individuals are supposed to marry within their own social category, but this practice has been breaking down for some time, particularly in the towns.

## 4 FOLKLORE

There are many proverbs, riddles, myths, and folk tales among the Tuareg. These are usually recited orally, by smiths/artisans and women in the evening at home. Animal tales depicting human moral dilemmas are used to socialize children. They feature the jackal, hyena, and rabbit—animal characters widespread in African folklore. Many Tuareg groups recognize mythical female founding ancestors such as Tagurmat, who fought a battle on Mount Bagzan in the Air region, and whose twin daughters allegedly founded the herbal healing profession. Other stories depict mythical Berber queens and

ancestors such as Tin Hinan in the Hoggar Mountain region of southern Algeria; and Kahena, who allegedly fought the Arab invaders. Another popular figure in myth and folk tales is Aligouran, said to be the author of messages and drawings on rocks throughout the Sahara. Aligouran is portrayed in a series of tales about the adventures of an uncle and his nephew. Other heroes are Boulkhou, an early Islamic scholar who built the first mosque and sank the first well in the Air Mountain area; and Kaousan, leader of the 1917 Tuareg revolt against the French. Many stories are about spirits, called *jinn*, who are believed to trick humans traveling alone in the desert.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Tuareg are Muslims, but religious practices generally incorporate pre-Islamic beliefs in jinns, spirits that mediate interactions between humans and the natural world, as well. Most spirits are considered evil, the cause of many illnesses that require healing by special exorcism rituals featuring drumming and songs. Some Tuareg perform divination and fortune-telling with cowrie shells, lizards, mirrors, and the Quran. Also, smiths/artisans play important roles in many Tuareg rites of passage, alongside Islamic scholars.

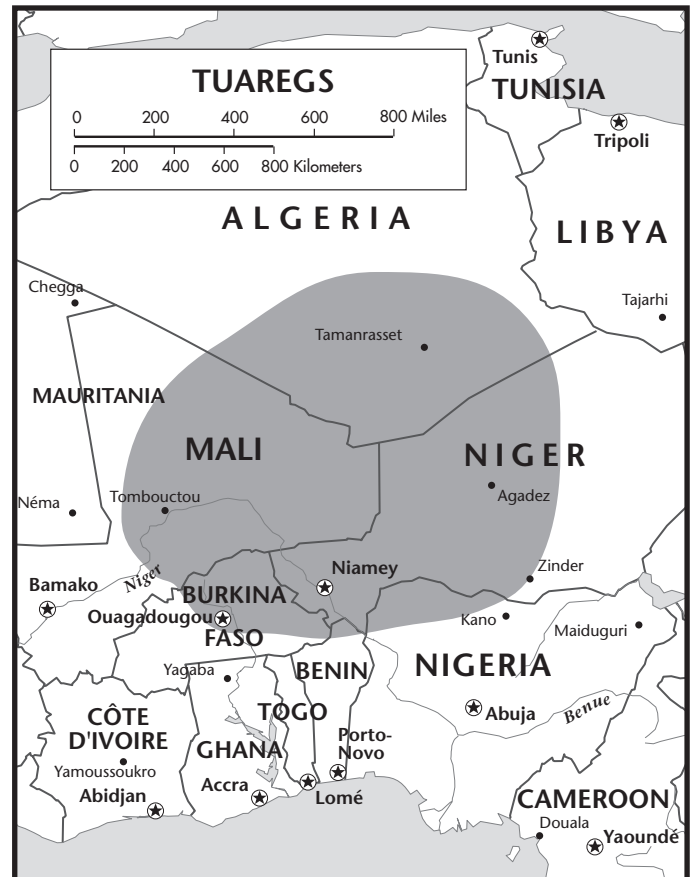
Islam most likely came from the west and spread into the Air Mountain region in the 7th century AD. Tuareg initially resisted Islam and earned a reputation among North African Arabs for being lax about Islamic practices. For example, local tradition did not require female chastity before marriage. Today most Tuareg women freely go about unveiled in public, and women may independently inherit property and initiate divorce. Islamic scholars, popularly called *marabouts*, are believed to possess a special power of blessing, called *al baraka*. They educate children in Quranic verses, officiate at rites of passage and Muslim holidays, and practice psychosocial counseling and, in rural areas, Quranic law.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Important holidays the Tuareg celebrate include Muslim holy days, as well as secular state holidays. Tabaski commemorates the story (from the Bible as well as the Quran) of Abraham's sacrifice of a ram in place of his son. Each household slaughters a goat or ram, feasts on its meat, and prays at the prayer ground. Tuareg celebrate Ganni (also called Mouloud in the Muslim world), the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, by special sacred and secular songs and camel races. The end of the month-long Ramadan fast, during which Tuareg neither eat nor drink from sunrise to sundown, is celebrated by animal sacrifice, feasting, prayer, and evening dancing festivals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Principal rites of passage are namedays, weddings, and memorial/funeral feasts. In addition, there is a ritual marking men's first face-veiling. Namedays are held one week following a baby's birth. On the evening before the official nameday, elderly female relatives take the baby in a procession around the mother's tent and give him or her a secret Tamacheq name. The next day, while a smith woman shaves the baby's hair in order to sever the baby's ties to the spirit world, the *marabout* (Islamic scholar) and the father give the baby his or her official Arabic name from the Quran at the mosque. The *marabout* pronounces the baby's official Quranic name at the same mo-



ment as he cuts the throat of a ram. There follow feasts, camel-races, and evening dancing festivals.

Weddings are very elaborate. They last for seven days, during which the groom's side of the family arrive in the camp or village of the bride on gaily decorated camels and donkeys, and elderly female relatives of the bride construct her nuptial tent. At weddings, there are camel-races and evening festivals featuring songs and dances. These are accompanied by a drum called a *tende*, constructed from a mortar covered with a goat-skin and struck with the hands; and a calabash (gourd) floating in water, struck with a baton. These musical instruments are symbolically associated with romantic love, and their music is opposed to the sacred music and prayer identified with Islam. The wedding festivals provide an opportunity for youths of diverse social backgrounds to initiate romantic relationships outside of official marriage.

Mortuary rites are simpler than namedays and weddings. Burial takes place as soon as possible after death and is quickly concluded with a graveside prayer led by an Islamic scholar. Burial is followed by *iwichken* or condolences, when relatives and friends gather at the home of the deceased, and an Islamic scholar offers a prayer and blessing. Guests consume a memorial feast, consisting of foods similar to those at namedays and weddings. Sometimes, these memorial feasts are repeated at intervals following death, offered as alms in the name of the deceased. According to Tuareg belief, the soul (*iman*) is more personalized than spirits. It is seen as residing within the living individual, except during sleep when it may rise and travel about. The souls of the deceased are free to roam, but usually



A Tuareg woman, hands colored by the traditional indigo dye, performs a dance in Tombouctou, Mali. (AP Images/Ben Curtis)

do so near graves. Tuareg make offerings of date-wine at tombs of important Islamic scholars, in order to obtain the special *al baraka* blessing.

Tuareg men begin to wear the face-veil at approximately 18 years of age. This marks their adult male status and signifies that they are ready to marry. The first veiling is performed in a special ritual by an Islamic scholar, who recites verses from the Quran as he wraps the veil around the young man's head.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

As in many African societies, greetings among the Tuareg are extremely important and elaborate. Upon encountering someone, it is considered highly impolite not to greet her or him. In the Air regional dialect, "*Oy ik?*" signifies "How are you?" (directed to a man). This is followed by "*Mani eghiwan?*" signifying, "How is your family?" and additional greetings such as "*Mani echeghel?*" ("How is your work?") and sometimes "*Mani edaz?*" ("How is your fatigue?"). The usual polite response to these questions is "*Alkher ghas,*" or "In health only." In addition, there are many nonverbal greetings, for example, extending and withdrawing the right hand (associated with religious purity) several times. Other hand signals are used at festivals to indirectly express romantic interest. Visiting is frequent in both rural and urban communities. Gift exchange between women is important as a sign of friendship.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Since independence and the establishment of nation-states in the region in the early 1960s, Tuareg have continued to lose economic strength and power. They resisted French and, later, central-state schools and taxes, believing them to be strategies to force them to settle down so that they could be more easily controlled. As a result, Tuareg tend to be underrepresented today in urban jobs in the new economies of their nations, as well as in central governments in the region. These governments have imposed restrictions on trade with neighboring countries to protect national economic interests. Droughts and decreasing value of livestock and salt—their last remaining export commodity—have weakened a once strong and diverse local economy. Geographic barriers, economic crises, and political tensions have had an impact upon health care. Health care among Tuareg today includes traditional herbal, Quranic, and other ritual therapies, as well as Western-style biomedical clinics. However, traditional medicine is more prevalent in rural areas because many rural Tuareg, especially women, tend to be suspicious or shy of medical personnel who are of outside origins. Thus, although many rural residents desire some biomedical remedies such as antibiotics, they rely more upon traditional specialists and remedies. These include Quranic scholars who cure with verses from the Quran and psychotherapy; female herbalists who cure with leaves, roots, barks, and holistic techniques of verbal incantations and laying on of

hands; and curers called *boka* who work with perfumes and incense.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In rural communities, each tent or compound corresponds to the nuclear household. Each compound is named for the married woman, who owns the nomadic tent. This tent was built by elderly female relatives and provided as dowry upon the woman's marriage. She may eject her husband from the tent upon divorce. Compounds in less-nomadic communities contain diverse residential structures. These may include several tents, a few conical grass buildings, and sometimes, among the more well-to-do in settled oases, an adobe house, built and owned by men. Thus, there are significant changes in property-balance occurring between men and women upon the increasing settlement of nomads.

Most camel-herding is still done by men. Although women may inherit and own camels, they tend to own and herd more goats, sheep, and donkeys. Caravan trade is exclusively done by men. Women may, however, indirectly participate in caravan trade by sending their camel(s) with a male relative, who brings goods back to them. Men plant and irrigate gardens. Women harvest crops. Although women may own gardens and date-palms, they leave the gardening to male relatives.

Islam has had long-term effects upon the family, the role of women, and property. Unless the deceased indicates otherwise before death with a witness in writing, Quranic patrilineal inheritance prevails: two-thirds of the property goes to the sons; one-third, to the daughters. Alternative inheritance forms from pre-Islamic institutions include inheritance called "living milk herds," animals reserved for sisters, daughters, and nieces; and various pre-inheritance gifts. Clan membership allegiance is through the mother and social class affiliation through the father. Political office in most groups goes from father to son. There are relaxed relationships featuring joking and horseplay with cousins and extremely reserved relationships featuring distance and respect with in-laws. Cultural ideals are marriage within one's own social category (noble, tributary, smith, and former slave) and close-cousin marriage. In the towns, both these patterns are breaking down. In rural areas, these rules remain strong, but many individuals marry close relatives only to please their mother, and later divorce, subsequently marrying nonrelatives. Some prosperous gardeners, chiefs, and Islamic scholars practice polygynous marriage to several women at the same time.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Tuareg men's face-veil has several levels of meaning. It is, first of all, a symbol of male gender role identity and conveys important cultural values of respect and reserve. It also protects from evil spirits believed to enter through bodily openings. Furthermore, it has aesthetic importance; it is considered attractive and can be worn in diverse styles. In addition to personal preference, the style of the veil depends upon the social situation. The face-veil is worn highest (covering the nose and mouth) in order to express respect and reserve in the presence of important chiefs, older persons, and parents-in-law. Tuareg women do not wear a face-veil, but rather a head-scarf that covers the hair. A woman begins to wear this after her wedding to convey her new social status as a married woman. Other features of Tuareg dress include men's long Islamic robes in rural

areas; women's wrapper-skirts and "bolero"-style embroidered blouses; and in the towns, more varied dress, including West African tie-dyed cottons and, among more cosmopolitan Tuareg, European styles.

## 12 FOOD

On oases, crops include millet, barley, wheat, corn, onions, tomatoes, and dates. Millet, spices, and other foods are also obtained through caravan trade. Almost 95% of the daily rural diet consists of cereal, with the added protein from animal products (milk and cheese), as well as a few seasonal fruits such as dates, mangoes and melon. Dried and pounded vegetables are added to sauces. Meat is consumed primarily on holidays and at rites of passage. A very sweet, thick, and richly blended beverage called *eghajira* is also consumed on these special occasions, as well as when traveling. It consists of pounded millet, dates, and goat cheese, mixed with water and eaten with a ladle. In towns, the diet is slightly more varied but, nonetheless, still consists of mostly nonmeat protein. Along the River Niger, some fish (both dried and fresh) are consumed.

## 13 EDUCATION

Until recently, many Tuareg, particularly nobles, resisted secular schools established by French and, later, central-state governments, because the schools are associated with forced settling of nomads and taxation. Nowadays, however, more Tuareg recognize the importance of education. Many rural residents achieve at least a primary school education, and some continue on to junior high school and high school levels in towns. Very few Tuareg are represented at universities. Quranic schools are important and respected. Much traditional education also consists of apprenticeship in adult tasks with older relatives.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In Tuareg culture, there is great appreciation of the visual and oral arts. The large body of music, poetry, and song are of central importance during courtship, rites of passage, and festivals. Men and women of diverse social origins who dance and perform vocal and instrumental music are admired for their musical creativity. But distinctive musical styles, dances, and instruments are associated with the various social categories. *Marabouts* (Islamic scholars), men, and older women perform sacred liturgical music on Muslim holidays. Youths perform more secular music on such instruments as the *anzad* and the *tende*. The *anzad*, a bowed, one-stringed lute, was traditionally played by noble women, and the *tende* drum was historically played by smiths and former slaves.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, occupations corresponded to social origins. Nobles controlled the caravan trade, owned most of the camels, and remained more nomadic, coming into oases to collect a proportion of the harvest from their client and servile peoples. Tributary groups raided and traded for nobles and had rights to the products and offspring of nobles' animals in their care. Peoples of varying degrees of client and servile status performed domestic and herding labor for nobles. Smiths manufactured jewelry and household tools and performed praise-songs at noble patron families' weddings. They also

served as important oral historians and political go-betweens and assisted in noble marriage negotiations.

Because of natural disasters and political tensions, it is now increasingly difficult to make a living solely off nomadic herding. Thus, there is now less correspondence between social origins, occupation, and wealth. For example, many nobles have become impoverished from loss of herds. Most rural Tuareg today combine different occupations, practicing herding, oasis gardening, caravan trading, and migrant labor. Other contemporary careers include tourist art, in which many smiths are active, and house-guarding in the towns. In towns, there are a few business entrepreneurs and teachers.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is extremely popular among young people. Traditional wrestling has been actively promoted by the governments of Niger and Mali, and wrestling arenas exist in most major towns. Tournaments are generally held at least once a year. Finally, camel races occur at major festivals and celebrations and are considered an important expression of Tuareg cultural heritage.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the towns, television, films, parades, and culture centers offer diversion. Movies from Nigeria, India, and China are popular. In the countryside, most residents make their own entertainment. Children make their own dolls and other toys; and adults dance, sing, and play musical instruments at festivals. In addition, people of all ages play board games with stones and date pits, which approximately resemble Western board games such as chess.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Visual arts consist primarily of metalworking (silver jewelry), woodworking (delicately decorated spoons and ladles and carved camel-saddles), and dyed and embroidered leather, all of which are specialties of smiths, who formerly manufactured these products solely for their noble patrons. In rural areas, nobles still commission smiths to make these products, but in urban areas many smiths now sell jewelry and leatherwork to non-Tuareg such as African civil servants and European tourists, as nobles experience greater economic difficulty in supporting smiths.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Development programs involving the Tuareg from the 1940s into the 1970s failed miserably because they worked against the traditional pastoral herding production systems. During the 1984–85 drought, some Tuareg men, who called themselves *ishumer* (a Tamacheq variant of the French verb *chomer*, which means “to be unemployed”) left for Libya, where they received military training and arms support. In the early 1990s, they returned to their homes and demanded regional autonomy in a separatist rebellion from 1990–1995. Since that time, there has been continued sporadic fighting in some regions of Mali and Niger. Some Tuareg have been forced into political exile and refugee camps.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Tuareg women are known for their independence and ability to freely circulate in public spaces before marriage. In spite of the fact that the vast majority of Tuaregs are Muslims, Tuareg women do not veil. Women also exert significant influence over political and economic matters. Men are normally chiefs, but chieftaincy passes through maternal bloodlines. Inheritance of property is also matrilineal, and it is not uncommon to find women engaged in large-scale trade.

Within the household, women are generally responsible for collecting water, preparing meals, and caring for children. Many Tuareg women also have herds of goats and donkeys. They are also permitted to own camels, though camel herding is generally left to men. Women usually do not participate in long-distance caravan trades with men, and thus are left responsible for their households when men are traveling.

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—revised by C. Breedlove

# TUNISIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** too-NEE-zuhns

**LOCATION:** Western North Africa (the Maghrib)

**POPULATION:** 10.25 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; French

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Tunisia is one of the countries forming the *Maghrib*, the term used to describe the western part of North Africa. Modern Tunisia's name can be traced back to the ancient settlement of Tunis, which by the 13th century had developed into Tunisia's capital. Tunisia was known to the Roman and Arab conquerors as *Africa (Ifriqiyyah)*, and later *Africa* came to be used for the entire continent. Tunisia is the most westernized state in North Africa and maintains strong ties with France, the colonizing power from 1881 to 1956. Until recently, Tunisia's modern development was considered a model for other nations emerging from European colonialism.

Tunisia's history dates back to Neolithic times (the Stone Age). Anthropologists have found evidence indicating that the coastal area was populated by hunters and fishermen as well as farmers. While south of the Atlas mountains, Tunisia is now primarily desert, until 4000 BC, the region was a vast savannah with giant buffalo, elephants, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus. Neolithic civilization, which is characterized by animal domestication and agriculture, developed in the area between 6000 and 2000 BC.

The various nomadic peoples who eventually settled in the area came to be called Berbers. The Phoenician, Roman, Greek, Byzantine, and Arab conquerors all attempted to defeat or assimilate the Berbers into their cultures, with varying degrees of success. Phoenician traders arrived in the area around 900 BC and established the city of Carthage around 800 BC. From there, the Phoenicians established towns along the coast. These became centers for trade with areas as far away as Lebanon. The Berbers were either enslaved by the Phoenicians or forced to pay tribute. By the 4th century BC, the Berbers formed the largest part of the Phoenician slave army and eventually revolted as the power of Carthage weakened. In time, several Berber kingdoms were created that vied with each other for power until the arrival of the Romans in AD 24.

The Roman conquest was disastrous for the Berbers. Tribes were forced to become settled or leave the area. For this reason, the Berbers continuously resisted Roman rule. The Romans began their occupation by controlling the coastal lands and cultivating the area. It is estimated that the Roman province of Africa produced 1 million tons of cereals each year for the Roman Empire along with fruits, figs, grapes, beans, and olive oil.

Along with the Roman presence, Judaism and Christianity began appearing among the Berbers. Many Jews who had been expelled from Palestine by the Romans settled in the area, and some Berber tribes converted to Judaism. Christianity arrived in the 2nd century AD and was especially attractive to slaves. By the end of the 4th century, much of the settled areas had become Christian.

In AD 429, the German king Gaiseric, along with 80,000 Vandals (a German tribe), invaded North Africa from Spain, eventually weakening Roman control. With the weakening of Rome, Berber tribes began to return to their old lands. Meanwhile, the Byzantine emperor Justinian sent his army to North Africa in AD 533 and within a year conquered the German forces, although the Byzantines never established as firm a hold on the area as had the Romans.

The most influential conquest in the area was the invasion of Arab Muslims between AD 642 and AD 669. In AD 670, the Arabs established the town of al-Qayrawan south of Tunis as a rival to the Byzantine influence of the more northern areas. The largely Christian Berber tribes in Tunisia converted to Islam, and in AD 711 the Muslims established firmer control in the region.

The ruling Arab view of Islam at the time was that Islam was primarily a religion for Arabs and Arabs subsequently treated non-Arab converts as second-class citizens. Many political trends developed among Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, however, that rejected the Arabism of the ruling Umayyad dynasty in favor of strict equality for all Muslims. Followers of this movement, called Kharijites, spread to North Africa, and many Berbers became attracted to their message of Islamic equality and strict piety. They eventually rebelled against the Arab caliphate's control of the area and established a number of kingdoms.

In AD 750, the Abbasids—who had succeeded the Umayyad dynasty—spread their rule to the area and appointed Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab as governor in al-Qayrawan. The Aghlabi dynasty was a perfect example of what has been called the Judeo-Islamic culture of the Muslim world. A thriving Jewish community with a long intellectual tradition existed in Muslim Spain and North Africa, and there was a great deal of interaction between the two communities.

Al-Qayrawan became a great center of learning, attracting students from all over the Muslim world. In the 10th century, Constantius Africanus, a Christian from Carthage, went to Italy and introduced the advanced Islamic learning to Europe. The works of the ancient Greeks, which had been translated long ago by the Arabs and studied as major texts, were now translated into Latin, thus reintroducing the Greek works to Europe.

To the west of Aghlabi lands, the Kharijites, under Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustum, established a Rustumid kingdom from AD 761 to AD 909. The leaders were elected by the leading citizens of the town and gained a reputation for honesty and justice. There was much support for scholarship, astronomy, astrology, theology, and law. By the end of the 9th century, Ismaili Muslims (Shia Muslims who followed a more esoteric and mystical interpretation of Islam) led a revolt against the established Sunni rulers in Tunisia and the rest of North Africa. In AD 909 the Ismaili forces established the Fatimid Dynasty in North Africa, first at al-Qayrawan and later in Cairo, Egypt.

The Fatimids were more interested in the lands to the East and left Tunisia and neighboring Algeria to Berber rule. However, considering the conflicting loyalties of the different tribes, conflict became inevitable. In the 11th century, the Fatimids sent Arab bedouins to North Africa to assist their forces against other Berbers. Eventually, the influx of Arabs promoted the Arabization of the entire area.





Nevertheless, independent kingdoms did manage to establish themselves in the area. The greatest of these were the Almoravids, the Almohads, the Hafsid, and the Zayanids. These kingdoms were all led by Muslim leaders who greatly encouraged learning and the arts.

Meanwhile, the Catholics of Spain were involved in reconquering southern Spain from Muslim control. Spain had become a cosmopolitan and pluralistic center of learning under Muslim rule. The Spanish conquest in 1492, however, fundamentally changed the character of the area. The new rulers forced all Muslims and Jews to convert to Christianity. Many fled to North Africa, and a sizable community of Jews settled in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Tunis changed hands a number of times until 1574, when Muslim troops loyal to the Ottoman Empire (based in present-day Turkey), finally established rule over Tunis.

The Ottoman empire controlled Tunisia through appointed governors, or Beys, for the next 250 years. However, by the beginning of the 1800s, real power was in the hands of the Beys, who had established the Husayn dynasty. In 1830, France invaded neighboring Algeria on a self-proclaimed “civilizing mission.” In June of that year, 34,000 French soldiers invaded Algiers, and after a three-week battle, took the city. Then, in 1835, the Ottomans re-established direct rule in Libya. In light of the brutality of the French invasion and subsequent annexation of Algeria by France, a direct threat to Tunisia’s west, and increased Ottoman power in Libya, to the east, the Tunisian leaders instituted a number of policies thought to be favorable to Europe.

Tunisia quickly attempted to modernize its government institutions and build a modern army. Tunisia took huge loans from French banks in order to pay for the reforms. Mustafa Khaznadar, the prime minister and treasurer at the time, unscrupulously cooperated with French banks to build up a large personal fortune while allowing France to charge extortionately high interest rates for its loans. This provided France with a lever to further its colonialist goals in Tunisia.

Eventually, as Turkish power weakened worldwide, Europe began imposing reforms on Turkey as well as Tunisia designed to make the economic environment more favorable for European exploitation. Meanwhile, the Tunisian government’s policies of assuming huge loans from an obliging France, as well as famines and the plague, finally led to its bankruptcy. In 1868, Tunisia was forced to give up control over its financial affairs to a commission of French, British, and Italian bankers called the International Financial Commission (IFC). The Europeans restructured Tunisia’s economy to provide payments to the European banks. Lands, for example, were confiscated from Tunisians and sold to Europeans.

In 1878 at the Congress of Berlin, Britain and France secretly agreed to allow each other the “right” to take over certain Ottoman territories. Britain took Cyprus, and France was given Tunisia. France, however, had to wait until 1881 for an excuse to invade Tunisia from Algeria. Using the pretense that tribesmen from Tunisia had raided in Algeria, France sent more than 40,000 troops to take over Tunis. In the south, a tribal leader named Ali ben Khalifa, with the help of Ottomans in Libya, held out until 1883.

France established what it called a “protectorate” in Tunisia, creating a model to be followed by a number of European countries thereafter. The leaders in the country were allowed to remain in power and personally profit from the occupation as long as they provided legitimacy for France’s presence.

Unlike the brutal occupation in Algeria, the colonization of Tunisia was a more gradual affair. Parallel institutions were created for Europeans and Muslims. French corporations moved in to take over the best land. The previous inhabitants of these areas were then hired as low-wage earners for the French corporations.

As in most occupied Muslim territories, a new nationalist class composed of Western-educated leaders developed in Tunisia. At first, they carefully asked for more rights and greater equality with the Europeans, never challenging the French occupation of the country. This made them more popular with the elite Tunisians, who also had been educated in the West, than with the overwhelming majority of Tunisians, who led a much tougher existence under occupation. In order to broaden their appeal, the nationalists, who called themselves the “Young Tunisians,” also began advocating the rights of Tunisian workers.

During World War I (1914–18), more than 60,000 Tunisians joined the French army to fight in Europe, expecting more rights upon their return. They were sorely disappointed, however, thereby increasing support for the nationalists. As the Young Tunisians became more popular and organized themselves into political parties, they were able to exert greater political influence on Tunisians, through newspapers and direct petitions to the government. The French began to take tougher action against them and on 9 April 1938, the French killed

122 rioting Tunisians and many prominent nationalists were arrested.

During World War II (1939–45), the Muslims joined the French forces in opposing the Nazi invasion. Once France was quickly defeated by Hitler's forces, the local French government in Tunisia also joined Hitler's forces and allied with Mussolini's Italy.

As the Germans took over the area, they freed Arab nationalist leaders, including Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia. Germany tried to court favor with the nationalists, urging them to provide support for the fascists. Despite their profound distrust of French leaders, the nationalists unanimously refused to issue any statements of support for Germany.

Coordinated attacks by American and Free French forces from the west and British forces from the east eventually defeated the German and Italian armies in North Africa, with heavy fighting on Tunisian soil. Tunisians once again had high expectations that they would be granted independence as a reward for their steadfast support of the Allies. Bourguiba even had a personal correspondence with U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, expressing his admiration of American democracy and urging American support for self-determination in Tunisia. The Allies, however, were more interested in maintaining the status quo, fearing instability if independence were granted to any colonies. The French leaders were reinstated in Tunisia, and the nationalists were once again imprisoned.

By 1952, Tunisian resistance turned violent, and many civilians—European and Arab—were killed. By 1954, the French decided to negotiate an agreement in Tunisia while exerting most of their military efforts in Algeria. Internal autonomy was provided to Tunisians for the first time since the protectorate. By 1956, Tunisia was officially independent and in 1957, the monarchy was abolished and Habib Bourguiba became the country's first president. Although France maintained military forces in Tunisia along with a large settler presence, the nationalists' gradual approach to independence was in stark contrast to the bitter war in neighboring Algeria.

After independence, Tunisia became a one-party socialist state ruled by Bourguiba's Neo-Destour (the New Constitution) Party. French law was maintained on many civil issues at the expense of Muslim sensibilities. For example, a part of the *Al Zaytuna* mosque, the center for Muslim scholarship, was incorporated into the University of Tunis, but the rest of the center was simply closed down. Tunisia announced a policy of non-alignment, allying with neither the Soviet Union nor the United States, although in practice Tunisia continued to have very close relations with France and, in recent years, with the United States.

Bourguiba personally led Tunisia to adopt Western laws and practices in public and private spheres. Polygamy, or the practice of marrying more than one wife, was outlawed. Women were provided with social rights similar to men. In order to increase productivity, Bourguiba even encouraged Muslims to stop fasting during the Muslim month of Ramadan as required by Islam.

However, Bourguiba did not extend his Westernizing policies to politics. Under his strong one-party rule, all dissension was effectively quashed, and opposition to his policies was viewed as sedition. By the 1970s, the strong-arm tactics of the government and the lack of political freedom led to a series of strikes and demonstrations by students and unions. These

were also encouraged by rising unemployment and lower standards of living resulting from the government's economic policies. By 1977 the army was called in to fight demonstrators and strikers for the first time since independence, and in 1978, 150 Tunisians were killed in clashes with security forces.

Opposition parties, some in exile and some in Tunisia, began to form. One of the most influential was the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI). The MTI wanted to promote economic reform along with the increased "Islamization" of the state. Eventually, the government began taking stronger action against MTI activists, finally arresting their leader, Rachid al-Gannouchi, and thus causing further disturbances. The aging Bourguiba had become increasingly authoritarian and erratic in his behavior, and attempted to have the head of the MTI executed. The United States and France both intervened, fearing civil unrest if the order were carried out. Although Bourguiba at first acquiesced, he once again attempted to have Gannouchi executed and was finally deposed by his prime minister, Zine al-'Abidine Ben 'Ali, a 51-year-old former army general trained in the United States. Gannouchi was subsequently exiled from Tunisia. In 2008 Ben 'Ali remained in charge of Tunisia as president.

Ben 'Ali stabilized the situation by calling for political pluralism and respect for human rights. In strong contrast to the secular Bourguiba, Ben 'Ali publicly acknowledged Tunisia's Arab Islamic heritage. However, within a couple of years this atmosphere of trust and openness was gone and most of the leadership of the MTI (which had changed its name to *Al Nahda*) were either imprisoned or in exile. Ben 'Ali refused to support U.S. intervention in the first Gulf War in 1991. This move angered the United States and the European Union (EU) but was popular with Tunisians.

After introducing a highly restricted form of political pluralism, Ben 'Ali went on to win three landslide election victories, gaining over 98% of the vote. Facing constitutional term limits, he engineered a constitutional change that cleared the way for him to continue to run for the presidency indefinitely. Economically, his rule has been relatively successful, with Tunisia among the most liberalized economies in Africa and the Middle East. Unlike its neighbor Algeria, which has experienced varying degrees of civil war between secularist and Islamist factions since the 1990s, Tunisia has remained a reliable, relatively secular ally of Western power in the region.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Tunisia has a population of 10.25 million, 24% of whom are under the age of 14. Some 300,000 Tunisians live abroad, many in France. Half the population in Tunisia lives in urban areas, with the remainder in rural areas. Unlike in other North African states, the Berber and Arab populations in Tunisia are completely intermixed, and all speak Arabic.

The country is located on the northern border of the continent of Africa. Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Tripolitania (in northwest Libya) together form the region of the Maghrib. The Mediterranean Sea borders Tunisia on the north and east. The country has three gulfs: Tunis, Hammamet, and Gabes. Tunisia has an area of about 164,000 sq km (63,320 sq mi) and a coastline of about 1,600 km (994 mi). To the west, Tunisia shares a border with Algeria; to the south and east, it borders Libya. Northern Tunisia is relatively fertile and mountainous.

The Dorsale mountain chain, Tunisia's branch of the Atlas Mountains, extends from the northeast to the southwest. The Mejerda River, which lies north of the mountains, rises in Algeria and drains into the Gulf of Tunis. The far south includes part of the Saharan desert.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Arabic is the national language of Tunisia. Arabic arrived with the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries, before which Berber dialects were the chief spoken languages. Berber is today used by very few Tunisians, mainly in the south of the country.

Arabic, a highly evolved Semitic language related to Hebrew and Aramaic, is spoken by almost everyone. Written Arabic is in the form of classical Arabic or a simpler version called "modern standard," which is taught in schools throughout the Arab world and is originally based on the Quran. This Arabic is used in the media, government, and literature throughout the Arab world, tying the Arab world together culturally. Tunisians also speak a North African dialectal Arabic that includes a number of slang terms, many from French. The Tunisian dialect also includes many Berber words, including the names for plants and geographic areas.

When the French occupied Tunisia, they emphasized the use of French. After independence, the new Tunisian government implemented a policy of reintroducing Arabic while maintaining the use of French. Today, French is used orally as well as in the sciences and the military and is important in education, international trade and government. About 60% of television programs are in Arabic and 40% are in French, and some of the major newspapers are printed in French. However, while most Tunisians have some knowledge of French, only an educated minority can speak it fluently.

Common women's names in Tunisia are *Leila*, *Hayat*, *Wasila*, and *Mariam*. Common men's names are *Muhammad*, *Habib*, *Moncif*, and *Ali*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Maghrib, including Tunisia, has many legends based on the exploits of Muslim leaders who acted as arbiters in disputes between families and tribal groups. These leaders often came from highly religious backgrounds and were considered well learned. They are called *marabouts* (holy men), and they were believed to have *baraka* (divine grace), which allowed them to perform miracles. Despite the fact that in Islam only God can bestow baraka, some marabouts have become saints in the popular mind, with sacred powers of their own and many Tunisians make pilgrimages to the tombs of these saints to ask for intercession. These tombs also act as focal points for local communities and as sites for yearly festivals, occasions for the reestablishment and confirmation of group solidarity. Many such tombs are located at or near particular landscape features, at natural springs, in forests, caves, or on hilltops, for example, suggesting links to more ancient religious beliefs. Before independence, Tunisian marabouts were very influential, but their popularity has dwindled since.

Many other folk beliefs have also lost popularity since independence, primarily because Bourguiba, the first president, encouraged modernization and discouraged superstition. Some Tunisians believe in evil spirits called *jinn*, who are said to assume the guise of animals so as not to be recognized. To ward

off these evil spirits, Tunisians wear verses from the Quran on an amulet. They may also wear the *khomsa* ("hand of Fatima"), a charm in the shape of the right hand that protects against the evil eye.

Most folklore in Muslim countries tells stories of important figures in religious history. One such story, which is also cause for annual commemoration throughout the Islamic world, is that of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*. According to legend, on the 26th day of the Islamic month of Rajab, the Prophet Muhammad traveled at night from Mecca, Saudi Arabia (then Hijaz) to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he rode his wondrous horse, al-Burak, on a nocturnal visit to heaven.

### 5 RELIGION

The overwhelming majority (98%) of Tunisians are Muslims. Most Tunisians belong to the *Maliki Sunni* school of Islam, introduced by the Arab invasions in the 7th and 8th centuries. There are still remnants, however, of the Muslim *Kharijite* influence in the south, which espouses a stricter egalitarianism. *Sufi* Islam, which stresses the mystical nature of the divine and which was closely connected to the monarchy, has lost much of its former influence. There are also small Jewish and Christian minorities.

Islam teaches that God (Allah) regularly sent guidance to humans in the form of prophets, and Islam accepts the earlier Semitic prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last in the line of prophets sent with the message that there is only one God. Muslims also believe in heaven and hell, the Day of Judgment, and angels. The Quran is the holy book of Muslims, and it teaches that, to get to heaven, men and women must believe in God and do good works by struggling in God's way. Belief and action are tightly bound together in Muslim literature.

The Islamic religion has five pillars: (1) Muslims must pray five times a day; (2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; (3) Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; (4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca; and (5) each Muslim must recite the *shahada* —*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashhadu in Muhammadu rasul Allah*—which means "I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah."

Most Tunisians use the Quran, *Hadith* (oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the prophet Muhammad) and a form of *Shariah* (Islamic law) to define and regulate their behavior, social relations, and daily rituals. The practice and belief of Islam varies, with the urban middle and upper classes generally being more open to the adoption of non-Muslim practices such as Western forms of dress (like the bikini), public socializing between the sexes, and the consumption of alcohol.

As in many other parts of the Muslim world, personal piety became highly politicized in the last decades of the 20th century. Many political parties have been created in opposition to authoritarian governments in the region, using Islamic symbols to promote their legitimacy and support within society. In Tunisia, where political parties based on such factors as religion, language, region or ethnicity are illegal, the main Islamist opposition group, *Al Nahdah* ("The Renaissance"), has been banned and its leaders imprisoned or exiled. The government has also responded by increasing harassment of Muslims who



*Tunisians parade with camels during the reenactment of a Bedouin traditional wedding at the 36th Sahara Festival of Douz in southern Tunisia. The festival showcases cultural traditions, including dance, poetry, and crafts. (AP Images/Hassene Dridi)*

exhibit outward signs of piety either in their dress or behavior under the assumption that certain kinds of religious behavior, attendance at a particular mosque for example, is an indication of political opposition. This has not only begun to fracture society between the more “secular” and the more “religious”, but has also led to rising apathy and discontent towards civil society in general.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Tunisia commemorates secular and Muslim religious holidays. One major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the month of fasting called Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or sexual relations during the daytime in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate. In Tunisia, perhaps more so than any other Muslim nation except Turkey, the practice of fasting is quietly discouraged by the government, although the holiday at its end, *Eid al-Fitr*, is still celebrated for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of the prophet Abraham and his son to obey God’s command in all things, even when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son. *Eid al-Adha* signals the end of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or *hajj*, which every Muslim must attempt to undertake at least once during his or her lifetime. Religious holidays are celebrated by going to the mosque for communal

prayers and then coming home to large meals with family and visiting relatives. Islamic practice says that a part of the meat slaughtered for the feast is given to relatives and to the poor. More Sufi Islamic holidays such as the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammed and the Feast of *Ashura*, commemorating the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson at the Battle of Kerbala, usually involve communal visits to tombs and shrines.

Secular holidays include the Proclamation of the Republic Day (25 July); socialist May Day (or Labor Day, 1 May), which commemorates worker solidarity around the world; Independence Day (20 March); Martyrs’ Day (9 April); to commemorate a French massacre of 122 Tunisians in 1938; and a holiday to mark the final evacuation of French troops in 1963 (15 October). There is also Constitution Day (1 June), Women’s Day (13 August), and a holiday to mark the assumption of the presidency by Ben ‘Ali (7 November).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The main rites of passage are regulated by Islamic traditions. The birth of a child in Tunisia is a much-celebrated event. Immediately after she delivers a baby, a new mother is fed a creamy mixture of nuts, sesame seeds, honey, and butter, known as *zareer*. On the seventh day after the birth, guests visiting the mother and baby are given the same sweet desert in celebration of the birth. On the seventh day, it is also custom-

ary to slaughter a lamb and have a dinner party with friends and family who bring gifts for the newborn child.

Male circumcision is carried out on almost all Tunisian pre-pubescent males. The boys are dressed up in formal clothes, taken to the local hospital where the operation is quickly carried out. They are then taken home where they are visited by extended family, congratulated and presented with gifts.

Engagement can be a long and difficult process, with much negotiation over finances, etiquette and gifts. Marriage, almost universal in Tunisia, can be arranged through the extended family or according to individual choice, generally depending on the socioeconomic status of the family. Cousins are preferred, as they are seen to hold equal social status, a particularly important factor for girls. Mothers in Tunisia often search for brides for their sons in the *hammam* (public bathhouse). On marriage, the bride is taken to the newly prepared house of the groom, who then enters and consummates the union. The newlyweds are usually left alone for several days before they reappear in public society.

Pilgrimage to Mecca, a duty for all Muslims, is the most important midlife rite of passage both for men and women. The extended family is usually closely involved in helping to prepare for and fund this costly journey. Much prayer and celebration surrounds the pilgrimage, and the returnees are addressed as *hajj* (men) or *hajja* (women), terms of real respect within the community.

Death is considered a natural transition and the soul is believed to live on. Mourners are encouraged to bury a loved one as soon as possible after death. The corpse is washed and wrapped in a shroud. It is then carried by a group of mourners dressed in red to the family tomb. There the body is laid on its left side facing Mecca. Condolences are given for three days after a death, and it is understood that the mourning period is over after the third day.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

While Tunisian society is relatively egalitarian, traditional manners still inform behavior and women are expected to dress and behave with modesty in public. In public, many women will wear a *sifsari* (a long plain cloth garment with head covering) over their normal clothes. Men, too, are expected to show respect to women and each other. For example, a man should not smoke when in the company of his father. Brothers might choose to frequent different cafés so as not to inhibit each other's relaxation.

Upon greeting, men shake hands with other men and with women. Two men who have not seen each other for a long time may kiss on the cheeks. Women may either shake hands with other women or kiss each other on the cheeks. Men and women, however, cannot kiss one another in public, and it is considered improper for unmarried men and women to kiss. In formal settings, it is common to greet one another using titles, mainly French—*Monsieur*, *Madame*, *Mademoiselle*, *Docteur*, and *Professeur*. The Arabic word for Mr. is *sayyid*, Mrs. is *sayyida*, and Miss is *anisa*.

Boys and girls attend separate classes until they enter college, and there is little dating until a man and a woman are ready for marriage. Male-female relations are governed by the Islamic code of modesty, and men and women avoid public displays of affection.

As Muslims, Tunisians eat and shake hands with the right hand. Tunisians enjoy bathing in the *hammams*, or public bathhouses, which they visit to socialize. These have separate hours for men and women, except in some resort towns where *hammams* are unisex for the benefit of tourists. Cafés are popular hangouts for men in the evenings. Here they smoke *chichas* (water pipes) and play cards. Both men and women smoke, but women hesitate to do so in public.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The government has actively promoted housing development and the vast majority of Tunisian families own their own homes. Most of the main Tunisian cities contain a traditional Islamic core, colonial and postcolonial suburbs, and slum areas. The Islamic urban center is comprised of the mosque as communal political locus, the market for exchange, and the public baths for health, informal networking, and relaxation.

Tunisian homes differ from region to region, although most are built of stone, adobe, or concrete because of a scarcity of lumber. Most homes have white walls and blue doors. In Tunis, the capital, it is common to find luxury homes and modern apartment buildings. Tunis is crowded, as are the other Tunisian cities, because of a growing middle class, and because former country folk have moved into urban areas. In urban areas, homes sit directly adjacent to the roads; there are no front yards and very few windows. The front doors of houses open directly onto streets. Most single-family homes are small, and it is common for neighboring walls to touch each other. Many houses are built to two or three stories to make up for the small size of the foundation. The flat rooftops are commonly used as outdoor living space. As of the early 21st century, most houses had water, electricity, sewerage, and other public services.

Surrounding the capital, many families live in *gourbis*, which are permanent tents set up for those who had once tended flocks of animals but have now settled into a sedentary life. Rural families often live isolated on their farmland and access to sufficient water was increasingly a problem in the late 20th and early 21 century. In southern Tunisia, Berber dwellings are carved out of rocks, and in Matmata homes are built more than 6 m (20 ft) underground in enormous craters that have a central courtyard. Since these homes are built out of the mud and stones that are excavated for the construction, they tend to be cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Scenes from the 1977 movie *Star Wars* were filmed there.

Tunisian cities are connected by railroads and highways, 80% of which are metalled. Tunis has a modern tram system. Railroads reach most urban centers and the mines in the southwest, and provide a link to neighboring Algeria. Tunis, Bizerte, Sfax Gabes and Sousse are all major ports. Tunisia has five international airports, with the largest located in Tunis.

The Tunisian telephone system has been automated since the mid-1980s and international calls can be placed directly from homes. However, as of 2006, there were six times as many cellular phones as land lines. The telecommunications market has been deregulated and Internet access is rising rapidly, though it is subject to government censorship.

Upon the evacuation of the French forces, Tunisia's modern health care system virtually collapsed as the vast majority of doctors, who were of European origin, left the country. Since independence, Tunisia has made great improvements in health care, although much remains to be done. In 2003, the govern-

ment spent over 7% of its budget on health care. A pyramid-like health care system was created in which the government constructed many local clinics and small hospitals that would refer more serious cases to larger regional hospitals, which, in turn, would refer the most serious cases to specialized hospitals in large cities. More than 80% of all health care provided is free. Even for those who must pay, the cost is subsidized. The greatest problem with the health care system is the concentration of facilities in Tunis. About 60% of all the country's doctors practice in the capital, leaving rural areas and other cities understaffed.

More traditional forms of health care also play a role in Tunisian society. The public baths, *hammam*, important for a variety of rituals, including engagements, weddings and pregnancy, is also a locus for medicine and healing. An innovative program of health care, and one that has received international praise, is based on the traditional postpartum visit to the *hammam* by the mother, about 40 days after giving birth. A group of Tunisian doctors adapted this custom so that postpartum women are provided with a comprehensive range of health care services for both themselves and their newborn child, and the program has been adopted nationally.

In parts of the center and south of the country especially, traditional ideas of health persist. In the practice of *Tasfiḥ*, for example, pre-menstrual girls receive seven small cuts to the knee, recite ritual language, and eat raisins soaked in the blood from the knee to encourage chastity as they enter pubescence. Just before marriage, a similar ritual is then carried out to allow conjugal relations.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Before the French occupation, Tunisian family life was very traditional and based heavily on kinship ties. Tunisians lived with their extended families in tightly knit communities. A mother and father would live with their children in one home, and the father's parents would usually also live with them. As the male children married, they would bring their wives to the family as well. If a daughter became divorced or widowed, she too would live with the family. Children were raised by the entire extended family, and the people in a town paid close attention to all children in case they needed anything. Marriages were conducted by negotiation between the families of the bride and the groom.

A combination of the French occupation and the country's attempt to industrialize since independence have gone a long way to break down these traditional family structures. In the cities as well as rural areas, the nuclear family started to predominate. For example, by 2004 the average family consisted of only four members, and more than 11% of family heads were women, a consequence of widowhood, divorce, single parenting, and males emigrating to work abroad.

The role of women has changed most noticeably. Women had traditionally been segregated in public life; their primary responsibilities were raising children and taking care of the home and the husband. Although this remains the popular view even among the Westernized elite, the Tunisian government has passed a number of laws giving women social rights similar to those of men.

Society, however, has found it difficult to keep up with the law. Although educated men began seeking out educated women to marry, in part because they could have careers and

bring home an additional income, the traditional expectations of women as keepers of the home and family have persisted. This has created unrealistic demands on women, who must essentially have two careers—one at home and one in the public sector. These clashes of expectations have contributed to a remarkably high divorce rate for a Muslim country—nearly 50%. Because of increased economic uncertainty, many families have begun to return to more traditional frameworks. Many marriages are still conducted within extended families, and some women have left their public careers to work at home.

## 11 CLOTHING

Two trends in clothing are visible in Tunisia. Many Tunisians dress in Western-style clothing; Western suits for men and dresses for women are common. Traditional dress, however, also remains common, particularly in the villages and among the elderly. Tunisian men often wore a *chehia* on their heads. This is a type of fez the shape and color of which vary depending on the part of Tunisia the wearer is from. The hat is made of brown or red felt and either rounded or flat-topped. The fez was made almost exclusively in Tunisia in the 19th century and exported throughout the Ottoman domains. Traditionally, men wear a *jalabiyya* (a long dress-like garment) and baggy pants.

Traditionally, women wear a *sifsari* (a long outer garment with loose folds and head covering) over Western-style dress. The *sifsari* is a practical garment, keeping women warm in the winter and protecting them from dusty winds in the summer. Country women wear a *mellia* (a large, loose head covering) draped across the head and shoulders. Berber women commonly use *kohl* (black eyeliner). Some tattoo their faces with ochre and blue designs, mainly on the forehead, cheeks, and chin. It is not strange to find women walking side-by-side in Tunis, one dressed in traditional *sifsari* and the other in a skirt and blouse. Since 1956 Bourguiba's secularization of Tunisian society and Ben 'Ali's strict clampdown on Islamism have resulted in the government officially discouraging the wearing of the *hijab* (Muslim veil) by women. As in Turkey, female government employees are banned from wearing hijab and risk losing their jobs by doing so.

## 12 FOOD

The most popular dish in Tunisia, as in all the Maghrib, is *kusksi* (couscous). This consists of semolina wheat sprinkled with oil and water and rolled into tiny grains. The grains are then steamed and ready for use in favorite recipes. Couscous can be mixed with a number of sauces (e.g., tomato sauce), and then combined with a stew of meat and/or vegetables. It is served regularly for lunch and dinner. Lamb cutlets, seafood, and shish kebabs are also common foods.

A very popular Tunisian salad is *chakachouka*, made of tomatoes, onions, peppers, and hard-boiled eggs. *Mechouia* (literally, "the grilled") is a main course that combines grilled tomatoes, peppers, and onions with olive oil, tuna fish, sliced hard-boiled eggs, lemon juice, and capers. Tunisian food is often cooked and/or served with *harissa*, a hot red sauce made from chili peppers, spices, garlic, olive oil, and tomatoes.

Tunisians cook a variety of *tajines*, stews that are cooked in conical *tajine* earthenware dishes. Spinach *tajine* consists of beans, beef, onions, tomato sauce, pepper, spinach, and egg—all combined and baked in an oven. Other varieties of *tajine*

make use of everything from chicken to prunes and honey. Reflecting the influence of the French colonial days, Franco-Tunisienne cuisine is common, especially in tourist restaurants and hotels. Seafood, especially lobster, is a prominent menu item. Tunisians commonly drink strong Turkish coffee and sweet mint tea. Pork and alcohol are both forbidden by Islamic religious code. However, alcohol is widely available and consumed, much of it produced by Tunisian companies.

### **13 EDUCATION**

One of the government's major reforms after independence was to emphasize education for children. The government adopted the French system, creating three levels of education. First, there is a six-year primary-level cycle that all students must attend. The secondary level includes a three-year comprehensive cycle. The third level includes a four-year cycle of specialized academic or technical education similar to the American university system. Students who do not go to the third level may enroll in three-year vocational cycles that teach students various technical trades. Women are considered the primary teachers of children and thus are encouraged to get an education. In agricultural areas, however, women's education takes second place to working in fields and caring for the home. Almost half of urban students are girls and nearly 40% of all university students are women, but the percentages are far lower in rural areas.

All schooling, even at the university level, is free. This includes books, school supplies, uniforms, and meals. University students in Tunisia and abroad receive stipends equal to those of a factory worker in Tunisia. However, in many cases, Tunisian students must supplement this with private funding. Classes are taught in French and Arabic, with an increasing emphasis on the latter. In the 1990s and early 2000s, English language materials were being used more frequently in Tunisian schools.

Literacy rates in Tunisia are evidence of the success of its education program. At independence, the nation had a literacy rate of only 30%. As of 2004, at least three quarters of the population over the age of 15 was considered literate, although rates for women stood at just 65% compared to over 80% for men.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

*Malouf* is a uniquely Tunisian form of music, played on lutes, guitars, violins, and drums. It is thought that this music originated in North Africa and was exported to Spain in the 8th century. There it was influenced by Iberian folk songs and re-exported to Tunisia in the 17th century when Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain. Today's *malouf* music is sad. Players sing along with the highly rhythmic music, and members of the audience often cry as they listen.

Tunisian literature, more in Arabic than French, has thrived. Such writers and poets as Tahar Haddad, Ali Douagi, and Aboul Kacem Chabbi have built international reputations for their work. There are increasing numbers of women writers and poets, such as Amina Sa'id and Hayat ben al-Shaykh. However, many, such as the poet Tahar Bekri, have chosen to remain outside the country owing to the lack of political freedom, thus limiting their Tunisian audience, especially if they write in French.

Tunisian film, a major focus of interest for Bourguiba, has earned a respectable international reputation. In the 1960s and 1970s, Omar Khilfi's films on anticolonial resistance, for example, were very successful and he became one of the most prolific directors in North African cinema. In the late 1970s and 1980s, a new generation of directors appeared, such as Selma Baccar, Ferid Boughedir, and Nourid Bouzid (a former political detainee). This generation focused more on sociopolitical critique, issues of gender, and comedy. The 1990s saw the rise of more women directors, including Moufida Tlatli, with a focus on women, the growing Islamism in Tunisia, and the effects of globalization on Tunisian society.

### **15 WORK**

Slightly more than half of Tunisia's population works in agriculture. Since independence, a major focus has been on expanding industrial production. This has meant a broadening of types of employment for Tunisians. Many work at oil fields, in electricity production, in cement production, and in mineral mining (especially phosphates). Investments in the food industry have produced jobs in flour milling, sugar refining, vegetable canning, and water bottling, among others. One of the major employment sectors is tourism, and students attend tourism schools and institutes of hotel management to cater to the large pool of tourists who visit Tunisia in the summer months.

Traditionally men go out to work while women are expected to work at home, processing foods or spinning wool, for example. Some women work as agricultural wage labor, where they are paid half the men's rate. Many urban women also work, in factories, offices and as professionals, but they are still expected to fulfill the more traditional duties of the housewife. While child labor is relatively uncommon, unemployment levels in Tunisia are relatively high, officially about 14% in 2007, though unofficial rates are probably considerably higher.

Although poverty has declined significantly, from an estimated 40% in 1970 to 4% in 2000, rural poverty is four to five times the urban rate and the rural population remains vulnerable to economic downturn. There is considerable rural-to-urban migration in the search for work, and there are an estimated 400,000 Tunisians working overseas, particularly in the Persian Gulf countries.

### **16 SPORTS**

Tunisia's national sport is soccer ("football"), which is both a spectator sport and played in the streets and open fields. Soccer in Tunisia is highly developed, with most towns fielding their own teams. Teams are organized into a three-tier league system. The Tunisian national team has qualified for the FIFA World Cup four times, and in 2004 it won the African Nations Cup.

Athletics is also becoming a major sport among both men and women, and Tunisian teams often win medals, particularly for long distance events. In the northern mountains, horse riding and hunting wild boar are popular. The development of tourism as a major industry has introduced and popularized such sports as scuba diving, windsurfing, and golf. Camel races are another spectator sport and are the focus of festivals, such as the International Festival of the Sahara, which began in 1910 and is held in Douz each November.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Tunisians hold many festivals throughout the year. Camel races are held at the International Festival of the Sahara, which is held in Douz each November. Parades are held at the festival in Nefta each April. Classical music and theatre performances are held at a festival in Dougga held each summer. In 1997 Dougga was named a UN World Heritage site. A falconry festival is held in el-Hawaria in June. Theater performances are held at the Roman theatre during the Carthage festival in July and August. The Carthage film festival is held biennially in October.

Tunisians seeking recreation often turn to water activities. They socialize while bathing in the *hammam* (public bathhouse), and they flock to the beaches that line the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Tunisians are also increasingly subscribing to satellite television and the Internet. There is a well-developed, though government-censored, press, reflecting the high rates of literacy.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Craftsmanship is an ancient tradition in Tunisia. Craftsmen make goods out of olive wood, copper, textiles, leather, wrought iron, glass, and ceramics. Pottery is made for everyday use, and molded pots are made in rural areas. Blankets, rugs, and grass mats are woven in rural areas. Hand-woven rugs and carpets are particularly popular, especially with tourists. Knotted carpets follow traditional decorative designs; Berber rugs (*mergoums*) are brightly colored and have geometric designs. Jewelry is also handmade. A very popular design is the shape of a hand, known as the *khomsa*, or the “hand of Fatima.” This is made of either gold or silver and found on earrings and pendants.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The greatest problems facing Tunisia today stem from continued economic stagnation and a lack of political freedom. The growing Tunisian middle class (80% of the population) is pushing for greater participation in society, for greater political freedom and pluralism, and for an expanded and more independent civil society, currently dominated by huge government funded organizations. Although Tunisia is a highly secular society and the government has banned Islamist groups, the failure of the government to positively address economic and political complaints has contributed to the growth of a religious conservatism among both urban and rural dwellers. Monitoring and controlling this has led to an expansion of the security services and a deteriorating human rights record, and in the winter of 2006–2007, security forces engaged in armed clashes with Islamist terror cells on the outskirts of Tunis.

While college studies have been emphasized as part of the nation’s education drive, this has resulted in an excess of graduates who cannot find appropriate jobs, particularly in nonscientific fields such as languages and social sciences. Unemployment and social problems related to it are expected to increase, as many educated Tunisians are unable to find suitable work. The labor market was already tight in the 1990s; it will be hard-pressed to meet the demands of the next two decades. In the past, many Tunisians emigrated to France and Italy in search of work. However, the immigration policies of European countries, in response to their own economic and

political conditions, have become stricter. Laws to further limit immigration to European nations were expected to be passed, which will certainly increase social pressures in Tunisia.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues in Tunisia are dominated by the Code of Personal Status (CPS) or *majalla* of 1956, a key part of Bourguiba’s program of secularization and modernization. The CPS, revolutionary for its time, regulated marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance and profoundly changed family law and the legal status of women by significantly expanding their rights and responsibilities. For example, polygamy and forced marriage were criminalized, a minimum age for marriage for women was established, and a man’s right to divorce through simple repudiation was abolished. The result of this was that women were generally considered by law to be equal to men in terms of inheritance, ownership of property, custody of children, and divorce.

Since its passage, the CPS has been almost updated frequently, to increase separated and divorced women’s control over their minor children, establish a fund to support divorced women and their dependent families, and to allow women to marry non-Muslims, for example. The CPS therefore lies at the core of the Arab world’s most gender-progressive society.

Tunisian society is characterized by high divorce rates, around 50%, and female-headed households are common. Contraception is widely available and socially accepted. Abortion for the first trimester is fully legal (the only Arab country where this is the case). In addition, there are a number of increasingly powerful women’s political, economic, and social organizations. Tunisia’s statistics for school and higher education enrollment, life expectancy, and reproductive health are all at the high end for both Africa and the Middle East. There are significant numbers of women in politics, business, and the professions: almost half of all doctors and secondary school teachers, a third of lawyers and journalists, and a quarter of all judges are women.

In practice, women in Tunisia still face discrimination on individual and collective levels. Many working women are expected to fulfill their duties as housewives and recent research has found that sexual harassment remains ubiquitous. On the other hand, the incidence of rural teenage girls being employed as domestics or for agricultural labor is declining, mainly due to effective law enforcement.

Homosexuality is illegal in Tunisia and there is no formal lobbying focus for gay or transgender rights.

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—revised by J. Henry

## TUTSI

**PRONUNCIATION:** TOOT-see

**LOCATION:** Rwanda, Burundi, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire)

**POPULATION:** Approximately 3–4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, French, English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (with aspects of traditional belief)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Burundians; Rwandans

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Tutsi refers to the people who live in the densely populated African countries of Rwanda, Burundi, and in border areas of neighboring countries. In Uganda Tutsis are commonly known as *Bafumbira*; in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as *Banyamulenge*. The Tutsi share many cultural traditions with the Twa and the Hutu. In fact, Tutsi, Twa, and Hutu are not only culturally similar; they also share the same language and culture.

During the period of colonial rule in Rwanda and Burundi, Tutsi and Hutu labels became associated with rigid stereotypes, although it is quite difficult to say exactly what the labels mean today. Both Tutsi and Hutu have been victims of violence that can be accurately described as genocide.

The Tutsi are said to be people of Nilotic (region of the Nile River) origin who were traditionally cattle-herding pastoralists, living the life of herders. They are said to differ physically from the Bantu farmers and Twa hunters who inhabited the region before the Tutsi arrived.

The Tutsi label is also used to refer to members of a high-ranking social category, similar to a caste. This is because in Rwanda and Burundi Tutsi came to form the majority of an aristocratic elite, even though they were a minority of the population in both countries. To further complicate things, some believe that the Tutsi and Hutu were not always ethnically different, but that they became two separate groups as a reflection of their different ways of life. Whatever their origins, people known as Tutsi came to rule others called Hutu. Lowest in this status system were the Twa, who were descended from pygmy people.

There are important divisions within the Tutsi category that complicate this picture even more. For example, in Burundi the highest status Tutsi were the *ganwa* (princes) and the people of the *Tutsi-Banyaruguru* (royal family). Lower status Tutsi, the *Tutsi-Hima*, were looked down upon by the royals.

With such complexities, it has not been difficult to distort what is known of the past for crass political purposes. For example, some have overemphasized ethnic divisions in order to foster ethnic and racial hatred. On the other hand, some have downplayed Tutsi-Hutu distinctions in order to maintain that that there has been no systematic domination of one group over another. In reality, the true history of the Tutsi-Hutu divide is incompletely understood, although it certainly has had much to do with kingship, the changes brought by colonialism, and contemporary struggles for power.

Through many periods of history, the rule of the *mwamis* (Tutsi kings) was autocratic, but it was not always unpopular. Historically, the *mwami* was strongest in central Rwanda. In Burundi the Tutsi king relied more on Hutu support. Hutu

leaders were able to rise to positions of power and influence within the court.

Social relations in Rwanda and Burundi were modified by European rule—Germans from the 1890s until World War I and Belgians from World War I until 1962. During most of this period, the Tutsi were treated with favor by the Europeans, but the Hutu were encouraged to attempt to end Tutsi domination by the Belgians toward the end of their rule.

The first major social upheaval began in Rwanda in the wake of a Hutu-led campaign for independence from Belgian rule in 1959. Hutu leaders seized power and abolished the monarchy, and some Tutsi fled to neighboring countries. During this period, and again in 1962 and 1963, thousands of Tutsi civilians were killed.

In Burundi, there was a more peaceful transition to independence in 1962. Initially, the king served as an intermediary between Tutsi and Hutu sides, but the monarchy was abolished by Tutsi leaders following a failed Hutu coup attempt in 1965. Law and order broke down altogether after Hutu forces invaded the country from Tanzania in 1972. This was followed by another coup that brought the Tutsi-Hima into power. After repulsing the Hutu invasion, they implemented widespread repression. All those identified as educated Hutu, even down to the level of elementary school students, were systematically hunted down. More than 100,000 people were killed in a campaign of what has been called “selective genocide.”

The Tutsi-Hutu divisions in Rwanda and Burundi thus became more rigid and violent as a result of colonial rule and the independence process. The end result of the colonial period was that opposite sides controlled each country. In Rwanda, the Hutu became associated with the power of the state. In Burundi, the state came to be controlled by a branch of the Tutsi. Efforts to end Tutsi domination in Burundi were crushed in 1988; five years later, in 1993, there was another period of genocidal violence. This was followed by a long period of conflict between the Tutsi dominated army and Hutu rebels that did not abate until a peace deal was reached in 2003. (Even then the conflict has not entirely been settled.) In Rwanda, Hutu domination ended only after the army of the RPF (Rwandan People’s Front) succeeded in overthrowing the government in the wake of the genocide of 1994. Since then, thousands of Tutsi refugees have returned to the country.

Former RPF commander Paul Kagame has been the dominant leader in Rwanda since 1994. In 2003 he won election as president. In Burundi, a former Hutu rebel leader and college professor, Pierre Nkurunziza, was elected president in 2005.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Rwanda and Burundi are mountainous countries in east-central Africa. Burundi shares a northern border with Rwanda. Rwanda’s northern border is with Uganda. Both countries are bounded by the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) to the west and Tanzania to the east, but much of western Burundi is bounded by Lake Tanganyika. The combined total area of Rwanda and Burundi together is approximately 20,900 sq mi (54,100 sq km). This is roughly comparable to the combined size of Maryland and New Jersey.

Tutsi also live in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the Mulenge region of the South Kivu province where they have lived for many generations. However, because of Congo’s recent civil war, many have had to flee as



refugees from the Mulenge region. Congolese Tutsi are commonly referred to as *Banyamulenge*.

Population densities in the region are among the highest in Africa. In 1994, there were an estimated 208 people per sq km (220 per sq mi) in Burundi. In 1993, there were an estimated 280 people per sq km in Rwanda. Today these figures are even higher. Despite the years of genocide and poor health care, the combined population of all groups in Rwanda and Burundi was approximately 19 million in 2008. Of these, more than one half are young adults and children.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa of Rwanda and Burundi all speak a Central Bantu language. This language is called Kinyarwanda in Rwanda, and Kirundi in Burundi; the two are dialects rather than distinct languages. Banyamulenge may be most at home speaking Congolese languages as well as French and the East African trade language, Swahili.

As with Bantu languages in general, Kinyarwanda/Kirundi is characterized by a system of noun classes identified by prefixes. These prefixes differentiate singular from plural, and group nouns into like categories. Thus, a word such as *Banyamulenge* (“Ba-nya-mulenge”) can be broken down into parts. The prefixes “banya” refer to people; Mulenge is the name of a region. Altogether, the word means “people of Mulenge.” Bantu prefixes are often omitted in English. For example, *Kinyarwanda* may be referred to as Rwanda in English, or *Kirundi* as Rundi. Many Tutsi from the region also speak Swahili.

As a result of its colonial history, Rwandese and Burundians have long received their formal schooling in French. Another implication of this is that many people in the two countries have French first names. However, since the change in government in Rwanda in 1994, English has become increasingly important there.

African personal names have meanings that reflect important cultural values. They may be derived from events, borrowed from praise poetry, or reflect attitudes about religion, kingship, or cattle. For example, the name *Ndagijimana* means “God is my herder.” *Hakizumwami* is a name that means “only the king can save.” *Muvunanyambo* means “the defender of noble cows.” Greetings may also reflect the traditional value placed on cattle. For example, a common greeting is “amasho,” literally meaning “may you be rich in cattle.”

Traditionally, the ability to express oneself well orally was highly valued. Aristocrats were expected to maintain a dignified style in speaking, and demonstrated their high status by calculated use of silence. Cattle terms were used to refer to the best and most precious aspects of social life. For example, the king of Rwanda was referred to as “the bull of the herd.”

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Verbal arts include praise poetry, proverbs, folktales, riddles, and myths. Traditionally, these were vibrant parts of everyday life. Tutsi elite typically knew the names of their ancestors to at least six generations, and many believed they were descendants of a mythical founding king named Gihanga.

Among the Tutsi, the most elaborate praises were reserved for the king, but cattle were named individuals worthy of praise and poetry as well. Herders commonly entertained themselves by singing the praises of their cattle during their daily rounds to the pastures.

One popular folktale tells the story of a greedy man named Sebgugugu. Sebgugugu is a poor man who is helped by God. God provides food for him and his family in a number of miraculous ways, but each time the greedy Sebgugugu wants more. Through his greed, Sebgugugu finally loses everything.

#### 5 RELIGION

Most people in modern-day Rwanda and Burundi are Christians, particularly Catholics. In the wake of the 1994 genocide, many Tutsi have converted to Islam. In traditional thought, the Creator is somewhat remote, although his power is manifest in the king. The word for creator, *Imaana*, means both God and “God’s power to ensure prosperity and fertility.” The king had special access to this power, and he demonstrated this to the people through his sacred fire, the royal drums, and the royal agricultural rites. For this reason, he was thought to be responsible for the nation’s fate. Ancestral spirits, called *abazima*, also act as intermediaries between God and the human world. However, the *abazima* may also hold grudges against the living and bring misfortune to those who do not respect them. To protect against the *abazima*, offerings are made, and diviners are consulted to interpret their wishes. Special ceremonies are held to pay respect to the most powerful of the *abazima*.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

National holidays include Independence Days, May Day, New Year’s Day, and the major Christian holidays. Rwanda has several new holidays. These include February 1 (National Heroes

Day); April 7 (Genocide Memorial Day); July 4 (National Liberation Day); and 1st of October (Patriotism Day). Other traditional holidays, such as the annual holidays connected with the *mwami*, are no longer observed. The elaborate royal rituals associated with these holidays included specially trained dancers and the use of giant sacred drums. Some of these practices have been preserved in the form of professional entertainment.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage for Tutsi and Hutu are very similar. The first ritual of life passage, the naming ceremony, takes place seven days after a child’s birth.

Marriage is legitimated by the transfer of *bridewealth*, a kind of compensation for the loss of the woman’s labor. Bridewealth is paid by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. For most Tutsi, bridewealth consisted traditionally of a cow and other gifts. In central Rwanda, however, the prestige of the Tutsi elite was such that they were often exempt from bridewealth payment. The traditional marriage ceremony itself is complex, and the details vary from region to region. These customs may or may not be practiced today by people most influenced by European culture. Except for marriage, there is no formal initiation process to celebrate the change from adolescence to adulthood.

Death is marked by prayers, speeches, purification rituals, and restrictions on many everyday activities. Close family members are expected to refrain from sexual relations and to avoid physical exertion during the period of mourning, at the end of which the family hosts a ritual feast.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social life in traditional Rwanda and Burundi was dictated by status distinctions. Signs of social status are indicated by posture, body language, and style of speech. The ideal for a person of elite status is to act with dignity, emotional restraint, and decorum. This ideal was called *kwitonda*.

There are separate greetings for morning, afternoon, and evening. In the early decades of the twentieth century, people of the same age greeted each other in an elaborate ritual that included sung greetings, stylized embraces, and formalized gestures. Subordinates showed deference to their social superiors by kneeling in their presence.

A system of cattle exchange helped to keep harmony among the factions of society. In this system wealthy elites (often Tutsi) lent cattle to herdsman (often Hutu) in exchange for their labor, loyalty, and political support. This was called *buhake* in Rwanda and *bugabire* in Burundi.

Traditionally, romantic relationships between young men and women were expected to occur within the caste group, and marriages were usually arranged. In the late twentieth century, socializing in group activities was more common than individual dating, although Western-style dating and socializing at nightclubs is practiced by some in urban areas.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The average life expectancy in Rwanda and Burundi is very low by world standards. However, in the past Rwanda and Burundi have been healthy and prosperous places, benefitting from the high elevation that offered protection from malarial mosquitoes. More recently, there are not only the problems of extreme political violence but also of inadequate nutrition, health care,

and diseases such as bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. It is also estimated that about 5% of adults are suffering from AIDS. Infant mortality is also very high.

Despite a high population density, the majority of the population remains rural. Houses were traditionally bee-hived shaped huts of wood, reeds, and straw, surrounded by a high hedge that served as a fence. The hut interiors of wealthy Tutsi were often elaborately decorated with screens that functioned as room dividers. Modern Tutsi are using the money they make from the sale of agricultural products to buy Western-style housing material to build rectangular houses, with corrugated iron or tile roofing.

For rural people, the chief source of income comes through the sale of agricultural products such as coffee and tea.

Transportation infrastructure in the region is not well developed. Roads are often unpaved, and there is no railway. In Rwanda, an aggressive plan of economic development has been promoted by President Kagame.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The basic unit of society is the household. These were not organized in villages but remained distinct as separate homesteads built on hills spread across the landscape. The concept of house, or *inzu*, is so important that it refers not only to a physical home but also to one's family and ancestral line.

Tutsi and Hutu families are organized patrilineally (through the fathers) into lineages and clans. Polygyny (a man having more than one wife) was permitted but the goal was to have a large family. Although love matches were not unknown, and elopements occurred, marriage in Rwanda and Burundi was traditionally about maintaining power and relationships between families. In modern times, however, marriage is more often a matter of personal choice.

Legitimate marriages between Tutsi and Hutu did occur, but they were rare. Twa men and women were looked down upon by both Hutu and Tutsi and were not generally considered acceptable mates. People from mixed Tutsi-Hutu families were also targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Tutsi men and women wore gowns and robes imported from the African coast before the arrival of the Europeans. A common form of dress was a wrap around skirt and top piece tied at the shoulder, not unlike a Roman toga. A woman's ceremonial dress included a plain white robe, with perhaps a few geometric designs, and a number of white headbands. On most occasions today, however, Western-style clothing is worn. Women wear dresses, headscarves, and the printed clothes that are popular throughout East Africa. Men wear pants and shirts.

In the past, Tutsi women wore numerous copper bracelets and anklets. These were often so heavy that the elite women were unable to do much work. In fact, this very inability to do agricultural labor helped distinguish them from the ordinary women who had to work in the fields.

### **12 FOOD**

Milk, butter, and meat are the most highly valued foods traditionally. Because of the social and religious value of cattle, however, people do not often butcher a cow without some ritual justification. While goat meat and goat milk may be consumed as well, these foods were taboo. The ideal for the elite

Tutsi was a pure diet of milk products, supplemented by beer made from fermented plantains or sorghum grain. Meal times are flexible, often revolving around work obligations.

Today the most common foods are beans, corn, cassava, peas, plantains, and sweet potatoes. Tropical fruits are also popular.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Literacy rates have been at times lower than 50% in Rwanda and Burundi in the vernacular (native language), and lower in French, but seem to be improving. Rwanda currently reports a literacy rate of about 70%. In Burundi, literate Hutu were persecuted in 1972, but education began to be encouraged again in the 1980s. There are teacher-training schools and at least one university in both countries.

In Rwanda, educational structures were disrupted by the 1994 political violence. Prior to 1994, the Rwandese school system was moving toward an emphasis on education in French but there is now a new emphasis on English, with a goal of trilingual education. The government also has the goal of providing free primary and secondary school education for all.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The kings of Rwanda and Burundi maintained elaborate dance and drum ensembles that were associated with royal power. On ritual occasions in Burundi two dozen tall, footed drums were arranged in a semicircle around a central drum. The musicians moved in a circle around the drums, each taking a turn beating the central drum. This style of drumming has survived the demise of the kingship. Since the 1960s the Royal Drummers of Burundi have toured the world giving performances. They have also recorded albums and collaborated with Western musicians.

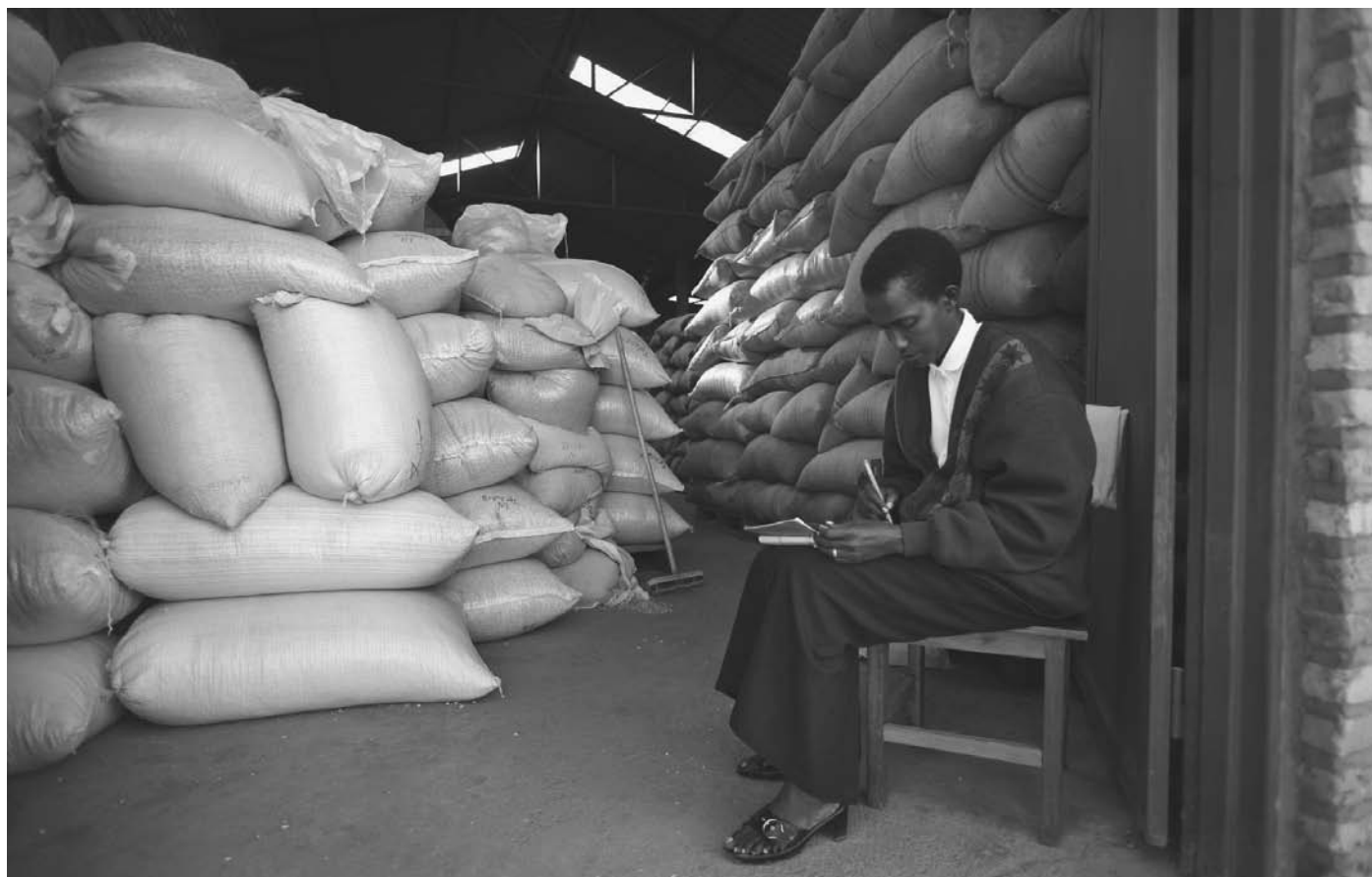
In Rwanda some young men, children of nobility, were singled out for special training. Known as *intore*, these students received the best education in rhetoric and warfare and served as the king's elite dance troupe. Their dances involved leaping and rhythmic stomping of the feet. Today they perform for tourists at the national museum.

Music, dancing, and drumming are all important in rural life. People compose many kinds of popular songs—hunting songs, lullabies, and *ibicuba* (songs praising cattle). In some areas, there were traveling minstrels who sang the news, accompanying themselves with a seven-string zither. A special dance was also part of the rituals of courtship. These days people also enjoy modern entertainment by way of television, movies, and recorded music. Some of today's musicians have developed new forms of music that combine elements of traditional and modern elements.

Many of the details of the cultural heritage of Rwanda were described in French by the renowned Rwandan scholar-priest Alexis Kagame. One example of his work is *La poésie dynastique au Rwanda* (The dynastic poetry of Rwanda), which was published in 1951. More recently, a number of individual Tutsi survivors of the genocide have published autobiographies and Rwandans who have gained experience working on such movies as *Hotel Rwanda* have begun to produce their own films.

### **15 WORK**

People of Tutsi background who cultivated the soil were often considered poor and could lose their status as nobles. In this



*Jeanette Nyirabaganwa, a Tutsi, in a coffee warehouse that she runs for the Maraba Coffee cooperative in Butare, Rwanda. Most of her family was murdered in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, where about 1 million Tutsis were killed by Hutus. Nyirabaganwa now employs many of those suspected of the killings on her coffee and sorghum plantation.*  
 (Melanie Stetson Freeman/The Christian Science Monitor/Getty Images)

way some Tutsi “became” Hutu. On the other hand, an especially high status was reserved for the *abashumba* pastoralists. These were a special class of herders whose job it was to take care of the king’s prize cattle (*inyambo*).

Today Tutsi as well as Hutu are farmers. In addition to growing food crops, they also produce cash crops, especially coffee and tea.

## 16 SPORTS

The main spectator sport in Burundi is soccer. Many people also enjoy playing the game informally.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are movie theaters that show contemporary European and American films in the capital cities. People also enjoy television, video, and a variety of modern musical forms. Contemporary musicians from Tutsi backgrounds who have developed international reputations include Jean-Paul Samputu and Cornelius Nyungura, popularly known as “Corneille” (Crow).

A popular game for young people and adults is *igisoro*, played with a wooden board that has rows of hollowed-out places for holding beads or stones that are used as counters. The object of the game is to line up one’s pieces in rows in such a way as to capture as many counters as possible. This is very

similar to the game is known as mancala played in other parts of Africa.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Both Rwanda and Burundi have traditions of basketwork, pottery, woodwork, metal work, and jewelry making. Items carved from wood included drums, quivers, shields, and stools, but wood carving was not highly developed. Metal objects included copper bracelets and rings, and iron spear points. Traditionally, Tutsi women were noted for their expertise in weaving, especially for their intricately woven screens with geometric designs used in the houses of the wealthy as room dividers and decorations. Recently, handicrafts are being produced for the international market. Most notable among them are the “peace baskets” woven by Rwandan women and marketed by a major American department store.

A national ballet was established to promote folk dance traditions in Rwanda during the rule of Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994). At its height it had more than 200 members. However, its reputation was tarnished when its founding director was implicated in the genocide.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Sporadically since the early 1960s, the peoples of Rwanda and Burundi have experienced some of the worst violence in the history of Africa. In Burundi, massive genocide was carried out against Hutu by Tutsi in 1972 and in 1993. Perhaps 100,000 died in the first case, and at least that many died in the latter case. In Rwanda, the roles of killer and victims have been reversed. In 1962, Hutu people massacred thousands of people they defined as Tutsi. Thirty-two years later, Hutu leaders directed the killing of an estimated 800,000 people, most of them Tutsi. Labeling this violence simply as Hutu versus Tutsi is an oversimplification, however. In practice the killings were not merely ethnic but also political. For example, in some regions, there was also major Hutu-on-Hutu violence that appears to have been related to local disputes. In addition, the United Nations and the major world powers have not acted effectively to stop the genocides.

The effects of the 1994 Rwandan genocide spilled over into neighboring Congo after defeated Hutu soldiers fled there, while an influx of civilian refugees into Burundi contributed to that country's pre-existing instability. In 1996 a military conflict began in the DRC between *Banyamulenge* (ethnic Tutsi) and the remnants of the Hutu military who had fled to the refugee camps there in the wake of their defeat in Rwanda.

After the Hutu soldiers were routed, most the Hutu civilian refugee population was able to return to Rwanda. Nonetheless, the incursion of armed Rwandans into the DRC helped spark a violent civil war that ultimately led to the death of several million Congolese.

In Rwanda, the government has made some dramatic attempts at Hutu-Tutsi reconciliation. Most prominent among these was implementation of the *gacaca court* system under which low level actors in the 1994 genocide were offered the opportunity for amnesty. In this system local communities conducted public proceedings and the mass of perpetrators who acted under the auspices of higher authorities were given the opportunity to confess. Critics complain, however, that attempts at political reconciliation are hampered by practices in government that discourage open dissent.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditionally women were socialized to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. They were expected to be subordinate to their husbands and did not have full rights of property and inheritance. Historically, a major exception to this occurred in central Rwanda under the administration of Mwami Rwabugiri (1865–1895). During this time some Tutsi women were able to acquire land. Some even could go to war or become war chiefs.

More recently, moves toward gender equality have been promoted. Both Burundi and Rwanda now require that a significant percentage of its elected representatives be women. In Rwanda, the government has enacted legislation to support women's economic rights. While once women were discouraged by many from obtaining education, today dropout rates for females have fallen and their rate of college attendance has increased dramatically. The gap between males and females in literacy rates appears also to be narrowing. Nearly 50% of the parliament is composed of women representatives; and half of national judges are women. For such accomplishments, President Kagame received the "African Gender Award" from the

Pan-African Center for Gender, Peace, and Development in 2007.

Violence against women remains a problem in the area. In the lead up to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, propaganda was particularly directed against Tutsi women, and they were frequently raped before being killed. As a consequence of the ongoing civil conflict in Burundi, women continue to be subjected to high rates of violence there.

Homosexuality is rarely openly acknowledged by Tutsi or Hutu. This is also something that many people find sinful according to the doctrines of the Catholic church. Homosexual acts are illegal in Burundi. In 2007, the government of Rwanda began considering a provision to the penal code that that would also penalize homosexual behavior.

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—by R. Shanafelt

## TWA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** BATWA, MBUTI (BAMBUTI), BAKA, AKA

**LOCATION:** Congo-Brazzaville (Republic of the Congo), Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia

**POPULATION:** About 100,000

**LANGUAGES:** Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Rukiga, Balese, Bira, Mangbetu

**RELIGION:** Indigenous (traditional) religions (90%), Christianity (10%)

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Twa people of the Great Lakes Region in Africa are a pygmy minority strewn across several countries, including Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda. It should be noted at the outset that the term "pygmy" is considered derogatory by many scholars as it perpetuates the discrimination of this group of people due to their characteristic small stature. The total population of the Twa and other similar groups is estimated to be anywhere from 82,000 to 126,000 people. The Twa, also known as the Batwa, are one of many ethnic groups, such as the BaKola, Aka, BaBongo, BaMbuti, Mbuti (Bambuti), Baka, and Aka. They are often referred to as the forest people, the original inhabitants of this region. They are traditionally a hunter and gatherer group, surviving on what the rainforests provide. However, as forests continue to dwindle due to deforestation, their livelihoods and way of life have become ever precarious, and many are undergoing a lifestyle change. They are no longer able to hunt or gather from the bounty of the tropical rainforest, but are reduced to a precarious lifestyle of subsistence agriculture. Those still found deep in the tropical rainforest continue to practice their culture and lifestyle as they have done for thousands of years.

The arrival of the Bantu peoples in the region brought the subjugation of the Twa. The Bantu people began arriving in the area from their original homeland (eastern Nigeria and Cameroon) between the 12th to the 15th century. Two such groups in present day Rwanda and Burundi were the Tutsi, a Bantu-speaking Nilotic people, and the Hutu, a Bantu group. The Tutsi soon became the ruling group that dominated both the Hutu and the Twa. The Tutsi created a highly centralized kingdom, presided over by Tutsi kings who came from one ruling clan. In pre-colonial times, the relationship between the ordinary Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa was one of mutual benefit through the exchange of labor and the goods they traded. However, during the colonial era, the Tutsi were more favored by the colonizing powers, particularly the Belgians. Coupled with the hierarchical nature of Rwandan traditional society with the Tutsi at the top, the colonial policies laid the foundation for present day upheavals and genocide in this region.

It is estimated that during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, over 30% of the Twa lost their lives. Today, the Twa play a marginal role in Rwandan and Burundian politics and are often ignored in discussions about the conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis. Many have been pushed away from the remaining patches of tropical rainforest and forcibly settled in areas where they have to abandon their way of hunter/gatherer life. They are current-

ly undergoing untold hardship as they try to adopt new ways of making a living, such as agriculture and raising livestock. Massive deforestation of their habitats, because of agriculture, logging and other development by their Bantu and Tutsi counterparts, has deprived the Twa of the natural resources essential for the cultural survival of this endangered and marginalized group.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The homeland of the Twa and associated groups is generally the tropical rainforest of central Africa around the Great Lakes of Eastern Africa. The Twa are scattered in a number of countries in this region, which include Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The rainforest homeland of the Twa people is tropical and experiences large amounts of rainfall, ranging from 127 to 203 cm (50 to 80 in). The forest, which experiences a short dry season for about a month or two, is a moist and humid region with many rivers and lakes. Not all Twa are restricted to the tropical rainforest, some are found in the savannah environments of southern Africa where they might have migrated out of the rainforest alongside the great migration of the Bantu people.

Around the Great Lakes region of eastern and central Africa the Twa people resided in high altitude mountain forests around Lakes Kivu, Albert, and Tanganyika. The tropical rainforest offers an excellent habitat for the semi nomadic and hunter-gatherer way of finding food that the Twa have survived on for generations. However, because of massive deforestation, as a result of logging and agriculture, their traditional homeland is under siege and many find themselves landless, poor, deprived of their traditional hunting and gathering grounds, and despised by other groups in the region because of their small stature.

## 3 LANGUAGE

There is no such thing as a language for the Twa people. The Twa speak several different languages, depending on the country or region in which they find themselves. For example, in Rwanda they speak Kinyarwanda, in Burundi they speak Kirundi, and in Uganda they speak Rukiga. This is not to say that they never had a language of their own. Some still speak their original languages, such as Balese, Bira, and Mangbetu among the Bambuti in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For some of them, interaction with other groups has resulted in their languages being diluted and/or disappearing altogether. Thus, interaction with the new groups that moved into their homeland has resulted in the dilution and, in many cases, the death of their languages and the modification of their rituals. Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Rukiga are part of the Bantu group or the Niger-Congo group of languages. Lukiga/Rukiga has a noun class system in which prefixes on nouns mark membership of one of the noun genders. Examples here include the following: *mu* - person (singular), e.g. *mukiga* = inhabitant of Bakiga land; *bu* - land, e.g. *Bukiga* = land of the Bakiga; *lu/ru* - language, e.g. *Lukiga/Rukiga* = language of the Bakiga; *ba* - people, e.g. Bakiga = The Bakiga people; *ki* - customs or traditions, e.g. *kikiga*, denotes religious tradition common to the Bakiga people. This is also true of languages such as Kinyarwanda and Kirundi.



## 4 FOLKLORE

The Twa have a well-developed and sophisticated folklore with legends, stories, and poetry. Their folklore has important lessons about their forest environments, movements, and their history and origin. For example, one of the legends narrates the origins of the Mbuti group of the Twa. It notes that Mutwa was a native of African tropical rainforests. He occupied the current Itwari and Bwindi forests in the Democratic Republic of Congo and western Uganda respectively. In the DRC he was known locally as Mumbuti (singular) and Bambuti (plural), while in Uganda he was Mutwa (singular) and Batwa (plural). He was a nomadic hunter and gatherer. In most cases, Mutwa lived in solitude. Therefore, when he died no one else was there to witness the death or burial. The legend goes on to narrate burial customs and taboos, the use of spears for hunting, and the glorious life in the forest. In short, this legend refers to the Twa as singular, denoting their lifestyle of roaming in small bands as individuals and their way of hunting and gathering what the environment provides, i.e. honey, animals, fruits, and other edible plants from time immemorial.

Another famous folklore legend narrated by Turnbull (1961) concerns the singing of the "Bird" with the "Most Beautiful Song." Turnbull writes:

"This bird was found by a young boy who heard such a Beautiful Song that he had to go and see who was singing. When he found the Bird he brought it back to the camp to feed it. His father was annoyed at having to give food to the Bird, but the son pleaded and the Bird was



fed. The next day the Bird sang again; it sang the Most Beautiful Song in the Forest, and again the boy went to it and brought it back to feed it. This time the father was even more angered, but once again he gave in and fed the Bird. The third day (most Pygmy stories repeat themselves at least three times) the same thing happened. But this time the father took the Bird from his son and told his son to go away. When his son had left, the father killed the Bird, the Bird with the Most Beautiful Song in the Forest, and with the Bird he killed the Song, and with the Song he killed himself and he dropped dead, completely dead, dead for ever.”

This legend tells of the importance of singing among the Twa in their forest homeland. Indeed, during the early hours of the night, the Twa sit by the fire outside their camp in their small bands and tell riddles and legends. Some sing, mimicking the various beautiful animal sounds in the forest. Central to the folklore of the Twa people are the many animals found in their environment. Many of these animals take on characteristics of men, for example, the ever-wise turtle and the cunning trickster hare. Thus, animals are used to tell entertaining stories designed to teach about human behavior and relationships.

## 5 RELIGION

Only a small portion (about 10%) of the Twa people has been converted to Christianity. The majority continue to adhere to indigenous beliefs in many gods. The most important deity of the Twa people is the god of the hunt, Khonvoum. He wields a bow made from two snakes that together appear to humans as a rainbow. His second in command is the god of thunder, through which he contacts mortal man. The Twa believe that man was forged from clay by Khonvoum, who forged different races and peoples from different types of clay, e.g. black people from black clay, white people from white clay, and the Twa from red clay. Khonvoum was also generous to the Twa by providing them with a forest rich of resources and animals for them to hunt. There are, of course other gods, such as Tore who is the god of the forest, as well as the god associated with death, as he decreed it on humans after his mother had died. Many of these gods appear as animals, such as the elephant, the chameleon, the leopard, and reptiles. This is keeping with the fact that the life of the Twa is part and parcel of the forest, their great provider, something to keep in awe, a sacred place bequeathed to them by their benevolent pantheon of gods.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

For the Twa people, there are very few holidays and, when celebrated, they are often impromptu. They celebrate a few traditional holiday events, such as the rite of passage for young boys, the end of Nkumbi (the honey feast dance), and other ceremonial activities. These traditional festivities are in keeping with their lifestyle of hunting and gathering. However, the few Twa that have been settled and live sedentary lives may be involved in national holidays, such as Independence Day or Christmas for Christians.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In traditional Twa society, there were and still are rites of passage for boys and girls. The girls' initiation is called the *elima*. The *elima* initiation ceremony signifies the coming of age of

girls. This is done during the first menstruation of the girl. She is immediately secluded into a hut with her friends who have also celebrated the coming of maturity. The girls are taught the duties of motherhood by an older and wiser woman in the community. There is much singing and dancing by both older women and girls. The *elima* is considered a great joyous occasion celebrated over days or weeks.

Boys undergo the *nkumbi* initiation ceremony. The *nkumbi* is the village circumcision school, which is done in partnership with the Bantu villages near the forests. The Twa and the Bantu have long interacted with each other, trading goods and resources from the forest. It was during these interactions that the Twa adopted some of the customs of the village Bantu and vice versa. One such custom is the *nkumbi* ceremony that is celebrated jointly. It happens after every four years. Boys from both the Bantu village and the nomadic Twas are secluded and undergo circumcision and initiation into manhood together. However, the relationship is still unequal, with the village boys in a more dominant position than the Twa, who are considered to be in a subservient position of their more powerful Bantu partners. Nevertheless, the joint initiation and circumcision ceremony is evidence of the symbiotic relationship between these two groups, in that one group provides material goods the other group does not have. In this way the two groups take care of each other. However, some initiation rituals are kept a total secret among the Twa. For example, the rite of initiation and the Spirit of the Forest is the preserve of Twa men only, who are revered as the holders of initiation knowledge. They are never supposed to talk about or reveal the secrets of this initiation to anyone, including their own women.

Another important ritual occurs when an important person in the Twa society dies. This is referred to as the *molimo* ritual that is celebrated with much noise. The Twa believe that they are the children of the forest and the forest is their caretaker and protector. They believe that when one dies, the forest must have gone to sleep and needs to be woken up, hence the noisy *molimo* celebration. The *molimo* is actually a trumpet made of wood or bamboo that is played by the men during the death ritual. When not in use, it is hidden away in the forest. The ritual is conducted at night around the campfire, and only men are allowed to be present. The *molimo* is also said to be a dangerous animal from the forest, not to be seen by women and children, who are hurriedly sent off into the huts. The men surround the *molimo* as it bellows out its forest noises and songs. There is much dancing and feasting by the men as they awaken the forest to come and protect them from death and other calamities.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Twa have what might be considered an egalitarian society in which no one has authority over another. It has been suggested that egalitarianism was one of several central characteristics of nomadic hunting and gathering societies, since mobility precluded the accumulation of material possessions for any one single member in the band. Furthermore, clear evidence exists concerning the sexual division of labor among Twa. Females are primarily assigned the food-gathering chore as they have developed a keen sense for and the greatest familiarity with nutritive plants, such as wild fruits and vegetables. Hunting activities are the realm of men. The Twa do not see themselves as living a solitary or poor life, constantly at the

mercy of the environment. They consider themselves to be living in a forest paradise on this earth.

Women continue to play a major role in community decision-making. Women are free to access forest resources anytime they wish. The Twa people have great respect for each other. Children learn this aspect of life early on, because anyone in a band can and is allowed to discipline any child. Children are also free to wander around into other peoples huts at will and are generally cared for by anyone in the band. Night is a time for socializing around a campfire. People come together to tell stories, legends, and riddles and sometimes to settle disputes between members of the camp.

The Twa are also a gregarious people that like to live in small groups or bands. However, from time to time, individuals or families will travel to visit other camps in the forest, where they might stay for substantial periods of time, to socialize and look for prospective wives or husbands. There is also a symbiotic relationship between the Twa of the forest and their Bantu neighbors, with whom they have interacted for generations. Although many consider the relationship between the Twa and their sedentary Bantu neighbors as unequal in favor of the Bantu villagers, others have argued that this is an interdependent relationship in which there is a flow of commodities either way. It is seen as a mutually beneficial relationship and, in some cases both groups, share some rituals such as the joint initiation of boys.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The Twa people live simple but rewarding lives. Their huts, often built by women, are made of branches and leaves. The Twa consider the forest to be their father and mother, a benevolent force that provides all their material needs. Hunting is one of the most important activities, as it is the main way of providing food and sustaining the group. Their material possessions are simple, geared towards the hunting and gathering way of life. The most prized possessions of the Twa are spears, bows and arrows, nets for hunting, and pots for cooking. They have developed an excellent trading relationship with the sedentary Bantu groups around them, with whom they trade forest products for important items, such as metal tips for their weapons. The huts are simple and temporary and can be abandoned anytime the group desires to move on. Women construct the huts from tree branches, covered with large leaves to ward off the constant dripping of the rain. The Twa sleep on leaves and sometimes mats woven from reeds. They usually live in a camp for up to one to five months, until they have exhausted the food resources around the camp and it is necessary to move on to a new environment. Thus, material comfort and wealth are not a significant aspect of Twa society. The forest provides the necessities for survival.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Twa live in small camps of about 30 to 100 individuals. They learn to depend on each other and share everything they collect from the forest. Children are raised by the entire group, calling all women mother. In terms of family and marriage, the Twa used to practice monogamy, but this may have changed slightly with the influence of their Bantu neighbors, who practice polygamy. In terms of kinship and descent, the Twa follow the patrilineal system in which children belong to the father, particularly male children. A typical Twa family consists of a

husband, a wife, and their children. Marriages can be arranged or two individuals can fall in love and marry each other. However, as in many other ethnic groups, marriage is the affair of extended families; it joins two groups, rather than simply the husband and wife. As a patrilineal society, when a marriage ends in divorce, male children stay with the father or return to the father's band when they grow up.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The Twa's clothing is simple, consisting of a loincloth for men either made from bark cloth or fabric. Bark cloth is made from the layer underneath the bark of selected species of trees. The bark is beaten until it is thin and soft to wear. The Mbuti and Efe groups of the Twa in the Ituri rainforest in northeast DRC and southwest Uganda are best known for their bark cloths. Today, cotton fabrics and western forms of clothing are quite common for both men and women.

## **12 FOOD**

The forest provides all the food the Twa need. Hunting is one of the most important activities of Twa men. Skilled hunters who specialize in hunting big game, such as elephants, are highly respected in Twa society. Other hunted animals include wild pigs, the giant forest hog, antelopes, and monkeys. While men are hunters, women gather products from the forest, such as wild yams, berries, fruits, roots, leaves, cola nuts, mushrooms, and other edible plants, as well as small animals such as larvae, snails, ants, termites, caterpillars, and reptiles.

Men and women also get involved in fishing activities, using various techniques such as traps, dams made of branches and trees, and nets for fishing from canoes. The most popular fishing technique by women is dam fishing. During the dry season, when the water level is low, areas of the river can be drained to catch the fish in the mud. The collection of honey, one of the most prized treats among the Twa, is left to men, as sometimes they have to climb 15 m (50 ft) to collect it from the trunks of huge forest trees.

Food is prepared in various ways. Meat is cooked in earthenware pots, children help to pound cassava or manioc with a pestle and mortar, vegetables are minced before cooking, and palm oil is processed and used in cooking food. Some Twa have adopted the agricultural lifestyle, farming crops of yams, legumes, beans, squash, sweet potatoes, peanuts, plantains, cassava, and maize. Sometimes these foods are obtained by trading with their agricultural neighbors. The Twa also practice certain food taboos. For example, a group may not hunt or eat an animal that is used as a totem for that band.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Twa who have been settled and now follow a sedentary way of life send their children to schools, especially in parts of Rwanda and Burundi. However, many Twa have resisted Western forms of education, preferring to teach their children in the ways of their life and traditions. From as early as three years old, boys are taught to use the bow for hunting and to climb trees to collect honey. Quite often, young boys accompany older men on their hunts. The boys carry the hunting nets, arrows, and bows for the older men. Girls are initiated into the tasks of a woman, which include gathering forest products for food, cooking, and fishing.



*A Rwandan Twa pigmy woman poses with her son in the village of Bweyeye in southwestern Rwanda. Twa pygmies are being forced into greater poverty due to conservation rules that threaten their traditional way of life. (Jose Cendon/AFP/Getty Images)*

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Twa people are renowned for their musical skills. As children of the forest, they mimic the many sounds they hear in the forest in their songs and dance. Twa culture is dominated by music and dances; from almost all life events, from healing to initiation rituals, from traditional tales to group games, from hunting songs to entertainment moments, music is ever present. Birth, initiation, and death are all marked by rituals where music and dance play a very important role.

When night falls, it is time to sit around a campfire and tell stories and folktales about legendary ancestors and forest spirits. While some may think there is little to talk about concerning the cultural heritage of the Twa, they have nevertheless perfected a way of living that promotes egalitarianism and teaches all members to do their part for the good of the entire community. Perhaps this aspect of their culture is their greatest legacy. Community and family come first and the individual is but a part of the whole.

#### **15 WORK**

The most important work for the Twa is hunting and gathering. For the Twa deep in the forest, they hunt and gather just enough for them to survive. However, for the Twa who are in contact with the Bantu or African villagers, they hunt and gather a little more to trade for commodities they need from the villagers. They hunt and gather from the forest meat, honey, and fruits to exchange for plantains, maize, beans, cloth, and iron tools. Recently, money has found its way into Twa society.

As such, both men and women offer their labor to the villagers to help them cultivate their fields in exchange for cash. They are also asking for cash even for the forest products they bring to the villagers instead of simple bartering.

Although there is some division of labor by gender among the Twa, certain activities are a communal affair. For example, men, women, and children can all get involved in a hunt if nets are used. In such instances, women will make noises and beat the bushes to herd the animals towards the net, while the men wait by the net to trap the animals that come their way. Some activities, such as foraging, are done by both men and women, while others such as cooking, cleaning, building huts, and obtaining water are reserved for women. For small game, such as monkeys and antelope, men may hunt alone using poison-tipped arrows.

#### **16 SPORTS**

As in every society, Twa children are quite playful. Children play games that teach them important hunting and gathering skills, as well as group cooperation. Children and adults play games together where hunting skills are imparted into the children through mock hunts. For the adults, women and men may compete in a tug-of-war to see who is the strongest. The game is designed to teach the members of a band their interdependence on each other.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment among the Twa comes in the form of feasting and dancing, especially after a successful hunt during which the giant forest hog or an elephant has been brought down. This would imply lots of meat and feasting for the group. There are celebrations, such as the honey festival, where there is much singing and dancing. In the shadow of the full moon at night, children, men and, women sit around a campfire for entertaining storytelling, riddles, or dancing.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Twa are skilled in fashioning many of the implements they need for hunting and gathering, such as bows and arrows. They also make their own nets from forest vines for hunting, and weave baskets and mats from reeds and grasses. They have excellent skills for making bark cloth that they fashion into loin cloths.

Given that music plays a central role in the daily life of the Twa, they have developed an impressive array of musical instruments. Some of the instruments are obtained from the Bantu villagers, such as the cylindrical drums, the arched harp, and rattles. Others are traditional to the Twa, such as the musical bow (made and played exclusively by women) and flutes.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One of the major problems facing the Twa today is their disappearing homeland, due to clearing of forests for agriculture purposes by the Bantu groups. Forested areas have receded as agriculture has expanded on the rich volcanic soils in the Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and DRC regions. By the 1980s, much of all the available land, apart from areas reserved for wildlife conservation and environmental protection, was under cultivation, particularly in Rwanda and Burundi. Pressures on the forests intensified through production of export crops such as tea, quinine, and coffee.

Thus, the forest environments for the Twa hunting and gathering activities have decreased resulting in their becoming a landless and endangered group. Their traditional forest-based culture that includes their religion and rituals as well as their language is in grave jeopardy. Some Twa have adapted themselves to new forms of livelihoods such as making pottery, basketry, and metalworking. Others have attached themselves to powerful and rich individuals in a subservient position and have become singers, dancers, messengers, guards, warriors, and hunters for these individuals. But, many continue to remain poor and landless with their food supply threatened. The ongoing civil unrest in the great lakes region has also affected them adversely.

In short, recent activities in the region, including logging, mining, road building, and commerce have brought the Twa into greater contacts with the modern world that threatens to erode their values, beliefs, and way of life. In addition to the loss of their tropical rainforest homeland, the Twa are despised and exploited by their Bantu neighbors, who often regard them to be subhuman. Recently, HIV/AIDS has been introduced into the Twa society, as many Bantu believe that sexual intercourse with a Twa can cure diseases such as AIDS. For those who have moved to live in towns and cities, commercial sex work for Twa women is on the increase putting them at an even greater risk for HIV infection. For the Twa still in the forests, there have reports of soldiers in the Congo hunting and eating them in

order to absorb their forest powers. These factors have caused untold hardships for a people used to living in harmony with their environment, and their culture could be obliterated in the near future.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As an egalitarian society, men and women have equal power and women are often involved in making important decisions, such as where to move the camp or where and when to go hunt or forage for food. Although some chores are left for women alone (e.g. cooking, cleaning, and fixing huts), women and men often go out hunting or fishing together.

There are of course some gender issues among Twa society that affect women unfairly. For example, the custom of sister exchange as a common form of marriage implies the bartering of women, rather than marriage through love. However, it needs to be emphasized that monogamy is the norm for Twa marriages and bride wealth does not exist in Twa society. Polygamous unions are increasing, although these are also rare in Twa society. In short, gender equality is an aspect of Twa society.

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—revised by E. Kalipeni

# UGANDANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** yoo-GAN-duhns

**LOCATION:** Uganda

**POPULATION:** 26,404,543 million

**LANGUAGE:** English (official); various tribal languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Islam; indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Baganda; Banyankole

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Uganda's present ethnic history is largely a result of two population movements that occurred in the first 500 years of the 2nd millennium AD. The first movement by cattle herders, known as Hima, into exclusively agricultural areas contributed to the development of centralized kingdoms in the west-central portion of the country. The second movement of Nilotic speakers into the northern and eastern areas also stimulated the further development of centralized kingdoms to the south by contributing ruling clans to them. These migrations contributed to the political and ethnic divisions that were present at the arrival of the British in the latter half of the 19th century and that can still be seen today.

Until 1967, Uganda had a number of tightly centralized kingdoms such as Butoro, Buganda, Bunyoro, Bunyankole, and Busoga in its southern and western areas. These kingdoms were sometimes internally divided between cattle owners, who were considered to be royal, and farmers, who were subservient to them. In Bunyoro, these groups are called Huma and Iru; and in Ankole, Hima and Iru, respectively. In Rwanda and Burundi, countries to the west of Uganda, these still warring groups are called Tutsi and Hutu. Northern Uganda was made up of Nilotic-speaking peoples (of the plains, and of the rivers and lakes) who did not develop kingdoms, although they had contributed leaders through conquest of the ancestors of the southern kingdoms. At the time of Uganda's independence in 1962, a sharp linguistic and cultural divide still existed between northern and southern regions of the country. A relatively more socialistic, egalitarian philosophy was preferred in the north. In the south, however, existing class differences were more compatible with capitalism.

The British established Uganda as a protectorate and worked with the Baganda from 1900 onward to establish their control over the other ethnic groups. Asians of Indian or Pakistani descent had been brought over to work as laborers on the Uganda railroad, which extended from Mombasa on the coast of Kenya to Kampala, Uganda. The British developed cotton as a cash crop in Uganda in the early 20th century. The Asians remained in Uganda as brokers in this and other emerging business enterprises. In the 1920s, for example, sugarcane was established in Uganda through plantations and processing plants run by Asian entrepreneurs. By this time, three-fourths of the cotton gins in Uganda were owned by Asians. Much later, coffee emerged as the most important export of Uganda. Europeans, particularly the British, were important in government, church, education, and banking, but their population in Uganda was quite small in comparison to the neighboring colony of Kenya, which attracted a large white settler community.

Uganda, which Winston Churchill once called "the pearl of Africa," had a promising future at the time of independence. A

favorable environment with fertile soil and regular rainfall, as well as a talented, multiethnic population contributed to this optimism. Nevertheless, ethnic divisions proved insurmountable. In 1967, Prime Minister Milton Obote from the north declared kingdoms illegal and tried to impose on the nation his "Common Man's Charter," a socialist doctrine. Sir Edward Mutesa, the Kabaka (King) of Buganda, and the first president of the Republic of Uganda, was overthrown by Obote, who then declared himself the president. In 1971, Obote was overthrown by his army commander, Idi Amin. This led to a repressive reign of terror against all Ugandans. The Asian community was ordered out of the country in 1972, and their businesses were given away to Ugandans without respect to their qualifications. The economy was soon in ruins. Milton Obote returned to power after a combined force of Tanzanian soldiers and Ugandan exiles drove Amin from the country. Obote became president again in 1980, although it was claimed that the elections had been rigged. An ensuing guerrilla war ended in 1986, with Yoweri Museveni becoming president. Uganda currently is experiencing a rejuvenated economy and political system under its present government, which has maintained an open style of leadership receptive to the participation of all ethnic groups.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Uganda is located in East Africa astride the equator between Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its area is not large, being about the size of the state of Oregon. Uganda is landlocked but has several large inland waterways, including Lake Victoria with its inland water ports at Jinja and Port Bell. Its climate is tropical with two rainy seasons; however, the northeast is semiarid. The country is primarily plateau with its capital city of Kampala about 1,200 km (4,000 ft) above sea level. Its population is about 20 million people. The Africans belong to about 40 ethnic groups, of which the Baganda, the Karamojong, the Iteso, and the Lango are the largest groups. There also are a small number of Europeans, Asians, and Arabs. A republic with a one-party political system, Uganda has a president as chief of state. The current president is Lt. General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official, national language of Uganda is English. Bantu languages are spoken by the greatest number of speakers in the nation, concentrated in the southern and western areas of the country. Nilotic languages predominate in the northern regions. The northwest area includes Moru Madi-speakers. The eastern border of Uganda, which is shared with Kenya, has both Bantu languages, such as Lusomyia, and Nilotic languages, such as Teso. Kiswahili, a Bantu language, is spoken widely throughout eastern Kenya.

Luganda, another Bantu language, is the mother tongue of the Baganda, who are the largest ethnic group in Uganda, comprising 17% of the population. Luganda spread throughout Uganda, particularly in the southern, eastern, and western regions, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a language of domination. This was supported by the British, who worked through Baganda chiefs as a form of indirect rule over other Ugandan ethnic groups. For this reason, Luganda, to this day, is understood in various sections of the country. There is also a well-developed indigenous literature in Luganda in the

form of histories, stories, folk tales and songs, political documents, plays, and newspapers.

Ugandans are typically comfortable in more than one language. Luganda, English, and Kiswahili, for example, are commonly used languages in Kampala. In other regions of the country, children learn English in addition to their own ethnic language. Nevertheless, even among the most highly-educated Ugandans, there is a strong preference for the mother tongue at home and in social situations. For this reason, perhaps, there is a strong tendency for individuals to marry those that speak a common ethnic language, or to remain within either the Bantu or Nilotic language families.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

All the ethnic groups of Uganda have a rich oral tradition made up of tales, legends, stories, proverbs, and riddles. Folk heroes include, for example, those thought responsible for introducing kingship into a society, such as the legendary Kintu, the first *Kabaka* (king) of the Baganda, or the first *Bito* ruler of the Bunyoro, King Isingoma Mpuga Rukidi. Morality tales were common throughout Uganda. Some Ankole tales include one about a wise woman and her selfish husband, which teaches faithfulness to one's wives during hard times; one about a pig and a hyena, which preaches against self-indulgence; and the wisdom of the hare, which demonstrates the advantages of being quick-witted and friendly against all odds.

Proverbs and riddles are perhaps the most significant mechanisms for teaching values to the young, while at the same time providing entertainment. The importance of parenting, for instance, can be seen in the following proverbs from the Baganda:

I will never move from this village, but for the sake of children he does.

He who does a good service to one's child, does better than one who merely says he loves you.

An only child is like a drop of rain in the dry season.

My luck is in that child of mine if the child is rich.

A skillful hunting dog may nevertheless produce weaklings.

A chicken's feet do not kill its young.

That which becomes bad at the outset of its growth is almost impossible to straighten at a later stage.

Collective riddling games are a popular evening entertainment in rural villages. Among the Baganda, these games involve men and women of all ages. A person who solves a riddle is given a village to rule as its "chief." Some examples of riddles are:

Pass one side, and I also pass the other side, so that we meet in the middle? (a belt)

He built a house with only one pole standing? (a mushroom)

He goes on dancing as he walks? (a caterpillar)

He built a house with two entrances? (a nose)

He has three legs? (an old man walking with his stick)



#### 5 RELIGION

About two-thirds of Ugandans are Christian, evenly divided between Protestants and Roman Catholics. The remaining third are about evenly divided between Muslims and those practicing indigenous, African religion. Religious holidays are celebrated in Uganda, especially Christmas and Easter for Christians, and Ramadan for Muslims. Each of the major religious denominations is associated with its own hill in Kampala, reflecting the practice of major institutions being situated on a hill in 19th century Uganda. Thus, there is a hill for the university, for the national hospital, and for the Catholic, the Anglican, and the Muslim houses of worship. Of international interest is the shrine near Kampala dedicated to the Uganda martyrs who are recognized as saints in the Roman Catholic tradition. These Christian martyrs were executed in the 19th century for refusing to renounce their religion at a time when Christians, traditionalists, and Muslims were competing for converts and influence in the emerging, but hostile, religious plurality of the day.

Indigenous supernatural ideas, such as belief in witchcraft, the evil eye, and night dancers, are still widespread. Among some groups, such as the Samia, amulets are worn to protect children from the evil eye of a jealous woman, which is thought to cause them sickness or death. Witches found in most societies also cause misfortune to people of all ages. A widely feared person throughout Uganda is the night dancer. He is a community member by day, who is thought to roam about at night eating dead bodies while floating along the ground with fire

between his hands. People generally avoid traveling alone at night for fear of these *Basezi*. Ancestors are highly respected and feared. They communicate with the living through dreams to warn them of impending dangers and to advise them on family matters. Children are advised to report their dreams to their elders soon after arising in the morning. Among the Lango, ancestor spirits (*Tipu*) are thought to cause illness, barrenness, impotence, and quarrels among the living, which may result in the division of kinfolk into new communities.

Most societies in Uganda believe that there is a high god who is the supreme creator. Among the Baganda, for instance, their supreme god was called *Katonda*. He was also known by other names that suggested his power, such as *Mukama* (the Master), *Lugaba* (the Giver), and *Liisoddene* (the Great Eye). *Were*, the high god of the Samia, is associated with the sun and was venerated each morning with its rising. Today, such beliefs have merged with Christianity and Islam. The older pantheon of lesser deities, each with their oracle priest and priestesses and special temples, has given way to churches and mosques. Nevertheless, Ugandans remain a very religious people with a deep-seated spirituality.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There is a single national holiday, celebrated on October 9, which commemorates the day in 1962 when Uganda achieved its independence from the United Kingdom.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The ethnic groups in Uganda recognize developmental stages in the life-cycle. Birth is generally received with a great deal of joy, as children are warmly welcomed into the community. Infancy is considered to be an important period in the child's development. For this reason, ceremonies such as those related to the milestone of sitting up alone and also obtaining one's clan name, often occur during the first years of life. Among the Baganda, for example, an infant is seated on a mat along with others who are to receive their clan names. Prior to this time, the infant has been regularly encouraged to sit by being placed in a hole in the ground or in a washbasin with cloths around the waist and buttocks for support. When the infant succeeds in sitting alone for the first time, there is a brief ceremony, and it is proclaimed, "now you are a man," or "now you are a woman," accordingly. Among the Lango, *Kwer* ceremonies are held throughout childhood to recognize changes in the status of a mother that are associated with the maturation of her child. Ceremonies involve exchanges of food and the drinking of beer by adult relatives of the child. Such celebrations occur, for example, shortly after childbirth when the mother spends several days in seclusion; after a mother has given birth to several children; after her oldest child is about 8 years old; when the oldest child is sick; and when the oldest child is about 12 years of age.

Childhood varies depending on whether the child comes from a wealthy or a poor family, or lives in the city of Kampala or in a small, rural village. Many young children walk upwards of 16 km (10 mi) daily to school. Since schools require fees, family members often need to pool their resources in order to send children (or, in some cases, only the most promising child) to school. This child, if successful, is expected to help other family members in turn. Boys and girls generally have household tasks to do. Girls 7 to 9 years old can be seen

caring for their younger siblings while the mother is working in the home or garden. During this time, the child caretaker will carry the infant on her back, sing lullabies, play, and otherwise amuse the baby. In rural areas, young boys typically are expected to care for livestock. Children from wealthy parents, by contrast, have fewer work responsibilities and more leisure time in that they live in homes with servants. They are also afforded opportunities for travel, better schooling, and luxury material goods, such as computers, TVs, and videos.

The teenage years are devoted to education, work, and courtship. Girls in rural areas are increasingly likely to become pregnant prior to marriage, especially if there is little prospect for education or gainful employment later in life. Although parents frown on teenage pregnancy, the infant is usually welcomed by the infant's maternal grandparents and may be raised as their own child. Abortions are discouraged in Uganda, given the high value placed on children.

Among many of the Nilotic societies, an age-group system is important. For the Karamojong, all males are formally initiated into an age-set that provides an established ranking. For example, all males are in one of two fixed generations, so that all the sons of one generation are in the same group, regardless of their ages. Therefore, the junior generation contains members who are still too young to be initiated. Should a male child be born before all members of the preceding generation have been initiated, he must wait to be named and publicly recognized. About every 25 years, a new generation is publicly established through a series of rituals officiated over by grandfathers of the new group. A final ceremony of inclusion occurs for a man with the ritual slaying of an ox that is then eaten in a communal feast. When a new generation is allowed to begin, some men are middle aged while others are quite young during this first year of initiation. Initiations are held about every 3 years with the average age being about 19. The name of a new group is chosen by the senior men. Common names are buffalo, jackal, leopard, topi, and snake. The age-set system functions most notably during rituals and determines participation, seating, and distribution order of meat. Authority is strictly along age-set lines in matters of discipline and community morality.

Pubescent girls were traditionally secluded and formally instructed by elder women (such as one's *Ssenga*, or father's sister), in societies that have patrilineal descent in sexual matters, domestic skills, and other expectations for married life. While the age-set system for boys is still evident in some communities, the seclusion of girls and associated sexual and domestic instruction has largely disappeared. Instead, girls learn about these matters through advice columns in daily newspapers and magazines and peer gossip in secondary schools. Traditionalists sometimes bemoan the fact that sex education is nowhere to be seen in the contemporary school system and dominant Christian ideology. Teenage pregnancies are thought to be one consequence of this change.

Adult life is concerned with work, family, religion, and community and national service of various forms. Death is a significant social event in all ethnic groups, where visiting and rituals are obligatory. Absenteeism from work for attendance at funerals is frequent and excused. Christian or Muslim burial is now commonplace. Ugandans widely believe that spiritual life continues after death, in accordance with Christian or Islamic concepts. Belief in the continued involvement of dead ancestors in family life is not uncommon. In some societies,

infants are named after ancestors so that a person can live on as long as his or her name is remembered. This form of reincarnation was seen by some demographers to be a deterrent to family planning efforts, given that to limit one's offspring is in a very real sense limiting one's opportunity to be reincarnated. Exposure to newer religions has caused some practices to decline, although many still persist from indigenous religions.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Ugandans on the whole are deeply imbedded in the social life of their communities, be these villages, schools, neighborhoods, clubs, churches, mosques, age-sets, clans, homesteads, or extended families. There are, of course, individual exceptions to this generalization, especially among those who are highly educated and who have the opportunity to travel. Ugandans enjoy looking "smart" (attractive) and are exceptionally fashionable. Women from Uganda have a favorable reputation in neighboring countries for their beauty and charm. Women from western Uganda, for example, traditionally went into seclusion prior to marriage and spent an extended period of time drinking milk in order to gain a good amount of weight prior to marriage. Today, plumpness is still considered desirable. Thus, eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, are virtually nonexistent in a culture where thinness is not valued. Obesity, nevertheless, is also extremely rare since Ugandans remain quite physically active, given that most do not own cars and, therefore, travel on foot.

Sociability is best symbolized through a pattern of ritualized greetings that vary according to time of day, a person's age, social status, and length of time since an encounter. Each ethnic group tends to have its own characteristic greeting pattern and vocabulary. Not to greet someone is considered to be a serious impropriety. The following is an example of a Kiganda greeting:

Mawulire ki? (What is the news?)  
 Tetugalaba. (We have none.)  
 Mmm or Eee.  
 Mpoza mmwe? (Perhaps you have?)  
 Naffe tetugalaba or Nedda. (We have none either.)  
 Mmm or Eee.

Dating occurs prior to marriage in a variety of social contexts. Young people meet at funerals, weddings, churches, and school socials. Nightclubs are a popular place for dancing, with friends or on a date. Love songs are popular with people of all ages. Some post-independence songs heard on jukeboxes in bars, and on the radio contain clever phrases that are admired in courtship. The following are some examples of songs in Luganda by Baganda composers. The song, "*Nassuna*," by E. Kawalya contains the lyric: "Your photograph which I have is now like my mirror. I always look at it. Great are the parents who gave birth to you." Another song, "*Nakiganda*," by C. Ssebaduka states: "I have been waiting for you, Nakiganda, my love. Why are you late? I placed my chair by the road so that I could watch you come. . . . Your picture you gave me. . . I took it and showed it to my parents." It goes on to explain that if the gentleman did not marry Nakiganda it must be, according to his father, due to someone "bewitching" him. A third, popular song also mentions parents in the context of love and romance precisely because marriage throughout Uganda involves large,

extended families and is not simply a matter of two individuals falling in love. The song, "*Ntonga*," by D. Mugula laments, "Really, Ntonga, I beg you and your parents not to listen to those who may want to come between our friendship. . . Here is some sugar for your parents, for what harm did they do in giving birth to a beauty like yourself?"

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

President Museveni's rule has had to contend with severe political and economic devastation brought about by the previous Obote and Amin regimes. Nevertheless, Uganda is in the process of making a comeback. Tourism is being revived, with an emphasis on conservation and ecology. Agriculture remains the basic livelihood, with about 90% of the population continuing to reside in rural areas. Important subsistence crops include millet, corn, cassava, and plantains. Beef, poultry, and milk are also significant, especially among pastoral populations where agriculture is less significant than cattle as a means of livelihood. Coffee remains the largest export, earning over 75% of foreign currency. Recently, flowers such as roses are being cultivated for export to European countries. Fishing along the northern and western shores of Lake Victoria is important for communities located in these areas.

Population densities are highest in the south and southeastern areas, sometimes exceeding 116 persons per sq km (300 persons per sq mi). Other regions of Uganda are sparsely populated. Kampala, the capital city, and its environs have about 0.5 million people. It is the administrative, commercial, and cultural center of the country. This city is a transportation hub with a network of good, paved roads connecting Kampala with smaller towns in rural areas throughout the country. The taxi market is an impressive sight, with hundreds of "speed taxis" coming and going with travelers to and from the city. Outdoor markets with foodstuffs, household items, second-hand clothing, and various other items are densely crowded. Automobiles are seen commonly in Kampala, but in rural areas the bicycle is the most important conveyance, especially for transporting items to and from the marketplace.

Homes in rural areas are frequently made of wattle and daub and have thatched or corrugated-iron roofs. Affluent residents of rural areas may, however, have elaborate homes. This is particularly true for those who have gained wealth through commercial farming and livestock maintenance. Urban homes are typically of concrete with corrugated-iron or tile roofs, and have glass windows. In the suburbs of Kampala, multilevel and ranch homes are very plush, with servant quarters, swimming pools, and elaborate gardens. Urban gardens of produce and flowers are also a common feature of the city landscape.

Uganda's population suffers from malaria and HIV/AIDS, known locally as "slim disease." Despite efforts at eradication, malaria-infested mosquitoes are present throughout the country. Southern Uganda has a particularly high rate of HIV/AIDS infection, and virtually every family there has lost loved ones to the disease. The government has maintained an active policy of public education. The daily newspaper, *The New Vision*, carries a regular column known as "AIDS Corner," which is meant to educate the public. Infant mortality rates are also high due to poverty, malnutrition, diarrhea, and measles. The infant mortality rate is 112 deaths per 1,000 live births.





*Ugandan life is concerned with work, family, religion, and community and national service of various forms.*  
(Paul Joynson-Hicks)

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

Marriage and family life are primary pursuits of most Ugandans, whatever their ethnic group or religion. The extended family concept continues to be the ideal, although individualism and the nuclear family have made inroads due to European and Christian influences on the nation's culture. Monogamy (one husband and one wife at a time) is now the national ideal, even though polygyny (one husband and several wives at a time) is sometimes encountered. Polygyny is functional in situations in which marriage is very much a negotiation between large, extended families. Polygyny became a mechanism for large, extended families to increase the number of children in their community—not a bad idea in a rural, subsistence economy based on human labor. Ideals of love and affection were maintained in both monogamous and polygynous marriage situations.

The importance of extended family ties in marriage can be illustrated by the Banyankole people's complex traditional marriage customs. When a man decided he wanted to marry, he visited the girl's parents and informed them. If they agreed to the marriage, he returned with some of his relatives and, over pots of beer, discussed with his prospective father-in-law and his brothers the amount of the marriage fee. Routinely, goats, for example, were divided as follows: seven for the bride's father, three for an elder brother of his, two for his mother's brother, one for the father's sister, and one for a younger brother of the father. The bridegroom would go to his own family

members to raise the fee needed for his marriage. After these fees had been paid, the bridegroom kissed both palms of his father-in-law's hands and returned home. His home was a portion of his own father's large compound. When the bride arrived in her new home for the first time, she entered the room of her father- and mother-in-law. She sat first on her father-in-law's lap and then on her mother-in-law's lap, to symbolize that she was now like a daughter who would bear children for the family. After this ceremony, future contact with her father-in-law was taboo. Emphasis on large, extended families and bride-fees seen in the context of reciprocal exchange often made for strong, lifelong relations between brothers and sisters because wealth brought into the family on the occasion of a girl's marriage often provided the means for the brother to obtain a bride for himself.

Nowadays, Ugandans typically continue to have some form of marriage fee, maintain allegiances to their extended families and clans, and generally marry outside of them (a custom known as exogamy). Children of these unions usually belong to the clans of their fathers and take their clan names from his group. Some common clans in Uganda are elephant, bushbuck, rat, fish, lion, mushroom, civet cat, and many other plants and animals. People are not supposed to eat the plant or animal associated with their clan names. In some societies, such as the Lango or the Karamojong, women join the clans of their husbands; but, in other groups, such as the Baganda, they do not.

Traditional marriage ceremonies, rituals, and practices persist in varying degrees depending on ethnic group and location, as well as on degree of conformity to Christian or Muslim ideals. Most women, regardless of their educational level, desire to have children. Family planning, when it is used, has the function of attempting to space children, rather than to reduce their number or to avoid having them at all.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Most Ugandans wear Western-style clothing. Young people are especially attracted to American clothing styles, such as jeans and slacks. The most prominent indigenous form of clothing is found in southern Uganda among the Baganda. The woman typically wears a *busuuti* (a floor-length, brightly colored cloth dress with short puffed sleeves, a square neckline fastened by two buttons, and a sash placed just below the waist atop the hips). Baganda men frequently wear a *kanzu* (long white robe). For special occasions, a western style suit jacket is worn over the *kanzu*. In western Uganda, Bahima women wear full, broad cotton dresses, with a floor-length shawl used to cover their bodies while seated, and to cover their heads and shoulders while standing. Northern societies such as the Karamojong wear cowskins, and signify social status (e.g., warrior, married person, elder) by items of adornment, such as feather plumes and large coiled, copper necklaces, and armbands.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Ugandan stores, supermarkets, and open-air markets make available a wide choice of foods from local and international sources. Each region of the country tends to have its own local foods and traditions, which have endured since pre-colonial times. Among pastoral groups, such as the Karamojong, there is a strong emphasis on cattle that provide meat and milk (sometimes eaten in curdled form, or mixed with blood drawn from the neck of an ox). Cattle are also a source of many other

necessities, such as clothing and blankets. Containers are made from the horns and hoofs. Cattle urine is mixed with mud as a base for the floor of huts, since water is scarce. Dung is used for fertilizer in those communities where grain is grown. Millet and sorghum are common grains available to communities throughout northern regions, where rainfall is not sufficient for root crops such as cassava, manioc, and sweet potatoes. Root crops and plantains are staples in southern and eastern Uganda where rain is plentiful year-round. In western Uganda, the Banyankole are internally divided into the Bahima, who are pastoralists having very long-horned cows; and the Bairu, who grow grains such as millet and sorghum.

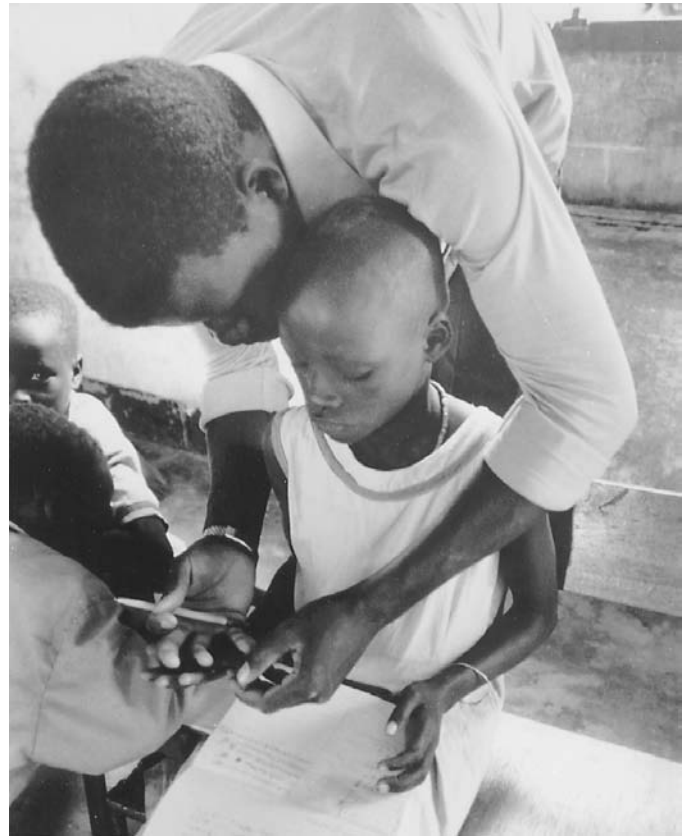
Kampala is supplied daily with large amounts of plantains (*matooke*). *Matooke* is the staple of the Baganda, the largest ethnic group in Uganda and in the city of Kampala. *Matooke* is served with various sauces that may be composed of peanuts, green leaves, mushrooms, tomatoes, meat, fish, white ants, and/or grasshoppers. Before eating, a bowl of boiled water and soap are passed around so that each person can wash his or her hands. Banana leaves are used to cover the steamed plantain while cooking and during serving. *Matooke* is eaten by taking the right hand and forming a small portion of the *matooke* into a ladle, which is then dipped in the sauces. The combination of a staple with a sauce is common throughout Uganda, as is eating with the right hand, although cutlery is available when desired.

Drinks include a wide variety of bottled beers and soft drinks. In rural areas, traditional beer fermented from maize (corn), bananas, millet, sorghum, or pineapples is sometimes available. Metal cooking pots and pans, dishes, and glassware are now commonplace in rural areas, although traditional gourds and ceramic containers are also prevalent. Throughout the country, agriculture is the special domain of women, who are responsible for the farming of staple foods. They also exercise much control over the foods that they grow and prepare in the kitchen, which is also considered to be a woman's domain. Men tend to be responsible for cash crops such as coffee and tea.

Chocolate bars and other sweet candies are not generally eaten as treats by children in rural areas. Instead, children enjoy picking sugarcane and chewing it for its sweet juices. Fruits, such as mangoes and small sweet bananas, are also favorite treats. These preferences make for strong gums and teeth. Thus, dental problems are rare, a fact also attributed to the custom of cleaning each tooth separately with a stick. Dental problems are becoming more of a problem, however, among young people today who have more exposure to processed sweets.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Obote and Amin years witnessed deterioration in the educational standard of the country. Makerere University College, which began as a secondary school in the 1920s, became a university in 1950 (known then as the University College of East Africa). It drew students from Kenya, Tanganyika (now Tanzania), and Zanzibar, as well as Uganda. In 1961, it became Makerere University College and continued throughout the 1960s to educate a large number of East Africans in a wide variety of fields including medicine. What was a distinguished university and faculty was decimated by the interventionist policies of Amin, who drove into exile or killed faculty and students



*Success in school is seen as the means to a better livelihood for the individual who is, in turn, expected to help his extended family. For this reason, Ugandan students are typically very hardworking and achievement-oriented. (AP Images)*

alike. The vice-chancellor of Makerere “disappeared,” never to be seen again. Prior to 1970, an excellent secondary school system was also in place, and included very prestigious schools such as Kings College Budu, Kisubi, and Gyaza Girls among others. The school system was modeled after the British system, having primary, secondary (Cambridge certificate—O level), higher (A levels), and three years of university education.

The present government is in the process of rebuilding the nation's school system. There are many challenges. For example, in the total population aged 15 and over, about half are illiterate. Literacy is higher among males than females. This sex imbalance is due in part to a policy of favoritism shown by the British during the protectorate years for the education of boys. Another problem interrupting the education of girls is a high rate of pregnancy among schoolgirls, usually requiring that they leave school. Poverty is another factor contributing to illiteracy, given that schooling can be expensive. For those with means, the boarding school is a popular concept, as are single-sex institutions.

Parental expectations are high concerning education. Success in school is seen as the means to a better livelihood for the individual who is, in turn, expected to help his extended family. For this reason, Ugandan students are typically very hardworking and achievement-oriented. They can be found working and studying in all professions and vocations both in Uganda and abroad.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The expressive arts embodied in music and dance remain a significant part of Uganda's cultural heritage. Dance forms vary somewhat by ethnic group, but everywhere people of all ages participate in dance and song in the course of routine rituals, family celebrations, and community events. Among the Karamojong and their neighbors, dance is especially significant during times of courtship, when young people dance late into the night outside in the open air. They dance by jumping up and down, facing members of the opposite sex, in accompaniment to hand-clapping and singing. Musical instruments are not present in these lively interactions.

Many Baganda households contain at least a small cowhide drum for regular use in singing and dancing. During the kingship, there were 93 royal drums called *mujaguzo* that varied in size, each with its own name and specific drumbeat. Other musical instruments included string instruments, such as fiddles and harps, and woodwind instruments such as flutes and fifes. Baganda dancers are skilled in their ability to swiftly move their hips to the alternating beats of drums playing simultaneously.

Among the Banyankole, pots are used as a percussion instrument. These are ordinary water pots filled with different levels of water, whose mouths are beaten by sticks to which small bundles of weeds are attached. Men and women accompany the rhythms, which sound not unlike drums, by singing, dancing, and beating their hands on their bodies. A familiar dance routine in imitation of cows is done. The dancer jumps up and down while holding the arms overhead, in imitation of a cow's horns, while producing a hissing sound with the mouth.

Modern nightclub and disco dancing are also part of the teenage scene, particularly in urban areas. Nevertheless, visits to rural areas to see relatives or friends may engage young people in traditional dances. In some areas, during large celebrations, such as a wedding or a funeral, many older people gather around the drum or water pot for music, while the young people prefer international music from the radio or CDs and audio cassettes played on a boom box.

Before the devastation of Uganda's economic and intellectual life, Uganda was in the process of developing an extremely rich literary tradition in English, especially in association with Makerere University. The Baganda also had developed a robust vernacular literature in Luganda that included novels, short stories, essays, historical writings, songs, plays, and poems. Perhaps the most famous Ugandan writer from the pre-Amin years was Okot p'Bitek, an essayist, poet, and social critic who once headed the Uganda National Theatre and was professor of creative writing at Makerere. Although he died in 1982, his work is still read throughout East Africa, as well as internationally. His best known work, "Song of Lawino," depicts the circumstances of modernization in his native Acholi land through the eyes of a woman who laments her husband's blind preference for women who wear modern makeup, speak English, know all of the modern dances and customs, and who look down on traditional women, such as herself.

## 15 WORK

During the Amin years, the economy in Uganda lost virtually all of its expatriate and Asian populations, who were significantly involved in the modern sector of banking, commercial

activities, and industry. Nevertheless, Uganda has maintained (up to the present) a strong subsistence agricultural base, so that recovery from the Amin years has the advantage of a plentiful food supply and a population that is overwhelmingly agrarian and rural in lifestyle. Most urban-dwellers in Kampala maintain continued access to nearby agricultural areas. These abound within short distances of the city and provide a reliable, inexpensive source of local food on a year-round basis.

Small-scale economic opportunities, involving tailoring, shop keeping, hair care, repair work of various sorts, carpentry, and the marketing of food and other household necessities, employ numerous Ugandans in Kampala and throughout the country's smaller towns and villages. The professions, including teaching, law, and medicine, are growing and employ many supportive staff, such as secretaries, receptionists, and computer personnel. Comparatively poor people can be seen operating small all-purpose stands, with huts that are folded up and taken down at closing time. Cigarettes, matches, candy, soft drinks, biscuits, cookies, and bread are available here for sale to people who may have missed a chance to visit stores during regular hours.

The leisure-time industry is quite lively, encompassing restaurants, bars, and nightclubs that together employ many thousands of Ugandans. A somewhat unique and striking aspect of this industry is the uniformed barmaid found in bars throughout the country, even in remote rural areas. Tourism, involving safaris to game parks to see mountain gorillas, tree-climbing lions, crocodiles, and elephants, is once again on the upswing as well.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular sport, with a national league and hotly contested playoffs. Cricket and rugby are also quite popular sports enjoyed by many spectators. Boxing is another competitive sport for which there is a national trophy awarded for the best in each division. Uganda sends competitors abroad to international events such as the Olympics and has in the past won medals for excellence in track-and-field.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most Ugandans own radios and enjoy listening to the variety of educational programs, plays, stories, news, and music offered. There are 10 stations, broadcasting in English and the major ethnic languages. There is a national television station that includes programs from the United States and England, in addition to its local subject matter. The American CNN provides an entertainment and news link to worldwide news. Television is available in most affluent homes and in hotels.

Individuals and families enjoy visiting restaurants and clubs where they can watch traditional dancing, whose performances are regularly available in Kampala. Popular theater is also a very significant means of entertainment in Uganda. Plays have a long-standing tradition often containing themes of concern to the population at large such as politics, social change, and health and family matters. Recently, plays have been used in Kampala and throughout the country to promote knowledge about health matters, especially those concerning HIV/AIDS and its prevention. The significance of public plays for educational purposes cannot be underestimated in a country in which about half of the country's population is illiterate.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Rural Ugandan women can often be seen sitting on the ground outside their homes weaving beautiful and colorful straw mats. Tightly woven coiled baskets are also prevalent. Wooden milk pots and bowls are carved and decorated. Elaborate and simple pipes for smoking are popular in remote areas. In general, much of Ugandans' everyday artistic endeavors involve useful objects that are part of their everyday existence.

Basketry is a highly developed art form in Uganda. Common fibers used to weave are banana palm, raffia, papyrus, and sisal. Weaving is used for house walls, fences, roofs, baskets, mats, traps, and receptacles for drink and food. Table mats and cushions are also common uses today. Bark-cloth was once a widespread craft used for many purposes, including clothing. Today, remnants of bark-cloth can be seen in its use as decoration on place mats and greeting cards, as well as in the making of blankets and shrouds. Another art form using cloth is batik, a type of cloth painting that can be hung on walls for decoration. The revival of the tourist industry currently underway is likely to stimulate the production of arts and crafts for foreign consumption.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Uganda suffers from one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the world. It has one of the best public awareness programs associated with HIV/AIDS anywhere. Many families have experienced the loss of loved ones to this disease, resulting in a large number of orphans. Another problem is the flow of refugees coming to Uganda from neighboring nations suffering from political turmoil. Hundreds of thousands of southern Sudanese have fled to Uganda in recent years, due to religious conflict in the Sudan. Regularly, refugees from Rwanda fleeing from ethnic conflict enter Uganda's western border. Many Banyarwanda are now citizens of Uganda, having fled there in the 1960s. Despite one of the most highly publicized terrorist regimes in modern times under Idi Amin, Uganda by all accounts is now well on the way to democracy, although it is still under one-party rule. Ugandans, on the whole, are very optimistic about their future.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In spite of the significant social and economic responsibilities that women shouldered in the traditional Ugandan societies, their roles were still subordinate to those of men. From their infancy, women would be taught to accede to the wishes of the men in their lives, including fathers, brothers, and husbands. Women were expected to demonstrate their subordination to men in public. For instance, among the Baganda, women would kneel while conversing with a man.

The responsibilities of childcare and subsistence farming rested in the hands of women. In religious circles, women also were allowed a dominant role. For example, Alice Lakwena, a religious Ugandan woman, led a revolt against Ugandan political establishment dominated by men. In a few areas, women owned property and large tracts of land for cash crop farming. In Uganda societies, there seems to be a clear-cut gender-based division of labor. The kitchen in most societies is a woman's domain, while taking care of cattle is a man's domain. Boys over the age of 12 were forbidden from going to the kitchen.

In the family circles, men have the overall authority. Women and older girls share the domestic chores while men and older boys may help digging in the farms or taking care of the livestock. Defending the society as well as making societal decisions was a man's duty. Women depend so much on men that they rarely have influence on matters related to their families or society in general. They are tied to male relationships for their sustenance and survival of their children.

The political violence that characterized Uganda in 1970s and 1980s during the rule of Idi Amin Dada affected women more negatively than it did men. Women faced a lot of hardships at home especially because they had very limited economic opportunities. It was, perhaps, these challenges that inspired them to be involved in the political struggle that led to the fall of Idi Amin and ushered in the reign of the current president. Ugandan government has promised to do away with all forms of discrimination against women and there are many women in the parliament due to affirmative action.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

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## WOLOF

**PRONUNCIATION:** WOE-loff

**LOCATION:** Senegal

**POPULATION:** About 5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Wolof

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim); Roman Catholic; small percentage of Protestants

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Mauritians; Senegalese

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Wolof form the majority ethnic group in Senegal and are influential culturally and politically in Senegalese life. Apart from oral narratives, information about their pre-colonial origins is sketchy and incomplete. The earliest Portuguese explorers in the 15th century observed that the Wolof and Sereer groups were well established along the Senegalese coast at that time. The Wolof had probably occupied that area for centuries and over time assimilated smaller neighboring groups. An alternative theory holds that several groups including the Soose, Sereer, and Pulaar joined to constitute the Wolof.

From the 1600s to the mid-1800s, slave trading caused much dislocation, though it did not deplete the Wolof to the same degree as other West African peoples. A reminder of this tragic epoch is the island fortress of Gorée, off the coast of Dakar, which served as one of West Africa's main slavery depots.

The French founded the Senegal colony in 1637, making it the oldest French colony in Africa and the longest-lived. As the French advanced their territorial claims eastward, the Wolof states resisted in the 1880s, but eventually succumbed to superior military force. Dakar acquired added importance when the French made it the capital of their West African territories in 1902. Colonization favored the Wolof and in just seventy years, from 1900 to 1970, the group nearly quadrupled its population to 1.4 million.

Since the first political reforms in 1946, the Wolof have played a leading role politically, culturally, and economically in Senegal. Despite the country's weak economy—or perhaps because of it—the Wolof have built a reputation for international commerce and trading. Wolof businesspeople are found throughout Africa, Europe, even on the streets of New York City and Washington, D.C. In Senegal, their key challenges are similar to those of their fellow citizens in neighboring countries: cope with stagnating economies, create living wage job opportunities, build adequate housing and provide basic services to meet rapid population growth and relentless urbanization.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Wolof presently occupy the westernmost point of Africa, between the Senegal River to the north and the Jurbel region about 300 km (185 mi) south. From the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the Wolof extend to the Ferlo desert, some 300 km (185 mi) east. In pre-colonial times, this territory included the kingdoms of Waalo, Jolof, Kajoor, and Baol. Today, this area remains approximately the same as the group's ancestral homeland. Neighboring minorities include the Maures and the Tuculor, the Sereer and the Peul—some of whose members have lived for centuries within the Wolof area.

In Senegal, the Wolof account for nearly 40% of some 13 million people (estimate 2008), followed by the Fulani (15%), Serer (15%), Toucouleur (9%), Dyula (9%), Malinke (9%), and others (3%). In Mauritania they account for about 7% of the population. Though they are a minority in The Gambia, they nonetheless comprise about 50% of the population of Banjul, the coastal capital city of The Gambia.

Physically, their homeland is flat and desert-like, covered by dunes and sandy plains. These are easily traversed in the dry season when vegetation is sparse and thin. The vegetation consists mainly of bushes, acacia, ficus, and baobab trees, and clay soils favor the cultivation of millet. Where the Senegal river overflows its banks, farmers grow sorghum, potatoes, and beans. There is a short rainy season lasting three months from July to September, but cyclical droughts and increasing deforestation add to the insecurity of crop farming.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Wolof is Senegal's dominant language. Practically all Senegalese understand Wolof, and the vast majority of non-Wolof speak it as a second language. Senegalese radio and television broadcast both in French and Wolof. Wolof is also spoken in Mauritania and Mali, and in The Gambia, although in a different form. Given the large number of emigrés, one finds Wolof speakers in France, and on the streets of West Harlem in New York City. Some 7 million people worldwide speak one or more of the six dialects of Wolof (which belongs to the Niger-Congo and Atlantic-Congo family of languages). One growing concern is that the language, especially among Dakar youth, is becoming 'polluted' by French. It is rare in Dakar to hear a complete Wolof sentence without one or several French words mixed in.

### 4 FOLKLORE

As elsewhere in Africa, orality characterizes Wolof folklore. In Wolof and Senegalese society, the most accomplished storytellers are African bards, or *griots*. They are similar to the European minstrel of the Middle Ages, combining the functions of historian, poet, and musician. They must be familiar with history, have many acquaintances, and speak about them diplomatically, but honestly. *Griots* use props, play flutes and harps, and break into song as they perform. Because they are archivists and entertainers in one, no ceremony or celebration of consequence is held without them.

The Wolof consider Lat Dior Diop, the Damel (king) of Kayor, to be a hero and liberator from French occupation in the 19th century. He opposed the building of railroads because he believed they would allow the French to control the entire region. In Senegalese schools, children learn that he was shot by the French and died in battle. Ironically, according to legend, after Diop's death, his horse stood on railroad tracks until hit by a train.

### 5 RELIGION

An overwhelming majority of the Wolof are Muslim, belonging to the Maliki branch of the Sunni group. The remaining 10% are Roman Catholic. Less than 1% is Protestant. There has been some syncretism of traditional, Muslim, and Christian beliefs. The Wolof typically wear protective amulets or "gris-gris" to overpower evil spirits. The small leather pouches once

contained herbs and medicines, but they now hold verses of the Koran.

The Wolof depend on *marabouts*, teachers of the faith, who also exercise much political and economic influence. People give a portion of their salaries to the marabouts, to build mosques and make charitable donations.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Wolof celebrate Muslim as well as Christian holidays and also secular holidays, such as Senegalese Independence Day (April 4). Four of the Muslim holidays are determined by the lunar calendar. The most popular of these is Tabaski, or the "feast of the lamb." This feast commemorates Allah's provision of a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice in the wilderness in the place of his son Isaac. In the morning prayers are offered at the mosque, and then a lamb is slaughtered. People get together with family to partake of a large meal and then visit their friends later in the day. Typically, children receive new clothing and money, and families often go into debt for the occasion.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The most important Wolof rites of passage are naming ceremonies, circumcisions, marriages and funerals. Much significance is attached to names. Parents carefully choose a name for their children, usually the name of a family member or friend who has influenced them and who will provide a model for their child. The decision may take up to a year and is revealed during a naming ceremony.

At age seven to eight, boys are taken from their homes and circumcised in the bush, where they wear white gowns and caps. When they return, they are looked after by a big brother, or *Selbe*, until they are fully healed. The *Selbe* educates them about Wolof heroes and legends. They also visit friends and family and receive gifts from them. After this rite, the community regards them as men.

Marriages give much reason to celebrate as they unite two families and symbolize readiness for children. Weddings are festive and typically involve civil, religious, and traditional ceremonies before they are complete. The reception is held at the home of the groom where the bride will come to live. In order to gain the consent of the bride, the groom's parents bring gifts to her parents. Once the bride has given her consent to marriage, her parents distribute cola nuts to family and friends as a way of announcing the marriage.

At death, according to Islamic custom, funerals are held at home the same or the following day. In the city, where regulations are stricter, the corpse may be taken to a funeral home. A 40-day mourning period follows, during which people visit the family of the deceased and offer gifts of money.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings can last 10–15 minutes. One who does not take time to inquire after another person's health, well being, and family may be snubbed altogether. The French custom of kissing three times on the cheeks is common in Dakar and in the towns. Handshaking is the preferred traditional greeting, but men and women do not shake each others' hands. A common Wolof exchange is illustrated below, although 5 to 10 additional inquiries would be routine. Praise for Allah is interspersed throughout the greetings:



*A Wolof girl helps bathe her little sister. (The Image Works)*

“Nanga def?” (How does it go?).

“Mangi fii rekk.” (I am here only).

“Nunga Fe” (They are there).

“Mbaa sa yaram jamm” (I hope your body is at peace).

“Jamm rekk” (Peace only).

“Alhumdullilah” (Praise be to Allah).

As in many African societies, Wolof respect both age and status. It is considered impolite for a woman to look a man directly in the eye. Women and girls traditionally curtsy to their elders. As in other Muslim societies, only the right hand must be used to shake hands, or to pass and receive objects, because the left hand—used for personal cleansing—is thought unclean. Pointing is considered rude, although people do point with their tongues.

Wolof are accustomed to visiting each other unannounced, even as late as midnight. Impromptu visits are not considered rude or inconvenient, though customs are changing owing to the cell phone culture. A visitor must share a meal, have tea, or spend the night. This traditional hospitality is called *Terranga*.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions vary greatly from the city to the countryside. In Dakar, St. Louis, and Diourbel, most homes have electricity and indoor plumbing, although the water supply—and sometimes electricity too—are unpredictable. Houses are made of

concrete with tin roofs. People who can afford it cook with bottled gas; however, most people use charcoal. Jobs, adequate housing, and coping with inflation pose major challenges for city dwellers. The cost of living in Dakar is relatively high.

Health care is available from the state for a nominal fee, though people must pay for their medicine. Many Wolof prefer to consult traditional healers first. While their spells have no known scientific basis, their other treatments involve the use of local herbs, bark, and roots that do indeed have medicinal properties.

Outside the cities, life is rustic. People live in huts made of millet stalks and thatched roofs. They sleep on traditional beds of wooden sticks with one end raised and draw water from wells or rivers. With no electricity, the only modern appliances to be found in some villages are radios—and yes, cell phones. In the absence of paved roads, the countryside is honeycombed with sand tracks. Trucks follow these or make new “roads,” going almost anywhere they please in the dry season.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The nuclear family is the pillar of Wolof life. Whatever misfortune may befall them, family members are there to support each other. The man of the family may officially make the decisions, but the wife and mother runs the household. She takes care of the children, does the marketing and cooking, draws water, and finds firewood. Mothers nurse their children for

about one year. A Wolof father blames the mother if the children make mistakes (“Look what your son did!”), but enjoys taking credit for a child’s accomplishments. A typical family has as many as ten or eleven children. In polygynous households, wives occupy separate rooms or dwellings, but they live together as co-mères. The first wife exercises seniority over her co-mères, but all join in the child-raising communally.

Traditionally, when a child comes of age, the mother looks for an appropriate spouse of equal or higher social status. For example, members of the *Guer* (noble) caste generally do not marry into the *Griot* (artist) caste. Similarly members of the *Griot* caste do not marry *Jam* (serfs), whose ancestors were servants. The father waits for the mother’s selection of a prospective spouse and then usually approves it.

Wolof do not keep pets, fearing that their prayer mats and other furnishings will be ruined if dogs bring dirt and fleas into the house and that friends might be discouraged from visiting. Cats are not well liked either, except to catch mice. However, people keep lambs because they believe that the “evil eye” will be deflected on the lamb instead of the family.

## 11 CLOTHING

In Wolof society, personal appearance is important. In town, men typically wear shirts and trousers and suits for special occasions; women wear dresses. It is becoming common to see teenage girls in jeans and T-shirts, but only children wear shorts in public. In traditional settings, people wear *boubous*, loose-fitting cotton tunics with large openings under the arms. Men wear cotton trousers underneath, while women wear sarongs, as well as matching headscarves or turbans that complement the *boubous*. Some *boubous* are elaborately embroidered and may cost as much as two to three hundred dollars. Men wear open leather sandals, or closed, pointed ones; women’s sandals may be colorfully decorated.

The wearing of tattoos is gaining popularity among urban youth, and ear piercing is traditional for girls. It is becoming popular with boys as well. White teeth are a sign of beauty, and teenage girls pierce their gums with needles to whiten them. Girls braid their hair, especially in the country.

## 12 FOOD

The Wolof usually eat three meals a day. Townspeople with the means to afford them drink cacao and eat French bread with butter or mayonnaise, jam, and processed cheese imported from France. The traditional breakfast consists of a paste-like dough made of millet with milk poured over it (*lakh*), or *som-bee* (boiled rice covered with curdled milk, sugar, and raisins).

Wolof are famous for *Tiébou Dienn* (cheb-oo-jen), a dish that can be made as simply or elaborately as desired. Essentially, it is a fish stew cooked in cilantro, scallions, garlic, pepper, onions, tomato paste, bouillon cubes, and oil. The stew is mixed with squash, sweet potatoes, okra, tamarind, and different kinds of peppers. It is eaten with rice that has been cooked in the fish broth. The Wolof people also are known for their *Mbaxal-u-Saloum*, a spicy tomato, peanut, and dried-fish sauce with rice. Another popular dish, *Mafé*, is made with peanut sauce, meat, and potatoes, sweet potatoes, or cassava, with a bit of dried fish to flavor it. The favorite drink of the Wolof is *bissap*, which is red and tastes somewhat like cranberry juice. It is considered a purgative, or a digestive drink.

People eat together on a large floor mat. They kneel on one knee and eat the food directly in front of them, using only their right hands. After finishing their portions, they wait for their neighbors to push some food their way. The goal is to get to the center of the food tray.

At night, Dakar residents enjoy going out to a *Dibiterie* (or *Dibi*) for the traditional mutton cooked over a wood fire and covered with a spicy sauce. A meal is completed with the evening tea ritual, *ataya* (the Arabic word for green Chinese tea). Three servings are poured into small glasses, each round sweeter than the last.

## 13 EDUCATION

Only 30% of Wolof read and write in French, and only about one woman in five is literate. School is mandatory and based on the French system, but attendance is not enforced. At the age of four or five, the majority of children attend Koranic schools, where some continue until they have memorized the entire Koran. In the cities, however, this practice is dying out.

Six years of primary school begin with a two-year preparatory program. At the end of four more years, pupils take a high-school qualifying exam. In the French secondary education system, classes progress from Class Six to Class One. A final year follows, in which the student prepares for the state baccalaureate exam. Few people reach this level, so holding a high-school diploma confers considerable prestige on its holder. A small percentage of high-school graduates continue at the University of Dakar. Those who can afford it prefer studying abroad in France or other French-speaking countries like Belgium, Switzerland, and Morocco.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Senegal is a leader in West African film and literature. Its internationally known filmmakers include Djibril Mambeti Diop, who is a Wolof. Another Wolof, Alioune Diop, founded *Presence Africaine*, the foremost African publishing house in Europe. He was also a prolific writer.

Wolof are accomplished musicians and have pioneered modern forms of traditional *griot* music. Modern *griot* “rap” performed in the Wolof language narrates stories about society, much like ancient *griots* narrated the lives of ancient kings. The internationally acclaimed singer Youssou N’dour performs in his native Wolof and in several other languages, including English, and has recorded CDs as well. Traditional Wolof instruments include a small drum (*tama*), held under the arm, which can be pressed against the body to produce different pitches. The goat-skin drum head is hit by a wooden stick with a curved end. The Wolof have skillfully adapted such instruments for pop music.

## 15 WORK

Many Wolof farm and keep herds. Although Wolof generally do not fish, a Wolof-speaking people, the Lebu, are fisherfolk on the coast of Senegal. If the Wolof have an international reputation, it is mainly for their tailoring, wood carving, and business acumen. They have traded with Arabs for centuries and specialize in import-export trading. According to a popular Wolof joke, when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, a Wolof tapped him on the shoulder and asked, “*Gorgui* (sir), would you like to buy this product?”



## 16 SPORTS

The Wolof participate in soccer, basketball, track and field, and jogging. Their traditional sport, however, is similar to ancient Greco-Roman wrestling. Called *Laamb*, it has been played for centuries. Each year, champions are crowned and praised in traditional songs. Two forms exist. In the first, wrestlers strike each other with their bare hands, whereas in the second this form of physical contact is not permitted. A wrestler loses the match when his back touches the ground.

In addition to its physical dimension, *Laamb* also has a spiritual dimension. Like promoters in American boxing, Wolof wrestlers count on *marabouts* or “Juju Men” to organize pre-match rituals. Even the most technically proficient wrestlers would not dare enter the ring without participating in these rites. The wrestlers dance around the ring with drummers and singers. They wear amulets on their arms, legs, and waist to protect them from the witchcraft of their rivals. Spectators enjoy this aspect of the sport as much as they do the fight. In ancient times, matches were organized in the village squares and provided occasions for storytelling by *griots*.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

City folk have access to videos, video games, radio and (satellite) television, but it is cheaper and more enjoyable for many people to create their own fun. For example, in Dakar, as the day cools down late in the afternoon, *griots* play drums in the streets, often accompanied by very suggestive dancing. The *griot* can speed up the beat to dizzying levels.

Young people enjoy nightclubs. In Dakar, some clubs are very elaborate, with moving dance floors, electronically controlled backdrops, and special effects including smoke, mirrors, and sophisticated light shows. *M'balax* is the Senegalese pop music. Rap, reggae, Caribbean zouk, macossa from Cameroon, and sukous from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are also popular with the younger set.

Older people find enjoyment in quieter pursuits, such as socializing at home, in the mosques or playing checkers at a local coffee house. For excitement, they go to wrestling matches, traditional dug-out canoe racing, and horse racing on weekends (although betting is frowned on). Cap-Vert, as the Dakar peninsula was so named by Portuguese explorers, is surrounded by water on three sides. It has excellent beaches, like N'Gor, offering respite from the heat as well as people-watching entertainment on the weekends.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Wolof *Laobé* are known for their woodcarvings. They fashion statues, figurines, and masks, mainly for the tourist market. Wolof are also fine tailors, and the *Teug* caste specializes in jewelry. Men prefer silver bracelets and rings, while women wear gold necklaces, chains, and rings. Some Wolof are traditional weavers. Hobbies may be practical, such as gardening, or instructive, such as storytelling.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Wolof society is undergoing rapid change from a rural to an urban style of living, which places stress on social structures, family relationships, and traditional values. Many Wolof villages have been depopulated as men migrate to the cities hoping to find work, especially white-collar jobs. Children and

young people often find it difficult to adjust—a factor in the rising abuse of alcohol and drugs by the Wolof.

Unemployment is also a major problem. Poverty and idleness have led to an increase in burglary, prostitution, mugging, drug trafficking, and even human trafficking. Pickpockets are common in downtown Dakar. Beggars frequently knock on doors for food, and people often cook extra food, in preparation for these visits. Nevertheless, serious crimes such as murder and armed robbery are still very rare. Handicapped people are generally, but not always, cared for by their families.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women face discrimination, especially in rural areas where traditional customs and polygynous relationships are the norm. Indeed, one in two marriages in the hinterlands is polygynous and, unless agreed to beforehand, husbands do not need to notify or seek consent of their wives to enter into subsequent marriages. Even though the law proscribes marriages for girls under 16, it is not uncommon in rural areas for girls 13-15 years old to be married as they represent a means of income via the brideprice. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is also widespread, despite efforts by government officially to eradicate it. Programs implemented by NGOs, such as TOSTAN, to create more awareness of the associated health risks have reduced the incidence of FGM, but the practice remains deeply ingrained in the culture. Since the man is the head of the household, women cannot take legal responsibility for children, and women have difficulty inheriting and purchasing property. In addition to running the household, they also do 85% of the agricultural work.

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—by R. J. Groelsema and Y. Fal

# XHOSA

**PRONUNCIATION:** KOH-suh (“X” represents a click sound)

**LOCATION:** South Africa (southeastern and urban areas)

**POPULATION:** 8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Xhosa (Bantu)

**RELIGION:** traditional beliefs (supreme being *uThixo* or *uQamata*), Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The word Xhosa refers to a people and a language of South Africa. The Xhosa-speaking people are divided into a number of subgroups with their own distinct but related heritages. One of these subgroups is sometimes rather confusingly called Xhosa as well, while other subgroup names are Bhaca, Bomvana, Gcaleka, Mfengu, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Xesibe, and Thembu (Tembu). Unless otherwise stated, this article includes all these subgroups, and refers to all Xhosa-speaking people.

The Xhosa, among all the Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa, penetrated furthest south towards the Cape of Good Hope. Well before the arrival of Dutch in the 1650s, the Xhosa had settled the southeastern area of South Africa. In this territory, they interacted with the foraging and pastoral people who were in South Africa first, the Khoi and the San.

The Europeans who came to stay in South Africa first settled in and around Cape Town. As the years passed, this limited region was not enough for some of the settlers. A subculture of *trekboers* (white pastoralists) moved away from the Cape, increasing the territory of white control. This expansion was first at the expense of the Khoi and San, but later Xhosa land was taken too. A series of wars between *trekboers* and Xhosa began in the 1770s. Later, in the nineteenth century, the British became the new colonizing force in the Cape. They directed the armies that were to vanquish the Xhosa. Sustained military resistance to the Cape forces ended in 1853, although warfare continued for another 25 years until at least 1878.

Christian missionaries established their first outposts among the Xhosa in the 1820s, but met with little success. Only after the Xhosa population had been traumatized by European invasion, drought, and disease did Xhosa convert to Christianity in substantial numbers. Most of the initial conversions began in the 1850s following the failure of a prophetic movement known as the Cattle Killing. Some 20,000 people died of hunger and disease after killing their cattle to fulfill the Cattle Killing prophecy. Without other recourse and in despair, many Xhosa sought help from the missionaries. Others were forced to flee the territory, taking menial positions working for whites.

In the aftermath of the Cattle Killing, a cultural division developed between mission-educated “school” people and traditionalists, who were called “Reds” after their practice of anointing themselves with red ochre. School people saw themselves as enlightened by Christianity and civilized by Western education, while red people saw themselves as being true to proper Xhosa traditions and the ways of their ancestors.

In addition to land lost to white annexation, legislative acts such as the Glen Grey Act of 1894 reduced Xhosa ability to control their own political affairs. Political authority was allocated to white magistrates, and landholdings were privatized.

Over time, Xhosa people became increasingly impoverished and had no other option except to become migrant laborers. In the late 1990s, Xhosa make up a large percentage of the workers in South Africa’s gold mines.

Under apartheid, the South African government created separate regions that were described as *Bantustans* (homelands) for black people of African descent. Two regions—Transkei and Ciskei—were set aside for Xhosa people. Although these regions were proclaimed independent countries by the apartheid government, they were not recognized as such outside South Africa. Apartheid policy denied South African citizenship to many Xhosa, and thousands of people were forcibly relocated to remote areas in Transkei and Ciskei. Rural areas became even more impoverished, although a few urban centers such as Umtata did achieve some economic growth. After apartheid ended, these areas became part of the Eastern Cape province. In fact, only one of the six districts of the Eastern Cape was not formerly a part of Transkei or Ciskei.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

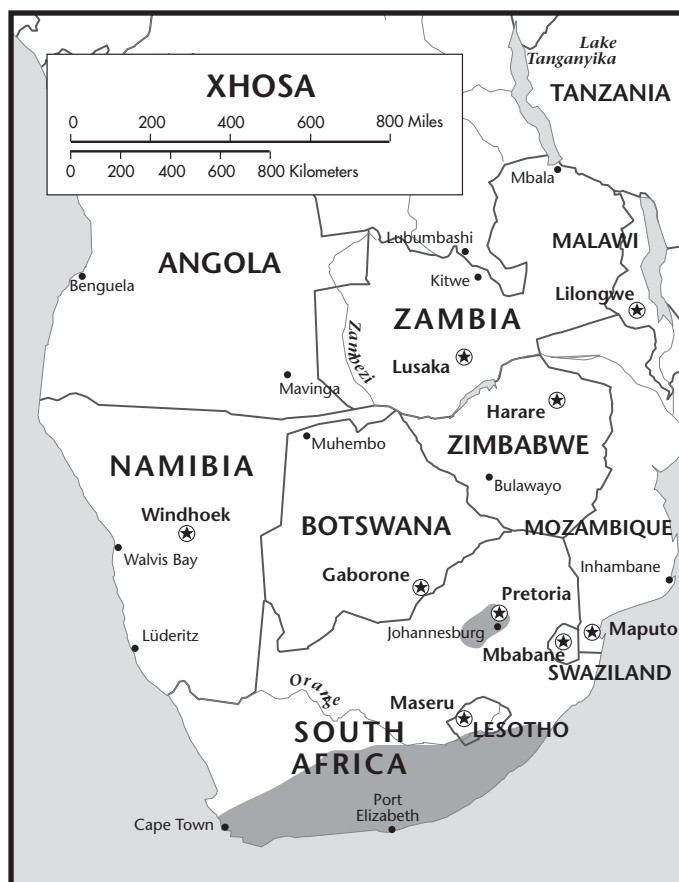
Before the arrival of the Europeans in the late 1600s, Xhosa-speaking people occupied much of eastern South Africa, extending from the Fish River to regions inhabited by Zulu-speakers south of the modern city of Durban. This territory includes well-watered rolling hills near scenic coastal areas as well as harsh and dry regions further inland. Many Xhosa-speaking people live in Cape Town (*iKapa*), East London (*eMonti*), and Port Elizabeth (*iBhayi*). They can be found in lesser numbers in most of South Africa’s major metropolitan areas. As of 2007, there were about 8 million Xhosa, making up approximately 17.5% of South Africa’s population. Others may speak Xhosa as a second language without necessarily identifying themselves as a Xhosa person.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Xhosa language, properly referred to as *isiXhosa*, is a Bantu language closely related to Zulu, Swazi, and Ndebele. There are also a number of dialects that are frequently associated with clans predominant in certain areas. “Thembu,” for example, may refer to people of a particular clan as well as a particular dialect. It is often suggested that the dialect of the Mpondo is most distinctive. As with other South African languages, Xhosa is characterized by respectful forms of address for elders and in-laws. The language is also rich in idioms. To have *isandla esishushu* (“a warm hand”), for example, is to be generous.

The historically close relationship between the Xhosa and other peoples is evident in the language. For example, Xhosa contains many words with click consonants that have been borrowed from Khoi or San words. The “X” in Xhosa represents a type of click made by the tongue on the side of the mouth. This consonant sounds something like the clicking sound English-speaking horseback riders make to encourage their horses. English speakers who have not mastered clicks often pronounce Xhosa as “Ko-Sa.” There are other consonants used in the written language to represent clicks as well, including “c,” “gc,” and “nq.” Modern Xhosa speakers also borrow words liberally from English and Afrikaans.

Names in Xhosa often express the values or opinions of the community. Common personal names include *Thamsanqa* (“good fortune”) and *Nomsa* (“mother of kindness”). Names



may also make reference to topical events, or be coined from English words. Adults are often referred to by their *isiduko* (clan or lineage) names. In the case of women, clan names are preceded by a prefix meaning “mother of.” For example, a woman of the Thembu clan might be called *MamThembu*. Women are also named by reference to their children, real or intended; *NoLindiwe* is a polite name for Lindiwe’s mother.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Stories and legends provide accounts of the Xhosa ancestral heroes. According to one oral tradition, the first person on Earth was a great leader called Xhosa. Another tradition stresses the essential unity of the Xhosa-speaking people by proclaiming that all the Xhosa subgroups are descendants of one ancestor, Tshawe. Historians have suggested that Xhosa and Tshawe were probably the first Xhosa kings or paramount (supreme) chiefs, although the time of their reigns cannot be precisely dated. Madzikane, a hero among the Xhosa-speaking Bhaca, was a contemporary of the famous Zulu leader Shaka in the early 19th century.

Xhosa tradition is rich in creative verbal expression. In the hands of masters, *intsomi* (folktales), proverbs, and *isibongo* (praise poems) are told in dramatic and creative ways. Folktales relate the adventures of both animal protagonists and human characters. These are related in ways that make them both theatrical and musical performances. Praise poems traditionally relate the heroic adventures of ancestors or political leaders. Folk themes are also incorporated into the modern

storytelling art produced on television and other media. One prominent artist named Gcina Mhlope tells stories in this way to promote literacy and education in general.

#### 5 RELIGION

The supreme being among the Xhosa is called *uThixo* or *uQamata*. As in the religions of many other Bantu peoples, God is only rarely involved in everyday life, but may be approached through ancestral intermediaries who are honored through ritual sacrifices. Ancestors commonly make their wishes known to the living in dreams.

Xhosa religious practice is distinguished by elaborate and lengthy rituals, initiations, and feasts. Modern rituals typically pertain to matters of illness and psychological well-being. A common spiritual affliction is a demand from ancestors to undergo *ukutwasa* (“initiation”) into *amagqira*, a cult of healers. An individual may experience physical ailments until he or she agrees to undergo the initiation process, which may take many months and is very expensive.

Christianity in one form or another is accepted by most Xhosa-speaking people today, although historically there was a division between traditionalists who rejected Western belief and those who embraced Western education and the message of missionaries. Among Xhosa-speaking Christians, this division may still be observed—traditionalists are more likely to belong to independent denominations, rather than to one of the denominations that were brought to South Africa by the missionaries. In South Africa, the independent denominations combine the Christian creed with acceptance of the ancestors and other traditional beliefs and practices. These denominations make up a slight majority of today’s Xhosa Christians. Statistics gathered in recent years in the Xhosa heartland of the Eastern Cape suggest that the most popular internationally known Christian denominations are Methodist (19%), Catholic (7%), Anglican (6%), and Presbyterian (5%). Varieties of independent churches known as “Zionist” are followed by approximately 13% of Xhosa while those known as “Apostolic” make up about 9%. Another 9% of Xhosa do not identify with any religion.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Xhosa observe the same holidays as other groups of South Africa. These include the Christian holidays, Workers’ Day (or May Day, May 1), the Day of Reconciliation (December 16), and Heritage Day (September 24). During the apartheid era, two unofficial holidays were observed to honor black people killed in the fight for equality and political representation: June 16th, a national day of remembrance for students who were killed by police in Soweto on that day in 1976; and March 21, a holiday honoring protestors who were killed by authorities during a demonstration in Sharpeville in 1960. Both days are recognized with a day of rest, meetings, and prayer. Another important holiday recognizes April 27, the date of the first national election in which black South Africans could vote.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

After giving birth, a mother is expected to remain secluded in her house for at least ten days. In the past, this seclusion lasted longer, frequently until the child’s umbilical cord dropped off and the navel area healed. In Xhosa tradition, the afterbirth

and umbilical cord were buried or burned to protect the baby from sorcery.

At the end of the period of seclusion, a goat was sacrificed. The meat was distributed in a prescribed way, and the baby anointed with the meat juice. Those who no longer practice the traditional rituals may still invite friends and relatives to a special dinner to mark the end of the mother's seclusion. On this occasion, guests bring presents or money for the baby and mother.

Initiation for males in the form of circumcision is practiced among most Xhosa groups, except among the Mpondo, Bhaca, and Xesibe. The *abakweta* ("initiates-in-training") live in special huts isolated from villages or towns for several weeks. Like soldiers inducted into the army, they have their heads shaved and wear special clothing. They wear a loincloth and a blanket for warmth, and their bodies are smeared from head to toe with a white clay. They are expected to observe numerous taboos and to act deferentially to their adult male leaders. Traditionally, the initiation was complete when young *amakwala* ("graduates") performed dances wearing special grass and reed costumes. Different stages in the initiation process were marked by the sacrifice of a goat. The actual physical operation of circumcision has considerable health risk because the surgeon typically have not received medical training. Risks include infection, gangrene, and even death. Recently in some areas, formally trained physicians have been working in the Eastern Cape to lessen these risks.

The ritual of female circumcision is considerably shorter, although there are similarities with the boys' ceremonies. The *intonjane* ("girl to be initiated") is secluded for about a week behind a screen set up at the rear of her home. During this period, there are dances, and ritual sacrifices of animals. The initiate must hide herself from view and observe food restrictions, but there is no actual surgical operation.

A traditional marriage agreement is finalized by the parents of the bride and groom and formalized by the transfer of *lobolo* ("bridewealth") from the groom's family to the bride's family. When the agreement was settled, traditionally the family of the bride walked in procession to the home of the family of the groom, driving a sacrificial ox before them. The traditional full marriage ceremony took place over several days and involved a number of ritual sacrifices and dances. The bride and her female attendants were led out of their hut, their faces, heads, and bodies completely covered by hoods and blankets. In a ceremony that took place inside the family's cattle enclosure, the women's coverings were removed at a dramatic moment. These days such ceremonies may be combined with Western church weddings or they may be abandoned all together.

Funeral ceremonies are important community rituals. Friends, relatives, and neighbors gather at the house of the deceased, bearing gifts of money and food. Prior to the burial, a *inkonzo yomlindo* ("wake") is often held, during which a large gathering of people sing hymns and pray through the night.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Xhosa have traditionally used greetings to show respect and good intentions to others. In rural areas, greetings between strangers frequently extend into conversations about travel intentions, health, and personal well being. In greeting, a distinction is made between addressing an individual and a group. *Molo* ("hello") is used when greeting one person, and

*molweni* when greeting two or more. On departing, one makes the same distinction: *Hamba kakuhle* ("Go well") for one person and *Hambani kakuhle* for two or more.

In interacting with others, it is crucial to show respect (*ukuhlonipha*). In order not to be rude, youths are expected to keep quiet when elders are speaking and to lower their eyes when being addressed. Hospitality is highly valued, and people are expected to share with visitors what they can. Socializing over tea and snacks is a common form of interaction practiced throughout English-speaking southern Africa.

In Xhosa tradition, one commonly found a girlfriend or boyfriend by attending dances. One popular type of dance, called *umtshotsho* or *intlombe*, could last all night. On some occasions, unmarried lovers were allowed to sleep together provided they observed certain restraints. A form of external intercourse called *ukumetsha* was permitted, but full intercourse was taboo. For Westernized Xhosa, romances often begin at school, church, or through mutual acquaintances. Dating activities include attending the cinema as well as going to dances, sporting events, concerts, and so forth.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

During the early period of white rule in South Africa, Xhosa communities were severely neglected in terms of social services. In fact, rural areas were deliberately impoverished so as to encourage Xhosa to seek wage labor employment. In the later years of apartheid, some attempts were made to address major health concerns in these areas, but most government money continued to be set aside for social services that benefited whites. As the Xhosa population in rural areas expanded through natural increase and forced removals, rural lands became increasingly overcrowded and eroded. In the twentieth-century, many men and women migrated to urban shantytowns such as those that exist on the outskirts of Cape Town. Poverty and ill health are still widespread in both rural and urban communities. Tuberculosis, malnutrition, hypertension, and diarrheal diseases are common health problems. Since 1994, however, the post apartheid government has expanded health and nutritional aid to the black population.

Housing, standards of living, and creature comforts vary considerably among Xhosa-speakers. Xhosa people make up some of the poorest and some of the wealthiest of black South Africans. Poor people live in round thatched-roof huts, labor compounds, or single-room shacks without running water or electricity. Other Xhosa people are among an elite who live in quiet suburban neighborhoods, in large comfortable houses on par with any to be found in Europe or the United States. In South Africa, a person can acquire all the creature comforts that money can buy, provided that one has the money to buy them.

The most common forms of transportation for black people in South Africa are buses, commuter trains, and "taxis." "Taxis" are actually minivans that carry many individual riders at a time. Most such taxis are for short distances in urban areas, but they are also used as a faster alternative to the long-distance routes of buses. Personal cars and trucks are also not uncommon, although in recent years high rates of inflation and increasing fuel costs have driven up prices considerably.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The traditional Xhosa family was patriarchal. Men were considered the heads of their households; women and children were expected to defer to men's authority. Polygynous marriages were permitted where the husband had the means to pay the *lobolo* (bridewealth) for each and to maintain them properly. Women were expected to leave their families to live with the family of her husband. The elaborate marriage ceremony discussed previously helped ease a woman's transition to the new home. In addition, her acceptance into the family was confirmed when she was given a ritual offering of milk.

In urban areas, traditional restrictions on sexual expression have been hard to enforce. Consequently, there have been higher rates of unmarried pregnancies than existed in the past. The migrant labor system has also put great strains on the traditional family, with some men establishing two distinct families—one at the place of work and the other at the rural home. With the end of apartheid, some of the families previously separated by the labor laws are beginning new lives in urban areas. Some of these families live under crowded and difficult conditions in shanty towns and migrant labor compounds.

## 11 CLOTHING

Many Xhosa men and women dress similarly to people in Europe and the United States. However, pants for women have only recently become acceptable. Also, as a result of missionary influence, it has become customary for a woman to cover her hair with a scarf or hat. As a head covering, many rural women fold scarves or other clothes into elaborate turban shapes. These coverings (*imithwalo*), plus the continued practice of anointing the body and face with white or ocher-colored mixtures, gives a distinctive appearance that marks them as Xhosa. Other signs of Xhosa identity in dress include intricately sewn designs on blankets that are worn by both men and women as shawls or capes.

## 12 FOOD

Xhosa people share many food traditions with the other peoples of South Africa. Staple foods are corn (maize) and bread. Beef, mutton, and goat are popular meats. Milk is often drunk in its sour form, while sorghum beer, which is also sour in taste, continues to be popular.

One particular food popularly identified with the Xhosa is *umngqusho*. This is a dish that combines hominy corn with beans and spices. Xhosa also regularly eat the soft porridge made of corn meal flour that is widespread in Africa. Eggs were traditionally taboo for women, while a newly wedded wife was not allowed to eat certain types of meat. Men were not supposed to drink milk in any village where they might later take a wife.

The major mealtimes are breakfast and dinner. Children may go without lunch, although school lunch programs have been established recently by the government. As with other South African peoples, food preferences change with the time. For example, a variety of American or British-style fast-food services are available in urban areas throughout the country. Fine locally produced wines are also popular.

## 13 EDUCATION

The first Western-style schools for Xhosa-speakers were begun by missionaries. Many of these schools were remarkably successful. One of the most famous of the missionary institutions, the University of Fort Hare, boasts Nelson Mandela and a number of other famous African leaders as former students. Unfortunately, however, an indirect consequence of the mission-school heritage was that public education for Africans was not considered a matter of national concern.

Under apartheid, African access to education was restricted and many of the best mission schools were shutdown. As a result, adult literacy rates dropped, in some areas to as low as 30%. Today, the goal is free education for all those aged seven to seventeen. Literacy and education are now seen as keys to success and are highly valued by most people.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Xhosa traditional music places a strong emphasis on group singing and handclapping as accompaniment to dance. Drums, while used occasionally, were not as fundamental a part of musical expression as they were for many other African peoples. Other instruments used included rattles, whistles, flutes, mouth harps, and stringed-instruments constructed with a bow and resonator.

Xhosa people also have specific styles in the material arts. They have distinctive forms of beadwork, pottery making, body decoration, basketry, and, as mentioned above, headwear. Many Xhosa-speaking artists today see themselves as employing their traditions creatively in the context of the world's entire art scene.

Missionaries introduced the Xhosa to Western choral singing. Among the most successful of the Xhosa hymns is the South African national anthem, *Nkosi Sikele' iAfrika* (God Bless Africa), written by a school teacher named Enoch Sontonga in 1897, with additional verses by S.E. K Mqhayi.

Xhosa written literature was established in the nineteenth century with the publication of the first Xhosa newspapers, novels, and plays. S.E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945) is considered by many to be the Xhosa national poet. His work *USamson*, published in 1907, is arguably the first Xhosa novel. Other early writers include Tiyo Soga, A.C. Jordan, I. Bud-Mbelle, and John Tengo Jabavu.

Today there are many individuals of Xhosa background working in literature and the arts. Among them are Fatima Dike, John Kani, Zakes Mda, Gcina Mhlope, and Sindiwe Magona.

## 15 WORK

Wage labor for many rural Xhosa has meant leaving home to find employment in the city. Under white rule, Xhosa men were most frequently hired as miners and farm laborers. Women also worked as farm laborers, but work in domestic service was more valued. For those with high school and college educations, the greatest opportunities were in health care, education, and government administration. Today, Xhosa seek degrees in all fields.

South Africa's migrant labor system has dramatically altered Xhosa social life. Besides putting strain on the family, migrant labor has led to the development of new social groups. For example, associations of young men called *iindlavini* were formed. *Iindlavini* are typically young men with some school-

ing who have spent time working in the mines. They adopted some of the ways of the city while developing their own particular traditions as well. Changes in international economic conditions greatly affect Xhosa peoples. For example, when gold prices declined in recent years, many Xhosa lost their jobs. These workers and the people who depend on their wages suffered considerably.

## 16 SPORTS

Many of the games popular among Xhosa children are found worldwide. These include skipping rope, racing, swimming, playing hopscotch, and so forth. Boys also enjoy wrestling and stick fighting.

The most popular sport in South Africa is soccer. There are many professional teams as well as teams associated with schools and companies. In school, there are also organized competitions in athletics, what Americans call “track and field.”

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular entertainments include attending movies, plays, and musical performances. Televisions and videocassette recorders are also popular. Most of the movies are imported foreign films, but a South African film industry is developing. A Xhosa version of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* (*U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*) set in a Cape Town won top honors in the 2005 Berlin Film Festival. Plays are often broadcast over TV and radio. Television broadcasts also include programs in Xhosa, with Xhosa “soap operas” a regular feature. Music videos can be seen as well.

South Africa has a well-established music industry. The most popular musicians are typically those that perform dance tunes, although religious choirs are also popular. One of the most famous of South Africa’s musicians, Miriam Makeba, is of South African background. By listening to her version of the “click” song, one can get a good sense of how clicks operate in the language, but she is also known for her contributions to world music. Today there are many other Xhosa musicians whose work is globally oriented and multicultural. Among them are the classically trained composer Bongani Ndodona-Breen and the late pop musician Brenda Fassie. Xhosa-speaker Thandiswa Mazwai is also known as one of the founders of the South African pop music form known as *kwaito*.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk craft traditions include beadwork, sewing, pottery making, house decoration, and weaving. Hand-woven materials were generally functional items such as sleeping mats, baskets, and strainers. Xhosa ceremonial clothing is often elaborately decorated with fine embroidery work and intricate geometric designs.

Xhosa-speaking artists today may see themselves as employing their traditions creatively in the context of the world’s entire art scene. Thus, they incorporate traditional forms into modern works of art.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Most of the social problems found among Xhosa people today stem directly or indirectly from the apartheid past. These include high rates of poverty, disease, fractured families, mal-



*A Xhosa-speaking worker creates a necklace from beads at Umtha Beads, a craft business run by David and Cheryl Milligan. The couple started the business after David was laid off work as companies restructured in the new South Africa. (The Image Works)*

nutrition, and crime. Poverty and social dislocation may also tempt people to form gangs and to abuse drugs and alcohol. Competition for scarce resources has also led to conflict with other South African groups such as the Sotho, the Zulu, and people of mixed-race. The high numbers of refugees and illegal immigrants who have come to South Africa from other African countries in recent years has also led to tension. There are divisions within the Xhosa community as well—between men and women, young and old, rural and urban, and highly educated and illiterate—which may lead to tensions if not resolved in the post-apartheid era. One of the biggest challenges for South Africa as a whole is to meet rising expectations for education, employment, and improved standards of living.

South Africa as a whole has suffered considerably from HIV/AIDS. Recent estimates suggest that nearly 700,000 people in the Eastern Cape are HIV positive with some 5.4 million South Africans suffering from the condition. These are some of the highest rates in the world. Deaths from AIDS and AIDS-related diseases have also led to a high proportion of orphans and poorly cared-for young people. On a more positive note,

the numbers who are receiving appropriate treatment has increased dramatically since 2006.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Xhosa society was in the past fairly typical of patriarchally organized societies. Women were expected to seek primarily fulfillment as wives and mothers. Under apartheid family bonds were strained under the system of migrant labor upon which many rural people depended. During this time, women in effect became household heads when their husbands' were away at their jobs. Families were further impoverished during the period of forced settlement in the Bantustans. These conditions also fostered high rates of gender violence, including domestic abuse and rape. The forced separation of husband and wives under apartheid led to other problems as well, such as adultery and prostitution. Also, some men and women engaged in homosexual behaviors, although the idea of a gay identity has not been widely accepted.

The South African government has made improving conditions of gender inequality an important part of its educational and economic development strategy. In terms of education, roughly the same proportions of males and females attend school and graduate, but they do not always achieve parity in employment and promotion opportunities. To correct this within the government, one goal is to have 50% of the managers in public service be women.

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—by R. Shanafelt

# YORUBA

**PRONUNCIATION:** YAWR-uh-buh

**LOCATION:** West Africa (primarily Nigeria; also Benin and Togo)

**POPULATION:** 19,327,000

**LANGUAGE:** Yoruba

**RELIGION:** Ancestral religion, Islam, Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Beninese; Nigerians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba are one of the largest and most important ethnic groups south of the Sahara desert. Their tradition of urban life is unique among African ethnic groups. The Yoruba rank among the leaders in economics, government, religion, and artistic achievement in West Africa. Within Nigeria, where they dominate the Western part of the country, the Yoruba are one of the three largest and most important ethnic groups. The Yoruba people are not a single group, but are a series of diverse people bound together by common language, dress, ritual, political system, mythology, and history.

There has been much speculation about the origins of the Yoruba people. Based on their beautifully cast brass sculptures from Ife, one opinion held that Yoruba culture had been introduced by Etruscans who reached West Africa by way of the "lost continent" of Atlantis. Others suggested that the Yoruba may have come from Egypt. Many educated Yoruba people accept this view, which is also supported by theories relating to similarities in the languages of the two people.

However, archeological evidence has not supported any of these claims. It is now recognized that Ife was the early center of an important glass-making industry and the home of native brass casting. Archeologists have also uncovered a town wall of about 8.8 km (5.5 mi) in circumference surrounding the city that was probably built between AD 950 and 1400. A later town wall of about 12.8 km (8 mi) in circumference from the middle of the 19th century was also discovered. This evidence seems to indicate that Ife was an important artistic and religious center by around AD 1000. As far as the origins of the Yoruba are concerned, all that archeology can point to is some stylistic similarities between pottery in Ife and in Northern Nigeria, dating to a period between 900 BC and AD 200. This indicates that they probably migrated southward from the savanna into the tropical forest area after that time.

The Yoruba are divided among over fifty kingdoms. Yoruba mythology holds that ultimately all Yoruba people descended from a hero called Odua or Oduduwa, and the Yoruba kings validate their right to rule by claiming direct descent from him through one of his sixteen sons. Today there are over fifty "kings" who claim to be descendants of the sons or grandsons of Odua and to have migrated directly from Ife. It is not possible to determine how many kingdoms there were before warring began between them in the last century, but they probably numbered over twenty. Yoruba country was torn by warfare for decades. One of the most damaging effects of the centuries-long warfare was the enslavement of many Yoruba people and their transport to the Americas. In 1893, the Governor of Lagos brought the Yoruba kingdoms in Nigeria under the Protectorate of Great Britain, and peace was achieved. Until 1960

Nigeria was a British colony and the Yoruba were British subjects. On 1 October 1960 Nigeria became an independent nation with the political structure of a federation of states.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Yoruba people live in West Africa, primarily in the country of Nigeria, but with some scattered groups in Benin and Togo. According to the 1963 census, out of a total Yoruba population of 5.3 million, 4.1 million lived in the five states of Oyo, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu, and Ondo. These states are primarily Yoruba, with the percentages of Yoruba in the population ranging from 89.2% for Ondo state to 97.7% in Ibadan State. These states have a combined area of 75,370 sq km (29,100 sq mi), giving an average population density of 58 per sq km (150 per sq mi), but ranging from a low of 31 per sq km (81 per sq mi) in Oyo state to a high of 141 per sq km (365 per sq mi) in Ibadan State.

Most of the other Yoruba are found in the Federal Territory, in Ilorin and Kabba Provinces in Northern Nigeria, in Benin, and in Togo. In Nigeria, the Itsekiri of Warri are a Yoruba-speaking offshoot who have been strongly influenced by Benin culture. Yoruba traders are also found in nearly all the major market towns of West Africa. Descendants of Yoruba slaves, some of whom can still speak the Yoruba language, are found in Sierra Leone where they are known as Aku, in Cuba where they are known as Lucumi, and in Brazil where they are known as Nago. During the four centuries of the slave trade when their territory was known as Slave Coast, uncounted numbers of Yoruba were carried to the Americas where their descendants preserved Yoruba traditions. In several parts of the Caribbean and South America, Yoruba religion has combined with Christianity, resulting in Yoruba deities being identified with Catholic saints.

The Yoruba homeland in West Africa stretches from a savanna region on the north to a region of tropical rain forests on the south. Lagos, the present federal capital of Nigeria, is located at the southern end of this area. It is this range of climate, together with the intensity of cultivation in the savanna area, that determines a very sharp division between regions and in the occupations and living situation of the Yoruba in the two areas.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Yoruba language belongs to the Niger-Congo branch of the Congo-Kordofanian language family that includes most West African languages. While there are many dialects within Yoruba, Yoruba-speaking people can all understand each other.

Yoruba is a tonal language; the same combination of vowels and consonants has different meanings depending on the pitch of the vowels. For example, the same word, *aro*, can mean cymbal, indigo dye, lamentation, and granary, depending on intonation. *Pele o* is "Hello;" *Bawo ni?* is "How are you?;" and *Dada ni* is "Fine, thank you."

## 4 FOLKLORE

The most important myths of the Yoruba are related to their origins. Yoruba believe that, not only did they originate at the city of Ife, but the earth and the first human beings were created there as well. According to this myth, the deities originally lived in the sky, below which there was only primeval water. Olorun, the Sky God, gave to Orishala, the God of Whiteness,





a chain, a bit of earth in a snail shell, and a five-toed chicken, and told him to go down and create the earth. However, as he approached the gate of heaven, he saw some deities having a party and he stopped to greet them. They offered him palm wine, and he drank too much and fell asleep, drunk. Odua, his younger brother, had overheard Olorun's instructions, and when he saw Orishala sleeping, he took the materials and went to the edge of heaven, accompanied by Chameleon. He let down the chain, and they climbed down it. Odua threw the piece of earth on the water and placed the five-toed chicken upon it. The chicken began to scratch the earth, spreading it in all directions, and as far as the ends of the earth. After Chameleon had tested the firmness of the earth, Odua stepped on it at Idio where he made his home and where his sacred grove in Ife is located today.

When Orishala awoke and found that the work had been completed, he put a taboo on wine that his worshippers observe today. He came down to earth and claimed it as his own. He insisted that he was the owner of the earth because he had made it. The two brothers began to fight, and the other deities who followed them to earth took sides with them. When Olorun heard of the fighting, he called Orishala and Odua to appear before him and told them to stop fighting. To Odua, the Creator of the Earth, he gave the right to own the earth and rule over it. To Orishala he gave a special title and the power to mold human bodies; he thus became the Creator of Mankind.

Yoruba mythology goes on to explain that when Odua grew old he became blind. He sent each of his sixteen sons in turn to the ocean for salt water that had been prescribed as a remedy.

Each returned unsuccessfully, bringing only fresh water, until Obokun, the youngest finally succeeded. Odua washed his eyes in the salt water and could see again. In gratitude, he gave Obokun a sword. Obokun took it and cut some of the beaded fringes from Odua's crown; because of this, he was not permitted to wear a crown to cover his face, as the other Yoruba kings do. Obokun went to the city of Ilesha where he became king, and the other sons founded kingdoms of their own.

## 5 RELIGION

In the last census the number of Yoruba who said that they adhere to their ancestral religion, rather than being Christians or Muslims, varied from 20% of the population in Oyo to only 6% in Ijebu. However, most people continue to participate in the annual festivals of their town, though Muslims are probably somewhat more rigid than Christians in the non-observance of certain rites. The rest are divided about evenly between Muslims and Christians.

Yoruba traditional religion holds that there are 401 deities. Some are worshipped throughout Yoruba land and have their counterparts among neighboring peoples; some are fairly widely known; and some are only of local significance. Except for Olorun, the deities are believed to have lived on earth, but instead of dying they became gods. The worshipers of a deity are referred to as his "children." An individual usually worships the deity of his father and some of his mother. Many deities are identified with a particular clan. After marriage, women return home for the annual festival of their own deity but they assist in the performance of the annual festival of their husband's deity. The priests of Yoruba cults usually hold no political office; they do not sit among the chiefs. They are usually men of little wealth; their prestige in the community is often low, but their sacred powers are feared.

There are three gods who are available to all. Olorun is the high god, the Creator, but no shrines exist to him, and there is no organized priesthood. He is invoked in blessings or in thanks, and one may call on him with prayers or by pouring water on kola nuts on the ground. Eshu is the youngest and cleverest of the deities and is the divine messenger who delivers sacrifices prescribed by the diviners to Olorun, after these are placed at his shrine. Regardless of what deity they worship, everyone prays frequently to Eshu. Ifa is the God of Divination and a close friend of Eshu. He is often spoken of as a scribe or clerk and is described as a learned man or scholar. Olorun gave him the power to speak for the gods and communicate with human beings through divination. Most importantly, he is the one who transmits and interprets the wishes of Olorun to mankind and who prescribes the sacrifices that Eshu carries to him. Whatever personal deities they may worship, all believers in the Yoruba religion turn to Ifa in time of trouble.

Other gods include Odua, the creator of the earth; Orishala, the god of whiteness; Ogun, the god of iron; Oranmiyan, the son of Ogun and Odua; Shango, the god of thunder; Shopona, the god of smallpox; and a number of river gods and goddesses. Cults to these deities are maintained by families or clans whose members participate in the annual festivals.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to local town festivals (usually dedicated to individual deities), Yoruba may also celebrate the following holidays, depending on whether they are Christians or Muslims:

(Muslim holidays vary according to the lunar calendar): New Year's Day, January; *Idul Adha* ("Feast of Sacrifice") June or July;

Easter (March or April); *Maulid an-Nabi* ("Muhammad's birthday") September or October; Ramadan (March–April), followed by a 3 day feast; Nigerian Independence Day (October); *Idul Fitri* (March–April); Christmas (December).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A newborn infant is sprinkled with water to make it cry. No word may be spoken until the infant cries, in the belief that silence will prevent the infant from becoming impotent or barren. No one younger than the mother should be present. The infant then is taken to the back yard where the umbilical cord is bound tightly with thread and then cut, using either a knife from the midrib of a leaf of the bamboo palm, or a piece of glass. The placenta is buried in the back yard. On the burial spot, the child is bathed with a loofah sponge and rubbed with palm oil. The child is held by the feet and given three shakes to make it strong and brave. After a specified number of days, a naming ceremony is held and attended by relatives who bring gifts of small amounts of money. Circumcision (boys) and clitoridectomy (girls) are usually performed in the first month and scarification of the face (the cutting of the facial marks) follows about two months later. Christians and Muslims are giving up scarification, but circumcision and clitoridectomy is still done.

Many children are given special names according to the circumstances of their birth. For example, the first-born twin, who is considered younger because he was sent ahead by the other, is called Taiwo, meaning that he came to inspect the world. The second-born or senior twin is called Kehinde, meaning that he arrived afterwards. There are special names for the first, second, third, and fourth children born after twins, for children born with the umbilical cord around their neck, for children born in an unruptured caul (membrane surrounding the fetus), for children born face down, for children born with six fingers, and for other circumstances of birth. Many Yoruba names begin with the name of the deity that the individual worships, for example, *Fagbemi* means "Ifa helps me."

In the past, men past adolescence were divided into a system of age-graded associations. These groups were formed at three-year intervals and continued until the death of all their members. Membership was automatic and universal. The age grades designated a young man's public duties in the town. The youngest grade, 0–9 years, did no work. The next grade weeded the roads, and the two highest grades provided the warriors. At the age of 45, a man became an elder and was exempt from manual public work. This system is now becoming obsolete, as all children attend school.

Girls were generally engaged before puberty in former times, often by age five. This is no longer the practice, although a man still must negotiate through an intermediary with the girl's father (usually before the girl reaches puberty) to arrange a marriage and cannot approach either the girl or her parents directly to propose marriage. If the parents approve of the young man, they consult a diviner. If he is approved by the diviner, the suitor is told to visit the family and to bring the first installment of the bridewealth (payment to the bride's family) to seal the engagement. This process is known as "becoming in-laws." The second installment, known as "love money" can

be given at any time before the third year after puberty when the girl becomes marriageable. The final installment is made just before marriage and is known as "wife money." When the girl reaches marriageable age her family notifies her suitor that it is time for her to have her body decorated with scarified designs. The groom then sends six calabashes (gourd-like fruit, hollowed out and used as a carrier) of water, six bundles of firewood, and the necessary leaves, oils, and other materials. Weddings are frequently performed in the season after the heavy rains. The night begins at the bride's house after dark with a feast to which the groom also contributes yams. The bride then is taken to the groom's house by women from his house after she has been blessed by her mother and her father. In the groom's house she is taken to the main chamber where she is washed from foot to knee with an infusion of leaves meant to bring her many children. For a period of 84 days, the bride then makes ritual visits to her parents' home, returning to her husband's compound after nightfall. For eight days, starting with the wedding night she spends two nights and two days each in her husband's and in her parents' compounds alternately, returning on the ninth day to make a sacrifice to the God of Divination in her husband's home.

Burials are performed by the adult men of the clan of the deceased, but those who can trace actual relationship to the deceased, including a man's brothers and sons, do not join them. The men divide themselves into two groups: one digging the grave and the other bathing the corpse. The body is laid out in the house and laid on fine cloths placed on a bed and covered with still finer cloth. Relatives and friends are notified of the death as soon as possible and they come to console the immediate family and to pay their respects to the departed. The grave is dug in the floor of the room where the deceased lived. Interment in the past was delayed as many as eight days, during which time there was feasting. Now it follows as soon as the grave has been dug. After the burial there is a period of feasting, lasting as long as eight or ten nights if the children can afford it. These funeral ceremonies may be postponed up to a year if the children do not have the resources to do it at once. Many of the rituals associated with burial are intended to insure that the deceased will be reborn again.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Kinship is the most important relationship for the Yoruba. This is where an individual gets his identity and where his primary loyalties lie. Not all ties are based on kinship, however. Friendship may or may not cut across kinship lines. A best friend is referred to as "friend not-see-not-sleep," meaning one does not go to sleep without having seen his best friend. Through experience one learns whose advice he can rely upon and whom he can trust not to reveal confidences. In times of trouble Yoruba turn to the best friend even before turning to the mother. The Yoruba shares his last wishes with the best friend—what is to be done at his burial, how he wishes his property to be divided—and the best friend shares this information with his family at his death.

The second institution that is not based on kinship is the club or association that may grow out of childhood associations. When his clan is performing a religious festival, or when he is sacrificing to his ancestral guardian soul, a child may invite his playmates and their friends to come to eat with him; and, he may be invited by them in return. If this continues,



*Yoruba girls in Lagos, Nigeria. Every Yoruba is born into a patrilineal clan whose members are descended from a remote common ancestor. The clan and sub-clan completely overshadow the immediate family in importance. (Jason Laure)*

they choose a name for the club and invite an elder man and an elder woman to serve as advisors. The members of clubs will consequently be more or less the same age. A man can invite the members of his club to his feast when he is performing a festival and to accompany him as he travels around town accompanied by a drummer on that day. A man's social position is judged by the number of his followers on such occasions. Clubs hold monthly meetings, with the members serving as hosts in turn.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The Yoruba people have lived in towns as long as their history has been recorded. These towns consist of dense aggregates of buildings housing 30 persons to the hectare (75 persons to the acre) in the built-up areas. The traditional compounds in these aggregates are vast structures of rectangular courtyards, each with a single entrance. Around each courtyard is an open or a semi-enclosed porch where the women sit, weave, and cook; behind this are the rooms of each adult. Today, the old compounds are rapidly being replaced by modern bungalows made of cement blocks with corrugated iron roofs.

Most Yoruba towns, even small ones, have adequate basic services, including electricity, running water, and paved roads. The major Yoruba cities, such as Ibadan and Abeokuta, have modern central areas that include banks, government buildings, churches, and hospitals. There is public transportation

connecting all settlements, mostly by mini-buses and taxis. The more affluent people own cars.

Traditional medicine continues to play an important role in the health care of people, alongside modern Western health services. Among the Yoruba both practices flourish. Since Nigeria became independent, the general health of the population has improved with the expansion of the public health network. In the late 1980s, an increase in vaccination against major childhood diseases was carried out under the government's health policy. Nevertheless, many problems remain, and chronic diseases, such as malaria and guinea worm, still resist efforts at eradication.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Whether urban or rural, the Yoruba live in large residential groups, called compounds. The members of the compounds consist of patrilineally related men and their wives and children. After marriage, a bride comes to live in one of the many rooms in the compound of the groom's father. Every Yoruba is born into a patrilineal clan whose members are descended from a remote common ancestor. An individual accepts all members of his own clan as blood relatives, even if he does not know in what way they are actually related. Both sons and daughters are born into the clan of their father.

Clan members are spoken of as "children of the house" with males distinguished as "sons of the house" from the females

or “daughters of the house.” The females live in the compound of their birth until they marry, when they go to live with their husbands. The males constitute the nucleus of the compound, being born, married, and buried in it. The wives of the male clan members are known as “the wives of the house.” Except for their own children, they are not related by blood to the rest of the compound members.

The clan and the sub-clan are each headed by its eldest male member, known as the *Bale* or “father of the house,” a term that also refers to a husband as the head of his own family. No one except a male member of the clan can hold this position, and it follows according to strict seniority. The *Bale* serves as the principal judge of the compound, presiding when disputes are brought before him. A husband is responsible for settling quarrels within his own family; but if he is unsuccessful or if an argument involves members of two different families within the compound, it is referred to the *Bale*. The *Bale* is also responsible for assigning living quarters within the compound, administering clan farmlands assigned to the compound, sacrificing to the founder whose name the compound bears, and making medicines and atonements to keep its inhabitants in good health and at peace.

The hierarchy within the clan, based on seniority, runs from the eldest *Bale* of its several compounds down to the youngest child, and is very important in regulating conduct between the members. Each person is “elder” to all others born or married into the clan after him. The reciprocal obligations involve authority on the one hand, and deference and respect on the other. Males are seated and served according to their relative seniority, and elders can take larger and choicer portions of what is served.

In terms of seniority or age, the male members of the compound are divided into three groups: the elders, the adult males who are economically independent, and the young men and boys who are still economically dependent on their fathers. The elders, the adult males, and wives of the compound hold separate monthly or bimonthly meetings to discuss the affairs of the compound, the allocation of clan farm land, and the collection of taxes.

The clan and sub-clan completely overshadow the immediate family in importance. The immediate family, consisting of a man, his wives, and their children is of less significance and is known only by a descriptive name referring to the dwelling that it occupies, “house that of mine,” to distinguish it from the compound.

The sub-family, consisting of a wife and her children within the polygynous family (husband with two or more wives), is an important unit of everyday life. They have a room in the husband’s house to themselves, and they share possessions in common. Each mother cooks for her own children only, and ties of close affection bind a mother and her children. A man is expected to treat each wife equally and not according to the number of her children, but the mothers compete to gain additional favors for their own children. The father is distant and authoritarian, often seeing little of his children. When they are young, children of co-wives play together on the best terms, but as they grow older and property rights become important, they usually grow apart because of quarrels over possessions. When the father dies, his personal property is divided into approximately equal shares according to the number of children each wife has. It is the children, not the wives, who inherit, and

the eldest son of each wife takes one share in the name of all the children of his mother. He may keep and use this inheritance as he sees fit, but he is held responsible for the economic welfare of the others.

## 11 CLOTHING

Western-style dress is the style of clothing worn in urban areas. Traditional clothing, which is still worn on important occasions and in rural areas, is very colorful and elaborate. Women wear a head tie made of a rectangular piece of cloth tied about the head in a number of distinctive ways. Women carry babies or young children on their backs by tying another rectangular cloth around their waists. A third such cloth may be worn over the shoulder as a shawl, on top of a loose-fitting, short-sleeved blouse. A larger rectangular cloth serves as a wrap-around skirt.

Men wear tailored cloth hats, gowns, and trousers of several different patterns. A popular form of gown is shaped like a poncho; it reaches to the fingertips, but is worn folded back on the shoulders. Trousers are usually very loose and baggy. All the cloth from which traditional clothing is made is hand woven and often decorated with elaborate embroidery.

Facial and body scarification (making small, superficial incisions or punctures in the skin) are both symbols of clan affiliation and a means of beautification. Hair styles, referred to as hairdress, are important forms of decoration for women. The most common hairstyles are composed of parallel, tightly braided stripes running from the forehead to the back of the head. From there, they are wound in a row of tiny queues, from the back of the head to the forehead, from the top of the head downward and ending in a circle of tiny queues on the top of the head where they form a small topknot.

## 12 FOOD

The Yoruba diet consists of starchy tubers, grains, and plantains, supplemented by vegetable oils, wild and cultivated fruits and vegetables, meat, and fish. Although yams are the staple food, they are both expensive and there is prestige associated with serving them. Therefore, they are reserved for social occasions. The daily family diet relies on cassava, taro, maize, beans, and plantains. One of the most popular foods is *foo-foo*, similar to a dumpling, but made of cassava. Rice is now widely grown all over Nigeria, and the Yoruba use it for ceremonial or important meals. In the past, meat was also reserved for ceremonies and special occasions. The predominance of starch in the diet is indicated by the fact that of 56 food recipes recorded in Ife, 47 describe different ways of preparing yams, maize, plantains, cassava, and taro. Six are stews, which may or may not contain meat or fish; they are made of vegetable oil and are highly seasoned with salt and chili pepper. Of the remaining three, two are based on melon seeds and one is simply toasted peanuts.

The following recipes are very popular and are usually served together:

### Pounded Yam

White yams, preferably round and fat in shape with long, thorn-like hairs

1. Scrub yams, peel, and cut into chunks or slices. Place in a pot with water to cover. Cover and cook until the yams can

be pierced easily with a fork.

2. Pound the yams in a mortar, one piece at a time, until it forms a mass that pulls away from the sides of the mortar and is elastic to the touch. (This cannot be done with electric mixers, because the pounded yams will be very stiff.)

Pounded yam is served with soups and stews of many types at main meals.

Variation: Boil some ripe plantain with the yam and pound it with the yam.

### Chicken and Okra Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 medium chicken
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 18 large okra
- 3 grams (1 teaspoon) dry ground red pepper
- 40 grams (1.4 ounces) dry crayfish, ground
- 2 medium fresh tomatoes
- 6 grams (2 teaspoons) tomato paste
- Pinch of salt
- 1.5 grams (½ teaspoon) potash

1. Clean and cut the chicken into pieces, breaking the bones. Place in a pot with salt and pepper, cover with water and boil until tender. Drain, reserving the broth.

2. Grate the okra coarsely. Combine with remaining ingredients and boil for 5 minutes. Add the chicken to the okra mixture and continue to cook for 5 minutes more. Serve with the pounded yam.

### 13 EDUCATION

When Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, its new parliamentary government set a priority on education, and universal primary education soon became the norm in southern Nigeria where the Yoruba live. Secondary school (high school) education also became widespread. The Yoruba were much involved in these efforts since education had a long tradition among them. The first university in Nigeria—established in 1947–48 and originally called University College, Ibadan—was located in a Yoruba city. (After independence, it was renamed the University of Ibadan.) The majority of students at Ibadan are Yoruba.

As a consequence of the priority on education, the literacy rate among people under 30 is high, even though the older generations may still be illiterate.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Yoruba cultural heritage includes verbal arts, such as praise names, praise poems, tongue twisters, hundreds of prose narratives and riddles, and thousands of proverbs. Whether the principal characters are humans or animals, the folktales all have a moral or lesson. Myths and legends impart information that is believed to be true about Yoruba heritage.

An evening session of telling folktales is usually preceded by a riddling contest among the children. Riddles sharpen the wits and train the memory of children. Adults share proverbs that express Yoruba morals, ethics, and social approval and disapproval.

There are songs of both ridicule and praise, as well as lullabies, religious songs, war songs, and work songs. These usually follow a “call and response” pattern between a leader and chorus. Rhythm is provided by drums, iron gongs, cymbals, rattles, and hand clapping. Other instruments include long brass trumpets, ivory trumpets, whistles, stringed instruments, and metallophones. Perhaps the most interesting musical instrument is the “talking drum.”

### 15 WORK

Traditional Yoruba economy was based on hoe farming, craft specialization, and trade. About 75% of the Yoruba men are farmers, producing food crops for their domestic needs. Farming is considered men’s work, and men only do clearing or hoeing fields. Wives can help their husbands with planting yams or harvesting corn, beans, or cotton. Wives also help at the market selling farm produce. A common practice was for several men to have a labor exchange, where they work together an equal number of days or hoeing the same number of heaps on each farmer’s land. Alternatively, a man might invite his relatives, his friends, or the members of his club to a working bee during busy periods. Wealthier farmers could hire laborers.

Since the 1920s cocoa has been an important cash crop in the Yoruba economy. This caused a shift in emphasis to wage labor, doing away with much of the traditional forms of exchange labor.

The Yoruba enjoy trading and huge markets with over a thousand sellers are common. In addition, Yoruba long distance traders can be found as far away as Accra in Ghana and Bamako in Mali. Trade in foodstuffs and in cloth is confined to women; meat selling and produce buying is the province of men.

A farmer can become prosperous by working hard, by enjoying good health and by being blessed with many sons. Today only a few men have enough capital to establish large cocoa farms worked by hired labor. But, by trading an astute man can become very rich. In the past there were noted traders; today the produce buyers, the building contractors and the truck owners are a town’s wealthiest men, enjoying the highest prestige. In the past this wealth was often spent on luxuries—houses, clothing, and the acquisition of wives. Today modern houses and cars are in vogue and every man hopes to send his children, especially his sons, to be educated at a university. The new, educated generation is moving away from farming and its members are looking for white collar jobs.

### 16 SPORTS

See the following section entitled “Entertainment and Recreation.”

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to rituals, dances, and traditional music, modern forms of entertainment include television, going to the movies, and discos. Many urban households own television sets. The more religious households prohibit family members, especially women, from going to see films. Among urban teenagers, American youth culture is popular. Most young people listen to rap and rock music.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES

The Yoruba engage in both visual and verbal art forms. Visual arts include weaving, embroidering, pottery making, woodcarving, leather and bead working, and metalworking. The Yoruba are considered among the most prolific of the art-producing people of Africa.

Both men and women weave, using different types of looms. Women weave on a vertical "mat loom," producing a cloth about 60 cm (2 ft) wide and 213 cm (7 ft) long. Men weave on the horizontal narrow-band treadle loom that produces a strip of cloth only 3 to 4 in (7.5 to 10 cm) wide, but as long as may be needed. The long strips are cut to the desired length and sewn together to make clothing. Patterns are named often after the clubs that ordered them. Cloth is woven from wild silk and from locally grown cotton.

Men also do embroidery, particularly on large gowns worn by men and on men's caps. Men are also the tailors and dress-makers. Floor mats, mat bags for storing clothing, baskets, and strainers are also made by the men.

Women are the potters. In addition to palm oil lamps, they make over twenty kinds of pots and dishes for cooking, eating, and carrying and storing liquids. Most everyday pottery is brown or black without decoration. Pottery used for rituals is decorated with red, white, or blue designs. Gourds or calabashes (a gourd-like fruit) are also used for drinking, serving food, and for carrying palm wine sacrifices and goods to sell in the market. Some are also used as containers for the ingredients of medicines. Some calabashes are decorated with carved designs.

Woodcarving accounts for the greatest variety of decorated and sculptural forms. The woodcarvers, all of whom are men, carve "art," that is, both sculpture and geometrical designs. Those who carve masks and figurines are distinguished from those who simply carve wood into mortars, pestles, and utilitarian bowls. Some Yoruba woodcarvers also work in bone, ivory, and stone.

Blacksmiths work both in iron and brass to create utilitarian and decorative objects. The brass Ife heads of the period before contact with outsiders are considered among the finest art works of the world.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are vast differences in wealth among Yoruba social classes. Differences in income and lifestyle are related to the person's occupation. In some rural areas, farmers barely manage to feed their families. Many traditional urban occupations, such as water carriers, hawkers, and sweepers, also do not provide adequate wages to support a family. Lower-skilled workers are employed in house construction and crafts, or as clerks, all at very low incomes. The oil boom and provisions of schooling in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the growth of a sizable middle class, most of whom adopted a Western lifestyle. The social elites include traditional chiefs and wealthy business and government leaders. The elite lifestyle is characterized by conspicuous consumption of material goods.

Nigeria is party to several international human rights treaties, but the current government's human rights record is poor. Military rule deprives many citizens of their rights through detention without trial, physical assault, torture, and harassment. An active human rights group, the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), was founded by a group of lawyers led by Olisa

Agbakobe, a Yoruba. It is one of several organizations critical of the government's violations of civil rights.

The crime rate in Nigeria is high, particularly in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and other urban areas. More than half the offenses are property crimes. Worsening economic conditions and an ineffective police and military heightened the incidence of crime in the 1980s.

Drug-related crime has emerged as a major problem, and young people are using both marijuana and cocaine in increasing numbers.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender relations among the Yoruba are complex. A lot of gender constructs are portrayed in their myths, which form both their social and religious practices. Some of the Yoruba gods, like Osun, were females and there were female priestesses too, thus illustrating the pivotal role that women played in Yoruba religious and spiritual matters.

As in many other societies, there were specific expectations for females and males. Such expectations were determined by the people's living experiences. For example, women were expected to be peaceful and fruitful; thus, female principles were generally regarded as symbols of coolness, whereas male principles were construed as representing toughness and virility. Consequently, men were portrayed as rough and violent while women were portrayed as peaceful. Hence, some years that are difficult are called "Male Years" (ako odun) while those that are fruitful and peaceful are referred to as "Female Years" (abo odun). In Yoruba culture, a woman who acts like a man is ridiculed and so is a man who behaves like a woman.

The people's social expectations as recorded in wise sayings and proverbs further portray social expectations. For example the Yoruba proverb *Ogbo-ogbon lagbalagba-a fi nsa fun eranla* (It is with dissembling that a venerable man flees from a wild beast). This proverb encourages men to confront danger with bravery and not to run away. Such would be the social expectation.

In Yoruba culture, the gender constructs stress complementary relations between women and men. Thus, they do not necessarily translate to issues of oppression and domination of women by men. This complementary nature of Yoruba gender relations is deeply ingrained in the socio-religious domains and the either gender is vital for a smooth coexistence and harmonious living experience in the society. In fact neither gender fully dominates a particular domain, be it private or public. All the same, either gender can enjoy prominence in a specific area like religious rituals, while the other may be prominent in settling disputes and reconciliation. For example, while women take care of the children and are in charge of the daily running of the homes, men are the providers of resources, such as yams, and defenders of the community against any imminent attacks. Thus, both females and males manifest cooperation in the running of the affairs of the community.

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—revised by M. Njoroge

## ZAMBIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ZAM-bee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Zambia

**POPULATION:** 11 million

**LANGUAGE:** English; Bemba; Nyanja; Tonga; Lozi; Lunda, Luvali and Kaonde

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Christianity with traditional African beliefs; Hindu; Islam; traditional African beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Bemba; Chewa; Tonga

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Although the 70 recognized ethnic groups who now reside in Zambia have distinct migration histories, different languages, and varying social, economic, and political organizations, they share a common colonial and post-colonial history. Zambia is a butterfly-shaped, landlocked country in southern Africa whose political boundaries are the result of European colonization of the region. The distinct groups who were living within the arbitrarily drawn boundaries at the time were first referred to as "Northern Rhodesians" under British domination. They became "Zambians" in the post-independence era.

For at least the past 500 years, the people of Zambia have been characterized by a high degree of migration. This migration, including urban to rural, rural to urban, and rural to rural, continues today. History and archeological evidence reveal that by 1500 much of modern Zambia was already occupied by Bantu-speaking horticulturalists who are the ancestors of many of the present day Zambians, particularly the Bisa and the Ila people. The Ngoni and the Kololo arrived in the region in 1855. Both groups came from South Africa as a result of the wars sparked by Chaka. The Ngoni and Kololo found the Tonga people already residing in the south, and the Chewa and Nsenga groups in the east. The Chewa and Nsenga had migrated earlier from the territory that would later be called Malawi. The Lozis trace their history to the Lunda people, and the Bemba trace their roots to the Luba people.

Prior to the arrival of the British, the nation's ethnic groups lived in relative isolation from one another. The first Europeans in the area were the Portuguese in the 16th century. David Livingstone traveled through the region in the 1850s and "discovered" Victoria Falls in 1855. He is credited with bringing British attention to the area. In 1889, the British South Africa Company (BSAC), under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes, received permits to trade and establish a government in what would become Northern Rhodesia. The BSAC maintained economic and political control of the region until 1924, when the British crown took over administration of the country by means of indirect colonial rule.

Kalomo, now a small district capital, was the first Capital of Northern Rhodesia, until 1911 when the capital shifted to the town of Livingstone. Livingstone remained the capital of Northern Rhodesia until 1935. Lusaka became the administrative center at that time. Between 1929 and 1939, four large copper mines in the north-central part of the country opened. Northern Rhodesia became a supplier of copper to the world market.

Along with many African countries, Zambia won its independence in 1964. It was a multiparty state until 1972, when it

became a “one-party participatory democracy.” The freedom-fighter leader Kenneth Kaunda was president of Zambia from 1964 to 1991. President Kaunda’s greatest strength as a leader was his ability to unite the various ethnic groups of Zambia under his “humanism” platform of “One Zambia, One Nation.” The first decade after independence was marked by the government’s proclaimed commitment to socialism, and its investment in social welfare programs. This was the decade of prosperity when copper prices and people’s spirits were high.

The historical importance of copper and the subsequent growth of the mining industry in Zambia, led to the rapid growth of Zambia’s towns. From the end of World War II to the late 1960s, Zambia’s urban areas, especially the Copperbelt and Lusaka, grew at phenomenal rates. Zambia soon became the most urbanized and industrialized of Africa’s countries. In 1980, 43% of Zambians lived in town, compared to roughly half that for the rest of Africa. Currently it is estimated that 36% of Zambians live in urban areas.

Compared to Zambia’s relative prosperity of the 1960s, overall economic growth rates throughout Africa have declined since the mid-1970s. Throughout the continent, economic troubles have increased due to a decrease in agricultural production and a continued, albeit slower, growth of the urban areas. Zambia’s problems were compounded by the sudden drop in the world market price of copper in the mid-1970s. At that time, copper accounted for 94% of Zambia’s export earnings. Over reliance by the government on copper revenues had resulted in little economic diversification in general, and tremendous neglect of the agricultural sector in particular. Subsidies on maize (corn) meal, which the urban population had come to rely on, compounded the agricultural sector’s problems. The combination of all of these factors in Zambia led to what observers have called “the greatest—and most rapid—economic decline” among all the nations of sub-Saharan Africa.

In the wake of economic problems in the 1970s and 1980s, President Kaunda’s government made several attempts at economic reform, all of which failed. In an attempt to revamp the economy, the 1980s saw the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). This approach, however, failed to achieve its intentions, as it left some 73% of the people in the country living in poverty. Throughout the 1980s, support for the government continued to erode. In October 1991, for the first time in decades, Zambia held multiparty elections. Long-time president Kaunda was voted out of power and President Chiluba, of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), was voted in. In an effort to redress the economic recession, the MMD adopted the Economic Recovery Program (ERP). As of 2004, 67% of the population was still living in poverty.

President Chiluba’s objectives were to diversify the economy, increasing the country’s food supply and thereby reducing food imports. Because copper was the primary export and foreign currency earner, the agricultural sector has long been ignored. Only 7% of the land area is under cultivation, with corn, sorghum, and cassava being the primary subsistence crops. The agricultural system is still largely unreliable, as it is dependent on rainfall. In 2001, at the end of his second term, per the constitution, President Chiluba stepped down. Elections were held and the MMD maintained the presidency, with Levy Mwanawasa as the new president. President Mwanawasa provided a level of stability and continuity, which, combined with increasing commodity prices, led to investment and growth. In 2006



Zambia issued its Fifth National Development Plan, which has a vision for Zambia in 2030 to be a prosperous and stable middle income country. According to the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, Zambia appears to be on the path toward achieving that vision.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Zambia is a landlocked country of south-central Africa, with an area of 751,000 sq km (290,000 sq mi). Zambia is bordered on the south by Zimbabwe and Namibia, on the southeast by Mozambique, on the east by Malawi, on the northeast by Tanzania, on the north and west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and on the west by Angola. Zambia is dominated by a tropical savanna climate. Most of the country has a single rainy season. Zambia has four great rivers: the Zambezi, Kafue, and Luangwa in the south and east of the country; and the Luapula in the north. The rivers offer a valuable resource potential in the form of hydroelectric power. Zambia has a wealth of mineral resources, including copper, lead, zinc, and coal. The earth is characterized as red and powdery and not very fertile. The country was very rich in game before the advent of widespread poaching. Now many species are threatened.

Thirty-six percent of Zambia’s 11 million people live in urban areas, with a trend indicating that urban to rural migration is growing. Most of the people are of Bantu origin (including Bemba, Tonga, Lozi, and Lunda). Some 98% of the population is African, with less than 2% being European and Asian.



### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Zambia is English, which also serves as the lingua franca (common language), but there are seven national languages. Bemba is largely spoken on the Copperbelt, where the majority of the labor force are Bemba. The Bemba people were largely recruited to mine copper because of their proximity to the Copperbelt. Nyanja is another commonly spoken language which comes from the Chewa and Nsenga people of Malawi, and now also from people of the eastern province of Zambia. Nyanja can be heard most commonly in the capital city of Lusaka because of the large eastern-province population that was recruited to work there by the British. The other national languages are Tonga, spoken largely in the south of the country, Lozi, spoken in the west of the country, with its origins in Botswana, and three languages are found in the northwest of the country: Lunda, Luvale and Kaonde.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Zambians have an active tradition of oral history and have passed proverbs, fables, riddles, and creation myths down through many generations. Even today, parables are in active use in conversation.

### 5 RELIGION

Some 72% of Zambia's population report that they are Christian or combine Christianity with traditional African religions. The remainder practice African beliefs, or are Hindu or Muslim. Zambia was officially declared a Christian Nation by President Chiluba, who was himself a born-again Christian. However, there is religious harmony in the country.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Official holidays include New Year's Day (January 1); Youth Day, March 12, Easter weekend (late March or early April); Labor Day (May 1); African Freedom Day (May 25); Heroes and Unity Day (the first Monday and Tuesday in July); Farmers Day (the first Monday in August); Independence Day (October 24), and Christmas and Boxing Day (December 25 and 26).

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Initiation ceremonies for boys are practiced among a number of Zambia's tribal groups. These rituals commonly involve circumcision in the north western part of the country, as well as instruction in hunting and in the group's culture and folklore throughout the country. At puberty, girls are also instructed in the ways of their culture, and receive instruction in sex, marriage, and child rearing, as well.

Both traditional arranged marriages and modern marriages are accompanied by the *lobola*, or bride-price, a payment by the man to his fiancé's family. Many Zambians have church weddings, however traditional marriages are also very common. Zambia is governed by both statutory law as well as customary law. These are sometimes in conflict with each other, such as in the case of property inheritance. Statutory law allows for the wife to inherit at least 20% the property of her deceased husband, while with customary law all property belongs to the family of the deceased husband. Many women have found it difficult to access their lawful right to property, due to the strong influence of customary law and the poor enforcement of statutory law.

Upon the death of a spouse, in-laws may require that a widow or widower undergo sexual cleansing (an act of intercourse with a member of the deceased family, often a brother or other close relative). In some areas it is said that this takes place to rid the widow or widower of the ghost of the deceased spouse. In the age of HIV and AIDS there was a lot of concern that this was increasing the transmission of HIV, therefore, many traditional leaders have outlawed the practice in their areas.

The funeral of a relative, even a distant relative, is considered an event of great importance that one must attend to show respect for the dead. However, in the era of HIV and AIDS, funeral traditions have been modified to ease the high cost of a funeral, as people were finding themselves overwhelmed with the higher than normal rate of mortality. Fortunately the introduction of HIV treatment has begun to slow this higher death rate.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In formal situations, Zambians address each other by their last names, prefaced by the terms for "Mr.," "Mrs.," or "Miss" in their local languages. Different greetings are used in different parts of the country. *Mulibwanji* ("How are you?") is common in the Lusaka area; *Mwapoleni* ("Welcome") is generally used in the Copperbelt region; and *Mwabonwa* ("Welcome") is a standard greeting in the southern part of the country. In most parts of Zambia, people commonly greet each other with a handshake, using the left hand to support the right, a gesture traditionally considered a sign of respect. People in the Luapula, Western, and North-Western provinces frequently use a greeting that involves clapping and squeezing thumbs. People often kneel in the presence of their elders or those who are their social superiors. Zambians, like many other Africans, often avoid eye contact out of politeness. It is considered unacceptable for men and women to touch when greeting each other.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Zambia's towns are bustling centers with a host of problems that are common to cities in general. Most of Zambia's urban residents live in poverty in low-cost, high-density housing areas, out of sight of the relatively few elite who reside in the few low-density, previously European sections of town. In the decade following independence, the population of Zambia's cities doubled in size. In those years the city represented opportunity and privilege. There was food on the table, transportation in the streets, and goods in the shops. Economic opportunities drew people from every province of Zambia, with the largest populations arriving in Lusaka from the Eastern Province (Chewa and Ngoni), and arriving on the Copperbelt from the Central Province (Bemba). The growing discontent in Zambia's large towns, as a result of the economic decline that began in Zambia in the mid-1970s, caused many Zambians to take up the challenge of leaving town and trying to make a living growing food. Recent renewed prosperity can be seen in the urban centers, especially Lusaka, where there is a housing boom, with a lot of new construction and high rents.

Average life expectancy in Zambia has dropped to under 40 years. This is largely due to HIV and AIDS and the opportunistic infections associated with it, such as tuberculosis and various cancers. The country also has a high rate of infant mortality—85 deaths out of every 1,000 live births, due to mal-



*A Zambian woman and her sons grinding millet into flour. (Jason Laure)*

nutrition, diarrhea, and childhood illnesses such as measles. Malaria is also a major cause of death in all age groups, but recent innovations in the use of insecticide-treated bednets, and household spraying are beginning to pay off with a reduction in the incidence of malaria. The country has over 1,200 health facilities with 12 major medical centers, concentrated in urban areas, and smaller health centers throughout the country. Free medical care is provided for those who cannot afford to pay for it.

In rural areas, buses are the main mode of transportation. With the recent economic prosperity, more and more Zambians own cars and traffic is becoming a problem in some urban areas. Taxis are also available to urban-dwellers.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Urban and rural studies of Zambia, as well as census data, indicate that relationships between the sexes are difficult and tenuous. As heads of households, men assume authority within the home. The cultural double standards of condoning polygyny (having more than one wife) and men's extramarital affairs while expecting complete fidelity from women, causes friction in many urban households and contributes to the spread of HIV. What is more, men are not obliged to share their resources within the household, and their access to resources is greater than women's. Certain themes about relations between women and men recur in the Zambian literature. Customary practices continue to shape gender and generational relation-

ships in conflict with, or accommodation to, ongoing social and economic changes.

Regardless of whether descent is traced matrilineally (through the mother's line) or patrilineally (through the father's line), cultural norms and assumptions support male authority and power. A woman's access to productive resources is very often mediated through a man: her father, husband, uncle, or brother. Bride-wealth continues to be transferred at marriage—from the groom's household to the bride's. Kinship and family systems often influence the manner in which women are able to act as full participants in all kinds of relationships. In general, women's access to and rights over property and people are still much more circumscribed than men's.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

With the decline of the economy, and the growth of the world trade economy, there has been a tremendous growth in the second-hand clothing industry, or what Zambians call *salaula*. The term *salaula* means to "rummage through a pile." In this case, the term refers to the bundled used clothing that arrives via Tanzania and South Africa from the industrialized north, including the United States, Canada, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. During the colonial era, and in the decade following independence, Zambians could afford to produce their own textiles and wear tailor-made clothing. With the decline in the economy, they have been forced to purchase the first world's second-hand clothing from local traders, who purchase the large bundles and sell pieces individually. Zambians have a

keen sense of style, nonetheless, and have been characterized by visitors and researchers in the past as being very stylish and particular about appearances.

There is little form of traditional dress, except in the western part of Zambia. The Lozi people appear to have been influenced by Victorian culture and women wear a dress made with local style *chitengi* cloth, but in a design with a long skirt and many petticoats. The men wear outfits more reminiscent of what one would consider traditional dress, with skins forming the man's short skirt, and a red beret on the head.

In other regions of Zambia, women commonly wrap a *chitengi* around their waist as a skirt. In many areas, men and women have adopted some of the more West African style of tailoring, using *chitengi* cloth. In both cases, these are not traditional to Zambia.

## 12 FOOD

The most important dietary staple is a dough or porridge called *nshima* generally made from cornmeal, but in some areas from cassava, or millet. It is typically eaten in combination with foods such as meat stew, vegetables, or a relish made from fish or chicken. Sweet potatoes and peanuts are commonly eaten in rural areas. Families that can afford it eat hot meals at both lunchtime and dinnertime, and a breakfast of porridge or bread and tea. However, in rural areas, especially during the seasonal period before the harvest, many families can only eat one meal a day. Beer is a popular beverage, both commercial and traditional brews, and alcohol abuse is a big problem.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education in Zambia continues to be modeled on the British system, where children begin in kindergarten and progress through the grades to high school. In an effort to provide basic education to all Zambian, public school is free, up to grade eight, but there are costs, such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fees and uniforms which can make education too expensive for some Zambians. As a result, illiteracy is high, totaling 27% (higher for women). Only 20% of Zambians have a secondary education, and only 2% are college graduates. Recently, with the increase in orphans and children made vulnerable due to HIV and AIDS, there has been a dramatic increase in open community schools, which do not require uniforms, but they also receive little support from the government and the standards can be quite low. In an effort to redress this, there is now a distance education radio program to support the community schools and to standardize the learning among those students.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Dance, accompanied by drumming, xylophone, or thumb piano, plays an important cultural role in Zambia. Dances are generally done in two lines, with men in one and women in the other. Dances, which are traditionally associated with the casting out of evil spirits, are performed to celebrate personal milestones (such as an initiation) as well as major communal events. In addition to their own traditional forms of music, Zambians enjoy contemporary music and music from neighboring African countries. To support the arts in Zambia, the National Arts Council introduced an annual national arts awards ceremony, the Ngoma Awards, which recognize Zambian talent in all areas of the arts.

## 15 WORK

If work is defined as wage-earning, then the history of work in Zambia has largely been characterized by high levels of rural to urban migration. When the British arrived, the people residing in Zambia were farmers and/or cattle-herders. The people (primarily men) were recruited by the British to work in the cities for cash, either working in the mines or as domestic servants. For rural entrepreneurs and farmers, access to labor is varied and often influenced by gender- and age-related access to resources. Men are more often wage-earners and homeowners than are women, and they have greater access to cash than women do. Women often find work or are able to recruit workers through personal networks. The 1980 census reports that men are more economically active in the urban areas, while women are more active in rural settings. The census defines the working population as those engaged in agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing, or production and other related occupations. Subsistence farming, which is not included under the category "work," was dominated by females, with 69% of all women engaging in subsistence farming compared to 44% of all men.

The Bemba are best known for their slash-and-burn cultivation practices, called *citimene*. The Bemba farm in the central region of Zambia where the soil fertility is low. The ashes left from cutting, piling, and burning the brush fertilize the soil, enabling farmers to grow grains (mainly). After a few years when the soil is depleted, the farmer will move on and repeat the *citimene* process. The MMD government has placed a high priority on increasing land productivity through foreign investment, and encouraging a largely unemployed urban sector to "go back to the land."

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the leading sport in Zambia, which entered a soccer team in the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in South Korea. Also popular are boxing, track and field, basketball and cricket. Golf is considered a game of the elite. The most popular sport among young women is a version of basketball called "netball."

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the rural areas of Zambia, the primary forms of recreation are drinking and traditional dancing. Urban-dwellers participate in social clubs, church activities, and volunteer groups. Other leisure-time pursuits include dancing at discos, and amateur drama (*ifisela*), as well as a variety of sports. Television is available to people living in the cities and larger towns.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The people of the Northwestern Province of Zambia are known for their masks, which are made of bark and mud, with fierce faces painted on them in red, black, and white. A traditional art among Zambian men is the carving of wood sculptures, sometimes decorated with costumes made of beads. Zambian crafts include sleeping masks, various types of beadwork, and the weaving of baskets and *chitenges*, the national costume, which consist of brightly dyed cloth wrapped around the body. Some of the designs on Zambian pottery are thousands of years old.

Recently there has been an increase in the production of modern art in Zambia. This includes painting, sculpture in



*Kinship and family systems often influence the manner in which Zambian women are able to act as full participants in all kinds of relationships. In general, women's access to and rights over property and people are still much more circumscribed than men's.*  
(Cory Langley)

wood and stone, lithography, and multi-media installations. Famous Zambian artists include the naive painter, Stephen Kapata, and sculptor Friday Tembo.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Poverty, crime, unemployment, rapid inflation, lack of health care and education opportunities, and housing shortages as well as a mushrooming informal economy are causing a growing discontent among residents of Zambia's towns. Pressure on the land, resulting in environmental degradation including deforestation and soil erosion, is a more immediate concern. Estimates indicate that of the 24 million hectares (over 59 million acres) of arable land in the country, only 6% is utilized. Land is currently being distributed to encourage development and investment .

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Zambian women have a relatively low socioeconomic and political status. They face multiple forms of discrimination and abuses, including gender-based violence and insecure property rights. For example, in a survey in 2001, more than half of the ever-married women reported being beaten or abused by their husbands.

On the positive side, the government has enacted laws to protect women and their rights. The government has established specialized units of the police to handle cases of domes-

tic violence and in 2006 a cabinet minister was appointed for gender and development. Zambia has also ratified many regional and international treaties that require the government to eliminate violence and discrimination against women and to guarantee their rights to health, physical security, non-discrimination and life. One such international agreement was the ratification of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, which include national targets on gender equality and the empowerment of women. There are many civil society organizations that provide services and support to women, especially those who experience violence.

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—by L. Ashbaugh; revised by E. Serlemitsos

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## ZIMBABWEANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** zim-BAHB-wee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** (Formerly) Rhodesians

**LOCATION:** Zimbabwe

**POPULATION:** 12.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** ChiShona; isiNdebele; English

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs; Christianity; Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 1: Ndebele

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Internationally, particularly in the West, Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) has been known for its rich tradition of stone sculpture and natural tourist attractions such as the Great Zimbabwe and Victoria Falls. Zimbabwe has a total area of about 400,000 sq km (150,000 sq mi). Before its colonization by Britain in 1896, the country was ruled by various autonomous ethnic kingdoms. The earliest people to inhabit the country were the San, sometimes referred to as the Qoisan or Khoisan (erroneously called “Bushmen”—this is a derogatory label). Their presence in the country can be deduced from the rock paintings scattered all over the country. After the San, the Shona arrived, who built stone walls in the region; the best-known of these are the Great Zimbabwe and Khami Ruins. Some of the well-known pre-colonial Shona kingdoms were the Great Zimbabwe, Munhumutapa, Torwa, Barwe, and the Rozvi.

Zimbabwe has been in a state of economic crisis since the early 2000s. The roots of the crisis date back to the mid-1960s and the era of African independence. In 1965, Ian Smith, the leader of Southern Rhodesia, declared unilateral independence from Britain, but imposed white minority rule, through the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). The UDI resulted in international backlash, including sanctions, and a guerrilla war, which lasted until 1979. More than 36,000 people died in the war and at least 15 million people were displaced. A peace deal was negotiated between Ian Smith's government, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).

Elections were held in 1980 and Mugabe became prime minister. In 1988, the ZANU and ZAPU parties merged into ZANU-PF, effectively creating a one-party state. In 1990, Mugabe's attempt to create a de jure one-party state failed, but despite that, in 1996, Mugabe succeeded in winning reelection on a platform of land reform. By 2000, Mugabe backed war veterans as they forcibly seized many of the white-owned farms. This led to shortages of commodities and a crippling of the economy.

The economic and political crisis has continued. Inflation is spiraling out of control. In January 2008, inflation was pegged at over 100,000%—the world's highest. Chronic food shortages, the collapse of basic services, compounded with over 20% HIV prevalence and corruption have led Zimbabwe to the brink of disaster. It remains to be seen if international pressure or negotiation will bring Zimbabwe back, or if collapse and chaos are inevitable.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Zimbabwe is situated in Southern Africa; it is one of South Africa's northern neighbors. It is located between 14° to 23°s and 25° to 33°e. By 2003, the country's population was estimated at 12.5 million—some 98% are African, and 2% are European, Asian, and mixed-race (sometimes referred to as “colored”). The geographic distribution of the population reflects the racial, ethnic, and economic make-up of the country. The rich farm land with favorable climatic conditions is inhabited and cultivated by the former colonial Europeans (whites), while Africans (blacks) cultivate poorer, overcrowded land. The industries in urban centers are controlled by the former colonial Europeans, Asians, and people of mixed race more than by Africans. Among Africans, those who live and work in the city are better-off economically than those who live in the countryside.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The African population of Zimbabwe is made up of at least 13 ethnic groups who speak different languages. Some of these ethnic groups are the Tonga, Kalanga, Nambya, Ndebele (who migrated from present-day South Africa), Shona (who migrated from present day northeast Africa), Shangani, Sotho, San (Abathwa), Dema, Shangwe, amaFengu, Sena, and Lemba. Two ethnic groups that have received much academic study and international visibility are the Shona and Ndebele. The Shona people make up over 70% of the country's population, while the Ndebele people make up less than 20%.

While these ethnic population groups have distinct cultures and languages, most people in the country speak at least two languages, including one of the three official languages: chiShona, isiNdebele, and English. All the indigenous languages fall within the so-called Bantu group of languages. Most of them are tonal languages.

These African groups also share some cultural practices pertaining to their social organization, folklore, religion, and historical experiences such as colonialism, pastoral economies, and the war of national liberation against British colonialism. Ironically, it was colonialism that provided the context within which most of the integration between the various ethnic groups occurred, particularly the educational, religious, and political systems. Even today, the education system has provided one of the means of developing a national culture that cuts across ethnic and racial boundaries.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Each ethnic group has its own historical heroes or heroines, legends, and myths that recount their origins, traditions, and history. Some of the heroes such as Mbuya Nehanda, Kaguvi, and Lobengula have become national symbols.

## 5 RELIGION

Historical processes have resulted in changes that have altered indigenous African life. Most families live in two worlds—the African and the European (or Western), and in their daily lives, they blend these two. Thus, while ancestral worship is the most dominant religious practice, Christianity and Islam have a stronghold in Zimbabwe.

Every ethnic group has its particular language, folklore, history, religion, cultural practices, cultural heritage, and folk



arts. All indigenous Zimbabweans practice some form of ancestral religion, and more than 75% of the population are also Christian or Muslim.

Some of the indigenous practices such as rites of passage, interpersonal relationships, family life, clothing, food, work, sports, and other forms of entertainment have borrowed some elements from European culture. Most of these changes are fostered by the education system. In essence, there is no longer what could be regarded as purely indigenous practices. However, some of the practices are heavily embedded in indigenous culture.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The various racial and ethnic groups of Zimbabwe share a number of holidays. There are about 12 public holidays observed nationally, as well as those observed by the various religious groups such as Muslims and Christians. There are no indigenous holidays observed nationally, but families may have special days in the year during which they remember their deceased relatives. The most important national holidays are Independence Day, April 18; Workers' Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; Heroes Day, August 11; and Defense Forces' Day, August 12. These are generally celebrated under the supervision of the state. Government officials, including the president of the country, usually address the nation, especially on Independence, Heroes', and Defense Forces' days. These celebrations are accompanied by poetry, music and dance, and plenty of food and drink. Workers' Day is run by trade unions.

Easter and Christmas holidays are Christian holidays celebrated by Zimbabwean Christians. For most people, these holidays are an opportunity for rest or travel. They provide urban workers with the opportunity to visit their families in the communal lands (in the country).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

While most Zimbabweans still practice their indigenous culture, that culture has been significantly eroded by Christianity and European colonization. Most of the traditional practices and beliefs associated with rites of passage are being replaced with Western ones such as baptism and birthday parties. The public celebration of rites of passage associated with birth and puberty has almost ceased, except among a very few ethnic groups such as the amaFengu (a subgroup of the amaXhosa people of South Africa). The amaFengu practice public adolescent male circumcision, to announce boys' graduation to manhood. There is one minor ethnic group, the Remba, who still practice infibulation, an extreme form of female genital mutilation. Marriage and death are still conducted in a manner that is very close to tradition. Marriage has remained a symbol of one's graduation into adulthood, while death and burial mark one's passage into the world of the "living dead," that is, ancestors.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Interpersonal relations in Zimbabwe are characterized by a combination of African and European cultural practices. These practices vary according to ethnic group, although different ethnic groups borrow some practices from one another. Each ethnic group has its particular greetings and visiting customs. In some groups, elders have to initiate greetings, while in others someone younger should initiate them. Some shake hands and some do not. Bowing one's head, and bending one's knees are other customs followed by some groups but not others. Whenever one visits another person's homestead, the visitor has to humble himself or herself before the hostess or host. Gesturing, including eye and facial expressions, are also an important aspect of greetings and interpersonal relations.

Another important aspect of interpersonal relations that has been affected by Western culture is dating. Any form of dating in Zimbabwe always has a mediator. Most people do not usually date a stranger, for obvious reasons. Dating a complete stranger is regarded as one of the recipes for disharmony in a relationship. Another explanation has to do with incest. People who do not know each other's family histories risk being involved in an incestuous relationship. However, these beliefs are changing because most young people meet and date in schools, colleges, and universities with no prior knowledge of each other's family background.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Not all Zimbabweans enjoy the same living conditions, particularly health facilities, housing, and transportation. Rural parts of the country are the worst, and cities enjoy most of the best conditions. However, the current economic crisis has heavily impacted both rural and urban areas. Most rural families do not have tap water. Transportation has become challenging in all parts of the country due to both fuel shortages and poor upkeep of the road system. Many parts of the country no longer have regular transport. The same is true for health facilities.

The whole country does not have adequate health facilities, but the rural population is hardest hit. Many communities do not always have access to a fully trained nurse let alone a doctor. Medicines are always inadequate. Some of the most common diseases are malaria, bilharzia, sexually transmitted diseases, tetanus, cholera, polio, and typhoid, and this is all compounded by the high HIV prevalence.

In both the city and the country, there are also local differences in the standard of living. In the city, the differences are based on race, gender, and class. People of European origin, Asians, people of mixed race, and elite blacks enjoy a better standard of living. In cities, women are the worst off because of the employment discrimination and related sexist practices that keep them from accessing resources such as land, credit, and housing.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage and the family are the cornerstones of Zimbabwean society, regardless of ethnic group and race. Besides being an important rite of passage, marriage is regarded as a sacred practice. It is through marriage that the living are connected with their ancestors. It is within the family that gender roles are defined. Most ethnic groups have patriarchal families, in which women play a subordinate role. They are expected to serve their husbands, work for them, and bear them children. However, women have particular rights, and access to a form of power that is not usually expressed publicly. Families are usually headed by men, although there are a growing number of single-parent families headed by women. A typical family is made up of a husband and wife and at least two children. Traditional families are big, including five or more children, grandparents and children of relations. There are also what are known as extended families, composed of a father, a mother, and their son or sons with their own families.

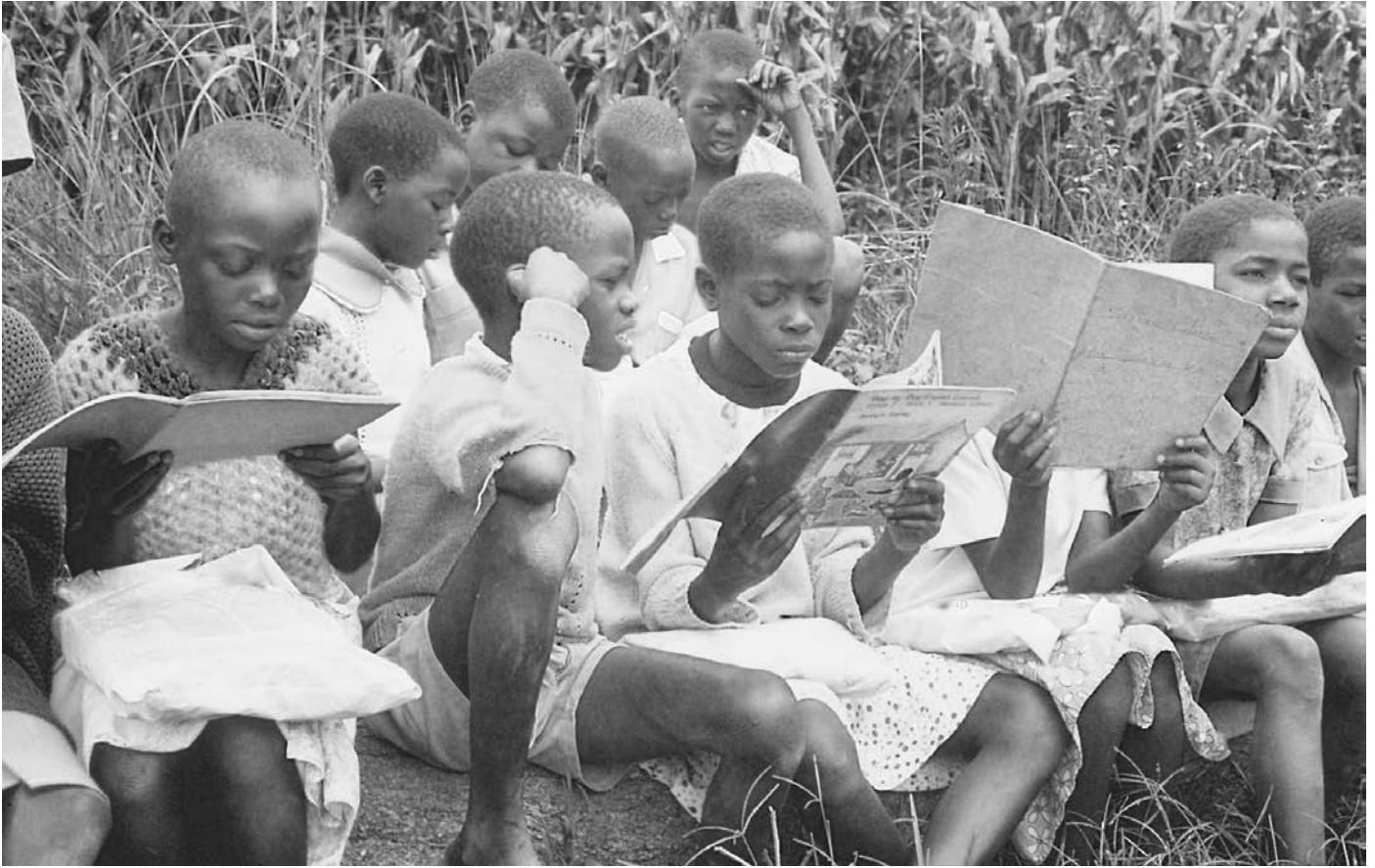
Some men have more than one wife. It is not uncommon to find a man with 10 wives. One of the most common features of a Zimbabwean family, especially in the rural parts of the country, are animals. Most animals are not reared merely as pets but to serve other purposes. For instance, cats are kept in houses in order to kill pests such as mice and rats, and dogs are used to guard homes and for hunting.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most Zimbabweans do not wear traditional clothing as part of their everyday dress. European dress is the most dominant form of clothing in the country. There are very few people who wear traditional clothes on a regular basis. Traditional dress comprises a headdress, wraparound cloth, and ornamentation such as earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. This dress is usually seen during ceremonial and state occasions such as Independence Day and Heroes' Day.

## 12 FOOD

Zimbabwe's staple food is called *sadza*, made out of cornmeal and eaten with any relish, the most common being either greens or meat (particularly beef and chicken). Other traditional foods are milk, wild fruits, rice, green maize (corn on the cob), cucumbers, peanuts, beans, and home-brewed beer. While most of the utensils used are Western, some traditional utensils are still in use. Some of these are calabashes (gourds) that are used to store and cool water and milk; and clay pots



*Education is regarded as an asset in a family since it is perceived as a passport to a good job. Zimbabwean parents invest a lot of money in the education of their children as a form of future investment, because children are supposed to look after their elderly parents. (Jason Laure)*

used for cooking special foods such as meat, and for storing milk. Wooden plates and spoons are still in use alongside Western ones. Since colonization, Zimbabweans have adopted some of the European food or the foods introduced by Europeans, especially sugar, bread, and tea. Most families usually have a minimum of three meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Nowadays, for breakfast people may eat porridge made out of cornmeal or oatmeal, cereal, or bread and tea. Leftovers from the previous day may be eaten for breakfast, too. For lunch, people usually have sadza with an accompanying relish, or any available heavy food. A similar meal might be eaten for dinner. However, foreign foods such as macaroni and cheese and mashed potatoes are now part of the staple diet. In cities, people can get meals from restaurants or take-out food places. Some of the fast-food places are Chicken Inn and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

There are taboos associated with certain types of foods. These taboos depend on a number of factors: family name, age, sex, and context. In some cultures, certain food is eaten only when it is in season. For instance, the amaNdebele discourage the eating of corn on the cob outside its season. Most ethnic groups also discourage the consumption of an animal, plant, or any other form of food that bears their family name. For instance, if one's family name is Nkomo (cattle: cow or oxen), one is not supposed to eat beef. Young children are discouraged from eating eggs. When a woman is menstruating, she is

not supposed to drink milk because it is believed that doing so might harm cows and their calves.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Zimbabwe has traditionally been one of the very fortunate countries in Southern Africa to have basic education facilities, especially for young people. While there are some people who cannot read or write, historically most people have at least three years of elementary education. Education has been regarded as an asset in a family since it is perceived as a passport to a good job. Thus, parents traditionally spend a lot of money on the education of their children as some form of future investment, because children are supposed to look after their elderly parents. After independence, especially in the late 1980s, the country invested many resources in education. This resulted in huge numbers of students graduating from four years of secondary school education. There was also an increase in the number of students with six years of secondary school education, the requirement for university enrollment. On average, the highest level of education is four years of high school. However, there have been growing numbers of people with a college education. Recently, the economic chaos has also had an impact on the education system. Many of the private schools have closed and the quality of public education has plummeted.



The national adult literacy rate increased from about 62% in 1982 to about 90% by 2004. The adult literacy rate is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. In both rural and urban areas, there are more literate males than females, and more males than females attain higher education levels. Attendance is mandatory for primary levels. Primary education is 7 years; secondary school, 6 years; college, about 2 to 3 years; and university at least 3 years to 7 for medical school.

University or college education gives one's family pride and happiness. However, the education system reflects the cultural and economic practices of Zimbabwean society. Most Africans in the country believe in educating sons rather than daughters because when daughters marry, they take family resources to another family.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Zimbabwe has a very rich tradition of the arts, including music, dance, fine art and crafts, and literature. Traditionally, Africans transmitted knowledge through the arts, especially through music and dance. Music and dance were, and to some extent are still, part of ceremonial celebrations and rites of passage. Other media continue to be used as forms of communication, such as praise songs (an equivalent of poems), stories and proverbs.

#### 15 WORK

Traditionally, work is defined along gender lines. Most domestic work such as cooking, brewing, and housekeeping is performed by women, while men work outside the home tending cattle, hunting and cultivating land. However, women also participate in agricultural work, by performing tasks that are defined as "light," such as planting and cultivation. These roles are changing, however. Men help with some of the roles that were previously set aside for women, and women and girls now herd and milk cattle. In the early days of colonization, some families did not allow women to engage in waged employment in the city, mines, or commercial farms. The colonial state also did not allow the employment of women, especially black women, in wage-labor. However, despite these constraints, women found their way into cities to seek work. The independence government introduced legislation that abolished labor discrimination against women. As a result, the number of women in waged labor, such as factories, corporate, and government positions, increased. There is still a lot to be done, however, for women and the disabled to improve their opportunities.

#### 16 SPORTS

The country's national sport is soccer. The Zimbabwe national soccer team is one of the rising soccer powerhouses in Southern Africa, if not in all of Africa. The team participates in the African Cup and World Cup competitions quite regularly. There are a handful of Zimbabweans who play on European soccer teams, especially in Britain, Germany, and Belgium. Other sports are track-and-field, golf, cricket, rugby, wrestling, boxing, netball (women's), tennis, and horse-racing. Sports in Zimbabwe are organized and funded along racial lines. Soccer, boxing, wrestling, and track-and-field are popular among Africans, while Europeans prefer golf, cricket, rugby, tennis, and horse-racing. However, people from either race cross over to other sports that are not common in their community.

Before colonization, people played indigenous games such as hide-and-seek, and engaged in various hobbies for amusement. Boys, while herding cattle, ran races or mounted small bulls, and played a type of stone game called *intsoro* or *tsoro*. Girls also had their own games such as *nhoda*, another kind of stone game. Today, most of the sports and games played are a mixture of indigenous and foreign ones. This has come about through the influence of schools and the mass media.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional forms of entertainment such as drinking, singing, and dancing have persisted in contemporary society. Traditional ceremonies, state functions, and rites of passage also serve as entertainment. Race, class, and geographical location shape one's form of entertainment or recreation. Europeans (whites) have their own forms of entertainment such as going to movies, horseracing and riding, bird watching, stamp collecting, boating, watching plays, flying kites, and going to concerts. The concerts that whites and Asians go to are usually different from those that Africans attend.

Children have their own forms of entertainment and hobbies that are developed through the school system and the mass media, especially radio and television. They watch a lot of television and listen to Top 40 radio. Most of the television programs, videotapes, and films come from the United Kingdom and the United States. Children in Zimbabwe also play video and computer games. Zimbabwe is one of the dumping grounds of cheap and old popular culture products from the United States and the United Kingdom, such as TV shows like *Dallas* and *Falcon Crest*, professional wrestling, and soccer games. As a result, young people dress and try to imitate the lifestyles of musicians and actors from these two countries, especially African American performers. They also listen to local and regional pop artists, especially those from South Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some of the local well-known musicians are Oliver Mutukuzi, Dorothy Masuka, Thomas Mapfumo, Lovemore Majaiwana, Bhundu Boys, and Andy Brown and Storm. Two internationally known films have come from Zimbabwe: *Neria*, a story about a woman whose property is about to be taken away from her by the relatives of her deceased husband; and *Jit*, a serious comedy centered on a young man who is torn between Western life and his ancestors.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Zimbabwe is well known for its folk arts, particularly stone sculpture and woodcarving. Stone sculpture is a Shona tradition, while mat making and related arts and crafts are popular among the Ndebele, Kalanga, and Nambya people. Among the most-practiced arts in the past were house-decorating, beadwork, tie-dyeing material, mat- and basket-making, and iron-smelting. Pre-colonial Zimbabweans made weapons, hoes, and other tools for domestic use, such as knives from iron. Wild cotton and wild bark were used to weave mats, dresses, beehives, food containers, and water coolers. Baskets, storage containers, chairs, fish traps, carpets, and sleeping mats were and are made from cane, reed, grass, sisal, and related materials, both for domestic use and for sale.

Some of the traditional arts and crafts have continued to be used and adapted to the present. This can be seen in urban toys such as wire bicycles, hats, pieces of sculpture sold at airports,

and related crafts, as well as popular culture such as music. Some dances and crafts are now used to attract and entertain tourists at places such as Victoria Falls.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Despite the long strides that Zimbabwe has made in terms of building a democratic society, since the 2000s, these gains have been undermined. Soon after independence in the early 1980s, there was a lot of political instability and violation of human rights in the southwestern part of the country known as Matabeleland, where the government claimed there was some rebel political activity (dissident activity). In an attempt to deal with the situation, government forces killed many civilians and violated other human rights in the region. This continued until 1988. It is estimated that more than 5,000 people were killed. Opposition is a political right in Zimbabwe, but it is not tolerated by the current government. Most opposition parties have found themselves having to give up because the state blocks their access to the government-controlled mass media and other resources that any political party requires. Most minority parties cannot access state funding because of existing legislation. As of 2008 the political crisis had shed light on more human rights abuses and raised concerns that the abuses could escalate. In 2005 the government undertook mass evictions and the demolition of many informal structures, known as Operation Murambatsvina. The United Nations reported that this operation deprived over 700,000 Zimbabweans of their homes or their livelihoods, or both. It has been suggested that this operation was conducted to punish those who were not supportive of the ruling party. There are concerns that more repressive laws are being introduced to suppress criticism of government policies. For example, in 2005 the parliament passed the Constitutional Amendment Act, giving government the power to expropriate property without the possibility of judicial appeal and to invalidate passports for those considered a threat to national security. Concerns have been expressed that while much of the international community has expressed outrage over these developments, the African leaders have been more conservative in their response, opting for "quiet diplomacy."

Another area of human rights concern is the treatment of women. It is a well-known fact that Zimbabwe had become one of the countries in the world with a very progressive legal system as far as human and women's rights are concerned. However, this legal system has not been backed with action. The current government continues to harass and detain women as prostitutes, and has taken away some of the gains that women had made since independence. Some of the laws that empowered women, such as the Legal Age of Majority Act that gave women the right to marry whomever they wanted independent of parental approval are likely to be repealed.

Economic and social problems are intertwined. Since the late 1980s, the country has seen growing unemployment, especially among high school graduates. Coupled with the effects of the war of national liberation and consistent drought cycles, this has resulted in more social problems such as crime, drug and alcohol abuse, disease, and a depressed health system.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The constitution says that "every person in Zimbabwe" has fundamental human rights, regardless of race/color, tribe, place of origin, political or religious opinion, or gender, how-

ever, domestic violence and discrimination against women remains a problem.

Women are underrepresented in government and politics. In the year 2000 only 20 of the 150 members of parliament were women. While women may legally participate in politics without legal restriction, traditionally husbands, particularly in rural communities, direct women to vote according to the husband's preferences.

Violence against women, especially wife beating, is common. In 1998 more than 60% of the murder cases tried in the Harare High Court were due to domestic violence. There has been increased media reporting on sexual violence against women, but it has been noted that some High Court Judges impose lenient sentences in such cases.

The health status of women is worse than men. Women are more likely to be infected with HIV than men, due to both biological and cultural reasons. While women normally carry a heavier burden of care-giving, this has been intensified as a result of the high prevalence of HIV. While fertility is relatively low, with only 3.34 children per woman, maternal mortality is very high, with almost 600 per 100,000 live births resulting in the death of the mother.

Despite the efforts of government and an active civil society supporting the empowerment of women, women remain disadvantaged in society. Widespread illiteracy, economic dependency, social norms and traditional practices reinforce discrimination. Girls are less educated than boys, more likely to marry at a young age and to a person not of their choosing. They are also less likely to have their own land, formal employment, or to achieve economic independence. Furthermore, tradition does not respect decision making among women.

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—revised by E. Serlemitsos

# ZULU

**PRONUNCIATION:** ZOO-loo

**LOCATION:** KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, urban areas

**POPULATION:** 23.8% of South Africa's 47.4 million people are Zulu-speakers

**LANGUAGE:** IsiZulu (mother tongue)

**RELIGION:** Traditional beliefs, Christianity, and syncretic religions

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

For many people, the Zulu are the best-known African people. Their military exploits led to the rise of a great kingdom that was feared for a long time over much of the African continent. They have a royal line that can be traced back to Shaka, the king of the Zulu during the 19th century. Shaka built his kingdom from small tribes that resided in what is today the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. The Zulu are the descendants of Nguni-speaking people. Their written history can be traced back to the 14th century, when they migrated southward from the east to settle in what is now South Africa. Archaeological excavations on early Iron Age sites indicate that people ancestral to the Nguni-speaking peoples of KwaZulu were settled there from about 1500. At that time, all the Nguni tribes of the area were autonomous; however, some were more powerful than others.

In the early 19th century a young prince, Shaka, from the Zulu tribe came onto the scene and welded most of the Nguni tribes into the powerful Zulu Kingdom. Shaka ruled from 1816 until he was assassinated by his brothers in 1828. During his reign, Shaka recruited young men from all over the kingdom and trained them in his own novel warrior tactics. After defeating competing armies and assimilating their people, Shaka established his Zulu nation. Within twelve years, he had forged one of the mightiest empires the African continent has ever known. Few leaders in history have accomplished so much so quickly. However, during the late 1800s, British troops invaded Zulu territory and divided the Zulu land into 13 chiefdoms. In 1906, a section of the Zulus under chief Bambatha attempted a rebellion against the British, but they were defeated by a better-equipped British force.

The Zulu never regained their independence. Throughout the mid-1900s they were dominated by different white governments, first the British and later on the Afrikaner. In the period leading up to South Africa's first democratic election in 1994 and continuing into the 21st century, the Zulu endeavored to regain a measure of political autonomy via the Inkatha Freedom Party. They have been unsuccessful, however, both with the National Party government and the African Nationalist Congress-dominated government. As of 2008, the president of the majority ANC party was Jacob Zuma, who is Zulu by birth.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Approximately 75% of the Zulu-speaking people live in KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, while the remaining 25% are scattered throughout the other South African provinces. KwaZulu-Natal is situated between 27° to 31°s and 29° to 31°e.

It borders on Mozambique in the north, Eastern Cape province of South Africa in the south, the Indian Ocean in the east, and Lesotho in the west. The provincial capital is Pietermaritzburg. KwaZulu-Natal constitutes 92,180 square kilometers (35,590 square miles), which is 7.6% of the total area of South Africa. It is a semi-fertile region with a flat coastal plain, highlands to the west, and numerous rivers and streams. The subtropical climate brings lots of sunshine and brief, intense rain showers.

Some 23.8% of South Africa's total population of 47.4 million are Zulu-speaking. While many Zulu still live in traditionally orientated rural communities, others have migrated to urban areas. However, links between urban and rural residents remain strong. A mixture of traditional and Western ways of life is clearly evident in the lives of almost all Zulu people. With urbanization, rural people have been affected directly and indirectly by modernization. Normal daily life for a 21st century Zulu is difficult to distinguish from that of other black people in South Africa.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The dominant language in South Africa is isiZulu, known commonly as Zulu. In KwaZulu-Natal, the most frequently spoken languages are Zulu and English. Zulu as a paralinguistic is idiomatic and proverbial and is characterized by many clicks. The daily life of a Zulu person can be captured in the naming system of people, buildings, organizations or associations, events, etc. Every name has a meaning and may relate to the past, the present, or the future. For example, the name "Welile" means literally "a person who has crossed something" (the river). Figuratively, it means a person who has overcome obstacles.

The Zulu language is characterized by words that pertain to the details of life, making distinctions that are difficult for others to comprehend. It is also characterized by *hlonipha* (respect) terms. Addressing those who are older than oneself, especially elderly and senior people, by their first names is viewed as disrespectful. Therefore, terms like *baba* (father) and *mama* (mother) are used not only to address one's own parents, but also other senior men and women of the community.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The belief in ancestral spirits (*amadlozi* or *abaphansi*) has always been strong. These are the spirits of the dead. The Zulu people recognize the existence of a supreme being. God is known as uMvelinqangi (One Who Came First) or uNkulunkulu, because he appeared first. This supreme being is far removed from the lives of the people and has never been seen by anyone. No ceremonies are, therefore, ever performed for uMvelinqangi, and his influence on the lives of the people is not direct. Zulu people believe that the intermediaries between uMvelinqangi and the people on earth are the spirits of the dead. The deceased heads of families are supposed to return after death to watch over the destinies of those who remain behind. The spirits, in turn, act as mediators with uMvelinqangi. Death is believed to bring one nearer to that mysterious supernatural personage. Because the ancestral spirits are believed to watch over those left behind, those alive have to ensure that they do not offend them. The ancestral spirits are believed to be offended when people break away from accepted customs. This belief has contributed to the conservatism for which some Zulus are known.

Zulus believe in a long life that continues after death. Getting old is seen more as a blessing than an unfortunate or unwanted phenomenon. This is based on the myth that long ago people did not die but rather lived for years. According to this myth, the Creator did not think that people should die and spoke to a chameleon, saying, "Chameleon, I am sending you to the people. Go and tell them that they are not to die." Although the chameleon was very slow, the Creator did not mind. He waited for the reply. However, after walking a long distance, the chameleon saw wild berries and decided to stop and eat them. The chameleon convinced itself that the Creator would not find out. Unfortunately, the Creator saw the chameleon and became very angry. Now the Creator called the lizard, which came swiftly. Angry, the Creator told the lizard to go and tell the people that they were to die. The lizard sped off, passed the chameleon on the way, and delivered the message to the people. After a long time, the chameleon appeared, breathing heavily, and delivered its message. The people were very angry and said to it, "Why did you waste time? We have already received the lizard's message!" Thus, growing old among the Zulu is seen as a special privilege, signifying that the Creator is overriding the lizard's message. Elderly people are believed to be sacred and are thus always respected.

## 5 RELIGION

Ancestral spirits are important in Zulu religious life. Offerings and sacrifices are made to the ancestors for protection, good health, and happiness. Grave sites are sacred because that is where the dead (who in turn will become ancestral spirits) are buried. Ancestral spirits come back to the world in the form of dreams, illnesses, and sometimes snakes.

The Zulu also believe in the use of magic. Anything that is beyond their understanding, such as bad luck and illness, is considered to be sent by an angry spirit, either from an ancestor or someone bewitching them. When this happens, the help of a diviner or herbalist is sought. He or she, in turn, will communicate with the ancestors or use natural herbs and prayers to get rid of the problem. Kinship members are prohibited from practicing magic or bewitching each other.

Under colonialism, many Zulu converted to Christianity. Although there are a large number of Christian converts, ancestral beliefs have far from disappeared. Instead, there has been a tendency to syncretize traditional beliefs and Christianity. This kind of religion is very common, especially among urbanites. Besides these two types of religions, there is a third type: fervent Christians who view ancestral belief as outdated and sinful.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to recognizing the national holidays of the Republic of South Africa, the Zulu people celebrate Shaka's Day every year in September. This holiday is marked by celebrations and the slaughtering of cattle to commemorate the founder of the Zulu Kingdom. On this festive day, Zulu people wear their full traditional attire (clothing and weapons) and gather at Shaka's tombstone, kwaDukuza in the village of Stanger, KwaZulu-Natal province. This is a very colorful day attended by both national and international dignitaries who represent their governments. *Izimbongi* (praise-poets) sing the praises of all the Zulu kings, from Shaka to Zwelithini, whose reign began in



1968. Zwelithini remained traditional king of the Zulu as of 2008.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Life among the Zulu is seen as a cycle that starts at birth, continues through puberty and marriage, and finally ends in death. All these stages are celebrated and marked by the slaughtering of sacrificial animals to ancestors. The first two stages are particularly celebrated. To Zulu traditionalists, childlessness and giving birth to girls only, are the greatest of all misfortunes, and no marriage is permanent until a child, especially a boy, is born. In olden days, relatives of a childless woman used to send her sister to the woman's husband to beget a new generation. When a child is born, the older women take great care in handling the umbilical cord and the afterbirth, which are buried near the birthplace. The new mother and her child are secluded for a time, usually until the navel string of the child falls off. During this period, the mother is believed to be polluted (unclean) and weak, and thus a possible source of evil influences. After a period of a month, a ritual ceremony is performed, to "introduce" the baby to its ancestors.

The next in the cycle of rites of passage is usually *umemulo* (the puberty ceremony), which entails a transition to full adulthood. This ceremony, which nowadays is performed only for girls, involves separation from other people for a period to mark the changing status from youth to adulthood. This is followed by "reincorporation," which is characterized by the ritual killing of animals, dancing, and feasting. After the cer-



*Zulus celebrate Shaka's Day every year in September. This holiday is marked by celebrations and slaughtering cattle to commemorate the founder of the Zulu Kingdom. On this big day, Zulu people wear their full traditional attire. (Jason Laure)*

emony, the girl is declared ready for marriage. The courting days now begin and the girl may take the first step by sending a "love letter" to a young man who appeals to her.

Zulu "love letters" are made of beads. Different colors have different meanings, and certain combinations carry particular messages. White beads are the symbol of love; black symbolizes darkness, doubt, or unhappiness; green represents weak or jealous feelings; pink signifies poverty; yellow symbolizes wealth; red signifies hurt and sorrow; and blue beads represent a happy dove that can fly over hills and rivers. Hence, a string of white and pink beads would express a young woman's love and her concern that the young man might not have the means to take care of her when they are married.

Dating for Zulu people occurs when a young man visits or writes a letter to a woman telling her how much he loves her. Sometimes the man may not be known to the woman. Once a woman decides that she loves this man, she can tell him so. It is only after they have both agreed that they love each other that they may be seen together in public. They usually hide their relationship from the parents, who should become aware of it only when the man informs them that he wants to marry their daughter.

Death and burial are not a family matter but involve the whole community. This is a time of unity and solidarity. Burial rites among the Zulu have a twofold purpose: first, to separate the deceased as painlessly as possible from the living; and second, to usher him or her into a marginal waiting period. After

death, the spirit of the deceased person is believed to wander about, in the veld or near the grave, until the *ukubuyisa* ceremony is performed, whereby the spirit of the dead person is integrated into the world of the ancestors. The *ukubuyisa* ceremony is only performed for men. A special beast is set aside by the members of the household to be slaughtered. The animal should be large enough to satisfy the deceased. A small, lean one might annoy him. On the appointed day and time, all men assemble in the cattle *kraal* (corral) where the beast is to be slaughtered. One of the oldest male relatives of the deceased recites the *izibongo* (praise-poems) of the deceased and also those of his fathers and forefathers. As he recites the praises of the dead, he implores the spirit of the departed one to return and look after his children still remaining on earth. The beast is then slaughtered.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

In contrast to their reputation as fierce warriors, on a personal level the Zulu are very warm and amicable people. *Ubuntu* (literally, humanness, good moral nature, good disposition) shapes the everyday life of the Zulu people. This comes from a notion that a human being is the highest of all the species in the world. There are hundreds of proverbs written about ubuntu, relating to the treatment of people, good and bad behavior, pride, ingratitude, bad manners, moral degeneracy, conceit, cruelty, obstinacy, pretense, helping others, etc. Very often a Zulu will be heard remarking, "Wo, *akumuntu lowo*.

*Akazi ukuthi lithatha osemamo limbeke emnyango* (“Oh, that is no person, he/she does not know that it [lightning] takes the one at the back and throws him/her in front”). This saying is an apt warning to people who, because they find themselves in easy and comfortable circumstances, tend to ignore and ill-treat those who are less fortunate. Just as the action of lightning is unpredictable, so is the future. In other words, “He who is scorned today may hold the whip in his hand tomorrow.”

“*Sawubona*” is usually enough of a greeting for strangers, but a formal greeting is more appropriate for those who are familiar. The formal greeting includes a three-times handshake, while asking about the well-being of the person and his or her relations (“*Ninjani?*”). It is considered bad manners to greet people while they are involved in conversation. In these situations, raising the right hand is usually more appropriate. Taking leave involves the standard “*Sala /Nisale kahle*” (“Remain well”), with the other person responding, “*Uhambe /Nihambe kahle*” (“Go well”). It is customary for juniors and the young to initiate the greetings when they meet their seniors and their elders.

It is considered rude and pompous to refuse an offer, especially of food. A straight answer like, “No, thank you” is received like a slap in the face. An excuse of any sort will be more appropriate. It is also considered “inhuman” and an embarrassment to the host not to offer a visitor something to eat. Elders and seniors are always considered in the right and women are supposed to take an inferior or subservient position. Not following this traditional hierarchy would be considered “lack of respect”. However, some of the *hlonipha* (respect code) behavior is losing ground with modernization.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In South Africa, living conditions cannot be divorced from local politics, and conditions for the Zulu are similar to those of other black people. As of the early 21st century, they can be categorized into two groups, namely the rural and the urban Zulu. Most of the rural areas do not have adequate basic services such as electricity, clean water, formal housing, transport, hospitals, or clinics. Urban Zulu live in the so-called black townships of South Africa and the areas fringing industrial cities. Their living conditions are, at least, better than those in rural areas. Urban Zulu constitute the middle class and their lifestyle is usually no different from that of other Western urbanites. Since the education available in rural black schools is inferior, the people in these areas are not equipped to migrate and seek a better life in the urban areas, where living conditions are better. Even if they migrate, most of them end up in the poor areas fringing cities. Democratization and modernization has brought far-reaching changes and Zulu-speakers are to be found making their mark in every walk of South African life—as star athletes, politicians, academics, and business people.

In the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, a typical Zulu homestead will be circular and fenced. The houses themselves are thatched-roof rondavels. Most households comprise extended families: brothers with their wives, unmarried sisters, children, parents, and grandparents all staying together in the same homestead.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Although the Zulu are aware of their immediate family, the term “family” (*umndeni*) includes all the people staying in a homestead and who are related to each other, either by blood, marriage, or adoption. As a sign of respect, parents and seniors are not called by their first names; instead, kinship names are used. The Zulu believe that first names are not important because changing such names is very easy, whereas patrilineal names never change. To the question, “Who are you?” the answer given is one’s surname rather than the first name.

The Zulu family is patriarchal, with a man not only being the head of the family but also the figure of authority. It is not unusual for young men to have as many girlfriends as they wish. If they can afford it, they can take more than one wife when they decide to get married. In the past, for a man to pass by a woman on the street without showing interest was viewed as an insult. Women were not supposed to go out and work, since it was a man’s responsibility to care for and support them. However, the status of Zulu women is slowly improving with more women receiving education.

Marriage is exogamous. Marriage to any person belonging to one’s father’s, mother’s, father’s mother’s, and mother’s mother’s clan is prohibited. If it happens, the *ukudabula* (literally, cutting of the blood relationship) ritual is performed. Once a man decides that he wants to marry his girlfriend, his clan group sends an *umkhongi* (a go-between) with *lobolo* to the girl’s family to open negotiations. To an outsider, *lobolo* can be mistakenly viewed as a business transaction, but to the Zulu it is part of the gifts that pass to and fro between the “contracting” families. Modern *lobolo* is usually in monetary form and, on average, totals about \$4,000. To show that this is not an economic exchange of women, the bride’s parents also reciprocate with endless gifts. Only children born after *lobolo* has been handed over will be regarded as legitimate.

## 11 CLOTHING

The everyday clothing of a modern Zulu is no different from that of any modern urbanite. Traditional clothing, however, is very colorful. Men, women, and children wear beads as accessories. Men wear a garment, *amabheshu*, made of goat or cattle skin. It looks like a waist apron, worn at the back. They decorate their heads with feathers and fur. The men also wear frilly goatskin bands on their arms and legs. Women wear *isidwaba*, a traditional Zulu black skirt made of goat or cattle skin. If a woman is not married, she may wear only strings of beads to cover the top part of the body. If she is married, she will wear a tee-shirt. Only on special occasions, such as Shaka’s Day and cultural gatherings, do Zulu wear their traditional clothes.

## 12 FOOD

Since the rural Zulu economy is based on cattle and agriculture, the main staple diet consists of cow and agricultural products. This includes barbecued and boiled meat; *amasi* (curdled milk), mixed with dry, ground corn or dry, cooked mealie-meal (corn flour); *amadumbe* (yams); vegetables; and fruits. The Zulu traditional beer is not only a staple food but a considerable source of nutrition. It is made from grain which is soaked, allowed to sprout, then dried, ground, boiled, fermented, and finally strained. The result is a whitish, not altogether homogeneous, beverage. Besides the nourishment it provides,

it is socially and ritually important and is drunk on all important occasions.

The everyday staple food of the Zulu today is soft porridge, made of mealie-meal, with bread and tea for breakfast; leftovers or any available light meal for lunch; and for supper, which is the main meal, any curry and *uphuthu* (made by boiling mealie-meal in salted water for about 20 minutes). The Zulu *uphuthu* differs from that of the Sotho-speaking people of South Africa in the sense that the latter is like a hard porridge while the former is coarse.

On average two meals are prepared each day—breakfast, after which adults and children leave the household, and supper when everyone is back from school and work. During lunch time, people eat whatever is available. If there are no leftovers, lunch may consist of bread alone. In South Africa, bread has become a basic food for most black households because it is relatively inexpensive and easy to prepare.

Many traditional utensils are still used in the modern Zulu kitchen, but the main one is the calabash (a decorated gourd). It is used to store Zulu traditional beer. The kitchen and the preparation of food is women's domain. The preparation of beer is also a woman's duty.

The Zulu follow many food taboos. A newly widowed woman cannot prepare food until cleansing rites are performed. In the past, unmarried women were not allowed to eat eggs and chicken so that they would not embarrass their parents once they were married by stealing their in-laws' chickens and eggs. Sour milk was reserved for clan members only and not for outsiders.

Drinking and eating from the same plate was and still is a sign of friendship. It is customary for children to eat from the same dish, usually a big basin. This derives from a "share what you have" belief that is part of *ubuntu* (humane) philosophy.

### 13 EDUCATION

Illiteracy is high among most black South Africans. However, by the mid-2000s education in South Africa in general, and that of Zulu children in particular, was slowly improving. In the past, children had gone to school only if their parents could afford to send them. Schooling started at 7 years of age and continued until about 24 years of age. It is, however, difficult to estimate the actual number of years of schooling. Since education was not compulsory, pupils could take their time to finish matric (high school) and no teacher could tell them that they were too old to be in school. Passing matriculation was and still is regarded as a high achievement by the whole community. In daily conversation, people will talk about so-and-so having "finished schooling." After finishing matric, those parents who can afford it usually send their children to college. Although the literacy rate for South Africa as a whole is 86.4%, the literacy rate for the largely rural Zulu people is the lowest in the country. The traditional professions for Zulus who seek higher education were teaching and nursing, but other professions are increasingly being pursued by some students. Once the children achieve these levels, the parents feel that they have done their part and thus can "retire" and wait for their children to take care of them. The University of Zululand was exclusively for Zulu people until 1994, and few Zulu students enrolled elsewhere. But students now enroll wherever their career plans, financial resources, and practical considerations allow them to go.

Raising and educating a child is one part of the family cycle among the Zulu. Parents spend all they have to raise and educate their children and, in turn, the children take care of their parents and their own children when they start working. This becomes a necessary cycle, and a person who breaks it is viewed as a community outcast and one who has forgotten about his or her roots. Consequently, education is regarded as a personal achievement and also an achievement by the whole community.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Zulu are fond of singing as well as dancing. These cultural activities promote unity, especially when the occasion calls for a great degree of harmony within the group, e.g., in the anxious moments of happiness and sorrow, and at all the transitional ceremonies such as births, weddings, and deaths. All the dances are accompanied by thunderous drums, the men are dressed as warriors, and they dance waving their clubs and thrusting their cowhide shields forward.

The tradition and folklore of the Zulu are transmitted through storytelling, praise-poems, and proverbs. These explain Zulu history and teach moral lessons. Praise-poems (poems recited about the kings and the high achievers in life) have become part of popular culture in South Africa.

### 15 WORK

In the past, it was only able-bodied men who were supposed to work. Before the 1970s, especially in rural areas, when a young boy was capable of sending a written letter and receiving a reply, he was considered ready to go and look for work. He might seek employment in the big cities or go to work in the gold mines in Johannesburg. Being able to read and write was once a kind of rite of passage. However, that has changed with parents and children striving to pass matriculation before entering the workforce.

In the mind of the Zulu, work should benefit either one's parents or children and siblings. The first paycheck (or at least a large portion of the first paycheck) is usually given to parents in return for blessings.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer, called football in South Africa, is very popular with both young boys and men. Children learn the game by watching their older brothers play. Whenever boys are together and not engaged in some household or school activity, they play soccer. Having a ball (of any kind) means a game of soccer for a group of local boys. They have their own rules and usually everyone is familiar with them. In rural areas, where living standards are poor, the stake for a game can be two to five dollars. Whoever wins gets the money. The spectators are usually friends of the players. Adult soccer is played like any other soccer (football) in the world. Young boys, especially those who live next to big rivers, also compete in swimming.

Girls, if they are not at school, are expected to assist their mothers in the house. However, they can play games once they have finished their chores. Games change with every generation, but one of the popular games played by girls, especially in rural KwaZulu is *masishayana/maphakathi*. Two girls stand opposite each other, usually not too far apart. Another girl stands between them, facing the one who is holding a tennis ball. The idea of this game is to try to hit the girl standing in

the middle with the tennis ball, while she tries to avoid being hit. If the ball hits her or touches her clothes, she is out. Being able to avoid being hit ten times earns the girl a point. Having the most points means winning a game and becoming the best player in your circle of friends. One sport that both girls and boys participate in is athletics (track and field), which is an organized school sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Ritual ceremonies, including transitional ceremonies, serve as part of the entertainment and recreation for the whole community. A formal invitation to any occasion where food will be served, like weddings and birthday parties, is not part of Zulu custom. They believe that food should be shared; thus, uninvited arrival at a celebration is not frowned upon but is considered an honor by the host. During these celebrations, singing and dancing will be enjoyed.

From a young age boys engage in stick fighting and as they grow older and more proficient this activity becomes an intensely competitive and macho pastime.

Television is very popular in urban Zulu households. Those who can afford to go to the movies do so. However, since electricity in rural areas is often not available, owning a television set is a luxury for rural Zulu. For urban teenagers, American youth culture, especially clothing and music, is very popular. Among the adults, *stokvels* (voluntary or common-interest associations) not only function as financial assistance associations, but also as occupational, friendship, and recreational associations.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Zulu, especially those from rural areas, are known for their weaving, craft-making, pottery, and beadwork. Women and children weave mats for everyday use, beer sieves, and baskets for domestic purposes. They also make calabashes (decorated gourds that serve as storage vessels). Men and boys carve various household objects and ornaments from wood and bone, such as headrests, trays, scrapers, household utensils, chairs, etc. Beadmaking is mainly women's work, because beads are believed to be a unique way of sending messages without being direct.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Zulu terms *ubuntu* and *hlonipha* summarize everything about human rights. However, if these factors are studied thoroughly, it becomes evident that some individuals in Zulu society, particularly women and children, enjoy fewer human rights than others. KwaZulu-Natal has a history of struggle between the two political parties, the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party. People have been known to be killed, not only in fights between these groupings, but also between other factions.

Alcoholism and drugs are not serious social problems, especially among rural Zulu. The level of alcoholism and drug abuse is not high. *Dagga*, the most common drug, was smoked traditionally like a cigarette; it can be and is still grown like any other plant. However, with Christianization and since colonialism, dagga is forbidden and illegal. The use of alcohol is very low among rural females. Culturally, a woman who drinks alcohol and smokes cigarettes is regarded as lacking morals.

However, modern Zulu women in urban areas do smoke and drink alcohol.

South Africa no longer conventionally issues birth rate, health, mortality rate, and other statistics by community or race, but the HIV/AIDS rates are much higher for certain sections of the nation, such as the colored townships (townships where black South Africans live). For South Africa as a whole, the HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate was 21.5% according to a 2003 estimate. This translates to about 5.3 million people who are living with HIV/AIDS. An estimated 370,000 people died from HIV/AIDS in 2003. However, the statistics for Kwazulu-Natal, where the Zulu people predominantly live, have consistently the highest among all South Africa's provinces.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

South Africa's constitution, in Act 108 of 1996, defines individual rights and protections. Equal rights for all citizens are guaranteed in Chapter 2 [9(3)], which specifically indicates that "The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender .... etc". But the reality is that a significant percentage of the Zulu-speaking people still live in rural-traditional contexts. Elder/senior males are still considered to be always in the right and must be shown respect; females are regarded as inferior; women are not supposed to go out to work, as work is regarded as a man's responsibility; polygyny is still practiced; a woman can become a regent but does not succeed to become a chief or king (contrary to both the constitution and legislation); women, like children, do not generally enjoy full human rights.

However, with migration, urbanization, modernization, and democratization, change has taken place. Even in the rural areas where Zulu tradition still thrives there are minor signs of improved conditions for Zulu women.

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— revised by M. de Jongh



Worldmark  
Encyclopedia of  
**Cultures and  
Daily Life**

VOLUME 2 Americas  
Second Edition

Editors

Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby



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Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

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# INTRODUCTION

by  
Arnold Strickon

## THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT

The ancestors of modern humans evolved in Africa. They migrated into the Eurasian land mass as pre-modern species. The last of the continental land masses occupied by human beings were those of the Western Hemisphere. The people who first occupied the land mass of the New World were full members of our species, modern *Homo sapiens*. The question of the antiquity of human beings in the New World is still being hotly debated among interested scientists. As this is being written, scientists postulate that it was between 12,000 and 15,000 years ago that humans first set foot in the New World. This is according to the most widely accepted and presently available evidence. Scientists call these earliest settlers of the New World "Paleoindians." They are the ancestral population of the Americas.

The terms *Indian* and *Native American* are widely used and misused. In this "Introduction," the terms *Indian* and *American Indian*, *Inuit*, *Eskimo*, *Aleut*, and *Hawaiian* are used to refer to people of those specific ethnic backgrounds. The term *Native American* is used to refer in general to all the descendants of the original settlers of the New World, whatever their specific ethnic background.

There was, of course, no one to record the arrival of the first humans. Our knowledge of it derives from the efforts of scientists from a wide range of fields. Archeologists study ancient tools and other artifacts made or modified by human effort and left behind by people who have generally left no written historical record. Paleoanthropologists study ancient human remains and paleontologists study ancient animal remains of all kinds. Anthropologists study the culture, the way of life, arts, and technology of peoples—living or historical. Linguists study the languages of a people. In addition, botanists, geologists, zoologists, and even chemists and physicists contribute their expertise to efforts to understand the first Americans, focusing their special knowledge and techniques upon the physical remains left behind by the Paleoindians in ancient campsites scattered from Alaska to Chile.

Living populations contribute data to this effort as well. Linguists compare the similarities and differences among Native American languages and make inferences about the history of these languages and the people who spoke them. Geneticists compare marker genes and genetic frequencies among geographically far-flung populations and make inferences about historical connections among them.

Scientists from these diverse fields collect and analyze clues to help us learn when and where the first pioneers entered the New World and settled. The task is made more difficult because the first settlers were foragers—people who subsisted by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild, edible plants. Foragers live in

small, widely scattered groups that are almost always on the move. Thus, what they leave behind is spread over a wide geographic area. Physical belongings are not likely to be preserved from generation to generation, leaving little for future archeologists to study.

Most European settlers of the New World believed until well into the nineteenth century that God had created the world only a few thousand years earlier. By the mid- to late-nineteenth century, however, thinking about the age of the earth, and of the creatures who lived upon it was undergoing radical change. The work of Sir Charles Lyell (1798–1875), the founder of modern geology, and Charles Darwin (1809–82), creator of the theory of evolution, expanded the time stage on which history played from thousands to millions of years.

By the end of the nineteenth century most scientists agreed that modern humans—in the Old World and the New—had evolved from forms different from the historic human species, *Homo sapiens*. Investigators found pre-sapiens (that is non-modern and extinct) human remains in most parts of the Old World, but none in the New. This led scientists to postulate that the New World was occupied relatively recently, after the appearance of modern forms of humanity some 40,000 years ago. Darwin had pointed out that the anthropoid (man-like) or great apes, such as gorillas and chimpanzees, had no representatives living in the New World. In fact, no fossil remains of great apes have ever been found anywhere in the New World.

## THE PLEISTOCENE: THE GLACIAL EPOCH

The emergence of *Homo sapiens* occurred 1.6 million years ago during the Pleistocene epoch when gigantic glaciers covered much of the planet. In the northern hemisphere these glaciers isolated habitable portions of the New World from regions of the Old World inhabited by humans. This seemed to support the idea that the earliest modern human populations could not have occupied the New World earlier than 8,000 year ago, when the last glaciers "withdrew." From the end of the nineteenth century until the 1920s and early 1930s, this was the accepted time period for the human settlement of the New World. Both professional and amateur archeologists claimed to have discovered sites containing ancient remains dating to an earlier period; in these cases, the evidence was dubious, the excavation and record-keeping badly done, and therefore, the case not proved.

## FIRST EVIDENCE OF THE PALEOINDIANS

In 1926, while excavating a site in central New Mexico near the town of Folsom, scientists uncovered the bones of a giant buffalo that had been extinct since the Pleistocene. Imbedded in one of its ribs was a finely chipped stone projectile point, about five centimeters (two inches) long, with a central channel running most of its length. There could be no doubt that it was

made by the hands of a human being, and that it was stuck into the living bone of an animal that had been extinct for thousands of years. Archeologists discovered other sites containing “Folsom Points” elsewhere in the southwestern and western US, and in the western provinces of Canada in the years that followed. Archeologists generally believe that these artifacts are 8,000 to 9,000 years old.

Shortly after the discovery of the Folsom artifacts, scientists unearthed another, even earlier and more significant, projectile point at Clovis in eastern New Mexico. The initial discovery was followed by the excavation of many more Clovis sites, where more characteristic artifacts and projectile points with the distinctive Clovis design were found. Since then, excavations containing Clovis-related artifacts have been made all over North America, including some as far south as central Mexico. In addition, scientists working in South America have found assemblages of artifacts similar to those found at Clovis. Clovis artifacts have been discovered in association with the remains of animals such as mammoths and relatives of the llama and horse—all of which had long been extinct in the New World by the time the Europeans arrived. (In fact, one noted archeologist has suggested that it may have been the hunting by the Paleoindians that drove many of the large Pleistocene mammals to extinction.) The association of these assemblages with long-extinct game animals is a powerful indication that modern human beings were in the New World 12,000 to 14,000 years ago. There have even been claims for earlier dates for New World sites: students of the Monte Verde excavations in southern Chile have assigned dates as early as 30,000 years ago to that location, and a few archeologists have made similar claims for sites in the Amazon River basin in Brazil. As of the late 1990s, findings from the sites alleged to predate Clovis are being subjected to further study before gaining widespread acceptance.

#### When Did Humans Come to the Americas?

For a period of 100,000 years or more, gigantic continental glaciers alternately covered and uncovered many parts of what are now Earth’s temperate zones. During periods of extreme cold, snow and ice in these areas failed to melt, causing the glaciers to expand in thickness and extent. By locking up huge amounts of water as ice, these periods of glacial expansion also led to a drop in sea levels all over the world. Within the glacial period, referred to as the Pleistocene epoch by geologists, there were times when rising temperatures caused melting, reducing the size of the glaciers. When this occurred, sea levels rose once again.

This rising and falling of the sea was crucial for the population of the New World by people from the Old World. An arm of the sea (now known as the Bering Straits) separated the New World from adjacent parts of Asia. For foraging people, especially for those who lived 100,000 years ago, such a stretch of open ocean was indeed an unbreachable obstacle. About 50,000 years ago there was a period of glacial expansion and growth that caused a fall in sea level of some 200 feet. This was sufficient to open a land bridge between Siberia and North America. There is no evidence that *Homo sapiens*, even if such a population existed in northern Asia at this time, found their way across the land bridge to the New World. Some 45,000 years ago, the weather warmed, the glaciers retreated, and the sea level rose once again. This warm period created a barrier

between the Old World and the New World that was to last for 20,000 years. The last glaciation took place between 25,000 and 15,000 years BP (before the present). It led to a fall in sea level, lowering the surface of the Bering Straits about 10 meters (300 feet) and once again creating an isthmus (land bridge) between Asia and North America. This time, there was human settlement in northeast Asia. It is around this time—between 12,000 and 14,000 years ago—that the earliest Paleoindians appear in the archaeological record. These first settlers did not necessarily realize they were going to a New World—they were following the large game that they hunted. As their hunting grounds slowly shifted eastward across the land bridge, the occupation of the Americas commenced.

#### Who Were They?

It is highly probable that the process of migration across the isthmus between the continents lasted for a long time, perhaps as long as the land bridge remained passable. It is unlikely, however, that all the migrants came from any single linguistic, cultural, or social group. In fact, there is every reason to suppose the opposite. Some linguists have suggested that America was originally peopled by three distinctive linguistic populations that came in three waves within a few thousand years of each other. Recent work in historical linguistics classifies all languages spoken by Native Americans (not counting the Hawaiians) as belonging to one of three ancestral language families: Amerind, Eskimo-Aleut, or Na-Dene. Some linguists believe that Amerind speakers were the first group to come to what are now the Americas. Most languages spoken by American Indians appear to be descended from that language. The second of the ancestral languages, Eskimo-Aleut, is still spoken by the groups in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Alaska and Canada. A number of American Indian languages originated from the third of the ancestral languages, Na-Dene. The most common of these are the Athabaskan tongues, which include languages spoken in the northwestern quarter of North America and Navajo and Apache spoken in the American Southwest. This linguistic view of the first settlers in the New World is supported by comparative genetics.

In the beginning, the Paleoindian population was small. A modest population increase of 1 percent per year over a period of 12,000 to 15,000 years resulted in a very large population. Conservative estimates place the New World population in 1492 at about 12 million people, while other estimates are as much as three or four times greater. As their numbers grew and became more geographically dispersed, the simple hunters and gatherers that had begun the human occupation of the New World developed a wide variety of Native American cultures. We cannot here trace the archaeological record to see how and by what processes these simple societies were transformed. We must, rather, be content to describe this complexity in the broadest and most general of terms.

### CLASSIFICATION OF NATIVE AMERICANS

Why and how are cultures classified? Every culture, every society—like every person—is unique. Yet for some purposes it is useful to classify people into larger abstract entities called categories or classifications, such as spouse, parent, or member of a political party. In considering the larger category, much of the uniqueness of each individual is overlooked. So it is with cultures. Every culture, in all its detail, is unique, but it may be

useful to classify cultures along lines of resemblance. One way of doing this is along lines of similarities of artifacts, art styles, and other regularities that can be observed. Cultures that are geographically adjacent to each other are classified as “culture areas.” Similarities of economy and major political institutions are classified as “culture types.” In either case these terms permit us to stress the similarities among otherwise distinctive societies and cultures.

#### Classification by Culture Area

A culture area is a region where people of differing social and political groups practice roughly similar life styles, art forms, technologies, subsistence practices, and philosophical and religious beliefs. In the New World, culture areas generally coincided with natural ecological regions. The various people in these societies need not be of a similar race or even speak the same language. They do not constitute a single political entity, and may fight quite bloody wars among themselves. Thus, Europe may be viewed as a culture area, and North Africa as another.

The culture area does not exist in nature, but rather in the mind of the historian or anthropologist. Not all people who live within the geographical confines of a culture area necessarily follow the way of life typical of that area. A culture area that includes village-dwelling farmers may also contain hunters and gatherers, or fishers. It may also contain people marked by philosophical and religious beliefs, artistic traditions, quite different from those of the larger number people who typify the culture area.

Museum curators originally developed the idea of the culture area in the first decades of the twentieth century as a way of organizing museum exhibits. It has since grown to represent a useful tool for describing the way of life or culture of large areas of the world.

#### Classification by Culture Type

Another way to classify cultures and societies is by *social* or *culture type*, where the emphasis is placed on social, political, demographic, or economic characteristics, or some combination of these. A culture type may cut across a culture area classification. Thus one might speak of “industrial states” as a culture type that would include societies in different “culture areas” such as Europe and Asia. The culture type is an idea or construct that serves the analyst of the group—not necessarily the people who comprise it. As with the culture area, the purpose of the culture type is to permit us to generalize and speak of broad similarities among societies.

## NATIVE AMERICA AT THE CONQUEST

The European conquest of the native peoples of the New World was not one event, but a process that continued for hundreds of years, and continues today.

In Native America, culture areas and culture types intersect in an interesting way. The cultures of pre-conquest North and South America are quite distinctive. Art styles, beliefs, details of village and extra-village political arrangements, and family and kinship institutions tend to differ; there were also differences in the subsistence crops grown and species of game animals hunted. In spite of these differences, anthropologists identified several social and political culture types that were the same on both continents, and observed an approximate

parallel between culture areas and culture types. Major culture categories are described in the sections that follow.

#### The Southeast and the Circum-Caribbean

The first major Spanish settlement in the New World was on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea, where the modern nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located. Relatively large and complex societies based upon productive agriculture existed on many of the neighboring Caribbean islands, in parts of Central America, in northern South America, and in what is now the southeastern United States. In its northern reaches the subsistence base of these societies rested upon corn (maize); in the southern continent and the Caribbean islands, upon corn or manioc. The people of both areas lived in rather large villages; populations of over 1000 were not unusual. Shared political and religious institutions often linked a number of villages into larger political units called confederacies or chiefdoms. These societies had part-time chiefs and priesthoods with restricted powers over the members of the confederacy except in times of crisis. It was people of this type who had created the great palisaded villages and temple mounds in Cahokia in southern Illinois, the largest archaeological remains in the United States. Succumbing more to Spanish diseases than to Spanish military might, these societies in the Caribbean were rapidly destroyed and their people almost exterminated. In parts of Central America and on the South American mainland some survived by withdrawing inland, especially to the rainforests of the Amazon River basin. Here, reduced in numbers and simplified in culture content and political organization, some survived.

In North America the chiefdoms or confederacies of the southeast fared somewhat better, with many surviving in place until early in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, however, Americans, hungry for more land, forced the southeastern Indians to relocate. The United States government resettled Indians on reservations far from their ancestral homes. In the Florida Everglades—territory particularly well-suited for defense and guerrilla warfare—the Seminole managed to survive for a time without suffering military defeat, but the United States ultimately subdued even them.

The cultures of the Southeastern United States—the Choctow and Seminole for example—are presented in detail in this volume. The Cuna Indians, also described in this volume, lived in eastern Panama and are the descendants of this type of Indian society. Their current society is far less complex than was that of their ancestors before the coming of the Europeans.

#### The State Societies of Meso-America and the Andes

The Spanish came into contact with the people of the Caribbean islands first. Soon, however, tales of immense wealth on the mainland enthralled and hypnotized them, drawing them to explore there. What they found—the great state societies of Meso-America (the region from central Mexico south through Guatemala and Belize) and the Andes—was even more spectacular than the tales had led them to believe.

The aboriginal state societies of Meso-America and the Andes were the central jewels of Spain’s New World empire for 300 years, although there were differences between the two regions. To many observers, the art and monumental architecture of Meso-America appear more interesting and sophisticated than that of the Andean civilizations. However, the Inca empire in the Andes practiced bureaucratic controls and central admin-

istrative complexity that were far more advanced, in the eyes of modern observers, than the organizational practices of their counterparts in Meso-America.

When the Spanish found these state societies, they already had long histories of expansion. Again, there were differences in the way the societies implemented their expansion practices. The Aztecs of the Valley of Mexico expressed domination of their neighbors by demanding tribute payments from those they defeated rather than by direct political incorporation or military occupation. The Inca empire of South America, on the other hand, had expanded by military force by defeating neighboring states and then incorporating them. Once that was accomplished, the defeated aristocracy was incorporated into the Inca state. The Inca sometimes resettled the population of the defeated group in a foreign region, where the defeated people would be surrounded by a population loyal to (or sufficiently cowed by) the victorious Inca. Then, the territory evacuated by the defeated people would be repopulated by a people loyal to the Inca state.

The state societies of the New World were characterized by social stratification. There was an upper class of royalty and aristocrats, and a middle class of artisans, artists, bureaucrats, architects, and engineers. The society rested upon the labors of the largest part of the population, the agricultural peasants. The peasants produced the crops and other products that provided the economic foundation of the empire.

The state conscripted peasants to serve in the army and on a wide variety of construction projects desired by the rulers. The projects included roads, walled cities, temples, storehouses, and huge irrigation systems. The peasants accomplished great feats of engineering without metal tools and without the use of the wheel. In the Andes, there was no knowledge of written language, although in Meso-America, however, there was. The Indians of Meso-American also developed a calendar system that was more accurate than the one used by the Europeans who conquered them.

Initially, gold and silver attracted the Spanish to the New World states. The real wealth of these states for the Spanish, however, lay in their massive population of peasant farmers, as it had been for the Incas and Aztecs before them. The peasants lived in agricultural villages where they farmed to provide food for themselves and the rest of society. The peasants were assessed part of the food they grew as taxes to support the state and priesthood. In the Inca empire, peasants provided two-thirds of the goods they produced for this purpose.

The Inca state designed, built, and maintained the irrigation system that most of the peasants required to grow their crops. The government also maintained roads, storehouses, and reserve food supplies in case of emergencies or local crop failure. The priesthood dealt with the complex spiritual world of the Inca people. The Inca state was a vast, complex, and centralized political system. Initiative flowed from the top down, and obedience and wealth flowed from the bottom up.

The states of central and southern Mexico lacked the centralized character of their Andean counterparts, however, but they too, showed the characteristics of a complex state—hierarchy of social class and well-developed religious, trade, and military institutions.

When the Spanish conquered the New World states, they intertwined their own institutions with those of the pre-conquest state, thus asserting control over the agricultural peas-

ants. Contact with the Spanish came at a high cost for Indian societies. Millions died from exposure to previously unknown European diseases ranging from the common cold to smallpox. These plagues disrupted families and destroyed age-old patterns of community life. Despite massive drops in population from disease, villages still had to send workers to labor in the mines, construction projects, and plantations of the Spanish.

The Spanish justified their conquest of the New World by citing the obligation to bring Christianity to the Indians. As part of this effort, the Spanish destroyed every symbol and structure of the Indian religions. If the symbols were made of precious metals that could be melted down and shipped as gold or silver ingots to Spain, so much the better. The Spanish attempted to convert massive numbers of Indians to Christianity in great ceremonies carried out in Spanish and Latin. For those Indians forced to participate, such a “conversion” could have had scant meaning. Over time, the Indians did become Catholic, but they did not completely forget their old religious beliefs. Many of the old pagan beliefs were transformed and incorporated into the folk Catholicism that the Indians still practice in many parts of modern Meso-America and the Andes.

There was resistance and rebellion by some Indians against the Spanish, but none was successful in the long run. However, the culture and languages of the ordinary people of the New World states did not completely disappear, as demonstrated by the articles in this volume on the Guatemalans, Mayan, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Bolivians, Quechua, and Aymara.

The pre-conquest populations had been so large that, in spite of the high mortality following conquest, enough people remained to provide the foundation for the human population of these colonies. In the modern homelands of the pre-Columbian states, the majority of the population are descendants of both Indian and Spanish ancestors.

It is not only genetically that the Indians left their mark. Millions of people of Mexico and Guatemala speak Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, or various dialects of Maya. The linguistic situation is similar in the Andean countries, where millions speak Quechua and Aymara. In Mexico, about ten percent of the people do not speak Spanish as their primary language; in Ecuador and Peru, that figure rises to twenty-five percent; and in Bolivia, those who do not speak Spanish as their household language rises to fifty percent. In all of these cases the vast majority of are speakers of Quechua, Aymara, Nahuatl, or Maya.

### Village Farmers

The people known as village farmers largely inhabited the forested land of the hemisphere, including the northeast, southwest, and the Amazon River Basin. In what is now the United States, this included the forested lands east of the Mississippi River, where the people were primarily growers of corn, beans, and squash—which they planted together and called “the three sisters.” Their diet was supplemented with animal proteins from hunting and fishing.

European Americans subjugated most of these village farmers east of the Mississippi River by the early nineteenth century. They displaced these people from their home territories and resettled them on reservations, often in the Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma and parts of Kansas and Nebraska). The Indian Territory was far—and ecologically different—

from their original homelands. Here their traditional ways of life were put under immense pressure. The US government and private groups subjected the Indians to growing pressure to use European farming methods and to surrender their traditional family institutions. Missionaries sought for them to surrender traditional religious beliefs. The government took their children away to educate them in boarding schools that attempted, above all else, to strip the children of their cultural heritage.

The conquerors incorporated whole communities and states into their empires in Mexico and the Andes. Among village farmers the possibility existed for escape. People of the village farmer type had fewer material goods to slow them down or hold them back, and there were other areas—unsettled or less densely settled—to which they could escape. However, escape only delayed for a short time—a few generations at best—some kind of incorporation into the conquering empires or the nations that replaced them.

In South America, village farmers were found primarily in the basins of the Amazon and Orinoco Rivers, where they grew corn or manioc as their chief subsistence crop. Manioc or cassava is a plant whose large tuber—sometimes weighing as much as 20 kilograms (40 pounds)—resembles a massive yam. The Indians (and present-day Brazilians) use the tuber to produce flour and starch for cooking. Manioc remains a major food source in Brazil and Latin America. Manioc comes in two varieties, sweet and bitter. The bitter variety is more widely used and contains large amounts of prussic acid, a poison. The grower must remove the poison through a complex processing procedure involving grating and pressing before the manioc can be safely consumed.

Kinship, age, and gender provided the hierarchy that ordered daily life among village farmers. All aspects of life—household structure, economics and trade, religious life and rituals, warfare and defense, and intergroup relations—were largely organized by these same three characteristics. Work tasks were assigned on the basis of age and sex and not always in the ways we would expect today. Women, for example, did most of the farming. Each household produced most of its needs, but people depended upon their kinsmen-neighbors to help them in times of crisis. Thus, everyone in society contributed according to their place in the hierarchy. There were no professional priests, armies, artisans or artists, traders, or, for that matter, people who did nothing but farm or hunt.

There were no social classes among the village farmers. All in the community lived at essentially the same economic level. If economic conditions improved, they improved for all; conversely, if conditions worsened, they worsened for all. However, some people had more influence than others. Some were better farmers, weavers, hunters, or warriors than others. The powers of leaders, however, were governed by the constraints of age, gender, and kinship. No one member can force another to do something. For example, a man may have chosen not to join in an attack against another community, and his relatives and neighbors could not physically coerce or punish him for so choosing. However, such a decision could not be made lightly and was not without repercussions. The request would have come from the members of his community, all of whom were kinsmen. Every member of the community knew that one day, he or she would need help from those same kinsmen. Thus, it was difficult to refuse to give assistance when called upon.

Even the residential arrangements differ from what is typical in modern Western cultures. Groups of people—often a group of brothers and their wives and children or a group of sisters and their husbands and children—resided together in a single large structure. (A couple never lived alone with their children in a separate home.) Within the extended family structure, each couple and their children had their own sleeping places and campfire, but all were within plain sight and hearing of each other. Home was not a place of privacy.

In many groups in the Amazon River basin—Yanomamo, Xavante, and Tenetehara, among others—men did not live in the same residence as their wives and children. Instead, they resided with adult males and older boys of the community in a Men's House. Women and children lived in group dwellings of their own. A man, his wife (or wives), and children still constituted a family, which represented a significant social and economic unit.

As the conquerors discovered new groups during their explorations, they incorporated whole communities and states into their empires. For the people of the Amazon and Orinoco basins, this process continued into the twentieth century. Even as of the late 1990s, new, previously unknown or barely known, groups of Indians are discovered in Brazil and Venezuela. However, the rate of discovery of new groups is declining, as fewer and fewer of them retain their independence. There are fewer deep forests to which they might escape. When these Indians experience first exposure to European viruses, it was just as deadly in the late 1990s as it was in 1496. A number of Indian groups are attempting to organize themselves into alliances for political opposition to European expansion into the little remaining territory.

#### **Village Farmers and Pastoralists of the American Southwest**

In many ways, the cultural conditions for the people of the American Southwest are different. The first dimension of this difference is environmental. The Northeast and Southeast culture areas are found in humid, temperate forests. The Southwestern culture area is the high, arid deserts of what is now New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah. Within this region are two different types of societies that came to share much in the way of cultural content.

The first of these Southwest societies are the Pueblo (after the Spanish word for “village”) people. The modern Pueblo people includes groups such as the Hopi described in greater detail later in this volume. These groups are traditionally growers of corns, beans, and squash. Their villages consist of adobe “apartment houses” several stories high. Their founders located them atop high, flat plateaus, called mesas or tables. The Pueblo people have left behind a long archaeological record in the region. Their ancestors had also lived in great multi-storied pueblos, but until several hundred years before the Spanish arrived these were not located on the mesa tops. They moved to these easily defensible locations due to the appearance at that time of hunting people and raiders from the north—ancestors of the Apache and Navaho—speakers of Athapaskan languages.

After the Spanish arrived, the Apache and Navaho learned how to herd sheep. They also learned agriculture and weaving from the Pueblos, but this did not dampen their raiding proclivities. The raids were now against the Spanish, and later, the Americans, as well as the Pueblos.



Although the Spanish occupied the Southwest relatively early in the conquest, an Indian revolt drove them out in 1680. The stark, dry country and lack of significant plunder helped preserve the independence of both the farmers and the hunters until the period of the US Civil War (1860s). By this time an increasing European population in the Southwest led the US government to bring the Hopi, Zuni, and Navaho under its control. The Apache fought on for a few years more. In 1886, the last of the remaining independent Apache leaders, Geronimo, succumbed to American soldiers.

The US government placed the Indians of the Southwest on reservations. Unlike many of the eastern Indian groups, those of the Southwest ultimately stayed in their traditional territories. The reservations, however, were much smaller than the Indians' pre-reservation territories. Within the territory of the United States, the Indians of the Southwest have probably managed to retain a larger proportion of their pre-European cultures than any other groups located between Alaska and the Rio Grande River.

### Foraging People

Although foraging peoples are often found living among agricultural peoples, there are culture areas populated largely by foragers—peoples living by hunting, gathering, fishing, or some combination of the three—only. Foragers generally live in highly mobile groups, and in North America these groups varied widely in terms of population size and density. There were even large degrees of variation in social complexity and technological sophistication, reflecting differences in historical experience and habitat.

### Buffalo Hunters and Guanaco Hunters

The open grasslands of the Great Plains of western North America and of the Pampas of southeastern South America supported herds of large herbivorous grazing animals before the arrival of the Europeans. In North America, these grazers were the buffalo (Bison) that roamed in huge herds numbering in the thousands or perhaps tens of thousands. The large grazing herbivore of the Pampas was the guanaco; the wild relative of its better known domesticated cousins, camel and llama. These animals lived in relatively small herds of perhaps fifty animals or less.

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, small groups of Indians hunted on the grasslands of North and South America, where hunting large herding game on foot was difficult. Hunters attempted to wage as stealthy an attack as possible, since the herd would bolt as soon as the animals sensed a threat. Thus, the herd would quickly be out of range of the hunters' simple weapons. The number of animals the hunters could hope to kill was therefore quite limited. A group of hunters, with careful planning, could improve their results by inciting a herd to stampede off a cliff. However, even when such a massive kill was successful, the means of preserving meat, chiefly drying (jerking), limited the amount of meat that the hunters could preserve for later use. Thus, hunting conditions dictated that the groups of hunters be quite small—about 100 people. Their social organization and technology were simple, based upon kinship and neighborly cooperation.

Things changed drastically on both continents after the arrival of the Spanish and their domesticated horses. The Indians of the Plains and Pampas soon acquired horses, and learned—or taught themselves—how to ride. The impact of this devel-

opment was dramatic. For many scholars, the emergence of the Great Plains and Pampas as distinctive culture areas dates from the introduction of the horse. It was now possible for the hunters to keep up with fleeing herds, hunting as they went. The Great Plains of North America could now support larger populations. Groups of over 1,000 people could remain together for long periods. The Indians' demand for horses led to trade with and raids against the Spanish, and later Argentines, Mexicans, Americans, and other Indians. The larger populations, the trade, and warfare led to the appearance of some temporary, more complex, societal institutions that governed these activities to some degree. It was a complexity rarely found among hunting and gathering people. The way of life that the Plains could now support was so attractive that many previously agricultural groups abandoned or curtailed their past way of life and became hunters of the buffalo.

Similar developments occurred at the northern edge of the Pampas in what is now northern Argentina and adjacent parts of Paraguay and Brazil. In the Pampas, the Indians also became more efficient hunters of guanaco from horseback, but the guanaco lived in small herds. Thus, improvements in hunting of guanaco did not result in the dramatic increases in the size of the hunters' groups that had occurred among the Plains Indians of North America.

In North America, these mounted warriors and hunters of buffalo generated a culture that became, in the eyes of most non-Indians, the stereotypic Indian culture. The icons of this culture—teepees, warfare, horses, feathered headdress, and all the rest of what is seen in film and on television—is Indian culture to people around the world. Even today, these icons are over-represented whenever Indian culture is described, thereby fostering a distorted view that all Native Americans were like these hunters.

European expansion had helped create the Pampas and Plains cultures, and improved transportation and agricultural technology helped end it. Railroads, thoroughbred cattle, refrigerated ships and railroad cars, barbed wire, windmill-driven pumps, steel moldboard plows, and mechanical reapers made it possible for European farmers to make massive use of the American Plains, and Latin American Pampas. By warfare or treaty, the Argentines and Americans drove the Indians out of the great grasslands by the end of the nineteenth century. The colorful, dramatic, and romantic cultures that had emerged on the Pampas and the Plains in the early years of the eighteenth century barely lasted two centuries.

### Other Foragers of the New World

In South America, the simple cultures of the pre-horse Pampas extended as far south as Tierra del Fuego at the very tip of the continent. In the northern reaches of the western United States and Canada were a variety of hunters and gatherers, their societies reflecting the habitats they exploited, the game and plants they sought, and the size of the population they could sustain. Furthest north were the Aleuts and Inuit (or Eskimos). The Tlingit, Kwakiutl, Nootka, and Haida and similar peoples inhabited the temperate rain forest of the Northwest Coast—from Vancouver Island to central Alaska. Outsiders knew them best as carvers of totem poles, but their talents and abilities extended far beyond those. The people of these cultures exploited rich fisheries, including massive salmon runs in their rivers and streams. They mastered sophisticated food preser-

vation techniques, hunted mammals on land and sea, and collected a rich harvest of wild plants. They supported very large populations—perhaps 10,000 people—though not in a single community. They lived in fixed villages of impressive wooden plank buildings, and were governed by complex systems of social organization that differentiated social rank based upon kinship, rather than by specialized political institutions.

The Paleoindians who had arrived in the New World some 8000 years before the first European settlement evolved into a wide variety of distinctive societies and cultures. They did not—and do not—constitute one single society. They did not recognize a common identity any more than Europeans, Asians, or Africans did. The patterns of Native American culture molded and channeled what was to happen to the next wave of settlers to arrive in the New World.

The first known European settlers in the New World—Vikings from Iceland and/or Greenland—arrived and settled briefly in northern Newfoundland in the second half of the tenth century. These settlements did not long survive, however; the first effective, sustained European presence in the New World began with the Spanish in the last years of the fifteenth century.

## CHARTER SOCIETIES AND CULTURES

Canadians refer to “charter societies and cultures” when describing the cultures that first traveled from Europe to what is now Canada. These were the people who provided the basic culture—laws, customs, and institutions—that influenced development in Canada from the time of their arrival until the present day. It was the charter societies that made the first contact with the Native Americans, and to which the Native Americans had to respond. For Canada, there were two charter societies—England and France. Later immigrants to Canada adjusted to the preexisting society and culture of English or French Canada, not the other way around.

The concept of the charter society remains useful in studying the New World, where four major charter societies—the major European conquerors and colonizers—and five significant charter cultures have been identified. Britain left its indelible mark on the social and cultural development in Canada, in much of what is now the United States, and on a number of Caribbean islands, including Jamaica and Barbados. France also played a major role in parts of Canada; to a lesser degree in the lower Mississippi River valley in the United States; and in several islands in the Caribbean, most notably in Martinique and the part of Hispaniola now known as Haiti. The third charter society for the New World was Portugal, which colonized the great eastern bulge of South America, notably Brazil. Finally, Spain, which colonized much of the New World, left its cultural imprint from California, in North America, to Tierra del Fuego, at the far southern tip of South America, and all over the Caribbean, especially in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the part of Hispaniola now known as the Dominican Republic. The fifth charter culture, unlike the other four, was brought by slaves who were brought by colonizers and conquerors.

### Plantation Societies

The societies created in the New World by the European conquerors were not uniform. Most obviously, they differed by areas settled by the charter societies. However, even settlements by the same colonizing power differed from area to area. For

example, English colonies in New England and the Caribbean islands differed greatly from each other. Differences were most dramatic between colonies that were located in different ecological and environmental regions. Colonies of different colonizing powers might show some similarities if they inhabited similar settings and were involved in similar economic undertakings. The most striking pattern of similarity between colonies of different charter societies is illustrated by plantation societies, built upon the production of valuable tropical or semi-tropical crops, especially sugar. These crops, for large-scale export, were grown on landed estates that depended for the most part upon massive numbers of slave laborers. The plantation society was the point of insertion of the charter culture of the African slaves brought to the New World by the colonizers. Unlike the other charter societies, the Africans were not supported by the institution of state power. African culture was carried in the minds of those Africans who survived the horrors of the shipment from Africa. The culture survived despite the attempts by slave masters to expunge anything that remained of the slaves’ former way of life. In some areas—part of the United States, the Caribbean, and Brazil, for example—the number of slaves was so great that they represented the majority in the population of the region and imposed their cultural mark upon the later cultures of the area.

Still other colonies saw few, if any, slaves. The colonizers’ decision to introduce slaves was neither random nor routine. It reflected the habitat and ecology of the region, the economic goals of the European colonizers, and the type of Native American society that had inhabited the region before the arrival of the Europeans. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, village agriculturalists tended to inhabit those regions that were to become the regions of plantation societies.

The native peoples of the Caribbean islands were largely wiped out by disease and the violence of the conquest. In Brazil, however, there was a large, thinly inhabited back country that served as a place of refuge for many Indian populations. There were massive displacements ever deeper into the Amazon and Orinoco River basins of coastal and other Indian societies accessible to the Europeans. They were not safe there forever. In later centuries the lure of gold, diamonds, rubber, and other commodities drew the Europeans and their heirs ever deeper into regions that had once provided safe refuge to the Indians. This process continues even in the late 1990s.

These same tropical and semi-tropical areas held great potential value for the Europeans as a place to grow sugar crops. Sugar was only in its early stages of becoming a common commodity in European marketplaces. Sugar could be easily shipped over long distances as brown sugar, or in an even more condensed form as molasses. Molasses was the most profitable of all, since it could be converted into rum. Sugar could best be grown in tropical conditions, but it required great amounts of intensive labor. The colonizers hoped to use the Indians for this purpose, but the Indians managed to escape. Elsewhere, on the Atlantic island colony of Madeira, the Portuguese had already solved the labor problem on sugar plantations by importing slaves from Africa. This solution was introduced to the Americas on the sugar plantations on the northeast coast of Brazil, where enslaved Africans were imported to work. From there, this pattern of sugar plantation agriculture spread over much of the rest of the tropical and semi-tropical New World.

The trade in African slaves continued for some three hundred years after the conquest. The enslaved Africans who survived shipment to the New World did not come from a single society or culture in Africa. In Brazil, on the northern coasts of South America, in the Caribbean, and the southeast United States, the Africans left their indelible stamp. Their presence shaped religious practice and concepts, family life and organization, music, and folklore. They influenced not only the plantation regions, but the greater nations of which these later became a part as well.

Plantation America was not the only system to grow out of economic opportunity and a unique labor force. Similarly, the variables of economic potential for the colonizers interacting with Native American cultural and demographic patterns produced two other important social and cultural New World patterns, known as Indo-America and Euro-America.

### Indo-America

The Europeans found much of value in the New World. The regions of the pre-conquest New World were largely temperate or semi-tropical. Although generally not suited to sugar production, they did have the potential to support a wide variety of European crops and animals. Of even greater importance to the Europeans were the gold and silver that could be found there. For the Spanish, most important of all were the large, dense, and highly organized populations of agricultural peasants that the Spanish Empire gained by the conquest. These peasants were accustomed to laboring to produce crops for their own subsistence and for their masters as well. The Spanish destroyed the ancient aristocracies and bureaucracies, but they retained or modified the structures of command. They simply replaced the former rulers with their own leaders to control the mass of surviving Indians. In these densely populated regions, there was no need to import African slaves or European peasants, workers, and farmers. The Indian peasantry remained the source of Spanish wealth and power as they had been for the Aztecs and Incas before them.

The Spanish attempted to maintain a sharp separation between Spanish and Indian. As always with such attempts, it was doomed to failure, and mating between Spanish and Indians began almost immediately. Most of the children of these unions were rejected by both the Spanish and Indian communities. In time in contemporary Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, however, the descendants of people of mixed ancestry became the majority or plurality. Despite the great numbers of people of mixed ancestry, political power remained in the hands of people of European background until the early years of the twentieth century. This situation only changed beginning with the early years of the twentieth century. By the late nineteenth century, political and economic differences had developed between the still largely white upper class and the largely mixed-race, urban, middle- and working-classes in these nations. These differences were of social class within a more all-encompassing national culture.

As previously noted, about ten percent of the population of Mexico does not speak Spanish as their primary language; in Ecuador and Peru, the proportion rises to twenty-five percent, while in Bolivia it reaches about fifty percent. The vast majority of these speakers are American Indian. Largely in rural areas within these nations, there are still communities that maintain modified Indian culture and speak the local Indian language.

These cultures are not unchanged from those of their 16th century ancestors. Rather, they have been much buffeted by the non-Indian world, and in some places and times, have risen in rebellion and revolution. They show a continuity with the past in many cultural practices, including language, the form of the Catholicism they practice, arts, lore, diet, and sometimes family organization. The Indian way of life is not totally shared by the other people of equivalent social and economic position in their homeland.

It should not be assumed that these Indian communities are in some way more “Indian” in a genetic sense. The people of these communities—like the rest of the nation in which they live—show a great deal of admixture of European genes. What defines a community as Indian is its culture, not primarily the physical appearance of its members. In the nations of Indo-America a person’s “racial” identity is a function of his or her cultural affiliation, not physical appearance.

### Euro-America

In North America, Euro-America extends roughly from northern Mexico north to the southern edges of the Arctic slopes. In South America, Euro-America extends roughly from southern Brazil, through Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina south to Tierra del Fuego. The habitat in South America did not offer the opportunity and potential for growing high-profit crops like sugar, and thus, there was no economic rationale to import slaves on a massive scale. Although great wealth lay buried beneath the land, it was not until the nineteenth century that this potential was appreciated and the technology developed to exploit it. The population of Indians who inhabited these regions was relatively small in number and relatively mobile. There were no great central states under which they were organized, and because of their small number, they offered no great potential as a labor force to the Europeans.

In North America, the colonists and their European masters lusted after furs, which the Indians would collect and trade, with little immediate or obvious negative impact upon their culture. In the long run, however, the European impact was just as profound upon these people as it had been upon the agricultural Indians who lived further south. These temperate colonies offered a variety of economic benefits to the European empires. These, however, were not as valuable as those colonies that lay in less temperate areas.

The European populations of Euro-America were small in the beginning. The crops, timber, fish, and livestock they produced were essentially similar to those produced in Europe. In southern Brazil and Uruguay, in Argentina and Chile, in the English colonies north of Virginia, and in the French colonies of eastern Canada, the inhabitants created European societies. These were not perfect and complete copies of their European homelands, however, since the class structure was incomplete—few aristocrats settled in these lands. Not all European regions sent immigrants to the New World. A middle class of free farmers, artisans, and merchants was over-represented, especially in North American. These isolated bits of Europe, sitting on the edge of vast forests, prairies, and plains, were to be the lure and haven for the third round of population transfer from the Old World to the New World.

## IMMIGRANT SOCIETIES

The Industrial Revolution that began quietly in Europe in the eighteenth century has continued to enhance in power and impact until the present. It initiated and stimulated a wave of demographic change probably unmatched in prior history. The economic, political, social, and cultural changes that it inaugurated worked together to set Europe, and later the rest of the world, on the move. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a tidal wave of migration began to flow. This flow of humanity occurred both within and between the nations of Europe and between Europe and the Americas. The flow within Europe was primarily a rural-to-urban migration, with large numbers of people from farms and small towns being drawn to the growing industrial cities. To a large degree, this was also true of the population movements between Europe and the Americas. People left peasant farming communities and moved to industrial and commercial cities. In this case, however, the cities were in another hemisphere half a world away. Many also came to the Americas seeking land, which was in short supply and expensive in Europe, but was available and relatively inexpensive in many parts of Euro-America.

The potential host societies in the Americas sought immigrants during this period, and in fact, competed for them. These societies were driven by their expanding economies and apparently unquenchable need for inexpensive labor.

North Americans think of the goal of the immigrant waves of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as directed primarily at the United States and, to a lesser degree, towards Canada. In truth, however, the immigrants were drawn to countries all over the Americas. The greatest number went to those nations in Euro-America: the United States and Canada, southern Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina. Smaller numbers of European immigrants settled in other parts of the Americas as well. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, far fewer immigrants came to the Americas from Asia and Africa, but by the mid-twentieth century, these numbers would grow. In the second half of the twentieth century the impact of industrialization, war, and revolution increased the flow of emigrants and refugees from Asia. Also, discriminatory laws against Asians in many host countries were softened, and the gates to Asian immigration were thus opened a bit wider.

The world in which new immigrants arrived had been shaped by the various charter societies for several hundred years. The assumption on the part of the host populations was that the newcomers would learn the ways of the host country, give up their “foreign ways,” and in time, become indistinguishable from everyone else. In the United States, this was expressed through the metaphor of “the melting pot.” In some ways, this metaphor was accurate, but in others it was not.

### Acculturation, Assimilation, and Ethnicity

Social scientists distinguish between acculturation and assimilation, two social and cultural processes. Acculturation refers to the process by which a group—usually socially and politically subordinate—learns the culture, language, dress, rules, and laws, of another—usually dominant—group. Assimilation refers to the process by which one group loses its identity through total absorption into another group. Acculturation without assimilation is common. Assimilation without acculturation is rare at best, and may even be impossible.

Many variables contribute to the process of acculturation and assimilation for an immigrant group, family, or individual. For generations of immigrants who came from the Old World as adults, acculturation occurs rather slowly because they are already trained in and accustomed to another culture. The first generation born in the new circumstances faces a complex problem. In their home environment, they learn aspects of their parents’ native culture; in the outside world—at school, for example—they are exposed to the host culture. The grandchildren of the original immigrants (the second generation born in the new environment) will usually be exposed to relatively little of the grandparents’ native culture. After two generations, all other things being equal, it will usually be difficult, if not impossible, to identify any highly visible cultural differences between the descendants of the immigrants and those of the host population.

All things, however, are not always equal. A Norwegian family, as an example, that settled in a place where there were no other Norwegian immigrants would have to learn the ways of the hosts quickly in order to live their everyday lives. The children, and certainly the grandchildren, of such a family would probably have few opportunities to even think of themselves as “Norwegians” or “Norwegian-Americans.”

If, on the other hand, that same family had settled in a community with many other Norwegian immigrants, they would face a different situation. They would have people with whom they could continue to practice at least some aspects of Norwegian culture. They could attend and support Norwegian-oriented institutions like churches, parochial or after-schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, newspapers, magazines, and social clubs. In a case such as this, two levels of acculturation might be observed. At the level of everyday life—on the job, in the street, in the public school—the people in such an immigrant-based community would appear no different than anyone else. At another level, they would practice a rich culture of Norwegian origin. They might, in appropriate circumstances, think and speak of themselves as “Norwegian-Americans.” Such a community could celebrate Norwegian Independence Day (17 May) as a holiday that mixes together Norwegian and American culture, symbols, and themes. The Norwegian immigrant family that settled among non-Norwegians and thus lost a sense of Norwegian identity would be considered assimilated. The Norwegian family that settled with other Norwegians to create a Norwegian-American community must be considered less assimilated. Both, however, are acculturated.

The process of assimilation is far more complex than the process of acculturation. Many factors affect the process of adaptation to a new way of life in a new culture. Examples include the nature of the diplomatic, political, and military relationship between the host and the homeland of the immigrant group; and racial categories and stereotypes held by both immigrant group and host nation, as well as the laws and customs relating to such issues in the host country. There are also important social and cultural differences among immigrants from a single country that influence acculturation and assimilation. Late nineteenth century Italian immigrants, for example, were different in almost every way from those who arrived late in the twentieth century. The older charter populations in the New World did not always welcome those who came later. Levels of education, wealth, social class, religion, and other

factors had major effects on immigrants. Very often the later immigrants were discriminated against—even to the point of physical attacks—due to racial, religious, social, economic, and other fears and prejudicial attitudes that the older populations had learned from their own ancestors. Most North Americans can easily understand the process of the loss or preservation of “national identity” by immigrant populations—perhaps having experienced it within recent generations in their own families. However, much the same process was at work all over the Americas, for not only immigrants from the Old World to the New, but also for those immigrating between countries of the Americas. Huge flows of population—black, white, and brown—flowed from rural to urban locations within the nations of the Americas and between them.

The effects of these processes of acculturation and assimilation, conquest and colonization, have left the New World a

mosaic of cultures and societies. None is homogeneous. All reflect a mix of identities and loyalties, social classes, races, and religions that is constantly changing and never stable. It is this complex set of psychological, social, and cultural processes that defines ethnicity in the New World.

Thus, generalizing about ethnicity is complicated at best. The reader will encounter the many groups that populate the nations of the Americas in this volume. It is more important to be alert to and aware of this complexity. The writers’ attempts to inform is unavoidably subject to some distortion. This volume provides a place to begin learning about the people of the Americas. It also leads the reader on, to sources for further study in the process of discovering the people and cultures of the Americas.

# AFRICAN AMERICANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Blacks

**LOCATION:** United States

**POPULATION:** 37 million (half of whom live in the Southern states, 2006)

**LANGUAGE:** English (sometimes with Black English variants)

**RELIGION:** National Baptist Convention; Church of God in Christ (Pentecostal); Roman Catholicism; Nation of Islam; African Methodist Episcopal Church; African Orthodox Church; Judaism; Rastafarianism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Unlike other immigrants to the United States, the ancestors of today's African Americans did not come to America of their own free will. Beginning in 1619, they were captured and forcibly brought from their West African homelands to serve as slaves, mostly on Southern plantations. The inhuman conditions aboard the ships on which they traveled killed many Africans before they reached the New World. When the thirteen British colonies declared and ultimately won their independence from Britain in the 18th century, the institution of slavery was retained, although largely confined to the Southern states. During the Civil War, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the Southern slaves; the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, passed in December 1865, abolished all slavery in the United States. At the close of the Civil War, African Americans accounted for 14% of the U.S. population.

The newly freed slaves made progress during Reconstruction, especially in education, but the end of this period, in 1877, brought a new era of repression marked by lynchings and other forms of persecution, in which the recently formed Ku Klux Klan played a prominent role. In 1909 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed. The following two decades saw the migration of about 1.6 million Southern blacks to Northern cities in search of newly available industrial jobs. Weathering the hardships of the Depression, blacks continued their northward migration through the years of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies and World War II.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the country's most egregious forms of racism were eliminated, as blacks joined forces to demand their legal and human rights through civil disobedience and other forms of protest and social activism. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared school segregation illegal. Progress was also made in the area of voting rights, as well as the desegregation of public facilities, especially in the South. In 1963, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial. The 1960s also saw the growth of the black nationalist movement, whose leadership was assumed by the Black Panthers following the assassination of Black Muslim leader Malcolm X.

By the 1970s, African Americans had been elected as mayors of several major cities, and affirmative action programs had created new opportunities in employment and education. However, many of these programs were weakened or eliminat-

ed during the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the country's continuing racial tensions were brought to the forefront of national attention by events including the riots in Los Angeles in response to the court's decision in the Rodney King case and the 1995 acquittal in the O. J. Simpson murder trial.

African-American achievement in American society has been remarkable in the 21st century. Black political leaders in the late 20th and early 21st centuries included: civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, who ran for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988; Douglas Wilder, elected the first state governor (Virginia) in the United States in 1989; Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois, who became the first black woman elected to the U.S. Senate (1992); General Colin Powell, Chairman of the U.S. Armed Forces Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1989–1993, and Secretary of State, 2001–2005; Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser from 2001–2004, and Secretary of State beginning in 2005; Ron Brown, United States Secretary of Commerce, 1993–1996; Supreme Court justices Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas; and President Barack Obama, who was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States in 2009.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the United States Census Bureau, there were an estimated 37 million African Americans in the United States in 2006, a population larger than that of most African nations and one that represents 12.4% of the total U.S. population. The Census Bureau projects the black population of the United States to rise to 61.4 million by July 1, 2050. On that date, blacks would constitute 14.6% of the nation's total population. As of 2006, 18 U.S. states had a black population of at least 1 million. New York, with 3.5 million blacks, led the way. The 17 other states were Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. Approximately 31% of the black population was younger than 18 in 2006. At the other end of the spectrum, 8% of the black population was 65 and older.

## 3 LANGUAGE

African Americans speak English, although some blacks, either in addition to or instead of Standard American English, speak a variant known as Black English Vernacular (BEV), or Black English. In the late 1990s, the term *ebonics* was coined by linguists to refer to the grammar of Black English. The grammar and syntax of Black English are traceable to West African and Niger-Congo languages. They include the frequent omission of forms of the verb "to be" ("He nice" instead of "He is nice"); the use of "be" in place of "is" ("He be home today"); the absence of endings from third person singular verbs ("She know"); absence of the possessives when possession is signified by word order ("That John house"); replacement of a final "th" sound in a word by an "f" sound ("I going wif you"); and replacement of indefinite pronouns such as "anyone" by negative pronouns when verbs are negated ("He don't like nobody"). Black English Vernacular has introduced African words such as *goober* (peanut), *tote* (carry), *juke* (juke box), and *okay* into the English language, as well as produced original terms later incorporated widely into general informal or conversational use, such as *jive*, *hip*, and *jazz*. In other cases, Standard English



terms have been given new meanings, as in the case of *cat*, *rap*, *bad*, and *awesome*.

In 1996, Black English Vernacular, newly labeled Ebonics, was the subject of nationwide debate when the Oakland, California, school board passed a resolution declaring it a separate language distinct from standard English in order to institute programs aimed at educating teachers in this dialect and inculcating respect for its African linguistic roots.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

African Americans have a folklore tradition that dates back to the period of black slavery. Early forms of African-American folklore include animal-trickster tales, spirituals, and folk beliefs, such as the belief in conjurers, figures similar to African medicine men who, by using spells and charms, could either heal or cause injury. Folk traditions were also passed down through the generations by proverbs, sermons, prayers, and a variety of folktales.

Modern African-American folklore includes the “dozens,” insult matches favored especially by young men and generally including disparaging remarks about each other’s mothers. Another popular type of folklore consists of rumors about organized anti-black conspiracies. Today these rumors take the form of “urban legends” that are in widespread circulation in the black community but virtually unknown to other ethnic communities. Examples include the assertions that the Ku Klux Klan tampers with Church’s fried chicken in ways that cause sterility among black men; that American scientists de-

liberately created the AIDS virus and then attempted to test it by infecting African populations with it; and that twenty-eight African Americans were killed in the course of interferon research at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

#### 5 RELIGION

The National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A., Inc., with some 7.5 million members in 2008, is the largest black religious denomination, followed by the Church of God in Christ, a Pentecostal sect (2008 membership of over 6 million). Roman Catholicism (with a black membership of more than 2 million in 2008) and the Nation of Islam both claim large black followings as well. Other religious affiliations include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Orthodox Church, Judaism, and Rastafarianism.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

African Americans observe the national holidays of the United States and the religious holidays of the faiths to which they belong. Dates with special significance for African Americans are the birthdays of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., on January 15 and of Malcolm X on May 19, and Juneteenth, which commemorates the date on which black slaves in Texas learned that they were free—June 19, 1865. In 1994 Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating the third Monday in January (near Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday) as a national day of volunteer service. The joyous holiday of Kwanzaa, the festival of first fruits, is celebrated from December 26 to

January 1. Each day of this holiday, inaugurated by the philosopher Maulana Karenga in 1966, is devoted to and named for a particular virtue.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

African Americans with active religious involvement mark major life events such as birth, marriage, and death within their respective religious traditions. “Jumping the broom” is a time-honored custom at African-American weddings. The African Americans of Louisiana’s New Orleans Creole community are known for their jazz funerals. Observers within the black community have decried the lack of coming-of-age rituals for young black men, and some groups, including the Urban League and PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) have developed rite-of-passage programs that focus on responsibility, values, character, and discipline. (PUSH also offers such programs for young women.) Increasing numbers of parents are also adopting African-based rites of passage for children, which are called *mfundalai*, or Changing Season rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Common greetings in Black English Vernacular include “Word up,” “Yo,” and “Look out.” A common nonverbal greeting consists of slapping another person’s outstretched palm. When done above the head it is called a “high five”; at knee level it is a “low five.” The women’s version of this greeting consists of sliding one’s forefinger across the forefinger of the other woman. Expressions of farewell include “See you later,” “Word to the Mother” (referring to the motherland of Africa), and “Stay black.” “Man” is commonly used in informal situations as a form of address for men; black women often address each other as “girlfriend” or “sista.” Many young African Americans still observe the West African custom of addressing their elders as “Aunt” or “Uncle.” Like people from many Asian and Latin American cultures, African Americans, especially those from the South, often avoid eye contact as a sign of respect.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

African Americans have a disproportionately high incidence of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, AIDS, obesity, and asthma than whites. The health of low-income blacks in particular is affected by a lack of affordable high-quality medical care and the health insurance that could pay for it. The rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) for black infants is as much as twice as high as for whites, a fact attributed to the lower quality of prenatal care many black mothers receive. However, recent increases in life expectancy have been pronounced among black males, whose average life expectancy increased from 64.5 years in 1990 to 69.5 years in 2004, following a decline in life expectancy in the late 1980s. Some of this increase reflects declines in homicide rates among black males during the mid- and late-1990s. Despite these increases, however, black children are still almost twice as likely as white children to die before reaching age 20. In 2004, white newborns had an average life expectancy of 78.3 years, compared with 73.1 years among black newborns.

Limited in their choice of housing by income and racial discrimination, the great majority of African Americans lived in substandard housing until the middle of the 20th century. Between 1950 and 1970 the proportion of blacks living in substandard dwellings dropped from 73% to 23%. In 2005, 48.2%



*Performers from the Ezibu Muntu Dance Company dance during a Kwanzaa celebration at the Lincoln Theater in Washington. Kwanzaa is a pan-African holiday established in 1966 celebrating family, community, and culture.*  
(Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images)

of blacks owned their own homes, compared with 69% of the total population and 72.7% of whites. Blacks are disproportionately represented among the impoverished of the United States: in 2006, 24.2% of blacks were below the poverty line, compared to 12.3% for the total population. As a result, they are more likely than whites to need housing assistance. African Americans are also disproportionately represented among those who have criminal records, and as such are more likely to be rejected for public housing on that basis.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

African-American family life offers many variations on the nuclear-family model, including single-parent families (usually headed by women); “blended” families that include a couple’s



children with previous partners as well as any children they may have together; adults, who live together, with or without children; and extended families, which have long played an especially important role in the lives of African Americans. In addition to grandparents, extended families may include aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives, who may join the nuclear family either temporarily or long-term. One prominent social trend has been a decrease in the number of married African-American couples, which has been associated with a variety of factors, including a demographic shortage of black men; increased opportunities for black women in the labor market; imprisonment of large numbers of black men; unemployment and low earnings among black men; and rising rates of intermarriage.

### **11 CLOTHING**

African Americans wear clothing similar to that worn by other Americans. Certain fashions among inner-city youth, such as baggy, loose-fitting pants that hang down far below the waist and baseball caps worn backwards, have caught on among young men of other ethnic and racial groups. Doo rags are also in vogue among black men. Doo rags are made of a silk-like material, usually black, that wraps around the skull, with a small flap hanging down in the rear, over the neck. They were popularized by hip hop artists in the 2000s.

### **12 FOOD**

Traditional African-American food, commonly known as “soul food,” originated with the mingling of the West African culinary heritage of black slaves with the cooking styles and available foods of the American South. In particular, the African custom of using all edible parts of both plants and animals was of great importance to the sustenance of blacks, who had to make do with scraps and leftovers. This practice has been especially evident in the preparation of pork, which has long been the most common meat eaten by African Americans, who traditionally used virtually all parts of the animal, including the hocks, snout, ears, feet, and tail—everything, it was said, “but the oink.” Other dietary staples of African-American diet have included chicken, corn, both white and sweet potatoes, okra, and a variety of greens. Barbecues are popular among African Americans, who take great pride in their sauce recipes. Depending on geographical region, fish has also been a staple of the African-American diet, and fish sandwiches with hot sauce on white bread are a current favorite in black communities. Popular desserts, including pralines and shortening bread, are often sweetened with molasses; and watermelon, which was brought to the New World from Africa, is still a favorite food.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education has been a strong concern of those seeking to improve the lives of African Americans, especially those in inner-city neighborhoods. In 2005, 6% of non-Hispanic whites ages 16 to 24 were not enrolled in school and had not completed high school, compared with 11% of blacks. As of the 2000 census, there were 14.4 million African Americans who held at least a high school diploma, and 2.8 million African Americans who held a bachelor’s degree or higher. Cities including Baltimore, Detroit, and Milwaukee have experimented with Afrocentric and multicultural curricula and other programs geared toward the cultural background and educational needs

of African-American youth. Among the oldest black colleges in the nation are Wilberforce University, Fisk University, Talladega College, Morehouse College, Howard University, and Tougaloo College.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The most famous period in African-American literature was the Harlem Renaissance between the two World Wars, when writers including Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston exposed racial injustice in works that reflected their personal experience. Classics of black literature in the years following this period included Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*. The Black Aesthetic Movement of the 1960s and 1970s reflected developments of the civil rights and black nationalist movements, as well as African Americans’ growing awareness of their African cultural roots. Since the 1970s, many black women writers have risen to prominence, including Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, former U.S. Poet Laureate Rita Dove, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, and Carolyn Ferrell.

Important genres of African-American music include spirituals, gospel, rhythm and blues (“R&B”), ragtime, jazz, soul, Motown, funk, rap, and hip hop music. Some of the greatest names of the jazz tradition include trumpeter Louis Armstrong, vocalist Ella Fitzgerald, bandleaders Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie, saxophonist Charlie Parker, and trumpeter Miles Davis.

Prominent African-American visual artists in the 20th century have included Romare Bearden, Benford Delaney, Jacob Douglas, Aaron Douglas, Horace Pippin, Clementine Hunter, Keith Haring, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Kara Walker is a 21st century American artist whose works are known for their exploration of race, gender, sexuality, violence, and identity.

### **15 WORK**

African Americans—and especially black men—are more likely to be unemployed and to work in low paying jobs than whites. But trends are showing that African Americans are making strides in employment in the 21st century. For instance, in 2007, for the first time in five years, the African-American unemployment rate dropped, from 8.4% in December 2006 to 8% in January 2007. In 1991 only 18% of blacks were employed in professional and managerial jobs. By 2006, 27% of blacks age 16 and older worked in management, professional, and related occupations. Nevertheless, black households had the lowest median income in 2004 (\$30,134). Asian households had the highest median income (\$57,518); the median income for non-Hispanic white households was \$48,977 and \$34,241 for Hispanic households.

### **16 SPORTS**

Many disadvantaged black youths have dreamed of a professional sports career—especially in basketball—as a way out of the urban ghetto, a dream most poignantly portrayed in the 1994 documentary film *Hoop Dreams*, which chronicled the lives of two talented inner-city teens over several years. Although the chances of making it as a professional athlete are slim, sports scholarships give many young blacks educational opportunities that can provide solid, if less spectacular, forms of upward mobility.

Within the field of professional sports, current issues include the hiring of blacks in coaching and front-office positions. In addition to the accomplishments of great African-American athletes in basketball, baseball, boxing, and football, black athletes have more recently made pioneering achievements in what had been all-white sports, tennis and golf. Arthur Ashe became the first black American to garner the Wimbledon and U.S. Open championships, and African American tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams have both been ranked number one in the world. In 1997 21-year-old Tiger Woods became the first athlete of black ancestry to win the Masters' Tournament. As of 2008, Woods was the top golf player in the world and the highest-paid professional athlete in 2006. By 2008 Woods had won 13 major golf championships, the second highest of any male player, and 64 PGA Tour events.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

African Americans enjoy many of the same types of leisure-time activities as other Americans, including television, movies, concerts, dancing, family gatherings, and both participatory and spectator sports. The Black Entertainment Television cable network broadcasts *hip-hop and R&B music* videos, black collegiate sports, public affairs programs, reruns of popular programs, *religious programming, and urban-oriented movies and series*. Dance clubs, at which music is provided by disk jockeys, create a sense of community for many young people, with popular dance styles including hip-hop, lofting, and house.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional forms of African-American folk art include basket weaving, pottery, wood-carving, quilting, and the making of musical instruments. Prominent characteristics of black folk art include a pervasive religious theme; the frequent appearance of bird, serpent, and other animal imagery; the use of significant figures in African-American history, both white and black, including Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and a talent for transforming scrap objects into works of art. Precisely this form of art was in evidence in "The Quilts of Gee's Bend," a nationwide exhibition of more than 60 quilts made between 1930 and 2000 by four generations of quilt makers from a rural community in Alabama. *The New York Times* declared that the exhibition featured "some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced."

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems faced by African Americans include the lack of good jobs, high unemployment, gang violence, the sale and use of crack cocaine in inner-city areas, reductions in social spending by governments at all levels, the high teen pregnancy rate and high percentage of households headed by young single mothers, and tensions with recently arrived Asian and Hispanic immigrants. In 2006, 46% of all African-American children in the United States lived below the poverty level.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

African American women face some of the same problems as other American women when it comes to gender discrimination. However, black women are more likely than white women to become pregnant when they are young and unmarried,

which not only makes it difficult for them to hold together and support their families, but also may prevent them from furthering their educations or careers.

Gay and lesbian African Americans face disproportionate degrees of homophobia from the black community than whites face in the general culture. Researchers have suggested this is due in part to the prominence of the black church in African Americans' lives. Beginning in the 1980s, HIV/AIDS became a dominant area of concern for homosexuals.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# AFRICAN BRAZILIANS

**LOCATION:** Brazil

**POPULATION:** About 16 million

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese with some African terms

**RELIGION:** Afro-Brazilian sects such as Condomble; spiritualist sects

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Brazilians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Brazilians of African origin comprise nearly 10% of the total population of Brazil. As in the United States, their arrival can be traced back to the slave trade of the mid 1500s. It is estimated that nearly 4 million or more slaves were shipped to Brazil from various African countries. This is vastly higher than the number of slaves that were imported into the United States, which has been estimated at approximately 600,000. The Portuguese crown traded African slaves to Brazil in order to have abundant and cheap labor in sugar plantations and mining. The majority of Africans brought to Brazil came from Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau (Republic of Guinea-Bissau), Benin, Angola, Republic of Congo, and Mozambique. In ethnic terms, the people brought to Brazil were part of two major groups: Sudan and Bantu people.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Afro-Brazilian culture is an important part of Brazilian society. Afro-Brazilian cooking customs and religion, for example, are practiced not only by blacks, but also by Brazilians of all races and ethnic backgrounds.

Brazilian law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race. Little overt tension or racial violence exists in Brazil, as it does in many countries around the world, including the United States. However, subtle racial discrimination continues to exist, and Afro-Brazilians have limited access to higher education and economic opportunities. As a whole, Afro-Brazilians are a socio-economically disadvantaged group in society.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Brazil is an ethnically diverse country. The population of 162,661,214 persons is primarily composed of indigenous Indians, mainly Amazonian tribes; Portuguese and other European immigrants; and Afro-Brazilians (about 16,000,000). More recent immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries has added Arabs and Japanese to the mix. These ethnic groups have intermixed. As a result, the percentage of the population that considers itself to be Black in the national census has been in dramatic decline, while the number of those who consider themselves Brown has increased. This has been called the "bleaching" of Brazil.

The northeastern state of Bahia can be considered the heart of Afro-Brazilian culture. Both sugar and cacao were produced in the northeast region and Bahia became the port of arrival for many slaves. Afro-Brazilians reside throughout the country, however, with large concentrations in the major cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Brazil is Portuguese. Afro-Brazilians originating from many different African countries and ethnic

groups learned Portuguese as a way of communicating both with colonial Brazilians and with each other. Some words of African origin have been incorporated into everyday language (i.e., *samba*). This can be seen most clearly in the area of Afro-Brazilian religion, which retained the original African names of deities, ceremonies, and dances.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Afro-Brazilian folklore has a rich tradition in Brazil. One of the most revered historical figures is Zumbi. He was a rebel slave leader in the region of Palmares, a zone in Brazil occupied by escaped African slaves, Amerindians, and other mixed races. The zone of Palmares was organized following African traditions with a king and an assembly where the best warriors were elected kings. Zumbi was the most famous of them.

Slaves, Amerindians, and people of mixed races of Quilombos dos Palmares fought for more than 65 years against Dutch and Portuguese soldiers. Today, many Afro-Brazilians celebrate November 20, the date that, according to the popular belief, Zumbi jumped off a cliff to avoid being captured by government forces. However, other historic accounts suggest something different. In 1694 Domingo Jorge Valho would have fought and defeated the African resistance of Quilombos dos Palmares and Zumbi would have survived and managed to escape feeding up the rumors that assured that the black leader was immortal. On 20 November 1965 Zumbi would have been captured and immediately decapitated and his head would have been brought to the public plaza to show the rest of the community that Zumbi was not immortal. The heroic actions of Zumbi have made him a legendary figure to Afro-Brazilians.

Perhaps the most well-known and powerful mythical creature in the Afro-Brazilian culture is the *boiúna*, or *mboiaçu* that lives in the rivers of the Amazon. According to the myth, the cobra-grande (large serpent) lives in the water and can take different shapes to frighten away the fishermen.

## 5 RELIGION

Brazil is a cosmopolitan country, and its cultural diversity can be appreciated in the existence of different religions. Even though most of African-Brazilians are Christians there is an extended range of religions rooted in African traditions. These Afro-Brazilian religious sects are becoming increasingly popular with Blacks and Whites alike in Brazil. There are a variety of religious groupings that continue to follow traditional African religious practices. The first is Condomble, a religion originated in the city of Salvador and first practiced by slaves from the Yoruba tribe. Based largely in the state of Bahia, Condomble followers worship many different gods and goddesses of nature, such as Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea. Condomble services are characterized by pulsating drums and rhythmic music that encourages followers to reach a trancelike state. Animal sacrifices, healing, and dancing are part of these ceremonies, which are conducted not on Sunday mornings, but late at night. It has been estimated that over 1,000 Condomble temples exist in the city of Salvador, Bahia.

Other spiritualist sects, such as Umbanda, combine African and non-African religious influences. In these religions, it is common for the services to be led by a female priestess. Umbanda is becoming widespread in Brazil's major cities. Followers of Umbanda invite spirits into their bodies as part of the services. When they are "possessed," they traditionally light a



Followers of African-Brazilian religious sects carry offerings to Iemanja, an African water goddess, on February 2, Iemanja's Day. (AP Images/Ricardo Moraes)

cigar. Umbanda services account for the majority of cigar sales in Brazil.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Bahia is the center of Afro-Brazilian culture, and it is there that its festivals are most celebrated. On February 2, residents of Salvador celebrate the Condomble goddess of the sea, Iemanja. Gifts and offerings are made to Iemanja and are floated out to sea in small handmade sailboats. These offerings are usually sent by fishermen's wives, in the hope that the goddess will protect the fishermen and ensure calm waters. Condomble rhythmic music accompanies the ceremonial events.

Another Afro-Brazilian festival is held in the city of Cachoeira. An Afro-Brazilian religious society holds an annual festival to celebrate the liberation of slaves in Brazil. Dancing, music, and prayer act to remind Afro-Brazilians of the suffering of their slave ancestors. Afro-Brazilians also celebrate Carnival (see **Brazilians**).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, puberty, and death, are marked by ceremonies appropriate to each Afro-Brazilian's religious tradition.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is difficult to distinguish Afro-Brazilian customs from those of Brazilian society as a whole. Afro-Brazilian mannerisms,

traditions, rituals, and music have been incorporated into wider Brazilian culture.

Afro-Brazilians are an outgoing and gregarious people. They speak animatedly and use a variety of hand gestures to add emphasis to what they are saying. Afro-Brazilians are also accustomed to close personal contact. Women will often walk down the street hand in hand, and male friends will greet each other with a hug.

Music has been incorporated into many aspects of Afro-Brazilian life. Samba clubs that rehearse for Carnival are an important form of social organization. In addition, music is incorporated into their traditional sports, *capoeira* (a martial art), and into religious services. Most Afro-Brazilians are deeply religious and these beliefs pervade every aspect of their lives. It is common, for example, for food and candles to be left on street corners as offerings to spirits.

In January in Bahia, colorful ribbons are sold that are believed to be good luck. These ribbons must be received as gifts and should never be bought for oneself. These ribbons are tied with multiple knots around the wrist. The wearer makes a wish with each knot tied. The ribbons are then worn continuously until they fall off from daily wear. Only then are the wishes granted.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Many Afro-Brazilians live in poverty in the urban slums that surround the major cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Many of these slums, called *favelas*, are on steep hillsides. The earlier settlers can be found at the base of the hill, which is more accessible. These areas are likely to have electricity and running water. Further up the hillside are newer, less accessible communities. Pathways between houses are narrow and cramped. Often large families will live in a single-room dwelling. The lack of running water and the accumulation of sewage in these densely concentrated areas create many health problems for residents. Gastrointestinal and infectious diseases are widespread. Clinics and health care, when they exist in the favelas, are overcrowded and poorly equipped.

The favelas surrounding Rio de Janeiro are also at risk of flooding. Heavy rain will carry garbage down the hillsides and can create landslides that wash away flimsy housing.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

In Brazil, there are different types of socially accepted marriages. Unions between couples can be religious, civil, or common-law. Civil marriages are those recognized by the state. Most couples undergo a civil wedding followed by a religious ceremony.

Long-term relationships between couples that live together are common and socially accepted in Brazil. This practice, known as *amasiado*, is common among Afro-Brazilians. Official forms of marriage are perceived to be unnecessary. As with other types of marriage, some couples ultimately separate while others may last a lifetime. Couples in *amasiado* are accepted as married by the community and may have children without fear of being shunned.

The extended family provides an additional source of mutual assistance and support. The role of godparent is taken very seriously and entails many responsibilities. Family loyalty takes first priority. Relatives offer both economic and moral support to family members in need.

### 11 CLOTHING

Regional differences in dress in Brazil are pronounced. In the largely Afro-Brazilian regions of Bahia, Black women dress in clothing inspired by 18th century attire. Colorful, full-length skirts are worn with delicately embroidered white blouses, which are sometimes worn off the shoulder. Women in Bahia, known as *Baianas*, also wear scarves or turbans wrapped tightly around their heads.

Brightly colored beads are worn by both men and women. These beads have religious symbolic meaning. The color of the beads worn reflects the individual's *orixa*, or African Condomble god.

### 12 FOOD

Brazilian cuisine has diverse culinary roots. The majority of its typical dishes are heavily influenced by culinary styles from Europe and Africa, syncretism that is expressed in a variety of tastes and aromas. Afro-Brazilian food combines African, Portuguese, and indigenous ingredients and cooking traditions. African peppers and spices are now grown in the tropical northeastern state of Bahia and are used widely in Afro-Brazilian cooking. *Dende* oil, for example, is extracted from an African palm now grown in Brazil. *Dende* is used to make *moqueca*, a spicy mix of sautéed shrimp, tomato, and coconut milk.

The most distinctive Afro-Brazilian dish is *feijoada*, also considered to be the national dish of Brazil. *Feijoada* is a black bean and pork stew, traditionally cooked in African-style earthenware pots. The dish was created by Brazilian slaves. They were given the discarded pieces of pork, such as the tail, snout, and feet, which they stewed slowly with spices and beans. This dish was so tasty that it was soon copied by the slave owners. *Feijoada* is now usually made with prime cuts of pork and beef and is a Saturday lunch time favorite.

*Vatapá* is another traditional dish among Afro-Brazilians. Its main ingredients are bread, shrimp, coconut milk, and palm oil. In some areas of Brazil, shrimp is replaced by fresh fish, tuna, chicken, or turkey. To prepare *vatapá*, all the components are smashed until getting a creamy paste. *Vatapá* is served with white rice.

### 13 EDUCATION

Brazil has a serious problem of illiteracy. Approximately 20% of the Brazilian population does not know how to read or write, while many others have only a rudimentary ability to read. Although the proportion of children that attend school has increased since the 1960s, the quality of the education they receive is poor. Not surprisingly, the schools in the poorer neighborhoods where many Afro-Brazilians live have limited resources. Classes are extremely crowded and there is often a shortage of books. A larger proportion of Afro-Brazilian children, moreover, fail to attend school. Many children, particularly in both rural and urban areas, begin work at a young age to help the family make ends meet. The low level of education most Afro-Brazilian children receive makes it difficult for them to find employment as young adults.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Most of the slaves brought over from Africa were illiterate, and slave owners preferred to keep it that way. As a result, an oral tradition of storytelling and history became very important in Afro-Brazilian culture. Many family histories, stories, and myths continue to be passed down through successive generations. Afro-Brazilian themes have also become an important aspect of Brazilian culture. Jorge de Lima is a poet who was widely read in the 1960s. He drew from African-style verses and wrote about the plight of Africans in Brazil.

Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage can be more readily seen in the powerful influence it has had on Brazilian music generally. Brazil's varied music traditions draw heavily from traditional African instruments, rhythm, and dance. Samba music, now popular around the world, is a direct descendant of African music. A more pure form of Afro-Brazilian music is performed by *afoxes*, dance groups that perform to music of the Condomble religion. Using drums and percussion, these dance groups have increased in popularity in recent years. The African influence continues to shape Brazil's music and culture.

### 15 WORK

Brazil is a vast country and common types of work vary from region to region. In the northeast regions, cattle-raising and ranching are important economic activities. In the southeast, sugarcane, cotton, and coffee are also grown and exported. This diverse agricultural sector provides employment as field hands for many Afro-Brazilians. This work, however, pays poorly and

is very laborious. In addition, many field workers are separated from their families to find employment at harvest time.

Brazil also has an impressive industrial and manufacturing sector. Autos, shoes, textiles, and electronic equipment are all made in Brazil, providing steady employment for many people. The manufacturing sector, however, does not generate enough employment for the millions of urban slum dwellers. Many *favela* (slum) residents work as self-employed street vendors or develop small-scale enterprises in their own homes. Many women, for example, work as seamstresses or hairstylists from their homes.

## 16 SPORTS

Perhaps the most famous soccer player in the world is an Afro-Brazilian, Edson Arantes do Nascimento. Better known as Pele, he continues to be a global personality. He rose from a low-income family in the state of Sao Paulo and had limited formal education. Pele led the Brazilian national team to World Cup championships in 1958, 1962, and 1970. Brazil was the first country to win the World Cup three times.

A more distinctive Afro-Brazilian sport is *capoeira*. This form of Angolan martial art is now more of a dance than an actual form of fighting. Brought over by slaves from Angola, this form of foot-fighting was banned by slave owners. In order to disguise this practice, slaves transformed foot-fighting into a rhythmic gymnastic dance form. Accompanied by music, capoeira dancers gracefully use arm and leg motions, designed to barely miss the opponent. Well-aimed high kicks skim over the head of the other fighter.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most entertainment revolves around music and dancing. Preparations for Carnival, for example, can begin up to six months in advance of the festival. Samba schools are popular in the *favelas* (slums) and provide an outlet and form of recreation for many Afro-Brazilian youths.

The other central form of recreation for Afro-Brazilian youths is practicing the national sport—soccer. Brazil is probably the country most enthusiastic about soccer in the world. Both in urban and rural areas, playing soccer is the preferred after-school activity.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Afro-Brazilians produce a wide variety of arts and crafts. In Bahia, the African tradition of cooking in ceramic pots is still followed, and functional clay pots can be found in many markets. Intricately hand-carved rosewood and handmade lace are art forms passed down through successive generations. Banana leaf fibers are sometime used in place of thread for lace making.

Many Afro-Brazilian arts and crafts are closely linked to African religious traditions. Many objects used in Condomble rituals are produced by skilled goldsmiths in Bahia. Charms and other forms of jewelry traditionally worn around the waists of slave women in Brazil are still popular.

The state of Bahia is also home to a growing number of painters. Numerous galleries have been set up in Salvador, Bahia, to market the paintings of talented local artists. Many of these paintings deal with themes relating to Afro-Brazilian life and culture.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Drug trafficking and related violence are serious problems that are on the rise in urban slums, or *favelas*. Organized gangs operate in the favelas, selling drugs and engaging in other types of crime. In part, this is the result of high unemployment among youths. Teenagers in the favelas are unlikely to have completed their formal education, and their employment prospects are bleak. The lure of easy money by selling drugs has drawn many young people into this dangerous activity. Conflicts between competing gangs often lead to violence and many deaths. Other forms of violent crime are also becoming widespread in the favelas.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The socioeconomic, political, and cultural situations of Afro-Brazilian women are, in general, extremely precarious. Most live below the poverty line and endure situations of social exclusion. Most black Brazilian women have limited levels of education and do not have access to information technology or training. It is not uncommon for black women to be educated in antiquated public school systems that do not promote cultural diversity or equal rights.

In addition, there is no public health policy that specifically addresses the needs of black women in Brazil, such as treatment or clinical testing programs for diseases that typically affect this population more frequently. Afro-Brazilian women also constitute the majority of sexual exploitation cases, feeding the sexual tourism and human trafficking markets in growing numbers. Statistics reveal that, in Brazil, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is growing mainly in the most impoverished social strata, and at an even faster rate among women. Black women are hit the hardest by the disease, since they are the poorest and least educated of all of Brazil's ethnic groups. Another health problem among Afro-Brazilian women is pregnancy-related deaths. For instance, in the state of Paraná, black women from that state are seven times more likely than other women to die from pregnancy- and childbirth-related causes.

In the labor market, Afro-Brazilian women suffer the highest rates of unemployment and spend the most time unemployed. When they do receive wages, they are paid on average 55% less than white women. Black women also constitute the majority of workers in the informal market. In addition, they are primarily employed in jobs that are considered less skilled, such as domestic work. According to the 1999 National Household Survey, 56% of all domestic servants are black women.

Regarding politics, Brazilian women are not adequately represented among elected officials. The number of elected female representatives falls short of the participation quota of 30% stipulated by Brazilian law. The situation of Afro-Brazilian women is even bleaker. In terms of political representation, black women are far from accessing institutional power resources.

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—revised by C. Vergara

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## ALEUTS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Unangan  
**LOCATION:** Aleutian Islands; Alaska  
**POPULATION:** 11,941 (2000 census)  
**LANGUAGE:** English; Aleut  
**RELIGION:** Based on animism

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

About 1,100 miles southwest of mainland Alaska lie the Aleutian Islands. They are home to a people known as the Aleuts, who also inhabit the Pribilof Islands and parts of western Alaska proper. No one knows the meaning of the word “Aleut,” which was first bestowed upon the islanders by Russian fur traders. Among themselves, the Aleuts are known as unangan, which means, “the people.” Racially and ethnically, the Aleuts are close relatives of the Inuit, or Eskimo. Nonetheless, they have developed their own unique culture and language.

Contact between the Aleuts and the outside world was first established around 1750, when Russian fur traders entered the area in search of fox, fur seals, and sea otters. They forced most of the Aleut men to hunt sea otters and other animals for their pelts and, by the latter part of the century, relocated some Aleuts to the Pribilof Islands to serve as forced labor in harvesting the pelts of the northern fur seal. The Aleut population suffered a steady decline over the next 100 years as a result of illness and maltreatment at the hands of the outsiders. By 1867, when the United States purchased Alaska, only about 3,000 Aleuts still lived on the islands, and an outbreak of tuberculosis at the close of the century reduced this small population still further.

In 1913 the Aleutian Islands were designated a National Wildlife Refuge by the U.S. Department of the Interior, which banned the hunting of sea lions and prohibited most other hunting without a special license. Between the two world wars, most Aleuts left their villages to relocate to the Alaska coast, where they worked in salmon canneries. The U.S. Navy removed the remaining villagers during World War II and destroyed many villages to prevent possible Japanese access to them. After the war, a naval base was built on Adak Island. The Aleut League was formed in 1967 to lobby for expanded economic assistance from the federal government, but it had little success. The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provided each Aleut village with title to some land within the Aleutian Islands and created the Aleut Corporation, which was also given ownership of certain lands. Today most Aleuts live in mainland Alaska rather than the islands, where government jobs provide virtually the only employment.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Aleutian Islands are located at approximately the same latitude as the British Isles, that is, about 800 miles south of the Arctic Circle. The entire Aleutian chain consists of over 150 small islands of volcanic origin and is typically divided into four sub-groups: the Near Islands, the Fox Islands, the Rat Islands, and the Andreanof Islands.

The climate of the Aleutian Islands is harsh and forbidding. In the summer the weather is generally wet, cool, and cloudy, while winter brings cold temperatures, bitter winds, and heavy

precipitation. Most of the time, the islands are covered with a thick layer of fog, and heavy rainstorms occur frequently. These barren, wet, and windswept islands provide little support for trees or long-rooted vegetation, which cannot grow on the mountainsides, cliffs, reefs, and rocky soil. Thus, the Aleuts have always established their settlements near the seashore, depending for their sustenance on the enormous local populations of fish, sea mammals, and birds, the seasonal migrations of which lead them to feed in Aleutian waters at certain times of the year. The islands are also used as breeding grounds for sea mammals such as sea lions and fur otters.

The Aleut population was once estimated at between 12,000 and 25,000 individuals. At the time of the 2000 U.S. census, it stood at nearly 12,000 people, of whom only some 1,500 lived on the Aleutian Islands, with the rest residing on the Alaskan mainland and elsewhere. There are some thirteen native villages remaining, most of them in the eastern Aleutians and the Pribilof Islands.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The language of the Aleuts originated from the same remote ancestor as that of the Inuit, from which both probably separated about 3,000 years ago. The language family that Aleut belongs to is called Eskimo-Aleut, or Eskaleut, or Eskimoan. Today Aleut and Eskimo, which includes Inuit, form two quite distinct and independent branches. Modern speakers of Aleut and Inuit cannot understand one another at all. The Aleutian language is spoken nowhere else in the world but on the Aleutian Islands and their immediate environs. Aleut is a highly endangered language with less than 400 speakers in Alaska and a possible additional 450 speakers in Russian territory.

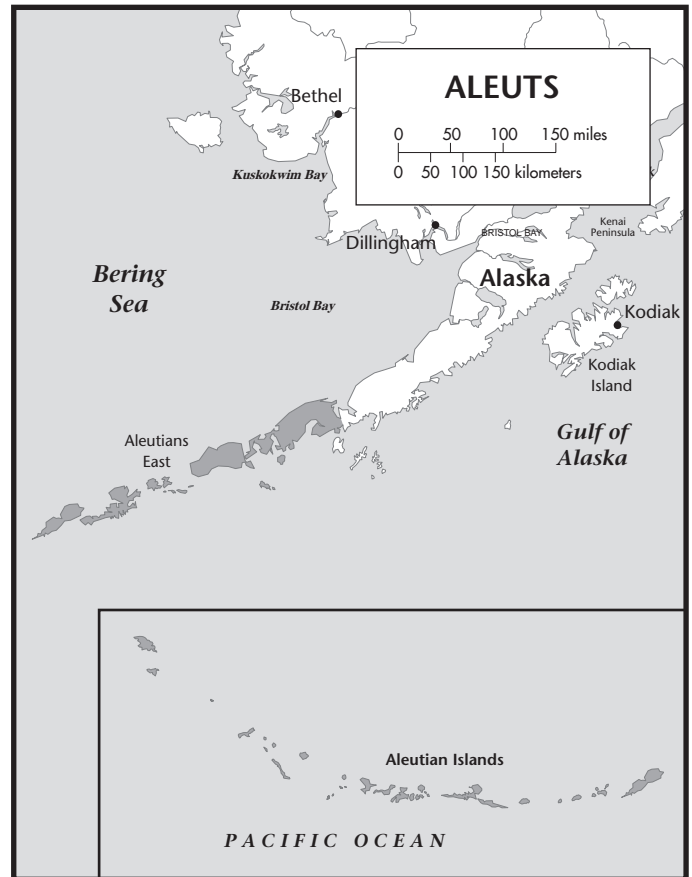
### 4 FOLKLORE

The Aleuts have a strong storytelling tradition. Reflecting the communal nature of Aleut folktales, storytellers typically begin their narratives with the clause "This is the work of my country." As a method of discipline, parents often tell their children cautionary tales peopled by dangerous characters called "outside men." The Aleuts also have a tradition of folk medicine, including knowledge of herbs that has been passed down through the generations. They traditionally believed that all running water, especially seawater, was sacred and practiced sea bathing even in the winter.

### 5 RELIGION

The early Russian fur traders who first came in contact with the Aleuts also first exposed them to Christianity, particularly the Russian Orthodox variety. The first Russian missionaries arrived in Aleut territory by the late 18th century, and Russian Orthodoxy had largely replaced the precontact Aleut religion by the mid-1800s. Today most Aleuts belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, and many have been trained as priests.

Like those of most hunting and gathering cultures, the traditional religion of the Aleuts was based on animism, which imparts spirits or souls to all the animals and objects in the landscape, together with the belief that these spiritualized animals and objects could be influenced by prayer or sacrifice. According to Aleut belief, human beings possessed several souls, or spiritual essences, one of the most important of which was the name. A common belief among Aleuts is that a dead per-



son's soul will occupy the body of a newborn infant if the child is given the same name as the deceased.

The belief that the environment can be influenced, either for good or ill, by human intervention led to the development of a whole constellation of customs and taboos intended to ensure prosperity and prevent disaster. Many such customs and taboos were designed to placate and mollify the souls of the polar bears, whales, walrus, and seals that are the Aleuts' chief prey. By way of example, one might note the widespread custom by which it was considered proper for a hunter's wife to offer a dead seal a drink of water when it was brought to the entranceway of the dwelling. This token of hospitality was believed to relieve the animal's soul of any resentment it might feel toward having been killed. In some areas, especially western Alaska, complex annual ceremonies of thanksgiving are performed to honor the souls of seals and whales that have given their lives for the sake of the Aleut hunters and their families.

The most important human figure in Aleut religious belief was the shaman, who served many vital roles within Aleut society. The Aleut shaman was either male or female and functioned as priest, doctor, and counselor to his or her people. In times of crisis, the shaman provided a course of action for the group to follow. In times of sickness, the shaman healed and cured. In times of deprivation, the shaman located the source of the problem, usually some member of the social group who had been guilty of breaking a taboo and thus angering the souls of the animals.





*Aleut people with traditional skin drums celebrate the end of the subsistence seal harvest, which provides meat for the community in St. Paul Island, Alaska. (© Eastcott-Momatiuk/The Image Works)*

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

In addition to the national holidays of the United States, most Aleuts celebrate the holidays of the Russian Orthodox calendar.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Aleuts observe major life events such as births, weddings, and funerals within the Russian Orthodox religious tradition. In the traditional Aleut religion, commoners and slaves were cremated when they died, but young children and members of the elite were mummified. After removal of the internal organs, the body was washed in a stream, oiled, wrapped in furs, and suspended in a dry cave.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The indigenous population of the Aleutian Islands was traditionally organized into small, relatively stable settlements scattered here and there throughout the island chain. Within each social group, a formal hierarchy was maintained. Each settlement, called a *deme*, was composed of an extended kin group and dominated by a chief. A higher chief was chosen by election from among the *deme* chiefs to govern a larger group of villages or an entire island. The village leader's responsibilities included watching over village hunting grounds, settling dis-

putes among village members, determining the appropriate punishment for criminals, organizing the group's activities, and leading the village warriors in the warfare that frequently broke out among villages, usually as a result of insults, raids, or murders committed by members of other villages. In return for his leadership efforts, the *deme* chief received a share of all catches made by the hunters of the village.

Social status was determined according to wealth, and traditional Aleut society was divided into three distinct classes—the upper class, the common or working class, and the slaves. Since they lived in permanent settlements all year round, the Aleut were able to accumulate commodities such as furs, shells, and slaves, and those who possessed much personal property were highly regarded. Aleuts shared food and possessions according to three principles: duty to relatives, repayment of a loan of supplies or equipment, and generosity toward the less fortunate. Through this system of mutual obligations, the Aleut protected the welfare of every village member.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The Aleut had a sophisticated level of precontact medical knowledge, much of it gained from their awareness of the anatomical similarities between humans and the marine mammals that populated their environment. Some of their

knowledge came from autopsies of these sea mammals. Their medical treatments included bloodletting and a form of acupuncture, as well as various spiritual measures. Today modern medical care is available to a limited extent to Aleut villagers, although they must travel to cities for certain services.

The traditional Aleut house (called a *barabara*) was a gigantic structure built on a rectangular frame made of whalebone or driftwood logs. The house was sunk three or four feet into the ground to provide added insulation. As a result, the entranceway was in the roof, as was another opening designed to allow light to enter the dwelling. The roof itself consisted of rafters of crisscrossing logs or other pieces of available wood, covered with sod and dried grass. The houses of the Aleut were similar to the sod dwellings of the Inuit in consisting of a single room. In many cases, however, that single room was very large, housing as many as 150 individuals from 40 or 50 different families. The family units within a single house divided the space into stall- or cubicle-like living areas that lined the walls of the common area. By the beginning of the 20th century, nearly all Aleuts lived in conventional above-ground dwellings that housed a single nuclear family. For transportation, the Aleut most often relied on skin-covered boats, usually using them to skim the waves in search of aquatic mammals to hunt.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Unlike many aboriginal cultures, traditional Aleut society was not based on the tribal unit. Instead, the basic social unit was the extended family, consisting of a man and wife and their unmarried children, along with their married sons and their nuclear families. In the normal course of events, several such family units joined forces to hunt and provide one another with mutual protection and support. Such a group of families was named by adding the suffix *miut*, or “people of,” to the name of the geographic region they inhabited. The leader of the group was typically the oldest male still physically able to participate in the hunt. Such a group leader was called upon to resolve quarrels within the group or among his own group and others.

### **11 CLOTHING**

For the Aleut, life often depended on one single piece of clothing, the parka, or outer jacket, made of fur and bird skins. As opposed to the traditional Inuit parka, the Aleut parka did not have a hood. Rather, it had a high collar protecting the neck and stretched clear to the ankles for all-over protection from the elements. Aleut parkas also differed from Inuit parkas in that they were unisex in form: men and women’s parkas were the same. In keeping with the somewhat milder temperatures of the islands, the Aleut parka was often worn with nothing underneath, and many Aleuts traditionally spent much of their time barefoot. Special to the Aleut was a unique type of headgear—either a hat or a visor, shaped somewhat like an inverted garden trowel, made of wood, and brightly decorated with animal motifs and abstract designs. Some examples of Aleut head wear are elaborately adorned with ornamental objects including shells, beads, feathers, sea lion whiskers, and carved ivory figurines. The level of ornamentation of the headgear signaled the status of an Aleut. Only the wealthiest hunters earned the right to wear the most beautiful hats, as well as hats that covered the entire head.

Today most Aleuts wear modern, Western-style clothing.

### **12 FOOD**

The Aleut did not normally store food, since the damp climate made it difficult to maintain most foodstuffs in an edible state. And with most animal resources readily available on a year-round basis, there was little motivation to develop effective means of food preservation. As a rule, the traditional Aleut diet was characterized by greater variety than that of the Inuit. Meat was provided by marine mammals, such as sea otters, sea lions and harbor seals. Other food resources included marine invertebrates (such as sea urchins, mussels, and clams) and fish (including halibut, cod, and several different species of salmon). The typical Aleut meal combined fish and sea mammal meat with edible plants like cow parsnip, wild parsnip, kelp, and other greens, although plant foods played a relatively small role in the Aleut diet. The Aleut also had at hand many kinds of edible berries, including blueberries, blackberries, cranberries, and salmonberries.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The curriculum of today’s Aleut schools is similar to that of other schools around the world. Children are taught math, history, spelling, reading, and the use of computers. Aleut teachers are also concerned that the students learn something about their culture and old traditions. Most Aleut villages have high schools, but relatively few villagers attend college.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Ritual dances were part of the Aleut cultural and religious tradition, although early missionaries banned dancing because they considered it sinful. At wintertime feasts celebrating the tribe’s ancestors, wooden masks with pictures of spirits and ancestors were worn by dancers. When dancing, Aleut men wore special gloves decorated with puffin beaks that rattled with the movements of the dancers. Special dances were done to ensure the success of the whale hunt.

### **15 WORK**

Traditionally, the Aleut survived by harvesting sea lions, whales, and fish in their skin-covered boats as well as by foraging on land for birds’ eggs and plants. Today many Aleut have entered the modern work force. Even those who live on the islands and still hunt, fish, and gather their traditional foods participate at least to some degree in the modern cash economy. Many travel from their villages to work at seasonal construction and fishing jobs.

### **16 SPORTS**

Aleut men traditionally engaged in contests of strength, such as wrestling, plus a variety of throwing and catching games.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Traditional recreational games of the Aleut include a form of chess played on a board with 56 squares instead of the customary 64 and a nonstandard distribution of pieces at the beginning of the game. Cat’s cradle is another traditional favorite. Today’s Aleut enjoy many of the same modern recreational pursuits as other Americans.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditionally, the Aleut have excelled at weaving dune grasses to make baskets, sleeping mats, and other necessary household items. They have also devoted much time and effort to the creation of their elaborate headgear. Nearly the only craft that is still practiced is the weaving of grass baskets.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Today, like many other Native American peoples, the Aleuts suffer from declining population and the destruction of their culture. The rate of unemployment is high, and alcoholism is a major problem.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The special powers and rights that were associated with whale hunting, as well as chieftainship, passed from fathers to sons in traditional Aleut society. Not all families in Aleut society had the right to whaling, and those families that did possess such rights held high status. The Aleut were like the Tlingit (See article on **Tlingit**) in having a class system of the wealthy, commoners, and slaves. Slaves in Aleut society were most often captives taken in raids or in feuding. It was primarily women who were taken as captives and then became slaves as warriors were typically tortured, defiled, and then killed.

Both men and women in traditional Aleut society could have more than one spouse at a time. Bride service was the normal means by which a man would acquire his first wife. In this system, the man would work for his maternal uncle and would be betrothed to one of his uncle's daughters during the duration of his service, which as typically from one to two years. Anthropologists refer to this marriage pattern as cross-cousin marriage, and it was the preferred pattern in precontact Aleut society. Following marriage, the couple would continue to live with the woman's parents until the birth of the first child, at which time they would relocate and live with the man's parents from then forward.

In some Aleut groups, women owned the home and all of its possessions except for the hunting, whaling, and fishing gear that belonged to the men of the household. The home and female possessions were inherited by the eldest daughter, and this pattern suggests that the eldest daughter would continue to live with her parents following marriage and the birth of the first child.

Due the rapid decimation of the Aleut population following Russian domination in the mid-18th century, there is only fragmentary evidence regarding the cultural construction of gender in precontact Aleut society.

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—revised by J. Williams

# AMAHUACAS

**LOCATION:** Peru (Amazon river basin area)

**LANGUAGE:** Panoan

**POPULATION:** 500 (estimate)

**RELIGION:** Indigenous religion based on spirits, with possible Christian influences

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Amahuacas are an Amerindian tribe who live in the Peruvian part of the great Amazon River basin area, which extends through Brazil to parts of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Peru. The Amazon River and its mighty tributaries (17 of which are over 1,600 km or 1,000 mi long) drain about 40% of South America, including the largest area of tropical rain forest in the world. The largest community of Amahuacas lives in the surroundings of Puerto Varadero, a community located in the tropical jungle next to the Peruvian-Brazilian border.

The first expedition of Spanish conquerors into this region was led by Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, who discovered the mouth of the Amazon and ascended it for about 80 km (50 mi) in AD 1500. This was a section of the river subsequently referred to as the R'ó Marañón. Subsequently, the Spanish explorer and conqueror Francisco de Orellana embarked on the first descent of the river from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean in 1541.

Battles with Amerindian tribes occurred from the 16th century onwards and have continued in one form or another even until today: a variety of scattered tribes, including the Amahuacas, continue to try to defend their land rights and their way of life.

The comparative remoteness of many areas allowed for the establishment of small settlements, missions, and trading posts, as well as some river ports established early on (such as Pucallpa on the Ucayali river, one of the longest tributaries of the Amazon), but prevented the total conquest of this vast area. Even 30 or 40 years ago, large areas of the eastern lowlands and jungles of Peru, known as the *montaña*, where the Amahuacas and other groups live, were largely unexplored. Even before the arrival of the Spaniards, the many tribes scattered in this part of the Peruvian Amazon basin area and along the Ucayali River were engaged in a complex relationship with each other, which included trade on the one hand and raids on the other.

During the 19th and 20th centuries the Amahuacas, among other Amerindian peoples, suffered the consequences of the exploitation and commercialization of rubber in the Amazon. Even though the so-called rubber boom helped to enhance regional development, it also had a huge impact on the environment and on the life of this community as a result of the appropriation of indigenous territories and the exploitation of their work force. Today, the Amahuacas, as well as other Amerindian people, are an endangered tribe menaced by different threats, such as ecological devastation, diseases, extraction of oil, and illegal loggers.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Amahuacas of eastern Peru are part of a group of tribes classified together as Panoans and located generally in the Ucayali Valley. Some of the stronger and more aggressive tribes, such as the Chama Indians, lived along the shores of the

Ucayali River itself. They went on raids and took slaves from neighboring tribes who also spoke the same or closely related languages.

These continual raids compelled the Amahuacas to seek a less exposed position. They feared some of their more powerful neighbors because if they were captured during raids they would be taken to work as slaves for them. Together with some other tribes, they kept to the headwaters of some of the tributaries. In the case of the Amahuacas, they settled mainly along the headwaters of the Ucayali, the Juruá, and the Puruá rivers.

This is a hot, humid region that has an immensely rich plant and animal life. Jungle life usually conjures up images of unpleasant mosquitoes and dangerous snakes, but in the Amazon basin area only about 1 in 25 varieties of snakes is poisonous. A great variety of tall trees form a thick canopy so high up they seem to reach for the sky, in all shades of green, with the occasional brilliant burst of flowers. Manatees and turtles swim in the rivers, along with hundreds of species of fish. Fireflies light up the darkness in flashes of gold or green or red. Flocks of parakeets splash their color against the sky, and hundreds of different butterflies add bright touches of turquoise, yellow, orange, red, and black in gorgeous patterns. In the evening the cicadas beat their wings in noisy concert before the hush that precedes nightfall, when the nocturnal animals begin their secretive forays.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Amahuacas speak a language that forms part of what is known as Panoan, which is spoken in Peru. The Amahuaca belongs to the Panoan language family and it is spoken in the southern part of the Peruvian Amazon Basin as well as in the border areas with Brazil by several dozen tribes, such as the Chamas, Remos, Cashibos, Nianaguas, Ruanaguas, and others. The language is also known as Amawaka, Amaguaco, Amehuaque, Ipitineri, and Sayaco. It is believed that because of the Spanish influence, the Amahuaca language have used Latin as its base. According to different sources, it is estimated that around 500 people of different tribes are fluent in the Amahuaca language. Children, especially boys, attend school for a few years and bilingualism is common. The language features suffixes “-gua” and “-hua,” both of which mean “people.”

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Amahuacas, along with many Amerindian tribes of the area, have creation stories of how the world came to be how and how they as a people came to be. In many stories, animals play a prominent part. Long centuries of observation led to an appreciation of the skills and strengths of many different animals, which play roles that are sometimes of symbolic importance in the stories. There are extended family formations where the affiliation to a particular animal (sometimes called a totem) is not only a symbol of identity but also a focal point for the contemplation of that particular animal's strengths and qualities.

Early explorers, adventurers, and traders differed greatly in their capacity to appreciate the various Amerindian cultures. The Amahuacas and others were sporadically visited by Christian missionaries from the 17th century onwards, but many missions failed over the centuries. However, this type of contact with White people, even if it did not succeed in Christianizing many groups in this area, did influence some of their



myths, legends, and stories. The individual variations of each group have meant that Christian concepts have been incorporated in widely different ways, even by groups living in the same vicinity.

## 5 RELIGION

The Amahuacas believe that every living thing has a spirit, be it a rock, a tree, a bird, a jaguar, a body of water, or a person. There is a widespread belief among people of the Amazon that there are also some evil river spirits, although in some interpretations they are thought to correspond more closely to ghosts. The Amahuacas have shamans who are seen as mediators between this world and the spirit world.

Amahuacas share a belief, widespread among the Amerindian tribes of the Amazon basin, that illness is not a natural event. Rather, it is often attributed to the harmful influence of either another person or a being from the spirit world. It is thought that illness is caused by an actual attack by one of these agents, and it is believed that a thorn or a similar sharp object that is harmful enters the person and causes the illness. It is therefore important for the shaman to manufacture his own magic thorns or similar sharp objects, which he can then direct at the offending person or entity. Shamans are seen not only as protectors for the group, both from evil spirits and from illness, but also as people who can cause harm if the occasion calls for this type of action. The Amahuaca who is preparing himself to be a shaman has to imbibe a special drug, called *cayapí*, and then he has to isolate himself in the forest and receive his magic thorns from a magician there.

Catholic missions have not been successful among many tribes in this area, including the Amahuacas. The Amahuacas were not only hostile to some of the raiding tribes, especially the Piros, the Cashibos, and the Shipibos, who at various times enslaved them, but also to White people. It was reported in the 19th century that slaves were in some cases kept to work for the capturing tribe and in other cases were sold to White people.

Nevertheless, one of the Amahuaca beliefs (about what happens to human souls after death) is superficially similar to Catholic belief, and it may be that even the few attempts to Christianize the Amahuacas on the part of missionaries left faint traces. The Amahuacas believe that a soul after death usually goes to a heaven or paradise, but some go to a type of underworld. This may be an adaptation of the Christian concepts of heaven and hell. However, where the Amahuaca beliefs differ is in the vision of what heaven offers. The soul continues to live in some respects as it did when on earth. If it is in heaven, it can get married and it consumes food. If it goes to a lower or netherworld, it lives with a spirit called Tjaxo.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Amahuacas are very isolated from mainstream Peruvian culture and do not participate in the holidays, whether religious or secular, of the majority of Peru's inhabitants.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When an Amahuaca baby is going to be born, the mother retires to a secluded place and is usually assisted by a few other women during childbirth. After the baby is born, the afterbirth and the umbilical cord are buried in the earth.

Some tribes along the Ucayali River have special rites when a girl reaches puberty. The Chama customs include an elaborate festival where a group of teenage girls, having reached puberty, are gathered together during the full moon at night, while the adults of the tribe celebrate the girls' fertility by dancing and singing all night. Some other tribes isolate the girls for a few days to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. Among the Amahuacas, no special ceremonies are reported.

There have been cases where a girl is betrothed or promised in marriage while she is still a child. In the majority of cases, if a girl wishes to marry, the girl's father has to give his permission. In some cases a man has several wives.

There is great variation in burial ceremonies, and some of these have changed over time. At different times, all of these have been practiced in the Ucayali River region: cremation, burial in a funerary urn, burial in a canoe, burial underneath the floor of the house, and burial in the earth outside of the house.

Travelers to the Ucayali reported that the Amahuacas at one time cremated the body of the dead person and then consumed the ashes. This was done by mixing the ashes with *masato* and drinking them. In more recent history, the Amahuacas continued to cremate the body but no longer consumed the ashes. Infants are buried in urns. The personal effects of the deceased are burned, and sometimes the house is either burned or abandoned. The small fields where the dead person grew his or her crops are then passed on to relatives.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings respect social norms, which include the positions occupied by the various members of the family and the ex-

tended family. However, Amahuaca settlements are small, with an average of five houses inhabited by 15 people. Each of these settlements are separated by several hours walking distance. Economically and politically, each village is completely autonomous. There are no shamans or headmen, and no kin groups larger than the extended family.

It would be difficult to approach an Amahuaca casually, since this tribe has long been suspicious of strangers, quite often for very good reason. The rubber boom that swept the region in the 19th century decimated at least 90% of the Amerindian population: the Indians died from diseases to which they had never been exposed before, from brutal working conditions when they were forced to work as slaves, from starvation, and from armed conflict.

Girls and boys are allowed to have sexual relations once they have reached puberty.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

For those unused to living in the tropical lowlands, life in the Ucayali river region can be very hard. It is remarkable that the Amahuacas and others adapted and survived, perhaps for hundreds if not thousands of years, in what is perceived by many as a hostile environment, where nature is fierce rather than benign. Some jungle ants not only sting but also bite; there are also scorpions and spiders, some of which are poisonous, as well as several poisonous snakes. In some rivers, the boa constrictor and the cayman pose dangers. Jaguars are hunted but also greatly feared.

The Amahuacas use a number of medicinal plants, including the leaves of a plant known as *Dracontium longpipes* that is used for snake bites, and also seek help in case of illness from their shamans. Many of the medicinal herbs of this area are not generally known to outsiders.

The Amahuacas lead a simple, sustainable lifestyle, but the strategies for survival require a considerable number of skills. Amahuacas use balsa rafts for fishing and for transporting goods. For hunting expeditions along the river, standard dug-out canoes are used. These activities of hunting and fishing provide the most important sources of protein for the Amahuacas' diet. Fish are caught with harpoon, arrows, spears, poison, bows, and arrows.

The pattern of agriculture in this area includes the slash-and-burn method, which means that when the land is exhausted after a few years, it becomes necessary to move on to another part of the forest to grow crops, often in clearings on the shores of a river. This requires a type of house that is light and methods through which a house can be quickly rebuilt elsewhere. Amahuacas also grow maize and bananas, and it is believed that this agricultural tradition was assimilated from Peruvians and missionaries.

The Amahuacas build rectangular huts with sticks and cane. Often the chonta palm is used for thatching roofs. Many accommodations are located close to water, and Amahuacas prefer to sleep in box-shaped nets instead of traditional hammocks. Some 19th-century travelers thought that the Amahuacas and some other tribes probably moved about a great deal, because they reported that they saw them living in boats. It is now appreciated that proper care and conservation, in an environmental sense, of this large rainforest area with its many rivers and tributaries does, in fact, require small settlements scattered over a large area and mobility to allow the land to lie

fallow for a time while other small areas are cultivated. This conservation strategy, which evolved over thousands of years, is now in danger of being overturned by colonists from outside the area, landowners hungry for more land, prospectors, and others.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The role of women is important among the Amahuacas in the sense that their society is matrilineal. When a couple gets married, they go to live with the bride's family. The extended family unit can consist of a man with several wives, but it is usual for the man to work with and for his wife's father. The Amahuacas do not live close together in large villages, but rather in extended family households over a scattered area. A household can consist of the head of the household as leader of the unit, his wife, his married daughters, and his unmarried sons.

The women do much of the productive and often heavy work, including farming and transporting goods, as well as cooking and preparing drinks, such as *masato*. They also make pottery and weave. Most Amerindians in this area grow cotton for weaving, and *urucú* or *genipa* for body paint.

The Amahuacas keep guinea pigs as pets.

## 11 CLOTHING

Amahuaca women wear a cotton skirt. Clothing for important or ceremonial occasions may include, for the man, a garment known as the *cushma*. These garments sometimes have painted panels. The designs are often geometric and the colors include black and red. They are woven of bark or cotton.

Amahuacas tattoo the face in a permanent form of ornamentation, which is usually carried out in childhood. The tattoo is made by using a thorn and soot from the copal tree. They also blacken their teeth. The dark color is obtained by chewing a species of pepper. Although little clothing is worn, a great variety of ornaments are used, including beaded necklaces, headbands, arm bands, anklets, bracelets, and rings.

## 12 FOOD

Amahuacas are a sedentary tribe that complements its diet with hunting and gathering of fruits and vegetables. A wide range of food is available in this region, including wild fruits and berries, wild honey, fish (including catfish), and game, such as water hogs, deer, tapir, peccaries, monkeys, agutis, some water snakes and caymans, and some species of water fowl, as well as parrots. The Amahuacas are skilled hunters and use bows and arrows. The arrows have four different types of tips. They also grow and use certain types of poison for fish. Food is sometimes cooked over open fires. The Amahuacas grow corn and cassava or manioc, and they use stone grinders to prepare some of the food. They also make their own clay cooking pots and a few wooden utensils, as well as sieves and graters.

## 13 EDUCATION

The education of boys includes the teaching of all the necessary survival skills, especially hunting and fishing, as well as house-building and boat-building and the making of weapons, such as bows and arrows. Girls are taught cooking, farming, pottery, and weaving skills.

The Amahuacas do not use a written language. They transmit their sense of identity and their explanations about the

world orally, through chants and stories. Officially, therefore, they are considered illiterate.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance form an important part of life for most Amerindian tribes of the Ucayali region. Musical instruments include gourds, rattles, flutes, and drums. These are played on ceremonial occasions.

The Amahuacas pass on to their children the sense of who they are, how they came to be, how the world came to be, and so on through stories that are transmitted orally.

#### 15 WORK

Collecting wild plants and berries is an activity that men, women, and children can perform. Hunting and fishing is a man's job among the Amahuacas. Women often till the soil and transport goods, as well as look after young children, cook, weave, and make pottery and ornaments.

#### 16 SPORTS

It has been noted by a variety of travelers that games are often very individual affairs among the Amerindian tribes of the Ucayali. There are miniature bows and arrows and dolls made for young children, as well as other miniature toys. These toys are played with individually, and these efforts do not develop into team games or sports. Children also play with corn-leaf balls, but team-based ball games are not played. Sometimes children enjoy wrestling. There are no adult sports.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most Indian groups of the Ucayali, including the Amahuacas, enjoy occasions for feasting. Typically, a successful hunt can provide an occasion, or the arrival of visitors from tribes the Amahuacas consider friendly, or a special ceremonial event. Drinking bouts are quite frequent. Fermented drinks are made from corn, sugarcane, and other plants.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pleasingly shaped and simple pottery in everyday use is made by Amahuaca women. They also weave cotton for simple garments, and these are sometimes decorated with panels in various colors. Dyes are prepared from *genipa* and *urucú*.

The Amahuacas sleep in hammocks in their huts, and weaving a strong yet resilient hammock out of *fique* or hemp requires real skill. Baskets and various types of bags for carrying are also woven. Some pipes are made for smoking tobacco, which is not in general use. Among the Amahuacas it is often the shaman who uses tobacco ceremonially in various rituals to protect a person or a group from illness or enemies.

Ornaments and jewelry are made, including earrings and beaded necklaces.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Amahuacas have resisted incursions for a very long time, but there has been a significant change that could shatter the Amerindian communities of eastern Peru. A U.S. oil company signed a contract early in 1996 with the Peruvian state oil company. It is thought that this is the most biologically diverse region on the planet. There are about 19 Amerindian tribes in this area, including Amahuaca settlements between the upper

Piedras River and the Cujar River, which is a tributary of the Purces river. There are also some tribes that have possibly never been contacted before.

Oil prospecting requires detonating underground explosives at particular set intervals and analyzing the shock waves to assess oil deposits. Wildlife will be severely disturbed in the area, which will threaten the food supply of the Amerindian communities. It will also be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the roving, seminomadic pattern that is an essential part of the way of life for Amahuacas and others. The Amahuacas range over long distances and their lifestyle, which plays a part in the conservation of the important resource that is the Amazon basin, may not survive this type of onslaught.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Amahuacas have a high index of masculinity, which means that there are considerably more men than women in their tribes. Their social structure is based on patrilocal extended families and a hierarchical division of labor in which men are primary providers, and leaders are paradigmatic providers. The senior male of a local group owns the land, which is defended against incursions by outsiders.

With few exceptions, the work of men and women is strictly divided and complementary. While men hunt and fish, cut and clear gardens, plant manioc, bananas, and tobacco, construct houses, and make telescope storage baskets, wooden tools, utensils, weapons, and benches, women plant, harvest, and transport most of the crops, cut and fetch firewood, draw water, grind maize, butcher game, cook, and care for children. Amahuaca women also spin, weave, make pots, mats, and most of the baskets, and drill seeds for beads.

Until recently, Amahuacas were removed from modern society and were said to participate in infanticide and cannibalism. Rules structuring marriage suggest strong endogamy among Amahuacas. Young men are usually forced to marry their cousin: the daughter of their uncle on their mother's side or the daughter of their aunt on their father's side. When a young couple gets married they usually live on the husband's family land, unless the father of the bride needs help cultivating his crops.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS

**LOCATION:** United States

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Virtually all Americans are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. As far as we know, the very first immigrants to America migrated from Asia to the North American continent somewhere between 15,000 and 40,000 years ago. The descendants of these first immigrants are now known as Native North Americans, Native Americans, American Indians, or First Nations people.

The majority of African Americans are not considered to be descended from immigrants because their ancestors were brought to America against their will. Another group of early colonists who were not truly immigrants were some 50,000 English criminals exported to America by the British government. They also did not freely choose to immigrate to America, but once in the New World, they settled down to a new life and became productive citizens.

European explorers arrived on the North American continent in the 15th century and continued to explore its lands throughout the 16th century. By the 17th century, England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands had all established American colonies. The Dutch (Netherlands) were conquered by the English in the late 17th century and withdrew from America, leaving the English, French, and Spanish to fight for control of the continent. The Europeans pushed the Native North Americans westward as they expanded their territories, eventually confining the original North American inhabitants to small reservations on undesirable land.

The 13 English colonies revolted against the crown in 1775 and declared independence from England in 1776. By 1783, the colonists had won the American Revolutionary War and established themselves as the United States of America. The U.S. Constitution contained no laws on immigration. In 1790 the U.S. government did legislate the process for becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen, however, restricting this privilege to any “free white person” who had resided in the United States for at least two years. In 1810 U.S. president Thomas Jefferson increased the residency requirement to five years, where it has remained ever since.

Because the original 13 states were former English colonies, the language, religion, architecture, customs, and legal, economic, and governmental systems of those English colonists became the standard for the United States. For the next 200 years, all immigrants were expected to be assimilated to the English norm. Only since the late 20th century has the expectation begun to shift away from assimilation towards multiculturalism in the United States. The basic structure of U.S. society is still based on the English standard, however.

The original English Puritans were fiercely Protestant, committed to a strong work ethic, and violently opposed to any extravagance. They had come seeking freedom from religious persecution but then refused that same freedom to others in their colonies. Other colonists, however, such as William Penn, promoted religious freedom for all, and a number of Catholics and Jews began to settle in America as well. In the 18th

century, Scottish and Scotch-Irish (Protestant), Welsh (Protestant), French Huguenot (Protestant), and German (Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish) immigrants arrived in the United States. Most came to escape religious, economic, and/or political oppression. France and Spain also continued to control parts of North America, and French and Spanish immigrants (nearly all Catholic) settled in those areas.

The rate of immigration rose sharply after the invention of the steamboat in 1819, which cut the length of an ocean crossing from two or more months to one or two weeks. Those who had resisted the notion of traveling for months in miserable conditions over dangerous seas on a sailing ship were much more inclined to take a one- or two-week trip on a heavy steamship. Most ship captains also required that passengers supply their own food, and more people could afford to buy one or two weeks’ worth of meals than two or more months’ worth. Conditions on the new steamships were still overcrowded and unsanitary, and many immigrants continued to become seriously ill or even die en route. But overall, the risks were fewer and the costs much less, and the number of immigrants increased rapidly.

A population boom throughout Europe in the late 18th and 19th centuries, caused by better living conditions and medical care, had also created pressure to emigrate. Most European countries did not have enough land to support all the new people, nor were there enough jobs in the pre-industrial cities to support landless peasants. Therefore, people were forced to look elsewhere for means of support. The United States was expanding rapidly and needed workers and homesteaders. Those immigrants who wished to continue farming took advantage of all the free or cheap land available in the United States, especially when the Homestead Act went into effect in 1862 (giving parcels of land at little or no cost to anyone who agreed to work it for at least five years). Others who wanted to get off the farm took one of the plentiful jobs available in mining, railroad and canal construction, lumbering, smithing, and other skilled and unskilled labor necessary for expansion.

Immigrants who came to the United States before 1880 are considered to be in the “first wave” of immigration. First-wave immigrants are also called “old immigrants.” Up until the 1880s, the United States had an open-door policy allowing almost anyone to enter the United States. Certain restrictions were applied in the mid-1800s to those with communicable diseases and to indigents with no resources, and no skills to acquire those resources. However, few were turned away, and the U.S. population grew in its multinational character.

“Old immigrants” were primarily Irish, German, Scandinavian, Canadian, and Chinese. Many were single young men who hoped to save up enough money to return home in better circumstances. Some did, in fact, return to their homelands, but the majority ended up settling permanently in the United States. These young men then encouraged their relatives and friends to join them in America, setting off a chain migration. The friends and relatives settled near the original immigrants, creating ethnic neighborhoods or farming communities. “Chinatowns,” “Germantowns,” and Irish parishes sprang up across the United States. Some of them still exist today.

About two-thirds of all U.S. immigrants by the mid-1800s came through New York City. In 1855, the city opened Castle Garden, a reception center for immigrants where they could stay while being processed. Castle Garden was replaced in 1892



by Ellis Island, which remained in service until 1943. Millions of immigrants to America passed through Ellis Island in its 51 years of functional existence. In 1976 Ellis Island opened for visits, and so many visitors came that in the 1980s the buildings were renovated and then reopened in 1990 as a museum of U.S. immigration history.

The period of 1880–1920, the second wave of U.S. immigration, is referred to as the “Great Migration” because so many immigrants entered the United States during those four decades. In contrast to the first-wave, or “old immigrants,” these second-wave “new immigrants” came mostly from southern and eastern Europe and Japan. Southern and eastern Europeans looked quite different from the old immigrants. While the old immigrants were generally fair-skinned Anglo-Saxons, the new immigrants were darker-skinned Slavic and Mediterranean peoples. Most old immigrants had spoken English or another Germanic language upon arrival in the United States, but the new immigrants spoke languages that sounded completely foreign to the old immigrant population. Many more Jews came during the Great Migration, along with Eastern Orthodox and Italian Catholics.

The influx of Japanese to the West added to the anti-Asian sentiments already developing in response to the Chinese presence there. Filipinos “imported” to work on the sugar plantations of Hawaii and in the agricultural industry of the West Coast further increased the perceived Asian threat to European Americans. In 1882 the U.S. government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first serious restriction on immigration and the only one to target a single ethnic group in U.S. history. The act was extended in 1892 for another 10 years and was then extended indefinitely in 1902. The Chinese Exclusion Acts were not repealed until 1943 when China became a U.S. ally in the war against the Japanese in World War II (1939–45).

The Great Migration of 1880–1920 brought 27 million immigrants through Ellis Island. In 1907 Congress passed legislation barring immigrants with physical or mental disabilities that would prevent them from working, immigrants with tuberculosis, and unaccompanied minors (children without adult supervision). Only about 1% of all immigrants were rejected. Once the United States reached its western border and the rate of expansion began to slow down, U.S. residents began to feel pressured by all the new arrivals. In 1921, therefore, the U.S. Congress passed the first generally applied immigration act, limiting new immigrants to 3% of the total population from each ethnicity or nationality already living in the United States. This was an attempt to keep the ethnic makeup of the United States predominantly Anglo-Saxon.

The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 limited immigration even further, setting stricter quotas for all nationalities. The Oriental Exclusion Act of the same year prohibited any Asians from immigrating. In 1929 the stock market crashed, and the U.S. economy descended into the Great Depression. Jobs were scarce, and there was no longer much to offer new immigrants. In response, Congress enacted the first complete national origins quota system, establishing a total limit of 150,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere, divided up according to percentages of the current U.S. population. Great Britain was allowed nearly half the total allowance. Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany combined comprised two-thirds of the total. Italy, which had been sending the largest number of

immigrants of any country just prior to enactment of the quota system, was now allowed only 6,000 immigrants per year.

Because the restrictions pertained only to nations of the Eastern Hemisphere, there was no limit on the number of Mexicans who could immigrate to the United States. Mexican workers leapt at the chance to fill the gaps left by European and Asian laborers who could no longer immigrate. However, there were not many jobs available during the Depression years of the 1930s. The United States even began a “repatriation program” to remove Mexican Americans back to Mexico. With the onset of World War II in 1939, however, American men left their jobs to fight in the war, and the United States suddenly suffered a labor shortage. Those same Mexicans who had been repatriated a few years before were now hired as *braceros*, contract workers with temporary visas.

World War II also brought other immigrants to the shores of America. In 1946, Congress passed the War Brides Act, allowing the immigration of foreign women (and men) who had married or become engaged to U.S. military personnel while they were stationed overseas. Many British women in particular became U.S. residents through this act. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 opened the doors to U.S. immigration a little bit wider, allowing refugees from war-torn Europe to move to America. Many Jews who had been excluded by earlier immigration acts were now able to escape Nazi terrorism through the Displaced Persons Act. The Chinese Exclusion Acts were also repealed, as mentioned above.

A new quota system was introduced in 1952 by the McCarran-Walter Act. The new system still favored northern and western Europeans, however. Not until 1965 did Congress loosen the restrictions on southern and eastern European immigration, as well as immigration from other continents. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 removed the quota system and instead allowed immigration on a first-come, first-served basis, with preferences given to those who had close family members already in the United States, and those with “desirable” job skills. Total annual limits were placed on immigration from the Western Hemisphere (120,000) and elsewhere (170,000), with a maximum of 20,000 allowed from any one country. In 1978, the act was revised to a single global limit of 290,000, with no distinctions between hemispheres.

Post-World War II immigrants are considered to be the “third wave.” The third wave of U.S. immigration is characterized by an easing of restrictions and a rise in the numbers of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The 10 countries with the highest numbers of foreign-born immigrants in the United States today are Mexico (representing 30% of all foreign-born persons counted in the 2000 U.S. Census), China, the Philippines, India, Vietnam, Cuba, Korea, Canada, El Salvador, and Germany. The fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population is now Hispanic Americans from Latin America, who comprised 52% of the foreign-born population in 2000.

Between 1975 and 1988, some 900,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos also entered the United States. Because of the need to assist refugees from Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, the United States passed the Refugee Act of 1980, setting a special quota of 50,000 for refugees and allowing the U.S. president to accept more as well, if necessary. The general limit for total immigration to the United States was also raised from 290,000 to 320,000. Since 1980 the U.S.



*Mexican immigrant Maria Teresa Camino (center) waves an American flag along with others after being sworn in as new American citizens during a ceremony in Los Angeles, California. (AP Images/Nick Ut)*

president, in consultation with Congress, has set the quota each year for the number of refugees allowed from different parts of the world. For example, in 2008, a total of 80,000 refugees would be accepted, with 28,000 from the Near East and South Asia, 20,000 from East Asia, 16,000 from Africa, 3,000 from Europe and Central Asia, and 3,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean, with the remaining 10,000 “unallocated” to be used for special regional needs as they arise.

A “refugee” is defined as one who is homeless due to racial, religious, political, or social persecution. Economic oppression is not considered valid for refugee status. This distinction and the way it is used to exclude certain people from immigrating to the United States is quite controversial. Immigration limits and the refusal by the U.S. government to grant certain people refugee status leads many of those who are excluded to enter the United States by “illegal” means. The number of “illegal” immigrants—the preferred term among the Hispanic community is “undocumented migrants”—has risen sharply since the latter half of the 20th century. Mexicans have crossed the U.S. border without proper documentation since the late 1800s, but they are now being joined by Central Americans, Haitians, Dominicans, and others.

In an effort to reduce the number of undocumented migrants, the U.S. government passed the Immigration Reform

and Control Act of 1986, granting amnesty to undocumented migrants who arrived in the United States before 1982 and could prove at least five years’ residency. Immigration offices were unprepared for the hordes of people who applied for amnesty. Those who met the requirements were automatically given a “green card,” or legal immigrant status. With legal status, they could now sponsor their relatives to immigrate. So many chose to do so that the U.S. government had to create a new quota category in 1990 to accommodate relatives of recent amnesty recipients.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act also imposed stiff penalties on employers who knowingly hire “illegal aliens.” Unfortunately, this did little to stem the flow of undocumented migrants but did make their situation once in the United States much worse than before. A number of employers stopped hiring undocumented migrants, forcing them to go even further underground to find work. Consequently, they became even more vulnerable to exploitation. Many employers, however, discovered that even with the fines they could still save money by hiring undocumented migrants because they could pay them much less than the minimum wage required by law.

Undocumented migrants contribute a great deal of money to the U.S. economy through paying taxes (which almost all do

on a regular basis) and spending their money. They also help keep prices down by saving employers wage costs. Very few undocumented migrants make use of government services (such as welfare or food stamps), and what it costs to educate their children is much less than what they give back to the economy. Undocumented migrants also create jobs by starting new businesses and by spending their money at other businesses, enabling those businesses to hire more workers. Despite these realities, however, many established Americans blame much of the economy's ills on undocumented migrants, claiming they take jobs away from legal Americans and drain the economy through the use of public services. In fact, neither is true. As long as both the U.S. economy and the migrants benefit from the arrangement, as they now do, undocumented migration to the United States will continue.

The most recent attempts to limit unwanted immigration into the United States are the Immigration Act of 1990 that limits the number of unskilled workers allowed to immigrate to 10,000 per year; and part of the USA Patriot Act, passed in response to the attacks of 11 September 2001, which specifically prohibits the immigration of any known or suspected terrorists or anyone who has supported or is in any way related to a terrorist organization.

Since the 1980s, the movement in America has been away from assimilation to the Anglo-Saxon norm and toward multiculturalism. Cities with large Hispanic populations have become de facto bilingual, and many schools now offer bilingual education. Ethnic groceries make it possible for newcomers to continue to eat the traditional foods of their former homelands. Multicultural education and ethnic and racial pride are gaining force across America. Racism and prejudice are still widespread realities, however. A nation made up of individuals from many different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds was a unique experiment when it began in the 18th century. Whether or not Americans can continue to create themselves out of such disparate elements in healthy and harmonious ways remains to be seen.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Groups of immigrants from the same country or ethnic background tend to settle together, at least in the early days of their immigration. Because most immigrants entered the United States by way of New York City, many simply settled there or in the surrounding areas. New York City itself is home to large concentrations of Irish, Chinese, Italian, Jewish, Greek, Southeast Asians, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Hungarian, Russian, and Ukrainian Americans, among others. Members of these groups are also spread across the Northeast (Boston is home to many Irish and Jewish Americans, in particular). Franco-Americans live in the northern sections of the Northeast, near the Canadian border.

California and the West Coast are very popular among Asian, Central American, and Mexican Americans. Cuban and Haitian Americans, as well as some U.S. Central Americans, on the other hand, prefer Miami, Florida. Filipinos and Japanese are heavily concentrated in both California and Hawaii, those being common ports of entry for Pacific immigrants. Texas is another popular destination for both Mexican and Vietnamese Americans. There is also a fairly large German American population in Texas.

For the most part, however, German Americans chose the farmlands of the Midwest and Dakotas, as did Scandinavian Americans. A special group of German immigrants, called the Amish, also settled in the Midwest, as well as the Mid-Atlantic region. They set up their distinctive farming communities on the fertile soil of such states as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

Immigrants who were not interested in farming headed for the industrial cities of the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest regions of the United States. Chicago drew Italian, Jewish, Slavic, Polish, Greek, Hungarian, and Irish Americans. Hungarian Americans, along with Slavic, Polish, and Ukrainian Americans, also settled in cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Buffalo, and Cleveland. Arab Americans continue to flock to the Detroit, Michigan, area where they were originally drawn by jobs at the Henry Ford Motor Company. Many still work in the automotive industry.

Scotch-Irish immigrants in the 18th century tended to settle in Pennsylvania, while those from Scotland preferred the South, especially North Carolina. Louisiana, with its French flavor, drew both Cajuns from Canada, and French plantation owners from Haiti. Bordering on Mexico, and having once been Mexican territory, Arizona and New Mexico are natural destinations for Mexican Americans.

Between 1820, when immigration records first began to be kept, and 2000, the largest number of immigrants came from Germany (7,176,071). Mexico has risen in the past decade to second place (6,138,150), followed by Italy (5,435,830), Great Britain (5,271,016), Ireland (4,782,083), Canada (4,487,572), and Austria-Hungary (4,367,664). About 40% of all U.S. immigrants throughout much of U.S. history have been from the five European nations of Germany, Italy, Great Britain, Ireland, and Austria-Hungary. Although Latin American (especially Mexican), Caribbean, and Asian immigration is increasing rapidly and will soon change the balance, German Americans are still the largest ethnic group in America, among those who claimed an ancestry other than simply "American" in the 2000 U.S. Census. German Americans are followed (in descending order) by Irish, African, English, Mexican, Italian, Polish, French, Native North American, Scottish, Dutch, Norwegian, Scotch-Irish, and Swedish.

According to 2000 U.S. Census foreign-born population figures, today's immigrants prefer to settle in California (8.9 million), New York (3.9 million), Texas (2.9 million), Florida (2.7 million), New Jersey (1.5 million), and Illinois (1.5 million).

## **3 LANGUAGE**

In general, U.S. immigrants are expected to learn English, and most work hard to do so. Foreign-born immigrants who do not speak English are at a great disadvantage in the English-dominated society of the United States. Language barriers severely limit employment opportunities and make life in general much more difficult. American-born children of first-generation immigrants grow up speaking English at school and with their friends, however, so they develop a natural fluency. This can create tension in the family as children become more capable in many ways than their parents. Parents may also resent the fact that their children lose fluency in the language of the parents' homeland. Communication and cultural conflicts abound between first- and second-generation immigrants due to these language differences.

The recent influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants has led to de facto bilingualism in many major cities, including Miami, New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Hispanic Americans promote bilingual education, at least in elementary school, to give their children a greater chance of succeeding. An anti-Hispanic backlash among some European Americans has spawned the “English Only” movement, which began in Miami in 1980 and spread quickly across the United States. “English Only” proponents want to have English declared the official language of the United States.

American English has incorporated many words from its immigrants’ languages, however. “Cookie,” “spook,” and “waffle” come from the Dutch, while German Americans contributed “kindergarten,” “gesundheit,” “ouch,” “delicatessen,” and “blitz.” Even Filipino Americans, though small in number, have given American English the words “yo yo” and “boondocks.”

English has borrowed numerous words from the French, including “boulevard,” “avenue,” “laissez-faire,” “coup” and “coup d’état” “potpourri,” “r.s.v.p.” (répondez, s’il vous plaît), “chic,” and “déjàvu.” French and Italian have given Americans many words for foods and cooking methods, such as “omelet,” “mayonnaise,” “hors d’œuvres,” “bouillon,” “filet,” “purée,” “sauté,” and “à la mode,” from the French, and “pasta,” “spaghetti,” “ravioli,” and the like from Italian.

Many U.S. immigrants Americanize their names in order to blend in with mainstream society. This was particularly true for second-wave immigrants. German names like Schmidt became the common English name Smith. Lebanese Americans changed their names from Haddad and Ashshi to their English equivalents, Smith and Cook. Italian Americans simply removed the final letter or letters from their names to change Italian-sounding names like Rossi and Gilberti to the English Ross and Gilbert. Today’s immigrants are more likely to retain their original names, although some Hispanics drop their mother’s surname, keeping only their father’s (as is customary in mainstream America), and some Asians reverse their names to follow the standard American given name-surname order.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Immigrants to the United States bring with them the legends and folktales of their homelands. Some of those tales have made it into the general American culture. The German stories in the Grimm brothers’ collection, as well as those by the French storyteller Charles Perrault and Danish master Hans Christian Andersen, are very well known by nearly all second- and later-generation Americans. Persian tales from the Arabian Nights and English nursery rhymes from Mother Goose are also quite familiar to most Americans.

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalized two early American heroines. Longfellow’s poem *The Courtship of Miles Standish* recounts the romance of Priscilla Mullins (Molines), a French Huguenot immigrant, and *Evangeline* tells the story of a young Cajun woman of that name. A real-life Cajun character who has since become legendary is pirate Jean Lafitte.

In recent years, increasing efforts are being made to record the folktales of various ethnic groups in America. Hmong legends have been collected by Charles Johnson in a book called *Myths, Legends, and Folktales from the Hmong of Laos*, published by Macalester College in 1985. Amy Tan and other Asian writers have begun telling the stories handed down to them by their parents and grandparents. Anthologies of Irish,

Scottish, and other folklore are becoming widely available as well in libraries and bookstores across America.

#### 5 RELIGION

The first English colonists in America were staunch Protestants and gave the United States a definite Protestant character for much of its history. The early English Protestants were joined by Dutch, French (Huguenot), Scotch-Irish, Scandinavian, and German Protestants during the 18th and early 19th centuries. This union cemented the Protestant slant of the United States. The Irish constituted the first major wave of Catholics in the United States and came to dominate the American Catholic Church. Some Italian, some German, Polish, and Hispanic Catholics found Irish Catholicism rather unappealing when they arrived in the United States and formed their own parishes.

The Greeks and Eastern Europeans brought another form of Christianity to America, known as the Orthodox Church. Small groups of Anabaptists, such as the Amish, Quakers, and Mennonites, created their own distinctive Protestant communities. American Jews gathered together and built synagogues, and Asian American Buddhists and Hindus constructed temples and ashrams. Eventually, enough Arabs immigrated to the United States to establish Muslim mosques; the lack of mosques had discouraged Arab immigration for some time.

Clearly, the United States is no longer a Protestant nation. Christianity is still the majority religion, but other religions are well represented. Mainstream Americans have recently shown an increasing interest in Asian philosophy and religion, such as Buddhism, Zen, yoga, and the martial arts.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most U.S. immigrants learn to celebrate major American holidays such as Memorial Day (the last Monday in May), Independence Day (July 4), Labor Day (the first Monday in September), and Thanksgiving (the last Thursday in November). They also celebrate whichever holidays are recognized in their particular religious faith. Many non-Christian Americans observe Christmas as well because it has become as much a secular, commercial holiday as a religious one in America.

Every ethnic group seems to have its own New Year’s Day. The official American date for New Year’s is January 1, but for Jewish Americans, New Year’s (or Rosh Hashanah) falls sometime in September or October; for Chinese and Vietnamese Americans, it occurs in late January or early February; the Cambodian American New Year is in mid-April; and Hmong Americans ring in the New Year in December.

French Cajun and Creole Americans hold a huge festival every year in New Orleans on Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”), the day before the Christian observance of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. Parades of costumed, masked figures, music and dancing, feasting, and general revelry draw thousands of visitors from across America. Irish Americans introduced St. Patrick’s Day on March 17, and Italian Americans made Columbus Day on October 12 into a national holiday.

Certain holiday traditions have also spread from specific ethnic groups into mainstream America. Blindfolded children of all backgrounds swing sticks at Hispanic *piñatas* (hollow, animal-shaped pottery or plaster containers that are filled with candy and gifts), and try to break them so the contents will spill out. The American name for Santa Claus comes from the

Dutch word for St. Nicholas, *Sinterklaas*, but the character itself was brought to America by the Germans. German Americans also introduced the traditions of Christmas trees and New Year's Eve festivities.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Other than birth, marriage, and funeral rites, most American immigrants drift away from traditional rites of passage. As a society, America has few meaningful rituals to denote passage from one stage of life to the next. Academic graduations, the first job, getting a driver's license, reaching the legal voting or drinking age, buying a house, and marriage are today's American rites of passage. Only Jews (and some Native North Americans) have managed to maintain their traditional rituals. Most Jewish boys and many Jewish girls go through a bar or bat mitzvah at the age of 13, the ritual age of adulthood.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Every immigrant group brings with it to the United States its own customs of interpersonal relations. American-born children, however, quickly become "Americanized" and begin to lose their distinctive ethnic style of interaction. Certain tendencies may remain for generations, such as the Italian American flair for dramatics versus the German American somber stoicism.

Nearly every immigrant group soon establishes mutual assistance organizations, as well as social and cultural associations. These organizations and associations replace the support given by extended families and close-knit communities in the immigrants' homelands.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Newly arrived immigrants to the United States often live in overcrowded slums until they are able to earn enough money to move to better neighborhoods. Those who do not speak English have an added barrier to success and must work extra hard to improve their circumstances. Even immigrants who have English language skills and upper-level educational and employment experience may still have to start working below their qualification level and find themselves with a much lower standard of living than that to which they were accustomed in their former homeland.

Refugees suffer from shock, injuries, and illnesses sustained prior to and during immigration, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other stress-related diseases. Many of today's refugees from Southeast Asia and Latin America have problems as severe as those found in survivors of Nazi concentration camps in World War II (1939–45).

Many immigrant groups continue to practice traditional folk remedies, such as teas or charms, to cure illness. First-generation immigrants from less industrialized countries are often hesitant to use modern Western medicine or go to Western doctors or hospitals. Mainstream Americans, on the other hand, are becoming increasingly interested in some of these folk remedies, creating an "alternative" medicine movement. Eastern medicine, brought to the United States by Asian Americans, has gained many adherents throughout the United States among Asian and non-Asian Americans alike.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family structure is perhaps the element of immigrants' lives that undergoes the most change upon resettlement in America. Many immigrants come from cultures that center on extended families with clearly defined gender and generational roles. American society, on the other hand, is highly mobile (creating a focus on nuclear family units), youth-oriented, and much less gender-defined. Immigrant families are often torn apart by immigration or the need to travel once in the United States to find work. Children quickly learn that American youth are independent and begin to resent their parents' control. Foreign-born parents are dismayed by their Americanized children's lack of respect and obedience. Foreign-born parents whose traditional culture involves arranged marriages are also distressed when their Americanized children want to go out on dates without chaperones and choose their own mates.

Many women are forced to work outside the home to help support the family, perhaps the first time they have ever done so. Men feel diminished because they are no longer the sole breadwinner, and they may feel their authority is threatened. Some women discover that they like having more freedom and begin to resist their traditionally defined roles. Some men who are frustrated by their inability to support their families and by their wives' new independence turn to drugs or alcohol to numb their feelings. They may also take out their frustrations on the women and children around them by becoming verbally or physically abusive. Domestic violence is a serious problem among some immigrant families.

The generation gap that always exists between parents and children, and even more so between grandparents and grandchildren, is intensified by the cultural differences between foreign-born parents and grandparents and American-born children. For some immigrants, a new conflict between men and women is introduced by the increased freedom for women in the United States, and the necessity for women to work outside the home. Tensions lessen with each succeeding generation as the family becomes more Americanized. However, with the lessening of tensions comes a loss of traditional ethnic culture.

## 11 CLOTHING

Today's world is becoming increasingly westernized, and many recent U.S. immigrants arrive in America with much the same clothing as mainstream Americans wear. Others, such as some Asian Indian women and Muslim Arabs, continue to wear their traditional clothing in the United States. Separatist groups like the Amish and conservative Mennonites wear distinctive dress based on centuries-old styles. All ethnic groups have cultural festivals in which dancers or parade participants wear the traditional dress of their particular culture, but most U.S. immigrants quickly adapt to American-style clothing for everyday use.

Certain elements of typical American dress were introduced by U.S. immigrants. For example, the blue denim used to make blue jeans is probably based on a kind of Cajun cloth dyed with indigo. Tartan plaids and tweed woollens were brought to America by the Scottish and Scotch-Irish. Various immigrant groups have brought with them different types of hats that then were worn by all Americans, such as the English bowler or French beret.

## 12 FOOD

American food is a colorful blend of many different ethnic traditions, as well as indigenous foods such as squashes and turkey. The cuisine of some immigrant groups has become popular on its own, like Mexican, Italian, French, Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Middle Eastern (Arab), Greek, and Cajun. Ethnic restaurants do a good business in most areas of the United States. Newer immigrant groups are beginning to introduce their cuisines to the general American public; restaurants serving Cuban, Central American, Vietnamese, or Cambodian foods are gaining popularity.

Many immigrant groups have introduced specific foods that have become a part of mainstream American eating. Jewish Americans contributed bagels with lox, deli foods, kosher dill pickles, potato latkes, and chicken soup (as a cure for the common cold). From the Dutch came pancakes, waffles, coleslaw, doughnuts, and cookies, while the Germans brought beer, frankfurters, hamburgers, potato salad, bratwurst, liverwurst, and pretzels. Sauerkraut is credited to both Germans and Poles, and Poles and Russians share credit for vodka. Poles also gave America kielbasa, pierogis, Polish dill pickles, and Polish ham, and Russians taught Americans to eat chicken kiev, stroganoff, sour cream, borscht, and pumpernickel bread, as well as to drink tea with lemon. The Scottish can be thanked for Scotch whiskey.

## 13 EDUCATION

Almost without exception, immigrants to the United States place a high value on education. A number of immigrants come to the United States expressly to pursue higher education or to give their children a chance at a good education. A few immigrant groups dismissed higher education at first as unnecessary (such as Polish, Slavic, and Italian Americans), believing a steady job was more important than an academic degree. Later generations of these groups have become more interested in education after seeing the opportunities it makes available in the United States. In particular, after World War II (1939–45), many soldiers took advantage of the GI Bill to pay for higher education and advanced themselves to skilled labor or professional positions.

A number of immigrant groups founded ethnic schools, usually meeting on weekday afternoons or weekend mornings, to promote their traditional language and culture. Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans, among others, created these schools to teach their children traditional ethnic ways. Foreign-born parents for the most part want their children to become Americans, but they also fear the complete Americanization that makes their children strangers to them and to their ancestral language and traditions. Most children resent the extra time they must spend on ethnic school work when their other American friends are out playing or taking part in extracurricular activities. Some children, on the other hand, appreciate learning about their ethnic background and enjoy speaking their ancestral language.

The Roman Catholic parochial school system, which provides good-quality, inexpensive private education for many American children, was established by Irish Americans in the 1830s–1840s. German Americans introduced the concept of kindergarten and founded the first U.S. kindergartens in the 1850s. They are also responsible for the inclusion of physical education in school curricula. Higher education for the deaf

was developed in large part by the French American Gallaudet family, founders of what is now called Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., the only liberal arts college for the deaf in the United States. French Americans also founded the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, the premier music school in America.

Other colleges and universities founded by U.S. immigrant groups include St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, established in 1874 by Norwegian Americans; and Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey, founded by Scottish Americans as a Presbyterian seminary in 1746.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

American arts culture, like American food, is a rich mixture of various ethnic elements contributed by the multitude of immigrants who make up America's population. Greek architecture with its massive columns stands alongside small Swedish log cabins and Haitian "shotgun" houses. Latin American surrealist fiction and poetry shares the shelf with books of Japanese haiku. The Japanese arts of ikebana (flower-arranging) and origami (paper-folding) are pursued by non-Japanese as well as Japanese Americans. One of the most enduring symbols of America, the Statue of Liberty, is a combination of French and Jewish talents. The statue was designed by French artist Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, and the poem on the base ("Give me your tired, your poor,/ Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free . . .") was written by Jewish American Emma Lazarus.

The Hollywood film industry was founded by two Hungarian Americans, Adolph Zukor and William Fox, and countless immigrant American actors and directors have made it a worldwide success. Italian Americans brought with them a love of opera, and in New York City in 1932, Italian immigrant Lorenzo Da Ponte founded the Italian Opera House, the first opera house in the United States.

American music is a true festival of ethnicity. Cajun music, Zydeco, Latin salsa, Cuban rhythms, Mexican mariachi and Tex-Mex sounds, Polish and German polkas, Asian Indian ragas, and the drone of Scottish bagpipes are heard across the United States. The rumba, mambo, Conga lines, and chachachá, very popular dances in mainstream America during the 1930s and 1940s, were introduced by Cuban immigrants. The now-common Christmas carol, "Carol of the Bells," was first brought to the United States by the Ukrainians.

The structure of blues music, one of the most "American" forms of music, is based on Haitian folk songs sung by early Haitian immigrants to Louisiana in the 19th century. Haitian Americans also contributed certain drums and rhythms, as well as the banjo, to American music. Early American folk music consisted largely of old ballads from England, brought by the very first English settlers. Today's American folk music, as well as country and western, rock, funk, and other genres, is an inextricable blend of elements from nearly every immigrant group that has ever set foot on the shores of America.

## 15 WORK

America is built on the backs of its immigrants. All immigrant groups, from the very first to the most recent, documented and undocumented, have poured their energies into the American labor pool. Many immigrants begin in unskilled, menial labor positions because they lack the language and/or industrial-

ized job skills to be employed at higher levels. Even those with advanced degrees and experience must often start out in jobs for which they are overqualified, until they gain the language skills and accreditation required in the United States for higher-level positions.

During times of expansion and economic growth, the United States has encouraged immigration in order to build its labor force. During the late 1800s, the United States even advertised for immigrants in Western European countries. In contrast, when the economy is depressed, immigration is discouraged because of fears of job scarcity. Peoples of many less-industrialized countries continue to see America as a land of opportunity regardless of the current state of the U.S. economy because even during a depression, the United States still offers a great deal more in the way of economic advancement than do their homelands.

When the United States chooses to restrict immigration during economic downturns, many underprivileged peoples choose to use “illegal” means of gaining entry to America. Undocumented migrants have always existed in U.S. society; the agricultural industry of the West and Southwest was largely developed through undocumented migrant labor. Employers continue to hire undocumented workers because they do not have to pay them the legal minimum wage and can therefore save a great deal in wage costs. The employers’ savings are passed on to the consumer in lower prices. Although the U.S. government attempts to stem the flow of undocumented migration, the U.S. economy actually benefits from the migrants’ labor, encouraging both sides (migrants and government) to continue playing their part in the game.

## 16 SPORTS

Many sports now popular in the United States were introduced by immigrant groups. For example, both downhill and cross-country skiing were brought to America by the Norwegians, while the Scots brought golf and curling (a sort of shuffleboard on ice). The Italians taught Americans to play bocce (lawn bowling), and the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans shared their various martial arts.

The United States introduced the sport of baseball to other countries, and many players from those countries now add their skills to U.S. teams. Cuban, Dominican, and Central American players, among others, are common in the U.S. major leagues. Softball leagues and Little League teams are sponsored by many different U.S. immigrant groups. Soccer, the most popular sport in the rest of the world, is becoming more popular in the United States through the influence of a variety of immigrant groups. Sports, particularly baseball, can open the door for some immigrants who would otherwise have a difficult time being accepted for immigration to the United States.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

All immigrants to America bring with them their own forms of entertainment and recreation. Some of those entertainments make their way into the larger American culture. For example, the early English Puritans were very somber people who did not believe in frivolous activities. When the Germans arrived, however, they instilled a different sense of fun into American society. Rather than the strict observances of the Puritan sabbath on Sundays, German Americans spent the day resting

and enjoying a break from their labors. Today’s understanding in the United States of weekends as a time of play descends from those original German Americans. German Americans also introduced the ever-popular Oktoberfest, and beer gardens, to the United States.

Many U.S. immigrant groups gather one or more times a year for cultural festivals that serve as ethnic pride and education events, as well as times for socializing. Among some traditional groups, the festivals are also an opportunity to meet potential marriage partners. Others simply enjoy eating their ethnic foods, wearing their traditional costumes, and listening and dancing to traditional ethnic music. On an everyday basis, most U.S. immigrants quickly adopt American forms of entertainment and recreation, such as watching television or going to movies.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Examples of ethnic folk arts can be found at the various cultural festivals held across the United States each year. Certain ethnic crafts, such as painted Ukrainian Easter eggs and Hmong *paj ntaub* (an intricate form of needlework, also known as *pa ndau*), have become more widely popular in America. Some Amish crafts are considered valuable collectors’ items in the United States.

Mexican and Central American folk arts are gaining popularity among the general American public today. Hispanic American murals grace the walls of many buildings in major U.S. cities, and shops selling *santos* (homemade religious figurines) or other Latin American crafts are frequented by Hispanic and non-Hispanic Americans alike. The new trend towards multiculturalism and ethnic pride in the United States is creating a wider market for folk arts and crafts of all ethnic groups in America today.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Ku Klux Klan, a violent white supremacist group, was founded in the 19th century by Scotch-Irish Americans. This was not the beginning of racism in America, however. Racism has always been a serious problem in American society, as has religious discrimination, ethnic hostility, and cultural prejudice. The Puritan settlers of the 1600s came to the New World to escape religious persecution in England but then proceeded to persecute non-Puritans who dared to settle near them in America. Anti-Asian legislation was passed in California as early as the 1850s, and the Chinese Exclusion Act, barring any further Chinese immigration to the United States, was passed a short time later in 1882.

Anti-German hysteria during World Wars I (1914–18) and II (1939–45) was so extreme that music by Beethoven was banned from symphony concert programs, sauerkraut was renamed “liberty cabbage,” and even dachshunds (meaning “German hounds”) were dubbed “liberty hounds.” Hungarian Americans also met with suspicion during the wars, as Hungary was allied with Germany. All American ethnic groups were driven to hide their ethnicity and prove themselves “good Americans” during the war years.

One of the most blatant and grievous examples of racial hostility in the United States was the internment of Japanese Americans in detention camps during World War II (1939–45). Americans whose only crime was their ethnic background were forced from their homes and imprisoned for the dura-

tion of the war with Japan. Anti-Asian violence continues to be a problem today, particularly with the recent influx of large numbers of Southeast Asian refugees into many U.S. cities.

The brutal attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 by the terrorist Al Qaeda group sparked a new xenophobic era of prejudice, violence, and discrimination against all Arabs or even those who “look” Arab, even though many Arab Americans were also killed in the attacks and others rallied to the support of the victims. Much confusion over the identities and allegiances of the attackers prompted non-Arab Americans to blame anyone in a headscarf or with an Arab name for the horrors and to retaliate accordingly. At the same time, a number of Arab and non-Arab American groups took the opportunity to begin educational programs and cooperative efforts to promote better understanding among all Americans. The result was that along with the rise in hate crimes came a new sense of neighborliness and mutual cross-cultural respect.

Although the American consciousness continues to lean towards multiculturalism and ethnic pride today, racism and cultural conflicts still plague the United States. Current immigration policies, though made more inclusive by reforms in the 1960s, continue to provoke accusations of racism, as white Cubans are welcomed while black Haitians and Dominicans are denied entry. Mixed-race Mexicans and Central Americans are also refused refugee status. U.S. investments in foreign countries and influence over their governments play a large part in refugee status decisions as well. However, racism cannot be denied. The perpetual flow of undocumented migrants across the Mexico-U.S. border is another contentious issue with continuing debates in Congress as well as among the general population over proposed solutions. A bill was passed in 2006 to build a “secure fence” along the border, but the efficacy of that solution (as well as how to fund it) continues to be hotly argued by opponents. A number of demonstrations have been staged in recent years by supporters of both sides of the controversy surrounding undocumented migration.

Another result of the September 11 attacks was an increased concern with national security, particularly as it relates to our borders. Keeping undocumented Mexicans out of the United States is not the only reason to tighten border regulations. There is a very real desire to keep out those who wish to do America harm. Even the long-open border with Canada now requires a passport from all wishing to cross into the United States.

Despite new fears, and old ones, the great experiment of a nation created out of many racial, ethnic, and cultural elements continues in America. New immigrants arrive daily to add their ingredients to the mix, and American society takes on a slightly different flavor with each one. The United States is faced with many decisions today about who and how many to allow through its doors, and tomorrow will surely bring others. The choices that are made will determine the future shape of America.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Throughout its entire history, U.S. immigration law has consistently denied one group access to legal immigration to the United States: homosexuals. The 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act excluded those “afflicted with psychopathic personality, epilepsy or mental defect,” which was understood to include homosexuals. In 1965, the act was amended to state

this intention more clearly, excluding those “afflicted with sexual deviation.” When the U.S. Surgeon General issued a new policy in 1979 declaring that homosexuality should not be considered a mental disease or defect, homosexuals began to challenge decisions by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) that excluded them on the basis of their sexual orientation alone and finally won a case in 1983. Given these changes, the 1990 Immigration Act no longer excluded immigrants based on sexual orientation.

However, anyone testing positive for the HIV/AIDS virus is still denied entry to the United States, and all applicants for immigrant visas are required to take an HIV/AIDS test. Also, anyone found carrying HIV/AIDS medications in their luggage can be refused entry. This obviously prevents homosexuals who are HIV-positive from crossing the border. A noncitizen living legally in the United States can even be refused reentry after traveling abroad if he or she is HIV-positive.

The major obstacle to immigration for homosexuals, however, is the centrality of “family reunification” in U.S. immigration law. Because same-sex marriage is not recognized by the U.S. government, a gay or lesbian U.S. citizen cannot sponsor his or her same-sex partner for immigration, as an opposite-sex spouse can do. Even if the immigrant’s country of origin recognizes the same-sex marriage, or if the couple was married in a U.S. state where the marriage is legally recognized, the INS refuses to view the couple as “family.” This leaves binational same-sex partners with few options. Most try to juggle different types of visas to extend their time together; some choose to stay beyond the expiration date of their visas and become “illegal” immigrants, or even enter into sham heterosexual marriages to stay near their partner, taking the risk either way of being deported if discovered. Others decide to leave the United States altogether and move to a country that honors same-sex unions.

The Permanent Partners Immigration Act was introduced in Congress in 2000 to change the INS definition of “family” to include same-sex partners, but the bill never made it out of committee. It was then rewritten and resubmitted in 2005 as the Uniting American Families Act and has over 100 co-sponsors from both houses. Among the many organizations that support the bill are Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and People for the American Way. If passed, the act will add the term “permanent partner” to all sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act where “spouse” appears, thereby allowing lesbians and gays to sponsor their same-sex partners for immigration.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

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## AMERICANS

**LOCATION:** United States

**POPULATION:** 300 million (2006)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Spanish, and other minority languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholic, Protestant [Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian]); Judaism; Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: African Americans; American Immigrants; Native North Americans

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The United States of America, with a population of more than 300 million, is a nation of immigrants. The very first Americans are thought to be prehistoric Asian peoples who first arrived on the North American continent sometime before 10,000 BC. From these first settlers evolved the cultures of the North American Indian tribes. When the European explorers first came to North America in the 1500s, an estimated two million people were living in the land that was to become the United States. The Europeans had advanced industrial, military, communications, transportation, and construction technologies that enabled them to dominate the native peoples. Successive waves of European immigrants ultimately led to a policy of forcibly resettling the tribes to make way for the new settlers. In the process, thousands of native people were killed or died when driven from their homes. By 1890, according to the official census count, there were only 248,253 native peoples remaining in the United States. Still, many tribal societies survived warfare with white settlers and retained their cultures. Their survival, however, has been on the fringes of North American society. Today, less than 1% of the population of the United States consists of these first Americans.

Another people subjected to the domination of the early European Americans were the African slaves who were forcibly brought by businessmen to America to work the plantations in the South during the 18th and 19th centuries. By the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the slave population of the United States had reached a figure of 4,000,000 persons. Although slavery was abolished in the 1860s, discrimination against blacks remained institutionalized until the major social legislation of the 1960s. Even in the 21st century, racism is one of America's enduring social problems. As of 2008, approximately 13% of the population of the United States could trace its ancestors back to these African peoples.

Ultimately, the Native Americans, African Americans, the European settlers, and the successive waves of immigrants that followed worked together to build one of the most powerful nations on Earth. Americans excel or lead in almost all areas of human endeavor.

European immigration to the United States peaked between 1880 and 1920 when over 20 million Europeans came to America. In 1900, 96% of all immigrants to the United States came from Europe, especially from Germany, Ireland, and Italy. In many cases these immigrants were fleeing starvation, poverty, and war. America offered hope and opportunity. For them, America was a great "melting pot" where people from many different lands came together and melted into a new American society. People from throughout Europe left the languages and customs of their native lands behind and began the process of

being assimilated into American society. After three or four generations in the new land, their descendants felt as American as the descendants of the original colonists. Unfortunately, the Europeans were reluctant to welcome non-Europeans into this “melting pot.” Still, Americans held a deep belief in the principles of equal rights and equal opportunities. These principles, embedded in the nation’s constitution and enforced by law, ultimately opened the door to full participation in American society to all Americans. Some would argue, however, that the door has not been opened very wide. Consequently, minority groups in America continue to struggle to assert their rights as American citizens. Estimates of the foreign-born population in 2000 ranged between 10.5 and 11 percent—higher than it had been since 1930, but still well below the peak of nearly 15 percent between 1870 and 1910.

As of the 2000 census, the American immigrant was more likely to be Asian (25.5% of all immigrants) or Hispanic (51.1%) rather than European (15.3%). Demographers predict this immigration pattern will continue. They estimate that by the year 2050 over 29% of the population will claim Hispanic origin (up from 10% in 1990), 13% will be blacks, while another 9% will be Asian (3% in 1990). By then, only 47% of the population will be of European origin, as opposed to 85% in 1960. Census categories, however, can be confusing and sometimes misleading. Whereas the terms Asian and Black are terms that define a *race* of peoples, the term Hispanic defines a geographic location (people from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America). Consequently, a person of Hispanic origin can be of any race. Many Hispanics are black while others trace their ancestors to the European countries of Portugal and Spain. There are even small percentages of Hispanics with Japanese, Chinese, or Filipino ancestry.

Now that the non-European groups are becoming a stronger force in American culture, the “melting pot” paradigm is fading. Today, most academics term America a multicultural society that is more like a “salad bowl” than a “melting pot,” with each ethnic group maintaining its identity in the mix. The well-known political scientist Samuel Huntington observed that former President William Clinton was the first American president to stress diversity instead of unity as a national goal.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The land Americans came to call their own is located in the Western Hemisphere on the continent of North America. The United States is the third-largest country in the world with a total area of 9,826,630 sq km (3,794,083 sq mi, land and water area combined). The northeastern coast, known as New England, is rocky, but along the rest of the eastern seaboard, the Atlantic Coastal Plain rises gradually from the shoreline and merges with the Gulf Coastal Plain in Georgia. To the west is a plateau, bounded by the Appalachian Mountains. This plateau extends from southeast Maine into central Alabama. Between the Appalachians and the Rocky Mountains, more than 1,600 km (1,000 mi) to the west, lies the vast interior plain of the United States. The Rockies and the ranges to the west—the Sierra Nevada, the Coast, and Cascade ranges—are parts of a larger mountain system that extends through the western part of Central and South America. Between the Rockies and the Pacific Ranges lies a group of vast plateaus containing most of the nation’s desert areas, known as the Great Basin. The coastal plains along the Pacific Ocean are narrow, and in many places,

the mountains plunge directly into the sea. Separated from the continental United States by Canada, the state of Alaska occupies the extreme northwest portion of North America. The state of Hawaii consists of a group of Pacific islands formed by volcanoes rising sharply from the ocean floor.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The primary language of the United States is English, enriched by words borrowed from the languages of Indians and immigrants, predominantly European. Some 82% of all Americans speak only English while at home. Over 10% of the population speaks Spanish at home. The majority of Spanish speakers live in the Southwest, Florida, and eastern urban centers. Other languages spoken at home include French, German, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Italian. Of the 20 non-English languages spoken most widely at home, the largest proportional increase in the 1990s was Russian. Speakers of this language nearly tripled from 1990 to 2000, from 242,000 to 706,000. The second largest increase was among French Creole speakers (including Haitian Creoles), whose numbers more than doubled, from 188,000 to 453,000.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Characters associated with the taming of the American wilderness, especially cowboys and Indians, are featured prominently in American folklore. Among the best known of these mythical figures are John Henry, Paul Bunyon, and Pecos Bill. John Henry was a “steel-driving man” (someone who used a sledgehammer to drive spikes into railroad ties) who challenged a steam-driven hammer to a spike-driving contest. As the story goes, John Henry won the race but immediately died thereafter. Paul Bunyon was a woodsman who could fell a tree with a single swing of his ax. He rode a giant blue ox named Babe. Pecos Bill was a cowboy in the so-called “wild west.” He could lasso a tornado and ride a mountain lion.

Americans are fascinated with outlaws. Among America’s most famous outlaws are Billy the Kid and Al Capone. Born in 1859, Billy the Kid had a career of cattle rustling and murder. He was shot and killed in New Mexico by Sheriff Pat Garrett on 15 July 1881. In the 1920s, “Big Al” Capone was a gangster who dominated the Chicago crime scene. He engaged in gang warfare and bootlegging during America’s Prohibition period when the sale of alcohol was prohibited. Although a ruthless killer, Al Capone was never convicted for any of his violent crimes; he went to jail for income tax evasion.

Since baseball is known as the national pastime, it is fitting that the story of baseball hero Babe Ruth has reached mythic proportions. The “Babe” is considered by many as the best player ever to have played the game. Some people have said that with the World Series, baseball’s championship, on the line and his team, the New York Yankees, behind on the scoreboard, Babe pointed with his bat to the outfield bleachers and then promptly hit a home run right to the designated spot.

Americans have a deep belief that anyone can achieve wealth and success if he or she works hard enough and is smart enough. Consequently, many Americans know a “rags to riches” story of someone who has beaten the odds and gone from poverty to immense wealth.



**5 RELIGION**

Although all of the world's major religions have adherents in the United States, the U.S. is primarily a Christian nation. Over 23% of the population is Roman Catholic, while another 51% are Protestant or non-denominational Christian. The largest Protestant denominations are the Baptists with more than 16%

of the population, followed by the Methodists (6.8%), Lutherans (4.6%), Presbyterians (2.7%), and Pentecostal/Charismatics (2.1%). Approximately 1.7% of the population is Jewish and 0.6% is Muslim. Atheists or agnostics account for 4% of the total population. Trends show that mainline Protestant churches

are in decline, non-denominational churches are gaining, and the ranks of the unaffiliated are growing.

Although Americans observe the holidays and traditions of their respective faiths, no religious holiday has become as institutionalized as Christmas, the day Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. However, for many Americans, the Christmas holiday has become as much a secular holiday as a religious one. The custom of buying Christmas presents for family and friends has made Christmas an important season for many of America's retailers. Consequently, the profits generated during the Christmas shopping period are watched closely by stock market investors on Wall Street and economic analysts in the government in Washington, D.C.

Although the U.S. constitution mandates a strict separation between church and state, the relationship between these two spheres of society is often blurred. For example, American currency is inscribed with the words "In God we Trust" and many public offices, including most public schools, close for the important Christian holidays. In areas with a heavy Jewish population, the public schools close for the Jewish holidays as well. On the other hand, officially sanctioned prayers in public school are forbidden.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important non-religious holidays celebrated by Americans are Independence Day (the fourth of July) and Thanksgiving Day (the fourth Thursday in November). Independence day celebrates the signing of the United States' Declaration of Independence from England on 4 July 1776. On the fourth of July, many Americans have an outdoor picnic or barbecue. Many communities sponsor parades with high school marching bands, local dignitaries in antique cars, and fire trucks with their sirens blaring. At the end of the day, people gather at a local park to watch a display of fireworks.

Thanksgiving Day celebrates the Pilgrims' first harvest in the new world. When the Pilgrims arrived from England, they had little knowledge of how to survive in their new land. They were helped by the local native Americans who taught them how to plant corn. The harvest was successful, and the Pilgrims celebrated by inviting the local inhabitants to share in a meal of thanksgiving. Since then, Americans have set aside Thanksgiving Day as a day to give thanks for their good fortune. For children and adults, a traditional activity is watching the Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City on television. The parade features giant helium-filled balloons made in the shapes of famous cartoon characters. These balloons, some nine or ten stories tall, float high among the New York skyscrapers and are dragged through the streets by teams of people holding long ropes. Thanksgiving day is one of the busiest travel days of the year with many Americans visiting family and friends. Another prominent feature of the day is the football games that are televised nationally. The highlight of the day is the Thanksgiving Day meal (see **Food**).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Apart from religious rituals and family occurrences like births, deaths, and marriages, rites of passage for all Americans include their first day at school and the day they graduate from high school. High school graduating classes have reunions every 5 or 10 years. Of particular importance are the 10-year and 20-year reunions. Of somewhat lesser significance, but heav-

ily anticipated nonetheless, is the day a teenager receives his or her driver's license. Many teens take the written and skill tests required to earn a license to drive shortly after their sixteenth birthday. Sixteen is the minimum driving age in most states. Perhaps the most bittersweet rite of passage is a person's retirement from the workforce. This day is often marked by some celebration involving one's coworkers and close family members. A prominent individual with a long career at one company may be given a party at a local banquet hall. A lesser employee or one with few years at the same company may celebrate the event with a special lunch at a local restaurant. The traditional gift for someone retiring from the workforce is a gold watch.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Americans are generally regarded as friendly and outgoing. In formal business communications, men are referred to as Mr. and women as Ms. (Ms. came into popular use during the 1970s when women argued for equal treatment in the workplace.) In social correspondence, some women prefer Mrs. or Miss. This may be the case with older American women. Social etiquette is changing as the society struggles to become less racist and less sexist. In business settings, shaking hands with people upon first meeting them is appropriate. This is true when meeting either men or women. However, when a man is introduced to a woman, the man may prefer to wait for the woman to offer her hand first. Kissing another person on the cheek in a business setting is not appropriate unless you know the person very well. Often in a social setting, men and women who have met previously kiss each other on the cheek upon greeting. In business and social settings, addressing the newly met person by his or her first name is typical. Exceptions to this include: if Mr., Ms., or Mrs. was used in the introduction; if the new acquaintance is significantly older or has significantly greater stature; if the situation is formal in atmosphere. In these cases, Mr., Mrs., or Ms. should be used to avoid offending anyone. When meeting or talking with someone, Americans feel that looking the other person directly in the eyes is important. This is a sign of openness and trustworthiness, as is a firm handshake.

Young people begin dating in groups or under loose adult supervision at the ages of twelve or thirteen. However, dating begins in earnest when teenagers begin receiving their drivers' licenses at the age of 16. At this age, parents rarely chaperone their children. Using the family car for a first date is an extremely important occasion for any teenager. Traditionally, the boy was the one to ask the girl out on a date; customarily, the boy would pay for the date. These social norms, however, are fading. Dates are frequently scheduled for Friday or Saturday nights. A typical date might consist of a casual meal and a movie or concert. School dances and sporting events are also popular. Most parents set curfews for their children to be home by midnight.

American society values equality, so language should not be used in a derogatory, sexist, or racist manner. A sexist or racist remark made to a coworker is not only rude but also illegal. Although there is a wide disparity in income levels among Americans, Americans generally think of America as a classless society. Some people have said that the American president Abraham Lincoln treated his butler with the same respect he treated visiting heads of state. In a country where most

Americans referred to the former American President William Jefferson Clinton as “Bill,” the average citizen feels his or her voice in political affairs is as important as that of the very wealthiest and most powerful of Americans.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Americans have one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. The average American household has income of over \$46,000 per year. Approximately 70% of American homes are single-unit structures. According to the National Association of Home Builders, the average home size in the United States was 2,330 sq ft in 2004, up from 1,400 sq ft in 1970. The remaining homes are multiple dwelling units such as two- and four-family houses and large apartment buildings with more than 50 units. Sixty-nine percent of American families own their own homes. Almost every American household has hot and cold running water, electricity, indoor plumbing, a refrigerator, a telephone, and a television. American homes usually have toasters, automatic coffee makers, microwave ovens, and clothes washers. One significant 21st century development in American living conditions is the prevalence of the Internet in Americans’ lives. As of December 2007, there were 215,935,529 Internet users out of a population of some 300 million, amounting to 71.7% of the population.

Not all Americans, however, share in this wealth. Although they represent only 1% of the total population, a significant number of Americans are homeless. The homeless population in the United States is estimated at some 3,500,000 in any given year. Children account for some 25% of the homeless population.

As of 2008, the country was experiencing a recession that was related to a housing crisis. Referred to as the subprime mortgage crisis, the economic problem had to do with liquidity issues in the banking system. The crisis began in 2006 with the collapse of a nationwide housing bubble, and high default rates on “subprime” and other adjustable rate mortgages (ARM) made to higher-risk borrowers with lower income or lesser credit history than “prime” borrowers. Loan incentives and a long-term trend of rising housing prices encouraged borrowers to assume mortgages, believing they would be able to refinance at more favorable terms later. However, once housing prices started to decline in 2006–2007 in many parts of the country, refinancing became more difficult. Defaults and foreclosure activity increased dramatically. During 2007, close to 1.3 million American housing properties were subject to foreclosure, up 79% versus 2006. As of 2008 it was estimated subprime defaults would reach a level between \$200 and \$300 billion. Also dismal was the news that for the first time in at least 40 years, and possibly since the Great Depression, the median price declined for an existing single-family home across the country in 2007. It was the first such annual drop since the National Association of Realtors began collecting data in 1968. Academics agreed the previous such decline was in the Great Depression. Families nationwide saw the median home price fall 1.4% in 2007 to \$218,900, from \$221,900 in 2006.

Automobiles are a very important part of American life. In many suburban communities pedestrians are an uncommon sight. Consequently, public transportation is not a primary form of transportation, and many housing developments no longer include sidewalks. Most Americans would find it hard to survive without an automobile for transportation. Every-

where in America are well-paved roads (including a multi-lane, high speed, interstate highway system that links every major and secondary city in the nation). Driving from east coast to west coast and from north to south is possible using these high-speed interstate highways.

America has been termed a consumer society. In fact, for many people, shopping is as much a pastime as a chore. In most American communities, shoppers are drawn to the local mall. The mall became a fixture in American society in the 1970s when developers began to gather hundreds of independent stores under one roof. These giant buildings, decorated inside with trees and fountains, are flanked by acres of parking lots. Inside, shoppers can go from store to store and be sheltered from the weather. The local mall took the place of the town square and quickly became a favorite meeting place for teenagers. The mall also changed the nature of the community by forcing the stores in the downtown area of the city out of business, thereby hastening the decay of America’s urban centers. In their place, a new type of suburban outdoor mall began to emerge, with stores arranged as if in a city or town, mimicking the urban centers they replaced. Another trend in American consumerism is the mail order catalog. Pioneered in the 1920s by Sears and Montgomery Ward, the mail order catalog made a comeback in the 1980s and now offers Americans at-home shopping for everything from fruit to sweaters to sofas. Internet shopping also became very popular in the early 21st century, and such auction sites as Ebay allow Americans to buy and sell goods to and from one another on the Web.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most Americans get married for the first time when they are in their twenties. However, some 40% of first-time marriages end in divorce. In 2003, there were 7.5 marriages per 1,000 people and 3.8 divorces. American families consist of an average two children. For every 1,000 live births, there are 291.5 abortions; the abortion rate has been decreasing in recent years. The issue of abortion is one of the most divisive ones in American politics. Even though legal since 1973, many Americans still see abortion as a morally tinged decision. In 2004, 35.8% of all births in the United States were to single mothers as opposed to 5% in 1950. In 2005, the adolescent birth rate dropped to a record low, to 21 per 1,000 young women ages 15–17, down from 39 per 1,000 in 1991. This decline followed an increase of one-fourth between 1986 and 1991.

In the 1950s and 60s, the husband in the family typically went to work and the wife usually stayed home and managed the house and children. Women’s roles in society were more strictly defined then, and opportunities outside of the home were limited. In the 1970s and 80s, however, economic pressures and the increasing desire of more women to pursue careers in the workforce resulted in both husband and wife working full-time jobs. However, the school day does not conform to the work day, and many children spend the hours before and after school in day care centers or alone at home until their parents return from work sometime after 5:00 pm, the typical end of the work day.

Increasing public tolerance of single-sex unions as well as the high divorce rate and incidence of birth to unwed mothers is changing the definition of family in American society. The traditional notion that family members are primarily related by blood is being expanded to include bonds based more on



*Madison and Jake Zeiss catch up on homework in the back of their family minivan. The Zeiss family in Los Angeles, California, is participating in a study of the modern American family by UCLA scientists. (AP Images/Kevork Djansezian)*

emotional or economic factors. Extended and blended families, comprised of a husband and wife and their children and relatives from previous marriages, are altering the way Americans view the household family unit.

Mobility of Americans increasingly means that family members find themselves living many hundreds of miles away from their parents and siblings. When older adults are no longer able to live on their own, they typically move into a nursing home or assisted living facility rather than into the homes of their children.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Conservative dress for a businessman typically consists of a western-style suit and a tie. Conservative dress for a businesswoman is a suit or dress in a subdued style—in muted colors and with modest tailoring. Less traditional businesswomen may prefer more fashionable styles, stronger colors, and more dramatic tailoring. Increasingly common among American businesses is the “dress-down” day. On this day, typically Fridays, all employees are encouraged to wear casual clothes. Men’s and women’s suits give way to casual slacks or skirts and sweaters. Formal footwear is replaced by running shoes or loafers. Many Americans who work in service industries or factories wear uniforms that are supplied by their employers.

When not at work, Americans prefer casual clothes, such as denim blue jeans, T-shirts, and sweatshirts. Increasingly, a baseball cap with team or other logo has become an important addition to the casual wardrobe. Casual clothing is often decorated with the logo of a sports team or the designer who designed the clothes. T-shirts often carry some advertisement or message. Casual footwear for Americans typically means some type of sports shoe: Tennis, basketball, walking, etc. These sports shoes can be very expensive and some, especially those endorsed by professional sports figures, are highly prized by some teenagers and young adults.

Children who attend private schools typically wear school uniforms. Children who attend public schools are free, within reason, to wear what they like to school. For many public school students, school clothes are the same as their play clothes. However, the increasingly outrageous fashions of school children sometimes disrupt the educational process.

Young adults in their late teens and early twenties may have their bodies tattooed or pierced. Until the early 1990s, tattoos were socially taboo. Women did not usually have tattoos. Consequently, the decision to get a tattoo was an act of social defiance and independence. By the late 1990s, some young men and women, following the lead of fashion models and rock stars, found tattooing a socially acceptable practice. Accord-

ingly, the decision to get a tattoo no longer had quite the same significance it did when fewer people engaged in the practice. Subsequently, as those young tattooed people began to age and look for professional employment, there emerged a growing market for tattoo removal. Young adults in the 21st century also found they had to go farther if they wanted to make a social (as well as fashion) statement with their bodies. This may explain the phenomenon of body piercing. Body piercing first gained widespread social acceptance in the 1960s and 70s when women began piercing their ear lobes and wearing pierced earrings. In the 1980s, having more than one hole pierced in each ear became fashionable for young women. At that time, young men took up the practice as well. However, unlike women, men have one ear pierced and wear a small earring. A minority of young Americans also pierce other parts of their bodies including their noses, eyebrows, navels, tongues, lips, and nipples. Whereas pierced ears are as common as the suit and tie, pierced noses and eyebrows still gain attention as unique fashion statements.

## 12 FOOD

The foods Americans eat are as diverse as the population. Regional specialties include clam chowder in the northeast seaboard, Tex-Mex with jalapeno peppers and tortillas along the border with Mexico, and spicy Cajun dishes in Louisiana. To say that all Americans favor a typical selection of food would be a gross oversimplification. However, certain foods are common throughout the United States and are familiar to almost all Americans.

For American children, a typical morning breakfast may consist of a bowl of cereal and cold milk and a glass of juice. Children's breakfast cereals, made out of wheat, rice, or corn, have brand names like "Fruit Loops," "Cheerios," and "Frosted Flakes." The more popular ones are heavily coated with sugar. Cereal boxes (some as large as 13 inches high, 8 inches wide, and 3 inches deep) are creatively decorated with games, contests, and advertisements. Oftentimes, children read the box as they eat their morning bowl of cereal. Older Americans may have a glass of orange or grapefruit juice, a cup of coffee, and toast and butter. Bagels and cream cheese, always a favorite of New Yorkers, have become popular throughout the country. A more hearty breakfast for children and adults alike may consist of eggs, hash brown potatoes, and either ham, bacon, or sausage. Also popular are pancakes or waffles covered with butter and maple syrup.

At the mid-day meal, young American children rarely refuse peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Adults and older children prefer sandwiches made with sliced meats (bologna sandwiches are popular with children), cheese, and lettuce. Soups are also widely consumed.

Dinner is the main meal of the day for most Americans. The conventional dinner meal consists of a portion of meat (chicken and pork are affordable and popular), a vegetable like broccoli, corn, peas, or green beans, and a salad made from fresh lettuce.

Increasingly, however, the busy schedules of Americans make it difficult for families to find the time not only to prepare the meal but also to sit down together to eat it. An alternative to the traditional home-made family meal may be a pre-prepared frozen dinner purchased at a grocery store. These meals can be quickly defrosted, warmed in a conventional or

microwave oven, and ready for serving within ten minutes. Also popular are pizzas that are ordered from local pizza restaurants and delivered to the home hot and ready for serving.

The frantic pace of American life has led more and more Americans from the kitchen and into restaurants for many of their daily meals. Among the most popular restaurants are those that offer "fast foods," especially hamburgers and French fries. In a fast food restaurant, the customer orders his or her meal from a fairly restricted menu at a counter. The food is delivered wrapped in paper or cardboard and served on a tray. The food is then taken by the customer to tables provided for the customers' convenience. Upon finishing the meal, customers clean up after themselves. Most fast-food restaurants are equipped with a drive-through window. The customer drives his or her car up to a microphone and places the order. He then drives his car to a window in the side of the building where an attendant takes his money and gives him his food in a bag. Among the most popular of these fast food restaurants are McDonald's, Wendy's, Taco Bell, and Burger King.

In addition to fast-food restaurants, Americans increasingly are eating out at more traditional restaurants, typically on the weekend but also during the work week. This can add up to a considerable expense for a family's food budget. Single people as well as couples are often found congregating at bars and restaurants after work or on the weekend.

Perhaps the most enduring traditional American meal is the annual Thanksgiving dinner. The traditional version of this meal consists of a whole roasted turkey stuffed with seasoned bread cubes and served with gravy. Children often ask for the legs of the bird, referred to as "drumsticks." Side dishes include mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, cranberries, a salad, and rolls. The meal is topped off with apple or pumpkin pie for dessert. In many parts of the country, a traditional feature of the Thanksgiving meal is the ceremonial breaking of the wishbone. Two people each hold an end of the wishbone and make a wish. They pull the wishbone apart, and whoever holds the larger end will have their wish granted.

## 13 EDUCATION

Most American children start their formal education at the age of 5, although many attend preschool or day care from an earlier age. The school year begins sometime near the beginning of September and ends in mid-June. Children do not attend school during the summer months of June, July, and August. This poses a dilemma for families where both parents work. Five-year-olds go to kindergarten where they learn socialization skills and receive instruction in arithmetic, reading, and writing. Although attended by most five-year-olds, kindergarten is not mandatory in all states; it is only a half-day program. After kindergarten, children attend elementary school (also referred to as primary or grade school) for grades one through six. In some school districts, primary schools end at grade four or five, after which the children attend what is known as middle school. Middle schools include grades six and seven, after which time the students attend junior high school. Junior high school goes until grade eight or nine. High school starts at grade 9 or 10 and goes to grade 12. The configuration of elementary, middle, junior, and high school is often a function of the number of students in a district and other nonacademic factors. Some districts have only elementary schools (1 through 8) and a high school (9 through 12). In most school

districts, the school day lasts about six hours for elementary students and up to eight hours for high school students. Children attend school Monday through Friday.

A feature of many school districts is busing to achieve racial integration. Until the 1960s, many students were segregated by race for education. Some school districts directed resources to white schools and away from black schools. To correct the situation, the federal courts required offending districts to bus children to schools outside of their neighborhoods to achieve racial balance in the classrooms. When first instituted, busing resulted in “white flight” as whites moved out of cities affected by busing and into adjacent suburban neighborhoods insulated from the court orders. Some argue that this demographic trend resulted in even greater segregation and a general impoverishment of America’s urban centers as the more wealthy white citizens moved away. Others argue that the remedy offered superior educational opportunities to black children and a more equal educational environment. Since the first court order in 1954, the issue of racial integration in American schools has torn at the fabric of American society. In the 2000s, the racial makeup of schools and neighborhoods is still an underlying motivation in where many people choose to live.

Children are required by law to attend school until age 16, usually having completed 11 years of education. As of 2004, 13.5% of the U.S. population age 25 and over did not have a high school diploma. Approximately 28% of Americans that year had attained at least a bachelor’s college degree. Some Americans pursue a degree from a technical college, which offers a two-year program designed to prepare the student for a specific job. Approximately 9.4% of Americans go on to graduate from a professional or graduate school (another three to eight years depending on the discipline). As would be expected, the more highly educated Americans make the highest earnings in the workforce.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

It can be argued that Americans do not have a common cultural heritage. For many Americans, their cultural heritage is that of the homeland of their immigrant ancestors. However, some cultural forms, which are viewed by the rest of the world as typically American, have evolved. Among them are the numerous popular musical forms including the blues, gospel, jazz, rock and roll, and country and western. In the world’s symphony halls, America is represented by many important composers including Virgil Thomson, Charles Ives, Aaron Copeland, and John Cage.

American poets of significance include Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, T. S. Elliott, John Ashbery, and James Merrill. Novelists also feature prominently in American culture. Colonial American life (1700s) has been captured in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and life before the Civil War (1861–65) was chronicled in the works of Mark Twain, including *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The excesses of the 1920s inspired *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, while the Great Depression (1929–40) that followed inspired *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Contemporary American authors who explore the human experience include Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, Paul Auster, Cormac McCarthy, Joyce Carol Oates, Lorrie Moore, and Annie Dillard.

Perhaps America’s most conspicuous contribution to world culture is the motion pictures that are synonymous with the city of Hollywood, California. Feature films like *Gone With the Wind*, *The Sound of Music*, and the *Wizard of Oz* are both embedded in the American psyche and distributed worldwide. Of similar significance are television programs. Throughout the world, people see America through the reflection of such popular programs as *Bonanza*, *Dallas*, and *Baywatch*. In 21st century “reality” television became popular, where television series chronicle the lives and escapades of everyday Americans doing either everyday or extraordinary things. Such programs include *American Idol* and *Survivor*.

#### 15 WORK

The United States has an advanced industrialized economy offering almost any job conceivable. The typical American workweek lasts 40 hours. Although the workday could begin and end at any hour, most Americans work between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm. The lunch break typically starts between 11:30 am and 12:30 pm and lasts between 30 minutes and an hour. Businesses, however, do not close during the lunch break. By law, as of 2007, the minimum wage employers must pay employees was \$5.85 per hour. The 2007 Fair Minimum Wage Act will raise the federal minimum wage twice more: to \$6.55 per hour on 24 July 2008 and to \$7.25 per hour on 24 July 2009. After 40 hours, an employee is entitled to overtime pay. Though some workers are paid by the hour, many Americans receive a weekly salary. Instead of an hourly wage, these employees are paid a fixed sum and are not paid extra when their work week extends past 40 hours. Many companies offer their employees one or two weeks of paid vacation after one year on the job. The number of vacation days given to an employee typically increases with the number of years he or she has been on the job, but rarely exceeds four weeks. Americans begin to retire from the workforce at age 65, although many work well into their 70s.

In the 1950s, the American workplace was dominated by white men. Since then, federal laws banning discrimination on the basis of sex and race have opened the workplace to women and ethnic minorities. Consequently, the workplace is becoming more diverse. However, the leadership of many American companies is still composed predominantly of white males.

In the late 1990s, a phenomenon of immediate urgency in the American workplace was the practice of “downsizing.” In order to stay competitive in the world economy, companies of all sizes were reducing the size of their workforces by laying off large numbers of employees. This was the case even with companies that were performing well and generating generous profits for their owners. Many of the employees who were downsized out of their jobs were the more highly-paid white-collar workers in their 40s and 50s. Through the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, workers felt that there was an unwritten understanding that if a worker was loyal to his or her employer and did a good job, he or she could expect to work at that company until retirement—at least as long as the company was profitable. In the 1990s, workers lost their jobs not because they were performing poorly, nor because the company was losing money, but because the company had changed its organizational structure and eliminated the workers’ positions altogether. This “change in the rules” changed employees’ attitudes toward employers and forced them to be more self-reliant and



self-centered. Savvy employees no longer saw their employers in a paternal light, and company loyalty was to a lesser extent part of the employer/employee relationship.

Another challenge for the American economy is the scarcity of good paying jobs for lower-skilled workers. The manufacturing jobs of the 1950s and 60s paid good wages and offered good benefits to low-skilled workers, most of whom were supported by a powerful labor union. However, these jobs have increasingly been automated or shipped offshore to countries where nonunionized workers earn a fraction of their American counterparts. The jobs available to low-skilled workers offer much less.

These structural changes in the economy are increasing the income disparity between the rich and the poor in American society.

## 16 SPORTS

About 40% of all Americans play sports. Americans enjoy and participate in all sports. The primary sports played by school children include baseball, basketball, football (American style), ice hockey, and soccer. Although these more rigorous sports are abandoned by most Americans as they reach their mid-40s, interest in them remains strong and, except for soccer, they are the most popular spectator sports enjoyed by Americans. Older Americans who participate in competitive sports prefer golf, tennis, and bowling.

The most popular noncompetitive sport is walking for exercise, followed by swimming, bicycle riding, fishing, and camping. With a growing emphasis upon the need to become healthier, Americans in greater numbers are joining gyms, hiring personal trainers, and participating in other forms of working out to reduce health risks and live longer and happier lives.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment opportunities abound in the United States. Many Americans go to motion pictures, sporting events, and amusement parks. Perhaps the best known amusement park in the United States is Disney World in Orlando, Florida. This mammoth installation is a city unto itself. Americans also entertain themselves by going to a restaurant for dinner or by reading. Sporting events including games staged by the National Football League (NFL), major league baseball, and the National Basketball Association (NBA) are watched by millions both on TV and in giant stadiums and arenas, many holding 50,000 persons or more. The annual football championship game, the "Super Bowl," is always the most watched televised event of the year. In fact, "Super Bowl Sunday" is approaching the status of an American holiday.

Many Americans have hobbies like gardening, coin collecting, and model building. However, no entertainment medium is as widely experienced as television. The average American spends more than four hours a day watching television. This number is certainly higher for children. The most popular shows on television are half-hour-long situational comedies, referred to as "sit-coms." These shows are shown during "prime time," the most popular viewing period of the day, between 8 pm and 10 pm. Most popular shows during the daytime are soap operas where ongoing dramatic interpersonal situations are presented with story lines running for months or years. In many American households, the television is on whenever

someone is in the house, even if no one is watching. Ninety-nine percent of households possess at least one television set, but the number of TV sets in the average U.S. household is 2.24. Sixty-six percent of American homes have three or more television sets. On average, the television is on in the home for 8 hours and 14 minutes per day. Sixty-six percent of Americans regularly watch television while eating dinner. Americans also pay for cable television or direct satellite broadcasts, and rent DVDs (previously videos). The U.S. is now moving to digital television. Legislation passed in 2006 requires over-the-air stations to cease analog broadcasting by February 2009. But led by female teenage viewing, in the 21st century average American television viewing continues to increase in spite of growing competition from new media platforms and devices, such as video iPods, cell phones, and streaming video.

America is becoming a nation of gamblers. Gambling, long considered a morally objectionable activity, has become a wildly popular form of entertainment. Until the late 1970s, most forms of gambling were either illegal or highly restricted. Gambling's transition to respectability was aided by the institution of state-sponsored lotteries that are now used in 42 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands as a means to generate revenues. In the early 21st century, more Americans gambled than went to movies, theater, opera, and concerts combined.

Popular children's toys include video games and bicycles. Action figures like GI Joe are popular with boys, while crafts and dolls are preferred by girls. Perhaps the most famous doll in America is "Barbie." Most American girls have at least one Barbie doll.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Typical American crafts include basketweaving, knitting, needlepoint, woodworking, pottery, glass blowing, and weaving. If a visitor from another country set out to purchase a craft item essentially American, he or she may wish to shop for a patchwork quilt.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

American society struggles with many social problems chief of which are crime, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, racism, sexism, and violence. The prevalence of sex and violence in American movies, television shows, and even popular songs on the radio has led the government to encourage the entertainment industry to establish a ratings system designed to help parents shelter their children from objectionable content. According to estimates, U.S. citizens spend as much as \$220 billion a year on illicit drugs, 44% of the world retail illicit drug market total. In 2001 it was estimated that 41.7% of the U.S. population 12 years old or over had used illicit drugs at some time in their lives.

In recent years sexual activity among teenagers has declined in the United States, and contraceptive use has improved, but teenage sex is still a significant social issue for Americans. As of 2003, 47% of all teenagers in grades 9–12 reported having had intercourse. Although American teen sexual activity is similar to that in other developed countries, American girls are much more likely to become pregnant: 34% of women in the United States become pregnant at least once before they are 20 years old.

In 2006, over 7.2 million people were on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole—3.2% of all U.S. adult residents or 1 in every 31 adults. At the beginning of 2008, 2,319,258 Americans were in jail or prison—one in 99.1 adults. The U.S. prison population is disproportionately African American. The United States has imprisoned more people than any other country: 500,000 more than China, which has a population five times greater than the United States. Statistics reveal that the United States holds 25% of the world's prison population, but only 5% of the world's people. The 50 U.S. states spent more than \$49 billion on corrections in 2007, up from less than \$11 billion 20 years earlier. The rate of increase for prison costs was six times greater than for higher education spending. The average annual cost per prisoner was \$23,876, with Rhode Island spending the most (\$44,860) and Louisiana the least (\$13,009).

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Homosexuality has gained increasing acceptance in the United States, although gay people often face discrimination, prejudice, and violence. Same-sex marriage is a divisive political issue in the United States. Massachusetts recognized same-sex marriage in 2004, although this only affects state law. The federal government does not recognize same-sex marriages in Massachusetts as being marriages under federal law. Connecticut, Vermont, New Jersey, California, and New Hampshire created legal unions that, while not called marriages, are explicitly defined as offering all the rights and responsibilities of marriage under state (though not federal) law to same-sex couples. Maine, Hawaii, the District of Columbia, Oregon, and Washington created legal unions for same-sex couples that offer varying degrees of rights and responsibilities of marriage. However, 26 states have constitutional amendments explicitly barring the recognition of same-sex marriage, confining civil marriage to a legal union between a man and a woman. In 2006, the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would prohibit states from recognizing same-sex marriages, was debated in the U.S. Senate, but was ultimately defeated in both houses of Congress.

There are more women in the United States than men (149.1 million versus 144.5 million in 2004), and women live longer than men. While women in America have made great strides in approaching equality with men, women still have not gained parity with men in earnings: in 2004 women aged 15 and older who worked full time, year-round, earned 77 cents for every \$1 earned by their male counterparts. More women hold high school diplomas and bachelor's degrees than men, and women vote more regularly than men. There were 25.4 million women age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or more education in 2004, more than double the number 20 years earlier. However, there are fewer women in the workforce than men, and more women work in the educational services and health care and social assistance industries than in any other. There were 6.5 million women-owned business in the United States in 2002, up 20% from 1997. Women in 2004 had an average 1.9 children during their lives, down from 3.1 in 1976. The total number of active duty women in the military in 2004 was 212,000. Of that total, 35,100 women were officers and 177,000 were enlisted.

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# THE AMISH

- ALTERNATE NAMES:** Old Order Amish, Amish Mennonites, Plain People, Anabaptists
- LOCATION:** United States (majority in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana); Canada (Ontario)
- POPULATION:** 218,000
- LANGUAGE:** English (with outsiders); German dialect known as Pennsylvania Dutch [or Pennsylvania German] (with each other)
- RELIGION:** Amish (an Anabaptist Christian sect)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Amish are members of a Protestant religious sect that traces its roots back to the Anabaptist movement in 16th-century Europe. The Anabaptists (a word that means “rebaptizers”) believed in adult baptism (instead of the prevailing practice of infant baptism) and promoted a literal interpretation of the teachings of Jesus. In seeking to pattern their daily lives around the teachings of scripture, they promoted a complete separation of church from the government, a move that led to the persecution and death of many Anabaptists in the 16th century. In 1536 Menno Simons, a Dutch Catholic priest, became the leader of a small group of Anabaptists who soon became known as Mennonites. In the late 17th century, followers of the Swiss Anabaptist cleric Jacob Ammann broke away to form their own church, whose members came to be called the Amish. To the basic Anabaptist doctrines of adult baptism and nonviolence, Ammann added the inclusion of ceremonial foot-washing in the communion service, the strict shunning of excommunicated church members, and the practice of dressing in plain clothing.

Responding to government persecution and economic hardship, the Amish, like other Anabaptist groups, began emigrating to other parts of the world, including America. They arrived in the United States in two stages. The first wave of Amish immigrants settled in Pennsylvania between 1727 and about 1790; the second migrated to Ohio, New York, Indiana, and Illinois between 1815 and 1865. The Amish who remained in Europe were eventually assimilated into Mennonite or mainstream Protestant congregations, leaving only those who had emigrated to preserve their religious tradition. In the New World, the Amish faced hardships, including pressure to fight in the American Revolution, but found the religious freedom they had sought. They have continued to practice their religion, succeeding at agricultural and, more recently, nonagricultural work while preserving their cultural roots across the generations.

Those communities that practice strict adherence to Amish precepts and customs are known as the Old Order Amish and are easily recognizable to outsiders by their somber, conservative clothing reminiscent of a previous century and by their use of horse-drawn buggies instead of automobiles. In their attempt to live lives of simplicity comparable to those of their ancestors, they also farm without tractors and make do at home without telephones, electricity, central heating, and other modern conveniences. Living in close-knit communities, they rely on each other and on their devotion to their religion to meet their needs and ensure the continuation of their way of life.

While the Amish strive to live in the world, but not of it, they have not been able to completely maintain a distance from the ever present media. Since the mid 20th century, many movies, books, and television shows have portrayed the Amish community in not always favorable terms, often without a full understanding of the customs and practices of the people. Often this unwanted publicity leads to discrimination against the Amish, as they may be portrayed as backward people who are defiant of local governments. The practices of shunning and *rumspringa* (a time when some Amish youth rebel against the practices of their community) are sometimes portrayed for their sensational value without offering a complete explanation of their purpose in strengthening the bonds of community. Occasionally, the public eye is shown a little bit of the great faith and commitment to love and forgiveness that are so central to the Amish faith.

In 2006, a non-Amish gunman in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, went into an Amish school and held 10 girls as hostages. He then murdered five and injured the others before killing himself. The immediate response from the families and friends of the Amish children was one of forgiveness and reconciliation, not only for the shooter, but for his family as well. The Amish and Mennonites are often thought of as being part of the same group. However, while both share a common heritage and many common beliefs and practices, they are properly defined as two separate groups and, since immigrating to North America, they have generally maintained separate settlements.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Amish population in the United States and Ontario, Canada, was estimated at just over 218,000 in 2007. The three largest communities are located in Ohio (54,270), Pennsylvania (48,600), and Indiana (36,180), accounting for nearly 70% of the total Amish population. Both Ohio and Pennsylvania have over 300 Amish church districts and Indiana has more than 260. Some studies have shown that the Amish population doubles about every 20 years. In 1951 there were about 200 church districts in the U.S.; in 2007 there were about 1,615. From 2000 to 2007 the largest number of new settlements were found in Wisconsin. The Amish also live in other parts of the country and can be found as far west as Montana and as far south as Florida and Texas. Altogether, they are found in more than 27 states in the U.S. There are over 4,100 Amish in Ontario, Canada.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Amish speak English with outsiders and a German dialect among themselves. Their language is a combination of their native German and the English that they learned upon their arrival in North America. It is known as Pennsylvania Dutch. In this case, the word “Dutch” does not refer to the Netherlands, but rather comes from the German word *Deutsch*, which means “German.” A sample of Pennsylvania Dutch words:

Mamm	Mother
Daat	Father
Grossdawdi	Grandfather
Grossmudder	Grandmother
redd-up	tidy up
outen	turn out, as in “outen the light”

strubbly	messy
dabbich	clumsy
rutchich	not well-behaved

Pennsylvania Dutch is the language used at worship services and most members read from a German Bible. However, most Amish read and write in English. English is the primary language of instruction in the schools. A small number of Amish speak Bernese Swiss German; they are known as Swiss Amish.

The Amish refer to all non-Amish as English. They sometimes refer to themselves as Plain People.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Amish do not believe in any non-Christian folktales, myths, or legends. However, many have retained a body of beliefs about folk healing, derived from both German and rural American traditions. Home remedies, including teas, tonics, salves, and poultices, are passed on from one family to another and between generations. In addition, some Amish subscribe to a somewhat controversial type of faith healing called sympathy "curing," or "powwowing," which relies on charms, amulets, and physical treatments. The following is a typical powwowing charm, said to cure a person who has worms. The following words are repeated silently while the healer circles the patient three times:

You are a little worm, not entirely grown.  
 You plague me in marrow and bone.  
 You may be white, black, or red,  
 In a quarter of an hour, you will be dead.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Amish are Christians who believe in the direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the believer. For them, the Bible (Luther's German Bible) is of primary importance since they consider its text to be the direct word of God. The Amish faith is also shaped by two other texts: *Martyrs Mirror* and the *Ausbund*. *Martyrs Mirror*, first published in 1660, is a collection of stories concerning those who have been persecuted and martyred for their faith. The *Ausbund* is a hymnal of lyrics written by persecuted Anabaptists in the 16th century. The Amish profess the 18 articles of Dordrecht Confession, written in 1632, as a central creed. Individuals will study these tenets and accept them as their own confession of faith at their baptism.

The Amish adhere to the Anabaptist tenets of nonviolence and believer baptism. Their most distinctive belief, however, is that of a strict separation between church and government. The German word *gelassenheit* (gay-la-sen-hite), meaning "yielding oneself to a higher authority," is a primary principle of Amish life and religion. Believing that the laws of man are often at odds with the teachings of scripture, they choose to live by faith, apart from the common society, embracing the teachings of scripture as a guide for daily living, rather than conforming to local customs.

The Ordnung (meaning "order") is the set of scripturally-based practices and principles by which the Amish pattern their daily lives. The Ordnung is primarily a collection of oral traditions and beliefs passed down through the generations. While many practices are common to all Amish communities, the Ordnung generally differs somewhat from one community to the next, based on the local customs and interpretations of scripture.



There are four primary groups of Amish. The Old Order Amish are the most conservative in their strict adherence to traditional practices of plain dress, rural life and occupation, and separation for worldly customs. The Amish Mennonites and Beachy Amish split from the Old Order Amish and have fewer restrictions in practice. For instance, the Amish Mennonites and Beachy Amish may use electricity in their homes and drive automobiles, while the Old Order Amish travel by horse and buggy and rely on other fuels such as wood and kerosene for power. The New Order Amish separated from the Old Order in the mid 1960s. They also tend to use horse and buggy for transportation, however, many groups allow the use of electricity and telephones within the home and modern tractors may be used instead of the horse-drawn plows of the Old Order Amish.

Settlements that are geographically close to one another may form a single church district. Each district is headed by a bishop, two or three ministers, and a deacon, all of whom are chosen by a process known as "the lot." Only men may serve in these leadership positions and all men may be eligible for selection as a leader. No special theological training is required. The bishop presides over the sacraments of the church (such as baptism, weddings, and funerals). Bishops and ministers may preach at worship services. Deacons serve as coordinators for charity within the congregation.

Regarding church buildings as a sign of worldliness, the Old Order and New Order Amish hold their three-hour long Sunday worship services in the homes of church members without adornments such as candles, flowers, or musical instruments.

In many areas, services might take place every other Sunday, allowing for one bishop to serve two congregations. Services include singing from the *Ausbund*, prayer, scripture reading, and messages offered by the presiding bishop and one or two presiding ministers. Beachy Amish, and Amish Mennonites have adopted practices of holding weekly services in a meetinghouse. Special communion services open to the entire district are held twice a year, in the spring and fall.

As a community-based faith, maintaining strict church discipline is considered to be an important principle in strengthening both the spiritual and social bonds of the community. Minor offenses against church rules typically result in a rebuke or temporary ban, while serious infractions such as adultery or refusal to submit to church authority may result in excommunication and in “shunning” by the entire community. The practices involved in shunning and excommunication may differ from one congregation to the other; however, the overall purpose is not to condemn or cast out a member but to give them an opportunity to mend their ways, confess, repent, and return to the church. Only baptized members of the church are subject to the laws of church discipline.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major Christian holidays that are important to the Amish include Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost, although the manner and degree of observance vary from one community to another. Every wedding is a holiday in itself, involving not only the day on which the service actually occurs (always a Tuesday or Thursday) but also the day of communal preparation that precedes it. Christmas is the most important holiday, although Christmas trees and Santa Claus do not form part of the festivities (children may, however, receive modest presents, such as a simple toy or nuts and candy). The extended family holds a festive meal on Christmas Day. Good Friday is observed as a day of fasting. Some Amish observe Christmas and Easter for two days in the European manner. Thanksgiving is celebrated without all the festivities usually associated with it by non-Amish Americans. For the Amish, Thanksgiving is a quiet day for visiting friends and relatives.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism is viewed as the most important rite of passage within the community. Most individuals choose to be baptized, between the ages of 18 and 22. At the time of their baptism, they are expected to make the profession of faith and a vow that marks the beginning of their lifelong commitment to the teachings of scripture and adherence to the *Ordnung*.

In some communities, the decision to be baptized is preceded by a period known as *rumspringa*. Beginning at about age 16 and sometimes extending to the age of about 22, many young men (primarily) and women may participate in “worldly” activities such as wearing English style clothing, going to movies, buying and driving cars, going to bars and nightclubs, and even spending time in the English world with English acquaintances. The purpose of *rumspringa* is to show the youth that their decision as to whether or not they will be baptized into the church and the community is a personal choice, not a dictate. Once a member takes their baptismal vow, he or she is expected to follow all of the practices of the church and is subject to church discipline, including shunning and excommu-

nication. Individuals who choose not to be baptized may leave the community without formal sanctions from the church.

Weddings are large public affairs in which the entire community participates; for this reason they are usually held in the fall (particularly in November), when the agricultural workload is light and everyone can be involved. Weddings are typically held on a Tuesday or Thursday, a schedule that allows for one full day of cooking and other preparations, one day for the wedding party, and one day for clean up. Weekend weddings would conflict with the Sunday Sabbath day of rest. The wedding itself involves a church ceremony followed by an elaborate communal meal, usually at the bride’s home. The bride typically wears a blue dress that she has made herself and a white apron. This dress will serve as a Sunday worship dress. The groom will wear a black suit. The couple’s parents provide substantial gifts, such as farm equipment or livestock, to help the couple start out on their own. The newlyweds may live with the bride’s parents until they have a home set-up for themselves. During the weeks following the wedding, the couple will spend weekends visiting the homes of relatives, at which time they often receive wedding gifts of practical household items.

Although death is treated with solemnity, it is accepted as a matter of course. Funerals usually take place on the third day after death. The deceased is typically dressed in white and buried in a coffin made to traditional specifications by an Amish carpenter. A woman may be buried with the same white apron that she wore at her wedding.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Since the Amish tend to marry within their own communities, many Amish people have the same family names—among a population of over 200,000 there are only about 126 surnames altogether. The most common names in Indiana and Ohio are Miller and Yoder; in Pennsylvania, they are Stoltzfus and King. Given the small number of surnames, it is common to find Amish persons who share exactly the same first and last names, a problem dealt with by the widespread use of nicknames within the Amish community.

Most social interaction between members of the community takes place in private homes. Husbands and wives do not display affection in public, since it would be considered immodest. Young men and women often meet together for a Sunday evening singing. It is often through this fellowship gathering that young couples meet and begin a courtship. The young man may drive or walk the young woman to and from the singing and might then spend some time at her home as the two get to know one another. When they decide to marry, the woman’s father will announce or “publish” the engagement during a Sunday worship service and announce the date of the wedding.

While the Amish do interact with their English neighbors from time to time, this is usually in a public business setting, such as at shops or restaurants. The Amish do not serve in the military, vote, or recognize the authority of any worldly government. The Amish suspicion of government and authority is a holdover from the mistreatment they received long ago from the governments of their European homelands. As much as possible, the Amish reject worldly things and material goods. Within their church congregations, they strive to maintain



*Amish children peer from the rear of a horse-drawn buggy in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. (AP Images/Rusty Kennedy)*

strong discipline, as well as honesty and love for all, inspired by the example set by the earliest Christians.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Since the Amish practice of separation from the outside world rules out college attendance, there are no Amish physicians. While some may find doctors they trust outside their own communities, many Amish also consult with folk healers and other providers of alternative medicine, including chiropractors. While there is no specific Biblical citation against the use of modern medical practices, most Amish choose to forego more high-tech procedures and medications as a way to express faith in healing from God. Some Amish people resist preventive health care measures such as immunization. Most women give birth at home with the aid of a midwife.

Amish homes tend to be large and simple, with little decoration other than quilts and china. Furnishings must be spare enough to allow room for religious services, which rotate from one home to another instead of being held in a church. Area rugs are preferred over wall-to-wall carpeting, which is considered overly extravagant. In the winter, individual rooms are typically heated with a kerosene heater or wood stove rather than central heating. The use of electricity and other services provided by public utilities is generally forbidden.

A strong sense of community and mutual aid is present in every Amish community. Members of the community freely offer their financial and other physical resources to one another

in times of need. The Amish typically do not accept government-sponsored welfare or social security and do not purchase health or life insurance. Instead, the needs of families and individuals are provided for by extended family or by the community at large through special funds set up for this purpose. Amish communities are also supportive of each other in a greater reach as well. If one settlement suffers from floods, tornadoes, or other natural disasters, members of other settlements will travel, sometimes at great lengths, to assist in rebuilding.

The main means of transportation for the Amish is the horse-drawn buggy or wagon. They do not use motor vehicles. Some may refuse even to ride bicycles, although Amish children are generally allowed to ride scooters.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Amish are strongly committed to marrying within their own communities—and remaining married to their original partners—since the perpetuation of their way of life depends primarily on producing new generations rather than increasing their numbers through conversion of people from outside their communities. The centrality of the family in Amish life can be seen in the fact that the Amish measure the population of their communities by the number of families rather than the number of individuals. Their families are typically large. The average number of children in an Amish family is about seven and one-fourth of the Amish have ten or more children. Divorce is not permitted.

Family roles are clearly defined. The husband is considered to be the head of the household, as both the spiritual leader and primary breadwinner. Women serve as the primary caregivers for children while maintaining the home. Husbands and wives do not display affection in public. While strict obedience is expected of Amish children, attitudes toward children are generally loving and affectionate. Amish children begin helping their parents with farm work or other domestic chores at an early age. Older children are expected to help care for and set an example for their younger siblings. It is not unusual for the family home to contain three generations. The elderly often live in small apartments attached to or on the same property of the home of one of their adult children. Adult brothers may maintain farms or businesses in cooperation with each other. Adult sisters may maintain a relationship with one another through special “sister’s day,” held once a month or so at the home of one of the women as a means to combine both social and work activities, such as canning vegetables together or sewing a quilt.

An Amish person who is excommunicated by the church and shunned by the community is also shunned by his or her spouse and family as well. While the particular practices involved in shunning differ from one community to another, the shunned individual is not necessarily expected to leave the family home. In some communities, the one who is shunned is not permitted to participate in some social activities with other family or community members and is not permitted to sit at the same dinner table as the others. The period of shunning is meant to lead a person to confess their wrong doing, repent, and reaffirm their vow to the church and the community.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The plain style of dress adopted by the Amish is part of the reason that they have become known as the Plain People. The practice of dressing in plain clothes is related more closely to the concepts of community than to any religious belief. Humility and obedience are of far greater importance to the Amish community than pride and individualism. By dressing plainly and in similar fashion, the community embraces a sense of oneness and of separateness from the world.

Colors and styles of clothing may vary from one community to the next, but there are many similarities. The Amish fasten all their clothing by means of old-fashioned hooks and eyes or buttons, rather than zippers or Velcro. Most clothing is made at home with fabric purchased at a local store that specifically carries the types of fabrics acceptable for use. Amish women wear solid color dresses with long sleeves and full skirts. Some groups may allow short-sleeves for women, especially in summer months. Although they do not use patterned fabrics, their clothes can be colorful. Besides the neutral black, gray, and brown, dresses may also be green, blue maroon, or purple, among other colors. Women typically wear aprons and shawls. Women’s clothing is fastened with straight pins or snaps. Women and girls almost always wear a bonnet or prayer covering. The styles of these head coverings may differ by community and, within each community, the color and style of the bonnets may have special significance. For instance, young, single women might wear black bonnets while married women wear white. A community might have one style of bonnet for children and youth and another style to show that one has been baptized. Women never use makeup or perfume, nor do

they wear jewelry of any kind, including wedding rings, since wearing such items might lead to prideful attitudes. Women wear their hair in braids or in a bun.

The men normally wear ordinary solid colored shirts, often blue or white, with full-cut pants called “broadfalls.” The broadfalls are so named because instead of having a zipper in front, they have a wide flap that folds down when necessary and is fastened up at the sides. Broadfalls are always held up by suspenders, never belts, and they do not have creases or cuffs. Suit coats are straight-cut, black or navy blue, and without collars or lapels. Men typically wear broad-rimmed black felt hats. Straw hats are worn by some groups, particularly in summer. Boys and single men stay clean-shaven until they get married, at that time, they grow beards, but never mustaches. Men and women wear boots, sneakers, or any other plain, comfortable footwear. In the summer, many go barefoot.

## **12 FOOD**

Amish meals are typically prepared in old-fashioned country kitchens, on a gas or wood stove, since the Amish do not use electricity. Women will generally can their own fruits and vegetables. Meals tend to be plain and filling, of the meat and potatoes type of meal, and entirely homemade. Very few processed or prepared foods are purchased by Amish families. Even so, the Amish do enjoy some unique and tasty dishes. Dandelion salad with bacon-fat dressing is a favorite. Another is *Snitz un Knepp*, dried apple slices cooked in sugar water with dumplings like doughnuts and served as a stew. Snitz pie is a pie made from dried apples. *Chow-chow* is an assortment of pickled vegetables. A tasty snack is cup cheese, a creamy smooth cheese that is best when spread on bread or crackers. Lebanon bologna is a type of cold sausage and red beet eggs are pickled in beets and vinegar and sometimes eaten straight from the jar. Cream of celery soup is a particular favorite for many Amish weddings. In Amish families, the main meal is served in the evening during the part of the year when school is in session. When summer comes, the main meal is served at noon, with soup and sandwiches for supper.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Most Amish communities have their own schools, where children of all ages learn together in one- or two-room schoolhouses with no restrooms and no hot water. In some rural communities, Amish children will attend public schools. Amish young people complete school only up to the eighth grade. After that, they are expected to become full-time workers on the family farms or businesses, although they sometimes continue their schooling one-half day each week, perfecting their skills as needed. The Amish do not believe it is necessary for their young people to attend high school or pursue an education at the college level. They do not value education for its own sake or feel that education makes one a better person. The standard curriculum includes reading (in basic German and in English), basic arithmetic, spelling and grammar (primarily in English), and some history and geography. Topics in science, independent thinking, or critical analysis are not considered appropriate or necessary. As for life skills, Amish boys learn farming from watching and helping their fathers, while Amish girls learn to be good homemakers by imitating their mothers. Teachers in Amish schools are not required to have attended college. Instead, young Amish people, usually women, who

have distinguished themselves as students simply remain in the school, assuming the role of teacher to the younger children. Within the school, older children will serve as tutors to the younger children.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Although artistic expression does not play an important role in the plain and simple lifestyle of the Amish, they do enjoy singing religious songs—mostly hymns sung *a cappella* as part of their religious services, at weddings, and Sunday singing sessions for young adults. The Amish also entertain their young children with sing-alongs and nursery songs. There are several Amish publications, including two newspapers, *Die Botschaft* (“The Message”) and the *Budget*, which consists largely of news about the various Amish communities. There is also a magazine for Amish teachers, *Blackboard Bulletin*, a monthly called *The Diary: Of the Old Order Churches*, and a publication called *Family Life*.

#### **15 WORK**

Traditionally, most Amish people are farmers, with family farms small enough to be run without the aid of mechanization, including tractors. More concerned with subsistence than with high profit margins, these Amish farmers raise livestock in modest numbers along with a variety of crops. Since about the 1960s, however, some farms have become more specialized, such as dairy farms or chicken farms and tend to be more fully mechanized, with items such as mechanical milkers and large cooling tanks. Many Amish have begun working at nonfarm jobs within their surrounding English communities. Amish men might find work at commercial construction companies or start their own businesses in furniture and cabinet making. The Amish community in Pennsylvania’s Lancaster County is home to over 1,000 such businesses, including furniture makers, construction contractors, and quilt shops. Relying on long hours and quality workmanship, Amish entrepreneurs are thriving, with a failure rate much lower than the average for small businesses. Some single women or married women whose children are grown might find part-time jobs at local shops or restaurants. Women may also make quilts for sale at local shops or offer their own canned and baked goods for sale at farmer’s markets, bakeries, restaurants, and general stores.

#### **16 SPORTS**

The Amish play as hard as they work. Although they do not participate in organized community or professional sports, they often play games of softball or volleyball. In season, hunting is a popular pastime among Amish men and Amish boys enjoy hiking. The country life of the Amish provides many opportunities for outdoor recreation. In the summer, everyone enjoys fishing, swimming, and all kinds of games; while in the winter, sledding and skating on frozen ponds provide plenty of excitement.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Amish children usually play with homemade rather than store-bought toys. Teenage girls enjoy playing clapping games called “botching,” played by two people seated opposite each other in chairs. Families often spend leisure time attending weekly auctions and visiting relatives and other members of the commu-

nity. In the fall, the many weddings that take place typically occupy much of a family’s leisure time. Sunday evening singings are a popular activity for young men and women. Some Amish will travel to different areas of the country for family reunions or simply to visit other Amish communities. Some families might vacation by travelling to historic sites or national parks. Some Amish communities may even charter buses to travel to distant locations.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Amish women are known for their quilts, which are all hand-stitched with distinctive styles. Quilt making is an important communal activity as well as a form of artistic expression. In addition, it has taken on increasing economic significance as Amish women have begun selling quilts to the general public in greater numbers. Amish quilts are also exhibited in museums and other public places, both in the United States and in other countries throughout the world. Amish made furniture and cabinetry has also become popular in the general commercial market. Personal photography and other types of representational art are not generally used among the Amish, in part because of a religious belief against creating graven images, but also because photos and other images of individuals might lead to expressions of pride rather than humility.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

A primary problem for the Amish and similar groups is the struggle to maintain their traditional ways in the face of the temptations of the modern world that surrounds them. The Amish are very much in the world, if not of it, and they see quite clearly the advantages that modern technology can provide. An Amish farmer toiling behind a horse-drawn plow can look up and watch his neighbor do his plowing with a tractor in a fraction of the time. An Amish family travelling in a horse-drawn buggy may worry about their safety on roads with fast cars and semi-trucks. The temptations of the English world are even more evident to the young people. Like teenagers everywhere, many Amish young people engage in typical forms of mischief. Usually, though, they return to the old ways as they grow older.

The strict beliefs and practices of the Amish mean that problems such as alcoholism and addiction, homelessness, or domestic violence are very rare. If such issues arise, they are usually quickly and strictly dealt with by church officials and those who are in need of assistance are offered such.

The Amish have sometimes faced difficulties with government authorities over issues of health care, education, and child labor, since they do not accept standard government regulations in these matters. The Old Order Amish Steering Committee, organized in the late 1960s, serves as a representative body through which the Amish may most easily deal with specific issues that arise. Most cases are settled amicably as most issues fall under a protection of religious freedom.

The Amish are sometimes discriminated against as being a backward and uneducated people. Their separation from the world is sometimes interpreted as hostility or general defiance against government. However, the Amish believe it is important to show respect for local government and government officials. They will accept the rules and regulations of the government as long as they do not come in conflict with their



religious convictions. The Amish do contribute to society by paying state and federal income tax, sales and real estate taxes, and in many cases, public school taxes. The Amish are exempt from Social Security taxes because they consider it to be a form of insurance. In return, they do not accept Social Security or other government-subsidized welfare benefits. The Amish are permitted to vote, but most do not, unless there is a particular local issue that affects their community.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The roles of men and women are clearly defined along very traditional lines. It is very rare for men or women to remain single. The husband is the head of the household as a spiritual leader and as the primary financial support for the family. The wife is the primary caregiver for the children and is primarily responsible for maintaining the home. Women may perform some tasks on the farm, such as milking or care of livestock. Husband and wife might make joint decisions concerning the household and on matters of discipline for children. However, the amount of input that the wife has in such decisions may depend on the attitude of her husband. Mothers with young children generally do not work outside of the home and farm. Single women or mothers with grown children might work part-time in local shops or restaurants. Some single or older women may be permitted to own and operate a business, such as a quilt shop, bakery, or greenhouse, but only when this is allowed within the Ordnung and if the woman's husband (or father in the case of single women) approves. Only men are permitted to be leaders in the church and community.

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—reviewed by K. Ellicott

# ANTIGUANS AND BARBUDANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** An-TEE-gahns and Bar-BYEW-dahns

**LOCATION:** Antigua and Barbuda

**POPULATION:** 69,842

**LANGUAGE:** English; Creole dialect, Spanish

**RELIGION:** Anglican Church; other Protestant groups; Roman Catholicism

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The nation of Antigua and Barbuda (pronounced An-TEE-gah and Bar-BYEW-dah), located in the Leeward Islands, consists of two islands lying approximately 43 km (27 mi) apart and also encompasses a third, uninhabited island, Redonda. The country's main source of income is tourism, which employs most of the population, and its international airport serves as a base for travel throughout the region.

Christopher Columbus sighted the island of Antigua in 1493 and gave it its original name, Santa Mar'a de la Antigua, in honor of the Church of Santa Maria de la Antigua in Sevilla, Spain. The Carib Indians and the island's scarce water supply kept the Spanish, as well as the French, English, and Dutch, from colonizing it until 1632, when a group of British settlers from St. Kitts landed and managed to stay, establishing tobacco and ginger plantations. Except for a brief period of French rule in 1666, Antigua, joined shortly afterward by neighboring Barbuda, was to remain under uninterrupted British control for over 300 years.

At first, tobacco was grown, but in the 17th century sugar crops were found to be more profitable. It was Sir Christopher Codrington in 1674, who introduced sugar plantations to Antigua, together with the large numbers of African slaves needed to work on them.

Eleven years later, Codrington leased the island of Barbuda, primarily to supply Antigua with livestock and provisions. The Codrington family's lease of Barbuda continued for nearly 200 years; in 1860 Antigua and Barbuda were legally united under Great Britain.

As the sugar industry on Antigua grew, much of the land was deforested, exacerbating the island's water supply problems, which have continued to the present day. After the slaves were emancipated in 1834, their living conditions were little better than they had been under slavery and were in some instances worse, as they were now required to provide their own food and shelter out of their meager wages. There was little improvement in the situation of Antigua's Black laborers over the next century. In addition, an earthquake in 1843 and a hurricane in 1847 hit the island causing severe economic turmoil among the population. As a consequence of this dire situation, Barbuda decided to go back to the crown in the late 19 century. With the passing of time, Barbuda's administration became so dependent on Antigua that in a short period of time Barbuda was ran by its neighbor.

The inhabitants of Barbuda, which had no plantations, continued their subsistence farming on small plots of land. In the 1930s, drought and economic depression worsened conditions on Antigua to the point of civil unrest, and a specially appoint-

ed British commission recommended the establishment of a trade union, which proceeded to win a series of labor victories for Antiguan workers.

Extending its influence to the political realm, the Antigua Trades and Labour Union (ATLU) formed the Antigua Labor Party (ALP) in 1946. Thanks largely to its efforts, Antigua and Barbuda achieved universal adult suffrage with no income or literacy requirements by 1951. The party's leader, Vere Cornwall Bird, rose to political prominence, becoming chief minister of the Antiguan Parliament in 1961. Full internal self-government for Antigua and Barbuda was granted by the British in 1967. By the 1970s Antigua had developed an independence movement led by its Prime Minister George Walter, a politician who opposed the British system of independence within a federation of islands and supported complete independence from the European crown. However, and in spite of his plan for the island, Walter lost the 1976 elections at the hands of Vere Bird, who supported and encouraged regional integration. In 1981, Antigua and Barbuda achieved independence, with Vere Bird as its first prime minister. The newly formed state obtained United Nations and Commonwealth membership and joined the Organization of East Caribbean States.

In the 1990s, the government fended off multiple scandals, including allegations of smuggling Israeli arms to Colombian drug cartels, as well as misuse of public funds. Nevertheless, the Antigua and Barbuda public, as well as overseas investors, has retained confidence in the government, and the country has achieved much international acclaim for its input and contributions to democracy, human rights, economic and social programs, and on issues relating to defense—particularly of the Americas. In 1994, Vere Cornwall Bird (Father of the Nation) resigned as prime minister and was succeeded by his son, Lester B. Bird.

Politics in Antigua and Barbuda take place in a federal parliamentary representative democratic monarchy framework. In this system the Head of State—Elizabeth II as of 2008—is the monarch; the monarch appoints the Governor-General as the vice-regal representative. In 2007, Louise Lake-Tack became the first female to hold the position of Governor-General in the history of Antigua and Barbuda.

Economically, the dual-island nation has performed well. Construction oriented to building infrastructure in the tourism sector—especially hotels and housing—has been pivotal in achieving a steady pace of economic growth. In 2002, the service industry represented 74% of the economy, the industrial sector another 22%, and tourism accounted for 3.8%. Agricultural production is focused on satisfying the internal demand. Agricultural production has been hindered by the lack of water supply and scarcity of labor due to higher salaries in the construction and tourism realms.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Antigua and Barbuda—close to the midpoint of the Lesser Antilles—is located at the outer curve of the Leeward Islands, between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Antigua is 650 km (404 mi) southeast of Cuba. With an area of 281 sq km (108 sq mi), it is the second-largest of the Leeward Islands and about two-thirds the size of New York City. Its terrain is mostly low-lying, although Boggy Peak, located among volcanically formed hills in the west, rises to 399 m (1,309 ft). The interior is primarily scrub-covered with some forest cover.



Annual rainfall—averaging about 11 cm (4.3 in) per year—is lighter than that on most other islands in the West Indies, and there are no permanent rivers or streams on either Antigua or Barbuda, so water supply and conservation are of great concern to the nation's people. However, the country's dry climate, together with its abundant natural harbors and sandy beaches (said to number 365, one for each day of the year) have made it a prime location for tourism, and Antigua was one of the first sites in the Caribbean to attract foreign tourists as a vacation spot.

Barbuda lies about 50 km (31 mi) northeast of Antigua and is about half its size—176 sq km (68 sq mi). It is very flat—its highest elevation is 44.5 m (146 ft)—with sandy beaches and a large lagoon and mangrove swamp on its western side. The island, which was leased to a single British family for nearly 200 years, has only one village, Codrington. Much of the island is a scrub-covered wilderness covered with cactus and thornbush and roamed by a variety of undomesticated animals, including what may be the only deer on a Caribbean island. The uninhabited island of Redonda, which has been under the jurisdiction of Antigua since 1869, has an area of 2.6 sq km (1 sq mi). Phosphate mining was carried out on the island until 1914. The population of Antigua and Barbuda is estimated at just under 70,000, of which 1,200 lived on Barbuda. St. John's, the country's capital and economic center, has an estimated population of between 35,000 and 40,000 people.

Demographically, descendants from African slaves (black or mulatto—mixed black and white race) account for more than 90% of the population. Other mixed races represent 4.4% and

close to 2% are white. The majority of the population has Irish, British, and Portuguese roots; there are also Arab, Jewish, and Asian minorities.

### 3 LANGUAGE

English is the official language of Antigua and Barbuda, but most inhabitants speak a Creole dialect that is based on standard English combined with African expressions and local slang. English pronunciation and grammar are also modified. One of the most noticeable differences is in the use of object pronouns in the subject of a sentence, as in "Her my friend" (which also omits the helping verb "is" that would be found in the standard English sentence, "She is my friend."). A similar construction is "Us alive" for "We are alive." Objective pronouns may also replace possessive pronouns, as in "You come me church," which also omits the preposition "to" of the standard English construction, "You come to my church." Spanish is also widely spoken among certain groups in Antigua, mainly because of the constant waves of migration from the Dominican Republic and other Spanish-speaking zones to Antigua and Barbuda.

### 4 FOLKLORE

*Obeah*, a collection of animistic beliefs and practices derived from Africa, has adherents in Antigua and Barbuda, although it has been declared illegal. Those who subscribe to it believe it can heal the sick, harm one's enemies, and even be used for such mundane purposes as "fixing" a court case. Its features include a belief in spirits (of which the best-known are *jumbies*) and the preparation of herbal potions. There is also a body of unrelated medicinal folklore that has been preserved on the islands, which includes such remedies as the use of a paste made from a plant known as the cancanberry bush to treat thrush, and the ingestion of maiden-blush tea for a variety of purposes.

### 5 RELIGION

The Anglican Church has the largest membership of any religion in Antigua and Barbuda, claiming about 25% of the population. Other Protestant groups also have an important presence in the region. The Seventh-Day Adventists represent 12.3% of the population, Pentecostal followers account for 10.6%, the Monrovia Church, 10.5%, Roman Catholics, 10.4%, the Methodists, 7.9%, and the Baptists with 4.9% of the total population.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Antigua and Barbuda include New Year's Day (1 January), Labor Day (first Monday in May), CARICOM Day (3 July), Independence Day (1 November), Christmas (25 December) and Boxing Day (26 December), as well as Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Whit Monday, which occur on different dates each year.

The nation of Antigua and Barbuda is particularly known for its Carnival celebration, held in late July through the first Tuesday in August. Historically, this holiday celebrates the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies. Most of the festivities take place in the capital city of St. John's, including street parades led by revelers wearing elaborate glittering costumes, calypso and steel drum music, street dancing ("jump-up"),

and contests. The climax of the festival is J'Ouvert on the first Monday in August, when thousands of celebrants pour into the streets at 4:00 AM in a frenzy of dancing accompanied by steel drum and brass bands. The island of Barbuda holds its own more modest Carnival celebration, Caribana, in June.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The religious confirmation of young men and women, performed at puberty, signals their acceptance into the Church by the general congregation. Other major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are also marked by religious ceremonies.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

"Aunty" and "Uncle" are sometimes used as terms of respect in addressing one's elders, and a woman may be addressed by the word "Mistress" before her last name. A handshake is a customary greeting among business associates.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Antiguans and Barbudans live in houses constructed of concrete and wood, with at least two bedrooms, a living/dining room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Most homes on both islands now have indoor plumbing and electricity.

The average life expectancy in Antigua and Barbuda is 73 years. In the late 1980s, gastroenteritis and dysentery, mostly due to poor sanitation, were the most common illnesses and causes of death, especially in children. Other causes of death include heart disease, cerebro-vascular disease, cancer, and influenza. Hypertension is the most common medical condition on Barbuda, which has a 10-bed hospital. There is some malnutrition among the nation's children, some of whom are not immunized against common diseases.

Antigua and Barbuda has 1 physician for every 2,200 people, and one general hospital, the Holberton Hospital. In the early 1990s the hospital was often short of basic supplies, but since 1994 supplies and services have been readily available. Sewage treatment and waste disposal problems have been under better control since the mid-1990s.

Antigua has 240 km (149 mi) of roads, previously known for their absence of street signs and other markings, including village names and distance indicators. Today, many streets and roads are marked, and through the cooperative efforts of local business and community organizations, road signs and village markers are more commonplace.

In 1992, 17,000 motor vehicles were registered. There is a railway consisting of 78 km (48 mi) of narrow-gauge track. St. John's is the major port, and Vere Cornwall Bird International Airport, about 10 km (6 mi) northeast of St. John's, accommodates large jetliners, serving as a hub for tourist travel in the region.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Couples in Antigua and Barbuda, as in other parts of the English-speaking Caribbean, are united in three basic types of relationships: legal marriage, unmarried cohabitation, and "visiting unions," where the man and woman live apart and the woman raises the children. Many children are raised by relatives other than their parents, and some grow up in a succession of different households. Decisions about where a child

will live are influenced by a variety of factors, including the parents' financial situation and employment patterns, educational opportunities, and the necessity of caring for the elderly. Inheritances are usually divided equally among legitimate and illegitimate children, and a 1987 law made it illegal to discriminate against children born out of wedlock. The country's fertility rate (estimated for 2008) is 2.2 children for each woman. With the growth of the tourism industry, an increasing number of women have entered the labor force.

### 11 CLOTHING

The people of Antigua and Barbuda wear modern Western-style clothing. Colorful costumes are worn by many during the Carnival celebration in August.

In 1992, a national competition to select a national dress was held as a part of the islands' eleventh anniversary of independence. The winning design was submitted by native Antiguan Heather Doram. The costume, which has versions for men and women, is worn by many Antiguan and Barbudans on Independence Day, 1 November.

### 12 FOOD

The Creole cuisine of Antigua and Barbuda is similar to that of other West Indian nations and includes such staples as rice and peas, pumpkin soup, and pepperpot soup. Fish and shellfish are an important part of the national diet, and the regional species of spiny lobster is especially popular, as are crabs and conch. Fungi, a sort of cornmeal pudding made with boiled okra, is another staple on the islands, especially served with salt fish.

Breadfruit (originally introduced to the region from the East Indies) is another staple, and meat-filled pastries ("pasties") are sold by street vendors. The country's most distinctive fruit is the Antigua black pineapple, which is exceptionally sweet.

### 13 EDUCATION

Primary and secondary education is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16, and pre-primary schooling is available from the age of 3. The educational system in Antigua and Barbuda is based on the British system, which has grade levels called "forms." Primary education is provided for five or six years, after which an examination is taken to pass on to the upper grades. Students then complete four or five years of secondary education.

There are 45 primary schools and 12 secondary schools. Although the nation has a literacy rate of 90%, there are serious deficiencies in the educational system, including a shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate facilities and supplies. Technical and teacher training is offered at the Antigua State College, and there is an offshore medical school, the University of Health Sciences, which was founded in 1982. In addition, the regional University of the West Indies has a continuing education facility in Antigua and Barbuda.

In 1998, Antigua and Barbuda decided to become the main provider of medical services in the Caribbean area. To accomplish this mission the nation built the most technologically advanced hospital in the Caribbean, the Mt. St. John Medical Centre.



*Antiguan girl carrying water jug. Many children are raised by relatives other than their parents, and some grow up in a succession of other households. (AP Images)*

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The music of the Fife Band is an important part of the islands' musical heritage. The band is made up of a stringed guitar, drum, and fife (or flute).

The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda, in St. John's, is dedicated to preserving the islands' heritage by maintaining their archaeological relics and historic buildings.

Internationally acclaimed author Jamaica Kincaid was born and grew up on the island of Antigua and now resides in the United States. Her novels and short stories, including *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) and *Annie John* (1985), provide a vivid portrait of the Antiguan people and way of life based on images and memories from her youth. Kincaid has also been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine since the 1970s, and her 1988 book-length essay, *A Small Place*, is a searing indictment of British colonialism, the tourist industry, and government corruption and neglect in post-colonial Antigua. Antiguan playwright Dorbrene "Fats" Omarde is known for dramas that address the social and political issues confronting his country.

### 15 WORK

The vast majority of people in Antigua and Barbuda are employed by the government. The figure for total employment in commerce or in service-sector jobs is 82% of the work force, while agriculture employs 11%, and industry employs the remaining 7%. Since tourism-related jobs are, in many cases,

seasonal, it is a common practice to have more than one source of income, which may include such part-time agricultural pursuits as keeping livestock or selling produce from “back-yard farming” at the market. Fishing is an important source of income on Barbuda, as are government employment and tourism.

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket is the national sport of Antigua and Barbuda, and the country has produced some of the world’s most outstanding players, including Viv Richards, Andy Roberts, Richie Richardson, and Curtley Adams, a fast bowler. Antiguan teams compete against teams from neighboring islands, and Antiguan play on the West Indies cricket team, which has been one of the world’s best since the 1970s. Soccer is another popular sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Caribbean’s universal male pastime of dominoes is enjoyed in Antigua and Barbuda. A game called *warri* is also popular. Favorite types of music include calypso, reggae, and hymns. Cricket is played recreationally, as are soccer, basketball, and netball.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Antiguan artisans are known for the exceptional quality of their hand thrown pottery. Striking items, both decorative and functional, are also crafted from hand-woven sea cotton adorned by batik and embroidery. Other handicrafts include woodcarving and basketry.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Antigua and Barbuda has serious environmental problems that threaten the nation’s economy and the health of its residents. In the absence of a central sewage system, contamination by raw sewage and other forms of domestic waste poses a grave threat to the water supply in a country without permanent natural lakes or perennial rivers. In addition, the removal of sand for construction purposes threatens the nation’s beaches, which are the basis of its tourist industry.

Inadequacies in the educational system have contributed to a shortage of skilled workers, and the tourist industry, while highly labor-intensive, creates work that is in most cases unskilled and low-paid. The government’s abolition of personal income taxes and its reliance on foreign borrowing has left the country with a massive foreign debt.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Violence against women, including spousal abuse, is a problem in both Antigua and Barbuda. The Domestic Violence Act prohibits and provides penalties for domestic violence, rape, and other sexual offenses, with maximum sentences (rarely imposed) ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment. Violence against women came into sharp focus in October 2005, when Senate President Hazelyn Francis was assaulted and raped in her home. In January 2006 authorities charged an 18-year-old youth with the attack.

While the role of women in society is not restricted legally, economic conditions in rural areas tend to limit women to home and family, although some women work as domestics,

in agriculture, or in the large tourism sector. Women are well represented in the public sector, accounting for 54% of the public service and more than half of the permanent secretaries (the most senior level in each government department). In addition, 41% of bar association members are women. However, there is no legislation requiring equal pay for equal work.

There is one woman in the 17-seat House of Representatives and two women appointed to the 17-seat Senate. In addition, the speaker of the House of Representatives and the president of the Senate, both appointed positions, are women. However, there are no women in the prime minister’s cabinet.

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—revised by C. Vergara

## ARAB AMERICANS

For more information on Arab history and culture, see **Vol. 1: Algerians, Egyptians, Libyans, Moroccans, Sudanese, Tunisians**; and **Vol. 3: Alawis, Bahrainis, Bedu, Druze, Emirians, Iraqis, Jordanians, Kuwaitis, Lebanese, Ma'dan, Maronites, Omanis, Palestinians, Qataris, Saudis, Syrians, Yazidis, and Yemenis**.

### OVERVIEW

The first Arabs to immigrate in large numbers to the United States were Lebanese Christians in the 1880s (see **Lebanese Americans**). Lebanese Muslims began to immigrate to America in the early 1900s and were joined by other Arabs, mostly Palestinians. Arab immigration to the United States continued in a steady stream until 1924, when the United States placed severe restrictions on the number of immigrants allowed in from each country. Arab countries were given extremely low quotas; for example, only 100 Syrians were allowed to enter the United States each year. Arab immigrants continued to trickle in to America for the next few decades, but sizeable immigration did not resume until U.S. immigration reforms were introduced in 1965, opening the doors to much greater numbers of Arabs. The humiliating defeat of Arab forces by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 triggered a sharp rise in Arab immigration to the United States. Since 1970, over 10,000 Arabs each year have immigrated to America.

Early Arab immigrants were mostly poor, uneducated farmers hoping to earn money quickly and then return to their homelands. The majority were Christian. Many became traders or peddlers. Others took factory jobs, especially in the Detroit auto industry. Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan, continue to lure Arab immigrants today; the Detroit-Dearborn area currently boasts the largest Arab American population in the United States.

Arab immigrants to the United States since World War II (1939–45) differ in a number of ways from those who came before. The majority are Muslim. They are mostly well-educated professionals or students seeking higher education. Whereas earlier Arab immigrants tended to take up the life of the traveling salesperson (both men and women worked as peddlers), newer immigrants are more likely to settle down in large cities and work in their various professions. Lebanese immigrants dominated earlier waves, while recent waves have brought large numbers of Egyptians, Syrians, Palestinians, and Jordanians.

When Palestine was partitioned into a Jewish state and an Arab state in 1947, and the nation of Israel was formed in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs were driven from their homes. Many decided to immigrate to the United States, at least temporarily. Civil unrest and a lack of economic opportunities in their former homeland led a great number to decide to stay in America permanently.

The Egyptian Revolution in 1952 drove many wealthy Egyptians out of Egypt when their property was confiscated and their businesses nationalized. As a result, Arab countries suffered a severe “brain drain” with 90,915 Arabs immigrating to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, most of them (90%) professionals. In the past few decades, other Arabs, such as Yemenis, Iraqis, and North Africans, have also immigrated

to the United States in search of a better life than that available to them in their conflict-ridden homelands.

Getting an exact count of the Arab American population is impossible for a number of reasons. Immigration records are misleading because early Arab immigrants were often listed as “Turks” (since Lebanon was under the rule of the Ottoman Turkish Empire). More recent immigrants frequently come to the United States from some other country than their homeland, as so many are displaced Palestinian refugees, and they are registered according to their last residence rather than as Palestinians. Some are still listed under vague categories such as “other Asian” or “other African.” Self-reported statistics on the U.S. Census are also incomplete because Arab Americans may fear revealing themselves as such due to anti-Arab sentiments in America. Others classify themselves in terms that are difficult to distinguish clearly as Arab.

The 2000 U.S. Census counted 1,189,731 Arab Americans. An acceptable estimate, however, of the true current Arab American population is 3,500,000. Almost half have arrived in the United States since 1990. Arab Americans live all across the United States, though the largest population (over 69,000) is in the New York area. Michigan has the highest percentage (1.2%) of Arab Americans in its state population. About half of the total Arab American population lives in the states of California (190,890), New York (120,370), Michigan (115,284), Florida (77,461), and New Jersey (71,770). Other states with large numbers of Arab Americans include Ohio (54,014), Massachusetts (52,756), Illinois (52,191), Pennsylvania (48,678), and Virginia (41,230). In proportion to the total state population, Rhode Island (7,012; or 0.7%) has a significant Arab American population as well.

Christian Arab Americans have tended to become Americanized quite quickly. Many early immigrants Americanized their names in order to fit in with mainstream American society. More recent immigrants find less need to change their names in the new atmosphere of multiculturalism in the United States. However, some still use Americanized names in public and reserve their Arabic names for family use. The Arabic language is an integral part of the Islamic religion, so Muslim Arab Americans retain at least some fluency in Arabic, even into the third and fourth generations. The majority, however, are also fluent in English. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, although 70% of Arab Americans spoke a language other than English at home, 65% also spoke English very well. Christian Arab Americans are more likely to lose their fluency in Arabic as soon as the second generation.

Muslim Arabs hesitated to immigrate to the United States in the early years of Arab immigration because America was a Christian nation, by and large. There were no mosques in America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although mosques have been built and Muslim communities have developed in several regions of the United States, Muslim Arab Americans still find it difficult at times to follow some of their religious practices, such as praying facing Mecca five times a day or fasting during the month of Ramadan. However, Islam does provide alternate ways of meeting religious obligations, and many Muslim Arab Americans choose to give extra money to charity or spend time educating young Muslims in place of missed prayers or fasting. Second- and later-generation Muslim Arab Americans often leave their parents' religion as they become Americanized and/or marry non-Arabs.



Because Druze religious leaders are not allowed to leave their homeland in the Middle East, Druze Arab Americans have never built a place of worship in the United States. Druze are also very protective of their faith and maintain a high degree of privacy or even secrecy around their religion. Many Druze Arab Americans attend Christian churches instead, as Druze and Christians worship the same God.

Christian, Druze, and Muslim Arab Americans almost never intermarry, nor do Sunni and Shia Muslim Arab Americans or Maronite and Melkite Christian Arab Americans. Arab Americans do intermarry, however, with non-Arabs. Muslim Arab Americans discourage marrying non-Arabs, but some do, especially as later generations become less attached to their religious and cultural traditions.

Intermarriage with non-Arabs creates difficulties for both parties, however, particularly in the area of family relations. The extended Arab family, with its complex and close relationships, is quite foreign to Western Europeans who focus on the nuclear family unit. Non-Arab American spouses can become quite frustrated with the multitude of in-laws who drop in at any time without warning, call at all hours, help themselves to food from the kitchen, etc., all of which are expected in Arab culture. Arab Americans may not understand their non-Arab spouses' frustrations or lack of connection with their own extended families.

Arab culture also has great respect for the elderly, and aged parents and grandparents are always cared for at home. Nursing homes do not exist in Arab countries, and Arab Americans almost never make use of them in the United States. This

can be another source of tension between Arab and non-Arab American spouses, as most non-Arab Americans are not used to caring for aging relatives in their homes.

Family and food are central elements of Arab culture, and this remains true for Arab Americans. Both family and food are enjoyed by Arab Americans at picnic festivals known as *mahrajan*. Arab foods such as hummus, kibbe, fattoush salad, and baklava have become popular in mainstream American society today, thanks to the many Arab Americans who opened Middle Eastern restaurants in cities across the United States.

Arab Americans also place a high value on education. Although the earliest immigrants were mostly uneducated and illiterate, they made sure that their children were given the best education available in America. Many of today's Arab immigrants are students seeking higher education. In 2000 some 85% of Arab Americans over the age of 25 had at least a high school diploma (in contrast to only 80% of the U.S. population as a whole), and 41% (almost double the total U.S. rate of 24%) had a bachelor's degree or higher.

Perhaps most central to an Arab's heart is poetry, and Arab Americans have lost none of their love for this art. Lebanese American poet Kahlil Gibran became internationally known with the publication of his book of mystical verse, *The Prophet*. Written in English, *The Prophet* has since been translated into 20 languages. More than 4 million copies have been sold in the United States alone.

Other Arab Americans who have contributed to American society in the arts include actors Danny and Marlo Thomas,



*Arab Americans join hands to form a human chain as a sign of Arabic unity during a rally in front of Dearborn City Hall on June 6, 2007. The event was designed to show their concern for increased divisions in the Arab and Muslim world. The metro Detroit area has the largest Arab-American population concentration in the United States. (Bill Pugliano/Getty Images)*

Jamie Farr, Kathy Najimy, Salma Hayek, and Tony Shalhoub; musicians Paul Anka, Sammy Hagar, Frank Zappa, Paula Abdul, Tiffany, and Shakira; and children's book author Naomi Shihab Nye. Among the many Arab American contributors to the world of politics are U.S. senators George Mitchell, John Sununu, and Spencer Abraham; Donna Shalala, former Secretary of Health and Human Services and the first Arab American appointed to a Cabinet post; Helen Thomas, former dean of the White House press corps; consumer advocate and former presidential candidate Ralph Nader; John Zogby, founder of Zogby International polling service; and retired General John Abizaid, commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) from 2003 to 2007. The co-founder of Apple, Inc, Steve Jobs, and the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Candy Lightner, are both Arab Americans. Just one of the numerous Arab American sports figures is Doug Flutie, winner of the 1984 NFL Heisman Trophy.

Because early Arab immigrants to the United States were mostly Christian and tended to scatter across the country in their work as traders, they met with little overt discrimi-

nation or prejudice from other Americans. They blended in with Christian mainstream America, and their small, scattered numbers did not pose an economic threat to established communities. Later Muslim Arab immigrants, however, stood out in sharp relief from mainstream America, with their exotic religious and cultural customs. They were also more likely to settle together in Muslim Arab American communities, presenting a more noticeable perceived threat to non-Arab Americans.

Since World War II, anti-Arab sentiment in the United States has been on the rise. The United States has consistently supported Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict that began in 1947, although the United States has also participated in efforts to bring peace to the warring factions. Jewish Americans, whose population is about twice that of Arab Americans, are quite vocal in their support of Israel. Such dissension creates a difficult situation for Arab Americans who are then seen as "the enemy." U.S. politicians hesitate to accept any support from Arab Americans for fear of alienating Jewish American voters.



In general, Arab Americans are stereotyped in mainstream American culture as terrorists and/or greedy oil barons. With the heightening terrorist activity in the Middle East and beyond, the oil embargo of the 1970s and rising oil prices since then, the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, and the Gulf War of the 1990s, anti-Arab sentiment in the United States steadily increased. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 brought anti-Arab feelings to a head, resulting in many hate crimes as well as legislative reforms and security procedures that single out Arabs for suspicion. Arab Americans are often subject to discrimination, harassment, and even violence.

Arab Americans have formed a number of organizations to address these problems and work towards legal, political, and educational solutions. Jewish American and Arab American groups have joined together to begin establishing better relations between their peoples. Many other individuals and groups throughout America have also initiated efforts to transcend fear and prejudice since 9/11, with varying degrees of success so far.

Although almost two-thirds of Arab Americans are Christian, and many Arab American Muslim women do not wear headscarves or other identifiably “Muslim” clothing, the headscarf in particular has become a focal point of controversy and tension in American and other Western European countries. Muslim Arab American women who choose to wear a headscarf for religious reasons face the prospect of confusion, fear, and discrimination from other Americans. Muslim women are likely to be refused jobs or promotions if they refuse to take off their headscarf, young girls suffer bullying at school, and those electing to travel by air may be subjected to invasive searches simply because they “look like” terrorists. The conflicts between religious freedom and civil liberties versus national security and the promotion of a secular public society in America find a focal point in Arab American women’s choice of headgear.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# ARGENTINES

**LOCATION:** Argentina

**POPULATION:** 40 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish (official); Italian; German; Quechua; Mapudungun; Guaraní; Toba

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Evangelical Protestantism; Judaism; Islam; Mormons

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Argentina derives its name from the Latin word for silver, *argentum*, and this is what drove the Spanish to explore the land during the 16th century. There was little silver to be found, however, but the fertile soil of the Pampas was to become the country’s most valuable asset. It was during the late 1800s that Argentina found a wealthy outlet with the export of meat and grain to Europe. This lucrative trade increased until, by the early decades of the 20th century, Argentina had become one of the wealthiest nations in the world. However, soaring inflation and a damaging series of complex political conflicts in recent years have badly affected the economy.

Argentina has always attracted European immigrants. During the 19th century, waves of Europeans, such as Italians, Basques, Welsh, English, Ukrainians, and immigrants of other nationalities poured into Buenos Aires. In the 16th century, early European settlers discovered a wide range of Indians across the country, with different economic and social systems. There were large populations in the Andes, in the tropical and temperate forests there were seminomadic farmers, and nomadic hunters and gatherers lived in the Amazon and on the Patagonian steppes. But as the European settlers moved out across the country to claim the lands for their own, the Indian populations were ousted from their lands and virtually disappeared. A quasi-feudal system of land control was established in Argentina, similar to those of most other Latin American countries.

During the 1820s, a series of independence movements throughout South America combined to pry control of the continent away from the hands of Spain. Under the leadership of General José de San Martín and others, the United Provinces of the River Plate, Argentina’s direct forerunner, declared independence in 1816. The Argentina Constitution was established in 1853.

After an oligarchic state-building process, mass politics erupted into Argentine political life in the first half of the 1900s due to the rapid expansion of the working class. However, the 1929 economic crisis brought to an end the democratic experiments. After a period of “oligarchic authoritarianism,” Colonel Juan Domingo Perón won the presidential elections of 1946 with the support of the organized labor and what would become the Partido Justicialista (PJ). With his charismatic wife, Eva Duarte de Perón (“Evita”), he established a regime based upon import substitutions and the empowering of the working class.

Between the mid 1950s and 1970s soft military and weak civilian administrations traded power, while the economy grew strong. However, the escalating political violence in the context of the Cold War pushed the armed forces to take power from 1976 to 1983. The military government was embroiled in

the Dirty War against “subversives,” an infamous chapter of Argentina’s history, which saw the death of thousands of innocent victims. Paramilitary death squads, operating with the covert approval of the authorities, were responsible for many other victims. A familiar phrase used at this time referred to people “disappearing.” What the phrase meant was that someone had been abducted, detained, tortured, and probably killed. All of this was carried out without any pretense of the administration of justice.

Eventually, a fast-declining economic situation and growing public resentment brought about huge demonstrations in the streets. In order to stay in power, General Leopoldo Galtieri decided to launch an invasion of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) in an attempt to distract the public. War with Britain followed, but Argentina’s badly trained and demoralized army finally had to admit a humiliating defeat after 74 days. Argentina’s military dictatorship was over, and within a year Raul Alfonsín of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) was elected to the presidency.

Despite the return of democracy, Alfonsín was incapable of stabilizing the economic and the growing cycle of hyperinflation. After winning the 1989 presidential elections, Carlos Menem of the PJ imposed a peso-dollar fixed exchange rate and adopted far-reaching neoliberal reforms, which contributed to investment and growth. However, the liberalization of the markets undermined the local industry and made the country vulnerable to international crises. In 1998 the Asian financial crisis precipitated an outflow of capital and Argentina entered into a recession that culminated in the economic crisis of 2001. After the freezing of bank accounts and the devaluation of the peso, Argentineans hit the streets, forcing the resignation of then-president Fernando de la Rúa of the UCR. Within the space of two weeks, the presidency changed hands on five occasions until a joint session of both houses of Congress elected Eduardo Duhalde (PJ), the former governor of the province of Buenos Aires.

After Duhalde decided to abandon the peso-dollar fixed exchange rate, Argentina defaulted on its international debt obligations and inflation spiked. However, after implementing new policies based on re-industrialization, the economy stabilized and began to grow again. In 2003 Néstor Kirchner of the PJ became president and renegotiated Argentina’s international debt. Four years later, his wife Cristina Fernández became the first woman to be elected as president of the country.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Argentina is the world’s eighth-largest country, only slightly smaller than India. It has a total area of about 2.8 million sq km (1.1 million sq mi), excluding the South Atlantic islands and the Antarctic quadrant it claims as national territory. From Quiaca on the Bolivian border to Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego, it is nearly 3,500 km (2,175 mi), about the same distance as from Havana, Cuba, to the Hudson Bay in Canada, or from the Sahara Desert to Scotland.

Approximately 86% of the population of 40 million people lives in urban areas. More than 33% live in Gran Buenos Aires, which includes the Capital Federal and its suburbs in the Buenos Aires province. Most Argentineans are of European origin (85%), including about 400,000 Jews, the world’s eighth-largest Jewish community. Approximately 15% of the population is Mestizo—people of mixed indigenous and European blood.



The four main provinces are the Andes; the lowland North; the Pampas, home to the famous *gaucho*, the Argentine cowboy; and Patagonia. The Andes separate Argentina from Chile, while rivers form its borders with Uruguay, Brazil, and Paraguay. The country also shares a short border with Bolivia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Argentina is Spanish, but a number of the European-descended communities still maintain their own languages. Italians, who constitute the largest immigrant group, have approximately 1.5 million speakers. Some 17 native languages still survive, being Quechua (900,000), Mapudungun (100,000), Toba (19,800), and Guaraní (18,000) the most prominent.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Despite the fact that Argentina regards itself as extremely cultured and European, spiritualism and the worship of the dead play an important part in the lives of the people. One of its own

famous novelists, Tomas Eloy Martinez, has commented that the country's national heroes, such as San Martin, are honored not on the anniversary of their birth but of their death, in the same way that saints' days are celebrated. Steady processions of pilgrims regularly visit the Recoleta and Chacarita cemeteries in Buenos Aires where personal prayers are said and ritual offerings are left, especially at the tombs of Juan and Evita Peron and the tango singer Carlos Gardel.

During the 1800s, the *gaucho*, the Argentine cowboy, came to represent a free-spirited symbol for the country. He was seen as a rebel who took on authority in order to preserve his freedom. Legends about him grew, and he became the inspiration for many writers.

## 5 RELIGION

Even though Roman Catholicism is the religion the government should support, this does not imply that it is Argentina's official religion. The Catholic Church estimates that approximately 70% of the population identifies with Catholicism. Evangelical Protestant movements are making converts among traditional Catholic believers, as is happening elsewhere in South America, since the 1980s. Today, they account for 3.5 million people or about 10% of the population. Around 2% of the population is Jewish, 1.5% is Muslim, and 0.8% of Argentines are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

All the main Christian festivals such as Easter and Christmas are celebrated throughout the country. There are also national celebrations of historical times and heroes such as the May Revolution of 1810; Independence Day on July 9; Malvinas Day, on June 10, which celebrates the establishment of the "Comandancia Politica y Militar de las Malvinas" in 1829; and Dia de San Martin, the anniversary of San Martin's death on August 17.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism, First Communion, and saints' days are major events, important to both individuals and families. Because of the strong Spanish and Italian heritage and the abiding influence of the Catholic Church, these occasions are used as important family get-togethers that serve to reinforce the family structures.

Younger people, however, are no longer getting married in church as a matter of course, and there is a growing trend toward divorce and remarriage. Civil marriages have become popular.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Argentines are extremely gregarious and eagerly invite visitors to participate in their activities.

One famous pastime is drinking *mate*, a Paraguayan tea made from holly leaves. This is more than a simple drink like tea or coffee. It is an elaborate ritual, shared among family, friends, and colleagues. For those taking part, the sharing of the tea-making process seems to be the whole point of the *mate* ritual. During the process, one person is responsible for filling a gourd almost to the top with the tea. Meanwhile, water is heated, but not boiled, in a kettle and then poured into the

vessel. Everyone sips the liquid from a silver tube with a bulbous filter at its lower end that prevents the leaves from entering the tube.

Argentines are quite formal in public and are very aware of proper civilities. Even when asking a stranger for directions in the street, one is expected to approach the person with a greeting such as *buenos dias* or *buenas tardes*, "good day" or "good afternoon."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The major cities in Argentina have a European look to them. The middle classes live in tall, modern apartment buildings, or in bungalows with small gardens. Since the 1930s, rural workers have flocked to the big cities and a number of slums have sprouted on the outskirts, where the workers live in shacks. Rural houses are often built of adobe, with earth floors and roofs of straw and mud.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The strong Catholic and Spanish heritage has meant that the role of the family plays a central part in Argentine life. There is still a strong belief in the nuclear family, which also extends to grandparents, uncles and aunts, and close relatives.

Much social life is family-centered, and occasions such as birthdays, First Communion, weddings, and funerals are of major importance. A favorite family get-together is the barbecue. Mealtimes are also regarded as important occasions for family cohesion and are often elaborate, time-consuming events.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most city-dwellers wear Western-style clothes, and many enthusiastically follow the fashions of Europe, particularly those of Italy.

In the rural areas, however, many workers on the *estancias* wear at least part of the *gaucho* costume—a wide-brimmed hat and loose trousers tucked into the boots. In the northwest, the Indians wear ponchos, colorful skirts, and bowler hats.

## 12 FOOD

Given the enormous cattle ranches of the Pampas, it is hardly surprising to find that the Argentine diet is very meat-oriented. At the same time, there is a surprising ethnic and regional variety to Argentine cooking. The huge Italian presence has resulted in a great popularity for pasta dishes such as spaghetti, lasagna, cannelloni, and ravioli. Beef, though, is the center of most meals. The most popular form is the *parrillada*, a mixed grill of steak and other cuts.

Some regions have very distinctive food. The Andean northwest offers very spicy dishes, and it is common to find Middle Eastern food in the Mendoza north.

## 13 EDUCATION

With a 97% literacy rate, Argentina is one of Latin America's most literate countries. From the age of 5 to the age of 12, education is free and compulsory, and the comprehensive secondary education system is based on the French model.

Universities are traditionally free and open, but the courses tend to be rigidly specialized. With so much higher education available, the system has turned out many people with profes-



*Couples taking part in the 5th Tango Dance World Championship pose for photographers in Buenos Aires, Argentina. More than 450 couples from different parts of the world competed. (AP Images/Natacha Pisarenko)*

sional qualifications, such as doctors and lawyers, not of all of whom can easily find work in Buenos Aires. Despite this, few of them are willing to move to the provinces.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

During the early 19th and 20th centuries, Buenos Aires readily adopted French trends in art, music, and particularly architecture, which can be seen in many of the turn-of-the-century buildings in the capital.

Argentine writers, much of whose work is available in English, have achieved international stature. They include Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar, Ernesto Sabato, Manuel Puig, Osvaldo Soriano, and Adolfo Bioy Casares.

In Buenos Aires, the Teatro Colon opera house is one of the finest of its kind in the world. Classical music and ballet, as well as modern dance, are staged here. The capital also has a lively theater circuit, as rich as any major city elsewhere in the world. Even in the provinces, live theater is an important part of cultural life.

#### **15 WORK**

Despite its abundant natural resources and its well-educated and cultured population, Argentina has failed to live up to its potential. Earlier in the 20th century, Argentina was seen to be on a par with prosperous countries such as Canada and Aus-

tralia. Yet it has not only patently failed to keep up with them, it has continually fallen behind them.

Its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly us\$6,500 makes Argentina one of Latin America's wealthiest countries, but its economy is in a constant state of crisis. Faced with foreign debt of us\$118 billion in September 2007, the living standards of the middle class are being eroded, while the working class and the poor are seriously suffering.

Like other Latin American countries, one of Argentina's fundamental problems lies in the poverty of its rural areas. Control of the richest agricultural lands of the Pampas are in the hands of a small number of wealthy families, while most rural people are reduced to scratching out a living on marginal lands or working as poorly paid workers on the big estates.

Corruption and inefficiency have plagued state enterprises, where workers frequently hold down a number of government jobs. A standing Argentine joke is to refer to these employees as *noquis*, named after the traditional potato pasta served in Argentine households on the 29th of each month—the implication being that these people appear on the job just before their monthly paychecks are due. Not surprisingly, such corruption has led to massive inflation rates, often exceeding 50% per month. Despite a determined government clean up of *noqui* workers, which led to a drop in state employment from 1 million to 370,000 persons between 1990 and 1995, reform

measures have hardly touched government departments in the provinces.

## 16 SPORTS

The country is soccer-crazed. In March 2007, the Argentine national football (“soccer”) team was ranked first in the world for the first time by FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), the international football organization. Argentina won the World Cup, at home in 1978, and again in 1986. The Argentine soccer team also won the gold medal at the Olympic football tournament in 2004. It has provided a number of internationally known players such as Diego Maradona and Daniel Passarella. There are more first-division soccer teams in Buenos Aires than anywhere else in the world.

Several tennis players have also become world-famous, such as Guillermo Vilas and Gabriela Sabatini.

The game of basketball has also become a notable sport in Argentina, following the influx of many North American athletes who were unable to play professional basketball in America or Europe. In 1995, the Argentine national team defeated the U.S. team for the gold medal in the Pan American Games in Mar del Plata. The team also won the Olympic Tournament in 2004.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The best-known and most-striking feature of Argentine popular culture is the tango, both as music and dance. It first became popular in 1880, when it emerged from working-class districts where it was frequently played in brothels. It was a blend of *gaucho* (cowboy) verse with Spanish and Italian music. Then came Carlos Gardel, the music’s most famous exponent, who created the *tango canción*, the “tango song,” lifting it out of the brothels and the poor streets and into the smart salons of Buenos Aires.

For many Argentines, the tango song sums up the fears and anxieties of life. It can carry themes as diverse as love, jealousy, and betrayal to everyday subjects such as going to work or coping with one’s neighbors. It is often full of sad nostalgia about a way of life that is fast disappearing.

In addition to tango, Argentina is known for being a major producer of motion pictures. Argentine cinema enjoyed a golden age between the 1930s and the 1950s due to state-sponsored productions. More recent films from the “New Wave” of cinema since the 1980s have achieved worldwide recognition, such as *The Official Story* (*La historia oficial*), *Nine Queens* (*Nueve reinas*), *Man Facing Southeast* (*Hombre mirando al sudeste*), *Son of the Bride* (*El hijo de la novia*), and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (*Diarios de motocicleta*).

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In artisans’ *ferias*, found throughout the country, the variety of handicrafts is extensive. *Mate* paraphernalia is widespread, and gourds and *bombilas* range from simple and inexpensive aluminum, often sold in street kiosks, to elaborate and expensive gold and silver found in jewelry stores. In the province of Salta, the distinctive *ponchos de Guemes* are produced.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Runaway inflation was temporarily halted by the government under Carlos Menem, which reduced the public sector defi-

cit by selling off inefficient state enterprises and curbing the powers of militant labor unions. The trouble is that continuing privatization has led to increasing unemployment, justified by the government as a necessary casualty of reform.

In 1995, official unemployment figures stood at 12.2%, and then rose to nearly 20% as the economy contracted in the aftermath of President Menem’s election. After three years of recession, the economy broke down in 2001 and millions of Argentineans saw their purchasing power drastically reduced. Since 2002 there has been an improvement in the living situation of poorer Argentineans and a strong economic rebound for the middle class. The urban poverty rate dropped to 26.9% by 2007, down from 48% in 2003. However, inflation, which reached 20% in 2007, and the risk of an over-heated economy are once more beginning to threaten the livelihoods of the lower and middle classes.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though Argentinean culture is strongly rooted in the machismo of *gauchos*, women have been prominent in traditional politics since the second half of the 20th century. The tradition began with Eva Duarte, an actress who became the nation’s patron saint through marriage to President Juan Perón. After Perón died during his second term of office, his third wife, María Estela (“Isabelita”), a former nightclub dancer, briefly succeeded him as president.

During the years of the “Dirty War,” women were the most prominent advocates of human rights. The mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo are the best known of the human-rights campaigners. After the return to democracy, a 1991 law required that at least 30% of the candidates on party lists for Congress must be women. Women made up 35% of the Senate seats in 2001. In 2005, Argentina was among the top 15 ranked countries in the world after Rwanda, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Cuba, Spain, Costa Rica, Mozambique, Belgium, and Austria in terms of the representation of women in the national legislature. In 2007 Cristina Fernandez became the first woman to be elected as president of Argentina.

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—revised by C. Vergara

## ARMENIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Armenian history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Armenians**.

### OVERVIEW

Few Armenians immigrated to the United States before the late 1800s. The first massive wave of immigration began around 1890 as a result of massacres of Armenians by the Ottoman Turk sultan Abdul Hamid. In the decade from 1890 to 1900, over 12,000 Armenian refugees entered the United States. Although the Turkish Empire forbade emigration for a few years (1899–1907), Armenian immigration to the United States continued sporadically until the end of World War II (1939–45). A particularly large number came in 1915 after a second round of massacres by the Ottoman Turks (often referred to as the Genocide).

The second wave of Armenian immigration to the United States began in the 1950s and continues today. Most of these second-wave Armenian Americans are from Iran, Lebanon, the former Soviet Union, and other countries of the Armenian Diaspora. They tend to be more educated, skilled, and worldly than first-wave immigrants (although first-wave Armenian Americans were much more highly skilled and educated than most other immigrants to the United States at that time). Many recent Armenian immigrants arrived with some proficiency in the English language, and a few came complete with financial fortunes from their former homelands.

For the most part, Armenian Americans were too few in number and too scattered throughout the United States to engender much discrimination. The one exception was Fresno, California, where a large Armenian American community suddenly developed in a fairly small area during the first wave of immigration. Fortunately, a long history of violent oppression had equipped the immigrants with the ability to avoid direct confrontations, and the racism never escalated to physical violence. The Armenians quickly were assimilated into American culture and were soon accepted as “Americans.”

The exact Armenian American population today is uncertain. There are no official records of the number of Armenian immigrants because they were often mistakenly recorded as “Turks,” “Arabs,” or “Russians” in the early days, and recent immigrants have Lebanese, Iranian, or other passports. Armenian American population estimates run anywhere from 600,000 to 1,000,000. The 2000 U.S. Census lists 385,488 persons reporting “Armenian” ancestry. About 20% of those Armenian Americans are foreign born.

The Turkish Armenians of the first wave of immigration tended to settle in northeastern cities, particularly New York City, Providence (Rhode Island), Worcester (Massachusetts), and Boston. Russian Armenians have settled mostly in southern California, especially Los Angeles. Iranian Armenians have almost all settled in Los Angeles.

Some early Armenian immigrants later moved from the Northeast to the Midwest, settling in Chicago, Detroit, Racine (Wisconsin), and Waukegan (Illinois). About 20% of those who listed themselves as Armenian American on the 2000 U.S. Census live in the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states; half (50%) live in California; roughly 10% are in the Midwest

(mainly Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois); and the rest are scattered throughout the United States.

The Armenian language is one focus of the dispute between traditional and progressive Armenian Americans. Traditionalists believe that fluency in Armenian is a requisite for a claim to Armenian ethnicity. Progressives (most of whom are not fluent in Armenian) feel that fluency is good but not necessary. The fact is that few second- or later-generation Armenian Americans speak, read, or write Armenian. By the 1960s, English was the official language of the Armenian American community, and even Armenian churches have modified their services to include portions in English. All-day and afternoon (or Saturday morning) schools exist throughout the Armenian American community to teach children the Armenian language, along with Armenian culture and history. Attendance at these schools is low and dwindling, however.

The Armenian Church was traditionally the center of Armenian life, and it has continued to play a crucial role in the lives of Armenian Americans, although its influence is rapidly declining among successive generations. Many Armenian Americans do not attend services on a regular basis, and a growing number are no longer even affiliated with the church.

The Armenian Church is said to have been founded in the 1st century CE by St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew, two of Jesus’ original apostles. In CE 301, Armenia’s King Tiridates III converted to Christianity, making the Armenian Christian Church the first national Christian church in the world. In the millennia following, the Armenian Church became divided into separate factions. These factions are represented in the United States by the Eastern and Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America (EWDACNA), the original American diocese founded in 1892, allied with the Patriarchate in Armenia; and the Eastern and Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America (EWPAACA), allied with the Catholicate of Cilicia in Lebanon.

The EWPAACA was created in 1933 when members of the Tashnag (Armenian revolutionary) party murdered Archbishop Tourian in New York City during a Christmas Eve service. All Tashnag members were expelled from Armenian Apostolic churches and forced to begin their own. The Tashnag congregation remained independent until 1957, when they allied themselves with the Catholicate of Lebanon.

In recent years, there has been increasing talk in support of reuniting the two factions. A new leader, Karekin I, was elected in April 1995 as the worldwide head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Karekin visited the United States and Canada in early 1996, calling for reunification of the Armenian Church in America. Born in Syria, Karekin served as the primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church in America from 1974 to 1977, so he is familiar with the situation of the Armenian Church in the United States, and he himself is familiar to Armenian Americans. A “unity commission” has been established to work towards unifying the two factions, both of whose headquarters are located in New York City.

Armenians have also become affiliated with other churches. In the United States, 69% of Armenian Americans belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, while 10% are Armenian Protestant (of various denominations), and 3% are Armenian Catholic. Some 13% of Armenian Americans belong to other non-Armenian churches, and 5% are not affiliated with any church. As of 2008 there were more than 150 organized



Armenian churches in the United States: 102 associated with the EWDACNA; 26 with the EWPAACA; 24 in the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America (AEUNA), not counting those in Canada; and 9 Armenian Catholic parishes. All Armenian American churches suffer from a severe shortage of adequately trained clergy.

With each succeeding generation, Armenian Americans become more "Americanized." Most young Armenian Americans today follow mainstream American customs around birth, weddings, funerals, etc. They celebrate mainstream American holidays, such as Thanksgiving and American Independence Day (4 July), as well as the major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter. Some Armenian Americans may include elements of their Armenian heritage in these celebrations, performing Armenian folk dances and serving Armenian foods like rice pilaf and shishkebab.

Recent Armenian immigrants to the United States maintain more of their traditional customs, but those customs vary according to the land of their birth. Armenians today are scattered among a number of countries in Europe and Asia, including Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, and the former Soviet Union. This is known as the Armenian Diaspora. Therefore, traditional "Armenian" customs are flavored by the cultures of Armenian Americans' various former homelands.

Overall, Armenian Americans have a high level of education. With each successive generation, more Armenian Americans attend college and universities and become professionals and executives. The average income for Armenian Americans is fairly high compared to other ethnic groups in America and

continues to increase with subsequent generations. Many early Armenian immigrants became small business owners, and there is still a high rate of small business ownership among Armenian Americans today. But fewer children enter the family business as more go on for higher education and become doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.

The best known Armenian Americans in the worlds of music and literature are singer-actress Cher (Sarkisian Bono Allman) and Pulitzer Prize-winning author William Saroyan. Other successful Armenian American actors include Arlene Francis (Arlene Kazanjian) and Mike Connors (Krekor Ohanian). Singer Kay Armen was well-known in the 1950s, and the Zildjian family has made world-famous cymbals for generations, beginning in Constantinople and continuing after the family immigrated to the United States. Another Armenian American who made a name for himself in the music business is Ross Bagdasarian, a music producer also known as David Seville of The Chipmunks.

Celebrated Armenian Americans in the worlds of science, technology, and public life include Christopher Der Seropian, who developed in 1843 the black and green dyes used on all U.S. currency today; Dr. Varazted Kazarijian (1879–1974), a world-renowned plastic surgeon; and George Deukmejian, who served as governor of California from 1983 to 1991. Alice Peraula was one of only a few women steelworkers and became a key player in the United Steelworker's Union in the 1960s and 1970s, fighting for and winning increasing rights for women in the steel industry.



Armenian Americans demonstrated against the visit of Azerbaijan President Geidar Aliyev in 1997 in Washington, D.C. Aliyev's visit was to seek U.S. aid for Azerbaijan, which has a long-standing conflict with Armenia. (Joyce Naltchayan/AFP/Getty Images)

Football's Ara Parseghian and wrestler Robert Manoo-gian are among the important Armenian American figures in sports. Another is lesser-known Captain G. Harry Adalian, inventor of the high-speed Futurity Foto-Finish Camera that was installed at the finish line of race tracks beginning in 1936 to eliminate disputes over winners of horse races.

Armenian Americans today struggle with factionalism within the Armenian American community itself. Conflicts exist over everything from church divisions to Armenian language proficiency to musical tastes (what is called "traditional" Armenian music in the United States is considered "Turkified" by non-Turkish Armenian Americans). There is also a heated debate over whether to use the term "genocide" to refer to the massacres of Armenian Christians by the Ottoman Turks in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At the climax of these massacres in 1915, at least 1.5 million (or 60% of the total population) of Armenians were killed, many of them on forced deportation marches to Syria. Most Armenian Americans, many of whom are children or grandchildren of survivors of the 1915 massacres, are pressing for official recognition of the atrocities as genocide. U.S. foreign policy, however, is influenced by conflicting political interests and economic concerns regarding the U.S. relationship with Turkey, so no official declaration has yet been made, leaving Armenian Americans feeling sidelined and unable to claim fully their identity as Americans.

Traditional Armenian culture is extremely patriarchal, with women assuming submissive roles in all aspects of life. At marriage, the bride goes to live with her husband's family and must become essentially mute—speaking only to her children and husband within the confines of the home—until her mother-in-law deems it time for the silence to end (usually when the first grandson is born). These patriarchal values make it difficult for Armenian immigrants to cope with the freedoms given to women in the United States. Second and third generation American-born girls come into conflict with their parents and grandparents over their social life, particularly where boys are involved. It is also not traditionally expected for girls to attend college, although education in itself is highly valued by Armenians. Sons, not daughters, are encouraged to pursue higher degrees. In very traditional homes, girls may even be expected to work to help pay for their brother's education. Armenian Americans who have lived in the United States for several generations now are becoming much more "Americanized," however, even to the point of some women choosing to pursue professional careers rather than get married.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

## ASHÁNINKA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Campa (derogatory)

**LOCATION:** Peru; Brazil

**POPULATION:** 45,000

**LANGUAGE:** Asháninka; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Native mythical beliefs

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Even though the Spanish conquerors were efficient and successful in subjugating a large portion of the Inca Highlands of Peru, they did not have the same luck in the eastern rainforests. According to many accounts, the Spanish invaders were expelled and killed by the Amazon people. The majority of these ferocious warriors call themselves Asháninka.

The Asháninka are an ethnic group of the Peruvian Amazon rain forest. They are also known in Peru and abroad by the name "Campa," which they consider derogatory because it derives from the Quechua *thampa*, which means ragged and dirty. Asháninka means "our fellows" or "our kinfolk." In 1595 an expedition led by Juan Vélez took along two Jesuit priests, Juan Font and Nicolás Mastrillo, in the first attempt by the Europeans to colonize the area.

For over three centuries, the Asháninka attempted to maintain their independence, efforts that were curtailed by Franciscan and Dominican missionaries who established settlements in the jungle. In 1742 this first period of colonization came to a sudden end with a general Indian rebellion led by the legendary Juan Santos Atahualpa. The uprising lasted until 1752 and succeeded in expelling all missionaries and colonists from the area. Historical chronicles suggest that after the revolt no Catholic missionary or soldier dared enter the jungle. The Asháninka and their neighbors controlled the area for over a century.

By the mid-19th century two simultaneous economic situations brought the missionaries back: the encroachment of agriculture from the Andes and the rubber-tapping industry from the Amazon. In 1847 a military garrison was set up, and from there recolonization by Franciscans and European, Chinese, and Japanese settlers began. Some 2 million hectares (5 million acres) of Asháninka territory, along with the main rivers, were granted to the British-owned Peruvian Corporation 44 years later. The Asháninka were then used as labor, and the appalling working conditions together with virus epidemics took a heavy toll on the communities. In the lower part of the territory, the rubber boom brought slavery, a trend that continued even after the rubber economy collapsed in 1915.

During the last decades of the 20th century, the Asháninka territory has been the site of conflicts between the Peruvian Army and rebel groups. Some Asháninka had a messianic leader, Guillermo Lobatón, whom they regarded as the Son of the Sun. He became the leader of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, or MIR, inspired by the teachings of Fidel Castro. In 1965, many died in fighting between the military and the MIR. Only 14 years later, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) killed the Asháninka leader of the Pichi river, claiming he had helped the police take their own leader. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Shining Path has entered

their territory. Since then, guerrilla and army actions often result in Asháninka deaths.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Asháninka, one of the largest ethnic groups of the Americas (their population numbers around 45,000 people), inhabit mainly the Central Forest in the Amazonian part of the eastern Andean foothills in Peru, but their communities stretch across the easternmost Peruvian Amazon and even as far as the State of Acre in Brazil. They inhabit an area of more than 103,600 sq km (40,000 sq mi). Their traditional heartland is the Gran Pajonal, a remote plateau of rolling terrain dissected by the gorges of rivers. On the slopes there are *pajonales* (grasslands), created in part by a long history of Asháninka clearing and burning.

Difficult access to the region allowed the inhabitants to remain isolated from outside influences until relatively recently. The area is strategically important, being directly east of the Peruvian capital, Lima, and linked to it by roads that cross the Andes. The degree of integration with their neighbors varies according to the geographic situation. Close to the frontiers, the Asháninka are more integrated with the settler society, living side by side with them. But, in remote areas, they are often the only inhabitants of large territories.

Asháninka people are highly dependent on agriculture to survive. After cleaning their lands through a process consisting of burning the soil, this Amerindian tribe grows yucca, corn, banana, rice, coffee, cacao, and sugar cane among other goods. Asháninka people complete their diet through the gathering of fruits and vegetables in the jungle. The major source of protein comes from hunting and fishing

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Asháninka language belongs to the pre-Andean Arawak linguistic family, which is the largest language family in South America and includes several dialects. In the Central Peruvian forest there are some variations: in the south of their territory they speak Asháninka, while in the north Ashéninka is spoken. Asháninka, like all pre-Columbian Arawak languages, is of a highly verbal nature. When examining oral narratives it has been found that the ratio of verbs to nouns is about four to one. As to gender, it is straightforward for humans, but when it comes to animals, gender depends on whether they were male or female when they were human, before they were transformed into animals, all in reference to legends.

In some regions, both Spanish and Asháninka are official languages. However, most of the aborigine population is monolingual until they go to school, where they learn Spanish. Children are given a provisional name when they start walking. Their official name is decided when they are seven years old.

Asháninka literacy rates range from 10% to 30%.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Among the Asháninka, history and nature are explained through myths and heroes. A great cliff in the Tambo river, for example, used to be a Spanish ship that Avireri, a powerful hero, transformed into a rock, its sailors becoming red ants. Other dangerous insects, like wasps, are also transformations of bad men. The moon itself used to be a man who ate other men, and as a punishment he was exiled to the sky. From

there, he continues eating Asháninka souls, which explains the phases of the moon. As to the origins of their neighbors, it is said that Avireri, the great mythological transformer, turned a murderous hawk and his wife into huge rocks, and they can be seen in the Ene river. Their feathers became canoes and each carried Piros, Matsiguenkas, Shipibos, and all the other Indian groups that live down the river.

A technological genius named Inka, according to another Asháninka myth, was swept away by a great flood of the river Tambo and carried to Lima where the White people, the Wira-cocha, captured him and are still forcing him to produce Western goods that really belong to them. Only the return of Inka will bring justice to the land.

## 5 RELIGION

The Asháninka cosmology is mainly mythical. There is not a figure of a creator but a hero, Avireri, who transformed humans into animals, plants, mountains, and rivers. Their universe is inhabited by the living forms that can be seen and also by a host of invisible beings. Their spiritual universe is dualistic. Good spirits or *amatsénka*, "our fellow spirits," reside on the mountain ridges in their territory, along the rim of the known world, and on other levels in the universe. Among them are the Sun (*Pavá*) and the Moon (*Kashiri*). There are male and female spirits, and they reproduce, albeit not through sex as their genitalia are diminutive and they are devoid of the passion of lust. The good spirits can assume the guise of several animals that have a power denied to humans, like a bird that can fly.

There are also evil spirits or *kamári*, a term used to refer to that which is repugnant, malevolent, or reprehensible. Some animals, like the deer, are demons and cannot be eaten. Nature is populated by bad spirits, like the Katsivoreri of Mironi, who can kill if encountered. Death is feared because the soul can return to earth as a bad spirit. The Asháninka also traditionally believed in the existence of child wizards who had to be killed or buried alive, or even left to die of hunger. They personify the very real dangers of the jungle.

The Asháninka have shamans or *sheripiári* who are intermediaries between the people and supernatural beings. Shamans use tobacco and some hallucinogens to enter trances that will allow them to communicate with the supernatural. Illness is cured with the help of steam baths, magical herbs, and sessions with the healer, who tries to send the disease back to the one who originated it. In the case of the plague and the flu, it is believed that they were brought by White human beings, blond with blue eyes, a mythical explanation that bears some resemblance to historical facts.

Throughout their history, the Asháninka have had an apocalyptic vision of the world. They believe that this world is plagued by evil forces, and people will be destroyed. Then there will be a new world with new people without sickness or death.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Festival of the Moon is a celebration of the god Kash'ri who, according to the legend, is the father of the Sun. Kash'ri appeared to a young girl and introduced her and her people to manioc (cassava). He taught them how to grow it and prepare it, putting an end to years of a diet of earth. He made the young girl his wife, and in giving birth to the Sun she was burned to death. Kash'ri began taking his nephews to the forest, where he

slaughtered and ate them. When his brother-in-law threatened to kill him, he escaped by rising into the sky. Kash'ri continues eating human souls and that explains why the moon gets fatter every month.

As some of the formal education available to the Asháninka is provided by Christian missionaries and, in any event, because Peru is a fervently Catholic country, some Indians gradually lose their traditions in the process of acculturation and begin to celebrate national holidays.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The magical world of the Asháninka includes a number of rites aimed at protecting the people. Prospective parents, for example, follow a diet during the pregnancy. They refrain from eating turtle meat, for fear that this would make their child slow-moving and slow-witted. Asháninka children are born in the house, and the umbilical cord is cauterized with burning coal. The mother has to remain indoors for a week. The child is only named when it learns to walk, and at the age of seven he or she gets a new name.

When girls reach adolescence, they spend up to six months in isolation. During that time they spin thread. Afterwards they are welcomed back to daily life with a celebration that has been described as orgiastic. Although after death a human soul can join the good spirits if the person was sufficiently good in his or her lifetime, the Asháninka consider it far more likely that the soul will become an evil ghost. In that case, it will revisit the settlement and attack those living there. That was the reason why, traditionally, the Asháninka would often abandon a settlement after someone died. If the deceased was believed to be a witch, the corpse was sometimes cremated so that the soul would be destroyed by the flames and would be prevented from joining the demons that taught it witchcraft.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Aráwakan tribes were perceived by explorers as being hostile among themselves and towards the Whites. But, inside the villages there is a real sense of community: many economic activities are carried out collectively, such as hunting and fishing, and the take is divided equally among the dwellers. There is also enough evidence of intertribal trade to suggest that it has always existed. Exchanging goods must have involved some degree of amicability and a recognition of the skills of others.

The Asháninka have been described as morose but open to and capable of change. Some Whites distinguish between "civilized campas" and "savages," and of the latter say they are rough and practice cannibalism on victims of war to assimilate their virile qualities. Nowadays, it is said that most Asháninka are friendly and carry out trade or work as day laborers in order to get metal tools.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, a native community would house between 300 and 400 people. There is a communal home surrounded by private dwellings of nuclear families that are related to the other families. They also erect observation platforms. There is a constant fire burning inside the houses and woven or bark mats for sleeping. The houses have two walls made of tree trunks, palm leaf roofs, and floors raised 20 cm (8 in) from the ground, built with pona palm trunks. But, the Asháninka territory has been the scene of conflicts between the Peruvian Army and guer-

rillas, as well as of the illegal trade in coca. Nowadays, under the raised floor, the Asháninka build trenches where they keep provisions, anticipating attacks. The situation has affected the Asháninka living conditions badly. Many are now refugees, having been forced to abandon their homes and land to save their lives. Historically, the Asháninka would only leave their homes for three reasons: soil exhaustion, a death in the family, or pressure by colonizers.

In 1991 the world witnessed a degree of malnutrition among Asháninka refugees never before seen in the American continent. Epidemics, such as cholera and measles, are another cause of premature death, and gastric, respiratory, and skin diseases are a common denominator among communities. The violence in the region has also affected the mental health of the population. Transport to many of the remaining Asháninka communities is costly. Vast regions are only accessible by light airplane as the roads cannot be used. The traditional means of transportation in the rivers is pointed balsa rafts held together with chonta nails and crossbeams.

Hunting, gathering, and some limited cultivation are the main ways of obtaining basic staples. Official statistics in the late 1980s suggest that 70% of Asháninka children suffer from malnutrition, and over 95% of Asháninka adults are illiterate.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

There are few restrictions on marriage among the Asháninka, apart from the immediate family. It is possible to marry a cousin but not an uncle or aunt. To prevent pregnancy, some women eat chantini roots. Polygyny is practiced, and women were once traded for goods from other tribes. According to early accounts, many Asháninka were not married, and widows and widowers did not get married again.

As social conditions have worsened, the typical way of life of the Asháninka has become almost impossible for many communities. The traditional family and community life that was closely linked with nature has had to be abandoned, as most men have had to devote themselves to defense duties. Nevertheless, in the midst of this crisis, women have taken up the role of community organizers. They have formed mother's clubs and crafts committees both to generate income and to feed their families and refugees. In many cases, women have replaced men on the communal farms, and it is they who cultivate the land.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Asháninka wear *chusmas*, a traditional garment made of a long piece of fabric with an opening in the middle for the head: from front to back for men, and from side to side for women. It is joined on the sides with vertical lines for men and horizontal lines for women. The *chusmas* are made of dyed wild cotton and are ornamented with feathers and beads. This traditional dress is a handmade robe fabricated from cotton, which is collected, spun, dyed, and woven by the women on looms. The shoulders of these traditional clothes are ornamented with seeds. Because of the laborious work that each piece requires, it can take up to three months to complete one finished robe.

Certain plants are sometimes used to perfume the fabrics. The Asháninka wore *chusmas* before they came in contact with White people, only then they were reserved for special occasions. On regular days, they would go virtually in the nude, though women often would wear an apron suspended from a



*Guillermo Naco, a leader of an Asháninka Indian community in Lima, Peru, speaks to the press during a meeting between Andean and Amazon communities. (AP Images/Silvia Izquierdo)*

string, covering their genitals. Accessories include nasal pendants and pins made of silver, pins for the lower lip, necklaces, feather headdresses, and arm and leg bands. They also groom their hair with a composite comb, paint their bodies with genipa, and blacken their teeth with *Piper*aeae.

## **12 FOOD**

The list of Asháninka crops is long, and ingredients for meals are certainly varied. Crops include yucca, the staple regional vegetable, as well as yams, peanuts, sweet potatoes, bananas, pineapples, tuber beans, macaba, pumpkins, and peppers. Some communities have added potatoes, maize, and lima beans. To grind the food, they use a wooden plate and a stone. Women are in charge of the garden, and men hunt. The Asháninka also keep and eat chickens and their eggs, and they hunt tapirs, boars, and monkeys. To supplement their diet, they collect honey, a root called *mabe*, ants, and several palm fruits. They also fish. The meat is cooked over the fire using sticks, in the shape of a pyramid or a rectangle, to hold it. The smoke from the fire helps preserve the meat for a few days. The Asháninka season their dishes with salt and pepper. Out of necessity, the Asháninka have begun to produce cash crops, such as coffee.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education has been badly affected by the social unrest in the area. Since 1990, according to the Satipo Educational Services Unit, 71 rural schools have been closed and the same number of teachers are counted as “disappeared,” as it is not known if they are dead, have joined the rebels, or are in hiding. Though many schools have been destroyed, some make do with improvised chairs and tables made of tree trunks, and blackboards donated by aid organizations.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music and songs are part of Asháninka ceremonies and rituals. Their voices, imitations of jungle animal sounds, and stamping of the feet are accompanied by various instruments that they make using available materials and decorate with indigenous paints in their particular style. Early accounts of what had been found among the Asháninka include lists of their numerous instruments: two-headed monkey-skin drums, five to eight-tube panpipes, bone flageolets, six-hole longitudinal flutes, two-hole transverse flutes, and musical bows.

## 15 WORK

Most Asháninka still live by fishing, hunting, and cultivating small plots of land. Early observers characterized the Asháninka as hunters rather than agriculturists because most males spent much of their working time hunting. Though meat is indeed the main source of protein and the frequent movement of the early settlements was related to the depletion of local game supplies, most of a family's food comes from cultivated plants. Through the slash-and-burn method they grow yucca, plantain, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and sugarcane. Colonization brought extensive coffee, cacao, rice, and coca plantations to some areas. They also grow medicinal herbs and *barbasco*, which is used for fishing. When possible, the Asháninka cultivate plots of land along the riverbanks, but in violent circumstances they move to the hilltops. Selling their produce provides some income. Asháninka communities are self-sufficient, and most economic activities are carried out collectively. The product is divided among the families. There is also a long tradition of trade between tribes.

## 16 SPORTS

The Asháninka, since before the arrival of the Europeans, made some objects that seem to indicate the practice of some kind of sport or games, such as humming tops, bull-roarers, and maize-leaf balls. In tune with their status as warriors, they also practiced wrestling. In modern times, those who live side-by-side with settlers take part in the spectator sport culture. Soccer is Peru's favorite sport, and it is played even in the most remote regions.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Contact with Western civilization has brought to some communities new forms of recreation. Radio and television have joined more traditional forms of entertainment, such as storytelling, singing, and dancing. Actually, a number of Asháninka did more than watch: in Werner Herzog's film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), the majority of extras were Asháninka men. In remote areas, where life continues to be quite similar to the past, the division between work or ceremonies and recreational time is not as sharp: there is a lot of work to do, but because many activities are carried out collectively, they also offer a chance for social intercourse.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Asháninka traditionally are a seminomadic tribe, and as such their material culture is minimal. But, the few objects they possess are manufactured with great skill and are artistically decorated. One of their most characteristic designs is that of a heavy line outlined by one or two fine lines. Similar designs, consisting of complex angular, geometric patterns drawn in rectangular panels, adorn most objects, from pots and beadwork to musical instruments and clothes. The Asháninka make the fabric for their typical costume, the *chusma*. They use wild cotton and two different kinds of frames to weave: one for small bands, and a vertical loom for large pieces of cloth. With gynerium stalks, the Asháninka make twined telescope baskets. They also make sieves and mats. Some containers are made of calabashes. Their plates are made of clay and have red designs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Asháninka traditional way of life is a casualty of the war between the national army and guerrilla groups. The mountain area of the Asháninka's forest territory was the birthplace of the rebel Shining Path. The Asháninka and other Indian peoples of the region have tried to remain outside of the conflict between the national army and the guerrillas but have often been its victims.

During the 1980s and 1990s the internal conflict in Peru led by the Maoist group Shining Path provoked massive displacement and death among its inhabitants. These years were especially hard for the Asháninka since the Shining Path gave just two options to the Asháninka population: to join their struggle against the national government or become a slave. In this precarious scenario the indigenous population was unable to fish and hunt due to the threat posed by armed groups in the forest. As corollary, many Asháninka were reduced to the status of refugees in their own land, and those who have been able to remain in their villages have seen their social structure severely affected by political violence.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 10,000 Asháninka were displaced, 6,000 Asháninka died, and 5,000 Asháninka were taken captive by the Shining Path during this time, and 30 to 40 Asháninka communities disappeared. Furthermore, the coca that has been grown in the area for centuries and used since ancestral times for its medicinal qualities has been turned into cocaine in the hands of the Whites, a dangerous and profitable drug that attracts outsiders interested in the illegal trade. Asháninka peoples, together with other indigenous tribes from the region, have formed pressure groups and with the help of international organizations demand justice and defend their human rights. There is still a long way to go before they can also secure Indian rights and be free to conduct their own way of life. In the mid-2000s, the Asháninka gained legal title to a portion of their ancestral lands.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The phases of Asháninka women's reproductive life cycle are based on ritual and myth, with great significance placed on the transition from childhood to young adulthood. The Asháninka mark this transition with a series of initiation rites that recognize not only physical changes in the woman, but also the expectation that she will now assume a new set of roles and responsibilities within the community. The average age of marriage for women is between 15 and 19, but it is not uncommon for girls as young as 12 to be married shortly following their first menstrual cycle.

The most pressing health problems for women are early marriage and pregnancy, sexual violence (including marital rape), high number of children, and internal pains and hemorrhaging. Among the Asháninka, women's sexuality is understood in terms of men's needs and expectations. Women "please" men and provide them with children, with the fear that if they fail to do so, they will be abandoned. Women put their desired number of children at four or five, but given difficulties associated with contraception and men's desire for large families, the average number of children per woman is seven or eight.

Violence against women is both physical and psychological, a byproduct of the power imbalance in married couples. Men decide how many children women will have and often coerce

women into sexual relations or accuse them of infidelity if they resist sexual advances. Women internalize this behavior as legitimate given their subordinated roles in the social structure of the communities.

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—revised by V. Salles-Reese, C. Vergara

# ASIAN INDIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Asian Indian history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Indians**.

## OVERVIEW

Asian Indian Americans began migrating to the United States from India in small numbers during the 19th century. By 1900, the U.S. Census counted 2,050 Asian Indians living in the United States, mostly professional men, merchants, and travelers who settled along the east coast, particularly in New York. Asian Indian students also came to study at American colleges, mostly on the east coast, although a sizeable number attended universities in California by the time of World War I (1914–18).

Asian Indian nationalists, organizing a revolt against British rule in India in the 1800s and early 1900s, used the United States as a base for their activities. The Ghadr (“Revolution”) Party was organized by Asian Indian nationalist Har Dayal in 1913 with its headquarters in San Francisco. After 1905, Asian Indian laborers began immigrating in large numbers to Canada. When Canada began to regulate Asian Indian immigration, turning away several thousand applicants, many chose to enter the United States instead. Though most were from an agricultural caste in India, the majority found work in the railroad and timber industries. Because almost all Asian Indian immigrants at this time were single males, they were willing to work long hours for low wages and soon became a threat to other potential employees. The same was true for those Asian Indians who had found their way to California where they were employed as migrant farmworkers. European American workers began to intimidate them, trying to force them off the job as they had earlier tried to intimidate Chinese and Japanese workers. The Asian Indians formed partnerships to protect themselves and saved money to buy their own land. By 1919, they owned 2,077 acres and leased 86,315 acres of land in California, producing rice, cotton, nuts, fruits, and potatoes.

European Americans formed the Asiatic Exclusion League in the early 1900s to persuade the U.S. government to restrict Asian immigration. The government did indeed turn away some 3,453 Asian Indians between 1908 and 1920. At first, Asian Indians tried to fight back through legal means, filing suits in court and lobbying government officials. When these methods failed to achieve success, Asian Indians sought the help of radical Har Dayal and the Ghadr Party. When Dayal was arrested and deported after a demonstration, however, the movement fell apart and all but disappeared in America by 1917.

The Immigration Act of 1917 placed severe restrictions on Asian immigration to the United States, and the Alien Land Law of 1920 prevented those of Asian ancestry from owning land. Some Asian Indians transferred the title of their land to European American friends so as not to lose it, while others were forced to become landless laborers once again. A number of Asian Indians married Mexican women and put their lands in their wives’ names and the names of their American-born children. (Anti-miscegenation laws prevented Asian Indians



from marrying American women.) Between 1913 and 1946, 92% of Asian Indians living in southern California were married to Mexican women (76% of those in central California, and 47% in northern California).

Asian Indian immigration to the United States slowed down considerably from the 1920s through 1940s. By World War II (1939–45), the number of Asian Indians in the United States had dwindled to 2,405. Only 4% were professionals, while 65% were in agriculture (15% farmers, 50% laborers). At the end of World War II, relations between India and the United States improved, and Asian Indians were finally allowed to immigrate to the United States, become U.S. citizens, own property, and marry Americans.

At first, only a small number of Asian Indians took advantage of these new opportunities; about 6,000 Asian Indians immigrated to the United States between 1947 and 1965. In the past few decades, however, Asian Indian immigration has increased rapidly, with 387,223 residing in the United States by 1980; 786,694 by 1990; and 1,899,599 by 2000. While the total U.S. population increased by only 13% between 1990 and 2000, the Asian Indian population rose by 113%. As of 2004, Asian Indians were the second-largest group (after Chinese Americans) among Asian/Pacific Americans.

Many Asian Indian Americans are students who decided to change their status to “immigrant” once in the United States. Because Asian Indian migration to the United States in significant numbers is such a recent development, and because so many are young students, most Asian Indian Americans (over 71% in 2000) are foreign-born. Asian Indian families have

not lived in the United States long enough to have developed a large population of second- or third-generation American-born children.

Most Asian Indians continue to settle in California (360,392, according to the 2000 U.S. Census) and New York (296,056), with sizeable communities in New Jersey (180,957), Texas (142,689), and Illinois (133,978), especially Chicago (27,889), as well. During recent decades, the number of Asian Indian women migrating to the United States has just about equaled that of Asian Indian men. The overall median age of Asian Indian Americans in 2004 was 31.7 years. Less than 5% of Asian Indian Americans are over the age of 65, as compared to 12% of the total U.S. population. Most Asian Americans are in the middle-adult taxpaying age range.

There are almost 2,000 languages and dialects spoken in India, with Hindi (spoken by 30% of the population), English, and 14 regional languages—including Bengali and Urdu—officially recognized by the constitution. Because most Asian Indian Americans are foreign-born, they speak their native languages, as well as English. Almost 75% of Asian Indian Americans speak a language other than English at home, but 77% also speak English quite well.

Asian Indian religions have greatly influenced American life since the mid- to late 1900s, when Buddhist and Brahmanic philosophies birthed movements such as Theosophy (originating in 1875) in the United States. The first Asian Indian religious leader to visit the United States was Swami Vivekananda in 1893. He established the Vedanta Society to bring Hindu teachers to the United States and spread the wisdom of the Ve-



Senior correspondent Hari Sreenivasan prepares for a weekly show inside CNET's television studio. (© Ed Kashi/Corbis)

das (Hindu scriptures). Many Hindu, Buddhist, Ayurvedic, and other Asian Indian philosophies have since made their way into American life. A recent Asian Indian religious teacher and healer to settle in the United States is Deepak Chopra, author of many books, including *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Medicine* (1989), and founder of the American Association of Ayurvedic Medicine.

Asian Indians celebrate many different holidays, depending on their religious and cultural backgrounds. Immigrants to the United States bring their religious and cultural traditions with them, continuing to celebrate the holidays of their homeland. Some of the major holidays celebrated by various Asian Indian Americans are Baisakhi, the Hindu solar new year; Buddha Purnima, the birthday and day of enlightenment of Gautama Buddha; Dussehra and Durga Puja, the triumph of good over evil; Deepavali or Diwali, the festival of lights (also the financial new year); Gandhi Jayanti, the October 2 birthday of Mahatma Gandhi; Holi, a spring festival; Ramadan, Id'Ul'Fitir, Id-Uz-Zuha, and Muharram—Muslim holidays; American Independence Day on July 4; Asian Indian Independence Day on August 15; Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna; Mahavir Jayanti, the birthday of Vardhamana Mahavira; Onam, and Pongal or Sankranti, harvest festivals; and Republic Day on January 26, marking the adoption of India's constitution in 1950.

Asian Indian Americans are more likely to be wealthy than members of any other American ethnic group, including European Americans. In 2004, they had the highest median annual household income of any Asian American group, at \$69,000 (compared to \$56,000 for all Asian Americans, and only \$45,000 for the U.S. population as a whole). Fewer Asian Indian Americans (10%) live below the poverty line as do other Asian Americans (12%). Asian Indian Americans are also less poor than the U.S. population as a whole, of whom 13% live below the poverty line.

Very few Asian Indian Americans live alone. The vast majority live either in family households or with friends, fellow students, etc. Most live in nuclear family units of at least three persons. In 2004 more than two-thirds of Asian American adults were married. Divorce is rare (about 3%).

Many foreign-born Asian Indian American women wear traditional dress, which varies according to the region of India in which the women grew up. Most wear *sarees* (or *saris*), made from six yards of silk, cotton, or other lightweight fabric draped around the waist over a long petticoat, with the end gathered together over one shoulder. A close-fitting blouse of matching fabric and color is worn underneath. Styles of draping and decorating the saree vary from region to region in India.



Asian Indian American men have mostly adopted Western-style clothing, only wearing traditional dress on special occasions. Traditional Asian Indian clothing for men consists of a long robe called a *sherwani* worn over either tight-fitting pants called churidars, or looser, straighter pants. Sometimes a loose shirt called a *kurta* is worn instead of the robe, and a vest is often added. A *dhoti*, several yards of fabric draped around the legs to form loose trousers, is sometimes worn instead of other types of pants.

Asian Indian food has become very popular in the United States in recent years. Most medium-sized and large cities have at least one Asian Indian restaurant, where dishes such as dal (lentil soup), tandoori chicken (coated with a yogurt sauce and baked in a special oven called a tandoor), and chapatis (flat bread) are served. The Asian Indian diet, based on rice and other grains, several kinds of beans, and vegetables, with lean meats such as fish and chicken, is very healthy and appeals to vegetarians and meat-eaters alike.

Asian Indian Americans place a high value on education and are generally high achievers. Over 68% of Asian Indian Americans over the age of 25 are college graduates, and 90% have a high school diploma. With their high grade-point averages and competitive scores on standardized tests and college entrance exams, Asian Indian Americans are eligible for acceptance at the best universities in the United States. Some schools, such as California State University at San Francisco, Harvard, Yale, and Stanford, have a significant Asian Indian student population.

Traditional Asian Indian music is divided into two styles: Hindustani, which is popular in the north; and Karnatak, popular in the south. The predominant musical instruments are the *sitar* in the north and *veena* in the south, both of which resemble a guitar. Flutes, drums, and other instruments are also prevalent. Ravi Shankar is a well-known Asian Indian sitarist who established the Kinnara School of Music in Los Angeles in 1967. Shankar also collaborated with Asian Indian conductor Zubin Mehta, former director and conductor of both the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras, to fuse Western and Eastern music and bring Asian Indian music to the attention of the West.

There are many successful Asian Indian American writers of both fiction and nonfiction, including Dhan Gopal Mukerji, one of the first Asian Americans to write books for children; Bharati Mukherjee, who won the National Book Critics Circle Award for her novel, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988); Jhumpa Lahiri, who won a Pulitzer Prize for her collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999); and Ved Mehta, a journalist and staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine.

A greater percentage (61%) of Asian Indian Americans are employed in professional and managerial positions than any other Asian American group (45% for all Asian Americans) or Americans in general (34%). Through the extended family or ethnic network, Asian Indian Americans have virtually taken over the running of newsstands in New York City. Many independent motels in the United States are also managed by Asian Indian Americans. A growing number of gas stations are owned by Asian Indian Americans, and Asian Indian Americans are second only to Hasidic Jews in the Diamond District of the jewelry trade.

Although Asian Indian Americans have been largely successful in their new home country, they have been (and con-

tinue to be) the victims of racial prejudice. "Glass ceilings" prevent them from attaining the highest executive positions in corporations, despite excellent academic and professional qualifications. Discrimination leads many European Americans and other non-Asian Indians to refuse to see an Asian Indian American doctor. Hate crimes cause injuries, death, and tremendous stress in Asian Indian American communities. In September 1987, for example, Asian Indian American doctor Kaushal Sharan was attacked near his home in Jersey City, New Jersey, by members of a racist gang who beat him unconscious. At that time, many anti-Asian Indian hate crimes were being perpetrated in Jersey City by gangs calling themselves the Dotbusters (referring to the red dot, or *bindi*, worn by East Indian women on their foreheads) and the Lost Boys.

Traditional Asian Indian culture, like other Asian cultures, views sexuality as a taboo subject, with little or no room for the acknowledgment of homosexual preferences. Asian Indian American gays and lesbians, therefore, find themselves at a loss within their families to be recognized for who they are. Many choose never to reveal their homosexuality to members of their family. Gay and lesbian Asian Indian Americans must also deal with a lack of acceptance among homosexuals because of their Asian ethnicity. Many feel as isolated within the homosexual community as within the Asian American community. Asian Indian American homosexuals must therefore wrestle with family disapproval and ostracism as well as racial isolation in their quest for identity.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# AYMARA

**LOCATION:** Bolivia; Peru; Chile

**POPULATION:** About 2 million (Bolivia); 500,000 (Peru); 20,000 (Chile)

**LANGUAGE:** Aymara; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism combined with indigenous beliefs; Seventh Day Adventist

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Aymara have existed for more than 2000 years and are considered more than an ethnic group. They constitute a linguistic unity among several ethnic groups, such as the Lupaca, Pacaje, Canchi, Uru, etc. They are found in the altiplano—a vast windy plateau in the central Andes—and in smaller numbers in the northern regions of Chile and Argentina. Because of the harshness of the region commonly inhabited by the Aymara people, they have been forced to develop sophisticated techniques that have allowed them to survive and become one of the most skillful agriculturists and herders in America.

The Aymara appeared in the altiplano after the decline of the Tiahuanaco civilization (1580 BC–AD 1172), probably having migrated from the southern part of the continent. Before they were conquered by the Incas, the Aymara population was widely spread in South America, where the most important regions were Colla and the Lupaca. After resisting more than 100 years of Incas attacks, the Aymara finally succumbed to their rule in the late 15th century. Since then, the Aymara have experienced three different periods of acculturation, first under the Incas, then under the Spaniards, and finally during the course of modernization.

The Aymara later joined forces with the Incas to fight and subdue other native tribes. While the Aymara retained their own language and many of their customs, the influence of the Incas on their religious and social traditions was pronounced. It is sometimes difficult for anthropologists today to determine whether a practice or custom has Inca or Aymara origins.

The Aymara faced great hardships under Spanish colonial rule. In 1570, the Viceroy decreed forced labor in the rich silver mines on the altiplano. Potosi was once the site of the richest silver mine in the world. Millions of Aymara laborers perished in the wretched conditions in the mines. As in the case of many other Amerindian groups, the Spanish Conquest had severe consequences over the indigenous population because of the spread of new and unknown European diseases and colonial exploitation, which eventually led to the decline in aborigine population.

Nowadays, Bolivia has the highest proportion of indigenous peoples of any country in South America, and not surprisingly, it is the poorest country on the continent. The Aymara have an estimate population of about three million in the early 21st century.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Aymara live on high-altitude plains in the Bolivian Andes, on the Lake Titicaca plateau near the border with Peru. The altiplano is at an elevation of 3,000 m to 3,700 m (10,000–12,000 ft) above sea level, where weather conditions are cold and harsh, making agriculture difficult. In such conditions, Ayma-

ra grew crops that were suitable for the Andean climate, such as coca, and breed alpaca and llama. An ethnic group closely related to the Aymara live among the Uru islands on Lake Titicaca. These communities live not on land but on islands that are made of floating reeds.

An estimated 2 million Aymara live in Bolivia, with 500,000 residing in Peru, and about 20,000 in Chile. It should be emphasized that the Aymara are not confined to a defined territory in the Andes. After almost five centuries of hybridization of the region, many live in the cities, participate fully in Western culture, go to urban schools (sometimes private ones), play a variety of sports (basketball, tennis, soccer, volleyball, cycling), and dress in Western-style clothes. Most of the ethnic and cultural characteristics pointed out here refer to isolated villages and to the rural regions where perhaps half of the Aymara live.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Aymara language, originally called *jaqi aru* (the language of the people) is still the dominant language in the Bolivian Andes and in the southeastern parts of Peru. Aymara is an amazingly versatile language in which—through suffixes—a word can be concrete or abstract, noun or verb, and through which nuances can be incorporated into the language, something unknown to many modern languages. In the rural areas one finds that the Aymara language is predominant, while in the urban areas the Aymara are bilingual in Spanish and Aymara, and even trilingual in Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara in regions where Inca rule was prominent. The Aymara language is the second-most-prevalent indigenous language in the Americas, second only to the Quechua spoken by descendants of the Incas. Since colonial times, most Aymara Indians have Christian first names but preserve their Aymara last names, for example, Francisco Mamani (“falcon” in Aymara). Given the large numbers of Aymara-speaking people in Bolivia, there are several radio stations and a couple of television channels that transmit only in Aymara.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Aymara share with other ethnic groups some of the Pan-Andean myths of origin. In one of them, the god Tunupa is a creator of the universe, but he is also the one that taught the people all his customs: how to develop agriculture, the songs they sang, how to weave, the languages each group had to speak, and the precepts to lead a moral life. Aymara mythology abounds in myths of origin, such as the origin of the wind, of hail, of mountains, and of lakes.

## 5 RELIGION

The religious practices of most Amerindian groups are a unique fusion between their traditional, indigenous practices and the religion imposed by the colonizers. The Aymara are no exception. The Aymara, however, have had two cultures imposed on them: first by the Incas and later by the Spanish. The Incas permitted the Aymara to maintain their language and all their customs, yet many of the religious practices of the Inca religion were adopted by the Aymara. Similarly, the Incas adopted the idols of the groups they vanquished and kept them in their temples. The similarity of these beliefs, which revered natural forces, such as the sun, the moon, and thunder, made the new religion easy to assimilate.



They suppressed native religious institutions but effected only a superficial conversion to Christianity. Today, the Aymara maintain their beliefs in a multispirit world, have many categories of magicians, diviners, medicine men, and witches, but are Christian in their beliefs about the afterworld. Independence and economic development brought changes in social organization and a decline in traditional arts and crafts.

Spanish conquerors prohibited native religious institutions. Catholicism was introduced during the colonial period and has been adopted by the Aymara. For example, the Aymara will attend Mass and celebrate baptisms, followed the Catholic calendar of important Christian events but the content of their many religious festivals, however, bears evidence of their traditional beliefs. The Aymara regularly make offerings to Mother Earth, in order to assure a productive harvest or to cure illnesses. The Aymara believe in the power of spirits that reside in mountains, in the sky, or in natural forces, such as lightning. The most potent and sacred of their gods is Pachamama, the Earth Goddess who has the power to make the soil fertile and ensure a good crop. Today, Aymara people maintain their beliefs expressed in the existence of many categories of magicians, diviners, medicine men, and witches.

Most recently, the Seventh-Day Adventists have made great inroads in Aymara communities, and the religion is attracting an increasing number of followers.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Aymara, being mostly Bolivian, celebrate the same holidays as everybody else in the country: the civic holidays, such as Independence Day, and the religious ones, such as Christmas and Easter. One particular holiday is Dia del Indio, on August 2, which commemorates their cultural heritage. The Aymara celebrate many holidays throughout the year. In every town, they celebrate the day of their patron saint on the liturgical Catholic calendar. These festivals last up to seven days and are celebrated with music, traditional dancing, and abundant consumption of alcohol. For each fiesta, a host is found. This person, known as the *preste*, is responsible for providing the food and drink for the community. To be a *preste* is an honor that Aymara seek, and they save for years in order to afford the expense.

The Aymara also celebrate Carnival. Carnival is a festival marking the beginning of Lent that is widely celebrated throughout South America. Dancing to drums and flutes accompanies a week-long celebration. Also important is the festival Alacistas, which features the God of Good Luck. Most households will have a ceramic figure of the Good Luck spirit, known as Ekeko. Purported to bring prosperity and grant wishes, the Ekeko doll is a round, plump figure, carrying miniature replicas of household goods, such as cooking utensils, bags of food, and money.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An Aymara child is gradually introduced to the social and cultural traditions of the community. Key stages in the development of a child are marked by traditions and rites of passage. A significant event in the life of an Aymara child is the first hair cut, known as *rutucha*. A baby's hair is allowed to grow until the child is able to walk and talk. At approximately two years old, when it is unlikely that he or she will succumb to childhood diseases that are prevalent in the Andes, the head is shaved bare.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

For the Aymara culture, the basic social unit is the extended family conformed basically by wife, sons, brothers, and unmarried daughters. However, this social organization had been affected by the expansion of cities and modern life resulting in migrations motivated by the hope of finding better salaries for them and their families in urban settlements.

A dominant feature of the Aymara culture is reciprocity and the social obligation to help other members of the community. The exchange of labor and mutual aid play an essential role within an *ayllu*, or community. Such exchanges are invoked at times when substantial amounts of labor are required that a single family cannot provide. An Aymara peasant might ask for help from a neighbor to build a house, dig an irrigation ditch, or harvest a field. In return, he or she is expected to reciprocate by donating the same number of days' labor to the neighbor.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions of the Aymara depend mainly on where they live and how much they have been integrated to the Western style of life. To generalize about their living conditions would be a gross mistake. Many Aymara that reside in cities live in

modern houses or apartments. There are also large numbers of poor Aymara in the cities who have just one room. In rural areas, the construction of an Aymara house depends largely upon its location and the availability of materials. A typical Aymara house is a small oblong dwelling constructed of adobe, although near the lake reeds are the primary building material. Thatched roofs are made of reeds and grasses.

The high altitude makes life in the altiplano very difficult. The low level of oxygen in the air can leave one with *soroche* (altitude sickness), which causes headaches, fatigue, and nausea. *Soroche* is also potentially fatal. In order to adapt to life in the mountains, the Aymara have undergone clear physiological changes that enable them to cope in this environment. Most significantly, the Aymara and other mountain peoples have a greatly increased lung capacity relative to their body size. Expanded lung capacity enables them to increase their intake of air and, therefore, oxygen.

The use of coca leaves also ameliorates the effects of altitude sickness. Chewing coca leaves releases a mild alkaloid that combats fatigue and hunger. Coca leaves produce a mild medicinal effect and do not contain cocaine, which results only after major chemical processing of the leaves.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The central social unit of the Aymara is the extended family. Typically, a family will encompass parents, unmarried children, and grandparents in one house, or in a small cluster of houses. Large families are common, with many families having seven or eight children. Systems of reciprocity and mutual obligation are very strong within the extended family, and cousins, in-laws, and other relatives form a network of support and assistance. Relatives help with minding the children and harvesting, and they may provide loans in times of economic hardship.

There is a sharp division of labor within an Aymara household, but women's work is not necessarily considered inferior. Planting, in particular, is a task ascribed to women that is highly respected. Women in Aymara society also have inheritance rights. Property owned by females will be passed down from mother to daughter, ensuring that not all land and property goes to the sons, as it does in other cultures. This practice, however, has had some drawbacks, as parcels of land become so small through generations of inheritance divisions as to be agriculturally impractical.

Marriage is a long process that entails many steps, such as the inheritance feasts, a planting ritual, and the building of the house. Despite the lengthy marriage ritual, divorce is accepted and is relatively simple.

## 11 CLOTHING

Clothing styles vary greatly among the Aymara. Men in the cities wear regular Western clothes, and women wear their traditional *polleras* (ample skirts) made of fine materials, such as velvet and brocade. They wear shawls that are embroidered, and bowler hats (some of which are made in Italy). In the altiplano, the story is different. The strong cold winds that blow on the altiplano require warm woolen clothing. Demonstrating the clear influence of the colonial Spanish, women wear long homespun skirts and sweaters. Layers of skirts are used to provide some protection against the cold. For festivals or important occasions, women will wear as many as five or six skirts



Aymara women dancers in traditional dress in La Paz, Bolivia.  
(David Johnson)

on top of each other. Traditional weaving techniques dating back to pre-Inca times are used to produce brightly colored shawls, which are also used to strap children to their backs or carry loads of goods. For headwear, the women wear distinctive *bowbin*, or bowler hats. Aymara men in the altiplano wear long cotton trousers and woolen caps with ear flaps. In many regions, men also wear ponchos. Both sexes may wear sandals or shoes, but many go barefoot despite the cold.

## 12 FOOD

In cities, the Aymara diet is varied with one distinctive characteristic: *aji*, a hot pepper used to season the dishes. In the countryside, potatoes and grains, such as quinoa, form the staple diet. Quinoa, which is becoming increasingly popular in health food stores in the United States, is a nutritious, high-protein grain that has been grown in the Andes for centuries. The extremes of temperature that exist in the high Andes make it possible for potatoes and other tubers to be naturally freeze-dried and preserved. The cold air at night will freeze the moisture from the potato, while the sun during the day will melt and evaporate it. After a week lying out in the elements, the potatoes are pounded. The result is *chuño*, small, rock-hard

pieces of potato that can be stored for years. Lengthy soaking in water will rehydrate them and prepare them for cooking.

Meats are also freeze-dried. A traditional dish is *olluco con charqui*. *Olluco* is a small potato-like tuber, which is cooked with *charqui*, dried llama meat. Llamas are important for their wool and packing ability and are therefore consumed only rarely. Fish from Lake Titicaca or neighboring rivers is an important part of the diet in many communities.

Food is cooked in clay stoves into spicy stews or soups. Condiments include *aji*, other hot peppers, and peanut sauces. For festive occasions, guinea pig is eaten. Spicy guinea pig stew is the most desirable dish at a feast.

### 13 EDUCATION

In Bolivia, primary school education is mandatory until the age of 14. However, as in other developing countries, children of subsistence peasants are less likely than their urban counterparts to complete their schooling. Most rural families rely on children to conduct many essential household chores. Children often have the responsibility of tending to a herd or taking care of younger siblings. Male children are more likely to complete school than are girls, who have greater household responsibilities, even at a very young age.

Despite this, Bolivian literacy rates are fairly high, estimated at 85% for males and 71% for females. Perhaps this is the result of the rural school program that was massively implemented after the agrarian reform of 1953. The state universities, being virtually free, educate many Aymara who achieve degrees in all the professions, including medicine, law, and engineering. There are also trade schools where Aymara electricians, carpenters, plumbers, and mechanics are trained.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Aymara have a rich musical tradition. Although a clear Spanish influence can be discerned, the Aymara's primary musical influences date as far back as their pre-Inca ancestors. Percussion and flutes are featured prominently at festivals and celebrations. Panpipes (*zampoñas*) and the *pututu* horn, made out of a hollowed-out cow's horn, are traditional instruments that are still widely played. Homemade violins and drums are also common.

Indigenous dances have also been passed down through the generations. Each festival has its particular traditional dances. Many dances feature large, brightly painted masks and costumes. Many dances symbolize and parody the Spanish colonizers. The "old man dance," for example, features a bent-over Spanish aristocrat with a broad top hat. In this satirical dance, the dancer imitates the gestures and mannerisms of old Spanish gentlemen to comic effect.

The Aymara have a very rich and long oral tradition. During colonial times many of their songs, poems, and stories were compiled by missionaries or Ladino Indians (Indians that had learned how to write). In the 20th century, many ethnographers and linguists have also transcribed their texts. Aymara literature has recently undergone a renaissance. Now there are many Aymara who write down their stories and legends. Many of them are published in bilingual (Spanish-Aymara) editions.

### 15 WORK

Many Aymara are subsistence farmers in a harsh, high-altitude environment. The high altitude, cold nights, and poor soil

greatly limit the types of crops that are able to be sown. The Aymara follow traditional patterns of agricultural production, often still relying on pre-Columbian terraces, and following a careful pattern of crop rotation. The most important crop is the potato, which originated in the Andes. Also important is corn, quinoa (a grain), and barley. Many families own land at different altitudes, which enables them to grow a diverse range of crops.

Tractors or even oxen teams are rare in the high Andes. Traditional agricultural implements, such as the *taclla*, a foot plow, are still widely used. While the men do the plowing and digging, the sacred task of planting is reserved exclusively for women, as only they have the power to give life. This is also out of deference to *Pachamama*, the Earth Goddess.

The Aymara are also herders, deriving both wool and meat from herds of llamas, alpacas, and sheep. A family may also supplement their grazing herd with a couple of cows, frogs, or chickens. Many communities are beginning to diversify economically and produce off-farm income. The growing tourist trade has increased the demand for the luxurious wool of the alpaca, and sweaters are often knitted for the tourist trade, generating much-needed cash income. Some Aymara also work as laborers in silver or tin mines. These mines are dangerous and can cause health problems. However, they offer a scarce opportunity for cash income.

Many Aymara have entered politics since the reforms of 1952. They have founded a political party, Katarista, and they have senators and representatives in the Bolivian congress.

### 16 SPORTS

Although there are no sports that are strictly Aymara, soccer is the Bolivian national sport and many Aymara participate.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

With the proliferation of mass media, the Aymara now enjoy their own TV shows, both as spectators and as performers. A kind of soap opera in Aymara is transmitted on the Aymara channel. There are musical groups that have made recordings that are avidly consumed by many Aymara. Urban Aymara are frequent moviegoers. One of the preferred activities is to dance in folklore festivals, for which they rehearse many months. Young people use these occasions to socialize among peers.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Aymara are skilled weavers, a tradition dating back to their pre-Inca origins. Many ethnologists believe that the textiles of the Andes are among the most highly developed and complex textile traditions in the world. The Aymara use a great many materials in their weaving, including cotton, as well as sheep, alpaca and llama wool. Additionally, the Aymara use to-tora reeds to make fishing boats, baskets, and related artifacts. Styles, patterns, and colors used in textile-weaving differ by region. Among the most sought-after textiles are those made in the town of Potolo. Potolo weavers emphasize zoomorphic designs that depict horses, llamas, and other animals.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems faced by the Aymara stem from colonial times. European colonizers and their descendants have marginalized the Indians and exploited them constantly, putting

them in the lower strata of the social scale. Beginning with the Spaniards, the Aymara culture (and, for that matter, of all Amerindians) has been stigmatized and forced to acculturate to the colonizers' imposed values and beliefs. In spite of all the efforts made during almost half a millennium to erase or extirpate their culture, however, the Aymara have preserved some of their indigenous traits, which unfortunately have maintained them on the fringes of a society sharply divided among classes. It has been only in the second half of the 20th century that there has been an openness to accept their heritage without derogatory connotations. After the MNR revolution of 1952 [see "Bolivians"], all Indians enjoy all the civil rights of every Bolivian. With their access to education, their participation in the life of the country is beginning to be more active, but there are still class and racial barriers to overcome before they can fully participate in the modern life of the country. Unfortunately, too many of the Aymara still remain in poverty in rural areas, forcing large numbers to migrate to the cities where life becomes even harder for them in many respects.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

One of the pillars of Aymara culture is the concept of *ayni* (reciprocity and balance), which used to give married Aymara women independent rights to own land. Moreover, in Aymara tradition, the principle of parallel lines of descent in which men conceived themselves as descending from a line of men and women from a line of women, was one of the key rules ordering pre-Columbian Andean kinship. Within this system, the basic structural unit was the sibling pair, which also ordered political and religious relations in the Andes. In addition, within the kin group itself, the designation of authority was based on order of birth, with no distinction made in terms of gender. Therefore, the male-dominated structure that the Spanish brought to the Andes imposed a special burden on Aymara women.

Aymara women are a marginalized, poor, and deprived social group, with low education, high unemployment, extreme poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. They also lack knowledge in Spanish. Illiteracy among Aymara women is more than one third and maternal mortality, especially in certain rural areas of the highlands, reaches 887 per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in Latin America.

In addition, Aymara women struggle against social traditions, which are particularly hard to break. Women rear the children, keep the house running, often manage the family business, and are preponderant in streets and markets selling everything from vegetables to electronic products.

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—revised by C. Vergara.

# BAHAMIANS

**LOCATION:** Bahamas

**POPULATION:** 307,451

**LANGUAGE:** English; Bahamian dialect

**RELIGION:** Christianity

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Although the islands of the Bahamas are actually located in the western Atlantic Ocean, they are often identified with the Caribbean. They were the first islands to be sighted by Christopher Columbus in 1492, and the explorer named them *baja mar* (literally, “low water” in Spanish) for the shallow sea that surrounds them. Since the Bahamas lacked the mineral wealth found on other islands in the region, the Spanish did not settle them but rather used the more than 32,000 native populations of Lucayans as slaves on Hispaniola and other islands. Within a quarter of a century, the islands were depopulated and remained so for over 100 years. During the 17th century, the Bahamas became both a refuge for English settlers and a base for pirates, including the notorious Blackbeard.

In 1647 the Company of Eleutherian was founded in London with the objective of exploiting the land of the Island of Eleuthera, formerly known as Buhama in America. The formation of this company was the kick off for the first permanent English settlement in the island, which was a community founded in 1649 by 70 colonists from Bermuda, comprising religious independents as well as women who originally came from England. With the pass of time, more settlers followed, bringing African slaves with them. Even though the English imagined a prosperous plantation colony, unproductive soil and Spanish interference made the project fail. In 1670 King Charles II granted the islands to the Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas who rented the islands from the king with rights of trading, tax, and administering the country. But, under the Lords Proprietors administration the Bahamas and the region became a dangerous place infested by pirates. To solve this problem, the Bahamas was made a British Crown colony in 1718. In the 1780s the islands received an influx of British loyalists—also with slaves—from the colonies following the defeat of the British in the American Revolution. By the end of the 18th century, the number of Blacks in the Bahamas was twice that of the European population.

As it was common in the Caribbean region, the Bahamas witnessed slave riots during the years that preceded the elimination of servitude. Slavery was abolished in Britain and its possessions in 1833, but illegal slave traders used the Bahamas as a base to smuggle slaves into the southern United States. During the American Civil War, New Providence became a site of blockade-running and gunrunning for the Confederate States. In the following decades, the Bahamian economy languished, except for a temporary period of prosperity during the Prohibition era in the United States, when rumrunners operated on Nassau. With the introduction of commercial aviation in the 1930s, the islands’ tourism industry began, and by the end of the following decade it had become their primary source of income.

A series of constitutional changes in the 1960s led to full national independence in 1973. In the 1960s new tax and finance

restrictions in the United States led to the Bahamas’s becoming an international center of finance.

The Bahamas has become one of the richest countries in the Caribbean and its economy relies heavily on tourism and offshore banking. Since 1986 total tourist arrivals—mostly from the United States—has topped 3 million per year, over half of which are cruise ship passengers. The tourism realm accounts for around 60% of GDP and directly or indirectly employs half of the archipelago’s labor force. The increased demand for visiting the zone has meant an extraordinary boom in construction of new hotels, resorts, and residences.

Financial services constitute the second-most important sector of the Bahamian economy and, when combined with business services, account for about 36% of GDP. In 2007 close to 90% of the population was employed in the service realm, 7% was occupied in the industrial sector, and just 3% was working in agriculture. It is important to remember that just 0.58% percent of the land is arable.

In 2007 the Bahamian economy grew 3.1%.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in the Atlantic Ocean off Florida’s southeastern coast, the Bahamas is an archipelago consisting of approximately 700 islands, of which about 30 are inhabited, as well as over 2,000 reefs and cays. Their total land area of 13,934 sq km (5,380 sq mi, or slightly more than the combined area of New Jersey and Connecticut) is spread out over nearly 260,000 sq km (100,390 sq mi). The islands are bisected by the Tropic of Cancer, which passes between Great Exuma Island and Long Island. Besides the United States, the Bahamas’ nearest neighbors include Cuba to the southwest and Haiti and the Turks and Caicos Islands to the southeast.

The two main islands of the Bahamas are New Providence, where the capital city of Nassau is located, and Grand Bahama, the site of Freeport, the nation’s only other metropolitan area. The remaining, less-developed islands are generally called either the “Family Islands” or the “out islands.” Among these are Bimini, Abaco, Eleuthera, the Exumas, Andros, Cat Island, Long Island, Rum Cay, and Crooked Island. The islands’ terrain includes rocky cliffs, dense jungle swampland, pine forests, isolated coves, and sandy beaches. The highest point in the Bahamas, on Cat Island, is only 63 m (207 ft) above sea level.

The Bahamas has an estimated population of some 307,000 people, of whom about 65% live in cities and about 35% in rural areas. New Providence and Grand Bahama, the most densely populated islands, account for more than 75% of the Bahamian population. About 85% of Bahamians are of African descent, 8% are of mixed ancestry, and the remainder are White (mostly of British origin). Most White Bahamians live on New Providence, the Abacos, or Grand Bahama.

In the 1950s and 1960s—the era of the Civil Rights movement in the United States—race relations in the Bahamas began to change. Until then, economic opportunities for Blacks were severely limited, and they endured the overt racism of being barred from theaters, hotels, shops, and other public places. Thanks to a movement known as the Quiet Revolution, together with government policies that improved educational and job opportunities, the lot of Black Bahamians has improved and a new Black middle class has come into being on New Providence and Grand Bahama.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Standard English is the official language of the Bahamas, but most of the population speaks some version of an English-based Creole language called the Bahamian dialect. The rise of Creole language finds its explanation in the influx of Haitian migrations since the mid 20th century.

The language of the working class is the furthest from Standard English, while that of Whites and middle-class Bahamians of African ancestry generally falls somewhere on a spectrum between the official language and the creolized version.

An example of the Bahamian dialect can be found in the following verse from the poem "Islan' Life" by poet and playwright Susan J. Wallace:

Islan' life ain' no fun less ya treat errybody  
like ya brudder, ya sister, or ya frien'  
Love ya neighbour, play ya part, jes' remember das de art,  
For when ocean fen' ya in, all is kin.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Bahamas is rich in myths and legends, especially those related to specific islands. Little Exuma Island is said to be haunted by a woman named Pretty Molly Bay, who is actually the source of two different legends. In one, she is a drowned slave who roams the beaches at night; in the other, she is a young White woman turned into a mermaid. There are stories about creatures called "chickcharnies"—three-toed sprites with red eyes—who hang upside down from trees on the island of Andros and are capable of turning a person's head around to face backwards. Bimini is traditionally associated with the Fountain of Youth, and North Bimini is associated with the lost city of Atlantis.

The 19th-century Haitian leader Henri Christophe, who committed suicide according to official accounts, is popularly thought to have escaped to Inagua Island in the Bahamas. The American playwright Eugene O'Neill based his play *The Emperor Jones* on this legend. The Bahamas' history as a base for pirate operations in the 17th and 18th centuries has spawned tales about buried treasure throughout the islands (treasure has actually been found on some sunken ships and on Cat Island).

### 5 RELIGION

Most Bahamians are Christian. According to the 2000 census, Baptists account for about 35.4% of the population, while Roman Catholics represent 13.5%, and Anglicans account for about 15.1% of the population. Other important creeds in the islands are Pentecostals representing 8.1% and Methodist with a 4.2%. Other Christians account for 15.2% of the population and 2.9% do not have a specific religious tendency.

It is not unusual for Bahamians to attend services at their own church and others as well. The influence of Christianity is reflected in the popularity of gospel music on the islands. On some of the islands, Christian beliefs are combined with the ancient African practice of *obeah*.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in the Bahamas include the major holy days of the Christian calendar as well as Labor Day (the first Friday in June), Independence Day (July 10), Emancipation Day (the first Monday in August), and Discovery Day (October 12). The best-



known celebration on the islands is Junkanoo, held on both Christmas and New Year's. Thought to be descended from the day off formerly given to slaves on Christmas, it is a boisterous, colorful event that shares much of its character with Carnival festivities in such Caribbean countries as Trinidad and Tobago. Costumed groups unified by specific themes compete for prizes as they and masses of other revelers parade through the streets to the accompaniment of whistles and goatskin drums called *gombays*. Fringes of brightly colored crepe paper adorn masks and costumes alike.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Christian ceremonies, such as baptism and confirmation, mark the major passages from one stage to another in a Bahamian's life.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Bahamian culture is an amalgam of its African and European heritages and the influence of the peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas. Even though family life is still important in their culture, it is also important to point out that the incorporation of women to the labor force has diminished women's leverage as cultural agents.

The Bahamas has a large urban population heavily influenced by the country's large tourism industry. The legal system is based on English common law.





*A Bahamian child's primary caretaker, generally either the mother or grandmother, is also the person in charge of discipline in the family.  
(Cory Langley)*

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions range from the modern urban bustle of Nassau (on New Providence) and Freeport (on Grand Bahama) to the rural existence on the Family Islands (also called the out islands), whose inhabitants have little or no exposure to tourists and live a simpler, more traditional life. Migration to the cities for better jobs has produced an urban housing shortage, especially in low-income areas. In the 1980s new housing did not keep pace with demand. A World Bank report described 40% of the islands' dwellings as being in average to poor condition. Most Family Islanders live near the shore in villages whose scattered houses are simple wooden structures, some without plumbing or electricity (according to the World Bank, two out of three households in the Family Islands did not have running water in 1986).

The Bahamians have made great progress in health care since the 1960s. Average life expectancy is 68 years for men and 75 years for women. However, during the last years, the effect on mortality rates due to AIDS has been catastrophic. Life expectancy has decreased to 62.5 year for men and 69 years for women.

In 1992 there was 1 physician for every 714 people. There is a system of clinics on the out islands (there were 107 clinics in 1992), and patients who need additional care are flown to Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau. Most Bahamian doctors receive their training in the United States, Great Britain,

or Canada. Bahamians in the out islands often use folk medicine, including herbal remedies, such as boiling parts of certain plants to produce medicinal teas.

Motorists in the Bahamas drive on the left side of the road, a legacy of the British presence on the islands. The more densely settled islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama have modern, paved roadways, but few Bahamians own their own cars. In 1991 the country had only 70,000 registered passenger vehicles, including buses, taxis, government-owned vehicles, and motor scooters (a very popular form of transport). More than half the registered vehicles were on the island of New Providence. Most of the Family Islands have only one or two roads, which run the length of the island, and boats are the preferred mode of transportation, since settlements are usually located near the coast. There are no railways on the Bahamas, but there are international airports at Nassau and Freeport.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Although the model family in the Bahamas is the two-parent nuclear family, the migration of adults to Nassau and Freeport has left many families in the out islands headed by grandparents, and there are also households headed by single parents. However, it is unusual for unmarried couples to live together. A child's primary caretaker, generally either the mother or grandmother, is also the person in charge of discipline in the family. Adult children often give their mothers gifts or financial assistance. On the out islands men and women often do

the same kinds of work, including farming and wage labor. According to a 1994 agricultural survey, 33% of the nation's farmers were women (and 50% of all agricultural workers were Haitians).

### **11 CLOTHING**

Bahamians wear modern Western-style clothing. Colorful costumes of all kinds can be seen at the annual Junkanoo festivals in Nassau and other locations.

### **12 FOOD**

Seafood is the mainstay of the Bahamian diet. The conch shellfish is a national favorite used in many dishes. Other popular fish and shellfish include grouper, snapper, crayfish (which Bahamians call lobster), and shark. Peas and rice, reflecting the islands' African heritage, is a dietary staple consisting of dried pigeon peas and rice prepared with thyme and other spices. Sauces—dishes containing lightly pickled meats—also figure prominently in Bahamian cuisine. Developed in the days before refrigeration to preserve meats in the islands' tropical climate, they are made from various meats (including lamb tongue and mutton) or conch stewed in lime juice and spices. Served with cooked grits and johnny cake (a type of bread), they are a popular breakfast food. The traditional Bahamian breakfast is based on the diet of fishers who needed a hearty meal before spending the day at sea.

#### **Chicken Souse**

2 chickens	2 cups chicken broth
cut-up celery stalks	10 allspice berries
4 potatoes, chopped	1 bay leaf
2 onions, chopped	1 teaspoon dried thyme
2 Scotch Bonnet peppers	½ cup lime juice

Put both chickens in a large pot with enough water to cover, and bring the water to a boil. After cooking for two minutes, pour out the water and add enough fresh water to cover the chickens. The vegetables and all other remaining ingredients except the lime juice should be added when the water boils, and the mixture should be allowed to simmer for 10 minutes. Then add the lime juice and simmer for 10 more minutes. May be served hot immediately (after skimming off the fat), or served cold after refrigeration.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Over 96% of adult Bahamians are literate. Education is mandatory between the ages of 5 and 14, but most students continue their schooling until at least the age of 16. The educational system is modeled on that of Great Britain, with secondary education referred to in terms of "forms" (12th grade is called 6th form in the Bahamas) and exams required in order to attend college. Students must also take exams at the end of every school year in order to pass to the next grade. Before independence in 1973, students from the out islands traveled to Nassau for their secondary education, but in the years since then secondary schools have been started on many of these islands.

The government-run College of the Bahamas opened in 1974, and the Bahamas has also been home to a branch of the University of the West Indies since the 1960s. The Industrial Training Center offers programs in such fields as electrical installation, plumbing, and auto mechanics, and the Bahamas

Hotel Training College prepares students to work for hotels, tourism organizations, and other tourism-related businesses. In addition, many Bahamians attend colleges and universities in North America and Great Britain.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Susan Wallace, from the island of Grand Bahama, is the nation's best-known poet. She has also edited *Back Home*, an anthology of Bahamian literature. Playwright Winston Saunders, author of *You Can Bring a Horse to Water*, is the director of the Dundas Theatre, which stages plays by Bahamian and other authors. The meticulously groomed and disciplined Royal Bahamas Police Force Band, reflecting the British influence on Bahamian history and culture, performs at all major public events. Well-known artist Alton Lowe captures many facets of Bahamian life in his realistic paintings.

### **15 WORK**

The government is the largest employer in the Bahamas. Many government jobs are related to tourism, which together with related employment, provides jobs for the majority of Bahamians—estimated at 50% or more of the labor force. Agriculture and industry are much smaller contributors to the nation's economy and employ far fewer people. Subsistence farming and fishing have traditionally been the main occupations on the out islands, whose inhabitants also earn money producing crafts or through seasonal employment in resort areas. Because of the shortage of salaried jobs in these areas, many residents move to Nassau or Freeport to seek employment.

### **16 SPORTS**

Softball is the most popular sport in the Bahamas, whose teams compete regularly in the World Softball Conference. Other favorite sports include basketball, volleyball, and track and field. Student athletes compete in intramural and interscholastic basketball and volleyball, and scholarships in these sports have helped many Bahamian young people attend universities in the United States. Water sports, including sailing, windsurfing, and fishing, are popular with Bahamians and tourists alike. Many islanders race in the Family Islands regatta, held every April and based in George Town, on the island of Exuma.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In addition to the indigenous Bahamian *goombay* (goatskin drum) music, calypso, soca, and reggae are also popular, as is gospel music, which is performed in concert halls and on outdoor stages as well as in churches. There is approximately one television for every four persons in the Bahamas. Programming includes American situation comedies, professional sports, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programming, and British and Canadian educational broadcasting. Church programs are broadcast on Sundays. Radio programming includes calypso music, soft and hard rock, "oldies" music, and talk shows.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Bahamian folk music is closely related to the African-based Junkanoo festival, where the popular goatskin drum called the *goombay* was originally heard. Today, goombay is also used to refer to the calypso-style music whose satirical lyrics it often



*Bahamians dance, sing, and play at a Junkanoo dance. The origin of the word Junkanoo is obscure, though some say it comes from the French. (David McLain/Aurora/Getty Images)*

accompanies. In the out islands, local bands playing the goombay, the guitar, and the saw entertain at weddings and dances. Folk dance in the Bahamas ranges from the European quadrille to the African-derived jump dance and the West Indian limbo.

Crafts including woodcarving, quilting, basketry, and shellwork that were once produced chiefly for use by their creators have become profitable commercial items for sale to the country's tourists. The straw work produced on the out islands is especially distinctive. Using palm fronds braided into long strips that are then sewn together, the island women make hats, baskets, purses, and other items, often decorating them with raffia paper and seashells.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Bahamas has not traditionally been a violent society and, in the past, serious crimes, such as homicide, have been rare. However, in recent years, drug trafficking has caused a substantial increase in crime. In New Providence the use of crack cocaine has resulted in frequent armed robberies.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Even though family life is important to most Bahamians, single women head an increasing number of households. Before the 1940s, women tended to be stay-at-home mothers and wives.

Now, as a result of increased educational opportunities and the development of the tourist industry, most women work outside the home.

Although legally Bahamian women have equal status under the law, men tend to dominate the higher-income and higher-status positions in the public and private sectors. While men dominate fishing and other maritime endeavors, the building trades, and the transportation industry, women dominate fields such as nursing, elementary school teaching, and office work. Out-island women tend to be farmers, shopkeepers, craft specialists, and domestics when they are employed.

Regarding marriage, a sexual double standard exists in which Bahamian women are supposed to be chaste until marriage and faithful during marriage whereas men are expected to have premarital and extramarital affairs. Because women are almost eight times more prone to get infected with HIV than men, the Bahamians's sexual standard tends to play in favor of spreading of the virus.

Among the hardest hit regions in the world, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa, Bahamas has the highest annual incidence of HIV/AIDS in the English-speaking Caribbean. Moreover, HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death for Bahamian men and women between the ages of 15 and 44 years. As in most of the world, women in the Bahamas represent the fastest growing segment of the population with HIV/AIDS.

The first female member of parliament was elected in 1982. Since that time, there have been female cabinet ministers, legislators, and supreme court justices.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# BARBADIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bajans

**LOCATION:** Barbados

**POPULATION:** 281,968 (2008)

**LANGUAGE:** English with West African dialect influences

**RELIGION:** Christianity: Anglican church (majority); Roman Catholicism; Methodism; Rastafarianism; other groups include Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Muslims, Baha'is, Jews; Apostolic Spiritual Baptist is the island's only indigenous religion

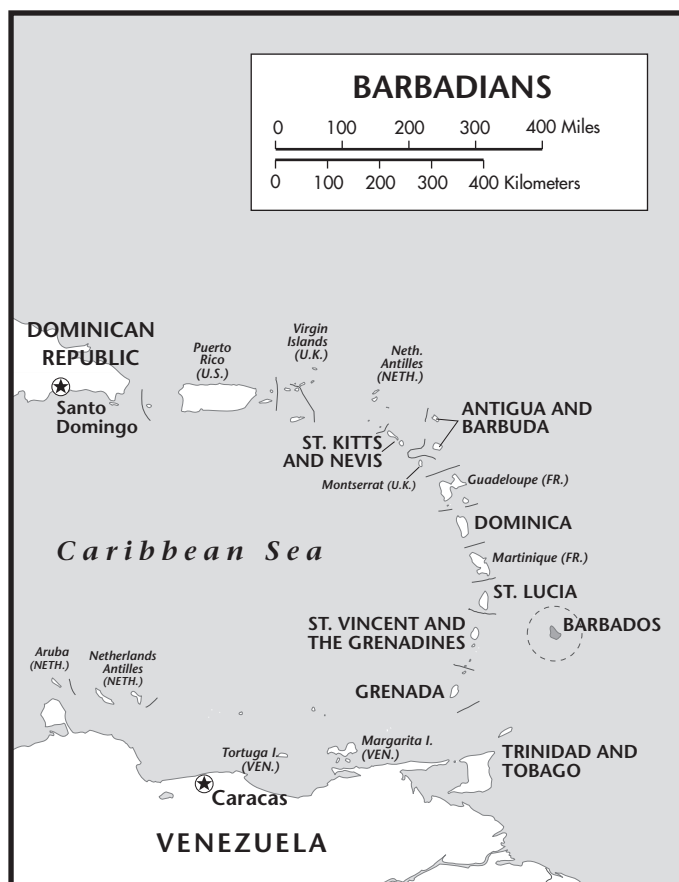
## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Barbados is unique among the islands of the Caribbean in having been governed by only one colonial power, the British, and the resulting influence has given the country its nickname of "Little England." The Barbadians' name for themselves (Bajans—pronounced BAY-juns) is derived from "Barbajians," which is the way the British commonly pronounced Barbadians. Although previously settled by the Arawak and Carib Indians, the island was uninhabited when the British first landed there in 1625. Sugar-growing was introduced by the Dutch from Brazil shortly afterward and African slaves were imported to work on the great sugar plantations. After the abolition of slavery in 1834, Black workers stayed on the plantations and life on the island changed very little. Economic and political power was maintained by a small minority of White landowners, and the fortunes of the territory were dictated by the alternating booms and slumps of the sugar trade.

Following an outbreak of rioting in 1937, the Barbados Progressive League, antecedent of today's Barbados Labor Party (BLP), was founded to promote social, economic, and political reform. Sir Grantley Adams emerged as its leader. A series of political reforms culminated in universal suffrage in 1950 and Grantley Adams became premier of a self-governing Barbados in 1953. Errol Barrow broke away from the Barbados Labor Party in 1954 to found the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) and led Barbados into independence in 1966. In 1976 Errol Barrow was defeated by Tom Adams, the son of Sir Grantley Adams. In 1974 Barbados participated in the founding of CARICOM (the Caribbean Community and Common Market) and in 1994 the island was the site of the United Nations Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The BLP led the government for fifteen years, from 1993 until the 2008 general election, when the DLP led by David Thompson came to power.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Belonging to the Lesser Antilles, Barbados is the easternmost Caribbean island, with a total area of 430 sq km (166 sq mi). The terrain of the pear-shaped island consists of lowlands and terraced limestone plains separated by rolling hills that run parallel to the coasts. With a 2008 estimated population of 281,968 persons on an island about the size of San Antonio, Texas, Barbados is one of the world's most densely populated countries (about 625 people per sq km or 1,620 people per sq mi in 2002). However, in recent decades its population has been controlled by an effective family planning program. The annual population growth rate in 2008 was 0.3%.



About 90% of the population is of African descent, descended from West Africans brought to the island to work as slaves on sugar plantations. About 4% are white, descendants of both wealthy plantation families and indentured servants from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales (called “redlegs” because many wore kilts that allowed their legs to become sunburned). Most people in Barbados have some admixture of European blood. The remaining 6% of Barbados’ population are of Asian or mixed race. Some of the most recent immigrants are from south Asia and the Middle East.

### 3 LANGUAGE

English is the official language of Barbados, but it is universally spoken in a dialect strongly influenced by the languages of West Africa. Many words, such as *duppy*, the term for ghost, are derived from African terms and the African practice of duplicate words (“sow-pig,” “bull-cows,” “gate-doors”) has also been imported into the language. Doubling is used for emphasis (“fast fast” instead of “very fast”), another typical African practice. The present tense of verbs is used to express actions in the past (“She cook dinner last night”). Actions in the present are expressed by the present participle (“He dancing to the music”), while the simple present tense (accompanied by “does”) is reserved for habitual actions (“He does dance on Tuesdays”).

Common words and expressions in Barbadian and their standard English equivalents are:

#### BARBADIAN

again  
all two  
black lead  
cool out  
duppy umbrella  
fingersmith  
jump up  
nyam or yam  
sand side  
t’ink  
yuh  
break fives  
tie-goat  
hag

#### STANDARD ENGLISH

now  
both  
pencil  
relax  
mushroom  
thief  
dance  
eat  
beach  
think  
you  
shake hands  
married person  
bother

### 4 FOLKLORE

Barbados has a rich body of folklore that harkens back to the African roots of most of its population. A number of folk beliefs center on ways to keep the ghost of a departed person—known as a *duppy*—from returning to haunt the living. These include sprinkling rum on the ground, walking into the house backwards, and hanging certain herbs from the windows and doorway. Other figures from Barbadian folklore include the *Conrad*, an avenging spirit thought to possess people, making them do and say strange things; the *heartmen*, who kill children and offer their hearts to the devil; and the *bacchoo*, a tiny man who lives in bottles and can decide one’s destiny.

Some examples of Barbadian proverbs are:

“One-smart dead at two-smart door” (No matter how smart you seem to be, there’s always someone who can outwit you).

“Coconut don’ grow upon pumpkin vine” (Children inherit their parents’ characteristics—equivalent of U.S. proverb, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”).

“Coo-coo never done til de pot turn down” (equivalent to U.S. proverb, “It’s never over until it’s over” or “It’s not over until the fat lady sings”).

### 5 RELIGION

Religion plays an important role in the lives of Barbadians. The school day usually begins with a prayer, small revivalist churches abound throughout the island, and there is a one-year waiting list for church choirs who want to perform on the popular Sunday afternoon television program, *Time to Sing*, which features a different group every week. Priests exert some influence over public policy and cultural life (one reason for the absence of casinos from the island), and a substantial amount of radio air time is devoted to religious programming.

The main religion of the Bajans is Christianity with the most members belonging to the Anglican Church, a legacy from the days of British rule. In 2007 there were about 70,000 members of the Anglican Church, with about 67% considered to be active members. Seventh-day Adventists made up the next largest group with about 16,000 members, 64% of whom were active members. Of the 11,000 Roman Catholics in 2007, about 20% were active. Other Christian groups include Pentecostals, Methodists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as small numbers of Baptists, Moravians, and Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Other religious groups, including Hindus, Muslims, and Baha'is, are generally made up of immigrants. A small Jewish community descended from Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain worships at a synagogue that dates back to 1640. The Jewish synagogue, destroyed in the hurricane of 1830 and rebuilt in 1834, fell into disuse in the early 1900s and was only recently restored with the help of public and government donations. Rastafarianism, which originated in Jamaica, was introduced to Barbados in 1975. After a rocky period when it was associated with rebellious youths and criminals attracted by its cocky image and dreadlocks, it has been accepted by Bajan society and includes among its ranks such well-known figures as actor Winston Farrell and calypso artist Ras Iley.

The Apostolic Spiritual Baptists (popularly known as "Tieheads") occupy a special place in Barbados' religious spectrum, as the island's only indigenous religion. Fashioned after other West Indian revivalist religions, the sect, founded in 1957 by Bishop Granville Williams, combines Christian observance with the foot stomping, hand clapping, and dancing characteristic of African religious practices. Converts are baptized and then sequestered for 7 to 10 days in the "Mourning Ground," a special area of the church. Tieheads, so-called because of the cloth turbans worn by both men and women, sport colorful gowns in colors symbolic of particular qualities.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Christian holidays of Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Whit Monday (Pentecost Monday), and Christmas are all national holidays. Other Barbadian holidays include New Year's Day (January 1), May Day (May 1), CARICOM Day (first Monday in August), Independence Day (November 30), and United Nations Day (first Monday in October). The island's major celebration is the Crop Over festival, which takes place in July and early August. This three-week festival was derived from the traditional festival that marked the end of the sugarcane harvest. Events include the ritual presentation of the Last Canes and the judging of costumed groups (called "bands") on Kadooment Day, the climax and final day of the festival. The festivities include calypso music and abundant food.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Couples often engage in "visiting" relationships, in which the man visits the woman at her home, or common-law marriages, recognized after five years of cohabitation, both of which are similar in their rights and conditions to legal marriages. Major life events (birth, puberty, marriage, death, etc.) are marked by the religious ceremonies particular to each Bahamian's faith community.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Barbadians are known for their politeness and civility, a legacy both of British influence and of the island's high population density—living in close proximity with others imposes pressure to avoid censure and unpleasant confrontations. Describing his homeland, well-known Barbadian author John Wickham wrote, "The inability of people to remove themselves from one another has led to concern for public order, a compassion for others, and a compelling sense of a neighbor's rights and integrity."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The standard of living on Barbados is among the highest in the Caribbean. The United Nations' 2007 Human Development Report rated the quality of life on Barbados—based on such factors as health, education, and earning power—first among 108 developing nations considered.

About 76% of Barbadians own their own homes. Nearly the entire population has access to safe drinking water. The traditional Barbadian wooden house, which can still be seen throughout the island, is called a "chattel" house. A single-story structure built from a single layer of planks, it boasts a unique feature—portability. It can be taken apart and moved to another location, traditionally when its owner is evicted by the landlord or saves enough money to buy his or her own plot of land elsewhere. The house is usually symmetrical, with a door in the center and windows to either side. The traditional roof of wooden shingles has given way to sheets of galvanized iron that create uncomfortably hot conditions within.

The newer type of house and the one favored by Barbadians today is the suburban "wall" house built of cement blocks and stucco, so-called because it is usually surrounded by a small cement wall. By economic necessity, the wall house, like its wooden predecessor, is often built in stages. Just as second and even third structures were often added to the chattel house ("two-roof house and shed"), the wall house may consist of cement block additions added to a wooden home, one room at a time.

The excellent health care system developed on Barbados in the postwar period has reduced the incidence of infectious disease and improved the overall health of the population significantly. Average life expectancy is 71.2 years for males and 75.2 for females (2008 est.). The infant mortality rate was estimated at about 11 deaths per 1,000 births in 2008. In addition to modern medicine, many Barbadians still rely on folk medicine and use home remedies either as a supplement or as an alternative to conventional treatment.

Barbados' small size and flat terrain have facilitated travel, and it is possible to get to any point on the island quickly and easily, a fact that has enabled many rural dwellers to commute to urban jobs. However, the traffic congestion accompanying Barbados' growing prosperity has strained the narrow, winding roads of Bridgetown, a city founded in 1628.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Many Barbadian households are based on arrangements other than that of a legally married couple living together with their children—this is a legacy of slavery, which often separated men from women and from their children, as well as the traditional shortage of males on the island due to emigration. As such, there are many single-parent families with the mother as head of household. Other relatives, particularly grandmothers and aunts, play an important role in child-rearing, often taking care of the children so that the mother can work. Older children may be expected to take on many household chores, including care of younger siblings.

Common-law marriages are legally recognized after five years and each partner is entitled to half the joint property.

## 11 CLOTHING

Barbadians wear modern Western-style clothing in casual, business, and formal situations. Colorful and inventive cos-

tumes may be seen at festivals, especially the Crop Over celebration in July and August. Members of the Apostolic Spiritual Baptist sect (popularly known as “Tieheads”) are known for their turbans—worn by both men and women—and their colorful gowns.

## 12 FOOD

Generations of Barbadian cooks have triumphed over the island’s limited selection of produce—as well as the Barbadian’s traditionally limited budget—to create a rich culinary tradition that draws on West African, English, Spanish, French, and other types of cuisine. *Cou-cou*, one of the most popular national dishes, is a cornmeal and okra pudding related to the African *foo-foo*. It is typically served with gravy and salt cod, another dietary staple. Another favorite food is flying fish, a locally abundant species. These fish are served fried, steamed, or baked using a special Barbadian seasoning that combines onion, garlic, pepper, thyme, paprika, lime juice, and other flavors.

Rice served with any of a variety of peas (including green, blackeye, cow, and gunga) is another dietary staple. The variety of ways pork is used to supplement the islanders’ diet has inspired the claim that the only part of a pig Barbadians can’t use for some dish is its hair. The most famous pork dish is pudding and souse. A black pudding made from sweet potatoes and pig’s blood, stuffed into cleaned pig’s intestines and boiled, is sliced and served with “souse,” made from cooked pig meat pickled in lime juice and hot peppers and served with onions, cucumbers, and peppers.

Popular beverages include coconut water, lemonade with fresh limes, and drinks made from such fruits as mangoes, guavas, gooseberries, tamarinds, and passion fruit. *Mauby* is a beverage made from the bark of a tree. *Falernum* is an indigenous liqueur made from lime juice, sugar, rum, and water, flavored with almond extract. A favorite dessert is coconut bread, which may be prepared using the following recipe:

### Coconut Bread

6 oz brown sugar	2 tsp almond extract
6 oz shortening	¼ lb raisins or mixed fruit
1 large egg	1 cup milk
3 cups grated coconut	1¼ lbs flour
1 tsp powdered cinnamon	½ tsp salt
1 tsp powdered nutmeg	3 tsp baking powder

Combine shortening and sugar. After beating the egg, add it in and mix thoroughly. Next, mix in the spices, almond extract, fruit or raisins, grated coconut, and milk. After sifting, mix in the dry ingredients and pour the dough into two greased loaf pans—a 1-lb pan and a 2-lb pan. Preheat oven to 350°F and bake loaves for one hour, or until browned. Cool on racks before serving.

## 13 EDUCATION

Educational opportunities on Barbados have expanded greatly since World War II and the country boasts a literacy rate of between 95% and 100%, the highest in the Caribbean. One of the strongest values typically imparted by the Barbadian family is the importance of academic achievement. In 2003 primary school enrollment was estimated at 100% while secondary school enrollment was listed as about 90% of age-eligible stu-

dents. Attendance is legally required between the ages of 5 and 16, and all education is free, including college.

Students are tracked into classes based on standardized test scores, so many travel great distances to schools located far from their homes. Thousands of children can be seen at bus terminals throughout the country every day on their way to or from school. However, new zoning was introduced in the 1990s to ameliorate the situation.

Thanks to movements aimed at giving recognition to the Barbadians’ African heritage, children are now exposed to African folklore and music in the schools. A branch of the University of the West Indies was opened on Barbados in 1963, and other institutions of higher learning include Barbados Community College, the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, the Codrington College Seminary, Barbados Institute of Management and Productivity, and Erdiston Teachers Training College. Students may also receive scholarships for college studies in the United Kingdom and other Caribbean institutions.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Although Barbados has a long oral storytelling tradition, written literature by Barbadians received its first real debut in the 1940s and 1950s in a Barbadian literary magazine called *Bim*, which was the first showcase of works by a number of Caribbean writers destined for future fame, including Derek Walcott, the 1992 Nobel laureate in literature, who was born in St. Lucia but has spent a large portion of his time in Trinidad. Well-known Barbadian writers include essayist John Wickham, novelist George Lamming (best known for *In the Castle of My Skin*), and poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite, winner of the 1994 Neustadt International Prize for Literature and a professor of Comparative Literature at New York University.

Barbados has a flourishing community of artists producing paintings, murals, sculptures, and crafts, many of which reflect strong African influences. The arts in Barbados have been supported since the mid-1950s by the Barbados National Arts Council, and tourism has provided many local artists, especially musicians, with patrons.

## 15 WORK

Most Barbadians belong to a large middle class that includes both skilled blue-collar workers and white-collar professional and managerial employees. The labor force contains an equal number of men and women. About 75% of employment on Barbados is in service-sector jobs, while industry accounts for about 15% and agriculture at 3.5%. The unemployment rate in 2003 was estimated at 10.7%. Many Barbadians work abroad and send money back home. In 2003 the World Bank estimated the total value of remittances to be about us\$97 million, or about us\$385 per capita, accounting for approximately 3.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP). In 2007 about 25% to 30% of the workforce was unionized.

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket is by far the most popular sport on Barbados—some have called it a “national religion.” When the nation gained its independence in 1966, it immediately challenged the rest of the world to a cricket match. Most of Barbados’ national heroes are cricket stars, such as Sir Everton Weekes, Sir Clyde Walcott, Sir Frank Worrell, and Sir Garfield Sobers, recognized as the greatest all-around cricketer of all time. The effigy of Sir Frank

Worrell adorns the island's five-dollar currency note. Other popular sports include horse-racing, soccer, hockey, rugby, volleyball, and softball. The local game of road tennis, played with a homemade wooden paddle and a long piece of wood for a "net," is a cross between ping-pong and lawn tennis.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The traditional locale where Barbadian men spend their leisure time is the rum shop, which combines the functions of grocery store, bar, and domino parlor. The island has one rum shop for every 150 adults. Women have traditionally gravitated toward the local church as a social center. Dance, music, and theater are all popular pursuits, and about 80% of Barbadian households now have television sets.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In addition to the popular calypso, reggae, and steel band music that reflects the influence of neighboring Trinidad and Jamaica, Barbados has its own indigenous musical tradition, the *tuk* band, which provides the backbeat for all major celebrations on the island. Composed of pennywhistles, snare drums, and bass drums, it is reminiscent of a British military band, but with a distinctly African flair.

Barbadian crafts include pottery, mahogany items, and jewelry. The Barbados Investment and Development Corporation (BIDC) supports the preservation of the island's handicrafts by operating numerous shops where local craftspeople sell their wares, as well as offering workshops for beginners and experts alike.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Some observers have seen a connection between the growth of tourism on Barbados and the rise of such problems as crime, drug use, and prostitution. In addition, tourism has contributed to water pollution and damage to the island's coral reefs, as well as overly rapid development of the coastline. A more traditional indigenous problem is family violence, which however has been decreasing as women have become empowered by increased educational and employment opportunities. There are no laws to prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities or to compel private businesses to be handicap-accessible. As a result, some disabled persons have faced difficulties in both work and social endeavors. While new public buildings are generally equipped with such features as ramps, reserved parking, and sanitary facilities for the disabled, private establishments and businesses housed in older buildings have not always followed this example. The government has a National Disabilities Unit that offers such programs as call-a-ride, but there are some fees associated with the use of services and some users, particularly parents of disabled children, have complained about the cost.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Having gained increased power since the 1960s due to better educational and job opportunities, women have been freed from some of their traditional roles as bearers of children and homemakers, and have become more empowered in their domestic relationships with men. Some problems still exist however. There are no specific laws dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace and many women choose not to report ha-

arrassment for fear of losing their jobs. While there are laws against domestic violence, such abuse still remains a problem, often because many cases go unreported. Women do have the right to vote and to hold public office; however, female candidates often find it difficult to gain financial support for their campaigns. This may be due to the fact that women are still often regarded as the primary domestic caretakers for husbands, children, and the elderly. Taking time away from these duties to participate in politics may prove to be difficult, both financially and emotionally.

Homosexual relations are illegal and there are no laws to prohibit discrimination against any person on the basis of sexual orientation. While the government has made attempts to discourage discrimination against those infected with HIV/AIDS, social discrimination against homosexuals has been reported.

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—revised by K. Ellicott



# BELIZEANS

**LOCATION:** Belize

**POPULATION:** 301,270

**LANGUAGE:** English; Spanish; local Creole

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (49%); various Protestant denominations (27%); evangelical groups such as Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists; Mennonites; Mormons; Baha'is

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Mayan people inhabited for centuries the area now as Belize before the arrival of Europeans. Mayans erected several major centers in Belize around the 1st millennium AD. Many of these constructions are testimony of the existence of rich and diverse pre-Columbian cultures such as Milpa, Xunantuchich, and Caracol. In fact, at 42 m (138 ft), the Sky Palace pyramid at Caracol is still the nation's tallest hand built structure.

Probably at least 400,000 people inhabited the Belize area around AD 900—twice as many as today. Mayan civilization had collapsed by the time Spanish expeditions reached the area in the 16th century, and diseases like smallpox and yellow fever took a heavy toll on the remaining population.

While the Spanish were able, at times, to control the western part of present-day Belize, English buccaneers used the eastern, Caribbean side as a base for their raids and for cutting logwood, which was used in the production of a dye needed by the woolen industry. Mahogany later supplanted logwood as the major export. British settlers forcibly brought in slaves from Africa to do the work. Before slavery ended in 1838, two other groups had made their presence: free Creoles of mixed African and European blood, and Garifuna, descendants of Africans and Carib Amerindians. Soon after, more Maya began fleeing into the colony to escape a war in the Yucatan and forced labor in Guatemala.

Once the Spanish crown lost its leverage in the so-called New World and waves of colonies obtained their independence from European domain, a new and prosperous empire decided to claim the right to administer the region. In 1862 Great Britain declared Belize a British colony, subordinate to Jamaica, and renamed it British Honduras. Immediately, the new colony attracted new capitals. However, as happened in many countries around the world, the Great Depression hit the economy leaving a large part of the population in a dire situation. In addition to the financial situation, the city of Belize was destroyed by a hurricane in 1931. Consequently, a series of strikes and riots, led by the unemployed, exploded and gave birth to a national movement demanding the right to self-determination. In 1950 the People's United Party (PUP) was created and led the independence movement.

British Honduras became the independent Republic of Belize in 1981. The British military, with the support of the United Nations, remained in Belize until 1994 in order to help local authorities in the construction of the new state. Even though Mexico and Guatemala had inherited Spain's claim to the territory, only Mexico dropped its territorial claims (1893). Guatemala, although it did not formally renounce its claim over the country's land, established full diplomatic relations with Belize in 1991. In 2005 Guatemala and Belize agreed that the

conflict could be settled by a supranational organization, and in 2008 both countries submitted their case to the International Court of Justice.

In 2008 Dean Barrow won the general elections and became the first black prime minister in the history of Belize. Barrow promised to end crime and government corruption.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Belize is a little larger than the U.S. state of Massachusetts. It is bordered on the north by Mexico, on the west and south by Guatemala, and on the east by the Caribbean Sea. It is flat and swampy along the coast and mostly level in the north. The southern part has mountains reaching a high point of 1,177 m (3,861 ft). Belize's climate is warm and humid. There are 17 rivers. The longest barrier reef in the Americas (about 290 km or 180 mi) runs parallel to its coastline.

Belize had a population of only slightly more than 300,000 in the mid-2000s. Creoles, of mixed African and European ancestry, had been the largest group, but the 1991 census showed that they accounted for only 25% of the population. Mestizos, of Amerindian and European descent, came to 48%. Another 9% were Mayan people. The Garifuna, or Black Caribs, descended from escaped African slaves and Carib Amerindians from St. Vincent and Dominica, came to 15%. There were also East Indians (descendants from immigrants from present-day India), Arabs, Chinese, and about 6,000 Mennonites from Mexico and Canada.

About 40,000 Mestizos were recent immigrants who either fled fighting in Guatemala and El Salvador during the 1980s or came to Belize seeking work or land to farm. In addition, in the late 1980s as many as 65,000 Belizeans were living in the United States, most of them were Creole or Garifuna.

## 3 LANGUAGE

English is the only official language in Belize and the only language of instruction in public schools. The 1991 census found that at least 80% of the population could speak some English or Belizean Creole, which is a dialect of English difficult for outsiders to understand. For 33% to 50% of the population, English or Creole was the first language, but many of these people could not speak standard English well. Spanish was spoken by about 60% of the people and was the first language of 33% to 50% of the population. Smaller numbers spoke Mayan languages or Garifuna as their first language, and the Mennonites spoke Low German as their language. About 33% of the population can speak two or even three languages.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Belizean folklore is a combination of European, African, and Maya beliefs. Creoles speak of a phantom pirate ship seen at night, its rigging lit by flickering lanterns. It is credited with luring sailors to destruction on the treacherous coastal coral reef. "Greasy Man" lives in abandoned houses, and "Ashi de Pompei" resides in the ashes of burnt houses. They come out at night to frighten people. *Sisimito* or *Sisemite* are great hairy creatures that carry women off to mate. They are impossible to track because they can reverse the position of their feet to heel-first, making it appear that they are walking in the opposite direction.

Of Mayan origin is a belief in four-fingered "little people" of the jungle, the *duende*. When encountered in the jungle they

must be given a four-fingered salute, hiding the thumb. The *duende* can cause disease, but placing gourds of food for them in a doorway will prevent an epidemic. They can capture people and drive them mad, but they can also grant wishes and confer the gift of mastering a musical instrument instantly. Xtabay is a lovely maiden who leads men astray in the forest. Also of Mayan origin is the belief that Saturdays and Mondays are lucky, while Tuesdays and Fridays are unlucky.

Many Creoles and Garifuna believe in *obeah*, or witchcraft. A black doll made from a stocking stuffed with feathers from a dark fowl and buried under the victim's doorstep can cause great harm. Shoes are frequently crossed at bedtime to keep evil spirits from occupying them during the night. A certain species of black butterfly is said to bring early death or at least bad luck to its beholder. To ward off the evil eye, the Garifuna paint an indigo cross on the forehead of an infant.

## 5 RELIGION

In 2008, 49% of Belizeans were Roman Catholic, while 27% belonged to various Protestant denominations, including Anglicans (5.4%) and Methodists (3.5%). Evangelical groups like Pentecostals (7.4%), Jehovah's Witnesses (1.5%), and Seventh-Day Adventists (5.2%) have been gaining on the mainstream Protestant denominations. Other religious groups include Mennonites, Mormons, and Baha'is.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

St. George's Caye Day, on September 10, originally celebrated a British victory over the Spanish. It now commemorates local heroes and is celebrated with parades, patriotic speeches, and a pageant. Independence Day is celebrated on September 21. Both days are occasions in Belize City for street parades, floats, and block parties. The birthday of Queen Elizabeth II, April 21, is also a national holiday, as is Commonwealth Day, May 24, and Columbus Day, October 12. Garifuna Settlement Day is on November 19, commemorating the day in 1832 on which a large number of their community reached Belize from Honduras in dugout canoes. The Garifuna also hold a New Year's celebration, called Yancanú, from December 25 through January 6. It is named for a Jamaican folk hero, "John Canoe." Baron Bliss Day is celebrated on March 9 and honors a British resident who died while on vacation in Belize and donated his fortune to the construction of local libraries, schools, and other institutions.

San José Succotz has fiestas on March 19 and May 3. In the south there are traditional fiestas in San Antonio around January 17 and in San Pedro towards the end of June. These fiestas resemble their counterparts in Guatemala.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Mestizo and Maya customs are similar to those of their counterparts in Guatemala and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Garifuna infants are baptized at the first opportunity. They have already been bathed ritually on their ninth day of age in water steeped with various herbs and leaves. Godfathers are more important than godmothers. Young children are generally indulged, but some are sent to live with another family, usually of a higher economic and social position, in order to obtain an education. Sometimes the Catholic Church acts as the caretaker for such children.



A death in the Creole community is observed with an evening wake in the home of the deceased. Guests bring gifts and take refreshments while praying, singing, dancing, and playing games. Burial is usually the next day. A second wake is held nine days later. Although Catholic, the Garifuna also have a deep belief in the power of the *gudiba*, deceased ancestors, who are honored.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings, gestures, body language, visiting customs, and dating among Mestizos and Maya are similar to the customs observed by their counterparts in Guatemala and the Yucatan. Creoles carry Old-World courtesy to the point of being reluctant to declare a negative; thus "maybe" or "possibly" usually means "no." Young people often meet at public dances, but Creole or "Spanish" (Mestizo or Maya) girls are rarely allowed to attend unless there is a special occasion.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In dollar terms, the national income per person of Belizeans is among the highest in Central America, but the cost of living is also high because so many goods must be imported into this small nation. In 2008, about 30% of the population lived under the poverty line and around 3,000 inhabitants were living with HIV/AIDS. Poor sanitation in rural areas contributed to a high incidence of intestinal parasites, especially among children. Malaria remained the leading health problem, and dengue fever, also carried by mosquitoes, staged a comeback in the



Young Belizean girls stand in a doorway of their house in San Miguel, Belize. (© Atlantide Phototravel/Corbis)

1980s. There were fewer than 100 physicians in Belize in the late 1980s.

The 1980 census found that 70% of Belizean houses were made of wood, 12% of concrete, and 7% of adobe. Creoles generally live in white painted clapboard bungalows, often on stilts and with corrugated-iron roofs. Outside the towns, most Garifuna live in two-room oblong frame houses with palm thatch or iron roofs and leveled mud floors. The kitchen is a separate building of similar construction. Yucatecan Maya mostly live in huts of plastered limestone or palmetto trunks with steep thatched roofs, while the Kekchí Maya have houses of rough-hewn planks topped with palm thatch. In Belize City, elite families live in oceanfront neighborhoods.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

For many ethnic groups and for the lower class generally, a formal marriage ceremony is not necessary, but wider kinship ties are in place, including close links to grandparents, aunts and uncles, and nephews and nieces. Marriage between members of different groups has been widespread. The average number of births per Belizean woman who has completed her child-bearing years, as measured in 2008, was 3.5 children. Single parents, usually women, head many lower-class households in Belize City.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

The business dress for men is a short-sleeved cotton or poplin shirt and trousers of tropical-weight material. Ties are seldom worn. Women generally wear simple cotton dresses.

#### **12 FOOD**

Belizean cuisine reflects ethnicity and international influences. The midday meal is the main one; Creoles call dinner “tea.” Corn tortillas, stewed chicken, and rice and beans are widespread staples. For Mestizos and Mayans, the diet is much like that of Guatemala, with corn tortillas and beans as the staple foods. For members of both cultures, tamales —cornmeal with chicken or vegetable stuffing that is steamed in banana leaves— and Mexican-style chilies and roasts are also traditional dishes amongst their cuisine.

In the interior, wild-game dishes, like roast armadillo and roast *paca*, have a Yucatecan flavor. Among Creoles, rice and red kidney beans are the staples, often accompanied by fried bananas or plantains. A wide variety of stews are another Creole influence, which can include barbecued chicken, beef, and pork. The Creoles and Garifuna consume lots of fish, usually boiling or stewing it in coconut milk or frying it in coconut oil. The Garifuna also make fiery-hot cassava fritters from a gruel prepared by cooking and crushing cassava in coconut milk.

Another Garifuna dish is *hudut*, a stew composed of pounded plantains, fish, and coconut milk. *Nanche* is a sweet liqueur made from *crabou* fruit. Many Belizeans mix the local rums with condensed milk.

### 13 EDUCATION

Belize has, by Central American standards, an enviable educational record. More than 90% of all adults can read and write. Education is free and compulsory between the ages of 5 and 15. In 1992, 96% of all primary-school-age children were in school. However, only 36% of secondary-school-age children were in school. A joint partnership of government and churches manages the school system. The University College of Belize was established in the 1980s. Other institutions of higher learning are Belize Teachers' College, Belize School of Nursing, and Belize College of Agriculture. The Mennonite community owns and administrates its own schools.

Half of primary school graduates receive secondary schooling, and just a small and privileged sector of the elite gets higher education.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among Mestizos, marimba music is popular. A marimba ensemble is made up of half a dozen men playing two large wooden marimbas, which resemble xylophones, perhaps supported by a double bass and a drum kit. The nation's top marimba group in the early 1990s was Alma Belicena. Mexican-style mariachi music is also heard.

*Brukdown* is the name given to Creole music played by guitar, banjo, accordion, steel drums, and the jawbone of an ass. It is accompanied by lyrics that often express social satire. Calypso is sometimes heard but has largely been displaced by reggae. *Cungo* is an offshoot of reggae. In the 1980s, Garifuna players made "*punta rock*" the rage throughout the nation. Its instrumentation includes maracas, drums, and turtle shells. Merengue, salsa, punk, and rap are also popular.

The Yancanu festival of the Garifuna begins with the blowing of a conch shell at midnight on Christmas Eve. Anywhere from 6 to 12 dancers—usually men only—perform in bright long-sleeved shirts, kiltlike skirts, and knee-length stockings, also wearing masks. Strings of seashells make rustling noises as they dance and sing, accompanied by a group of four drummers who keep time with the palm of the hand. Among Creoles, the *punta* is a wake dance in which a couple occupies the center of a ring formed by hand-clapping and chanting onlookers, accompanied by the beat of a drum. Maya dances are still performed at fiestas held in the south and west of the country.

Among Belizean painters are Manuel Carrero and Manuel Villamer, and among sculptors, George Gabb and Frank Lizama. Writers include Zee Edgell, Zoila Ellis, Felicia Hernandez, Sharon Matola, Yasser Musa, Kiren Shoman, and Simone Waight.

### 15 WORK

Although there is a serious labor shortage, the unemployment rate was about 15% in the early 1990s, and the rate was over 40% for youths who had dropped out of school. Many Creoles seek higher-paying work abroad and send remittances home to their families. Garifuna men often venture from their communities for seasonal work, then return to their villages. The labor shortage has been eased by large numbers of migrants

from Central America. In 1994 the minimum wage was \$1.12 an hour, but only \$0.87 for domestic workers. The normal work week, by law, was no more than six days and 45 hours.

Women experience an unemployment rate 2½ times higher than men. Jobs available to women typically have low status and wages, and few women are in top managerial positions. The law mandates equal pay for equal work, but women often are underpaid for work similar to that performed by men.

### 16 SPORTS

Sport culture in Belize has British influence, especially in sports such as soccer and cricket. However, the United States has also influenced Belizeans in the practice of basketball and softball. Soccer is today the most popular sport in Belize, closely followed by basketball. There are a number of horseracing meets around New Year's, and bicycle races are held. Other sports include polo and boxing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Among Creoles, all national celebrations are accompanied by open-air dancing, called "jump-up." Almost all villages, particularly those along the Caribbean coast, have their own discos, playing Afro-Caribbean music. There are only two or three cinemas, which mainly show films imported directly from the United States. Dish antennas now receive and rebroadcast more than 50 television channels via satellite signals, offering fare such as CNN News from Atlanta, Cubs baseball games from Chicago, and Spanish-language *telenovelas* (soap operas) from Venezuela.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Souvenirs like straw baskets and carvings in wood, slate, and stone can be found at the National Handicrafts Center in Belize City. Jewelry is made from black coral.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The migration of "Spanish" from Hispanic Central America into Belize is a cause of social tension in what has been until recently a prevalently English-speaking Creole society. A "brain-drain" of educated Creoles taking up residence in the United States has exacerbated the situation. Petty crime is rife in Belize City, and youth gangs have established a foothold there. Imported crack and powdered cocaine can now be found, in addition to a plentiful supply of marijuana. About half the rural population does not have access to pure water. Water pollution, coral removal, and spear fishing threaten the barrier reef and its marine life.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although women constitute over half of secondary school students, achieve higher scores on standardized tests, and have higher graduation rates than male students, they remain seriously underrepresented in skilled and professional positions. The majority of women in Belize are concentrated in traditionally female, low status, and poorly paid occupations, such as manufacturing, tourism, and domestic work. Despite constitutional provisions on equal pay for equal work, women consistently receive less pay than men for the same work and occupy lower level positions even in occupations where they predomi-

nate. In addition, rural women have the highest unemployment rate in the country (20%).

Important factors inhibiting women's opportunities to work include the high incidence of teenage pregnancy, the scarcity of childcare services both in rural and urban areas, and the fact that the government does not support or subsidize childcare. In 1988, nearly 70% of all children were born to single mothers and one of five births was a result of an adolescent pregnancy. In addition, since 1992 Belize has ranked second (after Honduras) in Central America in AIDS incidence. There is no legislation specifically prohibiting trafficking or the exploitation of women. Although the government recognizes the need to promote improved health standards for sex workers, the incidence of HIV/AIDS continues to increase at an alarming rate.

Regarding political participation, few Belizean women hold decision-making positions in the government, although women's representation in political leadership positions is increasing slightly. From 1975 to 1993 there were only three women in the government as heads of departments. In 1998, 6 out of 12 magistrates were women. As of November 1998, women held 4 seats in the 38-member parliament (10.53%), a cabinet of 16 included 1 woman (6.25%), and 10 women (out of 58) served in local government (17.24%).

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—by R. Halasz.

# **BOLIVIANS**

**LOCATION:** Bolivia

**POPULATION:** 9.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; Quechua; Aymara

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

There is evidence that the highlands of Bolivia and some of its jungle areas have been inhabited for thousands of years, well before the arrival of Spanish conquerors in the 15th century. Early Amerindian settlers may have been nomadic hunters at first, while later they established agricultural communities. Evidence of this early period, which lasted until about 1400 BC, includes several ceremonial sites. From this time until about 400 BC, an Amerindian culture known as Chavín developed in parts of Bolivia as well as Peru. It was followed by the Tiahuanaco culture, which lasted until about AD 900. An important site was the ceremonial center of Tiahuanaco on the shores of Lake Titicaca in the highlands of the Bolivian Andes. This civilization was prosperous and highly developed, with excellent road and lake transport systems, irrigation systems, and dramatically beautiful building techniques for its settlements and ceremonial sites. Subsequently, Aymara Indians (probably from the region of Coquimbo in Chile) invaded and settled in Bolivia, and finally the mighty Peruvian Incas extended their empire into the present Bolivian territory at the end of the 15th century.

In the 1530s, Spanish conquerors who had initially begun to explore Peru also extended their forays into Bolivia, which they called Alto Peru. Among these men were Diego de Almagro and Francisco Pizarro. During the Spanish colonial period, Bolivia was part of the Viceroyalty of Peru. The town of La Plata, in the Charcas region, was founded in 1538 and was the seat of the Audiencia de Charcas (the most important legal body of Colonial Alto Peru). The city of La Paz, which is Bolivia's political capital today, was founded by Alonso de Mendoza in 1548. General Antonio José de Sucre, who fought with Simón Bolívar, gained Bolivian independence from Spain in 1825 and established the República of Bolívar in honor of the liberator. The new republic was formed with a senate and a house of representatives.

Bolivia has been a mining country. First, it was famous for its silver mines in Potosí, which provided great riches to the Spanish Crown during the 16th and 17th centuries. Subsequently, it was one of the first providers of tin for the world market. Pitiful conditions for miners led to the establishment of a radical workers' party, the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), which came to power under President Victor Paz Estenssoro in the 1950s, during whose presidency Bolivia nationalized the mines and underwent agricultural, industrial, and social reforms. The new government also established universal suffrage, extending the ability to vote to women and illiterates.

In 1953, the Agrarian Reform Decree was signed and peasants in the Andean region began taking over lands. The radical and popular reform soon started to moderate itself because of the economic crisis that baffled the country in the 1960s, and the increasing pressure of the United States. In 1964, the gov-

ernment was taken over by pro-U.S. General Barrientos who signed the “Military-Peasant Pact,” which promised public works in the countryside in exchange of political support by the peasants.

In 1971, Hugo Banzer, a right-wing general, took power and governed the country for seven years, during which all the efforts of the agrarian reform were reversed and the first drug-trafficking boom began. Even though democracy was reinstated in 1978, Indian demands remained unaddressed. After the New Economic Policy was launched in 1985, trade liberalization flooded Bolivian markets with cheap imported goods, with the consequent closure of many national factories and the increase of unemployment. A decade later, the neoliberal structural adjustment, which brought with it a tremendous social cost, especially for the rural peasants, was complemented by the “second generation reforms” implemented by Sanchez de Lozada. In the 1993 elections, Sanchez de Lozada ran for president in alliance with the Aymara leader Victor Hugo Cardenas as his vice-president.

Parallel to the deepening of economic reforms, Sanchez de Lozada also carried out constitutional reforms that recognized the multicultural nature of Bolivia’s population and implemented a Law on Popular Participation (1994), aimed to decentralize the country’s administrative system. Consequently, the municipality became an important source of regional power that gave indigenous people space for self-rule. In the 1995 municipal elections, 29% of all councilors elected were from peasant-indigenous backgrounds.

In 1999 the government privatized the water supplies of Cochabamba. The contract was immediately criticized because it carried a sharp increase in consumer prices, which were projected to reach 180% for some sectors of the population. A coalition of urban and rural organizations called Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida was created to oppose the project by sponsoring a series of protests. The use of ethnic language and the invocation of indigenous deities and mythology in the so-called Water War proved successful for mobilizing indigenous communities and attracting international attention, which in the end forced the government to comply with the demands. This triumph proved the strength of indigenous groups and demonstrated the diminishing power of the state to repress new social movements. This awareness was furthered in the 2002 elections, the 2003 Gas War, and the victory of the *cocalero* leader Evo Morales as the first indigenous president of Bolivia in 2005.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Bolivia is a landlocked South American country of 9.8 million people, more than 60% of whom are Amerindian, speaking mainly Quechua and Aymara as well as Spanish. The rest of the population is divided between Mestizos (European and Amerindian descent), who comprise 30% of the population, and minorities of whites and people of African descent.

Bolivia shares a border to the north and east with Brazil, to the west with Peru, to the southeast with Chile, to the south with Argentina, and to the southeast with Paraguay. Bolivia has a very diverse climate and territory. In the western part of the country, the Andean Cordillera extends from north to south with some of the highest peaks in South America. The center of the country consists of fertile valleys, and the lowlands extend towards the east to the Amazon rain forest.



## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish-speaking Bolivians account for only 36% of the total population, while the majority of the people speak one of the two predominant indigenous languages: Quechua, the language spoken originally by the Incas, or Aymara, a language spoken by Amerindians prior to the arrival of the Incas. Spanish names of saints are very popular, as are Catholic names such as Jesús, José and, for girls, María. Many Quechua- and Aymara-speaking people have Amerindian last names and Spanish first names.

## 4 FOLKLORE

A myth of the early Incas and other Amerindians was that a White, bearded teacher, or the Creator God called Viracocha, had come to teach the Indians and would return. When the Spanish conquerors arrived in the 16th century, the Incas, who by then had extended their empire into Bolivia, mistook the white Spanish conquerors for Viracocha and, perhaps, companions of his. This belief was very widespread and existed even as far away as Mexico, where the Aztecs called this figure Quetzalcoatl, and it contributed to the Spaniards’ easy entry into the major Amerindian cities. The Spanish exploited these myths for their own benefit.

## 5 RELIGION

Around 80% of Bolivians are Roman Catholic. However, among the Aymara- and Quechua-speaking Amerindian

groups, certain beliefs and rituals remain that stem from local religions, which pre-date the Spanish conquest. The respect for nature is embodied in the belief in Mother Earth, known as Pachamama.

Among the Aymara, there is a household god known as Ekeko, a god of prosperity who also presides over matchmaking prior to marriage and helps people without homes. An important festival in La Paz, Bolivia's mountain capital, called the Alasitas, is held principally in honor of Ekeko. The artisans sell miniatures of everything imaginable, and people buy them believing that the things they represent will be plentiful in their homes. *Ekeko* means "dwarf," and he is generally a benevolent god.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Bolivians, in common with many other Latin Americans, celebrate the main Catholic holidays such as Easter and Christmas, as well as Corpus Christi. They also celebrate Labor Day and their Independence Day on August 6.

A major festival celebrated in March is *Pookhyái*, celebrated in the Andean town of Tarabuco in the department of Sucre. It was here that the famous heroine Juana Azurduy made her mark, leading her people against the Spanish in the Battle of Jambati on 12 March 1816, liberating the town. *Pookhyái* is a Quechua word meaning "entertainment," and during the festivities dozens of groups in local costume dance and sing, and the whole town, together with thousands of visitors, takes part in a special Quechua Mass and procession. It is a joyful celebration during which Bolivians give thanks for their freedom as a nation.

Carnival is celebrated throughout Bolivia the week before Lent, and the best-known celebration is the colorful *Entrada* in the town of Oruro. The *Diablada*, one of the most representative dances, has elaborate costumes and masks of the devil. Choreographed as a battle between good and evil, the dancers celebrate the triumph of good, in the person of the Archangel Michael, over evil, in the person of Lucifer and his devils. Other groups reenact the Conquest, where the Spanish conquerors such as Francisco Pizarro fight with the Incas, and the feasting and dancing last for several days.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most children in Bolivia receive the Catholic sacraments of baptism at birth, First Communion at the age of seven, and confirmation at puberty. Many Bolivian families regard these ceremonies as important events.

During the teenage years, Bolivian boys and girls are still expected to maintain close ties with their families. The poverty of many Bolivians means that young people work, often from a young age, to supplement the family income.

Many Bolivians marry in church, but they have to have a civil marriage as well. When a person dies, the full religious rites of the Catholic Church are often followed. A priest will often attend a dying person, who may wish to offer a final confession. Among many Indian communities, Catholic and Indian beliefs coexist.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A formal greeting will include the words "*mucho gusto*," which is the equivalent of the English "pleased to meet you." There is also an informal greeting, "*Qué tal?*" which means, "How are

you?" But Bolivians do not stop there. It is also considered polite to inquire about the welfare of other family members, and the greetings can become quite elaborate.

Men shake hands, but it is customary among urban men and women to greet each other with a kiss.

Visits are considered an important form of social communication and can take a number of forms: many religious festivals and important family events are occasions for reunions of family and friends. When people visit, it is customary to offer a small cup of black coffee. A pre-Columbian drink that still exists in the Andean region is *chicha*. Made from fermented corn, it is consumed by people in towns and villages.

Bolivian society is divided by marked classes, which do not mix easily. In some small cities young people are still very traditional when it comes to dating. Families keep a close watch on their daughters' friends and social contacts. In many places, girls are not expected to date boys who are unknown to their parents. The parents will inquire about the boy's family or may already know his family. A girl is not expected to date boys outside an approved social circle. Many people marry when they are still quite young, and the custom of having a *novio* or steady boyfriend in a serious relationship is seen as appropriate for a girl.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries of the Americas, and the people's health suffers accordingly. A serious disease called *chagas*, carried by the bite of the *vinchuca* beetle, which is particularly prevalent in the rural lowlands, has no known cure and eventually affects the heart. One estimate suggests that as many as a quarter of Bolivians are affected by this disease, although precise figures are not obtainable.

Many Bolivians, particularly in some of the Indian communities in rural areas, live outside of the cash economy altogether. They lead a sustainable, simple lifestyle. In the major cities, such as La Paz, which is the capital, or Cochabamba or Sucre—the legal capital, a more modern lifestyle prevails that is similar to that in major towns in other parts of Latin America.

Housing in the countryside often involves simple huts of adobe with thatched roofs. In the towns and cities, brick and cement are used, and red tiles are used for roofs in the traditional Spanish manner.

Many people who do not have access to a car use buses and trucks for local and inter-town travel. Even though practically all towns are connected by extensive bus routes, pack animals are used in the more-remote highland areas.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women in one sense have a lower status than men in Bolivia, yet in another sense they are at the center of family life and are regarded as very important in their role as mother, wife, and member of the extended family unit. In the lower classes, women are the economic support of the family. Since colonial times, Indian women have taken part in commercial activities in the country.

Although the trend is changing, families have traditionally been quite large in Bolivia: six or seven children are not uncommon. Families do not consist only of a father, a mother, and their children, but include many relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The traditional extended family is the main social support system in Bolivia.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the cities, men wear trousers and shirts, or suits, and women wear skirts and blouses or dresses. Bolivian Indian women wear voluminous skirts, shawls, and bowler-shaped hats. This manner of dressing is a hybrid form, since it derives from old-Spanish fashion. Men in the countryside often wear *ponchos*, which are derived from the Spanish cape, particularly in the cooler climate of the Andean highlands, where they are woven from wool and serve to keep out the cold mountain winds. In the countryside many Indians maintain their traditional, distinctive ethnic clothing.

## 12 FOOD

The bedrock of the Bolivian diet in the Andean highlands or *altiplano* is the potato, and many poorer people in this region eat a mainly carbohydrate-based diet. Main meals in the major towns include some meat, but there is also rice, quite often served with potatoes as well as some salad or vegetables. Visitors to Bolivia do not necessarily share the preference for plain and filling food. Instead they enjoy, as many Bolivians do, some of the tasty snacks.

One of these is the turnover or *empanada*, which varies from country to country in Latin America. The flour used to make the turnovers is made from wheat. Empanadas, which are shaped like half moons and are often fluted at the edges, are fried or sometimes baked. The imaginative aspects relate to the wide variety of fillings, which include chicken, cheese, and beef. A typical midmorning Bolivian snack is the *salteña*, a spicy round chicken, meat, or vegetable pie stuffed with olives, onions, hard-boiled eggs, and other ingredients.

In La Paz, the Bolivian capital, pieces of beef heart are grilled on skewers. These are known as *anticuchos*. A hot, peppery sauce called *llajua* is often served with meats. In the lowlands and the Amazon region, exotic meats such as alligator, armadillo, and agouti are also eaten, while fine salmon trout from Lake Titicaca is a delicacy.

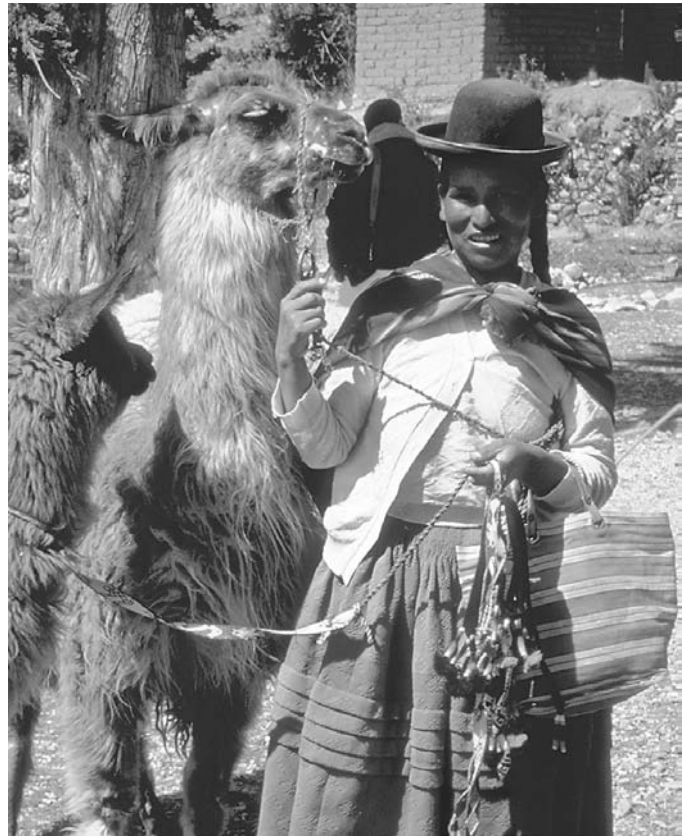
## 13 EDUCATION

Primary education is available in principle to all Bolivian children, but it did not really reach the villages until the reforms instituted by the Revolutionary National Movement (MNR) under Victor Paz Estenssoro in the 1950s. Since then, secondary education has also become more accessible. Today, primary education for children 6 to 13 years of age is free and officially compulsory, although school attendance is difficult to enforce in some areas. Secondary education, lasting up to 4 years, is not compulsory. At the end of the 20th century about four-fifths of the primary-age children were attending school. Most education is state-supported, but private institutions are permitted.

The nation's eight state universities are located in each of the departmental capitals except Cobija (capital of Pando department), and there are numerous private schools, including a Roman Catholic university. The largest institutions of higher learning are the University of San Andrés (founded 1930) in La Paz and Major University of San Simón (1832) in Cochabamba.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional music in the Bolivian Andes features flutes such as the *quena* and the panpipe, as well as stringed instruments



Young Bolivian woman with llama at Lake Titicaca, Bolivia. Families keep a close watch on their daughters' friends and social contacts. (Anne Kalosh)

derived from the Spanish guitar called *charangos*. To the untutored Western ear, this music can sound mournful, but attention rewards the listener, who marvels at the skill of the musicians and the range of tones and rhythms often suggestive of majestic mountain heights and the freedom of magnificent birds wheeling joyfully in the sky. Mountain dancing is often demure and suggests a mixture of Amerindian and Spanish courtly influences, whereas in the lowlands and in the Tarija region the music of warmer climates is more exuberant.

Bolivia has many fine churches that date from Spanish colonial times. Among painters who excelled in religious themes is Holguín, whose paintings of the birth of Christ and the birth of the Virgin Mary are displayed in the town of Sucre in the exquisite Church of La Merced, built in 1581.

Among Bolivian writers, one of the best known is Alcides Arguedas, who died in 1946. He was also a sociologist and a diplomat and served for a time as Bolivia's Minister for Agriculture. He dealt with major aspects of Bolivian Indian life, and his novels include *Raza de Bronce* (which translates as "The Bronze Race"), *Vida Criolla*, *Pisagua*, and *Wata-wara*. Another important modern writer is Augusto Céspedes, who examined the lives of the immensely wealthy Bolivian tin barons in a novel called *El Metal del Diablo* (which means "The Devil's Metal"). Bolivia has produced several excellent poets, among them Ricardo Jaimes Freire at the beginning of the 20th century. Julio de la Vega is exuberant in his *Poemario de exaltaciones*. Jaime Saenz was the first to use surrealism. Oscar Cerruto is a major Bolivian poet, and among current poets one



of the best is Pedro Shimose, the son of Japanese immigrants to Bolivia. The essayist Fernando Diez de Medina is also worth mentioning.

The poetry and songs of the Quechua language constitute a significant tradition for Quechua-speakers in Bolivia and Peru alike. In this language are included hymns, prayers, songs of love and war, satirical pieces, epic poems, plays, stories, and songs of mourning. A vivid example of the latter, which actually formed part of the mourning rituals upon the death of the last Inca king, Atahualpa, who was murdered by the Spaniards, can be found in the poem *El Llanto de las Nustas*.

Among Bolivian Indians, who form a significant part of Bolivia's population, it is no exaggeration to say that their history has been one of suffering and loss.

## 15 WORK

In rural areas, many Bolivians work as farmers on small landholdings. Miners have a long tradition in Bolivia, beginning with the silver mines of the Potosí region during Spanish colonial times and continuing with the tin mines. When there was an international tin crisis in the 1980s, thousands of tin miners were left destitute and, to avoid starvation, many made their way to the lowlands to grow coca leaves for the illegal cocaine industry. The Bolivian government has embarked on a crop substitution program, encouraging other crops, some of which can be exported. Since so many depend for their livelihood on farming, the government has had to adopt a gradual approach to this ongoing problem, which essentially has its roots in drug consumption in developed countries.

In the towns many people are employed in casual labor, as street vendors and hawkers, in the construction industry, as domestic servants, or as plumbers, electricians, or carpenters. There is also a professional middle class; the traditional professions such as law and medicine are still popular, but there are also increasing numbers of engineers and technicians of various types.

Organized labor had been the most important interest group in the Bolivian economy since 1952. The country's labor unions were some of the strongest in Latin America and were characterized by their activism, militancy, discipline, and political influence. However, the majority of the population works in the informal sector, and are thus not entitled to labor union benefits. Although primarily associated with La Paz, the informal sector also included a rural component and an illegal component linked to the coca industry. The urban and legal informal sector was estimated to contribute about 12% of gross domestic product (GDP) and employ as much as 60% of the labor force in recent years. Most analysts believed that this sector increased in the late 1980s because of public sector layoffs and the depressed mining industry.

The total labor force was 4.79 million in 2006 with 17% employed in manufacturing, 40% in agriculture, and 43% in services. Total unemployment was estimated at 8% in 2006, with a large number of workers underemployed. The law prohibits child labor under age 14, but this is generally ignored. Approximately one in four children between the ages of 7 and 14 are employed in some way. The minimum wage is subject to annual negotiation and in 2002 was set at \$59 per month. This does not provide a decent standard of living for most families, and most workers earn more than the minimum.

## 16 SPORTS

All kinds of modern sports are played by Bolivian youth. There are interschool athletic competitions, as well as professional basketball, volleyball, and soccer teams. Probably the most popular sport is soccer, and major towns have stadiums filled with enthusiastic crowds during matches. Bolivians gained international recognition for soccer, particularly after their national team placed second at the 1997 Copa America (South American Championship). In addition, the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz have professional-quality golf courses. Bolivians have also won Latin American boxing championships.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

As in many other Latin American countries, there are many cinemas in Bolivia and people enjoy going to the movies. There are also theaters in most of the main towns. One of the major theaters is the Teatro Municipal in La Paz, where enthusiasts can see both classical and modern plays as well as dance performances and musical events.

In the town of Santa Cruz, there are modern and popular discos to which many young people enjoy going. There are also good discos in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Sucre.

One of the most enjoyable events in Bolivia is Oruro's Carnival, celebrated everywhere but with interesting variations related to local costumes, dancing, and music.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

One of Bolivia's major crafts is weaving. Most young girls in rural areas learn to weave and spin, and it is thought that this ancient craft has been in existence in Bolivia for thousands of years. Patterns and colors vary according to region; quite often the patterns are either geometric or zoomorphic (depicting animals), while occasionally they show aspects of domestic life. Alpaca and llama wool were used traditionally, but sheep's wool is also used today.

Garments woven in the traditional way include warm and practical ponchos as well colorful hats with long ear-coverings, useful in cold mountain weather, known as *chullos*.

Many interesting musical instruments are made in Bolivia, including the armadillo-backed *charango*—a type of guitar—as well as native violins and a wide variety of woodwind instruments.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The serious social problems in Bolivia relate to the continuing poverty of so many of its inhabitants. Despite many efforts to eradicate coca production, hundreds of thousands of people are employed in its growth and distribution. Many peasant farmers who are often desperately poor have attempted to grow other types of crops. The crop substitution programs instigated by the Bolivian government offer replacement crops such as coffee and bananas, which are certainly not as lucrative as coca and which make earning a decent livelihood difficult for many people.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The 1998 Bolivian Human Development Report stated that gender inequities were considered very critical, concluding that Bolivian women have lower levels of human development

than men and that their education and income levels are below those of men. However, women's status has been improved since 1992 thanks to the promulgation of the Family Violence Law and the Quota Law, which mandates a 30% quota for women's representation in national and local elections.

In addition to changes in legislation, changes in the economy and employment have meant growing numbers of women are holding entrepreneurial positions. Educational opportunities are also increasing for women. Moreover, new women's political organizations have been created, such as the Political Forum for Women and the Bolivia Town Council Association, which have taken the lead in pushing for gender equality.

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—revised by C. Vergara

**BRAZILIANS**

**LOCATION:** Brazil  
**POPULATION:** 191,908,598  
**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese  
**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; Afro-Brazilian religions; other indigenous beliefs

**1 INTRODUCTION**

According to historical accounts, communities of farmers, fishermen, and gatherers occupied and developed in the Amazon lowlands. Between two and six million indigenous people lived in the territory known as Brazil at the time of Portuguese contact at the beginning of the 16th century. As a Portuguese colony, the region was named Vera Cruz (“True Cross”), but it was soon renamed Brazil after the type of tree found there.

In colonial times, Brazil played an important role in the world economy, providing nearly 75% of the world's supply of coffee. After independence from Portugal in 1822, Brazil underwent a period of economic growth and prosperity. A rubber boom led this period of economic growth, which was also fueled by sugar and gold. Brazil has since developed a significant industrial sector and was among the world's ten largest economies as of 2008. However, serious problems of poverty and inequality remain. This elusive economic development gave rise to the saying, “Brazil is the land of the future—and always will be.”

Even though Brazil is considered South America's leading economic power, internal problems such as a high crime rate, corruption, and an unequal income distribution continue to characterize Brazilian society. During the first years of the 21st century, more than 30% of the population lived in poverty.

From 2003 to 2007, Brazil achieved record trade surpluses due to increased productivity and high commodity prices. Many of these achievements were rooted in economic reforms implemented by Fernando Enrique Cardoso, president of Brazil from 1995 to 2003. He was succeeded by the leader of the Worker's Party, Luiz Inacio “Lula” Da Silva, who took office in 2003 and was reelected with more than 60% of the vote in 2006.

**2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Brazil is a large country (the fifth-largest nation in the world), with a landmass equal to that of the continental United States. Brazil has borders with every South American nation except Chile and Ecuador. However, most of Brazil remains sparsely populated. The Amazon basin takes up nearly one-third of Brazil's landmass. Most of the lowland areas in the north and west of Brazil remain populated only by native Amazonian tribes. Major indigenous tribes include the Yanomamo, Xavantae, and the Cayapo. Many land areas are protected as national parks, but the Brazilian government has failed to maintain these zones, giving in to pressure to allow construction of highways and other development projects.

In 2000 three oil spills transpired in Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay and in the Iguazu River. In addition, the Amazon rain forest is under threat as a result of extensive logging and deforestation. Consequently, many indigenous tribes are facing cultural extinction.



The majority of Brazil's population (about 192 million as of 2008) live in the densely populated south and southeast regions, where the major cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte are located. Brazil is an ethnically diverse country. Its population comprises European migrants, descendants of African slaves, and a variety of indigenous ethnic groups. Although Afro-Brazilians play an important cultural role, problems of racial discrimination exist. While Blacks have the same legal rights as Whites, most Blacks live in poverty in the *favelas* (urban slums) in Brazil.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Brazil is Portuguese. In pre-colonial times, many different indigenous languages were spoken throughout the country. At that time the *lingua franca* (the

language used by different groups to communicate with each other) was Tupi.

Even though Brazil and Portugal have made efforts to standardize the language, Brazil's geographical closeness to Spanish-speaking countries has deeply modified the Brazilian version of Portuguese. As a result, Portuguese spoken in Brazil has given birth to new words and pronunciations. Words combining Portuguese and Spanish languages, known as *Portuñol*, are common.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Each of the various ethnic groups in Brazil has its own tradition of folktales and myths (see **African Brazilians; Kayapos; Tenetehara; Xavante**).



Members of the Kayapo tribe, wearing traditional dress, from the Amazon River Basin of Brazil with villages that are along the Xingu River partake in a session in homage to the campaign of the brotherhood of the Catholic Church of Brazil in Brasilia, Brazil.  
(AP Images/Antonio Araujo)

## 5 RELIGION

The beliefs of many Brazilians reflect elements from African, European, and indigenous religions. A wide range of religious traditions and practices coexist in Brazil, from the European religions of Catholicism and Protestantism, to the multitude of spiritual sects of African origin such as *umbanda*.

While many Brazilians claim to be Roman Catholic, these beliefs are often infused by traditional practices. Offerings and gifts are made to saints and protective spirits for favors in this life. Self-sacrifice plays an important role in convincing saints to grant requests. Fervent believers, for example, may crawl on their knees to sites of spiritual significance to demonstrate their faith.

After Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian religions are the most important in Brazilian society. *Umbanda*, for example, is one of the most rapidly growing sects. Attracting both African and non-African Brazilians, *Umbanda* sects use music, dancing, and sometimes alcohol to reach a trance state that enables believers to communicate with spirits. Also significant is *Condomble* of African origin. *Condomble* priestesses also seek to communicate with African spirits. Their ceremonies sometimes include the sacrifice of goats and chickens.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Carnival in Brazil is one of the world's most famous festivals. Celebrated for the five days preceding Ash Wednesday (in February), Carnival virtually brings the country to a halt as

Brazilians take off work to join street festivals, dance contests, and other festive activities. The major Carnival parade takes place in Rio de Janeiro, with elaborate costumes and floats that are the result of many months' preparation. During Carnival, dance balls and samba contests are held. The festivities last well into the morning hours. While other Latin American countries also celebrate Carnival, only in Brazil is it done on such a grand scale.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions (such as birth, marriage, and death) are marked by ceremonies appropriate to each Brazilian's religious tradition.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Brazilians speak animatedly and use a variety of hand gestures for emphasis. For example, when a Brazilian speaker moves his or her fingers under the chin, this means "I don't know." Placing the thumb between the index and middle fingers is a sign of good luck.

Brazilians are accustomed to late-night dinners and parties. Many restaurants in the major cities do not open for dinner until 8:00 or 9:00 pm. The people make up for lost sleep during the afternoon *siesta*. Stores and many businesses close for three or four hours during lunch, and many Brazilians go home and have lunch and a short nap before returning to work.

Not surprisingly, Brazilians are also heavy coffee drinkers. In many city plazas, there are roving street vendors selling sweet espresso to passersby.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Brazil is a land of contrasts. Its cities combine modern skyscrapers, suburban houses, and impoverished slums. Known as *favelas*, Brazil's urban slums have been estimated to be home to as many as 25 million people. The inhabitants of *favelas*, which are built on hillsides surrounding the major cities, live in desperate poverty. Many of the older houses or shacks in the *favelas* now have electricity and running water. However, poor sanitation causes serious health problems. There is no garbage collection or sewer access in the *favelas*. A life of crime is often the only alternative for unemployed youth with no economic opportunities.

In contrast, the upper and middle classes that live relatively near *favelas* have a high standard of living. Brazil's major cities are very modern, with large shopping malls, restaurants, and superhighways. There are many luxury high-rise apartment buildings and large houses with all of the amenities one would expect in the United States. Most of the middle- and upper-class families have servants to assist with housework.

There is a diverse range of housing and living conditions in rural areas. The type of housing depends largely on the weather. Adobe, stone, and wood are all used as housing material. In the Amazon, reeds and palm are used to construct houses.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

A family in Brazil generally consists of parents and 5 to 7 children, although some families continue to have as many as 15 children. Both the nuclear and extended families play an important social role. It is a widespread cultural institution among the poorest families that inhabit *favelas* to share their shanty houses creating a spontaneous social net to protect their kin. At the same time, most socializing (drinking, dining, gambling, etc.) is conducted with members of the extended family. Godparents remain extremely important in rural areas, but their importance was declining in urban areas in the early 21st century. Godparents of a higher economic class are often chosen, as they have the financial means to take care of the child if a problem arises. However, family ties were losing importance as more and more of the population migrates from rural to urban zones.

Gender differences are clearly marked in Brazilian society and sexism is an ingrained feature of the culture. Limited educational opportunities, especially for lower-class women, keep females tied to traditional roles. Few middle- and upper-class women work outside the home, although this was beginning to change in the late 1990s and 2000s. It is a common custom for middle- and upper-class women to have social "teas" at 4:00 or 5:00 p.m., before returning home for dinner with their husbands.

Female beauty is highly valued and Brazilian society can be considered to be very flirtatious. It is common for young women to wear short skirts or shorts in an attempt to attract the attention of men. This also probably serves to perpetuate machismo among Brazilian men.

Marital infidelity is a serious social problem in Brazil. It is very common for men to take a mistress on a long-term or per-

manent basis. While this behavior is not completely sanctioned in Brazilian society, it is widespread and is tolerated.

## 11 CLOTHING

Brazilian dress in urban areas is very modern. Young people wear jeans and skirts, although among women short skirts and dresses are also very common. Business attire is very similar to that worn in the United States, with men wearing suits and ties.

Dress varies more widely outside of urban areas. In the south plains regions near the border with Argentina, the *gaucho* (cowboy) style is still worn. This includes ponchos, wide straw hats, baggy pants known as *bombachas*, and boots. In the Amazon, native Amerindians wear face paint and traditional tunics. In the predominantly Afro-Brazilian region of Bahia, women wear bright, colorful skirts and head scarves.

## 12 FOOD

Brazilian food reflects the many cultural groups that have settled there. Combining cooking styles and ingredients from the rain forest and the Portuguese and African cultures, Brazil's cuisine is a unique melting pot of influences. The African influences are particularly pronounced in the southeastern region of Bahia, where spicy seafood dishes may be flavored with peanuts, coconut, lime, or other tropical ingredients.

In Brazil it is a longstanding tradition to have *feijoada* for lunch on Saturday afternoons. Considered the national dish, *feijoada* is a stew of black beans with different types of pork—such as sausage, bacon, and salt pork—and an occasional piece of dried beef. A good *feijoada*, it is claimed, will have a minimum of five cuts of pork. This dish was common among the slaves in Brazil, who used discarded cuts of pork, such as the snout, tail, and feet. These cuts are still often used. Rice and/or vegetables such as collards or kale often accompany *feijoada*.

## 13 EDUCATION

Brazilian children are required to attend school for a minimum of eight years. In reality, however, a large percentage of the population fails to receive an adequate education. The overall national literacy rate was nearly 898% as of 2006 (men 88.4% and women 88.8%), although numbers are much lower in some regions. School attendance at the secondary level is low. Brazilian schools are generally underfinanced and overcrowded. In order to cope with the large number of students, children attend classes either in the evening or in the morning.

There are a growing number of universities and technical schools. These higher-level institutions of education, however, tend to be filled by middle- and upper-class students. Places are limited and entrance exams are very difficult.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Brazil has a wide variety of folk and modern music. Samba is perhaps the most popular and well-known internationally. Samba, however, is but one of Brazil's many rhythms and musical traditions. In the northeast, Portuguese guitar introduced during colonial times is still popular. African dances and percussion endure in Afro-Brazilian culture and are used in religious ceremonies. African influences are strongly felt in modern music as well.



*Inhabitants and tourists of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, take to Ipanema Beach to find relief from the high temperatures. In January, the temperatures can reach 36 to 39 degrees Celsius (97 to 102 degrees Fahrenheit). (Vanderlei Almeida/AFP/Getty Images)*

Brazil has been the birthplace of musical forms that have become popular worldwide. In the 1950s, for example, a fusion of American jazz and samba rhythms known as *bossa nova* made international stars of singers such as Sergio Mendes. More recently, the *lambada* topped the charts in the United States and Europe. The *lambada* is in fact a version of *carimbo*, a musical tradition of the northern regions with strong Caribbean influences.

### **15 WORK**

Brazil's economy is diverse. It has an extensive raw material and agricultural sector as well as heavy industry and manufacturing. Brazil continues to be the largest coffee exporter in the world and also produces sugar, soybeans, and corn for the export market. Many people in the northeast work in the sugar plantations and mills, while coffee laborers are found in the south. In addition, harvesting rubber, timber, and nuts provides a way of life for many inhabitants of the Amazon regions.

Of all the South American countries, Brazil has been the most successful in exporting its manufactured products. Brazilian shoes, for example, are now found in stores around the world. Automobiles and steel products are also major exports. While these industries provide formal employment for many, a significant proportion of urban Brazilians rely on small-scale, informal economic activities to survive. Women, for example, might become seamstresses or street vendors. A great many

young women from the *favelas* (urban slums) find employment as servants in middle-class homes.

### **16 SPORTS**

While soccer is popular throughout Latin America, in Brazil it is close to a national obsession. The city of São Paulo, for example, has three soccer stadiums, which hold matches nearly three times a week. The stadium in Rio de Janeiro is also spectacular. It seats 200,000 people and is the largest stadium in the world. Brazil has won more World Cups than any other country. Its most famous soccer player, Pele, is still a popular and highly regarded figure. It has been suggested that he might run for the presidency.

Volleyball is also very popular. The Brazilian women's volleyball team won the gold medal at the Barcelona Olympics in 1988, defeating Peru in overtime.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In Rio de Janeiro and other seaside cities, the primary form of recreation is the beach. Brazil is the nation with the largest coastline in the world. This is reflected in Brazilians' love for the beach and sunbathing, which attracts people from all social and economic backgrounds during the summer.

Samba schools are an important source of recreation in the *favelas*. More of a community or neighborhood club, samba schools work virtually all year long to prepare for the Carnival festivities. They teach dancing, create costumes, and write songs for the annual Carnival song competition.

Televised soap operas are extremely popular with Brazilians of all social classes. *Telenovelas*, as they are called, are broadcast in the evenings and attract a huge following. These soap operas are not permanently ongoing, but last from a few months up to a year. Brazilian soap operas are so popular that they are successfully exported to other Latin American countries.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

A rich tradition of folk art and handicrafts arises from different regions in Brazil. In the mining region of Minas Gerais, goldsmithing and jewelry are the local art forms. Gemstones such as diamonds, opals, sapphires, and rubies are produced in Brazil. A popular piece of jewelry throughout Brazil is the *figa*. The *figa* is a pendant of a hand with the thumb between the first and index fingers—the symbol of good luck. In areas where ranching predominates, leather goods are made from cattle- and goatskins. Shoes, handbags, and wallets of high quality are also crafted in these regions. In the Amazon regions, Amerindians produce woven straw baskets, weapons, textiles, and beads.

A unique traditional art form originates from the San Francisco River. This river, once believed to house evil spirits, led 19th-century boaters to carve fierce-looking figureheads, called *carrancas*, on their boats. These carvings of beasts that are half human and half animal were thought to provide protection from spirits and ward off bad luck. While most boaters no longer believe in these superstitions, many boaters still carry *carrancas*.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

A serious social problem in Brazil is the number of homeless children that live on the streets. It has been estimated that as many as 8 to 12 million street children live in desperate poverty. Street children as young as seven and eight years old have often been abandoned by parents who are too poor to be able to provide for them. Street children live a dangerous life. Drug abuse and glue-sniffing are serious problems among street children. They are forced to resort to stealing, pick-pocketing, and prostitution to survive. Although children have full protection under the law, thousands of street children have been murdered by Brazilian police. Shop owners hire “death squads,” believing that the immense problem of street children can only be solved by eliminating them. In response, many community groups and the children themselves have organized to raise awareness of children’s rights.

Another social problem in Brazil is its decreasing population. According to the data collected by the 2000 census, total population growth decreased by 3.3%. The decline in population may be attributed to the high rate of mortality due to an AIDS epidemic that Brazil has face since the late 1980s. At that time, the World Bank predicted that for the year 2000 Brazil would have around 1.2 million cases of AIDS. The government responded quickly and the prediction did not come true; in fact, AIDS cases numbered around 600,000 as of 2000.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Although women had equal access to schools and employment in the early 1900s and suffrage on a national level in 1933, they were not on an equal footing with men in family affairs. Men were automatically heads of households and married women were legally subordinate to their husbands. However, divorce

was legalized in 1977 and the 1988 Constitution granted women and men equal status for all legal purposes. In addition, female participation in the labor force grew dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s, due to the expansion of the services sector and economic pressures on family income. The economic participation of women in Brazil rose from 18% in 1970 to 30% in 1990.

Women’s movements grew in the 1980s, when the National Council on Women’s Rights (Conselho Nacional de Direitos da Mulher, CNDM) was created. Originally the feminist movement was closely connected to human rights movements and resistance to the military regime. In the 1980s and 1990s, attention shifted to violence against women, especially domestic violence and sexual abuse and harassment.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, women’s status in Brazil has been improving on various fronts. As a rule, there are as many females as males in schools, even at the highest levels, and professions that traditionally were dominated by males, such as law, medicine, and engineering, are becoming more balanced in terms of gender. Nevertheless, there are still relatively few women in positions of power. By 2006 women made up only 11% of Congress.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# CAJUNS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Acadians

**LOCATION:** United States (Louisiana; Texas)

**POPULATION:** 400,000

**LANGUAGE:** Cajun French; English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism, often mixed with old folk beliefs, pagan superstitions, and African spiritual practices

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the Cajun people is a tale of persecution, displacement, and the struggle to find a permanent homeland. Cajuns are the descendants of exiles from the early French colony of Acadia in Canada, an area that today comprises Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. ("Cajun" is a shortened form of the word "Acadian.") In 1713, after 150 years of control by France, the area was ceded to the British, who demanded that its French settlers swear allegiance to Britain and renounce their Catholicism. After steadfastly refusing to comply with these demands, the Acadians were driven into forced exile by British soldiers in 1755. Some fled to France or other parts of Canada, others to the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, and still others to the West Indies. Eventually a number of Acadians made their way to Louisiana, which already had a strong French presence although it was then under Spanish rule. In 1765, led by Bernard Andry, a Acadian community was established in the bayous of southern Louisiana, an area that came to be known as Acadiana.

Settled in a land very different from the one they had left, with exposure to varied ethnic groups including Spaniards, Native Americans, and Black Creoles, the Cajuns developed a distinctive culture of their own, living a rural lifestyle and relying on farming, fishing, and cattle raising for subsistence. They lived in relative isolation until the 20th century, when improved transportation and communication as well as compulsory education began to break down the barriers between their communities and the mainstream culture. Recent decades have been marked by concern over the preservation of Cajun ethnicity in the face of increasing cultural assimilation, with a particular focal point being the survival of the Cajun language. Meanwhile, certain aspects of Cajun culture have gained recognition and popularity among the general U.S. population, notably Cajun food and music.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

By 1790, about 4,000 Acadians occupied the wetlands along the banks of the Mississippi River near New Orleans. This area is full of swamps and bayous, which helped provide a safe haven for the persecuted French settlers. As their numbers grew, the Acadians moved west to settle on the Louisiana prairies. A few continued west into the wide open spaces of Texas, where they became cowboys and cattle ranchers. Today, the total number of Cajuns in the United States is estimated to be around 400,000. It is difficult to estimate the size of the population, however, because the 2000 U.S. Census dropped "Cajun" as a recognized ancestry or ethnic origin, but added "French-Canadian" instead. Modern-day Cajuns do not reject the ways of

the larger society, but they do strive to maintain many of the cultural and occupational traditions of their ancestors.

## 3 LANGUAGE

When the Cajuns first settled in Louisiana, they spoke French. Over time, their language changed as words from German, Spanish, English, and various Indian languages were added to the original French of colonial times to form what is today known as Cajun French, an oral language that does not appear in any written form. In addition to words from other languages, Cajun French is distinguished from standard French by its simplified grammar and use of some archaic forms of pronunciation retained from the 17th century. Today, Cajun French is in decline, and English is spoken in many Cajun homes as well as in public places, although often with a French accent. It is not unusual to find younger Cajuns who speak only English, while older Cajuns tend to speak Cajun French among themselves.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The most important Cajun folk figure is the heroine of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "Evangeline." The poem tells the story of how the Acadians were driven out of Canada and wandered for years before reaching their new home in Louisiana. In the poem, Evangeline is separated from her lover, who finally gives her up for dead and marries someone else. When Evangeline reappears and discovers what has happened, she kills herself. Another famous Cajun folk figure is Jean Lafitte, a Cajun adventurer who became both a notorious pirate and a prominent political figure and entered the realm of legend.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Cajuns are members of the Roman Catholic Church. However, since their arrival in Louisiana, their Catholic beliefs have become mixed with a host of other influences, from old folk beliefs and pagan superstitions dating back to the culture of pre-Christian Europe to African spiritual practices transmitted to them by African slaves and their descendants who migrated to Louisiana from the West Indies during the 1800s.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Cajuns celebrate all the major religious holidays that are celebrated by Christians the world over. But for Cajuns, the most important by far is Mardi Gras, a time of celebration that precedes Lent. Cajun Mardi Gras is a much more purposeful celebration than the enormous New Orleans street party that most people associate with the festival. During Cajun Mardi Gras, masked riders go from house to house within the Cajun community urging those inside to come out, join in the fun, and make a contribution of food and drink to the community celebration. This tradition is a time of fun and fellowship for Cajuns, but, more important, it is a way of ensuring that all those in the community have enough food to last until the end of summer, when the new crops can be harvested. The demand that each household contribute to the celebration is actually a way of checking to make sure that every household has enough food to allow it to give some away. Any household that is unable to contribute to the Mardi Gras is likely to be in need of some assistance from the group.





Cajun accordion maker Larry Miller (l) shows Chris Welcker how to properly press the keys on one of his instruments during the Festivals Acadiens in Lafayette, Louisiana. The festival helps show off and preserve the Cajun traditional ways of song, food, and dance. (AP Images/Rogelio Solis)

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life events, including birth, marriage, and death, are marked by rituals within the Roman Catholic Church.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Cajuns are an extremely close-knit group and have maintained their unity and their culture by emphasizing loyalty and cooperation. When a member of the community is in need, others give freely, knowing that their goodwill and generosity will be returned if necessary. Traditional Cajun houses are built with a hallway at the front entrance, bounded at one end by a door leading outside, and at the other by a door leading into the house. The outer door is always left unlocked so that anyone needing a place to spend the night can enter and sleep in the hallway without disturbing those inside. In a tradition known as the *boucherie*, neighboring families each bring one animal to the local butcher to be slaughtered. Over several weeks, all the animals are butchered and the meat is shared out equally. The butcher, who does not contribute an animal, receives an equal share in return for his work.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Cajuns today have access to modern health-care facilities, but this was not always so. Isolated in the swamps, bayous and backwoods, they traditionally relied on folk healers, usu-

ally women with a knowledge of the medicinal effects of plants and herbs. The folk healers, whose wisdom has not been entirely lost, are simultaneously feared and admired, since they have the power to harm as well as to heal with their special knowledge.

Traditional Cajun architecture consists of daubed or half-timbered houses with gable roofs, mud chimneys, and outside stairways leading to attics. Spaces between the timbers are filled with a mixture of mud, Spanish moss, and ground clam shells called *bousillage*. This mixture, held together by the lime that is extracted from the clam shells, is strong and fire-resistant, which makes it an excellent material for use in construction. The timbers themselves are often of cypress, a wood that is plentiful; strong and hard; resistant to rot, warping, and insects; and difficult to burn. Cajun landholdings are often surrounded by the characteristic *pieux*, a unique type of rail-and-post fence. Many old Cajun houses are still occupied today, modernized with plumbing, electricity, and corrugated metal roofing.

Cajuns use the meandering waterways of the Mississippi delta as routes of transportation, and the traditional means of getting about is a small boat known as a *pirogue*. Often a pole is used to push the pirogue along although today most are equipped with outboard motors. Swamp boats, which skim the shallow waters and are powered by a large fan mounted at

the rear, are also used by many contemporary Cajun bayou dwellers.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The distinguishing characteristic of the Cajun family is its extended network, created through intermarriage, which links each family to all the others in the immediate community—forming, as it were, one single family. In such a network, no one is left out, and institutions such as mental hospitals and retirement homes have never developed, since the aged and the infirm have always been cared for by the community at large. Since marriage is so vital to the unity of the group, Cajun courtships tend to be short, and most Cajuns marry at an early age. Even so, a Cajun young woman is always free to turn down an offer of marriage. Sometimes she does this by sending the suitor a paper-doll cutout of a young man as a symbol of rejection. By the same token, a Cajun father can speed up the marriage process by painting the top of his chimney with whitewash as a sign that there is a girl of marriageable age in the house.

When a wedding does take place, the wedding feast is invariably held outdoors. The entire community joins in the festivities and gives gifts to the newlyweds. In one tradition, called “flocking the bride,” the women from neighboring families each give the new bride one chicken to start her own flock.

When older people get married, or when people whose spouses have died get married for a second time, it is the occasion of a special celebration called a “charivari.” When the older newlyweds return home from their modest, and often secret, wedding ceremony, the neighbors arrive at their house, banging on pots and pans and making a racket outside the house. The noise continues until the secretive newlyweds finally give in and invite the neighbors to come into the house for dancing, feasting, and merrymaking.

When a Cajun child is born, the women in the family begin making towels, blankets, bedspreads, mattresses stuffed with Spanish moss, and other household necessities. These are then saved to be used as a dowry, or wedding gift, when the time comes for the child to get married.

## 11 CLOTHING

Cajuns today generally wear ordinary clothing, sturdy and nonsensical, which is best suited for their outdoor lifestyle. One type of fabric that they traditionally weave is usually dyed blue with dye from the indigo plant. This material may have been the origin of the modern denim used to make blue jeans.

## 12 FOOD

Cajun cooking is spicy and exotic, and increasingly popular among non-Cajuns. The predominant dish is gumbo, in which just about all available food is cooked together in one large pot, heavily flavored with herbs and spices. Bouillabaisse is a traditional French soup made of fish in a tomato broth, while *boulette* is a spicy shrimp croquette. In jambalaya, rice and other foods are cooked together in a spicy mixture. Much of the Cajun diet is made up of seafood and animals that are to be found in the waters and woods of the swamps and bayous. These include the shrimp, oyster, crab, turtle, frog (only the legs are eaten), quail, squirrel, pigeon, rabbit, muskrat, squid, and crayfish—called “crawfish” by the Cajuns (fried crawfish are sometimes called “Cajun popcorn”).

## Jambalaya

1 frying chicken, cut into 8 pieces  
4 tbsp. flour  
4 tbsp. oil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
2 cloves garlic  
½ bell pepper, chopped  
4 oz. sausage or cubed ham  
1 one-pound can tomatoes  
1 tsp. Tabasco or cayenne pepper  
2 cups rice  
2 cups water

Coat chicken with flour and brown in oil. Remove from pan and use drippings to sauté onion, garlic, and pepper. Combine all ingredients and cook on stove top in covered pot for 25 minutes or until rice is tender. (Can also be prepared in an electric frying pan).

## 13 EDUCATION

Living isolated lives deep in the Louisiana backwoods, many Cajuns in the past received little or no formal education. Today, Cajuns attend public schools, and they make the same choices concerning higher education that might be made by similar rural people all over the United States. Some choose to stay at home, work at traditional jobs, and carry on the traditional culture, while others choose to go on to college, often leaving the Cajun community to assimilate themselves into the larger society.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

There is no specifically Cajun literature, for Cajun French is exclusively a spoken language. The most important Cajun contribution to American cultural life is Cajun music, which preserves much of the archaic folk tradition of the original French Acadians. The basic instruments on which Cajun music is played are the accordion and the fiddle. It is earthy, exciting music, and sometimes very sad. Among the best known Cajun musicians are Dewey Balfa, Dennis McGee, Zachary Richard, and the group Beausoleil, led by Michael Doucet. In the 21st century, a more contemporary style of Cajun music includes influences from rock, R&B, blues, soul, and zydeco. In addition to the accordion, the electric guitar, washboard, and keyboard are used. Since the 1980s musicians such as Wayne Toups, Roddie Romero and the Hub City Allstars, Lee Benoit, Damon Troy, Hunter Hayes, Kevin Naquin, and Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys have popularized this contemporary form of Cajun music.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, the Cajuns are a self-sufficient people who fish, hunt, trap, and farm to provide for themselves and their families. Out of the waters of the swamps and bayous they gather fish, shrimp, clams, oysters, and crawfish. They trap and hunt fur-bearing animals such as muskrat, squirrel, and rabbit. Some gather Spanish moss. Farmers raise cotton, corn, or sugarcane. Prairie Cajuns operate cattle ranches and plant rice. In fact, one-fourth of all rice grown in the United States comes from the Louisiana prairie lands. Today, harvesting shrimp and oysters has grown into a major industry. Exploratory drill-

ing for oil in the wetlands and adjacent offshore areas has provided the Cajuns with another source of employment.

## 16 SPORTS

Cajuns enjoy all the sports that are popular among the general population of the United States, but they also enjoy more unusual pastimes such as cockfights and crawfish races. Probably the best-known Cajun athlete is New York Yankees pitcher Ron Guidry, who won the Cy Young award for his performance in the 1978 baseball season.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The favorite form of recreation for Cajuns is a get-together involving singing, dancing, and food. The *fais-dodo* is a big Saturday night dance party attended by the entire community, young and old alike. Annual festivals are also popular. One of the biggest is Lagniappe on the Bayou, which is held in the town of Chauvin every year. Others include the New Iberia Sugar Festival and the Annual Cajun Rice Festival and Parade.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Cajun folk artists are best known for their skill in weaving just about anything. The favored material is a special kind of brown cotton grown only in Cajun country, which is used to make blankets and clothing. But Cajun weavers can also make baskets and other objects out of palmetto leaves, corn husks, pine needles, and split oak bark. Handmade Cajun chairs are famous, as are the wide variety of items Cajun craftspeople fashion from Spanish moss, which grows on trees everywhere in the swamps and bayous.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The biggest threat to the Cajun way of life is damage to the environment as a result of the increasing presence of the oil industry in the area. Offshore oil rigs often spill oil into the water, and the maze of undersea pipelines changes the migration patterns of the sea creatures that the Cajuns depend upon so heavily for their sustenance. Cajuns also feel pressured by the rise in the number of sportsmen entering the swamps and bayous, who are often granted licenses to hunt and fish in areas that Cajuns have traditionally considered to be their own.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Perhaps one of the more interesting developments in gender relations for the Cajun community has been the increasing participation of women in “running” Mardi Gras (the *courir de Mardi Gras*). On Mardi Gras morning, groups of disguised riders on horses or trailers scour the countryside, singing, dancing, clowning, and coaxing homeowners into donating chicken, sausage, onions, rice, or lard to make a gumbo. These riders were invariably men. Women played essential roles in the celebration, but their work was mainly behind the scenes. Wives and mothers designed, cut, and sewed their menfolks’ fringed Mardi Gras suits. Women spent Mardi Gras cleaning chickens, cooking gallons of gumbo and pots of rice, and serving the hungry men at the end of their run. While working together, the women would joke and gossip among themselves, perhaps taking a nip of whiskey, and playing practical jokes on the men when they returned. Young girls and married women alike ended the day by dancing at the Mardi Gras ball—called

the “happy *fais do-do*.” Most women took pride in these supporting roles, but eventually some women decided that they too wanted to mask and run Mardi Gras. In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s it would have been unthinkable for men and women to run together. But between 1945 and 1975 women’s Mardi Gras runs began in Pointe Noir, Eunice, Duralde, Basile, and Tee Mamou. In the 1970s and 1980s the women’s runs in Eunice and Basile merged with local men’s runs. In the 21st century, mixed-sex runs take place in at least five other Cajun communities. As well, a growing number of children’s Mardi Gras runs offer young girls a chance to learn the art of running Mardi Gras at an early age.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# CAMBODIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Cambodian history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Khmer**.

## OVERVIEW

Cambodians did not begin migrating to the United States in large numbers until 1979. After the Vietnam War, which also ravaged Cambodia, and the takeover of Cambodia by the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, refugees began fleeing the country, seeking asylum in Thailand. When American journalists sent filmed reports of starving Cambodian refugees back to the United States and other countries in the West, Americans and Europeans responded by opening their doors to these immigrants.

Most Cambodians arrived in the United States in the early 1980s. Voluntary resettlement agencies, many affiliated with churches, were set up to assist the refugees in finding sponsors to help them adjust to life in the United States. Over 34,000 Cambodians immigrated to the United States in 1980 and 1981. From 1982 to 1984, more than 36,000 entered the United States. The influx of refugees began to dwindle after that, with less than 20,000 entering in 1985 and 1986, and less than 12,000 from 1987 to 1990. Cambodians continue to immigrate to the United States, however, with almost one-quarter of the foreign-born population having arrived since 1990.

The 2000 U.S. Census counted 206,052 Cambodian Americans, and by the time of the 2006 American Community Survey, the total had climbed to 238,943. Over one-third (86,700) of all Cambodian Americans live in California, particularly in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Stockton. Massachusetts also hosts a large number of Cambodian Americans (22,106), as do Washington (13,055) and Texas (11,646). Other states with sizable Cambodian American populations include Minnesota (7,790), Pennsylvania (6,787), Virginia (6,153), New York (5,720), Rhode Island (5,030), and Georgia (4,592).

As a fairly recent refugee population, Cambodian Americans are younger on average than the U.S. population as a whole; the median age of those with Cambodian ancestry in the United States, according to the 2006 American Community Survey, was 26 years, as opposed to 36 years for all U.S. residents. Almost half of the total Cambodian American population in 2000 was under the age of 18.

The Cambodian language, also called Khmer, is related to Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian languages. The Cambodian alphabet is based on that of ancient India, which is quite different from the Roman alphabet used to write English. Therefore, Cambodians have to learn not only a new language but also a new alphabet upon arriving in the United States. Because Cambodian Americans are such recent arrivals to this country, their general level of proficiency in English is still quite low, though most are making rapid progress in their English-language skills. Typical greetings in Cambodian (spelled phonetically) are *Jum-ree-up soouh* ("Good Day") and *Sohm lee-uh hae* ("Goodbye").

Proverbs are an integral part of Cambodian education, and Cambodian Americans continue to revere these expressions

of folk wisdom, such as "The new rice stalk stands erect; the old stalk, full of grain, leans over," and "Losing money is better than wasting words." Anyone can see the sound advice in "Don't let an angry man wash your dishes; don't let a hungry man guard your rice." Cambodian Americans find special guidance in the proverb, "Travel on a river by following its bends; live in a country by following its customs."

Nearly all Cambodian Americans are Buddhist, the traditional religion of Cambodia. Buddhism is divided into the "Northern School," or Mahayana Buddhism, and the "Southern School," or Theravada Buddhism. Cambodians follow the Southern School, which preaches the importance of becoming a monk and reaching Nirvana (eternal bliss) through one's own efforts, rather than with the help of Bodhisattvas (enlightened beings), as is encouraged by the Northern School. This teaching, combined with the law of Karma (or *Kam* in the Cambodian language), which states that good deeds cause the soul to be reincarnated as a higher self, tends to make Cambodians diligent, responsible workers.

Some Cambodian Americans have converted to Christianity, but the majority continue to practice their traditional Buddhism. Whereas in 1979 there were only 3 Cambodian temples in the United States, by 2007 there were 84. Of those 84 temples, 26 are in California, 11 in Massachusetts, and 6 in Texas.

Weddings, a traditional rite of passage, are still celebrated in traditional ways by most Cambodian Americans. Although weddings in Cambodia are usually arranged by the parents, young Cambodian Americans more commonly choose their own partners. The bride wears an elaborately decorated brocade dress called a *kben*, along with many bracelets, anklets, and necklaces. Grooms sometimes still wear the traditional baggy pants and jacket, but many have shifted to Western-style suits and tuxedos. The wedding ceremony consists of a procession, a feast with much toasting of the new couple, rituals performed by a Buddhist monk, and gifts (often money) to the couple from the guests.

The most important Cambodian holiday is the New Year, or *Chaul Chnam*, and it is still celebrated by most Cambodian American communities. Usually occurring in mid-April, Chaul Chnam lasts for three days. Buddhists go to the temple and pray, meditate, and make plans for the coming year. Many Cambodian Americans also play a traditional New Year's game called *bos chhoung*, in which young men and women stand facing each other, about five feet apart. One young man throws a rolled-up scarf to a woman in whom he is interested. She tries to catch it, and if she misses, she must sing and dance for him. If she catches it, she throws it back to him. If he misses it, he must sing and dance for her.

Most Cambodian Americans are relatively poor, having arrived in the United States as refugees so recently. Lack of language skills and cultural understanding creates high unemployment and low income. However, conditions are improving as Cambodian Americans adjust to their new home. While some 42% of Cambodian American families were living below the poverty level in 1990, according to the 2007 American Community Survey that number had dropped to 16%, with less than half as many (22.4%) on public assistance as in 1990 (51%). Cambodian Americans suffer from the typical health problems associated with poverty (anemia and vitamin deficiency diseases related to malnutrition, reduced immunities, etc.) as well as mental and physical health problems specific to



refugees from a war-torn country (depression, insomnia, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and the like).

Traditional Cambodian healing techniques are still practiced by Cambodian Americans. Traditional healers, known as *krou Khmer*, use massage, herbal medicines, and “coining” (*koh khchal*), where a coin dipped in kerosene is pressed against the body at strategic points to relieve pain.

Families are extremely important to Cambodian Americans. So many lost family members to the wars in Cambodia that remaining and future family members are cherished. Cambodian American families tend to be large (averaging 4 members, as opposed to 2.6 members for all Americans), and children are treated with tremendous affection.

Women are generally granted a lower status than men in Cambodia, but their opinions are still respected. Only men may become Buddhist monks, and education is usually reserved for males. Though the ideal woman in Cambodia is an obedient domestic manager, young Cambodian American women are beginning to venture beyond that role and become well-educated professionals, sometimes making significant financial contributions to their families.

Many Cambodian Americans lack formal education. Over 37% of Cambodian Americans over the age of 25 have less than a 9th grade education, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, and over 80% have not graduated from high school. Even those Cambodian Americans who were highly educated in Cambodia before coming to the United States find that their educations are irrelevant to the American work world, and

their lack of English language skills handicaps them further. Foreign-born Cambodian Americans with elite backgrounds in Cambodia often end up working as janitors or other menial laborers in the United States.

Young Cambodian Americans are beginning to do quite well in school, however, and are generally dedicated students. Over 95% of Cambodian American boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 18 were enrolled in school in 2000.

Traditional Cambodian literature is based on models from India and consists largely of poetry, proverbs, and fables. European literary forms, such as the novel, did not become popular in Cambodia until the 1970s. Since the takeover of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge, many intellectuals have been killed, and almost no literature has been produced.

Cambodian Americans have mostly used literature as a way to tell of the atrocities of the wars in Cambodia. Autobiography is the most prevalent Cambodian American literary form. Many Cambodian American writers have coauthors to help tell their stories in English, but others have become proficient enough in English to write their stories by themselves. One of these independent authors is Someth May, whose autobiography, *Cambodian Witness: The Autobiography of Someth May*, was published in 1986.

Most Cambodian Americans were farmers in Cambodia, but when they came to the United States they settled in cities. Lacking the job and language skills necessary to find employment, many have remained unemployed or are underemployed. Over half of those who do find jobs work in skilled blue-collar

occupations. The unemployment rate for Cambodian Americans continues to drop as they improve their language and job skills.

Poverty, unemployment, language barriers, and cultural dislocation all cause serious difficulties for Cambodian Americans, particularly those who have only recently arrived in the United States. Racial discrimination also affects Cambodian Americans, as it does other racial minorities. The generation gap between foreign-born Cambodian Americans and their American-born children (or children who were so young when they came to the United States that they have no memories of Cambodia) creates tension in Cambodian American families and communities as well. Young Cambodian Americans often discard their Cambodian first names and take on English ones to blend in better with their American peers. Some young Cambodians in tough urban settings have been forced to form gangs for self-protection.

Cambodian Americans also suffer from a stereotype that has developed because of differing cultural values. In Cambodia, courtesy and indirectness are highly valued, causing them to appear passive in the more aggressive American society. Cambodian Americans are far from passive, however, as their survival in the face of great odds proves.

Like many other Asian American women, Cambodian American women tend to have higher rates of reproductive and sexual health problems due to their profound sense of modesty that makes physical examinations by doctors who are strangers and often male extremely difficult. A lack of English language skills also complicates pursuing and receiving treatment. Consequently, about one-quarter of Cambodian American women do not have regular breast cancer screenings, and poor prenatal, natal, and postnatal care leads to one of the highest infant mortality rates among ethnic populations in the United States.

The persistent sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge against women and children left emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical wounds that Cambodian women (as well as men) carry with them to the United States. The need for survival forced victims of abuse to remain silent in Cambodia, and it takes some time in the safer environs of the United States for those victims to begin to feel able to express and address their hurts. This silence leads to a continuing cycle of abuse among Cambodian American families that is slowly being exposed and healed with treatment.

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*Cambodian-American writer and activist Luong Ung smiles during an interview in Washington, D.C. Members of Ung's family, including her father, were killed during the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia. Ung escaped to and resettled in America with an older brother and later wrote a book about her family's experience.*

(Joyce Naltchayan/AFP/Getty Images)

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# CANADIANS

**LOCATION:** Canada

**POPULATION:** 33.1 million (2008)

**LANGUAGE:** English and French (both official); Italian; German; Chinese; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (majority); Judaism; Buddhism; Sikhism; Hinduism; Bahaism; traditional religions of native groups

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: French Canadians, Native North Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Canada is the world's second largest country, surpassed in area only by Russia. It is also one of the least densely populated, with most of its population concentrated in a strip 180 miles (290 kilometers) wide along its border with the United States, and vast uninhabited or sparsely populated expanses to the north. The name "Canada" is derived from *kanata*, a Huron-Iroquois term for "village" or "settlement." Amerindian and Inuit peoples first migrated to present-day Canada from Asia across the Bering Straits around 10,000 BC. The native population is thought to have numbered between 10 and 12 million at the time the British and French were establishing their first settlements in the area.

The colonial rivalry between England and France for control of Canada began in the 15th century. In 1497 John Cabot landed on the shores of Newfoundland at the head of an English expedition. Some 40 years later, Jacques Cartier claimed the Gaspé Peninsula for the French and discovered the St. Lawrence River. By the late 17th century, France and Britain were rivals for the region's rich fish and fur trade. Their North American hostilities, reinforced by wars in Europe, were ended by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, giving the British control over what had formerly been New France.

The 19th century saw the creation of the Dominion of Canadian by the British North America Act of 1867. By 1949, with the addition of Newfoundland, the Dominion had grown to include 10 provinces. Since World War II, Canada has played an active role in world affairs as an influential member of the British Commonwealth, a founding member of the United Nations, and a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Domestically, a historic development has been the growth of the French Canadian separatist movement since the 1960s, leading to the establishment of French as Quebec's official language in 1974 and the elevation of the separatist Parti Québécois to power in Quebec in the elections of 1976. In 1995 a referendum for independence was voted down by a very narrow margin, but discussions for independence continued. Then in 2003 the Parti Québécois was defeated in provincial elections. Despite these minor setbacks, in 2006 parliament voted to acknowledge Quebec as a nation within Canada, but since there are no particular constitutional grounds to allow such a relationship, this nation within a nation status remains more or less a symbolic gesture.

In 1992, Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), joining with the United States and Mexico to create a common economic market. The agreement went

into effect in 1994. While the agreement has generally been beneficial for trade in Canada, some tension has arisen over issues that affect Canadian exports. Relations between the United States and Canada have been strained over issues of foreign policy, particularly after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the U.S.-initiated War on Terrorism. Canada sent troops to aid in the invasion of Afghanistan but did not support the U.S.-led efforts against Iraq, beginning in 2003. In Afghanistan, Canada by 2006 had begun a major role in the more dangerous southern part of the country for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). A battle group of more than 2,000 soldiers was based around Kandahar. Fighting was fierce and by mid-January 2008, 77 Canadian military personnel had died in the country. Canadians questioned whether or not troops should be pulled out at the end of the existing commitment in February 2009. In October 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper called for an independent panel to study the issue of when troops should leave, and if they were to stay, what their mission should be.

As neighbors, Canada and the United States share many cultural and social aspects. For instance, Canadians are very familiar with many aspects of U.S. culture, such as movies, music, sports, retail stores, and restaurant chains. But this influx of U.S.-based businesses and entertainment has led some Canadians to believe that their own unique cultural heritage is being unnecessarily overshadowed by their neighbors. Citizens and government alike continue to seek ways to promote and preserve their own Canadian brands and cultural heritage.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Canada is a vast country characterized by great geographical variety. Covering about two-fifths of the North American continent, it has an area of 3,849,650 square miles (9,970,594 square kilometers), of which about 90% is land and the rest is fresh water. Canada also has the world's longest coastline, totaling nearly 151,600 miles (243,924 kilometers). The country's dominant topographical feature is the Canadian Shield, a rocky area of forests, lakes, and wilderness that surrounds Hudson Bay and covers roughly half of Canada, separating the eastern and western parts of the country.

The Atlantic provinces, to the east of the Shield, include two islands: Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence lowlands south and southeast of the Canadian Shield are home to the largest portion of Canada's population and contain the major cities of Toronto and Montreal, as well as the nation's capital, Ottawa. The farmlands and ranching areas of the Western Plains lie west of the Canadian Shield and east of the Rocky Mountains. Still farther west lies the Western Cordillera (mountain range), which includes the Rockies. Canada's western coast is lined with deep fjords and inlets. The northernmost part of Canada includes the tundra that lies north of the tree line and the country's Arctic islands, of which the largest, Baffin Island, covers an area greater than California.

Although Canada is 10% larger than the United States (including Alaska), it has far fewer people—with an estimated population of about 33.1 million in 2008. Many areas of the country are sparsely settled, while nearly two-thirds of all Canadians are concentrated within 100 miles (160.9 kilometers) of the U.S. border. About 80% of the population lives in urban areas. Toronto is the most populous metropolitan area, with



over 5 million persons in 2008, followed by Montreal, with approximately 3.6 million. Canadians of British descent are the country's largest ethnic group, accounting for roughly 28% of the population. French Canadians account for around 23% (with a majority of them in Quebec) and 15% are from other European backgrounds. About 26% are considered to be of mixed heritage. Smaller percentages are represented by a variety of other groups, including, Asians, Africans, and Arabs. Canada's native peoples, including Inuits (Eskimos) and Amerindians, represent only about 2% of the population.

**3 LANGUAGE**

Both English and French are official languages in Canada. Speakers of both languages have the right to publicly funded primary and secondary education in their own language. Although Canada is generally considered a bilingual country, only about 15% of the population is actually bilingual. About 59% speak English only and 23% French only (primarily in Quebec). Other languages spoken as a mother tongue are (in order of importance) Italian, German, Chinese, and Spanish.

In the Prairies, the most common nonofficial language is German; in central Canada, Italian; in British Columbia, Chinese; in the Northwest Territories, Inuktitut; in the Yukon, the Athapaskan languages of the Déné family; and in the Atlantic region, Micmac. Canada's native peoples speak between 50 and 60 different languages belonging to 11 distinct linguistic families.

**4 FOLKLORE**

Canada's folklore tradition is generally divided into four main strains: native, French Canadian, Anglo-Canadian, and other ethnic groups (such as the Ukrainians of the prairie, Manitoba's Icelanders, or the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Montreal). The native tradition includes creation and hero myths, such as the Raven and Thunderbird cycles of the West Coast and the Nanabozo stories of the Algonquian peoples.

The oral tradition of the French Canadians was strengthened by colonial laws against the establishment of presses and by the scarcity of French schools, both of which made it important for French Canadians to transmit their culture orally across the generations. Popular characters in French Canadian



folklore include a hero figure named Ti-Jean (short for *petit Jean* or Little John) and a hunter named Dalbec. Jokes and anecdotes—including “Newfie” jokes about Newfoundlanders—are popular forms of folklore among Anglo-Canadians.

## 5 RELIGION

A majority of Canadians are Christians with about 43% belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. About 23% are Protestants, with the largest denomination being the United Church of Canada (9.6%), followed by Anglicans (6.9%), Baptists (2.5%) and Lutherans (2%). About 4% are members of other Christian denominations. Approximately 2% of the population is Muslim. Other religions include Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, the Baha’i faith, and the traditional religions of native groups. About 16% of the population claims no religion at all. Roman Catholics are in the majority in Quebec and New Brunswick, while the other provinces are predominantly Protestant. With larger numbers of immigrants coming from the Middle East and Asia, the numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are growing as well.

The United Church of Canada, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, was established in 1925 through the merger of the Methodist Church, Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and a large portion of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Freedom of religion is protected by the Canadian Bill of Rights, which has been incorporated into the constitution.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Canada’s most important national holiday is Canada Day (formerly Dominion Day), on 1 July, commemorating the establishment of the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Canadians celebrate their nation’s “birthday,” in much the same way their neighbors in the United States celebrate the Fourth of July: with patriotic ceremonies, picnics, and fireworks. The holiday marking the beginning of summer in Canada is Victoria Day, the Monday preceding May 25 (called Dollard Day by residents of Quebec, who prefer to remember a 17th-century French war hero on that date rather than Britain’s Queen Victoria). Canada’s Labour Day, like that of the United States, occurs at the end of summer (the first Monday in September). Other legal holidays include New Year’s Day, the major holidays of the Christian calendar, and a Thanksgiving holiday similar to that of the United States but held on the second Monday in October.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Canadians mark births, marriages, and deaths in ways similar to most western nations.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Canadian’s reputation for courtesy, tolerance, and cooperation is reflected in the traditional designation of their country as the “peaceable kingdom.”

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The average number of persons per household in 2006 was about 2.5. That year, about 55% of all households lived in single, detached homes and about 65% of all dwellings were owner occupied. About half of all dwellings were built between 1946 and 1990 and a majority of homes were considered to

be in good condition, requiring only minor repairs or regular maintenance. The average value of a private home was about c\$162,709 in 2001.

As a group, Canadians enjoy excellent health. Canada has a fairly low infant mortality rate—at 4.6 deaths out of 1,000 live births it is better than that of the United States. Life expectancy at birth in 2007 was estimated at about 77 years for men and 84 years for women. The Canadian national health plan—which has been a focus of attention in the United States debate about the future of its own health-care system—covers at least three-quarters of all the nation’s health-care expenses. A 1995 survey found that middle-aged Canadians’ risk of stroke and heart disease had increased since 1970 due to higher cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and lack of regular exercise. Stress and lack of time due to job demands were cited as reasons for bad health habits on the part of the nation’s aging “baby boomers.”

Because of Canada’s vast geographical expanse and scattered settlement patterns, the development of an adequate transportation system has been crucial to its development and survival as a nation. After the United States, Canada has the world’s highest per capita use of motor transportation. Private automobiles are used for four-fifths of urban travel, and there is one passenger car for every two persons. Canada’s severe winters make road maintenance an ongoing and expensive task. The government-owned Canadian Railways (CNR) and privately owned Canadian Pacific provide important all-weather transportation over great distances in large volume. Water transportation is heavily used for both domestic and international shipping, and international air service is provided by government-owned Air Canada and Canadian Airlines.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Nuclear families are the norm throughout Canada. The multigenerational extended family, which represented 7% of all households in 1951, now accounts for less than 1%. The Canadian birthrate declined rapidly from an average of 3.2 children per family in 1971 to 1.7 in the late 1980s. In 2007 the fertility rate was 1.6 children per family.

Fewer men and women are marrying in their teens or early twenties, with many waiting to marry until after they have completed college. Many couples are also waiting longer before having their first children. The average age at a first marriage is about 30 for men and 28 for women. In most families, women complete their childbearing within a relatively short time, with children separated from each other by only a few years. The majority of married couples share similar ethnic, religious, and educational backgrounds. In 2003 Ontario and British Columbia became the first two provinces in Canada to legalize same-sex marriages. That year, there were 774 same-sex marriages registered in British Columbia, of which about 54% of the couples were female. Same-sex marriage became legal nationwide in 2005 through the Civil Marriage Act.

Liberalized divorce laws, a variety of social changes, and a decline in religious belief have resulted in a growing divorce rate. Currently, close to half of all Canadian marriages (4 out of 10) end in divorce, with an estimated 38% of all marriages ending in divorce by the 30th wedding anniversary.

## 11 CLOTHING

Canadians wear modern, Western-style clothing. They may wear the traditional costumes of their ethnic groups (Eastern European, Asian, Middle Eastern, and so forth) on special occasions. In the western provinces, American-style cowboy gear is worn for special occasions and festivals, such as the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede in Alberta.

## 12 FOOD

Different foods are found in the different regions of Canada. "Brewis" (cod) is a favorite in Newfoundland, and the Maritime provinces are known for their seafood, including clams, oysters, salmon, lobster, cod, mackerel, and herring. Clambakes are especially popular on Prince Edward Island. In New Brunswick, the unusually shaped ostrich fern sprout, known as the fiddlehead, is considered a delicacy. Quebec has a distinctive French-Canadian cuisine. Popular dishes include the *tourtière*, a meat pie, and *ragoût de boulettes et de pattes de cochon*, a stew made from meatballs and pigs' feet. Quebec is also known for its maple syrup and families enjoy traveling to one of the province's many sugar shacks to sample this local product in candies, cookies, and other foods—even in ham and eggs.

Ontario has a wide variety of produce and cheeses; two of the province's favorite dishes are roast pheasant and pumpkin pie. Big, hearty meals are the rule in the rugged Prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Alberta is known for the quality of its grain-fed beef, and wild rice is a delicacy in Manitoba. Moose meat and fresh lake fish, including Arctic grayling and char, are widely eaten in the Northwest Territories.

## 13 EDUCATION

Nearly the entire adult population of Canada is literate. Education is administered by each province individually, although in all cases it is compulsory from the age of 6 or 7 to 15 or 16. In spite of some individual differences, the various educational systems are basically similar in all provinces except Quebec, which has two parallel systems, one of which is specifically for French-speaking, Roman Catholic students and the other for non-Catholic English-speaking students. Most higher education is government-funded. Canada's best-known universities are the University of Toronto and McGill University in Montreal. One of the oldest is Laval University in Quebec, which started out as a French Jesuit seminary. The first English-speaking college in Canada was King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Canada's degree-granting institutions (of which there are over 60) also include community and regional colleges, as well as colleges of applied arts and technology. As of 2006 about 23% of all adults between the ages of 25 and 34 had a university degree. About 24% of all adults of the same age group reported having a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Well-known Canadian authors of the past have included Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables*, and short-story writer Stephen Leacock. Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, and Margaret Laurence are among the best-known modern writers.

Internationally acclaimed classical musicians have included pianist Glenn Gould and vocal artists Jon Vickers and Maureen Forrester. Well-known popular performers include the bandleader Guy Lombardo, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Paul Anka, Celine Dion, and Gordon Lightfoot. There are a number of Canadian born actors that reached their claim to fame in Hollywood. They include Mary Pickford, Lorne Green, Raymond Burr, William Shatner, and Donald Sutherland.

Canada was the native land of many renowned scientists and inventors as well. Sir Sanford Fleming was the inventor of standard time. Sir Frederick Grant Banting and John James Richard Macleod were awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1923 for their discovery of insulin.

Prestigious theatrical events include the Stratford Festival and Shaw Festival, both held every year in Ontario, and the Festival Lennoxville in Quebec.

There are about 2,000 museums, art galleries, and similar institutions in the country. Some of the most prominent museums include the National Arts Center, the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Nature, and the National Museum of Science and Technology, all of which are located in Ottawa.

## 15 WORK

In 2006 about 76% of the labor force was employed in service-sector jobs, 13% in manufacturing, and only 2% in agriculture. That year, about 15% of the total labor force included those who were 55 years old or older. Such a high percentage of older workers is attributed to the aging of the baby boomer generation and to the fact that workers are choosing to remain working, either due to their financial situation or simply to remain active in their professions. Since the early 2000s, there has been a decline in the number of manufacturing jobs while the number of service related jobs has increased. In January 2008 the average weekly earnings for payroll employees was about c\$785. About one-third of Canada's labor force is unionized. About 81% of all employees work in full-time positions.

Like their neighbors in the United States, Canadian workers are increasingly finding themselves working harder for the same pay, as jobs become more competitive and less secure. Longer hours and greater pressure on the job have produced higher levels of dissatisfaction in the workplace, which in turn have led to increased absenteeism, job burnout, and associated family problems. The unemployment rate in March 2008 was estimated at 6%.

## 16 SPORTS

Ice hockey is Canada's national sport and its stars are worshiped as national heroes. Professional games draw thousands of fans on Saturday nights and youngsters often rise as early as 4:00 or 5:00 am on weekends to play on little-league teams that can book space at ice rinks only in off-hours. There are 6 Canadian and 24 U.S. hockey teams that compete in the National Hockey League, which was founded in Montreal, Quebec, in 1917. Canadian teams also compete with U.S. teams in the National Basketball Association and Major League Baseball (American League). The Canadian Football League, with nine teams nationwide, plays the sport similar to American football. The Canadian Soccer League has seven teams. Canada has three teams in the United Soccer League.



*James Dunnigan and his mother walk in the shadow of an iceberg on Alsek Lake in British Columbia, Canada.  
(David McLain/Aurora/Getty Images)*

Other popular winter sports include skiing, ice-skating, snowshoeing, and tobogganing. Favorite summer sports include baseball, volleyball, and soccer. CASCAR, the Canadian Association for Stock Car Racing, was established in 1981. Canadians often perform calisthenics during the seventh-inning stretch of professional baseball games, led from the dugout roof by fitness-minded fans. Among Canada's traditional sports, lacrosse originated with the native population before the arrival of Europeans and curling was adopted from the Scots. Curling was designated as the provincial sport of Saskatchewan.

Canada has been host to the Olympic Games in 1976 (summer) and 1988 (winter). The Canada Games is a national amateur event held once every two years that features about 40 different sporting events. The Arctic Winter Games, held every other year since 1970, is an international amateur event that is hosted in different provinces and territories.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Canadians today enjoy more leisure time than ever before and spend it in a variety of sporting and other recreational activities. Like their U.S. counterparts, Canadian families spend much of their evening time watching television. Many are regular newspaper readers. Their scenic native land provides many Canadians with recreation in the form of vacation trips, on which they spend over \$6 billion a year. Many own week-

end and vacation cottages on lakeshores or in wooded areas. There are more than 90 bird sanctuaries and 44 National Wildlife Areas in the country. If they choose, however, Canadians can also spend their entire vacation at the mall; the West Edmonton Mall—the world's largest shopping mall, with over 800 stores—boasts seven amusement parks, a large indoor ice rink, a 14-story-high roller coaster, several aquariums, and its own hotel.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Amerindian artists produce crafts, including jewelry, beaded moccasins, baskets, and leather goods, as well as stylized artwork that is displayed and sold in galleries and gift shops. The Inuit are known for their soapstone, ivory, and serpentine carvings as well as prints, paintings, drawings, and wall hangings, all in a distinctive native style. Their art shares certain common themes, including the group's traditional lifestyle and survival techniques, the animals native to its homelands, and the myths and spirits of its traditional religions. The arts and crafts of the Dene Indians and the Inuit are displayed in cooperative workshops in the Northwest Territory. A reconstructed Indian village in British Columbia displays the crafts of the North West Coast Indians.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Between 2001 and 2006 the foreign-born population of Canada increased by 13.6% so that nearly 20% of the total population was foreign-born in 2006. While this fairly rapid increase in immigration has generally been viewed as beneficial for the overall economy, there are also problems related to integration (such as language and job placement) and discrimination from native born citizens.

Canada has fewer violent crimes than many other societies. Its cities are generally clean, efficiently run, and relatively free of such common urban problems as homelessness and illegal drug dealing. It has a large national debt and faces growing demands for decentralization from many of its regions.

One of Canada's most serious problems is the threat that Quebec will secede and become a sovereign state, a move with grave political and economic implications for all Canadians. In 2006 the parliament voted to recognize Quebec as a nation within Canada. This, however, seems to have been primarily a symbolic gesture, since there are no constitutional or other legal grounds that define such a relationship.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Both women and men are able to participate fully in the labor force and in government; however, reports indicate that the average earnings of women are still substantially lower than that of men. In 2003 the average yearly earnings for a woman working full-time were about 30% less than that of a man. In 2004 about 58% of all women aged 15 and over were part of the paid workforce, accounting for about 47% of the total workforce. However, about 27% of all women in the workforce were in part-time positions. There have been slight gains in the number of women employed in various professional fields, such as medicine and financial services. In senior level managerial positions, however, men continue to outnumber women. The number of single mothers in the workforce has increased dramatically, from 50% in 1976 to 68% in 2004.

Same-sex marriage became legal nationwide in 2005 through the Civil Marriage Act. As of 2008 Canada was one of only five countries in the world to have legalized same-sex marriages. The other four countries were The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and South Africa.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

## CENTRAL AMERICANS IN THE US

For more information on Central American history and culture, see **Vol. 2: Belizeans, Costa Ricans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, and Panamanians.**

### OVERVIEW

The first officially recorded Central American immigrants entered the United States in 1820. Central Americans continued to immigrate to the United States in small numbers until the mid-20th century. Beginning in 1950, Central American immigration to the United States increased steadily, with a large wave in the 1970s when several Central American countries erupted in civil war. Since then, a number of natural disasters such as hurricanes Mitch (1998) and Stan (2005) and earthquakes have prompted other waves of exodus from Central American countries to the United States.

During the 1950s and 1960s, most Central American immigrants to the United States were middle- and upper-middle-class Panamanians and Hondurans. Many were students pursuing higher education, while others were young professionals in search of advanced career opportunities. In the 1970s, however, the make-up of Central American immigrants changed dramatically. Most were from El Salvador and Nicaragua (where violent civil wars had erupted) and Guatemala (where a repressive military government was in control). The majority were uneducated, illiterate peasant farmers with few, if any, industrialized job skills. For political reasons, these immigrants were rejected as legal immigrants by the United States and were refused refugee status. Those who chose to remain in the United States without official sanction were classified as “illegal aliens.” The preferred term in use today among the Hispanic American community, however, is “undocumented migrant.”

The passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996 imposed heavy requirements on Central American immigrants before allowing them legal status in the United States. A year later, the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act was passed to ease the process of legalization for certain Central Americans.

Refugees from the natural disasters of the 1990s and early 2000s were granted “Temporary Protected Status,” allowing them to work in the United States for a limited period of time without being deported. However, there is no process to apply for citizenship included. So, although some 374,000 Central Americans live in the United States under Temporary Protected Status, they will be expected to return to their countries of origin when their allowable time is up.

Because of strict U.S. immigration policies, Central Americans resort to desperate measures to immigrate. Smugglers and “tour operators,” sometimes called *coyotes*, profit from the situation by transporting refugees across the various borders between Central America and the United States. Coyotes may provide false documents and visas for a very high price. For most Central Americans, illegal immigration to the United States is extremely dangerous. In 1981, retired Arizona rancher Jim Corbett, a Quaker, founded the Sanctuary Movement by

giving aid to Central American refugees crossing the United States-Mexico border. A year later, Reverend John Fife and the congregation of the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, declared their church a “Sanctuary church,” sheltering refugees and helping them resettle in the United States. The movement grew throughout the 1980s to include over 500 churches as well as whole cities declaring themselves a “sanctuary city,” with local legislation implemented to assist undocumented migrants, often in defiance of federal laws. By the mid-1990s, the Sanctuary Movement faded from public discourse, although many churches and cities continued to claim “sanctuary” status. In response to recent conflicts over proposed immigration policy reforms, the New Sanctuary Movement was convened in 2007 to give undocumented migrants a public voice in the debates and protect them from abuses.

A large majority of Central American refugees settle in Los Angeles, California, sometimes called the “Central American capital of the United States.” According to the 2000 U.S. Census, over 370,000 Central Americans lived in Los Angeles. There are also large populations of Central Americans in Miami (128,903), New York City (99,099), Houston (60,642), Dallas (29,150), San Francisco (23,367), and Washington, D.C. (15,803). The state of New Jersey is host to over 80,000 Central Americans, and Georgia and North Carolina are each now home to more than 30,000 Central American immigrants.

Determining the exact number of Central Americans living in the United States is impossible because so many are undocumented migrants not included in official population counts. The 2000 U.S. Census counted 1,686,937 Central Americans, of whom 1,372,428 (81%) were foreign-born, but other estimates are as high as 2 million or more. In 2000, Salvadorans (655,165) were the largest Central American group in the United States, followed by Guatemalans (372,487), Hondurans (217,569), Nicaraguans (177,684), Panamanians (91,723), and Costa Ricans (68,588). Other Central Americans accounted for another 103,721 persons.

Most undocumented Central American immigrants in the United States live in overcrowded slum conditions, hardly better than the Central American refugee camps from which some of them started their journey. As many as 20 people may share a one-room apartment where they sleep and eat in shifts. Landlords exploit the fears of undocumented migrants by charging exorbitant rents and threatening to turn the migrants in to the INS if they do not pay.

Employers also exploit undocumented Central Americans. Lack of documentation, along with a lack of language (the majority speak only Spanish) and appropriate job skills, makes it very difficult for most U.S. Central Americans to find employment. Those who are lucky enough to find jobs are often paid less than minimum wage and expected to work long hours in poor work environments. Fear of detection forces the workers to accept these unfair working conditions. Common employment for undocumented U.S. Central Americans includes unskilled day labor, low-level work in the service industry, construction work for men, and domestic service or work in the garment industry for women. Most jobs are only part-time.

The majority of Central American immigrants of the past few decades suffer from serious physical and mental health problems caused by experiences in their homelands and the difficult journey to the United States. Undocumented migrants are often afraid to go to the doctor or hospital, however, for



*Carolina Blanco, originally from El Salvador, and others are sworn in as United States citizens during a naturalization ceremony in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. (Joe Raedle/Getty Images)*

fear of detection by the INS, so many of their ailments go untreated. A number turn to folk remedies prescribed by *sobadores* or *curanderos* (folk healers) or to drink *remedios* (herbal teas). Others may take advantage of clinics set up specifically for Central American immigrants in cities such as Los Angeles. U.S. Central Americans have also banded together to form organizations to help each other, such as the Central American Refugee Center (CARE-CEN), which has branches nationwide.

Prior to 1982, most undocumented U.S. Central Americans were afraid to send their children to school for fear they would be detected by immigration authorities. In 1982, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that children of undocumented migrants are entitled to free public education. Since that time, parents have not had to show evidence of citizenship or legal immigrant status to enroll their children in school. More U.S. Central American children, therefore, now attend school. However, most have had sporadic educations in their homelands and have a difficult time catching up to their age-appropriate grade level. Language barriers also create problems for U.S. Central American students, many of whom speak only Spanish at home. Older students may also feel resentment towards being treated as children, having functioned as adults in Central America.

Despite the obstacles they face, U.S. Central Americans have created a community in their new homeland. Many Central Americans play in major league U.S. sports, especially baseball. Through education and consciousness-raising, U.S. Central Americans have raised other Americans' awareness of conditions in Central America. And despite their struggles to find employment, and the low wages they often receive when they do, almost 80% of Central American immigrants send money back to family members in their country of origin; an estimated \$9.5 billion was remitted in 2007.

Central Americans have traditionally turned to the family for support, but most U.S. Central Americans' families have been torn apart by the violence in their former homelands and separation during immigration. Traditional male and female roles are also disrupted in the United States because finding jobs is often easier for women than for men. In Central America, the man is the undisputed head of the household and chief breadwinner. Some Central American immigrant men who are frustrated and angry at their situation in the United States turn to alcohol and drugs. Some take their frustrations out on the women and children around them, making domestic violence a problem among U.S. Central Americans.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

**CHILEANS**

**LOCATION:** Chile

**POPULATION:** 16.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish, Mapudungun

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; and indigenous religions

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Several Amerindian cultures such as the Atacameño and the Diaguita in the north, and the Mapuche further south thrived in Chile prior to the arrival in the 15th century of Inca invaders from Peru. The Incas extended their empire for a short time as far as Santiago, which is now Chile's capital city.

In 1520 the Portuguese explorer Fernando de Magallanes (or Ferdinand Magellan) sailed through the straits at the southern tip of Chile. In 1536, the Spaniard Diego de Almagro crossed into Chile from Peru, but it was Pedro de Valdivia who established the first Spanish settlement at Santiago in 1541. Spanish colonial rule lasted until the beginning of the 19th century, when conflicts with Spain led the Chilean military leader, Bernardo O'Higgins, to join forces with José de San Martín from Argentina to liberate the Chileans from Spanish rule. O'Higgins became the first ruler of the independent republic of Chile in 1818, and in further struggles this joint Andean army also fought the Spanish royalists as far as Peru.

Chile developed two main political parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, and Chile's economy developed as a result of trade that flourished with European powers such as England in the 19th century and the United States in the 20th century. First, there was a nitrate boom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Copper and silver mining became important sources of income, and farming developed. Initially wheat was an important crop, but gradually a variety of fruits and vegetables gained in importance as they found markets locally and abroad.

In the 20th century Chile experienced dramatic changes of government, including the socialist rule of Salvador Allende (1970–1973), who was the first Marxist Socialist president in the world to be freely elected in 1970. The socialist project of the Popular Unity (UP) ended on 11 September 1973 when the armed forces, with support from the parties of the Right and the Center, attacked the government palace, La Moneda. Immediately after General Augusto Pinochet took power, a group of Chilean economists, who had been trained at the University of Chicago on scholarships, implemented for the first time a package of radical neoliberal reforms. In order to maintain stability, the public sphere was reduced through censorship and repression, social movements were crushed, and people had to endure in silence the hardships caused by economic policies aimed to deregulate and fragment the labor market and to reduce state intervention in the economy. The resulting increase in poverty, from 17% to 38.6% of the total population, and inequality changed the social landscape and exacerbated class divisions.

Even though Pinochet's rule lasted 17 years, his regime ended without bloodshed when Patricio Aylwin, leader of a Center-Left coalition, Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, was elected president in 1989. The peaceful transition of

leadership was built upon negotiations between the elites and the military and was framed by guidelines introduced in the 1980 Constitution that were aimed to maintain political and economic stability. The Concertación committed to continue the economic model and to respect the self-granted amnesty of the military. Despite the constitutional restraints, economic growth averaged 6.3% a year, and targeted social spending to the poorest sector helped Aylwin's government achieve a 10 point reduction in poverty by the end of his administration in 1994. For the second presidential elections since the return to democratic rule, the economy was growing at a steady rate of 6% and inflation had been cut in half. Chile was in the middle of the so-called "golden decade of growth" and Eduardo Frei, the Concertación's candidate, was rewarded with 57.98% of the national vote.

In July 1997 the Asian financial markets fell and the world experienced the effects of the so-called Asian Crisis. Chile, one of the most open countries to the world market, was strongly hit by the debacle. After 13 years of constant economic growth, Chile's economy began to slow down. For the 1999 presidential elections the support for the incumbent coalition declined and during the 1999 presidential election the Concertación's candidate Ricardo Lagos, a former minister of education and public development, almost lost the election. Nevertheless, Lagos was successful in signing free-trade agreements with the United States and the European Union (EU) and in putting an end to the authoritarian elements still present in the Constitution. By the end of his presidency, Lagos enjoyed a 60% approval rating.

In addition to the popularity of her predecessor, Michelle Bachelet, the fourth president of the Concertación and the first woman to be elected to the highest office, won in 2006 thanks to the support of women. She managed to break the tendency of women to vote for the conservative Right and increased her female vote by almost 5 points over Lagos. As a newcomer to politics, Bachelet represented a new style of participatory democracy. In addition, her biography turned her into a symbol of reconciliation. Her father, a high-ranking army general, died after being tortured by Pinochet's supporters. She and her mother were also tortured and then sent to exile. However, she embraced the idea of reconciliation and focused on renewing the people's trust in the armed forces.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Chile's Pacific coastline is over 4,000 km (2,485 mi) long. The Andes Mountains run the full length of this immensely long, narrow country, which borders Argentina to the east and Peru and Bolivia to the north. Chile has a varied climate, from the northern Atacama desert, through snow-clad Andean peaks, to farmlands where grapes provide excellent Chilean wine and other fruits, such as apples and cherries are grown for export, to grain and cattle country, as well as fishing zones further south where snow-covered volcanoes and lakes abound. Despite the natural beauty, about 6.5 million people 40% of the total population live in the capital, Santiago.

Chile is a relatively homogeneous country regarding race and ethnicity. About 70% of the population is Mestizo (European and Amerindian descent), one fifth is of European descent (mainly Spanish, but also German, Italian, and British), and around 10% are indigenous. The Mapuche in the Araucanía region are the more numerous with almost a million



people, followed by the Aymara in the north and the Rapanui in Eastern Island.

## **3 LANGUAGE**

The official language of Chile is Spanish. However, there are several indigenous languages such as Aymara, Mapudungun, and Rapanui, which are spoken in indigenous communities in the north, south and Eastern Island, respectively. In addition, English as a second language is currently being taught in public school throughout the country, as well as in almost all private schools.

## **4 FOLKLORE**

One of the important folk heroes of Chile is a Mapuche Indian named Lautaro, who learned Spanish and was at the service of the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Valdivia. He was chosen by his people to lead the resistance against the Spanish. Having





*An older indigenous man from Socoroma waits for the start of the Roosters Race (Corrida de Gallos) during the Ño Carnavalón celebration in Putre, Chile. The celebration takes place in the days leading up to Ash Wednesday. (Francisco Manrique/AFP/Getty Images)*

learned the Spanish ways and arts of war, he proved a formidable opponent, teaching his people to ride horses and developing effective war tactics that gave Mapuches an advantage in known terrain. Lautaro was already at the gates of Santiago, the capital, when he was killed, and the Mapuches retreated southward where they continued to fight the Spanish. Still, many of them continue to resist assimilation.

Another folk hero is Captain Arturo Prat who represents honor and determination during troubled times. Even though his brave resistance aboard the battleship *Esmeralda* during the War of the Pacific in 1879 did not result in victory, the Batalla de Iquique, in which he died, is commemorated every May 21 with a national holiday.

Many myths and legends survive in Chilean folklore. One of the most common comes from the islands of Chiloé in southern Chile. It is the tale of a large phantom ship, the *Caleuche*, which sails the seas around Chiloé at night. It appears as a beautiful sailing ship with the sounds of a party onboard that is crewed by the drowned.

## 5 RELIGION

Even though around 70% of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic, only 16% are churchgoers. Around 18% are Evangelical, 8% are atheists or agnostics, and some Mapuche Indians continue to practice their own religion. Their beliefs include worship of the creator Ngenechen and the destroyer Wakufu.

Among the religious festivals is the feast of San Sebastian in Yumbel, near the city of Chillán; the Fiesta de Cuasimodo during Easter in the outskirts of Santiago; and the religious festival of La Tirana near the northern city of Iquique, which includes dances representing good and evil forces in the form of maidens and devils. The latter developed out of a mixture of Catholic and Amerindian beliefs.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Aside from the main Catholic holidays, Chileans celebrate Labor Day on May 1, Naval Glories Day on May 21, Independence Day on September 18, Army Glories Day on September 19, and Race Day on October 12, which commemorates the discovery of America by the Spaniards in 1492.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Many Chilean Catholics consider baptism and First Communion important for the identity of a child. Civil marriage is often accompanied by a church ceremony, which is considered more significant. In some very religious families, when a person dies, nine days of prayers according to Catholic custom are held in the home and attended by the person's family and close friends.

According to popular beliefs still adhered to in the countryside by some *campesinos* or peasants, and among city dwellers known as *pobladores* in poorer neighborhoods, the spirits of people who have died violently will continue to linger in the area where they died, and the living can appeal to them in their prayers, asking them to intercede on their behalf. Little shrines with flowers and candles, known as *animitas* (which means "little spirits") are often set up in the vicinity and sometimes become places of prayer and pilgrimage.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Chileans have a relaxed attitude towards time and, on social occasions in particular, people are not expected to arrive on time, but rather to be up to an hour late. This approach is often misunderstood in cultures where the attitude is that "time is money." In Chile, this is occasionally true in some business or professional sectors where the sense of hurry and the virtues of efficiency have been adopted from other cultures, such as European or North American. But in general, this flexibility also has its virtues, enabling people to enjoy themselves with a carefree attitude and to accept the unexpected with greater ease.

One of the best types of gatherings is the typical Chilean *asado* or barbecue, which involves large quantities of meat in large cuts, grilled on open charcoal fires in private yards and gardens or in parks or other public places during festivals. This is an occasion for family and friends to gather.

Formal greetings and introductions involve handshakes, but among friends, both women and men, the usual greeting is a kiss on the cheek.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

About 40% of Chile's population is considered middle class. The majority of Chileans go to semi-private or public schools and live in the new suburban neighborhoods in the capital, Santiago, such as La Florida and Maipú. The richest 20% of the population live in elegant houses in neighborhoods such as Providencia, La Dehesa, or Vitacura Santiago and go to private schools. This elite group continues to deploy strong economic, social, and political influence, and quite often a family in these conditions will have a summer home in the coastal resort area. It is also a landowning class, and many families of this type will also own a ranch.

In 2007, 13.7% of the population was living under the poverty line. Half of them, the *pobladores*, live in crowded shantytowns, particularly in Santiago, where housing is often a type of squatter's home made from every and any material at hand, such as zinc, bits of wood and brick, or any other available building material. Unlike their middle-class counterparts, the *pobladores* do not own cars, but rather use public transportation. In more remote areas, where there are fewer roads, particularly in the south, boats are important means of transport. In the countryside, particularly in rural areas such as the Andes Mountains, pack animals and horses are used as transport for local people.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Until recently, most Chileans had large families, although modern urban lifestyles, particularly among the middle classes, have included a change in family size, with modern families tending to have only two children. Even though many poor working women have to leave their children to go to work and middle-class professional women employ servants to help them look after their own families, women everywhere in Chile are considered pillars of family life and are expected to fulfill their maternal roles. This often means that women take up a larger share of chores as well as family duties in addition to work outside the home, since men are not as willing to share household responsibilities as in some European or North American environments. This is particularly true in poorer households, where women have little extra help and often rely on older children to look after the youngsters.

## 11 CLOTHING

Modern, middle-class city dwellers dress in Western-style clothes. Men wear suits, and women in offices are expected to dress quite formally, with suits or dresses, although trousers are also accepted. Good grooming is expected of women, including regular hairstyling and makeup. Given Chile's large middle class and lively cultural life, exceptions to this rule are found, for example, among those involved in the arts.

In the countryside, Chile's *huasos* or cowboys wear the *poncho*, a type of cloak, often with colorful stripes worn for festivities. Regular ponchos worn at other times are usually earth colors. They also wear *chupallas*, broad-brimmed straw hats in summer and felt hats in winter, and boots with finely crafted spurs.

## 12 FOOD

A typical Chilean dish is *pastel de choclo* (baked corn paste). A much-loved soup, a hearty meal in itself, is *porotos granados* or

white bean soup, which also includes pumpkin, peppers, and sweet corn. A delicious and popular snack is a type of turnover made of wheat flour, called *empanada*. Many Latin Americans have interesting variants of fillings for the empanada. In Chile the most typical empanada is oven baked, and it is called *empanada de pino*, which means it is filled with minced meat, onions, a slice of hard-boiled egg, and an olive. Other empanadas are fried and filled with cheese. During popular street festivals, empanadas are often accompanied by fermented fruit juices, such as a thirst-quenching type of apple cider called *chicha de manzana*.

Avocados, called *palta* in Chile, are used in salads or mashed up as a topping for bread (usually eaten for the afternoon snack called *onces*) or as an accompaniment to grilled meat. Native stews called *cazuelas* are made from beef, chicken, or fish, and include potatoes, pumpkins, corn, and green beans.

The range of climates produces an interesting selection of food in Chile, and in the south along the coast excellent varieties of shellfish are often eaten raw with lemon juice or prepared on open charcoal grills. In the more remote islands of Chiloé in southern Chile, stones are heated and placed in a hole to form a type of oven called a *curanto* where fish, beef, pork, and vegetables (mostly potatoes) are wrapped in vegetable leaves and covered with soil, then steamed for hours for special occasions, such as communal house-building. The community helps build a new house and the owners "pay" back the favor with a *curanto*.

## 13 EDUCATION

Primary schooling has been free in Chile since 1860, and literacy rates have been improving steadily since then, with a current estimated 95.7% literacy rate. On 7 May 2003 President Ricardo Lagos issued a law making high-school education mandatory, giving the state responsibility for educating all Chileans younger than 18 years of age. Also, there is a new law being discussed that guarantees full coverage of care and education to children from ages 2 to 5.

Regarding higher education, students can choose between 25 public or private universities. Universidad de Chile was founded in 1843, and since then increasing numbers of Chileans have attended university, forming a rapidly growing middle class. The Catholic Church has also played an important role in developing education with its Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, founded in 1888. For admission to public universities, students must do a University Selection Test or PSU, which consists of two mandatory tests on math and literature, plus other specific exams depending on what the student wishes to study. According to official statistics, in 2006 a total of 241,390 students took the PSU. The majority of the schools offer *licenciaturas*, which are equivalent to bachelor's degree, but in a specific area such as architecture, journalism, and physics.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Chileans have a rich cultural heritage and a love for the arts, and they enjoy numerous literary, theatrical, and musical activities. The national dance of Chile is the *cueca*, which involves rapid, emphatic steps, reminiscent of the Spanish *zapateado* (*flamenco*) in which the feet tap the beat on the floor.

An important political and artistic protest movement arose during the 1960s, acquiring a special force and meaning later

during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s. Its most famous figure was Violeta Parra, whose passionate voice embodied the yearning of an entire people, and whose style blended folk, classical, and modern influences. Her children Isabel and Angel continued this creative movement, which became known as the New Song Movement (*La Nueva Canción Chilena*). Other groups such as Inti Illimani or Quilapayún also blended folk traditions and instruments from other Latin American countries. While in exile, their members toured the world, sharing their music with young people everywhere.

Chile has a strong literary tradition and has the distinction of having produced two Nobel Prize winners, the poets Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda. Their powerful poetry goes beyond the individual to sing about the condition of humankind. These poets not only conveyed an intensely personal and intimate voice in their work, but also genuine social concerns. An interesting and very modern playwright who also gave expression to the suffering in his country caused by the Pinochet dictatorship is Ariel Dorfman. The work of modern novelists such as José Donoso, Jorge Edwards, Antonio Skármeta, Isabel Allende, and Roberto Bolaño have been translated into various languages including English.

## 15 WORK

Chile has undergone a modern economic experiment that began during the 1980s and that has resulted in many benefits for some sectors of the economy. Growing crops for export, especially fruit and excellent wines, has been one success story. Copper mining continues to be very important. However, working conditions vary sharply according to social class, and economic improvements have not reached marginalized poor people, particularly *pobladores* of the shantytowns, who often work in the informal market. This situation is repeated throughout Latin America, where many people cannot find secure employment and poor people's needs are ignored.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular sport is soccer, which is played and followed enthusiastically by many Chileans, who mostly support one of the three national teams, Universidad de Chile, Universidad Católica, and Colo Colo.

Rodeos are also popular in Chile. The Chilean *huasos* or cowboys compete in *medialunas* (corrals in the shape of a half moon), parts of which are heavily padded. The steers have to be driven against this padded section by two mounted *huasos*; one drives the steer from behind and the other has to press the steer against the padded wall and bring the steer to a full stop. The technique is difficult and involves unusual movements that demand great agility. Chilean horses, called *corraleros*, are short and stocky and well suited for the rodeo. It is not a violent sport and is popular only in the central valley and in the south of Chile.

Chile has fine beaches, and many people enjoy swimming in beach towns such as Valparaíso and Viña del Mar. Boating and fishing in Chile's beautiful lakes are also popular, and there are several ski resorts near Santiago and in the south (Chilán has the longest ski run in South America), among which is the well-known resort of Portillo, visited by both Chileans and Argentines.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Chilean town-dwellers enjoy movies, and there is a lively theatrical tradition in Chile. Santiago's Municipal Theater is a well-known venue, but there are many smaller venues for artists, playwrights and poets, actors, and singers to get together. Chileans are distinctive because they enjoy themselves not only as spectators but also as enthusiastic participants in a variety of activities that blend art and popular culture with recreation. In Santiago's main square, the Plaza de Armas, there is open-air evening entertainment with musicians, dancers, and comedians attracting people who are out for a stroll or a leisurely drink or snack. Young people often meet in the evening in cafés or bars and enjoy dancing. People also enjoy shopping, and some neighborhoods have elegant shopping districts and malls.

Chileans enjoy snacking and eating out, and one of the popular venues is the large Mercado Central, a lovely market that includes many small snack bars and informal eateries offering varieties of seafood.

Chileans also enjoy trips. Even though trips to the seaside to places such as Valparaíso and Viña del Mar are very popular, people also enjoy excursions to the rich farmlands of the central valley, to the lake district, and to the southern Andes, enjoying fishing, hiking, boating, white-water rafting, visiting farms, ski resorts, or thermal baths. Chile has over a hundred volcanoes and many beautiful national parks, some of which, in the north, have geysers, and in the south, glaciers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In Chile, taking part in some kind of artistic activity is not left simply to professionals, because Chileans have a tradition of expressing themselves through a variety of artistic media where historical, social, and political concerns blend with purely artistic ones. Many people combine a career or various types of work with an artistic hobby, which can include playing musical instruments, singing, painting, writing poetry, dancing, or acting. There are many musical groups or *peñas* in towns across Chile, playing a variety of music ranging from folk to *salsa* music from other Latin American countries as well as modern, Western-style pop music.

Weaving, basket making, pottery, woodcarving, and jewelry making are crafts practiced in Amerindian communities such as the Aymara in the north, close to the Bolivian border, or the Mapuches in the south. Leatherworking began as a craft and has continued in a more modern, industrial setting. The town of Pomaire is famous for its pottery. It includes many potters who often make miniature figures that derive from storytelling or religious traditions, and the beautiful clay *pailas* or pots of varying sizes and shapes find their way into many Chilean gardens and kitchens.

A unique feature of Santiago is the large cluster of arts and crafts shops called Los Graneros del Alba (in the back of the church of Los Dominicos) where visitors can watch artisans in the process of making their wares. In a uniquely Chilean way, this is combined on weekends with music and dancing.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Chile's social problems relate directly to the poverty-stricken conditions not only of the surviving Amerindian groups, but also of city dwellers or *pobladores* who do not have enough work or can only find temporary work. Official poverty figures

for 2007 show that nearly 14% of the population lives below the poverty line, however, experts argue that there are more people living in poor conditions because of high unemployment and informal jobs. Currently, 36% of the active population works in the informal economy, thus without rights to social security or protection from the state as workers.

In addition to poverty, extreme socio-economic inequality is a problem that has marked the country since the 1973 Coup. Despite poverty reduction since the return to democracy (from almost 40% of the population in 1990 to 14% in 2007), the participation of lower- and middle-income workers in the economy declined and income inequalities have worsened. While in 1990 the average income of the richest decile (10% of the population) was 27.5 times greater than the poorest decile, six years later this proportion had grown to 29 to 1, and has remained virtually unchanged since then. The wealthy landowners and industrialists possess not only most of the economic wealth but also the greater share of political power and social influence. The growth of a significant and well-educated middle class does not of itself solve the problem of underemployed and undereducated poor people, although it is an important indicator of development.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

From the beginning of the 20th century to the 1970s, the access of women to formal education increased significantly regarding the amount and diversity of the instruction received. In the early 1930s, men and women had achieved equal access and rates of attendance to elementary school. However, women had to wait two more decades for this same degree of equality to reach higher education. Even though women had been allowed to attend university since 1877, mass admittance to any type of higher education became regularized only in the mid-1960s. Despite access to education, women's inclusion in the job market proceeded at a slower pace. In the 1920s, women constituted only 15% of the formal working force. Fifty years later, this proportion had only risen to nearly 20%.

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a Latin American feminist line of thought that claimed the "personal is political." With this slogan in mind, women living in poor neighborhoods of Santiago took domestic activities such as cooking, eating, sewing, washing clothes, and looking after children to the public sphere, and organized clubs and cooperatives with the help of the Catholic Church. In 1982 the debt crisis resulted in high unemployment levels and the plummeting of salaries. Unemployment rates rose to almost one third of the active labor force, while wages declined by 20% during the 1980s. This scenario led to more women entering the labor force as part-time and temporary laborers mainly in the fishery, forestry, and agricultural industries and substantially augmented the number of homes with two employed adults. Female workers increased from 19.6% of the formal working force in 1970 to 32.4% in 1987, and constituted nearly 40% of temporary wage-workers in certain productive areas as the fruit industry.

Even though one in three people that worked were women, there was still strong discrimination against female workers regarding the quality of jobs they could aspire to and the amount of money they could expect to be paid. Women had difficulty gaining access to managerial positions and were paid less than men in the same jobs. The average salary paid to women holding a bachelor's degree was only 50% of the wages of men who

had some university studies. This explains why more than half a million families headed by women had severe economic difficulties during this period.

During the first democratic government, women obtained only a 5% average representation in the legislature. Something similar happened in the executive branch where Patricio Aylwin appointed only one woman as minister, three as under-secretaries, and four as governors of the regional administrations, which meant that women's representation in non-elected public posts was only 8.5%. In the general elections of 1993, women's representation in Congress remained extremely low at a meager 7%. While women were largely excluded from legislative power, their incorporation into the state apparatus almost doubled during the same period. The new Christian Democratic president, Eduardo Frei, increased women's presence in the executive branch by appointing three female ministers and four under-secretaries to his cabinet. Consequently, women's presence in non-elected public posts reached 16.8%.

After 10 years of democratic rule, the presence of women in non-electoral public posts increased by six points when Ricardo Lagos appointed five women as ministers of his cabinet. One of them was Michelle Bachelet who, after serving as the minister of health for two years, became the first female minister of defense in Chile and Latin America. Also, during Lagos' administration women achieved one long-denied right: divorce. Because of the strong influence of conservative values on the two dominant coalitions, approval of a divorce law was blocked for 14 years. Finally, President Lagos promulgated the new law in mid-2004.

Following a run-off in January 2006, Michelle Bachelet was elected as Chile's first female president and Latin America's first woman obtaining the highest office due to her own popularity—with 53.3% of the national vote. Her election marked a turning point in the evolution of Chile's political system, not only because a woman president meant a break from a predominantly male-dominated public sphere, but also because she represented a more radical leftist project inside Concertación, a rejection of politics as usual, and the demand for popular political participation in the country. She expanded healthcare coverage and reformed the pension system, policies that have improved women's daily lives.

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—revised by C. Vergara

## CHINESE AMERICANS

For more information on Chinese history and culture, see **Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities; Han.**

### OVERVIEW

The first Chinese immigrant to the United States arrived in 1820. For the following 30 years, few Chinese immigrated to America. When gold was discovered in California in 1848, however, many Chinese were drawn to what they called Gum San, the “Gold Mountain.” The numbers of Chinese gold-seekers increased rapidly from 450 in 1850 to 2,716 in 1851 to 20,000 in 1852. After that, immigration slowed to an average of 4,000 Chinese per year for the next several years.

Most of these first Chinese Americans were men because a respectable Chinese woman could not leave her parents’ or in-laws’ home. Therefore, the early Chinese American community consisted of bachelor societies governed by a district association. “Chinatowns” developed all along the West Coast, where Chinese American men could find the goods and services they needed in their new American home, such as housing, traditional Chinese groceries and restaurants, laundries, and the like. Most Chinatowns also had gambling rooms, many had temples, and a few had theaters for traveling Chinese opera troupes.

Due to the dramatic lack of women in the early Chinese American community, prostitution was big business. Local societies, known as “tongs,” ran the business, importing young Chinese women (or girls) to act as sexual slaves. “Tong wars” between rival societies made the U.S. national news in the late 1800s.

As the number of Chinese Americans who were willing to work for low wages increased (discrimination prevented them from obtaining high-wage labor), other Americans began to feel threatened by what they termed the “Yellow Peril.” Racist organizations initiated boycotts of Chinese American goods and services. Anti-Chinese gangs stormed Chinatowns and wreaked havoc, destroying homes and property and physically attacking Chinese American residents. Many Chinese Americans fled to larger Chinatowns for safety. By 1876, San Francisco’s Chinatown housed over 30,000 people in an area of nine city blocks.

The California state government joined the anti-Chinese movement by passing discriminatory acts in the 1850s such as the foreign Miners Tax and Alien Poll Tax. In 1854, the state of California ruled that no person of Chinese descent could testify in court, thereby declaring open season on Chinese Americans. European Americans robbed, beat, and even killed Chinese Americans freely, without punishment, because the victims and other Chinese American witnesses could not testify against them.

By 1882, the U.S. government decided the situation had gotten out of hand and passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, barring any more Chinese laborers from entering the United States for the next decade. Other Chinese immigrants were only to be admitted under severe restrictions. Chinese immigrants were also denied U.S. citizenship “hereafter,” relegating them to permanent alien status.

The Asiatic Exclusion League was founded in 1886 to lobby the federal government for further restrictions. In 1892, the Geary Act extended the Chinese Exclusion Act for another 10 years, and in 1902, it was extended indefinitely. Not only was the number of new Chinese arrivals stemmed, but also previous Chinese immigrants decided to leave the increasingly oppressive United States and return to China. The Chinese American population fell from 107,488 in 1890 to 71,531 in 1910.

In 1924, the final blow was delivered. The new Immigration Act passed that year barred any foreigners not eligible for U.S. citizenship from entering the country. This prohibited all future Chinese immigration, including Chinese women married to men who were already U.S. citizens. Chinese Americans in the United States were faced with further discriminatory laws forbidding them to own land, have certain jobs, attend certain schools, or marry European American women.

The situation for Chinese Americans improved when China became an ally of the United States during World War II (1939–45). On 17 December 1943, U.S. Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Chinese immigration to the United States was still limited to 105 persons per year, but it was a step in a more welcoming direction. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 removed race as a basis for immigration discrimination, and 10 years later President John F. Kennedy signed legislation allowing over 15,000 refugees from Communist China to enter the United States. Finally, the 1965 Immigration Act eliminated the national origins quota system for immigration entirely and enabled up to 20,000 Chinese to immigrate to the United States each year. The United States continues to be a popular destination for Chinese immigrants—over 13,000 Chinese migrated to the United States between 1990 and 2000—and recent events in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, and China have prompted more migration. When Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule from the British in 1997, fears of the future drove some Hong Kong residents to relocate to the United States. The suppression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement in China as well as rising levels of violence in China-occupied Tibet have spurred more Chinese to immigrate to the United States, along with Taiwanese escaping the tenuous political situation of their homeland. Many Chinese Americans are involved in peace and justice activism around political and human rights issues in China, Taiwan, and Tibet.

Although “Chinese” can include immigrants from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the census (as well as most studies of ethnic groups) lump them all together in one category. Numbers are therefore difficult to pin down with absolute accuracy. The number of people who reported themselves as being of Chinese ancestry on the 2000 U.S. Census totaled 2,865,232 or 2,879,636 depending on who is included. Almost two-thirds are foreign-born. Most Chinese Americans live either in California (1,122,187) or New York (451,859), with sizeable populations also in Hawaii (170,803), Texas (121,588), New Jersey (110,263), Massachusetts (92,380), and Illinois (86,095). Washington, Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania each host more than 50,000 Chinese Americans as well. The state with the highest percentage of Chinese Americans is Hawaii with 14%. California is second with 3.3%, followed by New York with 2.4%. The numbers of men and women immigrating from China to the United States have been fairly equal in recent years.



The Chinese language is fundamentally different from English in both its spoken and written forms. Therefore, attaining English language proficiency is quite difficult for older foreign-born Chinese Americans. Almost three-fourths (73%) of all Chinese Americans over the age of five speak Chinese at home. American-born Chinese Americans, and those who came to the United States as very young children, naturally grow up fluent in English. Many American-born Chinese American children attend Chinese language schools to maintain their connection with the language and culture of their heritage.

Early Chinese immigrants to the United States retained much of their traditional culture, which includes customs, folklore, and religion, and passed it on to their descendants. Traditional Chinese religion is a mix of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist elements. Chinese American communities in the 1800s each had a temple, most of them Taoist. Some of those early temples remain in California, and another was rebuilt in San Jose in 1991. Homes and shops in early Chinese American communities also frequently had altars to various deities. Some restaurants, homes, and shops continue the tradition today. Some Chinese Americans have converted to Christianity, and churches of various denominations can be found in Chinatowns.

Along with American holidays, most Chinese Americans also celebrate traditional Chinese holidays such as the fall Moon Festival, Ching Ming (ritual visits to ancestors' graves) in the spring, and Chinese New Year. Chinese New Year celebrations—with parades, firecrackers, and long, elaborate drag-

on puppets carried by dozens of dancers—have become very popular among the rest of the American population as well. Many visitors to the gold-rush town of Marysville, California enjoy the annual “Bomb Day” festival held there. Early Chinese Americans built a temple there to the water god Bok Kai, and every year since the 1880s they have honored him with a parade, including a huge golden dragon, during the second month of the Chinese lunar calendar.

Although most Chinese Americans make use of Western medicine, they still turn to traditional Chinese remedies for minor ailments. Traditional Chinese health practices have also become more widely accepted by Americans in recent years. Chinese medicinal teas and soups are sold in health food stores, and acupuncturists treat Chinese and non-Chinese Americans alike. The Chinese martial art of tai chi chuan, a form of kung fu, is taught across the United States as a way to improve physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Other forms of kung fu are also popular in the United States.

Although living conditions were often quite desperate for early Chinese Americans who were restricted to low-paying jobs and crowded into Chinatowns for safety from racial violence, most Chinese Americans now live in much better circumstances. The number of Chinatowns has dwindled as the need for them diminished. Networks of already established Chinese Americans help newcomers find housing and employment, and extended family groups provide other needed support.



*Chinese Americans pray at the Quong Ming Buddhist Temple during Chinese New Year in the Chinatown area of San Francisco, California. The Lunar New Year celebration brings families together to share food and pray for good health and prosperity in the coming year. (David Paul Morris/Getty Images)*

The family is central to traditional Chinese culture, and many Chinese Americans still hold to Confucian values that emphasize respect for elders and a clear hierarchy of authority among extended family members. Family loyalty and unity is more important than individual dreams and achievements. All emotional and financial support is expected to be supplied by the family. This very closed and structured system creates tightly bonded families where divorce is rare and children remain enmeshed with their parents throughout life. Younger, American-born Chinese Americans sometimes find this family closeness stifling. It conflicts with the modern American values of independence and autonomy they have learned in school and from other American friends. But it can also serve as an anchor of stability in the ever-changing, often confusing, world of the industrialized United States.

Food is almost as important as family to traditional Chinese. Many Chinese Americans continue to eat traditional foods prepared in traditional ways. Rituals and etiquette surrounding the preparation, serving, and consumption of food are passed on from one generation to the next. Today, Chinese restaurants are located in almost every city in the United States, as well as in smaller towns and villages. There are even Chinese fast-food chains. Chinese food is now one of the most popular ethnic foods in America, and even non-Chi-

nese Americans know how to use chopsticks. Fortune cookies, canned chop suey, and other “Chinese” foods are sold in mainstream supermarkets, and scores of Chinese cookbooks are available in libraries and bookstores throughout the United States.

Although Chinese Americans were barred from attending public schools up through the mid-1800s, they are now well integrated into the American educational system. Confucianism promotes education as the key to a successful life, and Chinese American parents continue to encourage their children to do well in school. Chinese American families place a high value on education and spend a large amount of their time, energy, and money on their children’s schooling. Chinese American children who also attend Chinese language school put in many hours of study each night to keep up with the increased amount of homework.

Chinese Americans have shared much of their traditional culture, as well as their experience as immigrants, with the wider U.S. public through their writings, music, and art. Well-known Chinese American writers include Maxine Hong Kingston, Betty Bao Lord, Amy Tan, Gus Lee, Gish Jen, and David Wong Louie; playwrights C. Y. (Chin-Yang) Lee, Frank Chin, and David Henry Hwang; poets Nellie Wong and Alan

Chong Lau; and journalists Ben Fong-Torres, Helen Zia, and Lisa Ling.

Until recently, Chinese Americans did not find much success in the American art world. Painter Yung Gee, an immigrant from Canton, was the only Chinese American in the modernist art scene in New York City in the 1920s. He was attacked several times in the streets by racist thugs when walking with his European American wife. Dong Kingman became the first Chinese American artist to have his work shown and purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1940. Today, however, there are many successful Chinese American artists. Maya Lin, a sculptor and architect, is perhaps the best known. She designed the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D. C., and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. Another famous Chinese American architect is I. M. Pei, who has designed many buildings including the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio.

Chinese American cellist Yo-Yo Ma is known worldwide. He has made over 75 recordings, won more than 15 Grammy awards, and has been given a number of honorary degrees from various universities, including an honorary doctorate from Yale University. In 1998, Yo-Yo Ma founded the Silk Road Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to multicultural exchanges among Asia, Europe, and North America through music, festivals, and education. Herb Wong, a disc jockey for over 30 years in San Francisco, is also president of the Association of Jazz Educators. He encourages young Chinese Americans to express themselves creatively, especially in music. Two up-and-coming Chinese American musicians are opera singer Hao Jiang Tian and singer-songwriter CoCo Lee.

Chinese American workers have made great contributions to American society. In the 1800s, they worked in factories and sweat shops, coal and quicksilver mines, and on farms in the West. Some 10,000–12,000 Chinese Americans blasted through mountains and laid track for the Transcontinental Railroad from 1865–69. However, they were still faced with discrimination in hiring and were legally forbidden to own land. Eventually, they set up laundries, restaurants, and gambling establishments across the United States, since these were the only businesses open to them.

In the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, however, new areas of employment were opened to Chinese Americans. Many were now able to pursue higher education and enter a variety of professions, while others were allowed to join trade unions and become skilled laborers. Some successful Chinese American professionals are several Nobel Prize-winning physicists, including Chen Ning Yang, Tsung Dao Lee, and Daniel C. Tsui; physicist Chien Shing Wu, who received from Princeton in 1958 the first honorary doctorate in science ever given to a woman; Min Chueh Chang, co-developer of the first birth control pill; and David D. Ho, credited with the breakthrough in HIV/AIDS treatment success using a “cocktail” of multiple drugs. Also in the realm of science, astronaut Leroy Chiao served on several shuttle missions as well as on the international space station.

Other significant Chinese American contributors to American culture are electronics specialist An Wang, founder of Wang Laboratories; computer-industry entrepreneurs David Lam, David Lee, and Albert Yu, along with Steve Chen, co-founder of YouTube; U.S. senator Hiram Fong, and for-

mer governor of Washington, Gary Locke; Elaine Chao, former peace corps director and president of the United Way of America, appointed U.S. Secretary of Labor in 2001; Lily Lee, who in 1983 became the first Chinese American woman mayor in the United States; news anchor Connie Chung; actors Anna May Wong, Bruce Lee, Rosalind Chao, Lucy Liu, sisters Jennifer and Meg Tilly, and B. D. Wong; and film director Wayne Wang. Fashion designer Vera Wang is Chinese American, as is Ming Tsai, host of “Simply Ming” cooking show.

In their early history, Chinese Americans were almost completely unrepresented in American sports. Today, however, a growing number of young Chinese Americans are rising to the top of the sports world, particularly in tennis, track and field, gymnastics, and figure skating. In 1989, tennis-player Michael Chang became the youngest man ever to win the French Open. In 1984, Tiffany Chin placed fourth in women’s figure skating at the Olympics, and Michelle Kwan has won numerous medals in Olympics and world competitions. A young Chinese American figure skater, Caroline Zhang, has won junior level competitions and is expected to do the same at the senior level. Amy Chow helped her team win the Olympic gold medal in gymnastics in 1996 and herself won a silver medal. Perhaps the most famous Chinese American sports figure is golfer Tiger Woods, whose multiracial heritage includes one-fourth Chinese.

Despite their widespread success in today’s American society, Chinese Americans still suffer from racial discrimination. One notorious example was the brutal murder in 1982 of Chinese American Vincent Chin by two unemployed European American auto workers in Detroit (who called him a “Jap” and blamed him for their lack of work). The auto workers were convicted only of manslaughter, fined \$3,780 each, and sentenced to three years’ probation. Chinese Americans also face tensions within their own community as well as with the wider American and Chinese communities due to the continuing conflicts in China, Taiwan, and Tibet.

As is true for most Asian immigrants to the United States, as well as those of other origins, conflicts arise between first generation Chinese American parents and their second and third generation children and grandchildren who become increasingly Americanized and resistant to traditional Chinese cultural values. Women and homosexuals have particular difficulty with this in Chinese American families. Women’s problems were especially intense in the late 1940s when Chinese women “war brides” were finally able to join their husbands in the United States. The men, who had either been born in America or had lived there for some time, were frustrated with the traditional, rural behaviors of their newly arrived wives (and children, in some cases). The women, on the other hand, were upset with the lifestyle their husbands had become accustomed to as “bachelors” in the United States, gambling, drinking, staying out late, and doing little to nothing around the house to help care for the home and children.

Traditional Chinese culture has very little concept of homosexuality; most Asian languages do not even have a word for “lesbian.” First generation Chinese Americans consider homosexuality to be a “Western” concept with little bearing in the Asian community. Sexual activity and orientation are not discussed, and women are expected to put family above everything else, marrying and bearing children. For homosexual Chinese Americans to publicly express their identity is seen



as disloyalty to the family honor and open defiance of traditional values. Therefore, many Chinese American homosexuals choose not to “come out” to their families, placing family identity ahead of individual identity.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# CHOCTAW

**PRONUNCIATION:** chok-taw

**LOCATION:** United States (Southeast Oklahoma; Mississippi; Louisiana)

**POPULATION:** 187,000 (worldwide)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Choctaw

**RELIGION:** Traditional Choctaw; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Choctaw, along with the Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole nations, were called the “Five Civilized Tribes” by European Americans because they had organized systems of government and education, and many of their ways seemed to reflect European culture. The Choctaw had their first encounter with Europeans in the fall of 1540. The Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto was making his way west from Florida when he came upon a Choctaw village. Afraid that de Soto and his forces were going to take them prisoner, the Choctaw attacked. Their bows and arrows did little against the Spaniards’ armor and guns. The Spaniards won the battle, and more than 1,500 Choctaw died. Fortunately, that was the Choctaw’s last encounter with Europeans for more than 150 years.

Throughout the first half of the 18th century, the Choctaw sided with the French in their war with the British over control of the New World. Shifting alliances between the three Choctaw bands and the European forces in the area, however, caused a Choctaw civil war in 1748. One of the bands had decided to side with the British and the nearby Chickasaw tribe. The French helped their Choctaw allies defeat the British and the British-allied Choctaw. The treaty signed at the end of the war made it clear that the Choctaw were never again to ally themselves with the British. They held true to this in the American Revolutionary War (1775–83), when many Choctaws sided and even fought with the American colonists against Britain.

After the United States became an independent country, the Choctaw continued to be on good terms with the government. Often, in exchange for Choctaw land, the U.S. government would agree to pay off Choctaw debts and frequently gave the chiefs gifts. For a large cession of land in 1805, the government agreed to pay the Choctaw an annuity of \$3,000, which immensely helped the tribe, providing it with a stable income. The Choctaw sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War in 1861, greatly influenced by the fact that the states of Texas and Arkansas (bordering the tribal lands) seceded from the union. In addition, the commerce and business routes used by the Choctaws were within the states sympathizing with the south. The Union also withdrew its troops from the Choctaw Nation as war threatened. The U.S. government stopped paying the annuity; the agents of the government were southern men. When the Confederacy approached the Choctaws, they were ready to join. After the war, the U.S. government began paying the annuity again, but further Choctaw land cessions required by the government prevented the Choctaw from climbing out of their poverty.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Choctaw are originally from what is now the northwestern United States, but after hearing good land was plentiful in the east, they emigrated to present-day Mississippi and Alabama. The climate there is very warm and humid, providing them with good farming conditions in the rich soils near the rivers. The land is home to abundant forests, filled with a great variety of wild game, fish, and berries for food.

Traditionally, there were two distinct Choctaw clans, designated by the Creator. Intermarriages between the two clans were forbidden, and Choctaws followed their mother's clan. Today most Choctaw do not know from which clan they are descended.

In 1820 the Choctaw and the U.S. government signed a treaty at Doak's stand in which the Choctaw agreed to cede the remainder of their land in Mississippi to the U.S. government. An article in the treaty promised a blanket, kettle, rifle gun, bullet molds and nippers, and ammunition sufficient for hunting and defense for one year. The Treaty of 1830, signed at Dancing Rabbit Creek, conveyed to the Choctaw Nation a tract of country west of the Mississippi River, in fee simple to them and their descendants. This treaty also gave them the right of self-governance. Of the nearly 20,000 Choctaw living in Mississippi at that time, about 14,000 moved west to Oklahoma. Many of those who stayed in Mississippi were cheated out of their land by a cruel Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) employee who refused them the right to register. The 6,000 Choctaw who had stayed in Mississippi consequently fell into harsh poverty, while their kinsmen in Oklahoma became prosperous. The Oklahoma Choctaw quickly rebuilt their tribal structure and began farming, soon producing a crop surplus which they sold to the U.S. government. By 1855, a generation later, about 6,000 more Choctaw had moved to Oklahoma to escape the rough conditions in Mississippi. This left only some 2,000 in the Choctaw's ancestral homeland.

After the Civil War, however, the Choctaw's prosperity in Oklahoma began to change. The U.S. government informed the Choctaw that European and African Americans would be allowed to live on Choctaw land. By 1890 there were 10,017 Choctaw, 28,345 European Americans, and 4,406 African Americans living on Choctaw land in Indian Territory. The Choctaw had become a minority in their own land.

When the General Allotment Act of 1887 was put into effect for the Choctaw in November 1907, the Oklahoma Choctaw lost their tribal designation and were forced to become Oklahoma citizens. While there are Choctaw communities in Oklahoma, there is no Choctaw reservation. There is a Choctaw reservation in Mississippi. The total population of the Choctaw Nation is over 187,000 worldwide.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Choctaw language is part of the Muskogean language family and is related to Creek, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Miccosukee. The word "Oklahoma" comes from the Choctaw language. When future Choctaw chief Choctaw Allen Wright was asked what he thought Indian Territory should be named if it were to be controlled under one common government, he replied *okla homma*, meaning "red people" in Choctaw.

The Choctaw have done a good job of preserving their language. In 1819 they requested the assistance of Christian missionaries in translating the Bible and some hymns into the



Choctaw language. In addition, missionaries worked with them to create a Choctaw dictionary, as well as a grammar and spelling book using the Roman alphabet. There are book/tape sets that offer instruction in the Choctaw language, available through the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Many Choctaw still communicate in their native language when English is not necessary.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Choctaw often tell a story about how they ended up in Mississippi. They began in the northwest and, in their search for good farmland, moved in an easterly direction. Every night the chief stuck a pole in the ground, and every morning it was leaning east. So they continued east until one morning they woke up and the pole was sticking straight up. That was where they decided to stay. To celebrate and to thank the Great Spirit, they built a large mound at that spot: present-day Nanih Waiya, Mississippi, which means "leaning mound."

## 5 RELIGION

While the Choctaw did not believe in any one, highest being, they did believe that there were spirits everywhere and that all things had a soul. Their medicine men, or *alikchi*, were traditionally thought of as prophets. When the *alikchi* saw a good vision, it was considered a good omen for the upcoming battle or raid. A dark vision undoubtedly meant bad luck or even death. Other members of Choctaw society were also seen to

have special powers. These healers or rainmakers, among others, were often consulted by members of the tribe to give aid in their particular area of specialty.

The Choctaw believed that every person had two souls. After a person's body died, one soul stayed among the living Choctaw to frighten them. The other soul went to a good or a bad place, depending on how the deceased had lived his or her life. Most Choctaw's souls went to the good, sunny place. Only the souls of murderers were condemned to the dark place.

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of Choctaw religion is its promotion of complete peace and harmony among peoples. The Choctaw almost never attacked anyone throughout their history. They did, however, defend themselves, their loved ones, and their way of life to the death when attacked by others. Today, the majority of Choctaw are Christian.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Every summer since 1949, the Choctaw have hosted the Mississippi Choctaw's Indian Fair in Pearl River, Mississippi. The fair is held on the campus of the Choctaw Central High School and thousands—including both Native North Americans and non-Native North Americans—come every year. The four-day fair promotes tourism in the area and helps the Choctaw maintain their tribal heritage and customs. Another Choctaw festival is held at Tushka Homma, Oklahoma every Labor Day weekend. It is open to the public and free of charge. Close to 100,000 visitors every year enjoy country music concerts in the amphitheater, handmade arts and crafts, sports and children's activities, Choctaw social dancing, stickball exhibitions, a quilt show, War Monument Memorial Services, rides, animal acts, and more. The Chief gives the annual State of the Nation address.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

One of the most elaborate ceremonies the Choctaw traditionally performed was when someone died. The deceased person's corpse was wrapped in animal skins or tree bark and then placed on a platform high above the ground, where it was left until it decomposed. During that time, friends and relatives would come by and mourn. When the body had fully decomposed, the tribal official known as the "bone picker" (usually ornamented with body paint and tattoos) would scrape the remaining flesh from the bones with his long fingernails. Once the bones were cleaned, they were placed in a box and stored in the community bone house. After the bone-picker had finished his unsavory task, he would preside over a feast for family and friends of the deceased—with his unwashed bare hands. Once a year, all the bones that had been collected in the bone house during the past 12 months were buried together in a mound, and a communal funeral was held.

This death ritual was abandoned in the 19th century, however. European Americans and mixed-blood Choctaw did not approve of the ceremony, thinking it uncivilized. Consequently, beginning in the 19th century the Choctaw buried the corpse with many of the deceased's valued possessions to accompany his or her soul to the afterlife. Then, after a mourning period, a tribal feast was held. This custom was changed even further as more Choctaw converted to Christianity and Christian elements were added.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Each of the three Choctaw bands was traditionally ruled by a district chief, or *miko*. The mikos were elected by the men of their district, and together the three mikos governed the entire Choctaw nation. Each village had their own council of elders, which had a chief to preside over the meetings. The Choctaw always elected their public officials and were always very democratic about it. Although women were not allowed to vote, they had a great deal of power in that clan membership was inherited through the mother and, therefore, women were at the head of the all-important clan. The eldest woman of each clan was highly respected by all in the community.

Increased contact with the British and French, and later with European Americans, significantly changed parts of Choctaw tribal structure and society. Many Choctaw women married British and French men, producing a large minority of Choctaw mixed-bloods, who later became fairly influential in the tribe. In addition, the tribe's judicial system was changed to be more like that of the United States. Traditionally, Choctaw who committed a crime were punished by the victim's family. But by the late 19th century, the Choctaw had instituted the "light horsemen," a group of sheriffs and judges that traveled from town to town, holding trials.

In the last 100 years the Choctaw have experienced many changes in their tribal structure. Since 1975 the Choctaw in Mississippi have had a tribal constitution stating that the tribal chief is to be elected by all tribe members every four years. The tribal council meets once every quarter and makes the laws for the Choctaw reservation in Mississippi. The state government legally has no power over those Choctaw living on the reservation. In Oklahoma, there is no reservation; it is considered "Indian Country." The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has its own constitution in place, with three branches of government: an executive branch, a legislative branch (with 12 council members), and a judicial branch. There is a Tribal Court at Tushka Homma, where the council meets monthly.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, the Choctaw lived in wood-frame houses constructed by fastening wooden poles together with vines. For insulation, the walls were then packed with mud, and the outside was covered with cypress or pine bark. There was one door three or four feet tall, and two small holes were left in the ceiling to allow the smoke from the cooking fire to escape.

When the Choctaw nation split in two in the 1830s, both groups grew accustomed to living in very different ways. The Choctaw in Oklahoma, who received a \$3,000 annuity from the U.S. government, were much better off than the poverty-stricken, landless Mississippi Choctaw. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, their respective conditions began to reverse. In 1907, the General Allotment Act was put into effect for the Oklahoma Choctaw, and many of them were swindled out of their land. In 1918, the U.S. government recognized the severe poverty of the Choctaw living in Mississippi and instituted programs to improve their living conditions.

Recently, efforts have been made to help the Choctaw further improve their housing. In 1965, the Choctaw Housing Authority (CHA) began building modern, sturdy homes for Choctaw living in Mississippi. A few years later, the CHA was established in Hugo, Oklahoma, to improve the standard of living among those of Choctaw descent living in Oklahoma.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Choctaw society is matrilineal (lineage is inherited through the mother). Children belong to their mother's clan. Traditionally, a mother raises her daughters while the mother's brothers, as the closest male relatives in her clan, raise her sons. Marriage between two people of the same clan is prohibited.

In the past, women were not allowed to speak their husband's name but would refer to him as "my children's father." They never dared look upon their son-in-law's face but would avert their eyes when he came into the room. This practice is no longer followed.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the days before the Choctaw had contact with Europeans, Choctaw men wore a loincloth and a belt in the summer, and in the winter, they added leather moccasins, leggings, and shirts woven from feathers. Women commonly wore deerskin skirts and added moccasins and a deerskin shawl in the winter.

Today's Choctaw wear modern Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. Traditional clothing is sometimes worn for ceremonies and festivals.

## 12 FOOD

The Choctaw, along with the other peoples of the "Five Civilized Tribes," made many traditional dishes, such as the following:

### Blue Grape Dumplings

½ gallon unsweetened grape juice  
2 cups sugar  
2 tablespoons shortening, melted  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 cup water  
Flour

Bring grape juice to a rolling boil with the sugar.

Mix water, shortening, and baking powder. Add enough flour to make stiff dough.

Roll out thin on a floured board and cut into small pieces.

Drop each piece one at a time into the boiling juice. Cook over high heat about 5 minutes, and then simmer for about 10 minutes, covered.

Remove from heat; let stand for 10 minutes, covered, before serving. May be served with cream or plain.

### Wild Onions and Eggs

Wild onions, cut up (any amount you want)  
1 cup water  
1 cup shortening, melted  
6 eggs

Cut up enough wild onions to fill a 6- to 10-inch skillet. Add water and shortening to onions.

Salt to taste, and fry until water is almost gone (15 to 20 minutes).

Break eggs on top of onion in skillet, and stir well. Fry until eggs are scrambled. Serve hot.

[recipes contributed by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma]

## 13 EDUCATION

In the 1810s, the Choctaws asked Cyrus Kingsbury, a Presbyterian missionary, to help them set up a school. With Kingsbury in charge, the first Choctaw school opened in 1818 in Elliot, Mississippi. The school was founded with the interest money from a large annuity the U.S. government had promised to pay the Choctaws for their 1816 cession of three million acres of land. When they were relocated to Oklahoma, again they used their annuity funds to build good Choctaw schools. Because of their fairly high level of education (even compared with most European Americans who lived in Indian Territory in the second half of the century), the Choctaw became better off economically.

Although presently most Choctaw children attend public elementary schools, in 1968 Choctaw Central High School was built in Pearl River, Mississippi. There are currently a number of Choctaw- and government-run programs to increase the educational level of the Choctaw. On the Mississippi reservation, there are adult education programs to help strengthen the Choctaw's English reading and writing skills. The Oklahoma Choctaw Council has established nearly a dozen Headstart centers throughout southeastern Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Nation also runs a Higher Education Vocational Development Program, GED programs, job training, and other assistance programs. Near Hartshorne, Oklahoma, there is a boarding school operated by the Choctaw Nation, called Jones Academy. More than 90% of Choctaw teenagers attend high school, and over 70% of the adult population has attained a high school diploma.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Dancing used to be a very important part of the Choctaw culture, but over the years the traditional dances were not performed as frequently. In recent years, however, the younger generations have regained an interest in their traditional culture and are reviving the traditional dances. In Broken Bow, Oklahoma, the public school offers a Choctaw dance program. Students learn the dances of their ancestors and they often travel to perform at ceremonies and festivals.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, the Choctaw farmed and hunted. Choctaw children (mostly boys) hunted with a blow gun, or an *uski thompa*. A hollow piece of swamp cane through which long, sharp darts were blown, it could kill an animal instantly. Other Choctaw boys hunted with rabbit sticks, which are similar to Billy clubs. They would line up in groups of 8 to 10 boys, cross the field together to flush out the rabbits, and then beat them in the heads with their sticks.

After losing nearly all of their land to European American settlers when the General Allotment Act was put into effect at the turn of the century, many Choctaw went to work in the timber and mining industries.

In 1953 the U.S. government instituted a number of vocational training programs in Mississippi to help prepare Choctaw for jobs in the mainstream industrialized job market. The Chata Development Company was created in 1969 by the Choctaw council to help find and create jobs for Choctaw in Mississippi. In 1977 the Chata Wire Harness Enterprise was established near Pearl River. This factory employs many Choctaw, making electrical parts for cars for the General Motors

(GM) company. The GM factory, built in 1973, is located in an industrial park that is also the home of many other industries, such as the Choctaw Greeting Enterprise of the American Greetings Corporation. Despite all these factory openings, however, unemployment on the Mississippi reservation is still at about 20%, well above the national average.

The Oklahoma Choctaw are doing well, though. They have opened bingo parlors in Durant, Pocola, Idabel, and Arrowhead, which has proven to be a very successful business, attracting many tourists. In addition, the Choctaw in Oklahoma run the Arrowhead Resort and Hotel in Canada, Oklahoma, and Travel Plazas in Hugo, Pocola, Idabel, and Durant. The tribe also owns a finishing plant, a trailer manufacturing plant, and tribally-owned and managed day care centers. Profits from all these businesses go to programs for Choctaw assistance.

## 16 SPORTS

A traditional Choctaw sport is *ishtaboli*, or “stick ball,” which is similar to modern-day lacrosse. The small ball is made from deerskin or cowhide that is stitched together. The players use two sticks, or *kapucha*, at the same time. Kapucha are made from hickory wood and are about three feet long. A point is scored when the ball is scooped up in the net of the stick and thrown against the other team’s goal post. Ishtaboli games used to be huge ordeals, typically lasting more than 12 hours (or until one team had scored 100 points), with 75–100 players per team. Traditionally, ishtaboli games were sometimes used to settle differences, but generally the Choctaw play just for fun.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Choctaw often held dances and feasts, frequently centered on an ishtaboli match. Before the match, the women would lay out some of their possessions and bet on which team would win. The players then performed a lengthy dance that lasted all night, before starting the game at dawn. When the game was over, the women who had bet on the winning team claimed their prizes, and there was a great celebration with a large feast. Another common way the Choctaw entertained themselves was with bow and arrow competitions, which they still hold at their annual festivals.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Choctaw women have always been master basket-weavers, which is the Choctaw’s most elaborate art. The women make the baskets by cutting sticks of cane from a swamp. They let the sticks dry, and then slice them into thin strips. Different colored strips are created with dyes made from wild berries and roots.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One of the biggest problems of the Choctaw tribe is their lack of unity. While the Choctaw in Mississippi are able to live together and function as a tribe on the reservation, they are separated from their kinfolk in Oklahoma. The Choctaw in Oklahoma, on the other hand, have no reservation and are consequently scattered throughout the state, making it difficult to maintain a sense of unity. However, they keep in touch with a monthly newspaper, *Bishinik*, which means “newsbird” in Choctaw.

In recent years, health has been a serious problem for the Choctaw as well. On the reservation in Mississippi, many die

from tuberculosis and pneumonia. On the reservation, new health service programs teach the Choctaw how to help prevent such diseases by improving their nutrition. In Oklahoma, health clinics have been opened in Hugo, Broken Bow, McAlester, Poteau, and Durant, as well as a hospital in Talihina, to treat those of Choctaw descent. Social assistance programs include a Recover Center for drug and alcohol dependency problems, and Chi Hullo Li, a residential treatment center for women who suffer from addictions as well as abuse. The women in the program may have their children live with them if they wish. More than a dozen sites in Oklahoma serve nutritious lunches, some five days a week. Other Oklahoma programs even offer such necessities as burial assistance.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Choctaw ideology links the activities, roles, and responsibilities of men and women together in maintaining the balance of society and nature. On a large level, the Choctaw notion of reciprocal roles of two pairs can be seen in the Choctaw moiety structure. Choctaw society was divided into two halves, which are called moieties by anthropologists. The moieties governed marriage as well as funerary roles and mourning. An individual could not marry someone who belonged to the same moiety as he or she did. When a person died, it was the members of the other moiety who mourned for the person and prepared the body.

The Choctaw view of men’s and women’s roles also followed the reciprocal pattern of moieties. While the participation of men and women might differ, the Choctaw believe that both are necessary for the accomplishment of tasks and goals. For instance, during the final days of a woman’s pregnancy her husband would fast during the daylight hours and would avoid eating pork and salt, in order not to harm the baby. The father’s activities were seen as being as important to the successful delivery of the baby as were those of the mother.

Since the 1960s Choctaw women have moved into more leadership roles in government and church life. At least seven women have served on the Oklahoma Choctaw council since the late 1970s. Only one woman (Harriet Wright James) has run for the office of Chief of the Choctaw Nation (in 1985); although her bid was not successful, it did signal the complete return of Choctaw women to the political arena.

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—reviewed by J. Allen

# COLOMBIANS

**LOCATION:** Colombia

**POPULATION:** 45,013,674

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish (official); various Amerindian languages

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Aborigine tribes that had migrated from North and Central America originally inhabited the territory known as Colombia, and developed a sophisticated political and economical organization. These tribes implemented a political system known as *cacicazgos*, a pyramidal structure of power headed by caciques, which allowed a fluid trade among different cultures such as the Tayronas in the Caribbean Region, and the Muisca in the highlands around Bogotá.

The Spanish conquered Colombia in the 16th century. In 1538 the colony of New Granada was established with its capital in Bogotá, and up until 1740 the area was within the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of Peru. During Spanish colonial rule, many Amerindian tribes were subdued and heavily taxed by the Spanish Crown. Slaves were brought from Africa but were eventually freed during the period of struggle for independence. During an uprising in the capital on 20 July 1810, the local inhabitants threw out their Spanish officials. In that year, a new viceroyalty was established that included modern-day Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. During the wars of independence against Spain, forces under Simón Bolívar achieved victory over the royalists at the Battle of Boyacá in 1819, and the region gained independence in 1821. This day is commemorated as Independence Day, although the struggles continued for several years. In the War of Independence, the Venezuelan-born leader Simón Bolívar played a key role, joining forces with the Colombian leader Francisco de Paula Santander. Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador together became the Republic of Great Colombia, although each became an independent nation not long after.

Colombian political struggle since the 1850s had been characterized by a rivalry between two groups that coalesced into the Liberal and Conservative parties. The Liberal-Conservative struggle led to at least six civil wars, which often ended in inter-party compromise. In the summer of 1957, leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties reached an agreement on constitutional reform in an attempt to end violence. The agreement, known as the National Front, included provisions for regular alternation of the presidency between the parties, as well as an accord on equal staffing of all political positions by both parties. The Liberal and Conservative parties agreed they alone would monopolize the arena of legitimate political competition for a 16-year period. This led to the present phase of democratically elected presidents, which has continued to this day.

The emergence of terrorist and paramilitary groups on both the right and left—some with ties to the drug trade—in the 1960s and 1970s weakened the two-party power-sharing monopoly. Throughout the 1980s, narco-terrorists murdered government officials, journalists, and innocent bystanders with impunity. There are fears that democracy and independence of major institutions, such as the judiciary and Congress, are

being compromised, thanks to power and money concentrated in the hands of drug traffickers, who also developed private armies in some instances. Equally, many judges as well as members of the press have paid with their lives for attempts to expose the activities of powerful outlaws.

Various left-wing guerrilla factions have also fought army units for decades. An unusual feature of Colombian life is that political and social unrest coexists with stable economic management.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Colombia is the fourth-largest country in South America and it is located in its northwestern corner. Colombia is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, a region of the world subject to earthquake and volcanic eruptions. The mighty Andes Mountains cross into Colombia from the southern border with Ecuador and divide into three long ranges or *cordilleras*, which run the length of the country. The capital, Bogotá, is located on a high plateau over 2,400 m (8,000 ft) above sea level at the foot of the eastern range of the Andes. To the east, extensive plains run as far as the Orinoco River, which borders Venezuela; to the south, thick jungle extends towards the Amazon River and the borders with Peru and Brazil. These contrasting features contribute to Colombia's natural beauty and variety, as well as to a climate ranging from cool, through temperate, to tropically hot. Because of its privileged geographical location and varied climate, Colombia has one of the highest diversity of birds and amphibians on the planet.

Colombia has a variety of Amerindian tribes, scattered partly in the north in the desert peninsula of La Guajira and high up in the Caribbean coastal ranges of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, as well as in the south, particularly in the Amazon region, with a few tribes in other areas, such as the Tierrentro region.

The majority of the Colombians are mestizo or of mixed Amerindian and white descent, representing 58% of the total population. About 20% of Colombians are white, 14% are mulatto, and about 4% are black.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Although the various Amerindian tribes continue to speak their own languages, Spanish is the official language of Colombia. The accent varies considerably according to the region, but it is generally recognized that the Spanish spoken in the capital, Bogotá, is remarkably clear. In Colombia much care has been taken to preserve the linguistic purity of the official language, Castilian Spanish, and there are close ties between the Spanish and Colombian language academies.

Today, more than fifty different indigenous ethnic groups inhabit Colombia. Most of them speak languages belonging to the Chibchan and Cariban linguistic families. The 1991 constitution established their native languages as official in their territories, and most of them have bilingual education. Some of the largest indigenous groups are the Wayuu, Arhuacos, and Muisca.

People usually use both their father's and their mother's surnames, in that order, as in many other Latin American countries. The strong influence of the Catholic Church has made names like María very popular, usually in combination with another name, such as María Cristina, María Teresa, or María Elena. It is not unusual even for men to use the name María in



combination with masculine names, such as José María, Pedro María, or even Jesus María. The names of the apostles are generally popular for boys.

Among poorer townsfolk there is a tradition of exotic names of famous warriors or unusual kings derived from ancient history, and it is not unusual to find people called Hannibal, Nebuchadnezzar, Mithridates, or Darius.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Amerindian, African, and Spanish folk customs have combined with beliefs and practices from all three traditions to create a rich culture that expresses itself in a great variety of festivals, which occur throughout the year in Colombia.

Barranquilla, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, and other coastal towns along the Magdalena River celebrate a yearly Carnival, which combines Spanish colonial, Amerindian, and black African influences, colorful costumes and masks, and flutes and African drums. Besides, Colombia has many traditional folk tales about legendary creatures. These legends are transmitted orally and have strong indigenous, African, and Spanish influences.

In colonial times, sedan chairs were a form of transport that is remembered in the city of Medellín. The chairs are decorated with a fabulous array of flowers and paraded through the city streets.

The Feast of St. Francis is celebrated in the Chocó region in the Pacific. He was adopted as the patron saint of the miners in this mainly black, gold-mining region, and this festival

links up with many other celebrations along the rivers where the statues of various saints are paraded in canoes and on rafts. There is also music, singing, and dancing. The miners of the Chocó gave St. Francis the affectionate Spanish nickname of San Pacho, and the festival is also known by this name.

#### 5 RELIGION

As other aspects of Colombian cultural expression, religion has been strongly influenced by its multilayered cultural heritage that includes Spanish, indigenous, and African influences. However, and in spite of these diverse influences, 75% of the population defines itself as Catholic. Colombians have a strong faith, and the Church has played an important role in the life of Colombia. Even the main political parties developed in relation to attitudes towards the church, with the conservatives adopting more favorable attitudes of support, and the liberals adopting an anticlerical role. Women have played a significant role in maintaining a tradition of strong faith.

Some Amerindian groups have adopted Catholicism, but in remote areas they continue to practice their own beliefs, which include various forms of shamanism.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Colombia celebrates Independence Day on July 20, the discovery of America on October 12, and makes provision for the main Catholic holidays. It also marks Easter with major religious events, such as the Holy Week procession in the town of Popayán during which many statues of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and saints like St. John the Evangelist are paraded by groups of *cargueros* or carriers along the streets. Others walk alongside carrying lit candles called *alumbrantes*. It is considered a great honor to take part in the processions, which are solemn and have a very Spanish flavor. The people of Popayán are traditionalists who remember their Spanish origins with pride, and various members of the Order of Knights of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem also take part in the procession in formal dress and white capes.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

All the main Catholic rituals that mark important phases in a person's life are observed by a majority of the population in Colombia. Among these are baptism and First Communion, as well as Catholic marriage and burial rites. Some practices have included a mixture of either Amerindian or black African customs. Even recently in some villages on the Caribbean coast, for example, it was not uncommon when a child died for the child to be "loaned" to neighboring villages so their inhabitants could also participate in the ceremonies.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Colombian customs vary according to region and social class in certain respects. For example, it is generally recognized that in coastal areas, such as Barranquilla, people are more informal, spontaneous, and easygoing, yet in the neighboring town of Cartagena, which has a strong historical sense and many colonial features, people are a bit more formal. The people of the capital, Bogotá, are generally considered more reserved, and it is still the custom there for close family members to address each other using the formal *usted* rather than the informal *tu*. They have also maintained an older, Spanish form of address,

*Su merced*, meaning “Your mercy,” which remains from colonial times in the 16th century.

Women usually greet each other with a kiss; men shake hands, but if they are friendly they shake hands and pat each other on the back several times as well.

It is considered essential to offer the visitor, whether on business or social occasions, a small cup of black coffee called a *tinto*. It is also considered rude to launch directly into a business discussion, or even a social one, without first inquiring after the person’s welfare and that of his or her family.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Out of a population of 45 million, some 7 million Colombians live in the capital, Bogotá. Other major towns are Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla. Living conditions vary greatly according to social class.

Colombian class structure is based on a combination of different factors, such as occupation, wealth, and ethnicity. The vast majority of the population belongs to the “marginal” classes, who lack steady employment, and the lower classes, who are mainly physical laborers. Members of these two groups are largely of African, Amerindian, or mixed descent. The middle and upper classes have more skills as a result of a better education. Although the middle classes have good occupations, they lack the wealth and the European heritage of the upper class. At the apex of the upper class is a tiny group of wealthy, traditional families, of which almost all are of pure Spanish background.

All main towns have wealthy suburbs with tasteful, modern housing that includes houses and apartment blocks. In poorer areas there are often large shantytowns and housing can vary from fairly solid constructions to basic shelters built with a variety of materials and corrugated metal roofs. There has been an increase in middle-class housing, but the construction boom has also included rising prices, which have put even modest housing units beyond the reach of many. In mountain villages some houses can still be quite basic, with adobe walls and thatched roofs, although some village housing can include plastered walls and tiled roofs. In poorer areas along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, especially in more remote villages, the hotter climate allows a type of housing that uses local cane, reeds, and palm branches. In such areas it is not unusual for people to use hammocks rather than beds.

Access to healthcare also varies greatly, and poor people rely on state hospitals, which usually are better equipped in major cities, as well as on nursing care often provided by religious nursing orders of nuns. In other instances, poor people appeal to native healers called *curanderos*, some of whom have genuine healing ability, although there are many charlatans. People with better financial resources have access to modern, well-equipped hospitals and health centers.

It is relatively expensive to run a car, so many people rely on public transport in the form of buses, and this form of transport also is used from one town to another. Because of the mountainous terrain, air transport developed early in Colombia, with even quite remote locations boasting an airstrip, whereas railways are much less developed. Colombians often joke about arriving “either by mule or air.”

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Close family ties and extended families are an important aspect of Colombian life. Colombians often have large families and often keep in touch through weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, baptisms, and other special occasions, with a family network that extends to second and third cousins. This network is more easily maintained in small to medium-sized towns. The population distribution of Colombia means that there are many towns of this type, in particular along the densely populated foothills of the three ranges of the Andes Mountains, which cross the country in a north–south direction.

The Church has also been influential in stressing the importance of close family ties. Family networks act as a vital support in the absence, for many, of welfare benefits, which are much less developed than those in North America or Europe. Godparents, or *padrinos*, may also play a supportive role, sometimes helping with tuition or gifts to assist a family. Family members are also depended upon to provide jobs wherever possible.

In cases where the stresses of extreme poverty lead to the abandonment of children, who are left to fend for themselves on the street, schemes have been devised where foster mothers are appointed for a whole street and, with state help, provide daytime shelter and meals during the day. Despite these efforts, there are children who are absolutely destitute and have to fend for themselves.

The great variety of animals, due to the range of climates, means that Colombians will often keep exotic animals, such as monkeys and parrots, as pets, as well as the more usual cats and dogs.

## 11 CLOTHING

Clothing varies according to climate in Colombia. Although Western-style clothing is worn everywhere, men on the coast sometimes wear cotton shirts with colorful, bright patterns. In cooler areas of the Andes Mountains, both men and women wear woolen *ruanas*, which evolved originally from Spanish capes. Middle- and upper-class women wear stylish versions of the ruana, which depart from the traditional brown shades of virgin wool and can be striped or plain, using a wide range of colors. Traditional peasant women in mountain areas wear voluminous fringed shawls called *pañolones*.

## 12 FOOD

Colombia has a great variety of fruits and vegetables. The traditional stew, known as the *cocido* in Bogotá, can include 20 different kinds of vegetables as well as various types of potatoes. Another typical dish from Bogotá is the *ajiaco*, which includes a bright yellow potato known as *papa criolla*, as well as chicken and corn, served with a slice of avocado and cream. A typical dessert is made with sweet, stewed figs called *brevas*, served with *arequipe*, which is milk cooked with sugar until it reaches the consistency of toffee.

On the coast a great variety of fish are served fried or sometimes grilled, often with rice flavored with coconut milk. A well-known Caribbean dish is *arroz con chipi-chipi*, or rice with tiny clams. In the Antioquia region and its capital, Medellín, rice and red beans, served with cornmeal cakes known as *arepas*, and often with fried plantains, are part of the staple diet. In the eastern plains known as Los Llanos, which is mainly cattle country, whole roast calf is sometimes served, tradi-



tionally cooked on a spit over a fire and turned manually over and over for about four hours. In other rural areas, roast suckling pig or *lechona* is popular.

Poor people in cities sometimes have a more meager diet than in outlying areas where people can grow their own food. In some cases, the urban poor subsist on diets of bread and potatoes, to which they occasionally add other vegetables.

### 13 EDUCATION

Primary education is free in Colombia, but about 20% of children in cities and 40% in rural areas do not go to school at all. The birth rate remains fairly high, and about half of the population is under 20 years old, so demand for schooling exceeds what the government can provide. However, in recent years education has been at the center of social spending, which has increased literacy among the population. An estimate of 92.8% of the population at the age of 15 is able to read and write.

In addition, there have been significant improvements in some aspects of education, particularly the expansion of college and university education since the 1960s. There are over 20 universities, as well as technical and commercial institutes, and training schools that have helped Colombia improve the skills of factory workers.

Colombia also has a reputation for the quality of its schooling, which is considered high, even if it is not able to provide for all those who need it.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The legend of El Dorado (the gilded one), one of the most well-known myths in Latin America, originated in Colombia. According to the popular belief, Zipa, one of the most important tribal chiefs in South America, covered himself with gold and dust and dived into a lake of pure mountain water. According to historic interpretations, different tribes in different regions would have carried out this ritual as a political ceremony to appoint new rulers and recognize them as kings among their people.

In addition, Colombia has a rich musical heritage that blends Amerindian, African, and Spanish elements. In the Andes region, 12-string guitars called *tiples* are often used to sing the courtly and romantic *bambucos*, which derive partly from Spanish and partly from Amerindian music. On the coast, the most famous music is the *cumbia*; the music is part of most festivals there and is played with flutes and drums. The women wear round-necked, lace-edged blouses and wide, flowery skirts. The men hold lit candles, and the dance itself is graceful, suggesting the swaying of palm trees.

Apart from a rich folk culture, the main cities, in particular Bogotá, have theaters, art galleries, bookshops, and many movie theaters, as well as symphony orchestras.

Colombia has produced excellent painters in the 20th century, including Fernando Botero. Some of his portraits of overblown, self-important figures are satirical and have achieved international fame. There are many other Colombian painters, including Alejandro Obregón, whose bright, joyful colors recall the landscapes of his Caribbean homeland.

Colombia developed a strong romantic tradition, which expressed itself in poetry during the 19th century. This tradition continued into the 20th century in the work of José Asunción Silva and many others. Other influences, such as surrealism and existentialism, also affected the development of modern

poetic styles. Thoroughly modern poets in this sense are Leon de Greiff and Jorge Zalamea Borda. A folk tradition that incorporates black African elements played a part in the development of other poets such as Porfirio Barba Jacob. Various other Spanish literary traditions, such as the picaresque, influenced some of the best-known poems of Rafael Pombo, who is loved by many children for his humorous depiction of an elegant and pompous frog in the poem *El Renacuajo Paseador* (*The Strolling Frog*), which most children learn at school.

Colombia's most famous novelist is Gabriel García Márquez, a Nobel Prize-winner. His imaginative novels have been translated into many languages. In his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the mental realities of people are contrasted with historical events and with time in such a way that a "fabulous" or mythical kind of time is convincingly created. His success encouraged a type of Latin American writing that gives free reign to the imagination. This school of writing has come to be known as "magical realism."

In addition, Colombians have a strong tradition of historical writing; among well-known modern historians are Rafael Núñez and Indalecio Liévano Aguirre, who wrote an interesting biography of Simón Bolívar the Liberator.

### 15 WORK

Colombia's economy has experienced positive growth over the past five years despite serious armed conflict. Policy makers and the private sector have praised 2007 as one of the best economic years in recent history. The economy continues to improve in part because of austere government budgets, focused efforts to reduce public debt levels, an export-oriented growth strategy, improved domestic security, and high commodity prices.

Despite economic growth, about 10% of the population is underemployed in Colombia, and people work as street vendors, in markets, on construction jobs, or in a variety of odd jobs. Poor women often find employment as servants. Skilled workers who work in manufacturing have better conditions and more secure employment. Small commercial traders and shopkeepers form an important part of the economy, and there is a growing class of graduates who find employment in trade, manufacturing, or finance. The traditional preference for careers in medicine or law is supplemented by new careers in various fields of engineering, and in communications and computers.

In rural areas people usually work in the fields, and in many parts of Colombia children add to the family income by working extra hours.

### 16 SPORTS

The most popular sport is soccer, but many other sports are played in Colombia. There are many sporting tournaments that include basketball, volleyball, golf, tennis, and swimming. In cattle-ranching areas there are rodeos. People in river or coastal areas enjoy boating and fishing. Cycling has developed as a competitive sport in which Colombians usually excel because they are used to training in difficult, mountainous terrain.

A game called *tejo* is played among the poorer town dwellers in the Andes region and consists of trying to land a horseshoe over an upright stick fixed some distance away from the thrower. Much of the betting involved in this game includes whole crates of beer.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular culture in Colombia includes folk music and dancing, as well as enthusiastic participation in the many secular and religious *fiestas* around the country. Some towns, such as Manizales and Bogotá, have bullfighting seasons, which draw large crowds, and it is not unusual for *aficionados* or amateurs to try their hand at bullfighting as well.

People also enjoy the movies and festivals that revolve around beauty queen contests. Depending on the festival and the region, the winner is given titles, such as the Queen of Coffee, or the Queen of Sugar, celebrating the importance of particular agricultural products that form part of Colombia's economy.

Another popular pastime is the *paseo* or outing, when a group of friends or family members leave the town or city to visit a place in the countryside. Some town-dwellers have land or a small farm or relatives in rural areas; wealthy people often have large ranches; others simply travel by bus with friends to outlying areas, choosing a small town or village with beautiful scenery or a few amenities such as a river or a good luncheon place where they can relax, have a picnic, and spend the day. Quite often people will take instruments such as guitars along as well.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

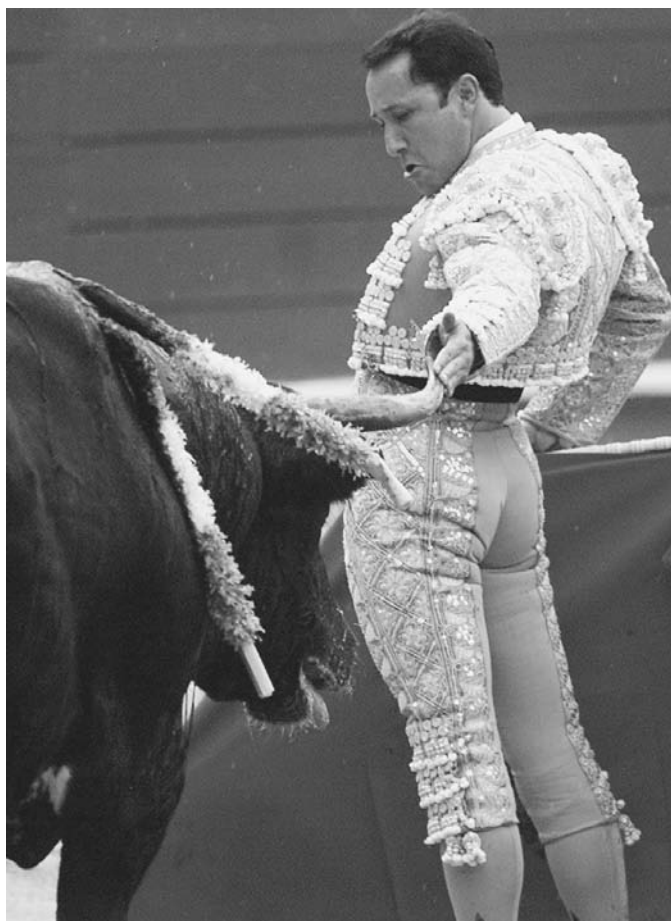
Colombians are very fine craftspeople, known for beautiful woodwork and metalwork, as well as weaving. When the Spanish conquerors first arrived on the high mountain plateau where they later founded the capital city of Santa Fé de Bogotá, they were astonished at the skill in textile production of the Chibcha Indians, who had developed interesting techniques for dyeing and printing as well as weaving.

The Quimbaya Indians of northwestern Colombia were famous goldsmiths, and during the colonial period there were noted gold- and silversmiths. This tradition of metalworking continues among artisans and jewelry-makers today. Colombians made fine furniture during the colonial period, and wood-working and furniture making are ongoing skills of many independent craftsmen who coexist with more sophisticated furniture manufacturers. Pottery has been made for centuries, both by the Amerindians and by subsequent mestizo craftspeople.

A typical Colombian instrument is the *tiple* or 12-string guitar, which is still made in Colombia. On the coast, the tradition of drum making that originated in Africa was brought to Colombia along with the slave trade and continues to this day. Craftsmen also make reed flutes and rattles. A number of Amerindian tribes weave beautiful bags called *mochilas* that are hung loosely over the shoulder and that city dwellers also find practical to use. Amerindian hammocks in various styles are also purchased, and town-dwellers in the tropical zones of Colombia often hang them up on their front porches or verandas.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Severe social problems in Colombia are caused by the widely differing living standards between rich and poor. Colombians often have a caustic wit, as exemplified in the sharp verse attributed to the Colombian humorist Gabriel Ocampo Giraldo: "Here, thanks to a just sentence, lies a thief who was a beginner, who did not steal enough to prove his innocence!"



Colombian bullfighter Cesar Rincon during a match in the Caaveralejo arena in Cali, Colombia.  
(AP Images/Inaldo Perez)

In addition to socio-economic inequality, there is ongoing conflict between army units and guerrilla armies. Problems continue with the activities of the drug traffickers, who often employ large numbers of people and resort to violence to settle scores with rivals. They have also used bribes to obstruct the course of justice, and some of them have become immensely wealthy. A continuing problem is kidnapping in order to obtain ransom money, a device often used by guerrilla armies or sometimes by drug traffickers who want to threaten people they think are interfering with their activities.

The atmosphere of insecurity has given rise to the increasing use of security guards to guard individual citizens who feel threatened, as well as to protect private homes and public buildings.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In the labor market, Colombia's economically active population has risen over the last three decades, due primarily to women's increased labor force participation. Women represent a surprisingly high proportion of workers in professional and managerial positions. Colombia's gender empowerment measure (GEM) shows that even though the women's share of income was still only 75% that of men in 1999, it had significantly increased from the 60% share eight years earlier. Gender wage gaps in Colombia have decreased significantly in

recent decades. In addition, women's life expectancy is seven years higher than men's, while literacy rates are roughly equal.

Even though criminal law penalizes women seeking abortions and those providing them, widespread recourse to abortion and its negative health consequences continue to be a cause for serious concern in Colombia. Approximately 16% of maternal deaths are due to complications brought about by unsafe abortions. In 1993, approximately one in every three women who has ever become pregnant acknowledged having had an induced abortion. Moreover, of every 100 women who have an abortion, 29 suffer complications and 18 arrive at the hospital in an extremely serious condition.

Women's formal political activism in Colombia began in 1954 when the military regime gave them the right to vote. However, their political participation has been thwarted because of guerrilla violence against political activists.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# COMANCHES

**LOCATION:** United States (Oklahoma; Texas)

**POPULATION:** over 19,000 (including those who indicate

Comanche and another racial category in the 2000 census)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Comanche

**RELIGION:** Native American Church

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Originally, the Comanches were part of the Shoshone tribe, who lived in the mountains of what is now northern Wyoming and Montana. Late in the 17th century, they broke into two bands, and those who would later be known as the Comanches moved south. In the Southern Plains, they met the Utes, who introduced them to Spanish traders. In this context, the Comanches assumed a new name, either “Koh-Mahts” or “Kwuma-ci,” rather than their original “Nerm.” The precise meaning of the Ute names are uncertain, but linguists think they mean “one who fights us all the time.” The Spanish transformed the Ute words into “Comanche.”

Once the Comanches had settled into their new home in the Southern Plains, they divided into five major groupings: the Penatekas, who lived the farthest south; the Nokohi of the east; the Kotsoteka of the north, and the Yamparika to their north; and the Quahadi of the west. The main enemies of the Comanches were the Pawnees, Osages, Arapaho, and Apaches. Although the five Comanche bands were independent of one another, they often came together to fight a common enemy (as was the case with many battles against the Apaches, who sought to gain land, horses, and captives).

There were two main European forces that interacted with the Comanches in the 18th century: the French and the Spanish. The French had purely economic interests in the land. They wanted a strong trading post and a steady source of income from the New World for the king. They had neither religious nor social interests in the area and were, therefore, able to maintain healthy relations with the Comanches. The French traded guns, ammunition, and metal goods such as knives and pots. When the French were defeated by the British in the French and Indian War of 1763, however, many French traders left the continent, and the Comanches lost valuable trading partners.

The Spanish, on the other hand, had very different goals. They were eager to convert the Comanches to Catholicism and desperately wanted Comanche land for the mineral wealth it possessed. Angered by the Spanish desire for dominance, the Comanches often raided Spanish pueblos in New Mexico and Texas. The Spanish had brought smallpox to the New World, however, and many Comanches died in a smallpox epidemic in 1780-1781. The tribe was greatly weakened, and they could no longer fight the Spanish. A few of the bands met with the Spanish governor of New Mexico, De Anza, and in 1786 they agreed to peace terms that promised trade and rest to both parties. Due to the autonomy of the different Comanche bands, the southernmost people continued raiding the Spanish pueblos in Texas, believing the treaty did not apply to them since they had not participated in the negotiations. The unstable treaty was maintained until Texas won its independence in 1836.

The Comanches and European American settlers suffered continuous conflict throughout the 19th century. The worst fighting occurred in Texas, where the Comanches had the largest land holdings, referred to as *Comancheria*. In the late 1830s, the Nation of Texas formed a special division of soldiers called the Texas Rangers. They were given the job of fighting the Comanches in *Comancheria* and keeping them out of the settlers' way.

In 1840 leaders of twelve Comanche bands went to the council house in San Antonio to try to reach an agreement with the Texas lawmakers, an agreement that would bring hostilities to an end. At this meeting, the Texans demanded that the Comanches return all European American captives. Because each Comanche band was autonomous, however, it was impossible for the Comanches to make this promise. Acting impulsively, the Texans took the Comanches hostage to better their bargaining position. The Comanches tried to escape, and all twelve of the leaders were killed in what has become the Council House Massacre—one of the most dramatic episodes in the Comanches' struggle to maintain their land. When Texas became a U.S. state in 1845, the Comanches' hostility turned toward the U.S. government. They resisted reservation life until the spring of 1875, when the government declared that any Comanche not living in so-called "Indian Territory" (present-day Oklahoma) would be shot on sight. This finally brought the Comanches to their knees, and they reluctantly became the last Native American tribe to submit to life on a reservation.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

When the Comanches arrived on the Southern Plains at the start of the 18th century, they had to fight the Apache (their most challenging enemy) to obtain land. *Comancheria*, as the Spanish called the vast territory the Comanches ruled, incorporated over 24,000 square miles stretching from southeast Colorado to southwest Kansas, and from eastern New Mexico to central Oklahoma and Texas. The climate is mild, and the buffalo were plentiful throughout the year. With buffalo as a staple, the Comanches became a nomadic hunting people who followed the herds and settled along streams for water.

Territory was always important to the Comanches. They were a communal people, and when they were forced onto individual land plots by the General Allotment Act of 1887, they chose their property according to the old patterns of the *Comancheria*. The four remaining bands settled more or less where they had in the old days. The Penteka went to the south, the Quahadi lived in the west, the Nokomi went east, and the Yamparika took the northernmost property. The Comanche population is nearly 20,000. Only 50% live in their old homelands of Oklahoma and Texas.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Comanche language belongs to the Uto-Aztecan family of Native North American languages. Because many of the Plains people spoke different languages, they developed a form of sign language to communicate with those from different tribes. In this sign language, the Comanches were often referred to by making a side-to-side, snake-like motion in the air with the finger moving backwards. The snake referred to the Shoshone, the Comanche's ancestors; *Shoshone* means "snake people." In this way, the Comanches were always connected to their ancestral heritage. While efforts are being made to pre-

serve this sign language, not many Comanches understand it any more. The few who still understand are those born before 1926. Those born after 1926 were educated in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools where indigenous and traditional languages were suppressed.

Today a federal grant is making possible a preschool total language immersion program for 3–4-year-olds in order to ensure the survival of the Comanche language. In addition, a Comanche Language Preservation Committee has been formed. In spite of the rather large number of Comanche tribal members, there are no more than 40 people who can still carry on a conversation in Comanche. The boarding school experience is the direct cause of the demise of the Comanche language.

During World War II, Comanche Code-Talkers, an elite group of 17 young men fluent in the Comanche language, received special communications training from the United States army. They were employed to send critical messages in a special code that confused the enemy.

## 4 FOLKLORE

According to Comanche myth, the Comanches were created by the Great Spirit after it had destroyed another people in a great flood. The former people displeased the Great Spirit, and a fresh start was needed.

Several stories are told concerning the tribe's emigration south, in which they left the Shoshone people. The first states that two bands were camping together and two boys, one from each band, were playing. One boy accidentally kicked the other in the stomach, and he eventually died. His band was irate and would have attacked the other if an elder had not intervened. He told both groups that they were one people and should not fight amongst themselves. Both bands agreed but also understood that they could no longer live together. Thus, the Shoshone stayed in the north and the other, who later became the Comanches, moved south.

The second story also starts with a camping party. Men from both bands went on a hunting expedition. A bear was killed with two arrows, one shot by a man in one band, and one from the bow of a man in the other band. Unable to decide who had shot the fatal arrow, the quarreling bands decided to go their separate ways.

Other legends exist regarding the Comanches' migration. One story tells how the Comanches split from the more peaceful Shoshone and traveled down the "Snake River" to continue their warlike, political, and opinionated way of life. Other sources of the snake image may be rooted in legends about the Comanche settling in an area inhabited by many snakes, and how they were considered to be "as dangerous as snakes."

## 5 RELIGION

Compared to the other Plains Indian tribes, the Comanches held few ceremonies. The night before the men went into battle or on a raid, the War Dance was performed. The Comanches believed that to dance the War Dance during the day would bring bad luck to their side.

Unlike all other Plains tribes, the Comanches do not perform the Sun Dance. In 1874, however, a radical Comanche preacher, Ishatai, claimed to have communicated with the Great Spirit. He told the Comanches that the Great Spirit wanted them to perform the Sun Dance and that if they did, they would win the Spirit's favor and drive away the Europe-



*Carney Saupitty Sr. tours an exhibit honoring code talkers at the Oklahoma History Center. His brother Larry Saupitty was a Comanche Code Talker in World War II, who sent the first message back after landing at Utah beach on D-Day. (AP Images)*

an Americans forever. With assistance from the neighboring Kiowas, the Comanches performed the Sun Dance in 1874. Afterwards, they set out with Kiowa and Cheyenne warriors to attack a European American trading post at Adobe Walls in the Texas panhandle. Although the Native North Americans greatly outnumbered the European Americans, their bows, arrows, and lances were hardly a match for the guns and rifles of the European American settlers. The Comanches lost the battle—and lost their faith in the Sun Dance, which was never performed again.

After being forced onto the reservation, many Comanches began practicing peyotism. In 1918 Comanches helped form

the Native American Church, which combines ideas of Christianity with the sacramental use of peyote.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The Comanches were unique among the Plains peoples, as they did not hold annual gatherings or assemblies. In fact, the Comanches rarely congregated. Sometimes they hunted or fought together, but almost never did they gather for a formal intertribal meeting.

Today the Comanches hold an annual Comanche Homecoming in Walters, Oklahoma, during the third week in July.

People from many different tribes come together for this huge powwow that celebrates the similarities of Native North American cultures. The Comanche Nation Fair is held yearly at Old Craterville Park, Ft. Sill, Oklahoma on the last weekend in September.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

For the early years of a child's life, he or she is called a variety of nicknames. Later a formal name is given in a public ceremony. This new name is most often based on an important experience in the child's life.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Comanches had an elaborate system of social etiquette. For example, hospitality was sacred, and all invited guests were treated with the utmost respect. This is why the Comanches took such great offense when they were invited to talks with the U.S. government and were later mocked or hurt. Equally important was the prohibition on stealing from friends and allies; to do so would bring severe punishment—although strangers were fair game. Lying was once an important taboo; to call someone a liar, or *e-shop*, was the worst imaginable insult.

Each person belonged to a family hunting band; each band varied in size. Comanche social structure was quite loose, and people changed hunting bands as needed or desired. If a band leader made a decision that was unpopular, people either started a new band or organized a change in leadership. There was no central ruling government, which allowed each band full autonomy.

Within each band there were band councils comprised of adult males. Decisions had to be unanimous, which caused many divisions because Comanches would rather leave than create conflict. A band chief ran each council meeting as long as he retained the support and cooperation of the others. A respected elder acted as a peace chief and brought wisdom and fairness to the mix. Before each battle, raid, or hunt, a war chief was elected. This war chief held power only until the task was completed.

Unlike other Plains tribes, the Comanches were not organized into military societies. While they often joined together for battles, they always returned to their smaller, independent bands when the fighting was over. During the hunt, each man did his own killing, and there was rarely a limit placed on the number of buffaloes taken. This was due to the abundance of buffalo on the Southern Plains throughout the year.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Because they were a migratory hunting tribe, the Comanches lived in portable tipis. Tipis were made by stretching many buffalo hides sewn together across a cone-shaped frame of four wooden poles tied together at the top. The Comanches, as well as the Blackfeet and Shoshone, used a four-pole tipi construction; most Plains tribes in the same area used a three-pole construction, even today. The Comanches had very little furniture in their tipis. Large piles of buffalo-skin robes served as beds, seats, and tables. The opening of the tipi always faced the rising sun in the east.

During the summer months, the Comanches often slept outside in wooden framework shelters with flat roofs covered with leaves and branches. The shelters had no sides and thus

allowed a breeze to circulate while offering shade during the daytime.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In traditional Comanche society, all children were highly valued, but boys were preferred. When they reached courtship age, boys and girls had to follow very strict courting rules. They were forbidden to show interest in each other while in camp, but they frequently arranged secret meetings outside of camp. When a boy decided that he wanted to marry a certain girl, he would give the girl's family a horse as a way to show that he would be able to provide for her. If his proposal was accepted, he would leave his tipi and live with his new wife in her family's tipi. Polygamy was common. Very often, the second and third wives would be sisters of the first wife. It was felt that sisters would get along with each other better and would be less likely to quarrel. The first wife was always considered the boss, however. To avoid conflicts and disharmony, men never spoke directly to their mothers-in-law.

## 11 CLOTHING

Today Comanches wear Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. Traditional clothing is still worn for ceremonials, however.

Traditionally, the Comanches made nearly all their clothing from deer and buffalo skins. Because of the warm climate in which they lived, Comanche boys went naked until they were 8–10 years old, when they would start to wear a breechcloth. A breechcloth is a piece of animal hide passed between the legs then draped over a belt around the waist to hang down in front and back. Girls wore only a breechcloth until they were about 12 years old, when they would begin to wear women's clothing. Women's clothing emphasized modesty. Comanche women wore loose fitting deerskin dresses with long sleeves. They decorated the dresses with fringe, beads, and small pieces of metal (after contact with Europeans, when metal began to be received in trade). Women also wore beaded moccasins made of buffalo skin. All Comanches used shampoo and soap made from yucca plant root.

Comanche men wore a breechcloth made of deerskin. In the summer, they went naked from the waist up. In the winter, they wore warm buffalo-skin robes and high leather boots that covered their legs. Men had pierced ears and long hair worn in two braids, decorated with strips of fur, leather, and feathers. Before battle, men painted their faces black. At other times, they would paint their faces in various colors and designs, none of which had any particular significance. Women often painted yellow or red lines around their eyes. They also painted the insides of their ears red and decorated their cheeks with orange or red triangles or circles. This was simply considered stylish and had no other deep significance.

After the United States forced the Comanches to relocate to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma, the government provided them with clothing made of cheap materials in a one-size-fits-all design that was usually too large to fit anyone. Children were not provided with any clothing at all. The women would cut the government clothing down to size for the adults, then use the leftover fabric for children's clothes.

**12 FOOD**

The acquisition of horses (introduced to North America by the Spanish) in the 17th century made buffalo hunting much easier for the Comanches. With more meat available, the Comanches became a healthier, and eventually more numerous, tribe. They ate all edible parts of the buffalo, plus deer, antelope, and black bear meat. When other meat was extremely scarce, they were forced to eat their horses to survive (dog and human meat were strictly forbidden).

Boiled meat called *söp* is made by boiling chunks of lean meat in water until tender. A staple food for the Comanches and other Plains tribes was *pemmican*. Traditionally made from buffalo meat mixed with berries and nuts, “glued” together with boiled buffalo fat, pemmican was extremely healthy and would last for years when stored in leather pouches called *parfleches*.

**Modern Pemmican  
(pie filling)**

1 quart apple cider	2 teaspoon salt
2 cups seedless raisins	2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 cup dried currants	2 teaspoons ground ginger
3 apples, peeled, cored, and chopped	1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup chopped suet	1 teaspoon nutmeg
2 pounds ground venison	½ teaspoon allspice

Put the cider, raisins, currants, apples, and suet in a large saucepan. Cover and let simmer over low heat for two hours. Stir in the remaining ingredients, and let simmer uncovered for another two hours, stirring occasionally. Use as pie or pastry filling. Makes 2 quarts.

[Adapted from Kimball and Anderson, *The Art of American Indian Cooking* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co.), 1965, p. 121.]

**13 EDUCATION**

At the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Comanche children were taught European American ways and values. At both boarding schools and day schools on the reservation, boys were taught vocational skills such as bookkeeping, while girls were taught how to iron, set a table, and address party invitations. Both boys and girls were taught to play croquet and baseball.

In 1935, when the U.S. Congress passed the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, new schools funded by the U.S. government but run by Native North Americans were opened, replacing the BIA schools. But Native-run schools were short-lived. They were closed after World War II (1941–1945) when the U.S. government reduced its spending. Today there are a few Comanche schools in operation, but the majority of Comanche children attend public schools in Walters and Lawton, Oklahoma. There are several highly educated Comanche who teach at major research universities in the United States. In 2002 Comanche Nation College was established by Tribal Charter. The goal of the newly formed college is to provide educational opportunities for members of the Comanche Nation as well as other neighboring tribes with an American Indian focus, which stresses the maintenance of language and culture in the modern world.

**14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

In the past, “sweats” were a form of purification or cleansing, but they were not considered a ritual religious ceremony.

**15 WORK**

Comanche work has changed dramatically since the days before the European invasion. When they were masters of the Comancheria, boys learned to ride horses and hunt at a very early age, and girls were taught to cook and tan hides. While men made weapons and hunted, women prepared the food, tanned hides, and made tipis and clothes. When forced to relocate to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), the Comanches had to learn to farm. After the General Allotment Act of 1887 divided their lands into parcels too small to farm successfully, many Comanches found jobs off-reservation, working as herders or farmers for European Americans. These jobs usually paid very low wages.

Many Comanches lost their already marginal jobs during the Depression of the 1930s and fell into even deeper poverty. In 1935, as part of the New Deal, Congress passed the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, which allowed Native North Americans to form business-development groups. The Comanches helped reestablish the Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache Business Council that had been disbanded in 1887 after the General Allotment Act. In 1966, however, the Comanches broke away and formed their own Comanche Business Council. The Comanche Business Council has since organized the operation of a meat-packing plant as well as a leather-tanning factory on Comanche lands in Oklahoma. Many Comanche men and women still must find work off-reservation, however. A number of young Comanches enlist in the U.S. Armed Services, the modern expression of their traditional warrior identity.

**16 SPORTS**

The Comanches traditionally played a sport called *shinny* that was very similar to modern-day lacrosse. They also played a sport similar to soccer.

**17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Traditionally, Comanche elders would tell stories around campfires at night to provide entertainment as well as education for the children.

Today Comanches enjoy the same forms of recreation as other Americans. A traditional pastime at tribal powwows is the hand-game, a gambling game for teams in which sticks are hidden in the hands of some team members and the opposing team must guess who the stick holders are.

**18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Comanche crafts represented everyday life with toy versions of real people and objects, much like “playing house”—dolls in cradleboards, miniature tipis, and so on.

In their art, Comanches used certain symbols to represent healing and medicine; for example, a buffalo design on a shield would represent the strength of the buffalo.

**19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Comanches suffer a great deal from racial discrimination in Oklahoma. A recent study showed that more Comanches are arrested than European Americans for similar offenses and

that more force is used while arresting Comanches than while arresting European Americans.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Comanche, as opposed to almost every other North American Indian tribe, do not recognize third or fourth genders. In other words, there are no *berdaches* in Comanche society. The cultural construction of gender in Comanche culture includes only males and females.

In prereservation Comanche society, that was considerable competition among men for wives. Polygyny was practiced throughout Comancheria. Men would often attempt to seduce the wives of other men and then run off to live separately. Comanche men did not punish the men who stole their wives with harsh brutality or death. Instead, they demanded some sort of recompense or payment.

The highest honor that could be bestowed on a Comanche woman was to be gifted with an otterskin cap. A woman would have to accumulate many good deeds in her lifetime to be bestowed with this honor. Most Comanche women do not receive such an honor until they are fifty or sixty years old. After receiving the otterskin cap, the woman would add her eagle plume that she received during puberty to the back of the cap.

One of the most well-known contemporary Comanche women is LaDonna Harris (b. 1931). A tireless champion of equal rights for peoples of all nationalities and ethnicities, Harris was one of the founding members of “The Group” that fought to desegregate the city of Lawton, Oklahoma in the 1960s. She also fought for Comanche separation from the Kiowa and Apache peoples during the late 1950s and 1960s. The Comanche separation secured independent status for the Comanche.

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—revised by J. Williams

# COSTA RICANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ticos

**LOCATION:** Costa Rica

**POPULATION:** 4,195,914

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (over 90%)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Christopher Columbus was the first European to arrive in what is now Costa Rica, in 1502, on his fourth and last voyage. It was probably named “rich coast” because of the gold ornaments worn by Indians, but it was never a source of great wealth for the Spanish. Indeed, when Central America freed itself from Spanish rule in 1821, the population of Costa Rica was under 70,000. San José became the capital of the Central American federation in 1823 and that of Costa Rica when it became an independent nation in 1838. During this period, coffee became an all-important export and source of national wealth; bananas, introduced in 1871, also became a major export crop. Political life was generally tranquil until 1948, when thousands died in a civil war.

After the internal clash that ended with the life of thousands of citizens, a new constitution was promulgated in 1949. This legal body among other innovations abolished the army, limited the power of the executive, and gave women the right to vote. Moreover, the new constitution guaranteed a complete net of social benefits to all Costa Ricans, such as the right to receive education. Today, Costa Rica has a 96% literacy rate, the highest in Central America.

Since the mid 1950s, Costa Rica has held a tradition of orderly democratic rule that has allowed the country to have 12 uninterrupted democratic presidential elections since 1953. In 2006, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Óscar Arias, was elected president of the country. Internationally, Costa Rica is well known for its high standards of living—it has been ranked 4th in the region and 48th in the world in the Human Development Index—and for its strong commitment to preserve and protect the environment. Honoring this environmental-friendly reputation, Costa Rica declared in 2007 its intention of becoming the first carbon neutral country in the world by 2021.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Costa Rica is about the size of the U.S. state of West Virginia. It is bounded by Nicaragua on the north, Panama on the southeast, the Caribbean Sea to the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the south and west. Mountain ranges run northwest-southeast the length of the country, reaching as high as 3,810 m (12,500 ft) above sea level. Some of the mountains are volcanic. About half the population lives in the small, fertile, central plateau nestled in the highlands. The lowlands along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts are hot and generally rainy, swampy, and heavily forested.

Because of its natural beauty, privileged climate, and the governmental commitment to protect the environment, tourism, especially ecotourism, has become an important source of national income, representing around 15% of the GDP. In addition, its tropical weather has made Costa Rica one of the main producers of coffee in the world. Thanks to the sustain-





able exploitation of its resources and its tax exemption policy for foreign investment, Costa Rica has achieved a GDP close to \$56 billion dollars (2007). However, distribution of wealth has lingered highly unequal with 20% of the population under the poverty line.

About 95% of the 4.1 million Costa Ricans are either of European (generally Spanish) or mixed European and Amerindian ancestry. The rest of its inhabitants are mostly of Amerindian, African, or Chinese descent. The number of refugees fleeing political strife in other Central American countries reached some 200,000 in the 1980s, but fell to about half that number in the 1990s. Costa Ricans call themselves Ticos.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the universal language. *Vos* is often used in place of *tu* as the singular familiar pronoun. Costa Rican Spanish is also influenced by Mexican television. There is a peasant country dialect but few regional variations. The 15,000 or so Amerindians belong to six linguistic groups. Some of the 50,000 or so Blacks—mostly descendants of Jamaican immigrants—use English as their principal language. The Amerindian dialects spoken in Costa Rica, such as Boruca, Térraba, and Maléku, are part of the Chibchan language. Among Central Americans, Costa Ricans are known for replacing the diminutive ending *tito* with *tico*, this explains why they are known in Central America as Ticos.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Costa Rican Amerindians see the world as created by God (Sibu) and controlled by good and evil spirits. A few *sukias* (shamans) are credited with curing illness, controlling the weather, and foretelling the future. *Curanderismo* (curing) with herbs and chants is also practiced by non-Amerindians. In Costa Rica these healers, also credited with concocting love potions and casting spells, are called *brujas* (witches); they are always female and at least 50 years old.

Catholic folklore is plentiful. As in all of Latin America, saints—including uncanonized “popular saints”—are prayed to as intermediaries before God, and statues and pictures of saints in the home are believed to confer good luck.

### 5 RELIGION

More than 90% of the population is baptized Roman Catholic. The 1949 Constitution recognizes Catholicism as the national religion and provides for state support of the Church while permitting the free exercise of “other cults not opposed to universal morality or good customs.” Only a Catholic marriage ceremony is recognized by the state without the need of a civil ceremony. Catholic doctrine is part of the public-school curriculum, and only a parental note excuses children from these lessons. However, in general Costa Ricans neither observe nor expect rigid conformity to the doctrines and rules of the Church. In recent years, Costa Rica has received continuous waves of immigrants, mainly from Asia and the Middle East, and as a consequence new religions, such as Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism, have been incorporated in the traditional creeds.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Of Costa Rica’s 15 public holidays, most are religious in character. Some businesses close for Holy Week (late March or early April), which is commemorated with religious processions. Christmas Eve (December 24) is celebrated with visiting, drinking, dancing, and gift-giving, as well as midnight mass. The feast day of Our Lady of the Angeles, Costa Rica’s patron saint, occurs on August 2. On this day, La Negrita, a small black stone image of the Virgin said to have appeared to a poor Indian girl over 300 years ago, is carried in solemn procession from the Basilica in Cartago to the parish church of St. Nicholas. It is returned on the first Saturday in September.

Among secular holidays, the most important is Independence Day, on September 15. This day is commemorated also in the other Central American countries that won their independence from Spain in 1821.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Parents of newborn children receive gifts from relatives and neighbors, and a man and woman—generally a married couple—are asked to serve as godparents, as in many other Latin American countries. The godparents traditionally take the infant to church to be baptized. A child’s first birthday is also a great occasion. After entering school at age seven, boys and girls play apart. Working-class children may be expected to do chores or supplement the family income as early as age six. A middle- or upper-class girl’s 15th birthday is a special occasion, marked by a party comparable to a debut. No fiesta or dance is complete without a “queen” and “princesses.” No similar

events exist for boys, but they enjoy much greater freedom and are steeped in the ways of *machismo*—assertive masculinity.

Most adult Costa Ricans let their birthdays pass unnoticed. A woman is considered well past her prime by age 40. Higher-status men, however, may celebrate their 50th birthday with a big party, and couples celebrate their silver and golden wedding anniversaries. Old women may spend much of their time in church, while old men gather in parks, cafes, or bars to talk.

Funerals are required by law to be held within 24 hours of death, and few corpses are embalmed. Whenever possible, a church ceremony is held and mourners proceed to the cemetery for the burial. If there is time, a wake may be held first, with the deceased placed in an open coffin in the family living room. A rosary and sometimes a Mass are held on the anniversary of the death for a decade or two. Widows sometimes wear black for the rest of their lives, although this practice is becoming obsolete.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Foreign visitors have described Costa Ricans as hospitable and gracious. Strangers are favored with a greeting in small towns. Acquaintances are greeted as *amigo* (friend) and given ritual shoulder-patting embraces. Yet, this is misleading, for many Costa Ricans say they have no real friends other than relatives. They value privacy and rarely invite non-relatives, except for friends from childhood and professional colleagues, to their homes. A great deal of socializing goes on outside the home, in clubs or bars, or at fiestas or other community diversions.

Dating is not common, and in rural areas and among more traditional urban families, girls under 18 must still be chaperoned at night. Movies, dances, and band concerts in the park are among the occasions where young people may get to know one another. If a boy and girl go out on a date even once, they are generally thought to be *novios* (boyfriend and girlfriend) who do not date anyone else.

Costa Ricans love music. They usually listen to rock and roll, pop, and reggaeton, and dance to the rhythm of salsa, merengue, and cumbia. Besides dancing, going to the movies is another of the main social experiences among Costa Ricans.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Costa Rica enjoys, with Panama, the highest standard of living in Central America. Life expectancy is on a par with the United States, and infant mortality is the lowest in Latin America. Many Costa Ricans credit the social security system, which took over community hospitals, for improved health. However, protein-deficient malnutrition remains common among landless peasants, and there has been an increase in obesity, alcoholism, smoking, and narcotics use. Most Costa Ricans live in small wooden or cement-block houses, with floors of wood or tile and roofs of zinc or corrugated iron. The urban poor, however, generally live in overcrowded, usually rented, slum dwellings. Squatters' shanties can be found on the fringes of the cities. Buses, rather than automobiles, are the main form of public transportation. Both coasts are also linked by rail with the capital, and there are airplane landing strips throughout the country.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The extended family group is the basis of Costa Rican society. Brothers, uncles, and cousins are expected to help other family



A Costa Rican boy cleaning fish. In the Costa Rican diet, however, beef or pork is preferred to fish. (Cory Langley)

members in times of need. Much of social life consists of Sunday visits to kin and to their parties, christenings, weddings, and funerals. Several generations may live under the same roof. Desertion and abandonment of children by fathers is common among the poor. It is not uncommon for a grandmother, her daughters, and their children to live together without an adult male present. Family size has dropped sharply since 1960 because of birth control. Women form a growing proportion of the labor force, and sex discrimination in hiring and salary is forbidden. Divorce, once seen as a disgrace, occurs more frequently than in the past, but separation and desertion remain far more common. Many women are also victims of domestic violence.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional women's costumes are based on a sheer, low-cut frilled, ruffled, or puffed white blouse and a flounced, flowered, full cotton skirt, which varies in color. A fringed, colored silk or cotton *rebozo* (shawl) is draped around the shoulders or over the head. A cross, medallion, or locket is usually suspended around the neck, and circular golden earrings are worn. Traditional men's costumes generally consist of dark trousers and a long-sleeved white shirt with a red-knotted handkerchief at the neck and a colored sash around the waist. A straw Panama hat is also worn.

Clean, unwrinkled clothing is very important to urban working-class people, and many of them will skimp on food to buy stylish clothing. All but the poorest people dress up on



Costa Ricans perform in a float during the Light Festival Parade. Thousands of people attend the festival to start the Christmas season in the country. (Yuri Cortez/AFP/Getty Images)

Sundays and on special occasions. Conversely, the upper and middle classes, more secure in their status, now dress more informally. Even top government ministers now doff their suit jackets on many occasions, confining themselves to sports shirts or short-sleeved shirts with neckties. Jeans and tee shirts are everyday wear for young people of all classes. Girls wear school uniforms, and older girls are expected to wash and iron the blouses of their uniforms and to press the skirts daily.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

The Costa Rican diet is based on rice, beans, tortillas or bread, fried plantains, and strong black coffee, sometimes prepared from home-grown berries, with lots of sugar. Vegetables and fruits, though available year-round, are not especially common. The midday meal is the main one.

Beef or pork is preferred to fish. *Olla de carne*, the traditional stew, is made with beef, potatoes, corn, plantains, squash, yucca, and other vegetables. Other popular entrees include *paella* and *zarzuelas* (spicy seafood stews). These dishes are derived from Spain but adapted to local ingredients. *Pozol*, a corn-based soup in Mexico and other Central American countries, is made with beans in Costa Rica. Rice, chayote (a pear-like fruit), and other ingredients may be added; in Guanacoste Province pozol is made with corn and a pig's head. *Gallopinto*, a popular peasant dish, is basically beans with an egg, although

its name suggests chicken. *Chayotes rellenos* are chayotes par-boiled in salted water, stuffed with cheese, eggs, butter, and breadcrumbs, covered with butter and breadcrumbs, and then baked.

Common drinks called *refrescos* are beverages consisting of liquefied fruits diluted in water and occasionally in milk. The typical flavors are melon, blackberry, strawberry, mango, and watermelon.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Costa Rica boasts the highest literacy rate in Central America. Elementary education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15, and the central government supervises school attendance and curricula. About 24% of the country's budget is used in education, which has permitted more than 96% of the population over 15 years of age to be able to read and write. However, high school dropout rate remains high, and many graduates enter college unable to read or write acceptably. Well-to-do parents usually send their children to private schools, where instruction is at a higher level.

The main institutions of higher learning are the University of Costa Rica, founded in 1941 and located in a suburb of San José and the National Autonomous University in Heredia. Because of political pressure, almost all applicants are admitted, which has resulted in overcrowding and has hampered qual-

ity. Founded in 1976, the Autonomous University of Central America is a private institution organized into autonomous colleges on the British plan. The Institute of Technology is near Cartago; a San Carlos branch has a school of forestry and agriculture.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Costa Rica has a national orchestra, opera house, and dance company. Alejandro Monastel is a classical composer who employs native folk themes. The marimba and guitar are popular instruments for folk dances. Among popular performers are Los Talolingas, who wrote “La Guaria Morada,” regarded as the nation’s “second national anthem.” Lorenzo (Lencho) Salazar writes popular humorous songs. Some Indians retain their traditional dances and musical instruments, and the calypso is popular among Caribbean Blacks.

A government-subsidized House of the Artist has offered free lessons in painting and sculpture since 1951. The Museum of Costa Rican Art was founded in 1977. Francisco Amighetti and Richard Kliefoth are among the nation’s painters and graphic artists.

Costa Rica’s best writers have been chiefly essayists and poets, including Justo Facio, Roberto Brenes Mesén, and Joaquín García Monge. Carlos Luís Fallas and Alberto Cañas represent social protest, while Alfonso Chase and Carmen Naranjo depict urban life. Ricardo Fernández Guardia was a historian and short-story writer; Moises Vincenzi was a novelist and philosopher.

#### 15 WORK

About three-quarters of all Costa Ricans are members of the working class. These include farm and domestic workers, gardeners, janitors, and vendors. Because of a widespread prejudice against manual labor, young people with middle-class aspirations prefer even poorly paid white-collar occupations, such as secretary or bank clerk. The work ethic and work hours in Costa Rica differ from those in the United States. As in most Latin American societies, work is seen as a necessity but not an end in itself. The workweek is often cut short on Friday afternoon, and there are many holidays.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the national sport—or even national mania—of Costa Rica, and it is a tradition for young working-class males who began kicking a ball since they learned to walk. Even the smallest hamlet is likely to have at least one team. It is also by far the chief spectator sport. Bicycling also has many working-class participants and spectators. Boxing and wrestling also are popular spectator sports for men of the working class. Basketball, volleyball, and tennis are played chiefly by upper- and upper-middle-class boys, and tennis and golf by their fathers. Baseball is more popular along the Caribbean coast. Among other sports are horseracing and automobile- and motorcycle racing. Once popular, cockfighting is now illegal.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Films are extremely popular, but most moviegoers are under 25 years of age. A censorship board, usually for reasons of sexual licentiousness, bans some films. Transistor radios are played everywhere, with popular music predominating. Even the

poorest homes are likely to have television sets. Favorite programs include cartoons and old movies from the United States, and Mexican *telenovelas* (soap operas). There are many other diversions and leisure-time activities, including sports, fiestas, dances, and games of chance. The national lottery, held each week, is a major event. There is a grand prize at Christmas.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Because it has only a small Indian population, Costa Rica has little in the way of native arts and crafts. A symbol of the nation, although dating back only to about 1900, is the elaborately painted wooden oxcart, typically done in brightly colored geometric patterns or stylized motifs such as flowers. There are a number of folk-dancing groups, and many songs, dances, poems, and stories have Indian and African as well as Spanish roots.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Costa Rica’s chief social problem is the poverty that grips perhaps one-third of its population. Most farmers have only tiny plots. Slash-and-burn agriculture and the cutting of forests threaten the environment. Politically, Costa Rica has a large, expensive, and relatively unproductive bureaucracy. It has, however, maintained democracy and individual rights and freedoms, avoiding the armed conflicts and dictatorial rule that have gripped other Central American countries. There is no standing army. Crime-control is hampered by the lack of a career police force. Thousands of personnel are fired with each change in national administration; working in the bureaucracy does not guarantee continued employment.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The first step towards Costa Rican women’s economic independence occurred during the late 19th century, when the liberal government considered their education to be essential for the improvement of the country. However, it was not until the first decades of the 20th century that women were allowed more expression and power in political spheres. In 1948 women were given the right to vote.

After ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984, the country instigated the first initiatives aimed at eliminating sexist stereotypes and practices that legitimize gender inequalities in the education system. The 1990 Act for promoting the Social Equality of Women made the central government and educational institutions responsible for guaranteeing equal opportunities for men and women, not only in terms of access to education, but also in terms of the quality of such education. This led to the creation of the Gender Equity Office in the Ministry of Public Education in 2000 and a strategic plan was defined containing measures to speed up gender equality and equity between men and women throughout the system. In 1996 the government introduced a 40% quota in the Electoral Code for all public elections, and political parties were required to change their statutes accordingly. In 1999 the Supreme Electoral Tribunal ruled that women must be placed in electable positions on party lists.

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—revised by C. Vergara

## CREEKS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Muskogee

**LOCATION:** United States (Oklahoma; Alabama; Georgia; Florida, California; Texas)

**POPULATION:** Approximately 71,000 (as of 2001)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Muskogee (Creek)

**RELIGION:** Traditional Creek; Muskogee (Creek) Protestant

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1670, British traders began referring to part of the group of Native Americans of the Creek Confederation who lived along the Ocmulgee River (in what is today the state of Georgia) as the Ocheese Creek Indians. They made their homes and villages along many rivers and streams in the southeast United States, in what are today the states of Georgia, Alabama, part of South Carolina, part of Tennessee, and northern Florida. Although the Muskogee (Creek) people shared a common language, culture, and history, they did not consider themselves a nation. Instead, the Creek Confederation was more like an alliance between all the different Creek towns.

The first encounter between the Creeks and Europeans, with the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in the late 16th century, was brief but devastating. De Soto made captives of some of the natives, disciplining them cruelly. He burned some alive, cut off their hands, hanged, and beheaded them.

Not until the British began trading with the Creeks in the 17th century did the Europeans significantly influence the Creek Confederacy. The British gave guns, ammunition, metal pots and pans, European clothing, and beads in exchange for deer skins and Native American captives for the slave trade. To meet British demands and acquire European goods, the Creeks began overhunting deer, upsetting the balance of nature in the southeast and causing a serious decline in the deer population. They also began making slave raids on neighboring Native American tribes. These activities made them very unpopular among other tribes in the southeast.

Soon the French and Spanish began to compete with the British for control of the southeast. The Creeks, eager to remain on friendly terms with all the European powers, made informal agreements with all three and maintained profitable trade arrangements with each of them. They officially allied themselves with no one until the British began having conflicts with the American colonists. The Creeks then sided with the British and supported them throughout the American Revolutionary War (1775–83). When the colonists won and established the United States of America, the British-allied Creeks were naturally considered untrustworthy by the new government. Over the next few years, the Creeks lost large tracts of land to the U.S. government.

A mixed-blood Creek by the name of Alexander McGillivray (1753–87) decided the Creeks would be more powerful, and therefore less able to be coerced out of their lands, if they were one unified nation. During the late 1700s, McGillivray worked with both the Spanish government officials in Florida and the U.S. government to ensure autonomy for the Creeks. At the same time, he worked with the Creeks to unite them under one government. When McGillivray died at the age of 34

in 1787, the Creeks lost their motivation to unite and became more deeply divided than ever.

The Creeks became known to European Americans as one of the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes” because many of their ways reflected European customs and values. In 1796, U.S. President George Washington sent Benjamin Hawkins, a former Senator from North Carolina, as the chief agent to the Indian tribes in the Southeast. Hawkins administered a “civilization” program that he believed would improve standard of living for the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles. The program attempted to impose white social, political, and economic values on the tribes and convert them from their traditional ways of life to the agricultural-industrial life of white European Americans. Geographically, there were two groups of Creeks: the Upper Creeks, and the Lower Creeks. Originally, geography was all that divided them. However, as contact with Europeans and European Americans increased, the Upper and Lower Creeks began to diverge more seriously. The Lower Creeks were eager to adopt the ways of Europeans and abandoned many of their Creek traditions. The Upper Creek, on the other hand, were much more wary of the Europeans and remained attached to their Creek way of life. The tension between the Upper and Lower Creeks reached its climax in 1813, when the Upper Creeks attacked a fort housing European Americans and full- and mixed-blood Lower Creeks. Throughout the following year, European Americans and Lower Creeks attacked Upper Creek settlements. In the end, the Lower Creeks, aided by the U.S. government, won the Creek War. The Upper Creeks were forced to cede 25 million acres of their lands in Alabama and Georgia to the U.S. government, without payment.

In 1824, a half-blooded Creek named William McIntosh decided to sell the rest of the Creeks’ lands to the U.S. government. He and his three aides made an offer to agents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), at the time a section of the U.S. War Department. When told of the offer, U.S. President Monroe ordered the BIA agents not to accept it on the grounds that it was illegal and unethical because no Creeks but McIntosh and his aides were involved. The agents went against President Monroe’s orders, however, and signed a treaty with McIntosh, giving him a large sum of money for lands that were not his to sell. In fact, the Creek Nation had passed a law stating that “no more land would be sold.” As McIntosh signed the treaty, he was warned by another Creek named Opothle Yoholo that his life was in danger. Six months later, the recently formed Creek National Council (a governing body similar to that which McGillivray had promoted decades earlier) arrested and executed McIntosh and his aides. In 1826, the United States signed a new treaty with the Creeks, nullifying the illegal treaty of 1824. This was the first and last time that the U.S. government ever nullified a treaty.

The McIntosh faction and its followers moved to the west and settled along the Verdigris River in eastern Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) around 1828. Under the Indian Removal Act passed by U.S. Congress in 1830, other members of the Five Civilized Tribes, including the Muskogee (Creek) who had not signed McIntosh’s treaty, were forcibly removed from their southeastern homelands and relocated to Indian Territory in 1836 and 1837. On March 25–27, 1836, the Upper Creeks and Lower Creeks held their last general council in Alabama; hostilities broke out soon right before their emigration

to Oklahoma. During the journey, made almost entirely on foot, an estimated 40% of the Creeks died, leaving only 14,000 to create a new life in Oklahoma. The removal of the Five Civilized Tribes is remembered as the “Trail of Tears” because of the tragic number of deaths it caused.

During the American Civil War (1861–65), some of the McIntosh-faction Creeks sided with the Confederate States, but many who came in the Indian removal tried to stay neutral. This caused old wounds to open between the Creek factions. At least four battles in the Civil War pitted Native Americans against each other. When the Confederates lost, the Creeks found themselves in a precarious position. Because some of the Creeks had fought with the Confederates, the whole Muskogee (Creek) nation was forced to cede a large amount of their land in Oklahoma to the victorious Union government. Although the Creeks were allowed to keep about 160 acres of land under the General Allotment Act of 1889, many individuals lost their land to unethical European Americans who tricked them into selling it when oil was discovered in Oklahoma at the turn of the 20th century.

In 1907, Oklahoma became a state, and the Creeks lost their official identity as a separate people. Lands in the former “Indian Territory” were not considered to be “reservations” by the U.S. government, nor were the Native Americans who lived there officially recognized as tribal nations. Native Americans did not become citizens of the United States until 1924. Creeks have struggled to survive on dwindling lands in a European-dominated culture to which they were poorly adapted. Finally, in 1970 the U.S. government made it legal for Native Americans to elect their own chiefs and tribal governments.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Creeks are descendants of a tribe belonging to the Mississippian Culture, a group of highly civilized Native Americans that lived in the southeast long before the Europeans arrived on the continent. Much of Mississippian culture was similar to that of the Aztecs in Mexico, leading scholars to conclude that a number of Aztecs migrated north and east thousands of years ago, introducing their customs and ways of life to the peoples they met along the way.

When Europeans first encountered the Creeks in the 17th century, the Creeks were split into two subgroups: the Upper Creeks, and the Lower Creeks. The Upper Creeks lived in Alabama along the Coosa, Tallapoosa, and Alabama Rivers, while the Lower Creeks made their homes along the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers in Georgia. Rich, fertile river valleys and a long growing season made farming both easy and practical for the Creeks. Game animals abounded in the dense forests, and fish were plentiful in the many rivers and streams. In the 1830s, the Creeks were forcibly relocated to a plot of land in eastern Oklahoma, near both the Arkansas and Canadian rivers. The climate in Oklahoma is hot and dry, and the land is much less fertile than that of the southeastern United States. Farming is much more difficult in Oklahoma than in the Creeks’ former homelands.

According to the United States Census, the total Creek population in 2000 was approximately 71,000. More than half live as part of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma. The only federally recognized group of Creeks remaining in the southeast is the “Poarch Band of Creek Indians,” in Atmore, Alabama. There are some groups remaining in the southeast

that claim to be Creeks but are not recognized by the Creek Nation.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Creeks, like many other Southeastern tribes, speak Muskogee, or Creek, a member of the Muskogean family of Native North American languages. Scholars believe that the Creeks probably spoke more than six different languages up through the 1600s, when they were still a loosely connected confederation of towns.

Preservation of the Creek (or Muskogee) language began with the Reverend John Fleming, the first Presbyterian missionary to the Creeks in Oklahoma, in 1832. He created a written Creek alphabet and published a children's Creek reader, *Istusi in Naktsoka*, in the 1830s. Fleming later published other books in the Creek language and helped the Creeks translate Christian hymns and parts of the Bible into their native tongue. The first English and Muskogee dictionary was written by the Reverend R. M. Loughridge and Church Elder David M. Hodge (who acted as interpreter) in 1914.

### 4 FOLKLORE

According to traditional legend, the Creek people were born from the earth's navel, located somewhere within the Rocky Mountains. After a time, the earth became angry, opening up and trying to swallow them again. They left this land and began to travel toward the rising sun. Their journey led them to the southeastern region of the United States, where they flourished and created a complex system of social structures to govern themselves.

Within the Creek Confederacy, there are many different clans. The Creek tell the story of how each clan got its name in this way: In the beginning, when This World was first created, it was covered by a thick fog. It was impossible to see anything. When the people went out in search of food, they often got lost. Therefore, each group of people came up with a call so that they could find each other. Because of these calls, the people learned there were other groups in This World in addition to themselves. Eventually, a great wind blew the fog away. The first group of people felt the wind and watched as it blew the fog away; they named themselves the Wind Clan. They are considered the first clan. Every group thereafter named themselves according to the first animal they saw—and so the Deer, Bear, and Turtle Clans came to be.

### 5 RELIGION

The Creeks, like many other Southeastern tribes, are a highly religious and ceremonial people. Christianized Creeks refer to God as the "Master of Breath" (who created all life). The Traditional Ceremonial Creeks refer to the Creator as "The One Above." The Creeks widely and wisely used the healing power of plants. The juices from certain crushed plants provided them with morphine and salicylic acid, the substance from which aspirin is made. The Creeks also brewed teas that relieved indigestion and other stomach ailments from leaves, branches, and roots.

The Creeks' most important formal ceremony has long been the *posketv*, or Green Corn Ceremony. It takes place near the end of the summer and marks the ripening of the corn and the beginning of a new year. It is a time of forgiveness and purification for both the ceremonial grounds and the Creek people.

Every element of the ceremony is in some way symbolic of the purification and cleansing taking place. One major element of the ceremony is the harvest of the New (Green) Corn, usually during July and August. No corn is eaten before then. The celebration of a single crop is not unusual considering its importance as the major food crop, producing even when other crops failed. During the four-day ceremony, there is much prayer, and the people fast. They abstain from eating not only the new corn but also all food. The men drink a tea brewed from holly leaves, which acts as a powerful emetic, causing them to vomit. They view this as a form of purification, readying them to accept the blessings of the new year. Participants in the ceremony are also expected to lay aside ill feelings, forgive wrongs done to them, and forget the conflicts of the previous year. Creek traditionally believe that all people should act with a pure heart and mind.

At the beginning of the Green Corn ceremony, all fires are extinguished. The central fire is then relit by the medicine man. From that central fire, then, all the cooking fires in the ceremonial grounds are rekindled, and the New Year begins. (Each family has a camp where meals are prepared.) These traditions are carried on today by the Traditional Ceremonial people of the Creeks.

A large percentage of Creeks have been converted to Christianity, and there are many Muskogee (Creek) Protestant churches in the Muskogee Nation. Services are conducted in English and the Muskogee language.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Creeks on each of the 17 traditional ceremonial grounds within the Muskogee (Creek) Nation still hold the Green Corn Ceremony every summer. It is a time for worship and thanksgiving.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past, a boy was not traditionally considered a man until he performed a heroic act in battle or on a raid. Once he performed this act, he was given a title describing the feat. At the next Green Corn Ceremony, a naming ceremony was held in which all boys who had performed a brave deed during the previous year were recognized and officially given their new name.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Creeks are a very democratic people among themselves. The Muskogee (Creek) Nation has a central government presided over by the elected Principal Chief and Second Chief. The Nation itself is divided into eight districts. The National Council has 26 representatives elected from these districts, and they make up the legislative branch of the government. The judicial branch consists of six Supreme Court judges and one district judge, who are all appointed by the Principal Chief.

Harmony and balance have traditionally been important concepts among the Creek. The Creek people attempted to balance work and play, religion and politics, and respect for nature.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Creeks traditionally lived in villages called *italwas*. In the center of each village was a square where religious and political



*Marian McCormick, principle chief of the Lower Muskogee Creek tribe, holds a gallberry broom at tribal headquarters. Her ancestors hid in a swamp to avoid being deported to an Oklahoma reservation with other American Indians during the early 1800s. (AP Images)*

events took place. The square was surrounded by low buildings with open fronts and seats inside facing the square. During the warm summer months, meetings took place in these buildings. In the winter, public meetings were held in a town house located in the central square. This town house was typically a large *chakofa*, which is a circular structure with a cone-shaped roof. The sacred fire was kept in this town *chakofa*.

The residential homes of the village families surrounded the square and the large town *chakofa*. Each family had a compound that consisted of a smaller *chakofa*; an open-sided,

airy summer home; and two or three storage sheds. The smaller *chakofas*, which served as the Creeks' winter homes, were made by weaving young, flexible saplings between thick, sturdy wooden posts into a cylindrical shape. The walls were then covered with a grass and clay mixture that served as insulation, and the roof was made of cypress bark. Inside, the only items of furniture were sleeping platforms covered with mats made of deerskin and beaver fur.

Today Creeks live in modern, Western-style homes. The Creek Housing Authority provides low-cost housing for low-



income families. These brick homes consist of three-bedrooms, one-and-a-half baths, and one-car garages and are constructed by Creeks. Thus, the housing authority provides jobs as well as housing.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The clan is the central unit of Creek society. Clans comprise all people who are descendants of the same ancestral clan grouping. Loyalty to one's clan traditionally came before anything else, and one's clan membership determined one's place in society. Clans are matrilineal (membership is inherited through the mother). Fathers are important within the family system, but in the clan, the mother's brother (the mother's nearest blood relation) functions as the primary disciplinarian and role model. Clan members consider membership in the clan to define "family"; for example, clan members of approximately the same age consider each other siblings, even if they have never met. Clan ties are strong and serve to unite and empower Creek people even today. The clan system influences marriage choices, personal friendships, and political and economic relations. Killing or eating one's own clan animal is traditionally considered a serious offense.

Marriages were often arranged by older women in the tribe, but the bride-to-be had the final say in the matter. When a young man wished to marry a young woman, he was prohibited from speaking directly to her. Instead, he went to her maternal female relatives to propose the idea. When both families had agreed that the match was a good one, the young woman made the final decision. To do this, the young woman set out a bowl of hot cereal for her suitor on a certain morning agreed upon in advance. The young man then had to request permission to eat the cereal. If the young woman consented, it meant that she agreed to marry him. If she refused his request, it stood as a rejection of his marriage proposal.

The actual wedding ceremony was simple. The man had to kill a deer not only to provide his new wife with food and clothing, but also to prove his merit as a provider. The woman, in turn, had to prove her worth as a domestic manager by preparing corn or some other food and presenting it to her husband. The newlyweds then lived for a year in a house the husband had built for his wife. At the end of the year, the couple could divorce if they wished, as simply as they married. The wife kept all the domestic belongings, including the house.

Children were highly valued in Creek society. Like the house, the children belonged to the mother. The mother was directly involved in the raising of her daughters, while her brothers did most of the parenting of her sons. The children's father was responsible for the upbringing of his sisters' sons.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Today's Creeks wear modern Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. Traditionally, the Creeks in the southeast wore very little clothing at all because the climate was so hot and humid. Early Muskogee people wore clothing made of woven plant material or animal skins, such as buckskin. In the colder winter months, the continual fire burning in the family *chakofa* kept it so warm inside that they rarely had to add any extra clothing, but animal skins and furs were used for warmth when they ventured outside.

In the 1600s, European fashion began to influence Creek clothing styles. Woven cloth was more comfortable and color-

ful than buckskin, and it became a popular trade item in the southeast. Because cloth came in so many colors and patterns, Creeks developed a more individualized style of dress, even using the traders' novelties such as bells, ribbons, beads, and pieces of mirror to decorate their clothing. Men began to wear ruffled cloth shirts with beaded sashes, and jackets with buckskin leggings. Women wore ruffled cloth dresses decorated with novelty trim, and pocketed aprons. Both men and women wore soft deerskin moccasins, often elaborately decorated with beadwork. During traditional ball games, Creek men wore only a breechcloth to make free movement easier. During the Green Corn Ceremony, women wore beautiful dresses covered with flowing ribbons during the Ribbon Dance.

Today, Creek women still wear their ribboned dresses during the Green Corn Ceremony. Men have adopted the common Western outfit of jeans, boots, and fitted shirts.

Creek men traditionally painted and tattooed their bodies. For men, tattoos revealed their war rank and tribal status in the community. Only women who were considered prostitutes tattooed their bodies.

## **12 FOOD**

The Creeks traditionally supplied all of their food through communal efforts in farming, gathering, hunting, and fishing. The women did the farming and gathering, while the men and older boys hunted and fished. Even small children and the elderly tried to help in any way they could. Among the crops the women raised were squash, beans, and corn; they gathered wild nuts and berries. (A typical Creek recipe follows for dumplings made from wild grape juice.) Corn was by far their staple food. "Modern" corn, or maize, and wild seed crops were introduced to the southeast United States from Mexico around AD 200. Bottle gourds and squash had been cultivated by the Muskogee people since approximately 1000 BC. Squash was important as a food source, and gourds were used to make cooking and eating utensils and masks. All food gathering and hunting followed a seasonal cycle.

The men supplemented their diet by catching fish in the many nearby rivers and streams in the spring and, mainly in the winter, by hunting the deer, bears, rabbits, and squirrels that abounded in the dense southern forests.

### **Grape Dumplings**

- 2 quarts possum grapes
- 3 cups water
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 tablespoons shortening

Grape juice: Boil grapes and strain the pulp, saving the juice. After adding sugar, set the juice aside to cool. (Frozen grape juice may be substituted for fresh juice.)

Dough: Sift together flour and baking powder, and cut in shortening. Add enough juice to form a soft dough and roll out into a ½-inch-thick sheet, then cut into strips. Boil the strips of dough in the remaining grape juice.

## **13 EDUCATION**

After the Creeks were forcibly relocated to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) in the 1830s, they established their

own tribal schools there. Kendell College was a Muskogee (Creek) institution started in Muskogee, Oklahoma. It was later moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and became Tulsa University. Bacone College, which was transferred from the Cherokee Nation, is owned and operated by the American Baptist Association today. At one time, it was exclusively for Native American students, but it is now a multicultural junior college.

The Creeks were always strong supporters of education. They agreed to let Presbyterian missionaries set up boarding schools on their lands in Indian Territory, the first in Coweta Mission in 1843. Creek parents were eager for their children to learn English so that they could be successful in the world of the European American. In 2004 the Muskogee Nation National Council created the College of the Muskogee Nation. The goal is to gain accreditation for the College of Muskogee Nation in order for the college to confer associate's degrees. As of 2008, CMN collaborates with Oklahoma State University in the delivery of courses with Muskogee content, including language.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Two modern Creeks who have been successful in the worlds of literature and art are poet Joy Harjo (1951) and actor/artist Will Sampson (1934–87). Harjo draws on her Creek and Cherokee background to write compelling poetry about the importance of language, memory, and stories in shaping who we are as people. Sampson's first big break in acting came in 1975, when he was chosen to play the role of Jack Nicholson's mute Native American friend in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Throughout his film career, Sampson insisted on portraying Native Americans honestly, making them multidimensional characters. He was a pioneer in expelling the traditional "savage" or "brave warrior" stereotyped image of Native Americans in Hollywood motion pictures.

Though he was best known as an actor, Will Sampson was also a highly successful visual artist. His paintings have been displayed at many museums nationwide, including the Smithsonian in Washington, D. C.

#### 15 WORK

Since the 1970s, some Creek in Oklahoma have raised cattle with great success. The Creek Nation operates five bingo parlors, which provide a source of income for the Nation. Tulsa Bingo is the second-largest tourist attraction in the state of Oklahoma.

The Muskogee Nation plans to open a truck plaza and Burger King restaurant in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, in 1997, and has plans for another plaza in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

#### 16 SPORTS

The Creeks, like many other southeastern tribes, were masters at a game called "stick ball." Similar to modern-day lacrosse, stick ball was a highly active and violent game. It served as a way to develop warrior skills, as well as providing fun and entertainment. To play the game, each of the members of two teams held two sticks. The players would pass a small ball made of animal hide back and forth down the length of the playing field, which was about the size of today's football fields. The aim was to throw the ball over the other team's goal at the end of the field and score a point. There were no other rules, and the games were often quite violent. Stick ball was sometimes

called "the little brother of war." Rather than fighting, the Creeks would sometimes settle their differences with a game of stick ball.

Another popular Creek sport was "chunkey." Two men each had a long stick with a crook at one end. A flat, smooth stone disk was thrown down a bumpy (or "chunkey") field. The men each then attempted to throw their stick so that the disk would catch in the crook. Whoever threw his stick closest to the disk won. A difficult game of perception and timing, chunkey trained men in the art of throwing spears.

Today Creeks play football, basketball, tennis, golf, baseball, softball, and participate in track-and-field sports. Many young Creek men and women have attended college on athletic scholarships. R. Perry Beaver, principal chief in the late 1990s, is a retired high school football coach.

A well-known Creek athlete is baseball player Allie Reynolds, who pitched for the Cleveland Indians and the New York Yankees. He holds the World Series record at seven wins, two losses, and five saves.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Modern Creeks enjoy the same forms of recreation that other American citizens do. Traditional Creek dances are considered sacred and are not used for entertainment.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Long before the Europeans arrived on the North American continent, Creek women were highly skilled weavers and tailors. They used plant fibers and animal skins to make elaborately decorated clothing and containers. When the Creeks began trading with the Europeans, the women acquired glass beads, European cloth, and new ideas and patterns. By combining traditional Creek and European styles, Creek women greatly enhanced their already beautiful work. Today's Creek women supplement their income with the sale of their traditional arts and crafts.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Muskogee Nation has social problems similar to those of other Native American groups. The Nation has its own tribal counselors who deal with specific tribal problems as they occur.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Like the Seminole, the Creek were organized around groups that traced their descent to a common female ancestress. These matrilineages were grouped together into larger social units, clans, which were united through a common ancestry to a long forgotten ancestress. Kinship relations governed all interactions in Creek society, including gendered interactions. The Creek observed strict avoidance rules between a man and his wife's mother as well as between a woman and her husband's father. These individuals were not permitted to communicate with each other directly. Instead, they would use their spouses and intermediaries. These avoidance relations also had to use a special pronoun, the third person dual form, when referring to each other. This would translate something like "those two males/females." English does not have a dual number, which makes an exact translation impossible.

The important role of women in Creek society is celebrated in the Ribbon Dance. The Ribbon Dance is the only Creek dance in which only women participate and where they dance without male accompaniment. The Ribbon Dance is performed on the Friday before the Green Corn ceremony commences.

Men and women are considered separate peoples in the Creek construction of gender. The menstruation of women is a defining feature of the separateness of males and females. During a woman's period, she is supposed to be separated from her husband and the other adult males in her household. She is also supposed to eat separately, and in the past, menstruating Creek women would sit on special woven mats. Menstruating women are also not allowed to attend stomp dances. A modern Creek explanation for diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, cancer, and heart disease is that the traditional prohibitions on menstruating women are no longer being followed. In Creek ideology, menstruating women can cause male sickness.

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—revised by J. Williams

# CREOLES OF LOUISIANA

**LOCATION:** United States (Louisiana; Texas)

**LANGUAGE:** Continental, or “old Louisiana,” French; )Cajun;

French Creole (Gombo or couri-veni); English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; some local sects

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is no single definition for the word Creole. It has been used to refer to people of mixed ancestry or African ancestry as well as people born in the Americas rather than Europe. However, the most common roots of Creoles come from the interaction between speakers of nonstandard European languages and non-European languages.

Starting in the 16th century, it came into use in the Americas to distinguish between residents of European colonies who were born in Europe and those who were born in the colonies to European parents. The Creoles were those born within the colonies. By the early 17th century the word was adopted into French and, to some extent, into English usage. During this century the word Creole was used to refer to people of African or European descent born in the American and Indian Ocean colonies. It was also used as an adjective to characterize plants, animals, and customs typical of the same regions.

In Louisiana, which was once a French possession, the word is used in two distinct ways. It was originally applied to the white descendants of early French or Spanish settlers in the area, who were known for their adherence to the ways and the language of their ancestors. Although this meaning is still in limited use, the word Creole is primarily used today to refer to persons of mixed African, French, and Spanish ancestry.

Blacks first arrived in Louisiana in the 18th century as slaves transported from the Caribbean and West Africa (primarily from the Senegal River basin). Because of the high ratio of blacks to whites in southern Louisiana and the liberal French and Spanish attitudes toward the intermingling of the races, black influence on the culture of the region was unusually strong, and New Orleans and the surrounding plantation region took on an African–West Indian character that was enhanced by the arrival of thousands of additional slaves and free blacks from Haiti at the turn of the 19th century. The relatively high degree of racial tolerance that prevailed in the region was evident in laws (including *Le Doce Noir* and *Las Siete Partidas*) governing master-slave relations that accorded various rights to slaves, including the right to gain their freedom under certain circumstances.

As a result of these laws and the attitudes that spawned them, a greater number of slaves were freed in southern Louisiana before the Civil War than in other parts of the South. Called *gens libres de couleur*, or “free people of color,” these blacks worked in occupations ranging from laborer and craftsman to merchant and planter. The most privileged members of this group, many of them born to white plantation owners and black female slaves or freewomen, formed an elite population, some of whom owned slaves themselves. A number had their children educated in Europe (historical records document the presence of about 2,000 foreign-educated blacks in Louisiana in 1866). However, they generally refused to admit the children of newly freed slaves to their own schools. In addition to

occupation and financial status, racial heritage was an important aspect of social standing, and Creoles of color followed a practice, common among many blacks, of according a higher status to those with lighter skins. A variety of categories, such as *griffe*, *quadroon*, and *octooroon*, existed for classifying people of color according to their racial ancestry.

From the post–Civil War era to the civil rights movement, the Creoles were pressured to conform to rigid racial expectations that were often in conflict with the more fluid notion of race characteristic of their culture and background. The Jim Crow segregation that followed Reconstruction in the South created artificial boundaries between the Creoles and the French-speaking white Cajuns of their region. Traditionally, the two groups had regarded each other as allies, and each group had had a significant cultural impact on the other. The segregationist mentality pitted them against each other by making the Cajuns, often regarded as inferior by other whites, feel that their own social standing could be improved if the Creoles were pushed even farther down the social ladder. To escape from the pervasive racial discrimination of the Deep South, some Creoles migrated to Los Angeles and San Francisco after World War II. Following the civil rights victories of the 1950s and 1960s, Creoles have shown a renewed interest in preserving the special cultural heritage nurtured by the centuries-old intermingling of races and ethnic groups in the bayous of Louisiana. It is believed that the language of the Creoles is now spoken almost only by people over 60 years of age, who are mainly monolingual in Louisiana Creole. In addition, around 2% of the population speaks Louisiana Creole French at home.

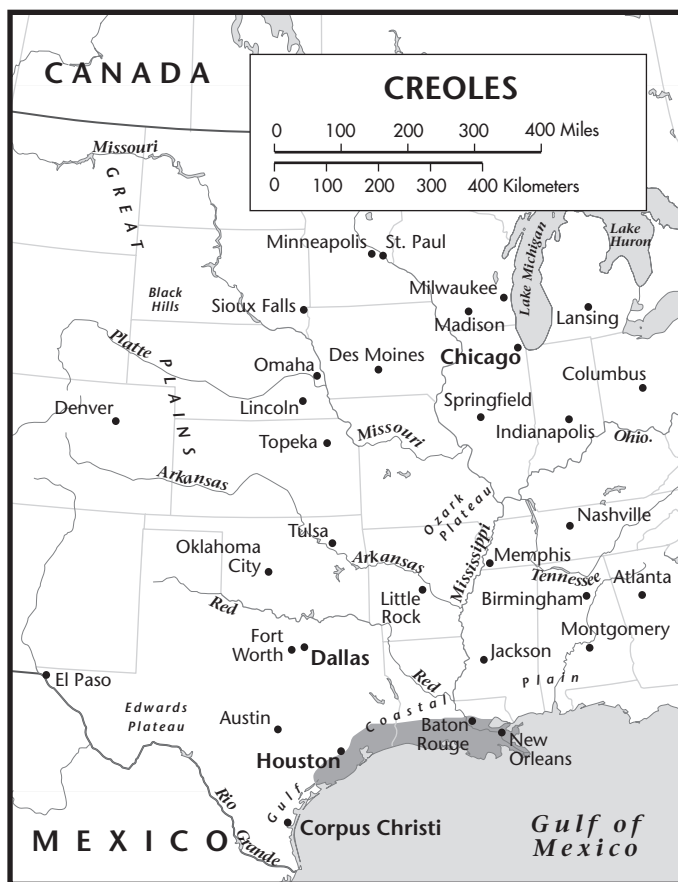
## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Creole community originated (and largely remains) in the bayous of southern Louisiana along the Gulf of Mexico. There is a particularly strong Creole presence in downtown New Orleans and in the inland bayou parishes of Bayou Teche, St. Martin, and St. Landry, as well as in the Lafayette, St. Landry, Evangeline, and Calcasieu parishes of the part of southwest Louisiana known as Cajun Country or Acadiana. In the 20th century, Creoles from Louisiana have migrated to Texas, especially Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Houston, and to parts of the West Coast. In Texas, there is a population of 3,500 speakers of Louisiana Creole French. Of that group, just an estimate of 7% has some basic knowledge of English skills.

Modern census surveys do not include Creoles as a distinct demographic group; at one time, they were classified as FMC (free man of color) and *mulâtre* (mulatto). It is thought that approximately a third of the population in the French-speaking parishes (districts) of southern Louisiana is black. However, this figure does not account for the substantial number of English-speaking blacks, both in Louisiana and in Texas and California, who consider themselves part of the Creole community.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Historically, the French language was a major part of the Creole identity, setting the group apart from other southern blacks. However, in recent years, the use of French has declined, especially among people under forty. There are actually several different varieties of French spoken in southern Louisiana. The least common is Continental, or “old Louisiana,” French,



which is closest to the French of the original colonial settlers. This language is still used by a small minority of Creoles in urban and upper-class rural areas, and it also survives in Catholic schools. Creoles in the Acadiana region of southwest Louisiana speak Cajun, the language of the descendants of the Acadians, French Canadians who migrated to the area in the 1760s after being expelled from their homeland by the British. Strictly an oral language, Cajun French is characterized by a simplified grammar and the use of some archaic terms. French Creole, the third language variant of French-speaking Creoles, is a pidgin language related to the pidgins of West Africa and the Caribbean. Its vocabulary is mostly French, and its pronunciation shows African influences, while its grammar is similar to those of other African-European Creole tongues. Often called *Gombo* or *couri-veni*, it is most common in the plantation region of southern Louisiana, where it is also the first language of some whites.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The mingling of Roman Catholicism with African religious influences in the lives of Creoles has resulted in a body of folk religion traditions that includes home altars and the placement of crosses made of blessed palms or magnolias over the doors of houses, as well as the practice of voodoo. The Creoles are also known for their belief in a variety of healers and spiritualists who make use of both prayers and charms. African religious traditions are also perpetuated by special churches whose services include spirit possession and ecstatic behavior, as well as

prayers to ad hoc saints, including Martin Luther King, Jr., and Chief Blackhawk.

In the city of New Orleans, Creole Mardi Gras celebrations include special traditions handed down over the generations. The Zulu parade mocks white carnival festivities by displaying white stereotypes about blacks. Participants paint their faces black, wear grass skirts and wild, frizzy wigs, and carry spears. As they walk, they throw coconuts to the crowd. In contrast with the primarily middle- and upper-middle-class Zulu parade, the festivities of working-class Creoles feature a parade with a Native American theme whose participants dress up as Plains Indians and engage in call-and-response singing, drumming, and other traditional activities.

#### 5 RELIGION

The majority of Creoles are Catholics, making up the largest per capita black Catholic population in the United States. Besides various local sects, the Josephite Fathers, based in Baltimore, are especially active in the Creole churches of Louisiana. The Catholic religion has played a major role in preserving the social and cultural unity of the Creoles.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Creoles observe the national holidays of the United States and the holy days of the Christian calendar. For the Creoles, as for other residents of southern Louisiana, the major celebration of the year is Mardi Gras, the festive holiday observed just before Lent with costumed pageants, feasting, and other forms of merrymaking. All Saints' Day (*Toussaint*) on November 1 is observed as a special occasion for honoring the dead by cleaning and painting their tombs. Candlelight ceremonies may be held as well.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life events of the Creoles are celebrated within the Catholic Church. Perhaps the most distinctive rites of passage of Creole origin are the jazz funerals held in New Orleans, in which a jazz band follows the body to the cemetery, playing dirges on the way there and parade music on the way back.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Nicknames, often retained from childhood, are popular among the Creoles. Some, such as *Nene*, *Soso*, and *Guinee*, have African origins. Relationships with one's godfather and godmother (*parrain* and *marraine*) hold a special place in Creole culture, as they do in many of the Catholic countries of Europe. In New Orleans, Creole social life is closely associated with social clubs, benevolent societies, and church activities.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Creoles, especially in colonial America, were excluded from high office in church and state. Discrimination arose from crown policy. The monarchy, in an attempt to seduce and motivate new expeditions to America, decided to offer lucrative and honorific colonial posts to Spanish subjects while excluding Creoles from those positions. However, during the last decades the majority of countries with Creole populations have made important efforts to include the Creole minorities to their cultures.



*Gracie Beauvais, a Creole evacuated from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, sits in a dining hall in Bourne, Massachusetts. Beauvais expressed a desire to settle in Massachusetts instead of returning to New Orleans. (AP Images/Robert E. Klein)*

Today, like their Cajun neighbors, rural Creoles have access to modern medical care but also have a tradition of folk healing by practitioners called *traiteurs*, who are thought to have the power to both heal and harm using their familiarity with herbal medicine and other types of esoteric knowledge.

The traditional Creole cottage, both in New Orleans and in rural plantation areas, is constructed with half-timbering and mud-and-moss plastering called *bousillage*. Two rooms wide, with a central chimney and a continuous-pitch roof, it has porches, elevated construction, and louvered doors and windows that reveal a Caribbean influence. Other characteristic Creole dwellings include shotgun houses with their long corridor of single rooms, bungalows, and mobile homes. Creole houses are typically painted in bright primary and pastel colors.

In addition to modern forms of land transportation, the Creoles, like other residents of the Louisiana bayou, use various types of small boats to navigate the waters of the Mississippi delta.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Creoles usually marry in their teens and early twenties within the Catholic Church, although common-law marriages are also legal in Louisiana. Rural families may give a newly married couple some land to help them start out on their own. Especially in rural areas, families tend to be large, and members of the extended family usually live near each other. Elderly parents often join the households of their grown children, especially after they are widowed. Women are associated traditionally with domestic activities, and family life is closely tied to conservative values, including education, hard work, and participation in the religious life of the community. In contrast with this ethic is the fast street life of bars, dance halls, and social clubs often indulged in by groups of young men, who are still expected to settle down eventually and make a commitment to family life.

## 11 CLOTHING

For the most part, Creoles wear typical modern clothing similar to that of other Americans. However, for dances and other social occasions involving zydeco music, many Creoles favor Western-style cowboy clothing, including Stetson hats, vests, jeans, and cowboy boots. The single most popular item of dance hall clothing is the straw cowboy hat often worn by both men and women.

## 12 FOOD

Cajun and Creole cooking have influenced each other extensively over the years and have many similarities. However, the predominant influence in Cajun cooking is French, while Creole cooking also features elements of Spanish, African, Native American, Italian, and other traditions. In general, there is a stronger gourmet aspect to Creole cooking than to Cajun. Gumbo, a popular dish that is also a Cajun staple, is said to have been created by black slaves who worked for the early French and Spanish settlers in Louisiana. Its name is derived from the African word for okra. It is a stew that can be made from a wide variety of vegetables and fish, meat, or chicken. A common Creole version is gumbo z'herbes, which contains seven different kinds of greens.

Other characteristic Creole dishes include jambalaya, made from rice, sausages, seafood, and spices; étouffé, a stew made with crayfish (locally called crawfish) or shrimp and served over rice; and *grillade*, thickly sliced round steak seared in oil and then braised. Popular ingredients in Creole food include andouille, a spicy country sausage served in gumbo and jambalaya or with red beans; crawfish (shellfish that resemble tiny lobsters and can be eaten either fried or boiled); *filé* (pronounced fee-LAY), a powder made from ground sassafras leaves and used to flavor and thicken gumbos; and roux, a gravy base made with flour and oil that is used in gumbo and a number of other dishes. Beignets, puffy fried squares of sour-dough bread dusted with powdered sugar, are a popular breakfast staple, often accompanied by chicory coffee. Pralines, a brown-sugar candy containing pecans, are a favorite dessert and dessert ingredient, and they can be found in creations such as praline bread pudding, praline crepes, and a variety of desserts served with praline sauce.

One of the most famous dishes is the *muffuletta*. The *muffuletta* is a type of Sicilian bread, as well as a sandwich in New Orleans. The main ingredient is a loaf of bread split horizontally. The bread is covered with olive salad and filled with salami, mortadella, capicola (Italian ham), and provolone. Mayonnaise is never used in this sandwich.

## 13 EDUCATION

The free blacks who were the ancestors of many of today's Creoles placed a high value on education; those who could afford it even sent their children abroad to be educated in Europe. Creoles today take advantage of the educational opportunities available to all Americans, attending both public and Catholic institutions.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Creoles of New Orleans have played a central role in its legendary jazz tradition, from such figures as Sidney Bechet and Jelly Roll Morton to today's Marsalis family. The Cajun-

influenced Creole music of southwestern Louisiana is called zydeco, a word said to be derived from *les haricots* (the snapbeans) and traditionally associated with the phrase *les haricots sont pas salés* ("the snapbeans are not salty"), which refers to hard times when there is no salted meat available. This phrase is also the title of a famous zydeco tune. Zydeco has drawn on several different ethnic traditions, deriving its language and melodies from Cajun folk tunes; syncopated rhythms, improvisation, and blues patterns from African and Caribbean music; singing and drumming styles from the Native Americans; optional use of the guitar from the Spanish; and the accordion from the Germans. Its main instruments are the violin and accordion, with a rhythm section that includes the *frottoir*, a washboard of corrugated metal (strummed with beer bottle caps or other objects) that is either freestanding or made with a sort of collar so that it can be worn like a bib while it is played. Zydeco music, in great demand as dance music, serves as a unifying force for the Creole community, which gathers in crowded dance halls and church social halls for evenings of lively dancing to this music that is often played in strenuous four-hour sets. Zydeco also has a tradition of commercial recordings that dates back to the 1950s.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, Creoles in rural areas raised sugarcane, rice, and other crops while those in New Orleans and other urban areas worked as craftspeople, artisans, or merchants. Today, Creoles work in many different fields, including the professions, the service sector, construction, and the oil industry.

## 16 SPORTS

Cajuns enjoy the mainstream American sports, such as softball and volleyball, as well as outdoor activities, including swimming, fishing, and horseback riding.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Focal points of Creole social life include Mardi Gras crews (groups that plan organized participation in the annual Mardi Gras festivities), knights of Peter Klaver (a black Catholic men's society), and social clubs. Dancing to zydeco music is a popular pastime, practiced in church social halls and in roadside dance halls that hold hundreds of people. Dance enthusiasts also enjoy "trail rides," social outings involving groups of people (both men and women) who ride horses to a series of dance events, stopping to dance and visit at every stop along the way, with beer and home-cooked food awaiting them at the last stop. Sometimes musicians or a disc jockey playing recorded music even ride alongside them on a flatbed truck.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Creole artisans are known for their carpentry and wrought-iron work.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Like other African Americans, the Creoles have faced racial discrimination, and many have experienced poverty. For a time, the French culture of the Creoles, like that of the Cajuns, was threatened by laws that banned French from classrooms and even from the schoolyard altogether. Today, Creoles display pride in their unique culture and try to ensure its preser-

vation through events and organizations, such as the Louisiana Zydeco Festival and Creole Inc., a group devoted to promoting recognition of the Creole heritage and lifestyle.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditionally, Creole men were the heads of their household, while women dedicated their lives to home and family. In addition, Creoles also felt it a duty to take widowed cousins and orphaned children into their families. Unmarried female relatives lived in many households and provided a much-needed extra pair of hands in running the household and rearing the children. Creoles today are still close-knit and tend to marry within the group. However, many are also moving into the greater community and losing their Creole ways.

In the old days, Creoles married within their own class. The young man faced the scrutiny of old aunts and cousins, who were the guardians and authorities of old family trees. The suitor had to ask a woman's father for his daughter's hand. However, most young Creoles were forced to abide by their parents' choices for their spouse, based upon monetary and landed wealth, status, and familial connections. The gift of a ring allowed them to be formally engaged. All meetings of young people were strictly chaperoned, even after the engagement.

Currently, the advances women have made in Louisiana are not experienced equally. Persistent inequalities mean that many Creole women of color experience disparities in their economic, political, social, and health status. Even though 55.5% of Creole women of color are in the labor force, they earn 30% less than white women and 52% less than white men in Louisiana at a full-time, year-round job. In addition, white women surpass Creole women by 13 percentage points in managerial and professional occupations.

Regarding health status, the principal problems of Creole women are infant mortality and AIDS. While the infant mortality rate among Creole women in Louisiana doubles that of white women, the average annual incidence rate of AIDS among Creole women is nine times higher than that of white women.

In the political realm, the participation of women in Louisiana is almost nonexistent. While only one white woman was elected to the U.S. Congress in 2004, there has never been a Creole woman of color in any elected office.

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—revised by C. Vergara



## CUBAN AMERICANS

For more information on Cuban history and culture, see **Vol. 2: Cubans**.

### OVERVIEW

Prior to 1958, only about 40,000 Cubans had immigrated to the United States. Most of them lived in south Florida. These early Cuban Americans were responsible for the development of the U.S. cigar industry. In 1958 members of the Fulgencia Batista government of Cuba became aware that the government was about to fall to Fidel Castro's forces, and some 3,000 fled to the United States. When Castro did in fact take over the government in 1959, the first major wave of Cuban immigration to the United States began. All told, somewhere between 215,000 and 280,000 Cubans immigrated to the United States between 1958 and 1962. Most were white, middle-aged, well educated, and fairly wealthy. When Castro announced that his government would be run on Marxist-Leninist principles and began nationalizing Cuban farming and industry, wealthy landowners and business people escaped to America.

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 severely curtailed Cuban immigration to the United States for the next three years. About 74,000 Cubans managed to enter the United States through clandestine means from 1962–1965, but the next major wave of immigration did not begin until Castro opened Cuban borders in late 1965. Castro then allowed the United States to organize so-called "Freedom Flights" to airlift Cubans who wished to immigrate to the United States. Two flights per day from Cuba to Miami, Florida, from late 1965 to April 1973 brought a total of up to 340,000 or more Cubans to America. The majority continued to be white, well-educated people from the middle class, but a number of working class Cubans also joined the exodus.

Castro closed Cuba's borders again in May 1973, and no Cubans were allowed to emigrate for the next seven years. In May 1980, however, Castro decided to permit Cubans to be boat-lifted to the United States from the Cuban port of Mariel. These "Marielitos," as they came to be called, were quite different from previous waves of Cuban immigrants. As opposed to the predominantly white, middle and upper class, well-educated family immigration of the past, 85% of the Marielitos were men, 65.6% were single, 40% were black, and 86.2% were blue-collar workers.

At the time it was reported that Castro had emptied Cuba's prisons and mental institutions and unloaded all the "undesirables" onto the United States. Estimates are that 16% of the Marielitos were ex-convicts, 4% of which were hard-core criminals. United States police arrested active criminals and sent them to U.S. prisons. A number ended up in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, where they staged a rebellion in which they took more than 100 hostages in 1987 when told they were to be sent back to Cuba. Cuban American Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Agustin Román, who had been expelled from Cuba in 1961, convinced the prisoners to release the hostages, and the rebellion was quieted.

The most recent wave of Cuban immigration began in the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Soviet aid to Cuba was cut off. The Cuban economy and government began to fal-

ter, and many Cubans decided to flee the potential disaster and look for better opportunities in the United States. Even Fidel Castro's daughter immigrated to America in December 1993. Huge numbers of Cuban refugees crossed the waters between Cuba and Florida on homemade rafts, called *balsas*, made of large inner tubes. These newest immigrants are referred to as *balseros*, after their common mode of transportation. The sudden influx of Cuban immigrants has created stress among Cuban and non-Cuban Americans alike in southern Florida, and the *balseros* continue to come. As the leadership of Cuba passed from Fidel Castro to his brother Rael in 2008, residents of Florida prepare for another possible influx of immigrants from Cuba if borders are opened. If Cuba moves toward democracy, many current Cuban Americans may choose to return to Cuba.

By far the largest Cuban American community is in the Miami, Florida, area. Early Cuban immigrants believed their stay would be temporary, assuming that Castro's regime would not last. Therefore, they chose to live as near to Cuba as possible to facilitate their return. Miami, Florida, is only about 150 miles from Cuba. When Castro maintained his rule and more Cubans fled to the United States, they naturally settled among their compatriots, thereby creating a vibrant Cuban American community in Miami. Also attractive to Cuban immigrants were the U.S. government assistance programs available in the Miami area. The first program was established in 1959.

Cuban Americans are the third-largest Hispanic American group, after Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. The total Cuban American population in 2000, according to the U.S. Census, was 1,241,685. By 2004, the estimated population of Cuban Americans had risen to 1,437,828. Two-thirds of all Cuban Americans live in Florida, with over half the total Cuban American population in the Miami area. One section of Miami that has a large concentration of Cuban Americans has come to be called "Little Havana." The second-largest Cuban American community is in Union City, New Jersey, with over 10,000 Cuban Americans, and more than 77,000 in the whole state. The other largest Cuban American populations in 2000 were in California (72,286) and New York (62,590).

Cuban Americans have been slow to be assimilated into mainstream American culture for two reasons: throughout Cuban immigration to the United States, many immigrants have believed their stay in America was only temporary and that they would soon be returning to Cuba; and the Cuban American community, especially in Miami, Florida, is so strong and tightly knit that the majority of Cuban Americans never have to interact with non-Cuban Americans. Most first-generation Cuban Americans continue to speak Spanish at home and among friends. Many Cuban Americans who work in Cuban American-owned businesses also speak Spanish in the workplace. This means that some Cuban Americans never have to speak English at all.

Due to the large concentration of Spanish-speakers in the Miami, Florida, area, the city has become de facto bilingual, with all signs and public information printed in both English and Spanish. In 1973, Dade County (where Miami is located) commissioners passed an ordinance declaring the county officially bilingual. Only seven years later, however, in 1980, an anti-Cuban American backlash prompted a referendum (that passed easily) reversing the 1973 ordinance and declaring English as the only official language of Dade County. The "anti-



bilingual referendum” spurred an English Only movement in other regions of the United States with large Spanish-speaking populations. Some proponents of English Only want English to be declared the official language of the United States on a national level. Despite the 1980 English Only referendum, however, the use of Spanish has continued to grow in Dade County and elsewhere.

The great majority of Cuban Americans are Catholic. Since Fidel Castro outlawed the practice of religion in Cuba in 1961, many Cubans have become nonpracticing Catholics. Immigrants to the United States, however, found the U.S. Catholic Church very supportive in their relocation efforts, and many Cuban Americans have become active churchgoers once again. There are also a number of Protestant Cuban Americans, as well as thousands of Cuban American Jews. When Fidel Castro took power, 90% of the 15,000 Cuban Jews fled the country, mostly to the United States. Cuban American Jews formed the Cuban Hebrew Circle in 1961 as a means of social, cultural, and religious support. The Afro-Cuban religion Santería also claims some adherents among Cuban Americans.

Baptism and First Communion are especially important rites of passage for Catholic Cuban Americans, as are the holidays of *La Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve) on December 24; *El Día de los Tres Reyes Magos* (Three Kings’ Day, or Epiphany) on January 6; and *La Semana Santa* (Holy Week), Palm Sunday, and Good Friday before Easter. A parade is held each year in Miami on Three Kings’ Day. Other important Cuban American festivals include the Feast of Our Lady of Charity, the pa-

tron saint of Cuba, on September 8; the Feast of Santa Barbara on December 4; and All Saints’ Day on November 1.

Cuban Americans are much better off economically than other Hispanic Americans. This is due partly to the fact that most of the earlier Cuban immigrants were from the middle and upper classes in Cuba and had the education, skills, and financial resources to be successful in the industrialized United States. Also, the average age of Cuban Americans is significantly older than that of other Hispanic American groups, giving them added wisdom and experience to apply to life in America. Cuban Americans also have the highest level of education among Hispanic Americans: 63% are high school graduates, and over 20% have graduated from college.

Cuban Americans are still not as well off as the average American citizen, however. In 2004 the median income for a Cuban American family was \$38,256, as compared to an average of \$44,684 for the total U.S. population; and 15% of Cuban Americans lived below the poverty line, as compared to 13% of the total U.S. population. Educationally, Cuban Americans also lag behind the total U.S. population. Of those over the age of 25 in 2004, 25% of Cuban Americans had less than a high school education, as compared to only 16% of the total U.S. population. However, by the time higher levels of education are reached, the percentage gaps begin to close up, with 25% of Cuban Americans having at least a Bachelor of Arts degree or higher, compared to 27% of the total U.S. population. Cuban Americans also have the highest percentage (over 30%) among all Hispanic Americans of workers in managerial and



*Cuban Americans wave the Cuban flag in the Little Havana area of Miami, Florida in August 2006. The celebration was in response to news that Fidel Castro of Cuba was handing over power to his younger brother Raul Castro while Fidel was undergoing medical treatment. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)*

professional occupations, further evidence of their increasing success in education.

Although Cuban Americans have only been in the United States in large numbers for a few decades, they have made a significant impact on mainstream American culture. As early as the 1930s, Cuban dances such as the rumba, mambo, and chachachá were becoming very popular among the general U.S. population, as were conga dance lines. Cuban music, which is a blend of Spanish, African, and Creole rhythms, is a central element of Cuban American gatherings. In Miami, Latin salsa music combined with American pop music to produce a unique form of music called Miami Sound. The foremost promoter of Miami Sound is Cuban American Gloria Estefan, with her band, the Miami Sound Machine. Estefan also helped launch the career of Afro-Cuban American singer Jon Secada.

Two other Cuban American musicians and bandleaders who became well-known and well-loved in America were Xavier Cugat and Desi Arnaz. Desi Arnaz went on to become an actor on the *I Love Lucy* show with his wife, Lucille Ball. Their children Desi Arnaz, Jr. and Lucie Arnaz also became entertainers. Other successful Cuban American actors and entertainers are Andy Garcia, Cameron Diaz, Elizabeth Pena, and Daisy Fuentes. Cuban Americans in the arts include ballet dancer Fernando Bujones and writers Cristina Garcia and Os-

car Hijuelos. In 1990, Hijuelos became the first Hispanic writer to win the Pulitzer Prize.

Cuban Americans have begun to make their mark in politics and public office, particularly in the state of Florida. Xavier Suarez was elected mayor of Miami in 1985. He was the first Cuban American to fill that post. Earlier, in 1979, Margarita Esquiroz became the first Hispanic woman to be appointed a judge in Florida. Cuban Americans finally broke through to the federal level in 1989 when Ileana Ros-Lehtinen was elected to U.S. Congress from Florida. Four years later, in 1993, Lincoln Diaz-Balart became the second Cuban American to be elected to U.S. Congress. In 2004 Melquiades Rafael Martinez became the first Cuban American to be elected to the U.S. Senate. The Cuban American vote is always sought after and was a determining factor in the 2000 U.S. presidential election where the decision came down to the state of Florida's delegates. Cuban Americans, who traditionally vote Republican in support of hard-liners opposed to the Castro regime, helped George W. Bush claim victory over Democrat Al Gore.

Sports have long been an avenue of success for Cuban Americans. Swimmer Pablo Morales won a gold medal at the 1992 Summer Olympics. Alberto Salazar won both the New York and Boston Marathons in 1982 and was selected for two Olympic marathon teams. The sport with the most representation by Cuban Americans by far, however, is baseball. Among

the many Cuban American major league stars are René Arocha, José Canseco, Mike Cuellar, Mart'n Dihigo, Miguel Angel Gonzales, Orestes Minnie Mi-oso, Tony Oliva, Rafael Palmeiro, Tony Perez and his son Eduardo, José Tartabull and his son Danny, and Luis Tiant. Preston Gomez was the first Hispanic manager in the major leagues.

Because Cuban Americans who came during the first two waves of immigration were mostly white, middle, and upper class professionals, they had fewer difficulties adapting to life in the United States than did other Hispanic Americans. Later Cuban immigrants (the Marielitos and balseros), the majority of whom are black, lower class, blue-collar or unskilled workers, have met with discrimination and rejection from both mainstream Americans and the established Cuban American community.

Largely, the influx of Marielitos and balseros has set off racist paranoia among white, non-Hispanic Americans and has led to the English Only movement and other forms of prejudice against all Cuban and other Hispanic Americans. Established Cuban Americans indulge in their own racism and classism, shutting out the new Cuban immigrants and forcing them to become marginalized. Tensions in the Cuban American community itself, as well as tensions between Cuban and non-Cuban Americans, continue to increase as more and more refugees flock to the United States from Cuba.

Miami, Florida, is a particular hotbed, as most Cuban immigrants still choose to settle there. In November 1999, a young boy named Elián Gonzalez was rescued at sea after his boat overturned on the way from Cuba to the United States. Elián's mother and stepfather both drowned in the accident. With his father's permission, Elián was temporarily placed in the care of his great-uncle in Miami, Florida, until he could be returned to Cuba. The situation quickly became politicized on both Cuban and American fronts, leading to a prolonged dispute over Elián's future. Eventually, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno ordered the Immigration and Naturalization Service to seize Elián and hold him in federal custody until arrangements could be made for his safe return to his father in Cuba. Both Cuban and non-Cuban Americans were unhappy with the way events played out, and the whole debacle caused a stain on relations that took quite some time to fade.

Cuban culture has a rather complicated perspective on male sexuality, promoting a thoroughly "macho" image of masculinity dependent on sexual prowess with women as well as fathering children. However, there is also an outlet for homosexual activity between men that is regarded as acceptable as long as the man is also married with a woman and takes the "aggressor" role in the homosexual encounter. Men who take the more passive role are considered inferior and referred to as *mariposas*, or "butterflies."

Cuban American men in the Miami, Florida, area find that this macho role fits quite well with the ultramasculine stereotype that is elevated in the Miami gay culture. However, it limits them to playing the aggressive role, making it difficult to realize their full identity. Cuban American homosexuals also find it very difficult to come out to their families because such a high value is placed on marriage and child-bearing in traditional Cuban culture. But family is also too important for Cuban Americans to abandon in order to pursue their homosexual identity freely. So many Cuban American gays and

lesbians live a divided life, remaining discreet about their sexuality when with their families.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# CUBANS

**LOCATION:** Cuba

**POPULATION:** 11.4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish

**RELIGION:** Forbidden by Communism, but Roman Catholicism and Santería are practiced clandestinely

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Cuba was discovered and claimed for Spain by Columbus during his first voyage to the New World in 1492. The island's indigenous population of Arawaks, who had displaced the Ciboneys from most of the island, staged their last significant uprising against the Spanish in the mid-1500s. In the late 1700s, African slaves were brought to Cuba as were Asian indentured laborers in the mid 1800s. Despite several revolutionary movements and a brief period of occupation by the English, Cuba remained a Spanish colony through the late 1800s. Most notable among the rebellions was the Ten Years War that began in 1868. The rebels, known as Mambises, fought mostly with machetes for lack of guns. On 24 February 1895, Jose Martí, Cuba's patriarch, led the War of Independence. Key military figures in the revolution included Antonio Maceo (known as the "Bronze Titan"), Maximo Gomez, and Calixto Garcia. In 1898, the United States intervened in the Cuban war and Spain relinquished Cuba's sovereignty to the United States under the Treaty of Paris. On 20 May 1902 the United States ended its military occupation of Cuba, formally inaugurating the Cuban republic. The United States and Cuba maintained close ties, with the Cubans leasing Guantanamo Bay to the Americans under the Platt Amendment.

Governments in Cuba during the early and mid-1900s were often plagued with corruption and were short lived, for the most part, with the United States stepping in from time to time. Despite an unsettled political climate, Cuba's natural beauty made it a haven for people from all over the world, and a popular vacation spot for Americans. In the 1940s and 1950s, vice and corruption were widespread in Havana, with the government establishing alliances with members of organized crime from the United States.

On 26 July 1953, Fidel Castro began his revolutionary movement with an attack on the army barracks at Moncada. In 1959, Castro's guerrilla movement successfully overthrew the existing government of Fulgencio Batista. Batista supporters were jailed and executed. Castro passed an agrarian reform act (which limited private land ownership), confiscated all foreign-owned investments, and established what would be a long-standing relationship with the Soviet Union. While the peasant class made some quick gains, middle and upper class citizens were stripped of most of their possessions. Over the next few years, approximately 1 million Cubans left home, most fleeing to the United States.

In January of 1961, the United States established an economic blockade of Cuba, halting the import of American goods to the island, and persuading a number of nations also to cease trade with Castro. In April, CIA-trained Cuban exiles staged the Bay of Pigs invasion, a failed attempt to topple the Castro regime. Later that year, Castro proclaimed Cuba a socialist country and declared, "I am a Marxist-Leninist and shall be

until the day I die." The following year, the Cuban Missile Crisis (when the United States discovered Soviet missiles in Cuba) was, perhaps, the most tense period of the Cold War. The crisis ended when the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles and, in exchange, the United States promised never to invade Cuba.

In the 1970s, Cuba made some social and economic strides. Schools and low-rent housing units were built, countryside roads were paved, and health care improved for many. At the same time, however, the government became more controlling and oppressive. By the end of the 1970s, the economy began to slip and, aggravated by political oppression, life on the island became intolerable for many. Since then, numerous Cubans have sought to exile themselves from the island, most notably during the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 when more than 125,000 Cubans made their way to Florida.

Today, Cuba remains the only communist government in the Western hemisphere. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, an already struggling Cuban economy took a turn for the worse. Facing civil unrest in the wake of an all-but-collapsed economy, the Cuban government has been forced to dabble in capitalism and reverse its position on tourism. Farmers' markets were legalized in 1994 and Fidel Castro opened the doors to foreign investors. Nonetheless, political and economic unrest continued and since 1994 tens of thousands have left Cuba, risking their lives in makeshift rafts in an effort to flee. In July 2006 Fidel Castro delegated his duties as president to his younger brother and first vice-president, Raúl Castro. In February 2008 Fidel Castro announced he was stepping down as president in favor of his brother Raúl. It was the end of an era. Raúl Castro announced some restrictions limiting Cubans' daily lives would be removed, including the lifting of a ban on the purchase of computers, DVD players, microwaves, and cell phones.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

A country of approximately 11.4 million people, Cuba is the largest island in the Antilles archipelago in the Caribbean Sea. It is located approximately 145 km (90 mi) south of Florida and is situated at the key approaches to the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. Columbus described Cuba as "The most lovely that eyes have seen." The island's topography is very diverse. Approximately 35% of the total land mass is made up of three extensive mountain systems: the Sierra Maestra (where Castro formulated his guerrilla-style revolution), the Guamuhaya, and the Guaniguanico. Two extensive plains account for 65% of the entire island surface and house almost 95% of the total population. There are nearly 200 rivers, most of which are short, narrow, and shallow. The combination of trade winds, the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, and sea breezes give Cuba a moderate and stable climate. Annual average temperature varies only by about 6°C (10°F); the average winter low is 21°C (70°F) and the average summer high is 27°C (81°F). The island has extensive arable land, accounting for more than half of the island. Other areas are used for cultivating sugar (Cuba's key export), rice, coffee, cocoa, and plantains. Nickel is the principal mineral on the island, and Cuba is the fifth largest producer of nickel in the world. (Cuba has the second largest reserves of nickel in the world.) Cuba is also a major exporter of cobalt.

Cuba is home to a number of rare birds and animals, many found nowhere else. The island's Bee hummingbird is the world's smallest bird, measuring just 5 cm (2 in).

Cuba is not lacking in beaches, with more than 100 in total. The most famous is Varadero, considered one of the finest in the world. The island, like many of its neighbors in the Caribbean, is subject to hurricanes. More than 150 such storms have been recorded since the days of Columbus. Cuba has also experienced a number of earthquakes (about 200 since the 16th century), mostly along the southeast coast.

In the late 1800s, Cuba was organized into 6 provinces: Pinar del Rio, Havana, Matanzas, Santa Clara, Puerto Principe (later known as Camaguey), and Santiago de Cuba. In 1976 the island was reorganized into 14 provinces: Pinar del Rio, Havana, the city of Havana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus, Ciego de Avila, Camaguey, Las Tunas, Holguin, Granma, Santiago, and Guantanamo.

Cuba's population consists mostly of whites, blacks and mulattos (a mix of white and black). Additionally, there is a small Asian population on the island. Very few Cubans can trace their ancestry to the indigenous populations.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Cubans speak Spanish. Their names are composed of three parts: first (given) name, father's surname, and mother's maiden name; for example, Jose Garcia Fernandez.

### 4 FOLKLORE

One of the better-known pieces of Cuban folklore is *El Bizarro*, the story of a man who outsmarts the devil. However, most of Cuba's heroes come not from folklore but from real life. Jose Marti is Cuba's undisputed national hero. Marti was the mastermind behind the War of Independence and is noted for his inspiring prose and poetry. The verses of his most famous poem, "The White Rose," have been put to music in what is Cuba's most moving song, "La Guantanamera."

Marti, who was born in 1853, lived in exile in New York City for a period of about 15 years beginning in 1881. Originally enamored with the United States and its freedoms, Marti soon became disenchanted with the United States and its threat of annexation of Latin America. Marti wrote of the United States, "I have lived within the monster and I know its entrails." Marti, being of frail physique, was killed in his first day of battle. For exiles and island-dwellers alike, Marti embodies all that it means to be Cuban.

Fidel Castro is without question a modern-day icon of legendary proportions. He stands for all that is the Revolution, and for this he is revered by some and despised by others. However, none can dispute Castro's ability for delivering long and dramatic speeches. Perhaps the most famous of his discourses was a five-hour marathon at his trial following the Moncada attack where he uttered the famous line, "Condemn me if you will." The Castro era came to an end in 2008 when Fidel stepped down as president, but it will take a very long time—if ever—for his legendary stature and reputation to fade.

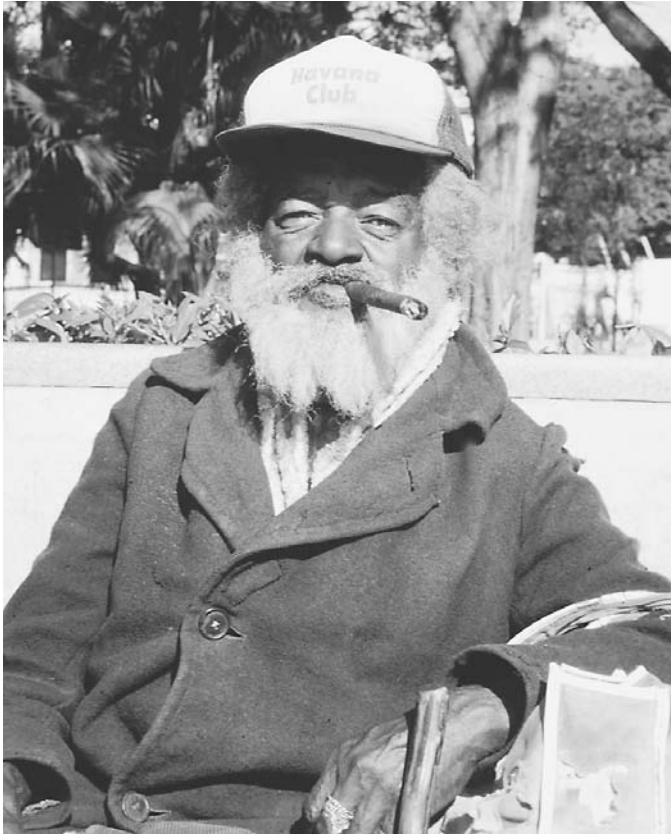
Ernesto "Che" Guevara's image, on murals, billboards, and the like, can be found throughout Cuba. Guevara, a key figure in Castro's revolution, has been elevated to a stature usually reserved in other cultures for martyrs and saints. Cuban schoolchildren begin their day by reciting the patriotic slogan, "Pioneers of communism, we shall be like Che." Guevara, a



medical doctor from Argentina, joined Castro and a band of other revolutionaries on board a used yacht named *Granma* by its original owner, after his grandmother (*Granma* later became the name of one of the 14 provinces and of the state-run newspaper). The yacht, which left from Mexico, made its way to Cuba, only to be captured by Batista. Guevara, Castro, and Castro's younger brother, Raúl, headed for the hills, the Sierra Maestra, and from there staged the revolution that culminated with the overthrow of a fleeing Batista on 1 January 1959. After serving as president of the National Bank of Cuba, "Che" resigned his post in 1965 and went to Bolivia to join the revolutionary movement in that country. He was killed by the Bolivian army in 1967. Castro declared a three-day period of national mourning, and to this day the government sponsors campaigns with themes of "Let's Be Like Che."

### 5 RELIGION

As a communist country, religious affiliation is deemed anti-revolutionary in Cuba. Nonetheless, many Cubans maintain a Catholic tradition, although they tend to do so covertly for fear of persecution. Much more openly practiced, Santeria is an African-based religion introduced into Cuba by the slaves. Worshipers would disguise their gods in the images of the Christian saints so as not to be accused of heresy. Our Lady of Charity, for instance, is Ochun. The rough equivalent of a priest or spiritualist in Santeria is known as a *babalao*. When someone is initiated into Santeria, they dress all in white for one year. A small group of Jews live in Cuba and celebrate holi-



In Cuba, handmade cigars are as much a craft as they are an export item. (Cory Langley)

days such as Passover to the best of their ability, given the economic restrictions.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major holidays in Cuba mark significant points in the revolution (January 1 and July 26). May Day (a communist holiday worldwide) is celebrated, as is October 10, marking the declaration of war against Spain in 1868. Catholics honor Three Kings Day on January 6, Epiphany.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Young girls in Cuba sometimes celebrate *los quince* (literally, “the 15”), the Latin American version of a sweet 16 party, but one year earlier. At *los quince*, often celebrated with great pageantry not unlike a wedding, the young lady will usually wear an extravagant gown made especially for the occasion.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Cubans are known for their warmth, friendliness, sense of humor, wit, and resilience. Cubans greet each other with a handshake and by saying *hola* (“hello”). Like other Latins, Cubans have very expressive body language—wrinkling one’s nose, for instance, means “What?” Commiserating in difficult times is as much a pastime as are sports or television. Traditionally, when young girls dated, they brought along a *chaperona* (chaperone); this has recently gone out of fashion.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba underwent what it called the “Special Period”—a mandatory belt-tightening way of life. Under the Special Period, energy consumption was drastically reduced, oxen were put to work in the fields, people got around on bicycles, and food rations were slashed to a minimum survival level. Once recognized as one of the best in the Third World, the health care system in Cuba suffered. Black marketeers, known as *macetas*, illegally buy and sell goods such as food, clothes, liquor, medicine, cigarettes, and gas. *Paladares* are illegal private restaurants. However, with inauguration of Raúl Castro as president, restrictions on some household and consumer items were lifted, including those on cell phones, microwave ovens, televisions, DVD players, and computers. It remains to be seen to what extent life for Cubans will become more liberal after the passing of the Castro era.

In ironic contrast to the living conditions of the locals, tourists in Cuba enjoy the best of accommodations, food, and drink. For the tourist, nothing is lacking.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Both tradition and economic necessity dictate the structure of the extended family in Cuba. More often than not, one or more of the grandparents live with a married couple and their children. For the same reasons, children tend to live at home until married.

## 11 CLOTHING

The *guayabera*, an embroidered man’s shirt, is considered a traditional, elegant article of clothing and is still worn today in both formal and informal settings. For everyday purposes, however, people tend to wear casual attire. As in so many parts of the world, blue jeans from the United States are a hot commodity.

## 12 FOOD

Like so many other aspects of Cuban culture, traditional Cuban cuisine is rich in both Spanish and African influences. Pork, the meat of choice in a traditional meal, is almost always accompanied by rice and beans. When the white rice and the black beans are cooked together, they are called *arroz con gri* (literally, “rice with gray”). White rice and kidney beans make *moros y cristianos* (“Moors and Christians”). Plantains, which when green are fried up as *tostones* or *mariquitas* (also used as a derogatory term for gays), and when ripe as *maduros*, round out the meal. *Yuca* (cassava), *malanga* (taro), and *boniato* (sweet potato) are also common elements of a traditional meal. *La raspita*, the scrapings from the bottom of a pot of rice, would never make its way onto the plate during an elegant meal but is often enjoyed by the cook in the privacy of the kitchen or is shared in a small informal gathering. Typical fruits include avocados, mangoes, guavas, mamees, and papayas. Traditional beverages include *guarapo* (sugarcane juice) and rum.

Bleak economic conditions have made the traditional meal a thing of the past. The ration under the Special Period of the 1990s consisted of a piece of bread per person per day, three eggs per week, and a portion of fish or chicken per month. A family of four got one small bottle of cooking oil four times a year, and milk was available only for children under the age



*Tourism jobs are highly sought after because of their access to dollars and foreign goods. Here a street vendor prepares to sell flowers to tourists visiting Havana. (Cory Langley)*

of eight. These items were often hard to come by, as were staples such as rice and beans. Many Cubans hadn't had beef or pork in years. A piece of beef on the black market could cost as much as a month's wages. Once the Special Period ended, Cubans were able to afford and obtain food much easier.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In 1961 the government initiated a campaign to wipe out illiteracy. Education is both free and mandatory, and today Cuba has one of the highest literacy rates in all of Latin America (99.8%). Shortages have dictated that textbooks be shared and workbooks be erased and passed along to the next class.

Higher education is also free, but admission is affected by one's political affiliations. Scientific and technical areas are emphasized. The University of Havana, founded in 1728, is the leading institution of higher education on the island.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music is, perhaps, the single most important aspect of Cuba's popular culture. Cuban music is a combination of Spanish and African influences. Typical styles of music include charanga, son, rumba, mambo, cha-cha-cha, and danzon. From a blend of these rhythms evolved "Salsa" (literally, "sauce"). Celia Cruz (d.2003), who was exiled in the United States, was known throughout the world as the Queen of Salsa. Cruz began her career in Havana in the late 1940s with the group Sonora

Matanzera. Other world-renowned Cuban artists include Beny More, Arsenio Rodriguez, and Israel "Cachao" Lopez. Notable postrevolutionary performers include the groups Los Van Van, Irakere, NG, Dan Den, and Yumuri Y Sus Hermanos. In addition to traditional music, teenagers are also known to enjoy rock and roll—of both the United States and homegrown varieties. In 1997 a group of legendary Cuban musicians, some as old as their nineties, were brought together by American guitarist Ry Cooder to record a CD. They called themselves the "Buena Vista Social Club." In 1999 a documentary film directed by German filmmaker Wim Wenders was made of the group's songs being recorded in Havana. There was also footage from concerts in Amsterdam and New York City's Carnegie Hall. In addition, many of the individual musicians talked about their lives in Cuba and about how they got started in music. Although most of the original members of the band had died by 2008, the group, with younger musicians, was still touring the world.

In Cuba, ballet is to the fine arts as baseball is to sports—it reigns supreme. The Cuban National Ballet Company has performed the world over. Its founder, leader, and star, Alicia Alonso, is considered one of the best dancers of all times. Cuba's film industry saw a period of growth under government control and sponsorship in the early days of the Revolution. One film, produced in the 1990s, *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry & Chocolate) won several international awards and was nominated for an academy award. The film tells of a young,



straight militant who (although reluctant at first) befriends a gay intellectual. The Havana Film Festival, held each December, promotes Latin American filmmakers and films with Latin American themes.

Several Cuban writers and poets, including Jose Marti and Alejo Carpentier, have left their mark upon Latin American literature. Herberto Padilla (d.2000) wrote an award-winning collection of poems, *Out of the Game*, about the myths of revolutionary society. While receiving critical acclaim worldwide, Padilla's work was banned in Cuba and Padilla was arrested.

Painters and sculptors prior to the Revolution demonstrated European influences, while postrevolutionary artists like Manuel Mendive and others have incorporated Afro-Cuban mythology and folklore into their work. Other artists have produced abstract works, and many have produced works with themes of protest. Under Castro's policy set forth in 1962, which states, "Within the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing," artists who disagreed with the Revolution and its ideals are silenced. The more outspoken ones were sentenced to labor camps. It remains to be seen to what extent artistic expression will be allowed in the new post-Castro era.

### 15 WORK

The labor force in Cuba is divided almost evenly among services, agriculture, trade, manufacturing and mining, and utilities. Tourism jobs are highly sought after because of their access to dollars and foreign goods. Many teachers, doctors, and engineers have left their professions to work in more lucrative jobs as waiters or bellhops.

### 16 SPORTS

Sports are a very important part of Cuban life and identity. "Sports is a right of the people," reads a banner inside the arena in the athletic complex in Havana. Castro, himself an athlete and enthusiast, was once offered a contract to pitch on a baseball team in the United States. Outstanding young Cuban athletes at the age of eight or nine are selected to attend an EIDE, a boarding school where they take academic courses and play different sports. The next step, at age 15 for those who excel, is to attend an ESPA, a school for athletic improvement and perfection. The top 1,000 athletes end up at a CEAR, a center for high-yield training.

Cuba has been referred to as the "best little sports machine in the world," consistently turning out champion Olympic athletes. In 1992, Cuba won more Olympic medals per capita than any other country. Cubans excel in baseball, boxing, track and field, and volleyball. Unlike the millionaire athletes of the United States, top athletes in Cuba, albeit heroes of society, make very little money.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

State-run television operates anywhere from 6 to 12 hours a day, with mostly sports programming and some recent American movies. Other programming includes *novelas* (short-run soap operas) from Latin America. However, one will rarely find a young Cuban just sitting at home watching TV. Young Cubans, when they are not partaking in sports, will be involved with one or another of many government programs. The Young Communists Union, for instance, operates numerous computer instruction centers. Older Cubans can be found playing dominoes or chess, or sitting at Copelia, the ice cream

parlor featured in the film *Fresa y Chocolate*, or simply strolling El Malecon, the boulevard that runs along the waterfront in Havana.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Handmade cigars are as much a craft as they are an export item. Considered the finest in the world, more than 150 million are produced each year. An experienced worker can make a cigar from start to finish in just two minutes. Cuban cigar sales stood at more than \$400 million in 2007. Cuban cigars comprise 80% of the world cigar market—not counting the United States, which has had a trade embargo banning Cuban products since 1962. Americans obtain their Cuban cigars illegally.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Cuba is often cited as a violator of human rights. Government control is strong. Members of neighborhood watch groups, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, watch their neighbors and report on all nonconformist behavior to the government. In addition, special brigades of paramilitary agents have been formed to crack down on protesters.

Tourism has brought about what is being called "tourism apartheid" where the locals are not allowed into the resorts unless they are accompanied by foreigners. Additionally, prostitution is on the rise.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Machismo is alive and well in Cuba. While women are expected to work outside the home, they are also expected to do the cooking, cleaning, and the like.

Gays and lesbians are openly discriminated against. They are banned from the Communist Party, and AIDS victims are quarantined.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# CUNAS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Cuna-Cueva, Kuna

**LOCATION:** San Blas Islands (or Mulatas Archipelago), along the Gulf of Darien from Panama to the Colombian border

**LANGUAGE:** Cuna (Chibchan group of languages)

**RELIGION:** Indigenous spirit-based beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

What is now Panama was inhabited by the Cuna Indians when the Spanish began exploring the Panamanian coastline early in the 16th century. It is believed that the Amerindian peoples, including the Cuna Indians, or Cunas, are descended from Central Asians who migrated across the Bering Straits some 20,000 years ago and gradually moved southwards.

The first Spanish explorer was Rodrigo de Bastidas in 1501, followed by Christopher Columbus on his fourth voyage to America in 1502, and Diego de Nicuesa in 1509. When the expedition led by Vasco Nunez de Balboa in 1511 landed in Panama, the Cuna Indians lived on the main land. None of them was successful in establishing a colony, partly because of the hostility of the Amerindians who lived there. The Cunas were fierce warriors and fought bravely against the conquistador. Finally, Mart'n Fernández de Enciso succeeded in founding the settlement of Santa Mar'a along the western shores of the Gulf of Darién.

During the 18th century, European diseases, mainly malaria, spread among the aborigine people, decimating the Cunas. In a desperate attempt to fight malaria, the remaining population migrated to San Blas. This region is characterized by the lack of freshwater, which is an unfavorable condition for the existence of malaria because this illness is mostly transmitted from mosquitoes to humans where stagnant waters are available. Besides, the archipelago offered natural defenses against the white population.

Cunas still inhabit the 45 largest islands of the San Blas Archipelago and a group of 300 islets located on the Caribbean coast of Panama and Colombia and organize their social structure in three politically autonomous *comarcas* or reservations in Panama. Few Cuna villages exist in Colombia. The region as a whole is governed by the Kuna General Congress.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Cuna Indians inhabit 30 or 40 islands in an archipelago of some 300 islands strung along the Gulf of Darien from Panama to the Colombian border. Some Cunas also live on Colombia's Pacific coast near the Panamanian border. The dwellers of the archipelago, sometimes referred to as the San Blas Islands or the Mulatas Archipelago, also farm along the shores of the Panamanian coastline proper, which is very close to the islands. The hinterland is jungle and has very few roads. The comparative inaccessibility of the Cuna settlements has helped them preserve their way of life.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Cuna language is an Amerindian language, and it is classified as belonging to the Chibcha group of languages. Dulegaya is the primary language of daily life in the Cuna communities and the majority of children speak it. Spanish is commonly

used, especially in education and written documents. Cuna is considered an endangered language.

Names are sacred, and naming ceremonies take place when girls and boys become teenagers. These ceremonies have an unusual feature: there is a special chanting of all available names. The parents of a child listen attentively, and when they hear a name they like they interrupt the ceremony and the choice of the name is made immediately.

Many Cunas also have Spanish names and, because the United States has been prominent in the Panama Canal Zone, some have also taken English names.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Among the first and most memorable of the Cuna to be discovered by Spanish explorers were the small population of albinos (estimated to be less than 1% the total population), most of whom lived on one island. The albinos were somewhat of an outcast group in the Cuna society, and many folktales grew up around them. For example, here is a Cuna legend reflecting the historic Cuna practice of Sun worship, which is no longer carried out today:

Inhabiting the fertile Darien region since time immemorial, the Cunas, descendants of the Sun, were blessed by the gods with a beautiful homeland, including magical lakes, rushing rivers, luxuriant jungles filled with exotic fauna and flora, and mountains where gold was stored.

Once upon a time, the Sun wanted to reward the tribe's shaman, called the nele, for his wisdom, goodness, and generosity. Appearing before the nele one afternoon at the hour of the sacrifice, the Sun offered to grant him anything he desired. Although the shaman's humility at first prevented him from making a request, the Sun repeated his offer. The shaman, who was old and did not have long to live, resolved to ask for something that would benefit the entire tribe after he was gone.

He asked the Sun to send his own son to the Cunas, to serve as their leader. Although this was a difficult request, the Sun agreed, and after three days two beautiful blond children—a boy and a girl—appeared in the sky at dawn, surrounded by golden light, and came down to earth. The people were overjoyed and gave thanks to the Sun for this miraculous occurrence. The children were raised in a golden palace with lavish gardens, and, when grown, they were married in a festive ceremony.

Eventually, however, they were unfaithful, both to each other and to their divine origins. As punishment, the Sun turned them from divine beings into mere mortals, condemned to suffer like other human beings. However, from their first union have come the albinos, who, with their blue eyes and nearly white hair, are still considered children of the Sun. It is said that they cannot bear the light of day. The rest of the Cunas, believed to be descended from the subsequent unions of the two original children of the Sun, still consider themselves to be descendants of a god.

Although the albinos comprise a small percentage of the Cuna population, their existence caused early explorers to label the Cuna the "white Indians."

## 5 RELIGION

The Cunas have a close connection with nature and see themselves as a part of it. Every living thing has a spirit counterpart—animals, men, bodies of water, rocks, trees, and plants.



The Cuna believe that what is taken from nature must be replaced in some way. The religious authority, the shaman, is in charge of dominating and controlling the spirit of the world inhabiting rocks and storms, among others. Becoming a shaman is regarded as an important vocation. Shamans may be men or women, and they perform three types of functions: curing illness in individuals, believed to be caused in most cases by the loss of one's soul; curing villages of epidemic illness; and establishing rapport with spirits, leading to the ability to predict the future. The shaman who serves the latter function is typically born into the role, but receives training, usually requiring a period of jungle isolation.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Cunas are Panamanian or Colombian citizens. Many continue to resist assimilation and do not celebrate their respective country's major national holidays. However, some Cunas have allowed and even encouraged their young people to go to the town of Colón at the mouth of the Panama Canal and receive a Western-style education. After education, most return to the islands. These Cunas speak Spanish, and in a few cases some have even learned English. While living among non-Cuna people, Cunas take part in the celebration of national holidays. These include Independence Day, celebrated in both Panama (November 5) and Colombia (July 20).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Women give birth in a special hut set aside for this purpose that men are not permitted to enter. If a girl is born, there is a joyous response on the father's part, because he is then allowed to leave the matrilineal household of his wife's family and set up his home independently with his wife and daughter. If a son is born, the father has to remain in his father-in-law's home. A father is not permitted full authority over his sons in the beginning. The father-in-law has that privilege and duty, until he considers that the young father has learned his parenting skills adequately.

Parents decide on a husband for their daughter when she is young. As she approaches adulthood, parents cut their daughter's hair, and there is a special celebration in honor of this occasion.

When a person dies, he or she is wrapped in a hammock and buried in a lonely place in the rainforest on the mainland. The husband or wife chants a song of praise and lamentation.

The large green iguana plays an important role in the Cunas' existence. According to their beliefs, this animal is in connection with spirits and Cunas use the reptile's tails and feet for making magic filters. As is stated by Cuna traditions, diseases are fought with spells, and it is the shaman of the village the person in charge of helping to cure the sick. During this process, wooden figurines—in a woman or man shape—owned by each Cuna family are pivotal for treating illnesses since the shamanistic spells are applied on them.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Cunas respect the different positions that family members hold and greet each other accordingly. Greetings are different when the Cunas are working or are engaged in trade. On these occasions, the men are in the background and the women are the dominant partners, and they can be very forward and even fierce. When entertaining visitors, the men stay in the background. The women play a more forthright role.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Spaniards who first visited the gulf of Darien and the Panamanian coast found the conditions very difficult. The Cunas fiercely resisted the encroachment of Europeans.

Cuna settlements are close to the sea shore. Many of Cuna constructions were erected as *palafitos*—built on posts planted on the sea floor. To ascend into the palafitos, Cuna people used ladders or reed. However, the palafitos constructions were the exceptions, and most of the villages were constructed on the ground. These houses were and are quite long and can accommodate extended family units. The thatched roofs are made out of palm fronds, and the walls out of bamboo or cane. The houses of some villages are very close together, with very little space between one and another.

The Cuna are excellent sailors. They use canoes known as *cayucas* made from a single, hollowed-out tree trunk, usually that of a large tree. The canoes are often fitted out with sails and are well-suited for navigating the waters of the Darien between the Panamanian coast and the islands. In the forests beyond the coast, the men go on hunting expeditions on foot.



A Cuna woman on the beach with a parrot in Panama. Cuna women wear long, narrow skirts that are tightly wrapped around them. They use ankle bands as well as arm bands of many beaded strands. (Cory Langley)

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Extended family units and clans are held together by the female line. Many aspects of Cuna family life indicate a matriarchal society in which women play a leading role. A young married couple usually moves into the home of the woman's family until their first children are born. The Cunas are fond of their children and, although respect for elders is expected, they are not harsh in the upbringing of young children.

The Cunas keep dogs as pets.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The Cunas are famous for their techniques in preparing layer upon layer of cloth, cutting out patterns, and sewing pieces on top of each other in colorful geometric patterns and lively colors including red, yellow, and black. They prepare blouses for women using this technique, and these are widely admired in both Colombia and Panama. The women also wear long, narrow skirts that are tightly wrapped around them. They use ankle bands as well as arm bands of many beaded strands. The men wear dark trousers, bright shirts, and straw hats. In many areas, Cunas wear these traditional articles of hand-crafted clothing and jewelry to complement a Western-style wardrobe.

The Cunas have golden-brown skin, almond-shaped eyes, high cheekbones, and shiny, straight black hair. Women wear

striking earrings that are large, thin gold disks, rather like flaming suns.

## **12 FOOD**

The Cunas grow yams, corn, and sugarcane in jungle clearings along the coastline. Their diet also includes a variety of fruits, such as plantains, bananas, and mangoes. They also drink *chicha*, a fermented drink prepared from sugarcane mixed with plantains, corn, and water. In Cuna family homes there are big jars where the *chicha* is stored. A refreshing drink, called *coco de agua*, is provided by the green coconut.

The Cunas also eat fish and a species of iguana. They stew sea turtle and eat rice boiled in coconut milk. Their traditional hunting weapons were spears and blow guns.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The men teach their sons both hunting and fishing skills as well as how to sew their own simple garments, which include a loose-fitting shirt and trousers. The women teach their daughters how to prepare and cook food, some basic farming skills, and the elaborate sewing techniques to make their beautiful blouses, known as *molos*.

Some Cuna men have received a Western-style education on the Panamanian mainland. Generally, the Cunas expect the young men who have been educated to return to their island and mainland settlements.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance are important for the Cuna. They preserve their strong cultural identity by passing down to their children accounts of their background, history, and values through stories, myths, and legends.

#### 15 WORK

Work is divided in very specific ways among the Cunas. The men hunt and fish and also make their own clothes. The women make their own distinctive clothes; they cook, weave, sew, and make hammocks. The women also work as sailors and traders. For many years, visitors have been able to sail to the San Blas region from the Panamanian town of Colón. Cuna women sail in their canoes to meet tourist and trading boats to sell their goods. They are accompanied by men who do not participate in the actual trading.

The coconut palm is important in this region and was once used as a form of currency. For the modern Cuna, it provides fibers for making clothing, brooms, threads for sewing and weaving, lamp wicks, rope, and hammocks. It provides sweet coconut water for drinking and coconut milk for cooking. The coconut palm is a source of fuel. Dishes are made from coconut shells.

#### 16 SPORTS

Cunas are skillful sailors and fishers, but do not consider these activities sports in the Western sense. They engage in these activities for their livelihood.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Important occasions are celebrated with feasts, and it is considered appropriate to mark these occasions with generous amounts of food and drink.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Cunas are noted for their skills with textiles. They decorate cloth with bright geometric patterns, dye it in a variety of colors, and cut and sew several layers to make the women's blouses, known as *molás*. The *molás* are prized in Colombia and Panama. They have found their way into exhibitions of Amerindian art. *Molás* may also be framed and hung as works of art, or used to make cushions. These practices are generally found outside the Cuna communities. The Cunas also make beaded necklaces and woodcarvings.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Cunas have tried to defend their way of life for centuries, and have energetically resisted assimilation. In the 1920s, the Panamanian government decided that the Cunas were too autonomous and sent a contingent of officers to police the islands of San Blas and the surrounding coastal area in the Gulf of Darien. At that time, the jungles that stretched inland from the coast did not have a single road. The police officers were all killed by the Cunas.

Since that disastrous interaction, a more peaceful climate of coexistence has generally prevailed. There is now a Panamanian governor for the archipelago. The governor's residence is in El Porvenir, a small, clean, whitewashed town on the mainland. A few markets have been established there, where

the Cuna women sell their wares to visitors. Visitors may only come to El Porvenir for the day.

On the Pacific coast of Colombian mainland near the Panamanian border where some Cunas live, there are real worries that policies to develop Colombia's Pacific coast may threaten the way of life of the Cunas there.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Cuna culture is matrilineal (tracing descent through the maternal line). Traditionally, women have held a powerful position in their culture. A wife holds primary decision-making responsibilities within a household. A man cannot trade or sell any article without first seeking his wife's permission. On the other hand, if she wants to sell the perfumed berry beads she has made into necklaces, or garments she has made, it is her right, and she does not have to obtain permission from anyone else. Modern Cuna women appear to have no difficulty in being assertive. This tends to confirm the view of the traditionally powerful position of Cuna women.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# DAKOTA AND LAKHOTA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Sioux

**LOCATION:** United States (North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Montana); Canada (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba)

**POPULATION:** approximately 150,000

**LANGUAGE:** English; Dakota Sioux

**RELIGION:** Traditional

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The term Sioux (a French form of *Nadowi-is-iw*, “little adders,” a name given them by their enemies, the Chippewa) has been used for a large group of bands and tribes who spread historically from Minnesota to the prairies of the Dakotas and as far as Montana. Speaking a common language with dialectical variations, these peoples today, as in the past, refer to themselves as Dakota in the east, Nakota in the central region, and Lakhota in the west. In all three regional dialects, this term means “allies,” and it was extended to affiliated tribes such as the Cheyenne and Arapahoe, both Algonkian speakers who fought alongside them in war. The unity of the Allies is symbolically expressed in the term *oceti sakowin*—the Seven Fireplaces. The easternmost Dakota groups are the *Mdewak’ant’unwan* (“Spirit lake village”), *Wahpek’ute* (“Leaf shooters”) *Sisit’unwan* (“Fish scale village”—although the meaning of this term is debated), and *Wahpet’unwan* (“Leaf village”). These four groups are collectively referred to as the Santee (*Isan t’i*—“Knife dwellers”—referring to the name of a lake). The central groups also call themselves Dakota, which sometimes was pronounced Nakota. These are the *Yankton* (“End dwellers”) and the *Yanktonais* (“Little End Dwellers”). These two groups are classed together as Yankton or “Middle” Sioux. The westernmost groups, known collectively as the Teton Sioux (*Titunwan*, or “Prairie dwellers”) form the third division. They subdivided themselves historically into seven further fireplaces: *Oglala* (“Scatters their own”), *Sicangu* (“Burned thighs”), *Mnikowojou* or *Miniconjou* (“Planters by water”) *Oohenunpa* (“Two kettles”—literally, “Two boilings”), *Itazipco* or *Icazipo* (“Without Bows”), *Sihaspapa* (“Black Feet”), and *Hunkpapa* (“Campers at the opening of the circle”). Today these people use their own language for self-ascertainment, the Tetons calling themselves the Lakhota and the others using Dakota. In 19th-century literature, these groups were collectively called Sioux or Dakota (and thus the Dakota Territory, which is, in fact, occupied in the west by the Lakhota and the east by the Dakota).

The Allies originally kept their own historical records in the form of winter counts. These pictographic documents highlight each “winter” or year with its most significant event. By their reckoning, the Allies have hunted and gathered on this continent since their emergence into this world, and in any case since long before the coming of Europeans. Items of European culture such as horses, cloth and later guns were initially acquired through trade with other Indians and later directly with Europeans through the fur trade (late 1700s until about 1851). Early contact resulted in widespread epidemics of European diseases that ravaged native populations.

The first written mention of the “Naduesiu” by Europeans was by Jean Nicolet in 1639, with the first recorded contact between the Dakota and the explorers Radisson and Grosselier in 1660. The first fur trading post was established on the Mississippi in 1683. The Dakota territory was “claimed” by the King of France in 1689 and later “purchased” by the young nation of the United States in 1803 (the Louisiana Purchase). Louis and Clark visited the Dakota territory in 1804, and the first treaty with the Eastern Allies was signed with Zebulon Pike, ceding two parcels of Dakota land on the Mississippi river for American forts. The Dakota allied with the British in the War of 1812. Fort Snelling, the first military outpost in the country of the Dakota, was built on one of these parcels in 1819. Fort La Framboise (later renamed Ft. Pierre) was built in 1917.

The first large-scale outbreak of hostilities between the military forces of the United States and the western Lakhota took place in 1854 when a Lakhota was jailed for the killing of a cow owned by a Mormon settler. Known as the Mormon Cow incident, Lieutenant Grattan and 29 of his men were killed in retaliation, and this sparked the Sioux War of 1855. A peace treaty was signed with the Lakhota in 1856, and the Lakhota who had killed the cow was released.

As the 19th century went on, the Eastern Dakota were increasingly pressed by settlers wanting their land. The United States government habitually delayed meeting its treaty obligations and did nothing to discourage encroachment of settlers into Dakota territory. In an attempt to maintain their land and resources, Inkpaduta killed 40 settlers and took four captives in 1857, but a year later the Yanktons ceded their eastern lands, retaining only a small parcel on the east bank of the Missouri River. Further pressure from settlers and continued delays in the government’s treaty payments resulted in the Minnesota Dakota conflict of 1862. During this conflict some Dakota fled to Canada and the west. By 1864 the remaining Santee were removed from their homelands to Nebraska.

When gold was discovered in Montana in 1863, settlers traveled to the gold fields by way of the Bozeman trail, disrupting game ecology and splitting the great buffalo herd in two. Hostilities continued with the unceasing expansion of whites through and to the territory of the Lakhota. The first Fort Laramie Treaty was signed with the Lakhota in 1851, but when the U.S. Army failed to fulfill its obligation to keep settlers off of Lakhota land, hostilities erupted, most notably resulting in the death of Captain Fetterman and 80 of his men in the Wagon Box Fight in 1866. In 1868 the Red Cloud War ended with the signing of the second Fort Laramie Treaty. The United States abandoned the forts along the Bozeman Trail, which was closed to white migration, and the Lakhota agreed to allow a railroad to pass through their country. This treaty also established the domain of the Lakhota: the lands to the west of the Missouri River in the present state of South Dakota and parts of its border states, as well as hunting rights in lands contiguous to the territory.

Once again whites abrogated their treaty agreements when gold was discovered during the Custer expedition to the Black Hills in 1874. The United States attempted to acquire the territory legally in 1875 and, when that effort failed, set up a commission in August of 1876, which fraudulently declared the territory was legally ceded according to the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty. On 31 January, 1876 the United States military announced that all Native Americans must leave their hunting

territories and report to reservations. General George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry went out to round up the Lakshota who would not follow this order. Custer's command was crushed in the Battle of the Little Big Horn on 26 June, 1876, but only a year later, the Oglala under Crazy Horse came in to Fort Robinson. Crazy Horse was murdered on 5 September while in custody at the Fort. By 1878 the Tetons were all on reservations except for Sitting Bull and his supporters, who had fled to Canada. Homesick and missing their relatives, Sitting Bull and the majority of his people returned to their territory in 1881, taking up residence on the reservation.

The United States hoped to assimilate the Native Americans, making them independent landowners and dissolving both religious and civil authority. U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant instituted the Grant Peace Policy 1869, whereby each reservation was allocated to a single Christian denomination to administer and proselytize (this policy was rescinded in 1882). Land allotment to individuals under the Dawes Act sought to dissolve the vast land holdings of the natives and sell the "excess" lands to white settlers. The first attempt to parcel out the Great Sioux Nation territory was in 1888 and the second in 1889, when the government managed to acquire the  $\frac{3}{4}$  signatures necessary to cede land.

By the late 1880s the status of the Allies had been so drastically reduced that spiritual remedy was sought. The Ghost Dance, begun by the visions of a Paiute Indian named Wovoka (Captain Jack) in Utah, spread throughout the Plains in the late 1880s. This faith taught that through prayer and dancing the earth would roll up and be renewed. The ancestors and the buffalo would return and the Europeans would disappear. Some Lakshota also claimed that sacred shirts would protect them from the bullets of the whites. The Ghost Dance movement gained strength in 1889, a year of drought and famine. The killing of Sitting Bull by Tribal Police on 15 December 1890 further disheartened the people. The Indian Agent at Pine Ridge panicked over this situation and called in troops, which violated an understanding he had with the Lakshota. At the same time, Chief Big Foot and his Miniconjou and Hunkpapa followers traveled down from the Cheyenne River agency to Pine Ridge to meet with Red Cloud and receive horses from him. They were arrested to the west of Pine Ridge and brought to Wounded Knee Creek. While the Lakshota were being disarmed, a shot was heard, and the soldiers began shooting into the encampment, massacring 368 men, women and children.

The Lakshota and Dakota struggled against great odds to preserve their cultural life. In the 1880s some Santee returned to Minnesota and small reservations were granted. In 1905, the first individual allotments were made on the Pine Ridge agency itself. All Native Americans were granted citizenship in 1924. Allotments continued until the United States reversed the policy of forced cultural assimilation and destruction of traditional cultural and political institutions through the Indian Reorganization Act, which allowed Indian tribes to constitute themselves as legal entities and again own and control land communally. The IRA was a mixed blessing; while it gave the tribes some autonomy, it also imposed governmental structures (tribal councils) that are derived from American civil government rather than from traditional forms of authority.

The Lakshota and Dakota continued to struggle for their legal, cultural, religious, and territorial rights, working through extended family governance as well as other traditional forms

of social organization. The United States set up the Indian Claims Commission in 1946 to settle outstanding treaty claims on the part of Native peoples. Although the Supreme Court has recognized the illegality of the seizure of the Black Hills by the United States government, the Lakshota and Dakota people involved in the suit refuse to accept the monetary settlement prescribed by the Federal government and continue to press for a return of the federally controlled regions of the Black Hills to their rightful owners. In the 1970s, Indian groups became more visible as contemporary peoples as they protested their political and cultural plights, particularly with the occupation of Wounded Knee by the American Indian Movement (AIM) (27 February–8 May, 1973), which brought world attention to Native issues. Legislation such as the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act (1975), the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), and the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) helped bolster Indian rights in the judicial and governmental arenas. Contemporary concerns of the Lakshota and Dakota people include tribal sovereignty, religious rights in general as well as protection of religious rituals from exploitation, return of the Black Hills, jobs, language retention and revival, cultural and political autonomy.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Some Lakshota claim that their people inhabited the Black Hills since the beginning of time. Others hold that the Allies emerged from a cave or from under a lake to inhabit the upper world. Anthropologists and archaeologists, who believe the inhabitants of this continent migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait, place origin of the Dakota people in the southeastern United States. At earliest European contact, the Dakota and Lakshota occupied the woodlands of a territory centered in what is now known as Minnesota. By the late 1700s the Lakshota spread westward to Montana and Wyoming and were successful on the plains as warriors as well as horsemen and hunters. They fought prolonged wars with the Crows, Pawnees, Shoshones, Omahas and Kiowas, who blocked their westward migrations.

Today Lakshota and Dakota live on a number of reservations: in South Dakota—the Lake Traverse, Standing Rock, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Yankton, Flandreau, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud Reservations; in Nebraska, the Santee Reservation; in Montana, the Fort Peck Reservation; and in North Dakota, the Fort Totten Reservation. There are also Dakota and Lakshota in present day Canada in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. As many as 85% of Native Americans live in urban areas, so it should be no surprise that there are many Lakshotas and Dakotas in off-reservation cities such as Pierre, Rapid City, Scotts Bluff, Denver, Chicago, Los Angeles and Minneapolis-St. Paul. According to the 1990 United States Census, there are 103,255 Sioux people, making them the fourth largest native group in the United States. Two of the ten largest reservations in the United States are Lakshota: Pine Ridge (28,000 persons), which is ranked second, and Rosebud (over 20,000), which is ranked sixth.

## **3 LANGUAGE**

Lakshota and Dakota are still spoken today and are commonly used during religious ceremonies and traditional social events. Great pains are taken today to preserve and expand the number of speakers of these dialects. Lakshota, Dakota and Nakota

are mutually intelligible dialectical variants of one of many languages of the Siouan family. Formal study and recording of Dakota by Euro-Americans was first carried out by the Pond brothers and Stephen Returns Riggs, all of whom were Protestant missionaries. Fr. Eugene Buechel, S.J., continued this work among the Lakhota, building on a dictionary first started by the Pond brothers and published by Riggs. Native Dakota scholar Ella Deloria and Lakhota scholar George Bushotter also worked on the language, recording native stories in their original dialects.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Dakota and Lakhota have a tradition of oral literature that continues into the present. Many stories are shared among the different groups of the seven fireplaces, and some stories have been picked up from the many surrounding cultures. The ability to tell stories well is honored. Many Dakota stories were recorded in Dakota by Stephen Riggs and Ella Deloria. Dakota stories in English were also written by Charles Eastman. Lakhota stories were recorded in the native language by George Bushotter and Eugene Buechel, S.J. Dr. James Walker recorded many stories narrated by George Sword, including stories of the creation of the word and the behaviors of the spirits.

Stories of the trickster Iktomi provide moral lessons by showing how not to behave. There are also many versions of the story of how the White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the Sacred Pipe to the Lakhota. Magical, handsome heroes come to save the people, and still other stories tell of war and peace, love and conflict, and every other human occurrence. Many stories are very funny and are told both to entertain and instruct.

#### 5 RELIGION

The religion of the Dakota teaches various ways to gain assistance from spiritual powers in order to live this life well. Sweat lodge rituals are used to purify an individual for contact with the divine. Individuals pray, make sacrifices, and endure suffering to make themselves pitiful so that the spirits would come to their assistance. The Dakota also adopted the *mdewiwin* ritual from the nearby Ojibway, with several levels of initiation into a healing lodge that helps individuals and the community through life.

The famous Lakhota spiritual leader Black Elk described Lakhota religion as consisting of seven rites: *Wanagi Yuhapi*, the keeping of the soul; *Inipi*, the rite of purification (sweat lodge); *Hanbleceyapi*, the rite of crying for a vision; *Wiwanyag Wacipi*, the sun dance; *Hunkapi*, the making of relatives; *Isnati Awcialowan*, preparing for womanhood, and *Tapa Wanka Yap*, the throwing of the ball. There are also a variety of healing ceremonies called *lowanpi*, "sings," or *yuwipi*, a ceremony in which the spiritual leader is tied and later unbound in the darkness by the spirits. Lakhota and Dakota continue to rely upon a variety of healers who used both prayers and various medicines to help their patients. Smudging and praying and offering food for the departed spirits are also important religious practices, as are acts of generosity and hospitality.

In the 19th century some Dakota and Lakhota became Christian. Traditional spiritual leaders like George Sword and Black Elk also became Christian leaders. While some individuals held exclusive allegiance to one or the other belief, others participated and still participate in both religious forms. Both

the government and the missionaries initially attempted to suppress traditional religious beliefs. Today both groups have a deeper respect for traditional religion. Some Dakota and Lakhota follow what are called the traditional ways, while others belong to one Christian denomination or other, and some, as in the past, pray in both groups. The majority of Lakhota and Dakota today hold that all religions seek to contact the same God and see prayer as a way to unify the people. There is controversy over non-Lakhota or Dakota conducting traditional ceremonies. For example, charging admission for such things as sweat lodges is disrespectful.

Some Lakhota and Dakota belong to the Native American Church, a group that combines Christian and traditional beliefs with the use of peyote as a sacrament that brings wisdom to those who use it. Native American Church congregations vary, based in how much Christianity and tradition they incorporate into their ceremonies. Individuals from other tribes often visit to participate in all-night prayer services.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In the past different groups came together for the annual Sun Dance, although the Lakhota and Dakota were so far-ranging by the end of the 19th century that it is unlikely they were all ever able to meet as a single body. Buffalo hunts were sometimes occasions for summer gatherings, as were trade fairs with other tribes. Trade with fur traders and at Army forts were also important social occasions. With the official ban on religious ceremonies, traditional religion went underground, and people substituted American civil and religious holidays for their own annual religious and economic gatherings. Thus the 4th of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Veterans Day, and other holidays became important on the reservations. The public Sun Dance was revived on Pine Ridge in 1961 and has become centrally important. Today, there are many Sun Dances in a single season. Powwows are important secular as well as religious events put on by different communities as well as reservations, often with prizes for dancers and singers. Most of these gatherings occur in the summer. The Sisseton Wahpeton Wacipi (*wacipi* means dance) is the oldest continuously celebrated event in the state of South Dakota. Many of the summer powwows are open to whomever wishes to attend in a respectful manner.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Dakota and Lakhota children, were and some continue to be, treated ceremonially at birth with traditional naming and ear piercing. Names have never been static, for as individuals achieve social recognition or are healed of a serious illness or are adopted by other extended families, new names are granted. Girls underwent a "sing" and were instructed in arts and manners proper to women when they reached their first menses. Boys would undertake vision quests, although individuals could do this at any time when they needed spiritual aid. Marriage was not ceremonialized in the past. Individual males could be initiated into various societies of curers, dreamers, and healers, and women had special associations for their various arts such as quill work. Leadership also conferred a different status on an individual, although in the past leadership was situational and transitory. For the Dakota, entrance into the *Mdewiwin*, or "Medicine Lodge," was accomplished through a series of ordeals and rites of passage to convey new status.



The most important and extended rite of passage was for the dead. In the past, there would be a long period of mourning during which those close to the deceased would show their sorrow through self-mutilation, such as cutting one's hair. In some instances, the soul would be ceremonially kept in a special bundle by a designated keeper for a period of a year and then released.

Dakota and Lakhotas rites of passage are very much alive today. There has been a revival of the girl's puberty ritual, and many individuals participate in the rites of passage mentioned above. These rites are all public and are accompanied by large feasts and give-aways (a distribution of gifts) to honor those undergoing the rituals. Young boys are taken out on vision quests. Boys and girls will be given a new name after a great achievement such as finishing a military tour of duty. Graduations from high school and college are marked in a traditional way by tying on an eagle feather (for men) or eagle down plume (for women), and giving the graduate a star quilt. There are also prayers and handshakes to mark these sacred events. Both Christians and Traditional people honor the dead with prayers, honoring songs, large feasts and giveaways, both at the time of death and to mark the one-year anniversary of the death. Food is also placed out to feed the spirit of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The basis of Dakota and Lakhotas life is kinship. Those related by birth and marriage are counted as kin, as are other human beings sometimes formally included through the *hunka* (adoption) ceremony. The extended family remains the focal social unit. Indeed, kinship is projected to the entire universe. Thus Lakhotas end their prayers with the phrase *mitakuye oyas'in*, which means "for all my relatives."

Dakota and Lakhotas society was once based in small roving bands organized by leaders according to needs. This leadership would be extended over larger groups at times of communal hunts and in warfare. Individual freedom was and continues to be highly prized. If a person was not content with how things were done, he or she was free to form another group. The smallest social group was the *tiyospaye*, "residential group or band," and consisted in cooperating families and individuals who attached themselves to that group. A number of these bands would comprise an *oyate*, "people," such as the Sicangu or Oglala.

The coming of the Europeans modified group structures, and a split arose between those who wanted to adopt white ways quickly and those who did not. The native governance of the Dakota and Lakhotas became more centralized and stable to deal with the European incursion into the territory and lives of these people.

In contemporary Lakhotas and Dakota life, personal freedom remains essential, but this is balanced by obligations to one's extended family and tribe. So, too, many Dakota and Lakhotas enter the United States military services and are respected for that; one is expected to sacrifice for the people and to be generous and kind to everyone, but especially to the poor and elderly.

The Lakhotas describe themselves as *ikcey wicasa*, ordinary people, and no one is supposed to be boastful. Even important governmental or religious leaders are expected to act humbly. Dakotas and Lakhotas are wonderfully humorous and enjoy teasing one another as well as making self-deprecating re-

marks. Individuals are expected to excel but never to separate themselves from the group.

Dakotas and Lakhotas today frequently perform the *hunka* (adoption) ceremony to increase the size of their families. Both Lakhotas and Dakotas, as well as outsiders who have grown close to certain families, will be honored in this way. Special songs are sung and a name is given to the adopted, sometimes the name of a deceased relative whom the adopted one resembles in some way. The relationship of a *kola* (Lakhotas) or *koda* (Dakota) is also vital and represents a deep bond of friendship existing between two individuals.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before the coming of the Europeans, the Dakota and Lakhotas were mobile peoples. The Dakota who lived in the woodlands had bark houses supported by poles in the summer and skin tents called tipis (*tipi* means "they dwell." Lakhotas generally use the word *tiobleca* for these dwellings) in the winter. These dwellings were comfortable and warm. In winter they were surrounded by wooden windbreaks for added protection from the elements. As the western Lakhotas moved onto the prairie, they used tipis almost exclusively. With the advent of horses, dwellings could be larger and were carried further than when the Lakhotas depended on human and canine transport. In the east and west, life could be difficult with frostbite, snow blindness, and starvation, as well as attacks from enemies or wild animals.

During the reservation period, Lakhotas and Dakotas adopted European-style log cabins, and today they have wooden frame houses. Originally, the Lakhotas settled according to families along creek bottoms, but the government wanted to centralize construction of new dwellings in housing developments. This caused further social disruption. Agency towns tended to hold the largest concentration of people since jobs with the government, schools, and missions were more available there.

In the 1950s the United States government sponsored a relocation program to help people find employment in the cities and to become more assimilated. Many people left the reservation but eventually returned. Today the Dakota and Lakhotas continue to be a highly mobile people; some live far from the reservations but return to renew family bonds. While some of the dwellings look poor, the mark of a prosperous Lakhotas or Dakota is not money or lavish surroundings but good relationships with one's family.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Lakhotas and Dakota people stress individual freedom, so each person is expected to make decisions for himself or herself. Children, too, are respected in this way and treated as adults, as they are allowed to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes. In the past, prosperous men might marry a woman and her sisters and form a household. Extended families continue to be very important, and there were strong kinship obligations in terms of respect and mutual assistance. There was no marriage ceremony, but marriages were sometimes arranged and often sealed with a ritual exchange of property, such as the groom bringing horses to his bride's parents. Once married, one was expected to avoid direct contact with one's in-laws. Children have always been honored as especially sacred beings.

Grandparents have an especially close relationship with their grandchildren. Anyone related to a child who is two generations away is considered a grandparent (rather than a great aunt or great uncle as in Euro-American society).

Women's roles in traditional Dakota and Lakhotas society included gathering food, cooking, and making clothes and tipi covers. Women have traditionally been treated with respect and dignity. Today, women as well as men are active in family and tribal affairs, serving as educators and political leaders. Women are healers and also have important roles in the Sun Dance and in Native American church services.

### 11 CLOTHING

Before the trade for European-manufactured cloth, Dakotas and Lakhotas used tanned and dressed animal skins, such as deer and buffalo, to protect themselves from the weather as well as to indicate their social status. There is a great seasonal variation in the weather of Dakota and Lakhotas territory. In the harsh winters moccasins and leggings were used to protect feet and legs. Mittens and gloves protected hands from frostbite. Early Europeans and Euro-Americans frequently commented on the careful ornamentation and good taste exhibited in native dress. Face paint as well as hair style were done with care by both men and women. There was ordinary clothing for daily life and special dress for social events.

Today Dakota and Lakhotas wear contemporary clothing for everyday purposes. Some men wear cowboy boots and broad brimmed hats. Women wear dresses or pants. For powwows, men and women will wear beautiful dance costumes decorated with intricate beadwork. Women wear leggings, moccasins, buckskin dresses, and shawls. Men wear breechclouts, moccasins, leggings with bells, and different types of headdresses. Individuals wear everyday clothing for most prayer ceremonies, traditional or Christian, but special dress for those dancing the Sun Dance. Men sometimes wear ribbon shirts for special occasions, while women sometimes wear ribbon dresses. Indian-style clothing is having a significant effect on the fashions of non-Indians, as styles are borrowed back and forth.

### 12 FOOD

The buffalo served as the staple food for the Dakota and Lakhotas in their pre-reservation days, but they also ate deer and other game, as well as wild fruits and plants, ducks and geese, and less often, fish. The Dakota harvested wild rice and grew some corn. The Lakhotas traded for corn and other produce. Eating was not only for nutrition but also a social event. This is also true today. When someone is to be honored, the family of that person will feed whoever comes for the ceremony. Food is freely shared and special attention is paid to the poor and the elderly. Early Euro-American observers consistently remarked on and benefited from the generosity of the Lakhotas and Dakota peoples.

At religious and social rituals today, the food served is a mixture of traditional and contemporary items. Dakotas and Lakhotas still serve dried corn, *timpsila* (prairie turnips), *wasna* (pounded dried meat, berries, and fat), *wojapi* (berry pudding), tripe, boiled beef or buffalo and soups when they are available. Fried bread, although made with flour introduced by Euro-Americans, is considered part of traditional fare. This food may be supplemented with fried chicken, soda crackers, store-bought bread, fruit cocktail, potato salad, beans, pies,

and cake. Food is distributed by the providers, and it is always abundant. Those attending feasts bring their own dishes and plenty of containers to carry back food they cannot finish. This extra is called *wateca*, and the mark of a good feed is the overabundance of food that will be used for days thereafter.

#### Venison and Wild Rice Stew

½ pound shoulder of venison, cut into 2-inch cubes  
2 teaspoons salt  
1/8 teaspoon black pepper  
2 quarts water  
1½ cups wild rice, washed in cold water  
2 onions, peeled and quartered

Place the venison, water, and onions in a large kettle, bring to a boil, then turn down the heat and let simmer uncovered for 3 hours until the venison is tender. Add the salt, pepper, and rice. Cover and let simmer another 20 minutes. Stir, then let simmer uncovered for another 20 minutes, or until the rice is tender and most of the liquid is absorbed. Makes 6–8 servings.

(Adapted from Kimball and Anderson, *The Art of American Indian Cooking*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965, p. 102.)

### 13 EDUCATION

Dakota and Lakhotas children learned from observation and imitation without coercion. They learned from the people around them the practical skills they needed to survive and the artistic and religious dimensions of life to enhance their existence. With the coming of the reservation system, the government and churches insisted that the children enter formal schooling. While the Dakota and Lakhotas were interested in learning European ways, they had already adopted much of this foreign technology. They wanted their children to learn how to deal effectively with the outside world, but they were not in favor of the loss of their own culture that these schools caused. Boarding schools deliberately sought to separate children from their native culture and language, considering both as inferior. Children did learn well in these schools and acquired skills that were helpful to them but at a high psychological and cultural cost. Most damaging was the fact that children were not parented; they were raised for long periods of time in institutions and thus never learned effective parenting skills themselves.

Today there are few boarding schools, and education is largely in the hands of the tribes and reservation communities. Mission schools also have local community school boards to advise them. There are Bureau of Indian Affairs schools on the reservations as well as contract schools (government schools run by the local community) and mission schools. Dakotas and Lakhotas off the reservation attend public or private schools, and local Indian centers set up cultural educational programs. Schools stress education in the local culture and language as well as western education.

In addition to primary and secondary schools, there are a large number of colleges on the reservations chartered and administered by the tribes. Some of these colleges are Oglala Lakhotas College (Pine Ridge Reservation), Sinte Gleska University (Rosebud Reservation), Sitting Bull College (Standing Rock Reservation), Sisseton Wahpeton College (Lake Traverse

Reservation), Fort Peck College (Fort Peck Reservation), Little Hoop College (Fort Totten College), and Nebraska Indian College (Santee Reservation).

Today, nearly 70% of Dakotas and Lakhotas over the age of 25 have at least a high school diploma, and 40% have attended college, though less than 9% have managed to attain a Bachelor of Arts degree or higher.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In literature Charles Eastman is known for his many works on Dakota life and belief, as well as his eye-witness account of the tragedy of Wounded Knee. George Bushotter worked with the Bureau of American Ethnology to record linguistic and cultural data about his people, the Lakhotas. Luther Standing Bear told of his life during the reservation and boarding school periods. Dakota Ella Deloria was an accomplished linguist who worked with Franz Boas and also wrote a novel called *Water Lilly* about the life of the Lakhotas at the time of contact from the perspective of women. Vine Deloria, Jr. is a lawyer, educator, and author. He brought the situation of the contemporary native people to the consciousness of larger American society through such books as *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *God is Red*. Lakhotas such as Oscar Howe, Arthur Amiotte, and Martin Red Bear have excelled in the visual arts. Kevin Locke is an internationally known traditional flute player. Matthew and Nellie Two Bulls are well known for their traditional singing as well as their composition of songs. There are several well-known singing groups that travel around the country. Billy Mills won Olympic gold medals for running. Tim Giago is the Lakhotas publisher of *Indian Country Today*, a national native newspaper.

#### 15 WORK

In the past, men and women had separate spheres of work. Men hunted and acted as warriors. Women dressed skins, cared for children, gathered wild fruits and roots, and ran the household. All worked together when moving the camp. Certain individuals acted as healers and spiritual leaders in addition to their every day roles. Dakotas and Lakhotas excelled in many things but never tried to separate themselves from the group. One's first duty was always to care for one's family.

Today, unemployment is very high on the reservation due to the marginality of the land and its remoteness from urban and industrial centers. Some Dakota and Lakhotas work in tribal government or with the federal government. Some are religious leaders, both traditional and Christian. Others are community or district leaders. Some work as educators, educational administrators, doctors, drug and alcohol counselors, and nurses. Some work as ranchers or farmers. Some Dakota and Lakhotas go off to cities to find employment because of the lack of opportunity on the reservations, but the tribes work hard to bring employment to the reservation that will be culturally appropriate for the people.

#### 16 SPORTS

The Dakota were very fond of a ball game similar to lacrosse. Different bands or villages would oppose one another in these games that were religious in character. It was a game that tested both physical endurance as well as tempers. Women also played a ball game that entailed knocking a ball with clubs on a surface of ice. Foot races as well as target shooting with bow

and arrow were popular. Lakhotas were known for their fondness of horse racing.

Dakotas and Lakhotas also play and excel at Euro-American sports such as basketball, football, and track and field events. High school sports are followed with particular relish on the reservation, especially basketball. Many also follow national sports from couches as do other Americans. Rodeo is also a sport in which many Lakhotas and Dakota participate successfully.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Children slid down hills on pieces of bark or using barrel staves. On the prairie they used the ribs of buffalos. Sometimes the boys would "surf" down the hills while standing erect on their sleds. Young men and boys also played at snow skates, glancing sticks off an ice surface so that they traveled great distances.

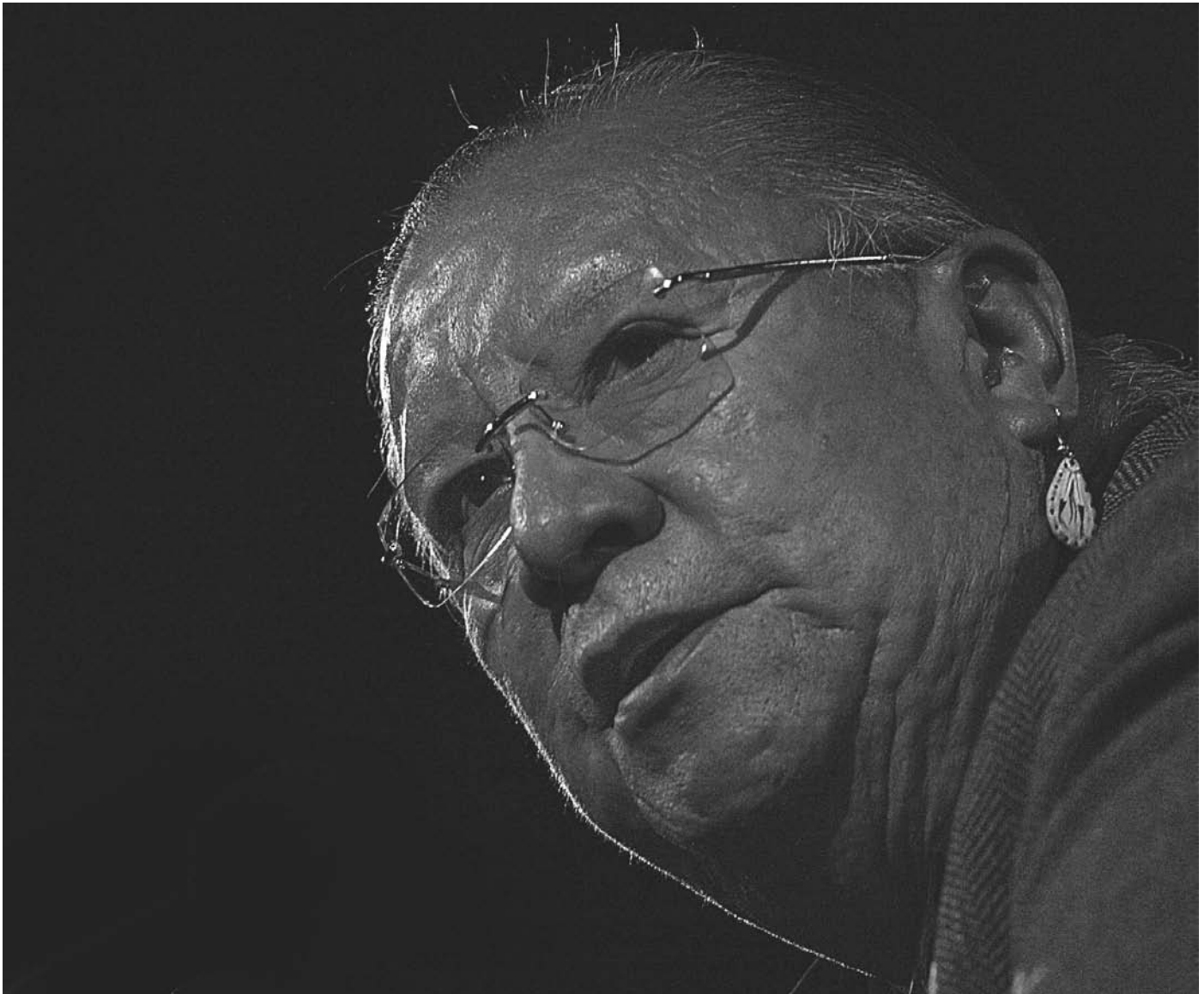
Dakotas and Lakhotas are traditionally fond of gambling and often bet on ball games. Other betting games involve guessing. One game required the person on the opposite team to guess where an object (a pit or sometimes a bullet) was hidden in a series of four moccasins or mittens. These guessing games were quite lively and were accompanied by singing and drumming, physical movement in rhythm with the music, and psyching out the opposite team. Women gambled using plum stones in a dish that were tossed to reveal certain patterns that individuals would bet on. Betting never interfered with daily life, and individuals had a detachment in losing objects. No one was deprived of food or livelihood in these exchanges.

Today, Dakotas and Lakhotas have revived traditional guessing games. A hand game in which one guesses the position of two marked sticks out of four is played to the accompaniment of singing and drumming. Money may change hands.

Children today ride bikes and horses, go to movies, play on swings and monkey bars, watch television, and play music. They dance both traditional style and like their Euro-American neighbors. Adults attend dances or movies and watch their favorite sports or movies on television.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES

Dakota and Lakhotas have a long tradition of artistry. Daily utensils and containers were decorated with paints and dew claws (parts of a deer's foot). Women used dyed, plaited porcupine quills to decorate household objects, moccasins, and clothing. Hides were also tanned by women and painted by men. Women originally learned quilting from missionaries and favor the star quilt design. Women are experts at sewing, and groups of women can turn out a beautiful finished star quilt in an evening if required for a ceremony or religious event. Some women design beautiful ribbon shirts. European trade goods allowed artistic creativity to be expressed in new media. Glass beads replaced porcupine quills, and ledger books and paper replaced hides for artistic expression. Quilting and beadwork continue the fine artistic achievements of the past. It is not uncommon to see pens, salt shakers, and even sneakers decorated with beadwork. Some families continue to do quillwork, and both men and women make silver jewelry and other crafts. Dakotas and Lakhotas engage in the fine arts as well as musical and dramatic performances. Today both men and women excel at the decorative arts and create their own costumes for traditional dancing.



*Chief Little Finger of the Lakota tribe and People of the Seven Council Fish, addresses indigenous people during the World Parks Congress in 2003. Chief Little Finger told the congress that his tribe is the only indigenous tribe to have beaten Americans in war.  
(Alexander Joe/AFP/Getty Images)*

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The incursion of whites into the territories of the Dakota and Lakhota caused widespread social and economic disruption. The buffalo herd was hunted to near extinction, and bands were restricted to smaller and smaller territories that were economically marginal. The Dakota were finally exiled from their own territories after the Minnesota-Dakota Conflict. The government and churches also disrupted cultural and leadership patterns in an attempt to weaken the resolve of these groups and assimilate them into American society. Economically, the reservations continue to be marginal and depressed. Much of the crime on the reservations can be linked to the use of alcohol. Dakotas and Lakhotas have higher rates of suicide (particularly among the youth), alcoholism, diabetes, fetal alcohol syndrome, heart disease, and other maladies than do the neighboring white populations. More and more, the people

themselves are looking at developing culturally appropriate solutions to these problems, and a new generation of leaders is arising.

The Pine Ridge reservation has some of the nation's highest unemployment, with the percentage of unemployment being nearly 50%. Life expectancies for males and females on the Pine Ridge reservation are some of the lowest in the entire Western Hemisphere. Female life expectancy is around 52 years, while male life expectancy is around 48 years. Suicide rates on Pine Ridge are four times the national average.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Siouan peoples recognize four genders: male, female, two-spirit males, and two-spirit females. There is still debate on the sexual orientation of the fourth two-spirit female gender. Some scholars argue that based on 19th century ethnographic evi-

dence that the two-spirit females were lesbians. Other scholars, including some Lakshota argue that the 19th century accounts are wrong on several counts, and that lesbians did not exist in traditional Siouan societies.

Third and fourth gendered individuals in Siouan societies had received visions. The *koskalaka* is a woman who receives a vision from Anukite. Anukite is a supernatural being who was punished for her beauty through the addition of a second, horrid face. As a result of this vision, the *koskalaka* chooses not marry, develops her skills in traditional arts and crafts, and becomes more sexually active than is the norm for Lakshota women. If a man receives a vision from Anukite, he will have to choose between male and female utensils. If he chooses the latter, he will become a *winkte*, or a woman-man.

There are various attitudes towards *winkte* in Lakshota society. Some accounts of these attitudes indicate fear, disdain, and other negative biases. Other accounts speak of *winkte* as almost holy in status, demanding a high degree of respect. It is likely that the influences of Christianity have impacted these attitudes. It appears that there is a growing attitudinal change whereby *winkte* are now being accepted and valued as important members of Lakshota society.

The most important sacred artifact of the Lakshota is the pipe. White Buffalo Calf Woman, or *Wohpe*, is responsible for bringing this to the Lakshota so that they could carry their prayers to the spirits. *Wohpe* is the daughter of the Great Sky Spirit and is partly responsible for bringing order in the cosmos. She mediates between the Lakshota and their ancestral spirits and is also responsible for refining the important Sun Dance ceremony.

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—revised by J. Williams

## DOMINICAN AMERICANS

For more information on Dominican history and culture, *see* **Vol. 2: Dominicans.**

### OVERVIEW

Dominicans have been immigrating to the United States in small numbers since the early 20th century, but mass migration did not begin until the end of Generalissimo Trujillo's oppressive reign in the Dominican Republic in 1961. Trujillo had tightly restricted emigration while in power, so few Dominicans were able to leave the country. After Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, however, thousands of Dominicans fled to Puerto Rico and the United States. Political instability and disastrous economic conditions, along with human rights abuses, continue to drive huge numbers of Dominicans from their homeland.

Some emigrants go the "legal" route by applying for visas at the American consulate in Santo Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic. Long lines of applicants form every day, with dozens turned away before they even reach the door. Dominicans already living "legally" in the United States can sponsor family members to immigrate. Most documented Dominican immigrants today are relatives of established Dominican Americans. "Legal" Dominican immigration to the United States is largely a chain migration, begun by an individual who is then followed by up to 80 or more relatives. The Dominican government supports emigration because it relieves some of the pressure on the Dominican economy, both by reducing the population and through the money that Dominican Americans send back to their families in the Dominican Republic. The Dominican economy receives about \$3 billion a year this way. Without these contributions from emigrants, the Dominican economy would suffer.

Acquiring a visa, especially if there are no sponsors, takes a long time, and there are no guarantees that a visa will ever be granted. The United States refuses to grant "refugee" status to Dominicans because the United States supports the Dominican government and cannot admit that its citizens require asylum. Therefore, many Dominicans choose to use "illegal" means of entry into the United States. Middle-class Dominicans who can prove steady employment in the Dominican Republic can get temporary tourist visas to the United States. They then overstay their visit and become instead "illegal aliens," or undocumented migrants (the preferred term in the Hispanic American community).

Those Dominicans who cannot get tourist visas take more desperate measures. They pay smugglers to ferry them across the Mona Passage between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. The Mona Passage is 70 miles of rough, shark-infested water. Most of the smuggler's boats are much too small to make the crossing safely. Hundreds of Dominicans die each year when boats capsize. Despite the dangers, however, thousands of Dominicans continue to risk their lives each year to make it to the United States.

Puerto Rico is a common first stop for undocumented Dominican migrants for two reasons: it is close to the Dominican Republic; and it is a U.S. Commonwealth, meaning that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and can move without restrictions be-

tween the United States and Puerto Rico. Undocumented Dominican migrants make their way to Puerto Rico, where the U.S. Border Patrol is less vigilant than at mainland U.S. borders, and establish themselves with new Puerto Rican identities. As Puerto Ricans, they are then able to enter the United States without question.

Puerto Ricans resent the presence of so many undocumented Dominicans, but stopping the flow of migration is difficult. Smugglers come up with increasingly clever ways of eluding border police, and modern technology makes creating convincing false documents easier. Border police arrest and deport thousands of undocumented Dominican migrants from Puerto Rico every year, but it is only a fraction of those who actually cross the border.

In an attempt to reduce the numbers of "illegal aliens" in the United States, Congress granted amnesty in 1986 to all undocumented migrants who could show that they had been living in the United States for at least five years. Hordes of people applied for amnesty, many of them Dominicans. Those who were granted amnesty were automatically given green cards, making them "legal" immigrants. Newly documented immigrants then rushed to sponsor their family members to immigrate. The U.S. government had to create a new immigration quota category in 1990 to accommodate all the relatives of those who were granted amnesty. A significant number of Dominicans helped fill this new quota.

Of the more than one million Dominicans in the United States today, about half live in New York City, particularly in the Washington Heights district. New York City is not the only destination for Dominican immigrants, however. New Jersey hosts over 100,000, Florida is home to over 70,000, and another 50,000 live in Massachusetts. Smaller numbers of Dominicans now choose to reside in Rhode Island and Illinois (particularly Chicago) as well.

A large number of Dominican Americans are undocumented migrants. Accordingly, the 2000 U.S. Census counted only 764,945 Dominican Americans, of whom 545,262 were foreign-born, while the 2004 American Community Survey brought the total up to 1,051,032 (with 61% foreign born). Nearly two-thirds lived in New York. Census figures show Dominican Americans as the fourth-largest Hispanic group in the United States, after Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Americans. When undocumented migrants are included, however, the Dominican American population most likely exceeds that of Cuban Americans.

Dominican Americans are Spanish-speaking Catholics. The family is central to Dominican life, and traditional families include a wide range of extended relatives. These extended families provide a tremendous amount of support, both emotional and financial, to their members. That support is sorely missed by Dominican Americans, whose families have typically been torn apart by immigration. Dominican Americans are forced to rely on fractured families, many of which (over 30%) are headed by women alone. To replace the help normally provided by extended families, Dominican Americans have established organizations and associations to assist each other. There are also a great number of Dominican American cultural, recreational, and social clubs.

Although Dominicans have only been in the United States for a short time, they have managed to contribute to mainstream American society in a variety of ways. Uniquely Do-



minican restaurants called *fondas* have become popular in both New York City and Miami. Fondas are constructed like diners, but the tables have tablecloths and flowers on them like a more formal restaurant. They serve “Spanish and American” food to appeal to a wide range of customers.

*Merengue* music, a blend of Spanish and African elements, was developed in the Dominican Republic and is a constant presence in Dominican American communities. It has become popular among other Hispanic Americans as well and is beginning to spread to a wider, mainstream American audience. Rap music boasts a number of Dominican American artists as well. Two well-known Dominican Americans in other arts are writer Julia Alvarez and fashion designer Oscar de la Renta.

Dominican Americans own thousands of small businesses in New York City, including a majority of the *bodegas* (Hispanic grocery stores) and independent “gypsy” cabs. A significant number of “buckeyes,” those who hand-roll cigars, are also Dominican American. Most Dominican Americans are relegated to blue-collar jobs, however, because of a lack of language skills, job skills, or legal immigrant documentation. Over half (55%) of Dominican Americans work in the sales and service industry, and another 21% work in manufacturing and transportation. Only 17% of Dominican Americans are in professional or management positions.

Perhaps the best-known arena for Dominican American contributions to American society is sports, especially baseball. Baseball is extremely popular in the Dominican Republic, and major league teams in the United States regularly recruit

Dominican players. Most Dominican baseball players return to the Dominican Republic in the United States off-season to play in the Dominican league, giving them year-round training and experience. Dominican Americans also sponsor numerous Little League and other amateur teams. Well-known early Dominican players (in the late 1950s and early 1960s) in the U.S. major leagues include Ozzie Virgil, Juan Marichal, and the brothers Felipe, Matty, and Jesus Alou. Some of the more recent Dominican players are Pedro Guerrero, Rafael Santana, George Bell, Joaquín Andújar, Tony Fernández, Mario Soto, Pedro Martínez, Manny Ramírez, Alex Rodríguez, and Sammy Sosa.

Undocumented Dominican Americans suffer the same problems as other undocumented migrants in the United States: poverty, unemployment, and exploitation. Most employers will not hire undocumented migrants, and those who do pay them less than minimum wage and force them to work long hours without a break in miserable working conditions. The workers cannot complain because the employer might turn them in to immigration officials.

Because of the difficulties in finding decent employment, some undocumented Dominican migrants turn to drug-dealing to support themselves. Unfortunately, because the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City had already developed a reputation as a center of illegal drug activity before Dominican immigrants began to settle there, the Dominicans inherited the reputation whether or not they were involved in the activities themselves. Many non-Dominican

Americans believe the stereotype that “all Dominican Americans are drug-dealers.” Innocent Dominican Americans are subjected to searches, harassment, and even brutality by local police. In 1992 Dominican Americans in Washington Heights rioted after a European American police officer shot and killed a Dominican American youth. The court determined that the shooting was justified, but many Dominican Americans felt otherwise.

Tensions also exist between Dominican and Puerto Rican Americans. Longstanding ill-feeling between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans persists among those in the United States. Also, because Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, they are allowed to vote. Those Dominican Americans who are undocumented migrants—half the Dominican American population—are not allowed to vote. Therefore, Dominican Americans must rely on others to represent their interests in the public sphere. The majority of Hispanic American politicians and voters in New York City, where most Dominican Americans live, are Puerto Rican. Dominican Americans generally feel that they are not being adequately represented by Puerto Rican Americans, and they resent Puerto Rican Americans for this. Puerto Rican Americans resent Dominican Americans for threatening their established presence as the Hispanic majority in New York City. Until more Dominicans are able to become “legal” U.S. residents, these tensions will likely continue.

The Catholic emphasis on marriage and family makes life for gay and lesbian Dominican Americans difficult. Gay men must also cope with the traditional Latino understanding of masculinity as “macho,” which paints homosexual men as “effeminate” and weak. Dominican Americans also tend to be overlooked in pan-Latino research and outreach efforts, leaving them at greater risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases due to lack of education in prevention methods. Because the macho culture, along with the Catholic Church, discourages the use of condoms, rates of HIV/AIDS and STDs (along with unplanned pregnancy) are high for Dominican American women as well as men.

To combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic and promote public health and welfare among Dominican American gays and lesbians, the Gay and Lesbian Dominican Empowerment Organization (GALDE) was founded in 2001 in New York City. Each year it sponsors a community-based health fair in Fort Washington Park and has participated since 2003 in the Dominican Day Parade in August. GALDE also presents drug awareness and prevention programs at schools and community centers and offers counseling for domestic violence victims.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott



# DOMINICANS (DOMINICA)

**PRONUNCIATION:** dah-men-EEK-uhns

**LOCATION:** Dominica

**POPULATION:** 72,514

**LANGUAGE:** English; kwéyòl (French-based dialect)

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; small groups of Anglicans, Methodists, Pentecostals, Baptists, and Seventh-Day Adventists, Baha'is, and Rastafarians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Dominica (pronounced dah-men-EEK-uh) is the most mountainous island in the Lesser Antilles. Historically, its rugged terrain delayed foreign settlement, and more recently it has slowed the pace of modernization on the island. Today, Dominica—popularly referred to as “the nature island of the Caribbean”—remains among the world’s few locations with virtually untouched tropical rain forests. The island is also home to the Lesser Antilles’ largest enclave of the Amerindians from whom the Caribbean takes its name—the Caribs, most of whom live on a reserve on its northeast coast.

The Caribs inhabited the island, which they called *Waitikubuli*, when it was sighted by Christopher Columbus on a Sunday (*dies dominica*) in 1493. The Spanish did not attempt to colonize Dominica, which was the object of a political tug-of-war between the French and British throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, with both nations simultaneously attempting to subdue the Caribs as well. In 1805 the French finally gave up all claims to Dominica, which remained a British colony until it gained its independence in 1978. However, because of the lengthy French presence on the island as well as the proximity of the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, the cultural influence of the French endured.

By 1834, when the British Empire emancipated its slaves, Africans brought to labor on the island’s coffee and sugar plantations made up a majority of the population. In 1902 the once-powerful Caribs, reduced to dire circumstances, sought better land and increased recognition from the British and were granted 3,700 acres in the northeast of the island, where they still live on what is known today as Carib Territory. In spite of economic progress under the direction of colonial administrator Henry Hesketh Bell between 1899 and 1905, Dominica remained relatively poor and undeveloped during the first half of the 20th century, its fragile economy vulnerable to the disruptions of worldwide depression and war.

By the 1950s, however, British government assistance, agricultural expansion, and exploitation of the island’s abundant hydroelectric resources inaugurated a period of development and relative prosperity. In 1951 universal adult suffrage was granted by the British government, followed by a new constitution in 1960 and complete internal autonomy by 1967. The independent Commonwealth of Dominica came into being on 3 November 1978.

In 1980 Dame Mary Eugenia Charles, head of the Democratic Freedom Party, became the first female head of government in the Caribbean. Reelected in 1985 and 1990, Dame

Charles retired in 1995 at the age of 76. Since then, Dominica’s citizens have had regular democratic elections.

In 1995, Mary Eugenia Charles was succeeded as prime minister by Edison James who led an ambitious program of economic diversification allowing the creation of off-shore business. In 2000, Roosevelt Bernard Douglas was elected prime minister, but his mandate was extremely brief. After only eight months in the office, Bernard Douglas was found dead in his house. Douglas was replaced by Pierre Charles, who continued his successor program of government. In 2005, Roosevelt Skerrit became the prime minister of Dominica. During his tenure, Skerrit has tightened the relations with China, Cuba, and Venezuela.

Economically, Dominica depends mainly on agriculture and exports bananas, citrus, mangoes, root crops, coconuts, and cocoa. During the last decades, tourism has increased notably on the island as the government has promoted Dominica as an ecotourism destination. A fundamental aspect in the marketing campaign of Dominica is to sell its image as a natural paradise. Dominica has been nicknamed “Nature Isle of the Caribbean.” One of the principal destinations is the mountainous rainforest where it is possible to find and observe rare species of plants, animals, and birds.

With the objective of attracting foreign investments, Dominica eliminated price controls and privatized the state banana company. The government has been attempting to develop an offshore financial sector and is researching Dominica’s capability to export geothermal energy.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Although usually regarded as the northernmost of the British-speaking Windward Islands, Dominica is actually at the midpoint of the Lesser Antilles and could also be grouped with the Leeward Islands. Facing the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Caribbean Sea to the west, it is nearly equidistant from Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. Dominica’s area of 750 sq km (290 sq mi) is slightly more than four times the size of Washington, D.C. Rainfall on Dominica is extremely heavy, and much of the land is covered by dense and largely unexploited rain forests containing rare wildlife species. Hundreds of rivers and streams flow into gorges, forming natural pools and crater lakes. One of the island’s most unusual natural features is the volcanically bubbling Boiling Lake, the second-largest lake of its kind in the world. An egg will supposedly boil within three minutes in its 92°C (198°F) waters.

A central mountain ridge runs from Cape Melville in the north to the island’s southern cliffs. Its highest point, Morne Diablotins, rises to 1,448 m (4,747 ft), the second-highest mountain in the Lesser Antilles. Several national parks surround the mountains, most notably the Morne Trois Pitons National Park in the southern part of the island. One geographical feature that has been of great consequence to Dominica is its location just west of the chief point of origin of the hurricane belt. Hurricanes David and Frederick in 1979 caused more than 40 deaths and 2,500 injuries, leaving two-thirds of the population homeless and causing extensive crop damage.

Estimates of Dominica’s population vary from 72,000 to around 80,000. About one-third of the country’s residents live in the capital city of Roseau and the surrounding area. With a population density of about 37 people per sq km (95 people per sq mi), Dominica is one of the most sparsely populated coun-

tries in the Caribbean region. The majority of Dominicans is of African or mixed descent, with smaller minorities of Carib or European ancestry. The Carib population numbers approximately 3,400, most of whom live on a 3,700-acre reserve in the northeast called the Carib Territory. Bataka is the largest of its eight hamlets, and other settlements include Sinecou and Salybia.

The Caribs, whose language is no longer spoken, are striving to preserve the remaining vestiges of their culture, which has been eroded by intermarriage and the introduction of Western religion and customs to the island. They do not celebrate the nation's November 3rd Independence Day because it also commemorates the date in 1493 when Columbus first sighted the island, an event that ultimately led to their political, economic, and cultural decline. Most of Dominica's remaining Caribs are of mixed ancestry—full-blooded Caribs are said to number 50 or fewer.

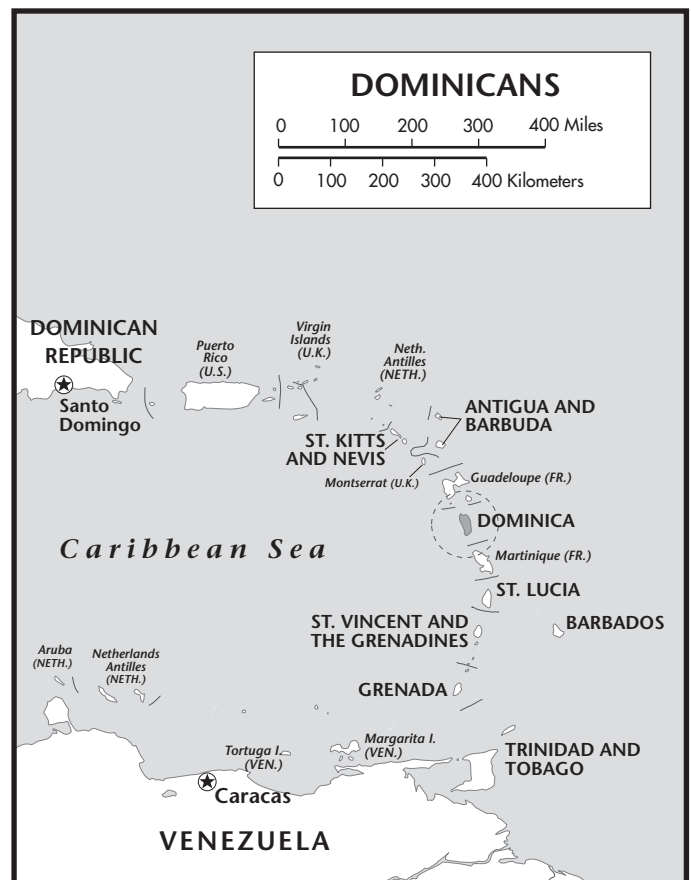
**3 LANGUAGE**

While English is the official language of Dominica, most of the population also speaks a French-based patois, or dialect, called *kwéyòl* (derived from the word “Creole”). While *kwéyòl* is a distinctive language unique to Dominica, it has elements in common with the dialects spoken on St. Lucia and other islands with French-influenced cultures. *Kwéyòl* is a source of pride among Dominicans and is increasingly being used in print. A *kwéyòl* dictionary was published in 1991. *Cocoy*, a type of Pidgin English, is spoken in the villages of Marigot and Wesley in northeastern Dominica, which were originally settled by freed slaves from Antigua.

<b>KWÉYÒL (PRONOUNS)</b>	<b>STANDARD ENGLISH</b>
<i>mwen/mon</i>	I
<i>ou</i>	you (singular)
<i>I</i>	he/she/it
<i>nou</i>	we
<i>zò</i>	you (plural)
<i>yo</i>	they
Simple sentences:	
<i>Sa ki non'w?</i>	What is your name?
<i>Non mwen sé Paul.</i>	My name is Paul
<i>Bon jou, Misyé.</i>	Good day, sir
<i>Bonn apwé midi.</i>	Good afternoon
<i>Bon swé.</i>	Good night
<i>Mon swèf.</i>	I am thirsty
<i>Mon fen.</i>	I am hungry
<i>Mon pa fen.</i>	I am not hungry
<i>Jodi sé yon bèl jou.</i>	Today is a beautiful day
<i>Lapli ka tonbé.</i>	It is raining
<i>Byenvini.</i>	Welcome

**4 FOLKLORE**

According to a Carib legend, a giant boa constrictor called the Master Boa has lived for centuries in a hole on Morne Diablotin. The Escalier Tête-Chien (Master Boa's Staircase), a basalt formation near Sineku, is said to be the spot where the snake crawled onto the island from its original home at the bottom of the sea. Looking at the Master Boa is supposed to be fatal unless a person has abstained from both food and sex for a certain number of days beforehand.



Many Dominicans believe in *obeah*, a collection of quasi-religious beliefs and practices derived from Africa. Obeah is believed to have the power both to heal the sick and harm one's enemies, and its practices include the use of herbal potions. Flying witches called *suquiyas* are the subjects of a number of Dominican proverbs.

**5 RELIGION**

The historical French influence on Dominica left the island's population predominantly Roman Catholic. About 80% of Dominicans belong to the Catholic Church. Smaller groups belong to the Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Seventh-Day Adventist churches, and the Baha'i and Rastafarian religions are represented as well. The Caribs' religious practices combine features of Christianity, such as belief in Jesus, the saints, heaven, and hell, with the nature worship inherited from their ancestors.

**6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Dominica's public holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), Carnival (February 14–15), Good Friday and Easter Monday (late March or early April), May Day (May 1), Whit Monday, August Monday (August 1), National Day—also called Independence Day (November 3), Community Service Day (November 4), and Christmas Day and Boxing Day (December 25 and 26). The main religious holidays are Christmas and Easter. *Tou Saintes* (All Saints' Day) is celebrated on November 1. The country's largest festival is Carnival, which occurs

on the two days preceding Ash Wednesday and is marked by masquerades, calypso contests, feasting, street dancing (“jump ups”), and parties. In keeping with the history of Carnival as an “anything goes” affair, slander and libel laws are suspended for the duration of the festivities.

Independence Day on November 3 commemorates the date in 1978 when Dominica became an independent nation with speeches, parades, and calypso music. On Creole Day, usually the Friday before Independence Day, Dominicans celebrate and display their Creole heritage by wearing traditional costumes; conducting all business in *kwéyòl*, their native dialect; eating distinctly Dominican dishes such as *crapaud* (frogs’ legs); and listening and dancing to Dominican folk music.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious ceremonies according to each Dominican’s faith community.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The majority of Dominicans are of African descent. Some of them have European, Syrian, and Caribbean blood. Dominica is the only island with a distinctive group of Carib Amerindians, descendants of the aborigines that inhabited the territory before the Spanish conquest. Today, this pure-blooded community lives in a Carib Reservation.

Dominicans are known for being more reserved than some of their neighbors in the Caribbean, and they place a high value on good manners. A common greeting is “*Cakafete*,” the equivalent of “How are you?”

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Dominica is one of the poorest nations in the Caribbean. Many Dominicans live in single-story wooden houses with corrugated iron roofs, typically protected from the island’s heavy rainfall by wide overhangs and an absence of porches. Average life expectancy is 74 years for males and 80 years for females, and the infant mortality rate is 9.9 deaths per 1,000 live births. Health care is provided at local clinics, 12 health centers, and the 136-bed Princess Margaret Hospital in Roseau. There are also hospital facilities at Portsmouth, Marigot, and Grand Bay.

Dominica has about 700 km (435 mi) of roads, of which 370 km (230 mi) are paved and much of the rest is blacktopped. In spite of the relatively good condition of the roads following major improvements in 1986, travel can be tortuous on these narrow, winding mountain thoroughfares: it commonly takes up to 40 minutes to travel the 10 km (6 mi) from the capital city of Roseau to the nearby fishing village of Scott’s Head. Roseau is the country’s main port. There are plans for the construction of a new international airport to encourage expansion of the tourist industry.

In 2000, the unemployment rate was about 23% and, two years later, 30% of Dominicans were living under the poverty line.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In addition to formal marriages, Dominicans also enter into common-law relationships (living together—with or without children—without being married) and “visiting unions,”

where the man and woman live apart (essentially, female-headed households).

## 11 CLOTHING

The Dominicans wear modern Western-style clothing. However, on Creole Day and other special occasions women still wear the traditional national costume: the brightly colored *jupe* (a skirt with lace petticoats), *la wobe douillette* (a wide blouse), and a madras hat called *tete case*.

## 12 FOOD

Dominican cuisine combines French, English, and African influences. Dietary staples include fish, yams, and other vegetables. The *ti-ti-ri* is a tiny whitefish found in Dominican rivers and served fried with garlic and lime. The most distinctive local food in Dominica is probably mountain chicken, which is not actually chicken but rather the legs of the *crapaud*, a local species of frog. Other regional favorites include crab backs (stuffed crabshells), *boija*, a coconut-cornmeal bread, and *funchi*, a cornmeal-and-okra pudding. Cassava bread is a staple among the Carib population. One popular beverage is a sea-moss drink—made from vanilla, algae, and milk, and resembling a vanilla milkshake—which is also a favorite in Grenada. Another local drink, *Bwa bande* (brewed from the bark of the tree of the same name), is reputed to enhance male sexual potency.

## 13 EDUCATION

The adult literacy rate in Dominica is approximately 94%. Historically, the Catholic Church has played an important role in education. Widespread access to public education was not attained until the 1960s. By the 1980s, all but 2 of the nation’s 66 primary schools were government-operated, and the secondary schools (which currently number 10) were equally divided between the government and the church. Before the 1960s, few students received a secondary education because rural areas had no secondary schools, and the island’s mountainous terrain and precarious roads prohibited traveling to cities or towns to attend school.

Primary and secondary education is based on the British system of grade levels called “forms.” Children attend school from age 5 to 15, at which point they are in the third form (equivalent to eighth grade in the United States). As of the late 1980s, there were no laws making school attendance mandatory. While family circumstances make it necessary for a number of school-age young people to work part- or full-time, families and communities place a strong emphasis on academic achievement as one of the few means of social and economic advancement available on the island.

Most students end their secondary schooling in the fifth form (equivalent to tenth grade), except for a relative few who continue their studies in order to qualify for admission to a university. Dominica has a teacher training college, a nursing school, and a technical college, and the University of the West Indies also offers programs on the island. Many qualified Dominican students have been unable to attend college for financial reasons. The United States, Great Britain, Canada, and France have offered assistance by making scholarships and other forms of financial aid available to Dominican students.



*Political rally in the Carib Territory, Dominica. The majority of Dominicans are of African or mixed descent, with smaller minorities of Carib or European ancestry. The Carib population numbers approximately 3,400, most of whom live on a 3,700 acre-reserve in the north-east called the Carib Territory. (AP Images)*

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Dominican-born novelist Jean Rhys (1894–1979) is mostly associated with Europe, where she spent much of her life. However, West Indian speech patterns figure in several of her short stories, Caribbean scenes appear in her 1934 novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, and her last work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), is set in the Caribbean. Phyllis Shand Allfrey was a poet and novelist who returned to Dominica in the 1950s after being educated in the United States and England. In addition to writing *The Orchid House*, her only completed novel, she was an editor of two Dominican newspapers and served as a cabinet minister in the short-lived West Indian Federation of the late 1950s and early 1960s. *The Orchard House* was adapted for film by British television in 1990. Lennox Honychurch, author of *The Dominica Story: A History of the Island and Our Island Culture*, is a well-known contemporary Dominican historian, folklorist, and painter.

Alwin Bully, co-author of *Speak Brother Speak*, is a well-known Dominican playwright and founding member of the Peoples' Action Theatre. He has also written radio plays and musicals. Dominica also has a School of Dance and a professional dance troupe, the Waitukubuli Dance Company, whose name is based on the island's original Carib name. The Carib Territory is home to several notable visual artists, including Faustulus Frederick and Jacob Frederick.

#### **15 WORK**

The Dominican labor force totals about 25,000 people, of whom an estimated 40% are employed in agriculture (including food processing), while industry and commerce employ 32%, and the rest work in other sectors of the economy. The standard work day is eight hours long. Officially unemployment is at 10%, but the actual figure is thought to be closer to 15%, and a number of Dominicans have sought work on St. Thomas and other nearby islands.

Per capita income on Dominica is the lowest of any country in the Antilles. Earnings are low for workers in agriculture and commerce alike. The distribution of land on the island favors the operators of large estates, which are located on deep soil near the coast, rather than small farmers, who often have to contend with erosion-prone plots on the steep terrain of the island's interior. They traditionally call these small plots gardens.

#### **16 SPORTS**

The nation's most popular sports are cricket and football (soccer). Major cricket games draw thousands of fans, and the game is especially popular in the Carib Territory. Other favorites include volleyball, basketball, and squash.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Dominican men, like their counterparts in other parts of the Caribbean, enjoy whiling away their leisure hours playing dominoes in one of the many rum shops on the island. Popular music on the island embraces a number of styles—reggae, zouk, cadance, and others.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Dominican dances include the quadrille, jing-ping, heel-and-toe, and bélé. The typical jing-ping band consists of an accordion, a bass instrument called a boom-boom, and a percussion instrument called a shak-shak. The Carib Territory has 16 craft shops that turn out intricately woven and colorfully dyed straw hats, baskets, and other woven goods. The Caribs are also known for their carved canoes. Other crafts on Dominica include mats woven from a special grass called *vertivert*.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Dominica's already sparse water supply is further threatened by pollution from agricultural chemicals, untreated sewage, and industrial waste. Dominica has been used by international drug traffickers as a transshipment point for narcotics.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though the government of Dominica ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1989, economic resources for accomplishing this task remain minimal. Domestic violence cases are common, but there are no specific laws criminalizing spousal abuse. In addition, the law does not prohibit sexual harassment, which is a significant problem for Dominican women.

While there is little open discrimination against women, cultural instances of discrimination exist. Also, property ownership continued to be deeded to heads of households, who are usually male. When the male head of household dies without a will, the wife may not inherit or sell the property, although she may live in it and pass it to her children.

Regarding labor, the law establishes fixed pay rates for specific civil service jobs, regardless of gender. However, women account for 53% of unemployed in the country, which results partly from the continuing decline of the banana export industry. Although there are some women in managerial or high-level positions, most women work as shopkeepers, nurses, or in education.

Dominican women are underrepresented in positions where they can sufficiently influence the power and decision-making process. This is apparent at all levels, from the highest political level to local government and managerial positions. On an average there is about a 30% female membership in local authority. There are six women who head village councils, and there were only two women in the 30-seat legislature: an elected parliamentary representative who also serves in the cabinet and a senator appointed by the president.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# DOMINICANS (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

**LOCATION:** Dominican Republic; United States (primarily New York City)

**POPULATION:** 9,507,133 million in the Dominican Republic; around 1.2 million in New York City

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Evangelical Protestantism; Voodoo

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Dominican Republic is one of the islands that make up the West Indies, located in the Caribbean Sea zone that goes from the tip of the Florida peninsula to the north coast of South America. The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the nation of Haiti. Christopher Columbus sighted Hispaniola in 1492 and, four years later, his brother Bartolomé founded Santo Domingo, the present-day capital of the Dominican Republic and the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere. Because of its strategic location in relation to other trading ports in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic came under the rule of a succession of foreign powers, including France and Spain. The Dominican Republic has experienced severe political conflicts since achieving its independence under the leadership of national hero Juan Pablo Duarte in 1844. The government has remained unstable with power passing not just from dictator to dictator, but from nation to nation.

When Christopher Columbus landed in Hispaniola, he encountered an indigenous group called Tainos, who lived on hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming. A few years after the arrival of the Europeans, disease and cruelty on behalf of the Europeans dramatically diminished the aborigine population. Once the Spanish crown discovered new and richer territories, such as Mexico and Peru, the Dominican Republic was totally neglected. In this complete state of abandonment, the island became prey for other colonial powers, which depleted the Dominican Republic's natural resources. Consequently, the Spanish crown lost its influence over the island and, in 1697, France claimed one third of Hispaniola, the western territory that would become Haiti. One century later, France came to own the complete island after Spain agreed to sign the Treaty of Basel. However, Napoleon's invasion of Spain in the early 1800s stirred a deep sense of resentment against French rule among the *criollos* (first generation of Spanish born in the island), who with British support recovered the Dominican Republic for Spain in 1808. After Haitians inhabited the island for 20 years, Dominicans struggled for independence and achieved autonomous rule in 1865.

After 50 years of self-rule, the United States occupied the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924. In 1930 the 30-year rule of Rafael Trujillo—direct and through handpicked surrogates—began. Although Trujillo expanded industry and introduced economic reforms, his regime ruthlessly suppressed human rights, engaging in blackmail, torture, and murder to ensure its hold on power. Trujillo was assassinated in 1961 and writer Juan Bosch came to power briefly before being ousted

in a 1963 military coup. After a period of instability that included U.S. military intervention in 1965, former Trujillo appointee Joaquin Balaguer was elected president. Even though democratic elections were held every four years, and other candidates were elected in 1978 and 1982, Balaguer remained a powerful figure.

In the 1996 presidential election, the candidate of the Liberation Dominican Party, Leonel Fernández, won the highest office. During Fernández's rule the economy improved significantly with a rate of growth of 7%, the highest in Latin America during that period. Despite economic growth, Hipólito Mejía, the candidate from the Socialist Dominican Revolutionary Party, won the 2000 presidential race. During Mejía's term the economy shrank and poverty increased. As a result of the economic crisis during Mejía's administration and the complex diplomatic relationship with Haiti, the Dominicans decided to rely on a familiar and experienced politician and reelected Leonel Fernández in 2004 with 57% of the votes. Fernández was reelected to a third term in 2008.

Even though the economy gained leverage during Fernández's administration, reaching a growth rate of 8.5% in 2007, the country remained highly unequal, Dominicans living under the poverty line represented more than 40% of the total population, and unemployment affected 15% of the workforce.

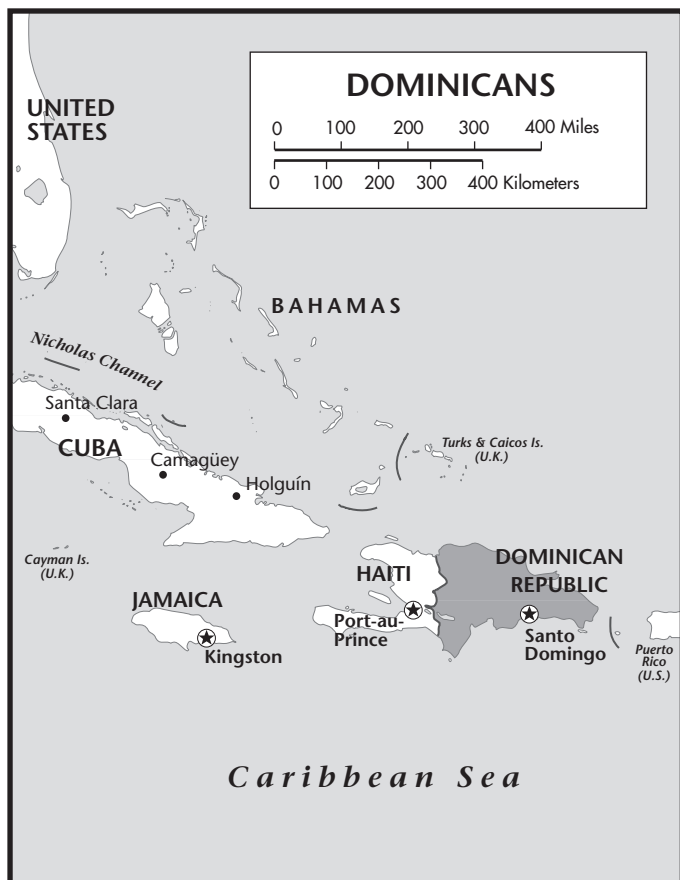
## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

With an area of approximately 48,741 sq km (18,819 sq mi), the Dominican Republic is about the same size as Vermont and New Hampshire combined. It is bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, on the south by the Caribbean Sea, and on the east by the Mona Passage, which separates it from Puerto Rico. The country is very diverse geographically, with terrain ranging from semiarid desert to fertile farmlands and mountain peaks. Both the highest and lowest points in the Caribbean region are found in the Dominican Republic.

About three-fifths of the country's terrain is covered by four mountain ranges. The largest is the Cordillera Central, which runs through the center of the Dominican Republic from east to west and extends into Haiti. It contains the Caribbean's highest peaks, Pico Duarte (3,175 m or 10,417 ft) and Pico la Pelona (3,168 m or 10,393 ft). The Cordillera Septentrional runs from east to west in the northern part of the country, and two lower ranges, the Sierra Neiba and Sierra de Bahoruco, stretch across the country's southwestern region.

The fertile Valle de Cibao, containing the Dominican Republic's richest agricultural land, stretches from east to west between the two northern mountain ranges, covering about 5,180 sq km (2,000 sq mi), or some 10% of the country's terrain. In contrast, the area between the two southern mountain ranges, called the Cul-de-Sac, is the country's most barren and is home to only 10% of the population. It is the lowest terrain in the Dominican Republic and also in the West Indies as a whole. The other major low-lying region is the Caribbean coastal plain in the north. The country's four major rivers are the Yaque del Norte, the Yaque del Sur, the Yuma, and the Artibonito.

The Dominican Republic has tropical temperatures and mild oscillations. The annual mean temperature is 25°C (78°F). As a consequence, staples, such as sugarcane, coffee, and cacao, represent an important source of the national income. Other typical export-oriented goods are bananas, rice, toma-



toes, and tropical fruits. Around one-eighth of the Dominican Republic's GDP is generated by the agricultural sector.

About 9.5 million people live in the Dominican Republic, 60% in the cities and 40% in rural areas. The capital city of Santo Domingo has a population of 2.1 million. The 20th century has been marked by massive rural-to-urban migration: the population of Santo Domingo approximately doubled every 10 years between 1920 and 1970. The second- and third-largest cities, Santiago and La Romana, also experienced dramatic growth, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

International emigration is also a fact of life in the Dominican Republic, and about one in seven Dominicans now live abroad. New York City has the highest concentration of Dominicans of any city in the world except Santo Domingo. Florida and New Jersey also have substantial populations of Dominican immigrants. Some Dominicans emigrate because they are unemployed or are seeking better-paying jobs. Others leave in order to pursue an education or to join relatives already in the United States. Remittances—money sent home by *dominicanos ausentes* (absent Dominicans)—represents about \$500 million dollars a year and is an important factor in their homeland's economy.

About 70% of the country's population is classified as Mulatto (of mixed Black and White ancestry), 16% as White, and 11% as Black. However, these broad classifications actually encompass a more complex range of racial distinctions. *Blanco* (white) refers to Whites and persons of mixed White and Amerindian descent (Mestizos); *indio claro* (tan) refers to Mulat-

tos, including those with Amerindian ancestry; *indio oscuro* (dark Amerindian) describes anyone who is mostly Black with some White or Amerindian ancestry; and *negro* (which is not a derogatory term in the Dominican Republic) is reserved for persons who are 100% African.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official and universally spoken language of the Dominican Republic. While the Spanish of the Dominicans is considered relatively close to "classical" Castilian Spanish when compared to that of other Latin American countries, it has a distinctive accent and incorporates numerous local idioms as well as many African and Taíno (Amerindian) words and expressions. Some English is spoken in the capital city of Santo Domingo. Because of the closeness to Haiti it is not uncommon in the island to hear French Creole among Haitian migrants.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Combining Catholic beliefs with African customs, *formularios* and *oraciones* are special incantations intended to attract good luck or avoid the evil eye. Many Dominicans also have a quasi-magical belief in the powers of the saints, expressed in *santos* (saints) cults. Images of one or two saints are kept in the house, and goods are offered to them in exchange for carrying out the wishes of the worshipper. On the Night of the Saints (*Noche Vela*), the saints are believed to be called to earth.

### 5 RELIGION

The importance of religion in the Dominican Republic is reflected in the cross and bible at the center of the nation's coat of arms. A significant portion of the money that Dominican emigrants send back home is sent to their churches. While some 93% of the population is Roman Catholic, many do not attend church regularly, and, as in a number of other Catholic countries, the women are generally more observant than the men. Religious customs among observant Catholics include *rosarios*, processions organized to pray for intercession from a patron saint or the Virgin.

Evangelical Protestantism has become increasingly popular in recent years. Its embrace of family values, including strictures against alcohol, prostitution, and wife beating, has made it especially attractive to low-income Dominicans, who traditionally have had unstable family structures. Followers of spirit worship and Voodoo (introduced into the country by Haitian immigrants) are thought to number about 60,000.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many holidays in the Dominican Republic are religious in nature. In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, they include the Day of Our Lady of Altigracia (January 21), Corpus Christi (June 17), and the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy (September 24). Secular holidays include Día de Duarte, commemorating the birthday of national hero Juan Pablo Duarte (January 26), Independence Day (February 27), Labor Day (May 1), and Dominican Restoration Day (August 16). Every town also holds a festival in honor of its patron saint, combining religious observance with such secular activities as dancing, drinking, and gambling. The Dominican Independence Day (February 27), which falls around the beginning of Lent, is the occasion for a

boisterous Carnival celebration that draws over half a million people annually to festivities in Santo Domingo.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious ceremonies appropriate to each Dominican's faith community.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When addressing each other, Dominicans use the formal pronoun *usted* instead of the familiar form *tu*, unless the relationship is a very close one.

*Compadrazgo*, a relationship resembling that of godparents in the United States, is an important part of the social fabric of the Dominican Republic. The *compadre* (literally, "co-parent") is chosen when a child is baptized, and the special relationship that ensues—with both the child and his or her parents—is a way of strengthening the bond between friends or even reinforcing other types of relationships, such as that between an employee and employer. Exploiting this dynamic, the country's long-time dictator Rafael Trujillo held mass baptisms where he became the *compadre* to thousands of peasant children in order to ensure their parents' loyalty.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditional rural dwellings are made of wood with roofs of thatch or corrugated tin and are often painted in bright colors. To keep the farmhouse cool, cooking is usually done in a separate structure with slotted sides that release smoke and heat. In the 35 years since the end of the Trujillo regime, which prohibited emigration within the country, rural-to-urban migration has created a severe urban housing shortage, and slums and squatter settlements have sprung up in the capital city of Santo Domingo.

The Dominican Republic's average life expectancy was 69 years in 1993. Hospitals and medical personnel are concentrated in Santo Domingo and Santiago, the two largest cities, with a lower quality of health care in rural areas. Health programs are offered through the nation's public welfare department (covering between 70% and 80% of the population) and the social security department (covering 5% of the population, or 13% of the work force). However, the country's economic troubles have resulted in shortages of doctors and nurses, medication, and surgical supplies. Public health care has been described as inadequate, with long treatment delays, and many who can afford it consult private physicians.

There are modern roads in the cities of the Dominican Republic, and a major highway connects Santo Domingo and Santiago. However, few Dominicans own their own cars—most of the nation's passenger cars are driven by either the very wealthy or by tourists. In rural areas, many roads are unpaved. The nation's railways are used mainly for transporting sugarcane.

Dominicans enjoy a better standard of living than their neighbors, the Haitians. However, lack of clean water, deficient housing, and lack of healthcare services has remained unsolved. In addition to these structural problems, deficient diet among the poorest segment of the society has contributed to a high rate of infant mortality: 27 children died per 1,000 births in 2007.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, the extended-family household with a dominant father figure has been the norm among the middle and upper classes. In contrast, low-income people have less stable family ties, and many of their households consist of either a couple (with or without children) living together in a common-law marriage, or a female-headed household with an absentee father. While women still consider a man the head of the household, they have been able to exert increased authority within the family as they have won greater educational and employment opportunities and an increased measure of control over the number of children they bear.

## 11 CLOTHING

People in the Dominican Republic wear modern Western-style clothing.

## 12 FOOD

The popular Caribbean dish of rice and beans (*arroz con habichuelas*) is a staple in the Dominican Republic, where it is nicknamed "the flag" (*la bandera*) and served with stewed beef. Another favorite dish is *sancocho*, a meat, plantain, and vegetable stew. Plantains, common throughout the Caribbean area, are especially popular in the Dominican Republic. Ripe fried plantains are called *amarillas*, green fried ones are *patacon pisaao*, and they become *tostones* when fried and mashed. Popular snack foods include *chicarrons* (pieces of fried pork) and *empanadillas* (tangy meat tarts). Puddings, including sweet rice, corn, and banana pudding, are a popular dessert.

### Banana Pudding

- 6 overripe bananas, peeled and mashed
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons melted butter or margarine
- 3 egg whites, beaten to stiff peaks
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons sweetened shredded coconut for garnish

Preheat oven to 325°F. Combine bananas, melted butter or margarine, orange juice, and sugar with mixing spoon or electric mixer. Carefully fold in stiffly beaten egg whites and transfer mixture to buttered or nonstick casserole or baking pan. Bake for about 40 minutes or until puffy and golden brown. Remove from oven and sprinkle top with shredded coconut.

## 13 EDUCATION

The estimated literacy rate of the Dominican Republic was 83% in 1990. Students must attend school for eight years, but many leave earlier to help support their families. Additional barriers to education include a shortage of teachers, especially in rural areas, and a lack of adequate facilities. Institutions of higher learning include the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo founded in 1538—the oldest institution of higher education in the so-called New World—and four private universities.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Historically, the Henriquez-Ureña family has been at the center of the Dominican Republic's literary heritage. Salomé Ureña de Henríquez was a respected 19th-century poet who also established the country's first higher education facility for





*Agriculture has traditionally been the main source of employment in the Dominican Republic, but today a growing number of Dominicans work in service-related jobs, especially in the tourism industry. Most Dominican farmers are sharecroppers or tenant farmers. (AP Images)*

women, the Instituto de Señoritas. In the 20th century, the critic Pedro Henriquez-Ureña was also deeply involved in education. Many consider Gaston Fernando Delingue, who wrote in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to be the Dominican national poet. The country's best-known writer internationally is undoubtedly novelist, essayist, and short-story writer Juan Bosch, who served briefly as president following the assassination of Rafael Trujillo. The Dominican Republic has a National Symphony Orchestra, and a National School of Fine Arts, located in Santo Domingo.

### **15 WORK**

Agriculture has traditionally been the main source of employment in the Dominican Republic, but today a growing number of Dominicans work in service-related jobs, especially in the tourism industry. Most Dominican farmers are sharecroppers or tenant farmers, and those who do own their own farms generally have fewer than 2 hectares (5 acres) and grow only enough food to feed their families. The country suffers from an extremely high rate of unemployment (an estimated 30% of the work force was unemployed in 1992), which led to widespread emigration. Race has traditionally dominated Dominicans' employment options, with higher-status jobs in business, government, and the professionals held by lighter-skinned persons. In general, the wages of female workers are lower than

those of their male counterparts, their unemployment rate is higher, and many are denied full employment benefits.

### **16 SPORTS**

The Dominican Republic's national sport is baseball, and thousands of fans attend the major games, which are usually held at one of Santo Domingo's stadiums. The United States currently has more Dominicans on its major and minor league baseball teams than players from any other Latin American country or any single state in the United States. The town of San Pedro de Macorís in particular has produced more professional players, including Juan Samuel of the Philadelphia Phillies and Joaquín Andujar of the Oakland A's, than any other locality in the world. Unlike the baseball season in the United States, the season in the Dominican Republic runs from October to February. Other popular Dominican sports include horseracing and cockfighting.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Dance is a national passion in the Dominican Republic. Even the smallest towns have a dance hall, and there are annual *merengue* festivals in Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, and Sosúa. Since the 1970s, local dance rhythms have been influenced by U.S. disco, the steps have become less formal, and the music has gotten faster. Salsa music is also very popular. The major cities, especially Santo Domingo, have an active nightlife, with

numerous nightclubs and gambling casinos, where patrons may (legally) play blackjack, craps, and roulette.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Dominican folk music reflects Spanish, African, and Amerindian influences. A native percussion instrument, the *güira*, is a legacy of the Taíno people who were among the island's original inhabitants. Together with the *maracas* and the *paltos* (also in the percussion family), and the guitar, it is used to accompany Dominican folk songs called *decimas*, which are usually romantic in nature. Other popular folk instruments include the *balsié* (accordion) and *pandero* (tambourine). The national dance of the Dominican Republic is the *merengue*, which features a stiff-legged step that is something like a limp. Other folk dances include the *yuca*, the *sarambo*, the *zapateo*, and the *fandango*.

Local crafts include mahogany woodcarvings, woven goods, pottery, handmade rocking chairs (which have been popular ever since one was given to President John F. Kennedy as a gift), ceramics, macramé, and hand-knit clothing. Dominicans also produce hand-crafted amber jewelry as well as jewelry made with *larimar*, also known as Dominican Turquoise, a light-blue stone unique to the region.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Dominican Republic suffers from serious economic and social problems, including a 15% unemployment rate, with an additional 20% of the work force underemployed. Migration from rural to urban areas has created a housing shortage and a rise in urban crime. In Santo Domingo, the capital, much housing is substandard and the water quality is poor. In the 1980s international drug traffickers attempted to use the Dominican Republic as a transshipment point for illegal substances, resulting in a rise in narcotics-related crimes.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

From 1998 to 2001 the country passed seven new laws to strengthen women's rights, with special emphasis on migrants, health, social security, and women's political participation. Regarding education, 51% of school attendees in 1999 were women and the percentage of women with no schooling dropped from 16% to 11% between 1996 and 1999. In addition, women made up 70% of technical and vocational school enrolment.

To stimulate Dominican women's employment, the government has introduced benefits for unemployed single mothers, day-care centers, maternal and child health services, services for older people, survivors' pensions, and breastfeeding subsidies for the poorest women. In addition, to promote gender equity in labor programs and policies, the state created a gender sub-secretariat in the State Ministry of Labor and has developed micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises through credit facilities and technical, managerial, and vocational training. As a result, female workers accounted for 49% of the workforce in 1999, a 2% increase from 1996.

In politics, a growing number of women participate in the sector, thanks partly to a 33% quota for women candidates to congress and a stipulation that women must be nominated as mayoral or deputy mayoral candidates. Consequently, women hold 17.6% of executive posts and 14.3% of seats in congress. Women also comprise 33% of supreme court judges, 9% of

local mayors, 17% of ambassadors, and 15% to 31% of trade union leaders.

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—by R. Wieder

## DUTCH AMERICANS

For more information on Dutch history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Netherlanders**.

### OVERVIEW

The first Dutch in America came with the Dutch West India Company to pursue the fur trade. The company established the New Netherland colony along the Hudson River in the early 1620s, and the first settlers arrived in 1624. By 1664, when the English seized the colony and renamed it New York, the Dutch population had grown to 7,000. It was almost 200 years, however, before Dutch migration to the United States began in earnest.

Between 1847 and 1913, there were four major waves of Dutch immigration to the United States. The first wave lasted from 1847 to 1857 and consisted largely of Catholics and Seceders (a conservative Dutch Reformed sect) searching for greater religious freedom. After the American Civil War ended in 1865, a second wave of Dutch immigrants flocked to the United States. Most were farm laborers drawn by offers of free or cheap land in the Midwest. The United States wanted to expand its territory westward and recruited immigrants through programs such as the 1862 Homestead Act, which gave away parcels of land for free to those who agreed to farm it for a certain number of years. Available land was dwindling in the Netherlands, and industrialization was slow to occur, so there were fewer and fewer opportunities for landless peasants. The United States offered a chance to become a landowner, and many jumped at that chance.

The third wave from 1880 to 1893 was prompted by an agricultural crisis in the Netherlands. Bad weather and overworked land caused low crop yields for several years in a row, beginning in 1878. This time, even farm owners chose to leave their homes and search for better opportunities elsewhere, particularly in the American Midwest and West where land was still available at fairly cheap rates.

The fourth major wave of Dutch immigration to the United States occurred in 1903–1913, spurred by an economic slump in the Netherlands. This time the immigrants were mostly urban and settled in major industrial centers in America, such as New York City and Chicago. Some craftspeople and merchants had also immigrated with the farmers of the previous three waves, escaping high taxes and fees in the Netherlands, but the majority of Dutch immigrants to the United States from 1847 to 1913 were farming families.

In the years immediately following World War II (1939–45), another wave of Dutch immigrants came to the United States to escape the war torn conditions in their homeland. About 80,000 Dutch entered the United States during this last major wave of immigration. Some were Jews who had survived the Holocaust.

Although the earliest Dutch settlers lived in what became New York State, along the Hudson River, subsequent immigrants moved west and settled at first almost entirely within a 50-mile radius of the southern shoreline of Lake Michigan. Later, they spread throughout the United States. Most Dutch Americans immigrated in entire family units and settled with others from the same province of the Netherlands. After im-

migrants of the first wave (1847–1857) established themselves in the United States, a pattern of chain migration began where relatives and friends of the original immigrants followed them to America. These newcomers settled near their kin, creating tightly knit rural communities, or urban neighborhoods in later years, of Dutch Americans. Surrounded by compatriots, they were slow to assimilate and remained quite “Dutch” for a number of generations.

Of the 4,541,970 Dutch Americans in 2000 (according to the U.S. Census; 1.6% of the total U.S. population), the majority still lived in the Midwest. A significant number continue to live in the Hudson River area of New York State, as well. The city of Renssalaer, New York, was founded by Dutch patroon Kiliaen van Renssalaer in the 1600s. Patroons were wealthy Dutch who were allowed to create an estate in the New Netherland colony if they attracted at least 50 more settlers to the New World. Renssalaer is the only patroonship that survived. Several other towns and cities in New York State, including Albany, the state capital, were founded by the Dutch. The New York City neighborhood of Harlem, originally established by New Netherland governor Peter Stuyvesant in 1658 as a farming community, was called Nieuw Haarlem.

Michigan is by far the most “Dutch” state in the United States with both the largest number (477,045) as well as the highest percentage (4.8%) of the population declaring Dutch ancestry. New York (265,670) and Pennsylvania (257,902) have the next highest numbers of Dutch Americans (the so-called “Pennsylvania Dutch” are not actually Dutch but German and so are not included in the count) but the overall percentages are much lower (1.4% and 2.1%, respectively) than in the states of South Dakota (4.7%), Iowa (4.6%), Wisconsin (2.8%), and Oregon (2.6%). Pella, Iowa, and Holland, Michigan, were both founded by Dutch immigrants and remain largely Dutch American communities.

Dutch Americans are divided into four major linguistic groups: Hollanders (the majority), who speak Dutch; Frisians, who speak Frisian, a language related to but distinct from Dutch; Flemish-speaking peoples from what is now Belgium (the Flemish language is almost identical to Dutch), and Dutch-speaking Germans from Hanover and Ost Friesland. Some Dutch words that have been adopted into common American usage are “cookie,” “waffle,” “spook,” and perhaps “Yankee” (which may have been a Dutch nickname for Dutch sailors). The American name for “Santa Claus” also comes from the Dutch: Sinterklaas is their word for St. Nicholas.

Dutch Americans maintained their ethnic languages longer than many other ethnic groups due to their clannishness and the conservative nature of the Dutch Reformed Church, to which most Dutch Americans belong. The Dutch Reformed Church is a Protestant Calvinist denomination that has been in existence for hundreds of years. The first Dutch Reformed church in America was founded in 1628 in the New Netherland colony, making Dutch Reformed one of the oldest denominations in the United States. The Christian Reformed Church was established in 1857 in Michigan, after a split in the Dutch Reformed church there.

The Dutch Reformed Church has a history of schisms and separations. The first major wave of Dutch immigration to the United States was made up partly of Seceders, members of a conservative sect that had split off from the parent church in the early 1800s. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a small



number of Doleantie secessionists, also known as Kuyperians, immigrated to the United States and joined the Christian Reformed Church, quickly becoming its leaders. Today's Dutch Reformed Church in the United States is still split into two branches: the original Reformed Church in America, founded in 1628, and the Christian Reformed Church, founded in 1857.

Dutch Protestants strongly resisted Americanization, especially in their church life. The original settlers of New Netherland intended to create a Dutch colony and therefore zealously guarded and promoted their Dutch identity. The Dutch Reformed Church believed that the Dutch way was the true way and made every effort to keep the Church in America pure. Once the English took over New Netherland and renamed it New York, those Dutch who remained struggled to determine their identity in the now-English colony. As English became the official and common language of New York, second and later generations of Dutch Americans lost their fluency in Dutch. By 1762 the Dutch Reformed Church conceded to Americanization and began holding some services in English to maintain its membership. By the end of the American Revolutionary War (1775–83), all Dutch Reformed Church services were in English.

Later Dutch immigrants to the United States came with the intention of making America their new home and were therefore more interested in adapting to American ways. The Dutch Reformed Church took on a new spirit of assimilation, searching for a way to remain faithful to its Dutch traditions while at the same time being true to its American setting. Though for

the most part a small denomination, one church has grown to over 10,000 members and is now housed in a complex known as the Crystal Cathedral in Los Angeles, CA. Founding minister Rev. Robert H. Schuller began broadcasting his worship services as "the Hour of Power" on television in 1970. Upon his retirement in 2006, Schuller's son, Rev. Robert A. Schuller, became the senior minister.

Dutch Catholics who immigrated to America assimilated much more quickly into mainstream American life. This was due largely to the multicultural aspect of Catholic parishes in the United States. Also, Dutch Catholics tended to be wealthier and more urban than Dutch Protestants (who were mostly farmers), so they had the resources to establish themselves quickly in industrialized U.S. society. Dutch Catholic, and later Jewish, immigrants came to the United States in noticeable numbers, but by far the majority of Dutch Americans were and are members of one or the other sect of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Dutch Americans have made tremendous contributions to American culture, from the colonial era when they founded towns and cities that still exist today, to the very Declaration of Independence, which owes much of its spirit and wording to the Dutch declaration of independence from Spain 200 years earlier. Pancakes, waffles, doughnuts, cookies, coleslaw, and pretzels (though pretzels are also credited to German Americans) were introduced by the Dutch. Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, was founded in 1766 (as Rutgers College, in Paterson, New Jersey) by Dutch Americans, as was

Hope College, which in 1866 grew out of Hope Academy, established in 1851 in Holland, Michigan, by the Dutch American founders of that city. Calvin College and the publishing houses of Eerdmans and Zondervan were all founded by Dutch American members of the Reformed Church. Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN, was founded by entrepreneur Cornelius Vanderbilt, a descendant of early Dutch American settlers and great-great-grandfather of designer Gloria Vanderbilt, whose son, Anderson Cooper, is now a well-known television journalist. Longtime publisher of the *Ladies Home Journal*, Edward Bok, was a Dutch immigrant to the United States.

Other famous Dutch Americans include film directors Cecil B. DeMille and Gus Van Sant, artist Willem de Kooning, poet Mark Van Doren and his brother, writer Carl Van Doren, singer/songwriter Bruce Springsteen (who is half-Italian American, half-Dutch American), and rock musicians Eddie and Alex Van Halen. Hans Kindler, a cellist who emigrated from Holland, founded the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C., in 1931, at the height of the Great Depression, and served as its conductor for many years. Many well-known American actors are of Dutch ancestry, including Marlon Brando, Henry Fonda, Audrey Hepburn, and Mary Steenburgen. The international distributor, Amway (short for "American Way"), was founded in 1959 by two Dutch Americans, Jay Van Andel and Richard DeVos, and is now run by their sons, Steven Van Andel and Dick DeVos. Walter Percy Chrysler, who introduced the Chrysler automobile and became a leading automobile manufacturer, was Dutch American, as was educator Clarence Dykstra. Len Dykstra is a well-known Dutch American baseball player, and celebrated golfer Tiger Woods is of partial Dutch ancestry. General David Petraeus, commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq since February 2007, is also Dutch American.

No fewer than three U.S. presidents claimed Dutch ancestry: Martin Van Buren (president from 1836–1840), Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1908), and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1932–1945). The Roosevelts traced their heritage back to Klaes Martensen van Roosevelt, who immigrated to the United States in 1644. It is clear that the United States would not be what it is today were it not for the Dutch. Although Dutch Americans are a relatively small group in the total U.S. population, they have played an enormous role in the history and development of America.

Because the majority of Dutch immigrants came to America in whole family units and settled on farms in rural areas, they maintained their traditional family roles in the new land. The strong ties to the Dutch Reformed Church, a conservative Calvinist sect, also supported these traditional roles. Men worked in the fields and women worked in the home. The Dutch historically allowed women a great deal of liberty in terms of earning money for the family, but this was usually done by selling or bartering homemade goods, eggs, butter, etc. A few young women worked as domestic servants in others' homes, but they were the exception to the rule. The Dutch Reformed Church was slow to allow women greater authority in the church. The Reformed Church in America did not ordain women as deacons or elders until 1970; it took another three years before a woman was ordained as a minister. The more conservative Christian Reformed Church still does not ordain women.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# ECUADORANS

**LOCATION:** Ecuador

**POPULATION:** 13,927,650

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; Quechua

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; some Pentecostal and Protestant churches

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Ecuador, as its name suggests, straddles the equator in South America. Located north of present-day Peru, Ecuador once formed part of the Inca Empire. The Ecuadoran city of Quito, moreover, acted as a secondary capital of the empire. The Incas had built an extensive footpath system that linked Cusco, the capital of the Inca empire in Peru, to Quito, over 1,600 km (1,000 mi) away.

During colonial times Ecuador continued to be ruled from Peru, this time by the Spanish Viceroyalty in Lima. In 1822 Ecuador was led to independence by General Antonio José de Sucre, a lieutenant of famed liberator Simón Bolívar. Independence, however, did not lead to political stability. The 19th century was a time of intense political struggle between pro- and anti-Roman Catholic Church factions. Ecuador succumbed to military rule in the late 1800s and again in the 1960s and 1970s. Ecuador has experienced democratic rule since 1979.

Because of the economic mismanagement of the country's debt during the military regimes, Ecuador has experienced constant deficits and power struggles. Since the 1990s, a weak executive branch has had problems appeasing the ruling classes that are extensively represented in the legislature and judiciary. In fact, all three democratically elected presidents between 1996 and 2006 failed to finish their terms.

Contributing to the country's political volatility is the emergence of indigenous peoples, who account for 25% of the total population, as political actors. The failure of the government to deliver on promises of land reforms, lower unemployment rates, and provision of social services has mobilized indigenous groups and destabilized the executive power. In November 2006, the leftist economist Rafael Correa was elected to the office of president with 56.67% of the national vote. He campaigned on a platform that promised to eliminate the privileges of the traditional ruling elite. Immediately after taking power, Correa called for legislative elections in order to create a National Assembly in charge of writing a new constitution. The new constitution was scheduled to be completed by mid-2008.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Ecuador encompasses many geographical regions and therefore has a rich diversity of plants and animals. Ecuador has three broad geographic areas: the coast, the sierra (mountains), and the jungle lowlands. These varied geographical regions and climatic conditions have created many habitats that allow a rich diversity of wildlife and flora to thrive. Off the Pacific coast of Ecuador, furthermore, are the renowned Galápagos Islands. The Galápagos Islands, which are classified as a protected area by the Ecuadoran government, are scarcely populated by humans. Instead, they are home to sea lions, penguins, flamingos, iguanas, giant tortoises, and a great many other ani-

mals. It is said that Charles Darwin found the inspiration for his theory of evolution when he visited the Galápagos in 1835. The Galápagos Islands are now a popular destination for ecological tours.

As of July 2008, Ecuador's population was estimated at 13,927,650 people. However, since the 1999 economic crisis, nearly 20% of Ecuadorians have migrated to industrialized countries, such as the United States, Spain, and Italy, in search of a better quality of life.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official language of Ecuador is Spanish. A significant proportion of its Andean population, however, speaks the ancient Inca language of Quechua and a variety of related dialects. Although mainly an Andean language, the Quechua language also spread into the lowland jungle areas at the time of the Spanish conquest as a result of migration and the influence of Quechua-speaking missionaries.

A variety of indigenous tribes still exist in the Ecuadoran Amazon. These native peoples have their own languages that are unrelated to Quechua. These groups include the Jivaro and the Waoroni.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

A number of folk beliefs are common among rural dwellers, combining Catholic tradition and indigenous lore, as well as vestiges of medieval Spanish custom. The "in-between" hours of dawn, dusk, noon, and midnight are feared as times when supernatural forces can enter and depart the human world. Many rural folk fear the *huacaisiqui*, which are spirits of abandoned or aborted babies, thought to steal the souls of living infants. A character specific to the Sierra region is the *duende*, a large-eyed sprite with a hat who preys on children. The blacks of Esmeraldas have inherited the folklore of their ancestors, including the figure of the *tunda*, an evil water spirit who takes the shape of a woman with a club foot.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Ecuador is predominantly a Roman Catholic country. Catholicism was introduced by the Spanish at the time of the conquest. The question of the role of the Church in state and society was one that generated significant political conflict in Ecuador. After independence from Spain, political struggle occurred between the pro-Church conservatives and the liberals, who believed in a more limited Church role. This political struggle ended with a constitution that ensured a separation of Church and State.

In the late 1960s, the Church in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America began to defend the poor and argue for social change. The "theology of liberation," as it was called, found religious justification for social change and political reform. Many bishops and priests spoke out against the government in defense of the rural poor.

Despite the strong grip of the Roman Catholic Church on Ecuadorians until the mid-twentieth century, its influence in rural society seems to be in decline. In the 1980s, Pentecostal and Protestant churches have begun to expand their influence in the countryside.



## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Christmas in many towns in Ecuador is celebrated with a colorful parade. In the town of Cuenca, reputed to have the most festive parade, townspeople decorate and dress up their donkeys and cars for the procession. On New Year's, the festivities include fireworks and the burning of effigies, made by stuffing old clothes. Many Ecuadorians take this opportunity to mock current political figures. These dummies are nicknamed *viejos*, or "old ones," and symbolize the passing year.

*Carnaval*, or Carnival, a major festival preceding Lent, is celebrated with much festivity. During the hot summer month of February, Ecuadorians celebrate Carnival by throwing buckets of water at each other. Even fully clothed passersby are at risk. Sometimes pranksters will add dye or ink to the water to stain clothing. In some towns, throwing water has been banned, but this practice is hard to repress. It is virtually impossible to avoid getting wet during Carnival, and most Ecuadorians accept it with good humor.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Ecuadorians are Roman Catholic and, therefore, this religion marks major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death. Protestant, Pentecostal, and Amerindian Ecuadorians celebrate rites of passage with ceremonies appropriate to their particular traditions.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In Ecuador, it is customary for most activity in cities to close down between 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm for the afternoon siesta. During this time, many offices and stores are closed. This custom, which exists in many Latin American countries, arose as a way to avoid working during the intense afternoon heat. Most people go home for an extended lunch and even a nap. They return to work in the late afternoon when it is cooler and work until the early evening.

In Ecuador, one is expected to kiss the cheek of anyone to whom one is introduced, except in a business context where it is more appropriate to use a handshake. Female friends will kiss each other on the cheek, while male friends will often greet each other with a full embrace. This practice is very common in most Latin American countries.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The major cities of Ecuador, such as Quito and Guayaquil, are modern cities with offices and contemporary apartment buildings. The style of housing in these two cities, however, varies as a result of their histories and locations. Quito, in the dry Andean highlands, is characterized by beautiful colonial architecture. The city remains relatively small as a result of its isolated, high-altitude location. Guayaquil, in contrast, is a more modern, bustling port city of over 3 million people. Guayaquil's busy economy has attracted huge waves of migration from the Andean region. Nearly a third of Guayaquil's population live in large sprawling shantytowns with limited electricity and running water. The poor housing and limited availability of clean water create unsanitary conditions that can cause serious health problems. Infectious diseases are, therefore, a problem for many poorer Ecuadorians.

Middle-class homes and apartments in the major cities, however, have modern amenities and conveniences. These cities are densely populated, and few homes have large yards, such as those found in the United States. In most middle-class neighborhoods, in fact, houses are all connected side by side and, in this way, form a city block.

In rural highland areas, most small-scale farmers live in small one-room houses with thatched or tiled roofs. Most often, these homes have been built by the families themselves, with assistance from family and friends. In the jungle areas, housing structures are made of locally available materials, such as bamboo and palm leaves.

The people of the jungle regions face many critical health problems. Parasites and river blindness are problems caused by contaminated water supplies. Malaria also remains a problem in humid jungle areas that attract mosquitoes.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

An Ecuadorian household typically consists of a nuclear family; that is, a husband, a wife, and their children. It is also common for grandparents or other members of the extended family to join the household. The role of women differs greatly in middle-class urban areas from that in rural village life. In Andean communities, women play an important role in the economic activities of the household. In addition to helping plant gardens and tend animals, many women are involved in petty trading. While there is a clear division between male and female roles in rural areas, both make important contributions to the household income.



An Ecuadorian bride waits for her wedding to begin while townspeople look on in Quito, Ecuador. (© Pablo Corral Vega/Corbis)

In middle- and upper-class households, in contrast, women are less likely to work outside the home. Commonly, women in these social classes devote themselves to managing the household and rearing children. These patterns, however, are beginning to change. There are a growing number of middle- and upper-class women who continue their education and find jobs outside of the home.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Clothing worn in the urban areas of Ecuador is very Western. Men wear trousers and a pressed shirt, or a suit to work. Women wear both pants and skirts. Although jeans and tee-shirts are becoming the clothing of choice for Ecuadorian youth, the use of shorts is still rare.

Clothing outside of the major cities, however, is diverse. Perhaps the most distinctive dress in the Andean region is worn by the Otavalo Indians. The Otavalo are considered a subgroup of the Quechuas, as they speak the Quechua language. Otavalo men are distinctive for their long, black braids and their identical black and white outfits. Otavalo men dress impeccably in white short trousers, white buttoned shirts, and solid black ponchos. They also wear stiff felt hats and sandals. Otavalo women wear delicately embroidered white blouses.

### **12 FOOD**

Ecuador is an Andean country and its population has relied on the potato as a staple crop since pre-Inca times. Over 100 dif-

ferent types of potatoes are still grown throughout the Andes. A traditional Andean specialty is *locro*, a dish of corn and potatoes, topped with a spicy cheese sauce. Seafood also forms an important part of the diet in coastal areas. A common snack item, popular throughout Ecuador, is *empanadas*—little pastries filled with meat, onions, eggs, and olives. Empanadas are sold in bakeries or by street vendors and can be considered the Ecuadorian equivalent of fast food.

Bananas are also an important part of the diet. Some varieties of bananas, such as plantains, are a nonsweet, starchy vegetable like a potato. They need to be cooked and are used in stews or are served grilled. Grilled bananas are often sold by street vendors.

Coffee is also grown in the Andean highlands. Coffee in Ecuador is served in a very concentrated form, called *esencia*. *Esencia* is a very dark, thick coffee that is served in a little container alongside a pot of hot water. Each person serves a small amount of coffee into his or her cup, then dilutes it with hot water. Even diluted, this coffee is very strong.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In Ecuador education is compulsory until age 14. In practice, however, there is a serious problem with illiteracy and a high proportion of students drop out of school. This problem is most severe in rural areas. For many rural families, children can play an important role by working on the landholding. It is difficult for many families to survive without this labor and



many children receive only minimal formal schooling. Currently, more than 100,000 five-year-old children are not able to enter first grade, and more than one million children between the ages of 5 and 18 do not access formal education.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Much of Ecuador's musical tradition has Andean roots. Pre-colonial instruments and musical styles are still popular in Ecuador. Flutelike instruments include the *quena*, an instrument used throughout the Andean countries. However, regional variations do exist. While most panpipes played in Peru or Bolivia comprise two rows of bamboo, the traditional Ecuadorian *rondador* has only one row. Other important wind instruments include the *pinkullo* and *pifano*. The Andean culture has also been influenced by its colonial past. Brass instruments are very popular in the Andes, and many village festivals and parades feature brass bands. String instruments were also introduced by the Spanish and adapted by the Andean peoples.

The coastal tradition draws more from Caribbean and Spanish influences. Colombian *cumbia* and *salsa* music are popular with young people in urban areas. American rock music is also played on the radio and in urban clubs and discos.

Ecuador also has a strong literary tradition. Its most well-known writer is Jorge Icaza, who wrote a moving book about the plight of the Ecuadorian Amerindians. His most famous book, *The Villagers*, describes a brutal takeover of indigenous land. This book raised awareness of the exploitation of indigenous peoples in the Andes by landowners. Although it was written in 1934, it is still widely read in Ecuador today.

#### 15 WORK

Work and lifestyles in Ecuador vary dramatically from region to region. In the mountains, most people are small-scale subsistence farmers. Many male youths find employment as field workers on sugarcane or banana plantations. This work is difficult and laborious and pays extremely poorly.

Ecuador also has a fair-sized manufacturing industry. Food processing, which includes activities such as flour milling and sugar refining, are important to the economy. However, much of the urban population makes a living not from employment, but by creating a small-scale enterprise. Home "cottage" industries include dressmaking, carpentry, and shoemaking, among others. Street vending also provides an economic alternative for many women in both the *sierra* and the urban slums.

Ecuador is also an oil-rich country. In the 1970s, an economic boom was sparked by the extraction of oil, and hundreds of thousands of jobs were created by the growing oil industry. In the 1980s, however, the boom ended with Ecuador's growing debt and declining oil prices. Ecuador still produces oil, but its reserves appear limited.

#### 16 SPORTS

Spectator sports are popular in Ecuador. Soccer, as elsewhere in Latin America, is a national pastime. Bullfighting, a sport introduced by the Spanish, is also popular. Famous bullfighters (known as *matadores*) from Spain or other South American countries come to Ecuador and attract huge crowds. In some rural villages, a nonviolent version of bullfighting provides entertainment at some fiestas. Local men are invited to jump into a pen with a young bull calf to try their skills as *matadors*. Another blood sport that is prevalent throughout Ecuador is

cockfighting. This entails tying a knife to the foot of a rooster (or cock) and having it fight another rooster. These fights usually end up in the death of one of the roosters.

Ecuadorians are also fond of playing different types of paddle ball. One type of paddle ball uses a heavy 1-kg (2-lb) ball and appropriately large paddles with spikes. A variation of this game uses a much smaller ball, which is hit with the hand rather than with a paddle. Standard racquetball is also played, although membership in clubs with courts can be prohibitively expensive.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The principal form of entertainment in the Andes is the regular festivals or fiestas that exist to mark the agricultural or religious calendar. These fiestas often last for days and involve music, dancing, and the consumption of alcoholic beverages, such as *chicha*, brewed from corn.

In urban areas, many Ecuadorans go to *peñas* on weekends for a special night out. *Peñas* are clubs that feature traditional music and folklore shows. This is often a family outing, even though these shows often go on until the early morning. When teenagers or young adults go out on their own, they are more likely to go to a club or disco that plays American rock and dance music. However, these clubs only exist in the major urban areas.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Panama hats actually originated in Ecuador. These woven straw hats were made in the city of Cuenca. They were produced for export to California gold-rushers and were also sold in large quantities to workers building the Panama Canal, thus giving rise to the name. Panama hats became a huge export item for Ecuador in the early to mid-1900s. While Panama hats are still made in Ecuador, they are no longer in great demand overseas. A good Panama hat, it is claimed, can be folded up and passed through a napkin ring, and it will then reshape itself perfectly for use.

Ecuadorans produce a wide variety of handcrafted goods, ranging from woven textiles, to woodcarvings, to ceramic goods. The market at Otavalo, near Quito, is sometimes claimed to be the most extensive and varied market in all of South America. This market was established in pre-Inca times as a major market where goods from the mountains could be exchanged for goods from the lowland jungle areas. Today, the Otavalo market continues to be an outlet for handwoven, vegetable-dyed textiles and tapestries made by the Otavalo Indians.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Poverty is one of the worst social problems in Ecuador. While almost 30% of the population lives in poor conditions, poverty is more concentrated among indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian groups who live in rural areas. More than two thirds of poor people are from indigenous descent, and 60% of people living in poverty reside in rural areas and live from agriculture.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Machismo is a serious problem in Ecuador, as it is in other Latin American countries. It is common for men to feel that they should have unquestioned control over their wives, daughters,

or girlfriends. Many Latin American men, in addition, believe in different standards of acceptable male and female sexual behavior. It is common for married men to have one or more long-term mistresses, while their wives are expected to be faithful and monogamous. Improvements in the education of women are beginning to make some impact on this behavior, as women increasingly are demanding greater respect. However, these beliefs are deeply ingrained in the culture and are difficult to change.

The country's civil code was amended in 1989 in order to address the issues of the legal status of women within marriage, the administration of conjugal property, mutual and responsible parenthood, marital rights and obligations of spouses, parental rights, and termination of marriage. Recent legislation also includes the Law to Combat Violence against Women, Children, and the Family; the Employment Protection Act; and the Free Maternity Reform Law. In addition, the government created an autonomous National Council for Women in 1997, aimed to coordinate public policies on gender issues. However, and in spite of laws and institutional machinery for equality, prevailing gender stereotypes still promote multiple forms of discrimination against women in daily life.

Even though Ecuador was the first Latin American country to grant women the right to vote, only 50% of women have voted in recent elections. In order to promote female participation in politics, the electoral law was reformed and quotas for women were established: women must constitute at least 20% of the lists of candidates for multi-person elections. This initiative led to 27% women's representation in local elections. In addition, the government has actively promoted the presence of women in the public sector. Since 1990 there has always been at least one female minister in the cabinet, and women have held the positions of governor and mayor as well. In 1994, 3 of the country's 69 ambassadors were female, and four years later 50% of participants in diplomatic training courses were women.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# ENGLISH AMERICANS

For more information on English history and culture, see **Vol. 4: English**.

## OVERVIEW

The original 13 American colonies, which became the United States, were founded by the English beginning in 1607. The land had been claimed for England long before, in 1497, by Italian sea captain John Cabot and his son, Sebastian. The Cabots were sailing under the commission of English king Henry VII and explored the east coast of North America from what is now Newfoundland to South Carolina. The English neither sponsored nor conducted any further North American exploration for the next 80 years.

Hard times for the peasant class in England from the late 1550s through the 1600s prompted many to look for new opportunities. The tyrannical reign of King James I (r.1603–1625), who levied heavy taxes, refused to call Parliament, and otherwise abused his powers, also drove many English out of the country. King Charles I, who followed King James I, was even more tyrannical. Thus it was that the 13 English colonies were founded in America.

The first colony did not survive. Established in 1587 with funding from Sir Walter Raleigh, the so-called “Lost Colony” on Roanoke Island lasted for only a short time. The sea captain who transported the 150 colonists (25 of them women and children) was supposed to take them to Chesapeake Bay but instead left them on Roanoke Island and promptly abandoned them. When supplies began running low, the colony leader, John White, found passage back to England to request aid but was detained for three or four years by the authorities there. When White was finally able to return to the colony in 1591, it was deserted. Only the word “Croatan,” the name of a nearby Native North American tribe, was found, carved on the trunk of a tree. Some suspect the colonists were killed by the Croatans or other Native North Americans. Others believe the Native North Americans may have been friendly and the colonists joined their community. No one may ever know the true fate of the Lost Colony.

Jamestown, founded in 1607 by the London Company, became the first successful English colony in North America. The second successful colony, Plymouth, was established in 1620 by a group of Puritans (Anglican reformers) who called themselves “Pilgrims.” The Pilgrims came to North America on a ship called Mayflower. Ten years later, a larger group of Puritans founded Massachusetts Bay Colony. Whereas Jamestown was founded purely for economic gain, Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay were created as religious havens for members of a persecuted sect. Likewise, Maryland was later established as a haven for Catholics and Pennsylvania for Quakers, both of whom were not welcomed in England. Georgia was originally intended as a debtors' colony, where those who had been imprisoned for unpaid debts in England could find a new start. But the English government refused to transport many debtors, so the idea never took form.

By 1733, all 13 colonies were established, including New York which had been seized from the Dutch (under whom it had been known as New Amsterdam) in 1664. Though the



initial numbers of settlers were fairly small, immigration increased steadily throughout the colonial period. Some 14,000 colonists settled in Virginia between 1607 and 1624, and Maryland had a population of 8,000 by 1657. The population of Massachusetts Bay Colony grew from 2,000 to 16,000 in just 13 years (1630–1643), and Georgia’s population similarly increased from a mere 100 in 1733 to as many as 9,000 in 1760. Between the years of 1717 and 1760, the number of settlers in North Carolina jumped from 9,000 to 93,000, and in South Carolina in the same period, from 19,000 to 100,000.

Overall, the total population of the 13 original colonies went from 220,000 in 1690 to 1,500,000 in 1760, then soared to 2,750,000 by 1790. Between 80% and 85% of the population was English. English customs, clothing, architecture, language, literature, law, and religion dominated in the colonies and shaped early U.S. culture. Although persons of English descent are now only the third-largest ethnic group in the United States (after German and Irish), English culture still predominates in America.

Once the Revolutionary War (1775–83) began, English immigration to America virtually ceased until about 1790. Then, a shortage of land in England led a number of farmers to take advantage of the new lands being cleared in the United States. Beginning in the late 1790s, thousands of textile workers also began flocking to the United States from England, settling in the mill towns of New England and New Jersey. Immigration was brought to a halt again when England and France went to war in 1803, and all ships were commandeered for military

use. When the war ended in 1815, English immigration to the United States resumed with force, bringing 750,000 English to the shores of America between 1815 and 1860. Most settled in the north.

The American Civil War (1861–65) once again halted immigration, but as soon as the war ended, the largest wave of English immigration to the United States began. A series of crop failures in England, plus a tremendous increase in opportunities available in America because of industrialization and westward expansion, created a high motivation for immigration. From 1865 to 1895, some 2,300,000 English moved to the United States. Some took industrial jobs in the East, while others became farmers or ranchers in the Midwest and West.

One interesting group of English immigrants to the United States were the gentlemen ranchers who set up huge cattle operations in the West in the late 19th century. Most were young aristocrats who had been educated at Eton or Harrow or one of the other elite schools in England. They played tennis and chess, drank tea, and rode with the cowboys during round-up time. Scottish and Irish aristocrats also established cattle ranches, though most of them took the enterprise more seriously than did the English. For the most part, the English gentlemen were drawn to the romance of the “Wild West,” and once real life took over and the free range became overcrowded, harsh winters killed off the cattle, and Native North Americans put up a fight for their dwindling lands, the gentlemen packed up and moved back to England. They did leave behind new cattle breeds to blend with the American stock, and some great stories of the “English cowboys.”

Another notable group of English immigrants were the United Society of Believers in the Second Coming of Christ, more commonly known as the Shakers, who arrived in the late 1700s. Shakers are notable not only for their distinctive religious communes, simple but elegant furniture, and music (“Simple Gifts” has become part of the national songbook), but also because they were led to the United States by a woman, Mother Ann Lee. Ann Lee (c.1736–1784) was born in England and was a member of the Church of England until the age of 22 when she joined the Wardley Society, a group led by James Wardley that split off from the Quakers. The Wardley Society held emotional services filled with body movement and shaking and became known as the “Shaking Quakers,” or later simply “Shakers.” In August 1774, Ann Lee arrived in New York with eight followers to spread their faith in the New World. By the early 1800s, 18 Shaker communities had been established in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia, and Florida, with an estimated 5,000 members total at their peak. Shakers are not opposed to technological innovations (unlike the Amish) and, in fact, are responsible for many improvements in daily life that we now take for granted: the flat broom, clothespin, circular saw, grain harvesters and separators, and the first round barn in America (still standing at Hancock Shaker Village in Berkshire County, Massachusetts). Shakers believe in celibacy and therefore can only add to their membership through proselytizing. Numbers began to decline as members died, and all but one Shaker community either disappeared or was turned into an historic site. The only remaining active Shaker community is Sabbathday Lake in Maine.

Since the late 18th century, most English immigration to the United States has been made up of individuals and indi-

vidual families. There has been no great chain migration of entire communities and no development of “English towns” in the United States. Immigration from England to America steadily dropped off during the 20th century. One exception to that trend were the 70,000 English war brides who came to the United States in the 1940s. “War brides” were English women who met American servicemen stationed in England during World War II and either married them in England or became engaged to them, marrying them later in the United States. English war brides were the largest group of female immigrants to the United States in the 1940s. Because there were so many of them, the U.S. Army and federal government facilitated their immigration. Congress passed the War Brides Act of 1945 and the Alien Fiancées and Fiancés Act of 1946 to allow qualified women (and men) to immigrate. The U.S. Army set up embarkation camps in England to process applicants, then provided free overseas transportation on army ships. The war brides comprised the last significant wave of English immigration so far in U.S. history.

In the 2000 U.S. Census, a total of 24,514,199 persons (8.7% of the total U.S. population) reported having English ancestry. This number is sure to be low given that many English Americans list themselves on the census as “British” (1,085,718), which can also include Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish, or as simply “American” (20,625,093), making it impossible to get a fully accurate count of the number of English Americans. Less than 2% of English Americans are foreign born (many of whom are likely to be war brides). Because English Americans have lived in the United States since before it became the United States and currently make up a large percentage of the total U.S. population, they are one of the standards to which other immigrants assimilate.

Today, English Americans live in every state of the Union. The five most “English” states in terms of percentage of English Americans are Utah (29%), where descendants and followers of Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon sect and himself a descendant of a passenger on the Mayflower, eventually settled; Maine (21.5%); Idaho (29%); Vermont (18.4%); and New Hampshire (18%). Wyoming, where most of the 19th-century gentlemen ranchers congregated, is sixth (15.9%); followed by Oregon (13.2%) and Montana (12.7%). Massachusetts and Virginia, where the original English colonists settled, are now in 12th (11.4%) and 13th (11.1%) places, respectively, after Delaware (12.1%) and Colorado, Washington state, and Rhode Island (all 12%).

English place names pepper the map of the United States. A few examples are Plymouth, Salem, Marblehead, Boston, Albany, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Maine, Delaware, and Cape Cod. English surnames are also common in America, such as Williams, Davies, Thomas, Evans, Charles, Morgan, James, Scott, Rivers, Hill, Brooks, Ford, Woods, Young, Black, Brown, Longfellow, Little, Armstrong, Taylor, Wainwright, Carpenter, Miller, Cartwright, Bishop, Masters, Bailey, and Smith (the most common surname in America).

The official church of England is, and has been for some time, the Anglican Church. Anglican immigrants to the United States created the Episcopal Church in America. Other early English immigrants were Puritan, Quaker, Shaker, or members of other Anabaptist sects, who established American denominations including American Friends (Quaker), Congregation-

alist, Unitarian, and American Baptist. Puritan Pilgrims in New England were the first Americans to celebrate Thanksgiving, joining with friendly neighboring Native North American peoples to give thanks for the fruits of the harvest.

English Americans Roger Williams, Increase Mather and his son, Cotton, and Jonathan Edwards were all important colonial religious leaders and writers. Colonial English American artists of note include Benjamin West and Charles Willson Peale. The 19th century saw a flowering of English American literature, with contributions by such writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Samuel Clemens (better known as Mark Twain), and three men who were also part French: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Henry David Thoreau, and John Greenleaf Whittier. Later English American writers include T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams.

So many English Americans contributed to American culture in the 20th century it would be impossible to list even a representative sample. A few of the best-known are film director Alfred Hitchcock, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and actors and entertainers Vanessa Redgrave, Cary Grant, Bob Hope and Will Rogers (who is half Cherokee).

The majority of colonial and Revolutionary leaders were English Americans, among them Benjamin Franklin, Daniel Webster, Samuel Adams, James Otis, George Washington, and John Adams. Forces on both sides of the American Civil War (1861–65) were led by English Americans: Union general Ulysses S. Grant, and Confederate general Robert E. Lee. Besides George Washington, John Adams, and Ulysses S. Grant, a number of other English Americans have served as U.S. president, including James Madison, John Quincy Adams, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, James A. Garfield, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William H. Taft, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Harry S. Truman, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

U.S. history is replete with English Americans who have made significant contributions, such as polar explorer Admiral E. Byrd; naval officer Commodore Matthew C. Perry; Army general George C. Marshall, author of the Marshall Plan; and inventors Eli Whitney, Samuel F. Morse, Isaac M. Singer, Thomas A. Edison, and Wilbur and Orville Wright. Samuel Slater founded the American textile industry; Colonel Edwin L. Drake founded the American oil industry; Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross; Dr. William Janes Mayo and his brother, Charles Horace, founded the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota; and Marshall Field founded the famous department store of the same name. Railroad tycoon James J. Hill, historian Charles A. Beard, and humanitarian Jane Addams were also English Americans.

Quite a bit of research has been done into the descendants of passengers on the Mayflower. Some notable Americans whose ancestors arrived on that ship include those already mentioned, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Joseph Smith; George Eastman, founder of Eastman Kodak Company; Alan Shepard, Jr, the first American astronaut in space; media personalities Clint Eastwood, Richard Gere, Christopher Reeve, Bing Crosby, Marilyn Monroe, Orson Welles, Humphrey Bogart, Cokie Roberts, and Hugh Hefner; as well as U.S. presidents George H. W. and George W. Bush.

One other significant contribution to American society for which we can thank English Americans is the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a fraternal organization second only to the Freemasons. The first American Odd Fellows lodge was established in 1819 in Baltimore, MD, by Thomas Wildey, an English ex-patriate. By 1829 there were 31 local lodges in Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. An African American member of the England Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was refused recognition by the American Odd Fellows and so began a lodge for people of color under the Grand United Order, which then spread throughout America. Both societies have also created organizations for the women related to male members of the order: the Daughters of Rebekah, and the Daughters of Ruth. Odd Fellows orders have created systems of support for their members, who traditionally come from lower economic classes than Freemasons, including “homes” nationwide for those needing assistance.

The list could go on and on. Although English immigration to the United States was minimal in the 20th century, the English were among the founders of the United States and so had a tremendous impact on American life. Descendants of those early settlers continue to create an English American backdrop to U.S. culture, despite the fact that they are now only the third largest ethnic group in America.

Because English immigrants in colonial times and early years of the United States came mostly in educated, middle class family groups, the role of women traditionally maintained in England traveled with them. Their close ties with their churches, be it Catholic, Congregational, or Quaker, reinforced those traditional roles as well. Women were masters of the home sphere while men worked in the public marketplace. This role became celebrated in the early 1800s after “Yankee,” a derogatory term for English Americans connoting a ruthless and arrogant moneymaker, began to be claimed by New Englanders as a positive definition of self-reliance and enterprise. To curb the ruthless individuality of the men in the marketplace, Yankee women were raised up as models of self-restraint, self-denial, and order. Their job was to instill in their husbands and children these conservative, decorous values. One woman, Lydia Maria Child, capitalized quite successfully on this movement to tame the Yankees with her book, *The American Frugal Housewife*, a compendium of housekeeping tips, advice, and recipes for thrifty living. Her book was so popular it was reprinted 28 times in 13 years after its initial publication. The orderly, economic Yankee matriarch described in Child’s book became the exemplar for American women everywhere.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# FILIPINO AMERICANS

For more information on Filipino history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Filipinos**.

## OVERVIEW

The first Filipinos, people from the Philippines, to set foot in what is now the United States were crew members of the Spanish galleon, *Nuestra Señora de Esperanza* (Our Lady of Hope), which landed on the shore of present-day California on 18 October 1587. Filipinos were conscripted to work on Spanish ships in the Manila Galleon Trade between Mexico and the Philippines from 1565 to 1815. To escape the harsh treatment inflicted on them by their Spanish officers, many Filipinos jumped ship in New Orleans beginning around 1765 and settled there. By 1833, a significant Filipino community had developed in the fishing village of St. Malo in the Mississippi River delta area.

St. Malo was destroyed by a hurricane in 1893, and the survivors founded Manila Village, south of New Orleans. Forty years later, in 1933, Manila Village had a Filipino population of 1,500. The Manila Village Filipinos developed the process of sun drying shrimp to market outside Louisiana. Eventually, this first wave of Filipino immigrants moved on to the present-day states of California, Texas, and New Mexico.

In 1903, after the United States had defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States annexed the Philippines, which had been a Spanish colony for nearly 400 years. When the Filipinos revolted against American occupation, American forces crushed them, killing an estimated one million Filipinos. The Filipinos then became the only Asians ever colonized by the United States. As colonists, they were free to immigrate to the United States, and many did. This is considered the second wave of Filipino immigration.

Many Filipino students also came to the United States during this second wave, which lasted from about 1906 to 1934. The U.S. government gave scholarships, or “pensions,” to young Filipinos (male and female) to study at American universities. These students were called *pensionados*. Pensionados were expected to return to the Philippines when they had finished their studies, but many stayed in the United States.

Filipino laborers were also “imported” during the early 1900s to provide cheap labor on the U.S. west coast, particularly in the agricultural industry, although some found work in salmon canning factories. Most of the laborers were young single men, between the ages of 16 and 22, with little formal education. Without family attachments, they were prime candidates for seasonal migrant work. As physically small people (in general), they were considered ideal for “stoop” labor—planting, and picking things that are close to the ground—a very demanding job. The young Filipinos were so eager for employment that they were willing to take jobs that were too harsh for others to consider.

Filipinos were then recruited for the Hawaiian sugar industry, when Japanese immigration was restricted. Between 1907 and 1929, Hawaiian employers imported 71,594 Filipino workers. About 15,000 of them later moved to California. Many stayed in Hawaii, however, eventually making up a significant percentage (18% by 1930) of Hawaii’s resident population.

U.S. immigration laws in the 1920s prevented any Asians except Filipinos from immigrating to the United States. Therefore, Filipinos were in great demand as low-wage workers on the west coast. From 1920 to 1929, 51,875 Filipinos arrived in California, along with the 15,000 who moved there from Hawaii. Filipinos also found their way to the Alaskan salmon canneries, quickly becoming the largest immigrant group employed there. By 1930 the Filipino population on the U.S. mainland had reached 45,200. Thousands more were in Hawaii and Alaska. European Americans began to feel threatened by the Filipino presence, and the U.S. government decided to restrict any further Filipino immigration after 1934.

Those Filipinos already residing in the United States were subjected to brutal attacks and harsh laws restricting their access to government aid. Working at such low-wage, seasonal jobs, many found the winters particularly difficult. Antimiscegenation laws prevented Filipino men from marrying European American women, leaving them with little opportunity for family development, as Filipino men outnumbered Filipino women in the United States by 15 to 1 at that time.

The Third Wave of Filipino immigration occurred after World War II, lasting from 1945 to 1965. This wave was made up of military personnel and their families, students, and exchange workers. Foreign-born Filipinos became eligible for U.S. citizenship during this time, making life in the United States much easier for Filipino immigrants.

The 1965 Immigration Reform Act, which lifted discriminatory restrictions on all Asian immigration, opened up the Fourth Wave of Filipino migration to the United States. In the first two decades after the passage of the Act, 668,870 Filipino immigrants arrived in the United States. From 1960 to 1980, the Filipino population in the United States more than quadrupled from 176,130 to 781,894. Filipinos continue to flow into the United States in this Fourth Wave, many of them well-educated professionals and highly skilled workers, creating what is known as a “brain drain” in the Philippines.

According to the U.S. Census, the Filipino American population was 2,364,815 in 2000. At 18% of all Asians in the United States, Filipino Americans are the second-largest group among Asian/Pacific Americans (Chinese Americans are the largest). About two-thirds of Filipino Americans in 2000 were foreign-born, but the majority are naturalized citizens; Filipino Americans have the lowest percentage (26%) of noncitizens among all Asian American groups.

Most Filipino Americans live in the West; California had the highest number in 2000 at over one million, and Hawaii had the largest concentration at almost one-quarter of the state’s population. Other states with large numbers of Filipino Americans include Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Washington. Florida and Texas also host large numbers of Filipino Americans, as does Nevada. Although early Filipino immigrants tended to settle in rural agricultural areas, today’s Filipino Americans, generally better educated than earlier immigrants, are choosing large urban centers and suburbs as their homes.

Filipinos speak more than 70 dialects, most of which belong to eight major language groups. The most common of these groups are Tagalog, Visayan, and Ilocano. About two-thirds of Filipino Americans speak a dialect from one of these three groups, with the majority speaking forms of Tagalog. A few Filipino words have become standard in English usage, such as yo-yo and boondocks.



Many Filipinos speak English before arriving in the United States, due to their years as a U.S. colony in the early 20th century. Filipino Americans have a very high rate of English language proficiency (75%), the second-highest of any Asian/Pacific American group after Asian Indian Americans. Despite these promising statistics, however, foreign-born Filipino Americans still experience language barriers. Over 50% of foreign-born Filipino Americans speak a native Filipino language at home, making it more difficult to become truly fluent in English.

Most Filipino Americans are Roman Catholic, the predominant religion of the Philippines, dating to 400 years as a Spanish colony before the United States took over in 1903. A few Filipino Americans are Protestant, and there is a minority Muslim population. Rites of passage celebrations center around Christian (or Muslim) traditions.

Along with Christian or Muslim religious holidays, Filipino Americans continue to celebrate Philippine Independence Day

on June 12 with parades, cultural fairs, folk dances, and traditional foods. Rizal Day on December 30 commemorates the martyrdom of Jose Rizal, a Philippine national hero. Philippine–American Friendship Day is added to the American Independence Day celebration on July 4.

Although early Filipino immigrants to the United States worked at low-paying, seasonal jobs and therefore lived in poor, often harsh conditions, later waves of Filipino immigration have brought well-educated, highly skilled Filipinos who have been fairly successful in the American work world. The majority of Filipino Americans now have comparable incomes to the rest of the U.S. population and enjoy a moderate to high standard of living.

The number of Filipino women migrating to the United States has increased to the point where Filipino American women now outnumber Filipino American men (54% women; 46% men). This fact, combined with the repeal of antimiscegenation laws and the shift from single male to family migration,

has led to a sharp rise in the number of Filipino American family households. Because of their traditional cultural and religious (Roman Catholic) values, most Filipino Americans have large families; in 2000, the average Filipino American family consisted of 4 persons, as compared to 3 persons for all U.S. families.

The large majority of Filipino American families are headed by a married couple. Less than 14% are headed by a woman alone, and less than 5% by a man alone. Though extended family groups are traditional in the Philippines, Filipino Americans generally live in nuclear family units. This lack of available support can prove difficult for those used to turning to other family members for help. Also, because children usually attend public schools, they are exposed to European American culture and values without the balancing force of an extended Filipino community at home. Filipino American parents struggle to keep Filipino traditions alive in their Americanized children.

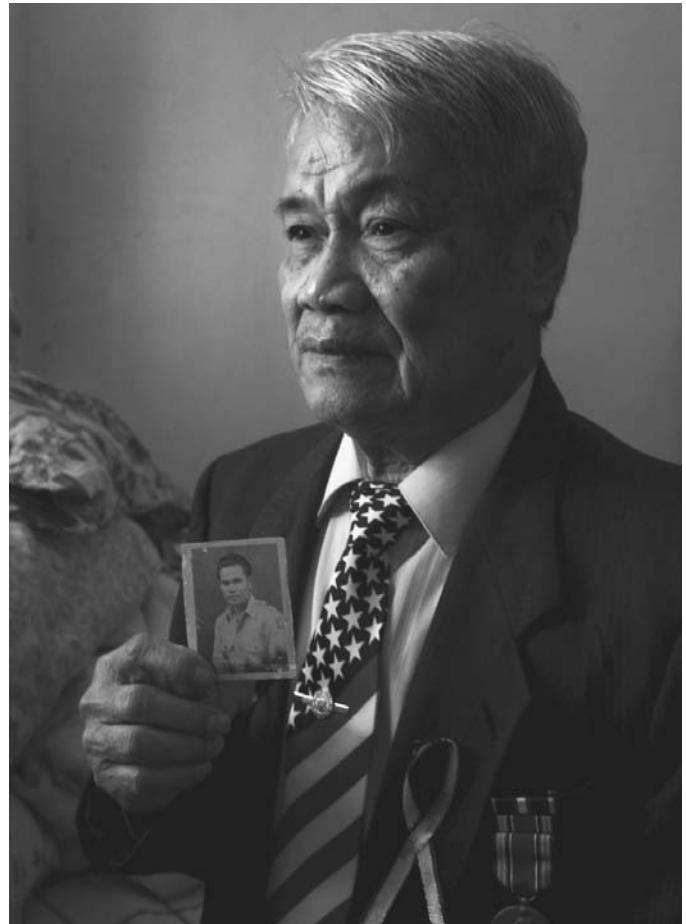
In keeping with the fact that many Filipinos came to the United States as students, Filipino Americans place a high value on education. In 2000, over 87% of Filipino Americans 25 years old or older were high school graduates, compared to about 80% of all Asian/Pacific Americans and of the total U.S. population. Of the same age group, 43.8% were college graduates, just slightly under the 44.1% rate for all Asian/Pacific Americans, but well above the total U.S. population rate of 24.4%.

Despite their high levels of education, however, Filipino Americans educated outside of the United States often find it difficult to obtain employment in the United States that is in keeping with their educational qualifications. Strict licensing requirements for certain occupations in the United States (such as doctors, lawyers, dentists, and pharmacists) prevent some Filipino Americans from practicing their professions in the United States, even though they may have been fully qualified, practicing professionals in the Philippines.

The rich cultural heritage of Filipinos and Filipino Americans is only recently being made available to the wider public. There are many successful Filipino American writers, including Jessica Tarahata Hagedorn, Jose Garcia Villa, and Carlos Bulosan. Bulosan's autobiography, *American Is in the Heart*, has been named one of the 50 most important American books ever published.

Successful Filipino American singers, actors, and entertainers include Tia Carrere, Lou Diamond Phillips, and Nia Peeples. A well-known Filipino American ballet dancer is Maniya Barredo, who was the first Filipina to give a solo dance concert in the United States at Carnegie Hall in May 1972. Barredo served as the prima ballerina of the Atlanta Ballet and became its dance coach in 1983. Pulitzer Prize winning journalists Alex Tizon and Byron Acohidio are Filipino American, as is the significant innovator and inventor in the computer chip industry, Diosdado Banatao. Among the many Filipino American sports figures are baseball players Benny Agbayani and Bobby Chouinard, and U.S. and World Championship figure skater Tai Babilonia.

Filipino Americans had a higher rate of participation (71%) in the American workforce in 2000 than that of all U.S. citizens (64%). Filipino American women had a higher rate (65%) of participation in the labor force than that of all U.S. citizens and well above the rate of all Asian American women (56%).



*Amado Calimquim, a Filipino American, holds a photograph of himself in uniform when he was a member of the Philippine Scouts. Mr. Calimquim served under the Americans as a soldier in WWII and was granted citizenship through naturalization in the 1990s. (Marvi Lacar/Getty Images)*

Over half of employed Filipino Americans work at white-collar jobs, while the rest work in service, labor, or agricultural (farming, fishing, forestry) occupations.

The medical profession has a particularly high number of Filipino American workers. Nearly every hospital in New York and New Jersey has Filipino American doctors and nurses on staff. Filipino Americans are also well represented in government and military posts, including Benjamin N. Cayetano who served as governor of Hawaii from 1994 to 2002.

Filipino Americans have largely overcome their bleak beginnings in the United States, transforming themselves from a population of uneducated seasonal laborers to one of the more successful ethnic groups in America. Racial prejudice still afflicts these moderately dark-skinned people, and the legacy of discrimination and exclusion from the rest of American society still shows its scars. For the most part, however, Filipino Americans are creating better and better futures for themselves in America.

The strongly Catholic culture, with its emphasis on heterosexuality, of most Filipino Americans makes life for gays and lesbians difficult. The majority wait years before coming out to their families, and many never reveal their sexuality to their families at all. This need for secrecy combined with a gener-



al tendency for Filipino Americans to be overlooked in pan-Asian American outreach efforts has led to a very high rate of HIV/AIDS cases among Filipino American gays. In 2001 HIV/AIDS was the leading cause of death among American-born Filipino American men between the ages of 25 and 34 in California and the second-leading cause of death among all Filipino Americans in California. Filipino Americans also had the highest rate of HIV/AIDS cases among Asian/Pacific Islanders in California.

Filipino American gays and lesbians have begun to band together across the United States to address these and other issues that plague their community. New York City is the home base for Kambal sa Lusog ("Pilipinas Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Gays for Progress") and Kilawin Kolektibo (a group for Filipino lesbian and bisexual women), two groups specifically for Filipinos; and Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC) as well as Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY), both of which include Filipinos among their membership. These groups and others work to promote education, justice, and social support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered Filipino Americans.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# FRENCH AMERICANS

For more information on French history and culture, see **Vol 4: French**.

## OVERVIEW

The French first arrived on the North American continent in 1523 when Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazano, sailing under the auspices of the king of France, Francis I, came with his French crew in search of the Northwest Passage. Verrazano was unsuccessful, as was Jacques Cartier, who followed him in 1534. However, Cartier also came with the intention of claiming lands for France and bringing back riches. Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River and claimed the surrounding lands as "New France." By the early 1700s, New France had expanded to include all of the territory between what is now northeastern Canada through the American Midwest, south to New Orleans. Virtually all of North America from the Appalachian Mountains to the Missouri River was claimed by France.

Most of France's early dealings with North America involved the fur trade. French fur traders established alliances with many Native North American tribal groups, who supplied them with furs, guides, and transportation in return for European goods (see **Native North Americans**). French explorer and cartographer Samuel de Champlain arrived in 1603 and mapped much of the Northeast, including Lake Champlain, to which he gave his name. Champlain also founded Quebec and Port Royal (now called Annapolis Royal), the first permanent French settlements in North America.

French Jesuit missionaries began to arrive in the 17th century as well, establishing missions along the St. Lawrence River and around the Great Lakes. Other French explorers and traders also came to ply their trades in the 17th and 18th centuries, extending French territory further and further inland. René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle traveled down the Mississippi River (thinking it might be the Northwest Passage) and claimed the territory of Louisiana for France, naming it after then-king Louis XIV. The French founded a number of cities during the 17th and 18th centuries that still exist today, including New Rochelle (1688), Detroit (1701), New Orleans (1718), and St. Louis (1764).

The struggle between the British and French for control of North America finally came to a head in 1754 and what is now known as the French and Indian War began. It ended nine years later, in 1763, with the defeat of the French. All of New France was turned over to Britain, except for New Orleans, which the French then ceded to Spain. Most French settlers simply adapted to the change in government, though when the American colonists revolted against British rule a few years later, the French saw their chance to get back at their conquerors and stood with the colonists in support of independence.

Many French immigrants to America in the 16th–18th centuries were Huguenots, French Calvinist Protestants who were fleeing persecution in Catholic France. Most Huguenots were middle-class merchants, skilled laborers, craftspeople, and business entrepreneurs who contributed a great deal to the early development of the American colonies. Priscilla Mullins (Molines), a French Huguenot, came to America on the Mayflower in 1620 and later married John Alden. Her descendants



include John Quincy Adams and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who immortalized Priscilla in his poem *The Courtship of Miles Standish*. Many other significant early American figures were descendants of Huguenots, including Paul Revere, Frances Marion (the “Old Swamp Fox”), John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton.

During the 1790s, a number of French aristocrats fled to the United States to escape persecution or even death in the French Revolution. At the same time, a revolution in the French colony of St. Domingue in the Caribbean drove out the French aristocrats there, most of whom also came to the United States. A shift in French politics in 1815 then led French Bonapartists to flee to the United States. Between the 1790s and 1850s, some 10,000–25,000 French immigrated to America.

French immigration has never been substantial. The largest wave occurred in 1841–1850, when 77,262 French immigrants entered the United States. For the most part, conditions in France were and are good enough that few French citizens wish to leave. Those who do immigrate tend to adapt quickly to their new surroundings, assimilating completely into mainstream American culture. The only communities that have remained distinctly French are Quebec, in Canada, and New Orleans, Louisiana, where Acadians from northeastern Canada relocated and became known as Cajuns (see **Cajuns**). The state of Louisiana continues to base its legal system on the Code Napoléon (a code of laws written by Napoleon Bonaparte), the only state to do so; other states use English Common Law. There is also a somewhat less distinct French culture in

New England, made up of immigrants from Quebec, who call themselves Franco-Americans.

The most-French states in the United States are New Hampshire (14.6%), Vermont (14.5%), Maine (14.2%), Louisiana (12.2%), and Rhode Island (10.9%). For the most part, however, French Americans are well distributed throughout the United States. The top five states in terms of numbers of French Americans are California (782,059), Louisiana (545,416), Massachusetts (508,211), Michigan (489,235), and New York (477,673). Texas (463,982) is sixth, followed by Florida (444,162), Ohio (271,423), Illinois (267,076), and Washington (215,097). French immigration since the mid-19th century has been slight, so most French Americans are at least second-generation, if not third-, fourth-, or later-generation. The percentage of foreign-born French Americans is just over 2.5% of the total French American population of 8,309,666, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Because the French have been in America for so long, they have contributed a great deal to American culture. French place-names abound, including New Orleans, St. Louis, Detroit, New Rochelle, Cadillac, Vincennes, Eau Claire, Duluth, Sault Ste. Marie, Boise, and numerous others. Many French words have become common in American usage, such as boulevard, avenue, laissez-faire, coup, potpourri, r.s.v.p. (répondez, s’il vous plait, or “respond, please”), chic, déjà vu, à la carte, and cuisine. In the realm of cuisine, Americans have adopted not only a number of French foods, but also their names and terms for their preparation: omelet, mayonnaise, hors



*Franco-American actor and director Jean-Marc Barr.*  
 (© Marianne Rosenstiehl/Sygma/Corbis)

d'œuvres, bouillon, consommé, café au lait, canapé, croissant, éclair, vinaigrette, salade nicoise, hollandaise, parfait, coq au vin, filet, julienne, purée, ^ la mode, ^ la king, and au gratin, to name just a few.

Although many early French immigrants were Huguenots, most French Americans are Catholic. They celebrate traditional Christian rites of passage and holidays. The Cajun community in New Orleans is known for its Mardi Gras ("Fat Tuesday") festivities in February, occurring the day before Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. In Lowell, Massachusetts, the Franco-American community takes special notice of the Feast of St. John the Baptist on 24 June with a week-long Franco-American festival, which has been held each year since 1970.

Most French immigrants to America were fairly well educated and they continued to value education highly in their new home. Girard College in Philadelphia and the Julliard School of Music in New York City were both founded by French Americans. The Gallaudet family made significant contributions to education for deaf persons. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet founded the Hartford School for the Deaf in Connecticut and taught with sign language rather than the mouth movements commonly used at the time. His sons also served the deaf community: Thomas, Jr., established a church where deaf persons could worship; and Edward served as the president of Columbia Institution for the Deaf and the Dumb and the Blind in Washington, D. C., which was later renamed Gallaudet College in honor of Thomas, Sr.

Fanueil Hall in Boston, Massachusetts, was given to the city by Peter (Pierre) Fanueil, a second-generation French American merchant. Perhaps the most famous French contribution to American culture is the Statue of Liberty, designed by French sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi. The statue was presented to the United States by France in 1884 to commemorate the French-American alliance begun in the American Revolutionary War (1775–83) and continuing through the French Revolution (1789–93) and beyond. The site chosen for the statue was Bedloe's Island in New York Harbor, where Huguenot immigrant Isaac Bedloe had pastured his cows in the 1650s. The island was renamed Liberty Island.

There have been many successful French American writers, among them Henry David Thoreau (part French, part Scottish), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Greenleaf Whittier, Kate Chopin, Will Durant, Stephen Vincent Bené, Anaïs Nin, Paul Theroux, Jack Kerouac (born Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac), and Annie Proulx. French American visual artists include John James Audubon and John LaFarge (sometimes called the "father of mural painting in America").

Composer Darius Milhaud and orchestral conductor Pierre Monteux are just two of the numerous French American musicians who have added their talents to U.S. society. On stage and screen, French Americans include actors Claudette Colbert, Charles Boyer, Nanette and Shelly Fabares, Robert Goulet, Julie Delpy, Angelina Jolie, Charlize Theron, and Ellen DeGeneres, among others. French American film director Jean Renoir is the son of the famous French Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Famed Cajun chefs Emeril Lagasse and Paul Prudhomme are also French American.

Four U.S. presidents so far have claimed French ancestry: John Tyler, James Garfield, Theodore Roosevelt, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (the Roosevelts were also part Dutch). The French American La Follette family of Wisconsin spawned three generations of governors and senators, serving from 1901 into the 1930s. Jacqueline Lee Bouvier Kennedy served as the first lady of the United States from 1960 to 1963 and maintained a high profile in American culture for the rest of her life. The first woman ever to deliver the keynote speech at the Republican National Convention was French American Anne Legendre Armstrong in 1972. Armstrong later served as the U.S. ambassador to Great Britain in 1976–1977.

French Americans have also made significant contributions to the business, science, and intellectual worlds of U.S. society. Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours and his son Eleuthere Irénée du Pont de Nemours, founders of the Du Pont chemical manufacturing company, developed nylon, dacron, and teflon. Dr. Edward Trudeau established the world's first sanitarium for tuberculosis sufferers at Saranac Lake, New York, in 1884. More recently, feminist scholar Ti-Grace Atkinson has helped open new doors in Americans' and others' thinking.

Joan Benoit Samuelson, a French American, won the gold medal in the Olympic Women's Marathon in 1984, the first year it was included in the Olympic Games. French Americans Ron Guidry, James Barrett, Lou Boudreau, Jesse Burkett, and Leo Durocher have all made their mark in baseball, as has quarterback Bobby Hebert in football. Hockey is perhaps the favorite sport among French Americans and has seen many French American stars, including Mario Lemieux, Jean Beliveau, Jacques Plante, and Maurice "Rocket" Richard.

French Americans have always adapted well to American life and assimilated easily into mainstream culture. They have met with little serious discrimination and are generally well respected by other Americans. With the long-standing alliance between France and the United States, dating back to the American Revolutionary War, Americans view the French as friends and therefore welcome them into their country.

French Americans are generally so well integrated into mainstream American society that they suffer no unique issues in regards to gender or sexuality issues. French American Catholics, however, tend to be more traditional than other American Catholics, creating an even greater struggle for French American than for other Catholic homosexuals and women to navigate Catholic doctrine prohibiting homosexual activity and limiting women's rights (re: birth control, abortion, ordination to the priesthood, etc).

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# FRENCH CANADIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Cajuns (in the United States)

**LOCATION:** Canada (mainly Quebec); United States (mainly Louisiana and New England)

**POPULATION:** 6.5 million in Canada; 2–5 million in the United States

**LANGUAGE:** French

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Canadians; Vol 4: French.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

French Canadians are descendants of Canada's colonial-era French settlers. Most live in the province of Quebec, where they account for a majority of the population. French Canadians can also be found in other parts of Canada—notably in the Maritime provinces—as well as in the United States. The past 35 years have seen a strong resurgence of the French Canadians' sense of cultural identity. With this has come a political separatist movement with far-reaching implications not only for Quebec, but for all of Canada and the United States as well.

The French presence in Canada began in 1534, when the explorer Jacques Cartier claimed the Gaspé Peninsula for France; the following year, Cartier discovered the St. Lawrence River. Permanent settlement did not start until the beginning of the 17th century, when Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec City in 1608. With the discovery of the Great Lakes, the fur trade flourished and missionaries began to arrive. The French eventually carved out an enormous territory stretching east to the Maritime Provinces, north to the Hudson Bay, west to the Great Lakes, and south to the Gulf of Mexico. Around 10,000 French settlers immigrated to the New World between 1608 and 1756.

By the late 17th century, France and Britain, already at war with each other in Europe, had become rivals for control of the region known as New France. After France's defeat in the French and Indian Wars that began in 1756, Britain won control of New France; and British rule was officially recognized by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. In the region of the present-day Maritime Provinces, the Acadians (French Canadians from the northeast) had already come under British rule by 1713, and roughly 10,000 (out of a total population of about 13,000) were deported in 1755. Many eventually returned to their homeland, while others settled in Quebec and still others, who later became known as Cajuns, settled in Louisiana.

In spite of their British rulers' negative attitudes toward their language and culture, the French Canadians remained a distinct cultural group in Quebec and elsewhere. Contributing factors were the unifying influence of the Catholic Church, the strong tendency to marry within their own community, and the tradition of having large families. When the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia joined to form the Dominion of Canada on 1 July 1867, French Canadians accounted for one-third of the new country's population.

In the 20th century, military service in the two world wars revealed the continuing cultural divisions in Canadian society. British Canadian soldiers mocked the broken English of their French counterparts, and the draft was viewed as an affront to the independent spirit of the French Canadians. After



1945, there were growing demands for political autonomy in Quebec, and, beginning in 1960, the province was swept by the “Quiet Revolution,” a wave of political, educational, religious, and economic reform. The influence of the Catholic Church was greatly reduced, and a more modern and secularized French Canadian society emerged.

The movement was justified by important Quebec intellectuals and labor leaders, who argued that the economic difficulties of Quebec were caused by English Canadian domination of the confederation. According to leaders of the independent movement, the solution to this problem was to modify or to end the ties with other provinces and the central government. The tension would lead into savaged violence in a matter of years. In 1970 terrorist acts by alleged separatists took place in Canada. The turmoil had its climax when Pierre Laporte, Quebec’s minister of labor and immigration, was kidnapped and assassinated. In 1974, French was recognized as Quebec’s official language, and the separatist Parti Québécois came to power in the province in 1976. A proposal for political independence from the rest of Canada was defeated at the polls in 1980, but French Canadian separatism has remained a contentious issue for both the province and the nation as a whole.

In a referendum held in October 1992, voters in Quebec narrowly rejected secession from Canada.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 6.5 million French Canadians living in Canada represent about a quarter of the country’s total population. The majority—5.1 million—live in Quebec, Canada’s largest province. The French Canadians of the Maritime provinces—New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island—are unified by their distinctive Acadian background and culture; they account for around 15% of the population in those provinces. There are also French Canadian communities in Ontario and the western provinces, with the greatest populations in Manitoba and Alberta. In addition, there were over 2 million persons of French Canadian descent in the United States as of the 1990 census (the actual number may be as high as 5 million). Most live in Louisiana, where they are known as Cajuns, or in New England.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Canada’s constitution established both English and French as official languages. About three-fifths of the population speaks English as their first language and around one-fourth identifies French as their primary language. French Canadians are the largest group of Francophones (French speakers) in North America. The main categories of French spoken by Francophone Canadians are called Québécois (Quebec French), Acadian French, Brayon French, and Newfoundland French. The majority of French Canadians are concentrated in Quebec, where they represent about 80% of that province’s 7,744 million residents. About 15% of the population in the Maritime Provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) speaks French, and there are Francophone areas in Manitoba and Ontario. Although French and English both have the status of official languages in Canada, the country is predominantly English-speaking, and Francophones are perennially concerned that their “French island” will be swallowed up in an “ocean of English.” While Canada is generally considered a bilingual country, only 16% of the population is actually bilingual. About 61% speak English only and 24% French only.

The vocabulary and pronunciation of Canadian French differ from those of the language spoken in France. Québécois is based on an archaic form of French and contains many English expressions. Many terms are closer to the English than to the French form of the word. For example, “to marry” is *marier* instead of the French term, *épouser*. Similarly, “appointment” is *appointment* instead of *rendezvous*, and “ignore” is *ignorer* instead of *négliger*. Joual, a special dialect spoken in Montreal, shortens so many words by contracting and dropping syllables that it is incomprehensible to most outsiders. For example, the phrase *Je ne suis capable* is shortened to a single syllable, pronounced “shway.”

The Acadians speak a distinctive form of French characterized by many archaic expressions preserved from the 17th-century dialects of western France. Acadian dialects differ from one region to another, and in Moncton, New Brunswick, contact with English speakers has produced a French-English called Chiac. Such hybrids are also generically known as “franglais.” The Canadian educational system promotes the use of modern, standard French in its French-language schools and discourages the use of both archaic expressions and the mingling of French and English.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The oral tradition of the French Canadians was strengthened by colonial laws against the establishment of presses and by the scarcity of French schools, both of which made it important for French Canadians to transmit their culture orally across the generations. Popular characters in French Canadian folklore include a hero figure named Ti-Jean (short for *petit Jean*, or Little John) and a hunter named Dalbec.

#### 5 RELIGION

The majority of French Canadians are Roman Catholic, and religion is fundamental in French Canadian life. The influence of the Catholic Church has heavily impacted the French Canadian community through the administration and, on occasion, monopolization of key institutions as health and educational centers. With the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, the Catholic Church lost important terrain in its social and political influence. Since that time, the French Canadian community has become more secular. Church attendance has declined, and the influence of the Church on daily life has decreased. The Acadians traditionally combined Catholicism with a belief in the supernatural, including sorcery and spirits, but this phenomenon has been on the wane in recent decades. Despite the deep process of secularization experimented by the French Canadian community, a great deal of schools have remained confessional and governments have lost the battle for the complete secularization of the educational system.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

French Canadians call Victoria Day, celebrated on the Monday preceding May 25, Dollard Day, preferring to remember a 17th-century French war hero on that date rather than Britain's Queen Victoria. The most important religious holidays for French Canadians are Christmas and Easter. Many—especially those in rural areas—still observe the traditional Christmas celebration, which includes a large midnight supper (*Réveillon*) of *tourtières* (meat pies), *ragout* (stew), and other dishes, served after the family has returned from midnight mass on Christmas Eve. On St. Jean Baptiste Day (June 24), the Québécois celebrate their patron saint with parties, bonfires, and fireworks. The Acadians' patron saint is Our Lady of the Assumption, and Assumption Day (August 15) is their day of celebration.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most French Canadians observe the major life cycle events, such as birth, marriage, and death, within the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. The government of Quebec, the home of Canada's largest French-speaking population, recognizes common-law marriage in cases where couples have lived together for two years.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Like their English-speaking neighbors, French Canadians are hospitable, friendly, and polite, and consider good manners important. It is common for men to open doors for women or give up a seat if a woman is standing. French Canadians use the common greeting of *Bonjour* (Good day) for "Hello" and *Au revoir* for "Good-bye." Adults use first names and informal forms of address (such as *tu* rather than *vous*) only with people they know well, such as close friends or relatives. Both

men and women may exchange kisses on both cheeks in a European-style greeting. Close women friends often greet each other by embracing. The American "thumbs down" gesture is considered offensive. French Canadians consider it good manners to keep both hands above the table during a meal. Women rest their wrists against the table, while men lean on their forearms. Elbows, however, are only placed on the table after the meal is over. It is considered bad manners to eat on the street unless one is at a cafe or food stand.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Housing in Canada varies from one region to another, depending on the local availability of building materials. Two out of every three Canadians own their own homes. Single homes are the most common type of dwelling although the current trend is toward greater numbers of multifamily structures. The homes of the Acadians, like most of those in the Maritime Provinces, are mostly built of wood.

Overall, Canadians enjoy excellent health. Canada has one of the world's lowest infant mortality rates—1 out of 100 live births, significantly better than that of the United States. Life expectancy is 74 years for men and 80 years for women. The Canadian national health plan, which has been a focus of attention in the U.S. debate about the future of its own health care system, covers at least three-quarters of all the nation's health-care expenses. Acadians still retain some of their traditional belief in folk medicine, including herbal cures and consultation with traditional healers, who are believed to have the power to cure various illnesses or stop bleeding.

After the United States, Canada has the world's highest per capita use of motor transportation. Private automobiles are used for four-fifths of urban travel, and there is one passenger car for every two persons. Canada's severe winters make road maintenance an ongoing and expensive task. Motorists cope with sub-zero winter temperatures by plugging their cars into battery warmers overnight. The government-owned Canadian Railways (CNR) and privately owned Canadian Pacific provide rail transportation. Water transportation is heavily used for both domestic and international shipping, and international air service is provided by government-owned Air Canada and Canadian Airlines.

#### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family unit is the center of society. As in the majority of western developed societies, both parents commonly work outside the home. Even though traditional norms are still valued, non-traditional households have increased considerably over the last 30 years. Currently, about one third of marriages are expected to end in divorce, a high proportion of children are born out of wedlock, and there are many single-parent families.

Until the 1960s, the family lives of French Canadians were heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church. Large families were the norm, because of strictures against birth control and also the desire to bolster the size of the French Canadian community.

Today, the average couple has only two children, and the French Canadian divorce rate is comparable to that among other groups in North America: roughly half of all newly married couples eventually divorce. The increased divorce rate has raised the number of single-parent families.

Traditionally, French Canadian women either performed agricultural labor or worked as teachers, nurses, or factory laborers. Since the 1970s, however, educational and employment opportunities for women have expanded, and women have entered the professions and other traditionally male areas of the economy in increasing numbers. Quebec established an affirmative-action program for women in the early 1980s.

### 11 CLOTHING

French Canadians wear modern Western-style clothing. The traditional costume of the Acadians, which is still worn on special occasions, consists of white bonnets and blouses, black skirts, and white aprons for the women and white shirts, black vests, and knee-length black pants for the men. White stockings and black shoes are worn by both men and women.

### 12 FOOD

Quebec has a rich, distinctive French-Canadian cuisine. Popular dishes include the *tourtière*, a meat pie, and *ragoût de boulettes et de pattes de cochon*, a stew made from meatballs and pigs' feet. Other favorites also include French onion soup, pea soup, and *poutine*, a traditional dish made with French fries or grated potatoes. Quebec is also known for its maple syrup, and in early spring families enjoy traveling to one of the province's many sugar shacks for a "sugaring off," where local manufacturers sell samples of their products. In addition to candies, cookies, and other sweets, even foods such as ham and eggs are served, all cooked in maple syrup. Children enjoy eating *tourquettes*, a natural candy made by pouring boiling maple syrup onto fresh snow. Another typical French Canadian dish is pea soup. It is enjoyed all over Canada, and it is the traditional lunch on Saturday in Newfoundland, usually with dumplings called doughboys floating in it. Its main ingredients are peas, onions, carrots, celery, potato, ham, and bacon.

#### Tourtière

1½ to 2 pounds pork, ground or finely chopped  
 1 clove of garlic, crushed  
 1 medium onion, chopped  
 ½ cup hot water  
 ¼ teaspoon celery salt  
 ¼ teaspoon ground cloves  
 salt and pepper to taste  
 double 9-inch pie crust, homemade or frozen

Mix the water, pork, and seasonings in a saucepan. Cook over a low flame for 20 to 25 minutes and then cool. (Optional: ¼ cup dry bread crumbs may be added at this point.) Cover the bottom of a 9-inch pie pan with bottom layer of pie dough, add pork filling, and cover with top layer of dough. Seal the crust by pinching the edges together. Preheat oven to 350° F and bake pie about 35 minutes, or until browned.

### 13 EDUCATION

Education in Canada is administered by each province individually, although in all cases school attendance is compulsory from the age of 6 or 7 to 15 or 16. Quebec has two parallel systems, one of which is specifically for French-speaking, Catholic students. The Acadian populations of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island are legally guaranteed access

to French-language schools in predominantly French-speaking areas.

Most higher education in Canada is government-funded. Laval University in Quebec is Canada's oldest university, and McGill in Montreal is one of its most prestigious. The first francophone university outside Quebec, the University of Moncton in New Brunswick, was established in 1963.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Canada has an extensive francophone communications network. The Canadian Broadcasting System's Radio Canada broadcasts French-language news programs, dramas, films, and sports events, as well as U.S. programs dubbed into French. French Canadian radio stations must allot 75% of their programming to music by French recording artists. Folk and country music are especially popular with Acadians.

Leading contemporary French Canadian authors include playwright Michel Tremblay and short-story writer Mavis Gallant. Perhaps the most renowned French Canadian author of the 20th century was Gabrielle Roy, whose first novel, *The Tin Flute* (1945), drew a stark portrait that opened the eyes of many in Canada, France, and the United States to the plight of Quebec's urban poor.

### 15 WORK

In 1992, 73% of all civilian employees in Canada worked in service-sector jobs, 27.7% in industry, and only 3.5% in agriculture. In 1990 the average income for full-time employment among Canadians 15 years and older was \$30,274. The unemployment rate in Quebec is higher than that in other provinces, and it reached 15% during the economic slump of the early 1990s.

Before the 1980s, management positions in Quebec tended to be dominated by English speakers. However, after the separatist Parti Québécois came to power in 1976, many English speakers left the province, and those who remained became part of a new social order in which the socioeconomic gap between the two groups has narrowed substantially. Today, there is a French Canadian bourgeoisie with interests in industry, financial institutions, and other economic strongholds. French Canadians work in the government as both managers and lower-level employees. They work in the professions and as small entrepreneurs. The emerging class of French entrepreneurs has traditionally favored businesses such as construction, in which they could overcome barriers posed by a lack of formal education or the need for extensive verbal contact with English-speaking clients. There is still a French-speaking working class in both unionized and nonunionized fields. Many Quebecois have performed hazardous and health-threatening work in the province's asbestos mines.

Before the 20th century, the French-speaking Acadians in the Maritime provinces participated in a subsistence economy that combined farming, fishing, and forestry. Today, many engage in commercial farming and fishing; this has kept rural areas populated in spite of some migration to the cities.

### 16 SPORTS

Hockey, the Canadian national sport, is popular among French Canadians. Every team in the National Hockey League includes French Canadians, and Quebec has had two professional teams since 1972. The Montreal Canadiens—popularly

known as the Habitants or Habs—have won the Stanley Cup, awarded to League champions, over 20 times. The exploits of Maurice Richard, the French Canadian hockey star of the 1940s and 1950s, are legendary. His suspension from the Canadiens before the 1955 Stanley Cup playoffs triggered rioting by fans that resulted in an estimated \$100,000 worth of damage.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to the French-language radio and television programming broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Quebec also has a large audience for English-language television and radio programming and magazines. *Le Journal de Montréal* and *La Presse* are the most widely read French-language newspapers.

Like Canadians of all backgrounds, French Canadians enjoy the beautiful and varied scenery of their native land on vacation trips, one of Canada's most popular forms of recreation. Many families own small cottages in the woods or at a lake shore, which they visit on weekends and during vacations. Others prefer to travel to distant parts of the country for camping or other outdoor activities.

A time-honored pastime among French Canadian families in Quebec is the "sugaring off" ritual. Early in the spring, they head for the woods to tap maple trees for sap that is then boiled down in *cabines à sucre* ("sugar shacks") to make maple syrup and maple sugar.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional crafts among the Acadians include knitting and weaving, and colorful hooked rugs are a specialty.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The global recession of the early 1990s threw Canada into an economic slump that included double-digit unemployment from 1991 through 1994; this reached its highest level in Quebec, where unemployment was as high as 15%. French Canadians have historically occupied a lower socioeconomic position than Anglophones. Traditionally, they have not been as well educated and have suffered widespread discrimination by the English-speaking majority.

A major concern of French Canadians today is the preservation of their culture and language against the threat of assimilation into English-speaking North America, especially in light of Quebec's decreased birth rate and its large number of immigrants from many different cultures (most of them non-francophone). In both Quebec and the Maritimes, the drain of resources caused by emigration to other parts of Canada and to the United States is also a concern.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though during colonial times French Canadian women were revered for their role as mothers, they were denounced as being intellectual inferiors to their men. Their role was to uphold the culture created by the men of New France, not to have any part in defining that culture. As a consequence, large families were the norm. Between 1850 and 1950, owing to a high fertility rate among French Canadian women, the proportion of Francophones in the Canadian population held at 30%. The fertility of the Francophones then dropped below the



*Local residents and tourists stroll among the flowers in the Place Jacques-Cartier of Old Montreal, Quebec, Canada.*  
(© Dave G. Houser/Corbis)

Canadian average toward the mid 1960s, and today the average couple has only two children.

The transformation of French Canadian society is most clearly seen in the changing role of women. The overwhelming urge to modernize produced a women's movement that has been the most militant in Canada. By the beginning of 2000, over 90% of French Canadian women of childbearing age practiced some form of birth control and abortions became slightly more common in Québec than in the country as a whole. As a consequence, the birthrate in Québec declined sharply from an annual rate of 30 births per 1,000 people in 1951 to 13 per 1,000 in 1991. In addition, during the mid-1990s, almost 44% of all French Canadian infants were born to non-married couples or single mothers, and the divorce rate grew from less than 10% in the late-1960s to over 40% in 1995. Regarding the labor market, from 1961 to 1990 the portion of French Canadian women working outside the home increased from 27% to 44%.

Although Canadian women were given the right to vote in federal elections in 1918 and in the English-speaking provincial elections in the 1920s, it was not until 1940 that Quebec



enfranchised women. French Canadian Jeanne Sauvé was not only Canada's first Canadian woman Governor General in 1984, she was also one of the three first women members of parliament to be elected from Quebec, the first woman federal cabinet minister from Quebec, and the first woman Speaker of the House of Commons in 1980.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# FRENCH GUIANANS

**LOCATION:** French Guiana (French American Dependency)

**POPULATION:** 187,200

**LANGUAGE:** French; Amerindian languages; Taki-Taki

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; traditional Amerindian beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

During the 17th century, explorers began to roam all over South America, enduring terrific hardships, feverishly searching for the famed El Dorado. *El Dorado* means "the golden one" and many Europeans thought they would find a city of gold. The French explorer Daniel de la Ravardiere was no exception, and traveling through previously unexplored territory in 1604 along the Cayenne River, he finally arrived at what is now Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana. Many hardships awaited the explorers and subsequent settlers. Eventually coffee, indigo, and sugarcane were cultivated. The Jesuits, famous in many parts of South America for their work with Amerindians, established several village colonies of Amerindians who had been living for centuries in the thickly forested interior of this tropical land.

In 1763 about 14,000 people disembarked at Kourou on the coast, lured by glittering promises that ended in disaster: some 11,000 people died of tropical fevers and 2,000 returned to France, shaken and disillusioned. After this catastrophe, Malouet, the French administrator, tried to reestablish the colony and by the end of the 18th century there were 1,300 Whites, 400 free Blacks and 10,500 Black slaves. Slavery was finally abolished in 1848, after many struggles and various attempts both to end it and to reintroduce it. While this was socially a progressive move, economically the plantation economy was ruined.

In 1852 French Guiana became a penal colony and the French sent many convicts there, particularly to the notorious Devil's Island. In 1855 gold was discovered, and in the ensuing gold rush, agriculture was neglected once again. Hindus who had arrived to work the land left for neighboring Brazil and Dutch Guiana.

As a penal colony French Guiana proved unproductive, and this type of status was formally abolished in 1940. Convicts who gained their freedom were not allowed to return to their country of origin but had to remain in French Guiana. With no serious attempt made to train them or to find them productive work, they became paupers, eking out a miserable existence as penniless beggars, occasionally managing to do casual work, until their deaths.

Nicol Smith, who visited the colony in the early 1940s, reported that convict labor still existed, and Smith even visited one of the large prison camps in the interior where convicts were engaged in timber logging. The governor of the time, Robert Chot, told Smith that not only were the convicts well-fed, but they were even allowed to fish and to hunt wild game such as deer, wild boar, and agouti on weekends. If this was the case, then it is quite possible that freed convicts fared worse in terms of a basic diet than when they were convicts. For many, however, freedom was preferable under any circumstances.

French Guiana ended its colonial status and became a department of France in 1964. It is governed by a prefect with

the help of an elected council and is represented in the French parliament by a deputy and a senator. French Guianans are, in effect, French citizens.

French Guiana, as part of France, belongs to the European Union. The monetary unit is the euro and the current president of French Guianans is the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

Movements for increasing French Guiana's autonomy grew during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1996, 1997, and 2000, all protest demonstrations ended in violence. These outbreaks of street violence, particularly those occurring in the 1990s, were motivated by high levels of youth unemployment and by historical tensions between the region and Paris. Support for greater autonomy and for independence has been tempered by the reliance on French subsidies. Thanks to the economic help received from France, French Guiana enjoys one of the higher standards of living on the South American zone.

The main exports are timber, fish, and gold. In the agriculture realm, rice, corn, sugar, cocoa, vegetables, bananas, and manioc as well as the breeding of cattle and pigs, are the main staples produced in the country.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

French Guiana, with an area of 91,000 sq km (35,135 sq mi), is about the size of Ireland. It has an Atlantic coastline stretching 320 km (200 mi) along the north and northeast, a border with Brazil to the south, and a border with Suriname to the west. The Maroni River forms its western border with Suriname, and the Tumuc-Humuc mountains run along the southern border with Brazil. The southeastern part of the border with Brazil is formed by the Oyapock River.

French Guiana is very under-populated for its size. Only about 187,000 people live there permanently, with about 40,000 living in the capital, Cayenne. Despite being sparsely populated, there is a colorful mixture of peoples in French Guiana. About 70% of the population, descended from a mix of French, Black and Asian Indian settlers, are known as Creoles. There are also settlements of people of Indochinese (Vietnamese) origin, since Vietnam was once a French colony. In the interior, there are several Amerindian tribes, including the Oyampi and the Palikour, who farm the tropical forests using traditional slash-and-burn methods and who still live according to their own traditions. The Gualibi Caribs live along the coast and have mingled with the Creoles. There are also black tribes people descended from runaway slaves, known as the Djuka, the Paramaka, and the Boni. They are descended from runaway slaves of African origin who were originally taken to the British West Indies and who escaped to the jungles of French Guiana, where access was difficult and the motivation of the locals to track them down was weak. In this way, after many hardships, they achieved their freedom and partially reverted to a lifestyle that differed from the hard life of a West Indian plantation slave, but was similar to the life their families once had in the African rainforests.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of French Guiana is French, but other languages are spoken, including a variety of Amerindian languages, while the Black tribespeople speak Taki-Taki, which is partly derived from English.

French Guiana is heavily influenced by the culture of mainland France in many ways, and girls and boys are usually given



French names. Popular French boys' names such as Jean, Paul, Pierre, or Daniel are often combined, in the French manner, and become Jean Paul or Jean Pierre. Many girls have names that end in "-ette," a French diminutive that means "little": Yvette, Suzette, Jeanette. Often girls will have combined names that include "Marie" (Mary): Marie Claire, Marie José, Marie Christine, and Marie Therese. In countries with significant Catholic populations, the custom of naming a girl Maria or Marie, often used in combination with another name, is widespread and is found throughout South America. This custom is less widespread in Protestant countries because the emphasis on the Virgin Mary is not as strong as among Catholic populations.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Heroes vary according to the particular cultural mix, but for the historically conscious a very important figure was the abbess Mother Anne Marie Javouhey, the mother superior of St. Joseph of Cluny, who between 1827 and 1846 established a thriving colony for slaves who had been freed.

## 5 RELIGION

Most French Guianans are Roman Catholic, although in the tropical forests in the interior region, some Amerindian tribes follow their own spiritual and religious practices, which probably derive from Central Asia, including shamanic practices. There are also Black tribes descended from runaway slaves in

the interior who have their own religious practices, and settlers from Vietnam, formerly the French colony called Indochina, who have their own religious customs. Although Buddhism was prevalent when Indochina was a colony of France, many Indochinese became Christian, and there were also tribal peoples living in more remote areas who were not Buddhist. There are also some Chinese settlers, and during the 19th century there were large numbers of Hindus who originally came from India to work in agriculture in the Guianas, particularly British Guiana and subsequently French Guiana. A number of Arabs, some of whom are Muslim, also made their way to French Guiana at a time when various countries in the Middle East were colonies of France.

Although French Guiana is mainly Catholic, it shares with some areas of the Caribbean an astonishingly varied cultural and religious background.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major French holidays, such as Bastille Day, are celebrated, as are Labor Day and major Catholic holidays, such as the Feast of the Assumption, Easter, and Christmas. Carnival is celebrated for the three days preceding Lent (in February) including Ash Wednesday.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Children are often baptized and also enjoy their First Communion, usually at the age of seven, when according to Catholic custom they receive a special name and are received into the Church. This is usually an important occasion for traditional Catholic families, and for the child it is often a memorable occasion.

Young people in French Guiana, particularly in the capital, Cayenne, are influenced by French culture as well as local customs that have developed out of their own colonial history. They enjoy dating and parties, just as young people do everywhere. Many couples marry in church.

When a person dies, a *novena*, or cycle of prayers, is said according to Catholic custom, and close relatives and friends are expected to visit.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A friendly and informal greeting in the French style is "*Salut!*" which means "Hello," whereas formal greetings would include the phrase "*Comment allez vous?*"

People in French Guiana generally enjoy social visits and festive occasions. Family occasions are important. Young people enjoy going out together, and a favorite occasion is an outing to a beach. There are good facilities for swimming just outside Cayenne, but these outings are more than sporting occasions; they are pleasant social occasions and a chance for young people or families to spend time together in a relaxed, informal manner.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The standard of living in French Guiana is relatively high, although the lifestyle of the Amerindians, who represent about 4% of the population, differs considerably from that of the majority Creole population.

The health of French Guianans has improved considerably over the years. In particular, the work of the Pasteur Institute

has made significant gains in helping to control and reduce serious diseases, such as yellow fever, malaria, and leprosy.

Heavily subsidized by the French government, the economy allows for more consumption than would otherwise be the case if French Guiana were to rely for significant income on its major exports alone. The European Launcher Development Organization's Equatorial Space Range, a rocket-launching base at Kourou usually used by the European Space Agency to launch satellites and for research programs such as weather studies, is pivotal for the economy, accounting for about one-quarter of French Guiana's GDP.

Housing in the interior, particularly in Amerindian settlements, often consists of simple huts with thatched roofs. In Cayenne, many streets have houses built in individual and varied styles, painted in bright colors such as light blue or yellow. The brilliant tropical flowers of many small gardens add to the impression of gaiety so often found in warm climates.

In the interior, rivers are often navigable by canoe or motorboats for long stretches. In towns, people use buses and cars for transport.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family life in French Guiana varies according to the customs of diverse settlers, but in general the family unit is close and family ties are considered very important. The Catholic faith prevalent among a majority of French Guianans also reinforces the importance of close-knit families. Families tended to be large in the past, but now many people have fewer children than in traditional families in many countries in Latin America, following a more modern trend.

## 11 CLOTHING

Western-style shirts and trousers for men, and blouses and skirts or cotton dresses for women, are often worn. One distinctive feature in Cayenne, the capital, is that many women are quite fashion-conscious and tend to follow French styles and tastes in dress, although there are local adaptations because French Guiana has a very warm climate.

## 12 FOOD

There are various types of food eaten in Cayenne because the mix of settlers, including some Chinese and, formerly, settlers from India, have all influenced the local cuisine. However, tasty fish and seafood dishes, including shrimp, are often eaten, sometimes seasoned with different spices and served with rice. The hot pepper known as cayenne, known and used in many parts of the world, takes its name from French Guiana's capital.

It is claimed that even when French Guiana was a notorious convict colony, the convicts ate comparatively well: their diet included meat and fish stews, pork, and shrimp.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Nearly all eligible children attend school. University education is available in France or the French Antilles. French Guiana has an 80% literacy rate. Primary schooling has been available to most people for some time, and secondary schools exist in Cayenne and some other smaller towns. Schooling is modeled on the educational system in France.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance vary according to the diverse traditions of French Guiana. Black tribes people who still live in the interior have percussion-based music and drumming, whereas some Amerindians produce quite different music where woodwind instruments have a central place. The capital, Cayenne, is Westernized to the extent that there are strong influences of more-modern music, including French ballads and pop and rock music.

#### 15 WORK

French Guiana had a long tradition of cheap, convict-based labor, which did not bring prosperity to its inhabitants. The modern economy relies on the export of tropical hardwoods logged in Inini, the inland forested region of the country, and valuable seafoods, such as shrimp. At one time gold was a major export in the mining sector, but people are now employed extracting bauxite, and diamond mining has also provided work. The fishing industry provides some employment.

A unique form of work in French Guiana is that provided by the modern space agencies located on the coast at Kourou. The European and French space agencies are both located there, and it was from Kourou that the *Ariane* rocket was fired in 1996. Unfortunately, this 10-year project failed when the *Ariane* rocket exploded in space, but millions of people around the world probably got their first look at Kourou and French Guiana's beautiful coast and starry skies on television during the rocket's launch. Work continues apace and brings in several thousand extra personnel to work in one of the most advanced industries in the world.

#### 16 SPORTS

Water-based sports are popular with many in French Guiana and include boating, swimming, and fishing. Others enjoy soccer.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

French Guianans, particularly in Cayenne, enjoy going to the movies, and watching television is also a popular pastime. Young people enjoy going to discos, and along Cayenne's main commercial areas there are now good shops with French imports, as well as cinemas, cafés, dance clubs, and nightclubs.

A favorite pastime is going to the beaches outside Cayenne for picnics and swimming, and families or groups of young people often spend the day there.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Crafts and folk art in French Guiana derive from Black, Amerindian, and even Vietnamese artisans and include textiles, pottery, and woodcarvings. Some of the early Vietnamese (formerly called Indochinese) groups arrived in French Guiana as convicts and were later freed. Some of these, called the Hmong, live in separate villages; their carvings in wood and their weaving are particularly appreciated.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

French Guiana is a land of astonishing contrasts, with tribes who live only with the basics needed for survival in the jungles of Inini on the one hand, and the most modern space technologies based in Kourou on the other, with a modern,

French-oriented population of Creoles in Cayenne, and many smaller settlements along the coast as well as villages with diverse groups such as the Hmong Vietnamese.

Some people think that despite the legal status of French Guiana as simply another department of France, this is really a colony under a different name. Despite exports of minerals, seafood, and timber, French Guiana is not independent economically, but remains heavily dependent on French government subsidies for its relative prosperity. Were this situation to change, life could become very difficult for French Guianans. It is too soon to tell how the establishment of modern space agencies at Kourou will affect the local population socially and economically in the long run.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though there is no systematic discrimination against women, traditional gender roles dominate social life. Women are generally responsible for tending to the children and other household tasks, while the men are in charge of providing financial support. This holds especially true in the rural areas, although there is some variation among the different ethnic groups. Traditional gender roles have prevented women from gaining access to high official positions in government.

As in other Caribbean countries, the fundamental social problems regarding women are teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and AIDS. During the 1990s, approximately 8% of mothers were younger than 18 years of age and in 1992 one third of these teenage mothers suffered from diseases while pregnant. The AIDS epidemic is also affecting teenage women, who represent 11.3% of those who are HIV positive.

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—Revised by C. Vergara

# GARIFUNA

**LOCATION:** Eastern coasts of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua; United States; Caribbean islands

**POPULATION:** 200,000–500,000

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English; Garifuna

**RELIGION:** Catholicism, incorporating aspects of the traditional religion

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Garifuna make their home along Central America's Caribbean coast in a territory that spreads across the borders of four different nations. They are descendants of the Caribs, an indigenous people of the Lesser Antilles. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Caribs on the island of St. Vincent intermarried with African slaves whom they captured in raids on European settlements or who escaped from their captors. According to some accounts, the resulting people, known as Black Caribs, formed a separate group distinct from other Caribs in the region, later called "Yellow" or "Red." However, other sources claim that the island people themselves recognized no such distinction and that these color designations were later applied solely by Europeans, who arbitrarily divided the native people into different groups based on skin color.

However the distinction came about, the Black Caribs, unsuccessful in their protracted resistance to British colonization of St. Vincent, were deported to the island of Roatan off the coast of Honduras in 1797. The deportees, who represented only about one-fourth of the former Black Carib population, managed to survive and reestablish their culture in an unfamiliar setting. They eventually migrated to the Central American mainland, where they settled mainly in the coastal lowlands of Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Belize (then known as British Honduras).

Over the next two centuries, both their population and territory expanded significantly, and they formed a major part of the work force on the Central American coast for over 100 years. In 1823 additional Black Caribs migrated to Belize, forced out of Honduras by a civil war in that country. In spite of their relocation to new territories and their incorporation of other local Black populations, the Garifuna have maintained a distinct cultural identity, preserving both the language and many of the customs, beliefs, and rituals of their island ancestors.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Garifuna live in a succession of villages and towns along the eastern coasts of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. These Caribbean lowlands have a varied terrain that includes mangrove swamps, tropical rain forests, river valleys, coastal plains, and pine and palm savannas. The Garifuna population that lives between Belize and Nicaragua is distributed in 43 towns and villages. Close to 98,000 Garifuna live in Honduras, most of them concentrated along the North coast from Masca, Cortés to Plaplaya, Gracias a Dios.

Many Garifuna have immigrated to large cities in Central America and the United States. Those in the United States live primarily in enclaves in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and

other major cities. There are also small groups of Garifuna on the Caribbean islands of Trinidad, Dominica, and St. Vincent.

Because of their geographic dispersion, it is impossible to arrive at exact demographic figures for the Garifuna population (in addition, only Belize counts them as a distinct ethnic group). Their total numbers have been estimated at anywhere between 200,000 and 500,000. Some estimates place the Garifuna community in the United States alone at around 100,000.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language of the countries in which the Garifuna live, except for Belize and the United States, where the official language is English. Most Garifuna, besides speaking Spanish, also master the Igñeri dialect that is a combination of Arawaco, French, Swahili, and Bantu.

The native language of the Garifuna (called Garifuna or Garinagu) is derived from the Arawak and Carib languages of their island ancestors.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Although it has long been illegal, *obeah*, the traditional witchcraft or voodoo of the Caribbean, is still practiced in secret by some Garifuna. Its rituals involve dances, drumming, and trances in which the dead are contacted, and it is generally used either to harm one's enemies or to ward off spells one fears from others. A characteristic object used in such spells is the *puchinga* doll made of cloth stuffed with black feathers and buried under the doorstep of the intended victim. Crosses are sometimes painted on children's foreheads to ward off the evil eye.

In 2001 UNESCO proclaimed the language, dance, and music of the Garifuna as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Belize.

## 5 RELIGION

The Garifuna religion is a product of a cultural syncretism. Their religious system is a mixture of African and Amerindian traditions in addition to Catholic elements. The Garifuna practice a version of Catholicism that incorporates many aspects of their traditional religion, mingling a belief in saints with reverence toward *gubida*, the spirits of their ancestors, and faith in shamans or "spirit helpers" (called *buwiyes*). Their religious practices—which encompass dancing, singing, drumming, and alcohol—have long been considered suspect by established churches and surrounding communities, which have accused them of paganism and devil worship. Some *buwiyes* have served as Roman Catholic priests or nuns.

Among the most important traditional religious practices is the *dugu*, a ritual feast held to appease the *gubida* when they are thought to be angry at a living relative (which manifests itself most typically in an illness suffered by that person). A *dugu* lasts from two to four days and is attended by both friends and relatives of the affected person, who sometimes come all the way from the United States in order to attend. Lavish amounts of food are prepared—both traditional dishes that were favored by the *gubida* (such as cassava bread, pork and plantains) and foods that are currently popular (including rice and beans, cheddar cheese, and soda pop). The participants engage in ritual song and dance, led by a *buwiye*, who calls forth the *gubida*. After the contents of the feast, together with rum, have

been ceremonially offered to the ancestral spirit, they are either thrown into the sea or buried underground.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many Garifuna ritual observances are held on the holy days of the Christian calendar, but some occur on the dates of secular holidays as well. Festivities generally include processions and street dancing, often in masks and costumes. John Canoe (*Yankunu*) dancers perform at Christmastime and receive money, drinks, or homemade candies for their efforts.

On November 19, the Garifuna of Belize celebrate Settlement Day, commemorating the original establishment of a significant Garifuna presence in that country in 1823, when a number of their ancestors, forced out of Honduras, arrived there to join the small band already settled at Stann Creek. In Dangriga, the center of Belize's Garifuna community, there is a ritual reenactment of the settlers' arrival by celebrants who row in from the ocean in dugout canoes. Their cargo duplicates that carried by their ancestors: rudimentary cooking utensils, drums, cassava roots, and banana tree saplings. When they land on the shore, they are joined by hundreds of spectators in a lively procession that winds through the streets of Dangriga to the Catholic church and ends with a special ceremony. Afterwards, the crowd continues the festivities by dancing and feasting on traditional Garifuna foods.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There are three healing celebrations and rituals in the Garifuna tradition: *chugú*, *lemesi*, and *dugu*. The *chugú* is the offering of food to the dead. Regarding the *lemesi*, there are two types of ceremonies: one is the official taking of the mourning clothes after one year and the second consists of a memorial in church as requested by the ancestors that passed away. However, the most serious of the healing rites is the *dugu*. According to the tradition, every time that there is a problem in the Garifuna family, the effects produced by tension and family struggles are felt among the living and the dead. If the living had been incapable of fixing the problem, then the death ancestors will intervene to solve it. The *dugu* lasts for six or nine days and takes over a year to plan it. The ceremony consists of drumming, singing, dancing, eating, and drinking.

Major life transitions (such as birth, puberty, and death) are marked by religious ceremonies that combine Catholic traditions with ancestral rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Physical violence is rare among the Garifuna. Aggression is almost always sublimated in such practices as name-calling, cursing, gossip, and satirical songs, and an aggrieved person may even resort to the form of witchcraft known as *obeah* for revenge.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Houses are typically either wooden or made of wattle and daub with thatch roofs. Wooden houses are raised several feet off the ground on posts and may have porches. Many villages still have no electricity, and in the towns, where it is more common, there are frequent power outages. Garbage is often thrown into the sea or disposed of in open ditches and streams. In some cases, it is tossed out the back door. Garifuna are prey

of poor sanitary conditions. Lack of clinical establishments, adequate infrastructure, illness prevention programs, and nutrition programs are the rule among Garifuna people. Close to 75% of children below 12 years of age suffer some degree of malnutrition, and three out of 10 will die before they are two years old. The growing consumption of "junk food," including many fried foods and foods high in refined sugar, has lowered the nutritional level of the Garifuna diet, and obesity has become common among the women. Protein deficiencies are widespread among preschoolers. The Garifuna use both modern medicine and folk remedies ("bush medicines") but retain their traditional belief that the most important determinant of health is the power wielded by the spirits of their ancestors.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

It is common for women to bear children without having established a permanent or legal relationship with the father, and legal marriage forms the basis of only a minority of households. Because of the centrality of women to family life, the Garifuna are generally considered a matrilineal society. In the past, households were often made up of three generations of women. Increasingly, however, only the oldest and youngest generations remain, as the adult population of working age emigrates in search of better employment opportunities, leaving the grandparents behind to rear the children. Since the 1960s, many women have emigrated to major cities in Central America or the United States, where they are employed in the textile industry or find work as maids.

Garifuna mothers do not display the same level of physical involvement with their children as do mothers in many comparable cultures, a fact that observers have correlated with a perceived tendency toward independence and individualism in the culture. Mothers wean children early, in some cases do not breastfeed at all, and easily leave them with caregivers for short or long periods of time. In keeping with the generally nonviolent nature of the Garifuna, children are raised with little or no corporal punishment. Fights among children themselves are frowned upon and firmly broken up by adults. The elderly commonly attempt to control the behavior of younger family members by threatening to withhold their inheritance. Domestic violence is also extremely rare among the Garifuna.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most Garifuna wear modern Western-style clothing. Even among the older women, very few still wear the traditional shell-trimmed ethnic costumes. However, the brightly colored full skirts that many wear, together with the kerchiefs worn on their heads, do give them a distinctive appearance compared to the younger women, who wear jeans, tee-shirts, and tight skirts that could be seen in virtually any locale. The men also wear jeans, and the traditional straw hats have been replaced by baseball caps. Young people's attire has been influenced by the emigration patterns of their parents and peers, and in the towns one may see some of them sporting the latest fashions from New York—a favorite emigration destination—paid for with remittances sent by relatives abroad.

## 12 FOOD

Dietary staples include rice, fish, green bananas, plantains, and coconut milk, which is used to prepare many dishes, such as *hudut*, where it is mixed with pounded boiled plantains. The

green bananas are boiled and served as a starchy vegetable. “Boil-up,” or *falmou*, is adapted from the spicy pepperpot of the Garifuna’s island ancestors, and its milder present-day version consists of fish, tubers, and coconut milk. While manioc or cassava plays an especially prominent role in the diet of the Garifuna in Honduras, who eat it boiled as a vegetable, it is important throughout the culture as the basic ingredient of the flatbread called *areba*. This food and the customs surrounding its preparation have long been among the central unifying traditions of the Garifuna, whose very name is based on the term *karifuna*, which means “of the cassava clan.”

Cassava roots were traditionally grated by hand on stone-studded wooden boards, a lengthy and tedious job formerly relieved by group singing and today often avoided altogether by the use of electric graters. The resulting pulp is then strained by hand in 2 m (6 ft) long bags made from woven leaves, which are hung from a tree and weighted at the bottom to squeeze out the starch and juices (which are poisonous). The white meal that remains is left to dry overnight, sifted, and made into the dry flatbread that still connects the Garifuna with their ancestors.

The most popular beverages are coffee and various “bush teas,” sweetened by generous amounts of sugar. Common desserts include cakes and puddings made from sweet potatoes, rice, and bread scraps. An especially popular dessert is the candy called *tableta*, made with grated coconut, ginger root, and brown sugar. The ingredients are boiled until they stick together, poured into a greased pan to cool, and either cut up or broken into squares. Children may be seen selling this confection, which is a favorite among tourists, at bus stops and other public places. In recent years, “junk foods” high in fats and refined sugar have become popular with many Garifuna, and cooking styles for many dishes have changed from boiling and roasting to frying.

### 13 EDUCATION

School attendance is generally low beyond the primary grades. Close to 70% of the population is illiterate or semi-illiterate. One of the main reasons behind this discouraging statistic is the lack of schools in nearby areas. Moreover, the villages that have educational centers do not have enough resources to invest in their staff and, therefore, many of the educators of those schools are only capable of teaching at best to six graders. 10% of Garifuna who finish elementary school continue with their studies, another percentage immigrates to other countries and the rest spend their life in their community and eventually become illiterates again because of the lack of practice. However, rudimentary levels of literacy are valued and most Garifuna do receive sufficient schooling to attain them. Garifuna are also interested in improving their command of either Spanish (in Honduras and Guatemala) or English (in Belize). A higher level of educational achievement is common among the Garifuna of Belize, many of whom have excelled as schoolteachers.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Garifuna have a rich heritage with roots in both African and indigenous cultures. Their traditional music, which includes work songs, hymns, lullabies, ballads, and healing songs, is characterized by African-influenced call-and-response patterns and complex drum rhythms. A number of

songs are typically sung as an accompaniment to daily tasks, such as the baking of cassava bread (*areba*).

The most characteristic Garifuna dance is the *punta*, which has its roots in African courtship dances. It is performed by couples, who compete for attention from spectators and fellow dancers with their fancy and flirtatious moves. The *paranda* is a slow dance performed only by women, who dance in a circle with a shuffling movement and traditional hand movements and sing as they dance. A sacred dance, the *abaimahani*, is performed at the *dugu*, a feast held for the spirit of a deceased ancestor. The dancers—all women—form a long line, linking little fingers, and sing special music for the occasion. The Warraguan or John Canoe dance, typically performed at Christmastime, includes songs lamenting the absence of loved ones.

While maintaining the older cultural traditions, the Garifuna are also forging new ones of their own. Contemporary musicians have transformed the age-old music that accompanies the *punta*, creating the popular “*punta rock*.” The paintings of internationally acclaimed artist Benjamin Nicholas depict aspects of Garifuna history and culture in bold, modern styles. A group of young Garifuna emigrés in Los Angeles created the Walagante Dance Group to perpetuate the traditional dances of their people.

### 15 WORK

The Garifuna have traditionally lived by fishing and small-scale subsistence farming. In the 20th century, the banana industry became a major employer, creating jobs both in the agricultural field itself and in the major ports that sprang up along the coast. Since World War II, many Garifuna have sought employment with the United States merchant marine. Currently, however, the largest segment of the work force consists of underemployed wage laborers, and many Garifuna have emigrated to other countries, especially the United States, in search of better employment opportunities.

In the towns, those Garifuna who still farm often travel 5 to 10 miles to their plots, leaving early in the morning by bus and returning late in the afternoon. The civil service, especially the teaching profession, has been a major employer of Garifuna in Belize. Many children of Garifuna emigrants to the United States enter the professions—including medicine, engineering, and education—some returning home and others remaining abroad permanently.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is a popular sport among the Garifuna. Young people organize games on flat open areas in their towns or villages or on the beach.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

*Punta* parties, named for the lively and sexually provocative traditional dance that is performed at them, are a favorite form of entertainment. Pop musicians have developed “*punta rock*,” which combines the beat of traditional *punta* music with the electric guitar sounds of rock music and contemporary Garifuna lyrics. This music, which originated in Belize, is becoming popular throughout the Caribbean. In a reverse development, the Garifuna have adapted the popular West Indian reggae music into a form of their own called *cungo*.

Many Garifuna households in the larger towns have television sets. Television is also a preferred form of recreation

among the Garifuna when they emigrate abroad, and a TV is one of the first purchases of Garifuna emigrants to the United States.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

So few of the Garifuna still practice the group's traditional crafts, including hat-making, drum-making, basket-weaving, and the carving of dugout canoes, that the National Garifuna Council of Belize held a workshop in 1987 to teach them to young people to help them preserve the heritage of their ancestors.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The lack of promising employment opportunities in their native regions has led many Garifuna to emigrate to other parts of Central America and to the United States, affecting the structure of both families and communities—it has been estimated that as many as 50% of the men are absent from the average Garifuna community at any given time. With growing numbers of women also emigrating, communities are essentially being depleted of an entire generation of working-age adults. The elderly and very young are left to survive together, often on remittances by absent family members, until the young people are old enough to emigrate as well.

In recent years there has been increased concern about alcoholism among the Garifuna. While alcohol consumption itself has risen—a fact that some have attributed to the social dislocations caused by unemployment and emigration—it is also the case that consumption levels formerly considered acceptable are now regarded as excessive. Marijuana use—mainly by young men—has become common among Garifuna living in towns

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

For more than two centuries, the mother was the focus of the home in Garifuna society. Women raised the children and tended the farm, while men were away to hunt or fish. As the economy changed, men had to accept jobs that took them away from the village—and sometimes out of the country, which placed women as heads of the households. The migratory process in which more men leave natal communities than women has strongly influenced Garifuna society and culture such that women play important roles in the local economy, subsistence activities, and religious practices. Women are also responsible for teaching the language and cultural practices to future generations.

Garifuna women have been most affected by land privatization on the Caribbean. While Garifuna land is held in common, use rights have been historically passed through the matrilineal line. It is, therefore, women who are harassed into abandoning or selling their resources. As the coastal land market expands, Garifuna women have lost their territorial control.

Garifuna women's activities connect them to community territory (land or sea) in a number of important ways. Women sow the land, care for and harvest crops, prepare food, and sell traditional food products. Access to land and sea are required for women to exercise their ancestral religion. There are various rituals that require access to the earth and sea in order to fulfill the requests of ancestors. Women play key roles in these ceremonies, preparing foods, singing, and performing gender-

specific dances for the ancestors. A woman can fill the role of the *buyei* (shaman), who leads such ceremonies.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic along the Caribbean coast has intensified in recent years and become particularly severe in Garifuna communities because of broader risk environment characterized by labor migration and transnational movement. Questions of power, sexuality, and affective expectations about partners complicate the situation for women hoping to prevent infection. Although it is generally expected for women to remain monogamous, men frequently have sexual relations with more than one woman, and it is not unusual for a man to have children by two or more women.

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—revised by C. Vergara



## GERMAN AMERICANS

For more information on German history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Germans**.

### OVERVIEW

Germans began immigrating to America in colonial times. By 1776, the German population in America had reached about 225,000. The founding of Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1683 is considered to be the birth of the real German presence in America. More and more families came to join the original 34 settlers, and by 1790 the Germantown population had grown as high as 3,000, or 556 families. Most of these early German settlers were farmers or craftspeople. German American farmers introduced diversified farming (planting a variety of crops), crop rotation, and the use of fertilizers (manure, red clover, and gypsum, or lime) to American farming.

Germany did not become a unified nation until 1871, so prior to that time, German-speaking immigrants were not “German” but rather hailed from various regions or small states. In the 1700s, most came from the southern and western areas of today’s Germany, along the Rhine River. The majority were Protestants, such as Mennonites, Amish, Reformed, and other Anabaptist sects, fleeing religious persecution. Many settled in the religiously tolerant colony of Pennsylvania. German immigrants of the 1800s tended to come from northern and eastern regions, such as Prussia, Bavaria, and Saxony. They came not for religious but political freedom. Whether driven by religious or political motives, all German immigrants came to America looking for improved economic opportunities as well.

A small (4,000–10,000) but significant group of Germans came to the United States in 1848, after the failure of a political revolution and social reform movement in Germany. The “forty-eighters,” as they were called, were radical intellectuals who, as the leaders of the failed revolution, needed to escape the consequences of their failure. They were quite different from the farmers and craftspeople who had preceded them to America, and conflicts arose between the old immigrants, called the “Grays,” and the new immigrants, known as the “Greens.” However, the intellectuals’ presence gave a new depth and vitality to the German American community and gave them a more powerful voice in national politics.

Most German Americans were against slavery and many fought with the Union Army in the American Civil War (1861–65). There were also a number of German American soldiers in the Confederate Army, but eventually the German American community fell in fairly solidly behind President Lincoln. The German American vote helped elect Lincoln, and they remained his staunch supporters. The German Americans were also instrumental in the labor union movement of the late 1880s. German American craftspeople had brought their guild system along with them to America. These craft guilds evolved into trade unions, giving rise to the general labor union movement.

Although Germans had been immigrating to the United States in huge numbers since the 1830s (surpassed only by the Irish), they were eclipsed in the Great Migration of 1880–1920 by southern and eastern Europeans who began flocking to America. Compared to these new “foreigners,” German Amer-

icans seemed to be members of the old, settled establishment. Until the outbreak of World War I, when anti-German hysteria erupted, German Americans became part of the status quo in the United States.

All this changed, however, with the start of World War I. German Americans suddenly became the face of the enemy, and they were subjected to violent harassment. Anything remotely “German” was attacked and/or destroyed. Books were burned, street names changed, German businesses boycotted. Music by German composers, such as Beethoven, was removed from public performances. Even hamburgers, sauerkraut, and dachshunds were renamed “liberty burgers,” “liberty cabbage,” and “liberty hounds.” German Americans were physically attacked, tarred and feathered, and even killed. Robert Paul Prager, a German-born coal miner, was lynched by a hyperpatriotic mob in 1918. Prager became the symbol of anti-German violence. On 5 April 1992, the first annual Prager Memorial Day was held in remembrance of all the victims of anti-German hysteria during World War I.

After World War I ended, thousands fled the resulting economic disaster in Germany. Between 1919 and 1933, some 430,000 Germans immigrated to the United States. Many were Jewish (see **Jewish Americans**). As a result of the anti-German sentiment in the United States, German Americans had gone underground, hiding their ethnicity and attempting to blend in as much as possible with mainstream American society. Many Americanized their names. German heritage festivals were suspended for a number of years. The new immigrants joined in the drive to be assimilated, losing their Germanness as quickly as possible.

When Hitler came to power in Germany, another surge of intellectuals, many of them Jewish, fled his regime and came to the United States. A total of 130,000 Germans immigrated to the United States between 1933 and 1945. German Americans already in the United States did not support Hitler, either. Most were decisively anti-Nazi; the rest were indifferent. German Americans made up one-third of U.S. armed forces during World War II. Anti-German sentiment began to wane in America with the German Americans’ obvious show of support for the Allied cause.

It was not until recent decades, however, that German Americans began to reclaim their ethnic heritage. The new climate of multiculturalism and the demise of communist East Germany have lessened people’s fear of German Americans. Cultural festivals have reemerged, and Oktoberfests are now popular among German and non-German Americans alike. German immigrants continue to come to America’s shores. In 1980, the U.S. Census showed that German Americans had surpassed British Americans as the largest ethnic group in America; 2006 estimates counted almost twice as many German Americans (50,764,352) as British Americans (28,290,369). Today, German Americans make up almost 17% of the total U.S. population.

According to the U.S. Census, 42,884,825 Americans claimed some German ancestry in 2000. The number had risen to 50,764,352 by the time of the 2006 American Community Survey. Only a small percentage (less than 2%) are foreign-born. Most German Americans are, therefore, at least second- or third-generation. German Americans are both the largest ethnic group in America and the most widely dispersed. They are spread across the United States, although the highest con-



centrations remain in the middle Atlantic and midwestern states of early German American settlement. North and South Dakota and Wisconsin have the highest percentages of German Americans in their total state populations (over 40% each). Nebraska, Minnesota, and Iowa come close, with over 35% each. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Pennsylvania, the original German settlement in the American colonies, still boasts the second-largest German American population (3,115,550), surpassed only by California (3,332,350). Other states with large numbers of German Americans include Ohio, Illinois, New York, Michigan, and Texas (all with over 2 million).

Because German Americans have been in the United States for so long and are so numerous, they have made countless contributions to American culture. German words now in common usage in the United States include kindergarten, gesundheit, ouch, delicatessen, blitz, sauerkraut, and wiener. Dozens of cities, towns, and streets are named after German people or places. Many of the Christmas traditions now seen as standard in America, such as Christmas trees (Tannenbaum) and Santa Claus (Kris Kringle), were introduced by German Americans, as were New Year's Eve festivities. Early German settlers also brought with them a much more relaxed attitude toward the Sabbath than that preached by the Puritans. German Americans transformed Sundays in America from days of rigid observances to days of rest and relaxation.

Food is extremely important to German Americans; they love to gather to eat and drink. Beer, a German specialty, has become one of the favorite beverages in America. Most Ameri-

can brewing companies, such as Pabst, Anheuser-Busch, and Schlitz, were founded by German Americans. The Heinz, Hershey, Kraft, and Fleischmann companies were also founded by German Americans. Other foods introduced by German Americans that are now common fare in American diets include frankfurters, hamburgers, sauerkraut (although some credit Polish Americans with this addition), potato salad, bratwurst, liverwurst, and pretzels.

Two German American women also gave us kindergarten. Caroline Louisa Frankenberg and Margarethe Meyer Schurz are both credited with opening the first kindergarten in the United States in the 1850s. By the 1870s, kindergartens had become part of the public education system. German Americans also introduced physical education into the American school system.

So many German Americans have made significant contributions to American arts and letters that it would be impossible to list them all. Germans love music, and German Americans established a multitude of music halls, opera societies, and choral festivals. In 1890, 89 of the 94 performers with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra were German born. One well-known German American visual artist was landscape painter Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), a member of the Hudson River School of painters. An important architect was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Cartoonist Thomas Nast created the political symbols of the Republican elephant and Democratic donkey in the late 1870s, and Charles Schulz created the much-loved Peanuts comic strip.

A few of the better-known German American writers are H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, John Steinbeck, Kurt Vonnegut, and Louise Erdrich (who is also part Chippewa). Well-known German American figures in the world of film include directors Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder; producer Florenz Ziegfeld of the 1920s' Ziegfeld Follies; playwright and lyricist Kurt Weill; and actors Marlene Dietrich, Grace Kelly, Lotte Lenya, and Rod Steiger. Four very well-known German Americans engaged in a different form of theater—Alfred, Otto, Charles, and John Ringling—created the Ringling Brothers' Circus, and later bought out their competitor, Barnum and Bailey, to become the largest circus enterprise in the United States. The Ringling Brothers' Barnum and Bailey Circus was owned and run by members of the Ringling family until it was sold in 1967, retaining the Ringling name.

German Americans have made countless contributions as well to the worlds of science and industry. Among the most famous are physicists Albert Einstein, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and Wernher Von Braun; anthropologist Franz Boas; millionaire John Jacob Astor; piano manufacturer Henry Engelhard (Steinweg) Steinway; automobile manufacturers Henry and Clement Studebaker; Levi Strauss, inventor of denim blue jeans; presidential advisor and U.S. secretary of state, Henry Kissinger; and U.S. presidents Herbert Hoover and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig are two of the many successful German American baseball players. Swimmer Johnny Weissmuller gained fame playing the character "Tarzan" in several movies in the 1940s, and Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel in 1926.

Radical pro-Aryan (neo-Nazi) groups represent only a tiny fraction of German Americans in the United States but create problems for all German Americans as they fuel lingering fears that "all Germans are Nazis." Other German American organizations do whatever they can to offset the negative impression given by neo-Nazi activists. German American Day was officially proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan in 1987 to be forever after celebrated on October 6, the date on which Germantown, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1683. Oktober-fests and other cultural festivals help promote understanding of German American heritage and traditions among German and non-German Americans alike. As German Americans now make up such a large portion of the total U.S. population, anti-German discrimination is mostly a thing of the past.

A great number of German immigrants in the mid-1800s were rural peasant laborers on larger estates who were forced to relocate by strict regulations regarding domiciles. These regulations were put in place by the estate owners to limit the number of peasant families dependent on them and were very successful in that regard. Legal rights were only extended to those with a house, and the number of houses was restricted, so young people had to wait for older residents to die in order to claim a residence and be able to marry, etc. When earlier migrants to the United States wrote to their friends and families in Germany with reports of work and land opportunities in America, huge numbers of men and women chose to emigrate.

Many of these immigrants ended up in urban settings that differed greatly from their former home. Women had always expected to contribute to the family's labor on the peasant farms, but the American culture of the time endorsed the idea that men be the main economic providers and women

take care of the home and children. Most German Americans found that women needed to work to bring in some income as well, and although many did this by taking in boarders so as not to leave the home, others took jobs in domestic service or, later, the clothing industry.

The Lutheran Church, the majority denomination of 19th century German Americans, was a place for women to find some activity and influence outside the home, but even that was limited. Women's groups in the church were only allowed superficial responsibilities, such as decorating the sanctuary, raising money for charity, and serving food at special dinners. Even Lutheran church-based schools only hired women teachers if no men were available, and the women were paid much less, regardless of age or qualifications. As soon as a man could be found to teach, the woman was let go.

But German American women found other ways to join together in the public sphere and create social and arts groups, including choirs, literary societies, and charity organizations. The earliest of these groups was the Women's Auxiliary of the German Society of Pennsylvania. The German Society was founded in 1764; in 1900, 12 women decided to start the Women's Auxiliary. Membership rose quickly, climbing to more than 800 after the auxiliary's official incorporation in 1908. Both the German Society of Pennsylvania and its Women's Auxiliary still exist today.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

## GREEK AMERICANS

For more information on Greek history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Greeks**.

### OVERVIEW

Few Greeks immigrated to the United States before the late 1800s, except a small number who fled during the Greek uprising against the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s. Greek war orphans from that uprising were also adopted by Americans. However, most Greek Americans today are descended from immigrants who came to the United States during the Great Migration of about 1880–1920. The majority of Greek immigrants were young men from the southern peninsula of Greece, known as the Peloponnesus region, who hoped to work hard in the United States, save up a sizeable amount of money, and then return to Greece. By 1925, one out of every four Greek men between the ages of 15 and 45 had gone to the United States. About 40% who immigrated between 1908 and 1931 did return to Greece, but the rest stayed in America. A few returned to Greece to marry and then brought their wives back to the United States.

These first Greek immigrants were farmers who suffered from poverty because of disruptions in the Greek economy and a population explosion resulting from improvements in sanitation and medicine. Most were uneducated and illiterate and had few job skills to offer in the industrialized work world of the United States. They took whatever jobs they could find, usually for very low wages. Many were exploited by padroni (contractors who brought primarily Italian immigrants to the United States) but even most of those treated like virtual slaves managed to survive and tuck away bits of money to build up their savings slowly.

Most Greek immigrants eventually opened their own businesses. They tended to specialize in shoeshine stands, florist shops, grocery stores, confectionaries, fruit stands, and restaurants, particularly diners. Many of these businesses still exist today, as a high percentage of Greek Americans continue to own their own businesses.

The Immigration Act of 1924 restricted the numbers of immigrants allowed into the United States from each country, slowing Greek immigration significantly. World War II (1939–45) and the Greek Civil War (1947–49) further reduced Greek immigration until about 1950. In return for its allies' support, the United States passed the Refugee Relief Act to allow refugees from countries devastated by World War II to immigrate to America. Many Greeks took advantage of this opportunity, and the number of Greek immigrants rose dramatically. Another wave of Greek immigration began in the late 1960s when an oppressive regime took over the Greek government and many Greeks decided to flee. Immigration reforms in the United States made entering the United States much easier by removing many of the previous restrictions. Most of the Greek immigrants to the United States since World War II have come to stay, and many are women and professionals.

Greek Americans suffered discrimination at first, which could at times turn violent. But for the most part, Greek Americans had an easier time becoming assimilated because so much of American culture is based on ancient Greek ide-

als. Although the values of modern Greeks differ greatly from those of ancient Greece, the values of democracy, hard work, and independence have remained constant. Among the educated elite of America, a number of Hellenic societies extolled the virtues of Greece and welcomed Greek immigrants to the shores of the United States. Despite some initial difficulties, therefore, Greek Americans have found themselves largely compatible with U.S. society.

The total Greek American population today is uncertain: some 1,153,295 persons reported themselves to be of Greek ancestry on the 2000 U.S. Census (0.4% of the total U.S. population); the U.S. Department of State, however, estimates the Greek American population to be closer to 3 million. Whatever their actual numbers, it is certain that Greek Americans comprise the largest Greek community outside of Greece.

Although Greek Americans are spread across the United States, almost one-third (30%) live in the northeast. Massachusetts (1.2%) and New Hampshire (1.2%) have the highest percentage of Greek Americans in their total state populations. The top five states with the largest numbers of Greek Americans are (in descending order) New York (151,812), California (135,487), Illinois (99,354), Florida (79,912), and Massachusetts (76,189). Greek Americans tend to cluster in cities, particularly New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston. Only a few of the original "Greektowns" still exist, including an area in Chicago and one in Detroit. Formerly, Greektowns were located in Lowell, Massachusetts; Salt Lake City, Utah; Tarpon Springs, Florida (where Greek Americans ran a profitable sponge-diving business); St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; and New York City; as well as others on Long Island and across New York State.

The Greek and English languages differ from each other significantly in both spoken and written forms. Most early Greek Americans were illiterate in Greek, however, so the written differences between the languages did not pose a problem for them, since they could not read or write Greek anyway. Many recent Greek immigrants to the United States are well educated and already have some English proficiency when they arrive. Therefore, English language ability has not presented a serious obstacle to Greek Americans for the most part. First-generation Greek Americans worked hard to acquire English language skills, and subsequent generations grew up speaking English as their native language. Most second- and third-generation Greek Americans, in fact, never learned Greek.

Many Greek Americans anglicized or shortened their names, particularly those with long surnames, such as Michael Anagnostopoulos (1837–1906), a Latin and Greek teacher at Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, who came to be known simply as Anagnos. (Anagnos was one of Helen Keller's teachers.) Traditionally, Greek children are named after their grandparents, and a large number of Greek Americans continue this tradition.

Greek American community life centers around the church, which serves cultural and social, as well as religious, purposes. One of the first things early Greek American communities did was to raise money to build a church. Greek Americans are almost exclusively Eastern (or Greek) Orthodox. They follow Eastern Orthodox birth and death rituals, such as bringing a baby to church 40 days after birth to be blessed and having the child christened within a year after that. When a Greek American dies, a wake is held, with the funeral the following day.



Easter is the most important holiday for Eastern Orthodox Greek Americans. (So that Easter will always come after the Jewish Passover, the Eastern Orthodox Church sometimes celebrates it one week later than the Western Christian Church. It always occurs sometime in early spring.) Good Friday and Great Saturday services build up to the joyous celebration of Easter Sunday. Christmas (25 December) and Epiphany (6 January) are also important, as is Holy Apostles' Day (29 June), which honors saints Peter and Paul (believed to be the "fathers" of the Christian Church).

Greek Americans also celebrate Greek Independence Day on 25 March, with parades in traditional costumes, speeches, and folk dances. Another secular holiday celebrated by Greek Americans is "No" Day on 28 October, which commemorates the day when the Greek government refused to give in to the Fascists during World War II (1939–45).

To provide a sense of community and mutual support, early Greek Americans formed cultural associations. Many of these associations exist in the United States today. One of the largest is the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) and its subsidiaries: Daughters of Penelope (for adult women), Sons of Pericles (for male youths), and Maids of Athena (for female youths). There are also numerous day schools and afterschool programs to teach Greek culture and language; the Greek Orthodox Church alone sponsors 50 of these schools. Early Greek American college students formed intellectual societies, such as the Plato Society founded in Boston in the early 1900s. The first university club in the United States

was Helicon, established at Harvard in 1911 by Greek American students. These students were members of an elite minority, however. Most Greek Americans were not well educated and did not encourage their children to pursue secondary or higher education. Attendance rates for Greek Americans at all levels of education are improving tremendously, however, with 85% of those over 18 having a high school diploma and 35% a bachelor's degree or higher.

Greek Americans take marriage and family very seriously. Although recently on the rise, the divorce rate among Greek Americans is still quite low compared with that of other ethnic groups. First- and second-generation Greek Americans usually marry other Greek Americans, but later generations have begun to marry outside their ethnic boundaries to an increasing degree. The 2002 film "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" presented a comic view of an intermarriage between a Greek American woman and a non-Greek man. Produced for just \$5 million, the film eventually grossed over \$200 million dollars at the box office.

Greek food has become quite popular among the general population of the United States. Gyro sandwiches, pita bread, feta cheese, and baklava are enjoyed by Greek and non-Greek Americans alike. Many American cooks are learning the art of baking with phyllo dough (paper-thin sheets of pastry dough). Greek restaurants and diners serve traditional Greek foods (which emphasize lamb and goat meats) with the addition of beef, which is more plentiful in the United States and more familiar to American palates than goat meat.



*Members of the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Youth Choir perform during an East Room celebration of the Independence Day of Greece in Washington, D.C. President George W. Bush celebrated the 187th anniversary of Greek independence with Greek Americans at the White House. (Alex Wong/Getty Images)*

Food is important to Greek Americans and symbolizes friendship, love, and human connection. It is considered an insult to the host if a guest does not eat. The refusal to accept someone's offer of food is seen as a rejection of that person's friendship.

Greek architecture, with its massive simplicity and soaring columns, has greatly influenced American building construction. The wings of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. were designed in the Greek Revival style by Thomas Walter in 1865. Greek American artist Constantino Brumidi (1805–1880) then painted Greek-style frescoes on the ceilings and walls of the Capitol building.

Many other Greek Americans have contributed to American culture, including opera diva Maria Callas (1923–1977); writer Nicholas Gage; Academy Award-winning director Elia Kazan; actor/director John Cassavetes (1929–1989); and actors Telly Savalas (1926–1994), best known as TV detective “Kojak”; and Olympia Dukakis, the cousin of Massachusetts governor and one-time U.S. presidential candidate Michael Dukakis (b.1933). Other well-known Greek Americans in the arts include actors Michael Chiklis, John Stamos, and Melina Kanakaredes; magician Criss Angel; and writer Jeffrey Eugenides (2003 Pulitzer Prize winner).

The world of U.S. politics has attracted a number of other Greek Americans in recent decades. Spiro T. Agnew (1918–1996) served as U.S. vice-president until forced to resign on 10 October 1973 because of his involvement in criminal activities. Paul Tsongas (1941–1996) became the youngest-ever member of the U.S. Senate in 1978 at age 37, and Olympia Bouchles Snow (b.1947) became the youngest-ever woman to be elected U.S. Representative, in 1978 at age 31. Snow was also the first-ever Greek American woman in the U.S. House of Representatives. George Stephanopoulos served as White House Communications Director during the first term of Bill Clinton's presidency (1993–1997) before becoming a political commentator. Arianna Huffington, also a political commentator, was born in Greece and is now a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Greek Americans who have made significant contributions to the worlds of science and industry include Dr. George Nicholas Papanicolaou (1908–1962), inventor of the Pap smear used to detect cervical and uterine cancers; and Spyros P. Skouras, a Hollywood movie mogul. Skouras began a chain of movie theaters, initiated “Cinemascope” technology, and eventually became the president of 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation. He was the first to allow African Americans into theaters in Missouri, and he always deleted racial or ethnic slurs from any film he financed. Skouras discovered and/or promoted a

number of successful movie stars, including Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Gregory Peck, and Henry Fonda. Greek American Christos Cotsakos served as the CEO of E\*Trade, a financial services company, from 1996 until 2003.

Ancient Greece was the site of the first Olympic Games, and Greek Americans continue to excel in sports. Successful Greek American athletes include Gus Triandos, Milt Pappas, Bill George, and Alex Karras (who moved on to become a broadcaster and television actor). Popular sports commentator Bob Costas is also of Greek ancestry.

Dancing is a favorite pastime for Greek Americans. Although in Greece girls are not allowed to lead or to perform the more difficult, fast folk dances, Greek American girls can both lead and perform any Greek folk dance, fast or slow. Folk dances are performed at cultural festivals as well as at outdoor parties called *glendi*. Traditional Greek foods and music are also enjoyed at *glendi*.

Early Greek Americans spent much of their leisure time in coffeehouses, which were given names like Acropolis or Parthenon. These coffeehouses sometimes had live entertainment and almost always offered different forms of gambling. The gambling got so out of hand in Chicago in the early 20th century that the mayor closed down the coffeehouses. From then on, Greek American coffeehouses had to be much more circumspect about their activities.

Conflicts in the Greek American community between earlier and more recent immigrants (typical of any immigrant group) came to a head in 1967 when the U.S. government backed a military takeover in Greece and supported the resulting oppressive dictatorship for seven more years. The U.S. government also supported Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Those Greek Americans who had lived in the United States for generations and considered themselves more American than Greek did not question U.S. policy. More recent immigrants, however, who had only lately arrived from Greece, opposed U.S. support of the military dictatorship and Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Either they themselves, or their family and friends, had direct experience of the oppressions in Greece and Cyprus that were being carried out with U.S. support.

Political shifts in Greece since then have perpetuated the discord among Greek Americans. Conflicts between those who emphasize the "Greek" and those who emphasize "American" in the Greek American community continue to create tension and disharmony today.

Greek culture is traditionally very patriarchal, and Greek society today continues in that tradition. Women did not receive the right to vote in Greece until 1952, and their representation in professional and political life is still quite small. Greek American women, however, began to organize themselves into a progressive public force as early as the 1920s. The Daughters of Penelope, one of the largest Greek American women's organizations today, was founded in 1929, and the corresponding organization for female youth, Maids of Athena, began in 1930. These and other Greek American organizations for women have promoted equal rights for women in education, politics, and family life in the United States, as well as supporting efforts to improve women's conditions in Greece. Becoming a member of the European Union in 1981 has propelled Greece to move forward on the issues of women's rights.

The importance of marriage and family in traditional Greek culture excludes homosexuals from social acceptance, in con-

trast to the myth of sexual freedom in ancient Greece. The Greek language does not even have words for "gay" or "lesbian" except for derogatory terms for gay men. Accordingly, most Greek American gays and lesbians remain closeted within the Greek community, although they may be very public about their identity in other settings.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# GRENADIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** Gre-NAY-dee-uns

**LOCATION:** Grenada

**POPULATION:** 90,343

**LANGUAGE:** English; French-African-English dialect

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; Hinduism;  
Christian-African sects

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Grenada (pronounced Gre-NAY-duh), located in the Windward Islands, is known for the beauty of its lush, fertile land, and for the spices it produces. The nutmeg grown there (one-third of the world's supply in the 1980s), as well as cloves, mace, and other flavorings, have given the island its nickname, "the Isle of Spice." Grenada was first sighted by Christopher Columbus on his third voyage in 1498, although he never landed there. The Caribs who inhabited the island drove off all would-be settlers, both English and French, for over 150 years. In 1650 a French party headed by Marie Bonnard du Parquet, the governor of neighboring Martinique, succeeded in acquiring the island from the Caribs in exchange for knives, trinkets, and brandy. Having gained a foothold, they soon proceeded to exterminate the native population. Forty of the last Caribs left on the island leaped to their death in a mass suicide at La Morne des Sauteurs (Leapers' Hill). The island remained in French hands until it was ceded to the British at the close of the Seven Years War in 1763. After 20 years of alternating French and British rule, Grenada became a British possession under the Treaty of Versailles in 1783.

During the 18th century the British brought in African slaves to work on the island's sugar and tobacco plantations. When these slaves were freed through a proclamation by the British government in 1834, the sugar industry declined, despite the arrival of East Indian indentured laborers to replace them. By the beginning of the 20th century, cocoa and nutmeg had replaced sugar as the island's main sources of income. The new century brought with it a growing desire for greater political autonomy among the people of Grenada, which had been officially declared a British colony in 1877. These nationalistic feelings supported the rise to power of Grenada's first national leader, Eric Gairy, who in 1951 was elected to head an autonomous government under British rule. Remaining at the center of the political stage for over 20 years, Gairy became the nation's first prime minister after independence was granted by Great Britain in 1974.

In 1979 the increasingly autocratic and eccentric leader was overthrown in a coup d'état—the first to occur in an English speaking Caribbean nation. The new Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, formed a Marxist government that established close ties with Cuba and other communist countries, from which they received aid and technical assistance. However, the government's political alignment caused fears among tourists and the international business community, and the country's economy suffered.

In October 1983 a faction of the revolutionary government ousted Bishop, who was placed under house arrest leading to spontaneous and massive street demonstrations. Bishop was soon released, but he was captured and killed along with sev-

eral of his associates. Days later, U.S. forces invaded the island and seized power, removing the national opposition as well as the Cuban military presence from the island. The People's Revolutionary Army formed a new government led by general Hudson Austin. This invasion of Grenada became part of the rivalry between the United States and Cuba during the 1980s. The United Nations condemned the military intervention as a violation of international law.

Since the 1983 invasion, Grenada has moved closer politically to the United States, which provided the nation with both disaster relief and a substantial package of long-term economic aid and technical assistance. The international airport at Point Salines, begun under the Bishop government, was completed with U.S. aid and much of the country's infrastructure was repaired and modernized. As part of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II is Queen of Grenada and head of state. The Crown is represented by a governor-general, who in 2008 was Sir Daniel Williams.

Economically, Grenada's main source of foreign exchange is tourism, especially since the construction of an international airport in 1985. In 2003, the service sector represented 76% of its GDP, followed by industry (18%) and agriculture (5.4%). Some of its most important crop products are banana, cocoa, nutmeg, mace, citrus, avocado, root crops, sugarcane, and corn. Even though the economy has shown signs of recovery, in 2000 people living under the poverty line accounted for 32% of the population. Grenada has also been a recovering from the devastating effects caused by hurricanes Ivan (2004) and Emily (2005).

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Grenada is the most southerly of the Windward Islands. In addition to its main island, the country consists of two dependencies in the Grenadines—Petit Martinique and Carriacou—and a number of smaller islets. Grenada is one of the smallest independent nations in the Western Hemisphere; its three main islands have a total area of 344 sq km (133 sq mi), a little less than twice the size of Washington, D.C.

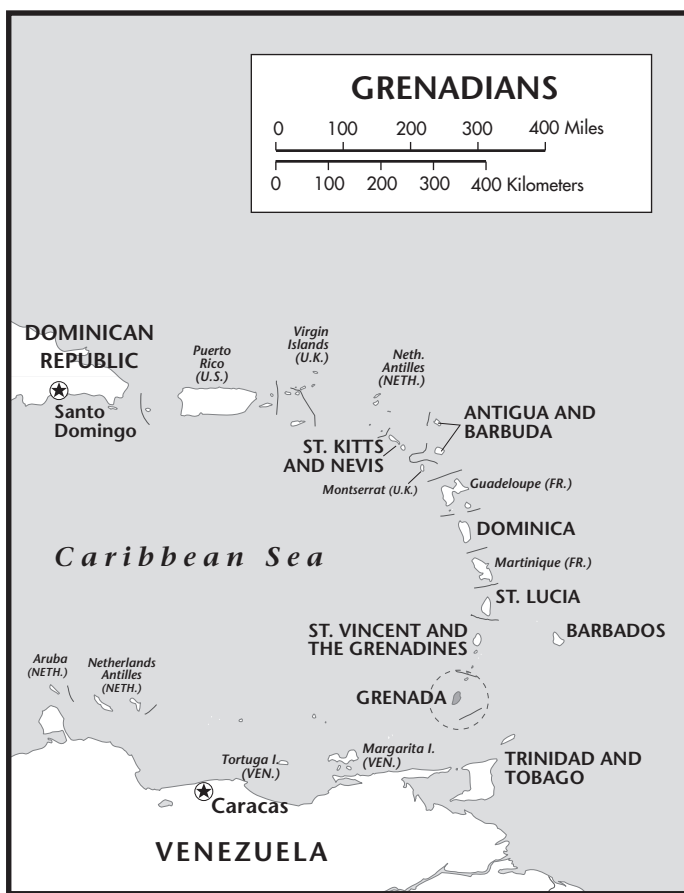
The island of Grenada itself is green and hilly. A central mountain range runs lengthwise through the island, dividing it in half. The interior also contains rain forests, waterfalls, crater lakes, and many rivers and streams. The coastal land includes swamps and woodlands, as well as fertile plains where fruits, vegetables, and the spices for which the island is famous are grown. Carriacou, the largest of all the Grenadines, has a small central mountain range, rolling hills, and sandy beaches. Petit Martinique is distinguished by one central hill that is 152 m (500 ft) high.

Grenada's total population is estimated at 90,343 people, of which about 9,000 live on the main island, with between 6,000 and 7,000 on Carriacou and under 1,000 on Petit Martinique. The population is predominantly rural, with about 33% living in urban areas. About 85% of Grenada's population is of African descent, while 11% have mixed Black and White ancestry. The rest of the population is divided between Asians (mostly East Indians) and Whites.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

English is the official language of Grenada, but many Grenadians speak a patois, or dialect, that combines English words and grammatical structures with elements of French and Af-





rican words and rhythms. Many place names are French, such as Grand Anse Bay, Morne Rouge, Sans Souci, and L'Anse aux Epines.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Animals from the jungles of Africa play a prominent role in the anancy tales that are popular in Grenada. In these stories, beasts often frighten or trick their enemies, sometimes by taking on the shapes of human beings, and sometimes through other stratagems. One example is the story "King Cat," in which rats are invited to a party to celebrate the feigned death of a famous rat-catching cat, who suddenly pounces on them and eats them all except for a pregnant female who lives on to perpetuate the "rat race."

While belief in the supernatural creatures of African legend is less prevalent in Grenada today than in the past, they live on in the region's Carnival figures and still appear as characters in bedtime stories. The name of one such creature—the zombie, or walking dead—has become a commonly used word in the United States, although removed from its original context. In African lore, zombies were dead people brought back to life to do the bidding of Voodoo priests.

Popular folk remedies include a tea made from lime bush leaves that is taken for an upset stomach and a preparation made of mango leaves that is used for rheumatism. Compresses made from the leaves of certain plants may be applied to the forehead to treat fevers.

#### 5 RELIGION

About 53% of Grenadians are Roman Catholic. Most of the rest belong to Protestant denominations (33.2%), including Anglican (13.8%), Methodist, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Baptist. Most of Grenada's small East Indian population is Hindu. Shango, a traditional African religion, is still practiced, generally in combination with Christian beliefs. African religious practices are especially prominent on Carriacou, and the mingling of Christian and African traditions can be seen in the island's boat-christening ceremonies, which combine holy water, sacrificial goats, and African-derived Big Drum music.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Grenada's public holidays are New Year's Day (January 1); Independence Day (February 7); Good Friday and Easter Monday; Labor Day (May 1); Whit Monday (May or June); Corpus Christi (June); the August holidays (the first Monday and Tuesday of August); Carnival (in mid-August); Thanksgiving (October 25); and Christmas (December 25 and 26).

The country's most important festival is Carnival, celebrated in August instead of during the traditional pre-Lenten season in order to avoid conflicts with the Grenadian Independence Day, which occurs in February. The opening rounds of calypso and steel band competitions and other preliminary events begin at the end of July. Carnival itself begins with a Sunday night celebration leading into the Jouvert (jour ouvert) festivities at dawn on Monday, which feature Djab Djab Molassi, who represent devils (Djab Djab is derived from diable, the French word for "devil"). These revelers streak their faces and bodies with grease or molasses, which they delight in smearing on bystanders.

The main events in the two-day Carnival festival include a pageant by costumed masqueraders, steel band and calypso competitions, and a parade of bands through the streets of St. George's to the market square. Another popular Grenadian Carnival character, called Short Knee, reflects the tumultuous history of the Carnival tradition on the island. The character's costume of knee-length, colorful, baggy trousers was created in the 19th century after the government outlawed the loose, flowing "Pierrot" costumes under which weapons could be hidden.

Another traditional festival is Fisherman's Birthday, celebrated on the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul at the end of June. It is marked by a ritual blessing of nets and boats followed by boat races, all accompanied by food and dancing. The major celebration of this festival takes place at Gouyave.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious ceremonies appropriate to each Grenadian's particular faith community.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Grenada's history of British colonization is reflected in many of its customs, such as driving on the left side of the road and the occasional tea party, which is usually a social fundraising event for a needy cause.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

While poverty exists on Grenada, few of its people go hungry, thanks to its fertile farmlands. Most Grenadians own land on which they can grow crops to feed their families, selling the remainder at the market. Housing ranges from wooden shacks with tin or corrugated iron roofs among the poorer villagers to the attractive, brightly painted bungalows of those who are better-off financially. Signs of urban poverty common to other developing countries, such as shantytowns, are rarely seen.

Average life expectancy in Grenada is 65 years, and infant mortality is 13 deaths per 1,000 births. In 1990 there was 1 physician for every 1,617 people. There is no railroad on Grenada, and its residents depend on 1,000 km (620 mi) of narrow, winding mountain roads for transportation. In the mid-1980s many of these roads were in poor condition, but major repairs have since been made. The main roads have been resurfaced, and others have been modified for easier access. Still, however, only 600 kilometers of roadway on the island are paved. Most Grenadians do not own cars, and the majority depend on bus transportation.

The opening of the Point Salines International Airport in 1984 was a milestone in Grenadian history, making it possible for major airlines to establish direct service to the island. Begun with Cuban aid under the Marxist regime that was in power at the time of the 1983 invasion, it was completed with U.S. assistance. The capital city of St. George's is Grenada's major port.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Many Grenadians live in extended-family households, which may include up to three generations of family members. Grandparents commonly assist with child care, although day-care facilities are available for working mothers. Elderly family members, when not actually part of the household, usually live only a short distance from their children, to whom they turn when they are in need of care themselves.

Within the past generation, the size of Grenadian families has declined dramatically. Formerly, it was common for a family to have as many as 10 children. However, with greater use of birth control and more women working outside the home, the average number of children dropped to 4 or 5 in the 1980s, and the country actually had a negative population growth rate (-0.2%) between 1985 and 1992, although this was partly due to emigration.

## 11 CLOTHING

Grenadians wear modern Western-style clothing. Women often wear straw or cloth hats for protection from the sun.

## 12 FOOD

Grenadian cooks may choose from among a rich and abundant variety of fruits, vegetables, and spices. Items commonly found at the market include yams, avocados, callaloo greens (similar to spinach), oranges, papayas (called "paw-paws"), plantains (which resemble bananas), mangoes, and coconuts. Many fruits are available year-round. The cuisine of Grenada reflects a variety of influences: Amerindian, African, French, British, and East Indian.

About 20 different kinds of fish are caught off the coasts, and both fish and chicken dishes are served at many meals.

Popular Caribbean staples eaten on Grenada include pigeon peas and rice, and callaloo, made from callaloo greens, okra, salted pork, crab, and fresh fish. The local dish most closely identified with Grenada is oildown, a mixture of salted pork and breadfruit steamed in coconut milk. Another favorite is turtle toes, a combination of ground lobster, conch, and other seafood shaped into balls and deep fried.

Popular beverages include locally brewed Carib Lager beer; rum punch spiced with lime juice, syrup, and grated nutmeg; mauby, made from the bark of the maubi tree and downed as a soft drink; and cocoa tea (cocoa beans and spices steeped in hot milk).

## 13 EDUCATION

The adult literacy rate in Grenada is over 96%, and all children are required to attend school for 12 years. The average primary school has 1 teacher for every 28 pupils, a figure that compares favorably with those in other developing nations. Post-secondary education is offered at the T. A. Marryshow Community College and University Center (a branch of the University of the West Indies) and more recently at the St. George's University, which is offering baccalaureate degree programs at its school of arts and sciences.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Grenadian authors first came to public attention in the 1920s and 1930s. One of the nation's best-known contemporary writers is Wilfred Redhead, author of one-act plays and short stories. The visual arts reflect a high degree of African influence, and Grenada's artists are mostly self-taught. Canute Caliste, who lives on Carriacou, is one of the most prominent. His paintings depict aspects of traditional life on the island, including Carnival bands, boat-launchings, dance festivals, and Big Drum performances. Many of his works include hand-printed texts.

Another well-known artist is Elinus Cato, whose brightly painted renderings of town and rural life in Grenada have been exhibited in London and Washington, D.C. One of his paintings, *People at Work*, was presented to Queen Elizabeth II when she toured Grenada in 1985. The wooden frame for Cato's painting was crafted by renowned Grenadian woodcarver Stanley Coutain, one of the country's leading sculptors. Other recognized masters at transforming the island's mahogany, teak, and cedar into works of art include Alexander Alexis and John Pivott.

## 15 WORK

Between 30% and 40% of Grenadians are employed in government or other service sector jobs and about the same percentage earn a living through some type of agricultural employment, often in the food processing industry. Typical food processing jobs include peeling nutmeg shells and sorting the seeds and washing bananas and other produce in large vats. The remainder of jobs in Grenada are mostly in construction and manufacturing. The country has a standard eight-hour work day. Grenada had a high rate of unemployment in the 1990s; in 1994 it was reported at 25% of the work force. However, thanks to governmental efforts, in 2000 this percentage was reduced to 12.5%.



*A Grenadian boy carries water through St. George's, Grenada, after Hurricane Ivan devastated Grenada, Barbados, and other southern Caribbean islands in September 2004. (AP Images/Andres Leighton)*

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket is Grenada's most popular sport, and there is a large stadium at Queen's Park, outside the capital city of St. George's. Grenada and several other Caribbean nations hosted the 2007 Cricket World Cup. Grenadians will start a game on any flat area that is available, and they even play cricket at the beach. Soccer is another favorite sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Calypso and steel drum music are both popular forms of entertainment in Grenada. The nation's television station, a division of Grenada Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), airs local news, sports, and local entertainment (including coverage of Carnival), as well as programs from the United States. There are also a number of privately owned and operated radio and television stations on the island.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

While calypso music is popular in Grenada, as it is throughout the Caribbean, the truly indigenous music of the Windward Islands, to which Grenada belongs, is Big Drum music. Derived from the African call-and-response tradition, it consists of song, dance, and drumming. Although its roots are similar to those of calypso and reggae, it retains a more authentic African character. The Big Drum is actually a set of three drums, originally carved from trees and later made of rum kegs. The skin of male goats is used for the two side drums and the skin

of a female goat for the middle one. The middle drum, which has pins threaded across its surface, produces the most complex rhythms.

The singers are usually women, and the lead singer is called a chantwell. The songs—in either English or French patois (dialect)—resemble those of other Caribbean traditions, such as calypso, in their reliance on satire and social commentary. The dancing is performed inside a ring of people by dancers wearing full skirts and headdresses and who interact with the musicians. On Carriacou, Big Drum music is performed at religious ceremonies including weddings and burial rites.

Woven handicrafts include hats, purses, baskets, placemats, and other items made from straw, bamboo, and wicker. Salad bowls, kitchen utensils, furniture, and other items are fashioned from mahogany and red cedar, and jewelry is made from black coral and turtle shells.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Poverty in Grenada increased in the 1980s due to the worldwide recession. Unemployment is high (12% of the work force). There was an increase in labor disputes in 1995. In 2000, people living below the poverty line represented 32% of the total population.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though there is no evidence of official discrimination in health care, employment, or education, women frequently earn

less than men performing the same work. Violence against women in Grenada is common and most cases of spousal abuse go unreported to police authorities. In addition, lesbians, transgender persons, and others who live outside of heterosexual and gender conventions are often at risk of violence, rape, and other forms of discrimination, harassment, and abuse.

In 2005 the Department of Women's Affairs put forward legislation on equal opportunity and treatment in employment that seeks to provide remedies against discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, and pregnancy in employment, education, and the provision of goods, services, and facilities. The Department of Women's Affairs also began a gender education program to better the welfare of women through economic and self-improvement programs.

Educational data for Grenada indicates that at the secondary and tertiary levels the ratio of girls to boys is greater than one, which is feeding a large number of female professionals into the workforce. Women are now occupying senior managerial, administrative, and professional positions in all sectors of the economy.

The proportion of seats in Parliament held by women has risen to 28.5% in 2005, up from 17% in 2001. In 2008, the president of the Senate was a woman, while 8 of the 13 permanent secretaries in government ministries were female. On the issue of gender equality, there continues to be concern about inequality of pay, and under-representation at decision-making levels of the society.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# GUAJIROS

**LOCATION:** Venezuela and Colombia (Guajira peninsula, which borders the Caribbean to the north and east, and Venezuela and the Gulf of Maracaibo to the west)

**LANGUAGE:** Guajiro

**RELIGION:** Mixture of Roman Catholicism and indigenous religious traditions

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Guajiro Indians are a distinctive and individualistic tribe from northeastern Colombia and northwestern Venezuela who have been seminomadic for hundreds of years. Their existence pre-dates the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, although their precise origins and migrations prior to the arrival of the Spanish are uncertain. The conqueror Rodrigo de Bastidas surveyed the coastal areas of the Guajira peninsula along the Caribbean as early as 1500-1501. The Guajiro tribe is divided into clans that are made up of several family groups, with leaders who are recognized as princes. Guajiros are a warrior culture, in fact, they were never subjugated by the Spanish conquerors.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Guajiros live in the dry lands and coastal areas of the Guajira peninsula, which borders the Caribbean to the north and east, and Venezuela and the Gulf of Maracaibo to the west. This territory has equatorial weather seasons. First, there is a rainy season that goes from September to December called Juyapu. The second season goes from December to April, and its main feature is its dryness. This time of the year is known as Jemial among Guajiros. A second rainy season called Iwa goes from April to May followed by another long second dry period from May to September.

Traditionally the Guajiros have ignored the border that divides Venezuela and Colombia, roaming freely in and out of both countries. Their nomadic habits were recognized and respected by both countries, which accorded them the privilege of citizenship and did not demand from them the formalities that normally have to be observed when crossing from one country to another.

This reluctance to recognize national borders persists to this day, since currently members of the same extended families and clans may live either in remote desert areas or in cities such as Riohacha, the capital of the Guajira, or in a neighborhood of the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo where some have migrated to find work, or in smaller settlements, such as Puerto López at the mouth of the oil-rich Gulf of Maracaibo. Many move from one location to another in indefinite patterns that do not conform easily to modern diplomatic requirements.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Guajiro language is a branch of Arawak, a linguistic language predominant within the Caribbean. Even though the new generations are able to speak Spanish fluently, there is a real concern among Guajiro people of maintaining their mother tongue. This concern has been shared by the Colombian and Venezuelan government, states that have supported bilingual education policies among Guajiros to preserve the aboriginal language. This stand helps to explain why although many



Guajiros have had continuous contact with the Spanish language for many years, they continue to speak their own language. In this sense it seems noteworthy to acknowledge that among Guajiros people it is common to have three names: a Guajiro name, a Catholic name given to them at birth, and another Spanish name that they usually use when in contact with White people. The Guajiro name is often kept secret, since it is used only by close members of the family on the mother's side.

Despite the difficulty of discovering the Guajiro names, the Colombian writer Eduardo Zalamea Borda, who wrote a novel about the Guajira region, records the names of three girls: Anashka, Ingua, and Pankai. He also records the name of a young boy: Nipaj. The language sounds more guttural than Spanish, and the story of Guajiro lives, their work, their loves and sorrows, and the landscape of sand and boat and sea is often recorded in poetic songs that, according to Zalamea Borda, are often quite melancholy. For example, in a song that refers to a boat and an anchor, the following line is repeated over and over again in a lengthy, sad tone, like the repetitive whistle of a bird:

*Eeeeeeeee guarapáin tanai, eeeeeeeee guarapáin tanai.*  
Then this sad lament changes into a joyful song.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Although the Guajiro Indians were gradually converted to Catholicism, in particular through the efforts of Capuchin monks who learned the Guajiro language and established some of the

first primary schools in the Guajira, beliefs and practices from earlier times persist, in particular because clan identities still form part of the Guajiro identity.

Each clan has a symbol, usually drawn from the animal world, which stands for certain virtues and characteristics with which the clan identifies. This symbol is usually understood by outsiders as a totem. What this means is the power, the aspirations, and the virtues that the clan regards as valuable are expressed by their choice of symbol. Sometimes this symbol or totemic sign is tattooed on the arm.

#### 5 RELIGION

Religious life for the Guajiros is a mix of the Catholic beliefs brought to them by the Spaniards who conquered the New World, and the older belief system that includes a different view of the afterlife. The cape at the head of the Guajira peninsula, called the Cabo de la Vela (the Cape of the Sail) is called Jepira by the Guajiros. It is regarded as a sacred place because they believe that Guajiros who have passed away still wander there.

One important figure in the Guajiro cosmovision is the Mareiwa, considered the god creator and founder of their society. Another important character in the Guajiro vision of the world and universe is a married deity. In the one hand, there is Pulowi, a character that represents life, and in the other hand, there is Juya, the male hunter that symbolizes male power.

Guajiro culture states that life does not end with death and, therefore, burials play an important role in their traditions. After someone passes away, the cadaver is buried with personal belongings and, after two years, the rest are exhumed and incinerated, stored in a ceramic vessel, and buried again.

The Wayœu clan records its origin with this poetic myth: "We were born of the Wind of the Northeast and the Goddess of the Rains." Winter itself is thought of as the brother of the Goddess of the Rains and represents the Guajiro Indians as a whole. Whereas in other cultures with different climates winter might represent hardship, in an arid area such as the Guajira, whatever brings water or rain also brings fertility and abundance.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Guajiros who have migrated to towns have become more involved in the celebrations and religious festivals of Catholicism. Even comparatively small towns, such as Puerto López, have developed a mixed population, including traders of Arab origin who migrated to the Americas in search of a better life, black people whose ancestors came to these shores originally as slaves, white people of Spanish origin, and people who are a mix of all of these. As Guajiros intermingle during religious feast days, they partake of the music, dance, and customs that evolve out of this rich and colorful brew.

The Guajiros also continue to mark special events in their lives according to their own traditions, particularly the Guajiro ceremonial dance known as the *Chichimaya*. This dance is a fertility dance and often takes place when a young girl reaches puberty and is considered able to marry.

The Festival of Uribia in the Guajira intermingles the dances, songs, and music of African, Spanish colonial, and Guajiro Indian origins, such as the *vallenato* music of the neighboring Magdalena region, with its mix of ballad-like songs and Afri-

can drums, as well as the Guajiro *maraca* or rattle, the Guajiro drum, and the Guajiro flute known as the *maasi*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Many Guajiro infants are not only baptized into the Catholic Church but also have a Guajiro naming ceremony that is conducted in a private manner, usually among the Guajiros themselves. The Guajiro name is always associated with a special family intimacy. Clan identity comes to the infant not through its father, but through its mother. Similarly, the Guajiro name is uttered usually only by close family members on the mother's side. Maternal uncles have a special authority and importance.

When Guajiros females become teenagers and start menstruating, they are separated for a time to remain secluded and cared for by their maternal aunts. This seclusion, it is thought, helps girls to prepare for married life. For months the girls have to drink specially brewed herbal teas that are expected to help them get rid of their childish attitudes and become more mature. They also improve their knowledge of various crafts, such as weaving and sewing, during this time. There are several rituals that take place during this time. For example, girls are obligated to shave their heads and to rest in hammocks hung near the house. Moreover, they are fed with a special vegetarian diet called *Jaguapi* and are bathed with frequency. During this training period Guajiro girls will learn about other aspects of becoming a woman, such as birth control, pregnancy, and erotic techniques. This time of seclusion is regarded as a rebirth, and the girls are each given a new name. They are then ready to go out into the world again, to meet the boys among whom they will eventually find a husband.

At this stage the girls have a coming-out party with the *Chichimaya*, the Guajiro ritual fertility dance. During the *Chichimaya* ceremonial dance, which takes place at dusk, a boy will take his hat off and wave it, dancing backwards in a circle, daring the girl to catch him. The girl has to dance and chase him, trying to step on his feet so that he will lose his balance and fall.

Traditionally, when a Guajiro dies he or she is buried wrapped in a hammock. At a later date, the bones are placed in a clay urn and buried in a tomb near others belonging to the same clan.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Greetings can be very friendly and enthusiastic. If someone has arrived, pleasure is expressed, and, in a simple shelter with a roof made of dry branches but open on two sides, the welcoming hosts will hang up some hammocks so that the visitor will be able to spend some time with them and spend the night there if necessary. Then the hosts will ask the visitor, "What news do you bring, *waré*?" The *waré*, or friend, is expected to relate news about relatives and friends.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

A common Guajiro settlement is comprised of five or six houses that form a *ranchería*. Each ranchería has a name that is usually of a plant, animal, or geographic location. The traditional home is a small rectangle house (*piichi* or *miichi*), generally divided into two rooms where Guajiros hang hammocks and cotton-woven bags in which they keep valuables. Children are born at home, assisted by the mother-in-law or female relatives.

The health of the Guajiros depends to a great extent on where they live. The people as a whole are in a state of transition. Some have migrated to towns. In larger cities, such as Maracaibo in Venezuela, there is a Guajiro quarter. In other towns they are less settled but might stay for a shorter time to visit friends or relatives or to work for a short time. Even those who do not live permanently in towns increasingly seek the services of town doctors at times.

Guajiros who have not migrated to various towns in Colombia and Venezuela still live in simple circular huts. Traditional house-building is undertaken communally, and the whole family lives under one roof, often in hamlets with others of their clan. This simplicity is well-suited to a seminomadic life because as goat herders they often move about with their flocks, seeking higher ground among the low-lying hill ranges on the Guajira peninsula where they can feed their animals. They sometimes keep pigs and hens.

In remote areas, paths are very basic and sometimes pack animals, such as donkeys, are used, although Guajiros also use trucks or catch rides with traders or visitors. Guajiros are fine weavers and make excellent hammocks that can be hung in the huts to provide simple sleeping quarters. Hammocks are easily carried from place to place.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The base of Guajiro social organization is the matrilineal clan, where kin is traced through the maternal side. Therefore, the role of the woman is very important among the Guajiros. The society is matrilineal, which means that the identity of the clan is passed on from the mother to her children. The mother's relatives are very important, particularly the maternal uncle and the maternal aunt, who are important figures of authority for the children.

If a boy wishes to marry, his family has to offer a generous bride-price, which may include as many as 30 or more goats. In an area where many forms of agriculture are difficult, the Guajiros regard goats as hardy and extremely valuable assets. The Guajiros also value gold jewelry, such as necklaces and bracelets, and these are usually included as offerings in exchange for a bride.

Guajiros usually look for wives from a different clan. If a wife is unfaithful, the husband can return her to her family and her family has to return the gifts received. If a husband has been unfaithful, he has to pay with a gift that equals the original bride-price.

When a woman is expecting a child, her husband is expected to protect her in specific ways. For instance, he has to ride before her to search out dangerous snakes that might harm her or the unborn child.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional clothes are striking and distinctive, particularly for women, who wear long, flowing, flowery dresses down to the ankles. They are loose-fitting and therefore cool in a hot climate, and they also protect the woman from the sun. The men are often lean and tall, with strong limbs. Their traditional loincloths are adorned sometimes with bright tassels and pompoms. They also wear pompoms on their sandals as a sign that may indicate their rank as a prince. When they go to towns, they wear simple cotton shirts and trousers, as do other town-dwellers in hot climates in South America.

## 12 FOOD

Corn and food products made from corn meal are part of the basic diet, but protein is also obtained from fish caught in the coastal waters of the peninsula. Turtles sometimes provide a source of necessary protein in the diet and are considered a delicacy. On festive occasions, meat (usually goat meat) is grilled on simple, open charcoal fires. Some Guajiros also keep pigs and hens, which provide valuable supplements to the basic diet.

## 13 EDUCATION

The first educational efforts to provide formal schooling for the Guajiros were begun by missionaries. Initially the rate of literacy was very low, but in the last few decades the picture has been changing rapidly as more Guajiros have migrated to towns. In the long run, this will have an important effect on the youngsters as schools in towns become more accessible. Part of the difficulty for the Guajiros is that the lifestyle of some is still quite nomadic, and for others the wives and children are left behind in more remote areas while the men go out in search of seasonal or occasional work. This pattern affects the schooling of many young people.

Many young Guajiros do not progress beyond primary school; others may have just a few years in primary school without completing it; and some, whose lifestyle has changed rapidly due to a move into towns, are able to complete high school.

While parents who remain in remote hamlets feel it is more important for young people to survive in that environment by learning to herd, hunt, or fish, to build simple shelters, and to weave, in towns these expectations change as parents try to help their children adapt to new environments.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

By a mixture of independence on the one hand and accommodation on the other, the Guajiros have preserved important elements of their own culture while absorbing belief systems and attitudes from the surrounding Latino culture. Their own music can be plaintive and melancholy. The ritual dance of the *Chichimaya* is a ceremonial dance that has been preserved, and their instruments, such as flutes, rattles, and drums, are still in use. Their myths, which often deal with their origins, are preserved in storytelling and song.

## 15 WORK

For centuries the Guajiros have dived for pearls around the Cabo de la Vela. They also worked in the salt-pans that traditionally belonged to them, many of which were subsequently taken over by the Colombian government, which then hired the Guajiros as paid labor. The Guajiros did not like the long, regimented working hours, since they were used to working in a freer pattern, and just enough for their basic needs. Often they would co-opt relatives to make up the full quota of hours. These attitudes still persist among those whose basic needs remain simple and who have not migrated.

Some Guajiros have found work in coal mines, since Colombia has rich coal deposits in the region, and others work in the oil-rich area of Maracaibo in Venezuela.

## 16 SPORTS

Loren McIntyre, who traveled for 17 years around Latin America and spent some time in the 1960s in the Guajira, records that the Capuchin monks who founded a school for Guajiro orphans tried to teach them basketball, unsuccessfully. Apparently, the monks thought they were "too individualistic" to develop the team mentality necessary for the game. This anecdote reveals that what the dominant Latino culture thought of as sport was not interesting enough for the Guajiros.

Children who are adapting to town life are also beginning to enjoy Western-style sports. In the traditional way of life, spectator sports do not exist as such, but sporting elements are included in dances and rituals during festivals, or in aspects of daily working life.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Town-dwellers have access to local radio and television, and to movie theaters. But, the aspect of popular culture that people living along the Caribbean most enjoy is the carnival, and Guajiros enjoy fiestas and carnivals as much as everyone else. The best-known fiesta in the Guajira is the yearly event in Uribia. The Guajiros come in all their finery, the women wearing their jewelry and colorful flowered dresses, their faces dramatically made up with ceremonial paint. They mingle with other peoples who live along the coast and who come to Uribia to listen to the music, enjoy the dancing, and admire the ceremonial elegance of the Guajiros.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Weaving, jewelry-making, and crafting musical instruments, such as flutes and drums, form part of Guajiro life. Their hammocks are well-known and are now sold in coastal towns. The women make their own dresses, and the specific cut and colorful choice of flowery prints is much admired. Dugout canoes, and the basic fishing crafts, such as the weaving of nets and the fashioning of rods and fishing spears, are all part of the Guajiro skills.

Generally, whoever was particularly good at a skill was accorded specific recognition and, if customs allowed it, the skill became an aspect of the person's work with and for the community, rather than a separate hobby.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In the early 1990s, constitutional reform in Colombia meant that representatives of the indigenous peoples of Colombia entered Congress for the first time. The various groups initially had to organize themselves and to communicate across their own barriers before they could demand and obtain this type of representation. This is an important step forward, but it is still too early to tell what effect this will have on the Guajiros and their problems, which have to do with changing lifestyles and growing differences between those who live in towns and experience specific types of urban poverty, such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, etc., and those who suffer from rural poverty with lack of access to health care and education.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Guajiros are a matrilineal people, which means that name, place in society, and property passes through the mother. Moreover, in the case of marriages with *alijuna* (non-Guajiro),

the child is only Guajiro if the mother is. Guajiro women are the center of the family and their presence in the household symbolizes respect and unity. In addition, community duties follow gender lines. Women are responsible for the household and child rearing, for weaving *süi* (hammocks) and *susu* (bags), and for fetching water, while the men are responsible for the fishing and goat herding, for weaving *womu* (hats) and *waireñas* (sandals), and for collecting firewood.

Matrimony represents a contractual agreement of economic basis as well as sometimes a political one between two families. A dowry of cattle, horses, and jewelry is taken by the man to the parents of his proposed wife to be. Women give birth in their home with assistance of their mother or a close female relative. During this period the entire household tends to stick to a strictly reduced diet to help ensure the child's survival.

The youngest daughter inherits property, as she is the nearest to life. The eldest daughter, being the closest to death, is responsible for funerary rituals. At puberty, only females have a rite of passage. This traditionally entails over a year of isolation from the community, during which time she learns the customs of being a woman, songs and dances, and to weave. Because of modern-day demands of school attendance, this ritual is now often done in two or three months.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# GUARANÍS

**LOCATION:** Paraguay; Brazil

**LANGUAGE:** Guaraní

**POPULATION:** 5 million (estimate)

**RELIGION:** Traditional indigenous religions

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Guaranís were once one of the most influential Amerindian peoples in the southern part of South America. Eventually they established their settlements in the tropical forests of Paraguay and southern Brazil and also extended their settlements into northern Argentina. Before the Spanish conquest, during the 15th century, the Guaranís warred with Amerindians as far as the southern limits of the vast Inca Empire, bringing back gold, which they wore as ornaments. In the 16th century the Spanish conquerors found Guaraní settlements over a very wide area, including the islands of the Plata River, parts of the Paraná River delta, along the Uruguayan coast, and along the Paraguay River. Large concentrations of Guaranís lived in the Province of Guairá in Paraguay, where some of them still live today.

When the Spanish first arrived, many Guaranís were friendly and assisted the Spanish in waging war against other Amerindian groups and in establishing new settlements. The approach between Spanish and Guaraní people was the search for gold and silver conducted by the Europeans. The Spaniards established small ranches around Asunción, many of them known for their harems of Guaraní women. Many Spanish men, attracted by the beauty of the Guaraní women, married them, and in this way the Guaranís entered into a direct relation with newly found Spanish relatives whom they supported in these early encounters. This was the beginning of the long process of intermarriage that produced the Paraguayans of today. In the countryside, the descendants of Spaniards and Guaranís are still called simply Guaranís, and the language is spoken by many, not just in rural areas but also in towns, including the Paraguayan capital, Asunción.

Other Guaraní groups turned against the Spanish and waged war against them, trying to protect their freedom and their own way of life. This process continued into the 19th century. Some Guaraní groups fell under the control of the Spanish in the cruel *encomienda* system, where they worked for landowners, and others and paid a tribute (effectively a type of tax) to them. It was a harsh, exploitative system.

Other Guaranís entered into a complex relationship with the Jesuits, who became very powerful in this part of South America, establishing many missions where Guaranís settled, sometimes with inducements and promises of an easier life, sometimes with threats of punishment. The early Jesuit missions educated the Guaranís, Christianized them, taught them music, and persuaded them to adapt to a different, if dependent, way of life in the missions where they grew crops and kept cattle. Not only were the missions self-sufficient in food, but eventually the mission Guaranís were taught to use modern weapons and became, in effect, a powerful armed branch of the Jesuits, who as a result encountered the opposition of other powerful interest groups, such as wealthy landowners. The Spanish Crown ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits from





South America in 1767. Guaranís at the missions were dispersed, and many returned to their old way of life in the forests. Those who remained had to fight raids on the missions by colonists who stole land from the Guaranís and destroyed both cattle and plantations.

This aspect of the Guaraní story forms the main part of the film *The Mission*, starring Jeremy Irons. He plays the part of a Spanish priest who agonizes over the choice between becoming a man of action and fighting the harsher aspects of the Spanish colonial regime, or remaining a pacifist priest.

In 1848 the Paraguayan dictator Carlos Antonio López decreed that the remaining Guaranís still living in missions should live in ordinary villages like everyone else.

The Guaranís also participated, as Paraguayan citizens, in the war against Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina (1864–70) and in the devastating War of the Chaco against Bolivia (1932–35), in which so many Paraguayan men lost their lives.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Today, the Guaranís who have retained their traditional way of life live in scattered settlements in Paraguay and in southern Brazil. Over the centuries, they migrated over vast areas, sometimes undertaking long journeys that led them to settle in widely diverse regions: forests and coastal areas, near sierras, and in river deltas. It is thought that the Brazilian settlements date from the 19th century. They also made their way into northern Argentina, particularly the province of Misiones.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Little is known about the Guaraní culture before the European explorers arrived to their lands. The reason is that Guaranís did not have written language, which would have allowed them to register their history. This Amerindian people relied on oral tradition and were a politically decentralized nomadic tribe, which made it even more difficult to confirm the information transmitted from one generation to another.

The Guaraní language is part of the Tupí-Guaraní language family, a family that includes many indigenous languages south of the Amazon. The two predominant branches of this family, Tupí and Guaraní, would have probably come from a common proto-language nearly 2000 years ago.

The Guaraní language is still widely spoken in Paraguay, a legacy of the influence this distinctive Amerindian people once wielded. However, the wide usage of the language is complemented by two other Guaraní languages that are both secret and sacred. In effect, the Guaranís have a “secular,” a “secret,” and a “sacred” language. The sacred language is used exclusively by male and female elders of the tribe, who receive divine messages and transmit them to the rest of the tribe. The secret language is a priestly language used only by initiates and shamans and is called *Ñe'e pará*, meaning “the words of our fathers.”

Guaranís often have a Spanish name for everyday use, as well as a secret Guaraní name. It is the task of the tribal leader to find the origin of the child’s soul and bestow a sacred name.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Guaraní folklore is very rich, and many myths hint at their origin in a very poetic way. According to the foundational myth, it was Tupã the god responsible for the world’s creation. To accomplish this titanic task, Tupã would have descended to the earth in the region known as Paraguay with the objective of creating the oceans, forests, stars, and animals. Then, using clay, Tupã would have sculpted statues of man and woman breathing life into the human forms. Guaraní myths stated that their race was the first race of people in the cosmos.

Among the *mbyás*, a group of Guaranís who have preserved much of their original literature, the Creator, called by them *Ñande Ru*, gave birth to his son, *Pa’í Reté Kuaray*, whose body was like the sun, and he is the father of the Guaraní race. *Pa’í* taught his people not only sacred dances and songs, but also agricultural skills and ethics. He is the destroyer of evil beings and created the honey bee as a sweet offering to humankind. He entrusted to four gods the care of his creation. After the Creator *Ñande Ru* created the first earth, it was destroyed by a great flood through the will of the gods. Then, the Creator asked the son of *Jakaira*, the God of Spring, to create another earth. Since then, the four gods send the souls of boys to earth, and the wives of the gods send the souls of girls to earth.

The Guaranís are a very religious, even mystical, people, and during a long history of suffering they have had messianic, heroic figures who have led them in a quest for a better life and a search for Paradise, which they call the Land Without Evil. Sometimes these quests have taken physical form in long treks or river journeys.

A famous Guaraní hero is the chief *Aropoty Yu*. The Paraguayan president sent a military expedition in 1844 against the Guaranís, and in 1876 it was still the case that no one could enter Guaraní territory without the consent of *Aropoty Yu*.

## 5 RELIGION

Not all Guaranís profess identical beliefs. Among the three major groups that remain today, known as the Chiripás, the Mbayás, and the Pai-Kaiová's, there are some interesting differences. Generally, they believe that every person has an earthly soul and a divine one. Dreams come from the divine soul and are the source of inspiration for the shamans, who mediate between the divine and earthly realms and who also have the task of identifying evildoers and protecting the tribe as well as curing illness. Some Guaranís believe in reincarnation; others, who have had more Christian influences, believe that evildoers go to a land of darkness, whereas good people go to the Land Without Evil.

Shamans often isolate themselves for periods of time in jungles or forests and live austerely, with a basic vegetarian diet. Among the Guaranís, it is thought that every man and woman eventually receives a protective chant from a dead relative, which is divinely inspired. It is then taught to the rest of the community. Powerful shamans sometimes receive many chants or songs. They are called to their vocation in this manner.

The Guaraní also believe that all living things, including plants, animals, and water, have protective spirits, and that malevolent spirits also exist.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Guaranís do not make clear-cut divisions between secular and religious occasions. Most feasts and celebrations have a religious character, and even harvest festivals include sacred rituals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

It is thought that the moment of conception of a child is revealed to the parents in dreams. The Guaranís who believe in reincarnation think that a person who has died can reveal that he or she will reincarnate in a particular body. A pregnant woman follows strict dietary rules, eating some special foods and avoiding others.

After a child is born, both the father and the mother are in a critical state known as *aku*. The father participates sympathetically in the birth pains of the mother, expressing his suffering, and after the child is born the father retires to his hammock for a time, avoiding all magic rites that might be considered harmful to the child, because it is his duty to protect the child. He has to maintain a strict diet and avoid hunting. The mother of the child avoids all heavy work for a time. Among some Guaranís, the shaman has to determine from what part of the sky the child's soul originated and give the child a special name.

When a boy becomes an adolescent he undergoes initiation rites in seclusion with a group, under the direction of the shaman. His lower lip is perforated with a piece of wood. He follows a strict diet based on corn for several days. Afterwards he can use adult words and adult ways of addressing people. During the initiation rites, the boy is instructed in appropriate behavior, which includes guidance on working hard, refraining from harming others, being moderate in his habits, not drinking excessively, and never beating his wife.

When a girl reaches adolescence she is secluded for a time under the care of female relatives. Her mother gives her guidance on her future marriage.

Guaranís are allowed informal marriages that are, in effect, a trial period. The young man takes the girl to his par-

ents' house to live there for a time, without formal marriage ceremonies. If he wishes to marry her, he approaches his future father-in-law for permission. The father of the girl is mainly an intermediary, but it is the mother who can object if she feels the match is unsuitable. When a couple forms a family, they are expected to raise their children with kindness and tolerance, and not to hit the children.

Burial rites still include aspects that are closely guarded secrets. Traditionally, the Guaraní were buried in large pottery jars that were then covered with a bowl. The funeral urns were then buried. Today, they are buried in a folded position directly in the ground or they are laid out in a hollowed-out tree trunk with their possessions. Some are buried under the ground inside the hut itself, which is then immediately abandoned. It is thought by some Guaranís that the earthly soul wanders, whereas the divine soul goes either to the land of darkness or to the Land Without Evil. Many Paraguayan Guaranís bury their dead in the bush. Then, the dead person's house is burned. The mention of his or her name becomes taboo.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditional greetings to visitors obliged the female hosts to wail and mourn, reciting the admirable deeds of the visitor's dead relatives. The guest had to cover his or her face with the hands and show appropriate expressions of sorrow, such as crying. Some of these traditional greetings have fallen into disuse.

There are particular celebrations among some groups, particularly the Chiripás, which offer young people a way of getting to know each other and that constitute dating rituals. These celebrations are known as *kotyú*. These are ritual dances that allude to important myths, but at the same time allow young men to dance with young women and to express their love. During the *kotyú* dances, both formal and friendly or even romantic greetings are exchanged. León Cadogan and Alfredo López Austin, who made a special study of Guaraní songs and literature, report that an official who came to investigate the condition of a particular Guaraní group was greeted in this way during the dance:

An inhabitant from faraway lands do I see. Oh bird!  
In truth, I see, oh bird, an inhabitant  
from faraway lands!

This was a greeting to girls during a *kotyú* described by Cadogan and López Austin:

Let us, my sisters, give a brotherly greeting,  
Oh spotless maidens,  
around the Great House  
near the Golden Grasses.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

War and conquest decimated the Guaranís, and the process of intermarriage over centuries also created the modern Paraguayan nation. Even after the end of the Spanish colonial period, smallpox proved a deadly disease that wiped out many communities. The various transition periods from one type of lifestyle to another, with painful phases of adaptation, have never been particularly orderly but rather cruel and often sudden; therefore, many hardships have affected the health of the Guaranís. In general, those living in traditional ways in remote forest or jungle areas have knowledge of medicinal plants that



*A Guaraní Indian child peeks out of the prayer house at the Morro da Saudade Indian village near São Paulo, Brazil. The Guaraní Indians struggle to keep their culture alive as the metropolis encroaches on their land. (AP Images/Dario Lopez-Mills)*

are effective in a wide range of conditions, such as certain infections, stomach conditions, and snakebites.

At the time of the European arrival, Guaraní inhabited villages formed by communal houses going from 10 to 15 families. These people were united by their common interest and language. Because of their kinship structure, Guaraní tended to form tribal groups developing a particular dialect. It is estimated that they numbered 400,000 people when they were first encountered by Europeans.

The more traditional groups continue to live a sustainable lifestyle that satisfies their simple and basic needs, such as food and shelter. Some live mainly apart from a cash economy and without surpluses. In some cases there is an active trade in basic implements for hunting, fishing, or cooking. This has led to the disappearance of clay pots, which are now replaced by aluminum ones that have been exchanged for other items. Fishing hooks, which the Guaraní used to make for themselves out of wood, have been replaced by metal ones.

The traditional extended family unit, which was part of a clan of as many as 50 or 60 families, required the construction of large houses with screened-off sections inside the house and a large communal area. During the Spanish colonial period, disapproval of this method of living on the part of state and religious authorities gradually compelled the Guaraní to abandon this mode of living, and single family huts with thatched roofs began to replace the traditional spacious houses.

The Guaraní in Paraguay live along streams and use bamboo rafts or occasionally canoes for transport. In some jungle areas they can trek for long distances on foot, especially during hunting expeditions. The Guaraní in parts of Brazil use dug-out canoes for transport.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The traditional extended family unit demanded a cooperative style of living under the authority of the head of the clan. Generally, Guaraní lived in small groups of large rectangular houses built around a square plaza or courtyard. Today in many areas these houses have been replaced by small individual family units. Even traditional hammocks have been replaced by sleeping mats or platform beds, which are probably less comfortable and practical. Although the Guaraní have never recognized a central authority, the disappearance of their traditional large clan houses in most areas has also undermined the family structure with its shared tasks and support systems.

Some marriage customs are changing, with young people having more say in the choice of marriage partners. In earlier times, child betrothals were sometimes practiced. Chiefs also had several wives in earlier times, although this is no longer the case.

Some Guaraní keep dogs that are prized as hunting companions, particularly in jungle areas where the jaguar is still hunted. They keep chickens and other farm animals in some areas.

## 11 CLOTHING

Guaranís who live on protected reservations in parts of northern Argentina and Paraguay have adopted the clothing of the rural Mestizo peasant farmers, with plain shirts and trousers, and a cloak or poncho. In remote areas of Brazil, some of the Guaranís still wear traditional ornaments and very little else. Originally they wore no clothing but used strands of women's hair around their legs in bands as protective ornaments; the lower lip was pierced. In some cases, a type of loincloth was worn by men. In remote areas, the women still wear black body paint and the men wear black and red body paint. Ear ornaments of shell or gold are still worn by some Guaranís.

## 12 FOOD

The whole community participates in clearing land to grow crops in communities that still live in the traditional style. When the soil is exhausted, the community moves on. While this traditional method is still in use in some areas, in other places the Guaranís have become more settled. The staple foods are cassava and corn. Sweet potatoes and beans, pumpkins, and tropical fruits, such as bananas and papayas, are also grown. Peanuts provide protein, and sugarcane is a delicacy. In the forests, wild honey is sometimes collected.

*Chipas* are corn-flour cakes, and the Guaranís also wrap corn dough in leaves and cook the parcels under ashes; this is called *auimi atucupé*. Cassava is often roasted or boiled.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Jesuits provided the first schools for the Guaranís. After the demise of the Jesuit missions, many Guaranís became *monteses*, taking refuge in remote areas and reverting to earlier lifestyles. Others went to work as salaried peasants on plantations; some went into the towns to find work and continued the process of assimilation. Those that remain today in remote areas, such as some of the Brazilian Guaranís, do not wish to adapt to the prevailing Western lifestyle, nor to provide their children with the schooling that will eventually mean the end of their independent existence.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Much of the music, dancing, songs, and poems of the Guaranís, as well as some of their prayers, legends, and myths, are the means by which they have managed to preserve important aspects of their culture. Some of their songs and poems have made their way into the popular culture of the Paraguayans. Some groups, such as the Mbayás, have preserved many of their legends and stories. All of these, for the Guaranís who still live a more traditional life, form part of an integral whole and are woven into their daily life and activities. Traditional instruments include drums, rattles, and flutes. Sometimes important ethical and social instructions are given in the form of short plays that are performed in front of children in a village.

## 15 WORK

Guaranís farm, hunt, and fish. Some Guaranís are also beekeepers. In areas where there is still game, they hunt the tapir, the anteater, and the jaguar, as well as the agouti. They do not hunt birds with blowpipes and darts, as do many other tribes who live in the tropical rainforests. Instead, they capture par-

rots by lassoing them with a small noose attached to the end of a pole.

The Guaranís are able fishers and still shoot fish with bows and arrows in some areas. They also use traps in the form of baskets or nets made of fiber. Fish provides an important source of protein in their diet.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports really begin as the games that children play. Guaraní children especially enjoy wrestling and racing. They also play variations of tug-of-war. Some studies report that the ancient Itat'n group of Guaranís played games with rubber balls. Adults still play a game with a shuttlecock made out of corn. The aim is to throw it at each other and try to keep it in the air as long as possible.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Guaranís have always enjoyed celebrations and feasting on those happy occasions, such as the return from a successful hunt, that call for them. Usually, they will celebrate with generous quantities of a fermented drink called *chicha*, often made from corn. A good harvest and a good fishing expedition are also occasions for celebration.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Baskets are woven from pindo palm fibers, and some are made out of twilled fabrics made of *tacuaembó*. Much of the fine pottery that archaeologists have found in various ancient Guaraní settlements is no longer made by the Guaranís. Some of the Paraguayan Guaranís make skin bags from leather. Some still make their own bows and arrows and carve dugout canoes from a single trunk of wood. They also spin cotton using a vertical loom with a circular warp. The cloth is usually white, with brown and black stripes. They also make their own flutes, sometimes from bamboo. They make beads and thread them into necklaces.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems of the Guaranís differ, depending on whether they live on the few remaining reservations or reductions in Paraguay and northern Argentina, or whether they live in the tropical forests of the Brazilian-Paraguayan border areas. In the latter case, they resent the incursions of the Europeans and cling to their traditional way of life. To maintain their simple, sustainable lifestyle, they need to live in small, scattered settlements, often ranging over a wide area to make use of the slash-and-burn agricultural methods that require them to move on when the soil has been exhausted, to find good hunting grounds, and to move on after burials. This lifestyle clashes with the needs of ranchers and poor farmers hungry for land, and with prospectors who want to try their luck in areas that have not previously been settled by non-Indians.

On the reservations, the problems relate to economic limitations and poor prospects for sustaining cultural and economic independence.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

With the loss of territory, Guaraní women have lost their space to plant, rear domestic animals, and produce medicinal plants. The disappearance of the forest has also caused a lack of raw

materials used in making utensils and crafts, which in the case of the Guaraní people is an activity mainly carried out by women. The loss of biodiversity has meant the loss of a considerable number of medicines derived from forest plants, roots, and animals. Guaraní women, who had previously used herbs to stimulate or to reduce fertility, have lost of their right to family planning as the necessary plants are harder to find and grow. Without the ecosystems that ensured the continuation of the way of life for these traditional peoples, the masculine role, within the family and the community, has been undermined. Some Guaraní men have turned to alcoholism and domestic violence.

Even though Guaraní society was polygamist when the Spaniards arrived to the Amazonian jungle, today marriages tend to be monogamous. Divorce is a right of Guaraní women, who has only to communicate to his partner that she is leaving him to end the marriage.

Guaraní women currently live in poor conditions, reflected in their high illiteracy rates, low school enrollment rates, poor access to health care, and significant levels of poverty, which have led them to migrate to urban centers to become maids, daily workers, nannies, and cooks, where they are even more vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination. However, Guaraní women that have chosen to stay in their villages have recently begun to form organizations, devoted to the production of crafts and recovering knowledge and use of medicinal herbs, in order to resist the white man's invasion of their territory and culture.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# GUATEMALANS

**LOCATION:** Guatemala

**POPULATION:** 13,002,206

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish and several Amerindian languages.

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism with ancient Mayan beliefs; Protestantism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

More than 1,000 years before the coming of the Spanish, the Mayas established a number of city-states in what is now Guatemala. The largest of these, Tikal, covered 26 sq km (10 sq mi) and included some 200 major stone structures, including high-rise temples and palaces. By AD 1000, however, the Mayan cities had been abandoned, and it is said the majority of the indigenous population had moved to the highlands. Soon after Spanish troops conquered Mexico in 1521, they moved south and subdued the native inhabitants. For the next three centuries the captaincy-general of Guatemala was the center of government for most of Central America. The captaincy-general won its independence from Spain in 1821. Guatemala seceded from the resulting federation of the United Provinces of Central America in 1839.

José Rafael Carrera, a conservative, ruled Guatemala from 1838 to 1871. Carrera first appointed himself as the military arbiter of the state and then, in 1854, the presidency was conferred to him for life. However, in 1871 Miguel García Granados and Justo Rufino Barrios ended the conservative regime imposed by Carrera and inaugurated a prolonged liberal period in Guatemalan history.

Justo Rufino Barrios, a liberal, ruled from 1873 to 1885. During his term many indigenous communities lost their lands, which were developed into coffee and banana plantations. During Barrios's administration and later after the Guatemalan aristocracy lost power, the Roman Catholic Church was brought under civil control, and heavy investment in national infrastructure yielded roads, railways, and telegraph lines. In addition, Barrios opened the country to foreign capitals and fomented the cultivation of coffee, a commodity that became the principal export of Guatemala.

In 1898, Manuel Estrada Cabrera became provisional president and, after repeated reelections, maintained himself in power until 1920. Estrada Cabrera continued Barrios's developmental policies, and the country enjoyed economy growth. However, the first decades of the 20th century were marked by political and social instability because of the unequal distribution of wealth. In this dire context, the army decided to intervene. In 1931, General Jorge Ubico —known among Guatemalans as “the father”—seized power. Even though the economy improved during Ubico's term, socio-economic inequality remained unsolved. In 1944, social discontent led to a general strike forcing Ubico to resign. The social crisis experienced by the Guatemalan society opened political space for the reorganization of political parties and other social movements. In this context, Juan José Arévalo, who was elected president in 1944, came to represent popular claims for social justice and reform.

Jacobo Arbenz, another social-oriented military officer, was elected in 1951 to succeed Arévalo. In 1954 the Arbenz's gov-

ernment, considered pro-Communist by the United States, was overthrown with help from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Leftist guerrilla groups organized to oppose the right-wing military-dominated and U.S.-backed governments that subsequently ruled the country. In this context, a violent conflict broke in Guatemala in the 1960s and lasted until 1996, when the peace agreements were signed. The death toll of the civil war has been estimated to be between 130,000 and 200,000. Political violence also resulted in 50,000 “disappearances,” 1 million internally displaced persons, 100,000 refugees, and 200,000 orphaned children. The root causes of the conflict can be traced to economic policies that marginalized the impoverished indigenous population, especially by restricting their access to land. These policies were implemented by a series of authoritarian and military regimes that were run by the nation’s economic elites.

One of the strongest voices calling to end the war came from inside the country. A Quiché woman, Rigoberta Menchú, who had lost her father in the civil war, campaigned internationally against national reconciliation and for the respect for indigenous rights. In 1993 Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming an icon for ending violence in Guatemala. When the peace agreements were signed, with the participation of the United Nations, the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (CEH) was established to shed light on human rights violations related to the armed conflict. In 1999, the CEH’s report acknowledged that between the years 1981 and 1983, the army identified Mayans as the internal enemy and concluded that the acts of the Guatemalan state against the Mayan people amounted to genocide.

In 2006 Guatemala entered into the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) with the United States. A year later, Álvaro Colom, representing the National Union for Hope won the elections, campaigning to improve public education and healthcare, especially in rural areas. Despite national and international efforts to improve Guatemalans’ living standards, distribution of income has remained highly unequal with about 56% of the population below the poverty line.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Guatemala is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Tennessee. It is bounded by Mexico on the north and west, by the Pacific Ocean on the south, and by Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador on the east. Eastern Guatemala also has a small Caribbean Sea coastline. The southern half of the country is mountainous, except along the Pacific coast. Some 33 mountains are volcanic, and the area is also subject to earthquakes. The northern third of the country consists of lowland rain forest.

Guatemala had a population of about 13 million people in 2007, making it the most populous country in Central America. The population was divided about evenly between Amerindians and *ladinos*, a term applied to those who have adopted the Spanish language, dress, and lifestyle, regardless of race. *Ladinos* may be of pure Amerindian ancestry but are more often *mestizos*, people of mixed Amerindian and European descent. About 1% of the populations are of purely European ancestry. Blacks, along the Caribbean coast, make up perhaps another 1% of the population.



## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language of Guatemala. Guatemalan Spanish is carefully enunciated and formal, even old-fashioned at times, with an emphasis on politeness and respect. Some words are of Amerindian origin. Many Amerindians speak Spanish poorly or not at all. Indigenous men are more likely to know Spanish than are women, and younger people more often speak Spanish than do older ones. There are 21 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala, the principal ones being Quiché, Cakchiquel, Kekchí, and Mam. Carib is spoken along the Caribbean coast by the Garifunas, or Black Caribs, the descendants of fugitive slaves and Carib Amerindians. Because of this idiomatic diversity, many official documents, such as those related to the peace agreement of 1996 that ended the civil war, were written in Spanish as well as in more than 20 types of Mayan dialects.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Guatemala’s folklore is based on Amerindian cultural beliefs as well as old traditions brought by the Spanish conquerors. According to Quiché legend, for example, the first four humans were made of corn paste into which the Heart of Heaven breathed life. To assure good growing weather before spring planting, the seed is blessed at a special planting. The night before the planting, the men burn incense in the fields and sprinkle the ground with a brew made from fermented sugarcane, while the women pray at home before lighted candles. In the

morning, women go to the fields with food for the sowers and place their candles at points representing the four winds.

The shaman (Mayan priest) is a man or woman credited with being able to mediate with the unknown forces that govern human destiny, to predict the future, and to cast spells. He or she is also a healer (*curandero*) who practices herbal medicine.

The Amerindians of Central America believe that every person has an animal counterpart called the *nagual* who shares his or her destiny. Tecún Umán, a heroic Quiché warrior who, according to legend, was slain by Pedro de Alvarado, the Spanish leader, had for his nagual the colorful quetzal, Guatemala's increasingly rare national bird.

Particular places serve as shrines for particular gods. The Amerindians of Alta Verapaz, for example, are careful when approaching a hot spring to leave kindling beside it for the god who boils the water. In return, it is hoped, the god will not cause fever by heating the Amerindian's blood.

## 5 RELIGION

Some 67% to 80% of all Guatemalans are Roman Catholic. Within this faith, however, the Amerindians have preserved ancient Mayan beliefs. Their gods, who govern aspects of life like weather and crops, are worshipped under the guise of saints; Jesus and Mary, for example, are identified with the Sun God and Moon Goddess, and the cross is associated with the Four Winds of Heaven. *Cofradías* (brotherhoods), rather than Catholic priests, are in charge of the religious life of an Amerindian community. Fiestas are the major form of public worship and sometimes conform to the 260-day Mayan religious calendar. Worship is orthodox among ladinos, but routine church attendance is often not possible because of a shortage of priests. Most priests in Guatemala are foreigners.

Perhaps 25% to 33% of the population is Protestant. Protestant missionaries, generally with ties to organizations in the United States, have been very active in Guatemala since the 1880s. Both mainline denominations and evangelical or fundamentalist groups are represented. Protestants are critical of folk Christianity and especially deplore the drunkenness that accompanies fiestas.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Pilgrims from all over Central America come to Esquipulas on January 15 to worship at the shrine of the Black Christ, a sculpted balsam-wood image, 1.5 m (5 ft) high, whose dark color resembled the complexion of the Amerindians before smoke generated by candles and incense turned it black. A temple, completed in 1758, houses the effigy, which is girdled in white satin, embroidered with gold, and laden with jewels. Also important is the pilgrimage on February 2 to the village church in Chiantla, famous for its silver image of the Virgin Mary.

For size and scope, Antigua's Holy Week (late March or early April) pageantry is unrivaled in Latin America. Events reach a climax with a Passion procession on the morning of Good Friday. A bright carpet of flowers and dyed sawdust lines the route. Chichicastenango celebrates December 21, the day of St. Thomas, with a weeklong fiesta marked by ritual dances of the Quiché and the *Palo Volador*, in which costumed men dangle by ropes from an 18-m-high (60-ft-high) maypole.

The Garifuna of the Caribbean celebrate their arrival in Guatemala with Yuriman, a simulation of the first farm plant-

ings, in Livingston each May 13–15. Singing, dancing, and hand clapping accompany this festival. Like the other nations of Central America (except Panama), Guatemala celebrates September 15 as Independence Day to commemorate the region's declaration of independence from Spain in 1821.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In Guatemala's villages, both a midwife and a *brujo* attend a child's birth, the latter to pray for long life and good health and protection against the evil eye, which can be cast on children by a stranger or a blue-eyed person. A breech delivery or one with an umbilical cord around the neck is considered a sign of good fortune. Baptism is the only Church sacrament in which Amerindians normally partake. An attendant godmother and godfather are essential to the ceremony. Amerindian babies are carried on their mother's back and breast-fed whenever hungry. Children wear clothing identical to their parents and are put to work at an early age.

In conservative ladino society, group boy-girl activities begin at about age 14, but real dating does not begin until later. A girl's 15th birthday indicates that she has come of age and calls for a special celebration. A boy's coming of age is recognized when he turns 18. A young man still asks a girl's father for her hand in marriage. Engagements of several years are common.

Although actual arranged marriages, with no say by the prospective partners, are rare among Amerindians, a youth's father may seek out a *tertulero*, or matchmaker, to find him a suitable bride—a girl under 16. Once an arrangement is reached, the young man provides a dowry. There is a betrothal feast, and there may be a marriage ceremony performed by a village priest if available, followed by a feast.

At Amerindian funerals the Mayan priest spins the coffin at the grave to fool the devil and point the deceased's spirit toward heaven. Yellow is the color of mourning, so yellow blossoms are hung in the form of a cross on the grave, with accompanying candles burning. Food is placed at the head of the grave for the spirit of the departed. Amerindians toll church bells for the dead to acquire merit with the gods.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In Hispanic countries, when people stop to greet each other there will probably be some physical contact as well as words exchanged. Both acquaintances and friends generally shake hands when meeting and parting. Men may pat each other on the back, and women often embrace and kiss each other on one or both cheeks. Men and women will generally do so only if they are relatives. When talking or simply standing or sitting in a public place, people tend to come closer to one another than in the United States. When talking, people may gesture more than in the United States and even touch the other person on the arm or shoulder for emphasis. Family and friends will drop in on each other, especially on Sundays and holidays. These are brief, informal stops.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In 1990 it was estimated that the poorer half of the population was receiving only 60% of its daily minimum caloric requirements. Infant mortality is high with 27 children out of 1,000 births dying during the first month of life. Gastrointestinal and respiratory ailments take a heavy toll because of poor

sanitation as well as poor nutrition. In rural areas, few people have access to drinkable water.

Perhaps the main feature that characterizes Guatemalan society is the economic and social gap among its inhabitants. Guatemalan urban elites have access to a good quality of life, having access to e-mails, cell phones, beepers, and computers, while in the rural areas indigenous inhabitants still conserve pre-Colombian patterns of daily life.

Because of rural overpopulation, the urban areas have swelled with migrants, many of them in illegal squatter settlements. Peasants mostly live in two-room, dirt-floor adobe structures or ones that use poles for walls. The roofs are made of palm leaves, straw, or tiles. Their small farm plots may be several hours' walk away.

Guatemala's road network is not extensive and, especially in mountainous areas, the roads are seldom paved. Most people rely on secondhand buses—formerly U.S. school buses—for more than purely local transportation. Automobiles range from old, patched-up Japanese models to the luxury cars of the elite.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Guatemala's families are close-knit and generally the only dependable source of help in a society where church and state have a limited impact on daily life. Among ladinos, the nuclear family of father, mother, and children is most common, but a moderately prosperous household often includes other relatives and servants or orphaned children. The extended family forms the basis of the Amerindian community. Amerindians rarely take mates outside their own linguistic group and village. Recently married couples typically live with the husband's parents.

Despite Guatemala's rapid population growth and the resulting division of land into ever-smaller plots, children are greatly desired, especially among Amerindians. During the late 1980s, the average number of births per woman completing her childbearing years was almost six. Ideally, a ladino woman does not work outside the home, but economic necessity has forced many to do so. Amerindian women tend gardens and household animals. Many earn cash by handicrafts or, in the city, domestic work.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The clothing of many ladinos is similar to that of modern Westerners, but almost every Amerindian community has its own style of dress. Indeed, an individual's village can be identified by the design of the cloth. It is estimated that there are at least 325 major patterns in the traditional dress that is still everyday garb—particularly among women—in Amerindian villages. These are hand-woven articles made on pre-Spanish looms or foot-powered treadle looms introduced by the Spanish.

However, traditional clothing is worn more frequently by women than men, and more often by poorer Guatemalans in general. Western-style dress is more frequent among people with a higher standing in their communities. Lately, second-hand clothing from the United States, sold at bargain prices, has become popular. It is not uncommon to see traditional garments worn together with a college tee shirt.

The typical dress of Amerindian women usually includes a *huipil*, which is a smock-style blouse; a skirt with a belt; a *tzute* (scarf or headdress); and a *rebozo* (shawl). Men may wear



*Despite Guatemala's rapid population growth and the resulting division of land into ever-smaller plots, children are greatly desired. During the late 1980s, the average number of births per woman completing her childbearing years was almost six. (Cory Langley)*

brightly colored trousers and a shirt with a belt or sash, a tunic or vest, a jacket, a straw hat, a shoulder bag called a *morral*, and sandals (Amerindian women normally go barefoot). Most Amerindian men, however, now wear manufactured clothing largely indistinguishable from their ladino counterparts.

## **12 FOOD**

Guatemalan food is generally simple and not highly spiced. Corn tortillas, rice, beans, tamales, and plantains are the staples. Tortillas and black beans are served at every meal. A classic method of preparing meats is to cook them in water before adding sauce or seasonings. An essential seasoning of Mayan foods is squash seed toasted and ground to a powder. Coffee is lighter and more watery than the brew Americans and Europeans are used to drinking.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education is free and compulsory between the ages of 7 and 13, but enforcement is lax in rural areas, and one out of every five children of those ages was not enrolled in school in 1991. Many do not complete the primary-school cycle because they must work to help their families. The adult literacy rate was only 55% in 1990. Amerindians are at a particular disadvantage since Spanish is not their mother tongue.



Six years of secondary school can lead either to a university education or specialized job training. There are six universities. Chief of these is the State University of San Carlos, in Guatemala City. The constitution guarantees it autonomy and not less than 5% of the national budget. The university, which charges no tuition, has more than 50,000 students, many of whom must work part-time while pursuing their studies. Most of the private universities are in Guatemala City, including the Francisco Marroquín University. The private Universidad Rural is based in Chimaltenango.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Native music developed from a blend of Spanish and Amerindian influences. But, Guatemala is better known for its traditional dances, which are often a kind of musical drama that recalls a historical event with the use of costumes and masks. These are performed at fiestas in honor of the local saint. The Deer Dance symbolizes the struggle between humans and animals. The Dance of the Conquest recalls the victory of the Spanish over the Amerindians.

Tikal and other monumental sites are testimony to the architectural accomplishments of the Maya. The Spanish influence can be found in colonial-era churches, sculptures, and paintings. Guatemala's best-known 20th-century painter is Carlos Mérida.

The Maya had the most advanced system of writing in the Americas among indigenous peoples. A Spanish priest, Francisco Ximénez, translated the rarest and most sacred book of the Quiché, the *Popol Vuh*, in 1680. This work is a treasure-trove of Mayan beliefs and practices. Because of the heavy hand of the Inquisition, the first history of Guatemala, written by Antonio de Remesal and published in 1619, was ordered "thrown to the stables." Even *Don Quixote* had to be smuggled into the colony. Rafael Landival, a Jesuit, wrote the poem *Rusticatio Mexicana* while in exile in Italy. This was the outstanding Guatemalan work of the colonial era. Famous authors of the 19th century include Jose Batres y Montúfar and José Milla y Vidaurre. Enrique Gómez Carillo (1873–1927) was a novelist and poet. The novelist and poet Miguel Ángel Asturias received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1967.

#### 15 WORK

Ladinos tend to become shopkeepers, government employees, or laborers in private industries. The *fincas*, or large plantations, employ both ladinos and Amerindians for seasonal labor during the harvest. The sizable part of the population outside the modern economy continues to till small plots for subsistence, supplemented by income from handicrafts and seasonal plantation work. Many migrants to the cities, unable to find employment, take to street vending. It was estimated in 1992 that 46% of the labor force was unemployed or underemployed. The minimum wage was under \$3 a day in 1994.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is a national passion, played even in the most traditional and remote Amerindian villages. Guatemala City has the largest soccer stadium in Central America.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Fiestas continue to provide popular entertainment and to reflect much of the creative life of the people. They all include music and dance, eating and drinking, and fireworks. Cinemas, found only in the major cities, mostly play U.S. films dubbed or subtitled in Spanish. Television fare includes dubbed U.S. programs and variety shows and *telenovelas* (soap operas) imported from Mexico and Venezuela.

Guatemala is the heartland of marimba music. Almost every town has a marimba orchestra, which includes the accompaniment of a brass band, and no wedding is complete without marimba music. The repertoire includes many Mexican numbers. Amerindians employ other instruments for their rites, including the pre-Conquest drum and flute.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Guatemala's handspun and woven textiles are among the finest in the world. Made by highland Amerindians, they display brilliant colors and intricate designs, both in the form of raw cloth and finished garments. Cotton, wool, and silk are the traditional fibers for clothing, although acrylics have been introduced. Blankets and rugs are also made from these fibers, while hats, mats, hammocks, and baskets are made with different types of cane and reed as well as fibers from the maguey cactus. Ceramics are produced both by pre-Conquest methods, molding clay by hand and using natural clays and dyes, and with the potter's wheel and glazes and enamels introduced from Spain. Jade jewelry dates from ancient times. Wood-crafted products include traditional masks, carved squash gourds, and colonial-style doors and furniture.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

About 2% of the population owns some 70% of the cultivable land. About 65% of the original forest cover has been destroyed, and about 30% of the land is eroded or seriously degraded. Only 33% of the population has regular access to health services. Domestic violence occurs but receives little attention. The labor code makes legal strikes difficult, and women, usually found in low-wage jobs, are paid significantly less than are men. These statistics explain why more than half of Guatemalans live under the poverty line.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In 1954, only educated women were given the right to vote, while male suffrage was universal. The vast majority of women from rural areas—especially indigenous women, who were illiterate—were denied the right to vote for the next 20 years.

Throughout two decades of political violence, women accounted for 23% of the cases of execution and 12% of the "disappearances" that were a consequence of the state's counterinsurgency policy between 1978 and 1996. In 1984, women searching for their "disappeared" family members formed the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), while other women, such as Rigoberta Menchú (Nobel Peace Prize 1992) and Helen Mack (Right Livelihood Award 1994) stood out for their individual fights for justice.

In 2007, 34.6% of illiterates in the country were women, of whom approximately 60% were indigenous in rural areas. In some communities, female illiteracy is as high as 90%. Higher dropout rates are found in rural areas among indigenous girls

who are required to do heavy domestic work when they are very young. In terms of access to social services, employment, and salaries, women continue to labor under severe disadvantages as compared to men.

In addition to exclusion in education and labor, Guatemalan women suffer high levels of violence that go largely unpunished. Guatemala's legal system is rife with provisions that minimize the seriousness of violence against women. In 2003 alone there were 4,500 cases of rape and 9,000 cases of domestic violence and, in 2005, 600 women were murdered. However, the estimated impunity in such cases reaches 97%.

In terms of representation and civil participation, and despite the creation of a Women's Parliament in 2004, only 14 of the 158 members of the national congress were women as of 2008.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# GUYANANS/GUYANESE

**LOCATION:** Guyana

**POPULATION:** 770,794

**LANGUAGE:** English (official); Creole patois; Hindi; Urdu

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; Christianity; Islam; native animism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Historical evidence suggests that Amerindian peoples occupied the territory that is now Guyana around the 1st millennium BC. Among the earliest settlers were groups of Arawak, Carib, and possibly Warao (Warrau). These aborigines survived practicing agriculture and hunting. Even though Spain claimed rights over this region, the area was avoided because of the difficult access to the zone. The place located between the Orinoco and Amazon deltas became known as the Wild Coast.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the great European colonial powers fought to claim the land for their sugarcane plantations, and the country changed hands with bewildering frequency, mostly as a result of wars between the British and the French. Britain shipped in slaves from West Africa to work in the sugarcane fields. Slavery was abolished in 1804.

Guyana became independent from Britain in 1966 and became a republic in 1970, being the only nation-state of the Commonwealth of Nations on the mainland of South America. Politically, Guyana has moved on a steady course toward socialism from the time of independence. Both the government and the opposition party are Marxist-Leninist, although, since the death of the first prime minister, Forbes Burnham, in 1985, ties with the West have been strengthened. Politics are essentially divided along racial lines and for 28 years, beginning in 1964, Guyana was ruled by one party, the People's National Congress (PNC), representing predominantly Afro-Guyanese interests. Initially identified with the urban black populace, the PNC essentially established a one-party state.

In 1992, however, a new election saw the return of Dr. Cheddi Jagan of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), which represents the predominantly Hindu population. Jagan was chief minister of British Guyana from 1961 to 1965, before independence. Jagan became president of Guyana in 1992 and remained in the post until his death in 1997. His presidential tenure was characterized by the revival of the union movement and a re-commitment to education and infrastructure improvement.

After Jagan's death in 1997, his wife, Janet Jagan, was elected president in elections held later that year, becoming the second female president in the history of South America—after Isabel Perón—and the first to be democratically elected. In 1999 Jagan's widow stepped down due to health problems, and Bharrat Jagdeo was appointed president of Guyana. In 2001, this politician of Indian descent won the presidential election. In 2006 he was re-elected for a new term.

The Guyanese economy exhibited moderate economic growth during the last decade (5.4% in 2007), based mostly on the expansion in the agricultural and mining sectors. However, the shortage of skilled labor and a deficient infrastructure remained the most severe economic problems. Guyana's

main exports are sugar, rice, rum, timber, diamonds, bauxite, shrimp, and molasses.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana is an independent republic and a member of the British Commonwealth located in the northeast corner of South America.

It comprises an area of 214,970 sq km (83,000 sq mi), and its coastline is about 430 km (270 mi) long. Inland there are many uninhabited areas, and most of the country's population (about 800,000 people) lives on the narrow coastal strip along the Atlantic coast, much of which has been reclaimed from the sea by a series of canals and some 140 miles of dikes. The capital and chief port is Georgetown. Inland is a huge plateau, which forms most of the country's center, crisscrossed with the numerous rapids of Guyana's rivers.

Guyana's population originally came from various parts of the British Empire, although a small number of aboriginal Indians still live semi-nomadic lives, scattered throughout the inland forest regions. The Afro-Guyanese, descendants of the African slaves shipped in to work on the sugarcane plantations, form one-third of the population. The Asian Indians, who came mostly as indentured labor to replace the Africans when slavery was abolished, form the largest racial group, making up about half of the population, while Portuguese, Chinese, and Amerindians make up the remaining one-sixth of the population.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official and principal language of Guyana is English. Guyana is the only South American country to have English as its official language. But, a Creole patois is spoken in the country. Hindi and Urdu are also heard among older Asian Indians.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Much of Guyanan folklore springs from religious and racial backgrounds of its diverse population. Hindus identify with their cultural heroes, such as Rama, Krishna, and Mahavira. In fact, many of them give their children names based on characters from the great epic stories of India.

Many Creole folk tales are based on the Afro-centered traditions that emphasize the organic unity between animals—including humans—and nature and also the unity between the living and the dead.

## 5 RELIGION

The major religions of Guyana are Hinduism and Christianity (chiefly Anglican and Roman Catholic). There is also a sizable minority of Muslims. About 35% of the population is Hindu, 50% is Christian, and 10% is Muslim. Many Asian Indians accept baptism and membership in Christian churches without abandoning their participation in Hindu rituals. Animistic religion is still practiced by the Amerindian peoples.

Some adherents of Christian groups also practice traditional African beliefs, such as *winti*, (meaning "wind"). This is a traditional polytheistic and largely secret religion of West African origin. It recognizes a multitude of gods and ghosts, each having their own myths, rites, offerings, taboos, and magical forces. The phenomenon of *obia* (a healer god) can be used to bring illness and other calamities onto the practitioner's enemies.



Hundreds of people turn up for the seven-day festival of Ramayana Yajma when the Brahmins read and explain the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* is an ancient epic poem that recounts the dramatic and difficult life of Rama, the royal heir, who is exiled from the court of Ayodha and exiled to the forest for 14 years because some of his royal relatives conspire against him. The sorrows of separation, the necessary courage required to confront tragic events in life, and the way a human being can create meaning and purpose in life are all important themes in the *Ramayana*. Christians as well as Hindus from all over the country participate in Ramayana Yajma. Throughout the week, participants are fed a variety of Indian dishes, with vegetables forming the main part of the meals.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Much recreational activity is based upon the festivities that accompany Hindu, Muslim, and Christian holidays, such as Christmas, the end of Ramadan, and (in early March) Phagwah, the Hindu New Year, which is a joyous celebration that celebrates the triumph of good over evil and is noted for the energetic throwing of perfume and water. Easter Monday is a traditional day for flying kites. Republic Day, on February 23, is the day the president reports to the nation and is marked by much street marching.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism is common, even among Asian Indians who attend Christian churches while maintaining their participation in Hindu rituals. In their homes, Hindus celebrate domestic re-

ligious ceremonies, such as *Pujas*, for special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries.

Many Afro-Guyanese couples do not regularize their unions with a license or church ceremony.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Anyone visiting a friend or acquaintance at their home address is expected to call upon everyone else that they know within that neighborhood. Not to do so is considered extremely rude. Open hospitality is a great feature of Guyanese life and no visit can be completed without the offer of a meal or refreshment.

The familiar Hindu caste system, which is a highly localized phenomenon in the villages of India, no longer exists in Guyana. When the low castes and the twice-born Brahmins were thrown together on board ship to travel from India to the Caribbean during the 19th century, the caste system soon became irrelevant. Today, there is just one caste for all in Guyana, although the Brahmins do retain their special religious role in interpreting the sacred knowledge of the holy rituals and Sanskrit texts.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Out of a population of about 800,000 people, some 170,000 live in Georgetown, the capital. Many houses in the center of Georgetown are made of wood. Most people live in small villages and towns along the coast. The houses are built of wood with tin roofs and are constructed on stilts 2.5 m to 3 m (8–10 ft) off the ground to avoid flooding from the sea.

Guyana's gross national product, estimated to be only about \$600 per capita in the mid-1990s, makes it one of the world's poorest countries. However, 10 years later governmental efforts to improve the quality of life of Guyanese have made impact on people's life. In 2007 the per capita GDP had increased by about three times to \$3,800. However, in spite of this huge leap, food shortages have remained, creating widespread cases of malnutrition and diseases formerly under control, such as beriberi and malaria.

The economy has been shattered by the depressed world demand for bauxite and sugar, which has led to a near breakdown in essential public services, such as electricity. The country is, however, nearly self-sufficient in food.

There is a limited road and highway system, much of which is only partly paved and partly made of baked clay. In fact, there are only a few hundred kilometers or miles of paved roads, mostly in the coastal region.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Ethnic identity continues to be important within daily life. The mother- and grandmother-dominated family that is common among the Afro-Guyanese differs from the father-oriented Asian Indian family. Bearing children out of wedlock among Africans is not stigmatized, although in recent years many have begun adopting middle-class values by "doing the right thing" and getting married. The African community is made up of a variety of households ranging from a nuclear monogamous family consisting of a couple and their children to a kind of extended family that includes grandparents, their children, their grandchildren, and other relations.

The Asian Indian traditionally has a different kind of extended family, but the European nuclear pattern is becoming the norm. Upon marriage, the son is expected to take his bride

and live for some time with his parents. This is because it is the duty of the parents to guide the children through the early days of marriage. Then, by the sixth or seventh year, the son will have set up his own household with his wife and children.

## 11 CLOTHING

A skirt and blouse is the popular form of clothing for women, but Hindu women are increasingly wearing the sari. Hindu men wear a type of shirt called a *kurta* and one-piece trousers called *dhoti* (see **Hindus of Guyana**).

## 12 FOOD

A tasty Amerindian dish is the pepper pot, a spicy stew that is a characteristic Guyanese dish. The main ingredient is cassava. Farina, coarse gravel-like flour derived from cassava boiled with local sun-dried beef, is known as *tasso* and is an edible and tasty fare for the Rupununi ranchers, who live in the savannas of the interior.

*Dal*, of Asian Indian origin, is also a very widespread and popular dish, and not just among the Hindus. It is a dish of lentils, often flavored with a mixture of spices (cinnamon, pepper, and garlic) cooked in oil.

## 13 EDUCATION

Children receive free, compulsory education. The government assumed full control of education in 1976 and took over Church-run and private primary schools. Teachers are expected to teach loyalty to both the PNC and socialist objectives. The principal university is the University of Georgetown at Turkeyen, in the eastern part of the capital.

The literacy rate is quite high and is estimated at 98% among men and 95% among women. Despite this, due to economic decline, physical facilities have deteriorated in schools; books and supplies are limited; and many educated Guyanese live abroad, particularly in London and New York.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Post-independent Guyana still bears the imprint of its colonial heritage and, despite government exhortation to the contrary, the people continue to be taught to respect and covet European values. Amerindian culture, which remains uninfluenced by national politics, is recognized as an important element in the cultural life of the country. Amerindian artifacts are featured in museum displays, and their culture inspires local music and painting. Major Amerindian groups include the Caribs, the Arawaks, and the Warraus of the northwest coast. The Makusis are the best-known group of savanna-dwellers, whereas other groups are forest-dwellers.

One of the most mysterious aspects of Guyana's cultural heritage are the hieroglyphics known as the *timchri* scattered on rocks in Guyana's interior, which have not been deciphered and that point to more advanced civilizations. Noteworthy writers are Wilson Harris, A. J. Seymour, and Walter Rodney. The best-known work of literature is E. R. Braithwaite's novel, *To Sir With Love*, about a black teacher in an all-White London secondary school, which became a famous film.

## 15 WORK

The country has a three-sector economy: private, public, and cooperative. The government controls over 80% of the econ-

omy. The state-controlled sugar enterprise, Guysuco, employs more Guyanese than any other industry. Domestic economy reflects ethnic divisions. Asian Indians and their families control most small businesses, such as small farms and shops, while Africans dominate the government sector. But, there are an increasing number of Hindus entering the legal and medical professions.

Wages are very low, and many people depend on overseas remittances from relatives abroad to survive. Many people also work at more than one job. The unemployment rate is about 13.5%.

## 16 SPORTS

The Guyanese share a passion for cricket that is prevalent throughout the English-speaking Caribbean. The game is one of the few unifying factors in the country. It has been said, however, that cricket in Guyana is totally unlike the game as it is played in England. In Guyana it is closer to the passionate atmosphere of a bullfight in Spain, galvanizing the people's national self-esteem.

The sport plays a special role in the historical, social, and cultural development of the country. By playing host in Georgetown to International Test Cricket Matches against other countries within the British Commonwealth, the people of Guyana have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities on the international scene and to make a symbolic gesture against their oppressive colonial legacy. There are a number of heroes who have played for the West Indies team including Clive Lloyd, who captained the side for a number of years, Rohan Kanhai, and Neville Kalicharan.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular culture is as mixed as the various ethnic groups who live in Guyana. Georgetown offers a wide mix of museums and art galleries, and for the young people there are discos. A favorite kind of music among both Hindu and Afro-Guyanese is something called "chutney," a hot, spicy mixture of traditional Hindu music and rock music.

The cinema still plays a large part in the lives of older people, and the imported films from India reconnect the Hindus with their cultural roots. In the villages outside Georgetown, street cricket is played with a sponge ball, and the pitch is a coconut mat laid out in a field. Card games are also a passion with older people during the quiet times between sowing and harvesting.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Many of the folk arts and crafts are entwined with the various Guyanese religions, such as kite-flying and bird-song competitions on Easter Sunday and Monday.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Race has been a divisive issue. The Asian Indians have accused the Africans of racism and repression during the 28 years of rule by the People's National Congress party, during which they claimed that Hindu villages were attacked and plundered by security forces. The Africans dominate the Guyana Defense Force and the police. Street crime and violence are particularly notorious in Georgetown. Community police have now been introduced into the city to try to retake control of the streets.

The new administration has announced its intention of introducing structural changes with a "human face," and aims to alleviate poverty through a basic-needs strategy. It also intends to increase foreign and local investment, production, and exports. Cheddi Jagan has promised a "lean and clean" government and is determined to end racial discrimination.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Guyana, gender issues are subsumed within the broader context of social, economic, and political dysfunctions and problems. The relations between men and women, in terms of roles, access to resources, and power, are circumscribed by the conditions of political instability, governance issues, crime and violence, and divisiveness.

As in most countries, women tend to be affected by poverty more than men: 50% of Guyanese women are living in poverty and nearly 30% of the households headed by women are characterized by absolute poverty. The most recent employment statistics (1999) showed women's labor force participation at 39%, while unemployment rates for females (14%) were more than doubled that of men (6%). In spite of higher achievement than men in formal education, women continue to face low wages in low status jobs, higher levels than men of unemployment and poverty, and low representation in decision-making positions. Domestic violence and gender-based violence remain unaddressed problems because the crimes are under-reported and victims often do not seek assistance. Research on sub-populations suggests that as many as two-thirds of all women will face abuse at some time.

Regarding political participation, women have managed to enter decision-making positions in the last decade. The number of women in parliament increased from 12 (18.5%) in 2000 to 20 (31%) after the 2001 elections. This increase resulted from pressure from women's organizations to have women in a third of the positions on the electoral plank of each party. This quota will increase to 50% for future elections. In addition, as of 2008, there were four female ministers in the governmental cabinet, the deputy speaker of the house was a female, one of the three justices of appeal was a woman, female magistrates accounted for 31% of the existing 16 magistrates, and the governor of the Central Bank was a woman.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# HAITIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Haitian history and culture, see **Vol. 2: Haitians**.

## OVERVIEW

There have been two major stages of Haitian immigration to America, the first in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and the second in the late 20th century. Both stages were prompted by economic and political unrest in Haiti. The slave rebellion in 1791 in what was then the French colony of St. Domingue drove the first wave of refugees to the American coast, especially to the New Orleans area of Louisiana. After several more years of political upheaval, bloodshed, and general instability, the black general Dessalines declared himself the leader of the independent republic of Haiti and began slaughtering all remaining whites. Those whites who were able to escape, along with many free blacks and mulattoes, as well as some black slaves, fled to America.

The second stage of Haitian immigration to America occurred more recently, beginning in the late 1950s. This time Haitians were fleeing the brutal dictatorship of François “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, who succeeded him. At first, those who left Haiti were mostly well-educated professionals who could afford airfare and who had particular skills that were considered “desirable” enough for the United States to allow them to immigrate. As a result, Haiti suffered a severe “brain drain,” adding to its internal troubles. Conditions worsened in Haiti, and by the 1970s life had become intolerable for many Haitians of all social and economic classes.

Lacking the necessary financial resources, most Haitian refugees from the 1970s until today have been forced to take desperate measures to leave Haiti and enter the United States. Thousands have piled onto small boats in recent decades, risking their lives and sacrificing all of their possessions for a chance at a better life in the United States. The first Haitian “boat people” arrived in Florida in 1972. Despite efforts by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the U.S. Coast Guard, boat people continue to arrive in the 21st century.

Some owners and captains of small boats in Haiti have made tremendous profits smuggling refugees across the hundreds of miles of water between Haiti and Florida, or across the much shorter distance to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. (Cuba does not welcome Haitian immigrants, so it is only a stopping place on the journey to freedom.) Haitian individuals and families sell all they have to raise the money for passage on a boat. The boats are small and overcrowded, conditions are miserable, and the risks are great. Boats capsize, or captains force the passengers overboard to avoid arrest as smugglers. Perhaps hundreds of Haitians have drowned within sight of the U.S. shore. In 1981, a boat carrying more than 60 Haitian passengers, two of them women with nearly full-term pregnancies, capsized only 50 yards off the coast of Florida. Some managed to swim to shore, but 33 drowned, including the two pregnant women (leading the medical authority to list the number of dead at 35). This was only one tragedy among many that continue to claim the lives of Haitian refugees.

In 1981, U.S. president Ronald Reagan ordered a number of measures to stop the flow of Haitian refugees into America, but Haitians have continued to risk their lives to gain entrance into the country. Unfortunately, the United States has failed to live up to that designation in the case of Haitian immigrants. The Immigration and Nationality (McCarran–Walter) Act of 1952 severely curtailed legal immigration from West Indian nations. Although U.S. immigration reform in 1965 removed some of the restrictions, it is still difficult for the majority of Haitians to achieve legal immigration status in the United States. Nor are they officially considered “refugees.”

The nonrefugee status of Haitians is extremely controversial, provoking accusations of racism on the part of the INS. Cubans, who are mostly white and fleeing a left-wing dictatorship, are welcomed as refugees and even assisted by the U.S. government in their efforts to immigrate to the United States. Haitians, who are black and fleeing a right-wing dictatorship or, currently, desperate economic and unstable political conditions, are not. In any case, lacking legal or refugee status, Haitians must enter the United States “illegally,” subjecting them to various forms of harassment and shutting them out of employment, housing, and other opportunities.

Many incoming Haitians, particularly “boat people,” are arrested upon entering the United States and placed in city and county jails, federal prisons, or detention camps, such as the Krome Center in south Florida. They may be held there for a period of months or even years. Some sign papers that say they agree to return voluntarily to Haiti, after which they are promptly flown back to that country from which they sacrificed everything to escape. Others are forcibly deported. A number manage to evade the INS and live as fugitives in their new home. The lucky ones are granted legal immigrant status, often through sponsorship by church agencies or other social justice organizations.

The most recent wave of Haitian immigration to the United States was prompted by the violent takeover in 1991 of the first democratically elected government in Haiti. Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the first democratically elected president of Haiti in 1990, only to be overthrown eight months later by former Duvalier supporters. Coup leaders then set up a military dictatorship that ruled by force. Masses of Haitians swarmed to the sea to escape the regime. The United States placed embargoes on Haiti to pressure the military to surrender its control, creating even more hardship for the Haitian people. Starvation and malnutrition became rampant in Haiti. Finally, when the United States threatened a military invasion in 1994, the Haitian military dictatorship stepped down and Aristide was returned peacefully to the presidency. When his term ended in 1996, he was succeeded by René Préval. Préval was unable to organize elections and instead filled government positions with local officials who supported him and the Lavalas party. The Lavalas party swept the first round of elections in 2000, causing the opposition to join together and boycott the second round, leaving Aristide a clear path to the presidency in 2001. But it was not to last for long: in 2004 Aristide was forced to resign and went into exile in Africa. With the help of the Organization of American States (OAS) and United Nations (UN), Haiti established an interim government and then held free and clean elections in February 2006. Préval was elected to serve as president again and chose Jacques-Edouard Alexis to once again serve as his prime minister. The UN Stability



Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), established in 2004, remains in the country to assist in peacekeeping and continued democratic freedom.

Conditions in Haiti remain extremely difficult, however. Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and is one of the poorest in the entire world. Economic development is proceeding very slowly, and political stability has yet to be established securely. Despite their lack of welcome in the United States, Haitian refugees continue to make their way to America, hoping for a better life, even if it is as an illegal alien.

Although Louisiana was the preferred destination for Haitian immigrants of the 18th and 19th centuries, only 1,010 Louisiana residents claimed Haitian ancestry in the 2000 U.S. Census. The largest Haitian populations today are in Florida (233,881) and New York (160,319), with a fair number also in Massachusetts (43,576) and New Jersey (39,902). The Miami, Florida, area has one of the greatest concentrations of Haitians in the United States (95,669 in 2000). Haitian immigrants have even created a "Little Haiti" section of Miami. According to the U.S. Census, the total Haitian American population has doubled in the past 10 years, reaching 548,199 in 2000 from 289,521 in 1990. Two-thirds of Haitian Americans (361,731) are foreign-born. Because so many Haitian immigrants are considered illegal aliens and are either in detention centers or in hiding, however, U.S. Census figures are undoubtedly quite low. It is impossible to know for certain just how many Haitian Americans live in the United States today.

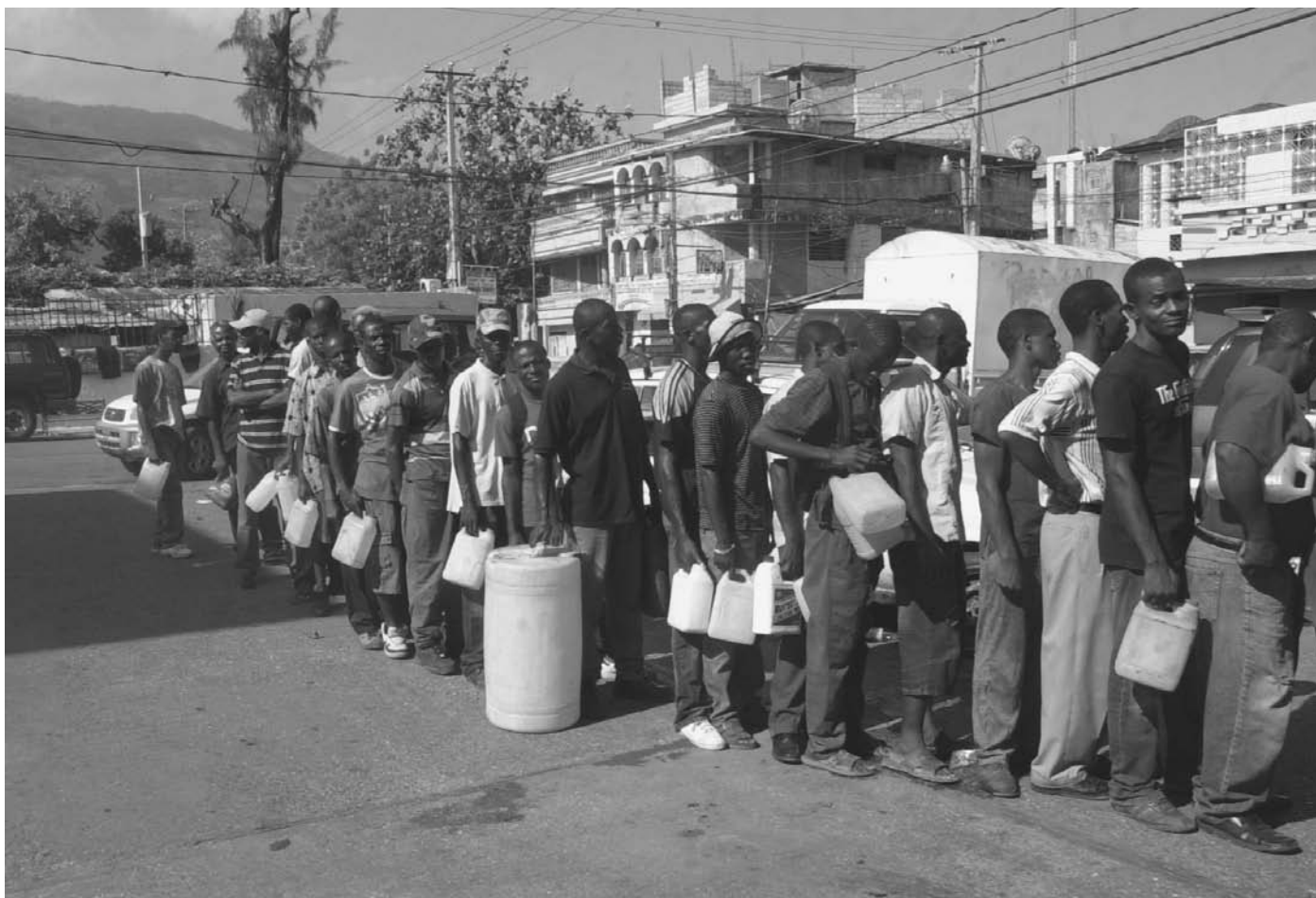
Haitians, both those who immigrated to America and those who stayed in Haiti, had a tremendous influence on American culture in the 1800s. Those who came to the United States brought with them their French and Creole culture. The population of New Orleans increased from 4,446 in 1791 to 8,056 by 1797, mostly through the influx of Haitian refugees. Because they generally had more education and training than the colonists already there, the Haitians rose quickly to the upper ranks of society and shaped that society in significant ways.

The majority of Haitian refugees in the 19th century were Catholic. This is one reason they chose to settle primarily in Louisiana. As a sometime-French, sometime-Spanish colony, the dominant religion was Catholicism, as opposed to the fiercely Protestant character of the English colonies. Haitian Creole Catholics, and later Cajun Catholics, created a French Catholic flavor to Louisiana, especially New Orleans. The festival of Mardi Gras ("Fat Tuesday"), a Cajun-Creole celebration preceding the beginning of Lent, is still a major annual event, drawing visitors from all over the world to New Orleans every February.

Many Haitian refugees today practice Vodou (also known as Voodoo), a blend of African folk religion brought to Haiti by the original African slaves, and the Catholicism of the slave owners. Vodou is predominantly concerned with appeasing the many spirits that rule nature. Ancestor worship is also of central importance. Vodou has been inaccurately popularized in American culture as black magic, where pins are stuck into dolls and people are cursed or turned into zombies. In fact, Vodou practitioners use herbal remedies and a form of psychology interpreted as exorcism to bring people back into balance.

Early Haitian immigrants had many other effects on Louisiana society and culture. Louisiana is the only state in the United States today that continues to base its legal system on the Code Napoléon (a code of laws written by Napoleon Bonaparte); other states use English Common Law. Music, food, and architecture all show strong Haitian influences in Louisiana and other places in the South where Haitians settled (such as Charleston, South Carolina). These influences have since spread throughout general American culture. For example, the basic structure of blues singing—an introductory couplet that is repeated, with the theme then developed around the couplet—is based on Haitian folk music. Certain drums and rhythms, as well as the banjo, were introduced into American music by the Haitians. Creole cooking has become quite popular in mainstream American society. "Shotgun" houses (one room wide and several rooms deep with doors at both ends) were introduced by black artisans from Haiti in the 19th century and are identical to houses still found in Haiti today.

Perhaps most importantly, the successful slave revolt in Haiti seriously influenced both white and black Americans. White Americans became extremely fearful of a similar revolt occurring in the United States and strove to prevent their black slaves from gaining enough education or organization to consider rebellion. Many white Americans were also afraid that emancipating slaves in the United States would lead to a black insurrection (once free, they would take over). Black Americans saw the Haitian revolt as proof that blacks were indeed capable of self-rule. As the first independent black nation in



*After several days of violence and demonstrations in Port-au-Prince against the cost of living in Haiti, Haitians wait for the distribution of gasoline from a petrol station. A group of Haitian lawmakers called on Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis to make way for a new government. (Thony Belizaire/AFP/Getty Images)*

the western hemisphere, Haiti became a symbol of pride for blacks in America.

Haitian refugees of the 18th and 19th centuries adapted quickly to mainstream American society with relatively few difficulties. This has not been the case for 20th and 21st century Haitian refugees. Classified as “illegal” by the INS, held in prisons and detention camps or forced to live as fugitives, and suffering from physical and mental health problems resulting from malnutrition, overcrowded conditions, and trauma, most recent Haitian refugees have found it difficult to survive—let alone thrive—in America. Those who are granted “legal” immigrant status often lack the language and job skills to succeed in the industrialized United States. A sizeable number end up working as migrant farm workers (as do many “illegal” Haitian immigrants), a scant improvement over their former lives in Haiti.

Some Haitian Americans have managed to create successful lives in the United States, including musicians Wyclef Jean and Joanne Borgella (featured on Season 7 of *American Idol*), and writers Edwidge Danticat and W. E. B. DuBois. Josaphat Celestin was the first Haitian American to be elected mayor of Miami, Florida, serving from 2001 to 2005.

Homosexuality is not accepted by the majority Catholic and Evangelical Protestant population in Haiti or among Haitian

Americans. The widespread practice of Vodou, however, allows for more fluid expressions of sexuality and gender, giving Haitian and Haitian American homosexuals and transvestites a place to be themselves without suffering ostracism. Being a Haitian American homosexual, however, carries with it a double difficulty in the United States: not only is homosexuality not tolerated by many in American society, but there is a historical tie between the AIDS epidemic and Haiti. Due to the prevalence of HIV infection among Haitian immigrants in the 1980s when HIV/AIDS was first recognized in the United States, Haitians were included in the “high risk groups” for infection. Although U.S. policy later changed to list high risk activities rather than groups, Haitians continue to carry the stigma of AIDS.

A new study of gene sequence mutation and evolution published in 2007 reaffirmed the hypothesis that the U.S. strain of HIV, subtype B, originated from Haiti, though years earlier than previously suspected, sometime around 1969. According to this study, the original HIV infection of this strain came to Haiti from Africa around 1966, spread and mutated in Haiti for three years, then migrated to the United States with a Haitian visitor or immigrant. Many Haitian Americans are outraged that this supposition of Haitian origin for HIV/AIDS in the United States has resurfaced. To them it is not just a sci-



entific study aimed at helping create effective vaccines for the HIV/AIDS virus but an accusation that they are carriers of a deadly disease. The stigma that resulted in the 1980s in Haitian Americans losing their jobs, non-Haitian friends, and the ability to carry on a normal life in society is being revisited upon them 20 years later.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# HAITIANS

**LOCATION:** Haiti

**POPULATION:** 8,924,553

**LANGUAGE:** Haitian Creole; French

**RELIGION:** Vodou; Roman Catholicism; Protestantism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

To a large extent, Haitian history has been shaped by foreign powers: first Spain, then France, and finally the United States. A rich, lush land with a strategic location, Haiti has often been viewed as a valuable piece of real estate.

When Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola on 6 December 1492, he was greeted by the Taino/Arawak Indians. However, the Spanish conquerors exploited the indigenous population, and by 1550 the Taino/Arawak population had been almost entirely wiped out in violent uprisings or from inhumane forced labor and exposure to imported European diseases. In their quest for gold and other mineral riches, the Spanish resorted to bringing West Africans by force to the New World to work as slaves. The Spanish stayed on the island because it was strategically important as the gateway to the Caribbean, from where many riches were shipped to Europe.

Tortuga Island, off the northwest coast of Hispaniola, was the first French foothold. Reportedly expelled by the Spanish from the nearby island of St. Christopher (St. Kitts), the first French residents of Tortuga, joined by runaway slaves from Hispaniola, survived by curing meats, tanning hides, and pirating Spanish ships. They became known as *buccaneers*, from the Arawak word for smoking meats.

After a French settlement was commissioned on Tortuga in 1659, settlers started encroaching on the northwest part of Hispaniola. In 1670, the French made Cap Fran ais (present-day Cap-Haïtien) their first major settlement on Hispaniola, taking advantage of its distance from the Spanish capital of Santo Domingo. The western part of the island was commonly referred to as Saint-Domingue, which became its official name after Spain relinquished the area to France in 1697 following the signing of the Treaty of Ryswick. Relying on slavery, the French turned Saint-Domingue into one of its richest colonies. Coffee, sugar, cotton, and indigo from Haiti accounted for approximately 67% of France's commercial interests abroad and about 40% of its foreign trade. Because of the high death rate among male slaves, France continually brought new slaves from Africa; the number of enslaved Africans shipped to Haiti by the French totaled over 500,000.

In the mid-1700s, the number of runaway slaves, known as maroons, grew. From the safety of the mountains and forests, guerrilla bands of maroons attacked the French colonists. The colonial authorities, often with what was probably the forced help of the *mulattos* (a Spanish term for persons of mixed African-European heritage), were able to repel the attacks. However, when the Colonial Assembly refused to give mulattos the right to vote, even though they owned land and paid taxes, the mulattos also began to revolt.

But it was the slave rebellion of 1791 that set the colony on the path to independence. The mulattos fought against the French colonists who supported the monarchy, but not against those of the new French Republic, who wanted to give mu-

lattos the right to vote. The slave forces were also split; some fought against the colonists, while others fought both the colonists and the mulattos. Competing for power over the area, Spain and Britain intervened and by 1794 they had almost gained control when tropical disease began to take its toll on their troops. Toussaint L'Ouverture, who had been one of the leaders of the slave rebellion in 1791, then made a crucial decision: he pledged his support to France. Although promising freedom, Spain had shown no signs of moving in that direction, while Britain had actually reinstated slavery in areas under its control. The French Republicans seemed the best choice for freedom. Thus in 1796, when L'Ouverture rescued the French commander from mulattos seeking to depose him, L'Ouverture was rewarded by being named Lieutenant Governor of Saint-Domingue.

By 1800 L'Ouverture was in command of all Hispaniola. He abolished slavery, but in order to ensure stability and economic survival, he reinstated the plantation system, using enforced contract labor, and became a military dictator. However, he had never formally declared independence from France. In 1802 Napoleon sent forces to depose L'Ouverture, and again the French attempted to use the mulattos to attain victory. Forced into surrender, L'Ouverture was assured by the French that he could retire quietly. But a short time later he was arrested and exiled to France, where he died in prison. After this deception, the remaining Haitian forces rallied against the French. The French military was fighting the British in Europe as well as the Haitians, and in 1803 Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States to help finance his campaigns. On 1 January 1804, Haiti declared independence, becoming the second independent nation (after the United States) in the Americas and the first free black republic in the world.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a former slave who had commanded the black and mulatto forces at the close of the revolution, became the leader of the new nation. Knowing only military organization, he used the military to govern, beginning what became an established tradition of military rule. The newly independent Haiti was not formally recognized by the European powers. The United States, itself a slaveholding power, withheld recognition until 1862, after the slaveholding south had seceded from the Union, sending Frederick Douglass as its consul to Haiti. In 1838, Haiti received its long-awaited recognition from France, after final payment of its "independence debt" (begun in 1825) totaling 150 million French francs, its entire annual budget at the time. After the revolution, the collaboration of blacks and mulattos, which had won Haiti independence, turned to conflict. The black generals of the slave armies were also now competing for power and wealth. Thus, the early regimes of Haiti, whether led by mulattos or blacks, were dictatorial, keeping access to education, wealth, and power to themselves.

From its beginning as an independent nation, Haiti developed two distinct societies. The minority elite lived in towns and controlled the government, military, and trade; they imitated a European lifestyle, using the French language for government, commercial affairs, and education. The peasants, however, lived in the *peyi andeyo*, or "the country outside." The majority peasant population remained outside the formal political, educational, and economic structure.

In 1915, Haitian political instability, American trade and investments, growing U.S. concern over German interests and

influence in Haiti, and Haiti's strategic importance to the United States led to a U.S. invasion and occupation that would last almost 20 years. U.S. intervention in smaller, neighboring nations (such as Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, and Nicaragua) to protect U.S. interests and promote regional stability was quite common during that period. Under the American occupation, Haitian figureheads were installed, but the United States had veto power over all government decisions, and the Marine Corps served as administrators in the provinces. The United States declared martial law, rewrote the Haitian constitution, took control of Haiti's finances, and passed legislation permitting foreigners to own land in Haiti for the first time since 1804. It also established the Haitian National Guard (*Garde d'Haiti*) as Haiti's first professional military force, which would later be used to create a repressive military regime. The occupation imposed stability and order. Infrastructure and health conditions improved; roads, schools, and hospitals were built using forced *corvée* labor. Guerrilla bands, led by Charlemagne Peralte, reacted against the occupation. Peralte was captured and assassinated by the U.S. Marines in 1919. When the United States withdrew from Haiti in 1934, the level of poverty and illiteracy remained unchanged. The United States left behind a legacy of anti-American feeling and a well-trained national military force. In the absence of any effective political or social institutions, the military remained the only cohesive institution in the country, apart from the Roman Catholic Church.

After a particularly chaotic period, during which attempts at democracy were made but ultimately failed, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, a doctor who had served as a rural administrator, was elected president in 1957 in military dominated elections. Perceived as an honest and humanitarian public-health expert, as well as a proponent of black power, Duvalier initially enjoyed the support of both the Haitian army and the United States. However, Duvalier soon set out to build a family dictatorship by changing the constitution to solidify his power. Knowing that an independent military was a threat to his presidency, he created the elite Presidential Guard. To maintain power outside the capital, he created a rural militia, commonly known as the *tonton makout*, whose mysterious and brutal tactics terrified the population. Using corruption and intimidation, he created a new elite of his own; in 1964, Duvalier declared himself President-for-Life. Duvalier's regime was marked by terror, corruption, and extremes of wealth and poverty. During the 1960s, U.S. aid and support for Duvalier continued because of the regime's anticommunist stand and Haiti's strategic location near communist-led Cuba.

Naming his 19-year-old son, Jean-Claude, as his successor, "Papa Doc" died in 1971. Although "Baby Doc" was not as brutal as his father nor as politically astute, he continued policies of arbitrary imprisonment and torture of perceived opponents. Corruption and poverty also continued, as did U.S. aid and support, much of which was siphoned off to Duvalier and his cronies. But it was opposition from young Haitians, as well as priests and nuns angered by the poverty and suffering, which eventually led to Duvalier's downfall. In 1983 Pope John Paul II visited the country and, appalled at the conditions there, declared that, "Things must change here." Under the institutional umbrella of the Catholic Church and galvanized by declarations in support of human rights by the Haitian Bishop's Conference, radio stations around the country broadcast uncensored news to the population, especially the sermons

and speeches of a young Salesian priest in the slums of Port-au-Prince named Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Encouraged by a grass-roots church movement (Ti Kominite Legliz or TKL), antigovernment protests swept through Haiti in 1985. Alarmed as people took to the streets, the United States withdrew its aid and support and arranged for Duvalier to step down. After hastily naming a National Council of Government made up of former military supporters, Jean-Claude fled in 1986 to exile in France.

Conditions for the masses did not improve. On election day in November 1987, scores of Haitians were killed at polling stations by soldiers and former tonton makout around the country. But the opposition movement could not be quashed and during a string of revolving dictatorships the voice of Father Aristide continued to echo the frustrations of the population. Aristide preached about the need for a *lavalas*, a flood to cleanse the country of corruption and make it clean and new. In 1990 at the urging of friends and supporters, Aristide declared himself a candidate for president to counter the political machinations of the neo-Duvalierist sector. In the country's first free and democratic elections, on 16 December 1990, he was elected president with 67.5% of the popular vote. But the underlying structure of the society and its long tradition of violence, control, and retribution had not changed. There continued to be strong and sometimes violent opposition to Aristide and his followers by those allied to the *ancien régime*. Aristide pledged to clean up the corrupt and repressive apparatus of the past. Under a unique six-month mandate granted him under the 1987 constitution, allowing him full power to carry out any reforms deemed necessary, Aristide retired eight members of the high command of the Forces Armées d'Haiti (FAdH) and removed corrupt members of the judiciary. The military and the wealthy, however, continued to wield power, and in September 1991 the army staged a coup d'état, forcing Aristide into exile.

After Aristide's departure, some 50,000 Haitians fled the island nation by sea, only to be forcibly returned to the country and later to refugee camps at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba by the U.S. Coast Guard. The repression unleashed by the military and their paramilitary allies known as *attachés* resulted in the deaths of some 4,000 citizens and the internal migration of over 300,000 people between urban and rural milieux. In 1993 General Raoul Cédras had agreed to step down in preparation for Aristide's return, under an agreement established at Governors Island, New York, but this was not honored. The United States, in concert with other countries, then applied pressure in the form of a trade embargo mandated by the United Nations, in order to pressure the coup regime to relinquish power. In 1994, after threats of a U.S. invasion, a U.S. negotiating team persuaded the military leadership to step aside so that the democratically elected Aristide could return to his rightful position. To ensure stability, UN troops led by the United States were sent to Haiti as a peacekeeping force. The military leaders went into exile, and on 15 October 1994, Aristide returned to power to begin the long, arduous task of rebuilding Haiti. In the 1995 legislative and municipal elections, the Lavalas movement overwhelmingly won the majority in Parliament and mayorships across the country. Presidential elections were held in December 1995, and former Prime Minister René G. Préal of the Lavalas coalition won resoundingly. The first peaceful transfer of power between two

civilian presidents took place on 7 February 1996. Jacques-Edouard Alexis was named prime minister in May of that year.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of Haiti's political upheaval. Unable to organize elections in 1998, President Préal dismissed all members of the government whose terms had expired (which was all but nine Senate members) and replaced them with local officials. Préal and Alexis filled the Cabinet with Lavalas party loyalists, and Lavalas swept the first round of elections in August 2000. Angered at what they viewed as election fraud, opposition parties joined together to form the Democratic Convergence and boycotted the second-round elections in November, giving Aristide an easy win to become president again in 2001. Tensions between the Lavalas and Convergence parties continued to escalate, leading to outbreaks of violence. Despite efforts by the Organization of American States (OAS) to help stabilize the situation, things continued to deteriorate throughout 2001–2004 until Aristide finally resigned as president and removed himself to Africa.

With the help of the Organization of the American States (OAS) and the UN, Haiti established an interim government and then held free and fair elections in February 2006. Préal was elected to serve as president again and chose Alexis to once again serve as his prime minister. The UN Stability Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), established in 2004, remains in the country to assist in peacekeeping and continued democratic freedom.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The name "Haiti" comes from the Taino/Arawak word *ayiti* or *hayti*, which means "mountainous" or "high land." The Haitian homeland is the Republic of Haiti, which occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola (known in Spanish as La Isla Espa-ola) in the Caribbean Sea. Hispaniola is located approximately 1,100 km (700 mi) southeast of Florida, between the islands of Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. The Republic of Haiti has an area of 27,750 sq km (10,714 sq mi) including the islands of La Tortue, La Gonâve, Les Cayemites, La Navase, La Grande Caye, and Ile de Vâche. Haiti's total size makes it slightly larger in area than the U.S. state of Maryland. The coastline is irregular, and there are two mountain ranges that stretch across the southern peninsula and one that runs along the northern peninsula. Mountains cover fully two-thirds of the interior, and the fertile plains that lie between them are used for agriculture.

Haiti's climate is generally tropical, both hot and humid. There are two rainy seasons: April through June, and August through mid-November. Annual rainfall averages 140–200 cm (56–80 in), with very uneven distribution. Rainfall is heaviest in the southern peninsula and parts of the northern mountains, while the western coast is relatively dry. Temperatures in the summer vary from 29–35°C (85–95°F) in the coastal lowlands to 18–21°C (65–70°F) in the interior highlands.

Haiti was once covered with virgin forests, but much of the natural vegetation has been destroyed by agriculture, grazing, and the exploitation of timber. Indeed, Haiti is in an alarming state of environmental devastation due to deforestation and soil erosion. Only a fraction of the land is arable, and what is left of the forests is rapidly disappearing due to clearing of land for agriculture and burning wood for fuel. Haiti is in the process of becoming a desert. Viewed from the air, the state of

Haiti's environment presents a harsh contrast to the Dominican Republic.

For the moment, however, pines, ferns, orchids, and other tropical trees and flowers can still be found. But the deterioration of natural vegetation has affected wildlife, which has lost its habitat. Once-common wild boars, guinea fowls, and wild ducks are now scarce, though caimans, flamingos, egrets, and small tropical birds can still be seen.

The population of Haiti was estimated at 8.9 million in 2008. Over two-thirds of the Haitians in the Republic of Haiti live in rural areas. Port-au-Prince, the capital, has a population of well over 1 million people, more than ten times the population of Cap-Haïtien, the second major city. Other major towns are Gonaïves, Les Cayes, and Jacmel. Almost all Haitians are descendants of the 500,000 enslaved West Africans who won their freedom from France in 1804. Haiti became the first modern independent republic where ethnic Africans made up the majority, which accounts for about 95% of today's population. About 5% have a mixed African-European heritage (traditionally the ruling class) or a solely European ancestry (mostly British and French). An even smaller minority have a Middle Eastern, North American, or Latin American ancestry.

About one in eight Haitians lives abroad, most of them in the United States. There are over 500,000 Haitians living in the United States, with the majority residing in either Florida or New York. The Haitian communities in the United States, particularly in South Florida, Boston, and the New York metropolitan area, have successfully established themselves as socially, economically, and culturally vibrant communities. Miami's Little Haiti is now an established community that has become a transitional place where recent arrivals and poorer Haitians settle temporarily until they become economically self-sufficient.

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The two main languages of Haiti are Haitian Creole and French. Traditionally, the two languages served different functions, with Haitian Creole the informal everyday language of all the people, regardless of social class, and French the language of formal situations: schools, newspapers, the law and the courts, and official documents and decrees. All Haitians speak Haitian Creole, and about 80% of the population speaks Haitian Creole only. Since the vast majority of Haitians only speak Haitian Creole, there have been efforts to increase its usage. In 1979, a law was passed that permitted Haitian Creole to be the language of instruction, and the Constitution of 1983 gave Haitian Creole the status of a national language. However, it was only in 1987 that the Constitution granted official status to Haitian Creole. An official orthography was only developed in 1986, since Creole reflects Haiti's dominant oral culture. Only about 20% of the population speaks French, and only about 10% of the population can be considered bilingual in French and Haitian Creole. Fluency in French carries a high status in Haiti. Those who cannot read, write, and speak French often have limited opportunities in business and government. Creole-speaking Haitians argue that the powerful French-speaking minority uses French language requirements just to maintain its authority. Most Haitians who have lived in the United States also speak English.

The Haitian Creole language evolved from a mixture of African dialect, indigenous Taino/Arawak, the Norman French



of pirates, and colonial French. Haitian Creole grammar (or syntax) has strong characteristics of African languages, while its vocabulary is mostly of French origin, with contributions from Spanish, African languages, and, much later, English. Contemporary Haitian Creole incorporates words of diverse linguistic origins, including: Caribbean, with *kannari* (earthen jar) and *sanba* (poet, musician); African, with *houngan* (Vodou priest) and *zombi* (ghost); Spanish, with *ablado* (talker) and *sapat* (sandal); and English, with *bokit* (bucket). As for the words derived from French, it is important to note that they have been modified in pronunciation or meaning. As an example, the following are borrowed French words with their corresponding meanings in Haitian Creole: *kriye* (to scream or shout), to weep; *bonbon* (candy), sweets; *boutik* (small, exclusive store), a family-operated store; *kabare* (nightclub), cafeteria tray. There are also some Haitian Creole words that have retained the 18th century French pronunciation.

The Haitian Creole language is called Kreyòl by native speakers. Some scholars have begun using the term Ayisyen (Haitian) as a symbol of national identity and to distinguish it from the generic term "creole," which refers to a number of languages. A creole language is a natural language that arises when peoples with different languages live and work among each other, similar to a pidgin language. Pidgin utilizes a simplified base language for the purposes of trade, with generous contributions from other languages, used to fulfill special, but temporary, communication needs. Pidgins have been used by sailors, traders, and pirates. They are native to no one; in other

words, no one speaks a pidgin as a first language. Since a pidgin is used only as a necessity, it is restricted in form and usage. However, when a pidgin becomes the native language of an individual (and subsequently, many individuals who form a speech community), a creole language is born. A creole language is not just a simplified form of a given language, but a full-fledged language that is capable of serving all the intellectual, psychological, and social needs of its speakers. Some examples of Haitian Creole proverbs are:

Yon sel dwèt pa manje kalalou. (You cannot eat okra with one finger—we must all cooperate.)

Chay sòti sout tet, tonbe sou zepol. (The load goes from the head to the shoulder—Problems go from bad to worse.)

Gras a diri, ti wòch goute gres. (Thanks to the rice, the pebble tastes of grease—good things rub off.)

Bon kòk chante nan tout poulaye. (A good rooster sings to all his chickens—a good person is sought after by everyone.)

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Haitian culture reflects a profound reverence for one's ancestors, a phenomenon that informs a particular cohesiveness within nuclear families and which extends to the larger family or race. Respect for the ancestors (*zansèt yo*) is reflected in the official observance of January 2 as Heroes or Ancestors' Day, a national holiday one day after the celebration of Independence Day (January 1).

Folk tales are popular in Haiti. Stories are introduced by an invitation to hear a story. The person wishing to tell the story shouts out: "Krik!" If people want to hear the tale, and they nearly always do, they answer in chorus: "Krak!" The most popular folk tales concern the smart but mischievous Ti Malis and his very slow-witted friend Bouki, who may also be found in the folklore of certain regions in West Africa. Here is one example:

Ti Malise paid Bouki a visit one day. To his amazement, when he got to Bouki's lakou (yard), there was Bouki playing dominoes with his dog! "What a brilliant dog you have!" exclaimed Ti Malis. "He can play dominoes." "Ha!" said Bouki, "he's not as smart as you think. I've just won three out of five games!"

Perhaps the most popular form of humor and amusement are riddles. There is a definite form for the riddles. The person "throwing" the riddle or *tire pwen* says: "Tim-tim," and those who want to hear it reply: "Bwa sèch." Then the riddle is given. If they get it, they announce it. If they give up, they say "Bwa sèch," which means they eat dry wood, the penalty for not getting the riddle. The riddles themselves are very difficult. They require a transition from the literal problem to quite fanciful and figurative answers. Here are several popular riddles:

1. They serve it food, it stands on four feet, but it cannot eat.
2. I enter white, I come out mulatto.
3. Three very large men are standing under a single little umbrella, but not one of them gets wet. Why?
4. When I sit, I am taller than when I stand.

5. How many coconuts can you put into an empty sack?

1. A table.
2. Bread.
3. It is not raining.
4. A dog.
5. Only one. After that the sack is not empty.

#### 5 RELIGION

Religion is an integral part of Haitian life and culture. Vodou (a mixture of African animism and Christianity, also known as Voodoo) and Roman Catholicism are the two main religions. The majority of Haitians are Roman Catholic, although efforts by Protestant missionaries have increased the number of Protestants in Haiti in the past decade from about 15% to almost 30%. Because Vodou is nonexclusive, many Catholics also practice Vodou. Most Protestants do not, however. All three religious sectors are organized at the national level and are officially recognized. The Haitian government does not impose any restrictions on missionary activities, religious instruction, or religious publishing.

Popular misconceptions about Vodou have created negative stereotypes concerning its practices and its adherents. Depicted in books and movies as a cult of sorcerers who practice "black magic," Vodou is in fact a religion based on ancestral spirits, tribal deities, and universal archetypes such as the goddess of the sea, all of whom generally help and protect. Although lacking a fixed theology and an organized hierarchy, this religion has its own rituals, ceremonies, and altars that practitioners do not find to be at odds with Roman Catholicism. Vodou keeps alive old African beliefs while borrowing freely from Christianity. In fact, many Roman Catholic symbols and prayers have blended with Vodou rituals and traditions to make for a unique syncretic and typically Haitian religion. For example, pictures of Catholic saints are painted on the walls of temples to represent the Vodou spirits; at funerals, it is not uncommon for Vodou ceremonies and rituals to be performed for family members first, followed by a more public traditional Roman Catholic ceremony presided over by a priest.

Vodou is derived from a synthesis of African religious beliefs. The word Vodou comes from the Fon language of Benin (formerly Dahomey) in West Africa and means "spirit." When Africans of various tribes were brought to Haiti as slaves, they brought with them their beliefs in spirits who acted as intermediaries with a single God Almighty; some of these spirits were ancestors of the living, while others represented human emotions and forces of nature. In time, a system of beliefs and spirits unique to the slaves of Haiti was formed. These spirits, or *lwa*, are inherited or bought by families and can be called upon for help; they can be paid to bring good fortune, to protect, or to attack enemies. Payment is usually in the form of food, drink, or other gifts offered during rituals. Vodouists attribute the good as well as the bad to the spirits. The Roman Catholic clergy, although opposed to Vodou, have a more benign view of it than do Protestants.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Commemorative Haitian holidays include Independence Day (January 1) and the Anniversary of Jean-Jacques Dessalines's Death (October 17). Dessalines was a former slave who led the slave armies to victory in 1803 and became the leader of Hai-

ti after the revolution. The Anniversary of the Battle of Vertières is on November 18, which pays homage to the final battle fought in 1803 during the struggle for independence. The landing of Columbus on Hispaniola in 1492 is commemorated on December 5. Other holidays include Ancestors' Day (January 2), Carnival (all three days before Ash Wednesday), Pan American Day (April 14), Labor Day (May 1), Flag Day (May 18), and New Year's Eve (December 31).

Haitians observe many traditional Roman Catholic holidays, including Good Friday and Easter Sunday (movable, usually in late March or early April), Feast of the Assumption (August 15), All Saints Day (November 1), All Souls Day (November 2), Immaculate Conception (December 8), Christmas Eve (December 24), and Christmas Day (December 25).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious ceremonies, often including both Voodoo and Christian rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Many Haitian values are traditional and conservative. Haitians value community cooperation and usually have close extended-family ties. Many are religious and have a strong work ethic as well as a deep respect for authority and societal laws. Education is particularly important, since it is a means of social mobility.

Haiti's unusual history has created a unique culture that is different from the Spanish Caribbean cultures and is dualistic in nature: European vs. African, French vs. Creole, mulatto elites vs. the black masses, urban vs. rural, Christianity vs. Voodoo, etc. For Haitians, the color of one's skin, the languages one uses, and the work that one does are all connected and have always been important aspects of interpersonal relations.

Manners are also important in Haitian society. Greetings are exchanged whenever boarding public transportation, walking into a doctor's office, entering a store, etc. When greeting friends, men generally shake hands, women will exchange two kisses, as will men with female friends. Children are taught early on to respect their elders and to greet formally visitors to their home.

It is not unusual for men to refer to each other by their last name, and many individuals are referred to by nicknames. For example, the firstborn male in a family is often given the nickname Fanfan. A woman named Dominique may be called Dodo by her friends and family.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The poverty in Haiti is reflected in the health statistics of its population. The infant mortality rate is the highest in the Americas, with one in eight children dying before the age of five. Average life expectancy is about 52–57 years. Some 80% of the population live below the poverty level and with over 50% living in abject poverty. Unemployment and underemployment are rampant—an estimated two-thirds of the workforce do not have formal jobs.

The population is afflicted by a number of infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, parasitic infections, and malaria, since a majority of the people live in malarial areas. Poor sanitation contributes to these illnesses: less than half the population has access to clean water, and only 4% of the rural

population has electricity. In 1982, the U.S. Center for Disease Control mistakenly classified Haitians as a high-risk group for AIDS, in part because early studies wrongly suggested that the disease originated in Haiti. Although the high-risk classification was finally dropped in 1991, AIDS is a problem in Haiti, responsible for at least 24,000 deaths and infecting another 280,000 (over 5% of adults).

Another factor contributing to poor health conditions is the lack of medical services. Political repression caused many doctors to emigrate, and the few remaining ones tended to locate in the capital, where they catered to those who could afford their services, although this pattern has also changed in recent years. Currently there about 2.5 doctors per 10,000 people in Haiti. Religious and social service agencies have established clinics, but the number of people who require services cannot be accommodated. Rural areas are especially lacking in health services because of poor infrastructure. Given the lack of modern, professional health services, it is not surprising that many of the people rely on traditional herbal remedies and religious healers to diagnose and treat illnesses.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Haitians place great importance on family life. In rural areas, the extended family has traditionally been the social unit. However, deteriorating economic conditions, which brought many peasants to the cities in search of work, have caused a shift in society: the nuclear family has replaced the extended family in certain urban areas. But family ties remain close, and family members tend to be supportive of one another; intergenerational conflicts are rare but increasing because of urbanization and efforts to identify with the world at large.

Men and women play complementary roles in Haitian families, generally sharing household and financial responsibilities. Women assist in farmwork, performing such tasks as weeding and harvesting. At home, women are generally responsible for child care and the daily household tasks, while men do heavy chores, such as gathering firewood.

The most common form of marriage among poorer Haitians is known as *plasaj*, a kind of common-law marriage. Although the Haitian government does not recognize *plasaj* as legitimate, this relationship is considered normal and proper among the poor. Although wealthy Haitians may openly disapprove of the practice, many affluent Haitian men have children by mistresses and provide financial support for their second "family." A man or woman may have a number of *plasaj* relationships in a lifetime. Children born from one *plasaj* relationship regard offspring from another *plasaj* as brothers and sisters and often live in the same household without conflict. If parents separate, a child may take either the father's or mother's last name.

Haitians value both their family reputation and their children, and they take pains to ensure that all children receive equal inheritances. Children are considered a gift from God and are treated accordingly. Children also provide security in old age.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Haitian mode of dress tends to be informal, conservative, and well-groomed. Comfortable, lightweight Western-style clothes are typically worn, made especially of cotton and linen fabrics. School children all wear uniforms. Men often wear a loose-fitting shirt called a *guayabera*, similar to those of other



Two Haitians working at a pottery wheel. Haitian handicrafts often make use of mahogany, sisal, and straw. Haitians are particularly skilled in woodcarving, weaving, and embroidery. (United Nations)

countries in the region and Latin America. While the wearing of pants by women is no longer inappropriate, most women, especially in rural areas, continue to wear skirts or dresses.

Traditional clothing tends toward a hand-embroidered denim shirt for men, in cotton, linen, or denim; and for women, an embroidered short-sleeved blouse, a colorful skirt, and a scarf wrapping the hair.

## **12 FOOD**

To supplement food and grain imports, Haitians grow corn, rice, beans, bananas, mangoes, avocados, and various other tropical fruits and vegetables. A typical meal will generally include one or two varieties of rice, usually prepared with either red or black beans. It will almost always feature plantain, which can be prepared in a number of ways, usually parboiled then cut into slices that are pressed flat and deep-fried. Chicken is very common for those who can afford it; this, too, is generally deep-fried. Other typical meats include goat, beef, and pork. The latter is often fried and barbecued (*grio*) and is very popular. Seafoods are especially favored including barbecued lobster, shrimp, and many varieties of fish.

Vegetable dishes include green beans, potatoes, squash, okra, cabbage, eggplant, and salads with generous slices of avocado. Most Haitians prefer a spicy sauce, resembling American cole slaw, which is fiery hot. Only a dash of piklès is needed to enhance a dish. Desserts include cake or tarts, often with pineapple garnish.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Haiti's first schools were established shortly after the Constitution of 1805, which mandated free and compulsory primary education. While education has been promoted in principle, a comprehensive and accessible school system never developed. Today, the majority of Haitians receive no formal education, and only a small minority are educated beyond primary school.

In 1978 primary schools, both urban and rural, were merged under the auspices of the National Department of Education (DEN). The education system was then restructured: 10 years of basic education, consisting of three cycles (4-3-3 years), are followed by 3 years of secondary education. Curriculum and materials were also changed. One major change was the use of Haitian Creole as the language of instruction in the first four grades. Other instructional innovations were grouping children by ability and an emphasis on discovery learning rather than on memorization. By 1981, primary school enrollment in urban areas had more than doubled from 1970 figures. School nutrition programs and support from private development agencies contributed to the increased enrollment, but rural enrollments continued to be low. Moreover, dropout rates remained high: 50% in urban areas, and as high as 80% in rural areas. Despite the reforms, obtaining an education in Haiti remains an elusive goal for most. Though education is highly valued, the majority of Haitians do not have access to it. Even

though education is technically free in Haiti, it remains beyond the means of most Haitians, who cannot afford the supplemental fees, school supplies, and uniforms required.

The Haitian curriculum requires learning many subjects in detail. Rote learning and memorization are still the norm. Grading and testing are very strict and formal in Haiti; it is much more difficult to attain a grade of B (or its equivalent) in Haiti than it is in the United States. Therefore, Haitian students tend to attach great importance to grades and tests, even quizzes. In Haiti the teacher addresses all students by their last names and has total authority over the class. A student speaks only when asked a question. As a sign of respect, Haitian students do not look their teachers in the eye, but keep their heads down in deference. There are no parent-teacher organizations in Haiti and parents are not routinely asked or encouraged to participate in school matters and decisions. In Haiti, if a parent is called to school, it generally means that the child has committed a great transgression.

Despite recent developments, major obstacles remain in helping the masses in Haiti achieve literacy, which stands at just over 50%. To that end, a literacy program was given ministerial status in 1995 in order to develop a nationwide institution to further the teaching of Haitian Creole. Although many sectors of the population do not see the value of becoming literate in Haitian Creole, this attitude is changing as Haitian Creole's usage in the media, in government, and in literature has increased. Even so, among the poor, who tend to view education as a means of escaping poverty rather than as a means for learning, French continues to be prized. While the reforms had sought to make Haitian Creole the language of all primary grades, the government was forced under pressure to limit its use to the first four grades only. Instruction in the secondary level remains almost exclusively in French.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Haiti's uniqueness is reflected in the originality of its paintings, music, and literature. Artists and musicians, drawing from the rich folk life and vitality of the people, have created internationally recognized works and sounds. Haitian paintings have long been recognized around the world; works by better-known Haitian artists have been exhibited in galleries and museums in the United States and France. Handicrafts such as woodcarvings and tapestries employ a similar style. Haitian music, like Haiti itself, is an original blend, containing elements of African drum rhythms and European dance music.

Haitian *kompa* and more recent *rasin* (Vodou-influenced) musical styles are among the most popular genres in Haiti today. Every year Haitian bands compete for the best song during the Carnival season, and recent entries reflect other influences of the Caribbean region through the utilization of reggae, dance hall, and rap styles.

Haiti has also produced writers, poets, and essayists of international standing. Attempts to write Haitian Creole date back to the 18th century, but because of its low status in Haiti, until recently there was little interest in writing in anything but French. Haitian literature has been written almost exclusively in French; however, with the recognition of Creole as an official language, novels, poems, and plays are being written increasingly in Creole. In 1975, the first novel to be written

entirely in Haitian Creole was published—*Dezafi* by Franketienne poetically depicts Haitian life.

#### 15 WORK

Although in decline since the 1950s, about 66% of the labor force in Haiti still works in agriculture. Deforestation, land erosion, and a declining economy have prompted many farm workers to migrate to the cities or abroad. The main cash crops are coffee and sugarcane. A large number of Haitians work in the Dominican Republic as *braceros*, under grueling conditions. Bracero is a Spanish term for a migrant farm worker, someone temporarily hired, usually for a harvest. In the Dominican Republic, Haitian braceros are used to harvest sugarcane, which is still cut by hand with a machete. Although secretly crossing the border is officially illegal, the Haitian government does not strictly enforce the immigration law.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the national sport. During the quadrennial World Cup competition, virtually the entire country roots for the national team of Brazil. In rural areas cockfighting is also popular, but only as an informal sport on the weekends. For men, a typical social game is dominoes or cards. For the more affluent, tennis is becoming an increasingly popular sport.

Children may often be seen playing hide-and-seek, hopscotch (*marelle*), round dances, and marbles. Organized sports in school or local leagues include basketball for girls and soccer for boys.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The expressiveness of the Haitian people is evident in their rich oral tradition, which includes storytelling, proverbs, riddles, songs, and games. Storytelling in Haiti is a performance art. The storyteller uses a different voice for each character in the story and may sing songs as part of the narrative.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Haitian handicrafts often make use of mahogany, sisal, and straw. Haitian craftspeople are particularly skilled in woodcarving, weaving, and embroidery. Wooden sculptures, intricate plaques, and furniture (especially chairs with caned backs and seats) are popular handicrafts, as are embroidered dresses, skirts, blouses, costumes, and men's shirts. Wrought iron items are also a part of Haitian folk art, including candle holders, coffee tables, lamps, and animal figures.

Every year before Christmas, artisans fashion often elaborate works of art known as *fanal* out of white cardboard and tissue paper within which lighted candles are (carefully!) placed.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and among the 25 poorest in the world. The elite, about 10% of the population, earn 50% of the national income, while unemployment ranges from 30% to 70%. The penetration of transnational companies into the Haitian economy has contributed to the influx of peasants into Port-au-Prince. These changing demographics have caused both urban problems and social changes. While peasants have traditionally depended on the extended



family and cooperative labor to survive, urban slum dwelling has weakened this aspect of the social fabric.

Another problem is Haiti's extreme state of deforestation. With wood fuels accounting for most of the country's energy consumption, deforestation of the once green, tree-covered land is now critical. The most direct effect of the destruction of trees has been soil erosion, which has made most of the land unsuitable for farming. The fluctuation of prices for agricultural products in the world market has also contributed to the decline in agriculture. The fall in coffee prices and the fluctuation in sugar prices have had a major impact on agricultural production and planning.

Negative stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings about Haiti are still prevalent, and many Haitian American youngsters lack a sense of ethnic pride because of the negative publicity related to the political turmoil that hinders Haiti's chances to progress socially and economically. As a result of problems such as prejudice and difficulty in English, younger Haitians sometimes present themselves at various times as African Americans, Caribbean Americans, West Indians, or Haitian Americans, depending on the current sociopolitical climate in both Haiti and the United States.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Officially, there is no discrimination against women in Haiti. Women have recently held prominent positions in both the public and private sectors, and a Ministry for Women's Affairs was established in 1995. For some Haitians, however, women's roles are limited by tradition. Peasant women remain largely in the traditional occupations of farming, marketing, and housework. In general, Haitian women have been more active in the labor force than women in other Latin American countries, perhaps because the rewards for their labor are greater. In the coffee industry, marketers (persons who transport coffee beans to local and urban markets to sell) are almost exclusively female and are known as "Madam Saras." Income earned from agricultural production belongs to both husband and wife, but income earned from nonfarm business activities does not have to be shared with the husband, and, as a result, many women are economically independent.

Rural Haitian girls, however, are at great risk of exploitation. The abject poverty of rural Haitians has led many to send their children to the cities to work as unpaid domestic servants, known as *restevek* in Haitian Creole. There are estimates that over 300,000 children in Haiti, three-fourths of them girls, are *resteveks*. The children often work long hours, receive little food, and some are known to be beaten or sexually abused. Human rights organizations such as the National Coalition for Haitian Rights are working to eliminate this practice, with minimal success so far.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# HAWAIIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ha-WHY-uhns

**LOCATION:** United States (primarily in the Hawaiian Islands)

**POPULATION:** 813,415 (2006 est. includes those who claim mixed heritage of one or more races)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholic); Buddhism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Polynesians; Micronesians; Melanesians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Hawaiian Islands are located about 2,000 miles southwest of San Francisco in the Pacific Ocean. They are part of the larger Polynesian island chain. This island group, known collectively as Hawaii, became the 50th state of the United States in 1959. The first Europeans to visit the islands were probably Captain James Cook, a British naval officer, and his crews aboard two ships, the *Resolution* and the *Discovery*, which visited the islands in 1778. Within 40 years the native population was substantially reduced by the unfamiliar disease strains that the British brought with them to the islands. Eventually, European and American fur traders and whalers began using the conveniently situated islands as a provisions stations and missionaries also arrived to win converts to Christianity. Foreigners were granted the right to purchase property in 1840 and by the mid-19th century the United States had begun large-scale sugar farming, eventually bringing in thousands of European and Asian contract workers, thus forever changing the ethnic makeup of the islands. In 1893 a group of plantation owners, with U.S. military aid, overthrew the reigning monarch, Queen Liliuokalani. In 1898 the Hawaiian Islands were annexed and made a territory of the United States.

In the 20th century, Hawaii became a center of American military power in the Pacific. America's involvement in World War II began when a surprise Japanese air attack destroyed United States military installations in and around Pearl Harbor, an inlet near Honolulu, Hawaii's capital, on 7 December 1941. Since Hawaii achieved statehood in 1959, defense has continued to play an important role in its economy, as has tourism. Descendants of the Asians who came to the islands as plantation workers have, on the whole, fared better than the Native Hawaiians, wielding both economic and political power while the Native Hawaiians became increasingly alienated and impoverished. Since the mid-1970s activists have worked to promote the ethnic, cultural, and economic interests of native Hawaiians, in a movement analogous to that of the Native Americans and Alaskan Natives on the U.S. mainland.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The state of Hawaii is made up of about 130 islands, both large and small. Only seven of the islands are regularly inhabited. Most of the islands were created by volcanic action. The highest point in Hawaii is Mauna Kea, an apparently extinct volcano on the island of Hawaii, which rises to a height of 4,205 m (13,796 ft).

Of the seven main islands, Hawaii is the largest. It was formed by five volcanoes, two of which—Kilauea and Mauna Loa—are still active. The island of Maui is made up of two vol-

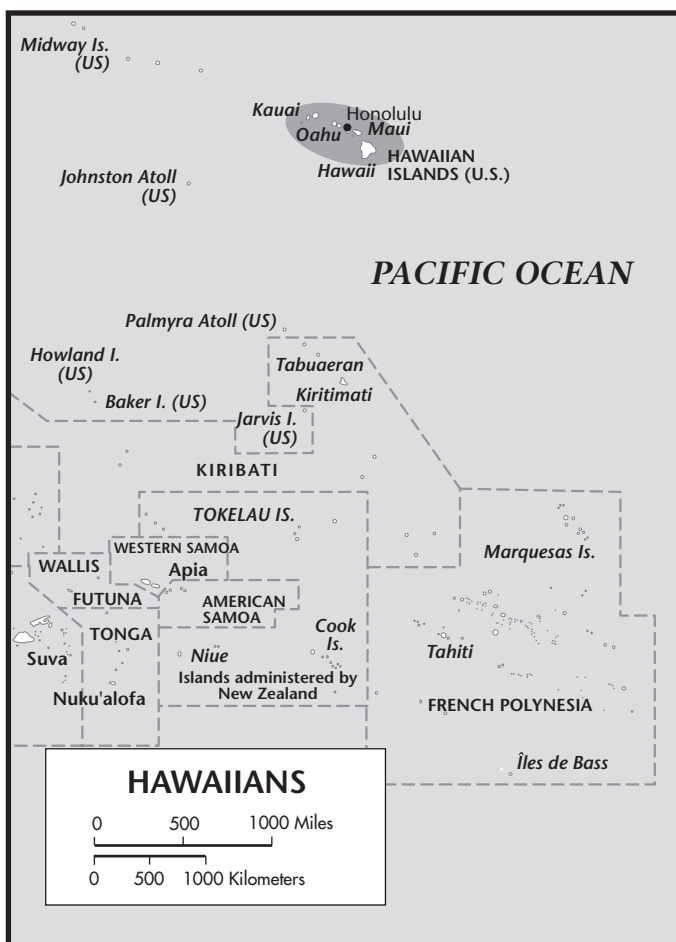
canic complexes joined by a low-lying strip of land. Both of Maui's volcanoes are dormant today, and one of them, Haleakala, has one of the world's largest extinct volcanic craters. Lanai is a hilly island that rises to a height of 1,027 m (3,369 ft) atop a long-extinct volcano. The island of Molokai is made up of three distinct regions, each formed by a separate volcano. Oahu, the most-populated island, is made up of two rugged mountain ranges, the Waianae Mountains in the west and the Koolau Range in the east. Pearl Harbor, one of the best natural harbors of the Pacific Ocean, is located on Oahu's south coast. Diamond Head and Punchbowl, remnants of extinct volcanoes, are famous landmarks found not far from the city of Honolulu. The island of Kauai is characterized by high precipitation and an abundance of lush vegetation. Kauai has many streams, some of which have worn deep canyons into the rock. Niihau is a private island. Its owners encourage the preservation of traditional Hawaiian culture and discourage outsiders from visiting the island. Hawaii's largest cities are Hilo, which is located on the island of Hawaii, and Honolulu, Kailua, Aiea, Kaneohe, Pearl City, and Waipahu, all on the island of Oahu.

When Hawaii was annexed as a U.S. territory in 1898, many Native Hawaiians, particularly those of the royal bloodline, lost the ownership rights over large portions of self-governed lands. Owners and community members alike lobbied the U.S. Congress for land rights, but the interests of the prosperous sugar plantation owners were considered of greater importance. In 1921 Congress passed the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act to set aside 203,500 acres of Hawaiian land for Native Hawaiians. In 2006 the Department of Hawaiian Homelands administered 201,660 acres of these lands that were set apart exclusively for the benefit of Native Hawaiians. About 58% of these homelands are located on the island of Hawaii. As of 2006 only about 42% of the total homeland area was in use.

At the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 140,652 people who claimed Native Hawaiian as their single race. However, a total of 874,414 listed themselves as Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders as a combination of one or more races. According to 2006 estimates, there were 148,598 people claiming Native Hawaiian as their single race and 813,474 listed Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders as a combination of one or more races. About 60% of all Native Hawaiians live in the state of Hawaii. California has the next largest number of Native Hawaiians (about 20,350 in 2006), followed by Washington (5,000 in 2006).

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official language of the Hawaiian Islands is English, which is spoken at home by about 76% of the population. Few people speak the original Polynesian-based Hawaiian language. There are, however, a number of academic and cultural organizations at work to preserve the language for future generations. Most of the native population speaks pidgin, a local creole that incorporates English, Hawaiian, and other Asian and Pacific languages. Spoken with a rising inflection, pidgin is especially popular among young people and has a distinctive vocabulary and syntax of its own. Other languages spoken in Hawaii include Japanese, Chinese, and Tagalog.



#### COMMON HAWAIIAN TERMS:

*aloha*: a common greeting, used for both hello and goodbye. Also means affection, romantic love, or good wishes

*hula*: a popular native Hawaiian dance

*kahuna*: priest or shaman

*kane*: man (also husband or boyfriend)

*lanai*: porch

*keiki*: child, children

*lei*: garland of flowers or vines

*luau*: traditional Hawaiian feast

*malihini*: newcomer or “tenderfoot”

*mauna*: mountain

#### COMMON PIDGIN TERMS:

*bimbye*: eventually (“by and by”)

*brah*: brother (equivalent of “bro” in the United States)

*cockaroach*: to steal, equivalent to “rip off”

*da’kine*: all-purpose expression, similar to “whatever” or “you know”

*hu hu*: angry

*ono*: number one; i.e., the best

*pau hana*: quitting time (end of the work day)

## 4 FOLKLORE

Like all Polynesian peoples, the original Hawaiians believed that their ancestors came from a mythical homeland near Tahiti, called Hawaiki. Many of the Native Hawaiian deities were associated with animals and nature. The original inhabitants of Hawaii offered human sacrifices to the active volcano, Pele, in an attempt to pacify the goddess known by the same name, thus preventing violent and disastrous eruptions. Another popular figure was Kamapuaa, who was half man and half hog. Polynesian mythology in general is a complex mix of stories about the creation of the earth and the relationships between the gods and people.

Traditionally, taboos called *kapu* (from which the word “taboo” is derived) were widely observed by the Hawaiian people. Typical *kapu* included a prohibition on letting one’s shadow fall on the body of a king and a ban on men and women eating together.

## 5 RELIGION

The traditional Polynesian religion, which declined in the 19th century with the arrival of Christian missionaries on the islands, was animistic and based on a belief in numerous gods, half-gods, and spirits. Chiefs were believed to be descended from the gods and to have sacred powers called *mana*. One can still see evidence of pre-Christian religion throughout Hawaii in open-air temples called *heiau*. Most Hawaiians are now Christian, with a majority of those being Roman Catholic. Buddhists are the largest religious minority in the state.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Hawaiians celebrate all major Christian holidays as well as all national holidays celebrated in the United States. They also celebrate special festivals of their own, including Lei Day (May 1) and Aloha Week in late September, which is observed throughout the islands with luau (feasts), pageants, balls, and other festivities. Other festivals are unique to a particular island or locality.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rituals marking major life events such as birth, marriage, and death are generally observed within the Christian religious tradition. Among the native Hawaiian population, the ceremony celebrating a birth was traditionally the most important rite of passage.

In ancient times, the bodies of the dead were placed in burial caves, and special care was taken to avoid having the enemies of deceased persons find and dishonor their remains after death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Sharing possessions and giving gifts have traditionally been central to the Hawaiian way of life. If someone was in need, people always gave generously, safe in the knowledge that others would be there to help them in return. This generous attitude survives in the famous “spirit of aloha,” a term that refers to the friendliness, generosity, and openness to strangers for which the Hawaiians are known. “Aloha” is also the universal greeting for “hello” and “goodbye.” A popular slang greeting, equivalent to “What’s up?” in the United States, is the pidgin phrase “Howzit brah?”

The traditional garland known as a *lei* is presented to people on any happy occasion, but especially upon arriving in or leaving Hawaii. A widespread practice in the workplace is the observance of the Hawaiian equivalent of the U.S. “casual day”—“Aloha Friday,” marked by playful behavior and the wearing of bright colors and flowers.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Native Hawaiians face many of the same difficulties as other native groups within the United States. Native Hawaiians once lived in communities in which resources were shared and the management of resources was designated to a chief. After the annexation of Hawaii as a U.S. territory, most land ownership was transferred from native royalty to non-native individuals, leaving many Native Hawaiians displaced from their traditional homes. The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1921 set aside 203,500 acres of homeland for Native Hawaiians, thus allowing the chance to obtain long-term land leases on property where they might continue to preserve a traditional lifestyle. However, eligibility was limited to those who could prove to be a descendent of not less than one-half of one of the races inhabiting the Hawaii islands before 1778. In the modern housing market, many Native Hawaiians, including those who are of mixed heritage, find themselves at an economic disadvantage in owning homes.

Native Hawaiians once had a system of health care that included holistic healing practices still around today, particularly those that combine mental and spiritual wellness with physical healing. As the foreign population grew, Western medical practices became more and more prevalent. However, many natives were suspicious of the new techniques and medicines. Today the primary barrier to adequate health care for the native population is low income. In 2003 only about 21% of all Native Hawaiians in the state had health insurance. The teenage pregnancy rate among Native Hawaiians was higher than that of other ethnic groups in the state and the number of unwed mothers was higher among Native Hawaiians as well. There has also been a higher number of infant deaths among Native Hawaiians than among other ethnic groups. The native population had higher instances of asthma and obesity than other ethnic groups within the state. About 25% of the native population smoked in 2003.

Papa Ola Lokahi, founded in 1988, is a not-for-profit consortium serving as the umbrella group for the Native Hawaiian Health Care Systems (NHHCS). Facilities within the NHHCS promote traditional healing practices with more modern techniques.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Hawaiian life centered on the extended family. Families were large and the extended family often lived under the same roof. All family members were expected to work together for the welfare of the *ainga*, or the whole family group. A child had many “mothers” and “fathers,” and was never lonely. It was a common practice for grandmothers to adopt and raise children as their own. The children in traditional Hawaiian households were usually spoiled through overindulgence.

Marriages were traditionally arranged without consulting the couple. In most cases, such marriages were intended to strengthen ties between families or political bonds between tribes and clans. Land was usually owned by clans or extend-

ed families and worked by individuals. Ownership changed mainly by inheritance or warfare. The roles of both women and men were clearly defined from an early age and children learned by observing their elders. The burden of providing for and protecting the family fell to the males, while females did the household chores and reared the children.

In modern society the centrality of family seems to have lost much of its significance among the native population. In 2004 the number of children born to unwed mothers was significantly higher among the Native Hawaiian population than that of other ethnic groups in the state.

## 11 CLOTHING

Modern Hawaiians wear Western-style clothing, but traditional garb can still be seen and, in fact, is often worn for the benefit of the tourists who flock to Hawaii each year. For men it includes a cloth skirt called a *lava-lava*, or *sulu*. Some women wear long, loose-fitting cotton garments called *muumuus*. Skirts are made of tapa cloth, made by stripping the inner bark from paper mulberry trees, soaking it, and then beating it with wooden clubs. Both men and women sometimes wear the familiar grass skirts which are identified with Hawaii in popular imagination.

The early Hawaiians often decorated their bodies with tattoos, a custom which has recently seen a resurgence of popularity among young people, not just in Hawaii, but all over the United States.

## 12 FOOD

Traditionally, the people of the Hawaiian Islands have depended largely on fish and native plants for food. Hawaiians catch crabs, lobsters, shrimp, and turtles in shallow water. Farther out to sea they catch bonito and tuna. On many islands they eat the fruit of breadfruit and pandanus trees and the meat of coconuts from the coconut palm. Traditional garden crops include sweet potatoes, taro (a plant with a starchy root), bananas, corn, pineapples, rice, and tomatoes. Some farmers also raise chickens and pigs.

A traditional way of preparing food is to cook it in a ground oven, a shallow pit lined with heated stones. The food is placed on the stones and covered with layers of leaves. The pit is then filled with earth to hold in the heat.

## 13 EDUCATION

The first formal schools in the Hawaiian Islands were established by Protestant missionaries from the United States in the early 19th century. In 1840 the Hawaiian king Kamehameha III established a public school system in the kingdom of Hawaii. Today the state school system is highly centralized, with one school board overseeing all public schools in the state. The system includes several charter schools. Elementary and secondary school enrollments have remained relatively stable, although a slight decline was evident in the 1980s. Hawaii’s institutions of higher education include Chaminade University of Honolulu, Hawaii Loa College, Hawaii Pacific University, and the University of Hawaii system, which includes several community colleges located throughout the islands. In 2006 about 85% of the native population aged 25 years and older had obtained a high school diploma or higher level of education. Only about 12.6% had obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher.



*Hula contest in Princeville, Kauai, Hawaii. Many Hawaiians are concerned with preserving traditional ways. The women's dances, such as the hula, involved graceful head and body movements that illustrated the songs. The men's dances, which were vigorous and energetic, included slapping the body, stamping the feet, and twirling wooden clubs or spears in the air in mock battles. (Corel Corporation)*

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The return of a loved one, the birth of a child, or the appointment of a new chief were always occasions for celebration in traditional Hawaiian culture. New songs were composed spontaneously to record the event, and dances were enacted to capture the spirit of the gathering. Most dances were performed either sitting or standing. The men's dances, which were vigorous and energetic, included slapping the body, stamping the feet, and twirling wooden clubs or spears in the air in mock battles. The women's dances, such as the hula, involved graceful head and body movements that illustrated the songs. Costumes varied according to the type of dance being performed, but were most often made of leaves and sweet-smelling flowers. Feathers, fine mats, grass skirts, and headdresses were worn for some dances. Traditional Hawaiian musical instruments included bamboo flutes, shell trumpets, panpipes, and slit drums.

A number of organizations seek to preserve and promote the native culture. These include the Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts and the Hawaii State Art Museum.

#### **15 WORK**

According to reports from the year 2000, only about 60% of the Native Hawaiians within the state (aged 16 years and older) were employed. Most of the native work force (about 71%) is

employed in private sector wage and salaried jobs. Less than 5% are self-employed or own their own business. These native-owned businesses tend to be either one-person operations or have only a few employees, who are often family members. About 62% of Native Hawaiians in the state of Hawaii have household incomes under \$50,000.

The people of Hawaii work at jobs that are similar to those of people in the mainland United States. In the cities they might be lawyers, doctors, or office workers. They may work in factories processing canned pineapples and pineapple juice; manufacturing stone, clay, metal or glass products; and making clothing. Some are engaged in shipbuilding.

Hawaiian farm workers specialize in sugarcane and pineapple production. Other crops include coffee, ornamental flowers and shrubs, papayas, bananas, avocados, taro, grain sorghum, macadamia nuts, alfalfa, beans, potatoes, and cabbage. Livestock farms produce beef cattle, milk and other dairy goods, hogs, chickens, and chicken eggs.

The tourist industry, which has grown rapidly in recent decades, is the leading source of employment for the people of Hawaii. Each year several million tourists visit the state.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Hawaiians enjoy all the spectator sports that are popular elsewhere in the United States, such as basketball, football, and

baseball. They enjoy watching and participating in golf, hiking, cycling, and polo.

In Hawaii, however, water sports are the most popular. Hawaii is considered one of the best places in the world for surfing. Other popular water sports enjoyed by Hawaiians are sport fishing, boat racing, swimming, windsurfing, body-surfing, snorkeling, and scuba diving.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Hawaiians tend to head for the outdoors when they're in the mood for recreation. They enjoy water sports like surfing, scuba diving, snorkeling, and deep sea fishing, and they also like to camp out and hike through Hawaii's spectacular landscape.

Traditionally, islanders enjoyed gathering to celebrate occasions like births and marriages with feasting, dancing, and singing. No such celebration would be complete without *kava*, a drink made from the roots of the native kava plant. For young boys, favorite pastimes are wrestling, dart-throwing, spinning tops, playing marbles, and flying kites. Girls might practice juggling, play cat's cradle, or participate in a game of hopscotch.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Many Hawaiian islanders are skilled artists and craftsmen. One important traditional craft is basketweaving. Using the leaves and fibers of native plants, such as palm and pandanus trees, craftspeople weave baskets, mats, and wall hangings, which they decorate with colorful designs. Others specialize in using native woods to carve masks, cooking utensils, and other objects. On a smaller scale, some Hawaiian artisans are skilled at making pottery.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Native Hawaiians face many of the same social problems as other native groups within the United States. Criminal activity is high among Native Hawaiians. In 2005 about 38% of the Hawaii state inmate population were Native Hawaiians. About 36% of all juvenile arrests involved Native Hawaiian youth. Larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft, burglary, and assault were the most common offenses among adult offenders. Burglary, assault, larceny, and marijuana drug use were the most common offenses among juveniles. Poverty is considered to be a primary contributing factor to many of the social problems faced by the native population.

Since the 1898 annexation of Hawaii as a U.S. territory, Native Hawaiians have faced several difficulties in maintaining their traditional lifestyle, with most challenges relating to their strained relationship with the U.S. government. The Hawaiian Organic Act of 1900 established U.S. government control of the islands and recognized Native Hawaiians as U.S. citizens; however, there was no provision made to recognize the native population as a distinct indigenous people. Through the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1921, Congress set aside over 200,000 acres to serve as homelands for the Native Hawaiians; however, the right to establish systems of self-governance, similar to that granted to Native American groups, was not part of the agreement. In 1993 the U.S. Congress issued a joint resolution (Public Law 103-150) that officially declared the 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii an illegal action under both U.S. and international law. Many Native Hawaiians viewed this admission and apology as a major turning point in

their efforts to reestablish some aspects of their traditional system of life and government.

In 2002 the state of Hawaii recognized the rights of Native Hawaiians to hunt, gather, and worship in the Wao Kele o Puna forest on the island of Hawaii. This land has had special significance for the native population for centuries as a place for hunting and religious gatherings. However, it had been under private ownership for many years. In 2006 the Office of Hawaiian Affairs announced the purchase of the 25,856-acre Wao Kele o Puna forest. This change in ownership is expected to allow for the permanent protection of the land and the protection of native rights for use of the land. The Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2007 was still before Congress as of April 2008. This proposed bill was designed to grant federal recognition of Native Hawaiians as an indigenous people, a move that could lead to the development of self-government on native homelands as well as greater access to health, education, employment, and cultural programs.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Native Hawaiian culture, gender roles were fairly well-defined with men as providers and protectors and women as caretakers of children and the home. The challenges affecting Native Hawaiian women in modern society are similar to those affecting women of other native or minority groups in the United States. The employment rate for Native Hawaiian women aged 16 years and older in the state of Hawaii was about 57% in 2006. There are more unwed mothers among the Native Hawaiian population than among other ethnic groups in the state.

Hawaii in 1998 passed a constitutional amendment banning homosexual marriage in the state. However, there is a thriving gay community on the Hawaiian islands.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# HINDUS OF GUYANA

**LOCATION:** Guyana (Atlantic coast area)

**POPULATION:** About 302,000

**LANGUAGE:** English; Hindu; Urdu

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Guyanans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

When slavery was abolished in Guyana in the early 19th century, the freed African slaves abandoned the sugar plantations and became peasants or town dwellers. So, the plantation owners turned to India to recruit their workers. Over the next 80 years, beginning in about 1838, thousands of Asian Indians from all parts of the Indian subcontinent crossed the *kalapani*, the Black Waters, as indentured laborers. Many of them were lower-caste Indians, sometimes existing in a state of virtual slavery in their own country, who were glad to flee their landlords and creditors for the prospect of a new beginning in a new land. But, the journey was a dangerous one. Out of 324 persons who embarked on a ship at Calcutta in 1858, as many as 120 died as a result of the conditions on board. Life was not much better when they arrived, for in the early years, they were seen as the “new slaves” and were treated as such until new regulations were brought in to improve their treatment by the owners. By 1917, when immigration ended, a total of 239,000 Asian Indians had left their homes to travel to Guyana. Many of them stayed, being offered land close to the plantations in exchange for giving up their rights to return to India. The former Black African slaves resented the fact that the “dal coolies” appeared to be favored over them by the plantation owners, and this became the basis for a racial resentment between the two groups that continues today.

Politics in Guyana have always been defined along racial lines. During the 1950s and 1960s, the history of the colony was stormy. The first elected government was formed by the People’s Progressive Party, representing the Hindu community, and it was led by Cheddi Jagan who is credited as spearheading the movement in the Caribbean towards independence. As a son of an Indian sugar plantation worker, Jagan represented the aspirations of the Hindu population in Guyana. His policies, however, appeared to be so pro-communist that the British government suspended the constitution and even sent troops to Guyana. The party was again elected into power in 1963, but rioting broke out between the Asian Indians and the Black Africans, which led to bloodshed. The British decided to introduce proportional representation and the African-dominated People’s National Congress (PNC), itself a socialist party, swept into power on a coalition ticket. Its leader, Forbes Burnham, declared the country an independent republic in 1970. For the next two decades, Guyana became virtually a one-party state, and it was not until 1992 that the PNC reign ended and Cheddi Jagan’s party took office once more.

During his presidential tenure, Cheddi Jagan focused on improving the country’s infrastructure and educational system. On 15 February 1997, Jagan suffered a heart attack and was taken to Washington, D.C., where he underwent heart surgery. Cheddi Jagan died on 6 March 1997. After his death, his wife Janet Jagan was elected president of Guyana, but two years

later, arguing health reasons, she stepped down. That same year, the former minister of Finance, Bharran Jagdeo, was appointed president and was reelected in 2001 and 2006.

Guyana’s government has been attempting to improve the economy, reduce violent crime rates, and to create the necessary dialogue among different segments of the society with the intention of softening the tension within different ethnic groups that, during the last decades, has severely affected the political agenda.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Guyana is a multicultural and multiracial group. The largest ethnic group is formed by Indian descendants, also known as Indo-Guyanese, and according to the 2002 population census 43.5% of Guyanese belong to this category. Under a religious perspective, Hindus make up almost 40% (or about 302,000 people) of Guyana’s 756,000 people of various races, including Africans, Portuguese, Chinese, and Amerindians. The second biggest ethnic group is formed by people of African heritage or Afro-Guyanese, who accounted for 30.2%. The third in number are those of mixed heritage representing 16.7% of the population. This ethnic group is composed by Amerindians such as Arawak, Wai Wai, Carib, Akawaio, Wapixana, Macushi, and Warao. The smallest groups are European, including Portuguese who make up 1,500 of the population and the Chinese (0.19% or 1,400 persons).

Guyana is divided between the coast, where most of the population is concentrated, and the interior. The coastal dwellers are heterogeneous and the majority of these inhabitants descended from the laborers brought in to work the sugarcane plantations. The Hindus live on a narrow coastal strip along the Atlantic coast, only 16 km (10 mi) across at its widest point, on land that has been reclaimed from the sea by a series of canals and some 225 km (140 mi) of dikes. Although many live in the capital, Georgetown, and other urban areas, a large number of Hindu families still live in the farming villages they created in the early days when they were first given land by the plantation owners.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Although the official and principal language of Guyana is English, Hindu and Urdu are also heard among the older Asian Indians.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Much of Guyanan Hindus’ folklore springs from their religious and racial background. The majority of Hindus came from the Gangetic Plain, which produced the great religious heroes of India, such as Rama, Krishna, and Mahavira. It was this area that was the scene of the great Asian Indian epics, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

All the major Hindu festivals are celebrated by Guyanan Hindus throughout the year. At the end of October is the religious festival of lights, Divali, which celebrates the return of Lord Rama after 14 years in exile. There are also Bhagwats, remarkable socioreligious activities centered on the reading of a sacred text by the Brahmins, usually the *Shrima Bhaga Vata Purama*. These events span 7, 9, or 14 days and involve a variety of rites

and massive communal meals with hundreds of participants. The Hindus are often joined by Christians and Muslims who travel from all over the country to take part.

Religious activities also include Pujas, which mark special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries, and a *pundit* is hired to perform the necessary Sanskrit rites over a weekend. No fish or meat must be eaten in the house before a religious function takes place. Even the refrigerator must be emptied for the occasion.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

A great part of Guyanan Hindus' recreational activity reflects their tolerant acceptance of other religions and is based upon the festivities that accompany Hindu, Muslim, and Christian holidays, such as Christmas, the end of Ramadan, and (in early March) Phagwah, the Hindu New Year, a joyous celebration that celebrates the triumph of good over evil and is noted for the energetic throwing of perfume and water. Easter Monday is also a traditional day for flying kites. Republic Day, on February 23, is the day the president reports to the nation and is a day for much street marching.

Once a year, most Hindus try to have a grand *puja*, or Ramayana Yagna, an event where the entire community is invited to participate. Ramayana is an ancient epic tale consisting in more than 24,000 verses that narrate the adventure of Rama, whose wife Sita is abducted by the demon. The characters of Rama and Sita among others are all fundamental to the cultural consciousness of India and the Hindus in general.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism is common among the Hindus, who attend Christian churches while maintaining their participation in their own religious rituals. Many of the names that they confer on their children reflect the epic heroes of their culture, such as Rama, Krishna, etc.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As of 2008, about 84% of the East Indian immigrants were Hindus. Around 30% of them belonged to agricultural castes, 31% were laborers, and 14% were Brahmins, the highest priestly caste among the Hindus. The familiar Hindu caste system is a highly localized phenomenon in the villages of India. Therefore, when low-caste Hindus and twice-born Brahmins were thrown together on board ships to become *jahagis* (shipmates) on the sailing boats from India to Guyana in the 19th century, that system soon became irrelevant. In this sense, it is possible to assess that Hinduism in Guyana was redefined.

Brahmins played an important role in reforming and, at the same time, maintaining the strength of the religion they served. Brahmins administered spiritual rites to all Hindus and were the roadblock that could contain the Christian missionaries' attempts of converting the East Indians into Catholics during the 19th century. During the first half of the 20th century, Hindu conversions to Christianity slowed down because the status of Hinduism improved and the discrimination against Hindus diminished.

Today, there is more or less only one common caste for all Hindus in Guyana, although Brahmins do retain their special religious role in interpreting the sacred knowledge of the rituals and Sanskrit texts.

Anyone visiting a friend or acquaintance at their home address is expected to call upon everyone else that they know within that neighborhood. Not to do so is considered extremely rude. Open hospitality is a great feature of Hindu life in Guyana, and no visit can be completed without the offer of a meal or refreshment.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Hindu homes are provided with a small place to pray, which is usually located at the front of the home. It is common among Hindus to dedicate time for singing, meditation, and—if their daily activities allow it—to go to the temple.

Standards of health care declined after Guyanan independence, when many doctors and trained medical personnel emigrated. Years of economic austerity programs led to reduced supplies of medicine and equipment. Food shortages led to widespread malnutrition, particularly during the 1980s.

Some 170,000 Guyanans, out of a population of 800,000, live in Georgetown, the capital. Many of the houses in the center of the city are made of wood. Many Guyanan Hindus live in small villages and towns along the coast. The houses are built of wood with tin roofs and are constructed on stilts 2.5 m to 3 m (8–10 ft) off the ground to avoid flooding from the sea.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the government under Burnham was determined to undermine the rural opposition of the Asian Indian small farmers and so developed a series of farming cooperative policies. As a result, rice production was cut by half, after the farmers lost their subsidies. Guyana is one of the poorest countries in the world and relies heavily on its self-sufficiency in food. Resulting food shortages led to increased malnutrition and the return of diseases that were formerly under control, such as beriberi and malaria. The economy was also badly hit by the depressed world demand for bauxite and sugar. This has led to a near breakdown in essential public services, such as electricity.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Ethnic identity continues to be important within daily life. The mother- and grandmother-dominated family among Afro-Guyanese differs from the father-oriented Asian Indian family. The extended family is still typical among Hindus, although the European nuclear pattern is becoming popular. Upon marriage, the son is expected to take his bride and live for some time with his parents. This is because it is the duty of the parents to guide the children through the early days of marriage. Then, by the sixth or seventh year the son will have set up his own household with his wife and children.

Because the caste system has virtually disappeared in Guyana, few fathers of high status would pass up the opportunity for their child to marry into a wealthy, established family because of considerations of caste. The arranged marriage is also not as widespread as it once was, and in urban areas it is almost non-existent.

## 11 CLOTHING

A skirt and blouse is the popular form of clothing for women, but the sari is being increasingly worn by Hindu women. For Hindu men it is the *kurta* (shirt) or the *dhoti* (one-piece trousers).



## 12 FOOD

Asian Indian food is very popular throughout Guyana. Curry and dal have become part of everyday life for the whole population. Dal is often flavored by the addition of spices cooked in oil. Hindus in the country serve the food on lotus or banana leaves.

Vegetables, such as pumpkin and eggplant, make up the main part of the diet, although fish is often eaten. Fish are often caught in the ditches and dikes by women using seine nets.

## 13 EDUCATION

Children receive free, compulsory education. The government assumed full control of education in 1976 and took over Church-run and private primary schools. Because of economic decline, physical facilities have deteriorated in schools, books and supplies are limited, and there are few qualified teachers. During the time of the People's National Congress (PNC) government, education became highly politicized, and teachers were expected to teach loyalty to both the PNC and to socialist objectives.

The principal university is the University of Georgetown at Turkeyen, in the eastern part of the capital, but many Hindus seek training and higher education abroad.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Post-independent Guyana still bears the imprint of its colonial heritage, and many people still look towards European values. But Hindus keep a strong link with their ancient roots and for many, the cinema provides that link, showing the great epics, such as the story of Lord Rama's long 14-year exile. For them it bears many echoes of their own past, reflecting their exile from India.

Young Hindus, too, are rediscovering their culture, through the religious fables as well as through the traditional music played at weddings and festivals.

One of the best known Hindu writers is Dr. David Dabydeen, whose works cover his experiences both in Guyana and Britain. His latest novel is *The Counting House*. Another popular author is Rooplall Monar.

## 15 WORK

The domestic economy of Guyana reflects the ethnic divisions of the country. Hindu families control most small businesses, such as small farms and shops. In fact, the Hindus are the mainstay of the plantation agriculture of rice and sugar. Meanwhile, the Africans dominate the government sector and security forces. An increasing number of Hindus are entering the legal and medical professions.

Wages for most people, however, are low, and many Hindus depend on overseas remittances from relatives abroad to survive. Most people work at more than one job. Those with farms will often take on part-time unskilled and semiskilled jobs between sowing and harvest times.

Many Hindus, including skilled and professional people, emigrated annually in large numbers to flee what they felt to be political persecution under the previous African-dominated government. They have settled in North America, Canada, Britain, and the Caribbean Islands. This emigration has been a great drain on Guyana's human resources. At the same time, others have sought part time work in western Suriname.

## 16 SPORTS

Hindus share the Guyanese passion for cricket—a passion that is prevalent throughout the English-speaking Caribbean. The game is one of the few unifying factors in the country, overcoming racial divisions. It has been said, however, that cricket in Guyana is totally unlike the game as it is played in England. In Guyana it has more of the passionate atmosphere of a bullfight in Spain, galvanizing the people's national self-esteem. The sport plays a special role in the historical, social, and cultural development of the country. By playing host in Georgetown to International Test Cricket Matches against other countries within the British Commonwealth, the people of Guyana have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities on the international scene, and to make a symbolic gesture against their oppressive colonial legacy. The Hindus did not come into the game at Test Match level until the 1950s. There are a number of great Hindu players, however, who have been selected for the West Indies team, including Rohan Kanhai and Neville Kalicharan.

In the villages outside Georgetown, street cricket is played with a sponge ball, and the pitch is a coconut mat laid out on the ground. Even during the rainy seasons, young players can be seen standing thigh-deep in water around a mat laid on the only piece of high, dry ground in a field.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular culture is as mixed as the various ethnic groups who live in Guyana. Georgetown offers a wide mix of museums and art galleries, and for the young people there are discos. A favorite kind of music among both Hindu and Afro-Guyanese is something called chutney, a hot, spicy mixture of traditional Hindu music and rock music.

The cinema still plays a large part in the lives of older people, and the favorite films among Hindus are those that are imported from India, depicting the great epics such as the story of Lord Rama.

The young are also turning more and more to the traditional Asian Indian songs and dances in their search for their artistic roots.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Many of the Guyanan Hindu folk arts and crafts are entwined with the Hindu fables and festivals.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Race has been a divisive issue in Guyana, with the Hindus accusing the Africans of racism and repression during the 28 years of rule by the People's National Congress party, during which they claimed that Hindu villages were attacked and plundered by security forces. The Africans dominate the Guyana Defense Force and the police. Street crime and violence are particularly notorious in Georgetown. Community police have now been introduced by the government into the city to try to retake control of the streets.

The new government has also announced its intention of introducing structural changes "with a human face" and aims to alleviate poverty through a basic-needs strategy. It also intends to increase foreign and local investment, production, and exports. Cheddi Jagan has promised a "lean and clean" government and is determined to end racial discrimination.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Indo-Guyanese women play a significant role as farmers, market vendors, teachers, nurses, civil servants, and clerks, as well as doing housework. Indian families are patriarchal and often function as corporate economic units, thus Indo-Guyanese women continue to fulfill traditional roles of wife, mother, and homemaker.

Until the 1930s, Indians tended to resist educating girls, but the example of other groups and the emergence of an Indian middle class, have led to a changed attitude. In 1925 only 25% of Indian children in primary schools were girls. In 1929, Subadri Lall was the first to qualify for matriculation to attend the University of London, establishing a unique record for local girls.

While many Indo-Guyanese women, especially among the working poor, have not attended school, they work to maintain their families and to send their children to school. Thus, these women contribute significantly to their household and community, planting their backyard with greens, raising chickens, goats, sheep, looking after their cows, selling milk, and buying and selling produce. Some also manage little shops in the villages and assist in their husbands' businesses, such as the tailor-shops and grocery shops. Despite their economic role, Indo-Guyanese women are not part of an established organization with leadership opportunities. It is still a social taboo for Indian women to join social organizations and carry the banners. However, a small group of middle-class Indian women in the urban areas are beginning to participate in public circles.

Even though many Indo-Guyanese women are now educated and have moved up in the social, political, and religious organizations, they are still marginalized. In 1965, a time when Indians were 50% of the population, Indo-Guyanese women comprised only 2.85% of all employees and only 13.5% of female employees on the staffs of all the government ministries. Currently, even though men dominate the economic and political spheres, a few women are senior officials in the government. Although there has been one female president, there is a paucity of women in the cabinet, the legislature, and the leadership of political parties.

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—revised by C. Vergara.

# HMONG AMERICANS

For more information on Hmong history and culture, *see* **Vol. 3: Hmong**.

## OVERVIEW

Hmong Americans first came to the United States in 1975 after the takeover of Vietnam and Laos by leftist regimes. Although many sources claim that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) promised to resettle the Hmong if they were defeated, only 1,000 Hmong were evacuated in the first year after defeat. Many Hmong were forced to flee across the borders of Vietnam and Laos into Thailand. There they lived in overcrowded refugee camps for months or even years.

In December 1975 the U.S. Congress finally agreed to start resettling Hmong refugees and brought 3,466 Hmong to the United States. The following year 10,200 refugees from Laos, some of them Hmong, were admitted to the United States. Hmong immigration continued over the next several years, and by 1990 the Hmong population in the United States had reached almost 100,000. The 2000 U.S. Census counted 186,310 Hmong Americans, and by 2006 the estimated population had risen to almost 210,000. About 44% of Hmong Americans in 2006 were foreign-born; 60% of them arrived before 1990, and the remaining 40% after 1990. Hmong Americans are generally very young; the median age in 2006 was under 20 years old (as opposed to 36 for the total U.S. population).

When the Hmong first arrived in the United States, resettlement agencies scattered members of the 12 traditional Hmong clans across the country. As soon as they were able, the Hmong made their way in small family groups to areas where they could reassemble their clan communities. The majority of Hmong Americans now live in California, with sizeable populations also in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Most live in farming towns and small cities.

Hmong Americans belong mainly to two Hmong tribes: White Hmong and Blue (or Green) Hmong. Each tribe speaks a different dialect of the Hmong language. Hmong is a monosyllabic, tonal language, meaning that most words have only one syllable, and the meaning of a word changes depending on which of eight tones (high, low, ascending, descending, etc.) is used to pronounce it. Because the Hmong language is so different from English, Hmong Americans are faced with a serious challenge in developing English-language proficiency. Their relatively recent arrival in the United States, along with their deep commitment to maintaining their Hmong identity, also contributes to language barriers as some 95% report speaking "a language other than English" at home. Over 40% do not speak English well.

Hmong legends and folklore have been passed down orally for many generations. Some tales have moral lessons; others convey mythical understandings of the world. Hmong Americans became interested in preserving these stories in written form, and a large bilingual collection, *Myths, Legends, and Folktales from the Hmong of Laos* (edited by Charles Johnson), was published by Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1985.



Most Hmong Americans continue to follow their traditional religious ways. Traditional Hmong religion is pantheistic, recognizing the presence of divine spirit in all things. Spirit cults, shamanism, and ancestor worship are the three major components of traditional Hmong religious life. Some Hmong Americans follow the Chao Fa religion of Laos, begun in the 1960s by Hmong prophet Yang Chong Leu (or Shang Lue Yang) who preached a return to traditional Hmong ways. Yang Chong Leu also promoted a traditional system of writing known as Pahawh Hmong, still used by Chao Fa followers today.

A number of Hmong converted to Christianity in Laos, and even more have converted since their arrival in the United States. Religious conversion has caused a great deal of division in the Hmong community, since religion is seen as an integral part of Hmong life, and Christianity is opposed to traditional Hmong beliefs and practices in many ways.

Rites of passage are particular areas of conflict. For example, whereas Christianity rejects the concept of reincarnation, traditional Hmong religion holds that when a man dies, he is reincarnated as a woman, and when a woman dies, she is reincarnated as a man. Therefore, traditional birth and death rituals involve preparations and protections for the soul that is about to enter the body of the newborn or leave the body of the deceased. The Christian Church finds these rituals unnecessary and even offensive and strongly discourages their practice.

Marriage customs have also undergone significant changes in the face of conflicting religious teachings and even societal

law codes. Traditionally, a Hmong man may kidnap a young woman and force himself on her sexually, thereby establishing her as a recognized marriage partner. In the United States, this is considered rape and is punishable by law (some young Hmong American women have pressed charges against men who carried out this custom). Polygyny (marriage with more than one woman at a time) is accepted and even common in traditional Hmong society but is illegal in the United States.

The most important traditional holiday celebrated by Hmong Americans is *noj peb caug*, the New Year Festival. In America, the festival begins sometime around the new moon in December (in Laos, the timing is much more specific) and lasts for a few days. It is the only holiday celebrated by the entire Hmong American community. For Hmong Americans, *noj peb caug* serves as an opportunity to reaffirm their Hmong identity, and so their New Year festivals generally include cultural fairs, dances, and exhibitions designed to teach young Hmong Americans about their ancestral traditions.

Traditional Hmong customs teach that while it is impolite to ask a stranger's name directly, it is polite, and common, to ask someone where he or she lives. It is also considered well mannered to try to keep visitors from leaving, encouraging them to stay and chat for a while longer. Hmong Americans generally hold to these traditional customs and are usually very friendly. They are also quite open to other ethnic groups, welcoming opportunities to teach others about Hmong culture.

Coming from a rural agricultural background, Hmong Americans have had a difficult time adapting to life in the

industrialized United States. Language barriers and lack of appropriate education and job skills prevent many Hmong Americans from finding adequate employment. In 2006 about one out of every three Hmong Americans lived below the poverty level and many depended on public assistance in order to survive. Poverty and unemployment lead to malnutrition, lower immunities, depression, and other stress-related diseases.

Although Hmong Americans are generally very healthy, there was almost an epidemic among Hmong American men in the late 1970s and 1980s of Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome, in which death occurs suddenly and mysteriously during sleep. Western medical researchers have linked the syndrome to breathing difficulties, but many Hmong Americans believe it is caused by an evil spirit that sits on the victims' chests while they sleep. It is often difficult for Western doctors to work effectively with Hmong American patients because Western and Hmong concepts of disease and healing are so different.

Traditional Hmong healing is based on the shamanistic view of the world that divides the universe into the spirit world and material world. Illness is believed to be caused most often by the loss of one's spirit, when the soul wanders from the body to escape emotional and physical stresses. Hmong shamans perform rituals to call the soul back to the body. There are also Hmong healers who have the *neng*, a healing spirit in their bodies. The *neng* and accompanying healing skills are inherited from another clan member. These healers can not only call back lost souls but also fight off evil spirits that may have brought on an illness.

The Hmong also have a great depth of knowledge about the healing properties of herbs, and most Hmong American households have a small medicinal herb garden. Herbal healers are nearly always women. Massage may be combined with herbal treatments for some ailments, such as stomach ache.

Hmong American families tend to be quite large. According to the 2006 American Community Survey, Hmong American families had an average of 5.36 persons, as compared to 2.61 persons in the average European American family. Hmong Americans are also very young, with a median age of 19 in 2006 (as opposed to 36 for the total U.S. population).

Since Hmong families are very "child-centered," children are treasured. This does not mean they are indulged, however. Hmong parents are quite strict with their children, exercising a great deal of control over their lives. American values stress personal freedom and a greater degree of independence for young people. Therefore, Hmong American children often come into conflict with their more traditional parents over issues of discipline and freedom of choice. Many Hmong American and other Southeast Asian youth feel moved to escape these conflicts by running away from home, creating a growing population of teenage runaways.

Extended families were the traditional basis of Hmong households, but building codes in the United States prevent large numbers of people from living together under the same roof. So Hmong Americans have had to split up into smaller nuclear-family units. The traditional clans are also losing importance, although clan leaders are still well respected.

Most foreign-born Hmong American adults have had little formal schooling. Only about 40% of those over the age of 25 are high school graduates. Young Hmong Americans, however, have shown great aptitude for Western education and have

high rates of secondary and post-secondary school attendance. About half of Hmong Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 were in college in 2006.

Among older, uneducated Hmong Americans, however, prospects are bleak and unemployment is high. Of those who have managed to find employment, most work at blue-collar jobs in manufacturing or sales and service.

One source of income for Hmong Americans is the sale of traditional crafts, particularly *paj ntaub* (or *pa ndau*). Done exclusively by Hmong women, *paj ntaub* is a form of needlework that combines embroidery and appliqué to create intricate, colorful geometric designs. These elaborate designs are done entirely by hand without any measuring tools. A wide market has developed in the United States and other Western countries for *paj ntaub* items.

Hmong Americans are very concerned with the problems of adapting to life in American society. Hmong organizations have sprung up in Hmong American communities to address these problems and help local Hmong Americans develop the skills they need to succeed. The Hmong National Development is the largest such organization and acts as an advocate to obtain funding for the local organizations. Although Hmong Americans have much to overcome, they are eager to make life work in their new home and to become integral members of American society while remaining true to their Hmong identity.

Traditional Hmong culture is extremely patriarchal, giving women few rights and requiring them to be entirely submissive to the men in their lives. The more egalitarian society of the United States causes a great deal of confusion and conflict among first-generation Hmong immigrants as they experience the culture shock of having their entire family structure disrupted. Men are frustrated in their attempts to rule the household by beating their wives and children, an acceptable practice in traditional Hmong society but liable to arrest and prosecution in America. Women find new opportunities and rights available that call into question traditional patriarchal values. Second-generation Hmong Americans also find themselves in conflict with their first-generation parents and grandparents as they try to navigate the divide between Hmong and American culture. The tension of these conflicts can lead to domestic violence and even suicide or homicide.

In response to the frightening rise of abuse cases and suicide/homicide rates among Hmong Americans in Minnesota in the 1990s, the Hmong Women's Circle (HWC) was created to help Hmong American girls explore their traditional culture and make healthy choices about which beliefs and practices to honor and which to change. The curriculum allows teenage girls to discuss their experiences in a safe context and begin to address the inequalities and expectations that foster abuse. The program was so successful that in 2003 the Hmong Men's Circle (HMC) was established to help teenage Hmong American boys to deal with similar pressures. As of 2007 some 250 youth had been served by HWC and HMC groups across the United States.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

## HONDURANS

**LOCATION:** Honduras

**POPULATION:** 7,639,327

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English; local dialects

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (95%); Protestantism

(Methodist, Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Assembly of God churches); native religions combined with Christianity

### 1 INTRODUCTION

A series of archeological excavations have demonstrated that the country now known as Honduras was once an important zone of the Mayan empire during the pre-Columbian period. The most prominent treasure among the great number of vestiges and ruins discovered in the region is Copán, a major Mayan city that flourished during the Mayan classical period—5th through 9th centuries—in that area. The city of Copán is well known for producing astonishing sculptures, most of which were used to decorate the central plaza of the city. These works of art have been considered some of the finest pieces of art in ancient Mesoamerica.

In 1502, in his fourth and last voyage to America, Christopher Columbus landed in Honduras and, two years later, the Spanish conquest began. Trujillo and Gracias were the most important cities during the three centuries of Spanish rule in Honduras. Throughout this historical stage, the Spanish crown administered the zone with an iron fist, depleting its natural resources and neglecting its aborigine population. In addition, multiple diseases, brought by the Conquistadores and slave laborers from other countries, made the native population under Spanish control drop to an estimated 8,000 in 1541.

Once Honduras ran out of gold and silver, the region became neglected by the Spanish. Consequently, English pirates harassed the area, and the Caribbean coast was effectively out of Spain's control. Spain granted Honduras independence in 1821. However, in 1822 the United Central American Provinces decided to join the newly declared Mexican Empire of Iturbide, which would collapse after less than a year. To fill the vacuum that followed the fall of the Mexican Empire, a new political organization was born: the Federal Republic of Central America. However, after 15 years of existence the Federation came to its end and, following its disintegration, Honduras became an independent nation again in 1838.

After Honduras achieved its freedom, the country fell under the grip of dictators and experienced some 300 internal rebellions, civil wars, and changes of government. The country's constitution was rewritten 17 times between 1821 and 1982.

The 20th century was marked by political and economic instability. Probably the most unusual event in Honduras was the so-called Soccer War. The conflict, also known as the 100 Hours War, was a five-day war between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969. Even though the tension between both countries was rooted in political differences, mostly because of the great flow of immigrant from El Salvador to Honduras, it was a soccer match between both nations that triggered an armed conflict. During the 1980s, Honduras served as a haven for anti-Sandinista contras fighting the Marxist Nicaraguan gov-

ernment and as an ally to Salvadoran government forces fighting leftist guerrillas.

Economically, Hondurans have relied heavily on exports, particularly bananas and coffee, making them vulnerable to shifts in commodity prices. In addition, Honduran dependence on natural resources has made their economy highly vulnerable to natural disasters, such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which killed about 5,600 people and caused approximately \$2 billion dollars in economic damages.

In 2008, Honduras was considered the second poorest country in Central America, with sharp income inequalities and unemployment rates close to 30%. Because of this uneven distribution of wealth and lack of opportunities, many Hondurans have migrated to other countries seeking better quality of life. Consequently, Honduras is the fastest growing remittance destination in the region, with inflows representing over a quarter of GDP.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Honduras has a long Caribbean Sea coastline to the north and a small Pacific Ocean coastline on the south, along the Gulf of Fonseca. Guatemala is its neighbor to the west, El Salvador to the south and west, and Nicaragua to the south and east. The Bay Islands lie in the Caribbean. Excluding the coastal areas, Honduras is a mountainous country: more than three-fourths of the land area is occupied by cordilleras with small, scattered, but numerous valleys where forests give way to agriculture and livestock raising. The nation's largest port and its largest industrial city lie in the Caribbean lowlands. Rainfall is plentiful in Honduras, and there are many rivers.

The climate is generally hot with high humidity in its coasts. The temperatures vary according to the altitude of each particular zone. For instance, in the lowlands the average temperatures are about 25°C (82°F) while in the mountains, average temperatures are close to 14°C (58°F).

According to archeological excavations, Honduras has been inhabited since the 1st century AD. Copán city confirms that the region was one of Mayan civilization's main centers. Therefore, it is possible to assess that most of Amerindians living in Honduras are Lenca—indigenous groups related to the Mayan and circum-Caribbean populations.

With just over 7 million people, most of them in the highlands, Honduras is not a crowded country. About 90% of all Hondurans are mestizos, of mixed European and Amerindian ancestry. Of the remainder, about 7% is Indian, 2% is black, and 1% of the population is white.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the national and official language, but English is often understood along the Caribbean coast, and Bay Islanders speak English as their native tongue. Black Caribs (Garifuna), descendants of freed black slaves and Carib Indians, speak a language related to Carib. Miskito, who are of mixed Indian, African, and European descent and live along the Caribbean coast, speak an Indian tongue with contributions from West African and European languages.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Among the folkloric beliefs found throughout Central America is the identification of a human being with a spirit (*nagual*), usually an animal, so closely connected that both are believed



to share the same soul. If one dies, so will the other. Similarly, a witch or other evildoer is considered able to assume an animal form. These beliefs are of Indian origin and, since Honduras does not have a large Indian population, are not as strongly held as in Guatemala, for example.

Folk stories tell of a variety of spirits, many of whom live in wells or caves. El Duende is an imp with a big sombrero and a taste for pretty young girls, whom he courts by wearing red trousers and blue jackets and by tossing pebbles at them. *Curanderos* are faith healers who can cure nervous ailments and can dispel the *vista fuerte*, or evil eye, which is often held responsible for children's illnesses. The god of the Lenca, the largest Indian group in Honduras, was Icelaca, who appears as a many-eyed, two-faced stone idol. *La compostura*, a Lenca rite dedicated to the land, consists of offerings to an altar in the shape of a wooden frame on which pine boughs are placed in the form of a cross. Plants on display symbolize the spirits to whom the rite is dedicated.

Lempira was a 16th-century Indian chieftain who fought the Spanish; he is much admired in national mythology, and the national currency is named for him. A hymn to Lempira has, as its chorus, the words: "Hondurans! With epic lyre/and brightly clad/we intone a hymn to Lempira/to the patriot of heroic valor."

## 5 RELIGION

Nearly 95% of the population is Roman Catholic. Protestants account for about 3% and are growing rapidly because of ac-

tive proselytizing by evangelical groups, such as the Methodists, Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Assemblies of God.

Although nominally Catholic, many Hondurans have incorporated pre-conquest indigenous traditions into their religious practices. The *rogación* is a special Mass, or procession, asking for rain. Each community has its own patron saint. The *guanacasco* is a celebration of the patron saint visited by saints from neighboring communities. Copal (a tree resin) is burned for incense, an ancient Mayan custom, and there are offerings to the sun. Pilgrimages to saints' shrines are common. Most houses will have an image or picture of a saint displayed on a wall.

Black Caribs, although chiefly Methodist, retain many African elements in their religious practices. *Digui* is a rite for the dead. Although most Miskito now belong to the Moravian Church, they formerly worshipped Wan-Aisa as their Supreme God. Yu Lapta was the Sun God, Kati the Moon Goddess, and Alwani was the Thunder God.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As in other Latin American countries, Christmas (December 25) and Holy Week (late March or early April), culminating in Easter Sunday, are the chief religious holidays. A Christmas tradition is the *posada*, a celebration held nightly beginning on December 16.

Just over the border in Guatemala, Esquipulas is the home of a dark-skinned wooden sculpture of Jesus that draws pilgrims from Honduras and other Central American countries to a celebration that begins on January 15 of each year. The feast day of the Virgin of Suyapa, Honduras' patron saint, is on February 2. A tiny wooden image to which miraculous powers have been attributed since the 18th century is on display at the basilica in Suyapa, a village near Tegucigalpa, the capital. Another manifestation of the Virgin is celebrated on 8 December (the day of the commemoration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception) at Juticalpa, with a procession bearing her image as the climax. Between December 25 and January 6, Garifuna men celebrate Yancunú with dancing, singing, and the wearing of masks to bring prosperity in the new year.

Of the secular holidays, the most important are Independence Day on September 15 and the birthday of Francisco Morazán on October 3. Morazán was the last president of the United Provinces of Central America, a federation that only lasted from 1823 to 1842.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism of infants is standard and is usually followed by a celebration. Among the upper- and middle-classes, dating is restricted. A prospective suitor is carefully checked out, and engagements of several years are common. Perhaps half of all Honduran couples, however, live together without a marriage license or a religious ceremony. A novena is commonly held after death, usually at home. A second novena may be held six months later.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Honduran customs are more conservative and traditional than those of the United States. A great emphasis is normally placed on courtesy and proper dress among the upper- and middle-classes. On the other hand, friends are more demonstrative

than in the United States. Men often embrace on meeting and departing. Women often embrace and kiss one or both cheeks, or at least touch cheeks.

Since most people are named for a saint, they celebrate their saint's day as well as (or in place of) their own birthday. Friends and relatives are invited to the home.

There has been less class conflict in Honduras than in the other Hispanic Central American countries. This is because the country has a relatively large number of peasants tilling their own plots rather than working as laborers for large estates and because the ruling elite has been willing to form alliances with others. However, social tensions have increased as landowners have accumulated more land in recent decades for cattle grazing.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

At least two-thirds of the Honduran people live below the poverty line. About one-third has no access to healthcare, and about one-fifth of all young children are malnourished. At least 0.5 million more housing units are needed in Honduras. The typical dwelling is a two-room adobe bungalow with a tiled roof. Poor peasants, however, live in one-room huts made of bamboo, sugarcane, and corn stalks, with dirt floors, and most of them till small, marginal plots or work for wages on larger farms. Migrants from the country to the city generally live in crowded slums.

The upper and middle classes generally have domestic servants and live in houses with thick adobe, brick, or concrete walls. Many have grillwork over the windows and as part of the structure of balconies on the upper floors. Homes usually have no front yard but rather an enclosed patio.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family solidarity is of basic importance and depends on mutual assistance from all its members. Families are usually large, since Honduran women give birth to an average of about five children each, and grandparents, plus aunts and uncles and their children, may also live under the same roof. Whether they live together or apart, the various branches of a family share and cooperate, finding work for unemployed members, extending loans, or taking in needy kin. As in other Latin American countries, *compadres* (godparents) also provide support to hard-pressed family members.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most people dress casually, with the men wearing loose trousers and shirts and the women wearing one-piece calico or cotton dresses or loose blouses and skirts. Open sandals are a common form of footwear. The poor generally are clad in secondhand rather than store-bought clothes. Colonial costumes are worn only on special occasions like fiestas. On these occasions, the women may wear silk dresses or cotton dresses embroidered with silk, using old Mayan patterns and designs.

The Tolupanes Indians are the only group in Honduras whose dress is distinctive. The *balandrán* is a one-piece, sleeveless male article of clothing. Women wear brightly colored dresses and silver necklaces with brightly painted beads made of dried seeds and thorns.

## 12 FOOD

Tortillas, made of cornmeal rolled into thin pancakes, are the staple of the diet, supplemented by beans, the chief source of protein. The poor generally eat tortillas and beans at every meal, generally supplemented with starches such as cassava and plantains. Rice, meat, eggs, and fish are served less often. Although pigs and chickens are raised widely in the countryside, their meat is reserved for special occasions. Green vegetables are not common in the average diet either.

*Mondongo*, a richly flavored tripe soup, is a popular Honduran dish. Other specialties include carrots stuffed with cheese, creamed beets and plantains, and corn dumplings in honey. The Caribbean diet is more exotic. The Black Caribs eat cassava in the form of big tortillas, and a mash made of ground plantains and bananas. *Baili* is a flour tortilla dipped in coconut soup with crab. *Tapado* is a soup made from coconut milk to which clams, crab, shrimp, fish heads, and plantains are added. The *mondongo hondureño* recipe includes cleaned beef tripe (innards), pig's feet, a number of vegetables, bread-crumbs, and a tomato sauce with spices and corn oil added.

*Chicha* is a homemade drink made of fermented corn. Also, Black Caribs make a drink out of fermented corn and sugarcane. Regional dishes are also common. In the south the typical dish is the *sopa de hombre* (man soup) and in the west *queso con chile* (cheese with chili peppers). Throughout the country Hondurans also eat *yucca con chicharrón*.

## 13 EDUCATION

At least 20% of Hondurans cannot read or write. Education is free and compulsory between the ages of 7 and 14, and more than 80% of all children of primary-school age are in school. However, fewer than half who are enrolled in public schools complete the primary level. The middle and upper classes generally send their children to private schools, often church-run. The chief institution of higher learning, the National Autonomous University of Honduras, is located in Tegucigalpa, the capital, and has branches in San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba. There are also three private universities.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

José Cecilio del Valle wrote the declaration of independence for the Central American federation, which failed to survive. Father José Trinidad Reyes founded what became the National University in 1847. Juan Ramón Molina was an important 19th-century poet. Rafael Heliodoro Valle, a poet and historian, was the most respected literary figure of the 20th century. Other 20th-century Honduran writers include the novelist Argentina Díaz Lozanto and the poet Clementina Suarez.

José Miguel Gómez was an 18th-century painter. Among 20th-century painters are Arturo López Rodezno and Carlos Garay. The primitive landscape paintings of José Antonio Velásquez are much admired.

Drums and the flute were the musical instruments of Amerindians before the Spanish conquest. The main instrument now is the marimba, which is similar to the xylophone and is backed by other band instruments.

## 15 WORK

More than half the labor force is not formally employed; it includes subsistence farmers, small shopkeepers, and self-



*Hondurans' diet is supplemented by starches like cassava and plantains. (Cory Langley)*

employed craftspeople. Women often seek jobs as domestic servants or, in urban areas, act as street vendors. Men supplement their income from tilling their small plots by working on plantations for part of the year. The small middle class consists of professionals, merchants, farmers, business employees, and civil servants. The minimum wage was as low as \$1.60 per day for farm workers in the mid-1990s.

## 16 SPORTS

As elsewhere in Central America, *fútbol* (soccer) is the most popular sport. The so-called Soccer War of 1969 followed matches between the national teams of Honduras and El Salvador; more than 1,000 Hondurans were killed in the four-day struggle. Honduras also has bullfights and, at fiestas, such traditional forms of sport as greased-pole climbing and the *carrera de cintas*, a horseback-riding race in which the rider must run a stick through small rings at full gallop, are common.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are more than 20 folk dances, based on combinations of Spanish, Amerindian, and African influences. The Garifuna holds two fertility dances—*sanvey* and *vanaroga*—with different songs by men and women. The Miskito generally form a circle when making music and sing and dance in turn to the accompaniment of drums and other instruments. Social dances are also held. Salsa, merengue, and Mexican *rancheras* are also popular. Fireworks are part of every celebration. Televi-



sion is still generally restricted to the cities, but radio reaches every part of the country.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Artisans carve objects ranging from wall hangings to furniture from mahogany and other tropical hardwoods. Baskets, mats, and hammocks are woven from plant fibers such as henequen. Ceramics include porcelain objects in the form of animals, especially roosters. The Lenca are noted for their pottery. Campa and Ojajana also produce distinctive pottery. Other handicrafts include embroidery and leather goods, such as belts and handbags.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Nearly two-thirds of the Honduran people live in poverty. Tuberculosis and gastroenteritis are serious health problems, as are influenza, malaria, typhoid, and pneumonia. Most of the people do not have access to running water and sanitation facilities. Unemployment and underemployment are high, and the country is dependent on income from only two commodities, bananas and coffee. The crime rate surged in the 1990s and there has been widespread domestic violence against women.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Honduran women hold only 8.6% of the seats in parliament and earn one-third of the income of Honduran males. Honduran women have one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the region. It is estimated that 8 out every 10 women suffer from domestic abuse. Domestic violence remains a major public health problem; with an increase from 3,000 cases in 2000 to over 5,000 in 2001 in the capital alone.

With one of Latin America's highest HIV prevalence levels, Honduran women accounted for 61% of new HIV cases in 2005. In addition, Honduras has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in Central America: 48% of women between 15 and 24 years old have been pregnant at least once and 59% of pregnancies occurred before the age of 17.

On a positive note, Honduran girls are gaining ground and are equally as likely to be literate and enrolled in primary school as boys. Between 1998 and 2001 the female illiteracy rate fell from 34.7% to 19.8%. However, women are not enrolling in higher education as much as their male counterparts do.

In addition to better education rates, the period 1995–2004 saw the publication of the Domestic Violence Act (1997), the act establishing the National Institute for Women (1998), and the Equal Opportunities for Women Act (2000). Even though the latter provides for a minimum 30% quota for women with respect to posts filled by popular vote, the number of women as titular deputies has remained extremely low. Also, women are poorly represented in public posts filled by appointment: in the government's cabinet there were only three women ministers and three women deputy ministers in 2008.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# HOP I

**LOCATION:** United States (Arizona)

**POPULATION:** estimated 14,000 enrolled tribal members

**LANGUAGE:** English; Hopi

**RELIGION:** Traditional Hopi

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Hopi are a Pueblo people, most likely descending from the Hisatsinom (Hopi for “people of long ago”) who lived among the cliffs of what is now the Southwest desert as much as 2,000 years ago. A prolonged drought from AD 1275–1300 apparently forced the Hisatsinom to relocate. They split into several different bands that settled in different areas of the region and have since developed into the various Pueblo peoples. The Hopi chose the westernmost area, in northeastern Arizona, and built their homes on the tops of almost inaccessible mesas. This inaccessibility kept them largely protected from the invasions by Spanish and then European American conquerors. Therefore, the Hopi have been able to maintain their traditional ways of life and beliefs almost uninterrupted up through the present day.

This is not to say that the Hopi have suffered no effects from the European invasions of their lands. Between 1519 and 1650, ten previously flourishing Hopi villages were wiped out by disease and bloodshed brought to their lands by the Spanish from Mexico. Conflicts between the Spanish and Pueblo peoples continued throughout the 17th century. The Spanish conquered all the Pueblos by the mid-17th century and built Catholic churches in every village. They forced the Pueblo people to convert to Christianity, using extreme torture as a persuasive tactic. At the Hopi village of Oraibi in 1655, Spanish Friar Salvador de Guerra caught a Hopi in what he called “an act of idolatry” (in other words, following his own Hopi Way). De Guerra whipped the Hopi in front of the whole village until the Hopi was covered in blood. Then de Guerra poured burning turpentine over him. By these methods, Spanish made nominal Christians of the Hopis and other Pueblo peoples and drove Native religious practices underground.

On 10 August 1680, the Pueblos revolted and drove out the Spanish. This was the first time the Pueblo peoples had acted together. Once the Spanish were gone, the Pueblos returned to their independent ways. Therefore, when the Spanish returned in 1692, they met no unified resistance and reconquered the Pueblos fairly easily. The Hopi lived in such a remote area that they remained mostly untouched by this second Spanish conquest. Other Pueblo peoples fled to the Hopi lands and took refuge there. The Hopi moved all their villages to the very tops of the mesas after the 1680 revolt and so were virtually impregnable. In 1700 the Hopi made it very clear to the Spanish that they were not interested in Christianity when they destroyed the mission church in the village of Awatovi (killing the priests and other Spanish in residence, throwing their bodies over the edge of the mesa). No other Christian missions were established in Hopi territory until the 1890s.

In modern times the Hopi have had to fight European American industry and expansion. On 15 May 1971, the Hopi filed suit to stop the Peabody Coal Company from strip min-

ing for coal on 100 square miles of the Hopi reservation. The Hopi consider Black Mesa to be sacred land, and strip mining would be a sacrilegious invasion of that holy place. Ten years later, in 1981, the Hopi sued to stop construction of a ski resort in the San Francisco mountains, another sacred place. The Hopi lost this suit.

The Hopi have only acted as a “tribe” since 1936, when the European American writer Oliver La Farge wrote the Hopi constitution. Before that time, the Hopi were simply people who followed the Hopi Way. The name “Hopi” is a shortened form of *Hopisinom*, which translates as “people of humility, respectful of their environment and earth stewards.” Today, Hopi translate their name as “one who follows the path,” or “one who walks in the right direction.” As the late Hopi elder Percy Lomaquahu of Hotevilla explained it:

Hopi means “good in every respect.” Humbleness means peace, honesty—all mean Hopi. True, honest, perfect words—that’s what we call Hopi words. In all the languages, not just in Hopi. We strive to be Hopi. We call ourselves Hopi because maybe one or two of us will become Hopi. Each person must look into their heart and make changes so that you may become Hopi when you reach your destination.

(In Stephen Trimble, *The People... Santa Fe: School of American Research*, 1993, p. 58.)

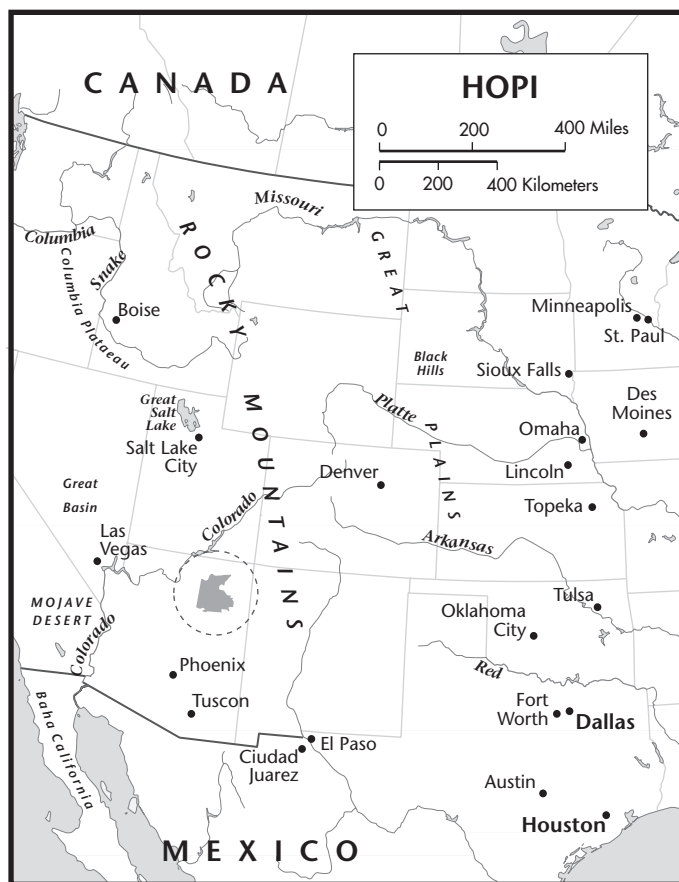
## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Hopi currently live in 12 villages located along the southern rim of Black Mesa in northeastern Arizona. Theirs is the driest of any of the Pueblo lands. Over the centuries, the Hopi have developed a reputation as the most skilled dry-farmers in the world. Ecologists have called them “environmental wizards.” The village of Old Oraibi has been inhabited since at least AD 1150, rivaling Acoma as the longest continuously inhabited village in the United States. Old Oraibi was for centuries the “capital” of Hopiland. Today it is a village of just over 100 people, but still highly respected by the Hopis of the third Mesa.

Black Mesa is divided by washes into three separate mesas, named in order of approach from the east: First Mesa, Second Mesa, and Third Mesa. Hopiland (or the Hopi reservation) is entirely surrounded by the much larger Navajo reservation. Hopiland encompasses 1.6 million acres over 3,862 square miles. While there are over 10,000 members of the Hopi tribe in the United States, only 7,061 of them live on the reservation (according to the 1990 U.S. Census). Modern Hopi communities are located at the bases of the three mesas. The ancient villages remain on the mesa summits. The area receives about ten inches of rain per year.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Hopi language is a member of the Uto-Aztecan family of Native North American languages. It is related to the languages of the Ute and Paiute peoples. It is not related to any of the other Pueblo languages. Each of the three mesas in Hopiland has its own dialect of the Hopi language. The first Hopi dictionary is currently being compiled in the Third Mesa dialect. Because the Hopi have lived in an inaccessible region, protected from most of the invasions by Spanish and European American peoples, the language has remained alive into the present



day. It is also required that a young Hopi speak the Hopi language in order to be initiated into adulthood.

The dictionary currently in process is the first attempt to create a standard written system for the Hopi language. Hopi has never before been a written language, so the oral tradition has grown strong and rich. It has become so poetic and dramatic that it is difficult to write down. Any written material in Hopi will necessarily have lost something in the translation. The dictionary compilers hope that by making a standard written system available, the Hopi people will begin to develop a literature that is their own. It will take some time, however, to adapt the language to written forms.

Ritual forms of the Hopi language are used by an exclusive group of priests and priestesses who keep this ritual language secret. This form of the Hopi language remains unknown to those outside the group.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

All Hopi stories begin with a formal opening: *Aliksa'i*. There is no exact English translation, but it means something like "Attention!" or "Let's take up the story where we left it." Because time for the Hopi is cyclical rather than linear, the Hopi care more about *where* a story happened than *when*.

The Hopi have an emergence-type creation story. The First Way of Life, or First World (Tokpela, meaning "Endless Space") was an infinite void until the Creator created finite forms, including human beings. For a time, all lived peacefully there, until some humans lost sight of the true way and fell

into decadence. The Creator allowed those humans who still had sight of the truth (and those who were willing to follow them) to emerge into the Second Way of Life, or Second World (Tokpa, "Dark Midnight") before he destroyed the First Way of Life with fire. The same course of events took place in the Second Way of Life, which the Creator then destroyed with ice after allowing the people to emerge into the Third Way of Life, or Third World (Kuskurza, an ancient name with no modern translation). When the same corruption began to occur in the Third World, representatives from all forms of life held a council and decided the Third World had become out of balance and it was time to migrate to the Fourth Way of Life, (Tivongyapavi, "The Earth Center"). The Creator allowed the peoples to choose a food before destroying the Third World with water. The Hopi chose a short blue ear of corn. Blue corn requires more work to grow, so the Hopi chose a life of hardship and humility. But blue corn is also heartier, so they also chose a life of strength and health. Blue corn symbolism runs throughout Hopi life. Blue corn is sometimes equated with the Hopi Way: planting, tending, and harvesting, it follows the path of the ancestors and fulfills the contract made with Ma'asau, keeper of the Fourth World who allowed the people to emerge into this Fourth World if they agreed to act as its caretakers. It allows the Hopi to reexperience the creation of the world. The Hopi must perform certain rituals and follow religious rules set out for them by Ma'asau if they are to keep this Fourth World in balance. Since the time of contact with Europeans, the Hopi feel this world has lost its balance. They call it *koyanisquatsi*, "life out of balance." Because of this, they must perform their rituals and follow the Hopi Way even more diligently to regain and maintain this world's balance.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Hopi believe themselves to be the caretakers of the earth, of this Fourth Way of Life (Tivongyapavi, "The Earth Center"). They perform certain rituals and follow a set of religious rules in order to keep this world in balance. These rules and rituals are called "the Hopi Way." Hopi ceremonies focus on creating community harmony, bringing rain for the crops, and honoring *katsinas* and Hopi ancestors. *Katsinas* (often called *kachinas* by European Americans) are spirits who live in the San Francisco mountains near Hopiland. The Hopi do not worship *katsinas*; rather, the *katsinas* act as intermediaries between the forces of nature and human beings. The *katsinas* visit Hopi villages for six months every year, arriving in December for the solstice ceremony (Powamuy) and leaving after the Home Dance (Niman) in July to return to the San Francisco peaks. Throughout the months between December and July, the *katsinas* dance frequently, bestowing gifts on the people. In Hopi villages, *katsinas*, represented by *katsina* societies, dance in the village plaza for all to see. Other Pueblo peoples allow only the initiated to see the *katsinas* dance.

The plaza of each village is the "heart-place," the center of the world for those villagers. It is the place where all four directions come together, where all the balanced forces of the world meet: north-south-east-west, the Sun above and Earth below, winter-summer, male buildings and female space, etc. A half-buried rock surrounded by offerings of corn meal and feathers marks the exact center of each village. The sacred place for the Hopi and other Pueblo peoples is the *kiva*, an underground chamber entered and exited by a ladder through a hole in the

roof. Religious rites and other activities are held in the *kiva*. The traditional religious leader of the Hopi is called the *kik-mongwi* and is often a member of the Bear Clan, the first clan to arrive in Hopiland, according to Hopi legend.

All Hopi are initiated into katsina societies at about age 9–11. As adults, Hopi may be initiated into priesthood societies (called *wuutsim*) priestess societies, or Snake societies. Young children are given katsina dolls as teaching tools to learn about the katsinas. Until they are initiated into the katsina society, children are not permitted to learn about esoteric matters.

Another character in the Hopi Way is the sacred clown. Clown dancers break all the social and religious rules, performing acts that the people are forbidden to perform. By showing life as it should not be but often is, clowns allow the Hopi to laugh at themselves and to see how they need to improve their behavior.

During the 1880s, the U.S. government divided up the Native North American reservations between religious groups. The Hopi were assigned to the Mennonites (and Baptists). The Reverend H. R. Voth arrived in 1893 and tried to destroy the Hopi Way and replace it with Mennonite Christianity. The Hopi despised him; modern Hopi still remember Voth and what he attempted to do.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are no holidays in the Hopi calendar.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When a child is born, a perfectly formed ear of white corn, representing its spiritual mother, is placed next to the newborn child and left there for 20 days. During this time, the child is also kept in darkness because it still belongs to the spirit world. On the 20th day, the mother passes the ear of corn over the child four times and names her or him. All the aunts who wish to be the child's godmother do the same. Then the mother and her mother (the child's grandmother) take the child outside toward the east before sunrise. When the sun comes up over the horizon and shines on the child, the child becomes fully human, belonging completely to the earthly realm from then on until death. The child is called by all of the names given to it by its aunts for the first few years of its life. Eventually, whichever name seems to stick becomes the child's name.

The corn ritual is repeated at the time of the child's initiation into the katsina society at age 9–11 and again at her or his initiation into Priest, Priestess, Snake, or other societies at adulthood. Boys grow their hair long when they are initiated into adulthood. Boys' initiation rites include a ceremonial hunt using the ancient Hopi "throwing stick," modeled after the sparrow hawk's wing. Sparrow hawks hunt by diving down onto their prey (such as a rabbit) and stunning it by hitting it on the back of the head with their wings. They then kill the prey with their talons.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Hopi Way teaches that all of creation is interdependent with every living being enmeshed in an intricate web of relationships with all other beings. This means that interpersonal relationships must be approached with care and respect to maintain harmony. The Hopi live very closely together in their small, isolated villages and so have learned to deal with

each other delicately. They are known as a simple agricultural people.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Many Hopi still live in traditional pueblos in either the ancient villages at the tops of the mesas or in the more modern communities at the mesas' bases. The Hopi build their pueblos of stone, rather than adobe as do the rest of the Pueblo peoples. Each pueblo begins as a single room with rooms of other families directly attached. As a family grows and new families are created through marriage and child-bearing, the pueblo grows upward as new rooms are added above. Some pueblos may reach four or five stories high. Traditional pueblos had no door or windows. They were entered and exited by a ladder through a hole in the roof. Modern pueblos have both doors and windows (though not all windows are covered with glass or screens). Many modern pueblos have modern conveniences, including running water and electricity. Some Hopi today live in housing provided by the federal government. About 20% of the housing in Hopiland was built before 1940. More than half was built before 1970. At least 75% of Hopi homes have running water from a public water system. About 8% have wells, and the other 17% haul their water from other sources. A study conducted in 2000 showed that about 30% of Hopi households did not have electrical service.

The Hopi are a very adaptable people, managing to maintain their traditional ways while adopting worthwhile elements from neighboring cultures. In Hopiland, traditional healing arts are used in conjunction with modern Western medicine. Those diseases that cannot be cured with traditional medicine are treated with Western medicine and vice versa.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Clans are vitally important to the Hopi. Clan membership is inherited through the mother. Women own the houses, food, seed for next year's planting, springs and cisterns, and the small gardens near the house (which they tend). Men do the herding, hunting, and larger-scale farming away from the house. Men also gather and haul fuel, do the spinning and weaving, and make moccasins. Women tend to exercise their responsibility at home rather than in public life. Recently, however, more Hopi women are claiming authority outside the home, serving on tribal councils, etc.

In general, Hopi do not discipline their children physically. Instead, they use lectures and teasing to teach children the Hopi Way.

## 11 CLOTHING

Hopi today wear Western-style clothing except for ceremonial purposes. Traditionally, unmarried Hopi girls wore their hair in a style unique to the Hopi, protruding from both sides of the head in the shape of a squash blossom.

## 12 FOOD

Corn is the center of Hopi life. They care for it as they do their children—diligently and tenderly. Many of their religious ceremonies focus on bringing rain so that the corn will grow. In the dry desert where the Hopi live, planting corn, melons, squash, beans, and other crops shows faith in life.

The Hopi adopted wheat, melons, apples, peaches, pears, tomatoes, and chiles from the Spanish and Mexicans. They gathered piñon nuts and acorns, wild roots, grasses, and seeds to supplement their diet, especially when the rains did not come and the planted crops failed. They also kept flocks of tame turkeys for meat. All of these foods still figure largely in the Hopi diet.

On most ceremonial occasions and at other special events, the Hopi serve *piki* bread, paper-thin bread made from blue corn meal. The thin batter is spread on a hot polished stone and then peeled off when it is cooked. Several layers of cooked bread are rolled together while still warm. These layered rolls become crisp when cool.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Hopi are very concerned with education. They realize that Western education is necessary for survival in today's world, while a traditional education in the Hopi Way is as vital for the world's survival as ever. Therefore, they want their children to have both Hopi and Western educations. From 1887 to 1911, Hopi children were forcibly taken to boarding schools by the U.S. government to be trained in European American ways. Though Hopi students are no longer forced to attend boarding schools, many still do because of a lack of adequate schools at home. Most Hopi children today attend local public schools, which have a majority of Native North Americans enrolled. These schools receive much less funding than schools with a majority of European American students. For example, from 1976 to 1979, the Cibola County school board spent \$38 per student at the Laguna-Acoma High School (which has a majority of Native North American students) and \$802 per student at Grants High School (with a European American student majority). Justifications for this difference put forth by European Americans, such as the argument that Native North Americans do not pay taxes on tribal lands, simply do not hold up to examination (Native North Americans pay heavy taxes on other things, such as mining revenues, etc.).

In 1986, after years of campaigning and preparation, Hopi High School opened on the Hopi reservation. It is a federally funded Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school, and its school board is made up entirely of local Hopi. The school's aims are to give children the opportunity to be more involved in cultural activities at home and to give parents the opportunity to guide their children in day-to-day matters. Students are allowed to be absent on Friday, the day of preparation for ceremonial dances, whenever their village is holding a dance that weekend. The school board hopes eventually to establish a regular four-day school week, so that all students (and faculty) will have Fridays off as a matter of course.

Hopi students have a difficult time in Western educational settings because the Hopi Way is based on cooperation, not competition. Western education values competition, and most grading systems are based on it. So Hopi students are not prepared to be competitive in class, and many fail because of it. In 1990, for those Hopi over the age of 25, 37% had no high school diploma (17% had less than a ninth-grade education). Only about 3% had finished college to receive a Bachelor of Arts, and less than 2% had graduate degrees.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

According to the Hopi Way, everything in life is approached as an art. Cooking, farming, raising children, singing, dancing, praying, weaving, making pottery and jewelry—all are forms of art. Traditional Hopi crafts are pottery, weaving, basketry, and carving katsina dolls. Recently, the Hopi have also taken up painting (although the inside walls of kivas have always been decorated with paintings) and silverwork, particularly silver overlay. In ancient times Hopi men wove, Hopi women who lived on First Mesa made pottery, while women on the Second and Third Mesas made baskets (Second Mesa women made coiled baskets, and Third Mesa women made wicker baskets). These trends are still true today, although exceptions do exist. In the late 19th century a Hopi woman named Nampeyo revived the ancient art of pottery after seeing pottery artifacts dug out of the ground during an archaeological excavation. Hopi pottery is made by coiling the clay, then smoothing the surfaces with a polishing stone. The same designs are used today to decorate the pottery as were used by the ancient Hopi.

The Hopi art form best known, perhaps, to non-Hopi is the carving of katsina dolls. The dolls, called *tihu* in Hopi, are given to Hopi children as teaching tools to learn about the katsinas and the Hopi Way. Some Hopis object to the sale of katsina dolls. However, certain Hopi artists have developed their carving skills into a fine art and can sell their dolls to top galleries for thousands of dollars. Traditional katsina dolls are carved out of cottonwood root. Modern dolls for sale may be made of wood or other materials.

A group of five Hopi painters who were trained in Western art schools formed Artist Hopid in 1973 to try to bridge Western and Hopi cultures through art. Hopi photographer and filmmaker Victor Masayesva, Jr., has made two films about the Hopi: *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (1984) blends narration in English and Hopi with other sounds and images to tell a mythic version of Hopi history, and *Pott Starr* (1990) mixes animation with real-life action to poke fun at commercial tourism in Hopiland and non-Native fascination with Hopi artifacts.

Since there has never been a standard written Hopi language, there is no literary heritage among the Hopi. The oral tradition is very well developed, however. Hopi oral literature is richly poetic and dramatic, defying translation into English or onto paper.

### 15 WORK

The Hopi are shrewd businesspeople and have always been highly adaptable. There are many skilled laborers among the Hopi who are able to find work in non-Native businesses off the reservation. Yet, the unemployment rate in Hopiland has remained steady at 30% since 1990. The crafting of traditional Hopi arts for sale to tourists, galleries, and collectors provides more income than any other source on the reservation.

### 16 SPORTS

Hopi play many of the same sports enjoyed by all North Americans.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Each Hopi village sponsors religious dance ceremonies during the months of August through mid-October. These dances celebrate the harvest and give young Hopi a chance to mingle.

These dances are open to men and young unmarried women with no children. Young children of both sexes may also attend. The most popular dance is the Butterfly Dance for which men wear embroidered kilts and velvet shirts with ribbons.

The first Hopi radio station, KUYI 88.1 FM, debuted on 20 December 2000. KUYI programming includes Hopi language, internships for Hopi high school students, national and local news, and traditional and contemporary Native American music.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

All Hopi crafts are approached as forms of art. Hopi artisans have developed their skills to the level of fine art and can sell some of their pieces for thousands of dollars to top galleries and collectors.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

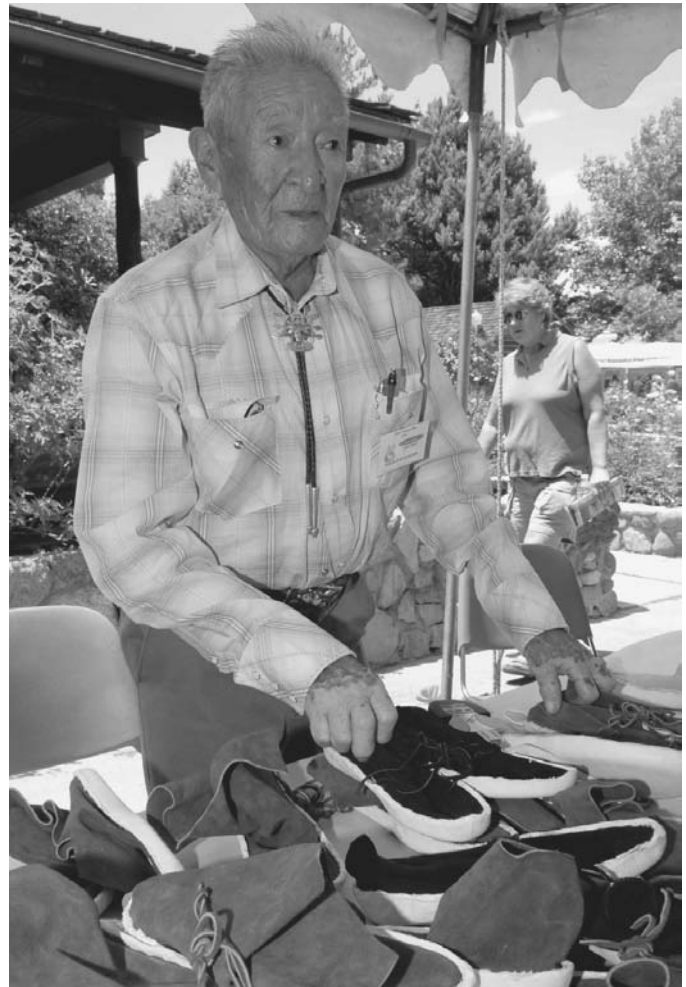
The Hopi are a peaceful, cooperative people who have learned to live closely together in a respectful way that maintains social harmony. The most serious conflicts among the Hopi themselves arise from the disagreement between Americanized Hopi who campaign for Western “progress” and traditionalists who wish to stay closer to the ancient Hopi Way. The Hopi tribal council was created, at the initiation of the U.S. government’s Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), by a handful of Americanized Hopi in 1935. The council represents only a minority of Hopi, and many traditionalists actively oppose it. The village of Shongopavi even sued the council in tribal court over proposed development projects.

Conflicts with non-Hopi center on land-use issues. Since 1974 the Hopi and Navajo have been embroiled in a conflict over what was known as the Joint Use Area—a region they have shared since the late 19th century. In 1974, the U.S. Congress passed a bill that partitioned the area between the Hopi and Navajo, requiring about 100 Hopi and thousands of Navajo to relocate. Many of these people had been living peacefully together on that land for generations. After years of wrangling with each other, the Hopi and Navajo are beginning to realize that it is not they but the Peabody Coal mining company that wants this land partitioned (the coal company wants access to the coal located there). So the Hopi and Navajo are now joining together to solve the question of land use in this area, leaving the federal government and mineral companies out of the negotiations.

The Peabody Coal Company is the subject of another Hopi conflict. When Peabody signed the first land-use lease in 1966 to strip mine for coal on Black Mesa, the Hopi tribal council agreed to this lease without consulting the rest of the Hopi. Nearly all Hopi except those on the council oppose strip mining, particularly in the sacred lands of Black Mesa. The coal mine also uses a great deal of already scarce water to transport mined coal down pipelines. This puts tremendous strain on the desert environment—the water table has dropped 70 feet since the mine went into operation. Water is precious to the Hopi; they will not survive if the water table drops much lower.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Hopi view gender as a balance of oppositions: male and female. Female aspects of the natural environment include earth, life, fertility, summer, south, west, plants, and soft substances. Male aspects of the natural environment include sky, death,



*Rex Pooyouma, a Hopi Indian artist, displays moccasins during the Prescott Indian Market in Prescott, Arizona. Pooyouma’s moccasins are on display in such places as the Peabody Museum in Boston and the Museum of Northern Arizona. (AP Images/The Daily Courier/Jo L. Keener)*

winter, north, east, and hard substances. Male and female forces of nature and the environment must be kept in balance, and these two forces rely on each other for completion. In the Hopi view of gender, females have a single nature: that of a life-giving mother. Males have a dual nature: as fathers who provide and protect as well as potential killers.

There are two stages in the life cycle for females and males in Hopi society. For females, *mano* are unmarried girls. *Mano* become *wuhti*, women, when they marry, which traditionally was between the ages of 16 and 18. A boy, *tiyo*, becomes a man, *taka*, when he is initiated into a ceremonial fraternity around the age of 18.

Infant girls are given *tithu*, kachina dolls, by their maternal uncles. The *tithu* (plural of *tihu*) are representations of the Hopi deities, or *katsinam* that are portrayed by adult males in the ceremonial dances. *Tithu* are not sacred and young girls are allowed to play with them. Infant boys are given miniature bow and arrow sets to prepare them for their roles as providers and protectors.

Hopi social organization is organized by gender. Hopi villages are made up of matrilineal clans. Buildings within the Hopi village are also organized along gender lines. Hopi households are uxori-local; meaning that a group of related women form the core of the group and their husbands come from other clans. Women own homes and are the heads of households. *Kivas*, on the other hand, are male centered. When the *kivas* are not being used for ceremonial activities, they serve as places where adult men can hang out.

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—revised by J. Williams

# HUNGARIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Hungarian history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Hungarians**.

## OVERVIEW

Hungarians have been immigrating to America since the 16th century, but mass migration did not begin until 1880. A small wave did arrive in 1849–1851, consisting of about 4,000 dissidents who had led a successful revolution in Hungary in 1848 but were then defeated by Austria in 1849. Although the total Hungarian American population was just over 4,000 by the time of the American Civil War, some 800 Hungarian Americans served in the Union Army and a much smaller number in the Confederate Army. Of the 800 Union soldiers, almost 100 became high-ranking officers. A few of the Confederate soldiers also became officers. Hungarian Americans thereby had the highest percentage of their total population serving as soldiers and officers in the Civil War services of any ethnic group in America at that time.

The largest wave of Hungarian immigration to America began in 1880 and lasted until 1914. Between 1880 and 1899, about 430,000 Hungarians entered the United States. The number jumped to 1,260,000 for the years of 1899–1914, with the peak year in 1907 when 185,000 Hungarians immigrated to the United States. Most of the immigrants in this wave were young peasant men who hoped to earn enough money in the United States to return to Hungary and set themselves up in better circumstances there. Perhaps 20% of the immigrants actually did return to Hungary. The rest settled permanently in the United States.

Although the majority of the immigrants had been farmers in Hungary, few took up farming in America. Their goal was to earn money quickly, and the best place to do that was in the industrial centers of the Northeast and Midwest. They took low-paying, menial jobs that no one else wanted. Many of the jobs were dangerous, such as mining or working in iron and steel mills. Serious injuries and deaths were common. Because most of the immigrants were hoping to return to Hungary in the near future, they saved as much of their earnings, and spent as little of them, as possible.

Despite their concentration in selected U.S. cities, Hungarian Americans did not create “Little Hungarys” during this first major wave of immigration. The young men were not interested in settling down, so they did not buy houses or establish neighborhoods. Instead, they moved from job to job, boarding house to boarding house, waiting for the day when they could return to Hungary. They did organize a number of insurance, or “sick-benefit,” societies to help care for each other. Other cultural, social, religious, and political Hungarian American societies sprang up in the late 1800s, but they remained fragmented, local efforts until 1906 when the American Hungarian Federation (AHF) was founded. The AHF has since become the umbrella organization for 72 other Hungarian American organizations throughout the United States. In recent years, due to differences in approach, other organizations have split off from the AHF including the National Federation of Hun-



garian Americans (NFHA—established in 1984), and the Hungarian American Coalition (HAC—established in 1991). All three continue to lobby the U.S. government for both Hungarian American and Hungarian interests, as well as provide needed services, cultural education, and social outlets to Hungarian Americans.

With the beginning of World War I in Europe in 1914, Hungarian immigration to the United States halted. As Hungary and the United States were on opposing sides of the war, Hungarian Americans found themselves in a difficult position, caught between their ties to Hungary and loyalty to their new home. At first, they continued to show allegiance to Hungary, but as this brought them increasing harassment, they began to hide their true feelings. Once the United States officially entered the war in 1917, Hungarian Americans felt it necessary to make a show of allegiance to America. Though most Hungarian Americans still sympathized with Hungary, they began to celebrate American holidays and hold “loyalty parades” in order to escape persecution.

At the end of World War I, Hungary was divided into a number of smaller states, ruled by foreign powers. Hungarian Americans who had intended to return to Hungary once they had saved enough money suddenly found themselves without a homeland. Many had not yet become American citizens because of their intention to return to Hungary, but the Hungary they had known no longer existed. Accordingly, the attitude among Hungarian Americans shifted from one of temporary residency in the United States to one of permanent residency.

The emphasis in their identity changed from “Hungarian” to “American.” They moved out of the miserable boarding houses and bought homes. “Little Hungarys” developed on the outskirts of cities. Immigrants who had clung to their Hungarian ways now began to be assimilated into mainstream American culture in language, dress, and other customs.

Hungarian immigration to the United States resumed at the end of World War I, but the new immigrants were quite different from those who came before. Instead of peasant farmers, most were well-educated professionals who had been displaced by the postwar economic upheaval or who disagreed with the increasing German Nazi influence in Hungary. There were a number of leftists, as well as Jews. These new immigrants were not interested in joining the peasant-based Hungarian American community and had little to do with them. Hungarian Americans became polarized between the old immigrants and the new. There was also a sizeable population of second-generation Hungarian Americans developing who felt confined by their parents’ “Hungarianness” and wanted to break out of the insular Hungarian American community. By the start of World War II, the Hungarian American community had become quite divided within itself.

World War II was a time of great ambivalence for many Hungarian Americans. Most believed that the Axis powers should be defeated, but they also felt attached to Hungary and could not bring themselves to stand fully against their former homeland. They tried to excuse Hungary’s role in the Axis forces by describing Hungary as an “unwilling satellite”





*Ferenc Juhasz, the Hungarian Minister of Defense (l), and Andras Simonyi, the Hungarian Ambassador to the United States (center), unveil a statue of Commandant Michael Kovats de Fabrice in front of the Hungarian Embassy in Washington D.C. in 2003. Kovats, who was born in Hungary, was a hero of the American Revolutionary War. (AP Images/Evan Vucci)*

of Germany. However, their loyalty to the United States effort was genuine this time, and Hungarian Americans freely contributed to the Allied war effort.

The Displaced Persons Acts of 1948 and 1950, passed by the U.S. Congress at the end of World War II to assist refugees, allowed a new wave of Hungarians to immigrate to the United States. Three distinct groups of Hungarians have immigrated to America since World War II. The first, referred to as the “45-ers” and “47-ers,” or “DPs (Displaced Persons),” consisted of right wing intellectuals, high-ranking Hungarian military officers, and members of the Hungarian elite escaping the new Communist regime. Then, from 1947 to the mid-1950s, middle-class Hungarians began to flee Stalinist oppression in

Hungary. Lastly, between 1956 and 1960, a wave of young people came to America seeking better educational and economic opportunities.

Hungarian immigration to America continues today, though in relatively small numbers. Illegal immigration to the United States from Hungary has been a reality since the 19th century, increasing each time the United States or Hungary placed restrictions on immigration and emigration. Hungarian immigrants are also sometimes classified as other nationalities, due to the multiethnic nature of the Hungarian population and the political division of Hungary into smaller states. Therefore, it is impossible to know the exact number of Hungarian immigrants to the United States. In the 2000 U.S. Census, a total

of 1,398,702 persons claimed Hungarian ancestry. Of these, 110,277 (about 8%) were foreign-born.

Although Hungarian Americans now live throughout the United States, their population is still concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest. The top five states in terms of numbers of Hungarian Americans are Ohio (193,951; also the top state in terms of percentage of Hungarians per total population, at 1.7%), New York (137,029), California (133,988), Pennsylvania (132,177), and New Jersey (115,607). Other states with sizeable Hungarian American populations include Michigan (98,036), Florida (96,885), Illinois (55,971), Connecticut (40,836), and Indiana (35,715).

The majority of Hungarian Americans are Catholic, but there are also significant numbers of Protestants (particularly Calvinist and Lutheran), Greek Orthodox, and Jews. The first Hungarian worship service in the United States was held in 1852 in New York City. It was an ecumenical service for any and all Hungarian Americans, including Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, and Jews. This ecumenical spirit is still evident in certain Hungarian American churches, while others, such as the Calvinists, have become fractured even among themselves.

Hungarian Americans have made countless contributions to all areas of American life. Noted Hungarian Americans in the arts include classical composer Béla Bartók; symphony conductors Eugene Ormandy, George Széll, Fritz Reiner, Sir Georg Solti, and Antal Doráti; singer-songwriter Paul Simon; and actors Béla Lugosi, Tony and Jamie Lee Curtis, the Gabor sisters, and Mariska Hargitay. The Hollywood film industry was essentially founded by two Hungarian Americans, Adolph Zukor and William Fox, who felt the New York City film world was too restrictive and moved instead to the southern California desert. Among the many motion picture companies Zukor and Fox started are Paramount Pictures and Twentieth-Century Fox.

The “Manhattan Project,” in which the first atomic bomb was developed, consisted of “three Hungarians and one Italian,” in the words of Laure Fermi, wife of the one Italian, Enrico Fermi. The three Hungarians (or Hungarian Americans) were physicists Leo Szilárd, Eugene Wigner, and Edward Teller. Other prominent Hungarian American scientists are Zoltan Bay, a pioneer in radar astronomy; and Andrew Grove, founder and president of Intel Corporation, a leader in the development and production of computer chips. Well-known Hungarian Americans in politics include Fiorello H. LaGuardia (former mayor of New York City), and New York state governor George Pataki.

Hungarian Americans today remain divided according to generation and time of immigration. Older Hungarian Americans from the first major wave, and some of their children, continue to hold fast to an outdated, idealized image of Hungary. The Hungarian Scouts in Exile organization promotes a similarly idealized Hungarian nationalism among younger generations. Founded in 1945 in Germany, the Hungarian Scouts in Exile first functioned in refugee camps in Central Europe to maintain a sense of Hungarian identity and pride among young refugees. Around 1950, as Hungarian refugees immigrated to the United States, the organization established troops here. There are currently about 4,500 Hungarian Scouts in 70 troops located in about a dozen countries on five continents. The largest of the five worldwide “districts” is District 3:

Venezuela and the United States, with most of the troops located in the United States.

Hungarian Americans who immigrated between World Wars I and II, and those who immigrated immediately following World War II, were radicals and professionals who were forced to flee Hungary because of political and economic upheavals, the increasing influence of Nazi Germany, and the eventual Communist takeover. They therefore have quite a different picture of Hungary than do the older, first-wave immigrants. More recent immigrants have lived in Communist-dominated Hungary and so have a vision of their former homeland that differs from both first- and second-wave Hungarian Americans. The Hungarian American community is therefore quite divided in regards to their view of and relation to Hungary. This division creates a certain amount of tension in the community and also prevents Hungarian Americans from becoming a unified force in U.S. politics.

Like other Eastern European immigrants, Hungarian women in the early migration periods maintained the traditional patriarchal values of subordination to their husbands and fathers and focused their attentions on the home. Many women contributed to the family income but always in ways that allowed them to stay at home, such as making crafts for their husbands or fathers to sell (Hungarian embroidery is a highly regarded art form), taking in boarders, etc. During the Communist era in Hungary, women were granted more freedoms, so later immigrants adapted easily to liberal American ways. This generational divide has caused discord between earlier and later immigrant groups in the Hungarian American community, as well as between first-generation immigrants and their children and grandchildren who grow up steeped in American ways.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# INUIT

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Eskimo

**LOCATION:** United States (Alaska); Canada; Denmark (Greenland); Aleutian Islands; Russia (Siberia)

**POPULATION:** approximately 167,000 worldwide

**LANGUAGE:** Inuit

**RELIGION:** Traditional animism; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Inuit, or Eskimo, are an aboriginal people who make their home in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Siberia and North America.

The word “Eskimo” is not an Eskimo word. It was bestowed upon these hardy, resourceful hunters by their neighbors, the Algonquin Indians of eastern Canada, and it means “eaters of raw meat.” Early European explorers of the area began using the name, and it is now in general use. Recently, it has begun to be replaced by the Eskimo’s own name for themselves, “Inuit,” which means, “real people.”

The Inuit are descendants of the Thule, whale hunters who migrated from Alaska to Greenland and the arctic regions of Canada around 1000 years ago. The people and their culture spread rapidly throughout the area, which accounts for the cultural uniformity of today’s Inuit. The first Europeans to enter these arctic regions were probably Norseman, who are thought to have arrived in Greenland at around the same time as the Inuit. Major changes in Inuit life and culture occurred during the Little Ice Age (1600–1850), when the climate in their homelands became even colder, changing their subsistence methods. European whalers who arrived in the latter part of the 19th century had a strong impact on the Inuit. The Westerners introduced Christianity; they also brought with them infectious diseases that substantially reduced the Inuit population in some areas. When the whaling industry collapsed early in the 20th century, many Inuit turned to trapping.

The Inuit are very involved in the modern world. Not only have they wholeheartedly adopted much of its technology, but also they use imported food, clothing, and housing styles. Their educational, recreational, economic, religious, and governmental institutions have also been heavily influenced by mainstream culture. Significant changes have begun to occur in all areas of their way of life as a result of sustained contact with the outside world.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Inuit live primarily along the far northern seacoasts of Russia, the United States, Canada, and Greenland. All told, there are more than 100,000 Inuit, most of whom live south of the Arctic Circle. The majority, about 50,000, live in the Danish territory of Greenland, with approximately 57,000 in Alaska and other parts of the United States, 56,000 in Canada, 8,000 in Denmark, and 1,700 in Russia. The Inuit homeland is one of the regions of the world least amenable to human habitation. Most of the land is flat and barren tundra where only the top few inches of the frozen earth thaw out during the summer months. For this reason, the Inuit have always turned their eyes to the sea as the source of their subsistence. Although

some settled along rivers and fish from the banks, and others followed caribou herds in their seasonal inland migrations, the majority of Inuit have always lived near the sea, hunting aquatic mammals such as seals, walrus, and whales.

Traditionally, some Inuit groups tended to settle permanently, while others were primarily nomadic. Settlement patterns differed according to geographic location, time of year, and the means of subsistence available in a given area. In Greenland and in Alaska, permanent settlements were the norm. Similarly, the Inuit of Siberia grouped themselves into established villages. In the central areas there were no such settled communities, although individual groups often returned to a favorite fishing or hunting site year after year. But despite these differences, all Inuit groups followed an annual cycle of banding into large groups during the winter and breaking up into smaller hunting bands during the summer months.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Inuit is part of the larger Aleut-Eskimo language family, which is comprised of Aleut, Yupik, and Inuit-Inupiaq. Inuit proper is part of the Inuit-Inupiaq subgroup. Inuit-Inupiaq is also known as Eastern Eskimo. Inuit-Inupiaq is an example of a dialect continuum. In other words, there are a number of geographical dialects of Inuit-Inupiaq that are spread across the Arctic region from Alaska to Greenland. The dialects in closer proximity to each other are the most intelligible.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Inuit have traditionally used spells and amulets for luck. Mythological figures include the Mother of the Sea, believed to control the sea mammals, and the Moon Man, thought to enforce observance of taboos by appearing to the offending party in a dream or in the guise of a polar bear. According to a traditional folktale told by the Tikigaaq Inuit of north Alaska, the raven (a traditional trickster figure in Inuit folklore) was originally white but turned black in the course of a deal by which it and the loon agreed to tattoo each other but ended up in a soot-flinging match that turned the loon gray and the raven black.

## 5 RELIGION

Missionaries introduced various forms of Christianity, including Russian Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Lutheranism; these have largely replaced traditional Inuit religious practices, although many of the traditional animistic beliefs still linger.

As with most hunting cultures, many traditional Inuit customs and taboos were intended to mollify the souls of hunted animals, such as polar bears, whales, walrus, and seals. In western Alaska and other regions, the souls of seals and whales, both living and dead, were honored in complicated annual ceremonies of thanksgiving.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Today the Inuit observe the holidays of the Christian calendar. Whenever a new totem pole was raised, a feast called a potlatch was held. There would be singing and dancing and varied contests of strength for entertainment. The Inuit who held the potlatch would often give away his most valuable posses-

sions at the ceremony, including his dugout canoe, sculptures of carved ivory, and jewelry.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, a modest feast was held when an Inuit boy killed his first seal or caribou. Women were married when they reached puberty and men when they could provide for a family. The Inuit traditionally believed in an afterlife thought to take place in one of two positive realms, one in the sea and one in the sky. Because a person's name was believed to have special powers, after people died their names were given to infants born subsequently, who were thereby believed to inherit the personal qualities of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Unlike many aboriginal cultures, traditional Inuit society was not based on the tribal unit. Instead, the basic social unit was the extended family, consisting of a man and wife and their unmarried children, along with their married sons and their nuclear families. In the normal course of events, several such family units join forces to hunt and provide one another with mutual protection and support. Such a group of families was named by adding the suffix *miut*, or "people of," to the name of the geographic region they inhabited.

The leader of the group was typically the oldest male who was still physically able to participate in the hunt. Such a group leader was called upon to resolve quarrels within the group or among his own group and others. In cases where the group leader was unable to settle the issue, the hostile parties might wrestle or engage in public contests in which they hurled jokes and insults back and forth until one was declared the winner. Non-related men often formed close relationships based on mutual support, trade, sharing of domestic arrangements, and protection when traveling through other, possibly hostile, regions.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Inuit had several different forms of traditional housing. In Greenland, they often lived in permanent stone houses. Along the shores of Siberia, they lived in villages made up of houses built from driftwood and earth. Summer housing for many Inuit was a skin tent, while in the winter the igloo, or house made of snow, was common. In Alaskan Inuit society, each village traditionally included a special house called a *kashgee*. This building, while serving as a dwelling place for one man and his family, was also used by the entire village as a ceremonial center and gathering place for the men of the group. In the *kashgee*, the men and boys of the village did their chores and often ate and slept together. Today many Inuit live in single-story wooden prefabricated houses with a combined kitchen and living room area and one or two bedrooms. Most are heated with oil-burning stoves. However, as the Inuit are spread across such a vast area, their housing styles vary.

With the widespread introduction of Western-style foods rich in carbohydrates and sugar over the past 25 years, the Inuit have begun to develop health problems that were unknown to them before, such as tooth decay. Alcoholism poses another major threat to the health of the Inuit, threatening not only the present population but also future generations through Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other conditions that arise during the prenatal period.

There are two kinds of boats traditionally used by Inuit hunters. The umiak is a large open boat made by covering a wooden frame with walrus hide or some other appropriate material. Especially popular with the Inuit of northern Alaska, it has been used to transport people and goods, and as a vessel from which to hunt large sea mammals such as whales. The other kind of boat favored by Inuit hunters is the kayak. This one-man hunting vessel is entirely covered with seal or caribou skin. The hunter, dressed in waterproof clothing made from the intestines of seals or walrus, sits in a small cockpit and propels himself forward with a double bladed paddle. Alone in his kayak, an Inuit hunter is able to glide silently through the waters and amid the ice floes to close in on his prey. Today it is common for the Inuit to use boats with inboard or outboard motors.

For land transportation, the Inuit dogsled is capable of traveling on land and frozen sea alike. A typical dogsled, drawn by anywhere from 2 to 14 huskies, is usually made of wood but may also be fashioned from pieces of dried salmon. In recent years, dogsleds have been replaced by snowmobiles as the main mode of transportation for many Inuit.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Given the cooperative effort required by a people who depended on hunting for subsistence, family ties—both nuclear and extended—were traditionally paramount among the Inuit, and having a large family was considered desirable. Although stability was valued in marriages, divorce was easily obtainable.

Women often assumed a secondary role in Inuit society. At mealtime, an Inuit woman was required to serve her husband and any visitors before she herself was permitted to eat. Sometimes men cemented their ties with each other by temporarily exchanging wives. But at the same time, a common Inuit saying extolled women in this way: "A hunter is what his wife makes him." The women were the ones who gathered firewood, tended the lamps, butchered the animals, and raised the children. They were able to erect the tents in summer and the igloos in winter and drive the dog teams if need be. They contributed to the subsistence requirements of the group by fishing and trapping small animals and birds, and joining in the pursuit of larger, more dangerous game was not unusual for an Inuit woman. Inuit hunters spent many hours waiting at breathing holes, drifting in their kayaks, or tramping through blizzards, so the greatest skill an Inuit woman could possess is that of being able to make good protective clothing. Inuit women learned that skins were suited for each type of clothing, how to cure the skins, and how to sew firm, watertight seams with bone and ivory needles and thread made of dried sinew.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Inuit clothing was perhaps the most important single factor in ensuring survival in the harsh Arctic environment. The Inuit did not weave fabric. Rather, they made all their clothing from various animal skins and hides. While Inuit clothing was often attractive and decorative, its ability to keep the wearer alive at sub-zero temperatures was of prime importance. The best way to keep warm is to trap a layer of warm air between the body and the outside cold. To do this, Inuit wore layers of loose clothes. If the clothes were tight, the wearers would sweat and the damp clothes would freeze as soon as they were taken off. In winter the Inuit wore two layers



*Arne Lange, an Inuit fisherman, and his son Angut Rosbach, eat breakfast in their home in Ilimanaq, Greenland. Lange has largely given up summer fishing to host eco-tourists in his home. (Uriel Sinai/Getty Images)*

of caribou skin clothing. The outer layer had the fur facing out, while the fur of the inner layer faced in. The outer garment, a hooded jacket called a parka, was loose enough for the wearer to pull his or her arms inside and hug them against the body for extra warmth. Sometimes snow goggles made of ivory or wood with small slits to see through were worn to keep out the snow glare.

Today a variety of shops sell modern Western-style clothing to the Inuit. Like their counterparts in cultures throughout the world, young people favor jeans, sneakers, and brightly colored sportswear. However, both old and young still rely on traditional Inuit gear when confronting the elements on any extended outdoor venture or journey.

## **12 FOOD**

Traditionally, Inuit dietary staples were seal, whale, caribou, walrus, polar bear, arctic hare, fish, birds, and berries. Seals were hunted all year round, and the Inuit found a use for almost every part of the animal. With the exception of the bitter gall bladder, all the meat was eaten, usually boiled or raw. Raw blubber was often enjoyed mixed in with meat or berries, while blood soup and dried intestines were favored as snacks. Because they ate raw food, and every part of the animal, the Inuit did not lack vitamins, even though they had almost no vegetables to eat. With the introduction of modern Western-style

food, including convenience foods, over the past two to three decades, the Inuit diet has changed, and not for the better. The consumption of foods rich in sugar and carbohydrates has resulted in tooth decay and other diet-related medical problems.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Modern Inuit schools are similar to other schools around the world as far as what the children learn, but the setting could not be more unique. Most Inuit children ski or ride snowmobiles to get to and from school. Because the weather is so cold, they usually receive a good hot breakfast as soon as they arrive in the morning. A typical breakfast might be pancakes or French toast served with milk, juice, and sausages. While Inuit children are taught math, history, spelling, reading, and the use of computers, Inuit teachers are also concerned that the students learn something about their culture and old traditions, including dancing, which was forbidden by the early missionaries because they thought it sinful.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Considering that the Inuit inhabit an area covering more than 5,000 miles of the immense Arctic wilderness, Inuit culture displays an amazing coherence and unity. From Siberia to Greenland, Inuit economic, social, and religious systems are much the same. Only in kinship systems is there any signifi-

cant variation, with those groups living in western regions that differed the most from the Inuit as a whole.

In addition to the prints and carvings for which the Inuit have become famous, dancing, singing, poetry, and storytelling play an important role in their native culture.

### 15 WORK

Traditional Eskimo subsistence patterns were closely geared to the annual cycle of changing seasons, the most important feature of which was the appearance and disappearance of solid ice on the sea. During summer, when the sea was free of ice, small groups of families traveled to their camps by open boat. There they stayed, hunting the northward-migrating caribou herds by killing them at river crossings or by driving them into large corral-like structures. Spawning fish were netted or speared. With the onset of autumn, the Inuit returned to their settled communities and villages to prepare for winter. The long winter was a time for hunting seal and other aquatic mammals and for trapping birds.

Today most Inuit live a settled existence in centralized villages and towns, participating in the cash economy through wage employment or receiving some form of social assistance. Major employers include the government, the resource extraction industries, and the arts and crafts industry. However, many Inuit are still involved in subsistence hunting and fishing at some level.

### 16 SPORTS

The Inuit, although mostly concerned with meeting survival needs, do find time to engage in sports. They enjoy games that display physical prowess, such as weightlifting, wrestling, and jumping contests. In addition, they also play a ball game similar in many ways to American football, and ice hockey is popular as well.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

When the Inuit come together for traditional gatherings, drumming and dancing provide the chief form of entertainment. Quiet evenings at home are spent carving ivory, antler, bone, and soapstone, or playing string games like cat's cradle. Another traditional Inuit game is similar to dice, played on a board and using little models of people and animals instead of dice. The Inuit also enjoy typical modern forms of recreation such as watching television and videos.

Inuit filmmaking has gained international notoriety through the success of the 2001 Inuit film *The Fast Runner*. *The Fast Runner* or Atanajuart in Inuit is based on a traditional Inuit oral tale. The film portrays the beauty and hardship of Inuit traditional life and has been acclaimed for its accurate portrayal of Inuit life from an Inuit perspective.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Inuit arts and crafts are mainly those that involve etching decorations on ivory harpoon heads, needle cases, and other tools. Over the past decades, the Inuit have become famous for their soapstone, bone, and ivory carvings, as well as prints and pictures. Another artistic tradition is the creation of elaborate wooden masks.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems include unemployment, underemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, and a high suicide rate.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Male and female roles and their symbolic representations are directly tied to traditional subsistence activities in Inuit societies. Inuit societies are characterized as being egalitarian, meaning that there are no intrinsic differences in status between people. Gender among the Inuit also functions in this manner, with gender roles and responsibilities being complementary in nature. Older adults of both sexes command the respect of the younger generations.

Boys begin preparing to assume their roles as hunters from an early age—often as young as 6 or 7 years of age. In modern Inuit societies, boys are given time off from school called “subsistence leave” to help with whaling, fishing, or other subsistence activities. Girls, while also eligible for “subsistence leave,” rarely take it. Training in the traditional subsistence activities for young girls has waned over the years, and now it often is not until after a woman leaves home after being married that she acquires some of these skills.

Men and women own homes and participate in child rearing. Traditionally, game that was killed by men became the possessions of their wives upon delivery to the household.

Whaling hunting rituals are performed by both men and women. It is equally important to the success of the hunts that the components of the male and female portions of the rituals, prayers, preparations, and avoidances be undertaken. This reflects the complementary and equivalent natures of male and female genders in Inuit culture.

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—revised by J. Williams

## IRISH AMERICANS

For more information on Irish history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Irish**.

### OVERVIEW

Irish emigration to America began in colonial times but reached its peak in the Great Famine years of the 1800s. Early Irish immigrants were mostly Scotch-Irish from Ulster, or Northern Ireland (see **Scottish** and **Scotch-Irish Americans**). Irish Catholics did not begin to immigrate in large numbers until about 1800, and then they came en masse. In 1790, the U.S. Census counted 44,000 Irish Americans, most of whom were Scotch-Irish. By 1800, the Irish population of America had swelled to 150,000. Most of the newcomers were Irish Catholics fleeing British oppression and the resulting famines.

The Irish constituted the first major Catholic presence in the predominantly Protestant United States and as such met with virulent discrimination. The majority of the immigrants were illiterate farmers with few, if any, other job skills. However, they had been so disillusioned with farming in Ireland that they preferred to starve in the cities of America rather than return to growing crops. Irish immigrants congregated in the large industrial centers of the Northeast, Middle Atlantic, and Midwest regions of America, living in overcrowded slum housing and working whatever jobs they could find.

The worst famines in Ireland, caused by a grossly unjust economic system imposed on Ireland by Britain, combined with a potato blight, occurred in 1800, 1807, 1816, 1839, 1845–1848, 1863, and 1879. Between 1800 and 1830, 300,000 Irish immigrated to the United States. In 1846–1851, more than one million Irish fled to America. Another 873,000 immigrated in the decades of 1860–1880. Many settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. By 1880, the Irish Catholic population in Philadelphia had reached 6,000, the highest of any community in North America. Other cities, such as New York, Boston, and Chicago, also had large Irish American populations.

Irish immigration to the United States continued, with some one million more immigrants arriving between 1880 and 1900. Ireland lost more of its population to the United States than any other country. In 1860, there were only five Irish persons left in Ireland for every Irish person in America (compared to 33 Germans in Germany for every German American, and 42 British in Britain for every British American). In the early 1900s, however, Irish immigration to America slowed considerably, and once Irish independence was declared in 1921, immigration virtually ceased. Small numbers of Irish have continued to come to the United States since that time, but the mass migration was over.

The Irish were victims of discrimination and violence in the United States not only because of their religion but also because of their willingness to work for extremely low wages. Other Americans felt threatened by this huge influx of unskilled laborers whom they perceived to be glutting the job market. Stereotypes of “Paddy” and “Bridget” (common Irish names) as drunken, disorderly, ignorant brutes took shape in American culture. However, when the United States embarked in the mid- and late-1800s on extensive construction operations of canals, railroads, and bridges and expanded its min-

ing industry, Irish Americans were ready to fill the vast need for workers. These jobs, though dangerous and underpaid, were a ticket out of the city slums. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Erie Canal were both essentially built by Irish Americans. They also laid much of the railroad track across the United States. Without the labor of Irish Americans, U.S. development would have occurred much more slowly. Their hard work and enormous contributions to American expansion began to earn Irish Americans some measure of respect among their fellow Americans.

Participation in the armed services also helped improve the image of Irish Americans in the United States. Irish American naval captain Oliver Hazard Perry became a hero in the War of 1812, uttering the famous words, “We have met the enemy and they are ours,” after defeating a British fleet on Lake Erie. Irish Americans fought on both sides of the American Civil War (1861–65), but most—some 200,000—fought for the Union.

During the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848, a number of Irish Americans defected to the Mexican side. The rate of desertion was very high for the U.S. Army during this war because at least half of the soldiers were recent immigrants (particularly Irish and German), and many of the American-born officers treated them quite badly. When the Mexican army learned that the Irish were Catholic, as were the Mexicans, they tried to lure them to Mexico with offers of land and religious fellowship. Some 250 Irish American soldiers deserted the U.S. Army and joined up with the Mexicans. Led by Captain John Riley, they formed the San Patricio (St. Patrick) Battalion along with about 200 other deserters, many of them German Americans. The San Patricio Battalion fought bravely for the Mexican side, but Mexico was finally defeated, and the deserters were brought to justice. Of those who had survived the fighting, 50 were executed for treason, 5 were pardoned, and another 15 (including Captain Riley) were branded and flogged, then released. Riley and others formed two infantry units that continued to serve the Mexican army for a number of years before disbanding. Some of the Irish American soldiers then returned to the United States, but others remained in Mexico, Riley among them. Intermarriage with Mexicans led to the creation of a small Mexican-Irish community. One of its best-known members is actor Anthony Quinn.

Irish Americans themselves unfortunately contributed to their bad image in 1863 when Congress passed the first national draft for military service. Outraged by this invasion of their freedom, Irish Americans in New York City took out their frustrations on the African American community there, which at that time was quite small. With 200,000 Irish Americans against 10,000 African Americans, the African Americans never had a chance. After four days of rioting and violence, 1,200 people (mostly African American) were dead or seriously injured, and the Irish Americans had burned Manhattan’s Colored Orphan Asylum to the ground.

Conditions in Irish American slums had become intolerable in the mid-1800s, with epidemics of typhoid (1837), typhus (1842), and cholera (1849) sweeping the population, and chronic outbreaks of tuberculosis and pneumonia claiming even more lives. In 1857, some 85% of the people admitted to New York City’s hospital were Irish immigrants. Infant and child mortality were so high among Irish Americans that immigrant children were expected to live no more than 14 years on the average after arrival in the United States. Many Irish

Americans turned to alcohol to numb the pain of their squalid lives. Often times, Irish American women and children became prostitutes, and women, children, and men took up other criminal activities to survive.

When gold was discovered in California in 1849, thousands of Irish Americans joined the rush west. A few struck it rich. The rest continued to languish in poverty, either returning to the East and Midwest or settling in the cities of the West. Things were beginning to change, however, for the Irish Americans. New waves of immigrants, this time from Eastern Europe, began to arrive. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, and speaking completely foreign languages (Western European languages are at least related to English), these new immigrants made Irish Americans seem much more “American” in contrast. Irish Americans began to be welcomed somewhat more into mainstream society. The Irish American community was also beginning to make itself known in politics.

The Irish American political machine was based on the units of family, block, and neighborhood. Each neighborhood had a block captain, a ward captain, and a precinct captain. Irish Catholic parishes also provided a political base, with most parishioners following the lead of the priest or local bishop. Irish Americans, therefore, could deliver significant blocs of votes. Years of fighting the British for their rights in Ireland had taught the Irish how to work the political system for their benefit. By the mid-1800s, Irish Americans had taken over the Democratic Party and city hall in several major cities and were becoming a voice to be reckoned with in American politics.

New York City’s Tammany Hall was one of the most significant political arenas for Irish Americans in the 1800s. William Marcy “Boss” Tweed, an Irish American, became its leader and ruled New York City, and exercised a great deal of influence in state and federal politics as well, from his political throne. Tweed and other Irish American politicians used their positions to promote the welfare of other Irish Americans, providing employment (particularly in blue-collar jobs such as police officers, fire fighters, etc.), food, and services to Irish American citizens and their neighborhoods. Corruption was rampant in American politics at that time, and the Irish American political machine was not immune. Boss Tweed himself was imprisoned in 1873 for illegal activities. But Irish American politicians were no more dishonest than any other. Irish Americans made politics work for them, and they improved their situation in America dramatically with their successful political maneuvering. The high point in Irish American Catholic politics occurred in 1960 when Irish American John Fitzgerald Kennedy was elected president of the United States, the first Catholic president in U.S. history. In fact, one has only to look at the number of Irish American presidents over the years to see how Irish Americans gained increasing acceptance in mainstream American society: from 1789 through 1921, only 8 out of 28 presidents had confirmed Irish ancestry, but since the election of John F. Kennedy, all but one president (Gerald Ford) can claim some degree of Irish heritage.

Another important arena for Irish Americans was the labor movement of the 1870s–1930s. Many Irish Americans led the way as workers organized for better working conditions and higher wages. By 1900, over 50 of the 110 unions in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had Irish American presidents. Mary Harris “Mother” Jones, a powerful leader of the labor movement, was Irish American. The AFL’s first official orga-



nizer of women was Mary Kenney, an Irish American who organized the garment workers in Boston, most of whom were also Irish American women. The garment workers mounted a successful strike for better wages and pay in 1894, establishing women as an important force in labor politics. Irish Americans continue to be a significant presence in American labor unions today. In 1955, Irish American George Meany became head of the largest union organization in the United States, when the AFL merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to form the AFL-CIO. Meany was re-elected president of the AFL-CIO for the third time in 2005 for another four-year term.

Some 30,528,470 people listed themselves as of “Irish” ethnicity on the 2000 U.S. Census. Another 4,319,232 chose “Scotch Irish,” and 65,638 claimed “Celtic” ancestry. Irish Americans currently make up the second-largest ethnic group in the United States (12.3% of the total U.S. population), behind German Americans. There are over seven times as many people in the United States who claim some Irish ancestry than there are people in Ireland today. Although early Irish immigrants settled mostly in the Northeast, Middle Atlantic, and Midwest areas of the United States, today’s Irish Americans are spread fairly evenly throughout the entire country. The top “most Irish” states in terms of percentage of Irish Americans are Massachusetts (24.1%), New Hampshire (21.7%), Rhode Island (19.5%), and Connecticut, Delaware, Vermont, and Pennsylvania (all about 18%).





*John Toner and daughter Kelly watch the St. Patrick's Day parade in Washington, D.C. Irish-Americans in the Washington area celebrate the day by marching on Constitution Avenue with dancers, bands, and floats. (Alex Wong/Getty Images)*

The most obvious contribution Irish Americans have made to American culture is the observance of St. Patrick's Day on 17 March. Nearly every community in the United States holds a St. Patrick's Day parade, and many Americans, whether Irish or not, wear green on that day. Shamrocks and leprechauns are familiar to all Americans, and several Irish tunes have become American standards ("When Irish Eyes Are Smiling," "Danny Boy," etc.). Irish Americans dominated the American Catholic Church into the 20th century, and Irish Catholicism still tends to define the Catholic Church in America. Many Irish Americans are also Protestant, particularly among those who call themselves "Scotch Irish." The parochial school system started in the 1830s–1840s by Irish American Catholics continues to thrive in parishes across the United States. Irish and non-Irish Americans, Catholics and non-Catholics alike send their children to parochial schools for the solid and affordable education they offer.

Individual Irish Americans who have made significant contributions to American culture are far too numerous to recount. A few of the best-known are composers George M.

Cohan and Victor Herbert; musicians Bing Crosby, Jim Morrison, John Fogerty, Mariah Carey, and Alicia Keys; and dancers Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor. The composer of the song "Dixie," which became the "national anthem" of the South, was Irish American Daniel D. Emmett. Irish American actors include Spencer Tracy, James Cagney, Grace Kelly, Errol Flynn, Buster Keaton, Helen Hayes, Gregory Peck, Walter Brennan, Jackie Gleason, Jack Lemmon, Peter O'Toole, Pierce Brosnan, Brian Dennehy, Patrick Duffy, Mia Farrow, Jack Nicholson, Carroll O'Connor, Ryan O'Neal, Ben and Casey Affleck, Lindsay Lohan, Rosie O'Donnell, and actor/director Robert Redford. Directors John Ford and John Sayles are also Irish American. Walt Disney was originally Irish Canadian, before moving to the United States.

The best-known Irish American artist by far is Georgia O'Keeffe. Irish American architect Louis H. Sullivan developed the skyscraper design, and Matthew Brady was a well-known photographer. The only American playwright ever awarded the Nobel Prize is Eugene O'Neill, an Irish American. Other Irish American writers include John O'Hara, Flannery O'Connor, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Mary Higgins Clark, Tom Clancy, Kate Chopin (born Katherine O'Flaherty), Margaret Mitchell, William Kennedy, Mary Gordon, Mary McCarthy, Andrew Greeley, J. P. Donleavy, Cormac McCarthy, Frank McCourt, and poets Galway Kinnell, Frank O'Hara, Robert Creeley, and James Whitcomb Riley. Among the many noteworthy journalists and other media personalities of Irish descent are Chris Matthews, Conan O'Brian, Norah and Kelly O'Donnell, and Bill O'Reilly.

Irish American leaders in science, industry, and politics include the Kennedy family (John Fitzgerald, Robert; Edward, or Ted; and Joseph Kennedy III, elected to the U.S. Senate in Massachusetts in 1986); former Chicago mayor Richard Daley (who served from 1955 to 1976) and his son, Richard M. Daley, also elected mayor of Chicago (in 1989); one-time New York State governor Alfred E. Smith, who became the first Irish American Catholic to run for U.S. president in 1928; Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to be appointed justice of the Supreme Court (in 1981); astronaut Kathryn Sullivan, the first woman to walk in space (in 1984); and Christa Corrigan McAuliffe, who was to be the first teacher in space in the ill-fated Challenger shuttle that exploded shortly after take-off in 1986. Henry Ford, builder of the first inexpensive automobile, the Model T, was Irish American, as was James Tobin, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1981.

Sports, especially boxing, provided a way out of the slums for young Irish American men in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Irish American boxer Paddy Ryan held the title of world heavyweight champion in the 1880s. Ryan was defeated by Irish American John L. Sullivan in 1892, and Sullivan was subsequently defeated by Irish American "Gentleman Jim" Corbett in 1897. Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney were successful Irish American boxers in the early 1900s. Baseball has been another favored sport among Irish Americans. The best-known Irish American baseball players today are pitcher Nolan Ryan and shortstop Derek Jeter, who is half African American and half Irish American.

Two notorious Irish Americans were outlaw Billy the Kid (born Henry McCarty), and Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, instigator of the American anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s, which came to be known as "McCarthyism."

For the most part, Irish Americans today have become part of established mainstream U.S. culture and suffer little discrimination. Most are second- or third-generation Americans, at least; only a fraction of 1% of the Irish American population today is foreign born. A small group of Irish Americans today face a unique problem, however. Born to unwed Irish mothers in the 1950s and 1960s, some 400 infants (or more) were sent from Ireland to the United States for adoption. Viewed as shameful, these births were hidden and records were falsified to protect the women involved, and their families. Those adoptees are now reaching the age where they want to know about their birth parents. Agencies in Ireland remain largely uncooperative, however, and the falsification of many records makes the search that much more difficult. Adopted Irish American women and men struggle to find out where, and to whom, they were born in Ireland. Others who have not been told they were adopted may not even know they are Irish.

Irish culture has historically been very family oriented with traditional male and female roles. The Catholic Church further emphasizes those roles, and the immigrants to America during the famine years brought those traditional Catholic values with them. To some degree, the fact that many Irish settled in cities in the United States broke down those roles, at least for women. Irish American women were much more likely to work outside the home than were women of other immigrant groups. Their experience in the working world provided the opportunity for Irish American women to gain confidence and public influence. Gay Irish Americans have not fared so well, however. The stereotype of the Irishman as a pugnacious pub brawler expresses a truth of the Irish American culture that puts great pride in (heterosexual) masculinity and views homosexuality as an affront. Patriotic military duty has also become highly celebrated among Irish Americans, and discrimination against homosexuals in the military is persistent. The Roman Catholic Church, which views homosexuality as sinful behavior, contributes as well to the marginalization of gays and lesbians in the Irish American community.

This tension came to a head in 1992 when the Irish American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group (GLIB) of Boston applied to march in Boston's St. Patrick's Day parade. The parade has become much more than a celebration of the life of St. Patrick; it now serves as an affirmation of "Irishness" in all its patriotic American glory. The Veterans Council, responsible for running the parade, rejected the GLIB's application for a spot in the parade, but a judge ruled that the GLIB had the right to participate. The ruling set off a huge and fractious debate over whose rights were being infringed: homosexuals by being excluded from the parade or the Veterans Council by being forced to include those whose views they do not support. Prior to the GLIB rejection, the only group to be denied a place in the parade was the Ku Klux Klan.

For the next three years, the GLIB and the Veterans Council fought it out in court, taking it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court which ruled in 1995 in favor of the Veterans Council. Although the ruling went against the GLIB, members of the gay and lesbian community still viewed it in some ways as a victory because the wording of the decision spoke of homosexuals as equal human beings deserving respect—the Court based their decision on the First Amendment right of the Veterans Council to include and exclude whomever they chose because they no longer receive public funding for the parade.

The only other group to be excluded from the parade since the GLIB was the Boston Veterans for Peace in 2003, rejected because of their opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# IROQUOIS

**LOCATION:** United States (New York, Wisconsin); Canada (Quebec, Ontario)

**POPULATION:** over 125,000 (U.S. and Canada)

**LANGUAGE:** English; various Iroquois dialects

**RELIGION:** Traditional tribal religions

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Iroquoian peoples are a group of tribes from the Great Lakes area who speak dialects of the Iroquoian family of Native North American languages and have similar lifestyles. For our purposes, we will only consider those tribes who are members of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy (or League of the Iroquois): the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, and Tuscarora. Other Iroquoian peoples include the Huron, Erie, and Wyandotte.

“Iroquois” is the name adopted by the French for the people they encountered in the Great Lakes region. The name was given them either by the Ojibwa (or Chippewa), in which case it means “poisonous snakes,” or by the Algonquin, meaning “bad or terrifying man.” Both the Ojibwa and Algonquin were enemies of the Iroquois. The Iroquois call themselves *Houde-nosaunee*, or “People of the Longhouse.” The Iroquois are most likely descended from the Owasco peoples, who lived in the Great Lakes area as long as 1,000 years ago. The Owasco were settled agriculturalists and supplemented their diet through hunting and fishing. The Iroquois continued in that tradition well into the 19th century, and even today the basic structure of their life remains the same, though on a much more limited scale.

The Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Cayuga were constantly at war with one another over hunting and fishing grounds, honor and revenge, and, later, trapping grounds for the fur trade, in the early part of their history. Eventually, two men joined together to create the Iroquois Confederacy. An Onondaga named Hiawatha (not the same Hiawatha as in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem) began preaching peace among the Iroquois nations but found little support and even active resistance. According to legend, all three of his daughters died of illness or injuries thought to be caused by the evil wishes of his opponents, particularly an Onondaga chief named Thadodaho, who was very powerful and very antagonistic. In despair, Hiawatha left the Onondagas and wandered to the outskirts of a Mohawk village. There he met Deganawida, who was either a Mohawk or a Huron, and the two of them discovered a great sympathy toward each other. Together they convinced the Mohawk to be the first nation to join the Iroquois Confederacy. Soon the Oneida agreed to join as well. Hiawatha and Deganawida knew the Confederacy would not succeed without the support of Thadodaho, so they set about persuading him to join. Finally, Thadodaho agreed and the Onondaga became the third nation in the Confederacy. The Seneca and Cayuga then followed. The Mohawk, as the most eastern tribe, became the Keepers of the Eastern Door; the Seneca, as the westernmost tribe, were designated the Keepers of the Western Door, and the Onondaga, in the center, became the Keepers of the Council Fire. Every year, the 50 sachems

(peace chiefs) who made up the Great Council of the Confederacy met at the Onondaga council house to discuss and vote on matters of the Confederacy. Sachems were always men, but they were chosen by the clan matrons, the elder women who headed each clan. Sachems served for life, or until their clan matron decided to remove them from office. Although the five nations each had a different number of sachems on the council, each nation had only one vote. So the sachems of each nation had to decide together how to use their one vote. In this way, each of the five nations had equal power in the Confederacy.

The first European known to have made contact with the Iroquois was the French explorer Jacques Cartier, who encountered the Iroquois in 1534. The Iroquois had already begun receiving European goods, such as metal knives and hatchets, guns, glass beads, and wool cloth, in trade with more eastern tribes. By the 17th century, the Iroquois were trading directly with the French, who were most interested in furs, particularly beaver pelts. The fur trade created tremendous hostilities between the Iroquois Confederacy tribes and their neighbors, especially the Huron. Competition was fierce for the best trapping grounds, and the French fueled the hostilities so that they could maintain control of the fur trade. In 1609 Samuel de Champlain, the governor of New France (now Canada), helped several neighboring, hostile tribes attack the Mohawk. At least 50 Mohawk were killed in the attack. Later, in 1649 the Iroquois invaded Huron territory in the search for more furs (as over-hunting had depleted the number of beaver and other fur-bearing animals in their home territory). The Iroquois decimated the Huron, killing most of them and forcing the others to relocate farther from Iroquois lands.

The Iroquois themselves had their population decimated during the 1600s by diseases introduced by Europeans for which the Iroquois had no immunities or known treatments. Epidemics of measles, influenza, smallpox, tuberculosis, and gastroenteritis (a stomach disorder) wiped out thousands of Iroquois and other Native North Americans. At the height of their power, the Iroquois Confederacy had boasted 10,000 or more members. By the end of the 18th century, their numbers had been reduced by more than half to about 4,000. At the turn of the 20th century (1910), their population had not yet fully recovered, reaching only a little over 7,000.

In 1722–23 the Tuscarora, an Iroquoian tribe from North Carolina, joined the Confederacy. They had been forced by European violence and abuses to move north, and they were surprised and delighted to find people speaking a very similar language, with a very similar lifestyle, living in New York. The Tuscarora settled down there, with the Oneida, and were soon accepted into the Confederacy.

The now Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy were split by the American Revolution (1775–83), when the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Mohawk were persuaded by Mohawk Joseph Brant (1742–1807) to become British allies, while the Oneida and Tuscarora chose to side with the American colonists. The Iroquois had remained neutral throughout the European struggles for control of the “New World” in the 17th and early 18th centuries. The Onondaga leader Teganissorens had convinced the Iroquois in 1700 not to become involved in the French and British wars, or the British and Dutch battles. Even when many of their Native North American neighbors chose sides in the French and Indian War (1761–63), the Six Nations refused to help either the French or the British. But

this resolve fell apart during the long and disruptive American Revolution, and the Confederacy fell apart as well. When the American colonists finally won the war, many of the four Iroquois nations who had sided with the British relocated to Canada where the atmosphere was friendlier. Of those who stayed, the new U.S. government sent the Cayugas and Mohawks to a reservation (called a “reserve” in Canada) in Ontario, Canada, and forced most of the Oneidas to relocate to a reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin. Some Iroquois were allowed to remain on their original homelands in what had become New York State, but European American settlement had greatly reduced their territories. Further European American expansion continued to squeeze out the Iroquois until finally the U.S. government (and Canada) confined the Iroquois to small reservations. The Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy were now reduced to small subsistence farmers, dependent on the U.S. and Canadian governments for their survival.

Because the Iroquois live in both Canada and the United States but think of themselves as one people, in 1974 they were given the right by a treaty to cross the border between the two countries without restriction. In 1924 the U.S. Congress passed a law rescinding this right, and the Iroquois were forced to fight in the courts to regain their rights. Clinton Rickard of the Tuscarora Nation founded the Indian Defense League in 1927 to help in the fight. This was the first advocacy organization for Native North Americans. In 1928 the Iroquois won back their right to cross the European-imposed borderline that passes through their lands. This victory is celebrated each year in July by a “Border Crossing” festival. Conflicts continue to arise, however, between the Iroquois Nations and the U.S. and Canadian nations over these rights. Legal battles also continue over land claims and water rights and over the right of the Iroquois people to possess their own history. Recently, the Iroquois finally succeeded in having some wampum belts (belts of strung beads that tell the stories of Iroquois history) returned to them that had been on display for decades at the New York State Museum.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Iroquois live mainly on seven reservations in the Finger Lakes and Great Lakes region of New York State and on five reserves (as they are called in Canada) in Quebec and Ontario, Canada. Some Oneida also live on a small reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin. The largest reservation, or reserve, is the Six Nations Grand River Reserve in Ontario, Canada. Most of the Iroquois on the Grand River Reserve are Mohawk or Cayuga. The reservations and reserves are all located (except for the Oneida reservation in Wisconsin) on the original homelands of the Iroquois, though with only a fraction of the territory. The terrain of these lands is hilly and wooded, covered with deciduous and evergreen forests. The climate is temperate with four distinct seasons. Fertile soil, sufficient rainfall (and snowfall), and an adequate growing season combine to make this area very good for farming. The Iroquois have been settled agriculturalists throughout their history. An abundance of wild game and fish provided large amounts of easily obtained protein for their diet as well. The Iroquois, therefore, were a healthy people who were able to sustain themselves in large, permanent settlements. This allowed them to develop a highly organized social and governmental structure known as the Iroquois Confederacy or League of the Iroquois. Some

see great similarities in the government and constitution of the new United States of America and the structure of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Not all Iroquois live on the reservations or reserves. Many have left to find work in cities. The largest groups of off-reservation Iroquois are in the cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Niagara Falls, and Brooklyn, New York.

The total population of Iroquois today is over 125,000. The Mohawk are the most numerous of the Iroquois nations, followed by the Oneida and Seneca. The Cayuga, Onondaga, and Tuscarora nations are much smaller.

## 3 LANGUAGE

All Iroquois speak dialects of the Iroquoian family of Native North American languages. There was no written language for most of their history (now it is written with the Roman alphabet), but the Iroquois did use wampum belts (belts of strung beads in various designs) to tell the stories of their history. These wampum belts were a form of recorded information. The Europeans sometimes used wampum belts as money in trade, but the Iroquois never did.

An Iroquois mother chooses her baby’s name from a list of those names owned by her clan, choosing one that no other living person is using at that time.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Iroquois have a combination earth-diver and culture-hero (or, in this case, two-hero) creation story. Before the earth or anything on it existed, the Sky People lived in Sky World, high in the heavens. They were ruled by Sky Chief and his wife, Sky Woman. When Sky Woman became pregnant, Firedragon—a notorious troublemaker—told Sky Chief that the child was not Sky Chief’s. Sky Chief became enraged and tore the Tree of Life, which grew in the center of Sky World, from the ground. Sky Woman bent over to look through the hole it left in the ground. In some versions of the story, she simply fell through the hole. In other versions, Sky Chief pushed her. In any event Sky Woman fell out of Sky World towards the deep waters below. The birds and animals below managed to save her by first having the birds break her fall and support her on their wings, then sending various animals down into the waters to try to find some earth. All failed until Muskrat dove down very deep and came up with a bit of mud in his paw. The animals placed the mud on Turtle’s back and the birds set Sky Woman down on top of it. This bit of mud on Turtle’s back became the Earth.

Sky Woman eventually gave birth to twin boys, Good Twin and Bad Twin. Good Twin was born first, in the usual way, but Bad Twin was so impatient he pushed his way out of his mother’s body through her armpit and she died. The plants that later became the Iroquois’ staple foods sprang up from Sky Woman’s grave. Good Twin and Bad Twin became enemies and fought a series of terrible battles, creating the things of this world as they went. Good Twin ultimately won and then created human beings to enjoy this world.

The Iroquois traditionally told stories around the fire during the long winter months when there was little else to do. These stories were told both for entertainment and to educate the young about Iroquois history and traditions.

## 5 RELIGION

There is a special longhouse in each village that serves as a cultural center for members of the Iroquois community where they can learn about practicing the traditional way of life. In the past, the longhouse was a dwelling and also a spiritual center for the Iroquois. To say someone is “longhouse” today means that they follow the traditional Iroquois way of life.

European missionaries of many denominations established missions among the Iroquois in the 1600s and attempted to convert them to Christianity. Many Iroquois have since become Christian or have combined Christianity with their traditional beliefs. Today some Iroquois remain purely traditional, but most of them are Christian.

One Mohawk who took strongly to Christianity was Kateri Tekawitha (1656–80). She converted to Christianity in 1670 and became a Catholic nun. Called a saint while still alive by those who knew her, Kateri became a candidate for sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church in 1884 and was declared “venerable” in 1943, then “blessed” in 1980. The campaign to have her declared a full saint continues.

Handsome Lake (?–1815) was a Seneca visionary who started a new religion in the early time called *Gaiwio*, or “Good Word.” Followers of *Gaiwio* today refer to it as the New Religion.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Iroquois celebrate seasonal changes and events relating to the production of food. There were traditionally six to eight festivals each year, including planting, ripening, and harvest times, maple sugar season and berry-picking seasons, and the New Year at midwinter. The most important was the New Year festival. One custom at the New Year festival was dream guessing. People would tell the community, through song, dance, or silent gestures, about a powerful dream they had had, and the members of the community would try to guess the dream. Then the community would come up with a way to make that dream come true. For example, if a woman dreamed of having a plot of land in which to plant corn, the community would give her that land. If someone dreamed of being angry with and doing violence to another member of the community, the people would find a way to work out the conflict through non-violent means. This custom allowed the Iroquois to resolve any tensions and fulfill unexpressed desires in their community.

A very significant ceremony developed after the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy. When a chief dies, a Condolence ceremony is held where the founding of the Confederacy is commemorated and the Condolence committee talks about the deceased chief and other leaders of the past. The Condolence ceremony helps comfort the mourners of the deceased chief and welcomes the new chief who has been chosen by the clan matron. Deer antlers are placed on the new chief’s head.

A modern holiday among the Iroquois is Border Crossing Day, held on the third Saturday of July, which celebrates the birthday of Clinton Rickard, founder of the Indian Defense League of America in 1927. Rickard and the Indian Defense League helped win back the Iroquois’ right to cross the U.S.-Canadian border without restriction.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, babies were given a taste of animal oil right after birth to clean out their system and feed the guardian spirit

that lived in their soul from birth until death. When a boy was born, he was then dipped in a stream to make him strong and courageous. The names given Iroquois infants were confirmed by the community at the next major festival.

Most boys upon reaching puberty would go on a Vision Quest. This entailed going alone into the woods without food and waiting for days, or even weeks, for that boy’s personal guardian spirit to appear (in the form of an animal or bird). The guardian spirit would give the boy instructions for his adult life, and a special song to sing for courage and protection in times of danger.

At the time of a girl’s first menstrual period, she would cook and eat her food alone from special pots. She would continue to do this at each menstrual period thereafter until menopause.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Iroquois traditionally put a high value on self-reliance, endurance, and courage in both men and women. Gentle and considerate towards their own people, they could be cruel to their enemies. The Iroquois code of honor required revenge for injury or insult. Murder was avenged by murder.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before they were confined to reservations, the Iroquois lived in large villages surrounded by wooden palisades (a fence of tall pointed stakes used for defense) with watchtowers along the top. The villages had to be moved every 10–20 years because the soil would become depleted and the available wood for building and fuel would be used up. They tried to make the new site as close as possible to the previous one.

Villages were made up of as many as 30 longhouses, each of which housed up to 100 or more people. A longhouse was so called because it was rectangular: 130 or more feet (40 or more meters) in length and about 30–33 feet in width. Each longhouse had a center aisle where the cooking fires burned and separate rooms along both sides divided by hide or bark partitions. Each family had one room. Inside the family’s room was a sleeping and sitting platform with the belongings stored underneath and shelves above to store food. Bearskins were used as bedcovers.

The Iroquois made elm-bark canoes. These canoes were not as fast on the water or as maneuverable as birch-bark canoes, but they were sturdier and could even be used as ladders to climb over the walls of enemy camps.

Today, the Iroquois live on reservations (called “reserves” in Canada) in modern housing and use cars and buses for everyday transportation. Health problems typical to all Native North Americans affect the Iroquois: diabetes, alcoholism, depression.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Iroquois are matrilineal and matrilocal (lineage is inherited through the mother and newly married couples live near the bride’s family). The extended family is very important to the Iroquois. The main unit of society in traditional times was the *ohwachira*, a group of relatives who trace their ancestry back to one woman. The eldest living woman was usually the head of the *ohwachira*. Two or more *ohwachiras* make up a clan. The Mohawk and Oneida had three clans: Turtle, Bear, and Wolf. The other Iroquois nations had these three clans and more, such as Beaver, Deer, and Hawk. Children in a matriline-

eal, matrilineal society are raised by their mother and her sisters and brothers, not by their father. Men helped raise their sisters' children, not their own.

Adoption of children and adults was common among the Iroquois. Enemy captives were sometimes adopted into a clan to keep it strong. Most captives were glad to be adopted because they could not return to their homes, having lost respect among the members of their former community by allowing themselves to be captured.

Women were expected to give birth quietly and with courage. To cry or scream during labor, no matter how painful it was, was very bad form. Babies spent most of the first year of their life strapped to a cradleboard, a flat board with a footrest at the bottom and a wooden hoop to protect the baby's head at the top. Cradleboards could be carried on the mother's back or propped against a tree or house while the mother was working. Cattail fluff was used for diapers.

Once the Iroquois were confined to reservations, family life began to change. Nuclear family units began to live in separate houses, rather than together with their cousins, etc., in a longhouse. With the extended family no longer on the premises to help with childrearing, and European-dominated education that taught that the patrilineal European culture was superior to matrilineal Native North American culture, men became the heads of families rather than women. Traditionalists among the Iroquois continue to struggle to maintain the old ways with matrilineal extended families and a strong clan system. But, swimming against the tide of modern Western European culture is difficult.

## 11 CLOTHING

Modern Iroquois wear Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. For ceremonies and festivals and to make a statement at activist demonstrations, they will wear traditional clothing.

Traditionally, Iroquois clothing was made from animal skins and furs. The men brought home the skins and the women prepared them by removing the hair and flesh with a stone scraper, soaking the hide in boiled deer brains to soften it, then drying and smoking it to make it durable. The leather was then stitched together with sinew. The fur was left on beaver, bobcat, and squirrel skins for warmth and decoration.

Both men and women wore a soft deerskin loincloth in the summer and leather moccasins. Both sexes were generally bare from the waist up in warm weather. In cooler weather, men wore kilts and women wore longer skirts. Both wore leggings and close-fitting, hip-length shirts with sleeves. In the bitter cold of winter, they wore cloaks or robes made of bear, deer, buffalo, or beaver skins, with the fur left on. Clothing was often embroidered with dyed moose hair and porcupine quills.

Adults painted their bodies with figurative or geometrical designs, using paint made from natural materials, such as red and yellow ochre, bloodroot, and charcoal, mixed with sunflower seed oil. They wore fur and feather caps and collars and jewelry made of feathers, animal teeth, bone, and shell beads. Women wore their hair in a single braid down the back. Men's hairstyles varied. Warriors preferred the "scalp lock" (today often called a "Mohawk"), where the head was shaved bald except for a strip of hair down the center.

After the Europeans arrived, the Iroquois began to wear woolen clothes and to decorate their clothing with glass beads,

both obtained in trade with Europeans or other tribes who had traded with the Europeans.

## 12 FOOD

The Iroquois have been farmers since the beginning of their history. Women traditionally did all the planting, tending, and harvesting of crops, while the men supplemented the diet by hunting and fishing. The only crop grown by men was tobacco, used in religious ceremonies. The women also gathered wild plums, grapes, cherries, berries, crabapples, and nuts (chestnuts, black walnuts, and hickory nuts). In the late winter and early spring, maple sap was collected and boiled down into syrup and sugar. This was the only sweetener available to early Iroquois. Corn, squash, and beans were the staple foods, referred to as "the Three Sisters," daughters of Mother Earth. Corn was called "our life," and squash was "supporter of life." Dried corn was often boiled with wood ashes to add nutrition and help loosen the hulls. Once the hulls were removed, the remaining corn, called *hominy*, was washed and boiled until tender. The Iroquois usually only ate one large meal a day, at midmorning (what would now be called "brunch"), though food was available throughout the day.

John Bartram visited the Iroquois in 1743 and later described a feast they served him, consisting of a corn and fish soup, boiled squash and squash blossoms, and corn dumplings with beans. A modern version of Iroquois corn and fish soup can be made as follows:

### Iroquois Soup

- 4 large mushrooms, sliced
- 1 medium onion, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 (10½ oz.) cans beef consommé
- Dash black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons yellow corn meal
- 1 (12 oz.) package frozen haddock fillets
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley
- 1 (10 oz.) package frozen baby lima beans
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- ⅓ cup dry sherry (optional)
- ½ teaspoon basil

Heat corn meal, consommé, mushrooms, garlic, parsley, and seasonings in a large saucepan. Once the liquid boils, reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes without covering. Add remaining ingredients (optional). If haddock is added, break into bite-size pieces as the soup continues to simmer, and stir occasionally. Simmer about 20 more minutes and serve hot. Makes 4-6 servings.

(Adapted from Kimball and Anderson, *The Art of American Indian Cooking*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965, p. 169.)

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, Iroquois children learned the skills they needed to survive in their world by watching and participating in life with their parents, relatives, and other adults. The Iroquois were first introduced to Western European education by French priests at Quebec in 1608. The priests first tried going to the Native North American villages and learning the Native language so that they could then teach the Natives French

culture and Christianity. The Natives simply ignored them. So the priests then tried taking young Native North Americans back to France to educate them there. The idea was that when these young European-educated Natives returned to their villages in North America, they would act as role models for the rest of their community. Instead, the young people found it impossible to adapt to such a foreign life in Europe, and when they returned they no longer fit in with their traditional society because they had not learned the skills necessary to survive there. So they became marginalized in both cultures and often turned to alcohol for comfort, becoming depressed alcoholics rather than role models.

The French priests decided then to send Native North American children to Roman Catholic boarding schools, but most of the children ran away from the schools, and their parents did not encourage them to return. Finally, the French set up reserves (known as “reservations” in the United States); each with a school, Christian church, and missionary hospital, then forced the Native North Americans to relocate there. The French hoped that the Natives would become acculturated to European ways by living on these reserves. Instead, the reserves became institutions of segregation, separating Native North Americans from the rest of European society (and vice versa). The Native peoples became even more resistant to adopting European ways as a result of their enforced segregation.

The Iroquois were never inclined to adopt Christianity or European ways, at least not in large numbers. A few Iroquois did become Christian, and surface accoutrements, such as Western-style clothing, have become standard. Educationally, the Iroquois have done fairly well in recent decades at making the European-dominated system work for them. Lloyd Elm (1934–), an Onondaga educator and administrator, served as the education programs specialist in the Office of Indian Education at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., from 1976–1981. Prior to that, he served on the board of directors for the National Education Association (1973–1974), and he now serves on the New York State Board of Regents (which oversees all education in New York).

Of Iroquois 25 years old and older in 1990, only 10.4% have less than a ninth grade education. Almost 72% (71.2% of men, 72.5% of women) are at least high school graduates, and over 41% have some college education. Only a fourth of those actually finish college—11.3% (11.2% of men, 11.5% of women) have a Bachelor of Arts degree or higher.

School enrollment is fairly high for primary and middle school students, but falls off somewhat in secondary school and falls drastically in college.

AGE	PERCENT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL IN 1990
3–4	29.9
5–14	94.5
15–17	89.9
18–19	59.0
20–24	28.1

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Traditional Iroquois musical instruments are water-drums (drums filled with water to produce a certain pitch), rattles, and the human voice. A modern Iroquois musician is John Kim Bell (1953–), a Mohawk who became the first Native

North American symphony conductor when he was hired by the Toronto Symphony in 1980. Bell also produced and co-wrote the orchestral score for the first Native North American ballet, entitled “In the Land of the Spirits.” He founded the Canadian Native Arts Foundation in 1988 to provide scholarships to young Native North Americans who wish to pursue training in the arts. Bell was named to the Order of Canada, a medal given by the governor general of Canada in recognition of outstanding merit and achievement.

The Iroquois language never had its own written form, so the oral tradition became strong and rich. Today, Iroquois write both in English and in the Iroquois language written down with the Roman alphabet. Modern Iroquois writers include Beth Brant (1941–), a Mohawk poet and prose author; and E. Pauline Johnson (1861–1913), an early Mohawk poet and performer. Johnson was also one of the first Native North American women to publish short fiction.

The Mohawk actor Jay Silverheels (1912–80) was best known for his portrayal of Tonto, the Lone Ranger’s sidekick in the popular 1950s series. (Silverheels was actually the second actor to play Tonto in the series.) He did a great deal of other work in film and was a tireless activist in the areas of alcohol abuse and the elderly. In the 1960s, he founded the Indian Actors Workshop in Hollywood, and in 1979, the year before he died, he became the first Native North American to be awarded a star on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame.

Other modern Iroquois in show business include Gary Dale Farmer (1953– ), a Cayuga actor, producer, and activist; Graham Greene (1950– ), an Oneida actor perhaps best known for his portrayal of Kicking Bird in the 1991 film *Dances with Wolves*, and for his occasional role as Leonard in the television series *Northern Exposure*; and Joanne Shenandoah, an Oneida actress, singer, and songwriter who founded Round Dance Productions, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving Native North American culture.

#### **15 WORK**

In this modern industrial age, Iroquois (especially Mohawk) men have become famous as high steel construction workers. The work requires the same agility, coordination, and courage as traditional Iroquois occupations, such as hunting and warfare. Iroquois construction workers have traveled all over the U.S. and Canada to build bridges and skyscrapers. The work is very dangerous, and it pays well. Unfortunately, it often separates the men from their families and creates a great deal of stress for everyone—for the men, isolated in large cities, or traveling long distances from home, for weeks or months on end; and for their wives, parents, children, and other loved ones waiting at home, and worrying about their safety.

Many other Iroquois work off-reservation in factories or other industries. Others are professionals, such as teachers, nurses, social workers, doctors, and lawyers. Individual Iroquois have become known for their work as anthropologists, educators, historians, scholars, environmentalists, engineers, journalists, and activists. One well-known 19th-century Seneca, Ely S. Parker (1828–95), became the first Native North American Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Appointed to the post by U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant, a longtime friend of Parker’s, he served from 1868 to 1871.

## 16 SPORTS

The Iroquois invented the game the French named *lacrosse*. It is now Canada's national sport. The Iroquois believe that their ancestors gave them the game to develop their endurance and make them great warriors. Boys began learning to play at a very early age. Many Iroquois today still start lacrosse lessons as small children. Lacrosse is played in much the same way as it was centuries ago. Two teams compete to try to move a small ball (traditionally made of wood or deer hide) down the field toward the other team's goal and, finally, into the goal. They carry and throw the ball with long wooden sticks that have a basket at the top, woven from leather thongs. Traditionally, at major festivals each team could have hundreds of men on it and the game could last for hours. Traditional lacrosse was much more violent than today's game. Injuries, often serious ones, were commonplace.

In earlier times children and adults also enjoyed playing a game called "snowsnake," in which a long stick carved and painted to resemble a snake was thrown along an icy path in the snow. The object was to throw it farther than anyone else. Bets were often made on this game. Women played "shinny," a sport resembling today's field hockey.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment and recreation for the Iroquois is similar to that for the general American population.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Iroquois today are known for their soapstone, wood, bone, and antler carvings and sculptures. They also make baskets, lacrosse sticks, and do leather, feather, and bead work.

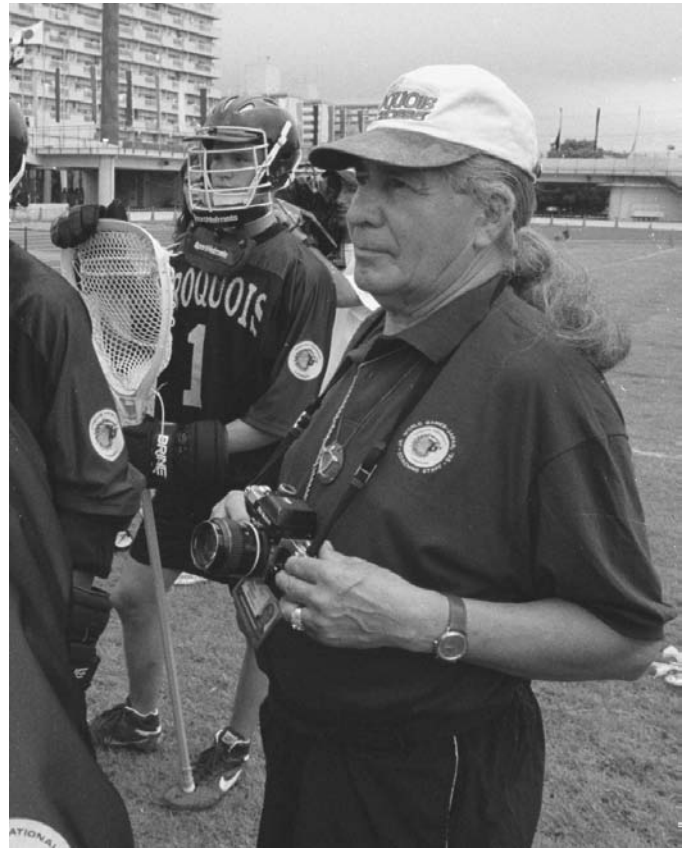
## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The same problems afflicting other Native North Americans today, such as alcoholism, depression, and suicide, also afflict the Iroquois. They also struggle with the same conflict between traditionalists and progressives. This conflict has become particularly fierce at the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation, which straddles the U.S.–Canada border. Violence erupting between traditional and progressive factions has led to many arrests and even a few killings in recent years. In some places this conflict becomes tangled (or is one and the same) with the conflict between traditionally religious and Christian Iroquois.

The loss of land has been a serious problem for the Iroquois, as with other Native North American peoples. In the 1950s the Seneca lost more than 9,000 acres, forcing 130 families to leave their homes, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the Kinzua Dam near Warren, Pennsylvania. Damming the Allegheny River caused waters to flood over Seneca lands. In 1960 the Tuscaroras near Niagara Falls lost a significant amount of land to a public reservoir (an artificial pond or lake, used to store water for public consumption) built by the U.S. government. The Iroquois are currently engaged in many legal battles to regain ancestral lands that were stolen from them during the past two or three centuries by European Americans and Canadians.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Reciprocal dualism is a governing principle that applies to all of Iroquoian society, including gender relations. For the Iro-



*Onondaga Chief Oren R. Lyons, the Iroquois Nation lacrosse team's honorary chairman, attends the team meeting during their match against the Japanese team at the Lacrosse World Championships for under 19 in Tokyo, Japan. Being able to compete in the tournament is very special to the Iroquois Nation players because the sport was first played by Native Americans. (AP Images)*

quois there is a symbolic opposition of the sexes. This opposition is reflected in all aspects of Iroquoian society, including the spatial organization of traditional villages. Women's space includes the village and all of the areas of cleared fields to the edge of the woods. Men's space is the wooded areas.

Within the Iroquois longhouse, the senior living woman is the matriarch who controls the household. All of the individuals living in the household are related by blood or marriage to a common female ancestor. The matrilineal descent group is the primary unit of Iroquois government, since males who hold political office derive their positions through their female relatives.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, the two major theoreticians of the early women's rights movement in the United States, wrote about the superior social, political, religious, and economic status of women among the Iroquois. Their work for women's rights was inspired and influenced by their knowledge of the Iroquois system of gender balance and harmony.

In precontact Iroquois society, individuals who changed gender were accepted; however, the evidence concerning their roles in society is sketchy at best. It is clear that following contact and the conversion of many Iroquois to Christianity, these gender changing individuals were no longer accepted or toler-



ated. There is evidence that, among the Iroquois, boys who began to demonstrate the characteristics of a woman-man were discouraged to follow the change in gender. As in other tribes where male prestige was based on warlike deeds, the Iroquois did not favor males who followed the female gender.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# ITALIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Italian history and culture, see **Vol. 4 Italians**.

## OVERVIEW

Italian Americans are the fifth largest ethnic group in the United States, after German, British, African, and Irish Americans. It is estimated that one out of every 20 Americans is of Italian descent. The first Italians to come to America emigrated from northern Italy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Few in number, they blended in with American society, making their homes mostly in the familiar terrain of California wine country. These first Italian Americans tended to be well-educated professionals and craftspersons.

Beginning around 1880, however, a massive migration began from southern Italy to the United States. These immigrants were uneducated, poor farmers or landless peasants who had suffered for many years from poor soil, drought, unemployment, and political corruption and oppression. Between the years of 1860 and 1920, some five million southern Italians moved to the United States. Most were young men hoping to find good-paying jobs, save up a significant amount of money, and then return to Italy and their families. Perhaps 1.5 million of them actually did move back to Italy. The rest stayed in America.

The southern Italian immigrants tended to settle in New York City or neighboring areas because they did not have the money to travel very far after disembarking from the ship at Ellis Island. Because Italians preferred to live among their friends and neighbors, subsequent immigrants settled near those who had come before. Small enclaves of Italian Americans from the same region of Italy developed into “Little Italys,” some of which still exist today.

Little Italys began as slums. Poor Italian immigrants moved into tenement housing recently vacated by earlier groups of immigrants such as Germans, Jews, or Irish, who had moved up to better housing. However, most Italian Americans chose to stay and improve their housing in Little Italy rather than move out when their financial situations improved.

Like most early immigrants, Italian Americans suffered from prejudice and discrimination, both from other Americans as well as within their own ranks. Northern and southern Italians have a history of mutual dislike, and Italian Americans continued to carry those bad feelings for one another. Other Americans were more accepting of northern Italians because they are generally fair haired and were seen as more “Germanic” and refined. Southern Italians, on the other hand, were seen as dark, brutish, ignorant peasants who would never fit in with sophisticated American society.

In the 1920s, American labor forces began to organize for better wages and working conditions. Because Italian Americans, poor and desperate for work, were willing to take any job for any wage, they were seen as a threat to other American workers. The press began depicting Italian Americans as criminals, suggesting that they were all connected with the Mafia. In fact, very few Italian Americans had any links with the Mafia or other organized crime. But the stereotype of the Italian American gangster had taken hold and has yet to be dislodged,

as testified by the popular gangster movies *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*, and the television series *The Sopranos*.

The trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian Americans from Boston who were leaders in the socialist movement, grew out of anti-Italian sentiment and added more fuel to the fire. Arrested in connection with a robbery and killing, they were convicted despite a lack of evidence. After seven years of appeals, they were executed in 1927. Italian American witnesses for the defense were discounted because, according to popular belief at the time, Italians could not be trusted.

The Great Depression of the 1930s worsened the Italian Americans' situation. Not only were jobs hard to find, but also other Americans used the Italian Americans as scapegoats, accusing them of taking jobs away from "real Americans." Violence against Italian Americans, though not a new phenomenon (lynchings and murders had occurred as early as the mid-1880s), increased. Wages fell, and more and more Italian American men found themselves unemployed.

Italian American women's horizons suddenly expanded, on the other hand. Although men were traditionally the sole breadwinners of Italian families, the Depression forced Italian American men to allow their wives and daughters to work outside the home to supplement the family income. This brought Italian American women into contact with more people of all backgrounds, gave them confidence in themselves as independent persons, and caused them to begin to question their husbands' or fathers' authority. The dynamics began to change in Italian American families, and World War II (1939–45) cemented those changes.

Italian American men and women contributed greatly to the American war effort in both World Wars I and II. Although Italian Americans made up only 4% of the U.S. population at the start of World War I, they constituted 12% of U.S. military troops. In World War II, over 500,000 Italian Americans served in the U.S. military. Like other American women, Italian American women went to work on the homefront to support their families and their country, while the men were away at war. By the time the men returned, traditional Italian divisions of labor were gone for good in America.

In the booming postwar economy of the 1950s, Italian Americans finally improved their circumstances. They found good-paying jobs or started their own businesses. Many either moved to better neighborhoods or improved their homes in Little Italys. Young Italian Americans were able to afford higher education and so could advance to managerial or professional positions. By the 1980s, Italian Americans' average family income was about \$2,000 higher than that for all U.S. families.

Italian immigration to the United States continues today, though at a much slower pace than during the Great Migration of 1880–1920. Because of global developments and improvements in worldwide communications, today's Italian immigrants are generally more knowledgeable and sophisticated than those who came before. For instance, as of the 2000 U.S. Census, two-thirds of Italian Americans worked in white-collar positions in business, medicine, law, education, and other professions. The total Italian American population in 2000 was nearly 16 million, although through intermarriage the number of people in the United States with at least one Italian grandparent was estimated to be about 26 million. About half of all Italian Americans live in the Northeast, with 2.7 million in

New York State alone. (As of the 2000 census, 8.7% of the population of New York City was of Italian descent: 692,739 New Yorkers reported Italian ancestry, making them the largest European ethnic group in the city. The New York metropolitan area is home to 3,372,512 Italians, which is the third largest concentration in the world after the Milan and Rome metropolitan areas.) New Jersey and California each have 1.5 million Italian Americans followed by Pennsylvania (1.4 million) and Florida (1 million).

Sicilians have chosen a slightly different settlement pattern than other Italian Americans. The largest Sicilian American population is in California, with a sizeable number in New York State. The rest of the Sicilian American population is spread across the United States, with noticeable numbers in Ohio, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, and New Jersey.

Most Italian immigrants speak regional dialects of the Italian language. Many early immigrants were illiterate in "official" Italian. Once they arrived in the United States, they began to blend their various dialects with elements of official Italian and English, creating a common language known as Italglish. English words such as "picnic," "sandwich," and "son of a gun" were Italianized to become *picnicco*, *sanguiccio*, and *sonamagogna*. Subsequent generations of Italian Americans were able to choose between the regional dialect of their parents and grandparents, official Italian, English, and Italglish. With each succeeding generation, however, fluency in all but English has diminished.

Italian Americans often anglicize their names to hide their ethnicity and/or ease their acceptance into American society. In earlier times, immigration officials also misspelled Italian names on entrance visas, anglicizing them either intentionally or accidentally. In this way, Rossi became Ross, Gilberti changed to Gilbert, and Bernardo was henceforth Bernard. Well-known Italian Americans who have anglicized their names include Anne Bancroft (Anna Marie Italiano), Tony Bennett (Anthony Benedetto), Dean Martin (Dino Crocetti), and Madonna (Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone).

Italian Americans adhere to a unique brand of Roman Catholicism. Their faith is filled with festivity, magic, and independent spirit. Although fervent believers, they also staunchly support their right to question the Pope's teachings. Many use contraceptives and promote a woman's right to have an abortion.

The first Catholics to immigrate in large numbers to the United States were Irish Catholics. Because of generations of persecution, their faith had become secretive and somber. When the Italian Catholics arrived in America with their parades, bright colors, huge feasts, and parties on any and every occasion, the Irish Catholics were shocked and offended. They refused to allow Italian Catholics to worship in their churches. Finally, the Church in Rome decided to establish separate Italian Catholic parishes in the United States. These parishes each have a patron saint, whose feast day is jubilantly celebrated with a *fiesta*. Italian Americans hold *fiestas* for a multitude of occasions, and though the specifics vary, each contains dancing, singing, feasting, and a procession through the streets. One of the largest *fiestas* is that of San Gennaro in New York City.

Weddings are the most highly celebrated rite of passage among Italian Americans, and Christmas and Easter are the most important holidays. Some Italian Americans honor the



feast day of St. Lucy (*Santa Lucia*) on 13 December, and most mark the feast day of St. John the Baptist on 24 June. All Souls Day on 1 November is another popular Italian American religious holiday, along with All Souls Eve (31 October), better known as Halloween.

Italian Americans began celebrating Columbus Day on 12 October 1866 in New York City. The tradition grew, and in 1909 Columbus Day became a legal U.S. holiday. Although Columbus Day has come under question in recent years by other ethnic groups in the United States, Italian Americans still cling to the holiday as an expression of their cultural heritage.

Italian Americans are very expressive people, communicating as much through gestures as with words. Some common Italian American gestures include slowly raising the chin, which means “I don’t know,” or “I’m not going to tell you”; thumbing the nose, an insulting gesture indicating that the other person is a fool; flicking the teeth to express anger; flicking the chin to express indifference; and lifting one eyebrow to say “It’s time to talk.”

The family is extremely important to Italian Americans. Family loyalty comes above all else. Younger generations of Italian Americans are less likely to live in neighborhoods surrounded by their extended family, so the nuclear family has become more central in recent years. The elderly are still cared for within the family whenever possible, however, in contrast to other Americans who are much more likely to admit their elderly parents and grandparents to nursing homes.

Food is nearly as important as family to Italian Americans. Most mainstream “Italian” restaurants serve an Americanized version of southern Italian cuisine, which centers on pasta (spaghetti, lasagne, ravioli, etc.). Northern Italian cuisine, revolving around polenta (made from cornmeal) and risotto (a rice dish) has been gaining in popularity in recent years. Bread is the staple food for all Italian Americans. Some traditional households use up to 25 pounds of flour per week for the family’s homemade bread supply. Homemade pasta can require another 10 pounds of flour each week.

Mealtimes are family times, and as recently as the 1970s, a high school in Cleveland, Ohio, reported problems in keeping its Italian American students in school during lunch hour. Despite regulations to the contrary, the students would leave school to have lunch at home with their families. Dinner times in the evening are also not to be missed, except in the case of emergency. Wine is always present at evening meals. Italian Americans consider wine a food, not a liquor. Drunkenness is considered disgraceful, however, as expressed in the Sicilian rhyme: *La biviri non misurata / Fa l’uomo asinata* (“Drunkenness makes an ass of a man”).

The majority of first-generation Italian Americans were uneducated laborers who believed that hard work was the path to wisdom. They did not, therefore, encourage their children to attend school. The dropout rate among second-generation Italian Americans was high. Gradually, however, succeeding generations of Italian Americans became more interested in education and began attending and finishing school in greater

numbers. According to the 2000 Census, Italian Americans had a greater high school graduation rate than the national average, and a greater than or equal rate of advanced degrees compared to the national average.

Perhaps the greatest artistic contribution Italian Americans have made to American culture is the love of opera. In 1932, Italian immigrant Lorenzo Da Ponte founded the Italian Opera House in New York City, the first opera house in the United States. Italian American Gian-Carlo Menotti composed *The Saint of Bleeker Street*, which debuted on 27 December 1954 in New York City. It was the first opera composed by an Italian American, concerning Italian Americans, and performed by Italian Americans, and it won a Pulitzer prize.

Other Italian American musicians include Enrico Caruso, Frank Sinatra, and Bruce Springsteen (who is half-Italian American, half-Dutch American), along with singer-actors Annette Funicello, Jimmy Durante, and Madonna. Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, and Sylvester Stallone are well-known Italian American actors, and Penny Marshall (Marsharelli), Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese (Martin Marcantonio Luciano Scorsese) are successful Italian American film directors. An Italian American artist whose creations are very well known is Joe Barbera, of the Hanna-Barbera animation team (creators of Yogi Bear, Tom and Jerry, the Jetsons, and the Smurfs). Frank Stella (b. 1936) achieved fame as a minimalist and abstract expressionist painter and sculptor in the 1960s: his paintings hang in America's most prestigious museums.

Italian Americans hold fast to the traditional Italian work ethic and so have risen to the top of many fields in American society. Physicist Enrico Fermi ushered in the atomic age; Fiorenzo La Guardia became the first Italian American mayor of New York City in 1933; Geraldine Ferraro won the nomination for Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1984, the first woman ever to do so; Mario Cuomo served as the governor of New York State from 1986 to 1994; Rudolph Giuliani served as mayor of New York during the 1990s and was mayor at the time of the 11 September 2001 tragedy; and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi was elected the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2007. The first Italian American millionaire was sand-and-gravel magnate Generoso Pope, whose son, Generoso Pope, Jr., publishes the *National Enquirer*. Lee Iacocca served as president of both the Ford Motor Company and Chrysler Corporation. Ernest and Julio Gallo, who entered the wine business in 1933, soon dominated the industry. Other successful Italian American businesses include Planters Peanuts, the Bank of America, Mr. Coffee, Chun King, Celeste Italian Foods Company, and Tropicana.

Italian Americans have also been very successful in sports. Charles Atlas (born Angelo Siciliano) was a world-famous bodybuilder whose correspondence course attracted the likes of Italian American baseball player Joe DiMaggio and Mahatma Gandhi. Other well-known Italian American athletes include boxer Rocky Marciano, baseball great Lawrence Peter "Yogi" Berra, football coach Vince Lombardi, quarterback Joe Montana, hockey player Phil Esposito, and gymnast Mary Lou Retton.

Older Italian Americans continue to enjoy the traditional games of *bocce* (lawn bowling) and *morra* (a guessing game where two people each extend some fingers of one hand at the same time and loudly guess what the total number of fin-

gers will be). Most younger Italian Americans, however, have turned to more Americanized pastimes.

For the most part, Italian Americans have adapted to life in the United States and are well accepted in American society today. The difficulties of their early years in America have largely been put behind them.

While many of the stories of Italian men who came to America at the turn of the 20th century are filled with adventure and daring, the stories of the tenacious Italian women who came to America in search of success are just as compelling. Young Italian women bravely left their small towns and villages to live in the new world. They valued education, hard work, and honesty, and schooled their children in such virtues. While traditional Italian American women still work primarily in the home, contemporary Italian American women have become doctors, lawyers, artists, scientists, nurses, businesswomen, educators, writers, judges, and politicians.

Italian American men are stereotypically known for their "macho" culture with its emphasis on honor and virility. Coupled with a religious tradition steeped in Catholicism, Italian American gays and lesbians often find it a challenge to be accepted within the community. This social situation was explored in the 2003 documentary film *Saints and Sinners*, which tells the story of an Italian American gay couple planning a wedding according to Catholic rite. In addition to portraying the social ramification of such a union, the film deals with the intimate link between Italian American culture and the Catholic tradition, and suggests the perceptions that Americans have of Italian Americans and their faith.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# JAMAICANS

**LOCATION:** Jamaica

**POPULATION:** 2.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** English; Patois (Creole dialect with West African, Spanish, and French elements)

**RELIGION:** Christianity; (Anglicanism, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism); Rastafarianism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The official motto of Jamaica is, “Out of Many People, One People.” The motto expresses the fact that Jamaicans include people of African, European, Arabic (Lebanese descendants known as “Syrians”), Chinese, and East Indian heritage. These cultures come together to form one people, one spirit. In fact, if Jamaicans had a second official motto it would almost certainly have to be, “No problem, Mon.” This phrase and others like, “No pressure, no problem,” are typical responses when asked to do something, and often serve as stand-ins for “You’re welcome.” Decorating tee-shirts and other souvenirs, these phrases capture the care-free, happy-go-lucky spirit of Jamaicans.

Columbus discovered Jamaica in 1494. In the early 1500s, African slaves were brought in to work the sugarcane fields, replacing the native Arawaks who had perished. The island remained under Spanish rule until 1655, when it was captured by the British. During the five-year struggle between the Spanish and the British, a number of runaway slaves (later known as the Maroons), took shelter in the pits that make up the Cockpit Country area of the island. The Maroons maintained an autonomous existence for more than half a century. Abolition came in 1833, and the decline of the plantations followed. The former slaves became peasant farmers.

In 1938, Norman Washington Manley, a well-known lawyer, founded the People’s National Party (PNP), espousing a moderate form of socialism. He served as chief minister of Jamaica (1955–59) and prime minister (1959–62). His tenure served to set the stage for Jamaican independence.

In 1958, Jamaica formed the West Indies Federation with nine other British possessions, but it withdrew three years later, which led to the collapse of the federation. Jamaica’s withdrawal was led by Sir Alexander Bustamante, a cousin of Manley’s. Bustamante was a labor leader. He founded the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union, Jamaica’s largest union. Subsequently he formed the moderate Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) to counteract the more radical PNP. He was chief minister from 1953 to 1955 and became prime minister in 1962 when Jamaica gained full independence. Bustamante, who initiated extensive public works programs and land reform, remained in office until 1967.

In 1972, Michael Manley, son of Norman Manley and leader of the PNP, became prime minister. Manley instituted many socialist changes. Manley’s policies created a large trade deficit which brought Jamaica to near bankruptcy by 1980. New elections were held, with conservative Labor Party leader Edward P. G. Seaga rising to power. Seaga won reelection in 1983 but was defeated by Manley in 1989. Manley, who then adopted free-market economic policies, resigned in 1992 due to failing health. He was succeeded as party head and prime minister by Percival J. Patterson. Patterson led the PNP to victories

in 1993, 1997, and 2002. In 2005 Edward Seaga announced his resignation as JLP leader. He was succeeded by Bruce Golding, who had been a government minister under Seaga in the 1980s. In March 2006, Portia Simpson-Miller was appointed Jamaica’s seventh prime minister. She was the first woman in the nation’s history to become prime minister. In September 2007, Bruce Golding was named prime minister.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Jamaica’s population of more than 2.8 million is equally divided between urban and rural dwellers, and grew at a rate 0.78% in 2008. Jamaicans are mostly descendants of African Blacks, with minor representations from East Indian, Chinese, and European ancestries.

Located south of Cuba and west of Hispaniola, Jamaica is the third-largest island in the Caribbean Sea. The capital is Kingston, with a population of more than 650,000 people. Most of the soil of the island contains a high percentage of limestone, which makes cultivation difficult. The weather is almost always pleasant, with a mean annual temperature of 27°C (80°F) on the coast. Tourists flock to Jamaica for its beautiful beaches. The towns of Montego Bay, Ocho Rios, and Negril offer some of the most popular resorts. The island is susceptible to hurricanes, however, and suffered considerable damage during Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 when nearly 25% of the population was left homeless and property damage was in excess of \$300 million. In the early 21st century, hurricanes Ivan and Dean also brought severe weather to the island.

Other popular attractions for tourists are the island’s more than 800 caves. Many were home to the earliest inhabitants. Others are said to be the home of “duppies,” the word Jamaicans use for ghosts.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Jamaicans speak English, but with a distinct flavor. Elements of Elizabethan English can be heard among Jamaicans engaged in casual conversation. A jug, for example, is referred to as a “goblet.” The “th” is substituted with a “d,” such that “that” becomes “dat,” for example.

While the official language is English, most Jamaicans who live in the rural areas speak a Creole dialect. Patois, as it is called, is influenced mostly by West African languages, but also contains elements of Spanish and French. Perhaps the most famous of the patois words is *I-rie* (meaning “fabulous”), which comes from the language of Rastafarians (a religious sect). Rastafarians place great emphasis on the individual—the singular being “I” and the plural being “I and I.” Other words, such as *putta-putta* (“mud”) come from Africa.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Central to Jamaican folklore are the tales of Anansi (or Anancy) the Spider. The tales, brought to the island by the first slaves, tell of the mythical Anansi, a spider (sometimes taking the form of a man) who uses his wits to outsmart his foes. While declining in popularity, Anansi is still the subject of many bedtime stories.

## 5 RELIGION

Religion is an important part of life for Jamaicans. Around 65% are Christian. Jamaicans’ major religions include Angli-

canism, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism. Other religions include Bahá'í, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. There is a very small Jewish population.

About 5 to 10% of Jamaicans call themselves Rastafarians. Rastafarians are members of a Jamaican messianic movement dating back to the 1930s. Jamaican Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association. His goal was self-reliance for Africans at home and abroad. His “back-to-Africa” theme inspired and influenced many worldwide and is credited as the inspiration behind the independence movements in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria, as well as the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Today, Garvey is a national hero.

According to Rastafarian belief, the only true God is the late Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie (originally known as Ras Tafari), and Ethiopia is the true Zion. Rastafarians claim that White Christians have perverted the scriptures to conceal the fact that Adam and Jesus were Black. Rastafarians place great emphasis on spirituality and meditation. Their rituals include the use of *ganja* (marijuana) and chanting. The ganja is smoked in a pipe called a “chalice,” usually made from goat horn or bamboo. Rastafarians are known for wearing their hair in dreadlocks, sporting beards (a sign of a pact with God), and carrying Bibles.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Jamaicans celebrate their independence on August 6. For several weeks beforehand, they stage a huge celebration called “Festival!” During this period artists of all types perform, many as part of competitions. School children get involved in the festivities, fostering their sense of national pride and traditions.

Jonkanoo (John Canoe) is a dancing procession around the time of Christmas. The origins of this celebration are unclear, but many believe its origins to be in East Africa. Celebrants wearing extravagant costumes dance to the music of drums and cane flutes.

Most other holidays and celebrations center on religious themes and include Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Christian sacraments and traditions define the rites of passage for most Jamaicans and are celebrated in similar fashion to that in the United States.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Jamaicans tend to be casual, open, and friendly in their relationships. When parting, a typical response is “Peradventure I will see you tomorrow.”

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions vary from luxurious for the affluent to rudimentary for those of lesser economic means. Poverty is an increasing problem. Health care is generally considered good, and the average life expectancy is 75.4 years for women and 71.9 years for men. For all Jamaicans, however, dealing with breakdowns of electricity, mail, water, and telephone services is not uncommon.



## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Men and women tend to marry or start living together at an early age, and a couple that does not have children soon thereafter is deemed unusual.

## 11 CLOTHING

Everyday wear for Jamaicans is cool and comfortable. Rastafarians have made the colors of the Ethiopian flag—red, green, and gold—popular in clothing. Churchgoers tend to dress very formally on Sundays.

## 12 FOOD

*Nyam* is the patois word meaning “to eat.” Jamaicans eat foods that are rich in spices, most commonly pimento, ginger, nutmeg, and pepper. Cassava (Yuca) is a tuber that is widely popular on the island. Bammy is a bread-like snack made from cassava. Ackee and saltfish is a popular Jamaican snack or breakfast dish. Ackee, the national fruit of Jamaica, if not properly prepared, can be poisonous.

For dinner, Jamaicans will typically eat peas and rice accompanied by either jerk chicken or pork. “Jerk” refers to the method of smoking the meat over a pimento wood fire. Below is a simple but spicy recipe.

### Curry Chicken

- 1–3 pounds chicken
- 2 tablespoon curry powder
- lemon juice
- 3–4 tablespoons cooking oil
- onion, thyme, garlic, pepper, salt to taste

Cut chicken into small pieces, and let sit in lemon juice for at least one hour. Remove chicken and season it. Marinate for several minutes. Heat 3–4 tablespoons of cooking oil in a skillet. Add chicken and let cook until done. Serve over white rice or rice and peas.



Young Jamaican girl holding baby girl. While women are often held in high regard, men are seen as the heads of households. (United Nations)

### 13 EDUCATION

Some 88% of all adult Jamaicans are literate. The law requires children to attend school from age 7 to 15. There are five universities in Jamaica: the University of the West Indies (Mona Campus); the University of Technology, Jamaica formerly the College of Art Science and Technology (CAST); the Northern Caribbean University; the University College of the Caribbean; and the International University of the Caribbean. Additionally there are many teacher training and community colleges. The Institute of Jamaica, also in Kingston, has a library and museum of Jamaican history, art, and natural history.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Jamaica's musical heritage includes Mento, which is a form of music and dance with roots in African music, and Ska, a soft-style rhythm-and-blues beat. Reggae, however, has almost become synonymous with Jamaica, and Bob Marley synonymous with reggae. Bob Marley spread reggae worldwide. In 1964, Marley formed his group, the Wailers. Their first hit was "Simmer Down." Three years later, Marley converted to the Rastafarian religion. Rastafarian themes dominated his work. Marley became a songwriter for Johnny Nash in 1972. His first international hit was "Stir It Up." In 1973 Bob Marley and the Wailers had their American debut album, *Catch a Fire*, and its follow up, *Burnin'* (which contained the subsequent hits, "Get Up, Stand Up" and "I Shot the Sheriff"—popularized by Eric Clapton). Later albums included *Natty Dread*, *Rastaman Vi-*

*bration*, and *Uprising*. Marley, who died of cancer in 1981 at the age of 36, was awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit. His work influenced countless reggae and pop artists, including Ziggy Marley (Bob's son), who revitalized reggae in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Dance-hall music (also known as "DJ music") is an offshoot of reggae which is popular with Jamaicans. The music is loud and dancers wear elaborate and colorful outfits. Also popular is "So-Ca," a combination of soul and calypso.

Paintings and sculptures are abundant in Jamaica. One of the most famous painters was John Dunkley, whose work has a primitive quality. Edna Manley (wife of Norman and mother of Michael) was renowned for her sculptures. Also renowned for sculpting was Mallica "Kapo" Reynolds, whose work is on display at the National Gallery in Kingston. In literature, Jamaican-born poet, critic, and educator Louis Aston Marantz Simpson is recognized for his elegant verse. His work, *At the End of the Open Road*, won the 1964 Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

### 15 WORK

Approximately 17% of the Jamaican work force is devoted to agriculture. Sugar, tropical fruits, coffee, cacao, and spices are grown in quantity for export through the ports of Kingston and Montego Bay. Another 64% is in services, including finance, real estate, public administration, public utilities, transportation, communication, construction, and other sectors. Manufacturing accounts for 19% of the work force. Jamaica has developed a profitable mining industry. Jamaica is among the world's leading producers of bauxite and alumina, which are exported to Canada, Norway, and the United States for refining into aluminum. Remittances account for nearly 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and are equivalent to tourism revenues.

The lack of indigenous energy sources has slowed Jamaica's industrial development. Jamaica struggles under the fourth highest foreign debt burden in the world in proportion to population. The economy also faces serious long-term problems, including high but declining interest rates, increased foreign competition, exchange rate instability, a sizable merchandise trade deficit, and large-scale unemployment and underemployment.

Some Jamaicans make a living as "higglers." These are people who buy inexpensive goods overseas and then sell them for a substantial profit on the sidewalks of Jamaica.

### 16 SPORTS

Sports for Jamaicans can be summed up as follows: cricket, cricket, and more cricket. Vaguely resembling baseball, cricket dates back to 16th-century England. A match can go on for days. George Headley was a legendary Jamaican cricket player of the 1930s. Children and adults alike play and watch the sport throughout the island.

Jamaicans have also excelled in track and field, boxing, and basketball. Jamaicans also enjoy all types of water sports.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

While the general attitude of Jamaicans is one that is typically laid-back and casual, Jamaicans are passionate about enjoying life. Jamaicans are not ones to sit and watch television. Entertainment and recreation often take the form of listening to live

music (usually reggae), gathering with friends, participating in sports, or enjoying a day of food and fun at the beach.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Along the tourist areas, Jamaican artisans display their crafts, which include *bankras* (baskets) and *yabbas* (clay bowls).

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Jamaicans have had their share of racial tension and class struggles that disrupt an otherwise unified, peaceful existence. Deteriorating economic conditions during the 1970s led to violence as rival gangs affiliated with the major political parties evolved into powerful organized crime networks involved in international drug smuggling and money laundering. Violent crime, drug trafficking, and poverty are continuing problems today. High unemployment also worsens the crime problem, including gang violence that is fueled by the drug trade. Considered sacred by some, *ganja* (marijuana) is illegal, but the government's actions against its cultivation and use are often seen as superficial.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women's liberation has been slow to come to Jamaica. While women are often held in high regard, men are seen as the heads of households. Great importance is placed on a man's virility and a woman's fertility.

Homosexual intercourse between men is illegal, and homophobia is rife in Jamaica. Homosexuality is a subject that evokes extreme reactions among Jamaicans. Most Jamaican gays have not "come out" of the closet.

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—revised by J. Hobby

## JAPANESE AMERICANS

For more information on Japanese history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Japanese**.

### OVERVIEW

The first Japanese arrived in America by accident in the early 1800s, swept off in their fishing boats by powerful currents and shipwrecked. Rescued at sea by U.S. ships, they were brought to America, where they usually remained because it was illegal at that time to leave or enter Japan. In 1868 a group of about 150 contract laborers secretly left Japan and came to work on the sugar plantations in Hawaii. After suffering mistreatment and harsh working conditions, they were called back to Japan. About one-third returned, while the others chose to stay on in Hawaii.

In 1885, Japan decided to open its borders in a limited way and allowed a restricted number of emigrants to leave for Hawaii. Most of those who chose to go to Hawaii intended to work hard, save a large sum of money, and return to Japan. A few did, but most ended up staying in Hawaii.

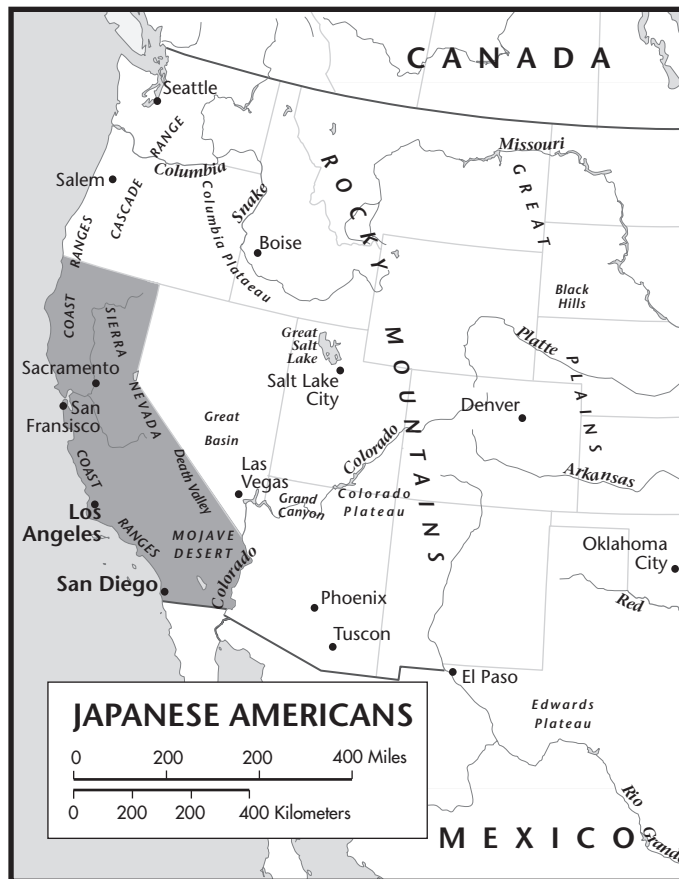
Groups of Japanese Americans began to establish farming colonies in the early 1900s. Although the first experiment, the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony established in 1869 near Sacramento, California, had failed, later attempts were more successful. Between 1904 and 1919, five farming colonies, each called Yamato Colony, were established in the San Joaquin Valley of California, near Boca Raton, Florida, and near Brownsville, Texas. The Texas colony did not last much longer than the original Wakamatsu failure, and the Florida colony eventually dwindled away (though it struggled along for almost three decades). The California colonies, however, are still in operation today, and the Wakamatsu Colony is being restored as an historic site.

In 1908, as a compromise between Japanese-U.S. relations and anti-Asian racial tensions in California, Japan and the United States signed the "Gentleman's Agreement," discontinuing all Japanese emigration to the United States except for "former residents, parents, wives or children of residents" in return for the integration of Japanese American students into American public schools. But fear of the so-called "Yellow Peril" led to further discriminatory acts, such as alien land laws (stating that no one who was ineligible for U.S. citizenship, which included all Asians, could own land); the "Ladies' Agreement" of 1921, barring any more picture brides from entering the United States, and, finally, the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924, which prohibited the immigration of anyone ineligible for citizenship, effectively ending Japanese immigration.

In 1929, Japanese Americans created the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) to fight for their rights and promote a Japanese American identity for all Japanese Americans. The JACL still exists today as the largest Asian American civil rights organization.

Relations between the United States and Japan worsened throughout the 1930s. Then, on 7 December 1941, Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, at that time a U.S. Territory (it would become the 50th U.S. state in 1959). The U.S. government immediately seized over 1,000 Japanese American community leaders in Hawaii and on the U.S. west coast and





imprisoned them. Two months later, on 10 February 1942, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which ordered all Japanese Americans to be evacuated from their homes and sent to detention camps. They were also presented with loyalty questionnaires to fill out and sign. At the time, the U.S. government believed this was necessary to prevent those Japanese Americans still loyal to Japan from sabotaging U.S. military efforts, carrying out espionage for the Japanese government, or staging internal attacks. However, no other immigrant group was detained or had their loyalty questioned during the whole of World War II (1939–45), including German and Italian Americans. Executive Order 9066 was clearly racially motivated, and it would take decades for the U.S. government to redress this grievous wrong. In 1988, a bill was finally passed to pay \$20,000 per internee living when the bill went into effect, or to his or her heirs, and in 2005 the California legislature passed a bill to give diplomas to Japanese Americans who had been forcibly removed from high school during the internment. The internment camps themselves are now being preserved as historic sites and educational centers.

Most Japanese Americans had been forced to sell their homes and businesses at a moment's notice when informed that they were to be evacuated. After suffering for almost three years in the dreadful living conditions of the internment camps, they were released to a life with no home, no property, and no financial resources. Many were afraid to return to the "Japantowns" of the West Coast because anti-Asian sentiment was still running high there. Consequently, the Japanese American community became much more widely dispersed, scattering across the United States.

Japanese Americans also tried to hide their cultural differences, blending in with mainstream American society as much as possible. A great deal of traditional Japanese culture was discarded by Japanese Americans in those first years after World War II, and more has been lost in succeeding generations. The movement for redress (compensation for wrongs done to Japanese Americans), which began in earnest in the 1970s, did lead many young Japanese Americans to examine their history and begin to reclaim their identity as Japanese Americans. Once redress was achieved, however, the rallying point for Japanese Americans as a culture group was gone and interest in a separate Japanese American identity waned once again.

The children and grandchildren of Japanese American internees were encouraged to adopt mainstream American values, traditions, and attitudes. Most grew up speaking only English, learning and experiencing very little of traditional Japanese culture. Because they no longer lived in Japanese American enclaves but were rather dispersed throughout American communities, they made many non-Japanese American friends. This led to a rise in interracial marriages to the point that today there are very few Japanese American children of pure Japanese descent. The Japanese American community may eventually disappear simply through racial blending.

According to the U.S. Census, there were 1,148,932 Japanese Americans living in the United States in 2000. Over two-thirds (about 70%) are American-born, almost twice as many as in any other Asian American group. Although Japanese immigration continues into the United States, most Japanese Americans are descended from Japanese who arrived before 1924. Some 200,000 Japanese settled in Hawaii and 180,000 on the U.S. mainland between 1885 and 1924.

Most Japanese Americans (68%) still live in the West, with the majority concentrated in the Pacific region. California has the highest population of Japanese Americans (394,896). Although Hawaii has fewer Japanese Americans (296,674) than California, they comprise a higher percentage of the total population (25%, compared to 1% in California). In 2000 one-fifth (20%) of all Japanese Americans lived in Honolulu alone. The next highest Japanese American populations are in the states of Washington (56,210), New York (45,237), Texas (28,060), and Illinois (27,702).

Japanese Americans distinguish themselves by generation. *Issei* are first generation Japanese Americans who were born in Japan. Their children, second generation Japanese Americans, are called *Nisei*. The children of *Nisei* and grandchildren of *Issei* are known as *Sansei*, or third generation Japanese Americans. *Yonsei* are fourth generation Japanese Americans, children of *Sansei*. Many Japanese Americans today are either *Sansei* or *Yonsei*. They have lived in the United States longer than some European Americans and consider themselves more American than Japanese. Most do not speak Japanese or follow traditional Japanese customs.

The Japanese are very tolerant, and Japanese Americans likewise follow a variety of religious faiths. In their efforts to assimilate with mainstream American culture, many have become Christian, though they may still visit Buddhist temples on traditional Buddhist holidays. Certain Shinto customs also survive, such as visiting shrines at New Year's and praying to Shinto gods for luck.

Major rites of passage, such as weddings and funerals, may be celebrated in traditional Buddhist or Shinto fashion. Some

families take their children to the Buddhist temple for the Infant's First Service, or *Hatsu Mairi*, in May, where the children are formally introduced to the community for the first time. Adult Japanese Americans who choose to pursue Buddhism seriously are given a Buddhist name in the Three Treasures, or *Ti Sarana*, ceremony held every March and September.

Most Japanese Americans continue to celebrate certain traditional Japanese holidays. Although different communities celebrate a variety of holidays, nearly all Japanese Americans recognize New Year's (*Shogatsu*), the Doll Festival (*Hina Matsuri*), Children's Day (*Tango no Sekku*), the Weaving Loom or Star Festival (*Tanabata*), and the Bon Dance (*Bon Odori*). Japanese Americans often add typical American holiday foods, such as ham or turkey, to their traditional Japanese feasts, and girls may display American rather than Japanese dolls on Hina Matsuri.

Tanabata had been celebrated in a rather reduced form in the United States, consisting of small gatherings of people reading poetry. Recently, however, Japanese Americans are returning to more elaborate displays of traditional Tanabata decorations. Bon Odori has become the occasion for huge parades with professional dancers in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Although Japanese Americans have for the most part become thoroughly Americanized, certain traditional customs remain, such as gift giving. Younger generations, however, are beginning to lose touch with the importance of these rituals, much to the chagrin of their parents and grandparents. One traditional Japanese value to which even younger Japanese Americans still adhere is the strong bond between mother and child. Studies show that Japanese American children are held more by their mothers and spend less time alone than other children in the United States. Japanese American children are taught to respect their elders, and they grow up with feelings of gratitude and obligation toward their parents that last throughout their lifetime.

Many Japanese Americans continue to eat traditional Japanese foods, such as sushi, sashimi, maki, and tempura. Japanese foods have also become popular among the general U.S. population. In May 1964, Hiroaki "Rocky" Aoki (1938–) opened the first Benihana restaurant, in New York City. Though some critics consider the food more American than Japanese, it is prepared in a flamboyant "Japanese" manner by Japanese American chefs wielding large knives at lightning speeds right at the customers' table. Benihana restaurants are now located in cities throughout the world.

Japanese Americans have contributed more than just food to American society. The arts of haiku poetry, origami (paper-folding), ikebana (flower arranging), and Kabuki theater are practiced and enjoyed by many Americans. Actors such as George Takei (*Star Trek*) and Pat Morita (*Happy Days* and the *Karate Kid* films) are well known to most Americans, and musicians including Yoko Ono, Toshiko Akiyoshi, and the jazz band Hiroshima have added elements of their Japanese heritage to the world of American music, as have James Iha, a guitarist formerly with the Smashing Pumpkins, and rapper Mike Shinoda of Linkin Park.

A number of Japanese American writers have found success, including Ronald Takaki, Bill Hosokawa, Jun Atsushi Iwamatsu, Lydia Minatoya, David Mura, Phillip Kan Gotanda, Kyoko Mori, and others. Successful Japanese American artists

and architects include Eiko Ishioka, Gyo Obata, and Minoru Yamasaki.

Although the first Japanese immigrants to Hawaii and the United States came as contract laborers, they were carefully selected by the Japanese government from the ranks of the well educated to serve as ambassadors of a sort. Most Japanese Americans descend from these hard-working, highly skilled immigrants and carry on their drive to succeed. The unemployment rate among Japanese Americans is very low, and only 8.6% live below the poverty line, as compared to 12.4% of the overall American population.

Some Japanese Americans who have risen to the top in their fields are Nobel Prize winners Leo Esaki and Tetsuo Akutsu; research scientist Douglas Ishii; Ellison Onizuka, the first Asian American astronaut (who was tragically killed aboard the space shuttle Challenger in 1986); U.S. Senators Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa and Daniel Inouye; U.S. representatives Bob Matsui, Patsy Takemoto Mink, and Norman Mineta; Superior Court Judge Lance Ito (who was named to preside over the O. J. Simpson trial in 1994); George Aratani, founder of the Mikasa Corporation (one of the largest privately owned international firms); lawyer and director of the U.S. Office for Civil Rights, Dennis Hayashi; and CBS news correspondent James Hattori.

Japanese Americans have also been very successful in sports. Kristi Yamaguchi won the gold medal for figure skating in the 1992 Winter Olympics and has also won gold and silver medals at World Championship competitions. Several Japanese American baseball players have made the major leagues, and Japanese American athletes have risen to the top in many other sports as well, including gymnastics, boxing, golf, track and field, tennis, volleyball, hockey, football, and basketball. Miki Gorman, a 2005 nominee for the National Distance Running Hall of Fame, is the only woman to win the Boston and New York City marathons twice each, as well as the only woman to win them both in the same year (1977). She was also the first woman to finish the Boston Marathon in under three hours (1974). Japanese Americans are also responsible for bringing karate, judo, aikido, and ninjutsu (whose practitioners are called ninjas) to the United States.

Japanese Americans still suffer the wounds and scars of internment during World War II, and anti-Asian discrimination continues to afflict their lives. Studies have shown that Japanese American men are paid less than what European American men earn for the same work, and few Japanese Americans are promoted to top management positions. Chinese American Vincent Chin was mistaken for a Japanese by European American auto workers in Detroit in 1982. The auto workers called Chin a "Jap," blamed him for the loss of their jobs, and beat him to death on the street. This sort of racial prejudice prevents Japanese Americans from taking their full and rightful place in American society.

Both Japan and Hawaii encouraged the emigration of women to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to promote a stable home life among Japanese laborers there and discourage prostitution, gambling, and other vices to which single young men might succumb. Many Japanese women came to Hawaii and the U.S. west coast as "picture brides." In a system similar to the traditional arranged marriages of Japan, a man and a woman would exchange photos and letters until the woman could travel across the sea to join her husband.

Despite Japanese and Hawaiian efforts, however, some hundreds or even thousands of young Japanese women were brought to Hawaii and the United States as prostitutes. Most were either sold into prostitution by their destitute families, kidnapped, or tricked into joining the recruiters. Life was hard for these young women, and they saw little of the profits from their forced labors.

Other Japanese women came to Hawaii and the United States, not as picture brides or prostitutes to serve the male contract laborers, but as contract laborers themselves. Thousands of Japanese women worked as cooks, seamstresses, and field laborers alongside the men. However, even their lives were more difficult than the lives of Japanese American men: although the women did equal work, they received only \$6 per month in wages, as compared to the men's wages of \$10 per month.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# JEWISH AMERICANS

See also the article entitled **Traditional Orthodox Jews** in Volume 3.

## OVERVIEW

The United States is home to 5.3 million Jews, the second largest Jewish population found in any single country (behind Israel) and more than 40% of the world's 13 million Jews. (Israel, the historical homeland of the Jewish people and a modern independent nation since 1948, had about 40,000 more Jews than America in 2006.) The significance of Jewish American contributions to American politics, business, science, and culture far outweighs the demographic importance of this group that represents fewer than 3% of the population. The sonnet of welcome ("The New Colossus") inscribed in 1896 on a bronze plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty was written by Emma Lazarus, a Jewish American. Its promise ("Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,") has rung true for generations of Jews fleeing poverty and religious persecution in Europe. In turn, they and their descendants have enriched the lives of many in their adopted country through their love of learning, their humor, their artistic gifts, their commitment to social and political causes, and their energy and ambition, fueled by the determination to provide better lives for their families.

The Jews are neither a race nor a nationality, and religious belief by itself does not provide a satisfactory definition, as there are Jewish atheists and agnostics who reject the traditions of religious observance but still claim Judaism as their cultural and historical heritage. In practical terms, a Jew is someone who is either born to Jewish parents—according to the Orthodox view, it is the mother who must be Jewish—or who converts to Judaism. Historically, the Jews are a Semitic people who trace their ancestry to the Middle East some 4,000 years ago, when the patriarch Abraham founded a monotheistic religion based on the belief in one God who is the creator and ruler of the universe. Abraham's descendants, known as the Hebrews, lived for over 2,000 years in Canaan (later known as Palestine and today the State of Israel). After a period of enslavement in Egypt, they were led to freedom in about 1225 BC by Moses, who is said to have received the Old Testament of the Bible—including the Ten Commandments—from God on Mount Sinai during that time. Except for a brief period of Babylonian captivity, the Jews remained in Palestine until the Romans destroyed their Temple in AD 70 and officially banned their religion in AD 135, inaugurating the long period known as the Jewish diaspora, or dispersion.

Scattered throughout North Africa and Europe, the Jews remained a minority in every country in which they settled. Rather than a homeland, the unifying force behind their survival as a people became their heritage of religious scholarship, observance, and customs. Under Muslim rule during the Middle Ages, the Jews of Spain and Portugal, known as Sephardim (or Sephardic Jews), enjoyed an unusual period of enlightened tolerance, when they made significant contributions to literature and learning before being expelled in 1492 at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition.

In the northern parts of Europe, Ashkenazi Jews, long persecuted as "Christ killers," were expelled from England, France,

and Germany during the 13th and 14th centuries. The majority migrated eastward to Poland, which was home to the world's largest Jewish population by the 19th century. After the Protestant Reformation, Western Europe became more hospitable to the Jews, many of whom were able to attain wealth and status through trade and banking. In late-18th and early 19th-century Germany, the democratic ideals fostered by the French Revolution led to a period of Jewish economic and cultural advancement known as the Jewish Enlightenment, or *Haskalah*. However, by mid-century, political unrest began to threaten Western and then Eastern Europe's Jewish communities, inaugurating a period of emigration, much of it to the United States.

The first wave of Jewish immigration to the New World had begun in 1654, when a party of 23 Sephardic Jews from Brazil arrived in the community that was known as New Amsterdam under Dutch rule and later as New York. In the following decades, Jewish immigrants from England, Holland, Germany, and southern Europe settled in coastal cities along the eastern seaboard, from Rhode Island to Georgia. Their numbers had risen to over 2,000 by the time of the American Revolution, and 6,000 by 1826.

The second wave of Jewish immigration began in the mid 19th century as a result of the social turmoil that had accompanied the failed European revolutionary movements of the 1840s. Immigrants from Germany, as well as from other German-speaking areas of central Europe, increased the size of America's Jewish population to 50,000 by 1850 and 150,000 only a decade later, pushing westward to settle in cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and St. Louis and, ultimately, communities on the west coast, including Portland and San Francisco. By the end of the 19th century, the main impetus for Jewish immigration had shifted to Eastern Europe. Following the massacre of Russia's Czar Alexander II in 1881, a resurgence of anti-Semitism culminated in a wave of brutal massacres known as pogroms. The pogroms, in combination with harsh economic conditions, led to a mass exodus of Eastern European Jews. In the years between 1880 and 1924, one-third of Eastern European Jewry emigrated, with the overwhelming majority bound for the United States. The U.S. Jewish population grew from about 250,000 in 1881 to 4.5 million by the late 1920s to become the largest Jewish community in the world. During these years, Jews accounted for about 8% of all immigrants to America.

The new Eastern European immigrants settled primarily in major cities including New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. Many were employed in the garment industry and other types of manual labor. After 1924, Jewish immigration to America—like that of Asians and other non-Western European groups—decreased sharply due to restrictive immigration legislation. Immigration quotas prevailed even during the era of the Nazi holocaust in Europe; only 150,000 Jews managed to enter the United States between 1935 and 1941, after which point it became virtually impossible for Jews to leave Europe. Levels of Jewish immigration increased in the years immediately following World War II, as Holocaust survivors began arriving in the United States. In the decades after the war, about a half-million Jews emigrated to America from Europe and Russia, even though, for the first time in 2,000 years, the Jews once again had a country of their own—Israel, which achieved statehood in 1948. In the 1980s, policy changes in the former Soviet Union allowed large numbers of Soviet Jews to emigrate

both to the United States and Israel. Approximately 300,000 Jews emigrated to the U.S. during the 1990s, but the community lost some 50,000 Jews a year into the 2000s, mostly to natural attrition.

Historically, the greatest number of Jews have settled in the northeastern states, although, mirroring a larger population trend, the number of Jews in southern and western states is increasing. In 2006, the four states with the largest Jewish populations were New York (1.6 million), California (1.2 million), Florida (650,000), and New Jersey (480,000). The metropolitan areas with the largest Jewish populations were New York City (1.9 million), Los Angeles (620,000), Southeast Florida (500,000), Philadelphia (276,000), Chicago (261,000), Boston (227,000), the San Francisco Bay area (210,000), and Washington, D.C. (165,000).

Given the high value that Jews have historically placed on literacy and education, early waves of Jewish immigrants tended to become rapidly acculturated into their new country. As 19th century German-speaking immigrants established themselves and attained material prosperity, they gained widespread acceptance within American society and, in turn, were eager to adopt the language and customs of their adopted land. However, the Eastern European Jews who followed them were assimilated more slowly into the mainstream culture. Their previous lives in the Jewish ghettos and *shtetls* (small towns) of Poland and Russia had, to a great extent, isolated them from Western secular ways. Once in America, most crowded together in closely knit communities, clinging to their customs and traditions and continuing (at least at home) to speak Yiddish, the hybrid of medieval German and Hebrew that had been the common language of Jews throughout Europe since the Middle Ages.

Perceived as different in a way that their predecessors had not been, these new immigrants also fell prey to a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment that affected attitudes toward newly arrived non-Jewish immigrants from southern Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. Ironically, the restrictive quotas that grew from the perceived foreignness of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe helped those already here to assimilate more rapidly into the mainstream. With fewer new immigrants to swell its ranks, the Yiddish-speaking working class declined, and American Jews became an increasingly middle-class, educated, and assimilated population. Anti-Semitic feeling in the United States, which had peaked in the 1930s with the broadcasts of the Roman Catholic priest Charles Coughlin, waned after World War II when the full extent of the Nazi atrocities became known. Restrictive quotas, which had been adopted in higher education and hiring, were gradually abandoned, and Jews attained full participation in business, academia, and the professions. Since about the middle of the 20th century, a modern secular lifestyle has been the norm for the vast majority of Jews in America, as elsewhere in the world. About 70% of American Jews identify themselves as either Conservative or Reform, including many who do not attend services regularly, while another 10% are Orthodox (a category that includes both modern Orthodox Jews, who practice strict religious observance while participating in mainstream American culture, and a small minority of ultra-Orthodox Hasidim who rigorously reject most aspects of modern secular life). The American Jewish community also includes secular Jews who do not practice any religious observance but identify themselves as Jewish on the basis of heritage and culture.

In spite of the great variety—in religious observance, in lifestyle, in occupation, in political affiliation—that characterizes Jewish life in America, one cultural tradition that still unifies many Jews and brings them close to their heritage is observance of the Jewish holidays. The most important holidays are Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), which mark the beginning and end of a 10-day period that occurs in September–October (the Jewish holidays are based on a traditional lunar calendar). Observant Jews attend services and, on Yom Kippur, undertake a 25-hour fast, a solemn period of contemplation and prayer.

Chanukah, observed in December, is, in religious terms, a minor holiday, but it is still one of the best-known and most widely observed. In Jewish homes, candles—one for each night—are lit in an eight-branched candelabrum called a menorah to commemorate the burning of an oil lamp for eight days when the Jews recaptured their temple from the Syrians in AD 164. Children traditionally receive gifts and chocolate Chanukah gelt (coins) and play with a top called a *dreydl*. Another important period of observance for Jewish families is Passover, which commemorates the biblical exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The holiday begins with a festive meal, called a *se-der*, at which the story of the Exodus is recounted and the guests sample a collection of symbolic foods, each of which has a special significance in relation to the Jews' enslavement in Egypt and their subsequent liberation. The most famous of these is the matzoh, a square of unleavened bread, which is eaten instead of bread and other bakery products throughout the eight-day Passover period. Other Jewish holidays are also associated with special foods, such as the potato pancakes (*latkes*) traditionally served on Chanukah, or the triangular pastries (*hamentashen*) baked on Purim. In addition, many types of "Jewish food"—such as bagels with lox, chicken soup, Challah bread, and kosher dill pickles—not only serve as a unifying tradition shared by observant and non-observant Jews alike but have been assimilated into the larger mainstream culture. As proclaimed by a 1960s poster that depicted a Native American eating a corned beef sandwich: "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's rye bread."

Jewish Americans have excelled in nearly every field of endeavor. From Nobel Prize winning chemists, biologists, physicians, physicists, and mathematicians, to psychologists, linguists, economists, social and political theorists, historians, politicians, journalists, jurists, sportspeople, and businesspeople, to entertainers, actors, architects, composers, artists, photographers, playwrights, poets, and novelists, Jewish Americans have contributed greatly—and disproportionately to their numbers—to American history, civilization, and culture.

With the emigration of large numbers of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th century, many Jewish immigrant women made a living in the garment industry and sweatshops of New York and other urban areas. Some first-generation immigrants became union leaders and political activists, such as Rose Pastor Stokes, Rose Schneiderman, Emma Goldman, and Mollie Steimer. The stage and screen also brought Jewish women into the spotlight, first as stars of Yiddish theater and film and then as leading ladies in national roles. However, marriage remained vitally important to most American Jewish women, and careers outside the home for middle-class women were unusual. Jewish American home-

makers were engaged in raising their children, participating in local female mutual-aid societies, and being involved in religious life, primarily through their synagogues and national Jewish women's groups such as Hadassah, a Zionist organization, or the National Council of Jewish Women.

The "second wave" of feminism in the United States got its spark from the publication in 1963 of Jewish American Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Some Jewish American women participated in campus protests and marches for feminists issues and civil rights, and against the Vietnam War, notable among them activist and author Grace Paley (1922–2007). They entered the Reform and Conservative rabbinate and sought equality with men in religious life, while Orthodox women began to study traditional texts typically reserved for men. Jewish women in the 21st century are scholars, politicians, Nobel Prize-winners, astronauts, and other prominent figures, among them U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (b. 1933).

Orthodox and some Conservative Jews regard homosexuality as sinful and forbidden by the Torah, while other Conservatives take a more liberal view of homosexual relationships. The Reform Judaism movement, the largest branch of Judaism in the United States, has rejected the traditional view of Jewish law on the issue of homosexuality. Reform Jews do not prohibit ordination of gays and lesbians as rabbis and cantors.

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—by R. Wieder

# JIVARO

**PRONUNCIATION:** Hee-va-ro

**LOCATION:** Ecuador; Peru (Eastern slopes of the Andes mountains), and western Colombia

**POPULATION:** 15,000–50,000 (Estimate. No recent census have been completed)

**LANGUAGE:** Jivaro; Quechua

**RELIGION:** Traditional mystical and spiritual beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Jivaro are an Andean tribe often considered to be the most warlike people of South America. Their history as violent warriors goes back to the days of the expansion of the Inca Empire when the Jivaro fought to remain free of Inca control. They also battled the Spanish during the conquest, and it is alleged that they massacred nearly 50,000 Spaniards in 1599. One of the preferred warfare devices used by Jivaro to fight the Europeans was the blowgun, using poisoned darts. In the centuries following the conquest, the Jivaro continued to fight assimilation into modern society, and they have resisted successive waves of missionaries. Once famed for their practice of shrinking human heads, the Jivaro in recent times have become largely peaceful and are no longer completely isolated from modern society.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Jivaro live on the eastern slopes of the Andes, where mountain ranges meet the Amazon headwaters. This tropical forest region is characterized by frequent and heavy rainfall, and dense tropical vegetation. The Jivaro people developed a tropical-forest type of agriculture that has allowed them to grow different crops such as cassava, corn (maize), and sweet potatoes. To complement their diet, Jivaro fish, hunt, and gather fruits in the forest.

The Jivaro are mainly concentrated in Ecuador, although many closely related tribes, such as the Aguaruna, are found in Peru and Colombia. Current estimates place the population at approximately 15,000–50,000 people.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Jivaro lend their name to a linguistic family. Jivaro consists of two languages, Jivaroan and Aguaruna, and a variety of dialects are spoken by related groups in the region, such as Achuar-Shiwiar, Huambisa, Shuar, and Maina among others. However, some linguists consider Jivaroan to be a single language with Aguaruna being the most divergent dialect. Jivaroan is known and spoken in Peru, Ecuador, and a small part of Colombia, while Aguaruna is spoken in four regions of Peru: Amazonas, Cajamarca, Loreto, and San Martin.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Jivaro have a rich mythology. A variety of ancient myths have been passed down through the generations to explain the origins of the Jivaro peoples. In one story of Jivaro creation, the Andean foothills were subject to a severe flood, killing all but two brothers. Upon the brothers' return to their shelter after the waters had receded, they found dishes of food laid out

for them by two parrots. One of the brothers caught one of the gift-bearing parrots and married her. This marriage produced three girls and three boys, whose descendants became the Jivaro people. Jivaro myths, it is believed, are an amalgamation of traditional Jivaro mythology and more modern beliefs introduced in the past decades by missionaries.

The boa constrictor holds a unique place in Jivaro mythology. The largest snake in the Amazon basin is respected and feared not merely because of its strength, but because it is believed to possess strong supernatural powers.

## 5 RELIGION

The Jivaro belong to a spiritual and mystical world. The Jivaro hold a deep-rooted belief that spiritual forces all around them are responsible for real-world occurrences. They ascribe spiritual significance to animals, plants, and objects. Many daily customs and behaviors are guided by their desire to attain spiritual power or avoid evil spirits. Fearful of witchcraft, the Jivaro often attribute sickness or death to the power of their enemies to cast curses.

There are a great many deities or gods that the Jivaro revere. Primary among these is Nungui or Earth Mother who is believed to have the power to make plants grow. Residing deep underground, she emerges at night to dance in the garden. Women sing to Nungui to ask her to protect the garden, and they carefully weed the garden daily to appease her. Equally important is the quest for an *arutam* soul, which offers protection from injury, disease, or death. This spiritual power is temporary, however, but it can eventually be replaced by killing an enemy. The pursuit of protection by *arutam* power provides the belief system underlying the pervasive violence in Jivaro society.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Jivaro holidays consist of the various rituals and celebrations that mark major life transitions or events.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Jivaro rites of passage and celebrations are reflections of their spiritual beliefs. All personal milestones and important events are celebrated with spiritual significance. The most important moment in a young male Jivaro's life is when he is encouraged to gain his *arutam*, or protective spirit. Parents fear that without this protective spirit, Jivaro youths will be unlikely to survive into adulthood. At or before puberty, young male Jivaro are led deep into the forest where they consume a hallucinogenic drug called *maikoa* and then await a vision of the *arutam* soul that will protect them from danger. They may remain there for days, fasting and bathing in a waterfall, while they await the sacred vision. If the vision does not come, they return home, then set off again to the forest to make a second attempt. Once this power is received, the boy is allowed to participate in many adult activities, such as hunting.

Full adult status, however, is not given until the boy successfully hunts down a sloth and learns the head-shrinking techniques. Despite the prohibition of headhunting activities, such practice reportedly continued into the mid-20th century. The Jivaro tribes of Ecuador and Peru had a degree of expertise in the art of mummification. According to historical accounts, Jivaro warrior used to take additional precaution of ensuring



the immortality of their chiefs by roasting their embalmed bodies over very low fires.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Despite their warlike reputation, the Jivaro are in fact a very sociable people. When visiting a neighbor or relative's house, guests can expect a hospitable welcome. Beer made from manioc (cassava) root will be offered, and the family meal will be shared. Often, if the distances traveled are great, the guests will be invited to stay for a few days. Banana leaves laid on the dirt floor serve as beds for the visitors.

These visits also provide an opportunity for men to seek new wives. In contrast to Western cultures, it is the men that are fussy about their appearance. A man may spend considerable time before a visit or party painting his face and putting decorative adornments on his clothes and in his hair. On special occasions, complex geometric designs are painted on the nose and cheekbones. Toucan feathers adorn the hair, and ear sticks are placed through holes in the ear. When trying to attract a young woman, the suitor concocts a homemade mixture of plants, herbs, and oils that acts like a perfume.

Gift-giving is also important among the Jivaro. A common gift for the potential bride is the fang of a boa constrictor that are purported to bring good luck. If these gestures of affection are reciprocated, the man may begin negotiations with the woman's father to marry her. Romantic love and mutual attraction are paramount in the selection of a spouse. In addition, women seek good hunters and warriors as husbands,

while men desire good gardeners and potters. The husband is obligated to pay a bride-price or perform services to the wife's father.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Related families live in a single large community house rather than in a village. The most common construction is a large, one-room shelter, with no internal walls or rooms for privacy. These houses, called *jivaria*, generally house large nuclear families averaging 8 to 10 people and an entire community goes from 30 to 40 people. For defensive purposes *Jivaria* shelters are built on a steep hill by the male head of the household with help from his male relatives. The houses must be strong enough to withstand both heavy rainfall and enemy attack. The men scour the forest for palm leaves to build a thatched roof to repel the frequent rainfall. The Jivaro seek to build large shelters, up to 24 m (80 ft) in length, which enable them to entertain visitors comfortably. Although they like to dance, it is their custom only to dance indoors, thereby requiring a large floor area.

Although there are no private rooms, the house is divided into two areas, one for men and one for women. There are even separate doors for use by men and women. They have very basic furniture, low-lying beds made of bamboo (with no mattresses), and shelves to store basic pottery.

One unusual characteristic of the Jivaro is the complete lack of any political organization. There are no tribal leaders or community organizations. The sole unit of organization is the family group. However, in times of war, two or more villages may unite to fight a common enemy, as was the case when the Spanish attempted to conquer them. The Jivaro population is widely dispersed, with an average of 1.5 km to 8 km (1–5 mi) between houses. Families live in a house for no more than 10 years, as the nearby supply of firewood and small game becomes depleted. Families will then move a few kilometers or miles away to an area richer in resources

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The roles of males and females in Jivaro society are clearly prescribed. These distinct roles are tied to religious beliefs. The division of labor is partly the result of the belief that most inanimate and living objects have either male or female souls. Manioc (cassava), for example, is thought to be female, so all tasks related to the planting, reaping, and processing of manioc is left for females. Planting and reaping corn, which has a male soul, is left to the males.

Jivaro are polygynous, that is, men may have more than one wife. An average Jivaro family will consist of a man with three wives and multiple children. This practice may have developed in response to the decline in the male population as a result of intertribal warfare. Women greatly outnumber men in many villages. Upon the death of the husband, the widow usually becomes the wife of the deceased husband's brother.

Most Jivaro families are not complete without one or two dogs. They are kept, not as pets, but as an essential aid for hunting and for protection from enemies. The essential roles dogs perform give them a privileged position in Jivaro households. They receive generous attention and care. In addition, monkeys or birds are sometimes kept as pets.



Amazonia Jivaro Indians stand on a beach in Peru with their blow pipes. (© Topham/The Image Works)

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Daily dress among the Jivaro is simple. Both men and women wear garb made of plain brown cloth, occasionally painted with vertical stripes. These hand woven clothes are durable and rugged and can last for many years. The women drape the cloth over one shoulder, sometimes belting it at the waist with bark string or a piece of woven cotton. Men wrap the cloth around the waist so that it reaches down below the knees. A common feature of male attire is the *etsemat*, a woven band decorated with feathers that is worn around the head.

Ceremonial dress is more elaborate. Men paint their faces with black and red dyes. An ornament made of bird bones is

wrapped around the shoulders, signifying the possession of an *arutam* soul and the spiritual power it provides. More recently, however, the Jivaro are acquiring Western clothing. Often, there is now a preference for using these manufactured clothes for special occasions, such as visits to neighboring families.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

The Jivaro have a fairly varied diet of meat and vegetables that they obtain from many sources. The primary elements of their diet are the staple vegetables grown in their gardens. These tubers (root plants such as potatoes) and vegetables are supplemented by foraging for wild plantains and other edible plants.



The protein in the diet is obtained by raising chickens and hunting wild game. Animals, such as wild hogs, peccaries, and monkeys, are hunted with great skill with blowguns and curare darts. Spearing fish in the rivers provides another form of protein. As with many other Amazon peoples, the most popular drink among the Jivaro is beer made from fermented manioc (cassava) root.

### 13 EDUCATION

Most Jivaro children receive no formal education. Rather than learning the modern skills of reading and writing, Jivaro children are taught the skills needed for survival in the jungle. They are, for example, taught how to swim at a very young age. They learn these basic skills from their parents and elder siblings. Because of the widely dispersed population, most children have little contact with playmates other than their siblings.

In less remote Jivaro settlements, some formal schooling may be offered by missionaries.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Songs and music are closely integrated into Jivaro daily life. Songs exist to accompany many daily occurrences and special occasions. Jivaro men sing special songs while weaving, as do women while gardening. At parties or ceremonial events, flutes and drums made with monkey skins are used to accompany the singing.

### 15 WORK

Much of the workday is dedicated to ensuring a constant supply of food. The Jivaro are primarily subsistence agriculturalists and grow a fairly diverse range of staple crops, such as manioc (cassava) root, sweet potatoes, sugarcane, peanuts, and plantains. The women spend a large proportion of the day dealing with the laborious task of keeping the large garden free from weeds. Women are also responsible for producing the pottery needed for storing food and drinks. Young girls tend to the house and are responsible for such tasks as sweeping the floors with banana leaves.

The men have more varied duties, such as clearing the forest, collecting firewood, and hunting. They also have developed the skill for crafting blowguns and spears, which are essential for game hunting. The process of making a blowgun can take as long as a couple of weeks from start to finish. Wood from a chonta palm tree is split open, tied together, and hollowed out with a mixture of sand and water. The final touch is the addition of a mouthpiece made of bone. Darts are made quickly, by sharpening palm leaves. Curare is placed on the tip of the dart, which can be propelled nearly 30 m (100 ft) to reach monkeys in trees or large birds. Longer blowguns, sometimes up to 4.5 m (15 ft) in length, allow for greater accuracy but are difficult to carry long distances while tracking prey. Most blowguns are therefore between 2 m and 2.5 m (6–8 ft).

The Jivaro are no longer completely isolated from modern society. They frequently trade skins and feather-worked handicrafts to obtain goods from the commercial sector. In addition, some Jivaro work as laborers to obtain cash to purchase modern goods. Particularly valued are machetes, axes, and guns, as they are useful tools for life in the forest.

### 16 SPORTS

The Jivaro do not participate in sports.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Jivaro are a festive people, and parties lasting throughout the night or even over several days are common. Evenings spent dancing and drinking manioc (cassava) beer with neighbors is the main form of entertainment. After a few hours spent drinking and talking, the party livens up as the drums are brought out. Dancing and singing ensue, usually until dawn. For the Jivaro, these parties provide a rare occasion for social interaction and communication in a society where there is limited contact with others outside the family on a daily basis.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Jivaro are skilled craftspeople. The women learn to make pottery from a very young age. The art of weaving is one reserved exclusively for men. They spin, weave, and dye cotton wool with natural dyes extracted from tropical plants. Elaborate feather headdresses and artifacts are also widely sought for their artistic beauty. These skills are still taught to successive generations, but the growing availability of Western goods has tended to diminish the quality of traditional goods.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Modern society continues to challenge traditional culture.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Jivaro tribes regularly practice polygamy. However, the Jivaro wage a constant warfare among themselves for which polygamy is the direct cause. Most of the wives are gained by the killing of an enemy and the confiscation of the women as the spoils of war. If a Jivaro wife is detected in any breach of infidelity, she is subject to a terrific course of discipline that includes various methods of physical torture for first and second offenses and death for a third offense.

The roles of males and females in Jivaro society are clearly defined and are tied to religious beliefs. Gender roles state that the men protect, hunt, fish, clear forest, and cut wood. Jivaro women cultivate the land, cook, make beer, and care for the children and animals. Jivaro women are also responsible for producing pottery for storing food and drinks. Young girls tend to the house and are responsible for such tasks as sweeping the floors with banana leaves.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# KAYAPOS

**LOCATION:** Brazil (Amazon rainforest)

**POPULATION:** A few thousand

**LANGUAGE:** Kayapo

**RELIGION:** Traditional indigenous beliefs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Kayapos are part of the South American Amerindian peoples who speak languages of the Macro-Ge group. The Ge peoples inhabit the east of Brazil and the north of Paraguay and consist of a wide range of different tribes located in different geographic zones. The Northwestern Ge tribes include the Timbira, Northern and Southern Kayapo, and Suya. The central Ge peoples divide themselves into Xavante, Xerente, and Akroa, while the Southern Ge, or Kaingang, include the Coroado and others. The Ge community, as whole, probably does not exceed 10,000 human beings.

The Kayapos are one of the main Ge tribes that remain in the Amazon basin in Brazil. There are several theories about the origins of the various South American Indian groups, and it is thought that they may have migrated thousands of years ago from Central Asia, crossing into North America and making their way southwards. There are others who believe that this may be true for some but not all Amerindian groups. The Kayapos resisted assimilation and were known traditionally as fierce warriors, raiding enemy tribes and sometimes fighting among themselves.

Their first steady contact with Europeans did not occur until the 20th century, in the 1950s. Since then, because of contact with squatters, loggers, miners, and eventually Brazilian government officials, the Kayapos evolved some new customs and have had to struggle to maintain their way of life. Logging and mining, particularly for gold, as well as some agricultural activities and cattle-ranching in cleared-out sections of the jungle have posed threats to the Kayapos' traditional way of life. Increasing destruction of the rain forest, as well as river pollution caused by chemicals used in gold-mining activities, threatens the delicate balance between humans, plants, and animals successfully maintained for thousands of years by Amazon Indians, such as the Kayapos.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

When the Portuguese conquerors first arrived in Brazil, there were about 5 million Amerindians, but today there are only about 200,000, of which a few thousand are Kayapos, living along the Xingu River in the eastern part of the Amazon rainforest, in several scattered villages. Their lands consist of tropical rain forest and savanna. The Amazon basin, which includes the Amazon River and its tributaries, such as the Xingu, is sometimes referred to as Amazonia and includes parts of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. In Brazil it covers about 7.8 million sq km (3 million sq mi).

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The language spoken by the Kayapos belongs to the Ge linguistic family and, as a result of diverse splits within Kayapo groups, many dialects have emerged. However, all these particular dialects lead to the recognition of a common root that

makes them part of a same culture. The Kayapos, for whom oratory is a highly-valued social practice, define themselves as those who speak well in opposition to all the groups who do not speak their language.

The great diversity of Amerindian languages is also partly due to the lifestyle of peoples sometimes living at considerable distances from each other, in this way developing distinct mythologies, religious customs, and languages. Even quite small groups, such as the Kayapos, are divided into smaller tribes with their own chiefs, although they all speak the Kayapo language. Thanks to some work by anthropologists and travelers (including several visits to the Kayapos by the pop star Sting, who made their struggles known to a wider world), the names of several Kayapo chiefs are known. One of these is Raoni, who left his Amazon homeland for a time and traveled widely with Sting. Another Kayapo who traveled with him was the panther-hunter N'goire. Sting also met a powerful medicine-man called Tacuma.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

There is an interesting legend among the Kayapos who live along a lagoon. They say that if one rises at dawn and looks across the lagoon, one can see the ghost of a White man on horseback galloping along the shore. The strange thing about the description of this ghostly rider is that he is said to wear a full suit of armor, rather like a European knight, or perhaps a Portuguese conqueror.

The Kayapos believe their ancestors learned how to live communally from social insects, such as bees. This is why mothers and children paint each other's bodies with patterns that look like animal markings, including those of bees.

The flamboyant Kayapo headdress with feathers radiating outward represents the universe. Its shaft is a symbol for the cotton rope by which the first Kayapo, it is said, descended from the sky. Kayapo fields and villages are built in a circle to reflect the Kayapo belief in a round universe.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

As opposed to the beliefs that some missionaries have brought to the Amazon, including the idea that after death people either descend into Hell or rise up to Heaven, the Kayapos believe that at death a person goes to the village of the dead, where people sleep during the day and hunt at night. There, old people become younger and children become older. In that village in the afterlife, Kayapos believe they have their own traditional assembly building. Kayapo women, it is thought, are permitted only short visits to deliver food to their male relatives.

The Kayapos share certain general beliefs about the universe and practice similar forms of magic with the Ge peoples. Although there are many specific differences, it is possible to assess that the major deities for these tribes are the sun and the moon. Kayapos, as the rest of the Ge peoples, have shamans to cure sickness.

## <sup>6</sup> MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Special days for the Kayapos revolve around the seasons, which in the Amazon are the dry season and the rainy season. Kayapo holidays are also linked to their ceremonies, such as the initiation rites held when a boy reaches puberty or when he receives, as a small boy, his special ancestral name. The important dry-season celebration called *Bemp* (after a local fish) also includes

marriage rites as well as initiation and naming ceremonies. Kayapos do not divide their time into secular and religious occasions: all events are linked in unifying ways, and the religious, natural, social, and festive elements are interconnected.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When children are born, the marriage ties between a husband and wife are formalized. A man may have two or three wives. Young children receive special ancestral names in ceremonies that are regarded as an important means of helping the child develop social ties and his or her identity as a Kayapo. The naming ceremonies are held in each dry or rainy season, along with other rites that include special dances or ceremonies related to the crops the Kayapos grow.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Kayapos have a traditionally hospitable way of greeting visitors to their homes. Food will be prepared by the women, and a bed made of bamboo will be laid out for a guest. On occasions body paint will be worn (usually geometric designs in black or red paint), and adornments, such as shell earrings or brightly colored feathers, are worn to decorate the head.

Ceremonial life is very important and continues year-round. Kayapos are often in the midst of a ceremony or making preparations for the next one.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Kayapos live in thatched-roof huts that have an open plan without room divisions inside. The thatch for the roofs is made of palm leaves. The huts are quite roomy and large enough for an entire family. Instead of using mattresses, the bedding usually consists of hammocks, which are much cooler and more comfortable in a jungle environment.

Health protection in the jungle areas where the Kayapos live is achieved through the use of roots and herbs that have medicinal qualities, some of which have been known to the Kayapos for a long time. The Kayapos also have their medicine-men, whom White people sometimes call witch-doctors.

The Kayapos use canoes to travel long distances in the Amazon. They can also trek for days or weeks at a time. In recent years, road tracks and an airstrip have been built leading out of the Xingu River reservation where they live.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Kayapos social organization is unique among South American Amerindians in its complexity. Every village is divided into moieties (dual groupings), clans, and associations according to age, sex, and occupation. These are found in various forms and combinations in different places. Participation between these clans takes place in almost all aspects of life such as games, ceremonies, warfare, settlement patterns, marriage, and handicrafts. What makes so peculiar this organization structure is the fact that every relationship is unique since it is governed by the individual's relationships among clans or tribes.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditionally men cover their lower abdomen with sheaths. The most striking ornamental addition to their attire is a light wooden lip disk that is about 6 cm (2.4 in) in diameter and



*A member of the Kayapo tribe in the Kari-Oka village, Brazil.  
(© John Maier, Jr./The Image Works)*

stretches their lower lip out to produce the Kayapos' extraordinary and very distinctive appearance. A small incision is made and a disk inserted and as time goes on, the disks are replaced with progressively larger ones. The lip plug symbolizes assertiveness among the Kayapos. Another characteristic device used by this tribe is the ear plug, which symbolize receptivity to others. Aggressiveness will be signaled by not wearing large ear plugs, meaning that they do not listen to others. The use of the lip disk is dying out among the younger men, who find it uncomfortable.

Modern, younger men often wear Western-style shorts. This is due to increasing contact with more-Westernized Brazilians who have come to the Amazon to clear the forest in logging activities, farming, and gold-mining.

A Kayapo chief wears many hats, with ceremonial feathers as part of his headdress. A headdress made out of bright golden-yellow feathers can look like the rays of the sun: a brilliant crown circling the head. Particular family links are indicated by the use of matching parrot feathers. The feathers signify initiation into adulthood. Other ornaments include beads, cotton bands, or shells, which women also wear.

Girls and boys wear colored cloth bands of various colors, such as blue, yellow, or orange, which are tied and sometimes knotted below the waist. Sometimes these colored bands of cloth are also worn crisscrossed across the chest. They also wear ornaments such as beaded necklaces made up of many strands, and wristbands, as well as armbands worn high up towards the shoulder. Occasionally, boys also wear knee bands just below the knee. Young Kayapos are usually barefoot, but

with greater contact with White settlers some Kayapo chiefs occasionally wear Western-style thonged rubber sandals.

Body paint is an important addition for men and women as well as for children, but it is not a casual form of make-up. The specific markings and occasions for wearing it are linked to particular rituals and activities.

## 12 FOOD

Fish is a main source of protein in the Kayapos' diet. Wild fruits and Brazil nuts are eaten. Vegetables are harvested, and animals, such as the coati, the monkey, and the turtle, are hunted. Some of these animals are eaten more often during festivals. Kayapos are skilled hunters who use blowguns and darts dipped in a type of poison called curare, which instantly paralyzes an animal. Because of greater contact with White society, Kayapos are changing their diet and can now purchase rice, beans, cookies, sugar, and milk from village stores that have cropped up in various parts of the Amazon to supply loggers, miners, and farmers. Supplies are usually flown in to frontier towns that are not far from the Xingu Reservation where the Kayapos live.

## 13 EDUCATION

Most Kayapos have continued to teach their young people the skills necessary to survive in the jungle environment, especially hunting and fishing, as well as the art of trekking, and the making of canoes and the skill to use them. Growing vegetables, beading, and body paint preparations, as well as cooking, are skills Kayapo girls are expected to know. In some cases missionaries arriving in the Xingu River area have attempted to offer a more Western-style education, including reading and writing, but many Kayapos have been extremely wary of accepting this type of schooling out of fear that their children will be lost to them and will forget traditional skills.

More recently at a meeting post in a protected area of the Xingu Reservation known as Leonardo (named after a famous Brazilian anthropologist, Leonardo Villas-Boas, who together with his brother tried to help many Amazon Indians), a school has been set up to teach children from various tribes. They learn reading, writing, and arithmetic and receive information about the ways of White people.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Completing a full cycle of festivals is essential to Kayapo culture. Singing, chanting, and dancing are an important part of Kayapo life. The men and women also sing as they go out on a hunt or work the land. They use a type of rattle, or maraca, and sticks to beat rhythms.

## 15 WORK

Gold-mining, an activity in which many Kayapos were pressured into taking part when the gold rush began in the Amazon, is hard and often dangerous work. The mercury used in mining pollutes the rivers. The Kayapos are organized into family groups with chiefs who have come together to defend their interests and to find ways of confronting the problems posed not only by mining, but also by the arrival of people who do not appreciate the delicate ecological balance of the Amazon region, which the Kayapos and other tribes have helped maintain during hundreds or perhaps even thousands of years.

The Kayapo chiefs arrive at decisions through a process of consensus and are helping to direct their people in a variety of activities that include harvesting nuts, fruits, and vegetables, as well as the construction of modern housing units for recently arrived settlers. This newer source of work means that the Kayapos no longer restrict themselves to traditional hunting and fishing and, because they now earn some money for their work, they can purchase goods they did not have before.

Some Kayapos have begun to have more contact with White people, but the modern way of life still can seem very bizarre to them. The English pop star Sting, and the French photographer and filmmaker Jean-Pierre Dutilleux, who made so many people aware of threats to the Amazon ecology and the difficulties of the Amerindians in that area, recount in their lively and sympathetic book, *Jungle Stories: The Fight for the Amazon*, that when Raoni, a Kayapo chief, first left his Amazon homeland to visit a Brazilian city during his long struggles to protect his people's way of life, he was amazed at the level of fear and anxiety in the city. He was also appalled to see people who had no food to eat forcing themselves to ask for money while others simply passed them by and ignored them. He concluded that money is bad and worried about the Kayapos being drawn into a cash economy.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditionally, the Kayapos did not develop sporting skills separately from skills that were useful for work. Hunting, fishing, and trekking, for example, have now become sporting activities in White society, but in Kayapo society they are vital to the survival of the people, even though aspects of these activities are also enjoyed in their own right by the Kayapos. Some may obtain great pleasure from teaching the younger members of the tribe the early steps necessary to master these skills, while acquiring prowess in any or all of them is a source of pride.

One activity that Kayapo children enjoy is swimming along the shores of the beautiful and clear waters of the Xingu River, which at least until recently was completely unpolluted from its headwaters right up to the area where it joins the Amazon river. Some villagers who have had more contact with White people have learned to play soccer.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Storytelling is a significant aspect of Kayapo life and a means of transmitting Kayapo legends and history, as well as a way of preserving the identity of a people. It is also a form of entertainment. Mostly, however, it forms part of the rituals that give structure and meaning to the life of the Kayapos, interwoven with dance rituals and ceremonies that follow a definite cycle, linked to nature and to the changing seasons, throughout the year.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Kayapos make beautiful beaded necklaces. Some of them are a brilliant blue or yellow. They also make bracelets and earrings using shells or stones, and headdresses made from the brightly colored feathers of various Amazon birds. The Kayapos are skilled in preparing and applying intricate designs as body paint. They weave sturdy and flexible hammocks and make their own canoes, as well as fishing and hunting implements such as spears, clubs, blow guns, arrows, and darts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many activities in the Amazon threaten a way of life the Kayapos want to preserve. Poverty, together with a population explosion and an unequal system of land ownership in countries such as Brazil, has driven many people into the Amazon region in search of land. People use slash-and-burn agricultural methods that are unsuitable when the population density rises, because the forest cannot recover. Although the Kayapos and other Amerindian peoples of the Amazon have practiced this method of agriculture successfully for thousands of years, their numbers have been sufficiently small to allow them to move on to other areas of the rainforest, allowing regrowth of the forest to occur in the patches of fallow land. Now deforestation of the Amazon is occurring at a rapid rate. Some of this destruction is accelerated by the activities of cattle-ranchers who have also come into the Amazon. Beef is supplied in this way largely to fast-food chains in the United States. Land that is over-grazed by cattle quickly becomes completely barren.

Commercial loggers have also contributed to the destruction of the Amazon rainforest by providing tropical hardwood for construction in Japan, Western Europe, and the United States. It is also used in paper products. But, the level of demand is unsustainable. To keep logging at a level that would not permanently destroy large areas of the rainforest, demand would have to drop sharply and protective regulations would have to be enforced. Recently, efforts have been made to slow some demand and to find alternatives to tropical hardwoods in construction. The destruction of so many trees contributes to carbon dioxide pollution in the atmosphere and, therefore, to global warming.

A third threat to the sustainable way of life of the Kayapos and other tribes of the Amazon is mining. Parts of the Amazon are rich in iron ore and gold. The smelting furnaces need charcoal, and much of it is taken from irreplaceable virgin forest. The gold rush in the Amazon has created many problems for the Kayapos. Frontier mining towns exist close to areas where the Kayapos and other tribes live. Amerindian groups have been affected by diseases to which they had never been exposed before. Mercury, used in extracting gold from the mud of the rivers, is a pollutant, resulting in mercury poisoning that affects Amerindian communities downstream from these mining activities. It is estimated that in 1988, 12% of the mercury released into the atmosphere was due to Amazon gold-mining.

Some Amerindian groups, including the Kayapos, have been attacked and murdered in the search for land. Others have had their land forcibly taken away, and they have had to work for very low wages in miserable conditions in some of the frontier towns. On occasion the Kayapos have attacked those they see as intruders. The delicate balance between plants, animals, and humans has already been severely upset, and the way of life of the Kayapos has been disrupted in areas they used to inhabit. The Kayapos and other Amerindians want to ensure that the Xingu area remains protected, with the support of world opinion and the Brazilian government, and does not become the target of activities that would permanently destroy their beautiful jungle habitat.

One of their most dramatic successes was the Kayapo opposition to the Brazilian government's plan to build a series of hydroelectric dams on the Xingú River with funding from the World Bank. For that occasion around 600 Kayapo Indi-

ans in addition to more than 40 other Indigenous nations of Amazonia, gathered along with over 400 representatives of the Brazilian government and world news media and diverse non-governmental organizations. The government and the World Bank had been reluctant to accept the Kayapo invitation to attend the Altamira's manifestations. When it became clear that hundreds of national and international journalists, filmmakers, and opinion leaders would attend the gathering, Brazilian authorities agreed to send an official representative. One of the famous artists who supported the protest against the construction of the hydroelectric complex was the rock star Sting, who made a brief appearance at the demonstration. As a result of all the international and local pressure, the World Bank denied the request for a loan that was to be used to build the dam.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though every village is autonomous and governed by prominent male secular leaders, auxiliary women's groupings also exist, consisting of wives of associated men's organizations, with the wife of the male chief serving as female chief. The visibility of this role is low and appears more as a conceptual counterpart to men's activity and organization rather than a public leadership role. Nevertheless, without a respected wife who exercises her own influence over female public opinion, a man is considered unqualified to lead.

The Kayapo division of labor splits down a strict gender based function. Men do all the work that does not require attending to children, such as hunting, fishing, farming, and construction. Kayapo women, on the other hand, are solely responsible for raising children. They perform other tasks, such as maintaining gardens or managing domestic animals, but only if that task allows them to attend to the needs of children.

Marriage is monogamous and divorce is common, although lifelong spouses are also common and may become extraordinarily close emotionally. Sexually active females traditionally shave the crown of their head. Male assertions of superiority to women, when they occur, refer to socially developed qualities, such as greater propriety and self-restraint, rather than to natural endowments of manhood. As in other Amazonian societies, women do not necessarily acknowledge male superiority, and conflicts between men and women as groups are considered to be normal. Characteristics such as intelligence are appreciated equally in males and females. Both males and females acquire specialized knowledge in the use of medicinal plants and both may become shamans.

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—revised by C. Vergara.

# KITTITIANS AND NEVISIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** Ki-TEE-shuns and ne-VEE-juns

**LOCATION:** St. Kitts and Nevis

**POPULATION:** 39,619 (2008 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** English; English-based Creole dialect with West African and French elements

**RELIGION:** Anglicanism; other Protestant sects; Roman Catholicism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The nation of St. Kitts and Nevis (pronounced NEE-vis) consists of two Caribbean islands separated by a narrow strait of water. Its official name was formerly St. Christopher and Nevis. St. Kitts, sometimes called “the mother colony of the West Indies,” was the first British colony in the region. The islands have been linked administratively since colonial times, when they formed a three-member entity together with the island of Anguilla. The people of the two islands are called Kittitians (ki-TEE-shuns) and Nevisians (ne-VEE-shuns).

Columbus sighted St. Kitts and Nevis in 1493, calling Nevis *Nuestra Señora de las Nieves* (Our Lady of the Snows) because of the white clouds encircling its highest peak, and naming St. Christopher after both the patron saint of travelers and his own patron saint as well. Like most other islands in the Caribbean, St. Kitts and Nevis received little attention from the Spanish, and European colonization did not begin until the first British colony in the West Indies was established on St. Kitts in 1623. Five years later, the British officially settled Nevis, where Captain John Smith and his men had stopped for several days in 1607 on their way to what would become the colony of Virginia.

The French soon followed the British, and the two nations competed for control of the islands. First, however, they joined forces to exterminate the native Carib population, 2,000 of whom were slaughtered on St. Kitts in a massacre at Bloody Point in 1626, after which their presence on the island was effectively over. The contest for European control of the islands continued until both were ceded to the British under the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Two famous 18th-century figures associated with the island of Nevis were U.S. statesman Alexander Hamilton, who was born there, and British war hero Lord Horatio Nelson, who spent time there as a colonial administrator and married a woman born on the island.

Under the British, sugarcane plantations flourished on both islands, supported by the labor of slaves from West Africa. Typically, an aspiring plantation owner would purchase 20 slaves to clear his land, plant a variety of crops, and build their own huts. When the plantation had expanded sufficiently in terms of both land and numbers of slaves, all of the land would be turned over to sugar production. After 1834, when the British Empire abolished slavery, the sugar industry declined in spite of the introduction of indentured servants from East India and other countries. The increasing production of sugar from beets contributed to this trend.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the United States and Europe were producing almost all their own sugar, and

the economies of St. Kitts and Nevis were floundering. In the 1930s the British-appointed Moyne Commission investigated conditions in the region, but most of its recommendations were delayed by the onset of World War II. Both St. Kitts and Nevis sent soldiers to fight alongside the British and, in addition, raised funds for the purchase of two Spitfires for Britain's Royal Air Force.

After several different administrative arrangements in the course of the 19th century, St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla were united within a larger Leeward Islands Federation in 1882. From 1958 to 1962, the islands joined the short-lived Federation of the West Indies and in 1967 accepted associated statehood from Britain. Eventually, Anguilla withdrew from the federation, and St. Kitts and Nevis achieved full independence on 19 September 1983. Nevis has its own legislative assembly and retains a constitutional right to secede from St. Kitts if the move is supported by a two-thirds majority in a public referendum.

Even though sugar production has been the historic cash-crop of the island, the government recently decided to close the majority of companies after decades of poor performances. Tourism, export-oriented manufacturing, and offshore banking are new areas of business and have been pivotal in the steady growth achieved in the early 2000s. As a result of governmental efforts to diversify the economy, in 2001 the industry sector grew to represent more than 25% of the national GDP, while the service realm accounted by an astonishing 70.7% and agriculture just 3.5%. As a result of the process of becoming a more diverse economy, a series of new products have been added to the national portfolio, such as rice, yams, vegetables, bananas, and fish. In the industry sphere the history is similar. Cotton, salt, copra, clothing, footwear, and beverages are part of the new exports. In 2007, the economy grew 3.3%.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

St. Kitts and Nevis belong to the Leeward Islands, in the Lesser Antilles. Separated from each other by a 3-km (2-mi) strait called The Narrows, they are 300 km (186 mi) southeast of Puerto Rico and 113 km (70 mi) south of Anguilla, with which they were formerly united politically. The country has a total land area of 269 sq km (104 sq mi), about 1.5 times the size of Washington, D.C. The oval island of St. Kitts, with its elongated southeast peninsula, and the small, rounded island of Nevis have often been compared to a cricket bat and ball, a reference to the island's national sport. Covering 168 sq km (65 sq mi), St. Kitts is the larger of the two islands and home to the capital city of Basseterre. It has a central mountain range with the country's highest elevation, Mt. Liamuiga, a dormant volcano that rises to 1,157 m (3,792 ft) above sea level. Rain forests are found on the higher mountains, while the fertile but drier lowlands along the coast mostly support sugarcane plantations. Erosion is a problem in certain areas due to faulty agricultural practices, including overgrazing, lack of crop rotation, and inadequate intercropping. Basseterre, the nation's capital city and chief port, is located on the southwestern coast of St. Kitts.

The southeast peninsula of St. Kitts is mostly scrub-covered and contains a large salt pond at its southern end. The former isolation of this area from the rest of the island was significantly reduced by the opening of the Dr. Kennedy Simmonds Highway in 1990. The nearly circular island of Nevis has as its



most outstanding feature Nevis Peak, rising to 985 m (3,232 ft) at its center. Like St. Kitts, it has forested mountains in its interior and low-lying areas along the coast. Its soil is less fertile than that of St. Kitts and more badly damaged by erosion. Charlestown is Nevis's only town.

Population estimates for St. Kitts and Nevis is close to 40,000, of which 9,000 to 10,000 inhabitants are estimated to live on Nevis and the rest on St. Kitts. The country experienced negative population growth between 1985 and 1993 due to emigration. The population is mainly black, about 95% of the population is of African descent, with a small mulatto minority and other mixtures. There are also very small East Indian, European, and white groups.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of St. Kitts and Nevis is English, which is spoken in its standard form with correct grammar in formal situations and with people one does not know well. Informally, however, most residents speak a local English-based Creole dialect with elements from West African languages and French. In common with other West Indian Creole languages, it interchanges subject and object pronouns and expresses past actions with present-tense verbs ("I tell she" for "I told her"). Also, the African-influenced "de" is used in place of "the."

### 4 FOLKLORE

Like other West Indians, Kittitians and Nevisians tend toward the superstitious, and some still fear the African-influenced

black magic called *obeah* that is common to the Caribbean region.

### 5 RELIGION

Between 33% and 50% of the country's population is Anglican. Other Protestant groups include Methodists, Moravians, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, the Church of God, and the Pilgrim Holiness Church. There is a Roman Catholic minority of about 10%, and the Baha'i religion is also represented.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in St. Kitts and Nevis include New Year's Day (January 1), Good Friday, Labor Day (May 1), Whit Monday, Bank Holiday (first Monday in August), Independence Day (September 19), Prince of Wales's Birthday (November 14), Christmas (December 25), and Boxing Day (December 26). St. Kitts's annual Carnival celebration is held the last week of the year—from December 25 through January 2—with the masquerades, calypso and steel band music, and street dancing common to Carnival festivities in the Caribbean. Nevis's Carnival, called Culturama, is held in late July and early August and includes arts and crafts and talent shows in addition to the usual features.

During the month of August the emancipation of slaves from the British West Indies in 1834 is celebrated and during this holiday, most businesses and government offices are closed. September is the month of independence celebrations. This month-long celebration includes drama festivals and cultural activities. The festivities culminate on Independence Day with a military parade at Warner Park, followed by a traditional picnic at the beach.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious celebrations appropriate to each Kittitian's and Nevisian's faith community.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

There is a local handshake called a "bump," which consists of two people clenching their hands into fists and bumping them gently together. "Liming," a term used throughout the Caribbean to denote relaxing and "hanging out," is an especially popular pursuit in St. Kitts and Nevis, which is known for its easygoing lifestyle. The Kittitians and Nevisians have maintained a historic rivalry, a fact that gives a real edge to the annual cricket match, the national sport.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Until the 1970s, the typical islander's house was wooden with a corrugated metal roof, often painted red. The houses themselves were often painted in pastel colors. Today, most houses are built from concrete blocks and wood; roofs are still corrugated metal. It is becoming more common for islanders to own the land on which they live, and houses are no longer built on piles of stones in case they had to be moved.

St. Kitts and Nevis has a healthy climate with virtually no tropical disease. However, until the 1990s, high rates of malnutrition and infant mortality posed problems; in recent years, there has been a significant reduction in infant mortality rates. Sanitation conditions in the country are good, and the Pan

American Health Organization reported that almost the entire population had access to safe water by 1983. There are three hospitals on St. Kitts and one on Nevis, and there is about 1 physician for every 1,000 people. The average life expectancy in 1993 was 68 years, but national efforts for improving the quality of life have yielded substantial fruits. A citizen born in 2008 had an average life expectancy of 72.93.

The country has a good road network with main roads circling each island. However, drainage ditches called *ghauts* pose an ongoing challenge to motorists, and “watch de *ghaut*” is a common expression on the islands. There is a state-run motorboat service between St. Kitts and Nevis. The capital city of Basseterre has a deep-water port that can accommodate cargo vessels and cruise ships. St. Kitts has an international airport, while Nevis’s airstrip handles only small charter planes.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family loyalty is strong, and it is not uncommon to find extended households including members of two or three generations.

## 11 CLOTHING

People on St. Kitts and Nevis take great pride in their appearance, wearing modern Western-style clothing that is generally spotless and in excellent condition. Even for casual wear, women wear mostly skirts or dresses and also avoid wearing pants in the workplace. Men wear jeans or casual slacks, and male business attire generally includes a shirt and tie or at least a button-down shirt, called a shirt jack. Fashion-consciousness on the islands is especially in evidence on weekends, which are considered occasions for dressing up rather than down. School children wear uniforms.

## 12 FOOD

Dietary staples include yams, plantains, rice and peas, saltfish, stuffed crab back, and a variety of soups, including pumpkin, bean, pepperpot, and fish soups and conch chowder. Lime juice is a common seasoning, and hot pepper sauce made from Scotch Bonnet peppers is a specialty on Nevis. Carib beer is a favorite beverage and sweet cassava bread—derived from the African *bammie*—is a popular dessert.

### Cassava Bread

½ pound cassava, finely grated  
3 to 4 ounces grated coconut  
½ cup brown sugar  
1 teaspoon salt

Salt the grated cassava, wrap in a cloth, and twist to wring out the liquid. In a heavy baking pan, spread out half the cassava and top with brown sugar and grated coconut. Cover with the remaining cassava. Using both hands, push down on the mixture. Preheat oven to 350° F and bake for 20 minutes.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education was formerly provided by the islands’ churches, whose generous funding and strict attendance requirements created high standards of schooling that were perpetuated by the government when it took over the educational system. Today, the adult literacy rate on St. Kitts and Nevis is 98%, among the highest in the Western Hemisphere. Primary education in

St. Kitts and Nevis (ages 5 to 14) is free and compulsory. There are over 30 primary schools and 8 secondary schools.

There is no university on either island, but post-secondary education is offered at a teachers’ training college, a technical college, a nursing school, and a one-year academic program whose completion allows enrollment as a second-year student at the University of the West Indies. The government of St. Kitts and Nevis has focused increasingly on vocational education to reduce the country’s high unemployment rate and produce more effective and motivated workers.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

With the objective of promoting tourism, the government has initiated a strong campaign oriented to attract visitors to the islands. With this goal in mind, St. Kitts Music Festival, an event of popular music is held annually in June on the Caribbean islands of St. Kitts. The festival, originally called the Shak Shak Festival, was first held in 1996. Among the bands that performed in 2007 were Arrow, Nigel Lewis, Roy Cape Band, Krosfyah, Nu Vybes, and the Small Axe Band.

On Nevis, the Drama and Cultural Society sponsors an annual play and other cultural events. Nevis’s best-known artist is Dame Eva Wilkin—now well over 80 years of age—who portrays the island’s people and way of life in pastels and watercolors.

## 15 WORK

It is not unusual for islanders to have more than one source of income, including fishing, selling produce grown on small garden plots, and doing seasonal or part-time work in the sugarcane fields or the tourist industry. Wages in the sugar industry are very low, and sugar producers have had to import labor from neighboring St. Vincent and Guyana because of the difficulty of finding enough local workers. Working in the sugarcane fields under a tropical sun is also notoriously grueling. The jungle-like clumps of sugarcane, growing 3 m (10 ft) tall, may be infested with insects or rats. Laborers cut into the cane at its base using an implement called a machete. Then they must trim the tops, divide the stalks into smaller lengths, stack them, and clear the debris.

In the 1970s and 1980s, nearly 20% of the population emigrated every year—mostly to the United States, Canada, or Great Britain—in search of better employment opportunities. (The money sent home by emigrants has been a major source of income on the islands, and some experts speculate that it has surpassed the sum earned at home in wages and salaries.) One factor cited in connection with the country’s high rate of unemployment is that much of the labor force lacks the employment skills to make the transition from agricultural work to better-paying jobs in the service sector.

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket is the national sport of St. Kitts and Nevis, and the whole country virtually shuts down for a major match, especially one between teams from the Windward and Leeward Islands. St. Kitts and Nevis has produced such world-class players as Elquemedo Willet, Derrick Parry, and Luther Kelly. The second-most-popular sports are horse-racing on Nevis, and football (soccer) on St. Kitts. Horse races are held on holidays, including New Year’s Day and Labor Day, and even on the religious holidays of Easter Monday and Whit Monday.





Caribelle batik artist Yvette Coker works on a piece in a studio at Romney Manor, St. Kitts. (© Bob Krist/Corbis)

They are also part of the festivities during such special events as the country's annual Culturama.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Music is central to entertainment on St. Kitts and Nevis, and favorite bands become a focal point of conversation for days before and after an appearance on one of the islands. Steel drum, dance-hall, string band, and reggae music are all popular.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

St. Kitts's well-known folk dance troupe, Masquerades, performs a variety of traditional dances from the French-derived *kwadril* to African war dances. The islands' crafts include baticed clothing and wall hangings made from the sea island cotton that has traditionally been Nevis's principal export. Nevisian craftspeople are also known for their fine pottery.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The country's continued reliance on the sugar industry has made its economy vulnerable to the ups and downs of that volatile commodity, upon which both the agricultural and manufacturing sectors rely for a large percentage of their earnings. However, this reality has changed dramatically thanks to the national efforts for diversifying the national economy.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The role of women in society is not restricted by law, but is circumscribed by culture and tradition. Even though there is no overt societal discrimination against women in employment, women do not yet occupy as many senior positions as men. While women outperform men in the education sphere, that same level of achievement is not translated into economic returns for women. Women still tend to be concentrated in jobs that paid the least, and many are solely responsible for the care of their children.

However, Kittitian and Nevisian women head about 43.9% of households in the country. Although female employment has increased from 1980 to 1991 by 10%, the high proportion of female-headed households and the significant unemployment rates of women have made pursuing gender equality a main goal for the government.

To protect the human rights of women, the government has passed a series of laws, including the Law Reform Act, which provides stiffer penalties for rape, incest, sodomy, indecent assault, or any offence involving children. There has also been significant law reform to support special measures to accelerate the equality between men and women. Before 1980, unmarried women who became pregnant while working in the public service were automatically dismissed. Government policy and the Constitution now safeguard the jobs of all women and give them greater legal protection in seeking child maintenance.

In addition, the Bureau of Women's Affairs, under the Ministry of Health and Women's Affairs, has been active in promoting change in the areas of domestic violence, poverty, health, institutional mechanisms to advance the status of women, and leadership positions for women. Since 1997 the Bureau has also focused on training the police and school guidance counselors on issues of domestic violence, sexual crimes, and child abuse.

Regarding politics, women in decision-making posts remain scarce. The first female parliamentarian was elected in 1984 and, as of 2008, only 13.3% of congressional members were women. In the executive cabinet only 10.7% of the ministers were women.

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—revised by C. Vergara

## KOREAN AMERICANS

For more information on Korean history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Korean Chinese; South Koreans**.

### OVERVIEW

The first Koreans arrived in the United States in the early 1900s. A total of 7,226 Korean exiles and laborers immigrated to the United States between January 1903 and July 1907. The exiles were leaders of a failed coup attempt, including So Chae-pil (1866–1951), who later changed his name to Philip Jaisohn and became the first Korean American medical doctor; Ahn Chang-ho (1878–1938); Park Yong-man (1881–1928); and Syngman Rhee (1875–1965). These four became leaders of the Korean American community and helped create a Korean national independence movement in the United States.

Most of the early immigrants from Korea, however, were agricultural laborers. They were recruited to work on the sugar cane plantations of Hawaii after Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Acts in the late 1800s, barring any more Chinese workers from entering the United States. Many of these Korean laborers soon left the plantations and began small businesses of their own. About 2,000 moved to California and started up small farms or retail stores there.

The first wave of Korean immigration included over 1,200 women and children, so there was a sizeable number of families among the early Korean American population. However, single men still outnumbered single women by a significant margin, leaving many unattached men with no prospects for marriage or family. Between 1910 and 1924, some 1,100 Korean "picture brides" arrived in the United States to marry Korean workers. The brides and grooms had been introduced to each other through letters and photos (some of which grossly misrepresented the truth). The women were often better educated than the men. By establishing families and adding their well-educated wisdom to the mix, these women helped stabilize and energize the Korean American community.

Korean Americans suffered from the discrimination leveled at all Asian Americans in the early to mid-20th century. Anti-miscegenation laws prevented them from marrying European Americans, and the Alien Land Law of 1913 barred them from owning land. European Americans refused to admit them to schools, give them jobs, or allow them to live in certain neighborhoods. Many Korean and other Asian Americans were injured and even killed by racially motivated violence.

Despite sometimes brutal prejudice, however, Korean Americans continued to survive as a community in the United States. They also continued to pour their energies into the Korean nationalist movement until Korea won its independence from Japan in 1945. Syngman Rhee then returned to Korea and was elected president of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 1948.

The second wave of Korean immigration to the United States occurred after the Korean War in the early 1950s. U.S. military personnel brought back Korean women they had married while stationed in Korea, and many U.S. families adopted Korean war orphans. Between 1951 and 1964, some 6,500 Korean women ("war brides") and 6,300 adopted Korean children entered the United States. Korean students also began to come



in greater numbers to study at American universities, and Korean doctors arrived to further their medical training.

The latest wave of Korean immigration to the United States began after Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which allowed entire families to immigrate at once, and granted Korean students and professionals the right to apply for U.S. citizenship. These new citizens, along with the Korean wives of U.S. military personnel (who automatically became U.S. citizens upon their marriage), then applied for permanent residency status for their parents, siblings, spouses, and children. Most of the U.S. immigrants from Korea since 1970 have been close relatives of already established Korean American citizens or permanent residents.

The 2000 U.S. Census counted the Korean American population at 1,228,427, with 70% foreign-born. That total is a 54% increase over 1990 census figures. Korean Americans live in communities across the United States, with the majority in California (375,571). The states of New York (127,068), New

Jersey (68,990), Washington (56,438), Illinois (56,021), Texas (54,300), Virginia (50,468), Maryland (42,335), and Hawaii (41,352) also have significant Korean American communities. Although “Koreatowns” developed in Los Angeles and other large cities, for the most part Korean Americans have not settled in ethnic enclaves but rather are scattered throughout U.S. cities, towns, and villages. Recent immigrants have continued to settle mostly in California and New York (especially Los Angeles and New York City), both of which saw more than 30% growth in Korean American population between 1990 and 2000. Other areas, however, have shown greater increases in Korean American population in that decade, such as Georgia (88%), North Carolina (73%), and New Jersey (70%). Other states whose Korean American populations have more than doubled in recent years include Tennessee (64%), Washington (58%), Arizona (55%), Florida (54%), and Arkansas and Virginia (both at 50%).

Almost three-fourths of Korean Americans, even those who have lived in the U.S. for more than one or two generations, continue to speak Korean at home and with other Korean Americans. The same language is spoken throughout North and South Korea (although accents differ from region to region), making it possible for all Korean-speaking Korean Americans to understand one another. A very simple phonetic alphabet was created in the 15th century to replace an extremely complicated set of ideographs. The new alphabet allowed nearly all Korean speakers to become literate. Koreans today continue to have one of the highest literacy rates in the world, at over 95%.

Korean names are usually made up of three syllables: the first is the family name, the second is the generational name, and the last is the personal name (sometimes the order of the generational and personal names is reversed). Because family names customarily come last in the United States, Korean Americans are often addressed incorrectly. Even when they reverse the traditional order of their names to conform to American conventions, they are often met with confusion because their family names resemble common American personal names (such as “Kim” and “Lee,” two of the most common Korean family names).

For centuries, Koreans followed the teachings of Confucius. Although mainly Buddhist today, South Korea remains one of the most Confucian of all Asian countries. Many Korean Americans have become Christian (particularly Protestant), yet they are still strongly influenced by traditional Confucian beliefs. Korean Confucianism emphasizes family responsibility and interdependence, along with respect for one’s elders. It also places a high value on hierarchies of authority, which is expressed in the structures of most Korean American organizations and businesses.

A large majority of Korean American families are affiliated with a Christian church and attend services regularly. Churches serve many purposes, both sacred and secular, in Korean American communities. For example, information regarding housing and employment opportunities is shared; English language classes are offered to foreign-born Korean Americans, Korean language classes are available for those born in America, and social events provide a chance for widely dispersed Korean Americans to come together as a community. In the first half of the 20th century, churches became the headquarters for the Korean national independence movement. Perhaps most importantly, churches have served as a replacement for the traditional extended family that was often lost in the move from Korea to the United States.

Since Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which allowed more Korean family members and entire family groups to enter the United States, the extended family has been able to regain some of its traditional strength as the center of society among Korean Americans. Extended family groups, which include families of friends, can once again provide Korean Americans with the physical, emotional, and financial support they need in their new home.

Many Korean Americans continue to eat traditional foods at home, such as kimchi (a fermented vegetable dish), rice with beans or barley, rice cakes, and a variety of soups that are made with fish and vegetables. Traditional Korean food is also available at Korean restaurants in some cities, but Korean food has

yet to become as popular or widely available as Chinese food in the United States.

Korean Americans have contributed a great deal in all sectors of American life. Successful artists include Frank Cho, Jim Lee, Derek Kirk Kim, David Choe, Amy Sol, and Nam June Paik. Opera singer Hie-Kyung Hong and punk rocker Karen O (lead vocalist of the Yeah, Yeah, Yeahs) cover both ends of the spectrum in music; and novelist Leonard Chang, poet Lee Herrick, and 2002 Newbery Medal winner Linda Sue Park represent the gamut of Korean American writers. Several Korean Americans have become well-known in the acting/entertainment industry, such as Margaret Cho, Daniel Dae Kim, Sandra Oh, Grace Park, and John Cho. In the sciences, Hyung-Soon Kim invented the nectarine fruit, Jeong H. Kim has risen to become the president of Lucent Technologies’ Bell Labs, and Peter S. Kim is the president of Merck Research Labs. Korean Americans are represented in a number of sports, such as Naomi Nari Nam in figure skating, Kevin Kim in tennis, Sammy Lee in diving (the first American-born Asian to win an Olympic gold medal), and winner of the NFL Super Bowl XL Most Valuable Player award in 2006, Hines Ward.

Many Korean Americans who are employed own their own businesses. In 2000, Korean Americans owned 158,000 businesses in the United States, with \$47 billion in revenue, and the number continues to grow. Between 1997 and 2002, there was a 16.3% increase in the number of Korean American-owned businesses in the United States. Over half of Korean American businesses are in retail and wholesale trade. Language and cultural barriers make it difficult for foreign-born Korean Americans to find jobs with other employers, so it is often easier for them to start their own businesses. Korean Americans also like the independence and control of running one’s own business.

When Jewish, Italian, and Irish business owners in the inner cities began selling their shops to move to the suburbs during the 1970s and 1980s, Korean Americans took advantage of the opportunities and bought many of the businesses. Racial tensions, crime, and inner-city poverty have made life difficult, however, for the new Korean American owners. Particularly devastating were the Los Angeles riots that erupted on 29 April 1992 and lasted for four days. In the violence and confusion, about 2,300 Korean American businesses were looted or burned. Korean American business owners suffered some \$500 million in damage (half of the total estimated damage losses in Los Angeles County). Recovery was slow in the Korean American community; by 1997, one-third of the damaged or destroyed businesses had still not reopened. The riots have come to be known as *sa-i-gu* in the Korean American community, literally “4/29,” the date the riots began.

As a result of the Los Angeles riots, Korean Americans lost faith in American society, and they are now struggling to rebuild their trust in their neighbors. Fortunately, Korean Americans have their extended families, churches, and community organizations to turn to for support. They can also turn to a centuries-old Korean organization called the *kye*, a rotating credit system that also provides emotional support and friendship to its members. A *kye* consists of 12–20 members who each contribute an agreed-upon amount (anywhere from less than \$100 to several thousand dollars) to the pot each month. Every month, a different member is given the collective pot, until each member has had a turn. Then the *kye* disbands. *Kyes* have provided the means for many Korean Americans to open

businesses, finance higher education, and survive sudden unexpected crises. Since the Los Angeles riots, they have offered a place of financial and emotional security to battered Korean American shop owners.

When Koreans began entering the United States in family groups after 1965, the Korean American population came to be divided along generational lines: the *il-se*, or first generation of adult immigrants; the *il-jom-o-se*, or one-point-five (1.5) generation, consisting of the *il-se*'s foreign-born children, and the *i-se*, or second generation, made up of those born subsequently in the United States. Generation gaps exist between each of these groups, with the *il-se* embedded in traditional Korean ways, the *i-se* growing up thoroughly American, and the *il-jom-o-se* stumbling between the two worlds. Conflicts and misunderstandings continually arise among members of the various generations, creating a great deal of tension in families as well as in the larger Korean American community.

Traditional Korean culture is not tolerant of homosexuality, as it is in direct conflict with Confucian values of marriage and family. For homosexual Korean Americans to publicly express their identity is seen as disloyalty to the family honor and open defiance of traditional values. Therefore, many Korean American homosexuals choose to compartmentalize their identities, being "Korean" with their families and "gay" elsewhere. However, racism against Asians exists as much in the gay community as in the wider American culture, so many Korean American homosexuals feel unable to be "Korean" when with other gays. There is almost nowhere for them to feel safely Korean and gay at the same time. Gay Korean American men also struggle with the stereotype in Western gay culture of Asian men as passive and submissive—the gay male version of the stereotypical Asian woman. This stereotype severely limits their ability to integrate their homosexual identity with their masculine identity, further compartmentalizing their sense of self.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

## LAOTIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Laotian history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Lao**.

### OVERVIEW

Prior to 1975, only a very few Laotians migrated to the United States. After Vietnam and Laos fell to Communist forces in 1975, however, thousands of Laotians fled their war-torn homeland and applied for entry to the United States. With the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, the United States gave Laotians refugee status and helped them relocate to America. At first, most of the refugees were government administrators, shopkeepers, and royal army soldiers. Later immigrants tended to be less educated, including farmers and small villagers. Only about 800 Laotian refugees immigrated to the United States in 1975, but the following year brought 10,200. The highest numbers of Laotian refugees entered the United States in the years 1979–1981, totaling about 105,000. Since then, Laotian refugee resettlement has continued, though at a slower pace.

The total Laotian American population in the United States in 2000 was estimated at over 200,000, of whom 65% were foreign-born. The majority of Laotian Americans live in California, primarily in Sacramento, San Diego, and Fresno. Other U.S. states with significant Laotian American populations are Texas, Minnesota, and Washington. Although few Laotians in Laos live in cities, Laotian Americans are largely urban dwellers. Lacking language and industrial job skills, Laotian Americans tend to settle in large cities where they can find work that requires neither.

On average, Laotian Americans are younger than the U.S. population as a whole (in 2005 the median age was 29, as opposed to 36 for the total U.S. population). This is true for recent refugee populations in general, as only the young are willing and able to leave their homelands for such a risky journey. Laotian Americans also tend to have large families, adding to the youthfulness of their overall population.

The Laotian language is tonal, which means that the meaning of a word depends on the tone in which it is spoken (for example, high, low, rising, etc.). Laotian is written with a phonetic alphabet based on an ancient writing system from India. Laotian is therefore quite different from English in both its spoken and written forms, making English language proficiency quite difficult for Laotian Americans to achieve.

Laotian folklore is often in the form of poetry and is sung to the accompaniment of a hand-held bamboo pipe organ called a *khene*. Many of these poetic tales are told through theater or opera productions, known as *maw lam*. Among the most popular Laotian folktales are those involving Xieng Mieng, a trickster figure. Others are taken from Buddhist writings. Laotian Americans continue to tell these stories at community gatherings, through *maw lam* productions.

Laotian Americans also continue to teach their children Laotian proverbs, which are filled with age-old wisdom, such as “Water a stump and you’ll get nothing”; “Speech is silver, silence is gold”; and “It’s easy to find friends who will eat with you, but hard to find one who will die with you.”

Though some Laotian Americans have converted to Protestant Christianity, most are Buddhists of the Southern School, also known as Theravada Buddhism. Theravada Buddhists emphasize the importance of becoming a monk and achieving Nirvana (eternal bliss) by one’s own efforts, rather than relying on the help of Bodhisattvas, enlightened beings, as is encouraged by the Northern School (or Mahayana Buddhism). Reincarnation and the concept of Karma are central to Buddhist beliefs. Laotians also retain a belief in spirits from their ancient, pre-Buddhist days.

Most Laotian Americans, when possible, continue to perform traditional Laotian ceremonies and rites of passage. The lack of available Laotian monks and temples in the United States can make this difficult, however. Two Buddhist holidays celebrated by all Buddhist Laotian Americans are Pha Vet, held in the fourth lunar month to commemorate the life of the Buddha, and Boon Bang Fay, or “rocket festival,” held in the sixth lunar month. Boon Bang Fay festivities include setting off fireworks.

Laotian American communities are very tightly knit, and everyone knows how and what everyone else is doing. Members of the community treat each other with great familiarity, addressing one another respectfully by first name, rather than last. For example, Khamsang Phoumvihane would be addressed as “Mr. Khamsang” rather than “Mr. Phoumvihane.”

As recent immigrants, many Laotian Americans lack the necessary English language and relevant job skills to be successful in the American work world. Although the situation is improving as Laotian Americans become more settled in the United States and acquire education and job skills, there is still a high rate of unemployment and a corresponding rate of poverty among Laotian Americans. About 17% of Laotian Americans lived below the poverty line in 2005. For children under the age of 18, the percentage rises to 22%, and a full third (32%) of those over the age of 65 were living in poverty that year. Public assistance eases the situation somewhat, but living conditions remain harsh for many Laotian Americans. Compared to the life-threatening conditions they left in Laos, however, even poverty in America is seen as a great improvement by most Laotian Americans.

Laotian Americans suffer the physical and mental health problems common to recent refugees, including culture shock, post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, and other stress-related illnesses. Although traditional Laotian healing methods involve the use of massage and herbal medicines and rituals to address the spiritual causes of illness, Laotian Americans are more likely to turn to mainstream Western medicine to treat their ailments.

Laotian Americans tend to live in nuclear family units, located close by members of their extended family. Families are important, both for social and emotional support as well as financial support. Divorce is rare among Laotian Americans, and families are large (5 members on average in 2000, as compared to 3 members in the average European American family). Dating is new to foreign-born Laotian Americans; in Laos, young people simply get to know one another through the regular course of daily village life. Foreign-born Laotian American parents, therefore, have difficulties accepting and guiding their children through the dating process.

In Laos, men deal with the public world, and women manage the household. For Laotian Americans, however, the need



to support the family financially under difficult circumstances has led many women to find employment outside the home. Because the women are now working at outside employment, Laotian American men have taken to sharing the household responsibilities as well. Positions of leadership in Laotian American community organizations are still usually held by men, but women are beginning to take a more active public role in the community at large.

On special occasions or at cultural celebrations, some Laotian American women wear traditional dress, consisting of a brocade skirt (*sinh*) held in place by a belt of shiny metal buckles or rings, and a shawl draped over the left shoulder and under the right arm. Laotian American men rarely wear their traditional dress, which includes baggy pants called *sampot*.

Many Laotian Americans still eat traditional Laotian foods at home. Most meals include rice or rice noodles, and all the food is spicy. Thai restaurants serve Laotian dishes in the United States, and areas with large Laotian American communities have Lao markets where traditional ingredients may be purchased.

Older, foreign-born Laotian Americans tend to lack formal schooling, but younger generations and American-born Laotian Americans place a high value on education and are taking advantage of educational opportunities in the United States. In the past decade, educational achievement among Laotian Americans has increased dramatically: as of 2005 some 64% of Laotian Americans over the age of 25 had a high school diploma or higher degree, including 22% with at least some college,

9% with a bachelor's degree, and 3% with a graduate degree. School enrollment for kindergarten through high school is actually above the national average for all Americans.

Language barriers are still a problem, however, particularly for first-generation immigrants: in 2000, 83% of Laotian Americans spoke a language other than English at home. Although many English language training programs are in place for both children and adults, the English language is significantly different from Laotian in both its spoken and written forms, making the learning process quite slow.

Though employment has been increasing in recent years among Laotian Americans, the overall unemployment rate was still 6.5% in 2005 for both men and women. Most Laotian Americans who find employment work at jobs involving unskilled labor or low-level service jobs. As many as 40% of employed Laotian American men in 2005 held jobs in "production, transportation, and material moving" occupations. About 33% of Laotian American women also worked in those jobs, with another 30% in sales and office positions.

Laotian Americans face problems common to recent refugee populations. The trauma of the desperate conditions in their former homeland that forced them to leave is still very present and immediate in their minds and hearts. Plus, the conditions in their former homeland usually have not changed a great deal, so there is fear and concern for loved ones who remained behind, with whom regular communication is often difficult or impossible. Post-traumatic stress disorders and culture shock set in shortly after they arrive in the new land that is to become

their home but is as yet alien to them. Laotian Americans tend to follow the usual pattern for refugees: their first year in the United States is filled with relief at finally finding safety; the second year brings shock and feelings of helplessness as the strangeness of their new home begins to overwhelm the sense of relief; and by the third and fourth year, they are starting to adjust to their new circumstances and begin to feel at home in the United States.

The first waves of Laotian immigrants are now largely adjusted to life in America, although language and cultural barriers still cause a certain degree of difficulty. More recent immigrants are still going through the adjustment period, but they now have a community of longer-standing Laotian Americans to turn to for guidance and support. American-born Laotian Americans find themselves in the troubling position of second-generation immigrants who straddle two worlds: that of their Laotian-born parents, and that of their native American society. Laotian Americans have not been in the United States long enough to have produced a significant population of third generation immigrants.

As is true for many Asian American immigrant women, Laotian American women struggle with the traditional approach to sexuality that relegates it to a very private realm related to reproduction alone. This impacts their health, their safety, and their sense of self. Language barriers also contribute to the low rate of women's health treatments among Laotian Americans. Fear of communicating in English along with fear of talking about sexual matters and being exposed to view and touch makes it extremely difficult for Laotian American women to pursue treatment. Studies show that one in three Asian American women receive no first-trimester prenatal care, leading to a high rate of high-risk births. One half of Asian American women have had no gynecological care in the past year, and one in four have never had any. One half also never use contraceptives or protection against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

The reluctance to discuss matters of sexuality combined with the traditional concept of sexuality as relating purely to reproduction renders homosexual Laotian Americans invisible. This is doubly true for lesbians given the different standards regarding sexual activity for men and women: while men are allowed some freedom to have multiple partners and sex without procreation, women are expected only to have sex within the confines of heterosexual marriage for the purpose of having children, leaving no place for lesbian sexuality to exist. Homosexual Laotian Americans, therefore, especially lesbians, have a very difficult time living out their identities publicly and even in private.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott



## LEBANESE AMERICANS

For more information on Lebanese history and culture, *see* **Vol. 3: Lebanese.**

### OVERVIEW

A few Lebanese pioneers immigrated to America in the mid-1800s, but the first real wave of Lebanese immigration did not begin until the late 1870s. Overcrowding and a shortage of tillable land in what was then called Mount Lebanon led to poverty for many of its citizens. The only other economic opportunities available in Mount Lebanon at that time were in the small silk industry, which was failing due to competition from Japan and China, and in wine production, which was severely curtailed by a grapevine disease in the 1870s.

First-wave Lebanese immigrants to the United States were mostly young men hoping to earn enough money in America to return to Lebanon and establish themselves in better circumstances there. The majority were Christian because they had been exposed to Western culture through Christian missionaries and schools and felt an affinity with the Christian West. Muslims, on the other hand, were drawn to Muslim countries in West Africa. There were no mosques in America in the 19th century. Although the great majority of early Lebanese immigrants to the United States had been farmers in Lebanon, very few took up farming in America. Young single men looking for fast cash were not interested in settling down to a long-term project like developing a farm. Neither were they interested in the industrial jobs that many other immigrants turned to, such as mining or working in steel mills or factories. Instead, they became traders, peddling their wares from door to door, at first on foot until they could afford a horse and cart. Over 90% of early Lebanese immigrants traded for at least a short time after arriving in the United States.

Huge Lebanese American trading networks soon developed. Central suppliers established themselves in various areas of the country, such as Fort Wayne, Indiana. Wholesalers in New York City would purchase large shipments of goods from Lebanon then send them on to the central suppliers. The suppliers would then distribute the goods to individual peddlers to be sold door-to-door. Wholesalers and suppliers sometimes helped Lebanese immigrants pay for their passage to America and find housing once they arrived. The wholesalers and suppliers were generally honest in their dealings with new immigrants, and the immigrants were grateful for the ready employment the traders offered in return.

At first, most of the goods sold through the Lebanese American trading network were religious or handcrafted items from the Holy Land, which were very popular in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Later, Lebanese American peddlers expanded their wares to include typical household items, such as pots and pans, shoelaces, kitchen knives, etc. These types of supplies were particularly welcome in rural areas where they could otherwise be obtained only by traveling a long distance to the nearest town. Some peddlers became so successful that they eventually settled down and set up permanent shops.

Lebanese immigration to America increased steadily until it became a flood in 1908, when Ottoman rulers in Lebanon

became exceptionally oppressive, and the military draft was expanded to include Christians. In 1900, some 2,900 Lebanese immigrated to the United States. By 1910, the number had jumped to 6,300. As Lebanon became embroiled in the international conflicts leading to World War I (1914–18), more Lebanese fled to America. Over 9,000 Lebanese came to the United States in both 1913 and 1914.

Once war was declared in 1914, borders were essentially closed and Lebanese immigration to the United States virtually ceased. At the end of the war in 1918, however, Lebanese immediately began leaving again for America. By 1922, the number of Lebanese immigrants to the United States had reached 5,100, but this second wave of Lebanese immigration was short-lived. Swarms of immigrants from all over the world, combined with dwindling opportunities as America reached its western shore, led the United States to place stringent restrictions on immigration in 1924, reducing the flow of Lebanese (and others) to a mere trickle. For the next two decades, few Lebanese entered the United States. Those that did were mostly family members of Lebanese already living in America.

The end of World War II (1939–45) brought a third wave of Lebanese immigration to the United States which lasted from about 1950 to the mid-1970s. These third-wave immigrants were quite different from their predecessors, however. Rather than young men looking for quick cash, third-wave Lebanese immigrants tended to be students and young professionals seeking educational and professional advancement.

The most recent wave of Lebanese immigration to the United States began in 1975 when Lebanon exploded in civil war. Many of these latest immigrants are well-educated professionals with the financial resources to leave their homes. They wished to escape the war-torn environment in Lebanon, both for their own welfare and their children's. Lebanese Americans continue to send money and other goods to support family and friends who remain in Lebanon, as did the very first Lebanese immigrants to the United States. Today, Lebanese Americans are beginning to band together to add their political support as well.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 440,279 Americans claimed Lebanese ancestry (about 0.2% of the total U.S. population). From the beginning, Lebanese immigrants settled all across the United States. By 1919, a Lebanese American family could be found in almost every town with a population of more than 5,000. Today, Lebanese Americans remain dispersed throughout the country. The top five states in terms of numbers of Lebanese Americans are Michigan (54,363; also the most Lebanese state in terms of percentage of population), California (53,286), Massachusetts (32,072; second-most Lebanese state by percentage), New York (31,083), and Florida (30,115). Other states with sizeable Lebanese American populations include Ohio (27,361), Texas (23,652), and Pennsylvania (19,889).

In order to blend in with mainstream American society, many Lebanese Americans anglicized their names. Some translated the meaning of their names into English: Haddad became Smith; Ashshi became Cook; Yusuf became Joseph. Others simply found English names with similar sounds: Sawaya became Sawyer; Tuma became Thomas; and Jirjus became George. More recent Lebanese immigrants to America tend to keep their Arabic names, now that mainstream U.S. society is more open to multiculturalism.



Muslim Lebanese Americans have always been more likely than Christian Lebanese Americans to retain their Arabic names. Muslims are also more likely to live together in tightly knit communities centered around a mosque. When Henry Ford announced liberal hiring policies and good wages at his automobile manufacturing plant in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1920s, many Muslim Lebanese immigrants took jobs in the Ford plant and settled in Detroit and nearby Dearborn, Michigan. Both communities continue to thrive today.

Besides Christians and Muslims, there is also a small group of Druze Lebanese Americans. Lebanese Druze began immigrating to the United States in the 1830s, and a school for Druze girls was opened in America in 1834. As early as 1907, a group of Druze Lebanese Americans had ventured all the way across America to form a society in Seattle, Washington. There are now an estimated 15,000–20,000 Druze in America.

The family is the central unit of traditional Lebanese society and it remains central to Lebanese Americans. Socializing and visiting with family and friends is also central to Lebanese, both in Lebanon and America. Lebanese American social clubs exist in almost every state in the United States. They host cultural events and festivals where Lebanese Americans can gather and eat, dance, and enjoy one another's company. Young Lebanese Americans sometimes use these events as opportunities to meet potential marriage partners. Another common Lebanese American social event is the mahrajan, a picnic festival with food, music, and dancing. The first American mahrajan was held in 1930 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Today they are held frequently all over the country.

Food is another central element in Lebanese and Lebanese American society. Lebanese cuisine is rich and varied, and some of its most common dishes, such as felafel, kibbe, and tabbouleh, have become favorites among the general American public today. Both Lebanese and non-Lebanese Americans enjoy eating at Lebanese restaurants, which can be found in many U.S. cities.

Lebanese Americans have made many other contributions to American culture besides food. Two Lebanese American men began clothing companies in Texas in the 1920s that have since become international businesses. Mansour Farah founded the Farah men's clothier company in 1920, and J. M. Hagggar founded the Hagggar men's clothiers in 1926. The Hagggar company is now among the world's largest manufacturer of men's pants. The Farah company was sold in 1998 and renamed Savane International. Lebanese Americans who have made contributions to American arts include opera singer Rosalind Elias and popular singers Paul Anka, Neil Sedaka, Herbert "Tiny Tim" Khaury, Frank Zappa, Tiffany, and Shakira; radio and television personality Casey Kasem; actors Danny Thomas, Marlo Thomas, Jamie Farr, Tony Shalhoub, Vince Vaughn, Kathy Najimy, Salma Hayek, Michael Nouri, and Harold Ramis; woodworker Sam Maloof, whose handcrafted furniture is displayed in national museums and the White House; writers William Blatty, author of *The Exorcist*, and children's book author Naomi Shihab Nye; and poet Kahlil Gibran.

Many Lebanese Americans have been elected to public office, and others have served in high-ranking public positions. Donna Shalala served as assistant secretary for policy devel-

opment and research at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1977–1980. Shalala then became president of Hunter College in New York City, transforming it from a struggling inner-city college to a well-respected institution. In 1987, Shalala was appointed chancellor of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. She also served as Secretary of Health and Human Services in President Bill Clinton's administration. Other Lebanese American political figures include George Mitchell, John Sununu, and Spencer Abraham.

Philip Habib was an important U.S. diplomat during years of crisis in the Middle East, and reporter Helen Thomas was a White House correspondent for many years. Retired four-star army general John Abizaid served as the Commander of United States Central Command (CENTCOM) from 2003 until 2007. Consumer activist Ralph Nader repeatedly ran unsuccessfully for U.S. president, and Nader's sister, Laura Nader, is a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Lois DeBakey, a professor of scientific communication at Baylor College of Medicine, also has a famous brother, Dr. Michael DeBakey, who pioneered open-heart surgery. In 1970 Paul Orfalea founded the copy company, Kinko's (Orfalea's nickname), which is now a national chain; and John Zogby founded Zogby Polls, now a nationally respected polling group, in 1984.

Noted Lebanese American figures in sports include tennis player Eddie Dibs, football coach Abe Gibrón, and football players Gill George and Doug Flutie (winner of the Heisman Trophy in 1984). Naturalist and adventurer Jack Hanna is also of Lebanese descent.

Christian Lebanese Americans have had very few problems since the beginning of their sojourn in the United States. Hard-working and friendly, they fit in well with mainstream American society. Muslim Lebanese Americans have met with more discrimination due to their obviously different religious and cultural customs, including traditional Arab dress. Muslim Lebanese Americans are also much more likely to live in insular communities, socializing only with other Muslim Lebanese Americans. Their social isolation increases other Americans' distrust of them. As tensions and conflicts erupted in the Middle East in the 1970s, anti-Arab sentiment grew in the United States, and Muslim Lebanese Americans came under greater attack. The rise of Muslim fundamentalism and the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 11 September 2001 crystallized the American fear of Arabs, resulting in a number of hate crimes directed at anyone who "looked Arab." Even third- and fourth-generation Lebanese American Christians were targeted. The anti-Arab backlash after September 11 brought Americans of Arab descent together, regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation, although it also spurred some Lebanese Americans to further differentiate themselves from Arab Muslims and emphasize their American and Christian identities, distancing themselves from "Arab" identification.

Another event that served to bring Lebanese Americans together across religious divides was the so-called "Cedar Revolution" in Lebanon in 2005. Incited by the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the Lebanese people took to the streets in a largely peaceful revolution, demanding the withdrawal of all Syrian troops and a return to independence. The revolution succeeded in removing Syrian troops, all but those associated with Hezbollah. The continued presence of Hezbollah and its protracted campaign against Israel along Lebanon's southern border has given Lebanese Americans a common

cause, with leading organizations focusing much of their attention and resources on supporting the fight for democratic freedom in Lebanon.

Traditional Lebanese culture is patriarchal, relegating women to the role of homemaker. A woman's honor is paramount to traditional Lebanese, propelling them into marriage at an early age to "protect" their virtue. Marriages are arranged, and young girls may be betrothed to men old enough to be their father. In fact, a woman who is not married by the time she reaches her 20s is considered a spinster. Throughout the early years of Lebanese immigration to the United States, men greatly outnumbered women, creating a sense of urgency on the part of the men to find a bride. Girls well below marriageable age were often promised to much older men who would then wait until the girl was old enough to marry, for fear that another man would claim her first otherwise.

After World War I, the ratio shifted to become more equal as Lebanese women chose to travel to the United States in pursuit of opportunities here. And the peddler lifestyle of so many Lebanese Americans was open to women's participation. Women were often better at sales because they were more easily trusted than men and were allowed into homes to sell their wares. Traditional women's crafts were also a good source of extra income. Either the Lebanese American women made them to sell, or they had relatives back in Lebanon make and send the goods to them in the United States for sale. These arrangements often developed into successful import businesses. As women became more involved in the economic fortunes of the family, they grew more independent and the patriarchal rule of the husband and father was gradually eroded. Gender roles continue to become more egalitarian with each passing generation. In the late 1990s, Lebanese American filmmaker Rouane Itani decided to begin an online forum for Arab American women, "Lebanese Women's Awakening," or LEB-WA, an Arabic word meaning "lioness." The forum provides a place for Lebanese women around the world to participate in discussions concerning what it means to be Lebanese and female in the 21st century.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# MAPUCHES

**LOCATION:** Chile; Argentina

**POPULATION:** About 800,000

**LANGUAGE:** Mapudungun

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism mingled with indigenous religious beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Mapuche (people of the land in Mapudungun) have historically inhabited the valleys of Central and Southern Chile and Southern Argentina. During colonial times, the Spaniards knew the Mapuche as Araucanos (Araucanians in English), term that is now considered pejorative. The Mapuche are a diverse ethnicity composed of various groups that share a common social, religious, and economic structure, as well as a common linguistic heritage. Each group has a distinctive name regarding the region they live in. It is believed that Mapuches first inhabited the valleys between the Itata and Toltén Rivers in Chile. In the early 15th century, Mapuches fought the Inca invaders from Peru, stopping the expansion of the Inca Empire toward the south. After the arrival of the Spaniards, Mapuches began expanding eastward into the Andes and pampas forming, with the native people, the Pehuenche (people of the Pehuén, the Araucaria's fruit).

Even though the Picunche (people of the north), who lived in the farming areas of Chile's Central Valley between the Aconcagua and Bío Bío rivers, were relatively peaceful, were easily overcome by the Incas, and then subdued and assimilated by the Spaniards in the 17th century, Mapuches established a reputation as fierce warriors who bravely defended their lands and their way of life. The Huilliche (people of the south) continued to resist the Spaniards in the so-called War of Arauco, answering to no central authority and choosing leaders only for the specific purpose of waging their wars of resistance. One of the main geographical boundaries was the Bío-Bío River, which Mapuches used as a natural barrier to Spanish incursion for 300 years.

Finally, in the late 1880s, Chilean authorities sent the army into Mapuche territory in the course of the so-called Araucanía Pacification. Using a combination of force and diplomacy, Chile's government obliged Mapuche leaders to sign a treaty absorbing their territories into Chile. The state appropriated the majority of the new territory, while forcing Mapuches to live in reservations that accounted for only 6.4% of their original territory.

After enduring another frontal attack on their lands, this time under the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), the Mapuche organized in resistance groups that struggled to recuperate their ancestral land from the hands of forestry companies and private landowners. In 1993, the new democratic government signed an Indigenous Law that created the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI) in charge of protecting and expanding land and water rights for the Mapuche and other indigenous peoples. Even though the law permitted land subsidies and buybacks, agricultural training, and intercultural education and health, the state failed to recognize the Mapuche in its constitution. This situation has encouraged further assimilation of the Mapuche into the national project

because of the dismissal of their status as a distinct people with a historical basis for rightful claims to collective and cultural rights.

Following their historical warrior skills, Mapuche organizations have occupied part of the land they claim and burnt private property in it, in order to assert their legitimate ownership over ancestral territory. The state has often resorted to repression and incarceration of Mapuches. The majority of them have been labeled as terrorists and charged under the Anti-Terrorist Law that was designed during the dictatorship to repress the opposition. This has motivated Mapuche organizations to demand justice through the United Nations.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Mapuches have historically inhabited a small region in Southern Chile and Argentina. After Mapuches in Chile were defeated and incorporated into the national project, they were forced to settle in *reducciones*, a land-tenancy scheme similar to North American reservation systems, many of them in the Araucanía Region, in the vicinity of towns such as Temuco, Villarica, Pucón, Valdivia, and Osorno, as well as in the southern island region of Chiloé. Today, there are only around 600,000 Mapuches left in Chile and only 20% of them live in *reducciones*. The majority of Mapuches have migrated to the cities and now live the lives of poor, urban workers.

In the 16th century some Mapuches crossed into Argentina, in the region of Patagonia, and resisted the Spanish colonizers until the 19th century. After Argentina gained its independence from Spain, the struggle against the Indians continued until 1879 when, during a cruel war led by General Julio Argentine Roca, Mapuche territory was conquered and thousands of Indians were killed. Those that remained were forced to work in the ranches of the new owners, in military forts, or as domestic servants. General Roca adopted a tough attitude to the hard fate of the Indians, and appeared to rejoice in the conquest of such a huge tract of land. Today, there are still a few Mapuche reservations in Argentina, particularly on the shores of Lake Rucachoroi and Lake Quillén. However, most Mapuches today continue to live in Chile, country in which they have concentrated their struggle for preserving their land and their identity.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Even though the majority of Mapuches speak Spanish, they continue to communicate with each other in Mapudungun, their ancestral language, which also survives in many place names: *quen* means "place," as in the town of Vichuquen, while *che* means "people," and *mapu* means "land." Mapuche, therefore, translates as "people of the land." In times of war Mapuches used to choose a leader who was called *toqui*, while in peacetime their leader was called *ulmen*. Choosing people to perform certain tasks because of their abilities was the Mapuche's principal strength. For instance, messengers, called *huerquenes*, were chosen because of their excellent memory.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The greatest hero in Mapuche folklore is the *toqui* called Lautaro, who was chosen to do battle against the Spanish invaders. While a captive of the Spaniards, Lautaro acquired important advantages with which to fight the invaders. He was trained as Pedro de Valdivia's page and learned Spanish and military



strategies. After escaping from the enemy's camps, he developed original guerrilla tactics and trained his warriors to ride horses. During lengthy battles, his warriors would fight in waves for short periods of time, then other groups of warriors would replace them in other waves, so that none of his men would be too tired. He won all the southern territories for his people over four years of remarkable battles with the Spaniards, and eventually killed his former master, the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Valdivia. Lautaro even reached the gates of Santiago, but the night before he planned to storm into the city, an Indian slave who had once fought for the Spaniards and then for the Mapuche, killed him while he was asleep in his tent. After this tragic loss, Mapuches retreated to the south, where they continued their resistance for three centuries, right up to their decisive defeat in the 1880s.

The Cuncos, a Mapuche group that inhabits the region of Chiloé, developed a rich mythological culture. One founding legend tries to explain the scattered islands of Chiloé and begins with a battle between the evil serpent Cai Cai, who rises furiously from the sea to flood the earth, and her good twin Tren Tren, who slumbers in her fortress among mountain peaks. While the Mapuche try unsuccessfully to wake Tren Tren, the evil serpent Cai Cai's friends, the pillars of Thunder, Wind, and Fire, pile up the clouds to make rain, thunder, and water. However, a little girl dances with her reflection in Tren Tren's eye and her laughter awakens Tren Tren, who also begins to laugh. Deeply insulted, Cai Cai is angry and shatters the earth, scattering islands all over the sea, while throwing

water higher and higher in order to flood the mountain peaks where Tren Tren lives. But Tren Tren manages to raise the mountain up toward the sky and the sun, until the evil serpent Cai Cai and the Pillars of Thunder, Wind, and Fire fall from the peak into the deep abyss, where they are finally silenced.

## 5 RELIGION

Mapuches believe in the forces of creation (*Ngenechen*) and destruction (*Wakufu*) and the ultimate balance between them. When the Spaniards arrived they were perceived as an expression of *Wakufu* because of the zeal with which they finally drove the Mapuche from their lands and forced them to pay tribute to the Spanish crown, and the impoverishment and threat to Mapuche culture, which followed from their forced resettlement in overcrowded reservations at the hands of the newly independent Chileans.

Central to Mapuche's beliefs is the reverence to spirits (*pillan*) and ancestors (*wangulen*), as well as to the forces of nature (*ngen*). The most important figure in Mapuches' system of beliefs is the *machi* or shaman, who is usually a woman. The *machi* performs ceremonies for curing diseases, warding off evil, influencing weather, harvests, and social interactions. Traditional prayer meetings called *machitunes* are held to invoke the help of the gods and goddesses for rain and good crops. Another type of meeting, called *malon*, which is still regarded as important by Mapuches who uphold their religion, involves listening to dreams as well as prophecy.

Jesuit missions were established early on during the Spanish colonial period, even as far south as Chiloé, and Roman Catholicism has coexisted alongside the original religious beliefs of the Mapuches. The relation between Catholicism and Mapuche beliefs reached its peak in November 2007 when the Argentinean Mapuche Ceferino Namuncurá was beatified.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Mapuches who live in cities and have joined the urban poor celebrate the major Chilean national holidays together with the rest of the population. In contrast, Mapuches who live in reservations have maintained some of their own celebrations, which do not have a strictly secular character, since the Mapuche do not divide the material from the spiritual. One of the best-known festivals is the *nquillatún*, which lasts for three days and dedicates the lands and the harvest to the gods and goddesses, and which is still celebrated at the reservation of Huapi Island on Lake Ranco.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional Mapuche family celebrations are large, since each chieftain can have many wives and many children, and gatherings for major occasions such as a birth or a wedding will also include brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

All major life events, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, are marked in special ceremonies among the Mapuche. Important members of the tribe such as chieftains, called *lonkos*, play special roles. There are religious connections to each event, and it is thought that certain women, who have chosen to speak for the spirits, can gather important information from the gods and goddesses on all such special occasions. In keeping with Mapuche beliefs in good and evil, women who deal with the forces of destruction are called *kalku*, and those

who deal with the forces of creation are *machi*. Music accompanies the ceremonies, and there is a strong oral tradition that weaves poetry, history of the people, legends, and religious beliefs into the celebrations.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The formality of a greeting is well-regulated, but a stranger can only come into a traditional Mapuche environment with the utmost care: strangers who come with another Mapuche may be welcomed with elaborate feasting and great hospitality, but those who come alone could just as easily be met with hostility and silence.

There is a formal structure governing Mapuche society, which is centered on the extended family. People are ranked according to age and relationship as well as socially recognized skills. There is, however, a contrast between this element and the fact that there is no single, central authority that governs them. The lack of central power, and the recognition of individual merit in appointing people to particular tasks and responsibilities within Mapuche culture, has enabled Mapuches to develop a particularly independent spirit and a resilience which survives among many of them even today.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Mapuche have tried to preserve and defend their way of life for centuries, but their less-than-happy encounters with the Spaniards and their descendants have left them in a condition of poverty. Some Mapuche continue to live in a fairly traditional style, but many have migrated as poor workers to towns where they share the lot of other urban workers as *pobladores* in shantytowns with poor housing and health conditions. The hardiness of the Mapuche makes them especially prized workers in some demanding working environments where the weather and the terrain tax people heavily. Therefore, Mapuche have acquired a reputation early on for toughness and indifference to hardship.

This "indifference" noted by Europeans is revealing: it is quite possible that the traditional cultural standards of the Mapuche and the adverse circumstances of their more recent history demanded a stoic outlook, and that the ability to develop endurance was highly prized by the Mapuche themselves because it was, in part, a necessary survival tactic as well as a virtue. Their seeming indifference has been a victory of character over circumstance, rather than a curious lack of sensitivity.

The housing in shantytowns among other urban poor people is basic, and the shelters can be of adobe and bits of other materials. In remote country areas the traditional thatched roof huts known as *rucas* provide shelter. In towns the bus is the most common form of transport, but in more remote areas horses are still used, and in the southern Chiloé region boats are an important form of transport. The Mapuche share with other poor people of Chile the difficulties of access to health care. In some towns there are better facilities; in more remote areas, people often rely on traditional healers or herbal remedies.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Mapuche that still live in *reducciones* have tried to maintain traditional family group structures, which include the extended family unit and a clan-like structure with a chief. The various Mapuche chiefs get together in the traditional way to

arrive at important decisions by a process of lengthy discussion and consensus. This collective spirit traditionally ensured that land was owned and worked by the group as a whole rather than by individual families. Power, whether in economic, social, or political terms, rested on the family, and at the head of the extended family stood the *lonko* or chief, with several wives and many children. The sense of family identity extends to grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and relatives by marriage.

Although this sense of family identity survives psychologically, this type of social structure is gradually being undermined, as various efforts both to Christianize the Mapuche and to erode their freedom and their access to land takes its toll. Under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s, a land law was passed that further restricted the Mapuche and forced them to get assimilated into the rest of society.

The role of women is important in a variety of ways. Very often women continue to maintain traditions even though their husbands and sons are engaged in struggles for work that bring them into contact with white society both politically and economically.

## 11 CLOTHING

Men in towns wear Western-style shirts and trousers; women are sometimes dressed more traditionally, with colorful aprons embroidered in abstract patterns; head scarves, sometimes decorated with silver coins; other types of jewelry such as long, heavy necklaces which include motifs such as crosses and coins; and gold earrings. Traditional skirts are long, and some forms of dress also include innovations, developed during colonial times, of Spanish elements such as elaborate, lace-edged collars.

Younger Mapuche girls often wear Western-style clothing such as sweaters and skirts, and boys wear shirts or sweaters and trousers.

## 12 FOOD

Traditional hunting and fishing, as well as some planting and harvesting of crops such as corn and various fruits, ensured a varied diet for Mapuches. However, more-modern town dwellers have adapted to the food that has developed over the centuries which includes elements of Spanish and other European cuisines, including corn turnovers or *empanadas* with fillings of hard-boiled egg, olives, raisins, and ground meat. The distinctive *curanto* oven allows meat and vegetables to steam for hours, wrapped in leaves, in the island of Chiloé.

Traditional feasting on special occasions can still last for several days. Utensils include clay pots.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Jesuits were active in early efforts to educate the Amerindians all over South America, and Chile was no exception. But struggles over land, and clashes caused by the expansion of Spanish conquests, also created dilemmas for the Mapuche, who did not want their way of life to disappear. Nevertheless, those who received an education in Western-style schools later developed organizations that helped them take part in Chile's political life. Mapuches who lost their lands and had to migrate to the towns to survive now try to offer their children opportunities to attend school. In the reservations many still try to preserve a traditional way of life. There have also been some

efforts to develop a type of school that includes Spanish as well as important elements of traditional Mapuche culture.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The music of the Mapuche includes special instruments such as whistles made out of wood, a type of flute called the *trutruca*, and various percussion instruments such as the *cultrun*. Music and dancing always accompanied important rituals. A type of poetic singing in *Mapudungun* includes the reciting of legends, special invocations and prayers, and stories associated with the forces of life and death.

Mapuche culture has an extensive oral literature tradition, which combines admiration for oratory skills, which are considered a supreme social talent, and for the beauty of the indigenous language. The principal form of oral literature is the *epew*, a fictional story in which animals have human characteristics.

#### 15 WORK

The Mapuche who still live in reservations engage in some farming or fishing, as well as in the production of handicrafts. A majority of Mapuche town dwellers live as urban workers. In their brave and remarkable struggle to preserve their culture and identity, they gradually developed in the 20th century a number of organizations to represent their interests. One of the most important modern Chilean Mapuche leaders was Manuel Aburto Manquilef. Following his lead, the Mapuche in towns affiliated themselves with larger trade union movements, especially the Workers' Federation of Chile during the 1930s. Some Mapuche joined political parties and were even elected to the Chilean Congress.

Working conditions and opportunities for work were closely linked to the struggle for representation and preservation of their identity, as well as their part in union movements, which led to persecution during military rule in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s. Many Chilean workers and leaders of workers' movements, including Mapuche, were killed or simply disappeared. However, not all the Mapuche took the path of opposition and struggle. Some thought that silence, conciliation, or accommodation with the military regime would ensure better chances of survival.

Women often contribute to the family's earnings by taking part in markets and fairs to sell their wares. In what is today a more democratic country, many Mapuche continue to struggle both to improve their working conditions and to try to preserve their customs and identity.

#### 16 SPORTS

The main indigenous sport is the *chueca* or *palin*, a game that resembles hockey. Many of the younger Mapuche who are growing up in towns and are gradually changing their habits and lifestyle are enthusiastic soccer supporters. In more traditional settings, a lifestyle that has included both hunting and fishing combined both practical skills necessary for survival as well as the enjoyment of developing and mastering these skills. Some of the Mapuche who have lived either on the island of Chiloé or by the shores of other lakes are skilled boaters.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Mapuche who live in or near towns enjoy the many fiestas beloved of many Chileans. Some of these are religious feast days, and others are linked to agricultural or special cultural events.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Mapuche are skilled weavers of cloth and baskets, jewelers, and potters. Traditional crafts included tool-making for hunting and fishing, including spears, bows, and arrows. They used wooden tools to farm potatoes and corn. They also thatched the straw roofs for their traditional houses known as *rucas*, an activity that still continues in some areas.

The descendants of the Mapuche who live on the island of Chiloé have blended with the original Chono Indian inhabitants and still maintain a distinctive culture, which includes the use of a special loom, which they use to weave sweaters and ponchos. Llama wool is used elsewhere, but in Chiloé sheep's wool is used, and the women prepare dyes made from herbs.

There are several important craft fairs in Chile that display Mapuche arts and crafts. One of these is the annual cultural fair in the town of Villarica on the Chilean mainland.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems of the Mapuche are related to economic hardship as well as to the struggle to preserve their traditions and identity. The situations of town dwellers and inhabitants of the *reducciones* differ in some important respects. Some of the Mapuche inhabitants of the reservations prefer to keep themselves aloof from the ways and customs of Europeans, even today, and try to teach their children the traditions and beliefs of Mapuche culture. Other groups of Mapuche, who migrated to the towns when they lost their lands, have been engaged in a struggle in which they joined trade unions as a way of fighting poverty by pushing for workers' rights in general. There is a growing awareness of their struggle in Chile today, and a more sympathetic attitude toward their difficulties.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Mapuche women see their interests as connected to those of their people, a people who possess a particular worldview in which man and woman together form a dyad and act in equilibrium and complementarity. The Mapuche struggle to maintain their identity and territory began with the arrival of the Spaniards but it was only the Chilean state, 70 years after independence, which managed to officially annex the Mapuche territory. Thereafter, a campaign of assimilation into the national worldview was imposed and reinforced by military, schools, and churches.

Mapuche men and women resisted this mandate of forced assimilation, especially throughout Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990), during which laws were decreed to facilitate the sale of Mapuche lands to non-Mapuches and the denial of their indigenous identity. Women such as Isolde Reuque, Ana Llao, and Elisa Avedaño were among the most important Mapuche leaders during the dictatorial regime.

After the return to democracy in 1990, Mapuche women formed the *Coordinadora de Mujeres Mapuches* to push for Mapuche women's rights and the recognition of their indigenous identity, in contrast to non-Mapuche women. Mapuche women assert that their unique cultural background and ex-

periences of discrimination make their concerns and priorities different from those of non-Mapuche women. For instance, Mapuche women are discriminated against because of their indigenous features and are disproportionately represented in domestic service, where violations of workers' rights are most invisible and ignored.

In 1993, the government mandated the CONADI to encourage the participation and development of indigenous women in coordination with the National Women's Service (SERNAM). However, indigenous peoples' rights in general and indigenous women's rights in particular have been constantly neglected by the state. Women have been visible actors and leaders in the conflicts derived from Mapuche resistance. For instance, in the emblematic case of the construction of the Ralco dam, two elderly sisters, Berta and Nicolasa Quintremán, led the group of families affected to resist the construction and halt the project, action that forced the state to compensate the dislocated Mapuche families.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# MATSIGENKA

**LOCATION:** Peru

**LANGUAGE:** Matsigenka, a dialect of Arawak; Spanish

**POPULATION:** Between 7,000 and 12,000. (estimate)

**RELIGION:** Traditional native beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Matsigenka live in southeastern Peru. They have inhabited their present territory since long before the Spanish conquest, where they have sought to live peaceably and to be left alone, being less fierce and more likely to avoid violence than the Arawakan and Panoan groups that surround them. They managed to avoid the influence of the Inca culture and the Spanish conquest, thanks to the uninhabited cloud forest that separates the highlands and the high forest.

However, evidence of contacts between the forest people and those in the highlands pre-dates the Inca Empire. The Matsigenka and their neighbors traded with the highlanders, exchanging cacao, bird feathers, palm wood, cotton, and herbal medicines for stone and metal tools and bits of silver that are used in jewelry. But, that trade took a different turn in the early 20th century, when the rubber boom and slave trade translated into Matsigenka strongmen trading their own people into slavery in exchange for shotguns and steel tools. The practice continued even after the rubber boom collapsed, as colonists still wanted laborers and household servants.

Nevertheless, during the past decades, the Matsigenka population has been recovering from the losses suffered because of a series of lethal diseases brought by Europeans as well as the calamities and abuses caused during the rubber boom of the early 20th century. The Amerindian people were expelled from their historic lands by two groups. First, agriculturalists pressured them while locating their farms in Matsigenka territory to grow coca as well as tropical crops. At the same time, Matsigenka had to compete for hunting and fishing territories with other neighboring groups.

Today, despite some degree of dependence on Western culture (medicine, clothing, and tools), the Matsigenka retain most of their own traditions. They reckon time by moons (12 to a year), by moon quarters, and by the blooming of certain flowers. They measure short objects by spans and half-spans, and long objects with poles, but have no weights. Travel is estimated by sun positions. They regard the Milky Way as a river where animals bathe to gain eternal youth.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Matsigenka inhabit the tropical rainforest of the upper Amazon of southeastern Peru. Rain is almost a constant occurrence in this region: the wet season extends from October to March in which around 250 to 500 cm (98 to 197 inches) of rain pour in a single day. From April until September there is a less wet, but still rainy, season. Temperatures range from 14°C (57°F) on the coldest nights to 32°C (89°F) during the hottest days. The annual average is close to 24°C (75°F). The landscape is full of mountains, steep inclines with rushing mountain rivers, and hazardous trails, which makes traveling difficult. Copious rainfall on a mountainous terrain causes natural disasters. The Matsigenka are therefore fearful of floods and earthquakes.



With the 1947 earthquake, many families disappeared. The condition of the soil—black and rich—and the availability of animals for hunting were very favorable until some 40 years ago. The use of firearms and the intensive agricultural activity by colonizers and Amerindians have reduced considerably the numbers of game animals and the fertility of the land. The Matsigenka traditionally live in small, semipermanent settlement clusters situated, when possible, near a source of water and often on hilltops and ridges, in the past for fear of slave raids and in the present day to avoid competition over resources and the danger of floods. A house up on a hill also allows them to enjoy the breeze and to escape mosquitoes.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Matsigenka means “people.” The Matsigenka or Machiguenga language belongs to the Campa group of the Southern Maripurean or Arawakan dialects. Arawak is one of the largest and most important linguistic families in South America, both in extent and in number of component languages and dialects. There are two varieties of Matsigenka: Caquinte and Matsigenka. It is estimated that around 8,000 people in the Amazon of Eastern Peru speak Matsigenka.

As with any other vernacular, the Matsigenka language gives us an idea of how the Matsigenka perceive the world. The animal kingdom, for example, is divided into five categories: *ibira*, for domestic animals; *yaágágáni*, for edible animals and birds; *átsigantatsíri*, for animals that bite; *ógantéri*, for animals that sting; and the last one is divided in two—*sima*, big fish; and *síbai*, small fish.

Up to 50% of Matsigenka men are bilingual in Matsigenka and Asháninka. Being able to speak the Asháninka language facilitates trade. Most men also speak basic Spanish, and an increasing number of children are fluent Spanish-speakers after the first school years. In contrast, most women are monolingual, with only an estimated 30% knowing how to count in Spanish.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Matsigenka believe they were originally made out of pieces of wood—palo de balsa—by a powerful creator spirit named Makineri, who cut sturdy saplings into lengths and brought them to life by singing and breathing on them. Makineri was one of many spirits or beings called Tasorinchi, who were created from nothing and were very powerful. They changed many Matsigenka into animals. One of the female Tasorinchi is the “mother of fishes.” A male Tasorinchi one tried to drown the Matsigenka by causing a flood. He was then nailed to the trees, where he still lives, and when he struggles to free himself he causes earthquakes. Several Tasorinchi finally became armadillos.

Another myth tells about the Inkakuma spirits, who were mining and dug through the underworld. The Chonchoíte, a legendary cannibalistic tribe, emerged from the hole that was eventually plugged and those remaining below became the Kamagáriní or demons. One of those demons from the underworld created the Kugapakuri, a tribe of bow hunters; and the Viracocha, the people of the Puna.

The Matsigenka also believe that formerly people lacked teeth and ate only potter’s clay. Kashiri, the Moon, brought manioc (cassava) roots to a menstruating girl and taught her to eat them.

The deep sections of the rivers are the home of a great manfish, Quíatsi, who hunts careless swimmers, takes them to the bottom, and weds them to his daughters. He is not considered a bad spirit. Mountain caves are homes of malignant spirits, and roaring winds are feared because they are believed to bring illness and death. The swallows that make their nests in the Matsigenka houses, on the other hand, bring good luck; and a kite (a type of bird), the *yasíbántí*, is protected since it takes the souls of the dead to other levels of existence.

### 5 RELIGION

Good and evil were the two forces involved in the creation of the world. Matsigenka associate “good” with happy and “not good” with sadness. It seems as if the pleasure principle were operating at its most elemental level.

According to Matsigenka cosmovision, the Creator made the world by mounding up mud into land. The Evil Contender created the bad things in the world, like stinging flies. These two figures are no longer active, but good and bad spirits are still present. Many things have spirits, and animals have spirit rulers, so if one of them is killed, their spirits should be appeased. Some animals are in fact descendants of humans that committed a crime, like theft or incest. Women have to beware of the various demons that haunt the forests and can impregnate them with a demon child.

It is possible for a human soul to fly to the land of the Unseen Ones by ingesting an alkaloid hallucinogen called *kamarampi*, “death medicine.” The Unseen Ones can perform cures, see the future, and instruct. After death, the soul begins a voyage towards a better layer of the cosmos. There are 10 levels of existence. The gods inhabit the top 5. The earth is the eighth level. After death, the soul can choose to remain on the seventh level, above the ground, where people live just as they do on earth but do not suffer or die and can still enjoy earthly pleasures. The higher levels can be reached, providing the soul is not caught and thrown back down by dangerous spirits that inhabit the sixth level, running the risk of falling to the deepest level where all is suffering, perpetual fire, darkness, and hunger. But, the soul can be rescued by the Quíibintí, which inhabit the ninth level below the ground, where there is life and happiness. If the soul manages to reach the highest levels, it will be happy forever.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There is only one major religious holiday, but it is celebrated every month: the Moon Festival. The Matsigenka have kept through the centuries the tradition of dedicating one day and night to honor the moon. During the last century, the festival took place from Saturday evening through Sunday. But, in the last years, this tradition has not been practiced with the same frequency. During the festival, the Matsigenka wear their best clothes, dance, and drink mildly fermented *masato*. In a big clearing, men in couples march together in a circle playing their *soncari*, or pan pipes. Meanwhile, the women, holding hands, form a long line and move as they sing a melody different from the one the men are playing. The words of the song are in an archaic dialect, and many young girls do not understand it. When the men finish a certain tune, they stop, look at the women, bow, go back one or two steps, bow again, and then start their music once more. The music and dancing con-

tinue through the night, with only a few short breaks to rest, drink *masato*, and take some coca.

In the last few years, and because of the opening of schools for the Amerindians, the Matsigenka have joined the Peruvians in the celebration of national holidays. For Independence Day—Independence from Spanish rule—Matsigenka children march, holding paper lanterns in the shape of stars, houses, airplanes, etc. When available, they like to march to the beat of drums, playing trumpets.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Ceremonies are rare among the Matsigenka. Their parties are more about dancing, singing, getting drunk, and joking, rather than invoking spiritual forces. Being a very individualistic people, the curing and spiritual encounters are conducted by individuals in the privacy of their homes.

There are no ceremonies for birth or naming the child. Some baptize their children with a Spanish name; otherwise, the children get a Spanish name from their teacher when they go to school. Puberty rites have disappeared. Girls used to have their hair cut and were isolated for one or two months, during which time they spun cotton.

Marriage does not happen until the accepted groom builds a house and plants a garden near his in-laws' dwelling. The ceremony is attended only by the bride's parents. The father orders his daughter to roast yucca for his new son-in-law. The bride offers some yucca to the groom and from then on they are considered husband and wife. Both of them have the right to throw the other one out if they get bored with each other.

An extreme lack of death ritual was previously found among the Matsigenka, who not only threw their dead unceremoniously into the river but similarly disposed of hopelessly ill people. They traditionally only buried those who were killed in warfare. To prevent the soul of a person who had died through attack by an evil spirit to linger in sorrow near his or her home, the house was burned down. The remainder of the family moved away so the soul would have no reason to stay and would begin its journey to the higher level of the cosmos.

Nowadays, when a person dies, the family weeps quietly so as not to attract evil spirits. For the first two weeks after a death, the family can only eat green plantains and rice. Afterwards, the closest relative bathes in a special brew and the nuclear family cuts their hair to avoid causing the deaths of other people. The body is washed and dressed in a *cushma* (the standard Matsigenka dress) specially dyed with achiote, and is buried with its personal possessions. It is believed that the soul of a dead person is evil, so the survivors try to forget the dead person to prevent the soul from coming back.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Though each Matsigenka household is virtually self-sufficient, game and fish are shared generously among people of the hamlet. Hamlet-dwellers exchange visits at dusk and on weekends. When a visitor arrives, the host asks, "Néga pijáque?" ("Where are you going?") and the guest replies, "Naniáquemíni" ("I am visiting you."). This is the same greeting used in casual encounters. The host always serves boiled yucca and *masato* (a type of drink), sometimes accompanied by other seasonal foods. At times, the guest brings food.

Gossip and shaming, together with early socialization, are quite effective methods for teaching people to control aggres-

sive impulses. If an individual does commit a crime, such as homicide or incest, he or she is punished by being ostracized or expelled from the community. Verbal fights with limited physical contact occur occasionally within the household and hamlet, usually after drinking at a beer feast. Conflicts with outside groups in the late 20th century are at a minimum. The Matsigenka are courteous towards strangers, but they are generally not too friendly as they fear exploitation. Friends share the meat from the hunts and some of the foods they collect, like palm nuts. They do not, however, buy each other presents.

There is virtually a lack of political organization as it is known by Western society among the Matsigenka. Leaders are elected by tacit agreement, rather than through elections. The basic rule is household autonomy, and the Matsigenka are notorious for leaving an area if their autonomy is compromised. There are no chiefs or councils to set policy, but recently they did form a multicomunity union and elected a council head, mainly to deal with the alien industries moving into their territories. They respect a person's word of honor, so agreements do not require written contracts. They do not have written laws either. Traditions of this kind have made encounters with the Whites and Mestizos difficult.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Matsigenka can be considered semi-nomadic or semi-sedentary. The reason of this double condition resides in the fact that they spend part of the seasons in sturdy houses where they store their possessions. However, this Amerindian tribe also leaves their houses for extended periods, living in temporary shelters part of the year, when they become nomads.

Matsigenka houses are constructed entirely from local materials. They are built with heavy hardwood posts tied with bark, have palm-wood walls, and are covered with a thatched palm-leaf roof. Houses were traditionally low, oval-shaped structures. Today many have raised palm-wood floors and are larger and rectangular in shape. Inside, there is always a fire burning. The Matsigenka prefer to build their homes next to a river or stream. Around the house, there is usually a clearing that helps keep snakes and rats out of the house. They usually plant flowers, and sometimes they place their kitchen in the garden. The clearings are an informal demarcation of ownership, although land is not owned as such. Men announce in advance their intentions to clear gardens in specific locations. Abandoned gardens revert to the public domain.

Some of the plants grown in the kitchen gardens are ingredients for the large number of herbal remedies known to the Matsigenka. It is believed that illnesses are caused by evil spirits; there are no physical causes: the symptoms that follow a snakebite are not caused by the snake's venom but by the spirit that inhabits the snake. A suggestion of nutritional deficiencies is beriberi, which the Matsigenka attribute to eating papaya after sungaro fish, roast crayfish, or hips juice. To cure coughs and rheumatism, they rub the body with the sap of a tree called *cobe*, which is like menthol. For the shooting pains caused by the bite of a *maní* ant, the remedy is to drink and bathe in an infusion made with a bulb called *manlibenqui*. They chew coca to counteract fatigue. Despite their impressive knowledge of natural medicine, there is a growing dependence among Matsigenka on Western medicine due to social changes and foreign diseases.

Most of the Matsigenka region is reachable by road. There are bus services, and trucks travel along the highways. Within the region, the Matsigenka often walk, and the traditional carrying devices were tumplines, infant-bearing bands, and small bags. Early explorers observed that Matsigenka men and women could carry up to 34 kg for 24 km (75 lbs for 15 mi) a day.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Commonly, Matsigenka live in a single-family residence. Even though family life conditions vary from one kinship to another, it is possible to suggest that on average households are dwelled by seven to eight members. Husband and wife—or wives—are independent of other households and are free to leave the house site for shorter or longer periods as their convenience indicates. With the division of labor among its members, a household is a self-sufficient unit capable of living on its own for long periods of time.

Traditionally, marriages are arranged at an early age and often with members of the families that share the hamlet. As a result, many Matsigenka are related in some way to everyone else in the vicinity. But, this convenient arrangement often fails, and the unmarried ones have to visit other settlements to procure a mate. There are a small number of cases of polygamy, and in such cases, each wife has her own living space within the house. Women provide most of the child care and prepare nearly all of the food. Men participate in the preparation of food for storage, like smoked meat and fish. Infants are fed on demand, pampered, and enjoyed. After the age of 1 year and until the age of 5 years, discipline is by verbal reprimand, rarely accompanied by corporal punishment. Starting at age 5, children begin to acquire adult skills by going with the parent of their sex to work. From then on, scolding is common, but the process is gentle and gradual. Young ones learn the values and customs of the group by oral instruction and imitation. Norms are taught mainly through legends.

According to early explorers, a Matsigenka man could exchange wives with a friend or lend his wife to a visitor. The women practiced abortion and gave birth in the woods, immediately after which the mother returned to routine life. Today, they give birth in a special hut built by the husband, aided by an older relative. The husband should be present to cut the umbilical cord with a piece of bamboo; otherwise, the mother's teeth will wear away.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The standard dress of the Matsigenka is the *cushma*, with a neck opening that runs from front to back for men in the shape of a V and from side to side for women, in a straight line. It takes a woman about three months, working during her free time, to make a *cushma*. Made of wild cotton and colored with vegetable dyes, it is ornamented with feathers, beads, etc. The most commonly used dye comes from the bark of a tree called *tsótoroqui*. To extract the dye, the bark is boiled in water. The cloth is then submerged into the resulting liqueur and dried under the sun. The process is repeated three or four times to get the desired color: from lilac to a reddish brown. Whatever the tone, it gets darker all the time as it is exposed to the sun, and it does not run or fade when washed. The *cushma* has vertical stripes for a man and horizontal for a woman. The designs of the stripes differ between communities so they can easily identify visitors.

For dress occasions, some Matsigenka nowadays wear European clothes. Since *cushmas* do not have pockets, the Matsigenka men use bags to carry things like matches, a knife, wax, cotton thread, a little bag with coca leaves, and a whistle to call birds. The women carry their things in baskets. As ornaments they wear cotton wrist and ankle bands, various seed necklaces, and gold-colored earrings. As men used to place pins through their noses, some of them have a perforation there. The men make crowns in the shape of topless hats decorated with feathers. Both sexes paint their bodies with *achiote*, both as decoration and as protection against sunburn and insects. The Matsigenka were known to paint even their animals.

## **12 FOOD**

Like many other Amerindians in the region, the staple food of the Matsigenka is yucca or manioc (cassava). The long tubers are peeled and then boiled or toasted to make their bread, which is a large flat pancake, and also *masato*, a thirst-quenching drink. Some kinds of yucca have a poisonous juice inside them, and after grating the tuber it must be squeezed out in a *tipiti*. Boiled yucca is also eaten accompanied by soups made with meat, fish, snails, plantains, pumpkins, nuts, fruits, maize, chili, larvae, or eggs.

The importance of the yucca is highlighted by a wonderful story that tells how the Matsigenka came to have it: it was a gift from the Moon, Kashiri. Long ago, the Moon came down in the form of a handsome man wearing a yellow feather crown. He met a girl, married her, and gave manioc, maize (corn), plantains, and other foods to her parents. He also taught them how to grow and prepare yucca the right way. The girl bore four boys, all Suns: the Sun, Venus, the Sun of the Underworld, and the Sun of the Firmament, which gives light to the stars. Then Kashiri went back to heaven. Since then, Kashiri watches over all his daughters—the yucca—and the plants complain to him if people tread on them or do not prepare them the right way.

Early explorers talk about the ways the Matsigenka cooked meat, using a pyramidal or rectangular *babracot*; the smoke helped preserve it for a few days. Rock salt from Cerro de la Sal and pepper were used as condiments. Today their favorite way of preparing big meals for a party is the *pachamanca*: the uncooked food is placed in a hole in the ground that contains hot stones, covered with leaves and earth, and left to cook slowly. They eat their meals with wooden spoons or monkey skulls, and the women eat separately from the men. They also use plates and spoons made of pumpkins, and they have their meals sitting on the floor on mats. Sometimes they drink coffee, but they prefer tea and other warm drinks made with cacao seeds, lemons, maize, and sugarcane.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education in some ways has been the reason for a change in the traditional living conditions of the Matsigenka, who have been drawn out of their isolation into school communities with airstrips. Matsigenka school communities, with family households of an average of 6 people each, range in size from 100 to 250 individuals. The change started in the 1950s, when the Peruvian government opened monolingual (Spanish) schools in the region. A few years later, a group of Matsigenka became schoolteachers, trained by a Protestant group in Pucallpa at the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The schoolteachers of-

ten serve as a link with the commercial world as well. In some communities, the children study in bilingual schools where the textbooks are in Spanish and Asháninka. The schools, with only one exception, offer only primary education. Children who finish when they are 13 years old have only one option if they want to go on to secondary education.

School terms are nine months long, from April to December. From 8:00 am until 2:00 pm, five days a week, the students study language, history, social and natural sciences, math, hygiene, sports, music, and religion. Their main problem is learning Spanish. Most of them do not speak it at home, and because their parents do not know it well, they cannot really help the children with lectures and math. Sometimes, Matsigenka children have to repeat a grade a few times before they learn enough Spanish to go on to the next one. There is also the problem of shortage of books and other materials and teachers. Nevertheless, the Matsigenka students learn how to read and write and recently have been finishing school in less time. According to observers, they particularly enjoy extracurricular activities, like playing in the school band.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Matsigenka like to sing and are good at it. Their songs are hypnotic repetitions and counterpoint, performed in groups of up to four people and accompanied by musical instruments. A traditional instrument is a two-headed, monkey-skin drum. They also play flutes and panpipes. When the singing and the music are mixed with manioc (cassava) beer, the rhythm accelerates into a rapid 4/4 time and the Matsigenka start dancing. While men dart and whirl around the clearing, women dance by walking behind the men, holding hands and singing.

#### 15 WORK

Farming is done in the traditional slash-and-burn method. After the morning bath in the river (from which they bring back water) and breakfast, the men go to the fields carrying a pumpkin container filled with masato (a thirst-quenching drink). They work from dawn until 4:30 pm without lunch and have breaks every two hours. Some days the men go hunting or fishing. Each Matsigenka family has its own clearing, which is made anew every two to three years. Men help one another prepare these clearings, but subsequently each woman cultivates and harvests her own plot. Women clean the house each morning and evening, light the fire, cook and take care of the children. They also make clothes and pots, gather firewood, and help the men with their work.

To supplement their diets, the Matsigenka fish, hunt, and collect nuts, wild fruits, and mushrooms. To fish, the Matsigenka use a drug called *cadge*, bone hooks, grill nets, hand nets, large nets with sinkers, fish pots, spears, and arrows. They also use a weir and dam to drain a section of the river. Men do all the hunting, using bows and arrows and traps. The arrows have cemented, spiraled feathers, and their points are never poisoned. Some Matsigenka have shotguns that make hunting easier, and they end up with enough catch to share with local households and thus offset resentment. To catch birds, the Matsigenka smear a glue on tree limbs. Early explorers observed that the Matsigenka were the only group in the Peruvian mountains to keep ducks, along with chickens, which were common elsewhere. To make fire, they used the drill method, with cotton, raw copal, or resin as tinder.

Money has only recently been introduced into the local economy. In communities with schools, they are encouraged to develop commercial crops such as coffee, cacao, peanuts, and beans for sale. The Matsigenka manufacture nearly everything they use, except machetes, axes, aluminum pots, and factory-made cloth. They also trade with their neighbors. A handmade *cushma* (traditional dress), for example, can be exchanged for a machete, an axe, two cans of gunpowder, or one parrot.

#### 16 SPORTS

Explorers say that archery was the game of Matsigenka boys, while the girls tossed balls made of bladders. For some festivals, the Matsigenka organize archery tournaments, gymnastic events, blindfolded cassava-peeling competitions, and poetry contests. Recently men and women have begun to practice organized sports. Soccer is the most popular. Basketball and volleyball are also played. But, the practice of sports in front of crowds or as a commercial activity is not part of their culture. The Matsigenka are good swimmers. They learn to swim at an early age, following the example of older boys who often choose the deeper sections of the rivers and know how to move in torrential waters.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Matsigenka value their free time and find many ways to enjoy it. Conversation is one of their favorite pastimes, whether serious, humorous, or simple gossip. They play word games, laugh at each other's misfortunes, and make fun of different accents or dialects. They discuss sex openly and often exaggerate its practice when telling legends. Children have few inhibitions: they speak their mind and defend their opinions with passion.

Games are another form of entertainment. Two games introduced by Quechua colonizers are very popular. One is called "Pull the Duck." A duck is hanged from a tree with a rope that can be pulled, and the participants try to get the duck down from the tree. The winner keeps the duck. In the second game, they hang a bag of sweets and treats from a tree and dance around it, periodically hitting the bag of sweets with an axe until it falls, and they then fight to get the treats. Recently, card games have been introduced. The Matsigenka play cards, betting small sums of money. For their own pleasure, some men play their flutes and drums. The Matsigenka also have a lot of fun teasing their domestic animals: they really enjoy pulling their dogs' whiskers.

Matsigenka smoke tobacco in pipes or take it as snuff through V-tubes. They also chew it with the ashes. To get drunk, they drink *chicha*, made with yucca, maize, sweet potatoes, bananas, and other produce.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Matsigenka make their own pots. They use the clay found in riverbanks and mix it with cotton fiber. When the pot has dried thoroughly, it is put in the fire for an hour, and as soon as it is taken out they fill it up with yucca water to make it waterproof. Decoration is rare in pottery and other objects and simple tools that are made of wood. But they do make children's toys of wood, and necklaces of animal teeth and carved bones. Women spin cotton and weave cloth, make mats for sleeping and sitting, and make the plaited sifters and strainers used in food preparation. Men are responsible for house-build-

ing, making bows and arrows, and making the fiber twine for netting.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Malnutrition has made the Matsigenka population more susceptible to parasites and epidemics. Cultural changes have affected the Matsigenka's psychological well-being, resulting in a number of suicides and an increase in alcohol consumption, which is helped by the availability of bottled and canned alcoholic drinks. Some communities are so isolated that medical help cannot always reach them. Formal education suffers shortages of teachers and materials. The teachers do not stay very long, as they are often not from the region and find the conditions difficult.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women provide most childcare, prepare nearly all the food, manufacture cotton cloth, and grow certain "women's crops," such as yams and *cocayam*. In addition, Matsigenka women spin cotton, weave cloth, make mats for sleeping and sitting, and make plaited sifters and strainers used in food preparation. Men do all the hunting, most fishing, the bulk of agricultural work, build houses, make bows and arrows, and create fiber twine for netting used in fishnets and carrying bags. Men and women occasionally work together in the garden or on foraging trips, complementing one another's tasks. With this division of work strongly gendered in Matsigenka households, many women left behind by their husbands who search for employment and leave their villages for periods of weeks and sometimes months, have difficulty keeping themselves and their children adequately nourished.

Other serious impacts of modernity include the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among the Matsigenka. Syphilis appears to be present in at least one community at an unprecedented rate: 35% of the pupils at one Matsigenka high school had tested positive for syphilis. Although the route of this disease into the communities is not clear, the timing strongly suggests that it is related to the increased contact between the Matsigenka and outsiders as a result, direct or indirect, of the gas project in Peru.

Medicinal plant knowledge is widely shared, though a degree of specialization is found along gender lines: women are more knowledgeable about plants for childcare and fertility control, while men specialize in hunting medicines and treatments for wounds and snakebite. Mildly psychoactive plants are used to improve women's concentration for spinning and weaving cotton, to control negative emotions, such as grief and anger, to manipulate the content of dreams and to pacify sick or frightened children.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# MAYA

**LOCATION:** Southeastern Mexico; Guatemala; Belize; Honduras; El Salvador

**POPULATION:** About 8–10 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English; various Mayan dialects

**RELIGION:** Folk Catholicism; evangelical Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Today's Maya are descended from one of the great civilizations of the Americas. They live in the same regions of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras as their ancestors and retain many of their ancient traditions. Mayan history reaches back some 4,000 years to what is called the Preclassic period, when civilization first began in Mesoamerica. However, it was during what came to be known as the Classic period—from roughly AD 250 to 900—that Mayan culture reached its peak and the Maya achieved their celebrated advances in architecture, mathematics, agriculture, astronomy, art, and other areas. During this period Maya civilization was formed by more than 40 cities, such as Tikal, Uaxactun, Copan, and Bonampak, among others. Each of these cities had an average population that would have oscillated between 5,000 and 50,000 dwellers.

They built spectacular temples and palaces, developed several calendars, including one reaching back to 3114 BC, and developed a numerical system capable of recording a number that today would be expressed as 142 followed by 36 zeros. They developed a complex system of writing and, beginning in 50 BC, were the first people in the Western hemisphere to keep written historical records. Around AD 900 the construction of buildings and stelae (stone slabs inscribed with names and dates) ceased abruptly, and the advanced lowland civilization of the Maya collapsed, creating a mystery that has fascinated scholars for many years. Possible causes that have been proposed include warfare, drought, famine, and disease. Later investigations suggest that the sudden decline could have been occasioned by war-related disruptions of river and land trade routes.

The Spanish campaign to subdue the Maya and conquer their lands began around 1520 and ended nearly 200 years later when Tayasal, the last remaining Mayan region (in present-day Guatemala), fell to the conquistadors in 1697. The Spanish seized Mayan lands and enslaved their populations, sending many to labor in the mines of northern Mexico. In addition, thousands of Maya died of diseases spread by the Europeans, especially smallpox. During the first half of the 19th century, the Central American lands won their independence from Spain, but the lives of the Maya did not improve. They labored on vast tobacco, sugarcane, and henequen plantations, in virtual slavery enforced by their continuing debt to the landowners. In the Yucatan, many joined in a protracted rebellion called the Caste War that lasted from 1847 to 1901.

After the revolution of 1910, the Maya in Mexico gained increased legal rights and better educational and job opportunities. However, a steep drop in world prices for henequen—the “green gold” from which twine was made—turned the Yucatan from one of Mexico's richest regions to one of its poorest. In Guatemala, the disenfranchisement and poverty of the

Maya (comprising roughly half the population) continued unchanged into the 20th century. Since the 1970s, political violence has forced many Maya to flee to Mexico, where they remain as refugees. In Chiapas, Maya of the Tzeltal and Tzotzil tribes took part in the Zapatista uprising of January 1994.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The modern Maya live in southeastern Mexico and northern Central America, including Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Altogether, their homelands cover an area of approximately 323,750 sq km (125,000 sq mi) with a varied terrain that encompasses both northern lowlands and southern highlands. Volcanic mountains dominate the highlands, which are home to the rare quetzal bird of the tropical rain forest. The fertile soil of the highland valleys supports the largest segment of the Maya population. While many Maya have settled in cities, particularly Merida and Cancún, and adopted an urban lifestyle, most remain rural dwellers.

Reliable figures for the total number of Maya are unavailable. Estimates range upward from 4 million. The true figure is probably between 8 and 10 million, including about half of Guatemala's total population of 10 million, close to 2 million Maya in the Mexican Yucatan, and additional numbers in Mexico's Chiapas state, as well as Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Among the larger individual groups are about 750,000 Quiché (K'iche') in the midwestern highlands of Guatemala; 445,000 or more Cakchiquel in several Guatemalan departments (provinces); and over 500,000 Mam in southwestern Guatemala and southeastern Chiapas.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Mayan languages are wide spread in Mesoamerica and northern Central America. According to recent estimations, it is plausible to suggest that Mayan languages are spoken by about 7 million indigenous Maya in Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala. In addition, most Maya today speak Spanish, the official language of the countries where they reside (except for Belize, where the official language is English, but much of the population speaks either Spanish or an English-based Creole that contains elements of Spanish and African languages).

The Mayan languages (alternatively: Maya languages) form a language family spoken in Mesoamerica and northern Central America. Mayan languages are spoken by at least 6 million indigenous Maya, primarily in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize.

The two Mayan languages of the Classic period, Yucatecan and Cholan, have subdivided into about 30 separate languages, some of which are not mutually intelligible. The most widely spoken are Mam, Quiché, Kekchí, and Cakchiquel. Advocates of Mayan cultural autonomy protest against the relegation of their indigenous languages to limited use (often in remote rural areas) while Spanish remains the language of government, education, the church, and the media. The following example is drawn from a creation myth in the *Popol Vuh*, the Mayan holy book:

Keje k'ut xax k'o wi ri kaj nay puch, u K'ux Kaj.  
Are ub'i ri k'ab'awil, chuch'axik.

(And of course there is the sky, and there is also the Heart of Sky. This is the name of the god, as it is spoken.)

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The greatest body of Mayan tradition is contained in the *Popol Vuh*, an ancient text first transcribed into Latin and later translated into Spanish that preserves both sacred and secular lore. According to its creation myth, the gods made three different attempts at creating life in earth.

In Maya mythology, Tepeu and Gukumatz, also known as Kukulcan and as the Aztec's Quetzalcoatl, are indicated as the universe makers. They were two of the first beings to exist and were as wise as they were sage. Other deities, such as Huracan, the Heart, and Heaven, are also present in these narrations. According to Mayan traditions, Tepeu and Gucumatz decided that to preserve their legacy it was necessary to create a race of beings who would worship them. During this process, the gods made several attempts, but false starts complicated the procedure.

Animals were created first but since all were howling and squawking and did not worship their creators, they were banished forever to the forest. Man was first made of mud, but they just dissolved and crumbled away. The second version was made of wood and proved deficient because they were without emotions, souls, and reason because they soon forgot their makers. Finally, men were formed from a paste of corn dough by more gods. At last their work was complete. Even though perfect beings were fashioned, this new version was modified. The gods decided to protect the new beings by limiting the extent of their knowledge, reason that explains why gods determined to damage their eyes so humans could not see too much, and the resulting beings were the first Maya. As such, the Maya believed that maize was not just the cornerstone of their diet, but they were also made out of it.

#### 5 RELIGION

From a general viewpoint, Mayan religion was based upon the existence of a group of nature gods, such as the sun, the moon, rain, and corn. A priestly class was in charge of elaborating rituals and ceremonies. Closely related to Mayan religion was the impressive development of mathematics and astronomy. Mayan astronomy shows a complex system capable of estimating the solar year (18 months of 20 days each, plus an unlucky 5-day period) and the sacred year of 260 days (13 cycles of 20 named days). Another fact that proves the astonishing Mayan skills as astronomers at that time was their ability to predict solar eclipses.

The traditional religions of the Maya were based on a cosmology that embraced the world, the heavens, and an unseen underworld called Xibalba. When Spanish missionaries introduced Catholicism to their regions, the Maya tended to graft it onto their existing religion, creating a unique brand of folk Catholicism. Their traditional gods that belonged to the natural world, such as corn, rain, and the sun, became associated with Christian saints, and various rituals and festivals were transmuted into forms approved by the church.

Since the 1960s, evangelical Christianity, mostly promoted by churches in the southern United States, has been adopted by large segments of the Mayan population. Entire towns have embraced conservative forms of Protestantism, which have not proven as amenable as Catholicism to the retention of customs related to traditional folk religions, such as the use of alcohol in association with religious rituals or the retention of the sacred brotherhoods—known as *cofradías* in Guatemala and as

*cargos* in Chiapas—which traditionally oversee village festivals and other aspects of civic life.

Even though almost all Mayas are nominal Roman Catholics their Christianity is mixed with their native religion. Its cosmology is typically Mayan, and Christian figures are commonly identified with Mayan deities. Public religion is basically Christian, but traditional domestic rites of their native pre-Columbian religion are still practiced in the privacy of their homes.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most holidays currently observed by the Maya are the holy days of the Christian calendar, although many of their observances retain a shamanistic character resulting from the grafting of a Christian framework onto the ancient nature worship of their ancestors. The most important celebrations are generally Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter in late March or early April) and Christmas (December 25). The Maya living in the Chamula region of Chiapas are known for their five-day Carnival celebration, called Crazy February, whose Christian significance (the period preceding Lent) merges with the older observance of the five "Lost Days" at the end of the Maya solar calendar. Religious societies called *cargos* sponsor the festivities, which include ceremonial dances, feasting, processions, and ritual reenactments of both religious and historic events, including a mock "manure war."

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions (such as birth, puberty, and death) are marked by religious ceremonies, many of which combine Christian and ancestral traditions.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The religious societies known as *cargos* in Chiapas and *cofradías* in Guatemala have been an important vehicle of social cohesion among the Maya. Charged since colonial times with organizing Catholic religious festivals, they provided the means for the Maya to conform nominally to the customs of their colonizers while privately preserving their own religion, traditions, and worldview. Mayan villages today have both civil and religious *cargos*, whose officials may ascend through a hierarchy of positions to ultimately become respected village elders, or *principales*.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Housing varies among the different regions and groups of Maya. The Mam, who live in southwestern Guatemala and southeastern Chiapas, inhabit houses with adobe walls; small, shuttered windows; roofs of tile or corrugated metal; and a floor of hard-packed dirt. The K'iche' in the Guatemalan highlands build rectangular houses with double-pitched tile roofs and walls of adobe, thatch supported by boards or poles, or other materials. Increasing numbers live in more modern homes built from brick or lumber with tin roofs.

The health of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal Maya of Chiapas has been compromised by their inadequate diet, which consists of fewer than 500 calories a day—one-fifth of the minimum standard set by the United Nations. Life expectancy is only 44 years, and the infant mortality rate is 150 deaths per 1,000 live births. Another factor endangering both infant and adult

health is the prevalence of adolescent pregnancies. Maya folk medicine includes the ministrations of ritual healers called *curanderos* and female herbalists who may double as midwives. Common cures include prayers, offerings, herbal remedies, and sweat-baths.

The main means of transport for most Maya is the bus. Buses in Maya areas may be crowded as early as 4:00 or 5:00 am, often with people traveling from remote villages to the larger market towns. By late afternoon and evening there are fewer travelers on the road. In the Yucatan, human travelers share narrow country roads with a variety of wildlife ranging from lizards to swarms of butterflies, and speed bumps abound on roads in the vicinity of virtually every village. Trains in the Maya regions—like those in many parts of Central and South America—are generally slow, old, and unreliable. In some areas, boats are used for public transportation.

Economically, today's Mayas are agricultural oriented. This Amerindian people raise a wide variety of crops such as corn, beans, and squash. Socially, today's Mayas live in communities organized around central villages and live on farm homesteads except during fiestas and market days.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Both nuclear and extended families are found among the Maya. Couples generally marry in their late teens or early 20s. Traditionally, all marriages were arranged, but since the 1950s it has become increasingly common among some groups for young people to choose their own mates. In arranged marriages, contact may be initiated by the couple, followed by negotiation between the two families. Gifts are generally exchanged, and in some cases the bride's parents receive a payment to compensate them for having raised her. Couples often have both civil and religious ceremonies, and they may live with the groom's parents until their first child is born.

Family structure may alternate between nuclear and extended, with the addition of newly married couples who will eventually leave to establish their own homes, or elderly parents who come to live with the family when it becomes hard for them to manage on their own.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Maya wear both modern Western-style clothing and traditional garb (although the latter is more commonly worn by women). Dress is mainly traditional, particularly for women. It is much more common to see men wearing modern clothing. Men generally wear trousers and sport shirts or *guayaberas*, dress shirts with decorative tucks worn outside the belt in place of a jacket. Women wear either traditional woven and embroidered clothing, or stylish dresses and skirt-and-blouse outfits. Traditional women's attire includes the *huipil*, a long, sleeveless tunic; the *quechquémitli*, a shoulder cape; and the *enredo*, a wrap-around skirt. Maya garments are commonly decorated with elaborate and colorful embroidery. The designs, which include humans, animals, and plants, often have some religious significance, and every Maya group and village has its own distinctive patterns of decoration. The decorative designs for huipiles are often said to appear to women in their dreams. Men often wear the traditional tunics over store-bought shirts. *Fajas* are sashes that hold garments in place and also serve as pockets. Domestic spinning and weaving, once common, are

becoming rare, and most clothing is made of factory-woven cloth.

## 12 FOOD

The Maya generally eat three meals a day: breakfast (*el desayuno*), lunch (*la comida*), and supper (*la cena*). Corn, the most important food of their ancestors, remains the central ingredient in their diet today. Throughout the region, women make daily trips to the village grinder with their corn kernels, returning with dough, or *masa*, from which to make tortillas, the most important food staple, or tamales, which are also popular. After corn, beans (*frijoles*) are the most basic staple, served boiled, fried, or refried. Soups, many of them actually thick stews, form a large part of the Mayan diet. One of the most popular is lime soup (*sopa de lima*), made from chicken, limes, and a variety of spices.

Poultry, either turkey, which is native to the region, or chicken, which was introduced by the Spanish, forms the basis of many meals. Plentiful seafood caught on the coasts of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico is also an important dietary staple. The Yucatan is known for its *ceviche*, a cold dish made with fish prepared with an acidic marinade (usually lime juice), served with onions, chiles, and cilantro. Popular desserts include flan (a custard introduced by the Spanish) and *Torta del Cielo* (Heavenly Cake), a cake made with rum, almonds, and 10 eggs that is served at weddings and other special occasions.

One of the best-known foods of the Maya is Cochinita Pibil, a pork dish that dates back to pre-Columbian times, when it was made from wild boar cooked in a coal-filled pit. Domesticated pigs, introduced by the Spanish, have replaced the boar, but the dish is prepared with the same seasonings as it was in the past.

### Cochinita Pibil

- 10 whole black peppercorns
- 1/3 cup lime juice
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 2 pounds lean pork, cut in 2-inch cubes
- 5 cloves garlic
- Banana leaves or aluminum foil
- 3 Tablespoons achiote paste
- 3 fresh xcatic or other spicy chilies
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- Sliced purple raw onions
- 2 bay leaves
- String

The cumin seeds and black peppercorns should be ground to a fine consistency, combined with the garlic, and pureed in a food processor or blender. Mix the spice puree with the lime juice, achiote paste, bay leaves, and oregano. Cover the pork with this mixture and marinate for at least 3 hours, or overnight. Place banana leaves on the bottom of a roasting pan, and put the pork, with the marinade, on top of the leaves. Add topping of onions and chiles. After folding the leaves over the meat, tie with the string. Preheat oven to 325°F and bake in covered pan for 1½ hours. Serve with beans, salsa, and heated corn tortillas.

Serve with warmed corn tortillas, beans, and salsa.





*Indigenous Mayans of the Cakchiquel ethnic group watch the San Antonio de Padua procession during the feast of San Antonia de Padua in Palopoo, Solola, Guatemala. (AP Images/Rodrigo Abd)*

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Maya are educated at either public or Catholic schools. In Guatemala, a half-dozen Catholic-run boarding schools are the main source of education for those wishing to progress beyond the basic education available in the villages. Maya concerned with preserving their culture argue that the formal education traditionally available to them has attempted to assimilate them into mainstream Western culture by causing them to lose touch with their own. The Guatemalan Academy of Maya Languages (Academia de Lenguas Mayas) is at the center of a movement to preserve the languages of the Guatemalan Maya by codifying their grammars and alphabets.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Maya have preserved many aspects of their ancient culture, including their traditional clothing, folklore, agricultural techniques, family structure, language, and dance. Many elements of their ancient religions have also survived for centuries under the guise of Catholic religious observances, although these are now threatened by the growing prevalence of Protestant evangelical sects.

### **15 WORK**

In rural areas, the Maya farm their maize fields, or *milpas*, much as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. Forested

sites are turned into new fields by felling the trees and burning the brush (today known as “slash-and-burn” agriculture). Maize kernels are then planted into holes made with digging sticks. Where the ancient Maya used stone tools for clearing and hardened the end of the digging stick with fire, today’s farmer uses a steel machete and metal-tipped stick. Because this type of agriculture rapidly depletes the soil, fields must be left fallow for periods ranging from 7 to as many as 20 years. Besides farming, Maya also work as laborers and artisans or own small shops. In urban areas, they work in jobs involving textiles or computers, for example.

### **16 SPORTS**

The ancient Maya played hip-ball, a game that involved keeping a hard rubber ball aloft with any part of the body other than the hands, head, or feet. In some regions, the ball had to be hit through a set of stone rings. Soccer and bullfights are two popular sports in the regions inhabited by the Maya of today.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Sunday afternoons after church are the most popular time for recreation. Most businesses are closed, and many people take the time to stroll the village streets or relax in local parks. Pop-

ular forms of musical entertainment include marimba teams and mariachi bands.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Maya women are famous for their weaving, often using locally handspun yarn and natural vegetable dyes. Using the pre-Columbian back-strap loom of their ancestors, they produce striped and plain white cloth for shawls, shirts, and children's clothes, some with designs that are over 1,200 years old. Colorful hammocks are woven from fine cotton string. Other craft items include both glazed and unglazed pottery, ceremonial wooden masks, and goods woven from palm, straw, reeds, and sisal.

For centuries, traditional Maya dances have been preserved by the religious men's fraternities called *cofradías*. These dances were performed for both ceremonial and entertainment purposes. The *Pop Wuj* dance depicts the four stages of humankind's development: the Man of Mud, who is destroyed because he does not recognize the gods; the Man of Wood, who is too rigid and ultimately burns; the Monkey Man, who is too silly; and the Human Being, who respects and prays to the gods. The K'iche' Maya of Chichicastenango have a dance that centers around Sijolaj, a harvest king whom the Spaniards identified with St. Thomas.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Maya of Yucatan, like many other Mexicans, suffer from overpopulation, unemployment, and periods of political unrest. In Guatemala, Mayan farmers have been crowded onto mountainous areas with poor land, and laborers are forced to work for extremely low wages. The most serious problem for the Maya in that country has been over two decades of violent political repression by the military and right- and left-wing death squads. Thousands have been murdered or "disappeared," and many have fled the country for Mexico or the United States.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Maya peasant society is characterized by a strong interdependence and equality of responsibilities between husband and wife. As in all societies with a subsistence economy, husband and wife provide goods and services for one another. While the husband contributes the corn and beans he has produced, the wife prepares the food to nourish the family, weaves hammocks, embroiders *huipiles*, and cares for the children. Maya women are most responsible for passing along the Maya traditions to the next generation.

Although cultural values encourage a complementary division of labor, they also give men the right to rule over women and to move about freely. These inconsistencies generate tensions in male-female relations and lead to an ambivalence towards women, especially with the arrival of modernity and globalization to Mayan territory.

The Mexican tourist industry began to demand easy access to cheap labor and most of the Maya communities in Yucatan provided this labor to Cancun. Maya women were separated from the extensive network of their extended peasant families and migrated to Cancun, where they complemented their domestic roles by joining the wage labor force and market. Among migrant families, male and female relations within the household, life ways, and worldviews have been, transformed

from the traditional peasant system, and female income has become a complement to men's wages.

Regarding politics, Mayan women have also acquired posts of authority throughout the Yucatan Peninsula. During the early 1990s, Mayan women took the political center stage of Yucatan state by winning the three most powerful positions in state government: governor, chief justice of the state supreme court, and mayor of Merida, Yucatan's largest city and state capital. Maya women were the majority on the state supreme court (three of five Justices) and headed three of the state's major political parties. Women also held the mayorships of two of the largest and most economically important cities outside of Merida, Progreso, and Tizimin.

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revised by C. Vergara

# MENNONITES OF PARAGUAY

**LOCATION:** Paraguay

**POPULATION:** 28,000

**LANGUAGE:** Plattdeutsch (Low German dialect); Hochdeutsch (High German); Spanish

**RELIGION:** Mennonite

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The name Mennonite derives from Menno Simons, a Roman Catholic priest who led the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and North Germany in the 1530s. The Anabaptists later split into other groups, including the Amish, and the first Mennonites belonged to a church organized in Zurich, Switzerland.

During the 16th century in Holland and Switzerland, Mennonites ran into serious conflict with both the Catholic and Protestant authorities over their religious beliefs. They believe that baptism and church membership should be given out solely to those who have voluntarily given up sin. Only those who proved their goodness could be baptized, which is how they came to be called Anabaptists. Persecution scattered the Swiss Mennonites throughout Europe, for as pacifists they believed in the separation of Church and State. What made matters worse was their rejection of compulsory military service, and they were forced to flee to Germany, Russia, and Canada.

In the early 1920s a group of conservative Mennonites in Canada, part of the 1874 migration from Europe, began to look for other places to settle because they felt the Canadian government was beginning to make too many demands on their freedom. These included restrictions on the school system, increasing pressure to serve in the military or support the military effort, and demands that English become the first language in the schools.

Paraguay was attractive to the Mennonites due to the offer of large tracts of nearly uninhabited land, on which they could continue their traditional agricultural way of life, and the government's willingness to grant them political autonomy under a "Privilegium." Under this they were to be responsible for their own schools (with German language instruction) and community law enforcement. They were also to have freedom from taxation, religious liberty, and even exemption from military service. Today, they are in charge of making their own regulations regarding ownership, transfer, and use of land, the building and maintenance of villages, roads, pastures, public buildings like schools, fire houses, governmental institutions, and jails, and the collection of taxes, as well as the training of teachers, the running of their own postal service, and the development of agricultural techniques. The only rights the Paraguayan government retained for itself were the rights to levy and collect taxes, to apprehend and adjudicate criminals, and the right of eminent domain.

The first group of Mennonites arrived in Paraguay in 1927. They were called the Sommerfelder, the Summerfield Mennonites from the Canadian prairies. These Sommerfelder formed the Menno colony, the first of three distinct but territorially overlapping Mennonite groups. They originally acquired a tract of land, more than 130,000 hectares (320,000 acres) in the

Chaco to the west of Puerto Casado. The Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia severely threatened this first settlement. One of the main motivations of the Paraguayan government to accept this religious community was the rumor assuring that exuberant oil deposits existed in the Chaco territory. Actually, this rumor led Bolivia to trespass on that area resulting in the 1932 War of the Chaco. This sovereignty violation made politically necessary to populate the region with Paraguayan citizens.

Although the Mennonite immigrants obtained major concessions under the Privilegium, they soon discovered that they had been given land in the middle of an area under violent dispute. From the beginning of the 20th century, Paraguay and Bolivia had been preparing for armed conflict by building fortifications throughout this part of the Chaco. In 1932 the situation developed into open warfare, and the Mennonite settlements found themselves at the center of ground fighting and air attacks between the two sides. Nomadic Amerindians were often targets for both Bolivians and Paraguayans. While some found refuge with the Mennonites, others were so hostile to the arrival of the settlers that they violently resisted any approach from them. Even as late as the 1940s, Ayoreo hunter-gatherers attacked and killed members of a Mennonite family in the northwest Chaco.

Only a few years after the founding of the Menno colony, Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union established Fernheim, with its main town at Filadelfia. Neuland was founded in 1947 by Ukrainian-German Mennonites, many of whom had been forcibly conscripted into the German army during World War II and had managed to stay in the West after being released from prisoner-of-war camps. Neuland's largest settlement is Neu-Halbstadt. Of the original 641 family units, 253 were without fathers due to casualties on the Russian Front while serving in German uniform.

Because of their isolation, the Mennonites saw Paraguayans only infrequently, but they regularly came into contact, and sometimes conflict, with Chaco Indians. Today, there are about 28,000 Mennonites in Paraguay, which are living in 20 colonies and in Asuncion, Paraguay's capital.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Gran Chaco covers more than 60% of the total area of Paraguay and yet contains only 4% of its population. Great distances separate its small settlements. The paved Ruta 9, known as the Ruta Trans-Chaco, runs 450 km (280 mi) to the town of Filadelfia, the administrative and business center of the area colonized by the European Mennonite immigrants. Beyond Filadelfia, the pavement ends but the highway carries on to the Bolivian border at Eugenio Garay, another 300 km (190 mi) northwest.

The Paraguayan Chaco is the northernmost segment of an enormous plain, which lifts gradually from the southeast to the southwest. Within it are three distinct areas that emerge gradually from east to west. West of the Rio Paraguay, the Low Chaco landscape is a huge savanna of caranday palms, with scattered islands of thorny scrub. The main industry here is ranching. The climate becomes drier the further northwest the Ruta Trans-Chaco runs, and it is within this inhospitable environment that the Mennonite colonists have created successful agricultural communities in the Middle Chaco.

There are about 28,000 Mennonites and a roughly larger number of Amerindians in the region. Through the years, church membership has been about 41% of the total population, while about 14.5% of people in the colonies never join the church. Menno's percentage of nonchurch members is only 2.2% because both men and women must belong before the church will perform a marriage ceremony.

The Mennonites in Paraguay can be grouped in three categories. The first group is the Mermonite colony in Chaco, which can be subdivided in: Menno, Femheim, and Neuland. The colonies work in a joint-venture and dedicate to evangelism and educate native populations. They also operate a local radio station known as the Voice of the Chaco of Paraguay. The three settlements run a psychiatric clinic in the Chaco as well as a sanatorium for leprosy. The second group of Mennonites is located in the Eastern part of Paraguay and its main colonies are Friesland, Volendam, and Tres Palmas. Finally, it is possible to identify the Mennonites of Asuncion, considered the most progressive Mennonites in Paraguay. In Asuncion, the Mennonites help in psychiatric hospitals in the preparation of meals and physical and mental therapies. Despite their different locations, there are not significant differences among these groups; all put emphasis on solid education and sound systems of values according to Jesus Christ's example.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Mennonites prefer to speak Plattdeutsch, a Low German dialect, among themselves at home and in church, but they also speak and understand Hochdeutsch, High German, which is the language used in schools. Most people speak Spanish, and quite a few have a passable grasp of English. Chaco Indians often speak German as well as Spanish, although most prefer their native languages.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The Mennonites' faith is based on the Christian Bible, especially the New Testament. Their creed is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), which they believe forbids them from going to war, swearing oaths, or holding offices that require the use of force. The Mennonites believe in adult rather than infant baptism, and as pacifists, they also believe in the separation of Church and State and reject compulsory military service.

### **5 RELIGION**

Mennonites are Trinitarian, believing in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They believe that Christ is the head of the Church, and only those who submit to Christ can be true members of the Church body. Their religion is based on the philosophy that religion is holy, that its spirit and way of life are different from the world about it and should be maintained as such. They maintain that they should adhere to a pure belief system and a holy life that has to be preserved in its entirety and passed on to the next generation.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The important Christian festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, are used to reaffirm the traditional beliefs and intensify the religious commitment of Church members.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Mennonites are not baptized as infants, but undergo this religious rite at the age of 18 or whenever the person publicly renounces sin. Communion is also celebrated, but unlike the Catholic practice of celebrating with the bread and wine as the actual body and blood of Christ, Mennonites participate in this ritual as a means of committing themselves, like Jesus, to a life of complete and utter obedience to God.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Mennonite thought has been characterized by a separation between religion and the world. As a result of severe persecution in the 16th century, Anabaptism was forced to develop a strategy of withdrawal from the outside world in its attempt to survive, and this has become central to Mennonite theology.

Consequently, a strong sense of identity and loyalty has been created within Mennonite society that is maintained and reinforced, first, by cutting themselves off from the outside world, and then by practicing a religious group discipline among themselves. It is this voluntary isolation that has led to the philosophy of encouraging the virtues of hard work, piety, and mutual cooperation.

Some members of the Mennonite community still practice foot-washing, a ritual based on the act of Jesus washing his disciples' feet.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Traditionally, work on the farm is done by hand or by draft animals, but the building of the Trans-Chaco road has brought about a gradual modernization. It has opened up communication with the outside world and increased the opportunities for marketing agricultural produce. A number of long-term credits have also been obtained, the first of which was a \$1 million loan from the United States. This has allowed the colonies to restructure agriculture and dairy production. Farms have gradually been mechanized. Food production and consumption has improved and, with it, the general level of health in the colony.

The town of Filadelfia has grown considerably. It has been the administrative center of the Fernheim Colony since 1931 and has 1,700 Mennonites out of a total population of 3,300 in the colony. An additional 200 non-Mennonites and more than 1,000 Amerindians also live there. One of the main reasons for Filadelfia's rapid growth is the fact that it is the location of all necessary services, schools, hospitals, cooperative stores, and industry. Many private enterprises are also located within the town, and it has a major airport.

Houses throughout the colonies are built in the simple Dutch or Midwestern American styles.

The administration of the Mennonite society is organized on a colony basis, consisting of a number of villages that originally settled in a region, which in turn is governed by an administrative head, the Oberschulze, with several assistants. The individual family heads who own the land are the backbone of the system, being eligible to take part in all decision-making. The villages meet periodically and decide on all matters not taken care of at the colony level. A committee also looks after various matters such as the promotion of agriculture and economic development, and funds are maintained to take care of widows, orphans, and the poor. The statutes and regulations agreed upon in the village system and at the colony level are

enforced by the Mennonite authorities through fines, penalties, and ultimately jail if a person does not conform. Sentences can include hard labor and flogging. Lawbreakers can also be handed over to the Paraguayan authorities in rare cases.

Landowners are the source of juridical power, since only landowners have the authority to vote in colony meetings. Each village, normally made up of 20 to 40 families, constitutes a political unit with an administrator, an assistant, and a clerk as the official group. There are also “tenth men” who assist the village unit. All the village decision-making and authority is vested in this group. Each village, for example, has its law enforcement officer, who is even authorized to arrest people for speeding through the village.

The Colony Authority, which oversees all the villages, holds yearly meetings at which all major decisions are made, such as election of officers, punishment of offenders, levying of taxes and dues, building of secondary schools, laying out new lands for cultivation, refusing a family permission to emigrate (if, for example, it has large debts), and deciding who can own land. It also organizes the levying of taxes to support the school system, the hospital system, and payment of doctors (each colony has a modern, well-equipped hospital and medical staff); the maintenance of roads and public fences; and the provision for power, burial grounds, and health and retirement insurance. Even the maintenance of colony ranches, public pastures, airports, the mail system, and telephone systems are under the control of the Colony Authority.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditionally, men have the authority in the family and women are expected to carry out the housekeeping functions and help with raising farm produce. Divorce, once unheard of, does take place, although it is still a relatively rare event.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Those in rural areas dress more simply than do urban dwellers. Men wear hats and blue or green overalls, and the women wear head coverings and plain, knee-length dresses of one simple color. On important religious occasions, such as Good Friday services, the women will wear plain black dresses and carry black caps in a box. The caps will only be taken out and tied under their shawls once they reach church.

#### **12 FOOD**

The Paraguayan Mennonite communities enjoy large meals, with many traditional German and Russian dishes, such as sauerkraut and borscht. They also make a Mennonite cheese, which has become well known throughout Latin America.

#### **13 EDUCATION**

The education system is organized and operated solely by the Mennonites. The system is directed by the administrator of the Colony Authority, two teachers, and two ministers, but an administrator for the school system is also employed. Families contribute to the cost of educating their own children, but the villages assist those with more than three children.

Each village is responsible for the building of the schoolhouse, the hiring of the teacher, and the general operation of the school. The three high schools are directed by the boards, responsible to the authority.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Through a traditional program of education—Sunday schools, Bible schools, preaching, and home training—the young people are introduced into the Mennonite Christian tradition. Bible study conferences are sponsored at Easter, Christmas, and other occasions to reinforce the Mennonite faith and theology.

#### **15 WORK**

Mennonites are not afraid of settling in the most inhospitable areas and are hard-working farmers. In the Bolivian wilderness (known as the Oriente) north and east of Santa Cruz, for example, they cleared the forest, built their houses, and sowed their crops. Each community trades their farm produce, dairy products, and crops such as cotton, sorghum, and wheat with neighboring towns. It is a Mennonite tradition to cooperate with one another at sowing and harvest times, as well as when building new barns. In Paraguay, the Mennonite community has built an excellent reputation as hard-working and disciplined farmers. This fame is understandable taking in account that in the wilderness of the Chaco, with its extreme climatic conditions, the Mennonites were capable of building a successful farming and religious community. In spite of the dryness and inhospitable territory known as Chaco, where the temperatures easily reach 122 degree in summer, the Mennonites have set up an efficient cooperative farming system that provides around half of Paraguay dairy needs and produces its finest quality cotton fiber and groundnut oil. Moreover, today Mennonites are the most important milk producers in Paraguay controlling close to 70% of the milk industry. Because of the success achieved by the Mennonite community, the Paraguayan government is planning to expand the development of the Chaco, based on the availability of potable water.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Mennonites enjoy games of all sorts but avoid any professional sport. They enjoy competing in friendly contests among each other, but they do not believe in the notion of towns or villages competing against one another. Sport is seen as a physical pastime, meant to be enjoyed for itself, as well as a means of learning to cooperate with others as part of a team.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Mennonites are against music, dancing, and any form of boisterous party. They prefer to live a simple, puritanical lifestyle. Social gatherings are the main form of recreation, such as men getting together to raise a new barn or gather in the harvest, and women preparing and serving meals for friends and neighbors. While Sunday is a day of rest, it is also a day of worship, although simple board games of skill are a favorite family pastime.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

All Mennonite crafts and hobbies have a practical purpose, from the handcrafted tools and implements made by the men, to the large quilts handmade and stitched together by the women.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

With the arrival of increasing numbers of Paraguayans settling in the Chaco, the Mennonite communities have come un-

der pressure from the authorities, and there is a growing worry that the government may not honor its Privilegium. More and more Mennonites are investing their money abroad, or looking to emigrate. The election of a Mennonite governor for the department of Boqueron, however, is a sign that Mennonites are deciding to become more involved with Paraguayan affairs.

Meanwhile, the modern world has caught up with Filadelfia, and the arrival of motorbikes and videos is seen as a threat to Mennonite values. At the same time, beer and tobacco, once forbidden in the settlements, are being openly sold, although they are only being bought and consumed by non-Mennonites.

In some areas of South America, the unique Mennonite lifestyle is attracting tourists, but the Mennonites do not like photographs to be taken of them and try to avoid tourists.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The primary role of Mennonite women in the Old Order society was that of mother and homemaker. Since children were seen as blessings from God, the use of birth control was discouraged. Church leaders also encouraged women to wear a prayer covering, a small mesh cap that symbolized their submission to men and their membership to the Mennonite Church. The home and family were traditionally Paraguayan Mennonite women's central focus, since raising large families is important to ensure the next generation of farmers. Labor tasks were delineated by gender, but families working together conducted much of the work. Males tilled small plots of tobacco for sale and home consumption and provided food for the table by hunting and fishing. Women and children made cheese and butter, gathered berries, and took care of cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens. As household producers, women's work was essential to the success of the rural household. These values were reinforced during the years following World War II through much of the 1970s. The model of the stay-at-home-and-on-the-farm mother and wife, however, did not adequately meet the financial challenges facing young couples that started farming by the late 1970s.

As a consequence, since the 1980s young Paraguayan Mennonite farming couples have begun to change religiously and historically cherished farming practices. Young married women with small children face an irreconcilable dilemma. Devout women's religious beliefs and church discipline strongly encourage women, especially those with preschool children, to stay at home and on the farm. However, they have felt obligated to work outside of the home because of economic necessity.

Even though historically women were not allowed to serve on church committees, teach Sunday school to men, or preach, since the 1980s women have increasingly held positions that had been filled by males for decades. Many Mennonite women were first resentful of this change, but saw no other way to keep the church functioning. In some cases, the large number of women as primary earners expedited the process of granting women a vote in church decision-making. In the last two decades of the 20th century, Mennonite women have become leading ministers in Mennonite churches.

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—revised by C. Vergara.

## MEXICAN AMERICANS

For more information on Mexican history and culture, see **Vol. 2: Mexicans**.

### OVERVIEW

In 1845, the independent republic of Texas became a U.S. state. The Mexicans living there suddenly found themselves living in America. They were not offered U.S. citizenship, however, so they were not officially considered Mexican Americans. The first official Mexican Americans entered the union when Mexico ceded the northern part of its territory to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). The Mexican inhabitants of that land were given the choice of either becoming U.S. citizens or relocating south to Mexican territory. About 80% (or 80,000) of them chose to stay and become U.S. citizens, comprising the first large group of official Mexican Americans.

Although this new U.S. territory had recently been part of Mexico, and the Mexican Americans residing there were living on land that had been in their families for generations, the new European American settlers assumed authority and relegated the Mexican Americans to second-class status. English was declared the official language; Mexican Americans were given only low-paid, menial work; stores, saloons, and schools were segregated, and landlords and employers put up signs saying, “No Mexicans need apply.” Some towns outlawed Mexican fiestas (celebrations). Perhaps worst of all, the United States broke its promise to the Mexican Americans that they would retain all rights to their lands and instead awarded numerous land claims to European Americans through the courts.

Mexican Americans therefore became impoverished, lower-class citizens in what had once been their own country. A Mexican American middle class did develop along the Rio Grande, which was used as a major trade route between Mexico and the United States. Mexican Americans were able to fill the need for trade brokers who were fluent in Spanish and understood Mexican culture. Elsewhere, however, Mexican Americans fell into landless poverty and were forced to work as itinerant laborers.

In the late 1800s, political and economic instability in Mexico prompted thousands of Mexicans to move across the border into the United States in search of better opportunities. The Mexican American population rose from 75,000 in 1890 to 562,000 in 1900. The majority were poor and illiterate. They became unskilled laborers, working mostly on farms, in mines, or for the railroad. When the U.S. government restricted Asian immigration, positions that the Chinese had formerly filled in railroad construction became available, and Mexicans leapt at the opportunity. Eventually, some 70% of track-layers and 90% of maintenance crews on U.S. railroads were Mexican. The U.S. mining industry, particularly in Colorado, Arizona, and California, was built largely on the backs of Mexican immigrants, and much of U.S. agriculture for the past 100 years or more has been accomplished through the contributions of Mexican migrant workers.

The largest wave of Mexican immigration to the United States, termed the “Great Migration,” occurred in the 1920s, partly as a result of the bloody Mexican Revolution (1910–1924). As many as 600,000 Mexicans legally crossed the bor-

der between 1920 and 1929. They were given permanent visas, allowing them to do contract work in agriculture but not to become U.S. citizens. Thousands of Mexicans also entered the United States illegally in the early 1900s. U.S. employers contributed to this illegal immigration by hiring smugglers, called *coyotes*, to bring the undocumented migrants across the border. The undocumented workers were easily exploited because they had no recourse. Employers could turn them in to immigration officials at any time. Some employers made a practice of hiring undocumented migrants, then turning the workers in to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) as soon as the job was done but before they had paid the workers their wages.

With the onset of World War I (1914–18), U.S. president Woodrow Wilson removed the restrictions on Mexican workers that had formerly limited them to agricultural labor. American men were going off to fight in the war, and workers were needed to fill their places. Because they could now work in other industries, many Mexican contract workers moved north to cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh where industrial jobs were plentiful. Mexican workers flooded across the border to take advantage of these new opportunities. By 1929 the Mexican American population had reached approximately one million, not counting undocumented migrants.

The boom was short lived, however. In October 1929 the U.S. stock market crashed and America entered the Great Depression. Job opportunities suddenly became scarce as the economy fell apart. Some 85,000 Mexican workers returned almost immediately to Mexico. Others were driven back across the border by frustrated European Americans who felt that the Mexicans were taking away their jobs. Anti-Mexican sentiment became especially violent in Southern California, and about 75,000 Mexican residents of that state decided to move back to Mexico. Many Mexicans who stayed in the United States were forced to go on welfare. European Americans saw them as a burden on an already overburdened economy and insisted that they be forced to leave.

The United States and Mexico decided to institute a cooperative repatriation program, where Mexican Americans would be resettled in Mexico. Some 500,000 Mexican Americans were removed to Mexico through this program before Mexico called it off because its economy could not support any more people either. Los Angeles established its own repatriation program in 1931–1934, deporting over 13,000 Mexican Americans, including a number of U.S.-born children.

When the United States became involved in World War II (1939–45), American men again left their jobs to fight in the war, and the United States again requested Mexican workers to fill their places. These workers, called *braceros* (hired hands), were given only temporary visas. The *braceros* unfortunately displaced Mexican American workers already in the United States because they were willing and able to work for less pay than the established Mexican Americans. The *bracero* program actually had little to do with wartime labor shortage. Instead, it was a way for U.S. agriculture to take advantage of the economic difficulties in Mexico, evidenced by the fact that the program was originally intended to last only from 1942–1947, but it continued (in somewhat less official form) until 1964. The original program peaked in 1944 with 62,170 *braceros* brought into the United States. The peak year from 1947–1964 was 1956,



when some 500,000 braceros were employed. Overall, about 5 million Mexicans came to the United States between 1942 and 1964 as seasonal workers.

The United States also hoped that the bracero program would discourage illegal immigration across the border by providing a legal way for Mexicans to work in the United States. However, since the program placed restrictions on where braceros could work and specified what they would be paid, it actually encouraged undocumented migration. Undocumented migrants could work wherever they could find a job, and employers could pay them less than the braceros, so both sides profited from illegal immigration. The fact that the bracero program increased, rather than decreased, undocumented migration is shown clearly in Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) records. In 1942, the first year of the program, 8,000 undocumented Mexican migrants were deported. By 1951 some 500,000 were arrested and deported.

The INS responded to this increased flow of undocumented migrants by instituting Operation Wetback in 1954. Undocumented Mexican migrants were called wetbacks (or *mojados*), a derogatory term, because they often swam across the Rio Grande to get into the United States. Through Operation Wetback, the INS deported 3,800,000 undocumented migrants in five years. Economic and political difficulties in Mexico, combined with economic opportunities in the United States, however, have continued to encourage the flow of undocumented migrants from Mexico to the United States since then. Most undocumented migrants today work at unskilled jobs in restaurants, hotels and motels, hospitals and nursing homes,

small manufacturing shops, on assembly lines, in sweatshops with the garment industry, in gardening and landscaping businesses, and in light construction.

In yet another effort to stem the flow of undocumented migrants from Mexico to the United States, a bill was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President George W. Bush in October 2006 to build a “secure fence” along sections of the almost 2,000 mile-long border. Some areas already have sections of fencing and other barriers, erected in the 1990s, which have essentially served to push migrants to other entry points, many of which require lengthy journeys through arid desert that result in an increased number of deaths. Debate over the fence, and over the undocumented migration of Mexicans into the United States, rages on.

Not all Mexican Americans are undocumented migrants. Many entered the United States legally and have become U.S. citizens. Others are descendants of the original Mexican Americans who became U.S. citizens in 1848. Second-, third-, and later-generation Mexican Americans have family histories in the United States that go back much further than some European Americans’ histories. Mexican Americans were one of the most decorated ethnic groups in World War II, earning 39 Congressional Medals of Honor. Some 350,000–500,000 Mexican Americans fought in the U.S. Armed Services during that war. Many of the Mexican American soldiers used the GI Bill after the war to pursue higher education and vocational training, allowing them to move into skilled labor and professional positions. Mexican Americans have also been at the forefront of the U.S. labor movement since its inception in the 1880s.



The best-known Mexican American labor organizer is César Chávez, founder of the National Farm Workers Association in 1962, which later became the United Farm Workers Union. In the 1950s, a rise in ethnic pride began among Mexican Americans, led by people like Reies López “Pete” Tijerina and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzáles. Called the Chicano Movement (or *El Movimiento*), it came to involve legitimate political organization as well as more radical protests, particularly around the issue of the theft of lands by European Americans that originally belonged to Mexican families.

Hispanic Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States today, and Mexicans comprise the largest Hispanic group in the United States. The estimated Mexican American population in 2004 was 26 million, although firm figures are impossible to calculate given the number of undocumented migrants who are reluctant to be counted. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about two-thirds of all Mexican Americans live in either California (8,455,926) or Texas (5,071,963). In 2000, 25% of California’s population was Mexican American, while Mexican Americans made up 24% of the population of Texas. Mexican Americans also have a relatively high birth rate (83 births per 1,000 women, compared to 55 per 1,000 for the U.S. population as a whole), so their population is increasing more rapidly than the population of other groups.

Other states besides California and Texas have significant Mexican American populations, including Illinois (1,144,390), Arizona (1,065,578), Colorado (450,760), and New Mexico (330,049). Colorado’s Mexican American population more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, as it did also in the states of Arkansas, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Many Mexican Americans speak only Spanish at home and with their Mexican American families and friends. Foreign-born Mexican Americans experience difficulties in the English-dominated United States, even though many cities with large Hispanic populations are de facto bilingual, with signs and other public information printed in both Spanish and English. Non-Hispanic Americans who feel threatened by the growing Hispanic American population have initiated an “English Only” movement in recent years in response to the bilingual movement promoted by the Hispanic community (see **Cuban Americans**).

Mexican Americans are nearly all Catholic, though their brand of Catholicism is somewhat different from European Catholicism. Many elements of Mexican folk religion have been retained, creating a colorful blend of Christianity and magic. Mexican Americans continue to celebrate the countless fiestas of their traditional Mexican Catholicism, as well as the conventional Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, etc.

Mexican Americans also celebrate a number of secular holidays. *Diez y Seis* (“Sixteen”) celebrates the El Grito de Dolores speech delivered by Father Miguel Hidalgo on 16 September 1810, which marked the beginning of Mexico’s struggle for independence from Spain. Benito Juárez’s defeat of French forces at the city of Pueblo on 5 May 1862 is commemorated each year on *Cinco de Mayo* (“Fifth of May”). Both of these events are marked with parades, floats, traditional dress and music, and other festivities.

One Mexican American holiday tradition that has become popular in mainstream American culture is the *piñata*, a hollow pottery or plaster jar (usually shaped like an animal) that is filled with candy, fruit, and gifts and hung from the ceiling

or a tree branch. Blindfolded children then swing a stick in the air (one at a time), trying to break the piñata. Once it is broken, all the children scramble to grab as much of the fallen contents as possible.

Other Mexican American contributions to mainstream American culture include zoot suits (baggy pants, long loose jackets, and wide-brimmed hats made popular by Mexican American youths in the late-1930s and 1940s) and foods, such as tacos, burritos, enchiladas, tortilla chips and salsa, and guacamole. Mariachi music played by strolling Mexican American musicians can be heard all across the United States, as can Tex-Mex music (or *musica nortena*)—a blend of Mexican and German polka music. Individual Mexican American musicians include singers Vikki Carr (born Florencia Bisenta de Casillas Martínez Cardona), Joan Baez, Carlos Santana, Tish Hinojosa, Linda Ronstadt, and the Garza brothers of Los Lonely Boys: Henry, Jo Jo, and Ringo.

Some well-known Mexican American actors are Ricardo Montalban, Anthony Rudolph Oaxaca Quinn (who is also part Irish), Jessica Alba, Salma Hayek, Cheech Marin, Edward James Olmos, and comedian Paul Rodriguez. Writers Jimmy Santiago Baca, Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, and Victor Villaseñor are all Mexican American, as are Xavier Martínez, artist and founder of the California Society of Artists, and Laura Molina, painter and publisher of *Chican@Art Magazine*.

Mexican Americans have begun to make more of a mark in the worlds of U.S. politics and science. Joseph Montoya became the first Mexican American elected to the U.S. Senate in 1964. The first Mexican American governors to serve since the early 1900s (Ezequiel C. de Vaca and Octaviano Larrazolo were governors of New Mexico) were elected in 1974 in New Mexico (Jerry Apodaca) and Arizona (Raúl Castro). Henry Cisneros became the first Mexican American mayor of a major U.S. city when he was elected by the citizens of San Antonio, Texas, in 1981. In 1993, Cisneros was named Housing and Urban Development (HUD) secretary by President Clinton. Educator Lupe Anguiano developed the Bilingual Education Act while serving in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and Federico Peña was appointed U.S. Secretary of Transportation in 1993 by President Bill Clinton. In 2002 Bill Richardson became governor of New Mexico and ran as a presidential candidate in 2008. President George W. Bush appointed Alberto Gonzales as U.S. Attorney General in 2005, the first Hispanic American to hold that post. In the sciences, Mexican American astronaut Ellen Ochoa earned the honor of being the first Hispanic woman in space in 1993.

Mexican Americans also shine in sports. Tennis great Richard “Pancho” Gonzáles won the U.S. Open in both 1948 and 1949, and also won the Wimbledon doubles crown (with Frank Parker) in 1949. Gonzáles was very popular with the American and international public. Golfers Lee Trevino and Nancy López are also highly successful and highly popular Mexican American sports figures. Oscar de la Hoya is a six-time World Champion boxer; Nomar Garciaparra has been named an All-Star major league baseball player six times; swimmer Donna de Varona won two Olympic gold medals; and Anthony Muñoz was named to the NFL Hall of Fame.

Although individual Mexican Americans have become successful in the United States, Mexican Americans as a group continue to struggle against racial and ethnic discrimination that confines them to the lower classes of society. Mexican Ameri-

cans have been stereotyped by European Americans since the beginning of their history together as poor, uneducated, cowardly criminals. Some European American teachers believe, because of these stereotypes, that their Mexican American students will not succeed, so the teachers do not direct much of their energy or attention to those students and, consequently, the students fail. This self-fulfilling prophecy promotes a high dropout rate among Mexican American students, which perpetuates their status as poor and uneducated, confirming the stereotypes. It is a vicious cycle that many Mexican Americans as well as other Americans are trying to break.

Despite their best efforts, however, the majority of Mexican Americans continue to be trapped in a cycle of poverty that prevents them from improving their situation in America. Until inequities in education and employment are resolved, Mexican Americans will not be able to obtain the skills and resources necessary to rise to more appropriate levels in American society.

Traditional Mexican culture places a high value on family, with expectations of marriage and child-bearing. There is also a sense of “machismo” for men that requires a man to be strong, dominant, and sexually powerful. The Catholic Church, a prominent part of most Mexican and Mexican Americans’ lives, prohibits sexual activity between nonmarried persons. All of these factors lead to a difficult life for homosexual Mexican American men and women. Gay Mexican American men may acceptably engage in homosexual activity with other men, but they must be in the position of power. It is the receptive man who is disdained as being weak and effeminate. Mexican American lesbians must break cultural norms to declare themselves publicly, thus announcing to the world that they are independent sexual beings rather than other-related wives and mothers. Many Mexican American homosexuals choose to keep their sexual identity secret rather than risk rejection by their families and causing their families shame and dishonor within the Hispanic community.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# MEXICANS

**LOCATION:** Mexico

**POPULATION:** 108.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; over 30 Amerindian languages

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (with Amerindian elements); various Protestant sects

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Mexico was the home of several native American civilizations before the arrival of the Spanish in 1519. The Maya, Olmecs, Toltecs, and Aztecs built cities and pyramids. Under Spanish rule these peoples were converted to Christianity, and European customs were added to the indigenous way of life.

Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821 but lost the northern half of its territory to the United States in 1818. The dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz was overthrown in a revolution that adopted a new, progressive constitution in 1917. In 1929 Plutarco Elias Calles created a hegemonic party the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR National Revolutionary Party), which would eventually be renamed the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI Institutional Revolutionary Party) that controlled both the presidency and both houses of Congress until 2000.

In the early 1920s, in the aftermath of military struggles, Mexico was a fragmented country where regional power holders contested national authority, creating political instability. The newly-formed PNR sought to bring together these disparate local powers in order to solidify the electoral strength that regional elites had in their territories. In an effort to achieve national consolidation, the PNR incorporated into its ranks revolutionary as well as conservative power holders in exchange for local autonomy. Consequently, the party of the revolutionary regime became the dominant political organization in the country and the primary dispenser of official patronage.

When Lázaro Cárdenas came to power in 1934, he brought together workers and peasants in an effort to consolidate new sources of power. Besides nationalizing the petroleum industry, giving the Mexican government a monopoly in the exploration, production, refining, and distribution of oil and natural gas, Cárdenas carried out far-reaching labor and land reforms, and supported organizations of peasants and workers. The party took its current name, PRI, in 1946, at the same time that the Mexican Congress gave it the capacity to cancel the registration of the opposition and to control the Federal Electoral Commission. Thus, besides the hegemonic status that the PRI already enjoyed in the countryside, the new electoral rules gave it the power to constrain its rivals and manipulate the electoral results.

The PRI achieved political hegemony thanks to the instauration of a model of development that subordinates democracy to political stability. In this way, development depended on the endurance of economic growth and political stability, which in turn provided resources to maintain electoral support.

After focusing public investment on the rural sector for more than three decades, the government shifted its center of attention in the 1960s toward expanding the nation’s industrial capacity. During this period, known as Stabilizing Development, Mexico averaged an annual economic growth rate



of 6.8%. Import-substitution industrialization generated rapid growth in urban areas and a demographic explosion Mexico's population more than doubled in less than thirty years, from 16 million in the mid-1930s to 34 million in 1960 which resulted in massive urban migration.

However, the development model began to wane with the first signs of growing fiscal imbalance. Mexico's public-sector deficit rose sharply from 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1970 to 7% by 1976, which forced the government to resort to massive external borrowing. The oil discoveries in the mid-1970s made Mexico eligible for large foreign credits that help finance 32% of public sector spending in 1971. Six years later, half of the public budget was being funded with foreign loans. When incoming President de la Madrid took office in 1982 Mexico's public-sector deficit amounted to 18% of GDP, nearly every state enterprise except the public oil company PEMEX was unprofitable, and both production and economic growth were stagnant.

The pro-business and free-market platform during the 1980s led not only to a general impoverishment of the population, but also caused an intra-party split between the populist wing dominated by the old-school politicians led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and the politically inexperienced pro-neoliberalism technocrats, headed by the former Budget and Planning minister and presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The left-wing Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD Revolutionary Democratic Party) was created in 1989 and shared

the opposition with the center-right Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN National Action Party).

The transition to democracy in Mexico began in 2000, when for the first time a candidate from the opposition won the presidency, ending 71 years of one-party rule by the PRI. Vicente Fox, candidate of the PAN, won the election, but left office with a mixed record on necessary reforms. In 2006, after a partial recount of votes, Felipe Calderón was declared the winner of the presidential election, having edged out Manuel Lopez Obrador from the PRD.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Mexico lies between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea, south of the United States and west of Guatemala and Belize. Most of the country is a highland plateau with little rainfall for most of the year. The plateau is enclosed by two mountain chains running the length of the country, the Sierra Madre Oriental to the east and Sierra Madre Occidental to the west. The summit of the highest peak, Orizaba, reaches 5,639 m (18,502 ft) above sea level. There is tropical rain forest in parts of the South and the Gulf coast. Mexico reaches its narrowest point at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, then widens to the east, where it includes the Yucatán Peninsula.

While 60% of the population is Mestizo (European and Amerindian descent), between 15% and 30% are believed to be full-blood Amerindians. In addition, roughly 9% of the population is unmixed European, predominately of Spanish de-

scent. Small black, mixed-black, and Asian groups comprise the rest of the population.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Even though there is no constitutional official language at the federal level in Mexico, Spanish is spoken by 93% of the population. The General Law of Linguistic Rights of the Indigenous Peoples considers Spanish as a national language, alongside the almost 60 different indigenous languages spoken by 7% of the population throughout the country. The largest of the indigenous languages is Náhuatl, followed by Mayan, Zapotec, Otomí, and Mixtec.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Mexican folk customs derive from beliefs and practices dating back well before the European discovery of America. One of these is herbal medicine. Particularly in Indian communities, *curanderos* function as healers and diviners who communicate with nature gods and spirits. Among them are persons seen as sorcerers or witches and credited with similar powers, including the ability to cast or dispel the evil eye (superstition derived from Spain) and to perform certain magic rites to help a person win or retain a loved one.

A wealth of major feasts (*fiestas*), although commemorating Christian saints, also parallels the worship of Indian gods dating back to the pre-European past. The saints are credited with the supernatural powers traditionally attributed to the gods. In Indian communities, *confradías* (brotherhoods) are charged with organizing and financing the annual cycle of fiestas. These events break the monotony of daily life with their bright costumes and ornaments and their traditional dances and music. Traditional masks represent animals, spirits, and religious or mythical figures. Alcohol and hallucinogenic drugs play a role in these observances, as they do in healing and divining.

### 5 RELIGION

Because of the early adoption of Roman Catholicism among the population, and despite the official anti-clericalism of the PRI regime, today 90% of Mexicans identify with this faith. However, just as early Christianity retained many beliefs and customs of pagan Greece and Rome, Mexican Catholicism includes folklore and practices of the pre-European period. The church credits the Virgin of Guadalupe, identified with the Virgin Mary, with miraculously appearing to an Indian soon after the Spanish conquest (and close to the shrine of an Aztec earth goddess). The Virgin of Guadalupe was proclaimed patron saint of Mexico in 1737. Similarly, many other Christian saints are identified with gods and goddesses of the Indian past.

About 6% of the population is Protestant. Evangelical Christian groups, including Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists, generally financed and staffed by Americans, have had particular success in southeastern Mexico, especially among Indian communities.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holy Week, commemorating the events leading up to and including the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, is of overriding importance. It was once commemorated in many outdoor processions and Passion plays, only a few of which remain.

United States influence has brought with it Christmas trees (sometimes even in churches), Santa Claus, and gift giving on Christmas Day. This has overshadowed the traditional Hispanic observance of Epiphany, or Twelfth Night, commemorating the journey of the Magi (the Three Kings). Preceding Christmas are the colorful *posadas*, nightly celebrations that begin December 16.

November 2, the Day of the Dead, is a holiday during which people visit the graves of their loved ones and leave behind fruits and flowers. At the evening meal a table is traditionally set with food and drink for the departed. Also typically Mexican is the annual commemoration, on December 12, of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531. The Basilica of Guadalupe, in Mexico City, attracts many pilgrims on that day, some, if able, climb its steps on their knees, and Indian groups play music and perform dances outside the cathedral.

Among secular (nonreligious) holidays, the most important is the celebration of national independence on September 16. The president of Mexico heralds this event on the evening before with the *grito* (cry or shout) given by Father Miguel Hidalgo, the priest who, in the name of the Mexican people, proclaimed independence from Spain in 1810. The birthday of Benito Juárez, March 21, is another national holiday. A Zapotec Indian, Juárez was president of Mexico from 1861 to 1872.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Purification by water goes back to the Indian past, so infant baptism is practiced even in Indian communities where the other Christian sacraments are not observed. Most Mexican children also are confirmed. In small towns among well-off families, young couples are still chaperoned on dates, and a suitor must court his future in-laws as well as his intended bride. In Indian communities, marriages may still be arranged and sealed with an exchange of gifts.

Most Mexicans marry young. Because of the separation of church and state, only civil marriages are legally valid, but more than 70% of all couples also marry in church. Many poor couples live together however, without benefit of clergy or legal license.

The dead are not customarily embalmed, and burial takes place 24 hours after death. Wakes are held, with the relatives and friends bringing food, drink, and other gifts to the bereaved.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Politeness and ceremoniousness are more important in Mexican life than in American. Even brief exchanges and questions call for an introductory *buenos días* (good day) or *buenas tardes* (good afternoon). Indirectness of speech is often employed so as not to lay or accept blame or give offense. Some government employees, including policemen, are poorly paid and sometimes will accept or even solicit the *mordida* ("bite" or bribe) as payment for minor infractions or to speed up or dispose of cumbersome paperwork.

Male friends are demonstrative; often they will embrace heartily on meeting and stroll arm in arm. *Machismo* is a male worldview that entails the practice of defending one's honor against any possible challenge to one's masculinity. Carried to violent extremes, this often results in the abuse of women.

In contrast with Americans, Mexicans set little store on punctuality. In fact, arriving on time when invited to dinner



A young Mexican girl wearing traditional dress. (Raul Touzon/National Geographic/Getty Images)

or a party is considered rude. Nor is it considered unusual for invited guests not to arrive at all and offer no explanation later. *Mañana*, although literally “tomorrow,” may refer to any indefinite future time. Business hours often fluctuate. Public offices, churches, and museums may close for two hours in the early afternoon, when the temperature is highest, the traditional *siesta* time.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before 2000, most peasants and many workers in Mexico did not earn even the meager legal minimum wage and were unable to feed or house their families decently. Open sewers and contaminated drinking water were common and a menace to health. However, after the first democratic government, the percentage of the population in extreme poverty decreased from 24.2% to 17.6% in 2004.

In addition to the macroeconomic stability pursued by the Fox and Calderón administrations (which has been singled out as the main cause of the reduction in poverty and the increase in purchasing power of the middle class), poverty has been further reduced by remittances from Mexican citizens working in the United States, which reaches \$20 billion per year and is the second largest source of foreign income after oil exports.

Ongoing economic concerns include low real wages, underemployment for a large segment of the population, inequitable income distribution, and drug-related violence.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

“Family values” are alive and well in Mexico, where widespread poverty forces households to stay together for economic as well as social reasons. The household in many cases includes grandparents, aunts, and uncles as well as parents and children. Married children and their spouses also remain part of this unit until they can afford to set up their own households. Well-to-do fathers may build houses for their married children on the parents’ property. Family groups may gather together for birthdays, saints’ days, and other holidays. On Sundays they often go on excursions together. Whether they live under the same roof or not, Mexicans maintain strong bonds with their relatives in order to help each other in various ways, including helping unemployed relations find work. The large number of family businesses is especially important to this form of assistance.

Family solidarity extends even beyond blood ties. *Compadrazgo*, or godparent-hood plays a very important part in Mexican life. One study of a Mexico City shantytown found 18 different occasions for involving godparents in celebrations, including not only the Catholic sacraments but even the graduation of a family member from school or the first cutting of a child’s hair. In return for his or her aid, a godparent expects loyalty, trust, affection, and respect from the child and parents.

Among middle-class and well-to-do Mexicans, servants also form part of the family unit. Even *arrimados* (renters or “permanent guests”) may belong.

## 11 CLOTHING

The more traditional forms of women’s dress include a wrap-around skirt, sometimes flounced and embroidered; the *huipil*, a sleeveless garment with holes for the head and arms; and the *quechquemiltl*, an upper outer garment with an opening for the head only. The *rebozo* is a shawl used for carrying babies. Among Indian women these are everyday articles of clothing, elaborately colored and patterned and distinctive for every ethnic group, or even for each village. Upper-class Mexican women may sometimes wear a traditional Spanish costume topped with a fringed and embroidered silk shawl and a tortoiseshell or ivory comb. The *china poblana* costume consists of a richly embroidered white blouse and black shawl, a flounced and spangled red-and-green skirt, high-heeled colored slippers, bracelets, earrings, strings of beads, and ribbons or flowers in the hair.

The peasant’s traditional pajama-like trousers and tunic of unbleached cotton, serape (functioning as both a blanket and a cloak), sandals, and wide sombrero have given way to jeans, shirt, shoes or boots, and a straw cowboy-type hat. Sweaters or a leather jacket now ward off the chill. Indian men seldom wear traditional dress except on special occasions. Mariachi musicians can be seen in the traditional Spanish horseman’s *charro* costume. This includes a dark suit of suede or velvet, braided in gold or silver embroidery, a flowing red silk necktie, a bright serape, boots and spurs, and an embroidered felt sombrero.

## 12 FOOD

The staple of Mexican food is corn, supplemented by beans, squash, and chilies, or chili peppers. Cornmeal is patted into a thin pancake called a tortilla, which encloses any of a great variety of fillings to form a soft sandwich-like taco. (The crisp-fried American taco is known as a *tostado*). Fried in chili sauce, the taco becomes an enchilada. The tamale is cornmeal dough wrapped around a filling of meat and chilies, then wrapped in paper, cornhusks, or banana leaves for cooking. Tacos made with a tortilla of wheat flour are called burritos. Mole is a rich chili sauce that sometimes contains chocolate, which is native to Mexico. *Mole poblano*, traditionally the national dish, consists of turkey (a native bird) topped with a spicy mole.

## 13 EDUCATION

Mexico has made improvements in education since the 1990s. In 2004, the literacy rate was at 91% and the youth literacy rate (ages 15–24) was 96%, ranking Mexico 24th in the world according to UNESCO. Primary and secondary education is free and mandatory, and different bilingual education programs and free textbooks in more than a dozen indigenous languages have been introduced throughout the country. In addition, Mexico established a distance-learning system known as *telesecundaria* through satellite communications to reach otherwise inaccessible small rural and indigenous communities. In 2007 there were approximately one million *telesecundaria* students in the country.

The largest and most prestigious public university in Mexico is the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM

National Autonomous University of Mexico) founded in 1551. Three Nobel laureates and most of Mexico’s modern-day presidents are among its former students. UNAM conducts 50% of Mexico’s scientific research and has a presence all across the country with satellite campuses and research centers. UNAM is the highest ranked Spanish-speaking university in the world.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mexico’s rich cultural life draws on both its Spanish and its Indian heritage. This is most evident in the visual arts. Pre-Conquest temple and palace wall paintings were recalled in the 20th-century murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Siquieros, and Juan O’Gorman, which were crowded with stylized figures and themes. Oil paintings by Rivera, his wife Frida Kahlo, Rufino Tamayo, and others are admired for their vibrant color. In architecture, Mexican stone carvers carried on a pre-Conquest tradition in the elaborate 18th-century decorative style known as *churrigueresque*. O’Gorman and Luis Barragán deftly combined pre-Conquest, colonial, and folk forms and traditional building materials with modern structural design in their architecture.

Traditional Indian music is chiefly limited to festive rituals and dances, with drums and flutes as the main instruments. Stringed instruments, including the most popular one in Mexico—the guitar—came from Spain. In mariachi music, these instruments are combined with trumpets. The marimba (similar to the xylophone) dominates in southern Mexico. Traditional song forms are the *corrido*, derived from old Spanish ballads; the *canción*, romantic and sentimental; and the *ranchera*, a Mexican style of country-and-western music. Composer Carlos Chávez drew on such forms in his music.

The Ballet Folklórico mounts productions of traditional dance, which incorporates both Indian and Spanish motifs. Best-known of these is the *jarabe tapatío* (“Mexican hat dance”), performed in *charro* and *china poblana* costume. Dating back to pre-Conquest times are the *conchero* dances, which honor the four winds, and the *pascolas*, or deer dances.

The love poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is still read, and the plays of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón are still performed. Noted Mexican writers of the 20th century include the poet and essayist Octavio Paz and the novelists Mariano Azuela, Carlos Fuentes, and Juan Rulfo.

Another cultural asset in Mexico is the cinema industry. During the Golden Era in the 1940s and 1950s Mexico had a huge film industry comparable to Hollywood of those years. Mexican films were exported and exhibited in all of Latin America and Europe. *Maria Candelaria* (1944) by Emilio Fernández, was one of the first films awarded a Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Famous actors and actresses from this period include María Félix, Pedro Infante, Dolores del Río, Jorge Negrete, and the comedian Cantinflas. More recently, films such as *Como agua para chocolate* (1992), *Amores Perros* (2000), *Y tu mamá también* (2001), *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006), and *Babel* (2006) have been successful in creating universal stories about contemporary subjects, and have been internationally recognized.

## 15 WORK

Workers constituted a relatively small share of the total population, in part because of the population’s relative youth (38%



A weaver using a backstrap loom in Mexico.  
(Linda Whitwam/Getty Images)

were below the minimum working age of 14 in 2000). Agriculture, forestry, and fishing employed some 18% of the economically active population in 2003, industry 24%, and services 58%. About half of all manufacturing workers were employed in small and medium-size enterprises. Partly because of high unemployment in the formal labor sector, the number of informal-sector workers swelled during the 1980s and early 1990s.

After falling sharply during the 1940s, real wages began to recover in the mid-1950s and continued to rise until the late 1970s, when the government responded to growing fiscal pressures by shifting resources away from the peasantry and the public sector. The government used its control of employment opportunities and the labor union movement to hold down wages throughout the 1980s in an effort to reduce inflation. This meant that the average worker's purchasing power in 1993 was only 65% of its 1982 level. Moreover, the difference between minimum wages and average wages in the country has increased between 1995 and 2007. While in 1995 the minimum wage represented 43% of average salaries, in 2007 minimum wages accounted for less than one third of average wages.

With half its population under 30 years of age, Mexico is scrambling to find enough jobs for the young people who enter the labor force each year. Migration to the United States helps

to relieve the unemployment problem. As of 2006 there were an estimated 6.57 million undocumented Mexicans living in the United States.

## 16 SPORTS

*Fútbol* (soccer) is by far the most popular sport in Mexico. The top professional teams, including Guadalajara and the Américas team of Mexico City, draw as many as 100,000 spectators to their matches. In addition, there is a professional baseball league, and some Mexican players, such as Fernando Valenzuela and Vinnie Castilla, have made it to the major leagues. American television has raised the profile of both basketball and American football in Mexico. Other sports include golf, tennis, swimming, and bicycling. Bullfighting or *charrería* is the national sport and very popular, with about 35 arenas in Mexico. Plaza México in Mexico City is the largest bullring in the world, which seats 55,000 people.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Television now dominates popular culture, with *telenovelas* (soap operas) and variety shows. Overwhelmed by American imports, Mexico's older song forms have been giving way to rock 'n roll, international-style pop, and even Spanish-language rap. Because so many Mexicans have had little schooling, comic books and magazine-style *fotonovelas* are more common reading material than newspapers and books.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The most important form of folk painting is the *retablo*, a devotional depiction, on canvas, of a miraculous event. It is offered to a saint in gratitude for favors conferred and hung in a church. Other works of art include murals and yarn and bark paintings. Folk sculptures, continuing a pre-Columbian tradition, include masks, papier-mâché skeletons and other grotesque figures, and candle-bearing trees of life made of clay.

The variety of Mexican handicrafts is almost endless. Silver objects include bracelets, rings, necklaces, and earrings. *Milagros*, charms offered to saints in church, may be made of silver, copper, or tin. Objects are also carved in onyx, jade, and other types of stone. There are many regional styles of pottery. The making of hand-blown glass, tile making, leather work, and lacquering are other crafts. Weaving in cotton and other plant fibers on hand looms is thousands of years old; wool was added after the Spanish conquest. Embroidery employs floral, bird, and animal imagery. Toys of all kinds are produced.

The piñata, usually made of papier-mâché or lightweight cardboard, is gaily decorated in many fantastic forms and holds candy. Blindfolded children break it open with a stick at birthday and other celebrations.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Although human rights violations, electoral fraud, repression of the labor movement, and the abuse of indigenous and rural peoples have almost been eradicated since the return to democracy in 2000, Mexico still faces acute problems regarding public health and environmental safety. However, the most serious social dilemma is related to drug trafficking and violence in the northern provinces where the power of the state is weak. Drug cartels often go on killing sprees and the government has had to send the army in to control the situation.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Mexico, inequalities between men and women represent a source of conflict in the family and the community and a handicap for social and economic development. Stereotyped notions of gender roles exacerbate the gender inequity. Women and girls still carry out most domestic tasks, for which they do not receive any income. Poor services (water and sanitation, electricity) and rural isolation particularly affect women. Men's problems also have negative repercussions on women—such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and violence associated with high rates of male unemployment.

In order to tackle gender inequity, Mexico launched in 2001 its Gender Equity Project or *Generosidad*, which is aimed to address the consequences of gender roles on both sexes and to consider the linkages between the genders rather than focusing solely on women. In addition, the federal Congress passed a gender quota law in 2002, which requires at least 30% of all candidates for all political parties to be women. This law was applied for the first time in the 2003 mid-term elections, in which women won 23% of the seats, up 7 percentage points from the 2000 election. These results catapulted Mexico up in the world ranking of women in legislative office from number 55 to number 29.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# MISKITO

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mosquito

**LOCATION:** Nicaragua; Honduras

**POPULATION:** About 200,000

**LANGUAGE:** Dialects of Miskito; English; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Moravian church (majority); Catholicism; fundamentalist Protestantism; Christianity mingled with folk beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Miskito (also spelled Mosquito) are an indigenous people living in the Caribbean coastal lowlands of Nicaragua and Honduras. They came to international attention in the early 1980s as a result of their resistance activities against Nicaragua's Sandinista government. They are the largest native group in the region (often referred to as the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast or the Miskito Coast) and have lobbied prominently for the cultural, territorial, economic, and political rights of the region's indigenous peoples.

Although considered a native people, the Miskito as a distinct group actually came into existence as a result of European colonization of the Caribbean region. Their forebears, unaffected by Spanish settlement of western Nicaragua and Honduras in the 16th century, later began welcoming escaped African slaves fleeing British possessions in the region. The mixed-race people that resulted from intermarriage between the slaves and the local population became the Miskito. Introduced to guns and ammunition by English traders and settlers in the area (it is commonly thought that "Miskito" comes from "musket"), they expanded their territory northward, southward, and westward from its original location at the mouth of the Rio Coco.

Those of the region's native groups that were not assimilated into the Miskito were pushed into the interior and became known as the Sumu. The Miskito became the most important non-White population on the coast, living in peace with the British and serving as an intermediary between them and the Sumu. From the mid-17th century to the late 19th century, the Miskito prospered, thanks to their trade with the British and the abundant natural resources of their territory, which at one time extended as far as the present-day nations of Belize and Panama.

In the late 19th century, an ethnic shift occurred in the region when banana growers began bringing in Black English-speaking laborers from the West Indies to work on their plantations. They and their descendants, who became known as Creoles, took the place of the Miskito as the area's dominant non-White group, settling mainly in the newly established port towns while the Miskito remained in rural villages, retaining their traditional language and way of life. Since Nicaraguan and Honduran independence from Britain in the 19th century, the United States played a greater role in the region, especially in the area of banana production, and its corporate interests, especially the United Fruit Company, now United Brands, remained influential well into the 20th century.

When the Sandinista government that came to power in 1979 moved to consolidate its control over the Miskito and bring them into line with its political and economic policies,





it met with widespread resistance. In response, the government forced thousands of Miskito out of their homes, sending them to relocation camps. Activists who joined the resistance were imprisoned, tortured, and killed, and thousands “disappeared.” Entire villages were looted and destroyed. Altogether, some 20,000 people were sent to relocation camps. Another 40,000 fled, becoming refugees. In spite of the magnitude of their persecution, they insisted on resisting independently, refusing U.S. pressure to join the Contras and other opposition groups. Their plight drew international attention, and they eventually won significant government concessions. By 1984, the government agreed to grant them limited political autonomy.

President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, whose 1990 election ended Sandinista rule, established a new ministry to serve as a liaison with the Miskito and the neighboring peoples of the Atlantic coast—the Nicaraguan Institute for the Development of the Atlantic Region (INDERA). The example provided by the Miskito of Nicaragua has inspired demands for autonomy by both the Honduran Miskito and other indigenous peoples in Nicaragua. The call for indigenous autonomy spread to many other countries in Latin America. In 1992 Miskito signed an agreement with the Nicaraguan government in which several “security zones” were guaranteed for this Amerindian tribe. Besides, and with the intention of integrating Miskito community to the Nicaraguan nation, 50 Miskito were accepted in the police force.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Miskito live along the Caribbean coasts of Nicaragua and Honduras. Their lands have a total area of 37,000 sq km (14,300 sq mi)—equal in size to Taiwan or the Netherlands—and extend 900 km (560 mi) along the Caribbean and 400 km (250 mi) inland up the Rio Coco River. The two major towns of Puerto Cabezas and Puerto Lempira are the communication centers with the outside world. A vast number of Miskito villages are located along the jungle river basins throughout the Caribbean coast. The Coco River (Wangki), one of the largest rivers of Central America, is considered to be the heartland of the Miskito people.

Miskito territory is extremely diverse geographically, with a large inland savanna, a tropical forest to the west, coastal lowlands, and the most extensive continental shelf in the Caribbean. Its varied lands include mangrove forests, estuaries, coral reefs, seagrass pastures, and the greatest concentration of coastal lagoons in Central America. Its major rivers include the Coco River (also known as the Wangki), Prinsapolka, Awaltara (Rio Grande), and Kuringwas.

In 1991, a conservation organization called Mikupia (an acronym that also means “Miskito heart”) was formed to protect the abundant resources of the region, with support from the World Wildlife Federation and the Boston-based human rights group, Cultural Survival. In the same year, President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro created the 1.3 million-hectare (3.2 million-acre) Miskito Cays Protected Area, the largest coastal protected area in Latin America.

The Miskito, like the other indigenous groups and the Creoles living on the Miskito Coast—a population collectively called *costeños*—consider themselves separate from the other inhabitants of Nicaragua and Honduras, whom they call “the Spanish.” Altogether, the Miskito are thought to number as many as 200,000, around 150,000 in Nicaragua, where they are the largest indigenous group, and 50,000 in Honduras. Most of the Miskito population is centered in the northeastern-most part of Nicaragua, along the riverbanks and in mining areas in the interior, including Siuna, Rosita, and Bonanza.

Before the persecution by the Sandinistas in the 1980s, there were over 260 Miskito communities with 500 to 1,000 people each. Sixty-five of the 100 communities near the Rio Coco River, the most densely populated area, were destroyed by the Sandinistas. Many Miskito migrated to Honduras in the 1980s to avoid political persecution by the Sandinista government. Major settlements in Honduras are located near the Laguna de Caratasca and the banks of the Rio Patuca.

The Miskito’s habitat is located in a tropical zone usually hit by natural forces. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch, and in 2007, Hurricane Felix, hit Miskito territory, causing severe damage.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Besides their native language, which is also called Miskito, the Miskito speak Spanish and English and are familiar with the English-based dialect spoken by the local Creole population. Because of their historically positive attitude toward Britain and the United States, in contrast to their enmity toward the Spanish, they are more likely to speak English than Spanish at home, in addition to Miskito.

Miskito belongs to the Misumalpan family of languages. There are three distinguishable dialects, belonging to the Miskito of eastern Nicaragua, those living along the Rio Coco,

and those of eastern Honduras. The dialects, characterized by differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, are all mutually intelligible. Miskito has been influenced by the grammar and vocabulary of West African languages, as well as Spanish, English, and German.

In areas where Miskito is spoken, it has been adopted as the language of the Moravian church, in both spoken and written forms. (The Bible, hymn books, and other religious texts have been translated into Miskito). It has been given official status as an indigenous language in the Nicaraguan Constitution, and the Nicaraguan government has also recognized, by decree, the Miskito's right to be educated in their native language.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

During the colonial era, the British nominally considered the Miskito society a "kingdom." Although its accepted leaders, or "kings," had little real power, legend has transformed them into an important cultural symbol, and they are now a popular subject for local theatrical presentations.

The Miskito believe it is possible to predict a person's death by dreams and other omens.

#### 5 RELIGION

Miskito people were originally animistic and, in spite of centuries of exposure to Christianity, many of them have maintained their religious practices. In Miskito culture, shamans play an important and varied role serving as healers, diviners, and exorcists. For these Amerindian aborigines there are different kinds of super-natural beings. These deities have the power to affect human well-being, crop failures, and bad hunting, among another.

Even though many of the animist traditions have been kept by a large number of Miskito, Catholic influence in the zone has resulted in a syncretistic Christo-animism. Today, the dominant religion of the Miskito is the Moravian church, which gained a foothold as early as the 17th century through its missionaries and had most of the population converted by the beginning of the 20th century. (Its adherents also include other non-Hispanic populations of eastern Nicaragua, including the Sumu and Rama and the Creoles.) Moravian pastors are important figures in Miskito communities. Their congregations generally provide them with food, an obligation that may take the form of actually planting the pastor's rice and beans themselves. Catholic and fundamentalist Protestant churches have also gained some converts among the Miskito. The traditional folk religion of the Miskito included beliefs in spirits (*lasas*), omens, and in the powers of natural phenomena such as the moon. Its rituals, including funerals, involved dancing and drinking. When Christianity was introduced, some elements of folk religion were mingled with Christian beliefs and practices.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Miskito observe the major holidays of the Christian calendar. Christmas (December 25) is an important holiday and is observed mainly in church. Christmas and New Year's (January 1) are especially festive because there is no plantation work at that time of year.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions (such as birth, marriage, and death) are marked by religious ceremonies, usually following Christian traditions.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Villagers tend to magnify their personal quarrels, and feuds between different villages are common.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Miskito people live in close family units forming small and autonomous villages. Each of these villages has a leader in charge of administering justice while settling differences among the village's residents. A sense of personal or private property is almost unknown among this people. Land is owned or sold except in the larger commercial towns. In rural areas, families have communitarian fields sharing tasks as well as the crops yielded by their common efforts. Rice, beans, and yucca are some of the main staples cultivated by Miskito people, while native bananas and plantain are gathered.

Miskito homes are built of split bamboo or lumber with roofs of thatch or corrugated metal. Some houses, usually wooden, consist of two structures, one that serves as a kitchen and the other as sleeping quarters, while bamboo homes are more likely to be composed of a single structure. Houses typically have a porch with a bench and a chair or hammock, and an open front yard that is used for both leisure and various types of work. The Miskito spend most of their time out of doors, and their houses are designed basically as places to cook, eat, sleep, store things, and take shelter from the elements when necessary.

Healthcare is limited or nonexistent in most villages and, therefore, infant mortality is one of the highest in Central America and life expectancy is one of the lowest. Western medicine coexists side by side with folk medicine among the Miskito, and a patient may receive conventional medical treatment and a "bush remedy" for the same ailment, as well as prayers by the local lay pastor. There are two types of folk practitioner: the *curandero* (herbalist) and the *sukya* (shaman). They use many similar treatment methods, but the *curandero* makes diagnoses based on the patient's dreams, while the *sukya* relies on chanting. Folk beliefs attribute illnesses to God, evil spirits, or the weather.

In addition to its distinctive culture, language, and way of life, the Miskito region is isolated from other areas of Nicaragua and Honduras by dense tropical rain forest and rugged mountains that make for difficult travel conditions. There is no comprehensive road network. Only a narrow dirt road connects Miskito lands to those outside them, and even this road is only open seasonally and takes two to three days to negotiate in a specially equipped four-wheel-drive vehicle. Many areas can be reached only on foot or by boat or airplane. There are port facilities at Puerto Lempira and Bilwi.

#### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Young people engage in flirting activities to attract a potential mate, although parental consent must be obtained for marriage. Premarital sex, although common, is officially frowned upon. A couple may have both a civil and a church ceremony, although church weddings are often prohibitively expensive,



*Miskito men wait to participate in a ceremony conferring property rights to five Miskito and Mayagana communities in Waspan, Nicaragua. (AP Images/Esteban Felix)*

and civil marriage is accepted in the eyes of the community. Fidelity is expected of both partners once they are married. Family life revolves around having children, who represent the union of the husband's and wife's families. The two families do not consider themselves related to each other until children have been born. In addition, children are their parents' only secure source of support in old age. When a woman remains childless, her husband is likely to father children by other women, and there is a good chance that their marriage will dissolve.

It is a common practice for children to have a godparent, or *libra* (often a female relative), who promises to be responsible for them in the event that the mother dies. Multiple family members, such as grandparents, older siblings, and unmarried aunts, help care for a child. It is considered acceptable for parents to have a child raised by someone else if they cannot afford to do it themselves.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Modern Western-style clothing, either store-bought or sewn from manufactured cloth, has replaced the traditional dress of the Miskito, which was made of locally woven cotton or bark-

cloth and included loincloths for the men and cotton waist wraps for the women.

### **12 FOOD**

The Miskito eat two main meals, a morning meal eaten shortly before dawn and a late-afternoon meal eaten after workers return from their labor on the plantations. A light snack may be eaten at noontime. Although the Miskito eat the universal Latin American staple of rice and beans, they regard these foods primarily as cash crops and maintain a disdainful attitude toward them, referring to them as either "English food" or "Spanish food" in contrast to their traditional native foods, which include wild game, bananas, and plantains. Manioc (cassava) and other tubers, eaten boiled or baked, is another dietary staple, as are green bananas.

Rice is ground and prepared as gruel or in small cakes. Coconut milk is heavily used as a flavoring and a thickener for soups and sauces. Meat and fish are eaten sparingly. Maize is not an important part of the diet and is used mostly to make beverages, such as *atol*, made from mashed green corn. A typical Miskito dish is a stew called "rundown," consisting of green bananas, plantains, manioc or other root crops, fish, and coconut milk. Fermented fruits and vegetables are also popular and may be wrapped in leaves and buried until they have soured. Popular beverages include coffee and *wabul*, a beverage made from mashed boiled bananas or plantains and water.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Although Honduras and Nicaragua, where most Miskito live, both have free, compulsory primary education, the educational systems of both countries are inadequate, with low enrollment and graduation rates and high adult illiteracy. There are government schools in larger villages and Spanish is taught after the third grade. However, because of the precarious economic situation of this people, the majority of Miskito children do not attend school. Estimates of the adult illiteracy rate in Honduras range from 27% to over 40% and as high as 80% in rural areas (where most Miskito live). Schools are understaffed and undersupplied, with as many as 80 pupils per classroom.

While the Sandinista government effected some improvements in Nicaragua's poor educational record under the earlier Somoza regime, these mostly occurred in the early 1980s before the Contra war drained the country's resources in the latter half of the decade. A 1980 literacy campaign reportedly reduced adult illiteracy to around 23%. During the same period, the government recognized the right of native groups to be educated in their own languages and instituted the first bilingual programs for the Miskito in 1984. By the end of the decade, however, illiteracy had risen to pre-1980 levels and many primary- and secondary-level students were still not enrolled in school. However, rural access to education did improve during the Sandinista era.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Together with their common history and territory, the Miskito have a common culture that, together with their language, has been passed down from generation to generation. In the centuries since the first European contact, some of the Miskito's indigenous art forms—like their religion—have mingled with aspects of European culture. Thus the traditional dance called the *aobaia* is now commonly performed at Christmastime.

The Miskito have a large collection of love songs, of which the following is an example:

Lalma tininska mairin	Wandering lady humming-bird
Naiwa mamunisna	today I sing your praises.
Naha paiaska kra wina	With this blowing breeze
Yang mai lukisna	I am thinking of you.
Prais mai alkra.	Precious thoughts sent to you.

Another interesting aspect of Miskito musical tradition is the fact that in their culture men are in charge of performing medicinal as well as secular songs. In the case of healing songs, they are performed with vocal tension while secular songs are carried out with a more relaxed inflection. One of the most characteristic musical instruments used by Miskito men during their performances is the *mirliton*. This musical device is built with bat's wings, stretched between reeds, and surrounded with beeswax. The singer places the *mirliton* in his mouth in order to alter his vocal quality during funeral rites. Performance contexts include healing, initiation rites, funerals, collective ritual dances, and social gatherings.

## 15 WORK

The Miskito have traditionally engaged in hunting, fishing, and subsistence farming, raising beans, rice, yams, bananas, corn, cotton, and sugarcane. Other sources of cash are fur-trapping and extracting the sap from wild rubber trees. Miskito also work as hired laborers for fruit and logging companies, and as gold miners. Increasing numbers are becoming migrant workers and sending cash remittances home to their families. Modern Miskito are eminently farmers. Even though their principal staple crop is the cassava, they also keep poultry, cattle, and other farm animals.

## 16 SPORTS

Informal games of baseball are often organized on Sunday afternoons after church.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

*Kihribaia*, or strolling, is a favorite pastime, especially on Sundays. During their leisure time, villagers also enjoy relaxing at home or visiting with relatives. Church activities are an important diversion for women and young girls, who look forward with great anticipation to church conferences held in neighboring villages. For the most part, they are closely tied to their homes and immediate villages while men, who often travel about seeking work, are typically more mobile.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Miskito weave baskets and fashion gourds and calabashes into both functional and decorative objects. They still make bark-cloth, which was used for clothing before their adoption of Western-style garments. It is now made into bed coverings. Other handmade items include carved and woven household utensils and furniture and dugout canoes.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Miskito generally fare worse than the mixed-race (*mestizo*) or black (Creole) populations in terms of income, education, and job opportunities. The Sandinista Revolution of the

1980s severely disrupted the lives of the Miskito population, threatening their subsistence and personal safety, leading to large-scale relocations, and creating refugee conditions for many. In the early 1990s, many Miskito were forced to migrate to other regions in search of work, separating from their families for extended periods of time.

Drug traffickers from Colombia have started using the Miskito Coast as a transshipment route and fueling stop, but cocaine consumption by the Miskito has not become a significant local problem. In fact, the Miskito have attempted to resist the intrusion of drug traffickers into their regions.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Miskito cosmology, like that of many indigenous peoples, describes an egalitarian duality between the masculine and feminine realms. In Miskito tradition, women are revered and violence against them is considered deviant. However, colonization, Christianity, and cultural assimilation have eroded egalitarian Miskito traditions. Today, a key concern of Miskito women is gender-based violence. For them, violence does not only stem from gender discrimination and women's subordination within their families and communities, but it also arises from attitudes and policies that violate collective indigenous rights.

Miskito practice matrilineal residence and Miskito women act as the keepers of traditional customs and values. In addition to their domestic responsibilities, women take part in farm work, including planting, weeding, and harvesting. Even though in the past Miskito women did not work for wages, today a few women, accompanied by men, work in town as domestics or in plantations. However, the discrimination that Miskito women confront in the labor market keeps many of them outside the wage economy and in the subsistence sector. Few of the jobs open to Miskito women pay a living wage, and many women who wish to work for wages cannot find employment.

The economic crisis that began in the 1960s in Nicaragua pushed Miskito men to look for alternative sources of income by commercializing their natural resources and agriculture. This change eroded traditional views of communal labor and reciprocity, and altered gender roles since women were predominately the agricultural laborers.

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—revised by C. Vergara

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## MORMONS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Latter-day Saints

**LOCATION:** United States (headquarters) and worldwide

**POPULATION:** 13 million worldwide

**LANGUAGE:** English; language of the country in which they live

**RELIGION:** Mormonism

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Latter-day Saints, commonly referred to as Mormons, are members of the Christian sect known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormonism is the term that refers to the combination of doctrine, lifestyle, and culture of the Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded by Joseph Smith in Fayette, New York, in 1830. Smith attracted a small group of followers and settled them first in Kirtland, Ohio, and then in Jackson County, Missouri. The people with whom the early Mormons came into contact considered their beliefs and their way of life peculiar and undesirable and as a result the Mormons suffered much persecution. Forced to move again and again, they relocated from their first settlements in Kirtland and Jackson County to northern Missouri and then to Nauvoo, Illinois. In Nauvoo, the early Mormon church prospered for a while, but hard times soon befell it. The Mormons' neighbors in Nauvoo resented the way they kept to themselves and did not share in community life. Some became enraged when rumors began to spread that the Mormons practiced polygamy, a lifestyle in which one man has several wives.

Because of the resentment growing in the community at large, Joseph Smith was imprisoned in Carthage, Illinois, in 1844. While Smith was in prison, an armed mob stormed the jail and assassinated him. Brigham Young, who was at that time the head of the church's Council of the Twelve Apostles, replaced Smith as the leader of the Church. In 1846 he organized and directed the mass migration from Nauvoo across the Midwestern plains and the Rocky Mountains to the Great Salt Basin of Utah.

In Utah the Church continued to grow, but when its leaders acknowledged that polygamy was in fact a Mormon belief, the United States government stepped in to put a stop to the unacceptable practice. In 1862 and 1882 Congress passed antibigamy laws and in 1879 the Supreme Court ruled that religious freedom could not be claimed as grounds for the practice of polygamy. In 1890 the Mormons officially ended the practice of plural marriage.

Almost 15,000 Mormons served in the U.S. armed forces in World War I. During the 1818-1845 tenure of Mormon president Heber Grant, the number of districts in the Church grew from 83 to 149. The first temple outside of the United States was dedicated in Cardston, Alberta, Canada in 1923. The church expanded its missionary efforts in the 1950s and 1960s and began constructing temples in Europe. In 1978 church authorities announced that they had been instructed by divine revelation to strike down the church's policy of excluding black men from the priesthood. The first temple dedicated on the African continent was in Johannesburg, South Africa in

1985. In 2008 there were an estimated 13 million members of the Church worldwide.

While Latter-day Saints typically integrate easily within the cultures and societies of the country in which they live, there are times in which the beliefs and practices of the Church are brought to public scrutiny and debate. In 1995, the church president, Gordon B. Hinckley, issued the “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” This statement, which reaffirmed Mormon beliefs in the importance of marriage and family came, in part, as a response to national concerns about traditional family values and same-sex marriages. The proclamation defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman and promoted the traditional roles of husband and wife as essential to maintaining the strength of the family unit. In 2007 interest in the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints was sparked when a Mormon, Mitt Romney, made the ballot as a Republican candidate in the U.S. presidential primaries.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

About half the world’s Mormons live in the United States, mostly in the western part of the country. Nearly 1.8 million members live in Utah. Latter-day Saints can also be found in virtually every part of the world, including Europe, South America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. In 1995, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints estimated its worldwide membership to be over 9 million individuals, double the number of members in 1975. In 2008 membership was estimated at 13 million worldwide with over 27,450 congregations. That year there were 128 temples throughout the world with an additional 11 under construction.

When the wandering Mormons finally found a home in Utah, Salt Lake City became the center of the Church. The headquarters of the Church are located in Salt Lake City. Salt Lake City is also home of the most extensive genealogical records collection maintained by the church. Some of these genealogical records are housed in vaults carved into the sides of the mountains located just outside the city. The value that Latter-day Saints place on genealogy is linked to their belief that temple ordinances such as baptism and priesthood may be offered by proxy for the souls of family members who have died. The extensive genealogical records are kept so that all ancestors of Mormon families will be known and their souls will be saved by the prayers of the living. Mormons are constantly updating these records, which include information not only on Mormons and their families, but on many non-Mormons as well.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Mormons speak the language of the country in which they live. Since most Mormons live in the United States and other English-speaking countries, the language spoken by most Mormons is English.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Mormons have no mythic or heroic figures in the usual sense, although they revere their early leaders, Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism) and Brigham Young. Some early Mormon beliefs incorporated elements of European and frontier folklore, infusing them with religious content. Faith healing and speaking in tongues both play a role in the Mormon belief system.



## 5 RELIGION

Mormonism began when its founder, Joseph Smith, reported having a vision through which God and Jesus appeared and told him that the true authority of the Church of Christ, having been lost at the death of the first twelve apostles, would be restored through him. Later, according to Smith’s accounts, another heavenly messenger, an angel named Moroni, directed him a spot where he found thin gold plates inscribed in a hieroglyphic language. Smith’s translation of the plates became known as the Book of Mormon, which describes the history, wars, and religious beliefs of a group of people who reportedly migrated from Jerusalem to America in ancient times. The Book also describes various appearances of Jesus to the people of America after his resurrection. Smith later announced that he had been visited through revelations by the apostles Peter, James, and John, who conferred upon him the authority of the Melchizedek priesthood, thus restoring the proper authority of the Church through him.

Mormon religious practices are based on the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and two other books of revelations that were believed to have been divinely revealed to Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price*. Although Latter-day Saints share some of the beliefs of traditional Christianity, there are also some important differences. Mormons believe that God reveals his true word to individuals who seek it for their own benefit, to leaders of local Mormon churches, and to the President-Prophet of the Church. Their understanding of baptism includes a belief in proxy baptism, or baptism of



*Mormon faithful outside the Salt Lake Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City, Utah, make their way to the 177th Semi-Annual General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (George Frey/Getty Images)*

the dead, for those who have died without receiving baptism by the proper authority. Latter-day Saints also believe in celestial marriage or eternal marriage, a doctrine which teaches that the bond of marriage is for all time and eternity and that such marriage is an essential part of the plan for salvation. Latter-day Saints also have different beliefs on such aspects of Christian faith as the fall of man, the nature of heaven, and the means to obtain salvation.

Sunday is the Sabbath day for the Latter-day Saints. The primary worship service is called a sacrament meeting and takes place in a meeting house. The meetings are typically family-oriented and visitors are welcome. Each meeting usually includes hymn singing, prayers offered by church members, the sacrament of Communion, and one or more speakers. Primary classes provide religious instruction and devotional time for children between the ages of 3 to 11. Men from the ages of 12 years and older will attend priesthood meetings. Women from the ages of 18 years and older will attend Relief Society meetings. Young Women meetings are held for those ages 12 to 17. Local congregations are called wards or branches. The spiritual leader of each ward is called a bishop. The leader of each

branch is the branch president. The ward and branch leaders are men who are chosen from and by the congregation and who serve on a voluntary basis. There is no paid clergy.

The temples of the Church are sacred places where the ordinances of endowment, celestial marriage, baptism, and confirmation may be performed. Because the temple is considered such a sacred place, members must receive a special recommendation, called the temple recommend, from their local bishops in order to enter the temple. The temple recommend indicates that one's conduct has proven them to be worthy of entering the sacred space.

After age 19, all Mormon men and some women are expected to devote two years to doing missionary work. This missionary service may take place anywhere in the world. Often, missionaries will call on people at their homes to tell them about the Gospel and the doctrines of The Church of the Latter-day Saints and to distribute the Book of Mormon. During their missionary work years, they must support themselves with money they have saved or earned previously. Many receive financial assistance from their parents.

The president of the church is the head of administration. He is assisted by counselors who make up a body known as the Quorum of the First Presidency. The Quorum of Twelve Apostles is also designated to aid the president. All of these men are considered to be prophets, seers, and revelators. They are responsible for developing, regulating, and administering church policies.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Latter-day Saints celebrate Christmas and Easter as well as the national holidays of the countries in which they live. Pioneer Day is celebrated worldwide on 24 July. This heritage observance is in honor of the arrival of the first Latter-day Saint pioneers in Salt Lake City on 24 July 1847.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Religious rites of passage include baptism, confirmation, temple endowment, marriage sealing, and ordination to the priesthood (for men). Any person eight years of age or older who wishes to join the Church may be baptized according to Mormon practices, which is generally by full immersion in water. After a person is baptized, one or more members of the priesthood will lay their hands on the person's head and offer a blessing that is meant to confer the gift of the Holy Spirit and confirm them as members of the church. This is known as the ordinance of confirmation.

Latter-day Saints also practice proxy baptisms or baptism of the dead, as a means of sanctifying the souls of those who have gone before. In proxy baptism, members of the Church undergo baptismal rites on behalf of their ancestors who either died without an opportunity to be baptized or who were baptized without proper authority, before the doctrines of the Church were revealed to Joseph Smith. Baptism is considered to be necessary for eternal salvation and for membership in the Church.

All men are eligible for priesthood within the Church. Beginning at age 12, males may become members of the Aaronic Priesthood through the blessing and authorization of the proper members of the Melchizedek Priesthood. As members of the Aaronic Priesthood, young men may be given various opportunities to serve within the Church as bishops, teachers, and

deacons, under the authority of a member of the Melchizedek Priesthood. From age 17 and older, worthy young men may receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, which is accepted as a personal oath and covenant of a lifelong commitment to the Church and to the faith. Members of the Melchizedek Priesthood have authority to minister to the sick and offer special blessings on behalf of family members and others. They may also serve at the confirmation and ordination of others.

Mormons also have a coming-of-age rite called an endowment. The endowment is a spiritual blessing through which one receives particular spiritual gifts from God. The ordinance also includes a series of instructions on how to live righteously as one makes a personal commitment to a lifelong practice of faith. Men typically receive their endowment once they have entered the Melchizedek Priesthood. Women commonly undergo the endowment ritual just before a marriage sealing.

The ordinance of marriage sealing is sometimes referred to as celestial marriage or, more properly, the New and Everlasting Covenant and Eternal Marriage. On receiving this temple ordinance, a man and woman are considered to be married (or sealed) to one another for time and eternity. Mormon couples may be married in ceremonies at other Christian churches; however, the sealing ordinance may only be performed within a temple.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Members of the Church often address each other as “Brother” and “Sister.”

The practice of home teaching forges an important relation between a family and the Church. Every family is assigned to the care of a member of the priesthood, who is responsible for visiting the family at least once every month to offering teaching and guidance. This Church-wide support system serves as a chance for instruction and growth among families. Church members and their home teacher also contact each other in times of crisis.

While customs concerning dating and courtship generally reflect those of local society, church leaders encourage young men and women not to date until they are at least 16 years old.

Charitable work on behalf of the Church and the poor is a hallmark of Mormon religious belief and practice. All members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints make generous donations to support Church activities and ongoing building projects, and also to work on welfare farms and a wide variety of other projects whose goal is to produce food and other things that can be of use to those in need.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emphasize hard work, nutritious food, exercise, and a family-centered home life. Statistics seem to show that this emphasis tends to lead to longer, healthier lives than are common among their non-Mormon neighbors.

In 1842, 12 years after the founding of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Relief Society was established by Joseph Smith as a women’s organization that works in partnership with the priesthood. The original purpose of the Relief Society was to provide care and assistance to poor and needy and to bring people to Christ. In the time since it was founded, the Relief Society has branched out into other areas of social work.

Salt Lake City is the home of Welfare Square, an enormous facility whose purpose is to provide various sorts of aid and relief to the poor and the needy. Welfare Square is staffed completely by volunteer workers. It features a large building housing a 178-foot-tall grain elevator, a large storehouse, a bakery, a cannery, a milk processing operation, a thrift store, and an employment center. The Latter-day Saints take great care to make sure that the items they sell are packaged attractively so that it will not be demeaning for people to shop there. The stores at Welfare Square provide all the necessities for a needy family’s comfort while at the same time providing jobs and volunteer work for those who have a desire to give.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

For Latter-day Saints, marriage is considered to be an essential part of God’s plan for the eternal destiny of God’s people and is, therefore, strongly encouraged. In eternal marriage, also called celestial marriage, a man and a woman are sealed unto one another through time and eternity. Children who are born to parents who have received the sealing ordinance are considered to be part of the eternal covenant as well, meaning that they become part of an eternal family. The role of parent is considered to be a sacred duty in that children are to be raised in a way that provides for both their physical and spiritual needs. Religious instruction is considered to be primarily a duty of the parents, with support offered through classes and programs of the Church. The importance of the family bond can be seen in the fact that the state of Utah, in which Mormons predominate, has one of the highest birth rates and lowest divorce rates in the United States. In strengthening this bond, Latter-day Saints are taught to set aside one night a week, usually Monday evening, as a family night, a time when the family may pray and study scriptures together, as well as play.

## 11 CLOTHING

At the time of one’s endowment, an individual may receive what is known as a temple garment, often just referred to as the garment. The garment is worn as an undergarment. The style of the garment, for both men and women, has changed many times over the years. The garment may be of one or two-pieces and is typically made of a white, lightweight material. The pant legs will often extend down to just below the knees and necklines are generally modest. The garment is meant to serve as a reminder and representation of one’s commitment to faith and wearing the garment is viewed as a sacred privilege. While believers are encouraged to wear the garment at all times, the practice is not obligatory. Since the garment is considered to be sacred, all outer clothing must cover the garment so that it cannot be seen in public. As the name temple garment suggests, the garment is expected to be worn whenever one is in the temple. Special white robes are generally worn within the temple as well. Dressing rooms and lockers are typically available onsite to allow members to change before entering the temple proper.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints places no other specific restrictions on the type of clothing that members may wear, but most Mormons dress modestly.

## 12 FOOD

Special teachings concerning food and drink are contained in Doctrine and Covenants in a section known as the Word of



Wisdom. Based on the teachings of this text, Mormons are instructed to avoid coffee, tea, and other caffeinated beverages, as well as alcohol and tobacco. Mormons are also asked to fast for two consecutive meals on one Sunday each month (typically the first Sunday) and donate the grocery money saved by fasting to charity.

One long-standing Relief Society project is a food-storage program. Following the dictates of this program, all Mormons are instructed to maintain a year's supply of food for emergencies. As a result of this policy, Mormons have often been accused of hoarding food. Such accusations are totally unfounded, however. The food-storage program is simply intended to maintain the Mormon community in a state of preparedness in the event of a natural disaster or some other sort of emergency.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Mormons believe strongly in the value of both secular and religious education. The state of Utah has the nation's highest literacy rate (about 95%). Nine out of ten people in Utah finish high school.

Religious instruction is a life-long pursuit for many Latter-day Saints. High school aged students generally participate in a four-year study program known as seminary. During seminary, students spend each school year studying one set of scriptures: Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants. While most students attend special classes for these studies, home study curriculums are available for students in areas without established Mormon communities. Church curriculums are available in 178 different languages. Special Institutes of Religion offer a program of religious instruction for church members who are single and between the ages of 18 and 30. Married college students may also attend the classes, which are generally open to students of other faiths as well. The curriculum focuses on the topics of scripture, Church history, doctrine, marriage, and missions.

The Church also founded and runs Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Founded in 1875, it was named for the charismatic leader who became the second head of the Mormons, succeeding Joseph Smith. There are branches of BYU in Laie, Hawaii, and Rexburg, Idaho. There is also an LDS Business College in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In church, Mormon children are encouraged to speak before the entire congregation at a very early age. This gives Mormon young people the confidence to know that whatever they have to share is always appreciated.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Mormons have always valued the arts; their cargo on the great trek westward included pianos and other musical instruments. The song "Come, Come Ye Saints" was written during this historic journey. The original Mormon pilgrims sang to God for help, for guidance, for relaxation, and for encouragement from the time they started their wagon trains across the country until they reached their new home in the west. Founded in 1847, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which carries on this tradition, is one of the most famous choral groups in the world. The choir includes about 375 members from all ethnic and economic backgrounds.

During the tenure of Mormon leader Brigham Young, a theater was built in Salt Lake City. The Utah Arts Council is the oldest state agency for the arts in the United States.

### **15 WORK**

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are free to work at all occupations and are active in all walks of life, especially industry, trade, and the professions. Mormons also hold prominent positions in the federal government and the military.

### **16 SPORTS**

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints enjoy all the sports that non-Mormons do.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints enjoy the same forms of recreation and entertainment as non-Mormons, although their beliefs generally prevent them from participating in any activities they consider to be unwholesome. While vacationing, Mormon families often attend pageants presented at historic Mormon sites, including Nauvoo, Illinois, and Palmyra, New York.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Antique Mormon furniture featuring stylized designs painted on wood by hand has become a collector's item whose value rises about 10% every year. The Folk Arts Program of the Utah Arts Council supports both visual and performing arts that reflect traditional and ethnic cultures.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Mormon tradition has come into conflict with feminism and some women speaking out against their traditional restriction to child rearing and homemaking have been excommunicated by the Church. Tension has sometimes arisen between the strict, fundamentalist beliefs of new converts to Mormonism and the more moderate views generally held by members of multigenerational Mormon families.

Latter-day Saints are sometimes discriminated against due to false assumptions concerning the topic of plural marriages (polygamy). The practice of plural marriage was part of official Church doctrine from 1831 to 1890. Since then, however, official church leaders have spoken out against the practice of any man having more than one living wife at the same time. The problem of discrimination has been compounded by the formation of small groups, such as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) and the Apostolic United Brethren, which are separated from the official Church and have continued to argue for the practice of plural marriage. The FLDS made national headlines in 2006 when its president, Warren Steed Jeffs, was placed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List as a fugitive from justice facing charges of arranging illegal marriages between adult men and underage girls. Jeffs was eventually arrested and, in 2007, was found guilty on two counts of being an accomplice to rape. The media focus on such groups tends to raise questions and suspicions against the official Church, which does not condone the practice of plural marriage at all.

The perceived secrecy of the Church, particularly involving ceremonies held within the temples, has also caused suspicion and discrimination of Mormons on the part of the general public. Latter-day Saints believe that ordinances and rituals performed within the temple are of such a sacred nature that participants generally do not discuss the proceedings casually in a public setting or among non-believers. The fact that only worthy members of the Church are permitted to enter the temple adds to a sense of suspicion on the part of non-believers. However, members believe that the practice is based on a desire to maintain the sacredness of the temple, rather than a wish to exclude anyone from the experience.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

While husband and wife are considered to be equal partners in marriage, the traditional roles of the wife as mother and homemaker and the husband as the primary financial provider and head of the family are still encouraged as the basis of a strong family structure. The Church's strong opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in the past was based on its belief that granting equal social and political rights to women would result in the disruption of these traditional patterns of family life. However, women may and do work outside of the home in a wide variety of occupations.

In some cases, women have found themselves at a disadvantage in the event of a divorce and/or cancellation of sealing. While the Church officially disapproves of divorce, a legal divorce or annulment is permitted in some cases as the end of a civil marriage. However, if the marriage had been sealed in the temple, the couple is still considered to be sealed to one another in celestial marriage. A cancellation of sealing, received from the president of the church, is necessary in order for an individual to be remarried within the temple. Without a cancellation of sealing, members who remarry in civil ceremonies are considered to be married for time only, not for eternity. There have been some cases in which women have reported more difficulties than men in receiving a cancellation of sealing (called a sealing clearance for men). There are several situations in which a man may more easily remarry within the temple. For instance, a widower may remarry and thus be sealed in celestial marriage to both his current and deceased wives. However, women have typically been permitted to be sealed to only one man. A woman who divorces and does not receive a cancellation of sealing may feel that she is at a spiritual disadvantage by not being permitted to remarry in the temple or by remaining sealed in a marriage against her wishes. Since celestial marriage is considered to be necessary in order for one to obtain eternal life, or exaltation, in the presence of God, all men and women are encouraged to marry, which leaves both single men and women at a spiritual disadvantage. Divorce is often difficult financially on single mothers, since large families are encouraged and custody is generally granted to mothers in the event of a divorce.

Only men receive the ordinance of priesthood in the Church. Women take leadership roles organizing and teaching the Young Women and Primary classes. All adult women, age 18 and over, are generally members of the Relief Society, a worldwide women's organization that functions in connection with the priesthood. On the local level, the Relief Society serves to offer women instruction in home management and family development as well as on tenets of faith. It is through

the Relief Society that most women participate in welfare service projects.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Indians

**LOCATION:** United States; Canada

**POPULATION:** Over 2,500,000 (2000 U.S. Census); over 1,175,000 (2006 Canadian Census)

**LANGUAGE:** See individual tribes.

**RELIGION:** See individual tribes.

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Choctaw; Comanches; Creeks; Dakota and Lakota; Hopi; Inuit; Iroquois; Navajos; Ojibwa; Paiutes; Seminoles and Miccosukees; and Tlingit

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Archaeologists generally agree that the first peoples to inhabit the North American continent crossed over from Asia to what is now Alaska on the Bering Land Bridge sometime between 12,000 and 25,000 years ago. When the glaciers melted at the end of the Ice Age, the water levels rose in the Earth's oceans and covered the land bridge, preventing any further migrations. The people who had already crossed over began to spread across the North American continent. According to the terrain and climate of the regions in which they eventually settled, they became either farmers or hunter-gatherers (or sometimes both). Farming tribes tended to form large permanent communities, while those who lived by hunting and gathering traveled in smaller, nomadic bands. By the time the first Europeans arrived (Nordic explorers reached Greenland in AD 985); a huge diversity of well-developed cultures had existed in North America for thousands of years. Over 500 years later, when Columbus "discovered" America, these cultures were centuries more sophisticated. Native North Americans, the First Peoples, were not primitive or backwards or wild savages, as the Europeans often described them. Rather, they were highly skilled providers and preparers of food, clothing, and shelter; fine artists; deeply religious peoples with complex belief systems; and self-governed, independent societies, some with complex governmental structures. From the time Columbus set foot on the Americas, through the next four hundred years, Europeans decimated Native North American cultures and populations, killing perhaps as many as 60 million Native peoples. Some were slaughtered in wars as the Europeans pushed them off their homelands to make room for European expansion. Many others died from European diseases for which they had no immunity or known treatments. Native North American populations did not begin to recover from this holocaust until about 1900.

The first "reservation" for Native North Americans was created in 1638 by the Puritans in what is now Connecticut, for the Quinnipiac Nation. The Quinnipiaks were given a mere 1,200 acres on which to live. They were subject to English rule and were required to convert to Christianity. Through the 17th century, European settlers pushed Native North Americans further and further west in what would become the United States. Those who remained in the east, and those in Canada, were squeezed onto smaller and smaller territories. British-ruled Canada began establishing what they called "reserves" for Native North Americans during the 18th century. In Can-

ada, reserves were set aside on the Natives' homelands, rather than forcing them to relocate, sometimes far from their homes, as did the U.S. government when it began confining Natives to reservations.

Reservations and reserves were not the only changes forced upon the Native North Americans by the Europeans. Christian missionaries, beginning in the 17th century with French Jesuits in the northeast and Spanish Franciscans in the southwest, built mission churches and schools near Native communities and worked to "educate" the Natives in European ways and religion. Missionary methods ranged from supportive and helpful to violent and destructive. Jesuit priests in eastern Canada kidnapped young Natives and took them back to France to try to acculturate them there. Many of the young people died in these experiments; others became marginalized in both societies and sunk into alcoholic depressions. In the southwestern United States, the Spanish brutalized the Pueblo peoples in their efforts to convert them to Christianity. After the Pueblo peoples staged a successful revolt in 1680, the Spanish agreed to a compromise: the Pueblo peoples would allow them to build their missions in the pueblos, but they must allow the Pueblo peoples to practice their native religion unhindered.

The 17th century also saw the beginning of the decimation of Native populations by European diseases, and the blurring of blood lines through intermarriage between Native North Americans and European traders. (In Canada, an entirely new population known as Métis, or mixed-bloods, was created in the 18th century from the marriage of European traders with Native women. They are now a recognized racial group in Canada.) Suddenly, tribal peoples who had existed in relative stability for millennia found themselves threatened with extinction. During the following centuries, Native North Americans struggled to survive, with varying degrees of success. Some European contributions were welcomed, such as the horse, adopted by Great Plains tribes in the United States and Canada during the 18th century, and wheat, which quickly became a staple food of agricultural Native North Americans. For the most part, however, the Europeans brought only destruction to the Native North American peoples.

During the 18th century, Native North Americans stepped lively among frequently shifting allegiances with European powers as the French, Spanish, and British vied for control of the New World. The Native peoples were interested in protecting their lands and their access to food. Whichever European power seemed most likely to allow them to do that became their ally of the moment. In the end, no European nation protected the Natives' interests, despite all the assistance the Natives had given them. In 1763, the British drew the first of a series of boundary lines between land available for European settlement and Native land, or "Indian Territory." This first line ran down the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. Many European settlers ignored this boundary and moved west of the line into the lands supposedly reserved for Native North Americans. Eventually, the line was redrawn further west, and again settlers ignored it. For the next one hundred years, Indian Territory was redefined further and further west, first by the British and then by the U.S. government, forcing Eastern tribes to relocate to unfamiliar terrain occupied by other Native North American nations. The lands allegedly reserved for Native North Americans were becoming crowded, and histori-

cally antagonistic tribes were forced to live in close proximity to each other.

In Canada, no imaginary lines were drawn between the European East and Native West, and Native peoples were allowed to stay in their original homelands. However, the lands set aside for them in these regions were small, and less valuable than those claimed by the Europeans. The first organized Native resistance to the Europeans in Canada was Pontiac's War against the British in 1763–66. Pontiac was an Ottawa chief who, with his warriors, successfully captured every British fort west of Niagara Falls except for Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh). Fort Detroit was under siege for five months before the British finally managed to turn the tables on Chief Pontiac and ultimately win the war.

Differences in culture, language, and worldview made peaceful resolutions to the conflicts between Europeans and Native North Americans almost impossible. Treaties were made, both in the United States and Canada, but misunderstandings by both sides and deliberate breaches of promise by the Europeans prevented the treaties from having any lasting positive effects. The Micmac tribe in what is now the Canadian province of New Brunswick signed the first treaty with Europeans in 1725. Canadian Natives signed a total of 11 more treaties between 1871 and 1923 with the British and then Canadian governments. The first treaty between Native North Americans and the U.S. government was signed on 17 September 1778 at Fort Pitt. A total of 389 more treaties were made or remade in the United States before Congress passed a law in 1871 forbidding the signing of any more treaties with Native North Americans. The U.S. government broke most of the promises it made to the Native North Americans in those 390 treaties.

The U.S. government not only defied most of its treaties with Native North Americans but also betrayed a promise made to them in its own Articles of Confederation. The Ordinance of 1787, contained in the Articles of Confederation, stated that “land and property shall never be taken from [Native North Americans] without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.” During the 19th century, in blatant disregard of this Ordinance, European American settlers invaded, destroyed, and seized most of the Native North Americans' remaining lands in the United States, all with the full support of the U.S. government. In the July-August 1845 issue of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, editor John L. O'Sullivan coined the phrase “manifest destiny” to justify this genocide of the Native Nations. He saw it as “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our multiplying millions.” Manifest Destiny became the rallying cry for the Mexican War of 1846–48 and was used to justify the annexation of Texas in 1845; the claim to Oregon country disputed with Britain, and the planned seizure of Cuba from Spain, in the 1850s; the Alaska Purchase of 1867; and even annexations of territories outside of the continental United States, such as Hawaii and Guam, in the late 1800s.

In Canada, the aim of the government towards the Native Nations was complete assimilation. Rather than drive them out or slaughter them, the Canadians attempted to assimilate the Native North Americans into European Canadian culture. In 1857, the Imperial (British) Government passed the Grad-

ual Civilization Act, which declared Native North Americans in Canada to be noncitizens and created a process by which they could attain citizenship. The government expected all Natives to become Canadian citizens—but in so doing, the Native peoples would renounce all legal distinctions as Native North Americans, essentially giving up their identities. It is not surprising that few chose to do so. Between 1857 and 1920, only 250 Native North Americans opted to become Canadian citizens.

To encourage assimilation, Canada created boarding schools for Native North American children where they would be taught European languages, values, and customs. These schools, both government-run and missionary schools, were purposely built far from the children's homes to break all contact between the children and their families. The children were placed in European homes for the duration of their education, sometimes not seeing their true families for years on end. Although Native parents resisted sending their children to these schools, government officials insisted that they comply, often kidnapping the children and threatening the parents with cuts in food rations or worse. Boarding schools were also set up in the United States by missionaries and by the government, and the scenario was much the same there as in Canada. Students in both Canadian and U.S. boarding schools were subject to physical and sexual abuse; they were punished severely for speaking their native languages or practicing native religions; and their homes, families, and cultures were denigrated. The damaging effects of these schools are still felt by Native North Americans. Needless to say, this attempt at assimilation was not very successful.

In the United States, the Indian Removal Act passed by Congress in 1830 legalized the forcible relocation of many Native North Americans to reservations in the West. The Trail of Tears over which the Cherokees and other southeastern tribes were marched during the winter of 1838 from their homelands to what was then Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), and the Long Walk of the Navajos in 1864 to a concentration camp in New Mexico called Bosque Redondo, are still remembered by Native North Americans everywhere. Some 4,000–8,000 Cherokees (one out of every four) died on the Trail of Tears. Hundreds of Navajos died on the Long Walk, and many more died soon after arriving at Bosque Redondo. The situation worsened for Native North Americans in the United States in 1831 when the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the previous U.S. policy and declared Native North American tribes as domestic dependent nations, rather than independent foreign nations. Native North Americans, therefore, no longer had the rights granted to sovereign nations, nor were they given rights as U.S. citizens. Native North Americans in the United States effectively had no rights whatsoever.

The Gold Rush which began in the late 1840s in California and soon spread throughout the West (in both the United States and Canada) brought swarms of European prospectors and settlers into Native territory. European settlers squeezed out the Native North Americans and upset the fragile balance of nature on the prairies and plains. By 1879, the buffalo herds had disappeared from Canadian prairies, and many Canadian Natives were forced to follow the few remaining buffalo into the United States. Native peoples in the United States were already struggling to survive on the dwindling supply of buffalo and other game. In an effort to starve the Natives into submis-

sion, the U.S. government sponsored massive buffalo hunts, where gunmen rode through Native lands and shot as many buffalo as possible, leaving them to rot on the ground. In California, European Americans killed as many as 84,000 Native North Americans between 1850 and 1880 to rid themselves of competition for gold, land, and other resources.

Finally, by the end of the 19th century, Native North Americans in the United States and Canada surrendered to the superior firepower and sheer numbers of the Europeans and resigned themselves to life on reservations and reserves. Both governments outlawed many Native religious practices and continued to whittle away at Native lands through various acts of legislation. The General Allotment Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1887, divided up reservation lands between individual Natives—160 acres per person. Whatever lands were left over were sold to European Americans. The 160-acre parcels allotted to Native North Americans were not contiguous but rather were laid out in a checkerboard pattern, making large-scale collective farming or ranching impossible. With this one Act, the U.S. government succeeded in trapping Native North Americans in poverty for generations.

The 20th century has seen some improvements and some setbacks for Native North Americans. The United States granted citizenship to all Native North Americans within its boundaries on 2 June 1924, though some individual states did not declare them citizens for years to follow. Canada gave its Native peoples the national franchise in 1960, but separate provinces were slower to give them the provincial franchise. The Indian New Deal of the 1930s in the United States made reforms in Native North American land controls, improved conditions on reservations, and lifted restrictions on Native religious practices. Twenty years later, however, the Termination policy of 1954–62 eliminated federal recognition of many Native North American tribes in the United States, leaving those peoples with no federal protections or services. The United States also embarked on a Relocation Program in the early 1950s to encourage Native North Americans to move off the reservations to urban centers. The government hoped that by living and working in cities, away from their tribal lands, Native North Americans would become more integrated into European American society. In fact, the many Natives who did choose to move to urban centers instead found themselves unqualified and unprepared to succeed in the European American work world. Most of them simply traded poverty on the reservation for poverty in the city. Although Canada had no organized program to encourage Natives to relocate to cities, many did so because there was simply not enough room, nor enough resources or employment opportunities, on their reserves for everyone to survive. They found no more success in Canada's cities than did Native North Americans in the United States.

Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in the United States, Native North Americans in both the United States and Canada began to band together in pan-tribal organizations to fight for their rights. In the United States, the National Indian Youth Council, a radical activist organization, was formed in 1961. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in the United States in July 1968 by Dennis Banks and Russell Means. AIM's original goals were to improve the conditions of urban Native North Americans and to prevent harassment of urban Natives by local police. Since then, their

activities have expanded to cover a spectrum of Native North American concerns on the national level. The first truly national Canadian Native North American organization was the National Indian Council, formed in 1961. Various other tribal and pan-tribal organizations have since come into being to promote the preservation of Native North American culture; to lobby, demonstrate, and fight for Native North American rights in Canada and the United States; and to improve conditions for Natives in both countries. Due to the efforts of these groups, governmental attitudes and approaches are beginning to change. In the 1970s, the Canadian government began funding Native North American organizations, rather than trying to suppress them as it had done in the past. It also adopted a policy of multiculturalism, as opposed to its former policy of assimilation. In both the United States and Canada, many Native North American tribes have submitted land claims and brought suit against the government for restitution for broken treaties. The first major land claims case won by Native North Americans was in 1970 when U.S. president Richard Nixon agreed to return 48,000 acres of land (including the sacred Blue Lake) to Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. It was another 12 years before the first Canadian Native land claims case was settled, for the Micmac tribe in Nova Scotia.

Much confusion and disagreement remains, however, on the relation of Native North Americans to the government that rules their lands and lives. Canadian Natives continue to wrestle with the Canadian government over what the Natives believe is their inherent right to self-rule. U.S. Natives struggle to define themselves in the murky area of sovereign dependence. Conditions are still harsh for the majority of Native North Americans, whether they live on reservations, reserves, or in cities. Unemployment, alcoholism, suicide, and cultural dislocation continue to plague these descendants of once-great nations. Racist perceptions of "redskins" and caricatured depictions of Indians persist in the European-dominated cultures of Canada and the United States. Dartmouth College in 1969, and Stanford University in 1972, stopped the use of Native North American symbols and mascots for their sports teams, but more than two decades later, other teams like the Cleveland Indians and Atlanta Braves in professional baseball continue to promote racist ideas of Native North Americans with their Chief Wahoo grinning-Indian mascot (Cleveland) and tomahawk chant (Atlanta).

On a potentially positive note, the late 20th century has seen a surge in European Americans' and Canadians' interest in Native North American spirituality and worldview. If this interest leads to increased respect for Native North Americans, it should create significant improvements in their lives. If the Europeans, however, use this as yet another opportunity to steal from the Natives, co-opting their spiritual traditions and Europeanizing them, Native North Americans will once again have one less thing to call their own.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Native North American tribes are usually grouped into major culture areas based on the geographic area of their traditional homelands. Those culture areas are generally designated as Northeastern (including the Great Lakes region, or Woodlands); Southeastern; Southwestern; Great or Northern Plains; Northwest Coast; Plateau, Great Basin, and Rocky Mountains; California; Alaska; and the Northwest Territory and Arc-

tic Circle. Due to the forced relocation of many tribes in the United States during the 19th century to so-called "Indian Territory" in what is now the state of Oklahoma, a new division known as Oklahoman Indians has been added to the list. (Oklahoman Indians identify themselves as such.) These culture areas, except for Oklahoma, are useful for historical discussions of Native North Americans, but tribal groupings are based more on differences in political and economic relations with the U.S. and Canadian governments than on geographic regions. In Canada, Native North Americans are divided into Inuit (a separate culture group living in the subarctic regions), Métis (mixed-bloods who have developed a distinct cultural identity), and North American Indians (all other Canadian Natives), as well as "status" and "nonstatus" Indians (referring to whether or not they are recognized as Native North Americans by the government). In the United States, most Native North Americans are now referred to simply by tribe. (There is a great deal of controversy over how to refer to Native North Americans in general: some say Native Americans, some say American Indians, while others use terms such as First Peoples or First Nations. In an attempt to find a middle ground, and with no intention of disrespect to those who prefer other designations, we have chosen to use Native North Americans as the general descriptive term.)

Historically, the terrain and environment of a tribe's homeland determined its way of life. Northeastern tribes lived in temperate woodlands where game animals abounded. They built semipermanent villages made up of wood lodges, cultivated some food, and hunted, fished, and gathered the rest. Southeastern tribes, on the other hand, lived in hotter climates with very fertile ground and a long growing season, so they became settled agriculturalists with large, well-organized communities. Plains tribes relied on the buffalo and wild grasses for their livelihood, while Southwestern tribes eked out a living on carefully tended corn and built apartment-style complexes of adobe. Within each of these culture areas, however, individual tribes had quite different religious beliefs, languages, social customs, and interpersonal relations. It is quite inaccurate to think of Plains tribes, or Southwestern tribes, as single, unified groups with one common lifeway. It is grossly inaccurate to think of Native North Americans as a singly defined unit. However, for the purposes of this article, we will attempt to offer some general statements about Native North Americans as a collection of distinct peoples.

According to the 2000 Census, the total population of Native North Americans in the United States was 2,475,956. The Canadian Census of 2006 counted a total of 1,172,790 Native North Americans, including about 700,000 First Nations Peoples; about 390,000 Métis and nonstatus Indians; and nearly 51,000 Inuit. Historians and archaeologists guess that the Native North American population was in the tens of millions when Europeans first arrived on the continent. By 1900, the Native population in the United States had reached an all-time low of 237,196. The Canadian Native population bottomed out in 1911 at less than 110,000. Since then, Native North American populations in both countries have increased significantly, though they are still far from their original numbers. Native North Americans make up about 1.0% of the total U.S. population, and 3.8% of the total Canadian population.

There are 564 federally recognized Native North American tribes in the United States, over 200 Alaska Native villages

and communities, and some 600 recognized "First Nations" in Canada. A total of over 56 million acres in the United States have been divided into about 310 Native North American reservations, mostly in the Great Plains region and the West. A few are located in the eastern United States. In the United States, Native North Americans make up less than 50% of the population on many reservations due to land allotment, leasing arrangements, and the opening of reservation lands to non-Natives. While reservations in Arizona, New Mexico, and the Dakotas still have over 90% Native populations, those in California, the Great Lakes states, and Washington have less than 30%. According to 2003 estimates, the state of California has the largest concentration of Native North Americans in the United States (413,382), followed by Arizona (294,137), and Oklahoma (279,559). The Navajo Nation, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, is the largest Native North American tribe in the United States, followed closely by Cherokee. In Canada, the Cree far outdistance the next largest tribe, the Ojibwa. The provinces of Ontario and British Columbia have the greatest concentrations of Native North Americans.

Many Native North Americans have left the reservations and reserves to live in cities. In Canada, anywhere from 60-80% of the Native population lives off-reserve in urban centers such as Winnipeg, Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto. Some 62% of U.S. Natives are urban dwellers. In the United States, the cities of Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, Phoenix, and Tulsa have the largest Native North American populations.

The relatively recent Native North American population increase from the lows of the early 20th century have created a youth-dominated population: 32% of Native North Americans are under 15 years old, while only 5% are over 64 years old. The decimation of tribal populations in the 19th century, plus the crowding together of many different tribes on common reservations in the United States, has led to a great deal of intermarrying and blurring of once pure tribal lineages. Many Native North Americans have also married and borne children with European Americans, resulting in a large percentage of mixed-bloods. In Canada, the Métis have developed a distinct cultural identity and are now recognized as such by the Canadian government. Because Native North Americans are eligible for government services and benefits, many with small percentages of Native North American blood register on tribal rolls. Some have such minute traces of Native blood that other Native North Americans refer to them as "no-bloods."

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Linguists guess that there may have originally been as many as 300 separate and distinct Native North American languages before Europeans arrived on the continent. Since that time, many Native languages have become extinct because of European decimation of tribal populations; the assimilation of Native peoples into European-dominated English-speaking society; education (forced and voluntary) of young Native North Americans in English, Spanish, or French; and the loss of faith in elders and traditional tribal culture by young Native North Americans who then reject their native cultures and tongues. Over 100 Native North American languages still exist, though some are spoken by only a few people. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional Native ways, including languages, by Native North Americans themselves and by the U.S. and Canadian governments. On 30



*Shoshone dancer in Wyoming. Most Native North American tribes continue to hold ceremonial dances.*  
(Pete Saloutos/Wyoming Division of Tourism)

October 1990, the U.S. Congress passed the Native American Languages Act to preserve, protect, and promote the practice and development of Native North American languages. This Act reversed the 19th century campaign by the U.S. government to eradicate those same languages that it is now trying to protect. Canada's new policy of multiculturalism supports Native languages and traditions, in contrast to its former policy of assimilation which tried to erase them.

The most widely spoken Native North American language is Navajo, with over 170,000 speakers. Cree, spoken by over 117,000 people in Canada, runs a close second. Navajo is a member of the Athabaskan language family; Cree is an Algonquian language. Linguists group languages with common roots into families, such as the Romance (Italian, Spanish, and French) and Germanic (German, English, Dutch) families in Europe. Native North American languages comprise some 57 families, including Athabaskan, Algonquian, Caddoan, Chumashan, Eskimo, Iroquoian, Kiowa-Tanoan, Muskogean, Pomoan, Siouan, Uto-Aztecan, Yuman, and others. There are also many "isolates," languages not related to any others, among the huge diversity of Native North American languages. Some examples of isolates are Aleut, Cayuse, Haida, Hopi, Tlingit, Washo, and Zuni. A number of languages have yet to be classified, such as Kutenai, Salishan, and Wakashan. The greatest linguistic variety exists in the relatively small area of California, which boasts 20 of the 57 Native North American language families. There is more linguistic variety in California than in all of Europe.

The only Native North American language written with its own symbol system is Cherokee. In 1823, a Cherokee named Sequoyah invented a writing system for his language using symbols to represent syllables (such as "ma," "no," "gu"). He borrowed some symbols from English, which he had seen but did not know how to read or speak, so the English letters do not correspond to the English sounds. For example, *D* represents the sound "a," and *T* represents "i." Other Native North American languages have since been written with adapted Roman or Russian (for the Aleut language in Alaska) alphabets. But for millennia, Native North American languages were purely oral. A form of sign language did develop among the Plains tribes so that they could communicate across language barriers. Many Europeans learned this system of gestures as well. Trade languages, with elements of two or more tribal (and even European) languages, developed between neighboring tribes, such as Chinook Jargon in the Pacific Northwest. A very special language was consciously created during World War II by a group of Navajo who devised a code based on the Navajo language, in such a way that even a native Navajo speaker would need the key to understand it. The United States used this code for military operations in the Pacific, and the Japanese were never able to break it. The Navajo Code Talkers, as they came to be known, were greatly honored for their invaluable service to the United States.

The English language has borrowed many words from Native North Americans since the arrival of English speakers on the continent. The oldest known borrowed word is *raccoon*. Others include *caribou*, *opossum*, *moose*, *skunk*, *woodchuck*, *chipmunk*, *hickory*, *squash*, *pecan*, *succotash*, *moccasin*, and *toboggan*. Many North American place names are Native North American words, such as *Massachusetts*, *Connecticut*, *Manhattan*, *Illinois*, *Michigan*, *Wisconsin*, *Chicago*, *Mississippi* (which means "big-water"), *Niagara*, *Ottawa*, *Ohio*, *Kentucky*, *Tennessee*, *Iowa*, *Missouri*, *Arkansas*, *Kansas*, *Nebraska*, *Minnesota*, *Manitoba*, *Dakota*, *Alabama*, *Appalachia*, *Oklahoma*, *Arizona*, *Utah*, *Seattle*, *Saskatchewan*, *Alaska*, and *Yosemite*.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Separating folklore from religion in Native North American cultures is impossible because all stories are religious teaching stories. Religion is an integral part of daily life for Native North Americans, and the lessons for living that life in a sacred way are passed down from generation to generation through rituals, songs and dances, and stories. In the following articles on Native North Americans, therefore, this section will discuss specific stories and characters in those stories, while section #5, "Religion: origin and traditional beliefs," will talk about sacred ceremonies and rituals and the general spiritual worldview of Native North Americans.

Each native North American tribe has its own creation myth, but many of these myths share common themes. There are three basic types of creation stories among Native North American tribes:

- 1) Earth-diver stories, where an animal or bird dives into the depths of the watery chaos to bring up a bit of mud which becomes the Earth;
- 2) Culture-hero stories, where great beings create the world and the people in it and teach those people how to live (or sometimes Two-Creator stories, where two great

beings create the world through their efforts to compete with each other); and

3) Emergence stories, where the people emerge from a lower world (or worlds) up onto this one.

Trickster tales are also universal among Native North Americans. Trickster figures are usually animals, birds, or insects who teach humans the limits of time and space, and the consequences of disrespectful or unbalanced behavior, by their own follies, errors, and tricks. They sometimes help humans by restoring balance to the world. Native North Americans believe that the world is made up of paired opposites, such as light-dark, night-day, male-female, sun-moon, etc. Tension between these opposing elements creates movement. Trickster figures keep the world moving by keeping the tension alive between paired opposites, often by turning them on their heads. Common trickster figures (according to region) are: Raven (Northwest), Hare or Raccoon (Great Lakes), Coyote (Southwest and Great Basin), Iktomi the Spider (Plains), Rabbit (Southeast), and Jay or Wolverine (Canada).

## 5 RELIGION

Modern Native North American religious movements and sacred ways tend to be pan-tribal (crossing tribal boundaries, rather than specific to one or another tribe). Though sacred ways are continually changing, adapting to the realities of life in a changing world, to new experiences and new wisdom, certain core beliefs remain fundamentally unchanged because the basic realities of life remain the same. The four traditional enemies are still poverty, sickness, fatigue, and old age. The sacred boundaries of tribal worlds are still the same and can still be mapped. The seasons continue in the same cycles, and the sun, moon, and stars continue in the same paths. People are still born, and they still die. Native North American sacred ways are involved with survival; the sacred ways are an integral part of life and cannot be separated from daily living. There is no word for “religion” in any Native North American language because it is not seen as a separate enterprise. The disintegration of tribal culture and severe disruption of traditional daily life in the last two centuries, therefore, caused many Native North Americans to lose their understanding of and sense of communion with their traditional sacred ways. In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional Native North American spirituality, both among Native North Americans themselves and among European Americans and Canadians.

Most Native North Americans share six concepts of the sacred:

1. Unseen powers, sometimes called The Great Mystery, exist;
2. All things in the universe are interdependent and we must, therefore, respect all life and maintain balance and harmony or else destruction will result;
3. Worship strengthens the bonds between the individual, community, and great powers;
4. Sacred traditions and teachers of those traditions teach morals and ethics for everyday life;

5. Trained sacred practitioners (called medicine men and women, shamans, priests and priestesses, etc.) are responsible for special, sometimes secret, knowledge that they preserve in their memories and pass on from generation to generation; and

6. Humor is a necessary part of the sacred because it keeps us in perspective and eases our journey through the difficulties of life.

Sacred rites among different tribes range from complex ritual dances and worship activities to a pervasive sense of sacred living with almost no ceremonial rites. Visions and dreams are considered by all Native North Americans to be powerful experiences worthy of serious attention. Native North Americans do not believe in a separate divine being who rules the universe, like the Judeo-Christian God. Rather, they believe that all of life and creation is sacred.

In the Native North American worldview, all elements of the universe are paired, and those pairs balance each other, such as male-female, north-south, east-west, up-down, night-day, sun-moon, moist-dry, dark-light, life-death. Each element in the pair is part of the other and necessary to the other: without night, there would be no day but simply a constant, unchanging, undefined sunlight. Because of this belief in balanced opposites, the concepts of good and evil are not nearly as important to Native North Americans as the idea of balanced or imbalanced, or harmony versus disharmony. The sacred is based on relationships that must be kept in balance. The sacred teachings give knowledge about those relationships, how to keep them in balance, and what tragedies will result if they are not kept in balance. This knowledge is taught through stories, ritual experiences, lectures, dances and songs, and the interpretation of visions and dreams.

Prayers are offered before and after many actions, such as waking, going to sleep, hunting, killing, planting, and harvesting. Three standard elements of Native North American prayer rituals are:

1. Purification—sweat baths, smudging with smoke, bathing, etc.;
2. Blessing—a call to the great powers, prayers for the self and others; and
3. Sacrifice—offering something of oneself to the great powers to reestablish one’s connection with all else.

Offerings, such as tobacco, feathers, corn meal, or pollen, also often accompany prayers.

Peyotism has a long history with Native North Americans. The use of peyote, an herb of the cactus species that grows along the Rio Grande in Texas and Mexico, was traditionally used by the ancient Aztecs of Mexico. In the early 18th century, the Mescalero Apaches began to use it in their healing ceremonies. Gradually, the use of peyote spread through the tribes of the Southwest and into the Great Plains. By the late 19th century peyotism had become a pan-tribal religion, eventually incorporated as the Native American Church. Sometimes blending aspects of Christianity (such as belief in the Trinity) with traditional Native North American sacred ways, the Native American Church promotes four basic teachings:

1. Love for one’s fellow beings;



2. Responsibility for one's family;
3. Self-reliance; and
4. Refraining from the use of alcohol.

Peyotism has enabled Native North Americans both to assimilate some elements of the dominant European Christian culture as well as to maintain a separate cultural identity and connection with traditional sacred ways. The discouragement of the use of alcohol and encouragement of responsibility and self-reliance have also helped Native North Americans to overcome the despair and accompanying social disintegration that has resulted from centuries of poverty, discrimination, and cultural dislocation.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists, people who live close to the earth, Native North Americans traditionally celebrated holidays based on the Earth's rhythms. Solstices, equinoxes, planting and harvesting times, the first fish caught each year, and other seasonal events constituted Native North Americans' sacred calendar. Many Native North Americans have become Christian and celebrate Christian holidays. Those who are U.S. citizens also celebrate major U.S. holidays such as the Fourth of July (Independence Day). Canadian Native North Americans celebrate Canada Day on 1 July.

However, most tribes continue to hold ceremonial dances and religious rites on their traditional, Earth-based holidays as well. These sacred ceremonies were outlawed for a time by the U.S. and Canadian governments during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But Native North Americans continued to celebrate them secretly and the ceremonies survived to take on new life in the return to traditional ways that has taken hold in Native North American communities in recent decades.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Common rites of passage among Native North American tribes are birth, naming, renaming, puberty, marriage, and death. Native North American initiation (or rite of passage) ceremonies mark a point of physical or emotional growth in a person and open that person's eyes to the Great Mysteries to which he or she is now exposed. The ceremonies also teach the person about the new responsibilities involved in being exposed to these powers. Birth rites are centered on rituals to ensure the child's safety into old age. Puberty ceremonies teach the young boy or girl about adult responsibilities and expectations. New names are often given at each passage from one stage of life to the next, or after a dramatic event in a person's life. Though naming customs differ among Native North American tribes, names are always believed to have great importance. In some tribes, a person may have acquired several names by the end of her or his life.

Death is not feared by Native North Americans because it is considered to be one more step on the path of life. Native North American burial rites involve preparations for the deceased's continuing journey after death. For example, in many Native North American tribes, the dead are buried sitting up, facing west (the direction of the life beyond this one), with things they will need as they travel the next part of the path, such as blankets and food. An inevitable part of the life cycle, death is deeply respected as a time of great transition.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Most Native North American societies are organized around some sort of extended family unit. In matriarchal tribes, the eldest woman is head of the group and carries a great deal of weight in the larger community as well. Patriarchal tribes look to the eldest man for leadership. Traditionally, most Native North American cultures practiced a similar division of labor in which women were responsible for domestic affairs and men took care of hunting, raiding or warring, and public affairs (such as intertribal business or meetings with Europeans). This division of labor made perfect sense in that women were frequently pregnant and/or nursing an infant and were not able during those times to perform heavy manual labor or venture too far from home. They also needed to be protected in the interest of the survival of the tribe or clan. Biologically speaking, women were more valuable because they could give birth only to one child every two years or so, whereas men could father many children in that same period of time. Therefore, fewer men than women were needed to perpetuate the group.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Whether on reservations or in cities, the great majority of Native North Americans suffer standard living conditions. In the United States, more than one out of every four Native North Americans (or 28%) live below the poverty level, as opposed to one out of eight (12%) of the total U.S. population. Native North Americans are the most disadvantaged group in Canada. Reservations and reserves were established on the poorest land and forced to hold many more people than the land could support. Farming has always been difficult, even at subsistence level, and there are few other sources of income. Many reserves and reservations are located in remote areas, often inaccessible by road, and work opportunities are scarce. Unemployment is extremely high (up to 90% on some Canadian reserves during the winter months), and income levels are extremely low. Access to modern Western health care is limited by poverty, isolation and lack of transportation, and misunderstandings of government policies and benefits. Entire tribes of Native North Americans were wiped out by epidemics during the 18th - early 20th centuries. Certain communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, and trachoma, were not brought under control on reservations or reserves until the mid-20th century. Canadian Natives receive free health care, and more than half of all U.S. Native North Americans receive health care from the federal Indian Health Service (IHS), a government-supported health care system like no other in the United States. But urban (or other off-reservation) Natives in the United States are not covered by the IHS, so they have extremely limited access to health care. Native North Americans in Canada are often too far removed from health centers to take advantage of their services.

The cultural destruction of Native North American tribes over the past three centuries has led to tremendous stress, depression, and the adoption of unhealthy habits and lifestyles (cigarette smoking, junk-food diets, alcohol dependence) by Native North Americans. Hypertension (high blood pressure), strokes, diabetes, cancer, and coronary heart disease are now prevalent among Native North Americans due to these changes in lifestyle. Mental disorders, alcoholism, and suicide have also become serious problems. As compared to the total U.S.

population, Native North American death rates from the following disorders are as follows:

alcoholism:	438% greater
tuberculosis:	400% greater
diabetes mellitus:	155% greater
accidents:	131% greater
homicide:	57% greater
pneumonia/flu:	32% greater
suicide:	27% greater

Death rates are similar for Native North Americans in Canada. One study determined that Canadian Natives may have the highest suicide rate of any racial group in the world.

Sexually transmitted diseases are now widespread among Native North Americans, and AIDS is becoming a concern. Toxic waste dumps are often located near reservations and reserves and create further health problems for Native North Americans through contamination of their soil, water, and air. Life expectancy for Native North Americans is at least ten years less, and the infant mortality rate almost twice as high, than for all other races living in the United States and Canada.

Federal housing programs provide low-cost housing for Native North Americans on reservations and reserves, but many Native North Americans still do not have adequate housing. Run-down trailers and shacks are not uncommon. Those living in remote areas usually have no electricity, indoor plumbing, running water, or any heat beyond a small cooking stove. Water is either hauled from wells or dipped from streams and brooks that are often polluted.

Native North Americans living in urban areas are usually marginalized as well. Lacking the skills and cultural background to succeed in the Western work world, most urban Natives find themselves unable to get steady, full-time jobs. Instead, they work at occasional odd jobs and struggle to make rent payments on the worst slum housing. Many eventually return to the reservations and reserves, poorer than when they left.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family relationship is the center and core of Native North American tribes. Extended families figure prominently in all Native North American cultures; clans are common. Many Native North American cultures are matrilineal (and often matrilineal, meaning a newly married couple lives with or near the bride's mother). In a matrilineal society, lineage is inherited through the mother, not the father. A child is born into the mother's clan or kinship group. Therefore, there is no such thing as an illegitimate child because it is always known who a child's mother is (while the identity of a child's father can be unknown). When a child inherits its mother's name or lineage, it is assured of a recognized place in society.

Children are highly valued members of nearly all Native North American societies from the moment of their birth (or even before). Family size tends to be large, particularly since the decimation of Native populations during the 18th and 19th centuries. In order to rebuild clans and tribes, Native North Americans encourage high birth rates. Children are rarely punished physically. Rather, they are scolded in a firm but gentle voice, or are teased into behaving well.

Women are usually responsible for domestic affairs, while men take care of public affairs and any work that requires trav-

eling a distance from home (such as hunting, trapping, raiding, and warfare). In matrilineal societies, women rank as the highest elders with the most authority. Clan mothers, or the eldest women of each kinship group, often choose the men who will be chiefs in public leadership and can remove those chiefs if they feel the men are not leading their people well. In patrilineal societies, women are still highly valued for their reproductive role and their many other contributions to the survival of the group.

## 11 CLOTHING

Native North Americans wear Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. Only for ceremonies and powwows do they dress in their traditional ways. Traditional clothing varies from tribe to tribe, depending on what natural materials were available in their traditional homelands and the climate of the region, as well as by particular tribal custom. Eagle feathers have always been highly valued by many Native North Americans. Eagles are considered powerful beings, and their feathers are believed to possess some of that power. Nowadays, Native North Americans must get permission from the U.S. government to use the feathers of a protected species.

## 12 FOOD

Thousands of years before Columbus arrived in the New World, Native North Americans of the Hopi and Zuni tribes were cultivating vegetables and corn. Corn is a very sophisticated agricultural product. First, it had to be created by crossing two types of wild grasses, neither of which was very productive on its own. Because it is a hybrid, corn cannot reseed itself simply by dropping its kernels on the ground. The kernels must be planted and tended carefully in order for them to grow. Native North Americans consider corn to have great spiritual power. Cornmeal and corn pollen are used in many religious ceremonies.

Pacific Northwest tribes had such an abundance of wild fruits and vegetables and fish available to them that they did not need to farm at all. They could gather enough food during the three months of summer to last them the rest of the year. The Plains tribes' primary source of food was the buffalo, along with wild rice in the northern Plains. Alaska and northern Canada Natives have long relied on seal and whale meat and blubber for the bulk of their diet. Most Northeastern and Southeastern Native tribes were farmers like the Southwestern tribes.

When Europeans first began to settle on the eastern shores of the continent, Native North Americans saved them from starvation by showing them what wild foods were edible and how to cultivate other foods unknown to Europeans, such as corn, pumpkins, and squash. Modern-day foods that originated with Native North Americans include corn, pumpkins, squash, lobster, sweet and "Irish" potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, peanuts, avocados, pineapples, certain kinds of beans, maple syrup and sugar, sunflower seeds, and turkey. We can also thank Native North Americans for barbecue, spoon bread, cranberry sauce, mincemeat pie, chili, guacamole, and many other dishes too numerous to mention.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditional Native North American education does not separate secular and sacred knowledge because religion and every-



*American Indian Exposition in Anadarko, Oklahoma. Native North Americans of today wear Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. Only for ceremonies and powwows do they dress in their traditional ways. (Fred Marvel/Oklahoma Tourism)*

day life are completely intertwined. Therefore, Native wisdom involves “seeking life,” or knowing what is necessary for survival. Survival requires balance and harmony with all things. The way to wisdom is to sit still, wait, and listen. Native North Americans teach their children to let the Great Mysteries be revealed to them. The children are taught not to ask questions but to listen and wait and the answer will come. Asking questions means a person is not listening well enough or learning anything. A person who asks questions is considered stupid in Native North American society. In a technological society, such as the modern Western society of European-dominated U.S. and Canada, one needs to ask questions because human-made things have origins and definite causes and effects. In an Earth-based society, on the other hand, such as that of traditional Native North Americans, life is based on mysteries that can only be revealed by listening in stillness. Traditional Native North American wisdom is taught mostly through stories, lectures, songs, dances, rituals and ceremonies, vision quests, survival training, and silence.

Western education was introduced to Native North Americans in the 17th century by early Roman Catholic missionary priests. Education was in French, Spanish, or English (depending on the country of origin of the priests). The priests’ goal was to “civilize the savages,” so they taught the Natives European manners, attitudes, culture, and languages, as well as Christianity. By the 19th century, the United States and Canadian federal governments had become involved in Native

North American education. In order to assimilate Natives into European culture, the government set up boarding schools and forcibly removed Native children from their homes and placed them in these schools. During vacations, the children were boarded with European American and Canadian families. Any Native parents who resisted having their children taken to these schools were punished by having their rations withheld. Conditions were generally terrible at the boarding schools. Poor health care and nutrition, combined with substandard living conditions, caused widespread illness among the students. Low teacher salaries also attracted unqualified teachers (who could not get better paying jobs), and they were given improper curricula with which to work. Vocational training programs did not fit the marketplace, so Native students graduated with no marketable skills. Students were required to speak English (or French, or Spanish), and any caught speaking in their native tongues were severely punished. Other physical and even sexual abuses have since been revealed. In June 1991, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) in Canada publicly acknowledged responsibility for the abuses inflicted on Native North American students at Canadian boarding schools. The DIA promised to fund programs to help abuse victims heal their wounds—physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social—and to treat other damaging effects, such as the breakdown of families, alcoholism, the perpetration of abuse on others by abuse victims, and suicide. The Reverend Douglas Crosby, president of the Oblate Conference

of Canada (the largest Roman Catholic missionary order in Canada) also asked forgiveness for abuses inflicted at Catholic missionary schools upon Native North Americans.

The Choctaw and Cherokee tribes of the southeastern United States had both developed extensive school systems of their own which taught both Native and Western subjects by the 19th century. The Creeks, Chicksaws, and Seminoles also had schools, and together these Southeastern Natives came to be known to European Americans as the “Five Civilized Tribes.” In the early 1900s, however, the U.S. government closed down the Native-run schools and took control of their education. It was not until the late 1960s that Native North Americans once again became responsible for the formal education of their own children. Ramah High School, on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico, opened in 1968 to become the first Native-controlled high school since the closing of the Five Civilized Tribes’ school systems. In Canada, the Cree band (or tribe) of northeastern Alberta took over the Blue Quills school in 1970, becoming the first Canadian band to control its own education. The Canadian government officially gave Native North Americans more control over their education in 1973.

The first tribally controlled college was Navajo Community College, established in 1966. Saskatchewan Indian Federated College became the first Canadian college run by Native North Americans, in May 1976. The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) provides grants for 32 tribally controlled community colleges in 13 states in the United States.

As of 2008, only 7% of Native North American primary and secondary students in the United States attend BIA-funded schools. Some 5% attend private or parochial schools, while most (88%) attend public schools. School attendance among Canadian Native North Americans has always been low, due both to traumas experienced at boarding schools and to the remoteness of many reserves. Attendance rates have been improving in recent years, however.

Native children educated in traditional ways encounter great difficulties when entering the Western education system. Traditionally taught not to ask questions, Native students are often considered “slow” or “stupid” by Western teachers and peers. Cultural contexts are often so different that Native students cannot fully understand what they are being taught. Native North American students are among the lowest in achievement and highest in dropout rates. More than 25% of Canadian Natives older than the age of 15 have less than a 9th grade education. At least 34% have some high school but no diploma. A mere 8% of all Native North Americans in Canada over 15 years old have completed high school (only 5% among the Inuit). The percentages in the United States are somewhat better, with 55% of U.S. Native North Americans graduating from high school, but this is still well below the national average of 66.5% for the total U.S. population.

The figures for college graduation are even more disparate: 16.2% of the total U.S. population graduates from college, while only 7% of Native North Americans do. In Canada, 4% of Native North Americans have achieved a university degree. Only a handful—1%—of Inuits have finished college.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Native North American music and dance is centered on religious ceremonies. These ceremonies were outlawed in the U.S. and Canada during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, so

much of the heritage was lost. The renaissance of Native North American culture in the late 20th century is helping to preserve what is left of traditional music and dance.

The voice has always been the most important musical instrument for Native North Americans. Rattles and/or drums often accompany the voice. A percussion instrument unique to Native North Americans is the water drum: a small container of wood, pottery, or metal is partially filled with water to create a certain tone. The container is covered with dampened hide stretched tightly, and it is beaten with a hard stick. Some Native North American tribes have used flutes for centuries. Recently, the flute has become popular pan-tribally. The Apache fiddle and musical bows in various tribes also have a long history, while modern fiddles and guitars have been adopted by many tribes in recent years.

Native North American dances express spiritual truths or tell religious stories through movement. Dancers stay close to the earth; there are usually no large leaps into the air. Most dances are performed by groups moving in unison. A few solo dances have always existed in certain tribes, and others have developed as show dances in the latter half of the 20th century (such as the hoop dance, where a solo performer dances with a number of hoops, forming them into intricate designs, usually collecting money contributions on a blanket nearby).

Native North American cultures developed highly sophisticated oral traditions. Storytelling is one of the most prized skills a Native North American can possess. Telling an entire story or story cycle can take two to three days. All Native North American stories are coded to contain many teaching elements and symbols that become more clearly understood as the listener matures and hears the story repeatedly. Another form of oral literature is oratory, or speech-making. One of the best-known Native North American orators was Chief Seattle (c.1786–1866) of the Suquamish tribe in the Pacific Northwest.

The first novel ever written by a Native North American was *Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*, by John Rollin Ridge (1827–67), a Cherokee. *Black Elk Speaks*, by Nicholas Black Elk, as told to John G. Neihardt, sparked a new blaze of Native North American writing when it was republished in 1959. It is the autobiography of Nick Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux medicine man. It is considered to rank among the most important holy books of the world. In 1969, N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa, became the first Native North American to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, for his novel *House Made of Dawn* (published in 1968). There is a growing list of successful Native North American writers, including Vine Deloria, Jr., Dee Brown, James Welch, Duane Niatum, Geary Hobson, Leslie Silko, Simon Ortiz, Louise Erdrich (whose first novel, *Love Medicine*, published in 1984, became a best-seller), Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, Beth Brant, Gerald Vizenor, and poets Wendy Rose, Joy Harjo, and Ray A. Young Bear.

Artistically, Native North Americans do not impose form on an object but rather attempt to uncover the form that is already there. This is true for music as well as the visual arts. Musical instruments are used to reproduce the natural musical patterns that exist in wind and moving water, for example. Traditional patterns and designs for visual art works are also based on the rhythms and lines of natural formations.

Native North American visual arts have a history that goes back perhaps 25,000 years. Many of the patterns and designs have been in use since ancient times. Each tribe has its own

particular style and set of patterns and designs that distinguish its art from that of other tribes. Native North American visual arts include rock engravings and paintings; ivory, bone, and soapstone carvings; pottery; jewelry and metalwork; beading and quillwork; weaving; and basketry. Ceremonial costumes are another expression of visual art. Native North American visual arts fall into four categories: 1) sacred drums and ceremonial costumes and objects; 2) tourist or popular art forms for sale to non-Natives; 3) contemporary art—carvings, prints, and crafts—for sale in small galleries; and 4) mainstream or high art that is created by Native North Americans trained in Western art schools and which is shown in major urban galleries and art institutions. There are many highly skilled Native North Americans working in each of these four categories.

Perhaps the first widely known Native North American in the performing arts was William Penn Adair “Will” Rogers (1879–1935), a cowboy, writer, actor, entertainer, and humorist of mixed-blood Cherokee descent who became very popular during the 1930s. Jay Silverheels (1912–80), a Mohawk actor, gained fame in the 1950s as “Tonto” in the *Lone Ranger* television series in the United States. Since the 1970s, Native North Americans have been paving the way for greater recognition and participation in the theater arts, including stage, film, and television. The American Indian Theatre Ensemble (later renamed the Native American Theatre Ensemble) was founded in New York City in the 1970s. It was the first professional acting company of Native North American performing artists. In 1983, the American Indian Registry for the Performing Arts was established for the advocacy and promotion of Native North American actors, directors, producers, and technical workers in film and on television. The Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium was also founded in the early 1980s to support Native North American work in television, video, and film.

Other well-known Native North American artists and entertainers include Navajo artist R. C. Gorman (1932– ); Oneida actor Graham Greene (1950– ), best known for his work in the 1991 film *Dances with Wolves* and the 1990s television series *Northern Exposure*; Navajo-Ute musician R. Carlos Nakai (1946– ); Cree folk musician Buffy Sainte-Marie (1942– ); and Osage prima ballerina Maria Tallchief (1925– ).

On 12 September 2004, grand opening ceremonies were held to launch the National Museum of the American Indian. The NMAI is part of the Smithsonian Institution museum system and is located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Native American consultants and curators were in charge of developing the building design, landscaping, and exhibit formats. The NMAI has been successful in giving Native Americans a forum for displaying themselves and their heritages from their own points of view.

In August 2005, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) banned the use of “hostile and abusive” Native American mascots from postseason tournaments, but they will still be allowed to be worn on uniforms during regular season play.

## <sup>15</sup> WORK

Native North Americans have the highest unemployment rate of all races in the United States and Canada. Unemployment soars as high as 90% during the winter months on some Canadian reserves. The average unemployment rate for Native

North Americans in the United States is consistently more than twice the national average. Of those who are employed, many work seasonal jobs. Native Americans in the United States have the second lowest median household income, \$32,116, while whites have the highest at \$46,305, according to the 2000 Census data.

The General Allotment Act of 1887 (also known as the Dawes Act) prevented Native North American business development on U.S. reservations by dividing the lands up into small, non-adjointing plots that were barely large enough to support subsistence farming. Farming and ranching for profit were impossible, and Native North Americans were not given the education or vocational training necessary to begin other types of businesses. Canadian reserves were also much too small, and located in areas too poor in resources, to support large-scale operations. When educational opportunities improved for Native North Americans so that they could gain the necessary skills to compete in the business world, most of the choicest niches for profitable enterprise had already been filled by European Americans and Canadians.

However, Natives in both the United States and Canada have managed to create business opportunities for themselves, including small retail operations, construction companies, hotels, tourist facilities, gas stations, commercial fishing, logging and other work in the forestry industry, Native arts and crafts production, and gambling establishments.

One of the most successful businesses owned and run by Native North Americans is the Blackfeet Writing Company in Montana which makes pens and pencils. In the United States, gambling establishments, such as bingo halls and casinos, have become a leading source of income on many reservations since the Federal Indian Gambling Regulatory Act of 1988 made it legal for any federally recognized tribe to engage in gambling activities for profit. At least half of all U.S. tribes have bingo halls, and there are about 40 Native-run casinos in about a dozen U.S. states. The Florida Seminole tribe was the first to adopt reservation gambling as a source of income, in 1979. The total income from gambling on reservations was estimated to be \$25.7 billion in 2006. Gambling revenues are sometimes the only real source of income for smaller, poorer tribes.

Western-educated Native North Americans sometimes succeed in the European American work world, but the work schedule often conflicts with traditional life. Native North American culture is not based on the eight-hour workday or Monday-Friday workweek. Traditional Native religious ceremonies usually do not coincide with U.S. or Canadian official holidays, so it is often difficult for Native North American workers to get the necessary time off. Most jobs are off the reservation or reserve as well, forcing Native workers either to commute long distances daily or to live away from their families, returning only on weekends and/or vacations. This creates a great deal of stress for all concerned.

Because Native North American women have traditionally been responsible for taking care of the home and young children, fewer work at jobs outside the home than do women of European or African descent in the United States and Canada. This means that Native households are less likely to have two incomes on which to draw. (Women tend to be the ones to make traditional arts and crafts for sale, however, so in this way they help support their families financially.) To survive, many Native North Americans resort to leasing their land to

non-Natives, but the income they receive from these leasing arrangements is usually six to nine times lower than market value. Most Native North Americans, therefore, are relegated to work as small ranchers, laborers on commercial (non-Native) farms, and low-level workers in other non-Native businesses.

## 16 SPORTS

The best-known Native North American sport, named *lacrosse* by the French, was invented by the Iroquois centuries ago. It is now Canada's national sport. The Iroquois believe that their ancestors gave them the game to develop their endurance and make them great warriors. Traditionally, boys began learning to play at a very early age. Many Iroquois (boys and girls) still start lacrosse lessons as small children. Most traditional Native North American sports were used to develop the skills needed for survival.

Two modern world-class Native North American athletes are James Francis "Jim" Thorpe (1888–1953), of the Sac and Fox tribe, and Billy Mills (1938), an Oglala Sioux. Jim Thorpe won gold medals in the pentathlon and decathlon at the 1912 Olympic Games. Seven months later, he was stripped of the medals because it had been discovered that he had previously played semi-professional baseball for \$15 per week. The rules at that time stated that any athlete who had received pay for athletic performance was officially considered a professional and was therefore ineligible to participate in amateur competitions such as the Olympics. Seventy years later, the medals were restored to Thorpe posthumously during the 1984 Olympics, after a grass-roots campaign led to the discovery that complaints must be made within thirty days of competition. It had been seven months before complaints were lodged against Thorpe. Thorpe also held world records in track-and-field and was a college All-American in lacrosse, basketball, and football. After the 1912 Olympics, Thorpe played professional baseball from 1913–19, with a career batting average of .252. He then played professional football and became the first president of the American Professional Football Association. In 1950, the Associated Press declared Thorpe the greatest athlete of the first half of the 20th century. He was also named to both college and professional halls of fame.

Billy Mills won the 10,000-meter run at the 1964 Olympic Games and set a world record for the event. He was the first American ever to win a distance race at the Olympics. Completely unknown to the world, he was never expected to win and had to give the official his name when he crossed the finish line in first place. Mills later set another record for the six-mile run. He has become successful businessperson and Native North American activist.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional Native North American games are a form of education, either to teach spiritual truths or survival skills (such as dexterity and coordination). Almost all traditional games have music and sometimes dance elements. The most popular are hand games or stick games where one team sings while hiding an object and the other team then tries to guess where it is (sometimes while singing also). The songs are usually simple with repeated phrases, though they sometimes have complicated rhythms and multipart singing. Many Native North American games involve gambling. Gambling has always been a favorite form of entertainment among Native North Ameri-

cans, and now they are turning that pursuit to profit with bingo halls and casinos on their reservations, catering to Natives and non-Natives alike.

The Inuit peoples of the arctic and subarctic regions of Siberia and North America created a special game to develop manual dexterity. It has come to be known as "cat's cradle." In this game, a piece of string (or sinew) is tied into a continuous loop and then held with the fingers of both hands. By turning the fingers and hands in certain ways, the string is woven into different patterns, some of which can be quite elaborate. When one player has made a pattern, another player reaches in and takes the string onto her or his own hands in such a way as to create another pattern. Sometimes two players can create one pattern together by contributing one or two hands each. The Inuit have played cat's cradle for centuries.

A uniquely Native North American form of entertainment and recreation, called the *powwow*, has developed in the last 100 years. Powwows are gatherings in which Native North Americans from many tribes come together to sing, dance, gamble, and visit with friends and family. The main focus is on dancing, usually with a dance contest (with money as prizes). A few Native North Americans make their living by traveling from one powwow to the next, competing in the dance contests and collecting prize money. Only the best dancers can make enough money to support themselves this way. The dances are traditional ones, formerly used for religious ceremonies, and the costumes are often extravagant expressions of traditional ceremonial garb.

*Pau wau* was originally the Algonquin word for "medicine man" or "medicine woman" (or spiritual leader). Europeans who saw these pau waus dances thought the word referred to the entire ritual and eventually the word *powwow* came to be applied to tribal gatherings featuring costumed dance. The modern powwow began among the Plains tribes and eventually spread throughout the United States and Canada. Up until the 1970s, powwows only took place on reservations and reserves. Now some are held in convention centers and gymnasiums, or other large gathering places, in cities. There are more than 1,000 powwows each year, and an estimated 90% of Native North Americans attend at least one. Alcohol is banned at most powwows as a way to promote healthful recreation. The majority of powwows are open to non-Natives, though they must be respectful of Native customs and may be asked to leave at any time if they are not. Powwows serve as cultural revivals, as well as entertainment, for Native North Americans. Important persons and personal events are also honored at powwows, such as athletic achievements, scholarships, retirements, and deaths.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Native North American art is a continuation of traditional forms and methods that have been in existence for centuries. It is therefore impossible to distinguish "folk art" from so-called "fine art" or "high art" (see #14, "Cultural heritage" above). The increased interest in Native North American arts and crafts in recent decades has led to a booming business in counterfeit imitations made by non-Natives but sold as authentic Native North American art. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 gave the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (established in 1935) more power to prosecute counterfeiters and thereby protect themselves from this kind of theft.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems of Native North Americans have been discussed throughout this article. The forced removal of Native North Americans from their tribal lands by invading European Americans and Canadians, and the resulting disruption of their traditional ways, culture, and heritage, have led to high rates of alcoholism and suicide among Natives. Drug abuse is also on the rise. Poor lands and lack of economic opportunities on reservations and reserves create oppressive poverty and unemployment. Deep-seated racism and widespread discrimination in the larger European-dominated societies of the United States and Canada keep Native North Americans under the heel of that oppression. Though Native North American populations are increasing, the vast majority of those numbers are made up of "mixed-bloods," children of intertribal or interracial couples. Traditional lineages and tribal lifeways are becoming lost in the blur of racial and tribal blending. Finally, the generations of life on reserves and reservations, at the mercy of government handouts, has cultivated a mind-set of dependency on the part of modern Native North Americans. Attempts by Native activists to reclaim control of their economic and political lives are often met with fear and doubt on the part of older Natives. And the United States and Canadian governments are not quite ready to give up their hold on Native North American reins. So the political and economic tug-of-war continues between tribal and federal governments over lands, services, jurisdictions, and racial equality.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Many Native American groups recognize four genders: male, female, woman-man, and man-woman. It has been estimated that over 150 tribes recognize women-men, or *berdaches*. An additional 50 tribes also recognizes men-women; the fourth gender.

The general characteristics of berdaches include: (1) specialized occupational roles where the berdache performs the work of a woman; (2) gender differentiation where berdaches are distinguished from both men and women in terms of dress, temperament, lifestyle, and other social characteristics; (3) spiritual intervention where berdaches are believed to be the result of a spiritual intervention in the form of visions or dreams; and, (4) same sex relationships where berdaches typically form sexual and emotional relationships with other men who are not berdaches. The most salient marker of berdache gender status is some manner of cross-dressing. A heightened sexuality is also a general characteristic of berdaches as well as men-women. Among the Pawnee, berdaches provide men with love charms to attract women.

From the European and American perspectives, the structure of Native American society lacked the complexity of their own communities. Yet by their own accounts of Eastern Woodland peoples, the tribes' division of labor and gender roles was actually very advanced, especially where the status of women was concerned. Whereas married women in Europe held few rights to their property, family wealth, or even children, women of the Eastern Woodland tribes had much greater power and autonomy over their produce, conditions of labor, and property. In many Eastern Woodlands tribes, women even served as representatives on the tribal councils and held rights to the lands they worked. While "women's work" was undervalued in many European cultures, women's daily contributions were

recognized by men in many of the Eastern Woodlands tribes as crucial to the prosperity of the community and worthy of respect and recognition.

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—revised by J. Williams

# NAVAJOS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Diné

**LOCATION:** United States (Arizona; New Mexico; Colorado; Utah)

**POPULATION:** 269,202 (2000 census)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Navajo

**RELIGION:** Native American Church; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Navajos are descended from a band of Athabascans who split off from the rest of the Athabascans in Canada sometime around AD 850 and migrated southward. About 200 years later, they settled in what is now north-central New Mexico among Pueblo peoples who had lived there since AD 400. Though the Navajos were originally hunter-gatherers, they were very adaptable people who adopted some of their Pueblo neighbors' ways. Pueblo Indians were farmers, and the Navajos learned from them how to cultivate corn and other crops. They made the shift from hunter-gatherers to agriculturalists so successfully that they came to be known as the Navajo—a name that most likely comes from the Tewa word *návahu'u*, or “the arroyo (riverbed) with the cultivated fields.” The Navajo call themselves *Diné*, or “the People.” The first recorded mention of the Navajos is from an account written in 1626 by Fray Zárate Salmerón. By the 1630s the Navajo had definitely become a large and powerful tribe, spreading across northern New Mexico into eastern Arizona. At this time they still hunted and gathered some of their food, and they supplemented their supplies by raiding other villages. But they had also begun to live in semi-permanent homes and grow crops, such as corn, beans, and squash. The preferred type of dwelling was the hogan, a dome-shaped structure (usually round, but sometimes hexagonal or octagonal) built of logs covered with mud, or sometimes rocks, with a central air vent in the roof. After the Spanish arrived in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Navajo adopted the use of horses and began to raise livestock such as sheep, goats, and cattle. The traits the Navajo borrowed from both the Pueblo Indians and the Spanish eventually distinguished them from their Apache relatives (also descended from the same Canadian Athabascans).

Conflicts between the Navajos and first the Spanish, then European Americans, escalated during the 19th century. Raids by the Navajo on Spanish settlers, and then European American travelers and settlers, continued despite peace-keeping efforts by the Spanish, however, and the U.S. Army finally decided to do something about the “Navajo problem.” U.S. Army General James Carleton began a campaign to round up all the Navajos and incarcerate them in a concentration camp called Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. Carleton enlisted Christopher “Kit” Carson to help. Together they burned Navajo villages, destroyed their crops (including extensive peach orchards in the Canyon de Chelly), and drove all Navajos who refused to surrender into the mountains to freeze and starve. Eventually, all the Navajos who had not been killed, or had not died of starvation and exposure, surrendered to Carleton and Carson and allowed themselves to be marched to the camp. The route was 370 miles, or 470 by an alternate route, and the Na-

vajos covered it entirely on foot. It is remembered as the “Long Walk of the Navajos.” Hundreds died en route, and hundreds more died from the horrible conditions at the camp once they arrived. A few escaped to try to survive in the inaccessible canyons of the area. Conditions at Bosque Redondo were so bad that even European Americans complained about the mistreatment of the Native North Americans there. The U.S. Army decided to relieve General Carleton of his duty in 1866, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs took over management of the Navajos and others at Bosque Redondo. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. government established a reservation for the Navajos on their former homelands, though the reservation covered only a small portion of their original territory.

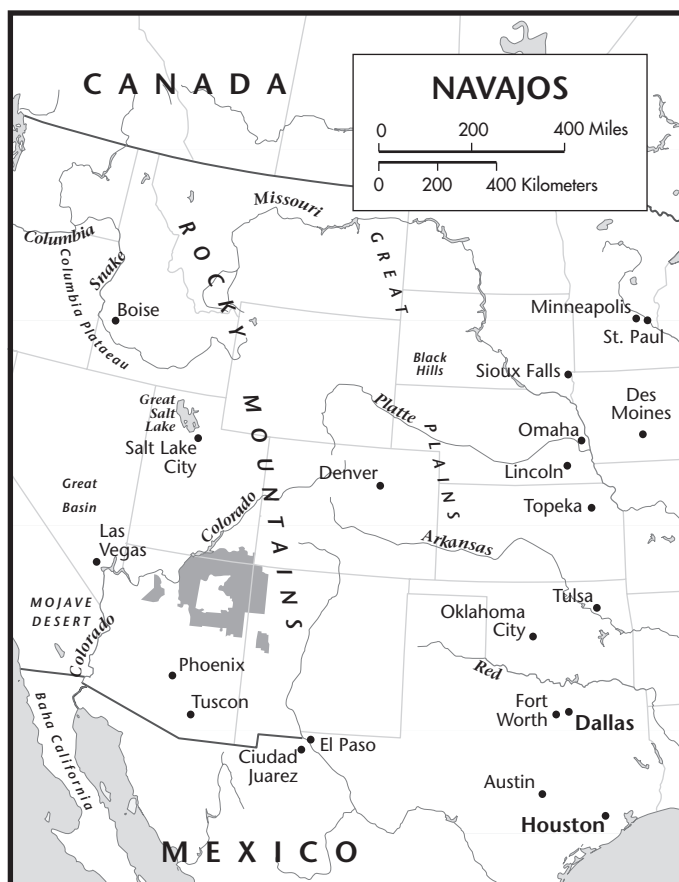
Some 25 Navajos volunteered to serve in the U.S. military during World War I in 1917–18. By the time of World War II (1939–45) Native North Americans were draftable U.S. citizens. As a result, at least 3,600 Navajos served in that war. The most famous and honored of those World War II Navajo servicemen were the Navajo Code Talkers, a group of 420 Navajo men who devised a code based on the Navajo language that was used for military purposes in the Pacific campaign. The Japanese never broke the code. In 1938 the Navajo Tribal Council had been formed to represent the interests of all Navajos. In 1969 the Navajo Tribal Council passed a resolution to call their land “the Navajo Nation.” The Navajo Nation is currently the largest reservation-based Native North American tribe in the United States. The government of the Navajo Tribal Council was reorganized after the conviction of Chairman Peter MacDonald on 41 counts of corruption in 1989. Executive, judicial, and legislative branches have been established with a system of checks and balances.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Navajo reservation is located in the Four Corners area of the United States (where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah have a common corner). Most of the reservation lies in Arizona, with the eastern border extending into New Mexico and a small southern portion in Utah. The total area of the reservation is approximately 25,000 sq mi, comprising some 17 million acres. The entire area is an almost level plateau with an average elevation of 5,500 feet. Mountains in some places rise to over 10,000 feet, and deep canyons cut through the plateau. The region is desert or semi-desert with very little rainfall. It is difficult to farm without irrigation. Winters are quite cold, and summers are hot. Navajos also live on other small reservations, such as Ramah in northwestern New Mexico (about 540 square miles, supporting a population of more than 2,000 Navajos), the Alamo (or Puertocito) Navajos in New Mexico (with a population of more than 1,900), and the Cañoncito Navajos, also in New Mexico, with a population of over 1,650. Over 25,000 Navajos also live in the “checkerboard area,” which covers the range east of the main Navajo reservation to the Jicarilla Apache reservation in New Mexico. This region is called the “checkerboard area” because lands were allotted in such a way that each alternate square mile belongs to Native North Americans, and the others belong to European Americans.

The total population of Navajos in 2000 census was nearly 300,000. The number of Navajos living on reservations in that year was about 174,000—the largest reservation-based Native North American population in the United States. The main Navajo reservation is by far the largest Native North American





reservation in the United States: it contains a total of 17 million acres.

The Cañoncito Navajos descend from those who favored peace with the European Americans and even worked as scouts for the U.S. Army in campaigns against their own people. Because of this, they came to be known to other Navajos as “Enemy Diné.” That negative name was dropped some time ago.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Navajo language is part of the Athabascan (also Athapascan) family of Native North American languages. At least 125,000 Navajos were still fluent in their native tongue in 1987. The Navajo language is one of the few Native North American languages that has been fully documented. Current education policies among the Navajo aim at restoring the language to its mother-tongue status among Navajos. All Navajo-run education is done in both English and Navajo.

Though all Native North American cultures were (and still are, to a large extent) oral cultures, transmitting all information through songs, stories, and chants, the Navajos developed especially long chants compared to other Native North Americans.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Navajos tell of their creation with an emergence-type story. First Man and First Woman lived in the first or Black World. When the insect beings that also lived there began to quarrel, First Man and First Woman were forced to leave that world

through the east and emerge into the second or Blue World. The Blue World was populated by blue-feathered birds and other animals and beings that did not get along. First Man and First Woman eventually moved to the third or Yellow World where they lived with Coyote (the Navajo trickster figure), Bluebird, and other beings. When Coyote stole the Water Baby, Water Monster flooded the Yellow World. First Man quickly ordered everyone to climb into a reed that gave them entrance into the fourth world. In the fourth world the people discovered that Coyote had stolen the Water Baby. When Coyote took Water Baby back to its mother, the waters receded immediately. However, the beings already living in the fourth world required the entering third-world beings to pass certain tests in order to live there. Locust, the being chosen to take the tests, passed them all, and the people entered safely into the fourth world.

Later, First Man and First Woman formed the four sacred mountains with dirt they had brought from the first (Black) world. Their daughter, White Shell Woman, later gave birth to twin sons. The Twins became the settlers of the Navajo lands and established the plant crops and animals given to them by their father, the Sun. The Twins are regarded as sacred.

Changing Woman is the mother of the four main Navajo clans. She took the people of the clans to the San Francisco Peaks, where the spiritual beings gave the Navajo people their language and also taught them how to use it in prayers and songs. Another important figure is Spider Woman, who taught the Twins how to overcome adversity.

Between AD 700 and 1400, the majority of Navajos gradually followed the San Juan River and migrated to the southwestern United States.

### 5 RELIGION

According to the Navajo, the universe has two classes of people: human beings and Holy People (supernatural beings). The universe functions according to a fixed set of rules, and these rules must be learned and followed to ensure safety. *Hózhó* is the Navajo concept of beauty, harmony, balance, health, goodness, etc. Ceremonies are performed to maintain or restore *hózhó*. There are six main groups of ceremonies: Blessing Way (to gain the good will of the Holy People and bring good fortune); War (no longer practiced); Game Way (hunting rituals—no longer practiced); Holy Way (to attract good); Evil Way, or Ghost Way (to exorcise evil), and Life Way (to cure bodily injuries). Each group of ceremonies contains a number of specific ceremonies. For example, the Holy Way group includes Beauty Way (if snakes have been offended), Shooting Way (if thunder and lightning must be appeased), and Mountain Top Way (for conflict with bears). Each ceremony has its own set of chants, and every chant has its own particular sand painting. Two important ceremonies for the Navajos are the *nidáá'* (called the “squaw dance” by European Americans), which is a three-day healing ceremony held in the summer, and the *yé'ii bicheii* (or Night Way), which is a nine-day healing ceremony held in the winter.

There are about 1,200 different designs for traditional sand paintings for use in specific ceremonies to treat specific illnesses. Details of each of these designs is handed down by memory from one healer to the next. Each chant also has its own songs, prayers, and herbal medicines. Blessing Way songs are sung in approval of a new headman, for an impending birth, for men

leaving for or returning from military service, marriages, and girls' puberty ceremonies.

Navajos believe that diseases and accidents result from an attack by the Holy People in return for some transgression or offense by the victim. The curing ceremony mends the wrong done. If the person is not cured after the ceremony, this means that the actual wrong that person committed has not yet been uncovered, and the search must continue. The cost of ceremonies is borne by the patient or her or his family. The Blessing Way is the backbone of the Navajo ceremonial system. It is performed frequently throughout the year. Other ceremonies are more specific, or more extensive, and are therefore only performed on occasion or at certain times of the year.

Peyotism took hold among the Navajos around the 1930s. Peyote, first described as a "narcotic cactus," was used as a sacrament and for religious purposes, but its use was prohibited on the Navajo reservation. In 1955 its use was approved by the Tribal Council. About 25,000 Navajos now belong to the Native American Church (incorporated as the peyote religion), and as many as 12,000 more probably attend services without being registered on the rolls. Many Navajos are also at least nominally Christian, though even Christian Navajos usually continue to practice their native religion. One of the keys to understanding the Navajo religion is recognizing that they focus on living well in the world rather than focusing on an afterlife, and they seek to live in harmony with nature.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As U.S. citizens, Navajos celebrate the Fourth of July, or Independence Day, and Christian Navajos celebrate Christian holidays.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The most important rite of passage still celebrated among the Navajo is the *kinaaldá*—the girls' puberty rite. The ceremonies last for more than four days and involve foot races and other rituals related to the ceremony.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Navajos communicate by listening quietly to one another. They speak slowly and thoughtfully, as if they are "weaving" their words. They also make decisions slowly, talking and thinking things over for a long time. Traditionally, Navajos preferred to reach consensus rather than letting majority rule. Today, their government is based on majority rule.

Sharing and reciprocity are central to Navajo interpersonal relations. If a favor is done, a favor can be expected in return, if an injury is done, an injury can be expected in return, unless some kind of compensation is provided: in other words, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," in both good and bad ways. Navajos are very generous as well and share what they have with those in need. However, in response to the modern world around them, Navajos are becoming more aggressive.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Some Navajos still live in traditional hogans (round, or sometimes hexagonal or octagonal dwellings built of logs and mud, or rocks, with a central air vent in the roof). Most today, however, live either in modernized hogans or Western-style homes or trailers. Almost all homes, whether modern or traditional,

are still built facing east, an ancient Navajo custom. The Western-style housing provided by the government at low cost on the Navajo reservations does not always fit well with the Navajo lifestyle. In addition, the cheap, lightweight construction often cannot stand up to rough use. Also, maintenance is neglected and funds for upkeep are often difficult to obtain. Most Navajo homes are still without telephones, and those in more remote or isolated areas of the reservations have no running water or electricity. Some families must haul water many miles to use for bathing and cooking. Water conservation is of utmost importance.

Navajos have many health problems stemming from poverty, lack of access to modern health care, the effects of coal and uranium mining (such as very high cancer rates), and pollution in the water, soil, and air. In 1979, near Gallup, New Mexico, gallons of radioactive water accidentally spilled into the Puerco River from the United Nuclear Corporation's uranium mill, making the water undrinkable. It remains undrinkable today both from the uranium spill and other sources of pollution. The Navajo health care system incorporates both Western and traditional Navajo healing methods. New Indian Health Service hospitals provide a room in which traditional Navajo healers may conduct curing ceremonies. Navajo health was greatly improved by Annie Wauneka, who headed a crusade against tuberculosis in the mid-20th century. The number of Navajos with the disease was reduced by almost half between the years of 1953 and 1960. Wauneka received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963 for her work.

A road-improvement campaign on Navajo reservations in recent years has led to many miles of paved roads and even more graveled ones (as opposed to the dirt tracks common and sufficient before the increased use of automobiles).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family and clan are central to Navajo life. It is believed that every full-blooded Navajo is generally related to no fewer than 12 clans. Clan relationships can be quite complex. Matrilineal and matrilocal, Navajos trace their descent through their mothers, and newly married couples live near the wife's mother. The home, crops, and livestock are owned and cared for by women, while the men represent their families in public and at ceremonials. Extended families are very important to Navajos, with Grandmother holding a place of great respect.

## 11 CLOTHING

Navajo men today wear Western-style clothing for everyday use: denim jeans, colorful shirts, cowboy boots, and Stetson hats, if they can afford them. Older women tend to wear more traditional dress, dating back to the 1860s: long, full, colorful skirts with velveteen blouses. For very special occasions, some women wear a *biil* (blanket dress), worn with buckskin leggings. Some Navajos still wear leather moccasins for everyday purposes. Navajos are known for their silver and turquoise jewelry.

## 12 FOOD

Although many Navajo children are fond of hamburgers, pizza, fried chicken, French fries, and soft drinks, mutton stew and fry bread are favorite foods for many Navajos. No Navajo gathering is complete without one or more booths making



*A Navajo family in Winslow, Arizona. (© Visions of America, LLC/Alamy)*

and/or selling mutton stew and fry bread. Navajo fry bread is fairly simple to make; the recipe follows:

#### **Navajo Fry Bread**

4 cups flour (the modern standard is Bluebird brand milled wheat flour, though any brand will do—white flour makes lighter, fluffier breads)  
 ½ teaspoon salt  
 2 teaspoons baking powder  
 1 cup powdered milk  
 Warm water  
 Vegetable oil for frying

Sift dry ingredients (flour, salt, baking powder, and powdered milk) together into a large bowl. Stir in water a little at a time until dough is soft. Knead dough with hands until smooth. Cover bowl with cloth and let dough “rest” for about 2 hours. Pat or roll 2” balls of dough into circles about 8 inches in diameter and ¼ inch thick. Make a small hole in the center of each circle of dough with your finger. Pour vegetable oil in frying pan or electric skillet to a depth of about ½ inch. Heat oil to 400° (or until a small pinch of dough browns quickly but does not burn). Slide a circle of dough into hot oil—dough will puff up as it cooks. Turn bread over when top is golden brown and fry for one or two more minutes. Repeat with remaining breads. Serve hot, with honey or cinnamon-sugar, or just plain. Serves about 6 people.

(Recipe courtesy of the Navajo Nation Division of Education.)

### **13 EDUCATION**

Navajos today place a great emphasis on education. The Navajo Nation has set up a multimillion-dollar scholarship fund to help worthy Navajo students attend the college or university of their choice. In 1987, more than 4,000 Navajos were students in higher education. The first college ever founded and run by Native North Americans was the Navajo Community College (NCC), opened on the Navajo Reservation in January 1969, near Tsaile, Arizona. Students at NCC are taught to be bilingual, with classes in both Navajo and English. Navajo culture and language is also taught at NCC.

Plans for Ramah Navajo High School began in 1970, the first Native North American-controlled high school since the closing of the Five Civilized Tribes’ school systems by the U.S. government in the early 1900s. The educational goals of Ramah High School are to make students bilingual in Navajo and English; to develop their self-esteem as Navajos; to teach them to be analytical and critical of all things, including Navajo history and culture; and to give them the skills they need to be successful in today’s world. Ramah children are “children of the Navajo Nation.” In 1991, about 70% of Navajo children attended public schools. One recent study found that of Navajos 25 years old and older about 50% had graduated from high school, 25% had some college, only 4.5% had completed college to receive a Bachelor of Arts or higher degree, and 28% had less than a ninth grade education.

The federal Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) has provided Navajo workers with jobs and job training since the 1970s.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Navajo culture is orally transmitted, since for most of Navajo history there was no written language (today, Navajo is written with an adapted Roman alphabet). Because religion cannot be separated from the rest of Navajo life, all music and oral literature was traditionally associated with religious rites, ceremonies, and teaching stories. Today, Navajos are writing works of literature, such as poet Rex Lee Jim, who has published several books of poetry in Navajo.

Navajo rugs and silver and turquoise jewelry have transcended the level of craft to become fine arts. Rug weaving, done on an upright loom adapted long ago from the neighboring Pueblo tribes, is traditionally a woman's art, with patterns passed down from mother to daughter. Intricately patterned rugs are woven without a printed design to follow. The designs are instead kept entirely in the woman's memory. Silver and turquoise jewelry is crafted by both men and women. Navajo jewelry has come to be highly prized by investors and collectors worldwide.

Sand paintings began as a religious tradition and have recently become a sought-after art form. Sand paintings made for show and/or sale are altered enough in design so as not to offend the Holy People. Traditionally made for use in curing ceremonies, sand paintings have specific designs for treating specific illnesses. In all, there were about 1,200 individual designs that healers had to memorize. Today those 1,200 designs have been supplemented by the secular patterns used for non-religious sand paintings. A traditional sand painting may range in size from 1 to 12 feet in diameter (if circular, or the equivalent if square or rectangular), but most are about 6 feet by 6 feet. They are done with sand colored with natural dyes on a tan sand base. Designs are made up of angular figures made of straight lines and zigzags, representing Navajo spirits, scenery, animals, corn, sun, sky, and rainbows. A sand painting often takes hours to complete. When finished, in a healing ceremony the ill person sits in the center of the painting and the healer transfers the orderly goodness of the painting into the patient and transfers the illness from the patient into the painting. The sand painting is then erased at the end of the ceremony.

## 15 WORK

Most Navajos are small farmers and herders. Some Navajos serve in the U.S. armed forces. Others work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), state, or Navajo tribe. Some find seasonal off-reservation employment. The timber industry and Navajo Tribal Utility generating plant provide some revenue and employment for the Navajo Nation, but unemployment on the reservation remains high. Silversmithing, performed by both men and women, was a traditional source of income, but today crafts are only a minor source. Women have been the most dependable source of income for generations through their weaving of Navajo rugs for sale. The Navajo Nation also leases land to oil and gas companies for drilling, and to mining companies for the extraction of vanadium, uranium, coal, sand, and gravel. But the Navajos get very little return from these operations. The Fort Defiance industrial park financed and built by Navajos and now leased to General Dynamics provides a somewhat better return, but poverty, unemployment, and underemployment are still serious problems for the Navajo Nation. The overall Navajo unemployment rate has remained constant at

nearly 40% since the 1990s. Many Navajos must leave home to find work in cities.

## 16 SPORTS

Rodeo is very popular among the Navajos. Dine College even has a rodeo coach on staff. Winning top honors at the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association Finals is considered a high achievement.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Navajo Nation Fair, held in Window Rock, Arizona, for nine days each year in September, is the largest such fair in the United States. The smaller Northern Navajo Fair is held in Shiprock, New Mexico, usually the first weekend in October. Both fairs feature competitions in traditional song and dance.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Rug weaving and jewelry making are crafts that have risen to the status of fine arts, along with the making of sand paintings. The traditional crafts of basketry and pottery are currently being revived. Pottery and basketry are considered women's crafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Like most Native North Americans today, Navajos suffer from widespread alcoholism and drug abuse. Perpetual conflicts exist between more "traditional" Navajos, who want to continue living in traditional ways, and the more "progressive" Navajos, usually the younger generations, who want to modernize life on the reservation. Navajos have a high rate of suicide, even among Native North Americans (all of whom have higher suicide rates than all other races in the United States and Canada). Child abuse is also becoming a serious problem in Navajo society.

The Navajo homelands, or *Dinéétah*, are being destroyed by environmental damage from oil drilling, mining operations, and overgrazing. Efforts to restore the lands to health are insufficient and not very successful so far. Since 1974, the Navajos have been embroiled in a conflict over what was known as the Joint Use Area—a region shared with Hopi Indians since the late 19th century. In 1874, the U.S. Congress passed a bill that partitioned the area between the Hopis and Navajos, requiring about 100 Hopis and thousands of Navajos to relocate. Many of these people had been living on that land for generations. After years of wrangling with each other, the Hopis and Navajos realized that it is not they but the Peabody Coal mining company that wants this land partitioned (the coal company wants access to the coal located there). The Navajo Nation joined the Hopi Tribe in filing a joint lawsuit against Peabody Coal in May of 2000. The Hopi and Navajo are asking for \$600 million in lost revenue.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Navajo ideology, there are four separate cultural categories of gender: women, men, *nádleehé*, and *dilbaa*. *Nádleehé* is "a person who is in a constant state of change," but is a feminine persona who was born with both male and female genitalia and dresses and functions in Navajo society as a woman. *Dilbaa* were persons born with both male and female genitalia but in adult life dressed and functioned as men. The *dilbaa* was the first of these gender categories to disappear

from Navajo gender classification; the process began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. *Nádleehé* are still recognized and still can be found in Navajo society today.

The sex of a child, while determined at conception in Navajo traditional belief, can be externally influenced both before and after conception. Navajo parents believe that there are many concrete procedures that can be followed to influence the sex of child; however, that only relates to the categories of males and females, not to that of *nádleehé* and *dilbaa*.

Boys and girls enter adulthood at the onset of puberty. For boys, this is signaled by the deepening of the voice, and for girls, by the onset of menstruation. The *kinaaldá* ceremony mentioned in section 7 above is the girl's puberty ceremony that socializes her into the role of an adult woman. For boys, there are several ceremonies that prepare them for the roles they assume as adult men in Navajo society.

In Navajo oral history, there was a separation between men and women. The two lived apart from each other for four years. After that time, both realized that they could not live without the other and rejoined. Men and women agreed to assume separate but complementary roles and responsibilities. Women were in charge of the household, the livestock, the agricultural fields and the products thereof. Men were in charge of hunting, politics, and ceremonies. This complementary division continues in modern Navajo society and has even been applied to the modern political arena of the Navajo Nation government where men are in control.

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—revised by J. Williams

# NICARAGUANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Nicas

**LOCATION:** Nicaragua

**POPULATION:** 5,785,846 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English; indigenous dialects

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism (Moravian church)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Spanish conquest of Nicaragua in the 1520s was a tragedy for the locals. The native population plummeted from more than a million to a few thousand due to the spread of Old World diseases and the mistreatment of the aborigine inhabitants after the imposition of slavery. During the colonial period, Nicaragua was weak and neglected, subject to destructive earthquakes, and plagued by raids from English, Dutch, and French buccaneers. The Caribbean coast was effectively under British control from 1687 until 1894. Nicaragua was one of the five provinces of Central America that declared independence from Spain in 1821. In 1838 it declared its independence from the federation that followed. William Walker, an American adventurer, exploited internal rivalries to briefly install himself as president during the 1850s. A half-century of peace and relative prosperity, during which many coffee and banana plantations were established, followed Walker's execution in neighboring Honduras.

In 1893, José Santos Zelaya, a fervent liberal, was elected president of the country. Zelaya was convinced that the reunification of Central America under one administration would bring peace and development to the region. He also was reluctant to allow international capital because it could undermine Nicaraguan sovereignty. Consequently, he refused to grant the United States canal-building rights on concessionary terms, thus encouraging Americans to choose Panama for the project.

In this tense environment, the United States backed up the conservative opposition in order to destabilize Zelaya's government. U.S. Marines landed in Nicaragua in 1909 and were kept there almost continuously from 1912 to 1933 to support a series of conservative regimes such as Emiliano Chamorro's (1917–1921) and Diego Chamorro's (1921–1923). The Bryan-Chamorro treaty gave the United States exclusive canal rights and allowed it to establish naval bases on Nicaraguan soil. Augusto César Sandino, the principal liberal leader, fought the U.S. occupation. Sandino won popularity in the Americas and in a few months became not just a national but also a regional hero. Sandino led guerrilla warfare against the government. Sandino was kidnapped and assassinated in 1934 and Anastasio Somoza attained power.

The Somoza family ruled Nicaragua with an iron hand from 1936 to 1979. Nicaragua experienced high economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s, largely as a result of industrialization, and became one of Central America's most developed nations despite its political instability. In 1972 a major earthquake destroyed 90% of the capital city of Managua. While the population was in a precarious situation, Somoza and his allies profited privately from international aid programs. In response to this governmental behavior, the Sandinista National Libera-

tion Front (FSLN) was able to overthrow the Somoza administration in 1979, following a struggle that killed an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 people. The new administration inherited a devastated country.

Alarmed by the Sandinistas' warm ties with the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the insurgents in El Salvador, the United States imposed a trade embargo and sent money and arms to resistance groups known collectively as the Contras. The Contras established its main bases in the border of Honduras and Costa Rica, and in the mid-1980s they reached the astonishing number of 15,000 soldiers. Some 30,000 people died in the decade-long struggle. A 1989 cease-fire was followed by elections in which the Sandinistas were defeated and surrendered political power to the UNO opposition coalition led by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Chamorro's main contribution was the disarmament of groups in the northern and central areas of the country, which provided the necessary stability to allow the country to follow an institutional path toward democracy.

In 1996, Arnoldo Alemán won the presidency backed by the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). The PLC won the 2001 presidential race, this time with Enrique Bolaños in the ticket. During Bolaños administration, former president Alemán was charged with corruption and money laundering, and sentenced to 20 years in prison. In 2006, Daniel Ortega—former guerrilla leader and member of the junta that took power in 1979—was elected president of Nicaragua.

Economically, Nicaragua has experienced with widespread underemployment. About 48% of its population was living under the poverty level in 2005. Nicaragua has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the world and the lowest per capita income in the Western Hemisphere.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America, at about the size of New York State. It is bounded on the north by Honduras, on the south by Costa Rica, on the east by the Caribbean Sea, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. The central highlands, including a belt of mountains, 25 of them volcanic, separate the Pacific lowlands from the more extensive Caribbean lowlands (the Miskito Coast), which occupy the eastern half of the country. Lake Nicaragua in the southwest is the largest lake in Central America and has the unusual distinction of being the only lake inhabited by freshwater sharks.

More than 50% of Nicaraguans live in the Pacific lowlands and about 33% live in the central highlands; fewer than 10% live in the hot and swampy Caribbean lowlands. Some 69% of the people are mestizo, of mixed ethnic Spanish and indigenous descent. About 17% are of European descent, about 9% are Black, and 5% are native Amerindian.

Nicaragua is rich in natural resources. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing support 40% of the labor force. In addition, the country has important deposits of gold, silver, zinc, and copper. Moreover, the forest supplies vast quantities of hardwoods and softwoods and the long, coastal waters contain abundant fish. Cattle are also a significant resource for basic staples, such as meat and milk. During the mid-1990s, Nicaragua's main export products were coffee, seafood, beef, and sugar.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official and predominant language spoken in Nicaragua. Speech tends to be "aspirated," especially in words



ending with the letter "s." As in some other Spanish American countries, *vos* tends to replace *tú* as the singular familiar pronoun, with corresponding changes in verb conjugations. Nicas, as the people call themselves, are known for the quantity and variety of irreverent and off-color jokes in their everyday speech.

English is the predominant language in the Caribbean half of the country, as well as in the capital city, and is the native tongue of the Creoles, Blacks who came from Jamaica and other British West Indies islands as laborers on banana plantations. The Miskito, Nicaragua's main indigenous group, also live in this region. Of mixed Indian, African, and European ancestry, they speak an Indian language related to the Chibcha of South America.

As in many Latin American nations, people have two family names: the mother's family name, which acts as a surname, followed by the father's family name. For example, Mario Garcia Sanchez would be addressed as Señor Garcia.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Spanish folk practices survived in Nicaragua in combination with Amerindian folklore, which attributed the very creation of the world to magic. A lively traffic in witchcraft developed from these roots. Love potions, for example, can always find customers. Folk medicine relies both on knowledge of plants native to Nicaragua and on superstition that derives from the Indian and Spanish past. The *cuadro*, or picture of a saint found in most households, is often credited with magical pow-

ers derived from native cult idols. Feasts for local patron saints are often held at the times of planting and harvesting and reflect folk beliefs that divine intervention will result in bountiful crops.

In the Indian mythology found in Nicaragua at the time of the Spanish conquest, the Corn Goddess Cinteotl was an aspect of the Mother Goddess Chicomecoatl. A feast called Xóchitl was held annually in honor of Cinteotl. Soups and fermented drinks derived from corn preserve some of the ritual significance once attributed to that most basic, and hence sacred, grain.

Nicaraguan folk literature abounds in tall tales and fantastic heroes, such as Pedro Urdemales. In fables, the jokester and trickster Uncle Rabbit constantly outwits Uncle Coyote.

## 5 RELIGION

Approximately 90% of Nicaraguans are Roman Catholic. City dwellers and those from the middle and upper classes are most likely to attend Mass and receive the sacraments. The lower classes tend to be less religious. There is a shortage of priests, and the Church's ability to reach people in rural areas is limited. During the civil war, the bishops were hostile to the ruling Sandinistas, but some priests and nuns have been activists who employ Marxist terminology in what has been described as "liberation theology."

The 10% of the population that are Protestant chiefly live in the Caribbean part of the nation. The Moravian Church is dominant in this region; almost all Miskito and many Creoles are Moravian. Pentecostal churches have made important gains among Nicaragua's poor. The Assemblies of God is the largest of the Pentecostal denominations.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

*La Purísima* is the most important holiday in Nicaragua. This is a weeklong celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. Elaborate altars to the Virgin Mary are erected or decorated in homes and workplaces, and people, especially children, go from altar to altar singing songs and reciting prayers.

The *posadas* are nine consecutive nights, ending on Christmas Eve (December 24), dedicated to nightly caroling processions commemorating the Holy Family's wanderings in search of shelter in Bethlehem. Holy Week (Easter, in late March or early April) processions are most impressive in Leon and Granada. Managua holds a fiesta in honor of St. Dominic, the city's patron saint, between August 1 and 10. Masaya has a notable feast to St. Jerome on September 30, complete with Indian dancers in costume, and a pilgrimage on March 16 in which the Virgin of Masaya and the Christ of Miracles of Nindirí is taken down to Lake Masaya, whose waters are blessed.

An important secular holiday is Independence Day on September 15, which commemorates the 1821 Central American declaration of independence from Spain. Liberation Day on July 19 marks the 1979 overthrow of the Somoza regime.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The baptism ceremony for the newly born is important. Godparents are responsible for the ceremony and the festivities that follow, and they are expected to concern themselves with the welfare of the child and to provide aid in times of hardship. A child receiving First Communion, usually at the age of nine,

is given many gifts. A girl's 15th birthday is often celebrated as denoting that she has come of age. Among the middle and upper classes, dating does not begin until later. Among adults, birthdays have little importance, but the person's saint's day may be marked. Death may be accompanied by a novena for the deceased as well as by the funeral ceremony.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Hispanic style of greeting is generally more demonstrative than in the United States, and among Hispanic Nicaraguans it tends to be more gregarious and demonstrative than most. Friends almost always shake hands when greeting and parting and often embrace. Women often kiss on one or both cheeks as well as embracing. People often stand closer to one another in conversation than is customary in the United States. A common casual greeting, especially among teenagers, is "Hola" ("Hi").

Visitors may drop in on friends without previous arrangement. Calling cards are often exchanged in social situations as well as in business relations. People of some social standing are greeted with respectful titles, such as *Señor*, *Señora*, and *Señorita* (Mr., Mrs., and Miss, respectively). Older people are often addressed by the respectful titles of *don* or *doña*. Titles reflecting professional attainment are also in common use.

The concept of honor is important in Nicaragua and is upheld vigorously. Personal criticism is considered to be in poor taste. Urban residents are more cosmopolitan, adopting "modern" values, but people in rural areas tend to be more traditional. The concept of *machismo*, in which men are seen as more important than women, is still common in rural areas.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The civil war of the 1980s left a bitter legacy as Nicaragua plunged to last place among Central American countries in national income. Indeed, the standard of living fell to that of 1960 or even before. In the mid 1990s, some 75% of Nicaraguans were living below the poverty line.

The Sandinista regime substantially increased spending on health care, broadening and equalizing access to services. There was a substantial drop in infant mortality and the transmission of communicable diseases. However, the system was increasingly strained by shortages of funds and the need to treat war victims. Because health care was subsidized under the Spanish, the economy suffered great damage. In the mid 1990s, most people had no choice but to rely on public facilities that were inadequately staffed, under equipped, and often mismanaged. Most people were malnourished, taking in well below the minimum recommended allowances of calories and protein.

Most people are also poorly sheltered. The national housing deficit, according to a 1990 estimate, was 420,600 units. In rural areas, the most basic dwelling is a dirt-floor straw or palm-frond hut supported by poles and sticks. Its counterpart in towns and cities is a low adobe structure with a tile roof. Squatter settlements are found on the outskirts of the cities. The more substantial homes of the middle and upper classes, of Spanish or Mediterranean style, are nevertheless sparing in ornament, their restraint perhaps reflecting the national vulnerability to earthquakes.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Nicaraguans turn to the family for support because community and church ties tend to be weak. Individuals are judged on the basis of their families, and careers are advanced through family ties. The nuclear family of father, mother, and children is fundamental, but the household may be augmented by a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or orphaned children. Newly married couples may take up residence with one or the other set of parents. Godparents, although unrelated by blood or marriage, are also important to the family structure.

Except for the middle and upper classes, marriage is not often formalized, although both civil and church ceremonies have the force of law, and common-law unions were given legal status in the 1980s. The birth rate is high, with the average woman giving birth to nearly six children during her child-bearing years. Abortion is illegal except to save the woman's life, but it is not uncommon. Women have major representation in the government, unions, and social organizations, but not in business. Many are heads of households and, in addition to their domestic duties, have joined the labor force in small-scale commerce, personal services, low-wage sectors such as the garment industry, and, to an increasing degree, in harvesting plantation crops.

## 11 CLOTHING

Typically, women wear simple cotton dresses, while many men wear work shirts, jeans, sneakers or sandals, and straw hats. Even businessmen will often wear sport shirts, or doff their jackets in hot weather in favor of the *guayabera*—a long cotton shirt.

Traditional dress for women varies. In Masaya it consists of a long, loose cotton skirt and short-sleeved cotton blouse, in red, blue, green, or yellow. The fringes of the skirt and blouse and the waistline are embroidered. A shawl is thrown over the shoulder, and a necklace and earrings are worn, with flowers in the hair. For men the native costume is blue cotton trousers, a long-sleeved collarless white cotton shirt, a sheathed machete strapped to the waist, a high-peaked straw hat, and sandals. (Women go barefoot.) More elaborate costumes are worn only for folk dances.

## 12 FOOD

Beans, which provide the main source of protein, and corn tortillas, are the basics of the Nicaraguan diet. Nicaraguans like *gallo pinto*—small red beans with rice—for breakfast. The *nacatamal*, wrapped in a banana-like leaf rather than a corn-husk, is the local form of the tamale. In addition to cornmeal, it may contain rice, tomatoes, potatoes, chili, cassava root, and a small piece of meat. The Christmas Eve meal consists of nacatamales with a filling of turkey, chicken, or pork, and raisins, almonds, olives, and chili, served with *sopa borracha* ("drunken soup")—slices of caramel or rice-flour cake covered with a rum-flavored syrup. Another distinctive dish is *vaho*, slowly steaming salted meat and various vegetables piled in layers over banana-like leaves and then covered while heating. Charcoal-grilled steak in a peppery marinade is another favorite. *Tiste* is a beverage made from ground tortillas and cacao beans, with fruit and sugar added. A snack food, the *tajada*, is a deep-fried plantain chip.

Meals usually last longer than they do in the United States, complemented with pleasant conversation. The main meal is



Beans, which provide the main source of protein, and corn tortillas are the basics of the Nicaraguan diet. (AP Images)

eaten at midday, often followed by a siesta, or afternoon rest. The siesta allows people to rest or even sleep during the hottest time of the day, when work is difficult.

### Glorious Bananas

- 2 ripe plantains (very soft)
- 2 cups (16 ounces) milk
- cooking oil
- 4 Tablespoons grated cheese
- ¼ cup (2 ounces) sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 Tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 Tablespoon butter
- ½ teaspoon powdered cinnamon

Slice the plantains and brown them in the cooking oil in a frying pan. In a bowl, mix the sugar, cornstarch, and cinnamon; add the milk and mix well. Add the grated cheese and vanilla. Use half the butter (½ tablespoon) to grease a Pyrex pan. Pour half the milk mixture into the greased pan, then place the fried plantains on top. Cover with rest of the milk mixture and dot with the remaining butter. Bake at 350°f for 30 minutes, or until the milk is set. Note: Do not use small yellow bananas, but plantains, a sort that is used for cooking. They are called *platanos verdes* when green and *platanos maduros* when ripe, but they always need to be cooked.

[Recipe courtesy of Embassy of Nicaragua.]





Two women talk during an exposition of various coffees in Managua, Nicaragua. Twenty-nine organic coffee producers offered their products to coffee roasters and importers from Europe, the Americas, and Asia during the “Cup of Excellence,” organized by the Specialty Coffee Association of Nicaragua (ACEN). (AP Images/Mario Lopez)

### **13 EDUCATION**

By making spending on education a priority, the Sandinista government lowered the rate of illiteracy from 52% to 23% of the adult population. School is mandatory and free between the ages of 6 and 13. In the mid-1990s, nearly 80% of primary-school-age children were in school; however, only 39% of females and 44% of males were attending secondary school. Nicaragua’s two principal universities are Central American University and the National University of Nicaragua. There are four others.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Nicaragua has rich cultural traditions. Native to Central America is the marimba, a kind of xylophone, which may have come from Africa. The *son nica* is a driving rhythm overlaid with instrumentals. In Masaya, the traditional capital of the country, the marimba is sometimes accompanied by the oboe, the asses jaw (played by running a stick along the teeth of the bone), and a single-string bow with a gourd resonator. In the east the music is typically Afro-Caribbean, with banjos, accordions, guitars, and drums.

Traditional dance is sponsored and patronized in Nicaragua more than anywhere else in Central America. There are many dance groups. Dances include *Las Negras*, *Los Diablitos*, *El Torovenado*, *Las Inditas*, and *El Toro Huaco*, all with masked

characters, some of them pink and large-nosed to burlesque the Spanish. In *La Gigantora*, a giant woman is paired with a midget. In the *pale volador*, participants unwind from a rope wound around a high pole, swinging to the accompaniment of native Indian percussive instruments. The Caribbean coast also has a maypole dance.

An important specimen of folk drama as well as dance is *El Güegüense*, a farce going back to the 16th or 17th century that combines dance and pointed social satire. As in the nation’s fables, the hero is a trickster who uses his wits to frustrate the powerful, in this case the wielders of royal authority.

Foremost of Nicaragua’s writers was the poet Rubén Darío (1867–1916), whose innovative verse had a profound effect on Spanish literature. He is known as the “prince of Spanish-American literature.” Other important writers have included the poets Azarias Pallais, Alfonso Cortés, Sálomon de la Selva, and Ernesto Cardenal, and the poet and dramatist Santiago Argüello.

The complex and dramatic political events experienced by Nicaraguan people through the 1970s and 1990s have influenced a flourishing group of artists. The paintings of Alejandro Canales, Armando Morales, and Leoncio Sáenz, as well as the poetry of Gioconda Belli and Ernesto Cardenal, are clear expression of this cultural trend. Unlike the Somoza regime, which promoted imported culture, Sandinistas encouraged what they call “democratizing, national, anti-imperialist” arts

forms. A ministry of culture was established under the poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal.

### 15 WORK

Reflecting the dismal state of the economy, unemployment and underemployment were estimated at 60% of the work force in the mid-1990s, but reliable statistics are hard to come by because many people eke out a living as street vendors or are engaged in other aspects of the informal economy. Social class is based on whether or not one works with the hands, and on that basis 80% of the people are lower class (those who do work with their hands). Nearly 50% of the work force lives by farming, mostly with hand tools and oxen-drawn plows on small subsistence plots. Farm hands are even worse off, employed mostly by large estates only at planting time and harvest season. Most industrial workers are employed in food-processing plants.

### 16 SPORTS

In other Central American countries soccer reigns supreme, but in Nicaragua (and Panama) baseball is the most popular sport. Nicaraguans were playing in organized leagues in the 1890s and, by the early 1960s, even the isolated Miskito were playing regularly. The nation's most famous player, Dennis Martinez, was the first baseball player from Nicaragua to play in Major League Baseball. Also popular, besides soccer, are boxing, basketball, volleyball, and water sports. Children's games abound; one authority has put their number at no less than 134.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Fiestas are an important part of public life and include such diversions as cockfighting, bull-riding, and bull-baiting. Dancing in clubs is popular; Lobo Jack's, in Managua, is the largest disco in Central America. Most films are in English with Spanish subtitles. In 1993 eight towns had television stations, and there were about 210,000 television sets in use.

Even though the family is the most important unit of society, youth clubs for socializing are becoming more popular.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Locally made earthenware is decorated much as it was before the Spanish conquest. Other handicraft items include hammocks, baskets, mats, embroidery, leatherwork, coral jewelry, and carved and painted gourds and dolls. Masaya's Artisans Market has the nation's most extensive selection.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In spite of the fact that the civil war had ended, at least 270 people died in political violence between 1990 and 1994, with police, army, and Sandinistas killing demobilized Contras, and northern Contra bands committing similar acts, often because of land disputes.

Previously undeveloped tracts of rainforest are being cut down at an alarming pace to grow crops and gather fuel wood. Health care is suffering from shortages of food, medicine, and basic medical supplies. Malnutrition and tropical diseases, such as yellow fever and malaria, are serious problems.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

With the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in 1979, Nicaraguan women acquired social and political rights that were not available during the Somoza dictatorship. During the Literacy Crusade in the early 1980s, over 45% of the teachers in the rural areas were female, and women made up 46.5% of the rural students who had passed the literacy course.

The participation of women in politics also increased dramatically during the years of the Sandinista government. After 1979, women occupied 32% of the leadership positions within the government and, throughout the 1980s, women held such positions as minister of health, ambassador to the United Nations, national police chief, minister of social welfare, supreme court judges and deputies to the national assembly.

Even though Nicaraguan women comprised 45% of the economically active population in 1989, they were still over-represented in lower paying and less stable occupations, such as domestic service (70%), market vending (84%), and informal sector work (65%). Prostitution, a common source of employment for women prior to the revolution, was outlawed in 1979.

Despite advancements in economic and political spheres, domestic violence against women and teen pregnancy have remained critical problems in Nicaragua. In 1998, 29% of all Nicaraguan women suffered some kind of physical or sexual abuse. In addition, Nicaragua has one of the highest teen fecundity rates in the world, where 10% of 15 year-old girls already have children. While abortion is illegal in Nicaragua, between 27,000 and 36,000 abortions are practiced every year, and two out of ten women die as a result of an unsafe abortion.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# NORWEGIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Norwegian history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Norwegians**.

## OVERVIEW

Legendary Norwegian explorer Leif Ericson (or Leiv Eiriksson) is said to have discovered North America sometime around the year AD 1000, according to Viking sagas. This has yet to be established for certain, but Norwegian Americans look to Ericson as the first example of Norwegian contributions to American history. Since Norwegians began immigrating to the United States in significant numbers in the early 1800s, they have made a great many contributions to the culture and history of America.

In the 1800s, the population in Norway expanded beyond available economic opportunities, and many decided to look elsewhere. Members of religious sects other than the state-approved Lutheran Church also chose to go in search of more religious freedom. Norway at that time was fairly isolated from the rest of the world, and little was known there about the young United States. In 1825, however, a group of 52 Quakers and Haugeans (a Lutheran reformist sect) pooled their resources and outfitted a small sloop called *Restauration* to take them to America. They came to be known as the “Sloopers.” A baby was born en route, bringing their number to 53. When they arrived in the United States, the Sloopers first settled in New York State, near Lake Ontario. The land was difficult to farm there, though, so they eventually moved west, in 1834–35, to Illinois where land was cheaper and easier to till. There they began the Fox River settlement, which became the base camp for future Norwegian immigrants to the United States.

The second group of Norwegian immigrants came to America in 1836, settling in Fox River and Chicago. Norwegian immigrants came yearly after that, settling first in Illinois, then spreading north and west to Wisconsin (Muskego became a major settlement in the 1840s), Minnesota, Iowa, North and South Dakota, and eventually to the Pacific Northwest. A few settled in Texas, and some stayed in New York State, near where they first landed, rather than traveling on west. Most Norwegians felt a deep dislike of slavery, which deterred them from settling in the South. Some of those in Texas did own slaves, but for the most part, Norwegian Americans opposed slavery and fought on the side of the Union Army in the American Civil War (1861–65).

In 1862, the Sioux in Minnesota rose up against the European Americans who were invading their lands and pushing them west into alien territory. Many Norwegian Americans were killed or wounded in the Sioux uprising, slowing Norwegian immigration temporarily. The land was too good to resist, however, and soon the Europeans forced the Sioux off the land, confining them on small reservations, driving them out completely, or killing them. Minnesota was added to the “White Man’s land,” and it became a heavily Norwegian American state.

Norwegian immigration to the United States peaked between 1866 and 1914. Over 600,000 Norwegians came to

America during these years; only Ireland lost more of its people to the United States. In contrast with earlier Norwegian immigrants, who came to America with the intention of settling permanently in their new home, many of the immigrants of the peak years were single young men hoping to earn enough money to return to Norway in better circumstances. As many as 25% did actually return. The rest stayed in America. The Great Depression of the 1930s convinced another 32,000 Norwegian Americans to move back to Norway, but other Norwegian immigrants continued to come to the United States. Currently about as many people of Norwegian descent live in the United States as live in Norway.

Norway is divided into *bygds*, or districts, each of which has developed its own culture with distinctive clothing, customs, folk songs and dances, stories, and language dialect. Immigrants to America tended to settle among others from the same *bygd*, creating small cultural enclaves. In 1902, as Americanization began to take its toll, Norwegian Americans who wanted to maintain their ethnic identity began to form *bygdelags*, or district societies. Within 20 years, 50 *bygdelags* had been established, with a total of more than 75,000 people involved. Many urbanized Norwegian Americans chose not to participate in the societies because they did not want to perpetuate the image of Norwegian “peasant farmers” held by other non-Norwegian Americans. Instead, they wished to be assimilated into American culture and become indistinguishable from mainstream society. The *bygdelags*, therefore, caused some tension in the Norwegian American community.

Most Norwegian Americans were rural in the early days of immigration. They came from peasant farming families in Norway and clung to what they knew, recreating their old environment in their new home. Most Norwegian Americans have continued to resist urbanization, right up through today. Many of the old family farms are still run by descendants of the original settlers. Of the 4,477,725 Norwegian Americans in 2000, according to the U.S. Census, most continue to live in the early areas of settlement—the Midwest and Pacific Northwest. North Dakota is by far the most “Norwegian” state in the United States, with Norwegian Americans making up 30% of the total state population. Minnesota is a distant second with 17%, and South Dakota comes in third with 15%. Montana, which is 10% Norwegian American, takes fourth place, followed by Wisconsin at 8.5%.

Because Norwegian and English are both in the Germanic family of languages, Norwegian immigrants to the United States find English relatively easy to learn. Early immigrants incorporated many English words into their Norwegian dialects so that later immigrants, even those who spoke the same original dialect, often could not understand them. Because Norwegian Americans tended to live in isolated farming communities, surrounded by other Norwegian speakers, they retained their native ethnic language longer than many other U.S. immigrants. Even third generation Norwegian Americans are often fluent in Norwegian. However, Norwegian Americans are still subject to Americanization, and fluency in Norwegian is eventually lost.

Many Norwegian Americans were outraged when the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA) decided to hold its services in English rather than Norwegian. The NLCA was formed in 1917 when the three major Norwegian Lutheran synods at that time—Norwegian Synod, the Haugean Synod,



and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church—merged. The merged church recognized the Americanization of later generations of Norwegian Americans and chose to minister to their needs. In 1946, the NLCA further enraged conservative Norwegian Americans by dropping “Norwegian” from their name, becoming the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). The LCA absorbed German and Danish Lutherans in 1960 and then united with the American Lutheran Church in 1987 to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Two Norwegian speaking congregations still exist: Minnekirken in Chicago, and Mindekirken in Minneapolis.

Not all Norwegian Americans are Lutheran. There are also handfuls of Quakers (who were among the first group of immigrants in 1825), Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Mor-

mons, and others. Some Norwegian Americans today belong to no church.

For a time in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Norwegian Americans celebrated Syttende Mai, or 17 May, commemorating the signing of the Norwegian constitution in 1814. Huge centennial celebrations were held in 1914, but then the hyper-patriotic hysteria of the World War I years in the United States suppressed any ethnic festivities. The multicultural movement that began in the 1960s, however, allowed Syttende Mai to re-emerge for its sesquicentennial in 1964. Today, many Norwegian American communities hold parades and other cultural festivities on 17 May each year. Two of the traditional Norwegian foods served at these feasts and on other special occasions are lutefisk, made from specially prepared cod, and lefse, a flat-

bread usually made from potatoes and rolled out paper-thin with a grooved rolling pin that gives it a grid-like texture.

Despite their relative isolation in early years, Norwegian Americans have contributed a great deal to American culture. Three top-notch Norwegian American colleges are located in Minnesota: St. Olaf College (Northfield), founded in 1874; Concordia College (Moorhead), established in 1891; and Augsburg College (Minneapolis), which in 1922 grew out of Augsburg Seminary, founded in 1896. The St. Olaf Choir has achieved international renown since its beginnings in the early 1900s. Founding director F. Melius Christiansen wanted to develop a cappella (without accompaniment) singing and created the first chorus of its kind in the United States.

Music has always been of great importance to Norwegians and Norwegian Americans. Early Norwegian Americans began many choral societies, some of which still exist today. Norwegian folk dances are still performed by Norwegian American dance groups around the country. Individual Norwegian Americans who have achieved success in the world of music are conductor Ole Windingstad and opera singer Rise Stevens, as well as the Andrews Sisters, Tom Waits, and Josh Groban. In the world of art, a traditional style of folk painting called *rosemaling* ("flower painting") was brought from Norway to the United States by immigrants in the 1800s. Per Lynne, considered the "father of American rosemaling," became widely successful as a rosemaler during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Though rosemalers had traditionally been men, the American Folk Revival of the 1960s and 1970s inspired renewed interest in the art, this time among women. It has since become a popular social hobby among Norwegian American women.

The first Norwegian American writer to become well known in the United States was Ole E. Rolvaag, who wrote in Norwegian in the 1920s. His first book published in the United States was an English translation (by Lincoln Colcord) of two earlier works that had been published in Norway. The English version was called *Giants in the Earth*, published in 1927. It was selected by the Book of the Month Club and sold almost 80,000 copies by the end of the year. Modern Norwegian American writers include Wallace Stegner, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for *Angle of Repose*, and poet Robert Bly, now considered the "father of the men's movement" since the publication of his nonfiction book, *Iron John: A Book About Men*, in 1990.

Norwegian Americans have also been successful in the worlds of theater, film, and television. Well-known Norwegian American actors include James Arness, James Cagney, Celeste Holm, and Rene Zellweger. Figure skater Sonia Henie also became a popular film star in the 1940s after retiring from a gold-medal Olympic career. Henie skated her way to fame in musical extravaganzas on ice, both live and in Hollywood movies. Sonia Henie is responsible for bringing figure skating to the public, transforming it from an unknown sport to a popular pastime.

Norwegian Americans are also responsible for bringing skiing to America. All forms of skiing were relatively unknown in the United States in the 1800s. When Norwegian immigrants came to America, however, they brought with them their love of skiing, both as a sport and as a mode of transportation during the long, snowy winters. Cross-country skiing and ski-jumping were particular Norwegian American specialties.

Telemarking (named after a district of Norway), involving a particular way of turning, later became popular.

Some famous Norwegian American sports figures are football place-kicker Jan Stenerud, who introduced the soccer-style kick now used by most place-kickers; Knute Rockne, revolutionary football coach at Notre Dame from 1918 to 1931; and Lute Olson, longtime coach of the University of Arizona basketball team.

Norwegian American figures abound in the worlds of science, industry, and politics. Building on Norwegian Americans' long history as farmers, agriculturalist Norman Borlaug worked with peoples all over the world to develop more productive strains of wheat. Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work. Earl Bakken invented implantable pacemakers, Dr. Ernest O. Lawrence invented both the cyclotron and color television tube, Dr. Conrad Elvehjem discovered vitamin B6 (niacin), and Dr. Ludwig Hektoen was the first to match blood types of recipients and donors. Computer pioneers Theodore Holm Nelson, who coined the terms "hypertext" and "hypermedia," and Douglas Engelbart, inventor of the computer mouse, are both of Norwegian descent. Engelbart was awarded the National Medal of Technology by President Bill Clinton in 2000. Another Norwegian American pioneer is Sally Ride, the first American woman astronaut to reach outer space.

Economist Thorstein Veblen coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption" in his landmark book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in 1899. Veblen is often called the "spiritual father of the New Deal." The Library of Congress cataloging system was created by Norwegian American James Christian Meinich Hanson. Two well-known Norwegian American journalists are Eric Sevareid, a World War II war correspondent for CBS who then became a news commentator at CBS until his retirement, and Eric Utne, publisher of the alternative journal, *Utne Reader*, founded in 1984.

Seattle, Washington, has the highest concentration of Norwegian American businesses anywhere in the United States. Over 30 Norwegian American companies are located there. Perhaps the best-known Norwegian American business entrepreneur is Conrad Hilton, the "Hotel King." The international chain of Hilton hotels is now managed by Conrad's son, Baron Hilton. Continuing the Hilton claim to fame are Conrad's great-granddaughters, Paris and Nicky Hilton, fashion designers and celebrity socialites.

Norwegian Americans have been represented in federal politics since 1883, when Knute Nelson of Minnesota was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Nelson later served on the U.S. Senate from 1895 to 1923. U.S. congressman Andrew Volstead introduced the Prohibition Act in 1919, also known as the Volstead Act. The consumption of alcohol was traditionally acceptable in Norwegian culture, but it became a problem in the United States and many concerned Norwegian Americans joined the temperance movement.

In 1954, Coya Gjesdal Knutson became the first woman from Minnesota to be elected to U.S. Congress, and she then became the first woman ever appointed to the House Committee on Agriculture. Norwegian Americans Hubert H. Humphrey and Walter F. Mondale both served as U.S. vice-president and ran unsuccessful campaigns for president. Earl Warren, half-Norwegian American and half-Swedish American, served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1953 to 1969, establishing

himself as a powerful liberal voice when he ruled against the racial segregation of schools. Two other Norwegian Americans who have been influential in recent American politics are Karl Rove, Deputy Chief of Staff and advisor for President George W. Bush; and John Ashcroft, 79th U.S. Attorney General.

Norwegian immigration to the United States declined yearly after World War II, coming to nearly a complete stop by the 1980s. Few new immigrants arrive, and previous immigrants have become almost thoroughly Americanized. However, a renewed interest in “Norwegian” identity among Norwegian Americans has recently spurred a surge of classes, festivals, websites, and other forums for the celebration of Norwegian foods, customs, history, folk songs, and dance traditions. Some Norwegian Americans even feel that Norway itself has become too “Americanized,” losing touch with its uniqueness that is now cherished in the United States.

Although the economic decline among American farmers has hit the Norwegian American community particularly hard, as such a high percentage of them are farmers, for the most part Norwegian Americans have few problems unique to their community. They adapted quickly and well to their new home and are now an established part of mainstream American culture. Despite their assimilation, however, Norwegian Americans have fought hard to retain the Norwegian Consulate General in Minnesota that Norway has twice now threatened to downgrade to “honorary” status, with Walter Mondale as Honorary Consulate. Norway reasons that a new consulate is needed in China and it must cut back elsewhere. Other Norwegian consulates in the United States will remain open.

Single Norwegian women who immigrated to the United States in the 1800s and early 1900s almost exclusively found work as domestic servants. They were greatly sought after for those positions; in 1920, 86% of Norwegian American women were domestic servants. Those who migrated with husbands were much more likely to remain on the farm. In Norway women typically took care of the dairy cows, and immigrants to the United States continued in that tradition. However, once the dairy farm became a business rather than simply providing family subsistence, men joined the women in dairymaking tasks. If the dairy business failed, men would take over care of all the livestock and women would move to in-home chores with their field chores reduced to keeping a kitchen garden.

The Lutheran church provided a place for Norwegian American women to practice some independence through the ubiquitous “Ladies Aid” societies founded by Lutheran pastors’ wives. The Ladies Aid society held fundraisers to pay for church construction and mission activities. Once these societies began to federate at the regional and national level, women had the opportunity to learn organizational and financial skills beyond the realm of the home. Inspired by their newfound independence, Norwegian American women joined the forces of the suffragist movement. The prospects for increased women’s rights even attracted feminists from Norway, such as Aasta Hansteen, to move to the United States, although the language barrier sent many of them back home.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# OJIBWA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Chippewa; Ojibway; Anishinabe

**LOCATION:** United States; Canada (Great Lakes area, especially around Lake Superior)

**POPULATION:** Over 150,000

**LANGUAGE:** English; Ojibwa

**RELIGION:** Traditional Ojibwa, based on spirits; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Ojibwa, or Chippewa, are descended from the ancient Anishinabe, a name that means “original people.” Their neighbors called them “Ojibwe,” which is probably a mispronunciation of *kamaziniibiigaewad*, “picture-makers” (for pictographs they made). Others believe the name refers to the unusual puckered seams on their moccasins. Europeans further distorted their name to become “Chippewa.” Today, both “Chippewa” and “Ojibwa” (or “Ojibway”) are used to designate these people. Many Ojibwa still prefer to call themselves Anishinabe.

The Ojibwa migrated from the northern Atlantic coast, around the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, to the eastern shores of Lake Superior (which they called Kitchigamiing) between AD 1000 and 1400. The Ottawas (who also sometimes refer to themselves today as Anishinabe) and Potawatomis migrated with the Ojibwa. Together they were known as the Three Fires Council. The Three Fires peoples split up when they reached the shores of Lake Huron. The Ottawas settled along the northern shores of Lake Huron; the Potawatomis settled in what is now Michigan; and the Ojibwa continued northwest to Lake Superior. The final Ojibwa homeland became all the lands surrounding Lake Superior (stretching west into what is now Minnesota and the Dakotas, south into Wisconsin and Michigan, and north into Canada).

The Ojibwa became arch enemies of the neighboring Iroquois Confederacy nations because of conflicts over land and competition for the fur trade. The Ojibwa began trading furs for European goods (such as knives, hatchets, fish-hooks, and needles) in the early 1600s, first with friendly eastern Native North American tribes who had already obtained goods from the Europeans and then with the Europeans themselves as the Europeans moved west. The Ojibwa’s first contact with Europeans was probably at a Feast of the Dead at a Huron camp in September 1641. Several Ojibwa and a number of French missionaries were guests at the feast. A few weeks later, Father Charles Raymbault and Father Isaac Jogues arrived in Pawatigoong (“the place at the falls”), one of the Ojibwa’s main villages, which the French named Sault Sainte Marie (Saint Mary’s Rapids). The French called the Ojibwa “Saulters” (People of the Rapids). Other French missionaries soon followed, but the Ojibwa were not very interested in Christianity. They just wanted European trade goods.

In 1659 two French traders, Pierre Esprit Radisson and Medard Chouart des Groseilliers, were guided by the Ojibwa from Quebec down the St. Lawrence River through the Great Lakes to Lake Superior. They visited many Ojibwa camps during the winter and traded goods for furs. When they returned to Quebec with loads of furs in their boats, other traders decided to follow suit. The Ojibwa village at Chequamegon Bay soon be-

came a trading center for French and Native North American peoples. Many of these French traders married Ojibwa women and lived part-time in Ojibwa villages. They adopted Ojibwa clothing and learned the Ojibwa language and Ojibwa customs and skills. These traders came to be known as *voyageurs* because of the long journeys they made along the fur-trade routes. They were also called *coureurs de bois*, or “runners of the woods.”

The Ojibwa soon became dependent on European goods and lost their traditional skills, such as making knives and needles from bone (rather than the steel ones provided by the Europeans). The formerly semi-nomadic Ojibwa now settled in permanent villages near trading posts. They hunted for profit, not just survival, and animals that had been their main source of food became scarce because the Ojibwa (and other Native North Americans) now killed more than they could eat for the furs and hides, thus upsetting the balance of nature.

Warfare, between European powers who wanted to control the trade routes and Native North Americans over the use of hunting grounds, increased. Native North American use of guns obtained in trade from Europeans (instead of traditional bows and arrows) increased the death toll in warfare. Europeans also brought diseases for which Native North Americans had no immunities or treatments. Between war and disease, Native North American populations, including the Ojibwa, were decimated.

By the late 1600s, the Ojibwa had spread throughout the Great Lakes area, as far east as the modern-day Toronto area. (They fought with the Iroquois for control of this territory and eventually drove the Iroquois to the south.) Other Ojibwa bands moved south into Wisconsin and drove out the Fox tribe to gain control of those lands. Some Ojibwa moved west into eastern Minnesota and fought Sioux tribes for lands there.

The British had begun their own fur trade in North America by the mid-1600s and the French made a treaty with the Native North Americans around Lake Superior, including the Ojibwa, to trade only with the French. In the late 1600s, however, the French decided the fur market was glutted and stopped buying furs from the Native North Americans for a time. The Ojibwa had become dependent on the fur trade by this time and had no other way to support themselves. When the French reopened trade in 1718, they found the Ojibwa nearly starving.

In 1736, the Sioux attacked French trading posts and became enemies of the Ojibwa, who were allies of the French. The Sioux then launched a series of quick raids on the Ojibwa, which the Ojibwa usually won because they had more European weapons and were better woodsmen than the Sioux. The Ojibwa eventually drove the Sioux entirely out of Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota.

The French and Indian War between the French and British began in 1761, while the Ojibwa were warring with the Sioux. The Ojibwa sided mostly with the French. Britain won the war in 1763 and took control of the Great Lakes fur trade. The balance of power in the Great Lakes area shifted. To make matters worse for the Ojibwa, the British wanted furs *and* control of the land.

From the mid-1760s to 1770s, the Ojibwa traded peacefully with the British. The Ojibwa tried to stay neutral during the American Revolution (1775–83) so as not to offend either side and be on good terms with whoever won (avoiding a repeat of their difficult situation at the end of the French and In-

dian War). When the American colonists won, the fur trade came under the control of the newly established United States of America. The new Americans solidified their control by defeating the British in the War of 1812.

The Ojibwa found that American goods were often inferior to European goods, and American settlers were greedy for land. Some Ojibwa moved to Canada to resume trade with the British. In the 1820s and 1830s, the U.S. fur trade was run mostly by the American Fur Company, owned by John Jacob Astor. Astor wanted to maintain Native North American culture and lands to keep the fur trade going. Settlers, loggers, and miners, however, wanted the Ojibwa's land, so they put pressure on them to move west of the Mississippi River. The Ojibwa were eventually forced to move to reservations established on their homelands in the United States and Canada. Nearly all Ojibwa were living on reservations by 1854.

There was not enough land on the reservations to support the Ojibwa's traditional life of hunting, fishing, and gathering food. The U.S. government expected them to become farmers, but the land was not good enough (and the growing season was too short) to grow enough food to sustain everyone throughout the year. The General Allotment Act of 1887, which divided up reservation lands into individually owned 160-acre plots, made the situation even worse. In that northern climate, 160 acres was not enough land on which to grow food for an entire household. The Ojibwa of Red Lake Reservation managed to prevent the government from dividing up their land; it is still owned communally by the tribe.

On the reservations, the Ojibwa were given government housing and Western clothing to wear. Their children were forced to attend European American schools, many of them boarding schools far from home, where their traditional culture was denigrated and denied in an attempt to "civilize" them. There was little opportunity for employment on reservations and the U.S. government built dams that destroyed thousands of acres of wild rice, the Ojibwa's staple food. The Ojibwa fell into poverty and despair.

The Battle of Leech Lake was triggered in 1898 when an Ojibwa leader named Bugonegijig ("Hole-in-the-Day") escaped from custody and refused to cooperate with European American law officers. Bugonegijig had been arrested on a trumped-up liquor charge (common treatment at the time because law officers were paid for every arrest they made) and then released for lack of witnesses. He refused to cooperate when subpoenaed as a witness in another case and was arrested, released, and arrested again. This time he escaped, and the U.S. War Department sent about 500 troops into the Leech Lake Reservation. During their lunch break, one of the soldiers' guns accidentally went off. Ojibwa who were hiding in the woods nearby thought the soldiers were shooting at them and fired on the troops in return. The commanding army officer and five soldiers were killed. The government then sent over 1,000 more troops to Leech Lake in preparation for a major battle. Fortunately, both sides agreed to a peaceful settlement before any more fighting occurred. The Ojibwa expressed deep regret for the deaths of the soldiers, and no one else was killed. Several Ojibwa were fined and sent to jail for periods of up to 10 months.

Poverty continued to be a painful reality for the Ojibwa into the 1930s. President Franklin Roosevelt included programs in his New Deal to improve the situation of Native North Americans throughout the United States. World War II (1941–45)

provided some war-related jobs for Ojibwa, and several hundred served in the U.S. armed forces. After World War II, many Ojibwas left their reservations to live in cities and try to find work there. Some did, but unfortunately many merely found a new sort of poverty because they lacked the skills and cultural background to succeed in the European-dominated urban world.

Despite their many difficulties since the Europeans arrived on the continent, the Ojibwa still live on their ancestral tribal lands and have survived as a tribe and a distinct people. Modern battles are fought in court for land-use, water-use, and other rights. In 1983, two Ojibwa spearfishers were arrested for fishing in waters outside their reservation in northern Wisconsin. A federal court (in what came to be known as the Voigt Decision) upheld the Ojibwa's right to fish in traditional ways on any ancestral tribal lands, whether those lands are currently included in an Ojibwa reservation. The Voigt Decision also gave tribal councils responsibility for regulating Native North American fishing in terms of health, safety, and conservation. In light of this decision, 13 Ojibwa reservations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota joined together to form the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Controversy still rages over fishing rights in off-reservation waters. Extremist European American opposition organizations, supported by white supremacist groups, bombed a boat landing, capsized Ojibwa boats, physically attacked Ojibwa fishers and verbally abused Ojibwa women in 1989 and 1990.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Ojibwa live in the Great Lakes area of the United States and Canada, mostly around Lake Superior. The climate of the northern Great Lakes region is subarctic with long, cold, snowy winters and short summers. One of most important early Ojibwa villages on the shore of Lake Superior was Bowating, now called Sault Sainte Marie. The population of Bowating at the beginning of the 17th century was probably between 250 and 500. There are between 70,000 and 104,000 Ojibwa in the United States as of 2008, living mostly on reservations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. A similar number of Ojibwa live in Canada, mostly on reservations in Manitoba and Ontario. Many Ojibwas left the reservations in both the United States and Canada after World War II (1941–45) and moved to cities to try to find work. Toronto, Ontario; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Winnipeg, Manitoba all have sizable Ojibwa populations.

The Ojibwa describe months and seasons with "moons." Spring begins with Crust on the Snow Moon (March), and sap begins running in the sugar maple trees. During this "moon," the Ojibwa traditionally moved from their winter hunting grounds to the maple groves. Maple sugaring continues through Moon of Boiling Sap (April). Flowering Moon (May) traditionally signaled the time to move to summer camps. Summer lasts through Strawberry Moon (June), Midsummer Moon (July), and Blueberry Moon (August). Fall begins with Wild Rice Moon (September), when the Ojibwa traditionally moved to the shores of lakes where wild rice grew. Falling Leaves Moon (October) is the time for Ojibwas to prepare for winter. They had traditionally headed for winter hunting grounds by time of Freezing Moon (November). Winter lasts through Spirit Moon (December), Great Spirit Moon (January), and Sucker Fish Moon (February). Then the cycle of the



year is completed when the Crust on the Snow Moon appears once again in the sky and the sap begins to run again in the trees.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Ojibwa language belongs to the Algonquian family of Native North American languages. In contrast to most Native North American peoples, the Ojibwa did have a system of writing. The ancient Anishinabe and their Ojibwa descendants painted pictographs (pictures used to record information) on birch bark.

Anishinabe and Ojibwa pictographs are considered to be the best example of written records left by any Native North American group north of Mexico.

In the native Ojibwa language, days are counted in terms of “sleeps”; the word “night” is not used by some Ojibwa. *Niizho-tibikut* means “two sleeps.”

Children were named at birth after a dream or vision. Friends and relatives rarely addressed children by their birth names. Instead, the Ojibwa generally addressed each other by their relationship to the other (such as “daughter,” “grandfather,” “sister,” etc.). Ojibwa children were also given a secret name that only their parents knew. This was done to prevent anyone from casting a spell on them, because spells only work if the spellcaster has a person’s true name.

### 4 FOLKLORE

According to the Ojibwa, Kitchi Manido (Great Spirit) created the universe. First he made the four basic elements: rock, fire, wind, and water; then he made the sun, stars, earth, and everything on it (including humans) from those elements. Kitchi Manido then organized the universe by the Four Directions: Waubanoong (east), Shawanoong (south), Nangabianoong (west), and Keewatinoong (north). Two more sacred directions were also included: Sky above and Earth below. After a while, there was a great flood on the Earth and the seas covered the land. Various animals dove down under the waters to find land but were not successful. Finally, Muskrat dove deep and after a long while came up nearly dead with a bit of mud in his paw, from which Earth was re-created.

Kitchi Manido gave everything in creation a spirit and a purpose in the Circle of Life. He also created Winebozho (First Man), also called Nanabush, born of an Earth Mother and Father Sun. Winebozho is a trickster figure and acts as an intermediary between humans and the spirit world. The Anishinabe were born of Winebozho. The Ojibwa have many Winebozho stories, including teaching stories, stories of how different elements of Ojibwa life were created, and others.

### 5 RELIGION

As is true for all Native North American peoples, religion is an integral part of the Ojibwa’s daily life. The Ojibwa believe that all creation is interconnected and that all things in creation are equally important. Everything in nature is occupied by a *manido*, or spirit. There are lesser and greater spirits, some of whom are evil, though most are good. The one Great Spirit is called Kitchi Manido. Ojibwa must please the spirits to have good health and success. Bad luck, illness, and injury result from angering the spirits. The best way to please the spirits is with a tobacco offering, which is an offering of thanksgiving. Each time an animal is killed, thanks are offered. Before

harvesting wild rice or peeling the bark from birch trees, an offering is made. Ojibwa give thanks for all gifts from Kitchi Manido and the spirits of creation.

All Ojibwa ceremonies begin by smoking the Pipe of Peace.

Many Ojibwa converted to Christianity during the 19th and 20th centuries. Others are nominal Christians yet continue to follow traditional religious ways. Some never gave up their ancestral beliefs, and still others are returning to those beliefs and traditions as they strive to reclaim their Native North American identity in this last decade of the 20th century.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Ojibwa hold seasonal celebrations, such as the Harvest Feast in autumn after the wild rice harvest. The Feast of the Dead is held each autumn in remembrance of all those who died during the previous year. Among traditional Ojibwa, each family who has suffered the death of one of their members during the past year holds a banquet for the entire village. The food is not necessarily placed on the table, but in an open area outside. A place is set for the deceased, whose spirit remains with the family.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, when a boy killed his first large animal in a hunt, his family held a celebration because he was learning to provide for his family. Boys were not considered true hunters until they had killed a bear and one other large animal (such as a moose or deer).

At puberty, boys go on Vision Quest. They spend several days alone in the woods without food and wait for their guardian spirit to appear and give them instructions for their adult life. When they return from their Vision Quest, they are treated as men.

The Ojibwa believe that girls are given a gift from the Creator at the time of their first menstruation that is not given to men. To receive this gift, girls are kept isolated in a special shelter away from the village for the duration of their first menstruation. During their seclusion, the girls fast and see only their mothers and grandmothers. When they return to the village, they are henceforth treated as women.

A ceremony is held to initiate a *Mide* apprentice into the *Midewiwin* society. The most important part of the ceremony is the ritual “death” and “rebirth” of the initiate. He or she is “shot” with a sacred shell, or *megis*, then “revived” with the breath of life from the presiding *Mide* leader.

When an Ojibwa dies, his or her body is placed on a platform for four days, the time it is believed to take for the person’s spirit to journey into the next world. The body is then wrapped in birch bark and buried with the feet pointing southward (the direction of the next world). Food and tools for the journey to the next world are buried with the deceased. Small buildings are sometimes constructed over the grave to shelter the spirit.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Ojibwa tribe was originally made up of many small, autonomous bands, each with its own leader. That sense of autonomy and division into separate bands is still evident among Ojibwa of different reservations. Ojibwa tribal chiefs were devoted to keeping the peace throughout their history.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Ojibwa traditionally lived in wigwams, dome-shaped structures built from saplings cut (by men) and placed in the ground in an oval measuring about 14 by 20 feet. The tops were then tied together to form the dome. Several lighter-weight poles were then tied horizontally to the first poles around the circle to complete the frame. Woven grass mats and strips of birch bark were laid over the frame by the women. Heavy poles were sometimes laid over the mats and bark to hold them in place. A fire burned continually in a central firepit inside the wigwam, the smoke escaping through a hole in the center of the roof. The floor was covered with mats woven by the women from bulrushes, and the door was covered with a piece of animal hide. Low benches and mats were placed around the inside edges of the wigwam for sleeping and sitting, and baskets held the family's belongings. The Ojibwa used deer or bearskin blankets as bedcovers. Each wigwam housed an extended family of parents, grandparents, and children.

A wigwam could be built in less than a day. When the Ojibwa moved to another campground, they would simply roll up the bark and hide covering of the wigwam and take it with them, leaving the pole frame behind. Or they might make the poles into a *travois*, a sort of sled, and pack their belongings on it. They either pulled the *travois* by hand or harnessed it to dogs.

Traditional healing is done by medicine men and women, called *Mide*. Most are a combination of priest and doctor. *Mide* have a special relationship with the spirit world and also have a wide knowledge of the medicinal uses of plants. They combine herbal medicine with spiritual ceremonies involving song, dance, and prayer. Many *Mide* become members of the *Mide-wiwin* society after a long apprenticeship. There are four degrees of *Mide* instruction today; in earlier times, there were as many as eight. Most of the ancient birch bark scrolls with *Mide* songs and history are gone, however, and much of the knowledge of herbal medicine is lost as well.

The Ojibwa became masters of the birch bark canoe. Each canoe weighed between 65 and 125 pounds (29–45 kg). Working together, men and women spent about two weeks building one. Every family had several canoes. In the winter, Ojibwa used (and still use today) snowshoes to travel about in the deep, soft snows. They also used flat, lightweight wooden sleds called *nabagidabanaakoog* (mispronounced as “toboggans” by Europeans).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Ojibwa men traditionally did the hunting, while the women cooked the food, prepared the animal skins, and sewed clothing from them.

Babies are strapped to a cradleboard for most of the first year of their life. A cradleboard is a flat board with a footrest at the bottom and a hoop to protect the baby's head at the top. The baby is placed on a cushion of moss and feathers, then covered with a piece of animal hide or fur. A leather strap is wrapped around the baby and cradleboard to hold the baby in place. The cradleboard can be strapped to the mother's back for carrying or propped against the wigwam (or house) or a tree when the mother is working.

Each Ojibwa household is made up of an extended family: parents, grandparents, and children. The clan system is very strong; clans are patrilineal (inherited through the father) and

exogamous (one cannot marry a member of one's own clan). The major Ojibwa clans in earlier days were Crane, Fish, Loon, Bear, Martin, Deer, and Bird. More clans have since been added. Each clan traditionally had certain responsibilities to the community; for example, Fish clan members were responsible for settling disputes between other clans.

Elders are very important in Ojibwa society. They advise adults on the wisest course of action and teach children the ways of the Ojibwa.

## 11 CLOTHING

Ojibwa today wear Western-style clothing for everyday purposes. At ceremonial dances, they will dress in the traditional way.

Traditional Ojibwa clothing is made from animal skins, mostly deerskin. Men and boys wear a breechcloth (a strip of hide passed between the legs and over a belt to hang down in the front and back). Thigh-high leggings are attached to the belt with a leather thong. In cold weather, fur or animal skin is wrapped around the shoulders.

Women and girls wear a dress made from two pieces of deerskin sewn together at the shoulders and down the sides. They usually wear knee-high leggings tied at the knees with a leather band.

Children's clothes have a similar design to adults' but are made from smaller skins or furs, such as beaver, fawn, squirrel, or rabbit.

All Ojibwas wear leather moccasins with soft soles, traditionally so they could walk quietly in the woods. Men and women both oil and braid their hair. Sometimes they stick feathers and porcupine quills in their hair for decoration. Both men and women also paint their faces; wear earrings, necklaces, and bracelets; and decorate their clothing with quills, feathers, and beadwork. (Beads were first made from shells; stones; animal teeth, claws, and hooves; nuts; berries; and seeds. Later, the Europeans traded glass beads for furs. Because glass beads were smaller, more durable, and easier to work with, designs became more intricate. Ojibwa women expanded from simple geometric patterns to elaborate floral motifs.) Traditional dyes are made from roots, nuts, bark, and berries.

The snowshoes worn in winter were traditionally made from a piece of flexible ash wood fastened in a bow shape with strips of hide from a deer or moose, then strung with rawhide.

## 12 FOOD

The main traditional foods of the Ojibwa were berries, nuts, leeks, corn, squash, wild potatoes, wild rice, maple sugar, large and small game, and fish. Many of these foods still figure largely in the modern Ojibwa diet.

Wild rice is a type of grass native to North America that grows in very watery areas. It is called *manomin*, or “good berry,” by the Ojibwa and was their staple food. It is harvested in the fall by work teams of two people in a canoe. One poles the canoe through the waters; one bends the tops of the grass stalks over the canoe with a stick and knocks the grains off into the bottom of the canoe with another stick. Grains that fall in the water seed next year's crop. The rice is then dried in a large pot over a fire (stirred constantly to prevent burning). After it is dry, it is threshed (the husk is removed from the kernel) by putting the rice in a sack and beating the sack with a club. Threshing can also be done by putting the rice in a hole

in the ground lined with hide and dancing on it. Finally, the rice is winnowed (the kernels sifted from the loosened husks) by putting it on a bark tray and gently shaking the tray so that the husks blow away in the wind, leaving only the edible kernels behind. Today, Wabigoon in northwestern Ontario has a wild rice processing plant.

### Ojibwa Wild Rice

1 cup wild rice, washed in cold water  
 ¼ teaspoon pepper  
 2½ cups water  
 2 tablespoon minced chives  
 1½ teaspoon salt  
 Bacon drippings plus enough melted butter or margarine to equal 1/3 cup  
 4 strips bacon cut into narrow strips  
 6 eggs

Place the wild rice, water, and 1 teaspoon of the salt in a saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat as low as possible and simmer, uncovered, until all the water is absorbed. Brown the bacon in a large, heavy skillet. Remove bacon from skillet, and drain on paper towels. Save the bacon drippings from the skillet. Beat the eggs with ½ teaspoon of the salt, and the pepper, until light. Pour the beaten eggs into the skillet in which you browned the bacon, and brown the eggs lightly. Turn them over gently, and brown on the other side. When the eggs are firm, cut them into narrow strips. Lightly toss the bacon, egg strips, chives, bacon drippings (plus melted butter or margarine) with the rice. Serve hot. Makes 4 servings.

(Adapted from Yeffe Kimball and Jean Anderson, *The Art of American Indian Cooking*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965, p. 107.)

### 13 EDUCATION

Although traditional Ojibwa education has always been important, the Ojibwa are very concerned with Western education today. They want to give their children the skills they need to succeed in the modern Western world and also teach them the traditional ways so that they maintain their Ojibwa culture and identity. Though dropout rates among Ojibwa students fell significantly in the 1970s, over 10% still do not make it through high school. Attendance rates for students under the age of 25 in 1990 were as follows:

AGE	PERCENTAGE IN SCHOOL
3-4	28.6
5-14	93.4
15-17	89.9
18-19	53.3
20-24	19.6

Of a sample of Ojibwas 25 years old and older in 1990, 9.8% had less than a ninth grade education; 69.7% had at least a high school diploma (68.6% of men, 70.6% of women); 37.8% had some college; and 8.2% had a Bachelor of Arts degree or higher (8.5% of men, 8.0% of women).

Museums in Ojibwa communities (run by the Ojibwa themselves) help teach their own people and others about Ojibwa history and traditions.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ojibwa were known in earlier days as a people who loved to sing. This is still true of traditional Ojibwa today. The Ojibwa have many sacred songs and dances, accompanied by drums and rattles. The flute is the only solo instrument used by the Ojibwa. Young men used to play the flute when they were courting a young woman to let her know they were nearby so that she would come to hear his music.

The Ojibwa of Lac Courte Oreilles run a public radio station that offers both music and information of interest to Ojibwa.

Modern Ojibwa writers who have found success among their own people and the wider world are Gerald Vizenor (1934), John Rodgers, and Maude Kegg. Kegg recorded Ojibwa legends in both English and the Ojibwa language and received the National Heritage Award in 1990 from the National Foundation for the Arts for her work.

### 15 WORK

Traditionally, Ojibwa men hunted and fished throughout the year, but particularly in the winter when other food was scarce. Women also fished, but mostly they were responsible for gathering and cooking food, preparing animal skins for use as blankets and clothes, sewing the clothes, weaving mats and baskets, and caring for young children. In the summer, all Ojibwa worked in the fields growing what crops they could in the subarctic climate. Autumn was harvest time, both for the field crops and for the wild rice that grew in the watery areas throughout Ojibwa territory.

The children's job was to keep birds and other marauders away from the field crops as they ripened. Girls would stand on tall platforms in the fields and flap blankets in the air and shake gourd rattles to scare away the birds. Boys would play noisy games between the cornstalks to scare away other animals. The girls were also responsible for keeping waterfowl and other birds from eating the wild rice before the people could harvest it. They would paddle their canoes through the marshes, singing and talking loudly and slapping their paddles on the water.

Today the Ojibwa operate many businesses in their communities, including boat marinas, campgrounds, bingo halls, and hotels. They also continue to hunt, fish, and harvest wild rice.

### 16 SPORTS

Ojibwa men have played lacrosse for centuries. The games could take all day to finish, and they often got quite rough. Women played a game like field hockey called "shinny," in which they used a curved stick to move a ball made of animal hide over the other team's goal. They also played a version of lacrosse called "double-ball," played with two balls tied together.

Ojibwa children played many games, especially in the winter when there was little else for them to do. One of their favorite winter games was "snow snake." Boys would throw a stick about 6 feet (2 meters) long with a knob at one end, representing a snake (the knob was the snake's head), along a frozen path in the snow to see who could throw it the farthest. The sticks were oiled, polished, and decorated by the players to resemble snakes.

Canoe-racing has long been a favorite sport for Ojibwa of all ages.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Ojibwa have always enjoyed games of skill and chance. They have turned their love of gambling into a profit-making venture today, with highly successful bingo halls located on their reservations. The Ojibwa also love to tell jokes and poke fun at each other and at outsiders.

Powwows have become a place for Ojibwa both to have fun and to promote their traditional Native North American identity. Nearly every Ojibwa community holds at least one powwow a year.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Two traditional arts that can still be found among the Ojibwa today are basket-weaving and beadwork. Both are considered women's arts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Ojibwa today suffer from the same cultural conflicts as other Native North Americans trying to survive in the European-dominated society while maintaining their traditional ways. On the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, the conflict between "full-bloods" (those with pure Ojibwa lineage) and "mixed-bloods" (those whose lineage is Ojibwa mixed with other tribes and races) has been particularly fierce and long-standing. The full-bloods generally want to preserve tradition at the expense of economic development, while the mixed-bloods promote economic development at the expense of tradition.

Conflicts with European Americans over land- and water-use rights go on, both in courtrooms and on the lands and waters themselves.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Ojibwa have recognized three genders: male, female, and *agokwa* or women-men. *Agokwa* were men who went to great lengths to imitate the cultural characteristics of women in Ojibwa society include imitating the female voice and the walk of women with their toes pointed slightly inward. *Agokwa* occupied themselves with female activities, such as the care and rearing of children, the production and decoration of footwear, and all of the duties of the household.

The Ojibwa women who engaged in men's occupations were not considered a separate gender like the *agokwa*. Traditional Ojibwa culture left the avenue open for any woman who wanted to shift towards male domains without requiring that she shift her gender or her sexual orientation. However, while a woman was married it was expected that she would pursue feminine occupations and roles. After divorce or the death of her husband, a woman could choose to be a "masculine woman" thereby asserting her independence. Among the Ojibwa, these women were held in high esteem as healers who had extensive medicinal knowledge.

Traditionally, the Ojibwa did not mark the passage to adulthood with any ritual or ceremony. However, when a girl has her first period she is secluded for a brief period of time and instructed in the restrictions that apply to her at this time. Menstruating women are expected to stay away from the main areas of camp, not to use men's equipment or tools, not to step over game trails, and not to eat certain parts of caribou. As

traditional hunting and camping traditions disappear among the Ojibwa, so do many of these prohibitions.

Women's work in traditional Ojibwa society is extensive. Women are responsible for setting up and breaking camp, which includes erecting the skin lodges. They also are required to pull toboggans and carry loads on their backs in moving camp. Women also prepare fires, cook meals, prepare animal hides for clothing, make clothing, care for children, snare small game, and pick berries. Since the bulk of daily subsistence and camp upkeep falls on women's shoulders, men are free to pursue hunting and fishing at their leisure.

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—revised by D. Kavanaugh

# PÁEZ

**PRONUNCIATION:** Pã-es

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Nasa (people)

**LOCATION:** Colombia:

**POPULATION:** 60,000 (20th century estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Páez

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; evangelical Protestantism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Páez Indians of Colombia, unlike their ferocious neighbors, the Pijao Indians, resisted the Spanish conquerors that arrived in the 16th century and have survived until now. One of the first to explore southwestern Colombia, where the Páez live, was Sebastián de Belalcázar, who undertook an expedition from Quito, in Ecuador, into what is today Colombia. He found many tribes there, among them the Pasto Indians in the Nariño region, who were docile and easily conquered, whereas the Pijao fought many bloody battles with the Spaniards and were eventually exterminated entirely. The Páez of the Cauca region resisted, and although decimated and impoverished, their rugged mountain retreats saved them from both complete assimilation and complete extermination.

Páez are known for their skills in the art of crafting. Their work on pottery, weaving, and baskets has received special recognition. The Páez people were estimated to number about 60,000 in the late 20th century.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Páez inhabit the high mountains and plateaus of Colombia. This Amerindian tribe has inhabited southwestern Colombia for centuries, in the middle of the rugged mountain ranges, along both eastern and western slopes in the state of Cauca and high plateaus of the central range (Cordillera Central) of the .Andes Mountains, and north of the headwaters of the Magdalena River. Ethnologists think that the Páez originally migrated in an east–west direction to the territory where their descendants still live, and that by the time of the Spanish conquest they had been settled in this mountainous region of forests, crags, and rivers for about 300 years.

The eastern region is generally referred to as Tierradentro and today is, in effect, an extended reservation with widely scattered settlements, of which the main centers are Inzá and Belalcázar. These are modest settlements that are also missionary centers and include churches and church schools. At the beginning of the 20th century, some Catholic missions were founded by the Lazarist Brothers.

Regarding their subsistence, an intensive horticulture using the slash-and-burn method was commonly used in the region. A variety of crops, including manioc, maize, sweet potato, bean, as well as vegetables and tropical fruits, were basic staples in these lands. Sometimes cotton was grown in some areas. This form of horticulture, usually done by men, produced abundant food. Antillean Arawak, Chibcha, Jirajara, and Páez, among other cultures, included irrigation and even occasional terracing, evidencing a great farming development. The main crop grown by Páez people is potatoes, but they also grow non-traditional crops, such as wheat and coffee.

In 1992, the Colombian government created the Fondo Páez, the largest indigenous group in the country. Its main goal was to recuperate the ancestral agricultural knowledge as well as to promote and preserve the Páez culture. Páez community leaders work with the non-profit organization Fundacion Colombia Nuestra. The members of Fondo Páez have created a workable, sustainable, and holistic vision for their indigenous communities. Fondo Páez currently helps to process, market, and export Páez crops, such as their coffee. However, this non-government organization does not get involved in the internal decision-making process.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Páez language is related to the language spoken by the Chibcha Indians who settled in the valleys and plateaus of the eastern range of the Andes, around the region of Santa Fé de Bogotá, which is the capital of Colombia today. Although the Chibcha language and many other related languages in the region are now extinct, the Páez still speak their own language today. It is believed that around 75,000 people speak the language.

One of the Páez names still in use is Calambás, which is a family name of a famous Páez hero and chieftain and is still used by his descendants today.

The following are some common Páez words, first in English and then in Páez language:

One/Teech  
Two/E'z  
Three/Tekh  
Man/Pihc  
Woman/U'y  
Dog/Alku

## 4 FOLKLORE

An important part of Páez folklore relates to a hero called Juan Tama, also called the Son of the Star. The legend says that one day when the Morning Star was shining, a group of Indians found a child in a gorge, which was later named the Gorge of the Star. This baby was Juan Tama, who was nursed by several women and grew up to be very strong. Eventually he married the female chief of the Huila region, Doña Maria Mendiguagua, and became chief of all the Indians. He became their teacher and showed them how to guard their land and advised them not to mix with White people.

Juan Tama appointed Calambás, a chief from Pitayó, as his administrator. Calambás proved rebellious and Juan Tama defeated him, but later Juan Tama forgave him because Calambás was so brave. Juan Tama accorded Calambás the right to rule over the Páez Indians of Vitoncó. Juan Tama, knowing that his death was near, went into the lake on the Páramo (the high, cold plateau) of Moras, where he disappeared into the water.

The name Calambás still exists today among those who claim descent from the rebel chief, and even the modern councils that exist today in the Tierradentro region appoint certain people who descend from early Páez chiefs. Lineages are still very important among the Páez.

## 5 RELIGION

Jesuits were originally given responsibility for converting the numerous tribes of southwestern Colombia. They established

some mission centers but were stubbornly resisted by the Páez. After centuries of comparatively meager results, from the missionaries' point of view, the task was taken up by the Lazarists. These missionaries began to work among the Páez in 1905. They learned the Páez language and still maintain missions among them. The result today is a rather unique blend of Páez religious customs and beliefs and important aspects of Catholicism. Currently, the Páez still retain shamans. Some Páez Indians have also become Catholic priests.

Since the 1930s there have been organized groups of evangelical Protestants among the Páez. There is a New Testament published in the Páez language.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Páez celebrate several religious Catholic holidays, including Christmas and Holy Week, and they have set their own stamp on them. They have their own music and include some of their own rites. Interestingly, they do not allow the presence of a priest during some of their celebrations, although they also attend and participate in aspects of church worship in the missionary centers.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When a woman is going to give birth, she retires to her own special hut, set apart from the family hut, where she gives birth either alone or with the help of a female relative. From very early childhood, both girls and boys learn the skills appropriate for their future responsibilities by observing and imitating their parents.

Adults form their own households and live in family units distanced from other family homes, in high places among the sierras that are often lonely and of difficult access. The Páez are very independent and often dislike living in villages; they prefer to live among their own families, separated from others, and only come together on special occasions, to discuss matters related to the well-being of the tribe as a whole or to their relations with the state authorities, or during major celebrations. However, they take part in local markets held once a week where they buy, sell, or exchange produce and acquire other basic necessities.

Some of the Páez in recent years have moved into villages or small towns. Some travelers to the Páez territory have occasionally reported interesting burial practices. The presence of funeral urns and elaborately decorated burial caves found by archaeologists in the area suggests that in earlier times people were cremated and important personages were accorded splendid funerals. Since then, burial customs have changed and are even now still undergoing a slow process of adaptation and change. José Péres de Barradas, who traveled to Tierradentro in the 1940s, quotes a Dr. Burg who witnessed burial rites for a young girl:

In the Indian cemetery, the men dug a hole in the ground. Meanwhile, the women were in the house with relatives and godparents. The dead girl was lying on the ground, on some cowhides, lightly covered by a ruana (a type of cloak or poncho widely used in Colombia by Indians and non-Indians alike). The body faced east, so that the soul would see its way to heaven more easily. By her feet were laurel-wax candles, and by her head, another three candles and a bamboo cross. To her right were her necklaces,

and at her feet, all her goods, including her clothing and girdles or sashes, and some fruit including plantains, as well as some chicha to drink. Children played by the girl's side, and they were not afraid if they fell on top of her.

The girl's father prepared a bamboo barrow and the women arranged some white clothing for the girl. They combed the dead girl with great care, and because the hair was quite stiff it produced laughter among everyone, even the father. Once she was dressed and placed in the barrow, the father and godfather of the girl took her to the cemetery, followed by rest of the men and women.

The father placed the girl in the ground, lit candles and placed food and chicha (a drink made from fermented corn) at her feet, then covered her. During this time, the mourners prayed aloud. The father threw four clumps of earth with his left hand over his daughter and took his leave of her, wishing her a good journey. Then the men, and afterwards the women, did the same. It is believed that at this point the soul begins its journey to heaven. The women continued covering the buried girl with the earth, and the men completed the task, stamping on it with their feet.

Before returning to the family home, the men and women bathed fully dressed in a stream to wash out the spirit of death, and then took part in a funerary banquet. For nine days they left a cross and flowers, between two candles, where the head of the dead girl had lain. It is customary to leave a gourd filled with water in those places that were once familiar to the person, so that the wandering soul will not suffer thirst.

After one or two months, there is a new purification of the house by the shaman, who sweeps it clean with two pigs' feet and then ensures that this special broom is buried. Afterwards he chews special leaves and spits at the four walls. Then everything is ready. The shaman breaks off a piece of meat and gives it to a dog to eat. Then he does the same with a corn tortilla. If the animal is fine, this is a signal that all may eat, and this is the second funeral banquet.

This account vividly illustrates the mixture of Christian and Amerindian elements in the Páez culture.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Páez are a reserved people, and there are quite formal greetings required in varying circumstances. A boy has to approach his godparent in a respectful manner when greeting him. A visitor or guest is given a formal "gift of affection," a custom that some think dates back to Spanish colonial times and was incorporated into the customs of the Páez. It usually takes the form of a food offering, such as a chicken or an egg, and includes some vegetables and coffee beans.

The Páez do not engage in Western-style dating as such, but their traditions include trial marriages of about a year for young people who intend to undertake formal marriage and the founding of a family. This year is called the *amaño*, or adaptation period. During this time, the young man observes the qualities of the young woman, and she also observes him.



*Páez girls in Colombia (AP Images)*

If either partner proves unsuitable, the trial marriage can be ended.

Socially, Páez families farm their own land but the fields that belong to the church are cultivated by the community. Their residences are commonly dispersed among each other's and the most common materials used to build houses are poles, mud, and stones.

Another characteristic of Páez culture is the high value that this people give to punishment as an educational tool. For instance, to whip adulterous tribal leaders along with their mistresses is a common accepted practice. In spite of the acceptance of punishment as a legitimate form of penalty, Páez people are a pacifist culture. For instance, they have refused to be part of Colombia's armed conflict, which has been going on for the past decades.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Páez are not affected by malaria or other tropical diseases, as the Andean highlands provide a generally healthy climate, and the abundant streams and rivers provide plentiful access to clean water. There is a rainy season that can sometimes be severe and can affect the general state of health of the people. The cold, damp weather often leads to bronchial problems and tuberculosis. Babies and small children occasionally suffer from gastrointestinal problems.

At various times, the Páez were affected by a shortage of salt, which was difficult to obtain, but this is no longer the case.

The Páez, although they now have access to some health centers, still depend in many cases on their shamans, who are also medicine-men, to cure them of illnesses.

The lifestyle is simple, even spartan. The Páez today are basically relatively poor farming communities who make do with the basic necessities required for survival. Water is generally carried to homes from springs, water holes, or streams. Occasionally, a small cement tank is built near a house or settlement to which water is piped from a spring.

Traditional houses are rectangular and are constructed using basic and locally available materials. They have thatched roofs and walls of cane and sticks, although they have also adapted the more solid *bahareque* style that includes reinforcing the walls with rocks and mud amid double rows of sticks. This is attributed to Spanish influence.

As they deteriorate, the traditional houses are giving way to those with walls made of adobe blocks or bricks and with roofs of corrugated zinc or cement. Houses are generally divided into two rooms, one for sleeping and storage, and the other, the kitchen, for eating and sitting around the fire to converse and keep warm. There are no windows in mud-walled houses. More modern houses have one or two window spaces that are covered with wooden shutters during bad weather and at night. Floors are of hard-packed earth or, occasionally, of cement or wooden planks. Instead of roof gutters, a shallow ditch surrounds the house to prevent rainwater from entering.

Furnishings are sparse—wooden beds covered by a cowhide, sheepskin, or straw mat, with woolen blankets for covers; a few plain wooden chairs with the back and seat of wood or cowhide; low wooden, carved stools; and perhaps a small table. In addition, a very small rustic temporary shelter with a roof but no walls is set up in the fields where some family members stay to protect their crops at harvest time. Most homes do not have access to electricity, although it is available to some degree in municipal centers and is in the planning stages to become more widely available.

The system of house-building is cooperative: relatives and neighbors come together to help an individual family who is building a house. This system, prevalent among many communities in the Andes, is known as the *minga*. Although the main centers, such as Inzá and Belalcázar, are communal focal points, as are other communally built pueblos or villages, the majority of the Páez do not actually live there. They use these places as meeting points to buy and sell goods in the markets and to exchange news or to discuss communal matters, after which they withdraw to their own family homes, separated from others.

When the Páez have to travel outside the reservation on communal business or, in some cases, for the purposes of trade, they will use buses. Locally, some pack animals, such as mules or horses are used, and on many occasions the Páez travel on foot.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Spanish chroniclers who gave us the earliest descriptions of the Páez and other groups reported that there were not only male but also female chiefs, indicating that in some communities the women not only occupied important leadership positions, but that the communities were also matrilineal. The chroniclers also reported that in southwestern Colombia many women went to war alongside the men.

Today, the Páez family unit places definite and, in some cases, nearly absolute authority in the hands of the father, whose wishes and commands must be obeyed by his wife and children. Families often include more children than the typical Western household of parents with two or three children; this is also true of many Colombian households generally. Small children are shown affection and given much freedom in how they behave, until the age of six or seven when they are expected to act with more restraint.

Marriage customs blend both Spanish and Páez cultures. Usually either the boy or his parents select a prospective bride and visit her family home in the company of the boy's godparents or *compadres* and ask for her hand in marriage. If the girl's parents consent, the father is first offered a half-bottle of *aguardiente* (a drink made from fermented sugarcane), and subsequently the mother is offered another half-bottle. The boy and his family then take the girl to his home to begin the year of trial marriage. If all goes well, the couple is then usually married in the Catholic Church, and the wedding feast, which includes a hearty banquet and music (usually flutes and drums), lasts for several days.

The Páez keep a variety of pets and farm animals, including dogs, hens, ducks, and turkeys, as well as pigs, and some horses, cows, and sheep.

## 11 CLOTHING

The cool weather of the Andes mountains has produced some practical and warm clothing, especially the ruana, a type of woolen cloak or poncho worn, with local variants, in many areas of the highlands. Wool is sheared and processed by the women, then it is spun into thread for weaving ponchos and skirts on hand looms braced against the outside wall of the house. While walking along the trails or resting from other work, it is common for women to spin wool or cotton yarn, holding the loose ball of wool or cotton in one hand and the simple spindle in the other, or to weave carrying bags by threading long string through loops in the bag. Women are seldom idle. Currently, many women buy ready-made clothing or make blouses or skirts if a treadle sewing machine is available. Some men learn to sew trousers.

A woman's traditional dress consists of two pieces: a heavy woolen skirt (called *anacus*) pleated at the back and held up by a woven sash (*chumbe*) and a blouse that is a single rectangular piece of wool cloth fastened at one shoulder. The wool was traditionally woven on a simple loom made of two upright and two horizontal poles. The process—from shearing sheep, cleaning and carding the wool, and spinning the thread, through the weaving—took much time. Now it is more common for women to wear a cotton blouse and a skirt that falls below the knees. They wear necklaces of 8–10 strands of tiny, hard, white beads.

Young girls wear a simple one-piece dress; young boys wear a long shirt and when away from home, short pants. Mature men and women wear a plastic, straw, or felt hat (even inside the house). Younger people are less apt to do so now, though baseball caps are popular.

Because of the cold, everyone usually carries or wears a poncho. Ready-made sweaters and jackets are now common as well. Women wear tennis shoes, plastic sandals, or low shoes. Men often wear rubber or plastic boots. Children often go barefoot until they go to school.

## 12 FOOD

The basic diet of the Páez includes potatoes and corn as well as other vegetables that grow in the Andes, including *arracacha* and cassava, beans, and fruits. For special occasions, rich stews with vegetables and potatoes as well as chickens or roasted meats are cooked. Food is cooked either over a wood fire in the center of the kitchen floor, with pots balanced on three stones, or on a dried mud or brick stove on a raised platform by a wall, with a trough for the firewood and several holes in the top large enough to support a cooking pot. The food for large gatherings is cooked in heavy, shallow metal pots large enough to hold food for up to 100 people. While cooking, the food is stirred with large wooden spoons that have bowls about 10 cm to 15 cm (4–6 in) long and 2.5 cm (1 in) deep, and handles 50 cm to 75 cm (20–30 in) long. Plates, bowls, and cups are usually made of enamelware, and food is eaten with enamelware or wooden spoons.

A traditional Páez breakfast is hearty and provides the main meal of the day until dinnertime. It is called *mute* (pronounced “moo-the”) and is really a soup of boiled cabbage, corn, potatoes, and squash. During the day, the Páez drink fruit juices in their natural state or fermented as *guarapo*.



Because there are times of scarcity, the Páez learn early to endure hunger while working hard on difficult terrain in their fields, which are cultivated without machinery.

### 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, the Páez have resisted education for girls in the mission schools (formerly it was thought that they did not need education for their duties at home), but in the last few decades a process is slowly going forward in the villages where schooling, at least at the primary level, is offered to both girls and boys. Under pressure from the Páez communities themselves, more schools are now bilingual, whereas the custom had been for teachers to teach only in Spanish, and children were not allowed to use their own language in class or at play. The result was that few learned to read with understanding. Bilingual education is being encouraged now by some communities and churches. Previously this has meant merely having a bilingual teacher's aide help monolingual Páez-speaking children, but now, along with Spanish, there is more interest in teaching children to read in their mother tongue.

Children attend primary school from first through third grades, sometimes through sixth grade. Young people who aspire to a secondary education may go to a regional center or larger non-Páez town where they rent lodging, usually with family acquaintances or relatives. Some have earned diplomas through a high-school-by-radio program where the material is dictated over the radio and exams can be taken in a regional area or the state capital. Either way, a high school education is not altogether free, and if parents cannot afford to pay, the student usually finds work to cover expenses while studying. When farm activities require their help, children often skip school.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Páez have musical instruments that include short and long flutes (*chirimías*) as well as drums made from hollowed-out tree trunks and animal skins, and they play their music during all special occasions as well as during religious celebrations. Many Páez Indians play the flute. Their music can be melancholy, with something of their reserve and love of solitude in it. Their strong attachment to their music has meant that even in the churches of their villages it prevails, since the Páez never accepted the traditional Gregorian music of the Catholic Church.

Some of their music today has incorporated popular elements of Colombian folk tunes prevalent in the Andes, which are a blend of Amerindian and Spanish courtly music, such as the *bambuco*. This music has a gentleness and a sweetness that does not reflect the earlier, warlike reputation of the Páez feared by the early Spanish conquerors and settlers. Guitars are now very popular with young men.

Dances have been an important form of expression for the Páez, and early reports of the Páez include descriptions of a wide range of dances that formed part of all major ceremonies, including the dance known as the *Itsa kó*, which celebrated a girl's coming of age. Earlier songs also celebrated the feats and deeds of warriors, but they have not survived.

### 15 WORK

The Páez today are mainly farming communities. The land is owned communally by the different communities, and the In-

dian council, or *cabildo*, assigns some land for each individual's use. Some tasks must be undertaken communally, and free work days must also be given by each Páez farmer for collective planting as well as for road- or bridge-building and work in the villages.

Since travel in this rocky and mountainous terrain, full of rivers and torrents as well as canyons, is often difficult, the Páez were traditionally proficient bridge-builders, using local materials to allow for passage on foot. The bridges were flexible and made of cane and vines, and some of these traditional bridges are still constructed and regularly repaired today. As the traditional bridges fall into disrepair, new ones are being constructed with steel and cement to accommodate motor vehicles. There are also some unusual bridges covered with thatched roofs, built out of strong logs with supporting stones and sticks, and with floors of wooden boards. They are practical and sturdy and can support the passage of loaded pack animals such as mules, which are often used in the highlands because they are so sure-footed.

Weaving is exclusively done by women, and the husband must obtain the wife's permission to sell any goods she has made. Men and women cultivate plots together.

Many families have their own press for rendering sugarcane stalks into liquid form by pressing them between heavy wooden cylinders that are anchored close together in a straight line. The outside wheels go clockwise while the center one moves counterclockwise. Fastened to the press is a long pole that is tied at one end to a horse or mule who moves in a circle, forcing out the liquid. This is collected below the press. The juice is cooked in large cauldrons over an open wood fire outdoors. After the hot liquid is run through a sieve, it is poured into molds and allowed to harden into blocks of brown sugar. Some of the fresh-squeezed cane juice may be poured into a hollowed-out section of a wooden tree trunk set horizontally on the floor, where it is left to ferment somewhat before being drunk.

### 16 SPORTS

Although some ball games were introduced at the mission schools for the Páez, traditionally sports did not play a significant role in their lives. They mainly practiced a sport that was a type of war game. There were two teams, each led by a chief. The teams attacked each other with bows and arrows, and even if there were deaths, apparently they were accepted stoically and not resented. This war game was performed as a rite to honor the dead after a community feast and is not practiced today. Some young people today are not even familiar with this piece of their history.

Soccer is a very popular sport among young men, and teams compete on Sunday afternoons.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Aside from important religious or communal celebrations or major family events, such as weddings, the Páez sometimes make a special occasion out of market days. Many villages hold particular markets days, and after the buying and selling has taken place, the Páez enjoy drinking and chatting with their friends and *compadres*.

Priests who visit some communal pueblos on the eve of a particular feast day are greeted with much fanfare, even with fireworks and rockets, as well as a *chirimía* orchestra of flutes and drums. The community leads the priest to the church and

takes generous food offerings there. The church is then decorated with candles and flowers. After Vespers, a celebration continues outside by the church door, and the people play music and dance all night. Some travelers who have witnessed these evening festivities have commented on the decorum and reserved behavior of the Páez, even on these occasions, describing a dignified style of dancing where they never touch each other and dance in a very orderly fashion.

Children play and entertain toddlers with whatever they find at hand—sticks, string, or discarded household items. Little girls roll a corn cob in an old cloth then tie it on their backs in the way their mothers carry babies and toddlers. Small transistor radios, cassette players, or “boom boxes” are carried everywhere for pleasure and as status symbols.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Páez crafts formerly included pottery, weaving, and basket-making. Weaving is becoming a lost art. Older women continue to weave long colorful sashes with geometric designs and stylized figures of birds, animals, or persons with red wool yarn on a white cotton background. They find that their daughters do not want to learn to do this anymore. The belts are used as sashes for their skirts and for tying babies and small children in a cloth on their backs when they are walking or rocking the baby to sleep. Young children, both boys and girls, often carry the babies and entertain them while their mothers are occupied with their work.

The Páez also make jewelry, such as beaded necklaces. There is gold in this area, and metalwork is a traditional craft in southwestern Colombia. Earlier jewelry included nose-rings and breastplates, but today inexpensive earrings are popular among Páez women, as well as barrettes to hold their long hair in place.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Colombia's social and political problems have affected the Páez communities. Guerrillas have waged war for many years in Colombia, and the Páez have sometimes suffered at their hands. In addition, there have been incursions by drug barons and actions by some police forces. In December of 1991 a group of Páez Indians, including women and children, were massacred as they sat down to their evening meal. It is thought that the killers were either working for a local landowner trying to drive the Indians out of the region, or were working on behalf of drug dealers or even the police.

The required one-year military service for 18-year-old males in the country is waived for the indigenous people, although a few Páez young men choose to enter the military to experience life in the world outside their communities.

Although the Páez have lived in this area for centuries, and additionally have had land grants dating back to colonial times, the struggle for land has always existed, and at various times local landowners have tried to drive them out. Father Alvaro Ulcué, a Páez Indian who became a Catholic priest, played a role in defending Indian rights and was murdered on his way to a baptism in 1984. Other human rights activists who have acted on behalf of the Páez have also been killed.

Today, the Páez are active in the council of Indian communities of the Cauca region, and the Amerindian groups in Colombia have congressional representation, but the struggle for a decent life with a sufficient degree of autonomy continues.

During the last years, Páez tribes have blocked the principal highways that connect Bogota with Ecuador in order to pressure the Colombian government to recover their ancestral lands.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though the father has nearly absolute authority in a Páez family, the Spaniards found at their arrival that the Páez had not only male chiefs, but also female chiefs. A famous female chief was

With the escalation of conflict in Colombia, indigenous peoples came together to create the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (association of indigenous governing councils of North Cauca, ACIN), led by Páez women, who are playing a key role in denouncing human rights abuses in the country such as rape, kidnappings, and killings. In the spring of 2001, ACIN and other Indigenous organizations, fed up with violence, staged a massive peace-and-protest march. Some 30,000 people walked from Santander de Quilichao to the neighboring city of Cali, Colombia's third largest city to denounce human rights abuses.

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—revised by C. Vergara.

# PAIUTES

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Snakes (Northern Paiutes)

**LOCATION:** United States (Northern Paiutes: Oregon; Southern Paiutes: along the Colorado River; Nevada; California; Utah)

**POPULATION:** 13,532 (2000 census)

**LANGUAGE:** English; various dialects of Paiute

**RELIGION:** Elements of Christianity and Mormonism; traditional Paiute

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Paiutes are often thought of as one group of people, but this is incorrect. Just as the other Tribal groups or Nations, the Paiutes are as diverse as the environment they occupy. The Northern Paiutes mainly occupy the Great Basin Region of the United States. The Great Basin includes the western states of Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, and parts of Utah. The Southern Paiutes occupy the southern portions of Nevada, California, and Utah. Linguistically speaking, the Paiutes belong to the Uto-Aztecan language family, which includes the Shoshone, Hopi, and other Tribal groups in Northern Mexico. Broken down further, the Paiutes are of the Shoshonean Family Stock, specifically, the Numic branch. Aside of the language similarities, there are major differences in cultural material (which depends on the type of environment), religious practices, subsistence patterns, and social practices.

The main sub-groups of Paiutes within the states of Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Southern California are:

GROUP	STATE	ENVIRONMENT
N. Paiute	Coleville, California	Mountains
N. Paiute	Fallon, Nevada/Stillwater area	Desert and marsh
N. Paiute	Fort McDermitt, Nevada	Desert and mountains
N. Paiute	Honey Lake, California	Lake
S. Paiute	Las Vegas, Nevada	Desert
S. Paiute	Lovelock, Nevada	Desert
S. Paiute	Moapa, Nevada	Desert
N. Paiute	Pyramid Lake, Nevada	Desert lake
N. Paiute	Susanville, California	Mountains
N. Paiute	Walker River, Nevada	Desert lake
N. Paiute	Warm Springs, Oregon	Mountains
N. Paiute	Winnemucca/Summit Lake, Nevada	Desert/lake/mountains

Because of the desert environment, the Great Basin Paiutes were broken down into smaller groups or “bands.” Bands usually consisted of family units that would include the nuclear family (father, mother, child[ren]) and could include what is considered the extended family—grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. These bands subsisted on the land in a purposeful, non-wasteful, seasonal pattern. The land sustained food items, cultural materials, and shelter. Because the bands had cyclical hunting, fishing, water spots (for drinking and personal hygiene), and gathering food crops such as pinenuts and chokecherries, they did not stay in areas long enough to exhaust their supplies totally. In times of hardship (and as pre-

vention), bands often had “caches” (stores of food, usually hidden in caves).

Each group or band had regular routes to hunt, fish, and gather. Depending on the environment, Northern and Southern bands of Paiutes hunted the following: small game animals—jack rabbit, cottontails, beaver, badgers, and groundhog; fowl—mallard duck, geese, quail, mudhens and sagehens; and large game hunted—deer, big horn sheep, antelope, and even bear at times. Many bands have traditional fishing areas that are their traditional homeland or base area. Pyramid Lake had a multitude of people fishing for cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, perch, and *Kui-ui* (cui-ui is a prehistoric sucker fish found only at Pyramid Lake). Vegetation gathered were seeds, such as pinenuts, sunflower, and cattails, and berries that included buck and chokecherries.

Encroachment on traditional Northern Paiute lands began with the fur trappers in the early 1800s. Beaver was plentiful in the river areas, and the trappers followed the rivers to cash in on the pelts. Organized groups were sent into the Nevada rivers; the first recorded trapper was Jedediah Smith in 1827. Later, in 1828, the Hudson Bay Company dispatched Peter Skene Ogden. Ogden ran across a group of Indians believed to be Northern Paiutes in southern Oregon. He tried to capture some, and they told him about the Humbolt River, which was plentiful in beaver.

The first groups of fur trappers did not really have any skirmishes with the Paiutes. The general impression of the bands by the whites was that they were poor and living a scarce existence. Many of the trappers found the indigenous people to be quite peaceful. But that soon ended with a group headed by Joseph Walker. Walker held contempt for the Native people. As his first party crossed into Northern Paiute territory in 1833, the group of forty-three, which had a large herd of cattle, traveled through the Humbolt Sink area. As Walker ran across Indians between 1833 and 1843, he began systematically killing the Native People as he traveled through Nevada. In the end, his group was responsible for killing approximately 100 Indians. As a response to this reign of terror, the indigenous people began distrusting all white people who had crossed their lands and began taking action before the whites could. Many Indians stole livestock from the “trespassers.” They felt this was justified, as the whites did not respect the land, nor did they know the weather patterns of the area. The Donner Party incident (a group of settlers trapped in the mountains during the winter resorted to cannibalism to stay alive) led the Native People to believe the whites were strange and cannibals. The Donner Party and the Mexican War helped stop some travel across Nevada up until 1847. Unfortunately, the gold rush of 1848 caused many Native People to be displaced from their homelands, as well as to deviate from their subsistence patterns. Virginia City hosted a small discovery of gold; the major mineral found was silver. The Virginia City range was traditionally a pine nut gathering area; thus, many Indian people had to adopt non-Native foods in order to live. As a result of the shift in subsistence patterns, Native People had to obtain jobs in order to survive. Many were employed as ranch hands, laundry and cleaning helpers, and the like.

The Paiutes probably spread from what is now southern California into the western part of their new territory—eventually stretching from southern Nevada and California to north-central Arizona and southern Utah—sometime around AD 1000.

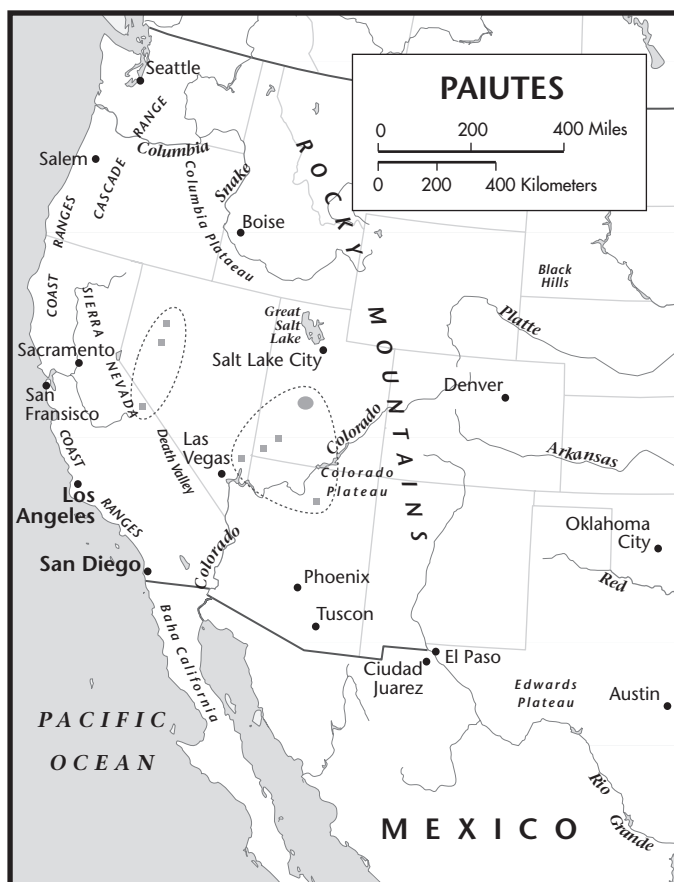
At some point they split into two bands, one going north and the other remaining in the south. The Northern Paiutes, also known as the Snake Indians or Paviotso, were a more militant people than their southern relatives. After the Northern Paiute or Snake War (1866-68), fought between the Northern Paiutes and the U.S. Army, the Northern Paiutes were imprisoned at various forts and reservations and were eventually forcibly resettled on those reservations.

The first contact the Southern Paiutes had with Europeans was with Spanish explorers in the early 1600s. The Spanish lumped the Southern Paiutes together with the related Ute tribe and called them *Yutas*. (The name of the state of Utah is derived from this word.) The Utes called the Paiutes *Payuch*, and the Paiutes called themselves *Payuts*. The Utes and Paiutes speak dialects of the same language and had very similar lifestyles until the Utes acquired horses from the Spanish and adopted the ways of the Great Plains tribes as horse-mounted buffalo hunters. The Paiutes were less inclined to interact with Europeans and so did not acquire as many horses nor learn to use them as extensively as the Utes did. The Utes, Shoshone, and Northern and Southern Paiutes were probably all one people at first, who then split up and developed into distinct tribes. The respective dialects of their original unified language remain similar enough that they can understand one another even today.

The Southern Paiutes supported the Pueblos in their revolt against the Spanish in 1680. Although they had long been enemies with the Hopi in their struggle for territory, the Southern Paiutes had even less regard for the Spanish and sided with the Hopi in their continued efforts to resist Spanish conquest in the years after the Pueblo Revolt. Because of this, the Spanish left the Southern Paiutes alone for the next 100 years or so. The Utes, however, had established good relations with the Spanish and frequently raided Southern Paiute camps for goods and slaves to sell to the Spanish. Many Southern Paiute women and children ended up in Spanish hands through Ute slave raids. The Mexicans continued the slave trade after becoming independent of Spain in 1821. At the height of the slave trade in the 1850s, Native North American slaves brought \$100 to \$400 each.

Paiute lands were never colonized, but many trade and travel routes were opened up across their territory. For the most part, the Southern Paiutes tried to stay out of the way of Europeans and European Americans, and their traditional way of life was not greatly impacted until the 1850–60s. When European Americans first began traveling across Paiute territory in the 1830s and '40s, they described the Southern Paiutes they encountered as completely uncivilized savages—"lizard eaters" and "diggers" (referring to the Paiute method of digging roots for food). Some European Americans even saw them as less than human, portraying the Paiutes as animals in their accounts of their travels. This image of the Southern Paiutes was to remain with them (as much as a century or more) seriously affecting their relations with European America.

The Southern Paiutes were mostly a shy people, avoiding contact with strangers as much as possible. This became difficult as more and more strangers began to pass through their lands. When gold was discovered in California in 1848, swarms of European Americans crossed Paiute territory in pursuit of riches. These gold rushers often shot at the Paiutes and stole food from their fields. The Southern Paiutes rarely fought back



and never initiated any attacks on European Americans. They would occasionally take European Americans' cattle that they believed were trespassing on their lands.

In 1847, another group of European Americans arrived in Paiute territory, this time to settle there. Brigham Young led the Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) to Great Salt Lake in present-day Utah to establish a community of believers. By 1849, the Mormons were expanding into Southern Paiute lands. The Southern Paiutes took the Mormons' trespassing cattle as well, but they also hesitantly welcomed the Mormons' protection from gold rushers and slave raiders. The Mormons believed in establishing friendly relations with the Native North Americans they met, and they were grateful for the Southern Paiutes' help in setting up their colonies. The Southern Paiutes helped the Mormons build houses, prepare fields for farming, and even washed their clothes. Unfortunately, the Mormons also brought disease to the Southern Paiutes, diseases for which the Paiutes had no immunities or known treatments. Epidemics of cholera, scarlet fever, whooping cough, measles, mumps, tuberculosis, and diphtheria killed hundreds of Southern Paiutes who were infected either by direct contact or through the water supply. By the mid-1870s, the Southern Paiutes had probably lost three-fourths (75%) of their population.

During the late 1850-60s, the Paiutes showed European Americans many mines in their territory that they had been working to a small extent for much of their history. The European Americans subsequently took over the mines and forced the Paiutes off their lands. The Paiutes became ghettoized serfs,

treated basically as slaves by the European Americans. By the 1870s, the Mormons no longer needed the Paiutes' help, so the Paiutes' last refuge was gone and they became landless and destitute. The U.S. government set up a small reservation for the Paiutes on worthless land in the late 1870s, but only a few Southern Paiutes moved there. Other small reservations were established for different Paiute bands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but for the most part, the Paiutes were neglected and shunted around by the government and European American settlers through the first half of the 20th century. In 1957, the U.S. government "terminated" the Utah Paiutes under the Termination policy (which means the government rescinded the Paiutes' recognition as Native North Americans eligible for government services), even though the Utah Paiutes did not meet the government's own standards for tribes eligible for termination. The Southern Paiutes were already impoverished and without the resources to improve their conditions. Once terminated and ineligible for government aid, they suffered severe hardships for many years. Some relief came when the Paiutes won a court case filed through the Indian Claims Commission for over \$7 million in payment for lands taken unjustly. Finally, in 1980 the Southern Paiutes were restored to recognition as a Native North American tribe by the U.S. government and once again became eligible for government services and relief programs. Their living conditions are slowly improving.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There are approximately nine Northern Paiute Bands/Tribes located within the northwest portion of Nevada. The Fort McDermitt Reservation is located near the Oregon-Nevada border and was developed into a reservation in 1889 by Executive Order. Prior to the opening of the reservation, the former military post consisted of 3,945.6 acres, which was originally opened to the general public for settlement. The Pyramid Lake Reservation was also established by Executive Order on 23 March 1874. The Act of 18 May 1916 established the Yerington Reservation. And a year later, 9,456 acres of land was purchased to begin the Yerington Colony (colonies are "Indian lands" within a city). The Reno-Sparks Colony began when twenty acres of land was purchased in 1917 from two individuals. The Reno-Sparks Colony is unique, as its membership consists of Washo, Shoshone, and Paiute people. Reno was a central place for many people to live, but the whites viewed the people as homeless people, as they camped along the riverbanks. The Lovelock Colony existed early, but the Tribal Government was not established until it adopted the Indian Reorganization Act Constitution and By-laws on 14 March 1968.

The Southern Paiutes today live in several communities along the Colorado River. The western communities include the Las Vegas, Pahump, and Moapa bands of Nevada, and the Chemehuevi band of California. This western territory is made up of mountain ranges and basin area with scrubby creosote bushes, mesquite, and piñon pines. Bighorn sheep, antelope, rabbits, lizards, and desert tortoises are among the common wildlife found there. The eastern communities, including the five bands of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, the Kaibab Tribe, and the San Juan Paiute Tribe, live in a region of high plateaus and deep canyons. At high elevations, fir, spruce, and aspen trees grow. Low elevations are covered with ponderosa pines, piñon pines, juniper, sage, and grasslands. Agave and small

cacti grow in the canyon bottoms, and the streams and rivers that cut through the region create narrow green oases with an abundance of wildlife.

Paiute populations were decimated by European diseases beginning in the 1840–50s. Not until the 1930–50s did the Paiutes begin to have more births than deaths in a year. After 1950, their population began to increase slowly. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, today's Paiute population is around 13,500.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Northern and Southern Paiutes speak dialects of the Uto-Aztec family of Native North American languages. Though their dialects are distinct in the Northern and Southern regions, the Northern Paiutes (Pyramid Lake, Fallon, Walker River, Lovelock, Reno-Sparks [which have many members directly from Pyramid Lake], etc.) can understand each other fairly well. However, the Southern Paiutes and Northern Paiutes have some translation difficulties, as many of the groups have adopted other native terminology of their particular outer perimeter or territory.

Because of legislature to terminate Indian Tribes and establishment of government boarding schools, many of the Northern and Southern Paiutes do not have their languages intact, particularly those who live near cities or metropolitan areas.

Through bilingual education programs and special grants, many of the tribes have taken advantage of funds in order to revitalize their language. Fort McDermitt has taken an aggressive measure to ensure the longevity and viability of tribal language. Videotapes have been developed in fluent Paiute (the McDermitt dialect) in order to preserve and teach. Traditional and contemporary activities are recorded and documented for today's and future generation(s). To count from one to ten, the Northern Paiutes say:

NORTHERN PAIUTE TERM	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
simi'yu	One
waha'yu	Two
paha'yu	Three
watsikwi'yu	Four
manigi'yu	Five
naapahi'yu	Six
natakwatsikwi'yu	Seven
simidadu'upi	Eight
simidadu'upi (Pyramid Lake)	Nine
siukadu'upi	Nine
siimano'yu	Ten

To count from one to ten in Southern Paiute, say: *soo'ee, wai, pai, wachuhng'wee, munuh'kee* ("all," meaning all five fingers of one hand), *navai', navaik'uvawt* ("over six"), *wa'ong' wachuhng'wee* ("two fours"), *soowaw' toaho' mawsoo' weinee* ("nearly all the fingers"), *toaho mawsoo' weinee* ("all the fingers").

All Paiutes speak dialects of the Numic branch of the Uto-Aztec family of Native North American languages. Though their dialects are distinct, they are able to understand one another fairly well. English has become the common language of today's Paiutes, but many still speak their native tongue. Some phrases in Southern Paiute are:

uhdu' vuhts	That's the way it is
mai'nuhgwaik	That's what I said
ai'u whaihump	It's all right
mud'u awvawn' kawduh'vungwu	Don't sit on that
one	
ai'nekai	Be quiet
kunchuh'eets pono'ai	armpit odor

Northern and Southern Paiutes were often named after physical or behavioral characteristics in early childhood. These names generally remain for one's entire life. They are not embarrassed by these names as they understand the naming conventions, and they fit with the Paiute sense of humor. Some Paiutes are given new names later in life for a significant achievement or action, but even great chiefs and well-respected elders often still go by their childhood names. Examples of Southern Paiute names are Quee tus (Burning Fire), La wa wi (Chipmunk), Mai-mi eno (Waving Hands), and Sang a nim (Wind Blows The Sand).

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Traditionally, much of the Northern and Southern Paiute storytelling happened in the winter months when the pace of life slowed, and there was not so much work to be done. Some stories could only be told during the winter because at other times of the year, bears and rattlesnakes were awake and might hear the story and come and bite the storyteller.

Stories were not solely for entertainment purposes; they also served to teach morality. In Northern and Southern Paiutes, Coyote (*Itsa*) was constantly getting into predicaments. He always thought of himself as an extremely handsome individual, yet when he saw himself in reflections, he was scared at the hideous creature that looked at him. He was lazy and always tried to get out of work. He also tried to marry his own daughters. He is cited as the one that *Numanah*, "Creator of All Things" entrusted to deliver people to a designated location. (The People or *Numa*, were to be transported in a pine-pitched covered water jug, and *Itsa* was given strict instructions *not* to open the plug. But he did and tried to place the plug back on. Most of the people got out [in California] and by the time *Itsa* reached Nevada, only a few chubby Indians who weren't able to get out actually made it. That's why Nevada doesn't have a lot of Indian people!)

#### 5 RELIGION

The Northern and Southern Paiutes believe there is one most powerful spirit, known to the Northern Paiutes as *Numanah*; the Southern Paiutes call this spirit *Thuwipu Unipugant* ("One Who Made The Earth"). The sun is the most visible representation of *Thuwipu Unipugant*. The Paiutes traditionally prayed to the sun every morning, and sometimes at noon and at sunset. Ceremonies to honor the spirits of the world were conducted by a *puagant* (One Who Has Sacred Power). *Puagants* had specific animal spirits as helpers, and often kept a live representative as an assistant.

The Ghost Dance Religion was first started in 1869 by a Paiute mystic named Wodziwob, although it failed to take hold among the population. In 1888–90, another Paiute, Wovoka (known as Jack Wilson to European Americans; c.1856–1932), revived the Ghost Dance Religion, preaching that all deceased Native North Americans would return to life, and the balance

of power would once again shift from European Americans to Native North Americans. The Ghost Dance was performed to call back the deceased to life. The Ghost Dance Religion incorporated elements of traditional Paiute religion, such as the Round Dance. This time, the Ghost Dance Religion spread rapidly among western Native North American tribes, especially in the Great Plains. The U.S. government and European American citizens felt threatened by Ghost Dance teachings, however, and sought to suppress the religion (even though the religion taught that this shift in power was inevitable and did not preach any form of violence to initiate the shift). Tensions built up until 1890, when the U.S. Army massacred hundreds of Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota (see **Dakota and Lakota**). The Ghost Dance Religion declined rapidly after that, although it is occasionally revived by isolated groups even today.

Christian and Mormon religious elements have been adopted over the last century by the Paiutes. Since the 1960s, most San Juan Paiutes have become members of the Full Gospel church, a Pentecostal Protestant denomination. Although members of the Full Gospel Church, however, they continue to combine traditional Paiute beliefs with their new Christian faith.

Revitalization of Native American beliefs or concepts have been readily adopted by tribes whose religious infrastructure has been dismantled. Ceremonies such as the Sun Dance of the Plains Tribes have been accepted into both Northern and Southern Paiutes belief systems. Many believe this was a result of a cultural exchange when the Sioux of South Dakota adopted the Ghost Dance of 1888–90 (Wovoka, from Mason Valley, Nevada). Other adaptations have also been indicative of cultural beliefs. For example, the people of Pyramid Lake used the sweat lodge as a method of personal hygiene and cleansing. It has now been modified to incorporate religious ceremonies, such as prayers and songs to bring in spirits or communicate with the Creator.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Tribal holidays are designated by the Tribal Councils. The National Indian Day holiday is usually held on the last Friday in September to promote Tribal Pride and individual awareness of the tribe's cultural background.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The three most important times in a Paiute's life were traditionally considered to be puberty, the birth of a first child, and death. A four-day ceremony marked a girl's first menstruation. Her relatives built her a special house away from the rest of the camp and painted the girl's face, hair, and scalp with white clay or red ochre. Every morning, the girl ran to the east before the sun rose (sometimes she also ran to the west at sunset). She followed certain taboos concerning food (she could eat no meat or salt), drink, and touching herself, and was given hard labor to do, such as gathering wood. Every night the girl slept on a "hot bed" made by digging a shallow pit and filling it with warm coals, then covering the coals with earth. At the end of the four days, the girl—now a woman—was fed a small animal's liver wrapped in medicinal plants. Her relatives washed her hair and singed the ends of it, and burnt her old clothes. This puberty ceremony had two purposes: to help the girl grow up strong and healthy with the power gained through the spir-

itual rituals; and to teach her that she is no longer a child but now has adult responsibilities.

Boys marked puberty with hunting taboos that they then followed until they reached marriageable age (in their mid- to late-teens). Neither the boy nor his mother, father, or any girl or woman who was fertile could eat any game he killed. He gave any meat he brought home from the hunt to the old people in the community. Once he reached marriageable age, his elder relatives washed and singed his hair, painted his head with red ochre, and lifted the hunting taboos.

At the birth of their first child, both husband and wife followed taboos concerning food, drink, and touching themselves that were similar to those placed on girls at their first menstruation. The husband also ran to the east each morning before the sun rose.

When a death happened in the family, the Northern Paiutes typically burned the *kah-nee* (house), until they occupied government housing. Then the Northern Paiutes adapted and began changing around the room, which included new paint, so that the spirit of the person who died would move on to the next world. It is believed that personal items are to be buried with the individual, including food, water and tools for the journey. The Northern Paiutes didn't believe in Hell; however, if a person was bad in life, he or she would have an uneasy afterlife.

Among Southern Paiutes a corpse's face was painted with red ochre, or the body was wrapped in buckskin and then buried or cremated. The body was often buried in the house where the person died. The house was then sometimes burned. Whether or not the deceased was buried there, the house where he or she died was always abandoned. The deceased's belongings were burned and her or his horses and dogs were killed. Sometimes a child or other relative of the deceased was also killed to keep the deceased company in the next world. Mourners singed their hair and did not eat meat or salt for four days after the funeral.

In the late 19th century, the Paiutes adopted the Cry Ceremony from their Mojave neighbors. At first it was conducted separately from the traditional Paiute funeral rites, but it eventually became a regular part of the funeral ceremony. In the Cry Ceremony, singers chant songs from evening until dawn for one or more nights to help guide the spirit of the deceased to his or her dwelling place in the next world. Each song is part of one of several song cycles, such as the Salt song cycle or the Bird song cycle. Between times of singing, friends and relatives give speeches about the deceased. Paiutes today still perform the Cry Ceremony.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Prior to the arrival of the whites, the Northern Paiutes grouped in bands. These bands were family units that consisted of a father, mother, their offspring, a sister to the mother (which also could be the man's second wife), aunts, uncles, and grandparents. The bands were relatively small in order to sustain life in a harsh desert environment. A Head man or Head woman led the groups to carry out specific tasks. For example, a rabbit Head person would lead the rabbit drive. This person would have special skills in capturing/hunting the rabbits. They might conduct special prayers prior to the activity and request special blessings from the *Numanah*, "Creator of All Things."

Other individuals had special talents/skills in seasonal gathering and other tasks.

Early Southern Paiute communities were led by chiefs called *niavis*. The *niavi* was always male and was usually succeeded by a male family member (often a son). Women had other leadership positions in the community and took part in all community meetings. The community council was made up of all adults, male and female, and made all the decisions concerning community affairs. The *niavi* could make suggestions, but he could not make a decision on behalf of the larger community. He must instead always carry out what the council decided. One of the *niavi*'s most important functions was to give a speech every morning in which he informed the community of the plans for that day and encouraged the people to live in harmony with one another.

Today, the Northern and Southern Paiutes have elected Tribal Representatives who make up the Tribal Councils. These individuals are elected by the Tribal membership and serve one- to four-year terms. Within Nevada, each of the twelve Tribal groups in the state belongs to the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Inc. (ITCN). ITCN was first incorporated in 1963, and the intent of the Inter-Tribal Council was to act as a political vehicle or voice for the Nevada Tribes. Each Tribal Chairperson is a member of the Executive Board, with an annual paid membership of \$250. The Executive Board oversees programs such as the Head Start Program (pre-school education designed to target high-risk families); Women's, Infants, and Children (WIC); Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA); Elders Program (Title X); and the Child Care Development Block Grant (CDBG), to name a few. These programs are intended to help build stronger Native American families and raise the living standards of Indian people as a whole.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the winter, the Paiutes traditionally lived in cone-shaped houses made from a frame of poles joined at the tops, covered with juniper bark, rushes, or the like. By the mid-19th century, they sometimes used animal skins or canvas for the covering. In the summer, they made open-sided rectangular houses with roofs of brush held up by poles. Sometimes they simply made a wall of brush for shelter, or even just lived beneath one or more trees. Winter or summer, in whatever type of shelter, the doorway always faced east, toward the sunrise.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the Paiutes became extremely marginalized and impoverished. Forced onto inadequate reservations, neglected, and eventually "terminated," they had insufficient resources to continue in their traditional ways and little or no access to modern goods and services. In 1968, the average income for the year for a Paiute household was \$2,746. New government programs instituted in recent years have improved conditions on Paiute reservations somewhat. New government housing has been built and an effort has been made to create more job opportunities. The Kaibab Paiute tribe now runs its own police department, senior citizen program, and health and education programs. They also have their own social worker, a member of the tribe, who helps them to take advantage of available social services.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Extended families are extremely important to the Paiutes. They maintain close ties with even the most distant relatives. Mar-

riage to anyone even remotely related is discouraged, so Paiutes often have to look to other communities to find marriage partners. Dances and festivals where many communities gather have long been used as places to meet potential spouses.

The Paiutes traditionally had no marriage ceremony. Couples simply set up housekeeping together. Divorce was just as simple: the household was dissolved and the couple went their separate ways. Marriages were often arranged by older relatives (who knew the extensive family tree and could therefore determine who was and was not related to the prospective bride or groom). Marriages were usually monogamous, but on occasion two siblings would share a spouse. Widows and widowers were encouraged to marry a relative of the deceased.

Households were very fluid, and still are. Family members move around easily between homes, children often going to live with aunts, uncles, or grandparents, etc. This is common and accepted. Many mothers also still use traditional cradleboards (a cushioned board to which a baby is strapped for the first year or so of its life).

## **11 CLOTHING**

Today, Native Americans wear contemporary clothing styles. Prior to the settling of the West, the Northern and Southern Paiutes wore clothing that was culturally indicative of their environment. The Northern Paiutes sometimes wore buckskin clothing, but not to the extent of the well-known Plains style. Deer required major skill to obtain on foot and without guns. The Northern Paiutes utilized rabbit skins in the winter for coats and blankets, while sagebrush bark was processed and used for footwear and other articles of clothing such as skirts for year-round wear. Willow basket hats served to protect the head from the sun.

After contact with white people, the clothing changed from natural materials to man-made materials such as the denim pants, long sleeved shirts, and hats for the men, while the women adopted the calico style dresses with aprons of the 1800s. The women exchanged the woven hats for scarves or handkerchiefs that were worn over the head and tied under the chin. The women usually cut their bangs straight across.

In the summer, both men and women of the Southern Paiutes wore just a breechcloth (a piece of material passed between the legs and through a belt around the waist to hang over in front and back) made of cliffrose bark or antelope or buckskin with woven yucca sandals or leather moccasins. In winter, a blanket of rabbit fur was added over the shoulders. They either stuffed their moccasins with cliffrose bark or wore socks made of badger skin with the fur turned to the inside.

## **12 FOOD**

Traditionally, Northern Paiutes maintained their subsistence patterns by hunting and gathering. An effort was made to change the “roaming” patterns of the Great Basin Natives by settling them on reservations. Farming was introduced, but for the most part it failed as the Nevada environment is arid and water is a scarce commodity. Native People, such as the Northern Paiutes of Pyramid Lake, became involved in long, drawn-out court battles over water rights. The Newlands Reclamation Act of 1915 caused the Truckee River to be diverted at the Carson River point and from the Derby Dam (a 1930s project). The ramifications included the drying up of Pyramid Lake’s sister lake, Winnemucca Lake. This had an impact

on the migratory flyway patterns of geese and ducks, in addition to killing a multitude of animal life and even threatening the prehistoric sucker fish to extinction. The *Kui-ui* or cui-ui is found only at Pyramid Lake. Many other fish, such as the trout, suffered, too.

Traditionally, the people of the Great Basin within Nevada are named after the food that is indicative or prevalent in their area. Examples are the *Kui-ui ticutta*, which translates to “Cui-ui eaters” (Pyramid Lake Paiutes); *Toi Ticutta*, “Cattail Eaters,” (Fallon area people); and *Agai Ticutta*, “Trout Eaters,” (Walker River Paiutes).

Adoption of non-Indian food became a necessity as the lands were being taken over by white settlers. The Native People began to adopt other foods readily, and one in particular has been associated with American Indians—the “frybread” or “fried bread.” The Northern Paiutes have incorporated the frybread into their regular dietary patterns. It is generally eaten by itself, with beans, or even in the form of an “Indian taco.” This somewhat resembles a Mexican tostada, although the tortilla is substituted for the frybread. Another deviation of the frybread is the “greasebread” (“flat bread” or “Indian bread”). Both breads are made of baking powder, salt, white flour and water. It resembles a biscuit type dough, when made; the frybread is fried in 1 to 2 inches of lard or oil, and the greasebread is fried in very little oil or lard. The frybread is 6 to 9 inches in diameter (it resembles a disc), and the greasebread is flattened to resemble an elongated biscuit.

Southern Paiutes traditionally farmed as their means of supporting themselves. They adopted Pueblo-style farming methods that were diffused from Mexico. Traditionally, they grew corn, squash, melons, beans, sunflowers, and two important herbs: amaranth and chenopodium. By the late 18th or early 19th century, they had acquired wheat from the Mojaves (who had obtained it from the Spanish) and added that to their list of crops. They also gathered wild foods such as seeds, berries, agave, and piñon nuts (piñon nut porridge was one of their staple foods) and hunted wild game to supplement their diet. The Paiutes cooked small game animals whole under the coals of the fire and ate the entire animal. Even the bones were crushed and eaten.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Paiutes received very sporadic formal education through the early 20th century. Some government-operated day schools were established and then closed. Stewart Indian School (formally Carson Indian School) was established in 1890 and remained open until 1980. This boarding school was originally designed to “de-Indianize” the Indian, by offering vocational-type training; the students (primarily the Washo, Paiute, and Shoshone) were often kidnapped from their families and forbidden to speak their native tongue. The children ranged from kindergarten age to tenth grade. By World War II, Stewart began accepting other Tribal groups. These included the Navajo, Apache, Hopi, Walapai, and Yavapai, to name a few. Although the school primarily remained vocational, in the 1960s a move was made to provide the students with more academics. Sports were a big plus for many of the students, and they readily excelled in boxing, track and field, football (in the early days up until the early 1970s) and basketball. Many delighted the crowds with the type of ball playing that was considered to be “rez ball.”





*Evelyn James, president of the San Juan Southern Paiute tribe, stands on land they were trying to obtain from the Navajo Nation near Tuba City, Arizona. Tuba Butte, considered sacred by the Paiute, Hopi, and Navajo, can be seen in the background. (AP Images/Jeff Robbins)*

Paiute children were sent to boarding schools for a time, but these were largely unsuccessful. Today, most Paiute children attend public schools. These schools are located a long distance from the Paiute reservations, and the children must spend hours each day on the bus. At the schools, Paiute students are in the minority and suffer from discrimination and harassment. The dropout rate for Paiutes is fairly high.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Northern and Southern Paiutes within the Great Basin are renowned for their basket making skills. Northern Paiute baskets were made from willows. Designs were made from the outer fiber of the willow plant. Southern Paiutes utilized the husks of Devil's Claw seed pods to make designs. Willows were gathered in the early spring and stockpiled for later use. The basket makers were very selective in willow gathering. They selected straight willows that weren't budding with leaves. The process of preparing willows included soaking them in water to make them more pliable. The bark or outer membrane of the willow was then stripped. The core of the willow was then cleaned out by splitting the willow three ways: one piece was held in the mouth and the other two sections held by the right and left hand. The split was done in one continuous movement.

Because of the arid climate of the Great Basin desert area, Nevada basketry and as other pre-historic artifacts have often been preserved in mint condition. Northern and Southern basket collections can be found in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., University of California at Davis, and California's Sacramento Museum of History, as well as in the University of Nevada, Reno's Anthropology Collection and the Lost City Museum in Overton, Nevada.

Although the Northern and Southern Paiutes did not have much in the way of material, they utilized the resources available to them in the most advantageous ways. Pine nuts were often "baked" while shaking and tossing the nuts with hot stones in winnowing trays. Water was transported in pine-pitch covered water jugs. Conical shaped baskets were used to store and carry food. Babies were carried in the *hoop* (Northern Paiute) cradleboards. In the West, whites today use one derogatory term for cradleboard; it is mistakenly called a "papoose." This term is very degrading and inappropriate, since the Native People have a name for the baby's basket.

The first autobiography by a Native North American woman ever published was *Life Among the Paiutes*, by Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (1844-91), published in 1883-84. Sarah Winnemucca, a Northern Paiute, is a controversial figure in Native American history. Many Indian people view her as a

traitor and cite her personally for the forced march to the Fort Malheur Reservation. Sarah was born at Pyramid Lake, and her family was well known within Indian country and among the whites. She acted as an interpreter at Fort McDermitt, and she allegedly informed the U.S. Army of the whereabouts of a so-called renegade group of Indians. Sarah Winnemucca, however, has been credited for starting a day school at the Lovelock Colony, and for being an early leader in Indian education, and for advocating against the wrongdoing of Indian Agents. Her cousin, Young Winnemucca (also referred as Numaga) was the reluctant war leader in the Battle of Pyramid Lake of 1860.

### 15 WORK

Traditionally, Paiutes were small farmers and hunter-gatherers. Both men and women helped with the farming; women did most of the gathering, and men did most of the hunting. Women made baskets and leather goods, first for everyday use, then for sale to traders and, later, tourists.

Today, unemployment and underemployment are serious problems for the Paiutes. The biggest source of income is from basket weaving. The San Juan Paiute women began making Navajo wedding baskets for Navajo ceremonies in the late 19th century. The Navajo either traded or paid for the baskets, but the prices were not high. In the mid-20th century a Navajo paid \$25–60 for a wedding basket. In 1985 the Paiutes held their first basketry exhibition at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was very successful and led to more sales and exhibitions. The Paiutes set up a basketry cooperative to help promote their art form. Today, Paiute basket weavers are able to be much more creative and ask much higher prices for their baskets.

### 16 SPORTS

Young Paiutes today enjoy modern Western sports, such as basketball and softball. Traditionally, the Paiutes played a game they called *kwepu'kok*, or “shinny,” which was like field hockey.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditionally, winter was a time for relaxation for the Paiutes. There was less work to be done, and days and nights were spent telling stories and playing games (mostly gambling games). Three favorite traditional Paiute games were *naiung'wee* (“hand game”), *too'dookweep* (“stick dice”), and *tawsuhng'uhmp* (“rabbit-head game”). In the hand game, two teams sat facing each other and took turns hiding bone or wood cylinders, called “bones,” one striped and one plain. Each team would sing songs to give its side luck while the other team tried to guess in whose hands the striped and plain “bones” were hidden. Teams bet valuable goods, such as buckskin, jewelry, and horses on the outcome of the game.

The stick dice game was played with dice made from flat-sided sticks, colored on one side. The sticks were tossed in the air, and the particular combination in which they landed determined the number of points won. This game was also the occasion of high-stakes gambling.

Paiutes also bet on the rabbit-head game, in which a rabbit's skull was attached by a string about 8 to 12 inches long to a pointed bone (called a *tawsuhng'uhmp*). The player held the bone pin in his or her hand and tossed the skull into the air, attempting to catch it on the pin. If the pin went through

the nose, ear, or eye holes in the skull, the player won 2 points. Catching it through the tooth sockets earned the player 5 points, and the small hole below the ear gained the player 10 points. A player continued tossing and catching the skull until she or he missed.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Besides basketry, Paiutes are known for their porcupine quillwork on buckskin. They traditionally used roots for dyes to color the quills.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Paiutes suffer from centuries of poverty, discrimination, and neglect. They are still viewed by European Americans in terms of old negative stereotypes first promoted in the 19th century, such as “lizard eaters” and “diggers.” At best, Paiutes are patronized by well-meaning European Americans. At worst, they are subject to harassment and racist mistreatment.

In the European-dominated world, Paiutes are faced with prejudice and cultural insensitivity at the hands of non-Native teachers, classmates, workmates, and employers. It is not uncommon for Paiute students in biology classes to have to handle bones known to have been taken from Paiute burials. On the reservation, Paiutes struggle to maintain their traditional identity and Paiute ways under very limiting circumstances. Just recently reinstated by the U.S. government in 1980 as a recognized Native North American tribe (after being “terminated” in 1957), the Paiutes have a long way to go to make up for years of deprivation and marginalization.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Like many other American Indian groups, the Paiute recognized four gender classes, which include males, females, and male and female *berdache* categories. Berdaches, or two-spirit people as they often now referred to, adopted many of the roles of the opposite sex. As the term two-spirit people implies, these individuals mixed both male and female genders and they often signaled this through the adoption of mixed-gender dress. The role of berdache was adopted either through personal choice or through a personal vision that instructed the individual to choose this role. For some Southern Paiute groups, it was reported that male berdaches could become pregnant for the social group.

Gender and age are the two main determinants of Paiute social behavior and social roles. Although the genders each had their own specific roles and responsibilities, both males and females could hold curing or doctoring positions. Northern Paiutes had men and women shaman or curers. For example, the people of the Pyramid Lake area were a matrilineal society. This was contingent on the powers or gifts that the person had. Some individuals had spirit beings called “water babies” assisting them. The doctor or medicine person would go to Pyramid Lake to pray and these special beings would take them under water to learn doctoring techniques. It is believed that the beings took the medicine people/shamans to the surrounding lakes—Winnemucca (now dried-up due to the Derby Dam, part of the Newlands Reclamation Project in the 1930s) and Walker River. Regular people, if they saw these beings, were believed to die later, as these beings' powers were too great. It is believed that these beings were made from a union of a

mermaid (the Northern Paiutes traveled to coastal areas) and a *Numa* (Indian) man. The water babies are their children.

According to Knack (1989), Southern Paiute women had a high degree of economic and political contribution and concomitantly high status even during the historic period, when there were catastrophic economic and social upheavals including reservationalization. In modern times, Southern Paiute women are forced into the economic sector to support their families due to a high degree of male unemployment. The women maintain control over the revenue of the household but are drawn into a traditional pattern of kin-support for their less fortunate relatives. Although Southern Paiute women are often the primary wage earners within families, they typically make less than half of the wage of employed Southern Paiute men.

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—revised by J. Williams

# PANAMANIANIANS

**LOCATION:** Panama

**POPULATION:** 3,292,693 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English; native Amerindian languages

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; Islam; small number of Jews, Hindus, and Baha'is

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

In 1501 the Spanish expedition led by Rodrigo de Bastidas, Juan de la Cosa, and Vasco Nuñez de Balboa traveled around the Atlantic Isthmus of Panama. The 1513 Spanish expedition led by Vasco Nuñez de Balboa made an even greater impact on history as Balboa crossed the isthmus and discovered the Pacific Ocean. This geography made Panama a strategic link for the Spanish empire, especially for the transshipment of gold and silver from Peru. English buccaneers, notably Sir Francis Drake and Henry Morgan, burned and looted the country's ports and towns. Panama declared its independence from Spain in 1821 and became part of Colombia.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought hundreds of thousands of fortune seekers from Europe and the east coast of the United States to Panama, since the isthmus crossing was, for them, the fastest route to the gold fields. A rail line was constructed to speed them on their way. In the 1880s the French tried, but failed, to build a canal across the isthmus. When Colombia balked at allowing the United States to take over the project, Panama declared its independence, with U.S. backing, in 1903. The United States was granted "in perpetuity" an 8-km (5-mi) strip on either side of the canal, which was completed in 1914.

Before long, Panamanians were demanding a revision of the treaty that, in effect, cut their nation in two. A settlement was not reached until 1977, when the United States agreed to return the Canal Zone to Panama in 1979 and to return the canal itself to Panama at the beginning of the year 2000. Relations plummeted again in 1988, when Panama's strongman, General Manuel Antonio Noriega, was indicted in U.S. courts for drug trafficking. In December 1989, 23,000 U.S. troops landed in Panama City, seizing Noriega and installing a new government. At least 4,000 people died in the assault, mostly civilians.

In the 1994 presidential elections, Ernesto Pérez Balladares won with the support of the Democratic Revolutionary Party. His administration was marked by his tireless effort to maintain good relations with the United States and to reform the economy. Balladares' policies focused on privatizing several government companies in pivotal areas, such as the telephone system. Under his administration the country reduced trade barriers and encouraged private investment. In addition, his government decreased unemployment and crime rates and began an ambitious program of highway construction. In spite of his economic achievements, Panamanians voted against Balladares' reelection in the 1998 referendum. A year later, Mireya Mocosó ran a successful campaign and became Panama's first woman president. Mocosó's priority was on improving income distribution in the country. Even though she achieved some of her goals, her government was marked by several corruption scandals.

Consequently, in 2004 Martin Torrijos—the illegitimate son of a former dictator—won the presidential race. Under Torrijos' administration the country has experimented economic growth. However, corruption and government inefficiency have remained without solution. Despite these setbacks, the economic future of Panama looks buoyant because of the blueprint to improve and bolster the Panama Canal. An expansion project began in 2007 with a completion date set for 2014 at a cost of \$5.3 billion dollars (about 30% of GDP). This expansion was expected to double the actual capacity of the canal, thereby increasing tax revenues.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Panama, which is a little smaller than the U.S. state of South Carolina, occupies the narrowest part of the American mainland separating the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It is bounded on the west by Costa Rica, on the east by Colombia, on the north by the Caribbean Sea—an inlet of the Atlantic—and on the south by the Pacific. Heavily forested mountain ranges form the spine of the country, with the highest peak reaching 3,475 km (11,401 ft) above sea level. The Panama Canal runs through a gap in these mountains. There are also more than 1,600 islands off the shores of the mainland. The climate is tropical except at mountain elevations, and rainfall is heavy.

Panama had a population of about 3.2 million in the mid-1990s. In keeping with its position at the crossroads of the world, Panama has a varied racial composition. More than two-thirds of its people are Mestizo, which in Panama includes descent from Africans as well as Indians and Europeans. A smaller number are White or Black, the latter being descendants of migrants from the British West Indies who helped construct the railway and canal and who worked on banana plantations. The Indian population is about 150,000, with the Guaymí, Cuna, and Chocó the chief peoples. There are also significant numbers of Chinese—mostly descendants of railway workers—and of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and Arab countries.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official and almost universally spoken language. Panamanian Spanish is spoken very rapidly in a distinctive accent and includes a lot of slang and many distinctive words. English is the first language of some of the Blacks who are descended from West Indians and is widely spoken and understood in the commercial sector, which includes international banking and trade. It is also the compulsory second language in schools. The Indian groups still speak their own languages, as do immigrants from many parts of the world.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Many peasants believe that on All Souls' Day (November 2), those who died during the previous year are summoned before God and the devil for judgment, with their good and bad deeds weighed on a scale. There are two types of *curanderos* (folk healers): herbal-medicine practitioners, who also may cure by praying and making the sign of the cross over the patient; and *hechiceros* (sorcerers), who traffic in secret potions. The witch (*bruja*) is a malevolent old woman possessed by the devil. Witches can transform themselves into animals, especially deer, but only some can fly. To avoid harm from witches, one should turn a piece of clothing inside out. Also to be feared



are black dogs and black cats and the *chivato*, a malignant animal spirit.

There are numerous other spirits, including *duendos* (fairies). A red shirt on a newborn wards off evil, as does a necklace of the teeth of jaguars or crocodiles, and the infant is bathed in water in which certain leaves and plants have been steeped. Panamanian folklore is perhaps best expressed in the nation's many festivals, during which folk dramas and dances are performed.

## 5 RELIGION

More than 80% of the people are Roman Catholic; Protestants and Muslims account for about another 5% each. The constitution specifies that the Catholic faith shall be taught in public schools, but it is not a compulsory subject. To be completely integrated into the mainstream of Panama society, however, requires at least a nominal adherence to the faith. As elsewhere in Latin America, women are the mainstay of the Catholic Church. There were fewer than 300 Catholic priests in Panama in the mid-1980s. In addition to churches and mosques, Panama City has a Jewish synagogue and Hindu and Baha'i temples.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Carnival is celebrated on the four days before Ash Wednesday (in February), especially in Panama City, where the festivities include music, dancing, costumes, and a big Mardi Gras pa-



*The nuclear family of parents and children prevails in Panama, and the average household has five members. Wider kinship relations are essential, however. The extended family provides economic support in a society where the larger community cannot be counted on for help. (Cory Langley)*

rade. It comes to an end at dawn on Ash Wednesday with a mock ceremony called the “Burial of the Sardine.” Las Tablas also has an outstanding Carnival celebration. Holy Week (late March or early April) also is marked by costumed dances and drama, and by Good Friday processions. Dramatizations of the Passion are held in Rio de Jesús and Pesé. Los Santos holds a traditional Corpus Christi festival.

Portobelo’s Festival of the Black Christ, on October 21, draws purple-clad pilgrims to a life-size statue, housed in a colonial-era church, which is said to have miraculous powers and is paraded through the streets on that day. Similar is the pilgrimage to Atalaya on the first Sunday of Lent to the shrine of Jesus of Nazareth. Each town has a yearly fiesta in honor of its patron saint, culminating in a procession in which the saint’s image is carried through the streets.

The chief secular holidays are November 2 and 28, which commemorate Panama’s independence from Colombia and Spain, respectively. Mother’s Day, which falls on the day of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) in the Church calendar, is also a national holiday, reverently observed.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The one indispensable sacrament for Panama’s Catholics is baptism. Even peasants in remote areas will make the trek to the nearest church, although they may have to wait for the annual fiesta, when a priest will be present. It is believed that

fairies, witches, or the devil can carry away a child who is not baptized. First Communion is generally observed only by the middle and upper classes. A country boy receives his first machete at the age of seven or eight as an early portent of *machismo*, the spirit of male assertiveness common to Hispanic America. Most boys are put to work early, doing farm chores when not attending school. In the cities, boys can earn money shining shoes or selling papers. Girls help their mothers in the home.

The street is the playground for lower-class urban youth, who also may join a *padilla* (gang). Girls are more closely supervised. A girl’s 15th birthday is an important event and, in well-off families, is marked by a debut with a reception and dance. Middle- and upper-class girls enjoy more freedom than in most other Latin American countries. Nevertheless, dating and courtship are closely linked, and a girl is expected not to date more than one boy at a time.

Every effort is made to bury the dead in consecrated ground. The *velorio*, or wake, is an all-night affair in the home, with the deceased, in his or her best dress, on display. This is followed by a novena that may be repeated the next month and the next year. A Mass may be held if a church is near.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Like other Hispanic Americans, Panamanians greet friends and relatives more demonstratively than is the custom in the United States. Common among men is the *abrazo* (embrace), particularly if they have not seen each other for some time. Acquaintances will shake hands both on meeting and departing. Women often embrace and kiss on one or both cheeks. People are likely to stand closer to one another in conversation than is common in North America.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize are more prosperous than the other Central American countries. The average life expectancy of 75 years in Panama is almost as long as in North America. In the early 1990s, 80% of the people had access to healthcare services, and 83% had access to safe water and adequate sanitation. Rural areas, however, have disproportionately high infant and maternal mortality rates, and 25% of Panama’s children under the age of five are considered to be malnourished.

The basic peasant dwelling is the *rancho* or *quincha*, a hut supported by poles, with walls of palm fronds, cane, clay, or boards. The thatched roof is of palm fronds or grass. The building of such a house is a local event in which neighbors gather to help. Houses in town are often of cement block, with a tile roof. The urban poor usually live in overcrowded, decaying two-story frame houses with tin roofs. During the late 20th century, and mainly as a result of the economic boom experimented in urban areas, important sectors of the rural population migrated to the main cities in pursuit of better quality of life for them and their families. Migrants from rural areas often settle in squatter communities on the urban outskirts. Better-class houses generally do not have a front yard but have an enclosed patio in the rear. There are high-rise apartment buildings in Panama City, some of which are condominiums.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family of parents and children prevails in Panama, and the average household has five members. Wider kinship

relations are essential, however. The extended family provides economic support in a society where the larger community cannot be counted on for help. Married children may visit their parents every day, and grandparents, uncles and aunts, and cousins routinely gather together on Sundays, holidays, and birthdays. Also buttressing the nuclear family are godparents, who are expected to take a lifelong interest in their godchild's welfare as well as to provide gifts on baptism, confirmation, and marriage.

Church and civil marriage are both legal, and a recent marriage code recognizes traditional Indian cultural marriage rites as the equivalent of a civil ceremony. Formal marriage, however, is not the rule outside the middle and upper classes, most new couples merely taking up residence in a new home. One study reported that 72% of Panama's children were born from unstable, short-term unions. There is little social stigma to illegitimacy, and many households are headed by women; some are three-generation households headed by a single mother who has a daughter or daughters who are themselves single mothers. In contrast to men, women are expected to be gentle, long-suffering, forgiving and, above all, devoted to their children.

The average Panamanian woman is more likely to practice birth control than are her Central American sisters, giving birth, on average, to three children. Abortion is illegal except to save the life of the mother. Poor women must work outside the home, at least in urban areas. While the constitution mandates equal pay for equal work, wages for women are often lower than those for men for equivalent work, and women hold only 4% of managerial positions. Middle- and upper-class women are under social pressure to attend church services regularly and otherwise to take part in the religious life of the community.

## 11 CLOTHING

Peasant clothing has traditionally consisted of simple cotton garments, homemade sandals, and hand-woven straw hats. More recently rural folk have begun to adopt urban dress, which is much like the summertime clothing in North America.

By contrast, there is a wealth of costume displayed at the nation's many fiestas. The spectacular *pollera*, an embroidered two-piece dress with an off-the-shoulder neckline, is the national costume for women and is perhaps the most beautiful traditional apparel in Latin America. Handmade lace joins the flounces on both blouse and skirt in a color that matches the embroidery. Beneath the skirt are several handmade petticoats. Heavy gold chains are worn around the neck, the hair is studded with flowers and glittering gold jewelry, and the feet are encased in satin slippers. The *pollera* is of Andalusian origin, while the far simpler and more rustic men's *montuno* is of Indian origin. Made of unbleached muslin embroidered in bright colors, the *montuno* consists of a long shirt with a fringe hanging over short trousers, and it is usually accompanied by sandals and a true Panama hat: braided, not woven.

## 12 FOOD

The Panamanian diet differs from that of the other Central American countries (except Belize) because rice is at least as important as corn. A basic breakfast is *guacho*, rice mixed with red beans. However, meat, yams, yucca, and other ingredients



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can be added for a more filling meal. Cornmeal is used for tortillas, tamales, and empanadas, which are like tamales but are fried, not steamed. *Sancocho* is a traditional dish of meat, potatoes, yuccas and yams, corn, perhaps beans or peas, turnips, onions, carrots, and plantains. It is boiled and flavored with the coriander leaf. *Lechona* (suckling pig) is wedding fare. *Carimañola* is yucca root fried and wrapped around seasoned ground meat. Panama's bountiful seafood catch yields many dishes. Roast iguana, tapir, and monkey are treats in the remote forested areas. *Chicha* is a fruit drink rather than, as elsewhere in Central America, one made from fermented cornmeal. *Seco* is rum prepared from sugarcane.

## 13 EDUCATION

Panama had a literacy rate approaching 90% in 1990. Public education is free between the ages of 6 and 15, and six years of primary school are compulsory. About 94.8% of all children of primary-school age, and 50% of those of secondary-school age, are enrolled in school. There are three universities. Nearly 75% of the nation's university students are enrolled at the University of Panama. The other institutions of higher education are Technical University and the Church-run University of Santa Maria la Antigua.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Panamanian traditions are rich in diversity, blending different cultural heritages, such as African, Amerindian, North American, and Spanish influences.

Panama has two traditional song forms, both of Spanish origin: the *copla*, sung by women, and the *mejorana*, sung by men and accompanied by the small native guitar of the same name. The *saloma* is a male song style with yodeling and falsetto. Blacks sing calypso, and the Cuna and Chocó have their own songs to the accompaniment of flutes. Panama has a national symphonic orchestra and a national school of music.

The most popular folk dance, the *tamborito*, is of African origin. Drums furnish the rhythmic background, while female voices sing coplas to the melody. Couples dance one at a time within a circular area. The *cumbia* is a circular dance for any number of couples, set to simple repetitive melodies and accented drumbeats. The *punto*, more graceful and dignified, has precise and formal movements that echo the refinement of 19th-century ballroom dances. As a dance form, the *mejorana* exists in both rustic and refined versions, with men in one line facing women in the other. A national *mejorana* festival is held every September 24 in Guararé.

A wealth of costumed folk dramas are performed at festivals. In *Los Montezumas*, the confrontation of the Spanish and Aztecs in Mexico is recounted. *Los Grandiablos*, a dance-drama, portrays Lucifer and his band of devils in battle with the Archangel Michael for the possession of a soul. The Congos, descendants of slaves, perform a dance-drama in a special dialect during their Carnival festivities.

Important Panamanian poets have included Dário Herrera and Ricardo Miró. Leading Panamanian painters have included Roberto Lewis and Humberto Ivaldi. Among composers have been Narciso Garay, Roque Cordero, and Gonzalo Brenes. One of Latin America's best-known musicians is the Panamanian salsa singer and actor Rubén Blades.

Panama's architecture is known for its eclectic influences. In 1997 the 17th-century colonial design of Panama City's Historic District was designated as a World Heritage site, as were the old Caribbean coastal fortifications of Portobello and San Lorenzo in 1980.

## 15 WORK

Panama's leading economic sectors are government services, commerce, and agriculture. Many subsistence farmers still clear plots by slashing and burning, then move on when the soil loses its fertility. However, cattle ranchers are now displacing them. Other peasants find seasonal work on banana, sugar, and coffee plantations. Most factory jobs are in food processing. Panama has become one of the major international banking centers in the Americas, and the Colón Free Zone is the world's most important duty-free trading zone except for Hong Kong. The official unemployment rate of about 15% appears to be considerably understated.

## 16 SPORTS

Baseball is Panama's most popular sport. A number of Panamanians have played in the major leagues, and Panama-born Rod Carew is in baseball's Hall of Fame. There have been several Panamanian boxing champions, including Roberto Durán. Swimming, fishing, hunting, and horseback riding are popular. Panama City has horseracing with pari-mutuel betting.

Bullfighting in Panama is merely teasing, in which participants annoy the beast while nimbly avoiding danger. It is performed at festivals. Cockfights, accompanied by wagers, are popular throughout the country. Cuna and Guaymí Indians hold pole-tossing contests. Children play a game like marbles with cashew seeds.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For rural people, festivals are still the high points of the year. These include agricultural fairs, in which a queen is crowned, judges pick prize-winning animals, and carnival rides draw youngsters. Traditional forms of live entertainment, however, are giving way to the lure of discos, movies, and television. By law, all foreign-language movies must be subtitled in Spanish. There are five television stations. Mexican and Venezuelan soap operas are widely popular in Panama. Panama City has lots of nightclubs and more than 20 gambling casinos.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Handicraft articles include baskets, straw hats, net and saddlebags, hammocks, straw mats, gourds, woodcarvings, and masks. Most pottery is dark red and dull-finished. *Molas* are colorful hand-stitched appliqué textiles made by Cuna women. Georgina Linares is known for her paintings on leather.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There is a serious street-crime problem in urban slums. Spousal violence against women is widespread. According to official 1994 statistics, one-fifth of all families do not have enough money for a minimum diet, and a further one-fourth cannot meet their basic needs. The nation's forests are being reduced at an alarming rate, and soil erosion is a serious problem.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

During the 1990s, considerable progress was made in women's rights at the political and institutional levels as a result of pressure from the women's movement. The Ministry of Youth, Women, Children, and the Family, which includes the National Directorate of Women, was created in 1997 and charged with management of public policies concerning equality of opportunities. To encourage greater women's political participation, an amendment to the Electoral Code, proposed by the National Forum of Women in Political Parties, was adopted in 1998, requiring a minimum electoral quota of 30% for women. Even though Mireya Moscoso was elected as Panama's first female president in 1999, the highest rate of women's participation in government is in the judiciary, where 129 (46.4%) of the 278 judges, magistrates, and court counsels are women. In contrast, women comprise only 8.3% of the legislative assembly.

In addition to political participation, women in Panama have made important advances in education. In Central America, only Costa Rica has a higher adult literacy rate. With a net enrollment ratio of 94.8%, the country has achieved nearly universal coverage of elementary school and women are a majority of the students in higher education. About 68% of the enrolled students at the University of Panama are women.

Even though Panamanian women have always had a lower employment rate than men, the gap has narrowed during the last decades. While in 1970 women's labor force participation rate was 26%, in 2000 this proportion climbed to 35%. How-

ever, women are found disproportionately in positions of low prestige and remuneration and are paid less than men in the same positions. Between 1985 and 1995, the average monthly income of Panamanian women was us\$289, or 83% of men's average monthly income of us\$349.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# PARAGUAYANS

**LOCATION:** Paraguay

**POPULATION:** 6,831,306 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; Guarani

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism 89% (official). Protestant 6.2% Christian 1.1%

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

An isolated, landlocked country, Paraguay has for much of its history deliberately kept itself apart from the rest of Latin America. Tucked away in the south-central part of the continent, it is a sparsely populated country, hot, subtropical lowland that has been dubbed “the empty quarter” of South America.

When the first Europeans arrived in the 16th century, Guarani-speaking people inhabited most of what is now eastern Paraguay, while west of the Rio Paraguay many other Amerindian tribes, known collectively as Guaycuru to the Guarani, lived in the Chaco territories. The Paraguayans threw out their Spanish governor in 1811 and proclaimed independence. But, because the colony was regarded as being so isolated and economically unimportant, the Spanish authorities did not bother to do anything about it and left the new country to its own devices.

Paraguay's recent history has been characterized by wars, political and economical instability, and authoritarian regimes. The country has been involved in two of the three major wars on the continent: the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay and the Chaco War (1932–1935) against Bolivia. During the War of the Triple Alliance in 1864, Paraguayan forces were badly defeated and the country lost 150,000 sq km (58,000 sq mi) of territory. But far worse, it lost much of its population through combat, famine, and disease. One estimate indicates it lost nearly all its males between the ages of 15 and 70. It was a blow from which the country has never completely recovered.

In 1932 a series of hostilities occurred between Bolivia and Paraguay over the Chaco boreal territory, a region located to the west of Paraguay. The conflict was rooted in the War of the Pacific (1879–1884), during which Chile annexed the entire coast of Bolivia. After having lost its maritime condition, Bolivia attacked Paraguay with the intention of ending its landlocked situation while seizing the strategic territory that goes from Rio de la Plata to the Atlantic coast. Paraguay formally declared war on Bolivia in 1933. After two years of conflict that took the lives of about 100,000 men, the Chaco Peace Conference Treaty ended the war, and Paraguay made impressive gains in territory.

After the civil war of 1947, Paraguay underwent a 35-year military regime. In 1954, Alfredo Stroessner seized power through a military coup. During more than three decades (1954–1989) this son of German immigrants governed the country with an iron fist, becoming one of the most repudiated dictators in South America during the 1970s. Economically, Stroessner's administration stabilized the currency and controlled inflation. In addition, the Paraguayan dictatorship improved the country's infrastructure with the construction of schools, public health facilities, and roads. However, the mil-





itary government spent huge sums of the national budget on paramilitary forces to repress political opposition. Stroessner's supporters dominated the nation's legislature and courts. The constitution was modified in 1967 and 1977 to legitimize his six consecutive elections to the presidency. Moreover, Stroessner's human rights record was heavily damaged by its participation in the so-called Operation Condor, a clandestine campaign coordinated by several South American rulers to eliminate their opponents. This illegal organization was responsible for numerous extralegal arrests, extraditions, and other human rights abuses.

In 1989 the brutal dictatorship was overthrown by General Andres Rodriguez, who was elected to the presidency. In the same election, more opposition party members gained congressional seats than ever before. Democratic elections were held in 1991 and General Rodriguez's Colorado Party won a legislative majority. An era of political debate and activity was opening up for the first time in Paraguay's history. However, Paraguayans continued to experience violent political events. In 1999 Vice President Luis Maria Argana was assassinated. Later, the first and second civilian elected presidents, Juan Carlos Wasmosy (1993-1998) and Luis Angel Gonzalez (1999-2003), were indicted on charges of corruption.

Since 2003, Nicanor Duarte has ruled the country, focusing on ending corruption and drug trafficking. In pursuing these goals, purging and modernizing the national police force, as well as deep reform processes in the judiciary system—espe-

cially oriented to renovate the Supreme Court—have remained the main goal of the current administration.

Economically, Paraguay relies on agriculture for much of its export industry, and the most important crops grown are cassava, sugarcane, maize (corn), soybeans, and cotton, as well as cattle products. It remains one of the most industrially undeveloped countries in South America. The development of the world's largest hydroelectric project at Itaipu, situated in eastern Paraguay, brings the hope of economic change. Mineral resources, including petroleum, are almost nonexistent.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Lying within the heart of South America, Paraguay is surrounded by the huge, neighboring countries of Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia. With an area of 407,000 sq km (157,000 sq mi), it is slightly larger than Germany and almost exactly the size of California. Although half the country is covered by timber, much of it has little commercial value.

Dividing the country into two unequal halves is the Rio Paraguay. This river connects the capital, Asunción, with the Rio Paraná and the Atlantic Ocean. The great majority of the population lives in the eastern section of this divide, making up about 40% of the whole country.

Contraband has become one of Paraguay's major sources of currency. Electronic goods and agricultural produce find their way through Ciudad del Este to and from Brazil. There is also a substantial trade in stolen cars and illegal drugs, including cocaine.

Paraguay's population of 6.8 million is approximately one-seventh the size of that of the state of California, which has about the same area. Asunción is the largest city, with 577,000 residents, but only 43% of Paraguayans live in urban areas, compared with 80% in Argentina and Uruguay. Most people can claim to be native Paraguayans, and 90% are mestizo, of mixed Spanish and Guarani blood. Many Paraguayans are peasant farmers, who make a living by selling their small surplus of crops.

About 20% of Paraguayans are of European stock, including about 100,000 Germans. In the 1930s, German Mennonites, a pacifist, religious sect similar to the Amish sects of North America, were allowed in by the government to establish agricultural settlements in central Chaco. Despite the harsh, challenging conditions of the region, the Mennonites have been very successful, although there have been problems with a number of local Amerindian tribes. Japanese immigrants have also settled in parts of eastern Paraguay, along with Brazilian agricultural colonists, many of German origin, who have moved across the border in recent years. Paraguay's Amerindians represent 3% of the population, and most of them live in the Chaco region.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Both Spanish and Guarani are Paraguay's official languages. Guarani is spoken by nearly nine-tenths of the population; however, government and business use the Spanish language almost exclusively. This co-existence of both languages is a reflection of its colonial history, for when the Spaniards settled in the country they were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the Guarani native Amerindians. As a result, intermarrying became the norm. Today, almost 90% of Paraguayans are

mestizos, of mixed Spanish-Guarani heritage, many of them preferring to speak Guarani.

Several other Amerindian languages are spoken in the Chaco and in isolated parts of eastern Paraguay, including Lengua, Nivacle, and Ache. Contact with the Mennonites has also meant that for many Amerindians, German has become their second language, rather than Spanish.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The historical merging of Spanish and Guarani blood over the centuries has created a Spanish-Guarani culture, which is reflected in the folklore, arts, and literature of the country.

#### 5 RELIGION

The state religion of Paraguay is Roman Catholicism, although the Catholic Church is weaker and less influential than in most other Latin American countries. Two of the reasons for this are Paraguay's traditional isolation from mainstream South America and the fact that the government has shown less interest in religion as an institution. As a result, a number of irregular religious practices have grown up over the years. In fact, in some rural areas, priests are seen as healers and men of magic, rather than as official representatives of the Catholic Church.

At the same time, fundamentalist Protestants have not had as much success in finding converts in Paraguay as they have in other Latin American countries, although the Mennonites have had some influence among Chaco Amerindians since they arrived in the 1930s.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Christmas and Easter are major Christian holidays, as well as the Día de la Virgen, on December 8, celebrating the Immaculate Conception. The War of the Triple Alliance in the 1860s is commemorated on March 1, and February sees the celebration of the popular Latin American festival, Carnival.

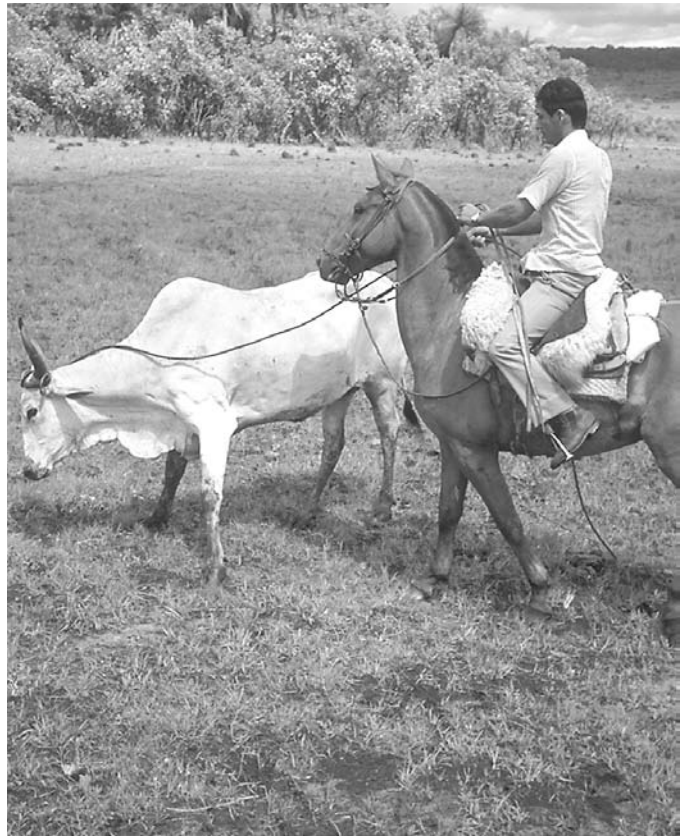
#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Because of the influence of the Catholic Church, baptisms, first Communion and saints' days play an important part in the lives of many families.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As in the rest of South America, Paraguayan social life revolves around the family. For example, padrinos, or godparents, are particularly important because if parents become unable to provide for their children, godparents are expected to assume responsibility for them.

A popular social pastime is the drinking of *mate*, Paraguayan tea made from holly leaves. It is regarded as being more significant than a simple drink like tea or coffee and is, in fact, seen as an important ritual to be shared among family, friends, and colleagues. In other words, the whole purpose of drinking *mate* is the act of sharing. At each sitting, one person is responsible for filling a gourd almost to the top with the tea. Water is heated, but not boiled, in a kettle and poured into the vessel. The liquid is then sipped by each person from a silver tube, which has a bulbous filter at its lower end to prevent the leaves from entering the tube.



*Most Paraguayans in rural areas survive on subsistence crops on small landholdings, selling any surplus at local markets.*  
(Anne Kalosh)

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Asunción has preserved much of its 19th-century architecture, with narrow streets full of low buildings. Meanwhile, a steady flood of rural poor has caused large shantytowns to mushroom in open spaces by the river and close to the railway. Some 40% of the population still survives in rural areas, enduring poor sanitation and malnutrition. Paraguay has one of the highest infant mortality rates in South America, and its levels of welfare place it very low by world and South American standards. Paraguay's social welfare system, however, does provide cash and medical care for sickness, maternity, and injury at work, as well as pensions for old age.

Most rural Paraguayans live in one-room houses, called *ranchos*. Most have earthen floors; reed, wood, or brick walls; and a thatched roof, sloped to carry off the heavy rains. A separate or attached shed serves as a kitchen. Few houses have indoor plumbing. Urban dwellers—over 40% of the population—occupy small, pastel-colored houses of brick or stucco, with tiled roofs and iron grillwork covers on the windows. The urban poor live in shacks, although, unlike other large Latin American cities, Asunción does not have sprawling slum areas.

Paraguay's geographical isolation has led to high transport costs, which have driven up the price of its exports in comparison with other Latin American countries.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Population growth is encouraged, although child abandonment and high rates of maternal mortality are problems. However, between the 1970s and the mid-2000s, the total population increased from 2.4 million to more than 6 million as a result of a decreasing death rate and a continued high birth rate. This explosive growth has resulted in a relatively young population.

There is also a high level of illegitimacy, particularly in rural areas. This is often blamed on the great distances that separate rural dwellings from the nearest towns, as well as the extreme poverty of the peasants who cannot afford the expense of the wedding ceremony. Marriage itself may be performed both as a civil and a religious ceremony.

## 11 CLOTHING

In urban areas, Paraguayans dress as people do in America or Europe. Many rural women wear a shawl, called a *rebozo*, and a simple dress or a skirt and blouse. The men generally wear loose trousers, called *bombachas*, a shirt or jacket, a neckerchief, and a poncho. Rural people generally go barefoot.

## 12 FOOD

Paraguayan cuisine reflects traditional Guarani cooking styles. Beef dishes and freshwater river fish are popular. Typical foods are soups, often with meat and different types of breads, especially *chipa*, which is flavored with cheese and eggs. In general terms, Paraguayan food is similar to that of Argentina and Uruguay, although there are significant differences. People eat less meat than in either of the other River Plate republics, although *parrillada*, grilled meat, is still a popular item on restaurant menus. At the same time, the influence of Guarani tastes in tropical and subtropical ingredients can often be seen in Paraguayan recipes.

A common part of almost every meal is grain, particularly maize (corn), and tubers such as cassava. *Locro* is a maize stew, while *mazamorra* is a maize mush.

The national dish and dietary staple is *sopa paraguaya*, which is not a soup but rather a cornbread with cheese and onion. Cassava dishes are the mainstay of the rural poor, for the vegetable thrives abundantly on thin to mediocre soils.

Corn (maize) is a staple ingredient in many dishes, including *sopa paraguaya*, a pie made from corn, eggs, and milk; *avatí mbaipy*, a corn soup; and *mbaipy he-é*, a dessert made from corn, milk, and molasses. Beer and *caña*, a cane sugar spirit, are popular drinks. *Yerba mate*, the local herbal tea, is consumed year-round—chilled in summer, hot in winter. A common pastime is drinking *tereré* (a bitter tea made from the same type of leaves that are used to brew *yerba mate*) from a shared gourd or from a hollowed cow's horn, or *guampa*, which often is beautifully carved.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is only compulsory up to the age of 12. Although the official enrollment figures are high, the dropout rate is also high. The literacy rate is 94%, making it the lowest of the River Plate republics, although it is higher than all the Andean countries except Ecuador. There is higher education at the Universidad Nacional and the Universidad Católica in Asunción, both of which also have branches throughout the country. Since the

return to democracy, beginning in the 1990s, the number of private universities has increased. At least half of all university graduates are female.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In general, very little Paraguayan literature is available to English-speaking readers, but novelist and poet Augusto Roa Bastos introduced Paraguay to the international literary stage by winning the Spanish government's Cervantes prize in 1990. Although he was forced to spend much of his life in exile from the Stroessner dictatorship, Roa Bastos uses Paraguayan themes and history, intertwining them with the story of his country's politics.

Works by other important Paraguayan writers, such as novelist Gabriel Cassaccia and poet Evio Romero, are not readily available in English.

## 15 WORK

Most people in rural areas survive on subsistence crops on small landholdings, selling any surplus at local markets. They then supplement their incomes by laboring on the large *estancias* and plantations.

There are still small, but important, populations of Amerindians in the Chaco and in scattered areas of eastern Paraguay. Until very recently, some of them relied on hunting and gathering for their livelihood. The Nivacle and Lengua are the largest groups, who both number around 10,000 people, and many of them work as laborers on the large agricultural estates.

Many Paraguayans, either for political or economic reasons, live outside the country, mostly in Brazil and Argentina. Between 1950 and 1970, more than 350,000 Paraguayans migrated to Argentina to find work. Although the official minimum wage in Paraguay is approximately 200 dollars per month, the Ministry of Justice and Labor is unable to enforce its regulations, and it is estimated that about 70% of Paraguayan workers earn less than the minimum wage.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer, like elsewhere in this part of Latin America, is the most popular sport, both for watching and playing. Asunción's most popular team, Olímpico, is on a level with the best Argentine and Uruguayan teams.

Paraguayans also enjoy basketball, volleyball, horseracing, and swimming.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Theater is popular in Paraguay, and productions are staged in Guarani as well as Spanish. The visual arts are also very important and popular. Asunción offers many galleries, the most important being the Museo del Barro, which mounts a wide range of modern works. Classical and folk music are performed at venues throughout the capital.

Religious holidays are celebrated with festivals that include music, dancing, and parades, as well as athletic contests.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Paraguay's most famous traditional craft is the production of multicolored spider-web lace in the Asunción suburb of Itaugua, where skilled women from childhood to old age practice the cottage industry. Paraguayan harps and guitars, as well as

filigree gold and silver jewelry and leather goods, are made in the village of Luque, while the Amerindian communities of Chaco produce high-caliber craft items of their own.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

When Juan Carlos Wasmosy was elected as Paraguay's first civilian president, the then-ruling Colorado Party, nominated him merely as a figurehead. Since then, however, he has clashed with the still-powerful military establishment, particularly General Lino Oviedo, who led the coup against the previous military dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the military's position is being challenged as it comes under scrutiny for its treatment and abuse of conscripts, from groups like the Movimiento de Objeción de la Conciencia. At the same time, President Wasmosy is also being investigated for his business dealings connected with Paraguay's major hydroelectric projects.

So far, Paraguayan industry, which is mainly concerned with the processing of agricultural products, has seen little benefit from the hydroelectric boom. The economic growth of the 1970s has been almost wiped out by the long delays in finishing two major hydroelectric projects. In 1994 the economic growth rate was only 3.6%, while inflation has been running at roughly 45%.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

According to the UNDP Gender Development Index, Paraguay does worse than most of its neighbors in terms of gender equality. Women continue to have lower educational levels than men and 6 out of 10 illiterate persons in the country are women. In addition, the country has one of the highest rates of maternal death in the Latin America and Caribbean region, with abortion being the second most common cause of maternal death. Teenage pregnancies are also high for regional standards. About 28% of the women aged 15 to 24 have been pregnant at least once and, among these, the majority has given birth to their first child when they were 18 years old or younger. This figure goes up to 32% among the poor. Single mothers, separated women, and widows comprise 23% of Paraguay's poor population.

A new generation of gender-based organizations began to activate in Paraguay in the mid-1980s and have been able to successfully pursue several legal and institutional reforms, including the creation of the Women's Secretariat in 1992, a state agency responsible for coordinating gender policies.

However, women are still heavily underrepresented at all levels in the Paraguayan political structure. Women represent slightly less than 16% of all elected officials and less than 3% of those voted to positions of executive authority. There are no women governors and only seven women had been elected as town mayors as of 2008. The percentage of women in the Chamber of Deputies in 2004 was 2.5%, which makes Paraguay one of the worst countries in the world for female representation in parliament. The share of women in congress is not only very low, but also decreased from 4.2% in the 1989–1993 period.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# PEMON

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Arecuna, Kamarakoto, Taurepan

**LOCATION:** Venezuela

**POPULATION:** 15,000 (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Pemon

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs mingled with Christian elements

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Though the date of first occupation of the Gran Sabana is not known, the Pemon are thought to have immigrated into the region some 200 years ago. The Pemon-Caribs are known in the literature as Arecuna, Kamarakoto, and Taurepan. They call themselves Pemon and became widely known relatively recently when Capuchin missionaries and Protestant evangelists from Guyana and Brazil came to their territory in the southeast of Venezuela, together with the first gold and diamond mine workers. There are no historical sources from before 1750, when the area was mentioned in the context of determining borderlines by individuals who never visited the area. The first real incursions date from 1838 and 1843. At the end of the 19th century, English Protestant missionaries started to evangelize among the Pemon, followed later by all kinds of Christian groups, but it was only in 1931 that the first Capuchin mission post in the Pemon area was established, 20 km (12 mi) from the Brazilian border. From 1936 onward, the gold and diamond rush penetrated the area and, during the 1960s, the air connection and overland route were built. But, the diamond mining operations have been intermittent. This, together with the poor quality of Pemon agricultural land and grasses for pasturage, and the late opening of the Pemon area, has spared them from major land invasions. Many traditions and much of the original communication—language, smoke signals, and swift-footed walks—have survived.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The expanse of the Pemon's tribal territory covers the coastal area of the Atlantic in Venezuela, the inland mountain savanna area, and the Amazon area. They are the most far-flung of the Central Guiana Highlands peoples. The Guayana region of La Gran Sabana in the state of Bolívar is characterized by big table-mountains and an immense savanna. The German writer and explorer, Uwe George, when describing what he saw in this part of the Pemon territory, in a remote corner of southeastern Venezuela near the border with Brazil and Guyana, spoke of the *tepui*s, the Pemon word for enormous sandstone mesas. The *tepui*s are the remains of mighty sandstone plateaus that once stretched across the entire area. In the course of time the plateaus were largely worn down by erosion, leaving only the *tepui*s as giant monuments to their existence. The word *tepui* means "house of gods" in the native language of the Pemon.

The table-top mountains are the oldest exposed rock formations on the planet, and there are more than 100 such *tepui*s, but fewer than half have been extensively explored. Many of them are hidden by dense cloud cover for days at a time, like the surface of Venus. "In some respects," George says, "we know more about that distant planet than we do about the vast and mysterious *tepui*s of Venezuela." The tops of this flat-topped hill are characterized by cool temperatures with frequent rain-

fall, while the bases of the mountains have a tropical, warm, and humid climate. Some *tepui* depressions contain unique animals and flora not found anywhere else in the world. This has led topographers and other scientists to call the *tepui*s the Galapagos Islands of the mainland. Most *tepui*s are located in the more than 30,000 square kilometers that conform the Canaima National Park in Venezuela, which in 1994 was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The most famous *tepui*s in the park are Mount Roraima, the tallest and easiest to climb, and Auyantepui, which has the Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world with 807 m (2,648 ft) of altitude. The Pemon have an intimate relationship with the *tepui*s and believe they are the home of the *mawari* spirits.

## 3 LANGUAGE

There are at least 40 languages in Venezuela, and Pemon is one of them. According to the Venezuelan constitution of 1999, Spanish as well as the languages spoken by Indigenous peoples from Venezuela are considered official. Pemon is a Caribbean language spoken mainly in Venezuela, specifically in the Gran Sabana region of Bolívar State. According to the 2001 census, there are 15,094 Pemon speakers in Venezuela. Other names used in the literature to describe Pemon speakers are: Pemong, Arecuna, Aricuna, Jaricuna, Kamarakoto, Camaracoto, Taurepan, Taulipang, Makuxi, Macuxi, and Macushi. There are two major Pemon dialects, Taurepan and Arecuna. Speakers of each dialect can understand each other fairly easily. Two other closely related languages, Camaracoto and Ingariko, are also considered Pemon dialects by some linguists but are more distinct and difficult for Taurepan and Arecuna speakers to understand.

Father Cesareo de Armellada was the author of the first grammar and dictionary of the Pemon language (1943), formerly called Taurepan. The world of the Pemon is shown in their very descriptive language. Their word for "sugarcane" is *kaiwara-kún-imá*, which means "pineapple with very long leg." The word for "pineapple" itself, *kaiwara*, means "a sweet with wrinkles." The Pemon word for "dew" is *chirké-yetakú*, which means "star's saliva." *Yetakú* is "saliva" or, more precisely, "juice of the teeth."

There is no word for "year" in the Pemon language, and the day is divided into "dawning," "morning," "noontime," "afternoon," and then just "dark" or "nighttime." Most temporal references only cover "yesterday," "today," "tomorrow," and *pena*, "time past." The Pemon speak their own Carib language among each other, and Spanish or pidgin Spanish with the *criollos* (mixed-blood Venezuelans). In the mission villages and mining areas of the state of Bolívar, more and more youngsters also use Spanish in their own Amerindian society. Most Pemon people have Christian names now. They often have two Amerindian names as well, one of which is a sacred and secret name.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The religious notions from the time before contact with the Christian world have been preserved by accounts from anthropologists and folk tales. The Pemon traditionally believed that each person has five souls that look like shadows of a human. The fifth one is the one that talks and leaves the body to travel around when the person is dreaming. This is the only one that goes to the beyond after death, en route to the Milky Way. Be-

fore arriving, it meets the Father of the Dogs, and if the person has mistreated his or her dogs, their souls will recognize the person and kill him or her. One of the other four souls inhabits the knee and stays put for a while after death to turn later into a bad spirit. The other three souls turn into birds of prey after death. All animals and plants are believed to have souls. Stones, on the other hand, do not have souls but house bad spirits.

The *Makunaima* is a sequence of creation tales of the Pemon land, crops, techniques, and social practices. It starts with the creation of a wife for the first Pemon—the Sun—by a water nymph. The basic sexual divisions of labor, and the ideas of proficiency in subsistence tasks as a prerequisite to a successful marriage, are laid out in this story. At the time, the Sun was a person. One day he went to the stream and saw a small woman with long hair. He managed to grasp her hair, but she told him, “Not me! I will send you a woman to be your companion and your wife.” Her name was Tuenkaron, and the next day she sent the Sun a White woman. He fed her, and she lit a fire. But when the Sun sent her to the stream, as she came in contact with water, she collapsed into a little heap of clay. The woman was made of white earth. The next day Tuenkaron sent him a black woman. She was able to bring water, but when she tried to light a fire, she melted: the woman was made of wax. The third woman was red, a rock-colored woman. The sun tested her—she did not melt or collapse. She was strong and able to contribute to the running of the household. They had several children, and these are the Pemon. Other important myths are the Tree of Life and the Spirit of Death.

The Tree of Life narrates a famine experienced by Pemon ancestors and how they managed to overcome this great hunger. According to this tale, Pemon people discovered a magical tree laden down in the jungle. What made this tree special was that it had all the fruits and vegetables in the world, which allowed the tribe to survive in times of scarcity. The Spirit of Death is related to the highest waterfall in the world: the Angel Falls. Even though this natural beauty is regarded as one of the most impressive natural beauties, for the Pemon people the cascade represents an evil spirit that seduces the visitors with its gorgeous beauty and attracts them into the forest where a poisonous snake awaits to bite the intruders.

The wide range of myths in Pemon culture finds its explanation in the fact that they do not believe in natural death, therefore, all legends are an attempt to explain through magical means the people’s disappearance. Moreover, with the purpose of personalizing the evil, Pemon people have created a symbolic character, the Kanaima. This figure represents death in Pemon culture. According to the popular belief, it is the Kanaima who seeks them to defeat and kill them. Among Kanaima’s supernatural powers is the ability to take the form of a jaguar or a spirit.

## 5 RELIGION

Though the Pemon have been relatively spared the influence of the modern nation-state, as not enough of anything valuable has been found to attract wholesale colonization, the presence of missions has left its mark. Most of the Amerindian thoughts and consciousness came to be mixed to a lesser or higher degree with Christian elements. *Chichikrai* is the name for Jesus Christ in three syncretistic Christian Amerindian cults: Hallelujah, Chochiman, and San Miguel. These cults have the nature



of a spiritual movement. Hallelujah as a name suggests Christian influence. However, while to Christians it means “Praise the Lord,” to the Amerindian it means “the word of god.” This is because, in a vision given by God to a former shaman, who had converted to Christianity and was then betrayed by the missionaries, God taught the shaman the new religion and told him it was called Hallelujah. Some Hallelujah beliefs are similar to Christian beliefs. They believe in God and Jesus Christ as his son but do not acknowledge the concept of salvation through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. In spite of the strength of Catholicism, the Pemon believe in Kanaima—the spirit of evil. Social traditions, like cross-cousin marriage, that are opposed by the Church are practiced by many Pemon. Cult saints, like Maria Leonza, a female saint of Amerindian origin whose role is a healing and protecting one, sometimes can hardly be discerned from another local saint, the Virgin of the Valley, who is actually a Maria (Mary, mother of Jesus) in the Catholic sense.

An important attempt to prevent the disappearance of Pemon beliefs and traditions was made in 1985 at the AVEC Congress on Bilingual Education. It was declared that the Amerindians have a natural right to uphold their traditional beliefs, and that Jesus Christ and the New Testament are only additions to that indigenous religion.



Pemon Indian Jose Lesama walks in the Gran Savanna in Canaima National Park, near Caracas, Venezuela. (AP Images/Leslie Mazoch)

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As most Pemon have been evangelized, their major holidays are the same as those celebrated by Catholics. Holy Week and Christmas are duly kept, with open demonstrations of sorrow during the first and joy in the latter. As is common all over Latin America, religious practices are a potpourri of new and old beliefs and, particularly in the case of peoples like the Pemon Indians whose cultural memory has not been lost, the shadows of the past can be traced, even when hidden behind a thick layer of Catholicism.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional rites of passage were associated with the life-cycle (birth, puberty, and death), but most are no longer celebrated. Baptism in a Catholic mission is the only important rite of passage nowadays. Often the father will give the child a name in the Pemon language that is secret, and it is forbidden to use the secret name to address any person, male or female. Not so with Spanish names, and the Pemon are eager to baptize their children to give them such names. Women usually do not have last names, and men adopt the ones of their *criollo* (mixed-blood Venezuelan) bosses in the diamond mines. Brothers, therefore, sometimes end up with different last names.

One of the traditional rites of passage ruled eating habits during pregnancy to protect the soul of the child. The parents were forbidden to eat big fish, some species of birds, and many

mammals. The big fish, for example, would take the child's soul into the water where it would drown. The parents were allowed, on the other hand, to eat small fish and the dove *waku-wa*, which is the one that brings the soul to the baby.

The Pemon believe that the man forms the baby in the woman's uterus through repeated copulation. According to traditional beliefs, the solid parts of babies—the bones—come from the father, and the blood comes from the mother. The mother gives birth behind a partition installed in the hut. Her mother or mother-in-law helps her. For ten days after the birth, the parents stay behind the partition with their newborn child.

The rites of puberty also involved forbidden foods for males for a year after the first ceremony in which an alderman lashed the boy's body, made incisions in his body, and applied magical substances to the wounds. Finally, the boy had to endure the challenge of the ants. Girls' hair was cut before their first menstruation, and the edges of their mouths were tattooed in a traditional design. At the first sign of menstruation, the girl would retire to her hammock and was considered impure. Her grandmother would then paint her whole body. At some point during puberty, the girls also had to endure the challenge of the ants, on their hands, arms, face, and feet.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Marriage is the key to the social organization of the Pemon people: it determines the pattern of visits between villages,

which is at the heart of their social life. Reciprocal visits for beer parties and meetings with relatives tie neighborhoods and regions together. The prestige of a settlement is often gauged by the quality and quantity of manioc (cassava) beer offered by the hosts. Conversation is animated when the family gathers around the pepper pot, and if guests are present, the men will eat first. Overt conflict, anger, and fighting are strongly reprobated by the Pemon. The basic response to conflict is to withdraw from the conflict situation, often by taking an extended visit to relatives living elsewhere and waiting for things to calm down. Gossip, ridicule, and sometimes ostracism are used as ways of controlling situations. Gossip, however, is a double edged weapon: the Pemon say trouble occurs over false gossip and women. As the Pemon do not approve of anger or displays of hostility, physical punishment of their children is very rare. If an adult strikes a child at all, it is so mildly as to be merely a reminder. Pemon children learn by example and are given free rein.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the old days, when somebody in a Pemon village fell ill, the local shaman or *paisan* ascribed the illness to one of the many mythical spirits. For healing, the shaman uses his *taren* recipes, a mixture of magical and medicinal plants and charms. The *taren* is a magical invocation, a verbal spell that can aid in the birth of a child, counter the bite of various snakes, heal headaches and stomach pain, and so on. The *taren* can only be taught on a one-to-one basis, and its performance is as private as possible. *Taren esak* are practitioners and may be men or women who do not have to be shamans. The problem is that the traditional *taren* and *murang* treatments cannot heal the Old World diseases easily, to which the Amerindians are still extremely sensitive, as they were in the first centuries of the colonial period when their population was decimated. Today, "medicine-men" as well as dentists have the task to visit the Amerindian villages in their area regularly, but the modern *criollo* (mixed-blood Venezuelan) doctors are too far distant. Still, mission-provided antibiotics and vaccines have reduced Pemon infant mortality rates.

The Pemon's traditional housing consists of huts whose walls are made of clay or bark, with roofs made of palm leaves. Their shape is either oblong or rounded and, more recently, square. Also recent is the introduction of walls within the house. The hammocks are hung from the beams of the roof, and a fire is kept at one or two corners of the house. Arrows, knives, axes, and fishing rods are piled up in one corner, while baskets, haversacks, and pumpkins hang on the walls. The Pemon, even those who live in the forest, like to build their houses out in the open savanna. They place them near watercourses, and often the settlements are known by the name of the adjacent watercourse. Living on the savanna and cultivating in the forest often means traveling long distances on foot to get to the fields and back.

The traditional subsistence activities of the Pemon are agriculture, hunting, and fishing, but today there is increasingly more work to be found in mining and tourism.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage is the basis of the principal economic unit: the couple. The relationship between the father-in-law and son-in-law is most important. For the father-in-law, his son-in-law is the

substitute for his own son; therefore, after the marriage, the son-in-law will detach himself from his own father and take care of his father-in-law. In the Pemon society there is no wedding ceremony. The groom simply moves his hammock to his father-in-law's house and starts working with him.

The Pemon love their children, and their attitude towards them is lenient. Grown-ups never impose severe prohibitions, and parents are not constantly reminding their children how they should behave. Children learn by following the parents' example and very seldom require discipline or punishment.

Pemon women can run the household well enough by themselves, and they often do so, as their husbands are absent for long periods on trading trips, working at missions, or in the diamond mines.

## 11 CLOTHING

Even though in the past the Pemon went naked, now the traditional clothing of a Pemon woman is an apron made of cotton or beads. At the beginning of the 20th century, Pemon women wore metal earrings known as butterfly earrings. It was also common for them to have facial tattoos and to wear bands of cotton cloth or glass beads around their arms and legs. Traditionally, the men wore loincloths, which in the 20th century were made of a bright red fabric obtained from the *criollos* (mixed-blood Venezuelans). Influenced by the Capuchin missions, by 1945 the Pemon had started wearing Western cotton clothes: the men tend to wear khaki, while the women make their dresses using cotton fabrics with patterns. The mixture of indigenous and outside items is not exclusive: the Pemon might wear Venezuelan *alpargatas*, or Western-style shoes, but it does not mean they have abandoned their own sandals, made from parts of the moriche palm stalk.

## 12 FOOD

Yucca, manioc root, or cassava, as for many other Amerindian groups, is an important ingredient for the Pemon's culinary art. The peeling, washing, and grating of this root is done by women, who then proceed to squeeze out the acid and, with the resulting dough, prepare their flat bread or fermented drinks. One of these beverages, the *cachiri*, is made with bitter yucca paste that is grated and chewed and mixed with a red root, *cachiriyek*, also grated. The mix is then boiled for a whole day. The resulting brew is mildly intoxicating.

Also part of the Pemon diet are a spinach-like vegetable called *aurosa*, peppers, more than 10 varieties of bananas, potatoes, pineapple, plantain, and sugarcane. Women gather peppers and *aurosa* daily for the pepper pot, a soup that forms part of every meal. Fishing provides the principal source of animal protein in the Pemon diet. In the past, hunting was not very effective, though men put a lot of time into it. The situation changed, however, with the arrival of firearms in the 1940s. Birds and mammals, such as deer and vampire bats, became an important part of their diet. During the rainy season, the Pemon capture flying ants, and throughout the year, they gather the larvae found in the moriche palm.

## 13 EDUCATION

One of the Pemon tools for educating their young is oral tradition. Their many stories are used by the elders to teach their sense of morality and concept of the world. "A-pantoní-pe



nichii,” “May you take advantage of this story,” are often the closing words of the narrator.

Since the law of 1979, bilingual education at Amerindian primary schools is compulsory. Most of the main languages in Amerindian territory have at least one schoolbook. Though the teachers’ organizations and the government have proved their good will in the recent past, the difficulties are considerable; they include long distances, bureaucracy, and Amerindian teachers sometimes too acculturated to cooperate wholeheartedly or just too poor to travel to the federal bilingual course far away in the middle of the industrialized part of the country. Some Pemon children spend time in mission boarding or day schools, through the primary school years and sometimes beyond.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance are important components of Pemon activity. The same forms of dances and melodies, with different texts, are performed in medical contexts, shamanistic wars, or hunting preparations. They also accompany various rites of passage, incidental celebrations, and nonpublic healing rituals. *Mari’* or *Mari’k*, for example, is the Pemon word for the dance and music that used to be performed in public by the *paisan* (shaman) and his assistants. In one *Mari’k* everyone sang and danced and stamped the *waronka* (a hollow tube of wood or bamboo) or a branch around which strings of rustling and rattling seeds or shells are hung. They also played flutes and a kind of horn made from a long, straight bamboo tube. The Pemon *paisan* generally restrained himself to a bundle of rustling leaves, the drum *sambura*, or the *waronka*.

Nowadays, there are no *paisans* left in the Christianized Pemon villages, and some Pemon seem to be ashamed of tokens from the past, like old instruments. Still, on occasions when *cachiri*-drinking makes them receptive to tradition, spontaneously an old dance starts. With sticks and empty cans and tins, they sing songs full of endlessly repeated short phrases, varied by improvisation, jokes, and remnants of the old shaman songs.

#### 15 WORK

Work for the Pemon is part of life, and there is no word for working other than *senneka*, which means “being active” more than “laboring.” Only when they started working with the missionaries or miners did they adopt the Spanish word *trabajo* (work) that turned into *trabasoman* to characterize work done in the European fashion. The Pemon’s means of subsistence are based in slash-and-burn horticulture, fishing, hunting, and collection of wild fruits and insects. There is now considerable flexibility in the division of work in all areas among the Pemon people. Traditionally, for example, men were responsible for the preparation of the soil, while women were in charge of weeding, harvesting, and transporting the produce.

Processing bitter manioc (cassava) takes a long time and a great deal of effort, but women break the monotony with the aid and companionship of other women. The arrival of metal tools made the preparation of the fields less difficult, so the men have more time for mining diamonds and gold. The task of fishing is usually shared. Catching the small fish found in the savanna is possible with the help of the *inek*, a poisonous plant that asphyxiates the fish and brings them to the surface where they can be easily trapped with nets. The men go up the

river and pound the stems of the *inek* to extract the poison, while the women and children wait down the river to gather the fish with the nets. A Pemon man is a hunter, fisherman, woodsman, clearer of fields, maker of fiber basketry, and house-builder. A Pemon woman is a manioc-processor, weaver and tier of cotton, seamstress, and tier of fish nets. Cooking and procuring water and wood is left to the women. They are also responsible for the care of the children, though men help.

#### 16 SPORTS

Spectator sports were not very common among aboriginal tribes. Most of the talents applauded by indigenous societies are what they consider to be essential survival skills and are part and parcel of Amerindians’ day-to-day life. Fishing, hunting, and merely getting from one place to another demand the ability to run fast, jump high and long, master archery and swimming, etc. Though good hunters might be admired, hunting is still above all a subsistence activity.

Pemon Indians who are in close contact with Whites participate in the national sporting culture.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Pemon culture is very rich in what is known as oral literature: tales and legends that the Amerindians call *pantón*. There is no specific time dedicated to telling stories, but the favorite moment is just before going to sleep. The morning is the time to narrate and interpret dreams, and storytelling might happen again after meals. Stories and legends are considered luxuries of such worth to justify a trip to visit other tribes to procure them. The possessor of stories is called *sak* and, for the Pemon, a guest that tells stories or brings news or new songs is always welcome.

Dancing and beer accompany Pemon ceremonies, which draw large groups for periods of several weeks. Their gatherings are informal: while lines of men and women dance in a circle inside the round house for Hallelujah ceremonies, others slip in and out for conversation or for a gourd full of manioc (cassava) beer.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Pemon value the abilities of their artisans: outstanding persons are recognized for their individual skills. Some women are renowned for the quality of their clay bowls. They are mainly made in the Kamarata and Uriman areas by women who learned the skill from their mothers. As not many females know the skills, and good clay sites are limited, the bowls are dispersed in the trade network. Basketry is another main Pemon art form. Men manufacture all basketry and fiber articles, including eating mats, strainers, baskets, and squeezers used in everyday household production. But everyday basketry is different from the more elaborate forms, which can be used as trade items. As in the case of pottery, only certain men are skilled at making complex patterned baskets. The Pemon also make wooden dugout and bark canoes, paddles, and bows, and weave hammocks and baby carriers.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Venezuelan government’s presence has increased substantially in the area of Santa Elena along the border with Brazil during the last 25 years. Road penetration of the eastern por-

tion of the Gran Sabana dates from the early 1970s. Land entitlement for the communities has been recognized by experts and international support organizations as the most pressing issue facing the Pemon in the 1990s. Venezuela recognizes land rights for their Amerindian population but in many cases provides only provisional titles that can be easily ignored. Gold, diamonds, and wood are once again attracting outsiders, and their arrival often leads to violation of Amerindian rights. The tourist industry is also threatening the region, as what has been a controlled eco-friendly enterprise could turn into a virtual invasion if plans to build big hotels are approved.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though polygamy is practiced, only about 8% of all marriages involve a male and two or more co-wives. Divorce rates are low, accounting for about 10% of all ever-married individuals.

Women still tend the gardens, bake the traditional *kasabe* bread, and brew *kachiri*, the fermented drink made from manioc roots. Women often tend their gardens with a sister-in-law. Although the content of daily work is often gender-specific, men and women carefully coordinate their tasks and cooperate in many of them, such as the preparing of game for cooking and the making of tools for vegetable processing.

In 2001, the Women's Development Bank had worked to extend women's access to credit in Venezuela, particularly for small businesses and technical assistance purposes. Credit programs for indigenous women had benefited 70 Pemon women, and micro-enterprises involved career development, self-esteem building, and sexual and reproductive rights.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# PERUVIANS

**LOCATION:** Peru

**POPULATION:** 29,180,899

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; Quechua

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism, intertwined with native beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Quechua, Aymara, Shipibo

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Archeological excavations have found evidence of a human presence in the Peruvian territory since 11,000 BC. The oldest culture was the so-called Norte Chico civilization, which flourished between 3000 BC and 1800 BC. In the 12th century, the Inca civilization emerged as a powerful state when Manco Capac founded the kingdom of Cuzco. In 1442, the Incas began a far-reaching expansion under the command of Pachacutec, forming the Inca Empire of Taiwantinsuyu, which would become the largest empire in pre-Columbian America. However, the empire suffered a civil war, which pitted the brothers Huascar and Atahualpa against each other in competition for the throne of emperor, a scenario that facilitated the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire.

In 1532 the Spanish conquistadors, led by Francisco Pizarro, reached Inca territory in the middle of the war of succession. Pizarro, who did not have a formidable force, originally offered diplomatic negotiations as a means of gaining control. His intentions were questionable, however, since both brothers were put to death within a year.

After the conquest of the Incas, Peru's capital, Lima, became the center of Spain's colonial power structure in the Americas. Often called the "city of kings" in honor of Charles V, its name is a modification of the river that divides it, the Rimac. In Quechua, Rimac means "river that speaks." This combination of a strong Spanish influence with a rich indigenous heritage has shaped Peru's traditions, politics, and culture.

The Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808 initiated a wave of independence movements in Spanish colonies in South America, but the Peruvian aristocracy remained loyal to the Spanish crown. However, this loyalty did not prevent General José de San Martín of Argentina—whose aim was to secure Argentine control of Upper Peru's silver—from destroying the remaining Spanish power in South America. Peruvian independence was declared on 28 July 28 1821.

Peru's political history in the 20th century has been characterized by swings from democracy to military dictatorship. A leftist military government, the result of a military coup on 27 August 1976, instituted an economic program that promoted agricultural cooperatives, expropriated foreign companies, and decreed worker participation in modern industry. A return to democracy took place in 1980, when different administrations reorganized the economic system, while reducing the government's involvement in the productive sector and encouraging private capital investment in the country's industries. However, an explosive increase in imports injured the nation's industry. Lower prices of Peru's major commodities and the devastating effects of El Niño in 1982–83, made impossible the amelioration of the Peruvian economy. In this dire context were born two powerful guerrilla movements: the neo-Maoist group known as Shining Path (Sendero Lumino-



so) and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. The existence of these two paramilitary factions forced the government to spend important resources in combating the guerrillas and repairing the damages inflicted during the conflict.

In 1985 a young and compelling politician, Alan García, was elected president of Peru. His economic plans were quickly defeated as the International Monetary Fund declared Peru ineligible for future loans. With inflation, guerrilla warfare, and drug-trafficking on the rise, the 1990 presidential elections brought a political outsider to the highest office. After winning the presidential race, Alberto Fujimori implemented a harsh economic plan, which stopped inflation but caused immediate hardships, especially among poor Peruvians. In 1992 Fujimori, in alliance with the military, staged a self-administered coup, in which congress was dissolved and a new constitution was promulgated. From 1992 to 2000, Fujimori's administration implemented neoliberal economic policies, leading to a rapid recovery of the economic situation. In addition, Fujimori led a successful antiterrorist campaign that ended with the capture of the main figures of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. Even though Fujimori won a second term in 1995, charges of fraud and unconstitutionality accompanied his election to a third term in 2000. Growing allegations of corruption made Fujimori flee to Japan.

In 2001, Alejandro Toledo became the first democratically elected Quechua as president of Peru. During the five years of his presidency, the Peruvian economy grew at an average of

6%, one of the highest growth rates in Latin America, while inflation averaged 1.5%. In 2006 former president Alan García won the election in spite of criticisms to his performance during his previous term. The fact that his opponent, Ollanta Humala, was openly supported by Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, ultimately helped García in his bid for a second term.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Three times the size of California, Peru has an extremely varied geography ranging from tropical rainforest to arid desert. With Ecuador and Bolivia, it is one of the three Andean countries on the Pacific coast of South America. Peru can be conveniently divided into three basic geographical areas. The sierra, or Andes mountains, which covers 27% of Peru's land area, is the home not only to domesticated llamas and alpacas, but also to the majority of Peru's population of 29 million people. On the Pacific coast is one of the world's driest deserts. The capital city of Lima is located on the coastal desert, making access to water problematic for its nearly 8 million residents. In sharp contrast, areas of the Amazon rain forest in the north and east of Peru receive a massive 190 to 320 cm (75–125 in) of rain annually. The tropical rain forest covers 67% of Peru's landmass but is rapidly being destroyed by logging companies.

Peru's population of 29 million people can be subdivided into the following groups: Quechuas, who constitute almost half of Peru's population; mestizos (of mixed Amerindian and European descent), comprising slightly less than one-third; and people of European ancestry, who account for about one-eighth. There are also small minorities of Aymaras and Chinese.

Many Amerindians are illiterate and speak only their native language and no Spanish. Ethnic identity in Peru, however, tends to be culturally defined. For example, if an Amerindian speaks Spanish and adopts Western dress, he or she may be considered a mestizo or *cholo*. Although the percentage of the population that is indigenous is not declining, Peru's culture is becoming increasingly *mestijado*; that is, a mix of Western and traditional customs.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The two official languages of Peru are Spanish and Quechua. Quechua, the language of the Incas, which is still widely spoken throughout the Andes, was made an official language by the military government of 1968–1975. The dominant language in urban areas, however, is Spanish. Although there are some vernacular differences between the Spanish spoken in Spain and in Peru, the primary difference is the accent.

In Peru, as in other Hispanic countries, names comprise three parts: the given name, the father's surname, and the mother's maiden name. A name, for example, would be Pedro (given name) Suárez (father's name) Durán (mother's name).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Many of the beliefs and practices that comprise Peruvian folklore are associated with the native faith and customs that prevailed before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. For example, the Incas believed that they descended from the Sun God, Inti, and that the reigning Inca was an offspring of the Sun. Though they did not practice human sacrifice, many were headhunters. The Incas believed that the possession of another's head increased the owner's spiritual strength. While head-

hunting no longer exists, a blending of Indian and European beliefs often persists in current festivals and other observances. In Pacaroztambo, November 30—St. Andrew's Day—signals the close of the planting season. Eight crosses taken from the churches are set up on the mountains that overlook the fields to protect the crops from natural disasters. They remain there until May 3 (Cruz Velakuy), the beginning of the harvest. There is one cross for each of the four *ayllus* (the basic unit of Inca society) of the two *moieties* (the two main divisions of the tribe). The latter take turns preparing the annual celebration.

At San Pedro de Casta, *la fiesta del agua* takes place the first Sunday in October. The gates of the principal river, the Carhuaymac, are opened to fill the irrigation ditches, which have been cleaned and repaired. Close to La Toma, the river gate, is a cave in which the God of the Water, Pariapunko, lives. The head of the festival goes into the cave bearing gifts of coca, cigarettes, and *chicha* beer. He begs the god to favor the community with the water it needs.

## 5 RELIGION

Even though Peru's constitution provides for freedom of religion, Peruvians are fervent Catholics. Catholics comprise 90% of the population. No Peruvian town, no matter how small or remote, is complete without a church. As with many Andean customs, their religious practices carefully intertwine modern and traditional beliefs. The Peruvian version of Catholicism, for example, has incorporated some of the traditional gods and spirits by referring to them as saints or lords. In fact, when the Spanish converted the Amerindians to Christianity, they moved many of the Christian holidays to coincide with existing traditional festivals. In so doing, many traditional festivals continue to be practiced, with minor modifications, within the Christian framework. It is also considered appropriate in Peru for a Christian to make the sign of the cross while walking or driving by a church.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

One of the most colorful festivals is the month-long celebration of the Lord of the Earthquakes in October. Peru is subject to constant tremors and earthquakes, and in the past many of its cities have been severely damaged by them. In October, a weekly procession through the streets of Lima features a painting of Christ that has survived successive quakes, trailed by throngs of followers dressed in purple robes. Strict Catholics will dress in purple on these days, whether they are able to attend the procession or not.

A secular holiday that is of great importance to Peruvians is their Independence Day on July 28. This occasion is celebrated with much festivity, especially dancing, eating, and drinking. On this day, all homes are obligated by law to fly the Peruvian flag.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism of infants, first Communion, and confirmation of children in church are common. About half of all couples live together without formalizing their unions with a license or a church ceremony. A birthday may not necessarily be celebrated; the person's namesake saint's day is likely to be observed instead. A novena (nine consecutive days of special prayers) for the dead is usually held in the home of the deceased, with

friends invited on the final night. Often a second novena is held later.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is poor manners to arrive on time if invited to a dinner or a party. Tardiness of an hour or more is expected. If hosts expect the guests to arrive more promptly, they will ask them to observe *hora inglesa* (English time). When being introduced to a woman at a social occasion, the proper greeting is a kiss on the cheek. Men, when introduced to each other, will shake hands.

At an informal gathering, when a group of friends are drinking together, it is a sign of friendship to share the same glass. When a large bottle of beer is opened or a *pisco* (a Peruvian alcoholic beverage) is made, the bottle or glass is passed around in a circle. One is expected to serve oneself a small serving, drink it quickly, and then pass both the bottle and glass to the next person. To ask for a separate glass would give offense.

The "okay" sign (touching your finger to your thumb) is considered a rude gesture in Peru.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Approximately one-third of the entire Peruvian population lives in Lima. Of the nearly 8 million residents of Lima, over half live in urban squatter settlements, known as *pueblos jóvenes* (young towns). Migration to Lima from the Andean region drives the development of *pueblos jóvenes*. Uninhabited land is selected and invaded overnight by a group of settlers. The initial housing is usually made out of light reed matting. More-permanent structures are built gradually, bit by bit as the family can afford to buy bricks and mortar. The vast majority of dwellings in the *pueblos jóvenes* are still under construction years after the initial incursion into the area.

In addition to poor housing, residents of the *pueblos jóvenes* suffer from a lack of basic services. While the majority now has electricity in their houses, water is scarce. Most homes have a large water tank behind the house, which the residents fill with water purchased from water trucks. These unsanitary conditions create serious health hazards. Restricted access to safe water puts children and the elderly at high risk for gastrointestinal infections. The largest killer of infants in Peru continues to be one of the most easily treated ailments: diarrhea. In 1991, a cholera epidemic swept the country, killing nearly 3,000 people.

The residents of the modern suburbs of Lima have living standards comparable to those found in the United States. Suburban houses range from high-rise apartments to grand colonial houses. In periods of drought, however, even these sectors have their water and electricity rationed by the municipality.

Men have an average life expectancy of 68 years; women, of 72 years.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In countries without a welfare system, such as Peru, families tend to bond together not only as a social unit, but as an economic one as well. The basic household unit includes parents, children, and, in many cases, grandparents or aunts and uncles. In middle-class households, it may also include a live-in servant or nanny to look after young children. These small extended family groups share household chores and tasks, and those who are able generate income for the family. Financial



*The basic household unit includes parents, children, and, in many cases, grandparents or aunts and uncles. (Cory Langley)*

difficulties mean that children live at home until they get married as young adults.

Bonds between families also supplement bonds within families. *Compadrazgo* (godparenthood) is an important tie between friends and forges bonds of obligation between two families. Godparents are expected not only to contribute a modest amount of financial support for the godchild, but to provide emotional support and guidance to the family. These interfamily social arrangements expand a family's support network.

Although *machismo*, an attitude of male superiority and sexism, is widespread, Peruvian women are neither meek nor shy and participate actively in important family decisions. Women play an active role both in family and community life. In the urban squatter settlements, or *pueblos jóvenes*, women often take a leading role in community organizations that lobby the municipality or provide services to the community. They also make significant contributions to family income.

### **11 CLOTHING**

In Andean areas, women wear colorful woven skirts with many layers of petticoats underneath. Solid-colored llama wool sweaters offer protection against the cold Andean night air. Hats are used throughout Peru. Each region has its own style of hat, and it is possible to tell which region an Amerindian is from by his or her hat. Men wear simple trousers, Western-style button-down shirts, and sandals.

As the process of urbanization in Peru has advanced, so has the process of Westernization. Most Peruvians don Western clothes for both everyday and special occasions. Young Peruvians in urban areas prefer jeans, American tennis shoes, and Western-style skirts over the traditional alpaca and llama wool clothes worn in the Andean regions. Upon arrival in Lima, most migrants abandon the use of their traditional clothes in favor of tee-shirts and skirts. One useful custom that is often retained, however, is the use of a shawl across the shoulders to carry small children.

### **12 FOOD**

Peru has one of the most developed national cuisines of Latin America. Many dishes are a delicate combination of indigenous, Spanish, and African ingredients and cooking traditions. Seafood is the dominant ingredient on the coast, yucca and plantains in the jungle, and potatoes in the Andes. In fact, potato originates in Peru, and there are over 100 varieties still being grown in the Andes.

The national dish of Peru is *ceviche*, a spicy dish of onions and seafood. In ceviche, the fish is cooked not by applying heat but by soaking it for a few hours in limejuice. The acid in the limejuice has the effect of breaking down the protein, thus "cooking" the fish. Sliced onion, hot peppers, and chopped coriander are then added. Ceviche is purported to have beneficial effects on hangovers, thus it is customary for partygoers to eat ceviche at dawn.

The high cost of living has led many mothers living in low-income neighborhoods to organize and form communal kitchens. These groups, now recognized by the government, receive subsidized food and cook for 100 or so people for a small fee. Most of Lima's shantytowns, or *pueblos jóvenes*, will have communal kitchens, organized and operated by the residents themselves. It has been estimated that 1.5 million people in Lima alone rely on these kitchens for affordable meals.

### 13 EDUCATION

Children are obligated to attend school. Peruvian children, dressed in solid gray uniforms, attend either the morning session or the afternoon/evening period. The literacy rate in Peru is relatively high, reaching 93% for males and 82% for females.

The relatively small number of universities in Peru means that it can be difficult to gain admission. Only 3% of the population is able to attend university. An informal rite of passage common in Lima is for friends to tackle a successful male entrant—and shave his head.

The Peruvian army, because of its dedication to civic action, has worked to counteract illiteracy, especially prevalent among its Amerindian draftees. Measures are taken to teach inductees to read and write. During the final three months of service, the draftee undergoes special training to provide him with a trade.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The different ethnic groups that have migrated to Peru have left a rich musical heritage. Both *música criolla* of Spanish influence and Andean folk music are popular. Traditional music, recently becoming popular with young Peruvians, is Afro-Peruvian melodies. This rhythmic music has its roots in the protest songs of the Black population of Peru. The cultural center of Afro-Peruvian music is the town of Chincha, on the Pacific coast south of Lima. In the 1980s and 1990s, Afro-Peruvian music has witnessed a strong revival and is now popular in the bars and dance halls of Lima. Musical shows for tourists feature the *alcatraz*, a traditional Afro-Peruvian fire dance. Alcatraz dancers tuck a piece of paper into their back pockets or around their waist, leaving a short tail hanging out. A second dancer follows behind with a lit candle trying to set the tail on fire. The first dancer must move his or her hips vigorously to prevent the paper tail from catching fire. Other dances include *el zapateo*, in which intricate footsteps on hard wood are used as percussion.

Peru also has a strong literary tradition. Available in English translation is José María Arguedas' novel about life in the Andes entitled *Yawar Fiesta*, as well as the writings of poet Cesar Vallejo, whose masterpiece is *Trilce*. One of the most revered contemporary writers in Peru is the novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. Vargas Llosa is known worldwide both for his writings and for his bid for the presidency in 1990. His comic autobiographical narrative, *Aunt Julia and the Script Writer*, was made into a Hollywood movie starring Keanu Reeves. Other outstanding writers include the novelist Ciro Alegría, dramatists Salvador Bandy and Gregór Díaz, and poets Cecilia Bustamante and Cesar Moro.

### 15 WORK

Formal paid employment is difficult to find in Peru. Most families are forced to seek varied and innovative means to gener-



*Most Peruvians don Western clothes for both everyday and special occasions. One useful custom that is often retained, however, is the use of a shawl across the shoulders to carry small children. (Sally Keener)*

ate an income, struggling to earn a living by whatever means possible. Approximately 80% of the population are either subsistence farmers or operate their own tiny enterprise. Both women and children make important contributions to family income, either from small-scale cottage industries in their homes, or as traders outside the home. Common economic activities include part-time tailoring, kerosene sales, food processing, or even charging neighbors for watching one's TV. Children may contribute by selling goods on the street or through activities such as collecting tin cans. Even if the father is working, most families will be involved in a multitude of economic activities. Other economic survival strategies include labor for labor swaps with neighbors, or raising chickens for family consumption.

Outside urban areas, Peruvians are largely subsistence farmers. The dry Andean terrain makes agriculture a challenge. Steep slopes are farmed by a process of terracing, in which multileveled steps are created to provide flat areas for planting. Potatoes and corn, which adapt well to high altitudes, are the primary crops.

### 16 SPORTS

As in most other Latin American cultures, soccer is the dominant sport in Peru. The love of soccer is one of the few cultural traits that transcend both ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries. Even in densely populated urban shantytowns, large pieces

of land are often set aside for a soccer field. Middle-class children set up goals and play in the streets.

Lima's two soccer teams, Alianza Lima and Universitaria, have an intense rivalry that has kept *Limeños* (residents of Lima) fascinated for years. This rivalry has a particular poignancy. In 1987 the plane carrying the members of Alianza Lima crashed when landing in Lima, leaving no survivors.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular culture in Peru is varied. In the evenings, young people flock to both Western-style bars and discos or to *peñas* where traditional Peruvian folk music is played. In Lima, an old colonial suburb of the city called *Barranco* has become the focus of trendy and artsy activities. A variety of music halls, theaters, bookshops, and art galleries attract crowds of middle-class youth.

Also popular in Peru are televised soap operas. Produced largely in Venezuela or Mexico, these evening shows attract a vast following. Soap operas are also produced in magazine format. *Fotonovelas*, as they are called, present soap operas with a series of photos and captions. *Fotonovelas* are the reading material of choice of many in the *pueblos jóvenes*.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

See the article on the *Quechua* in this volume.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Peru has one of the worst human rights records in the world. The Peruvian government battled the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas in the 1980s and 1990s. In its battle to eliminate this violent terrorist group, the military kidnapped and killed many suspected Shining Path sympathizers. Trade union officials, university professors, and students were the main targets. The military has been successful in eliminating the Shining Path movement, but human rights abuses remain a serious problem.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Peru has improved its gender equity conditions at a slow pace. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Woman and Social Development (MIMDES), the government has aimed to build gender equity conditions under an integral perspective with the application of the Equal Opportunity Plan 2000–2005 and its new version 2006–2010. Although the budget assigned to MIMDES has increased by 28% during the period between 2003 and 2006, it only represents 2.4% of the public sector expenditure and 2.5% of the total GDP.

The largest gender gap can be observed at the economic level, in which Peruvian women receive an average income that only represents 27% of what men make. In addition, 84% of women are employed in the service sector, while 10% is in industry and only 6% in the agricultural sector. In Metropolitan Lima, 49% of women work without labor protection or social security rights. Moreover, while 8.1% of women in urban areas are jobless, almost half of working women are underemployed, which means that one of every three women is receiving income that does not meet the minimum family basket requirements.

Illiteracy for 15-year-old women or older is 18%, while the Latin America average is 11%. In South America, Peru has the second-highest maternal death rate, after Bolivia, and rural

women who live in poverty have the highest risk of maternal death. Another problem for Peruvian women has been the increase of HIV incidence in the last decades. In 1986, for every nine men there was only one woman infected with HIV. In 2005 the ratio was three to one.

Regarding political participation, 18% of the country's congressional representatives were women as of 2008. At the local level, about 26.3% of district council members are women, but only 2.7% of mayors were female.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# POLISH AMERICANS

For more information on Polish history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Poles**.

## OVERVIEW

Polish settlers helped establish the Jamestown colony in Virginia in the early 1600s. Polish adventurers and radicals came across the sea to help the American colonists win the Revolutionary War (1775–83), including heroes Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746–1817), who later returned to the United States to serve as liaison between President Thomas Jefferson and leaders of the French Revolution and Count Kazimierz Pulaski (1747–1779), sometimes called the “father of the American cavalry,” who was killed in the battle of Savannah, Georgia. Since then, millions of people from Poland have immigrated to the United States.

When Poland was partitioned in the 1770s between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, members of the Polish upper class chose to escape the new oppressive governments. Many came to America. So many came, in fact, that Polish America became known as the “Fourth Province” of Poland, the other three being those areas controlled by Russia, Austria, and Prussia, respectively. (Another term for the Polish community outside of Poland is “Polonia.”) A few groups of peasant farmers also came to America, looking for better economic opportunities. They set up Polish farming communities in places like Panna Maria, Texas, the first permanent Polish community in America, founded in 1854.

Polish immigration from the 1770s to about 1870 is sometimes referred to as the “first wave,” but more often, the first wave is considered to have begun in 1870 when Polish serfs were given their freedom. The United States also began encouraging immigration to help rebuild the country after the devastation of the American Civil War (1861–65). Up to 2 million Poles immigrated to the United States between 1870 and 1914, when the beginning of World War I brought immigration to a halt.

Most Polish immigrants in this first large wave of immigration, also called the “old emigration,” were single young men looking for the chance to work at wage-earning jobs, save up their money, and return to Poland. Some 30% actually did return to Poland, but the rest stayed in the United States. As uneducated (though generally literate) peasant farmers, they were unskilled and unprepared for the industrialized world of America. They took whatever jobs they could find, working in mines, mills, factories, slaughterhouses, refineries, and foundries. Once established in their new home, many sent for their families or returned to Poland to marry, then brought their wives back to the United States with them. Women and children went to work then to support the family.

The second wave, or “new emigration,” of Polish Americans came to the United States under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which allowed Europeans who had been displaced by the destruction of World War II to enter the United States as immigrants. These second-wave Polish Americans tended to be well-educated intellectuals, the writers, artists, and scholars who had been targeted by the Nazis for elimination. A number of them were Jewish (see **Vol. 2: Jewish Americans**). The

new emigration added depth to the already established Polish American community.

In the 1960s and 1970s, “Polack” jokes became popular in the United States, portraying Polish and Polish American people as stupid, crude, and lazy. The Polish American community fought back with a campaign showing the great achievements of Polish writers and scholars, etc., but the discrimination continued. Even Ronald Reagan, while running for president in 1980, told “Polack” jokes to a group of reporters. When the Solidarity movement took off in Poland, however, Americans were drawn into sympathy with the revolutionary Poles, and “Polack” jokes died out. First-generation Polish Americans were allowed to vote in the 1990 Polish presidential elections and they helped bring Lech Walesa, leader of the Solidarity movement, into office.

In the 2000 U.S. Census over 8.9 million people were listed as having Polish ancestry. Early immigrants generally settled in the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, such as Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio; South Bend, Indiana; Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota; Omaha, Nebraska; St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; and Buffalo and New York City, New York. Few of the old purely Polish neighborhoods still exist, but many of the cities of early settlement still host larger communities of Polish Americans. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were about 213,447 people of Polish ancestry living in New York City and 210,421 living in Chicago, Illinois. The states with the highest populations of Polish Americans were New York (986,106), Illinois (932,982), Michigan (854,815), Pennsylvania (824,146), and New Jersey (576,465). About 9.3% of the population of Wisconsin was listed as having Polish ancestry. The 2005 American Community Survey estimated a total of about 9.7 million people of Polish ancestry, with 38% living in the Midwest, 33% in the Northeast, 17% in the South and 12% in the West. In the 2000 U.S. Census, Polish ranked as the 10th most popular language other than English that was most frequently spoken at home.

The Polish American community has been in the United States for several generations and traditional Polish ways are being lost by later generations. Polish language proficiency is limited or nonexistent among third- and subsequent-generation Polish Americans. Some first- and second-generation Polish Americans lament that their children speak Spanish or some other language learned in school better than they speak Polish.

Many Polish Americans chose to shorten or otherwise Americanize their names in order to blend in better with the mainstream society when they first arrived. Immigration officials simplified others’ names on their entry papers because they either could not understand the actual name or did not care to write it out. In today’s climate of multiculturalism and ethnic pride, some young Polish Americans are reclaiming their true Polish names.

Nearly all Polish Americans are either Catholic or Jewish. When Polish Catholics arrived in America, they found the Roman Catholic churches controlled by Irish Catholics who had arrived earlier. The Irish Catholics did not welcome the newcomers and Polish Americans began establishing their own churches whenever and wherever possible. In 1897 a number of Polish Americans decided to separate from the Roman Catho-





Participants, wearing traditional clothing, wave as they take part in the 61st annual Pulaski Day Parade in New York, New York. The parade is meant to honor Polish American heritage. (AP Images/Gino Domenico)

lic Church entirely and formed the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) under the leadership of Father Franciszek Hodur. The PNCC is very similar to the Roman Catholic Church with a few very important differences: PNCC priests are allowed to marry and church officials are *elected*, rather than appointed. The PNCC had over 25,000 members in 2008. There were parishes in 20 states and 3 Canadian provinces.

Polish Americans celebrate the holidays and rites of passage common to their tradition, be it Catholic or Jewish. Many Polish American Catholics continue to hold the traditional Polish Christmas Eve dinner called *Wigilia* and sing *koledy*—Polish Christmas carols. A secular holiday celebrated by all Polish Americans is May 3, commemorating the Polish Constitution of 1791, the first democratic constitution in all of Europe. Some Polish American communities celebrate Pulaski Day (October 11), a holiday established in the United States by presidential proclamation to commemorate the death of General Kazimierz Pulaski, a Polish hero in the American Revolution. The state of Illinois has designated the first Monday of March as Pulaski Day, a date which more closely coincides with Pulaski's birthday (March 4).

Polish Americans continue to hold to the traditional Polish values of hard work and tenacity, good manners, and generosity. They are also competitive within their personal community, striving to achieve higher status (usually by means of material goods) than those around them. However, Polish Americans are also very loyal to their community, so the competition is good-natured, even joyful. The people of Poland learned to be wary of change after centuries of upheaval and oppression. Polish Americans carry on that wariness, placing a high value on security, stability, respectability, and order. For this reason, as well as religious convictions, the divorce rate is quite low among Polish Americans as compared to other ethnic groups in the United States.

Polish Americans have contributed a great deal to American culture. Kielbasa (Polish sausage), pierogi, Polish dill pickles, sauerkraut, Polish ham, and babka (an egg-dough cake) are all fairly common items in the American diet. Paczki, a jam-filled donut, has become a traditional food for some Polish Americans to eat on Fat Tuesday (Shrove Tuesday). Vodka, originated by the Polish, not the Russians, is now a favorite liquor in the United States.

Polish American writers, musicians, actors and directors, and even fashion designers (Helena Rubinstein) have all made a serious impact on U.S. society. Writer Czeslaw Milosz won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1980. Other successful Polish American writers include Isaac Bashevis Singer, Jerzy Kosinski, and playwright Janusz Glowacki. The first well-known Polish American film actor was silent-screen star Pola Negri (credited with introducing painted toenails to American women). She was followed by Gloria Swanson, Carole Landis, Loretta Swit, Stephanie Powers, Jerry Orbach, and Charles (Buchinsky) Bronson, among others. Producer/director/screenwriter Joseph L. Mankiewicz is another important figure in American film, as are producer Samuel Goldwyn; producer/director Roman Polanski; the founders of Warner Brothers Studio, Harry, Albert, and Jack Warner; and filmmakers Zbigniew Rybczynski and Agnieszka Holland.

Polka music is probably the best-known contribution Polish Americans have made to American culture. Contrary to popular belief, the polka did not originate in Poland but in Bohemia (a region of the Czech Republic) and it was never more popular in Poland than such dances as the mazurek or the polonaise, which are similar to the polka in rhythm and steps. Polish immigrants to America embraced the polka as a “national anthem” as they began to link Polish verses to the tunes. The Polish-style polka originated in Chicago and generally features an accordion, drums, string bass, and two trumpets. The International Polka Association in Chicago preserves and promotes both the Polish-style polka and the cultural heritage of Polish Americans.

Many individual Polish Americans have also made significant contributions to the world of music, including pianists Liberace and Arthur Rubinstein; orchestral conductors Leopold Stokowski and Arthur Rodzinski; singers Bobby Vinton, Pat (Andrzejewski) Benatar, and Huey Lewis; drummer Gene Krupa; and jazz violinist Michal Urbaniak.

In the world of industry, Joseph “Jock” Yablonski was a strong force in the United Mine Workers union. He ran for president of the union in 1969 but lost. While appealing the decision, he was assassinated, along with his wife and daughter. Martha (Kostyra) Stewart, home economics maven, has

become enormously popular in popular culture. Her books and magazine are highly successful and she has made numerous appearances on morning and afternoon talk shows. She also stars in her own television show. Max Factor, Sr., a Polish born businessman, is well-known for the cosmetic company he founded under his own name.

Polish American scientists have made significant contributions in their fields. Albert Abraham Michelson was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1907 for his study on measurements of the speed of light. He was the first American to receive the Nobel Prize in the sciences. Stephanie Kwolek discovered the synthetic material known as Kevlar.

Polish Americans are well represented in the U.S. government. Edmund Muskie served as a U.S. senator for a number of years, then ran unsuccessfully for U.S. vice-president, with presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey in 1968. He later served as the U.S. Secretary of State during Jimmy Carter's presidency. Another Polish American, Zbigniew Brzezinski, also served in Carter's administration, as National Security Advisor. Other Polish American politicians include U.S. Senators Barbara Mikulski and Frank Murkowski, and former Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, Dan Rostenkowski.

A form of baseball was probably introduced to America by Polish settlers in the Jamestown colony in the early 1600s. Baseball remained Polish Americans' favorite sport for many generations. In the 1870s Oscar Bielaski was the first Polish American to play professional baseball. When the National League was formed in 1876, Bielaski joined the Chicago White Stockings (as they were then named). Men's baseball stars since that time include Stan "the Man" Musial, Carl Yastrzemski, and Dave Dombrowski. Sophie Kurys, Loretta (Jaszak) Jester, Connie Wisniewski, and Jenny Romatowski were among the stars of the short-lived women's professional baseball league.

Two Polish Americans have won the Heisman Trophy for college football: Johnny Lujack and Leon Hart. Ron Jaworski, Bill Romanowski, Alex Wojciechowicz, Bill Osmanski, and Ed Danowski are all successful professional football players. Wayne Gretzky is considered by some to be the best hockey player ever to take the ice. Ed Olczyk is another well-respected hockey player. Janet Lynn found great success on the ice as a figure skater.

Polish American culture is celebrated at several Polish American festivals, usually held in the summer. The parades, feasts, and polka music are enjoyed by Polish and non-Polish Americans alike. Few Americans are aware that October is Polish American Heritage Month. Polish American organizations are trying to increase awareness of Polish American heritage among the general American public as well as among younger generations of Polish Americans, many of whom have lost touch with their traditional culture.

The Polish Women's Alliance of America (PWAA) was founded on 22 May 1898 in Chicago as a fraternal benefit society. Stefania Chmielinska, PWAA founder, was a Polish immigrant who worked as a seamstress in Chicago. She and others like her realized that women needed equality and worked to promote this cause. The right of women to pursue higher education, the right to enter many professions, and the right of women to purchase life insurance in their own names were some of the issues taken on by the PWAA. Polish American women worked against prejudices and narrow-mindedness to become leaders in their communities. During World War I and

II, during the years of political freedom in Poland between the wars, and for almost 50 years of Communist rule in Poland, the PWAA and other Polish American organizations worked to bring aid and moral support to the Polish nation, its people, and religious institutions. Polish American women today must decide to what extent they want to relinquish their traditional culture in the face of modern American values and habits. Such negotiation of the past and present can be difficult.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# PUERTO RICAN AMERICANS

For more information on Puerto Rican history and culture, see **Vol. 2: Puerto Ricans**.

## OVERVIEW

A few Puerto Rican political exiles from the unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Spanish rule emigrated to the United States in the late 19th century, but large-scale Puerto Rican immigration to the U.S. mainland did not begin until the early 1900s. Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory in 1898 when the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War, making it fairly easy (legally speaking) for Puerto Ricans to immigrate to the United States. The rate of immigration was slow at first, however, because transportation by ship was too expensive for most Puerto Ricans. By the time of World War I (1914–18), the number of Puerto Ricans arriving on the U.S. mainland had risen sharply, despite the continuing high travel costs. This was due to conditions in both Puerto Rico and the United States.

In Puerto Rico, improved health care and public health systems had caused a sudden population boom, resulting in high unemployment, overcrowding, and poverty. In the United States, the war economy had created a surfeit of unskilled jobs. Many Puerto Ricans decided that the prospect of employment in the United States was worth the cost of transportation. In 1917, citizens of Puerto Rico were granted U.S. citizenship and were therefore exempt from the immigration quotas established in 1924 for other nationalities. Competition for jobs in the United States decreased as the flow of other immigrants lessened, and Puerto Ricans rushed to fill the demand for unskilled laborers. Worsening economic conditions in Puerto Rico, combined with a series of natural disasters, drove the number of Puerto Rican immigrants to the United States to an all-time high. By 1930, the Puerto Rican American population had reached approximately 53,000.

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, economic opportunities in the United States decreased rapidly and it was no longer worth the cost for Puerto Ricans to relocate. Immigration consequently slowed considerably during the 1930s. U.S. agriculturalists, however, were looking for cheap farm laborers in the 1930s, and a number of Puerto Ricans began to travel to the U.S. mainland during the off-season of Puerto Rico's sugarcane industry (which was summer and fall harvest season in the United States) to become migrant workers along the Atlantic coast. By 1940, Puerto Ricans made up a significant percentage of Atlantic coast migrant workers. The work was exhausting and paid very little, and living conditions were miserable, but many laborers felt it was better than being unemployed in Puerto Rico. After increasing protests by Americans over the terrible treatment of migrant farm workers, the U.S. government passed laws in 1947 to improve their conditions. Although conditions did improve somewhat, the life of migrant farm workers and their families was still harsh (and continues to be so today).

When World War II began in 1939, sea transportation was suspended because of German submarine activity. Puerto Rican immigration to the United States therefore ceased until

the war ended in 1945. The second wave of Puerto Rican immigration, termed "the great migration" began as soon as the war was over and lasted through the mid-1960s. Air travel had become a very affordable option, and in the booming postwar economy in the United States, unskilled jobs were plentiful. Puerto Rican immigration to the U.S. mainland surged, peaking in the 1950s. By 1960, the Puerto Rican American population had risen to almost 900,000. Since the mid-1960s, Puerto Rican immigration has slowed somewhat, but the numbers of new arrivals each year are still significant.

It is difficult to determine the exact Puerto Rican American population because there is a high rate of travel between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland. It is impossible to know who is immigrating on a permanent basis, who is coming on a trial basis, and who is just visiting family and friends or traveling on business. There are no official immigration records because Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and cross the border freely, and U.S. Census figures are only approximate because not all Puerto Ricans report themselves as "Puerto Rican." Some place themselves in the catch-all categories of "Latin American," or "Hispanic," etc. The *estimated* Puerto Rican American population, therefore, is somewhere around 4 million. Puerto Rican Americans made up some 9% of the Hispanic population in America in the 2000s.

About 95% of Puerto Rican Americans are urban, concentrated in the larger cities of New York, New Jersey, Florida, California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Half of all Puerto Rican Americans live in New York City, giving it the highest Puerto Rican American population in the United States. In fact, in 1970 New York City's Puerto Rican population was higher than that of San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico and the country's largest city. By 1980, the numbers had reversed, but New York City continues to have the second highest Puerto Rican population in the world. Many Puerto Rican Americans in New York City call themselves *Nuyoricans*. In the United States, Puerto Rican Americans are the second largest Hispanic group, after Mexican Americans. Their population is very young, with the median age around 25, compared to around 35 for the total U.S. population.

At the time of the "great migration," many U.S. cities had just begun to implement public housing systems in which people were randomly assigned housing in public housing projects throughout the city. Puerto Ricans, therefore, were scattered across neighborhoods. They were not able to develop the same sort of ethnic communities in which other earlier immigrants had found comfort and support. Despite these public housing systems, however, Puerto Rican Americans did manage to congregate in certain areas, especially in New York City. The stretch along East 116th Street has been called *El Barrio* ("the Neighborhood"), or Spanish Harlem, since the 1930s because of the heavy concentration of Puerto Rican Americans who live there.

In New York City and other places in the United States with large Hispanic American populations, signs and other public information are written in both English and Spanish. Puerto Rican Americans still encounter a language barrier, however, because English is the standard language of American business and education. Most Puerto Rican Americans continue to speak Spanish at home and with their friends, making it more difficult for them to become fluent in English. Bilingual education programs have been instituted in some elementary

schools to help Puerto Rican and other Hispanic American children succeed, but many still fail. The drop-out rate among Puerto Rican American high school students was as high as 75% in the 1970s and 1980s. Though more Puerto Rican American students are finishing high school in the 2000s (over 63%), the percentage of those who drop out is still among the highest of any ethnic group in America. (For example, in 2000 84% of whites, 73.6% of blacks and 83.4% of Asians graduated from high school.)

Puerto Ricans have two surnames: the father's family name, followed by the mother's family name. In Puerto Rico, both names are usually used when addressing someone, but if only one name is used, it is the father's. To avoid confusion in the United States, many Puerto Rican Americans drop their mother's family name altogether.

Most Puerto Rican Americans (80%) are Roman Catholic. However, Puerto Rican Catholicism is quite different from mainline American Catholicism. When the Spanish introduced Catholicism to Puerto Rico in the 1500s, the Puerto Ricans simply blended Christian teachings and rituals with their previous beliefs, creating a magical religion of saints and spirits. When Puerto Rican Catholics began to immigrate to the United States, they found Irish, Italian, and German Catholic churches that were quite strange to them. They were never allowed to establish their own ethnic parishes (as the Italians and Germans were), so they struggled to maintain their particular brand of religion at home while attending the unfamiliar European churches. Eventually, European Catholics moved on to better neighborhoods, and the parishes became predominantly Puerto Rican American. The language of church services shifted to Spanish, and traditional Puerto Rican rites and festivals began to be celebrated, such as Three Kings Day (or Epiphany) on 6 January, and *Fiesta de San Juan* (The Feast of St. John the Baptist) on 24 June.

The influence of Hispanic Americans on the Roman Catholic Church in America is finally being felt. In 1972, there was only one Hispanic bishop in the United States. By 2008, there were 38 Hispanic bishops in the United States, 25 of whom remained active and 10 were retired. They made up 6% of all U.S. Catholic bishops. Three Kings Day and the *Fiesta de San Juan* are celebrated each year in many cities with huge festivals, fairs, processions, and fireworks. *Bótanicas*, shops that sell charms, incense, herbs, magic potions, candles, and *santos* (homemade statuettes of religious figures) are found in every Puerto Rican American neighborhood.

Not all Puerto Rican Americans are Catholic, however. About 20% are Protestant, with the largest share belonging to the Pentecostal Church and other evangelical denominations. There are also Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Episcopalians. Some Puerto Rican Americans choose to follow various combinations of spiritualism and folk religion, such as *Mesa Blanca*, *Santería*, *Brujería*, and *Curandera*. A number of Puerto Rican Americans follow both Christianity and a spiritualist folk religion.

Family is very important to Puerto Ricans, and immigration has always been in whole family groups. Puerto Rican families are typically large, and Puerto Rican Americans in New York City continue to have the largest families of all city residents. A high percentage of Puerto Rican American families are headed by single females, many of whom receive financial assistance from the government. Puerto Rican Americans have one of

the highest poverty rates (22.8% for families) among Hispanic Americans, surpassed only by Dominicans. This is partly due to their young average age, which is a result of the high number of children per family. Poverty rates for Puerto Rican American families headed by single women is 39.3%.

Despite their relative poverty and poor performance in school, many individual Puerto Rican Americans have found success in the United States. Puerto Rican American contributors to the world of American arts include actors Rita Moreno, Freddie Prinze, Erik Estrada, Liz Torres, Jimmy Smits, Esai Morales, Roxann Biggs-Dawson, Raul Julia, José Ferrer, Chita Moreno, and Jennifer Lopez; television personalities Geraldo Rivera and Vanna White; and film director Leon Ichaso.

Salsa music has become popular with the wider American public. Some individual Puerto Rican American contributors to the world of music are opera singer Justino Díaz; singer-guitarist José Feliciano; pop singers Tony Orlando and Julian; rappers Lisa M and Vico-C; the teen singing group Menudo; bandleader and percussionist Tito Puente; violinist José Figueroa; jazz trombonist Juan Tizol; and jazz flutist Dave Valentin.

Well-known Puerto Rican American visual artists have included Dennis Mario Rivera, Roberto Lebrón, Ramón Carrasquillo, Rafael Ferrer, Wilfred Labrosa, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Ballet artists Brunhilda Ruiz, Tina Ramirez, and Edward Villella are all Puerto Rican American. Many Puerto Rican American writers have found success, including René Marqués, Piri Thomas, Jesús Colón, Miguel Algarín, J. L. Torres, Ed Vega, Judith Ortíz-Cofer, Nicholasa Mohr, Pablo Guzmán, and David Hernández.

Though voter registration and turnout among Puerto Rican Americans is consistently low, preventing them from becoming a significant voice in the political scene, Puerto Rican Americans have managed to make a mark in U.S. politics. Herman Badillo became the first Puerto Rican American in the U.S. Congress when he was elected to the House of Representatives from New York City in 1970 and Dr. Antonia Novello was appointed U.S. surgeon general by President George Bush in 1990.

Sports is perhaps where Puerto Rican Americans have become best known among the wider American public. Golfer Juan A. "Chi Chi" Rodríguez and horse jockey Angel Cordeiro became famous in their arenas. Boxers Sixto Escobar and Carlos Ortiz, tennis player GiGi Fernández, and Olympic swimmer Chayenne Vasallo have also been highly successful. The sport with the most Puerto Rican American success stories, however, is baseball. Roberto Clemente, Orlando Manuel Cepeda, Ruben Sierra, Sandy Alomar, Sr., Sandy Alomar, Jr., Roberto Alomar, Joey Cora, Carlos Baerga, Juan Gonzalez, Bernie Williams, José Santiago, Edgar Martínez, Carlos Delgado, and José Valentin have all been stars of the game.

One of the biggest contributions that Puerto Rican Americans could make to American culture is a new attitude towards race. In Puerto Rico, centuries of interracial marriage have led to a kaleidoscope of skin colors and facial features. Social structure in Puerto Rico is therefore not based as strictly on race as it is in the United States. "Black" and "White" as rigid categories do not exist in Puerto Rico.

Recent clinical studies of Puerto Rican women living in the United States link acculturation, sex-role traditionalism, assertiveness, and symptoms of mental and physical illness.

Examining such indicators as migration history, educational attainment, sex-role traditionalism, assertiveness, religious beliefs and practices, and family background indicated that second-generation Puerto Rican women (those born in the United States), when compared with their first-generation counterparts, were better educated and less sex-role traditional. Those Puerto Rican American women who followed traditional sex-roles were less assertive, and more assertive women experienced fewer mental or physical illnesses. Such studies are important in measuring the degree to which modern Puerto Rican American women are responding to the traditional Hispanic “macho” culture, and carving out strong new sex roles for themselves.

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—reviewed by J. Hobby

# PUERTO RICANS

**LOCATION:** Puerto Rico

**POPULATION:** 3.96 million in Puerto Rico; 4 million on U.S. mainland (2008 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; English

**RELIGION:** Christian (mostly Roman Catholic); Santería

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Known as “the isle of enchantment,” Puerto Rico is a densely populated island in the Caribbean. Currently a commonwealth of the United States, “Bori(n)quen,” as the native Arawak (Taino) Indians called it (and locals still affectionately refer to it), was discovered and claimed for Spain by Columbus during his second voyage in 1493. Columbus renamed the island San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist), from which the island’s capital, San Juan, takes its name. “Puerto Rico,” the name given to it by Ponce de Leon (a 16th century settler and seeker of the Fountain of Youth), means “rich port.”

The Spanish brought African slaves to the island starting in 1518, just a few years after they had introduced sugarcane. By the end of 16th century, most of the native population had disappeared. The Spanish fought off a number of attacks from the British, the French, and the Dutch, but they never had to contend with a war of independence as they did in other colonies. Following the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States in 1898. Under the Jones Act of 1917, all Puerto Ricans were made citizens of the United States. In 1948, Puerto Ricans for the first time elected their own governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. Muñoz Marín introduced “Operation Bootstrap,” a plan to improve the island’s economy by attracting industry through tax incentives and low labor costs. In 1952 the island became a commonwealth of the United States. As a commonwealth, Puerto Rico’s residents have the same rights, privileges, and obligations as other U.S. citizens but pay no federal income tax and lack voting representation in Congress and the right to participate in presidential elections.

In plebiscites held in 1967, 1993, and 1998, Puerto Rican voters chose not to alter the existing political status.

Today, more than 3.9 million Puerto Ricans inhabit the island. Another 4 million Puerto Ricans live on the U.S. mainland, many in New York City. Puerto Ricans in New York City often refer to themselves as “Nuyoricans.” It is difficult to determine the exact Puerto Rican American population because there is a high rate of travel between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland. It is impossible to know who is immigrating on a permanent basis, who is coming on a trial basis, and who is just visiting family and friends or traveling on business. There are no official immigration records because Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and cross the border freely, and U.S. Census figures are only approximate because not all Puerto Ricans report themselves as “Puerto Rican.”

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Approximately 1,609 km (1,000 mi) east-southeast of Miami, Florida, Puerto Rico (160 km or 100 mi long and 51 km or 32 mi wide) offers beaches, mountains, and urban areas. It is in the urban areas where most of its nearly 4 million inhabitants are found. The capital, San Juan, is home to approximately

434,000 residents. The next-largest municipality, Bayamon, boasts about half as many dwellers. In addition to the main island, Puerto Rico also consists of several smaller islands, including Culebra, Mona, and Vieques.

Puerto Rico enjoys a subtropical marine climate with an annual mean temperature of 24°C (75°F). Puerto Rico is a popular beach resort and is one of the world's busiest cruise ship ports. Unfortunately, the island is often in the path of hurricanes. In 1989, Hurricane Hugo brought much damage. Hurricane Jeanne in 2004 caused seven deaths.

Unique to the island is the Coqui, a tiny frog that sings “co-kee.” Its likeness, however, is sure to be found the world over on tee-shirts, hats, and other souvenirs.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Puerto Ricans speak both Spanish and English, but predominantly Spanish. In 1991, Governor Rafael Hernandez Colon signed a law making Spanish the only official language. Two years later, his successor, Pedro Rossello, restored English as an official language. The Spanish spoken in Puerto Rico (or any other former Spanish colony) is as different from the Spanish spoken in Spain as American English is different from the English spoken in England—that is to say, different, but still the same language.

“Spanglish,” a mix of English and Spanish, can sometimes be heard on the island but is most often spoken in Puerto Rican communities on the U.S. mainland.

In Puerto Rico names are traditionally composed of three parts: first (given) name, father's surname, and mother's maiden name; for example, Juan Gomez Lopez.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Puerto Rican folklore, with origins in Taino, Spanish, and African traditions, deals mostly with stories of demons who roam the island after dark, seeking food or people, or protecting gold stashed by pirates. Other tales give an account of hurricanes and the damage they cause.

The legend of “El Chupacabras” (The Goat Sucker) spread throughout Puerto Rico in the early 1990s. “Chupa” is said to be a panther-like creature that stands on its hind legs and hops around like a kangaroo. It has claws on its appendages and plumage down its back. Some believe that the creature, which leaves behind bloodless animal carcasses with surgically precise incisions, may be a space alien. Others believe it is the work of satanic cults.

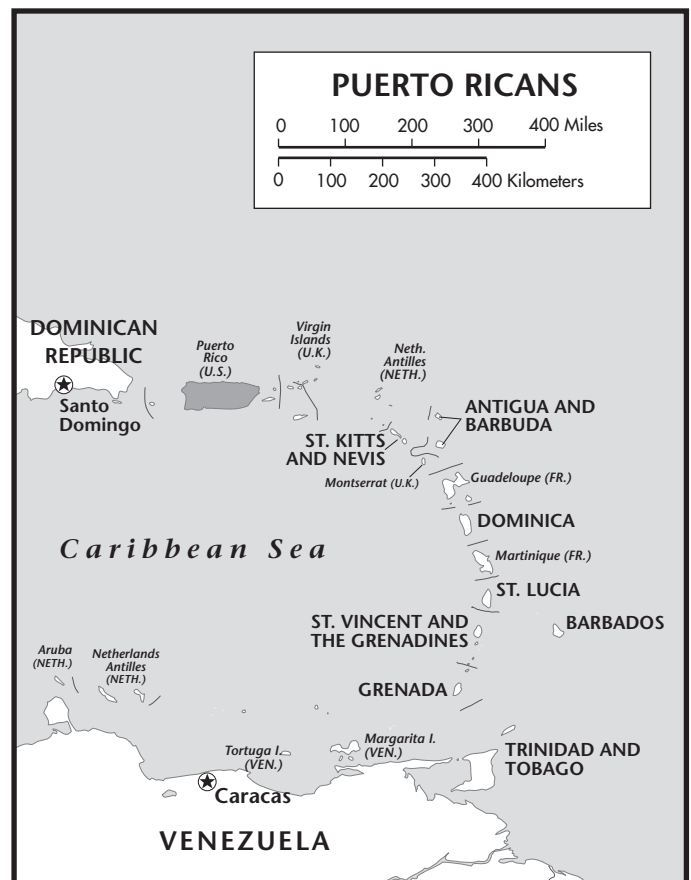
### 5 RELIGION

Most Puerto Ricans are Christian, mainly Roman Catholic (85% of the population). Santeria, the religion introduced by the African slaves, is also prevalent.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

While every town has its own feast honoring a patron saint, the main festivities occur on San Juan Bautista Day. At midnight celebrants dip their fully clothed bodies in water in order to bring themselves good luck.

Puerto Ricans also celebrate American holidays such as the Fourth of July and Memorial Day. Christmas celebrations take place on December 25 (as is done on the mainland) and on January 6, Three Kings Day (as is traditional). During the



Christmas season, Puerto Ricans carry out what is called an *asalto* (“assault”). Celebrants go from house to house, singing songs called *aquinaldos*. Members of each household then join in and move to the next house.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage in Puerto Rico are mainly those of the Catholic Church. Soon after a child is born it is baptized, and great emphasis is often placed on the *padrinos* (godparents). First Holy Communion is cause for great celebration. Death is mourned in much the same way as on the U.S. mainland.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Puerto Ricans, like many other peoples of the Caribbean, are characterized as being warm, open, and friendly—they will give you the shirt off their back.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Puerto Ricans enjoy a standard of living that is among the highest in the Caribbean. Health care on the island has continued to improve since the 1940s. The majority of Puerto Ricans have cars. While per capita income for Puerto Ricans is higher than that of other Caribbean nations, it is much lower than that of any of the 50 U.S. states. The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) for Puerto Rico in 2007 was \$19,600, while the per capita GDP for the American mainland was \$46,000.



A family parades in Puerto Rican flag costumes at the annual Carnival celebration in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was an outpost of Spanish colonialism for 400 years, until the United States took possession in 1898. Today, Puerto Ricans debate their relationship with the United States, with about half the island wanting to become the 51st state and the other half wanting to remain a U.S. commonwealth. (Amy Toensing/Getty Images)

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The extended-family setting prevails over that of the nuclear family. However, the fertility rate in 2008 was 1.76 children born per woman in Puerto Rico, compared with 2.1 children per women on the U.S. mainland.

## 11 CLOTHING

The *guayabera*, an embroidered man's shirt, is considered a traditional, elegant article of clothing and is still worn today in both formal and informal settings. For everyday purposes, however, people tend to wear casual attire.

## 12 FOOD

"Fondas," small, cafeteria-like restaurants on the island, are popular eateries for locals and tourists alike looking for generous portions at reasonable prices. *Arroz con gandules* (rice with pigeon peas) is a typical Puerto Rican dish. *Pasteles* are tamales made from plantains and stuffed with meat. In large cities, like San Juan, one can find most of the same fast-food chains found on the U.S. mainland.

Like many other Latin Americans, Puerto Ricans typically have a simple breakfast; the most common breakfast is *cafe con leche* (coffee—usually espresso—with milk). If one happens to

visit a family at dinnertime, they are likely to insist that the visitor stay and eat. To refuse may be considered impolite.

Puerto Rico is known for its rum. The Bacardi family, which moved the center of its production from Cuba to Puerto Rico in the 1930s, is the world's largest producer of rum.

Like many of the Caribbean people, Puerto Ricans are known for their sweet tooth. Most desserts employ ingredients that are grown right on the island. Below is a simple recipe for something called *Polvo de Amor* ("love powder").

### Love Powder

1 coconut  
1 pound of sugar

Open the coconut and extract the milk. Grate the meat. Mix with sugar and cook in a kettle. Stir for 5 minutes on a high flame. Reduce heat and stir for an additional 10 minutes. Serve crisp and golden brown.

## 13 EDUCATION

More than 94% of the island's population is literate. The government spends more money on education than on any other sector. The University of Puerto Rico provides higher education at several campuses throughout the island.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Puerto Rican culture has strong roots in Spanish and African traditions. Nowhere are those traditions more visible than in its popular music. Like other Spanish-speaking nations, salsa is the music of choice for Puerto Ricans. It blends elements of Spanish music with African rhythms.

The *Decima* (literally, “tenth”) is a poetic form of traditional Puerto Rican music in which the *Jibaro* (peasant farmer) expresses his hopes, dreams, and letdowns. The *decima* is usually improvised.

In the world of classical music, Puerto Rico boasts cellist Pablo Casals. Born in Spain in 1876 of a Puerto Rican mother, Casals is recognized the world over as one of the finest classical musicians of all time. He founded the Puerto Rican Symphony Orchestra, the Conservatory of Music, and the Festival Casals, a series of classical music concerts held in mid-June. Casals, who passed away at the age of 97 in 1973, is considered a national hero.

Other notable Puerto Rican “exports” in the arts include Raul Julia, Tito Puente, Jose Ferrer, Rita Moreno, Chita Rivera, and Jose Feliciano. Feliciano and his music embody the Puerto Rican spirit and its American influences. A true crossover artist, Feliciano is as acclaimed for his English-language recordings as for those in Spanish. One of his better-known works, “Feliz Navidad,” is a bilingual piece that has become a holiday classic.

Of all the Puerto Rican painters, none has gained greater acclaim than Jose Campeche. Campeche lived during the late 18th century and spent all of his life in San Juan. He was the son of a freed slave and an immigrant from the Canary Islands. The artist is renowned for his masterful religious works. Francisco Oller, born in 1833, demonstrated a European influence in his works. Oller applied the impressionist style to scenes depicting plantations, palm trees, and other local sights.

In literature, poet Francisco de Ayerra y Santa Maria and Latin scholar Alonso Ramirez stand out as notable contributors from the time of the conquistadors. The 19th century brought noted poets such as Lola Rodrigues de Tio, Jose Gautier Benitez, and Jose Gualberto Padilla (“El Caribe”). That same era featured distinguished writers such as Salvador Brau, Eugenio Maria Hostos, and Alejandro Tapia y Rivera. The 20th century was marked by works that deal with Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States. Poets and writers include Jose de Diego, Evaristo Ribera Chevremont, Antonio Pedreira, Enrique A. Laguerre, Pedro Juan Soto, and Rene Marques. Contemporary Puerto Rican writers include Rosario Ferré, Mayra Calvani, Esmeralda Santiago, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Ivan Silen, Giannina Braschi, and Jesús Colón.

## 15 WORK

Puerto Rico is strong in commerce, finance, tourism, and communications. The labor force of 1.3 million is divided into services (77%), industry (20%) and agriculture (3%). Puerto Rico is one of the world’s largest producers of pharmaceuticals. At \$77.4 billion in 2007, the island’s gross domestic product (GDP) is by far the largest in the Caribbean, and one of the largest in Latin America. A diverse industrial sector has far surpassed agriculture as the primary source of economic activity and income. Encouraged by duty-free access to the United States and by tax incentives, U.S. firms have invested heavily in Puerto Rico since the 1950s. In agriculture, dairy production

and other livestock products have surpassed sugar production. Tourism has traditionally been an important source of income, with estimated arrivals of nearly 5 million tourists in 2004. The “siesta” is becoming a thing of the past, as more and more businesses adopt a “nine-to-five” mentality.

## 16 SPORTS

As in other Spanish-speaking Caribbean islands, baseball reigns supreme above all other sports in Puerto Rico—both as a participatory and as a spectator sport. Professional baseball is played by teams in the Caribbean League. Often players from the U.S. major leagues will also play in the Caribbean League. Roberto Clemente, who played in the major leagues with the Pittsburgh Pirates in the 1960s and 1970s, is arguably one of the finest athletes Puerto Rico has ever produced, and one of the best players of the game. Tragically, Clemente died at the height of his career in an airplane accident while performing charity work. Roberto Alomar is considered by many to be one of the best second basemen in history.

Other notable Puerto Rican athletes include jockey Angel Cordero, tennis player “Gigi” Fernandez, and golfer “Chi Chi” Rodriguez.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like others in the Caribbean, Puerto Ricans cherish baseball, basketball, and a good game of dominoes. Highly controversial, cockfighting remains of great interest. To pass the time, people read, listen to one or more of the over 100 radio stations, or watch any of a half-dozen TV stations. On weekends, high school and college students frequent dance clubs and bars.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Carved religious figures called *santos* (saints) have been produced for more than 400 years on the island of Puerto Rico. *Mundillos* (tattered fabrics) is a lace craft that is equally old and equally popular. Musical artisans in Puerto Rico make *cuatros* (four-stringed guitars). Other craftspeople make *caretas*, festive masks (made of papier-mâché) in the shape of animal or devil heads, used during the Lenten season.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Puerto Rico is not immune to the problems of racial and sexual discrimination that plague the world. Large, densely populated cities like San Juan suffer the same social and criminal problems as do other large, densely populated cities on the mainland—AIDS, drugs, theft, unemployment, and violent crimes. The annual murder rate on the island is high. In response, many of the wealthier neighborhoods have barricaded themselves with electronic gates.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The gender roles of Puerto Rican women are more traditional than those of American women on the mainland. The women’s movement was slow in coming to Puerto Rico, and a “machismo” attitude among men is still prevalent.

“SanJuanBrothas” is an annual gay pride event held in San Juan each Memorial Day weekend. It is marketed toward gay men of color, but everyone can join in. Homosexuality in Puerto Rico is legal since a new penal code was passed in 2005. As of 2008 Puerto Rico’s legislature was debating giving same-sex



couples some of the rights of marriage through civil unions. Crimes motivated by prejudice based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity are considered hate crimes and are prohibited according to the Article 72 of the Penal Code of 2004.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# QUECHUA

**LOCATION:** Peru; Ecuador; Bolivia (Central Andes regions)

**POPULATION:** About 7.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Quechua

**RELIGION:** Combination of pre-Columbian and Roman Catholic elements

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Quechua Indians of the central Andes are the direct descendants of the Incas. The Inca Empire, which existed for a century before the arrival of the Spanish, was a highly developed civilization. The Inca Empire stretched from parts of present-day Colombia in the north, southward into Chile. The Incas had an impressive governing structure. The government imposed tribute and taxes on the population that were extracted in the form of labor and in crops. Vast warehouses were used to store food that was then distributed in times of famine. The Incas also had an immense army, used to continuously expand the empire and conquer new peoples.

The Spanish conquistadors arrived in South America in the early 1500s. When they arrived, the Inca king had already succumbed to the many European diseases that preceded the conquistadors. The Incas were in a state of civil war when Spanish forces arrived. After the Spanish captured the new Inca king, Atahualpa, the Incas suffered a swift defeat. The Spanish banned the Quechua language and culture from politics and education.

Before being assimilated by the Incas, the requirements made by this empire did not violently affect Quechua's way of life. It was more of a slow process of assimilation in which the Inca Empire imposed a series of taxes, which were accompanied by a series of social benefits. However, when the Spanish conquered the Inca Empire and Quechua culture came under Spanish rule, their society and life was deeply altered. The Spanish institution known as *encomienda* illustrates this phenomenon.

In general terms, the *encomienda* was a legal system of tribute established by the Spanish crown. The *encomienda* (from *encomendar*, "to entrust") granted a conquistador, soldier, or others, a specific number of Indians. The *encomendero*, or the beneficiary of the grant, could demand tribute from the Indian in gold, money, or labor. In exchange, the *encomendero* was obligated to protect and teach this Amerindian population the Christian faith. As a result of this system of tribute, Quechuas were forced to produce unfamiliar crops at the expense of their own food. Moreover, unlike the Incas, Europe did not supply the Quechua people with any kind of welfare.

In addition to these obligations, the Roman Catholic Church also demanded time and resources from this people. By the time Spanish rule ended in the 19th century, Quechua people had been so changed that many remained as servants on the grand haciendas and estates. In practice, the *encomienda* became a source of institutionalized injustice where the *encomenderos* gained control over Quechua land.

Peru attained independence from the Spanish in 1821. Modern-day Peru has struggled to modernize, plagued by problems of hyperinflation, poor governments, and terrorism. Most

Quechua still live in the Andean highlands, relying on subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, as did their Inca ancestors.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Quechua Indians still live in the areas once governed by the Inca Empire in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. At least one-third of Peru's 23 million inhabitants are Quechua Indians, still living as subsistence farmers throughout the Andes. The geographical conditions between regions differ dramatically. In mountain valleys there is rich soil and access to water that is suitable for farming. Most Quechua, however, live on the stark, steep slopes of the central Andes. Here, the soil is poor, the wind strong, and the weather cold.

Migration and urbanization in the past few decades have drawn many Quechua to Lima, the capital city of Peru, where there is now a large indigenous and Mestizo (mixed-race) population.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Quechua was the official language of the Inca Empire, the kingdom that ruled the Andes region from the mid-1400s until the arrival of Spanish conquistadors in 1532. This language became the lingua franca of Spaniards and Amerindians in the Andes regions.

The Quechua language is known by its speaker as *Runa Simi*, or the language of the people. Today, the term *quechua* refers more to the language than to a concrete ethnic group. In this sense, the Quechua extend throughout all the territory where Quechua is spoken, including a number of ethnic groups that speak Quechua and whose original language has disappeared. In the colonial chronicles, the term is used to refer to an ethnic group, whose original homeland is hard to determine. They seem to have inhabited the region of northwest Peru and to have expanded southward to the Andean region of Ecuador until they reached Peru. The diffusion of the Quechua language stems from Inca politics, continued throughout the colonial period, which gave Quechua a superior status to the other languages spoken in the Andes.

The Quechua language was the administrative language of the Inca state. Today it is spoken by nearly 8 million people in Peru alone, 1–2 million in Ecuador, and 1 million in Bolivia. Quechua words that have been assimilated into the English language include *puma*, *condor*, *llama*, and *coca*. Unlike most other native South American languages, Quechua is an official language of Peru, accorded the same status as Spanish. Although it is unusual, senators and congresspersons can give speeches in the Peruvian Congress in Quechua. The present Bolivian vice-president, Hugo Cárdenas, gave his acceptance speech in Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara.

Rafael Correa, a trained economist who took office as president of Ecuador in 2007, is fluent in Quechua, Spanish, English, and French.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The myth of Incarrí perhaps reveals the most about the feelings of the vanquished Inca. After the conquest of Peru in 1532, the Inca rulers retreated from Cuzco to Vilcabamba, where they resisted the Spanish invasion for nearly 50 years. In 1579 the last rebel Inca, Tupac Amaru, was captured and beheaded by the Spanish. The Spaniards stuck his head on a pike and placed it in the plaza of Cuzco as a warning to the rebels. The head



disappeared, and they say that it is buried. The myth tells that it is slowly growing its body back and when the body is complete, the Incas will return to rule their land.

Many of the ancient Quechua myths are still preserved in their oral tradition. Most of them narrate the origin of different ethnic groups, or of mountains, rivers, and lakes.

## 5 RELIGION

Quechua religion combines both pre-Columbian and Catholic elements. The most significant pre-Columbian influence that endures is the belief in supernatural forces that govern everyday events, such as weather and illness. The continued belief in supernatural powers controlling rain, harvests, earthquakes, and the like serves a utilitarian purpose to the agricultural Quechua. By making offerings to the powers that control natural forces, the Quechua feel that they can influence events and not merely be helpless in the face of bad weather or disease. When drinking alcohol, for example, it is customary to first offer a drink to Mother Earth, Pachamama. The first sip of beer or wine is spilled on the ground, out of respect for Pachamama.

This religious Andean world is populated by gods who have human attributes, like love and hate—sometimes they love each other and other times they hate and fight each other. For this reason, the Andean religion has two dimensions in the lives of the people: first, in human terms to promote social cohesion; and second, in transcendental terms to relate gods and humans.

Despite the continued importance of pre-Columbian rituals, the Quechua have adopted the Catholic calendar of festivals. This calendar has been integrated into the pre-Columbian agricultural timetable. The festival of Carnival, for example, marks both the beginning of Lent and the planting season. Catholic symbols, as well, have dual meanings. The cross, introduced by the Catholic Church, not only symbolizes Christianity and Christ but is used to symbolize the *Womaniize* (mountain deities) in some rituals and fertility in other rites. The Quechua, therefore, have not merely adopted Christianity but have incorporated it into their indigenous beliefs.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

While the Quechua celebrate important Catholic holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, they have not abandoned their ancient holidays. In the ancient Inca capital of Cuzco, the Inca Sun Festival is still celebrated. The Inti Raymi festival, as it is called, draws thousands of tourists from all over the world to witness its spectacular festivities. Donning replicas of Inca tunics, rather than contemporary Andean garb, Quechua Indians reenact the Inca sun-worshipping ceremony. The Inti Raymi festival, which celebrates the June solstice, reflects the Inca's vast knowledge of astronomy. On this occasion, there is much eating, drinking, and dancing. True to Inca traditions, a llama is also sacrificed on this day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, puberty, and death, are marked by rituals and celebrations that combine Catholic and indigenous traditions.

It is common that many rituals of the Quechua culture are expressed while singing and dancing. For instance, Qamili is a dance practiced on a large scale with numerous chorales. A variation of the Qamili is the Saratarpuy, and it is commonly practiced when people are sowing corn. To celebrate that special day, Quechua women dance the Saratarpuy, hoping they will have a good harvest.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Courtship and marriage involve a lengthy series of rituals and stages. Most unmarried youths meet (and flirt) during one of the community's many festivals. When a young couple decides that they are ready to consider marriage, the family of the bride is visited by the family of the prospective groom. The groom himself stays home while his parents and godparents discuss the wedding and negotiate what each family will donate to the newlyweds. The engagement is made official at a later date when the bride and groom exchange rosaries. At the wedding, there is a public procession as the bride leaves her home to join her husband's *ayllu*, or community. Various other rituals, including fertility rites, follow the wedding.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The dominant building material throughout most of the Andes is adobe. Adobe has the advantages of being highly durable, free, and widely available. Adobe can be made almost year-round with the rich Andean soil. Roofs are now more often made of tiles, rather than of the traditional thatched material used in the past. House-building is a communal affair, based on the ancient Inca system of labor exchange known as

*mita*. This institution was mandatory public service required by the Inca Empire. It was a tribute in the form of labor every time that public service was needed in public works projects, such as the construction of roads or public buildings. All the citizens able to perform these tasks were required to do them for a number of days every year. Since the Inca Empire was so wealthy, it usually only took about 65 days a year for the family to farm for its own needs; the rest of the year time was usually devoted to the *mita*.

In the communal construction of house-building for members of the community, neighbors will be offered *chicha* beer, cigarettes, and food in return for their help in the construction of a new home. In exchange, those who participated in the house-building are owed labor that they can claim at any time.

Regarding the economy realm, farming techniques were highly developed. Quechua adapted the agricultural process to satisfy the demands imposed by the Andean landscape. For instance, Quechuas developed a unique system of irrigation to water their fields as well as techniques to preserve their food by freeze-drying it in the cold mountain air. Llama and alpaca herds supply meat, wool, grease, fertilizer, fuel, and leather.

Although the Peruvian government has made efforts to decentralize its health care services, the quality of health care in rural communities is still extremely poor. Most remote communities have no access to medical care, and even those villages that do have a public health center receive little more than basic first aid. Given the cold, damp conditions, respiratory illnesses are the major cause of illness and death among the Quechua. Although vaccination rates are gradually increasing, infectious diseases such as measles and whooping cough are still frequent causes of death. Given the absence of good medical care provided by the state, most Quechua first turn to a *curandero* (literally, "curer") who provides herbal medicines and treatment.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Children in Quechua society play many important roles. From a very young age they participate in economic activities and perform key household tasks. Children are highly valued by the Quechua, and childless couples are sometimes considered to be social outcasts. As in most other subsistence economies, children are essential as they are expected to provide long-term economic security to their parents as they age. However, limited access to birth control makes it difficult to limit family size. While an optimum family size is considered by many Quechua to be three or four children, many families have up to 10 or more children. Generally, male children are more highly valued than females, as their economic potential is seen to be greater.

It is difficult to generalize about the role of women in Quechua society. Women clearly play a subordinate role compared to men in the community political structure. Women are less likely to receive a formal education, do not hold significant positions of power within the community, and are excluded from many potentially profitable economic activities. A clear sexual division of labor exists with regard to both agricultural and household tasks. Women's role in the family, however, is more ambiguous. Women do have a say in family matters, such as decisions about finances or issues surrounding the upbringing



*Quechua farmers celebrate the Feast of the Cross in Canisaya, Bolivia. The farmers from this area are known for producing some of the finest textiles in the Andean world. It is a diminishing art, as young residents migrate to the city and adopt modern dress.*  
(AP Images/Peter McFarren)

of the children. However, there is little evidence to suggest that they are free from subordination in family life as well. One beautiful and traditional task made by women takes place in the agriculture realm. The *llameras*, or girls who take care of the llamas, dance and sing while pasturing their animals or while traveling with the llamas along the lonely mountains. In the present times, it is not just the mountain girls who sing and dance, but also girls in every city of the Andes in any major event or celebration.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Andean clothing reflects strong Spanish influences. In 1572, the Spanish prohibited the Quechua from wearing native Inca tunics and wrap-around dresses. Andean peoples then adopted the clothing still in use today. Quechua women wear skirts and blouses, with colorful woven shawls around their shoulders. Men wear trousers, shirts, and woven ponchos. Sandals are the preferred footwear for both men and women.

The style and color of clothing worn by Quechua Indians does vary dramatically from region to region. The Otavalo of Ecuador, an important subgroup of the Quechua, has a very distinctive dress. They wear white trousers and shirts, covered by a solid black poncho. Otavalo men are also famed for their long black braids.

### **12 FOOD**

The potato was first domesticated in Peru approximately 4,500 years ago. The potato and quinoa grain remain as two of the main staples of the Quechua diet. Common dishes include meat or potato stews, spiced with hot peppers, coriander, or peanuts. For community feasts, a *pachamanca*, or underground oven, is occasionally used. Taking up to four days to prepare, a hole is dug in the ground, lined with bricks or rocks, then layered with hot coals. Potatoes, meat, beans, and corn are placed in the ground, covered, and left to cook slowly. The *pachamanca* is particularly common in the central Andes of Peru.

Also considered a delicacy is guinea pig. The preferred dish for festivals, guinea pigs are often raised in the house and provide a productive use for kitchen scraps and discarded food. The use of guinea pigs as an important source of protein predates the Incas.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Formal education in Peru is required until the age of 16. In rural areas, however, the percentage of students who finish their schooling is much lower than in urban areas. This is, in part, because children play a valuable role in household and agricultural tasks and their labor cannot be spared. The schooling received is generally very poor. Teaching methods are based

on rote memorization rather than teaching children problem-solving skills. Personal initiative is rarely encouraged, and teachers generally have low expectations of what their students can achieve. A further problem emerges for Quechua children, as Spanish is the primary language taught at schools.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The characteristic music of the central Andes is called *huayno*. The mountain origins of huaynos are reflected in their lyrics that recount daily life in mountain villages and proclaim Andean nationalism. Traditional instruments still widely used for this lively form of music include drums, flutes, and the *charrango*, a mandolin-style guitar made from an armadillo shell. Many huayno singers have been given recording contracts and are increasingly popular in urban areas.

Quechua folk music also includes beautiful, haunting pan-pipe music. One of these songs, *El Condor Pasa*, was recorded by Simon and Garfunkel in the 1960s and was a hit record.

As the Incas did not write, there is not a tradition of Quechua literature. In 20th-century Peru, however, there has emerged a tradition of *indigenista* writers that focus on the life of the indigenous peoples of the Andes. Jose Maria Arguedas, Cesar Vallejo, and Ciro Alegría have written influential books that portray the oppression of the Quechua throughout the centuries and chronicle their hard life in the Andes. These authors have contributed to a growing Andean nationalism and pride.

#### 15 WORK

Most Quechua rely on subsistence farming for their livelihood. Corn, potatoes, and grains are crops that have adapted to the high-altitude environment. Land is still farmed using the Inca method of terracing on steep slopes. This labor-intensive approach to agriculture absorbs a tremendous amount of time, leaving little time to dedicate to other economic activities.

Trade is highly developed between different villages and regions. In addition to agricultural products, many communities produce pottery, textiles, belts, hats, and other handicrafts for cash sales. In most communities, there is a weekly market day, which plays an important role in the economic and social fabric of the village. Most farmers bring their surplus goods, produce, or livestock to sell at the market. The vast majority of petty vendors throughout the Andes are women.

#### 16 SPORTS

The Quechua, as part of a Mestizo society, participate in many of the manifestations of Western culture. Although there are no definite Quechua sports, the Quechua participate in a variety of Western sports, such as soccer.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Socializing is the primary form of recreation in Quechua society. The Quechua celebrate a great many religious festivals, national holidays, and birthdays. Parties and festivals are events that are eagerly anticipated and require many weeks of planning. Many festivals, in fact, involve up to eight days of drinking, feasting, and dancing.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The most significant handicrafts produced by the Quechua are textiles. Women throughout the Andes can be seen spinning wool almost all day, even while they are sitting at the market or waiting for a bus. Both llama and sheep wool are used. The “belt loom” still in use by the Quechua dates back to pre-Columbian eras. The Quechua are skilled weavers, and their products are increasingly in demand for the tourist and export markets.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Alcoholism is a serious social problem, especially in males, throughout the central Andes. Drinking alcoholic beverages is not only an accepted behavior at the Quechua’s many festivals and parties, it is also an expected behavior. Alongside feasting and dancing, becoming drunk is a core part of most social occasions. Unfortunately, this behavior often spills over into daily life. Excessive drinking is common, and this has a negative impact on both family relations and family finances. Spousal abuse is a common result of alcoholism.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Quechua community, women and men are considered as complementary in life. Both have spaces and rights assigned to them in an egalitarian way. The unity man/woman (*hari warmi*), linked together in the process of life, in space and time, and interrelated with the animal, vegetal, mineral, and spiritual world, symbolizes a reciprocal and complementary behavior in harmony with nature. This means that the human being does not exist alone but in a couple and that a single person is never complete. Men and women united through marriage are considered as the seed of the community, or *ayllu*, which creates and recreates social harmony between men and women.

Women participate in the whole agricultural production cycle but have specific feminine duties such as putting the seed in the earth, selecting the harvest, and collecting it in the warehouse. Men manage the different tools, take care of animal health, and sell the products in the market. In Quechua culture, women are the administrators of the resources because they are recognized as having this skill, and, implicitly, they are the ones who make decisions at home. They are considered as the cement of the household (*warmin wasi simintuqa*).

The survival of values and knowledge of the Quechua culture are made possible by women due to the transmission of these values and knowledge to their children and due to their keeping of the language, oral proverbs, medicine, weaving, music, and clothes. It is women’s responsibility to keep and strengthen Quechua culture, for example by their fundamental role in the elaboration of the *chicha*. However, men often despise women and depreciate women’s traditional knowledge and capacities. This lack of validation from men leads to Quechua women’s low self-esteem.

Regarding political power, it is commonly assumed that men are the ones who should participate in the community assemblies and that, when a man votes, he is expected to represent both his own opinion and that of his wife.

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—revised by C. Vergara.

## RUSSIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Russian history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Russians**.

### OVERVIEW

The term “Russian Americans” is somewhat confusing because it can be used to refer either to ethnic Russian immigrants or to immigrants from any of the former soviets of the Soviet Union (including Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, etc.). In this article, Russian Americans will be used to refer only to ethnic Russian immigrants. Russian Jewish immigrants will be mentioned in this article, but they are discussed in more detail in the article on Jewish Americans.

Most Russian American scholars and ethnic Russian Americans count three major waves of immigration to the United States: The first wave happened just after the Russian Revolution of 1917–21, stretching from the 1920s into the 1930s; the second wave occurred after World War II, from 1945 until the early 1950s; and the third wave began in the 1970s and continues today. A sizeable number of immigrants came to the United States from Russia before 1920, but they were of varied ethnic origins and so are discounted by most ethnic Russian Americans.

The very first Russians to set foot on the North American continent were fur traders from Siberia who traveled across the Bering Strait in the 1700s in search of game. They settled in Alaska and maintained a Russian colony there for a time. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Russians from the middle class fled Russia to escape the oppressive government of that time, many emigrating to the United States. In 1861 Russian peasants (or serfs) were given their freedom, and a host of them emigrated to America. Between 1861 and 1914, 9 out of 10 Russian immigrants to the United States were peasants. Most were single young men, hoping to find employment and a better life in America. A few young women also came to the United States to escape arranged marriages in their homeland. During this same time, a number of German–Russian Mennonites, Molokans (another religious sect), and Jews fled religious persecution in Russia and settled in America.

The “first” wave of Russian American immigration (according to scholars and ethnic Russian Americans) consisted largely of members of the Russian middle class and aristocracy who suddenly found their homeland inhospitable after the Communist Revolution of 1917. About 40,000 Russians came to the United States in the first few years after the Revolution. When Stalin took over the Soviet government in 1930, he introduced strict regulations forbidding emigration. For the next 14 years, only 14,060 Russians managed to escape the Soviet Union and come to America.

Most of these “first”-wave Russian Americans were well-educated, skilled laborers or professionals. They had a much easier time acclimating to life in the industrialized United States than did the peasants of earlier immigrations. However, first-wave Russian Americans met with a sudden surge of hostility from non-Russian Americans who suspected them of being Communists (called “Reds”). The “Red Scare” of 1919–20 drove many Russian Americans to hide their ethnicity. Some 3,000 Russian Americans were arrested and jailed as suspected



Communists and, although most were soon released, a number were deported to the Soviet Union. In actuality, very few Russian Americans were Communist sympathizers. Most had in fact *fled* the Communist government.

The pressure to assimilate caused much of Russian culture and heritage to be lost by Russian American immigrants. Many Americanized their names, stopped speaking Russian, and adopted American customs. The same was true of the “second” wave of Russian American immigrants, who entered the United States under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. Europeans displaced by the destruction of World War II were allowed to immigrate to the United States. Those Russians who immigrated encountered a second surge of anti-Communism in America, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Russian Americans again felt driven to hide their ethnicity and become “American” as soon as possible.

No one was allowed legally to leave the Soviet Union again until the 1960s and 1970s, when Russian Jews were permitted to emigrate to Israel. Some then moved to the United States shortly after arriving in Israel. A handful of elite Russians, such as artists, scientists, and athletes, defected (illegally renounced their Soviet citizenship and requested residency in the United States) while visiting America on Soviet-sponsored tours or exchanges. Stalin’s own daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, defected to the United States. Other defectors include ballet artists Rudolf Nureyev, Natalia Makarova, and Valery Jalina Banov; poet Joseph Brodsky; cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich; and scientists Valery Chalidze and Chores Med-

vedev. However, the number of Russian immigrants, legal or illegal, was very small during these decades.

The “third” wave of Russian immigration to the United States, beginning with Russian Jews in the early 1970s, picked up speed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, approximately one million Russians have immigrated to the United States. A majority of them are still Russian Jews, most of whom settle in New York City, but a number of other ethnic Russians are also making the trip across the globe in search of a better life.

The 2000 U.S. Census counted some 3 million “Russian” Americans, but this includes many who are not ethnic Russians. According to the U.S. Census 2000, 706,242 Americans indicated Russian as their spoken language. The regions with the highest concentration of Russian-Americans in 2000 were: the NY Tri-State Area (24%), California (16%), Illinois (16%), Pennsylvania (10%), Massachusetts (8%), Florida (7%), and Washington D.C. and Maryland (3%).

The very first Russians in America, the Siberian fur traders, settled in Alaska. Russian immigrants who came between 1870 and 1920 tended to settle in large cities of the Northeast and Midwest, including New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Buffalo, and Detroit. Some Russians who fled to China after the Revolution in 1917 later fled persecutions in China, ending up in California. Some settled in the San Francisco area and others in Los Angeles. German-Russian Mennonites established farms in the Midwest, particularly in the states of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Minnesota. A religious sect known as

the Molokans escaped persecution in Russia and moved to Los Angeles. Today, there are about 20,000 Molokans in California and a few thousand more in Oregon.

Most of the Russian immigrants who have arrived since the 1960s and 1970s have settled in and around New York City. Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, New York, is one of the few Russian neighborhoods left in America. In 2008 there were more than 700,000 Russian speakers in the tri-state New York metropolitan region. More than 100,000 Russian Americans also live in San Francisco. Other small Russian American neighborhoods exist, but there are no real "Russiantowns" to speak of today, excepting Brooklyn Beach and the San Francisco Russian American community.

First-generation Russian Americans strive to learn English as quickly as possible in order to blend in with their American environment and enable themselves to get better jobs. Their children grow up speaking both English and Russian, but when they establish homes of their own, they speak only English. Therefore, by the third generation, most Russian Americans no longer speak Russian. The Orthodox Church in America (OCA), which began in Alaska in 1792, now uses English in its liturgy. Most Russian Americans, if they are not Jewish, belong to the OCA. Another organization is the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR). Traditionalists believe that the Russian language is the only thing that gives Russians their true identity and to lose it is to lose one's heritage.

The OCA has about one million members; the ROCOR has about 400,000 members. About half of the Russian American population is Jewish; a minority are Mennonite or belong to other Protestant denominations. A very small group of Russian Americans belong to the Old Believers sect of the Russian Orthodox Church, following the teachings of the Church prior to changes that were made in 1654. These Old Believers live in intentionally isolated communities in Alaska and Oregon, speak only Russian, wear 17th-century clothing, and keep themselves separate from the rest of society.

Russian Americans celebrate the rites of passage and holidays common to their particular religious tradition, be it Jewish, Orthodox, Protestant, or Mennonite. They have also adopted traditional American holidays such as Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. Most were not supporters of the Soviet government and so do not celebrate any Soviet holidays.

Russians love to party, however, so they find many occasions to celebrate together. Russian Americans are no less festive. Births, weddings, holy days, graduations, the purchase of a new home, new jobs, even funerals are all reasons to gather together and eat, drink, and be merry. Hospitality and generosity are highly valued by Russian Americans, and old-time traditions such as welcoming guests with a loaf of bread are still honored.

Russian families are traditionally very close and, though Americanizing influences have lessened the bonds somewhat, most Russian Americans are still closely tied to their families, particularly first- and second-generation immigrants. Elderly relatives are cared for at home, and women give birth at home. Young women often live with their parents until they marry, and sons tend to settle near their parents after marriage. Later-generation Russian Americans are more Americanized with a greater focus on individual nuclear family units.

Food is an important part of Russian Americans' ethnic identity, and many of their traditional foods have become

common among the general American population. Mennonite farmers introduced hard wheat to American farmers, and it is now grown on many farms across the United States. Chicken Kiev (batter-fried chicken breasts stuffed with butter and herbs), beef stroganoff (thinly sliced beef in sour cream sauce), and borscht (beet soup) are well-known to most Americans. Bagels, pumpernickel bread, sour cream, vodka, and lemon in tea are even better-known Russian additions to the American menu.

Russian Americans have made tremendous contributions to the cultural life of America as well. Russian folk music, played on the balalaika (a triangular guitar with a flat back, usually with three strings), and Russian folk dances are very popular with the general American population. Classical music and dance abound with Russian Americans, including composers Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Rachmaninoff; conductors Serge Koussevitsky, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Nicholas Sokomoff; violinists Isaac Stern, Yehudi Menuhin, and Mischa Elman; pianist Vladimir Horowitz; and ballet artists Michael Fokin, George Balanchine, Natalia Makarova, Valery Banov, Alexandra Danilova, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Barishnikov. Popular music composers Irving Berlin, Efram Zimbalist, Louis Gruenberg, and Dmitri Tiomkin also contributed greatly to American culture.

Russian American visual artists include Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, who work together, and Louise Nevelson (Berliawsky). There are many highly successful Russian American writers, including Isaac Asimov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Joseph Brodsky, Ayn Rand, Saul Bellow, Vladimir Nabokov, and Irina Ratushinskaya. Director Konstantin Stanislavsky (founder of The Actors' Studio in New York City) made a tremendous impact on American theater and film, and actors Natalie Wood, Yul Brynner, Milla Jovovich, and comedian Yaakov Smirnoff found success in film and television. Fashion designer Oleg Cassini was a Russian American.

In the worlds of science and industry, Russian Americans have made countless contributions. Some noted examples are David Dubinsky, founder of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union in 1900; Vladimir Zworykin, inventor of the tube that made television possible, and inventor of the electron microscope; Solman Waksman, who discovered the bacterium that causes tuberculosis; and George Gamow, who played a critical role in the development of nuclear fission technology. In the world of business, Sergey Brin is one of the co-founders of Google.

Tennis stars Anna Kournikova and Maria Sharapova are important sports figures in the 21st century.

For the most part, Russian Americans have successfully adapted to American life, suffering little overt discrimination excepting the two "Red Scare" eras. Perhaps the greatest problem Russian Americans face at this juncture is the rapid loss of their traditional culture. Americanization is quickly turning Russian Americans into merely "Americans," with little of their Russian heritage remaining. Some see this as a good thing; others grieve the loss. For Russian American women, escaping some of the trappings of traditional culture can be liberating. Be they orthodox or Jewish, many Russian American women are carving out new roles for themselves in the wider American society.



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—revised by J. Hobby

**ST. LUCIANS**

**PRONUNCIATION:** (saint) LOO-shahns

**LOCATION:** St. Lucia

**POPULATION:** 172,884 (July 2008 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** English; French-based dialect with West African, English, and Spanish influences

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; small groups of Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and Seventh-Day Adventists; Hinduism; Islam

**1 INTRODUCTION**

St. Lucia (pronounced LOO-shah) is a nation in the Windward Islands with a distinctive mix of cultures. Its mostly Black population is descended from West African slaves who worked for both French and British plantation owners. Although the British, its final colonizers, ruled the island for 165 years without interruption, the island's previous history produced a culture that is pervasively French in many ways.

Although it was formerly thought that Christopher Columbus sighted St. Lucia on 13 December 1502 (St. Lucy's Day), historians now believe that there is no real evidence for such a sighting. However, it was apparently seen and named by some explorer within the same time period because it appears under its present name on a 1520 Vatican map. In the 17th century the English made two unsuccessful attempts to settle on the island. Following an agreement with the native Carib population in 1660, the French established a presence on the island. However, their claims were disputed by the British, and St. Lucia alternated between French and British control 14 times until 1814, when it became a British Crown Colony under the Treaty of Paris.

Although political control ultimately went to the British, the cultural influence of the French has persisted to the present day, reflected in the dominance of Catholicism among the population, the islanders' French-based patois (dialect), and such customs as its Flower Festivals. Sugarcane continued its previous dominance over the economy for some time, although the plantation owners were forced to modify their operations when the British abolished slavery in 1834. One consequence was the *meytage* system of sharecropping, devised to induce former slaves to continue working the land. Later in the 19th century, St. Lucia became a major shipping center for coal.

On 10 September 1994, the island was struck by Tropical Storm Debbie, which inflicted greater damage than that caused by Hurricane Allen in 1980. Some 61 cm (24 in) of rain fell within seven hours, killing 4 people and injuring 24. The capital city of Roseau was flooded, a laboratory building located there was swept out to sea, and over two-thirds of the nation's banana crop was destroyed.

In the 20th century, the island reduced its dependence on sugar, whose volatile market made for an unstable economy and expanded its production of bananas. St. Lucia produces the largest banana crop in the Windward Islands. Throughout the century, the island gradually moved toward self-government, beginning with the establishment of a constitution in 1924. Universal adult suffrage was granted in 1951, and in 1958 St. Lucia joined the short-lived West Indies Federation. In 1967 full internal autonomy was achieved, and on 22 February

1979, St. Lucia became an independent state within the British Commonwealth.

The same as many islands located in the Caribbean Sea, St. Lucia has been attracting foreign investment, especially in its offshore banking and tourism industries. In 2006, direct investment to the construction of several resorts was massive. Tourism is the main source of foreign exchange, with almost 700,000 arrivals in 2005 and more than 900,000 in 2007. St. Lucia has attempted to diversify its national portfolio. However, its vulnerability to external economic crisis and customer preferences are some of the main factors that have complicated the self-imposed task of diversification. Declines in the European Union banana preferences, volatile tourism receipts, natural disasters, and dependence on foreign oil are the main reason of its precarious economics' wellbeing.

St. Lucia grew steadily during the early 1990s. GDP increased by an average 3.2% between 1988 and 1991 and by 3.9% between 1992 and 1995. However, it grew by only 2.2% during 1996–1999. Per capita GDP was us\$2,785 in 1999. In 2005, the services realm accounted for 80% of the GDP, the industrial sector for 15%, while the agricultural sector represented 5% of the total economic output. The main industry products are focused on producing clothing, beverages, electronic components, corrugated cardboard boxes, and lime and coconut processing. The most important goods produced in St. Lucia are—besides bananas—coconuts, vegetables, citrus, root crops, and cocoa. Even though the national economy has remained strong with an economic growth of 3.2% in 2007, unemployment has kept stubbornly high.

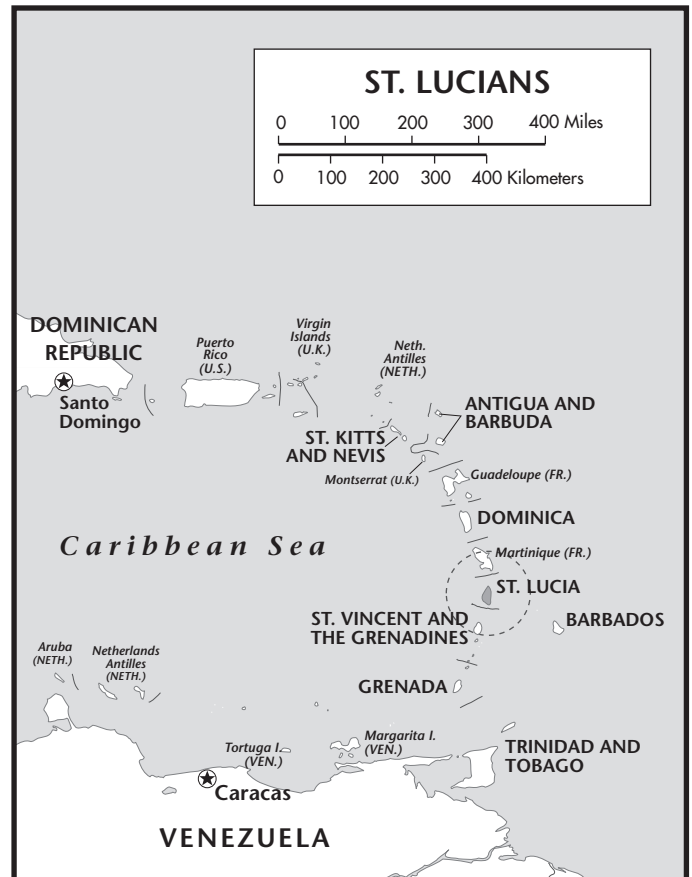
## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The second-largest of the Windward Islands, St. Lucia has an area of approximately 620 sq km (239 sq mi), between three and four times the size of Washington, D.C. St. Lucia's geographical position between the former French colony of Martinique to the north and the former British colony of St. Vincent to the south parallels its dual historical exposure to the cultures of France and England.

The island is volcanically formed, and like neighboring St. Vincent, Martinique, and Dominica, it has a mountainous interior with lush rain forests. Its highest point, Mt. Gimie, in the southern half of the island, rises to 951 m (3,118 ft) above sea level, and the twin peaks of Gros Piton and Petit Piton on the southwest coast are prominent as well. Fertile plains that support the country's banana plantations are located at the base of the central mountains, and numerous rivers flow from the interior to the Caribbean.

St. Lucia's population estimated 172,000 people, almost evenly divided between urban and rural areas. The capital city of Castries had just under 52,000 people in 1991, and its current population is estimated at between 57,000 and 60,000. No Caribs remain on the island. The majority of the inhabitants of the island is of African or mixed descent. In addition, there is a small minority of mulattoes and other mixtures. The rest are whites, mostly European, or from East Indian extraction. Overcrowding on the island due to high fertility rates has resulted in migration to neighboring Caribbean countries, such as Trinidad and Guyana, or to the United States, Canada, and Britain.

St. Lucia is a constitutional monarchy. The British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is the head of state and is represented by



a governor-general. The bicameral parliament consists of the House of Assembly elected by universal adult suffrage.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Although the official language of St. Lucia is English, a majority of its people speak a patois (dialect) based on French and influenced by the grammar of West African languages, with a largely French vocabulary that includes words from English and Spanish. This language, which historically had no written form, was developed by French plantation owners and their African slaves before the British took final possession of the island in the 19th century and set about making English the national tongue. English, in its most proper British style, is the language of the schools, government, and media, but patois prevails at home, on the streets, and at informal occasions. More than half of St. Lucia's residents are more comfortable with patois than English, and as many as 20%, especially elderly rural dwellers, speak little English or none at all. Some court cases are even tried in patois.

In recent years, greater recognition has been accorded to patois as a symbol of St. Lucian cultural identity. Cultural groups on the island even offer instruction in it. A written form has been developed for teaching purposes, and patois primers are available, including *Mwen Vin Wakonte Sa Ba'w* ("I am going to explain it to you") and *Se'kon Sa I Fèt* ("Know how it is done"). The Folk Research Centre in Castries has published a patois handbook and dictionary and a collection of folk tales

and common expressions called *Annou Di-Y an Kweyol*. The name of St. Lucia in patois is “Sent Lisi.”

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The African-derived quasi-religious belief system called *obeah* is practiced in St. Lucia, although it has been outlawed since the 1950s. Many of its practices are meant to ward off harm at the hands of various spirits, devils, and human beings. It is thought to be capable of healing the sick, harming one’s enemies, and accomplishing more mundane goals such as “fixing” a court case. Its features include the preparation of herbal potions.

#### 5 RELIGION

According to the 2001 census, about 67.5% of the island’s population is Roman Catholic, with smaller groups belonging to the Seventh-Day Adventist (8.5%) and Pentecostal (5.7%). Other religious minorities are Rastafarian (2.1%), Anglican (2%), Evangelical (2%), and other Christian groups, such as Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists (5.1 %). The island’s East Indians are either Hindu or Muslim. The Catholic population celebrates saints’ days.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

St. Lucia’s public holidays include New Year’s Day (January 1), Independence Day (February 22), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Queen of England’s Official Birthday (June 5), Corpus Christi (June 6), August Bank Holiday (first Monday in August), Thanksgiving Day (first Monday in October), St. Lucia Day (December 13), Christmas (December 25), and Boxing Day (December 26). The annual Carnival celebration, a focus of many of the island’s cultural activities, is held in Castries right before Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. The finals of the calypso competition and the naming of the Carnival King and Queen are held over the weekend, followed by the spirited street revels of J’Ouvert, which begin at 4:00 AM on Monday morning. The more orderly costumed bands parade on Monday and Tuesday.

A tradition unique to St. Lucia are its two competing flower festivals, which are held on the feast days of two saints and grew out of the historical rivalry between France and Britain for control of the island. La Rose, the Feast of St. Rose of Lima, is held on August 30. Its counterpart, La Marguerite (the Feast of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque) occurs on October 17. Each festival, planned and staged by a special society, includes costumed parades and a “royal court” of kings and queens. Special songs called *belairs* are composed for the festivals by society members, and the evening of each festival is spent feasting and dancing traditional dances. In addition, Saint Lucia holds a carnival in mid-July.

The National Day, St. Lucia Day on December 13, is an important occasion. St. Lucia (St. Lucy), who is associated with light, is the island’s patron saint; its motto is “the land, the people, the light.” St. Lucia Day is marked by nationwide cultural and sporting events.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions are marked by religious ceremonies appropriate to each St. Lucian’s particular faith community. For instance, Catholics hold funeral wakes on the first and eighth

nights after a person’s death. Mourners gather at the house of the deceased, providing coffee, sugar, and rum, and music is performed. The music played inside the house (generally hymns and gospel) is for the dead, while that played outside (drumming or unaccompanied songs) is meant to comfort the mourners.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The distinction between English and patois has traditionally been linked to social standing. While English was historically the language of culture and education, patois implied a lack of status and sophistication, and it was once common for St. Lucians to hide their knowledge of it. Parents who harbored ambitions for their children would insist that they speak English, even at home. The 20% of the population who do not speak English are still excluded from full participation in the island’s social, economic, and political life. However, the government has initiated outreach measures designed to bring that group fully into the mainstream. At the same time, there has been a revival of respect for patois as a symbol of cultural pride among St. Lucians.

Social relations in St. Lucia are strongly influenced by the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic religious affiliation of the island’s inhabitants.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Health conditions on St. Lucia improved substantially in the 1980s, with a decrease in infant mortality and an increase in average life expectancy, which stood at 72 years in the early 1990s and 74 years (estimate) in 2008. Total deaths were 3,837, and the crude death rate was 6.4 per 1,000 people during 1996–1999. Diseases of the circulatory system are the principal cause of death (38%), and tumors and external causes represent 16% and 9%, respectively. External causes of death are more than three times greater for males than females.

Free services provided by the health care system include both curative and preventive care, the latter including immunization, family planning, and nutrition programs. There are approximately 3,400 persons per physician, and most (70%) of the country’s urban dwellers had access to safe drinking water as of 1990. There are two major hospitals located near Castries and Vieux Fort. Other service providers include a network of clinics.

A 760-km (470-mi) road network links the island’s villages, towns, and major residential areas, with the major cross-island route running from Castries in the northwest to Vieux Fort in the south. Local mass transit is provided by vans and mini-buses, which are known as “transports.” Rural dwellers often reach the nearest town or main road by footpath. Castries and Vieux Fort are the country’s most important ports, with ferry links from Vieux Fort to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Hewanorra International Airport accommodates jet aircraft, while the smaller Vigie Airport is used for flights to neighboring islands in the Caribbean.

An existing housing shortage due to overcrowding on the island—especially in urban areas—was worsened by damage from Tropical Storm Debbie in 1994.

Regarding media property, St Lucia’s newspapers and broadcasters are mainly privately owned and carry a range of views. The government operates a radio network. There are no daily newspapers.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Couples in St. Lucia, as in other parts of the West Indies, are united in three basic types of relationships: legal marriage, unmarried cohabitation, and “visiting unions,” where the man and woman live apart and the woman raises the children. Visiting unions are more likely to occur in early adulthood, while married relationships are more common later in life. The traditional nuclear family is mostly found among the upper classes, with female-headed families the norm at other levels of society. Many households are largely composed of different generations of women, and women have the major decision-making responsibilities. Children acquire a strong sense of responsibility toward their families from an early age and are expected to care for their parents as they age.

In rural areas, men and women do the same types of farm work, but women also take care of the majority of domestic chores and assume primary responsibility for child-rearing.

## 11 CLOTHING

St. Lucians wear modern Western-style clothing. Some older women may still be seen in the traditional national costume consisting of a madras head-tie and a skirt with lace petticoats draped at the sides. Costumes are also worn at the Flower Festivals and the Carnival celebration.

## 12 FOOD

Like its language, St. Lucia’s cuisine combines the island’s French and African heritages. It is based on the local produce and seafood catch, liberally spiced and prepared in clay pots heated by coals. The waters surrounding the island contain crab, tuna, dolphin fish, conch, flying fish, and snapper, while its tropical climate yields breadfruit, dasheen, green-skinned pumpkin and yam, avocado, coconut, guava, mango, and papaya. (Produce is generally available year-round). Favorite Caribbean dishes enjoyed on St. Lucia include fish soup, callaloo, and plantains prepared in many different ways. *Pouile Dudon* is a French-derived sweet-and-spicy chicken meal. The national dish is saltfish and green figs (a type of banana also known as “bluggoe”).

### Saltfish and Green Figs

- ¼ pound salted codfish
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- water
- 3 medium-sized green figs (unripe bananas)
- 1 small onion, finely chopped

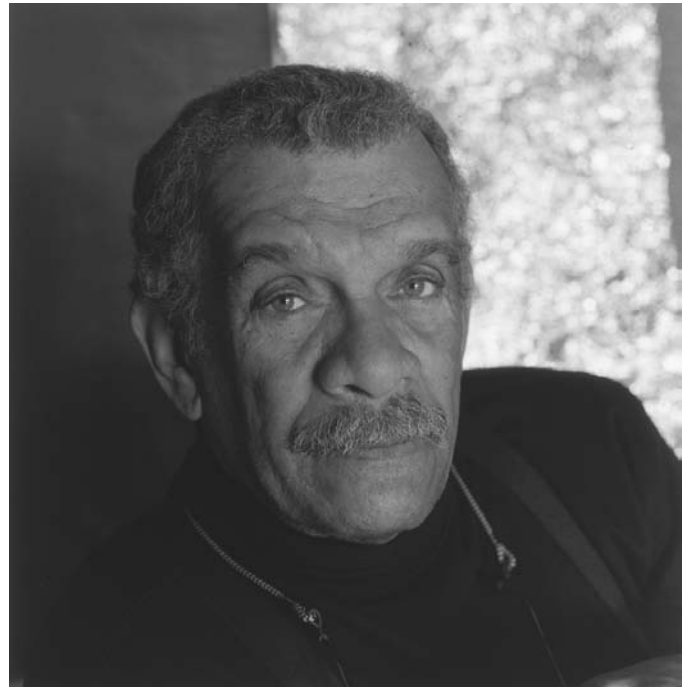
Place the salted codfish into a bowl, breaking it into large chunks. Add water to cover and let soak for 12 hours, adding fresh water at least twice.

Cut the bananas into 2.5-cm (1-in) pieces and boil in about 2 cups of water, simmering about 15 minutes.

Boil the salted fish in 3 cups of water for 15 minutes, or until tender. Drain thoroughly, remove any remaining skin or bones, and shred or flake.

In a large skillet, sauté the fish together with the onion for about 5 minutes. Stir in the drained bananas and cook for 2 more minutes.

Optional: garnish with tomato or avocado slices, or celery sticks.



St. Lucian-born poet Derek Walcott. Walcott won the Nobel Prize in 1992. (Horst Tappe/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

## 13 EDUCATION

Education on St. Lucia is free and compulsory between the ages of 5 and 15. The literacy rate of the adult population has been estimated at about 90%, a figure related to the fact that some 15% of the populace speaks only the French-based Lucian dialect, or patois. There are 83 primary schools and 13 secondary schools. In the 1980s only 6 of the nation’s secondary schools offered schooling beyond the junior secondary level (equivalent to junior high school), sending many young people into the work force without having received a full education. Higher education is offered at Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and a branch of the University of the West Indies. There is also a technical college and a teacher-training college.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nobel Prize-winning poet and playwright Derek Wolcott was born in St. Lucia in 1930. Although he has long divided his time between Boston and Trinidad, where he founded a theater workshop, he has established an international writers’ retreat called the Rat Island Foundation off the coast of his native land. Wolcott’s works represent a fusion of the English language and literary tradition with Caribbean culture and folklore. Other St. Lucian writers include Walcott’s twin brother Roderick Walcott, novelist Garth St. Omer, and poet and short-story writer John Robert Lee.

In addition to Wolcott, St. Lucia has produced another Nobel Prize winner: economist Sir Arthur Lewis. The country’s visual artists include Dunstan St. Omer, known for his religious paintings, and Llewellyn Xavier, the St. Lucia-born creator of Mail Art who has become involved in environmental conservation on the island in recent years. Modern dance has thrived on St. Lucia, and two of its best-known performers are Michael Francis and Carlton Ishmael.

In addition to the calypso and reggae music that are universally popular in the Caribbean, two other musical styles, zouk and cadance, are heard on French-influenced islands like St. Lucia. The St. Lucia International Jazz Festival has been held annually since 1992, with the dual goals of bringing top international performers to the island and encouraging local musicians. Festival participants have included such acclaimed artists as Herbie Hancock, Nancy Wilson, and Ramsey Lewis. The 1993 festival was attended by 6,000 people.

### 15 WORK

The cooperative labor ethos of St. Lucians extends from the family to the neighborhood *cou-de-main* tradition, where villagers organize themselves into work parties to help their neighbors with such tasks as building a new house or organizing a major family event such as a wedding. The majority of the work force is engaged in agriculture, with light manufacturing and a growing tourist industry employing most of the rest.

### 16 SPORTS

As is the case in other British-influenced Caribbean islands, cricket is very popular on St. Lucia, whose team competes regularly against the British team (which itself has a number of West Indian players).

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Dancing is extremely popular on St. Lucia, and dances are held regularly, even in the smallest towns. In the 1980s, up to one-third of a popular radio news program broadcast in patois was devoted to dance announcements. Other favorite forms of recreation include beach parties, full-moon parties, and simply gathering with friends at night to discuss the day's events. Popular music on the island includes the Caribbean calypso and reggae styles, as well as the French-influenced zouk and beguine. As on other islands in the West Indies, the rum shop is the traditional male after-hours gathering place.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

St. Lucia has a rich and varied folk music tradition, which can be heard on a CD collection compiled by the island's Folk Research Centre and recorded at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (*Musical Traditions of St. Lucia*). The island's traditional music includes work songs that originated during the days of slavery, as well as beach party and game songs, "play-song-dance" music, and Carnival music. Some of St. Lucia's folk instruments, including the violin, guitar, and mandolin, are of European origin. Instruments of African origin include the *bélé* (or *ka*) drum; a long, hollow tube called the *baha*; a rattle called the *chakchak*, the *zo* (bones); and the *gwaj* (scraper). Various types of banjos and a four-stringed instrument called the *cuatro* are also native to the island.

The music itself shows both French and African influences. The former is evident in the St. Lucian *kwadril*, derived from a French dance form, and the latter can be seen in the *koutoumba*, derived from African call-and-response forms. St. Lucian gospel songs are called *sankeys* (in honor of American singer and songwriter Ira D. Sankey). Each year the calypso tunes currently popular on the island appear in a recorded collection called *Lucian Kaiso*. The St. Lucian *kwadril*, like the French version, consists of five distinct parts with complicated steps

that must be carefully learned and memorized. The *kwadril* has enjoyed a revival since the mid-1980s, when it was recognized as a unique cultural expression rather than simply a vestige of European colonialism.

Traditional crafts on St. Lucia include pottery, woodcarving, and weaving. The Craft Centre at Choiseul was established by the St. Lucian government to preserve the island's folk art heritage and help support its craftspeople.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In recent years, low banana prices have affected St. Lucia's economy, and the situation has been exacerbated by farmers' strikes and the damage wrought by Tropical Storm Debbie in 1994. In that year, the St. Lucia Banana Growers' Association was forced into receivership and confronted a heavy debt load. Prime Minister John Compton estimated that it would take two years and cost US\$30 million to repair the damage from the storm. It was feared that up to one-fifth of the island's fertile farm lands might have been permanently ruined for crop production.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

St. Lucia still has discriminatory laws against women. St. Lucian women who marry foreign men are not permitted to acquire citizenship for their husbands, but men who marry foreign women receive automatic citizenship for their wives. Women also must consult and receive permission from their husbands before basic procedures related to their reproductive health. On the other hand, men are not required to have the consent of their wives if they choose to have a vasectomy. Abortion was made legal in 2003, but only in limited circumstances, in cases of rape, incest, deformed fetus, and to protect the life of the mother.

Violence against women is a critical problem in St. Lucia and the government has enacted laws to deal with the problem. However, there is a low level of public awareness and sensitization. Many people still believe that domestic violence is a private affair. Law enforcement and the judicial system also pose major problems, as many cases of violence against women remain unsolved and those that do go before the court experience years of delays. In addition, there has been a growing trend in adolescent childbirths and girls from poor families are more prone to become pregnant due to sexual abuse, unlawful carnal knowledge, or the inability to gain access to contraceptives. Also, there is currently no recourse in the criminal code for women who are victims of rape within marital relationships.

Female participation in the labor force stands at 44.42% and there has been a steady increase in women occupying senior and middle management positions since 2002. However, women are still concentrated in elementary positions, including services and clerical work. Even though women have a greater level of education and skill attainment than men, more women are unemployed. Moreover, not only do women have more consistently higher rates of unemployment than men, they are also generally paid less than men for the same work.

Regarding politics, in St. Lucia there is no quota system that could create spaces for participation of women in parliament and in local government. In 1997 and 2001 there was an improvement in the participation of women in the parliamentary assembly, as two women were elected to office out of the 17 constituencies and seats in the lower house. There are

11 seats in the senate and women maintain a presence there, but the numbers have decreased. In addition, the speaker of the house has always been a male. Senior management posts in public service are still dominated by men although there have been some progress for women. There are many female attorneys and there are also female judges. Even though women are holding positions in most areas of the public service, including that of permanent secretary, the majority of top positions are still held by men.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# ST. VINCENTIANS

**LOCATION:** St. Vincent and the Grenadines

**POPULATION:** 118,432 (July 2008 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** English; local dialect with French, West African, Spanish, and English elements

**RELIGION:** Protestant sects (80–90%): Anglicans, Methodist, and Seventh-Day Adventists; Roman Catholicism; Hinduism; Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

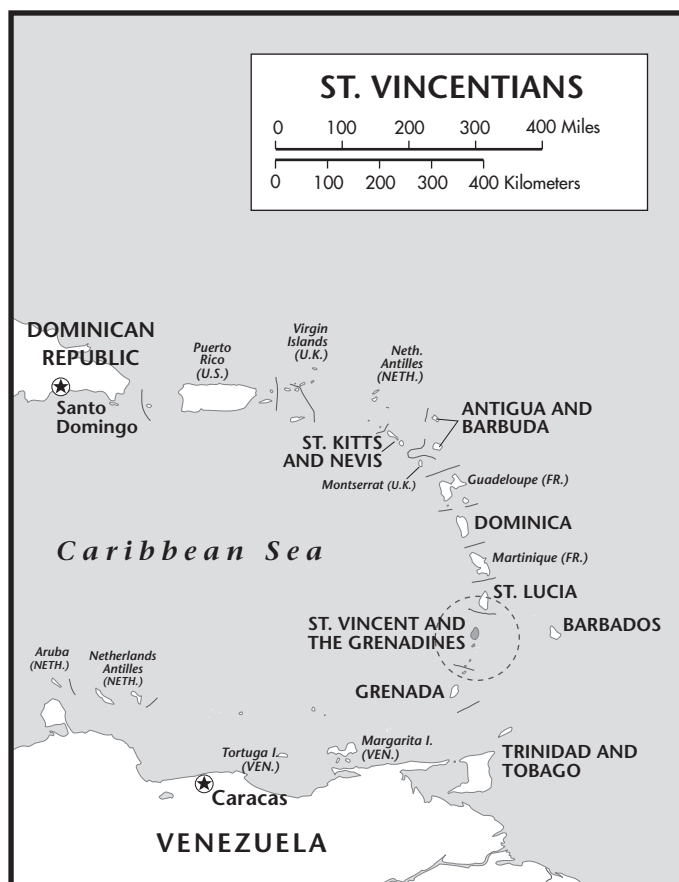
In spite of its small size, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has a tumultuous early history. Control of its constituent islands was vigorously contested by both Amerindian and European groups for nearly 300 years, and its heritage includes the unique mingling of Africans and Amerindians that produced the group known as the Black Caribs. The Amerindian population on the island of St. Vincent guarded their homeland so vigorously that it became the last major Caribbean island to be colonized.

Christopher Columbus's sighting of the island in 1498 is thought to have taken place on 22 January, the feast day of the saint for which it is named. Aggressively defended by its native Carib population, St. Vincent remained impervious to European settlement attempts until the 18th century. However, when a passing Dutch ship carrying settlers and slaves was shipwrecked off the coast of Bequia in 1675, the Caribs welcomed the Africans who were the sole survivors of the disaster. They were allowed to settle on the island and mix with its population. The resulting people, whose numbers were swelled by escaped slaves from the neighboring islands of Barbados and St. Lucia, became known as the Black Caribs. Ensuing tensions between this group and the "pure" or Yellow Caribs on the island led to hostilities and territorial division by 1700.

In the 18th century, the French, the British, and the Caribs fought for control of the island, which was ultimately ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. However, the French retained control of some of the Grenadines for a number of years, establishing a strong cultural influence in the area. On St. Vincent, sugarcane plantations flourished under the British in the first part of the 19th century. East Indian and Portuguese indentured laborers were brought to the island to make up for the labor shortage that followed the abolition of slavery by Great Britain in 1834.

In the mid-1800s, sugar prices fell, and the islands sank into an economic depression that lasted for decades. The century ended with two natural disasters, a hurricane in 1898 and the most destructive eruption to date of La Soufrière, St. Vincent's active volcano. Clouds and gases from the eruption were recorded as far away as Barbados, and nearly 2,000 people lost their lives. La Soufrière's most recent major eruption in 1979 forced over 16,000 people to evacuate their homes and blanketed much of the island with ash, resulting in extensive crop damage. However, no lives were lost.

Long administered as a British crown colony, St. Vincent and the Grenadines moved gradually toward full independence following the breakup of the West Indies Federation (of which it had been a member) in 1962. Internal self-government was granted in 1969 and full independence came on 27 October



1979. The period of independent statehood has been marked by secessionist tendencies in the Grenadines, including a rebellion on Union Island immediately following independence and protests in the early 1980s.

The eruption of La Soufrière in 1979 was followed a year later by Hurricane Allen, which caused extensive crop damage. In 1987, Hurricane Emily destroyed an estimated 70% of the nation's banana crop. This lower-middle-income country still is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. Tropical storms wiped out substantial portions of crops in 1994, 1995, and 2002.

The economic growth was of 6.6% in 2006, which was considered low after a decade of sturdy growth of nearly 7%. However, it has been predicted that the economy will remain robust. Economic growth is heavily dependent on the seasonal variations that affect the agricultural and tourism sectors. In recent times, the increase in construction activity has become an important engine for the national economy, especially regarding job creation.

Bananas, coconuts, sweet potatoes, and spices, as well as a small number of cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, and fish, represented 10% of the economy in 2001. In industry, food products, cement, furniture, and clothing are the main commodities produced by the country, accounting for 26% of national production. The service industry represented 64% of the economy during the same period.

As in other Caribbean nations, tourism has been one of the sectors with spectacular growth. The filming of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* saga on the island also helped to increase tourism and expose the country to the wider world. During 2007,

the islands received more than 200,000 tourist arrivals. Saint Vincent is home to a small offshore banking sector and has moved to adopt international regulatory standards. The government's investment plans in social programs and its responses to natural and external shocks are strongly limited by its high debt burden.

Queen Elizabeth II, the British monarch, is the head of state and is represented on the island by an appointed governor-general. St. Vincent and the Grenadines have a unicameral legislature that is composed by the House of Assembly, an organism that is formed by representatives and senators appointed by the governor-general.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is located among the Windward Islands in the southern portion of the Lesser Antilles. St. Vincent is 32 km (20 mi) south of St. Lucia, while the Grenadines stretch southward toward Grenada. Thirty-two of the Grenadines are part of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, while the rest belong to Grenada. Barbados lies 161 km (100 mi) to the east. St. Vincent itself has a total area of 345 sq km (133 sq mi), while the land area of the Grenadines totals 44 sq km (17 sq mi), bringing the country's total area to 389 sq km (150 sq mi).

St. Vincent is a volcanic island whose highest point—at 1,234 m (4,048 ft)—is La Soufrière, an active volcano whose last major eruption, in 1979, caused serious crop and property damage but no loss of life, thanks to modern warning systems. La Soufrière is the northern end of a mountain range that runs southward to Mt. St. Andrew, bisecting most of the island. The mountains are heavily forested, with numerous streams fed by heavy rainfall.

Of the Grenadines associated with St. Vincent, the largest are Bequia (pronounced Beck-way), Canouan, Mayreau, Mustique, Isle D'Quatre, and Union Island. Bequia, 14.5 km (9 mi) south of St. Vincent, is the largest of the Grenadines. It is also the last Caribbean island on which whaling is still practiced, with the approval of the International Whaling Commission, which has granted the island a special Aboriginal Whaling Status. The home of the country's prime minister, Sir James Mitchell, St. Vincent has only had electricity since the 1960s and was only accessible by boat until the construction of an airport in 1992.

Farm animals outnumber the human population on Mayreau, which had its first—and only—telephone installed in 1990. Union Island (with an area of 8 sq km or 3 sq mi), the country's southern port of entry, was also the site of a secessionist revolt by about 50 young men a few days after St. Vincent and the Grenadines was declared an independent nation in 1979. Perhaps the best-known of the Grenadines is Mustique, a tiny semi-privately owned island with homes belonging to such well-known public figures as Mick Jagger and England's Princess Margaret, as well as other wealthy but lesser-known owners.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has an estimated population of 120,000 people, of whom some 100,000 live on St. Vincent and about 8,000 on the Grenadines. About 25% of the country's population lives in the capital of Kingstown or in one of its suburbs. Kingstown itself has an estimated population of 15,000–16,000 people, and the surrounding area has another 10,000 people.

The ethnic composition of the population is estimated as 65% Black, 20% of mixed Black and White ancestry, 5.5% East Indian, 3.5% White, and 2% descended from the island's native Carib population, with the remainder being immigrants from North America, Latin America, and Asia. There is a Carib reservation at Sandy Bay in the northern part of St. Vincent.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

English is the official language of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, but most people on the islands speak a local dialect, or Creole, that contains elements of both French and West African grammar and a vocabulary that is mostly French with some African, Spanish, and English words. It includes one of the most characteristic features of West Indian Creole languages, the use of object pronouns in the subject position, as in "Me going down town." There are many French place names in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, including Sans Souci, Petit Vincent, and Mayreau, as well as Carib names, which include Bequia (one of the Grenadines) and the Commantawana Bay on St. Vincent.

St. Vincentians have historically prided themselves on their ability to speak standard English correctly, while devaluing the use of the Creole that is for most the language of everyday life. In recent years, however, Creole has enjoyed an enhanced reputation as its use has become associated with cultural and national pride, especially among young people. Skits, speeches, and other activities in Creole have become popular in the schools, long the bastion of proper English.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The folklore of St. Vincent and the Grenadines reflects its combined English, African, and French heritage, as well as Creole and West Indian influences. Like other West Africans, Vincentians tend toward the superstitious, and some still fear the African-influenced black magic called obeah that is common in the Caribbean region. The nation's best-known folk tradition is its annual summer carnival celebration.

### **5 RELIGION**

Between 80% and 90% of the populations is Protestant. Anglicans represent the greatest share with 47% of the population, followed by Methodists, who account for 28% and the Roman Catholic with 13%. Other minority groups in the island include Hindus, Seventh-day Adventists, and other Protestants, who in total account for around 12% of the inhabitants.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Public holidays in St. Vincent and the Grenadines include New Year's Day (January 1), St. Vincent and the Grenadines Day (January 22), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Whit Monday, Carnival Tuesday, CARICOM Day (July 1), Emancipation Day (August 1), Independence Day (October 27), Christmas (December 25), and Boxing Day (December 26). The nation's Carnival celebration (Vincy Mas) is held in late June and early July and features costumed parades, calypso and steel drum bands, and "jump-up" (street dancing). The final two days are J'Ouvert (a Monday when revelers stream into the streets at dawn), and Mardi Gras, and there are boisterous street parties on both days. Preliminary rounds in preparation

for the Carnival calypso competitions can be heard throughout the island in the two months preceding the festivities.

Union Island holds sporting and cultural events, including a calypso competition, at Easter, and a Big Drum festival in May.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious ceremonies appropriate to each St. Vincentian's faith community.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

"What di' man say?" is a typical greeting. Popular slang among young people on the islands includes "Irie" (an all-purpose phrase that is something like "stay cool" or "see you later") and "Sic too bad" (similar to "awesome").

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

In 2007 the national economy experienced a growth of 6.6%, while GDP per capita was of \$9,800 dollars and the inflation reached 6.1%. It is common to see public spaces crowded with young men and women who are without jobs. High unemployment rates have prompted many inhabitants to leave the islands seeking a better quality of life.

St. Vincentians generally own their own homes, growing produce for their own consumption and selling the surplus at the market. Women are more likely to own homes through inheritance, while men typically build their own; it is not uncommon for a family to live in a house owned by the wife. Besides inheritance, another way that a woman commonly acquires a home is by having a son or daughter build it for her. A typical rural dwelling is a single-story wooden house with a tin roof, often painted red.

According to recent estimates, there is 1 physician per 3,800 people. Common health problems include parasitic diseases and circulatory disorders. Gastrointestinal diseases are also prevalent, although less so than before. Average life expectancy was 71 years as of 1992. Medical care is provided at the Central General Hospital in Kingstown, as well as at 35 clinics and dispensaries in various other locations.

Parts of St. Vincent are accessible only by foot or boat. The country's road area is divided nearly equally between all-weather and rough roads. Local transportation is provided by open-air buses and small minibus-taxis sporting colorful hand-painted names such as "Mad Dog II," "Stragglin' Man," and "Say Wha Yo Like." The E. T. Joshua Airport is located on the island's southern tip, near Kingstown, and there are smaller airports or airstrips on Bequia, Union, Canouan, and Mustique islands.

The Vincentian press is privately-owned. The constitution guarantees a free press and publications openly criticize government policies. There are several private radio stations and a national radio service, which is partly government-funded.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Three types of family arrangement common throughout the much of the West Indies are found on St. Vincent and the Grenadines: legal marriage, unmarried cohabitation, and "visiting unions," where the man and woman live apart and the woman raises the children. Visiting unions are more likely to





*A Saint Vincentian woman wearing a traditional West Indian dress gives Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian a basket with fruits while St. Vincent & the Grenadines' Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves looks on. (AP Images/E. Glenford Prescott)*

occur in early adulthood, while married relationships are more common later in life. Even in visiting unions (also referred to as “friending”), strong links are maintained between father and child. There is equal recognition of kinship through legal and nonlegal unions.

Infants are highly valued and receive a large amount of attention and physical affection from all members of the household. Fathers, sons, grandparents, and daughters may actually provide the greatest amount of attention if the mother is too busy taking care of the family’s washing and cooking, as well as raising its produce and, in many cases, serving as the household’s water carrier.

Men are responsible only for those children they have actually fathered, whether through a present or previous relationship. Thus, they may have obligations toward children living in different households. The mother occupies a central position in the household as the only person with obligations toward all its members, including the children from both her present and previous relationships, as well as toward her husband and any grandparents, aunts, or uncles who may live with the family.

Although women accounted for 38% of the nation’s work force in the 1980s, traditional gender roles and expectations kept most women from receiving an education equal to that of men.

## 11 CLOTHING

People on St. Vincent and the Grenadines wear modern Western-style clothing. They favor light and brightly colored clothes and are interested in the latest fashions. Some young people enjoy dressing in attention-getting items, such as bright orange jeans, the latest in expensive footwear, or shirts with popular designer names. Children wear uniforms to school.

## 12 FOOD

Staple foods include rice, sweet potatoes, and fruits, especially those of the banana family, which includes plantains and bluggoe (green figs), in addition to ordinary bananas. Another widely eaten food, breadfruit, is associated with a famous historical incident, the mutiny on board the *Bounty* by the crew of Captain William Bligh in 1789. Bligh's men mutinied on a voyage to gather breadfruit and other items to be shipped to Jamaica and St. Vincent. Although he and 19 loyal sailors were cast adrift and compelled to sail 6,667 km (3,600 mi) in an open boat before reaching dry land, Bligh undertook a second voyage in 1793, gathering the breadfruit that ultimately found its way to St. Vincent and the rest of the Caribbean. Today, St. Vincent's local rum is called Captain Bligh in honor of the tenacious seaman, and its national dish is jackfish and breadfruit. Arrowroot, a major cash crop, is used in desserts, including arrowroot sponge and arrowroot custard. Popular fare includes dishes containing spicy Scotch Bonnet peppers.

## 13 EDUCATION

Primary education is free but not compulsory, and there are both government-operated secondary schools, which are free, and government-assisted private schools, which charge tuition. In 1994/95, about 76% of all children at the primary level were attending school, while only 24% of older students were enrolled in secondary school. At the post-secondary level, St. Vincent has a technical college and a teacher training college affiliated with the University of the West Indies. Most students seeking a higher education must leave the country, attending college at other campuses of the University of the West Indies or in the United States, Canada, or Great Britain. The adult literacy rate of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is estimated at 96%.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Big Drum music of the Windward Islands, to which St. Vincent and the Grenadines belongs, reflects the islands' African cultural roots, combining the African call-and-response tradition with features of calypso and reggae, but retaining an authentic African flavor. The Big Drum is actually a set of three drums, originally carved from trees and later made of rum kegs. The singers are usually women, and the lead singer is called a chantwell. The songs—in either English or patois (dialect)—resemble those of other Caribbean traditions, such as calypso, in their reliance on satire and social commentary. Dances are performed inside a ring of people by dancers wearing full skirts and headdresses who interact with the musicians.

## 15 WORK

Many St. Vincentians practice agriculture or fishing, either at a subsistence level or for profit. Those who farm small plots

bring their surplus fruits, vegetables, chickens, or fish to sell at the modern market in Kingstown on Saturdays. Bananas are St. Vincent's main commercial crop. Most banana growers cultivate only 0.8 to 2 hectares (2–5 acres) of land. Translucent blue plastic bags cover the "hands" (bunches of bananas) to protect them from the full heat of the sun, retain moisture, and prevent bruising. The sensitive bananas must be harvested at exactly the right time, and radio broadcasts keep farmers advised of the best harvesting time. The growers are paid for their harvest at the stations where bananas are boxed. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are counted into small envelopes every week and distributed to as many as 3,000 waiting St. Vincentians with receipts in their hands.

On the Grenadines, most men are fishermen or boat-builders. The island of Bequia has a tradition of whaling, a skill the islanders have been practicing since the 19th century. The International Whaling Commission has granted the Bequians Aboriginal Whaling Status, a classification reserved for people who hunt whales for local consumption rather than commercial use and who have a whaling tradition that is closely linked to their familial, cultural, and community ties. No more than three whales are caught in any one year. The whales are subdued with harpoons, which today are often shot from a whale gun rather than thrown by hand. They are then towed to the island of Petit Nevis to be processed and sold. A successful catch is considered an important event on Bequia, and much of the island's population flocks to Petit Nevis to see the whale.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has a high rate of unemployment, estimated at about 25% in the early 1990s.

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket, the most popular sport, is played throughout the islands on any piece of flat ground and even on the beach. Other sports include football (soccer), netball, volleyball, and basketball.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Nighttime gatherings outdoors are a favorite form of recreation and may include singing, dancing, and the universally popular pastime of gossiping. With the recent growth of tourism on the islands, it has become common for locals to gather at hotel and restaurant entertainment facilities to eat, drink, dance, and socialize. Men on St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like those elsewhere in the Caribbean, are inveterate players of dominoes.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk music is played on the four-stringed cuatro, as well as the guitar, fiddle, drums, and a variety of percussion instruments. Bequia is known for its skilled model-boat-builders, who fashion small-scale versions of yachts, whaleboats, and other vessels that are faithful in every detail. Even the island's children make model boats out of coconut shells with brightly colored sails.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The low percentage of young people who complete their secondary education has created a shortage of skilled workers on the islands, exacerbated by the fact that the better-educated

segments of the population often emigrate and live abroad until retirement.

There is a high level of concern about drug-related crime on the islands.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Women in St. Vincent are expected to fill the traditional roles of caregiver and homemaker. Their male counterparts, on the other hand, are mostly considered to be breadwinners and the ones who discipline the children and provide a safe and comfortable environment in which the household can live. Even as women have been incorporated into the labor force, they are expected to be able to fill their traditional roles in the home. Male infidelity is often tolerated, though not accepted. Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, and they receive an equitable share of property following separation or divorce.

Adolescent pregnancy is one of several reproductive risks and constitutes a barrier that prevents women from developing capabilities to achieve the resources necessary for their well being. In 2004, 6% of adolescents 15 to 19 years old gave birth. Violence against women is also a serious problem. The law does not criminalize domestic violence or sexual harassment. Cases involving domestic violence have been normally charged under assault, battery, or other similar laws. Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal, and the government enforces the law. Depending on the magnitude of the offense and the age of the victim, sentences for rape could be 8 to 10 years. Although prostitution is illegal, it remains a problem among young women and teenagers.

The line separating what is a traditional occupation for each gender is increasingly disappearing. However, males still dominate the construction and manufacturing industry, with most females in these sectors are involved in clerical rather than manual work. The minimum wage law specifies that women should receive equal pay for equal work.

Even though there are female politicians in St. Vincent, they are significantly fewer than their male counterparts. In 2008, there were two women in parliament, three women in the cabinet (minister of education, minister of urban development, labor, culture, and electoral matters) and a female attorney general.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# SALVADORANS/ SALVADORIANS

**LOCATION:** El Salvador; United States

**POPULATION:** 7,006,403 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Protestantism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. When the Spanish arrived in 1524, the Pipil, who spoke a language similar to that of the Aztecs, resided there. Atlatl, their leader, initially defeated the forces led by Pedro de Alvarado, and Atonatl, an archer, wounded Alvarado. Both are remembered as heroes, but the whole area fell under Spanish control by 1540. The Indians were put to work on plantations that produced tropical products like cacao and indigo.

El Salvador declared its independence from Spain in 1821 and belonged to a Central American Federation from 1823 to 1841. For the next century, the government was dominated by the coffee-growing industry. When, during the Depression, coffee prices dropped and wages were cut, peasants rose in revolt in 1932. The military crushed the revolt and then massacred about 15,000 to 30,000 people, mainly Amerindians. Military rulers governed the country until 1980.

During the 1980s, armed left- and right-wing groups fought for power. About 70,000 people were killed in the struggle. Many were victims of right-wing death squads, including Archbishop Oscar Romero, the country's highest-ranking Roman Catholic prelate, who was killed while saying Mass. About one-fourth of the 5 million or so people in El Salvador became refugees or displaced persons during the war, and more than 500,000 left the country. A peace agreement was reached in 1992 and, two years later, the conservative Armando Calderón was elected president. Calderón, a lawyer and businessman, restored the rule of law after the civil war and promoted the privatization of state-owned companies and pension funds to stimulate the economy. His major achievement was the peaceful incorporation of former guerrilla groups back into civilian life.

In 1999 Francisco Flores, representing the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), was elected president of El Salvador. During his tenure, Flores followed a close alignment with U.S. policies, authorizing the deployment of Salvadoran troops to Iraq and signing a free-trade agreement with the United States. In 2004, Elías Antonio Saca succeeded Flores as president. Saca embraced the free-market and offered a pro-U.S. standpoint.

El Salvador's economy is predominantly dependent on its agricultural sector, with sugar, cotton, corn, and coffee exports as its main cash crops. Cattle have also become a promising source of income. Other important commodities for the Salvadoran economy are shrimp, textiles, chemicals, and electricity. The principal buyers of Salvadoran goods are the United States, Germany, and Japan. Even though Salvadorians have focused on developing their agriculture sector, the country has had severe problems feeding its population, mainly because there is

an unequal distribution of land in favor of commercial corps. Many of the landless peasants, unable to sustain themselves and their families, have migrated to more developed countries, especially the United States and Mexico. Consequently, as of 2007 El Salvador leads the region in remittances per capita with inflows equivalent to nearly all export income.

Since the middle of the 20th century, El Salvador heavily increased its investment in industry, which boosted the banking system. As a consequence, manufactures of beverages, canned foods, organic fertilizers, cement, plastics, cigarettes, shoes, cotton textiles, leather goods, petroleum products, and machinery have also thrived.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

El Salvador is slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Massachusetts. It is bounded on the north and east by Honduras, on the north and west by Guatemala, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. The Gulf of Fonseca to the east separates it from Nicaragua. Two east-west mountain ranges cross El Salvador: the Sierra Madre along the border with Honduras, and a southern range that includes more than 20 volcanoes. The country also lies on an earthquake zone.

The climate is tropical, with the rainy season extending from May to October. Most of the people live in the fertile central zone or in the metropolitan area of San Salvador, the capital. About 90% of the people are Mestizo, of mixed European and Amerindian ancestry. Whites account for about 9% of the population and the remainder, almost all are Amerindians. Of the more than 1 million people displaced by the civil war, about 500,000 settled in other parts of El Salvador, 250,000 migrated to Mexico, and 150,000 moved to the United States. By 1990 there were believed to be 1 million Salvadorans in the United States.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official and universally spoken language. Very few people still speak an Amerindian language, mostly Nahua.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

According to the Pipil creation myth, Teotl rubbed two branches together to produce the sparks that became the stars. Teopantlí, the reformer who rules the universe, then appeared in the heavens. A handful of fire that condensed down below into a ball of light became Tónal, the sun, and a tear from Teopantlí created Metzti, the moon. Metzti projected her light onto the earth, creating mountains, canyons, and wild beasts.

Ten-year-old Cipitín, a kind of Cupid, is the god of young love in national folklore. Always elusive, he hides behind the foliage. From high in the treetops he shakes flowers off the branches so they will fall on girls passing below. He has a sweetheart, Tenáncin, who lives with him in a cavern inside a volcano.

Folk medicine is not as prominent in El Salvador as it is in Mexico and Guatemala, where Indian heritage remains stronger. Witchcraft is sometimes blamed for illnesses and love problems. *Ojo* (eye) is the name given to infant illnesses attributed to the infant being seen by a strong person, who does not necessarily intend any ill will.



## 5 RELIGION

More than 80% of all Salvadorans are Roman Catholic. In the late 1960s, activist clergy began condemning the army's violence and human-rights abuses. Priests went into the countryside to educate peasants and organize them into cooperatives and unions. Right-wing groups killed dozens, and others joined the guerrillas. The Church continued to operate social programs in the 1990s, but most were less political than before.

About 10% of the population is Protestant. A number of groups, including the Baptists, Mormons, and Seventh-Day Adventists, have been active in missionary work developed and financed in the United States. Evangelists preach a message of personal salvation through belief in Jesus rather than through social action.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many Salvadorans journey over the border to Esquipulas, Guatemala, each January to honor the "Black Christ," a mahogany image of Jesus placed in a basilica built to house it in 1758. San Vicente also holds elaborate festivities for this occasion, with processions on January 14 and 30. Indian men perform a dance in the local church to an accompaniment of fife and drums.

On January 20, Villa Delgado holds a fiesta for St. Sebastian, including a bullfight farce set to fife and drums. The Day of the Cross is held on May 3 nationwide. Homeowners set up a cross in the patio or garden, decorated with fruits and flowers. A folk belief is that if no cross is erected, the devil will come and dance until midnight. Between 1 and 6 August, San Salvador

holds a fiesta commemorating the Transfiguration of Christ with sports events, games, and parties. A float stops across from the cathedral, and from there a figure representing Jesus makes his way underground into the church, where he reappears in white robes. Pilgrims flock to San Antonio del Monte for a fiesta held between August 22 and 26; an image of the saint in the local church is credited with miraculous powers. Christmas is celebrated with nightly *posada* processions from December 16 to Christmas Eve (December 24). In Izalco, the period between Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6) is celebrated with nightly processions and *Jeu Jeu*, an Indian rain dance. Izalco and Texistepeque have notable Holy Week (late March or early April) celebrations.

Among secular (nonreligious) holidays, November 5 commemorates the day in 1811 on which Father José Matías Delgado gave the first call for independence in all of Central America. Independence Day is September 15.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism of infants and confirmation of children in church are common. Perhaps half of all couples, however, live together without formalizing their unions with a license or a church ceremony. A birthday may not necessarily be celebrated; the person's namesake saint's day is likely to be observed instead. A novena for the dead is usually held in the home of the deceased, with friends invited on the final night. Often a second novena is held later.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

El Salvador shares the customs of other Latin American countries. A greater degree of formality is expected in relations with strangers than in the United States, but punctuality is rarely esteemed. People generally stand closer to one another and gesture more than in the United States when conversing. Unconventional behavior, including inappropriate dress, is frowned upon in this tradition-conscious society.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

A sharp contrast between great wealth and extreme poverty has characterized Salvadoran society since colonial times. About 2% of the people own 60% of the nation's productive land and account for about 33% of the national income. In 2006, more than 30% of El Salvador's population lived under the poverty level.

The elite generally live in San Salvador, in houses typically surrounded by walls many meters high and topped with barbed wire. They travel periodically to their country estates and send their children to private schools. The middle class, about 8% of the population, includes professionals, government employees, teachers, and small business owners. Many army officers come from such a background. The vast majority of people are laborers or peasants who own or rent small plots of land.

In the early 1980s, the poor were taking in fewer calories than anywhere else in the Western Hemisphere. Their diet consists mainly of corn, beans, rice, and sorghum, with only about 1 kg (2 lbs) of meat a month for a family of six. Malnutrition is particularly common among children. The rural population rarely has access to sewage systems, and surface water is seriously polluted. In the countryside, peasants live in one-room, earthen-floor, thatched-roof huts made of adobe or wood frames with mud or rubble fill. The poorest such homes



Wedding dinner in Segundo Montes, El Salvador. Perhaps half of all Salvadoran couples, however, live together without regularizing their unions with a license or a church ceremony. (David Johnson)

are made of poles and straw. In the cities, a poor family may occupy a single room of a compound or establish a shanty in a squatter community on the edge of town.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

A provision in El Salvador's civil code requires a man to protect his wife and a wife to be obedient to her husband. Often, however, there is no man around, although Salvadoran women give birth to an average of more than five children. Many marriages have fallen apart as spouses travel in search of work, often outside the country. The dislocations caused by the civil war of the 1980s have had the same effect. About 60% of all births are out of wedlock. The institution of *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) provides aid to the family from outsiders but is not as common as it is in Mexico.

The constitution includes a provision guaranteeing equality for women, but girls are generally expected to be passive and submissive, while boys are taught to be the opposite. There is a history of sexual abuse in the countryside. However, the nation has more women professionals than ever before, including nearly 30% of its doctors and lawyers.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Because the 1932 massacres targeted people of Indian appearance, native El Salvadorans exchanged their dress for European clothes. Few Indians retain traditional dress today, which for men usually meant white cotton trousers and shirt,

sandals, and a large palm-leaf hat with a high crown. Women wore a *huipil* (blouse) with short puffed sleeves; a tightly wrapped skirt called a *refajo*; and a large, bright cotton cloth on the head. Festive dress for women now consists of a cotton skirt above a petticoat, trimmed with a few ruffles around the bottom and reaching to the ankles, and a blouse trimmed with lace and embroidery around the sleeves and neck.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple of the Salvadoran diet is corn. The *pupusa* is (like a tortilla) a cornmeal pancake, often fried. It is folded over and filled with soft, white cheese or some other stuffing such as chopped meat or fried pork rinds (*chicharrón*) or simply *frijoles* (red or black beans). *Gallo de chicha* is chicken marinated in a fermented cornmeal brew mixed with brown sugar. The *quesadilla* is a sweetish bread or cake served as a flat, thin square. El Salvador's markets abound with fruits, some of them unfamiliar to Americans.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Primary education is free and compulsory and since 1968 the school system has been composed of preschool, primary, and secondary education. In 2003, 80% of Salvadorans over the age of 15 were literate. About 70% of all children of primary-school age were enrolled, but only 15% of children old enough for secondary schooling were enrolled there. Although public education is free, many parents are unable to afford the school



*In Salvadoran families, there is often no man around as spouses travel in search of work, often outside the country. (PhotoEdit)*

materials their children need to attend. Thousands of schools closed during the civil war, when spending on education per pupil dropped by 67%. Half the work force has had no more than three years of schooling. The National University, which is in San Salvador, allows many poorly qualified students to attend but graduates few. The University of Central America, also in San Salvador, is a private institution run by Jesuits. There are also schools for technology, fine arts, agriculture, social services, and nursing.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Juan José Bernal, a priest, wrote poetry during the colonial period. Francisco Galindo was a 19th-century poet and dramatist. Salvador Salazar Arrué, writing under the pen name Salarué, was a prominent short-story writer. Claudia Lars was an outstanding poet. Manlio Argueta and Claribel Alegría are novelists and poets. Roque Dalton was a left-wing poet killed by his own guerrilla comrades. Other 20th-century writers include Francisco Gavidia, cofounder of the national theater; Alberto Masferrer, essayist and poet; and Juan Ramón Uriarte, essayist and educator.

Among artists, Juan Francisco Cisneros was a 19th-century painter. Arrué was known for his tapestries as well as his writings. José Mejía Vides created paintings and woodcuts.

The marimba, an instrument that resembles the xylophone, is popular throughout Central America. Before the arrival of the Spanish, music was based on a five-tone scale, and the marimba was a keyboard composed of long gourds. Drums and

flutes—also traditional Indian instruments—accompany over 30 types of dance performed as a ritual on the local saint's day. *La historia* is a dance that dramatizes the conflict between the Moors and Christians in Spain. A *gracejo* (jester) dressed in rags interrupts the narrative with bawdy exclamations. *Turco del monto* is a mountain-pig dance performed at several local festivals. Masks made of cloth, coconut fiber, wood, or gourds may be worn in Indian dances.

#### 15 WORK

The minimum wage in 1995 was only \$2 per day in agriculture and \$3.50 a day in industry and commerce. Half the work force was believed to be unemployed or underemployed. About 70% were unskilled laborers, and about 33% were engaged in agriculture. The average Salvadoran earned about \$1,400 a year, but peasants averaged less than half that much. By 1995 Salvadorans working in the United States were sending home nearly \$1 billion a year to their relatives, a greater inflow of cash than from all Salvadoran exports combined.

#### 16 SPORTS

Fútbol (soccer) is the national passion. The so-called 1969 Soccer War with Honduras followed two matches by the national teams of both countries and resulted in as many as 3,000 deaths, mainly civilians. Basketball is also popular. Other sports include horseback riding, bicycling, motorcycling, swimming, baseball, tennis, golf, and sports fishing.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular music is dominated by the Mexican music industry. Nightlife is found in San Salvador, in the form of clubs, discos, and marimba street bands. The fiestas offer popular entertainment on a large scale and are accompanied by games like greased-pole climbing and the *carrera de cintas*, in which contestants on horseback must put a stick through a ribboned loop while riding at full gallop.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Weaving of textiles on pre-Conquest hand looms may still be done in Izalco, where belts are made, and Panchimalco, where women have a long history of weaving skirts and carrying cloths. Cotton is dyed, but not silk or wool. Foot-pedaled looms, introduced by the Spanish, are still used to produce hammocks and bedspreads in San Sebastián. Hats are woven from palm fibers, while hammocks, saddle and net bags, and *petates* (large woven mats) are made from henequen fiber. Baskets are made from palm leaves, rushes, reeds, or wicker. Wicker furniture is made in Nahuizalco.

Molded both by hand and the potter's wheel, ceramic pieces are decorated with red clay dissolved in water and applied with a corn husk. Izalco is the traditional center for gourds, made into bowls, jugs, and cups and often decorated and finished. Also handmade in El Salvador are dolls of wood or dried corn husks, tiny clay figurines for nativity scenes, wooden stirrups and small lacquered boxes, powder puffs made from goose feathers, and silk shawls.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In the mid 1990s, about 270,000 children were working up to 12 hours a day, and 90% of the Indian population lived in ex-

treme poverty. El Salvador has the second-highest rate of deforestation in the world. Erosion depletes 20% of the topsoil each year, and 90% of the rivers are polluted. About 50% of the population, mostly in the countryside, does not have access to uncontaminated water. San Salvador is dirty, overcrowded, and crime-ridden.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Salvadorian government introduced the principle of equality between men and women in the constitution and has modernized family legislation with the Family Code and Family Procedural Code (1994) and the Domestic Violence Law (1996, revised 2002) that protects, prevents, and penalizes domestic violence—of which women are victims in 91.6% of reported cases. However, sociocultural barriers, along with institutional and financial constraints, hinder progress in legal and policy frameworks for gender equality in El Salvador. Consequently, the political participation of women remains low and gender-based violence affects women in all social groups.

As in other Latin American countries, poverty has been feminized. In 2002 the percentage of poor women in urban areas was 17.7 points higher than that of poor men, and there were more poor urban households headed by women (33%) than by men (27%). In the rural sector, migration is changing the social landscape. It is estimated that one fifth of the Salvadoran population lives abroad, mainly in the United States. Immigrants are mainly men of the rural sector and, as a consequence, one third of the rural population subsists on family remittances, since the agricultural production is no longer profitable. This situation has led to an increase in the number of households headed by women from 26.4% in 1992 to 33.6% in 2002.

Despite the efforts to incorporate women into leadership posts, the presence of women in executive, administrative, professional and technical positions has decreased between 1999 and 2002, which indicates a higher gender inequity. As of 2008, there were 13 women deputies, who accounted for 15% of the country's single-chamber legislature, and 6 women ministers of a total of 17 members in the executive branch.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# SCOTTISH AND SCOTCH-IRISH AMERICANS

## OVERVIEW

Though their numbers have never been large, Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans have contributed the qualities of pragmatism, utilitarianism, individualism, and self-reliance to the general “American” character. Throughout their early history, Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans tended to be people of the frontier. They were used to dealing with difficult conditions in their homelands of Scotland and Northern Ireland, and they preferred to be far away from interfering neighbors and governments. Much of the early American frontier was settled by the Scots.

Scottish immigrants to America include three distinct groups: Highlanders, Lowlanders, and Scotch-Irish (Ulster Scots or Scots-Irish). Highlanders came from the north of Scotland, where the land is rugged and the people fierce. The clannish Highlanders wore kilts and spoke Gaelic. Lowlanders came from southern Scotland, which had been much more influenced by English language and culture. The Scotch-Irish were originally from the lowlands but had been sent to Northern Ireland (Ulster) by English rulers who hoped to establish a Protestant stronghold in that Catholic land. The Ulster Scots kept to themselves, mingling very little with their Catholic neighbors and preserving their Scottish identity.

The first Scottish immigrants to America were prisoners of war, sent to the colonies by English ruler Oliver Cromwell after he defeated Scotland in 1650. The Scottish prisoners of war served out their sentences by laboring in the English colonies of North America. Scots were legally barred from emigrating to America until England and Scotland were united in 1707. After the union, Scots were given the same freedoms as English citizens. In the early 18th century, a number of Scots were sent to America as political prisoners of England, much like the earlier prisoners of war. Another large group of nonvoluntary immigrants were Scottish soldiers who had been brought to America to fight in the Seven Years' War (1754–1761). At the end of the war, the soldiers were discharged and the majority elected to remain in America. Of the 12,000 Scottish soldiers discharged, only 76 returned to Scotland.

Voluntary Scottish emigration to America began after the union of England and Scotland in 1707. Conditions were already difficult for Scottish farmers with a cold, rainy climate, short growing season, and rocky ground. When the English began encouraging Scottish landlords to raise rents, seize grazing grounds, and evict tenants in order to squash Scottish uprisings, many Scots decided to look elsewhere for better opportunities. Wealthy landowners in America advertised for “indentured servants,” emigrants who would work for a period of years in exchange for passage to America and a number of Scots hired on. Others sold their farms and livestock to pay for their passage.

Whole communities packed up and moved to America, setting up Scottish towns in the English colonies. In 1738, 83





Two Scottish American men in kilts. (Alex McNeill)

families from a neighborhood in Argyllshire, Scotland, immigrated to the Lake George area of New York. Others settled throughout the 13 colonies, although North Carolina was a favorite destination, particularly for Highlanders. Pennsylvania was also popular, especially with the Scotch-Irish.

The Scotch-Irish began to leave Ireland en masse in the early 18th century, seeking self-government and religious freedom. They had become quite disillusioned with the English government, which was high-handed and oppressive. They were also tired of being persecuted by the Catholics for being Protestant and by the Anglicans (the official church of England, also Protestant) for being Presbyterian. Pennsylvania encouraged religious freedom for all and in the early 18th century it was still largely unsettled frontier, so it was very attractive to the Scotch-Irish. By 1749 about 25% of the total population of Pennsylvania was Scotch-Irish. The Scotch-Irish also moved into regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio and became a dominant cultural group in the region known as Appalachia.

Scotch-Irish Americans, with their anti-English stance, were quite ready to join the rebel cause in the American Revolution. Scottish Americans from the Highlands and Lowlands, however, tended to side with the British crown. Fearing that the Scots would side with the rebels, the English prohibited Scottish emigration to America beginning in 1775. The dam-

age was already done, however, and the Scotch-Irish (and some Scottish) Americans contributed significantly to the downfall of the British. Scottish and Scotch-Irish American Revolutionary War leaders include Patrick Henry; John Stark and Henry Knox, who led the rebel troops at the Battle of Bunker Hill (1775); naval commander John Paul Jones, and General "Mad" Anthony Wayne. After the Revolution, many Scottish emigrants chose to go to British-friendly Canada, rather than to the United States, for the next several years.

Scots also played a great part in the opening of the American frontier. Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans tended to be the first to clear an area, then they would sell it to other settlers who would improve it while the Scots moved on. The Scots were such fierce fighters and defenders of their territory that eventually the American government had to step in to protect friendly Native North American peoples from Scottish American attacks. Some of the best-known frontiersmen were of Scottish descent, including Daniel Boone, Christopher "Kit" Carson, and Davy Crockett. Somewhat later, Scottish American Sam Houston led the Texans to independence and became the first president of the Republic of Texas.

Other Scottish American contributions to America in the 19th century include the Whiskey Rebellion of 1792–94 and the Ku Klux Klan. Scotch-Irish farmers in the Pittsburgh area of Pennsylvania distilled whiskey from their surplus corn, both for their own consumption and for sale. They refused to pay required local and federal taxes, however. The federal government finally sent in troops to force payment. The farmers almost set fire to Pittsburgh in retaliation but were discouraged from doing so at the last minute by members of the clergy. The Ku Klux Klan, a secret society advocating white supremacy, was founded in the South after the Civil War (1861–65) by a group of Scotch-Irish Americans.

After its post-Revolutionary War decline, Scottish immigration to the United States picked up again in the 19th century and continued at a fairly steady pace into the early 20th century. Perhaps the largest wave occurred after World War I (1914–18), when Britain descended into an economic depression with high unemployment. Over 300,000 Scots emigrated to the United States between 1921 and 1930 in search of better opportunities. When the Great Depression hit America in 1929–30, however, conditions became just as bad there as in Scotland and Scottish immigration to the United States virtually ceased. Since then, negligible numbers of Scots have moved to America.

In the 1990 U.S. Census, 5,393,581 Americans claimed Scottish ancestry and 5,617,773 reported their ancestry as Scotch-Irish. At the 2000 U.S. Census there were 4,890,581 Americans listed as having Scottish ancestry and 4,319,232 listed as Scotch-Irish. That year Scottish was the eleventh largest ancestry group in the nation with Scotch-Irish ranked as the fourteenth largest group. States with the highest number of Scottish Americans included California (541,890), Florida (294,293), Texas (289,827), Michigan (224,803), and New York (212,275). For Scotch-Irish Americans, the top states included California (410,310), Texas (337,630), North Carolina (255,825), Florida (246,580), and Pennsylvania (218,173).

Although Scottish Highlanders spoke Gaelic when they first arrived in America, they quickly shifted to English to avoid harassment, and fluency in Gaelic was rapidly lost. Subsequent generations of Scottish Americans learned English as their first

language. Some learned no Gaelic at all. Today, few Scottish or Scotch-Irish Americans speak Gaelic.

In 1560 John Knox, a Catholic priest in Scotland, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed a Protestant denomination that he called the Church of Scotland. Scottish immigrants brought their religion to America, where it came to be known as the Presbyterian Church. The Scots, particularly the Scotch-Irish, were fiercely religious and loyal to the Presbyterian Church. Though they were persecuted in many of the Anglican-dominated English colonies in early America, they held fast to their Presbyterian faith. In 1860 the Reformed Presbyterian Church, made up mostly of Scotch-Irish Americans, declared that it would not serve Holy Communion to slaveholders. It was the first church in America to take a stand against slavery.

Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans have made significant contributions to all areas of American life. "Scotch broth," a soup made from lamb, barley, and vegetables, is well loved in America, as is Scotch whiskey. Plaid woolen clothing and tweed (a woolen cloth) are both worn by many Americans. Bagpipe music is familiar to all, and Scottish folksingers, such as Jean Redpath, have a wide following in the United States. Many colleges and universities were founded by Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans, including the Universities of Virginia, North Carolina, Pittsburgh, and Pennsylvania; Allegheny College, Grove City, Waynesboro, and others in Pennsylvania; and perhaps best known of all, Princeton University, founded in 1746 as a Presbyterian seminary in New Jersey.

Writers from Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry and William James, Mark Twain, John Kenneth Galbraith, James Reston, Norman Maclean, Margaret Mitchell, and poet Richard Hugo all claim Scottish or Scotch-Irish ancestry. The New York Library was begun with the collections of Scottish American James Lenox in the 1800s. The first newspaper printed in America was the *Boston Newsletter*, published by Scottish American John Campbell. Hugely successful newspaper publisher Horace Greeley was a Scottish American.

One of the earliest American-born actors of note was Edwin Forrest, a Scottish American. Famous Scotch-Irish actors include John Wayne, Robert Redford, Jimmy Stewart, and Ava Gardner. Modern dancer Isadora Duncan; artists Gilbert Stuart, George Innes, and Thomas Hart Benton, and composers Edward MacDowell and Stephen Foster were also of Scottish descent. A Scottish American who made many educational and artistic programs possible was steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. It is estimated that Carnegie gave over \$350 million in his lifetime to found schools, libraries, concert halls, museums, etc., and to fund art, research, and other projects. The Carnegie Foundation has continued his philanthropic work since his death.

The worlds of American science and industry owe a great deal to Scottish Americans. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone; Samuel F. B. Morse invented the telegraph; Peter Cooper built the first American locomotive; Robert Fulton developed the first steamboat; and Cyrus McCormick invented the wheat harvester. Naturalist John Muir helped found the U.S. national park system, Asa Gray was a well-known botanist; and William Maclure is sometimes called the "father of American geology."

Politics has always been a favorite pastime of the Scots as has going to battle. Many Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans have played a part in both arenas in the United States, beginning with seven of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, including the first to sign, John Hancock. Scottish and Scotch-Irish American Revolutionary War leaders have already been mentioned. In later U.S. military engagements, Scottish and Scotch-Irish American leaders include Captain Oliver Hazard Perry (War of 1812); Union generals George B. McClellan and Ulysses S. Grant, and Confederate generals Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, J. E. B. Stuart, and Robert E. Lee (Civil War); and General Douglas MacArthur (World War II). Commodore Matthew C. Perry established the first trade relations with Japan in modern times.

In politics Scottish and Scotch-Irish American figures abound, such as Andrew Mellon, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury from 1921 to 1931; Alexander Hamilton (who was also part-French); Philip Murray, who served as the president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO); and Adlai Stevenson and George McGovern, both of whom ran unsuccessfully for U.S. president. Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans who ran successfully for U.S. president include James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, Chester A. Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton.

The greatest contribution Scots have made to American sports is the game of golf, which was invented in Scotland and brought to America by Scottish and Scotch-Irish immigrants. Scots also brought the sport of curling, known better to Canadians than Americans, though there are American teams. An individual sports figure of Scottish descent is baseball great Grover Cleveland Alexander.

For many generations, Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans simply blended in with the rest of the population, becoming a fairly inconspicuous part of the general "American" backdrop. In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in Scottish and Scotch-Irish heritage among members of those groups in the U.S.. Highland Games (Scottish festivals that involve piping, dancing, track events, and sheepherding contests) have become popular again and Scottish American societies are popping up throughout the country. Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have adopted resolutions (in 1998 and 2005 respectively) that designate April 6 as National Tartan Day. The date commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish declaration of independence, in 1320. National Tartan Day celebrates the accomplishments of Scottish Americans and their contributions to modern culture. Although clans quickly lost importance in early America, "clan" gatherings are once again being organized in the United States as glorified family reunions. Most Scottish and Scotch-Irish Americans are several generations removed from Scotland and Northern Ireland, so their ethnic identity is largely symbolic, yet nonetheless fiercely defended today.

The family dynamics of early Scottish American and Scotch-Irish immigrants reflected a basic male dominant pattern, with men serving as the heads of household while women primarily took care of the home and the children. However, women were

not generally regarded as fragile flowers of domestic life. Traditional roles also placed men as warriors and women as the workers left at home. Women typically worked right alongside the men on the family farms. This was especially true among the Scotch-Irish who moved into the region now referred to as Appalachia. As they began to migrate to the West, Scotch-Irish and Scottish American women showed just as much strength and courage as men in taming new lands and forging a life and home out of next to nothing. The same spirits of pride and adventure that have often been applied to the Scottish American and Scotch-Irish men have generally been attributed to women as well.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# SEMINOLES AND MICCOSUKEES

**LOCATION:** United States (Florida)

**POPULATION:** 6,000 (enrolled Seminole Nation of Oklahoma)  
600 Miccosukees

**LANGUAGE:** Muskogee; Creek; Miccosuki; English

**RELIGION:** Traditional religion; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Native North Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Groups of tribal peoples who lived in southern Alabama and Georgia were called “Creeks” by the British. Around 1740 some of these people moved south to Spanish-held Florida. There in the northern part of the state, they established permanent settlements. These Creek people, once they moved to Florida, were called “Seminole.” The derivative of this name has been attributed both to the Creek *simanoli*, which means “runaway,” and to the Spanish *cimmaron*, or “wild,” like an animal. The first Seminole settlers in Florida were Oconee Creeks who spoke the language known by linguists as Hitchiti or Mikasuki (the people themselves call the language “i.laponki.”; they call themselves “i.laponathi.”). Other bands of Seminoles came into Florida: Yuchi, Ochise, and Tallahassee.

When the Creeks lost the Red Stick War against the Americans at Horseshoe Bend in 1813–14, there was a great influx of Red Stick Creek refugees who joined the Seminoles in Florida.

From the earliest Spanish records of exploration it is known that southeastern Indians kept slaves as part of their economic system. Slaves were taken as part of the spoils of war. When the British arrived, they wanted the Indians’ slaves to work on their plantations in the Carolinas and the West Indies. The Indians began to trade their slaves to the British for trade goods. It was a lucrative market. Soon they were making raids on other groups of Indians for that specific purpose, often wiping out entire Indian towns. The over-slaving of Native American populations in the southeast was one of the reasons that trade in African slavery escalated.

By the late 18th century, African slaves began to escape from the plantations in the American South. They fled to Spanish Florida where the Seminoles had settled. The Africans were welcomed by the Seminoles, who could no longer make slave raids due to European influences and had an economic need for slave workers. Slavery among the Seminoles was not harsh as it had been in the plantation system. The slaves were required to work and give tribute to their masters, but they were treated with respect.

The white masters wanted the runaway slaves back. There was something else that the Seminoles had that the southern plantation owners wanted. Cattle. By the early 19th-century, the Seminoles had massed sizable herds of cattle, based on feral cattle that strayed from the large Spanish haciendas. The Seminole settlements were situated on prime grazing lands near Tallahassee and Mikasuki and south on the Alachua (or Payne’s) Prairie near present day Gainesville. Their herds multiplied.

Cattle and slave raids by Georgians and Seminoles over the Georgia/Florida border and into Alachua created the catalyst

for war. It was, in fact, Seminole cattle and runaway slaves that provided the impetus for the First Seminole War in Florida in 1818. The War was little more than a series of raids to destroy the Seminole settlements and capture cattle and slaves. But politically it was very important. The unauthorized raid was made into Spanish Florida under the command of Andrew Jackson, who also captured the Spanish capital at Pensacola. Jackson was reprimanded by Washington for his rash actions attacking another country, but he had succeeded in demonstrating the weakness of Spain's hold on Florida. Ultimately, in 1821, Florida was ceded to the United States and Jackson, the greatest enemy of the Seminoles, was appointed Territorial Governor. The Treaty of Ft. Moultrie Creek in 1823 placed the Seminoles on a reservation in the middle of the state. They were not able to have contact with the coasts.

In 1830, under President Jackson, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This Act specified that all Indian tribes east of the Mississippi would be removed to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi. This was considered to be for their own good as settlement was encroaching on them. This forced migration is the famous Trail of Tears. In Florida, the Treaty of Payne's Landing was made by the government in 1832. This treaty specified that seven Seminole chiefs would inspect the Indian Territory prior to their leaving Florida and give their consent to emigrate. When the delegation returned to Florida, however, they said that they had been forced into signing the treaty and that it was therefore not valid. The removal date was January 1, 1836. The Seminoles did not want to emigrate and began their patriotic resistance, the Second Seminole War, 1835 to 1842. Best known leaders from this war are Osceola, Alligator, Jumper, Micanopy, Coacoochee, and Sam Jones (Abiaki). Osceola was martyred by the whites, as he was captured in a truce situation and then died in prison. Many other Seminoles were captured and emigrated by ship from Florida to New Orleans. From there they journeyed overland to Indian Territory. From a pre-First Seminole War population of 6,000, only 300–400 remained in southern Florida.

The Third Seminole War was fought 1855–1858. By this time, settlers were moving south into the state. The state's cattle interests were politically important. The Seminoles again had accumulated cattle and were considered to be in the way of progress. Leader Billy Bowlegs was taken on a trip to Washington, Boston, and New York to show him the powerful United States and to persuade him to acquiesce to leave for Indian Territory. He would not. This war was fought mainly in the lower Florida Everglades.

The Third Seminole War ended, like the Second Seminole War, with the United States troops' withdrawal, not with a formal "peace treaty." Thus today's Florida Seminole Tribe and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida consider themselves "unconquered," a fact that every tribal child knows.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

About 200 Seminoles were left in Florida after the Third Seminole War. Today, these people constitute nearly 2,500 persons. Reservations were established for them relatively near their post-war centers of population. The reservations are located in Brighton, Big Cypress, Tampa, Ft. Pierce, Immokalee, Ft. Lauderdale, Ft. Myers, West Palm Beach, and Naples. The Seminole Tribal Headquarters is on the Hollywood Reservation in the city of Hollywood, Florida. This location was the site of the

old Florida Seminole Agency in the 1920s. In the 1950s, the newly chartered Seminole Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs were housed in a single building. Recently, the Seminole Tribe of Florida has opened a four-story, modern office building. Tribal members live in subdivisions of modern houses on most reservations. At Brighton and Big Cypress some houses are scattered throughout the hammocks, where they have been built on the families' traditional camp sites. The Miccosukee Tribe (about 500 persons) is headquartered on the Tamiami Trail, 40 miles west of Miami and a large reservation is in the Big Cypress.

After the Third Seminole War, the Florida Seminoles resumed their hunting and trade economy, selling furs, hides, and bird plumes to trading posts located on the rivers that flowed out of the Everglades basin. Their travel was primarily by dugout sailing canoes made of cypress wood. Carts pulled by yokes of oxen were also used by those living in the Big Cypress and around Lake Okeechobee. The Everglades, rivers, coastal ridges, and beaches teemed with wildlife. Gathering activities provided vegetables, the starch "coontie," and medicinal plants.

The Oklahoma Seminoles were placed on a reservation in an environment very different from Florida. They were wards of the government and were no longer able to subsist off the land.

The Florida Seminoles retained their freedom and wanted no contact with the government. Early in the 20th century, the hide market declined, and programs to drain the Everglades for farming began. The Seminoles living around the city of Miami found a new economy in tourism. Over the decades of the 20th-century, these people founded a tourism economy that eventually spread to the whole population, creating the popular alligator wrestling show and an important crafts market. Tourism promoted the wearing of Seminole traditional patchwork clothing, their foremost art form. Cultural tourism continues to be very important to both tribes today, as the tribes explore European tourist markets.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Seminoles speak languages from the Muskogean family of Native American languages. There are two unintelligible languages spoken within the Seminole Tribe. All of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and two-thirds of the Seminole Tribe of Florida speak Mikasuki (also called Hitchiti). Those people, however, call their language *i.laponki*. and themselves *i.laponathi*. The remaining one-third of the members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida speak Muskogee or Creek. Since today all tribal leaders and most of the population speak English, there is no problem with communication affecting tribal unity.

Many of Florida's place names are derived from Seminole words. For example, Tallahassee (the state's capital) comes from the Muskogee word for "old town," and Okeechobee means "big water" in Mikasuki.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Seminoles' creation myth involves the Creator instilling powers to the clan animals, the Panther, and all other animals. When the earth was made, he put the animals in a large shell. When the time was right, the shell would open and they would come out. A tree root cracked the shell. The Wind helped make



the crack large enough for the Panther to come out first as the Creator had wished. After the Wind, the Bird came out next, then the Bear, Deer, Snake, Frog and Otter. These are the original Seminole clans. The Creator gave them all duties. The Panther, for instance, has the power to heal, so only people of the Panther clan are to make official medicine.

The Seminole clans are Panther, Bird, Otter, Wind, Bear, Deer, Frog and Snake. Big Towns was created long ago when two sisters of Spanish descent were adopted into the tribe.

The Green Corn Dance is a special ceremony for the Seminoles. It is attended by traditional people. Few Christians attend. It marks the ripening of the corn in late May or early June and is a new year's celebration. The four-day ceremony is a rite of purification, of starting anew. Rites of passage are conducted. Court is held and punishments are meted out. Fires are extinguished, the men take sweat baths and drink medicine, a tea made from native holly. The Black Drink causes them to vomit, cleansing their body. There is a day of fasting and one of feasting. There is dancing and stickball playing, men against women.

At the Corn Dance grounds a medicine man builds a fire out of four logs pointing in the four directions. An ear of ripe corn is placed on top of each log, and dried kindling is laid in the center of the logs. While praying to the Breathmaker (fisaki omici), the bundle carrier (the highest-ranking medicine man) creates a spark and lights the fire. From that fire, the symbol of the Breath Maker, all the other fires in the village are lit. When traveling, a Seminole woman always takes some ashes from her

last fire with her. In that way, the corn dance fire is always with her family.

The four directions (north, south, east, and west) and the number four are very important to the Seminoles and play a major part in their traditions and lives. The four medicine colors are white, black, yellow and red.

The Bundlecarrrier (the head religious leader), the medicine men and women, elders, and some of the tribal leadership are involved daily in traditional practices and are anxious to support and promote such awareness to the tribe at large.

## 5 RELIGION

Since the Seminoles began converting in the latter 1930s, Christian Seminole churches have scheduled revivals at the time of the Corn Dance. Attendance at the native gathering was chastised. In turn, the traditional people did not want the Christians to attend. These chasms have aided in curtailing many traditional ways.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Green Corn Dance, which marks the beginning of the new year, is the most significant holiday for Traditional Seminoles and Miccosukees. Some families have a major get-together for the celebration of Thanksgiving. This holiday is at the same time of year as the Seminoles' former Hunting Dance, which has become obsolete. Thanksgiving continues the tradition of a fall get-together.

Both Tribes hold Christmas parties. This is especially true for the affluent Seminole Tribe of Florida, who host a huge party at the Broward Convention Center with a leading country and western singer for entertainment.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, babies received a name four days after they were born. Modern legal requirements, however, have made the Seminoles conform to name-giving at birth. For the past 40 years or so, especially with many families receiving Christianity, children have been given first and last names at birth. When a baby is four months old, traditional families cut its hair and nails, which are hidden to keep bad luck from the child.

Young boys attend a "Boy's School" at the age of 12 to learn traditional ways in preparation for receiving their man's name at the next Green Corn Dance. They fast, take medicine, and attend school taught by a high-ranking medicine man or bundle carrier. At the four-day Corn Dance, little children are given their second names, marriages and divorces are ratified, widows and widowers are reinstated into the community. Young people, such as the graduates of the Boy's School, receive their adult names that are given by the medicine man. The names are usually those of deceased elders, who in turn had been given names of their deceased elders. These names are seldom used in public, but are used in the families by traditional speakers.

A death in the village was once a very serious stigma. The spirits of the dead were feared, as they might not wish to leave and might try to take one of the living with them. Very important rites followed a death of a clan member. If a person died in a village, the entire village had to be moved. As a result, if a person was known to be deathly ill, a structure was made outside the village area where they would be cared for till death.

For the same reason, the birthing house was also placed outside the village.

Marriage in 1900 took place in early to late teens. Divorces were simple in this matrilineal society (where the woman was in charge of the family). The wife or her relatives would place the husband's belongings outside the camp. Today, Seminole couples may or may not choose to marry, and teen pregnancies may or may not result in marriage. With the mother's clan being the most important thing to be passed on to a baby, the father is not as important an entity as he is in many other cultures.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Prior to the First Seminole War (1818) the Seminoles lived in large villages with huge fields, herds of cattle, droves of hogs, and horses. Each village had a *mico* (chief) and a council of warriors and elders. They elected war chiefs whenever one was necessary. There were medicine men. Because the Seminole make no distinction between the body, soul, and spirit, the medicine man worked to heal all three. He was highly respected in the society. This continues to be true today. Even some Christian burials have the medicine man (or medicine he has prepared) in attendance to assure this rite of passage.

It was common practice for Seminole men to practice polygyny (having two or more wives) in the 19th century. Women were the heads of the family and were responsible for large villages of their clan members. Polygyny was practiced with the consent of the first wife. Most often her sister was taken as the second wife. Doubtless this situation eased some of the burdens of the first wife's position. Polygyny was practiced by some in the Seminole communities well into the 20th century.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Seminoles are very adaptable people. They have had to alter their housing and general way of life due to forced relocations. When they settled in northern Florida, their permanent villages were large and made up of many families, all with their own compounds—settlements called Tallahassee, Miccosukee, and Cuscowilla. Each family had two houses, a storehouse and a two-story cooking and sleeping house. The houses were built of logs.

After the Second Seminole War (1835–1842), the Seminole population was further south. They then utilized an open-sided house, thatched with palmetto fronds, with a dwelling platform three feet off the ground called a *chickee*. It appears most probable that the chickee was borrowed from the earlier Indians who lived in south Florida, the Calusa, as they had long utilized this type of structure. Chickees can last years in a sunny location. (Many families build the traditional chickee in their yard as an outside work area or as a garage for their car.) This type of home was well adapted to the Everglades where the climate is hot and humid with periods of heavy rain. They slept on blankets and bedding purchased at the trading post. They made cheesecloth mosquito nets. At night these were unrolled from the ceiling from which they were suspended and were tucked in around their beds. Furniture consisted of work platforms and tables in various locations around the camp. The chickee platforms provided seating during the day when the bedding had been put away.

The Seminoles again grouped in settlements, usually on large islands just within the Everglades interior, until 1900–1920s

when subsistence became difficult and whites encroached. The large settlements then broke up, and the families formed nuclear or extended family camps: a man, wife, children, her mother and father, and perhaps an unmarried brother or uncle. They moved to smaller islands deeper in the Everglades. These camps consisted of several chickees for sleeping and working and a central cooking chickee.

In the latter 1930s some Seminole children began to ask to be sent to school. Because there were no schools for Indian children in Florida, they were sent to Indian boarding schools such as the one at Cherokee, North Carolina. When these children returned to Florida, they had become accustomed to flush toilets, hot and cold running water, and showers. They had none of these in their chickees on the reservations where by the 1940s many of them were living. This was the impetus for standard housing. The first houses were small, wood frame houses that were donated to the Seminoles' cause and moved from the towns of Ft. Lauderdale and Pompano Beach to the reservation at Dania. The local women's clubs, chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Friends of the Seminoles contributed time and ingenuity to see this project through. They also set up a revolving fund to loan money to Seminole families so that they could finance and build their first concrete block houses or refurbish the donated houses. Seminoles could not borrow money from a bank as they did not own their own property. It was a new experience for the Seminole women to use electric stoves rather than their open cooking fires. Various architectural designs for reservation housing were attempted over the years to make housing comfortable in the hot climate, but none were better than the chickee. There are modern subdivisions on the reservations today, and many families have air conditioning.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Seminole society is matrilineal. This means that kinship is carried through the mother. Her children inherit her clan and pass it on to their children. Anyone of that clan (on any reservation in Florida, whether Seminole or Miccosukee tribal members) is considered a "relative." One must never marry a clan member, since it would be considered incest. Thus, one must always know one's clan members. The traditional ways taught that a father has little to do with the upbringing of his own children. Instead, he had obligations to his sister's children, who were his own clan members. Thus, it was a child's maternal aunts and uncles who educated and disciplined. In the traditional camp, the extended family would have included aunts, uncles, maternal grandparents, and cousins, with the eldest woman as the head of the family. Matrilocal refers to residence. Seminole society has not been matrilocal since the 1960s when subdivision housing became available. Traditionally, married couples would reside with the wife's mother. Today, most communities are not organized around the clan system. Clan is still very important to the Seminole community, however, influencing tribal politics and many other relationships.

## 11 CLOTHING

As soon as European trade goods became available from colonists, the Indians of the southeast began to obtain them. These goods included items of wearing apparel. The Creeks had most of their trade relationship with the British, who had the fin-



*Adrienne Cypress takes care of a garden during a sixth grade culture class at the Ahfachkee school at the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation. About 20 percent of the school's funding comes from the federal Bureau of Indian Education, with the rest coming from the Seminoles. (AP Images/Luis M. Alvarez)*

est trade goods. Fine paisley shawls, cotton goods, and wools in blue and red became highly prized and can be seen in engravings of southeastern Indians from the 18th century. From the first writings we find that Seminole clothing was of British cotton. A man's outfit consisted of a knee-length shirt with an open ruffled coat over it, woolen leggings, and one-piece leather moccasins. A turban made of a shawl blanket, trade silver, finger-woven yarn, and bead garters (perhaps a sash with long tassels), and a woolen shot bag woven with beaded designs completed his dress attire. Women wore a short, ruffled blouse and a long skirt. They, too, wore silver trade bracelets and earrings and long strands of necklace beads that were popular everyday attire well into the mid-20th century.

Women and young girls of the 19th and early 20th century were accustomed to wearing as many necklace beads as they could from chest to chin. It was a mark of wealth and popularity. Bead necklaces and bracelets were also birth gifts. Necklace beads were standard suitor and engagement gifts. Women were buried with all of their possessions, including necklace beads.

Seminole women acquired the hand-cranked sewing machine in the latter 1800s. In time, the machine technology changed their hand-sewn garments (described above) that had changed little since the 19th century. The man's main garment, the shirt, began to change around 1900. It became banded with inserted and appliquéd ornamentation forming horizontal stripes. A belt was inserted at the waist. The ruffled coat, how-

ever, retained its traditional design even till today. Leggings by this time were of smoked, tanned deer hide. Plaid wool shawls formed their turbans. Moccasins remained the same. The old-style yarn garters and belts were owned by only a few elders, as were the beaded bags. When those men died, the only examples of this work were to be seen in museum collections.

Women continued to wear the blouse and skirt, but by the 1920s the blouse ruffle had become longer, eventually forming a separate ornamental cape over a plain bodice.

Machine-sewn patchwork as it exists today is the Seminole and Miccosukee's premier art form and cultural identifier. It began being made around 1917 by the *i.laponathi*. This was also the time when these Mikasuki-speaking Seminoles began to reside in the tourist attractions in Miami. Leisure time and the tourist market cannot be overlooked for the blossoming and great evolution of this art form. Until the 1950s, traditional clothing was all that was worn by Seminole and Miccosukee women. The popular Seminole jacket evolved from the aforementioned man's shirt. Today, elders continue to wear their traditional dress, while most people have some patchwork clothing to wear for special occasions.

Seminole and Miccosukee youth dress in clothing bearing popular name brands and rarely wear Seminole attire. Clothing contests at annual festivals such as Seminole Fair promote 19th-century and modern patchwork clothing and offer cash prizes as incentives. Today, machine-sewn patchwork con-

tinues its evolution in intricate creations that command high prices.

Seminole men of the 18th and early 19th century wore their hair in bangs in front, shaved on the sides, with two long queues braided down the crown to the back of the head. Women wore their hair in bangs with their long tresses gathered up in a knot on top of the head. The men began to cut their hair in a “bowl-cut” in the last two decades of the 19th century. The women’s hairstyles began to change around the 1920s. The bun was loosened and worn under a hairnet held in place with hair pins. The hair then began to be pulled forward and rolled, forming a crown around the face. By the 1940s this style became highly accented by the addition of a “hairboard,” a crescent-shaped piece of cardboard over which the hair was fanned, held in place with a hairnet and pinned down. Styles of Seminole women’s hair can be seen in the dolls they made over the decades of the 20th century. Many dolls sold today continue to show the popular Seminole “hairboard” of the 1940s.

## 12 FOOD

The cook fire is one of the most important of all Seminole traditions. It was the hub of the camp. Children were taught to respect the fire, which was a focal point of the clan in each camp. Traditionally, Seminoles from different clans were not supposed to eat from foods prepared from the same fire. In a large gathering, separate cooking fires were made.

The Seminoles did not eat three prescribed meals as many Europeans do. Thus, food was kept hot and ready at all times. The staple was (and continues to be in many families) a type of soup called *sofki* (Creek) or *o’they* (Mikasuki). Sofki is a cooking term for any food put in water and cooked down so that it can be consumed as a liquid. While corn and grits are the common ingredients for sofki today, meats and even fruits such as guavas were traditionally made into sofki. Sofki was kept on the fire so that anyone who wanted food could stir the kettle with the large sofki spoon and sip about two cups of liquid from it at a time.

The entire family might sit on the eating platform together for an evening or special meal. However, when guests were present, the women and children waited to eat. There were many traditional customs concerning the serving of refreshments and food to guests.

### Pumpkin bread

2 cups self-rising flour  
 ½ to 1 cup of sugar (to taste)  
 Enough canned pumpkin to make a soft dough  
 Oil for frying

Blend ingredients lightly. Turn onto a floured surface. Knead. Pull off a large piece of dough and knead it with your fingers to form a cake 4 inches in diameter and ¼ to ½ inch wide. Fry in 1 to 2 inches of oil. Turn over when one side gets lightly browned. Lay on paper towels to soak up grease.

## 13 EDUCATION

In the latter 1930s there were no public schools open to Seminoles Indians in Florida, so the first Seminole students who requested a formal education attended Indian Boarding School at Cherokee, North Carolina. These students became the first

Seminole high school graduates. These early graduates held a number of the first official tribal positions after 1957 when the Seminole Tribe of Florida was formally organized.

Both tribes comply with state regulations concerning mandatory public school education. The Seminole Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs operate Ah-Fach-Kee School on the isolated Big Cypress Reservation. Originally kindergarten through eighth grade, the school has recently added a high school program. The BIA provided the first educational endeavors on the Brighton Reservation (1938) and in Big Cypress (1943) and instituted the first Head Start programs. Since 1972, the Seminole Tribe has been contracting for the Tribe’s educational services. The Tribe’s Ah-Fach-Kee School on the Big Cypress Reservation offers programs in Seminole history, culture, and language as part of the curriculum. Other students on that isolated reservation and on the Brighton Reservation are bused to schools in distant towns. Children living on reservations that are near cities attend county public schools. The Tribe has an active high school equivalency program. Annually, more tribal members are seeking higher education and obtaining degrees.

The Miccosukee Tribe has been operating its own bi-lingual elementary school since the early 1960s.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional songs are in the form of lullabies, songs that are sung in the telling of stories, and medicine songs used when preparing medicine or doctoring. Other songs are sung for specific dances during the Green Corn Dance.

Of the modern-day music, the Seminoles and Miccosukees tend towards country and western music. The Seminole Tribe hosts bluegrass festivals and hires top country stars to perform at the annual Tribal Christmas party.

Traditional dancing takes place ceremonially at the Green Corn Dance. The dancers form a single line (some dances use couples) following a dance boss. The dance boss follows the lead of the medicine man who keeps time with a rattle while singing. The men in the line repeat his phrases. These dances are representational of an animal: Catfish, Lightning Bug, Black Bird, etc. Some of these dances can often be seen in performance at Seminole Fair in February.

Three publications have been written by members of the Seminole Tribe. Former chairwoman Betty Nae Jumper published *...And With the Wagon Came God* (1985), discussing early Christian contact with the Seminoles. Also from Jumper, *Legends of the Seminoles* (1994) is a collection of folktales with color illustrations. Moses Jumper, Sr. has published a book of poetry.

## 15 WORK

Following the Seminole Wars of the 19th century, the Seminoles resumed their trade in Everglades products—furs, hides, bird plumage, beeswax, honey, etc. They sold to trading posts set up by settlers on the rivers flowing out of the Everglades. This market began to decline early in the 20th century. They then developed a relationship with tourism through non-Indian operated tourist attractions, specifically in Miami and Silver Springs. By the 1930s this was the major economy. Families lived “on exhibition” during the months of the tourist season made and sold crafts to the tourists.



This economy continues to be lucrative for Seminole families. Today, “cultural tourism” is an industry that is being heavily promoted by both the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes. The two major Seminole attractions are Kissimmee Billie Swamp Safari and the Ah-Tha-Thi-Ki Museum in Big Cypress. The museum also has branch facilities in Hollywood and Tampa. Okalee Indian Village is operated by the tribe in Hollywood. The Miccosukee Culture Center is operated by that tribe on the Tamiami Trail 40 miles west of Miami.

For decades, the Seminole Tribe struggled to create a notable cattle industry. They have succeeded and are known throughout the country as producers of fine calves. In the 1970s the Tribe pioneered the concept of tax-free cigarette shops on sovereign reservation land. High-stakes bingo followed. These enterprises have made the long impoverished Seminole Tribe wealthy. Much of the proceeds goes into better education and health care for tribal members. Importantly, with this new financial independence, the tribe has been able to take charge of its business interests. They are able to support political candidates who can offer them assistance and can hire lobbyists to protect their prized reservation lands from harm. Yet, the tribe does not view these lucrative enterprises as permanent situations. They know that a high court ruling could take them away. They would then fall back on revenues from cattle production (19th largest in the nation), citrus (the world’s number one producer of lemons), and tourism. Tribal members receive monthly dividends from gaming revenues.

## 16 SPORTS

Before the Second Seminole War (1835), “stick ball,” a game similar to lacrosse, was played by southeastern Indians as a man’s war game, town against town. Deaths were not uncommon. The post-war version of this game is played ceremonially at the annual Green Corn Dance, men against women. The men use two stick ball racquets, the women use only their hands. The object was to throw the ball and hit the ball pole above a mark and score.

Alligator wrestling for the enjoyment of spectators was created in the tourist attractions by a non-Indian, early in the 20th century and soon became popular with young Seminole men. For many decades, alligator wrestling has been a very respected occupation within the Seminole and Miccosukee tribal communities. It is considered a cultural activity. Alligator wrestling is performed at most tribal festivals and attractions and continues to be a crowd thriller.

The Seminole Tribe’s Recreation Department is very active in sponsoring team sports. There are full facility gyms on all major reservations. Members of the Seminole Tribe also belong to bowling, basketball and softball leagues. The Tribe sponsors national and circuit rodeos during the year and sends tribal members to compete in such competitions as the Indian National Finals Rodeo.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like most families in the United States, the Seminoles and Miccosukees have the advantages of cable TV, computers, and the Internet. There is a great difference in the generational mindset.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Many Seminole women (and a few men) make machine-sewn patchwork. Since the early 1900s, this form of artistic expression has identified these Native Americans. Patchwork was originally made in simple and large designs. Over the decades it was refined and is today made extremely complex. This colorful art form is used as decorative ornamentation in the women’s traditional skirts and men’s jackets. It is accented by rows of tiny rickrack to enhance the designs.

The oldest commercial craft is doll making. The women make dolls out of the fiber of the palmetto (also used in basket making). Dolls are dressed in traditional Seminole garb. Seminole and Miccosukee men carve souvenirs, miniature canoes, and Everglades animals, as well as popular tomahawks and lances for the tourist trade. The commercial sale of crafts has been a major household industry for most of the 20th century. Many Seminole and Miccosukee families sell crafts (they also buy from other Seminole and Miccosukee craftsmen and women) at seasonal and weekend fairs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Generation gaps are problematic, but they are typical to all cultures. However, the Seminoles have had to learn elements of someone else’s culture. Problems arise in learning how to deal with situations outside one’s cultural upbringing. As an example, the traditional decision-making process should result in a total consensus of agreement, not just a majority. Christianity and other European-influenced ideals first replaced the traditional Seminole ideology at the tribal decision-making level.

Aggression is not a traditional attribute of Seminole culture; in fact, people who showed aggressive or ambitious tendencies would have been considered atypical and “crazy” to a traditional Seminole or Miccosukee. In the old days, such a person could have been ordered killed for “deviant” behavior. Today, tribal leaders must be able to function aggressively in order to uphold and protect tribal rights.

All tribal members are in some way participants in the non-traditional system today. Yet, traditional cultural patterns often remain. For instance, a parent may not demand that children study their lessons, or may not encourage them to excel in school, as involvement in others’ affairs and the stimulation of ambition is not traditional behavior.

Thus, there are inherent social conflicts continuing to plague tribal members as they move forward in the 21st century. However, both the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes have been fortified by new economic windfalls such as gaming, that provide these formally impoverished tribes with the means to continue in their upward swing, paying for those services that will aid them in their future endeavors. In looking back over their tumultuous history, they celebrate the fact that they have survived and are prospering.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditional Seminole society was organized around principles of matrilineal descent and matrilocality. However, under the influences of state legal codes in Oklahoma and Florida, matrilineality and matrilocality have almost entirely disappeared. In spite of the importance of women in the reckoning of descent and in the establishment of residency after marriage, gender relations in traditional Seminole society were markedly asymmetrical.

Women were responsible for cultivating the fields and preparing the food that was harvested. Women did not hunt nor did they fish. Men were responsible for those subsistence activities.

Women were excluded from political activities in traditional Seminole society. Furthermore, women were not allowed to take active roles in public rituals, such as the Green Corn ceremony. Women were responsible for food preparations and other behind the scenes activities for public rituals.

Divorce in traditional Seminole society could be initiated by either a husband or a wife. If a man initiated a divorce, he became immediately free, while a woman had to remain married until the next Green Corn ceremony. Upon the death of her husband, a woman would enter into a period of mourning and seclusion that lasted for four years. During that time the woman was held to the strict adultery punishments of Seminole society. Those punishments for women included beatings, hair cropping, and cutting off of pieces of the ears and nose. Punishment for men who committed adultery was much less severe.

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—revised by J. Williams

# SUDANESE AMERICANS

For more information on Sudanese history and culture, see **Vol. 1: Sudanese**.

## OVERVIEW

Decades of civil war, violent uprisings, famine, and disease in Sudan have killed millions of Sudanese and driven hundreds of thousands more from their homes. Some of these refugees have made their way to the United States over the years. The 2000 U.S. Census counted almost 20,000 Sudanese Americans, and the population increased to an estimated 35,000 by 2005. Of the 20,000 Sudanese Americans identified by the 2000 U.S. Census, three-fourths of them entered the United States after 1990. Men and boys outnumber women and girls by two to one.

By far the best known of the Sudanese American population are those known to Westerners as the "Lost Boys" (a name they themselves dislike as it infantilizes them), children who were separated from their families in the 1980s and walked for months across Africa to reach refugee camps. Most of the children were boys because they were away from home tending the family's cattle when their villages were attacked. Girls are traditionally kept at home, doing domestic work, so the majority of the girls were either killed or kidnapped by the attackers and few escaped. Of the approximately 3,800 refugees who were resettled in the United States in the early 2000s, only 89 were girls.

Sudanese boys are traditionally sent off in peer groups after initiation into manhood, either to tend cattle or go to nearby towns and cities to attend school or find other work. Banding together to survive the trek across the country to find safety in refugee camps was, therefore, a familiar response to unfamiliar circumstances. Sudanese culture also stresses the importance of cooperation and communal sharing, values which contributed greatly to the refugees' ability to survive the dangerous journey.

Upon entering the United States, the boys, or young men as many now were after years in the refugee camp, were randomly assigned locations by the resettlement agencies based largely on what city had the most resources available to handle their needs. The young men, however, found it very difficult to be separated from those they had lived with and depended on like family for so long, so eventually the agencies began to make more of an effort to keep those who were attached to each other together.

Sudanese Americans generally come from southern Sudan, where the majority practice traditional animistic religions. The number of Christians is growing, however, both in response to aid efforts by Christian groups as well as in reaction against the Muslim Arab rulers of northern Sudan. Once in the United States, refugees find themselves in the hands of Christian resettlement agencies, as well as church volunteers, and turn to Christianity as a way to connect with their new communities.

The most important celebrations in traditional southern Sudanese culture are weddings, births, and funerals. Marriage and having a family is considered the most important part of life, and most young people are married by the age of 18. Divorce is only allowed in cases where the woman is unable to

bear children. The question of marriage has become a difficult one for Sudanese Americans due to the scarcity of women in the population. Most young Sudanese American men would prefer to marry a Sudanese woman, partly because they hope to return to Sudan at some point, and fear that a non-Sudanese woman would not want to go with them, and partly because a Sudanese woman will share their cultural values. Some have even begun to request that resettlement agencies focus on bringing women to the United States so that they will have marriage prospects. The potential for marriage, however, is one of the reasons more young women have not been resettled outside of Sudan. Brides bring a large dowry, so Sudanese foster families choose to keep the girls with them in order to marry them off for the “bride price.”

Birthdays are not considered significant or even remembered, so the ages of many Sudanese Americans are approximate guesses by resettlement workers and recorded as January 1 of the appropriate year. This had a significant effect on refugees resettled in the United States: those deemed to be under 18 were eligible for immediate placement in high school and to be able then to go to junior college for free, while those over 18 were ineligible and had to take on menial jobs to support themselves. Education is highly valued by Sudanese American refugees as a way to succeed in their new world and then take their learning (and money) back to Sudan to improve life for all in their homeland. Many of those who were “too old” to enroll in school chose to work full-time and attend classes as well to earn their degrees.

Although southern Sudanese are farmers and cattle herders, nearly all Sudanese Americans live in cities where they were resettled and have had to adjust to urban life. Apartments, electricity, supermarkets, and other integral aspects of urban living were completely new to them when they arrived. Fortunately, most had become fairly proficient in English at the refugee camps, so they were able to communicate with other Americans well from the start. Those who were not immediately enrolled in school quickly found employment, mostly in unskilled labor or service jobs. Sudanese Americans place a high value on work and consider themselves the equal of everyone else as long as they are working.

The majority of Sudanese Americans send money back to family and friends in Sudan. Relatives who remain in Sudan, in fact, put a great deal of pressure on Sudanese Americans to share their newfound wealth, which is not as great as those in Sudan imagine. Some Sudanese Americans have even had to change their phone numbers after receiving so many calls for help.

Sudanese Americans have not resided in the United States long enough to have made a significant contribution to the larger society yet. Two well-known Sudanese Americans, however, are retired NBA star Manute Bol who came to the United States at age 18 in 1983, just before the Sudanese civil war started, to play college basketball; and Simon Deng, a former Sudanese slave who escaped to the United States and is now an activist on behalf of emancipation.

One of the difficulties Sudanese Americans face in the United States is how to integrate themselves into what is still a racially divided society. Southern Sudanese have very dark skin, much darker than many African Americans' skin tone, automatically relegating them to second-class status in American society. Recognizing this, most Sudanese Americans choose

to emphasize their African identity in an attempt to stay outside the limited boundaries of being black in America. Since many hope to return to the Sudan at some point, they are not interested in assimilating fully into American society anyway, so they retain their sense of being African rather than American. It remains to be seen how this dynamic will play out in the long run for those Sudanese Americans who decide to stay in the United States.

As stated above, a mere 89 of the 3,800 Sudanese refugees who were resettled in the United States in the early 2000s were girls. There are a number of reasons for this, including cultural restrictions on girls' travel and independence, the profit to be made in dowries, and lack of attention to girls by refugee camp and resettlement agencies. Many of the girls who made it to the refugee camps were placed in foster homes where they are exploited as domestic servants and “sold off” as brides. Those who made it to the United States were mostly relatives of boys who protected them and insisted that they be resettled as well.

Even those girls who have been resettled in the United States face the danger of exploitation. American foster parents have reported incidents where their foster daughter has traveled to meet with relatives only to discover that the relatives were merely interested in the dowry she could bring them. Although American foster parents want to encourage the girls to be connected with their families and traditional culture, they are wary of exposing the girls to disappointment at best, exploitation at worst.

Sudanese American women have begun to join together to help Sudanese women and girls both in the United States and in Sudan. Organizations such as the Southern Sudanese Women's Association, founded in 2000, provide counseling, education, and financial assistance to help Sudanese women and girls free themselves from exploitative expectations while still respecting Sudanese culture.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

## SUMU

**LOCATION:** Nicaragua; Honduras (eastern coasts)

**POPULATION:** 13,000–16,000

**LANGUAGE:** Sumu; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Protestantism (Moravian); Catholicism

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Sumu group has sometimes been called Ulwa and Twahka, which are actually two sub-tribes of the same family. As a general name, the Miskito designation Sumu or Smu is preferable. The Sumu are split in five different tribes: the Bawiha, the Twahka, the Panamaka, the Ulwa, and the Kukra.

The Sumu are an indigenous group living on the eastern coasts of Nicaragua and Honduras, in the area commonly known as the Atlantic or Miskito (also spelled Mosquito) Coast, a region that they share with their traditional adversaries, the Miskito. The Sumu are the second-most-populous native group in the region, after the Miskito. Historically, the Sumu were composed of at least 10 subgroups, and their territory stretched from the Rio Patuca in present-day Honduras to the Rio Escondido in Nicaragua.

In the 17th century, the Miskito (a mixed-race people resulting from intermarriage between escaped African slaves and other segments of the local population) were introduced to guns and ammunition by English traders and settlers in the area, who wanted help in their colonial rivalry with the Spanish. The Miskito used their newfound fire power to enhance their own position as well, expanding their territory northward, southward, and westward from its original location at the mouth of the Rio Coco. They demanded tribute from the Sumu or captured them, enslaving them or incorporating them into the Miskito population.

The beleaguered Sumu ultimately retreated into the interior of the region, living by the headwaters of the coastal rivers. The Miskito became the most important non-White population on the coast, living in peace with the British and serving as an intermediary between them and the Sumu, whose numbers declined sharply as a result of Spanish, British, and Miskito aggression and the spread of European diseases. From the mid-17th century to the late 19th century, the Miskito prospered, thanks to their trade with the British and the abundant natural resources of their territory, which at one time extended as far as the present-day nations of Belize and Panama. Moravian missionaries arrived in the region in the 1849. After converting large numbers of Miskito, they began directing their efforts at the Sumu at the beginning of the 20th century.

In the late 19th century, an ethnic shift occurred in the region when banana growers began bringing in Black English-speaking laborers from the West Indies to work on their plantations. They and their descendants, who became known as Creoles, took the place of the Miskito as the area's dominant non-White group, relegating both the Miskito and the Sumu to a lower social status. The Creoles settled mainly in the newly established port towns while the indigenous groups remained in rural villages, retaining their traditional languages and way of life. With Nicaraguan and Honduran independence from Britain in the 19th century, the United States began to play a greater role in the region, especially in the area of banana pro-

duction, and its corporate interests, particularly the United Fruit Company (now United Brands) remained influential well into the 20th century.

When the Sandinista government came to power in 1979 and moved to consolidate its control over the native peoples of the Atlantic coast, they met with widespread resistance from the Miskito, who formed their own Contra force, a supposed alliance between the native groups of the region called *Misura* (a combination of the groups' names: Miskito, Sumu, and Rama). However, most of the Sumu did not want to become involved in the hostilities between the Miskito and the government. They tried to stay out of the conflict, but the Miskito raided their settlements, drafting young men and torturing and murdering those who resisted (or were suspected of resisting). In 1982 the Miskito occupied Musawas, the largest Sumu settlement, conscripting, killing, or evacuating its residents. Throughout northern Nicaragua, innocent civilians were terrorized and murdered. Schools and clinics were destroyed, farms went untended, and livestock were killed.

Caught between pressure from *Misura* and from the Sandinistas themselves, between 2,000 and 3,000 Sumu fled to refugee camps in Honduras, while others hid in the mountains, were forced into military service, or relocated to the coast. Their persecutors even raided the refugee camps to draft Sumu men. By 1985 conditions in the camps had led the Sumu to begin returning to their homes, and by 1987 about half the refugees had returned to Nicaragua, where the worst of the fighting was over. Although Nicaragua nominally granted autonomy to the native groups of the Atlantic coast in 1987, the threat of either Sandinista or *Misura* violence remained ever-present.

President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, whose 1990 election ended Sandinista rule, established a new ministry, the Nicaraguan Institute for the Development of the Atlantic Region (INDERA), to serve as a liaison with the peoples of the Atlantic coast. The Sumu have drawn international attention due to their political plight, as well as their role in conserving the natural resources of their homeland. There was a small community to begin with, and the continuing violence in their region has threatened them with virtual extinction through the reduction of their birth rate and the destruction of their settlements. As of the late 1980s, many were living in either Honduran refugee camps or resettlement camps in Nicaragua.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The large region on the Atlantic side of Nicaragua and Honduras, known as the Miskito Coast, is inhabited by four different Amerindian tribes: Miskito, Sumu, Paya, and Rama.

The Sumu live in isolated inland villages along the main rivers of what is known as the Atlantic or Miskito Coast, located in Nicaragua and Honduras. The Miskito Coast is extremely diverse geographically, with a large inland savanna, a tropical rain forest (home to most of the Sumu), coastal lowlands, and the most extensive continental shelf in the Caribbean. Its major rivers include the Patuca, Coco (also known as the Wangki), Prinsapolca, Awaltara (Rio Grande), and Kuringwas. There are three main subgroups among the Sumu, each living in a different region. In Nicaragua, the Sumu live along the Bocay, Umbra, and Waspuk tributaries of the Rio Coco River and near the headwaters of the Prinsapolca and Grande rivers. In Honduras, they live along the Patuca River.

Each of the Sumu subgroups speaks its own variant of a common language. The communities of the Panamaka, who account for 70% of the Sumu, center around the Bocay, Saslaya, and Waspuk rivers and the mining town of Bonanza. The Tawahka, who make up another 20%, live along the Rio Bambana in northern Nicaragua and far up the Rio Patuca in eastern Honduras. The Ulwa, who represent 10% of the Sumu, live along the Prinzapolca and Rio Grande de Matagalpa rivers at around the midpoint of the Nicaraguan coast. During the protracted warfare of the 1980s, the Sumu suffered persecution at the hands of both the Sandinista government and the Miskito resistance, which destroyed a great number of their settlements. Many Sumu fled to refugee camps in Honduras, but most have been repatriated in the years since 1985 and are attempting to rebuild their shattered communities. Altogether, there are thought to be between 13,000 and 15,000 Sumu in Nicaragua and 1,000 in Honduras.

The Miskito Coast is located in a tropical zone usually hit by natural forces. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and Hurricane Felix in 2007 hit Miskito territory, provoking severe damages.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Sumu, like the language of the Miskito, is a Misumalpan tongue derived from the Chibchan family. Outside influences have produced loanwords from English, Spanish, and Miskito. There are three distinct Sumu dialects: Tawahka and Panamaka, which are very similar to each other, and Ulwa, which is more divergent. Most Sumu are multilingual, speaking Spanish in school and their native language at home. In addition, many learn to speak Miskito within their communities. Few Sumu know how to write in their own language, but its written form may enjoy resurgence with the growth of bilingual education that has accompanied the demands of indigenous groups, including the Sumu, for greater cultural autonomy. However, not all public policies during the last decades have been oriented to preserve the Sumu language. For instance, sociological studies have shown that until 1950, Ulwa, or southern Sumu, was the primary language of the eastern Nicaraguan town of Karawala, population of 935. In 1950, the Nolan Lumber Company came to Karawala, drastically changing the linguistic picture through the introduction of a sizable Miskito-speaking workforce. Since the people of Karawala were bilingual in Ulwa and Miskito, the shift to Miskito on the part of the whole town was not a hardship. But the shift had serious consequences for Ulwa. At this point, only 18% of the population under 20 years of age speaks Ulwa.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Sumu traditionally believed in a sun god, called Mapapak, who lived in the heavens. Other forces of nature, including the moon and the wind, were also worshipped. A variety of spirits (*walasa*, *nawah*, and *dimalah*) was thought to have either harmful or beneficial influences on human beings and was even thought capable of causing death. Much Sumu folklore has been preserved by its shamans, or *sukia*, who also serve as priests, exorcists, herbalists, and spiritual advisors.

## 5 RELIGION

Sumu as well as Miskito people were originally animists, however, exposure to Christianity has influenced to a certain degree their religious practices through a slow process of syn-

cretism. In spite of this cultural influence, Sumus have been capable of maintaining important rites and beliefs. For instance, in Sumu and Miskito culture shamans still play an important and varied role serving as healers, diviners, and exorcists. For this Amerindian aborigines there are different kinds of supernatural beings. Although many of the animist traditions have been kept by a large number of Sumus and Miskito, the Catholic influence in the zone has resulted in a syncretistic Christ-animism. The Sumu in Nicaragua are mostly adherents of the Moravian Church, a Protestant sect. The Tawahka Sumu in Honduras are mostly Catholic. Although their traditional religion, which involved sun and moon worship and a belief in both benevolent and malevolent spirits, declined with the arrival of Moravian missionaries in the 19th century, some Sumu continue to hold beliefs associated with it. Its holy men, or shamans, were called *sukia*.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holiday celebrations combine the major holy days of the Christian calendar, including Christmas (December 25) and Easter (late March or early April), with the traditional Sumu practices of singing, dancing, and drinking.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Festivities mark major events in the life-cycle, such as weddings and funerals. Special ceremonies, such as the *asang lawana*, formerly marked rites of passage for both men and women.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Sumu family traditionally functioned as an independent economic unit. Men felled trees and hunted, while women performed agricultural work and household chores. Although there is still some division of labor according to gender, today both men and women participate in the cash economies of the countries in which they live. The Sumu formerly had a labor exchange system called *birbiri* for heavy physical work, but today it is more common to exchange commodities for cash.

Elders are honored and respected but have no formal evaluation in social status. Shamans have traditionally exercised some authority within Sumu society.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Sumu dwellings are typically wooden or post-and-pole structures, with thatch or tin roofs and floors made of board, split bamboo, or palm branches. They mostly consist of one room (although some have interior divisions) and generally have windows and doors. Instead of having a foundation, houses are usually raised several meters or feet off the ground on posts. Although modern medicine is replacing traditional Sumu folk remedies that use roots, leaves, bark, and seeds, herbal cures are still used for a variety of purposes, including the treatment of poisonous snake bites.

The Sumu generally live in remote areas that make for difficult travel conditions. The home of the Tawahka in Honduras is accessible only by plane and canoe. In Nicaragua, the Rio Bocay and Rio Coco are the only means of transportation to and from Sumu villages, and those making the journey run risks from white water, rocky shoals, and portages. Groups attempting to improve access to these areas have recently had

success with dugout canoes modified to accommodate an outboard motor. Rice, beans, yucca, bananas, and plantain are some of the main staples that are part of the Sumu and Miskito peoples.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most Sumu live in extended families with two or three generations under one roof. Men formerly had more than one wife, but today monogamy is the rule. Courtship customs include the presentation of gifts, such as food and firewood, by the suitor to the young woman's parents. Once married, the couple generally lives with in-laws until their house is built. At one time, marriage with outsiders was strictly forbidden, but today it is common for the Sumu to marry Blacks, Mestizos, or members of other native groups, including their traditional enemies, the Miskito. In addition to their domestic responsibilities, women take part in farm work, including planting, weeding, and harvesting.

## 11 CLOTHING

Formerly, Sumu women made loincloths and skirts from pounded tuno tree bark and other clothing from cotton they spun, dyed, and wove by hand. Today, however, the Sumu, like other inhabitants of Nicaragua and Honduras, wear mass-produced Western-style clothing, mostly lightweight cotton.

## 12 FOOD

Dietary staples for the Sumu include root crops, such as sweet manioc (cassava) and yams, plantains and green bananas, which are boiled, or baked, rice and beans, and fish. Corn is pounded to make tortillas. Ripe plantains and bananas are mashed together with other ingredients, including maize and palm fruits, and mixed with water to produce a fermented beverage called *mishla* or *wasak*. The role that fish and wild game play in the Sumu diet varies depending on their availability. The Sumu also keep chickens, ducks, turkeys, pigs, and cows.

## 13 EDUCATION

Although Honduras and Nicaragua, where most Sumu live, both have free, compulsory primary education, the educational systems of both countries are inadequate, with low enrollment and graduation rates and high adult illiteracy. Estimates of the adult illiteracy rate in Honduras range from 27% to over 40% and as high as 80% in rural areas (where most Sumu live). Schools are understaffed and undersupplied, with as many as 80 pupils per classroom. Sumu children receive a practical education that prepares them for daily life by observing and helping their parents, an activity that breaks down along gender lines, establishing sharply differentiated future roles. While boys participate in farming, fishing, and hunting with their fathers, girls help their mothers with domestic chores.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Many of the traditional Sumu flute melodies imitate bird calls, with accompaniment provided by rattles and drums.

## 15 WORK

The Sumu have traditionally lived by subsistence agriculture, raising root crops, maize, plantains, bananas, and other produce, both for food and cash. They use the same slash-and-

burn farming techniques as their ancestors to clear forest land for planting. However, today they mostly fish with hook and line rather than the spears of their ancestors, and hunt wild game with shotguns and .22-caliber rifles, which have replaced bows and arrows and blowguns. Sumu villagers traditionally helped each other with major tasks, such as house-building, through a traditional system of labor exchange called *birbiri* that usually involved kinship networks. Today, however, the exchange of labor has been replaced by payments of produce, supplies, or cash.

In addition to their traditional subsistence activities, the Sumu have been employed by Europeans since the 17th century for a variety of tasks, which have included tapping trees for saps, resins, and gums, catching shrimp, turtles, and lobsters, and panning for gold. Today, many own small stores or work as teachers, nurses, boatmen, or ministers.

## 16 SPORTS

Popular sports in the Nicaraguan and Honduran homelands of the Sumu include baseball, soccer, basketball, and volleyball. Cockfighting is a favorite spectator sport among the Sumu and other groups living along the Miskito Coast.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Holidays and other special occasions are marked with singing, dancing, and drinking alcoholic beverages, including *mishla*, a fermented beverage made from fruit and water.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The traditional crafts of spinning, weaving, and dyeing cotton for clothes and household items such as sheets have been replaced by the production of more decorative items for marketing, such as carved tree gourds, tuno bark tapestries, and *majao* bags. Tuno bark is also used for making blankets and mosquito netting, and twine for weaving bags and hammocks is made from pounded *majao* bark.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Sumu, like the Miskito and other native groups in eastern Nicaragua and Honduras, generally fare worse than the mixed-race (Mestizo) or black (Creole) populations in terms of income, education, and job opportunities. Many hold low-paying, dangerous mining jobs. The Sumu are additionally victimized by the historically disdainful attitude of the Miskito, who refer to them as “slaves” (*albatuina*) and “flatheads” (*Ialtanta*), ridiculing their language and customs.

In the 1980s, the Sumu suffered mistreatment at the hands of both the Sandinista government and Miskito resistance forces, who drove as many as 3,000 Sumu from their homelands by a campaign of terror that included forced conscription, mass kidnappings, rape, torture, and murder. Repatriation began in the mid-1980s, and the Sumu are now struggling to rebuild their homes and reestablish their culture in the wake of the devastation of the past 15 years. In 1987 the Tawahka Sumu in Honduras formed the Federación Indígena Tawahka de Honduras (FITH) to protect the group’s political, economic, territorial, and cultural rights. The comparable group in Nicaragua is Sumu Kalpapakna Wahaini Lani (SUKAWALA), also known as the Sumu Brotherhood.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Sumu cosmology, like that of many indigenous peoples, describes an egalitarian duality between the masculine and feminine realms. Sumu men formerly had more than one wife, but today monogamy is the rule. Labor is divided along gender lines and tasks are complementary.

While indigenous communities themselves have limited access to higher education, indigenous women are generally relegated to home life. The percentage of girls going to secondary school is minimal. Children may attend primary school in their communities, but the secondary schools are in mestizo towns in the area. Life conditions, such as lack of food and housing, are hard for everybody in the mestizo town, boys and girls alike. Given the scarcity of resources, girls are more likely to stay back home, than boys are. Because Sumu women are in charge of preserving the traditions of the community, the Nicaraguan government has designed aid projects targeted at women. Sumu women are the direct beneficiaries of the natural medicine cultivation project and the family garden and community kitchen capacity building activities prompted by the state.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# SURINAMESE

**LOCATION:** Suriname

**POPULATION:** 475,996 in Suriname; 200,000 in Holland (the Netherlands)

**LANGUAGE:** Dutch (official); English; Spanish; Sranan; Hindi; Sranan Tongo (Taki-Taki)

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Hinduism; Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Suriname became a British colony in 1650 and then a Dutch colony in 1667. The Dutch made what has been known in history as the worst land-swap deal ever—taking Suriname in exchange for New Amsterdam, or New York, as the new British owners called it. The Dutch planted sugarcane and coffee, importing West African slaves to work on the plantations. But, the brutality of the owners drove many slaves into the interior, where they successfully evaded capture. In 1863, slavery was abolished in Suriname and former slaves were placed under government supervision for a period of 10 years, in order to perform important tasks under contract. Indentured workers were then brought from Java, China, and India to work in the fields. It is this rich ethnic mixture that influences the modern Surinamese society.

In 1954, Suriname was granted autonomy in its internal affairs, receiving aid and resources from the Netherlands. Ten years later, in 1964, Suriname became an associated member of the European Economic Community (EEC) and started receiving aid from the EEC's development fund.

Suriname's journey from independence in 1975 has been marred by several military coups that led to the brutal repression of opposition and a rebellious uprising by the Maroon communities, evolved from Black African slaves, within the rainforest interior. The military, then under the leadership of Desi Bouterse, prosecuted citizens who were accused of plotting against the government. The National Army was accused of carrying out raids on their villages, killing and detaining large numbers of them, which resulted in the flight of 10,000 to 20,000 Maroons to French Guiana. During the military dictatorship, Suriname was cut off from aid by the Netherlands and America. The loss of \$800 million of aid badly damaged the economy.

In 1987, elections were held and a new constitution was adopted, returning the country to civilian rule. However, the political agreement allowed Bouterse to remain as the army commander. Bouterse's power began to wane after the 1991 elections. That year Ronald Venetiaan became president and, in 1992, a peace accord was signed with the two main guerrilla groups, the Surinamese Liberation Army and the Tucayana Amazonas. In 1996, Jules Albert Wijdenbosch was elected president of Suriname. His administration was marked by deep economic problems. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared the country virtually bankrupt. During his administration, Wijdenbosch also had to face the political instability generated when the Netherlands issued an arrest warrant against Bouterse on charges of drug smuggling. Even though Suriname failed to extradite Bouterse, the former dictator was sentenced to 16 years in prison in 1999.

In 2000, the mathematician Ronald Runaldo Venetiaan was elected president of Suriname. His first term as president was from 1991 to 1996, but he lost the reelection to Jules Wijdenbosch. In 2005, Venetiaan was reelected to serve a third term as president.

Suriname's economy has been dominated by the mining industry, accounting for 55% of the GDP. Aluminum, gold, and oil represent about 85% of the national exports and 25% of government revenues, making the national economy highly vulnerable to international mineral prices. Even though Suriname's economy has grown during recent years—in 2007 GDP growth was 5.1%—national wealth has remained highly concentrated. In 2002 more than 70% of the population was living under the poverty line. In 2004, the unemployment rate was 9.5%.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Formerly Dutch Guiana, Suriname is the smallest country in Latin America with the smallest population, estimated in 2008 at 475,996. Located on the north-central coast of South America, it has an area of 163,820 sq km (63,251 sq mi)—but 17,635 sq km (6,809 sq mi) remain as disputed territories with neighboring Guyana and French Guiana. Suriname has a narrow coastal plain near or below sea level, much of it swampy and requiring draining systems and dikes. A central massif of low, forested mountain ranges covers 80% of the entire country.

Suriname has a humid tropical climate throughout the year, tempered along the coast by the northeast trade winds. Rainfall is over 300 cm (118 in) annually in the rain forests and averages 193 cm (76 in) along the coast. The country is rich in wildlife, including monkeys, anteaters, armadillos, sloths, tapirs, deer, jaguars, pumas, and ocelots. There are also snakes, birds, and a wide variety of insects, and the rivers teem with fish.

The capital is Paramaribo, an Amerindian name. Many place names are taken from the Amerindians, as are the names of rivers, animals, plants, and common tools used by everyone.

The population is principally composed of Asian Indians, who make up 37% of the total, and Creoles (mixed African and European stock), who also make up 31%. The Javanese population represents 15%, Maroons (African ancestors brought in the 17th and 18th centuries as slaves) account for 10%, while Amerindians and Chinese represent just 2%. The white population account for 1%. It is also a youthful country, with about 75% of its people under 30 years old and 40% under 15 years of age.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official language of Suriname is Dutch, but many people speak English. Other languages are Sranan, a Creole tongue; Hindi; and other Asian Indian, African, and Amerindian languages. Altogether, 22 languages are spoken. The most common language is Sranan Tongo, also called Taki-Taki, which combines elements of English, Dutch, and several African languages. The main working language is Spanish.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The African slaves who escaped into the wild forest recreated the myths and legends of the West African culture from which they had been torn. They reestablished the tribal hierarchies,





customs, and polytheistic beliefs that had governed their lives in Africa. The Maroons of Suriname, as the Black descendants are known, form the largest Maroon population in this part of the hemisphere, and their culture has influenced the thinking of many of the urban Creoles. There are six main Maroon tribes, each with their own chieftain or Granman.

Many Surinamese folk tales are based on Afro-centered traditions and emphasize the persistence of African belief, the organic unity between animals, and between humans and nature generally, as well as the continuing link between the living and the dead.

There is a particular folk tale about a cunning spider who outwits humans and animals. Many of the stories take place in Africa. In Creole folklore, riddles play an important part. The *lai tori* riddles, despite European influence, are overwhelmingly of African origin.

## 5 RELIGION

The main religion in Suriname is Christianity, followed by Hinduism and Islam. Some Christian groups also practice traditional African beliefs, such as Obeah and Winti (which means “wind”). Winti is a polytheistic and largely secret religion of West African origin. It recognizes that there are a multitude of gods and ghosts each having their own myths, rites, offerings, taboos, and magical forces. Obeah is a healer god, who can also be invoked to bring illness and other calamities to one’s enemy. The cult of Obeah exists not only in Suriname,

but also in neighboring Guyana, formerly a British colony, and in several Caribbean islands, such as Jamaica.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Muslim holiday Id ul Fitr, or Lebaran or Bodo in Indonesian, celebrates the end of the fast of Ramadan. The Hindu festival of Holi Phagwa varies each year and is a lively event when water, paint, talc, and colored powder are liberally thrown into the streets at passersby. The Maroons celebrate with their “dance feasts” in the interior. These are competitions between men or women and are accompanied by songs and rhythmic clapping and chanting from the audience.

Another important holiday in Suriname is New Year’s Eve, called Oud jaar, which means old year. To celebrate this day, waves of Surinamese inhabitants go to the historical downtown to watch fireworks demonstrations. These celebrations start in the morning and finish the next day.

Independence Day, a major national holiday, is on November 25.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Naming ceremonies at birth are important in all the diverse religious cultures in Suriname. Wedding ceremonies are also considered to be major occasions and can be elaborate and colorful, with generous feasting. Circumcision is practiced by Muslims.

Among Hindus, the birth ceremony traditionally takes place before the umbilical cord is cut. This ceremony is called *jatakarma*. The naming ceremony occurs 10 days after the child is born. Among the Christians there are Catholics, Lutherans, and Moravians, who baptize their children according to their own religious traditions, as do those of the Reformed Church.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Generally, status is based not on race or creed but on a person’s education, profession, and economic position, as well as on how much political influence that person is able to wield.

The familiar Hindu caste system is a highly localized phenomenon in the villages of India. So when low-caste people and twice-born Brahmins were thrown together on board ship to become *jahagis* (shipmates) on the sailing boats from India to Suriname in the 19th century, that system soon became irrelevant. Today, there is more or less only one common caste for all Hindus in Suriname, although Brahmins do retain their special religious role in interpreting the sacred knowledge of the rituals and Sanskrit texts.

Anyone visiting a friend or acquaintance at their home address is expected to call upon everyone else that they know within that neighborhood. Not to do so is considered extremely rude.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The birth and death rates in Suriname are lower than the average for Latin America as a whole. Life expectancy is 70 years for men and 76 for women, one of the highest in Latin America.

The gross national product (GNP) suffered a sharp decline during the troubles of the 1980s because of political instability caused by military coups. It was the ensuing reign of terror against the Maroon uprising that led to Dutch and American

aid being withdrawn. The loss of one-fifth of its GNP caused havoc in the country's economy.

Since then, the GNP has nonetheless become one of the highest in South America. Health is generally good, although many doctors emigrated to the Netherlands after independence. The majority of the populations have health insurance. The state provides to the unemployed and workers in the informal sector with free medical care once they have obtained a "certificate of poverty" from the government.

There is a poor transport infrastructure, with only 25% of the roads paved and fewer than 160 km (100 mi) of railways. Navigable rivers and canals are important for freight and passenger transport.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Maroon men are close to their children, passing on ritual knowledge to their sons and playing an active role in the raising of the family. Many of the men have more than one wife, though few have more than three wives at a time. Care of the children is entrusted to one parent rather than two, and children spend their first four to six years with the mother. Many are then given to the father of another relative, and there may be further shifts at later ages in order to accommodate the child's developing needs, or changes in the parents' marital status or residence patterns.

### 11 CLOTHING

Many of the Javanese women in Suriname still wear sarongs as they would in Indonesia, while the Creole women continue to wear the *kotomissie* traditional costume and the *angisa*, the handkerchief.

### 12 FOOD

The food of Suriname reflects the ethnic diversity of the country. There are the *warungs*—Javanese food stalls serving *bami goreng* (fried noodles) and *nasi goreng* (fried rice). Creole food uses tubers, such as cassava and sweet potatoes, and plantains with chicken and fish, including shrimp.

Rice is the staple diet for most people. There is also *pom*, which is a purée of the taro root, a relative of cassava, which is tastily spiced and served with *kip* (chicken). *Moksie alesie* is a rice dish with meat, chicken, white beans, tomatoes, peppers, and spices.

### 13 EDUCATION

Suriname's education system is modeled on that of the Netherlands, and Dutch is the language of instruction. Education is free and compulsory from the age of 6 years until 12 years. Most students leaving primary education continue on into secondary school, while higher education is provided by the government at the Anton de Kom University, which has schools of law, medicine, social sciences, economics, and engineering. Literacy rates are high, about 89% for both men and women.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among the Maroon tribes, children are expected to learn or participate in the world of artistic production, performance, and appreciation from a very early age. Many of the Maroons' huts display the fine woodcarvings for which they are famous and that adorn furniture, tools, and boots. They also carve



*Diners at a lodge on Kumalu Island, Suriname. Surinamese cuisine reflects the ethnic diversity of the population, which includes Javanese and Creole influences. (Anne Kalosh)*

their drums, which must never be touched by any female. These drums are used to accompany skillful and intense dancing during the dance feasts.

At night in the capital city, Paramaribo, one will hear in the distance the mellow sounds of metallic music. This is the famous traditional "gamelan" music played by the Javanese to accompany their dances.

Hindu weddings and religious plays are elaborately ceremonial and make use of exquisite costumes. The cosmopolitan mix of the country means that everyone, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, frequently attends these ceremonies.

### 15 WORK

Much of the farmland has fallen fallow as a result of the civil war between the government and the Maroons during their uprising. Low wages and sharp price increases (tenfold for gasoline) set off a series of strikes in post offices, banks, and offices early in 1993. Many families depend on relatives in the Netherlands who send home money. The Asian Indians are mostly small farmers, while the Creoles are concentrated in retail, politics, and the professions in urban areas. The Javanese work mainly on Dutch-owned plantations.

In 1975 approximately 40,000 Surinamese fled to Amsterdam, expecting racial unrest with independence. That exodus continued throughout the 1980s as nepotism, corruption, and lack of central planning hindered economic development. To-

day there are some 200,000 Surinamese living in Holland—almost a third of Suriname's population.

The majority of Surinamese work for the government or in the service sector, such as banking, insurance, education, and medical institutions. Others supplement their incomes by working illegally in neighboring Guyana and French Guiana. There are no unemployment benefits or other social provisions, and the unemployed must obtain a "certificate of poverty" to receive free medical care.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is a popular game played in towns and villages everywhere, and a great hero of the game is Ruud Gullit, of Suriname descent, who went on to become the captain of the Dutch national team. Another popular sport is swimming, and the country took great pride when Anthony Nesty won a gold medal for Suriname in the 100-meter butterfly event at the 1988 Olympic Games.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

A distinctive pastime practiced throughout Suriname are the birdsong competitions held in parks and public plazas on Sundays and holidays. People carrying their songbird (usually a small black tua-tua) in a cage are a frequent sight on the streets of Paramaribo as they set off for a training session or simply to take the bird for a stroll.

Young people enjoy outings, sporting events, and the cinema, as well as dancing.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Afro-centered culture of the Maroons makes a distinctive contribution to the arts and crafts of the country's museums and galleries in the form of woodcarvings and sculpture.

The Hindu and Javanese cultures are reflected in their religious festivals, dress, and ceremonies.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Certain parts of the interior are still off-limits to visitors as they are controlled by groups of armed rebels. The violent reprisals inflicted on the Maroon villages during the war drove many refugees across the border into French Guiana where they were put into camps. Since the signing of a peace treaty, the French authorities have been persuading or compelling the refugees to return to Suriname, increasing tension in some war-devastated areas.

Meanwhile, the government has been forced to take action to try to resolve its continuing economic crisis. Inflation was around 54% by mid 1993 and was heading towards 100%.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although the country ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993, there are still discriminatory laws in effect. Although article eight of the constitution protects against sexual discrimination, daily realities show that women still have a long way to go before gender equality is achieved.

Gender policy is embodied in the 2006–2010 Integral Gender Action Plan. The main policy priorities include institutional arrangements for improved gender policy development, poverty reduction from a gender perspective, macroeconomic

planning to increase the participation of women in the labor market, equal participation in decision-making, and the development of legal and policy instruments that enhance human rights.

An increasing problem is the AIDS epidemic affecting the Surinamese. Poverty, especially among women, is one of the main driving forces behind the epidemic. Women comprise almost half of the total population with HIV and there has been a clear and alarming trend in greater numbers of young women becoming infected with HIV. Suriname is one of the Caribbean countries in which newly infected women are significantly outnumbering newly infected men. In 2000–2001, women account for 63% of the HIV positive in the age group of 15–19 years old, 81% in the age group 20–24 years old, and 62% in the age group 25–29 years old.

Regarding politics, the average participation of women in the various government bodies, from the national assembly to local councils, has gradually increased from 12% in 1988 to 18% in 1996. As of 2008, there are 13 women in the 51-seat national assembly, and the cabinet includes three female ministers. In 2001 the first female judge joined the Court of Justice and in 2006 a woman was appointed head clerk of parliament. However, senior positions in business, unions, and the media remain firmly in the hands of men.

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—Reviewed by C. Vergara

## SWEDISH AMERICANS

For more information on Swedish history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Swedes**.

### OVERVIEW

In the 1600s, Sweden attempted to establish a colony called New Sweden in North America near today's Wilmington, Delaware. It was the first permanent settlement in the Delaware River Valley. New Sweden was never very successful, however, and it was soon abandoned. Some 200 years passed before Swedes began to immigrate to the United States on a large scale. Then, they came en masse. Between 1851 and 1929, 1.2 million Swedish immigrants entered the United States. Only Ireland and Norway (and perhaps Iceland) lost a higher percentage of their population to America.

Several factors in Sweden encouraged emigration. Political upheavals, a repressive government, religious oppression (it was illegal to belong to any but the official Lutheran Church), a rigid class system, and mandatory military service all drove Swedes to look elsewhere for more freedom. Above and beyond these concerns, however, were economic considerations. Sweden's population, largely rural, had expanded beyond available farmland. Industrialization had not yet taken hold, so there were few jobs to be had off the farm, even in Stockholm. A series of droughts and floods created years of famine, and a soaring inflation rate made what little cash people had worth less and less.

The first wave of Swedish immigration to the United States, beginning in 1851, consisted largely of entire farming families. They settled in the Midwest, where the terrain was much like what they had known in Sweden. At that time, the United States was expanding westward and promoted settlement by offering acreage at low prices. The Homestead Act of 1862, which offered free land to those willing to farm it for a certain number of years, drew huge numbers of Swedes to the United States. The descendants of some of the original Swedish American homesteaders continue to work those farms today.

A second major wave of Swedish immigrants to the United States from the late 1870s to early 1890s included many more urban Swedes who settled in cities and industrial areas of New York State and New England. Others joined earlier immigrants in Chicago. Swedish farmers continued to immigrate as well and began spreading westward, all the way to California. A number of Swedish Mormons, who had been converted in Sweden by Mormon missionaries, settled in Utah, the center of the Mormon community. Today, 6% of the Utah population is Swedish American, making it the third most Swedish state in the Union (after Minnesota and Nebraska).

The last major wave of Swedish American immigration began in the early 1900s and lasted until the stock market crash of 1929 (minus the World War I years [1914–18]). With the onset of the Great Depression, economic opportunities were no better in the United States than in Sweden, and many of Sweden's repressive government measures had been lifted. There was no longer any compelling reason to leave Sweden, therefore, and emigration virtually ceased. Since 1930, only a very small number of Swedes have immigrated to the United States.

The Swedish American population, according to the year 2000 U.S. Census, was 3,998,310, or about 1.4% of the total U.S. population. Swedish ancestry was fifteenth among the largest ancestry groups enumerated in the 2000 census. The highest density of Swedish Americans is in Minnesota, where almost 10% of the population declared themselves of Swedish ancestry on the 2000 U.S. Census. Over 40% of Swedish Americans live in the states of California (459,897), Minnesota (486,507), Illinois (303,044), Washington (213,013), and Michigan (161,301). The states with the highest percentages of Swedish Americans are Minnesota (10% Swedish), North Dakota (5%), Nebraska (5%), Utah (4.3%), South Dakota (3.9%), and Washington (3.6%). The populations of Wyoming, Montana, Iowa, and Oregon are all more than 3% Swedish American.

The rate of intermarriage with people of other ethnic backgrounds has been fairly low for Swedish Americans. In 1980, almost 30% of Swedish Americans claimed pure Swedish ancestry—a very high percentage considering how few new immigrants had arrived since 1930. Because of their relative isolation in Swedish American farming communities, and the low rate of ethnic intermarriage, Swedish Americans retained their ethnic language longer than many other American immigrant groups. However, Americanization eventually took its toll and fluency in Swedish was largely lost.

During the hyperpatriotic hysteria of the World War I years in the United States, many Swedish Americans chose to hide their ethnicity and become as “American” as possible. Parents spoke only English with their children at home. They Americanized their names: Svenson became Swanson, Nilsson became Nelson, and Bengtson became Benson. In 1925, the Augustana Synod (the largest Lutheran denomination, or any other denomination, among Swedish Americans) began conducting its church services in English, much to the chagrin of conservative Swedish Americans. By 1935, all Swedish American Lutheran church services were in English.

The majority of Swedish Americans are Lutheran, though a number are Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Episcopal. Many Janssonists, a revivalist Lutheran sect, immigrated to the United States in the 1800s, along with converted Mormons. The Augustana Synod, a conservative form of Lutheranism, claims the most Swedish American members. The second largest Swedish American denomination is the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America, formed in 1885 by the merger of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Synod and the Asgar Synod. In 1960, the Augustana Synod united with the United Lutheran Synod (a German denomination) to form the Lutheran Church of America (LCA). In 1987, the LCA and the American Lutheran Church merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Many Swedish Americans continue to celebrate the traditional Swedish Christmas, beginning on December 13 with St. Lucia's Day. On Christmas Eve, they serve the traditional foods of *lutefisk* (dried cod soaked in lye) and rice porridge. Another traditional Swedish food still enjoyed by Swedish Americans is *limpa*, a type of rye bread.

Swedish Americans have made countless contributions to American culture, beginning with the introduction of the log cabin in pioneer days. Early Swedish immigrants were mostly peasant farmers to whom higher education had been denied in the class-oriented system of Sweden. They were thrilled, therefore, to have access to education in America and took full ad-



vantage of it. The Swedish American Lutheran Church founded a number of colleges that continue to offer high-quality education today, including Augustana College and Theological Seminary, founded in 1860 in Rock Island, Illinois; Gustavus Adolphus College (1862, St. Peter, Minnesota); Bethel Institute (1871, St. Paul, Minnesota); Bethany College (1881, Lindsborg, Kansas); North Park College (1891, Chicago, Illinois); and Upsala College (1893, East Orange, New Jersey).

More than 300 Swedish American writers were publishing their works in the early 20th century, but few achieved national prominence. The best-known Swedish American writers are poet Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) and science fiction writer Ray Bradbury (b.1920). In visual arts, sculptor Carl Milles (1875–1955) designed a number of public fountains in both Sweden and the United States, including the huge *Meeting of the Waters* in St. Louis, Missouri, which celebrates the convergence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Successful Swedish American actors include Greta Garbo (born Greta Louisa Gustafson, 1905–1990), Ingrid Bergman (1915–1982), Ann-Margret (Olsson, b.1941), and Candice Bergen (b.1946) and her father, ventriloquist Edgar Bergen (1903–1978). Contemporary actors Melanie Griffith, Uma Thurman, Kirsten Dunst, Edie Falco, and Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal all have at least one Swedish parent or grandparent. Swedish Americans who have been successful in the field of music include Kris Kristofferson and rapper MC Lars.

A number of Swedish Americans have also made great contributions in the areas of business, industry, science, and politics. Earl Warren (1891–1974), half-Swedish American and

half-Norwegian American, served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1953 to 1969, establishing himself early as a powerful liberal voice when he ruled against the racial segregation of schools. Another Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Swedish American descent was William Rehnquist, a strong conservative, who took office in 1986 and served until his death in 2005. He is perhaps best known for presiding over the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton and the *Bush v. Gore* decision in the 2000 U.S. presidential election. U.S. Representative John Anderson (b.1922) from Illinois ran unsuccessfully as a third-party candidate in the 1980 U.S. presidential election. Joe (Häglund) Hill (1879–1915) gained attention as a labor union activist in the early 1900s. Hill was convicted of murder and executed in 1915, although many believed he had been framed.

Swedish American John Ericsson (1803–1889) designed the Union Army ship *Monitor* that defeated the Confederate ship *Merrimack* in 1862 during the American Civil War. Pioneer aviator Charles Lindbergh (1902–1974), even before his child was kidnapped, was perhaps one of the most famous Swedish Americans. Scientist Gustavus August Eisen (1847–1940), who made numerous contributions in botany, zoology, and archaeology, is most remembered for founding the Sequoia National Park in California in 1890. Chester Carlson (1906–1968) invented xerography in 1938 and went on to found the Xerox Corporation. Glenn Seaborg (1912–1999) discovered plutonium and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1951. Business entrepreneur Walter Hoving (1897–1989) served as chair of the board of Tiffany & Company and as president

of the Lord & Taylor clothing company; and Carl A. Swanson (d.1949), whose company C.A. Swanson & Sons invented TV dinners in 1952, immigrated to the United States from Sweden.

Swedish immigrants adapted quickly and well to life in the United States, lending their skills in farming, fishing, logging, mining, and construction to the building of America. In the 21st century, they are part of mainstream America and suffer few, if any, problems unique to their community. There was a great deal of difference between the experiences of single young men and women who emigrated from Sweden to the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Immigrants typically came from rural farms in Sweden, and men continued to work as farmers in the United States. Single young women, however, were highly sought after by middle-class American families to work as domestic helpers. They lived in the homes of their employers and therefore had access to middle-class accoutrements and education. Their employers treated them with respect, their workload was much lighter than farm labor, and they were paid regularly and well. Swedish women, therefore, became “Americanized” much more quickly than their male counterparts. This caused some conflict between the young Swedish Americans, with women viewing the still-rural men as uncouth and men viewing the citified women as pretentious. But these men and women still tended to marry each other rather than those of other ethnicities and so created a blend of the women’s new American ways and the men’s more traditional Swedish family values. Within a short time, most Swedish Americans who returned to Sweden for a visit quickly came back to the United States, having grown accustomed to the more egalitarian culture of the United States.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# TENETEHARA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Guajajara and Temb 

**LOCATION:** Brazil

**POPULATION:** 13,000 (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Guajajara (Tup -Guaran  family)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Tenetehara, known also as Guajajara and Temb , are a numerous Brazilian indigenous peoples. Tenetehara lands are located at the eastern margin of the Amazon region, in Maranh o State. During the last 400 years, Tenetehara contact with another cultures, especially whites, has been marked by tragedy. In 1901 a revolt against Capuchin missionaries provoked the last war against Amerindians in Brazilian history.

The Tenetehara tribes seem to have inhabited the northeastern Brazilian region since pre-Columbian times. The first recorded encounter with the Christian world dates from the beginning of the 17th century, though it is possible they had contact with the Portuguese slave-traders who used to roam the region searching for Amerindians to capture. By the middle of the 17th century, three separate expeditions were organized by Jesuits to find Tenetehara and bring them to their missions. Various mission villages were established with some degree of success. The Colony of Janu rio, established in 1854, had a population of 120 Tenetehara 20 years later. At the same time, Neo-Brazilians started advancing into Tenetehara territory, a trend that has continued into the early 2000s.

Although the first 50 years of contact between the Tenetehara and Europeans were marked by slave raids, massacres, and epidemics, the Tenetehara made adjustments in their culture and society to changing external circumstances and survived. The story of the meeting between the Tenetehara and the Neo-Brazilians has been generally peaceful, except for several sporadic uprisings. The result of the contact between neighbors becomes evident when elements from one culture, such as clothes, tools, and myths, are found integrated into the other.

Agriculture is the principal subsistence activity of the Tenetehara. Among a wide range of crops, this Amerindian tribe grows manioc, rice, squash, watermelon, beans, sesame, and peanuts. The communities that dwell on the river coast commonly practice fishing. The most common catches are *car * (*Geophagus brasiliensis*), *casculo* (*Loricaridii* fam.), *lampreia* (*Petromyzon fluviatilis*), and *tra ra* (*Hoplias malabaricus*). Hunting has become a less producing activity because of competition with whites for hunting areas and the spatial limitations of indigenous lands. Collecting fruit and vegetables is still practiced by almost all Tenetehara.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tenetehara live in the north of Brazil, in the states of Par  and Maranh o, east of the Amazon River. They live close to rivers, surrounded by trees and palms in the dense tropical forest. The palms, especially the babass , are quite useful as their leaves and nuts provide shelter and nourishment. The nuts can also be sold to outsiders. From December through June, everything is wet: it is the rainy season. Then comes an equally long period that offers completely the opposite: the dry season. In



the past, the Tenetehara had sufficient territory to move their settlements when the gardens were used up, every five or six years. Early explorers noticed that Tenetehara villages tended to be large, with each house holding 10 or more related families, under a powerful chief, usually a shaman. There are indications that the villages' average size was approximately 200 people.

Tenetehara people, as well as other Amerindian cultures, have faced the requirements imposed by modernity. In this sense, Tenetehara have adapted their economic organization by exchanging different goods, such as manioc flour, fur skins, babassu nuts, and carnauba, with other people and organizations in order to maintain their economic stability without breaking up the community organization. However, this type of reaction and adaptation goes against cultural tradition. For instance, when groups collect rubber for commercial firms, the gathering of this material obliges the tribe to split into family units and to spread over vast areas, which carries the risk of rupturing tribal bonds.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Guajajara language belongs to the Tupi-Guarani family and its most closely related languages are Asurini (of Tocantins), Avá (Canoeiro), Parakanã, Suruí (of Pará), Tapirapé, and Tembé. In the villages, Guajajara is spoken as the first language, while Portuguese, which is understood by the majority, functions as the lingua franca. The socio-linguistic situation of the Guajajara who live in towns and cities is unknown.

The language of the Tenetehara is considered by grammarians to be unique because of the characteristic way in which the words are formed and put together. Those traits make it difficult for the language to be learned as a second language by adults whose first language is English or Spanish. To say, for example, "The woman ate the mango," the Tenetehara would say, "Eat woman mango;" "John killed Peter" would be "Kill John Peter."

### 4 FOLKLORE

In one Tenetehara myth, Maira stole fire from the vultures and hid it in the urucú wood so the Tenetehara could use this wood to make fire. Maira also gave the yucca and maize (corn) to them and then abandoned his wife, who was pregnant with his son, Maira-üra (üra is "son"). While she was searching for her husband, Maira's wife stayed one night in the house of Mukwüra and conceived a second time. She gave birth to twins, and they continued searching for Maira.

The other main Tenetehara hero is Tupan, the creator and protector. He was later identified with the Christian God by the missionaries, who emphasized his influence. Among some groups, Tupan was the "demon of thunder."

The Tenetehara also tell many animal stories. One tells about the difficulties of the Gamba when he tries to arrange a good marriage for his daughter. On one occasion she marries a wood tick, and Gamba tries to imitate his son-in-law by floating to the ground on a leaf from a treetop, only to fall hard to the ground.

### 5 RELIGION

With the exception of cultural heroes, Tenetehara supernatural beings are dangerous: Maranäüwa, the owner of the forest and animals that inhabit it, for instance, punishes Amerindians who needlessly kill some species, like white-lipped peccaries. Zuruparí, the forest demon, causes hunters to get lost in the forest and then kills them. Uwan, known also as Upóre and Uzare, is the spirit of the rivers and river animals and plants. He is also malignant and causes illnesses. These spirits, though often known by different names, are also part of Neo-Brazilian folklore.

Apart from the spirits, the Tenetehara also have to deal with ghosts (*azang*). Ghosts are the souls of people who died in adverse circumstances, such as from sorcery or by slowly wasting away, and also the souls of those that broke incest taboos during their life. They wander through the forests and appear in the shape of animals to hunters. They also haunt cemeteries and abandoned houses, so the Tenetehara avoid such places at night.

Because the supernatural world is so menacing, the Tenetehara need their shamans to protect them. A shaman can invoke the spirit that caused the problem in the first place, be possessed by it, and have its powers to solve the crisis. Each shaman can only call a number of spirits with which he is familiar; therefore, the more spirits he knows how to call, the more powerful he is.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are two major holidays celebrated by the Tenetehara: the Honey Festival and the Maize (Corn) Festival. The Honey Festival is held during the last days of the dry season, after months of collecting enough wild honey to last until the end of the

next season. During those collecting months, in the evenings, people gather to sing and bless the honey. As soon as the 20 to 30 gourd containers (each holding 1–2 liters or about 1–2 quarts) are filled, the leader sends out invitations to nearby villages. When the time comes, they sing the songs learned from the animals in mythical times and dance in circles while they drink honey mixed with water. The ceremony lasts as long as there is honey to drink.

Songs and dances are also the basic elements of the Maize Festival. It takes place during the rains of January through March, accompanying the growth of the maize. During the festival, the shamans conjure spirits that will protect the crop.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Through pregnancy and even after the birth of a child, a Tenetehara couple must observe a series of restrictions aimed at protecting the child. Most of these restrictions limit the variety of animals they are allowed to eat or hunt; the Tenetehara believe, for example, that killing a jaguar during pregnancy may cause the birth of an insane child. For the first 10 days after birth, the parents can only eat yucca flour, small fish, and roast maize (corn), drinking only water. And, they cannot have sexual relationships until the child is “hard,” at six months old.

Until the evening of the puberty ceremony, children are forbidden to eat some meats, like peccary, guariba monkey, wild goose, and various forest fowls. That night they are given official permission to eat such meats and have their first taste of them, as the men of the village would have been hunting during the previous days for the feast that follows the singing. Because of this, some outsiders called the Tenetehara puberty ceremony the Festival of Roasted Meat. In the past, adolescents of both sexes were isolated for 10 days, after which they would end the isolation by breaking the entrails of an agouti stretched across the door. The boy’s penis would have been then checked by the fathers in search of signs of masturbation and, if found, he would have been whipped. The girls were chased by the young men of the village from their doors to the stream or pool where they could have a bath.

Some of this has been lost. The boys are no longer isolated in most cases. The girls do spend some days lying in their hammocks or behind a palm-leaf screen and are still chased. For the ceremony, boys are painted red, and falcon feathers are glued on their chest and arms. The girls are painted black and, sometimes, white falcon feathers are glued to their hair. At dawn the ceremony begins, with songs and dances and shamans calling spirits.

After the puberty ceremony, the girl can consummate the marriage with her husband, who would have been living with her family since their marriage. There are no special wedding ceremonies: the young man simply moves into his father-in-law’s house. If the girl is not married yet, her father will find her a husband after the puberty ceremony. Monogamy is generally the rule.

The Tenetehara bury their dead in cemeteries outside the villages. The bodies are wrapped in mats made of babassú palm leaves or placed in boxes. It is reported that formerly they used to bury the first dead person in the house, and after the second death the house was destroyed.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Tenetehara culture and society has been modified through centuries of contact with the outside world. The result is a new culture and social system, a combination of aboriginal and borrowed elements. In 1855 a report from the Brazilian authorities described the inhabitants of some Tenetehara villages as “happily endowed for social life.” They were perceived as docile and industrious. The president of Maranhao then said that “these Indians like peace and work: they are docile, hospitable, and faithful.” Although they were deemed to be “almost white and intelligent,” the Tenetehara retained many aspects of their own culture, among them their sense of community. Their villages vary in size according to resources. If tensions arise between extended families, a group breaks off to form a new settlement where they carry out the cooperative economic and ceremonial activities of the society. Gardening and collecting are two of those cooperative activities that involve large extended families. Children often help when collecting babassú nuts. As for the children, they are loved passionately: corporal punishment or abuse of Tenetehara’s young is simply not tolerated.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The size of the villages varies enormously. Tenetehara villages can be composed by one family or can have as many as 400 inhabitants. The houses are occupied by nuclear families. Even though the communities use to maintain their independence, it is also common that the existence of various kinds of kinship among them originated by marriage and ritual. The most important unit is the extended family, which is composed by a number of nuclear families unified by kinship ties. These social units are basically composed by a group of women related by kinship and headed by a man. There are no clans or lineages. Heads of extended families try to keep as many women as possible with them, even by adopting daughters of deceased men. They try to arrange marriages for these girls and women with the aim to attract sons-in-law who should live for some time with their fathers-in-law, rendering various kinds of service.

A Tenetehara village can be as simple as two rows of houses with a wide street between them. Rows are added as the village grows. In the past, a large ceremonial house could be found situated at the end of the village street. Some of the ceremonial houses were erected just for the Honey Feast, during which the villagers danced inside, and then they were destroyed.

A typical Tenetehara house is rectangular in shape, with the walls and roofs covered with babassú palm leaves. There are no inner walls, even if more than one nuclear family lives in the house. Each family (husband, wife, and their children) has its own fire and hangs its hammocks around it, thus creating their own space within the house. Their belongings are hung on the upright supports against the walls, and sometimes there are shelves near the roof to store maize (corn), yucca, or farming instruments.

The traditional Tenetehara doctor is the shaman. Shamans can cure illness by invoking the powers of the spirits that caused the illness and then removing the cause by sucking or massaging the patient. The cure involves songs and dances, the shaman smokes large cigars, and when he is finally possessed by a spirit or a ghost, he shows by his actions which one it is.



## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Tenetehara basic social groupings are extended families and widely extended bilateral kin groups. Families are the organizers of ceremonial and cooperative economic activities. Although there are indications of infanticide (only in the case of twins, as they are believed to be the children of dangerous supernatural beings) and knowledge of some formulas to produce abortion, the Tenetehara generally do not limit family size. During pregnancy, long taboos are imposed on the parents, but despite this discomfort, the Tenetehara like large families. Men are proud to father several children, and women are eager to bear children. According to the American anthropologist Charles Wagley, this desire for large families was one of the reasons for their survival. Many Tenetehara died from new diseases, war, and slavery when contact was first established with Europeans. But, new babies were born and replaced their population until they adjusted to the new circumstances.

## 11 CLOTHING

Covering the body is one of the habits the Tenetehara acquired through contact with other cultures, particularly Christians. Nudity was traditionally the rule. Then they adopted not just clothes from Neo-Brazilians but also the socially attributed values that accompany them: it is prestigious to have new or better clothes than other people. Women always wear skirts now, and men wear pants and shirts.

## 12 FOOD

The Tenetehara are tropical forest horticulturalists, who practice the slash-and-burn system. The staple food of the region is yucca or cassava, which is used to make bread and beverages. Maize (corn) and peanuts were already traditional crops by the time steel instruments were introduced, tools that made it easier to grow new plants, such as rice, bananas, and lemons. As their villages have traditionally been situated near rivers and streams, fishing adds protein to their diets. They also hunt tapir, deer, peccary, monkeys, and various forest fowls for their meat and collect forest fruits and nuts. The Tenetehara drink *chicha*, a fermented alcoholic drink made from various plants.

## 13 EDUCATION

Many Tenetehara are bilingual. They have learned Portuguese, and most of them still speak their own language as well. Being able to communicate clearly with the Brazilians is considered very important, not only to carry out trade, find work, and take part in the national life, but also to defend their rights when needed. As some have lost their own language, there are already projects to forward bilingual education in schools where Amerindian attendance is high. There are some primary schools provided by the government agency FUNAI, but secondary education is scarcer. Many schools are still run and funded by missionaries, as they were in the first stages of colonization. As to the level of education achieved, it is difficult to generalize, but as the Tenetehara are one of the tribes that adapted best to the change of circumstances brought about by European settlers, formal education is not alien and, when possible, is readily attained.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Singing and dancing are not only the Tenetehara's most favorite pastimes, but they also play a central role in their ceremonial rites. The Tenetehara are very fond of music, and some of their songs are considered by many to be the most beautiful of the region. Each ceremony has its own particular songs, and they should not be sung out of season because it would upset the spirits. The songs of the Honey Festival are believed to have been brought to the tribe by a young Tenetehara shaman who visited the Village of the Jaguar during the festival of the animals when each animal sang a song.

To be a shaman, it is essential to have a good voice. At shamanistic sessions, the shaman sings the group of songs attributed to the spirit he is calling until the spirit itself enters his body and sings through him. When possessed, the shaman dances, imitating the animal of the spirit inside him; e.g., a toad spirit will make him hop. Meanwhile, men and women dance, usually stamping their feet on one spot. In some ceremonies, they form lines facing each other and approach and retreat. In the Maize (Corn) Festival dance, they make a large circle and move with a skipping step.

## 15 WORK

Agriculture is a central activity for the Tenetehara. The produce not only provides food for the families but also can be traded for manufactured articles. The task used to be divided between females and males according to the product. Women planted and harvested cotton and peanuts, while men cultivated yucca, maize (corn), and other plants. Nowadays, men do most of the planting and the women help when required. The land is cleared and the dry vegetation burned to create a garden, which is said to be owned by the head of the family but is cultivated and used by the entire extended family. The gardens are planted throughout December using metal tools, such as steel axes, hoes, and bush knives, obtained through trade with Neo-Brazilians.

As with agriculture, hunting and collecting wild foods have a dual purpose: complementing their own diets and being used for trade. Babassú nuts and copaiba oil are good products to sell in order to buy clothes, guns, fishhooks, and salt. Hunting is nowadays carried out with shotguns, when available, or with bows and arrows. The skins can be sold to Neo-Brazilians and the meat kept for consumption. The Tenetehara fish with hooks and lines, though poisoning drying pools with *timbó* is also known.

## 16 SPORTS

No specifically Tenetehara sports have been noted. However, having been close to European and Brazilian culture, popular sports have become familiar. Boys play tops and marbles in the same manner as the Neo-Brazilian children of the region. Many Brazilian Amerindians are very keen on soccer and play it frequently.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Singing and dancing are favorite pastimes among the Tenetehara. New tunes learned from their fellow country people are welcome. But, singing their own native songs is a pleasure in which the Tenetehara often indulge. Many evenings throughout the year, men and women gather for a *zingareté*, which

means “to sing much,” and enjoy their secular songs just for the fun of it. No native alcoholic beverages are known, but they do buy the usual from Neo-Brazilians. On the other hand, the smoke of native tobacco and hashish has lingered over many a zingareté, and other activities, since long ago.

The Tenetehara also hold parties in which some play bamboo flutes and skin drums, and couples dance to Neo-Brazilian rhythms, like the samba. Sometimes they hire Neo-Brazilian musicians to play their instruments.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Apart from their leather headbands and wands made of wood with tail feathers of the red macaw, the rest of the Tenetehara crafts are basically necessary utensils made of available raw materials. This does not mean that they do not decorate what they make, for aesthetic reasons or to distinguish one object from the rest. Their baskets, for example, have woven geometric designs. They are made principally with a split flexible creeper, woven also into round sieves, for straining yucca flour, and flexible *tipitis*, which are used to squeeze the poisonous juice from the bitter manioc (cassava). The Tenetehara also weave native cotton to make hammocks.

Gourds are used to make eating utensils. The gourd is boiled and then allowed to dry. Then a single hole is cut to make a jug for drinking water or wild honey, or the gourd is cut in half and the interior mass scraped out to make a bowl. The inside of the bowl is stained black, and the outside is decorated with geometric incisions and black lines.

Pottery has been largely abandoned as the Tenetehara can now buy metal utensils. Pottery used to be simple, decorated only with incised designs. Their bows and arrows are made of pau d'arco wood, with bowstrings of twined tocum fibers. Both bow and arrows are 1 m (3 ft) long, and today the arrows have steel points.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The northeastern tribes of Brazil have seen their land swallowed up by colonizers in recent years. It is history repeating itself, only this time the many colonizers do not come from lands across the ocean but from Brazil itself. Although the Brazilian government has an organization that takes care of the Amerindian population (FUNAI), another body, the INCRA, has opened the region for settlement. Harried and hemmed in by settlers, the Tenetehara, along with other regional tribes, are running the risk of social breakdown once again.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The shift in emphasis in the economic life of the Tenetehara from the production of use-values to the production of exchange-values has been accompanied by a change in the division of labor, so that the basic economy based upon agriculture, while formerly controlled by the women, is now in the hands of the men. Males formerly planted the chief staple, manioc, leaving flour-preparation and supplementary horticulture to the women. Today, most of the trading and agriculture is man's work and individual gardens are developed as extra holdings. However, a family preference for girls, the addition of a male worker to the family at marriage, women's initiative in sexual affairs, and the earlier, pre-adolescent entrance into household duties emphasize the older patterns of life.

Although a revolution has occurred in the sexual division of labor, the Tenetehara women have preferential treatment within the tribe. Women are revered because they form the core of extended families and they are in charge of attracting wealth-creating males, who have to leave their own families to join that of their wives just at the beginning of their productive years. This marital rule makes boys a burden to the community in which they were born because they will not contribute to the group's economy. After looking at the diagrams of extended families and finding a preponderance of females over males in the contemporary generation, anthropologists have suggested that Tenetehara may engage in indirect male infanticide. In addition, women's powerful position within Tenetehara society makes them aggressive when it comes to sexual relations.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# TLINGIT

**LOCATION:** United States (Alaska)

**POPULATION:** 17,200 enrolled members

**LANGUAGE:** English; Tlingit

**RELIGION:** Christianity; native Tlingit

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tlingit (meaning “the people”) is the name given to a native group of the Northwest Coast, whose original homeland was located in the Alaskan panhandle. With the exception of a part of the Prince of Wales Island, the thirteen tribes that make up the Tlingit group occupied the land of the panhandle south of Yakutat Bay. The Tlingit developed as a coastal culture, well adapted to the rugged, heavily forested coastal areas that they inhabited.

Beginning in the 18th century, the Tlingit tribes experienced frequent conflicts with the early Russian fur traders who first entered the area at that time. In 1799, Russian adventurers built a fort on one of the islands that makes up the southeastern archipelago. But three years later, in 1802, they were driven out by Tlingit warriors. Some time later, however, a Russian trader by the name of Aleksandr Andreyevich Baranov was successful in recapturing the fort. Baranov turned the fort into a trading post that, over time, grew into the present-day city of Sitka. By 1867 the United States had won control over Alaska and opened Tlingit lands to settlers and prospectors searching for gold.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the Tlingit, like other Alaskan natives, have fought for their civil rights and for control over the natural resources of their ancestral lands. In 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act transferred about 100 million acres of land back to native Alaskans, including the Tlingit, who were organized into a regional corporation called Sealaska, with the title to 330,000 acres of land and 660,000 acres of mineral rights. Today Tlingit work in industry, business, government, and the professions. In 1994 the Tlingit gained media attention when two Tlingit youths from Alaska who had attacked a pizza delivery man in Washington state were turned over to an ad hoc tribal court, which imposed a traditional punishment of banishment to an isolated island off the coast of Alaska.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In the 18th century, at the time of the initial European entry into the area, the total number of members of the thirteen Tlingit tribes was estimated to be about 10,000. Over the course of the next one hundred years, their numbers dwindled; at one time only about 4,500 remained. As of the 2000 U.S. Census, the number of tribally enrolled Tlingit in the United States was 17,200. Almost all contemporary Tlingit live in the state of Alaska. Many of their original villages on the southeastern Alaska coast between Ketchikan and Yakutat are still populated. This is an area of rugged mountains with snow-capped peaks, offshore islands, and plentiful streams.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language of the Tlingit Indians belongs to the Dene linguistic family. Dene is the largest language family in North

America and includes Yak, Tlingit, and Athabaskan. Tlingit is a highly endangered language, meaning that younger people are no longer learning Tlingit as a mother tongue, or first language. The best estimates for number of speakers of Tlingit in Canada and the United States is between 300 and 500 (in 2008).

In 2008, a proposal to link the Yeniseian languages of central Siberia and the Na-Dene languages of northwestern North America into one large language family was presented by Edward Vajda of Western Washington University.

The Yeniseian language family, which only has a few remaining living languages, did not show any genetic relationship with any of the other language families of the Old World. The most well-known language of this family is Ket, which has only about 200 speakers. Many different attempts to link Ket to the languages of the Old World have been proposed during the latter half of the twentieth century. Vajda's proposal has been supported by many linguists who specialize in the Na-Dene languages as well as the Siberian languages.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The most important character in Tlingit mythology is the trickster figure Raven, who is also considered the ancestor of the Tlingit. The power of animal spirits in general and communication between the spirits of animals and humans are also themes in Tlingit myths, as is reincarnation. Traditional beliefs encompassed an afterlife spent in one of two domains, corresponding roughly to the Judeo-Christian Heaven and Hell: *Kiwa-a* was the heaven for the virtuous, while those who had been morally deficient went to a place of torment called *Ketl-kiwa*, or Dog Heaven.

A common Tlingit folk belief was that if a girl going through puberty looked at the sky, she would cause a storm. A special hood with tassels was worn by girls of this age to shroud their eyes.

## 5 RELIGION

Like the other native peoples of the Northwest Coast, many Tlingit belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Tlingit forebears were converted the Orthodox Church by the Russian missionaries who followed the traders that arrived in the area in the 18th century.

The traditional religion of the Tlingit, like that of most hunting and gathering cultures, was based on animism, the belief that spirits—which the Tlingit called *jek*—inhabit people, animals, and objects in the natural world. They believed that the environment can be influenced in magical ways, either for good or ill, by human intervention, a belief that led to the development of a whole constellation of customs and taboos intended to ensure prosperity and prevent disaster. Many such customs and taboos were designed to placate and mollify the souls of the animals that were the chief prey of the Tlingit. The Tlingit are also thought to have believed in a creator, called *Kah-shu-goon-yah*, who controlled both the heavens and the earth, and whose name—which means “divisible-rich-man”—was always whispered rather than uttered aloud. Each Tlingit clan had a totem animal with which it identified, and erected totem poles as tributes to their totem animals. The Tlingit also paid homage to their ancestors and included them as elements of totem pole designs.

The most important human figure in Tlingit religious belief was the shaman, who served many vital roles within Tlingit society. The Tlingit shaman could be either male or female and functioned as priest, doctor, and counselor to his or her people.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Today many Tlingit observe the holidays of the Russian Orthodox calendar. Within traditional Tlingit society, by far the single most important occasion was a gathering called a *potlatch*, a communal ceremony that centered on feasting and gift-giving and that accompanied almost every major event in Tlingit life. A *potlatch* might be given by a retiring chief in honor of the occasion of his role being taken over by a new leader. *Potlatches* were held to celebrate birthdays and to legitimize adoptions and marriages. Sometimes a *potlatch* would be held for no other reason than to demonstrate in no uncertain terms the wealth and status of the host or to make a good impression on guests or visiting dignitaries. At other times, a Tlingit might host a *potlatch* as a means of saving face and restoring dignity following an embarrassing public failure or a personal disappointment.

The *potlatch* is a form of redistributive exchange. Redistributive exchange involves a complex level of social organization within a society. Modern taxation is an example of redistributive exchange. In redistributive exchange, a centralized authority accumulates wealth and then through culturally defined rules, distributes that wealth to members of the society. These traditional *potlatches* were later replaced by “destructive *potlatches*” that developed after European colonization of the region. In particular, it was the availability of trade goods that were incorporated into the system of Tlingit wealth that changed the nature and structure of the *potlatch*. The destructive *potlatch* was an ostentatious display of wealth and prestige, which called for as much showing off as possible, the entire point of the ritual being to waste or destroy publicly as much of the host’s wealth as possible. The goal was to demonstrate that the host was so wealthy that even such large-scale waste could not damage his economic situation. The *potlatch* simply served to establish and reinforce his standing within the community. The host of a *potlatch* might throw precious oil on the fire until the flames leap out to singe the surrounding guests. A wealthy chief might kill a valuable slave with a special club known as a “slave killer” and then fling the slave’s scalp to his rival. Many beautiful things were made by Tlingit craftspeople simply in order that a chief or other notable person might give them away or destroy them at a destructive *potlatch*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life events of the Tlingit were traditionally marked by the *potlatch* (also called a *koolex*). Such events included the transfer of ancestral names to children; the point at which a daughter became eligible for marriage; a son’s coming-of-age (also marked by the erection of a memorial totem-pole and the construction of a new house); a marriage; and funeral rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Unlike that of most other American Indian groups, Tlingit society evolved as an aristocracy. At the top of the Tlingit social ladder were the chiefs, who were considered to be of royal blood. Directly beneath the chiefs in rank and privilege were



members of the nobility, and beneath them were the working-class (or common) people, the majority of the population. At the bottom of Tlingit society was a slave class made up of members of other tribes who had been captured in war. Tlingit society equated wealth with the right to rule; chieftainship, along with the rights, advantages, and prerogatives that accompany it, was passed on from one generation to the next of the same wealthy family. Tlingit chiefs and nobles controlled all the tribe’s wealth, determined the social rank of the members of the tribe, laid claim to the best fishing and hunting areas, and maintained the exclusive right to practice certain highly esteemed crafts.

Even today, class and social status are important in Tlingit villages.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Tlingit have three advocacy organizations that promote their culture, rights, and welfare. The Alaska Native Brotherhood is concerned with cultural preservation; the Tlingit-Haida Association (Haida are a neighboring tribe) address housing and other social welfare issues; and the corporation Sealaska lobbies for economic and political power. Some Tlingit villages have their own city officials, police forces, and school boards.

The Tlingit have access to, and use, modern medical services. Traditionally, they had a system of folk medicine that included principles of hygiene and a knowledge of herbs. When necessary, they consulted with a special healer who had more advanced knowledge of medical practices.



*Reggie Peterson, Ben Didrickson, and John Nielsen, wearing Tlingit clan hats, watch as ceremonial objects are presented during the Kaagwaantaan 100th Anniversary Commemoration of "The Last Potlatch" in Sitka, Alaska. The two-day gathering brought together Tlingits from the Southeast Alaskan towns and villages as well as objects on loan from as far away as the University of Pennsylvania Art Museum. (AP Images/Daily Sitka Sentinel, James Poulson)*

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

Arranged marriages were formerly the norm, but this practice continues to diminish during the early 21st century. Divorce was rare in traditional Tlingit culture, as it was considered an affront to the clans of both the husband and wife. The Tlingit had an elaborate system of kinship by which their society was divided into two halves, or moieties, called Raven-Crow and Eagle-Wolf. Although the various rules and prohibitions attached to this system are still upheld theoretically, in practice they are often broken, and its terminology has fallen into disuse among the younger Tlingit. A child's lineage is linked to the maternal rather than the paternal side of the family, so maternal relatives traditionally played an important role in a child's upbringing. Traditionally, sons learned how to hunt, fish, and fight from their maternal uncles; daughters learned domestic skills from their maternal grandmother and aunts, who also prepared them for childbearing and taught them the history of their clan. The family elders still hold a high level of respect and influence among the Tlingit, including those who are college educated.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

In the summer, Tlingit men traditionally wore no clothes, or only a breechcloth made of animal skin. In the winter, they

wore shirts with trousers or leggings made from deer, caribou, or other animal skins. These were decorated with fringes at the sides and bottom and with rows of porcupine quills. Women wore cedar-bark skirts and capes in the summer and skirts or tunics of buckskin during the cooler seasons. Both men and women went barefoot much of the time, even in snow during the winter. On especially rough terrain, they wore moccasins, or snow-shoes with webbing or spikes. Women wore their hair loose or in braids, with ornaments of wood or shells and beads, and both men and women wore feathers in their hair. People who became shamans were forbidden to cut or even comb their hair. A fur cap was a common form of winter headgear. Both men and women painted their faces, either the entire face or only the upper or lower part. Black and red were the colors most often used. Often, rings were painted around the eyes. Tattooing was also common. Mourners wore old clothes and cut their hair short.

The Tlingit of today wear modern, Western-style clothing appropriate to their northern climate. Traditional clothing, masks, and headdresses are still worn on ceremonial occasions, and by dancers and other performing groups. Traditional Tlingit garments are known for their intricate beadwork, typically in white on a red background. Chilkat blankets, with their abstract animal designs, are valued by collectors of folk art.

## 12 FOOD

The traditional Tlingit diet consisted of fish, meat, and wild plants. Given their resource-rich environment, they rarely experienced times of deprivation. The rivers of their Alaskan homeland abound with salmon, halibut, herring, candlefish, and other fish, which the Tlingit caught with nets and traps, speared, shot with bow and arrow, or sometimes simply stunned with a club. Skimming the open sea in their enormous dugout canoes, they hunted whales, seals, sea lion, and walrus. On land, they hunted deer, mountain goats, bear, and small animals and availed themselves of the bounty of bird's eggs, berries, and edible plants that were theirs for the taking.

Although today's Tlingit eat typical modern-day American fare (including packaged convenience foods), salmon, their traditional staple, still plays a prominent role in their diet, along with other fish, including halibut, herring, and cod, as well as crabs and other shellfish. Salmon is eaten both fresh and dried, and salmon grilled over a smoking fire is especially popular. Oil from the euchalon, or candlefish, is used as a dip with many foods.

## 13 EDUCATION

Modern Tlingit young people attend public schools, where, much like school-aged children everywhere in the United States, they are taught basic subjects like math, history, spelling, reading, science, social studies, and the use of computers. But Tlingit teachers are also concerned that their students learn something about their culture and old traditions before this knowledge is lost completely. The Tlingit place a high value on education, and many work in business, industry, government, and the professions.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

An elaborate woodcarving tradition can be seen in Tlingit homes and on their boats, and Tlingit ceremonial costumes are decorated with individualized crest designs. Characteristics of Tlingit art include stylized conventional forms and the practice of filling in any blank spaces. The most favored colors are red, black, and green. Perhaps the most famous form of Tlingit art is the elaborately patterned Chilkat blanket.

Although the dancing societies that were important to other tribes of the Northwest Coast did not hold a prominent place among the Tlingit, they did have a dance tradition. Special dance aprons that were like miniature Chilkat blankets were worn by shamans, chiefs, and other tribe members. Other elements of the traditional dance costume included belts made from ropes of shredded cedar bark, headbands also made from cedar bark, special collars or bibs, and headdresses with eagle feathers. Shamans in particular were known for their wild dancing, characterized by spirited gesticulation. Today, dancing groups still perform for local ceremonies and for visitors in several Tlingit villages.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, the Tlingit worked at hunting and gathering the food they needed to survive. However, this way of life declined after 1880, and the Tlingit began to participate in the Western cash economy. World War II and the discovery of large oil reserves in Alaska created many opportunities for employment in construction and other jobs for the Tlingit and other native

groups in Alaska. Instead of engaging in traditional fishing practices, many of today's Tlingit drive diesel-powered boats with hydraulic hoists and industrial-size nets. Tlingit women often work in fish canneries or produce crafts for sale. Many Tlingit work in urban areas, some of them settling permanently in large towns and cities and working in government, business, and the professions.

## 16 SPORTS

Tlingit men enjoy engaging in contests of strength such as wrestling.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional Tlingit feasts and dances usually took place in the winter. The frequent potlatches held in Tlingit villages provided the major source of entertainment. Today the Tlingit enjoy modern types of recreation, such as watching television or renting movies.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Tlingit are expert carvers and use the wood, especially red cedar, that is so plentiful in their native habitat extensively in their arts and crafts, especially for storage boxes, dishes, and ceremonial masks. They make excellent baskets, some of which are so tightly woven as to be waterproof, and also weave fine blankets of dog hair and mountain goat wool. They are experts at finishing their wooden artifacts with inlays of bone, copper, and shells, which are found in abundance everywhere at the water's edge. All Tlingit crafts are highly ornamented with elaborate and beautiful designs. Since the arrival of tourists by steamship, the Tlingit have maintained an active crafts industry.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many Tlingit Indians today live in poverty in substandard housing. They face the imminent destruction of their culture and way of life and experience difficulty in adapting themselves to the ways of the prevalent society. As a result, many suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse, and other forms of social distress.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Tlingit recognize two gender categories: *káh* (man) and *shawát* (woman). Gender and rank were the governing categories for behavior in precontact Tlingit society. Rank was indicated by differing styles of dress and bodily adornment. High-ranking senior women wore large labrets in their lower lips.

While rank could change during the course of a person's lifetime, gender was fixed during life but not after death in rebirth. Tlingit traditional belief holds that following death an individual is reborn into his/her clan. It was possible for a man to be reborn as a baby girl or for a woman to be reborn as a baby boy.

Females were important to the perpetuation of the Tlingit matrilineal clans. As such, the puberty rituals for girls were elaborate and lengthy. At the onset of a girl's first menstruation, she would enter seclusion at the rear of the family longhouse or in a small, separate structure built near the family house. She would be isolated from contact with outsiders except for young

girls and older women. The length of time spent in seclusion was dependent upon the rank of the girl through her family. Girls of high ranking families could remain secluded for as long as a year. Following the period of seclusion, the girl would emerge from this state as an adult woman who was now ready for marriage.

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—revised by J. Williams

# TRINIDADIAN AND TOBAGONIAN

**LOCATION:** Trinidad and Tobago

**POPULATION:** 1,047,366 (July 2008 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** English; English-derived Creole with African and other elements; Hindi and Urdu; Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Church of England and Church of Scotland; Methodism, Seventh-Day Adventism, Pentecostalism, Baptist Church, and other churches; Hinduism; Islam; Christian-African sects

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The nation of Trinidad and Tobago consists of two Caribbean islands that have been united politically since 1962. The people of both islands are generally referred to as Trinidadians. The islands were inhabited by the Arawaks, Caribs, and other Amerindian groups when sighted by Christopher Columbus in 1498. The explorer is said to have named Trinidad, where he landed, either for three hills visible in the distance or in honor of the Holy Trinity. The name Tobago is thought to derive from the Carib word for tobacco. It took nearly 100 years for the Spanish to establish their first permanent settlement on Trinidad, and they regularly had to defend the island from attacks by the Dutch, French, and British. Eventually sugar plantations were established and slaves brought in from West Africa to work on them. A British expedition captured Trinidad in 1797, and the island was ceded to the British in 1802. By 1814, Tobago, which had changed hands several times, was also a British possession.

During the 19th century, the ethnic diversity of Trinidad's population expanded as the British brought in indentured servants from India to work on the sugar plantations following the freeing of the island's West African slaves by the British in 1834. A variety of Europeans fleeing religious persecution or seeking employment also settled there, and Chinese laborers arrived toward the end of the century. In 1888 Tobago was joined with Trinidad as a colonial territory under the name Trinidad and Tobago.

Following World War I, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, like those of other colonial territories, sought greater political representation with a view toward eventual independence. Their nationalistic aspirations came to be embodied in one revered leader, Eric Williams, who in 1955 founded the People's National Movement (PNM), which gained legislative control of the territory the following year. After a brief membership in the Federation of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago became an independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1962 and a republic in 1976. Throughout these changes, Williams remained the head of the government until his death in 1981.

The worldwide oil crisis of the 1970s gave newfound value to Trinidad and Tobago's offshore oil reserves, which were first discovered in 1910, and the nation enjoyed a period of great prosperity and development that ended after the Middle Eastern nations began releasing their stockpiled oil at the end of the decade. World oil prices declined, and Trinidad and Tobago suffered an economic recession. In the 1990s, the nation

faced the challenge of stabilizing its economy and reducing its dependence on world oil prices. In 1995, unemployment rates were at their lowest level in 10 years, inflation was down, and economic growth was predicted. In 2003, Trinidad and Tobago started a second oil boom, which the government used to begin turning the country's main export back to sugar and agriculture. Economic growth reached 12.6% in 2006 and 5.5% in 2007 as prices for oil, natural gas, and petrochemicals remained high.

Trinidad and Tobago has one of the highest growth rates and per capita incomes in Latin America (in 2007 its GDP per capita rose to \$18,300). Part of this robust figure finds its explanation in the fact that huge flows of capital have been invested in energy and mining projects to liquefy natural gas and produce steel. Additional petrochemicals, aluminum, and plastics projects are in various stages of planning.

Even though the islands are the leading Caribbean producer of oil and gas, accounting for about 40% of GDP and 80% of exports respectively, the national administration has implemented a steady process of diversification resulting in many manufactured goods in the food and beverages industry being produced in the country. Moreover, the country is also a regional financial center, and tourism is a growing sector.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

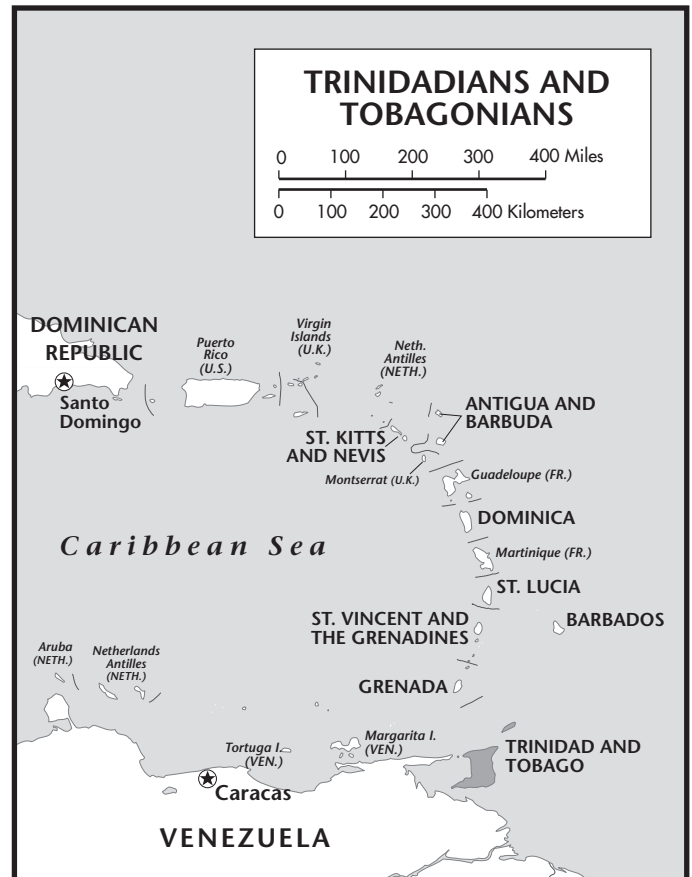
Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands of the West Indies, with Trinidad located only 11 km (7 mi) from Venezuela on the South American continent. With an area of 4,828 sq km (1,864 sq mi), Trinidad is the largest island of the Lesser Antilles. Three mountain ranges stretch across the country from east to west: the Northern Range; the Montserrat Hills, which cut across the island's center; and the Southern Range, which runs along the southern coast. Tiny Tobago, located about 34 km (21 mi) northeast of Trinidad, is only about 42 km (26 mi) long and 11 km (7 mi) wide. It consists of lowlands dominated by a chain of volcanic hills that runs the length of the island.

The original inhabitants of Trinidad migrated from the Orinoco River delta region of northeastern South America. The ethnic structure of Trinidad is defined by blacks and Indo-Trinidadians, or East Indians. Black population, as in the majority of the Caribbean, descends from African slaves brought in to work on cotton and sugar plantations. Regarding the East Indian population, it is an ethnic group whose ancestors were primarily workers who freely immigrated from the Indian subcontinent to work as plantation workers after the abolition of slavery in the mid-19th century. Other migrants from Spain, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have also contributed to the multicultural composition of the population.

While the different ethnic groups on Trinidad and Tobago have succeeded in living peacefully together, each has retained its cultural identity, lending richness and diversity to the nation's character and daily life. According to the 2000 census, an estimated 37.5% of Trinidad and Tobago's one million people were Black, 40% were of East Indian descent, 20% were of mixed descent, and smaller numbers were Chinese and European. The island of Tobago is predominantly Black.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The languages of Trinidad and Tobago reflect its diverse ethnic heritage. English is the nation's official language, while the



common language of the great majority of residents is an English-derived Creole that contains elements of African and other languages. Hindi and Urdu are spoken by segments of the Indian population, and Spanish, the language of the nation's first European conquerors, is spoken in some areas as well.

Creole is a type of hybrid language found throughout the Caribbean area, created by the blending of various European and African languages. The Trinidadian Creole blends English with the syntax and vocabulary of West African languages, including Twi and Yoruba. Plural pronouns differ from those of standard English: the plural form of "you" is *allyu*, and the French-English *ah wee* means "ours." French expressions, such as *il fait chaud* and *il y a*, are mirrored in the Trinidadian "it making hot" and "it have," which is used for "there is." French words also show up in the names for vegetation (*pomme* for apple) and mythological figures.

Crops grown by East Indian Trinidadians have come to be called by their Hindi names, such as *beigun* for eggplant. One of Trinidad and Tobago's most popular prepared foods, *roti*, also has a Hindi name, reflecting the culture from which it originates. Amerindian-derived words include the names of foods, including cassava, balata, and roocoo, as well as place names, including Tunapuna, Guayaguayare, and Carapichaima. The Creole that is spoken on Tobago, which differs slightly from that of Trinidad, has similarities to the Creole spoken in Jamaica, another country with a predominantly Black population.



#### 4 FOLKLORE

Trinidadian folklore, which is often reflected in Carnival themes and costumes, includes devils in disguise, a wolf man named Lagahoo, and a variety of other sinister figures. Folk tales are told about Papa Bois, the ruler of the forest, and his son, Callaloo, whose legendary battle with Mancrab supplied a memorable theme for well-known Carnival designer Peter Minshall. Other folklore figures include Diabliesse, a character comparable to Circe in Greek mythology that attracts men and then turns them into hogs, after which they fall down a precipice. The spirits of unbaptized children, called Douens, have their feet turned backwards and are said to raid people's gardens.

#### 5 RELIGION

Religion in Trinidad and Tobago is a clear radiography of its history as well as its multicultural reality inherited after years of colonization and migrations. Under the Spanish, Roman Catholicism was the official religion, and it was strengthened by French immigration during the French and Haitian revolutions. Anglicanism and Protestantism gained a foothold in various forms with the advent of the British. People from the Indian subcontinent brought with them their languages and their Hindu and Muslim religions. Both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim groups are present.

According to the 2000 census, about 26% of Trinidad and Tobago's population is Roman Catholic. Besides Catholicism, Trinidadians of African descent belong to the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland, as well as the Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist (4%), Pentecostal (6.8%), and other churches. The Baptist religion is especially popular in Tobago, representing 7.2% of the national population while Anglicanism accounts for 7.8%. Other Christians account for about 5.8% of the population. Trinidad's Indian community embraces the Hindu and Muslim religions: Hindus account for 22.5% of Trinidad and Tobago's population and Muslims for 5.8%. Some Africans are also turning to Islam, but in their own organizations (through the "Black Muslim" movement) rather than those of their East Indian neighbors.

There are also religious sects that combine Christianity with African religious beliefs and practices. The best known of these is Shango, based on a religion practiced by the Yoruba tribe in Africa, which embraces Shango, the god of thunder and lightning, and Christian saints. Through dance and drumming, its priests, called *mogbas*, summon spirits known as *orishas*.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Because of the nation's religious diversity, Trinidad and Tobago has an abundance of public holidays. In addition to the major Christian holy days, recognition is accorded to the Hindu holidays of Divali (pronounced "Duwali") and Ramleema and the Muslim festival of Hosay, a religious rite that has grown into a four-day festival that includes a potpourri of Trinidadian cultural elements, such as *tassa* drumming, which is Hindu in origin. Other holidays, such as Emancipation Day (August 1) and Independence Day (August 31) commemorate important dates in the nation's history.

Trinidad and Tobago's most important festival, however, is its Carnival, recognized as one of the world's most extravagant and colorful pre-Lenten celebrations, equaling or topping New Orleans' Mardi Gras and Brazil's Carnival. The festivities are

held annually in the final two days preceding Lent. The entire nation participates in this 200-year-old tradition, which is thought to have started with the first influx of French settlers to the islands in 1783. The main activities take place in Port of Spain, although festivities are also held in San Fernando, Scarborough, and other locations. Preparations for Carnival begin months in advance, as the participating groups, called "bands," plan their "mas" (short for "masquerade") costumes. Each band chooses a historical, cultural, fantastic, or folkloric theme. Past themes include Bright Africa, Ye Saga of Merrie England, and Callaloo (a folk character as well as the name for a popular Trinidadian food). Hundreds of coordinated costumes are painstakingly debated, designed, and assembled to be paraded and judged.

Aside from the costumed bands, calypso and steel drum groups provide the other major focus of Carnival, and a series of musical competitions is held in the period leading up to the Carnival itself. On the night of Dimanche Gras, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, the King and Queen of Carnival are chosen based on their costumes. The Carnival festivities officially begin at dawn on Monday morning, called Jour Ouvert, or Joovay, and include an "anything goes" parade, in which revelers wear a gamut of individually designed satirical and outrageous costumes. Next come massive parades by the organized bands, ranging from 500 to over 2,000 members, accompanied by flatbed trucks full of musicians and huge speakers. The climax of the celebration is the judging of the Carnival's best band, which takes place at the Queens Park Savannah, and awards are also given for the best calypso and steel drum groups.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, are marked by religious ceremonies appropriate to each Trinidadian's faith community.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The spirit of Trinidad and Tobago's famous Carnival carries over, in more modest forms, into everyday life on the islands: Trinidadians are known for their penchant for enjoying life, even in the face of adversity. When curfews were imposed during a period of civil unrest in 1970, they held "Curfew fêtes"; when the country's economy fell victim to plummeting oil prices in the 1980s, people threw "Recession fêtes." An important part of the Trinidadian calypso tradition is the refusal to take not only themselves but also others too seriously, and there is a special term, *picong*, for calypso's irreverent satirizing of people and institutions, both great and small.

Another aspect of this casual attitude can be seen in the practice called *liming*, which is the counterpart of "hanging out" in the United States. Trinidadian men have a long tradition of congregating at street corners, on front stoops, or near movie houses, chatting and whiling the time away as they take in the passing scene. Young limers are more apt to pick a single spot from which to survey the action, while for older men liming (or "taking a lime") may involve spending part of a day or evening at a series of places. Although it is frowned upon by some segments of society (signs proclaiming "No Limers" or "No Liming" signs can be seen in public places), this seemingly aimless activity can be an important way of maintaining social visibility while keeping up with what is going on in

the community. Long before it was heard in the United States, the phrase “Yo! Wha’ appenin” was a common working-class greeting in Port of Spain.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Trinidadian house, called an *ajoupa*, was built of thatch and mud. Today, most Trinidadians live in wooden houses with roofs of galvanized metal. There are generally three or four rooms; almost all houses have indoor plumbing, and most have electricity. Several houses often share one yard. There is a serious housing shortage in Trinidad and Tobago since the demand for housing in the urban areas is high, but construction has been hampered by population movement, high construction costs, shortage of land, and inadequate long-term financing. Even though the government has attempted to meet the needs of low-income families by erecting modern concrete dwellings throughout the country still many city dwellers live in slums and tenement buildings.

The state supplies social security consisting of noncontributory old-age pensions and workers’ compensation compulsorily paid by employers. Moreover, a national health insurance program has been established, as well as a spread network of public clinics and hospitals where treatments are free or at low-cost. Thanks to these governmental efforts to provide medical care, the incidence of traditional diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, and syphilis, has been reduced. However, the average life expectancy in Trinidad and Tobago is estimated at just 67 years.

While roads are adequate in the nation’s more densely settled areas, rural roads often consist of single-lane dirt paths, and some areas of Tobago have virtually no usable roads. In the cities, minibuses called maxi-taxis are a popular form of public transportation. In the mid-1980s, there was about one car for every four people in Trinidad and Tobago.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women wield considerable authority within African families in Trinidad and Tobago, and many are heads of households. Common-law marriages are widespread within the African community. Among the Indian population, large extended-family households are common, and even members of smaller households have a strong sense of obligation toward their relatives outside the nuclear family. Arranged marriages are common, and the man is always considered the head of the household. Marriage is regarded as a lifetime commitment; divorce, and even the remarriage of widows, is frowned upon.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most Trinidadians wear modern Western-style clothing. The Caribbean “shirt jac,” a belted jacket worn with a scarf and no shirt, is popular among men in Port of Spain. Traditional clothing, including men’s turbans and women’s saris, is worn by some members of the country’s Indian population. Every year special clubs spend months preparing extravagant “mas” (short for “masquerade”) costumes for Trinidad and Tobago’s famous Carnival celebration preceding Ash Wednesday. The brightly colored, eye-catching outfits, coordinated to be worn by hundreds or even thousands of people, may be made of either cotton or such dressy fabrics as velvet, satin, and lamé, as well as beads, feathers, sequins, shells, leaves, and straw.

They are often accompanied by a profusion of body paint and glitter.

## 12 FOOD

The rich and varied cuisine of Trinidad and Tobago combines African, East Indian, Amerindian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, and European influences. Breakfast is usually continental-style, consisting of coffee (or cocoa) and bread, while lunch and dinner (which is eaten at 8:00 or 9:00 PM) are both substantial meals, generally consisting of meat, rice, vegetables, and fruit. The most important meal of the week is Sunday dinner, and many women are at the market by dawn on Sunday morning to buy their provisions.

One of the country’s most popular foods is *roti*. Sold at restaurants, bars, and outdoor stands throughout the country, it consists of Indian flat bread with a variety of fillings, including curried beef, chicken, lamb, and beef, and cooked vegetables, to which curried potatoes and chickpeas are added. The type of bread most commonly used for *roti* is *dhalpourri*, which consists of two thin layers of dough with ground split peas in between. Another favorite dish is *sans coche*, a stew containing pork, salted beef, pig’s tails, onions, chives, and various other spices, served with dumplings. Other popular dishes include *callaloo*, a mixture of okra and puréed dasheen leaves (also called callaloo greens) with either crab or salted pork added for flavor, and *coocoo*, a cake similar to cornbread, made from corn flour and okra.

The national beverage of Trinidad and Tobago is rum, which is consumed liberally, especially during the country’s national holidays and numerous festivals. Nonalcoholic drinks include *sorrel*, made from the petals of the sorrel flower; *ginger beer*, which is similar to ginger ale; and *peanut punch*, which is something like a peanut-butter milkshake.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is free at the primary and secondary levels and compulsory between the ages of six and 12. Formal education, which begins at age five, is highly valued in Trinidad and Tobago, and the country has a literacy rate of about 98.6%. In 1986 about 75% of high-school-age students were enrolled in school. The University of the West Indies has a campus on Trinidad offering courses in engineering, business administration, law, medicine, social science, natural science, education, agriculture, and humanities. Other facilities for higher education include government-supported technical colleges, five teachers’ colleges, and John F. Kennedy College, a liberal arts college near Port of Spain. In 2004 the University of Trinidad and Tobago was created. In its campuses, spread throughout the islands, the population can opt for technical and professional training in the sciences, technology, education, and other fields.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Given the country’s small size and the fact that it had no written literary tradition until the 20th century, Trinidad and Tobago has produced an impressive roster of eminent writers, including V. S. Naipaul, who emigrated as a young man but brought his homeland to life for readers around the world in such books as *Miguel Street* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Other well-known Trinidad-born writers include Michael Anthony, Samuel Selvon, and Paul Keens-Douglas. Derek Wolcott, the



*British Prince Charles plays on a steel drum used in a steel band concert to greet his arrival in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. (Tim Graham/Getty Images)*

1992 Nobel laureate in literature, was born in St. Lucia but has spent much of his time in Trinidad, where he founded the Trinidad Theatre workshop in Port of Spain in 1959.

Peter Minshall, a celebrated designer for Carnival masquerade bands and other art forms in Trinidad and Tobago, has also achieved renown in the international art world. Several active theater groups in Trinidad and Tobago mount stage productions regularly; some of the most interesting take place at the Little Carib Theater.

## **15 WORK**

According to 2006 estimations, about 65.6% of the labor force in Trinidad and Tobago is employed in service-related jobs; 12.9% in mining and manufacturing; 4% in agriculture, forestry, and fishing; and the remainder in other occupations. Agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago is carried out on both large mechanized farms and on small tracts of land worked by peasant farmers without modern farm machinery. The oil industry, which brought great wealth to the country in the 1970s, employs only about 3% of the work force. The nation has had a high rate of unemployment—sometimes approaching 20%—for decades. Emigration has removed many skilled workers and professionals from the nation's labor force.

## **16 SPORTS**

Sports in Trinidad and Tobago reflect the historical influence of the British. Cricket is so popular that champion player Brian Lara is hailed as a national hero and has even received government recognition for his achievements. Another Trinidadian favorite is the quintessentially British sport of soccer (called football in Trinidad and Tobago, as it is in Britain). Most cities, towns, and even villages have their own soccer teams. Horse-racing is very popular as well.

Hasely Crawford won the first Olympic gold medal for Trinidad and Tobago in the men's 100 m race dash in the 1976 Summer Olympics. Nine different athletes from Trinidad and Tobago have won twelve medals at the Olympics, beginning with a silver medal in weightlifting, won by Rodney Wilkes in 1948 and most recently, a silver medal by Richard Thompson in the men's 100 m race in 2008.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Music plays an important role in everyday life in Trinidad and Tobago, and much Trinidadian entertainment includes or revolves around it. The latest calypso songs, with their witty commentaries on public figures and controversial issues, can be heard on radios and sound systems throughout the country. SoCa—primarily recorded music that combines soul (“So-”) and calypso (“-Ca”) as well as other styles—has been universally popular since the 1980s. Trinidadians also enjoy watching

movies and television, and American soap operas are especially popular. Trinidadians of Indian descent enjoy seeing movies from India, a country noted for its film industry.

One Caribbean leisure-time tradition that is fast disappearing in Trinidad and Tobago is the rum shop, where working-class men have traditionally met after work to drink and socialize. The country's remaining rum shops are few in number but retain their spirit of informality and camaraderie.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Two forms of native Trinidadian music, calypso and steel drum music, have become famous throughout the world. Calypso was originally developed by plantation workers as a covert way to poke fun at their owners and overseers and at rival work gangs. This subversive tradition continues today in calypso music that mocks politicians and other local figures and comments satirically on current affairs.

Steel drum music originated when members of traditional African percussion bands began using discarded oil drums. With their bottoms cut off and their tops hammered into a convex shape marked by a pattern of dents that produce different pitches, these objects turn into musical instruments capable of a surprising range of musical nuance and expression in the hands of expert players. The drums (called "pans") are tuned to four musical ranges: bass (also called "boom"), cello pan, guitar pan, and ping-pong.

In addition to steel drums, which are a prime example of Trinidadian crafts, the nation's artisans also produce handcrafted copper jewelry, woven straw goods, pottery, woodcarvings, boldly printed fabrics, and other handmade goods.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As Trinidad and Tobago becomes an increasingly urbanized society, its cities face housing shortages and difficulty in providing essential public services. Immigration of unskilled workers has contributed to the overcrowding of urban areas, while emigration of skilled workers has raised concern about a so-called "brain drain" depriving the country of needed talent. High unemployment has led to social unrest, particularly among the country's youth (43% of persons aged 15 to 19 were unemployed in 1994), and there has been an increase in serious crime, much of it drug- and gang-related.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Trinidad and Tobago has encountered several constraints in the promotion of gender equality. These include deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and practices, the impact of globalization, structural and institutional obstacles, and lack of adequate financial and human resources. Poverty is more widespread among female-headed households, and Trinidadian women occupy the lowest paying, traditionally female-dominated, fields of work.

To strengthen women's economic rights and remove discrimination against women, in 1998 the Maternity Protection Act guaranteed maternity leave with pay for a period of 13 weeks to all employed women. In order to help single mothers to have easier access to the world of work, some state and non-governmental agencies have established homework centers and afterschool clubs. In addition, Trinidad and Tobago's government has pursued different strategies to diminish gender inequality in the country. To stimulate the micro- and small-

enterprise sector among women, 43% of loan guarantees are awarded to women and 90% of training recipients are women.

Even though women have advanced in education, excelling beyond their male counterparts in some institutions, they continue to be grossly underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making. In order to begin to change this, Trinidad and Tobago supports the target of 30% of women in political decision-making posts. Participation of women in the media has also been largely at the lower strata of employment, for example, reporters, writers, and presenters. Management and decision-making is predominantly the domain of men. However, as of 2008, one woman had been appointed chief executive officer out of three major daily newspapers, and there was one female head of news.

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—revised by C. Vergara

## UKRAINIAN AMERICANS

For more information on Ukrainian history and culture, see **Vol. 4: Ukrainians**.

### OVERVIEW

Few Ukrainians immigrated to the United States before 1865. At that time, however, Ukraine was divided between Russia (eastern Ukraine), Austria (western Ukraine), and Hungary (Transcarpathia). The Austrians were fairly supportive of Ukrainian identity and gave the Ukrainians a certain amount of autonomy. The Russians and Hungarians, on the other hand, were very oppressive, the Hungarians especially so. The first wave of Ukrainian American immigrants came to the United States to escape the oppressions of their foreign rulers. Most were poor farmers from Transcarpathia.

Official immigration records list only 67,218 Ukrainians entering the United States between 1899 and 1906 and 187,058 between 1907 and 1914. This is certainly a low count, however, because Ukrainians were not listed as such until 1899 (most were called “Ruthenians” instead), and even after 1899, many were mistakenly recorded as Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians, or Russians. It is estimated that there were actually closer to 500,000 Ukrainian Americans living in the United States by 1914.

About 85% of these first-wave Ukrainian immigrants settled in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. As poor farmers, they lacked job skills relevant to the industrialized United States, and their lack of English-language skills presented another roadblock to success. Therefore, most worked as low-paid unskilled laborers. A large number took jobs in the coal mines of Pennsylvania because the wages were higher due to the dangerous nature of the work. Many were injured, became sick, or even died in the mines.

The second wave of Ukrainian immigration to the United States occurred between 1920 and 1939. The numbers were much lower during this second wave because of new immigration laws in the United States that placed quotas on the numbers of immigrants allowed in, and because the newly formed Soviet Union forbade emigration. Only about 40,000 Ukrainians entered the United States during this period. Most of these second-wave Ukrainian immigrants settled in cities of the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest, such as New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago.

In 1948, the United States passed the Displaced Persons Act, allowing people who had been displaced by the destruction of World War II (1939–45) to immigrate to the United States. Many Ukrainians took advantage of this opportunity, creating the third wave of Ukrainian American immigration. Some 85,000 Ukrainians entered the United States under this Act, most of them to escape Soviet rule. These third-wave immigrants were generally much better educated than previous Ukrainian immigrants to the United States. They also were more likely to have lived in cities in the Ukraine, so they had more experience with the industrialized urban world. Third-wave Ukrainian Americans adjusted much more quickly and easily to American life than did first- or second-wave immigrants.

The Ukrainian National Republic declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and became a recognized nation of the world a few months later. A fourth wave of Ukrainian immigration to the United States began at this time, as Ukrainians were once again free to leave and needed money to help build up their newly independent country. Most fourth-wave Ukrainian Americans come to the United States hoping to earn money to send back to Ukraine and eventually to return themselves.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, more and more former Soviet citizens emigrated to find a better, more prosperous life elsewhere. Of all former-Soviet emigrés in 1993, 38% were Ukrainians emigrating to the United States. Many came under the auspices of the Lautenberg Amendment, passed by U.S. Congress in 1989, which makes it much easier to claim refugee status.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 892,922 Ukrainian Americans in the United States (0.3% of the total U.S. population). The majority (72%) were American-born and have become very Americanized. The states with the highest percentages of Ukrainian Americans were Pennsylvania (1%); New Jersey (0.9%); New York (0.8%); Connecticut and Delaware (0.7%); and North Dakota (0.6%). The largest concentrations of Ukrainian Americans are in Philadelphia, New York City, northern New Jersey, Sacramento and Los Angeles, and northern Chicago. Smaller but vital Ukrainian American communities exist in Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Rochester (NY).

Because Ukrainians lacked a cohesive national identity for so much of their history, their cultural identity became centered on the Ukrainian Church. The Ukrainian Catholic Church follows the Byzantine Rite, rather than the Latin Rite followed by earlier Catholic immigrants to the United States. Therefore, Ukrainian Catholics set up their own churches when they came to the United States. By 1898, there were 51 Ukrainian Catholic Churches in America.

Around the turn of the century, many Ukrainian Americans began converting to Russian Orthodox because Ukrainian Catholic churches were not available in their communities, and Russian Orthodox was closer to their Byzantine Rite than were Roman Catholic churches. So Ukrainian Catholics in the United States petitioned the Pope for a Ukrainian bishop to serve in America. The Pope finally agreed, and in 1907, the first American Ukrainian Catholic bishop was appointed. In 1913, the Catholic Church set up a separate jurisdiction for American Ukrainian Catholics, and by 1914 there were 206 parishes in the United States. Today there are thousands of Ukrainian Catholics in America.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church grew more slowly in the United States. Orthodox Ukrainian Americans began gathering together for worship in Chicago in the early 1900s. In 1924, an American Ukrainian Orthodox archbishop was appointed, and by 1932 there were 32 parishes in the United States. As of 2008 there were 105 Ukrainian Orthodox parishes in America.

In 1892, a group of Ukrainian Protestant farmers started a church in Yale, Virginia. Other Ukrainian Protestant farmers settled in North Dakota, and by 1914, North Dakota had more Ukrainian Protestant farming communities than any other state in the United States. Ukrainian American Protestants



belong to a variety of denominations, such as Presbyterian or Baptist.

Besides traditional religious holidays (Christmas, Easter, etc.) and common American holidays (Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, etc.), Ukrainian Americans also celebrate Ukrainian Independence Day on January 22, and Taras Shevchenko Day on March 14.

Ukrainian Americans maintain their ethnic identity through their various churches and through cultural and other ethnic organizations. There are dozens of these organizations in the United States today, including insurance clubs, credit unions, sports clubs, political associations, and women's leagues. These organizations were originally established to help Ukrainian immigrants adjust to life in the United States. They then became concerned with providing opportunities for second- and subsequent-generation Ukrainian Americans to learn about their Ukrainian heritage and maintain their Ukrainian identity. In recent years they have focused on providing for aging Ukrainian Americans and lobbying for government funding and services, etc., as well as supporting the development of democracy in the Ukraine.

There are two main umbrella organizations for Ukrainian American associations: the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), and the Ukrainian American Coordinating Council (UACC). The UCCA was founded in 1940 and grew to encompass over 50 associations. In 1983, however, radical supporters of the Liberation Front took over the organization, prompting 26 associations to leave. Those 26 groups joined with 30 others to form the UACC, defining themselves

as more moderate and "American-oriented," in contrast with the UCCA that had begun to focus heavily on independence efforts in Ukraine. The UCCA and UACC maintain an ongoing discussion regarding reuniting, but so far little progress has been made.

The first Ukrainian American all-day school (kindergarten–eighth grade) was established in Philadelphia by the Ukrainian Catholic Church in 1925. By 1947 there were 18 all-day Ukrainian American schools in the United States. Most Ukrainian parishes also had weekday afternoon or Saturday morning classes in Ukrainian language and culture. Some Ukrainian American high schools and junior colleges were established in the 1930s. Numerous Ukrainian American schools continue to thrive today.

Saturday "heritage schools" are run by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Educational Council of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America. These schools offer an 11-year study program in Ukrainian language, culture, history, literature, etc. The Ukrainian Research Institute founded in 1968 at Harvard University offers doctoral programs in Ukrainian studies, publishes Ukrainian-studies books, and has a large Ukrainian library.

Ukrainian Americans are proud of their Ukrainian cultural heritage and encourage their children to learn Ukrainian folk dances and folk songs. Bandura (the national musical instrument of Ukraine) schools exist throughout the United States. The Ukrainian National Chorus toured the United States in 1922–23, with great success and introduced the now-classic Christmas carol "Carol of the Bells" to American audiences.

Shortly after their highly successful tour, the entire Chorus emigrated to the United States. Other Ukrainian American musicians include opera stars Paul Plishka and Andrij Dobriansky, both with the Metropolitan Opera Company.

The best-known Ukrainian American actors are Jack Palance (born Walter Jack Palahniuk) and Leonard Nimoy. Anna Sten, John Hodiak, Nick Adams (Nicholas Adamchok), Mike Mazurki, and George Dzundza are among other Ukrainian Americans who have found success in the acting world. Sculptor Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964) and painter Jacques Hnizdovsky are two renowned Ukrainian American visual artists. Ukrainian American literature is still, for the most part, written in Ukrainian by first-generation immigrants and known only to other Ukrainian Americans.

Although early Ukrainian immigrants to the United States were generally uneducated farmers who worked as low-paid unskilled laborers in America, subsequent generations (and more recent immigrants) have increased their levels of education and are now well represented in all of the major professions. Many have risen to the top of their respective fields, such as Igor Sikorsky, founder of Sikorsky Aviation Corporation. Ukrainian Americans are also well-represented in government from the local to the federal level. Mary Beck was the first Ukrainian American woman elected to public office and served longer than any other Ukrainian American before or since. Beck served on the Detroit City Council from 1950 to 1970. In the world of science, Ukrainian American geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky was instrumental in discovering the great variety of genes, especially recessive genes, in human society.

Two Ukrainian American soccer teams, the Ukrainian Nationals of Philadelphia and the New York Ukrainians, played in the national championships, both in the 1960s. Many individual Ukrainian Americans have also been successful athletes, including hockey players Bill Moseienko, Terry Sawchuck, Dave Balon, and Walter Tkaczuk; and football players Bronko Nagurski, George Andrie, Bill Malinchak, George Tatasovic, John Machuzak, and Don Chuy. Probably the best-known Ukrainian American athletes, however, are football player and coach Mike Ditka, and figure skater Sasha Cohen.

Summer camps, called Taboruvannia, are very popular with Ukrainian American children. Thousands attend these Ukrainian American camps each summer to learn about their Ukrainian heritage and/or simply enjoy the company of other Ukrainian American youngsters. Taboruvannia come in many varieties, including educational/recreational, sports, music, and other types of camps.

Ukrainian American women continue to do traditional embroidery, but perhaps the most loved Ukrainian folk art in America is the painting of Ukrainian Easter eggs, known as *pysanka* (*pysanky*). Classes in traditional egg-painting techniques are offered across the United States, and many craft stores now carry the necessary materials.

Problems in the Ukrainian American community stem almost entirely from divisions within the community itself, particularly between fourth-wave immigrants and those who immigrated to America in earlier waves. Fourth-wave Ukrainian Americans tend to see their time in the United States as temporary, so they are not interested in becoming involved in the Ukrainian American community to any great extent. Established Ukrainian Americans from earlier waves of immi-

gration resent the new immigrants for their lack of interest. The fourth-wave immigrants also tend to head for California and the Pacific Northwest, where jobs are more plentiful, rather than settling in established Ukrainian American communities. Also, the prevalence of the Russian language during the Soviet era means that many of the fourth-wave immigrants speak Russian rather than Ukrainian, upsetting the earlier immigrants who wonder why they would choose to speak the language of their oppressor.

Religious conflict has also increased because many of the newest Ukrainian immigrants are Protestant or Jewish, rather than Catholic or Orthodox like the majority of earlier immigrants. As the church has always been the center of Ukrainian cultural identity in America, these religious differences make it difficult for new immigrants to fit in with the earlier Ukrainian American cultural establishment.

Perhaps the most heated argument today among Ukrainian Americans is the legitimacy of the newest wave of immigrants. Some Ukrainian Americans feel that no one should leave the new Ukrainian National Republic. Rather, those who are there should stay and support it in its fledgling growth. They also question the “refugee” status of many of the new immigrants because Ukraine is now an independent state, no longer subject to any oppressive foreign rule. However, few (if any) Ukrainian Americans have returned to Ukraine to give their support to the new republic, so the new immigrants question established Ukrainian Americans’ right to criticize them for leaving.

The new independence of Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union created economic problems that resulted in a high unemployment rate, particularly among Ukrainian women. Approximately 75% of the unemployed in Ukraine are women. These desperate economic straits have prompted many women to leave Ukraine for better opportunities. Unfortunately, this makes the women vulnerable to traffickers who use skillfully constructed deceptions to trap them into slavery. An estimated 50,000 women from Southeast Asia, Latin America, and former Soviet bloc countries, including Ukraine, enter the United States illegally each year. About half of them end up working in sweatshops, while the other half are forced into prostitution. From 1988 to 1998, some 400,000 women under the age of 30 left Ukraine to work in the sex industry in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North America. There is also a burgeoning market for Ukrainian “brides.” Young women imagine that a wealthy American man will marry them and solve all their problems. Some of these “marriage” agencies are actually fronts for sex traffickers. Even the agencies that are legitimate promote false expectations among the desperate Ukrainian women who often find that circumstances are not what they had hoped once they arrive in the United States.

Ukrainian American organizations such as the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America are part of the expanding global effort to push for recognition of the sexual exploitation of women. The subject has been put on the national agenda in the United States, largely through the efforts of Ukrainian American organizations. Concerns over this criminal activity transcend the divisions between Ukrainian Americans and promote cooperation between Ukrainian and American groups.

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—by D. K. Daeg de Mott

# URUGUAYANS

**LOCATION:** Uruguay

**POPULATION:** 3,447,778

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; some Judaism; Afro-Brazilian churches; evangelical Protestantism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the territory that is now Uruguay was inhabited by Amerindian tribes. The Charrúas and the Guaraní, were the main tribes when the Europeans arrived. The Charrúas were a semi-nomadic ethnic group who occupied territory near the shoreline, where they fished and gathered clams and fruits. In winter, the Charrúas moved inland, where they could hunt for deer and rheas (*ñandú*), a flightless bird. Guaraní people were concentrated in the subtropical forests of eastern Paraguay.

In 1515, the first European expedition explored the region. The Spanish navigator Juan Díaz de Solís who, along with several of his men, was killed by Charrúa warriors, led the mission. Because of the lack of gold and silver, the European conquerors lost interest in the region.

Eventually, during the 16th and 17th centuries, Uruguay became a natural zone of contention between the Spanish and Portuguese empires. As the two countries expanded their colonial rule in Latin America, Uruguay became the focus of the conflict, and the Amerindians were driven out. The Portuguese, based in Brazil, migrated south into Uruguay in 1680 and founded a new colony called Colonia de Sacramento. In response to this challenge, Spain established a fort in nearby Montevideo, the present-day capital of Uruguay. A struggle for control over Uruguay ensued. Uruguay fell under Portuguese control and later became a province of Brazil. Uruguay was only granted full independence in 1828, through an agreement between Argentina and Brazil.

Modern Uruguay has an export-oriented agricultural sector, a highly educated workforce, and robust social spending. In 2007 the economy achieved a growth rate of 7% and the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was \$11,600.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Uruguay is located between Brazil and Argentina on the Atlantic coast of South America. Its terrain is characterized by gently rolling hills and natural grasslands. In contrast to the Andean or Amazonian countries, a high proportion of Uruguay's territory is suitable for agriculture. Most of Uruguay's grasslands are used for grazing sheep and cattle. In addition, Uruguay produces a wide range of fruits, cereals, and other agricultural products.

Unlike many other Latin American countries, Uruguay does not have a native population. Although there were Amerindian groups that lived in Uruguayan territory at the time of the colonial expansion, they were either displaced or annihilated. As a result, since 1830 the Uruguayans have been ethnically European, descending mainly from Italians or Spaniards. There is also a small population of Afro-Uruguayans (2.5% of the population).





### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Uruguay is Spanish. No Amerindian languages are spoken in modern Uruguay. In regions close to the Brazilian border, however, a Spanish-Portuguese dialect called *Portuñol* (or *Portuniol*) is spoken.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The name given to Uruguay's capital, Montevideo, originates in Ferdinand Magellan's visit to the region in 1520. According to legend, a sailor on board saw land and shouted, "*Monte vide eu*"—"I see a hill." The origin of the city's name is also from a phrase in Spanish found on early maps: "*Monte VI de E.O.*," or "The sixth hill from east to west."

Uruguayan culture shares some features with Argentina, mainly because of their strong European influence. The most noticeable characteristic of this common background is the preponderance of the *gaucho*, a kind of cowboy (usually a *mestizo*—mixed European and Amerindian descent) in the art and folklore. Uruguay's theatre and music are broadly based in terms of support and participation.

### 5 RELIGION

Most Uruguayans are descendants of Italians and Spaniards and they have inherited the Roman Catholic tradition (66%). Although the Church has historically played an important role in Uruguayan society and culture, it has no official role in politics. A variety of minority religions are practiced in Uruguay in addition to Catholicism. A small Protestant population (2%) and some Jewish residents (1%), for example, exist in Montevi-

deo. Many Afro-Uruguayans who live in the Barrio Sur (South Neighborhood) of Montevideo practice the Afro-Brazilian religion of *Condomble*. In addition, more than 31% of the population does not profess any type of religion.

There is a sharp separation between church and state. This has actually led to the renaming of many religious holidays. Many have been given secular (nonreligious) names. Christmas, for instance, is widely referred to as Family Day. Similarly, Easter Week is also known as Criollo Week.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Perhaps the most celebrated holiday in Uruguay is Carnival (or Carnaval), a weeklong celebration that marks the commencement of Lent. During Carnival, the country virtually comes to a halt, as stores close and people celebrate. Drinking, feasting, and dancing accompany a series of street parades with music and elaborate costumes. Competitions are held for the best musical performance. Water throwing is a key ritual during Carnival. Water balloons and buckets of water are used to drench friends and strangers alike.

Many of Uruguay's festivals celebrate its cattle-raising heritage. During Easter Week, a Cowboy Festival (*Fiesta Gaucha*) is held in Montevideo. Rodeo competitions are the main event. Contestants compete in a variety of events, such as knife throwing, riding, and lassoing. Grilled beef and folk music accompany these celebrations.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions, such as birth, puberty, and death, are marked by rituals and celebrations appropriate to each Uruguayan's particular religious tradition.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The most substantial meal of the day in Uruguay is not dinner, but lunch. Many Uruguayan employees are given a two-hour lunch break that enables them to return home for a large, home-cooked meal with their families. Evening meals are traditionally much lighter. When invited to a Uruguayan home, one may be offered *mate*, an herbal tea. Traditionally, *mate* is drunk through a silver straw, called a *bombilla*, from a carved gourd. The gourd and straw are passed around and shared by all present. In most urban homes, however, *mate* is now served in teacups.

In Uruguay, the Italian influence in both language and culture can be felt. For example, to say goodbye, most Uruguayans have adopted the Italian *ciao* or *addio* in place of the Spanish *adios*. In addition, it is proper to kiss someone both when saying hello and upon departing.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Uruguay does not have the extreme inequality of incomes and standards of living found in other Latin American countries. However, there is a marked difference in patterns of living in urban and rural areas. Nearly half the population lives in the capital, Montevideo. Montevideo is a modern city, with high-rise apartments and office buildings. The city has many restaurants, cinemas, and shopping centers. However, many of the poorer residents live in small homes or shacks on the outskirts of the city.

A substantial proportion of the population continues to live in rural areas. For many, cattle- and sheep-ranching is their way of life. Large-scale farms, called *estancias*, employ many people. Uruguayan cowboys, called *gauchos*, still wear traditional dress as they brand cattle, fix fencing, and round up the herd. Most *gauchos* live in simple communal housing on the farm where they work. Other households live in adobe homes.

The life expectancy in Uruguay (76 years) is almost equal to that of developed countries. Uruguay's relative prosperity gives most residents access to health care (94%) and clean water (98%). Adequate living conditions mean that the rate of infectious disease is low in comparison to other Latin American countries. Uruguay also has a varied agricultural sector, and locally grown beef and vegetables are affordable for most households.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The rights of women in Uruguay were historically more advanced than in other Latin American countries. As early as 1907, divorce due to spousal abuse became legally recognized. In addition, women now have the right to a divorce without giving a reason. This privilege is not offered to men. This growing legal protection of women and the secularization of society (i.e., the separation of church and state) enable women to escape traditional female stereotypes and work outside the home. Girls in Uruguay are also more likely to complete their schooling than are their counterparts in other Latin American countries.

Marriage in Uruguay can now be formalized through a civil, or nonreligious, ceremony. There is no requirement, as in other Latin American countries, that weddings be performed in a church. Civil weddings also mean that the bride no longer has to vow to obey her husband. Instead, both the man and woman pledge to treat their partner with respect.

Families in Uruguay are relatively small in comparison with other countries in the region. Most urban families have access to birth control and choose to limit the size of their families. In rural areas, however, access to birth control is more restricted, and women there typically have more children.

### 11 CLOTHING

The lifestyle of Uruguay's cowboys, or *gauchos*, has not changed dramatically since the 1800s. *Gauchos* proudly use the distinctive clothing worn by their ancestors. Because they spend most waking hours on horseback, *gauchos* have adopted the use of very baggy pants called *bombachas*. Wide-brimmed black hats offer protection from the midday sun, while woolen ponchos are used for warmth in the evenings. Leather boots and intricately tooled leather saddles complete the rugged picture.

In contrast, urban Uruguayans wear modern European dress. Today's youths favor jeans and tee shirts, while suits and ties are appropriate attire for businessmen.

### 12 FOOD

Not surprisingly for a cattle-ranching country, beef features predominantly in Uruguayan cuisine. Uruguayans are reputed to be among the largest consumers of beef per capita in the world. *Churrasco*, or grilled steak, can be said to be the national dish. Sometimes the meat is grilled with the skin on, in order to prevent it from drying out. Also very popular are *chivitos*:

hot steak sandwiches, topped with bacon, eggs, cheese, lettuce, and tomatoes.

The Uruguayans have also adapted traditional Spanish dishes. A Uruguayan version of *puchero*, Spanish meat stew, is sometimes cooked with blood sausage. Although this dish is considered a delicacy, it has been nicknamed *olla podrida*, or "rotten pot." Uruguay's cuisine also has a significant Italian influence. Pasta and lasagna are Uruguayan favorites.

#### Puchero (Uruguayan meat stew)

4 pounds osso buco (veal shanks), cut into six pieces  
1 cup chopped celery  
6 carrots, peeled  
6 white potatoes, peeled  
1 onion  
6 zucchini  
1 pound green beans  
1 bunch parsley  
6 ears of sweet corn, peeled  
4 teaspoons salt  
1 squash (medium size), cut into 6 pieces, unpeeled

Fill a large saucepan with water and bring it to a boil. Add all ingredients to boiling water, putting the meat in first, then carrots, onion, green beans, corn, squash, and celery. Then add potatoes and zucchini. Add parsley and salt to season the stew. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes, or until potatoes are tender. Drain off broth and serve meat and vegetables. To enhance the flavor, the stew may be served with mustard, mayonnaise, tomato, onion, or pepper sauce. If desired, add rice or noodles to remaining broth and serve in soup bowls.

(Recipe courtesy of the Embassy of Uruguay.)

### 13 EDUCATION

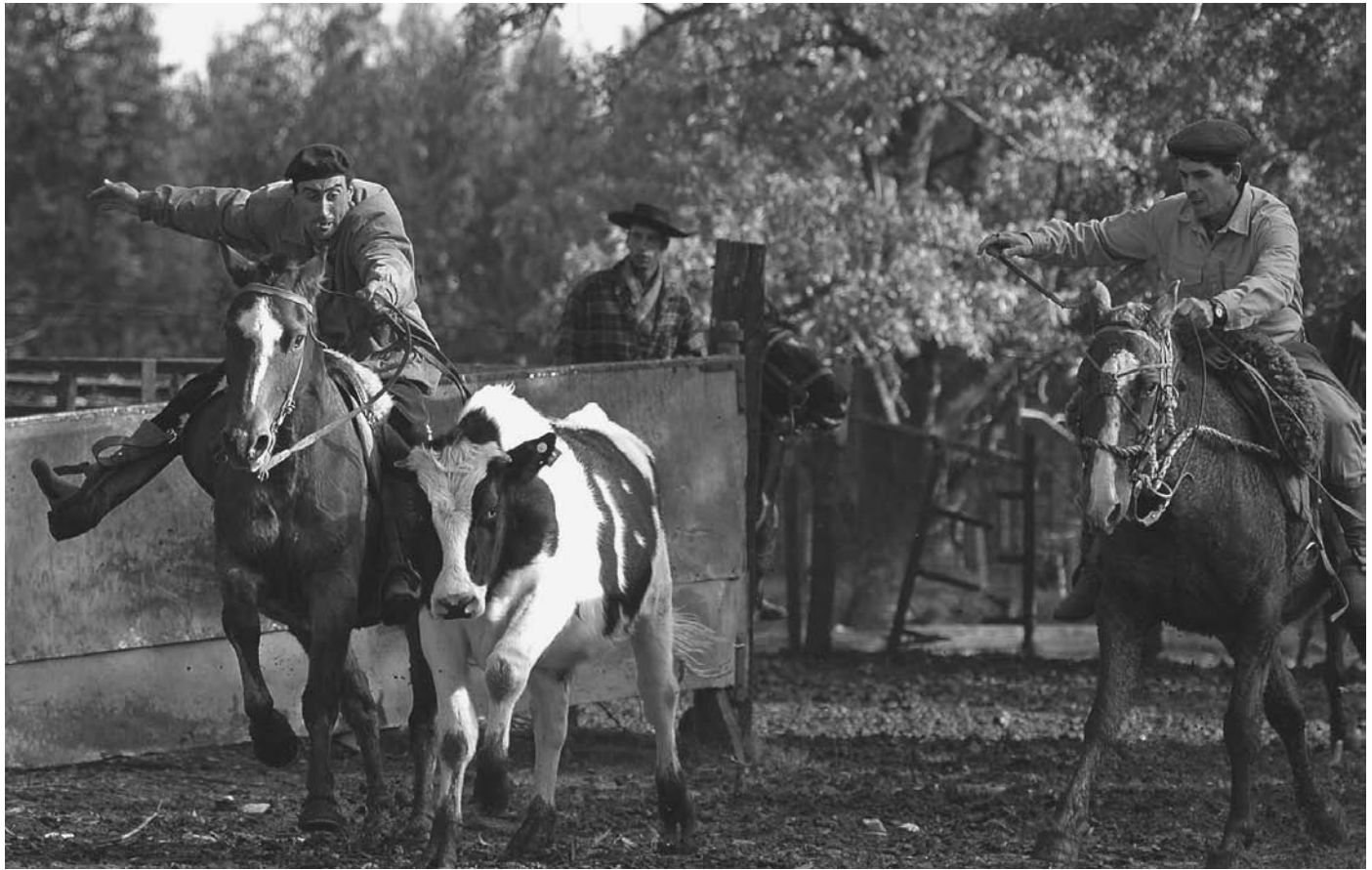
Uruguayans are among the most-educated people in Latin America, with a literacy rate topping 98%. The impressive educational system in Uruguay originated in the government of José Batlle y Ordoñez. Early in the 1900s, this president introduced sweeping educational reforms and invested in developing Uruguay's educational structures. Children are obligated by law to attend school until the age of 12.

The University of the Republic (1849) has numerous faculties, including a distinguished medical school that draws students from throughout the region. The Catholic University of Uruguay (1985) is also a well-reputed and prominent private institution.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Uruguay has a rich literary tradition, combining both European and indigenous cultural influences. Perhaps the most celebrated poet was Juan Zorrilla de San Martín. Referred to as the "poet of the Fatherland," he wrote a poem in 1879 about the native Amerindians. The poem "Tabare" has been considered to be among the most powerful in Uruguay's literary history. A more-recent writer of international acclaim is Juan Carlos Onetti, a contemporary novelist.

Uruguay's musical tradition has been shaped by its European history—as in Argentina, the tango is a popular form of dance. One exception to the European influence is *candombe*,



Gauchos show their skills in a game involving a cow at Parada Arteaga, Uruguay. (Pablo Porciuncula/AFP/Getty Images)

an Afro-Brazilian musical and dance form that is also popular in Uruguay.

### 15 WORK

Uruguay's population works in many different sectors of the economy. Many urban dwellers find work in the industrial sector, including textile plants, breweries, and canning factories. Many industries are closely tied to the processing of agricultural products. For example, the leather industry generates employment. Small firms produce shoes, purses, bags, and other leather items. In addition, wool is an important export.

In addition to industry and manufacturing, Montevideo offers jobs as waiters, taxi drivers, and shopkeepers. Unemployment, however, is a major problem. Many Uruguayans are unable to find paid employment and are forced to develop their own small-scale enterprises. Many of these people turn to street vending, tailoring, or other activities to make a living.

Agriculture is the primary driving force behind the Uruguayan economy. Sheep- and cattle-ranching are the most important agricultural activities. Growing crops such as fruits, wheat, oats, sugar, and corn is less important than raising livestock.

### 16 SPORTS

Uruguayans love soccer (*fútbol*) and enjoy the game both as spectators and participants. They have won the World Cup twice, first in 1930 and later in 1950. In the second World Cup

game, Uruguay beat the strong favorite, Brazil. The country responded with such jubilation that the government declared a national holiday! Soccer is also a favorite of youths. Informal neighborhood matches can be seen not only in soccer fields but also on quiet streets throughout the city.

Uruguayans are equally passionate about horses. Rodeos where *gauchos* (cowboys) demonstrate their equestrian skills are always widely attended. Horseracing is also very popular. Uruguay also shares with Argentina a passion for polo. Regular matches between the two countries are held on the Punte del Este.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many Uruguayan families flock to the beaches on weekends for rest and recreation. Many beautiful beaches provide an opportunity for swimming and sunbathing. Uruguayans are also fond of camping. The coastal forests provide numerous sites for camping and fishing. Weekends are often a time in the cities for visiting friends or having large family lunches. Montevideo also has a varied nightlife. Restaurants, cinemas, and musical shows are widely attended on weekends.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Most of Uruguay's crafts involve processing the raw materials produced by the large cattle- and sheep-ranching sector. Uruguayans excel in producing handcrafted leather goods. Belts,

hats, boots, and purses of high quality are carefully crafted from homegrown leather.

Many craft items are produced by a well-known handicraft cooperative in Montevideo called *Manos de Uruguay* (Hands of Uruguay). This cooperative includes skilled artisans from all over Uruguay. They spin the wool, dye it, and knit sweaters. *Manos de Uruguay* produces over 100,000 sweaters each year. In addition to handmade woolen items, they also make ceramic crafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Uruguay's highly urbanized society faces the same problems common to other industrialized countries. Unemployment typically ranges from 10% to 15%, and there is a serious lack of housing. There is, however, no major drug abuse problem.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender equality in Uruguay presents a mixed picture. Girls and boys participate in the education system at approximately the same rates through high school. Women enter universities at a higher rate than men. In fact, some 60% of students at public universities are women. Women often pursued professional careers, and approximately 60 percent of public university students were women. Literacy rates for women are the same as for men, and Uruguayan women have the highest labor force participation rates in Latin America. However, fewer women than men receive unemployment insurance.

A serious societal problem affecting Uruguayan women is domestic violence: 46% of women reported that they were victims of domestic violence during the early years of the 21st century. An estimated one woman dies every nine days as a result of domestic violence in the country.

Gender differences persist in employment with respect to hiring women and promoting them to higher positions. As for the wage differential, the gap has been closing in recent years: women's salaries are now 84.7% of men's. At the same time, differences remain with respect to decision-making in the political, economic, and social spheres. The labor market remains segmented, both horizontally and vertically: women are still found mainly in traditional sectors and their increased levels of education and training have not translated into positions of professional responsibility. Among employees, women are more numerous than men in so-called "non-standard" or casual employment, and they are heavily represented in seasonal and part-time jobs.

As of 2008 Uruguay had 4 women senators (out of 30) and 11 female deputies (of a total of 99 representatives), making up 11% of the seats in the General Assembly. In addition, 3 of the 13 cabinet ministers are women. Given the weakness of the executive branch's gender mechanisms, the national legislature has assumed the role of coordinating efforts in the various areas of government and of civil society. This role is pursued through the Special Commission on Gender and Equity of the House of Representatives, and through the "Women's Bloc", an ad hoc mechanism created by female senators and deputies committed to gender issues, drawn from all political parties.

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—revised by H. A. Azeves

# VAUPÉS

**LOCATION:** Colombia (along the Vaupés River)

**LANGUAGE:** A variety of Amerindian or mixed languages and dialects, including Tukano and Lingua Geral; Spanish; Portuguese

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Vaupés Indians of Colombia comprise several major tribes, including the Caribs, the Cubeos, the Uananas, the Karapanas, the Tucanos, and the Macús. Another tribe, the Arawaks, live further north along the Isana river. All of these groups share certain important features that relate directly to the lifestyle in a region consisting of tropical jungle and areas of savanna, along a major river, the Vaupés, and its tributaries. For example, it is now clear that conservation methods practiced in these areas of northwest Amazonia have been successful for thousands of years. It is also evident to historians and anthropologists that the trade along the rivers of the Vaupés among the varying tribal groups has been going on for a very long time. It is assumed that the origins of the Amerindians of this region lie in Central Asia. All of these groups share certain religious aspects, including shamanic practices, which are also found in Asia.

When Colombia was first colonized by the Spanish, the Vaupés region, because of its large expanses of dense jungle, remained remote and often inaccessible. Nevertheless, missionaries and traders made contact with the various tribes over the centuries, and rubber-tapping in particular brought more commerce to the region. After gaining independence from Spain, between 1821 and 1830, Vaupés regions became part of the first version of the Boyaca Department. Afterwards, between 1831 and 1857, the territory became part of the National Territory of Caquetá to later be part of the Sovereign State of Cauca. With the expansion of the rubber industry and the industrial revolution, exploration for rubber reached the area bringing colonizers that altered and, in some cases, extinguished the majority of the indigenous population. In 1910, the town of Clamar (meaning squid in English) functioned as the capital, and the rest of the territory was sectioned into commissaries. Later, and for security reasons, the capital was moved to the town of Mitú near the frontier with Brazil. The Department of Vaupé was constitutionally created in 1991.

Eventually, during the 20th century, the regional capital of the Vaupés (called Mitú) became a point of contact between the tribes of the Vaupés and regional government officials and traders. Although many Amerindians of the Vaupés, particularly the Cubeos, have resisted the efforts of White missionaries to Christianize them and to persuade them to adopt Western norms, some groups of Amerindians from many of these tribes have begun a process of cultural adaptation that is painful and, initially, at least, often plunges them into a type of dependence and poverty that is quite different from the rather magnificent self-sufficiency of which some of the Vaupés Indians are still capable.

In 1998 this remote locality achieved national and international popularity. In November of that year, a group of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) attempted

to take control over the capital town of Mitú. The Colombian Air Force sent aerial and ground forces to support the national troops in its clash against the more than 1,000 guerrilla combatants. The fight left the town and the region severely damaged and more than 50 policemen and 10 civilians lost their lives.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Vaupés region with its major rivers, such as the Vaupés and its tributaries, the Cuduyarí and the Querarí, forms part of the extensive Amazon basin that continues into Brazil. The Amerindian tribes of the Vaupés relate themselves geographically more to the Vaupés River and its tributaries, rather than to the boundaries of a particular municipality, department, or country. The Vaupés River itself flows into Brazil, and trade along this river system, which eventually flows into the Amazon River, has existed between the various tribes for centuries.

The Cubeos live between the Vaupés River and its tributary the Cuduyarí, whereas another major tribe, the Tukanos, live in the area between the Tiquié and the Poporí, which are both tributaries of the Vaupés. The Macús are scattered in several areas and also live among some of the other tribes, but some of their settlements lie in the area between the Apoporis and the Poco River, while other Macús live to the east of the Desanas, near the Negro River. The Karapanas and the Uananas live to the north of the Tucanos. In all cases, the Amerindians of the Vaupés divide the rivers and their banks into specific locations, some of which are, in effect, farming, hunting, or fishing areas belonging to particular clans, families, or individuals, whereas certain large rocks and other areas are considered sacred grounds.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Vaupés Indians speak a variety of languages and dialects. It is not unusual for a single large home or *maloca*, which houses several nuclear families that together form the extended family unit, to include four or five languages. This is because there are strict rules governing suitable partners for marriage. In a maloca where several brothers live, there may be a number of wives, therefore, who speak other languages. One of the major languages of the Vaupés that, in effect, is understood by many is the Tukano language.

Those who have had contact with missionaries, traders, and government officials also speak some Spanish and Portuguese. There is also a dialect or language that has developed over time, containing a mixture of Spanish, Portuguese, and Amerindian, known as Lingua Geral, which means, in Portuguese, a "general language" that enables different types of people in this region and in the bordering areas between Colombia and Brazil to communicate with each other.

The Vaupés Indians often have a Spanish name, but among many of them, particularly the Cubeos, the name must be given to them by a White person. This confers an immense advantage, in their view, because it may be used without restrictions. Their Amerindian names are never used casually but are instead closely guarded. When they refer to each other publicly, among themselves, they will use a name relating to their position as a relative. For example, among the Cubeos, a woman may refer to her grandchild or to a young person as *Teumi*, which means "little one" and is used affectionately.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

One of the most important characters of Vaupés folklore, shared by several of the tribes, is Vaí Mahse, the Master of the Animals. His name is pronounced *Vaeeh Mahsuh*. He can appear in a variety of forms, including that of a red dwarf, and he watches over the balance of nature so that humans, as hunters, do not exceed themselves when hunting animals. He also is said to wander over the Milky Way, which is a pathway for him, where he watches over the activities of animals and humans. He is a guardian of all the animals.

A hero shared by several tribes is Kúwai. He is a mythical figure and is regarded as “the one who has the power to transform, to change.” Kúwai is not perceived as a god in the strict sense but rather as a teacher who taught the mysteries of creation, the use and manufacture of tools, and the practical arts such as fishing and farming. He is also seen as the creator of rivers.

Early travelers to the Vaupés region refer to a god called Yuruparí, but several anthropologists think this is a term used by all the Amerindians of the Vaupés region to refer to any sacred or taboo element or thing.

#### 5 RELIGION

In general, most of the Vaupés Indians see the earth as midway between the underworld and the sky, and they generally accept the existence of spirits and ghosts, as well as entities relating to nature. They have a concept of the body as separate from the person's spirit or soul, and there is among some groups a cult of their ancestors, who are not only figures from the past but whose presence can be invoked in the present, through the appropriate rituals, to accompany their descendants. There are a great variety of colorful myths to explain the origins of the various peoples of the region, but their very color and variety, indicative of a rich imagination, can sometimes veil a deeper, metaphysical way of thinking that links the proper conduct of humans and society to a genuinely spiritual purpose in life.

The Tukano peoples of the Vaupés believe there is a balance in nature that must be maintained, and everything humans take from nature must be replaced. Humans themselves have access to two worlds: the outer, or what we might call objective reality; and the inner, psychic, or mental reality. To fulfill the principle of restitution in nature, humans must come to understand that everything that can be perceived through the senses in the physical world also has a fundamental meaning in the mental or psychological world. To know and to understand these significances or meanings is the main aim in life for the Tukanos.

All the Amerindians of the Vaupés have shamans who mediate between this world and the spirit world. The Cubeos have a division between shamans who are essentially healers and the much rarer shaman known as the *yaví*, or “jaguar,” who is supremely powerful and who can, it is believed, take the form of a jaguar.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many of the Vaupés Indians do not observe the major national holidays of Colombia, including Independence Day, or the arrival of Christopher Columbus on American shores, or major Catholic holidays. They still live within their own cultural and religious norms, and their festivals coincide with major life events, such as initiation rites, naming rites, or marriage rites.



In the capital of the Vaupés region, the town of Mitú, there has been a gradual process of adaptation carried on in part by some Vaupés Indian women who have married townsmen and have begun over the last few decades to participate in the national holidays.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When a child is born, a Vaupés woman will retire to a special place to give birth, outside the large hut where she lives with her extended family. Quite often she will give birth outdoors, in her own field where she grows manioc (cassava). She will reenter the hut or *maloca* through a special entrance, usually at the back of the house. Among some groups, the baby and the parents will be ritually painted, and this paint will last for a few days.

Childhood is somewhat different for boys and girls. The girls remain close to their mother and learn a wide array of skills that are considered appropriate for women, whereas boys essentially form groups and are allowed to play collectively until they reach adolescence.

Young children are treated with great tolerance and permissiveness, but the upbringing becomes much stricter when they become teenagers. After boys have reached puberty they are eventually initiated in a group, in secret rites well away from the gaze of girls and women. They are assisted by shamans, and they have to take special substances that will give them visions of the spirit world. Afterwards, they are entitled to wear special ritual jewelry and ornaments, as well as a headband decorated with feathers. They can also look for a suitable wife.

Among many Vaupés Indians, when a person dies, he or she is wrapped in his or her hammock and buried in his or her canoe. All the Amerindians of this region believe that a person's spirit leaves the body when he or she dies.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Amerindians of the Vaupés region who continue to live in the traditional manner have particular orders and levels of importance governing their relations. The men have a greater status than the women, and young men who have been initiated have a greater standing than younger boys. These societies have been evolving, and chieftains have been replaced in importance by shamans and people with secret or hidden knowledge.

Among the Cubeos, the strongest bonds are between brothers. Their settlements are usually sparsely populated and include extended family units of about 35 or 40 members, including brothers, their wives, and their children. The Tukanos also live in extended family units consisting of up to seven or eight nuclear families (husbands, wives, and children). Strict rules govern marriage. Among the Tukanos, men must choose wives who speak a different language and therefore belong to a different group known as a *phratry* (derived from the Latin word for "brother"). Each phratry is composed of about 20 smaller groups called *sibs*. Each sib shares a common mythical ancestor. Groups defined in this way do not occupy particular areas and so cannot be called tribes.

The notion of a language group as a particular type of phratry also includes mental and psychological elements (the common mythical ancestor that unites each subgroup or sib). This is close to the idea of other types of Amerindian groups organized as clans with particular totems, which are sometimes symbolized by animals and the virtues of the particular animals. These totems or clan symbols form part of the inner landscape of a person and contribute to his or her identity.

The peoples of the Vaupés often gather for drinking parties and social occasions during which fermented drinks called *chicha* and *mihí* are consumed. This is a way of cementing relationships between groups or sibs that make up the larger phratries. Among these groups, those who live "down river" have a higher standing than those who live "up river." This means that the "up river" groups will often prepare the *chicha* for the "down river" groups.

The most important factor governing any occasion is the right inner mood of the person or persons taking part, and this applies both to work-related activities and to social or ceremonial occasions. Among the Tukanos and the Arawaks, the *chicha* is served in an elaborate, formal manner by hosts carrying the chicha-laden gourds, who dance towards the guests in single file in a crouching position. During these social occasions young men and women are provided with an opportunity to dance together. The dances usually begin quite formally, first with only the male dancers, and as the evening progresses the girls gather courage and join them, overcoming their initial shyness.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Some travelers to the Vaupés have observed that the Amerindians who have managed to preserve their lifestyle and resist the pressures of the missionaries to abandon their spacious, communal longhouses in favor of smaller, rather miserable, single-

family huts are in better health than the groups who are in a state of transition, attempting to adapt to White society. This may well be because the Amerindians who continue to live in the traditional manner have not lost their knowledge of medicinal herbs and plants. It is also possible that the stresses of adaptation may contribute to illness. Nevertheless, some groups are not averse to seeking the help of White doctors, who live in the town of Mitú, the capital of the Vaupés region.

The attitude to consumption is interesting in the Vaupés, since ritual objects and handicrafts created by the different tribes are highly valued, and there has been a form of barter in existence for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years. A good fishing area along the river is an important possession and may be given as a gift even to a child. At the same time, the Vaupés peoples display an amazing detachment, even in relation to highly prized ritual objects that are considered irreplaceable, in the case of children who take these objects without permission or destroy them. There is a calm acceptance and an equanimity that is part of a tolerant attitude to young children.

The traditional longhouses, or *malocas*, are about 18 m (60 ft) long and almost 12 m (40 ft) wide, built with sloping palm-thatched roofs. Up to seven or eight nuclear families live together, usually brothers, their wives, and children. Inside there are communal spaces, nuclear-family spaces, spaces for young men at the front of the house, and special spaces at the back reserved for women and young children. The front entrance is reserved for males, the back entrance for females. The outer front walls are often painted with geometric motifs related to the views of these cultures about the life-giving forces of the universe. In recent years, nucleated villages have replaced traditional settlements consisting of a single longhouse with four or eight nuclear families. Today, town sizes range from 15 individuals in a single household unit to 300 people in a town.

The attitude that what is consumed must be replaced in some way is essentially a successful attitude of conserving resources in the environment. This makes for a standard of living sufficient for the basic needs of life, without excesses that are seen to be harmful if they create imbalances in nature.

The most important form of transport in the Vaupés is the canoe, although hunters can trek on foot for days in the jungle or the savanna if necessary.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The role of women is significant as bearers of children and cultivators of food. They are also skilled in various handicrafts, such as pottery and some types of weaving, and are expected to prepare the food. Women usually own their own small fields where they grow manioc (cassava). This field is not simply an economically productive unit, but also a private space. An interesting and important aspect of a woman's life is her role as a trader. She often has less contact with White society than some of the men and has continued to engage in the traditional form of barter in use among the Vaupés for centuries. This is not just a form of trade, but a pattern of social relationships that becomes established through this type of barter and that imposes a series of obligations. Among many groups, people take great care in what they ask for, because merely asking for a particular object imposes an obligation to surrender it. Every object has a history (where it was obtained, from whom, and under what circumstances) that invests the object with less imperson-

al meanings than those of objects obtained in a Western-style, mass-consumption society where only certain things may keep these associations in the mind of the consumer.

Among the Tukanos, when a man wishes to take a wife, his father and some male relatives have to kidnap the girl and take her to the house where the prospective groom awaits her. Among the Cubeos, it is the groom himself who has to kidnap the girl, take her to his canoe, and then to his home. If the girl is unhappy, she can escape back to her parental home, and her parents will respect her if she wants to stay with them. Even after the marriage rites, this situation may arise, and the family of the girl will never force her to stay with her husband if she is unhappy. The “kidnap” must be understood as a ritual that always precedes marriage.

Some Amerindians of the Vaupés, particularly the Cubeos, have been known to keep dangerous animals as pets, even anaconda snakes.

### 11 CLOTHING

The Vaupés Indians wear a type of loincloth and some forms of feathered headbands and arm bracelets, as well as body paint. Women who live in the traditional manner also use body paint, but some have adopted skirts or even loose cotton dresses as a result of contacts with White society, including missionaries and traders.

### 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Vaupés is manioc, also called cassava, which is made into flour and cakes. Wild fruits and nuts are also eaten, and an important source of protein is fish. Sometimes the peccary and the tapir are hunted, as well as some species of monkey.

Some cooking utensils have the advantage not only of being made locally, but also of being multifunctional and graceful: a circular mat woven from the mirití palm serves as a cooking-pot cover and a plate.

Men grow tobacco and some plants that provide the ingredients used in initiation rites, and women grow manioc. Girls and boys help women gather wild fruits and nuts.

### 13 EDUCATION

Some children in the Vaupés have attended mission schools, and their traditional way of life has been altered in favor of the single-family unit preferred by missionaries. For many others, a traditional Amerindian education includes learning a number of tribal languages, as well as all the survival skills necessary for their traditional lifestyle, including hunting, fishing, farming, weaving, tool-making, and house-building. These are accompanied by instruction in correct understanding of the principles of conservation and a view of nature and the cosmos as an interplay of forces and energies where a balance has to be maintained.

Moreover, during the last years the Colombian government through the Ministry of Health has executed a healthcare program that genuinely attempts to preserve and support the Vaupés culture by creating the so-called “shaman school.” In this educational centers traditional shamans are in charge of teaching to younger members of their communities their ancestral rituals and therapeutic approaches. The shaman school project, as well as other grassroots blueprints, reflects the influence of large number of pressure groups that have argued that

top-down programs and polices often result in tremendous cultural losses. Along with the shaman school project, many successful struggles have been highly useful to ameliorate the Vaupés’ condition. For instance, today Colombian indigenous have the following rights: to be educated in their own languages, to be taught their own history and cosmology, and to have their own healing system incorporated into public programs of health. Moreover, Amerindians in Colombia enjoy advantages not granted to other citizens such as the exemption of paying taxes and to serve in the military. Among their rights stands out their privilege of having accesses to free education and to receive free healthcare.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music can be either sacred or secular. Sacred instruments are prepared and stored with care and used on ceremonial occasions. They include flutes, rattles, and drums. Both singing and dancing are important to the Amerindians of the Vaupés. These activities can occur in a religious and ceremonial context, such as initiation rites or the invocation of ancestor or burial ceremonies, or they can occur in a secular context such as social drinking parties to celebrate the completion of a house. Certain melodies played by young men on reed flutes are courtship songs well known in the area, suggesting unsung words meaning: “If the women from these parts do not want us, we will go somewhere else!”

The literature of the Vaupés Indians is oral, although some petroglyphs (symbolic designs and drawings on large stones along the river suggesting written hieroglyphic messages) have been found. This suggests that these cultures may be very old.

The myths and legends of the Vaupés represent a rich body of oral literature. There are stories of the origin of the world and of the peoples and all the natural elements, as well as of the plants and animals. The Desanas, a branch of the Tukanos, refer not only to the physical sun, but also to the invisible Sun Father who sent Pamurí Mahse, who carried his staff and searched everywhere in the Vaupés for a place to establish humanity. He stood in his canoe and probed the riverbank to find fertile ground. He had to find a place where his staff would cast no shadow. Finally, he found this place, and seed fell from his staff into a deep pool in the river, and from this seed the first Desana was born.

### 15 WORK

Some Vaupés Indians have worked in the past in the rubber-tapping industry, although others who do not participate in the cash economy and live in more remote areas, relying on barter and exchange, have regarded this as a calamity, a type of slave-labor that destroys the culture. Trade among tribes is an important activity, although trade with White people is becoming more common, and some Indian traders have become adept at bargaining. Hunting, fishing, and farming are major activities. The Vaupés Indians make beautiful fish traps along the riverbanks out of delicately woven reeds, and they also use blowpipes and spears for hunting. The fine arrows or darts used in the blowpipes are dipped in a specially prepared *curare* poison that paralyzes the prey.

### 16 SPORTS

The Vaupés Indians are remarkable boaters. This is due to the large number of rapids along the Vaupés River, which they





Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe shakes hands with an indigenous woman in Mitu, Colombia. Mitu is the capital of the southeastern Vaupés state. Vaupés is one of the states with the largest native population. Uribe promised that all indigenous people would have access to free government healthcare. (AP Images/HO-Miguel Solano, SNE)

navigate with marvelous skill in their canoes. While this activity is not, strictly speaking, conceived by them as a sport, much of the thrill and the intense concentration experienced by the sportsman are present during this activity, even when it is linked to the necessity of travel rather than sport.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Children play a game relating to jungle demons and the *tem tem* bird. Girls and boys play the demons who surround a boy who is the tem tem bird and who has to try to break out of the circle. In another game, a girl builds a thatched palm shelter and waits inside for a boy hunter to free her. Some travelers to the area have described a game of catch where the ball is made out of corn.

A main form of recreation, which is enjoyed mainly by young adults but which also includes whole families, is the social drinking party where vast quantities of fermented manioc (cassava) beer or *chicha* is consumed, and people dance and sing all night, or until they drop! This type of reunion occurs between groups organized as *sibs*, a type of kinship that relies on a common mythical ancestor and is a type of clan.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The arts and crafts of the Vaupés include jewelry-making, particularly delicately beaded necklaces, as well as basket-weav-

ing. The Makú Indians are particularly skilled basket-weavers, and their baskets are deep and pleasingly shaped, as well as lightweight and strong. Makú baskets are an easily traded item along the Vaupés River. Body-painting is practiced by all the Indians of the region, and the attractive geometric motifs are also repeated on the walls of their spacious longhouses. The motifs refer to fertility, creation, and various entities from the spirit world, or animals that have counterparts in the spirit world, such as jaguars. The jaguar is a symbol of power, and very often jaguar spots are painted on people or on particular places as a form of protection.

The Vaupés Indians also make musical instruments such as reed flutes and larger flutes known as *chirimías*. Pottery, made mainly by women, takes a variety of pleasing shapes.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The social problems of the Vaupés Indians relate mainly to the incursions of missionaries, traders, people involved in the rubber industry, and government officials, as well as, on occasion, curious but unsympathetic travelers who have disturbed the delicately balanced lifestyle that survived for hundreds or perhaps thousands of years. Missionaries over the years have disapproved of the extended family households and have tried to persuade the Vaupés Indians to live in single-family units. For this, they have been heavily criticized by anthropologists

who point out that the extended household is a form of social organization that, once it is broken up, impoverishes the families both physically and psychologically because they are deprived of important support systems well-suited to their environment.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Opposition and complementarities mark gender relations in Vaupés society. Even though women are excluded from religious rites, female attributes and values form a major element of the ritual symbolism. Typical Vaupés males display their virility openly in front of women. In addition, males are vigilant over women so that they carry out their daily responsibilities and duties, which communicate the fact that women are inferior (or at least subordinate) to males.

Women play a much more important role in the provision of dietary components (especially carbohydrates through the cultivation of manioc) than the relatively smaller contribution of men (mostly protein through fishing and hunting). However, the salience and significance of women in this respect is not acknowledged either in myth or reality. While only products of fishing and hunting are called “food,” the more abundant commodities supplied mostly by women are considered “side dishes.”

In terms of marriage relations, while male infidelity is accepted, women’s infidelity can be punished by death. Man’s economic position is related to polygamy in that women are a very important economic factor in the prosperity of the male, since women are major producers. Therefore, women are net economic assets or gain for the males.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# VENEZUELAN S

**LOCATION:** Venezuela

**POPULATION:** 27.3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish (official); Amerindian languages

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; some Protestantism, Judaism, and native Amerindian religions

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Spaniards discovered Venezuela during Christopher Columbus’ third expeditions to the New World in 1498, and named the country “little Venice” because of the stilt-supported villages on its coast. During the 18th century the export market of cocoa and coffee fostered a small elite of European planters, which turned the country into the world’s largest producer of coffee during the 1800s and produced Simon Bolivar, the father of independence. In addition to Venezuela, Bolivar helped to free Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia from Spanish rule. The decisive defeat of the Spanish forces in his home country took place at Carabobo in 1821, after which battle Bolivar was known as *El Libertador*, or The Liberator.

Following the discovery of petroleum resources at the end of the 19th century, oil overtook coffee as the main export commodity. The oil industry’s windfall profits made power struggles the normal state of affairs. Until 1958 Venezuela had enjoyed only three years of civilian rule. After the overthrow of the last dictator, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, political elites made the explicit decision to reduce inter-party tension and violence in order to prevent further instability. This new orientation took concrete form in the agreement signed between the two mass parties: the social democrat Acción Democrática (AD—Democratic Action) and the Christian-democrat Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI—Committee of Independent Electoral Political Organization).

In the Pact of Punto Fijo (1958) the parties committed to support a common program, a pledge that was reinforced by an agreement to participate in a coalition government regardless of the outcome of elections. In this way, all parties were devoted to the defense of the system, based upon a sustainable oil economy, through a power-sharing scheme. As part of the common project of the AD-COPEI coalition, the oil industry was gradually nationalized between 1974 and 1976 and the oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) was created to run it. The influx of petrodollars between 1973 and 1983 due to the oil price shocks provoked by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which Venezuela helped found, caused the oil price, and thus state revenues, to quadruple, and prompted the government to increase spending. However, after the price of oil began to plummet in 1983, the declining per-capita state oil revenue made poverty increase dramatically from 18% of the population in 1980 to 36% in 1984 and to over 55% in 1989.

In the midst of declining oil revenues and indebtedness due to the acquisition of international loans during times of high oil prices, second-time President Carlos Andrés Pérez implemented a package of neoliberal economic adjustments that he had negotiated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) prior to becoming elected. The drastic 30% fuel hike ignited the *Caracazo*, a 19-city popular riot that lasted for a week. Unable



to reverse the economic crisis and having created no meaningful differentiation between their projects, the ruling coalition began losing its base support, faced two coup attempts in 1992, and finally lost the presidency to Hugo Chávez, a political outsider, in 1998.

Through his Bolivarian Revolution and the imposition of “21st-century socialism” in contradiction to the American-backed Washington Consensus, Chávez mobilized large segments of the lower classes, which felt excluded by established parties and did not possess institutionalized forms of political self-expression. After taking power, President Chávez called for a National Assembly to write a new constitution, which became official in 1999. A year later, he was reelected under the new electoral rules.

Even though the opposition has accused Chavez of authoritarianism and has tried to overthrow him, first by force in 2002 and then by calling a recall election a year later, Chavez’s electoral majority coupled with the more than 1,000% increase in oil prices since he became president in 1999 have helped him stay in power.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

Venezuela is the size of Texas and Oklahoma combined. It shares a border with Colombia to the west, with Brazil to the south, and with Guyana to the east. In the north its Caribbean coastline is around 3,000 km (1,865 mi) long. The central part of Venezuela consists of vast, grassy plains; the south is partly jungle, and a range of the Andes Mountains crosses Venezuela from the Colombian border, running in a northeasterly direc-

tion. These features contribute to Venezuela’s variety, from Andean peaks clad in eternal snow, to rain forests, beaches, and savannas. The greater part of the country has a warm climate.

While 67% of the population is Mestizo (European and Amerindian descent), roughly 21% of Venezuelans are largely unmixed European, predominately of Spanish descent, but also Italian, Portuguese, and German. Another 10% of the population is black or mulatto, and 2% is Amerindian. There are at least 40 Amerindian groups, mainly in the Amazon basin, and the majority of them retain their native language.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Venezuela is Spanish. The country offers a variety of accents. There is a difference in the Andean region, where Spanish is spoken more slowly, as compared to the rest of Venezuela where the language is spoken more rapidly, a feature it shares with other Caribbean areas of Latin America.

The majority of Amerindian tribes continue to speak their own languages; among these are the Guajiros who live near Maracaibo, the Warao in the Orinoco River region, and the Makiratare and Yanomani in the Amazon region in the south.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The folklore in Venezuela has evolved from blending of Spanish, African, and Amerindian customs. Several colorful festivals are the result of this blending of cultures. Carnival, known simply as *Carnaval*, is a nationwide yearly event that lasts for several days and begins just before Ash Wednesday (in February). There is a dramatic Dance of the Devils where people parade and dance in costumes and masks in the streets of San Francisco de Yare on Corpus Christi. Black African music influences the Fiesta de San Juan, held in Miranda state in June.

## 5 RELIGION

Even though 85% of Venezuelans are Roman Catholic, there are also Protestants and Jewish communities that reside mainly in Caracas. In addition, the majority of native tribes, particularly in the Amazon region, continue to practice their own forms of religion, which share some features with other Amerindian groups throughout the Americas, including a deep reverence for nature.

One of Venezuela’s important religious events takes place in the town of Guanare. It is an annual feast day honoring the Virgin, known in Venezuela as Nuestra Señora de Comoroto, Venezuela’s patron saint. It commemorates the occasion in 1652 when the Virgin is said to have appeared to an Amerindian chief on the shores of the Guanaguare River, encouraging him to accept baptism, and leaving him a tiny image of herself. The chief was frightened and ran away and later died of snakebite. Just before his death, however, he asked to be baptized and advised his tribesmen to undergo the same ritual.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Aside from religious festivals and the national Carnival, the major holiday in Venezuela is Independence Day, celebrated on April 19. Other public holidays marking important historical events include Simón Bolívar’s birthday on July 24, the victory over the Spanish in the Battle of Carabobo on July 5, and the discovery of America on October 12. Labor Day on May 1 is also a public holiday.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Since most of Venezuela is Roman Catholic, baptism and First Communion of children are important occasions. Most children will also bear the name of a saint, either exclusively or combined with another name, and many celebrate their saint's day as well as their actual birthday. When a person dies, prayers are held during nine days at the person's home, and relatives and close friends are usually in attendance.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Venezuelans are considered outgoing and friendly, and their spirit of gaiety is evident in their love of social gatherings and parties. In common with many other Latin Americans, they have a more easygoing attitude to time and are tolerant of late arrivals to meetings. Even business lunches can be lengthy affairs, lasting two or three hours.

Formal greetings include shaking hands, but women usually greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. In some other Latin American countries, the formal *usted* is used when addressing a person who is not well-known to the speaker, and this formality may continue for a long time. But Venezuelans tend to be more informal and they often use the more informal *tu* when addressing each other.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Even in the prosperous 1960s and 1970s, when the oil boom changed Caracas from a relatively quiet town to a busy center with shopping malls, numerous highways, many skyscrapers, and expanding residential areas, the contrast between prosperous and poor housing was vivid: lavish hotels and apartments blocks vied with shantytowns that were sometimes only a few streets away on the surrounding hillsides. Some of this housing was so precarious that it would slide down the mountainside in the wake of torrential rains. Although some of this poorer housing included dirt floors and corrugated iron roofs, Venezuelans living in these conditions nevertheless had electricity, refrigerators, and televisions, which was not the case in neighboring, less-prosperous South American countries.

This contrast also existed, but to a lesser extent, in other less-populated towns. Since then, the expansion of education and newer universities have contributed to the creation of a growing middle class, and this is reflected in the increased building of middle-class homes.

The rapid expansion of urban areas and the drift of people from the countryside to the cities in search of work put pressure on many urban services, including transport. To ease the traffic jams, which were particularly acute in Caracas, the government built a subway system.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Venezuelans value family ties, and the bonds between the extended family—which includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—are very important. Occasions for larger family gatherings include major events such as birthdays, baptisms, First Communions, weddings, and major holidays. The extended family is regarded as a close source of support, particularly when there are young children, and also as a source of help in obtaining jobs in a society where personal contacts are important even to secure introductions that may lead to work opportunities. Extended families also gather on weekends

or on short holiday visits to sites such as beaches. In smaller towns, the extended family gathers often for family meals and celebrations. The family offers a secure network in the absence of some state services and benefits that are taken for granted in wealthier societies.

Women have made considerable progress in gaining access to what were traditionally male professions, including medicine, dentistry, economics, and the legal profession. In middle-class households, the workingwoman relies on servants to help in the home; in poorer households, older relatives or older children provide help wherever possible.

## 11 CLOTHING

In cities, men wear lightweight suits or shirts and trousers that suit Venezuela's climate. Women are generally very fashion-conscious and take considerable care grooming themselves, taking as much care of their hair and nails as of their clothes, which are frequently washed and carefully pressed. A woman is expected always to look her best, and the Venezuelan woman often succeeds, even when wearing informal clothing such as a blouse, simple trousers, and sandals, or a simple shirt and skirt. She will choose accessories and makeup carefully.

## 12 FOOD

A typical Venezuelan dish, which is in fact a hearty meal derived from the cattle-ranching areas of Los Llanos, consists of shredded beef, called *carne mechada*, served with fried plantains, black beans, cornmeal pancakes called *arepas*, rice, and sometimes white cheese.

Another type of corn pancake, called *cachapa*, is often served for breakfast with jam. A staple, tasty snack is the *empanada*, a fried cornmeal turnover sometimes stuffed with cheese, meat, or chicken.

In many poor households, tropical fruits such as coconuts, mangoes, watermelons, pineapples, and papayas enrich the basic diet of beans, rice, and plantains. In coastal areas the diet includes fish, which is often served fried or in a stew called a *sancocho*, with vegetables.

## 13 EDUCATION

Formal schooling begins in Venezuela at the age of six and is compulsory for the first six years. The four-year high school leads to a one-year preparation for college, which usually lasts four years but can be longer if the chosen university career is medicine or engineering. Many poorer households cannot afford schooling, and young people who are unable to complete high school often have to go out to work to supplement the family income. They might find work as street vendors or messengers, or in the building trade. In rural areas they will work in the fields.

Greater numbers of Venezuelans are nevertheless finding their way to universities and colleges, a few of which offer completely free tuition. There are about 30 universities, located in several towns. The largest is Universidad Central in Caracas with about 70,000 students, and another well-known university, Universidad de los Andes in the Andean town of Merida, has over 30,000 students.

Women have made great progress in university education, and about half of the student body at university level is now female.



Venezuelan woman picking coffee beans. Farming and cattle-ranching are major sources of work in rural areas. In cities, people work in a wide range of commercial activities or find work in factories. (Anne Kalosh)

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Venezuela has produced fine writers, painters, poets, musicians, and, more recently, playwrights. The work of expressionist painter Armando Reverón is admired throughout the American continent, and he has been succeeded by others who have become known internationally, such as Hector Poleo, Alejandro Otero, Marisol, and the sculptor Jesús Soto. One of Venezuela's first poets was Andrés Bello, who knew Simón Bolívar. Venezuela's best-known poet is Andrés Bello, who died in 1955. One of his poems, "Angelitos Negros," became world-famous when it was made into a popular song and sung by artists everywhere.

Venezuela's most famous novelist is Rómulo Gallegos. In one of his novels, *Doña Bárbara*, he created a strong-willed, unforgettable character of the same name. His novel *Canaima* is a dramatic account of humans' struggle to survive, psychologically and physically, in the jungle. A contemporary of Rómulo Gallegos was Miguel Otero Silva, who died in 1985. His novel *Casas Muertas* is widely admired. Another internationally known writer was Mariano Picón-Salas, born in Merida. Also worthy of mention is Arturo Uslar Pietri, who greatly enriched the modern Venezuelan cultural scene as both a novelist and a historian. He also became well-known as a journalist, continuing a Latin American tradition in which literary figures also engage in high-quality journalistic writing.

The *zoropo* is Venezuela's national dance, and the music is played with a small harp, rattles, and a four-string guitar called the *cuatro*.

#### 15 WORK

The prosperity of the 1960s and 1970s based on the oil boom was followed by a world drop in oil prices that affected Venezuela as a major oil-producing country. Besides the rampant poverty and inequality after the oil-price downfall in the 1980s, neoliberal reforms smashed the labor market, severing the networks between the Democratic Action (AD) Party and grassroots labor. The previously strongly unionized labor force, which accounted for more than a quarter of the total workforce in the 1980s, was cut nearly in half; people working in the informal market rose from 34.5% in 1980 to more than 53% in 1998, and unemployment reached 15.4% of the urban work force. The labor force in 2007 was 12.5 million and the unemployment rate was 9.1%.

Farming and cattle ranching are major sources of work in rural areas. In cities, people work in a wide range of commercial activities or find work in factories. During times of economic hardship, casual labor increases and many have to find a living as street vendors or in the building trades when work is available.

For university graduates, the prospects vary depending on the choice of career. Mining is an important activity and mining engineers usually find jobs, as do oil engineers. Economists find work in business or banking, and medical and legal careers are still popular. Newer careers include the media, and television is a growth industry in Venezuela.

#### 16 SPORTS

Both baseball and soccer are national passions in Venezuela. In coastal areas, water sports such as swimming, boating, and fishing are very popular. Inland, in the grassy plains known as Los Llanos, riding is popular both for work and pleasure, and fine equestrians take part in colorful rodeos known as *toros colcados*, in which they compete to bring a bull down by grabbing its tail while riding at top speed.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Venezuelans enjoy visiting their beautiful national parks, and they are also fond of traveling and taking part in a variety of festivals around the country, which include singing, playing instruments, and dancing. In the major cities there are nightclubs and discos. Venezuelans also enjoy eating out.

Television is popular, and Venezuela produces a variety of soap operas known as *telenovelas*. Going to bullfights is also a popular pastime.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Anthropologists and local historians have played an important part in helping Venezuelans become acquainted with the arts and crafts of the various Amerindian tribes. Much of their handiwork is now more readily available and includes pottery, baskets, hammocks, and rugs.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Under the strong rule of Hugo Chávez, who managed to speak to the people's unfulfilled demands for social justice

by castigating the oligarchy, Venezuela is faced with increasing political polarization. However, the sharp increase of oil prices—which represents a third of Venezuela's gross domestic product (GDP) and 80% of the country's exports—from \$8 a barrel in 1999 to \$117 in 2008, created an impressive average economic growth rate of 7.6% between 2003 and 2007. This has kept the country in relative peace.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Human rights groups, women's rights organizations, and feminists have praised the new Venezuelan Constitution of 1999 as one of the most advanced constitutions in the world in terms of its vision on gender, because it recognizes the rights of Venezuelan women as equals with their male counterparts, promotes affirmative action, and is against discrimination. In addition, it gives a pension to housewives and mandates the use of gender inclusive language.

However, in 2008 only 18 of the 165 National Assembly Deputies, about 11%, were women. Moreover, only 2 out of 23 governors and 20 out of a total of 335 mayors were women, which amounted to 8.7% and 5.9% respectively. In recognition of the contrast between law and practice, the National Electoral Council (CNE) passed a resolution on 1 April 2005 that legally obliges all political parties to run an equal number of men and women to any deliberating body. In addition, the newly created Unified Command of Women for Unity and Parity has the role of processing the complaints of excluded women and of taking their cases before the Supreme Court of Justice to ensure that their rights are upheld.

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—revised by C. Vergara

# VIETNAMESE AMERICANS

For more information on Vietnamese history and culture, see **Vol. 3: Vietnamese**.

## OVERVIEW

Before 1970, only 3,788 Vietnamese had immigrated to the United States. The first real wave of Vietnamese immigration to the United States began on 30 April 1975 when Saigon fell to North Vietnamese communist forces. At least 65,000 South Vietnamese fled the country that same day. By the end of 1975, some 130,000 Vietnamese refugees had entered the United States. These early refugees tended to be well educated and wealthy; many were high-ranking military officers and government officials. With their high level of skills and education, they adapted quickly to American life and within 10 years were at an equal economic level with the average American citizen.

Because of its involvement in the Vietnam War, the U.S. government felt a responsibility toward the South Vietnamese refugees. Congress passed the Indochina Refugee Act in 1975, allowing up to 200,000 Southeast Asians to enter the United States under a special “parole” status. The U.S. government also allocated \$405 million in resettlement aid to help South Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees start a new life in America. The refugees were moved to resettlement camps in the United States where their papers were processed and they were given English language classes. Private organizations matched each of them with a sponsor somewhere in the United States who would then help them resettle in the sponsor's community. Although most of these first refugees could only find low-paying jobs and many ended up on welfare, the U.S. government planned to phase out its aid program by 1977.

However, the situation in Vietnam worsened, and by 1978 thousands more refugees had fled the country. Some 85,000 climbed aboard overcrowded, flimsy boats and attempted to cross the sea to safety. These desperate folk came to be known as the “boat people.” U.S. Congress passed the Refugee Act in 1980 to admit more Vietnamese refugees. In this second wave of Vietnamese immigration, 95,000 refugees entered the United States in 1980 and 86,000 in 1981. In contrast to the first wave, most of these refugees were poorly educated farmers and fishermen who had a much more difficult time adapting to life in the industrialized United States.

The Orderly Departure Program was put into effect in 1982 to reduce the number of people risking their lives in boats to escape Vietnam. Under this new program, 66,000 more Vietnamese entered the United States between 1983 and 1991. In 1987, Congress passed the Amerasian Homecoming Act to help Amerasian teenagers (the children of Vietnamese women and American military men) and their families immigrate to the United States.

The 2000 U.S. Census counted 1,223,736 Vietnamese Americans (0.04% of the total U.S. population; about 10% of the total Asian American population). The total estimated population of Vietnamese Americans in 2006 had climbed to almost 1.5 million. According to the census, 73% of Vietnamese Ameri-



cans in 2000 were foreign-born and 83% spoke only or mostly Vietnamese at home.

At first, Vietnamese refugees settled near their U.S. sponsors throughout the United States. The U.S. government hoped to spread out the impact so that no one community would be overly burdened by a sudden influx of newcomers. Most Vietnamese settled in California, with a large number in Texas and sizeable groups in Pennsylvania, Florida, Washington, Illinois, New York, and Louisiana.

However, family and kinship groups are very important to traditional Vietnamese, so they began a secondary migration within the United States to rejoin their families. They also moved from smaller towns and rural areas to cities where they would have better access to jobs and community and government services. Many also moved to warmer climates. California and Texas now host over half of all Vietnamese Americans; the original “Little Saigon,” south of Los Angeles, is the center of the Vietnamese American community, with Houston’s newly dubbed “Little Saigon” taking second place.

Acquiring English language proficiency is no easy task for Vietnamese Americans. The Vietnamese language differs from English in fundamental ways, making the shift from one to the other extremely difficult. American-born Vietnamese Americans, who have grown up speaking English, and those who came to the United States as small children, are easily bilingual. Older foreign-born Vietnamese Americans, however, still speak Vietnamese almost exclusively at home and among friends and family and struggle to speak English when necessary in non-Vietnamese society. Vietnamese Americans have

not been in the United States long enough to have a significant population of third-generation immigrants (children born to American-born Vietnamese) who might begin to lose their fluency in Vietnamese.

Most Vietnamese Americans are Buddhist of the “Northern School,” also known as Mahayana Buddhism. Vietnamese Buddhist temples exist throughout the United States. Other religions are also represented among Vietnamese Americans, including Confucianism (considered a philosophy rather than a religion by some), Taoism, Cao-Dai (a combination of Eastern belief systems), and Hoa-Hao (a meditative sect originating in the Mekong Delta in 1939). A small minority of Vietnamese Americans are either Muslim or Protestant.

Although Roman Catholics make up only 10% of the population of Vietnam, a third or more of Vietnamese Americans are Catholic. This is due both to the high percentage of Roman Catholics among the first wave of refugees, and the involvement of Roman Catholic organizations in refugee resettlement in the United States. Many Vietnamese refugees, in gratitude to their Roman Catholic U.S. sponsors, at least nominally converted to Roman Catholicism. One of the largest parishes is in New Orleans and played a significant role in relief efforts after hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit in 2005. Some 30,000 Vietnamese Americans were affected by the hurricanes, either evacuated to other cities and states or left homeless in New Orleans. Told that their parish would not be resettled, Father Vien Nguyen of Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church in New Orleans organized his parishioners to conduct a furious campaign of photos, petitions, and visits to the utility compa-

ny Entergy to persuade them to reestablish electrical service to the parish. Entergy eventually agreed to restart services, allowing for the return of more Vietnamese Americans as well as others to the city.

Another Vietnamese American organization contributed greatly to relief and resettlement efforts in Louisiana and Mississippi after the 2005 hurricane disaster. First established in 1980 to aid Vietnamese “boat people,” Boat People SOS (BPSOS) developed over the years into an agency that helps Vietnamese immigrants to the United States in many ways, including advocating for them with policy-makers in the U.S. government. When Katrina and Rita caused the flooding of New Orleans and the Mississippi coastline, BPSOS used its experience air-lifting boat people in the 1980s to rescue those stranded by the hurricanes. BPSOS continues to follow and assist Vietnamese Americans as they resettle either in their former homes or in communities to which they were relocated.

The most important holiday for Vietnamese Americans is Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. Occurring sometime between mid-January and mid-February (based on the Chinese lunar calendar), it is a combination New Year, spring, family, and national festival. Traditionally, Tet lasts for seven days, but most Vietnamese Americans celebrate only the first three. As every Vietnamese has two birthdays, their personal birthday and Tet, Tet also becomes a community-wide birthday party. Other elements of Tet include the payment of debts, forgiveness of past wrongs, and vows of personal improvement.

First-wave Vietnamese Americans, who were generally well educated and had job skills relevant to the industrialized American work world, now enjoy living conditions comparable to or better than the national average. Second-wave refugees, however, have had a more difficult time succeeding in the United States. With less formal schooling and few relevant job skills, many second-wave refugees have either been stuck in low-paying blue-collar jobs or remain unemployed. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, almost 10% of all Vietnamese American families, and over 25% of families with a woman alone as head of the household, lived below the poverty level. Some 12% of individuals were also living below the poverty level.

Health problems common to recent refugees, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, and lowered immunities, plague the Vietnamese American community. Many Vietnamese Americans were also exposed to tuberculosis either in Vietnam or in refugee camps. Cultural attitudes and traditions contribute to health issues, particularly among Vietnamese American women. Modesty combined with the language barrier discourage many women from getting regular health screenings such as Pap smears and mammograms, resulting in a high fatality rate for cancers that remain undetected into advanced stages. In the late 1990s, the rate of cervical cancer among Vietnamese American women was higher than that of any other ethnic group and almost five times that of European American women.

Traditionally, the family is the center of Vietnamese culture. Most Vietnamese Americans continue to cling to the family as their source of support in their new home, as well as continuing to support those they left behind, sending money every month to family members in Vietnam and sponsoring their relatives to join them in the United States whenever possible.

Vietnamese Americans tend to eat traditional Vietnamese foods at home. A few cities with large Vietnamese American

populations now boast Vietnamese restaurants where traditional foods are served. In 2007 Vietnamese American chef Hung Huynh won the Season 3 Top Chef competition on Bravo TV.

Young Vietnamese Americans, like other Asian American students, tend to be high achievers at school. Despite language and cultural barriers, they work hard and are eager to acquire the skills necessary to succeed in their American homeland. Many adult Vietnamese Americans attend adult education classes for English language and job skills training. Vietnamese Americans often describe themselves with the traditional Vietnamese phrase *tran can cu*, which expresses a combination of hard work, persistence, ambition, and patience. Their short history in the United States so far shows this to be an apt description.

In recent years, more Vietnamese Americans are becoming known outside the Vietnamese American community for their successes in various fields. The book, *Watermark: Vietnamese American Poetry & Prose*, published in 1998 by the Asian American Writers' Workshop (edited by Barbara Tran, Monique T. D. Truong, and Luu Truong Khoi), gathers together the works of a number of Vietnamese American writers, including novelists, short story writers, and poets. In sports, Catherine Mai Lan Fox is a gold medalist swimmer, Danny Graves has played baseball in the major and minor leagues, and Dat Nguyen plays football with the NFL. Hugely popular in the Vietnamese American community, musician and composer Pham Duy has yet to become well-known among the general American population.

Vietnamese Americans have found the most employment success in the area of small business ownership. Most are family run and serve primarily Vietnamese American customers. Typical Vietnamese American businesses include restaurants, specialty grocery stores, laundries and tailor shops, convenience stores, beauty salons, car repair garages, and real estate offices. The U.S. Census Bureau counted more than 147,000 Vietnamese American businesses throughout the United States in 2002, with combined receipts of over \$15.5 billion.

Vietnamese Americans suffer from the same problem that all new immigrant communities face: the tension between foreign-born elders who continue to hold to traditional values and American-born young people who have been acculturated to American values. In the Vietnamese American community, this breakdown of traditional generational authority and respect has led to a particularly violent situation. Vietnamese American teenagers are bonding together in youth gangs to protect themselves from anti-Asian discrimination and to give each other the support they feel is lacking at home. Most often, gang violence is directed at other Vietnamese Americans. Much of it goes unreported because the victims do not trust the police, fear retaliation on the part of the gangs, and/or do not wish to give the Vietnamese American community a bad name.

There is also some tension between first-wave and second-wave Vietnamese Americans. The more educated and successful first-wave refugees criticize second-wave refugees for their lack of success and their dependence on welfare. Second-wave refugees, on the other hand, resent the privilege and snobbery of the first-wave refugees. For the most part, this tension is a continuation of class conflicts in Vietnam between the educat-



ed elite (the first wave of refugees) and less educated laborers (the second wave).

Vietnamese women have had a particularly difficult time in their journey to becoming Americans. Those who escaped Vietnam on boats were subjected to rape by pirates, and life in the refugee camps was likewise dangerous. Separated from family members and forced to survive on their own, they became both more independent than traditional Vietnamese culture allows for women, as well as deeply fearful of being without a man's support.

Traditional Vietnamese culture with its patriarchal structure promotes values of subordination and submission for women. The Four Virtues of womanhood are good work habits, good appearance, good speech, and good behavior. The Three Obediences command women to be subordinate to their fathers when young, to their husbands when married, and to their eldest sons when widowed. A man is allowed to beat his wife as long as he inflicts no lasting injuries, and women are expected to submit without complaint. These values come into direct conflict with American values of egalitarianism, as well as with U.S. laws prohibiting domestic violence. Some Vietnamese American women report that their husbands beat them less often since arriving in the United States for fear of being arrested. But traditional behaviors as well as the stress of relocation and dislocation contribute to an ongoing problem with domestic violence. Fear of bringing shame to the family, and a lack of knowledge about available services to help abuse victims, prevents many Vietnamese American women from reporting the abuse. Information about the extent of the problem comes from studies done within the population with those willing to speak out.

Gay and lesbian Vietnamese Americans also suffer from the rigid patriarchal structure of traditional Vietnamese culture. Such a heavy emphasis is laid on traditional gender roles, as well as on the importance of marriage and family, that many Vietnamese American lesbians and gays choose never to come out to their families rather than risk bringing shame to the family and/or being rejected by them.

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—D. K. Daeg de Mott

# XAVANTE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Crixá, Curixá, Puxití, Tapacuí

**LOCATION:** Brazil

**POPULATION:** around 10,000 (2000 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Gê

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

In the late 16th century, the Portuguese colonizers named the Amerindians that inhabited the north of the Goiás region. The chosen name was *Xavante*, and the reason for it is unknown. The name the Amerindians used for themselves bears no resemblance to it: *Auwe*, meaning people. The Xavante were numerous, strong, and rebellious. The Lisbon government only managed to dominate them for the first time in 1784, when they were put into mission villages surrounded by military guards. The Xavante had resisted the invasion of their lands by attacking mining camps and raiding the settlers' cattle and crops. It is perhaps because of this kind of resistance that the colonial governors called the period between 1784 and 1788 the "pacification."

Life in mission villages was not kind to the Xavante and, by the time the gold mines were exhausted and many of the settlers left, a group of the surviving Xavante abandoned the missions. They went west, crossed the rivers Araguaia and das Montes, and settled in eastern Mato Grosso, in the land of Roncador. The Xavante successfully defended their new territory against outsiders. They occupied these lands and lived in relative isolation until the 1930s, when they gained sudden notoriety due to their furious resistance to the new wave of settlers and government agents who were trying to bring central Brazil into the mainstream of Brazilian culture and economy. During the 1940s and 1950s Xavante, especially under the dictator Getulio Vargas, were mistreated, experiencing massacres and diseases. These efforts oriented to "pacify" the Xavante started again during the 1940s, this time by the Brazilian government, with the aim to open their lands to settlement. Contact was established, and the Xavante had made many adjustments during the last decades in order to deal with a wider society. However, they continue to this day to preserve a strong sense of identity. Until 1988 the Xavante, like all Amerindians in Brazil, were legally considered to be minors: they were not allowed to vote or make decisions for themselves. In 1983, Mario Juruna, a Xavante, became the first Amerindian to be elected as a member of the Brazilian Congress. He served until 1986. Brazilian Amerindians are now regarded as full citizens.

Traditionally, the Xavante were nomadic hunters and gatherers who lived in temporary horseshoe-shaped villages on the savannah and cultivated corn (maize), beans, and pumpkins on seasonally visited garden plots. They hunted tapir, deer, wild pigs, and birds and gathered roots, nuts, and honey. Xavante children are still initiated into age-based kinship societies where they are taught by their elders. This education process gives to the new generations the skills and insights of a people who depend directly on the natural world for survival.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Xavante live in the state of Mato Grosso, between Rio das Mortes and the Araguaia River, in a region of upland savannah. This zone is about the size of France, Germany, and Great Britain combined. It is situated in the southwest of Brazil. *Mato Grosso* in Portuguese means "dense forest." Xavante villages used to be found at intervals for the entire length of the Rio das Montes, until the land was sold to private companies during the 1960s. Afterwards, the new settlers pushed the Xavante to the vast wasteland of eastern Mato Grosso and even drove them to seek the patronage of either the missions or the Indian Protection Service posts, which they had fought so successfully in the past. The forest, now depleted, once supplied rubber and rare timbers; diamonds and silver are still mined. The region is known as the Serra do Roncador or Snoring Mountains, though there is no real sierra (highlands). The hillocks look like mountains, however, because of the flatness of the surrounding countryside. The Xavante land is referred to as "savanna" but is really poor country, not a prairie, and only occasionally productive land. The Xavante prefer it to the tropical jungle because it is open country where hunting, one of their favorite activities, is more thrilling. They also consider the savanna to be more beautiful than the jungle and choose to build their villages out in the open.

Still, there are patches of tropical rain forest all over their territory, usually along the water courses. These local jungles, known as "galleries," are appreciated by the Xavante because in them they can find water and wild roots and fruits, which are the basis of their diet, as well as palms and trees that provide leaves and woods used to manufacture various artifacts. The seasons in the region are clearly marked: a very dry season from May to September, when even a shower of rain is most unusual and the lakes turn into an expanse of dried mud, followed by heavy rains in October; by January, hunters and Amerindians get used to walking perpetually in ankle-deep water.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Xavante, though dispersed through a vast region, share a common language and culture. They are one of the Gê-speaking tribes of Amazonia. They have also been known by the names Crixá, Curixá, Puxití, and Tapacuí. Understanding their language often leads to a deeper understanding of their culture. *Ro was'té-di*, for example, is what the Xavante call the close country or local jungle. *Ro* means "country" and *was'té* means "bad," making no secret of their dislike of anything that is not open, that is not the savanna, which they call *ro pse-di*, or *ro we-de*. *Pse* means "good," and *we* means "pretty" or "beautiful." It is easy to guess, therefore, where they prefer to spend time and live their lives.

The Xavante language has 13 consonants and 13 syllables. Honorific and endearment terms are used to refer to others such as one's in-laws or grandchildren. Many of these key relationships are actually reflected in the grammar of the language. For example, when speaking directly to his son-in-law, a man will use the indirect (third person) grammatical forms instead of second person.

Xavante boys are not named at birth. They receive their first name at a ceremony performed by the mother's brother when they are about five or six years old. Although the naming ceremony is quite important, as it establishes their father's broth-



er-in-law's rights over the boy, adult Xavante rarely bother to learn the names of the boys because they will take fresh names when the time comes to enter the "Bachelors' hut" (adolescence). At initiation, boys take a third name, and when they graduate to the status of Mature Men, yet another. Each name cancels out previous ones. Today, not all Xavante pass through so many names by the time they reach maturity. On the other hand, some take even a fifth name: a man may assume further names if he so wishes.

As for girls, the ceremony of bestowal of their names is performed by the whole community, but no rights are asserted. This is because women do not play a part in Xavante politics.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Xavante tradition is very rich in legends that try to explain natural phenomenon and their history. Many highlight the value of the qualities the Xavante appreciate most: strength and courage. One tells of two young men who had the power of making new varieties of fruits grow, using only their words. But, a time came when they started using their powers to frighten their friends. Finally, they were killed, and in the place where their blood was shed, two trees grew. The Xavante use the wood from those trees to make sticks that they place in

their ears to protect themselves from dangers like jaguars and bad dreams.

Another legend tells about a hunter who was abandoned by his friends in the jungle because his body was covered with horrible boils. The vultures came and took him to heaven to heal. When the hunter returned to earth, he brought some potatoes, which became part of the Xavante diet.

The Xavante believe that the stars are the eyes of heavenly people who are watching us from up above. It happened that once a young man fell in love with the beauty of a particular star. When he fell asleep, the star came to earth in the shape of a woman and found him. Their love grew, and so did the palm where they were sitting, taking them up to the sky. When the young man came back to earth, he told his family about his affair and then went back to heaven and stayed with his loved one forever.

#### 5 RELIGION

Xavante are more concerned with change or discovery than with the question of creation. "The world was created because in the beginning there was nothing" was an explanation given to an interested academic. "Then Aiwamdzú came out of the earth. He was the creator and he was Xavante." By the time Aiwamdzú appeared, the earth already existed, but it was empty. The east—the beginning of the sky—had not been created yet. The north and the south were created afterwards, as well as the Whites and their towns. More-detailed are origin myths that tell about people becoming human after being like animals. For example, one myth tells how people used to eat only rotten wood because it was soft enough to chew and could be eaten without preparation, something animals do. But then a young girl discovered maize (corn) and a young boy discovered fire, so they could grow proper food and cook it.

The beliefs and ceremonies of the Xavante revolve around their reverence for life and fertility. Thus, the good spirits, the Danimite, protect and create life, while the bad ones, the Tsimihöpari, cause illness and death. During the *Way'a* celebration, the Xavante act out a fight between the good and bad spirits with songs and dances. The good spirits win, and the bad ones are buried in symbolic barrows. Extinction is thereby avoided and the Xavante people will not only live on but will be even stronger. A similar ceremony shows the recovery of an ill Xavante. For a whole night a group of men, some painted black as bad spirits, dance and sing until the good spirits defeat the bad ones, who are once again symbolically buried.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Xavante holidays are full of joy and happiness. A sensational one is the *buriti* competition, in which their great athletic abilities are put to the test and celebrated. Some holidays are aimed at bringing back the good times, known as *Roweda*. Though in many of their holidays the men have a more active role than the women, some do have women as central figures. One of them is the ceremony of the naming of a child, in which many of the staged legends have women as protagonists. They tell about the female contributions to their cultural wealth, such as the time when their ancestors could only eat rotten wood and roots. The women, however, thanks to their immense curiosity, found a parakeet in the jungle that had white maize (corn). They took some of this maize and brought it back to the village and started to cultivate it. To get the quality of maize and the kind of

beans that the Xavante prefer, they had to fight bad spirits in their houses and with great courage drive them away. During the naming ceremony, the men imitate the voices of animals, like jaguars, leopards, wolves, and storks.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Xavante have complex initiation rituals in which gender difference plays a fundamental role. The Xavante are divided into groups according to their ages: Babies; Not-Babies; Children; Boys and Girls; Bachelors; Young Men and Women; Mature Men and Women; and Elders. Each group is formed by those born in the same five-year period. Passing from one group to the next is celebrated with special rites, songs, and dances. When a group reaches adolescence, the boys leave their home and move into the Bachelors' hut. During this transition, generally at the age of fourteen, ears are pierced with small wooden sticks that are inserted in the earlobes. As time goes on, the size of these adornments is increased.

Through dramatic representations of legends, they learn the origins and significance of the new role they are about to take up. This is also the occasion to officially introduce brides- and grooms-to-be, to each other and to the rest of the village.

Among the Xavante, coupling is a process strictly regulated by laws. Marital relationships within families are discouraged. The decisions are made mainly by the parents, though they do listen to their children and take their feelings into account.

Like other Gê-speaking groups, the Xavante have an elaborate social organization. A village is divided in two halves called *moieties*. A moiety membership can be based on descent or on such distinctions as whether a person was born during the dry or rainy season. Moieties can carry out a number of reciprocal functions, such as burying each other's dead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

"The Xavante are full of life" is very often the opinion of those who have had the chance to meet them and especially to witness their many festivals. The sight of their bodies artistically painted with bright colors, the joy and energy transmitted through their songs and dances, and the wisdom imparted via representations accompanied by their own timeless rhythms all communicate vitality and an enduring commitment to survival.

The Xavante community sense is evident in the way they organize their economy. They exchange goods and distribute their wealth with one premise in mind: it should be equal both within families and among the members of the tribe. They guarantee their survival as a group with a cyclical system of give and take.

Hierarchy is mostly an organizational tool. When the Xavante hold council discussions, it is up to the chief to begin the deliberations. But, that does not mean that he has more power, as all decisions are made by consensus and every man in the council has his say. Whatever is decided is commonly announced by shouting it through the village at dusk and dawn.

From an organizational viewpoint, this Amerindian tribe has a dualistic societal structure formed by two clans: the *Âwawe* and the *Po'reza'õno*. With the intention of preserving the culture richness of both tribes, marriages are not allowed between members of the same clan.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Since being contacted by outsiders in the middle of the 20th century, the Xavante have gradually ceased to be nomadic. They now live in independent horseshoe-shaped villages on the open savanna. The opening of the horseshoe faces the water. The center is the setting for meetings of the council of aldermen: it is there where important decisions are made. Some Xavante have abandoned this traditional crescent for oblong Brazilian-style houses in rows by the side of the missions, but most favor the original "beehive" houses. Built by women, the round structures are made of sticks and cane and are covered with palm leaves all the way to the floor. Up to three families can share one house. Inside the houses, the light is perpetually dim, and the smoke and odor of cooking lingers while the insects crawl or buzz around.

Before and after the first "pacification" carried out by the Portuguese, the Xavante furiously defended their land and people. After their experience in the missions, around the middle of the 19th century, they remained isolated for some 80 years. The isolation protected them, among other things, from epidemic disease. When contact with outsiders was restored in the 20th century, various studies described the Xavante as powerful, numerous, and muscular, with keen vision, lack of dental decay, slow pulses, and low blood pressure. They were also among the tallest and heaviest of Lowland South American Indians. But, contact often led to a demographic crisis, through introduced diseases, and deaths by fighting to resist territorial incursion. Still, the Xavante groups that survived the shock have not only recovered but have increased their numbers. In some cases, the doubling time of population is 15 years or less. The Brazilian government Indian Agency initiated a vaccination program in 1990.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women are still the queens of Xavante homes. They build the houses, and inside they manage the whole operation: they prepare the food and distribute it. Collecting, the most important economic activity, is primarily a woman's job. Though gathering is not regarded as a prestigious activity, it is an essential contribution to the household and the survival of the group. It also provides one of the few opportunities for women to go out and have a good time together. In the past, women were also responsible for the preparation of the land, as well as the planting and harvesting. Nowadays, because of the increasing importance of agriculture for the society, and a wider variety of crops, men share those tasks.

It is quite common to find Xavante men married to more than one woman. Young men marry 5 to 10 years later than young girls, as the boys are not permitted to marry until they are initiated. At the ceremony, the boys are introduced to their future wives, but the girls are often so young that the couples wait years before they can go to the next step: the wedding hunt. When the time comes, the bride then takes part in the *Adaba* ceremony: she kneels in front of her house until one of her friends approaches and removes all of her necklaces. The groom goes out hunting with a few friends and can only come back when he has caught enough game to impress his father-in-law. If all goes well, he can then visit his bride at night until their first child is born, after which he moves into her family's house.

Frequently a man's brothers marry into the same household with the younger sisters of their older brother's wife. Cases of polygyny also often involve sisters: a young man marries the eldest daughter in a household and then marries her younger sisters as they become of marriageable age. Some monogamous or widowed men marry much younger women. Women, however, if widowed after the age of 30 usually do not remarry.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Like many tribes of the eastern Brazil region, the Xavante originally went virtually naked. In contrast with the lack of clothes, however, there was an abundance of ornaments, such as ear-plugs, distinctive haircuts, body painting, and tattoos. Men wore penis-sheaths from the moment they entered the Bachelors' hut and were never seen without it again. The sheath is a tiny conical spiral of palmito bark. It is worn over the folds of the foreskin, covering only the tip of the genital organ, and the men would only take it off when urinating or having sex. In fact, were it to fall off when they were running or bathing, it would be the cause for great embarrassment.

Today, though, men usually wear shorts, and most no longer wear their penis-sheaths or their ear-plugs. Women have taken to wearing clothes and even make-up when they can get it. Most Xavante wear boots, and both sexes cut their hair short. In traditional Xavante communities, it is the men who do all the preening, but that has changed since contact with Whites and other tribes.

The Xavante are noted for their beautiful body painting. Urucú scarlet seeds are used to make red paint, and genipa is used for black ink. Red is the Xavante's favorite color. It is thought to be beautiful and have beneficial and creative properties. Furthermore, they believe it makes a person strong. Some of the designs also have special powers: the armbands of the wrestlers are believed to increase strength. Babassú nuts are the Xavante's favorite cosmetic. Men, who are more into taking care of their appearance than women, keep a supply of nuts that they chew carefully to extract the milky juice with which they oil their hair and bodies at least once a day.

### **12 FOOD**

The Xavante have a real passion for meat. Any game is hunted and eaten. Peccary, deer, and anteaters are fairly plentiful. Pigs, wild or domestic, steppe rats, monkeys, and armadillos, as well as most birds, are also part of their diet. The meat is roasted for a long time and protected with a covering of ash and earth so it can be kept for any length of time. Turtles are sought for their meat and their nourishing and fatty eggs.

Preferences aside, the Xavante live primarily on roots, nuts, and fruits. The roots are boiled or roasted and eaten with their skins, unless they are too dirty. Nuts and palmitos are eaten year-round. Palmitos are edible shoots of a palm that grows all over the interior of Brazil and can be found canned in supermarkets around the world. The Xavante collect the shoots and eat the younger ones raw. Older, thicker ones are cooked in an earth oven. Nuts, particularly babassú nuts, are a constant in the Xavante diet. Whenever they are hungry, they help themselves to their supply of nuts. This is the only food they eat without offering some to everyone present. From July until the end of the year, carob fruit is a staple food. Carob, burití (a fruit with a high vitamin-C content), and piquí are the most important fruits in the Xavante diet.

When first encountered, the Xavante mainly grew maize (corn), yucca, two kinds of beans, a few types of pumpkins, and potatoes. Later on, some groups were encouraged by government programs to grow upland rice, keep enough for their own needs, and sell the rest.

To prepare the brew for feasts, the women start the fermentation by chewing some corn or cassava mash and spitting it into a bowl, which is then covered and kept in a dark corner for three days. The result is a mildly alcoholic beverage that, according to some explorers, if drunk in huge quantities can produce a "grand intoxication." The Xavante also eat honey anytime they catch sight of a beehive. As many bees are stingless, the Xavante simply climb the trees, open the hive, and eat the contents, bees and all.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The level of formal education among the Xavante varies according to the geographical situation of their villages. It ranges from groupings where only one or two of the younger men speak some basic Portuguese for the purpose of dealing with the outside world, to villages where most children and young Xavante are literate and some have become teachers in their own hometown.

The very important skills to face life, like learning how to overcome exhaustion, pain, and fear, are taught by the elders through traditional legends. Many bear the message: "Be strong and courageous, and multiply." The education of children is a shared responsibility. In the early years, the mother is the main figure, but as they grow older, the grandparents help with the education of the girls. The boys, on the other hand, are guided by their godfathers, a group of young men about 10 years older.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music and dance are at the core of the Xavante's ceremonies. Accounts of the Jaguar and girls naming ceremonies tell of groups of men singing from the morning through the day and the following night, of the hiding of gourd flutes for the girls to fetch, and of beating time with rattles made of pig's teeth. In their relentless quest "to make beautiful" the melodies, the Xavante choreograph their dances in a series of highly formalized patterns designed to inspire and delight both the performers and spectators.

### **15 WORK**

The Xavante practice shifting cultivation. Toward the end of the rainy season, a man fells an acre or two of trees and leaves them to dry. Just before the next rainy season begins, he sets them on fire. The ashes add mineral nutrients to the soil. Planting is time-consuming and sometimes even dangerous, for gardens attract snakes and stinging insects. Traditionally, the Xavante planted crops that required virtually no tending, such as maize (corn), beans, and pumpkins. Manioc (cassava) is also an important crop. These shrubs with starchy tuberous roots, even with indifferent cultivation, will yield four or five tons of tubers, which is quite convenient as the Xavante do not like to give much time or thought to their agriculture. Hunting is their passion: Xavante men spend a lot of their time planning communal hunts, discussing the possibility of finding deer or peccary in particular regions, or going out to enjoy the activity



*An Indian of the Xavante tribe smokes a pipe during a protest in front of the presidential palace in Brasilia, Brazil. The Indians were demanding the resignation of the president of the National Foundation of the Indian and an audience with the Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. (AP Images/Eraldo Peres)*

for the fun of it. Fishing, which used to be the males' responsibility, is still a very important activity among the Xavante.

The traditional way of hunting is using darts with curare. Curare is a formula whose active ingredient comes from the sap of the vine *Strychnos toxifera*, along with 30 other magical ingredients, like stinging ants and powdered snake fangs. The active ingredient blocks nervous impulses to the muscles so they become flaccid, making the animals easy to retrieve: a monkey would simply fall to the ground. Nowadays, the Xavante hunt with firearms. Meat is regarded as a prime delicacy.

Wild roots, nuts, and fruits gathered in their wanderings are really the basis of the Xavante's diet, rather than meat. The Xavante collect roots and babassú nuts as part of their day-to-day activities. Fish are also stupefied with poisonous forest vines. Their sap dispersed through the water paralyzes the breathing apparatus but leaves the meat edible. This method works best in low waters and slow currents, as the poison lingers long enough to take effect.

However, the Xavante traditionally were not particularly interested in fishing. They did not have special arrows for the task and preferred to walk rather than sail, so they had rafts instead of canoes and would cross rivers by swimming. Nevertheless, the introduction of metal hooks and nylon has trans-

formed some sedentary Xavante into passionate fishers: it is a way of feeding the family without wasting time planting.

## 16 SPORTS

The Xavante are superb runners. As often as once a week, teams of relay runners, each carrying a length of burití palm that weighs around 80 kg (175 lbs), compete in a long race that may begin far out in the plain, ending with a dash into the village. The runners decorate their bodies with red and black vegetable dyes and tie a white cord around their necks with the tufted ends in the front like a bow tie. The winner is the team that can continue the longest, so the one who arrives first does not always win. The Xavante are reputed to be capable of catching game on foot. In some communities, the Xavante have developed a passion for soccer. Everybody plays, young and old, and when all the men get tired of playing, the women take over.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Hunting provides not only a means of subsistence but also a source of entertainment. Xavante men spend hours planning treks and telling tales of fights and hunting exploits. Xavante men enjoy all aspects of hunting, especially since it allows them to make a public exhibition of their manliness. It is an expression of virility. Xavante women, for their part, are inter-

ested in the end product. They are cold towards an unsuccessful hunter, discuss at great length the prospect of getting meat, and send their children to find out for them when the hunters are expected to return.

Xavante ceremonies have been compared to classical ballet, as the performers try to create a harmonious spectacle where beauty is most important. The Xavante word for "ceremony" is *dasipse*, which translates as "something that makes oneself good." The performances are carefully prepared, enjoyed by players and spectators, and regarded as a major form of aesthetic expression.

In 1996 an unusual event took place in Brazil. That year the world-wide-known Brazilian heavy metal band Sepultura (grave) recorded with the Xavante people and featured it on their album *Roots*. A small number of Xavante even traveled to Sao Paulo to participate in Sepultura's "Noise Against Hunger" concert in 1998.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Among the first Xavante artifacts to become known to the outside world were the *uibro*. Characteristically used by the Young Men's age-grade, the *uibro* are war clubs that symbolize power. They are made from a young tree so that part of the root can be left as a knob at one end. The other end is sharpened to a point, and the club is exposed to the heat of the fire to make it hard. Many *uibro* were found by the corpses of people they had killed in the days when the Xavante were fighting the Brazilians. Other more polished clubs, decorated with woven bastwork, are carried by Mature Men. With one end pointed and the other broad, they can be used for digging and striking respectively.

One of the most stunning art forms of the Xavante is body painting. The process of making the paint the Xavante use to decorate their bodies is almost as elaborate and interesting as the designs themselves. They use the pasty covering of scarlet seeds, which are boiled to release the pigment. The bright red pigment is then mixed with oil and left until it congeals. The mixture is shaped into a ball and is then ready for use as a dye, insect repellent, or in decoration. To make domestic objects of wood, the Xavante use a chisel and fire. Fire is made by twirling between their palms a thin stick of wood into the surface of a thicker one until sparks are produced that ignite the sawdust. The chisel has been made in the same way for the last 200 years. Using a splinter of stone, they rub a piece of iron until they can cut it. Then it is sharpened with another type of fine stone. Finally, it is attached to the handle, which is made of wood. Other tools are the cutting teeth of the piranha fish and the sharp claw of the great armadillo. Palm leaves and bark from trees are plaited to make most household utensils, such as baskets, mats, and fans. A Xavante man can make a carrying basket out of green palm fronds in a matter of minutes, an ability that proves useful when hunting away from home.

Xavante's women weave an amazingly strong kind of basket, which is used for carrying newborn babies. The basket's wide strap is placed across their forehead while the basket lays against their back, freeing up the woman's hands for other tasks.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Amerindian tribes in Brazil are still burdened by colonization. The groups that survived the European "discovery" of the

Americas were being pushed off of their land at the end of the 20th century by private companies. Contact with Whites has also created the need among the Xavante to learn the national language and culture, in order to be able to function in the newly imposed way of life. However, education is not attainable by all, a fact that leaves many unable either to continue living in their traditional way or to embrace the new one.

Nevertheless, the Xavante are recognized as one of the most forceful people of the many Brazilian tribes. They frequently send their representative to Brasilia to defend their rights and insist on better treatment. The Xavante Mario Juruna, the first Amerindian to become a deputy in Brazil's parliament, spoke of the dangers and the wishes of his people: "Indian wealth lies in customs and communal traditions and land that is sacred. Indians can and want to choose their own road, and this road is not civilization made by Whites....Indian civilization is more human. We do not want paternalistic protection from Whites. Indians today...want political power."

The Xavante, like many other Amerindian tribes, are an endangered people. Modern technological society is threatening their way of life with the dangers of environmental degradation and cultural extinction. The Xavante and 11 other tribes such as the Karajá, Krikati, Bororo, and Tapirapé, among others, are facing the construction of a series of dikes on their life-sustaining rivers. The industrial waterway would dynamite, canalize, and dredge 1,200 miles from the mouth of the Amazon River through the Araguaia/Tocantins river basin, one of the world's most important reserves of biological and cultural diversity. Alterations of the river systems, proposed for 87 different sites, could have disastrous effects on the ecosystem causing the collapse of river banks, siltation, erosion, and flooding.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Xavante perceive their society through a male ideology. Men are seen as the guardians of culture and tradition and are responsible for the continuity of society. If it is through men collectively that society is culturally maintained, it is through women individually that it is renewed, through each body and each birth. In contrast to the central plaza of a Xavante village, considered as male and public space, the Xavante house is a female domain. The authority of Xavante women derives mainly from their control over the production, transformation, and distribution of food at the domestic level.

The women are responsible for looking after the house and plantations, while the men tend to do more of the hunting. There are some tasks that are gender specific to the tribe and there are some tasks that are shared between the genders.

Xavante society presents a sharp distinction between male and female naming practices. Women have a "girl's name," usually known and used only by members of their household, and a "woman's name" as a proof of maturity. The latter is conferred by groups of men in a public ceremony and never abandoned or substituted. A Xavante girl is said to become a woman at the birth of her first child.

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—revised by C. Vergara



Worldmark  
Encyclopedia of  
**Cultures and  
Daily Life**

VOLUME 3 Asia & Oceania  
Second Edition

Editors

Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby



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Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

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# INTRODUCTION

by  
Rhoads Murphey

The first humans, or their immediate ancestors, seem clearly to have evolved in East Africa. By about two million years ago these creatures had spread to Asia and Europe. Archeologists have labeled them *Homo erectus*, and their bones and tools have been found in China, Java, and elsewhere in Asia. Over the time since their arrival in Asia, the minor physical differences that distinguish modern Asians from Africans or Europeans gradually emerged. The cold areas of Siberia were penetrated by people later and more slowly, but by about half a million years ago, that migration had also been accomplished. Australia was settled by people from Asia, probably via a land bridge linking the two continents at a time of lower sea level, by about 50,000 years ago. By about the same time, people also spread via Southeast Asia into Oceania (the islands of the Pacific east of Indonesia).

The native people of Siberia—Yakuts, Tungus, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and many others—spoke different languages and had quite separate cultures. The Uzbeks and a few others who occupied dry areas had developed irrigated farming in scattered oases by about the beginning of the Christian era. The other Siberian groups remained dependent on hunting, gathering, and trapping in the vast forests.

## AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA

Most of the inhabitants of Oceania also practiced hunting, gathering, and trapping until quite late, although they practiced rudimentary agriculture, based on cultivation of coconuts and taro and including the raising of pigs and fishing, by the second millennium BC. There are three major groups of the peoples of Oceania, each speaking a different language. (In the case of New Guinea, by far the largest unit of Melanesia, the people spoke many different languages). The groups are Melanesians, so called from their dark skin color, since *mela* means black; Micronesians, inhabiting a great number of small islands south and east of Melanesia; and Polynesians, settled over a huge arc of the Pacific on smaller islands as far east as Hawaii, speaking a common language, and sharing a common culture. (Polynesians of New Zealand have been known as Maoris since the fourteenth century AD.) The Polynesians are renowned for their long sea voyages in small outrigger canoes, which carried them over great distances in search of new islands to settle.

The aborigines of Australia are a different group that migrated from the Asian mainland much earlier than those who peopled Oceania. Thus, these Australian aborigines are largely unrelated to the Melanesians, Micronesians, or Polynesians; they survived in Australia with a relatively primitive technology centered on hunting and gathering without even domesticated animals.

In Siberia there was little change in culture or technology until the coming of Russian people in their expansion across Asia, beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries AD.

Russian explorers and conquerors crossed the Ural Mountains, the conventional boundary between Europe and Asia, seized Kazakstan and Astrakhan immediately east of the Caspian Sea by the early seventeenth century, and reached the Pacific by 1639. Their chief objective was to obtain furs, long Siberia's major export, but they also sought to colonize this vast area in the name of the Czar (the ruler of Russia). Russians became, and remain, the dominant settlers of Siberia in a narrowing wedge of patches as far east as Irkutsk near Lake Baikal, with a further extension in the valley of the Amur River that forms the boundary with China. Siberia is the center of the route followed by the Trans-Siberian Railway, completed by 1905, and the cities along it are dominated by Russian inhabitants. Although they have been drawn into the web of commerce, they are still hunting and gathering, mining for gold, and producing timber for export from the huge Siberian forests.

Oceania was penetrated by Westerners beginning in the late eighteenth century. These Westerners were largely explorers and whalers, many of the latter from New England. The cultures and peoples of Oceania were not too affected until the advent of missionaries and permanent white settlers, who (in Hawaii especially) attempted to convert the Polynesians to evangelical and puritanical Christianity, which condemned many aspects of their traditional culture. Europeans, including missionaries, had invaded New Zealand by 1820 AD, although the islands were not formally taken over by Great Britain until 1840. Many of the Maori inhabitants there were killed in small wars with the new arrivals. However, Maoris still constitute about five percent of the total population, with a number of mixed Maori-white descent.

Australia was first settled by whites, predominantly British, late in the 1780s. They quickly drove off or killed aborigines who lived in the better-watered areas along the coasts, pushing their settlements inland, where large areas of wheat and other crops were planted, and even larger areas were converted to grazing for sheep and cattle. Aborigines now survive on reservations in the driest and most remote areas, but are dwindling in numbers. Most now hold low-paying jobs in the dominant white economy, in areas including the big cities along the coast.

## SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The rest of Asia south of the former USSR and east of Afghanistan—sometimes called Monsoon Asia—is composed of the modern states of Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (together constituting what is called South Asia); Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines (together constituting Southeast Asia); China, Korea, and Japan. Peoples of the Paleolithic or Old Stone Age were settled in all of these areas from about one million BC to about 25000 BC. The early

habitation by *Homo erectus*, including Peking Man and Java Man, gradually gave way to the universal spread of *Homo sapiens*, or Modern Man. But the pace of other change remained slow until about 30000 BC, when the last phase of glacial ice advanced and its subsequent retreat changed the physical environment and stimulated new adaptations. Fire had been used since about one million BC, but after about 30000 BC stone tools slowly improved and population probably increased.

The big change was the Neolithic revolution from about 10000 BC, including the appearance of settled agriculture. Neolithic means New Stone Age and finer and finer stone tools continued to be made. These were increasingly supplemented by tools of bone, including such delicate items as bone needles for sewing and bone fishhooks. Clothing—leather suits, suits or jackets made of fur pelts sewn together, fur hats, and leather boots—could now be made much less crudely and fitted to each individual. Hunting could now be supplemented on a larger scale by fishing, and population again increased. Agriculture began in two quite different and widely separated areas: the uplands of southwest Asia surrounding the Tigris-Euphrates lowland of Mesopotamia, and the coastal or near-coastal areas of mainland Southeast Asia, especially in what are now Thailand and Vietnam.

Neolithic settlements in what is now Turkey, Palestine, Syria, northern Iraq, and Iran began the transition from gathering grains, including the ancestors of wheat, in the wild to planing the seeds in tended fields. Wheat, barley, and other steppe (dry climate) grasses were native to this area of winter rains. Neolithic stone-toothed sickles, dated to about 10000 BC, have been found there with a sheen on them from cutting such grasses with their grain heads. Dating from a little later, small hoards of stored grain have been found. It must have been a longish process of adaptation from gathering grains in the wild to planting them, perhaps originally by accident, in fields that could be prepared and tended until harvest. Fields growing only the desired plants could obviously yield far more than could be gathered in the wild. But they did require care, and hence a permanent settlement was developed, usually one where a supplement of water was available. Soon after 10000 BC stone mortars (grinders) appeared, indicating that the grain was ground into flour and that it helped support a population beginning to grow well beyond what could be sustained by hunting and gathering.

By about 7000 BC there were large and numerous storage pits for grain, and clay pots for the same purpose and for storing and carrying water. By this time cultivated wheat, barley, and peas had evolved into more productive forms than their wild ancestors, probably through purposeful selection of the best seeds by the cultivators. Sheep, goats, and dogs were domesticated instead of being hunted, and in the case of dogs, used as hunting assistants. A thousand years later cattle and pigs had joined the list of domesticates. By about 4000 BC or slightly earlier agricultural techniques were advanced enough and populations large enough to allow the expansion of settlements into the different environment of the Tigris-Euphrates lowland, and somewhat later to the Indus valley in what is now Pakistan. Most of these areas were desert or near-desert, but the river floodplains, with their fertile soils and long growing seasons of high temperatures, were very productive if they could be given water through controlled irrigation. Both rivers are fed by rains and melting snow in their mountain source ar-

reas, and are thus subject to seasonal flooding, which had to be protected against. Techniques of irrigation and flood control were developed at about the same time in Egypt. The names of the cities supported by the newly productive agriculture are recorded in the world's first written texts, scratched on clay tablets while they were still wet: Ur, Eridu, Nippur, and others.

The Neolithic revolution was completed with the development of metalworking and the production of bronze tools and weapons. In Mesopotamia by about 4000 BC successive experiments mixing copper with tin and lead in varying proportions produced bronze, which made all these innovations possible, including the division of labor whereby some people were able to pursue non-farm occupations such as smelting and working metals. Perhaps through trade, agricultural and irrigation techniques spread east from Mesopotamia and western Iran, and by about 3500 BC were fully developed in eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and the fringes of the Indus valley. By or before 3000 BC irrigated agriculture was established on the floodplain of the Indus and its major tributaries, where the first true cities of monsoon Asia arose, growing out of Neolithic villages and towns. There and in Mesopotamia and Egypt cities had bureaucrats, tax collectors, priests, metalworkers, scribes, schools, and traffic problems, almost all the features of our own times.

In mainland Southeast Asia, the other equally early hearth of agriculture, upland fringes of river valleys and areas along the coast had probably begun to practice farming soon after 10000 BC. On the coast, gathering and early cultivation could be supplemented by fishing and by collecting from shellfish beds. This is an area of warm temperatures, ample rainfall, and an unbroken growing season. Rice and several tropical root crops such as taro and yams were native there in wild form. Root crops are easily cultivated in this tropical climate by setting cuttings in the ground. Rice was probably domesticated somewhere to this area. Unlike the dry Middle East, the constant humidity and high temperatures meant that no organic remains lasted very long, and we thus cannot date any of these developments accurately. But stone tools and the evidence from charcoal fires suggest that by at least 8000 BC, in what is now northern Vietnam, local people had moved from gathering to agriculture. By about 4000 BC, as in Mesopotamia, bronze objects had begun to appear there and in nearby northern Thailand (although this was long before the Thais, migrating south from south China, occupied the area). Chickens and pigs, both native to mainland Southeast Asia, are also identifiable at these sites, and at one there is a large cemetery, suggesting a large population. Later, perhaps by about 2000 BC, agriculture, by then further evolved, moved down from the early upland sites to the fertile floodplains of the great Southeast Asia rivers, Irrwaddy (in Burma), Mekong, and others, a move which paralleled the earlier one in Mesopotamia.

Most of the modern inhabitants of Southeast Asia came originally from what is now China, including Tibet, many thousands of years ago, although they surely interbred with other people already there. It seems to have been other waves of migrants from the Chinese course area that produced the people called Malays, who became the dominant inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, what is now Indonesia, and the Philippines. Ethnically and physically the varied Malay people are broadly similar, speaking related languages and sharing a generally common culture, but they did not penetrate beyond what is now eastern Indonesia. The areas east of there belong

within Oceania, outlined above as Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. As they migrated south and east, the Malays brought agriculture and domesticated animals with them. The fertile volcanic island of Java came to support by far the greatest concentration of population.

## INDIA (SOUTH ASIA)

The Indus civilization collapsed by about 2000 BC, but we do not know for sure who its people were. We cannot read the script they wrote on clay tablets, but it seems likely that they were relatively dark-skinned ancestors of the present inhabitants of southern India. Beginning about 1700 BC or slightly later, the north was invaded over several centuries by a lighter-skinned central Asian or Iranian people who called themselves Aryans, speaking an early form of Sanskrit, the ancestor of the modern languages of the north, and through its Iranian (Persian) connection also those of modern Europe. In the years following 2000 BC these Indo-European people, as they are called, migrated both east into India and west into what is now Greece and Turkey from an original homeland probably in what is now Iran, bringing their language with them. In India they intermarried with the people already there, but although they remained a minority their military skills conquered the north, while mountain barriers and southern resistance kept them largely out of the south. The new rulers of the north evolved the religion of Hinduism, a blend of the ideas of the Indus civilization with those brought in from Iran, centered on the supreme gods Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, with many lesser gods, but basically monotheistic (one god) in its belief in a single creative principle and the sanctity of all life, or the great chain of being. According to Hindus, the faithful following of *dharma* or duty produces a good *karma* or character, which in turn determines identity in the next re-birth; a bad karma may result in re-birth as an animal or insect, while a good one can even result in escape from the endless cycle of re-birth to a bodiless reunion with the godhead, or *moksha*, equivalent to the Buddhist *nirvana*. Hinduism spread to all parts of India and remains the dominant religion even in the south.

Buddhism is a later offshoot from Hinduism that was developed in the sixth century BC, sharing most of its beliefs but centered on denial of worldly preoccupations, following the four noble truths announced by the Buddha: Life is full of pain, suffering, and impermanence. This is caused by desire. To end suffering, end desire. To end desire, end worldly attachments and live a charitable and holy life. Buddhism gradually was reabsorbed into Hinduism by the thirteenth century AD, and the few remaining Buddhists were slaughtered by the Islamic invaders early in that century. By the beginning of the Christian era Buddhism had spread to Southeast Asia and China, and from China to Korea and Japan, although it was later extinguished in the land of its birth. Most Indians, both Hindus and Muslims (followers of Islam) take religion far more seriously than any people elsewhere, and religion is still a major part of South Asian life.

The Mauryan empire, which ruled the north from 322 BC to about 180 BC, was followed by fresh invasions by several central Asian groups including those who formed the Kushan kingdom which ruled north India from about 100 BC to about 200 AD. Before the Mauryas Alexander the Great of Macedon had also invaded India and left behind several Greek kingdoms in the northwest. Trade with the Mediterranean continued for

several centuries thereafter, and early Christianity was carried to India in the first century AD. After the fall of the Kushans India relapsed into its more normal pattern of separate regional kingdoms until the rise of the Gupta empire which ruled the north from about 320 AD to about 550 AD. It was destroyed by new invaders from central Asia, probably Iranians, one more in the long succession of ethnically and culturally different outsiders drawn into India through its western passes and woven into the Indian fabric to form a hybrid population and culture. Outside groups however never conquered the south, which still speaks languages of the north. In the sixth century BC, the island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) off the southern tip of India was settled by the Sinhalese from north India largely displacing the original less technically developed inhabitants, the Veddas. Later Dravidian migrants from south India, the Tamils, settled in the north of the island, with their Hindu faith, but the Sinhalese had earlier been converted to Buddhism, which remains the major religion.

Beginning in the twelfth century AD India was again invaded, this time by Afghans and Turks from central Asia who brought with them the crusading religion of Islam. They were fiercely intolerant of other religions, and forced many Indians to convert to Islam while oppressing Hindus, but never conquered the south. The Delhi Sultanate, which ruled most of the north from 1206 to 1526, was replaced by the Mughal Dynasty which conquered Delhi and established a new empire that lasted into the new colonial order established by the British. The Mughals also came from central Asia, but were the carriers of a largely Persian culture as well as of Islam. Originally tolerant of Hindus, still the great majority of Indians, they later became less so and thus helped to sow the seeds of antagonism between Hindus and Muslims, although they never conquered the south. By 1600 the population of undivided India was about 100 million.

The last invaders of India were the British, never more than 100,000 in total but the dominant group after about 1800 out of a population which reached 200 million by 1800 and 400 million by the end of the Colonial period. The British transformed the country in partnership with many Indians. Some of the British married Indian wives and produced a new hybrid group of Anglo-Indians, while building a huge rail network and stimulating the beginnings of industrialization. Their early coastal trade bases: Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, became the biggest cities in India, as Calcutta and Bombay still are, while Madras was overtaken after independence in 1947 by the capital of Delhi-New Delhi, a twin city where the Mughals had also ruled. South India had been ruled in Mughal times, as under the Delhi Sultanate, by many independent kingdoms, and it still preserves a distinct regional culture, distinguished from the north also by its different languages, collectively known as Dravidian. Modern India is thus a mixture of peoples, languages, and religions, more diverse than in any modern state. At independence in 1947, India was partitioned at Muslim insistence into Pakistan in the northwest, where there was a Muslim majority, and, later, Bangladesh in the east, also a largely Muslim area, leaving what is now the Republic of India occupying the largest share of the sub-continent. South Asia as a whole now has a population well over one billion, larger even than China's.

The small Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, independent since 1923, also has a mixed population, including Tibetans

with both Hinduism and Buddhism practiced. The neighboring kingdoms of Bhutan and Sikkim remain under Indian supervision while nominally independent. There is a long list of people called “tribals,” by no means all of them primitive and some highly developed. “Tribals” are concentrated in mountainous central India and along the mountain borders of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Ceylon (called Sri Lanka since 1975) had never been politically united with India but in larger terms belongs within Indian culture, except for its continued adherence to Buddhism. It became independent in 1948, but then was torn by violence between the dominant Sinhalese and the minority Tamils, about 18 percent of the population. Roughly half of the Tamils have lived there for some 2000 years after migrating from nearby south India. The other half are more recent arrivals in the nineteenth century who came to work on the tea and rubber plantations, and remain an underprivileged group. Tamil terrorism in support of their demands for regional autonomy has been met by harsh reprisal in an atmosphere close to civil war.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

The label of Southeast Asia is a term of convenience rather than one that suggests regional coherence. It includes nine modern states: Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia (Kampuchea), Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines, which have never operated as a political unit. Most of them also contain a variety of minority peoples, and most won their independence from Western colonialism only after the World War II. Burma (which the military dictatorship there renamed Myanmar) is dominated by the lowland Burmese who settled in the valley of the Irrawaddy before recorded history. Burma contains in its hill and mountain fringes a number of separate people who have similar origins in southwestern China but different cultures and languages; Shans, Kachins, and Karens are the largest such groups, in the past beyond the control of the Burmese government and now in chronic rebellion. The traditional capital was at Mandalay (earlier at Paga) in the mid-Irrawaddy valley. Thailand (formerly Siam) is numerically more dominated by the lowland Thais of the Menam or Chao Praya River, even though they seem to have become the main inhabitants more recently than the Burmese; they too came originally from south China, but probably in successive waves over many centuries, the last being in the thirteenth century AD. Laos is a small mountain country chronically split into factions, but the inhabitants are preponderantly Thai. Cambodia is what remains of the once far more extensive Khmer empire, which included much of what is now southern and central Thailand and southern Vietnam. The Khmers also originated in south China, following the valley of the Mekong River.

The Vietnamese are closely related to the Chinese and were for a thousand years incorporated into the Chinese empire. They reclaimed their independence in the tenth century AD and have always been a separate people with their own language. Their early center was in the valley of the Red River with their capital at Hanoi, but beginning in the thirteenth century AD they extended their occupation and rule southward, at the expense of the Khmers, and by the fifteenth century were the dominant inhabitants of the lower course of the Mekong River and its delta in southern Vietnam. The western mountain borders of Vietnam have long been occupied by a variety of dif-

ferent peoples, called by the French, who ruled Vietnam from 1886 to 1954, simply “Montagnards.” Malaya (known as Malaysia since 1963), occupying the tail of mainland Southeast Asia, was until recently thinly settled by Malays, with the towns being populated primarily with people who originated in China. As a British colony, Malaya boomed after 1890, when the discovery of tin and the developed of new rubber plantations produced major exports. As such, Malaya attracted large numbers of migrant Chinese and Indians as laborers, who became a dominant presence in the country. Chinese entrepreneurs prospered, handling much of Malaya’s trade with Indonesia. Following Malaya’s independence in 1957, Singapore was separated from the new state in 1965 and at the same time other formerly British areas in northern Borneo were added, to form the new state of Malaysia, primarily to reduce the proportion of Chinese and to give Malays a stronger majority. North Borneo includes some Chinese, but also more tribal groups such as Dyaks, Bugis, and others. Independent Singapore remains as a tiny city-state, 80 percent Chinese and 8 percent Indian.

Indonesia is both the largest and the most diverse country of Southeast Asia, composed of some 3000 islands inhabited by a great variety of people and never governed as a unit until the Dutch colonial rulers took over most of it at the end of the nineteenth century. The island of Java has always been by far the most populous and most developed; its language, Javanese, was not shared by the other islands, although its Malay culture was. Cultural influences from classical India were formative from the third century BC to the fourteenth century AD and survive in the Hindu-Buddhist religion of the island of Bali. From the fifteenth century Islam began to spread into what is now Indonesia via the trade routes from India, and is now the official state religion, but Christianity was established especially in the outer islands beyond Java by Portuguese, Dutch, and American missionaries, and original animism remains vigorous in many areas.

Modern Indonesia includes the large islands of Sumatra and Borneo (except for its northern coast), Celebes or Sulawesi farther east, the several small islands of the Muluccas or Spice Islands beyond, and many others directly east of Java, including Bali, each of these with its own original language. In 1960 the new Indonesian state, independent of Holland from 1949, forcibly took over the western half of New Guinea and named it Irian, thus adding a veritable welter of unrelated aborigines in hundreds of different tribal groupings. To try to give the new state some coherence, the Indonesian government created a new national language, Indonesian, based almost entirely on Malay, long the universal trade language of maritime Southeast Asia. It was taught in all schools, and most people in Indonesia necessarily became bi-lingual, retaining their own languages among themselves. The capital remained at Djakarta in west Java, where the Dutch had ruled. Java has long been extremely densely settled but also highly productive with its rich volcanic soils and unbroken growing season. The other islands, except for parts of Sumatra and Bali, are by contrast thinly populated. The Javanese may be regarded as a single people, but the rest of Indonesia, with a total population now of about 200 million, is made up of a very long list of separate cultural and language groups, including tribal groups.

The Philippines is even more fragmented than Indonesia—some 7000 islands rather than only 3000—and thus preserves many regional cultural differences. But conquest by Spain in

the sixteenth century, and by the United States in the twentieth, have brought nearly universal conversion to Christianity, a high literacy rate, and the rise of strong national consciousness, despite the survival of many small tribal groups and their separate cultures in the mountainous areas, even on the main island of Luzon, where Manila, the capital is also located. There is a somewhat larger community of Muslims on the southernmost island of Mindanao, a group known as Moros, relics of the early spread of Islam. Otherwise English has replaced Spanish as the major common language, although the official state language is Tagalog, a Malay-related language of lowland Luzon.

## CHINA

This most populous country in the world is dominated by ethnic Chinese called Han, but also includes a great number of ethnic and cultural minorities, altogether 6 percent of the total. The main non-Han groups are the Tibetans, Mongols, and Uighurs (in Sinkiang-Kinjiang), but others include the Manchus of Manchuria, the Khirghiz and Kazaka of Kinjiang, and a great number of groups scattered around south and southwest China too numerous to mention. The latter were the original inhabitants of most of south China but have been pushed off the best lands and into the mountains by the advancing wave of Han Chinese migration from the north, spread over the period from the fourth century BC to the present. There were several centers of early civilization in China where settled agriculture, bronze-making, and writing were gradually evolved. The best preserved evidence is in the dry north, in the middle Yellow River valley, where a fully developed late Neolithic site has been excavated at Banpo near modern Sian (Xian). Southern sites are less well preserved in a warm humid climate, but equally early developments with some archeological evidence have been found in the lower Yangtze valley and south of there. By about 2000 BC the Black Pottery Culture or Lung Shan in the north was building cities with pounded earth walls, making bronze, and producing early writing, while such developments were also present in the south.

Given the early evolution of agriculture, bronze, and domesticated animals in adjacent Southeast Asia, it seems probable that these techniques spread early into south China and were diffused northward from there. This included rice, the water buffalo, pigs, and chickens, all native to mainland Southeast Asia. There are no major mountain barriers between Thailand or Vietnam and south China, and until more modern times it is best to think of this area as a single cultural unit. It is hard to imagine Chinese agriculture without even one of these imports from Southeast Asia, something which strengthens the case for origins in south China as early as those in the north. By 1600 BC the first authenticated Chinese dynasty, the Shang, had emerged in the Yellow River valley, leaving behind written records using characters close to those still in use. Bronze making reached a height of perfection never surpassed elsewhere, and the Shang capitals, which were frequently moved, became true cities. Shang technology was probably matched in all respects in central and south China, which belonged to different cultures. The Shang were overthrown in 1027 BC by the Chou (Zhen) who founded a new dynasty which lasted until 221 BC when it was in turn overthrown by the Ch'in (Qin) conquest. The last several centuries of the Chou however were marked by the rise of rival regional states in north, central, and

south China as central control weakened. This was the period of Confucius (c. 551–c. 79 BC), who aimed to treat the chaos of his time by a return to order, following what he called the rules of an earlier golden era. His rough contemporary Lao Tzu rejected the Confucian prescriptions in favor of a philosophy based on inaction and contemplation, the heart of the religion he founded known as Taoism (Daoism), or simply “The Way.”

The Ch'in conquered all of the other rival states in a series of lightening campaigns culminating in 221 BC, and imposed its own imperial model on what had heretofore been a wide variety of regional cultures, including both spoken and written languages. Until this occurred, one could not speak of China or the Chinese as a single people but as a collection of separate groups united for the first time by the Ch'in as the first all-China empire. The Ch'in conquered much of the south plus northern Vietnam, but its rule was oppressive and it fell in a series of revolts, to be succeeded by the Han dynasty in 202 BC. Under the Han, which ruled until 220 AD, most of the area now within China's modern borders was conquered, and the movement of the Chinese southward acquired new momentum. The Chinese still call themselves “people of Han.” The Han empire included southern Manchuria, settled in large numbers by Han Chinese, northern Vietnam, parts of Inner Mongolia, and the far western desert of Sinkiang (Xinjiang), through which the silk road ran, guarded by Han watchtowers and garrisons. To begin with, most of the south was still occupied by non-Han people, but over the following centuries they were displaced by the movement of Hans from the north, especially after the fall of the dynasty in 220 AD and the invasion of the north by barbarians from the steppe. The Han census recorded a total population of 60 million, but the real total was almost certainly at least 80. We have only guesses for earlier periods, but the population of the whole of China in Shang times has been estimated at 5–10 million, and by mid-Chou at 20–30 million.

Buddhism had spread to China under the Han, via central Asia, and in the “time of troubles” after 220 its other-worldly message of salvation attracted many followers, although in many cases it blended with the Taoism already there. With the revival of empire under the T'ang dynasty (618–907) there was new resistance to this alien religion with its denial of the material world, and in the ninth century the T'ang government confiscated the large Buddhist landholdings as a threat to the state. From that time on Buddhism remained a small minority religion, merged with Taoism, in a society where Confucianism was again dominant. The T'ang reclaimed the empire won by the Han, and established new contacts with central Asia, while briefly occupying Tibet, although Chinese control there was not achieved until the eighteenth century. Korea, occupied as part of the Han empire, was not obliged to accept status as a tributary state, as was Vietnam after the fall of the T'ang. The Sung (Song) dynasty (960–1279) continued this arrangement but gave up the costly and unprofitable effort to hold Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet—until it was overwhelmed by the Mongol invasion which also conquered most of the rest of Asia and swept even into Europe. By 1350 the hated Mongols had largely been driven out of China, and the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) reaffirmed the traditional Chinese system, as did its successor the Ch'ing (Qing-1644–1911). Population totals reached 100 million in the Sung, 150 in the Ming, and 450 by the end of the Ch'ing.



With the fall of the Ch'ing in 1911, China lapsed into the chaos of the warlord years, briefly and incompletely relieved by the nationalist government from its capital at Nanking (Nanjing) for the ten years between 1927 and the full-scale Japanese attack on China in 1937. The long and bloody anti-Japanese war helped to destroy the nationalist government and to build up support for the Chinese Communist Party with its effective guerrilla resistance to the hated Japanese in north China. The Japanese had taken Manchuria in 1931 and developed its rich resources to create the largest industrial complex in East Asia, but Manchuria had been massively settled by Han Chinese from the late nineteenth century and was reclaimed by the communist guerrillas at the end of the war. The remnants of the nationalist government and its army, defeated by the communist advance into south China, fled to the offshore island of Taiwan, where the nationalists still rule.

Taiwan had been settled by Han Chinese from the early seventeenth century, slowly displacing the aboriginal occupants who now live largely on reservations, distantly related to but basically different from the Han. Taiwan had been ruled as part of the Japanese empire from 1895, but under nationalist control it experienced vigorous economic growth on foundations laid by the Japanese in industry, agriculture, and communications. Meanwhile the new communist government on the mainland declared the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, and announced a new policy toward the many non-Han minorities, who were to be given recognition as members of the greater Chinese family. Tibet, brutally re-occupied in the 1950s, Sinkiang, and Inner Mongolia were designated as "Autonomous Areas," but the hand of the Chinese state was strong and the people of these areas continued to be dominated by Han Chinese, who held all power together with their local collaborators. Smaller areas in mountainous south China where non-Hans remained numerically important were designated as "Autonomous Regions," including large sections of Kiangsi (Jiangxi) Province. But "autonomy" remained a cruel joke, and there were pressures on all non-Hans to conform to the standard Chinese way if they were to succeed in the new society.

One reason for Chinese reassertion of control was that most of these areas, especially Tibet, Sinkiang, and Inner Mongolia, lay along the country's international borders and hence had some strategic significance, especially after China and Russia became adversaries rather than allies in the late 1950s. Another reason was the new government's determination to reclaim all of the territory held by the great Chinese empires of the past, and thus to establish its credentials as their successor. Chinese behavior in Tibet, where there has been an effort to suppress Tibetan Buddhism and to root out other elements of Tibetan identity, has been so brutal, especially toward Tibetan protests, that it has attracted international censure. In Inner Mongolia, the tide of Han Chinese settlers has engulfed the remaining Mongol population and now outnumbers it by at least twenty to one, replacing the traditional pastoral nomadic economy with commercial agriculture and industrialization. Outer Mongolia, where Mongols are still the (slight) majority, declared its independence from China in 1921, but there too the trend is toward agriculture and industry rather than the traditional pastoral nomadism. In Sinkiang, Chinese technicians, managers, and political bosses are almost as numerous as the indigenous Uighurs, and the capital at Urumchi (Ulumuqi) has become a major industrial center. Wherever a

technically more advanced, more powerful, and more numerous people has become dominant over another population, it tends to overwhelm the latter and to force it to accept the rule and ways of the dominant group. (We have ample evidence in the fate of the North American Indians.) Non-Hans are about 6 percent of the total Chinese population, but the numbers have become vaguer as many Hans marry non-Hans in order to get the benefits reserved for the latter. Muslims are listed as by far the largest minority, although nearly all are in fact Han Chinese. Total population of China doubled between 1949 and 1982 and is now over one billion.

## KOREA

The Korean people came originally from eastern Siberia and northern Manchuria, as their spoken language, unrelated to Chinese but akin to Japanese, suggests. We do not know when this migration into the mountainous Korean peninsula may have taken place, but it was well before the beginning of any written records. By 2000 BC agriculture and domesticated animals spread to Korea from China; bronze-making was diffused from China somewhat later. The early Koreans were tribal peoples dependent on hunting, gathering, and fishing. As their culture merged into farming, permanent villages and towns arose, and bronze weapons and ornaments began to be made. Northern Korea, adjacent to Manchuria, was incorporated in the Han empire and settled significantly by Han Chinese, who introduced most elements of Chinese culture, at least to the Korean upper classes. Chinese influences continued after the fall of the Han dynasty, but Korea divided into three rival kingdoms which were later unified by the state of Koryo (the origin of the name Korea) in the tenth century. Buddhism had spread to Korea from China during the Han dynasty and spread widely, but after the founding of the Yi dynasty in 1392 Confucianism was favored and Korean Buddhism declined. Korea, especially its upper class culture, became a faithful echo of China while retaining its Korean distinctiveness. Koreans referred to China as "Elder Brother" and looked up to the Chinese model in all things, producing their own accomplishments in ceramics, printing, and the early use of moveable type as well as a magnificent art in the Chinese style but recognizably Korean.

The early tribes at the beginning of Korean history slowly merged into a single Korean people, and no traces of any early distinctions remain. Korea was conquered by the Mongols and was terribly exploited, including the forcing of its army and navy to aid in the Mongol conquest of China and its fruitless attempt to conquer Japan. After the Mongol collapse, Korea slowly recovered but then had to fight a Japanese invasion by the warlord Hideyoshi from 1592 to 1598 which devastated the country. There were some Korean successes against the Japanese, but Hideyoshi died in 1598 and his troops quickly returned to Japan. The Yi dynasty slowly lost effectiveness and was crippled by factional fighting among different upper class groups. It stubbornly resisted foreign pressures to open the country to trade and clung to traditional Korean culture, trying to prevent the disruption that inevitably comes with change. In the end, the Japanese took over Korea in 1895 and ruled in oppressively until their defeat in the second world war in 1945. Korea's population grew from an estimated five million in 1669 to 9 million by 1800 and continued to rise slowly

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a 1995 total of over 60 million in north and south Korean combined.

In 1945, the newly independent Korea was partitioned between a Russian puppet government in the north and an American puppet regime in the South, as a reflection of the Cold War. This led directly to war when the North invaded the South in 1950, a campaign that was halted just short of success by an American-dominated United Nations force in aid of their South Korean allies, who drove slowly north, devastating the country yet again as they advanced. A stalemate was reached, and the armistice signed in 1953 returned matters almost exactly to where they had been before, the country still divided roughly along the 38th parallel. Since then the South, still a police state, has seen strong economic growth, while the even more repressive communist government in the North was less successful. Dangerous tensions between the two halves of the artificially divided country remained.

## JAPAN

As an island country—four main islands and many smaller ones—120 miles off the coast of Korea at the nearest point, Japan has preserved a separate identity and its culture has remained a distinctive variant from those on the Asian mainland. Like the Koreans, the present-day Japanese people can be traced back to migrants from northeast Asia or eastern Siberia, speaking an Altaic language related to Korean but not to Chinese. There were probably, however, some movements of people into Japan from south China and perhaps from the south Pacific. Paleolithic cultures were widespread in Japan by at least 50000 BC, and by about 6000 BC a variety of Neolithic cultures had arisen, of which the best known is called Jomon. Some Jomon groups had begun to practice a rudimentary agriculture about 300 BC, presumably diffused from China via Korea. They made cord-marked pottery, lived in sunken pit shelters, and engaged in hunting, gathering, and fishing. But the direct and principal ancestors of the modern Japanese did not begin to arrive, again via Korea, until some time between 300 BC and 200 AD, in successive waves. Other and unrelated groups already inhabiting the Japanese islands, including those of the Jomon culture, were absorbed by conquest and intermarriage, and the survivors of the Japanese invasion were slowly driven northward. The principal group among the aborigines was the Ainu, related to the Causasian family and with more facial and body hair than most East Asians. The Ainu seem to have been the principal opponents of the advancing wave of Japanese invaders as they moved north from their original beachheads in the southern island of Kyushu, closest to Korea, and by about 500 AD had established their chief center on the mainland of Honshu, on the Yamato Plain between modern Osaka, Nara, and Kyoto. For a long time the boundary with the Ainu lay just north of Kyoto along the line of Lake Biwa, although there was doubtless some interbreeding that may help to explain the greater hairiness of most Japanese than other East Asians.

Meanwhile the Jomon culture was progressively displaced beginning in the third century BC by an early agricultural culture called Yayoi. It is likely that the transition into settled agriculture was hastened by the arrival of the Japanese via Korea, bringing with them other new techniques used by the Yayoi people: the potter's wheel, cultivated rice, irrigation, and the beginnings of bronze and then iron tools and weapons, all diffused from China. A few Chinese coins found at Yayoi sites

show that there was trade with China, but we do not know for sure who the Yayoi people were, most probably a mix of the early Japanese and those already there. By the third century AD, with the Japanese migration largely complete, Yayoi sites included large earthen mounds over the tombs of prominent men, a practice that seems clearly to have been derived from earlier Korean models. Much of Yayoi culture, and its people, may most accurately be seen as provincial Korean. By the fifth century iron swords and armor appeared that were similar to or identical with Korean equivalents, as were the jeweled crowns and other ornaments found in some of the tombs. Houses were now raised off the ground, agriculture was becoming more productive with the help of iron tools, and pottery had become harder and more highly fired. Kyushu and Honshu had reached the technological levels achieved in China some 2000 years earlier and in Korea perhaps 1000 years thereafter. But Japan still lacked writing and we have no evidence of true cities or what the population totals may have been.

The earliest written accounts of Japanese and Chinese, compiled in the third century AD, describe the route via Korea. The country was shown as divided into a hundred “kingdoms”—probably better called “clans”—of about a thousand households each. The earliest Japanese written accounts, using the characters adopted from China, did not appear until the eighth century, strikingly late. They are a mixture of pious and often contradictory myths, especially for the early periods, with some more factual accounts of later events. They recount the story of the divine creation of the Japanese islands, and the descent of the Japanese emperor from Amaterasu, the sun goddess. We can infer that by the fifth century the earlier clan basis of Japanese society was giving way to an infant state called Yamato, on the Yamato plain, a label that the Japanese came to apply to themselves as a nation. The emperor was both a temporal and a spiritual ruler who presided over the worship of the sun goddess and the forces of nature. In later times this nature worship came to be called Shinto, or the “Way of the Gods,” but it was never a fully developed religion and had no coherent philosophy or moral code.

Immigration from Korea continued into the ninth century, and until the sixth century the Japanese retained a foothold on the southeast Korean coast. There may have been some form of alliance between groups on both sides of the Tsushima Straits, which now separate the two countries. Large numbers of Koreans lived in Japan, where they seem to have dominated or at least been prominent in Japanese society. A genealogical record of 815 AD, one of the earliest Japanese written texts, listed over a third of the aristocracy as claiming Korean or Chinese ancestry, clearly a mark of distinction. Koreans also served in Japan as skilled artisans, metallurgists, and other technologists. For some centuries there seem to have been periodic raids in both directions across the Straits of Tsushima, but by the fifth century such violent interactions faded. Those remaining in Japan continued to move northward, mainly against the Ainu, who were slowly overcome and now live as a tiny and dwindling group on reservations in the northernmost island of Hokkaido.

Buddhism came to Japan from Korea in the sixth century and brought with it further elements of Chinese and Korean culture. The pace and scope of such influences accelerated on a major scale with the rise of the T'ang dynasty of China in 618. The T'ang model of cultural brilliance powerfully attract-

ed the Japanese, who had by now reached a level in their own development where they were ready to move from a tribal and pre-literature state to a Chinese-style civilization. Successive embassies were sent from Japan to China beginning early in the seventh century, to bring back all they could learn about Chinese ways, including writing and city-building.

Japan is smaller than France or California and somewhat larger than the British Isles, but it is mainly covered with mountains. Settlement has thus remained heavily concentrated on the narrow coastal plain between modern Tokyo and Osaka, in a series of disconnected basins over an area roughly equivalent to the coastal corridor between Boston and Washington, D.C. in the United States. In practice this makes Japan an even smaller country since so much of it, in the mountains, is thinly populated. Hokkaido, the northernmost island, was occupied by the Japanese very late, mainly after World War I. Mountains retarded Japanese economic development and political unification came late, not until 1600, after many centuries of disunity and chronic fighting among rival regional groups. Agriculture too has been hampered by the shortage of level land. Japan's great agricultural advantage is its mild maritime climate, the gift of the surrounding sea, which keeps it humid, mild in winter, and largely free of the droughts that plague north China. The mountains are steep and come down close to the sea so that nowhere are there extensive plains where soil can build up. Fish from the surrounding seas have always formed an important part of the diet, especially convenient since the bulk of the population lives close to the coast. The Chinese, in their superior attitude toward other peoples, called the Japanese "hairy sea dwarfs," since they were also generally shorter than the Chinese norm (perhaps the result of a different diet, lower in meat); the "sea" is a reference to the highly successful Japanese piracy along the coasts of China.

Beginning in 710, a Chinese-style capital city was built at Nara, midway on the Yamato Plain, a direct copy of the T'ang capital, and including many Buddhist temples, the first real city in Japan. This was still a small country, and over half of the original plan for Nara was never built. A Chinese-style law code was also issued, and a census taken, but the results it reported were not clear. In 794 a new emperor began the building of a new capital at modern Kyoto (then called Heian), also on the Chinese model, as its checkerboard pattern still shows. The Japanese, despite their admiration of Chinese civilization, altered that system of government wherever necessary to fit Japan's quite different circumstances. But on the whole they successfully transplanted Chinese culture on a major scale, including T'ang music and dance, architecture, gardens, and the tea ceremony, most of these things long since gone in China. If you want to get a glimpse of T'ang China you must go to Japan, where these and other adoptions have been carefully preserved.

One important difference between Japan and China was the persistence in Japan of an hereditary and privileged aristocracy, as in Korea, where China had long before abolished it and set up a system of competitive examinations as a basis for selecting officials. Officials in Korea and Japan came only from the aristocracy. For other reasons, Japanese art, architecture, and literature slowly diverged to some extent from their Chinese origins, as was only to be expected. Japan also produced a number of outstanding women writers, including Lady Murasaki, author of the world's first psychological novel, *The Tale*

*of Genji* written about 1000 AD. Court women, such as Murasaki was, where literate, in both Chinese and the soon-developed Japanese phonetic system called *kana*, which represented the sounds of spoken Japanese. But the splendor of court life at Kyoto (Heian) was limited to a fortunate few. Most of the Japanese remained poor villagers, with limited exchange through barter, and many, perhaps most of them were, in effect, serfs. This may help also to explain the relatively slow movement of Japanese northward beyond Kyoto, not only because of Ainu resistance but because northern Japan was not a desirable place to live during this period. The Japanese had arrived at the sub-tropical island of Kyushu, and southern or western Honshu was not dramatically different. Northern Honshu, let alone Hokkaido, was cold and snowy. Japanese culture had adapted to a mild winter climate with hot summers. Their traditional houses could be opened to the breezes on all sides by sliding panels, there was minimal provision for heating, and people wore loose-fitting clothes, although all of this could be related, as some argue, to cultural or migratory influences from south China or the south Pacific.

The spread of Buddhism led to the building of many large monasteries as well as temples, and armed monks began to take part in fighting rival groups. Japanese Buddhism moved far from the Buddha's message of non-violence, and acquired magic elements such as the recitation of the Buddha's name as a means of salvation. At the same time, Japan became torn by warfare between rival secular groups. This was the age of the samurai or warriors, who destroyed the rule of Heian and set up successive military regimes headed by a *shogun*, who claimed to be the emperor's military lieutenant but was in fact the real power. The chronic fighting came to a climax in the civil wars of the sixteenth century, but was finally ended by the victory of a new shogunate, the Tokugawa, in 1600. The Tokugawa shoguns largely unified the country for the first time but tried to suppress change of any kind as threatening their feudal-style rule. Nevertheless pressures for change built up, and by the 1850's were ready to break out as trade had thrived and merchants had grown newly prosperous. In 1853, the U.S. government sent Matthew Perry to demand free trade access to Japan. His mission, resulting in a commercial treaty, sparked a new wave of change, and in 1868 a largely nonviolent revolution toppled the Tokugawa and put in power a new group of radical reformers who were determined to save Japan from western pressures by building up its military and by pushing wholesale westernization as a source of strength.

This change was called the Meiji Restoration, from the title of the new boy emperor, who in fact he remained, as in the past, an essentially powerless symbol, as the emperor still is today. Under the direction of the new Meiji era leaders, Japan quickly industrialized and became a major world power, defeating China in 1894 (and acquiring Korea and Taiwan as a result), and Russia in 1904. Japan was now acknowledged by the Western powers as an equal, but Western sentiment began to turn against the Japanese as pride in their military successes and their growing ambition led them to make plans for the conquest of China, beginning with Manchuria in 1931, and leading gradually to an all-out confrontation with the United States and Britain at Pearl Harbor and Singapore in 1941. World War II destroyed most of Japan's cities and factories, as well as killing over three and a half million Japanese, soldiers, sailors, and civilians, including those who died in the nuclear

bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the closing days of the war.

The recovery of Japan from such a disaster has been almost miraculously rapid. By 1965 Japan had become the world's third industrial power, thanks to its newly rebuilt factories but even more to the hard work and determination of its people. High quality Japanese goods won buyers all over the world. The American Occupation from 1945 to 1952 helped to push Japan away from militarism and in the direction of American-style democracy, which has struck deep roots in Japan, in part no doubt because rapid economic growth has created a new middle class and because general prosperity means that people are not seeking radical alternatives. Population growth has leveled off, as tends to happen when the survival of children can be assumed and families concentrate instead on providing well for their children. At nearly 130 million, Japan is clearly a dominant country, but the huge increase in population has been accompanied by a steep rise in living standards. The pop-

ulation in 1000 AD has been estimated at about 5 million, in the late sixteenth century at 15 million, and by the mid-nineteenth perhaps 30 million, but at each period most Japanese remained poor. Now most Japanese are affluent, and enjoy a wide range of social services plus a highly effective education system, which in turn is a major key to economic growth. Perhaps Japan's major shortcoming now is its limited living space. Over 80 percent of Japanese live in cities—Tokyo being the world's largest at over 30 million—and most of them live in tiny apartments. Space is at a premium, and very few Japanese begin to have the living space many Americans take for granted. The countryside, although very beautiful, tends to be horrendously crowded on weekends and holidays by urbanites anxious for a break. But Japanese know that in other respects they are very well off on any comparative scale.

The remainder of this Asia volume treats in more detail each of the major areas: South Asia, Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan.



# ACEHNESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** AH-cheh-neeZ

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sumatra)

**POPULATION:** 2–3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Acehnese

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Located at the northernmost tip of Sumatra, Aceh has been the region of Indonesia most exposed to influences from the Islamic Middle East and Islamized India. Even the physical appearance of the coastal population reflects this: a great many Acehnese have Arab or Indian features. The Acehnese seem always to have played a key role in the trade linking India and China. Their closest linguistic relatives are the Cham of central Vietnam; their languages preserve a common fund of Austro-Asiatic loanwords that indicate intimate contacts with Mon-Khmer peoples. A network of kindred communities may have run from Vietnam to Sumatra through the Malay Peninsula, particularly as the earliest trade passed over the Isthmus of Kra instead of rounding the peninsula, as it did later.

The most renowned early state recorded in the Acehnese region is Samudra (meaning “ocean,” from which the name “Sumatra” probably comes). Still pagan when Marco Polo stopped there in 1292, it was already Muslim in 1323 when the famous Arab traveler Ibn Battuta passed through. Under a new name, Pasai, the kingdom became the model Islamic court in the archipelago. In its immediate vicinity, however, were other independent states: Barus, Daya, Lamri, and Aru. In the territory of Lamri, Sultan Ali Mughayat Shah established the kingdom of Aceh at the beginning of the 16th century. The new power profited from the Portuguese capture of Malacca; Muslim merchants (and later Protestant Dutch and English) sought refuge at Aceh, and the sultanate carried on a holy war against Malacca’s new Catholic rulers from 1540 to 1630.

These years, particularly during the reign of the autocratic Sultan Iskandar Muda (“Young Alexander”), constituted Aceh’s Golden Age. Acehnese ships carried pepper to ports in the Red Sea, providing half of Europe’s supply. Acehnese power extended far south on Sumatra (sultan’s viceroys were placed over the Minangkabau, Simalungan Batak, and Karo Batak) and into the Malay peninsula (Kedah, Perak, Johor, and Pahang fell under its sway).

In 1629 an Acehnese armada was destroyed in an attempt to take Malacca; from that point, Acehnese power began a slow decline. Bloody succession struggles led the Acehnese aristocracy to accept a series of female rulers in the 17th century, despite the conflict with Islam’s male bias. The power of the central government weakened as that of local lords (*uleebalang*, who controlled river mouths and thus the trade of the interior) grew.

The diffusion of political power to regional overlords did not harm Aceh’s economic vitality. Its wealth, particularly in pepper, attracted attacks by foreigners, such as the Americans and French, in the 1820s and 1830s. Because of a mutual defense treaty between Aceh and Britain, the Dutch did not launch a major invasion until 1871. Warfare with the Acehnese lasted

from 1873 to 1906 and cost the Dutch much in money and men.

The Indonesian Revolution took a particularly bloody form in Aceh; *ulama* (Muslim religious leaders) directed popular fury against the *uleebalang*, who were virtually exterminated as a class. In 1953, not wanting to be included with Christian Batak in the province of North Sumatra, Acehnese began a revolt against Jakarta that lasted for 10 years. In the end, the central government granted Aceh the status of “Special Region” (*Daerah Istimewa*), with autonomous jurisdiction over religion, education, and customary law. This special status notwithstanding, Suharto’s New Order regime (1966–1998) exploited Aceh’s natural resource bounty (natural gas, petroleum, gold, silver, and copper) without benefiting the rural majority of Acehnese, provoking the emergence of a separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM—Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) that went into armed rebellion in the late 1980s; this in turn was answered by brutal military repression that killed 2,000 Acehnese in 1989–1991 and made thousands of others refugees within their own homeland or in neighboring provinces. The years immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 were marked by Acehnese continuing to mobilize to demand autonomy and the central government going back and forth between conceding greater autonomy and resuming military offensives against GAM insurgents.

The guerilla war was again in full swing when a massive earthquake and tsunami devastated Aceh on 26 December 2004, killing 230,000 and leaving over 500,000 homeless. The epicenter of the earthquake was right off Aceh’s coast, though the resulting tsunami struck as far as Thailand and Sri Lanka. The catastrophe led GAM and the Indonesian government, under the mediation of Finnish ex-president Martti Ahtisaari, to reach a peace agreement (signed on 15 August 2005). With financial help for reconstruction coming from many foreign governments and organizations, Aceh is recovering. In 2006 the economy began to experience positive growth (7.7%). Aceh now enjoys the expanded autonomy granted in 2002, including the implementation of Sharia (Islamic law), the right to retain 80% of revenues from petroleum and natural gas production and receive foreign direct investment and not via the central government, and a new official name, “Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam” (literally, “The State of Aceh, Abode of Peace,” i.e. “domain of Islamic government”).

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Acehnese inhabit coastal lands along the northernmost end of Sumatra, as well as river valleys leading into the interior (the high mountains and thick forests of the interior are the home of another ethnicity, the Batak-related Gayo people). Acehnese comprise 50–70% of the population of the Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, or 2–3 million people. There being no large cities (the capital of Banda Aceh counts only 80,000 inhabitants), the majority of Acehnese live in small towns in the fertile coastal plain, most hugging the modern 600-km (375-mi) road between Banda Aceh and Medan in neighboring North Sumatra province, Indonesia’s greatest metropolis west of Jakarta.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Acehnese language is related to Malay but is even closer to the Cham languages of central Vietnam. The vocabulary of Acehnese and Cham includes some basic words adopted from



Austro-Asiatic languages (modern representatives of that family are Khmer, Mon, and Vietnamese). Until the 17th century, Acehnese used Malay in Arabic script as their sole written language; in the 17th century they began to produce literature in their own language.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Traditional Acehnese believe evil spirits reside in forests, swamps, river mouths, and banyan trees. The *jen aphui* (fire spirit) appears as a light in the night. The *sibujang itam* is a coarse, scary, but magically potent being whom one can enlist for evil purposes. The *geunteut* is a giant who squeezes down on sleeping people. The *burong* are women who have died in childbirth. They are clothed in white and have unnaturally long fingernails and a hole in their back. The *burong tujuh* are seven sisters who died in childbirth whose spirits threaten those giving birth.

#### 5 RELIGION

As befits a region long known as the “front porch (*srambi*) of Mecca,” the region where all Southeast Asian Muslims used to embark on the Haj (the pilgrimage to Mecca), the Acehnese are regarded as among the most devout Muslims in the archipelago and their culture as the most inseparable from Islam. A saying expresses this: “*adat ngon hukum lagee zat ngon sifeuet*,” meaning, “[Acehnese] custom is to [Islamic] law as the essence is to manifestation.” Islamic law (Sharia) influences every as-

pect of family life: weddings, marital conflicts, civil suits, funerals, and inheritance.

The lowest-level religious court is held after Friday prayer. The Acehnese support the national Islamic political parties such as, formerly, the modernist Muhammadiyah.

The Acehnese are zealous in their observance of three of Islam’s five pillars: going on the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj); paying the tithe (*zakat*); and fasting (*puasa*) during the month of Ramadan. Many are less consistent in performing the five daily prayers. Pantheistic mysticism has been widespread, and it is common to make pilgrimages of the graves of famous mystics.

Outside the scope of Islamic orthodoxy is the use of magic to ensure success in agriculture and other enterprises. Ritual meals to bless rice cultivation (*kenduri blang*) and fishing (*kenduri laut*) include Islamic elements, such as Arabic prayers and the chanting of the surah “Yasin” from the Qur’an. There is a tradition of female shamanism. *Dukun* (spirit healers) issue *sijunde*, spells that can cause sickness or death or that can counteract the action of other spells. Healing includes exorcistic practices aiming to “cool” the sick person. *Dukun* also specialize in interpreting dreams and omens.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage generally resemble those of the Malays (see **Malays**). A boy’s placenta is buried under the spot where rainwater draining from the roof comes down, and a girl’s placenta is buried under the entry ladder. Features of the wedding process specific to Acehnese are as follows: the representative (*teulangke*) of the man’s side presents the woman’s side with gold and other valuables (*kongnarit*); if the latter accepts them, this renders the betrothal binding. In addition, the man’s side must deliver a bride-price (*jeunamee*) of 50–100 g (1.75–3.5 oz) of gold; alternatively, the bride-price may be given to the couple later as a *peunalang* to buy a separate house or rice land. Preparatory to the wedding are the *malam berinai*, during which the bride is made as beautiful as possible and the bridal dais is decorated; and the *mandi berlimau*, in which an old woman gives the bride her last bath as a single woman. The procession (*intat linto*) of the groom to the bride’s house is accompanied by noisemakers and the chanting of the *Barzanji* and *selawat Nabi* (tales of the life of Muhammad).

Children are buried in their father’s family burial place (*bhom*). Modernist Muslims (Muhammadiyah) do not perform the post-funeral prayers for the deceased that others do.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Under the sultanate, the following hierarchy of political units existed: several *gampong* (villages) led by a *keusyik* (*geucik*), grouped into a *mukim* led by an *imeum*. A number of mukim fell under the jurisdiction of an *uleebalang* or, in the capital region, formed into one of three *sagoe* each under a *panglima*, kin of the sultan. Originally, the title *imeum* indicated the head official of a mosque, but its bearers gradually gained worldly power; sultans recognized the more powerful ones as *uleebalang* (regional lords, hereditary, and largely autonomous). The *uleebalang* appointed and could dismiss the *keusyik*; the latter was responsible for ensuring village security and prosperity and for arbitrating disputes. In addition, each village had

a *teungku* (a person knowledgeable in Islam to head religious observances and take charge of the *meunasah*), *ureung tua* (an elected village council), and a *tuha peut* (an expert on customary law). Of this structure, only the gampong and mukim remain under the Indonesian bureaucracy.

In the 19th century, society divided into the following classes: the sultan and those of royal blood; nobles (*uleebalang*); peasants; slaves; and *ulama*, a group of religious leaders not tied to a particular locale. Sultans' descendants carried the titles *ampon* for males and *cut* for females; the uleebalang, *teuku*; and the ulama, *teungku*. Nowadays, the only distinction recognized is that between the wealthy and the non-wealthy.

Touching the head, especially that of an older or higher-status person, is a grave insult. When meeting people, one must always greet them. One must speak politely and softly, especially with an older or higher-status person. Guests must be offered betel to chew before drinks are brought out. The duty to participate in community works binds villagers together: they cooperate to build the village mosque and other common buildings and, on Fridays, repair water channels and roads and clear away underbrush. Villagers also help each other build houses and establish wet-rice fields.

Traditionally, there was no free interaction between young men and young women. According to social norms, a man may not enter a house if the husband is not there. In the husband's absence, a visitor may not enter even the yard. If he has happened to, or must, enter the yard, he coughs to signal his approach so the women of the house can withdraw to the interior. These strictures are changing, one major reason being the fact that boys and girls are not separated in school. Nonetheless, censorship of sex-related material from films is considerably stricter in Aceh than elsewhere in Indonesia (where films edited by Jakarta authorities are screened).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

A village (*gampong*) consists of 50–100 houses, with the houses of kin clustering or lining up with no more than a fence separating them. Each village has at least one *meunasah*, a structure that is open on all sides and raised on piles. It serves as a prayer hall and school, and as a place where the village's young men and houseguests sleep and public ceremonies are held.

Facing the sea or the south, houses are raised on 20–24 posts, each 30 cm (12 in) in diameter and 2.5–3 m (8–10 ft) in height (either wooden or bamboo, depending on family wealth). Floors are usually made of wooden planks, sometimes of bamboo; older houses employed rattan cording instead of nails. Roofs are two-sloped, 2–6 m (6.5–20 ft) high, and of plaited sago palm-leaf, lasting 20 years. The front room (*seuramoe keue*) is an open veranda where the children sleep, as do guests during weddings, funerals, and other celebrations. The middle room (*tungai*) contains a central corridor with the *romoh inong* on the left and *anjong* to the right (sleeping quarters for the women of the family and the parents respectively). The kitchen is in the back room (*seuramoe likot*) or in a room of its own (*tiphik*). Poorer families house their married daughters in annexes to the main dwelling. Harvested rice is stored inside the house in a *krong pade* or *berandang*. The garden contains coconut, citrus, and banana trees.

Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 69 (2005 score), almost as high as Indonesia's national score of

69.6. Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam's GDP per capita is us\$7,752, moderately high for Indonesia (cf. us\$10,910 for North Sumatra, us\$6,293 for Central Java and us\$2,919 for North Maluku, with income from petroleum and natural gas production added, Aceh's GDP per capita reaches us\$12,679, among the highest in the country). In 2000, the level of infant mortality, at 39.71 deaths per 1,000 live births, was the fourth lowest in the country (after the national capital region of Jakarta, the highly urbanized Yogyakarta region, and North Sulawesi). Neglect by the central government and the effects of insurgency and military repression, compounded now by the devastation of the earthquakes and tsunamis of December 2004 and March 2005, have long denied Aceh a level of development fully commensurate with its resource wealth, a situation slowly being corrected since the post-tsunami peace agreement.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Following Islamic strictures, marrying an uncle or aunt or a nephew or niece is taboo. Nor should first cousins, especially the children of two brothers or of two sisters (parallel cousins), marry each other; this, however, occurs often, despite being thought very unlucky.

Except in some areas where the choice depends on whose parents are wealthier, in general a newly married couple lives with the wife's parents. As part of the marriage contract, the wife's parents pledge to support the couple until the first child is born, or for 3–4 years (the exact duration depends on the amount of the bride-price). In the case of poorer families, the husband does not reside in but rather only visits his wife in his in-laws' house, still regarding his own mother's village as his home. If the spouses are from the same village, the man will sleep in the *meunasah* when not with his wife. In some regions, many husbands trade or grow coffee far from home and only return for Ramadan festivities.

Parents-in-law and sons-in-law are very formal with each other until the birth of the first child. Parents-in-law will sleep in a back room to avoid hearing or running into a son-in-law; they will even speak to him only through the wall. A man feels much closer to his younger siblings-in-law; the latter can act as intermediaries between the man and his parents-in-law if the wife is out.

Children tend to be closer to their mother than to their father and are more likely to bring up their problems with the former (mothers raise the children, while the fathers are usually away all day working). Relations between fathers and grown children tend to be rather distant, with the father often appearing as an "autocratic" authority figure. Moreover, although the father's siblings are responsible for his children should the father die, children still tend to feel more intimacy with the mother's siblings. Grandparents love to spoil their grandchildren; because of this, parents prefer that their children not stay with their grandparents.

Only wealthy men take more than one wife at a time (a legitimate reason, according to Islam, would be the first wife's failure to bear children). Interference by parents-in-law in a couple's affairs constitutes the most frequent cause for divorce. If a wife dies while the couple is still being supported by the parents, her parents give the husband a refund of half of the bride-price or, alternatively, give one of their other daughters to him as a wife. If a husband dies, one of his brothers almost always takes the widow as his wife.



## 11 CLOTHING

Everyday wear for men consists of a shirt, sarong, and *peci* cap. Some women wear Acehnese-style black pants and the *baju tukulok*, a short-sleeved shirt; most wear a long-sleeved shirt and a sarong, with a sash over the shoulder.

For ceremonies, men put on a collared jacket, long pants (*cekak musang*), a sarong (*pendua*) over it, a *peci* cap (*makutup*), and a *rencong* (a slightly curved blade) tucked in the front. Women attire themselves in a *cekak musang*, with a *pendua* of silk woven on a traditional *pok teumpeun* loom over it, a shirt covering the hips, a waist sash (*pending*), and jewelry (necklaces, bracelets, and anklets). A bride wears a *kulah kama* crown with golden hairpins, and flower blossoms. The groom wraps a head cloth around the *peci* and puts a *kulah kama* on the front.

## 12 FOOD

Meals consist of rice and fish. Supplementary foods include cassava, sweet potato, maize, and *jeneng* (a kind of wild tuber). *Jeneng* are mixed with grated coconut or granulated sugar and eaten with coffee as breakfast. Acehnese prepare sticky rice in various ways: as *bu leukat keurabee*, mixed with grated coconut and salted; as *bu leumak*, cooked with coconut milk; as *bu leukat kuneng*, steamed with coconut milk and turmeric; and as *bu leukat meukuah*, cooked in a coconut milk sauce and optionally mixed with banana or durian. They also enjoy *kanji* (congee, a gruel of rice or sticky rice) cooked with coconut milk and sometimes mixed with mung beans.

Foods for special occasions include the following: *timphan*, rice flour boiled with grated coconut and sugar; *pulut panggang*, sticky rice mixed with coconut milk and grilled; and *guleplei*, a combination of *maninjau* fruit, green pepper, banana blossoms, young *maninjau* leaves, tamarind leaves, string beans, and small shrimp, eaten with rice. One special Ramadan food is *ibupeudah*, rice gruel mixed with 44 kinds of edible leaves and sprinkled with grated or finely chopped coconut.

Because Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol, those who do so must drink it secretly. Popular drinks include sweet palm-saps, sugarcane water, and coconut juice. Rather more exotic is *air madu*, the “honey” secreted by an *uno*, a kind of spider; *dukun* specialize in collecting this fluid.

## 13 EDUCATION

In Aceh, religious education is compulsory from age seven. This entails first instruction in reciting the Qur'an at a village *meunasah* then goes on to further education at a *pesantren*. In 2005, North Sulawesi's level of literacy stood at 95.98%, high by Indonesian national standards.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional dances include the *tari ranub lampuan*, depicting young women offering betel to guests; the Arab-influenced *seudati agam* for males and *seudati inong* for females; the *saman*, where dancers sit in a row on the ground, performing coordinated hand and body movements in a dynamic rhythm; and the *ramphak*, a female dance displaying courage in fighting the Dutch. One type of musical performance is *rapa-i*, playing the *rebana* tambourine to accompany chanting.

Many of the classics of Malay literature were created in Acehnese cities, e.g., the Pasai royal chronicle *Hikayat Raja-*



Acehnese students read the Quran at a mosque in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. (AP Images/Binsar Bakkara)

*Raja Pasai*; the heretical mystical poems of Hamzah Fansuri; and the Nuruddin ar-Raniri's *Bustan as-Salatin* (the Garden of Kings), an encyclopedic work on history and politics. Prose and poetry in the Acehnese language only began to be written in the 17th century. One classic is the *Hikayat Perang Sabil* (Chronicle of the Holy War), a narrative of the Dutch war.

## 15 WORK

The majority of Acehnese support themselves through wet-rice agriculture. Most fields begin as sectioned-off swampland; only some rely on irrigation from rivers and streams. Men, working cooperatively, manage irrigation, while women plant and weed. Swidden (shifting-cultivation) fields far from the village provide supplementary crops, such as dry rice, chilies, papayas, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. Formerly, pepper was the primary cash crop; now it is coffee. An alternative to farming is life as a trader, marketing agricultural produce.

Fishing is another major source of livelihood; traditionally, *pawang* guilds, each consisting of a chief and a boat crew, partitioned a stretch of coast among themselves. Acehnese also keep cattle and water buffalo, selling their animals as far away as Medan. A dairy industry exists, though it was introduced and remains in the hands of Bengali immigrants.

In the past, the primary exports were plantation-produced rubber and palm oil. Nowadays, oil and natural gas production supports local development.

## 16 SPORTS

*Pencak silat*, a Malay-style martial art characterized by the dance-like grace of its hand movements, is a popular sport; many women practice it.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 62.1, higher than Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) is 55.5, also higher than the national GEM (54.6).

The position of women is relatively high. For instance, a wife does not automatically submit to her husband's wishes. She takes an active part in wet-rice cultivation and within the home wields much power (the children fear her more than the often-absent father). Women have exercised leadership roles in Acehnese history; there were several queens in the 17th century, as well as a female military commander, Malahajati. However, a woman, especially one about to be married, cannot leave the house without her parents' supervision. When parents die, daughters inherit the house while sons get the rice fields, which usually end up under women's control, in any case, as men seek their livelihood away from the village. The ideal is for parents to build a house for each of their daughters as she marries, often spending their last years in a shack surrounded by the houses of their married daughters; if they cannot afford to build a separate house for a married daughter, they may leave their house to her and move into the kitchen (a separate structure).

Acehnese women suffered greatly during the struggle between GAM guerrillas and the Indonesian military. Many were brutalized, driven from their homes, and forced, with their children, to endure life in refugee camps (where they were even denied control of a kitchen of their own, the one place they were master in a society where Islamic teaching is interpreted to support patriarchy). Worse yet, many were raped by government soldiers. In the wake of the war, over 377,000 households are headed by widows. Women played an active role in promoting peace, from organizing regency-wide days of communal prayers to negotiating with the Indonesian army and presenting statements to the United Nations Committee in Geneva.

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—revised by A. J. Abalahin

# AFGHANIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** af-GHAN-eez

**LOCATION:** Afghanistan

**POPULATION:** 31.9 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Dari; Pashto (Pushto); Turkish

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni, 80–90%; Shia, 10–20%)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hazaras; Kafirs; Vol. 4: Pashtuns

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the territory that is now Afghanistan has been a crossroads for conquering armies and a jumping-off point for invasions of India. This pattern seems to have begun when the Indo-European-speaking Aryans first began to penetrate the Indus Valley in about 1800 BC. The Persian Empire of Cyrus was established in 545 BC. Persian rule lasted for the next two centuries. From 330 BC to 327 BC, Alexander the Great campaigned in Afghanistan. In 307 BC, Seleucus, one of Alexander's successors, traded Alexander's conquest in India and eastern Afghanistan to an Indian ruler named Chandragupta for 500 war elephants. This deal introduced a millennium during which Afghanistan was divided along often-shifting frontiers between a part ruled from the East, with an Indic culture, and a part ruled from the West, with a Hellenic and later Persian culture.

The armies of the Islamic invasion of the 7th century AD conquered Afghanistan in AD 699. In 1220, Genghis Khan brought his hordes into Afghanistan. For the next century and a half, parts of Afghanistan were under the control of various descendents of Genghis Khan. Then, after a time of rule by other conquerors, a central Asian ruler named Babur established a base in Kabul in 1504. From there he marched into India in 1525 and founded the Moghul Empire that dominated India for nearly 200 years. Until 1739, the moghuls controlled parts of Eastern Afghanistan, although they were often resisted by indigenous tribal groups. Western Afghanistan came under the control of the Persian dynasty. For 150 years, Afghanistan was divided between two empires.

The Afghan Empire took shape when Ahmed Khan, a young Pashtun (or Pushtun) cavalry leader, led his 4,000 troops to Kandahar where he was elected leader of a group now renamed Durrani. The Durrani set out on a campaign of conquest and brought much of Afghanistan under control by 1750. At its height, the empire of Ahmed Shah Durrani covered modern Pakistan and Kashmir, Afghanistan, and the northeastern province of Iran. Modern Afghanistan can be considered the part of this empire that was not subsequently whittled away.

The existence of a national entity that we can recognize as Afghanistan dates from the reign of Amir Adbur Rahman in 1880–1901. The country came to have its present boundaries during this period. However, Afghanistan was still under the heavy influence of various foreign powers. It was not until 1919 that the Afghan government succeeded in gaining independence in conducting its foreign affairs. In 1964 a new constitution was adopted that looked toward development of a parliamentary democracy. In a coup in 1973, the king was ousted by his first cousin, Daoud, who declared the country a republic, with himself as president. Five years later, Daoud was killed in a leftist coup in April 1978. Within a year, the

widespread perception of the new regime as anti-Islamic and pro-Russian led to uprisings in most parts of the country. At least 400,000 refugees crossed over into Pakistan, and another 600,000 fled to Iran. Soviet military aid for the suppression of insurgency was not succeeding, so in December 1979 the Soviet army marched into Kabul. Thousands more Afghanis fled across the border. By late 1981, there were about 3 million Afghanis in Pakistan, and 250,000 in Iran. Ten years later, the number of refugees had climbed to 5 million.

The Soviet army left Afghanistan in 1989 and fighting among tribal and ethnic groups intensified. In the mid-1990s a Pakistan-supported mercenary army of Islamic fundamentalists called the Taliban (Arabic for "students") began taking control of large swathes of the country. Many Taliban fighters were Arabs who had come to Afghanistan in the 1980s to repel the Soviet occupation of a Muslim land. Their deeply traditional brand of Islam was welcomed in many parts of the country, particularly in the southern provinces around Kandahar. They were less successful in the Hazara lands to the east and the Tajik part of the north. By 1996 the Taliban had taken control of most of the country. A tiny pocket of Afghanistan was still ruled by a coalition of Uzbek, Hazara, and Tajik forces called the Northern Alliance.

After the al Qaeda-led attacks on Washington D.C. and New York on 11 September 2001, the United States and the United Kingdom began a bombing campaign of Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban and to capture leaders of the al Qaeda terrorist network who were being protected by the government. The Taliban forces fell quickly and an interim government was established and backed militarily by a large contingent of American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces. Partial peace returned to regions of the country held by NATO and the United States, and a democratic government, headed by Hamid Karzai, was established in 2004. The Taliban, however, were never fully defeated and beginning in 2005 they began a counter-offensive in the south, attacking from the mountainous border areas with Pakistan. By 2007 and 2008, suicide bombings were becoming common throughout the country, even in Kabul, by that time a heavily fortified and militarized city.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Afghanistan is a relatively inaccessible, mountainous, land-locked country of southwestern Asia. It is bounded by Pakistan; Iran; the republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan; and, for less than 65 km (40 mi), China. Afghanistan is about the same size as the U.S. state of Texas. The mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush cover most of the country, with elevations rising to 7,300 m (24,000 ft). In the northeast, the mountains are perpetually covered with snow, while in the southwest there are rocky or sandy deserts. Most of Afghanistan's water supply comes from the snow that falls on the mountains between December and April, which only amounts to the equivalent of 38 cm (15 in) of rain. Without irrigation, little of Afghanistan's land can be cultivated. The climate varies widely according to altitude and regional weather patterns. The range between high summer and low winter is large. Almost all places have some freezing weather, and those below actual mountain zones have temperatures above 32°C (90°F). In some areas, temperatures can go above 38°C (100°F). A wide day-to-night range of temperature is also typical. The

area along both sides of the Afghanistan-Iran border is very windy—a south wind blows continuously from June through September, at speeds of up to 160 kph (100 mph). Wheat is harvested during the windy period and is ground with the aid of windmills with vertical vanes and a vertical shaft, an ancient invention of this region.

The 2007 population of Afghanistan was estimated to be 31.9 million. Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 and the overthrow of the Taliban regime, many of the estimated population of 6 million Afghanis have returned home from years as refugees in, primarily, Pakistan, Iran, and Tajikistan. Aid agencies differ as to how many Afghanis have returned home.

Ethnically, Afghanis are very mixed. Racially, there are Caucasians, Mongoloids, and Australoids. Pashtuns (or Push-tuns) make up about half the Afghani population and consider themselves the true Afghanis. Of Aryan stock, they appear to have lived in Afghanistan since the earliest recorded history. Pashtuns are tall and fair-skinned, with black or brown hair and brown eyes (hazel or blue eyes are also common). Tajiks are Persian, of Mediterranean stock. They are tall with fair skin and black hair (though some have red or blond hair). Afghanis of Mongoloid descent include Hazaras, Turkmen, and Kirghiz. Mongoloid races have Asian features. The Uzbeks, along with several small nomadic tribes, are of Turkish origin and have Turkish features and fairer skin than other Afghanis. There are also many groups of Afghanis who claim to be of Arab descent. They call themselves *sayyid* and speak a form of Arabic. Through centuries of intermarriage, most Afghanis are a blend of these different races. One more isolated group is the Nuristanis, about whom little is known. They seem to be of Mediterranean descent, with light-brown skin, thin straight noses, and black to brown or even blond, hair.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The principal languages of Afghanis are Dari, a variety of Persian; and Pashto (or Pushto), a language shared with the residents of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. Both are official languages of the country, and most educated Afghanis can use both. Schools use whichever is most common in the area and teach the other as a second language. The languages are related, though they probably split into two distinct languages millennia ago, before the Christian era. Speakers of Pashto, called Pashtuns (or Pushtuns), have been the ruling group in Afghanistan and have tended to set the tone for the entire nation. The Pashtuns constitute a single ethnic group, while the Dari-speakers are more diverse. Geographically, Dari is the predominant language of the Kabul area and the regions to the northwest of the Hindu Kush Mountains; while Pashto is principally located to the southeast of the mountains. Dari is a much more urban language, and is the language in which business is most frequently conducted. Both Dari and Pashto are written using adaptations of the Arabic alphabet. Dari adds four extra consonants for sounds not occurring in classical Arabic, and Pashto adds those four plus eight more letters. In written form, Dari and Pashto are closer than when spoken.

There are many other languages spoken by the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan. After Dari and Pashto, the major language family is Turkish. Turkic languages are spoken mostly in the northern regions of Afghanistan. Ancient Indo-European languages are also spoken, by small groups living in



isolated areas. Each language may have only a few thousand speakers.

Afghani names are for the most part Islamic. The Pashtun population uses non-Arabic names frequently. The father's oldest brother is usually the person to pick a child's name. The name is then officially conferred by a religious leader on the third day after birth. Surnames are a recent innovation in Afghanistan. Where they have been adopted, they usually have a geographic reference, or a connection with the professional interests of those using them. Since the choice of a surname is personal, close relatives (even brothers) may opt for different names. Pashtuns normally identify themselves by the tribal lineage-division to which they belong. Most Afghanis only use their given names in public. Within the privacy of the home, they call each other by nicknames, or *laqubs*. All nicknames are made up of combinations of the same few words—candy, flower, lion, uncle, dear, etc.—like “Lion Uncle,” or “Flower Dear.”

### 4 FOLKLORE

Afghanis love to tell stories, and they all have quite a repertoire that they know by heart to tell at a gathering. Stories for children are usually teaching stories about foolish people who get what they deserve, such as the Three Sons of Mah'madyar, or Bachey Kul (the “Bald Boy”). Another favorite character for Afghani stories is Mullah Nasruddin. Mullahs are respected Islamic religious teachers or leaders, but they are not sacred like the Quran, so people often poke fun at them in a friendly

way. The Mullah frequently figures as a “wise fool” in Afghan stories, appearing foolish but turning out to be very smart.

Adult Afghanis enjoy stories of love and/or heroism. The most popular love story is that of Leilah and Majnun, two doomed lovers who are separated when young and then cannot reconnect when old. They both die of grief and unfulfillment. Many hero-tales come from the *Shahnama*, *the Book of Kings*, written in Afghanistan for a Turkish emperor about the rise of the Iranian people. Other tales are about real-life heroes, such as the warrior Habibullah Ghazi who overthrew the Pashtun government in 1929 and ruled for nine months. The Pashtuns, on the other hand, call him Bacheh Saqao, “the Water Carrier’s Boy,” and paint him as a fool.

Afghanis believe in *jinns*, spirits who can change shape and be either visible or invisible. Jinns are usually evil, or at least out to do no good. Many Afghanis wear amulets around their necks to protect them from jinns. Stories of jinns are often told at night, like ghost stories around a campfire.

## 5 RELIGION

Afghanistan is one of the most solidly Muslim countries in the world. The overwhelming majority follow the mainstream branch of Islam, the Sunni tradition. About 10–20% of Afghanis are Shia Muslims, of both the Imami and Ismaili sects. There are also sufis (or dervishes), members of the mystical branch of Islam. Afghan Sufis generally belong to the Qadiri order or “path,” the most ancient and widespread of sufi paths. For the most part it is the folk level of Islam that is important to Afghanistan. The local religious leaders are not usually well-instructed. They are mostly peasants with other part-time work. In upper valleys of the tributaries that run into the Kabul River from the north between Kabul and the Pakistan border, there used to be a pocket of paganism. It was called Kariristan (“land of the heathen”) until 1896 when Abdur Rahman invaded it and forcibly converted the inhabitants to Islam. He then renamed these valleys Nuristan (“land of light”). The Nuristanis of today are a very distinct ethnic group in Afghanistan.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Probably the most important annual observance in Afghanistan is the ancient Persian New Year celebration, Nawruz (or Now Ruz), meaning “new day,” at the beginning of spring on March 21. It is marked by special foods, including *samanak*, a dessert made of wheat and sugar, and *haft miwa*, a mixture of seven fruits and nuts symbolizing spring; sporting events; and attempts to secure good fortune for the following year. The ceremonial raising of the flag at the tomb of Muhammad’s son-in-law, Ali, occurs on Nawruz at Mazar-e-Sharif. The standard of Ali, a staff, is raised in the courtyard there. For 40 days, pilgrims flock to touch it and gain merit or be cured of disease and injury. On the fortieth day after Nawruz, the staff is lowered and a particular red species of tulip blooms, disappearing soon after. Fairs and carnivals brighten Nawruz, as does the custom of dyeing farm animals—green chickens and purple sheep abound.

Most major holidays in Afghanistan are religious, following the Islamic lunar calendar (causing the dates to vary on the standard Gregorian calendar). The main Muslim holidays are Ramadan (or Ramazan in Afghan pronunciation), the month of fasting (called *ruzah* by Afghanis) from dawn to dusk; Ayd Al-Fitr, a three-day festival at the end of Ramadan; Ayd Al-

Adha, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (known as the Hajj); the First of Muharram, or the Muslim New Year; Mawoulid An-Nawabi, the prophet Muhammad’s birthday; and Ayd Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven. Ashura is celebrated by Shia Muslims, after the first 10 days of the new year that are spent in mourning to commemorate the killing of Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad on 10 October 680. Ashura is an optional fast day.

Nonreligious holidays in Afghanistan include Jeshn, or Independence Day, on August 18, a week-long festival celebrating Afghanistan’s independence from Britain in 1919; Workers’ Day, or Labor Day, on May 1; and Revolution Day on April 27, the date in 1978 when President Daoud was overthrown by the leftist regime.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Weddings are the greatest occasions for celebration in Afghanistan. After several preliminary observances, the ceremonies connected with the actual wedding are spread over a three-day period, except in cities, where they are all condensed into one day. The most popular time for weddings is late summer or early fall. Most marriages are arranged by the parents and relatives, often when children are still very young. Men generally marry between the ages of 18 and 20; and women, between the ages of 16 and 18. Marriage between cousins, especially paternal ones, is preferred. A bride-price is paid by the groom’s family to pay for the loss of a valuable family member. A dowry of household goods, etc., is paid by the bride’s family to help with the initial setting up of a home. The groom’s family pays for the wedding, which involves much feasting and dancing. The official ceremony is called *nikah-namah* and consists of the signing of the marriage contract before witnesses, readings from the Quran by the *mullah* (local religious leader), and the tossing of sugared almonds and walnuts onto the bridegroom.

The birth of a first child is the occasion for a day-long celebration; most elaborate if the child is a boy. Children are named on the third day after birth. The name is chosen by a paternal uncle who then becomes the child’s guardian, responsible for the child if the father dies. The sixth night after a birth is observed with an “open house” for friends of the family, who bring small gifts. Boys are usually circumcised at about the age of seven (after which they begin wearing turbans). The circumcision is the occasion for a feast, likely to involve wrestling contests and other demonstrations of manliness.

Large-scale food distributions connected with funerals were made illegal in the 1950s. Now, commemorative meals take place several times in the year following a death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Interpersonal relations among Afghanis are largely ruled by *Pashtunwali* (or *Pushtunwali*), unwritten laws and codes belonging to the Pashtuns but followed by almost all Afghanis. The laws and codes deal mostly with honor and self-pride. Hospitality is required for honor’s sake, so travelers and guests never go without food or shelter. *Pashtunwali* involves *mel-matia*, being a good and generous host; *ghayrat*, upholding personal and family honor; *namus*, defending women’s honor; *nanawati*, providing shelter to anyone who needs it; *sabat*, or loyalty; and *badal*, avenging blood with blood. Other requirements of *Pashtunwali* are never to kill a woman, a minstrel, a

Hindu, or an uncircumcised boy; to pardon any wrong—except for murder—when asked to by a woman, the wrongdoer's family, a *sayyid* (an Afghan who claims Arab descent), or a *mullah* (local religious teacher or leader); to punish adultery with death; and to spare the life of anyone who takes refuge in a mosque or shrine, or anyone in battle who begs for mercy.

Afghanis are very expressive with their bodies, using extravagant gestures and facial expressions to communicate. There is also a lot of physical affection expressed between members of the same sex. It is forbidden in Islam to touch members of the opposite sex who are not intimately related. Afghan men greet friends and acquaintances by clasping both hands in a firm handshake, hugging, and kissing each other on the cheeks. They often walk together, arm in arm. Business contracts are sealed with a nod of the head.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Nomadic Afghanis, called *kochis*, live in tents and move from place to place to find grazing grounds for their herds of camel and sheep. In the north, the Turkoman nomads have red dome-shaped tents. In the south, the Pashtun or Balūchī nomads live in black tents that look like huge bats. The Pashtun or Balūchī nomads keep large dogs with heavy shoulders and big heads; they are known as *kochi* dogs. Afghanistan is one of the few places left in the world with a sizable number of nomads. There are about 2 million nomads in Afghanistan.

Settled Afghanis mostly live in small villages with a few hundred to a few thousand people. They generally make their living as farmers. Some wealthier Afghanis live in *qalas*, or country forts, with other farmers working their land. Some 70% of Afghanis are farmers, even though the country is very dry, and only a tenth or less of the land is arable. Constant warring has prevented the Afghanis from developing and maintaining effective irrigation systems, so most of them barely scratch a living out of the soil. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. With the harsh terrain and destruction from the continual conflicts, Afghanis have not been able to move very far beyond a medieval world of poverty and hardship. Many of the few major roadways in the country have been destroyed in the wars. Hydroelectric power is only readily available in the springs when the mountain streams swell with melting snow. During the dry summers, dams and reservoirs must provide this power.

Village houses are made of bricks plastered with a mixture of mud and straw. Most are flat-roofed, but in some regions domed roofs are preferred. An enclosed compound holds the livestock and storage sheds, as well as the cooking area and the general living area. Women carry water from nearby streams or pools (some wealthier Afghanis have artificial streams or pools called *juy*). Bathing and laundry are also done in these streams and pools. Households have the bare minimum of furniture, with mattresses spread on the floor at night for beds. The mattresses are then stacked in a corner during the day. In summer, Afghanis sleep on their flat roofs where it is cooler. Dung patties—made by the women and children, who collect the manure, shape it into patties, and slap them on the walls to dry—are used for fuel. Two uniquely Afghani ways to keep warm are *tawkhanah* and *sandali*. *Tawkhanah* are hot-air tunnels built under the floor with a fire at one end. The heat from the fire travels through the tunnels and warms the whole floor. These *tawkhanah* are used mostly in villages south of the Hin-

du Kush mountains. In other places, a small, low table with a blanket over it is placed above a charcoal brazier. The blanket holds in the heat, and the family then sits around the table to keep warm. This is known as the *sandali* system.

Villages in Afghanistan are circled around larger towns that act as commercial, communication, and administrative centers. Farm goods, crafts, and raw materials are brought to the towns from the villages. The goods are then sent to the cities. Horse-carts are used for transportation in the towns. From the towns to the cities, trucks are used. The trucks are often brightly painted with elaborate designs. *Caravanserais*, or inns, are located in the towns, as well as teahouses where men gather to smoke water-pipes, talk, and drink strong tea. The teahouses are known as *chaykhanas*. Markets, or bazaars, are located on the main street of the town. Most shop-owners live above their shops.

Where major routes intersect, cities have sprung up. The five major cities in Afghanistan are Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kunduz. The first four all have populations of over 100,000 people, and Kabul has some 2 million residents. Kabul has become almost a separate nation, with a very different lifestyle and flavor than the rest of the country. High-rise buildings with bricks are found in cities to house their ever-growing populations. Though the standard of living is somewhat better than in villages and towns, it is still not modernized or consistently comfortable. Plumbing and water-supply are particularly iffy. Afghanistan has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Afghani life revolves around the family, and “family” includes all extended relations. Traditionally, Afghani society was tribal, and tribal affiliation is still the most significant organizing principle in parts of rural Afghanistan. Tribal units have a strong patrilineal organization, which is supported by Islam. “Modern” extended family units are still patrilineal, consisting of men related through their fathers, the men's wives, and unmarried female relatives. Extended families often live together in the same household, or in separate households clustered together. Even large cities are made up of small “villages” of extended family units. The women of the households form a single work group and care for and discipline the children. The senior active male member, typically the grandfather, controls all expenditures, and the grandmother controls all domestic work assignments.

Women have a great deal of say in the home, but little authority in public. Strong, courageous, and hard-working, women are primary members of the Afghani household. But Islamic tradition requires that they be veiled and kept separate in public, so they play little part in society outside the home. In Kabul, some women are leaving behind the traditions of Islam and venturing out to take jobs, serve in government (though very few women have gained prominence politically), and attend higher education classes alongside men.

Divorce is fairly simple in Islamic law—a man merely has to say “I divorce you” three times in front of witnesses to divorce his wife. A woman has to appear before a judge with reasons for divorcing her husband. Despite the ease of divorce, however, few Afghanis end their marriages. Polygamy is also allowed but rarely practiced. Adultery is punishable by death.



A young boy holds onto his mother's burqa while walking through a market in Kabul, Afghanistan. Despite the fall of the Taliban regime, most Afghan women still opt to wear the burqa. (AP Images/Farzana Wahidy)

Children are cherished in Afghani society, particularly boys. Girls are not openly abused, but often the needs of their brothers' come first, to the point where some girls may seem to be neglected. All children are raised in the women's quarters, and a baby is nursed until the next child is born or the child becomes too old. Children are expected to grow up quickly and learn to take care of themselves. They are toilet-trained and taught to feed themselves at a very early age. After a boy is circumcised, usually at age seven, he is treated like a man and is expected to behave like one. Girls have no rite of passage into adulthood, but by the time they are 9 or 10 years old they know all the skills necessary to be a wife and mother. They can grind wheat and corn, fetch water, cook, clean, and sew, and make dung patties for fuel.

Marriages are almost always arranged by the families, often when the couple are still young children. A match between paternal cousins is preferred. Boys usually marry at age 18–20, and girls at 16–18.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

The ordinary clothing of Afghani men is a rather baggy pair of trousers with a drawstring at the waist, and a loose, long-sleeved shirt reaching about to the knees. Over this (when

it is cool), a vest is worn. Coats worn in rural areas are often brightly striped, and they are quilted for winter warmth. Turbans—traditionally white, but now of any color—are wound around the locally favored type of turban caps. Pashtuns (or Pushtuns), and others who imitate them, leave some of the turban cloth hanging down, while most of those in the rest of the country tuck the end in. Pashtun men customarily have their hair cut off square at earlobe length. Other groups have their heads shaved about once a month. In villages and rural areas, men follow the Islamic custom of wearing beards and moustaches. In Kabul, many men are clean-shaven. The *pakol* hat has become popular recently. Originally a Nuristani hat, it was adopted as a sign of the Mujahideen resistance to the government. However, now even the president that the Mujahideen are fighting sometimes wears the *pakol*.

Women often wear pleated trousers under a long dress and cover their heads with a shawl. Urban women traditionally wore a *chadri*, an ankle-length cloth covering, like a sack over the whole body, with a mesh insert over the eyes and nose. Though the *chadri* was officially banned in 1959, some women continue to wear them. In the countryside, hard-working village and tribal women could not go about so encumbered, so they have never worn *chadris*.

In large cities, particularly Kabul, Western-style clothing is becoming increasingly popular, for both men and women.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Afghani cuisine is a blend of all the different cuisines of the peoples who have occupied their country over the millennia. The strongest influences are from India and Iran. Staple foods are rice, a flatbread known as *naan*, and dairy products. A variety of fruits and vegetables are also available.

Afghan bread, leavened or unleavened, is baked thin on a very hot fired-clay surface. Typically, a round pottery vessel whose sides come in toward the bottom is buried in the earth and heated by coals in the middle of the bottom. The dough is formed and slapped onto the hot concave sides where it bakes rapidly. Bread is eaten at every meal, often serving as a utensil for scooping up the food, since Afghans generally eat with their fingers.

The main feature of a major meal is a rice *pilau*, which is rice cooked with meats or vegetables. There are as many kinds of pilaus as there are cooks, though certain combinations are common. For example, an honored guest would be served *qabli*—rice with raisins, shredded carrot, almonds, and pistachios. *Kala-pacheh* is rice with the head (including the eyeballs) and feet of a sheep. In rural Afghanistan, regular meals are not eaten between breakfast and supper, but people carry nuts and dried fruit to eat during the day for energy.

The usual beverage is tea, usually drunk without milk. Black tea is generally preferred south of the Hindu Kush mountains, while green tea is preferred in the north. Sugar is expensive in Afghanistan, but many Afghans will pay the extra price to soak a sugar cube in their tea and then either eat the cube or hold it between their teeth while they drink the tea. Alcohol is forbidden by Islam (as is pork).

Meals are spread on a cloth placed on the floor. The family and any guests sit on the floor around the cloth. A bowl is carried to each guest with fresh water poured into it for each person to wash their hands before and after eating. Most families

have a special pot and bowl for this purpose, called an *aftawagan*. Women and girls do the cooking.

A special soup served only on *Nawruz*, or the Persian New Year, is *haft miwa*. This soup is made of seven fruits and nuts to symbolize spring. In the recipe that follows, peaches are substituted for a locally grown Afghani fruit known as *sanje*.

#### Haft Miwa (Seven Fruits)

- 1 cup skinned almonds (unsalted)
- 1 cup skinned walnuts (unsalted)
- 1 cup skinned pistachios (unsalted)
- 1 cup dried peaches
- 1 cup red raisins
- 1 cup green raisins
- 1 cup dried apricots
- 6 cups water

If you only have salted nuts, rinse off the salt with water. Put the nuts in one bowl and the fruits in another. Add 3 cups of cold water to each bowl. Stir, cover the bowls, and put them in the refrigerator. After two days, combine the ingredients from the two bowls into one large bowl. Stir, cover the bowl, and put it in the refrigerator for two or three more days. Serve cold.

(Adapted from Ansary, p. 59)

### 13 EDUCATION

Western-style education has never been widely accepted in Afghanistan, and the literacy rate is still very low. Literacy in Dari is much more prevalent than literacy in Pashto (or Pushto).

Before 1903, the only education available was in mosque schools taught by the local *mullah* (religious leader or teacher). The mosque schools, or *madrassas*, were just for boys. Girls were taught at home by elderly women. At the madrassa, boys learned Islamic subjects and were taught to read and write using the Quran. The first modern school was established in 1903 in Kabul by King Habibullah. Both religious and secular subjects were taught there, and foreign teachers were brought on the staff by World War II (1939–45). King Habibullah also founded a military training academy and a teachers' college. Under King Amanullah in the 1920s, more schools were opened in both urban and rural areas. The first high school class graduated in 1923. The first school for girls was founded in 1924 in Kabul. The 1931 constitution made primary education mandatory and free for all children, but this aim was not realized for decades. With the constant warring, formal education has been erratic. The University of Kabul was founded in 1946, with separate faculties for men and women. By 1960, all faculties had become coeducational.

Before the Communist takeover in 1978, there were 3,404 schools with 83,500 teachers. After two decades of civil war, however, the number of schools and teachers had both been slashed dramatically. After the Taliban came to power, education of girls was banned and virtually all non-religious education was forbidden. After the Western allied powers installed the Karzai government, education was reformed (the 2004 constitution guarantees education to all Afghans) and by 2007 the government reported that there were 5.4 million children enrolled in schools, 35% of whom were girls.

Education in Afghanistan is conducted strictly, with few frills. Students sit in rigid rows of desks, with a blackboard

and perhaps a map or two on the walls. There is no playground equipment—at recess, if there is no shooting or bombing going on, students play simple games, or sit and talk with each other. Learning is by rote; the students repeat lessons back to the teacher. There are no group projects or “learning centers,” etc. Grades are based solely on oral and written exams given several times a year in each subject. Exam grades are added up at the end of the year, and students who pass move on to the next grade. Failing students repeat the grade, which is not uncommon. The educational system of Afghanistan consists of six years of primary school, and six years of *lycee*, or high school. Refugee students may receive no formal education at all.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Persian is a language with a vast cultural and literary tradition (Dari is a form of Persian). The first shoots of classical Persian literature began to appear in the 9th century AD. During the late medieval period, a Persian civilization developed that embraced Iran, Afghanistan, and the Muslim-ruled parts of India. It also included much of Central Asia. Throughout this region, Persian became the language of administration. The small world of the literate also made it their principal medium of expression, whatever their native language, much as Latin dominated Western Europe. It was presumably during this period that Persian replaced other Iranian languages as the common speech in much of northern Afghanistan. Contemporary prose and poetry are most often written in Dari and often imitate classical Persian style and form.

Pashto (or Pushto) literature was essentially created by Khushal Khan Khattak, who lived from 1613 to 1690. He was a brilliant warrior who opposed the Moghul emperor. He was also a poet of wide-ranging interests. Pashto literature has not been cultivated since then to the extent that Dari literature has been. There has been little new or original art, literature, or architecture of any sort produced since the 17th century, when the rivalry between the Persians and Moghuls began. Almost constant warring, with no significant periods of peace, has prevented the Afghanis from giving their attention to the arts.

The Islamic reverence for poetry continues to inspire poetic recitals and some original writing. The greatest modern Afghani poet, Khalilullah Khalili, died recently. Mujahideen resistance fighters often quote his poems. The most popular theme in Afghani poetry is war, followed by love and jealousy, then religion and folklore (though almost all poems have some religious sentiment in them). There is also some nature poetry. Traditionally, Afghanis have not been known for writing fiction or other prose. After the 2001 war and its violent aftermath brought the world's attention to the country, a few notable books were produced by the Afghani Diaspora, as well as internationally renowned films. *The Kite Runner*, written by the Afghan-American writer Khaled Hosseini and published in 2003, was an international best seller. The Siddiq Barmak film of 2003, *Osama*, was the first film shot in Afghanistan since the Taliban had taken power. The film, which won several international awards, is a rather bleak assessment of life in modern Afghanistan.

Visual arts reached their peak in the 15th century AD. Since then, no exceptional painters or sculptors have emerged, and no new styles or content have been developed. Most painting is done in the form of calligraphy, illumination, or functional



decoration. Muslim architecture continues to be beautifully realized, particularly in the design of mosques. Tall minarets with bulbous domes and colorful, intricate tile-work make for one of the most graceful and elegant architectures in the world.

## 15 WORK

Most Afghanis (about 80%) are farmers and herders. Even those who engage in crafts such as pottery, weaving, shoemaking, and housebuilding are also part-time agriculturalists. The army and government administration are the only large-scale employers outside the agricultural sector. Wheat is the principal crop. For trade purposes, grapes and orchard fruit (dried or fresh), together with walnuts and almonds, are important. Cotton is also a commercial crop. Perhaps the most profitable crop in Afghanistan is opium derived from poppies grown in the northwest provinces near the Pakistani border. Opium is the base for morphine and heroin. Efforts have been made from time to time to curtail the illegal drug trade, but political instability, the power of local warlords, and continuing Taliban insurgency make it difficult to supervise people's activities effectively. By 2006 Afghanistan was the world's largest producer of opium.

Sheep are raised in most parts of the country. Some 14% of Afghanis are still nomads, traveling from grazing ground to grazing ground. Goats are often herded together with the sheep. The skins of the Karakul sheep ("Persian lamb") of northern Afghanistan are the country's most profitable product. Wool is also exported.

In towns there are traders and full-time craft specialists, teahouses, and schools, but only about 300 such communities exist in Afghanistan. Only the few large cities, and particularly the capital, Kabul, have a modernized economic sector. Besides these, there are a very small number of factories and mining centers in other locations. Some small industries begun by the government include tanneries; machine-repair shops; cotton-ginning mills; bakeries; fruit-processing plants; and oil, soap, shoe, and ceramics factories. Larger government industries include cotton, rayon, and wool mills; the production of domestic construction materials and chemical fertilizers; and mining, especially for natural gas and lapis lazuli. Afghanistan is the leading producer of the precious stone lapis lazuli. Some Afghanis also find jobs as truck drivers, transporting goods from towns to cities and vice versa.

In 2008 more than 50% of the population lived below the official poverty line. The country's economy was growing, but was largely dependent on foreign aid.

## 16 SPORTS

Afghanis are very competitive and take their sports very seriously. Winning is a question of personal, family, and tribal honor. Afghan sports also tend to be violent, although injuries are rare. A favorite Afghan sport is called *buzkashi*, or "goat pulling," though these days a calf is usually used. In this contest, a headless calf carcass is placed in the center of a circle formed by two teams of horsemen (known as *chapandaz*). Only men participate. Teams have been known to number up to 1,000 players. A signal is given and all the *chapandaz* move to the center to try to lift the carcass onto their horse. Once someone captures the carcass, he rides to a point 1.5 km to 5 km (1–3 mi) away, then returns to the starting point and drops

the carcass where he picked it up. During all this, the other *chapandaz* are trying to grab the carcass away from him. The Afghan Olympic Federation laid down rules to *buzkashi*, limiting teams to no more than 10 players and games to 1 hour, with a 10-minute break at halftime. Two declared fouls are intentionally hitting an opponent with a whip, and forcing an opponent off his horse. Horses must be trained for the sport for at least five years. These rules are only used at official games. *Buzkashi* is to Afghanis what baseball is to Americans.

Another popular Afghan sport is wrestling, or *pahlwani*, where the only rule is that one cannot grab one's opponent's legs. Some modern sports were introduced in the 20th century, including tennis, golf, cricket, basketball, soccer, and field hockey.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Afghani children do not have much time for play, nor do their families have the money to buy manufactured toys (which are not widely available in their war-torn country). So children play simple games with basic toys, such as dolls made from natural objects, or slingshots. *Buzul-bazi* is a game like marbles or dice, played with sheep's knucklebones. Girls play a game very similar to hopscotch or amuse themselves for days with *marayadast-tura-furamosh* ("I remembered, you forgot"). When a family cooks a chicken, the girls take the wishbone and break it in half, giving one half to each girl. Then they try to trick each other into looking at their half of the wishbone, for example by tying it up in a bandage on their finger and asking the other one to look at the injury. When one succeeds in tricking the other into looking at her wishbone, she shouts, "Mara yadast, tura furamosh!" One sighting does not end the game; rather, a game can continue for days with repeated successes.

Boys enjoy kite-fighting, or *gudi-paran jungi* (literally, "flying-doll fighting"). Each boy makes his own kite from tissue paper stretched over bamboo sticks, decorated with other tissue-paper cutouts glued on the surface (often to give the appearance of a face). The point of the game is to cross strings with another kite-flyer and saw your string back and forth on his to cut the string and set his kite loose. To make their strings more lethal, boys "glass" them by soaking them in a mixture of ground glass and paste. Each boy has his own jealously guarded method of "glassing."

Adults love to sing and dance, and do both often. Afghanis do not dance with partners; instead, they either dance alone or in circles. Once a party gets going, Afghanis can dance outside for hours. Men spend time in teahouses listening to music, drinking tea, and talking. They also indulge in a more violent entertainment—animal-fighting. Cocks (roosters) are used most often, but partridges, dogs, goats, and even camels are sometimes pitted against each other as well. The two animals fight to the death, and men bet on the outcome.

What movie theaters there are in the cities usually show movies from India and Pakistan.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The main folk art, and the most profitable one, is carpet-weaving. The weaving is done by young girls and women (except in Turkoman, where men weave, too). Patterns are passed down from generation to generation. Carpet patterns, like recipes elsewhere, are considered "family secrets." The best carpets are from Meymaneh, woven from Karakul wool. These carpets

have as many as 55 knots per sq cm (355 per sq in), whereas coarser ones have only 20–30 knots per sq cm (129–194 per sq in). The finest work takes four weavers three months to finish a 6-sq-m (6.6-sq-yd) rug.

Embroidery is widely practiced. Indeed, Afghani women have raised embroidery to an art form, embroidering nearly everything around them. The skullcaps around which men's turbans are wound are usually decorated according to designs that are characteristic of the region. Shirts, vests, and coats may be embroidered—particularly ones for wear on special occasions.

Metalworking has produced silver jewelry and elaborately designed dagger handles, as well as trays and bowls. Lapis lazuli, which Afghanistan has produced for millennia, is made into jewelry. Folk artists paint colorful scenes on the body-panels of trucks. Herat is noted for glassware, and Istalif (in the mountains not far from Kabul) produces a special blue-glazed type of pottery.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Continual warfare is the biggest social problem facing the Afghans. It is hard to talk of any social problems that are not related to the fighting that has been going on for centuries. A country made up of separate tribes of people who are historically warriors seems almost doomed to drown in conflict. The Communists hoped to end that conflict by creating a unified state, but the devoutly Islamic Afghans rebelled against an “atheistic” government. Without a significant period of peace, there has been no time for Afghans to give their attentions to improving their standard of living. In Kabul, the only extensively modernized city in Afghanistan, the more-Westernized lifestyle has led to a disintegration of traditional family and tribal values. The elderly, who are respected and revered in villages, are neglected in the cities and turn to drugs for comfort, becoming heroin and opium addicts. Education, health care, employment opportunities, and even the basic food and shelter needs for survival have been severely disrupted by the fighting.

Even the relative peace that was imposed on the north of Afghanistan, in and around Kabul, after the U.S.-led invasion of 2001 has started to unravel. Suicide bombings, unheard of in Afghanistan just a few years prior, had become by 2007 and 2008 nearly commonplace.

Refugee resettlement is also a significant problem. Western countries have been encouraging Afghans to return to their homeland, but as violence has increased, the government has faced delays in finding homes for the returnees.

Opium cultivation also contributes to the lawlessness of Afghanistan. International agencies estimate that Afghanistan's crop, by far the world's largest, has the potential to create more than 500 metric tons of processed heroin annually. Money from the trade is used to arm local warlords and Taliban fighters. The Kabul administration has tried for years to eradicate opium crops, but simply doesn't have the resources, even with United States and NATO support, to make a significant dent in the trade.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Afghanistan face great difficulties at nearly every stage of their lives. By nearly every internationally used measure of quality of life Afghani women rank near the bottom.

Their life expectancy in 2007 was 46 years, 1,600 women die in childbirth for every 100,000 births (it is reported that an Afghan woman dies in childbirth every 30 minutes), and only 12% of women over 15 years are literate. Although the constitution guarantees equality between the sexes, this has made few dents into centuries of traditional oppression. Women in much of the country must still cover themselves in a *burqa* to appear in public and can rarely go anywhere without a male relative accompanying them.

Violence against women is widespread. Most estimates suggest 30–50% of women experience physical, psychological, or sexual violence. It is estimated that between 70–80% of Afghan women are forced into marriage, often at a very young age. The 2004 constitution sets the legal age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys, but the laws are widely ignored. In villages, it is not uncommon for girls to be married at 11 or 12, often to men in their 40s, 50s, or even older.

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—revised by J. Henry

# AHIRS

**PRONUNCIATION:** uh-HIRS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Goala; Gaura; Gopal; Rawat

**LOCATION:** India (middle Ganges valley; states of Bihar, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh)

**POPULATION:** About 45–50 million

**LANGUAGE:** Language of the region of India in which they live

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ahirs are a traditional cattle-keeping caste distributed widely throughout northern and western India. They are thought to be the descendants of an immigrant, probably non-Aryan, tribe of ancient India. One first hears of this tribe, the Abhiras, around the 3rd or 2nd century BC. Abhiras are mentioned in the epic *Mahabharata* as “slaves” and “barbarians” coming from the northwest. Some authorities see them as nomads of Central Asian origin, perhaps entering India in the troubled times that followed Alexander’s death. Their early settlements were limited to the Punjab, Rajasthan, and Sind, but in the centuries following the beginning of the Christian Era they migrated towards the south and east. Abhira rulers established extensive kingdoms in Gujarat and nearby areas during this period. Abhiras may even have reached southern India, as legends of the Ayars (Abhiras) appear in the ancient Tamil literature. Eventually the nomadic Abhiras gave up their migratory ways and began to integrate with the surrounding communities. The Sanskrit *Abhira* becomes *Ahir* in the vernacular language.

Ahirs today are mainly cattle-keepers and dairy farmers. They are known locally by names such as Goala, Gaura, Gopal, and Rawat. Although their precise rank varies according to region, Ahirs are usually placed among the Sudras, the third of the four major caste groupings in Hindu society.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Because of the variety of names by which they are known and the lack of caste data in the modern census, any estimate of the Ahir population is, at best, crude. The 1931 census placed the number of Ahirs and related castes at just over 14 million people, or roughly 4% of the population. Assuming that this percentage has not changed significantly, with an estimated population of 1.13 billion in India (March 2008), the Ahir population would lie between 45 million and 50 million people.

*Ahir* defines numerous cattle-keeping communities with the same (or related names) distributed throughout India. These usually fall into regional groupings who are not interconnected and do not intermarry. Ahirs are most numerous on the alluvial plains of the middle Ganges valley. Significant Ahir communities are found in the states of Bihar, Orissa, and areas of Uttar Pradesh. Ahirs are also found in central India, and in the western states of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Over time, Ahirs have adopted many of the cultural traits—including language—of the regions in which they have settled. Thus Ahirs in Gujarat speak Gujarati, in western Uttar

Pradesh they speak Braj, and in Bihar their language is Bihari. Ahirs in other parts of India speak the language current in the areas they inhabit. In some areas, the importance of Ahirs in the local population is reflected in the names of local dialects. Khandeshi, a dialect of the Gujarati language, is also known as Ahirani. Malvi, a Rajasthani dialect, bears the name Ahiri. Ahirwal (Ahirwati) is the name of a folk region southwest of Delhi in which Ahirs dominate and in which the local dialect is called Ahirwati.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The legend of Lorik is one of the most popular in Ahir mythology. Several versions of the legend exist, but the following is told in Mirzapur District in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Lorik is an Ahir who elopes with Chandani, his neighbor’s wife. He defeats her husband in a fight and then goes on to meet Mahapatiya Dusadh, chief of the gamblers. Lorik loses everything, including Chandani, but the girl argues her jewelry was not part of the stake and induces Lorik to play again. This time Chandani distracts the chief of the gamblers by displaying her ankles, and Lorik wins everything back. Chandani tells Lorik she has been insulted by his opponent, so Lorik cuts off the gambler’s head with his magic sword. The head and the body are turned to stone.

In his subsequent wanderings, Lorik gains a kingdom and marries the girl (not Chandani) to whom he had been betrothed. He eventually incurs the displeasure of the god Indra, and after giving in to temptation by Indra’s wife who assumed the form of Chandani, Lorik dies in shame in Varanasi (Banaras). Several elements of this tale—the gambling match, the magic sword, the body turning into stone, and the fidelity test—are common motifs in folk tales in both the East and the West.

## 5 RELIGION

The majority of Ahirs are Hindu and share in the basic beliefs and practices of Hinduism. They belong mostly to the Vaishnava sect, i.e., they worship the god Vishnu rather than Shiva. (In Bihar, however, many are Shaivites or worship the Mother Goddess). Ahirs pay particular respect to, and are closely identified with, the legendary god Krishna. Krishna is regarded as the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, although he is also worshiped in his own right. The name *Krishna* (meaning “black”) occurs in the Vedas, but not in reference to any deity. The dark-skinned god of later times is basically non-Vedic in origin, with a later Aryan overlay. Some scholars have argued that Krishna was a pastoral deity of the Ahirs, whose worship was spread throughout northern India during their migrations and subsequently absorbed into Hinduism. Others see aspects of Krishna (e.g., Krishna as child-god) as reflecting knowledge of Christ acquired by Ahirs from early Christian missionaries in India.

Many legends of Krishna, for example, his birth and childhood, his exploits as a cowherd, and his amorous dalliance with the *gopis* (cowgirls), are set in Braj, the region of western Uttar Pradesh State around Mathura and Vrindavan. Even today, many Ahir groups in northern India have a tradition that their ancestors came from this region of India. The cow is regarded as the favorite animal of Krishna, and Krishna-worshipers are among the most ardent supporters of the Hindu concept of the sanctity of the cow. Not only is the cow revered

as a deity, Ahirs also worship various local gods who are linked in some way with cattle and cattle-keeping.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Ahirs celebrate all the major festivals of Hinduism. Of particular importance among the community, however, are the festivals dedicated to Krishna. These include Holi, Divali, Janamastami (Krishna's birthday), and cattle festivals such as Gopashtami and Govardhan Puja. Gopashtami, literally "Cow Eighth," falls on the eighth day of the Hindu month of Kartik (October-November). It marks the occasion when the child Krishna first took his father's cattle out to graze in the forests of Braj. Cattle are washed and decorated at this time, processions of cattle are taken through the streets of towns and villages, and cows are worshiped (the *go-puja* ceremony). Govardhan Puja, another cattle-related festival, falls on the day after the Divali festival. The centerpiece of this ritual is the worship of an image made of cow dung said, in certain areas of the country, to represent Krishna. An unusual custom of the Ahirs of Bihar and West Bengal at Govardhan Puja is a ritual involving the goading of village cattle to trample a pig to death.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the Chhattisgarh region of central India, Rawats (i.e. Ahirs) follow a rite known as *sidhori* during pregnancy. This involves feeding the pregnant woman special foods so that the unborn child will not hunger for these foods in its later life. If the birth is delayed, a line of men and boys is formed between the house and a well. A pitcher is then passed rapidly along the line, filled with water, and returned to the house. The speed acquired by the water on its trip to the house, it is believed, will be communicated to the woman and give rise to a quick delivery. The father is not allowed to see the mother or child until purificatory rites are performed on the sixth day. If a child is born on an inauspicious day, its ears are pierced in the fifth month after birth to protect it from possible harm.

Ahirs cremate their dead, after performing the appropriate funeral rites. One unusual ritual in Chhattisgarh involves bringing the soul back to the house. On the third day after death, women place a lamp on a red, earthen pot and go to a pond, river, or stream at night. Fish are attracted to the light and one is caught, placed in water in the pot, and taken home. The son of the deceased, or a close relative, takes a stone and washes it with water from the pot. After the sacrifice of a cock or hen, the stone is enshrined in the house as a family god. It is believed that the dead person's soul is brought back to the house in the fish and then transferred to the stone by the act of washing it in the water. The sacrifice of a fowl is repeated annually before the stone.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Ahirs follow the greeting patterns and visiting customs of the local communities among whom they reside.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Wherever Ahirs settled, they adopted many local customs concerning caste, kinship, and material culture. Ahir villages in Rajasthan, for example, differ little in form and appearance from other villages in the region. Settlements are nucleated, located in the center of the village lands. Houses, constructed



haphazardly along winding, unpaved lanes, are built of mud or sun-dried brick. Attached to the houses are small compounds, enclosed by low mud walls or thorn fences, used for keeping cattle at night. Residences contain living quarters and several small rooms used for storage. People sleep on the floor on mats or on low wooden cots. In the hot season, it is common to sleep outdoors or on the roof. Most houses lack sanitary facilities, with villagers going to the fields to perform daily bodily functions. In general, creature comforts and standards of living reflect the economic status of individual families.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Ahirs fall into several broad regional groupings which are not connected and which do not intermarry. In any given region, there are endogamous groups of Ahirs, each divided into exogamous clans (*gotra*). Marriage rituals do not differ much from those of other Hindu castes. The rules of marriage conform to broader regional practices. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, marriage is forbidden between a member of a clan and the clans of one sister's relations up to three generations. In Bihar, marriage is regulated according to territorial-based categories called *muls*. The marriage of first cousins is prohibited. Marriages are arranged. Ahir girls are wed around the time of puberty, although some groups prefer infant marriage. Residence is patrilocal, i.e., the bride moves into the household of her husband's family. Family structure conforms to regional patterns, with the extended family being the norm. Divorce is possible under certain circumstances, although it requires the

approval of the caste's *panchayat* or council. Widow remarriage is allowed.

### 11 CLOTHING

Just as they have adopted local languages, Ahirs have assumed the regional dress of their locality. Thus Ghosis (Ahirs who have converted to Islam) in central India wear tight, short pants of white cotton, a waist band with a fringe on either end, a short jacket, and a tight, saucer-shaped turban. Ghosi women wear a long bodice over a petticoat. Women wear a variety of jewelry. Rawat women favor large, cylindrical leg-ornaments called *churas*. Ahir girls are commonly tattooed immediately after marriage.

### 12 FOOD

Most Ahirs are nonvegetarian, eating goat, chicken, and, in some cases, pork. There are reports from central India that local Ahirs will even eat field mice and rats. Ahirs do not eat beef, however, and their special relationship with the cow is reflected in their good social standing in many communities. Many higher-caste communities will accept food and water from Ahirs. Milk and dairy products are important in the Ahir diet, which generally mirrors regional dietary patterns. Ahirs also consume local "country" liquor in fair quantities.

### 13 EDUCATION

In such a numerous and widely distributed community, literacy and educational levels vary. Although Ahirs have access to government schools, the nature of their occupation and their predominantly rural character is reflected in generally low levels of literacy and educational achievement.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The folk songs and dances of the Ahirs reflect their pastoral traditions and their historical associations with Krishna. Known as *birhas*, Ahir songs are accompanied by the flute and tell of past heroes or of the carefree life of the cowherds. Some are love songs, expressing the longings of Ahir youth. Love is also the theme of the *rasas*, the folk dances depicted in early paintings and sculptural representations of Krishna. These often show the cowherd god playing on his flute, surrounded by a ring of dancing *gopis* (cowgirls). The *garba* dance of Gujarat and many of the folk dances of Uttar Pradesh and other areas are derived from the *rasas* of old.

### 15 WORK

The hereditary occupation of Ahirs is tending milk cattle and dealing in dairy products such as milk, butter, and *ghi* (clarified butter). In the past, Ahir women sometimes entered domestic service. One group, the Dauwa Ahirs of central India, are descended from the illegitimate offspring of Rajput fathers and Ahir women employed as wet-nurses. Today, perhaps no more than one-third of the Ahirs breed cattle or are dairy farmers, and even less cling to their old nomadic ways. The majority of Ahirs are now engaged in cultivation, either as farmers or as laborers. Those few who have acquired some education may work in offices or other low-level clerical jobs.

### 16 SPORTS

As might be expected, many of the traditional pastimes of Ahirs focus on their cattle. At the time of the Gopashtami festival, bull fights are staged in honor of Krishna. Two bulls are set on each other, and they lock horns in a test of strength until one submits to the other. The animals are separated before they hurt each other. Cattle sports represent an ancient tradition in India, with evidence suggesting "bull-jumping" took place in the Harappan culture nearly 4,000 years ago. Another modern practice found in rural areas is the "running of the herds." At the time of Govardhan Puja, village cattle are taken outside the settlement then stampeded towards their pens in the village. The men of the village try to stop them from reaching their pens. It is considered a sign of good fortune for the next year if the herds manage to reach their pens safely.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to their folk activities, Ahirs seek recreation and entertainment at the numerous fairs and festivals of rural India. One of the biggest and best-known of these is the Pushkar Camel and Cattle Fair in Rajasthan, which is attended by livestock breeders and farmers from a wide area. The fair has even become an attraction for Western tourists. Depending on their individual circumstances and where they live, Ahirs have radios and televisions and can visit movie theaters in nearby towns for entertainment.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Although pastoral themes and the legends of the cowherd god Krishna are prominent motifs in Indian art, paintings and sculptures depicting such subjects are produced by professional artisan castes. The Ahirs themselves have not developed folk arts or crafts that can be considered unique to the community.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Given the extensive geographic distribution and variation in culture of Ahir communities in India, it is difficult to make generalized statements about their social conditions. Ahirs are usually ranked as the highest of the cultivating castes and thus do not face the problems of discrimination, etc., encountered by Untouchables and tribal groups. However, in central India many Ahirs are hardly considered Hindu because they live in Gond villages.

There are many among the Ahir community who face problems typical of the rural peasant in India today, such as landlessness, poverty, debt, illiteracy, and alcoholism. In general, however, Ahirs are placed with the Jat and Gujar as being among the most successful cultivating castes of northern India.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Ahir women, like most women in India, occupy a low social status. They are involved in agricultural activities (many are agricultural laborers), collect fuel and run the household, but have little say or control in the social arena. Literacy among them is low, despite recent central government attempts to remove gender barriers in education. (Until 1976, education was solely the concern of states but a Constitutional Amendment permitted the Union Government to legislate educational reforms, viz the 2001 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SAA) was which aimed at providing schooling for all 6-14 year-olds by the year

2005, at bridging all gender and social gaps by 2007, and at universal retention by 2010). Although formerly practicing child marriage (this still occurs, though it has been made illegal by the Union Government), there is a tendency among Ahirs for the age of marriage to be delayed to between 15 and 20 years for women. Customs regarding widow remarriage and divorce vary among Ahir groups. Occasionally, due to illness or the inability of a wife to bear children, a man is allowed to take a second wife, provided this act is approved by the local *panchayat* or tribal council.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# AINU

**PRONUNCIATION:** EYE-noo

**LOCATION:** Japan (Hokkaidô)

**POPULATION:** 25,000 (Official figure for Hokkaidô; some believe that the numbers are substantially higher for Japan as well as for Hokkaidô)

**LANGUAGE:** Japanese; Ainu (few present speakers)

**RELIGION:** Pantheistic beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Japanese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Until 400 years ago, the Ainu, a hunting and fishing people, controlled Hokkaidô, which in the late 19th century was incorporated as the northernmost of Japan's four main islands. Today they are a small minority group of Japan. Their origins remain in dispute. It was long believed that they came from Siberia or from the southern Pacific, originally comprising different groups; recent DNA studies seem to indicate, however, that the Ainu have approximately the same genes as mainstream Japanese and Ryukyuan, all stemming from north Asia. After centuries of developing Ainu culture in interaction with, but distinctive from, that of the Japanese, in recent centuries, they have faced Japanese government policy of modernization and integration. As with indigenous people in the United States and many other nations, the Ainu have largely assimilated. And like many other such groups, there have been signs of cultural revival in recent decades.

The oldest ruins found in Hokkaidô, the Ainu homeland, date from 20,000 to 30,000 years ago in the Old Stone Age. Iron was introduced approximately 2,000 years ago from either southern Japan or the continent, probably by ancestors or groups related to the Ainu. Between the 8th and 13th centuries, earthenware unique to Hokkaidô and the northern mainland appeared. Its producers were the direct ancestors of the Ainu. The subsequent 300 to 400 years saw the development of the culture known today as uniquely Ainu.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Hokkaidô is 83,520 sq km (32,247 sq mi)—one-fifth of Japan, and twice as large as Switzerland. A small number of Ainu live on southern Sakhalin. Earlier, the Ainu also lived in the southern Kuril Islands, along the lower reaches of the Amur River, and in Kamchatka, as well as the northern part of the Northeast region of Honshû. Their ancestors may once have lived all over Japan.

Hokkaidô is surrounded by beautiful coasts. There are many mountains, lakes, and rivers. Into the 20th century its land was densely wooded with ancient trees. Two major mountain ranges, Kitami in the north and Hidaka in the south, divide Hokkaidô into the eastern and western regions. The Saru River basin area in southeastern Hokkaidô is known as a historical center of Ainu culture.

An 1807 survey reported the Hokkaidô and Sakhalin Ainu population as 23,797. Mixed marriages between Ainu and mainland Japanese became more common over the last century. In 1986 the total number of people in Hokkaidô identifying themselves as Ainu was 24,381. A 2006 Hokkaidô survey found 23,782 Ainu in 72 municipalities, of which 59.5% resided in Hi-

daka and Iburi districts. There is Ainu population in mainland cities as well, including some 2,700 in Tokyo. The survey numbers represent only those who identified themselves as Ainu. In the past many people of Ainu ancestry may have preferred not to identify themselves as Ainu.

In the late 19th century, the central government created a colonial office for Hokkaidō's economic development and encouraged settlers from other parts of Japan. A similar government office now continues to promote Hokkaidō's development. With the loss or in some cases the deliberate destruction of their land, their livelihood, their language and their traditional culture, the Ainu had to adapt to a rapidly industrializing society.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Ainu is said to belong either to a Paleo-Asiatic or a Paleo-Siberian group of languages. It divides into Hokkaidō and Sakhalin dialects, and each can be subdivided into minor dialects. The Saru region dialect is said to be especially refined, rich with oral traditions. The Ainu language was first systematically studied by the British missionary John Batchelor (1854–1944), the Japanese linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke (1882–1971), and the Ainu linguist Chiri Mashio (1909–1961).

Interesting characteristics of the Ainu language include: (1) *p*-, *b*-, *k*- sounds are interchangeable with *b*-, *d*-, *g*- sounds, and *c*-, *s*- sounds are close to *ch*-, *sh*- sounds; (2) instead of stress accents, as in English, a pitch accent system, as in Japanese, is found in most Hokkaidō dialects; (3) word order is similar to Japanese: the subject, the object, then the verb; (4) verbs and some nouns, instead of conjugating and declining as in Latin and other European languages, have affixes that indicate the first person (“I”) and second person (informal “you” and formal “you”).

To explain the fourth point, the noun *tek*, meaning “hand,” takes the form *ku-tek-e* when the hand(s) belonging to the speaker is meant (*ku*- indicating the first person and *-e* indicating the possessive mode). The verb *kore*, meaning “give,” takes the form *e-en-kore* if the giving occurs from “you” (second person singular informal) to “us” (first person plural). Affixing is a distinctive aspect of Ainu. Adding prefixes and suffixes can produce long words, even so long that they correspond to whole sentences in English or Japanese.

Ainu and Japanese share many single words. God (male or female) is *kamui* in Ainu and *kami* in Japanese. Chopstick(s) is *pasui* in Ainu and *hashi* in Japanese. The word *sirokani* (silver) and *konkani* (gold) in literary Ainu correspond to *shirokane* and *kogane* in literary Japanese (see quotation below). The two languages, however, are unrelated. Two well-known Ainu words still commonly used refer to venerated Ainu individuals: *ekasi* (grandfather or sire) and *huci* (grandmother or grand dame).

The Ainu historically had no written language. It can no longer be said, however, that there is no written Ainu language. It is the same situation as when the Japanese adopted Chinese characters to create the Japanese phonetic system of hiragana and katakana, or borrowed the Roman alphabet to write “Romaji,” Ainu adopted the alphabet and katakana, improving both systems over the years to represent Ainu language. Now “Ainu-go” is one of the language choices on the computer. Extended katakana (the Japanese phonetic syllabaries with some modifications) or the Roman alphabet is used to transcribe

or write Ainu. Few people now speak Ainu as their primary language. The folklorist from the Saru region Kayano Shigeru (1926–2006) called himself the youngest living Ainu able to speak fluent Ainu. In 1982 Kayano, a leading figure in the Ainu cultural preservation and revival movement, founded the first Ainu Language School. By 1993 the number of Ainu language schools had increased to 11; by 2007 the number had risen to 14 in Hokkaidō and a few in Kantō.

Traditional Ainu names are single names without surnames. For example, Kayano Shigeru's grandfather was named Totkaram (“may he grow well”), and his grandmother Tekatte (“an added hand”). Starting in 1876, the Ainu were forced to adopt Japanese names. A few Ainu people today have reclaimed their Ainu names, using a single name or combining it with a Japanese name. Thus, an Ainu embroiderer calls herself Chikap Mieko, “Chikap” being an Ainu name meaning “bird.”

The name Ainu comes from a common noun *ainu*, meaning “human(s).” Once the term was felt to be derogatory, but more Ainu now use the name positively, taking pride in their ethnic identity. Their land is called “Ainu Mosir”—peaceful land of humans. The phrase *ainu nenoan ainu* means “human-like human.” The following is a famous refrain from a poem about the owl deity:

*sirokanipe ranran piskan*  
(fall, fall, silver drops, all around)  
*konkanipe ranran piskan*  
(fall, fall, golden drops, all around)

In 2001 Kayano Shigeru opened a small Ainu language FM radio station called *FM Nibutani Broadcast* (nicknamed “*FM Pipausi*” after the name of the old village, meaning “a place where there are many marsh snails,” now part of present-day Nibutani). It only reached listeners in the Nibutani area then, but back numbers are now available on RealPlayer, a cross-platform media player. The radio not only provides local news and recalls Ainu tradition mostly in Japanese, but also offers Ainu lessons and airs recordings of old recitations by Ainu bards. The quarterly *Ainu Times* is a bilingual newspaper, with Ainu and Japanese printed side by side. STV (Sapporo Television) started an Ainu language lesson program in 1999 with Kayano Shigeru as the original instructor. It continues today with elderly and younger Ainu lecturers from different areas of Hokkaidō presenting Ainu local dialects. Kayano Shigeru was the driving force behind all these activities, along with Kayano Shirō, his second son.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The world was created, according to mythic poetry, when floating oil in the ocean rose like a flame and became the sky. What was left turned into land. Vapor gathered over the land and a god was created. From the vapor of the sky, another god was created and descended on five colored clouds. Out of those clouds, the two gods created the sea, soil, minerals, plants, and animals. The two gods married and produced many gods including two shining gods—the sun god and the moon god, who rose to Heaven in order to illuminate the fog-covered dark places of the world.

Okikurmi of the Saru region is a semi-divine hero who descended from Heaven to help humans, who lived in a beautiful land but did not know how to build fire or make bows and arrows. Okikurmi taught them how to build fire, to hunt, to

catch salmon, to plant millet, to brew millet wine, and to worship the gods. He married and stayed in the village, but eventually returned to the divine land.

Ainu historical heroes include Kosamainu and Samkusainu. Kosamainu, who lived in eastern Hokkaidô, led an Ainu rebellion against the mainland Japanese ruling the southern tip of Hokkaidô, called Matsumae. He destroyed 10 out of the 12 Japanese bases but was killed in 1457. Samkusainu organized Ainu in the southern half of the island during a 1669 uprising, but after two months they were destroyed by Matsumae forces armed with guns.

## 5 RELIGION

Ainu religion is pantheistic, believing in many gods. In the mountains dwell the god of mountains and in the river dwells the god of water. The Ainu hunted, fished, and gathered food in modest quantities so as not to disturb these gods. Animals were visitors from the other world who temporarily assumed animal shapes. The bear, striped owl, and killer whale received the greatest respect as divine incarnations.

The most important god in the home was the female god of fire. Every house had a fire pit where cooking, eating, and rituals took place. The main offerings made to this and to other gods were wine and *inau*, a whittled twig or pole, usually of willow, with shavings still attached and decoratively curled. A fence-like row of taller *inau* stood outside between the main house and the raised storehouse. Outdoor rituals were observed before this sacred altar area.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The spirit-sending festival, called *i-omante*, either for a bear or striped owl, was the most important Ainu festival. The bear *i-omante* was observed once in 5 or 10 years. After three days of reverence to a bear cub, accompanied by prayers, dancing, and singing, it was shot with arrows. The head was decorated and placed at the altar, while the meat was enjoyed by the members of the village community. The spirit, while visiting this world, had temporarily adopted the form of a bear; the bear ritual released the spirit from the form so it could return to the other land. Similar festivals are observed by many northern peoples.

Another important festival is boat-launching, called *cip-sanke*. A newly built canoe (or canoes) is brought from the place of construction to the river. The festival is still celebrated in Nibutani around August 20. In April 1996, the Nibutani dam was filled with water but the Ainu won their legal battle to have the water drained and the festival occurred one last time in the original Saru river. More recently, it has been celebrated in a lower reach of the Saru. It has become a festivity welcoming mainland Japanese as well, and the launching preceded by prayers and dances is followed by Japanese Bon-dances joined by all who wish to participate.

There are also youthful attempts to create new forms that combine traditional Ainu oral performances with contemporary music and dance. "Ainu Rebels," formed in 2006, is constituted mostly of Ainu youth but also including wajin and foreigners, is active, singing and dancing. They draw on Ainu oral tradition adapted to hip hop and other modern forms, as well as engaging in artistic activities that combine traditional Ainu art with contemporary artistic elements.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In preparation for adulthood, boys traditionally learned hunting, carving, and making tools like arrows; girls learned weaving, sewing, and embroidery. Girls, usually in their mid-teens, were tattooed around the mouth in stages by a skilled older woman; long ago they were also tattooed on the forearms. The Japanese government banned tattooing in 1871.

The gift of a knife mounted in carved wood from a young man indicated both his skill and his love. The gift of embroidery from a young woman similarly indicated her skill and her willingness to accept his proposal. In some cases, a young man visited the family of a woman he wished to marry, helping her father in hunting, carving, and so forth. When he proved himself an honest, skilled worker, the father approved the marriage.

A death was mourned by relatives and neighbors, fully dressed in embroidered costume, men wearing a ceremonial sword and women a necklace of beads. The important elements of a funeral were prayers to the fire deity and verse laments that included wishes for a smooth journey to the other world. Items to be buried with the dead were first broken or cracked so that the spirits would be released and travel together to the other world. Sometimes burial was followed by the burning of the dwelling. The funeral for an unnatural death could include a tirade against the gods.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A formal greeting, *irankarapte*, which corresponds to "how are you" in English, means "let me softly touch your heart."

It is said that Ainu people always shared food and drink with neighbors, even a cup of wine. As the host and the guests seated themselves around the fire pit, the host dipped his ceremonial chopstick in the cup of wine, sprinkled a few drops onto the fire pit giving thanks to the fire god (goddess of fire), then he and the guests shared the wine. The first catch of salmon of the year in early fall was a special item to be shared with neighbors.

There was a custom, called *ukocaranke* (mutual argumentation), for settling differences by debating instead of fighting. The disputants sat and argued for hours or even days until one side was defeated and agreed to compensate the other. Representatives with oratorical skills and endurance were chosen to resolve disputes between villages. Kayano Shigeru repeatedly emphasized the importance of this tradition, and the term is now widely known to mainlanders as well.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the old days the Ainu house was made of poles and thatch plant and warmly insulated for the northern climate, with a fire pit at the center of the main room and an opening below each end of the ridge for smoke to escape. Between 3 and 20 such houses, built at appropriate distances from one another so that fire would not spread but a voice would reach in case of emergency, formed a village community called *kotan*. A *kotan* was usually located by water for convenient fishing but also in the woods to remain safe from floods and close to gathering grounds. As necessary, the *kotan* moved from place to place in search of a better livelihood.





*Tatsue Sato, wearing traditional Ainu clothing, in her Tokyo restaurant. To many Japanese, the Ainu remain a target of discrimination. In the summer of 1997, a law was passed to officially recognize the Ainu as a minority.*  
(AP Images/Shizuo Kambayashi)

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Besides weaving and embroidering, women farmed, gathered wild plants, pounded grains with a pestle, and cared for babies, while men hunted, fished, and carved. Some accounts suggest that married couples lived in separate houses, others that they stayed with the husband's parents. A bilineal descent system was observed until recently. Males traced descent through different animal crests (such as a killer whale insignia) and females through hereditary chastity belts and forearm tattoo designs. The inheritance could include the art of a bard (male or female), a midwife, or a shaman. The midwife and shamaness Aoki Aiko (1914–1995) inherited her arts as the fifth generation offspring of the female line of the family. Dogs were favorite animals. In one scene of an epic poem describing the descent of a divine youth to this world, a dog is mentioned as guarding millet grains. Dogs were also used in hunting.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Ainu traditional robe made of a textile woven of inner elm bark fibers and worn with a woven sash is similar in shape to the mainland Japanese kimono. The male robe was calf-length. In winter a short sleeveless jacket of deer or other animal fur was also worn. The female robe was ankle-length and worn over a long undershirt with no front opening. The robes were hand-embroidered or appliquéd with rope-like designs. A

pointed edge at the tip of each front flap was characteristic of the Saru region.

The traditional costume is still worn on special occasions by some, but in everyday life the Ainu wear international-style clothing like other Japanese.

## 12 FOOD

Traditional staple foods were salmon and deer meat, in addition to millet raised at home and herbs and roots picked in the woods. Millet was largely replaced by rice earlier in this century. During the season, fresh salmon was cut up and boiled in soup. A rice porridge called *ciporosayo* was prepared by adding heaping servings of salmon roe to boiled grains.

As in other cold regions, Ainu children used to enjoy making maple ice candy. On a late March or early April evening, when a cold night was expected, they made cuts in the bark of a big sugar maple and placed containers of sorrel stalks (sorrel is hollow inside) at the roots of the tree to collect dripping syrup. In the morning, they found the sorrel cylinders filled with frozen white syrup.

*Sito*, dumplings made of vegetable starch, usually eaten with kelp-based sweet sauce, are still commonly enjoyed today.

Among the many traditional utensils and artifacts are the poison arrow, unattended trap arrow, rabbit trap, fish trap, ceremonial sword, mountain knife, canoe, woven bag, and loom.

In the early 1960s Kayano Shigeru began privately collecting many such genuine items in and around his village in the Saru region, when he realized that what was left of the Ainu cultural heritage were scatterings from the communities. His collection developed into the Biratori Township Nibutani Ainu Cultural Museum and the Kayano Shigeru Ainu Memorial Museum. Also famous is the Ainu Museum established in 1984 in Shiraoi in southeastern Hokkaidō on the Pacific.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally children were educated at home, with grandparents reciting poems and tales while parents taught practical skills and crafts. From the late 19th century, the compulsory education emphasized the use of Japanese by Ainu children. According to a 2006 survey conducted by Hokkaidō, in the municipalities inhabited by Ainu, the rate of Ainu children advancing from junior to senior high school increased from 41.6% in 1972 to 93.5% in 2006. The rate of Ainu advancing to college increased from 8.8% to 17.4% in the same period. Nevertheless, the 2006 Ainu ratios are below those of mainstream Japanese in the same areas, which are, respectively, 98.3% (to senior high) and 38.5% (to college).

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ainu have handed down a vast body of oral traditions. The main categories are *yukar* and *oina* (longer and shorter epic poems in literary Ainu), *uwepekere* and *upasikma* (old tales and autobiographical stories, both in prose), lullabies, and dance songs. *Yukar* usually refers to heroic poetry, chanted mainly by men, dealing with demi-gods and humans, but it also includes *oina*, or *kamui yukar*, shorter epics chanted principally by women about the gods. The Saru region, in south central Hokkaidō, is especially known as the homeland of many bards and storytellers.

*Yukar* was narrated by the fireside for a mixed gathering of men, women, and children, with men sometimes reclining and

beating time on the belly. Depending upon the piece, it lasted all night or even for a few nights. There were also festival songs, group dance-songs, and stamping dances.

The best known Ainu musical instrument is the *mukkuri*, a mouth harp made of wood. There were also coiled-bark horns, straw flutes, skin drums, five-string zithers, and a type of lute.

## 15 WORK

Since the mid-19th century, hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild plants, accompanied by millet raising, have been replaced by rice and dry-crop cultivation and commercial fishing. Other activities in Hokkaidō include dairy farming, forestry, mining, food processing, wood working, pulp, and paper industries. The Ainu contribute to all of these. In 2006, 28.6% of the Hokkaidō Ainu population worked in the agricultural sector, decreasing over one half from 1972; 27.7% worked in manufacturing, increasing 1.4 times more from 1972; and 41.1% in small and medium-sized service-oriented enterprises, the latter increasing over 2.5 times.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditional sports for children included swimming and canoeing. In the early 20th century there was a children's game called *seipirakka* (shell clogs). A hole was bored through the shell of a large surf clam and a thick rope passed through it. Children wore two clams each, with the rope between the first two toes, and walked or ran about on them. The shells made a clicking noise like horseshoes. Another indigenous Ainu game was making toy *pattari* in the creek when the snow thawed in spring. They were made from hollow stalks of sorrel filled with creek water. With the accumulation of water, one end of the stalk dropped to the ground under the weight. On the rebound, the other end hit the ground with a thump. Adults used real *pattari* to pound millet grains.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Ainu enjoy many forms of modern entertainment similar to those enjoyed by mainland Japanese, such as television, movies, theater, concerts, and karaoke. Appreciation of seasonal changes and holiday festivals are traditional pastimes that remain popular. Major festivals attract huge crowds, and famous sites for admiring plum and cherry blossoms, irises, azaleas, chrysanthemums, and the bright leaves of fall draw many visitors who come to view the sights and to party outdoors among the flowers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Weaving, embroidery, and carving are among the most important forms of folk art. Some types of traditional Ainu weaving were once almost lost, but were revived around the 1970s. Chikap Mieko, a second generation professional embroiderer, builds her original embroidery on the foundation of the traditional art. Carved trays and bears are treasured tourist items. Ainu influence on modern Japanese music has been observed in recent years. Again recently, two traditional musical instruments have become better known: *tonkori*, a five-stringed Sakhalin string instrument revived the musician by the name of OKI, and *mukkur*, a mouth harp. At Shiraoi Museum, *tonkori* lessons are given.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The 1899 Ainu law that treated the Ainu as "former aborigines" remained in effect into the 1990s. As a representative to the National Diet between 1994 and 1998, Kayano Shigeru took the lead in fighting to eliminate this law. A new Ainu law, called "A Law Related to the Promotion of Ainu Culture as well as Spread and Enlightenment of Knowledge related to Ainu Traditions," was enacted in 1997, replacing the 1899 law. The recent construction of a dam in Kayano's homeland, Nibutani village in Biratori town, exemplifies forceful development of Hokkaidō at the cost of the Ainu's civil rights. Despite the resistance led by Kayano Shigeru and Kaizawa Tadashi, construction proceeded and in early 1996 the village was buried under water. In a speech delivered in February 1988 at a meeting held in Hokkaidō's capital city on the use of Hokkaidō lands, Kayano stated that he would accept the Nibutani dam construction plan if only the salmon fishing rights be returned to the Nibutani Ainu in exchange for the destruction of their homes and fields. His request was ignored.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Ainu society traditionally was organized around clear cut divisions among men and women. Typically men went out to hunt or fish, and women wove, maintained the household, and ground grains. Traditionally, men chanted long heroic verses while women chanted shorter songs of the gods. By mid-20th century, with few male chanters available, women chanters replaced them.

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—by Kyoko Selden

## 'ALAWIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ah-LOW-eez

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** 'Alawite

**LOCATION:** Syria; Lebanon; Turkey.

**POPULATION:** 1.4 million in Syria; 100,000 in Lebanon; indeterminate numbers in Israel-occupied Syrian Golan Heights, uncounted numbers in Turkey, and a small diaspora in Australia

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Secret 'Alawi faith; a branch of Shia Islam

### OVERVIEW

'Alawi (or 'Alawite) means "a follower of 'Ali," the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. The 'Alawis (and all Shia Muslims) believe that 'Ali was Muhammad's rightful heir to political and spiritual leadership of the Muslim community. Originally calling themselves "Nusairis," they became known as 'Alawis only in 1920 after the French colonizers dubbed them as such. As part of their colonial strategy, the French normally allied with the minority of any particular territory they occupied. The minority would then greatly benefit from the occupation of the country, as the French would promote them to positions from which they otherwise would be banned. This was true of the 'Alawis as well.

During the Abbasid Empire of the 12th century AD, Nusairi views became increasingly differentiated from mainstream Shia views. This resulted in increasing persecution by the Sunni government of the Abbasids. The Nusairis were forced to flee from Iraq and Arabia farther and farther west, until they reached the mountains in western Syria on the Mediterranean coast. There they survived, despite continuing persecution, for centuries.

The French granted the people they called 'Alawis a strong measure of autonomy in 1920 when the French occupation of Syria was formalized by the League of Nations. However, when the French left in 1946, the new Syrian government sent troops into the 'Alawi villages to squelch their autonomy and forcibly assimilate them into becoming fully integrated Syrian citizens. Although some 'Alawis moved down from the mountains to the Latakia province on the coast, they rarely mingled with the rest of Syrian society, even in their new urban environments.

The 'Alawi are believed to be remnants of an ancient Canaanite people, who were then influenced by both Islam and Christianity. They adopted the Arabic language and Islamic faith over the course of the Muslim domination of the region beginning in the 7th century AD. However, they broke away to form their own religion during the reign of the Abbasids. Sunni and Shia Muslims refuse to accept 'Alawis as true Muslims because of their belief in a holy trinity: the Imam 'Ali as the most important figure; Muhammad; and Salman al-Farisi, one of Muhammad's companions. In Syria, the president is required to be a Muslim by law, and as an 'Alawi, the first Asad had a religious cleric issue a fatwa, a Muslim religious pronouncement, that 'Alawis were Muslim. The head of state as of 2008, Bashar al Asad, relies also upon this fatwa for his legitimacy.

*Location and homeland.* In 2008 there were estimated to be about 2.6 million 'Alawis in the world. Most (about 1.4 mil-

lion) were concentrated in the Latakia province on the western coast of Syria though there are small numbers in Turkey, Israel (2,000 in Israel-occupied Golan Heights), Lebanon, and Australia. In Lebanon, they live in a small area just to the south of the Syrian border; in Turkey they occupy rather larger settlements near Antioch, the al-Kuysar plateau, and in the plains formed by the Lower Orontes river.

The ancient 'Alawi stronghold is the Jabal an Nusayriyah mountain range, which is named for them ("Mountains of Nusairi," as the 'Alawis were formerly known). The mountain range runs north-to-south along the Mediterranean coastal plain of Syria. It is sometimes called Jabal 'Alawite. The wetter western side of the range supports some farming, but the drier eastern side is good only for sheep-herding. It is a poor region, and the 'Alawis have for centuries been a poor, struggling people. Over 60% of the rural population along the coast in the Latakia province is 'Alawi. The largest ethno religious minority group in Syria, 'Alawis made up between 10% and 12% of the total Syrian population according to 2004 estimates; reliable, more precise figures are unavailable.

'Alawis are not considered by some to be true Arabs; they converted to Islam centuries after the majority of modern-day Syrians. Thus, 'Alawis have historically felt a sense of estrangement from the Sunni Arab majority that surrounds them. Centuries of persecution and life hidden away in tiny mountain strongholds has also led to a sense of separation and isolation for the 'Alawis. Their society is organized tribally, with most 'Alawis belonging to one of four main tribal confederations: the Haddadin, the Matawira, the Khaiyatin, and the Kalbiya. Three smaller tribes—the Darawisa, Mahaliba, and 'Ama-mira—settled at the northern end of the Jabal an Nusayriyah range. Some detribalized 'Alawis settled on the plains surrounding the mountain area. Modern 'Alawis are trying to replace tribal notions with notions of citizenship in the state, but all 'Alawis, even the children, still know which tribe is theirs.

*Language.* The 'Alawis adopted Arabic as their language during the period known in the West as the Middle Ages. Arabic, spoken by at least 300 million people worldwide, has many dialects. Nevertheless, most Arabs can understand each other's speech, although certain words may have different nuances in different countries. Written Arabic comes in two varieties: the classical Arabic of the Quran and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The latter is the version of the language printed in newspapers and books in all Arab countries. Arabic is written and read from right to left. "Hello" (*marhaba* or *ahlan*) in Arabic is a very informal greeting one rarely hears. Far more common is the traditional *As-salam alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Walaykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Go in peace." "Thank you" is *Shukran* and "You're welcome" is *Afwan*. These greetings and pleasantries are known not only in the Arab world but by virtually all Muslims around the world who use them daily. "Yes" is *na'am*, and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba'a*, *khamisa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *tamania*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

*Religion.* The precise details of the tenets of the 'Alawi faith, its rituals and practices are somewhat mysterious. After decades of persecution by Muslims who considered their veneration of saints and other rituals and beliefs heretical to orthodox Islam, the 'Alawis began to carefully guard their holy books and practice their rituals in private. The 'Alawi story of creation tells of



An 'Alawi child makes a victory sign as women hold red flags and banners during a protest in Istanbul, Turkey. The people marched to commemorate deadly riots that happened in 1995 between police and 'Alawi residents. (AP Images/Murad Sezer)

a spirit world inhabited by beings of light who worshiped God but who began over time to deny his divinity. This caused their exile from paradise and condemned to the mundane existence of suffering humanity. The 'Alawis worshipped a pantheon of prophets and minor deities throughout their history, but in the Islamic era they have embraced devotion to a trinity consisting of the Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammad, and Salman al-Farisi, one of the Companions of the Prophet, the men and women who were Islam's first converts and are held in great esteem all over the Muslim world. It is speculated that they perform a ritual using bread and wine to represent the body and blood of the incarnate God, much as Christians do in their Eucharist or Holy Communion. Only men take part in worship and are initiated into the faith. The initiation is a long process that begins no earlier than age 19, and involves tremendous study and the passing of trials and tests.

The 'Alawis believe that God has appeared on the earth seven times, the most recent being in the form of the greatly revered Imam Ali.

The most authoritative book for the 'Alawi faith is not the Muslim holy book of the Quran, which they interpret largely allegorically, unlike virtually all other Muslims, who consider it to be the direct words of Allah transmitted through the Prophet Muhammed. Rather, the 'Alawis' holy book is the Kitab al-Majmu, which has 16 *surahs* (chapters) and almost certainly was compiled over many years by many writers. 'Ala-

wi ritual and belief appears to involve the worship of sacred springs and trees, etc., probably descending from their ancient Phoenician pagan heritage. They also worship stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies, believing as they do that they began their existences as beams of light not unlike the heavenly bodies. Through successive reincarnations, 'Alawis believe humans may eventually return their souls to the heavens, becoming celestial bodies once again, healing the rift with God created by their doubting his divinity at the beginning of time.

The 'Alawis do not worship in mosques in a symbolic protest and recognition of the fact that their highly revered Imam Ali was killed in a mosque. Most 'Alawis gather in friends' houses for prayers. There is no prohibition against drinking alcohol among the 'Alawis. In addition, they do not, generally, adhere to the controversial topic among Islamic scholars as to the meaning of Allah's command that the wives of and daughters of the Prophet cover their heads and chests.

Other aspects of their beliefs relate to objects of light, including the belief by one 'Alawi sect, known as the Shamsis, that the Imam Ali lives in the sun; the Qamaris believe he lives on the moon. The Alawis believe in reincarnation and the existence of more than the world they currently inhabit. They believe that after death, 'Alawis that practiced goodness are reborn into another human form: the wicked are reborn as animals seen as unclean or predatory.

*Major holidays.* As the 'Alawis keep their faith so secret, it is difficult to discover their major holy days. It is said they do not observe the Muslim month-long fast of Ramadan or make a pilgrimage to Mecca (some believe doing so constitutes a form of idol worship), though the traditional Persian new year festival, known as Nowruz, is widely celebrated. There is good evidence they do celebrate something very similar to the Catholic mass and partake in the ritual of the Eucharist though the wine they drink is not meant to represent the blood of the Christian prophet Jesus but that of the Imam Ali. They may celebrate some Christian holy days such as Christmas, Easter, and Epiphany.

*Living conditions.* 'Alawis have traditionally been very poor. Living in marginal mountain villages, most families grow wheat and raise goats to provide their bread, bulghur (cracked wheat), yogurt, and butter. Wealthier families might have grapevines, fruit trees, and sheep. Since Hafiz al-Asad, an 'Alawi, ascended to the presidency of Syria, conditions have improved for his people. After his death in 2000 his son Bashar took over the country, with few expecting him to do other than follow his father's policies of preferences to the 'Alawis. In 1970, for example, only 10% of houses in the Latakia province had piped-in drinking water; in 2004, more than 90% did. Roads have been built to every village. Communications and technology have improved and Internet cafes are spreading in the major cities, though the state keeps close watch on their use. In 2007 Syria had 119 Internet providers and 1.5 million regular users. Its country domain code is .sy. Government power projects have supplied electricity to even the most remote corners of Syria. However, high inflation rates and a struggling economy eat away at the gains made in the 'Alawis' standard of living. Also, any change in government (if an 'Alawi is no longer in power) could, and probably would, return the 'Alawis to their former days of hardship and poverty.

*Education.* Through much of their history, 'Alawis were illiterate mountain dwellers. There were no schools in the mountain villages until the 1930s, when the French started some elementary schools there. After the Ba'ath Party takeover in 1963 with 'Alawi Hafiz al-Asad at the helm, 'Alawis poured into the educational system. By 1985, under the first al-Asad regime, 'Alawis were strongly represented in Syrian professions and upper-level government. Under the second al-Asad's Democratic Socialist regime, education has been made available to everyone at all levels of society. Between 40% and 62% of 'Alawi girls now attend school, a significant increase from earlier times.

*Work.* Before the Ba'ath Party takeover in 1963 when the 'Alawis came into power, many 'Alawis joined the military because it was the only opportunity for employment readily available to them in the Sunni-dominated society. It is these 'Alawis who joined forces to overthrow the government in 1963. The 'Alawis continue to be the largest ethno religious group in the Syrian military. Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, the only industry in the 'Alawi mountain area was tobacco, and it employed just a few dozen workers. By the mid-1980s, however, under President al-Asad's Democratic Socialist reform program, 40,000 'Alawi workers were employed in public sector companies in food processing and the manufacture of aluminum, cement, textiles, and carpets. Under the second al-Asad administration, tentative steps toward economic liberalization have been

instituted and in 2007 the country experienced a real economic growth rate of 3.5%.

*Social problems.* 'Alawis continue to be looked down upon by the Sunni Muslim majority. Their current good fortunes are largely due to the fact that an 'Alawi, Bashar al-Asad, is president of Syria. Any change in government resulting in a loss of 'Alawi power would probably reverse their situation and send them back to the struggling, persecuted poverty that they knew for so many centuries. In Turkey, where 'Alawis hold no political power, their situation is worse. The Turkish state does not even recognize them as a distinct ethno religious group from the Kurds.

*Gender Issues.* 'Alawi society is patriarchal in ways not dissimilar to most non-Western cultures around the world. Religiously, there are gender practices and rituals worth noting: for example, women are excluded from the priestly classes and are not allowed to participate in rituals intended to return the 'Alawis to their former existence as beacons of semidivine lights in the presence of God. This is justified by the belief that women are born of the devil. Some extreme 'Alawis even consider that women have no souls. On the other hand, Syria is a secular, quasi-socialist state where strict interpretations of Islam common in other parts of the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf and the Maghrib (western part of North Africa), are not adhered to. In this sense, women enjoy greater personal freedoms in Syria. They are highly visible in the public sphere, most do not cover their heads and, like all 'Alawis, are free to drink alcohol.

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—revised by J. Henry

# AMBONESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** AHM-bawn-eez

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Moluccas)

**POPULATION:** Over 800,000

**LANGUAGE:** Ambonese; Ambon Malay

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

No later than 40,000 years ago, the first humans entered the Moluccas, the same basic stock that would go on to settle Papua New Guinea, the Melanesian islands, and Australia. However, with the exception of parts of Halmahera (including the important former sultanate on Ternate), the present population of the Moluccas (“Maluku” in Indonesian) speaks Austronesian languages brought by farming and seafaring people from Sulawesi beginning 4,500 years ago. In physical terms, the Ambonese and other Moluccan groups represent a mixture of the aborigines and these newcomers.

Produced exclusively in the Moluccas until the late 18th century AD and traded as far as Syria as early as the 18th century BC, cloves first came into high international demand during the Han dynasty in China and the Roman Empire in the West. Traders en route between the north Javanese ports and the clove-trading sultanate of Ternate (Muslim since the 15th century) made stopovers at Hitu on the north coast of Ambon island. A year after capturing Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese sent an expedition under Antonio de Abreu to the famed Spice Islands, landing at Hitu. They set up a fort there in 1522, from which Hitu Muslims (with Ternatan aid) were to drive them in 1575. In the meantime, however, the first conversions to Catholicism occurred in 1538, to be greatly augmented by the work of St. Francis Xavier in 1565 (three decades later, 50,000 converts are recorded).

After their expulsion from Hitu, the Portuguese transferred to the south coast where they established the fort that would become Kota Ambon (Ambon City). This the Dutch captured in alliance with the Hitu Muslims in 1605, desecrating the Catholic churches and deporting the “white” and “black” (*mestizo*) Portuguese. The single-minded Dutch pursuit of the spice monopoly led to the notorious massacre of English traders in 1623 and to the *hongi tochten*, annual sweeps to locate and destroy spice trees (and growers) outside the monopoly areas. Cloves were permitted to grow only on Ambon, no longer on Ternate and Tidore. The Dutch pressed Ambonese men and boats into service on the *hongi tochten*, offering villages land rights in proportion to their contribution.

The spice monopoly made Kota Ambon a rich town, the “Queen of the East” beside which Batavia and Manila were said to pale. Fond of European dance and dress, the local notables shared this wealth and some of the power, joining a representative council in the archipelago at the side of Dutch East India Company officials. As coffee, tea, and sugar came to overshadow spices in the 18th-century European market, the city began to decline. In any case, the British occupation of Ambon from 1796 to 1802 released cloves for cultivation elsewhere.

The Ambonese played a prominent role in the expansion of Dutch power in the archipelago, forming half of the colonial

military (KNIL) and a disproportionate percentage of the bureaucracy. Priding themselves on their loyalty and discipline, Ambonese soldiers received higher pay and rations than non-Ambonese; the Javanese called them “dogs of the Dutch” and “black Dutchmen.” From the 1880s on, Ambonese (as many as 10% by 1930) migrated to fill jobs as soldiers, clerks, and minor professionals for which Ambon’s educational system, the best in Netherlands Indies, qualified them. Christian Ambonese in particular felt more tied to the Dutch than to other “native” peoples.

Strategic to both the Japanese and the Allies, Ambon, especially Kota Ambon, was devastated in World War II. After the war, Christian Ambonese, having identified more with the Dutch than with other “native” peoples, tried to set up an independent nation, the Republic of the Southern Moluccas (RMS), waging a guerilla war against the Indonesian national army until the capture of the RMS president in 1956. After the 1950 transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia, the Dutch government brought ex-KNIL soldiers to refugee camps in the Netherlands; with their expectation to return home to fight for the RMS frustrated, the soldiers and their families continued as a neglected minority in the “mother country.” It was only after some Moluccan youth resorted to terrorism in the 1970s that the Dutch government focused its attention on the problems of this 40,000-strong community, beginning programs for bicultural education and job procurement.

Under the New Order regime (1966–1998), the government policies promoting the emergence of a Muslim technocratic elite in the country as a whole as well as the largely spontaneous, non-government-directed influx of Muslim transmigrants into Maluku (especially Bugis and Butonese from their poorer provinces) threatened the fragile balance in the region between Christians and Muslims, heretofore evenly matched in numbers (a situation almost unique in Indonesia). Christian Ambonese, whose high education level gave them dominance in the bureaucracy, resented the Muslim newcomers from Sulawesi for taking increasing control over the regional economy (though they had not begrudged local Christian Chinese their economic power). Moreover, Christian Ambonese feared they would be pushed out of the bureaucracy by increasingly educated and increasingly numerous Muslims, who for their part saw the Christians as continuing to shut them out of positions of power in the province.

Post-Suharto democratization and decentralization intensified competition and tension between the two groups; hostility erupted into mass inter-ethnic/inter-religious violence, beginning in Kota Ambon (initially only between Protestant Ambonese and Muslim transmigrants but eventually involving Catholic and Muslim Ambonese) and then spreading to other parts of the province and to neighboring North Maluku. News of the conflict provoked many Muslims in other parts of Indonesia. Mass rallies in Jakarta called for jihad in Maluku, thousands of Laskar Jihad vigilantes streamed into the province to fight Christians (even as the Ambonese themselves, Christians and Muslims, were becoming tired of the violence), and anti-Christian/Chinese and anti-Hindu/Balinese rioting broke out on Lombok. The conflicts in Maluku and North Maluku ultimately killed 3,000–4,000 people; these constituted the worst episode of collective violence in Indonesia since the 1965–1966 anti-leftist massacres, surpassing even the Dayak-Madurese conflict in Kalimantan in 1997. The “Maluku wars” displaced



between 123,000 and 370,000 people, comparable to the numbers displaced by Indonesia's far more murderous 1975 invasion of East Timor. Since hostilities subsided in 2002 after a peace accord, Kota Ambon, heavily devastated by the fighting (including its state and Christian universities), remains segregated along religious lines (with people not being able to return to their homes if they are not of the majority religion of their neighborhood), but commerce and other contacts have resumed between Christians and Muslims.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

For Indonesians from outside the region, "Ambon," including the island, the city, and the people, is the "Moluccas," hence, anyone hailing from any of this diverse array of islands is likely to be called an "Ambonese" (*orang Ambon*). However, in the strict sense, the Ambonese ethnic group comprises the populations of the islands of Ambon, Haruku, Saparua, and the western portion of the much larger "mother island" of Seram. The two "peninsulas" of Ambon Island itself, Hitu and Leitimur, were once separate islands but are now linked by an extremely narrow isthmus. The long bay formed by the joining of the two land masses provides excellent shelter for ships, and it was on the southern shore of the bay that the city of Ambon (Kota Ambon) rose. The relatively high precipitation level and the quality of the volcanic soils favor agriculture, although much of the land is too steep for cultivation. Off the long stretches of beach are coral reefs that, however, have in many places been

ruined by people fishing with dynamite or digging for sand to make cement.

The population of Ambon has grown very rapidly: in 1971, Central Maluku counted 378,870 people; by 1980, Ambon island alone had 651,000 inhabitants. In 2005, the two regencies corresponding to the Ambonese homeland plus Ambon city had a combined population of nearly 700,000. The growth of Kota Ambon appears even more dramatic when one considers that the population of 234,000 (up from 209,000 in 1980 and 80,000 in 1959) must squeeze into 4 sq km (1.5 sq mi) between the shore and the hills, with only some relief from reclaiming land from the sea and building houses up the hillsides.

Since colonial days, when they were disproportionately represented in the military and bureaucracy, the Ambonese have settled in cities throughout the archipelago, particularly Makassar and Jakarta. In addition, there are 40,000 Ambonese in the Netherlands, mostly former soldiers of the KNIL (Dutch colonial army) and their families who came for "temporary" refuge after Indonesian independence.

## 3 LANGUAGE

A member of the Central Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family (and thus more distant from Bahasa Indonesia than the languages of Madagascar and the Philippines), the Ambonese language is closely related to dialects in West Seram and, on a higher level, groups with the Austronesian languages in Timor.

At the end of the colonial period (1950), Dutch was widely known in Kota Ambon. As the city has always attracted migrants and sojourners from elsewhere in the archipelago, the dominant language, however, has been a version of the Malay lingua franca, Bahasa Melayu Ambon. Malay in its local variant, as well as Bahasa Indonesia, is displacing the indigenous speech.

## 4 FOLKLORE

A Christianized origin myth places the first people on the slopes of Mount Nunusaku in western Seram. There they lived in abundance until the Fall (as in Genesis), when they scattered to Ambon and other islands.

The short British occupation during the Napoleonic Wars produced two heroes whose resistance to the reimposition of Dutch rule earned them national honor. Thomas Matulesy, a.k.a. Pattimura, had served the British as a sergeant major before leading an uprising against the returning Dutch. The daughter of another rebel leader, Martha Christina Tiahahu, continued her father's struggle after his death and, when captured, refused to inform on her co-rebels; she eventually starved herself on the way to exile on Java.

An example of a ghost story is the legend of Soya Atas village. The daughter of the head of the village fell in love with a Dutch official. Because of her father's disapproval, she drowned herself. Her ghost is said to kidnap foreign men or small babies; the victims disappear, only to be found after a few days either dead or in shock. Only a drink of water given by the present head of the village can revive them.

In order to deter thieves, farmers put up *matakau* figures in their fields suggestive of a curse (e.g., a grasshopper symbolizes stomach pains like an insect crawling about inside the body). The owners of young coconut trees have the church council

pray for their protection; a potential thief knows that theft will lead to misfortune.

## 5 RELIGION

The Ambonese divide almost evenly into Christians (51%) and Muslims (49%). Except for five mixed villages, the rest (42) are either exclusively Christian or Muslim. Traders from Ternate and the north Java coast introduced Islam to Hitu (north Ambon) well in advance of the Portuguese, who in turn brought Catholic missionaries such as St. Francis Xavier. The Dutch uprooted these early Catholic communities. Conversions to Protestantism (the Dutch Reformed Church) accelerated only in the 19th century.

Indigenous beliefs focusing on ancestral spirits remain strong, though they coexist more harmoniously with Islam than with Protestantism. Village halls (*baileu*), which formerly one could enter only after asking permission of the spirits dwelling there, contain a mystically charged stone (*batu pamali*) used as an altar for sacrifices and other offerings. In some places, the heads of goats slaughtered in Islamic rites are placed on the stone in the *baileu*, alongside skulls from previous years. When getting wood from the forest for a school, church, or the *baileu* itself, one hangs the head of a sacrificed goat from an old *baileu* pillar. Before the Dutch forbade the practice, the taking of human heads was crucial to traditional rituals, including weddings (as part of the bride-price).

Coexisting with Muslim and Christian religious authorities, the *mauweng* mediates between humans and ancestral spirits, particularly in rites for success in agriculture. This folk religious specialist also heals the sick by employing divination techniques to learn the underlying cause of disease, i.e., what is displeasing the ancestors (modern medicines are considered effective only for treating symptoms).

Since the 1863 abolition of the clove monopoly deprived village heads of the basis of much of their power, in Christian villages, ministers (always originally outsiders to the village) have challenged their authority. The *mauweng* have supported the village heads, but the balance tends now to favor the minister.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In villages, the most important festival is the *cuci negeri*, the annual village cleansing. The *baileu*, as well as every house and yard, is thoroughly cleaned; one family's failure to do so would invite fatal illness or crop failure for the whole community. Village leaders make speeches to the ancestors who established the *baileu*, the springs, and the holy places and pray to God to grant well-being. Eating, drinking, and general merrymaking follow the ceremonies. In Soiya, however, scheduling the *cuci negeri* for the Friday before Christmas reduces the scale of the celebration.

Seven days after Idul Fitri, the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, young men in Mamala village strike each other with rattan brooms (consisting of the sharp central spines of pine fronds) until they draw blood. The wounds disappear after the application of a locally made coconut oil.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There are three ways to get married: by proposal (*kawin minta*); by elopement (*kawin lari* or *lari bini*); or by the man's "moving in" (*kawin masuk*).

For *kawin minta*, a young man first informs his family of his choice for a bride. His *famili* (all his paternal and maternal relatives) gathers to discuss arrangements for the bride-price, the wedding ceremony, etc. Once agreed, they send a delegation to the young woman's parents asking for a time when they can issue the marriage proposal. The man's kin sends a spokesperson at the time set by the woman's kin. After paying the customary forms of respect to the woman's kin, giving the young man's full name (including those of his family and clan) the spokesperson of his kin negotiates the amount of the bride-price and other arrangements with the young woman's kin. The bride-price must be paid in full before a Christian or Muslim wedding ceremony can be held; otherwise, the ancestors will be offended and may cause death to the couple's children. The slowness of the woman's father in accepting the man's side's terms often results in a postponement of the religious ceremony and in the birth of children out of wedlock, a situation very unsatisfactory to Christian authorities.

Marriage by elopement avoids all these negotiations and, thus, is by far the most popular form of wedding. The young man may prefer this method in order to avoid rejection, or his family might prefer it in order to spare themselves the shame of a refused proposal. Although the woman's kin do not prefer elopement in principle, they sometimes agree to it beforehand as a way for them to reduce the bride-price without losing face. The young man's brothers or friends help him to "abduct" his bride and carry away all her clothes and other things. If the young woman's family knows beforehand, the young man leaves a letter in a white envelope on the girl's bed explaining in flowery language who has taken their daughter and that she is safe. After a week in hiding, the young woman is brought to the young man's house for the wedding rite and feast. During the feast, the bride offers around a tray of cigarettes and drinks to show that she is officially a wife. All friends and neighbors are invited so that the marriage will be public.

While generally it is the bride who comes to live with the groom's family, under the third type of wedding, *kawin masuk*, the groom moves in with the bride's family. He may choose this if his own family cannot afford the bride-price (in which case he himself must work for his in-laws in lieu thereof), if his family does not approve of the match because of differences in status between the sides, or if the woman is an only child and the man must join the woman's clan.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Before the Dutch, related lineages originating in Seram formed *soa*, headed by an *upu* who was assisted by a military commander (*malessi*) and a religious leader (*mauweng*). Under Ternatan hegemony, *soa* formed federations (*uli*). Ambonese also applied the Javanese terms for "state" (*negeri*) and "king" (*raja*) to their own villages and village headmen.

The Dutch abolished these federations, replacing them with a system of independent villages run by councils (*saniri*). The highest council was the *Saniri Rajapatih*, consisting of the village head and the *soa* heads. The next lower council, the *Saniri Negeri Lengkap*, added to the above the various village officials: the *tuan tanah*, an expert on traditional land inheritance law; the *panglima*, formerly a military leader; the *kewang*, forest police; and the *marinyo*, the town-crier. Finally, the *Saniri Negeri Besar* included all adult males but was convened very rarely, usually only for village-head elections. In recent times,



the once-hereditary village headmanship has become largely ceremonial, with the soa heads rotating de facto governing duties among themselves.

While the distinction persists between a village's "original inhabitants" (the descendants of the village founder, as such the village elite) and "newcomers," Ambonese society recognizes many translocal organizations. Every village belongs to either the Patasiwa or the Patalima faction, a division tracing back to the manipulations of the Sultan of Ternate and referring to federations on either side of the Mala River on Seram. More significant is the *pela*, an alliance linking two villages, often very distant and of different religions. The allies draw blood with knives and dip the bloody knives in water. They seal an oath of alliance by drinking the water containing each other's blood. The villages provide famine relief to each other and refuge in war; a Muslim village will contribute funds to its *pela* partner's Christian church and vice versa.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

While traditional dwellings were built on wooden piles, contemporary Muslim and Christian houses sit on the ground. These houses have a square floor plan with an open veranda (*dego-dego*) in the front. The frame consists of tree trunk sections or wooden beams, while the walls are made of plaited sago-palm leaf (*gaba-gaba*). As most houses lack windows, the steep roofs have holes in the corners to release smoke. Sometimes there is a room in back serving as a kitchen. The houses of village leaders are in the European style, partially brick with windows and separate rooms inside.

Villages usually consist of houses grouped closely along a main road, though houses may also be separated by fenced yards. Each village includes a *baileu*, the village head's house, a church or mosque, the clergy's house, and small shops.

In Kota Ambon, in addition to buses, *becak* pedicabs provide the most common means of transport; the city has more than 2,000 *becak* that, not all being able to share the streets at a single time, are divided into three color-coded groups (red, white, and yellow). Of the local boat types, the *patakora* from Ternate is regarded as the best. Big boats (*jungku* and *orambi*) carry merchandise to Kota Ambon.

Maluku province has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 69.2 (2005 score), almost as high as Indonesia's national HDI of 69.6. Kota Ambon's HDI is considerably higher at 76.2, while the two surrounding regencies, Central Maluku (a portion of the earlier province of that name) and Western Seram, have lower HDIs (respectively, 67.7 and 64.8). Maluku has a higher HDI than all the nearby provinces other than North Sulawesi. The closest, North Maluku, at 67, has one of the country's lowest. However, this is despite the fact that Maluku's GDP per capita is only us\$3,637, among the lowest in Indonesia (us\$9,784 for West Sumatra, us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, but us\$6,293 for Central Java and us\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara). Kota Ambon's GDP per capita (us\$5,699) was higher, but still rather low. In 2000, the province's rate of infant mortality stood at 60.63 deaths per 1,000 live births (though only almost half this in Kota Ambon).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Perhaps under Muslim and Christian influence, kinship is patrilineal as expressed, for instance, in newlywed couples' residing with the groom's family.

A household includes parents, unmarried children, and married sons with their wives and children. An individual belongs to a clan (*rumah tau*, *matarumah*, or *fam*) of patrilineally related kin who has a name and possesses rights to titles (political office), land, and sacred stones and springs; one must marry outside the clan. Women join their husband's clan (unless she is an only child, in which case the man joins his wife's clan). The *rumah tau* has a meeting house built by the clan founder containing weapons, cloth, and other heirlooms, which are under the hereditary stewardship of a clan leader.

## 11 CLOTHING

Elements of traditional Ambonese clothing preserve influences from 16th century Portuguese fashion. While younger women wear bright pink, yellow, and blue Western-style dresses to church, older women wear long black dresses with long sleeves and a highly prized sash made of beads.

## 12 FOOD

As the sago palm grows abundantly in the local swamps, sago-palm starch is the staple; rice supplements sago-palm starch but does not displace it. A 6- to 15-year-old tree can be cut down for food. The preparer beats the tree core to loosen the flour-rich fibers. These are then washed and squeezed through a filter to obtain the starch, which is formed into squares (*tuman*). The *tuman* are either grilled or made into a thick porridge (*pepeda*).

Other foods are bananas and papayas, available all year round. Freshly grilled fish is served with *colo-colo*, a sauce of chopped onions, chili, and tomatoes. *Kohu-kohu* is a pungent salad of shredded tuna meat, bean sprouts, onions, and cabbage. Also eaten with a spice mixture are *laor*, seaworms who come to shore to breed in March and April. Local menus do not announce it, but black dog is also cooked. From the sap of the lontar palm, local people distill wine (*moke*).

## 13 EDUCATION

Since the 19th century, when Christian missionaries built schools, Ambon has enjoyed one of the highest education levels in the archipelago. This has allowed many local Ambonese to migrate to other parts of the country as office workers. In 2005, Maluku province's level of literacy stood at 96.16%, very high by Indonesian national standards and comparable or superior to provinces with much higher GDPs per capita. (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Throughout Indonesia, the Ambonese are famous for singing (Western-style) music. Cassettes of local songs and singers are popular nationwide. Traditional instruments include the *tifa* (a single-membrane drum) and the ukulele. The latter forms part of the *kroncong* ensemble, a sentimental Portuguese-derived musical style, one of whose cradles was Ambon. Bamboo flutes are also played; orchestras of bamboo flutes open church services. Famous dances are the *lenso* and the *cakalele* (a war dance).



*Ambonese men perform a traditional war dance in Ambon, Indonesia. There has been religious turmoil between Muslims and Christians on this small eastern Indonesian island since 1999. (AP Images/Vonny Litamahuputty)*

## 15 WORK

Most people continue to obtain a living by agriculture, which involves slash-and-burn cultivation of tubers and peanuts. The Dutch brought potatoes, which remain a minor crop, grown on mountain slopes. Other crops are coffee, sugarcane, cassava, maize, and fruits (bananas, mango, mangosteen, durian, and gandaria, the last having medicinal value). Coconut production satisfies regional consumption. Farmers grow tobacco for their own use under the eaves of their houses, where they can benefit from rainwater coming off the roof; the leaves are dried on the roof itself. Although a Dutch clove monopoly no longer confines clove cultivation to Ambon, the spice continues to be grown, requiring little work from the farmer but yielding a substantial profit on the market (as an ingredient in Indonesian-made cigarettes, *kretek*). Farmers sell their surplus crops to obtain money for taxes, school fees, and daily necessities that they cannot produce themselves.

People hunt for deer, wild boar, and cassowary birds using traps that may endanger unwary humans. Fishing by hook, harpoon, and net also adds protein to the diet.

## 16 SPORTS

Children's toys include hoops from old bicycle wheels and stilts from palm trunks. Billiards is a popular pastime. Children play in the early evening, as the afternoon is too hot.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

"Paintings" (usually intricate still-lives of flowers) are fashioned from thin slices of mother-of-pearl. Large models of boats made entirely of cloves and wire are common souvenirs. Embroidered *baju kurung* (long shirts) are also produced. The woodcarvings and *ikat* (tie-dyed) cloth available in Kota Ambon generally come from the more traditional Tanimbar islands to the southeast.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Maluku's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 62.6, somewhat higher than Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2 (2002 scores). The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, is 51.8, rather lower than the national GEM of 54.6. Kota Ambon itself, however, has a GDI of 71.3, higher than Jakarta's (which is the highest among the country's province-level administra-

tive divisions) and a GEM of 59.4, higher than North Sulawesi's (which is number one among province-level administrative divisions). This contrasts sharply with the immediately surrounding province of Maluku Tengah, which has a GDI of 54.1 and a GEM of 34.3.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# ANDAMANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** an-duh-mun-EEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onge, Sentinelese

**LOCATION:** India (Andaman Islands)

**POPULATION:** 429 (2001 Census of India)

**LANGUAGE:** Andamanese

**RELIGION:** Animism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Andamanese are the original inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, which lie in the Bay of Bengal some 1,000 km (640 mi) southeast of the mouth of the Ganges River. Of Negrito (Asian pygmy) stock, this population consists of hunting-and-gathering tribes who are related physically and culturally to the peoples of Southeast Asia. Little is known of their origins, but the Andamanese most probably reached the islands from the Malay and Burmese coasts. The northernmost point of the Andaman Islands is only 300 km (190 mi) from the mainland of Burma (Myanmar).

Various explanations of the name *Andaman* have been proposed, but it possibly comes from the Malay *Handuman*, i.e., Hanuman, the monkey god of Hindu mythology. Lying astride the trade routes across the Indian Ocean, the Andamans have been known from early times. Among those who have mentioned the islands are Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monks, 9th-century Arab travelers, and Marco Polo. A common theme in historical reports of the islands is the hostility and ferocity of the native peoples. In 1789, the colonial government of Bengal established a penal colony on the islands, though it was subsequently abandoned. The British returned in 1858 to found Port Blair and maintained a presence in the islands (except during Japanese occupation in World War II) until control of the islands passed to India when that country gained its independence from Britain. Today, the Andamans are administered by New Delhi as part of the Union Territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In the early years of the 20th century, 13 distinct indigenous tribes were present in the Andaman Islands. By the mid-1960s, however, only 4 groups remained. These were the Great Andamanese of Strait Island, the Jarawas of Middle Andaman, the Onge of Little Andaman Island, and the Sentinelese of North Sentinel Island. The Andamanese are few in number compared to the rest of the islands' population, who are largely immigrants and descendants of immigrants from mainland South Asia. The total tribal population of the Andaman Islands was estimated to be 429 according to the Cennus of India, 2001, but this number is unreliable.

The tribal populations of the Andamans appeared to survive the tsunami of December 2004 relatively untouched, although at first there was concern that they had perished in the disaster. Their survival has been attributed to a knowledge of ancient lore and an understanding of the behavior of birds, wind and the sea. Apparently the tribal groups moved inland and thus escaped the worst of the tsunami, which ravaged much of the coast of the Andamans. Forty one of the 43 Great An-

damanese reported in the 2001 Census of India were sighted after the tsunami, as were 73 Onge of the 98 reported in the Census. The Jarawa, reported as having a population of 240 in the 2001 Census, are thought to number about 300, while the Sentinelese are reported as having 39 people (clearly an undercount—the population is actually estimated at around 300) in 2001

The Andamans are a group of 204 islands, 6,340 sq km (2,448 sq mi) in total land area, located in the Bay of Bengal. Centered at about 12°N latitude, they form an arc running north-south for 500 km (300 mi). North, Middle, and South Andaman Islands, known collectively as Great Andaman, are the chief islands of the group. Many of the other islands are uninhabited. Great Andaman consists of a jumble of hills rising to 740 m (2,427 ft) at Saddle Peak that enclose narrow valleys covered in dense tropical forest. Little Andaman, the southernmost island in the chain, is relatively flat. The climate is tropical, with heavy rainfall in the summer during the southwest monsoon.

### 3 LANGUAGE

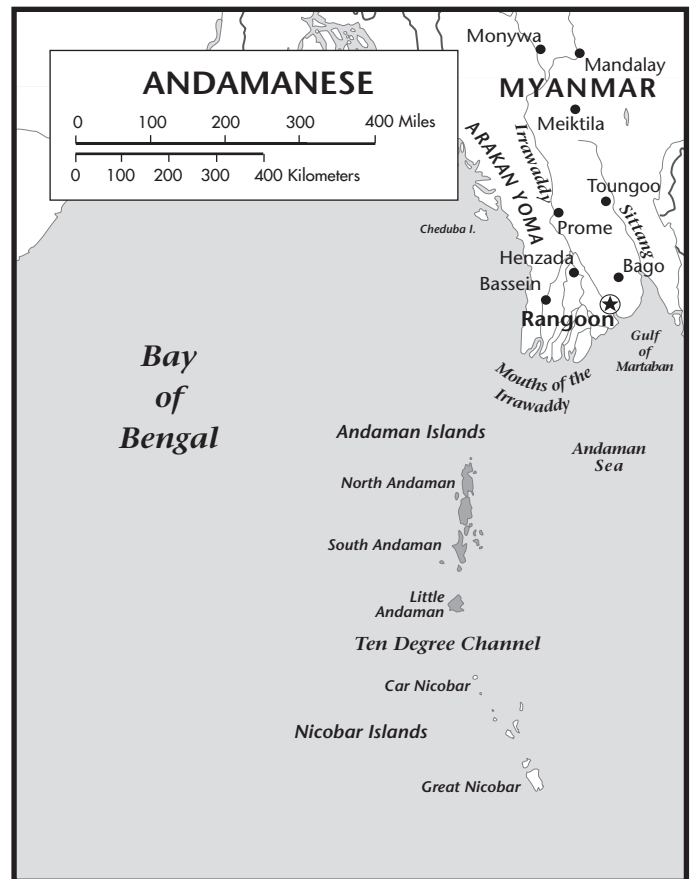
The aboriginal tongues of the Andaman Islands are grouped together in the Andamanese family of languages. They are clearly related, though early accounts of the Andamanese indicate that the tribes spoke languages that could not be understood by other tribal groups on the islands. The Andamanese languages have yet to be classified in relation to the major linguistic families of South and Southeast Asia. They fall into two main groups. Proto-Little Andamanese includes Onge, Jarawa, and Sentinelese, the tongues of the tribes in the southern islands. The various languages spoken by the tribes that once inhabited North, Middle, and South Andaman Islands fall into the category of Proto-Great Andamanese.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The following legend, from one of the Great Andaman tribes, accounts for the origin of night. In the early days of the world, the tale goes, in the time of the ancestors, there was no night; it was always day. Sir Monitor Lizard went into the jungle, where he found yams, resin, and a cicada (a type of insect). He brought them to the camp of the ancestors. He rubbed the cicada between his hands, crushing it. At this, the cicada let out its cry, and day became night. It remained dark for several days. The ancestors tried to get the day to return, lighting torches of resin, singing, and dancing, but with no success. Various types of birds also sang to try to get the day to return, but all in vain. Finally, after an ant sang, morning came. Ever since that time, day and night have followed one another.

### 5 RELIGION

The Andamanese religion is animistic in nature. Among the Onge, the supreme being (Eiugia) takes the shape of a lizard that is bigger than a crocodile. The thunder is his voice, and the wind is his breath; if he becomes angry, he breathes out storms and sets fire to the forest. In addition, two broad categories of spirits inhabit the Onge universe. There are the spirits associated with natural phenomena such as earthquakes, rainbows, and waterspouts, or which control the reproduction of plants and animals useful to humans. There are also the spirits of the dead, who may be benign or evil in nature. The Onge do not revere the spirits, but rather fear them. Their anger is to be



avoided, but the Onge do not hesitate to deceive or trick them if they can get away with it. The spirits of the ancestors are seen to be in direct competition for the resources of the islands.

Certain individuals among the Andamanese can communicate with the spirits while in a trance. Frequent contact with the supernatural is thought to enhance the powers of these shamans or medicine men. The medicine man is consulted to deal with the spirit world, to diagnose illness and effect cures, to help the community find food, and to determine its ceremonial activities.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Lacking any formal religious system, the Andamanese also lack a calendar of festivals or holidays. Celebrations revolve around ceremonies accompanying events such as birth or marriage. For the Onge, even a successful hunt is an occasion for gorging oneself and painting the body in white clay.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There is a complete absence of ritual surrounding the birth of children. Women do not go through any period of isolation or purificatory ceremonies after childbirth, returning to their normal activities within a few days. The Onge interchange or adopt children freely, perhaps reflecting both strong maternal instincts and the low birth rates among the group. Such children may be kept temporarily, for a number of years, or even permanently if the birth parents do not ask for their return. Matrilineal relatives assume responsibility for raising children

in their early years, and after menstruation a girl's ties with her mother's family become even stronger. Following his initiation, however, a boy's training and education lie in the hands of his father and paternal relatives.

Just as initiation makes an adult out of the child, so funeral ceremonies complete the transformation of the human to the spirit. In fact, the Onge believe that if the proper burial rites are not completed, the spirit becomes malevolent and will return to cause harm. The dead are buried underneath the floor of the communal hut. A second burial occurs later when the lower jaw is exhumed, colored with red ochre, and carefully reburied in the floor. Some of the bones are kept and worn as necklaces and ornaments around the neck. The spirits of the dead, which stay near the bones, are thus kept near their relatives to protect them and help them in their daily lives.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In the past, it was customary for the Andamanese to kill all outsiders who landed on their shores. Early encounters between Europeans and the Andamanese tribes resulted in bloody conflicts that frequently left casualties on both sides. The Jarawas, in particular, have an implacable hatred for outsiders. This hostility extends even to other Andamanese groups. Even today, the Jarawas have not been totally subdued and remain isolated from the rest of the islands' population.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

During the dry winter season, the Andamanese migrate to coastal areas where they fish and hunt sea turtles and dugongs (sea cows). Groups of families set up camp, constructing flimsy lean-to huts and shelters (*korale*) in a circle around a central campground. With the onset of the rains in early summer, the Andamanese move into the interior. Breaking up into smaller groups of four or five families, they build temporary huts or live in rock shelters as they move through the forests in search of pigs and other game. At the end of the wet season, families gather at the circular clan hut (*berale*), which is tended throughout the year by men from the clan. This structure has a thatched roof and side walls, and contains permanent sleeping platforms for each family in the clan. Individuals sleep on mats, using log headrests as pillows. These, along with a few living utensils and weapons, are carried by the families on their yearly migrations between the coasts and the forests. Territory is identified with specific bands which generally hunt and fish within their own lands. Little Andaman, which is inhabited solely by the Onge, is divided into four divisions each of which is identified with one of the four Onge clans.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Clan and lineage might determine where one hunts, but the basic social and economic unit among the Andaman islanders is the family. This is nuclear in character, consisting of husband, wife, and children, both birthed and adopted. Women have an important role in Andaman society, with descent being reckoned by both male and female lines. Most rights and obligations are inherited through the female line, although items such as weapons and canoes may be passed down from the father's side.

Marriage is highly valued among the Andamanese. Marriages are arranged by tribal elders, with a man's patrilineal relatives approaching his matrilineal family for a suitable girl.

Given the relatively small populations of the surviving Andaman tribes, there is often some difficulty in finding a match. The actual marriage ceremony is simple. The man and woman take possession of each other in the presence of the group, and he leads her to a new bed built for the occasion in the group's sleeping quarters. The event is celebrated by dancing late into the night.

The Onge are passionately fond of dogs, which were introduced to the Andamans in 1850. They are kept as pampered pets, and puppies are even suckled by Onge women. A family may have 10 or 12 dogs. The animals are used for hunting pigs and other wild game.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditionally, the tribes of the Andaman Islands went completely naked. The Jarawas still follow this practice, although Onge women have adopted a small apron to cover their genitals.

## 12 FOOD

The Andamanese subsist on a diet of seafood, wild game, and products gathered in the forest. The importance of fish to the Onge is seen in the fact that their word for fish (*cioghe*) also means food in general. Men fish with harpoons or bows and arrows, hunting sea turtles, dugongs (sea cows), and large fish. Men also collect turtle eggs. Women use nets, catching pilchards (sardines), crabs, and a variety of other fish. The pig is the favorite game of the Andamanese, who often gorge themselves to excess after a successful hunt. For the Onge, birds harbor the spirit of the dead and are never eaten. Honey is a favorite food, being gathered in considerable quantities during the dry season. When an Onge finds a beehive, he or she marks its location as a sign of ownership. No other would then dare to take possession of it. When convenient, the finder returns with others to help get at the nest and open it up. Other foods gathered in the forest include wild fruits, edible roots and tubers, and wild berries. The larvae of insects such as the cicada are regarded as delicacies. The Andamanese have no knowledge of salt or alcoholic drinks.

## 13 EDUCATION

As might be expected among relatively primitive hunting-and-gathering tribes, the traditional Andamanese have no written script and are totally illiterate, i.e., they have no ability to read or write. They also have no access to formal education. Individuals who have had contact with Bengālis and other peoples may have learned some Bengali or other Indian languages. The highest literacy rate is found among the Onge, who have taken advantage of development programs.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Dancing is a common feature of Andaman culture. It is almost always done at night and marks occasions such as marriage or the end of a mourning period. In the past, a dance was held before going to battle, as well as to mark peace between warring groups. Among the coastal Great Andamanese, males and females form lines on either side of a man who beats out the rhythm of the dance on a type of convex shield made of a hard and aromatic red wood. Onge and Jarawa men dance in single file, hitting the ground first with the right heel, then with the

left, the toes raised just above the ground and moving forward a short way each time. Women clap their hands, then grasping the wrist of one hand with the other, slap one thigh with the open palm of the hand. Dances are accompanied by songs, each person composing his or her own song for the occasion.

### 15 WORK

Agriculture is unknown to the Andamanese, who survive entirely by hunting and gathering. Their weapons include the bow and arrow, and harpoons with detachable points. Fishing is carried out from dugout canoes with a single pontoon as an outrigger. Though they frequently capsize, the canoes rarely sink and are easily righted. The Onge use digging sticks to uproot yams and other tubers. As these have to be “stolen” from the spirits who own them, the Onge collect tubers some distance from the main stem and cover all traces of their activities. The traditional Andamanese had no knowledge of how to create fire, although they utilized it and carried it wherever they went.

The Jarawa and Sentinelese are still totally dependent on hunting and gathering. Some Onge, however, are employed gathering coconuts from plantations introduced into their area in 1958. They are paid for their services with food and manufactured items from the mainland. The Great Andamanese are furthest removed from their hunting-and-gathering roots, being paid a regular allowance by the government and also wages for taking care of citrus fruit plantations.

### 16 SPORTS

Children are introduced to skills they will need as adults through play and toy nets, shelters, canoes, and weapons. Hunting is a means of survival, rather than a pastime as it is among many other tribal groups in South Asia.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Andamanese have no access to modern recreation and entertainment and rely on traditional activities such as dancing, singing, and feasting for their enjoyment.

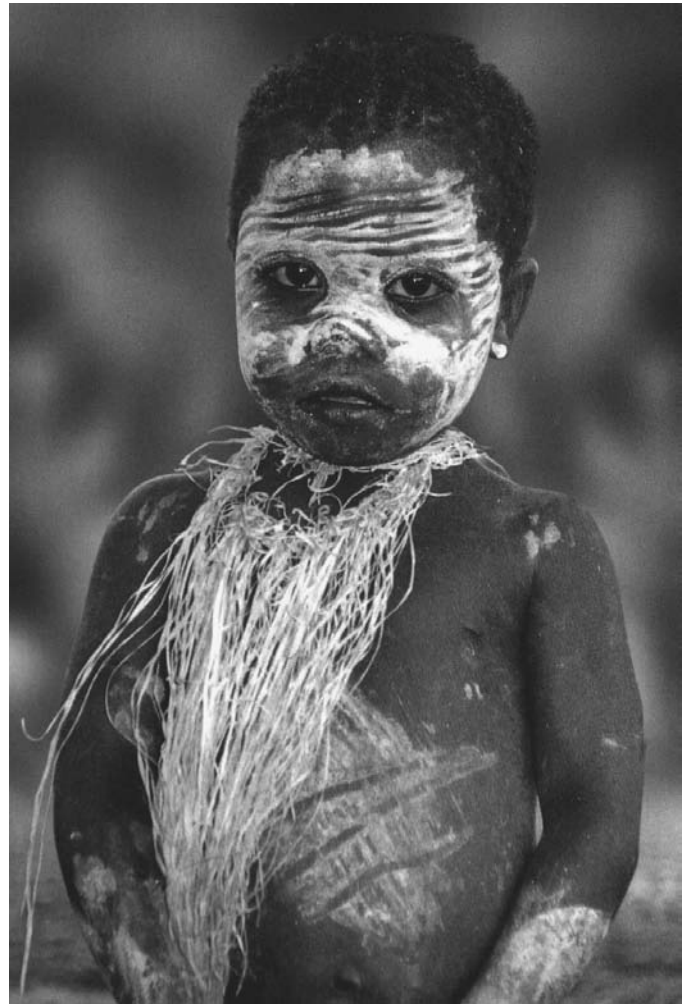
### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

As is to be expected, the graphic or visual arts are poorly represented among the Andamanese.

Although some tribes resort to tattooing, the Onge do not, painting geometrical designs on their bodies with white clay instead. This seen as a protection from evil spirits (as well as from the attention of mosquitoes). The Andamanese have acquired a knowledge of pottery. Their pots have pointed bases, so they do not stand upright and are carried in baskets. Basket-making is practiced by the Andamanese, with the Onge being particularly adept in the art. The Andamanese fashion dugout canoes from single tree trunks. The Jarawas, however, appear to have lost their ability to make seaworthy craft. The Andamanese are skilled in making bows, arrows, and other weapons.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Andamanese are unique in that they represent a contemporary example of perhaps the earliest form of society known to humans. Subsisting by hunting and gathering, and without even the means of making fire, they have survived undisturbed in their island refuge for thousands of years. Today, they face



*An Andamanese boy in Nicobar, India. (AP Images/Anthropological Survey of India, HO)*

a situation that it seems will almost inevitably lead to a loss of tribal identity. Contact with the large population of immigrants from the mainland of India and their more complex economic systems has already begun to erode the traditional Andamanese way of life. This will continue in spite of—or perhaps because of—attempts to promote development among the tribals by government and quasi-government agencies. For example, in 2002 the Supreme Court of India ordered the Andaman Trunk Road, the road that crossed the territory of the Jarawas, closed, though it still remains open. Similarly, in an effort to protect the Jarawas, tour operators have been warned that arranging “sightings” of the Jarawas also violates a Supreme Court order. But the most telling problem is simply a matter of numbers. The Andamanese population has been declining in recent decades. It may well be that the critical mass has already been passed, and that within a few generations the Andamanese people and their culture will no longer exist.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Given the nature of the Andamanese, it is not surprising that women occupy the traditional roles typically associated with primitive societies and do not participate in the “gender” advancement associated with other women’s groups in South

Asia. There are reports of sexual exploitation of Andamanese women.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# ANDHRAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** AHN-druz

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Telugu

**LOCATION:** India (Andhra Pradesh State)

**POPULATION:** About 81 million

**LANGUAGE:** Telugu

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Andhras, who are also known as Telugu, are a Telugu-speaking people of India. Ancient Sanskrit texts describe them as non-Aryans (*Anarya*). In later times, however, some Andhras claimed Brahman descent and added the suffix *-ayya* to indicate their high status. The Hindu epic literature refers to them as a primitive, indigenous tribe inhabiting wild, inaccessible forests to the south of the Aryan region. The traditional home of the Andhra people is the land between the Godavari and Kistna (Krishna) rivers in southeastern India. Today, Andhras make up the dominant element in the population of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

Over 2,000 years ago, the Andhra region formed part of Ashoka's Mauryan Empire. It was strongly Buddhist and remained so for several centuries after the decline of the Mauryas. The 1st century BC saw the emergence of the earliest in a line of Andhra dynasties that were to rule much of central India. The Andhras subsequently came under the control of most of the important states that arose in southern India. These included the Pallavas, the Eastern Chalukyas, and the Cholas. At the time the Europeans arrived in India, the northern areas of Andhra country were in the Muslim state of Golkonda, while southern areas lay in Hindu Vijayanagara. During the colonial period, the British gained control of most of the Andhra region and administered it as part of their Madras Presidency. Northwestern areas remained under the Muslim princely state of Hyderabad, which accepted British paramountcy (overall British rule in India). Princely states in British India were supposed to accede to either India or Pakistan in 1947, but the Nizam of Hyderabad—ruler of the largest Muslim princely state in India—refused to join India. Hyderabad was invaded by the Indian army and integrated into the Indian Republic in 1949. Andhra pressure for a Telugu-speaking state resulted in the creation of Andhra Pradesh in its present form in 1956.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The population of Andhra Pradesh was reported at 76.3 million people in the 2001 census. To this number should be added Telugu-speakers who live in the border areas of the surrounding states, as well as a substantial Telugu population in Tamil Nadu State. Telugu-speakers are also found among the various immigrant Indian communities in Africa, Asia (especially Malaysia), and the West.

Andhra Pradesh falls into three geographic regions: the coastal plains, mountains, and interior plateaus. Running for some 800 km (500 mi) along the Bay of Bengal, the coastal lowlands are intensively cultivated and support dense populations. The central region is formed by the alluvial deltas of the Godavari and Kistna rivers. To the west, the plains are bounded by

the Eastern Ghats, the hills that mark the edge of the Deccan Plateau. These reach an elevation of 1,680 m (5,513 ft) in the north, decreasing to around 1,000 m (3,300 ft) in the south. The Ghats are not a continuous mountain system, but are broken up by numerous rivers flowing eastwards to the ocean. West of the Ghats lie the interior plateaus of the Deccan, averaging about 500 m (1,600 ft) above sea level. This area is drier than the rest of the state (annual rainfall is less than 75 cm or 30 in) and supports only scrub vegetation. Parts of the Eastern Ghats, however, have an extensive cover of tropical deciduous forest and thorn forest. Annual rainfall in coastal areas, associated mostly with the summer monsoon, approaches 125 cm (50 in). Summers along the coast are hot, with maximum temperatures exceeding 40°C or 104°F. Minimum temperatures in winter, especially in the plateau region, can fall as low as 10°C (50°F).

### 3 LANGUAGE

The language of the Andhra people is Telugu. It is a Dravidian tongue which, along with Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam, is one of the four major languages of this linguistic family. There are several regional Telugu dialects such as Andhra (spoken in the delta), Telingana (the dialect of the northwestern region), and Rayalasima (spoken in southern areas). There are also specific dialects identified with social categories, i.e., Brahmans, non-Brahmans, and Untouchables. Literary Telugu is quite distinct from the spoken forms of the language. Telugu is written in its own script. This script is allied to Sanskrit but, because it was originally written on palm leaves, developed a cursive (i.e., rounded, flowing) form. Telugu is the official language of Andhra Pradesh, as well as being one of the regional languages officially recognized by the Indian constitution.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Hero worship is a significant element in Andhra culture and folklore. Andhra warriors who died on the battlefield defending their king, or who sacrificed their lives for great or pious causes, were deified and worshiped by the common people. Stone pillars or *lingams* (phallic symbols) commemorate their deeds. These memorials or “hero stones,” called *Viragallulu* in the Telugu language, are found all over Andhra country. Hero worship has become something of a cult in Andhra Pradesh and is observed by annual rituals in various parts of the region. The *Katamaraju Kathala*, one of the oldest ballads in Telugu, celebrates the heroic exploits of the 12th-century warrior, Katamaraju.

### 5 RELIGION

Andhras are mostly Hindu by religion. They accept the fundamental philosophy of Hinduism, from the concept of *dharma* (right conduct) and its related beliefs, to ideas of ritual pollution, concepts of sin (*pap*) and merit (*punya*), and the caste system. The Brahman castes, as everywhere in Hindu society, have the highest social status, and Brahmans serve as priests in temples dedicated to the gods of the Hindu scriptures. Andhras worship Shiva, Vishnu, Hanuman, and other Hindu deities. At the popular level, however, Andhra religion is distinctly South Indian in character. Worship of *ammās* or village goddesses is as important as that of the major gods of Hinduism. Durgamma presides over the welfare of the village, Maisamma protects the village boundaries, and Bamma is



a goddess of fertility whose anger causes sterility in women. These deities play a much more immediate role in daily life and are to be respected and feared. They are all forms of the great Mother Goddess, and their rites invariably require blood sacrifices. The lesser deities often have priests drawn from the lower castes, and low castes may use their own priests rather than Brahmans. Ancestor spirits have to be appeased, and ghosts and evil spirits cause trouble for the living. Ritual specialists are called on to deal with spirits, and also to protect against sorcery and witchcraft.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Important events on the Andhra festival calendar include Ugadi (the Telugu New Year's Day), Shivaratri (honoring Shiva), and Chauti (Ganesha's birthday). This is in addition to celebrations such as Holi, Dasahara, and Divali. Different castes also have their own caste festivals. For example, Rath Saptami is observed only by Brahmans and is an occasion for the worship of the Sun. In the northwestern Telingana region, the annual worship of Pochamma, the goddess of smallpox, is an important village festival. As described by Dube (1955) in a village near Hyderabad, the day before the festival the village drummers go around the village announcing the plans for the festival. Members of the potter caste clean the shrines of the village goddesses, and those of the washerman caste paint them with whitewash. Village youths construct small leaf sheds in front of the shrines, and women of the sweeper caste smear the ground



around the booths with red earth. On the day of the festival, every household prepares rice in a new, decorated earthenware pot called *bonam*. The Madigas, the Untouchable caste that act as village drummers, worship and perform sacrifices at their own Pochamma shrine, then return to participate in the main ceremony. They lead the village in procession to the Pochamma shrine, where a member of the potter caste (Kumari) officiates as priest at the ceremony. Every family, in strict order of caste and standing within the caste, offers some rice to the goddess. Goats, sheep, and fowl are sacrificed at the shrine. Following the ceremony, families return to their houses where they feast on the rice and meat. Even Muslims, though they do not participate in the worship, take part in the ceremony and offer sacrifices. They, just like the Hindus, feel the need to propitiate the goddess Pochamma.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Although the specifics of life-cycle rituals vary among castes, in outline they follow the forms set out by the Hindu texts. On the birth of a child, the mother and other family members are considered impure. Rituals are performed to remove this impurity, which last up to 30 days for the mother. In villages, women from the barber caste act as midwives for the “clean” Hindu castes. A Brahman may be consulted to cast the infant’s horoscope. The name-giving ceremony is held within three to four weeks, with the occasion marked by a feast for family and friends. Infants are raised by the women in the household, though young children are often left in the care of older siblings. As they grow up, children accompany their parents in their daily tasks and begin to learn their household duties and caste occupation at an early age. Higher castes often perform the sacred thread ceremony for males before puberty is reached. A girl’s first menstruation is accompanied by elaborate rituals, including a period of seclusion, worship of household gods, and a gathering of village women for singing and dancing.

The higher Hindu castes usually cremate their dead, except in the case of death from snakebite and smallpox. Children are normally buried, and burial is also common among low-caste and Untouchable groups. The corpse is bathed, dressed, and carried to the cremation ground or graveyard on a bier. On the third day after death, the first of several purifying rituals takes place. This involves cleansing the house, washing all the linens, and discarding all earthen pots used for cooking or storing water. On the eleventh or thirteenth day, rites for removing the impurity of family members are performed. This includes shaving the head and face if the deceased were one’s father or mother. Food and water are offered to the soul of the deceased, and a feast is given. The higher castes collect bones and ashes from the funeral pyre and immerse them in a holy river such as the Godavari. In exceptional cases, they are taken to the sacred Ganges in North India.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Andhras tend to be hypercritical and very sensitive in their interpersonal relations, especially in rural areas. There is a great tradition for argument that can easily progress to noisy quarrels or confrontations. There is a pervasive attitude of fault-finding, and people do not easily let pass the opportunity to criticize their neighbors. However, in situations that demand

generosity and good neighborliness, Andhras are quick to rise to the occasion.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In northern Andhra Pradesh, villages are usually linear in form, with occasional isolated outlying hamlets. Settlements in the southern areas of the state can be either linear or square, but they also may have tributary hamlets. House types and creature comforts vary according to the economic circumstances of the owner. The average cultivator in a village in Telangana typically has a square house built around an internal courtyard. The walls are made of stone, the floor is made of mud, and the roof is tiled. There are two or three rooms, used for living, sleeping, and housing livestock. There is invariably one room used for the family shrine, where family valuables are also kept. The doors are often carved, and designs are painted on the walls. Most houses lack latrines, the inhabitants using the fields for their natural functions. There may be a backyard used for growing vegetables and keeping chickens. Furnishings are sparse and may consist of a few bedsteads, wooden stools, and a crude chair or two. Kitchen utensils, except for metal plates for eating, are usually of earthenware and are made by the village potters. In cities, houses are more substantial, have modern conveniences such as running water, and are better furnished.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Andhras must marry within their caste or subcaste. These endogamous social units are divided into exogamous clans (*gotram*), each of which may be further subdivided into lineages (*vansham*). One must marry outside one’s own clan. And, as different clans have lineages of the same name, one has to make sure to marry outside one’s own lineage. (Members of the same lineage, even though of different clans, are regarded as brother and sister. A sexual union between members of the same lineage is viewed as incestuous.) Marriages are arranged, and cross-cousin marriage is common. The details of marriage practice vary according to caste, but in outline they follow normal Hindu practices. Newlyweds usually move into the household of the groom’s father. The extended family structure is regarded as ideal, although the nuclear family is also found.

Women occupy a subordinate role in Andhra society, being responsible primarily for rearing children and household chores. Among the cultivating castes, women also engage in agricultural activities. Divorce and widow remarriage are permitted by lower castes, though not by Brahmans and other high castes. Property is equally divided among sons.

## 11 CLOTHING

Male clothing consists of the Indian loincloth, or *dhoti*, tied in a distinctive Andhra manner and worn with a long *kurta* that comes down to the knees. In many rural areas, the material used is a slightly brownish, village-made *khadi* (handspun cloth). A cloth with a colored border is also thrown around the shoulders. Villagers commonly wear a turban. Women favor the *sari* and a bodice, the latter often brightly colored and embroidered. Saris are traditionally dark blue, parrot green, red, or purple in color. Young people, especially in urban areas, are turning to synthetic fabrics and ready-made, Western-style clothes. The sari is the preferred formal wear of women.



Andhra Pradesh folk artists get ready to perform during the India International Trade Fair in New Delhi, India.  
(AP Images/Manish Swarup)

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

The basic diet of the Andhras consists of rice, millets, pulses, and vegetables. Nonvegetarians who can afford it eat meat or fish. All Hindus avoid beef (although Untouchable castes eat carrion meat), and Brahmans and other high castes abstain from any kind of meat, fish, or eggs. Economic standing also influences the diet of individuals. The relatively well-to-do eat three meals a day. A typical meal would be rice or *khichri* (rice cooked with lentils and spices) or *paratha* (an unleavened bread made from wheat flour and fried in oil); this would be taken with a meat or vegetable (e.g., eggplant or okra) curry, hot pickles, and tea. Coffee is a popular drink in coastal areas. Savories are preferred to sweets. Betel leaves, twisted into rolls and filled with nuts, are served after a meal and considered a delicacy. In a poor household, a meal might consist of millet bread, eaten with boiled vegetables, chili powder, and salt. Poorer-quality rice would be eaten, and meat would only rarely be consumed. As is common throughout South Asia, men dine first and the women eat only after the men have finished. Children are served as soon as the food is ready.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Literacy in Andhra Pradesh is relatively low. Recent data are not available, but the 1981 census records a literacy rate of only

29.72% for the state. Even though this figure includes children and can be expected to have risen over the last few years, it still compares unfavorably with many Indian states. Variations in literacy rates range from 14.10% among women in rural areas to a high of 61.05% for urban males. Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh's largest city and the state capital, is an important center of learning with several universities and institutions of higher education.

## <sup>14</sup> CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Andhra people have made major contributions to India's culture in the areas of art, architecture, literature, music, and dance. The early Andhra rulers were great builders and patrons of religion and the arts. From the 1st century BC on, they developed a style of architecture that led to the creation of some of the greatest Buddhist monuments of Central India. The *stupa* (a monument built to hold a relic of Buddha) at Sanchi, and the ruins at Amaravati and other sites, attest to the achievements of the Andhras. Many critics see sculptures of the mature Andhra period (c. 3rd century AD) as among the finest in India. Some of the paintings of the famous Buddhist caves at Ajanta are ascribed to Andhra artists.

The Andhras developed a style of classical dance known as *kuchipudi*. This is a dance-drama, presenting religious themes,

that is performed by certain Brahman families and passed down from generation to generation. The Andhra region and its people have contributed greatly to the development of South Indian classical music. South Indian compositions are mostly written in Telugu because of the smooth, rich, flowing sound of the language. Telugu literature dates to the 11th century AD. Major contributions were made by Shaiva (followers of Shiva) poets of the 13th century. However, Telugu literature reached its greatest heights under the patronage of the Vijayanagara kings around the 16th century.

### 15 WORK

Over three-quarters (76.75%) of Andhras live in rural areas, making their living mostly from agriculture. Rice is the dominant food grain. Sugarcane, tobacco, and cotton are grown as cash crops, in addition to chilies, oilseeds, and pulses. Periodic village markets throughout the region afford the opportunity for selling and trading one's goods.

Once basically agricultural in nature, Andhra Pradesh has emerged as one of the most highly industrialized states in India. Industries such as aeronautics, light engineering, chemicals, and textiles are found in the Hyderabad and Guntur-Vijayawada areas. As well as being an important port, Visakhapatnam has India's largest shipbuilding yard.

### 16 SPORTS

Young girls play with dolls, dressing them and celebrating doll marriages. Boys play ballgames and indulge in the usual pastimes of tag, hide-and-seek, and similar children's games. Playing with dice is common among men and women, and traditional amusements such as cockfighting and shadow plays are popular in rural areas. Modern sports such as cricket, soccer, and field hockey are played in educational institutions across the state.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Folk culture predominates in rural areas. Wandering entertainers put on puppet shows for the amusement of villagers. Professional ballad singers recount the exploits of past heroes, or tell stories from mythology. Modern media such as the radio have been used to make urban dwellers aware of folk traditions, as well as to expose rural people to Andhra's classical heritage. Andhra Pradesh has its own movie industry, making films in the Telugu language. The late N. T. Rama Rao, a popular movie idol who starred in over 300 Telugu films, rose to become chief minister of Andhra Pradesh.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Andhra has a variety of traditional handicrafts. It is known for its wooden toys, which are carved and skillfully decorated. The subjects include birds, animals, human beings, gods and goddesses, and legendary beings from Hindu mythology. Other crafts include lacquer ware, hand-woven carpets, hand printed textiles, and tie-dyed fabrics. Bidri ware (silver inlay on metal), filigree silver work, embroidery, painting on ivory, basketry, and lace work are also products of the region. The making of leather puppets was developed in the 16th century under the Vijayanagara rulers.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

With a population exceeding that of many of the larger European nations, Andhras are subject to the full range of economic and social problems that afflict India in the late 20th century. In contrast to the emerging middle classes, rural populations are frequently faced with excessive population growth, poverty, indebtedness, illiteracy, and lack of social infrastructure. Consumption of *arrack* or country liquor has been such a problem that pressure from women in recent years has led to the imposition of prohibition in the state. Economic problems are worsened by the destructive cyclonic storms (the last occurred in 1996) that sweep in from the Bay of Bengal. Currently, Andhra Pradesh State is involved in a longstanding dispute with Karnataka over the use of the waters of the Kistna River. Sporadic outbreaks of crime and violence are associated with the Peoples War Group (PWG), a quasi-political Maoist leftist organization that assassinates local government officials and political leaders as "class enemies" and "caste oppressors." Through all of this, however, the Andhras retain a very evident pride in being Andhra and have a strong sense of identity with Telugu culture.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Telegu women face the same gender issues as other women in South Asia—arranged marriages, child marriage, complaints over dowries and dowry deaths. In April 2008, SIFF (Save Indian Family Foundation) filed a memorandum with the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh complaining about the inadequacies of IPC (Indian Penal Code) Section 498A and the Dowry Prohibition Act by which people have been arrested without the complainant's charges having been investigated by police and demanding that laws (e.g. adultery laws, laws against rape and sexual harassment, domestic violence laws, divorce laws, child maintenance laws and child custody laws) should be gender neutral. The memorandum claims that innocent women have been incarcerated and even committed suicide because of the arrests made under these laws.

Despite the fact that Andhra Pradesh's performance in schooling of girls is better than many other Indian states, gender bias in schooling for girls still persists in the state.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# ANGLO AUSTRALIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** AN-glo aw-STRAY-lee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Australia

**POPULATION:** 19.3 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (majority); Islam; Buddhism; Judaism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Australia is a relatively young country in the world community. Yet it is also a very ancient land, where for over 40,000 years the Aboriginal people had lived in harmony with their environment. When England first settled Australia in 1788, however, and made it a penal colony for its overcrowded prison population, all that was to change.

Australia was rich in mineral wealth and became a leading world producer of wool and wheat. But links with Britain kept it isolated until World War II, after which it turned more and more towards the United States. Today, Australia is becoming a multicultural society that is seeking to establish itself as a leading nation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, Australia has had a democratic form of government in which individual freedom has been prized above all else. It is considered a safe, peaceful country that has never experienced internal war. Its standard of living is high and the country has some of the world's most uniquely beautiful environments. Consequently, one of its fastest-growing industries today is tourism.

Australia's identity is a result of its English and European past and its multicultural (i.e., a European and Asian mix of cultures) present. In a speech in Indonesia in 1992, the Australian prime minister Paul Keating said that Australia's identity in the 1990s was changing "due to the multi-cultural reality of our society, and the final passing of . . . our colonial past."

Australia today is a foremost member of APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, and looks to forge free trade agreements with China and ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Australia is both a continent and an island, situated in the southern hemisphere between the Pacific and Indian oceans. It measures about the same in area as the United States (excluding Alaska), yet it has a total population of only about 21 million people. Of those 21 million people, about 80% live in just 10 cities, all by the sea. By far the largest of these are Sydney and Melbourne. Approximately 92% of the population (about 19.3 million) is of European descent. In the 2006 Australian Census, about 25% of Australians specifically listed themselves as having English ancestry while another 29% listed themselves simply as Australian.

Most of the country is empty of people. In fact, Australia has one of the lowest population densities in the world. The state of Western Australia, for example, is three times the size of the US state of Texas, yet has only about 1.5 million people. The main reason for the low population density is that Australia is an extremely dry continent—two-thirds of the continent is desert.

Apart from the flat desert lands, however, the country's geography is quite varied. It includes large areas of tropical rain forests in the northeast, a long mountain range running along the eastern coast (the Great Dividing Range), snowfields in the southeast, and flat tablelands in the west.

The climate varies tremendously, from the tropics in the north with their "wet" and "dry" seasons to the much colder climates of Tasmania.

Because the country was first settled by England in 1788, most Australians were of English origin and, until 1950, about 90% of Australians were born there. Some 9% were immigrants from Britain. However, after World War II, the country took in more than 5 million immigrants from Europe and, in the post-Vietnam-War years, Australia was a major recipient of refugees from Indochina. The population in the early 21st century has become more international.

Immigration dropped dramatically in the late 1990s. Almost all immigrants have chosen to live in the ever-growing cities and have not populated the sparse country areas as was hoped.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language of Australia is English, brought by the first English settlers. However, the accent is far more nasal and less clipped than the British English accent.

Since World War II, the culture of the United States has had a large influence on Australia, so that Australians are using many American expressions introduced by movies and television shows. However, a typical Australian greeting is still "G'day," and men routinely call each other "mate." To congratulate someone, Australians say, "Goodonya" ("Good on you"), and to reassure someone, they say, "She'll be right, mate." And, of course, there is what is known as the Great Australian Adjective—"bloody"—before almost everything, as in, "Oh bloody hell! I'm going to be bloody late for school again!"

## 4 FOLKLORE

Australia is an ancient land and for more than 40,000 years its Aboriginal people had lived there undisturbed, until the Europeans came over. Over time, a complex and rich Aboriginal mythology has evolved and has been passed down from generation to generation. This mythology is known as the Dreamtime Legends—the Dreamtime being the mystical time during which the Aborigines' ancestors established their world. These myths from ancient times are accepted as a record of absolute truth, and dominate the cultural life of the people.

There are many myths of the Dreamtime. One tells how the sun was made: Long ago in Dreamtime there was no sun, and the people had to search for food in the dim light of the moon. One day, an emu and a crane started quarreling. In a rage, the crane ran to the emu's nest and snatched one of its huge eggs. She flung the egg high into the sky, where it shattered and the yolk burst into flames, causing such a huge fire that its light revealed for the first time the beauty of the world below. When the spirits up in the sky saw this great beauty, they decided that the earth inhabitants should have this light each day. So, every night, the sky-people collected a pile of dry wood, ready to be set afire as soon as the morning star appeared. But a problem arose—if the day was cloudy, the star could not be seen and no one lit the fire. So the sky people asked the Kookaburra, who had a loud, braying laugh, to call them every morning. When



the bird's laugh was first heard, the fire in the sky was lit but threw out little heat or light. By noon, when all the wood was burning, the heat was more intense. Later, the fire slowly died down until the sun had set.

It is a strict rule of the Aboriginal tribes that nobody may imitate the Kookaburra's call, because that could offend the bird and he could remain silent. Then darkness would again descend upon the earth and its inhabitants.

There are some folklore tales regarding the early European settlers. Many stories have been inspired by the figure of William Buckley, an English convict sent to Australia who escaped from prison and lived among the Aboriginals. There are legends and folk songs about "bushrangers," escaped convicts that were wild enough to be unwilling or unable to live in mainstream communities. Ned Kelly represents one such popular folk hero. Some stories about gold diggers from the mid-1800s have survived as folk lore, painting these rugged men, who generally showed disdain for authority, as heroes of the land. Other folk tales relate to the drovers and shearers (cattle and sheep herders) of early European settlers. Romanticized tales of life in the bush or outback continue to be popular in modern culture.

## 5 RELIGION

Australia is predominantly a Christian country. Most Anglo-Australians are members of the Anglican Church of Aus-

tralia, accounting for 19% of the total population in the 2006 Australian Census. The Roman Catholic Church, however, is the largest denomination in the country with about 25% of the population claiming membership. The Uniting Church in Australia was established in 1977 through the union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Uniting Church, which embraces doctrines and confessions from all three of its founding traditions, was the third largest single denomination in the country in 2006 with a membership of about 1.1 million. About 18% of the total population claimed no religion in the 2006 Census.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Apart from those holidays celebrated throughout the Christian world, such as Christmas and Easter, Australia celebrates some of its own.

ANZAC Day on April 25 each year is set aside to honor Australians who died in all wars. ANZAC stands for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Veterans of the armed forces march through the streets of Australian cities and towns in the morning and share drinks and memories in the afternoon. It is a solemn and patriotic day when the country remembers its war heroes.

Australia Day is celebrated on January 26, commemorating the day in 1788 when the English soldiers raised their flag and declared Australia a new colony. Today it is celebrated with street fairs, parties, picnics, and fireworks. It coincides with the last days of the long summer vacation from school and is a fun time for families. Backyard barbecues are very traditional on this day—followed by time on the beach or in the pool.

Boxing Day (December 26) is also a public holiday in Australia. It is known as a traditional day to spend at the beach and in practical terms it makes for a longer Christmas break.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

At age five, children begin kindergarten at their local state or private primary school, which they attend through the sixth grade. There is usually a ceremony celebrating the child's graduation from primary to secondary school, consisting of a ceremony at the school with a guest speaker. There is usually a family celebration as well. The child then enters the high school (grades 7 to 10), followed by senior school (grades 11 and 12), and graduates from senior school at about age 18.

When students are in the twelfth grade they attend a senior school dance called the Formal. This is like the American tradition of prom night, when students hire limousines to attend a formal function sponsored by their school, usually held at some reasonably glamorous location. Just as in the US, the students place much emphasis on having the "right" clothes and the "right" date.

The 18th birthday party is a large, peer-group party celebrating entry into the adult world. At age 18 the young adult is given all legal rights. The 21st birthday celebration, a much more traditional family-and-friend celebration party, often is held in a hotel or restaurant. Gifts are traditionally given and this celebration often marks the time the young person leaves home to live independently.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Men shake hands when introduced to each other or to a woman. Women often greet other women with a kiss on the cheek.

Pub life—the sharing of drinks with friends at a hotel bar—plays a large role in most Australians' social lives. The “shout” system is used—i.e., one person in a small circle of friends buys a drink for themselves and for everyone else in the circle. When it comes time for the next round, another person in the circle does the same—and so on, until each person has “shouted a round” of drinks for their group.

When invited to dinner, guests are usually asked to come at “7:30 for 8:30” which means the guests should arrive somewhere between 7:30 and 8:30 pm for pre-dinner drinks, with dinner to be served at 8:30.

Young people in Australia usually begin dating around age 14 or 15 and make their own choices of friends and partners in life. They tend to marry in their mid-20s.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

At the 2006 Australian Census, an estimated 33% of all dwellings were owner-occupied, with an additional 32% of dwellings being purchased by the occupant, either through a loan or rent-to-own plan. The most popular home is the freestanding brick house with a red tiled roof, a front lawn, and a back garden. Most people want to own a home and usually rent until they can afford one. There is a trend toward larger houses and prices of houses vary according to the desirability of the location. However, housing prices in all cities have increased steadily over the years. The average household size was 2.6 persons in 2006.

Australia does not have the extremes of wealth and poverty that the US does, and therefore does not have extravagant mansions or slum dwellings. Instead, homes tend to be more like those found in a typical American middle-class suburban dwelling. Young people in cities live in flats (apartments) or townhouses close to the inner city, where there is a great deal of night-life. Cities are usually busy centers of life at night, with restaurants, bars, theaters, and activities at the harbor.

Australia has a universal public health system called Medicare, under which a broad range of medical and hospital services are available either for free or with substantial government rebates. Private health care providers are free to determine their own fees and to choose what rebateable services they will provide. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme pays for some physician services as well as most prescription medications. The 2006 National Health Survey reported that about 50% of the population aged 15 years and older had private health insurance.

Life expectancy for Australians at birth is about 80 years (2008); 77.8 years for men and 83.7 years for women. A majority of Australians are considered to be in very good or excellent health, according to a 2005 National Health Survey. Excessive weight was the most common health problem in the survey, with about 62% of men and 45% of women being in the category of overweight or obese.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family life in Australia is changing, as the nuclear family unit of two married parents and two children with the father in the workforce and the mother at home is becoming a thing of the past. In 2006 only 49.6% of Australians aged 15 and old-



*A boy and his father celebrating Australia Day.  
(© Sean Davey/Corbis)*

er were married; representing a decrease from 51.4% in 2001. About 33.2% of the population had never married and 11.3% were separated or divorced. About 5.9% of the population was widowed. In 2005 the marriage rate was listed as about 5.4 marriages for every 1,000 people. This figure represents a downward trend in the number of marriages. In 1986, for example, the marriage rate was at about 7.2 marriages per 1,000 people. It was estimated that about 33% of all marriages entered into in 2000–2002 would end in divorce within about 14 to 16 years. In 2005 the median age for marriage was 30 years old for men and 28 years old for women. The number of couples choosing to cohabitate without a registered marriage has been increasing. In 2006 about 7.7% of the population aged 15 years and over were in such a de facto marriage. This figure represents an increase from 5.3% in 1996 and 6.4% in 2001. The decrease in the number of marriages and increase in the number of divorces translates into a larger number of children being raised in single-parent households, primarily with the mother as head of household.

Australian families have seen an increase in the number of adult children who remain living with their parents after leaving secondary school or university. This is due in part to unem-



*Bindi Irwin poses with a snake during a promotional tour for her show, "Bindi the Jungle Girl," at the Australia Zoo, Beerwah, Australia. (Bradley Kanaris/Getty Images)*

ployment, as some new graduates have a difficult time getting a job. However, the dreams of most young people remain the same as those their parents had at that age—to travel “overseas” (which means England, then Europe) usually for about a year, before returning and settling down.

### 11 CLOTHING

Australia’s temperatures are generally far milder than those found in the US. Australians favor easy-to-wear, light clothing in the summer. To stay cool, many Australians wear long socks and long tailored shorts instead of slacks. This is acceptable apparel even in the workplace. Clothing styles are a mixture of European and American fashions. People tend to dress stylishly in the city and the office but wear jeans and sneakers on the weekends.

All school children wear uniforms. School caps are now almost compulsory. These are usually “legionnaire”-style cloth caps with a flap covering the back of the neck for protection from the sun. All children also wear sunscreen all year round, as Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. In fact, having a suntan is regarded as a sign of foolishness. Most people are very careful to protect their skin from the fierce Australian sun.

### 12 FOOD

Good seafood is abundant along Australia’s coastline, and is very popular. Australians also eat a lot of meat—especially beef or lamb roasts.

The tropical north of Australia offers wonderful fruits and vegetables and there is also an excellent local wine industry with vineyards in the south of the country. Typically, a family would have cereal and toast or eggs and bacon for breakfast; sandwiches, salad, and fruit for lunch; and either meat or seafood with vegetables and dessert for the main meal in the evening, around 7:30 pm.

The influx of European and Asian immigrants over the past 20 to 30 years has led Australians to enjoy foods from all cultures, and Australian families now incorporate Chinese, Thai, or Indian foods into their weekly meal planning. European foods, particularly Greek and Italian, have always been favorites.

One food remains an Australian tradition—a black spread called Vegemite. This is made from yeast extract plus salt and is spread on toast and butter for breakfast or eaten in sandwiches for lunch—all children are brought up eating it from babyhood. The other famous Aussie meal is meat pie. Approximately 260 million meat pies are eaten by Australians every year. Favorite desserts include the Australian Pavlova—a cake-sized soft meringue filled with fruits and cream—and a small treat called Lamingtons, which are sponge cake cubes coated with chocolate and grated coconut.

### 13 EDUCATION

Education is compulsory for students aged 6 to 15. School children enter kindergarten at about age five or six. Primary school covers grades 1 to 6. High school consists of middle school (grades 7 to 10) and senior school (grades 11 and 12). At the end of the twelfth grade, when students are about 18 years old, the student takes a public exam called the Higher School Certificate. From this exam alone the student is ranked against others in the country and his or her grade determines which university, if any, the student may enter and which course of study to follow. If the student does not plan to enter a university, he or she needs the exam to enter any other higher education institution or to show a prospective employer. Therefore, this is a very stressful exam for the student.

University entrance is extremely competitive. Fees are very low by US standards, though up until the 1980s all university courses were free. Nearly all universities are government-run. In 2003 it was estimated that nearly 74% of the adult population was enrolled in some type of higher education program. At the university level, students enter their chosen field of study immediately, without needing to complete an undergraduate degree first. Students often live in large shared houses with other students around the universities, but many also continue to live at home. Apart from the universities, there are many institutions of adult education and career training, mostly government-run, with minimal fees, where students can study for other careers.

The literacy rate among Australians is about 99%.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Australia has a growing film industry that is fast gaining international respect. In the 1980s and 1990s it produced such hits as *Babe*, *Muriel’s Wedding*, *Mad Max*, *The Piano*, and *Crocodile*

*Dundee*. Most celebrities must travel to Hollywood, however, to gain worldwide fame—e.g., Errol Flynn, Paul Hogan, Olivia Newton-John, Mel Gibson, and Nicole Kidman. Australian television shows that have been exported and well-received in the UK and the US include *The Crocodile Hunter*, *The Wiggles*, and *A Country Paradise*.

Sydney's Opera House is world-famous, designed by the Danish architect Utzen to resemble sails on the ocean. It houses the Australian Opera Company, theaters, concert halls, and restaurants, and attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists each year.

The country has wonderful wildlife and many natural attractions. The Great Barrier Reef is one of these—a world heritage coral reef, the longest and most complex living system in the world. Farther inland is the beautiful Kakadu National Park. This park has 275 bird species, and many ancient examples of Aboriginal folk art, and is classified by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a world heritage area, as are Cradle Mountain in Tasmania and Shark Bay in Perth. Also classified as a world heritage area is Ayers Rock—a giant red rock sacred to the Aborigines that stands majestically in the Olgas in the middle of the desert.

Famous Anglo-Australian writers include Patrick White, the author of *The Eye of the Storm* and winner of the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, and Germaine Greer, known for her feminist writings and her career in journalism. The composers Percy Grainger and Arthur Benjamin were both born in Australia.

## 15 WORK

Australians work in a wide variety of professional fields and trade occupations. In 2005 about 76% of the population aged 15 to 64 was employed. About 75% of the work force is employed in service-related professions and occupations, 21% in industry, and about 4% in agriculture. The unemployment rate in 2007 was estimated as 4.4%. The standard minimum wage in 2005 was at about us\$362.35 per week. Full-time workers usually receive four weeks annual vacation and belong to a superannuation scheme which will give them income when they retire. The working week is Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Workers' rights are protected by numerous laws, and Australia has an attractive union system.

## 16 SPORTS

Australians love sports—both playing and watching them on television. The all-time favorite is football. Australians follow three different types, depending on which part of the country they come from: The Rugby League, played in N.S.W., Queensland, and Canberra; Australian Rules, played in Victoria, Southern Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania; and Rugby Union, played in N.S.W. and Queensland (also played internationally, and usually the football game played by schoolboys, along with soccer).

In summer, Australians enjoy cricket. Within Australia, the states play each other to see who will win that year's Sheffield's Shield; teams also play internationally. Australia plays countries such as Britain and the West Indies to see who will win the Ashes.

Other popular sports include swimming, tennis, surfing, and sailing. However, the fastest growing new sport in Australia today is baseball.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the cities, many forms of entertainment are offered. Theaters, movies, bars, and discos, plus every type of restaurant imaginable, are common. Australians enjoy a pub life similar to that found in England. But mostly they enjoy the ocean. On summer weekends the beaches are packed with surfers, and the harbors are full of boats of all types. Australians love to spend weekends outdoors near the water.

During their vacations, Australians travel within the country, usually by car, exploring the tourist attractions and the "Outback," as the dry, flat inland areas are called. When vacationing outside the country, favorite places are Bali, Fiji, and New Zealand.

Sunday afternoon barbecues at home are very popular. Traditionally, friends arrive around 2:00 pm for a barbecue lunch. The host cooks steaks, sausages, or seafood on a grill and friends talk, eat, and drink into the evening. Entertainment in Australia is mostly relaxed and informal.

Many Australians enjoy gambling, especially on horse-racing. This culminates in an event that takes place on the first Tuesday of November each year, at exactly 3:00 pm—the running of the Melbourne Cup. This event brings the country to a standstill—it is even broadcast live over loudspeakers in most offices. Everyone has a small bet on the outcome—usually "sweeps" are run among friends and at offices.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Australian hobbies are very similar to those pursued by people in the US and just as varied. There is a rich culture of Aboriginal art and wood carvings in Australia—often using various hues of clay color. Aboriginal rock paintings and carvings are found in many of the states' National Parks and reserves.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As of 2008 the question of when and how Australia might become a republic was a source of political and social debate. Australia is still part of the British Commonwealth, with the queen of England serving as the official head of state. However, many citizens and politicians have argued that the government should reorganize into a republic with a president taking over the roles currently held by the queen and a governor-general. Concerns arise as to how power will be apportioned within the new style of government. These issues have yet to be decided.

Immigration is a further concern. Many people feel that Australia cannot support more people, because of the nature of the land. Others are concerned that the country is becoming multicultural too fast. The country has maintained a strict policy on unauthorized arrivals. Asylum seekers are held in detention centers, which have been criticized at home and abroad, until their cases are heard. However, in February 2008 Australia ended its policy of sending asylum seekers into detention on small Pacific islands, with the last refugees leaving Nauru.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

An increase in the rate of divorces and decrease in the number of marriages has caused an increase in the number of single-parent households. Most single-parent households are headed by women. In 2006 approximately 87% of all single-parent households with children under the age of 15 years were head-



ed by mothers. Education and employment are issues of concern for single parents, both male and female. In 2006 about 39% of all single parents had left school before year 12. About 19% of all single mothers were employed full-time in 2006, compared to about 24% of married mothers. Approximately 32% of single-mothers worked part-time, compared to 39% of married mothers. Nearly 40% of all single mothers were unemployed and seeking employment. About 48% of single fathers worked full-time while 15% worked part-time and 10% were unemployed. About 85% of married fathers worked full-time while 6% worked part-time and 2% were unemployed. It has been estimated that 51% of all single-parents do not receive weekly income from child support or maintenance payments.

While women can and do participate in a wide variety of profession, women in the workforce tend to earn less money than men in similar employment positions. In 2007 it was estimated that women's full-time average weekly earnings were about 83.6% of those of men. Women can and do participate at all levels of government.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# ANGLO INDIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** AN-glo IN-dee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Domiciled Europeans

**LOCATION:** India

**POPULATION:** 100,000–125,000

**LANGUAGE:** English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholic, Church of England [Anglican], other Protestant sects)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Goans; Vol 4: People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

“Anglo Indian” has two meanings, one essentially historical and one in use today. In the past, the term described Europeans (usually British) who had made India their permanent home and lived there for generations. They were sometimes known as Domiciled Europeans. In its modern usage, however, Anglo Indian refers to people of mixed European and Indian ancestry. This sense of the word received official government recognition in India in 1911. Prior to that, various designations such as “Eurasian” or “Indo-Briton,” or more derogatory terms such as “half-caste” or “mixed-breed,” were used to describe this population.

The Anglo Indian community has existed in India for almost 500 years. Its beginnings go back to AD 1498 when Vasco da Gama established a Portuguese colony on the Malabar coast of southwestern India. The Portuguese established a formal policy of encouraging Portuguese men to marry Indian women. This was seen as a way of spreading the Christian faith, as the women were required to be baptized before the marriage was approved by the authorities. During the 17th and 18th centuries, other Europeans established themselves in India. However, the Dutch presence was temporary and the French were defeated by the British, so few people today can claim a Dutch or French ancestry. The British East India Company, however, followed policies that encouraged mixed marriages and sexual unions between British men and Indian women. In the early 1700s, Anglo Indians in India outnumbered overseas British. Anglo Indians were in a favored position, filling many military and commercial posts as British interests in India expanded. At the same time, the British East India Company had a supply of trained recruits who were “Western” in their outlook who could be employed in the Company's service.

This situation changed following 1785. Fears that the Anglo Indians were becoming too powerful led the East India Company to prohibit their employment and dismiss those already working with the company. The next 50 years was a period of economic hardship for Anglo Indians, who had few alternate sources of employment. It also saw the alienation of the Anglo Indian community from the British, and the emergence of a sense of communal identity within the group. Anglo Indian fortunes changed again when the East India Company's policy of nonemployment was reversed after 1833. This was also the time when the railroad and telegraph were introduced into India, and Anglo Indians were closely involved in the construction and operation of these systems. As might be expected, the Anglo Indian community supported the British during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, and Anglo Indian military leaders played a prominent role in this conflict.

During the early decades of the 20th century, Anglo Indians in India were faced with growing economic and political pressures. A rising tide of Indian nationalism saw government reforms open occupations formerly reserved for Anglo Indians to Indians. The political concerns of the Anglo Indian community were largely ignored by the British government in England as it grappled with the problems of larger minorities such as the Muslims. As independence for India approached in 1947, many Anglo Indians, especially the more affluent and better educated, emigrated rather than remain in the country. Even though Anglo Indians fought for and received certain rights and special political representation in the Constitution of the newly independent India, the community remains a small and marginal one in the context of modern India.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Reliable data concerning the size of the Anglo Indian population in India today are unavailable. Leaders of the community suggest the population numbers 250,000 people, but a more realistic estimate is between 100,000 and 125,000.

The Anglo Indian community is essentially urban in nature, and this is clearly seen in its modern distribution in India today. The largest concentration of Anglo Indians is found in Calcutta, with sizable communities living in Madras, Bombay, Bangalore, and the Delhi area. In addition, there are small Anglo Indian communities in towns around the country, such as Ajmer, Jhansi, and Bilaspur, that are important centers on India's rail system. In many of these towns, Anglo Indians lived in "railway colonies." These were planned settlements, with housing constructed specifically for employees of the railways. They created de facto Anglo Indian neighborhoods which set the community apart from the surrounding population. With the decline in numbers of Anglo Indians employed by the railways since independence, this informal segregation is less noticeable today.

One group in India that is viewed as belonging to the Anglo Indian community by some, and not by others, is the Goans. Of mixed Portuguese and Indian descent, they are technically Anglo Indian. Many Anglo Indians of British descent, however, do not see them as "proper" Anglo Indians and do not accept them into their communities.

In 1947, there were approximately 300,000 Anglo Indians in India. Over the next 25 years, this number was reduced dramatically by a mass exodus of Anglo Indians from India. Even though Frank Anthony, a prominent leader of the Anglo Indian community in India, was able to negotiate two nominated representatives in Parliament, jobs for Anglo Indians, and educational concessions, many Anglo Indians saw little future for themselves in the new India. A first wave of emigration, in the years following 1946, took many Anglo Indians to Britain. A second wave of emigration occurred in the 1960s. By this time, however, British immigration laws were more restrictive, so many Anglo Indians relocated to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Studies have shown that although these overseas Anglo Indians continue to preserve a sense of their past, they integrate very quickly into their new societies.

## 3 LANGUAGE

A distinguishing feature of the Anglo Indian community, and also a matter of considerable pride, is the use of English as the mother tongue. While members of the group may be bilingual,



speaking Hindi or another regional language in addition to English, English is the language of choice used in the home. English is the medium of instruction in Anglo Indian schools. The use of the language has come to be a symbol of the "separateness" of the Anglo Indian community.

Some writers have identified an accent and speech patterns in the English spoken by Anglo Indians that set it apart from standard English. This includes a mincing or sing-song intonation of words and phrases that has been called *chee-chee*. This term was also used by the British in India as a derisive word for a member of the Anglo Indian community.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Anglo Indians are neither Europeans nor Indians. In the areas of culture and lifestyle, they are Western in outlook. They reject the Indian part of their heritage, yet they are not British or European, either. During colonial times, Anglo Indians were regarded as a separate and socially inferior community by the British. Any direct links with their British (or Portuguese) heritage are long gone. What remains is a sense of identity with a British past—perhaps, if one disregards genetics, more semimythical than real—that is reinforced by the consciously Westernized way of life followed by Anglo Indians in India today. For many of the older generation, even though they had never lived there, "Home" was Britain, not India.

## 5 RELIGION

All Anglo Indians are Christians, and the church plays an important role in the religious and social life of the community.

Anglo Indians often attend church on a regular basis and also participate in the church's organized social and recreational activities. There is no one particular Christian denomination that is exclusively identified with the Anglo Indian community. Catholics form the most numerous group, but non-Catholic denominations such as Church of England (also known as Anglican or Episcopalian), Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian are also represented. Of the Protestant sects, the Church of England is the most prestigious and attracts Anglo Indians of the middle and upper classes.

In the years since independence, the Anglo Indian Christian community in India has had to accommodate inevitable changes in their church life. One is the presence of Indian Christians in their churches. Historically, Indians who had accepted Christianity were looked down upon by Anglo Indians. The reality of declining numbers has meant that Indian Christians have been accepted into the congregations of churches that were formerly almost exclusively attended by Anglo Indians. However, subtle forms of discrimination against Indian Christians continue. Another major change since 1947 is the reorganization of the Christian Churches in the subcontinent as independent entities (e.g., the United Church of Northern India and the Church of South India). In addition, the clergy and church hierarchy are now almost exclusively Indian.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Anglo Indians observe the traditional Christian holidays with great enthusiasm. Attendance at church on holy days such as Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or Christmas is customary, to be followed by visits to friends and relatives, socializing, and entertaining. Children are given chocolate or marzipan Easter eggs at Easter. During the Christmas season, homes are decorated with Christmas trees and colored streamers, Christmas gifts are exchanged, and a traditional "English" Christmas lunch is eaten. Christmas is also a time when clubs and social organizations hold parties for children and dances for adults.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage of the Anglo Indian community follow those of the Christian Church, with specific details being determined by the denomination involved. Infants are baptized in church, with godparents standing witness. Children attend Sunday School to receive religious instruction and at the appropriate time are confirmed and receive their First Communion. Marriages are performed in church and, with so many Anglo Indians being Catholic, the divorce rate is low. Death ceremonies follow the normal Christian pattern, with funeral services held in church, followed by burial in a cemetery.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Anglo Indians greet each other in the Western fashion, men shaking hands and women embracing and kissing each other on both cheeks. Young children address any adult visitor as "Auntie" or "Uncle" as a matter of respect, regardless of the relationship. Visiting and entertaining, especially at times such as Christmas and other holidays, is a common practice. Visitors are offered tea, snacks, or, should the occasion demand it, drinks such as beer, rum, or whiskey.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Anglo Indian homes are usually furnished in a Western style, with decor and furniture showing a marked British influence. Among the middle classes, furniture typically consists of overstuffed sofas and chairs, oak or mahogany tables, and carpets, mixed together with objects of local manufacture. Pictures on the wall may consist of European landscapes, with perhaps portraits of the British royal family, along with family photographs.

The living conditions of Anglo Indians reflect, by and large, their economic standing and social status. The affluent live in spacious, well-furnished houses with several bedrooms and modern conveniences, and servants to perform household tasks. By contrast, there are many Anglo Indians who, through force of economic circumstances, are forced to live in slum-like conditions. One writer cites an instance in which three families numbering a total of 23 people were living in a two-room house in Bangalore. In the area of Ripon Street in Calcutta, many Anglo Indians live in one- or two-room homes lacking running water, electricity, and modern toilet facilities. Large numbers of this community depend on the financial support of various welfare organizations.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Anglo Indian family structure has been described as the modified-extended family. This ordinarily consists of husband, wife, and children, and sometimes other dependents such as grandparents residing in the same household. The actual number residing in any given household, of course, depends to a large extent on economic circumstances.

Young adults are permitted to mix relatively freely with members of the opposite sex, and the selection of a spouse is a matter of individual choice, unlike the arranged marriages of Hindu society. Young married adults try to set up their own household if their finances permit it. In the past, Anglo Indians were a strongly endogamous community. The British would not marry Anglo Indians, while it was unthinkable for an Anglo Indian to marry an Indian (as it was for an Indian to marry an Anglo Indian). The great majority of Anglo Indians continue to marry within the community today, but intergroup marriage is evidently becoming more common. Increasing numbers of Anglo Indian girls are marrying Indians, both Indian Christians and men of other religious communities. This is partly economic, reflecting high unemployment among Anglo Indian males and their inability to support a family. It is partly a matter of choice, as economic security and a comfortable life with an Indian husband for some girls is more attractive than the possibility of years working as the main wage-earner to support an Anglo Indian husband. It should be noted that Anglo Indian girls marrying an Indian often face resistance and resentment from the husband's family. Because of their lifestyles and dress, Anglo Indian girls are viewed as loose and promiscuous by traditional Indians.

## 11 CLOTHING

Dress in South Asian society is of considerable symbolic significance, and the cultural orientation of the Anglo Indian community is clearly reflected in its dress styles. Men invariably wear Western attire. Among the older generation, the "solar topi" or sun helmet is worn as a sign of one's European descent. Women wear dresses, blouses, and skirts and follow Western

fashion fads such as miniskirts. Whereas Indian women traditionally wear their hair long, Anglo Indian women follow hair fashions prevailing in Western countries. Differences in hair styles, however, are becoming less apparent as more Indian women are adopting cosmopolitan fashions. Anglo Indian women and girls may wear the Indian *sari* for formal occasions or for work situations. Western dress, nonetheless, remains a symbol of Anglo Indian cultural identity.

## 12 FOOD

In few areas of life are Anglo Indians more Western than in food preferences and dining customs. The inevitable Indian influences are, of course, seen in a taste for curries and a liking for local “sweets.” But the kinds of food eaten, the methods of preparing food, and the style of eating show marked Western influences. Unlike Hindus and Muslims, who have strong religiously based food taboos, Anglo Indians have few restrictions on their diet. They are usually nonvegetarians, eating beef, pork, chicken, and other meat if they can afford it. They dine seated at the table, using plates, cups, and saucers, and eating with knives, forks, and spoons. The traditional Indian practice of eating with one’s hands is totally unacceptable in Anglo Indian society. In addition, alcohol may be served as an aperitif or taken along with the meal.

A typical day begins with early morning tea (“bed tea”), followed around 8:00 or 9:00 am by an English breakfast of porridge or cereal, eggs, toast, and tea. Lunch is curry and rice. Afternoon tea is taken around 4:00 pm, accompanied by biscuits or cake. Dinner, which is eaten quite late, usually starts with a soup course. Mulligatawny, a spicy “pepper-water” soup, is a standard on the Anglo Indian menu. The main course might consist of roast meat or cutlets, served with potatoes and vegetables. Dessert or cheese and crackers, perhaps followed by coffee, completes the meal.

The modern diet of Anglo Indians depends largely on financial circumstances. Wealthier families with having the resources to buy meat and other expensive foodstuffs may keep to traditional Anglo Indian menus. The less fortunate, who may not be able to afford meat, tend to eat Indian-style vegetarian dishes, and their diet more closely resembles that of the local Indian population.

## 13 EDUCATION

Literacy among Anglo Indians is high. This is a measure of the pride the community takes in English as a symbol of its European heritage. English-language schools, often church-run and staffed by Anglo Indian teachers, provide education of a relatively high standard. However, these schools are private institutions, and their fees are often out of the reach of the lower-class Anglo Indian. Competition for entrance is fierce, as middle-class non-Anglo Indians see English-language schooling as essential for their children to succeed in government service and the professions. A common perception is that many Anglo Indian students—especially boys—lack the motivation to pursue higher education.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

As a small, isolated community that has rejected its Indian heritage, Anglo Indians lack cultural traditions of their own. They live a consciously Western lifestyle and share, secondhand, in Western trends in fashions, dance, and popular culture. In the

1960s, for example, young Anglo Indians formed rock-and-roll bands that performed at dances and social events. Some Anglo Indians achieved fame in the West as pop singers, notably Engelbert Humperdinck and Cliff Richards. Other famous Anglo Indians include the movie stars Merle Oberon and Ben Kingsley.

Although it can hardly be said that there is an Anglo Indian literary tradition, many British writers have dealt with Anglo Indian society in their works. A few, such as John Masters, focus specifically on the Anglo Indian community, notably in his novel *Bhowani Junction*. Others paint a picture—of varying degrees of accuracy and bias—of Anglo Indians as part of their overall consideration of relations between the British and Indians in India. Such authors include Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, and Paul Scott.

## 15 WORK

Under British rule, Anglo Indians fulfilled an important occupational role in the economy of India. They were well represented in the Indian railways, posts and telegraph service, customs, and police. Anglo Indians reached high rank in the British Indian Army and other branches of the armed forces. Following the policy of Indianization initiated in 1919, however, Anglo Indians lost their advantage over Indians in terms of employment in the civil sector. This process was speeded up following Indian independence in 1947.

As a community, Anglo Indians have not fared well in terms of their accomplishments in modern India. Some individuals have gained national recognition. Melville de Mellow, for instance, was a broadcaster of international fame on All-India Radio. Many Anglo Indians served with distinction in the armed forces during India’s wars with Pakistan and China. But these were of another generation. The picture for Anglo Indian youth today is bleak. Girls have traditionally become secretaries, teachers, and nurses. Unemployment among Anglo Indian men is high, with many reluctant to accept employment they feel is beneath their status. Many Anglo Indians also see discrimination by Indian society at large as a barrier to their advancement.

## 16 SPORTS

Anglo Indians had the reputation, particularly in the early decades of this century, of being the best athletes in India. They raised field hockey to new levels of play and dominated India’s representative teams at the time. Hockey teams dominated by Anglo Indians were fielded by railway departments, customs, and other organizations. They regularly swept national tournaments such as the Aga Khan Cup in Bombay and the All-India Scindia Gold Cup. Cricket and soccer were also popular sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Anglo Indians have full access to the recreational amenities of urban India. These include radio, television and movie theaters. Church-related social and recreational activities are important in many communities. In the past, clubs such as Railway Institutes were the focus of social life, but these are no longer exclusively the preserve of Anglo Indians.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There are no folk arts or crafts that can be said to be unique to the Anglo Indian community.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Anglo Indians form a small and isolated community in India. Western in outlook and lifestyle, they reject their Indian background. Yet the question remains how long Anglo Indians, as a minority cut off from their European roots, will be able to maintain their separate identity in Indian society. A few Anglo Indians have prospered in post-Independence India and lead lives similar to other Indian elites. The majority, however, still clinging tenaciously to their non-Indian identity, have not fared so well. Anglo Indian men are typically identified with poor educational qualifications, high unemployment, poverty, and a high incidence of alcoholism. This has led to Anglo Indian women seeking partners outside the community, forcing men in turn to look elsewhere for their wives. Should the trend of marrying outside the community continue, the erosion in numbers of an already small group could threaten its very existence within the next few generations. With strong leadership, schools, and cultural organizations, and their focus on the English language, Anglo Indians may survive in India as a distinct entity. An equally likely scenario, however, is the gradual integration of the community into Indian society, as has happened to so many "alien" peoples in India in the past.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Anglo-Indian women, being more exposed to feminism and gender issues current in the West, are much more familiar with such issues than other women's groups in India. However, with more Anglo-Indian women marrying into Indian families, they tend to face discrimination because, to do so, they flout indigenous customs of arranged marriages and specific caste rules. However, once they bear male children, much of this discrimination disappears. Their children tend to be raised according to the customs of the caste into which they marry.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# ASMAT

**PRONUNCIATION:** AWZ-mot

**LOCATION:** Indonesian province of Papua on the island of New Guinea

**POPULATION:** Approximately 70,000

**LANGUAGE:** Asmat-Kamoro language family; Bahasa Indonesia (national language of Indonesia)

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Asmat religion based on spirit worship

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Asmat are a Melanesian, or Papuan, people who live within the Indonesian province of Papua that occupies most of the western half of the island of New Guinea. They are widely known for the quality of their wood sculptures, and they are also notorious for their traditional practices of headhunting and cannibalism, which have been linked to the unsolved disappearance of Michael Rockefeller, 23-year-old son of former New York governor Nelson Rockefeller, in 1961 while touring the region to collect indigenous artwork.

The Asmat's first European contact was with the Dutch in 1623. Some 150 years later, Captain James Cook arrived on their shores. For many years, due to their fearsome reputation, the group had few outside visitors, and another 150 years passed before the Dutch began to settle the Asmat area in the 1920s, bringing in the first Catholic missionaries. The first permanent Dutch colonial post, at Agats, was established in 1938. During World War II, Asmat lands lay on the border between Allied-controlled Papua and Japanese-controlled West New Guinea, and some skirmishes occurred between the Japanese and the Asmat. Contact with the West has expanded steadily since the 1950s, and traditional Asmat warfare and cannibalistic practices have declined.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Asmat have traditionally been a coastal people occupying a low-lying swampy region that covers approximately 25,000 square kilometers in southwestern Papua. The swamps are punctuated by stands of sago palms, mangroves, and patches of tropical rain forest. Numerous streams and tributaries that overflow their banks in the rainy season provide the primary means of transportation for the Asmat. The Asmat population is estimated at around 70,000, living in about 120 villages with populations of up to 2,000. There are five main cultural groups of the Asmat: Central Asmat, Casuarina Coast Asmat, Yaosakor Asmat, North Asmat, and Citak. In the remainder of this entry, Asmat will refer to the Central Asmat unless otherwise specified.

The Indonesian government granted Papua "special autonomy" status in November of 2001, along with a promise to provide limited autonomy and control to the indigenous peoples there such as the Asmat as long as they can substantiate their traditional land claims.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Asmat languages belong to a larger language family known as Asmat-Kamoro. This language family is classified by linguists as being non-Austronesian or Papuan. There are around 70 different language families within the non-Austro-

nesian grouping, but their internal relationships to each other have not yet been determined. The Asmat-Kamoro family has over 50,000 speakers, which is fairly large by Papuan standards. Because of missionary involvement in the region, central Asmat now have a written form of the spoken language. A modest publishing effort in the language exists that produces children's readers and religious literature. A form of Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of the Republic of Indonesia, is spoken by many Asmat men.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

A significant body of mythology surrounds the origins of headhunting among the Asmat. According to the origin myth, two brothers were the original inhabitants of the Asmat region. The older brother convinced the younger brother to cut off his head, and the decapitated head instructed the younger brother about how to go headhunting, process the trophy head, and use it in initiation rituals for young males. The name of the older brother was also transferred to the younger brother, an event mirrored in the practice of an Asmat taking the name of a person he has decapitated. The number of names a man has reflects the number of heads he has taken in his lifetime. In accord with the great power traditionally accorded to the spirits of the deceased, the skull of a deceased relative was traditionally kept as a desirable protection against evil spirits.

#### 5 RELIGION

Prior to the introduction of Christianity into the territory, the Asmat religion was based on a belief in spirits that inhabited things in the natural world, as well as the fear of the ghosts of the dead. It was also believed that the deaths of all persons except the very young or very elderly were deliberately caused by some malevolent outside force. The ancestral spirits, to whom great powers were generally attributed, were said to demand that tribe members avenge a wrongful death by killing and decapitating an enemy and offering his body to the community for cannibalistic consumption. Headhunting and other male activities associated with that endeavor were the focus of many Asmat rituals.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In traditional Asmat societies, there were elaborate cycles of ceremonial feasting that occurred throughout the year. Feasts that celebrate the feast-givers' deceased kinfolk are still very important celebrations. Other events that required a feast were the opening of a new men's house, the dedication of the tall ancestor poles (*bis*), the dedication of twenty or more war canoes, a celebration of masks, and a celebration of shields. In the past, most of the feasting events centered on male activities associated with raiding and headhunting.

Missionary activity has introduced Christianity into the Asmat area. Now some Asmat are professed Christians and celebrate the major Christian holidays. Although Islam is the major religion of Indonesia, it not practiced among the indigenous population.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Male initiation was one of the most important rites of passage in pre-colonial Asmat society, although it has lost some of its importance today. In the past, initiates were given a decapitat-

ed head that they would contemplate. The power of the warrior, which was believed to reside in his decapitated head, was to be absorbed by the initiate. The initiates would fast during this time. They would then take a canoe trip to the sea. Their sponsors would eventually plunge the initiates into the sea, symbolically killing them. The initiates were reborn as warriors. Male prowess is still highly valued in Asmat society, although male initiation rites no longer involve decapitation.

Death is accompanied by grieving by family and friends of the deceased, who roll in the mud of the riverbanks to hide their scent from the ghost of the deceased. Ceremonies are performed to ensure that the ghost passes to the land of the dead, referred to as "the other side." The skull of a person's mother is often used as a pillow.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Precontact Asmat life is only sketchily known to anthropologists. The earliest reliable accounts date from the 1950s around the time of pacification. These accounts focus more on ritual behaviors and practices than they do on the mundane.

Little is known about the Asmat's everyday life, and the current Indonesian practice of limiting the amount of time researchers may spend in Asmat country does not facilitate the acquisition of such information.

Missionary and governmental influence has affected practices relating to greetings and other forms of social etiquette. In precontact times, sexual relations between unmarried males and females were not prohibited, and there were extensive ritual contexts in which promiscuity was expected.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The southern coast of Papua is an ideal setting for the proliferation of malaria, which is endemic to the region. The debilitating aspects of the disease take their toll on the Asmat population. Death due to crocodile attack is also common in parts of the Asmat territory. In one region, these deaths occur frequently enough to warrant the carving of special commemorative poles called "crocodile poles."

Houses are elevated on stilts to prevent them from flooding during the rainy season. There is no running water or electricity in a traditional Asmat house. Mission and government posts in the area typically do have these services, and Asmat who work with those institutions do have some access to these comforts. Most houses have an outside porch area where people can congregate to talk, gossip, smoke, or just watch their neighbors.

The coastal Asmat groups travel extensively by canoe along the coast and inland along rivers and tributaries. Most of their travel has traditionally been related to inter-village feasting and the visitation of relatives in other communities. Transportation for the Asmat is primarily by dugout canoe and also by foot on trails through the rain forest. There are different kinds of canoes constructed for different activities. War canoes of the Asmat are about 21 m (70 ft) long and can hold around 30 people. Paddling is done from a standing position, and the narrowness of the hull demands that each person maintain their balance; otherwise, the canoe could easily capsize. This is extremely dangerous in the crocodile-infested rivers, lakes, and streams.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage among the Asmat is traditionally defined in terms of the village and the kin group. Asmat society is divided into two complementary and contrasting halves termed "moieties" by anthropologists. A person is supposed to marry someone from within their village who belongs to the opposite half of the society: the other moiety. In the past, men were allowed to have more than one wife. A groom had to pay a "bride price" to his prospective father-in-law to negotiate a marriage. In some cases, the price would be so high that he would have to make installment payments on the total amount due. However, he was also given rights to harvest a portion of his in-laws' sago trees. Before the introduction of European goods, the payments consisted of animal furs, bird of paradise feathers, triton shells, dogs' teeth necklaces, stone axes, and other weapons. In modern times, tobacco, money, and other Western goods are included in the payments. After the marriage, the bride moves in with her husband's family. Extended families occupy large houses built of bamboo, sago bark, and sago frond thatching.

Men sleep apart from their wives in the men's longhouse (*yew*). Ceremonial activities that take place inside the men's house are prohibited to women. Menstruating women stay in a separate house that is off-limits to men.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Asmat traditionally have worn little or no clothing. Footwear is not often owned. The Asmat women wore a fiber skirt, while men went completely naked. Men among the eastern Asmat wore rattan bands around their waists and a small hollow tube covering their penises. Plaited cane bands were also worn around the wrists and just below the knees. Because of missionary and governmental influence, many Asmat today wear Western-style clothing, often consisting of rugby shorts for men and floral, cotton dresses for women. Objects of bodily adornment that are still seen today include the tusks of wild pigs or boars that are worn in the pierced nasal septum of men. On ceremonial occasions, men and women have their bodies decorated with paints made from natural products and dyes including mud and ochre.

## 12 FOOD

Fish and the sago palm are the staple foods of all Asmat groups. The larva of a butterfly that is often found in the rotting carcasses of fallen sago palms is an important ritual food and a delicacy among the Asmat. Canned meats and fish, as well as flour, tea, and sugar have become important food items for the Asmat. These items are obtained from trade stores set up by Indonesians or from mission stores.

As opposed to other groups on the island of New Guinea, the Asmat did not have trading relationships with neighboring groups that would have allowed for specialization in foodstuff production in pre-colonial times. In other areas, one group would produce sago and trade it for the fish caught by another group. Instead, Asmat villages attempted to monopolize the food resources in their area. The Asmat went to great lengths to provide for the fertility of the sago palm stands in their territory. The heads of headhunting victims were frequently hung in the sago palm stands to promote the fertility of the trees. Ancestor poles (*bis*) were also erected in the sago stands to promote the sago palms' fertility. Although the fertility of the

sago stand is still important to the Asmat, they are no longer permitted to engage in headhunting activities.

## 13 EDUCATION

Outside influences on the Asmat include formal education. Missionaries and colonial administrations have set up various schools in the region. Agats, the regional administrative center in the coastal Asmat area, has schoolhouses for mass education. In precontact times, children would learn from their elders those tasks that were specific to their sex.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

As is the case with other Melanesian peoples, drums are important instruments. Asmat drums are similar in shape to drums produced in other parts of insular New Guinea. They have an hourglass shape and a single, lizard skin-covered head that is struck with the palm of the hand. The other hand is used to hold the drum by a carved handle. Ceremonial horns were also used by the Asmat. Although the Asmat regard drums as sacred objects, they do not define the sounds produced by instruments as music; only singing is classified as music in Asmat culture.

Dance was an important part of ceremonial life in precontact Asmat villages, although missionary activity has discouraged dancing among the Asmat. Written literature was not available to the Asmat, since their language was exclusively an oral one. However, they have an extensive body of oral literature. Epic songs that often lasted for several days and metaphorical love songs are still important forms of expression among the Asmat.

## 15 WORK

The Asmat are hunters and gatherers who gather and process the pulp of the sago palm and hunt crocodiles and other animals. Some also grow vegetables or raise chickens, which have been imported to the area in small numbers. There is a traditional division of labor along gender lines. Women are responsible for net fishing, gathering, and other domestic tasks. Men are responsible for line and weir (fence or enclosure) fishing, hunting, horticulture, and the felling of trees. Tree felling is an important job since canoes, ancestor poles, and domestic structures are all constructed from forest wood. An export market in crocodile skins and tropical hardwoods has been developing among the Asmat, and the sale of wood carvings to outsiders represents an additional source of income.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditionally, male competition among the Asmat was intense. This competition centered on the demonstration of male prowess through success in headhunting, the acquisition of fishing grounds and sago palm stands, and the cultivation of a number of feasting partners. Males still compete in these areas, except headhunting, which is now prohibited.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Asmat region of Papua is still very isolated. Agats is the major administrative center for the entire southwestern coastal region. Amenities are available on a limited basis, but Western forms of entertainment and recreation are not available.



*An Asmat tribe from Papua perform their traditional dance during the Fifth Indonesia Art Festival in Sanur, Bali. The festival is held to promote tourism on the resort island. (Sonny Tumbelaka/AFP/Getty Images)*

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Asmat art has been highly valued by European and American art collectors ever since it was brought to the attention of the outside world. During the 1960s there was a move to collect Asmat art following pacification efforts throughout the entire region. It was known that much of Asmat artistic production was tied to the practice of headhunting, and with pacification and the prohibition of headhunting, the proliferation of artifact production declined.

Art from the central and coastal Asmat is the most widely known in museums in Europe and the United States. Groups in these areas produced decorated shields, spears, digging sticks, canoes, bows and arrows, and a wide range of figurative carvings. The most famous ritual carving of the central and coastal Asmat is the ancestor pole, called *bis* in the Asmat language. These elaborately carved and decorated poles commemorated the deaths of those killed in battle or by sorcery. They were erected during a feast that preceded a headhunting raid to avenge those deaths. Phallic symbolism is evident in the *bis* poles.

Birds and flying foxes were important motifs on shields and other objects because of their association with headhunting. In Asmat cosmology, trees and human beings are viewed as similar entities. The head of a human being is equivalent, symboli-

cally, with the fruit of a tree; therefore, creatures that eat the fruit of trees are equivalent to men who take the heads of other men. The praying mantis is also an important motif in Asmat sculpture.

The Asmat Woodcarving Festival is an annual event held in October. The purpose of the festival is to promote the development of Asmat art and culture for the Asmat people. It is a mechanism to support the continuation of traditional wood working. The carvings are judged and the one that is awarded the top prize is put on permanent display in the Asmat Museum of Culture and Progress in Agats. Many of the other carvings and poles are sold at auction during the festival.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Asmat are fighting to retain their traditional ways of life in the face of pressure by Indonesian administrators. As of the 1990s, many Asmat had converted to Christianity and were being educated in Western-run schools. However, they have had limited influence on Indonesian government's policy regarding the use of their land.

A native-run cultural center and museum in Agats called the Asmat Museum of Culture and Progress is striving to collect artifacts from all areas of Asmat culture. It also produces catalogues and cultural monographs on Asmat culture, my-



thology, and history to preserve these bodies of knowledge for future generations of Asmat.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

By all accounts, Asmat women experience difficult lives in many regards. Wife beating is sanctioned within the society, although the influence of missionaries and the presence of local law enforcement officials currently mitigates this practice. Unmarried women and girls can be beaten by their fathers or brothers for promiscuity. A woman's property is transferred to her husband at the time of marriage, and, as a result, she loses control over any resources that she might derive from it. Traditionally, wife-swapping was a common practice, either to confirm a bond of friendship between two men or as a community-wide phenomenon in times of crisis. Women were directly involved with the fertility cult within the community. Sorcery was attributed to women only among the central Asmat.

The Asmat also engage in a practice called "wife exchange," or *papisj* in Asmat. In this practice, two men—or the families of two unmarried boys—determine that a *papisj* relationship needs to be established. In the case of married, adult men, the men rub sago powder on each other's foreheads and then return to their respective wives to convince them of the agreement. Once convinced, the wives will exchange households for one day/night where they will prepare a meal for the exchange family and sleep with the exchange husband. The following morning, the woman will be decorated with sago flour and feathers and will return to her husband and family.

Unlike neighboring South Coast cultures of Papua, the Central Asmat males did not engage in ritualized homosexuality. However, the Asmat did engage in ritualized heterosexuality especially as a means to calm disturbances in either nature or the village itself. There is evidence among the Casuarina Coast Asmat had ritualized homosexual relationships between males called *mbai*. The *mbai* relationship of the Casuarina Coast Asmat is very similar in many respects to the *papisj* relationship of the Central Asmat.

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—by J. Williams

# ASSAMESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** as-suh-MEEZ

**LOCATION:** India (Assam state)

**POPULATION:** c. 20 million

**LANGUAGE:** Assamese

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In referring to people, the word "Assamese" is used in two senses. It can identify the entire population of the state of Assam in northeastern India (numbering 26, 655,528 according to the Census of India, 2001). Used in this manner, it includes not only the majority ethnic group found in the Brahmaputra Valley, but also all the tribal groups (e.g., Bodo, Mikir, Miri, and Naga) and immigrants from other parts of India living in the state. In its more restricted sense, "Assamese" refers to the peoples of the Brahmaputra plains whose native language is Assamese and who developed what may be considered Assamese culture. Unless otherwise stated, it is this latter group that is the focus of this article.

The Assamese of the plains are mainly of Indo-Iranian stock, with some Mongoloid physical characteristics. This reflects the complex history of migrations into the area over many centuries. Early Indian texts identify Assam as Kamarupa, and the 7th-century Chinese traveler Hsuan-tsang has left a detailed account of the region. The Assam valley fell under various regional and local dynasties until the Ahom, a Shan people from Burma (Myanmar), assumed power in the 13th century. The Ahoms ruled Assam for four centuries, until their kingdom fell to Burma in 1821. The former Ahom lands were ceded to Britain in 1826 following the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26). Assam was administered as part of British India until India gained its independence in 1947. The modern state of Assam is much reduced in area from colonial times, reflecting the separation of many of the tribal areas of the northeast as states in their own right.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Assamese are the dominant ethnic group in Assam, making up some 48.8% of the state's population. The Census of India 2001 gives a population of 26,655,528 which, at current growth rates, would be projected to over 29 million people today.

The geographical and historical heartland of the Assamese people lies on the lowlands of the Brahmaputra Valley. One of India's great rivers, the Brahmaputra (literally, "Son of Brahma") emerges from the Himalayas in eastern Assam. It then flows in a southwesterly direction for 650 km (400 mi) through the length of the state. As it leaves Assam, the river swings south into Bangladesh where it joins the Ganges and flows into the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra and its valley are the dominant physical features of Assam. The river is over 8 km (5 mi) wide during flood stage, and widespread and destructive flooding is common in the area. The valley, lying at elevations generally below 100 m (330 ft), averages about 100 km (60 mi) in width. To the north lie the foothills of the Himalayas. South of the valley are the Meghalaya Plateau and the hills that form India's eastern border with Burma. Climate is monsoonal. An-

nual rainfall varies from 160–320 cm (65–125 in) and falls mainly between May and September. Mean monthly temperatures range from 16°C (61°F) in January to 29°C (84°F) during the summer months.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Assamese is the language spoken by the Assamese people. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family but has been influenced in its vocabulary, pronunciation, and structure by its contact with the Tibeto-Burman dialects spoken in the region. Assamese is closely related to Bengali and is written in a script that shows only minor deviations from the Bengali script. Assamese has emerged as the *lingua franca* of northeastern India. A *lingua franca* is a language that is widely used for communication by peoples who do not understand each other's languages. Currently, there are about 20 million Assamese speakers, of whom perhaps 13 million reside in Assam (the remainder are found on the borders of Assam and in the Indian State of West Bengal. In 2001, for the first time, Assamese speakers accounted for less than half the population (48.8%) of Assam.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The *Mahabharata* and *Kalika Purana* relate numerous stories concerning Kamakhya, the site of an important temple near Gauhati, in Assam. According to legend, when the goddess Sati died, her distraught husband, Shiva, carried her body on his head as penance. Vishnu, fearing this would give Shiva excessive powers, cut Sati's body into numerous bits with successive throws of his discus. Each place on earth where a piece of Sati's body fell became a sacred center of pilgrimage. Tradition has it that Sati's sexual organs landed at Kamakhya, where a temple was built to mark the spot. There is no image of the goddess—who is also called Kamakhya—at the temple, but in the depths of the shrine is a cleft in the rock that is worshiped as the *yoni* (female organ) of the goddess. Kamakhya is one of the most important *sakti* or Mother Goddess temples in India. (*Sakti*, or “energy,” refers to the power of a deity manifested through his female counterpart.) Rites of worship at the temple include animal sacrifice.

### 5 RELIGION

The Assamese are Hindu and follow the basic observances of the religion. They worship many Hindu gods, are organized into castes, and have ritual specialists (the Brahmans) to perform religious functions. Within this overarching structure, however, there exists considerable diversity in practice. Vaishnavism has a strong following among the peoples of the plains, and Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) is by far the most popular deity among the Assamese. Villagers gather at *namghars* (prayer halls) to recite Krishna's name as part of the rituals of this devotional (*bhakti*) sect. Shiva, too, has his following, while the importance of Kamakhya has already been noted [see “Folklore”]. At the level of folk religion, local deities such as Manasa, the snake goddess, and Shitala, the goddess of small pox, are revered. Assamese believe in spirits who inhabit trees, water, and other elements in nature. Some are good, but some are evil and cause disease and other problems for humans. Various charms, spells, and rituals are used to deal with the spirit world.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Assamese have three principal festivals known as Bihu. Baisakh Bihu is celebrated in mid-April to usher in the New Year. It also marks the end of the unlucky month of Chait, and the beginning of Baisakh which is considered auspicious. Cows are worshiped and bathed in the sacred Brahmaputra. They have their horns painted, are garlanded with flowers, and are then driven through the village streets in procession. It is a time for visiting friends and relatives, for singing and dancing, and for general rejoicing. The other Bihu festivals, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu, are also occasions for feasting and merriment. Other major Hindu festivals such as Holi, Durga Puja, and Janamashtami (Krishna's birthday) are also celebrated.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Assamese follow the basic life-cycle rituals as set out by the ancient Hindu lawgivers. Some specific customs, however, are unique to Assam. When a baby is born, for example, a knife is kept under the mother's bed to keep evil spirits away. Iron is believed to have certain magical properties. Similarly, fish play an important role in Assamese culture. When a baby is born, and particularly if it is a son, the Assamese distribute fish to friends and relatives. Fish is invariably served at the feast that accompanies the naming ceremony, which is usually held when the baby is around six months old. The period of pollution for a woman after childbirth lasts for a month. A girl attaining puberty is also considered unclean and is confined in a room during her first period.

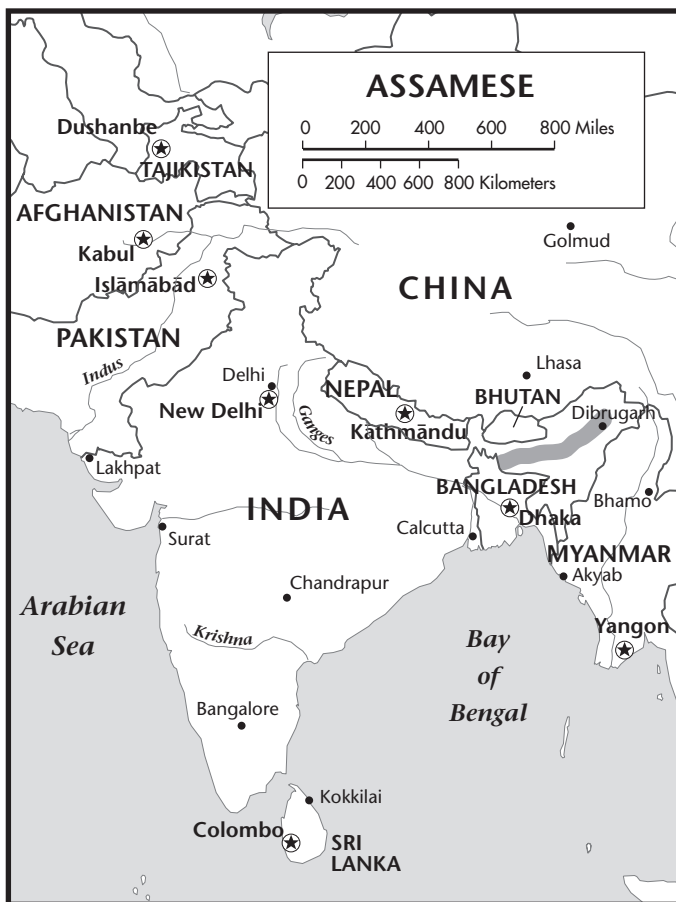
At death, the corpse is removed from the house. It is rubbed with oil and turmeric paste, before being bathed and dressed in new clothes. The dead person is thus ready for his or her last journey. The body is carried to the cremation grounds, where it is burned according to Hindu custom. The man who performs the *sraddha* (funeral) rites carries a knife, the metal being protection against evil spirits. The mourners returning from the cremation have to bathe, place their feet on stones, and step over a fire before they can enter the house. If it is late at night, they cannot enter until the next morning, in case the spirit of the dead person follows them into the house.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As a rule, Assamese have two names. One is known publicly, but the real one, which is given in accordance with astrological calculations, is kept secret. This is for fear that harm might befall the person if the true name is divulged. Names are often given after popular gods and goddesses in the hope of receiving protection from them, or of children acquiring their godly qualities.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Assamese are mostly rural people, living in villages and hamlets on the alluvial lowlands of the Brahmaputra River valley. Traditional houses are built of wood, bamboo, and other available materials. The walls are plastered with a mixture of cow dung and clay, with the roof thatched with grasses or reeds. A residence typically consists of a building containing the living quarters and kitchen, a separate structure for cattle, and a storehouse—often built on piles—for keeping paddy rice and other items. Wealthier families may have a separate guest house, and a small hut for daily worship. Furnishings depend



on the means of the individual family but in villages typically consist of cane mats, wooden stools and beds, and the usual cooking and eating utensils.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Assamese follow North Indian marriage patterns. They practice caste endogamy and clan (*jati*) exogamy. Marriages are arranged, and among castes such as the Brahmans and Kayasthas child marriage is still prevalent, particularly in rural areas. The marriage rituals last for two or three days and follow the Vedic rites, although certain practices reflect local customs and beliefs. In an Assamese marriage, for example, a conical structure called a *bei* is built of bamboo and bark, and the bride and groom bathe under it. A couple of eggs are buried at the spot of the bathing, and sometimes the bride has to carry two eggs to her new home. The egg is a symbol of fertility, and this custom may have been acquired from local tribal peoples for whom the egg has great ritual significance.

As with all Hindu groups, the bearing of male children is the desired outcome of any union. Divorce and widow remarriage are not permitted by most groups. The extended family system is traditional among the Assamese, with residence being patrilocal (i.e., the bride resides at the home of her new father-in-law). Although women are assigned an honored position in Assamese society, inheritance passes down the male line.

### 11 CLOTHING

The typical clothing of Hindu men on the Assam plains is the *dhoti*, the long cotton loincloth that is wrapped around the body, then drawn between the legs and tucked in at the waist. Villagers might go bare-chested, but the higher castes wear upper garments. The *kurta* and the Western-style shirt are common dress nowadays. Villagers of social standing often wear a turban. Female dress consists of a blouse, with a long cloth wrapped around the body just above the breasts like a sarong. Alternatively, the traditional *choli* (bodice) and *sari* are worn. Ornaments favored by women include earrings, necklaces, nose studs, armlets, bangles, and anklets. The use of scented oil is a common practice among both men and women.

### 12 FOOD

Rice is the staple food of the Assamese, eaten with a variety of fish or meat curries. A particular favorite is sour fish curry. Most Hindus in Assam, even the Brahman castes, eat fish and meat. However, all except the lowest Hindu castes avoid beef. At certain times, such as the period of mourning following a death, fish and meat are avoided. Caste Hindus usually do not eat chicken, eggs, or pork. The rice and curried dishes are served with vegetables, pulses, and condiments such as chutneys and pickles. Fruits such as bananas, pineapples, and oranges are also eaten. A type of rice pudding prepared with milk and sugar is a particular favorite of the Assamese. Rice beer is brewed and consumed in quantities, especially at celebrations such as the Bihu festivals. The chewing of areca nut and betel leaf is universal in Assam.

### 13 EDUCATION

Education in Assam is compulsory up to the age of 12, and free through the secondary level. However, actual educational levels of the Assamese vary considerably, according to factors such as openness to modernization, economic circumstances, and location. The literacy rate for the population of Assam 7 years and older was reported as 64.28% in the 2001 census. Literacy among males (71.93%) was higher than among females (56.03%). There are universities at Gauhati and Dibrugarh, as well as the Assam Agricultural University at Jorhat.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The earliest indisputable work in the Assamese language dates to the 13th century AD. Literature of this period was mostly derived from Sanskrit sources, but by the 16th century the *buranjis*, the chronicles of the Ahoms, were being written in Assamese. The writings of Shankaradeva and other poets of the devotional Vaishnava sect greatly enriched Assamese literature during the 15th and 16th centuries. Modern literature in Assamese dates to the late 19th century but has done little more than mirror Western writing.

The Assamese have a rich tradition of oral literature, folk music, and dance. Of particular note are the songs (*nam*) associated with the Bihu festivals and weddings. Some folk songs are lullabies and nursery rhymes for children, others deal with love, while still others focus on the god Krishna and his life. In addition, there are ballads on both popular and historical themes. Dance is as important a part of Assamese culture as is music. Special Bihu dances are performed at the time of the Bihu festivals. *Ojha-Pali* is a group of dancers and singers that



Assamese Bihu dancers perform in Gauhati, India. (AP Images/Anupam Nath)

presents stories from the Hindu epics and the Puranas. *Deodhas* are temple dancers who are believed to become possessed and dance in honor of the snake-goddess Manasa and other deities.

### **15 WORK**

Most Assamese are cultivators, with rice being the dominant food crop produced in the region. Vegetables, pulses (peas, beans, lentils), and oilseeds are also grown. Sugarcane and jute are important cash crops. Tea is grown on estates on the flanks of the Brahmaputra Valley. However, these are often corporate ventures operated with immigrant labor from other parts of India. Assamese also work in the important forest industries, in the limited industries of the region, and in the service sector of the economy.

### **16 SPORTS**

The amusements of Assamese children are relatively few. For the most part, they play with balls, cowry shells (which pass for money), tops, kites, and the like. They play hide-and-seek, games of tag, individual wrestling, and team wrestling (*kabaddi*). At the time of the spring Bihu, fighting with eggs is a game popular with children. In the past, elephant-fights and buffalo-fights formed part of the Bihu festivities. Modern sports such as soccer, cricket, volleyball, basketball, and track-and-field are played in the schools, colleges, and universities of Assam.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Assamese are essentially a rural people. They rely mainly on festivals, fairs, and traditional forms of folk entertainment for their recreation. Modern entertainment such as radio, television, and movie houses are available in urban centers to those with the means to access it.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Assamese women are skilled in the art of weaving, producing fine cotton cloth and gold-colored *muga* and rough *endi* silks. Nearly every household has its hand-loom, and every young girl is taught the art of weaving. Embroidery is also a local art. Artisan castes work gold and silver; produce pottery, metal goods, and brassware; and make items of cane and bamboo. Wood from Assam's abundant forests is carved into both domestic items and religious icons.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Since India became independent in 1947, separate states have been created for many of the tribal peoples of the "old" Assam. Despite this, the Assamese face serious social and political problems arising from ethnic tensions in the state. Since the 1980s, resentment among the Assamese against outsiders has led to widespread communal violence and the loss of hundreds of lives. The so-called "foreigners" targeted in this campaign are Bengali villagers who have lived in Assam for many years but still retain their Bengali identity; more recent immigrants from Bangladesh; Biharis; and Nepalis. The situation

is further complicated by other ongoing conflicts. Disaffected Bodo tribespeople have been agitating for a separate state of their own within Assam. In addition, some Assamese are advocating outright secession from India. Indian security forces operating against the militant United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) are facing numerous charges of violating the civil rights of Assamese civilians.

The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Agitation in New Delhi in 1985. The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of soon after. Some of the key clauses of the Accord have yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering, and violence from insurgent groups remains a problem in Assam.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Assamese society has traditionally treated women with disdain, and the plight of women (mostly poor and low-caste or tribals) is one of exploitation. As a result of poverty, age, custom, and terrorism many women, out of dire need, are forced to sell their bodies and are engaged in the sex trade throughout India. In 2005, Javed Akhtar, a noted Assamese lyricist, raised a firestorm with his alleged remark on Assamese women on a private TV channel in Guwahati—"Assamese women are known for frequently changing husbands and can be purchased in any city of the country." Police are far too involved in fighting insurgents to turn their attention to the thousands of women and girls in Assam who go missing every year, many of these ending up as "sex slaves" for wealthy landowners in other parts of the country.

Despite this, a UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) report finds greater gender equality in Assam than elsewhere in India. The society doesn't suffer from practices like dowry, child-marriage and bride-burning.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

**PRONUNCIATION:** aw-STRAYL-yuhn ab-bor-RIDGE-in-eez

**LOCATION:** Australia; Tasmania

**POPULATION:** Approximately 517,000

**LANGUAGE:** Western Desert language; English; Walpiri and other Aboriginal languages

**RELIGION:** Traditional Aboriginal religion; Christianity

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Australian Aborigines, the original inhabitants of the continent of Australia, took up residence there at least 40,000 years before Europeans landed at Botany Bay in 1788. In 1788, the Aborigines were clearly the majority, numbering around 300,000. In 1996, they were a minority struggling to claim rights to their traditional lands and financial compensation for lost lands and resources. Relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia have not been very good, and there is a great deal of resentment on the part of many Aboriginal people for the treatment their ancestors received from the European colonists. In February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologized to Aboriginal peoples for mistreatment by the Australian government in the past. Prime Minister Rudd singled out the "Stolen Generations" who were children forcibly removed from their families to attend boarding schools where they were punished for speaking their native languages and following their native traditions. Australian Aborigines face many of the same problems that Native Americans face in the United States.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Australian Aborigines traditionally lived throughout Australia and Tasmania. As Australia and Tasmania lie south of the equator, the seasons are reversed from those of North America. The varied climatic zones gave rise to local cultural adaptations among populations. In Central and Western Desert regions, Aboriginal groups were nomadic hunters and gatherers. They had no permanent place of residence, although they did have territories and ate whatever they could catch, kill, or dig out of the ground. The Australian desert is an extremely harsh environment with hot days and cool nights and very few permanent water sources. In the southern parts of the island continent, winter is cold and Aboriginal populations had to shelter themselves from the cold wind and driving rain. Although many Aboriginal people move frequently within Australia, very few emigrate. Approximately 33% of the total population of the Northern Territory is Aboriginal according to the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing. This is the highest percentage of any Australian state/territory.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

There were approximately 300 different Aboriginal languages spoken in 1788 when Captain James Cook claimed the island continent for England. Now, there are only about 145 Aboriginal languages still spoken. Only about 18 of these, like Walpiri, spoken in and around Alice Springs in the center of the continent, have a good prognosis. Walpiri is taught in schools and a

growing body of written literature is produced in the language daily. Other languages such as Dyirbal are dying out. Of the 145 language still spoken, 110 are severely and critically endangered. This category indicates languages that are spoken only by small groups of people, mostly over 49 years old. Aboriginal Australian languages are very different in structure from Indo-European languages such as English. Linguists believe that all of the languages of the Australian continent are genetically related to each other; however, there is some disagreement about the genetic relationship of the language of the Tasmanians, which is now extinct. The largest language in terms of number of speakers is called the Western Desert language, spoken by several thousand Aboriginal people in the Western Desert region of the continent. Most Aboriginal people speak English as their first or second language. In parts of Australia, distinctive kinds of English have developed within Aboriginal communities. In the Northern Territory there is a kind of English spoken by Aboriginal people that is called Kriol.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Australian Aborigines have a large body of folklore and oral history that is often referred to as “the Dreaming.” This body of verbal art relates humans to the natural and mystical landscape in which they find themselves. “The Dreaming” is the time when everything came into being and the rules of social relations and behavior were instituted by ancestral beings. It is the means by which Aboriginal people identify themselves with their territory and their heritage. “The Dreaming” is also the mechanism by which Aboriginal people claim traditional ownership of land through the display of intimate knowledge of the terrain and its inhabitants. Myths of “the Dreaming” often have cultural heroes as central characters. These cultural heroes, like those of most cultures of the world, have greatly exaggerated powers.

#### **5 RELIGION**

Traditional Aboriginal religion revolves around “the Dreaming.” Totems are also an important part of Aboriginal religious identity. Totems are symbols from the natural world that serve to identify people and their relationships with one another in the social world. These totems both defined social groups, such as clans and lineages, as well as individual totems. The conceptual landscape was inhabited by ghosts of the dead as well as a variety of spirits who controlled certain aspects of the natural world, such as the Rainbow Serpent, who brought rain. Rituals were performed to placate these spirits and also to increase the fertility of certain species of animals that were important.

Since the colonization of Australia, many Aboriginal people have converted to Christianity either by choice or by the influence of education in mission schools. About 75% of Aborigines indicate that Christianity is their primary religion. One aspect of the conversion of Aboriginal people to Christianity is that very few, if any, traditional elements of Aboriginal spirituality have been incorporated into Aboriginal Christianity.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

As part of the larger Australian society, Australian Aborigines can participate in major holidays. Australia Day, January 26, is the equivalent of Independence Day in the United States. This holiday often invokes public protests on the part of Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people participated in major protests

on the event of the Bicentennial in 1988. Traditional Aboriginal society, however, had no holidays as such.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

In some Aboriginal societies, there were both male and female initiation rituals that marked the passage of the child into adulthood. Male initiation still takes place among groups like the Aranda in central Australia. Circumcision is an important part of male initiation among the Aranda. Exclusion of young males is also an integral part of the initiation process; however, school schedules have to be taken into account in a modern context.

Death in Aboriginal Australian societies was accompanied by complex rituals. Among the Walpiri of central Australia, a wife would have to isolate herself from the rest of the community upon the death of her husband. She would live in a “widows’ camp” for a period of one to two years. During that time she would communicate through an intricate system of sign language. She was not permitted to speak during this period of mourning and seclusion. If a woman chose not to follow these traditions, her husband’s ghost could steal her soul, which would lead to her death.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Behavior and interpersonal relations among Australian Aborigines are defined by who one is related to and who one is descended from. In many Aboriginal societies, certain kinfolk stand in avoidance relationships with each other. For instance, in some groups a son-in-law must avoid his mother-in-law completely. Individuals will often change course entirely and go out of their way to avoid a prohibited in-law. In these complete avoidance relationships, he must not have any contact with her at all. In other types of relationships, a son-in-law can only speak to his mother-in-law by way of a special language, called “mother-in-law language.” The opposite of avoidance relationships are joking relationships. These are relationships between potential spouses that typically involve joking about sexual topics.

Aboriginal people comment that non-Aboriginal people say “thank you” all the time. Aboriginal social organization is based on a set of reciprocal obligations between individuals that are related by blood or marriage. Such reciprocal obligations do not require any thanks: If I am related to you and you ask me to share my food with you, I am obligated to do so without any expectation of gratitude on your part. Anglo-Australians often misconstrue this behavior as rude.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Health care is a central problem for most Aboriginal people. For rural groups, access to health care may be extremely limited. In precontact times, they would have relied on traditional health practices to cure illness and limit disease. However, through European influence, many rural societies have lost knowledge of traditional medicine and now must rely on Western medicine, which is often available only sporadically.

Aboriginal people receive a monthly allowance in restitution from the Australian government in the same way that Native Americans receive a monthly payment from the United States government. Aboriginal people buy various kinds of goods with this money. Often in rural communities, the majority of the check goes to food in the form of tea, flour, and



tinned meat. Some Anglo-Australians visit outstations after the checks are delivered to these communities. They then will set up a type of bank/general store from the back of a utility truck and sell products to the people at extremely inflated prices.

Housing varies between urban and rural Aboriginal people. The national, state, and local governments have encouraged nomadic groups to settle in houses in the European manner, and, to this end, they have built houses for some groups that live in the desert regions of central and western Australia. Aboriginal people have adapted these structures to their own design, using them as a place to store things, but generally regarding them as too small and too hot to actually eat, sleep, or entertain in.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage in traditional Aboriginal societies is a complicated matter that has interested and perplexed anthropologists ever since they encountered the marriage prescriptions of Australian Aborigines. In many societies, first marriages were arranged. Husbands were often much older than their wives. Among the Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst islands off the northern coast of Australia, female infants were betrothed at birth. Females in this society were always married. This practice was related to Tiwi belief that females became impregnated by spirits; human males were not active participants in the process

of human procreation. Tiwi society also required that every individual needed to have a “social father.” Since the biological father was a spirit and could not provide for the child, and since procreation could occur at any time in a female’s life, it was necessary to ensure that any child that might be produced would have a social father: the husband of the female.

### 11 CLOTHING

Australian Aborigines were one of the only groups of people in the world to not wear any type of clothing. Both men and women went naked. Nowadays things have changed considerably. Urban Aborigines wear modern clothes appropriate to their age group. Rural groups dress like the Anglo-Australians who also live there: many of these people dress like American cowboys. Aborigines from the southeastern coast wear large blankets made from kangaroo hide to protect them from the cold, wind, and rain that characterize winter in that region.

### 12 FOOD

Since many Aboriginal groups were nomadic hunters and gatherers, they did little in the area of food preparation. Meals were simple. Almost all Aboriginal groups made a conceptual distinction between meat and non-meat foodstuffs. This is reflected in the terminology of the various languages. In Walpiri, the term *kuyu* refers to meat or any game animal or bird that is killed for meat. In contrast, the term *miyi* refers to vegetables or fruit.

### 13 EDUCATION

Most urban Aboriginal children have the opportunity to attend public school. They often encounter discrimination in the classroom in terms of their culture and their language. Some communities have developed their own educational programs to help Aboriginal children achieve in the educational system. At Yuendumu in central Australia, the Walpiri have a very well-developed educational system that provides both European-style education and education in the areas of traditional language and culture. As is the case for Anglo-Australians, school is mandatory through the tenth grade, with grades 11 and 12 being optional. There have been attempts to develop institutions of higher education targeted to Aboriginal people, for the most part in rural areas of the country.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional Aboriginal societies possessed little in the way of material objects due to their nomadic lifestyles. As a result, Aboriginal groups did not have many musical instruments. The most well-known Aboriginal musical instrument is the *dijeridoo*, a long, hollow tube made from a piece of wood that had been hollowed out by termites. These instruments were traditionally only found in groups in the Top End region of the continent, in the areas around Arnhem Land, Cape York Peninsula, and the Kimberleys. These long trumpets produce a characteristic drone that accompanies ritual dancing. Djiridoos have become popular instruments in the production of modern world music. A few Aboriginal people teach dijeridoo to non-Aboriginal people who want to learn to play it.

In many Aboriginal societies men used a “bullroarer” to frighten women and uninitiated males at ceremonial events. The bullroarer is a decorated and shaped piece of flat wood

that is attached to a line and swung around and around above a person's head to produce a whirring sound. The sound is usually said to be the voice of important spirits of the land. As opposed to their Oceanic neighbors, Australian Aborigines did not use drums.

Dance is an extremely important part of Aboriginal ceremonial life. Many Aboriginal dances mimic the movements and behaviors of animal species such as the *broilga* crane of the northern wetlands. Typically, men and women had separate rituals and, as a result, separate dances and dance performances. There are several Aboriginal performance troupes in Australia that travel to urban centers to perform traditional dances as well as newly created pieces.

### 15 WORK

In traditional Aboriginal societies there was a division of labor according to age and sex. Women and children were responsible for gathering vegetables, fruit, and small game such as *goannas* (a large lizard). Men were responsible for obtaining meat by hunting both large and small game. Men in Aranda society hunted with a variety of implements including spears, spear throwers, and non-returning boomerangs.

Aboriginal people in urban areas are employed in a variety of jobs. However, gaining employment is often difficult due to discrimination.

### 16 SPORTS

Rugby, Australian-rules football, and cricket are important spectator and participant sports in Australia, though basketball has been a fast-growing sport for some time now. Aboriginal people play for some of the semi-professional rugby teams.

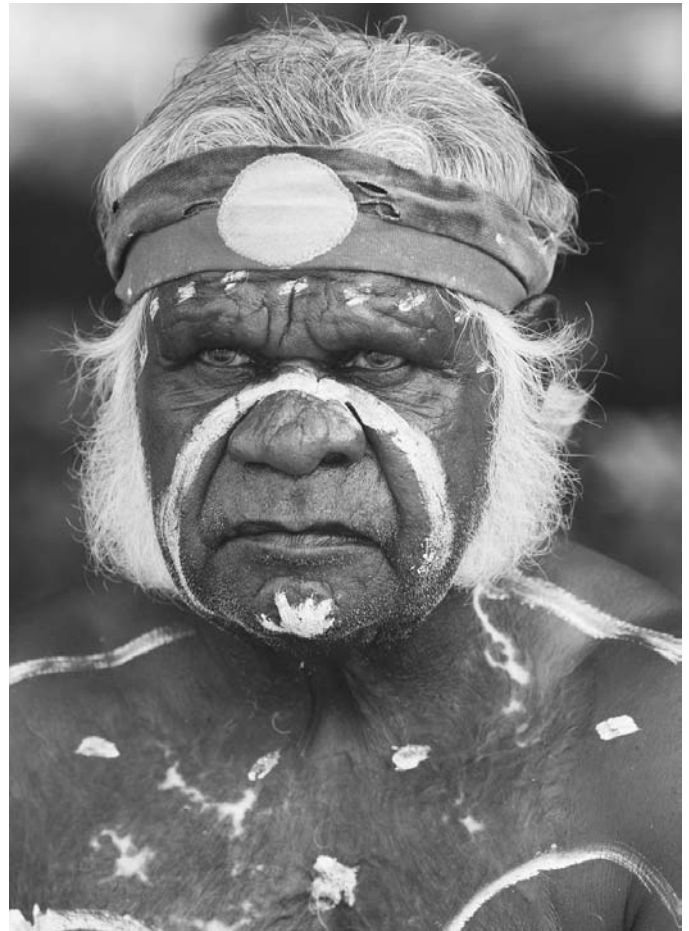
### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In some parts of Australia, Aboriginal people have established their own broadcasting stations for radio and television. These establishments have been most successful in the central region of Australia in and around Alice Springs. In these communities, elders have realized that if they do not provide alternative programming for their youth, they will turn away from the traditional ways of life under the influence of American and Australian television programs. Aboriginal bands also produce music videos for these programs, as well as for distribution to the larger society.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Australian Aboriginal art has been extremely popular on the world art market for some time now. The pointillist acrylic paintings of "dreamings" from the Central Desert region bring a high price, especially if the artist is one of the well-known Aboriginal artists. In the Walpiri community of Yuendumu, the elders decided to paint the doors of the classrooms of the school with various "dreamings."

There are regional differences in the art of Aboriginal Australia. Arnhem Land in the northern part of the Northern Territory is renowned for bark painting, weaving, rock art, and sculpture. The use of cross-hatched patterns is a distinctive characteristic of Arnhem Land art. Even within the Arnhem Land region, there are subregions whose art can be distinguished, demonstrating the complexity and variation in traditional Aboriginal artistic expression.



*An Australian Aborigine in New South Wales, Australia.  
(Tim Graham/Getty Images)*

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The retention of the right to pursue traditional ways of life is one of the biggest social problems facing Aboriginal people. To pursue traditional lifestyles, language and folklore must be maintained in the face of societal pressure to modernize. Many Aboriginal communities have hired linguist-teachers to help in the efforts to preserve the traditional language for future generations; however, there are more languages in need of preservation than there are linguist-teachers willing to take on the task of aiding in the preservation and transmission of these languages.

Life in urban areas, where the standard of living is very low and prospects for further education and meaningful employment are minimal, has fostered a high incidence of domestic violence and alcoholism. In an attempt to reverse this trend, some older males have "kidnapped" young men and taken off to traditional lands to participate, involuntarily, in a kind of "scared straight" rehabilitation program. There have been mixed reactions to this kind of behavior both within Aboriginal society and the larger Australian society as a whole.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Most Aboriginal societies recognize two genders: male and female. Some Aboriginal languages encode gender grammatically through a system of noun classes. While somewhat sim-



ilar to the use of gender in many Indo-European languages, the Aboriginal systems are more complex and have provided some interesting semantic relationships. For instance, in Dyirbal, which was once spoken in far northern Queensland, there were four noun classes. The first class included men and animate objects. The second class included women, water, fire, and violence; all of which were considered dangerous by the Dyirbal. The third class was composed of edible fruits and vegetables, while the fourth class included everything that was not in the first three classes.

In traditional Aboriginal ritual and social life, male and female were sharply demarcated and differentiated. Any ritual that was sacred and secret to one gender was held out of eye and ear shot from the rest of the group. There are strict punishments for any females who transgress a male ritual. While the punishments were less extreme for men, they still avoid going near female rituals. In social life, gender and kinship also dictated behavior and decorum. There are precise rules that govern the interactions of men and women who are related to each other either by blood or marriage. To avoid contravening these rules, men and women tend to gather together in gender-exclusive groups when in public places.

For groups like the Mardu of Western Australia, the strong egalitarian nature of the society means that men and women feel equally able to make decisions and express opinions on most matters important to the well-being of the group. However, this does not mean that women and men have equal rights within Mardu society. For instance, women are not free to divorce their husbands, to have more than one husband at a time, or to engage in "husband-lending." Mardu men, on the other hand, are free to engage in the equivalent activities within the society. Older male relatives often make major decisions that will affect the lives of women, the most influential being infant betrothal. Infant betrothal is a social practice whereby an older male relative negotiates a husband for a baby girl, although the formal marriage does not take place until the girl attains puberty. The practice typically results in young girls being married to much older men.

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—by J. Williams

# AZERBAIJANIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ah-zer-bye-JAHN-eez

**LOCATION:** Azerbaijan; Iran

**POPULATION:** Estimated about 40-45 million worldwide:

Republic of Azerbaijan, 8.2 million; Iran, estimated 30 million; Georgia, Dagestan, Russia, China, Iraq, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom, Canada, United States and Australia.

**LANGUAGE:** Azeri (also called Azerbaijani)

**RELIGION:** Islam (majority); Christianity (Orthodox and Evangelical); Judaism

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The word Azerbaijan means "land of fire." Even today, it is possible to find places in Azerbaijan where fires ignite and burn spontaneously on the surface of the earth. These fires seem to burn eternally because they are fed by gas that seeps through cracks in the surface of the earth. The fires indicate that this land has vast oil reserves deep beneath the surface of the earth; geologists and geophysicists are discovering that Azerbaijan has more oil hidden below its surface than ever imagined before.

Azerbaijan is an ancient land. Some of the earliest evidence of all human civilization can be traced to this region. For example, in 1960 archeologists discovered a prehistoric cave (Azikh) that dates to the Neanderthal period. A human jawbone found there is believed to be 350,000–400,000 years old. Stone tools were also unearthed that date back to the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods, which would make them approximately 1–1.5 million years old.

In ancient times, Azerbaijanis were believed to be skilled mariners who lived along the western coast of the Caspian Sea. The people of this advanced culture navigated, explored, and colonized many waterways, from the Volga and Dvina rivers in present-day Russia to the Black, Baltic, and North seas. Some archeologists believe that the ancestors of modern Azerbaijanis may have even traveled as far east as China and as far west as Norway and Sweden and that even modern Scandinavians themselves may have descended from ancient, fair-skinned Azerbaijani explorers and colonists.

Azerbaijan is located at the crossroads of Europe and Central Asia along what used to be called the Silk Road, which was a famous web of roads between Europe and China traveled by traders in mule and camel caravans. The Italian explorer and adventurer Marco Polo passed through Azerbaijan in about 1270. He wrote about the eternal fires burning from the earth and about a special oil that was used as medicine for skin diseases and other ailments in people and cattle. He observed that people came from neighboring countries, often from great distances, to obtain oil for their lamps.

Because visitors from many countries and nationalities passed through this region, not only were goods, such as silk and tea, traded, but also many ideas about music, literature, medicine, and science were exchanged. Even today, this openness to foreigners and this curiosity about other parts of the world is part of the Azerbaijani legacy.

Azerbaijan is a tiny country squeezed between three major economic and political powers—Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

Azerbaijan is bordered by Russia to the north, the Caspian Sea to the east, Iran to the south, and Armenia and Georgia to the west. There is also a 10-km (6.2-mi) strip that touches Turkey on the western border of Nakhchivan, an autonomous republic in Azerbaijan. Each of these countries (except Georgia) has, at different times in history, tried to gain control over Azerbaijan and to benefit from its vast natural resources, especially oil. Some people say Azerbaijan lives in a “tough neighborhood” because of the political pressures it has to deal with from all sides but as writer Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli (1887–1943) described, Azerbaijan was located between “Two Fires”—Russia and Iran.

Over the centuries, many kingdoms and empires have fought to gain control over the region, including the Romans, Greeks, Mongols, Persians, and Russians. For example, Arabs from the south conquered this region in AD 642 and imposed the Muslim religion. Then Mongols from the east dominated the region from 1236 to 1498. The country was ruled by Safavids beginning in the 16th century. During the 18th century, Russians from the north began their territorial expansion into the region, only to be countered by Turks from the West.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the region was again under Russian jurisdiction. In 1918 Azerbaijan gained its independence and became known as the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. But, freedom was very short-lived. Less than two years later, in 1920, Soviet army troops invaded and occupied Baku. Azerbaijan then lived under the domination of the Soviet Union until 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Azerbaijan was able to regain its independence. The country is now known as the Republic of Azerbaijan. Since 1988, the Armenians have been fighting with Azerbaijanis. As of 1994, Armenians occupied about 15% of Azerbaijan’s territory.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Azerbaijan is a small country. The map of Azerbaijan somewhat resembles an eagle flying eastward. The Republic of Azerbaijan covers 86,600 sq km (33,430 sq mi), making it about the size of the U.S. state of Maine. The land has many contrasts in temperature and terrain, from coastal lowlands (along the Caspian Sea and at the basins of the Kura and Araz rivers) to high mountain ranges of the Greater and Lesser Caucasus and Talish mountain chains. The mountain regions are extremely cold, but other regions in Azerbaijan are nearly as hot as tropical or desert regions. These vast temperature differences mean that many kinds of foods can be grown here. Azerbaijan grows cotton, grapes for wine, and a wide range of garden vegetables. The population of the Republic of Azerbaijan is approximately 8.2 million people. However, three times as many Azerbaijanis live to the south in Iran (an estimated 30–35 million). More Azerbaijanis live in Iran because of a treaty signed between Russia and Persia in 1828, splitting the country into two sections, northern (now the Azerbaijan Republic) and southern (now part of Iran).

Azerbaijanis also live in other parts of the former Soviet Union, especially Georgia, Dagestan, and Russia. Azerbaijanis also live in China (Xinjiang Province) and Iraq. An estimated 200,000 Azerbaijanis used to live in Armenia, but according to UNHCR about 182,000 Azerbaijanis fled Armenia in 1988 before the war started between these two countries. In the 1970s, many Azerbaijanis immigrated from Iran to Western Europe (especially Germany, Sweden, and England) and to Canada

(Toronto) and the United States (Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and New York City). Also, a considerable number of Azerbaijanis from Iran have settled in Australia. An estimated 40–45 million Azerbaijanis live throughout the world.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Azerbaijanis speak Azeri (sometimes called Azerbaijani). It is a Turkic language belonging to the Altaic-Turkic language group, which also includes Anatolia Turkish and other Central Asian languages. For centuries, Azerbaijanis wrote their language using the Arabic alphabet. However, a Latin-based alphabet was adopted in 1923 in a purge by the Soviet government to rid Azerbaijan and other Muslim countries of the influence of Islam.

In the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union, the people were forced to burn books that were written in Arabic script into giant bonfires in the middle of their villages and towns; these books were not only religious books, but also books of poetry and medicine. It was tragic for Azerbaijanis and for the rest of the world that these books and manuscripts were destroyed. The Soviets wanted to destroy these books primarily because they associated the Arabic script with Islam (particularly the holy book, the Quran) and wanted to stamp out all religious influences in the region.

In 1939, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin (1879–1953) feared that the people of Azerbaijan and the other Central Asian Turkic Republics, who spoke Turkic languages, might join together and rebel against the Soviet government. In order to make it impossible for them to communicate with each other through writing, he imposed the Cyrillic alphabet that was used for the Russian language. Azerbaijan and the other Turkic republics (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) in the Soviet Union had no choice. Almost overnight, works were published, not in Latin any more but Cyrillic script. Furthermore, to confound the situation, Stalin assigned different letters for some of the identical sounds in their Turkic languages that did not exist in the Russian language. For example, there were seven different letters created in Turkic Cyrillic script to represent the “ng” sound (as in “English”). Thus, it became nearly impossible for speakers of related languages to read each other’s languages.

One of the first things that Azerbaijan’s parliament did after Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991 was to readopt a Latin-based alphabet for their language. However, the enormous task of rewriting everything from street signs to textbooks to computer keyboards, as well as teaching in a new alphabet, has been daunting.

But, Azerbaijanis, who have changed their alphabet three times in the 20th century, feel that the new alphabet represents their new, independent country and that they are no longer under control of anyone else. It also reflects the desire of Azerbaijanis to develop friendships with people in Europe and the United States, countries where a similar Latin alphabet is also used.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Azerbaijanis have close family ties, spending much of their time talking with one another. Therefore, a rich tradition of oral folklore has developed in this region. Many songs, stories, proverbs, and expressions have been passed down over hundreds and thousands of years. The oldest known story in the



Turkic languages is Dede Gorgud. It was first written down in the 11th century, but its origin dates to the 7th century. Dede Gorgud is believed to have been a real person who entertained others with stories, many of which bear a resemblance to tales in the Greek *Odyssey*.

Azerbaijanis have many legends. One of the most famous is about an ancient tower, called Maiden Tower, which still stands today as the most famous landmark in Baku. According to the legend, a young girl ordered the tower to be built and threw herself from its heights into the sea below when her father wanted to marry her off. Legends like this have become favorite themes in the works of many Azerbaijani artists and poets. There is even a ballet based on the Maiden Tower legend.

Azerbaijanis have many proverbs, such as: "Wish your neighbor two cows so that you may have one for yourself" (In other words, wish good fortune for others so that you also may benefit); "Laughter is the remedy for 1,001 illnesses;" "The dog barks, the caravan passes" (Don't get discouraged and distracted when people criticize you); "The more you know, the less you should talk;" and "Even the ground has ears" (There is no such thing as a secret).

Like other people of the region, Azerbaijanis love the humor and wisdom of Molla Nasraddin stories. There are hundreds of stories, many set in the 13th century, that deal with social issues that are fundamental to human nature. Molla Nasraddin stories often point to an obvious truth taken for granted. Molla appears to be the fool but, in reality, he exposes other people's foolishness. Some of the stories are very short and witty. For

example, one story is as follows: "One day Molla was asked the secret to his long life. He replied, 'Keep your feet warm, your head cool, be careful what you eat, and don't think too much!'"

## 5 RELIGION

Some historians believe that Zoroastrianism (which involves the worship of sacred fire), which originated in the 6th century BC, was prevalent in ancient Azerbaijan because of the presence of underground oil and natural gas. Zoroastrianism is believed to have influenced Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

It appears that Christianity was popular in the region from the 2nd through 6th centuries when the area was called Albania. Numerous archeological sites and churches date to this period. Recently, Dr. Zaza Alexidze (born 1935) of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Georgia, discovered a palimpsest manuscript in St. Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai, Egypt, that proves that early Christians in the region known as Caucasian Albania (now Azerbaijan) had parts of the Bible available in the Caucasian Albanian script. This alphabet dates back to 5th–7th century. There are still people known as Udins in Azerbaijan and Georgia who speak this language.

In the 7th century, when the Arabs invaded the region, Islam was imposed. By the end of the 9th century, it is believed that most Azerbaijanis had become Muslims of the Shi'ite branch (as in Iran).

During the Soviet period, religious worship was discouraged, and most mosques and churches were either destroyed or converted into cultural centers or music halls. Atheism was the official religion. Today, Azerbaijan enjoys freedom of religion—Muslims, Christians (Orthodox and Evangelical), and Jews can all worship openly and freely. The constitution ratified by the Azerbaijan Parliament in 1995 guarantees freedom of religion to all. The state has no official religion, though most people are traditionally Muslim. The Constitution provides for separation of the powers of church and state. A person does not have to belong to a certain religion to be elected or hold an office. However, especially since 2000, more and more Azerbaijanis are becoming devout, practicing Muslims, and more women are wearing head scarves and modest apparel associated with Islam.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most anticipated and joyful holiday of the year is Novruz (meaning New Year). Novruz is an ancient tradition marking the Spring Solstice (March 21) or the coming of spring. This holiday is not only celebrated by Azerbaijanis, but by others throughout the region, including Iranians, Afghans, Turks, and people in the Central Asian countries. During the Soviet period, Novruz was officially banned because the holiday was thought to be too nationalistic. Soviets wanted to emphasize the unity of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union, not the distinctive characteristics of individual states. Nevertheless, many Azerbaijanis commemorated Novruz in the privacy of their homes. Since 1990, Novruz has been an official holiday in Azerbaijan and is celebrated openly.

Novruz is always associated with the colors red and green and the newness of spring. One of the most vivid symbols of Novruz is a plate of green wheat seedlings that each family grows (or these days, often buys) that is tied up with a red ribbon. On the Tuesday before Novruz, young boys build bonfires

in their yards and in the streets and dare each other to jump over the flames without getting burned. Women bake cookies and sweets, and friends and relatives visit each other at home. Shops and government offices are closed, as are schools.

Azerbaijanis in the republic celebrate January 1 as New Year's Day, though in Iran, Novruz officially ushers in the new calendar year.

Since 1992, the Azerbaijan Republic has celebrated Independence Day on May 28, which commemorates the first period of independence from 1918–1920 before the Bolsheviks took power and Azerbaijan became a part of the Soviet Union.

The saddest public holiday of the year for Azerbaijanis is January 20. It commemorates “Black January” when Soviet troops attacked Baku in 1990 with tanks and machine guns and killed hundreds of civilians in the streets. Mikhail Gorbachev, then president of the Soviet Union, was afraid that Azerbaijanis would rise up and demand independence. He sent troops to Baku to squelch the rebel movement. Now on this day, people visit cemeteries and place red flowers on the graves of those who have died for Azerbaijan.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The most significant Azerbaijani rites of passage are connected with birthdays, marriage, and death. The birthdays of famous people, such as artists, musicians, scholars, or statesmen, are called Jubilees and become significant events in the life of the nation. Usually, jubilees occur on the person's 60th, 70th, or other decade birthdays. If a person has made an incredible contribution to the nation, his or her jubilee may be celebrated even after he has died. For example, the 120th jubilee of the famous composer, Uzeyir Hajibeyov, was celebrated in 2005 although he had died in 1948. Hajibeyov is honored as the founder of classical music in Azerbaijan.

The color red is associated with both marriage and death. Often, the bride wears a white wedding gown with a red sash tied around her waist. Weddings are important celebrations. In the countryside, weddings can continue for three days. In cities wedding celebrations usually take place in restaurants with big halls with ample space for dancing.

Thursdays are days for visiting cemeteries. Mourners place red flowers, usually carnations in pairs (for example, two or four) on the grave. When a person dies, the funeral is usually held the next day. Friends also gather again one week later, 40 days later, and then on the annual date of the death. When a person dies who has never married, a cracked mirror wrapped with a red ribbon is often placed near the grave. The red ribbon is a reminder that the person never had the chance to enjoy the joyous occasion of getting married and starting his own family.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Azerbaijanis are generally expressive with their emotions. They are not shy in expressing their love. People feel very comfortable holding hands and touching. When people meet each other, generally they kiss each other on the cheeks—men with men and women with women. Young girls often walk down the street holding hands, or arm in arm. Parents often hold the hands of their children, even older ones. Personal relations are highly nurtured and, in general, people are very courteous to one another.

Azerbaijanis are known for their kind hospitality to strangers. They love to invite guests from the international community to their homes for dinner. They enjoy traveling to other countries and making friends throughout the world. For about 70 years (1920–1991) Azerbaijan was under the control of the Soviet Union and lived behind what was called the “Iron Curtain,” which restricted them from being able to meet or communicate easily with people from other countries. Since Azerbaijan became an independent country, Azerbaijanis have been able to continue their tradition of international friendship. Now they travel abroad frequently.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The average life expectancy for Azerbaijanis in the Republic is not as high as in established industrialized nations. As in many of the other former Soviet republics, there has been a shortage of modern medical equipment and pharmaceuticals in Azerbaijan, especially during the transitional years since the collapse of the Soviet Union as Azerbaijan works to establish a market economy.

Azerbaijanis, however, especially those living in the Caucasus Mountains, are famous for their extreme longevity. Many people live to be over 100-years-old. Throughout Azerbaijan, there are numerous regions where longevity is the norm, including Lerik, Lankaran, Gazakh, Tovuz, Ismayilli, Jalilabad, Shamakhi, Lachin, Kalbajar, and Aghdam. Azerbaijanis credit their longevity to a variety of factors best described as a combination of heredity, environment, and psychological, social, and cultural patterns. They believe longevity is basically inherited; many of the oldest Azerbaijanis had parents who also lived long lives. Centenarians living in the mountains typically are poor and eat yogurt and vegetables that they grow themselves. Most say they have spent much of their lives involved in hard physical work.

The leading cause of death in Azerbaijan is heart disease, followed by cancer, respiratory infections, and accidents. Diabetes, tuberculosis, hepatitis A, and acute respiratory infections also pose serious public health problems.

The war with Armenians over the Karabakh territory in Azerbaijan began in late 1988. It has resulted in more than 25,000 deaths and many permanent injuries to people who stepped on land mines.

Much of the water supply is unsafe due to high levels of chemical and biological pollution. Much of the pollution comes from oil leaks at petroleum plants and from the dumping of raw sewage into the Caspian Sea. In Baku, for example, it is essential to boil any water intended for drinking.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Older people are greatly esteemed in Azerbaijan and are given high positions in the family and community. The elderly are never left to feel useless or unneeded. Traditional Azerbaijani social organization, including extended kinship and inter-generational bonds, makes aging less stressful. Children are greatly revered among the Azerbaijanis, as well.

## 11 CLOTHING

Clothing is very similar to Western styles. Women, especially, try to look as attractive as possible. Azerbaijani women rid themselves of the traditional Muslim veil (chador) in 1928. The event is even commemorated by various statues in Baku.



*An Azerbaijani shepherd with his sheep, standing between Dahana and Dagestan in the Caucasian mountains. Despite oil contracts and foreign investment, Azerbaijanis still live with low incomes. (Manoocher Deghati/AFP/Getty Images)*

However, the influence of Islam is becoming more evident, and more and more women do wear head scarves and long-sleeved jackets and long clothing.

## **12 FOOD**

Food consists primarily of bread, grains, fruits, and vegetables but is supplemented by meats, such as lamb, chicken, and fish. Pilaf (rice) and dolma (grape leaves stuffed with meat) is one of the favorite dishes. In Iran, Azerbaijanis eat rice nearly every day. In the Republic, the cuisine is patterned more on Russian-style food during the Soviet republics. In Russian meals there is more emphasis on bread, potatoes, and cabbage. The traditional beverage is black tea with sugar cubes. Azerbaijanis are excellent hosts and love to invite people to their homes to share meals. Dinners often last three hours or longer.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Soviet period placed great emphasis on education. Azerbaijanis have achieved a high level of literacy, estimated at about 99%. Today, even though Azerbaijan has gained its independence, the education system is severely challenged. Nearly 800,000 refugees lost their homes in the early 1990s because of the ethnic conflicts with Armenia. This placed severe pressure on the education system. Many refugee children had no schools to attend. Sometimes, school buildings were used to house the

refugees, which meant that children from families who were not refugees also suffered. Salaries for teachers and professors still have not been adjusted to reflect current living standards and, therefore, enormous bribing goes on in the education system at all levels. This is beginning to have an enormous impact on the society. Many Azerbaijanis admit that education standards were higher during the Soviet period.

During the Soviet period, Russian was the predominant language taught in Azerbaijan. Today, young people have the greatest chances of getting the best jobs if they are trilingual—fluent in Azeri, Russian, and English. Great emphasis is being placed on learning English. Popular music in English is played on local radio stations.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Since ancient times, Azerbaijanis have held their poets and literary figures in highest esteem. The city of Baku has many statues devoted to Azerbaijani poets and literary figures, such as Nizami, Fuzuli, and Nasimi.

Baku is a charming city known for its architectural diversity, which is a unique synthesis of both Eastern and Western styles. An incredible architectural transformation took place during the relatively short period of the oil boom years (1880–1920) that completely altered the physical features and character of Baku, converting it from a sleepy, medieval feudal city

into a bustling international metropolis comparable to its European sister cities. One of the primary reasons so many Western-style buildings appeared was that a number of prominent European architects were hired by oil barons and brought to Baku from countries such as Poland, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Russia. Naturally, they drew upon their own experience and training. They introduced a wide range of European styles; for example, Neo-Classical, German, and Italian Renaissance Revival, French Islamic Maghrib, Venetian Gothic Revival, etc.

However, the architecture of the oil boom period in Baku is becoming overpowered by hundreds of modern apartment towers. The city has taken on a new skyline.

Azerbaijanis are famous for their music. It is impossible to truly understand Azerbaijani culture without understanding their deep love of music. The majority of Azerbaijanis have either been trained in music or perform it on Western or traditional Eastern stringed instruments, such as tar or kamancha, or wind instruments such as zurna and balaban.

Classical Azerbaijani music is a rich blend of eastern melodies, rhythms, and modes blended with Western forms and styles like symphonies, ballets, and opera. Azerbaijani world-class composers include Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Gara Garayev, Fikrat Amirov, and Agshin Alizade. The world-renown cellist Mstislav Rostropovich was also born in Baku

## 15 WORK

The greatest sources of employment are the oil industry, construction and agriculture. Enormous reserves of oil have been discovered in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea. Many international companies are already helping Azerbaijan drill for oil and gas and building pipelines that will transport the oil and gas to international markets.

New Azerbaijan oil began reaching the international market in 2005. Already Azerbaijan is exporting about 1 million barrels of oil per day. However, the recent conflicts between Russia and Georgia have already impacted oil export because Azerbaijan's BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) pipeline travels more than 1000 miles from Baku to Tbilisi (Georgia) before it reaches the Mediterranean port in Ceyhan (pronounced Jeyhan), Turkey.

The most serious challenge facing the economy is to make sure that the proceeds from the oil benefit the entire country and that the infrastructure within the country is built up for the benefit of all. In other words, that wealth is not concentrated in the hands of only a few.

## 16 SPORTS

Azerbaijanis love sports and excel at wrestling. They are famous for chess, as well. World chess champion Garry Kasparov grew up playing chess in Baku.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

It is a rare Azerbaijani home that does not have a television. The few exceptions would occur in remote mountain villages. Satellite dishes are becoming popular throughout the country, many of which are affixed to the narrow balconies above the streets. Western television programs are well-liked among the Azerbaijanis, as are Russian and Turkish programs. Azerbaijanis, especially elderly people spend their leisure time playing nard (backgammon), dominoes and chess. Educational insti-

tutions, work places are computerized. Many homes now have personal computers. More than half the population has mobile phones.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In Azerbaijan more emphasis is placed on music than on folk arts and hobbies, though during the Soviet period, many people enjoyed collecting postcards, stamps, and other memorabilia that made them feel more connected to the world.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since the mid 1980s, Armenians and Azerbaijanis have been fighting over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh within the borders of Azerbaijan. The region has a large percentage of Armenians who wanted to separate from Azerbaijan and join with Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh region has some of the most productive farmland in the area, favoring a wide cultivation of products including cotton, wheat, tobacco, grapes, tomatoes, and other fruits and vegetables. It also has gold mines. The fighting has caused a tragic loss of life (an estimated 25,000 people), and many have been permanently injured.

As of the late 1990s, the Armenian military occupied about 15% of Azerbaijan's territory. Approximately 800,000 Azerbaijanis who lived in this region were forced to flee their communities, their homes, their schools, and their workplaces. The refugees used to live scattered throughout the countryside in refugee camps, hostels, schools, and anywhere else they can find shelter but now there are no refugee camps left in Azerbaijan. Refugees move to special communities with buildings constructed by government. Azerbaijan wants to reclaim the Nagorno-Karabakh area so that the people can go back and rebuild their homes, schools, and factories that were burned down during the war. A cease-fire agreement has been in place since May 1994, but Azerbaijanis are eager to resolve the problem and bring about a permanent peace. At the same time, they are unwilling to give up their lands. The problem will probably take a long time to resolve.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Many women hold down office jobs as well as manage their households and raise the children. The work load on women is extremely heavy.

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—revised by B. Blair

# BAHRAINIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** bah-RAIN-eez

**LOCATION:** Bahrain

**POPULATION:** 727,000 (2006)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic (official); English; Farsi (Persian); Hindi; Urdu

**RELIGION:** Islam (Shia, 70%; Sunni, 24%); Christianity; Hinduism; Judaism; Baha'i

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Bahrain (meaning “two seas”) has been the only safe port on the Persian Gulf throughout history because of prevailing wind and weather patterns. Therefore it has played an important part in the life of the Gulf since civilization began there. This tiny island nation has been of strategic significance since Sumerian times (4000 BC) to the present. Despite this, it has had a relatively peaceful history.

The entire northern coastal region of the Arabian peninsula was once known as Bahrain, with present-day Bahrain known then as Dilmun. It is described in the Sumerian herotale *The Epic of Gilgamesh* as an island of immortals where heroes went after death to live in eternal bliss. In fact, Bahrain hosts the largest cemetery in the world: more than 170,000 burial mounds, dating from 2500–1800 BC, are located on the island of Bahrain. They range from slight lumps in the ground to mounds as high as 12 m (40 ft). The mounds have been pillaged by grave robbers for 3,000 years, however, and few archaeological artifacts remain.

For a time in ancient history, and later in modern days, Persia (now Iran) claimed Bahrain as its territory. The Portuguese laid claim to it in 1521, but they were forced back out by the Bahrainis in 1602. In 1782, the al-Khalifa Arab family took over the islands and have been the ruling family ever since. (They are cousins of the al-Sabah ruling family of Kuwait and are distantly related to the al-Saud ruling family of Saudi Arabia.) Pirates long used Bahrain as a base for attacking ships in the Gulf. In 1820, Bahrain signed an agreement with Britain to become a British-protected state, meaning that Britain would protect Bahrain's sovereignty in return for safe sailing up the Gulf for Britain's ships. Therefore, while Bahrain kept the pirates from attacking Britain's ships, Britain kept the Iranians (and others) from attacking Bahrain. This agreement lasted until Britain decided to terminate it in 1968. By 1971, all British troops had left Bahrain, although British soldiers still supervise Bahrain's army and security forces. On 15 August 1971, Bahrain proclaimed independence. The constitution of 1972 provided for a parliament, or National Assembly, the first in the nation's history, and elections were held in 1973. Two years later, in 1975, the Assembly was disbanded by the king for security reasons; the king claimed that some Assembly members were involved in subversive activities.

In 1993 the king created a 40-member Consultative Council, all of whose members serve by appointment. The 2002 constitution also created a 40-member Chamber of Deputies, whose members are directly elected by universal adult suffrage. Women have not only the right to vote but can also stand for office, and the Bahraini Chamber of Deputies typically has a few elected female members.

Known as “the land of sweet waters,” Bahrain's first wealth was in the form of fresh water that bubbled up in artesian wells and springs, even through the saltwater of the Gulf just off the islands' shores. Bahrain had more easily available fresh water than anywhere else on the Gulf coast. Pearls were the other big moneymaker, collected from offshore oyster beds. When the Japanese introduced cultured pearls in the 1930s, Bahrain's economy was in danger. However, oil was discovered in 1931, giving Bahrain the first oil well, and then the first oil refinery, on the Arab side of the Arabian Gulf. Although Bahrain has always produced less oil than other Arab states, oil continues to be the major source of income for the tiny island nation.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Bahrain is an archipelago in the Persian Gulf, lying 24 km (15 mi) off the northeast coast of Saudi Arabia, and 21 km (13 mi) northwest of the Qatar Peninsula. Of the 33 islands, only 5 are inhabited. The six major islands are Bahrain (also known as as-Awal), Muharraq, Sitrah, Umm al-Nassan, Jidda (used as the Bahraini prison), and Nabi Salih. The 27 minor islands include the Muhammadiyah and Hawar groups. There is dispute between Bahrain and Qatar over the possession of the Hawar Islands. The total area is 678 sq km (262 sq mi), of which 85% is the island of Bahrain. There are 126 km (78 mi) of coastline. The capital city, Manama, is located on the north coast of Bahrain island. A causeway 2 km (1.5 mi) long connects the islands of Bahrain and Muharraq (the second-most important island, where the ruling family lives). A bridge joins the islands of Bahrain and Sitrah. There is also a long bridge, the King Fahd Causeway, linking Bahrain to mainland Saudi Arabia.

Bahrain is essentially a desert surrounded by water. Although freshwater springs bubble up from beneath the sea floor just offshore (these “wells” are marked with iron posts that rise above the surface of the water), and other artesian wells flow out of the ground at the north end of Bahrain Island, the land is otherwise dry and sandy. The climate ranges from hot (up to 48°C [120°F]) and humid in the summer to chilly (down to 10°C [50°F]) and damp (as high as 90% humidity) in the winter. Only about 7.6 cm (3 in) of rain fall per year, always during the winter. In recorded history there has never been any rain during the months of June through September. The *shamal* is a wind from the southeast in the winter that brings damp air and occasional dust storms. In the summer, *gaws* blow from the southwest, bringing hot air and frequently blinding sandstorms. The climate has probably changed over time. In Sumerian times (4000 BC), the prevailing winds were most likely from the northeast, bringing more temperate weather.

There are no forests in Bahrain, and the plant life is restricted to date palms and desert plants. Wildlife includes desert rats, gazelles, mongooses, snakes, lizards, and rabbits. A large wildlife refuge at al-Andareen provides protected space for various exotic birds, gazelles, oryx, and ibex.

In 2006 the Bahraini population was estimated at about 727,000, with 63% Bahraini Arabs; 27% Pakistanis, Indians, and Iranians; 5% other Arabs; and 4% Europeans. The population is increasing rapidly, but as more women enter the workforce, the birth rate is expected to slow. Bahrain is a largely urban nation. A full 85% of Bahrainis live in cities, and only 15% live in rural areas. The largest city is Manama, the capital, with a population of more than 150,000. Muharraq is the second largest city with 75,000 people.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Bahrain is Arabic. English, introduced during the time Bahrain was a British-protected state (1820–1968), is also spoken by many Bahrainis. Farsi (Persian) is spoken by the Iranians in Bahrain. The Indian population speaks Hindi and the Pakistanis speak Urdu.

Arabic, spoken by 300 million people worldwide, is spoken in different dialects from country to country, and the same words may have different shades of meaning in different areas. Even within the small nation of Bahrain, the Arabic dialect used by the rural population sounds “uncultured” to urban Bahrainis. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken forms are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that has no distinction between upper and lower cases. It is not necessary for the letters to be written on a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation conventions are also quite different from English.

Arabic speakers tend to use emotional appeal, exaggeration, and repetition in their language. They are very interested in the poetry of the language. “Hello” in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam alaykum* (“Peace be with you”), with the reply of *Walaykum as-salam* (“and to you peace”). *Ma’assalama* means “goodbye.” “Thank you” is *Shukran*, and “You’re welcome” is *Afwan*; “yes” is *na’am*, and “no” is *la’a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are: *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba’a*, *khamsa*, *sitta*, *saba’a*, *tamania*, *tisa’a*, and *ashara*.

Arabs have very long names, consisting of their first name, their father’s name, their paternal grandfather’s name, and finally their family name. Following Islamic tradition, women do not take their husband’s name when they marry but rather keep their father’s family name. Popular Arabic names include Mohammad, Abdullah, Hamad, and Ahmad for boys and Fatima, Laila, Hessa, and Shaima for girls. Because the majority of Bahraini Muslims are Shia, many are named for the great Shia Imams such as Ali and Husayn.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Bahrainis tell their children a popular legend that explains how the freshwater springs or wells bubble up from beneath the sea just off their shores. According to the story, falling stars knocked holes in the ground and Allah, the One God, cupped them up for his faithful followers to use. The ancient Sumerians (4000 BC) believed that the springs came from a freshwater sea that lay beneath the regular saltwater sea. This submarine sea was called *Abuz*, and it was ruled by a god known as *Abyss*, whom it was very important to please. In English, the word *abyss* has come to mean any bottomless depth. Geologists now believe the freshwater springs come from the Tuwaiq Mountains in Saudi Arabia—the water seeps through the porous layers of rock to flow towards Bahrain.

Pearls, long a source of wealth for the Bahrainis, have also inspired much folklore. Bahraini parents like to tell their children that pearls are created when a mermaid’s tears fall into an open oyster shell. Certain “magic” pearls have supernatural powers, such as helping to find lost objects or to bind love (if a young woman rubs her eyes with a pearl, she can make a man her slave simply by gazing on him).



### 5 RELIGION

At least 94% of the Bahraini population is Muslim. About 70% of Bahrainis are Shia, and 24% Sunni. A small percentage (5%) of the population is Christian, and the remaining 1% is Hindu, Jewish, Baha’i, or other faiths. Although Sunni Muslims are numerically in the minority, they have been the dominant religious community in Bahrain since the 17th century or before. The royal family of Bahrain and the majority of its wealthy merchant class are Sunnis. This has created many conflicts between the majority Shia and the ruling Sunnis. Even among the Sunnis and Shia there are various groups who are not always in agreement with one another, so Bahrain is beset with constant religious conflicts.

Islam is one of the youngest of the world’s main monotheistic religions, having only begun in the early 7th century AD when the prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah (which means “God” in Arabic). Muslims believe that Jews, Christians, and Muslims all worship the same God but by different names. Within just a few years of Muhammad’s



death in AD 632, Islam had spread through the entire Middle East. The Arab tribes were the first to convert.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570) in what is now Saudi Arabia, Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his outspoken denunciation of the pagan idols worshipped there (idols that attracted a lucrative pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca, AD 622 (July 16), called the *Hegira*, is counted as Year One in the Muslim calendar. Muhammad fled to the city now known as Medina, another of the holy sites of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Eventually Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the *Kaaba* [or Cube] building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship), and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam. All prayers are said facing Mecca, and each Muslim is expected—and greatly desires—to make a pilgrimage there (called a *Haj* or *Hadj*) at least once in his or her lifetime. Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living. Religion, politics, faith, and culture are all linked together for Muslims.

The difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims, which has played an important role in Bahraini history, has to do with the early history of the religion. After the Prophet Muhammad's death, the entire Muslim community was divided over who should become the first political successor, or *caliph*. A strong minority believed that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, should be caliph. The rest accepted Abu Baker as the first caliph. Abu Baker assumed the caliphate and eventually obtained the allegiance of Ali.

Ali did not become caliph until after the death of Uthman, the third caliph. At that time, Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria and a relative of Uthman, challenged Ali for the caliphate using Syrian troops personally loyal to him. The battles between the caliph and Mu'awiyah were inconclusive, and Ali remained in control over most areas except Greater Syria until his death. At that time, Mu'awiyah was able to defeat a number of challenges from Muslims of Muhammad's family and friends to firmly establish himself as caliph. He instituted a system of hereditary rule for his family, thus establishing the Umayyad dynasty. Those Muslims who refused to recognize the legitimacy of Mu'awiyah's caliphate and the Umayyad dynasty were called the followers of Ali, or *Shi'iat Ali*, while the supporters of the Umayyads were known as *Shi'iat Uthman*. Eventually the followers of Ali became known as the Shia.

Although there are doctrinal differences, the fundamental difference between the sects is an argument about authority, not doctrine. The Shia believe that the successors of Muhammad should have come from his close family (or *Ahl al-Bayt*) and that Ali should have been the first caliph. The Sunnis believe that although Ali was justified in defending the caliphate from Mu'awiyah, once the Umayyads took control it was more important to maintain political stability than to risk the chaos that might have resulted from a civil war. These political differences have developed into substantial theological differences over the centuries.

In present-day Bahrain, there is political tension between the Sunni ruling elites (including the royal family) and the majority Shia population. Many boycotted the 2002 parliamentary elections, and street demonstrations, which can turn violent, are common.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Secular holidays include New Year's Day on January 1 and National Day on December 16. Because 94% of Bahrainis are Muslim, their holidays are the official ones. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, which moves back by 11 days each year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are: *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations, and which is celebrated by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month; *Ayd Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of *Ramadan*; *Ayd Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca known as the *Haj* (families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims); the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *Mawoulid An-Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Ayd Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj*, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. All government offices, private businesses, and schools are also closed during *Ayd Al-Fitr* and *Ayd Al-Adha*.

*Ashura* is only commemorated by Shia. It is a formal day of mourning marking the anniversary when Muhammad's grandson, Husayn, and a small band of loyal followers were massacred by Yazid, the son of Mu'awiyah, who was named caliph by the Umayyeds after Mu'awiyah's death. Yazid was almost universally despised by the Muslims for his impiety and oppression but maintained a strong army personally loyal to him. The massacre occurred at Karbala' in Iraq. The Muslims who had asked Husayn to oppose Yazid failed to show up at Karbala' to help him against Yazid's army. Today the holiday has political overtones as Shia cry and lament the failure of the Muslims to defend Muhammad's family and as they celebrate the bravery of Husayn in opposing an unjust ruler despite terrible odds.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Bahraini rites of passage are similar to those in other Arab and Islamic cultures. Marriage and family are the focus of most Bahrainis' lives. Typically, marriages are arranged, although young men and women are consulted about prospective partners and in most cases can refuse a potential spouse.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Arab hospitality reigns in Bahrain. An Arab will never ask personal questions, as that is considered rude. It is expected that a person will say what he or she wishes without being asked. Food and drink are always taken with the right hand, because the left hand is used for "unclean" purposes, such as cleaning oneself. When talking, Arabs touch each other much more frequently and stand much closer together than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking, even if they are virtual strangers. Members of the opposite sex, however, even married couples, rarely touch in public. Arabs talk a lot, speaking loudly, repeating themselves often, and interrupting each other constantly. Conversations are highly emotional and full of gestures.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Bahrain has one of the highest standards of living in the Persian Gulf region. A rapidly increasing population is beginning to put a strain on housing and water supplies, however, raising the cost of living and causing poorer Bahrainis to live in substandard conditions. To help alleviate overcrowding in other cities, the government built a new town in the center of Bahrain Island called Madinat Hamad (Madinat is Arabic for “city” or “town” and Hamad is the name of the king who initiated the project). It encompasses 1,300 hectares (3,212 acres) of desert land, reaching 8 km (5 mi) from north to south and 2.5 km (1.5 mi) east to west. A road was built to connect Madinat Hamad to Manama and also gives access to the causeway linking the islands of Bahrain and Muharraq. After the first Gulf War (1990–91) many Kuwaiti refugees were resettled in Madinat Hamad. In 2001 the new city had a population of 126,000.

Bahrain’s oil wealth has enabled the government to make many improvements in Bahrain’s standard of living, including better health care, housing, and education. Technologically advanced medical care has led to the eradication of smallpox. There are government-subsidized medical facilities, as well as private ones. Bahrainis needing specialized care not available at home are flown abroad at the government’s expense. The government also provides social security coverage for pensions, industrial accidents, illness, unemployment, maternity, and a family allowance.

Although there is no railway system in Bahrain, there are now 225 km (140 mi) of paved roads, which is more than adequate for such a small country. Bahrain also has one of the most modern communications systems in the world, with two communications satellites in space (the first launched in 1968, the second in 1980). A state-of-the-art international airport serves more than 3 million passengers per year, and Mina Salman, located east of the capital city of Manama, is one of the most modern and efficient ports in the Middle East. Members of the older generation can still remember making their own shoes—that is how quickly the “industrial revolution” has happened in Bahrain.

Traditionally, Bahraini homes were made from palm fronds, or *barasti*. Modern homes are made of cement and lime brick. Rooms are built around an inner courtyard, and houses are built vertically (rather than horizontally, like ranch houses) to catch the breezes that blow higher in the air. “Wind towers” on the upper floors of many houses and other buildings catch these breezes and funnel the air down to the lower floors through air shafts. The most prized furnishings in Bahraini households are handwoven rugs, either imported from Iran or locally crafted.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Bahraini women are more publicly active than in most other Arab countries. With the increase in higher education and paid employment for women, traditional women’s roles are beginning to change. Fewer marriages are arranged by the couple’s parents as more couples choose their own partners. The dowry or “bride-price” paid by the groom to the bride’s family is disappearing. These changes are taking place only among the upper-middle and upper classes, however. Only those with sufficient money can afford to send their daughters for higher education, and only wealthy women can afford to

hire domestic help so that they may work outside the home. The lower and lower-middle classes of Bahrain remain much more traditional.

The family is the center of life for Bahrainis. Family lineage is very important, extending out to the whole tribe. Bahrainis continue to be fiercely loyal to their tribes. Children live with their parents until they are married, and sometimes after marriage as well. Polygamy (up to four wives) is legal, but few men practice it. Divorce is fairly simple, for both men and women, but it rarely occurs.

## 11 CLOTHING

Bahrainis have never been as conservative as many of their Saudi neighbors. Women were never as strict about covering themselves completely in public, and many modern Bahraini women no longer veil their faces at all. (Most do still choose to wear some sort of head covering and long sleeves.) Bahraini men wear a *thawb*, which is a long outer robe reaching from neck to ankles, made of white cotton, to keep them cool in the hot sun. They also wear a *ghutra*, a large rectangular piece of material draped over the head and held in place with an *agal*, a thick, black woven band. This headscarf protects them from the sun as well as from sandstorms (it can quickly be drawn across the face).

Western-style clothing is becoming more popular in the larger cities of Bahrain. The large numbers of expatriate workers normally dress as they do in their homelands, so it is a common sight in Bahrain to see, for example, cinema lines containing women in black abayas, Indians in saris, Pakistanis in shalwars, and Westerners in jeans and t-shirts.

## 12 FOOD

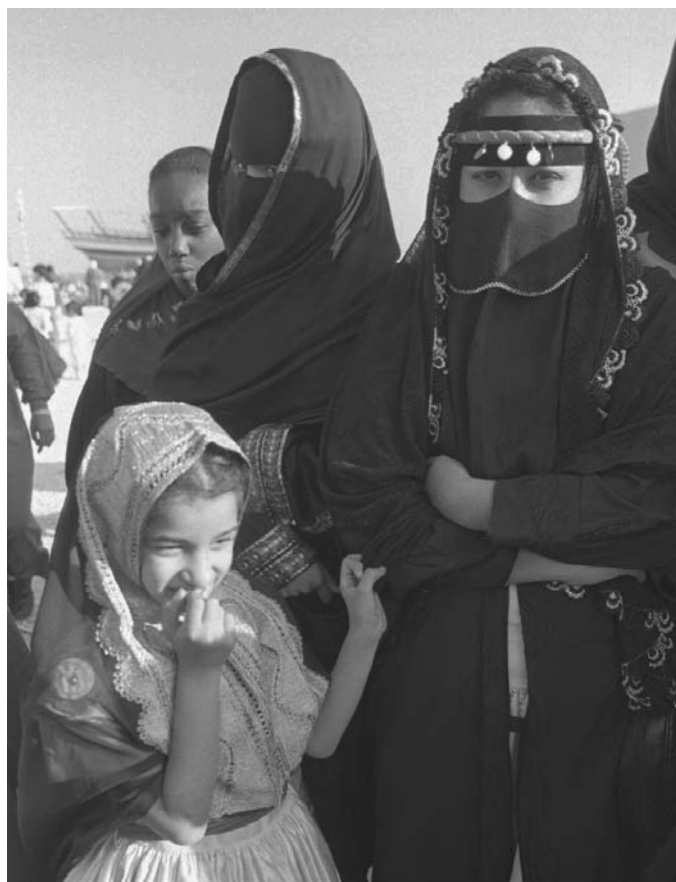
Meals are taken very seriously by Bahrainis. All talking is done during the hour or so before sitting down to eat; there is no conversation during dinner. After the meal, coffee is served, and then any guests leave. Coffee is also always served as a welcome to guests when they first arrive. It is most often drunk unsweetened and flavored with cardamom. Fresh vegetables, lamb, fish, chicken, and beef are common foods. (Pork is forbidden by Islam, as is alcohol.)

Meals always include a dish made with basmati rice. *Khoubz* is the name of the local flatbread, and *samouli* is a white bread (like French bread) that is glazed with water or egg and then sprinkled with salt or sesame or caraway seeds.

One of the most popular dishes is *ghouzi*, which was developed by the Bedu (or Bedouin) nomadic Arabs (see Bedu). A lamb is slaughtered and left whole, and then a chicken stuffed with rice, nuts, onions, spices, and shelled hard-boiled eggs is placed inside the lamb. The lamb is sewn up, trussed, and cooked on a spit. To serve *ghouzi*, the chicken and stuffing are removed and arranged around the lamb. Diners break off chunks of meat with their right hands (the meat is not carved).

Date groves, fruit orchards, and vegetable gardens are located along the well-watered northern and northwestern coasts of Bahrain island. Bananas, citrus fruits, pomegranates, and mangoes are grown there, along with dates and other produce.

Bahrainis love desserts, and they love dates. Here is a recipe that combines both:



Bahraini women in Manama wear traditional dress to celebrate the last day of *Ayd Al-Fitr*, which ends the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. (AP Images/Mohamed El-Dakhkhny)

### Date Bars

- 1 cup rolled oats, plain or instant
- 1 cup melted butter or margarine
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 eggs, well beaten
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup finely chopped pitted dates
- ½ cup dark brown sugar
- 1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts, peanuts, or pecans)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup confectioner's sugar for garnish
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease 8-inch-square baking pan. Put oats, flour, baking powder, brown sugar, salt, and cinnamon in large mixing bowl and mix well. Add butter or margarine, eggs, dates, and nuts, and mix well using clean hands. Put mixture into greased baking pan and bake in oven for about 35 minutes, until firm. Remove from oven and cut while still warm into 1½-inch squares. Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar. Makes 16 date bars.

[Adapted from Albyn and Webb, *The Multicultural Cookbook for Students*, p. 73]

### 13 EDUCATION

Bahrain has had the highest literacy rate in the Arab world for decades. More than 90% of Bahrainis are literate. The public school system was established in the early years of the 20th century. The first school for boys in the Persian Gulf region, the Hadiyya al-Khalifiya school, was opened in Bahrain in 1919. The first school for girls in Bahrain opened in 1929. Education is compulsory and free for all children. Government primary and secondary education facilities are still segregated by sex, but the education received by boys and girls is comparable. Private institutions have mixed gender classrooms. Primary education runs from the age of 6 to the age of 11. Almost 100% of Bahraini children attend primary school. Secondary education lasts from age 12 to age 17. The University of Bahrain and the College of Health Sciences are two of the older universities in Bahrain. Foreign universities from the west have branch campuses in Bahrain, as they do in many other Gulf countries. The New York Institute of Technology, for example, has a campus in Manama.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bahrain has a well-established artistic community, including some of the most respected writers in the Persian Gulf region. Ibrahim al-Urayyid and Ahmad Muhammad Al Khalifah write lyrical poetry about heroes and romance in the classical Arab style. Younger poets have developed a more Westernized style, writing non-rhyming poems on personal and political subjects. Qasim Haddad (b.1948) is the best-known contemporary Bahraini poet. He has published several collections of poetry, including *The Good Omen* (1970), *Doomsday* (1980), and *Shrapnel* (1983). Hamdah Khamis (b.1946) is a journalist and a contemporary poet. Her collection of poetry, published in 1978, is called *An Apology for Childhood*.

Arab music is much like the Arab language—rich, repetitive, and exaggerated. The *oud* is a popular instrument; it is an ancient stringed instrument that is the ancestor of the European lute. Another traditional instrument is the *rebaba*, a one-stringed instrument. A traditional Arab dance is the *ardha*, or men's sword dance. Men carrying swords stand shoulder to shoulder, and from among them a poet sings verses while drummers beat out a rhythm.

Islam forbids the depiction of the human form, so Bahraini art focuses on geometric and abstract shapes. Calligraphy is a sacred art, with the Quran being the primary subject matter. Muslim art finds its greatest expression in mosques.

### 15 WORK

The pearl trade was the big money-maker for Bahrain until the Japanese introduced cultured pearls in the 1930s. Before that, divers would go down to depths of 30 to 120 ft, with just a nose clip and earplugs, to collect oysters. The best divers could hold their breath for up to two minutes. It was a dangerous trade for the divers, and not a lucrative one. Although profits were supposed to be shared by all on the pearl boat, the captains kept the largest share and gave the divers a minimal share, not even enough to repay their captain for the cost of food and expenses he had advanced to them. In this way, pearl divers were kept in virtual slavery by debts that were passed down through the generations.

Since 1931, oil has been a major industry in Bahrain, as well as natural gas. Although small in comparison to other oil-pro-

ducing nations in the region, the income from oil and natural gas has paid more than 70% of the Bahraini government's expenses in the past few decades. Unfortunately, Bahrain's oil reserves are quickly being depleted. Its offshore natural gas reserves are somewhat more plentiful, but still small in comparison to major producers in the area, in particular Qatar. Therefore, the government is attempting to diversify the industrial sector to prepare for the depletion of the oil and gas reserves. Bahrain has developed state-of-the-art technology for petrochemical plants and oil refineries that it will be able to sell to other oil-producing nations. It has also begun manufacturing plastics and producing aluminum.

International offshore banking has also become one of Bahrain's mainstays, in these days of large economic transactions. Like Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, Bahrain has become an important banking center in the region. Many international financial institutions have set up offices in the kingdom. A stock exchange was opened in 1989.

Shipbuilding has long been a respected trade in Bahrain. Some of the shipbuilders of today can trace their lineage back through many generations, with skills passed down from father to son. Bahrain currently constructs everything from huge, industrial oil tankers to small wooden *dhow*s, which are built in the same style that has been used since ancient times (with motors added today).

Because of the desert climate, there is not much farming in Bahrain, but fishing is a significant industry. Bahrain is known for its fist-sized shrimp.

## 16 SPORTS

Football (known as soccer in the United States) is the national sport of Bahrain. It was introduced during the time when Bahrain was a British-protected state (1820–1968). Other popular modern sports include tennis, water sports, and dune-buggy racing. Ancient sports that are still greatly enjoyed are horseracing and -breeding (the famous Arabian horses, probably the oldest domesticated breed, date from 1500 BC or before), camel-racing, and falconry. Falconry is a sport for the rich because birds are very expensive; a well-trained falcon can cost up to \$15,000.

Bahrain has hosted a Formula One race, the Bahrain Grand Prix, since 2004. It was the first Formula One Grand Prix in the Middle East.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Camping is perhaps the favorite Bahraini family recreation. Men spend a great deal of time in coffeehouses, drinking tea and chatting. Educated and upper class women also congregate in coffee shops in upscale districts. There are many cinemas in Manama and they provide an important cultural gathering point. On weekends, Saudis drive across the causeway and fill the cinemas (movie houses are banned in Saudi Arabia), creating a lively, energetic atmosphere. Restaurants in malls are filled on weekends with young people from the upper classes, who have time and money to spare. Because of the intense heat in Bahrain, people spend a lot of time in their air conditioned cars and many young people spend their free time simply driving around and listening to the latest Arabic pop music.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The government supports traditional arts with generous subsidies. Bahrain is known for its elaborate and uniquely designed coffee servers. Metalworking is an ancient tradition in Bahrain, as are ceramics and basket-weaving. Folk music is popular and the traditional music of the pearl divers, called *fijeri*, is widely performed. Bahrain is home to an important Islamic museum, the Beit al Quran (the House of the Quran). It has a large collection of Islamic holy books, some dating to the 8th century.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The rapidly increasing population has put a tremendous strain on Bahrain's water supply. In 1968 daily consumption of water was less than 4 million gallons; by 1982, consumption had risen to over 30.4 million gallons per day. Freshwater sources are unable to provide for the increasing demand and by 2005, three-fifths of Bahrain's water supply was from desalination plants. These plants, powered primarily with natural gas, are a great cost to the country and also cause significant environmental stresses. They contribute to global warming by burning fossil fuels and they alter the salinity of the Persian Gulf.

The increase in population has also put housing at a premium, driving the cost of living up. With the focus on new home construction, old homes are not given the attention or repairs they need and are becoming run-down and dilapidated. Many Bahrainis, therefore, are forced to live in overcrowded, substandard conditions.

Bahrain has experienced serious challenges to its ruling regime stemming from the lack of full democracy and from sectarian tensions. Although the new constitution did create a democratically elected chamber in parliament, the king retains the most power both through executive powers left to him in the constitution and by his power to appoint all the members of the Consultative Council. The politically and economically marginalized Shia majority regularly engages in street demonstrations and other forms of political protest, but the government typically responds with force. Some Shia look to predominantly Shia Iran for political inspiration, and this also causes great fear in Bahrain, a tiny island not too many miles distant from large, militarily powerful Iran. The United States maintains an enormous naval presence on the Island, and this also has caused social strains. This tension has increased since the U.S.-led War on Terror led to war in neighboring Shia-majority Iraq.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The status of Bahraini women is better than in some Islamic societies, but remains far behind the rights and privileges typical in Western countries. Women have the right to vote and to stand for political office (in 2007 there were two female cabinet ministers), but the Bahraini judicial system is based on Islamic (Sharia) law and women therefore face obstacles in obtaining divorces and in securing custody of their children after being divorced. A major problem is the lack of a personal status system of laws that would ensure some degree of rights to women. In the absence of such a system, legal matters are left to the discretion of judges who are free to interpret Islamic law and issue rulings. The judiciary is made up of conservative, religious men.

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—revised by J. Henry;

## BAI

**PRONUNCIATION:** BYE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bo

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 1.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Bai; Chinese

**RELIGION:** Polytheism; some combinations of Buddhism and indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3 : China and Her National Minorities

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Bai people were called Bo and were descendants of the ancient Qiang (Tibeto-Burman group), who lived around present-day Sichuan more than 2,000 years ago. After unifying China, the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) planned to carve out a way to India through the area inhabited by the Bo. For this reason the Bo gradually migrated to Yunnan and joined the other Bo already living there. In 109 BC, the King of Yunnan pledged allegiance to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), placing the Bo under the latter's authority. From the 1st century AD the Bo oscillated between submission and rebellion. Gradually the Chinese character that was in ancient times pronounced "Bo" came to be pronounced "Bai," both pronunciations meaning "white." This is an example of the different pronunciations of the same character in north (Bai) and south (Bo) China.

In the 8th century, following the unification of six small principalities, the powerful kingdom of Nanzhao was established with Dali (in northwest Yunnan) as its capital and ruled Yunnan for 247 years. Ten of the 13 successive kings received titles granted by the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Later, Nanzhao was replaced by Dali, which acknowledged allegiance to the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and ruled Yunnan for more than 300 years. In 1253, the Mongolian aristocrats conquered Dali. Before long, the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) set up a system appointing Bai headmen under the jurisdiction of the former royal court of the Dali Kingdom. In the following centuries, hundreds of thousands of Chinese, Mongolians, and Manchus moved from the central provinces into the areas of Yunnan inhabited by the Bai. There was much cross-cultural exchange and intermarriage. Chinese culture exerted a strong influence on the Bai.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Today over 80% of the Bai live in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture. There are small communities dispersed in other counties of the Yunnan Province. Bai are also found in Sichuan and Hunan. Two rivers, Lancang and Nu, flow south through the Dali prefecture, which is located in the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. The deep river valleys are thickly forested. The snow-capped Cang Mountain and limpid Er'hai Lake in the suburbs of Dali inspired many beautiful legends of the Bai people. The Bai population was 1.86 million in 2000.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Bai is classified as belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family in the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. In 1990, it was estimated that 900,000 people speak Bai. Scholars still debate the exact

place of Bai as a branch of the Tibeto-Burman group. There are three Bai dialects. Bai is a self-given name. Most of the Bai speak Chinese.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Bai myths are usually long and complex. Most of them are related to daily life, love, and religious beliefs. A famous one, called “Husband-expecting Cloud” was transformed into a dance drama and a Bai opera. In short, a princess of Nanzhao Kingdom fell in love with a young hunter. They escaped to Cang Mountain and married in a cavern. During a snowstorm, the hunter left the cavern to find a suit of thick clothes for his chilled wife. Unfortunately, he was discovered by a Buddhist priest of the royal court. The priest turned the hunter into a stone mule, which was sunk into the Er’hai Lake. Dying from cold and hunger, the princess transformed herself into a cloud. If it suddenly appeared around the peak of Cang Mountain in winter, the stone mule in the deep water always cried in response. Then a strong gale blew abruptly, the water split, and the stone mule appeared in an awe-inspiring manner.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The Bai are polytheistic, believing in many gods. Each village enshrines and worships a certain god as the master and protector of the village. The villagers carve an idol made of wood or clay and put it in the temple. Most of the masters are famous personages of the kingdoms of Nanzhao or Dali. Some are part of their respective myths, while others are gods related to agriculture. After the 9th century, Buddhism became prevalent in areas around Er’hai Lake. The three Buddhist temple pagodas at the foot of Cang Mountain date from the Tang Dynasty. The stone relief sculpture of the Buddha and of the Kings of Nanzhao in the grottoes of Shibao Mountain are a combination of Buddhism and of Bai traditional belief in the Master God.

The Bai revere conch and fish. The Bai believe in the Fish God: whenever a fisherman catches a big fish, he puts it back in the water at once and prays while burning incense.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The Spring Festival extends from the last day of the old year to January 15 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, from February 6 to March 6) during the slack season. Each family cleans the house and prepares fine dishes for the holidays. A great variety of recreational activities are held, such as the Lion Dance, the Dragon Lantern Festival, walking on stilts, flying kites, playing the “tossing the silk ball” game, etc. Some villages devote most of the holiday to “meeting the Master.”

The Third Month Fair is a grand festival of the Bai, held March 15 to 21 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, from April 6–12 to May 4–10). It has a history of more than 1,000 years. On the occasion, the endless array of native products and the dazzling articles of daily use are exhibited on the streets and squares. The number of participants may reach hundreds of thousands, including various neighboring nationalities.

The “Memorial Ceremony for the Dead” in February, the “Torch Festival,” the “Rao San Ling,” and the “Yu Tan Hui” are also distinctive and colorful festivals celebrated in the areas inhabited by the Bai.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Gifts are important on the birth of a child, the engagement of two young people, and the birthday of a senior person. On these occasions, money or items that come in sixes are always welcome. For instance, a gift of 160 *yuan* (Chinese currency) will be gladly received, while 500 *yuan* might be refused. The reason for the prominence of the number “six” is that the Bai are descendants of six tribes. When, in the past, their king presented gifts to the Emperor of imperial Tang, each tribe prepared a gift of its own—altogether six. The gifts from the Emperor in return were also six and each tribe took one gift as its own. Moreover, in Bai language, the pronunciation of “six” is the same as that of “enough” or “handsome salary,” so six is an auspicious number.

A rite of “seeing off the soul” is held after the death of a senior person. In the eyes of the Bai, the soul will come back to its native house again and again. Therefore, on the first, third, seventh, thirtieth, and hundredth day after death, family, relatives, and friends perform the rite of “seeing off the soul.” On the occasion, the family will receive relatives or neighbors to dinner. It is believed that after the last ritual performance, the soul will definitely go to the “other side” to unite with the ancestors.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

In addition to public festivals, every happy event of the family or clan is an occasion to pay a congratulatory visit. Gifts are absolutely necessary. When they are about to leave, guests usually receive a gift in return from the host.

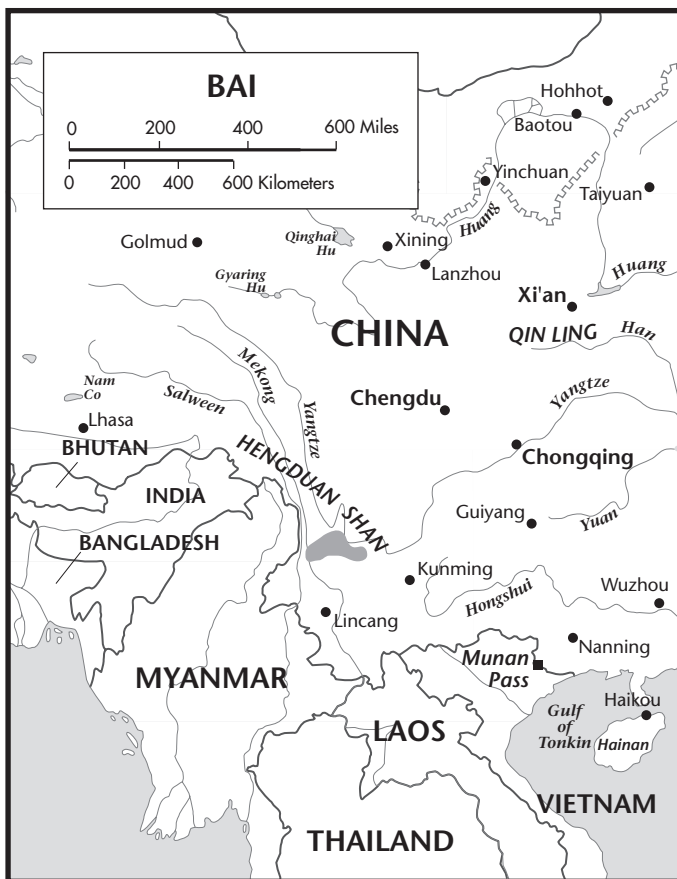
Young people used to express their feelings for the opposite sex by blowing on a tree leaf. The addressee tried to understand the meaning from the melody and the tune. This is a rather indirect method of courtship as compared with the antiphonal singing prevalent among neighboring ethnic groups.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most Bai houses are two-story, made of wood and bricks (or adobes), usually roofed with tiles. The walls on two sides are often higher than the roof; this is to keep fire from spreading. The house is oriented toward the east. The family lives downstairs; the central room is for daily life and receptions. Rooms upstairs are for storage. In some areas, wooden houses on stilts still exist; in that case, pigs and chickens are kept on the ground floor, while the family lives on the second floor. Bai dwelling in mountainous areas have thatched-roof cottages; the family sleeps in the firepool room. Bai inhabiting the plains and valleys have a much higher standard of living than mountain-dwellers. Bai cities and towns have flourished since 1949. Many endemic (sometimes epidemic) diseases, such as schistosomiasis (a parasitic disease carried by certain types of snails) have been practically eliminated after years of treatment.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Bai family is patrilineal (traced through the fathers), with two generations usually living under the same roof. Parents live with the youngest son, because the older ones leave the house after marriage. A son-in-law is allowed to live with his wife’s parents if they lack a son. Childless families are allowed to adopt a child from brothers of the same clan. In those cases, the names of the son-in-law and the adopted son should be



changed to the family's surname; otherwise, they do not have the right of inheritance. Bai families are monogamous, but there exist cases of polygamy. The position of women is socially lower than that of men. People with the same surname or of the same clan are not allowed to marry. The marriage of cousins, however, is prevalent. Arranged marriage is common, although "love marriages" are increasing. Betrothal gifts are usually expensive.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Men wear multi-buttoned Chinese-style upper garments in white or blue, sometimes with a vest, and long white trousers. They wrap their heads with white or blue cloth and carry a decorated bag over the back of the shoulder. Most women wear white tops with a black or purple velvet vest and loose trousers in blue. A short apron with embroidered ribbons is fastened to the waist. A string of silver ornaments is hung on the right of the garment. Unmarried girls have a braid on their back or coil the braid on the top of the head. Married women comb their hair into a bun, which they wrap with an embroidered or printed scarf with the tassels hung over one side of the head. Some of them put together the four angles of the scarf on the back of the head, then fix them with string. They are fond of embroidered shoes. Their costumes for special occasions are not much different from their daily dress. Various ornaments are put on during the festival.

### **12 FOOD**

Rice and flour are the staple foods of the Bai. Mountain dwellers live on corn and buckwheat. All have a liking for sour, cool, and spicy dishes, as well as for a medium roast pork, which is shredded and seasoned. They are good at making salted fish, ham, and snail sauce. Baked tea is a distinctly favorite dish. As a rule, they take three meals a day.

### **13 EDUCATION**

There are primary schools, middle schools (junior and senior), and universities in Bai villages, counties, and cities respectively. Illiteracy, however, is still prevalent in the rural areas. The intensive manual labor in the fields often requires the participation of the children. As a result, many girls are usually obliged to drop out of primary or middle school. The overall cultural and educational level of the Bai is higher than the average for national minorities, but it is still below the average for the whole country.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The "Bai Melody" is a kind of national folk song. Although slightly different in various Bai districts, it is always a poem with five or seven characters to a line, accompanied by three stringed instruments (sometimes the opening bars are accompanied by a woodwind instrument). It is part of every important Bai festival.

Bai opera, as a combination of music, song, and dance, developed under the influence of Chinese models. The famous Lion Dance, however, was borrowed from the Bai by the Chinese during the Tang Dynasty. The works of Bai poets of Nanzhao Kingdom were included in the great Chinese poetry anthology called *Quan Tang Shi* (Complete poetry of the Tang).

### **15 WORK**

Bai economy rests principally on rice culture, complemented by barley, wheat, millet, and beans. Fruit growing, stock raising, and fishing on Lake Er'hai provide important sideline economic activities. Bai workers, with heavy slabs of marble on their backs, descend from a quarry in the Cang Mountain, just as their ancestors did 1,000 years ago; but, the processing of the slabs is now carried out with mechanical devices by Bai factory workers. The fine texture and natural designs have made Dali marble famous for more than 2,000 years and continues to inspire craftsmen in carving ingenious landscape scenes. Dali horses and knives carved by Bai artists are also much sought after by connoisseurs.

### **16 SPORTS**

"Tossing the silk ball" and "rattle stick dance" are traditional popular Bai sports and spectator sports as well. The game of "tossing the silk ball" is usually played on festivals. The ball is actually a small bag padded with cottonseed or rice husk, ½ to 1 lb in weight, and variable in size. Two teams, one of boys and one of girls, oppose each other, but are separated by a mat shelter. A member of one team tosses the ball over the top of the mat shelter; the ball should be caught by a member of the receiving team. If the ball is missed, a negative mark will be recorded. This game offers the occasion for boys and girls to meet and get acquainted socially.

The rattle stick is a 3 ft bamboo stick, thicker than one's thumb. There are nine openings on the shaft, each of which is pierced by a bamboo nail. Two-holed copper coins are hung on each bamboo nail. Each player taps his or her own shoulders, arms, knees, and feet with the rattle stick while dancing, jumping, marching, or squatting, but without letting the coins drop from the stick. The one who loses the least coins is the winner.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Bai people have complete access to movies, television, and other recreational equipment in their cities and towns, especially in Dali. More traditional forms of entertainment are mainly singing and dancing. Singing contests are held around Mount Wudiao in the fall of each year. Torches are kindled. The rising and falling sounds of songs fill the night like waves. Young boys and girls in Jianchuan, north of Dali, sing all night long in antiphonal style, accompanied by three-string instruments. When the busy season of transplanting rice shoots is finished, the Bai people have a festive dinner party in the temple of the Master. They dress as fishermen, woodcutters, peasants and scholars, participate in the procession of the "rattling stick dance," and tour their village for fun.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The artistic sense of the Bai is exemplified in their lacquerware and wood carvings, for which they are famous. More than 1,000 years ago, their lacquerware entered China proper. The lacquerers chosen by the central government of the Yuan and Ming dynasties were all Bai artists. The Bai also excel at wood carving, as may be seen in the exquisite birds, flowers, and personages carved on the doors and windows of Jizushan Buddhist Monastery. The continuation of their skills in all kinds of wood carving can be also found in present-day private house decorations.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The economic cleavage of Bai society is quite prominent. On the one hand, urban Bai have a markedly improved living standard, especially in recent decades; on the other hand, mountain-dwellers still live in abject poverty. There is no easy solution to this problem, which is not specific to the Bai, but it is shared by every nationality whose people are divided into urbanites, valley dwellers, and mountain dwellers.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students. China has strict family planning laws, and it is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men) and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests, and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and five million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the



*Bai women in traditional dress.*  
(© Steven Vidler/Eurasia Press/Corbis)

police and government workers, and as a result prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc



# BAJAU

**PRONUNCIATION:** BAH-jau (Indonesian pronunciation) or bah-JOW (Philippine pronunciation)

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Badjao (Philippine spelling), “Sea Gypsies”

**LOCATION:** Philippines (Sulu Archipelago), Malaysia, Indonesia

**POPULATION:** Over 200,000

**LANGUAGE:** Samal

**RELIGION:** Islam; indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos; Vol 4: Tausug

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Bajau (or Badjao) of the Sulu Archipelago are one of several groups of Sea Nomads who not only make their living from the region’s waters but also spend most of their lives on them. Little used in Sulu itself, the name “Bajau” seems to derive from the Wajo kingdom of the Bugis, who have had a long history of association with Sea Nomads. The Bajau of southern Philippine waters, however, were claimed as vassals by the Sulu sultanate of the Tausug people, rivals of the Bugis. Traditionally, Tausug *datus* extended their protection to particular Bajau groups in exchange for various services, such as delivering tribute in dried fish. Stressing a common origin with the land-dwelling Samal peoples of the archipelago, such as the Yakan and the Jama Mapun, the Sulu Bajau call themselves *Sama Laut*, or *Sama Mandelaut* (Sea Samal).

The term “Sea Gypsies” popularly applied to the Bajau is apt insofar as it reflects their position as outcasts within the wider Sulu society. Although it was Samal peoples, such as the Balangingi, who carried out (as clients of Tausug, Bugis, and Malay aristocrats) most of the piracy and slave-raiding that plagued Southeast Asian waters until the late 19th century, the Bajau themselves are a peaceable people whose response to exploitation or victimization by non-Bajau has been to take flight. Despising Bajau nomadism, passivity, and paganism, neighboring peoples refer to them with derogatory names, such as the Tausug *Luwa’an* (“that which has been spat out”) and *kuto dagat* (“lice of the sea”).

Occupied with the more assertive Tausugs, Spanish, American, and still to some extent Filipino governments have left the small numbers of Bajau largely to themselves. Over the last century, Bajau have more and more been abandoning the boat-dwelling life for a more sedentary one on land, as well as dropping animistic practices for a more orthodox Islam; these trends are reducing their distinctiveness from the other peoples of the Sulu archipelago. Devastated by the Moro separatist conflict, Tawi-Tawi province (where Samal peoples predominate) was separated from Sulu province in 1973 and was one of the four provinces that formed the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in 1989. Samal remain wary of reassertion of Tausug dominance, even to the extent of more readily identifying themselves as Filipino rather than Moro and on insisting on addressing Tausug in English rather than in Tausug as they can and the Tausug expect. In recent years, Muslims (commonly referred to as Badjao) have become highly visible in Manila, often as peddlers of pirated DVDs.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Bajau communities, collections of either houseboats or houses raised above the water, lie mainly in a zone stretching from Zamboanga Bay through the Sulu archipelago to Semporna on the Sabah coast; the islands within this region are dominated, however, by non-Bajau. Other more distantly related Bajau communities can be found on or off the shores of eastern Kalimantan; northern, western, and southern Sulawesi; Flores; and Sumbawa; as well as the Togian, Bangga, and Sula island groups.

In the early 1970s, the Sulu Bajau numbered perhaps 20,000. In 2000, there were 13,180 Badjao and 49,000 Samal in Sulu province, while in Tawi-Tawi province a number of Samal groups were distinguished (Sama Dilaya, 115,400; Sama Abakon, 49,000; and Jama Mapun, 18,800). Among the Samal (including those outside Tawi-Tawi province), various dialect-groups are also identified (2000 figures): Jama Mapun, 40,600; Central Samal, 90,000; Southern Samal, 120,000). The largest group on Basilan island (35.8% of the population), the Yakan, speak a Sama-type language. About 6.37% of households in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao identified Samal (Sama/Abakon) as their first language (that could mean as many as 125,000 people). Bajau in Malaysian Sabah numbered 40,000 in 1980 and in eastern Indonesia 90,000 in 2000 (cf. early 1970s estimate of 10,000–15,000).

Sea Nomads can also be found in a zone stretching from the east Sumatra coast and the islands off it, up along the shores of the Malay peninsula as far as southern Thailand and beyond to Burma’s Mergui archipelago. Generally known as *Orang Laut* (Sea People), the groups there are often called “Bajau,” though their relation to the Sulu Bajau is unclear as they do not (at least presently) speak Samal but rather a dialect of Malay close to that of the land-dwelling Kubu.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Bajau speak a single, largely homogeneous dialect of Samal. The Samal languages are Austronesian but form a group distinct from Tausug (a Visayan language) and the languages of mainland Mindanao and Borneo.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The Bajau believe in a variety of supernaturals (*saitan*), e.g., *panggauh* (ghosts), *umagad* (spirits), *balbalan* (vampires), and *ah-ah inggai tandah mata* (sorcerers).

They are careful not to trespass on the territory of *tungguh* (watcher), guardians of both animate and inanimate objects, who live in areas such as clumps of mangrove trees. If a family fishes in a particular area without asking permission of the *tungguh*, a member may suffer punishment, such as stomach pains. One appeases the *tungguh* by leaving offerings of betel or cigarettes or by placing small green or white flags at the spot. Such pennants also mark the roofs of the houses of village headmen who have the favor of an *omboh*, an illness-curing spirit; in the corner of such a house is a *bangku*, the *omboh*’s place, including a bed and a trunk holding a multicolored piece of cloth donated by the community.

Saitan also take the form of animals or fish, invading villages and spreading disease. Rites to combat epidemics include the launching of a spirit boat; thanksgiving celebrations require seven nights of dancing (*igal*) to entertain the *omboh*.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Bajau consider themselves Muslim, although they rarely perform the daily prayers, nor do their communities usually have mosques. Neighboring Muslim peoples look down on them as pagans. Nonetheless, *imam*, and older men with some knowledge of scriptures, lead prayer during ceremonial occasions and oversee life-crisis rituals.

Among the Bajau, mediums, both male and female, commune with spirits through dreams and trances in order to affect cures and predict the future. Several times a year, mediums renew their relations with their supernatural patrons in a nightlong public dance, a rite benefiting the entire community. Once a year, a village's women and children bathe in the sea to fortify themselves against spirits.

To cure an ill person, members of his or her *pagmunda* (a group of boats traveling together) gather at his or her houseboat while a knowledgeable person leads a curing ritual, burning incense to call the spirits and making food offerings to them. In case of serious illness, relatives swear to hold a *magtimbang* ceremony. The recovered individual is put into a sling hanging at one end of an improvised scale. At the other end are placed goods (bananas, sugarcane, and firewood) equal to his or her weight, which, after the scale is rotated several times while chanting, are distributed to those attending the ceremony.

Another important rite is thanking Omboh Dilaut, the Lord of the Sea, after a bountiful catch; one drops a plate, bowl, or saucer into the part of the sea where the fish were caught so the spirit will not be angry and will provide more fish in the future.

The college-educated among the Samal are those who tend to be the most interested in Islam. Many have been attracted to the teachings of the Ahmadi sect, which has been considered heretical by many Muslims worldwide for recognizing a prophet after Muhammad, the late 19th century Indian figure, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. However, in Tawi-Tawi, ahmadi generally means anyone who questions traditions.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Bajau observe the Muslim festivals, but seldom fast for Ramadan. In July or August, a *dakampungan* celebrates the *maggomboh* to avert disaster in the coming year. Each family obtains rice and places it in a special basket that they put at one end of the boat; everyone sleeps with their heads towards the basket. The next day the rice is cooked and formed into a cone. The families bring these cones to a central houseboat. A medium invites the spirits to partake of the rice, then takes some rice from each cone and mixes the handfuls in a common bowl for all the children of the *dakampungan* to eat. After this, the families take the cones home to consume with the next meal.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

All infant girls undergo a first ear-piercing rite, accompanied by the chanting of an old man. Circumcision for boys can be a very simple ceremony, although wealthier families host elaborate celebrations, decorating the houseboat and making merry with music and dancing on the reef top or beach throughout the afternoon and evening.

For marriage, a boy indicates his preferred partner, or his parents persuade (but never force) him to accept a girl of their choice. Siblings of the boy's parents, rather than the parents themselves, convey the proposal to siblings of the girl's par-



ents. The boy's representatives present family jewelry and other valuables to the girl's side. After discussion, and with the girl's consent, her family announces the bride-price, setting an unreasonably high one if they are not interested in the union. As a single nuclear family cannot generally afford the bride-price, the boy's parents receive contributions from their siblings.

The engagement period commences with a *pag-angbat* announcement celebration, including a fluvial parade of the boy's kin to the girl's residence, to the accompaniment of gongs. The boy sends cash and goods to the girl's family but is not to speak to the girl during the engagement period.



Members of the Bajau fish on the Sulu Sea in the Philippines.  
(© Ted Spiegel/Corbis)

For one to two weeks before the wedding, there is merry-making every night, with relatives and well-wishers dancing to display their grace and skill. It is also a chance for young men to check out young women. To announce the wedding, a pole on which a multicolored blanket hangs is raised in front of the house. After the Islamic ceremony itself, three days of celebration begin, the highlight of which is the *paglibuhan*. Young women (15 from either kin-group) take turns dancing in front of the couple (earning a fee); at the end, the bride herself dances. The guests sometimes push the groom to join in as well.

A forced marriage (when a man abducts a woman or impregnates her) merits much less ceremony. The *imam* solemnizes the wedding, but subjects the couple to seven lashes to wash away the sin of premarital sex; the man, moreover, must pay a fine.

Formerly, at his death a man's boat was disassembled to make his coffin. All through the night following the death, most adults of the moorage or village drop in to chant prayers and sing laments. The next morning, a flotilla of boats accompanies the body to the cemetery islands where it is buried with the deceased's personal belongings. The surviving family makes periodic visits to the grave, leaving small offerings of betel nuts.

## <sup>8</sup> INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A consensus of a community's household heads selects a headman (*panglima*). The headman's duty is to call meetings when there is a dispute or breach of custom. He collects fines from an offending party, which he shares with the offended party. However, such penalties cannot be imposed without the voluntary submission of both parties. Those who have antagonized their neighbors can just move away to another community until the incident is forgotten.

## <sup>9</sup> LIVING CONDITIONS

Communities are either permanent villages of houses raised over water just off islands or reefs or, alternatively, are semi-permanent or seasonal collections of houseboats (as many as 40) moored together with or without onshore houses nearby. A channel open during low tide runs through a village like a main street; a complicated network of gangplanks connects most houses. Houseboat groups exhaust one fishing ground then move on.

The living space in a houseboat measures 3 m (10 ft) long, 1.2 m (4 ft) wide, and 1.2 m (4 ft) high. A portable bamboo framework with a plaited nipa roof provides the shelter. At the stern, food and water are stored, and meals are cooked and eaten.

A pile house is 6–9 m by 4.5 m (20–30 ft by 15 ft) and consists of a single large room; in front, an open platform for docking boats juts out, and the kitchen occupies a separate smaller building.

Average family income in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, of which Tawi-Tawi province is a part, amounted to 89,000 pesos (us\$1,745) in 2006, the lowest in the country, cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog's ₱198,000, and those of the neighboring Davao and Zamboanga regions, ₱135,000 and ₱125,000 respectively. In 2000, Tawi-Tawi, however, had the second lowest Human Development Index, 0.391 (combining measures of health, education, and income) in the country (above Sulu and below Basilan, its fellow provinces in the Sulu archipelago, cf. the Philippines' national HDI of 0.656)

According to the 2000 census, the proportion of houses in Tawi-Tawi with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum reached 52.2% (a great increase over just 37.9% ten years earlier) and the percentage of homes with a roof of grass or palm thatch was at 38.3% (down from 55.88%); 67.5% of houses had wooden outer walls, and another 21.3% walls of bamboo or thatch. 4.7% of households had access to a community faucet, 7.5% to a faucet of their own, and 21.6% to a shared deep well, while 39.3% obtained their water from a well, and 34.9% from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. 41.3% of households disposed of their garbage by burning it, 25.6% by dumping it into a household pit, 5.8% by burying it, and 3.3% by feeding it to their animals; only 3.5% had it picked up by a collection truck. 71% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 17.2% with electricity, and 7.2% with firewood. 61.9% possessed a radio, 9.7% a television, 4.8% a refrigerator, 8.5% a VCR, 2.8% a telephone or cell phone, 2.3% a washing machine, and 14.7% a motorized vehicle.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

For boat-dwelling Bajau, the *mataan*, consisting of a man, his wife, and their children, is the most important social group; this nuclear family may include, in addition, other relatives: a widowed parent, a divorced sister, or a husband's adult neph-

ew. The widowed remarry quickly, as houseboat life is too difficult without a partner. Sometimes, incomplete *mataan* will join forces, such as when two widowed second cousins with children set up a single household.

Most marriages are between cousins (excepting the children of brothers); marrying a relative of another generation or a close same-sex kin of one's former spouse is regarded as incestuous. The ideal, rarely achieved given such a mobile lifestyle, is for a new couple to settle in the wife's moorage after a few months of moving between the two parental houseboats (or after a year of living with the wife's parents).

Spending most of a day's 24 hours at sea cut off from other families, the members of the *mataan* develop extremely strong bonds. Bajau tend to trust only their own siblings and form the next-higher unit of economic and ritual cooperation, the *pag-mundah* (literally, a group of boats traveling or moored together) by uniting, on average, four sets of siblings, spouses, and unmarried children (a member leaves the *pagmundah* once he has married children who can form a *pagmundah* among themselves). Among house-dwelling Bajau, a house will shelter an entire *pagmundah*, with the senior male as the leader. Upon partition of the household, the youngest sibling stays with the original house while the others set up their own houses adjacent to it.

Most Bajau marry more than once, usually divorcing before the third year, once the romantic feeling is lost.

The Bajau keep no animals other than (occasionally) cats and fighting cocks.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Bajau clothing is similar to Tausug clothing [see *Tausugs*]. Young children are left naked so that they can get used to the extremes in temperature that they will encounter as fisher-folk. Once prestigious but now regarded as signs of ignorance were the filing, blackening, and gold capping of teeth. To preserve their complexion from the sun, women apply a thick coating of white *burak* rice powder to their faces.

### **12 FOOD**

The staple food is ground cassava root from which the juice has been squeezed; the resulting powder is wrapped in banana leaf as is, or it is fried or steamed. When they can afford it, people eat rice (often mixed with corn). Boiled or grilled fish is the main accompaniment; shark meat, sea urchins, and shellfish (crabs) are also eaten. Bajau prefer to sell the better-quality seafood such as shrimp and lobsters. Considering it unclean, Bajau avoid the meat of land animals. They rarely eat vegetables other than seaweed. There are no set mealtimes—the family eats when the father returns with the catch.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Bajau take less advantage of modern educational opportunities (which in any case remain very limited) than Tausugs or other Samal.

According to the 2000 census, the literacy level in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao was 68.9%, very low by national standards. In Tawi-Tawi province, 39.9% had completed elementary school, 23.7% high school, and one in 8.6% college or university (the latter two percentages were actually higher than in Sulu).

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Melodious, sentimental songs (*leleng*, *lolo*, and *tenes-tenes*) are performed by a young man and young woman alternating parts to the accompaniment of a *gabbang* xylophone. For exercise and relaxation and as a part of ceremonies and celebrations, Bajau perform *igal*, dancing to the beat of *kulintangan* and *agong* [see *Tausugs*].

### **15 WORK**

Fishing (by men) provides subsistence and a product to trade for (or sell for cash to buy) necessities available from non-Bajau (agricultural produce, cooking hearths, metal utensils, nipa matting). All year round, groups of siblings and siblings-in-law cooperate in fishing; large seasonal fish drives, however, bring as many as 60 boats together. One method, the *pag-am-bit*, involves a group of boats encircling a shoal of fish with a net. Women and children gather shellfish at low tide. Some Bajau have recently begun to tend onshore gardens on borrowed land.

Respected specialists include *imam*, herb doctors, midwives, woodcarvers, and boat builders.

### **16 SPORTS**

Popular sports include swimming and running races or playing volleyball on a sand bar at low tide, there being no suitable areas for basketball or softball.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Bajau spend what little leisure time they have chatting, picking lice, playing cards, tossing coins, and enjoying water-splashing games. Today, they also like to record and play back their own and their children's singing on cassette recorders, as well as to go to movies in town.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES**

Women weave mats that are in high demand in local and tourist markets.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In 2000, in Tawi-Tawi the ratio between men and women was 99 men for every 100 women (a dramatic decline from 106 men for every 100 women just five years earlier); women were more numerous in the age group 0 to 39 years, men more numerous in the age group 40 and above (which may be partly the result of male insurgent casualties in recent years and high rates of women's deaths in childbirth in earlier years). Literacy levels in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, low by national standards, were somewhat higher for men (69.8%) than for women (67.7%). In Tawi-Tawi (differing in this regard from the ARMM and the Philippines as a whole), despite there being more women than men, men were still somewhat more numerous among those completing all levels of education except in post-secondary education. In contrast to other parts of the country, such as Southern Tagalog, more overseas workers from the ARMM were female (56%) than male; the median age of those female overseas workers was 24 years. There are hiring

quotas for Muslim domestic workers employed in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim Middle Eastern states.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# BALINESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** BAHL-uh-neeZ

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Bali)

**POPULATION:** 3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Balinese

**RELIGION:** Indigenized version of Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Although, as Southeast Asia's prime tourist destination, Bali provides much of Indonesia's image to the outside world, Balinese culture deviates widely from the national mainstream, most crucially in its unique Hindu-animist religion. Created from the early 1st millennium AD on, huge stone sarcophagi and bronze drums attest to the fertile island's ability to support social stratification and attract long-distance trade. Inscriptions from the 9th to 10th centuries record the emergence of Hinduized kingdoms that would later fall under the domination, political and cultural, of the great east Javanese realms. In 1334, Gajah Mada, the prime minister of the Javanese kingdom of Majapahit, conquered Bali, laying the foundations for the later transplantation of Hindu-Javanese culture by refugees from Majapahit after its fall to Islamized rival states. In the 16th century, King Batu Renggong of Gelgel unified Bali (acquiring also Lombok, Sumbawa, and parts of East Java) and in partnership with the high priest Nirartha established the socioreligious order that continues to the present day.

By the 18th century, Gelgel's domain had fragmented into nine competing kingdoms. Beginning in the 1840s, the Dutch, initially on the pretext of punishing the Balinese for plundering shipwrecks, involved themselves more and more in the island's internal affairs, imposing direct rule on north and west Bali in 1853. Between 1894 and 1908, the Dutch subdued the Balinese kingdoms first in Lombok and then in south Bali; bloody resistance by the royal courts ended in *puputan* (suicide charges) into Dutch fire. However, the Dutch ruled Bali through the surviving aristocrats; the latter became administrators and major landowners, as well as playing up their religious authority. Colonial legislation rigidified caste hierarchies at the expense of rising commoner families. After Indonesia won its independence from the Dutch in 1950, increasing competition over land in an overpopulated island (suffering, moreover, the effects of the catastrophic eruption of Gunung Agung, Bali's most sacred volcano in 1963) and the penetration of rival nationwide political networks into Balinese rural society intensified social conflicts, culminating in the anticommunist massacres of 1965–66 that claimed 100,000 lives and annihilated whole villages.

Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998) promoted Bali as a destination for international tourism, seeing the resulting income flow as essential to achieving its development goals for Indonesia as a whole. At the same time, the government sought to minimize what it considered to be the erosive effects of tourism on traditional Balinese culture by confining large-scale tourist infrastructure (especially high-class hotels) to a zone on Bali's southern peninsula; towns there, such as Kuta, are barely distinguishable from beach resort areas in other parts of the world, including the appearance of some European

nude bathing. Catering to foreign “hippies” and other budget travelers, cheap guesthouses have proliferated beyond the official tourist zone, and domestic tourism into Bali, particularly among urban middle-class Javanese and Chinese-Indonesians discouraged from travel abroad by heavy airport departure taxes, has grown massively.

Still, tourism is only one of the phenomena transforming contemporary Balinese culture: the same economy- and nation-building program pursued by the government in the rest of the country, including everything from the Green Revolution to the institutionalization of religion, has been a more important one as have been generic industrialization and urbanization. Balinese indigenous culture is changing and thriving, driven by internal dynamics to which tourist consumption of such things as abbreviated dance shows is peripheral. The complex situation is captured in the following paradox: while, in the cities, preparation of daily offerings to gods and demons has become a noticeably rushed affair with women and girls often simply buying offerings at market before heading to work, at the same time, the productivity of workers in the garment industry is lowered by the time and energy they spend on traditional rituals, ignoring workplace rules.

Bali has remained largely free of the violence that has afflicted some other parts of Indonesia during and since the fall of Suharto, though it was the site of the most murderous terrorist attacks in the world since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, the suicide bombings of Denpasar tourist bars by (ethnically Javanese) Islamic militants on 12 October 2002 (202 people were killed, of which 88 were Australians and 38 Indonesians). The assertion of Islamism in Indonesia as a whole, though restrained by moderate Muslim, secular, and Christian counter-pressure, has caused some concern for the Balinese: a recent “anti-pornography” bill has been viewed as potentially threatening traditional Balinese religious art.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Separated by narrow straits from Java to the west and Lombok to the east, the island of Bali covers 5,808 sq km (2,243 sq mi), or an area slightly larger than the state of Delaware. Its population of 3.4 million is, however, four times as high as that of Delaware. Population density (2005 figures) reaches 601 people per sq km., three times as high as in neighboring West Nusa Tenggara, more than six times than in East Nusa Tenggara, and 79% that of East Java. An unbroken east-west chain of volcanoes leaves a narrow plain along the north coast. A series of valleys carved by swiftly flowing rivers stretches south to the Indian Ocean; the southernmost tip of the island is an arid limestone peninsula.

The axis between the mountains and the sea dominates the Balinese sense of orientation. For instance, custom dictates that one should sleep with one’s head facing *kaja*, the direction of the divine mountains, and one’s feet facing *kelod*, the direction of the demonic sea (the soles of the feet should not face a party that must be shown respect, in this case the mountains). *Kaja* can mean “north” or “south” depending upon the location.

The Balinese have not been known as a seafaring people nor, before the 20th century, as migrants (except in western Lombok). Overpopulation, however, has forced many Balinese to participate in government-sponsored transmigration to South Sumatra, Central Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara



(Balinese form 3% of the population of West Nusa Tenggara province). On the other hand, Bali attracts people from other islands, especially Java; 11% of the population of Bali is ethnically non-Balinese.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Balinese speak an Austronesian language whose closest relative is Sasak, the language of Lombok. Although now they increasingly use Latin letters, their traditional script was a calligraphically distinct version of the Javanese alphabet. From its earliest recorded form (in an inscription from AD 882), the Balinese language shows profound influences from Sanskrit and Kawi (Old Javanese).

Balinese linguistic etiquette employs a system of politeness levels (High, Refined, Middle, and Low). Most words only have one form in all levels, but a few hundred of the most basic words, ranging from conjunctions to names of body parts, do have more than one form, e.g., “to eat” can be *ngunggahang* (referring to a Brahmana priest); *ngajeng* (referring to other high-caste people); *nglungsur* (referring to common people); *naar* (referring to family members); or *ngamah* (referring to animals).

Nowadays, the High (*tinggi*) language is spoken only to Brahmana priests; in most families, no more than one member is fluent in it, and so he or she alone approaches Brahmana with requests. The Refined (*alus*) level is used when addressing higher-status people, older people, and one’s parents. The Low (*rendah*, also referred to as Ordinary, *biasa*, or Coarse,



Balinese dancers take part in a peace parade in Denpasar on Bali island. The peace parade took part one day before the anniversary of the bomb blasts that ripped through a night club in Legian Kuta, killing about 200 people in October 2002. (Sonny Tumbelaka/AFP/Getty Images)

*kasar*) level serves for talking to those one considers of equal or inferior status: children; relatives; intimate friends; and lower-status people, such as maids; men address their wives with the Low language. Strangers whose status is as yet unknown are addressed with a mixture of Refined and Ordinary levels. The Middle (*madia*) level is used to people of equal status with whom one is not intimate. When two Balinese meet for the first time, they begin the conversation in the Middle level, and then, once it becomes clear who is of higher status than the other, each speaker adjusts his level accordingly.

Although the old etiquette is scrupulously observed in the context of religious rituals and other customary activities, in other contexts this is becoming less and less the case. In recent times, higher-caste people have been using the Refined level with lower-caste people, particularly if the latter rank high in the national bureaucracy. Classmates converse in the Ordinary level, regardless of caste differences. In schools in the provincial capital of Denpasar, teachers address students using the Middle level (in conservative east Bali, the medium of instruction is the Refined level, which is also what strangers there will use the first time they meet). As in Java, the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, taught in school at all levels, offers a means of communication whereby people can avoid locating themselves and others within the traditional hierarchy

(though not necessarily evading any of modern society's status differences).

One common way of referring to adults is by a name that places them in relation to a child or grandchild, e.g., "Father (*Pan*) of X," "Mother (*Men*) of Y," or "Grandfather (*Kak*) of Z." Moreover, custom assigns names according to birth order among siblings. For Sudra families, the first-born will receive the name "Wayan," the second "Made," the third "Nyoman," the fourth "Ketut," and the fifth "Putu." To these, the Wesya will prefix "Gusti" for males and "Gusti Ayu" or "Ida"/"Ni," for females; the Satrya "Dewa" (males) and "Dewa Ayu" (females) or "Agung Gede," and the Brahmana "Ida Bagus" (males) or "Ida Ayu" (females).

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

*Leyak* are witches who are ordinary people by day but who leave their bodies at night, taking any shape (a monkey, a bird, a disembodied head, a ghostly light). Haunting cemeteries and crossroads, *leyak* can cause disease or crop failure, poison food, or introduce foreign objects into their victims' bodies. Amulets or *mantra* (incantations) acquired from a priest or shaman can combat them. A person who dies without any apparent cause is

regarded as having been a *leyak* whose spirit, for whatever reason, never returned to the body after a night's roaming.

## 5 RELIGION

Unlike the vast majority of Indonesians, the Balinese are not Muslims but Hindu (except for tiny Christian and Buddhist minorities). Their Hinduism is not a wholesale transplant of the Indian religion but rather consists of the grafting of Indian elements onto an indigenous stem. Balinese believe that *kesaktian*, "potency" or "magical power," is present in ritual objects, trees, stones, mountains, etc., and must be respected. The object of their religious practices is to maintain the equilibrium between the "upper" (pure, good, constructive) forces and the "lower" (impure, evil, destructive) forces. Thus, Balinese make offerings to both gods and demons, e.g. prepared food, especially rice cakes, or leaf-weavings for the former and the blood of freshly slaughtered animals for the latter.

The Balinese recognize an immense range of supernatural beings, ranging from demons to ancestral spirits to divinities, such as the sun god Surya (a manifestation of the Hindu deity Siwa [Shiva]) and the rice goddess Dewi Sri. Since the Indonesian state philosophy Pancasila emphasizes monotheism, the organization Parisada Hindu Dharma (founded in 1959) has promoted the worship of Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, a supreme being of which all the other deities are lesser manifestations. This "reform" has not altered everyday practices other than to install Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa's shrine, an empty lotus seat, in every temple.

All rituals aim to purify and thus require holy water that people can only obtain from priests. Other religious specialists include several types of *balian*, "shamans" (masseuses, healers, augurs, spirit mediums, and so-called "literate" *balian*s who use *lontar*, palm-leaf manuscripts, in their magic).

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Each of the thousands of temples on Bali celebrates its own *odalan* or festival, usually lasting three days. The timing of these festivals is determined by a calendrical system including a 210-day ritual cycle and a 12-month lunar cycle, the latter numbered according to the Indian *Saka* year, the first of which corresponded to AD 78. In addition, there are three "week" cycles: a Balinese market week (three days: Pasah, Beteng/Tegeh, Kajeng); a Javanese market week (five days: Umanis, Paing, Pon, Wage, Kliwon) and the seven-day week.

*Galungan*, a festival celebrated throughout the island, runs for 10 days, beginning with the first day of the eleventh week of the 210-day year; the Balinese invite the gods and deified ancestors to descend from heaven, which is directly above the island's greatest mountain, Gunung Agung. As *Galungan* originated as a harvest festival, *penjor*, high bamboo poles bending with decorations, are raised in front of each house and temple to represent fertility.

*Nyepi* occurs on the first day of the *Saka* year. While on the eve people make a great deal of noise, either to drive demons away or call their attention to offerings laid out for them, on *Nyepi* itself people observe absolute quiet—not even vehicles may travel.

*Eka Dasa Rudra* occurs only once every 100 years, the last time being in 1979. This entails several weeks of ceremonies at Bali's supreme temple, Besakih, on the slopes of Gunung

Agung, whose aim is to purify the entire universe by exorcising Rudra, the chaotic aspect of Siwa.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Depending on the caste or wealth of a family, as many as 13 life-cycle rituals (*manusa yadnya*) can be performed: the sixth month of pregnancy; birth; the falling off of the umbilical cord; the 12th, 42nd, and 105th days after birth; the 210th day after birth, marking the child's first "touching of the earth"; the emergence of the first adult tooth; the loss of the last baby tooth; the onset of puberty (first menstruation for girls); tooth-filing; marriage; and purification for study.

Great care is taken to show respect to a newborn infant's "spiritual siblings": the placenta, the amniotic fluid, the blood, and the *lamas* or *banah*, a natural yellow salve covering the skin; the placenta is buried under a river stone at the entrance of the sleeping house. These "four companions" (*kanda empat*) can, if properly treated, protect the child in life, but, if neglected, may harm it.

As a necessary prerequisite to adulthood, tooth-filing is performed on teenagers to purge them of the "animal" nature, associated with the evils of lust, greed, anger, drunkenness, confusion, and jealousy, that are symbolized by the fang-like upper canines.

Full adulthood, in the sense of complete social responsibility, begins only with marriage. Wedding protocol involves roughly three stages: a ceremony whereby the boy's family asks for the hand of the girl from her family; the wedding ceremony itself; and a formal visit by the new couple and the groom's family to the bride's family so that the bride may "ask leave" of her own ancestors. This would also be the time for the groom's family to deliver the bride-price, a custom largely dropped by educated people. Such "weddings by proposal" involve many expensive rituals and feasts, to which kin, neighbors, and *banjar* will contribute aid. A cheaper and very popular alternative is "elopement" (*mamaling* or *nyogotin*). A boy and a girl spend a night at a friend's house, a publicly known deed after which they must marry. The boy's family holds a wedding ceremony to which the girl's family are not invited, since the latter are obliged to appear angry even if they secretly consented to the match. Some time afterwards, bringing gifts, the boy's family pays a formal visit to the girl's family in hopes of reconciling her family to the union. After this, the girl's side can publicly accept the marriage.

As a proper cremation ceremony is extremely expensive, the family may take months or even years to accumulate the necessary funds, installing the body in a special pavilion or burying it temporarily in a cemetery. Many families wait until a high-caste family holds a cremation, in conjunction with which they can perform ceremonies for their own deceased at a much reduced cost. For the cremation itself, the body is placed in an ornate animal-shaped coffin installed in a portable tower, whose number of levels (roofs) reflects the status of the deceased (as many as 11 for royalty). Dozens of mourners carry the tower to the cremation field, rotating it at each crossroads so that the deceased's spirit cannot find its way back home to haunt the living. Under the supervision of a priest, the body, coffin, tower, and offerings are burned; the ashes are collected and with further ceremony cast into the sea. Only after all this has been done can the deceased become a deified ancestor.



One striking exception to the above pattern is the Bali Aga people of Trunyan: after mourning, the body is laid under a tree in a forest-cemetery and allowed to rot away.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Following the Hindu scriptures, Balinese society has been divided since the Majapahit period into four castes (which do not correspond to occupation in any straightforward way): Brahmana; Satria; Wesia; and Sudra. Comprising 15% of the Balinese, the first three (the Triwangsa) claim direct descent from transplanted Majapahit nobility, the privileged “insiders” of the pre-colonial kingdoms, while the Sudra majority were literally the “outsiders” (*Jaba*). However, a small minority, the Bali Aga or Bali Turunan, claiming to be the “original [pre-Majapahit] Balinese,” have kept themselves apart in mountain villages. The position of the castes relative to each other has always been a matter of great dispute. Only under colonial rule have the Brahmana been able to assert a certain superiority, a status unconceded, for example, by a Sudra subcaste, the Pande (blacksmiths in origin), who take holy water from priests of their own subcaste.

Balinese society divides into a great variety of organizations; an individual belongs to several of these groups at once (their memberships never completely overlap). All these organizations have a leader and a set of written regulations (*awig-awig* or *sima*, passed down through the generations). Agriculture, house repair, rituals, emergencies, and other major tasks require the cooperation of members of these organizations (though nowadays, hiring workers is often cheaper than feeding helpers).

The *banjar* is a subvillage residential unit, which in the lowlands may include as many as 100 families or 500–600 people; it is led by a *klian banjar*, elected by the membership (though often from a hereditary line), who is responsible for arbitrating conflicts falling under the jurisdiction of customary law, as well as leading the banjar’s religious activities. Eligible to join upon marriage, men may have to pay a fee for banjar membership; a man can expect aid from fellow members in staging his own family’s rituals and feasts.

The *subak* is an association of individuals who depend on the same irrigation network (which does not match village or banjar boundaries). *Subak* join other *subak* in reliance upon one of several mountain-lake temples from which their water ultimately derives.

*Sekaha* are associations for specific purposes, temporary or permanent, e.g., music, dance, and theater ensembles, or separate clubs for young men and young women.

Traditional etiquette, now increasingly confined to ceremonial occasions, requires that people of higher status (including greater age) sit on a physically higher place and closer to the *kaja* direction and the east. For Brahmana priests and in ceremonies, the greeting is “*Ohm Swastiastu*,” with a small bow and the palms put together at the chest (this is now being promoted as an equivalent to the Muslim “*Assalamu alaikum*”). In opening conversation with higher-status people, one also bows; but to children and lower-status people, one simply nods. One takes advice, instruction, or criticism with “*nggih*” (a deferential “yes”) or with silence and without contradicting; one does everything possible to comply with a request or command. Adults correct children indirectly, e.g., a mother will tell her children that she herself will be scolded if the child misbe-

haves, or that misconduct is “low-caste” behavior. High-caste wives do not dare to correct older people; they either let them do as they will or appeal to another older third party, such as a mother-in-law. Self-deprecation (referring humbly to one’s own person, property, or achievements) is essential to polite conversation.

Between adolescents of the opposite sex, only chatting at food stalls in the presence of others is acceptable. Balinese joke freely about sex but take great care to keep the genitals covered and to keep garments that have been in contact with them (especially those of menstruating women) in a place where they will not be above people’s heads.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Inhabited by a group of brothers and their respective families, a residential compound (*uma*) is surrounded by a wall pierced by a narrow gate. Within it, grouped around a central courtyard, are separate pavilion-like buildings on the *kelod* side for cooking (one for each nuclear family), storing rice, and keeping pigs, and in the other directions ones for sleeping (on the *kaja* side for grandparents, parents, or the senior brother; on the east for guests; on the west for children). Each compound has a shrine (*sangguh*) in the *kaja*-east corner. A thatched pavilion (*bale*) serves for meetings and ceremonies, and a walled-in pavilion (*bale daja*) stores family heirlooms. Rivers serve for toilet and bathing functions. The compounds of *banjar* members cluster around a meeting pavilion (*bale banjar*), which nowadays often has a television and ping-pong tables.

Villages (*desa*) may be compact (in the mountains) or dispersed among fields and gardens (in the lowlands). Each village has three, usually separate, temples: the most *kaja* is the *pura puseh*, associated with the god Wisnu and the purified ancestors; at the center is the *pura bale agung* or *pura desa*, dedicated to Brahma; and most *kelod* is the *pura dalem*, associated with Siwa and the not-yet-purified dead.

Bali has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 69.8 (2005 score), slightly higher than Indonesia’s national HDI of 69.6. The province’s GDP per capita is us\$10,033, relatively high for Indonesia (cf. us\$9,784 for West Sumatra and us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, two regions with much higher HDIs, us\$6,293 for Central Java, which has the same HDI, and us\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara, which has among the lowest HDIs in the country). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality stood at 35.72 deaths per 1,000 live births, the lowest in the country after Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and North Sulawesi (by contrast, neighboring West Nusa Tenggara’s infant mortality rate was 88.55, the highest in the country).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage between members of different castes is now common, although before Indonesian independence a woman marrying a man of inferior caste would be banished with her spouse from their locality. Unions between a husband’s sisters and a wife’s brothers remain taboo. With some exceptions, a newlywed couple remains in the groom’s compound; children belong to the clan or subclan of the compound where they live (either the father’s or mother’s as the case may be). Households include married sons and their families until they are able to establish their own households. At least one son must stay behind to care for the parents in their old age.

Clan organizations (*warga*) for the Triwangsa include branches scattered all over the island. The senior family (of most direct descent from the common ancestor) keeps the clan history and genealogy (*babad*).

## **11 CLOTHING**

In work outside the home, especially for office and store jobs, Balinese wear Western-style clothes. Around the house, men wear shorts and a tank-top or, alternately, a sarong. Men's traditional clothing includes a *kamben sarung* (a tube sarong) of *endek* or *batik* cloth. In temples, a *songket* cloth (woven with gold- or silver-thread designs) is worn over the *kamben*; for rite-of-passage ceremonies, the *kamben* itself would be of *songket*. Men are very particular about how the *kamben* and the head cloth (*udeng*) required for formal occasions are tied. The lower edge of the *kamben* hangs longer in the front (held up while walking) and may be hitched up trouser-like for work in the fields.

Women wear a *kamben lembaran* (a nontube sarong), usually of mass-produced *batik* cloth, often with a sash (*selempot*) when outside the house; going about outside the house with breasts exposed has long been rare. When carrying things on the head (the usual method), women put a cloth between the load and the head. For temple ceremonies, women wear a *sabuk* belt wrapped around the body up to the armpits and put a *kebaya* jacket over this (but no *kebaya* or *selempot* for rite-of-passage ceremonies). As most women now wear their hair too short for traditional coiffures, they wear wigs to complete ritual dress.

## **12 FOOD**

Balinese consume their ordinary meals individually, silently, quickly, and at no fixed times, snacking very frequently. Everyday food consists of rice and vegetable side dishes, sometimes with a bit of chicken, fish, tofu, or tempeh, and seasoned with chili sauce (*sambel*) made fresh daily. Many dishes require *basa genep*, a standard spice mixture (sea salt, pepper, chili, shallots, garlic, shrimp paste, ginger, galangal, tamarind, candlenuts, sugar, coriander, and citrus).

For ceremonial feasts, much male labor goes into the making of *ebat*, chopped pig or turtle meat (including innards) mixed with spices, grated coconut, and *lawar* (slices of turtle cartilage or unripe mango). Other Balinese specialties are *sate lembat* (barbecue skewers consisting of ground meat rather than pieces of whole meat), *babi guling* (stuffed pig turned over a fire), and *bebek betutu* (stuffed duck wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in ashes).

## **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005, the level of literacy stood at 86.22%, low by Indonesian national standards but comparable to provinces with high population densities and high numbers of poor, such as Central Java, East Java and South Sulawesi. (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

An essential part of religious ceremonies as well as entertainment (for Balinese and tourists), traditional performing arts are highly developed and vigorously pursued. A great range of musical ensembles exist, variants of the *gamelan* orchestra

(drums, flutes, and bronze instruments or their substitutes of iron or bamboo). Examples are the *gong gede*, which plays slow, stately, and very old temple music; the delicate *gamelan semar pegulingan* accompanying court dances (also said to have once provided music for the palace bedchamber); and the dynamic *gong kebyar*, dating only from the beginning of the 20th century, also accompanying dance, theater, and rituals. A vast array of dances are performed, the most famous being the *Baris* dance, depicting drilling warriors; the *Legong* dance, depicting dueling princesses (sometimes girls in trance execute its intricate movements without previous instruction); and the *Barong*, in which a mythical lion, symbol of the good, combats the witch Rangda. Several dramatic genres are practiced: the *wayang kulit* shadow play (differing from the Javanese version in the form of the puppets and in the accompaniment by four *gender* instruments) and various forms of masked and unmasked theater (*topeng*, *wayang wong*, *gambuh*, and *arja*).

Balinese literature has been preserved incised on *lontar*, palm-leaf books. It divides into the epics of the gods and heroes of the previous world (in Kawi, Old Javanese) and tales of the old Balinese kingdoms (in Literary Balinese).

## **15 WORK**

Some 70% of the Balinese earn a living from agriculture, which, where water is sufficient (as in the south), means wet-rice cultivation and elsewhere means nonirrigated crops, such as dry rice, maize, cassava, and beans. Sharecropping has become common in the most densely populated areas. Coconuts are grown along the coasts; fruits, such as citrus and *salak* (snakefruit), are grown for the off-island market. Pigs, ducks, and cattle are kept; fish are raised in flooded paddies as well as caught in the sea.

Many Balinese find employment in cottage and medium-scale industries. Since the 1970s, the garment industry has expanded dramatically; there are also factories for printing, canning, and coffee and cigarette processing. With a flood of foreign and domestic visitors every year, tourism provides work in hotels, travel bureaus, guide and taxi services, and craft shops, as well as money for performing and visual arts.

## **16 SPORTS**

Although officially banned in 1981 as a venue for intense gambling, cockfights are still permitted as a necessary part of temple rituals (three rounds to appease demons). Cricket fighting continues as a milder substitute.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Painting, stone carving, and woodcarving in traditional and modernist styles, puppet making, mat- and basket weaving, and gold- and silver working are the most prominent crafts, with much production now directed towards the tourist market.

The most popular locally made cloth is *endek*, a kind of *ikat* (tie-dyed weft and solid warp). Particularly precious is another kind of *ikat*, *geringsing*, whose complicated dyeing process takes months to complete.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Bali's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 61.2, significantly above Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2 and dramatically above that of both neighboring provinces, East Java (56.3) and West Nusa Tenggara (51.6, the second lowest in the country). The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, is among the lowest in the country, 45.6, compared to the national GEM of 54.6.

Although menstruating women are considered ritually impure and may not enter temples, discrimination against women is not pronounced. However, there is a clear division of labor: women buy and sell in the markets, cook, wash, care for the pigs, and prepare offerings; men work for the *banjar*, prepare spices and meat for feasts, play in orchestras, attend cockfights, and drink together in the early evenings. Women join the caste of their husbands; the wife of a Brahmana priest succeeds to his duties upon his death. Wives have control over their dowries and over their own and their husbands' earnings, have ownership of their clothing and jewelry and of family's small livestock (a form of capital, and a significant one, in itself), and in general manage family finances.

If a husband abuses his wife, is impotent, does not support his family, or takes a co-wife (*madu*) without his first wife's approval, she may return to her own family and, if she is able to convince a court of her husband's guilt, she gets custody of the children. Upon divorce a wife has rights to a share of assets jointly acquired with her husband. A wife who neglects her duties, commits adultery, or remains childless may be "thrown away" by her husband only if they had married by elopement. If they had married with familial consent or arrangement from the very beginning, it is much more difficult for him to do this, and he may go live with his lover while continuing to support his wife. In principle, inheritance goes only to men, but women can be classified as "males" for legal purposes and thus inherit (while their husbands become classified as legally "female").

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—revised by A. J. Abalahin

# BALŪCHĪ

**PRONUNCIATION:** bal-OOCH-i

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Baloch; Balochi

**LOCATION:** Pakistan (Province of Baluchistan); Iran; Afghanistan; Turkmenistan; Oman; East African coast

**POPULATION:** 7.5–11 million

**LANGUAGE:** Baluchi

**RELIGION:** Islam (mostly Sunni Muslim; also the Zikrī sect)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Pakistanis

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Balūchī (also Baloch, or Balochi) are a semi-nomadic tribal people inhabiting the southern mountains and coastal regions of South Asia's west+ern borderlands. Though united by a common language and culture, they have suffered the fate of many groups in the region in that their traditional homeland is divided between several political units—Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

The Balūchī, who believe they are descendants of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, trace their origins to tribes living in the region of Aleppo, in Syria. Migrating eastward, these tribes reached the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and from there settled in their present homeland sometime between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. Isolated by the remoteness and inhospitable nature of their lands, they existed for several centuries as more or less independent groups organized along clan lines. Persians, Arabs, Hindus, and others have laid claim to parts of Balūchistan, the traditional Balūchī homeland, at various times. None, however, succeeded in effectively establishing political control over the area. In the 12th century, Mir Jalal Han succeeded in uniting some of the Balūchī tribes under the short-lived First Balūchī Confederacy. Tribal conflict and intertribal rivalries were commonplace throughout the region, often instigated by competition for land, revenues, and resources. By the 16th century, the Balūchī were organized into three political entities—the Makran State, the Dodai Confederacy, and the Kalat Confederacy. In the 18th century, virtually all of the Balūchī tribes were united in a loose confederacy under the banner of Mir Adbullah Khan of Kalat.

The British annexation of Sind in 1843 pushed the frontier of British India to the borders of Balūchistan. Concerned with a possible Russian threat to their Indian Empire, and also with gaining access to the strategic Afghanistan frontier, the British sought to extend their influence over the Balūchī. They achieved this by playing local leaders against each other, exploiting the Balūchī through a policy of divide and conquer. Tribal chiefs were guaranteed local autonomy and cash payments in return for allowing British garrisons in their territory. Some areas along the Afghanistan border were brought under direct British administration. By the early 20th century, British control over the region extended to the borders of Afghanistan and Iran.

The British Province of Balūchistan passed to Pakistan when that country came into being in 1947. Pakistan also inherited the problems of the region, with the fiercely independent and warlike Balūchī tribes resisting integration into the new political state. Opposition to the central government led to brutal

confrontations with the Pakistani military in the mid-1970s. Indiscriminate air attacks were mounted on villages and civilian populations in an effort to subdue the Balūchī dissidents. Today, the Balūchī see themselves as a neglected minority in a country, whose government is dominated by non-Balūchī ethnic groups such as the Punjabis.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Balūchī speakers today are estimated to number about 8 million people. This figure is based on linguistic data, as census information from the countries in which the Balūchī live is unreliable. (The 2002 Pakistan Census estimate for the population of Balūchistan Province is 7,215,700.) In addition, there are perhaps half as many people again who, though essentially Balūchī in culture, have adopted the language of their neighbors. Thus, if cultural rather than linguistic criteria are used, the Balūchī in Pakistan could total around 11 million in number.

The traditional homeland of the Balūchī extends west from the borders of the Punjab and Sind, across a small section of Afghanistan, to the areas of the Iranian Plateau southeast of Kirman. The southern boundary of the region is defined by the coast of the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. The section of this territory falling within Pakistan makes up the Pakistani Province of Balūchistan, in which some 7 million people or 70% of the total Balūchī population live in Balūchistan.. Some 1-2 million Balūchī reside within the borders of Iran, and a further 300,000 are found in Afghanistan. Balūchī communities are also found in Turkmenistan in Central Asia, in Oman in Arabia, and along the coast of East Africa, and also in the Pakistani city of Karachi.

Apart from the fringing coastal lowlands in the south and the arm of the Indus flood plain that extends towards Sibi in Pakistan, the entire region is characterized by harsh, inaccessible terrain. Rugged mountain ranges are interspersed with upland plateaus and desert basins. In Pakistan, the eastern margins of Balūchistan are defined by the north–south-running Kirthar Hills and the Sulaiman Ranges. The latter average 1,800–2,100 m (6,000–7,000 ft) in elevation, but in places mountain peaks exceed 3,000 m (10,000 ft). Zargun, near Quetta, reaches a height of 3,591 m (11,738 ft). In southern Balūchistan Province, the mountain ranges swing westward to parallel the Makran coast. The northwest of the province is made up of the desert basin of the Hamun-i-Mashkel, a region of bare sun-cracked clay, sand dunes, and marshes. The entire region experiences an arid climate, with the hot summers and cold winters typical of desert regions.

The Province of Balūchistan is rich in natural resources, though its inhabitants perceive that they receive little benefit from this and that they are exploited by the central government.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Balūchī language is an Indo-Iranian language of the Indo-European linguistic family. Related to Kurdish and Pashto, its origins are apparently to be found in the civilization of the ancient Medes or Parthians. Modern Balu chi shows borrowings from Persian, Arabic, Sindhi, and other languages. Distinctions are made between Western, Southern, and Eastern Balu chi, and six individual dialects of Balūchī are identified. No written form of the language existed before the early 19th century. Persian was used for official purposes until that time.

Subsequently, Balūchī was written in the Persian and Urdu scripts. With the rise of Balūchī nationalism, an adaptation of the Arabic script known as Nastaliq has been adopted for writing purposes.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Bravery and courage are respected by the Balūchī, and many tribal heroes who remained true to Balūchī values are revered and honored in folk songs and ballads. Doda, for example, is remembered for defending the principle of *bāhot*, or protection. Legend tells of a wealthy widow, Sammi, who sought protection in the village of Doda Gorgez. One day, Beebagr, a relative of Sammi's deceased husband, carried off some of Sammi's cows. Even though Doda had just been married, he pursued the thieves because he was honor-bound to safeguard the property as well as the life of the widow. Doda was killed in the ensuing battle (a similar tale is found in Rajasthani folklore). In keeping with Balūchī tradition, Doda's death was eventually avenged by his brother Balach.

Balūchī culture incorporates many elements that pre-date Islam. The veneration of tribal heroes and belief in the power of ancestral spirits reflect these ancient practices. In the past, it was customary for the Balūchī to perform certain rituals and even sacrifice at the graves of heroes. No doubt under later Islamic influence, such rites are now undertaken at the shrines of Muslim saints.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Balūchī are Muslim, mostly Sunni but also including members of the Zikrī sect. Zikris (pronounced "Zigris" in Balūchī) were estimated to number over 750,000 people in 1998. If they increased in numbers at the same overall rate as Pakistan's population, today they would number close to 1 million people. They live mostly in Makran and Las Bela in southern Pakistan and are followers of a 15th-century *mahdi*, an Islamic messiah, called Nur Pak ("Pure Light"). Zikrī practices and rituals differ from those of orthodox Islam. For example, they do not observe the month of fasting during Ramadan. Zikris see themselves as Muslim, but in the eyes of Sunnis they are nonbelievers. This is because they place the teachings of their mahdi above those of Muhammad. As a result, Zikris are discriminated against by the dominant Sunni majority in Pakistan. They are also subjected to personal violence as well as attacks on their places of worship by Muslim extremists.

Balūchī Sunnis follow the teachings of Muhammad, keeping to the practices and principles of Islam as set out in the Koran (*Quran*). Religious instruction and the performance of religious ritual and observances lie in the hands of the *mullahs* (priests). However, many Baluch, and particularly the Zikris, are ardent followers of Sufi saints or *pirs*. These mystics, who can cure illnesses, foretell the future, and are reputed to perform miracles, are seen as evidence of the direct hand of God in the affairs of humans. For the Balūchī, religious beliefs and practices are very much an individual matter. The Balūchī do not support the idea of the religious state that underlies national policies implemented by Pakistani governments in recent years.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Balūchī observe the festivals of Id ul-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan, and Id ul-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice that

falls at the end of the Islamic year. On these occasions, clean clothes are worn in honor of the occasion. The day begins with prayer, and the rest of holiday is spent in gambling, horse-racing, and general merry-making. Id ul-Adha is celebrated with the sacrifice of goats and sheep and the distribution of the meat to relatives, friends, and the poor. Alms are distributed at this time. The tenth day of Muharram is observed by visits to the graves of relations, followed by prayers and the distribution of alms to the poor. In general, the Balūchī pay less attention to celebrating festivals than do other Muslim peoples in South Asia.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a child is greeted with much rejoicing, music, and singing. Food and sweets are prepared and distributed to commemorate the event. The birth of a male child is cause for greater celebration, and some tribes barely recognize the arrival of a girl. The naming of the child usually takes place on the sixth day after birth. Children may be named after deceased ancestors, days of the week, trees, plants, or animals. Names peculiar to the Balūchī include Lalla, Bijjar, Kannar, and Jihand. Other ceremonies mark occasions such as the circumcision of males, the child beginning to walk, and the first wearing of trousers. This last event, occurring around the age of 15, was traditionally an important stage in a boy's life. It marked his becoming an adult and the time when he took up arms and joined his people in tribal warfare.

Balūchī burial rites follow usual Islamic practices. The corpse is taken to the graveyard, where it is washed and dressed in a shroud. A *mullah* (Muslim priest) reads the prayer for the dead over the body before it is committed to the grave. The body is laid in a north-south direction, with the head turned toward the west, i.e., facing Mecca. Sweets are passed among the congregation, and prayers are offered up before the mourners disperse. For nomads on the move, the body is placed in a pit dug to serve as a grave, rather than in a cemetery. A goat or sheep is killed, and the meat is cooked and distributed instead of sweets. The initial mourning period lasts for three or five days, depending on the sex of the deceased. During this time, normal activities are restricted, and women discard their jewelry and wear black dresses. The end of this period is marked by *asrokh*, a ceremony involving prayers and the distribution of meat. A second period of mourning lasts several months, during which friends come from a distance to offer condolences to the family of the deceased.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When Balūchī greet each other, they normally shake hands. However, if an ordinary tribesperson meets a religious leader, the tribesperson reverently touches the leader's feet. A meeting usually commences with inquiries after health (*durāhi*) and then proceeds to an exchange of news (*hāl*). Not to ask for news of the person one is meeting is considered the height of rudeness.

The Balūchī are guided in their daily lives and social relations by a code of conduct known as *Baluchmayar*, or "the Balūchī way." It is expected that a Balūchī be generous in hospitality to guests, offer refuge to those who seek protection (*bāhot*), and be honest in dealings with others. A Balūchī man should be merciful to women and refrain from killing a man who has sought sanctuary in the shrine of a *pir* (Sufi saint). He



Balūchī leaders of Pakistani opposition parties raise their hands during a demonstration in Quetta, Pakistan. Some 8,000 opposition activists protested in 2006 against the military operation in the restive southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan. (Banaras Khan/AFP/Getty Images)

is equally expected to defend his honor (*izzat*) and that of his women and family. Some insults are avenged only by blood, leading to reprisals and blood-feuds that have lasted generations. When both parties involved agree to it, such feuds are settled by the tribal council or *jirgāl*. Invariably blood-money or some form of compensation is required to be paid. Another means of resolving disputes is through *med*, a informal gathering of tribal leaders and elders who volunteer their services to help reach an end to the conflict.

The Balūchī are organized into territorially based tribes such as the Marri and the Bugti, each under the leadership of a central chief or *Sardār*. The tribes are made up of various kin-groups such as clans, clan sections, and subsections, with the smaller of these groups coinciding with the actual units of settlement found throughout the region.

## <sup>9</sup> LIVING CONDITIONS

Balūchī nomads live in tents (*gidām*) made of palm matting stretched on poles. Two upright poles are driven into the ground and a third connects them in the form of a crosspiece. The matting is thrown over this, with the corners and sides fastened to the ground with pegs and heavy stones. In winter the matting is replaced by goat-hair blankets. A coarse, goat-hair carpet forms the floor of the tent. Typical contents of the tent include a hand-mill for grinding grain, waterskins, and goat-hair sacks for holding grain, salt, and clothing. Flint and tinder are carried for making fires, and various cooking and eating utensils complete the list of household belongings. Both

the tent and its contents are transported on the backs of pack animals when the camp is on the move.

Permanent settlements are usually occupied during the summer months. They generally consist of small villages comprising a collection of mud huts clustered around the fort of a chief or headman for protection. More recent structures may be made of sun-dried brick, with houses built along narrow, winding village lanes. Both old and newer houses have an open courtyard in front, enclosed by a low mud wall or palm fence.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

As in all Muslim societies, women occupy a subservient role among the Balūchī. However, they are less subject to social restrictions than are women among other Muslim peoples in South Asia. Traditionally, *pardah* (seclusion) was not followed, although some upper-class families have now taken up the custom. In addition to household chores, women share in the tending of the family's herds. The gathering of wild plants, water, and firewood are specifically women's work.

Balūchī have strong prohibitions against marrying outside the Balūchī community. Marriages are arranged, with the union of first cousins being common. Such a match has the advantage of strengthening the ties between related families that are already familiar with each other. A bride-price (*lab*) consisting of cash and livestock is customary, although in certain instances an exchange of brides is negotiated. Islamic law permits polygamy, but monogamy is the norm among the Balūchī. Adultery was traditionally punishable by the death of

the guilty parties under tribal law. Divorce occurs for reasons such as barrenness but is considered a matter of great disgrace. A widow returns to her father's home on the death of a husband, although she is allowed to remarry if it is acceptable to her family. Inheritance of property passes from father to son, a woman keeping only her personal belongings such as utensils, clothing, and jewelry.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional clothing for the Balūchī man is a long, loose shirt (*jāmag* or *kurti*) that reaches below the knees, baggy trousers (*salwār*), and a turban (*pāg*) made of a long cloth wound around a turban cap. Shoes of leather or palm-leaf sandals complete the dress. A shawl or wrap (*chāddar*) provides extra warmth in winter but can also be used as a towel, waistband, or headcloth, or to carry objects. In the past, Balūchī wore only white, although this is now changing. An embroidered waistcoat or vest is sometimes worn over the shirt. Balu chi men may wear rings in the ears and on their fingers, but they disdain other jewelry. Hair is worn long, and most Balūchī men sport beards.

Dress for a woman is simpler, consisting of a long shift (*pa-shk*) reaching to the ankles, and a wrap used to cover the head, shoulders, and upper body. The wearing of trousers under the shift was restricted to women of high status. The clothes of better-class women are often made from silk and are elaborately embroidered. Colors are usually avoided, but widows wear black, and scarlet is popular among girls of marriageable age. Women wear an assortment of rings (nose-rings, earrings, rings on fingers and toes), necklaces, bracelets, and ornaments in the hair. Jewelry is made from gold or silver, depending on one's means.

### **12 FOOD**

The Marri Balūchī take food twice a day, in the morning and evening. The food for the family is cooked together, but men and women eat separately. The most important food-grain is wheat, though millets (*juārī* and *bājra*) and rice are also eaten. They are ground into flour and baked into unleavened bread in mud ovens. Meat is an important part of the Balūchī diet, *sajjī* being a particular favorite that is often served to honored guests. A sheep is killed, flayed, and carved into joints, with the meat being slashed and sprinkled with salt. The pieces of meat are spitted on green twigs, which are stuck into the ground in front of a blazing log. This dish is eaten with a knife, although Balūchī normally eat with their hands. Milk is drunk and also made into curds, buttermilk, and butter. In summer, a sherbet (*lassī*) is made with milk, molasses, and sugar. Dates and wild fruits and vegetables also form an important part of the Balūchī diet.

### **13 EDUCATION**

With their traditional seminomadic life-style, Balūchī have little access to formal education. Only an estimated 10% to 15% of Balūchī children attend school, mainly in the more-settled areas of the country. As a consequence, illiteracy among the Balūchī is high.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Although they lack a tradition of written literature, the Balūchī are heirs to a rich body of oral literature that extends back at

least to the 12th century AD. Poets and minstrels are traditionally held in high regard by Balūchī society. Epic poems, heroic ballads, romances, folk tales, and proverbs all form part of the Balūchī cultural heritage. Many works recount tales of Balūchī heroes and all embody the very essence of *Balūchmayār*, the Balūchī code of honor. Among the more famous and popular of these poems are those relating the legendary exploits of Mir Chakur, a 16th-century Balūchī warrior and chieftain of the Rind tribe. Music plays a role in all ceremonies, except death rituals which are of a more solemn nature. The Lori and Domb castes, though not of Balūchī blood, serve as professional musicians. Dancing accompanies many events such as weddings and other festivals, men and women forming separate dancing circles. Men's dances reflect the warrior traditions of the Balūchī. The drum, the lute, and the shepherd's flute are the most common instruments used to accompany singing and dancing.

### **15 WORK**

The traditional economy of the Balūchī combines dry-crop cereal farming with seminomadic pastoralism based on the herding of sheep, goats, and cattle. Of particular interest in central and southern areas is the cultivation of date palms, irrigated by underground aqueducts (*karez*). Some Balūchī communities along the southern Makran coast derive their living from fishing. Balūchī tend to look down on trade or commerce, these activities being viewed as unworthy occupations. Such business is left largely in the hands of non-Balūchī.

### **16 SPORTS**

Popular games include *chawk*, a type of checkers introduced from Sind and played with wooden pieces on a cloth divided into squares. Moves are governed by six or seven cowrie shells, which are thrown on the ground in the manner of dice. *Jī*, a game of tag, is played by village boys and young men. Games such as wrestling and horse-racing are useful in developing skills in young men for war. Shooting and hunting are favorite pastimes among the upper classes. Card games and gambling are also popular among some groups.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Balūchī living in Karachi and other towns of southern Pakistan enjoy all the recreational facilities available to the urban resident. Those who follow a traditional seminomadic way of life in the remote Balūchī heartland have to rely on festivals, music, dancing, and folk culture for their entertainment.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Balūchī are not particularly known for their folk art or crafts. However, women are skilled at embroidery and adorn their garments with elaborate geometric and abstract designs. They make felt from sheep's wool, and weave rugs for their own use and for the purposes of exchange.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Balūchī have not fared well in modern Pakistan. They form an ethnic and cultural population that has a transnational distribution, and whose natural affinities are more with their fellow Balūchī in Iran and Afghanistan than with other Pakistanis. Indeed, they are viewed as virtual "savages" by

the dominant Punjabi and Sindhi majority in the country. It is little wonder that the Balūchī have very little sense of identity with Pakistan. This alienation is intensified by the failure of the national government to promote economic development in Balūchīstan, one of the most underdeveloped areas of the country.

Many see poverty and lack of education as a major hindrance to Balūchī economic and political advancement. Even in major urban centers such as Karachi, Balūchī children are at a disadvantage. Though they speak Balūchī at home, at school they have to struggle with Urdu, Sindhi, English (the language of commerce and higher education), and Arabic or Persian (the languages of Islam). Few advance beyond high school or low-status or menial jobs. The sense that they are viewed as second-class citizens, combined with resentment against their treatment by a central administration seen as heavy-handed and corrupt, has in the past given rise to Balūchī separatist movements. This has occasionally led to armed conflicts such as the Marri insurrection of 1973–77. Though defeated in the 1970s, a resilient Balūchī nationalist movement lingers on, garnering recruits and support from a population disaffected with establishment policies that emphasize resource transfer. In October 1992, ethnic tempers ran high and clashes took place between the Balūchīs and second largest ethnic group, the Pathans in Balūchīstan. After the Chagai nuclear tests by Pakistan in 1998, some Balūchī students hijacked a PIA (Pakistan International Airways) plane to register their disapproval and draw international attention to the prevailing sense of discrimination in Pakistan against Baluch people and Balūchīstan. Balūchī nationalism remains a sensitive issue, especially given the strategic location of Balūchīstan on the shores of the Arabian Sea and the political dynamics of the region. A proposed pipeline will carry natural gas from Turkmenistan to India through Balūchīstan, although the security of the pipeline remains an issue for the Pakistani government, under Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, in the face of the continuing low level insurgency in Balūchīstan.

Increasing levels of violence in southern Afghanistan since 2005 have been attributed to Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters finding safe haven in the border areas of Balūchīstan along with support from local Balūchīs, with whom the Islamic extremists have cultural affinities. Indeed, from this time, extremists involved in the anti-U.S. conflict in Afghanistan have converted areas of Balūchīstan into an operational rather than a logistical base. Quetta is a hotbed of extremist activities and, though the Pakistani Army is fully aware of this, the Islamabad government under President Musharraf did little to bring the area under government control. It remains to be seen whether the newly elected government will tackle the situation.

In August 2006 Pakistani security forces killed Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, the 79-year-old chief of the Bugti tribe and former Chief Minister of the province, an incident which was followed by widespread unrest in eastern Balūchīstan. Since early 2005, Bugti, who was seen by locals as a leader, had been fighting the Pakistani Army with a private force of 5,000 loyal tribesmen in the mountains of eastern Balūchīstan. Bugti claimed only to be seeking provincial autonomy for Balūchīstan, a view which, naturally, was not shared by the Pakistani Army and security forces, who saw him as “anti-Pakistani.”



## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As is to be expected in a Muslim society, Balūchī women are seen as inferior to men and are expected to be obedient to their husbands. However, Balūchī women are less restrained than women among other Muslim peoples in South Asia. As noted earlier, they are not subject to the custom of *purdah* (except in some upper class families). Monogamy is the norm, while divorce is permitted. A Balūchī woman is responsible for household chores, as well as tending the family's herds and the gathering of wild plants, water, and firewood.

“Honor killings,” originally common among the Balūchī tribes, is occasionally still faced by Balūchī women who still, even in urban areas, have low literacy and face difficulties in accessing education. Sexual and physical abuse by male family members also remain issues.

Women in Balūchīstan remain extremely poor, illiterate and bound by traditional norms of a tribal society that is patriarchal in nature, but they are nonetheless becoming involved in politics and play an increasingly influential role in society and in determining the future of the province.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

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## BANGLĀDESHĪS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ban-gla-DESH-eez

**LOCATION:** Bangladesh

**POPULATION:** 158 million

**LANGUAGE:** Bengali (Bangla)

**RELIGION:** Islam (majority Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Chakmas; Vol. 4: Santals; Pakistanis

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Banglādeshīs, like Indians and Pakistanis, owe their modern political identity to the events that accompanied the end of the British Empire in South Asia. When British India was partitioned in 1947, areas with a Muslim majority in the population were assigned to Pakistan, the new Muslim state. This included northwestern areas of the Indian subcontinent that were first conquered and settled by Muslim invaders in the 11th century AD. However, Muslim majorities also existed in the east of the subcontinent in Bengal. This area was separated to form the “East Wing” of Pakistan. Residents of the region thus became “Pakistani,” members of a Muslim state that was split into two territorial units separated by 1,600 km (1,000 mi) of Indian territory. The link between the two Wings was religion, their populations being followers of Islam. The ties of religion, however, were not strong enough to overcome historical and cultural differences, as the events of the following two and a half decades were to show.

The region in which Bangladesh lies is thought to have been settled around 1000 BC by Dravidian-speaking peoples who came to be called the “Bang.” This ancient tribal name is echoed in modern names such as Bangladesh, Bengal, and Bengali. For most of its history, Bengal (as it is convenient to call it) remained on the periphery of the great political events of the Indian subcontinent. At times, it fell under the control of the great pan-Indian empires such as that of the Mauryas (321–181 BC), while at other times it led an independent political existence. In AD 1202, however, Bengal came under the influence of the Muslim Turks who had established themselves in Delhi, and it remained under Muslim rule for the next 550 years. Beginning in the 13th century AD and continuing for several hundred years, Bengal saw the wholesale conversion of its people to Islam. These conversions were generally of the lower-caste Hindus, attracted by the ideals of brotherhood and equality taught by Islam.

Conversion to Islam did not mean adopting the language and culture of Islam. Bengali Muslims spoke the Bengali tongue and displayed a deep-rooted commitment to Bengali culture—something that was never fully understood by the national leaders of Pakistan, who were mainly from West Pakistan. Attempts in 1953 to impose Urdu as a second language in East Pakistan led to riots and several deaths. This day is still celebrated in Bangladesh as “National Mourning Day.” Cultural differences, economic pressures, neglect of East Pakistan by the central government, and West Pakistanis’ feelings of the superiority of their Islamic heritage, all contributed to deteriorating relations between East Pakistan and West Pakistan.

Popular dissatisfaction among Bengālīs resulted in a growing movement for autonomy in East Pakistan, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib) of the Awami League. National elec-



*Banglādeshī women watch a fair during celebrations of Bengali New Year. (AP Images/Pavel Rahman)*

tions held in December 1970 gave Mujib a sweeping victory, and by rights he should have been appointed prime minister of Pakistan. However, General Yahya Khan, President of Pakistan, postponed indefinitely the convening of the National Assembly. When talks between Mujib and Yahya broke down, Yahya decided to solve the problem by force. In March 1971, the Pakistan Army embarked on a terror campaign in East Pakistan aimed at forcing the Bengālīs into submission. They identified and executed students, teachers, writers, members of the intelligentsia—anyone who was deemed a threat to the regime in power. For the next nine months, a bloody civil war was waged, pitting East Pakistan’s Mukti Bahini (Liberation Force) against the Pakistani military. One estimate claims that more than a million Bengali civilians died at the hands of the Pakistan Army. The matter was ended when the Indian Army entered the fray, leading to the capitulation of Pakistan’s forces on 16 December 1971. The “independent, sovereign republic of Bangladesh,” first proclaimed on 26 March 1971, now became a reality.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Bangladesh lies in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent at the head of the Bay of Bengal. It is a relatively compact country covering an area of 147,570 sq km (56,977 sq mi), roughly the size of the state of Iowa. The Banglādeshī population num-

bers 158 million people, which ranks the country the seventh most populous in the world.

Except for its southern coastline, Bangladesh is virtually surrounded on all sides by India. Of its 4,246 km (2,638 mi) land border, only some 193 km (120 mi) in the southeast is shared with Burma (Myanmar). Bangladesh extends over 650 km (approximately 400 mi) northwards from the mouth of the Ganges River almost to the foothills of the Himalayas. In the extreme northwest, its border comes so close to Nepal’s that less than 40 km (25 mi) of Indian territory separates the two countries. (The vulnerability of this narrow land corridor to Assam and its oil reserves was a strategic factor in India’s decision to enter the 1971 war on the side of the insurgent Banglādeshīs.)

Bangladesh lacks the geographical diversity of the other countries of South Asia. The Chittagong Hills in the southeast are the only significant hill system in the country. An extension of the mountain ranges of eastern India and Burma, they form narrow north–south ridges rising to between 600 and 900 m (approximately 1,970–2,950 ft) above sea level. The highest point in Bangladesh (1,046 m or 3,432 ft) lies here in the south east. Roughly 80% of Bangladesh is located on the fertile alluvial lowland of the Gangetic Plain and on the Ganges Delta itself. Soon after it enters Bangladesh, the Ganges River is joined by both the Brahmaputra River (known in Bangladesh as the Jamuna) and the Meghna River to form one of the largest del-



tas in the world. The coastal section of the delta is known as the *sundarbans*, a belt of low-lying tidal forests and mangrove trees that is the home of the Royal Bengal tiger.

The rivers of Bangladesh, some 700 in total, are at once its lifeblood and its curse. The annual flooding of the alluvial plain and delta renews the fertile soils of the region and allows it to support some of the highest agricultural population densities in the world. Yet periodically the region is subject to devastating floods with considerable loss of life and economic cost. In 1988, some of the worst flooding in the country's history occurred. Some 83% of the country was affected. Over 1,600 people died, a relatively small number compared to some natural catastrophes in the region, but the cost in terms of lost crops, livestock, and damage to the economic infrastructure was enormous.

Bangladesh experiences a subtropical monsoon climate, with the three distinct seasons typical of South Asia. Cool, dry winters are experienced from October to February. Temperatures rise during the following months to maximums between 32°C and 38°C (approximately 90°F to 100°F) in April, the hottest month. May sees the onset of early monsoon rains, with high humidity making for unpleasant conditions. June to October is the rainy season, with rainfall totals varying from 160 cm (63 in) in the west to 500 cm (approximately 200 in) in the northeast. During the late monsoon season, tropical cyclones periodically sweep in from the Bay of Bengal, often with disastrous consequences. In November 1970, such a storm slammed into the delta with winds exceeding 160 kph (100 mph) and a storm surge of 5.5 m (18 ft). Many of the coastal areas lie be-

tween 4 and 10 feet above sea-level and were completely submerged. Lacking an early warning system and given the poor transportation facilities, an estimated 250,000 people lost their lives in this storm. In November 2007, Bangladesh was struck by cyclone Sidr, which similarly caused enormous damage to the country. This was followed by severe flooding. As the Jamuna, Ganges and Meghna Rivers spilled over their banks, 30 million people were made homeless, 135,000 cattle died and 11,000 kilometers of roads damaged or destroyed. Two-thirds of the country was underwater.

Perhaps more than any other nationality in South Asia, Banglādeshīs are characterized by ethnic unity. Over 98% of the population are Bengālīs, speaking the Bengali language and identifying with Bengali cultural traditions. Biharis form another element, although a numerically small one, in the Bangladesh population. Biharis are non-Bengali, Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees from Bihar and other parts of northern India. This group stood to lose from Bangladesh's independence and supported the West Pakistanis during the 1971 war. At that time they numbered about 1 million. Many of them were repatriated to Pakistan after the war, however, but their current total is estimated at as many as 500,000 people.

Tribal peoples make up less than 1% of Bangladesh's population but they differ significantly from the rest of the population in their social organization, customs, and rituals. The largest of these groups are the Chakmas who, along with the Marmas, occupy the highland valleys of the Chittagong Hills. The Mros, considered the area's original inhabitants, and the Tiparas are other tribal groups of the Chittagong Hills. These hill tribes are of Sino-Tibetan descent and have distinct Mongoloid features. Other tribal groups, such as the Santal, Khasis, Garos, and Khajons, represent extensions of tribal populations from adjacent areas of India.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Bengali, or Bangla, is spoken by 98.8% of the population and is also the country's official language. It is a member of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family of languages and is written in its own Bengali script. Regional dialects of Bengali include Rajbangshi, Varendra, and Vanga. Dialects such as Sylhetta and Chittagonian show strong Arab-Persian influences. Chakma, the tongue spoken by Chakma tribals, is a dialect of Bengali, although tribal languages such as Magh and Arakanese belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. Urdu is the language spoken by Biharis. English remains an important language in Bangladesh.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Banglādeshīs identify with the folk traditions of Bengali culture. This includes belief in shamanism and the powers of *fakīrs* (Muslim holy men who are viewed as exorcists and faith healers), *ōjhās* (shamans with magical healing powers), and *Bauls* (religious mendicants and wandering musicians). *Sūfism* is strongly entrenched in Bangladesh, with Shah Jalal and Khan Jahan Ali being among the most celebrated Sufi saints.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, and the fighters of the Mukti Bahini are regarded as national heroes of the Banglādeshī independence movement.

## 5 RELIGION

At its creation, Bangladesh was constituted as a secular state. However, a series of constitutional amendments in 1977 and 1978 led to the adoption of Islam as the state religion. Most Banglādeshī are Muslims, with nearly 90% of the population claiming Islam as their religion (2001 Census). The conversion of local populations to Islam began after AD 1202, when Bengal fell to invading Turkish armies, and continued for several centuries. Conversions were generally collective, with lower-caste Hindus and groups of Buddhists attracted to Islam by its ideals of equality, brotherhood, and social justice. Sufis played a major role in this process, and fakirs and *pirrs* (wandering Muslim holy men) were familiar figures in the villages of the region. Sufism remains an important element in the religious life of the people today. Most Banglādeshī are Sunnis, although small Shia minorities are found in urban areas. The *Shia* festival of Muharram is widely observed by Sunnis in Bangladesh.

Although many non-Muslims fled Bangladesh in 1947, Hindus still account for 9.2% of the population. Buddhists (0.8%), Christians (0.3%) and tribal groups (0.1%) form other religious minorities in the country.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As an Islamic state, Bangladesh officially celebrates the Muslim festivals of Id-ul-Fitr, Bakr-Id, Muharram, and other Muslim festivals as public holidays. In addition, several Hindu festivals (e.g., Janamashtami, Durga Puja), Christian holy days (Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas), and Buddhist celebrations (Buddha Purnima) are recognized as holidays.

Secular holidays include National Mourning Day (21 February), Independence Day (26 March) National Revolution Day (7 November) and Victory Day (16 December).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage of Banglādeshī follow normal Muslim patterns. Births are occasions for rejoicing, with male babies preferred over females. Muslim prayers are whispered into the baby's ears, and the naming ceremony is accompanied by the sacrifice of a sheep or goat. Male children undergo the *Sunnat* or circumcision. It is becoming fashionable, especially in urban communities, to celebrate children's birthdays.

Death rituals are performed according to Muslim canonical rules. The corpse is washed, shrouded, and carried to the cemetery where it is interred with the customary prayers for the departed soul. The next forty days are marked by various rituals, ending in the ceremonies held 40 days after death that bring the main period of mourning to a close.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Banglādeshī are a warm, accommodating people and follow the usual traditions of South Asian hospitality. Visitors, even casual ones, are expected to stay for refreshments. Even the poorest host will provide a visitor with a glass of water and a spoonful of molasses, a piece of betel nut (areca nut), or offer a *hukkā* (a pipe used for smoking tobacco).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Some have described Bangladesh as belonging not to the Third World of developing nations but to the Fourth World, the

poorest of the poor. This is reflected in its health statistics and economic indices. Life expectancy at birth in 2001 was 62.5 years—almost 20 years less than in Japan, the world's leading country in terms of life expectancy. Leading causes of death include typhoid fever, tetanus, and respiratory ailments such as tuberculosis. Medical advances have reduced infant mortality rates to around 62 deaths per 1,000 live births. Fertility rates are high, with the average number of births per childbearing woman in the population being 3.11 and the rate of natural increase of population is just over 2% per year.

Banglādeshī are a rural people, with some 78% living in villages scattered across the country. Rural house types and construction materials depend on local conditions. Reeds are used in the delta, but houses further inland are made of mud, bamboo, and brush wood. Roofs are thatched with palm leaves, though the more prosperous now use corrugated iron. Tribes in the eastern hills build their houses on raised platforms. Villages may also contain the more substantial houses of former landowners (*zamīndārs*) and Hindu moneylenders. Per capita income in 2006 was among the lowest in South Asia, at us\$2,300, well below the world average of \$10,200 per year. However, the middle classes in cities such as Dhaka (the capital) live very much in the manner of urban elites throughout South Asia.

Land communications in Bangladesh are generally poor, with only 4% of the country's 193,000 km (120,000 mi) of road paved. The numerous rivers of the country make rail transportation difficult (there is an average of six bridges or culverts per kilometer of rail line), but water transport is an important means of communications. Biman Bangladesh Airlines is the country's air carrier, providing both international and domestic services.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The basic social unit in rural Bangladesh is the family (*paribār* or *gushtī*). This consists of an extended family living in a household (*chula*) residing in a homestead (*bārī*). Individual nuclear families known as *ghar* are often to be found within the extended family. Beyond the circle of immediate relatives is an institution known as "the society" (*samāj*). This voluntary association concerns itself with issues such as the maintenance of the local mosque, support of a mullah (priest), and settling village disputes.

The extended family is the significant unit of economic endeavor, with jointly held property and household activities under the direction of the father's authority. Banglādeshī society is patrilineal, and married sons and their wives reside in the father's household. Marriage is a civil contract in Islam and is often made for the interests of the family rather than the individual. In Bangladesh, marriages are arranged by parents, although men may have some say in the choice of their spouses. Partners are chosen from families of similar social standing. The custom of paying a bride-price is followed, and some families have adopted the Hindu custom of providing a dowry.

Women remain subordinate to men in Banglādeshī society. Purdah, the seclusion of women from male company after puberty, is practiced to varying degrees. Even among modernized groups that have rejected purdah, segregation of the sexes continues. At public performances or lectures, for instance, it is common for men and women to sit in separate parts of the hall. Purdah also limits women's access to the workplace.

## 11 CLOTHING

In rural areas, Banglādeshī men wear the *lungi* and a vest or a shirt. The *lungi* is a piece of cotton cloth, usually checkered, that is wrapped around the waist like a sarong. The better-educated wear a collarless, tunic-length shirt known as a *punjābī*, and *pyjāmās* (loose cotton trousers.) On formal occasions, the *sherwani* (*śerwānī*), tight trousers known as *chūrīdār*, and a turban are worn. Hindus wear the dhoti or the *punjabi-pyjama* attire. Women typically wear the sari and blouse, although girls and young women prefer the *salwār-kamīz* tunic and pants combination. Western-style shirts, pants, and jackets are commonly worn by men in urban areas.

## 12 FOOD

Rice, vegetables, pulses, fish, and meat form the staples of the Banglādeshī diet. The tastes and preferences of Muslims and other groups, however, differ. Beef is popular with Muslims, though taboo for Hindus. At feasts or formal dinners, Muslims often serve Muhgal-style dishes including pilaf and *biryānī* (rice dishes containing meat and vegetables), *kebābs* (barbecued cubes of meat), and *kormās* (meat served in various kinds of sauces). *Ghī* (clarified butter) is commonly served at such meals. Milk forms an important element in the diet, and Bangladesh is known for its milk-based sweets. All communities eat with their hands rather than with utensils.

## 13 EDUCATION

Nearly 59% of Banglādeshīs 5 years of age and over have no formal schooling, and only 15.3% have completed their secondary education. This is reflected in literacy rates among the lowest in South Asia, with only 43.1% of the population over 15 years old being able to read and write (2001). This figure drops to 32.8% for females. Universal primary education is a goal of government education policy, but high drop-out rates, inadequate resources, and a lack of trained teachers at all levels have hindered education in the country.

The national government has attempted to modernize the curricula of *madrasas*, Islamic religious schools attached to mosques and supported by endowments and public charity but which cater mainly to males.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Banglādeshīs are proud of their Bengali culture, with its traditions of music, dance, and literature. The country shares in the classical and devotional traditions of Hindu and Muslim music but has developed its own regional forms of popular music (e.g., *bātiālī* songs connected with boatmen and life on the river, and *baul*, mystical verse sung by a caste of religious musicians called Bauls). Indigenous dance forms include the *dhali*, *baul*, *manipuri*, and snake dances.

The Bengali literary tradition is one of the oldest regional traditions in India, dating to the 11th century AD. Its greatest figure was the poet Rabrindranath Tagore, who was part of the 19th-century revival of Bengali culture. Kazi Azrul Islam is a modern poet and playwright known as the “voice of Bengali nationalism and independence.” He forms part of a Muslim literary heritage in Bengali culture that can be traced back to the Sufi devotional compositions of the 13th century. A distinctive regional style of architecture may be seen in mosques

and other monuments built by Muslims beginning in the early 15th century.

## 15 WORK

Bangladesh is primarily an agricultural country, with 60% of the labor force involved in cultivation. Rice is the dominant food crop. Jute is the country’s major cash crop and an important export item. The industrial resource base is poor, and the manufacturing sector of the economy is quite small. Since the 1970s, however, Bangladesh has become a major producer of ready-made garments for export to the West (particularly the U.S.). Based on cheap Banglādeshī labor (mostly women), this now accounts for over 80% of export revenues, although the preferential system afforded Banglādeshī-made garments ended in 2005. The export of frozen shrimp and fish has also increased in importance over the last several decades.

Large numbers of Banglādeshīs are working in the Persian Gulf region, and remittances from this population is an important source of foreign exchange for the country.

## 16 SPORTS

Children in rural areas play games common to all of South Asia, such as hide-and-seek, flying kites, and spinning tops. *Ha-do-do* is a traditional game in which teams send a member into the opponents’ territory to tag as many of the opposition as possible while holding his or her breath. Wrestling is a favorite pastime for young men. Soccer is the most popular modern sport, while cricket, field hockey, badminton, and table tennis are also played.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In villages, festivals and fairs are occasions for entertainment and relaxation. Dances, music, and song are popular, as are the *jātrās* (village operas based on local myths). Boat races allow young men to display their prowess. In urban centers and those villages that have cinema houses, movies are by far the most popular form of entertainment. Radio and television broadcasts are available, but these are controlled by the government. The press is relatively free, but given the low literacy rates, newspapers in Bangladesh have a low circulation.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Among the arts and crafts for which Bangladesh is known are *kathas* (finely embroidered quilt-work); hand printed textiles; terracotta dolls, toys, and idols; and *sikhars* (elaborate rope hangings for pots, bottles, etc.). *Alpana* drawings are designs made on floors and courtyards out of rice-paste. They are prepared by Hindu women in connection with certain religious festivals and rites. Copper and brass metalwork, basketry, and mat-weaving are also traditional crafts among Banglādeshī artisans. The region also has an important boat-building industry, and the decoration of boats is a thriving folk art in Bangladesh.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

When Bangladesh became independent in 1971, the country was referred to in some foreign circles as an “international basket case.” It suffered from overpopulation, extreme poverty, malnutrition, and lack of resources. It was subject to periodic natural disasters—drought, famine, cyclones, and especially

the repeated flooding that plays havoc with peoples' lives and the country's economic infrastructure. Few thought there was much of a future for the country.

A quarter of a century later, little seems to have changed. Bangladesh ranks lowest among the nations of South Asia in many economic indices. Overpopulation and poverty are still a problem, and the country has one of the highest population densities in the world. Daily per capita calorie intake is over 2200 kcal, though 75% of the population is classified as below the poverty line in terms of caloric intake. Natural disasters still devastate the country. Yet the country's very survival is a victory of sorts, and the future looks less bleak than it did in 1971. Slowly, with generous foreign aid provided through the World Bank-led Bangladesh Aid Group in Paris, the economy is struggling upwards. Food production has increased and a nationwide birth control program has succeeded in lowering the rate of population growth. Flood control projects will help limit the incidence of flooding. Diversification of the economy has increased the value of the country's exports.

A major political problem faced by Banglādeshī was that of tribal unrest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Chakmas and other tribal groups resorted to armed resistance in support of demands for regional autonomy. Banglādeshī Army operations in the area during the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a flood of refugees into India, and charges of human rights violations against the government. In 1997 a peace agreement was signed between Chakma rebels and the government of Bangladesh, granting a degree of autonomy to the Chakma people. Bangladesh has also survived the imposition of military government and periods of civil unrest. Following rioting in early 2007, a caretaker government (now under Fakhruddin Ahmed, a former World Bank economist) was installed to oversee general elections, which were postponed until the end of 2008.

Concerns exist that Bangladesh is becoming a safe haven for al Qaeda and Taliban extremist terrorist groups.

Bangladesh continues to have major economic, social, and political problems. Despite an expanding economy, it will remain dependent on massive foreign aid for the foreseeable future. Its population remains among the poorest in the world, and its political future is uncertain. But it also has a population united by Bengali culture, the heritage of Islam, the legacy of its struggle for independence from Pakistan, a tradition of democracy and considerable optimism for the future and pride in its nation.

One success story in the development of the Banglādeshī economy has been the widespread propagation of microcredit by Muhammad Yunus (awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2006) through the Grameen Bank. The Grameen Bank currently has nearly 5 million members, many of them poor rural women.

In order to enhance economic growth, the government has set up several export processing zones to attract foreign investment. These are managed by the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority. Exports of garments and agricultural products have helped propel Bangladesh to an annual economic growth rate of around 5% a year—not quite on a par with China and India, but quite impressive in its own right.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Global Gender Gap Index 2007 ranks Bangladesh 100 out of 128 countries in terms of gender equality. Bangladesh being a predominantly Muslim country, women are viewed as

inferior citizens and subject to Shariah law. Despite this, the Bangladesh government is pushing ahead with a new National Women's Development Policy (NWDP). A section of Muslim clerics and some Islamic political parties say equal rights for women in terms of property would violate Sharia law on inheritance, which stipulates that a woman should inherit only half of what her brother would get (in April 2008, there were riots by Muslims protesting women receiving equal rights in terms of inheritance). Only 32.8% of women are literate (compared to 43.1% for men) and only 4% participate in tertiary education. Despite the two most important political parties in Bangladesh (the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League) being headed by women (Khalida Zia and Sheik Hasina, respectively), only 15% of parliamentarians are women.

A certain ambiguity exists surrounding the question of violence against women in Banglādeshī society. On the one hand, violence is held in repugnance and may provoke outrage. On the other hand, violence against women is accepted, tolerated and "in certain prescribed forms and given contexts," it is legitimated. Gender inequality, leading to gender violence, is deeply embedded in the Banglādeshī social structure; all Banglādeshī social institutions permit, even encourage the demonstration of unequal power relations between the sexes.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BANIAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** BAHN-yuhz

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Vania

**LOCATION:** India (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra states; also sizeable communities in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and other Indian cities); Singapore; Malaysia; Fiji; Hong Kong; elsewhere in the Middle East

**POPULATION:** 55-65 million

**LANGUAGE:** Rajasthani, Marwari and other dialects of western Hindi or the language of the region from which they originate

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; Jainism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; Vol 4: People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The word *Bania* (also *Vania*) is derived from the Sanskrit *vanij*, meaning “a merchant.” The term is widely used to identify members of the traditional mercantile or business castes of India. Thus, Banias are bankers, moneylenders, traders, and shopkeepers. Though some members of the Bania castes are cultivators, more Banias than any other caste follow their traditional caste occupation. Banias are classed as *vaisyas*, the third of the four great categories of Hindu society, and stand below *Brahmans* and *Ksatriyas* in caste ranking. They are, however, considered to belong to the “twice-born” castes of India, they wear the sacred thread, and they adhere strictly to the rules of behavior that go along with this status. The Aggarwals and Oswals are prominent Bania castes of northern India, while the Chettiar are a mercantile caste of the south.

Banias believe that the community originated 5000 years ago when an ancestor Maharaja Agrasen (or Ugarsain) of Agroha, Haryana divided the Vaisya (third in the Hindu *varna* system) community into 18 clans. Their surnames include Aggarwal, Gupta, Lala, Seth, Vaish, Mahajan, Sahu and Sahu-kar. There are six subgroups among the Bania—the Bisa or Vaish Aggarwal, Dasa or Gata Aggarwal, Saralia, Saraogi or Jain, Maheshwari or Shaiva and Oswal. The Bisa believe that they are descendents of the 17 snake daughters of Bashak Nag (cobra) who married the 17 sons of Ugarsain. The husbands slept with the handmaidens of the snake daughters resulting in Dasa offspring. The Bisa (“twenty”) consider themselves of a higher status to the Dasa (“ten”) and the Pancha (“five”). The Saralia are an offshoot of the Bisa who migrated to Saralia, near Ambala in Haryana State.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Although no recent data are available, the Bania castes make up an estimated 6% or 7% (or 55 million to 65 million people) of India’s Hindu population. Bania communities are found in cities, towns, and villages all over India but have their densest concentrations in the northwest in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. and in Uttar Pradesh. There is considerable speculation as to why the trading ethic has been so important in the western part of the Indian subcontinent. Some scholars have argued that the harsh desert environment of Rajasthan forced much of the population to turn to nonagricultural occupations to support themselves. Others have suggested that proximity to the overland and maritime trade routes with the Middle

East have played a role in this emphasis on trade and commercial activities. Whatever the facts of the matter, Banias from the northwest have migrated to all parts of India and beyond. Much of the commerce of Bombay (Mumbai) is in the hands of Gujarati Banias. Rajasthani businesspeople, known as “Marwaris” after the region of Rajasthan called Marwar, are found as far afield as Assam and Tamil Nadu. There is an important, and also affluent, community of Marwaris in Calcutta.

The Bania castes, and Gujaratis in particular, also form an important element in the population of overseas Indians. They have settled in Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji, Hong Kong, and elsewhere in Asia where business opportunities present themselves. They are also found in the Middle East and among the Indian populations of the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Banias speak the language of the region from which they originate. Thus, a Shrimali from Gujarat speaks Gujarati, an Oswal from Rajasthan speaks Marwari (a Rajasthani dialect), and a Banajiga Lingayat (a trading subgroup of the Hindu Lingayat sect) from Karnataka speaks Kannada. Banias who are settled in regions where other languages are current obviously need to know the local language in order to do business. But, even though they are long removed in both distance and time from their original home, they still use their native tongue among themselves and at home. Marwari business communities in Gauhati and other towns in Assam, for example, still keep their books and converse among themselves in their own Rajasthani language.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The Bania castes share in the mythology and folklore of their own religious communities and regional cultures. Many Banias, for example, are Jains and are thus brought up in the traditions of the Jain religion. Vaishnavism is strongly rooted among the Bania castes of Rajasthan and Gujarat, and for these Banias the myths and legends of Krishna, the cowherd god of Hinduism, are of utmost importance. Each caste has its own lore and folk traditions. The Shrimali caste of Gujarat traces its origins to Bhinmal, a town in Rajasthan formerly known as Shrimal. There, they believe, 90,000 Shrimali families were created by Mahalakshmi, the daughter of the sage Bhrigu, to maintain 90,000 Shrimali Brahman families. One account says they came from her thigh; another, from her garland. Some explain the division of the Shrimali castes into two subdivisions by the fact that the Bisa Shrimalis sprang from the right side of Mahalakshmi’s garland and the Dasa Shrimalis from the left. Of interest here, Mahalakshmi or Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth and is of great importance to the Bania castes. The Shrimali Brahmans are still the family priests for the Shrimali Banias.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Banias are Hindu or Jain and follow the beliefs and customs of their respective religions. Some castes, such as the Shrimalis, have both Hindu (“Meshri”) and Jain (“Shravak”) sections. Thus, a Dasa Shrimali Shravak is a member of the Dasa section of the Shrimali caste who follows the Jain religion. Most Jains, because of religious restrictions on occupations they can follow without violating the principles of their religion, belong to the

Bania castes. They are split between the *Svetambara* (“white-clad”) and *Digambara* (“sky-clad”) sects of Jainism. Jains in northern India generally belong to the Svetambara sect. Hindu Baniyas are almost exclusively Vaishnavas, i.e., they worship the god Vishnu, in his incarnation as Krishna. Most follow the Vallabhacharya sect of Hinduism, in which Krishna is seen as the supreme deity. This sect is also known as *pushti-marga* (“abundance way”), as it calls on its followers to enjoy the good things of life Krishna has provided for their enjoyment.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Baniyas celebrate the festivals of their religious communities, although some are more significant than others. For example, Divali, the Hindu “Festival of Lights,” is kept by all Hindus but it holds particular importance for the Bania castes. It is an occasion for the worship of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, and is also a time when the financial books for the old year are closed and new ones started for the coming year. Houses are painted and all food in the household is thrown out and replaced. It is also a time for card-playing and gambling. The festival of Ganapati or Ganesh, the Hindu god of good fortune, is also important for the Baniyas. Jains celebrate the usual festivals of Jainism, but they, too, observe Divali, which coincides with their own festival honoring the death of the founder of the religion, Mahavira.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The life-cycle rituals of the Baniyas conform in general to Hindu and Jain practices, although they may show variations in their details. In Gujarat, a Hindu Bania woman usually returns to her father’s house for her confinement and to give birth. Various rituals such as the Sixth Day worship are performed. Among the objects used in this ceremony are a piece of paper, an inkstand, and a reed pen—items clearly related to the traditional occupation of the Bania caste. Similarly, to mark events such as a betrothal, contributions are made to the caste fund. The caste association is important among Baniyas, and many castes are still organized into trade guilds or *mahajans*. These are modern survivals of institutions that date to medieval times.

Like all Hindu groups, Baniyas cremate their dead. But again, some of the death rituals are unique to each caste. On his deathbed, a Hindu Bania in Gujarat traditionally performs Godan (“the gift of a cow”) by giving a Brahman a cow or the monetary value of a cow. He also names a sum of money to be given to charity in his name. After death, the body is taken to the cremation ground, bathed, wrapped in a shroud, and burnt on the funeral pyre. The ashes and bones are collected and thrown into a river or the ocean. A cow is milked on the spot where the body was cremated. Various rites are performed during the period of mourning. These include marrying a steer to a heifer, giving food to crows, and feeding dogs. This latter custom is of interest because in Hinduism the dog is usually viewed as an unclean animal. The funeral rites conclude by the giving of a caste dinner.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The term *bania* is often used by other castes in a negative sense to mean someone who is greedy, who exploits customers, who resorts to shady deals, and who will do anything to make a profit. There is, perhaps, an element of truth in this stereotype.



The Bania is the principal moneylender in the villages. Uneducated peasants who borrow money at high rates of interest so that they can grow their crops may never be able to pay off the loan. They eventually end up losing their land, and the Bania is seen as the villain. The same problem in repaying loans applies to the large amounts of money that may be borrowed for marriages and dowries. On the other hand, as bankers, moneylenders, traders, and businesspeople, Baniyas have played an essential role in the functioning of India’s economy. Some scholars argue it was Bania moneylenders who funded British economic development in India. Today, many of the country’s important industrialists and capitalists come from the Bania castes.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Baniyas are, by and large, prosperous, and this is reflected in their lifestyles and standards of living. However, the specifics of housing, creature comforts, and other aspects of their material culture are determined to a large extent by the place and social context of their lives. The Bania who runs a small shop in a village in Rajasthan lives very much like his or her neighbors. The Bania’s house may be bigger and built of better materials, and its furnishings may be more opulent, but in appearance and design it is little different from other houses in the village. On the other hand, the prosperous industrialist in Bombay or Calcutta is likely to live in a luxurious, air-conditioned house, with numerous servants, automobiles, and all the conveniences of modern living.



Traditionally, the Bania are strict vegetarians whose diet consists of wheat, rice, maize, pulses, lentils, vegetables, fruit and dairy products. Many younger men eat meat at social events outside their community. They do not drink alcohol but smoke and chew tobacco and *paan* (betel leaf).

Literacy levels are high as both boys and girls are encouraged to study further and attain university degrees. Banias visit clinics and hospitals as well as alternative indigenous medicine. Family planning is practiced to limit family size. They have made good use of media and communication and benefited from the government's development programs. They have embraced progress and developments. Agriculturists use fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to increase crop yields. Loans provided by banks have enabled the Bania to expand or set up new businesses.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Banias are divided into numerous castes distributed over the Indian subcontinent. As with all Hindu castes or *jati*, they are endogamous social units. The basic unit in which endogamy is practiced, however, may be a subcaste rather than the caste itself. Among the Banias of the northwestern region, the Bisas are considered the most pure and unpolluted section of the original caste. Dasas are ranked lower, perhaps because of intermarriage with local peoples in the past or the taking up of occupations considered demeaning by the caste. The Pancha section is ranked the lowest of the three. These various sections often act as endogamous groups in their own right. For example, the Shrimali caste of Gujarat has all three sections, Bisa, Dasa, and Pancha (known among the Shrimalis as Ladva). These groups do not intermarry, and the Bisa Shrimali does not even dine with the Ladva Shrimali. In this sense, the three sections virtually function as separate castes. The Bisa Shrimalis are exclusively Jain. In northern Gujarat, the Dasa Shrimali Shrivaks (Jain Shrimalis) will marry Dasa Shrimali Meshris (Hindu Shrimalis).

Marriage among the Banias reflects the basic differences between North and South India, as well as differing regional customs. In Gujarat, for example, cross-cousin marriage is prohibited, and there is a certain distance of relationship required within the marriage pool defined by the endogamous caste or subcaste. Marriages are arranged and are often seen as business associations between two families as well as unions of a boy and girl. In the past, child marriage was common, although obviously this has changed today. A wedding is an occasion for a display of wealth and may often last as long as eight days. The marriage ceremony follows the Hindu or Jain rites. Residence after marriage is patrilocal, i.e., the newlyweds move into the home of the groom's family. Bania families display the typical joint family structure of Hindu society. The role of women is primarily to deal with domestic matters, with the business affairs of the family left in the hands of the men. Divorce is not socially permitted but does occur rarely. Widow remarriage is allowed and is becoming acceptable except in Karnataka, where it is definitely not permitted. Levirate, i.e. when a woman marries a deceased husband's brother, and junior sororate, when a widower marries a deceased wife's younger sister, are permitted by most Bania groups.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Bania clothing reflects regional styles of dress. In Gujarat, this consists of a *dhoti*, over which is worn a jacket, a long-sleeved coat known as an *angarkha*, and a shoulder cloth (*pichodi*). A variety of turbans are worn, depending on locality, but all clearly identify the wearer as a Bania. In northern and central Gujarat, Banias wear a small, tightly folded, cylinder-shaped turban with numerous folds in the front and several coils at the back. Bania women wear the *sari* over a petticoat (*ghaghra*) and bodice (*choli*). Both men and women are fond of ornaments. A wealthy man may wear a silver girdle, a gold armband above the elbow, earrings, a necklace, and rings on his fingers. A well-to-do Bania woman wears gold hair ornaments, gold or pearl earrings, nose rings, and a variety of necklaces, bangles, anklets, and toe rings.

Although traditional dress is still worn in rural areas and in many towns, the modern businessman in a city such as Calcutta is likely to be dressed in a Western-style business suit, shirt, and tie.

### **12 FOOD**

Banias observe fairly rigid dietary restrictions. Both Jains and Vaishnavas are strictly vegetarian, out of concern for ritual purity, regard for animal life, and the sanctity of the cow. Liquor and narcotics are prohibited to the Bania castes (although this does not stop many Westernized individuals from drinking alcohol). Actual diet and eating habits tend to reflect regional cuisines. Thus, in Gujarat, where vegetarianism has long been an established tradition, the typical diet consist of breads (*roti*) made from wheat or other grains, eaten with vegetables, condiments, and copious amounts of *ghi* (clarified butter). Jain concern for *ahimsa*, the philosophy of nonviolence to all living things, means that even certain plant foods are taboo. Milk and milk products are an important part of the diet. Even where Banias have migrated to areas such as Bengal or Assam where eating fish is acceptable among the higher castes, they preserve their vegetarian traditions.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Banias, as a group, are highly literate because of their need to keep accounts. Young boys receive training in traditional accounting methods, mathematics, and mental arithmetic at an early age. These skills, combined with intelligence, shrewdness, and an ethic of hard work have contributed to the economic success of the community. In the past, they have been employed in positions of responsibility in the administrations of the princely states of northwestern India. The more conservative groups prefer traditional education to Western schooling. However, modern education has come to be seen as a means of success in both personal and business life. Among the Agarwal community of Delhi, for example, a premium is placed on education even for girls. Even though a woman may not use her education, it may be essential for finding her a suitable husband. Among the younger generation who are entering modern industrial or commercial concerns, university and even professional degrees are commonplace.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Bania castes have a tradition of patronage and support for culture and the arts and also of giving to charity. They contrib-

ute heavily to the support of temples and religious institutions. Many impressive temples in northwestern India, some dating to the 11th century AD, reflect the generosity and piety of the Jain merchant community. The Birlas, a successful, modern bania family, have funded the construction of temples across India. The most recent, the Shri Radhakrishna Temple in Calcutta, with its exquisite Rajasthani carvings, was dedicated in 1996. Baniyas have supported artists and artisans, as seen in the Jaina school of painting or the magnificent wood and stone work found in the Bania houses and mansions (*havelis*) of Rajasthan and Gujarat. They have built, and still support, hospitals, schools, colleges, and universities throughout India.

Charity is an important part of the Bania ethic. Bania castes have their own charitable funds to help the needy of their caste. They also provide charity to the general public, feeding the poor and supporting hospitals and *dharamsalas* (rest houses for pilgrims). Two unusual institutions of the Baniyas are the *pinjrapol* and the *goshala*. The former is a Jain home for animals. Sick or injured animals are provided with medical care, and old animals are maintained until they die from natural causes. This institution originates in the Jain concern for *ahimsa* (nonviolence). The *goshala*, a home for old and useless cows, stems from the Hindu concept of the sanctity of the cow. Both institutions are supported by charitable contributions from Baniyas.

## 15 WORK

The Bania castes make up the mercantile classes of Hindu society, and most Baniyas continue to follow their traditional occupation today. Many remain small entrepreneurs, running stores and shops in villages and towns across India, they are traders of grain, groceries, and spices and also work as money lenders. They have a reputation of being shrewd and mercenary. Money is loaned at very high interest rates with secured collateral, usually against land or gold. They also work in government departments, private enterprise and agriculture, and include administrators, engineers, doctors, advocates, judges, teachers, scholars and stockbrokers among them. Others have emerged as leaders of commerce, trade, and industry in the modern Indian economy. The Birlas, for example, one of the most prominent business families in India, belong to the Marwari community of Calcutta, and the Singhanias, Modis, and Bangurs, also among the top ten business houses in India, are also Marwari. Baniyas are active in politics at local, regional and national levels and have a powerful presence in India.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no sports that are distinctively “Bania” in origin or practice.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment and recreation depends on individual circumstances. A conservative village Bania from Gujarat may forgo modern mass media in favor of traditional entertainment associated with religious festivals and local folk traditions. Affluent young Marwaris who belong to Calcutta’s business elite are more likely to lead a Westernized lifestyle, turning to golf, horse-racing, and exclusive clubs for their entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There are no folk arts, crafts, or hobbies specifically associated with the Bania castes.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Baniyas, as a community, are relatively prosperous, and the problems they face are different from those of many other groups in India. As “twice-born” Hindus, they do not face the discrimination met by low-caste and Untouchable communities. As merchants, they are not as dependent as the cultivator on a good monsoon. Many are more concerned with the stability of India’s economic policies than with the arrival of the rainy season. Perhaps the most common problem faced by the community is the survival of the stereotype—especially in rural areas—of Baniyas as greedy moneylenders, traders who adulterate their goods, and shady dealers who make their living by exploiting the common person.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Bania women face the same problems as all women in a male-dominated society. Their families follow local caste customs in terms of arranged marriages, child marriage, dowry demands, widow remarriage, etc., even though child marriages and the giving of dowries have been legally banned by the government of India.

Women among the Bania castes have a low status and are usually confined to their homes though some help their husbands in the family shop and city women work. The women take part in social and religious functions only, although they do have input on financial matters relating to the family. The women sing folksongs and dance at marriages, births and festivals. They are known for their cooking, making rich dishes and sweets on special occasions.

Bania women tend to be better educated than other women in South Asia, though this rarely translates into achievement in the workplace, but rather is a means of obtaining a better match in marriage. The prime role of women is still to bear children, run the household and to complete household chores. Bania women who have migrated to other countries, especially the West, fare better in terms of education and the workplace, if they so choose.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BANJARESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** BAHN-jar-eez

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Borneo)

**POPULATION:** 3.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Banjarese

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians; Javanese; Vol. 4: Malays

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The modern Banjarese people are the product of the mixing of four Dayak groups (Ma'anyan, Lawangan, Bukit, and Ngaju) with Sumatran Malays, Javanese, Sundanese, Arabs, Chinese, and Buginese. What distinguishes them from their upriver and highland neighbors is their use of the Banjarese language, a dialect of Malay, and their adherence to Islam, both reflecting connections to the maritime world beyond Borneo. Their identity focuses on the now defunct sultanate of Banjarmasin, whose origins go back to the Hinduized kingdom of Negara Dipa. The city of Banjarmasin itself was founded at the end of the 13th century by Ampujatamaka, the son of a merchant from the Coromandel coast of southeastern India. In 1377, a Majapahit prince married the daughter and sole heir of the Negara Dipa king; thus, Banjarmasin became a vassal of the great Javanese realm and experienced strong Javanese influences, still reflected in the language and various local art forms. In 1526, one side in an internal power struggle triumphed, thanks to aid from the north Javanese state of Demak; conversion to Islam was the price for this aid.

The 17th century was the Golden Age of Banjarmasin when it flourished in the pepper trade, enjoyed vigorous commerce with Java and Gujerat in India, and exercised influence along the Borneo coast from Sambas and Sukadana in the west to Kutai and Berau in the east. Dutch attempts at extending its monopoly over Banjarmasin's pepper trade (including once destroying the city and expelling their British East India Company rivals) failed, due largely to competition from Chinese merchants.

From the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries, Banjarese internal struggles encouraged Dutch intervention. In 1817, one sultan with a less-than-solid claim to legitimacy obtained Dutch aid in exchange for ceding the rights to suzerainty over most of Banjarmasin's traditional sphere along the Borneo coast. The Dutch also demanded the right to name the sultan's successor. In 1857, their installation of their own candidate on the throne enraged the Banjarese and started a short but vicious and costly war. The Dutch dissolved the sultanate in 1860 but faced resistance mounted by Pangeran Antasari, a royal descendant, and Sultan Kuning (despite the title, a peasant) until 1864. Islamic leaders were to stage sporadic uprisings until as late as 1905.

With the exploitation of Kalimantan's timber and fossil fuel wealth, as well as the development of the immediate region's agricultural potential, Banjarmasin and South Kalimantan as a whole are developing rapidly. This is accelerating the forces of integration (Malayification and Islamization) through which the Banjarese community has always expanded.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Banjarese are the majority population of the province of South Kalimantan on Indonesian Borneo. The Meratus mountains, a long, broad range with no peak higher than 1,900 m (6,235 ft), run north-south through the province. The great Barito River and the Martapura, a tributary meeting it close to the sea, provide access to the interior of the province and beyond into Central Kalimantan. A vast tidal swamp occupies the coast. Over the last six decades, part of the swamp has been reclaimed for the cultivation of wet-rice and other crops; this area constitutes one of the major rice bowls in the Outer Islands (i.e., outside Java-Bali-Lombok).

According to the 2000 census, Banjarese numbered 3.5 million (Indonesia's tenth largest ethnic group), up from 2,755,000 in 1990. The 1990 figure represented a 55% increase over the 1980 level, the fastest growth rate for an Indonesian linguistic group during that period. As they have become integrated into wider society through conversion to Islam, increased economic activity, and cross-ethnic marriage, speakers of smaller regional languages in South Kalimantan have adopted Banjarese as their primary language in recent years (an acceleration of the process that created the Banjarese identity in the first place). Between 1980 and 1990, the Banjarese-speaking proportion of the province's population rose from 62.8% to 81.7%; in Central Kalimantan, the proportion nearly doubled over the same period, going from 17.5% to 32.3%. By 2000, the Banjarese proportion of the South Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan populations had declined slightly, to 76% and 24% respectively (probably due to the immigration of other ethnic groups, such as the Javanese who accounted for 13% and 18% respectively). At 14%, Banjarese were the third largest ethnic group in East Kalimantan, between the Javanese (30%) and the Bugis (18%), all immigrant groups.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Although popularly regarded as a separate language (and counted as such in Indonesian government usage), the speech of Banjar is essentially a dialect of Malay, although one which differs considerably from other dialects such as standard Bahasa Indonesia. Banjarese itself divides into two dialects: *Banjar Hulu* (upriver or interior) and *Banjar Kuala* (downriver or estuarine). The language is rich in words of Javanese origin, such as *pitu* ("seven"), *banyu* ("water"), and *lawang* ("door"), which correspond to Malay *tujuh*, *air*, and *pintu*. Under the influence of Javanese, a special *bahasa keraton* or "palace language," expressing respect to social superiors, developed and spread to the upper and middle classes. When speaking to someone younger, a person uses *aku* and *ikam* for "I" and "you," respectively. The younger, however, will say to the older, *ulun* and *sampiyon* in the Hulu dialect, and *unda* and *nyawa* in the Kuala dialect.

Banjarese is an oral language: writing (traditionally in the Arabic script) and formal speech-making are in standard Malay. In Islamic rites, Banjarese naturally use Arabic chants. In customary rites, however, incantations are in a mixture of Arabic and Kawi (Old Javanese) or will begin with "*Bismillah...*" ("In the name of Allah..."), go on to express the main content in Malay or Banjarese, and end with "*La ila ha ilalaha, Muhammadaddar Rasulullah*" ("There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet").

#### 4 FOLKLORE

According to the foundation myth of the Banjar kingdom, the first raja's wife emerged from a gigantic mass of white foam (or, alternatively, mud) with the assistance of the vizier Lambung Mangkurat, who would live for three generations to oversee the new realm. Other mythological or historical figures are regularly invoked in traditional rituals, e.g., various sultans, other aristocrats, such as Pangeran Surianata and Puteri Junjung Buih, and the *muwakkal* Datu Baduk a "good" (literally, "Muslim") spirit who came with Sheikh Banjari from Mecca.

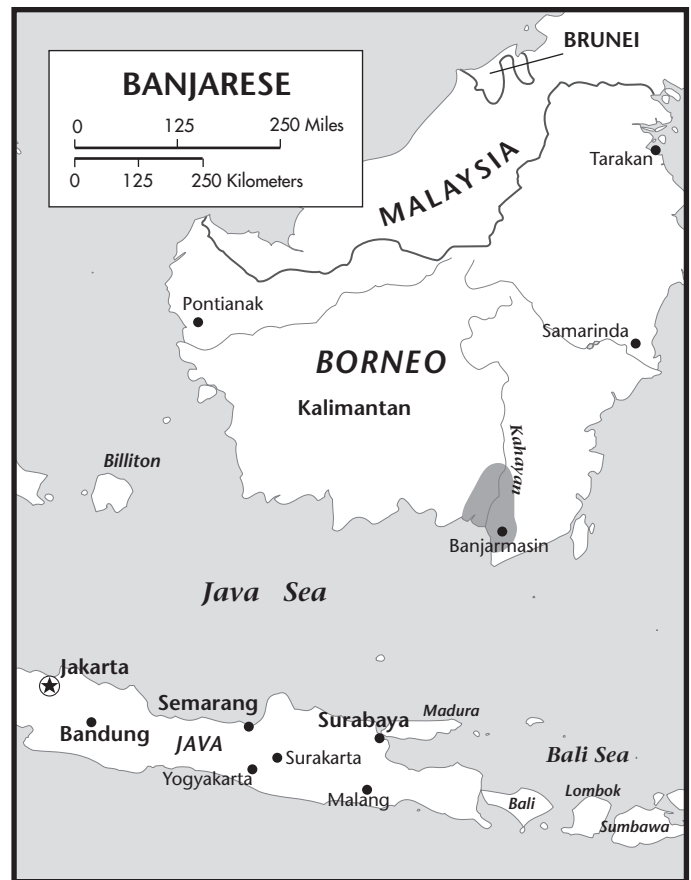
Banjarese recognize a variety of spirits or ghosts. One such is the *takau*, which appears as a black cat that can grow to the size of a water buffalo. A woman who has employed black magic to control her husband becomes a *penjadian* after death; smelling of pus, it visits its family to ask for food. *Tabib* (traditional healers) have the power to take spirit form while still alive, transforming themselves into grass or animals or becoming invisible so they can cause mishaps for persons to whom their clients have directed them. A woman who has drunk *minyak kuyang* (a kind of oil) becomes a monster capable of severing its head from its body. With the ears as wings and the heart, lungs, and stomach dangling as a tail, the monster flies about in search of pregnant women whose blood it can suck. The monster leaves the body hidden behind a door and returns to it before daybreak.

One type of amulet is the *jimat tambang liring*, used to enhance beauty and gain popularity. This consists of a paper with Qur'anic verses; a picture of the wayang clown-servants, Semar with his children; and one of the wayang heror Arjuna as Batara Kamajaya, the guardian of the heavenly nymphs (*bidadari*), with seven *bidadari*. The ink used in the amulet has been mixed with the blood of a killed person, whose spirit must continually be honored.

The Islamic texts *Syair Tajulmuluk* and *Syair Siti Zubaidah* are used to predict the future: one opens such a book to a random page, turns three or seven pages ahead, then interprets the content of the fourth or eighth page. One can diagnose diseases and ascertain cures by turning to the fourth page *before* looking at the random page. A man can similarly employ the surat "Yasin" from the Quran to make a woman fall in love with him or to harm an enemy.

#### 5 RELIGION

Being Banjarese by definition includes professing Islam. The region has produced Islamic scholars famous throughout the archipelago, the most renowned being Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari (1710–1812), sent by the sultan to study in Mecca (his book, the *Sabilal Muhtadin*, gives its name to Banjarmasin's great mosque, resplendent with the finest marble and calligraphic decoration). Islamic mystical sects, some of which assert (heretically) the identity of God and self, have long been active. Mystics meditate in large buildings raised in the forest near villages, each man sitting within his own *kelambu* (mosquito net) and leaving only to defecate. In the early 20th century, conflicts arose between conservative and modernizing Muslims (respectively, the "older" and "younger" generations). If a modernizer came to pay respects to an older kinsman of the conservative group, the latter would receive him, but, after the modernizer left, the chair upon which he had sat would be wiped clean as if a leper had been there. Currently, both the conservative Nahdatul Ulama and moderniz-



ing Muhammadiyah organizations have strong constituencies among the Banjarese.

Families of *topeng* (masked dance) performers and *dalang* (shadow puppeteers) venerate Hindu gods, respectively Batara Kelana (the *Ramayana*'s Dasamuka) and Batara Kala, chief of the spirits and Lord of Time. A *dalang* cannot perform without receiving the *bisik wayang* ("whisper of the shadow puppet"), i.e., without being possessed by Arjuna and Semar [see *Javanese*].

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

*Aruh* are ritual celebrations that community tradition obliges a village to hold at regular intervals. Of the various types of *aruh*, the most elaborate is the *aruh menyanggar banua*, held right before the Islamic New Year, or at any other time deemed appropriate or necessary. Led by older people versed in ritual, this *aruh* serves to purify the village of the evil of the previous year, ward off disaster in the next, and call on the aid of ancestors and Batara Kala. Prayers are recited and offerings made, including great quantities of uncooked rice, thread, old Chinese coins (*picis*), incense, and 41 kinds of traditional foods prepared by postmenopausal women. Various forms of entertainment complete the celebration: *wayang* (shadow plays); *topeng* (masked dance); *kuda kepang* (hobby-horse dances); and *gamelan* (music).

Another important *aruh* is the *aruh terbang besar*, celebrating the birth of Muhammad during the month of Maulud. Its



A Banjarese woman sitting at a loom and weaving in a shop in India that sells traditional woven caps.  
(© Christine Pemberton/The Image Works)

highlight is the performance of *hadrah*, a combination of Islamic changing and rhythmic movements.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage generally resemble those of the Malays. Aspects of the wedding process specific to the Banjarese include the following: parents discuss the choice of a partner for their child with their closest kin and also consult a fortune-teller to learn the fate of the proposed union; and the man's family sends an old woman to make the initial inquiries of the woman's family and chooses a well-spoken and influential person to deliver the proposal. Included in the rites are ceremonial baths of purification. The bride and groom present each other with *palimbaian*, an arrangement of betel leaves and flowers; afterwards these are thrown to the unmarried women among the guests and the ones who catch the *palimbaian* are believed soon to find a partner. Clans bring out heirloom *naga-naga* (the carved heads of dragon-serpents) to escort the bride and groom in a procession around the village.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditional Banjarese society distinguished two strata: the *tutus* and the *jaba*. Possessing titles such as *pangeran*, *ratu*, *gusti*, *antung*, *nanang*, *andin*, and *rama*, the *tutus* were the aristocrats, descendants of the Banjar rulers. The *jaba* were com-

moners, including various office-holders, such as *kiai adipati*, *patih*, *tumenggung*, *ronggo*, *demang*, *mangku*, and *kiai*. While society once divided into aristocrats, *ulama* (Islamic scholars), merchants, and peasants, nowadays the main distinction is between educated people and "ordinary" people, with *ulama* remaining as a special category.

Etiquette within the family requires that, while eating, older individuals sit with other older folk, and younger sit with younger; older people also sit on a physically higher spot on the floor. Moreover, the younger walk behind the older and assume the heavier tasks.

The only occasion sanctioned by custom for young men and women to meet is during the communal preparation of food for large celebrations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Villages (*kampung*) usually extend along rivers or roads. Houses line up along a riverside, with their backs facing the water and their fronts facing the road, if there is one. After pacifying the region in 1865, the Dutch forced the inhabitants of scattered interior villages to relocate along a newly built post road. A village includes one or more prayer-halls (*langgar*, or a mosque if the settlement is big enough), a bathing place (usually riverside), and an area for a once- or twice-weekly market.

The most characteristic Banjar house is the *rumah bubungan tinggi*, so called for its “high roof” that rises at a 45° angle, high indeed given the total area of the house. All types of houses are raised on piles. Roofs were once made of dried leaves, but now more often they are made of shingles. Wall materials range from palm leaf to tree bark to bamboo plaiting to wooden planks; beams are of long-lasting ironwood or other hardwoods. The front most section is the *palataran*, an open veranda where the family relaxes in the afternoon and where it receives guests. Deeper into the house on successively higher levels are the chambers *panampik kecil*, *panampik tengah*, *panampik besar*, and *palidangan*. The wall between the *panampik besar* and the *palidangan*, called the *tawing halat*, is decorated with intricate carvings; in front of it are seated the most esteemed guests during celebrations. On both sides of the *palidangan* are *anjung*, lofts for sleeping. Behind the *palidangan* at a lower level is the *panampik dalam*. Behind that and lower still is the *padapuran*, the kitchen; above the door to the kitchen is the *katil*, the sleeping area for the family’s unmarried daughters.

South Kalimantan has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 67.4 (2005 score), significantly lower than the national HDI of 69.6 and dramatically lower than that of the neighboring provinces, Central Kalimantan (73.2) and East Kalimantan (72.9), which are now attracting Banjarese transmigrants. South Kalimantan’s GDP per capita is US\$8,644, relatively high for Indonesia (cf. US\$9,784 for West Sumatra and US\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, but US\$6,293 for Central Java and US\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara), though much lower than that in the contiguous provinces (East Kalimantan’s is US\$23,253 even minus income from petroleum and gas). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality stood at 69.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, the third highest in the country, surpassed only by North Maluku (74.59) and West Nusa Tenggara (88.55).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The principal productive and property-holding unit is the nuclear family: a man, his wife or wives (polygyny is not uncommon), and their unmarried children.

A newly married couple sometimes remains for a time in the wife’s parents’ house. This results in parents, their unmarried children, and their married daughters with their husbands and children sharing the same roof (though sleeping in separate annexes and keeping their own kitchens). Married daughters usually, however, move out to a small house they have built themselves or which the parents have given them.

Parents usually choose their children’s marriage partners. A young man who already has an eye on a girl other than that selected by his parents may use magic to undermine the arranged engagement. Young women who meet their husbands for the first time only at the wedding ceremony itself often refuse to sleep with their husbands; the family will do everything in their power, including resorting to spells, to persuade the woman to accept her man.

Kin relations are traced through both paternal and maternal sides, but the father or, if he is dead, one of his brothers will represent the bride in the wedding ceremony. Terminology distinguishes a parent’s eldest sibling (*julak*) from the second eldest (*gulu*), from the third eldest (*angah*), and from the youngest (*pakacil* for uncles and *makacil* for aunts). Relatives

are almost always addressed with abbreviated kin-terms: *datu* (great-grandparents); *kaye* (grandfather); *ni* (*nini*, grandmother); *bah* (*abah*, father); *ma* (*uma*, mother); *lak* (*julak*, eldest uncle or aunt); *ngah* (*angah*, middle uncle or aunt); *cil* (*pakacil*/*makacil*, youngest uncle or aunt); *anak* (child); and *cu* (*cucu*, grandchild); or *yut* (*buyut*, grandchild).

## 11 CLOTHING

Everyday wear for men consists at its most simple of the *salarwar culuk*, trousers of unbleached cloth that reach down to the calf; the top of the trousers is folded over and rolled tight at the waist. Shirts and the *laung* head cloth are rarely worn with it. Alternatively, men may wear *salawar panjang* (long trousers), *baju taluk balanga* (an open-collared, long-sleeved tunic), and a *peci* cap. Women wear the *tapih kurung* (sarong), *kebaya* (long-sleeved blouse), and *kakamban* head covers; nowadays, the favored fabrics are from Pekalongan in Java.

Aristocratic styles can still be seen as ceremonial wear. A man will put on a *baju pokok pria*, a white sleeveless undershirt whose sides remain unsewn, secured by ties; and over this a *baju miskat*, a black or red long-sleeved shirt, tapering down to the waist and sporting a wide, stiff collar and buttons (always uneven in number). In addition, he will wear the *salawar pidandang*, trousers that taper towards the bottom to hug the lower leg, and a *laung* head cloth (differing in style according to rank). Women wear the *baju kurung basisit*, an open-collared, long-sleeved shirt of blue or black satin or silk, extending down to the knees. Ceremonial clothing for both sexes is decorated with motifs (plants, *naga* snakes, etc.), embroidered in gold thread.

## 12 FOOD

Meals consist of rice and side dishes. The latter could be fish (dried or fried) from rivers or flooded rice-fields, vegetables, and curries (e.g., preparations with squash, jackfruit, or taro). Supplementary foods include cassava, sweet potato, sago, *pati panguning* (a kind of tuber whose plant resembles turmeric), and a variety of bananas. One specialty available throughout Indonesia is *soto Banjar*, a rich soup of chicken meat and duck eggs eaten with *lontong* (rice steamed in banana-leaf wrappers).

Rice provides the basis of local sweets, such as *apam*, which is rice flour, palm or granulated sugar, and coconut milk blended into a batter, poured into molds, and steamed; *dodol*, a taffy made from glutinous rice flour, palm sugar, and lots of coconut milk, which is eaten with coconut meat, durian, or peanuts; and *kalapon*, green-dyed, ping-pong-size balls of rice flour filled with a chunk of brown sugar, steamed, and sprinkled with grated coconut before eating. *Amping* are chips made from newly harvested rice that has been pounded; they are eaten with grated coconut or sugar. One local drink of note is *banyu tipikan*, water in which ginger and brown sugar have been boiled.

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2005, South Kalimantan’s level of literacy stood at 94.47%, relatively high by Indonesian national standards, comparable to provinces with higher HDIs, such as West Java and Jambi (see also the article entitled **Indonesians**).

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

An accompaniment for celebrations, such as weddings, *hadrah* is a performing art of Arab origin that combines Islamic chanting, the striking of the *rebana* tambourine, the waving of multicolored pennants, and the spinning of decorated umbrellas.

*Mumenggung* is an elegant step-dance welcoming spectators to all-male *mamada* plays (dramatizing tales from the *Thousand and One Nights*). The Banjarese also perform Javanese-style dances, *topeng* (masked dances), *wayang* (shadow plays), and *gamelan* music.

## 15 WORK

Agriculture is the most common occupation among the Banjarese. Since 1939, from the vast tidal swamp between Banjarmasin and the Java Sea, 100,000 hectares (247,100 acres) of land have been reclaimed for wet-rice fields, tangerine and orange groves, and vegetable gardens. Varieties of rice are cultivated that can grow in as much as 2 m (6.5 ft) of water; farmers harvest these from boats. Less and less by the swidden (shifting-cultivation) methods of the past, Banjarese also grow crops in dry-fields: dry rice, oil palm (*kelapa sawit*), *rosela* (a plant yielding fiber for sacks and ropes), sugarcane, and fruits. Traditionally, pepper was the primary cash crop, but cacao, *illipe* nuts, and especially rubber have taken its place.

Livestock includes water buffalo, horses, cattle, goats, sheep, ducks, and chicken. Some 160,000 people make a living fishing in the province's inland waters, and another 5,000 from the sea; large quantities of dried fish are exported to Java.

Although Banjarese shun work in the local lumber mills that process wood from the Kalimantan interior (leaving it to Javanese migrants), many do work in factories where upriver rattan is transformed into mats and furniture. Another alternative to agriculture is small-scale mining for gems (including diamonds) and panning for gold. Many Banjarese engage in commerce, such as the women of Banjarmasin's *pasar terapung* ("floating market"), who sell vegetables and other produce from boats. The region has long been the source of various "exotica": frog legs, snake and lizard skins, and roots for *jamu* (traditional herbal remedies).

## 16 SPORTS

Kite-flying and top-spinning are popular pastimes and form an integral part of post-harvest festivals.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional crafts include the weaving of baskets and mats, the carving of house walls and furniture, and the working of metal and gems. One regional specialty is *batik sasirangan*, a tie-dyed cloth of many designs, once believed to ward off evil spirits and cure disease.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

South Kalimantan's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income

relative to men's) is 61, slightly above Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, is 51.8, lower than the national GEM of 54.6.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# BATAK

**PRONUNCIATION:** BAH-tahk

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (North Sumatra)

**POPULATION:** 6.1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Various Batak dialects

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Protestant Toba church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestant) and Catholic; Pebegu (indigenous animist religion); Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The name “Batak,” which also applies to a totally different ethnic group on the Philippine island of Palawan, seems to have originated as a derogatory term by which Muslim lowlanders of the archipelago referred to pagan highlanders. In North Sumatra, six related though distinct peoples have come under the blanket classification of “Batak”: the Toba, Karo, Simalungun, Dairi (Pakpak), Angkola, and Mandailing. Of these, the heavily Islamized Angkola and Mandailing reject the label; only the largely Christianized Toba, the largest of the groups, has taken this former insult as a badge of pride.

The Batak descend from the earliest Austronesians to have settled on Sumatra, arriving from Borneo perhaps as early as 2500 BC, well in advance of the Malayic peoples whose dialects would come to dominate the coasts and, in the south, even the interior of the island [see **Malays**, **Acehnese**, and **Minangkabau**]. Thickly forested mountain ranges and the Batak’s own reputation for ferocity deterred coastal states from penetrating the highlands; thus, Batak villages enjoyed not only independence from foreign rule but also the freedom to wage war on each other. Moreover, although from the earliest times trade (most importantly in local benzoinwood, used to make incense) linked the Batak lands to the outside world, the Batak experienced the waves of Indic influence that transformed neighboring societies only as faint ripples, mediated by the island’s more modest Hindu-Buddhist statelets or by armed Tamil merchant guilds on the coast. While in general lowlanders or coastal peoples feared highland or interior peoples as headhunters (for instance, the Dayak of Borneo or the Igorots of Luzon), the Batak were also infamous as cannibals. Popular rumor has greatly exaggerated the extent of Batak cannibalism; some Batak groups were only recorded as subjecting a person condemned to die for especially heinous crimes to the additional torture of having fellow villagers slice off and swallow bits of his flesh.

Islamic influence remained similarly superficial until the early 19th century, when the Padri struggle to purge Minangkabau culture of pre-Islamic elements spilled over into the southern Batak lands as a war to force the conversion of the pagan Mandailing and Angkola. Intervening against the Padri, Dutch colonial power followed them into the southern Batak lands; by the 1840s, the coasts below the Batak highlands fell under Dutch control. Despite facing no pan-Batak resistance, the Dutch subdued all the Batak only after several fierce campaigns over the latter half of the 19th century.

In 1862, Ludwig Nommensen of the Rhenish Mission Society (German Lutheran) began working among the Toba. By 1900, most Toba had become Protestants, thanks in great part



to Nommensen distancing himself from the Dutch colonial authorities and offering his services as doctor, teacher, and mediator. Most concretely expressed in the 1908 construction of the first road into the highlands (formerly accessible only by footpaths), the Dutch penetration of Batak society, nonetheless, did face resistance: in armed syncretistic and messianic movements; in Karo and Simalungun mistrust of a Christianity viewed as a partner of colonialism; and, in the establishment of a self-governing Batak church, free of European missionary paternalism.

The educational advantages that Batak received from the mission schools enabled them to fill commercial and teaching jobs throughout the Netherlands Indies and, later, to play prominent roles in Indonesia’s national leadership from the revolution down to the present day. The Batak lands are undergoing rapid development as the farming hinterland of the oil- and rubber-rich northeast Sumatra coast, of Medan (the metropolis of western Indonesia), and even of Singapore and Malaysia. The Karo and Toba highlands are attracting the greatest number of tourists in all of Indonesia, after Bali and Yogya.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Batak homeland in North Sumatra province is located on a high rolling plateau (1,000 m or 3,280 ft above sea level) between the two parallel volcanic ranges of the 2,000 m (6,560-ft-high) Bukit Barisan Mountains. The region centers on Lake Toba, a veritable inland sea occupying the crater left by a vol-





*A Batak man in Lake Toba, Indonesia. The Bataks are some of the original inhabitants of Indonesia and are now a remote tribe that lives around Lake Toba in Northern Sumatra. (AP Images/Horst Faas)*

canic explosion 75,000 years ago (2,000 times more powerful than that of Mount Saint Helen's). In this century, overpopulation has forced many Batak to settle in the densely forested piedmont and in the coastal plantation zones to both the east and west. Batak also form a major part of the population of the multiethnic metropolis of Medan and can be found in cities throughout Indonesia.

According to the 2000 census, Batak numbered 6.1 million, Indonesia's fifth largest ethnic group, which is 3% of the population. This was almost twice the 1990 census figure of 3.1 million for speakers of the three Batak languages. A more recent estimate puts the number at 9 million. The relative size of the various Batak sub-groups can be judged from the following estimates from 1991 (or 1989, where noted): 2 million Toba, living around Lake Toba, on Samosir Island, and in the highlands to the south; 600,000 Karo to the northwest of the lake; 1.2 million Simalungun, east of the lake; 1.2 million Dairi, west of the lake; 750,000 Angkola (1991) and 400,000 Mandailing (1989) between the Toba and the Minangkabau; and 800,000 Alas-Kluet (1989) in southern Aceh.

### **<sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE**

Batak dialects divide into three mutually unintelligible groups: Toba-Angkola-Mandailing, Karo-Dairi, and Simalungun. In the past, intercommunication was possible because many Batak knew Batak languages other than their own and some-

times also Malay (which could also be used with non-Batak). Today, it is a widespread mastery of Bahasa Indonesia that facilitates intercommunication.

Batak religious specialists have long employed a script (ultimately of Indian origin) to record occult knowledge; the letters vary slightly among the six Batak groups.

Children take as surnames the clan (*marga*) names of their father.

### **<sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE**

According to the Toba creation myth, the primordial universe consists of the seven-layered upperworld of the god Mula Jadi Na Bolon, and the watery underworld of the dragon-serpent Naga Padoha. Mula Jadi Na Bolon sired three sons by a blue hen: Batara Guru, Mangalabulan, and Soripada. He also sired three daughters to give to his sons as wives. It is the daughter of Batara Guru, Si Boru Deak Parujar, who created the earth. She married her cousin Boraspati ni Tano, the lizard-shaped son of Mangalabulan, and gave birth to twins of different sexes. In turn, these twins married each other, descended to the earth at the volcano Pusuk Buhit (on the west shore of Lake Toba), and founded a village, Si Anjur Mulamula. From this pair, all humanity descends. From one of their grandchildren, Si Raja Batak, all the Batak descend (the other Batak groups do not widely recognize this genealogy).

## 5 RELIGION

The Toba have been predominantly Protestant Christian for over a century, while the Angkola and Mandailing have been Muslim several decades longer. Pebegu, the indigenous animist religion, is strongest among the Karo, claiming 57% as adherents (though many of these describe themselves as “secular,” i.e., with a rather uncertain grasp of their religion). Some 12% of Karo profess Islam, while 31% are Christian (converts were few until the 1965 suppression of communism compelled every Indonesian to declare adherence to a universal religion). The self-governing Toba church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestant or HKBP) is the largest Christian body in Indonesia and one of the most powerful. The Simalungun and Karo Protestants have each established their own churches. Finally, about 10% of all Batak are Catholics, missionary work having begun only after independence. To a considerable extent, however, Christian and Muslim Batak maintain beliefs and practices of the traditional religion alongside those of the newer creeds.

The traditional Batak religion recognizes numerous gods but focuses much more upon handling spirits directly associated with human life. One of two deities who do figure prominently is Boru Saniang Naga, goddess of rivers and lakes, who must be honored before fishing, farming, and making or traveling by boats. The other is Boraspati ni Tano, a fertility god whose lizard form appears on house façades; every working of the soil requires that he be appeased.

*Tondi* (in Toba, *tendi* in Karo) is the life-force present in human beings (as well as in rice and iron). The god Mula Jadi Na Bolon gives each person his or her tondi before birth; the tondi also chooses the person's destiny before birth. The tondi is not bound to the body; it may roam, or a more powerful spirit may capture it. The separation of the tondi from the body causes illness, and, if the tondi cannot be enticed back by offerings or successfully summoned back by mediums, this can lead to death.

Upon death, the tondi disappears, releasing the *begu* or essential soul. The *begu* remains near its former home or in the vicinity of the cemetery and can contact surviving kin and descendants (for instance, it can express disapproval through a nightmare or a particular mishap). Babies who die before breaking their first tooth; persons who die by accident, murder, or suicide; and young women who die unmarried become *begu* who protect their families. If their kin group mounts large-scale funerary sacrifices, the *begu* of powerful individuals attain the higher status of *sumangot*, an ancestor figure around which a new subclan can be formed. Further rituals can promote *sumangot* to *sombaon*, prominent ancestors of 10 to 12 generations back who dwell in spooky places such as mountains or dense forests. Unelevated *begu* become resentful and, if not sustained through offerings, can harm rather than help humans. The *begu* is not immortal but will die seven times before turning at last into a blade of grass.

Religious specialists include *guru sibaso* (female spirit mediums) and *datu* (male priests). The latter acquire a specialized knowledge of the occult through a rigorous apprenticeship. *Pustaha*, folding bark-books in Batak script, record information on magic, divination, and medicine.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A wedding links not only two individuals but, more importantly, two kin groups, usually reaffirming longstanding relations. The man's family sends a delegation to deliver an initial proposal to the woman's family. If the latter accepts the proposal, the two sides hold a later discussion to negotiate the bride-price and the gifts to be given by the man's side to the woman's relatives, as well as to fix the date of the wedding. Among Christianized Toba, it is important for the families to announce the wedding formally to the church congregation. The wedding feast is attended by kin of both sides and by all the inhabitants of the village where it takes place. The celebration includes the handing over of the bride-price, the slaughtering of a water buffalo or several pigs, and the distribution of the meat to the relatives.

Should any of the kin object to the wedding, the couple may elope, the man taking the woman to his parents' house. Before one day passes, the man's kin must send a delegation to the woman's side to inform them of the elopement and of the man's intention to marry the woman. After a while, the man's side asks pardon of the woman's side in a formal ceremony, after which a conventional wedding can take place.

Even among Christians, traditional funerary practices continue to be practiced. These include having masked dancers accompany the coffin to the grave. These masks, representing a male, a female, and either a hornbill or a horse, are oversized, as are the wooden hands that go with them; the masks are left on top of the coffin as protection against evil spirits. Proper funerary rites must be performed by a son; therefore, among the Toba, those without sons substitute a *si gal-gale*, a dummy with wooden limbs, for the son never born or earlier deceased.

While the poor are simply wrapped in a mat and interred, the wealthy receive elaborate, often massive, coffins, whose crafting often begins while the person is still alive. These incomplete coffins can be seen under houses. Karo are known for the *pelangkah*, a boat-shaped coffin adorned with a hornbill head at one end. Some Karo and Dairi place the elaborately confined body of a prestigious notable in a special structure, burning it after a year. More common is for Batak to exhume the bones of the powerful for reburial in a large stone sarcophagus, often with a *singa* (lion) carved in the front. Today, tombs no longer use stone but rather consist of massive concrete structures and statuary.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In pre-colonial times, political organization above the village level hardly existed. Among the Karo, an *urung*, a confederation of villages, looked to a *raja urung* or *sibayak* for leadership in time of war. The Toba recognized a line of priest-kings of very limited authority, the *si singamangaraja*. Only Simalungun chiefs who had received titles from the Acehnese sultan were said to wield “despotic” power over their districts.

Thus, for the most part, villages were independent and the individual village chief (*raja*) answered to no higher authority. The *raja* arbitrated disputes, extended hospitality to visitors to the village, and gave permission for people to move in or move out of the village. Although a member of the village's founding (and dominant) clan (in Karo, *merga taneh*), the *raja* himself was no more than a first among equals, relying on personal charisma to attract loyalty and compliance. He could not exercise authority without consulting with village elders and

his family's *anak boru* (wife-takers). The community could remove a *raja* for incompetence, and a wealthy freeman (*anak mata*) could command as much influence as an impoverished *raja*.

Traditional society distinguished between free persons and slaves (in Toba, *hatoban*; in Karo, *kawan*). The former divided into *biak raja*, the descendants of chiefs and other notables; specialists believed to be mystically potent (iron- and goldsmiths, woodcarvers, musicians, and singers); and ordinary people. Slaves were either debt-pawns or prisoners of war; they worked the lands of the *raja* and were generally well treated. The Dutch abolished slavery in 1860.

One is careful to speak respectfully to older people and strangers, for instance by prefacing a refusal with words of apology (in Toba, "*sattabi*"; in Karo, "*ula ukurndu litik*"). One touches hands in greeting, giving thanks, and bidding farewell.

Among the Toba, one way young people of different sexes may meet acceptably is *martandang*. In the evening, young men visit the house where young women live, under the supervision of a widow. The young people communicate in riddles. Should a young man find one of the maidens to his liking, he approaches her parents to ask her hand. Among the Mandailing, a young man can communicate with the object of his affection by *markusip*. He enters the space under her house, stands under the spot where she sleeps, and gives a secret signal to announce his arrival; the two whisper through the floorboards.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Toba village (*huta*) consists of 8 to 10 houses facing each other across a broad central avenue, which serves as a place for drying rice and gathering for ceremonial celebrations. All of the village inhabitants belong to the same clan. Community meetings take place in an open area (*partukhoan*) near the village gate. The Karo *kuta* is much larger, includes families of different clans, and possesses a meeting-house (*balai kerapatan*). Batak villages established in warlike pre-colonial times were ringed by a high wall of earth or sometimes stone blocks, a moat, and thick stands of bamboo.

Most Batak now live in brick or cement houses, and roofs of corrugated metal sheets have replaced thatched ones even on many traditional homes. Traditional Batak houses are rectangular structures raised on piles. The Toba house is home to a single couple, their unmarried children, the eldest son and his family, and the father's widowed sisters. The house has a high saddle roof whose ends project well beyond the walls of the house; the roof juts farther out in the front where there is a veranda; the foot of the entrance staircase is under the veranda.

The much larger Karo dwelling houses eight related families, each family inhabiting 5 sq m (approximately 54 sq ft) of living space and sharing a hearth with one other family. The apartments (which today can be rented by unrelated families) line up, four on either side of a central hall that often has a gutter down the middle for debris. The house has identical verandas and doors at both front and back. One particularly distinctive type of roof, for houses with a square plan, has side surfaces rise evenly to the ridgepole, while the front and back sides stop under the ridgepole and connect to it with a wall. Most impressive were the *rumah anjung-anjung* of *rajas* whose roofs were topped with a miniature house.

Human Development Indices (combining measures of income, health, and education) in the Batak region vary widely: the HDIs for the residencies of Toba Samosir (74.5) and Karo (73.5) are higher than that for North Sumatra as a whole (72), while those for Simalungun and Dairi residencies are below (71.3 and 70.5 respectively). All are above Indonesia's national HDI of 69.6. One Batak area, Mandailing Natal residency, has one that is slightly below, 68.8. Its GDP per capita is only us\$3,677, compared to us\$8,035 for Toba Samosir, and its infant mortality rate is 66.61 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 25.78 for Karo. The provincial IMR is 43.69.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

Batak belong to lineages that trace back to a common ancestor though the male line. These broad patrilineages or clans (in Toba, *marga*; in Karo, *merga*) are numerous and divide further into subclans. A Toba *marga* is named after a common ancestor who can be traced back 20 or more generations through genealogies (*tarombo*). A Karo *merga* carries a group name that does not refer to a specific ancestor and does not keep *tarombo*.

The most important social unit is the group (in Toba, *saompu*; in Karo, *sada nini*) of all the descendants of a common grandfather who live together in the same settlement. Within the *saompu/sada nini* are numerous nuclear families (in Toba, *ripe*; in Karo, *jabu*), each of which includes a couple, their unmarried children, and their married sons.

The ideal (though now rare) match is between a man and his mother's brother's daughter. Matches between people of the same *marga* and between a man with his father's sister's daughter are taboo. Members of one kin group customarily take wives from a specific kin group, while giving wives to yet another kin group. Typically, kin group A would give wives to kin group B, which in turn would give wives to kin group C, which would give wives to kin group A, thus forming a circle.

A husband treats his wife's family with great respect, regarding them as *dibata ni idah*, "gods on earth." Only the wealthy have ever been able to take more than one wife. From time to time, a husband takes a second wife but only visits her, as she remains living with her parents (Christians do not practice this).

Along with childlessness and adultery, a wife's inability to get along with even one of her husband's kin is sufficient reason for divorce. The *raja urung* among the Karo or the convened village passes divorce decisions, usually requiring the wife's side to return the bride-price. A Karo wife can have a "temporary divorce" (*ngelandih*) if she goes to stay at her parents' house after a quarrel.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

Although elements of traditional clothing can still be seen in everyday use, modern Batak dress much as other Indonesians do, wearing international fashions, such as tee-shirts and jeans, or Malay-style *kebaya* blouses. Rectangular, finely patterned cloths called *ulos* (in Toba; *uis* in Karo) continue as an essential part of ceremonial celebrations, both as part of the attire and as gifts exchanged to affirm the bonds between social groups. An *ulos* can be folded for a broad headcloth, or worn over the back as a shawl or over the shoulder as a sash (also a baby-carrier). In former times, women wore an *ulos* as a sarong with the breasts exposed, or wore the cloth wrapped around their

whole body with only the shoulders bare. Traditional clothing also included jackets and vests.

The colors of traditional ulos were symbolic: white of the upperworld and life; black of the underworld and magical power; and red of the middle world, bravery, and spiritual potency. While Karo tradition preferred cloth of indigo, contemporary Karo prefer dark red, following Simalungun taste. Toba weavers have long produced cloth in Karo patterns for Karo buyers. Machine-woven fabrics imitate the older hand-woven styles and are actually preferred by the younger generation, who also have begun to request that traditional patterns be done in gold or silver thread (Malay-style *songket*).

## 12 FOOD

Rice is the staple food, supplemented by cassava, taro, maize, beans, and bananas. A common side dish is *bulung gadung tumbuk*, cassava leaves pounded and then stewed as a curry. A popular feast food is *saksan*, roast pig eaten with a ginger-laden spicy sauce that includes the blood of the animal. *Dengke ni ura dohot na margota* is a big lake fish, spiced and mixed with tamarind as a souring agent and kept for two or three nights before eating. *Dengke ni arsik* is carp with cassava leaves, spiced, then cooked until the fish is tender and dry. *Pinadar* is chicken or pig meat grilled until dry, then mixed with hot spices, tamarind, and salt. *Tuak tangkasan* is palm-sap alcohol, flavored with a kind of bark.

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2005, the Batak region's level of literacy was very high by Indonesian national standards; that of Mandailing Natal, the regency with the lowest HDI of all the Batak region's regencies, 98.53, was even higher than that of the national capital, Jakarta, 98.32. (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Batak are celebrated throughout Indonesia for their love of music-making, often appearing as entertainers in hotels and restaurants. Traditional ensembles divide into two types: one for loud, outdoor ceremonial music and the other for soft, indoor informal music. The former includes *gondang* (a set of long, cylindrical, tuned drums, beat in dynamic rhythms), *sarune* (a penetrating oboe played with circular breathing), and *ogung* (gongs). The latter type of ensemble includes the *hasapi* (a long-necked lute), the *surdam* (a bamboo flute), and the *keteng-keteng* (a bamboo-tube zither, struck with sticks).

Accompanying themselves on guitars (and nowadays also on Yamaha electric organs), Batak sing passionate songs (*lagu Batak*), whose style reflects Portuguese and Spanish influences. This music is widely available on cassette. Churches may have as many as 10 choirs, singing (in unison and improvised four-part harmonies) many hymns that are no longer known in Europe.

Traditional dances served mainly three different functions: to show respect for guests, especially the host's wife-giving kin group; to induce possession by spirits (through orchestral crescendo); and for young people to divert themselves (often with a humorous erotic component). Funerals include the *tortor*, a solemn dance with slow and rigid movements.

Oral literature includes *andung-andung*, laments for the dead, including fixed expressions that can no longer be under-

stood; and *tonggo-tonggo*, poetical prayers recited during offering ceremonies (these include *tabas* incantations).

## 15 WORK

Most Batak gain a living from agriculture, in some areas cultivating irrigated rice, in others raising maize, cassava, indigo, sugar palm, and other crops in dry-fields, to some extent still with swidden (shifting-cultivation) methods. Karo and Simalungun farmers grow vegetables and fruits for the Medan market, but also for Singapore and Malaysia. Spreading over the Simalungun area since colonial times, and once employing primarily Chinese and Javanese labor, plantations grow rubber, oil palm, cacao, tea, and tobacco. Other cash crops are coffee (especially among the Mandailing and Dairi) and cloves.

Men clear and plow the land as well as set up irrigation systems, while women plant, weed, and harvest; neighbors and close kin cooperate in accomplishing agricultural tasks. Batak keep water buffalo as draft animals and to be sacrificed and consumed at ritual celebrations; pigs are raised both for meat for everyday meals and feasts. Cattle, goats, chickens, and ducks are raised for sale in coastal cities. Fishing is a major occupation on Lake Toba.

Because of a relatively high educational level, Batak fill office (including bureaucratic), teaching, and health service jobs throughout Indonesia.

## 16 SPORTS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Villages and regions specialize in particular crafts: textile-weaving; mat- and basket weaving; iron-, gold-, and silver working; pottery; and woodcarving (important in decorating the walls of traditional houses).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In 2002, the Gender-Related Development Indices (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) of the regencies of the Batak region were almost all higher than Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2: 69.3 for Toba Samosir, 68.5 for Karo, 66.5 for Dairi, and 61.5 for Simalungun. Only Mandailing Natal was lower, at 58.4, which was also lower than that for North Sumatra as a whole, 61.5. The Batak regencies' Gender Empowerment Measures (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, were all lower than the national GEM of 54.6, ranging from Dairi's 53.4 to Karo's 46.

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—revised by A. J. Abalahin

## BEDU

**PRONUNCIATION:** BEH-doo

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bedouin

**LOCATION:** Deserts of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt

**POPULATION:** 4 million to 5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Western term *Bedouin* is actually a double plural; in their own language (Arabic), Bedouin refer to themselves as "Bedu" (also plural, but for simplicity it will be used here as both singular and plural). The definition of who is and is not a Bedu has become somewhat confused in recent times, as circumstances change and the traditional nomadic life of the desert herders had to adapt. Generally speaking, a Bedu is an Arab who lives in one of the desert areas of the Middle East and raises camels, sheep, or goats. The Bedu traditionally believe they are the descendants of Shem, son of Noah, whose ancestor was Adam, the first man. Bedu society is based on complicated lineages that govern the formation of tribes and family clans. Bedu introduce themselves by giving their name, then naming two generations of male ancestors, and then stating their tribe: for example, "Suhail son of Salem son of Muhammad of the Bait Kathir." Women are also known as the daughters of their fathers and grandfathers, and they keep their family names even if they marry into a different tribe.

Genetically speaking, the Bedu are Semitic in origin, of the Caucasian race. The Arabian Peninsula historically has been the crossroads for trade as well as war. Bedu tribes often took strangers into their system as *mawali* and offered them the tribes' full protection and identity, thus intermingling with other peoples. Where the Bedu have had little contact and, therefore, little intermingling with other races, their skin complexion is fair where it is not exposed to the sun. Bedu are considered the "most indigenous" of modern Middle Eastern peoples, meaning they lived there before anyone else. At the time when Arabs were first distinguished from other races, they were desert nomads. The first appearance of nomadic peoples in the Arabian desert can be traced back as far as the third millennium BC.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Bedu territory covers the Arabian deserts of the Middle East, including parts of the Palestinian territories and the modern states of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt. Their entire range extends over 2.5 million sq km (1 million sq mi), which is about the size of western Europe. It is difficult to count the exact number of Bedu living within this huge territory. Most estimates figure that the Bedu population is about 4 million to 5 million, which puts the population density at less than 1 person per sq km (around 2.5 persons per sq mi). It is estimated that approximately 10% of all Bedu continue to live in a purely traditional way: nomadic camel herders who follow the scattered, sporadic rainfall to find grazing

for their animals, live off the products of those animals (milk, meat, hair, and skins), and use them as their sole form of transportation. This article primarily focuses on the nomadic Bedu. Life for the other 90% of the Bedu is similar to that of other urbanized Arab peoples.

The desert environment is harsh and does not lend itself easily to the support of human life. Much of the Bedu territory receives only four inches of rain per year, and those four inches are scattered and unpredictable. Temperatures can go as high as 50°C (122°F) in the shade during the summer months, and as low as 0°C (32°F) during the winter. At night, the temperature drops dramatically, plunging as much as 30°C (54°F) from daytime temperatures. The beginning of summer is often heralded by violent sandstorms and scorching winds. The Bedu recognize four or five “seasons” that vary in length depending on the amount of rainfall. In a good, rainy year, spring can last as long as six weeks (during February and March), whereas in a dry year there may be no spring at all, with winter simply shifting right into summer.

Despite these harsh conditions, a great deal of life manages to exist in the desert. Wolves, foxes, wildcats, gazelles, hares, small rodents, reptiles, and many insects and spiders make their homes there, and flocks of migratory birds pass through on their way from summering to wintering grounds (and vice versa). A variety of plant species have also adapted to the extreme temperatures and lack of water, developing long roots and spiny leaves, water storage capacities, and seeds that will last hundreds of years in a dormant stage until conditions become right for sprouting. The Arabian deserts are not all sand, either, although they do boast the highest sand dunes on Earth, with some as high as 600 m (2,000 ft). Within Bedu territory are mountains, rock outcroppings, gravel and stony plains, *wadis* (dry riverbeds, which can become sudden torrents during a heavy rainfall), and stands of scrubby bushes or trees. A few days or weeks after a rainstorm, the desert floor is transformed into a carpet of grasses and brilliantly colored wildflowers. The Bedu travel in search of these green places in the desert.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Bedu speak Arabic, but it is a very rich, stylized Arabic. Bedu Arabic is somewhat comparable to Shakespearean English. As is the case with many indigenous peoples, the Bedu language is filled with words that pertain to the details of their life, making distinctions that are difficult for others to comprehend. Just as the Inuit people have many words for snow, the Bedu have more than one word for desert, and the differences between them are hard to define in English. A *badiya* is something open and uncovered, a country in full view. A *sahra* is a vast open space that is generally level, defined in contrast to a “settled” area. The Bedu also have many words for water, which was historically far more important as a scarce resource in the desert.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The two main types of Bedu folk tales are realistic stories involving the familiar Bedu way of life and fantasies that tell of love and include a woman as a main character. These two types of folk tales generally fall into three categories: raiding stories, which celebrate heroism, strength, and courage; love stories, which revel in the emotional highs and lows of star-crossed lovers and struggles to overcome obstacles to true love; and

stories about thieves of the desert, which tell of robbery, murder, and treachery.

Some Bedu are superstitious, putting great stock in amulets and charms, lucky numbers (odd numbers are usually considered lucky), and spirits. Stones and designs in jewelry have magical qualities. Triangles, which represent hands, called *khamsa*, ward off the evil eye, as do blue stones, such as turquoise or lapis lazuli; red stones will stop bleeding or reduce inflammation. Children, especially boys, are protected by charms hung around their necks or ankles and with ear studs containing magical stones. Many adult Bedu still have the holes in their earlobes from these magic ear studs. Animals that prey on the Bedu herds (e.g., wolves, wildcats) are considered the embodiment of evil, and in southern Arabia the camel is believed to be the direct descendant of the spirits of the desert.

### 5 RELIGION

Bedu are now Muslim. At one time there were Jewish and Christian tribes, but none of them survive today. For the most part, Bedu do not follow Islamic duties and rules strictly. Given the Bedu desert environment and demanding existence, many Islamic rituals are difficult to practice in the same manner as elsewhere. For example, ritual dry washings are utilized when there is insufficient water. The *Hadj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) is an important ritual for the Bedu, and most parents take each of their children on his or her first pilgrimage at the age of seven or eight. Some Bedu construct a place of prayer, called a *masjid* or *mashhad*, shortly after setting up their tents by enclosing a small piece of land with pebbles. The morning and noon prayers are usually considered the most important of the five daily prayers of Islam.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most highly regarded Islamic festival among Bedu peoples is *Ayd al-Adha*, the “feast of sacrifice,” when the Bedu sacrifice a camel or sheep from their herd to commemorate Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. (Because Islam uses a lunar calendar, the dates for Muslim holy days change each year on the Gregorian calendar.) Given the strong identification with lineage and kinship in Bedu society, the rite of honoring those who have died is taken very seriously.

Because many Bedu do not fast during the month of *Ramadan* (the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations, celebrated by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month), the festival of *Ayd Al-Fitr* (a three-day celebration to break the fast at the end of *Ramadan*) has little meaning. Bedu also do not pay much attention to the celebration of the prophet Muhammad’s birthday or his *hegira* (Muhammad’s flight from Mecca); in fact, some Bedu do not even know the dates for those holy days in any given year.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In some tribes, when girls reach puberty they must then cover their hair and wear a mask or veil over their faces when in public (which, in Bedu terms, means whenever anyone but immediate family is present). Girls look forward to wearing these head and face coverings as a sign of maturity, and many design them so as to be alluring and provocative. They use their masks and veils to great effect in flirtations.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Two things shape the interactions of Bedu people: the Arab tradition of hospitality and the Bedu code of honor, or *sharaf*. These things themselves are shaped by the extreme conditions of desert nomadism. Survival as small groups of wanderers in the unforgiving desert required tremendous cooperation. The guest fed in one's own tent today may be the one who can provide food tomorrow. Passersby traditionally exchanged formal greetings with the families in the tents they passed and were asked for any news. The polite reply was to say one has no news or only good news. The passersby were then invited into the men's side of the tent for coffee and tea, served in a ritual way. It is considered polite to drink at least three cups before wobbling your glass to show that you do not want it refilled. Guests were assured of food and shelter for three and one-third days and then protection for another three days after leaving the tent, that being considered the length of time it takes for all traces of the host's food to pass through the guest's body. (Before a guest departed, the host burned incense in a special crucible called a *madran* or *mijmar*, and the guest perfumed his headscarf and beard with the smoke.) Anyone who even exchanged greetings, whether they came into the tent or not, was considered a guest entitled to the host's protection for the customary three days.

Women are inviolate in the Bedu code of honor. No man who is not intimately related to a woman may touch her in any way, not even so much as to brush his fingers against hers while handing her something. To do so is to dishonor her, and the traditional punishment for that was death. Likewise, in some tribes, if a woman brings dishonor to herself, she shames her family, because honor is held not by individuals but by whole families. According to old Bedu custom, if a woman committed any shameful conduct, her father or brother traditionally had the right, and was expected, to kill her immediately. Even in wars or raids, women were not touched. Raiding parties left enough supplies in the raided camp to support the women and children there. The loss of a woman's honor, her *ird*, is extremely serious in the Bedu code.

Long-time warriors, the Bedu have developed a very clear idea of what constitutes a fair fight and have strict rules governing the conduct of wars and raids. Another important element of Bedu honor is *as-sime*, giving up something so that a weaker person will benefit. Children are trained in the code of honor and tradition of hospitality from a very early age. By the time they are seven or eight years old, boys and girls know well what is expected of them and can behave with adult dignity when called upon.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Bedu live either in tents made of woven goat hair, known as a *bait sharar* ("house of hair"), palm-frond shacks called *barasti*, or in the shelter of a few bushes or trees, on which they may drape blankets for more protection from the wind. Bedu adapted to more modern customs live more settled lives in villages or take advantage of technological items such as "portacabins."

Bedu tents vary in size, depending on the number and wealth of the people living in them. The smallest are two-room tents, about 4 to 5 m (12 to 16 ft) long, and the largest can be anywhere up to 45 m (150 ft) or more in length. Most tents are about 2 m (6 ft) high. Larger tents are harder to move, so nomadic Bedu tents tend to fall somewhere between those two

extremes. A tent houses an extended family of around 10 people, and it is divided into at least two sections—the men's side, or *al-shigg*; and the women's side, or *al-mahram*. Cooking is done and possessions are stored on the women's side, unless the tent has a third section for those purposes. Guests are entertained on the men's side, and the coffee and tea utensils and a fire for heating the water are located there. The men's and women's sections are divided either by a woven curtain called a *sahah* or *gata'ah*, or by a wooden mat called a *shirb* held together by wool woven around the canes in geometric patterns. These tent dividers are frequently beautiful works of art.

Bedu families stay close to their permanent wells during the dry summer months, then migrate to better grazing areas during the winter. The Bedu can travel as much as 3,000 km (1,600 mi) or more in a year. Traditional Bedu ride camels, which move by lifting both legs on one side at the same time, giving them a seesaw motion that requires a great deal of balance to ride. Some modern Bedu have acquired trucks and other four-wheel-drive vehicles to replace the camel as transportation. Each tribe has its own territory, or *dirah*, but as modernization encroaches on their range, the Bedu have had to cross over each other's territories much more frequently, and now it is commonplace to do so. However, each tribe still knows its *dirah* and the boundaries of those of other tribes.

The life of Bedu in oil-rich Arab nations is not quite as harrowing, as tanker trucks often bring water to outlying areas. Mobile medical units have made Western medicine more available to the Bedu, but most only turn to them when folk medicine fails. Traditional Bedu beliefs held that physical health is related to the actions of spirits and devils. The Bedu traditionally put red-hot coals to their skin to open a door for an evil spirit to exit the body at a place where it was causing trouble (e.g., between the eyes in the case of headaches). Herbal medicine (teas, poultices, etc.) is widely used, as are charms and amulets. Today, herbal treatments are no more considered "magical" among the Bedu than acupuncture is in the West. If all else fails, including folk and Western medicine, the Bedu may turn to *sahar*, practitioners of alternative medicine who have been outlawed by most state governments but who continue to provide their services.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Bedu live in extended families made up of paternal cousins. A group of families who are related to each other make up a *fakhadh* (literally, "thigh"), which means a clan "of the same root" or "part of the whole." A group of *fakhadhs* constitutes a tribe, called a *kabila* or *ashira*, though these words may also refer to subsections of a larger tribe. A group of tribes is a "confederation." Tribes vary widely in size and are constantly changing through marriage or territorial needs for grazing. A small tribe that has to move into the territory of a larger tribe to feed its herds may become absorbed by the larger tribe. Later, if the original small tribe has gained enough members and/or wealth, it may strike out on its own again.

Every group of Bedu has a *sheikh*, or leader. The sheikh always comes from the same family line within each group, but it is not necessarily the oldest son who takes over when the father dies. The post is given to the male family member most qualified for the job. A sheikh leads by consensus, not by absolute will, so all members of the group must respect the sheikh in order for him to lead them effectively.

Marriage is more of a social contract among the Bedu than a love match, although love often enters into it and sexuality within marriage is greatly enjoyed and celebrated by both men and women. The bride and groom are usually first cousins. Women marry between the ages of 16 and 22, while men marry between the ages of 18 and 30. The wedding is accomplished without much ceremony. It is essentially a process of customary negotiations after which the bride is escorted to the groom's tent. Divorce is just as simple: a man simply states in front of witnesses that he wants a divorce. A woman can initiate a divorce by moving back to her parents' tent. If she refuses to return to her husband's tent with him, he will grant her a divorce. Women give birth without much fuss as well. Siblings are very close to and protective of one another; brothers in particular guard their sisters' honor fiercely. Incest is forbidden and is virtually unknown.

### 11 CLOTHING

The primary article of clothing for both Bedu men and women is the *dishdasha*, a long gown worn by most Arabs that covers the body from the base of the neck to the wrists and ankles. Men wear the dishdasha as an outer garment with baggy trousers called *sirwal* underneath (some modern Bedu men wear sweatpants now instead), while women wear the dishdasha as an underdress beneath a larger, looser dress called a *thob*, which is almost always black. Women also wear baggy trousers, which are tight at the ankle and embroidered, under their dresses. Bedu men wear some sort of headcloth, the design of which varies from tribe to tribe. Adult women wear veils over their hair and either veils or masks on their faces (in most tribes). Both men and women use *kuhl* (kohl, a black powder made from lustrous antimony) to accent their eyes. It reduces glare from the harsh desert sun and is believed to help repel flies as well. Bedu traditionally walk barefoot.

Women love jewelry and wear a lot of it; they may also wear the family's wealth as jewelry, which will then be completely safe since, according to the code of honor, women cannot be touched. Older women may have tattoos, which were believed to enhance their beauty, but that tradition is dying out, and very few younger women wear them. It is considered effeminate for a man to have a tattoo. Men wear silver or gold belts with elaborate curved daggers called *khanja* strapped to them. Belts designed for carrying bullets are now popular, and nomadic Bedu men are rarely seen without their rifles.

### 12 FOOD

Bedu cooking emphasizes quantity rather than style. The traditional Bedu diet consisted mainly of camel milk, served cold or hot, boiled with bread, or cooked with rice. Meat, usually goat's meat, was an occasional luxury. Bedu along coastal areas also eat fish. Thin, flat bread is cooked over the fire on a curved metal sheet. The Bedu also hunt for meat to supplement their diet. They traditionally used trained falcons captured in the fall and released in the spring to hunt desert hares and foxes or migratory birds. Many Bedu hunt with a breed of dog called *saluki*, which is somewhat like an elegant greyhound. Although herding dogs are considered unclean and are never allowed to enter the living area, salukis are treated with a great deal of affection and live in the tent with their masters.

### 13 EDUCATION

Traditional Bedu education consists of training in the skills necessary to live the life of the nomadic desert camel herder. It takes years to learn how to take care of a herd of camels and a family in the harsh desert environment. Although some Bedu parents are beginning to provide a more formal education for their children in schools, this makes it difficult for those children to learn their desert skills. These skills are hunting, rope-weaving, camel-herding, -riding, -milking, and -breeding, tracking, and the rituals of entertaining guests for Bedu boys and weaving of all sorts, embroidery, cooking, cleaning, setting up and taking down camp, tent-making, and herding for Bedu girls. Traditional Bedu society was largely oral, without much need for reading and writing. However, reading the Quran is very important, and there are always some members of the family, including women, who must know how to read and write. Bedu can recite poetry and tell stories by memory, however, and recognize all of the hundreds of *wasms*, the camel brands of their own tribe and neighboring tribes. They can also "read" the signs left on the hard desert ground by people and animals that have passed that way.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Poetry is considered the highest art in Bedu society; it is the outlet for emotional expressions otherwise restricted by the code of honor. The *rabab*, the one-stringed Bedu violin, is often played to accompany the recitation of poetic verse. Other literary genres, all oral, in the Bedu world are the *qissa* (folk tale), *qasid* (ode), riddles and proverbs, the *murafa'a* (pleading one's case before the magistrate), and the discussions of the *majalis* sessions (gatherings of family to pass on wisdom and traditions to the younger members).

Many Arab nations and even many Zionists within the modern nation-state of Israel regard the image of the Bedu as important to their cultural identity. For many, the Bedu shepherd is regarded as a bridge to the past. That link to the past is essential to nations that encompass ancient lands, peoples, and traditions but are relatively new as modern states.

### 15 WORK

Herding camels during the winter migration is a full-time job for at least two family members and usually requires two others part-time. Men and boys do most of the herding, but if there are not enough sons to do the job, teenage girls will help out. In a family with no sons, daughters take on all the work, including herding, entertaining guests, driving the vehicles (if they have any), and so on. Setting up and taking down camp is the women's job, plus all of the cooking, cleaning, weaving, and sewing. Pregnant women generally work right up to the time of delivery and then go back to work as soon as possible after giving birth. Nomadic Bedu life is a constant round of chores: collecting firewood, filling water drums, obtaining and preparing food, taking camels to pasture in the morning, and bringing them back to camp at night, milking the camels, moving camp, making and repairing tent cloths and clothing, and so on.

Many Bedu have given up full-time nomadic herding to take on wage-earning jobs. In many Middle Eastern countries, Bedu men form important elements in the military and are well compensated. In Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the armed forces are composed almost entirely of Bedu. In Israel, they



have also been enlisted as trackers and wardens to protect endangered desert species.

## 16 SPORTS

Nomadic Bedu do not have much time for sports, but they do enjoy camel racing and spend quite a bit of time and energy breeding fast, light camels and even training them to pick up alternate feet, rather than both feet on the same side at the same time, to make them easier to ride at high speeds. Hunting is done purely for sport by wealthier Bedu, though it is a necessity for poorer families.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Winter is a sociable time for the Bedu, with many clans and tribes gathered in good grazing areas, rather than stuck by their isolated wells in the dry summer. At night, they gather to recite stories in verse around the campfire. Other times, the women may sing to the men in an informal performance called a *summejr*. Given the harsh realities of nomadic Bedu life, there is not much time for more recreation than this.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Textiles woven by Bedu women are the most important product and one of the oldest crafts of Bedu society. The ground loom used by Bedu women is shown in an Egyptian fresco dating to 2200 BC. The women weave sheep's wool, goat or camel hair, or cotton into geometric designs, sometimes including stylized representations of everyday objects such as coffee pots, scissors, or camels. The Bedu traditionally put no border on their designs, instead letting the design go all the way to the edge of the cloth to reflect the infinite horizon of the desert, which leads one's mind to reflect on the infinity of God. Natural dyes were traditionally used, producing muted earth tones, reds, and blues, but they are difficult and time-consuming to make, so many Bedu women now purchase commercial dyes that create brighter colors. Other Bedu crafts are basketry and weaving palm fronds into mats and bags.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The modern invention of national boundaries and the encroachment of cities and cultivated areas on the desert has reduced the Bedu range and forced many to become only semi-nomadic, settling in villages for part of the year and returning to their herds in the desert for only a few months, or to give up the Bedu way of life altogether. With the advent of trucks and planes, the Bedu services were no longer needed to transport goods and people along the Middle East desert trade route by camel caravan. The Bedu thereby lost their biggest asset and source of much of their wealth and power. Many of the Bedu themselves have purchased trucks and other four-wheel-drive vehicles for their own use or to cater to tourists as "taxis." Once the Bedu succumb to modernization, becoming dependent on motor vehicles and wells, they need cash to maintain this new lifestyle. When men take wage-earning jobs in the villages or cities, it separates them from their families and herds. Bedu parents see that their children will need formal schooling if they are going to succeed in this new modern life, so they settle near villages to take advantage of public education. The children then are divorced from their ancestors' traditional lifestyle and can no longer survive in the desert, so they must take

wage-earning jobs. As the Bedu come into more contact with the industrial world, they also see that their *sheikhs* have little authority there, threatening the respect necessary for the sheikh's leadership.

These changes have undermined the traditional Bedu way of life and threaten their very existence as a separate people. Because of assimilation into the settled, technological world and the poverty (even death) of those Bedu who attempt to continue their nomadic ways, the Bedu as an identifiable group may soon become extinct. Yet, the Bedu are a proud people and have fought to retain their way of life. Arab nations and even many Israelis recognize the importance of the Bedu to their cultural heritage and have tried to accommodate the nomadic way of life. Efforts to incorporate the Bedu into modern nations have had varying degrees of success. Israel, for instance, tries to encourage the Bedu to give up their nomadic ways and to settle into modern Israeli society. Many Bedu resist this call because they prefer their nomadic, rural way of life. Other Arab nations such as Jordan have tried to build their national identity on the basis of their leaders' Bedu ties. However, the difference between the settled nature of modern nations and the wandering way of life of the Bedu is difficult to reconcile.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The rise of the modern nation-state has not been beneficial to Bedu women. The nomadic lifestyle was harsh, but it did give women a great deal of independence and authority. Bedu women typically supervised the domestic affairs of their clans. While men dealt with matters of herding, women ensured that the social relationships within a clan functioned. Divorce often was instituted by women who chose to express their displeasure with a spouse by moving back into their natal family's tents. As Bedu were forced to settle into planned communities, women lost a great deal of their autonomy. Their role became one not of supervising movement but of housecleaning and serving the male members of their clans. Many modern Bedu women have rebelled against the constraints that the new way of life imposes upon them and have often left their clans to integrate more fully with modern Arab society.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson

# BENGĀLĪS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ben-GAWL-eez

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bangalis

**LOCATION:** Bangladesh (Bengal region); India (state of West Bengal and other northeastern states)

**POPULATION:** 380 million (estimate, including expatriates)

**LANGUAGE:** Bengali

**RELIGION:** Islam; Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; Vol. 4: Muslims

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Bengālīs are the inhabitants of Bengal in the northeastern part of the South Asian subcontinent. Historically, the area was known as Banga, after local peoples who settled in the region over 1,000 years ago. This ancient term survives in many modern names, e.g., the region of Bengal, the Bengali (or Bangla) language, and the country of Bangladesh (literally, “the land of the Bengali people”).

Bengal came under the influence of many political empires that arose in northern India. It was ruled by the Buddhist Pala dynasty from the 8th to the 12th centuries AD. Following this, it had a series of Muslim overlords and by the late 16th century formed part of the Mughal Empire. With the decline of the Mughals, the region was governed by the independent Nawabs of Bengal until they were deposed by the British in the middle of the 18th century (1757–64). In 1757, at the Battle of Plassey, a small village and mango grove near Calcutta (Kolkata), the forces of the East India Company under Robert Clive defeated the army of Siraj-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, and thus the Company gained the right to administer Bengal, and in 1765 it gained the *Diwani* of Bengal, which virtually conferred upon it the civil authority of the Province in perpetuity.

In 1905, Bengal was divided into the Provinces of Bengal (essentially the modern state of West Bengal and Bihar) and Eastern Bengal and Assam (the modern Bangladesh and the Indian state of Assam). There was considerable opposition to this partition, particularly among Bengālīs, and in 1912 Eastern Bengal was reunited with Bengal. Assam was created as a separate province in 1914. At the same time, at the end of 1911, the capital of British India was moved from Calcutta to Delhi, where Lutyens and Baker created an imperial capital that is today New Delhi.

The political events in the region following Independence in 1947, led to another partition of Bengal into East and West, again dividing the peoples of Bengali culture, not only between two administrative units, but between two countries. The eastern parts of Bengal, where Muslims were most numerous, were assigned to Pakistan when India was partitioned in 1947. East Pakistan, as it was known, became the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971, following a bloody civil war between Bengālīs and West Pakistanis.

Calcutta, on the River Hooghly—a tributary of the River Ganges, is the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal and is the “Bengali” city, par excellence. It is a major center of intellectual activity (Bengālīs see themselves as the “intellectuals” of India). Today, it has a population of about 5 million and forms an urban conglomeration of approaching 16 million people, ranking third in size in India, after Delhi and Bombay.

Until 1911, Calcutta served as the capital of British India (it is the starting point of the Grand Trunk [GT] Road that links the cities of the Ganges Plain over its 2,500 km length to the North West Frontier) and is said to have rivaled London in its splendor. One only has to see the magnificent, decaying mansions that abound in Calcutta to get a sense of what it must have been like in the 19th century. Unlike Delhi, Calcutta is a colonial creation, being founded by the British in 1690. The city was a hotbed of the Free India movement prior to Independence, but experienced massive Hindu-Muslim riots prior to partition. The 1947 Partition of Bengal affected Calcutta’s hinterland. For instance, the city, a major regional center of the jute manufacturing industry, lost access to its jute-growing areas, which fell to East Pakistan.

West Bengal is one of the few states in the world that has had a democratically-elected communist government for several decades. The government led by Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), is formed by the Left Alliance, a coalition led by the CPI-M. As of 2008, it had been in power since the 1970s.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 2001 census puts the population of West Bengal at just over 209.5 million and that of Bangladesh at 131.3 million. This, along with the number of ex-patriots and growth since 2001, makes the 2008 estimate of the numbers of Bengali speaking peoples in the world around 380 million people. The greatest number of Bengālīs are found in Bangladesh with the remainder living in the Indian state of West Bengal. Significant communities of Bengali-speaking peoples are distributed throughout other states in northeastern India. Bengālīs have also emigrated in large numbers to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

The lower plains and vast delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers lie at the heart of the Bengal region. The rich fertile soils, renewed by periodic deposits of sediment, support some of the highest agricultural population densities found anywhere in the world. Water is constantly present, in rivers, streams, and ponds. The many rivers that cross the landscape provide an important means of transportation, but also hinder land communications. Frequent floods in the region cause extensive damage and loss of life. In the extreme north, a narrow strip of West Bengal State reaches into the foothills of the Himalayas around Darjiling. The climate on the plains is hot and humid, with mean monthly temperatures at Calcutta ranging from 20°C (68°F) in winter to 30°C (86°F) in summer. In May 1991, maximum temperatures in Calcutta rose to 40° (104°F). Heavy rains, most of it falling between May and early October, occur during the monsoon period. Calcutta receives 158 cm (62 in) annually, though this total increases to nearly 400 cm (over 150 in) in some parts of the region.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The language of the region is Bengali, which is a member of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European linguistic family. Like most of the other languages of northern India, it is derived from Sanskrit. Dialects of Bengali, such as Radha, that are spoken in the western region are quite different from those in the east, which show strong Arabo-Persian influences. Other regional dialects include Rajbangshi, Varendra, and Vanga. Bengali is written in its own script, which contains 57 letter



symbols. Numerous Bengali speakers have migrated into the Indian state of Assam, so much so that Bengali is one of the state's official languages.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The folk traditions of Bengal include folk tales, songs, and riddles that express the values, beliefs, superstitions, and taboos of the common Bengali people. One popular folk tale, known all over the region and even forming the basis for a film, is "Seven Champa Brothers and One Sister Parul." (The Champa and Parul are trees native to the Bengal area.) There once was a king, so the story goes, who was married to seven queens. When the favorite youngest queen gave birth to seven sons and a daughter, the barren elder queens were jealous. They killed the babies, buried them in a garbage heap, and substituted puppies and kittens instead. Fearing witchcraft, the king banished the youngest queen. Seven Champa trees and one Parul tree grew out of the garbage heap where the babies were buried. When the evil queens, and even the king, tried to pluck the flowers from the trees, the flowers moved away. They asked for the banished queen to be brought to them. She plucked the flowers, and a boy emerged from each Champa flower and a girl from the Parul flower. They were reunited with their mother and their father, the king. When the king learned the truth, he had the jealous queens killed and lived happily ever after with his remaining wife and children. The main theme of this tale is that jealousy leads to wrongdoing, but this will eventually be found out and punished.

#### 5 RELIGION

Bengālis, though unified by a common language and culture, are divided by religion. Over 60% of Bengālis, most living in Bangladesh, are Muslim. Even in Hindu India, more than 20% of West Bengal's population is Muslim. This reflects the historical importance of Islam in Bengal during nearly 800 years of the region's history. Most Muslim Bengālis are Sunnis, though Sufism also plays a role in their religious lives.

Bengālis in India are mainly Hindu, with beliefs and customs conforming to the orthodox forms of the religion. West Bengal, however, is also known for some unusual Hindu sects. Vaishnavas are followers of the Hindu god Vishnu. But Bengali Vaishnavas believe that Krishna is the supreme deity, rather than an incarnation of Vishnu. Accordingly, the rituals of this devotional (*bhakti*) movement focus solely on the forms and images of Krishna. Shaktism is a religious cult based on the worship of the female principle (*śakti*, literally "energy"). The Bengal form of Shaktism involves the worship of the goddess Kali. Kalighat in Calcutta, where animal sacrifices are carried out in the name of the goddess, is one of the major Shakti centers in the region. Popular religion in Bengal reflects a mixing of Hindu and Muslim folk beliefs, deities, and customs. For example, Hindus as well as Muslims worship at Sufi shrines.

Bengal is known for its itinerant religious musicians such as the Bauls. These, who are both Hindu and Muslim and tend to ignore sectarian differences between the two religions, wander from village to village singing devotional hymns and folk songs for the local people.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Bengālis celebrate the major holidays of the Muslim and Hindu faiths. For Muslims, these include Id ul-Fitr, Id ul-Adha (Bakr-Id), and even Muharram. Bengali Hindus observe Holi, Divali, and other important festivals on the religious calendar, but Durga Puja is of particular importance to them. Dedicated to the goddess Durga, who is a manifestation of Shakti (female energy), the festivities last for nine days. Months before the festival, special images are made of Durga, showing her mounted on a lion and killing the evil demon Mahishasura. These images are lavishly painted and decorated. They are worshiped on each day of the festival. On the tenth day, the image, garlanded with flowers, is carried through the streets in procession by an excited crowd. The procession makes its way to a river or the ocean, where the image of Durga is thrown into the water to be carried away by the current or tide. Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, and Saraswati, goddess of learning, also have their annual festivals. At the level of folk religion, both Hindus and Muslims worship local deities such as Shitala, the goddess of smallpox.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage followed by Bengālis are prescribed in outline by Islam or Hinduism but have underlying currents that are specifically "Bengali" in nature. For example, Muslims follow the custom of saying the Call to Prayer (*azān*) to the newborn, but the umbilical cord is cut by the midwife who is usually a Hindu of the Hari caste. She performs the same task for Hindus, except for those who are of too low a rank to receive her services. Hindus observe the naming ceremony, the initiation ritual known as the "first feeding of rice" (*annaprāsana*), and—for the higher castes—the sacred thread ceremony (*upanaya-*

na). Muslim boys undergo the all-important circumcision rite (*sunnat*).

As with other Hindus, Bengālis cremate the dead. The funeral pyre is usually lit on the banks of a river or stream, with the necessary rites normally performed by the deceased's eldest son. Death is followed by a period of mourning (which varies in length according to caste), purification rites, and the *śrāddha* or death feast held at the end of the mourning period. Muslim practice requires that the body be ritually bathed and wrapped in a shroud before being taken to the place of burial. There the body is laid in its grave with the face turned to the west, i.e., in the direction of Mecca. Prayers for the dead and readings from the Quran are part of the funeral rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Hindu Bengālis greet each other by saying "Namaskar," placing the hands together in front of the body with the palms touching. This form of greeting is widespread throughout India. Sometimes the phrase "Kamen asso" (How are you?) is added. Muslim Bengālis use "Salaam" or "Salaam alaikum," accompanied by the appropriate gestures.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Rural settlement patterns in Bengal vary from the compact, shapeless villages of West Bengal, to the isolated farmsteads of the Ganges Delta, to the hamlet clusters of the northern plains. House types and construction reflect local environmental conditions. In the interior, houses are made of mud, bamboo, and brush wood. Roofs are thatched, though the more-prosperous now use corrugated iron. In Bangladesh, a typical village house consists of several huts around a compound. Facing the compound is the main structure, with a veranda in front that leads into the living quarters. These may consist of one or more bedrooms, a sitting room, and a kitchen. Other huts on the sides of the compound are used for storage and cattle sheds. There is usually no latrine, with villagers using the fields for their daily functions. Such a lifestyle and standard of living are in marked contrast to those of the urban elites, who enjoy all the modern conveniences of city living. Some of the wealthy industrialists and business owners of Calcutta have a style of living that compares favorably with that found among the wealthy in the United States.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Bengālis follow the normal patterns of Hindus and Muslims in South Asia in their social organization. Bengali Hindus belong to castes (*jāti*), and their caste ranking influences many aspects of their economic and social lives. Muslims are, in theory, egalitarian but they also retain traces of a social hierarchy. In both communities, marriages are arranged by the parents. Hindu marriages are governed by rules of caste endogamy (i.e., marriage within the caste) and lineage exogamy (marriage outside one's immediate line of descent). In contrast, Muslims have no caste restrictions, although marriage partners are usually chosen from families of similar social standing. Cousin marriage is common among Bengali Muslims. The actual wedding ceremonies follow standard Hindu or Muslim rites. After marriage, the newlyweds typically take up residence in the household of the husband's father.

The extended family is common among both Hindus and Muslims, though this is changing among the educated, urban



A Bengālī girl with water lilies. The water lily is Bangladesh's national flower. The girl sells them to visitors.  
(AP Images/Pavel Rahman)

elites. As in most communities in South Asia, women remain subordinate to men. Some Muslims continue the custom of *purdah* (the seclusion of women from males). Divorce and widow remarriage reflect traditional Hindu and Muslim practices.

## 11 CLOTHING

In rural areas, Muslim men wear the *lunglī*, a piece of (often checkered) cloth that is wrapped around the waist and extends to the ground, covering the legs. Hindus dress in the *dhotlī*, the long piece of white cotton cloth that is wrapped around the waist, then drawn between the legs in the manner of a loin-cloth. Village men usually go shirtless but on occasion may put on a vest or a long shirt called a *punjāblī* as an upper garment. Wooden sandals are common, and during the rainy season almost everyone sports an umbrella. Women wear the *sari* and blouse, though younger Muslim girls may favor the combination of *salwār* (loose trousers) and *kamlīz* (tunic). Women in the countryside go barefoot. A variety of rings, bangles, and other ornaments and jewelry are worn by women of all classes.

In large metropolitan areas such as Calcutta and other cities and towns, safari suits or Western-style business suits, shirts, and jackets are a common sight. Younger urban women may also dress in Western fashions, although the sari is retained for formal occasions.

## 12 FOOD

Boiled rice is the staple food in rural Bengal, eaten with vegetables such as onion, garlic, eggplant, and a variety of gourds

according to the season. Fish and meat are favorite foods, but their cost places them beyond the reach of most villagers. The vegetables, fish, and meat are prepared as spicy curried dishes. Beef and water-buffalo meat are popular with Muslims. Hindus view the cow as sacred, and so they do not eat beef. Most Bengali Hindus are not vegetarians, however, and will eat goats, ducks, chickens, and eggs, in addition to fish. Cuisine among the more-affluent includes Mughal-style dishes including pilaf and *biryanī* (rice dishes containing meat and vegetables), *kebābs* (barbecued meat), and meat dishes known as *kormā*. Milk forms an important element in the diet, and milk-based sweets are popular throughout the region. Tea may be drunk, as it is throughout India, at any time of the day.

### 13 EDUCATION

Literacy rates vary among Bengālīs. Those living in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, are likely to be poorly educated and illiterate. Bangladesh has the lowest overall literacy rate (34.8%) of any South Asian country. By contrast, literacy in West Bengal (57.7% in 1991) is slightly higher than the average for India (52.6%). Education has long been a mark of higher social status among Bengālīs, and this is reflected in the high college enrollment in West Bengal. Vishva-Bharati University, founded by the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore in Shantiniketan, is world-famous as a center for the study of Indian history and culture. The University of Calcutta, with its numerous affiliated colleges, is one of the major academic institutions in India.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bengālīs are heirs to one of the richest literary traditions in the Indian subcontinent. The earliest known works in Bengali are Buddhist texts that date to the 10th and 11th centuries AD. The influence of the Vaishnava saint and mystic Chaitanya (1485–1534) on the development of medieval Bengali literature was immense. Some of the gems of Bengali poetry at this time were the songs dedicated to Krishna and his consort Radha. Islam, too, contributed to medieval Bengali literature through the devotional works of the Sufis and the writings of other Muslims.

More recently, Bengālīs have created a vibrant modern literature ranging from the novel and short story to poetry and drama. Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet and writer, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Bengālīs have also achieved great success in the field of classical Indian music and dance. Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), the only Indian film director of his era to gain international fame and acclaim, was a Bengali. There still exists an important film industry in Calcutta producing Bengali films.

### 15 WORK

Bengālīs are predominantly rural and agricultural in nature, with over two-thirds of the region's population engaged in cultivation. Bengal's climate allows three crops to be grown in the year, with wet-rice cultivation dominating the economy. Jute, produced mostly in Bangladesh, is the major cash crop of the region. West Bengal, however, is also an industrial area. The cities and towns along the banks of the Hooghly River (an arm of the Ganges) make up one of India's most important manufacturing regions. It is here, 154 km (96 mi) upstream from the Bay of Bengal, that Calcutta is located. Founded in 1690 as a British trading post on the banks of the river, Calcutta is

now one of the world's largest cities with a population of over 12 million people. Its industries include jute processing, engineering, textiles, and chemicals. Calcutta is perhaps the most important intellectual and cultural center of India, a fact of which Bengālīs are extremely proud. The city is the birthplace of Indian nationalism, and of modern Indian literary and artistic thought.

### 16 SPORTS

Bengali children play games common to children all over South Asia. These include tag, hide-and-seek, kite-flying, marbles, and spinning tops. Youths and young adults enjoy wrestling. Cricket, soccer, and field hockey are major spectator sports, and many children play these games at school as well. Sports such as tennis, golf, and horse-racing are popular among the Westernized urban middle classes.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Recreational activities among Bengālīs vary to a considerable degree. Villagers in isolated rural areas may derive their greatest pleasure from fairs, religious festivals, and Bengali folk traditions such as *jātrā* (itinerant folk theater), the *bhātīālī* (boater's songs), and the *baul* (mystical songs sung by wandering minstrels). On the other hand, the sophisticated resident of Calcutta has access to radio, television, theater, movies, films, museums, and other cultural activities.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The folk arts and crafts of Bengal reflect the diversity of its people and the skills of its artisans. Among the items produced are hand printed textiles, embroidered quilt work, terra-cotta dolls, toys, and idols such as those used during Durga Puja. *Alpana* drawings, religious designs prepared by Hindu women, are made on walls, floors, and courtyards out of rice-paste. The decoration of boats is a thriving folk art in the delta region. Copper and brass metalwork, pottery, weaving, basketry, and carpentry are among the many activities pursued by the craft-people in the region.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As might be expected in such a large and diverse population, problems vary considerably in their nature and scope. Some problems, such as frequent flooding in Bengal, reflect the region's environmental setting. Others—for example, poverty and illiteracy—result from the fact that the people live in countries that are still developing. Thus, malnutrition among villagers in rural Bangladesh mirror that country's standing as one of the poorest nations in the world. Similarly, the plight of the urban poor in cities like Calcutta and Dhaka is linked to the dynamics of urban growth in the Third World. Still other problems originate in the political volatility of the region. Bangladesh, for example, has experienced civil unrest, suspension of democratic rights, and repressive military governments.

Social tensions in the region often arise from a mix of cultural, historical, and political factors. There are non-Bengali minorities in both West Bengal (the Gorkhas in the north who want a Gorkha homeland) and Bangladesh (e.g., the Chakmas in eastern Bangladesh) who have resorted to violence to fight what they see as Bengali cultural imperialism. Similarly, large numbers of Bengālīs fled Bangladesh during both Partition

and the country's 1971 War of Independence. In West Bengal, this refugee problem was largely one of numbers. However, in India's northeastern states such as Assam and Tripura, where the population is non-Bengali, this created ethnic tensions between Bengali refugees and the local peoples. Resentment against these "foreigners" is strong and periodically, as in Assam in the early 1980s, leads to ethnic violence. An armed militant organization namely United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was established in 1979 "with a purpose of liberating Assam from the illegal occupation of India," i.e. limiting the Bengali presence in Assam. Such events, however, are but the most recent chapter in the story of a people that extends back almost 1,000 years. Language, history, and shared traditions give Bengālis a sense of identity that makes Bengali culture one of the most unique and distinctive in all of South Asia.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Despite the efforts of governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Women for Women to promote gender equality for women among Bengālis, Bengali women suffer from the constraints of the society in which they live. Thus Hindu women face problems of arranged marriages, exploitation of girl children, child marriage and dowries, while Muslim women face issues of *purdah*, the wearing of the *burqa* and the role of women in Islamic society. Among both Hindus and Muslims, women are regarded as inferior to men and their main role is to take care of the household and bear (male) children. In rural areas, women participate in agricultural activities. Poverty is an issue for many Bengali women (though institutions such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh are providing capital for poor women wishing to go into business). Literacy among women in Bangladesh hovers around 40%, over 25 percentage points below the male average, and of course is much higher in urban areas than in the countryside. Fewer than 10% of Bengali women continue with higher education. However, women writers, such as Suchitra Bhattacharya and Bani Basu, have made a considerable name for themselves in the world of Bengali literature, in keeping with a tradition that extends back several centuries.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BHILS

**PRONUNCIATION:** BEELZ

**LOCATION:** India (Southern Rajasthan and bordering areas of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra states)

**POPULATION:** 12,705,753 (2001 census)

**LANGUAGE:** Bhili

**RELIGION:** Tribal religions (97%); Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Minas; People of India; Rajputs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The name Bhil identifies various ethnic communities inhabiting the hills and forests of southern Rajasthan and neighboring areas of western India. Some scholars argue that "Bhil" comes from the Dravidian word for bow (*billa* or *billu*) and reflects the popularity of the bow and arrow as a weapon among these groups. The term is also used in a broader sense to refer to the aboriginal peoples of this region. Bhils are divided into numerous tribes and subtribes, including the Barela, Bhilala, Garasia, Gameta, Mina, Tadvi, and Vasave. Many of these groups, however, see themselves as quite distinct from the Bhil community.

The Bhils are mostly tribal in nature. In the past, they acquired a reputation for a fierce sense of independence. Isolated from the rest of Indian society by their rugged environment, Bhil groups have managed to preserve many of their ancient tribal customs. At the same time, close social and economic ties with their neighbors have exposed them to Hindu cultural influences.

Though little is known of their origins, the Bhils appear to be the oldest inhabitants of the area. They are generally dark complexioned and small of stature. Their racial affinities are uncertain, although they have been identified with both the Dravidian and pre-Dravidian peoples of South Asia. Some writers suggest that the wild, hill peoples of the region mentioned in the ancient Sanskrit literature were, in fact, the Bhils. A Sanskrit text dating to the very end of the 6th century AD mentions a Bhil chieftain, mounted on an elephant, opposing the passage of another king through the Vindhya Mountains. By the 7th century, various Rajput clans began to settle in western India and subdue the local peoples of the area. Some Bhils resisted the invaders and fled into the interior to preserve their independence. Other Bhil groups seem to have accepted this conquest peacefully, even intermarrying with the newcomers. One finds other ties linking the Bhils and the Rajputs. Bhils, for example, played a role in Rajput coronations. In some Rajput states, it was customary for a Bhil to place a ceremonial mark (*tika*) made with his own blood on the forehead of a new *raja* (king). Although no longer followed, the ritual has been seen by historians as a sign of Bhil allegiance to the Rajputs as well as of former Bhil power. The figure of a Bhil chief is included on the emblem of Mewar (Udaipur), an important Rajput state in southern Rajasthan.

The Bhils were treated quite differently by the Marathas. This Hindu group, which extended its military power northwards from Maharashtra into the region at the beginning of the 17th century, mercilessly persecuted the Bhils. If a criminal were caught and found to be a Bhil, he or she would often be killed on the spot. Historical accounts tell of entire Bhil



communities being wiped out. The Bhils retreated to the safety of their strongholds in the hills. From there, they raided villages in the neighboring lowlands and robbed travelers passing through their lands.

Although their reputation for banditry, thievery, and lawlessness has been exaggerated, the unruly Bhils did pose problems for local rulers. The British government in India, which gained control of the region in the early 19th century, even set up special military units to pacify local Bhil populations. The Bhils also took part in local tribal resistance movements during the 19th and early 20th centuries, protesting political and social injustices. However, the Mewar Bhil Corps, a unit of Bhils formed in Mewar in the 1840s with a view to weaning them away from their predatory habits, to give them honorable employment, and to assist the government in preserving order, were the only native troops in Rajasthan to stand by the British during the 1857 Mutiny.

The Indian Constitution (1949) designated the Bhils as a Scheduled Tribe, one of the groups identified as needing special representation and assistance in India after independence from British rule. Today, the Bhils remain a disadvantaged community with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, and other social problems.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Bhil homeland lies at the western end of India's tribal belt. It includes southern Rajasthan and bordering areas of Gujarat,

Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra states. Bhil populations are concentrated in the southernmost hills of the Aravalli Range, the western uplands of the Vindhya and Satpura ranges, and the northernmost hills of the Western Ghats. Some Bhil groups occupy the nearby river valleys and coastal plains. The Gujarati term "Rewakantha," the basin of the Rewa (Narmada River), is sometimes used to describe the traditional territory of the Bhil peoples.

The environments inhabited by the Bhil are relatively inaccessible and unproductive. The rugged Aravalli hills of southern Rajasthan attain a height of 1,722 m (5,650 ft) at Mount Abu. The region experiences a semiarid climate. Annual rainfall in southern Rajasthan and Gujarat averages around 63.5 cm (25 in) and comes mainly from the summer monsoons. Rainfall is highly variable, however, and droughts are frequent. Maximum temperatures during the summer average over 40°C (104°F), but in winter they can approach freezing. The natural vegetation is thorn scrub forest, dominated by drought-resistant species such as acacias. The vegetation cover has been much degraded through overuse by humans and animals. To the south, in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, rainfall increases and temperatures become less extreme. Scrub forests give way to denser deciduous forests, but here, too, the vegetation has suffered from human and animal activity.

The Bhils numbered 12.7 million people (12,705,753 according to the 2001 Census of India). Assuming population growth rates that approximate those of the rest of India, the current population of Bhils will be close to 14 million people. The Bhils are exceeded in number only by the Gonds among the tribes of India and account for over 10% of the country's total tribal population. The accuracy of the census data, however, is open to debate because of questions concerning exactly which groups should be included under the classification of "Bhil." The Bhils remain, nonetheless, one of the largest tribal groups in South Asia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language of the Bhils is called Bhili, a term that refers to the numerous dialects spoken by Bhils throughout western India. For example, Wagdi, Dungri, and Mavchi are Bhili dialects spoken in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, respectively. Dialects change within a radius of 32 to 48 km (20 to 30 mi) and Bhils from one area may have difficulty in understanding those in a neighboring area. Bhili dialects show varying degrees of influence of regional languages such as Rajasthani and Marathi, but they all appear to have their origins in Gujarati. Gujarati, the language spoken in Gujarat, belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family. Thus, linguistically, the Bhils are unlike most tribal groups in India whose tongues more commonly are Dravidian or Munda in origin.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Bhil mythology and folklore place great emphasis on the antiquity of the Bhils, as well as the Bhils' traditional place outside the mainstream of Hindu society. At the same time, Bhil traditions demonstrate the longstanding influence of Hinduism on Bhil culture.

One account of the origin of the Bhils holds that Mahadeo (literally, the "great god," an aspect of the Hindu god Shiva) was resting in a forest, sick and unhappy. A beautiful woman appeared before him and, on seeing her, Mahadeo was cured

of all his ailments. The god was smitten by the woman and together they produced many offspring. One of these children was an ugly and vicious son. Mahadeo, enraged when this son killed his favorite bull, expelled him. All Bhils are said to be descended from this outcast.

Numerous variants of this tale exist, but Bhil myths of origin universally ascribe the beginnings of the Bhil tribes to some similar misdeed, a misfortune, or an incestuous union.

## 5 RELIGION

Bhil religion is essentially animistic in nature. It is the belief in the powers of supernatural forces and the need to order one's relations with these forces that dominate Bhil religious life. The Bhils are highly superstitious. They believe in omens and the evil eye and wear charms and amulets for protection from ghosts, evil spirits, and witches. Individuals, usually women, suspected of witchcraft, sorcery, or magic are identified by a shaman or witch-finder. (This figure is called a *Bhopa* in Rajasthan and *Badava* in eastern Gujarat). Traditionally, the victims were subjected to trial by ordeal, tortured, and even killed. The *Bhopa* and *Badava* play an important role in rituals performed to exorcise ghosts. The Bhils recognize gods and goddesses in the natural world, revering various deities of the sky, trees, water, and rain. Fire is held to be sacred, and totemic animals include the horse, tiger, boar, peacock, and sparrow. Animal sacrifice is a common Bhil practice.

The Bhils have long paid homage to Hindu deities such as Mahadeo, viewed as the creator of the universe; his consort Parvati; Hanuman, the monkey-god; and Bhairon. Mata-ji (Kali) is much respected and propitiated by the sacrifice of goats and male buffaloes. Numerous lesser gods and local godlings are worshipped.

Groups such as the aristocratic Bhilala, the descendants of Bhil-Rajput marriages, and some plains' Bhil have adopted formal Hindu practices. They use Brahman priests, accept the existence of a caste hierarchy, and show a greater degree of integration into Hindu society. Small numbers of Bhils have converted to Islam. Others have adopted Christianity as the result of the efforts of Christian missionaries during the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, census returns show that 97% of the Bhils follow tribal religions.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Although their chief festivals are held to honor the dead, Bhils also observe the Hindu festivals of Holi, Dasahara, and Divali in much the same way as their Hindu neighbors. Holi, the spring festival of India, for example, is marked by the burning of bonfires and throwing of colored water; and Dasahara, the autumn festival honoring the goddess Durga, is accompanied by the sacrifice of goats and buffaloes. There are, however, differences in observances. Holi, in particular, is celebrated with much revelry, with singing, dancing, and drinking lasting for up to 10 days or more. Bhils tend to celebrate the festivals of their region. In Rajasthan, for instance, Gauri is a popular festival.

Bhils, in the new Indian state of Chhattisgarh, celebrate the Bhagoriya Festival, a festival that occurs a week before Holi when lovers are officially given permission to elope. A male applies gulal (colored powder) to the head of a girl he likes and, if she reciprocates, the couple is at complete liberty. The marriage is formally consecrated at a later date. On the occasion of

this festival, Bhagoradev or the God of Dancing is worshipped religiously by the people of the Bhil community. The eldest member of the village supervises over the ceremony. Sweets are offered to the god and later these are distributed amongst the members of the tribe. (Chhattisgarh was created out of the southeastern districts of Madhya Pradesh and has a distinctive language and culture. It, along with Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, came into being as states in India in 2000).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage of the hill Bhils tend to differ from those who live in the plains. For both groups, however, the chief ceremonies are associated with the naming of a child, the shaving of the male child's head, marriage, and death.

The birth of a son is announced to the community at large by a particular beat of a drum (*dhol*). Hymns may be sung to propitiate Shitala Mata, the goddess of smallpox who is widely feared by primitive peoples in India, and sweets and liquor are distributed. The male child's head is shaved after a few months and the naming ceremony soon follows. Among some groups, the shaving ceremony may not occur until the child is several years old. It is common for a child to be named for the day of the week on which it is born, or for some characteristic feature. For example, a child may be called Navapuria to denote that it was born on a Saturday, or Kalia (the dark one) because of its dark complexion. Male children are often tattooed on the wrist and forearm.

The ceremonies accompanying death are important in Bhil society. The dead are cremated after a period of mourning, although infants and victims of smallpox are buried. A carved wooden post or a stone tablet is placed at the site of cremation of males, with the deceased often represented on horseback with lance, sword, or shield. After 10 or 12 days, the *kata* (death-feast) is held for the community. Food consumed at this time includes maize, rice, sometimes the flesh of goats or buffaloes, and considerable quantities of liquor. During the feast it is important that a *Bhopa* be present to give voice to the demands of the spirit of the deceased. These demands are invariably met by the family and, once appeased, the spirit departs the confines of the settlement.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social interaction among the Bhils conforms to local and regional practices. Bhil communities that are more integrated with broader society have greater contact with non-Bhil groups, while those in more isolated areas tend to keep to themselves. The Bhils are hospitable to visitors. No guest goes without food and refreshment, no matter how scarce such supplies may be.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, Bhils live in small, dispersed hamlets known as *phala*, which are occupied by families of the same clan. Each settlement comprises a hut or group of huts standing alone in the middle of an area of cultivated land. Several hamlets may grow together to form a village or *pal*. The village may be a multi-clan community. Each village has a hereditary headman, who is a member of the village's dominant or founding clan. The headman is called *panch*, *vasavo*, *tadavi*, *naik*, *mukhi*, or other names according to local usage. The presence of the headman is necessary at most social and ritual functions in the village.





Young girls of the Bhil tribe at the Bhagoria fair in Valpur village, India. Bhagoria is an annual tribal festival held a week before Hoki, the Indian festival of colors. (AP Images/Prakash Hatvalne)

Individual huts are often surrounded by a bamboo fence. Their walls are typically built of mud or bamboo, wattle with mud, clay, and cow dung. The roofs are thatched, made from grass or leaves, and supported by rafters of teak or whatever wood is available. Huts are windowless and have a single entrance only. They are often used both as living quarters and for housing cattle. Bedsteads woven from bamboo or sleeping mats are used for sleeping, while household utensils are usually made from clay rather than metal. Earthenware jars and baskets are used for storage. The more affluent farmers may own cattle and possess a bullock-cart and other agricultural implements. Few Bhils attain this level of prosperity, and livestock is more commonly limited to a few goats and poultry.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Kinship among the Bhils reflects regional Gujarati, Rajasthani, and Maharashtrian patterns. Bhil tribes and subtribes are endogamous; that is to say, marriage occurs within the social group. There is, however, little intermarriage between the inhabitants of the hills and the plains. The Bhils also make a distinction between the Ujwala (pure) Bhils and the Kalia (impure) Bhils, groups that also rarely intermarry. The Bhils are divided into numerous clans, and clan exogamy (marriage outside one's own clan) is strictly followed. However, beyond

its name and its role in defining a pool of marriage partners, the clan is of little significance in Bhil society.

In practice, brides come from villages within a limited geographical area—villages that are already linked through institutions such as the Gauri festival, weekly markets, and existing matrimonial ties. Marriage proposals invariably come from the suitor or his family, rather than from the girl's father. The groom's family pays a bride-price to the father of the bride. Marriage among the Bhils occurs much later than among Hindus, occurring between the ages of 16 and 21 years. The eve of the marriage ceremony is marked by singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking. Marriage rituals are similar to Hindu rituals, with the bride and groom walking around the sacred fire, and the giving of presents.

Bhil society is patrilineal, with inheritance passing down the male line. The new bride moves into the home of her husband's family and assumes the burden of household chores. She also participates in the family's agricultural activities. It is customary for a father to provide his son with land and a hut on his marriage, so that among the Bhil the nuclear rather than the extended family is the norm.

Polygamy, the custom of having more than one wife, is acceptable, particularly if the first wife is barren or too ill to keep house. Widow remarriage is permitted, with the deceased husband's younger brother being the most desirable partner. Di-

voce, though uncommon, is allowed but can only be initiated by the husband.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Though many have now adopted the local dress of loincloth, jacket, and turban, the Bhil formerly went nearly naked, wearing a loincloth and perhaps a blanket during cold weather. As is common throughout India today, some males wear Western-style shirts. The hair is traditionally worn long, either partly plaited and fastened with a wooden comb, or falling freely to the shoulder. Males wear earrings, and some carry guns or swords. The Bhils' traditional weapon, however, is the bow and arrow.

Women's dress consists of a skirt, bodice, and a loose cloth pulled up over the head. Clothes worn for festivals and special occasions are more colorful and made of finer cloth. Women wear head ornaments, usually made of silver or tin, and commonly wear brass rings around the arms. Brass rings may also be worn on the legs, often extending from ankle to knee. Children wear few clothes until close to puberty.

### **12 FOOD**

The Bhils were originally hunters and gatherers. They subsisted by hunting small game such as rabbits, foxes, deer, wild pigs, birds, and rodents. They fished the local streams and rivers, and gathered edible plants and fruits from the forest. When they turned to agriculture, the Bhils adopted the slash-and-burn techniques of shifting cultivation (*jhum*). Many continued this form of subsistence activity up to the middle decades of the 20th century. Today, however, most Bhils engage in settled agriculture using the plow and draft animals. The staple foods are maize, millet, barley, pulses such as lentils, chickpeas, and vegetables. Food is taken twice a day, normally in mid-morning and then again in the evening. Rice is occasionally eaten, but the Bhils partake of the flesh of the goat or buffalo only on special occasions.

Bhils are strongly addicted to the use of tobacco and alcohol, making liquor from the flower of the mahua tree (*Bassia latifolia*) or from the bark of the babul (*Acacia arabica*). The consumption of alcohol accompanies every feast and celebration.

### **13 EDUCATION**

As an economically depressed group, often inhabiting isolated and difficult terrain, the Bhils' access to education is limited. Despite the availability of state-supported schools and government-sponsored programs for the Scheduled Tribes, literacy levels and educational achievement among the Bhils are low, literacy rates being 6.6% (for women it is less than 1%).

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music, song, and dance are an integral part of Bhil life and accompany all feasts and celebrations. The Ghanna or Gher is a ring dance of Rajasthan. Men carry sticks in their hands and revolve in a circle around the drummers, alternately hitting the sticks of the men ahead and behind them. Other dances are performed to propitiate Mataji and other deities.

An important Bhil institution is the Gauri, a dance-drama with a strong ritual element that presents various episodes from the life of Mahadeo and Parvati. Undertaken by a village once every three or four years, the Gauri festival is held at the

end of the rainy season (usually in August). The festival may extend over a period of 40 days or more. Once the bhopa has given permission for the Gauri to take place, the village sends out a troop of male actors to stage performances in neighboring villages. The host villages are expected to provide food and gifts for the visitors, hospitality that is reciprocated when these villages in turn stage their own Gauri celebrations. The Gauri festival serves to tie villages together through ritual exchanges, because the villages visited by the performers are those where there are kinfolk, daughters who have been married, and those with important economic ties to the village that stages the Gauri.

### **15 WORK**

Most Bhils are farmers. However, the pressures of subsistence agriculture, uneconomic land holdings, the burden of debt, and frequent drought have forced many Bhils to leave the land and turn to other occupations. Many are laborers or earn a living cutting wood, preparing charcoal, and gathering forest products like gum and lac. Bhils in the past have made their living from hunting and other forest activities, and are renowned as trackers. Some Bhils have been employed as watchmen, while others have learned shop-keeping from their encounters with the bania (trading) castes, and a small number of them—perhaps 3%—operate shops, tea stalls and flour mills. Again, largely because of a lack of education, a few Bhils are involved in the service industry, but the vast majority are agricultural laborers.

Despite efforts by the Union and State Governments to promote economic development among the Bhil Adivasis (tribals), especially in the areas of agriculture, sericulture, and education, Bhils in India remain socially and economically disadvantaged.

### **16 SPORTS**

The Bhils do not engage in any organized sports.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Bhils, though regarded by outsiders as shy and retiring, have a strong sense of community. Social and cultural occasions are celebrated by singing, dancing, and feasting, with the free consumption of liquor. Hunting and fishing, formerly a means of subsistence, are popular pastimes, although opportunities for such activities today are greatly limited.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Bhils do not possess a tradition of folk art or crafts. They rely on artisan castes to provide clothing, utensils, and other material necessities.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

During the last 100 years, many attempts have been made to improve the social and economic conditions of the Bhils. Christian missionaries, Hindu reformists, the followers of Mahatma Gandhi, and modern social workers have all worked to eradicate what have been perceived as the evils of Bhil society—the traditions of magic and witchcraft, thievery, alcoholism, meat-eating, and animal sacrifice. Many Bhil groups have abandoned their traditional customs and one community, the

Bhagats, has even adopted the observances and practices of orthodox Hinduism.

The Bhils face many social and economic problems today. Frequently inhabiting isolated and marginally productive environments, they experience widespread poverty and live in depressed economic conditions. Rapid growth of population, land fragmentation, unproductive landholdings, inefficient farming techniques, and constant indebtedness have forced many off the land to seek work as landless laborers.

While some groups have assimilated to a degree into Hindu society, the Bhils remain a people set apart from the mainstream of Indian society. They have yet to share in the wealth and social and economic advances of post-Independence India.

## 20 GENDER ISSUE

Generally, women in tribal societies experience more gender equality than their counterparts in Hinduism or Islam, although they still play a subordinate role to men. Bhil women are subject to arranged marriages and their families receive a bride price rather than pay dowries, but marriage remains a loose arrangement, and pre-marital and extra-marital affairs are common. However, once an affair becomes public, disputes are resolved by local panchayats, which tend to favor males and give short shrift to women's rights. In the past, movements existed among the Bhils for the identification and killing of witches.

Bhil women are sometimes subject to many of the restrictions of their Hindu upper caste neighbors. For instance, some Bhil groups have adopted the Hindu custom of veiling their women. Married women have to veil themselves in front of their elder male in-laws. This means that whenever they go out into public places like a market where an elder male in-law might pop up at any time, the married Bhil women have to remain veiled all the time, even though the custom is opposed by the Kansari nu Vadavno, a mass organization of Bhil women formed in 1998 to address women's issues (Kansari is the goddess who symbolizes the life-giving power of jowār (sorghum), the staple of Bhil life).

Kansari nu Vadavno ran a fairly successful campaign against the sale of illicit alcohol during the late 1990s. Their take was that the men under the influence of alcohol not only did not work but also beat them up and demanded excessive sex from them. They contended that the alcoholism of their men added considerably to the overall patriarchal oppression that they suffered.

Domestic violence, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to education remain issues for Bhil women.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BHUTANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** BOOT-un-eez

**LOCATION:** Bhutan

**POPULATION:** About 800,000–1.8 million (including Nepalese immigrants and other minorities, and Bhutanese in refugee camps in India and Nepal)

**LANGUAGE:** Dzongkha (official); Nepali; Assamese; Gurung; Tsangla; some Hindi

**RELIGION:** Mahayana Buddhism (official); Bon (shamanism); mix of Hinduism and Buddhism; Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Assamese; Bhutia; Gurung; Vol 4: Nepalis

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Bhutanese is the name given to the population of the kingdom of Bhutan, a small, landlocked country situated on the northern mountain rim of South Asia. The name *Bhutan* is derived from a word that means the “borderland” of Bhot, or Tibet. The Bhutanese themselves call their country *Druk-Yul* or the “Land of the Thunder Dragon.” The ruling monarch of the country carries the title *Druk Gyalpo* or “Dragon King.”

Bhutan’s early history remains obscure, although from the beginning of the 9th century AD the region was settled by Tibetans migrating southwards from the upland plateaus of their homeland. Some historians view this migration as an organized invasion, with Tibetan troops seizing the region from the ruling Hindu *maharaja* (princely chief). Bhutan assumed a distinct political identity in the early 17th century, when a Tibetan Buddhist monk established his authority as king, taking the title of *Dharma Raja*. The early Dharma Rajas were both temporal rulers and spiritual leaders, but they gradually left the country’s government in the hands of ministers who came to be known as the *Deb Rajas*. The current king, Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, is the fifth in a line of rulers descended from a territorial governor who was elected to become the hereditary king in 1907. The Dharma Raja has continued as leader of the Drukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which remains the official monastic order of Bhutan.

The extension of British rule to India’s Brahmaputra Valley in the 1820s eventually led to conflict with Bhutan, which lies just to the north of Assam. At various times during the 19th century, Bhutan ceded territory to the British, and in 1910 its external relations were placed under the control of British India. In return, Britain agreed not to interfere in Bhutan’s internal affairs.

In 1949, India assumed Britain’s role in handling Bhutan’s external affairs. The occupation of Tibet by Chinese forces in 1950 further strengthened Bhutan’s ties with India, as Bhutan saw the need for foreign support against a potential threat from China. During the 1960s, Bhutan abandoned its historic policy of isolation (foreigners could only enter Bhutan at the invitation of the king) and embarked on a policy of modernization, which led to a coup d’état against the king at the end of 1964. The political crisis of 1964–1965 compelled the king to forge an alliance between him and the traditionalists and abandon his efforts at modernization. The integration of diverse ethnic and cultural groups into the Bhutanese state was forgotten, and Bhutan became dominated by the Ngalong

(Dzongkha-speaking Bhutanese). At this time, the king ruled as a constitutional monarch, although there was a 152-seat national assembly, the Tsongdu, with many of its members elected by popular (though indirect) vote. The king appointed the prime minister, the Cabinet, and a number of delegates to the Tsongdu. Religious groups also appointed a number of representatives to nonelective assembly seats.

Under the king, the state’s “Bhutanisation drive” and 1989 promulgation of Driglam Nam Zha (Etiquette and Manners), by which people were required to wear traditional Bhutanese clothes in public, led to ethnic conflict between the Ngalong-dominated state and the people of Nepali origin. As a result, numerous people of Nepali origin were expelled from Bhutan. The majority of them, estimated to be between 100,000 and 135,000 in number, are now living in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal maintained by the UNHCR.

The Bhutanese view the Nepalese as newcomers and fear having them become the most populous ethnic community in the country (they have the model of Sikkim, once an independent country, but now a state in India, in mind). Since 1990, antigovernment extremists among the Nepalese have been waging a terrorist war in Bhutan. Southern Bhutan was placed under Army control, and international human rights agencies have claimed extensive violations of human rights in the Bhutanese security forces’ operations against Nepalese dissidents.

In March 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck unveiled the government’s new draft constitution—which would introduce major democratic reforms. In December 2006 the King abdicated the throne to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in order to give him experience as head of state before the democratic transition. In early 2007 India and Bhutan renegotiated their treaty to allow Bhutan greater autonomy in conducting its foreign policy, although Thimphu continues to coordinate policy decisions in this area with New Delhi. In July 2007 seven ministers of Bhutan’s 10-member cabinet resigned to join the political process, leaving the remaining cabinet to act as a caretaker regime until the new government assumed power following parliamentary elections. Bhutan completed its transition to full democracy in 2008, when its first fully democratic elections to a new National Assembly were held on 24 March 2008. Two parties contested the election: the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (DPT, for *Druk Phuensum Tshogpa*), which was formed by the merger of the previously established Bhutan People’s United Party and All People’s Party, which is led by Jigme Y. Thinley, and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), led by Sangay Ngedup. The DPT won over 67% of the vote and 45 of the 47 seats in the new parliament. Thinley’s party, which is widely viewed as being the most loyalist of Bhutanese political parties hews closely to the king’s vision for Bhutan and seeks to promote the objective of “Gross National Happiness,” an all-encompassing political philosophy that seeks to balance material progress with spiritual well-being.

The new government was to adopt the new constitution when it met in May 2008. This was to complete the historic transition from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy, albeit with considerable power still concentrated in the hands of Bhutan’s king.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Population data for Bhutan are unreliable. The Census of Bhutan, 2005, places the total population at 634,982. This figure,



however, excludes a large number of immigrants from Nepal. If the Nepalese and other minorities are included, the population may currently exceed 1.8 million. There are three major ethnic groups in Bhutan: the Bhutia (also Bhotia, or Bhoté), Nepalese, and Assamese. Bhutia comprise roughly 50% of Bhutan's population. The Nepalese, who include Rai, Gurung, Limbu, and other peoples, account for another 35%, while the Assamese and tribal groups make up 15% of the country's inhabitants.

Bhutan, with an area of 47,182 sq km (18,217 sq mi), lies in the eastern Himalayan Mountain Range. The country's location between India and Tibet gives it considerable strategic importance. Bhutan falls into three distinct geographic regions. In the south is a narrow strip of lowland known as the Duars Plain. The area receives between 500 cm and 760 cm (200–300 in) of rain a year. It is covered with dense subtropical forest and undergrowth and is hot, humid, and generally unhealthy. North of the Duars is the Inner Himalaya, a region of mountain spurs extending southwards from the main Himalayan Range. Between these spurs lie fertile valleys at elevations between 1,500 m and 2,700 m (5,000–9,000 ft). With a relatively moderate climate, these valleys support agriculture and relatively dense populations. Further to the north, along the Tibetan border, are the main ranges of the Great Himalaya. The highest peaks approach 7,300 m (24,000 ft), with Kula Kangra soaring to 7,554 m (24,784 ft). Below the high peaks are alpine meadows used for grazing yaks in the summer months.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Bhutan is Dzongkha, one of the many dialects of Tibetan spoken by the Bhutia people. In its written form, Dzongkha is identical with Tibetan. Some 40% of the Bhutan's population speak Dzongkha. Other languages spoken in Bhutan include Nepali, Assamese, and Gurung. Tsangla is a language of the Mon family spoken in eastern districts of the country. Some Hindi is found in southern areas that border India.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Bhutanese possess an extensive lore relating to events and personalities of the region's past. One tradition tells of an Indian prince who settled in Bhutan in the 8th century AD and invited the monk Padmasambhava to his kingdom. Known in Tibet as Guru Rimpoche ("Precious Teacher"), Padmasambhava was primarily responsible for introducing Buddhism into Bhutan. Other stories center on the 15th-century lama Pemalingpa, who is seen as an incarnation of Padmasambhava. Pemalingpa is known for composing various dances that are popular among the Bhutanese. Another heroic figure of Bhutan's past is Shabdrung, the lama who assumed the title of Dharma Raja in the 17th century and laid the political foundations of Bhutan State.

### 5 RELIGION

Approximately 75% of the Bhutanese are Buddhist. Mahayana Buddhism is the official religion of Bhutan. The dominant religious order in the country is the Red-Hat sect (Kargyupa). The Bon religion, which embraces pre-Buddhist shamanistic traditions, is also practiced in Bhutan. Beliefs in sorcerers, spirits, demons, and the need for exorcisms as undertaken in the "devil dances" are thus a part of everyday Bhutanese religious practices. Lamas skilled in rituals are used to perform the necessary religious observances. Animal sacrifice has been replaced in Bhutan by the offering of *torma*, ritual figures made from dough and butter. Hinduism, or the mix of Hinduism and Buddhism that typifies Nepali culture, is the religion of the Nepalese peoples of Bhutan. Some 5% of the population follow Islam.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Losar, the Tibetan New Year, is one of the most important festivals in Bhutan. It is celebrated in February with feasting and drinking. Folk dances, including masked dances, are performed and archery competitions held. A recent custom is the exchange of greeting cards between friends and relatives. Domchheo and Tsechu are annual religious festivals marked by worship ceremonies and performances of the ritual masked dances by monks. These are held at monasteries and *dzongs*, the forts around which many Bhutanese villages are built. Various other Buddhist and Hindu festivals are observed. The king's birthday (February 22) and the National Day of Bhutan (December 17) are celebrated as public holidays.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth and marriage in Bhutan are observed with a minimum of ritual, being a social or family event rather than a religious one. Funerals, on the other hand, are elaborate affairs. After a death, a lama is called in to extract the spirit (*sem*) from the

body and speed it on its way. The body is placed in a sitting position before an altar, on which various ritual objects—including *torma* (figurines made of dough and butter)—are placed. A lama leads the service for the dead, reciting passages from various Buddhist texts. Cremation is the usual form of disposal of the corpse, although bodies may be buried or thrown in a river. Rituals are performed for 49 days after death, and during this period an effigy of the deceased is kept in the house. The end of the mourning period is marked by a feast, as is the first anniversary of the death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A Bhutanese host greets a guest by bowing slightly, extending his or her hands towards the ground with palms facing the visitor, and moving the hand in a gesture inviting the guest into the house. The host may also say, “*Yala! Yala! Kuzu zangpola?*” (Hello! How do you do?). The guest, after responding in an appropriate manner, is then seated in the drawing room where she or he is served tea, beer, or other refreshments. Men and women mix and converse freely, without the restrictions that separate the sexes among other groups in South Asia.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Bhutan historically remained isolated from the outside world, and it was only in the 1960s that the country embarked on a path of modernization. As a result, Bhutan ranks among the lowest of the South Asian countries in terms of indices of development. Leading causes of death include respiratory tract infections, diarrhea and dysentery, various skin and parasitic infections, and malaria. Infant mortality rates are extremely high, running at over 70 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003. The natural increase of population is 2.17% per year (2006 est.).

Bhutan is a predominantly rural country, with nearly 90% of the population living in villages scattered throughout the country. Although there are a handful of small towns in Bhutan, only Thimphu, the capital, exceeds 20,000 inhabitants in size. Domestic architecture in the north is Tibetan in style, while southern areas show Indian influences in house types and construction. Living standards are generally low, with per capita income standing at us\$1,400 per year (2006 est.), making Bhutan one of the poorest countries in the world.

Bhutan’s mountainous terrain makes for difficult land communications. No railroads exist in the country, and there are only 2,418 km (1,502 mi) of road providing links with India. Bhutan’s national airline, Druk Air, links the town of Paro with India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Thailand.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The various ethnic groups that make up Bhutan’s population are endogamous, i.e., they marry within their own community. The age of marriage has been raised by the government to 16 years for women and 21 years for men. Although in the past marriages were arranged, more and more young couples are beginning to select partners for themselves on the basis of mutual attraction. Compared to the elaborate and expensive Hindu marriage ceremonies, Bhutanese marriages are relatively simple. A lama officiates at the religious ceremony. Offerings of *chang* (beer) are made to ghosts and spirits, and betel leaves, areca nuts, and fruits are distributed to those present at the wedding. Guests are provided with food and entertainment.

The Bhutanese are essentially monogamous. Polyandry (multiple husbands) has recently been abolished, and polygamy (multiple wives) has been restricted to a maximum of three wives per man. Bhutan is essentially a matriarchy, and a bride does not necessarily move into her husband’s household, as is common throughout much of the Indian subcontinent. The new husband may reside with his wife’s family if their need for labor warrants it. Alternatively, the new couple may set up their own household on their own plot of land. Divorce is permitted in Bhutanese society, although compensation is required from the party seeking the separation.

## 11 CLOTHING

Bhutanese dress consists of a long, loose robe (*ko*) that reaches the ankles. During the day, the robe is hoisted up and fastened at the waist by a woven belt so that it reaches the knees. At night, it is let down to the ankles. The coat fastens at the neck and, generally, during the day is left open. The sleeves are long and loose. Bhutanese men seldom wear a hat, but they sometimes wrap a scarf around the head at night. Shoes are rarely worn, though some men wear sandals, and those of the wealthier class use Tibetan-style woolen boots. Every man carries a long knife slung from his belt. When the *ko* is tied in the “up” position, it forms a pouch that is used for carrying objects.

Bhutanese women wear the *kira*, a woven dress that is fastened at each shoulder by silver buckles. A woven belt is tied around the waist. Women commonly wear necklaces of coral and turquoise, strung together with silver amulets. The hair is usually cut short.

## 12 FOOD

Rice is the main food in Bhutan and is eaten with meat whenever this is available. Though most Bhutanese are Buddhists, they are nonvegetarian and eat beef, pork, goat, chicken, and eggs. A typical Bhutanese meal might consist of *thugpa*, a meat soup prepared with herbs, rice (of the round, red variety), and a meat curry or omelet. Sweet rice (white rice cooked in milk and sugar) is served on special occasions. Tea, made with salt and butter, is a Bhutanese staple. Beer (*chang*) is made from cereals and served to guests and friends, as well as being offered to the gods.

At high altitudes where rice is not cultivated, barley and buckwheat are grown. The cereals are ground, then roasted or fried, and stored for future use. Fried corn powder is as popular among the Bhutanese as *tsampa* (roasted ground barley) is among Tibetans. Milk is scarce and of poor quality, although a hard cheese is made from yak milk.

## 13 EDUCATION

No formal schools existed in Bhutan before the early 1960s, except for those associated with religious institutions. Despite a concerted effort on the part of the government, and especially King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, to improve education, Bhutan lags behind other South Asian countries in its educational achievements. A modern educational system was introduced into Bhutan only in the 1960s. Although in 2004 education was made compulsory up to the age of 11, only about 73% of primary-school-age children attend school, and this figure drops to 35% at the secondary-school level. Education, however, is a major priority of Bhutan’s development programs and

there now exist over 350 educational institutions in the country. These include The Royal University of Bhutan, founded in 2003, which was established to consolidate the management of tertiary education in the country. It is a federated university with 10 member colleges spread across the Kingdom. Literacy among adults now stands at about 47%. International organizations such as the World Bank and UNICEF are involved in promoting educational projects in Bhutan.

Bhutanese seeking higher education or professional training have to turn to foreign educational institutions. Most Bhutanese students being educated abroad receive technical training in India, Singapore, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), and the United States. English-speaking countries attracted the majority of Bhutanese students. The vast majority of Bhutanese students return to their homeland.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bhutan's culture is deeply rooted in Tibetan Buddhism. The country began as a theocracy (i.e., its ruler was a religious leader), and even today lamas are highly influential in the affairs of the country. The *dzongs* (forts) and monasteries remain centers of political, economic, social, and religious life. It is here that festivals are celebrated with religious music and masked dances, and lamas continue the traditions of Buddhist learning. Religion finds architectural expression in numerous *chorten* (relic mounds) and temples, while dzongs are often patterned after the Potala, the Dalai Lama's palace in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. Religious objects such as the *mandala* (Buddhist Wheel of Life) and *thanka* (a painted religious scroll) are works of art in their own right.

#### 15 WORK

Bhutan is essentially an agrarian country, with 67% of its labor force involved in subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. Much of the land is mountainous or heavily forested, and less than 3% of the country's area is under permanent cultivation. Rice, wheat, maize, and millet are the main crops grown in the country. Fruit production is important, with apples, peaches, plums, and apricots among the varieties grown. Livestock raised in the region include cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, and the yak, a bovine adapted to high altitudes.

Although Bhutan restricts the number of tourists allowed into the country in order to limit foreign influences, tourism has great potential. The tourist dollar accounts for about 1.6% of the gross national product, but this figure may be expected to increase in the future. Electricity, timber and wood products, fruits and vegetables, and cement are important export items. India is Bhutan's major trade partner.

#### 16 SPORTS

The Bhutanese are well known for their archery skills, and archery competitions are commonly held at the time of festivals and national holidays.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Bhutanese have limited access to modern forms of entertainment. In June 2000 FM radio service became available for western Bhutan with the inauguration of the main FM station at Dobchula and one relay station at Takti in the south. The

FM service was extended to central Bhutan in January 2001 and the rest of the country in 2005.

In 1989, in an attempt to preserve Bhutan's culture, the government banned the viewing of foreign television by ordering all TV antennas in the country to be dismantled, but in June 1999 permitted television—and later, the Internet—into the country. The last country in the world to permit television within its borders, Bhutan—which had remained virtually unchanged for centuries—was suddenly bombarded with 46 cable channels. The introduction of television into Bhutan was sparked by the World Cup Soccer Final of France in 1998. The 3-0 victory of the home side over Brazil was watched by thousands on a big screen in Bhutan's National Square. TV in Bhutan was such a success that a year later, on the 25th anniversary of his coronation, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk decided to allow the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), founded in 1973, to broadcast TV programming. However, the vast majority of Bhutan's population today (some 70%) do not even have electricity, let alone access to television.

Now, both cable TV, the Internet, and cell phone service are available in Bhutan, providing access to the outside world. With its new satellite television service (launched in February 2006), BBS's programming is now received in almost 40 Asian countries—from Turkey in the West to Indonesia in South East Asia.

The impact of access to TV screens has changed Bhutanese society considerably, especially one that, as a matter of policy, attempts to preserve and conserve traditional values. The editor of Bhutan's only regular newspaper, the bi-weekly *Kuensel*, explained that the thinking in the country is that as it will never be a military or economic power, its strength must be its unique society. He believes that television represents a direct threat to this. Some observers have noted an increase in violence among children and a rise in crime, while others note that the more the Bhutanese are exposed to globalization, the more likely they are to lose their own culture. Such concerns have led to the regulation of the industry and control what goes out over the airwaves through acts such as the 2006 Information, Communication, and Media Act, which bans the broadcasting of material (e.g. pornography and the U.S. wrestling series WWE, both of which, it is believed, leads to violence among Bhutanese children) thought to be detrimental to Bhutanese society.

The government publishes a bi-weekly newspaper, *Kuensel*, which faces competition from two other private newspapers the *Bhutan Times* and the *Bhutan Observer*, which began publication in 2006. But with the country's low literacy rate (47% in 2003), the papers have a very small circulation. Religious festivals and folk traditions such as singing and dancing are the primary forms of entertainment and recreation.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Bhutanese women are skilled at weaving and make their own clothing, bedding, tablecloths, floor coverings, and items for religious use. Embroidery is a favorite art. Much effort goes into making costumes and masks for the ritual dances performed at festivals. Smiths excel in working gold, silver, brass, and other metals.



*Bhutanese men, in traditional attire, engage in archery in Thimphu, Bhutan. Archery is one of the few sports to which Bhutan sends a team to the Olympics. (AP Images/Sherwin Crasto)*

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Bhutanese live in the least-developed country in all of South Asia. Despite efforts at modernization since the 1960s, poverty, lack of potable water, inadequate health care, illiteracy, and difficulties in transportation remain serious problems. Bhutan is heavily dependent on foreign aid in its efforts to improve the life of its people. Recently, ethnic tensions between the Bhutanese and Nepalese minority have created a problem in the country. Mindful of what happened in nearby Sikkim, where Indian immigrants eventually outnumbered the native Sikkimese and voted to accede to India, Bhutan has acted to restrict immigration from Nepal. Despite this, some estimates place the Nepalese population as high as 40% of Bhutan's total. The Nepalese see themselves as second-class citizens, resent government restrictions on them, and demand a greater say in the affairs of the country. They also object to government efforts to develop a Bhutanese "national identity" based on a Bhutia model.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Bhutan enjoy considerable freedom and equal opportunity both in government and society in general. This is attributed mainly to the strong influence of Buddhism in every aspect of Bhutanese religion, culture, and tradition. In Mahay-

ana Buddhism, male and female are considered equal. Women are treated as equal to men under Bhutan law. The law of inheritance, for example, reserves equal rights for all children, irrespective of sex and age. Both men and women enjoy equal freedom to choose their partners. In contrast to other South Asian countries, parents in Bhutan do not have strong gender preferences for their children and treat girls and boys equally.

However, although officially the government encourages greater participation of women in political and administrative life, male members of the traditional aristocracy dominate the social system. Economic development has increased opportunities for women to participate in fields such as medicine, both as physicians and nurses; teaching; and administration. Reflecting the dominance of males in society, girls were outnumbered three to two in primary and secondary-level schools.

Women play a significant role in the agricultural work force, where they outnumber men, who were leaving for the service sector and other urban industrial and commercial activities. Up to 90% of all Bhutanese women are involved in agricultural work (70% of the land registered in Bhutan is owned by women), although this figure is decreasing as more opportunities become available for women in other sectors of the economy.

The government founded the National Women's Association of Bhutan in 1981 primarily to improve the socioeconomic



status of women, particularly those in rural areas. The association, at its inaugural session, declared that it would not push for equal rights for women because the women of Bhutan had already come to “enjoy equal status with men politically, economically, and socially.”

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BHUTIA

**PRONUNCIATION:** BOOT-ee-uh

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bhot; Bhotia; Bhute

**LOCATION:** Bhutan, Nepal, and India (southern Himalayan region)

**POPULATION:** Over 1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Bhutia; Tibetan; Hindi, Nepali

**RELIGION:** Forms of Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Bhutanese; Buddhists; Hindus; Vol. 4: Nepalis; People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

*Bhutia* (also Bhot, Bhotia, Bhute) is a generic term that identifies several socially unrelated groups of India's northern mountain rim. The name *Bhutia*, thought to be derived from “Bhot” or “Bod,” which means “Tibet,” reflects the Bhutia's origins. The Bhutia are believed to have emigrated southward from Tibet in the 9th century AD or sometime after and settled in the Himalayan mountain ranges along the Indo-Tibetan border. Although they are Tibetan in origin and retain Tibetan cultural traits, many Bhutia groups have adopted elements of Hindu culture. Bhutia society is transitional, representing a blending of Hindu-dominated South Asian and Buddhist Central Asian cultures. Although the various Bhutia groups of the Himalayas exhibit social, cultural, and religious differences, they do have certain features in common. All live in a mountain habitat and traditionally have been involved in trade across the Himalayas between South Asia and Tibet.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Bhutias occupy a narrow belt of mountainous territory that lies along on the southern flanks of the Himalayas. This zone extends from the kingdom of Bhutan in the eastern Himalayas, through Nepal and the northern mountain states of India, to the mountains and plateaus of the Ladakh region of Kashmir. Population data for the Bhutia are unreliable, although their numbers exceed 1 million. They make up approximately 50% of Bhutan's population (approximately 400,000), and form minorities in Nepal (200,000) and India (200,000).

The Bhutia in the Garhwal region of India are the focus of this discussion. They live in three mountain districts known collectively as Uttarakhand (in 2008, the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of Uttar Pradesh became the 27th Indian state, known as Uttarakhand. Raputs form the main element in the state's population). In the north lie the main ranges of the Himalayas, with peaks reaching over 7,600 m (25,000 ft) above sea level. Much of this area is under permanent snow and totally uninhabitable. Bhutia settlements are found at altitudes up to around 4,500 m (15,000 ft) in valleys carved into the mountains by streams flowing in a general southwesterly direction. Winter conditions at these elevations are severe, and the Bhutia spend this time of year in the lower valleys.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Bhutia speak various dialects of the Bhutia language, a member of the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The dialects found in Uttarakhand belong

to the Central Bhutia group, and include Rankas, Chaudansi, and Darmi. Some Bhutia communities, such as the Joharis of Pithoragarh District, have forgotten their own dialects and use the language of their southern neighbors. All Bhutia groups are multi-lingual and know Tibetan, local hill (Pahari) dialects, and Hindi as well as their own tongue.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

All Bhutia groups in the Himalayas have their own folklore and traditions. In Uttarakhand, both the landscape and folk culture are dominated by Nanda Devi. At 7,817 m (25,645 ft), the mountain Nanda Devi towers over the other peaks in the region. Like many other Himalayan peaks, the mountain is identified with a deity, the Hindu goddess Nanda Devi. For more than 1,000 years, central Himalayan rulers have legitimized their authority by claiming a relationship with Nanda Devi. Nanda Devi, a form of Shiva's consort Parvati, is the focus of a local cult and figures prominently in the life of the Bhutia and other peoples in the region. Folk songs are devoted to Nanda Devi, pilgrimages made in her name, and the goddess is honored at the Nandashtami festival.

#### 5 RELIGION

Bhutia religion varies according to the specific Bhutia community involved. In Bhutan, for example, Bhutias are followers of the Tibetan form of Mahayana Buddhism. In the Central Himalayas, however, only the Jad Bhutia profess Buddhism. Other groups are Hindu, or their religion reflects a mixture of Lamaistic Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism. Hinduized groups such as the Johari Bhutia use the services of Brahmans while performing *puja* worship to the Hindu deities. Gabala, the god of trade, is among the most popular deities and is worshiped along with other Hindu deities such as Mahadev (Shiva) and Nanda Devi. Some gods (e.g., Saai and Laandey) are exclusive to the Bhutia, who also have their own clan deities. Ancestor worship is an important part of Bhutia life, and Bhutias also believe in ghosts and spirits. When disease or other misfortune befalls a community, a magician-priest becomes possessed and identifies the cause of the trouble. The villagers then perform the appropriate rites or sacrifices to appease the offended deity or spirit.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

All the Hindu festivals are celebrated by the Bhutia of the Central Himalayas. Some have particular significance and are the occasion for religious fairs. An annual fair is held at Bageshwar in mid-January. Bageshwar lies at the confluence of the rivers Gomti and Sarju, and participants take ritual baths at this sacred place and offer water to Shiva in the Bagnath Temple. Bhutia traders and customers from the entire region attend the fair to buy and sell woolen clothing, shawls, carpets, ponies and other livestock, and miscellaneous goods. Some festivals that are exclusively Bhutia in nature center on the community's seasonal migrations. At the Lapsa festival, which falls in October when the Bhutia are leaving their summer quarters, prayers are offered to the goddess Nanda Devi for a safe journey down the mountains. Bikhid and Asadh Shankranti are festivals related to the spring migration to the summer pastures. The Losar, the Tibetan New Year, is also an important festival celebrated by the Bhutia community. Losoong, which



marks Sikkimese New Year, is celebrated in December by Bhutias in Sikkim.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Bhutias of Uttarakhand show a considerable degree of Hinduization in their life-cycle rituals. Horoscopes may be drawn up by Brahmans, and a naming ceremony is held about three weeks after birth. Male children undergo the *mundan* (head-shaving) ceremony when they are around three or four years old. Infants are carried around on the backs of their mothers or elder sisters, tied in place with a length of cloth. For the seasonal migrations between winter and summer quarters, infants in arms are usually placed in a cylindrical basket strapped to their mothers' backs. As soon as they reach six or seven years old, however, Bhutia children are expected to assume a role in the annual migration of the family and its herds.

The Bhutia cremate their dead, except for children and those who died of tuberculosis, smallpox, or leprosy. It is customary for the men of the community to each carry a log of wood to the cremation ground for the funeral pyre. The final funeral ceremony, called *dudhung*, is usually performed in the family's summer residence. As traditional customs disappear, the *dudhung* is giving way to the Hindu forms of *sraddha* rites. The *sraddha* is an important ceremony involving numerous rituals, a feast, and the giving of gifts to Brahmans in the name of the deceased. It is believed that if the rites are not performed properly, it will adversely affect the soul of the departed.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A traditional institution of the Bhutias is the *Rang-Bang*, a meeting place or dormitory for unmarried youth. Young girls and boys from the village (and surrounding villages) gather in the evenings in a vacant house for dancing, drinking, and music. A considerable degree of sexual license is permitted. Couples pair off and spend the night together, going their own ways in the morning. Such meetings sometimes lead to courtship and marriage. Care is taken not to violate any taboos such as having sexual relations with a member of one's own clan. Today, the *Rang-Bang* is rapidly disappearing as an institution under the increasing influence of Hinduism and Hindu social values.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Bhutias in Uttarakhand typically have two settlements, one for summer and one for winter. The main village is the summer settlement, situated at elevations between 3,500 and 4,500 m (11,500–15,000 ft), where the community lives from May to October. These villages serve as bases for pasturing animals in summer and trade across the mountains into Tibet. Women, children, and livestock are left there while the men travel to the Tibetan market centers. Houses are built with stone walls and slate roofs and set in the middle of a patch of cultivated land. The harsh winters in the highland valleys force the Bhutia to descend to lower elevations for part of the year. They spend November to March in villages situated at altitudes between 1,500 and 2,500 m (5,000–8,000 ft). These winter quarters are not exclusively Bhutia settlements. Bhutia live in villages alongside Brahmans, Rajputs, Shilpkar, and other castes of the area. The more affluent among the Bhutia have both houses fully furnished, but most people must transport all of their household goods between the two residences every time they move.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Bhutias of Uttarakhand are divided into eight subgroups based on factors such as religion, territory, and dialect. Each subgroup is again divided into clans, lineages, and sublineages, which serve to regulate marriage. The Johari Bhutia, for example, are defined on a territorial basis (they inhabit the Johar Valley). They marry within the Johari community, but are divided into 14 exogamous clans. Being the most Hinduized of the Bhutias in the region, they also have three endogamous social classes (Nitwal, Bharet, and Kunkiya) that function much like Hindu castes. The Kunkiya are regarded as ritually impure by the Nitwal and Bharet groups, who do not interdine or intermarry with them. Cross-cousin (i.e., father's sister's daughter, or mother's brother's daughter) marriages are preferred. Formerly, Bhutias had considerable freedom in selecting partners, but arranged marriages are becoming more common. "Bride-price" is paid and marriages solemnized according to Hindu rites. Women have traditionally had a considerable degree of freedom and equality in Bhutia society. However, as Bhutia communities come more under the influence of Hinduism, women are slipping into the lower status assigned them by Hindu society.

## 11 CLOTHING

The dress of Bhutias varies throughout the region, although many groups resemble the Tibetans in their appearance. In

Bhutan, Bhutia men wear long, loose-sleeved robes (*ko*) tied at the waist. Women wear the *kira*, a woven dress fastened at each shoulder by silver buckles. In Uttarakhand, as elsewhere in Bhutia country, clothes are of wool and usually made at home by Bhutia women. Male dress consists of tight-fitting trousers, a long coat that fastens on one side of the neck, woolen boots, and a white turban. The turban is sometimes replaced by a round "hill" cap or, at higher altitudes, by the warmer Tibetan-style hat. The traditional female dress is the *Chyung-bala*. The *bala* is a skirt, and the *chyunga* is a tunic-like smock that is open down the sides to the waist. A full-sleeved blouse is worn under the *chyunga*. A pair of embroidered boots and a white sash worn around the waist completes the outfit. A white, hood-like cap, multi-colored at the back and reaching down to the waist, is worn on the head. Jewelry includes earrings, nose rings, and an array of necklaces and chains around the neck.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of Bhutias is rice, supplemented by millet, barley, wheat, and, in some areas, potatoes. Bhutias, whether Buddhist or Hindu, are nonvegetarian and eat beef, pork, and mutton. A typical meal in Bhutan might consist of *thugpa*, a meat soup prepared with herbs, red rice, and a meat curry or omelet. The Johari Bhutia of Uttarakhand have abandoned beef-eating, but still relish other meats. Lentils and vegetables, along with chutneys, are commonly taken at meals. The local version of Tibetan tea—made with tea, butter, and salt—is known as *namkin chai*. The butter is derived from the milk of goats, zebu cattle, and the yak. Bhutias can drink alcohol, both liquor distilled from rice and molasses and fermented rice-beer. Chang, a beer made from millet or other grains, is popular. Liquor is also offered when worshiping spirits and local deities.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education levels and literacy vary among the numerous Bhutia groups of the Himalayan region. Bhutan lags behind India and Nepal in the area of education, literacy among Bhutanese adults in Bhutan standing at 47% (2005). Compared to this, literacy among the Bhutias of Sikkim is 67.9% (according to the 2001 Census of India), above the norm among the Scheduled Tribes of India. In Uttarakhand, where literacy in the state stands at 72% (Census of India, 2001), the attitude of the Bhutias to education is positive, and the literacy rate is higher than the average for tribal groups in India. Nonetheless, the yearly migrations are disruptive to education, and drop-out rates are high, especially among the children of lower-income Bhutias.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Many Bhutia customs reflect the influence of Tibetan culture on Bhutia life. In the days of Tibetan trade, the Bhutias were exposed to *lamas* and their teachings. They would build "Mana Walls," stone walls with the Buddhist mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* inscribed on the boulders, for the safety of the village and its inhabitants. Bhutias believe that this mantra has great powers to protect against evil spirits and misfortune. The Bhutias are also greatly influenced by the Tibetan dragon symbol, which features as a prominent design in their handicrafts. Like virtually all Himalayan peoples, the Bhutia have a tradition of folk songs in which the mountains figure prominently. Dancing is popular, with both sexes usually participating. Some

dances are performed at the time of weddings, and others contribute to the evening's festivities at *Rang-Bang* gatherings.

### 15 WORK

Bhutias were traditionally engaged in pastoralism and trade across India's northern border. They would carry food grains, *gur* (molasses), utensils, clothing, woolen goods, and assorted manufactured items north into Tibet. There they would barter these goods for salt, wool, borax, musk, and yak-tails. The closing of the Tibetan border in the 1960s destroyed this trade. Bhutias were forced to turn to cultivation, their secondary occupation. In the Uttarakhand region, however, Bhutia land holdings were commonly too small for self-sufficiency, and many people had to seek other employment. Today, about one-third of the area's Bhutias are engaged in agriculture, and a similar number are involved in weaving and embroidery as a cottage industry. Some have turned to manual labor, and only a very small percentage of Bhutia continue in their traditional occupation of trade and commerce.

### 16 SPORTS

There are no sports that can be identified with the Bhutia community in general. However, certain groups have developed individual skills. The Bhutanese, for example, are well known for their archery skills, and they stage competitions for festivals and national holidays.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

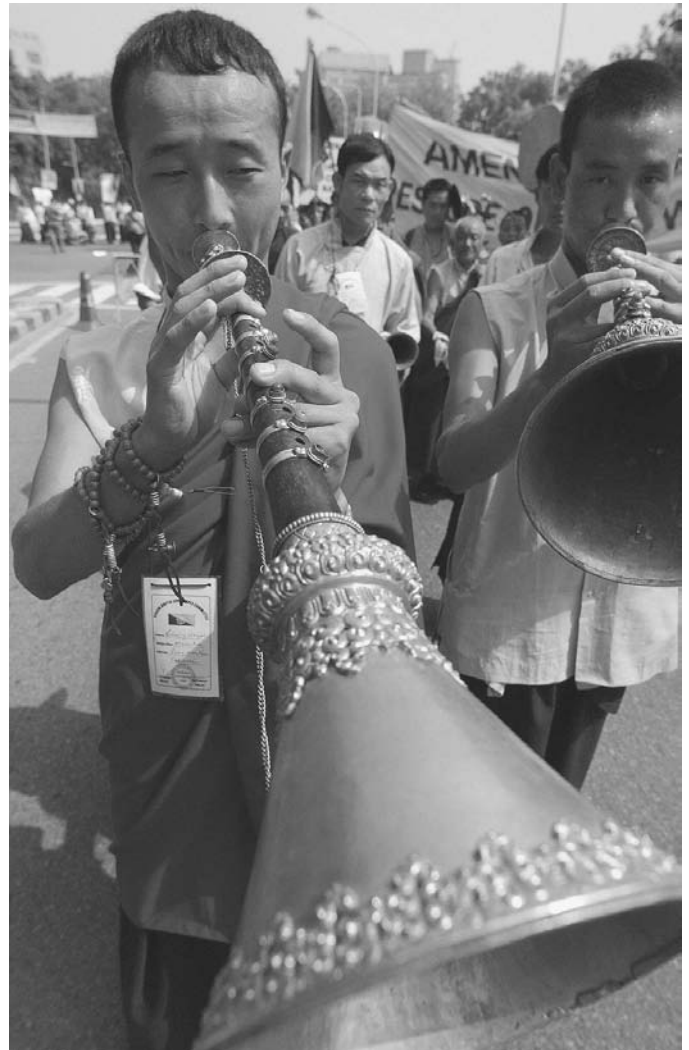
Living mostly in isolated villages and leading semi-nomadic lives, few Bhutias have access to modern forms of entertainment. However, their lives are enriched by the activities associated with religious fairs and festivals, social events, and folk traditions such as dancing and singing.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Bhutia women in the Central Himalayas have a reputation as excellent weavers and embroiderers. Not only do they make their own clothes, but in the past they traded their blankets, rugs, and shawls to Tibet. Today, many women continue to produce these items for local markets as part of a thriving cottage industry.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Bhutia communities are found in the Himalayas from Bhutan to Ladakh. Each group faces problems that reflect its specific social, cultural, economic, and political context. The Bhutia, for example, are well aware of the deforestation and environmental degradation that is rampant in the Himalayan foothills. Bhutia in Uttar Pradesh are deeply involved in the Chipko movement, a popular environmental movement aimed at preventing the cutting down of trees. Historically, all Bhutia groups depended on trade with Tibet. The political events that brought an end to this trade have resulted in profound changes in the life of the Bhutias of Uttarakhand. They do not have the land to support themselves and so must purchase food grains. They have also seen a decline in the numbers of their livestock. The cutting off of wool supplies from Tibet has affected their weaving industry, leading to impoverishment for many. The plight of the Bhutia was recognized by the state government, which designated them a Scheduled Tribe in 1967. Many Bhutia



*Monks of the Bhutia community in India blow traditional ceremonial horns during a demonstration in New Delhi, India. (Prakash Singh/AFP/Getty Images)*

tia have abandoned their traditional occupations and turned to labor, office work, and government service.

In 2008 Baichung Bhutia, well-known international soccer player from Sikkim and currently captain of India's soccer team, was solicited to run with the Olympic torch in India, but he refused to carry the torch to show support for the Tibetan independence movement. "I sympathize with the Tibetan cause. I'm against violence but I thought I should stand by the Tibetan people in their fight," Bhutia said. His actions won him praise from the Tibetan community and its supporters in India.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Specific issues relating to gender vary considerably among the Bhutia. For example, Buddhism treats women as equal to men, and so Bhutia women in Bhutan, where the official religion is Buddhism, fare differently than their counterparts in the Indian Himalayas, especially among those groups who have adopted Hinduism. In the Indian state of Sikkim, for instance,

though agricultural chores are shared by men and women on a relatively equal basis, women are primarily responsible for taking care of poultry, hauling water, cooking, and other household chores. Bhutias are classed as a Scheduled Tribe in most states in India and, as such, are not subject to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. Custody of children and of household property is determined by customary law, which relies on elders to resolve custody issues. Child marriage and the dowry system are unknown among the Bhutia, though daughters have no rights of inheritance to their fathers' properties, even when there are no sons. All land is registered in the male's name, Bhutia society being patrilineal in nature. Bhutia women who marry outside of their ethnic group forfeit their rights to any property.

Bhutia women in Sikkim tend to have benefited best from access to education with over 60% of them being classed as literate, whereas in Ladakh, where the status of Bhutia women is generally low, many women have never attended school at all.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# **BRAHMAN S**

**PRONUNCIATION:** BRAH-muhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Brahmin

**LOCATION:** India; Nepal

**POPULATION:** 65–70 million

**LANGUAGE:** The language of their geographic region; Sanskrit for religious purposes

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; Vol. 4: People of India

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Brahmans are members of the first and highest-ranked of the four *varnas* or classes of traditional Hindu society. The name *Brahman* is frequently spelled “Brahmin” to avoid any confusion between the caste, the supreme being of the Hindus (*Brahma*), and the sacred scriptures known as the *Brahmanas*. In ancient times, Brahmans were above all a priestly caste. Their duties included daily recitation from the *Vedas*, performing religious rituals, conducting sacrifices, and studying and teaching the sacred books of Hinduism. It was almost inevitable, given their control of ritual sacrifice and claim to be the exclusive guardians of sacred knowledge, that Brahmans should rise to a dominant position in the life of the Hindu people. Wherever Hindus went, as during their expansion into Southeast Asia in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, Brahmans followed. (However, some scholars have argued Brahmans were brought to Southeast Asia by local rulers to help set up the administrative structures of their states). Even today, their former presence in the region can be seen in the Brahmans and caste system found on the Indonesian island of Bali.

Brahmans have faced periodic challenges to their power. The reformist religions of Jainism and Buddhism, for example, were founded on the basis of a society without castes or priests. The conversion of Ashoka (273–232 BC), in particular, to Buddhism was a serious setback to the Brahmans in India. However, the 5th century AD saw the beginnings of a Hindu revival that raised Brahmans to a position of social dominance. This was based on three features of Brahman society: a hostility to all languages not Sanskrit, an intolerance for all religions not Hindu, and a deep prejudice towards all castes not Brahman. From this point on, Brahmans openly claimed superiority in all aspects of life. This state of affairs continued for several centuries, until the Brahmans' dominance was threatened by the introduction of Islam and its egalitarian ideals at the end of the 12th century. Western ideas, introduced by missionaries and social reformers, and ideals of democracy have acted to reduce the power and prestige of the Brahmans in recent times.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Brahmans make up about 6% of all Hindus, or roughly 65 to 70 (2007 est.) million people. Rather than being a single caste, Brahmans form a bewildering array of subgroups. Each of these can be considered a caste (*jati*) in its own right in that it is endogamous (i.e., marriage occurs within the group) and subject to restrictions on interdining. The orthodox Brahman from Malabar in South India, for example, cannot eat with the orthodox Brahman from Kashmir. Today, there are over 1,800 subdivisions of Brahmans. The Brahman castes are generally

divided into two broad divisions: those of northern India (*Pancha Gauda*), and those of the south (*Pancha Dravida*). Each of these divisions is further divided into five categories. The *Pancha Gauda* categories are the Sarasvata Brahmins of the Sindh, Punjab and Kashmir, the Kanyakuba Brahmins of Kanauj, the Gauda Brahmins of Bihar and Bengal, the Utkala Brahmins of northern Orissa, and the Maithila Brahmins of the areas of Bihar and Nepal north of the River Ganges. These groups include both high caste groups (e.g. the Kashmiri Pandits) and those of lower ranking (e.g. the Chithu and Prot [Purohit] Brahmins, also of Kashmir). Although in any given area Brahmins are ranked as the highest caste, there is no relationship between the Brahmin castes of different regions. The Brahmin castes are even ranked into a hierarchy among themselves, depending on factors such as occupation and descent.

Although Brahmins are found throughout India and Nepal, they are not spread evenly over the subcontinent. Their highest concentration is in Kashmir, where they form 35% of the Hindu population. Around 12% of Hindus in the upper Ganges plains are Brahmins. However, the numbers of Brahmins drop dramatically in areas distant from the Aryan heartland. In Assam, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu, for example, they make up less than 3% of the Hindu population.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Brahmins speak the language of their geographic region. Thus, the Kashmiri Pandit speaks Kashmiri, the Nambudiri Brahmin of Kerala speaks Malayalam, and the Ayyar Brahmin from Tamil Nadu speaks Tamil. The sacred language of Hinduism, however, is Sanskrit. Brahmins need to know Sanskrit to carry out their priestly functions. There is, however, considerable variation in the level of the Brahmin's knowledge of Sanskrit. A Vedic scholar may have extensive knowledge of Sanskrit and Sanskrit literature. On the other hand, a temple functionary may be illiterate and have learned the Sanskrit passages he needs to perform his duties by rote.

### 4 FOLKLORE

In Vedic legend, Purusha was a giant being, representing the original primeval male. He was thought to be a form of Brahma, who created the universe. The *Rig Veda*, the earliest of the Vedas, tells of the sacrifice of Purusha that served as the model for all future sacrifice. The four castes (*varnas*) of Hinduism were created from Purusha's severed body. The Brahmin was created from his mouth for the purposes of teaching humankind. The *khsatriya* came from Purusha's arms, the *vaishya* from his thighs, and the *sudra* from his feet. It is this origin from Purusha's (i.e., Brahma's) mouth that underlies the Brahmin's claim to superiority over all other castes in Hindu society.

### 5 RELIGION

Brahmins are Hindu and embrace the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism. These include concepts of the soul (*atman*), the illusion that surrounds one's physical existence (*maya*), the cycle of rebirths (*samsara*), the law of *karma*, the pursuit of righteous behavior (*dharma*), the philosophy of nonviolence (*ahimsa*), and the total release (*mokhsa*) of the soul from the physical world. They also include belief in the authority of the Vedas, in the caste system, and in the superiority of the Brahmin caste. Beyond this, however, Brahmins may follow differ-



ent philosophical systems. The Smarta Brahmins, for example, are followers of the Smarta sect of Hinduism. They are orthodox, but in their worship ceremonies they invoke five deities (Shiva, Vishnu, Suraj, Ganpati, and Shakti). In contrast, the Shri Vaishnava Brahmins of the Tamil region exclusively worship the Hindu god Vishnu. There are almost as many differences in Brahmin religious customs and practices as there are Brahmin castes in the country.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Brahmins celebrate all of the major festivals of the Hindu calendar. Of particular importance to Brahmins, however, is the festival of Shravani-purnima, the full moon of the month of Shravana (July-August). Sometimes this is known as "Coconut Day" because people commonly throw coconuts into the ocean and rivers. It is a day on which Brahmins (and other high-caste Hindus) renew the sacred thread. For many Brahmins, this is the beginning of the sacred year, and the rituals they perform on this day serve to purify them of the sins of the past year.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

All periods of transition and change in Hindu life are held to be times of danger and are accompanied by rituals to counteract evil influences. These rituals (*samskara*, in Sanskrit) are set out in the Vedas and other Hindu texts. At one time they numbered over 300, but now have been reduced to around 9 or 16 (there is disagreement among scholars as to the exact num-

ber of rites that should be performed). All Hindus perform these rituals, no matter what their caste, although they are often more elaborate for Brahmins. The Maithila Brahmins of northern Bihar, however, observe no pre-birth rituals. Mother and child are viewed as ceremonially unclean until the *Chhat-tihar*, the ritual purification undertaken on the sixth day. During infancy, rituals to protect the child from black magic, the first-feeding ceremony, and the head-shaving ceremony (*mundan*) are performed. One of the most important rites for the Maithila Brahmin is the *upanayana* ceremony, the donning of the sacred thread. This is a ritualistic rebirth (hence the term “twice-born”) by which the male is initiated to the full status of a Brahmin.

In theory, soon after the sacred thread ceremony, a boy should enter the first of the four stages (*asramas*) into which a Brahmin’s life is divided. He lives as a student in the house of his teacher, studying the Vedas and the sacred law. Around the age of 30, he should return to his father’s house to marry, raise a family, and become a householder (the second *asrama*). Then, having raised his children and fulfilled his family obligations, a Brahmin is free to seek his own salvation. During the third stage, the Brahmin leaves his family for an austere life of discipline and meditation in the forest. Finally, he progresses to the stage of *Sannyasa*. A *sannyasin* is an ascetic who has given up his possessions and renounced the world. He has no home, begs for his food, and wanders the country awaiting the ultimate release of the soul from the physical body. Few Brahmins follow the ideal of the four *asramas* today, although individuals who have become *sannyasin* may be seen today at Hindu pilgrimage centers and holy places across the land.

Maithila Brahmin death rituals involve the custom of *Godan*, or “gift of a cow.” When possible, just before death a Brahmin worships a cow and gives it away as a gift to a near relative. This is seen as essential, as the cow will carry the dead Brahmin across the river of blood and filth (*Vaitarani*) that separates the earth from the land of the dead (this rite is described in the Vedic literature). The body is placed on a bamboo stretcher and carried out to be cremated. The Maithila Brahmins have no common cremation ground, each family having its own place, usually in a mango garden, for the burning of bodies. Water is sprinkled on the ground to thwart evil spirits. The corpse is bathed, dressed in a white shroud, and placed on the funeral pyre with the head pointing south. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, places five pieces of wood on the pyre, walks around it three times, and then sets it alight. All the participants in the funeral ceremony take a ritual bath in a river or pond before returning home. Before entering the house, they are required to touch iron, stone, and fire, and then tear a chili into three pieces. Various rituals are performed in the following days, including the gathering up of the bones and ashes and placing them in the sacred Ganges River. A grand feast, at which fish and meat are served and to which a minimum of 11 Brahmins have to be invited, is held on the thirteenth day to complete the *sraddha* (funeral) rites. If the funeral rites are not performed correctly, it is believed the soul of the departed will become a ghost (*preta*) and never obtain salvation.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Brahmins use the standard Hindu greetings, “*Namaste*” or “*Namaskar*,” accompanied by the joining together of hands in front of the body. Orthodox Brahmins concerned with ritu-

al purity take great care to avoid physical contact with people of lower castes, and, thus, rarely venture into crowded public places or use public transport. Even the shadow of an Untouchable falling on a Brahmin is polluting and requires ritual purification.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of Brahmins reflect factors such as occupation, economic status, and regional culture. The Anavil Brahmins, who are relatively affluent landowners in Gujarat, have a very different lifestyle from the Ganga-patra, a Brahmin who guides pilgrims through the sacred city of Varanasi (Banaras). The pilgrim-guide also leads an existence quite different from that of the Vedic scholar who lives and works in Varanasi, the holiest of the Hindus’ holy cities. In general, the material culture of Brahmins (e.g., settlement patterns, house type, household belongings, and furniture) conforms to regional cultural patterns.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Brahmins generally follow regional systems of kinship and marriage, although considerable diversity exists in their practices. Among the Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala, for example, only the eldest son was traditionally allowed to marry. Like all Hindu castes, Brahmins are divided into exogamous *gotras*. One marries outside one’s *gotra*, but there are also complex rules delineating other *gotras* and degrees of relationship that are taboo. Marriages between persons of the same name is usually prohibited because they are considered to be related. The matter is further complicated by the fact that many Brahmins will not marry outside their own sect. Brahmins have been known to practice hypergamy, i.e., members of a caste will accept daughters from a caste of lower status but will not give their daughters in return. Marriages are, of course, arranged, and the forms of marriage available to the Brahmin are clearly set out in the sacred texts. The extended family with patrilineal residence is the norm for Brahmin families. Most Brahmin groups do not recognize divorce or widow remarriage.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional dress for the Brahmin man is the *dhoti*, a single piece of white cotton wrapped around the waist for half its length, and then drawn between the legs and tucked into the waist behind. There are regional variations in the way the *dhoti* may be tied. The chest is usually left bare. A turban, often red in color, may be worn by the cultivating castes. Any items made of bone or leather are regarded as unclean and are shunned. Women wear the typical Hindu dress of *sari* and *choli* (bodice) and share in their countrywomen’s love of jewelry. Orthodox Brahmins continue to wear their traditional clothing, though in many areas the cultivating castes have adopted local styles of dress.

## 12 FOOD

Geography and ecology set the broad outlines of the Brahmins’ diet. In the drier northern and western regions, cereals (wheat, millet, barley) made into flat, unleavened breads (*roti*) are the staple food. This is eaten with spiced vegetable dishes, pulses (*dal*), and fruits. Rice (*chawal*) replaces the cereals in the more humid east and south.



*Thai officials prepare for rice planting during royal plowing ceremonies, Bangkok, Thailand. The royal plowing ceremony is an ancient Brahman ritual that was reintroduced by King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 1960. It is considered the official commencement of the rice-growing season. (AP Images/Sakchai Lalit)*

The specifics of the Brahman diet are determined by concerns for ritual purity and the need to avoid pollution. Food habits in Hindu society are closely linked to social status and standing in the caste hierarchy. As high-caste Hindus, Brahmans are subject to rigid dietary restrictions. In theory, Brahmans are strict vegetarians, eating no animal flesh and even avoiding eggs. But Kashmiri Brahmans eat mutton, and Brahmans in Bengal eat fish. In South India, however, no orthodox Brahman will eat animal flesh. No Brahman in India will eat beef, either, as this violates the basic Hindu concept of the sanctity of the cow. Milk and milk products are important foods, however. They also have ritual significance, because the five products of the cow are regarded as both sacred and sanctifying. (These five products are milk, curds, *ghi* or clarified butter, dung, and urine—known collectively as *pancha-gavya*.) Some Brahmans even avoid foods such as onions and garlic that grow in the ground and are regarded as unclean. Alcohol is strictly forbidden. Even inadvertent violation of food taboos can lead to serious problems. An incident is recorded among the Maithila Brahmans where an individual accidentally ate a vulture, thinking it was a water-hen. He was cast out of the community for this act, and the priest refused to purify him.

Dietary restrictions extend not only to the foods a Brahman will eat, but also to who can prepare the food and with whom the Brahman can eat. In any given region, rules of commensality, i.e., rules concerning with whom one can eat, are a clear indication of one's standing in the caste hierarchy.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Educational levels vary among Brahman castes across the country. Some, such as the elites among the Pandits of Kashmir, have a long tradition of learning and scholarship. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, was of this caste. By contrast, a Brahman cultivator in a desert village in Rajasthan may have had hardly any schooling at all. There is a tendency among the more conservative groups, such as the Nambudiri Brahmans of Kerala, to shun Western education. This has restricted their opportunities for advancement in modern India.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Brahmans all over India share many common features, e.g., high social status, traditional priestly functions, and restrictive food taboos. However, the cultural heritage of a particular Brahman group is rooted in the group's own regional culture. Each group shares in the language, literature, history, and folk traditions of the regional society of which it forms a part. Thus, the Ayyars of South India are Brahmans by caste but Tamil in culture; the Pandits of Kashmir have helped shape Kashmiri society; and the Maithila Brahmans are an integral part of the peoples and culture of the middle Ganges plains.

### **15 WORK**

The traditional occupation of the Brahman castes is to serve as priests for Hindu society, either in temples or as family priests (*purohit*). In the past, because of their learning and literacy,



Brahmans rose to positions of power in the state administrations, acting as royal advisors and even attaining the rank of “Diwan” (Chief Minister). Textual sources indicate that, in addition to their priestly role, Brahmans have been teachers, soldiers, tillers of the soil, and even traders. Today, there are still Brahman castes (e.g., the Anavil Brahmans, the Bhaghban, and the Bhumihar) who are primarily landowners and cultivators, and who are barred from performing priestly functions. These groups do not, of course, have the ritual status of the priestly castes. Brahmans are also found in occupations such as teacher, scribe, and government clerk.

Of the Brahmans involved in religious occupations, those connected with the actual rituals of temple worship are considered socially inferior. These include the *pujari* who performs the *pujas* (rituals of worship) at temples and shrines, the *ojha* who exorcises demons and evil spirits, and the *gyotisha* or astrologer who casts horoscopes and determines auspicious dates. The Brahmans who act as guides for pilgrims at sacred centers such as Varanasi or Allahabad, as well as those who preside over funeral rites, also fall into this category of “inferior” Brahmans. By contrast, the Sarasvata Brahmans of the northwest are regarded as among the purest of the Brahman castes.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no games or sports associated specifically with Brahmans, although individual groups have developed certain athletic skills. For example, the Chaturvedis are a Brahman caste of Mathura (in western Uttar Pradesh) who are known for their wrestling ability.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are no forms of entertainment or recreation specifically identified with the Brahman castes.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Brahmans are not known for any unique folk arts or crafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Given the wide geographical distribution and varied occupations of Brahmans, it is difficult to generalize about their problems. Some problems, such as the violence and political instability in Kashmir or the deteriorating law and order situation in Bihar, are regional in nature and affect all castes. Others, for instance the difficulties faced by struggling Brahman cultivators, are class—rather than caste—related. Perhaps the single greatest problem facing Brahmans in recent years has been the emergence of a secular and democratic India. The modernization of India, especially in economic terms, has eroded the traditional power and prestige of the Brahmans. The adoption of the democratic principle of one person, one vote has given the lower castes, and especially the Untouchables, political power that they could never have possessed in times past. Political movements among the lower castes, such as the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra State, often are based on a rejection of Brahmanism. Recent government actions, such as the Mandal Commission’s recommendations to “reserve” government jobs and university places for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, have further strengthened the position of the lower castes at the expense of the upper castes. It is per-

haps no accident that a militant Hindu nationalism (*Hindutva*), supported in part by Brahmans, has recently emerged as a major force on the Indian political scene.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is an example of this. Created in 1980, the BJP is a major center-right Indian political party championing the socio-religious cultural values of the country’s Hindus and is supported by members of the set of Hindu nationalist organizations informally known as the Sangh Parivar, in which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) plays a leading role. Currently, the BJP rules in eight states of India (Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand) and while its leaders are not necessarily Brahmans, the party supports the traditional values of Hinduism. Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the BJP led the National Democratic Alliance, which formed the Union (central) Government in Delhi between 1998 and 2004. L. K. Advani, Deputy Prime Minister under the Vajpayee administration explained the BJP’s unexpected loss to the Congress-led UPA (United Progressive Alliance) in the 2004 general elections in terms of a failure to keep to the tenets of Hindutva.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Brahman’s emphasis on ritual purity has led inevitably to discrimination against women. In the past, Brahman women have been subject to the worst excesses of Hindu society—child marriage, early consummation of marriage, prohibitions against widow remarriage, and demands for dowry. As members of India’s highest castes, they were expected to religiously practice the basic tenets of Hindu society. Even though many of these practices have been made illegal in modern India, (viz. the 1984 Dowry Prohibition [Amendment] Bill), they still occur. One only has to read the press, even today, to find instances of “dowry deaths”: over 6,700 dowry deaths were reported in India in 2005 and one suspects many more go unreported as such. Brahman women also face problems in accessing education and tend to experience the same discrimination faced by all Hindu women, especially in rural areas where they are expected to perform agricultural labor, as well run the households. Casteism absolutely forbids a Brahman women from having any kind of physical relationship with a man of lower caste and requires marriage (usually arranged) into the Brahman caste.

Brahman women, by virtue of their status, tend to be better educated than other women in South Asia, and many have achieved prominence in public life in India. Indira Gandhi (Nehru’s daughter) was a Kashmiri Brahman (Pandit), who was educated at Oxford and continued the Nehru dynasty, ruling India with an iron fist from 1966 until her assassination by Sikhs in 1988 (with an inter-regnum between 1977 and 1980). Brahman women have risen to positions of prominence in science (for instance, Ashima Chatterjee in organic chemistry and Archana Sharma in particle physics) sports, and politics. But in general, they still play a subordinate role to males and their husbands, in particular, and face many of the same issues—access to education, poverty, health awareness, sexual discrimination and abuse, inequality in the workplace, inheritance of property and balancing work and family life—as other women in modern Hindu society.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BRAHUI

**PRONUNCIATION:** brah-HOO-ee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Brohi

**LOCATION:** Pakistan (Baluchistan Province); a small number live in southern Afghanistan and Iran

**POPULATION:** 2.3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Brahui; Sindhi

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Baluchi

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Among the rugged hills of South Asia's western borderlands lives a group of tribes known as the Brahui (also Brohi). Various explanations of the name *Brahui* have been suggested, the most likely being that it is a corruption of *Barohi*, meaning "mountain-dweller" or "highlander."

The origins of the Brahui remain unclear. The Brahui language belongs to the Dravidian linguistic family, and this has led some writers to argue that the Brahui are survivors of the peoples who developed the Harappan civilization. Others have argued that the Brahui and the Baluchi are one and the same, and that the term *Brahui* designates status rather than any ethnic differences. If this were true, then the Brahui would have been part of the Baluchi migrations into their present region between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. During the 17th century, the Brahui rose to prominence in Kalat, in Baluchistan, when Mir Ahmed Khan I acceded to the leadership of a confederacy of Brahui tribes in AD 1666. For nearly 300 years from that time, an unbroken line of Brahui rulers held the Khanate of Kalat. British expansion westward from Sind, and their interest in the Afghan border regions, brought them into conflict with the Khans of Kalat in the middle of the 19th century. The British eventually acquired control over the strategically located Kalat, although the state remained nominally independent until it was incorporated into Pakistan in 1948.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The current estimate of the Brahui population is 2.3 million people. Most of this number is concentrated in Pakistan's Baluchistan Province around Kalat, the historical focus of Brahui territory and power. Brahui-speakers are also found in southern Afghanistan and Iran.

The Brahui homeland lies on the Kalat Plateau, where elevations vary between 2,135 m and 2,440 m (7,000–8,000 ft). Running roughly north–south through the region is the Central Brahui Range. West of these mountains lie the uplands of Jhalawan and Sarawan. To the east, the land descends to the alluvial lowlands of Kacchi. This is an extension of the Indus plain that runs northward towards Sibi and the Bolan Pass. The region is extremely arid, with annual rainfall averaging less than 20 cm (8 in). Strong northwesterly winds prevail through the area, bringing dust from the Iranian deserts and scorching temperatures in summer and bitter cold weather in winter. The plateau consists of extensive areas of barren rock, or hills with a thin cover of drought-resistant vegetation.



### 3 LANGUAGE

The Brahui language is a Dravidian tongue related to the languages spoken in South India. The existence of this isolated pocket of Dravidian speakers almost 1,800 km (1,000 mi) from the main area where Dravidian languages are found is a problem that has long puzzled South Asian linguists. Brahui contains many loanwords acquired from the Indo-Aryan languages (e.g., Baluchi, Sindhi, and Persian) spoken by the peoples of the surrounding region. There is no Brahui script. Many Brahui-speakers are bilingual, speaking Baluchi or other local languages. Those Brahui settled in Sind tend to speak Brahui at home but use Sindhi (or in Karachi, Urdu) in dealings with others.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Brahui language is rich in oral literature, the various genres including stories and tales, proverbs and riddles and songs. Brahui folk stories are mostly created by nomads, shepherds and farmers for the entertainment of their children and immediate family members. Mothers, for instance, tell their children legends about the *mammā*, a large apelike creature known for its physical strength and resemblance to humans, and once thought to be quite numerous. Other stories criticize the *sardārs* (hereditary tribal chiefs) and landowners from the point of view of the oppressed classes.

In Brahui, as in Baluchi, proverbs tend to have background stories. There is, for instance, the saying *Balwān nā barām* ("This is like the marriage of Balwān"), which is often used

when plans are too complicated or never come to fruition. The story goes that a simple, but foolish, man Balwān (or Balo Khān) was engaged to be married. His greedy father-in-law-to-be asked Balwān to bring him the required bride-price to marry his daughter. So, Balwān went to his relatives and collected the required amount of money. But when he went back to his father-in-law, the latter asked for more money. Balwān returned to his family to obtain the extra funds, and this situation continued for many rounds, so that Balwān never succeeded in marrying and died single. Hence the proverb.

Another Brahui story tells of Mulla Mansur, an orphan who got a job in the house of a *qadi* (a Muslim religious leader). The *qadi* was an insensitive man. Even though Mansur had served him loyally for seven long years, he beat him over a trifling mistake. Mansur left the *qadi* and took to traveling the world. He met an old shepherd, fell in love with his daughter, and married her. When Mansur and his wife returned to his home, the beauty of his wife caused such a stir that everyone from the *qadi* to the king desired to possess her. However, Mansur's wife was steadfast in her fidelity to her husband. When the *qadi* continued to make advances and tried to seduce her, she exposed him publicly. All the people joined in condemning the *qadi*, and the king banished him from the Brahui lands. This tale presents the Brahui view of the qualities and strength of character desirable in a wife, as well an element of skepticism toward religious leaders who preach purity to the world but practice otherwise.

### 5 RELIGION

The Brahui are Muslim, belonging mostly to the Sunni sect of Islam. They follow Islamic religious beliefs and practices as set out in the *Quran* (Koran), though many of their social customs are Indian in origin. Communal worship focuses on the mosque, and *mullahs* (Muslim priests) see to the spiritual and ritual needs of the people. Reverence for saints (*pirs*), a characteristic of Islam in South Asia, is also deeply entrenched in Brahui culture. Every family has its particular saint, and women often keep in their houses some earth (*khwarda*) from the saint's shrine to be used in time of need. For example, a little earth may be fed to a sick person along with prayers to the saint for a cure. Sacrifices of sheep or goats are performed at the shrines as an offering to the *pir* or in fulfillment of a vow. Many take their children to a shrine for the first shaving of the head or, failing that, place a little bag of the hair in the shrine, where it is hung from a pole. The Brahui believe in sorcery and possession by *jinn* or evil spirits. A *mullah* or *sayyed* (holy man) is often called in to read from the *Quran* or provide charms and amulets to exorcise these spirits. Should this fail, a *sheikh*, who is known for his power over *jinn* and casts them out by dancing, may be used.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Brahui observe the usual holy days of the Muslim calendar. On the eve of most high festivals, respect is paid to the souls of the dead. The holiest of all is the eve of the tenth day of Muharram, which is known as *Imamak*. Women prepare special dishes of meat and rice during the day. The family gathers near sunset in the presence of a *mullah* (Muslim priest), who reads from the *Quran* and recites prayers for the dead over the food. Dishes of food are then sent to relatives and neighbors, who reciprocate with their own offerings. The following morn-

ing is an occasion for the head of the house to visit the graveyard to pray at the graves of his dead relatives.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a son is of utmost importance for a Brahui. A daughter is seen as little more than a gift to one's neighbor. Barrenness in a wife is a cause for reproach, and in the past female circumcision is reported to have been secretly practiced to try to remedy this situation. A craving for earth, and earth-eating, among pregnant women is also reported. When a son is born, the father announces it to the community by firing shots in the air. Various rituals are followed to protect the mother and child from the attention of witches and *jinn* (evil spirits). For the mother, the period of postnatal impurity lasts 40 days. Sheep are killed (two for a son and one for a daughter) and a feast held for relatives, friends, and neighbors. The child is then named, sometimes after a worthy ancestor. The head-shaving ritual (*sar-kuti*) is performed by the time the child is 2 years old, often at the shrine of a favored saint. A male child may undergo circumcision (*sunnat*) within 6 months, though the cost associated with the celebrations cause many to postpone it until as late as the age of 10 or 12.

No particular ceremonies accompany the male reaching puberty. An unusual rite is reported to be followed when a girl begins to menstruate for the first time. At sunset, the mother arranges three stones in a triangular pattern on the ground and has her daughter leap over them three times. It is thought that this will ensure that the girl's periods during the rest of her life will last no more than three days. Childhood did not last long in traditional Brahui society. If a girl were not married as a child, she would be soon after puberty.

At death, word is sent to relatives and friends, who gather for the funeral. A shroud is sent for from outside the house, and when the *mullah* (Muslim priest) arrives, the body is carried to a place of washing. It is washed by the mullah and near kinsmen (or the mullah's wife and female relatives, in the case of a woman), then wrapped in the shroud. The body is taken in procession to the graveyard, with the mourners reciting the *kalima*, the profession of faith. At the graveside, the mullah offers the prayer for the dead, and the body is given its burial. The traditional period of mourning was 11 days for a man and 9 for a woman, but this has been reduced in modern times. Women weep and wail, covering their faces in mourning. Other rituals include the singing of dirges (*moda*), and a death feast (*varagh*). Another feast is held on the first anniversary of the death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Brahui share their forms of greeting with the Baluchi. On meeting, they stop, shake hands, and embrace each other. The encounter continues with inquiries after each other's health and then proceeds to an exchange of news (*hal*) concerning family, friends, cattle, etc. Brahui are known for their hospitality to their guests.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Brahui settlements essentially reflect the economic activities of their inhabitants. Pastoral nomadism was the traditional occupation of many Brahui, and nomadic herders lived in tents and temporary camps, migrating with their herds in search of pasture. By contrast, in the Kacchi plains Brahui live in permanent villages that differ little in form and function from

their Baluchi neighbors' settlements. Pastoralism has declined in importance in recent years, and many Brahui in the upland areas have adopted a transhumant economy. Transhumance is based on a seasonal migration to differing elevations. Highland cultivating villages in the Korat Plateau are occupied for nine months of the year. During the winter months, however, the inhabitants drive their herds to the Kacchi lowlands where they live in tent camps. (This pattern is the reverse of transhumance in Europe. There, settlements are at lower elevations, and animals are taken up to alpine pastures during the summer months.)

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Brahui are organized into tribes, each of which has a hereditary chief (*sadar*). These are unlike the clans of the Rajputs with their elaborate genealogies; rather, they are loosely structured units based on patrilineal descent and political allegiance. This allows for a considerable degree of fluidity, with Baluchi and Pathan groups incorporated into the Brahui tribal units, and the movement of sections between Brahui tribes. Some of the more numerous Brahui tribes are the Mengals, Zahris, and Muhammad Hosanis. The Khans of Kalat were of the Ahmedzai tribe. The Brahui tribes are further divided into descending kin-groups down to the level of the immediate lineage.

The favored marriage among the Brahui is with the father's brother's daughter. Marriages are arranged, although the wishes of the couple are taken into consideration. In the past, child marriage was common, though this practice is now banned under Pakistani law. The betrothal and marriage ceremonies are important events in the life of both family and tribe. Disputes within tribes are usually settled at the time of marriages. A bride-price (*lab*) is paid by the groom's family. Although Muslim law allows polygyny (multiple wives), economic realities mean most Brahui marriages are monogamous. Family structure tends to reflect economic systems. The nuclear family predominates among nomadic Brahui, while extended families are common among village inhabitants. Divorce, though simple, is rare. In the past, adultery was punishable by death, although such practices are forbidden by Pakistani law. Widow remarriage is accepted.

## 11 CLOTHING

A young boy is given his first trousers at about three years of age, and thereafter wears clothes similar to those of adult males—the *kurti* (long shirt), worn over the *salwar*, the loose, baggy trousers found throughout the area. For men, a turban (*pag*) completes the outfit.

Women wear a long shift over trousers, although among Brahui nomads women wear skirts rather than trousers. Among the Brahui of the Jhalawan region, women's shifts are typically black in color. Women's clothes are embroidered with various patterns and designs in colored thread. Women's ornaments include finger rings (*challav*), nose rings (*vat*), and earrings (*panara*). Brahui settled in Sind tend to be indistinguishable from the Sindhi population in their dress.

## 12 FOOD

The settled Brahui cultivate wheat and millet, which are ground into flour and baked into unleavened breads. Rice is also eaten, but usually only on special occasions. Mutton and

goat are important in the diet of the Brahui, with the flesh of animals that are sacrificed at various rituals and festivals distributed to the community at large. The more-affluent farmers in lowland areas may raise cattle. As is common throughout South Asia, food is eaten with one's hands, and often from a communal platter. Milk is drunk and also made into curds, *ghi* (clarified butter), buttermilk, and butter. Dates, wild fruits, and vegetables are also part of the Brahui diet. Tea is drunk at meals and is also taken as part of various social ceremonies. Opium is also used.

### 13 EDUCATION

In general, levels of literacy among the Brahui are extremely low. The 1972 census for the Kalat Division of Baluchistan Province records an overall literacy rate of only 6.3% in the population over 10 years of age. The Brahui community is essentially rural in nature and lives in areas of Pakistan where the social infrastructure is poorly developed. Nomadic groups have no access to formal schooling, and even where schools do exist, attendance is low. In settled areas such as Sind where Brahui children are more likely to attend school, they are taught in the local language rather than in Brahui.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Brahuīs have an oral tradition of folk songs and heroic poems. These are sung by a class of professional minstrels and musicians called *Dombs*, who are attached to every Brahui community. Musical instruments include the *rabab* (an Afghan stringed instrument plucked with a piece of wood), the *siroz* (a stringed instrument played with a bow), and the *punzik* (a reed instrument). These have replaced the *dambura* (a three-stringed instrument played with the fingers) that is found in the more isolated areas. Dancing is an important feature at events such as weddings and funerals. The local country dance known as *chap* has largely been abandoned, however.

### 15 WORK

Historically, the Brahui were pastoral nomads, migrating with their herds of sheep, goats, and cattle from the upland plateaus to the low-lying alluvial plains. Today, however, many Brahui have abandoned their pastoral activities in favor of transhumant or settled agriculture. In the Kacchi lowlands, river and canal irrigation support cultivation, but settlements in other areas of the Brahui region depend on *qanats*. Qanat (or *karez*) irrigation is found over a wide area of Iran and Southwest Asia and even in the Turfan Depression of Xinjiang Province of China. It involves sinking a line of vertical shafts and then tunneling horizontally at the bottom of the shafts to create an underground passageway to carry water from its source to the fields.

### 16 SPORTS

Horse-racing and target-shooting were traditional sports popular among the more affluent sections of the Brahui community.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the past, the Brahui had to depend on their own resources for entertainment and recreation. They found this in their family celebrations, their traditions of folk song and dance,

and in the festivities accompanying religious observances. This is still true for nomadic Brahui today. Epic poems are performed by specialist poets known as *Lorī*, who are considered as belonging to the lower-status groups in Brahui society. Their traditional occupation was to serve the Brahui at marriage ceremonies, playing the *dhol* (drum) at festivities and at funeral ceremonies. Folk songs are most often sung by the Brahui without musical accompaniment, although both men and women play musical instruments such as the *sironz* (a fiddle) and the *dambura* (a plucked string instrument). Women play the *daira* (tambourine). The Brahui settled in Karachi or villages on the plains have access to more modern forms of recreation.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Like other women of the region, Brahui women embroider their garments with colorful designs. Tents and rugs are made from sheep's wool or goats' hair.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Brahui tribes inhabit some of the harshest, most-isolated, and least-productive environments in Pakistan. This is reflected in the relative inefficiency of traditional economic systems and the generally low standards of living of the community. Belated government efforts to bring development to the region have done little for the welfare of the Brahui, who are essentially nomadic and rural in character. The lack of a written literature (what there is dates only from the 1960s) has hindered the development of a tribal consciousness, and matters are made worse by the declining numbers of people speaking Brahui. The Brahui appear to be rapidly assimilating with the surrounding Baluchi populations. Apart from their language, which gives them a sense of cultural identity, the Brahui lack a sense of identification with their country and have very little representation in the political arena. They still tend to function on a tribal basis, dealing with the government through their *sardars* and other tribal leaders. The Brahui remain one of the many tribal peoples of Pakistan who remain "outsiders" in a country dominated by ethnic elites such as the Punjabis and Sindhis.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Brahui women face the same gender discrimination that women do in all Muslim societies. Brahui women, for instance observe *purdah*, i.e. the segregation of women to ensure that family honor is maintained. This means that women live in compounds behind mud walls where they are virtually hidden from view. Women must avoid being seen by strangers, especially strange men. Access to compounds is restricted and a woman's mobility outside the compound is controlled by her husband and male relatives.

Most Brahui women are engaged in agricultural labor. During the productive season from March through mid-November, a woman may spend as much as 60% of her time in her agricultural role. A typical day for a Brahui farmer's wife is seventeen hours long, but her work is sheer drudgery because the labor she performs is merely repetitive and requires no decision-making as to how land and other resources are to be utilized—this is the prerogative of the males in the family. Women are responsible for transplanting, weeding, harvesting, and collecting fuel and water. Official statistics grossly underestimate the contribution of women to the agricultural

gross domestic product (GDP) in rural areas of Pakistan. Very few government departments or even projects collect gender disaggregated data, and most development projects are geared towards men.

In addition to the payment of bride-price and the custom of *pardah*, Brahui women are subject to all the ills of women in Pakistan—domestic violence, rape, “honor killings,” acid attacks, and trafficking. Proof of rape generally requires the confession of the accused or the testimony of four adult Muslim men who witnessed the assault. If a woman cannot prove her rape allegation she runs a very high risk of being charged with fornication or adultery, the criminal penalty for which is either a long prison sentence and public whipping, or, occasionally, death by stoning.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# BRUNEIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** Bru-NYE-uhns

**LOCATION:** Brunei

**POPULATION:** 372,360 (2005 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Malay

**RELIGION:** Islam

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The official name of Brunei, a tiny oil-rich Southeast Asian nation, is Negara Brunei Darussalam, which means, “The Country of Brunei, Abode of Peace.” According to Chinese and Arab records, Brunei existed as early as the 7th or 8th century AD at the mouth of the Brunei River. In the 9th century, Brunei was conquered by the Srivijaya Empire based in Sumatra. By the 13th century, Islam had spread to Brunei. In the 14th century, it was ruled by the Majapahit Empire based in Java. Brunei then became independent and experienced its golden age from the 15th to the 17th centuries when it was a huge empire and controlled the entire island of Borneo as well as parts of the Philippines. During this period, Brunei’s fifth sultan, Bolkiah (1473–1521), was famous for his sea exploits and for capturing Manila, while its ninth sultan, Hassan (1605–1619), was known for developing an elaborate court structure that, in part, still exists today.

Brunei then entered a period of decline due to internal problems over succession, which led to civil war, and to external problems in the form of Western colonialism, which resulted in its loss of territory. Brunei lost much territory to the British in Sarawak and Sabah. In the case of Sarawak, in 1839 a British adventurer, James Brooke, helped the Sultan of Brunei quell a rebellion by local chiefs and in return gained land that became the First Division of Sarawak. Brooke soon gained more land from the Sultan—Sarawak’s Second Division in 1852 and its Third Division in 1861. His successor, Charles Brooke, obtained further territory for Sarawak at Brunei’s expense. For instance, in 1882 Charles purchased Brunei’s Baram district, which became Sarawak’s Fourth Division, while in 1890 he took Brunei’s Limbang district (without the Sultan’s permission) and made it the Fifth Division after some chiefs had asked for his help against the Sultan. In the case of Sabah, in 1865, the Sultan of Brunei gave a ten-year lease to Charles Lee Moses who established the American Trading Company. In 1875 this company was purchased by an Austrian Consul, Baron von Overbeck, and his English partner, John Dent. In 1881, Dent bought Overbeck’s share in the company and formed the British North Borneo Chartered Company. The same year, the Sultan of Brunei permitted the Company to rule over Sabah. In 1888 Britain made Brunei, Sabah, and Sarawak British Protectorates to prevent the Brooke family or the Company from taking over Brunei. In 1906 Britain established the Residential System in Brunei, whereby a British Resident was to advise the Sultan in all matters except Malay customs and religion. In the 1920s the British discovered oil and natural gas in Brunei and began the extraction of these resources. During World War II the Japanese invaded and occupied all three areas. After the war, Brunei remained a British protectorate and retained a British Resident until 1959 while Sabah and Sarawak became Crown Colonies.



In 1959, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin introduced the country's first constitution, which made Brunei a self-governing state with Britain still responsible for its foreign affairs and defense. The Sultan was not keen on full independence, preferring instead a British presence. In 1961 he favored federating with the other British territories of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak, and Brunei to form a larger political unit, the Federation of Malaysia, by 1963. In late 1962, however, he changed his mind about the merger after an armed coup by the Brunei People's Party, led by A.M. Azahari, revealed local opposition to the Federation. The British authorities crushed the armed revolt while the Sultan declared a state of emergency in Brunei. Since then, the Sultan of Brunei has ruled by decree as a non-elected prime minister. In October 1967 Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin abdicated in favor of his son, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. In January 1979 Britain and Brunei signed an agreement declaring that Brunei would become fully independent within five years.

Brunei remained a British protectorate until 1 January 1984 when it attained full independence. On Brunei's Independence Day, Sultan {xe "Bolkiah, Hassanal"} Hassanal Bolkiah proclaimed Brunei's National Philosophy: *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy), which incorporates the Malay language, culture, and customs with Islamic laws and values and with the monarchy system. In 1984 Brunei also joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the regional body's sixth member. In 1992, when Brunei celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the reign of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, the Sultan set up the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Foundation as a gift to his people. In 1994 through the Davao Agreement, Brunei

joined Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines to form the East ASEAN Growth Area (BMIP-EAGA) to improve trade between them. In 1998 the Sultan proclaimed his son, Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, as the Crown Prince.

In 2000 the Sultan began civil proceedings against his brother, Prince Jefri, for misappropriating \$16 billion from the Brunei Investment Agency, but the case was later settled out of court. Since 2003 Brunei and Malaysia have held talks over the disputed territory of Limbang, which the Brooke family in Sarawak took from Brunei without permission in 1890. Meanwhile, in September 2004, the Sultan reconvened the 21-member Legislative Council, suspended since 1984, to debate several proposed amendments to the Brunei's Constitution, including the direct election of 15 members to the Legislature. In May 2005 the Sultan reorganized his cabinet, dismissing four prominent ministers and replacing them with new ministers with private sector experience. His other changes included the creation of a new Ministry of Energy and the appointment of the first ethnic Chinese to a cabinet position, Pehin Dato' Lim Jock Seng as Minister of Foreign Affairs II. In September 2005, the Sultan dissolved the existing Legislative Council, which acts as Brunei's Parliament, and appointed 29 new members. As of 2008, no schedule had been established for the holding of elections.

Brunei is an absolute monarchy, with the Sultan serving as Premier, Defense Minister, Finance Minister, and as the religious head of Brunei. The present Sultan is the 29th in a line that dates from Sultan Muhammad, who converted to Islam in 1514. His brother, Prince Mohamed, serves as the Foreign Minister while his son, Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, serves as the Senior Minister. The Sultan's cabinet is made up of members of his extended family, the Bolkiahs, who control all the government departments and most of the nation's wealth. The Sultan is assisted and advised by his Cabinet, the Religious Council, the Privy Council, and by the Council of Succession.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Brunei is located on the northern coast of the island of Borneo; it lies between the South China Sea and the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. It is divided by Sarawak into two unconnected parts: a larger western portion and a smaller eastern portion. The western portion contains three of Brunei's four districts—Brunei Muara, with the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan; oil-rich Beliat; and agricultural Tutong—while the eastern portion has the sparsely populated district of Temburong, which is separated from the rest of Brunei by Sarawak's Limbang district.

With a total area of only 2,228 sq mi (5,770 sq km), Brunei is a very small country that is roughly the size of Delaware. Its population centers are mainly along its flat coastal plains. To its west, Brunei has hilly lowlands, and to its east, mountains. Over 70% of Brunei's entire land area is covered by tropical rainforests. The Brunei government has set aside 317 sq mi (820 sq km) as national parks or forest reserves, in part to protect the unique wildlife found in its rainforests, such as the Bornean proboscis monkey, the silvered leaf monkey, and the slow loris, a tree dwelling nocturnal primate. Brunei has an equatorial climate that is hot, humid, and wet all year round. The average daytime temperature is between 79° F and 95° F. Although typhoons, earthquakes, and severe flooding are rare,

Brunei is subject to seasonal haze from forest fires in Indonesia. The country is rich in petroleum, natural gas, and timber.

Brunei has a population of 372,360 (2005 estimate), which is growing by 1.9% annually. Over 75% of the population lives in the urban areas, with 60,000 in Bandar Seri Begawan, the largest city. The Malays, the largest ethnic group, comprise 67% of the population while the Chinese make up 15% and the indigenous groups, including the Ibans, Muruts, Dusuns, and Melayu Tutong, form 6%. The remaining 12% includes European, Asian, and North American expatriates.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Brunei is Malay (Bahasa Melayu), which is the primary language of most Bruneians. A common greeting in Malay is *Apa Khabar?* (How are you?). Another typical greeting, particularly among Muslims, is the Arabic *Assalamu alaikum* (May peace be among you), to which the reply is *Wa'alaikum salaam* (And peace be upon you).

English is also widely spoken and used, especially in business settings. Among the Chinese, Mandarin, Hokkien, and other Chinese dialects are commonly used. Each indigenous group in Brunei also has its own language.

### 4 FOLKLORE

One Brunei folktale is the legend of Nakhoda Manis (Sweet Sailor) that tells of how the ship of an unfilial son was turned into a huge rock, known as Jong Batu, in the Brunei River. According to this legend, a widow, Dang Ambon, lived with her son, Nakhoda Manis, in the village of Kampong Ayer until he left home to seek his fortune in the city of Sulu. He eventually gained wealth and success, married a noblewoman, and became the owner of a large ship. He then planned a trip to the Brunei River to visit his mother. Since his mother longed to see him again, she paddled out in a small boat to his ship, shouting that she missed him. However, when the wife of Nakhoda Manis saw the mother, she was so disgusted with what she viewed as a very old and poor woman that she demanded that the mother be chased away. Unfortunately, Nakhoda Manis listened to his wife and ordered his crew to push his mother's small boat away. The heartbroken Dang Ambon then cursed her son. Soon thereafter his ship capsized in a storm. After the storm, a huge rock, called Jong Batu, appeared in the Brunei River where Nakhoda Manis had anchored his vessel.

### 5 RELIGION

Brunei's state religion is Islam. The importance of the Islamic religion is clearly seen in Brunei's description of its government as a Malay Islamic Monarchy (Melayu Islam Beraja), with the Sultan serving as the head of the Islamic community. He represents the main ethnic group in the population, the Malays, who are Sunni Muslims and who comprise over two-thirds of the total population. For Muslims in Brunei, Islamic law (Shariah) takes precedence over civil law in a number of areas, including divorce and inheritance. The importance of Islam in Brunei is also seen in the adherence by Muslims to the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet; prayer five times a day; giving alms to the poor; fasting from dawn until dusk during the holy month of Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage during one's lifetime to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Under Islamic law, the drinking of alcohol is forbidden as is the eating of pork.

In 1991 the government introduced laws that made the sale of alcohol illegal.

The Sultan encourages the recital of the Holy Quran every morning prior to the start of work to obtain blessing and guidance from God. Every government function and project also incorporates the *Doa*, a very important link to God's blessing. The main mosques in Brunei are the magnificent Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, completed in 1958 in classic Islamic style, and the Jame 'Asr Hassanal Bolkiah Mosque, Brunei's largest, built to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah's reign in 1992.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, all government officers and staff work a six-hour day, instead of the usual seven and a half hour workday, and all entertainment and sports activities are temporarily suspended. Non-Muslims are also encouraged during this period to refrain from eating, drinking, or smoking in public and from wearing clothing that expose their arms or feet.

The other two main religions in Brunei are Buddhism and Christianity, with Buddhists making up 13% of the population and Christians about 10%. Animism is also practiced in Brunei by some of the indigenous groups. The Brunei constitution guarantees religious freedom.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In Brunei, the following are public holidays: New Year's Day on January 1, National Day on February 23, the Royal Brunei Armed Forces Day on May 31, the Sultan's birthday on July 15, Christmas Day on December 25, and Chinese New Year, which follows the lunar cycle. Muslim celebrations, which follow the lunar calendar, are also public holidays. These include Hijrah (Islamic New Year); the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; Hijrah Hari Raya Aidiladha (the Feast of Sacrifice); Isra' Mikraj (the anniversary of Muhammad's ascension); Hari Raya Ed-il-Fitri (the end of Ramadan); Hari Raya Haji (the end of the Haji pilgrimage session); and Nuzul Al-Quran (the anniversary of the revelation of the Holy Quran).

Because the lunar cycle is shorter than the Gregorian calendar year, the Islamic New Year can occur twice in one Gregorian calendar year. For example, in 2008 the Islamic New Year fell on January 10 and on December 29. State-level celebrations accompany the Muslim celebrations.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

One rite of passage is a ceremony called *mandi belawat*, held after a mother gives birth to the couple's first child. During this ceremony the mother and baby wear the *kain jong sarat* (a hand-woven brocade with gold and silver threads) while the guests present the *zikir*, a form of religious chanting, praising the prophet Muhammad. The *zikir* is a traditional welcome used not only for a baby's birth but also to welcome the arrival of a guest of honor at an event or ceremony.

Another rite of passage, a traditional one for Muslim boys, is the circumcision ceremony, which takes place when a boy is between the ages of 9 and 12. Whereas traditional healers used to perform the circumcision, nowadays the circumcision is usually carried out in a hospital. The circumcision is then followed by a family celebration.

Yet another rite of passage is the burial of Muslims after death. According to Muslim tradition, the burial must take place as soon as possible after a person dies. The body is first



ritually washed and then wrapped in a white cloth before it is placed in a coffin and transported to the cemetery. For the next three nights, prayers known as *takhil* are offered for the deceased at a family ceremony. In the weeks that follow, these prayers can be repeated by individuals or by groups of mourners. After a death, friends and relatives can offer condolences and money to the deceased's family but never flowers.

There are also rites of passage concerning marriage between Muslims in Brunei. After a Muslim couple decides to marry, several stages precede their wedding ceremony. For example, in the first stage, the members of the prospective groom's family make a formal marriage proposal to the family of the prospective bride. In the second stage, the engagement ceremony (*bertunang*), the groom's mother places the engagement ring on the bride's right hand. In the third stage, as the wedding approaches, the sending of dowries and gifts (*menghantar be-rian*) takes place. For example, the groom's family gives the bride's family a cash dowry and gifts such as a *kain jong sarat*, shoes, and handbags while the bride's family also gives some gifts in return. In the fourth and final stage before the wedding, the *majlis berbedak* is held separately for the bride and groom where they are given a religious blessing and showered with scented perfume. At this ceremony, family members also place dye on the palms of the bride and groom. The bride wears the *kain jong sarat* and also a floral headdress.

Then the wedding ceremony, or *akad nikah* (the solemnization of marriage vows) is held, usually at the home of the bride. At this ceremony, an *imam* (Muslim religious leader) reads a sermon and officially pronounces the couple as husband and wife. The wedding reception (*bersanding*) follows, with the couple seated on a dais as guests come up to congratulate them. The same evening, the groom's family brings food for the bride's family and the bride and groom feed each other. Three or seven days after the wedding, the groom's family usually brings the couple household items like rice and sugar or appliances like a washing machine or a television. The groom then stays with the bride's family for at least a week before the couple moves out to go to their own place.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When Bruneians meet, they shake hands by lightly touching the hands and then bringing their hands to their chest. Some also shake hands in the Western manner. When meeting with members of the opposite sex, some do not shake hands with them but instead nod, smile, or give a verbal greeting. When a person joins a small group, it is polite to greet each person individually, beginning with the person on the right. In the case of members of the royal family, they are first greeted by a bow and then by a light handshake.

When greeting others, Bruneians usually address them by their given name. In formal situations, however, full names are used. Malay men use their father's name, preceded by their own given name, as in Ahmad bin Ibrahim, with bin denoting "son of". The usual honorific for men is Awang. Malay women also use their father's name preceded by their own name and with a binte in between, to denote "daughter of," as in Fatimah binte Yusof. The usual honorific for women is Dayang.

In formal situations, titles are also used. For example, members of the hereditary nobility have the title *Pengiran* before their name and this title is included when addressing them. Another title is *Pehin*, awarded by the Sultan to commoners

and the equivalent of a life peerage in the United Kingdom. Some men also have the title *Dato*, awarded by the Sultan to male subjects and the equivalent of a knighthood in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, some women have the title *Datin*, awarded by the Sultan to his female subjects and the equivalent of a damehood. For men who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, the title *Haji* is used before their name whereas for women who have made the pilgrimage the title *Hajjah* is used before their name.

An important aspect of Bruneian life is visiting friends and neighbors. These visits usually take place without prior notification, although visitors know that they should avoid doing so during the Muslim prayer times. Evening visits usually take place around 8pm after the last prayer for the day. For special occasions like weddings and birthdays, formal invitations are extended. During a visit, guests remove their shoes before entering a home. Among the older generation, male guests often enter before the female guests. The host usually offers a drink of either tea, coffee, or a soft drink, and some snacks in the form of finger sandwiches, cakes, cookies or puddings. When visiting a sick person, gifts are not expected, but some visitors do bring cakes, fruit, or a cash gift for the sick person's family. When receiving food or gifts, only the right hand is used although the left hand may be used for support. When refusing any food that is being offered, it is considered polite to touch the plate lightly with the right hand.

It is considered rude to point with the index finger. Instead, the thumb of the right hand is used, with the four fingers folded beneath it. It is also considered rude to touch another person's head, although an adult may touch a child's head. In conversation, hand gestures are usually not used. However, among close friends and family members, some Bruneians do use some hand gestures.

Before entering a mosque, the shoes must first be removed. In the mosque, the women cover their heads and wear clothing that also covers their knees and arms.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Brunei's per capital gross domestic product (GDP), at \$33,600 in 2005, is among the highest in Asia. Crude oil and natural gas production account for over half of GDP and more than 90% of exports. Brunei is the third largest oil producer in Southeast Asia and the world's fourth largest producer of liquefied natural gas. The nation has no external debt and the Sultan ranks as one of the wealthiest men in the world. Brunei also has no personal income tax.

Brunei's healthcare system ranks among the best in Asia. Health services are free for Brunei citizens while permanent residents and expatriates pay a nominal charge. The healthcare system is a three-tiered system, with health clinics providing primary care, health centers providing secondary care, and district hospitals providing tertiary and specialized care. Patients requiring very specialized treatment are sent abroad, with expenses for Brunei citizens being borne by the government. Brunei's healthcare system is heavily subsidized by the government and its quality is comparable to any developed country. Private and public hospitals have very modern and up-to-date facilities. Nearly all the villages in Brunei have health centers and children clinics. In remote areas that are not easily accessible, the government provides health care through its Flying Medical Services. The military has its own hospitals to look af-



*A young Bruneian girl, wearing a traditional Muslim head-dress, known as a tudong. (AP Images/David Longstreath)*

ter the military personnel and their dependents. Since 1970 all major diseases have been eliminated, including malaria, cholera, and smallpox. The Ministry of Health carries out regular immunization programs and has a successful track record in preventative medicine.

Regarding housing, the Brunei government provides its employees with various types of accommodation at a monthly rental that is maintained at a relatively low price. The government also provides its employees with interest-free loans to enable them to build their own home or to buy one that has already been built. There are also national housing schemes of three categories that are open to all eligible citizens: the National Housing Development Program (NHDP), the Landless Indigenous Citizens Housing Scheme (LICHS), and the Land Entitlement and Infill Scheme (LEIS). Under the NHDP, there are five types of houses, each with three to four bedrooms. These houses are located at various housing sites with facilities like schools, community centers, mosques, parks, and playgrounds. The houses cost between \$52,000 to \$95,000 Brunei dollars, payable within a period of 15 to 30 years. Besides the government housing and the National Housing Schemes, Brunei has private sector housing schemes, such as the Brunei Shell Petroleum Housing Scheme and the Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Scheme.

As for infrastructure, Brunei has two airports—the Brunei International Airport located in Berakas, near Bandar Seri Begawan, and the airport in Anduki, near Seria, used by the Brunei Shell Petroleum Company for its helicopter ser-

vices. The national air carrier is the Royal Brunei Airlines, which operates flights to destinations in Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Middle East. Regarding ports, the main one is Muara, about 28 km from the capital, while other important ones are the smaller Bandar Seri Begawan port and the port at Kuala Belait. There are also ferry services between Brunei and Labuan, Malaysia. There is one railway line, a 19 km railway in Seria operated by the Brunei Shell Petroleum Company. Regarding roads, a major highway is the Muara-Tutong coastal road. There are also several highways linking the districts and the towns and an extensive overland road network that connects Brunei to Sarawak and Sabah. From Brunei, one can also travel, via Sabah and Sarawak, to the Indonesian province of Kalimantan by road, air, or sea.

Brunei has one of the highest rates of car ownership in Southeast Asia, with most families having at least two cars. Drivers drive on the left hand side of the road. Taxis are available and are metered. Water taxis are also available and are unmetered, with fares negotiable. These water taxis are used to get to Kampong Ayer, Temburong District, and to the Malaysian towns of Limbang, Lawas, and Labuan. Bus services operate along selected routes throughout Brunei. Regarding tourist facilities, these are very good but underutilized; there are over 2,500 rooms spread over 30 establishments ranging from guesthouses to the very luxurious Empire Hotel and Country Club.

Most individuals in Brunei own a cellular phone and most households have a landline telephone. Broadband Internet is also widely available. The only local television station is government-owned, but foreign stations are available by satellite. The local television station broadcasts local programs and news as well as programs from the region and from around the world. Brunei has an advanced telecommunications system that offers international direct dialing services to 160 countries through two earth satellite stations. It also has a full range of worldwide telephone, telex, and facsimile facilities.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

On the whole, Bruneians have large families. This is especially so among the Malays and the indigenous groups, while the Chinese tend to have smaller families. A generation or so ago, many couples had as many as eight children and relied on help from extended family members to raise their children. Nowadays, however, the trend is towards smaller families as most women now work outside the home. Moreover, although extended families can still be found, in some cases with three generations living together, there are presently many nuclear families as well. Regarding maternity leave, women who work in the public sector receive 56 days of paid maternity leave. Women continue to be mainly responsible for looking after the children and for managing the household. For families who can afford the expense, they employ live-in domestic helpers, mainly from the Philippines or Indonesia, to help with childcare and with the tasks of cooking and cleaning. These live-in domestic helpers are usually given a separate room in the family home.

The family home, in olden days, was a traditional wooden house built on stilts. Now the usual family home is a modern Western style brick house with three to four bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. However, some traditional wooden homes can still be found in the rural areas, but with metal roofs, and

in Kampong Ayer (Water Village), a residential area of Bandar Seri Begawan, where homes are built on stilts over the Brunei River. Kampong Ayer has been called the world's largest water village on stilts. In fact, about 10% of Brunei's population lives in Kampong Ayer but the wooden houses are now equipped with modern appliances, satellite television dishes, and the latest amenities. Kampong Ayer is almost self-contained, with its own shops, mosques, schools, clinics, and a police station. To get to the mainland, the residents of Kampong Ayer use speedboats. In some parts of Brunei, one can also find many traditional longhouse communities where several families still live in one longhouse.

While family homes among the indigenous, the Malay, and the Chinese may differ in structure, the people of Brunei are one when it comes to their attitudes toward the elderly. They all tend to respect their elders and to care for them when they grow old. Because of this traditional respect for elders, Brunei has very few old folks homes or retirement homes. Many young adults also live with their parents, even after marriage. Arranged marriages have become less common as most of the young people prefer to choose their own spouse. Under Muslim law, unmarried couples are forbidden to date in secluded areas or to be by themselves in empty rooms or houses. Those caught violating these rules are fined by religious officials.

## 11 CLOTHING

The people of Brunei wear either traditional clothing or Western-style outfits and are usually smartly dressed. The traditional clothing for women is the *baju kurung*, a loose-fitting outfit consisting of a long blouse and a long skirt. The material used is either cotton, satin, or silk. This outfit is in keeping with the requirement under Muslim law that women wear conservative clothing, with the body to be covered except for the face and hands. Clothing that is revealing is considered immodest and thus socially unacceptable. Most Muslim women also wear a *tudong*, a headscarf that covers their hair.

For men, the traditional clothing consists of a *baju*, a loose shirt with long sleeves, trousers, and a *kain samping*, or short sarong. The *baju* and the trousers are of the same material and color. The *kain samping* is worn over the *baju* and trousers, covering the waist to the knees. The material used for the *kain samping* can vary in quality, with some made from brocade. Some men also wear the traditional Malay headdress, the *songkok*, a brimless hat made of black or blue velvet. For men who have performed the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, they wear a white skull cap instead of the *songkok*.

Westernization has impacted traditional dress and costumes in Brunei as Western clothing and other fashions from abroad are popular. For instance, professional women like bankers and lawyers often wear dress suits and other Western business attire while professional men are usually seen dressed in business suits and ties. Moreover, Western clothing like jeans and sports jackets are commonly worn by the young people.

## 12 FOOD

For breakfast, along with tea or coffee, Bruneians usually have fried rice, noodles, *soto* (noodle soup), *cucur* (fritters) or sandwiches. For lunch and dinner, the meal revolves around rice, the main staple, which is eaten with chicken, beef, lamb, seafood, or vegetables. Lunch is traditionally the main meal of the day but, with family members having different work and

school schedules, they usually sit down to a family meal at dinner time.

For most Bruneians, the traditional way of eating is with the fingers of the right hand although some do use utensils. Popular dishes at mealtime include *pais lauk* (grilled fish), *pais daging* (grilled meat), *lauk rabus* (a sour and spicy fish soup), and *nasi katok* (spiced chicken or beef with rice). These dishes, heavily spiced with garlic, chilies, ginger, and tumeric, are usually accompanied by *sambal belachan* (a spicy shrimp paste). Locals are also fond of *satay*, pieces of marinated meat cooked on skewers, and eaten with a tangy peanut sauce, fresh slices of cucumber and onions, and with *ketupat*, rice filled in pouches made of coconut leaves. A special dish, often referred to as Brunei's national dish, is *ambuyat*, made from the pith of the sago palm. This pith is grated, dried, and emulsified into a starchy paste that is then boiled with water to form *ambuyat*. To eat the *ambuyat*, special joined chopsticks called *chandas* are used to twirl the *ambuyat* like spaghetti around it. The *ambuyat*-coated *chandas* are then dipped into a special *ambuyat* sauce made from salted durian, lemon juice, shrimp paste, and *binjai*, a mango-like Bruneian fruit. Other side-dishes that traditionally accompany a meal of *ambuyat* include salads, boiled fish in a very hot sauce made from small chilies, and a preparation of ferns, or *pakis*, sautéed with ginger and garlic. One very popular salad is *rojak sotong*, which includes sweet turnip, cucumber, pineapple, and calamari.

Desserts are either fried or steamed and are made from glutinous flour, sugar, coconut and *pandan* (pandanus leaves). The desserts include *kuih talam*, made from sticky rice and *pandan* leaf jelly, and *kuih tako*, made from coconut and *pandan* leaf. A favorite drink is *teh tarik*, a frothy tea prepared from powered local tea-leaves. Other favorite drinks are cool, sweet drinks made from local fruits and spiced with cinnamon and anise. During Ramadan, drinks made from sugar and *pandan*, like *air selasih* and *air cincau*, are very popular. Local fruits include the durian, the rambutan, and the langsat.

## 13 EDUCATION

In Brunei, education begins with preschool, followed by six years of primary education and up to seven years of secondary education. For citizens, education is provided free from the age of five years and is mandatory for nine years. Muslim students who live more than eight kilometers (five miles) from their school are entitled to free accommodation in hostels, free transportation to school, or a subsistence allowance.

The schools are either Malay, English, or Chinese schools as they are classified according to the language of instruction. The Malay schools are public schools. While Malay is the medium of instruction in these schools, English and Arabic are used for certain subjects and Islamic studies form an important part of the curriculum. Students usually attend Islamic classes in the mornings or afternoons. Those who pass the sixth year of religious instruction can enter an Arabic course of study and many choose to go overseas, especially to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The private schools mainly use English or Chinese as the medium of instruction. The families of government employees receive educational allowances for sending their children to private schools.

The literacy rate in 2006 was 94.7%. In 1985 the Brunei government established the University of Brunei Darussalam on a sprawling campus overlooking the South China Sea. By 2005

the university had about 3,674 students and over 300 instructors. Another institute of higher learning in Brunei is the Brunei Institute of Technology. However, most of Brunei's college students attend universities abroad and on government scholarships, especially when the fields of study sought are unavailable locally. The most popular destination abroad for higher studies is the United Kingdom although many students also go to the United States, Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Brunei's cultural heritage is derived from the Old Malay World, a region that encompasses the Malay Archipelago. The Malay origins of Brunei's culture are reflected in the country's language, architecture, customs, and ceremonies. Brunei's Malay culture has been impacted by animism, Hinduism, Islam, and by Western influences in the form of colonialism, legal systems, and trade. The most important impact, however, has been Islam, as clearly seen in Brunei's national ideology and philosophy of a Malay Islamic Monarchy, which incorporates Malay culture and the Islamic religion. This national ideology and philosophy is aimed at forging a stronger sense of identity and at fostering unity and stability.

The Brunei government is committed to the preservation of its people's culture, especially the core ethnic Malay and Islamic elements of that culture. In 1975 the government set up the Arts and Handicraft Center as a living testimony to the preservation of Brunei's traditional arts and crafts, such as boat making, bronze tooling, cloth weaving, silver-smithing, wood carving, and basket and mat weaving. Also on display at the Center are Malay weaponry, the Malay art of self defense (*silat*), traditional games, and traditional musical instruments. Some of these cultural artifacts can also be found in the Brunei Museum and in the country's Malay Technology Museum.

At handicraft centers and shops, traditional cloths can be purchased. These cloths include the beautiful gold or silver-threaded material known as *kain jong sarat* and collector textiles called *kain tenunan*. *Jong sarat* is usually worn during weddings and formal occasions. Also on sale are brassware, silverware, bronze items, gongs, and the traditional Malay dagger known as the *kris*. Some of the brassware, silverware, and bronze have been hammered and crafted by hand into attractive trays, jugs, spoons, jewelry boxes, bracelets, and napkin rings.

Brunei's cultural heritage includes its fine collection of Islamic art outside of the Arab world, such as its gilded Holy Qurans, its ceremonial items, and its intricate mosaics that adorn several of its religious monuments.

#### 15 WORK

The government is the largest employer in Brunei, employing more than half of the total labor force, which totaled 180,400 in 2006. About 10% of the labor force is employed in the oil and gas industries. The major sectors in Brunei's economy are oil, natural gas, government, construction, services, retail, and some light manufacturing industries. The light industries include textiles, foodstuffs, mineral water, soft drinks, and cement. In 2003 around 2.9% of the labor force was employed in agriculture, 61.1% in industry, and 36% in services. In 2006 the unemployment rate was 4%.

Because Brunei's small population is insufficient to provide all its manpower needs, the government relies on foreign

workers from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines. They work mainly in the construction industry. The government carefully regulates the flow of overseas workers into Brunei. Work permits for foreigners are issued for short periods and must be continually renewed. Despite these restrictions, foreigners make up a significant portion of the work force, numbering 60,000 in 1995. The government is trying to reduce the country's reliance on foreign workers and is training more locals in technical and professional fields.

The economy's dependence on oil has made Brunei vulnerable to swings in world oil prices. Since oil reserves are expected to run out in the next 50 years, the government is doing its best to diversify the economy by developing tourism and other industries. Agriculture and fisheries are among the industrial sectors that the government has selected for highest priority in its efforts to diversify the economy as only about 15% of Brunei's land area is cultivated while roughly 80% of its food is imported. The government owns a cattle ranch in Australia and most of its beef supply comes from that ranch, which is larger in size than Brunei itself. The government is also encouraging foreign investments and developing education and human resources.

#### 16 SPORTS

Traditional sports include *silat*, a self-defense sport, and *sepak takraw*, a court game in which players pass a rattan ball using only the head, shoulders, or legs.

Brunei's most popular sport is soccer, which is both widely played and a spectator sport. Another very popular game that is also a spectator sport and widely played is badminton. Other popular sports are indoor soccer (*futsal*), cycling, golf, volleyball, softball, basketball, netball, cricket, and rugby.

Water sports include swimming, sailing, water-skiing, windsurfing, and snorkeling. Swimming pools are found throughout Brunei, for private and public use. Brunei also has several fitness and sports centers and a water sports marina. Other sports include athletics, squash, and horseback riding. Brunei has an assortment of world-class championship-quality golf courses, with some offering floodlit night golfing for cooler play. The Trijaya Equestrian Park has first-class facilities, including horses imported from Argentina, and is the world's largest indoor arena that can accommodate up to 50 horses at a time. It offers classes to all ages and abilities, including polo lessons for adults.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For entertainment and recreation, families with young children go to the cinema or theater, or they go on hikes, jogs, or walks through a national park or a forest reserve. One of Brunei's best known attractions is Jerudong Park and Playground, a 57-hectare amusement park in Brunei's capital, with facilities that include an outdoor amphitheatre, a Sky Tower, a roller coaster, a skating rink, a go-kart track, a video arcade, a shooting gallery, and a French carousel for children. Another very popular family-oriented attraction is the Oil and Gas Discovery Center (OGDC), which is in Seria, outside the capital. With its seven galleries that showcase over 100 interactive exhibits, the Center attracts many visitors and is both an educational and recreational landmark.

On weekends, some families enjoy picnics at a swimming pool or at a beach. Karaoke is popular at restaurants and at home, as most families have karaoke machines. Other recreation activities in Brunei include kite-flying, snooker, and bowling. In the case of the young people, many of them enjoy socializing at sidewalk cafes and at shopping malls. For some, going shopping is also a favorite leisure time activity. Shoppers can be found at traditional markets, at tiny boutique shops, or in large shopping malls. The malls include the Yayasan Shopping Complex, the Hua Ho Mall, The Mall, and the Seria Plaza.

### **18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

In general, Bruneians enjoy music and dance. The government's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports sponsors musicians and dancers who perform locally and abroad. Folk arts include traditional Bruneian performances like *Adai-adai*, a song and dance performed by men in fishermen attire, and *Puteri Lela Menchanai*, a musical tragedy about the accidental death of Brunei's fifth Sultan at the hands of his queen.

Among traditional crafts are weaving, silverwork, wood carving, and metalwork. Some of these crafts are taught to the young people in Brunei at a government-sponsored center aimed at preserving Brunei's national heritage.

Hobbies include the playing of traditional musical instruments, such as the gong, the small gongs or *tawak-tawak*, and a type of xylophone known as the *gulingtangan*. These musical instruments are played at wedding ceremonies and family gatherings. Among youth, their hobbies also include contemporary music and dance; these are taught at private studios.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Brunei government is concerned about the increase in domestic violence and abuse against women and currently has several pieces of legislation in place to protect women. The government is also concerned about the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and children and has legislation to deal with these crimes.

There is also some concern about drug use but this is not a major problem. On the whole, Brunei has a very low crime rate, due to government stability and economic prosperity. It also has a very low prevalence of HIV/AIDS (less than 0.1% in 2003) as health care services are very good. Homosexuality is illegal in Brunei.

While race relations between the Malays and the Chinese remain cordial, it needs to be pointed out that it is not easy for the Chinese in Brunei to become citizens. The 1961 Citizenship Law raised the residency requirement for non-indigenous peoples (mainly Chinese) to 25 years, of which 20 years had to be continuous. In 1984, another Citizenship Law raised the residency requirement for non-indigenous peoples to 30 years, of which 25 years had to be continuous. As a result, many Chinese are stateless. Under the country's law, birth in Brunei does not automatically confer citizenship. All seeking citizenship in Brunei have to pass tests on Malay culture, customs, and language.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Males outnumber females in population figures. Males also comprise the majority of scholarship holders and dominate the upper levels of the government echelon although more women

have achieved high government positions, including the posts of ministers. Moreover, of the 60 local pilots in the Royal Brunei Airline, only 4 are women. In addition, under Muslim law, women are left less inheritance money compared to men. However, in a marriage, a husband is required to share his earnings with his wife but is forbidden to touch his wife's money.

Females outnumber males at the university level, with nearly two thirds of Brunei University's entering class in the late 1990s being women students. Brunei also has more female than male teachers. Women serve in the armed forces and they have equal opportunities to land and house ownership. The government also emphasizes affordable and equal access to healthcare. In general, women have fair access to jobs across the Sultanate and Brunei does not have gender wage bias issues. In Brunei's public sector, the gender wage gap hardly exists due to the uniform pay scale for men and women. In the private sector, however, men on average earn 28% more than women in all occupations.

The percentage of women in the Bruneian workforce has grown significantly, from 20 % in 1971 to 59 % in 2006. Under Brunei law, women under the age of 18 are not allowed to work at night or on offshore oil platforms. The employment of children below the age of 16 is also prohibited. In the business sector the government's supportive measures for women include the financial assistance schemes through commercial banks, such as the Enterprise Facilitation Scheme, the Micro-Credit Financing Scheme, and the Working Capital Credit Fund. Nearly two-thirds of the beneficiaries of these schemes are women. The main government agency for women's affairs is the Department of Community Development, in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. This Department is responsible for the protection of women and girls and provides counseling services, welfare allowances, and emergency relief when needed. The Department's programs are strongly supported by the Women's Council of Brunei Darussalam, a non-governmental organization affiliated to the ASEAN Council of Women's Organizations, and by other government agencies and the private sector. Brunei has acceded into the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women and is committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other regional and international declarations on gender issues. Brunei's National Registration and Immigration Act allows children of female citizens married to foreign nationals to be accorded Brunei citizenship upon application.

Regarding homosexuality in Brunei, it is frowned upon and considered illegal. As Brunei is a Muslim country, homosexuality can be punished by up to 10 years imprisonment or a fine of 30,000 Brunei dollars.

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—by P. Sodhy

# BUDDHISTS IN SOUTH ASIA

**PRONUNCIATION:** BOO-dists

**LOCATION:** Sri Lanka; India; Nepal; Bhutan; Myanmar; all other countries of South Asia; East Asia

**POPULATION:** 30 million

**LANGUAGE:** Language of community or region in which they reside

**RELIGION:** Various sects include Theravāda (Hīnayāna), Mahāyāna, Tantric; also Tibetan Buddhism (Lāmāism)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Buddhists are believers in the teachings of Gautama Buddha, who was born in the 6th century BC in what is now Nepal. Although his views represented a system of morality or ethics more than a religion, the Buddha founded what was to become one of the world's great religions. Today, there are an estimated 325 million Buddhists in the world. Buddhism is the dominant religion in the countries of mainland Southeast Asia and has a strong presence in East Asia. In South Asia, however, although it is of considerable historical importance, Buddhism has relatively few followers.

The birthplace of Buddhism lies on the Ganges plains in the modern Indian state of Bihar and adjacent areas of Nepal. This is where Buddha lived and died, leaving behind the Sangha ("Order") to continue his work. Buddhism remained a minor sect until the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka was converted in the 3rd century BC. This marked the beginnings of Buddhism as a world religion. Ashoka sent missionaries to the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and converted the entire island to Buddhism. The southern form of Buddhism (Theravada or Hinayana) eventually spread from Ceylon to mainland Southeast Asia and Indonesia. Buddhism also spread northward into Central Asia and from there to China and Japan.

By AD 700, Buddhism had entered a period of decline in much of India, mostly as a result of the revival of Hinduism. The arrival of the Muslims after the 12th century was the death knell for Buddhism in India. Monasteries were destroyed, Buddhist monks were slaughtered, and the survivors fled to safety outside the country. It is one of the great ironies of South Asian history that Buddhism is virtually absent from the land of its birth.

Buddhism in India saw a revival in the late 19th century, with an increased interest in the religion on the part of both Western and Indian scholarship. Buddhists from outside India have campaigned to restore Buddhist sites in India, and post-1947 Indian governments have participated in efforts to preserve that part of the country's cultural heritage. The conversion to Buddhism of "untouchables" seeking to escape the inequalities of the Hindu caste system has swelled the ranks of Buddhists in India in recent years.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Buddhists in South Asia number approximately 30 million people. They are present in all countries in the region, although their greatest concentration is in Sri Lanka. Buddhism

is the religion of the Sinhalese people and accounts for 69% (c.14 million people) of the island nation's population. They are distributed throughout the country except in the north, where Hindu Tamils are in the majority.

There are some 11 and a half million Buddhists in India, amounting to a mere 1.1% of the population (Census of India, 2001). Found mainly in central India, many are recent converts to the religion and have been named "neo-Buddhists." Buddhists are also present in the northern mountains that fringe the Indian subcontinent. These are mostly followers of the Tibetan form of the religion, which is also known as Lamaism. Nearly 10% (about 4 million people) of Nepal's population are Buddhists, living mainly in the Kathmandu Valley and the northern mountain areas. Some 75% of the mountain kingdom of Bhutan's over 800,000 people are Buddhists. Buddhists are found in the Indian state of Sikkim and among the Bhutia population of eastern Kashmir. Small Buddhist communities are also found in Bangladesh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

There is no language specifically identified with Buddhists. Buddha himself used the language of the common people, and the sacred literature of southern Buddhism is written in Pali, a literary language closely related to the language of Buddha's homeland. The scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, however, use Sanskrit, the classical language of northern India.

Buddhists today use the language of their community or region. Sri Lankan Buddhists speak Sinhala, the language of the Sinhalese people. This is an Aryan language of the Indo-European language family and is closely related to the languages of northern India. Buddhists in Maharashtra speak various Marathi dialects. In the northern mountain belt, however, Buddhists speak languages of the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. They include Lepcha and dialects of Bhutia such as Dukpa in the eastern Himalayas and Ladakhi in Kashmir.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Numerous legends are told about the birth and life of Buddha. Before his birth, Buddha's mother Maya dreamed that four kings raised her to the Himalayas where their wives bathed her and dressed her in heavenly robes. Buddha appeared in the form of a white elephant carrying a silver lotus in his trunk. He circled the queen's bed three times, struck her right side, and entered her womb. Tradition has it that at the birth of the Buddha, the udambara tree (*Ficus glomerata*), which is said to blossom only when a Buddha is born, burst into flower.

Another story tells how the Buddha came to renounce his normal life and begin his search for the truth. Born into a noble family, the Buddha was kept protected from the outside world. However, one day while driving in his chariot, the young prince saw an old man bent with age stumbling down the road. He was struck with sorrow that all things must grow old. At another time, he saw a sick man and felt sad at the thought of the suffering brought on by disease. On a third occasion, he saw a corpse. On a fourth journey, Buddha saw an ascetic, totally at peace with himself, setting out with a begging bowl in search for wisdom. After pondering these signs, the prince left his family, newborn son, home, and possessions to pursue his search for enlightenment.



Over the centuries, the relatively simple mythology surrounding the life of Buddha became much more complex. Buddha came to be seen as the seventh in a series of Buddhas, and a popular mythology soon developed around his previous lives. These stories were later gathered in the *Jātakas*, a collection of 550 tales, riddles, and legends about his acts and teachings in past incarnations. In each tale, Buddha appears as a king, or a peasant, an animal, a bird; each story has a moral that elaborates on some Buddhist virtue. Westerners may be indirectly familiar with these stories through Aesop's Fables, which appear to incorporate some of the Buddhist tales.

## 5 RELIGION

Buddha was born Siddhartha, son of a king and member of the Gautama clan of the Sakya tribe, around 563 BC. His birth place was Lumbini, close to Nepal's border with India. The young prince led a pampered and secluded life, but in his 29th year he left his home to seek enlightenment. He became the student of a number of renowned teachers before rejecting asceticism as the path to salvation. He ultimately found Enlightenment (*Bodhi*) under a pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) at Bodhi Gaya at the age of 35. From that time, he was honored as the "Buddha" (the Enlightened One). He preached his first sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath, near Varanasi (Banaras). Buddha died at Kusinagar in Bihar at the age of 80.

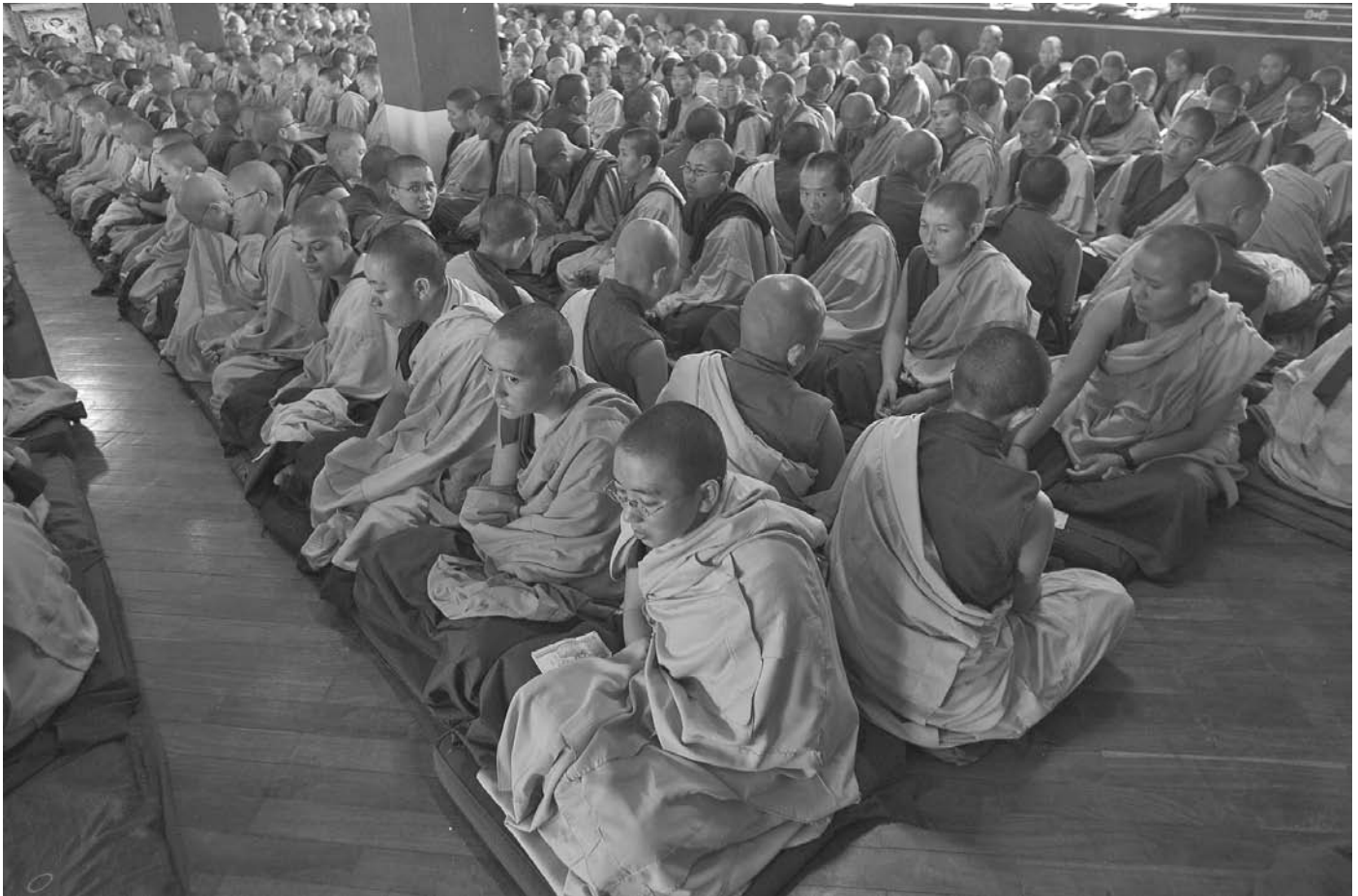
There is little evidence to suggest Buddha set out to reform Hinduism, but many of his teachings were in direct contrast to the practices and customs of the Hindus. He rejected the

authority of the *Vedas* (the sacred books of the Hindus), the superiority of the Brahmins, and the whole idea of the caste system. He was strongly opposed to ritual, the worship of idols, and particularly the sacrifice of animals. Nonetheless, Buddha's teachings embraced many of the philosophical concepts current in the religions of the time. Although they may be interpreted differently, concepts such as dharma, samsāra, karma, and ahimsā are common to Hinduism and Jainism as well as to Buddhism. In Buddhism, dharma has come to mean the Law, i.e., the teachings of Buddha. Samsara is the cycle of birth–death–rebirth in which we are all caught. Karma relates to the effect of good or bad deeds in life determining the nature of one's rebirths. Ahimsa is the doctrine of noninjury to living things that underlies much of Buddhist behavior.

Buddha taught that people are bound to the Wheel of Existence, an endless cycle of rebirths full of suffering and misery. The only way to obtain total release (*nirvāna*) from this cycle of existence is through the teachings of Buddha. In order to fully appreciate these teachings, certain basic truths have to be understood. These are the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism: 1) life is full of suffering; 2) the cause of suffering, which leads to endless rebirths, is desire; 3) release from suffering can only be achieved by abandoning desire; and 4) the way to stop suffering includes right views and right conduct—honesty, noninjury to living creatures (ahimsa), and forgiveness of enemies. A set of rules known as the Eightfold Path guides the pilgrim on the road to Nirvana, which is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist.

At his death, Buddha left behind the Sangha, the community of monks (*bhikku* or *bhikshu*), nuns, and laity who had accepted his teachings. The Order grew rapidly in numbers, but Buddhism remained a minor religion until the conversion of Ashoka, the third Mauryan Emperor, around 260 BC. Under his patronage, Buddhism spread throughout the Mauryan Empire, which included nearly the entire Indian subcontinent. Ashoka's newfound beliefs can be seen in the inscriptions he had carved on rocks and pillars throughout his empire. These Edicts of Ashoka were in effect statements of public policy. Their pronouncements included strong support for ahimsa and banned animal sacrifice, regulated the slaughter of animals for food, and even encouraged the creation of hospitals for animals. Ashoka was also responsible for sending Buddhist missionaries to Egypt, Greece, Syria, Malaya, and other countries outside of India. His own son and daughter went to Ceylon, where they converted the island's ruler to the Buddhist faith.

Following Buddha's death, Buddhism soon splintered into numerous sects. A major division is that between *Theravada* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism, defined by the *Thera* (Elders) at the First Buddhist Council held c. 483 BC, remains true to the original teachings of Buddha. According to its teachings, there is no God, Buddha was an ordinary mortal who should be revered but not worshipped, and everyone is responsible for working out his or her own salvation. This form of Buddhism, sometimes called "southern" Buddhism, was introduced into Ceylon, and from there spread into Southeast Asia. It is also called *Hinayāna* Buddhism, the "Lesser Vehicle." Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, is derived from a sect that broke away from orthodox Buddhism at the beginning of the 4th century BC. Mahayana, literally the "Greater Vehicle" because it holds that salvation is open to greater numbers, made Buddha divine, surrounded him with angels and spiritual beings, and developed elaborate rituals for worship.



*Buddhist monks attend morning prayers at the Kopan Buddhist Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. Kopan Monastery hosts 360 Buddhist monks. (AP Images/David Longstreath)*

Mahayana Buddhism also contains the central concept of the *bodhisattva*, the “Savior Buddha,” who appears on earth at intervals to guide people on the path to salvation. It was Mahayana Buddhism that was carried northwards over the mountains and along the trade routes of Central Asia to China and Japan.

Two other forms of Buddhism have a presence in South Asia. *Tantrism* is of unknown origins, but it came to influence certain Buddhist (and Hindu) sects, especially in the east of the region. Tantrism is generally associated with occultism, black magic, and perverse sexuality. Tantric Buddhism gives tantric interpretations to Mahayana concepts. Thus “Buddhas” are demoniacal figures, each with their consorts, and forever involved in acts of sexual debauchery with female beings. Elements of Tantric Buddhism have been absorbed into the religion as practiced by the Buddhist peoples of the eastern hills of the Indian subcontinent.

It was a Tantric master that gave form to Buddhism in Tibet, the country located immediately to the north of India and Nepal. Buddhism had reached Tibet in the mid-7th century AD, most likely from Central Asia and China. Towards the end of the 8th century, however, a celebrated Indian Tantric monk was invited to Tibet. He was reputed to have miraculous powers and is credited with subduing the demons and spirits associated with Bon, the indigenous religion of the area. Despite the existing influence of Chinese Buddhism, a council decid-

ed that the Indian form of Buddhism should prevail. Tibetan Buddhism represents an intermingling of the sexual-magical Tantric Buddhist cult with Tibetan shamanism. Abandoning the traditional nonviolence of the Buddha, it holds that evil gods and spirits are to be overcome by the superior force of benign powers. The most important rituals are religious dances in which the performers, wearing fearsome and grotesque masks, impersonate the gods and demons. The masks of the gods are intended to strike fear into the hearts of the evil spirits. These so-called “devil dances” form part of all festivals of the Tibetan Buddhists. Tibetan Buddhism is also called Lamaism because of the importance of the *lāmās* or spiritual leaders in the religion. It is the form of Buddhism prevalent among groups such as the Lepchas, Bhutias, Sherpas, Tamangs, and other peoples of the Himalayan region.

Although Buddhism spread around the world from its place of origin in South Asia, it did not fare so well in its homeland. At times, under imperial patronage, Buddhism flourished throughout the subcontinent. But by the beginning of the 8th century, Buddhism in India was coming under increasing pressure from a revitalized Hinduism. Although it survived and flourished in northeastern India under the Pala kings, the death-blow came with the Islamic conquest of India following the 12th century. Muslims killed Buddhist monks, burnt their books, and destroyed their monasteries and centers of learn-



ing. Although Buddhism survived in Ceylon and in the mountain periphery, it was virtually annihilated in the heartland of the Indian subcontinent.

It is unlikely that Buddhism will ever again achieve its position of former prominence in India. However, two separate events have stimulated the expansion of Buddhism in the country since the mid-20th century. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, author of the Indian Constitution and himself a member of an untouchable Hindu caste, announced his conversion to Buddhism in 1956. He recommended this as a means for the entire community of “untouchables” in India to escape the social and economic inferiority imposed on the lower castes by the Hindu caste system. Mass conversions occurred largely among two low-caste groups, the Mahars of eastern Maharashtra, and the Jadavs of Uttar Pradesh.

The second event that contributed to the modern Buddhist revival in India occurred in Tibet. From the mid-17th century, Tibet had been a theocracy, that is, its political ruler was also its religious leader. This figure was the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists. For centuries, Tibet was in effect an independent country. In 1950, however, China invaded Tibet in support of its historical claim to the region. Resentment at Chinese attempts to undermine Buddhism led to an unsuccessful uprising by the Tibetan people. This was suppressed with considerable brutality by the Chinese Army, and in 1959 the Dalai Lama and some 100,000 of his followers fled to India. The Dalai Lama remains in exile in India. His presence, along with the Tibetans who have settled at Dharmasala, Kalimpong, Delhi, and other locations, has given added impetus to Buddhism in northern India.

The “Tibetan” issue has continued to fester since 1959. In 1995, for instance, the Dalai Lama in exile in India, with the help of Chatrel Rimpoche, the abbot of Tashilhumpo monastery (Xigaze, Tibet), named Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, aged six, as the new Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama is the second highest ranking Lama after the Dalai Lama in the Gelugpa sect (also known as the Yellow Hat sect) of Tibetan Buddhism (the sect that controlled Tibet from the 16th century until the Seventeen Point Agreement established Chinese hegemony over Tibet in 1951). The successive Panchen Lamas form a tulku (reincarnation lineage) and are said to be incarnations of Amitabha Buddha. The name, Panchen Lama, meaning “great scholar,” is a Tibetan contraction of the Sanskrit *pandita* (scholar) and the Tibetan *chenpo* (great). In November of the same year, the Religious Affairs Office of China, in a bid to weaken the authority of the Dalai Lama, chose another six-year-old boy, Gyaincain Norbu, citing special ritual reasons. After this recognition, the little Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was apparently kidnapped by police and disappeared and has not been seen since. The Chinese authorities say “he is well, living with his family and does not want to be disturbed.” In March 2008, prior to the Olympic Games in Beijing, and coinciding with the 49th anniversary of the 1959 uprising in Tibet against China, violence erupted again in Tibet. Activists claimed over 100 protestors, mainly Buddhist monks, were killed and 1,000 arrested by the Chinese authorities. They sought to use the occasion of the Olympics to protest China’s “occupation” of Tibet. Protests and violence marred the carrying of the Olympic torch through the streets of London, Paris, and San Francisco, as supporters of Tibet rioted, and calls were made for world political leaders to boycott the Opening Ceremonies of the

Games in Beijing in August 2008. In April 2008, however, the Dalai Lama announced his envoys would be willing to meet with the Chinese authorities to discuss Chinese-Tibetan relations and the meetings commenced at the beginning of May. Popular forms of worship reflect differing Buddhist traditions as well as regional cultures, but there are two practices common to Buddhism wherever it is found. The first is veneration of the Buddha, or Buddha-like figures such as the bodhisattvas. The second is the support of monks by the lay Buddhist community. Other than this, Buddhists in different areas of South Asia have their own forms of religious practice. Tibetan Buddhism, with its distinctive monasteries, use of prayer wheels and prayer flags, mantras, and colorful festivals has quite a different feel from the more austere Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka, and both differ from the Buddhism of the hill tribes of eastern India or the neo-Buddhists of central India.

If religious customs vary among lay Buddhists in South Asia, the life of the monk is much more structured. The rules and responsibilities of life in the monastery are clearly defined. Initiation ceremonies for novices, the rites for ordination of monks, the custom of retreat during the rainy season, and other monastic practices are all set down in the Buddhist texts.

Pilgrimage is an important part of Buddhist religious life in South Asia. A pilgrimage may be undertaken for any number of reasons ranging from a desire for spiritual fulfillment to redeeming a pledge made at a time of sickness or misfortune. Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, the Deer Park at Sarnath, and Kusinagar—the places where the four great events in the Buddha’s life occurred—are the most sacred pilgrimage centers. Buddhists from around the world make the journey to visit these sites. Many Buddhist groups from outside South Asia have built temples and established educational centers at these locations. There are many Buddhist holy places in Sri Lanka, the most important being Kandy, where the Tooth Relic of the Buddha is kept, and Anuradhapura, where an offshoot of the original *bo* tree under which Buddha found Enlightenment still grows.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

For Buddhists, Buddha Purnima (the full moon day that falls in the month of Vaisakha [May]) is a thrice sacred day. It is celebrated as the anniversary of Gautama Buddha’s birth; it is on this day that Buddha received Enlightenment under the pipal tree at Bodh Gaya; and it is also the day on which Buddha attained Nirvana. The festival is described by the Chinese traveler Fa-hsien, who visited India in the 5th century AD, and it has changed little from ancient times. It is marked by continuous recitation from the Buddhist scriptures and the worship of the statue of Buddha, with offerings of incense, candles, flowers, and fruits. Fruits and clothes are distributed to the sick. The Bodhi tree, the tree under which Buddha attained Enlightenment, is also worshipped and its branches decorated with garlands and colored flags. Oil lamps are placed around the tree, and milk and scented water are sprinkled on its roots. Large numbers of pilgrims gather at the four sites where the great events of Buddha’s life occurred to participate in the celebrations.

Other festivals commemorate Buddha’s sermon in the Deer Park (Wheel of Law Day), the end of the Bhikshu Vassa (the three-month period during the rainy season when monks are confined to their monasteries), and Magha Purnima, the full moon day in February when Buddha announced the time of

his impending death. Madhu Purnima is observed by offering honey (*madhu*) to Buddha and to monks in the monasteries. This celebrates the occasion when, according to the Buddhist scriptures, Buddha was presented with honey by a monkey while staying in a forest.

Every June a major festival is held at Hemis Gompa (monastery) near Leh, the capital of Ladakh in India, to honor the birthday of the monk who founded Lamaism in the 8th century AD.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Buddhists follow the practices of local cultures in their birth rituals. It is customary among some Buddhist groups for boys to enter a monastery for a short time on reaching puberty. They shave their heads, don the saffron robes, and lead the life of a novice before returning to normal life.

Buddhists in South Asia follow the basic customs of the region in their death rites, with bodies being cremated on a funeral pyre. The Buddhist scriptures tell how the Buddha's ashes were dispersed and entombed in *stūpas* across the land. In the northern mountains, however, where wood is scarce, it is the custom to expose bodies to be consumed by vultures and wild animals. Important figures in Lamaistic Buddhism, such as the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, are entombed in stupas in attitudes of meditation. In Tibetan monasteries, a sacred text known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is sometimes read to dying monks. It is believed that the last thoughts in one's mind before death are of significance.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Buddhists follow local forms of greetings and visiting customs.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of lay Buddhists reflect those of the culture and society to which they belong. Monks and nuns reside in monastic communities known as *vihāras* in India or *gompas* in Tibetan Buddhism.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Buddhist society reflects the kin system, family structure, and marriage customs of specific ethnic communities or of the dominant regional culture.

## 11 CLOTHING

Buddhist monks and nuns shave their heads and dress in simple saffron (yellow) robes when they join the monastic order. Tibetan Buddhist monks wear a coarse red outer robe, and on ceremonial occasions they wear elaborate headdresses. In lay society, Buddhists adopt local forms of dress.

## 12 FOOD

Food habits of Buddhists in South Asia reflect regional dietary patterns, subject to the specific restrictions imposed by their religion. However, Buddhist dietary laws and practices lack unity and show considerable variation from place to place. Many Buddhists are strict vegetarians out of respect for the ahimsa principle and reluctance to take animal life. But even Buddha himself taught that fish and meat could be eaten if the animal were not killed specifically for one's consumption (Buddha

is thought to have died after eating tainted pork). Thus in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese Buddhists object to the slaughter of animals or the raising of livestock for food, yet many eat beef. By contrast, tribes in the eastern hills of India, though nominally Buddhist, make offerings of chickens, goats, and even pigs to deities and local spirits and eat the flesh of the sacrificed animals. Similarly, Buddhists in the western Himalayas avoid fish and even view fishing as sinful, while Buddhists elsewhere have no prejudices against eating fish.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is important in Buddhism, and monasteries have always been centers of learning and religious education. In lay society, Buddhists mirror the educational standards of their specific communities. Thus, literacy rates vary from among the highest in South Asia (over 90% in Sri Lanka) to the lowest (15%) among the Chakmas of Bangladesh and other hill tribes of eastern India.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Buddhists have a rich heritage of literature and art in South Asia. The Pali canon, the sacred literature of Theravada Buddhism, was set down between 350–90 BC. In addition to discussions of philosophy, it covers subjects ranging from the rules of monastic discipline to the ethical teachings of the Jataka stories. The best known of this collection of texts is the Dhammapada, the "Law-Path." The *Dīpavamsa* and the *Mahāvamsa* are later Pali works chronicling the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Mahayana scriptures are presented as a series of dialogues and sermons (*sūtras*) delivered by Buddha himself. There are many hundred *sūtras*, most originally written in Sanskrit and translated into Tibetan, Chinese, and other Asian languages.

Buddhist architecture flourished centuries before the oldest known Hindu temples were built. The first Buddhist monuments were stupas—massive, hemispherical funeral mounds built to hold the relics of the Buddha. Stupas, though of a later date, are found today at Sarnath, Sanchi, and other Buddhist sites. The Buddhist sculptures at Bharhut, Sanchi, and Bodhi Gaya (all dated c.185–80 BC) are among the earliest in South Asian art. Buddhist frescoes at the Ajanta caves, along with the rock art at Sigiriya in Sri Lanka, are regarded as outstanding examples of early South Asian painting. The unique sculptures of Gandharan art represent a blending of Western influences with Buddhist traditions. In Sri Lanka, a Buddhist heritage extending unbroken for over two millennia is seen in the island's numerous monasteries, temples, and sculptures. The huge statue of the reclining Buddha (14 m or 46 ft long) at Polonnaruwa is one of the highest achievements of Sri Lankan art.

Buddhism has influenced many other aspects of life in the region. Buddhists kept the first systematic historical records in India. Three of India's greatest rulers (Ashoka, Kanishka, and Harsha) were Buddhist, and many early political and administrative systems have their origins in Buddhist democratic assemblies. The Buddhist universities at Nalanda and Taxila were ancient centers of learning in India. Buddhism has also had a profound influence on Hinduism, which adopted Buddhist practices in a struggle for the allegiance of the common people. Concepts such as nonviolence (ahimsa) and prohibitions against meat-eating and drinking liquor are Buddhist rather than Hindu in origin. Although Buddhism is virtually

absent from South Asia today, South Asian civilization cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the contributions of Buddhism and the Buddhists.

### **15 WORK**

Belief in ahimsa, though not carried to the same extreme as in Jainism, prohibits Buddhists from occupations related to the killing of animals for food. Thus Buddhists do not become butchers, and some even object to the raising of livestock for slaughter. Beyond this, and some restrictions relating to anti-fishing sentiments among some groups, Buddhist laity are free to engage in the full range of activities offered by the economies of South Asia.

### **16 SPORTS**

There are no sports unique to Buddhists.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

There are no forms of entertainment or recreation associated specifically with the Buddhist community.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

While there are no folk arts that can be termed "Buddhist," there are Buddhist (and non-Buddhist) artisans who produce items having religious symbolism for sale. These include the thankas (painted scrolls) and prayer wheels of Tibetan Buddhism, masks used for "devil-dancing," and metal and stone statues of the Buddha.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Given the nature of Buddhism in South Asia today, it makes more sense to talk about individual Buddhist communities rather than Buddhists in general. Each community exists in its own cultural setting and each has its own set of problems. For the most part, these are political and social in nature rather than stemming directly from religion. In Sri Lanka, for example, Buddhism is symbolic of the island's Sinhalese majority. It is fear and resentment of the cultural dominance of this group that has led to the Hindu Tamil uprising in the north of the island. The problems of the Chakmas of eastern Bangladesh exist not because they are Buddhists, but largely because they are a non-Muslim tribal minority that is fighting to retain its identity and some of its traditional freedoms. The Tibetan refugees in northern India fled what was a concerted attempt on the part of the Chinese to stamp out the authority of Buddhism in Tibet. Although accepted by India, they remain exiles in a foreign land.

Dr. Ambedkar, a member of the Mahar community (a Hindu Untouchable group), converted to Buddhism in 1946 and gave rise to what have been called "neo-Buddhists" i.e. low caste Hindus who converted to Buddhism to escape the strictures of the Hindu caste system. On the occasion of his conversion, Ambedkar repeated what he had been saying for years: that only conversion could really change the social status of the lowest castes. However, unlike many of his followers, Ambedkar did not convert to Buddhism merely because he found it socially useful. He had studied Buddhism and did believe that it was the most rational and humane religious tradition, the best for all human beings, untouchables and touchables alike. He consequently rejected "opportunistic" conversions to Islam

and Christianity, not merely because he considered these religions a threat to India (on this point, he is supported by the Hindutva spokesmen), but because he considered these religions inferior to the humanism and rationalism of Buddhism. An additional reason for his choice of Buddhism was his highly unlikely belief that Buddhism, an elite religion thriving on patronage, had been the original religion of the Dalits. In Ambedkar's view, the Dalits should not seek a new religion but return to their original religion.

Today, there are about 10 million neo-Buddhists in India, most of them from Ambedkar's own Mahar caste and related Scheduled Castes. Occasionally, local mass conversions to Buddhism still occur in these communities. Buddhist sources claim that, in 2006, over 300,000 Dalits in central India converted to Buddhism on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar embracing the religion, though one suspects this number is exaggerated. Unlike the Dalai Lama, who emphasizes the close tie between Hinduism and Buddhism before his Indian hosts, the Ambedkarite tendency in Buddhism is overtly anti-Hindu and tries to maximize the separateness of the religion.

The problems of the neo-Buddhists are of a different nature than those of other Buddhists in India. With no local historical roots, and isolated from contact with the broader Buddhist community, they lack the traditional structures of Buddhist society. There is, for example, a scarcity of Buddhist monks to perform religious functions. As a result, it is common for leading members of the community to officiate at marriages and other ceremonies. One might reasonably expect neo-Buddhist society to develop along slightly different lines, with monks playing a less important role than in other Buddhist communities. This will only add to the diversity that characterizes Buddhism in South Asia today.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Theoretically, in Buddhism, women are treated as equal to men and so gender issues should be absent from Buddhist societies, as claimed by women's groups in Bhutan. There are, for example, Buddhist nuns, but in Sri Lanka there is strong opposition to the idea of full ordination for women from conservative monks. Indeed, after the schism of Buddhism between Māhāyāna and Hīnayāna Buddhism, discrimination against women became entrenched in the latter. For instance, in Hīnayāna Buddhism, a woman cannot attain full Buddhahood. Such attitudes originate essentially in the views of Hinduism towards women.

Thus, the place of Buddhist women in society varies considerably throughout South Asia and is determined largely by the individual group among which a woman lives. Women in Hīnayāna societies, such as that prevalent in Sri Lanka, are seen as somewhat inferior to men, whereas in the Mahāyāna Buddhism prevalent in the north, such discrimination is not so overt. Women in Buddhist societies in India, such as newly converted low-caste groups, are strongly affected by traditional Hindu attitudes towards women and tend to occupy the role of inferior citizens so typical of Hindu societies. Poverty and lack of education remains the key to the role of Buddhist women in society.

Several states governed by the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have introduced laws to make conversions of low caste Hindus to Buddhism difficult. The

states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu have all passed laws restricting conversions. Gujarat has reclassified Buddhism and Jainism as branches of the Hindu religion, in an attempt to prevent conversions away from Hinduism eroding the BJP's bedrock support. Officially, caste discrimination was outlawed when India gained independence in 1947, but many of the country's Dalits say that people's attitudes towards them remain the same.

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—by D. O. Lodrick.

# BUGIS, MAKASSARESE, AND MANDARESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** BOO-gheez, muh-KAHSS-uh-reez, and MAHN-duh-reez

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Buginese, Bugis-Makassarese, Mandar

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sulawesi)

**POPULATION:** Bugis (5 million); Makassarese (2 million); Mandarese (0.5 million).

**LANGUAGE:** Buginese; Makassarese; Mandarese; Makassar Malay

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

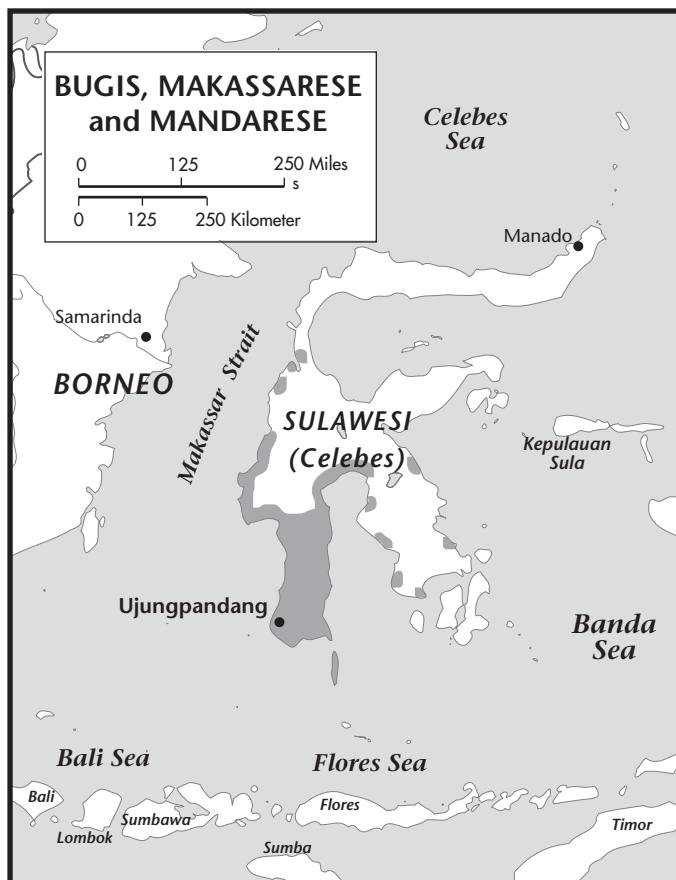
## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Although the majority gains their livelihood from wet-rice cultivation, the Muslim peoples of Sulawesi's southwestern peninsula have long been renowned throughout the Indonesian archipelago as seafarers, whether as shipbuilders, traders, pirates, mercenaries, or migrants. While the Bugis, Makassarese, and Mandarese speak mutually unintelligible languages, they otherwise share so much in common that Indonesians often speak of one "Bugis-Makassar" ethnic group.

Austronesian-speaking agriculturalists entered Sulawesi from the Philippines about 4,000 years ago. In comparison with regions farther west, Indian civilization made little impact on early Sulawesi cultures, although pre-Islamic graves full of Chinese, Siamese, and Annamite porcelain attest to a bustling trade at this stopover on the route to the spice-rich Moluccas. First referred to in 14th century Javanese writings, the first kingdoms were founded on control of iron mines in eastern Luwu. Over the next three centuries, local rulers transformed village confederations into monarchies, basing claims to divine ancestry on possession of *arajang*, regalia believed to have descended from heaven.

Two of these kingdoms, Makassarese Gowa and Tallo, joined to form a power whose hegemony in the early 17th century extended far beyond the peninsula to coastal states in eastern Kalimantan, eastern Sulawesi, and the Lesser Sundas. Its capital, the fortified port city of Makassar, attracted Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Danes as well as Malays, Gujeratis, and Chinese eager to circumvent the monopoly that the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was then attempting to impose on the Moluccan spice trade. These widened contacts introduced South Sulawesi to Islam; Luwu converted in 1603, Gowa-Tallo two years later, and the other Bugis kingdoms shortly thereafter, upon being defeated by the Makassarese.

In 1615, Sultan Alauddin of Gowa replied thus to VOC envoys: "God made the land and the sea: the land He divided among men and the sea He gave in common. It has never been heard that anyone should be forbidden to sail the seas." The VOC succeeded in crushing this greatest obstacle to its monopoly only in alliance with Arung Palakka, a nobleman from the Bugis kingdom of Bone, who was able to gather a great army of Bugis resentful of Gowa dominance. As a VOC city rose on the ruins of Sultan Hasanuddin's capital, and power in the peninsula shifted to Bone, many Makassarese and Wajo Bugis found refuge elsewhere in the archipelago, the former fighting along-



side other enemies of the Dutch and the latter founding dynasties as far away as Johor and Selangor on the Malay peninsula.

Outside of the VOC strongholds at Makassar and along the south coast, Dutch colonial rule came to South Sulawesi only in the first decades of the 20th century after a series of hard-fought wars from 1824 to 1906 (the last Mandar resistance ended in 1916). After 30 years of stability, Sulawesi again changed hands, falling under the administration of the Japanese Navy from 1942 to 1945. Although the nationalist movement had only the shallowest of roots there, a very effective guerrilla movement sprang up to fight the bloodiest Dutch counter-revolutionary campaign in the whole archipelago. However, even after the Dutch puppet-state of “East Indonesia,” based in Makassar, dissolved itself on 17 August 1950, local strongmen who had seized power in the previous years of chaos were reluctant to move aside for the central government, and the central government in turn alienated much of the population by deflating hopes for an Islamic state and local autonomy. In July 1950, Kahar Muzakkar, a modernist Muslim leader and a revolutionary activist, launched a rebellion against the Jakarta government that only ended upon his death in 1965.

Under Suharto’s New Order regime (1965–1998), economic development resumed in South Sulawesi, and a new commercial elite emerged to join bureaucrats, military officers, university graduates, and Islamic religious leaders in replacing the aristocracy that had lost power with the coming of the Indonesian independence. Despite the real progress made, South and West Sulawesi continue to lag behind parts of the coun-

try with comparably dense populations and high incidences of poverty, such as Java and Bali. South Sulawesi has experienced a disproportionate amount of the collective violence occurring in Indonesia during the final years of the Suharto regime and immediately after and ranked third in number of incidents of inter-group or village brawls (132 in 1990–2003, compared to 193 for Central Java), as well as high in incidents of vigilante “popular justice” violence. The rioting that destroyed much of the Chinese section of Ujungpandang/Makassar in September 1997 as the Asian/global emerging markets financial crisis was making itself felt in Indonesia is only the most infamous example.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The topography of Sulawesi’s southwestern peninsula ranges from the precipitously rising limestone mountains of the north to a broad plain in the center (its lakes are the remnants of a shallow sea) to a volcanic range in the south. December and January bring the heaviest monsoon rains, while the hottest and driest season runs from June to August. The 1.5 million Makassarese (Indonesia’s thirteenth largest ethnic group) reside along the mountainous southernmost coast of the peninsula, on Selayar and other offshore islands, and on a bit of fertile lowland north of Makassar city. The 5 million Bugis (the country’s eighth largest ethnic group) live to their north, stretching as far as the northern highlands and farming the peninsula’s lowland midriff, eastern Indonesia’s greatest rice-bowl (while linguistically closer to the Sa’dan Toraja, the Massenrempulu of the northern highlands and the Luwu at the head of the Gulf of Bone are usually classified as Bugis due to their adherence to Islam). The Mandarese (500,000) occupy the mountainous westward bulge of the island, comprising half of the population of the new province of West Sulawesi (separated from South Sulawesi in 2004).

In addition, Bugis communities (and to a lesser extent Makassarese) can be found scattered along the shores of eastern Indonesia’s islands; they have traveled as far as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and northern Australia and have settled in Sumatra, Malaya, and in the cities of Java. According to the 2000 census, Bugis, 42% of their ancestral province of South Sulawesi constitute the second largest ethnic group in the following provinces: 19% in Southeast Sulawesi; 14% in Central Sulawesi Tengah; and 18% in East Kalimantan Timur. An opposite movement has recently affected Luwu and Polewali Mamasa (directly east of the Mandar region): transmigrants from Java, Bali, and Lombok have compounded ethnic diversity in those areas. Makassar has long been a multiethnic city (the city’s official name from 1971 to 1999, “Ujungpandang,” recognized this reality); in addition to Makassarese, Bugis, Mandar, and Toraja, its population includes Chinese, Javanese, Minahasans, Ambonese, and representatives of virtually every group in eastern Indonesia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Buginese, Makassarese, Mandarese, and Sa’dan Toraja constitute a discrete group of closely related Austronesian languages. Regionally prestigious, Bugis has over 500,000 second-language speakers, and Makassarese has over 400,000 (this does not include the many ethnic Chinese in Makassar for whom Makassarese is the first language). As its lingua franca, the multiethnic city of Makassar has long had its own dialect of

Malay, distinguishable from the now-common Bahasa Indonesia by, among other features, its use of Makassarese sentence-final particles (e.g., for “One only,” “*Satu ji*” instead of the standard “*Satu saja*”).

Reflecting Islam, personal names generally are Arabic in origin. Family names are not used.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Running to thousands of pages, the Bugis epic *I La Galigo*, the greatest repository of the pre-Islamic mythology common to all the peoples of South Sulawesi (including the Sa'dan Toraja), recounts the adventures of the *Tomanurung*, beings descended from heaven whom South Sulawesi's kings claimed as ancestors. The epic begins with Batara Guru, the eldest son of the principal god of the upperworld, descending through a bamboo tube to eastern Luwu, then creating the earth's flora and fauna. After he completes a 15-day fast, other heavenly beings join him to cultivate the earth, and his cousin, a princess of the underworld, emerges from the sea to marry him. The rest of the epic focuses on six generations of his descendants, beginning with his son Sawerigading who, unable to consummate his love for his twin sister, embarks on adventures in the upper, middle, and lower worlds, finally gaining the hand of the princess We Cudai'. They have a son, La Galigo, whose exploits in love and war occupy most of the remaining narrative.

#### 5 RELIGION

Virtually all Makassarese, Bugis, and Mandarese adhere to Sunni Islam. These peoples are considered among the strongest believers of any in the archipelago, comparable in devotion to the Acehnese and the Minangkabau. Although Muslim Malay traders had sojourned in the peninsula's port since at least the 15th century, tradition attributes Islam's initial propagation to Minangkabau holy men arriving at the beginning of the 17th century.

Islam as practiced in South Sulawesi often includes elements of the pre-Islamic religion: offerings to ancestors and spirits of the sea, earth, and rice (an homage rendered also to Muslim saints); healing, agricultural, house-, and boatbuilding rituals; the care of *saukang* (supernaturally charged places); even a (now almost entirely vanished) transvestite priesthood (*bissu*) to care for the *arajang* regalia and perform oracles. In the 20th century, modernist Muslims, who considered many of the local traditions idolatrous, have worked with considerable success to eliminate them. However, pre-Islamic religious traditions are still observed by the To Lotang of Sidenreng (the government has classified their beliefs as Hinduism) and the Amma Towa of Bulukumba (who defend their identity as Muslims).

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Getting married among the Bugis and Makassarese entails the following steps. The man's family pays a formal visit to the woman's family to sound out the possibility of a union. If a proposal can be made, the man's family sends a representative to negotiate the bride-price, a wedding date, wedding expenses, and feast arrangements. After this, the wedding can be announced to all the kin of both sides. On the wedding day

itself, the groom with a procession of kin, young and old, male and female, arrives at the bride's house bearing the bride-price, women's clothing, and different kinds of food. Then, the wedding ceremony itself follows. For the reception, guests are invited inside the house; they give presents or money (formerly, paddy fields, gardens, or livestock) as a kind of competition between the bride's and groom's sides. A few days after the wedding, the new couple visits first the groom's family and then the bride's, giving out presents to all family members. The couple stays with the bride's parents before setting up their own household.

If the woman's family refuses the man's proposal or sets the wedding expenses too high (a kind of subtle refusal), the couple may elope. The elopement causes the woman's family to lose face, and her male kin might pursue and kill the man, if they catch him. The man seeks the protection of a powerful person who will try to assuage the anger of the woman's side. If the woman's family shows signs of accepting the union after all, the man's family takes the initiative to make a reconciliation meeting.

For additional information on rites of passage, see the article on **Indonesians**.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The central value governing interpersonal relations is *siri*, a powerful sense of face that demands that the individual or the group strive as hard as possible to win prestige as well as uphold honor at all costs, even going as far as dying in the attempt to kill offending parties.

Traditional society distinguished three classes: nobility (“descendants of kings”); commoners (“freemen”); and slaves (war captives, violators of custom, and those selling themselves to pay debts). In the 20th century, the category of slave has disappeared. Noble titles (*Karaenta*, *Puatta*, *Andi*, *Daeng*, *Puang*) are still used, but, since World War II, education and bureaucratic position earn as much or more deference than ancestry alone.

Although linguistic etiquette is far simpler than in Java or Bali, one does modify one's speech according to whether the addressee is one's social superior, equal, or inferior: e.g., “Where are you coming from?” can be rendered in Bugis as *Pole tegai petta?* (deferential), *Pole tegaki?* (polite), or *Pole tega-ko?* (brusk, appropriate towards children or people of greatly inferior status). To show greater respect, euphemistic or indirect expressions can be employed: e.g., *Leccekki yolo mab-bura*, “Please transfer there and take the remedy,” rather than *Lokkakki yolo manre*, “Please go eat.” To persons of the highest status, such as religious teachers or royalty, an appropriate greeting is to bow and kiss the person's hand.

Contact between unrelated members of the opposite sex outside the surveillance of older family members is still strongly discouraged, although modern education and work provide some opportunities for this. For a young man to show interest in a girl, one strategy acceptable to custom is for him to steal her underwear while she (covered in a sarong) is bathing by a river. He then returns the underwear to her without telling anyone else about it. If the theft does become known to others, the girl's family loses face and may harm the young man.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Villages consist of 10 to 200 houses facing either south or west or backing onto a river if there is one; a banyan tree and a mosque or prayer house lies at the town center. .

Traditional wooden-frame houses are raised on 1.5-m to 2-m (5–7 ft) stilts. For floors and walls, richer houses use wood with zinc roofing, while poorer ones use bamboo with leaf-fiber roofing. The house is divided vertically into three parts: the spirit-inhabited area immediately under the roof; the middle area for human living; and the area under the house floor for storing tools and keeping animals. Horizontally, beginning in front facing the road, the house is partitioned into: an unroofed veranda; a vestibule where the family relaxes and guests wait before being invited in; a second room where the family eats, containing heirloom weapons and the house's central pillar (the place of the house's protective spirit); and a sleeping room, further divided into a front section for the parents and a back section for the daughters (sons sleep on the front veranda or at the village mosque). Commoner houses will have one lower roof over the vestibule and another higher one over the rest of the house; aristocratic houses may have as many as five further roofs. Cooking takes place at the back or behind the house.

South Sulawesi, comprising the ancestral homelands of the Bugis and Makassarese, has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 68.1 (2005 score), while that of West Sulawesi, the homeland of the Mandar, is 65.7, both figures considerably lower than the national HDI of 69.6. South Sulawesi's GDP per capita is us\$6,913, relatively low for Indonesia (us\$9,784 for West Sumatra, us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, but us\$6,293 for Central Java and us\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Ideal (but not obligatory) marriage partners are cousins of the first, second, and third degrees; marriage with a sibling, a child of a sibling, or a grandchild, however, is taboo.

A household consists of one nuclear family, including grandparents and unmarried adult children. In wealthier urban households, relatives from the countryside may stay for considerable lengths of time, joining in household chores. Traditionally, husbands and wives address each other respectively as "Father of [child's name]" or "Mother of [child's name]," e.g., in Bugis, "*Ambonna/Ambenna Beddu*" or "*Indonna/Emmakna Beddu*" (Beddu being the child). Parents call sons "*Baco*" and call girls "*Bece*." Children address fathers with a variety of titles (*Ambo*, *Abba*, *Puang*, *Petta*, and others) and mothers with *Indo*, *Emmak*, *Ummi*/*Mi* or a shortened form of the mother's name (e.g., "Lima" for "Halimah"). Older siblings call younger ones by their name or with *Anri*; younger siblings address older ones with *Kaka*, *Daeng*, or sometimes with their name.

## 11 CLOTHING

House clothes are shorts with or without a shirt for boys, and a shirt and a skirt down to the knees for girls. Adult men wear a plaid-patterned sarong with or without a sleeveless undershirt, while adult women wear a batik sarong with a *kebaya* blouse or a shirt with sleeves down to the elbow. In contrast to the practice elsewhere in Indonesia, men and women both wear the same type of tubular sarong, the only difference being that

traditionally men kept the sarong in place with a knot while women draped the edge over their right forearm.

For male street wear, although Western-style trousers and shirts are common, so too is the sarong with a long- or short-sleeved shirt. It is impolite to go out in public without a head-covering (a black velvet cap, a white *hajji* cap, or, now rarely, the *sangkok rucca*, a traditional brimless, flat-topped cap woven of palm-leaf fibers). For traditional ceremonies, a man adds a buttoned-up jacket to the shirt and sarong (often silk).

Female street wear consists of the sarong-blouse combination or modest Western dress. Traditional clothing, now largely ceremonial, is a silk sarong with a *baju bodo*, a blouse with wide, short sleeves (now over an undershirt). Before Indonesian independence (much less so now), the color of the *baju bodo* had to fit age and status: light reds for teenage girls and still-childless married women; dark reds for married women with children; green for the daughters of aristocratic families; purple for widows; white for nursemaids; and black for the elderly.

## 12 FOOD

Daily food consists of rice with fish, soupy vegetables, pickles, and chili sauce. Grilled fish, shrimp, and other seafood eaten with dipping sauces are popular, as are curries and meats stewed in coconut milk. Nationally famous are the region's sweets and cakes, *konro Makassar* (a beef-rib soup), and *coto Makassar* (a soup of water-buffalo lungs, intestines, liver, and tripe eaten with rice steamed in palm leaf packets).

Men eat first in the front room of the house, while women eat later there or in the kitchen. According to folk belief, one should close windows and doors before eating.

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2005, South Sulawesi's level of literacy stood at 84.6%, low by Indonesian national standards and even below other densely populated provinces with large numbers of poor, such as East Java and Bali. (See also the article entitled **INDONESIANS**.)

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Played solo or in small ensembles, traditional musical instruments include the drum, gong, *kesekeso* (a two-string vertical fiddle with a pot-bellied soundbox), a boat-shaped zither (*kecape* in Bugis or *kacaping* in Makassarese), the *pui-pui* (a high-pitched oboe-like instrument), and the Mandarese *jarumbing* (a pronged bamboo cane). Popular songs following national or international models are sung in the local languages, such as in the genre *lagu Makassar*.

Traditional dances divide into court and folk dances. Among the former are the Bugis *Pajaga* (danced by 12 aristocratic girls), the Makassarese *Pakarena* (12 girls and 12 boys), and the Mandarese *Pattudu* (6 to 8 girls); these contrast the restrained movements of the dancers with dynamic drumming. A similar aesthetic governs a wedding dance in which the bride remains impassive while being taunted by a pair of older male dancers. Folk dances include martial dances accompanied by the *rebana* flat drum, the *Pattenung* depicting weaving, the *Mappuka*, which imitates fishing, the Bugis *Mappadandang* harvest dance (an occasion for much horseplay among young men), and the Makassarese *Ganrang Bulo*, a highly syncopated dance with young boys beating time with bamboo rods.

The Bugis and Makassarese have written extensive literatures in their own script called *aksara lontara'*, after the lontar palm leaves used as paper (the Gowa king Daeng Pamatte standardized the letters in the 16th century). This literature encompasses customary regulations, augury books (especially for planting and harvesting times), genealogies, dynastic origin myths, factual chronicles, and court diaries (the last two genres are unique in Indonesia).

There is also a religious literature written in Arabic-derived letters called *aksara serang*, presumably introduced via Seram in the Moluccas. Local literary works were also composed in Malay, the most famous being the *Sya'ir Perang Mangkasara* about the defense of Makassar against the Dutch.

## 15 WORK

In earlier times, South Sulawesi exported rice, livestock, and dried fish to the food-deficient Eastern Kalimantan, Southeast Sulawesi, and the Moluccas. Decades of warfare ending only in the mid-1960s left the province among the poorest in Indonesia, and income remains below the national average, though it is rising rapidly as the region begins to fulfill its potential as eastern Indonesia's service and production center. In the past, the Bugis in particular have been dependent on rice cultivation for a livelihood but now are diversifying into coconuts, coffee, cloves, kapok, candlenut, and tobacco. Erosion caused by deforestation, however, threatens agricultural expansion. Fishing, and the collection of sea products such as sea cucumber for the Chinese market, is also an important occupation, particularly among the Makassarese and Mandarese.

Unlike certain other groups such as the Javanese, there is no prejudice against manual labor; what is important in a job is the extent to which one is free of other's commands.

## 16 SPORTS

One traditional sport is *paraga* in which boys or young men attempt to keep a rattan-work ball in the air with their feet to the sound of the drum and *pui-pui* playing.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The first European travelers admired the region's boat builders, the premier center being Bira at the southwestern tip of the peninsula with its access to the ironwood of Bulukumba and Selayar. Bira boatbuilding teams travel all over the peninsula and even to Kalimantan and Java in order to sell their skills. The boats are built from memory without written designs and with the simplest tools: a vertical saw, hand drill, adze, and a plane, and *no* nails. Only bolts are used to secure ribs to the hull. Traditional boat-types include the large, elegant *pinisi* and smaller outriggered *lepa-lepa* and *sande*. Today, the biggest boats are motorized and reach 500 tons.

Until the early 20th century, South Sulawesi exported silk and cotton; weaving still provides supplementary income for village women. Two styles are best known: *sarong Mandar*, cloth of very fine weave with checkered patterns in sober colors, widely traded in the archipelago; and *sarong Bugis*, brilliantly colored silk cloth with large patterns reminiscent of Thai fabrics.

Other highly developed crafts are blacksmithing (now using scrap metal rather than freshly mined ore), gold- and silver smithing (a specialty being fine filigree work), and mat- and basket-weaving.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

South Sulawesi's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 56.9, significantly below Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) is 45.6, also lower than the national GEM of 54.6.

According to anthropologist Christian Pelras, Bugis culture overall emphasizes the equality and complementarities of the two genders, despite Islamic influence often appearing to put men in the foreground and women in the background. The freedom and power of women in Bugis society struck early European observers; many instances are known of woman rulers (even one ruling her kingdom without interference from her husband, the ruler of another kingdom!) and woman warriors (female fighters participated in the Indonesian struggle for independence and female squads fought in the rebellions of the early post-colonial years). The strict barriers between classes in traditional Bugis society actually permitted a woman ruler to have men of lower rank, men who could never marry her, as her vassals or retainers. Although village leadership tends to be male, these male leaders are called "mothers of the people," another indication that political power and womanhood are not considered incompatible.

Women are not regarded as inherently weaker or more delicate than men (one type of "women's work," pounding rice, is very physically demanding). In the first years of his marriage, a man generally moves into his wife's parents' house and for that reason is not likely to be domineering towards his wife. The home is the domain of the wife, but this does not mean that the wife does not contribute to the family's economic livelihood; on the contrary, she, in addition to helping out with farming, engages in weaving, petty trade, or other activities to bring in income (in the case of fishing families, it is the wife who supports the family while the husband goes to sea, his earnings going largely to sustain him while he is away from home with the surplus he brings back serving as a mere supplement to family resources).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

## BURMAN

**PRONUNCIATION:** BUR-muhn

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Burmese, Myanmar

**LOCATION:** Myanmar (Burma)

**POPULATION:** 30 million, estimated.

**LANGUAGE:** Burmese (also called Myanmar)

**RELIGION:** Theravada Buddhism

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The country known today as Myanmar or Burma is a multi-ethnic entity, formed in colonial times from Burman, Rakhine, and Mon kingdoms; Karenni and Shan principalities; Chin, Kachin, Naga, and Wa chiefdoms; as well as Karen and other communities. Burmans are the largest ethnic group, with an estimated 68% of the population. Myanmar is an ancient name for the land of the Burmans, Burma (or Bama) is a less formal name. Burma was used as the name of the entire nation during the British colonial period and following independence, but the military government officially renamed the country Myanmar in 1989. The Burmese democracy movement, U.S. government, and BBC News continue to use Burma while the United Nations uses Myanmar. The Burman people are also called Bamar or Burmese.

Like many other peoples of Myanmar, the ethnic Burmans descended from western China. During the 7th century, they migrated to the dry areas in the valleys of the Irrawaddy River and the Chindwin River. Originally a hill tribe, they learned the art of wet rice cultivation from the indigenous Pyus and converted themselves to Buddhism, which flourished then among the Pyus. From the dry zone of Burma, the Burmans migrated to what is now lower Burma. In British colonial times, many Burmans moved to lower Burma, outnumbering the Mons in their own land. In the country's largest city, Rangoon (also spelled Yangon), much of the population is of mixed descent from China, India, and Europe.

King Anawrahta founded the first Burman kingdom in 1044 at Pagan. There were three Burman dynasties: the Pagan, Ava, and Konbong. Most Burman kings were aggressive towards their neighbors and attacked Arakan, Mon, Thai, Manipur, Shan, and Assam kingdoms whenever they were confident and militarily strong enough. Loot, slaves, and white elephants were the main attractions.

Burma's sovereignty ended in 1885 when the British annexed Burma for the final time and colonized the region. During World War II the Japanese invasion force was initially backed by ethnic Burman leaders and most of the Burman population, while other ethnic groups supported British and American forces. Although the Burman leadership under General Aung San switched sides later in the war, the wartime ethnic conflict continued after the war was over. The Burmans and other ethnic groups had grown to distrust each other.

In 1947 the Burman leader General Aung San negotiated with the British for Burma's independence. In the course of the negotiations, Aung San met with the leaders of the people bordering the land of the ethnic Burmans. The Chin, Kachin, and Shan agreed to join the Burman union. In 1948 Burma gained independence together with the Chin, Kachin, and Shan. General Aung San and his cabinet were assassinated right after in-

dependence. Since gaining independence the ethnic Burmans have built the governments that have ruled Burma, first replacing the British with the democratic government of the Union of Burma. Burma remained democratic until 1962, when the head of the military, General Ne Win, took over in a coup d'état, in order to crush ethnic and Communist insurgency. Ne Win's military dictatorship introduced "The Burmese Way to Socialism" and the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), which ran the affairs of the country. A prosperous country under the British, Burma became one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. General Ne Win dissolved the BSPP in response to a mass civil disobedience uprising led by students against the government in 1988. After killing several thousand peaceful demonstrators, another military government—the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)—took over in September 1988 and was still in power as of 2008, although its name was changed to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The most powerful of the generals is the SPDC junta's head, Gen. Than Shwe.

Rebellion by non-Burman ethnic groups continued on a small scale into the 21st century and the regime was notorious for its human rights violations against civilians in the non-Burman areas, including Karen and Shan States. Repression also extended to the Burman population, with Gen. Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, an extremely popular democracy movement leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, held under house arrest for many years. Her party, the National League for Democracy won 1990 elections in a landslide, but was never allowed to take office. In 2007 Buddhist monks led tens of thousands of demonstrators in the streets of cities and towns, peacefully calling for change, but the "Saffron Revolution" was violently suppressed by the regime. On 2 May 2008 Cyclone Nargis devastated Burma's Irrawaddy Delta region, killing at least 80,000 people in Myanmar's worst recorded disaster, and leaving millions with their homes and farms destroyed. The Delta's population is mostly Burman and Karen and had been the major rice producer for the nation. The military regime was strongly criticized by the international community for rejecting immediate relief efforts from the outside world.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The population of ethnic Burmans is estimated at around 30 million, but a true census has not been taken since the 1930s. Burma is bordered by India, Bangladesh, China, Tibet, Laos, Thailand, and the Indian Ocean and it is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia. Most of the Burman people live in central and southern areas, including the cities of Rangoon (Yangon), and the former royal capital, Mandalay, which is considered the cultural center for the Burman people. There are also many Burman refugees and emigrants in many other countries, although the bulk of overseas populations from Myanmar are of other ethnic groups.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Burmese language (also called Bamar) belongs to the Tibeto-Burman subgroup of the Tai-Chinese group of languages. The Burmese language has affinity to Tibetan and the Lolo tribes in China. The Burmese script was taken from Sanskrit and is similar in that way to Urdu, Hindi, Thai, and Cambodian, although its rounded letters are very distinctive. Because of the colonial influence, English is widely spoken as the



second language of the Burmans, especially among the older generation.

Burman names are equivalent only to a first or personal name. The Burmans usually have no family names. Burman names have meanings. For example, "U Nu" (former Prime Minister) means "uncle young," or "uncle tender." "U" means "uncle" but is used in the same way as "Mr." in English. "Ma" is equivalent to "Miss" and "Daw" (aunt) for women. The Burmans stress age in social and human relations. An elder must be addressed as "uncle" or "aunt" or, if the ages are not far apart, as elder brother ("ako") or elder sister ("ama"). Most Burmese names consist of two or three words (e.g., Ne Win or Khin Maung Gyi.) Infrequently, a Burmese person will add a family name to their own, most notably Aung San Suu Kyi, whose name contains the name of her father, Burma independence hero Gen. Aung San.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Burmans fear and respect spiritual beings called the Nats, which they celebrate in their ritual plays, prayers, sacrifices, and dances. These beliefs coexist with Buddhism in Myanmar, but are not part of the Buddhist religion. The Nats are believed to be very clever and possess immense power. They have human bodies and can exist in the trees, on top of mountains, in the ocean, and anywhere else. The 37 major Nats have distinct personalities, usually based on real people who died terrible deaths. The people give offerings to the Nats out of fear, so that they will protect them. Thagyamin, considered to be



*A Burman girl with a decorated face from a local cosmetic, called Tanaka, is photographed while selling souvenirs to tourists at a temple in Mandalay, Myanmar. Mandalay's Buddhist monasteries are among the most important in the country. (AP Images/Apichart Weerawong)*

a god, hears all and knows all, and is usually honored during the New Year Festival. The Burmans also honor the Naga, divine serpents that live at the bottom of rivers, seas, and oceans in palaces built from precious stones and pearls. They are the protectors of the water and land. The Naga serpents have the advantage of being able to take the form of human beings, whereby the female Naga can become beautiful women and marry powerful men in order to influence them. The Burmans also believe in Bilus, monsters who live in hidden places.

## **5 RELIGION**

The Burman people are close to 100% Buddhists of the Theravada type, which originated in Sri Lanka and emphasizes the wisdom of ancient scriptures to show how humans may overcome suffering. Before the Burmans came to Burma, the Pyu and Mon people were influenced by the Buddhism of India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka.) Burman kings invaded their neighboring countries and brought back slaves and artisans to build

pagodas or temples and captured religious teachers, such as the Mons. Burma has over one million Buddhist temples. Old Burman cities, such as Pagan, Ava, Sagaing, and Mandalay, remember past Burman glories with their numerous pagodas. Rangoon is the site of the magnificent gold leaf covered Shwe Dagon Pagoda. In cities, towns and villages, Buddhist monasteries are centers of community life, culture, and learning. In the morning, lines of monks walk along the streets, accepting offerings of food and blessing the households. Many Burmans practice meditation every day, as a way to gain insight into life and achieve a calm state of mind.

Although Buddhism is supposed to be tolerant, Myanmar's military regime has been accused of trying to impose the majority religion on non-Burman, non-Buddhist ethnic groups. Buddhist monks have often been a political force in Burma and marched against military rule in 2007's Saffron Revolution. They are highly respected by the Burmans, but many were beaten, arrested, and even killed by the military at that time.

After Cyclone Nargis in 2008 Buddhist monasteries provided sanctuary for storm victims and organized local relief efforts.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Burmans have two major holidays. The New Year, combined with the Thingyan (or “Water Festival”), takes place April 13–16; April 17 is the New Year. During the Water Festival, at the height of Myanmar’s hottest season, everyone sprays each other with water from cups, buckets, or water-pumps. Respect is shown to elders, who have water poured gently on their hands, but everyone else (including foreign tourists) is fair game for getting completely soaked by the water splashing. Young Burmans take this opportunity to express their secret love to girls or boys by throwing water on them. Song and dance performances and satirical skits also take place at this festive time. The other major Burman holiday takes place on the full moon of Tasonmon in November and is called the Light Festival. Like Christmas in the Western world, at that time the Burmans decorate their houses with lights, mostly candles. Wearing their best outfits, young men and women walk the town streets, which are filled with people.

Myanmar’s national holiday commemorates independence from Britain on the fourth of January with military parades, speeches, and gun salutes. Union Day, observed on February 12, celebrates the signing of the Panglong agreement, in which the Shan, Kachin, and Chin agreed to join the Burmans to form the Union of Burma in 1947. Martyr’s day (August 12), the day Aung San, the founding father of the Union of Burma, was assassinated, is also observed.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As soon as a baby is born, the mother avoids eating meat, especially fish. From birth, boys and girls are treated differently. Names are usually given immediately after birth, but it is not unusual for the baby to be unnamed for many months. The initials of the names reflect the day of the week on which the baby was born, and that day is important in Burmese astrology, with an animal or symbol for each day of the week. For a girl, ear-piercing is an important event, meant to beautify her. When a boy is born, a learned man is invited to wash the baby’s hair. The learned man places gold and silver coins in a cup, which is used to wash the baby’s hair so that he will grow up rich.

One of the most important duties of the parents of a boy is to send him to the Buddhist temple to train as a novice monk. The boy can be anywhere between 9 to 13 years old, depending on whether the boy believes he is able to survive without food from noon until night, when the monks fast. The celebration starts with the boy’s dressing up as a prince and being carried on a platform to the temple. He is not supposed to touch the ground. On reaching the temple, the parents bring out a special cloth, on which the hair of the boy is to drop without falling on the ground. After the boy’s hair is shaved, he officially becomes a novice monk with prayers and Buddhist chanting. The duration of the monkhood can last from three days to a week. Some novices stay on to become monks, in which case the monkhood lasts a lifetime. Grown men sometimes go back to the monastery as monks for a limited period. Girls and women may become Buddhist nuns, sometimes in later life if they are widowed. In Myanmar, Buddhist monks wear robes of a dark red color, and Buddhist nuns wear pink robes. Their vocation is to know and teach the Buddhist scriptures, but

the monks and nuns provide support to their communities in many other ways.

A deceased person may be buried or cremated with a coin in their mouth so that the deceased can pay for boat and bus fares in the afterlife. The family brings leaves from the funeral ground back home so that the dead relative will know the way home. Seven days after death, a monk is called to tell the deceased that he can go anyplace he or she wishes to go from that day on. Most Burmans believe in ghosts and haunted houses.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Burmans greet each other by asking “Have you eaten?”—they do not have a specific “good morning” or “good evening” greeting. If the person is visiting and replies in the negative, the host is obligated to serve food. If the answer is in the positive, then the next question will be, “What did you have for your meal?” Meeting on the street, they tend to ask, “Where did you go?” or “From where did you come?” These greetings are more a formality than an actual question. In the morning they may say to each other, “Are you up already?” There is also an expression, “Mingalaba,” which means “Welcome” or “Hello.”

Burman men and women hold hands in public only if they are already engaged or married. However, men often hold hands with each other, and women may hold hands with each other, just as friends. Kissing is still regarded as a Western custom, and kissing in public places is regarded as uncultured. As would be expected, nodding the head means “yes,” and shaking the head means “no.”

Because telephones are very expensive, people visit each other at home whenever they have time. They visit each other in the very early morning or at night, usually unannounced. The Burmans are very friendly and are always open to visitors.

Parents often play a role arranging their children’s marriages. Astrologers match their birth day of the week for a man and woman; for example, two people are a good match if they are born on a Wednesday and a Saturday. Nowadays, a boy and a girl might meet more casually and go to see a movie or have dinner together. If a boy likes a girl, he may walk in front of the girl’s house a thousand times until the girl and her family notice him. He may also give her a love letter, which she might refuse or reluctantly accept, which does not mean complete rejection. In traditional Burman society, a girl’s acceptance of admiration is a serious commitment and indicates that a wedding is not far off. More casual relationships have become normal in urban areas and universities, however.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Myanmar’s health care system has gotten worse and worse under military rule, and malaria, diarrhea, dysentery, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS are among the common diseases. Malnutrition is also widespread, particularly among children. Most people live on one dollar a day or less, and own very few possessions. They have only necessities, such as two or three cooking pots, a few plates, wooden spoons, and some articles of clothing. Radios and books are cherished possessions, and only the elite own cars, telephones, computers, or TV sets. Even for well-off people in the cities, electricity is unreliable, so they must use generators to keep lights and appliances running.

Burma is an agricultural country and therefore about 80% of the population lives in the countryside. Most Burman farmers have a pair of oxen or water buffalo for wet rice cultivation,

a hoe, and a cart. Chickens, goats, and pigs are raised for food. Burman farmers do not own horses, but some towns still have horse carriages for transportation. Houses of the Burman rural people are made mostly from bamboo and have two partitions; one side is for cooking and storage, and the other half is used for sitting and sleeping. In urban areas, brick and concrete buildings, often dating back to colonial times, contain small apartment spaces.

Burmans' means of transportation include ox carts, bicycles and motorbikes. Trucks and jeeps take passengers between towns. River ferries, buses, and trains link towns and cities, and are usually very crowded and slow. There are also domestic airlines, which fly between Rangoon (Yangon), Mandalay, and a few other airports, but they are used mainly by government officials and tourists.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Usually a Burman family has at least five children. The family also includes grandparents and the extended family members. When a Burman man marries a woman, it is most likely that he will live with the woman's family. The grandparents of his wife and possibly the parents of his mother-in-law all live in the household. The brothers and sisters of his wife might also live in the house. The man goes to live with his in-laws because he is expected to go to work all day and be absent from the home. He has very little contact with his mother-in-law. On the other hand, if the wife went to live with his family, she would be in constant contact with her mother-in-law, and they may experience difficulties. Young couples also live together with their parents because the babies can be better taken care of by aunts and grandmothers. Burmans are expected to look after their elderly, so it is possible that parents may stay with their children their whole lives.

Dogs are the most common pets, but are kept outside to guard the house. Cats are also a common pet. Many Burman farmers keep cows and water buffalo for plowing their fields and pulling carts.

### 11 CLOTHING

Both Burman women and men wear sarongs, called *htami* for women and *longyi* for men. The sarong is a long tube of cloth that is wrapped and tucked in at the waist for women, knotted at the waist for men. The designs on the *longyi* and *htami* are different according to regions and fashions. Men traditionally wear collarless shirts with their *longyis* and women wear short, fitted blouses and jackets. The traditional clothes are made of cotton, but for special occasions they are woven of silk. Wealthy people adorn themselves with gold jewelry and the gems produced in Myanmar: rubies, sapphires, pearls, and jade. Farmers wear big conical hats as sunshades, and people often carry umbrellas as shelter from sun or rain. Burman women and children use a fragrant wood paste called *thanaka* as a cooling sunscreen on their faces and women also pin flowers in their hair.

Because the sarongs don't have pockets, a cloth shoulder bag is an essential accessory for men and women. Among younger Burmans, jeans have become popular. Sometimes jean jackets or t-shirts are worn with sarongs by younger people. The Myanmar school uniform is a green sarong and a white shirt for boys and girls, with a cloth shoulder bag for carrying

books. Everybody wears flip-flops outdoors and goes barefoot inside the house.

### 12 FOOD

The staple item of Burman food is white rice, eaten with a curry of fish, pork, beef, or chicken, plus vegetables, garlic, and ginger. Fish sauce, chili, and dried shrimp are used for flavor. *Ngapi*, a pungent fish paste, is eaten at almost every meal. Burmans do not eat meat in large quantities. Meat is usually cut into small pieces, about one-half inch on all sides, and fried with lots of oil. The two most common Burman noodle dishes are *Mohinga* and *Ohnokhawkwe*. *Mohinga* is rice noodles mixed in a thick fish soup. *Ohnokhawkwe* is a chicken stew cooked in coconut milk, also served with noodles. Burmans love to eat sour, sweet, salty, bitter, and spicy snacks. Unripe mangoes and limes are a must for the meal to be properly served. Fruit is usually served for dessert or a snack and may include ripe mango, pineapple, watermelon, or mandarin oranges. Tea, either plain or with milk and sugar, is the most common beverage. A salad called *laphet thoke* is made of pickled tea leaves with garlic and peanuts. Beer and soda pop are produced in Myanmar and imported beverages are very expensive.

Burmans eat rice and curry with their fingers and soup is eaten with a spoon from a shared bowl. Most restaurants in Burman areas are run by Chinese or Indian ethnic people; Burman food is normally available in homes or at temple fairs. Burmans normally eat two times a day, once in the morning, which could be considered brunch, and the other meal in the afternoon. They may start and end the day with tea or coffee and a few cookies. As the country has become more impoverished, many Burmans subsist only on watered-down rice soup, instead of rice and curry.

### 13 EDUCATION

The literacy rate among the Burmans was traditionally quite high because Buddhist monasteries served as the center of learning, where the monks functioned as teachers. After independence, with public schooling, Burma had one of the highest literacy rates in Asia. However, education steadily lost funding and declined under military rule. Because university students led the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, the regime closed down educational institutions nationwide for several years. Myanmar's educational system is highly controlled, with university students assigned their major fields of study instead of choosing for themselves. Teachers are underpaid and often work second jobs. Access to books and computers is very limited. In spite of the many problems, Burmans seek educational opportunities for their children (girls as well as boys) as their highest personal priority. Many overseas Burmans have advanced degrees and are medical doctors or university professors.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Burmese classical music is performed by orchestras at Pwes or concerts, usually in open-air theaters. It uses a gong and drum percussion ensemble for complex rhythms, accompanied by stringed instruments and horns. Some Burmese music has also been adapted for the piano, an instrument imported by the British. Vocal music uses the orchestral compositions or a harp as background.

Burmese dances are very graceful movements of the whole body and feature hand gestures combined with fast, skilled

footwork. The classical dances are performed by learned professionals with years of strict training. Burmese dance dramas, with an orchestral score, mostly are romantic love stories and are accompanied by an orchestra.

"The Glass Palace Chronicle," written in the 19th century, recounts the history and mythology of the Burman monarchy. Although the Burmans have a rich literary history, often with Buddhist themes, literature has been very limited under military rule by strict censorship. It is extremely hard to get serious fiction or any nonfiction published, but popular magazines feature romantic stories and poetry. Books in Burmese and English are considered very valuable and are shared by many readers.

### 15 WORK

Most Burmans are farmers, going to work in their rice and vegetable fields very early in the morning, before dawn. When the sun becomes hot they go home to rest and eat. They go back to the fields when it cools down until darkness. Part of the rice crop is often confiscated by the military.

People with education often work as civil servants. Office hours are from 9:30 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon. In 2005 the SPDC moved the capitol of the country from Rangoon to Naypyidaw, in a remote area 200 miles to the north. Government workers were compelled to move there and a new complex of office buildings was built for them. Many government workers, and even teachers and doctors, must take second jobs to support their families.

Myanmar has some manufacturing of goods for local use and garments for export, although factory wages are low. Many Burmans work in small craft workshops, making lacquer ware, baskets, pottery, and tobacco cheroots. Burman men and women run shops, market stalls and street carts, selling a great variety of goods in rural and urban areas. Extra farm produce is brought to markets for sale, usually early in the morning. Children work on farms and in other occupations, including manufacturing and construction.

The army in Myanmar is very large, with almost half a million mostly Burman troops. Most soldiers join voluntarily in hopes of a better living standard; however, many are forced to join, and Myanmar's army is known for its thousands of child soldiers, who are raised with the military as their parents.

Burman refugees have tried to continue their education in exile, although most take any work available so they can survive in a new land. Some have careers in journalism or work for human rights organizations. Other exiles are professionals in the arts and sciences and Burman doctors can be found around the world.

### 16 SPORTS

*Chinlon*, a typical Burman sport, resembles hacky sack. A cane ball about 6 inches in diameter is kicked by people standing in a circle, passing the ball from one to the other. This sport can be played by two or more people, on flat ground anywhere. Soccer is the favorite spectator sport of the Burmans, attracting large crowds. Other popular sports include volleyball, badminton, and Burmese kickboxing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The most common live entertainment for the Burmans is the Pwe, in which music and dance dramas are played along with

comedy skits, usually outdoors and lasting all night as part of a temple fair. Traditional puppet shows use a set of characters portrayed by large wooden marionettes.

Myanmar's television stations, like newspapers and other media, are completely controlled by the military regime, so satellite TV is a popular alternative. Burmans watch local or foreign movies in theaters, or on disc at video parlors. Hollywood movies set in Myanmar include *Beyond Rangoon* and *John Rambo*, both of which are banned by the regime.

Satirical comedy performances are a Burman tradition but often land the performers in trouble with the regime. Myanmar has an underground hip hop culture, whose rappers have ended up in prison as politically suspect. The SPDC controls the Internet servers, but young Burmans find ways to communicate with the outside world through Internet cafes. Burmans also enjoy karaoke singing and video games.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Myanmar's Burman areas are replete with pagodas and monasteries. The prayer pavilions of the pagodas are decorated with elaborate wood carvings. Most Burman homes have a Buddhist shrine with Buddha images set on wood carvings resembling the thrones of Burman kings. Painted wooden statues of the various Nats are also made by the Burmans. Lacquer ware, in which layers of shiny shellac form a colorful coating on a bowl, tray, or box, is a popular Burman craft. The lacquer items often are carved with scenes or painted in gold. Burmans are also known for their silk weaving and for kalaga tapestries of royal or mythical scenes, which are embroidered with velvet and sequins. Charming toy tigers, elephants, and owls, hand-made of paper maché or wood are still sold in the markets of Myanmar.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Myanmar is one of the world's poorest countries despite many natural resources. Corruption is pervasive, usually involving military officials and rich business owners. Narcotics are easily available, and drug abuse affects a large section of the population, especially young people. Many people are unemployed and seek sanctuary in the power of drugs to forget their daily miseries.

In Burman areas the regime often demands that each household or family must supply laborers to work in the construction of railroads, roads, government buildings, etc., calling it voluntary work. However, these people are never paid and must bring their own food for the duration of their assignment. If a household is unable to supply a laborer, the household is fined a large sum of money.

While human rights violations are most severe in non-Burman areas of Myanmar, repression is also pervasive in Burman regions. People are often arrested without any reason given and jailed without trial for many years. Family members may be imprisoned if a dissident relative has escaped from arrest. Freedom of expression is almost completely nonexistent in Myanmar, although ties to the outside world through underground Internet and cell phone networks are increasing. Overnight house guests must register with the authorities and travel is highly restricted. Decades of repression and poverty for the Burmans and other people of Myanmar have led to a psychology of fear, depression, and resignation, which Aung San Suu

Kyi, the Buddhist monks, and student activists try to overcome with messages of hope and by examples of courage.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditional Burman society was distinguished by rights for women in property ownership, marriage, and divorce. While women are considered to have less status than men in Theravada Buddhism, they have always played an active role in Burman society. Women are vital participants in health care and education. Burman women sell goods in markets and shops and own small businesses. In the family, the wife has the duty to look after what her husband earns. The husband delivers his total paycheck to the wife, and the wife administers the household budget. Burmans are usually as eager to educate their daughters as their sons.

Contradicting the social and economic status of Burman women is Myanmar's military rule, which is entirely male-administered, with no women holding important office, although the main opposition party is headed by a woman, Aung San Suu Kyi, who is greatly respected throughout Myanmar and around the world. Burman folk beliefs also express a suspicion of women, who are thought to have powers that can weaken men. Many Burmans believe that these powers can contaminate men if they come into contact with women's sarongs or undergarments. Women and transgender people can become mediums to the world of the Nat spirits, a respected role in Burman society. Although its emphasis is on male/female marriage, Burman society is usually very tolerant of gay, lesbian and transgender people.

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—revised by E. Mirante)

# BUYI

**PRONUNCIATION:** BOO-yeec

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Buyue, Bunong, Buyai, Buzhang, Burao, and Buman

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 2.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Buyi

**RELIGION:** Ancestor worship; some Catholicism and Protestantism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Buyi represent one of the most ancient nationalities of China. They formed a branch of the ancient Yue of southern China, called Liao in ancient Chinese books. Around 200 bc, the state of Yuelang was established in an area long inhabited by the Buyi; thus, there may be a historical link between the Yuelang and the Buyi people. This area was later incorporated by the Western Han Dynasty (206 bc—ad 8). During the Tang Dynasty (ad 618—907), it was ruled by native officials following an agreement with the central government. In the 18th century, the native officials were replaced by Manchu or Chinese officials appointed directly by the Qing Dynasty (1644—1911). This reform evoked strong opposition from the Buyi and led to uprisings. Although their rebellion was short-lived, the names and heroic deeds of their leaders are still frequently on the lips of Buyi people.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Buyi are mainly distributed in Guizhou, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces, with dense concentrations in the city of Guiyang, the district of Anshun, and two autonomous prefectures in Guizhou. The famous scenic spots of Huangguoshu Waterfall and Huaxi are located in Buyi territory. On the whole, the Buyi inhabit fertile lands with smooth terrain, mild climate, and abundant rainfall, very suitable for farming. Their population was over 2.9 million in 2000.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Buyi language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Zhuang-Dong group, Zhuang-Dai branch, and is closely related to the Zhuang language. The Buyi did not develop their own writing system, but use Chinese characters. In the 1950s, a written language based on Latin was created, and is very useful and convenient for the Buyi people.

Buyi is a self-given name. Other designations include Buyue, Bunong, Buyai, Buzhang, Burao, and Buman, reflecting a historic era when each clan had its own name. The ancient Chinese books called them Liao, Man, Li, Zhongjia, Yijia, etc. Buyi is the most commonly used designation nowadays.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Buyi folklore was transmitted orally from generation to generation for many centuries. Their myths were deeply influenced by those of the Chinese and other nationalities, so that we find many similarities among them. A myth called *Buyi* describes the creation of the universe by Pangu, a creator god. Buyi was

the man who successfully mastered the flood but died a heroic death. His son and daughter escaped from danger by hiding in a calabash. (They rolled down from the mountain top two millstones that laid one on top of the other when they came to rest, a heavenly-sent sign that they must marry.) After marriage, the girl gave birth to a fleshy lump. Her husband cut it into 99 pieces and threw them in all directions. They turned into 99 villages, each having its own name. Another myth called “Nian Wang shoots suns” says that there were originally 12 suns in the sky and the people suffered a great deal from their fierce irradiation. Nian Wang shot down 11 of the 12 suns to save the people.

The Buyi revere their heroes. Wei Chaoyuan and Wang Achong were leaders of an insurrectionary army against the Qing Dynasty. The Buyi erected statues in their honor and worshipped them (in Anlong County and Dangzhang village). This is rarely seen among other national minorities.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The Buyi believe in ghosts and worship their ancestors. The shaman, called *laomo* by the Buyi, acts as an intermediary between ghosts and human beings. Illness is considered mischief caused by a ghost, so a shaman is invited to perform rituals in which poultry or livestock is sacrificed. The importance of the sacrificial offerings depends upon the virulence of the ghost, which can only be assessed by the shaman. The Buyi also believe in chicken divination; whatever they want to do must be decided beforehand by divination, especially in the case of marriage, funerals, and house building. The Buyi regard their ancestors as gods of protection and blessing.

Since the beginning of this century, a sizable number of Buyi have converted to Catholicism and Protestantism.

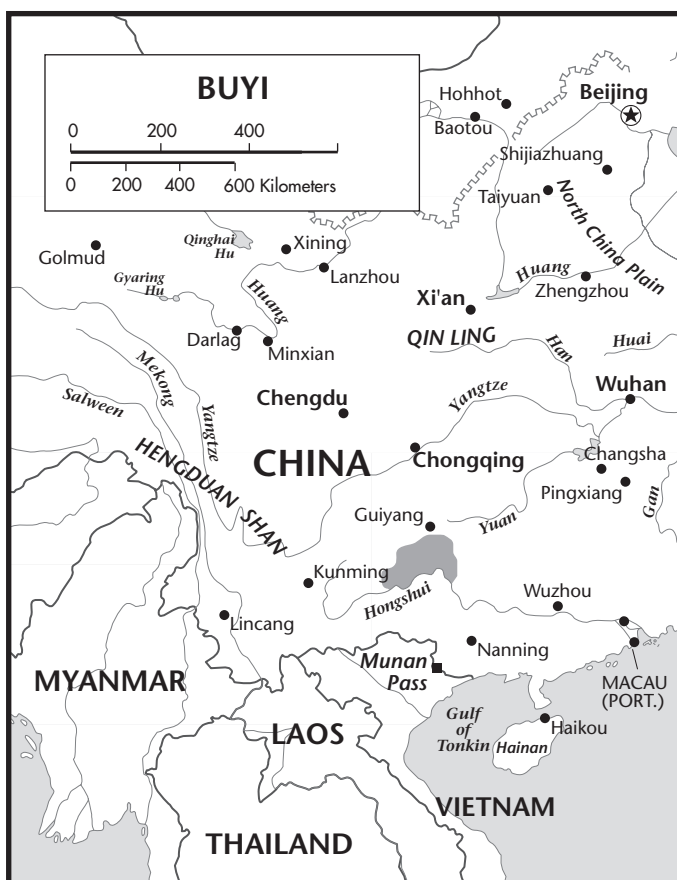
## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, which they share with the other nationalities and with the Chinese, there are other major spring holidays. April 8 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between May 2 and May 30) is called the Buffalo King Festival, held after the fields are plowed in the spring. Every household makes Buffalo King cakes and steams multicolored rice. People first offer them to the ancestors, then call back the spirit of the buffalo, and finally give half of the food to the buffalo and let it rest for one day. Today, all national minorities in Guizhou participate in this festival. There are spectacular performances, sporting games, and *sheng* (a reed-pipe wind instrument) competitions. The sixth of June (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between June 27 and July 27), called Genjiang or “lesser New Year” is second in importance only to the Spring Festival. Every village kills pigs and cows as sacrificial offerings to the gods of the mountain, of the land, and of the cooking stove. The Buyi of Zhenfeng County in Guizhou take a chicken, a piece of pork, and a cardboard paper horse to the limit of their field. They kill the chicken, splatter the blood onto the paper horse, which is then planted into the field. All of these rituals aim to avert misfortune and obtain a good harvest.

## <sup>7</sup>RITEs OF PASSAGE

The Buyi pay much attention to their newborn children. Besides celebrating the birth, they try to find a god to bless the baby and protect him or her from disease and danger. In the





past, the Buyi had a custom called *Qiangbaohun* (marriage in swaddling bands), that is, matrimonial engagement shortly after the baby's birth. When the boy grew to teenage years, he would ask somebody to put a hat called *jiake* on his fiancée's head. This meant that she was caught by her fiancé, indicating his request for a wedding. If she did not want to marry yet, she should beware lest anyone put the *jiake* hat on her head.

The Buyi make offerings to the spirit of the dead during funerals. The family will kill a buffalo as sacrifice to release the soul of the dead from purgatory. According to traditional custom, the Buyi bury the dead underground.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Buyi are hospitable. A village is usually composed of 10 or more families belonging to a few clans. They are on intimate terms with each other. If something happens, the whole village will come to help. Guests will be treated cordially with wine and dishes. Song will never cease. Duck is often offered—first the head followed by the body—and presented politely. This indicates the hospitality of the host: the duck is all for the guest, from top to toe. The guest should never beg to be excused. Otherwise, it might seem that he thinks the food is unclean.

The Buyi youngsters practice group dating called *ganbiao*. They take advantage of festivals (or going to fairs) to get together. If a girl takes a fancy to a boy through antiphonal singing, she will throw an embroidered ball to him. If he is glad to receive it, they will move to a place close to the other youngsters and sing love songs to each other. After several dates, they

may be deeply in love, but their marriage must be approved by their parents. If disapproved, they usually cannot get married.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most of the Buyi dwell at the foot of a hill and beside a stream. They live in houses of one or two stories. Some are combinations of one-story and two-story houses, that is, houses built on the slope, two-story on one side and one-story on the other. The family lives upstairs, while the bottom is for livestock and fowl. The frame of the house is made of wood, and the roof of tile, flagstone, or straw. Buyi in the Biandan Mountain district (in Guizhou) live in houses made of stone with stone tables and stools.

Most traditional infectious diseases have been eliminated or brought under control. By the time babies are one year old the majority have been inoculated against diphtheria, pertussis, infantile polio, and measles.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Patrilineal extended families of three and more generations are prevalent among the Buyi. A large family means that the parents live with several married sons and daughters-in-law. In the family, men are persons of authority, while women are in a subordinate position. Buyi families are monogamous. Although close relatives are not allowed to marry, marriage between cousins is prevalent. Furthermore, a woman should marry her husband's younger brother after her husband's death. In the old days, the Buyi married very early. The bride went back to her parents' home right after the ceremony and only returned to live with her husband for a few days at a time during festivals or the busy season. She moved to her husband's house if she got pregnant. After childbirth, she changed her hairstyle from pigtails to combing it plainly, as a nun, and fixing it with hairpins made of silver or horn.

Common pets include dogs, cats, and birds.

## 11 CLOTHING

Men usually wear long-sleeve shirts and long robes covering their pants down to the ankle. Solid navy or white-navy checked scarves are used on their heads. Women wear Mandarin-style blouses and trousers. Sometimes, they wear lace-trimmed blouses over multi-pleated and wax-printed long skirts. A beautiful embroidered cotton apron covers the skirt. During the holidays, Buyi women also like to use silver ornaments to decorate their costumes.

## 12 FOOD

The Buyi are agriculturists. Their staple food is rice, supplemented by wheat, millet, corn, buckwheat, and yams. They love glutinous rice most. They eat Chinese cabbage, radishes, hot peppers, melons, and beans. Protein comes from pork, beef, mutton, chicken, duck, goose, fish, and eggs. A favorite drink of the Buyi is sweet wine fermented from glutinous rice. Mixed with spring water, it makes for a cool beverage in summer. The Buyi take breakfast as early as five o'clock in the morning, then go right away to work in the fields. They return home for lunch at noon, although they sometimes bring a simple meal, which they eat at the edge of the fields. They leave work at five or six o'clock, then do the cooking at home, and take dinner at six or seven o'clock.



*Buyi people eating beside a tree in China. (© Panorama/The Image Works)*

### **13 EDUCATION**

There are primary schools in large villages of Buyi districts. All children over seven are able to receive a formal education. Middle schools, vocational schools, and normal schools were established in counties and some small towns. There are colleges in the cities. As a result, the number of professors and teachers, as well as professionals and technicians, has been increasing rapidly. However, rural families pay little attention to girls' education. The rate of illiteracy is very high among Buyi women.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Buyi songs include historic songs, love songs, labor songs, "weep songs," and lyrics. They can be divided into songs in the major mode and those in minor mode. The former are sung with inspiring strains on ceremonial occasions, such as marriages and funerals. The latter are sung tenderly in dating. *Yueqin*, a four-stringed plucked instrument with a full-moon-shaped sound box, and *Dongxiao* (or *Duanxiao*), a vertical bamboo flute, are their favorite instruments. An age-old traditional percussion instrument, the bronze drum with various figures and geometrical patterns, is available in almost every village. It is used as accompaniment for bronze drum dances in grand festivals, or beat by the shaman on funeral or sacri-

ficial offering rites. Famous dances include "Sewing Dance," "Chaff Packet Dance," and "Lion Dance."

The Buyi culture is rich in folk tales, myths, stories, fairy tales, fables, proverbs, and poems.

### **15 WORK**

The Buyi engage in self-sufficient agriculture. Sometimes the males go hunting in the slack season of farming, and the females gather edible wild herbs. Some peasant households grow apples and medicinal herbs. The double-cropping of rice requires intensive labor. Besides crop-growing labor, the household chores are women's burdens. The ready-made clothes now available in the market greatly lighten their load.

### **16 SPORTS**

Horse racing on festive occasions is a traditional sport. We find in Guizhou a kind of horse with short legs but great galloping speed and stamina. Dragon boat regattas held in broad rivers also attract a large number of spectators. The youngsters like to play a game called "throwing the chaff packet." Boys stand in line on one side and girls on the other. They throw small cloth packets filled with chaff to the opposite line, generally to the individual he or she likes.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Singing competitions are often held on festivals as entertainment. Dozens of singers of both sexes sing musical dialogues in antiphonal style. The songs are not allowed to cease and the words of the songs may not be repeated. There are two kinds of plays that are bound to appear on festive occasions. One is called *Dixi*, performed with masks and stage costumes, the songs being folk melodies. The other, a festive lantern play, is performed with a distinctive tune. The Buyi also like gamecock and buffalo fighting on festivals for recreation. Buffalo fighting is held among villages. Each side chooses buffalo of extreme sturdiness and prompts them to fight along the river bank. A rosette will be placed on the winning animal with pride and joy by the owner.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The *ko-hemp* cloth, a typical Buyi craft, was traditionally sent as a tribute to the emperor. Wax printing cloth is one of the most famous crafts of the Miao and Buyi. They draw figures of wax on the white cloth, which is then dyed and dewaxed. A white decorative pattern in a blue background thus manifests itself at once. After a series of improvements in the technological process, multicolored wax printing cloth (*batik*) was developed and greatly welcomed in the market. Embroidery is a tradition of Buyi women. A pyramid-shaped bamboo hat with a variety of figures is not only beautiful and durable, but also useful as an umbrella for rain and sun.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Poverty and isolation are still the most important socio-economic problems of the Buyi. Modernization through reform and opening to the outside world has brought social and economic development to the coastal areas, border areas, and areas along the Yangtze River. The Buyi districts share, to a limited degree, in this new-found wealth.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational levels between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students. China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# CHĀKMĀS

**PRONUNCIATION:** chahk-MAHZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Changma; Sawngma

**LOCATION:** Bangladesh; India; Myanmar (Burma)

**POPULATION:** around 700,000 (est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Dialect of Bengali (Bangla)

**RELIGION:** Theravada (Southern) Buddhism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Buddhists

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Chākmā is the name given to the most numerous tribe found in the hilly area of eastern Bangladesh known as the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT). The name Chākmā was first used by British census-takers in Burma to describe the hill peoples of the Arakan. The tribe call themselves Changma or Sawngma. The derivation of this is unclear, though one author suggests it means “people of the Thek clan,” Thek being a Burmese name for the Chākmās.

Little is known about the origins and early history of the Chākmās. According to Chākmā tradition, the tribe is linked in some way to a mountain kingdom in the Himalayas and the Sakya clan (the clan to which Buddha belonged). Sakyas entered Burma and established kingdoms in northern Arakan and upper Burma at an early date, but the exact link with the Chākmās is unclear. Similarly, the Chākmās believe their ancestral homeland to be Champaknagar. The location of this is uncertain, though many place it in the modern Bihar.

More recent events are easier to outline. Chākmā oral history holds that the tribe migrated from Champaknagar to Arakan, the western hill region of Burma, where they lived for about 100 years. Around the 16th century, they moved northwards into Bangladesh and were granted permission by the ruling Nawab of Bengal to settle in the hill region of Chittagong. When political power in Bengal passed to the East India Company in AD 1760, the British formally defined Chākmā territory and recognized the powers of the Chākmā Raja—subject to payment of tribute. The exact amount of this tribute was a matter for dispute and resulted in a long drawn out war fought by the Chākmā Rajas against the British. The issue was settled by the peace treaty signed in 1787 between Raja Janbux Khan and the British government.

By and large, the Chākmā rajas and the British colonial administration remained on good terms. At first, the British followed a policy of noninterference with the Chākmā hill tribes. But unrest in the hill areas ultimately led to Chākmā territory being brought under direct British control. In 1860 and 1900, various rules and regulations were set in place for the administration of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

At the partition of India in 1947, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were awarded to Pakistan rather than to India. This caused considerable resentment among the predominantly Buddhist Chākmā population, who saw their cultural affinities to be with the Hindu peoples of India rather than with the Muslims of East Pakistan. This resentment increased with the removal of the old British “Excluded Area” status that provided some protection for tribal areas. One result of this was an influx of Muslim settlers into the region. The seeds were thus sown for a tribal movement that came into focus in the early 1970s, when

it became clear that the policies of the new Bangladeshi government would differ little from those of the Pakistanis. The year 1973 saw the beginnings of an armed insurgency by the Shanti Bahini (“Peace Force”), aimed at gaining autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The problems in the Chittagong Hill tracts can be traced back to the completion of a dam at Kaptai near Rangamati between 1957 and 1963 when the area was a part of East Pakistan. At least 54,000 acres of settled cultivable land, mostly farmed by the Chākmā tribe, were lost in 1957 when the government began the construction of the Karnaphuli hydroelectric project. Over 400 square miles of land were submerged with far-reaching effects on the economy and life-style of the tribal people there. Some 100,000 people lost their homes and prime agricultural lands. Compensation for lost land was inadequate and over 40,000 Chākmā tribals crossed the border into India where the majority have sought Indian citizenship. At the same time, the Pakistan Government announced its intention to open up the area for economic development and encouraged poor Bengali families to settle there. This policy was even more vigorously pursued by the Bangladeshi government. Conflict over land together with the threat of assimilation into the majority culture of Bangladesh, provide the background to the armed conflict between Chākmās and Bangladeshis.

The Shanti Bahini was the name of the military wing of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS)—the United People’s Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It was formed in 1972, shortly after the creation of Bangladesh following the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, to preserve the rights of the tribal people in south-eastern Bangladesh, and fought for many years against the central government. In February 1972, a tribal delegation called on Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to put forward four basic demands: autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, together with provisions for a separate legislative body; retention of the provision of the 1900 Regulation that allowed a form of self government; the continuation of the offices of the traditional tribal chiefs; a constitutional provision restricting amendment of the 1900 Regulation; and the imposition of a ban on the influx of non-tribals into the area. All the demands were rejected and the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh made no provision for any special status for the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The Shanti Bahini did not become militarily active until the mid-1970s when it began to attack military and paramilitary personnel and their bases in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as well as non-tribal settlers, resulting in hundreds of deaths and the abduction of foreign nationals for ransom money. Violent army operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts began in March 1980 when it was reported that 22 soldiers were ambushed by the Shanti Bahini in the village of Kaukhali west of Rangamati where Bengali families were being resettled. The army retaliated by deliberately firing on two groups of unarmed tribal people killing a number of villagers after they were ordered to line up. From then on, Bengali settlers began to attack the tribal people apparently at the instigation of the army or in conjunction with the operations of army personnel. The army reportedly recruited armed groups known as Village Defense Parties (VDP—also called village defense police) from the new settlers and provided them with firearms to resist the Shanti Bahini. Official figures indicate that more than 8,500 rebels, soldiers and civilians were killed during two decades of insurgency. The



number of civilians killed is estimated at 2,500, with Amnesty International, the human rights organization, reporting serious violations of human rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by Bangladeshi military personnel, including rape, torture, indiscriminate shooting, assaults on women, capture of farmland by Muslim settlers, and the killing of Chākmā.

Rebels and Bangladeshi security officials say that, after the assassination in 1976 of Sheikh Mujabir Rahman, India secretly provided arms and money to the tribal insurgents fighting in the area. The rebels, who were mostly Buddhists, say they were being persecuted and pushed off their fertile lands by an influx of ethnic Bengali Bangladeshis, who are overwhelmingly Muslim. "We are not separatists and we do not want armed intervention by India," said Mr. Chākmā, a rebel spokesman. He said they wanted a stop to Muslim settlers, protection of the region's (Chittagong Hill Tract's) demographic character, free elections, and extensive economic and political powers.

In August 1992, the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti declared a unilateral cease-fire for three months, which remained in force indefinitely until the signing of the peace accord with the Bangladeshi government on 2 December 1997, although some organizations such as the Hill Students Council, Hill Peoples Council, and Hill Women's Federation opposed the peace deal and formed the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF), a dissident political party. The main provisions of the Peace Accord included the establishment of a Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council with its Chairman, who would be a tribal, having the status of a state minister.

Any new laws in connection with the Chittagong Hill Tracts were to be enacted in consultation with and on the advice of the Regional Council. No amnesty was to be provided to the army and police personnel for past human rights violations, but there was no commitment in the Accord that past human rights violations by the law enforcement personnel or the Bengali settler groups close to the army would be addressed. However, a general amnesty was to be extended in the accord to the former members of the Shanti Bahini who surrendered their weapons. The Accord committed both sides to "uphold the characteristics of tribal creed and culture."

Although the government has amended some existing laws to provide for the implementation of the Peace Accord, the Accord is currently in tatters. It was opposed by opposition groups at the time of signing and the current unstable political situation in Bangladesh has not helped matters (a caretaker government is in power to oversee general elections scheduled for the end of 2008). In August 2007 the High Court directed the government of Bangladesh to explain why the Accord should not be declared "illegal," and it has already set aside certain provisions of the Accord by directing the authorities to allow the illegal plains settlers who were implanted into the Chittagong Hill Tracts to register themselves in the voters' list. Few instances of past human rights violations have been investigated, and the main provisions of the Peace Accord have yet to be implemented.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Chākmā population today is estimated to be around 700,000 people, but it is spread over three different countries. The majority (approximately 450,000 people) are located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. This population spills over into neighboring areas of southwest Mizoram State in India, where another 100,000 Chākmās live, and Burma (Myanmar), which has around 30,000 Chākmās. In addition, Tripura State in India had some 50,000 Chākmā refugees who fled Bangladeshi Army operations against their villages in the Chittagong Hills in 1988. By 2000, most of these refugees had been repatriated to their homeland. Another group of Chākmās, numbering around 100,000 people, is found in the foothills of the Himalayas in northeastern India. These refugees fled from Bangladesh to adjacent areas of India in the 1960s and were later relocated to Arunachal Pradesh state by the Indian government. The Chākmā refugees are often stateless, despite petitioning the Indian government for citizenship, although some have recently been granted voting rights in India over the protests of local populations.

Ethnically, the Chākmās are a Mongoloid people related to the Arakanese of southwestern Burma. The Chittagong Hills, the homeland of the Chākmās, are a northerly extension of the Arakan Hills and form part of the western fringe of the mountain systems of Burma and eastern India. They are formed by narrow, steep-sided ridges running north-south at elevations between 600 and 900 m (approximately 1,970 to 2,950 ft) and rising to the highest point in Bangladesh (1,046 m or 3,432 ft) in the southeast. The ridges are separated by lush valleys drained by numerous small rivers. On the west, the hills are bordered by a broad, fertile plain that extends to the Bay of Bengal. The climate of the region is subtropical monsoon, with warm temperatures, monsoonal rainfall patterns, and high humidity.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Chākmās speak a dialect of Bengali (Bangla) and nowadays write in the standard Bengali script. This language of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family of languages has clearly been adopted by the Chākmās through contact with their Bengali neighbors. At one time, however, it seems that the Chākmās spoke a Tibeto-Burman tongue, which today is called Changma Vaj or Changma Kodha. Changma Vaj is written in its own script, known as Ojhapatt, which uses a cursive script similar to those found in Burma and Cambodia, which in turn are derived from the scripts of southern India. Some authors suggest that the Chākmās common language is so distant from Bengali that its classification as a Bengali dialect is questionable.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Chākmā myth of origin traces the tribe to the ancient kingdom of Champaknagar. One of the king's sons, so the story goes, marched east with a large army in the hope of conquering new lands. He crossed the "sea" of the Meghna River and captured the kingdom of Arakan in Burma, where he settled. His people intermarried with the Burmese and gradually adopted the Buddhist religion. The last of the Champaknagar dynasty was a ruler named Sher Daulat (contact with the Muslims led to the Chākmā rulers adopting Muslim names). He was credited with supernatural powers and was supposed to purify himself from sin by bringing out his intestines to wash them in the river. His wife, out of curiosity, hid herself and watched him do this one day. Sher Daulat found her spying on him and, in a fit of rage, killed her and all his family. His eccentricities and tyranny grew so great that finally his people tired of them and killed him. Fearing the consequences of this, the people left the Arakan, moving north into the area of the Chittagong Hills they occupy today.

### 5 RELIGION

The Chākmās are Buddhists and officially follow the Southern, or Theravada, form of the religion. Theravada Buddhism was introduced into Southeast Asia from Sri Lanka, but in Burma there appears to have been a mixing with elements of northern Tantric Buddhism. Exposure to Hinduism in the 19th century brought Hindu influences to Chākmā society. Likewise, Buddhism in the region has absorbed rather than displaced existing pre-Buddhist beliefs. Buddhism, as practiced by the Chākmās, is thus a mixture of the southern and northern forms, with a touch of Hinduism and aspects of shamanism and animism thrown into the mix.

Almost every Chākmā village has its Buddhist temple (*kaang*). Buddhist priests or monks are called *Bhikhus* and preside at religious festivals and ceremonies. The villagers support the monks with food, gifts, and offerings to Buddha. In the past it was customary for boys, usually around the age of puberty, to take Buddhist vows, even if only for a few days. The novice would shave his head, don the saffron robe, and live the life of a monk until his return to lay society.

The Chākmās also worship Hindu deities. Lakshmi, for example, is revered as the Goddess of the Harvest, and offerings of pigs and chickens are made to her. Similarly, *pūjās* (worship ceremonies) are performed for spirits of the hill, the wood, and the stream, with offerings of rice, fruit, and flowers. Spirits that bring fevers and disease are propitiated by the sacrifice of

goats, chickens, or ducks. Animal sacrifice is, of course, totally against Buddhist beliefs, but the Buddhist priests turn a blind eye to the practice. Exorcists (*ōjhās*) and spirit doctors (*baidyo*) are called in to deal with harmful spirits. The Chākmās believe in witchcraft and the casting of spells for both good and evil purposes. It is considered a very bad omen if vultures, kites, or owls settle on the roofs of Chākmā houses, and *pūjās* are immediately performed to counter this misfortune.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Chākmās celebrate various Buddhist festivals, the most important being Buddha Purnima. This is the anniversary of three important events in Buddha's life—his birth, his attainment of enlightenment, and his death. It is observed on the full moon day of the month of Vaisakh (usually in May). On this and other festival days, the Chākmā put on their best clothes and visit the temple. There, they offer flowers to the image of Buddha, light candles, and listen to sermons from the priests. Alms are given to the poor, and feasts are held for the priests. The three-day festival known as Bishu, which coincides with the Bengali New Year's Day, is celebrated with much enthusiasm. Houses are decorated with flowers, young children pay special attention to the elderly to attain their blessings, and festive dishes are prepared for guests. The Mahamuni fair, held at Rangunia at the time of Bishu, is a favorite with all the hill tribes, who attend in great numbers.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A Chākmā woman is subject to no particular restrictions during pregnancy. After the birth of a child, the father of the child places some earth near the bed and lights a fire on it. This is kept alight for five days, after which the earth is thrown away, and the mother and child are bathed. A woman is considered polluted for a month after childbirth and is not allowed to cook food during this period. Children are suckled to a considerable age by their mothers.

Chākmās cremate their dead. Sometimes, if death occurs during times of hardship when the proper funeral rites cannot be performed, the corpse may be buried and disinterred after the harvest for cremation. The body is bathed, dressed, and laid out on a bamboo bier. Relatives and villagers visit the body, and a drum used only at this time is beaten at intervals. Cremation usually occurs in the afternoon, and the ritual is presided over by a priest. The rich are carried ceremoniously to the cremation ground in a decorated chariot. The morning after the cremation, relatives of the deceased will visit the cremation ground to search for footprints, believing the departed will have left some mark of his or her new incarnation. Some remains of bones are collected, placed in an earthen pot, and placed in a nearby river. The mourning period for the family lasts for seven days, during which no fish or animal flesh is eaten. On the seventh day, the final ritual (*Sātdinya*) is held. At this time the family offers food to their ancestors, Buddhist monks deliver religious discourses, offerings are made to the monks, and the entire village participates in a communal feast.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Chākmā hospitality is a byword in the region, with guests plied with home-brewed liquor and the *hukkā* pipe. In the hills, Chākmās hail each other with the traditional hill-cry

“Hoya.” This exuberant shout is also used to express pleasure at victory in sports such as tug-of-war that accompany the numerous hill festivals held throughout the year. The influence of Muslim contacts is seen in the use of the “Salaam” greeting by some Chākmās.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Chākmās build their houses on slopes near the banks of a river or a stream. A few related families may build on the same plot of land, creating a homestead (*bāri*). Baris cluster together to form hamlets (*parā*), and a number of hamlets make up a village (*grām*).

The traditional Chākmā house is made of bamboo. It is constructed on a bamboo or wooden platform roughly 2 m (6 ft) above the ground, with access by means of a crude wooden ladder. The front area of the platform is bare, providing space for household activities. It is usually enclosed by a low fence for the safety of young children. The house is built on the rear of the platform. Mat walls divide the house into separate compartments, the exact number depending on the needs of the household. A veranda in the front of the house is divided in two by a mat partition, one area being used by males and the other by females. Small compartments may be built for storage of grain and other possessions. Household objects ranging from baskets to pipes for smoking tobacco are made out of bamboo.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Chākmās are divided into about 150 clans (*gojas*), which are further subdivided into subclans (*guttīs*). Chākmā rules of exogamy forbid marriage between members of the same subclan, although this practice is not always strictly observed. Adult marriage is the norm in Chākmā society. Parents arrange marriages, although the wishes of sons and daughters are taken into account. A bride-price is fixed during the course of negotiations. The marriage ceremony is known as *Chumulong* and is performed by Buddhist priests. If young people elope, the marriage can be formalized on payment of the appropriate fines. Chākmā society is patrilineal and patrilocal. Polygamy, i.e., marriage to more than one wife, is acceptable but rare. Divorce is allowed, as is widow remarriage.

## 11 CLOTHING

Chākmā men have given up their dress of *dhotī*, *kurtā*, and white turban in favor of Western-style shirts and trousers. It is the women who maintain the traditional Chākmā style of clothing. This consists of two pieces of cloth. One is worn as a skirt, wrapped around the lower part of the body and extending from waist to ankle. Its traditional color is black or blue, with a red border at top and bottom. The second piece of cloth is a breastband, woven with colored designs, that is tightly wrapped around the upper body. This is worn with a variety of necklaces, bracelets, anklets, rings, and other ornaments. Chākmā women are skilled weavers and make their own cloth. The *sārī* is becoming increasingly common.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Chākmās is rice, supplemented by millet, corn (maize), vegetables, and mustard. Vegetables include yams, pumpkins, melons, and cucumbers and are supplement-

ed by produce gathered from the forest. Fish, poultry, and meat, even pork, is eaten, despite the Buddhist taboo on consuming animal flesh. Traditional diets have slowly been abandoned, as the Chākmās have been forced to flee their homeland and/or come into contact with nontribal populations. Some typical Chākmā dishes include fish, vegetables and spices stuffed into a length of bamboo and cooked in a low fire; foods wrapped in banana leaves and placed beside a fire; and eggs that are aged until they are rotten. Like most hill tribes, Chākmās view milk with distaste. Chākmās are hard drinkers, and every household distills its own rice-liquor. Alcohol is consumed freely at all festivals and social occasions.

Food is customarily served on a low table, roughly 15 cm (6 in) high. This is made of bamboo or, among the higher classes, copper. Diners sit cross-legged on a mat on the floor.

## 13 EDUCATION

As might be expected in a non-Muslim minority population in one of the more isolated parts of Bangladesh, Chākmās do not score highly in terms of educational achievements. Individual figures for Chākmās are not available, but overall literacy among the hill tribes stands at 14.8%. This figure drops to 7.2% for women. Literacy rates are much higher in the states of India. Mizoram, for instance, ranks second behind Kerala among the states of India for literacy, but even here the figures for Chākmā are only 45.3% for men and 36.6% for women. In Bangladesh, however, literacy in a second language (usually Bengali) stands at over 70%, which provides some indication of the extent to which the Bengali language is replacing Chākmā.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Chākmās possess a literary tradition of sorts, with a variety of works written in the Chākmā language. Buddhist texts, translated into Chākmā and written on palm leaves, are known as *Aghartara*. The *Tallik* is a detailed account of medicinal plants, methods of their preparation, and their use in the treatment of disease.

Folk music is a major aspect of Chākmā tribal culture. It includes romantic love songs known as *Ubageet*, the *Genkhuli* ballads relating some incident from the past, and epic poems like *Radhamon and Dhanapati*. This last work recalls the period when the Nawab of Bengal first gave shelter to the Chākmā Raja when the tribe entered southern Chittagong during the 15th century. Traditional musical instruments include a bugle made from buffalo horn, a circular piece of iron with a string stretched across it that vibrates to produce sound, and the drum. The bamboo flute is played by almost all Chākmā youth. Unlike other tribal groups of the eastern hills, dancing is not an important part of Chākmā life.

## 15 WORK

The Chākmās are agriculturalists, traditionally practicing shifting cultivation known by the local term *jhum*. This is common in the hill areas, where the slope of the land may be quite steep. Each year, land is selected for cultivation. There is no ownership of land, but Chākmā custom holds that no one should encroach or interfere with *jhum* fields that bear the mark of another person. Land is cleared of trees and bushes, and any remaining vegetation is burned during the dry season in April. Crops are planted after the first heavy rains, and harvesting usually takes place in October and November. All



A Chākmā woman with her children in the Bijoypur Chākmā refugee village. Several thousand Chākmās were displaced during the 1960s following atrocities allegedly committed by the majority Muslims and the construction of a hydro-electric dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The Chākmās sought refuge in India. (Parthajit Datta/AFP/Getty Images)

agricultural work on the fields is done by hand, or with a hoe. The fields are fenced to protect the crops from animals. Crops raised include dry paddy rice, root crops such as taro and ginger, vegetables, pulses, chilies, and garlic. Cotton is also grown, with Chākmā women using this for spinning and weaving cloth. Many of the tribes have now adopted permanent cultivation and use ploughs and cattle to till fields in the flatlands along the valley floors. Irrigated rice cultivation dominates in these lowland areas, with conditions favoring two harvests a year.

Some Chākmās have given up their farming lifestyle and entered the local labor market. Those fortunate enough to have the necessary education have gone on to clerical and other white collar jobs. Many, however, work as laborers in the factories and industrial projects that have grown up along the valley of the Karnafuli River.

## 16 SPORTS

*Ha-do-do* is a game played throughout Bengal. Two teams of equal numbers stand on either side of a central line within a defined playing area. They take turns sending a player into opposing territory to touch as many people as he or she can during the space of one breath, while at the same time saying “Ha-do-do.” If the player runs out of breath or is caught by his

or her opponents, he or she goes out. On the other hand, if the player successfully returns to his or her own territory, the players he or she has tagged must leave the game. Other pastimes include *Gila Khela*, a type of marbles game in which small wooden disks are used in place of marbles; *Nadeng Khela*, played with a spinning top; and various wrestling games. Girls do not have dolls or play at being “mother.”

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Because Chākmās live in the more remote, hilly areas of Bangladesh and neighboring countries, their access to modern forms of entertainment is limited. Traditional forms of recreation include popular folk songs and music, and *jātrā*, the village opera. Wrestling and other sports held at fairs are popular. In the past, hunting and fishing were favorite pastimes, although they are less so today.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Chākmā are adept at making a variety of household goods from bamboo, often with nothing more than a hill-knife (*dao*) at their disposal. Women are expert weavers and dyers and make their own cloth called “Alam.” They are skilled in the art of making baskets from bamboo.



## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Chākmā people face an unenviable situation today. Numerically, their population is larger than that of over 60 independent nations in the world, yet the tribe is fragmented and scattered over three countries. In each country, Chākmās form a minority and many are refugees from their homeland, living in conditions of squalor. One group of Chākmā has been transplanted over 500 km (approximately 300 mi) from their traditional home to Arunachal Pradesh in northeastern India. Chākmā refugees face resentment from local populations. A recent Indian Supreme Court ruling that Chākmās in Arunachal Pradesh be granted Indian citizenship is being strongly opposed by local politicians and other peoples of the area.

The most serious problem faced by the Chākmās is in Bangladesh, where charges of genocide have been leveled against the Bangladeshi government. Facing increasing numbers of Muslim migrants in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and erosion of tribal identity as the area was opened to economic development, tribal groups formed a political party (PSJSS or Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti) to fight for their rights. (The tribal peoples of the area now refer to themselves collectively as the Jumma people or the Jumma nation.) Some Chākmās and other tribal peoples have resorted to armed resistance, and since 1973 they have been involved in guerrilla warfare against the government. This, in turn, has led to reprisals by the police and Bangladeshi Army. Both Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department have reported human rights violations against civilians in the tribal area. The 1997 Peace Accord, signed with the Bangladeshi government, has yet to be fully implemented, and, given the general political situation in Bangladesh, may never be so.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Chākmā women, despite being Buddhist and therefore viewed as theoretically equal to men in their own society and facing none of the discrimination that characterizes their Hindu and Muslim neighbors, have fared badly in the conflict with Bangladeshi Muslims. Women have been subject to rape, violence, and other sexual abuses during the Chākmā insurgency. In 2002, for example, after the death of a local Muslim, which was blamed on local Chākmā, all the menfolk of the community of Madarbania, a remote village in the hill-tract Ukhia subdistrict of Cox's Bazaar, fled the village. With the menfolk gone, brutalities were heaped on the remaining Chākmā women. Many of them were raped or molested and several badly beaten up by the local attackers, who subsequently carried away all the livestock that the Chākmās had and prevented any women from getting out of the village. Occasional attacks on Chākmā women by the illegal plains settlers and security forces are still reported in the press.

Some women have banded together to form the Hill Women's Federation (HWF) to raise consciousness among the tribal women about their rights and duties as the most repressed section of Bangladeshi society in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. HWF is highly vocal against military repression on women and organizes protest demonstrations against every incident of human rights violations against tribal women. In 1996, HWF came into the national and international limelight when its organizing secretary Kalpana Chākmā was abducted by the Bangladeshi military, but, so far, the government has failed to bring the culprits responsible for her abduction to justice.

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—by D. O. Lodrick.

# CHAM

**PRONUNCIATION:** CHAHM

**LOCATION:** Cambodia; Malaysia; Vietnam

**POPULATION:** About 250,000

**LANGUAGE:** Cham; Cambodian

**RELIGION:** Islam; orthodox Cham; Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Muslims

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Cham of Vietnam and Cambodia are descendants of refugees from the ancient kingdom of Champa, who fled central Vietnam 500 years ago. The Cham may have originally come from Java before migrating to the mainland peninsula of Southeast Asia—certainly their Kings and ruling class incorporated many Javanese traditions. They are one of several groups of Malayan stock, which also includes the Jarai and Rhade of Vietnam, the Dayak of Borneo, and the Igorot of the Philippines. The Cham of Cambodia, in current statistics, also includes more recent Malay immigrants.

The ancient Cham were heavily influenced by Java, which in turn was influenced by India, as seen in borrowed cultural elements, such as religion and art. Cham were fishermen, seagoers, rice-cultivators, and masters at temple construction. The remains of their religious monuments dot the landscape of Vietnam and Cambodia today and were imitated by others who came after them.

The Kingdom of Champa ruled much of what is now central Vietnam from the 2nd to the 15th centuries. From the 2nd to the 10th centuries, the Cham were usually at war with China to the north. From the 10th to the 15th centuries, Champa was frequently at war with the Khmers to the west, and the Vietnamese, also to the north.

By 1213 the Vietnamese had reduced Champa to a feudal state but Champa again gained its independence in 1326. Under a Cham hero named Che Bong Nga, Champa repeatedly attacked Vietnam throughout the 1300s. After this hero's death, Vietnam again continued its incursions into Cham land. By 1471 the Vietnamese ruler Thanh Ton had completely subdued Champa.

Over the next years, the Cham attempted but failed to end Vietnamese rule. From the 16th century on, the great Champa kingdom had been extinguished with the Cham. Numerous Cham fled central Vietnam for Cambodia, including a number of nobles and other dignitaries. The last royal descendent died in the early 1900s.

Since the 16th century, Cham have continued to live in Vietnam and Cambodia, minority neighbors to the majority ethnic Vietnamese and Cambodian population around them. Cambodian Cham today remember themselves as the survivors of the massacre of their people by the Vietnamese and the fighting in 1841 against the Cambodian armies of King Ang Duang.

Those who settled in Cambodia were well-treated by the French. From the first elections in 1946, they supported the Liberal Party of Prince Norindeth, and then, from 1955, the Sangkum movement of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. One prominent politician of Cham ancestry, Eng Meas, worked in the police, and his daughter Eng Marie, married Sihanouk's

second son Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Many Cham served in the Royal Cambodian Army and after the 1970 takeover by Lon Nol, a large number continued to serve him and also the pro-U.S. FULRO organization (United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races), which also heavily recruited from the Mountain Khmers. A Cham, Yisales Yasya, also served as a senator from 1972 until 1975.

In 20th century Cambodia, the Cham were again the victims of massacres by the neighboring majority population. From 1975 to 1979 Cambodia was ruled by the Khmer Rouge, Communist extremists determined to erase all non-Khmer characteristics from the population. The Cham were special targets of the Khmer Rouge for a number of reasons. In fact, it was a surprise to many surviving Cham and to observers that any remained in 1979. Many of those who managed to flee Cambodia during the 1980s supported the Khmer People's National Liberation Front or their allies, the Royalist FUNCINPEC movement (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia); although several, such as Abdul Koyom and Mat Ly (son of Sos Man, a long-time Communist), held senior positions in the pro-Vietnamese Communist party of Hun Sen.

The Cham were forced to adopt Cambodian language and customs and to abandon their own. Their communities, which had traditionally been separate from Buddhist Cambodians, were broken up and the people dispersed to other villages. Fishermen were forced to grow rice and dig canals, and religious leaders were stripped of their authority. Many were killed. In just two districts of Kompong Cham alone, over 40,000 Cham were killed by Khmer Rouge soldiers in the late 1970s.

The Cham claim that 132 of their mosques were destroyed during the Khmer Rouge period, and the Cham were not allowed to practice their religious rituals. Only 20 of the 113 most prominent clergy survived the Khmer Rouge period. This loss of leadership, as well as the destruction of mosques, dispersion of the population, and poverty, has slowed the re-establishment of mosques, services, and schools. Despite the losses, however, the number of mosques in Cambodia is roughly what it was before the Khmer Rouge era.

In Vietnam, the Cham have fared much better, but have also been subject to discrimination, pressure to assimilate to Vietnamese society, and ridicule for retaining their customs.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

By the late 1800s, according to some reports, not many Cham were left—maybe as few as 15,000 in both Vietnam and Cambodia. By 1910, in other reports, there were approximately 45,000 Cham in both countries, half as many in Vietnam as in Cambodia. Their numbers then increased rapidly. In 1936 the census for Indochina listed the Chams as being 73,000, with 29,786 listed on the electoral roll (males over the age of 21), with a population of about 250,000 in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge Communists came to power.

From 1975 until 1978, the Cham were a particular target of the Communist Democratic Kampuchean government. Many died and others fled Cambodia entirely. By the late 1980s, though, their numbers were increasing. Some observers suggest their numbers still do not approach the figures of the 1970s; others conclude that the Cham population at least equals its number prior to 1975, although exact numbers remain elusive.

In Vietnam, most Cham continue to live in the south central area of the country. In Cambodia, the Cham have settled along the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers and in western, southern, and central Cambodia. They have fared relatively well with their much more populous Khmer neighbors (with the exception of the late 1970s), despite their differences in religion, language, schooling, and even subsistence patterns.

Following the violence and massacre of late 1970s Cambodia, some Cham, along with other Cambodians, fled their homeland for Thailand. After some time in refugee camps, most were resettled in Malaysia, and also Western countries, where they continue to live.

Many resettled Cham live in communities separated from their fellow Cambodian and Vietnamese countrymen. Some have migrated thousands of miles in their new lands to join fellow Cham, even if they were strangers. Those in Malaysia have been welcomed by the majority Malay community. Other Cham attended the local mosque and found themselves having more in common with black American Muslims and immigrants from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, than they did with other migrants from Cambodia.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Cham is an Austronesian language, and thus Cham is related to languages spread over much of Asia and the Pacific. Cham is also related to Jarai and Rade, languages spoken by Mountain Khmer hill tribespeople in northeastern Cambodia, and to Malay, a language also spoken in Cambodia.

Most Cham in Cambodia are bilingual, speaking both Cham and Cambodian (Khmer). Cambodian Cham speak a dialect called Western Cham, which is also spoken by some Cham in Vietnam. Western Cham is distinguished from Eastern Cham, which is spoken by Cham in coastal central Vietnam. Western Cham has borrowed numerous words from Khmer, Arabic, and Malay, and has borrowed also from Vietnamese, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Malayo-Polynesian languages. The Cham language is atonal, with words containing up to three syllables.

The Cham language has its own writing system. Western Cham speakers, however, no longer use the traditional Cham script originally based on Indian Pali script, although it has been retained by Eastern Cham in Vietnam. Instead, Cambodian Cham is written in Arabic script. Protestant missionaries also developed a romanized script in the 1960s, which has been used occasionally.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Many ancient Cham are remembered as great heroes. The most famous was the king named Che Bong Nga, who ascended the Cham throne of central Vietnam in 1360. He led his armies against the Vietnamese and reoccupied Cham land to the north. While his victories were temporary, with the Vietnamese eventually overtaking the Cham empire, his triumphs over the Vietnamese are remembered.

The most renowned king of all, Po Rome, ruled Champa from 1627 to 1651. But his rule, remembered as glorious by present-day Cham, was overshadowed by a Vietnamese invasion. When Po Rome was killed by his Vietnamese enemies, his Vietnamese wife threw herself on his burning funeral pyre in grief.

### 5 RELIGION

Although numbers of Cham were already Muslim, the Cham who fled the Champa kingdom of central Vietnam in the 15th century apparently converted to Islam sometime before the 17th century, influenced by contacts with Malay kinfolk, who had been Muslims for some centuries.

Cambodian Cham are all Muslim, with Islam being their defining characteristic, and Cham adherence to their religion has undoubtedly helped their survival as a separate ethnic group. The Cham worship in their own mosques. Their holy book is the Quran, and each Cham community has a community and religious leader, called the *hakem*. There is also a *bilal* who calls the faithful to prayer and an *imam* who leads them in their prayers. Influenced by Hinduism from India, Cham continue to practice some Hindu beliefs along with their Muslim faith.

The spiritual center for Cham within Cambodia is Chrouy Changvar, a market town near Phnom Penh. There they go to consult the high Muslim officials in residence, to celebrate special occasions, and to visit with Cham throughout the country. Some young male Cham go each year to study the Quran in Malaysia or in Mecca. The greatest wish of every Muslim throughout the world, including Cambodia, is to make a *haj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca. In the 1950s, about 7% of the Cham population made the trip, and today, many more long to go.

Many Cambodian Cham are Sunni Muslim of the Shafii school, although there are traditionalist and orthodox branches. Traditional Cambodian Cham, numbering about two-thirds of the population, have kept many ancient traditions and rituals. Although they consider Allah the single, all-powerful God, they also recognize other non-Islamic deities. In this respect they resemble the Cham of coastal Vietnam more than Muslims of other countries. Traditional Cham believe in spirits and practice magic to avoid illness and death. Less concerned with making a pilgrimage to Mecca or praying daily, they do nonetheless celebrate many Muslim festivals.

The remaining one-third of Cambodian Cham are orthodox Cham, who retain religious beliefs and practices much closer to Muslims from other countries. They do so in part because of their close ties to the Malay migrant community in Cambodia. Many orthodox Cham have adopted Malay customs and many speak the Malay language in addition to Cham and Cambodian. They are much more integrated into the worldwide community of Islam believers, making the pilgrimage to Mecca and attending conferences, visiting mosques, and studying in other countries.

Most traditional Cham are scattered throughout central Cambodia, while orthodox Cham are located primarily around the capital of Phnom Penh, the former capital of Udong (formerly Oudong), and in provinces to the south.

Most Cham in Vietnam are Hindus who practice a form of Shaivite Brahmanism. The most important Hindu officials among the Vietnamese Cham are the priests, who are chosen for life. These men belong to the *basaih* caste. Some members of the *basaih* caste are taught sacerdotal rituals as young as 10 or 11 years of age. Other Hindu Cham officials include the priestess, who must remain celibate.

Members of the *camenei* caste, considered inferior to the *basaih* caste, maintain the temples. Musicians sing and play instruments in accompaniment to religious ceremonies. Another category of people gives offerings to higher officials and



A tourist looks at Cham artifacts in one of the temples at My Son in Quan Nam province, Vietnam. My Son was an important spiritual center for the ancient Hindu kingdom of Champa from the 4th to the 13th century. (AP Images/Richard Vogel)

performs ceremonial dances. Other officials, such as family priestesses, preside over family magical and religious rituals.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Both Hindu and Muslim Cham observe a number of religious and magic ceremonies. Most religious and magical ceremonies contain rituals that originate in Islam, Hinduism, and traditional religions of the area.

The two most important festivals of the Hindu Cham are the *Bon Kate* and *Bon Cabur*. *Bon Kate* is held during the lunar month, which corresponds to late September/early October, preferably on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. *Bon Kate* is celebrated over a period of five days if possible, during which time Hindu Cham make religious offerings of a goat, two cups and one box of cooked rice, a tray of ground rice cakes, five cups of sticky rice, lemon juice, and 10 pieces of betel to the statue of their god. This ceremony continues to be celebrated by non-Muslim Cham in Paris, France.

The other important ceremony is *Bon Cabur*, held during the lunar month corresponding to late January/early February. Both ceremonies honor the spirits of the dead: similar festivals are also held by both the Vietnamese and Cambodian neighbors of the Cham. The people gather to share an elaborate feast and to celebrate for a period of five days.

Another major holiday is *Eidul-Fitr*, which celebrates the breaking of the 30-day fast observed by Muslims throughout the world. For the entire month of *Ramadan*, Muslim Cham refrain from eating from sunrise to sunset. A typical holiday feast includes lamb, chicken curry, and fish with the standard rice and vegetables.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As with their fellow Cambodians, the birth of a Cham child is considered a blessed event and is greeted by the family and community with great joy.

Toddlers are nursed until two to four years of age and are treated with considerable lenience. At age four, children are expected to feed, bathe, and control themselves, and shortly thereafter, to care for their younger siblings as many Cham have large families.

Most parents continue to exert almost complete control over their children until they are married. Even then, the influence of their parents is heavy. Children are expected to show great respect to their parents and elders and are severely punished for any lapse.

While the Khmer Rouge loosened the traditional control of parents over their children and modernization in urban areas continues to threaten traditional respect and obedience toward parents, most Cham continue to observe traditional fam-

ily behavior. Cham express pride in the fact that their children have suffered less rebellion and their families less conflict than many other Cambodian families. Children become full adults when they have jobs, their own households, spouses, and children. Even then, they are expected to follow the advice of their elders.

The Cham bury their dead after the funeral service. In the year following the funeral, several more ceremonies are held, each honoring the deceased person. At the end of the year, the bones of the deceased are exhumed and reburied in one final ceremony. The bones are then carried to the final permanent cemetery and are buried with the rings of the deceased person.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Cham often exchange the traditional Muslim greeting, giving one another a blessing. One person begins by saying “*Salamu alaikum*,” to which another responds “*Alaikum salam*.”

Cham in Cambodia also greet each other with the traditional Khmer greeting, the *sampeah*, joining their palms together, their fingers pointing up or slightly tilted toward the other person, then bringing their hands up to their chest or forehead.

The Cham, like their fellow Cambodians and Vietnamese, place importance on hierarchy and proper behavior, influenced by Confucian ideas. Women must respect men, children must respect their elders, and everyone must respect their superiors, which includes anyone with higher status, greater wealth, or a more important job. Inferiors greet their superiors with greater respect, a deeper bow, or greater stoop when offering food or passing by. Visitors, both familiar and strange, are treated to the best the household has to offer.

Few young people date, and virginity remains highly valued for brides. Girls and boys have the opportunity to talk and flirt only on special occasions and during these times are surrounded by relatives and neighbors.

Most men marry between 19 and 25 years of age; women are slightly younger, usually between 16 and 22. Most young people continue to court as their parents did. It remains much more common for a young man to ask his parents’ permission and assistance in obtaining a wife than to do so on his own. His parents or a matchmaker approach the young woman’s family to see if they are interested in a match. If the response is positive, the families negotiate the terms and time of the marriage.

After an exchange of gifts, the young couple marries. It is still common for many young couples to spend the first year of marriage living in the home of the woman’s parents. After the parents are assured of their son-in-law’s stability, or after the birth of the first child, the young couple commonly moves into a new house built for them by their families.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Health care in Cambodia and Vietnam has been devastated by the events of the past decades. The subsequent isolation of both countries from much of the international community and the embargo against most imports and aid meant that inhabitants went another decade without even the minimum of modern health care.

International health assistance has improved services to many people. But the Cham continue to patronize local spiritual leaders for most health needs. Modern medicine is expen-

sive, with patients having to pay before being seen for services and medicines supposedly offered without fee.

Cham villages are usually comprised of only Cham. Most are located on or near the banks of rivers or lakes, although some are located inland. Villages remain small, with between 200 and 300 people.

Like the houses of the Vietnamese and Cambodians around them, their homes are made of split bamboo and thatch. Most houses are built on stilts to protect them from seasonal flooding; thus most stand 4–12 feet off the ground. The area beneath the house is used for housing domestic animals, such as chickens, ducks, and oxen, and is shelter for the family during the heat of the day. Families often gather there during the day to do chores, look after the children at play, and visit with neighbors and passersby. In the evening, most Cham retreat upstairs to their homes, where they eat, chat, and rest. Visiting is a traditional activity and occurs frequently.

The upstairs portion of the house may be an open room or may be divided into several rooms: a private room for keeping possessions and a public room for entertaining guests, eating, and visiting. A lean-to kitchen may be attached to the house, also on stilts.

Because of their isolation, most Cham do not have electricity, running water, sewage systems, or appliances, although in recent years some have installed small generators. Houses usually contain little furniture, decoration, or utensils. Most Cham continue to own few objects that they have not made themselves. A few books, a pad of paper, and a pencil or two may be wrapped in plastic and placed in the rafters for safe-keeping. The package is out of the way but can be easily reached. Other possessions are placed similarly or hang on pegs on the walls. People sleep on mats, which are rolled up and leaned against the wall or stored overhead during the day.

The most common piece of furniture for many Cham, especially in Cambodia, is a low platform bed. Bedding materials include mats made of rush or plastic, which people place on the wooden platform, and cotton and synthetic blankets.

Rather than using modern electric appliances in their kitchens, Cham use simpler, less expensive, often handmade items. They cook over an earthenware stand placed over a fire. Because most Cham do not have refrigeration, women use preserved, salted, or fresh food. Kitchen utensils include pots, bowls, cooking ladles, and spoons made of coconut shells, although plastic plates and utensils have started to be used by some communities. Basic work tools of Cham women include looms, spinning wheels, mortars for pounding rice, baskets, jars, and trays. The Cham also make rope, mats, wooden implements, and some iron tools.

Like many of their fellow countrymen, the vast majority of Cham have never ridden in an airplane, car, or motorized boat, although most have been in buses. Most have paddled a boat and those who own a bicycle consider themselves lucky, and the dream of most youth and adults is to be able to purchase a motorbike. For most Cham, the most common form of transportation continues to be by foot.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women are viewed as important members of society, contributing materials and skills without which the group could not live. The Cham observe a fairly strict division of labor, with women caring for children and the household, and men repre-

senting the family in public and bearing the brunt of responsibility for supporting the family.

Men remain responsible for rice cultivation and the heavier chores of construction, tool craft, and repair. Men have the responsibility of gathering information from others, the government, and knowledgeable leaders. Both women and men are engaged in planning family subsistence activities and carrying them out. Men and women share much of the labor involved in supporting the family. Women tend to manage the household affairs and do most of the textile manufacture, such as carding, spinning, and weaving cotton. They are also generally responsible for the family vegetable and fruit gardens and for threshing, husking, and milling the grain. Women carry most of the family's water from the nearest lake, river, or pond to the family house.

The vast majority of Cham marry within their own group and religion. Those who do not often have difficulty adjusting to village schedules, diets, language, clothing, and ways of making a living. When Cham do intermarry, it is usually with members of other minority groups such as Vietnamese, Burmese, Malay, or Chinese in Cambodia, with Chinese or Cambodian in Vietnam.

Both young men and women are given considerable freedom in choosing a spouse, with preference going to other Cham. When a girl and her parents agree on a selection, her parents approach the parents of the young man.

Cham marriages are simple, involving little expense or ceremony. In the presence of an imam who acts as the witness, the parents of the young woman ask the groom if he will accept their daughter as his bride. After he agrees, the marriage is concluded and is then celebrated with a feast. Polygynous marriages are allowed (up to four wives), although the first wife must approve the selection of any subsequent wives. Divorce is also permitted. Most polygamy and divorce occurs in families with more resources.

Cham families are matriarchal and matrilineal. Cambodian Cham trace their descent and pass inheritance through the maternal line. Residence is also matrilineal, so that young couples go to live with the wife's family.

In the past, the Cham said they had a matrilineal clan system with two clans struggling for dominance: the areca nut tree clan and the coconut tree clan. Royal succession, however, was patrilineal, with the king's son inheriting the throne in the kingdom of Champa.

Cham villages are often divided into hamlets and are governed by elected officials. The religious leaders of the community often have considerable political influence.

Animals are kept to support the family, and an animal that does not contribute to the family's income or diet is a luxury that most families cannot afford. This is not to say that children do not occasionally get close to a dog or cat, but pet relationships as they exist in the United States are rare.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Cham wear distinctive clothing. Both men and women wear a *batik*, a garment much like a sarong, which is worn knotted around the waist. Men wear a shirt over their batik, while women wear close-fitting blouses with tight sleeves over theirs. Men and women usually wear a turban or a scarf.

On religious days, both men and women don their best clothing. Their leaders dress completely in white and shave

their heads and beards. On other days they wear clothing similar to other Cambodians: a *sambot* and blouse for women, a sarong or trousers and shirt for men. Children usually wear shorts, girls add a blouse, and both go barefoot or wear rubber thongs.

## 12 FOOD

With several important exceptions, the Cham of Cambodia and Vietnam eat much as their fellow countrymen. Rice is the most important food; eaten at virtually every meal, it forms the basis of most dishes.

Fish is almost as important and is eaten fresh, dried, and salted. Vegetables are also a vital part of their diet. The Cham grow a number of crops in their gardens, including onions, peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, and potatoes. Many homes are surrounded by coconut and banana trees and numerous other plants. Other fruits include mangoes, papayas, jack fruit, durian, and palm fruit. The sugar palm also yields syrup, which is used in cooking.

A traditional meal is a bowl of steamed rice eaten with a sauce containing bits of fish, fowl, or meat, eggs, vegetables, and spices such as onions, chilies, garlic, mint, ginger, or lemon grass.

The two important exceptions are pork and alcohol, consumed by many of their fellow Cambodians but forbidden to the Cham on religious grounds. Their refusal to eat pork is so great that many lost their lives during the Khmer Rouge period for refusing to do so.

The Cham usually eat an early meal of left-over rice, cakes, or fruit either at home or in the field. The big meal of the day is lunch around midday, followed by supper at twilight.

Cham men usually eat together, women and children later. Each has a bowl of rice and all take bites of food from several dishes sitting in the middle of the group. When eating on the job, away from the house, or under the house, Cham may eat sitting in a squatting position, their feet flat on the ground, their knees bent sharply, and their bottoms hanging almost to the ground. Whether squatting or sitting on the ground, the men cross-legged or, like the women, with their legs folding back to one side, they can sit for hours in positions that are uncomfortable for Westerners after just a few minutes.

In Vietnam most Cham use chopsticks to eat, while in Cambodia most use spoons like other Cambodians.

## 13 EDUCATION

A higher than average number of Cham are literate, for literacy is greatly valued and parents and religious leaders go to great lengths to teach reading and writing to their children. Cham children attend their own schools, where they learn Cham language and writing, religious instruction, and Cham history and traditions. Some children also attend Cambodian or Vietnamese public schools, their parents wanting them to have the benefits not only of Cham heritage but the economic opportunities available in the surrounding society.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Literature is extremely important to the Cham, and they highly value their books and religious texts. The greatest cultural heritage of the Cham is their religion. Without it, they say, they could not sustain life, nor would they wish to. However, many of the holy books were destroyed by the Khmer Rouge in 1975.

## 15 WORK

Most Cham are involved in agricultural subsistence activities but are also engaged in domesticating animals, hunting, and fishing. Hunting is done with bows and arrows (and now guns), nets, beaters, dogs, and traps. Fishing is done primarily with nets.

Most agriculture involves the cultivation of rice, both wet and dry. The Cham also grow maize, manioc, peanuts, ferns, and vegetables. Other non-food plants include cotton, tobacco, and plants that yield castor oil. The Cham domesticate buffalo, goats, dogs, and fowl. They use animals not only for food but for making tools and in religious ceremonies.

The inhabitants of river villages are primarily engaged in fishing, cultivating rice, and growing vegetables. Many grow onions. Fishermen who do not cultivate rice or who need extra amounts exchange their fish for it with neighboring Cambodians. Women may make extra money by weaving. Other cash crops include tobacco and mangrove tree cultivation.

The residents of inland villages support themselves by fishing, cultivating rice, and numerous other activities, depending on their location. Some villages specialize in raising fruit or vegetables. Others concentrate on metal working.

Some Cham cultivate rice by swidden cultivation, which involves the slash-and-burn technique, whereby they cut down trees and underbrush, burn the material, and then cultivate the cleared area. The ash benefits the soil and crops can be cultivated there for several years before the process must be repeated in another area.

Many Cham are butchers, since Buddhists hesitate to do so because their religion teaches not to kill animals. Cham also have a reputation for breeding water buffalo.

## 16 SPORTS

Most Cham children spend only a few years in the classroom. The rest of their time is spent helping their families make a living. Even the smallest children help their parents fish, cook, gather firewood, and do a variety of chores. Both boys and girls help with younger children, and it is not uncommon to see boys carrying a baby sister for hours at a time.

Children are often responsible for caring for the animals. Boys herd the water buffalo and oxen when they are not being used for plowing, and girls feed the pigs and chickens. Boys climb up sugar palm or coconut trees seeking syrup or coconuts.

Children usually turn these subsistence activities into play and games. In addition, they enjoy swimming and running. A popular village game is played with rubber thongs. The boys draw a line in the dirt, then stand back and throw their sandals at the line. The boy who gets the closest is the winner. Girls and smaller children play a similar game with rubber bands, and the winner wears his captured bands around his wrist. Girls also play hopscotch.

The most popular spectator and participant sport is soccer. Volleyball is also a favorite, and both are seen frequently in Cham villages.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In Cham villages, local festivals remain the most common and popular leisure activity. Playing, games, visiting, and gossiping are everyday pleasures. Modern leisure activities, such as tele-

vision, movies, and videos are still rare in most Cham villages and homes.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Like all Muslims, Cambodian Cham do not focus on visual arts, one reason being that Muslims believe it is improper to visually portray an image of God or of his prophets. Music, however, is exceedingly important. Cham musical instruments are similar to Cambodian and Vietnamese musical instruments and range from guitars to gongs, drums, and xylophones.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Cham are proud of never having completely assimilated to either Cambodian or Vietnamese culture. A few Cham hope that one day the international community will force the Vietnamese to abandon Vietnam. When that happens, some Cham say their dream will come true and Champa, their great and ancient nation, will be reestablished and reoccupied by the Cham. But most Cham—in Cambodia, Vietnam, and overseas—are content to raise their families, practice their religion, and hope for a somewhat better life for their children.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Until the 1970s most Cham women remained home-makers, performing traditional roles in the house and in villages. The dislocation from the Civil War from 1970, and the Communist Khmer Rouge rule from 1975–1978, led to the deaths of many Chams, including large numbers of men, forcing many women to be involved in working in the rice fields and even in hunting. As the population has stabilized, women have returned to the traditional roles in the villages.

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—revised by J Corfield

# CHAMĀRS

**PRONUNCIATION:** chah-MAHRS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Untouchables; Scheduled Caste

**LOCATION:** Northern India (mainly Uttar Pradesh state)

**POPULATION:** About 90 million (est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Local dialects of the region in which they live

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; traditional animism, nature-worship, and superstition

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; Vol. 4: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Chamārs form one of the major occupational castes of India. Although known by different names in different areas, they are traditionally associated with the working of leather. Their name is derived from the Sanskrit word for a shoemaker or tanner (*chamakāra*). Chamārs include groups that skin and dispose of animal carcasses, tanners, and makers of shoes and other leather goods. Found throughout the country, Chamārs are most numerous in northern India.

Chamārs may be traced back to very early times in the Indian subcontinent. They are mentioned in the *Rg Veda*, the earliest of the *Vedas* that probably was composed some time before 900 BC. There are numerous references in the Vedic literature to leather goods (e.g., leather bags, clothing, bowstrings, reins, leather shields, etc.), and even instructions for the preparing of skins for manufacture. Tanners and leatherworkers were clearly an important occupational group in early Aryan society. But even at this time, it is likely that they were of inferior social standing. The Aryan village community must have been organized very much along the lines of villages in India today. The cultivators residing in the villages were Aryans, but on the outskirts of the village there would be laborers whose occupations made them unclean. These were often the conquered inhabitants of the country, or peoples of mixed descent who lived outside the Aryan community. It was to this non-Aryan segment of Vedic society that the Chamārs belonged.

The sheer number of Chamār castes and their widespread distribution in India today suggest that the Chamārs have originated from numerous sources. Some groups were tribal peoples who were assimilated into the lowest strata of Hindu society. Others appear to have been of higher social standing who were conquered or otherwise degraded to their present status. Still others may have their origins in illicit sexual relations between peoples of different castes. Yet there are certain characteristics common to all Chamār groups. Their traditional occupation handling carcasses, hides, and leather makes them “unclean.” This is reinforced by certain common practices, such as eating meat, that are usually identified with the lowest classes. Their touch is polluting to caste Hindus, and so they are regarded as “untouchables.” As such, even if they no longer follow their traditional occupation, Chamārs occupy the lowest rungs of Hindu society.

Chamārs are fighting for political representation in India, claiming they have been ignored for too long. Chamār and Madiga (leather workers from Andhra Pradesh) leaders from the south claim that they were not given a single position on the All India Congress Committee (AICC) or the Congress Working Committee (CWC), with the Chamār representation on

the latter coming from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Their claim is that there is poor representation of the “Chamārs” from the south despite Chamārs making up over 50% of the Dalit population in the country.

Chamārs and Dalits in the north have banded together to form a political outlet for Bahujans (the Other Backward Castes [OBCs], Scheduled Castes [SCs], Scheduled Tribes [STs]) who are viewed as being at the bottom of the Indian caste system. The Bahujan Samaj (*Bahujān Samāj*) Party (BSP) is a national political party with socialist leanings that claims to be inspired by the philosophy of Dr B. R. Ambedkar. The BSP was founded by the high-profile charismatic leader Kanshi Ram in 1984. The BSP is one of the most powerful political parties in north India, has 19 members in the lower House of Parliament (the Lok Sabha), supports the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition, which forms India’s current government in New Delhi, and is led today by Ms. Mayawati Kumari, herself a Chamār. The BSP was created and is dominated by Chamārs but nowadays also includes Brahmans and other high caste Hindus. At present, the BSP forms the state government of Uttar Pradesh with Ms. Kumari as Chief Minister (in fact, this is the third time Ms. Kumari has been Chief Minister. She occupied that position for a short time in 1995 and also in 1997 as part of a coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The number of Chamār castes and subcastes, the diversity of names by which they are known, and the sometimes arbitrary identification of groups as Chamārs by census-takers makes it difficult to provide an accurate count of the Chamār population in India today. An acceptable estimate would place their total number at around 90 million people, although this number is a crude estimate, because of the problem of enumerating Chamār communities in census figures. It is based on Chamārs making up 50% of the Dalit (Untouchable) community, which is approximately 16% of India’s total population. Though Chamārs are found in small numbers throughout India, their main concentrations lie on the plains of the upper and middle Ganges Valley. By far the largest Chamār population—perhaps close to 50% of the total—is found in Uttar Pradesh. The neighboring states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab all have significant numbers of Chamārs in their populations, as do areas of Nepal close to the border with India.

The explanation for this pattern is not immediately clear and may reflect a number of factors. In its broad outlines, Chamār distributions fall within the drier areas of India where cattle-breeding is an important economic activity. The role played by Chamārs in this context would be of more significance than in the wetter, rice-growing areas of the south and east. But perhaps of greater importance is the fact that the upper and middle Ganges Valley were among the first areas to be colonized by the Aryans as they expanded out of their original heartland in the Punjab. One might expect to find the structures of traditional Aryan society more developed here than in the non-Aryan parts of the country.

Many Chamār groups go by other names, and some such as the Jadav, Mochi, Satnami, and Raidas claim an identity distinct from the Chamār. This may be because they have separate origins, different myths, different religious and social practices, or even occupational differences. In Uttar Pradesh, the





Jadav and the Raidas are the main Chamār groups. Chamārs in Rajasthan are called Regar. Bhambi is a name used in Maharashtra. In the Punjab State, many Chamārs have converted to Sikhism and are known as Ramdasias (after Guru Ramdas). Mochis are a subgroup of Chamārs found in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal. In Andhra Pradesh, the leather workers, equivalent of Chamārs elsewhere, belong to the Madiga caste. Chamārs are also referred to as Untouchables, for reasons already explained, and as a Scheduled Caste, because they are identified in special government schedules (lists) as a disadvantaged caste. Mahatma Gandhi called Chamārs *Harajans* (“Children of God”) in an attempt to improve their social standing. Today, many Chamārs consider themselves “Dalits,” another name for unclean, lower-caste Hindus.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Chamārs speak the local dialects of the region of India in which they live. Thus the language of Jadavs living around Mathura in Uttar Pradesh is called Braj Basha. Literally the “language of Braj,” the local name for the region, this is the dialect of Hindi spoken in the area. Similarly, a Chamār living in central Rajasthan speaks Marwari, the dialect of Rajasthani current in the region. Ramdasias in the Punjab are likely to speak Punjabi and write in the Gurmukhi script (the Sikh script). Hindi, Rajasthani, Punjabi, and the other languages of northern India commonly spoken by Chamārs belong to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family.

The leatherworking castes in southern India speak languages belonging to the Dravidian family. The Chakalliyans of Tamil Nadu, for example, speak Tamil, while the Madigas of Andhra Pradesh speak Telugu.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Chamārs are mostly Hindus and share in the mythological traditions of the Hindu religion. However, many Chamār groups have their own myths of origin. One account traces the Chamārs to a union between a lowly boatman and a despised Chandal (i.e., of non-Aryan or mixed descent) woman, but others assign them a respectable lineage. According to one legend, in the beginning there was only one family of men of the highest caste. In this family, there were four brothers. One day, a cow died. Since no one could be found to remove the carcass, the three older brothers decided the youngest should dispose of the animal. They agreed that they would accept him back on an equal footing after he had bathed. With much effort, the youngest brother dragged the carcass into the jungle, but his brothers refused to accept him back on his return. They made him live some distance away and told him that he was to skin carcasses and work with leather. So the Chamārs were born. On another day, the story continues, a buffalo died. The Chamār told his brothers that he was not strong enough to remove it, so the carcass just lay there. The three brothers complained of this to the god Shiva, who happened to be passing. Shiva suggested that one of the brothers help, but they protested at this. So Shiva told the Chamār to make a pile of refuse (*kūrā*) and urinate on it. When he did this, a strong man rose from the refuse, and from this man the Kuril subcaste of Chamārs arose.

### 5 RELIGION

In general, Chamārs are Hindus. They accept fundamental Hindu doctrines such as karma (the law of cause and effect) and samsāra (transmigration), follow Hindu rituals, and worship many Hindu deities. However, they do reject the Hindu teachings that make them Untouchables and the Brahman priests who proclaim these teachings. This does not affect the inferior status assigned to Chamārs by other Hindus. In the past, they were barred from entering many Hindu temples, and some Brahman priests still refuse to serve them. They are allowed to make offerings at temples dedicated to Devi, Bhairon, to various mother-goddesses, and at some Shiva temples. In many places, Chamārs have their own temples.

Underlying this layer of Hinduism is a widespread and deep-rooted belief in animism, nature-worship, and superstition. The worship of stones is universal. The stones represent village godlings and are anointed with vermilion (a red coloring), possibly a survival of an ancient blood-sacrifice. Many trees are worshipped, in particular the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) and the nim (*nim*) tree (*Azadirachta indica*). The nim is considered to be the home of Shitala Mata, the goddess of smallpox. The snake, the tiger, the elephant, and various other animals and birds are revered and worshipped. The Chamār have numerous superstitions about evil demons, spirits (*bhūts*), and ghosts who have to be driven away or appeased through blood-sacrifice. Various diseases or epidemics are thought to be brought on by deities such as Shitala Mata or Mari, the goddess of cholera. Goats, pigs, chickens, and eggs are among the sacrificial

offerings made to appease demons and gods. Chamārs strongly believe in the dangers of witchcraft and of the evil eye.

Chamārs have a number of resources they can turn to for protection from evil spirits. There are numerous godlings—spiritual beings and local saints who are seen to have special powers over the forces of evil. Guga Pīr, for example, is worshipped in the Punjab to prevent snake-bite. He was born a Hindu, so his legend tells, but became a Muslim so he could enter the earth and bring the snake-kingdom under his control (a *pīr* is a Muslim saint). He is also worshipped on behalf of sickly children, to cure various diseases, and to remove barrenness. In addition, there are various practitioners skilled in dealing with the spirit world. These include sorcerers, magicians, witch-doctors, shamans, and the like known by names such as *ōjhā*, *sayānā*, *baigā*, and *bhagat*.

Given their low status in traditional Hindu society, it is not surprising that Chamārs have been attracted to religions that downplay or reject notions of untouchability. Many are followers of devotional (*bhaktī*) Hindu sects such as the Kabir Panth. One such group is the Satnami Chamār of Madhya Pradesh. Some Chamārs have accepted the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, while other Chamār castes such as the Julahas are Muslims. Christianity has made some headway among the Chamārs. More recently, some groups such as the Jadavs in Uttar Pradesh have converted to Buddhism. They were motivated in this by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an Untouchable and India's first minister of law, who became a Buddhist in 1956.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Chamārs observe the normal festival cycle of their religions and their regional cultural traditions. The spring festival of *Holi* is an important celebration among Hindu Chamārs and is marked with the customary bonfires and throwing of red colored powder. It is a time of drunkenness and sexual license that can last for days. *Nagpanchami* is held in the middle of the rainy season to honor snakes. Women make images of snakes out of cow dung and worship them. Saucers of milk are placed outside the house as offerings to snakes, and milk and dried rice are poured down snake holes. *Divali*, the festival of lights, is a time when the ancestral spirits visit their old homes. *Govardhan Puja*, a festival honoring Krishna and cattle, is accompanied by excessive drinking and gambling.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The bearing of children, especially sons, is of utmost importance to Chamār women. Barren women visit shrines and perform various rituals to ensure they conceive, and pregnant women employ ritual and magical devices to obtain sons. Chamārs take elaborate precautions to protect the expectant mother from witchcraft and the influence of evil spirits. After a birth, the local women gather and sing songs to Shitala Mata. The singing continues day and night for six days, and during this period, mother and child are never left alone. Purification rites are performed on the sixth day and again (usually) on the 12th day after birth. A black goat is frequently sacrificed to Kali Devi (the local form of the goddess Kali, the consort of Shiva) on the twelfth day. Childhood rituals include the first "rice-feeding" ceremony, held at about 6 months of age.

No special rites mark the onset of puberty, so there is no formal initiation ceremony such as the sacred thread ritual of the higher castes. However, a girl is carefully watched for the

first signs of menstruation and at its onset is kept in seclusion for four days. She must be kept out of the sight of men, and no one is allowed to touch her during this period. This results from a superstitious fear of menstrual blood. The menstruating girl has to avoid food containing sugar, salt, yogurt, and tamarind. She must not look up into the sky, nor see the sun, a cat, or a crow.

Chamārs both burn and bury their dead. The poor, who often cannot afford the wood necessary for a cremation, may scorch the face of the corpse and then dispose of it in a nearby river. Members of the Shiv Narayan sect practice burial. Death rituals include emptying all the water containers in the house, and breaking any earthenware utensils touched by the deceased just before the time of death. Chamārs believe that the dead return to visit the house, so for 10 days food is set out for the departed spirit. On the tenth day, a feast is held for relatives and friends to conclude the funeral rites. Portions of the food may be set aside as offerings to Brahmans and to local godlings. Food is also placed out for crows, in the belief that it will reach the ancestral spirits.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Chamārs follow the general customs of their region and religious community in their interpersonal relations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Chamārs are among the most economically disadvantaged castes of India and, in general, live in poverty and squalor. Most live in villages, but as Untouchables they are required to remain separate from the other Hindus in the community. They are not even allowed to use the same wells as caste Hindus, as their presence is polluting. Small clusters of Chamār houses are found on the outskirts of virtually all Indian villages. These are usually simple, one-room structures made of mud and clay, and plastered with a mixture of mud and cow dung. Houses are sparsely furnished, according to the means of their occupants. In villages, there are no latrines and the people relieve themselves in nearby fields. Chamārs who live in cities may have better standards of living. Their houses may be of brick, have two stories, and possess some basic sanitary facilities. Chamārs in urban areas still live in segregated neighborhoods.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

With the wide geographical distribution and diversity of religions found among the Chamārs, variations are to be expected in Chamār social organization and kinship systems. However, they tend to follow general regional practices. Castes and subcastes (*jāti*) are endogamous units, i.e., one marries within the caste community. These are subdivided into patrilineal clans (*got*) and lineages that are exogamous. Chamārs usually practice village exogamy, seeking marriage partners from outside the village in which they live.

Marriages among the Chamārs are arranged. In the past, it was customary for the first step, the betrothal (*mamgnī*), to take place during infancy. The actual wedding ceremony (*sadī*) would be performed in childhood, when the bride was around 8 years. In its outline, this ceremony follows Hindu marriage rituals—various ceremonies are performed in the homes of the bride and groom, the marriage procession (*barāt*) makes its way to the bride's home, and the wedding includes the ritual



Some of India's poorest people, known as Chamārs, or untouchables, participate in a march where they are demanding the government give back their land. The marchers say they aim to shame the government into keeping its promise to redistribute land. (Tauseef Mustafa/AFP/Getty Images)

walk around the sacred fire (*pherā*). Some customs, however, reflect the Chamārs' lowly origins. Among castes not served by Brahman priests, a senior relative has to officiate at the ceremony. Some groups sacrifice a goat or a ram as part of the wedding ritual. Bride and groom return to the groom's home for further ceremonies. If the bride is not of an age when the marriage can be consummated, she returns to her parents' house. The final step in marriage, the consummation or *gaunā*, occurs at puberty. A dowry is usually paid to the groom's family.

The role of a Chamār woman in family life is typical of all South Asian groups. She marries at an early age but does not achieve full respectability until she bears male children. She manages the household, cooks for her family, and performs all the household chores. A Chamār woman also contributes to the family income, working at menial labor, and even skinning animal carcasses.

### 11 CLOTHING

In their clothing, Chamārs are usually indistinguishable from the lower classes of their region. In Andhra Pradesh, for ex-

ample, the dress of Mochi males consists of a shirt and a *dhoti*, the typical Indian lower garment. They also wear a cloth on the shoulders, draped from the right to the left side. They tie their hair in a knot at the back of the head. Mochi women wear the *sāri* and blouse, with the usual array of ornaments, nose studs, and bangles.

### 12 FOOD

The staple diet of the Chamārs consists of breads (*roti*) made from cereals such as wheat, maize, barley, and millet (rice replaces *roti* in the wetter areas). Their main meal is consumed at night, when pulses (*dāl*) and vegetables supplement the breads. Chamārs also eat meat, even carrion meat (flesh from carcasses), which is a practice that contributes to their low-caste status in Hindu society. However, individual Chamār groups vary considerably in their attitudes towards meat-eating. For instance, the Bhambi, the leatherworkers of Maharashtra, are nonvegetarian, eating goat, pork, chicken, deer, and hare. The Bhambi of Karnataka will eat beef, but not pork. In Gujarat, however, Bhambis will eat fish and mutton, but not beef. Some Chamār groups have abandoned meat-eating in an effort to raise their caste status.

Food in India has important ritual and social dimensions as well as its basic nutritional function. This is true of Chamār society. The specific ranking of Chamār castes and subcastes in any region, who will accept food from whom, who can provide acceptable marriage partners, and many other social attributes are linked to the dietary patterns of specific Chamār groups.

### 13 EDUCATION

Historically, poverty and discrimination barred Chamārs from access to education. After independence, India legally abolished the practice of untouchability. The government set in place policies providing increased educational opportunities for disadvantaged communities such as the Chamārs. Many Chamār groups favor education, especially for boys, but educational levels vary from place to place. Literacy among the Chamārs of Goa, who are called Chambhars, is 58.02%, which is far above the average for the Scheduled Castes. By contrast, Chamārs in Bihar show a literacy rate of only 11.52%, with female literacy falling as low as 2.36%.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Although they can hardly be said to possess a distinctive cultural heritage, Chamārs share in traditions of regional folk culture. Thus, legends of Guga Pīr (also known as Zahra Pīr) are widely known and popular among Chamārs and other low castes throughout northwestern India. In addition, specific groups have developed their own cultural traditions. The Chamārs of Gujarat, for example, express their art and culture in their leather goods, floor designs, tattooing, Garba folk dance, and folk songs sung at the time of birth and marriage. As with most nonliterate groups, Chamār culture is largely oral in nature, focusing on folk tales, song, music, and dance.

### 15 WORK

In the past, Chamārs carried out their occupation as tanners and leatherworkers in the context of the traditional Hindu economic system, the *jajmāni* system. In this, Chamārs had a hereditary relationship with a *jajmān* or patron, usually a

landowner in the village. They provided their services to the *jajmān* and in return received a portion of the landowners harvest. With the emergence of the cash economy, the mutual responsibilities of such a relationship no longer have meaning. Furthermore, historically Chamārs could not own land. While this is no longer true in independent India, few Chamārs have the resources to buy land. As a result, although some Chamār castes follow their traditional occupation as tanners, leatherworkers, and shoemakers, many Chamārs in rural areas live as landless agricultural laborers.

Those Chamār individuals who have managed to obtain the necessary education have been able to pursue white-collar jobs and enter the professions. A few successful Jadavs in cities in Uttar Pradesh, for example, own their own factories. Social policies that “reserve” jobs and legislative seats for the Scheduled Castes have allowed some of the more educated generation to enter government employment and politics.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no sports associated specifically with the Chamār community. Children play games common to the young throughout the country.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Chamārs enjoy gambling, while country liquor is consumed at most social events. In rural areas, entertainment is essentially limited to activities related to fairs and festivals. Chamārs living in towns and cities have access to movies and other urban entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Not all Chamārs follow their traditional occupation today. Many of those who do, however, are known for their leatherworking skills. Chamārs have a strong tradition of folk songs and music.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Chamārs are an economically depressed and socially disadvantaged community in India. They face problems of landlessness, poverty, debt, and lack of education. Gambling and excessive drinking is common among some Chamār groups. Population growth has resulted in increasing pressure on limited resources. The traditional occupation of Chamārs makes them polluted and polluting to caste Hindus. Even though they might no longer handle hides and carcasses, they are despised by most upper-caste Hindus. Recent attempts by Chamārs to claim some of their newfound rights in an independent, democratic India have led to conflict with upper castes in villages and towns across India. For example, serious rioting involving Jadavs and upper-caste Hindus occurred in Agra in 1978. As lawmakers in the United States have discovered, social equality can be proclaimed by the stroke of a pen. But it takes much longer to change social and cultural attitudes that have been in place for centuries—for the Chamārs, attitudes that have been in place for millennia.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In most states of India, Chamārs are classified as belonging to the Scheduled Castes, i.e. castes identified by governments as needing special help in terms of education and development.

Scheduled Castes also have “reservations,” i.e. a certain number of places in colleges and positions in the government are allocated to them in a type of affirmative action program. Because of their traditional occupation as leather workers and handlers of animal carcasses, however, Chamārs are considered as “untouchable” and polluting to caste Hindus. Chamār women are thus alienated from society on the basis of class, caste and gender. They tend to be poor and illiterate—in Tripura, only 54.4% of Chamār women were classed as literate in the 2001 Census of India, compared to 63.4% for Chamārs as a group—whereas in Bihar, the literacy rate among female Chamārs falls below 14%. Even though many Chamārs have changed their occupations (in the *terai* of Nepal, for example, they act as midwives), poverty and illiteracy have limited their upward social mobility. Other Hindu castes tend to treat Chamārs as traditional “untouchables,” no matter what their current occupation. One writer indicates that Chamār women are not very “shapely” and their lot remains “poverty and disease.” Chamār women experience the same travails as all women in Hindu society—arranged marriages, child marriage, dowry-giving (despite the giving of dowries being made illegal by the Union Government in 1961), limited access to education and health facilities, and lack of property rights.

Despite India being a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which came into force in 1982, cultural oppression and social subjugation remains an issue with Chamār women, who are often subjected to domestic violence, physical assault, verbal abuse, sexual exploitation, rape, abduction, forced prostitution, and murder etc., which are usually inflicted by the men belonging to caste Hindus.

Nonetheless, some Chamār women have risen to a position of prominence in the political sphere. Ms. Mayawati Kumari, for instance, is leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party that forms the government of Uttar Pradesh State and she is, in fact, the State’s Chief Minister. She remains a national emblem for Chamār women.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# CHIN

**PRONUNCIATION:** CHIN

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Sho, Asho, Zo, Mizo, Lai, Yaw, Zomi

**LOCATION:** Myanmar (Burma); India; Bangladesh

**POPULATION:** About 2 million in Myanmar, over 1 million in India

**LANGUAGE:** Chin

**RELIGION:** Christianity

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Chins are a Tibeto-Burman people. Although they are collectively known as Chin by outsiders, they call themselves names such as Sho, Asho, Zo, Mizo, Lai, Yaw, Laizo, Zotung, Zophei, and Zomi. Whether their original name is Chin, Lai, Zo, or Sho is debatable, but it can be concluded that most of their clan names are similar sounding. Based on old Burmese inscriptions from the Pagan period, some contend that Chin is the original name. In history books written by British colonial officers, the people were referred to as Kuki, Lushai, and Chin because the British came in contact with Bengalis, Thado, and Burmese. The Bengalis called them Kuki, and the Thado, who the Bengalis gave the name Kuki, called the other clan living next to them Lusei, which was corrupted by the British to become Lushai. The British adopted the Burmese term “Chin” when they came to Burma (which was renamed Myanmar by its military government in 1989). The name Chin is commonly used in Myanmar and Zo or Mizo in India.

The Chin people originated from somewhere in Western China (possibly where the Lolo people, a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group, still live today) or Tibet. They reached the Chindwin Valley, northeast Burma, in the first millennium AD. After living in the Chindwin Valley they gradually moved into the Kale-Kabaw, Yaw, and Myittha valleys. During the 12th and 13th centuries they came in contact with the Burmese (Burman) ethnic group, Burma’s largest. Some, known today as the Asho, wandered to the south to live in the plains of Burma. The majority of them moved to the Indo-Burman ranges, where they have made their home for the last 500–600 years. Because fertile land was scarce in these Indo-Burman ranges, each clan either had to protect its own territories or find new ones, which created clan-oriented societies whose acquired territories were guarded by means of warfare. Through these skirmishes the people were pushed toward the north, south, and west, resulting in the formation of many different dialects and customs among the same people. The mountainous terrain further isolated different dialect groups. Each clan was ruled by its own chief. Some clans would attack others to widen their influence. Just before the British annexation, the Falam clan had control of almost the whole people. During the early 1800s, the British annexed the Chin country in the west at the Bengali/Chin border. They completed colonization of the Chin people in the 1890s. Even today, Chin society is often divided by clan-based regional rivalry.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Chin people as a whole number over 3 million, with around 2 million in Myanmar (Burma). In India, at least 800,000 live

in Mizoram state. The Chin population in Bangladesh is about 50,000.

The Chins live mostly in the Indo-Burman ranges stretching from the Letha range in the north to the Arakan mountains and neighboring plains. Some also live in the Pegu and Popa hills of Myanmar, in the midst of the Burmese people. The British colonial administration divided the people into many administrative districts. The borders drawn by the British that divide the Chin exist still today. There is great contrast in living standards between the impoverished Chin areas of Myanmar and Mizoram, a modern, Mizo-governed state of India. In Myanmar, the Chins reside mainly in the Chin state and surrounding areas, in the State of Arakan, in the Prome-Thayetmyo area, in the Yaw Valley, in the Kale-Kabaw-Myittha valleys, in the Tamu-Hkamti area, and in the Popa and Pegu hills; in India, they reside in the Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, and Assam states; and in Bangladesh, they reside in the Chittagong-Bandarban Hill tracts. Uneasy relations between the Kuki (Chin) people in Manipur, India and the non-Chin ethnic groups of that state have sometimes resulted in violent conflict.

Tens of thousands of Chins from Myanmar have fled the ruling military regime, taking refuge in neighboring Mizoram, where relations with the related Mizo people are often difficult, with the Mizos accusing the Chin refugees of being criminals. There are also thousands of Chin refugees in Indian cities such as New Delhi, in Malaysia, and other countries. Chin refugees have been settled in the United States in increasing numbers since 2006. Battle Creek, Michigan, is one place where many of those new immigrants have found a new life.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Chin language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Dozens of regional dialects exist among the Chin. The major dialects are the Duhlian, Lai, Paite, Khumi (Mru), Cho, and Asho.

The Chins have family or clan names. With their clan names, they can recognize each other as relatives and friends. Whole communities can have a single name, such as Sizang, for example. The Sizang have a population of about 5,000 people living in five neighboring villages; all of them have the same clan name of “Suantak.” Because villages commonly carry the name of their founder, and all the village members stem from the same clan, they all have the same family name. Consequently, among their own people, the Chins usually do not use their family name, unless they come in contact with the outside world. Many of their names usually consist of two or three words. Every name has a meaning and describes the status of the person giving the name, as explained below.

The paternal grandfather has the prerogative of naming the male children. In the Tedim (Zomi) district, the grandson’s name begins with the last name of the grandfather’s first name (since names consist of more than one name). For example, if a grandfather’s name was En Vum, the grandson would receive the name “Vum Son.” The name “Son” means “to tell.” In other words, the name given to the baby means he should tell of the deeds of his grandfather. While the naming practice is similar in other Chin, they do not necessarily begin their names with the names of relatives. Conversely, the paternal grandmother has the prerogative of naming her granddaughters. Next in line are the maternal grandfather and grandmother. After them,

uncles or aunts may name the children. The people of northern Mizoram and Hualngo differentiate male and female by ending male names with the “a” sound and female names with the “e” sound. Chin people often have a Christian name from the Bible or an English nickname, as well as their traditional Chin name.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Chins say that they had their own writing at one time, which was kept written on leather. A myth tells that a dog ate the leather, and the writing was lost. Although they had no trace of that writing, the Chins have a long oral history, tracing back their history through songs. Every successful man had his own song. When Chins gather in mourning or in celebration they sing the songs of their forefathers, in which are composed the deeds of the ancestors. These songs have kept their history alive. However, because most Chins have converted to Christianity and these songs may be perceived as unchristian, their people’s oral history has been neglected.

The Chin heroes are those ancestors who were successful and whose lifetime deeds are recorded in the songs sung by their descendants. Many Chin clans have a myth that their originator came out of a hole in the earth, a cave named Sinlung.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Chin people were once animists. They believed in evil spirits who lived in trees, caves, high mountains, water springs, and everywhere else—even in human bodies. They could be two-legged or one-legged beings, and were always ready to bite or punish human beings. They were the source of all human suffering. The people therefore gave offerings to the evil spirits when they fell ill or when their crops failed. At funerals they sacrificed chickens, dogs, pigs, cows, and mithuns, a huge domesticated gaur (wild ox) so that the deceased could arrive in heaven as a rich person. Many families would keep a mithun as a family pet, letting it graze in the forest by day and calling it by name to come home at night. The mithun is the rarest of the large animals domesticated by humans. While they ate most of the meat of the sacrificed animals, they laid the rest of the meat, such as the legs or parts of the animal not suitable for human consumption, on altars for the evil spirits.

The Chins also believed in a powerful god, called Pathian, who was good to them. They did not give offerings to Pathian because he did not harm them. They also believed in going to another place after they died. They believed that they could take along their possessions. Thus, when someone died, the families had extravagant funerals at which they might slaughter a number of animals, especially the mithun. Long ago, when a powerful chief died, they went out to hunt for heads so that he could take slaves to his next life.

Christian missionaries arrived in the land of the Chins during Burma’s British colonial period. The first were American Baptist missionaries who came to the Hakka area in 1899. They were followed by other missionaries, who did medical work among the Chins and preached to them. Eventually, the majority of Chin people (estimated 90%) joined Christian churches, including Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Anglican, and other denominations. The Chins are known for a diversity of Christian sects, with a number of different churches even in small villages. There are also “new religions,” indig-

enous varieties of Christianity, and some Chins in Myanmar and Mizoram who became Jewish, following the Old Testament and considering themselves a Lost Tribe of Israel. Some of the Jewish Chin/Mizo population has emigrated to Israel in the 21st century.

Most of the Chins’ animist beliefs gave way to Christianity, but some survive, such as the use of mithuns for feasting. Many of the churches discourage the use of traditional fermented beverages like Zu. The Chins in Myanmar have experienced pressure from the military regime to convert to Buddhism, the country’s majority religion. Some Chin children have been taken to Buddhist boarding schools, and crosses erected by Chins on hilltops have been torn down and replaced by Buddhist pagodas by Burmese soldiers. It is very difficult for Chin congregations to get permission from the regime to repair or rebuild church buildings. Pastors and other church workers have been arrested and even killed by the Myanmar military, according to reports by the U.S. government and international human rights groups.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The traditional Chin/Mizo holiday is the Harvest Festival during November/December at the end of the harvest season. The Harvest Festival is named according to the dialect of the people, such as Khuado, Khuangcawi, etc. The Harvest Festival begins with the slaughter of family-reared pigs, which must be large enough to produce some amount of pork fat. This time is the opportunity to eat plenty of food, when every household shares their cooking with relatives, friends, and the community. The women prepare plenty of *Zu*, a fermented rice, maize, and millet alcoholic beverage that is the Chin national drink. Everyone joins in the drinking, singing, and dancing in the evenings that could go on for the whole night and up to four days. There is also a corn harvest festival in Mizoram in August.

Christian holidays including Christmas and Easter are celebrated by the Chins with church services, singing, and feasts. Young people go from house to house with candles and torch lights, singing Christmas carols. The Chins in Myanmar also commemorate the arrival of the missionaries and founding of churches in their land. A Chin National Day is commemorated early in the year by exiles from Myanmar.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a child is traditionally celebrated with the drinking of Zu by the neighbors and relatives. Friends or relatives kill a chicken, cook it at home, and bring it to the family. The chicken soup is for the mother, so that she has plenty of milk to breast feed the baby. A few days, weeks, or even months go by before the Chins give a name to the newborn. The giving of a name is celebrated by inviting relatives. The person naming the child contributes Zu and the meat, usually a pig or a cow.

A child joins his or her parents in the fields as soon as he or she can walk the distance. Most teenage boys and girls do the same work as their parents. Boys have fewer duties than their sisters. As soon as a girl is able, at the age of six or so, she is expected to help her mother in preparing food or other chores. Because many villages are built on the tops of hills, one of the usual duties of the girls is to carry water from the springs or streams to the house. They are also expected to carry firewood and to pound rice and corn. Boys are expected to look after the

livestock, to hunt, and to make traps to catch wild animals. In the villages, teenage boys used to sleep in a designated house; for example, the Mizo had the Zawlbuk (bachelor's house), where all young men of the village would sleep.

Life expectancy for the Chin in Myanmar is short, due to a high child mortality rate, and access to health care is very limited, so many people rely on traditional herbal medicine. The Mizos in India enjoy better access to hospitals, clinics, and health workers. Before the influx of Christianity, the dead were kept at home until the family could afford a proper burial. A proper burial included killing several animals and drinking a large number of Zu pots. Before the corpse was buried, the family would recreate the likeness of the person, wrapping his clothes around the skeleton. The people sang the songs of their ancestors, most importantly the song of the deceased. On wooden posts they would hang the skulls of the animals killed at the funeral. For an important person, relatives still erect a monument, usually a stone platform or tablet on the main road or trail. The monument carries inscriptions and animal figures that show how many animals the deceased hunted.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Before the British came the Chins normally did not shake hands, but today it is common practice. Their greetings are very personal, such as "Have you had your meal?," "Where are you going?," or "What are you doing?" If someone comes by to visit, they may say, "Are you coming to visit me?" Or if somebody is eating, the greeting will be, "Are you eating?" Then the person eating will say, "Please join me and have food." Should there be a guest when the family is eating (breakfast, lunch, or dinner), the guest is invited to join in the meal. The duration of the visit has no limits. It is very impolite to tell someone to go home. People visit each other early in the morning or any time of the day. If the host is busy the guest might help with the work while they chat.

In the traditional Chin society, when a young man was of age, which could be as young as 16, a marriage could be arranged. Because the Chins trace their ancestries over many generations, each person's lineage was known. A young man was expected to marry a girl from the mother's lineage. A man of good standing in the family, either the father, an uncle, or a close relative, was chosen as the ambassador to go to the house of the prospective girl to meet with her parents or guardians. The ambassador would take a chicken or a pot of Zu with him. In more recent times, he might take a small bag of sugar. The ambassador announces his mission in a cordial and very humble manner. For example, he may say, "The good-for-nothing boy of mine, Zam Tual, has come of age, and in life a man needs a woman to fulfill his life's obligations. I am here to ask your kindness in agreeing to match your daughter and my son." The parents of the girl, whether they mean it or not, will appear unwilling to give their daughter—not because they think the boy is not good enough for their daughter, but because their daughter is unfit for the boy. They may say, "The girl is lazy. She does not know how to work. She has a bad character, and you would not like her at all as your daughter-in-law." Now the ambassador would insist, explaining to the girl how bad the boy is but how much the boy needs a wife. He also must explain that because of the family ties, there is the need for the union of the two families. The girl's parents then explain the impossibility of giving away such a useless girl in

marriage. They then part cordially. The admirer and his family must wait about a month for the girl's reply. If the family does not return the presents, they have accepted the request. The ambassador once again goes to the girl's house to discuss the terms of the marriage, such as how many cows or mithuns are to be slaughtered at the wedding, what kind of bride-price the groom must pay, and the timing of the wedding. If the families had been at odds before, then a solution has to be found—usually an expensive bride-price or an elaborate wedding. The bride-price may depend also on the community's tradition, or on the physical appearance of the bride.

These days, young people are likely to meet at church activities and decide for themselves who they want to marry, but parental blessings are still important. In addition to a church marriage ceremony, weddings are celebrated by killing a cow or mithun at the bride's house. On that day, the main bride-price, given to the parents, is settled upon. There are also prices to be paid to the aunt, who took care of the bride when she was a baby, when the mother was working in the fields. After dinner is served, the bride is taken to the groom, where the friends will sing and play games the whole night. The actual wedding celebration is the next day when more cows or mithuns are slaughtered and the whole village and neighboring villagers are invited.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The land where most Chin people live is very rugged. Fertile land is scarce, and therefore living conditions for most Chins are very basic, although there is a much higher standard of living for the Mizo/Chin people in India than for Chins in Myanmar. The capital of Mizoram state, Aizawl, has a population of 340,000. The city's houses are mostly wood and bamboo, built on a series of hills connected by roads, paths, and stairs. Roads and an airport connect Aizawl with the rest of India. In Myanmar raids by soldiers and forced labor contribute to living difficulties for the Chins and cause many to look for refuge and work in other countries.

Chins in rural areas build their own houses with lumber and bamboo they cut themselves. Every homeowner yearns for two things: a wooden platform in front of the house and a corrugated zinc roof. Most Chin houses are divided into two parts. One part, the larger part of the house, stores grain. The other part of the house is used for eating and sleeping around a big fireplace. The front of the house is usually only partially enclosed and stores firewood and utensils for corn and rice husking. Most of the household chores are done in this part of the house, including pounding the rice or corn. As decoration, skulls of wild animals may hang on the walls. Family photographs, calendars, and Christian posters decorate the rooms.

Most Chins have very few consumer goods, weaving their own clothing and making all their utensils themselves, mostly using bamboo. There is hardly any furniture in the houses, except for cane or bamboo stools or benches for sitting. The only luxury in the house is the fireplace, used for cooking and warmth. Family members and visitors sit around the fireplace every day when it is cold. People use their blankets to keep warm when they go out in the cold mountain mornings or evenings.

In the Chin Hills of Myanmar, transportation of goods is mostly on people's shoulders and backs. Few people own horses, and carts cannot be used in the hills since there are few roads. People carry grain from the field to the house. Fire-



*A little Chin girl holds her mother's hand during the Kut festival in Churachandpur, India. The skirt of her mother and the pattern in the girl's sweater reflect traditional motifs. (© Lindsay Hebbard/Corbis)*

wood and drinking water are also carried the same way, but some villages may have bamboo flumes to guide water to their houses. In Myanmar only the towns and cities have electricity but even there the service is sporadic. In Mizoram roads good enough for four-wheel drive vehicles have been built to reach all but the most remote villages.

Most Chin households keep cats and dogs. The cat's purpose is to catch rats and mice, which eat the grain stored in the house, and the dogs are used for rat catching, guarding the village, and hunting.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Most Chin families are large, averaging about five children per family. Girls marry and go to live with their husbands. The families in rural areas work together on their farms and older and younger generations live in the same house. Chin customs differ on who inherits the parent's house. The child inheriting the parents' house is expected to care for the parents in their old age. When the oldest son inherits the parent's property, he remains in the house. His brothers must move out soon after they marry. When the youngest son inherits the house, the older brothers move out after they get married. This makes sure that there is constantly a daughter-in-law who cares for the parents.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Men's traditional daily wear was the loincloth and, when the days were cold, men used the same blanket they slept under at night and wrapped it around them for warmth. For the women, traditional dress was a woven short skirt and, to keep out

the cold, they also wrapped their blankets around themselves. A jacket, longer skirt, and a headdress of porcupine quills are worn as dance costumes by Chin/Mizo women today. At present the Chin men wear trousers, jeans or shorts with t-shirts or other shirts, and jackets, while the women wear sarongs and blouses in Myanmar and skirts, dresses, or jeans in Mizoram, with sweaters or jackets for the cold. Even with those changes, traditional woven blankets are still used as cloaks and as ceremonial gifts, and traditional embroidery is used on sarongs, blouses, jackets, and even neckties. Chin men and women both carry woven and embroidered cloth shoulder bags. Weaving patterns, colors, and embroidery are very regionally distinctive, so one can tell where a person comes from by the clothes they wear. Christian symbols, such as crosses, are often included in the weaving or embroidery. Necklaces made out of Pumtek (petrified wood) or carnelian beads and silver bracelets are favorites among the women. Some older women still have traditional tattoo patterns on their faces.

## **12 FOOD**

Although the Chins work daily in the fields, they may not harvest enough food for the year. The Chin seldom eat meat. They usually eat two to three times a day. Their breakfast, lunch, and dinner may be very similar. Corn and millet are the staple foods for people living in higher elevations. Potatoes and sweet potatoes are commonly served for dinner. Dry corn grains are pounded to get rid of the skin, then cooked for four to six hours. Rice is the staple food for people who live in more fertile areas where rice can be grown in hillside fields. Meat usually is



boiled for a long time. The Chin were only introduced to spices by the Burmese and Indians, so they are not prevalent.

Chin farming tools are basically a hoe, a long knife, and an ax. The use of spades, breaker bars, and shovels was introduced by the British and they become very popular. Cooking pots and dishes made in China, India, or other parts of Myanmar are traded to the Chins; however, locally made pottery is also important because it is used for boiling corn soup, the staple food of the Chin. Every 48 years, a common type of bamboo that grows thickly in Chin/Mizo regions flowers, produces fruit, and then dies off. A huge population explosion of rats accompanies the bamboo flowering, as the rats eat the bamboo fruit. When the bamboo fruit is gone the rats raid the people's grain storehouses and devour everything. This phenomenon, known as *Mautam*, caused severe famines in the region in 1911 and 1959. While Mizoram prepared for the 2008 bamboo flowering by building roads and helicopter landing pads for food relief shipments, reports of starvation in Chin areas of Myanmar began emerging in early 2008. With a worldwide rice shortage and severe increases in the price of rice in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, this was considered a particularly dangerous situation for the Chins.

### 13 EDUCATION

Prior to the British invasion in the later part of the 19th century, there were no schools for the Chin people. The only education they received was how to survive on rugged land. Although a writing system invented by Paucinhau (1859–1948) became popular in the Chin Hills in the 1930s, Christian missionaries taught the people to write their language with the Roman alphabet. The missionaries then translated the Bible into the Chin language with the Roman alphabet, so the Chin writing was lost. Today, the Chins are not allowed to teach their own language in the schools in Myanmar. Many young people cannot read or write in their language.

Although the British colonial administration offered very few schools, the missionaries started many schools. Today, Mizoram (in India) has a high literacy rate. However, the overall level of education in the Chin area of Myanmar is very low, due to lack of education by Myanmar's regime. Rules and regulations introduced by the military regime have prevented entry into the medical and engineering professions for Chin students. Because of the hardships faced by the people to simply survive, parents try to encourage children to go to school and learn so that they may gain employment, but it is hard for even the most educated Chins to find jobs in Myanmar.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Because of the conversion of the people to Christianity, much of the traditional culture has disappeared. Instead of traditional songs, people are versed in Christian songs. It was the duty of important chiefs and personalities to compose their own songs, which would be remembered and sung during social gatherings. Today, these traditions are sometimes regarded as unchristian because of the missionaries' message that old forms of traditions were evil influences. Most young people do not know how to sing traditional songs, although there has been a revival of traditional dances for men and women, especially in Mizoram. Flute and stringed instrument music accompanies the dancers. Contemporary Chin/Mizo culture combines Christian influences with some of the old traditions.

Myanmar's military regime is dominated by the Burmese (Burman) ethnic group and suppresses cultural expression by other ethnic groups, including the Chins, but there are some performances by Chin cultural groups on national holidays in Myanmar. In contrast, the Chin/Mizo culture is very much encouraged in India's Mizoram and Manipur states, with literary journals, dance, music, martial arts performances, and a revival of textile arts.

### 15 WORK

Most Chins are hillside farmers using swidden cultivation, in which fields are cleared with fire and planted on a rotating basis. The farmers move from one location to another every year, returning to the same field in four to nine years, depending on the size of the village land. The whole household pulls together to cultivate the fields they own. Work begins at first light and ends at sundown, usually six days of the week with Sunday as a day of rest and churchgoing. Clearing of the fields starts during winter, sometime in December, and has to be finished before the end of February. The wood and grass are left to be dried by the summer sun, being burned at the end of March or beginning of April. A good burn is the key to good grain production. Surrounding forest is relied on for hunting and foraging but has been increasingly logged for the timber trade by Myanmar's military.

During Britain's colonial rule over Burma, many Chins were soldiers in the British Chin Rifles. Even after Burma's independence, Chins joined the national army, but that trend decreased after 1988, when the military was widely perceived as repressive, especially in ethnic minority areas, like the Chin state. After 1988, Chin students formed an armed resistance group, the Chin National Front, which is one of the few rebel armies in Myanmar that has not made a cease-fire deal with the regime. The Chin National Front occasionally stages guerrilla raids on Myanmar military units stationed in Chin areas. Exiled Chin student leaders founded human rights and refugee advocacy organizations and often present the plight of the Chin people to international conferences and groups of indigenous peoples. In Mizoram, a group that had fought the Indian government negotiated a settlement, and the former rebel leaders are now prominent politicians in the state's government.

Chin and Mizo people who live in towns and cities engage in a variety of occupations and professions, operating small shops and businesses. Not only Chin farmers, but the most educated young people have fled Myanmar as refugees, creating a "brain drain" to other countries. Chins who find work in India, Malaysia, or elsewhere usually try to send money home to their families through underground currency transfer networks. Chins in exile have established news agencies and web-based magazines, including *Khonumthung News Group* and *Chinland Guardian*.

### 16 SPORTS

Traditional sports included wrestling, martial arts, and the high jump. The British introduced soccer to the Chins, and it is now the most popular sport by far. Other sports such as tennis, badminton, volleyball, and basketball are played in the towns, but are very rarely played in the rural areas because of a lack of flat ground and the cost of equipment.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Church activities, like singing groups, are a primary source of entertainment for many Chin/Mizo people. Those who can afford it watch movies on disc or satellite TV. Mizoram and Manipur have rock and pop music scenes with numerous bands recording and giving concerts, as do the Chin refugee communities overseas. Some Chin pop singers have become well-known in Myanmar.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Chin/Mizo people are known for their traditional weaving and embroidery, including blankets, skirts, and bags. Their distinctive textiles have been exhibited in museums in the United States. They also make baskets and stools from bamboo and cane.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Severe narcotics problems affect young people on both sides of the Myanmar/India border. The northeast Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram have some of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in India, due to injection of narcotics. Drugs used intravenously include heroin refined from cheap opium produced in Burma, amphetamines, tranquilizers, and other pharmaceuticals. There are few options for drug rehabilitation or HIV/AIDS treatment, particularly in Myanmar.

Myanmar stationed increasing numbers of its troops in Chin areas during the 1990s and early 21st century. As in other regions of Myanmar, this military presence was characterized by human rights violations against the local civilians, including rape, torture, summary execution, imprisonment, forced labor, and forced relocation, a pattern that led to the outflow of refugees. Food shortages in 2008 may cause even more people to flee Myanmar's Chin areas

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditional Chin/Mizo society was patriarchal, with the man regarded as the head of the household. Men rarely participated in the preparation of food and chores in the house; instead, they built and maintained the house itself and took care of the domestic animals. However, there was very little difference between what the women and men could do. The society as a whole was generally quite gender egalitarian.

In agriculture, the women are the main work force. Although the men work with the women and cut down the bigger trees, the women organize and lead the work. After working the entire day in the field and carrying firewood on their backs, the women are still expected to pound rice and corn when they come home. Cooking may be done by the children, supervised by the women. The men may walk around the village, visiting friends and relatives while the women cook, feed the children, and do household chores.

In the towns and cities of Chin/Mizo areas of Myanmar and India, women are often teachers, market vendors, shopkeepers, or owners of other small businesses. In recent years they are playing an increasing role in village administration and church activities, with female pastors leading some congregations. Chin women in exile from Myanmar have founded self-help economic groups and schools for refugee children. Cheery Zahau, an activist of the Chin Women's Organization in exile in India, presented documentation to the international

community in 2008, which stated that Myanmar's soldiers were raping Chin girls and women as a strategy to terrorize the ethnic minority people. Chin women participate in an underground movement resisting military rule and smuggling human rights information to the outside world.

Traditional Chin/Mizo society and evangelical Christianity in the region are not particularly tolerant of homosexuality, as the emphasis is on male-female marriage, but gay and transgender individuals are not usually harassed. Mizoram has gay and lesbian networking and support groups.

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—revised by E. Mirante

# CHINA AND HER NATIONAL MINORITIES

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Han (Chinese), Mandchus, Mongols, Hui, and Tibetans

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 1.33 billion

**LANGUAGE:** Austronesian, Gan, Hakka, Iranian, Korean, Mandarin, Miao-Yao, Min, Mongolian, Russian, Tibeto-Burman, Tungus, Turkish, Wu, Xiang, Yue, Zhuang

**RELIGION:** Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Chinese Americans; Immigrant Americans. Vol. 3: Bai; Buyi; Dai; Derong; Dong; Ewenki; Gaoshan; Han; Hani; Hui; Kazakh-Chinese; Korean-Chinese; Vol. 4: Li; Man; Miao; Mongols; Naxi; Tibetans; Tujia; Uighurs; Yao; Yi; Zhuang.

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The apparent uniformity of the Chinese population is a di-hard stereotype. The image of an ethnic mosaic better fits the real situation. From time immemorial, the territory comprised within the frontiers of the People's Republic of China has been, and continues to be, the homeland to a wide variety of nationalities.

Chinese historical records dating from the early Zhou Dynasty (1121–222 BC) already speak of the “Four Barbarians,” a blanket term covering a large number of tribes or ethnic groups surrounding the Chinese Middle Kingdoms of the Yellow River Valley. In many cases, the nationalities exercised full sovereignty over their land and were considered by the Chinese themselves as kingdoms or principalities.

All through Chinese dynastic history, the relationship between the Chinese (Huaxia in ancient times, Han since the 3rd century AD) and the Barbarians oscillated between hostility and friendly cooperation. There has been uninterrupted intermarriage between the Han and the other ethnic groups, as well as among these ethnic groups themselves, so that there are no pure ethnicities in China.

When Sun Yatsen established the Republic of China in 1912, he defined it as “The Republic of The Five Nationalities”: the Han (Chinese), Mandchus, Mongols, Hui, and Tibetans. In his speech of October 1, 1949, announcing the foundation of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong characterized China as a “multi-ethnic unitary State.” The various ethnic groups were invited to manifest themselves so as to enjoy their newly won equal rights.

By 1955, more than 400 groups had come forward and were registered by the state authorities. After years of research by Chinese ethnologists, this number was reduced to 56; the Han formed the national majority (now more than 1.2 billion people, by far the largest ethnic group on earth), and the other 55 ethnic groups formed the national minorities (now accounting for 113 million people or 8.5% of the total Chinese population).

According to China's constitution, all nationalities are equal under the law. National minorities were granted the right to govern themselves (*zizhi*) under the leadership and the author-

ity of the Chinese State and of the Chinese Communist Party. Five large “autonomous regions” were created for the most compact, populous, or historically important national minorities (Tibetans, Mongols, Uighur, Hui, Zhuang), while 29 autonomous districts, 72 counties, and 3 banners were established within provinces for the other national minorities.

Special laws were enacted by the Chinese State to preserve the culture of the diverse national minorities and to promote their economic and educational development. In order to stimulate their demographic growth, national minorities were exempted from the “one-child” policy; their percentage of the total Chinese population passed from 5.7% in 1964 to 8.5% in 2000.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

One of the most striking features of the national minorities is the tremendous size and strategic importance of the land they occupy compared to their small population. Actually two-thirds of China's territory is inhabited by national minorities.

If one looks at a map of China, one realizes that the northern frontier is formed by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (500,000 sq mi), the northwestern frontier by the Uighur Autonomous Region (617,000 sq mi), and the southwestern frontier by the Tibet Autonomous Region (471,000 sq mi) and by Yunnan Province (168,000 sq mi), whose population is composed of no less than 22 national minorities.

One can say in general that the totality of the Chinese continental borders (with North Korea, the People's Republic of Mongolia, Russia [and many former Soviet Republics], Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Burma, Laos, and Vietnam) lie in territories inhabited and governed by national minorities. This creates many sensitive situations; for instance, the same ethnic group may occupy both sides of the border.

The immense territories occupied by the national minorities also pose an acute economic problem: in many cases, the most important timber, hydroelectric, petroleum, and mineral resources needed for China's economic development lie in national minorities' territory. Besides the difficulty of access to these resources because of distance, weather, altitude, and lack of infrastructure (roads, railway, airports, bridges, towns), the reticence of the local populations adds a further obstacle to the development of these resources by the Han Chinese.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Obviously one of the most important factors—but not the only one—to identify distinct nationalities is the language spoken. One may distinguish the following linguistic families in China (figures are 1990 census estimates):

### HAN DIALECTS (SPOKEN BY 1.04 BILLION HAN)

Mandarin (all of north and part of southwest: more than 750 million)

Wu (Shanghai region: 90 million)

Gan (Jiangxi: 25 million)

Xiang (Hunan: 48 million)

Hakka (scattered in southern China: 37 million)

Yue (mainly Guangdong, but also Guangxi: 50 million)

Min (mainly Fujian; excluding Taiwan: 40 million)

**ALTAIC DIALECTS**

Turkish (Uighur, Kazakh, Salar, Tatar, Uzbek, Yugur, Kirghiz: 8.6 million)

Mongolian (Mongols, Bao'an, Dagur, Santa, Tu: 5.6 million)

Tungus (Mandchus, Ewenki, Hezhen, Oroqen, Xibo: 10 million)

Korean (1.9 million)

**SOUTHWEST DIALECTS**

Zhuang (Zhuang, Buyi, Dai, Dong, Gelao, Li, Maonan, Shui, Tai: 22.4 million)

Tibeto-Burman (Tibetans, Achang, Bai, Derong [Dulong], Hani, Jingpo, Jino, Lahu, Lhopa, Lolo, Menba, Naxi, Nu, Pumi, Qiang: 13 million)

Miao-Yao (Miao, Yao, Mulao [Mulam], She, Tujia: 16 million)

Austronesian (Benlong, Gaoshan [excluding Taiwan], Bulang, Wa: 452,000)

**INDO-EUROPEAN**

Russian (13,000)

Iranian (Tajik: 34,000)

Many of these linguistic groups show wide dialectical variations; for instance, Mandarin varies significantly according to regions: northern, western, southwestern, and eastern. These regional dialects are mutually intelligible.

Yue (Cantonese) also falls into various regional dialects: Yuehai, Siyi, Gao-Lei, and Qin-Lian, some of which are mutually unintelligible. Important dialectical variations also occur within the language family of given national minorities, often due to the isolation of subgroups. On the other hand, Mandarin Chinese is spoken more and more as a second language by the various national minorities.

**4 FOLKLORE**

Each national group in China has its own mythological tradition. Myths are usually shared by nationalities belonging to the same linguistic family. Thus, to have a complete view of Chinese mythology, one has to study the myths and heroes of the various peoples inhabiting China.

In most cases, myths and the rituals to which they were attached were handed down from ancient times to the present by an uninterrupted oral tradition. During the course of history, there were many cultural borrowings among the various ethnic groups. With a few exceptions, only the Han recorded their myths in writing.

One of the most common and ancient mythological traditions in China regards the beginning of humanity and society. According to this tradition, in remote antiquity humans and gods lived in harmony in Heaven and on earth. However, due to a conflict among the gods, the earth was flooded, and humanity was destroyed, except for a brother and sister who escaped by hiding in a huge pumpkin that floated on the waters. When the brother and sister came out of the pumpkin, they realized they were alone in the world. They were confronted with the problem of incest—if they did not marry, it would be the end of humanity, but if they married, they would break the taboo of incest.

So, the brother devised a ritual to know the will of Heaven: he and his sister would each let a millstone roll down a hill. If

the two millstones laid one on top of the other at the end of their run, it meant Heaven favored marriage; if the two millstones went separate ways, it meant Heaven wanted them to respect the incest taboo.

However, the brother surreptitiously placed two millstones one on top of the other in a hidden place down the hill. Later, he and his sister let two other millstones roll down the hill. Then, the brother led his sister to the two millstones he had hidden down the hill. After they married, the sister gave birth to a formless lump of flesh; the brother cut it into twelve pieces, which he threw in different directions. These became the twelve peoples of ancient China.

This myth seems to have originated with the Miao, who, around 1000 bc, lived in the Yellow River Valley. The Miao often clashed with the Chinese and were eventually forced to flee to southwest China. Their myth of origins spread widely, both among the Chinese and the nationalities of southern and southwest China.

Around the second century bc, the myth, profoundly transformed, was put into writing in Chinese. The brother and sister, called Fuxi and Nüwa, were represented as divine beings with human bodies and reptilian tails and as symbols of *yin* and *yang*.

In the north, the Tibetan, Mongolian, Uighur, Mandchu, and Korean peoples each has its own mythological tradition about the origin of mankind.

Another important myth widely spread in China is that of Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor. This myth, of Chinese origin, deals mainly with the origin of various cultural patterns (esoteric arts), socio-political institutions (marriage, emperorship), and technological inventions (chariot, medicine).

Among other well-known myths, one may mention the myth of Yu the Great, who tamed the great rivers of China and made the land inhabitable and productive, and Pangu, a primitive hero god, whose body, when he died, gave birth to the world.

**5 RELIGION**

Three major religious traditions contended for the hearts and minds of the peoples of China: Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Although many national minorities have preserved their own native religious traditions, they have primarily been influenced by the three major religions of China.

To have a full picture of the religious complexity of China, one would have to treat systematically the specific beliefs and practices of the 56 nationalities of China. Even within one single nationality, one may find important religious variations that demand to be studied on their own. Here, this entry will limit itself to the three great traditions mentioned above.

**TAOISM**

The origins of Taoism are lost. It seems Taoism derived from ancient popular religions linked to shamanism and nature worship. Around the 6th century bc, a philosophical wing developed whose main ideas were condensed in the *Daode jing* (Classic of the way and its power), attributed to the sage Lao zi, a senior contemporary of Confucius (551-479 bc).

The central idea of Lao zi is that of *Dao*, conceived as the ineffable source of creativity and harmony that animates the universe. The sage and saintly person is one who, being united to the *Dao*, partakes of its creativity and harmony. Such a per-

son lives in bliss, serenity, and inaction, being carried by the Power of the Dao: “doing nothing, nothing is left undone.”

When one is united to the *Dao*, all the other beings of the universe, as well as our perceptions and feelings, reveal their relativity. Between the 6th and the 2nd centuries BC, many important Chinese thinkers developed the ideas of Lao zi and formed a “Taoist School of Philosophy.”

Among the most important works issuing from the Taoist School of Philosophy, one may single out the *Zhuangzi* (Writings of Master Zhuang, 4th century BC), the *Liezi* (Writings of Master Lie, 4th century BC), and the *Huainanzi* (Writings of Master Huainan, 2nd century BC). These works exerted a deep influence on the Chinese view of life and of the world.

In the 2nd century AD, a Taoist preacher called Zhang Daoling established a formal Taoist Church (perhaps in response to the coming of Buddhism to China in the 1st century AD). Zhang Daoling claimed that the blueprint for his church was revealed to him directly by the divinized Lao zi, who became the god of his church, called the “Heavenly Masters.”

The Taoist Church, closely linked to the ancient cults, beliefs, and magical practices of popular religion, developed at a rapid pace, and by the 8th century AD had spread all over China. Despite severe constraints imposed by the government of the People’s Republic of China in the 1960s and ’70s, the Taoist religion has started to make a comeback in that country. Because of its ancient indigenous roots, it may be called the unofficial national religion of the Chinese people.

#### CONFUCIANISM

While Taoism refers to an ineffable being, Confucianism refers to the teachings of a human being, Confucius. Confucius was rather reserved about religious beliefs and practices. He said: “One must respect divine beings, but keep them at a distance.” He thought human beings had within themselves the power to be wise and good and did not need to seek wisdom and goodness from outside, even from a divine being.

Confucius’s main idea was that human beings are naturally inclined to do good to others. His conceptions of education, social relations, and government were based on this premise. Confucius recognized the value of certain religious attitudes, such as respect, earnestness, sincerity, devotion, decorum, etc. But, according to him, these values should foremostly inform human relations and not simply the man-god relation.

Confucius insisted that the quality of human relations within the family circle was the foundation of an orderly society and of a prosperous state. Confucius, the “father of Chinese philosophy,” may be viewed as a profound reformer who tactfully demythologized ancient Chinese religious beliefs and practices and sought to establish universal humanistic values based on reason and human nature.

Confucius was never considered a divine being by his contemporaries or by his disciples; he never made claims of divine ancestry or attributions. It was only about five centuries after his death, with the victory of Confucianism as the state ideology of the imperial Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), and with the emergence of many religious movements (among them Buddhism and Taoism), that a cult to Confucius as a god was established around the 2nd century AD. But, contrary to Taoism and Buddhism, religious Confucianism was mainly restricted to the literate elite of China, who looked on Confucius as their patron saint and never spread, as a distinct church, among the

masses—although many village temples regularly performed rituals at an altar dedicated to Confucius.

#### BUDDHISM

In contrast to Taoism and Confucianism, which were both indigenous religious traditions, Buddhism came from abroad, mainly from its birthplace, India. Buddhism was established by an Indian prince, Siddharta Gautama of the Sakyamuni clan, on the border between India and Nepal in the 6th century BC.

The term Buddhism comes from an ancient Sanskrit word meaning “enlightened.” Buddhism, which laid stress on meditation rather than ritual in reaction against Hinduism, spread rapidly in the Indian subcontinent and in Southeast Asia (mainly Burma and Thailand).

Two main churches developed: that of the “Small Vehicle” (*Hinayana*), which stressed monastic life and celibacy, and that of the “Great Vehicle” (*Mahayana*), which was opened to the laity. Mahayana Buddhism came to China through the Northern Silk Road in the 1st century AD.

Buddhism had been significantly modified by its passage through the Indo-Greek kingdoms established north of India following Alexander’s conquests, but the essential teaching remained the “Four Holy Truths” discovered by the Buddha: 1) Life is suffering; 2) suffering comes from desire; 3) to overcome suffering, one must extinguish desire; 4) to extinguish desire, one must follow the “Eightfold Path” (right views, intentions, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration) and attain the state of perfect bliss (*nirvana*).

Mahayana Buddhism developed rapidly in China, especially during the long period of disunity that followed the fall of the Han dynasty in AD 220. By the time the Tang dynasty (618–907) was established, the Buddhist conquest of China was complete, but it was a Buddhism with very strong Chinese characteristics.

The glory of Buddhism under the Tang was probably unparalleled in any other country to this day. Thousands of sutras and other Buddhist writings, written in Pali, Sanskrit, Persian, and many vernacular languages, were inspiringly translated into Chinese (in many cases, only the Chinese version is still extant); tens of thousands of monasteries, convents, temples, and sanctuaries spread in cities, suburbs, villages, and mountains throughout China. Under the Tang, the Buddhist Church was composed of some ten schools or patriarchates (*zong*). Each school recognized one patriarch as its founder and one sutra as representing its specific teaching and ritual.

Among the most famous schools one may mention *Chan*, whose first patriarch, Bodhidharma, came to China around AD 520; the Chan school was based on the *Lankavatara Sutra* (Sutra of the Transmission of the Lamp), which emphasized the importance of meditation (the Sanskrit *dhyana* was rendered *chan* in Chinese) to attain enlightenment.

Chan was transmitted to Japan around 1200, where it was known as *Zen* Buddhism, Zen being the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character for Chan. Because of the richness of its teaching and of its well-organized ritual and monastic life, Buddhism exerted a deep influence on all classes and nationalities of Chinese society.

For almost 2,000 years Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism coexisted as the three main religions of China. Their mutual tolerance may be explained, in part, by the fact that



each emphasized one aspect of three important concerns of religious consciousness: man's relation to nature (Taoism), to society (Confucianism), and to the absolute (Buddhism).

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Although most of the numerous feasts and festivals celebrated in China originated with the Chinese, many are shared by the other nationalities. Practically every month there is at least one major celebration. The celebrations are usually held in accordance with the lunar calendar and are based on the yearly solstices and equinoxes. Among the most important, one may single out the following:

*The Spring Festival* (so called to distinguish the Chinese New Year from its Western counterpart), lasts about a

week between January 21 and February 20. The New Year begins with a midnight banquet starting on New Year's Eve; at dawn, the house is lighted and sacrificial offerings of thanksgiving are made to the ancestors and to the gods. Friends and relatives visit each other and share sumptuous banquets, where the main dish is Chinese dumplings (jiaozi). Children receive gifts—traditionally, money in a red envelope (hongbao).

*The Lantern Festival* (Dengjie), held around March 5, was originally a ritual in honor of the divine Supreme Unity. Recently, it has become a folkloric feast for children. Houses are lighted and large paper lanterns of every shape and color are hung in public places. A special



*Performers on the eve of the Chinese New Year celebrate at a park in Beijing, China. The Chinese New Year is based on the lunar calendar. (AP Images)*

cake (yanxiao) made of glutinous rice is eaten on this occasion.

*The Qingming* (“pure brilliance”) is a feast of the dead, which falls at the beginning of April. On this day, families pay a visit to the tombs of their ancestors, tidy up the burial ground, and offer incense, flowers, fruits, and cakes to the departed. On that day, the hearth fire is put out and only cold dishes (hanshi) are served.

*The Mid-Autumn Festival* (also called the Moon Festival) is both a harvest and a nature celebration (gazing at the full moon), held at the beginning of October. The main dish is “moon cakes.” It is said that in the last years of the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), the Chinese hid a small piece of paper in the moon cakes inviting the population to revolt, and thereby succeeded in overthrowing the Mongolian rulers. The Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the most colorful and joyous celebrations in China. The Dragon-Boat Festival is usually held in conjunction with this festival.

*The National Day of China* is October 1, marking the founding of the People’s Republic of China. It is celebrat-

ed lavishly with all the main buildings and streets of cities illuminated.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Because of the restrictive one child policy of the Chinese government, the birth of a child, especially a boy, is considered an important and most joyous event in China. The traditional rituals surrounding courtship have given place to a freer, haphazard, and democratic choosing of partners—at school, at work, or in community activities, such as collective dances organized by the local authorities.

Under the Communist government, marriage has become a rather sober ceremony involving the spouses, some witnesses, and the State authorities. Private celebrations are held with friends and relatives. However, the traditional rituals are still alive in the rural and national minorities’ areas. In major cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou, well-to-do families tend to adopt Western-style marriages.

Because of demographic pressure, cremation has become the most widely used method of burying the dead. Private ceremonies for the deceased are held within the family circle and with close friends.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Strong interpersonal relations (*guanxi*) characterize Chinese society, not only within the family, but also among friends and in corporate groups (school, work, sports, entertainment, etc.). Besides daily social intercourse, the numerous feasts and festivals that punctuate the year are special occasions to strengthen individual and community ties. Visiting friends and relatives is an important social ritual; the guests bring gifts, such as fruits, candies, cigarettes, or wine, while the host usually offers a specially prepared meal in tune with the spirit of the feast.

Although most young people think that the best way to find a partner is through their own efforts, there are still a number of them who are helped by their parents, relatives, or friends. The role of the “go-between” is still important in China. On most occasions, the males take the initiative. The response of a girl invited for the first time in her life for a date is usually to postpone it until later, unless she is well acquainted with the inviter. Mutual attraction is of utmost importance in selecting a partner. Position and wealth are also important considerations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditional household architecture varies a great deal according to regions in China. From the 1950s to the late '70s, socialist style architecture has dominated both in the rural areas and the cities, replacing, in part, the ancient structures. On account of their isolation and their attachment to their way of life, the national minorities have, by and large, escaped the destruction of their architectural heritage.

Since the mid 1980s, one witnesses the appearance of modern and even post-modern style, especially in large cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing. In the countryside, many communal apartment buildings have been replaced by two-story individual households with all the modern commodities. This is especially true in the farming villages surrounding large cities, where a class of wealthy peasants has arisen.

Lodging is still a problem in booming cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Guangzhou, where the space available per capita is below the minimum defined by the United Nations. By curbing the influx of newcomers (mainly peasants) into the cities and by developing accelerated programs of apartment building, available space is increasing in urban areas and should reach 8 sq miles of living space per capita by the year 2000.

Transportation systems in and between cities have developed at a dramatic pace over the last decade. These include railways, subways, paved throughways, and air links. It is surely air transport that has known the most rapid development, on account of the relatively small investment in physical infrastructure.

One of the major rail developments is the new electrified line under construction between Beijing and Hong Kong. Rapid throughways already exist between Beijing and Tianjin, around Dalian, while others are under construction in the Shanghai-Nanjing axis and in the Guangzhou-Hong Kong axis. Local roads in the countryside have improved significantly in order to facilitate the exchange of goods.

It is estimated that more than 100 million Chinese travel by train to visit friends and relatives during the first days of the Spring Festival.

On account of China's traditional medicine, it is very difficult for a Westerner to understand the question of health in China. While China represents 20% of the world population, it spends only 3.5% of its gross national product (GNP) on health (world average: 8%); China's health expenditure per capita is only \$11/year (world average: \$329/year).

Medicine is primarily a family and community affair, at least one person in the extended family having some knowledge of herbal medicine, acupuncture, etc. The Chinese only resort to state clinics and hospitals for major ailments and accidents. Medical knowledge spread in rural areas and national minorities' areas in the 1960s and '70s, thanks to “bare-foot doctors.” At present, there is on average one doctor per 1,000 inhabitants in China. The peoples of China have a life expectancy of about 70 years (first among the developing countries).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Except for a few national groups, such as the Naxi in Yunnan, the various national minorities of China have traditionally adopted a patriarchal family structure. The social status of women was, therefore, rather low. One of the avowed goals of the Chinese Revolution and of the People's Republic of China was to overthrow the patriarchal system, linked to feudalism, and to establish a functional equality between men and women.

There is no doubt that the position of women in China has improved significantly since 1949, especially in the family, in the education system, and in the work place. However, there is still a gap to be bridged in the political sphere.

Mao Zedong advocated large families; from 1949 to 1980, the population of China increased from about 500 million to more than 800 million. Since the 1980s, China has adopted a stringent natality policy, the so-called “one child per family” policy. This policy has been successful (mainly in urban areas, not so much in rural areas) in drastically diminishing demographic growth, but at a significant human cost (forced abortions, female infanticide, international adoption, etc.).

National minorities, which only represent 8% of the population of China, have been exempted from the “one child per family” policy and their demographic growth is double that of the Han Chinese.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the 1970s and 1980s, city streets were uniformly grey and dark; men and women, young and old, wore clothes of the same style and the same color. Today, in the frozen north, down jackets, woolens, and fur overcoats in red, yellow, orange, and other bright colors liven the bleak winter scene.

In the south, where the climate is milder, people choose smart Western suits, jeans, sporty jackets, sweaters, and other fashionable clothing to wear year-round. Famous brand names and fashions are a common sight in large cities, and they sell quite well. Cheaper and more practical clothing is also available.

Similar changes have also occurred in the rural areas, especially among the new class of well-to-do farmers, as well as among the national minorities living near the Han Chinese. However, in isolated rural areas, peasants still wear their “Mao suits,” while most national minorities have kept their traditional style of clothing.





*Two Chinese babies sit with their mothers in a Beijing park. As a result of its strict one child policy, China has kept its growth rate from 1990-2000 at a low 1.5 percent.  
(AP Images/Greg Baker)*

## **12 FOOD**

There are important differences in the diets and food preparations of the various national minorities of China. The most widespread staple foods in China are rice, flour, vegetables, pork, eggs, and freshwater fish.

The Han Chinese have always laid much stress on cooking skills, making the Chinese cuisine (basically Han) well known throughout the world. Dumplings, wonton, spring rolls, rice, noodles, and roast Peking duck are examples of traditional foods.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Han Chinese, who invented an original system of writing more than 3,000 years ago, and the university more than 2,000 years ago, have always prized education and literacy. The imperial government was based for more than 2,000 years on superior literary competence and skills tested by the civil examinations.

The rate of illiteracy and semi-illiteracy among the Han Chinese is only about ten percent. Some 98% of children enroll in school when they reach school age. More than 80% of the students who graduate from primary school and 45% of those who graduate from junior middle school continue to higher levels.

There are more than 1,000 universities and colleges and 800,000 primary and middle schools at different levels, with

a total enrolment of 180 million, including 2.6 million college students and graduate students. In addition, 800,000 students are now taking undergraduate training courses at home, while 14 million adult students attend classes of different levels in adult schools.

Although education is in progress, still about five million school age children do not enter school or have dropped out, and the college entrance rate is only 1.8%, below the average of developing countries. Deficiencies in education mainly result from underfunding.

Among the national minorities, the level of education varies significantly and depends on various factors: tradition, way of life, proximity of cities, etc. Some national minorities, such as the Koreans, have the highest level of education of any ethnic group in China, the Han included.

In general, advanced education in China supposes the knowledge of the Chinese language and writing system.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The variety of traditional musical instruments used in China is sufficient to form a full-fledged orchestra. The most popular instruments include the two-string violin (*erhu*), the lute (*zheng*), and the *pipa*.

Institutions of traditional music and dance were established throughout China early in the 1950s in order to promote tra-

ditional Chinese music. The rich musical heritage of many nationalities was thus preserved.

Most nationalities in China only have oral literary traditions. Since the 1950s, many important literary works of the nationalities (epics, poems, songs, short stories, novels) have been translated into Chinese and published. Some have now been translated from the Chinese into Western languages.

The Tibetans, Mongols, Manchus, Koreans, and Uighur have rich written traditions and some of their major works have been translated in English and other Western languages. However, it is the Han Chinese who have produced one of the longest and richest written traditions of the world: there is practically no genre in which they have not created world masterpieces.

The traditional literature of the Han Chinese—extending over a continuum of more than 3,000 years and written with the same Chinese writing system—includes poems, drama, novels, short stories, history, philosophy, religion, rituals, letters, and administrative documents. Many works have been translated into many languages and introduced into many countries; however, these translations represent but a tiny fraction of the immense Chinese literary output.

A single anthology of the Tang dynasty (618–907) contains more than 40,000 poems, including those written by the world class poets Li Bai and Du Fu. The monumental Chinese novels, starting in the 14th century with the epic *Water Margin*, also include *Pilgrim to the West*, *Golden Lotus*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. One should also mention philosophic masterpieces written around the 5th century BC, namely Confucius' *Analects* and Lao zi's *The Way and Its Power*.

The Han Chinese have also contributed greatly to world civilization by inventing paper and noodles (2nd century BC), ceramics (7th century), gunpowder (10th century), porcelain and movable printing (11th century), and the compass (12th century).

## 15 WORK

China is a developing country, but the rate of development varies considerably from region to region. The coastal area, open to international commerce, has known a real economic and technological explosion since the early 1980s.

While the hinterland has also developed at a rapid pace, the gap between the seaboard and inland China has widened significantly, producing a socially disruptive disequilibrium. The unbalance is not only *territorial*, it is also *technological*. For instance, in Gansu Province in northwest China, one sees both scientists engaged in highly technical research in nuclear power plants and peasants cultivating the land with centuries-old farming techniques and implements.

In general, the land inhabited by the national minorities, for various social, political, cultural, and logistical reasons, has remained rather undeveloped as compared to the Han Chinese regions. This explains the growing numbers of poor farmers who attempt to migrate to cities and to the eastern coastline in order to improve their lot. This has given rise to the phenomenon of unemployment in urban areas.

About 70% of China's population is rural and engages overwhelmingly in farming; for them, it is very difficult to change their income and lifestyle.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports do not play the same role in China as they do in the West. This is particularly true for competitive sports. Many sports in China are held only during seasonal festivals or in certain regions (especially among the national minorities).

Of course, the universal sport in China is ping-pong. Other widely practiced sports include traditional shadow boxing (both *wushu* and *taijiquan*). More recently, some Western sports, especially soccer, but also swimming, badminton, basketball, tennis, and baseball, have gained some popularity in China and are practiced mainly in schools, colleges, and universities.

The Chinese government has set up a Federation of Chinese Sports to train Chinese athletes for the international Olympics and for the Asian Olympics. Athletes from China have performed brilliantly in many sports, especially swimming, diving, gymnastics, ping-pong, and volleyball.

In the 2008 Summer Olympics held in Beijing, Chinese athletes earned 100 medals overall, ranking the country second after the United States (with 110). China ranked first in gold medals won, with 51 (to the United States' total of 36 gold medals).

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Watching television has become a major daily evening entertainment for a majority of families in China. In addition, video cassette recorders and DVD players are now very popular in urban areas. Although movie theaters are usually full, they are scarce and can only accommodate a small percentage of the population.

Young people are often enthusiastic about dancing, karaoke, and rock music, while older people are likely to spend their leisure time attending the Peking opera, local drama, engaging in humorous dialogues, listening to classical music, or playing cards or mahjong.

Travel is quickly becoming a new way to spend one's free time, especially since the five-day work week was introduced in 1995. Storytelling is still a popular form of entertainment among many national minorities, who do not have ready access to television.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES

Each of China's 56 nationalities has its own tradition of folk art and crafts. The rich heritage of the Han Chinese is, however, the only tradition that has spread widely and is shared by many of China's nationalities. It goes without saying that many motifs and art forms of the Han Chinese were borrowed in ancient times from non-Chinese peoples and progressively "sinicized."

Calligraphy and traditional painting are the most popular folk arts of the Han Chinese. Paper-cutting, embroidery, brocade, cloisonné, colored glaze, jade ware, clay sculpture, and dough figurines, meticulously wrought by craftsmen, are famous around the world.

Chess, kite flying, gardening, and landscaping are hobbies among people of various ages.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

China is in a period of transition, moving from a traditional to a modern society. The coexistence of the old social structure



*A Chinese military band playing in Harbin. (E. Gall/EPD Photos)*

and the new, immature social system produces a number of contradictions. The widening gap of living standards between rural and urban areas draws a surplus rural labor force of more than 100 million into the coastal areas looking for jobs. This situation, which favors mobility and exchange, entails serious social disturbances.

The disequilibrium of the economic development between the coastal areas and the inland, the irrational income for different occupations, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the growing inflation, the spread of greed and bribery, and the reappearance of other ugly phenomena, such as gambling, drugs, prostitution, and abduction of women, create serious problems for the people and for the government.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese government states that men and women have equal rights in all areas of life and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men was narrowing in the early years of the 21st century,

with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005 (but only 32.6% of doctoral students).

One area of legislation that affects women involves marriage and family planning. China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for a woman to marry before age 20 and for a man to marry before age 22. It is also illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests to enforce this law. Single women face few options. They may be forced to undergo abortion or sterilization.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. Because prostitution may involve organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, prosecution of laws against prostitution has limited success.

In 2002, China removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses. Although homosexuality is still a taboo topic, gay men and lesbians are increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

## DAI

**PRONUNCIATION:** DYE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Daile, Daina, Daiya, Daibengm, Dianyue, Dan, Liao, Gold Teeth, Silver Teeth, Black Teeth, Baiyi

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** Over 1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dai

**RELIGION:** Polytheism; ancestor worship; some Buddhism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

### 1 INTRODUCTION

From ancient times, the Dai inhabited a region at the southern tip of Yunnan Province, which was set up under the name of Yizhou Prefecture in 109 BC by the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC—AD 8). In the 1st century AD, the Dai chief, Yongyoudiao, sent emissaries thrice to Luoyang, the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25—220). Yongyoudiao was subsequently appointed to a high post by the central government, thus establishing formal political relations between the Dai and the Chinese authorities. Later on, the name of Yizhou Prefecture was changed to Yongchang. From the 8th to 13th century, the prefecture was successively under the jurisdiction of the Nan-zhao Kingdom and then of the Dali Kingdom of Yunnan.

As early as the 9th century, the ancestors of the Dai planted rice extensively in south and southwest Yunnan. Plowing was done by elephants and buffalo. Extensive water conservation works and irrigation systems were set up to increase rice and other grain production. Dai women wove a special cloth called "silver cotton cloth." The Dai decorated their teeth by covering them with a thin sheath of gold or silver; thus, different Dai tribes were named "Gold Teeth," "Silver Teeth," "Black Teeth," etc. A chief of the Dai in Xishuangbanna, Bazhen, unified all the tribes in the 12th century. Making Jinghong the capital, he founded the State of Jinglong. Paying homage to the emperor of China as his sovereign, he was granted an official title by the central government; the title passed on to his son. From the Yuan Dynasty (1271—1368) onward, the custom of appointing Dai hereditary chiefs became official. It was only in the 18th century, under the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644—1911), that the Dai chiefs were replaced by officials of Manchu or Chinese nationality. From then on the Dai districts were directly administered by the central government.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Dai population amounted to just over one million in 1990. They are mainly concentrated in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (South Yunnan) and in three western Yunnan "mixed administrations," namely Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture of Dehong; Dai and Wa Autonomous County of Gengma; and Dai and Lahu Autonomous County of Menglian. The rest of the Dai are scattered into more than 30 counties of Yunnan Province. They live mostly in the plain and valley areas at the foot of the mountains, a region of the subtropics with abundant rainfall and rich soil.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Dai is classified as belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family, Zhuang-Dong group, Zhuang-Dai branch. There are three dia-



*A young Dai woman performs a traditional dance in Manyanguang village, China. Young girls of the Dai ethnic group wear silk dresses to perform the umbrella dance to celebrate Datum, or the "Sending the Buddhist Scripture" festival. (AP Images/Eugene Hoshiko)*

lects (mutually unintelligible). The Dai have devised several alphabetic writing systems of their own in various regions, but these systems are mutually incompatible. The main systems are Daina (Dehong dialect), Daile (Xishuangbanna dialect), Daibeng (around Ruijiang), and Dairui (Quanping dialect).

Dai is a self-given name meaning "people who love peace and freedom." The Dai also call themselves by other names, such as "Daile," "Daina," "Daiya," "Daibeng," and so on. Other designations were given by the Chinese or by other nationalities, such as, "Dianyue," "Dan," "Liao," "Gold Teeth," "Silver Teeth," "Black Teeth," "Baiyi," etc. Dai was chosen as a unified designation since 1949.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

One of the most stirring stories in the rich Dai mythology is the long poem "Princess Peacock and Prince Zhaoshutun." One day, Prince Zhaoshutun of Mengbanjia Kingdom went hunting. He saw seven princesses in peacock clothes bathing in the Golden Lake. Helped by the Dragon God, he stole the peacock clothes of the youngest princess, Nannuona. She could

not fly back to her Peacock Kingdom without those clothes. Besides, she loved the prince at first sight. They married and led a happy life. However, King Peacock was so angry about their marriage that he sent troops to attack the Mengbanjia Kingdom. Prince Zhaoshutun had to leave his beloved wife and lead his army to battle. Unsure about the length and the outcome of the war, King Peacock ordered a shaman to perform divination; he falsely accused Nannuona of being a demon and advised that she should be killed. She asked for remission, but it was refused. She then asked to dance one last time in her peacock clothes before her execution, to which he agreed. As soon as she put on her peacock clothes, she swiftly flew upward and returned to her Peacock Kingdom. Prince Zhaoshutun defeated his enemies and returned in triumph. Overcome with grief and regret, his father told him the story. He went back to the Golden Lake, where he was helped again by the Dragon God to stride over thousands of crags and torrents and ultimately arrived in the Peacock Kingdom. Surmounting all sorts of obstacles put up by the Peacock King, he was finally reunited with Princess Peacock, Nannuona.

According to the myths entitled "The Origin of Yingba" and "The Creation of Yingba," Yingba was the ancestor of all gods. The many stories attached to this mythological figure form an important part of the traditional beliefs of the Dai.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The Dai are polytheistic. They offer sacrifices to "Diula" (a divinized ancestor) on an annual, three-year, and even nine-year cycle. The rite is called "Diula Meng." "Meng" means an area where many villages are bound by blood ties. Therefore, many villages attend the rite, which may last from 1 day to as many as 10 days. The participants wear uniform ceremonial clothes. Oxen and pigs are butchered as offerings. The road leading to the ceremonial place should be sealed off and no outsiders allowed.

The Dai also offer a sacrifice to the Paddy Field Ghost before they transplant the rice shoots and after harvest. A makeshift shed is set up in the paddy field to perform the ritual. Four pairs of candles, a certain amount of areca leaves and one rice roll are used.

Each village may have a few "village gods" of its own; these are actually ancestors who made important contributions to the village in the past. Villagers offer them sacrifices at regular intervals.

Hinayana Buddhism came to the Dai in the 7th century (according to another version, in the 14th century). Sakyamuni receives special homage as the founder of Buddhism. The religion advocates as the highest ideal that the Buddhist believer become a monk or a nun, lead an ascetic life, free oneself from worldly preoccupations and, in the end, reach nirvana (a state of perfect bliss), equally detached from life and death. For this reason, people are asked to offer donations to the monks, the nuns, and their temples. In Dai areas, each village has its own temple and monks are very common. In Xishuangbanna, boys are expected to lead the life of a monk for a certain period of their life. They learn to read and to chant scriptures, then resume their secular life; some of them choose to remain monks all their lives.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Dai festivals are related to Buddhism, such as the Haolunwa Festival, Danpa Festival, Dangang Festival, Shanghan Festival, Danpopazhao Festival, Aowasa Festival, Danmuohaban Festival, Dandanmu Festival, the Haowasa Festival, etc. One of the goals of festivals is to offer donations to the temples.

Besides these temple festivals, traditional Dai holidays include the Spring Festival, the Multicolored Egg Festival, the Water-Splashing Festival, the Moon Worship Festival, the Opened-Door Festival, the Closed-Door Festival, and Huanglu Festival, and so on. Among them, the Water-Splashing Festival is the most elaborate and the best known. It is comparable to the Spring Festival of the Chinese, but is held June 24–26 (Dai calendar). The first thing the Dai do after dawn on the Festival day is to prostrate themselves before the Buddha and give alms to the monks. They splash clean water on the Buddha image to wash off the dust. Thus, they perform the “Bathe-Buddha Ceremony.” Then, they splash water on each other. It is said that a fire demon had occupied Xishuangbanna. One day, it kidnapped seven beautiful girls. The youngest of them, Nongxiang, coaxed a secret out of the demon: a long hair put around its neck would cut its head off. She did a good job with her hair, but the demon’s head turned into a fire ball. Wherever it went, it burned. The seven girls splashed a lot of water and finally put out the fire. They rid the people of a fierce scourge. In memory of their contribution, the Dai have performed water-splashing activities annually since then and ultimately turned the ritual into a festival. Water-splashing on each other is considered very auspicious. Many recreational activities, performances, and competitions are held on the same day. It is, of course, a great opportunity for the young people to date. If it happens to be raining, this is regarded as an omen of a bumper crop.

The Closed-Door Festival is a festival in which the door of love and marriage is closed and a grand donation activity is held in the temple. The Opened-Door Festival is held right after the Closed-Door Festival; it is a feast dedicated to young people, where dating and marriage are encouraged.

The Huanglu Festival is both a fair and a parade held at harvest time, fostering the exchange of commodities in the context of festive recreation; it follows the Opened-Door Festival. The central figure of the parade is the image of an elephant, woven with bamboo strips and covered with multicolored papers. It is operated by a man lying beneath the elephant belly. The base of the image is carried on the shoulders of four or eight strong men.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past, the education of Dai children was restricted to the temple. Only monks acquired a certain amount of knowledge through religious education. In Xishuangbanna, there has been a tradition that every boy should be a monk from the time when he was seven or eight years old. He only left the temple when he reached adulthood. Most of them then resumed their secular life and soon married. A select few chose the monastic life and remained in the temple for the rest of their lives.

In general, the Dai bury their dead in the ground, but the monks practice cremation. The ash of the dead monk is put into a pot and buried in the rear of the temple. A rite should be held for a widow or widower to cut off her or his relation with the dead. A thread is bound to the body of the widow or widower and its other end is attached to the coffin or to the straw mat

wrapping of the dead. A senior person cuts the thread, then the deceased is no longer related to the surviving spouse. This ritual is probably linked to the wedding ceremony, in which a thread-tying ritual is performed.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Taboos among the Dai often bear profound religious meanings. For example, to stroke a young monk’s head is strictly prohibited. When calling on a family, the guest is not allowed to stride over the firepool, sit behind the fire while facing the door, sit on the threshold of the door, lean against a column, or enter the inner rooms. In spite of such formalities, the Dai are very hospitable. Tea, tobacco, and wine are offered as soon as the guests arrive. The family prepares special dishes to honor the guests, including fish, chicken, pork, vegetables, sweet bamboo shoots, peanuts, and fruits after a meal. When a guest is to leave, the host will see him off to the gate.

Dai youngsters enjoy full freedom in dating. The sure way of knowing whether a girl is married or single is to look at her silver waistband. According to Dai custom, a married girl will hang the keys of her household on her waistband, thus indicating that she refuses any advance. “Tossing an embroidered ball” is a sport and also a ritual of social intercourse between boys and girls. The ball is a 4 in square bag padded with cottonseed, with a 1 m-long brocade band attached at one of its corners. Boys and girls are separated into two teams and stand in lines about 10 m apart facing each other. One member of a team—a girl, for instance—holds the band and rotates the ball, then lets the ball fly toward the opposite team; the ball should be caught by a young man. However, if the ball is tossed by a girl he likes, he might purposely “miss” the ball and let it drop; according to the rules, he must then walk to the girl, present a bouquet of flowers, and say something (in this case, of course, words expressing his innermost feelings). The girl should receive the flowers and listen to his confession of love.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Dai live in stilt-supported storied houses made of bamboo. They use 24 to 40 bamboos as stilts. A wooden floor is laid on the stilts, 2-3 m above the earth. The house is cubic in shape. Rows of straw cover the double slopes of the roof. A bamboo ladder leads to the door. There is a corridor and a balcony for relaxation and cooling off in the evening and for hanging the wash out to dry. Livestock and miscellany are placed on the ground floor. The central room, covered with a large bamboo-strip mat, serves for eating, for resting, and for receiving guests. There is a firepool in the center, with a triangular iron framework for cooking or boiling tea. The inner room, separated by planks or a mat woven with bamboo strips, is the main bedroom; there are also bedrooms on each side of the central room. People should take off their shoes before they enter. Some houses are built with bricks and tiles. In Delong District, most houses are one-story. The wall is built by adobe or bamboo, the roof covered with straw.

Transportation in the Dai districts is very convenient. There are highways connecting almost all the townships and even the villages. A reinforced concrete bridge crosses the Lanchang River. A land and water communication network is already operative around Jinghong. There are airlines connecting Simao and Baoshan with Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Dai families are patrilineal and small. The parents live with the unmarried children. In case a couple has no son, the man is welcome to live with his bride's family. This situation is quite common. There are quite a few marriage rites. For instance, the bride's side and bridegroom's side set up tables exhibiting their respective wedding gifts. The gifts from the bridegroom's side usually include wine, two rolls of white threads, straight skirts, garments, two silver waistbands, a silver bracelet, a long sword, glutinous rice, eggs, and cooked chickens; the gifts from the bride's side usually include wine, a hat made of banana leaves, a piece of white cloth, a piece of black cloth, five strings of areca, two strings of banana, brown sugar, and salt. These traditional gifts are symbolic and express the wish that the new couple will lead a sweet and tasteful life.

During the wedding ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom sit on a felt mat, side by side. The master of ceremonies ties a white thread on their wrists. Then a senior person among the relatives binds the bridegroom's left shoulder, crosses their backs, and binds the bride's right shoulder. The thread is finally tied by a guest. "White" means pure love. "Tying the thread" means binding the couple together, never to separate.

In some districts, the bridegroom should work for the bride's family for three years. Then, the couple is allowed to move to his family's home.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Dai men wear collarless, edge to edge tops and long trousers. They usually wrap their heads with white or dark blue cloth. In the winter, they have felt draped over their shoulders. Tattoos are very common. As early as 11 years old, boys are tattooed over the chest, back, belly, loin, and extremities with the figures of animals and flowers, as well as with symbolic designs and even with Dai writing. Quite a number of the aged and middle-aged men are tattooed with Buddhist scriptures over their thighs. It was a custom in the past: anybody whose thigh was not tattooed with scriptures would be looked down upon.

The traditional clothes of women include short garments with tight sleeves and long straight skirts reaching to their feet. In areas around Mangshi, girls wear long trousers and a small waistband. Dai women usually comb their hair into a bun with a multicolored wooden comb stuck into it. They like to wear a silver waistband, a bracelet, and other ornaments.

## **12 FOOD**

Rice is the staple food of the Dai. They prefer pork to beef. Sweet wine is welcome by all of them, including the children. They usually take two meals a day. Chopsticks and bowls are used. In the case of glutinous rice, they take it with their hand. Their traditional foods include rice in a bamboo tube, sour bamboo shoots, roasted fish, sour vegetables, thick sauce made from shrimp, fish, crab, cicada, ant's eggs, or cricket, as well as fried ant's eggs, fried crickets, roasted spiders, and raw worms in the bamboo. They like to chew areca leaves (tropical Asian palms).

## **13 EDUCATION**

Primary schools, middle schools (junior and senior), and technical schools are set up in all Dai areas. The vast majority of students receive primary school education. Many Chinese

teachers, who learned the Dai language and writing, work as teachers. Newspapers and books written in Dai are published. Programs in the Dai language are broadcasted. Traditional temple education is gradually being transformed; however, the cultural and educational level of the Dai is still lower than the average for the national minorities of China.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Dai folk singers are called *zhuanha*. Their performances are well received. The Peacock Dance is usually performed on festivals by one or two dancers. They wear white masks and ornaments simulating peacock wings. Their movements imitate those of a peacock, such as leaving the nest, sliding down the slope, taking off, finding the water, looking at their image in the water, drinking, bathing, and flying. The performance is accompanied by musical instruments, such as the elephant foot drum, gongs, and cymbals.

## **15 WORK**

The Dai have acquired more than 1,000 years of experience in rice cultivation. They have well-integrated systems of cultivation, of water conservation, and of irrigation. This is the basis of their economy. Handicraft, trade, livestock husbandry, light industry, and mining are all making progress. There are nearly 100 small-scale power stations in Xishuangbanna Prefecture. Their Pu'er tea is famous throughout the country. The success of rubber tree plantations promises important developments in the rubber industry in the near future.

## **16 SPORTS**

Basketball, soccer, and volleyball are very popular with the youngsters. The Dai have also developed a distinct style of shadow-boxing based on the Peacock Dance.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Besides movies and television, which are already popularized, karaoke halls have recently been set up in almost all townships. This is due to the influence of tourists who visit the Dai areas in increasing numbers. But, traditional forms of entertainment remain very much alive—in particular, song competitions and festival entertainment. For instance, during the New Year celebrations, groups of young people sing and dance in front of each household in the village. New Dai theater has developed from traditional themes.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The artistic sense of the Dai is best seen in the architecture and design of Buddhist buildings, especially the Manfeilong White Pagoda in Jinghong County, the Mangmengding Pagoda in Yingjiang County, and the Octagonal Pagoda in Jingzhen County. These are not only admired for their architectural sophistication, but also their exquisite carvings and paintings. Among handicrafts, Dai brocade items have a special attraction for the tourists.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Dai have their own calendar, writing system, and a well-developed agriculture. Their educational inadequacy, however, is quite marked among the minorities. This is related to their

traditional form of education and inhibits their economic development in the future.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involves organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# DANI

**LOCATION:** Indonesian province of Papua on island of New Guinea

**POPULATION:** 270,000

**LANGUAGE:** Dani

**RELIGION:** Native Dani, Dani Church, various sects of Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Dani are a well-known tribal group from the province of Papua, Indonesia. Papua is the largest of the 33 provinces of Indonesia and was formed out of the former province of Irian Jaya in 2003. The province occupies a large portion of the western half of the island of New Guinea and is a disputed territory with the neighboring independent nation of Papua New Guinea. Indonesian encroachment into the highlands rapidly thrust the Dani into the 20th century. The Dani were contacted by expeditions prior to World War II, but wasn't until the 1950s that permanent contact was made by Christian missionaries working and living in the area. Former stone tool users, the Dani are now metal tool-using cash crop growers.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Dani live in and around the Balim River Valley in the central highlands of Papua. While a significant number (approximately 90,000) of Dani live in the Grand Valley of the Balim drainage, there are an even larger number living west of the Balim River Valley (approximately 180,000). There are about 90,000 Dani in this area alone. The other 50,000 Dani live scattered throughout the highland region at altitudes ranging from 1,000 to 1,800 m (3,300 to 5,900 ft). The Grand Valley is a grassy region with rainfall averaging around 200 cm (79 in) per year. The nights can be very cool at this high altitude. The largest city in Papua, Wamena, is located at the south end of the valley. The best estimate of the population of Wamena is approximately 40,000. Included in this estimate is a significant number of non-Dani living and working there. Wamena has also been developing as a tourist hub with guest houses and hotels for tourists who want to experience Dani culture in the Balim Valley. Relocation of the Dani from their highland valley to the lowlands to allow non-Dani to establish farms continues to be a civil and land rights problem.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Dani is spoken in several mutually intelligible dialects in the central highlands. The Dani language family, which contains Dani and six other Papuan languages, is part of the larger Trans-New Guinea phylum, which includes most of the languages spoken along the highland ranges on both sides of the border between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The Dani have a special form of their language that they call "Police Talk," which was used with the early Dutch colonial officials and is still used with any outsiders who want to learn their language. The language is a simplified form of the everyday form of Dani that they speak to each other. One particularly intriguing aspect of Dani grammar is the fact that the language has only two basic color terms (dark and light), while English, for example, has 11 basic terms. This fact has been explored by



linguists and psychologists since the mid-1960s to provide evidence for the universality or specificity of color cognition.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Myths are not very prevalent in Dani culture. There are myths that are told among the Dani that describe relationships between humans and birds. Each kinship group has a mythical relationship with a particular species of bird, and the group is prohibited from eating this bird. This kind of relationship is called "totemism" by anthropologists. Birds are very clearly identified with human beings; in fact, enemies killed in battle are called "dead birds" in some Dani groups. *Dead Birds* is the title of a renowned ethnographic documentary about the Dani that was filmed by Robert Gardner and the late Michael Rockefeller between 1961 and 1965.

#### 5 RELIGION

An important part of Dani indigenous religious belief is founded on the concept of *mogat*. *Mogat* is what leaves a person's body when he or she dies and tends to stay near the place where the person lived. The Dani concept of *mogat* corresponds very closely to the concept of a ghost. Ghosts are found everywhere, and most Dani have stories about either direct or indirect contact with ghosts. Ghosts are found especially at night and adults generally do not like to venture out after dark. Ghosts in Dani culture do not harm children because they are said to feel sorry for them. The Dani also believe in a vital essence called *edai-egen*. This substance is found in the chest, just below the sternum of adults. Children are born with this substance that grows and settles as they learn to walk and talk and become more social beings. Ghosts can affect the *edai-egen* and cause it to twist, which causes a person to become weak and susceptible to illness and disease.

In Dani traditional religion, it is only men who perform the ceremonies and rituals. Christianity has made a major impact in Dani territory and is steadily eroding adherence to the traditional ceremonies and rituals.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Dani culture does not recognize or celebrate holidays. As one of the populations of Indonesia, the Dani are exposed to Indonesian holidays that are celebrated by the local Indonesian population. Christian Dani celebrate the major holidays in the Christian calendar. An extremely important event for the Dani was the Pig Feast, which is celebrated by an entire alliance every five years. During the two-and-a-half weeks of the Pig Feast, all of the important celebrations since the last feast take place: weddings, funerals, initiations, and ritual affirmations of leadership and authority. The feast involves the killing and cooking of many pigs. Prior to the Pig Feast, the leader of the alliance will install a prohibition on the killing of any pigs. This typically lasts from two to three months before the Feast begins. The Pig Feast also allows people to pay debts they have incurred to others through the exchange of valuables and pig meat.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Girls are permitted to marry at the first Pig Feast following puberty. The wedding begins at the bride's home. She is given items to indicate her passage into the world of adult women: a

digging stick, carrying nets, and a woman's skirt. The woman's skirt is wrapped around her waist by the older women. The skirt can measure up to 27 m (30 yd) in length and will be decorated with orchid fibers. The skirt is held on by pressure alone. There is a true art to winding and wrapping the skirt so that it does not fall off. A woman will essentially wear the skirt she receives at her wedding for life, only taking it off or replacing it on rare occasions. Since weddings take place only every five years, they are group affairs involving several couples. The ceremony culminates after four days when the new bride is delivered to the home of the groom's family. The groom plays no role in the ceremony at all. The couple will live in his father's house for at least a couple of years, and it is not until they move out that they will begin to have a sexual relationship.

The Pig Feast is also a time for male initiation. The ceremony is not as brutal as those of other groups in New Guinea. The initiation includes a brief period of seclusion, a mock battle, and a final immersion in fire to purify and restore the warmth of the boys at the end of the seclusion. Observers confirm that the boys are not burned because the fire is covered with damp leaves that contain the flames.

Upon the murder of a person, young girls who were particularly close to the individual would have had one or two fingers cut off. The process was performed by a specialist who would take off the first joint of the fingers with a stone adze. The purpose of this practice was to appease the ghosts since a murder had taken place. The Dani discontinued this practice in the mid-1960s.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The traditional Dani greeting among men is to touch each other and to say "*halao*," which is the shortened version of *hal-loak-nak*, which translates as "Let me eat your feces." This is a friendly greeting and no one takes the stock phrase literally.

In traditional Dani society, visiting, working in the gardens, tending the pigs, and virtually every activity was constrained by the constant threat of war. War was endemic to Dani culture. Communities located near the frontier between two groups not united by an alliance could see and hear battles every day. These communities had to be on the alert for raids, especially when traveling to the gardens or tending the pigs away from the compound. Groups were separated by areas of fallow fields known as "no man's lands," where formal battles usually took place. Hundreds of men participated in these battles armed with bows, arrows, and spears. Men who carry the long jabbing spears and short throwing spears do not use bows and arrows. Bowmen do not carry spears. The tips of arrows were often smeared with dirt or grease to cause infection when they entered the body. Since the Dutch took control of the area in 1958, efforts have been made to put an end to the warfare in the Grand Valley. Except for a few relapses, warfare has ceased to be a part of Dani social life. The Indonesian government does permit and even at times encourage reenactments at ceremonies and for tourists who visit the area.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The basic unit of Dani social life is the compound. The compound consists of a round men's house, a round women's house, a rectangular shared cooking house, and a rectangular pigsty. Large compounds may have as many as a dozen women's houses. All of these traditional houses are built of wood



*Dani tribes people wait for their turn to vote outside balloting booths at Pike Village near Wamena Irian Jaya, Indonesia. (AP Images/Mark Fallander)*

and have thatched roofs. A few Dani now live in government-built houses made from timber with corrugated roofs.

Health in the Balim Valley was relatively good until the recent introductions of malaria and different types of venereal diseases. Malaria was the byproduct of an agricultural scheme initiated by the Indonesian government to grow rice in Dani territory. Traditional medicine among the Dani was not highly developed, although there were certain botanical and herbal remedies for ailments. Some men were well known for their curing abilities.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Marriage is regulated through membership in moieties. The term moiety comes from French, in which it means "half." In the Dani system, a person is born into the moiety of his or her father and must then choose a spouse from the other moiety. The choice of a spouse may occur either through an arrangement between families of different compounds or through love matches arranged by individuals. The families begin a series of equal exchanges that occur over a generation. The purpose of these is to continue to bind the two families together in an alliance. This was extremely important before pacification took place in the Dani region. Polygyny, having more than one

wife at a time, took place in Dani culture but has now all but disappeared.

After a couple is married, they take up residence in the groom's father's house. Within a few years, the couple will relocate to their own place of residence within the compound. Families are rather small, with most women having only one or two children. Although divorce among the Dani is fairly easy, long-term separation is more likely to be the result of incompatibility.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

On most occasions the Dani now wear Western-style clothing. In the not-so-distant past, however, Dani traditional clothing was far from Western standards of modesty. Men wore the obligatory penis sheath made from the gourd of a vine that grows in the area. Women wore a braided cord fiber skirt and a large woven bag draped over their backs and buttocks. This bag would protect them from ghosts that might try to enter their bodies.

Prior to contact with Christian missionaries, Dani men wore their hair long and greased it with pig fat and soot. Men's hair was a source of pride. Following contact and the subsequent conversion of many Dani to Christianity, men began

to wear their hair short and washed it regularly. Bathing and washing was seen as a means to finding eternal life. However, as Christianity became better understood by the newly converted Dani, bathing and washing was continued as a habit no longer associated with spirituality.

## 12 FOOD

The major foodstuff in the Dani diet is sweet potatoes. They also grow other crops such as corn, taro, yams, sugar cane, bananas, cucumbers, ginger, and tobacco. Domesticated pigs are also part of the Dani diet, but they are not eaten on a daily basis; instead, they are only killed and eaten on ceremonial occasions. Pigs are also an extremely important medium of exchange among the Dani. The Balim Valley has been virtually decimated of all indigenous wildlife and any hunting for wild game must take place in the surrounding montane tropical rain forest. Western foods have not taken hold among the Dani.

## 13 EDUCATION

Formalized instruction of children in traditional Dani society was rare; however, the building of state-sponsored and missionary-sponsored schools in the Dani area has meant that Western-style education is more prevalent among the Dani. A growing number of Dani children are being taught to read and write Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia. Child-rearing in general is very permissive and there are few expectations on the part of parents concerning their children.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Artistic expression is limited among the Dani. Music consists mostly of songs, which include funeral dirges, victory songs after battles, and boy's songs that often have lewd lyrics.

## 15 WORK

In sweet potato production, men prepare the fields for planting with wooden digging sticks. Women do the planting, weeding, and harvesting of the crop. Dani men and women make their own fiber string for net bags, though only women weave the bags. There are no full-time specialists for any skill or activity. Dani society is what anthropologists refer to as an egalitarian society; egalitarian societies do not have inherent differences in status among different members of the group.

Dani children are given the responsibility of tending to the herds of pigs as they wander through the fields and nearby forests. Pig theft and loss are problems for the Dani.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditional Dani society does not have sports. There are mock battles and children play at the bow and arrow wars that were part of precontact Dani life. Wamena is the home of the Persiwa Wamena soccer team, one of only two such clubs on the Indonesian half of the island of New Guinea. The Persiwa Wamena club competes in the Liga Indonesia league competition that includes only the teams at the top of the Indonesian league system.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

The Dani have been described by anthropologists as one of the few cultures in the world that lack games. Competition is lack-

ing among the Dani, which is usually given as a rationale for the absence of games as Americans know them.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Dani produce little art of any kind. Body decoration is the most elaborated art form in Dani culture. The Dani do not produce masks, sculptures, or paintings, as do groups from the lowlands of Papua New Guinea. The Dani, like other highland cultures, focus on the body as an art form. Men decorate themselves more elaborately than do women.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Maintenance of cultural institutions and the right to self-determination are immense problems for the present-day Dani. The loss of land rights is also a major problem besetting the Dani. Encroachment onto traditional Dani territory by Indonesian transmigrants causes tension. The need for money and the lack of reliable ways to earn it are also problems for the modern Dani.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Like so many other highland societies of the island of New Guinea, the Dani exhibit a pattern of gender antagonism. Males and females are segregated beginning with the incorporation of boys into the men's houses. A group of boys will undergo introduction into the cult of adult men, and there is no corresponding cult for females. Sexual differences are elaborated and developed into a general fear of female sexuality, menstruation, childbirth, and female bodily substances.

Dani men are responsible for the construction of both wood and traditional grass houses. Men also prepare the fields for planting. Dani men weave the fiber skirts worn by women, and they also weave bark and shell bands. Dani women, however, are responsible for weaving the important net carrying bags that form part of their attire.

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—by J. Williams

# DERONG

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Qiao, Qiu men

**LOCATION:** China (Derong River Valley)

**POPULATION:** About 7,500

**LANGUAGE:** Derong

**RELIGION:** Polytheism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Derong is a nationality of limited population, amounting to less than 7,500 people. Their history has been overshadowed by several larger nationalities that exerted a marked influence on them. They lived for centuries in a canyon surrounded by great mountains, isolated from the rest of the world. Nobody was aware of their existence until the 13th century, when an ancient Chinese book recorded their presence and called them "Qiao." They were called "Qiu men" in the Yuan (1271–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Administered by local officials, headmen of the "Mu" clan, of Naxi nationality, they led a primitive life up to this century.

They still preserve many remnants of the primitive commune. There are 15 clans (*nile*) consisting of 54 family groups (*ke'en*). Each family group constitutes a village. There are two, three, or more "extended family houses" in a village, in each of which dwell three to four generations of family members, altogether 20 to 30 people. Collective cultivated land, granary, hunting, fishing, and gathering areas are owned and used by the whole village community. The Derong practice collective labor and egalitarian distribution of goods and commodities. Another form of collective labor is limited to a small portion of people. Small collectives of two to four individual families (mostly brothers, uncles and nephews of the patrilineal line) have their own land, cultivated collectively. All of these collectives are now splitting into smaller ones, mainly into individual farms.

Members of a family group (*ke'en*) belong to a common pedigree, acknowledge a common ancestor, and keep a joint name system. Every family group selects a head, generally of a senior position in the family hierarchy, and having a glib tongue. He takes charge of both internal and external matters of his village, including command of the collective labor, organization of sacrifice offering rituals, arbitration of quarrels, and negotiation of treaties with other villages, as well as participation in collective labor. Although members of a clan (*nile*) may share a bitter hatred of the enemy ("blood feud") when any one of them is treated unjustly or murdered, there is no unified organization of the Derong nationality, even to administer justice.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The population of the Derong amounts to about 7,430 living around the reaches of the Derong River Valley in 2000. The valley extends about 161 km (100 mi), walled in to the east by the Gaoligong Mountains and to the west by the Dandangli Mountains, both chains reaching more than 13,000 ft. Influenced by a maritime current from the Indian Ocean, the rainfall exceeds 100 in per year. There is a great disparity in the temperature at the peak and at the foot of the mountains. The snow cap on peaks over 13,000 ft lasts more than seven months



a year, while the annual average temperature in the river valley reaches 74°F. Vast areas of the mountains are covered by a thick primeval forest.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Derong language is classified as belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family, Tibeto-Burman group, branch undecided. They can communicate with the people of the Nu nationality. They have no writing system.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Derong have myths concerning human origins and the flood. A long, long time ago, there was no human being on earth. One day, two gods, Gamei and Gasha, descended on a big rock. They scraped some soil from the rock and kneaded the soil into a man, Pu, and a woman, Mu. Gamei and Gasha blew air into their bodies and the man and the woman began to breathe. The gods taught them how to work and how to have children. Mu was more clever than Pu, because the gods put more soil into her ribs. Human beings grew in number day by day. When they died, they were buried underground, for they should return to the soil from which they were created.

Another myth relates how human beings lived with ghosts in ancient times. They were friends, so close that they brought up each other's children as a kind of exchange of their friendly feelings. The children of ghosts were brought up nicely by the humans, while the human children were all eaten up by the ghosts. Thereafter, they became enemies. The humans chased

ghosts away by means of tree branches. Vengeful, the ghost king attempted to destroy mankind by throwing a large red-hot iron ball into the river, creating a catastrophic flood. All the humans drowned except for a brother and a sister who made a narrow escape to a high mountain. Two snakes that climbed on the same mountain were also spared. That is why snakes are so numerous nowadays. Later, the brother and sister married. Nine sons and nine daughters were born. They married each other and lived on the shores of nine different rivers. They are the ancestors of the Derong, the Nu, the Tibetans, and other nationalities.

## **5 RELIGION**

The Derong believe in a spiritual world. They ascribe spirits to animals, plants, and many other objects. They call ghosts *bulan*, which means “endowed with a supernatural force.” The shaman is not a professional, but usually holds a concurrent post as family group head. The Derong offer sacrifice to the Mountain God at regular intervals each year. This is a group affair, each household offering its own cake, meat, and dough figurines of humans and animals on the slope of the mountain by the village. The villagers are arranged in such an order that the men stand in front while the women are in the rear. Everybody prays to the god for safe and successful hunting. Then they sing and dance around a bonfire. The Harvest God is also revered. Each family offers some of the crops, a chicken, and several cakes to the field after harvest. Illness is always ascribed to the Mountain Ghost. When someone falls ill, the family hangs two bottles of wine and two chickens on a tree as propitiatory offerings. If this does not work, one offers a pig or an ox. The patient should be moved outdoors while the shaman recites the scripture for the diseased. Then, the animal is butchered.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The only holiday of the Derong is the Kaqueqi Festival, their New Year. The date is not fixed, but usually falls around November or December on the lunar calendar. Each family group used to choose a lucky day by divination for the New Year. The duration also varies, usually depending upon the amount of food prepared beforehand. For the occasion, they butcher pigs and chickens, invite each other to celebrate, and give a banquet for the guests. The invitation is unique. It takes the form of a piece of wood. The number of notches carved on the wood represents the number of days before the feast. The banqueters usually bring some foods to the host. A rite of “Offering to Heaven” is held on this day. Led by the head of the family group, the villagers tie an ox to a wooden pole. A butcher kills it with a single stab. Then, the crowd of villagers wields their swords and dance, praying to Heaven to bestow good fortune.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Ground burial is practiced. The coffin is carved out of a tree trunk. After the burial, wine and meat are offered to the dead; no tumulus (an artificial hill or mound) marks the grave location. The bereaved family receives grain, chicken, and wine from relatives as condolences for the deceased. Those who died a violent death or from a foul disease undergo fire or water burial.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Derong like to share their own food with members of their community. Whoever bags an animal in a hunt or butchers a pig or an ox will naturally give a banquet to his relatives and friends. The host usually presents a gift to the guests upon their leaving. Moreover, it is a custom to entertain a stranger passing by. Quite a few households have an extra firepool ready at any time to accommodate a guest. The firepool keeps the room warm and serves for cooking. Passersby are allowed to stop on the way for a rest at their house.

In the busy season, the Derong usually move to a place by the field. On these occasions, the house door is only fastened with a small wooden rod. A tender twig tied on it tells the guest that the host is not at home and feels sorry about it. When heavy snow seals the mountains, food and tools are hung on the trees; they are never taken by other people.

A small bamboo-strip basket is usually used as a token in relations between young men and women. Young Derong men make these small baskets about 7 inches in diameter. If a young man likes a girl, he will hang a basket on her house door around midnight. The girl can usually surmise who the maker is from the style of the basket. If she likes him too, she will carry it on her arm, to show the basket-maker that she is willing to have a friendly relationship with him and to show the community and especially other young men that she has a young man of her heart.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

There are two kinds of storied buildings. One is made of bamboo, usually built on a slope. Doors open to the front and the rear. One comes in and goes out by wooden ladders. The main entrance opens onto two rows of small rooms, each of which can accommodate a couple and their children. In some cases families break away from the collective houses and build their own houses and granaries. These storied houses of individual families are made of logs, usually small and low, the ground floor being dug well below the surface of the earth. The floor of the upstairs room is only 2–3 ft from the surface of the earth. The door is so low that one can enter only by bending. Most of these houses are windowless. There are usually two or more firepools in a house. One firepool symbolizes the family. A married son usually lives with his parents as well as his brothers and sisters, but he and his own family must use the second firepool. If another son gets married, he should build a new house attached to the old one.

Because of the craggy, mountainous terrain and the inclement weather, transportation is extremely inconvenient. From November to May, the mountains are sealed off and transportation is completely interrupted. After the bitter seasons, the only means of communicating with the outside world are sliding ropes and suspension bridges made of rattan or steel rope. The sliding ropes are made of steel wires, usually set up over a narrow river, between two mountains facing each other. Besides the sliding rope itself, a pulley with a few cords (sometimes a bamboo basket) is the only means available to cross the river. To see the Derong use the sliding rope and rattan suspension bridge across the turbulent waves of the Nu River is nothing less than breathtaking.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Derong families are patrilineal and small. The first married son lives with his parents, although he must use the second firepool. The other sons build their own houses after marriage. These houses are adjacent to the old parental home. This is one of the remnants of the patriarchal clan commune. All Derong women participate in field work, but their position is lower than the men's. They are not allowed to bear children inside the family house: otherwise, the farming and hunting of the family, so they believe, will be seriously affected. Thus, a makeshift shed is set up for childbearing.

The Derong still preserve vestiges of the "pairing marriage." For instance, several sisters may marry one husband without disturbing the family hierarchy. Intra-clan endogamy (marriage within the clan) is strictly prohibited. The systematic practice of exogamy (marriage outside the clan) has led to the formation of a fixed circle of inter-clan marriage. For example, a girl of the Rendang clan is married off to a young man of the Bukawang clan, whose daughter is married off to the Lopian clan. A girl of the Lopian clan is married off to the Bingdang clan, whose girl is married to the Muqiantu clan. The girl of the Muqiantu clan is married off to the Rendang clan. These seven clans form a circle related by marriage, allowing for the continuation of the exogamic rule.

In general, the Derong are monogamous, although polygamy does exist as a result of the sororate and levirate customs (marriage to the brother or sister of a deceased spouse).

## **11 CLOTHING**

The only traditional clothing preserved by the Derong and worn by both men and women is a black-and-white or multicolored striped linen wrapping the body and tied over the right shoulder. Otherwise, their garments and trousers are the same as those of the Chinese—polo and ordinary shirts, long trousers, women's skirts, and so on. The aged and middle-aged women usually have tattoos over their faces; formerly, girls were tattooed when they were 12 or 13 years of age. Although the figures and designs were different in different clans, the girls' forebrows usually remained untattooed. Tattooing is now rare among the youngsters.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple foods of the Derong include millet, corn, and buckwheat. Rice is rare. For six months a year, their food is supplemented by gathering, fishing, and hunting. They gather mainly the stem tuber of some wild plants that contain starch, such as wild yams and wild lily. They like homemade wine, tea, and tobacco; the latter is smoked in a long-stemmed pipe. They prefer roast meat to other cooking. Food and wine are divided equally by the hostess. A guest might have his share. A new firepool is added for a newly married son. Each firepool takes turns cooking for the extended family.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Nobody in the Derong communities received a formal education in the past. They knew only how to keep records by notching wood or tying knots. In recent decades, more than 20 primary schools have been set up. Half of the teachers are Derong. College students and intellectuals have emerged.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

On occasions of productive labor, harvest, hunting, house building, marriage proposal, or festive activities, the Derong all sing and dance to express their thoughts and feelings. There are traditional melodies, while their lyrics are improvised for the occasion. They have only one percussion instrument, the *mangluo*, composed of three gongs fixed on a frame. There is a traditional group dance, *niuguoazhuang*, accompanied by songs.

## **15 WORK**

Derong agriculture is based on the slash-and-burn method, yielding very poor results. Because of grass burning and rotation farming, only half of the arable land is available for production in a given year. Rice has been introduced and some terraced fields have been built up. Unfortunately, the cold weather severely affects rice production. Hunting, gathering, and fishing are the main sources of food. Recently, livestock husbandry has been developed. Pigs, sheep, and oxen raised either by family groups or by individual families have proved beneficial to their quality of life. Hunting, fishing, and the manufacture of farm tools and of daily necessities made of wood and bamboo are specific male activities; gathering is left to the women. The Derong River, from which the nationality gets its name, has been its traditional fishing ground. Because of the swift current, small fishnets must be used, resulting in limited production. Thus, the fishing potential of the Derong is not expected to expand significantly.

## **16 SPORTS**

Arrow shooting with bows or crossbows is one of the skills in which the Derong excel; it is the main means of hunting and is very popular as a competitive spectator sport during festivals. Unique skills of the Derong are vigorous and nimble movement on the sliding rope and balanced, swift steps on the rocking and undulating suspension bridge made of rattan—skills that few athletes could perform with such consummate art.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Only fearless emissaries of culture—in this case a film projection team—have accepted the challenge of striding across turbulent rivers and steep mountains 12,000 ft above sea level to bring the Derong the benefits of the seventh art in the guise of several long feature films.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Although the Derong are not known for handicrafts, the small and delicate bamboo-strip baskets usually used as love tokens and the small fishnet devised by the fishermen are exquisite objects of art.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

It is difficult to see how the Derong can overcome their poverty and illiteracy to improve their lifestyle as long as their isolation persists. It seems that the only way would be to leave their valley and accept resettlement. As of now, there is no movement in this direction.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. While minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# DONG

**PRONUNCIATION:** DAWNG

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Liao; Geling

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dong; Chinese

**RELIGION:** Polytheism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Dong are a nationality whose origin can be traced through a branch of the Xiou tribe during the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220) dynasties more than 2,000 years ago. They were also called Liao, Geling, and other names in ancient Chinese works. It was said that some of the Dong ancestors went upstream through the Xun River and the Dulu River and arrived in the area now inhabited by the Dong. The Dong have lived in areas surrounded by the Miao, Zhuang, and Yao; these were ruled by the central government of successive Chinese dynasties. The Dong had their own social and administrative organization. The families of a given Dong village all bore the same surname. Public order was maintained by customary laws, which were decided through consultation among the heads of the villages. As a member of the village organization, every adult male participated in the general membership meeting to discuss matters concerned. This organization has been markedly weakened since the 1950s, but some of the customary laws are still effective to a certain extent.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Dong are mainly concentrated in a mountainous area at the junction of three provinces, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Hunan, with warm climate, abundant rainfall, and criss-crossed by rivers running in all directions. The villages, located at the foot of hills and bordered by streams, are adorned by a drum-tower of exquisite beauty at the center with an ancient banyan tree on the side. Dong population was 3 million in 2000.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Dong language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Zhuang-Dong group, Dong-Shui branch. There are southern and northern dialects, each having three regional idioms. Most of the Dong know the Chinese language, both spoken and written. An alphabetic system of writing based on Latin was created in 1958, and proved very helpful to those who did not know the Chinese language.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The rich mythology of Dong has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next without written records. An epic described the achievements of the Goddess Sasui and her offspring, including the creation, the flood, and the marriage of the brother and sister. This myth of origins is common (with many variants) to many national minorities of southwest China.

Another story described four tortoises incubating four eggs. Three eggs went bad. Only one egg hatched a boy. They

tried again. This time, also only one egg hatched, giving birth to a girl. The offspring married and gave birth to 12 sons and daughters. Among them were a brother, Jiangliang, and his sister, Jiangmei, who were naughty. The boy cut a tree with a saw, leading to a fire that hurt the Thunder Goddess. She got angry, so it rained continuously for nine months. Fortunately, Jiangliang and Jiangmei hid in a huge melon when the flood came. The Thunder Goddess raised 12 suns to dry up the flood, but they scorched the earth and the trees. Helped by bees, Jiangliang and Jiangmei shot down 10 suns out of 12. They left one sun for the daytime and the other for the night. An eagle tried to persuade them to marry. They rolled two millstones from the mountain top, which laid one on top of the other, a Heaven-given sign that they should marry. They married and their progeny formed various peoples, the Han, Miao, Yao, Dong, etc.

### 5 RELIGION

The Dong are polytheistic. They regard the almighty Goddess Sasui, the most lofty of all gods, as their protector. Each village has a temple in which there is a round altar made of stone, 4 ft in height, more than 10 ft in diameter, surrounded by banana trees and brambles. On February 7 or 8 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between February 28 and March 27) the Dong will bring chicken, duck, fish, and a gruel of sweetened fried flour, as offerings to the goddess. They also revere huge stones, large trees, wells, and bridges. Divination by means of chicken, grass, eggs, snails, rice, or divinatory symbols is prevalent among the Dong.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Spring Festival (lunar New Year; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20) is the most important holiday of the year. In some districts, however, they choose one day in October or November (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between October 24 and January 18) as the Dong's New Year. Before the feast, every family member will take a bowl of rice gruel symbolizing a watery field to be ploughed in the future.

On the first of January (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20), right after the first cockcrow appears, girls will scramble to draw water from the well. The luckiest sign is to draw a bucket of water with white bubbles. Festival activities include buffalo fighting, mountain climbing, and bronze drum percussions. April 8 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between May 1 and May 30) is the Festival of the Birth of the Buffalo God. Every household will clean the buffalo pen, feed it with black glutinous rice, give the animal a day off, and kill a chicken or duck as a sacrificial offering. In addition, this is also the day when a heroine boldly delivered a meal of black glutinous rice to her brother (imprisoned for having led an insurrectionary army to occupy Liuzhou City) and rescued him from jail. Commemorating that day, married women gather to sing and dance and to make black glutinous rice cakes that are carried to their parents' homes and offered as gifts to their relatives.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Three days (or one week) after childbirth, relatives bring glutinous rice, eggs, and chickens, as well as a hat, for congratulations. Gifts also include 3–5 ft of yellow cloth for the baby's clothing. According to Dong custom, one is not allowed to



make baby clothes before childbirth. The infant should be draped with used cloths right after its birth. The new clothing should be made of the yellow cloth given by the relatives. The maternal grandmother chooses a name for the baby while sewing the baby's clothes. Girls gather to sing blessing songs until late in the evening. When the baby is one month old, the mother paints the baby's brow with a little tang oil and soot from the bottom of a pan. Accompanied by her mother-in-law, the new mother will bring gifts to her own mother's house, where she will be received warmly. Next day, her mother will send a large glutinous rice cake to her house, indicating that the mother is allowed to call on relatives to present the baby.

The Dong bury the dead underground after shaving the hair and washing the body. It is taboo to have any copper or iron touch the body.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Dong are hospitable. Bowls of gruel of sweetened fried flour will be repeatedly offered to the guest. Each bowl is offered with different refreshments. This ritual usually takes one hour or more. The wine before meal is sweet, but bitter wine is offered during the meal. All dishes taste sour: pork, fish, chicken, duck, cucumber, and hot pepper; it is a "sour feast." There is a Dong custom in Guizhou to receive a guest from each family. A man, representing his family, will bring his family's dishes to the dinner party. Thus, a great variety of dishes will be offered to the guests. A grand occasion of Dong celebration is when all the members of a village call on a neighboring village, usually after autumn harvest. There is a deafening sound of gongs and





*A Dong child wearing traditional clothing in Congjiang, China.*  
(© Keren Su/Corbis)

drums, reinforced by songs and reed-pipe wind music. Dating is common and dates last late into the night.

### **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most Dong houses have two or three stories, sometimes more, made of wood. The roof is covered with tiles or bark of China fir. Houses occupied by branches of the same family are sometimes connected by verandas and open into each other. Buildings at the foot of a hill or beside a river are built on stilts, sometimes 20–30 ft high. The family lives upstairs. Firewood and livestock are placed on the ground. A shrine for idols or ancestral tablets is set up in the central room. The “windswept rooms” on both sides are used as bedrooms and firepools. A Dong village is usually made up of row upon row of wooden houses. The pathways are paved with flagstones or crushed stones. The Dong live on self-sufficient agriculture. City dwellers have a standard of living similar to that of other residents.

### **<sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE**

Dong families are patrilineal. The position of women is much lower than that of men. They are not allowed to touch the bronze drum or to go upstairs if the men stay downstairs. They have a limited right of succession from their parents (“girl’s field”) only after their marriage—while the man inherits the

property. Women participate in heavy labor in the fields and bear the responsibility of all household chores.

The Dong are monogamous. They have freedom to choose their spouse. Arranged marriages are very rare. Youngsters of the same family branch or of different generations are not allowed to marry. The children of brothers are allowed to marry the children of sisters and vice versa, but the children of two sisters are not allowed to marry. The bride, holding an umbrella, accompanied by six women, walks directly to the bridegroom’s house. On certain occasions, girls of the whole branch are the bridesmaids. They are received by boys of the bridegroom’s branch, who see the bride to her family’s door right after the wedding ceremony. She will return to live with her husband for a few days only during festivals or after the busy season.

If she gets pregnant, she will then move to her husband’s house. If she does not get pregnant, she is expected to move three to five years after her wedding.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

The rural people like to use self-made yarn to dye and knit their traditional clothes, which are in dark navy, purple, white and blue colors. Men wear cotton shirts and pants and always wrap their heads. Women’s wear varies in the different districts; most of them wear nice trimmed short tops and multi-pleated skirts. They use dark navy cotton fabric to wrap their legs from knee to ankle and wear sandals. They usually comb their hair into a bun with colorful flowers. This is the typical style of most Dong women. Some women like to use a floral cotton patch to cover their shoulders and sew large pure silver buttons on their costumes for decoration. Others wear long shirts going down to the knee and loose pants. Their sleeve openings and the cuffs of pants are all piped and lace-trimmed. They even make dragon and phoenix embroidery on their clothes. However, Dong people living in urban areas usually wear the same basic clothes as the Chinese.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

The staple food is rice. The Dong like hot and sour dishes. One of their traditional meals is salted fish or meat. Raw fish or meat is salted for three days, seasoned with spicy pepper powder, ginger, Chinese prickly ash, and glutinous rice, and then put in hermetically sealed pots or wooden barrels. The preparation may be served after three months, but only reaches full flavor after many years. The salted fish or meat can be steamed, but the Dong prefer to eat it raw. A gruel of sweetened, fried flour is a favorite dish. Rice is stir-fried with tea leaves, then cooked in water; when it is done, the tea leaves are discarded. To serve, one puts fried glutinous rice, peanuts, walnuts, soybeans, sausages, or pork liver selectively in a bowl, then adds the hot gruel, sweetened or salted.

### **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Primary schools have been established in every village, and middle schools in every district. The number of college students is increasing. More and more teachers, engineers, scholars, and medical doctors are being trained. However, illiteracy is still present in remote mountainous areas, especially among women. Parents support the education of their children. However, boys form the greater majority of middle school and, especially, university students.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

One of the striking cultural accomplishments of the Dong in recent years is the creation of the Great Song of Dong, a women's chorus unaccompanied by musical instruments, which, under the leadership of a woman, has developed a unique style, free in tempo and full of power and grandeur.

The Pipa Song is also typical of the Dong musical tradition. The *pipa* is a plucked string instrument with a fretted fingerboard. The song borrows the name of the accompanying instrument.

Dong plays were developed in the last century from a genre of popular entertainment consisting of talking and thinking. The gait and movement are rather simple, but the music for voices is manifold. The actors wear Dong dress, but use no facial makeup. Songs are accompanied by a two-stringed bowed instrument, the *huqin*.

The Dong practice group dancing in a circle, boys and girls holding hands and singing while dancing. A musician-dancer blows the reed-pipe wind instrument (*lüshen*) while going through various dance movements.

The Dong area is the "land of poems and sea of songs." The rhyme scheme of their poems is rather loose. The Dong Song is a chanted rhymed poem, marked by an abundance of striking metaphors. The content includes themes of creation, flood, the origin of human beings, the migration of the Dong, customary law, as well as the exploits and the loves of heroes. Chinese stories also appear in Dong songs and plays.

## 15 WORK

In addition to farming, men are adept at carpentry and in building Dong-style wooden structures. Today there is a trend among young people to move to coastal areas and to engage in trade.

## 16 SPORTS

Wrestling is a favorite sport among the youth, while whipping a top is a popular game with children. Other sports widely practiced are basketball, table tennis, volleyball, and chess.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Some movies have been dubbed into the Dong language. Many Dong families now have black-and-white television. Recreation for youngsters is almost always related to dating. Singing is one of the favorite pastimes in Dong areas; the aged teach songs, the youth sing songs, and the children learn songs. Singers take much pleasure in performing. The Lion Dance and the Dragon Dance are performed on the Spring Festival.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Dong crafts include embroidery, cross-stitching, rattan artifacts, bamboo articles, silver ornaments, brocade, and Dong garments. The Dong's wooden buildings are renowned for their exquisite architecture. The Drum Tower, all made of wood, is held by tenon and mortise, without a single iron nail; numbering 3–15 stories, it may reach 40–50 ft in height. It is the symbol of the family branch and a place of rally. The magnificent "Wind and Rain Bridge" is a wooden bridge built on stone piers, with three to five pavilions raised on top of the piers.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Poverty and slow development are still the most important social problems. Changes are slow and the way to modernization and wealth is long and difficult.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. While minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# DRUZE

**PRONUNCIATION:** DROOZ

**LOCATION:** Lebanon; Syria; Israel; Jordan

**POPULATION:** 1 to 1.5 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Secret Druze faith (Muhwahhidun)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Druze are both a unique religious and a unique ethnic group whose history dates back to the 11th century AD. Originating in Cairo, Egypt, in 1009–1010, they then spread to the mountains of southern Lebanon and beyond. The Druze faith grew out of the Isma'ili sect of Shia Islam, but from its beginnings it has been an entirely new religion. Disillusioned with the Isma'ilis in 1009–1010, the Druze turned to caliph al-Hakim, of the Fatamid dynasty based in Cairo, Egypt, as their deliverer. In 1017 he declared himself to be the incarnation of God, and the prophet Hamza ibn 'Ali took over al-Hakim's mortal duties as *imam* (spiritual and political leader). Hamza is considered the leader of the Druze movement. One of his disciples was named Muhammad al-Darazi, who quickly came into conflict with Hamza and was rebuked publicly by him. On the last day of 1019, al-Darazi was assassinated and then proclaimed a heretic. It is commonly believed that the Druze get their name from this heretic; it was probably given to them by their detractors.

Caliph al-Hakim disappeared in 1021 (he was most likely murdered, though no one knows for sure), and Hamza went into hiding. The new caliph, al-Zahir, denounced Druzism and persecuted its followers mercilessly. The Druze in Cairo and north to Aleppo were wiped out. The survivors in southern Lebanon and Syria continued to follow their faith, becoming secretive and highly protective of their survival. Hamza (still in hiding) appointed a new imam named Baha' al-Din after the persecution eased off. Baha' al-Din collected and organized 111 letters and directives written by al-Hakim, Hamza, and Baha' al-Din himself into six books called *al-Hikmat al-Sharifa* (The Noble Knowledge), the Druze bible. In 1043, the call for converts was closed, and since then it is said that no new converts have been accepted, although a few infusions of new blood have occurred over the centuries. Technically, though, one must be born a Druze; one cannot become one by choice.

The Syrian Druze community grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s as many fled war-torn Lebanon. The Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt was murdered in 1977 in the Lebanese civil war, triggering an increase in Druze aggressions there. Compared to the Arab Muslims and Christians in Israel, the Arab Druze community is relatively well off because of their unqualified support for Israel. This is in marked contrast to the political position of the Druze in Lebanon, which supports traditional Arab nationalist principles favoring Palestinian independence. It is the only Arab community in Israel, besides a small group of Bedu, allowed to serve in the Israeli armed forces.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The total Druze population throughout the world is difficult to estimate because of the secrecy of the sect and because, for example, Syria's government demographic information is unreli-

able. Some estimates put their numbers as high as 2 million, but it is generally thought there are between 1 and 1.5 million. The vast majority of them live in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. Good estimates as to their dispersion are: Lebanon, 400,000–600,000; Syria, 600,000–800,000; Israel; 85,000 (including 15,000 Syrian Druze living in the Golan Heights); Jordan, 15,000; and at most 80,000 elsewhere in the world. The oldest and largest concentration of Druze is found in Lebanon. The largest communities outside the Middle East are in North and South America, with smaller groups in Australia, West Africa, and Western Europe. All are immigrants from Middle Eastern communities, especially from Lebanon. The Druze population in the United States is estimated at 20,000–27,000. Most US Druze settled in small towns and kept a low profile, joining Protestant churches (usually Presbyterian or Methodist) and often Americanizing their names. However, they continued to send money back to their families in the Middle East and even arranged marriages with persons from their home villages. They have now formed Druze associations in the US to develop community relations in their new homes.

The racial background of the Druze is obscure. They are definitely Arab, with Persian, Kurdish, Turkish, Byzantine, and probably European (from the time of the Crusades) physical traits mixed in. This has led to a great variety in physical characteristics among the Druze, despite centuries of marrying within their own group. Most Druze are still hardy, independent farmers living in mountain villages of less than 10,000. Some, however, have moved to larger urban centers and taken on other sorts of jobs. All Druze villages are located on the tops or sides of hills and mountains for a number of reasons, the first and foremost being defense. This position also puts them closer to their holy shrines, which are also always built on the tops or sides of hills and mountains. For farming purposes, it makes it easy to fertilize their fields: they simply collect dung from their livestock, pile it on the hill outside the village, and let the rains carry it down to the fields below. In Lebanon, most Druze have olive groves and fruit orchards. In southern Syria, they are more likely to be wheat farmers.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Druze speak Arabic, with slight distinctive differences. For example, they have kept the *qaf*, the strong guttural *k* sound of classical Arabic that has been dropped or changed to a *j* or hard *g* sound in other Arabic dialects, and they have retained the *dad*, a soft, tongued *d* sound that is close to classical Arabic, which has lost its unique sound in other dialects.

Traditional, religiously significant names used to be common for both boys and girls: *Mohammed*, *Husayn*, and 'Ali for boys, and 'A'isha and *Fatima* for girls. But now most Druze children are given neutral names that are common to Christians and Muslims, such as *Samir*, *Salim*, *Fu'AD*, or *Fawzi* for boys.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

See the following section entitled **Religion** in this article.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

The Druze believe that Sunni Muslims follow the First Course of literal interpretation of scriptures, Shia Muslims follow the Second Course of allegorical interpretation, and they themselves follow the Third Course (*al-maslak ath-thalith*), or

*Tawhid*, of real knowledge of the unity of God and the unity of Being in God. They call themselves *Muhwahhidun* (rather than Druze), which means, essentially, Unitarian—they believe in absolute monotheism. Their beliefs have been held in secret since the closing of the call for converts in AD 1043. Since then, only a few people from each community in each generation are initiated into the details of the faith. The rest are called the *juhhal*, which means “noninitiated” but also has an implied meaning of “ignorant” or “uninformed.” The *juhhal* are given a simple outline of the faith to follow.

The initiated are called *`uqqal* (*`aqil*—masculine singular, and *`aqila*—feminine singular), or “enlightened,” and are put through rigorous tests to determine if they are able to handle the responsibility of enlightenment. Women have been included in the *`uqqal* since the beginning of the Druze movement. Those who pass the tests then go through a secret initiation ceremony, after which they wear a heavy white turban and never wear bright colors, swear or use obscene language, drink alcohol, or smoke. The *`uqqal* are then divided into two further classes: those who know some of the elementary aspects of the faith, and those who study for years to gain an in-depth knowledge of the mysteries of the religion. This most advanced class of Druze is called the *al-ajawid*, or “the righteous.” At the weekly Thursday-evening worship service, held at a place for seclusion and prayer called a *khalwa* or *majlis*, the *juhhal* attend the first part of the service, where community affairs are discussed, then they leave so the *`uqqal* can engage in prayer, study, and meditation.

Because the Druze faith is held in secret, few of their beliefs are known to the wider world. What is known is that they believe that God is One and All is God; God has had many incarnations in this world, including Jesus, but Jesus is not “God’s Son” as Christians believe. According to the Druze faith, the caliph al-Hakim was the final incarnation of God in this world. The Druze believe that prayer and ritual are unnecessary when true knowledge of God’s unity is gained (prayer is the association of the soul with the oneness of God and is a constant state of being, rather than something one does at certain times of day). The number of souls of believers and nonbelievers is believed to have been fixed at Creation, so every time a Druze dies, another Druze is born, and the soul of the deceased immediately enters the body of the newborn. This belief in the immediate reincarnation of souls leads the Druze to be fierce and fearless warriors, because death simply means they will leave one body and enter another.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Druze believe that they have been freed from ritual on their Third Course, so holy days are not important as religious duties. They do have shrines, called *mazar* or *maqam*, located on the tops or sides of hills and mountains they visit frequently. At the tomb of the holy man or woman to whom the shrine is dedicated, the Druze pray quietly, leave small gifts of food and money, and take away small pieces of colored cloth as tokens of divine blessing to be kept in their homes or in the family car. Some families come for extended stays to sacrifice animals in the fulfillment of a vow. Others just have picnics or spend a quiet weekend there. Annual religious festivals attract thousands of Druze to some shrines, such as al-Nabi Shu’ayb. There is also an annual pilgrimage to the alleged burial place of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, near Horns of Hittim in Galilee.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The circumcision of males is not practiced as a ritual rite of passage among the Druze, as it is among Muslims and Jews. Weddings are small gatherings, though they can be extravagant, depending on the wealth of the family. Funerals are huge community events; people from all around attend. Every Druze village has a *mawqaf*, or “stopping place”—a small cement or stone amphitheater with rows of seats where hundreds, even thousands, can gather to honor and remember the deceased and give condolences to the family. When a respected community or religious leader dies, everyone who knew of the person, whether or not they had ever met, is expected to attend the funeral, either in person or by representative. Funeral arrangements are made immediately after death, and the ceremony is held the next day at the latest. Announcements are made, formerly by a town crier but now usually by loudspeaker, in the deceased’s village and other villages where he or she was known. The body is washed, dressed in the finest clothes available, and buried above ground-level just outside the village. Women lament in the traditional Lebanese Muslim way, although not as excessively, and acquaintances tell of the deceased’s virtues.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

With the habit of secrecy and defensive privacy that the Druze have developed over their persecuted history, the average Druze has little contact with non-Druze, even in the same small village. Among themselves (and others they feel they can trust), however, the Druze are extremely hospitable and generous. There is a strict code of honor that all Druze are committed to maintaining. For example, Druze men, including soldiers, will never touch a woman in any harmful way, even if she is one of the “enemy” during combat. The Druze look after their own community’s orphans, widows, and poor people. There is no such thing as a Druze beggar. If an extended family cannot support one of their members for some reason, the rest of the community will help out. Almost all Druze villages have one or more *mudafat* (singular, *mudafa*), guest houses where visitors can stay. There is an extensive system of *awqaf* (singular, *waqf*), endowed properties for religious or charitable use given in wills for the purpose of establishing and maintaining *khalwa* (prayer-houses) or *mazar* (shrines).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

It has been said by many throughout the ages that the Druze are a healthy and handsome lot. Most Druze still live in small villages. Some villages have electricity and telephone service; others do not. Almost all villages now have regular bus and taxi service to major nearby cities.

The quality of Druze life depends greatly on the country in which they live. Those in Israel, for example, generally have a higher quality of life than do those in small villages in Syria or Lebanon. The Diaspora, which accounts for a large number of Druze, live very comfortably in the West.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is central to Druze life, and the Druze make frequent formalized visits to their family members. Even those who have emigrated to other continents maintain their family ties as closely as possible. The most important factor in



Druze sheikhs cross the Quneitra checkpoint between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israel seized the strategic plateau in 1967 and annexed it in 1981. Some 18,000 Syrians, most from the Druze community, still live there. (Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty Images)

Druze family life is a woman's honor (*ird*), and her dishonor is the family's worst humiliation. For this reason, even though women have equal rights politically and religiously, they are socially very restricted (to minimize the possibility of dishonor). Women are expected to marry at a fairly early age (17 to 20) and become stay-at-home homemakers. The minimum age for marriage is 17 for women and 18 for men, but most men do not marry until age 21 to 23. Marriage partners usually come from the same village and frequently from the same extended family (including first cousins). These close family marriages are preferred in order to preserve property and maintain the knowledge of family background and heritage. Marriages are almost always arranged by the family, and the groom pays the bride's family a dowry. Polygamy, and the Islamic custom of *mut'a*, or temporary marriage, are forbidden, as is marriage to a non-Druze. *Shaykhs* and *masha'ik al-Din* (community and religious leaders) administer the law in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

The Druze prefer sons to daughters, particularly for the first-born child, and they will continue to have children until a son is born. The average family has 5 or 6 children, but Druze families can be as large as 10 to 12 children. The failure of a woman to bear children (particularly sons) is a frequent cause for divorce.

### 11 CLOTHING

Druze living in small villages still wear traditional clothing. Women wear a blue or black peasant dress with a gauzy white

head covering called a *mandil*, and red slipper-like shoes that are their only spot of bright color. Most *juhhal* (uninitiated) no longer wear *shirwal*, the baggy pants that are tight at the ankle, worn by the *'uqqal* (initiated). *Juhhal* men wear the common Arab headscarf, the *keffiyeh*, and the *'uqqal* wear heavy white turbans. Most Druze men sport large moustaches with waxed tips. Westernized Druze dress in modern clothing.

### 12 FOOD

Most Druze families grow their own fruit and vegetables and bake their own bread. They eat a mostly vegetarian diet with meat only on special occasions. Typical village meals include olives; mountain bread (paper-thin, round, unleavened bread); eggplant; cauliflower; chickpeas flavored with onions, garlic, and *tahini* (sesame paste); rice; bulghur (cracked wheat); potatoes; salad (made of tomatoes, cucumber, parsley, and other herbs, dressed with olive oil and lemon juice); yogurt; and seasonal fruit. Lamb (or kid—young goat's meat) is the favorite meat, with chicken second, and then beef. Eating pork is not forbidden, but it is not encouraged, either. Some Druze do occasionally eat pork.

### 13 EDUCATION

Among the younger generation of Druze (under age 25), literacy is almost universal. No literacy statistics are available for the general population, but the literacy rate is believed to be fairly high. Most girls traditionally stopped their formal schooling

after six years of basic elementary education, but more are now beginning to attend secondary school, and some even go on to university or professional training (as nurses or teachers, for example). Druze women are found on the faculties of universities in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, but it is still very rare for a rural Druze girl to be allowed to leave home to study abroad. The urbanized Druze communities are far less conservative and Druze girls from these areas regularly attend university.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Druze poetry does not have any love songs, focusing instead on themes such as the love of God and of one's native countryside. Druze poets and writers include Samih al-Qasim, a poet from the town of al-Rama in Galilee; and Shaqib Arslan, a Druze prince known as "the prince of eloquence" (*amir al-bayan*), who was chosen in 1938 to be president of the Arab Academy in Damascus. Druze musicians have become known in both Western classical music (e.g., pianist Diana Taqi al-Din) and traditional Middle Eastern music (e.g., lute (*oud*) player, singer, and composer Farid al-Atrash [1916–1976]).

#### 15 WORK

Although they were traditionally farmers, Druze can now be found in all areas of business, including banking, trade, retailing, and transportation services. The former president and principal shareholder of Middle East Airlines, Najib 'Alam al-Dim, was a Druze, and a large percentage of the airline's personnel, including pilots, have been Druze throughout most of the company's existence.

Druze who leave rural communities are often successful businessmen and there are large numbers of Druze working in the oil rich Gulf countries, where they have earned a reputation as hard working and reliable. Druze women rarely work outside the home in rural communities, but in the West and even in the Gulf, Druze women do work in modern jobs.

#### 16 SPORTS

The Druze enjoy most popular sports including hunting, fishing, soccer, basketball, tennis, volleyball, water skiing, and water polo.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditionally situated rural Druze in the Middle East lead traditional lives. Men dominate the social space and can be seen most days drinking tea in small tea shops. In cities, Druze engage in the sorts of activities typical to the country in which they live. They meet in restaurants, attend and play sporting events, and shop at malls.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Druze are known for their weaving, carpet-making, and basketry.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Because they are such a small, close-knit, protective society, the Druze have very few social problems within their own community. Their protective secrecy, however, has grown out of almost constant persecution from outsiders since their inception. Relegated to small mountain villages, the Druze have learned to take care of their own and to be suspicious of stran-

ers. This same protectiveness has led them to be misinterpreted and misunderstood for centuries, accused of everything from communism to fanatical aggression.

Modernity and the Diaspora have somewhat altered the lives of the Druze. As they have moved around the world, changes have slowly emerged. The tradition of dowry, or bride price, has caused some Druze to actually marry outside the community due to lack of financial resources. In Israel and in the Western Diaspora, women regularly take jobs outside of the community, and this has led to changes in Druze traditions.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Druze women have high status in terms of religion. There are by some accounts, more female uqqal than male, because of teachings that women are more spiritual. Socially, however, women face fairly strict restrictions. It was only in the 1970s that Israeli Druze were allowed to obtain drivers licenses. In most rural Druze communities, women are forbidden to work outside of their home village, go to the cinema, or be photographed—a restriction that has to be overlooked for identity documents in most developed countries. It is forbidden to perform autopsies on Druze women and women are forbidden to give birth in hospitals without female physicians.

Though marriages are generally arranged, the woman has the right to refuse a spouse. Divorce is difficult to obtain, but women as well as men can initiate the proceedings. A man can obtain a divorce on grounds of: failure to bear children, or sons; disobedience; immodest behavior (proven adultery is an automatic, guaranteed ground for divorce); and mental or other chronic illness that makes regular sexual intercourse impossible. A woman can also obtain a divorce on those last grounds, as well as on grounds of impotence, nonsupport, and desertion or prolonged absence. A divorce is irrevocable—once divorced, always divorced. Ex-spouses cannot remarry each other or even be under the same roof ever again. In a divorce, women are almost always given financial compensation because it is difficult for a divorced woman to remarry and thereby be supported.

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—revised by J. Henry

# EMIRIANS (UNITED ARAB EMIRATES)

**PRONUNCIATION:** em-EE-ree-uhns

**LOCATION:** United Arab Emirates (UAE)

**POPULATION:** 4,621,399 (2005 estimate/less than 20% are UAE citizens)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam (majority Sunni)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates is a confederation of seven sheikhdoms, or emirates, located on the shore of the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf. Each emirate is named after the main city within its boundaries. The largest is Abu Dhabi, the capital. Dubai is known as the confederation's business center. The other emirates are Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, and Fujairah.

The nomadic and settled Bedu (or bedouin—*see Bedu*) tribes were converted to Islam during the 7th century AD. The following centuries were marked by continual wars and violence between rival dynasties. The emirates also became known as the Pirate Coast, because their peoples resented foreign ships in the Gulf and raided them constantly. After suffering these raids for many years, Britain launched an attack on the emirates, after which the emirates signed a peace treaty with Britain (1820). However, the raids continued to occur off and on until the emirates and Britain signed a “perpetual maritime truce” in 1853. The emirates then became known as the Trucial States. This arrangement lasted for over 100 years, until 1971.

When the truce ended, Bahrain and Qatar became independent states, and six of the other emirates decided to join forces. On 2 December 1971, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, and Fujairah became the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In February 1972 the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah united with them as well. The provisional constitution drawn up at their union was made permanent in 1996. Because Abu Dhabi is the largest and most powerful of the seven emirates, its emir is designated the president of the UAE. The vice president and prime minister is the emir of Dubai, the second-largest emirate.

In 1962 oil was discovered in Abu Dhabi. Until then, the emirates had been poor, with pearling, fishing, and sheep and goat herding being the main forms of livelihood. The discovery and production of oil brought new wealth into the area, turning the Emirians from among the poorest people of the world into some of the wealthiest. Dubai began producing oil in 1969 and Sharjah in 1974. The other emirates have yet to discover oil on their land and depend on Abu Dhabi and Dubai for financial support. Proven oil reserves in Abu Dhabi are estimated to last for another 200 years, based on production rates in 2008. Dubai's oil reserves were projected in the late 1990s to run out in about 30 years, but the UAE has been decreasing its oil production and estimated in 2008 that overall reserves could last more than 90 years. Dubai has become a world trading center and will continue to have international significance and a source of income after its oil runs out.

Sheikh Zayid bin Sultan al-Nuhayyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi, served as president of the UAE from 1971 until his death in 2004. His successor was his son, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan. Al-Nuhayyan took office on 3 November 2004 and organized the first elections in the UAE in December 2006. A group of 6,700 electors participated in the historic election.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The UAE is located on the southern coast of the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf and the northwestern coast of the Gulf of Oman. The total area of the UAE is 83,900 sq km (32,400 sq mi), which is about the size of the U.S. state of Maine. The UAE has 621 km (386 mi) of coastline on the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Abu Dhabi is by far the largest emirate, with an area of 67,340 sq km (26,000 sq mi). Dubai is the second largest, at 3,885 sq km (1,500 sq mi). The areas of the rest of the emirates are as follows:

EMIRATE	SQUARE KILOMETERS	SQUARE MILES
Sharjah	2,590.0	1,000
Ras al-Khaimah	1683.5	650
Fujairah	1165.5	450
Umm al-Qaiwain	777.0	300
Ajman	259.0	100

The land is mostly desert with a mountain range in the north and oases scattered across the sands. The only other variation in the terrain, except for Ras al-Khaimah, is a few salt marshes. The emirate of Ras al-Khaimah is called the “garden spot” of the UAE because, unlike the rest of the emirates, the land there is very fertile. Almost all of the people in Ras al-Khaimah are farmers. The humidity is high on the coast, where all but one of the major cities and towns are located. The summer months, May through October, are extremely hot, with temperatures reaching 50°C (122°F) in the shade. Winters are much cooler, with temperatures dropping to 10°C (50°F). Humidity can rise as high as 100% in the summer and winters are also damp, but there is little rainfall during the year. Hot desert winds kick up occasional sand and dust storms.

Flamingoes are year-round residents of the coast, and many other birds pass through on their migration routes. As many as 25,000 migratory birds can be counted in August. Desert wildlife includes foxes, rabbits, gazelles, lizards, snakes, and eagles.

The human population of the UAE is estimated at 4.6 million. Only about 20% of these residents are Emirate citizens, or muwatiniin (locals). The rest are foreign workers who come mostly from other Arab countries, Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Western European countries, the United States, and Canada. The foreign workers hold no political power or privileges of citizenship. About two-thirds of the population is male because many of the foreign workers are men who leave their families behind in their home countries, or they are young men who have not married yet. The most densely populated city is the capital, Abu Dhabi, with about 1.7 million residents. Dubai, with 1.3 million residents, is the second most densely populated city.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language and native language of UAE citizens is Arabic. English is widely used in the business and public sec-

tors because of the large presence of foreign workers. Other languages spoken by UAE residents are Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Malayalam, and Tagalog.

Arabic, spoken by 100 million people worldwide, has many distinct dialects, so that people living as few as 500 km (310 mi) apart may not be able to understand one another. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken dialects are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet, which makes no distinction between capital and lower-case letters. It is not necessary for the letters to be written in a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation rules are also quite different from those of English.

"Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam 'alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Wa 'alaykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is *'Afwan*; "yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba'a*, *khamsa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *thamanya*, *tisa'a*, and *'ashara*.

Arabs' names consist of their first name, their father's name, and their paternal grandfather's name. Women do not take their husband's name when they marry but rather keep their father's family name as a sign of respect for their family of origin. First names usually indicate an Arab's religious affiliation: Muslims use names with Islamic religious significance, such as Muhammad and Fatima, while Christians often use Western names, as well as Arabic Christian names, such as Elias and Butrus.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Before the discovery of oil, pearling was a major source of income for the people of the Emirates. Pearl divers made up 85% of Abu Dhabi's male population. The pearl diving season lasted for four months, from May to September, after which husbands, fathers, and sons returned to their homes. The patience and hope of Emirian women for the safe return of their loved ones were beautifully depicted in the following folk song:

Neighbor of mine, my adventurous sailor shall return.  
Neighbor of mine, he shall return from the world of dangers.  
With perfumes, precious stones, rosewater and incense he shall return.  
He shall return, and to see him again will be like seeing the moon.

#### 5 RELIGION

Native-born Emirians are all Muslims. Most of the foreign workers are also Muslims, although there are also Hindus and Christians. The majority of Emirians are Sunni Muslims, with a small Shi'ite minority.

Islam is the youngest of the world's Abrahamic religions, having begun in the early 7th century AD when the Prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah (God). Within just a few years of Muhammad's death in AD 632, Islam had spread through the entire Middle East, gaining converts at a dynamic rate.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570), in what is now Saudi Arabia, Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his vigorous denunciation of the pagan idols worshiped there (idols that attracted a profitable pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca, AD 622 (16 July), called the *Hijra*, is counted as the year one in the Muslim calendar. Muhammad fled to the city now known as Medina, another of the holy sites of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Eventually, Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the *Ka'aba*, or Cube, building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship) and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam.

The Islamic religion has five so-called "pillars": 1) Muslims must pray five times a day; 2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; 3) Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; 4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca; and 5) each Muslim must recite the *shahada*: "*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashhadu an Muhammadu rasul Allah*," which means, "I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." Arabs say all their prayers facing in the direction of Mecca. Both men and women are expected, and greatly desire, to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations, is observed by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month.

Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living; it is a total way of life, inseparable from the rest of one's daily concerns. Therefore, religion and politics, faith and culture, are one and the same for Muslims. There is no such thing as the "separation of church and state." In theory, there should be no distinction between private religious values and public cultural norms in an Islamic country; in actuality, history, geography, and daily life have influenced the cultures of Islamic countries, resulting in standards of social behavior and interaction that are not always in agreement with religious codes of conduct.

The difference between the Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, which has played such an important part in Arab history, has to do with the early history of the religion. After Muhammad's death, the entire Muslim community recognized the legitimacy of the next three successors, or caliphs. The fourth caliph was Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. His legitimacy was challenged by Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria, and after the Battle of Siffin, in 657, Ali was forced to withdraw. He moved his capital to Iraq and was murdered shortly thereafter. His followers refused to recognize the legitimacy of Mu'awiyah's caliphate and established the Shi'ite sect. Although there are doctrinal differences, the fundamental difference between the sects, therefore, is an argument about authority, not doctrine: the Shi'ites believe that caliphs must be direct descendants of Muhammad and that Ali was the legitimate fourth successor, while the Sunnis believe that caliphs should be elected by the people and therefore that Mu'awiyah and his successors were legitimate. Because there are more Sunnis than Shi'ites worldwide, the Sunnis refer to themselves as the "orthodox" sect.

The official religion of the UAE is Islam and the laws of the emirates are made in accordance with Islamic principles. For instance, Emirians and Muslim foreign workers are prohibited from consuming alcohol. However, the UAE exempts





non-Muslims from some rules of Islamic law and allows non-Muslims to practice their religion. Several Christian churches have been formed in UAE cities, and good relationships generally exist between the various religious groups. Despite the influence of Islam, many Emirians continue to identify themselves on the basis of their tribal affiliations. These affiliations influence their political, social, and financial decisions.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Secular national holidays include National Day, which is celebrated on December 2, and New Year's Day on January 1. Each emirate may also celebrate its own holiday. For example, August 6 is a holiday in Abu Dhabi marking the accession of Sheikh Zayid. Other official holidays are Muslim ones. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by 11 days each Western year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are *Eid Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of Ramadan; *Eid Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca, when families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *al-Mawlid An-Nabi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Eid Al-Isra' wa Al-Mi'raj*, a feast celebrating Muhammad's nocturnal visit to heaven. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. All government offices, private businesses, and schools are closed also during *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Births, especially the births of boys, are celebrated by Emirians, as they are among Arab Muslims generally. The first word spoken to a baby is "Allah." After birth, the next important event in a boy's life is circumcision, which, performed at the age of seven, formally makes him a member of the religious community. Children and adolescents are prepared for adulthood by being given adult responsibilities, sharply differentiated by gender. In adolescence, the sexes are strictly segregated while outside of their immediate family, and girls are monitored to assure their chastity.

Dating remains unacceptable among Emirians. Marriages are still arranged and often occur within extended families. Young men and women, however, do have the right to reject a proposed mate. Most men marry around age 26 while women marry between the ages of 22 and 24. In the traditional arranged marriage, the groom pays the bride a dowry, or *mahr*, which becomes her property no matter what happens. The *mahr* consists of two stages. The first stage is the *muqaddam*, which is a dowry given preceding the wedding to allow the bride to buy things for herself and her new home. The second stage, the *muta'akhir*, is a form of insurance for the woman in the event of divorce; the groom pledges in a contract that he will pay the bride an agreed-upon amount if he should divorce her.

Marriages traditionally involved spending a great deal of money on festivities and dowries, which led some Emirian men to seek non-Emirians as wives. The government has tried to encourage Emirians to marry each other and has set a limit on the dowry a groom must pay to his future wife. The government also pays for some wedding expenses and provides free housing to Emirian newlyweds.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Arab hospitality reigns in UAE. When talking, Arabs touch each other much more often and stand much closer together than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking or walking. (In earlier days, members of the opposite sex, even married couples, never touched in public.) Arabs talk a great deal, talk loudly, repeat themselves often, and interrupt each other constantly. Conversations are highly emotional and full of gestures.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before the discovery and production of oil, conditions were very primitive in what is now the UAE. Emirians had no electricity, running water, or sewage disposal system; there were no paved roads or telephones; public education and health care did not exist; and housing consisted of the bare minimum needs for shelter.

Since oil production began in 1962, conditions have rapidly improved, so that almost all Emirians now live in thoroughly modern homes in ultramodern cities. The government allots land to Emirian families so they can build their own homes and provides no-interest loans for housing.

Roads are paved and well maintained; multilane divided highways connect the major cities and link the UAE with neighboring countries. Automobiles and trucks crowd the streets, and four-wheel-drive vehicles race across the desert sands. A railway system is being planned to relieve some of the traffic congestion, particularly that caused by cargo trucks.

Five of the emirates have international airports, and there are radio and television broadcasts in Arabic and other languages, and broadcasts from other countries can be picked up on the many satellite dishes on apartment buildings and private homes. Telephone service is state-of-the-art; fax machines are very common.

Traditional *souks*, or street markets, exist right alongside huge new shopping malls. There is almost no crime in the UAE. Medical care is still not up to Western standards, but it is improving. Health care is provided free of charge at hospitals and clinics staffed mostly by foreigners. The average life expectancy of Emirians is 76 years.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Emirians are a tribal people, and family is the center of their life. Marriages are traditionally arranged by parents, with first cousins being the preferred match. Polygamy is legal—a man may have up to four wives, if he guarantees that all will be equally loved and cared for—but it is very rarely practiced. Divorce is a fairly simple procedure, but it does not occur very often. In a divorce, the father is given custody of all children over the age of five, and the mother takes the younger ones with her back to her parents' house, where she will live until she remarries.

Although the UAE is a conservative country by Western standards, it is still one of the most liberal in the Gulf. Women are much less restricted in the UAE than in other Arab countries. Over the past few years, women have made remarkable progress in obtaining education and joining the work force. As of 2008, about 98% of the female population of school age was attending primary or intermediate school. Women form 70% of the student body at the Higher Colleges of Technology and over 60% at the UAE University. The number of employed women almost quadrupled from 1980 to 1990, increasing from 5.3% to 16.3% of the total work force. Emirian women have also joined the armed forces and the police.

### 11 CLOTHING

Emirians wear traditional Arab clothing. For men, this consists of an ankle-length robe called a *dishdasha*, or *kandura*. The *dishdasha* is often made of white or off-white cotton cloth and sometimes in a dark color. A large piece of cloth, called a *ghutra*, is worn on the head, held in place with a piece of woven rope called an *'aqal*, which is a thick black circular band made of twisted wool. On formal occasions, a *bisht*, a full-length cloak embroidered with a golden thread edge, is worn on top of the *dishdasha*. Women's fashions vary and, with the new flow of wealth, some women import the latest fashions from the West. A traditional UAE woman's costume, however, is the *'abaya*, a full-length, black cloak-like garment that covers her from head to toe when she is in a public place.

### 12 FOOD

The Emirian cuisine includes a variety of dishes that are prepared and served on various occasions. Rice, meat, and fish are staple foods. They are cooked in various ways in varying combinations. Spices are an essential part of the Emirian cuisine. Among the most commonly used spices are coriander, cardamom, saffron, and turmeric.

A favorite dish in the UAE as well as in other Gulf countries is *machbous*, or rice and meat seasoned with spices, on-

ions, tomatoes, and dried lemon. During Ramadan, the month of fasting, *harees* is usually served. *Harees* is a dish consisting of small pieces of shredded meat with wheat and water, mixed together and thoroughly beaten over and over again to the consistency of porridge. Favorite desserts include *al-halwa*, a sweet made from sugar, eggs, starch, water, and oil; *al-Jibeet*, a sweet made from date syrup and sesame seeds; and *Kul Wis-kut*, a dessert made from a mixture of peanuts and sugar.

Coffee and tea are the most popular beverages and are often mixed with spices, coffee with cardamom and tea with saffron or mint.

### 13 EDUCATION

As a newly developing state, the UAE focuses much of its resources on education to give its young citizens the tools they need to compete in the modern world. Education is compulsory from age 6 to age 12, and it is free through the university level.

The government also provides full scholarships for study abroad if the course of study is not offered at United Arab Emirates University, which opened in Al Ain in 1977. In 2006, UAE University had about 14,500 students, with women making up 79% of the student body. The UAE established a second university, Zayed University, for women in 1998, with campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. As of 2008, 3,400 students were enrolled.

Although public schooling was virtually nonexistent before the late 1950s, enrollment at public primary schools is now almost 100% and the literacy rate has risen to 89% for men and 88% for women, compared with an overall figure of 24.9% in 1980. Most teachers in the public school system are Arabs from other countries. Outside the public school system, there are also schools for foreigners run by their home countries.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The only native Emirian artistic traditions are those passed down from the Bedu (or bedouin) nomads [see *Bedu*]. These include traditional Arab music, storytelling, dances, and the strong passion for poetry. Traditional Emirian music is characterized by a marked drumbeat accompanied by the sounds of various percussion and stringed instruments. The *tubool*, or drums, which come in various sizes, are beaten with a stick or with the fingers. The *oud*, a popular instrument, is an ancient stringed instrument that is the ancestor of the European lute. The percussion instruments include the soft sad tone of the Arabian flute or *nai*, and the *mizmar*, a long open-ended instrument which produces a loud, nasal sound. Another traditional instrument is the *rebaba*, a one-stringed instrument.

A famous dance which marks the UAE traditions and customs and is performed on almost every occasion is the *ayyala*. Men form two rows, shoulder to shoulder, facing each other at a distance. This is meant to resemble the scene of a battle, where one row represents the line of attack and the other row represents the cannons, reflecting the Arabs' love of expressions of courage and chivalry.

### 15 WORK

About 90% of the work force in the UAE is foreign. During the early part of 1995, the UAE launched a nationwide campaign aimed at bringing more Emirians into the work force. The largest industry in the UAE is the Dubai Aluminum Company,



*Emirati men greeting each other. (arabianEye/Getty Images)*

which opened in 1979, but most of the UAE's income (about 40%) comes from the oil industry. Most of the oil wealth comes from the emirate of Abu Dhabi. In the smaller emirates, sheep and goat herding, fishing, and farming are the main occupations along with boat-building, handicrafts, and jewelry. Business and industrial workers in the cities often take a two- to three-hour lunch break and then return to work and stay until 7:00 pm or later.

## 16 SPORTS

The traditional sports of camel and horse racing still attract great crowds. Nowadays, however, owners and fans often speed alongside the race course in four-wheel-drive vehicles, shouting instructions and cheering. No betting is allowed at camel races. The UAE boasts three ice-skating rinks and some Emirians and visitors enjoy sand skiing in the desert. Water sports are also popular throughout the UAE. The Dubai Desert Classic Golf Tournament is an annual event, drawing top international golfers. It is held at the Emirates Golf Club in Dubai, the first 18-hole grass course in the Gulf region; it opened in 1988.

Dubai also hosts world-class tournaments in tennis, rugby, snooker (or pool), soccer, cricket, volleyball, and chess. The

Dubai World Cup is one of the richest horse racing competitions in the world.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Movie theaters showing movies in Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and English are very popular with Emirians. Videos can be rented, but they are censored. Several satellite channels, over eight TV stations, and numerous radio frequencies from all over the Gulf can be received in the UAE. Camping in the desert, family outings at parks, and listening to music are among Emirians' favorite pastimes.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Most of the folk art sold in UAE markets is imported. The UAE's Women's Association runs a Handicrafts Center in Abu Dhabi that produces some local basketry and weaving. Baskets are made of palm tree fronds, called *al Khoos*. Wool from sheep is woven into colorful fabrics, to be used for pillowcases, covers, blankets, carpets, and bags.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The emirates have a long history of intertribal wars and violence, and although they are now united in an attempt at cooperation, old conflicts continually erupt. The financial and political structure also causes problems. Because Abu Dhabi is the largest emirate and has the largest oil reserves (and therefore makes the most money), it makes all the decisions in the UAE. Abu Dhabi's emir is the president of the union. Dubai is the only emirate large and wealthy enough to challenge Abu Dhabi's decisions. The other emirates are all too small and too dependent on financial support from Abu Dhabi to risk speaking out against the Abu Dhabi-dominated government. This creates resentment among the smaller emirates. Dubai occasionally acts on its own, going against decisions handed down by the Abu Dhabi leaders. The union of the emirates is too young, and the new oil wealth and resulting development too recent, to determine if the UAE will be able to maintain its unity and function as a stable federation of states.

The fact that the UAE is a young federation also creates some tensions between the traditional nomadic life of the Bedu and a more modern, sedentary world. Roles of men and women remain primarily traditional, with males expected to provide for their families and women expected to maintain control over the running of domestic affairs.

The UAE also faces some international disputes. Its reliance on foreign workers remains a pressing problem, partly because the government is unwilling to grant citizenship privileges to non-Emirians. Policies approved in 2007 allowed for companies to regulate the activities of foreign workers but gave the workers no additional rights. A longtime boundary dispute with Oman was ratified in 2003, but the agreement had not been published as of 2008. In addition, drug traffickers use the UAE ports as a transfer point in the exchange of illegal drugs. The country's great wealth also poses a possible problem. As a major financial center, the UAE is vulnerable to money laundering. Although the government has imposed some controls, its informal banking sector is largely unregulated.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Emirian women have enjoyed more educational opportunities with the opening of Zayed University, an all-women's university that emphasizes the enrollment of Emirians first. As such opportunities have opened up, women have consistently outperformed men in schooling. However, university opportunities have not been viewed by Emirian women or their families as career choices. Instead, a college degree is seen as improving the value of a young Emirian woman whose family wants her to marry well. Few Zayed attendees intend to pursue careers; most are interested in retaining the traditional social structure.

Women in many Arab nations have begun to press for more equality between the genders in the public sphere. Such a movement has not yet occurred among Emirian women because of the UAE's wealth and because of Emirian beliefs in the value that Islam places on women in traditional, more domestic roles. Many women, even those who attend universities, see a future as a wife and mother as one that their society values. The equality sought in the workplace and political sphere by women in other Arab nations means little to Emirians.

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—revised by H. G. Carlson

# E W E N K I

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kamonikan; Suolun; Tongusi; Yakute

**LOCATION:** China; Mongolia

**POPULATION:** 30,200

**LANGUAGE:** Ewenki and Chinese

**RELIGION:** Traditional beliefs, Lamaism, and Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Ewenki dwelled northeast of Lake Baikal and in the forest bordering on the Shilka River. They lived from hunting, fishing, and raising reindeer. The Ewenki are historically linked to the Shiwei (especially the Bei Shiwei and the Bo Shiwei), as recorded in the ancient books in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534). In 544, the Shiwei began to pay tribute to the Eastern Wei Dynasty (534–550). The imperial Tang Dynasty (618–907) set up a government office in the area where the ancestors of Ewenki dwelled. Later on, they moved eastward. A branch moved as far as the middle reaches of the Heilongjiang River. The ancient books in the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) called them "the forest people." Under the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties they were called "the northern mountains deer riding people." From 1633 to 1640, the Manchus of northeast China conquered the Ewenki (at that time called "Kamonikan" and "Suolun"), who had to pay tribute to the Qing imperial government. After the mid-17th century, because of the invasion of Manchu territory by czarist Russia, the Qing moved the Ewenki to the Nen River Valley, close to the Greater Xing'an Mountains. In 1732, the imperial Qing placed more than 1,600 "Kamonikan" soldiers in garrison in the Hulunbeir grassland. They were allowed to bring their wives and children along. They finally settled there and became the direct ancestors of the present-day Ewenki.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Ewenki amount to more than 30,200 people in 2000. They are mainly scattered in Inner Mongolia, living together with the Mongols, Daur, Chinese, and Oroqen. The region where they live in compact communities is called Ewenki Autonomous Qi County, a hilly grassland with more than 600 lakes as well as a large number of rivers flowing in all directions. Ewenki villages are also found in Nehe District in Heilongjiang Province.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Ewenki belongs to the Altaic linguistic family, Manchu-Tungusic group, Tungusic branch. There are three dialects but no writing system. Ewenki children are educated in schools set up in pastoral areas using Mongolian language, both oral and written. In agricultural and mountainous areas, however, Chinese language and characters are widely used.

Until the mid-20th century, the Ewenki living in different areas were called by various names: Suolun, Tongusi, Yakute, and so on. In 1957, according to their will, a unified name was adopted: Ewenki, which means "people living in the wooded mountains."

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

The origin of mankind is explained as follows in an Ewenki myth: After the creation of the sky and the earth, the god Enduli made 10 men and 10 women from the skeletons of birds. Encouraged by his success, he planned to make more men and women, 100 of each. He made men first, but in the process of his great work, he nearly ran out of bird skeletons. He had to use soil as a supplement to fashion the women. As a result, the women were weaker, a part of their body being made of soil.

The Ewenki have a special reverence for fire. This may be related to their tough Nordic environment and is reflected in one of their main myths. A woman was injured by a shower of sparks from the household hearth. Angered by her pain, she drew her sword and stabbed violently at the hearth until the fire died out. The following day, she tried in vain to light a fire. She had to ask for a burning charcoal from her neighbor. Leaving her house, she found an old woman crying miserably, with a bleeding eye. Replying to her queries, the old woman said: "It was you who stabbed me blind yesterday." The woman, suddenly realizing what had happened, kowtowed to the Fire God and asked for her forgiveness. The Fire God finally pardoned her. From then on, she never failed in lighting a fire. Up to the present, the Ewenki throw a piece of food or a small cup of wine into the fire as an offering before meals. However, sprinkling water on a fire or poking a fire with a sword during meat roasting is taboo.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The traditional beliefs of the Ewenki are rooted in shamanism and totemism, stressing worship of ancestors, animals, and nature. Special rituals are performed for Jiya (the livestock god) and fire. Fire should never be allowed to die out, even when Ewenki families migrate. Among the hunters, a number of rites and taboos demonstrate their reverence for the bear. When a bear is killed in hunting, they wrap its head, bones, and internal organs in birch bark or straw, then hang them in a tree. They kowtow, pretend to cry, and offer tobacco. In some areas, all the clans of the Ewenki have a bird totem, such as the eagle, swan, or duck. Whenever a bird flies overhead, they sprinkle a little milk in the air. Killing or doing harm to a bird is considered taboo, especially if the bird is one's own totem. Almost every clan has a shaman. He is not a professional, often playing the role of headman of a clan or a tribe and enjoying high status. The shaman explains the cause of disease, divines fortune and misfortune, exorcizes ghosts, and dances in a trance. He expects no reward.

In some pastoral areas, the Ewenki believe in Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism adopted by the majority of Mongols. In some areas, one finds communities belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Church, a remnant of czarist Russia's influence from the 17th to the 19th century.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

In agricultural areas, the festivals of the Ewenki are not different from those of the Chinese. In pastoral areas, their festivals include Aobao Gathering and the Mikuole Festival. Aobao is a Mongolian term meaning "a pile"; it consists of a pyramidal pile of stones and adobes, flanked by a certain number of poles from which float multicolored silk streamers. Some streamers are covered with sacred Buddhist inscriptions. The Aobao is regarded as the dwelling of God in shamanism. In some ar-

reas, the Aobao is a large tree, called the Aobao tree. The Aobao Gathering, one of the most important festivals of the Ewenki, is held around June or July on the lunar calendar (Western calendar, between June 22 and August 21). Oxen and sheep are slaughtered as sacrificial offerings. The festival includes popular sporting events, such as horse racing and wrestling. The Mikuole Festival is essentially a fair of the stock raisers. It is held in the last ten days of lunar May (Western calendar, between June 11 and July 21). Horses are branded and their overlong manes are shaved; the sheep's ears are incised with the owner's mark. This is a special occasion for villagers to call on each other and to gather in dinner parties. The Ewenki also celebrate the Spring Festival (lunar New Year; Western calendar between January 21 and February 20), which is a common holiday for all the nationalities of China.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Regardless of gender, the young pastoral Ewenki start to look after calves at six or seven. Boys learn to ride a horse at seven and lasso and break in a horse shortly afterwards. Girls learn to milk cows at 10. The children pay due respect to their elders. Meeting them, the youngsters always salute by bending at the knee and cupping the hands in front of the chest. The seats and beds in the room are assigned on the basis of generation. Traditionally, the Ewenki practiced tree burial (or wind burial). The corpse was placed in a coffin or wrapped with bark or willow twigs and then hung high in a tree. The blowing of the wind, drenching of the rain, scorching of the sun, and beaming of the moon were regarded as effective in transforming the dead into a star. Ground burial is now more and more prevalent under the influence of the neighboring nationalities.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

"People coming from afar," the Ewenki say, "cannot carry their own house on their back; nor can we when we go out." The visit of a guest is always a happy event. A fur cushion will be offered by the host. The guest sits on the cushion wherever it is; any shift of its place is considered impolite behavior. The hostess will carry a birch wood tray and serve deer milk, deer meat, toasted cake, and homemade wild fruit wine. The host will pour a few drops of wine on the fire first, then takes a sip for himself and finally hands the cup over to the guest.

The huntsmen store their food, clothes, and tools in their storehouse in the forest, which is never locked. Any huntsman is allowed to take food from the storehouse as needed without prior agreement with the owner. He should, however, return the amount of food taken when he meets the owner.

Arranged marriages are now abandoned. The youngsters will not lose any opportunity to choose a partner. Unfortunately, opportunities are rather limited in the pastoral areas on account of the great distance between villages and of the clan structure of individual villages.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The traditional Ewenki house resembles an umbrella, more than 10 ft in height and 13 ft in diameter, framed by 25–30 poles covered with birch bark and roe or deer skin. One side, provided with a door, is used as the living room. The other three sides are all platforms for sleeping. A fiery pit is in the center, with a pan hanging over it. There is an opening at the

top for ventilation. The tablet of the ancestors is attached to the top of the central wooden column.

In hunting areas, the house is a wooden cube. The walls are built by piling up logs. The roof is made of birch bark. In some areas, they live in Mongolian-style *yurt*.

Bicycles, horses, and cars are the main modes of transport of the Ewenki. The epidemic and endemic diseases of bygone days have now been controlled. Hospitals have been set up in various localities of the Ewenki Autonomous Qi County.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Ewenki live in small patrilineal families. Since they need mutual help in hunting and in searching pastures, they form nomadic villages. Villages, whether nomadic or sedentary (agricultural), have a clan structure in which each family has blood ties with the other families.

Ewenki families are monogamous. Marriage practices retain remnants of clan society, such as the marriage of cousins and inter-clan marriage. In bygone days, arranged marriage was prevalent. The parents of two families “engaged” their children when they were just a few years old or even before they were born. This led to precocious marriage. As an alternative, the custom of “elopement marriage” emerged. The date of elopement is agreed upon by the young man and woman who are passionately in love. The parents of the male side prepare a new house beforehand and an old woman is waiting there for the eloping girl. After dark, the girl escapes from her family. Riding on horseback, she comes directly to the new house. The old woman unties the girl’s eight braids and combs her hair into two large ones. This is a symbol that the marriage is now “legal.” Before dawn, the couple goes to the man’s paternal house and kowtows to the fire and to the tablet of his ancestors. Then, two persons are sent to the bride’s family, first to offer *hada* (a ceremonial silk scarf) to her ancestors and then to kowtow. They explain their purpose in coming, ask forgiveness and promise obedience. After long hours of persuasion, the bride’s parents finally agree. Consequently, all members of the clan congratulate the couple, who kowtow to the clan’s ancestors, to the village Fire God, and to the bridegroom’s parents. A sumptuous banquet follows, guests and relatives dancing and singing with utter delight.

There has been no inhibition of intermarriage between the Ewenki and other nationalities. The intermarriage with the Daur has a long history and is very popular. Some families and clans intermarried for generations. Thus, the Ewenki and the Daur are called two “familial nationalities.”

## **11 CLOTHING**

In former times, both sexes donned a long fur robe covering the ankles and a long coat down to the knees. The cuffs and the bottom of the women’s robes were embroidered with multicolored figures and designs. They all wore fur hats. Today, they mostly wear cloth robes and cotton padded garments in winter. Urban Ewenki dress is similar to that of the Chinese.

## **12 FOOD**

The Ewenki’s staple food is animal meat, including deer meat, mutton, beef, and pork of wild hog, supplemented by grains, such as Chinese sorghum, corn, millet, oats, and buckwheat. On account of the Nordic climate, vegetables are scarce. They like roasted meat. “Cooked meat held in hand” is very popular

during festivals. The meat, attached to the bone, is chopped in big pieces and is half-cooked with a little salt. They hold the big piece with their hand while eating. They like gruel with milk, which is also a sacrificial offering to the gods. The diet of Ewenki farmers is not much different from that of the local Chinese or Manchus.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Most of the Ewenki were illiterate in the past. Today, primary school education in the Ewenki Autonomous Qi County has become popular. Eighteen middle schools (junior and senior) have been set up. Quite a number of youngsters enroll in the university. Compared to other nationalities, however, their education is at a low level.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Ewenki folk songs, slow and unconstrained, evoke the vast expanses of the grassland. Dancing styles vary according to region and to occasions. A dance called Ahanba is performed by women at wedding ceremonies. There are no accompanying instruments; the tempo is set by the singers’ voices. Each group consists of two to four dancers. In the beginning, they cry softly, “A-Han-Ba, A-Han-Ba,” while swinging their arms. Then they turn face to face and bend their knees. The tempo is gradually hastened and the rhythm is intensified by the movement of their feet. Ultimately, the dance bustles in full swing. Another dance is performed by two young men. One of them is a hunter, the other dresses up as a wild hog. With their hands behind their back, they hit each other with their shoulders while roaring. A group led by a singer encircles the two actors, moves around a bonfire, and dances while singing.

Ewenki literature has been handed down orally; it includes myths, tales, folk songs, and riddles.

## **15 WORK**

The frequent migrations of the Ewenki in the course of history have resulted in scattered communities. Because of the significant difference of natural environments in which they dwelled, their mode of production and lifestyle varied a great deal. Those living in Ewenki Autonomous Qi County and in Chen Barag Qi practice livestock husbandry; those dwelling in Butha Qi, Arun Qi, and Morin Dawa Qi have a mixed economy, half farming and half hunting; those inhabiting Nehe in Heilongjiang Province are farmers; those inhabiting Ergun Zuo Qi are huntsmen, riding deer while hunting, and are thus called “Deer back riding Ewenki.”

## **16 SPORTS**

The Ewenki start to ride, lasso, and break in horses early in their childhood. Later, they frequently gather to learn arrow shooting, high jumping, pole vaulting, long jumping, and skiing. Brave hunters and capable herdsman have mastered these skills by the time they are adults. Horse lassoing is a popular competition mostly held on festivals.

As early as 1,300 years ago, the ancestors of the Ewenki, called Shiwei, fashioned a primitive form of skis. The skis used today by the Ewenki for hunting are but an improved version of the Shiwei “snow-sliding boards.”



*A cuoluzi (a tepee like structure) used by the Ewenki nomadic tribe in Da Hinggan Ling Mountains, China.  
(© Earl and Nazima Kowall/Corbis)*

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Most of the Ewenki areas are provided with a movie theater and a television station. Film studios and television broadcasting stations have been set up in Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang Province. Therefore, most of the Ewenki can enjoy watching television as daily entertainment. In hunting areas, old hunters are master storytellers, spinning tales about ancient and modern heroes in their fight against the harsh environment and wild animals; this is still the preferred form of entertainment.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Ewenki excel in designing and producing implements for daily necessities as well as toys from birch bark. Painting on the birch bark is a hallmark of the Ewenki. Canoes made of birch bark, besides their unique design, provide swift and easy transport on the many lakes and rivers of the Ewenki land.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Poverty and isolation are serious problems confronting the Ewenki. Community fragmentation, harsh environment, illiteracy, and the absence of a market economy, make it difficult to implement a short-term, global solution for the whole population. It seems the situation can only be improved gradually in the long run.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. While minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic,

homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# FIJIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** FEE-gee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Taukei (indigenous Fijians)

**LOCATION:** Fiji

**POPULATION:** Approximately 828,000 (57% or 471,960 ethnic Fijians)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Fijian; Hindi are official languages of the Republic of Fiji

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Methodist)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The term "Fijians" refers to any of the inhabitants of the chain of islands in the Pacific Ocean called the Republic of Fiji. The islands claimed independence from Great Britain in 1970 but remained part of the Commonwealth until October 1987, when they became the Republic of Fiji. Although there are a great number of ethnic groups indigenous to the Fiji Islands, they all share a number of cultural traits. Here the term "Fijian" is used to refer to the descendants of the indigenous population of this chain of islands. The Fijian word *Taukei* is now being used to refer to this group as opposed to other ethnic groups that inhabit the islands. In Fijian the word translates as "owner" or "original inhabitant." This term and the concept behind it have become more important recently as indigenous Fijians have sought to reestablish their claims to the land, resources, and political authority in Fiji.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Fijian archipelago lies in the western Pacific Ocean, southwest of Hawaii. There are more than 300 islands within the Fijian group, the two largest being Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. These two islands account for around 86% of the total 18,272 sq km (7,055 sq mi) of land that makes up the island group. Of the approximately 300 islands, only about 100 are either inhabited or capable of human habitation. Most of the larger islands are referred to as "high islands." High islands are volcanic in nature and have high, rugged mountain peaks with deep, winding valleys and quick flowing streams and rivers. The deltas that have been created by the networks of waterways are very fertile and have been the primary areas of human settlement and farming from the earliest times. The archaeological record of Fiji indicates that the first human habitation of the archipelago was approximately 3,500 years ago. The first inhabitants were likely migrants from nearby Vanuatu and New Caledonia. Fiji was a crossroads of the Pacific in prehistoric times. The distinctive cultures and physical features of the Fijian groups are evidence of that fact.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Fijian language belongs to the Oceanic branch of the Austronesian language family. Linguists usually refer to the Fijian language as a composite of approximately 300 dialects defined by village membership—that is to say, people from different villages speak different dialects of Fijian. Standard Fijian is based on the dialect spoken by the Bau. This dialect had also formed the basis for an earlier form of Fijian that was used to communicate more easily across dialect boundaries in the time before the arrival of Europeans. Missionaries to the islands chose this





*Fijians in traditional dress prepare a drink of Kava during a welcoming ceremony for Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Nadi, Fiji. (AP Images/Rob Griffith)*

dialect as their standard for translation of the Bible. Wesleyan Missionaries developed a written form of Fijian in 1850, which has contributed to the high degree of literacy in the islands. English is the official language of the country.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Fiji has a large body of folklore, mythology, and oral history. Many stories revolve around the feats of cultural heroes and gods. One myth details the protection of the island of Kadavu by the Shark God and explains why the inhabitants of the island today have no fear of the sharks which populate their island's reefs. There is also a series of myths which account for the Fiji practice of "fire walking," which has now become an important tourist event. Traditional fire walking was a ceremonial occasion accompanied by symbolic acts and the reenactment of the myth concerning fire walking. Before the fire walking ceremony, men would separate from any contact with women for a period of three days. Men would also refrain from eating coconut during this time. A large pit would be dug and filled with large river stones. A fire would be built on top of the stones about six hours before the event. The coals would be raked over the stones, eventually making the stones become white hot. Then the men would walk the circumference of the pit without any protection for their feet and without any apparent ill effects.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The overwhelming majority of indigenous Fijians, nearly 90%, are Methodist. Both Methodist and Catholic missionaries established churches, schools, and missions in Fiji in the 1800s. The Fijians were quick converts to the Wesleyan Methodist Church, probably due, in part, to the Methodists' use of Fijian in services and their early translation of the Bible into Standard Fijian. The Catholic Church still used Latin in mass at that time, and Fijians were not interested in listening to a language that they could not understand.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Major holidays for Fijians include the annual Hibiscus Festival, a celebration of things Fijian; Queen of England's Birthday in June; Fiji Day, October 13; Constitution Day, June 28; and Christmas Day and Boxing Day, December 26.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Children are socialized to recognize the social hierarchy of the extended family and the society as a whole. From the time they can understand, children take orders from the senior males in the family, especially their fathers. Respect and strict obedience are expected of their children by fathers. Discipline and punishment is the domain of the father. Mothers are more indulgent with their children.

In traditional Fiji society, women are expected to be virgins at the time of marriage. Premarital sexual relationships were not advocated within the society.

Disease and death were attributable to malevolent spirits in traditional Fijian culture. The mortuary ceremony was once very elaborate, especially for men of status. Groups with relationships to the deceased would visit the village and pay homage to the corpse. A set of taboos were enforced after the death and they remained in effect for up to 100 nights. In the past, wives were strangled to accompany their dead husbands into the spirit world. It was believed that the god Ruvuyalo would kill the spirit of any man who did not have his spouse accompanying him.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The standard Fijian greeting is *ni sa bula*, or the informal *bula*. Visiting a person's house always entails removing the shoes before entering.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

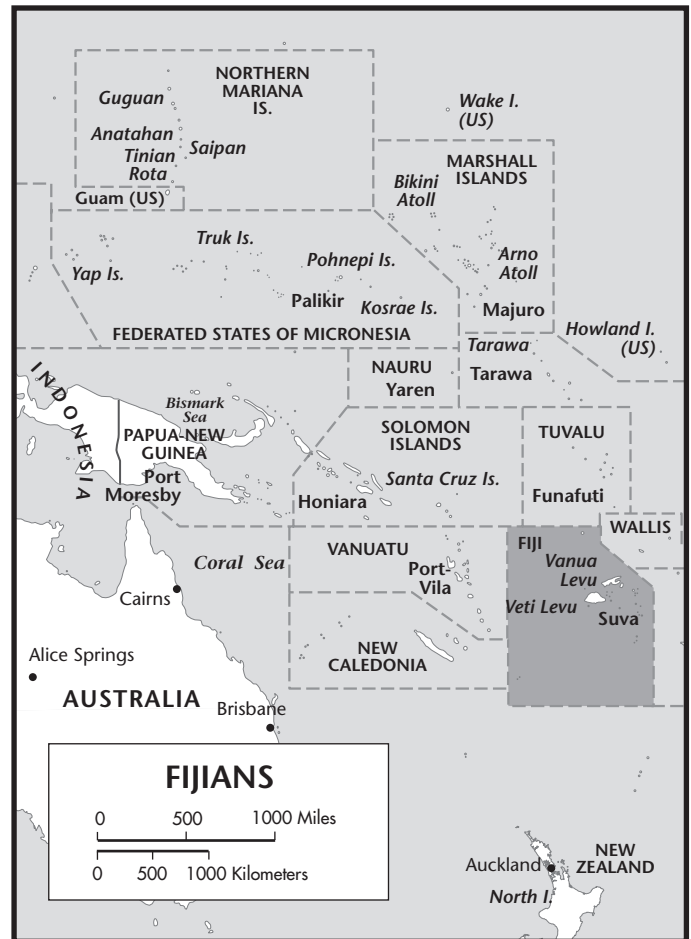
The majority of houses on Viti Levu are made of wood and concrete breeze blocks. Almost all homes have electricity and a piped water supply. On the smaller islands, houses are often constructed of local materials and have either thatched or corrugated iron roofs. Western-style houses are a sign of prosperity. Electricity is available in many rural areas. In very remote regions, people still use kerosene or benzene lanterns.

Villages in rural areas are centered on a village green, called *rara* in Fijian. At either end of the *rara*, each village has a church and a village hall. People who have left traditional villages to live in cities and towns often return for the Christmas season. In the 18th century, Fijians developed a new type of ocean-going double-hulled canoe. This type of canoe had a large mast set in the middle of the larger hulled vessel, and there was no significant difference between the head and stern. These ships were more maneuverable and faster than the other style of double-hulled canoes that were being used in other Oceanic societies. It permitted the Fijians of the time to move more quickly between islands and to escape quickly after raids. These canoes were elaborately carved and decorated.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In traditional Fijian society, the preferred marriage was between cross-cousins. Men were permitted to have more than one wife at a time, and the more wives a man had, the higher his social status. Chiefs especially had many wives and created a number of political alliances in the process. After a couple was married, they would typically reside in the house of the groom's father. Each household was composed of an extended family. Each extended family was under the leadership of one senior male. Divorce was easily accomplished by either the husband or the wife.

Family structure is very hierarchical. This reflects the larger pattern of hierarchy and position in Fijian society. The senior male of the family is equivalent to the chief of the family line. The higher the social position in the family, the more respect that has to be given to the person. Any food that is not eaten by the senior male cannot be eaten by anyone else. A woman's social position within an extended family is traditionally based on that of her husband, unless her family is of higher status than his.



## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Fijian clothing for men is a native kilt called a *sulu*. Men also wear Western-style clothing, as do many women. The *sulu* is always worn during ceremonial occasions and has seen a renaissance due to social and political developments since the coup of 1987.

## 12 FOOD

The main staples of the traditional Fijian diet are taro root and cassava. Although sago palms are found on some of the Fijian Islands, this plant was never a staple foodstuff as it was in other nearby islands of the Pacific. Fish and shellfish are still important foods in the current diet, as they were in the past. Western foodstuffs and cooking techniques have become prominent in Fijian society.

## 13 EDUCATION

The literacy rate for the Republic of Fiji is estimated at 93%. Western education has been available in Fiji since European missionaries became established in the islands. Mission schools were built for the indigenous Fijians by Methodist and Catholic missionaries. Nowadays, primary education is free and compulsory. Villages in rural areas often share a common school. Adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 attend junior secondary school, which is not free. High school education can only be obtained in towns and cities. The University of the South Pacific is located in the capital city of Suva.



*A Fijian throws a casting net to catch live bait in Suva, Fiji. Many Fijians still fish daily to provide food for themselves and to sell in the market place. (AP Images/Rob Griffith)*

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Dancing is an important part of traditional Fijian culture. Men and women danced separately. Women's dances often utilized intricate and delicate hand gestures. Many of the men's dances related to military exploits and involved aggressive posing with weapons. Both men and women had "sitting" dances. Singing was also important in traditional society. In the present day, Western-style instruments and singing styles have become popular.

#### **15 WORK**

Traditional Fijians engaged in subsistence horticulture, and some continue to do so into the present time. They raised taro root and cassava as well as fished and collected marine resources. Agriculture was the traditional domain of men. Fishing and the collecting of marine resources were tasks allocated to women. Now, although around 60% of Fijians are still rural, the loss of labor due to urban migration is a problem for village organization. Many younger Fijians seek wage labor opportunities in the towns and cities. Tobacco and sugar are important cash crops in the Fijian economy.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Rugby is an important spectator and participant sport for Fijians. Rugby Union is considered the national sport of Fiji. The Fijian team qualified for the Rugby World Cup in 2003. Soc-

cer is another important sport for Fijians. Fiji sent participants to the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta and had very good performances from the athletes who competed in judo and swimming. Cricket is also popular in Fiji, but more so with the Indo-Fijian population there.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

One form of social intercourse among adult Fijian men is the consumption of *yaqona*, known as "kava." Kava is an intoxicating beverage made through the pounding, grating, or chewing of the root of the shrub *Piper methysticum*. Kava drinking has a definite set of social rules. The sharing of kava accompanied the performance of pre-Christian religious events, political discussions, the curing of illness, and restricted social interaction of adult, "high status" men in Fijian villages. Kava drinking has become an important attraction for tourists who visit Fiji, although the event does not carry any of the ceremonial importance that it did in traditional contexts.

Electricity has made television, radio, video, and movies all popular forms of entertainment in Fijian cities, towns, and villages.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Traditional crafts made by Fijian women include pottery, woven mats, and bark cloth. Men did a great deal of carving and sculpting in wood; creating beautiful spears, clubs, ceremonial

bowls for kava drinking; and elaborately decorated double-hulled seagoing canoes. In precontact times, the Fijians were well-known for their armory and especially their war clubs. The Fijians had several types of war clubs, each designed to perform a special function in battle. “Throwers” were constructed to be thrown at an enemy and strike with the wide, knobbed butt. “Penetrators” had a spike with a weighted head. They were made of the heaviest wood available and were used only by the most skilled warriors. The club would make a single, fatal hole in the skull of the victim. According to tradition, a person killed in this manner was the most desired for cannibalism and the killer received much prestige.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

With the coup of 1987 and the constitution of 1990, Fijians have made it clear that they want to reclaim the resources and rights to self-determination that have gradually slipped away from them. This has heightened tensions between the Fijians and the other ethnic groups of the island, especially the Indo-Fijians.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Recent statistics for the Republic of Fiji indicate that females and males are now equally educated. There are no gender-based differences in literacy, and in fact, females at all levels have a somewhat higher literacy percentage. School enrollments for males and females are equal. In fact 1995 enrolment figures show girls comprising 48.6% of all primary level enrolments and a little over 50% of total enrollments at secondary level. Female attendance at tertiary level institutions has also significantly increased. However, women still tend to dominate in the courses traditionally considered for females (nurses, secretaries, teachers etc.) while males still dominate course such as engineering and marine studies. Enrolments at the Fiji Institute of Technology in 1996 for example, for these male dominated fields showed less than 3% were females. On the other hand the enrolments for secretarial studies and for office administration were over 98% females. These statistics reflect the prevailing attitudes on gender roles which will take considerable time to change.

The Fiji Women’s Crisis Center (FWCC) is a feminist non-government organization that was established in 1984 to deal with the social problem of violence against women and children. FWCC is the first organization of its kind in the Pacific region.

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—by J. Williams

# FILIPINOS

**PRONUNCIATION:** fih-lih-PEE-nohz

**LOCATION:** Philippines

**POPULATION:** 93 million

**LANGUAGE:** Tagalog (national language); Cebuano; Ilocano; Hiligaynon (Ilongo); Bicolano; Waray-Waray; Pampango, and Pangasinan

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (85%); Philippine Independent Church; Iglesia ni Kristo (Church of Christ); Protestantism; Islam; animism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Filipino Americans. Vol. 3: Bajau; Hiligaynon; Ifugao; Ilocano; Ilongot; Kalinga; Vol. 4: Mangyan; Maranao; Negrito; Tagbanua; Tausug; T’boli.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Distributed among thousands of islands, themselves divided by barriers of mountain and jungle, the territory of the Philippines by its very nature has encouraged the proliferation of distinct local cultures. However, three centuries of Spanish colonialism provided most Filipinos with a single framework within which to develop a common, eventually national, culture. Despite speaking several mutually unintelligible mother tongues, the 90% of the population classified as “lowland Christian” share essentially the same civilization. The remaining 10% consist of numerous non-Christian peoples, who differ greatly from the Christian majority as well as among themselves.

As early as 40,000 years ago, the first modern humans, Australo-Melanesian hunter-gatherers ancestral to the modern Negritos, roamed the Philippines, which was at that time virtually linked to Asia by land bridges exposed during the Ice Age. The ancestors of most Filipinos, however, were groups of Austronesian-speaking, Southern Mongoloid agriculturalists who arrived from Taiwan beginning between 3000 and 2000 BC (some of their descendants would migrate further to colonize Indonesia, Madagascar, and the Pacific Islands).

With the opening of a direct passage between China and the Spice Islands through the Philippines in the early 2nd millennium AD, small trading-and-raiding chiefdoms begin to appear in Chinese records. By the 15th century, items of the wider Asiatic civilization, such as Chinese porcelain, the Malay lingua franca, and the Islamic religion, had reached the archipelago. The first natives of the Philippines to be found in European documents are the Luzones (Tagalogs affiliated with the north Bornean kingdom of Brunei) whom Tomé Pires, a Portuguese, described in 1512 as settling in the Malay city-state of Malacca at the crossroads of international trade.

Looking on the archipelago as a base from which to capture the Spice Islands and to evangelize China, Spain sent several expeditions to follow up on Ferdinand Magellan’s 1521 “discovery” of the islands (which eventually received the name “Filipinas” after the Habsburg Philip II). Only in 1571 did Miguel López de Legaspi succeed in establishing a viable colony at Manila. Aside from the lucrative galleon trade between China and Spanish Mexico that ran through Manila, there was little to attract Spanish settlers with the exception of Catholic missionary orders, whose friars became the only representatives of the colonial power that most natives ever regularly encountered. The Spanish not only imposed the Catholic religion, but



also introduced forms of political and economic organization, as well as arts and technologies, which transformed native life both for good and for ill. Colonial annals record frequent local revolts against Spanish abuses, but on numerous occasions Catholic Filipinos stood with the Spanish against invaders and their own rebellious brethren.

The opening of the colony to non-Spanish commerce and capital in the 19th century promoted the growth of an economy heavily dependent on plantation-grown cash crops, and the rise of landed elite of largely mixed European-Chinese-native blood. While economic changes exposed most natives to novel forms of exploitation, an unprecedented affluence permitted some Filipino families to send their sons to Europe for an education. The native intelligentsia that was thus created, the *ilustrados* (literally, the “enlightened ones”), at first hoped only to gain for Filipinos equal rights as Spanish citizens but, facing no Spanish response other than repression, began to long for independence.

In 1896, secular ilustrado ideals and folk Catholic notions of justice impelled the Katipunan, a Manilan secret society, to launch a revolution to end Spanish rule. The leadership of the struggle soon shifted to the provincial Filipino elite who were able to raise impromptu militias. Although on 12 June 1898 Filipinos proclaimed their independence, the United States, which had initially collaborated with the Filipinos in defeating the Spanish, moved to take possession of the islands for their strategic value. The ensuing war, which eventually established American dominance, dragged on for years, and caused directly or indirectly the death of a million Filipinos.

American rule introduced mass education in the English language and improvements in public health and communications. Although the United States early on decided to prepare the Filipinos for eventual self-rule, it sought to retain ultimate control by favoring the landed elite whose interests would be bound to its own. Because of this, American-introduced democratic institutions became little more than arenas for competition among powerful families, while the welfare of the laboring masses continued to decline.

Japanese invasion and occupation and American liberation during World War II devastated the country to which the United States was to grant independence in 1946. Desperate for U.S. reconstruction funds, Filipino leaders submitted to treaties that gave Americans privileged access to the Filipino economy, as well as to lands for military bases. Cold War-era American pressure on the Filipino government to exclude leftist parties from legitimate political participation left disaffected peasants no other recourse but armed rebellion. Elite resistance to land reform perpetuated conditions hospitable to Communist insurgency. It was ostensibly to overcome Communist and Muslim rebellions, the breakdown of law and order, and an economic crisis that President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Marcos, however, accomplished little more than exchanging the old oligarchs for his own cronies, whose corruption and incompetence plunged the economy into a tailspin by the 1980s.

Finally, during snap elections in 1986, masses of unarmed ordinary people mobilized first to thwart government attempts at electoral fraud and then to block government troops from capturing Corazon Aquino, the genuine president-elect, and the generals who had defected to her. In the end, this peaceful revolution, the first to be internationally televised, left Marcos no other option than to flee in an American helicopter to Hawaii. Aquino restored democracy but, belonging to one of the country’s biggest land-owning families, restored the pre-1972 oligarchy to power. A series of army coups and natural disasters destabilized her regime and retarded economic recovery. However, with the election of Fidel Ramos in 1992, the country at last began to enjoy stability and embark on a consistent rate of economic growth closer to those set by the Philippine’s Asian neighbors.

The Asian/global emerging markets financial crisis of 1997–1998 affected the Philippines less traumatically than neighboring countries like Thailand and Indonesia; growth slowed to a minimal contraction but resumed by 1999 despite the instability under the presidency of former actor Joseph Estrada, who was later impeached on corruption charges in 2001. His successor, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, has pursued policies that have made the Philippines one of the fastest growing countries in Southeast Asia, as reflected in the blossoming of Manila’s skyline and Cebu’s malls, though this has yet to translate into substantial alleviation of poverty, as seen in the continuing growth of slums. Many problems persist from earlier decades, including not only communist and Muslim separatist insurgencies but also massive corruption.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 7,000 islands (1,000 inhabited) of the Philippines comprise a land area equal to that of Italy and a little larger than that of Arizona. If superimposed on the eastern United States, they would stretch east to west from New York City to Chi-

ago and north to south from Massachusetts to Florida. There are 11 major islands: Luzon (more than one-third of the total land area); Mindoro; Palawan; Masbate; Panay; Negros; Cebu; Bohol; Leyte; Samar; and Mindanao (another one-third of the land area).

Mountains separated by narrow valleys dominate the topography on all islands, although Luzon, Panay, and Mindanao have wider interior plains. The source of the fertility of much of the country's soils, the archipelago's volcanoes form a link in the circum-Pacific "Ring of Fire." Throughout the country, deforestation has reduced the once-thick rainforest cover, replacing it with cogon grass; in turn, this has encouraged erosion that ultimately silts up coastal waters and chokes coral reefs, already damaged by dynamite fishing and other harmful practices.

The tropical climate is dominated by the monsoon cycle: (1) from June to October the southwest monsoon carries torrential rains to most of the country; (2) from November through February the northeast monsoon brings warm, dry weather; and (3) from March to May easterly North Pacific trade winds afflict the islands with a period of extreme heat and drought. From 20 to 30 typhoons wreak havoc on sections of the country every year.

Though estimates vary rather widely, in 2008, over 90 million people inhabited the Philippines, making it the 12th most populous country on earth (after Mexico and before Vietnam); this represents a more than thirteen-fold increase since the beginning of the 20th century. Population density stands at a high of 320 persons per sq km. More than one in three of Filipinos (36.2% to be exact) are under the age of 14, constituting a heavy burden on the employed portion of the population and demanding in future years a continual expansion of education and labor opportunities; only 3.8% are 65 years or older (2005). The annual growth rate declined to 1.8% in 2005 from 2.3–2.4% in 1990, 2.6–2.75 in 1980, and 3.08 in 1970; in the period 2000–2005, 3.5 children were born for every woman of child-bearing age, down from 6.0 in 1970–1975. However, because of the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to birth control and to inconsistent government support for family planning, reductions in the population growth rate have not been as dramatic as in the neighboring countries of Thailand and Indonesia.

Between the 1950s and early 1980s, the ratio of land per agricultural worker fell by half, from 1.0 hectare (2.47 acres) per worker to 0.5 hectares (1.24 acres), meaning that even vigorously pursued land reform could not provide each farmer with sufficient land. Land scarcity has forced people to move from more- to less-densely populated regions. More significantly, Filipino cities are growing rapidly, receiving a continual influx of migrants from the countryside: in 2005, 62.7% of the population was urban, compared to 48.6% in 1990 and 31.8% in 1990. Migration within the country has in a sense spilled over the borders, creating one of the great diasporas in modern history. In 2004, 8.1 million Filipinos were estimated to be working temporarily or residing permanently abroad, in countries as diverse as the Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Italy, and the United States.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Some 70 languages are spoken as mother tongues in the Philippines, virtually all belonging to three branches (Northern,

Central, and Southern Philippine) of the Austronesian family, which includes the languages of Indonesia, Madagascar, Oceania, and aboriginal Taiwan. The eight languages with the greatest number of speakers are:

**Tagalog**, the basis of Pilipino/Filipino, the national language, spoken natively by 28% of the total Filipino population (2000 census), concentrated in Manila and the immediately contiguous provinces and extending to coastal settlements on Mindoro and Palawan;

**Cebuano**, whose native speakers include 21% of the population inhabiting the islands of Cebu, Bohol, southern Leyte, eastern Negros, and the northern and eastern coasts of Mindanao (speakers of the language not from Cebu or eastern Negros prefer to refer to their dialects as "Bisaya" or "Binisaya");

**Ilocano**, whose speakers (approximately 9% of the population) originated along a narrow coastal strip of northwestern Luzon, but who can now be found throughout northern Luzon;

**Hiligaynon** (or Ilongo), natively spoken (7.6% of the population) on Panay, western Negros, and southern Mindoro;

**Bicolano**, whose speakers (almost 6% of the population) inhabit the long southeastern "tail" of Luzon;

**Waray-Waray**, spoken (nearly 3.4%) on the island of Samar and on northern Leyte; and

**Pampango and Pangasinan**, whose speakers live respectively at the southern and northern ends the Luzon's Central Plain.

Along with a number of smaller language groups, these eight ethnolinguistic groups constitute the "lowland Christian" majority of the country. Outside this lowland Christian majority there is a great diversity of **non-Christian ethnolinguistic groups**, constituting fewer than 10% of the population and falling into four broad categories:

Muslim peoples of Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Palawan—Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug (each over 500,000 people), Samal (272,000), Yakan, Bajau, and others.

Animist highlanders of Mindanao, Palawan, and Mindoro—Mangyan (on Mindoro), Tagbanua and Palawan (on Palawan), Subanon, Bukidnon, Bagobo, Manobo, T'boli, and others (on Mindanao).

Animist highlanders of northern Luzon—Ifugao, Bontoc, Ibaloi, Kalinga, Isneg, Ilongot, and others.

Negritos—dark-complexioned, hunter-gatherers of extremely short stature, known to have lived in uplands throughout the archipelago but now confined to the northern Luzon highlands.

Among groups that have settled in the Philippines in historical times, the numerically most significant are the Chinese (mostly speakers of Hokkien), now numbering around 2.2 million people, or over 2% of the population.



*Filipino children peek through curtain slots of a passenger jeepney after a rainstorm in Manila, Philippines. The Philippines is slashed by typhoons and tropical storms each year with the heaviest rains falling from July to November. (AP Images/Aaron Favila)*

As the Spanish friars who administered most of the country chose to learn the local languages, only a small fraction of the population speak Spanish (Castilian), although numerous Castilian words became part of the native languages. Filipinos refer to Spaniards as “*Kastila*.” In some parts of the Philippines, a creolized form of Spanish, called Chabacano, is spoken as a mother tongue, with the most important concentration of speakers, 600,000, in Zamboanga on the former Spanish frontier on Mindanao.

After conquering the country, the Americans replaced Spanish with English as the language of government and education. In 1937, the Commonwealth government decided to promote the use of Tagalog, the most prestigious of the indigenous languages, as the national language, now called “Filipino/Pilipino,” though not without continuing resistance from non-Tagalogs, particularly Cebuanos. Taught in schools and heard in pop music, television programs, and movies, Tagalog-Pilipino has rapidly gained currency throughout the country, although people continue to use their local languages for most everyday purposes. Although competence in English seems to be declining (46.98% of the population, down from 63.71% in 2000), a mastery of English remains the key to professional, academic, government, and business careers. In the media, English-language publications and programming continue to command an audience; the Philippines, by one estimate is the country with the largest number of speakers of English as

an additional language, ahead of more populous Nigeria and Pakistan. It has often been remarked that the true national language is “Taglish,” a free mixture of the two languages.

Among Christians, names of Spanish origin predominate, although names from indigenous languages are common enough. While Catholicism requires Spanish baptismal names, a 19th-century Spanish decree directed Filipinos to choose Spanish surnames for taxation purposes (inhabitants of the same locality had to select surnames beginning with the same letter). Filipinos generally have three names in the following order: (1) one’s personal name, (2) one’s mother’s surname (usually appearing only as an initial), and (3) one’s father’s surname. Upon marriage, a woman’s name changes to the pattern: (1) her personal name, (2) her father’s surname, and (3) her husband’s surname.

Names vary among non-Christian Filipinos according to their ethnic group.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Mounds of earth (including termite nests and backyard garbage heaps), particularly spooky old trees, and mist-shrouded mountains are said to be home to beings that can influence human lives for good or ill. In appearance, they range from beautiful goddess-like figures, such as Mariang Makiling, who is mistress of a Luzon mountain, to monsters, such as the *kapre*, a black-skinned giant, to dwarves and elves (often pic-

tured dressed in medieval European fashions). By far the most widely feared of supernatural creatures is the *asuwang*, a being who appears as an attractive woman by day but who at night leaves behind the lower portion of its body in a hiding place and flies about in search of human victims, usually the sick, from whom it sucks the entrails with the aid of a long, tubular tongue. Inexplicable deaths in sleep are often ascribed to attacks by *asuwang*, although they are frequently also credited to *bangungot*, a fatal nightmare induced by witchcraft. Filipinos expect recently deceased kin to return in some form, as a moth, a strange breeze, or, if resentful of the living, as a wail heard in the night.

The legendary Juan Tamad (“John Lazy”) appears in a great many folk tales; his extraordinary indolence and stupidity embroil him in all sorts of misadventures, usually ending in him being beaten up by his fellow villagers or scolded by his mother. In popular imagination, the opposite of Juan Tamad is Jose Rizal (1861–1896), the national hero, a European-educated doctor, scholar, and novelist. With his execution by the Spaniards during the Revolution (despite his disinclination for a complete break with Spain), Rizal became the supreme martyr; there is even a 250,000-strong sect, the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi (“Church of the Banner of the Race”), which venerates him as a reincarnation of Christ and anticipates his return to earth to deliver his people from suffering.

## 5 RELIGION

As a result of Spanish evangelization, 81–83% of the population is Roman Catholic, making it the world’s third largest Catholic majority nation (after Brazil and Mexico). This gives the Roman Catholic Church a powerful influence on national life, despite the separation of church and state introduced by the American colonialists. Power within the Church was monopolized by Spanish friars, so that native priests being granted control of parishes became a key reform that was sought by the nationalist movement in the late 19th century, ultimately resulting in the founding of the Philippine Independent Church (also called Aglipayan after Gregorio Aglipay who established it in 1902). Claiming 3.9% of the population, the Philippine Independent Church maintains essentially Catholic practices but does not recognize the pope. Another 1.3% of Filipinos adhere to another indigenous church, the evangelical Iglesia ni Kristo (Church of Christ), founded in 1914, known for its tight hold on its members’ lives, demanding a temperate lifestyle, claiming a large portion of personal income (but also providing them with hardship support), and even dictating voting choices. The Church of Christ’s well-kept places of worship, noted for their tall, vaguely “Oriental” spires, can now be seen in every town. In addition to these, American missionaries since the beginning of the century have proselytized for various Protestant sects, such as Baptist or Methodist, which now count about 2% of the population among their followers.

First arriving in the 15th century, Islam, the majority religion in neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia, claims about 5% of the population, concentrated in the south of the country. The 3% of Filipinos classified as “tribal” highlanders still follow ancestral animist traditions to varying degrees. The country’s Chinese practice elements of Taoism and Buddhism, though many have converted to Christianity.

Belief in supernatural forces unrecognized by official Catholicism persists throughout the population. Faith healers

and spirit mediums, often employing exorcistic strategies in addition to the usual herbals and massage, continue in popularity. To a greater extent than in contemporary Europe or North America, Catholicism in the Philippines stresses the veneration of intercessor figures, such as patron saints and the Virgin Mary (who is invoked in frequent group recitations of the rosary). Filipinos concentrate on the more human face of the Christian God, as in the cults of Santo Niño (the Child Jesus, conventionally dressed as prince), especially popular in the Visayas, and of the Dead Christ, characteristic of the Bicol region. Although some do not regularly practice their faith (for instance, adult men tend to avoid weekly mass) or are skeptical of organized religion, many others express an intense personal devotion, subjecting themselves to acts of self-mortification such as the world-famous flagellations and (nonfatal) crucifixions, or joining Catholic lay organizations such as the Cursillo, the ultraconservative Opus Dei, or the charismatic El Shaddai.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As the majority of the population is Christian, Christian holidays are the most widely celebrated holidays in the Philippines. Christmas festivities begin on December 16 with the first of the *simbang gabi* or *misa de gallo*, masses held before sunrise every morning before Christmas itself. After Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, kindred families gather at one of their homes for a feast, the *Noche Buena*. On Christmas Day itself, further parties are held, with children making the rounds of relatives and godparents to pay respect to them and receive presents.

The other highlight of the year is Holy Week in March or April, celebrated by spectacles differing from locality to locality. Many towns hold a *sinakulo*, a traditional sung drama, staged over several nights and occupying many hours per segment, focusing on the sufferings of Christ but often including scenes from the Old Testament, all the way back to Genesis. Mass on the night before Easter is followed by the reenactment of the meeting of the resurrected Christ and his grieving mother, represented by life-sized statues carried in procession.

Another important nationwide festival is the Santacruzán in May, commemorating the discovery of Christ’s cross by Helen, mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman emperor. These celebrations feature processions in which the daughters of prominent families are splendidly dressed as Reina Elena (Queen Helen) and accompanied by a male escort and a cortege of other couples. On All Souls’ Day (November 2), people gather at the graves of family members for a 24-hour vigil during which, in addition to praying, they clean the graves, decorate them with candles and wreaths, eat, drink, and play cards.

Each town has an annual fiesta in honor of its patron saint. In addition to religious rituals, fiestas include public feasting, fairs, brass-band playing, performing arts, social dancing, sporting events (especially cockfights), and beauty contests.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Taking care to bury the placenta in a place where it will not be stepped on is one the many folk customs that to some extent still ensures the well-being and good fortune of a newborn child. For Christians, baptism offers an occasion for the parents to make alliances with kin and non-kin through the godparent relationship.



Around the onset of puberty, Christian boys undergo circumcision, without religious connotations; a simple lecture on hygiene by older female relatives accompanies a girl's first menstruation. Graduations from elementary, high school, and college require major celebrations. Elite families give their daughters debuts on their 18th birthday; the girl, her close female relatives, and male partners rehearse set pieces of ballroom dancing to perform in front of the guests.

Catholic weddings in the Philippines consist of the standard nuptial mass, but also include a section during which a white veil and a cord are draped over the couple's shoulder and an *arias*, an object made of coins, is presented to them, all symbols of unity and prosperity. A couple will have several sponsors ("wedding godparents"). A reception follows, to which everyone even remotely connected to the couple and their families is invited.

Funerals are extended affairs, usually postponed several days, waiting for relatives of the deceased to arrive from as far away as the United States. The body remains in the house, and there are always people keeping vigil over it, usually by playing cards or mah-jong through the night. A procession accompanied by somber music from a brass band brings the body to church for the funeral mass and takes it from there to the cemetery amid dramatic weeping from older kinswomen. Afterwards, mourners gather for nine nights to pray for the departed, and then again at longer intervals such as the first anniversary of the death. Surviving kin will avoid brightly colored outfits for some time, often attaching a black ribbon to their clothes; a widow will wear only black for a full year.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Filipino values aim to promote group solidarity and to underline individuals' mutual dependence. A person must have *hiya*, a sense of "shame," which prevents him or her from violating social norms. Behavior unacceptable to the wider society will damage the reputation of the groups to which one belongs, particularly the immediate family. Moreover, an individual should strive to earn and keep the esteem of others (in other words, protect his or her good name), a value called *amor-propio*, Spanish for "loving oneself"; those who do not care about their own "face" will not be sufficiently sensitive to the dignity of others.

Filipinos are careful to show deference to those of superior status (greater age, educational attainment, organizational rank, perceived wealth, etc.). For instance, when speaking in Tagalog-Pilipino to an elder, a social superior, or a stranger, a person inserts the particle *po* or *ho* ("sir" or "ma'am") into virtually every utterance. In order to save face, both one's own and that of others, one avoids making direct demands of others by either resorting to "beating around the bush" or enlisting a go-between. A person should show proper gratitude for the good others have done him or her and be eager to reciprocate in whatever way he or she can. Some *utang na loob* ("inner debts") can never be repaid, e.g. a child's debt to its mother for the gift of life.

In addition to the Spanish-derived "*Kumusta?*" ("How are you?"), the most common greetings translate as "Where have you just come from?" and "Where are you off to now?" In reply, no one expects to hear more than "Just over there."

It is customary to greet older relatives with a kiss on the cheek or forehead or, more traditionally, to bow in front of

them, take their hand, and press it to the forehead to receive a "blessing." While passing in front of older or higher-status people, etiquette dictates that one walk slowly, bowing the head and either clasping the hands together in front or extending one of the open palms in the direction one is going. One beckons another to come closer with a downward motion of the open palm. Pointing with the fingers is offensive; people point pursed lips in the direction they wish to indicate. When catching sight of acquaintances, quickly raising and lowering the eyebrows is sufficient sign of recognition and may substitute for small talk if one is in a hurry. Prolonged staring, however, is considered aggressive, as is holding the arms akimbo. With merely a sharp, clipped hiss, mothers can show displeasure to their children; anyone can use a softer, somewhat more prolonged hiss as a very informal means of catching someone's attention. Physical contact between members of the same sex is a common sign of affection without homosexual connotation. In embarrassing situations, the reflex is to smile to cover over the natural emotion, or sometimes also to lower the head and rub the back of the neck.

Before entering a house, a visitor announces his or her presence by saying "*Tao po*" ("A person is here, sir/ma'am") and waits to be invited in. Even unexpected guests are always served drinks and whatever snacks are available. It is polite to appear shy to accept what is offered, but the host will vigorously insist that the guest partake. The guest leaves a little on the plate to show that the host has provided more than enough. Taking formal leave of the hosts and any older or distinguished people is a must; this is usually a lengthy operation as there tends to be a line of people waiting to say goodbye, and farewells tend to ramble. Party hosts always wrap leftovers for the departing guests to take home. Similarly, those returning from long-distance trips are expected to bring back presents (*pasa-lubong*) for those remaining at home.

In the past, a suitor stood below the door of his interest's raised house and serenaded her, often with companions at his side literally to provide accompaniment. If the girl liked him, she could invite him in to chat with her and her family. Contact between the sexes unmonitored by elders is increasingly common (such as in discos), but same-age chaperones and group dates continue to make "courting" a public affair. This is becoming more so as Filipinos introduce their relatives and friends to likely partners or approach their interests by asking the help of a common friend. Public displays of affection, though no longer taboo, are still subject to social disapproval; girls, in particular, are careful not to appear too free with boys. In urban areas today, though usually only after much dating, many young people engage in discreet premarital sex, often going to "love motels" because of lack of privacy at home. Many young men have their first sexual experience with a prostitute.

According to survey data plotted on the Inglehart-Welzel World Values Map, Filipinos are moderately more tradition-oriented than secular-rational-oriented and slightly more survival-oriented than self-expression-oriented (most resembling Peruvians, who are slightly more tradition-oriented, South Africans and Iranians who are slightly more tradition- and survival oriented, and Indonesians, who are both somewhat less traditional- and less self-expression-oriented).



Children throw confetti to dancing women wearing traditional dress during a celebration of the feast of Sto. Nino, Manila, Philippines. (AP Images/Pat Roque)

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In 2005, per capita GDP, adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity, stood at us \$5,137 a year, placing the Philippines in the category of lower middle-income nations. Its ranking in the United Nations Human Development Index is 90 (out of 177 countries ranked). Countries with similar HDI's are Peru, Lebanon, Tunisia, Fiji, and Iran. Its HDI ranking is eleven places higher than its ranking according to GNP per capita (PPP), indicating that its population is somewhat better off in terms of health and education than per capita income alone would provide for (Tunisia's per capita GDP, adjusted for PPP, is 60% higher than the Philippines, but its HDI is slightly lower).

Some 30% of the population lives below the government-set poverty line (although the sharing of resources by more affluent family members and relatives working overseas mitigates somewhat the hardship of many of the poor). While recent economic growth has benefited a growing portion of the population, most of the nation's wealth remains in the hands of a small fraction of the population—elite families (some Spanish mestizo but mostly Chinese mestizo and Chinese-Filipino) who own plantations and other large enterprises. Nearly half the population (43%) lives on less than two dollars' equivalent a day, and 14.8% on less than a dollar a day. The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line (earning less than the amount needed to provide themselves a daily intake of 2,100 calories and other basic needs) has declined dra-

matically over the years, from 40.1% in 1976 to 16.58% in 2007. This last figure, however, represents a recovery from the situation in the aftermath of the economic collapse of 1997–1998; in 1990 the figure was 15% while the average for the years 1990–2004 was 27.1%. As measured by its Gini coefficient of 44.5, income inequality in the Philippines is severe by world standards (it is greater than in Japan, 29.9; Indonesia, 34.3; and the United States 40.8; though far less than in Brazil, 57). The richest 20% earns 9.4 times as much as the poorest 20%. Moreover, there is wide variation in the standard of living from region to region and between urban and rural areas.

Spanish colonialism dictated a settlement pattern that had at its core a *población*, a town laid out in a grid plan focused on a church plaza. The *población* was in turn the center for a number of *barrios*, villages surrounded by fields. Finally, the *barrios* themselves had often remote satellite hamlets, *sitios* with a small chapel visited only intermittently by the priest permanently resident in the *población*.

The *bahay kubo* or nipa hut, a two- or three-room structure with bamboo walls and floors and a cogon-grass or palm-leaf roof raised on wooden pillars, has provided housing for the peasants, who make up the vast majority of Filipinos, until recent times. Animals, primarily pigs, chickens, and a water buffalo, are kept below the house. . In less-developed parts of the country, this remains the most common type of house. In Sulu, 1990 census figures count nearly 90% of houses as having

neither solid roofs nor solid outer walls; the national average is 44.4% and 39.1%, respectively.

In contemporary towns, houses typically have two stories with wooden walls, corrugated iron roofs, and cement foundations. Wealthier residences adopt Spanish elements, such as tiled roofs and floors, walls of brick or stone, and iron grillwork on windows, fences, and gates. Whereas traditional neighborhoods juxtaposed rich and poor houses, modern urban development has favored: the growth of upper-class residential areas surrounded by walls, with entrances guarded by security personnel; middle-class subdivisions (including gated condominium complexes); and squatter settlements whose houses are improvised from scrap materials and lack utilities. About 25% of the Manila population was squatters in the early 1980s.

In 2004, 80.2% of households had access to safe drinking water within their residence, 86.2% to a sanitary toilet, and 79.7% to electricity. About 64.4% of households owned their residence, and for 70.5% of households that residence was a “strong housing unit,” defined as one with roof and outer walls of galvanized iron/aluminum, tile, concrete, brick, stone, and asbestos. In 2000, 1 in 3 households had a refrigerator, up from 1 in 5 in 1990 and 1 in 20 in 1970. About 46.1% of households in 2000 still disposed of garbage by burning it in their backyards, although the percentage of households that had their garbage picked up by a truck rose to 32.5% from just 15.8% in 1990.

Life expectancy has risen dramatically over the last generation: standing at 51.2 years for both sexes in 1960 and 58.1 in 1970–1975, figures for 1990 reached 69 years for women and 63 years for men, and for 2005 it increased to 73.3 and 68.9 respectively. Infant mortality was halved between 1950 (101 deaths per 1,000 live births) and 1989 (51.6 deaths); it was halved yet again by 2005 when it ran to only 25 per 1,000 live births. Still, 1 in 5 infants were underweight at birth and around 1 in 3 children under 5 years old were underweight and under height; 18% of the general population was undernourished (1996–2005 averages, down from 26% in 1990–1992). In 2005, 13.78% of deaths were due to intestinal tract infections. Communicable diseases were the cause of 25% in 1980 and 75% in 1923. About 41.8% of households included a member enrolled in the government health care plan; access to physicians and hospitals remains limited in rural areas, where there were only 58 physicians per 100,000 people. Individuals still consult traditional healers and employ herbal remedies.

Telephone access is spreading rapidly. Although the number of telephone landlines per 1,000 people only rose from 10 in 1990 to 41 in 2005, there were 419 cell phone subscribers for every 1000 people in that year. The number of internet users has reached 54 per 1000 people.

In 1990, only 7.9% of households owned a motor vehicle; by 2000, the figure had risen to 12.2%. Within urban neighborhoods or in the countryside (where *kalesas*, horse drawn carts, can still be seen), people take tricycles (motorcycles with a passenger car on the side). Brightly painted *jeepneys* (originally U.S. military surplus jeeps with back sections lengthened to accommodate passengers) are the cheapest way to get around cities and between towns. Buses, some air-conditioned, also carry passengers within cities and between more distant locations. Commuting to and within cities, metropolitan Manila above all, consumes much time due to extreme traffic congestion. Interisland travel is by large ferries or passenger ships or,

more expensively, by airplane; the traditional *bangka*, an outrigger canoe, is still in common use for fishing and local transport. Overall, per capita carbon dioxide emissions are still low, at 1.0 tons in 2004 (up from 0.7 in 1990).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is Filipino society’s central institution; to it individuals subordinate their own interests and frequently their obligations to other social groups, their workplace, or the government. The typical household consists of a married couple, children, grandparents, and sometimes servants, who are common in middle-class households. Children generally live at home until marriage, and often newlywed couples stay with either set of parents for some time. Older children, as well as grandparents and other relatives, aid the mother in caring for younger children; it is common for older children to sacrifice for the younger, such as by working to put them through school.

Great respect is shown for elders. Older siblings are addressed with special terms. In Tagalog-Pilipino, “Ate” is used for an older sister and “Kuya” for an older brother. Older cousins (as well as friends and associates) are also addressed with these titles. Traditionally, a person would address a younger cousin as “older sibling” if the cousin’s parents were older than his or her own parents. Filipinos have a bilateral kinship system that bonds them equally to relatives from both the mother’s and father’s sides. Relations between cousins of as far as the second and even third degree are close. Married couples are expected to maintain equal closeness with both spouses’ kin groups, though this is not always achieved. Inheritances are divided equally among the children of the deceased.

The Catholic sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and marriage give Filipinos opportunities to establish or reinforce relationships with non-kin through asking non-kin to become godparents to one’s children; these godparents can be old friends or individuals one wishes to make alliances with or seek the patronage of, though very often they are actually one’s own relatives. The godfather and godmother of one’s child are called one’s *kumpare* and *kumare* (from Spanish *compadre* and *comadre*), and one’s own godfather and godmother are called *ninong*, *ninang* (from Spanish *padrino* and *padrina*).

Individuals are free to choose their marriage partners, but family approval is an important consideration, often a decisive one. In agreement with Catholic doctrine, divorce (though not separation) is illegal except among Muslims and other non-Christians. Often, a man takes a mistress (*querida*), with whom he may have a second family. The need to work away from home or even outside the country has produced numerous “incomplete” households, which can be where one parent (often the father) must raise the family with only the occasional presence of the other, where grandparents must care for their grandchildren, or where elder siblings must care for their younger siblings. Illegitimate births have become common and do not always lead to marriage as was the case in the past because today there are fewer stigmas around this situation.

Filipinos are relatively tolerant of homosexuality. Though often the object of good-natured teasing, the *bakla*, the effeminate man with a “woman’s heart” (*pusong babae*) has an established place in society (*bakla* beauty contests are popular entertainment for the general public).

## 11 CLOTHING

The Spanish pressured Christianized Filipinos into abandoning the more “immodest” Southeast Asian articles of dress such as the G-string, but prohibited them from fully adopting European fashions. *Indio* (native) men wore collarless, long-sleeved, untucked shirts (*baro*) and loose pants that could be rolled up easily for heavy work. *Indio* women wore wide-necked, wide-sleeved short blouses and ankle-length skirts; in public, they draped a shawl over their shoulders and wrapped a *tapis*, a small piece of cloth, over the skirt (the *tapis* was in fact the skirt of pre-Christian times). The wealthier *mestizo* (mixed-blood) men added collars and cuffs to the *baro*, thus creating what would become the male national costume, the *barong tagalog*, finely embroidered and woven of pineapple leaf fibers. *Mestizo* women preferred fuller skirts (or sometimes ones ending in a long train) and butterfly sleeves, developing the *terno*, the later female national costume.

Nowadays, for formal occasions men wear either the *barong tagalog* or Western-style suits, and women wear either a modified *terno* or Western-style dresses. Suitable home attire very often consists of no more than shorts with or without a tank top for men, and a *maong*, a loose one-piece dress with wide sleeves and open neck for women. For younger people, t-shirts and jeans are common streetwear.

## 12 FOOD

Except for the 20% of the population (in the central Visayas) for whom maize is the staple, boiled rice is the indispensable component of a full meal, with all other foods being termed *ulam* (accompaniments). For peasants, the *ulam* may consist of no more than dried fish and some sliced tomato or onion. Only for the comparatively well to do is meat a regular part of the diet; most consume meat only at special celebrations (often in the form of *lechon*, roast whole pig). Common preparations include soups heavy with vegetables and meat or seafood (such as *sinigang* and *tinola*), meat or seafood simmered in coconut milk (*ginataan*), Chinese-derived noodle dishes (such as *pansit*), stewed meat dishes of Spanish origin (such as *adobo* or *kaldereta*), or, most simply, freshly grilled fish. Party menus emphasize dishes inspired by Chinese or Spanish cuisine, such as *lumpia* (spring rolls) and *paella* (a dish of meat, seafood, and rice cooked together).

Seasonings tend to be simpler than elsewhere in Southeast Asia, with ordinary dishes rarely employing more than garlic, ginger, peppercorns, soy sauce, fish sauce, and shrimp paste. Although Muslim peoples and Christian Bicolanos cook with hot chilies as much as Indonesians or Thai, elsewhere in the country one regularly encounters chili only as a flavoring for vinegar.

Aside from a Spanish custard, *letseplan*, and rich American-style baked goods, desserts consist of a variety of rice- or cassava-based cakes. A wide selection of fruits is available, such as numerous types of bananas (bananas are sometimes even eaten alongside the main meal).

Associated with peasant ways, the traditional mode of eating has been to scoop up food from flat dishes with the fingers of the right hand (the left hand being reserved exclusively for washing oneself after defecation). It is considered more refined to eat with a spoon and fork (using the fork in the left hand to push food on to a spoon in the right hand). Individual portions

are not separated; rather, everyone takes from common dishes laid out in the center of the table.

Breakfast usually consists of leftovers from the previous evening’s dinner (the remaining rice is often fried with garlic) or, alternatively of bread bought fresh from bakeries and eaten with coffee. Other common breakfast dishes consist of fried rice, fried eggs, and a meat product (longanisa sausage, *tosino* bacon, beef *tapa*, or spam). The heaviest meal of the day is lunch for country people (to satisfy hunger built up working in the morning, the coolest part of the day) and dinner for city people (when the entire family can gather together). Taking an afternoon snack, called the *merienda*, often virtually a meal in itself, is common for those who can afford it.

Smoking is common among men, but women smokers are rare. For a mild stimulant, some (far fewer than in the past) chew betel nut. Wines, made from palm sap, sugarcane, or rice, are the traditional alcoholic beverages, but today beer predominates. Small groups of men often gather at night on the porch of a house to chat and drink beer with *pulutan*, snacks ranging from peanuts or the eggs of quail or duck (the last often a fully formed chick in the shell, called *balut*) to grilled fish or shrimp.

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2003, literacy stood at 93.4%, a 10% increase over the 1970 level, though a minimal change from 1990. Elementary school lasts for six years beginning at age seven, and high school lasts for four years (seven years of education is compulsory). While 94% of the relevant age group was enrolled in elementary school, which is free, in 2005, only 61% of the relevant age group attended high school that year because poorer families cannot spare the money for fees, as well as travel costs to the often distant high schools, and need teenagers to help in the fields or otherwise earn income for the family. Of high school graduates, a large percentage go on to college, ranging from low-quality “diploma mills” to excellent universities, the most prestigious being the state-run University of the Philippines, the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila, and the Dominican-run University of Santo Tomas, which has been in existence longer than Harvard. About 31.2% of the relevant age cohort is enrolled in a tertiary educational institution. In 1990, 12.9% of the population held an academic degree. In addition to the public school system, private schools abound at all levels, teaching 7.3% of students at the primary level and 30.8% at the secondary, usually run by the Catholic Church or other Christian sects; Chinese and Muslim communities also have their own schools.

American policy promoted mass public education, the beginnings of which date back to 1863 under the Spanish. Since then, Filipinos have held a deep reverence for education, seeing it as a means of freeing oneself from manual labor by entering more prestigious occupations as doctors, lawyers, or, at least, schoolteachers. Families are willing to sacrifice a great deal to send a child to college. A major national problem has been providing the great number of college-educated people with jobs commensurate with their qualifications; many emigrate to attain the living standard proper to their educational attainments.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The most prominent types of traditional group music making are the *rondalla*, which is an ensemble of Hispanic plucked and

bowed string instruments to accompany social dancing and suitors' serenades, and the municipal brass band, whose repertoire includes Italian opera overtures and other orchestral music to contribute to the gaiety of fiestas. Traditional songs (for instance the *kundiman*, a melancholy love song) are generally reminiscent of Spanish forms; certain types demand operatic vocal delivery. Similarly, modern vocal music follows American pop models with a preference for the sentimental and the Broadway-style dramatic (although rap in Tagalog-Pilipino does exist).

Folk dances include those that have analogues elsewhere in Southeast Asia, such as the *tinikling*, where a couple executes intricate figures while skipping through two bamboo poles being clapped together at an accelerating pace. Others are adaptations of European couple dances such the waltz, polka, and mazurka. Both disco and ballroom dancing have long been popular (especially Latin American styles such as the cha-cha).

At the time of the Spanish arrival, Filipinos were using their own alphabet (one derived via Javano-Malay or Cham scripts that in turn derived from Indian ones), incising messages (though not literature, which remained oral) on palm leaves or bamboo. Word play ranged from riddles (*bugtong*) to extended poetical debates (*balagtasan*), an integral part of courtship; formal declamation remains an important art. Long verse narratives, from retellings of Christ's Passion to heroic tales set in mythical lands, came to be composed in native languages; the culmination of this tradition was the Tagalog classic *Florante at Laura*, composed by Francisco Baltazar in the 1830s. By the last decades of the 19th century, Filipinos were producing poetry and novels in Spanish. Jose Rizal's patriotic poem "*Mi ultimo adiós*" and his anti-colonial novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El filibusterismo* are the most famous examples. Under the Americans, writers switched to English, a tradition that continues today. Nick Joaquin is one of its most renowned heirs. Meanwhile, poetry, prose, and drama continue to be written in Tagalog-Pilipino and the other indigenous languages, although Filipino novels face strong competition from imported English-language books. For most people, consumption of literature in native languages is confined to stories (*nobela*) appearing serially in comics.

## 15 WORK

In 2004, over one in three Filipino workers (37%) was employed in agriculture, a dramatic reduction from the 1980 figures of one in two (49.2%). Some 70% of agricultural workers do not own the land they work, working either as tenant farmers or plantation laborers. The staple crops are rice, maize, and sweet potatoes. Wet-rice fields dominate the rural landscape, in some places as terraces climbing steep mountainsides. The principal cash crops are coconuts, bananas, pineapples, sugar, tobacco, and abaca (hemp). Livestock includes pigs, chickens, ducks, and goats. Raising cattle is limited to the few areas with suitable grazing lands; *carabao* (water buffalo) pull plows and carts and also provide meat and milk. Fishing provides many rural families with a livelihood or at least supplementary income. Complex networks of bamboo traps cover lakes and other bodies of water.

Manufacturing and construction employ 15% of the working population. Traditionally, industry has focused on producing consumer goods for the domestic market and the

processing of exported primary agricultural products. Recent years, however, have seen the growth of export-oriented manufacture, such as computer components assembly; though to a lesser extent than in neighboring Asian countries, Japanese and South Korean firms have outsourced many of their production operations to factories in government-established special economic zones in the Philippines, such as the one on the territory of the former U.S. naval base at Subic Bay.

Services accounted for 48% of all workers. Considerable stigma was traditionally attached to manual labor and mercantile occupations, though careers in business and technical professions, such as engineering, have recently gained greatly in respectability. Thanks to having one of the largest populations of young highly educated English-speakers in the world and low labor costs (in this respect resembling India, the world leader), the Philippines has become a major center of the call center industry; in 2004, it employed over a million people (largely in the Metro Manila region) and contributed to 12% of GDP.

Unemployment is high, estimated at 7.9% in 2007 (the 2004 figure reached 10.9%). Over 45% of the working population was employed in the informal sector.

Finally, the country's economic difficulties have pushed many people to emigrate in search of work. Although Filipinos already sought education and employment abroad in late Spanish times and Filipino migration to the United States began with the U.S. conquest of the Philippines at the very end of the 19th century, large-scale migration there and to elsewhere in the world only began in the 1970s. A command of English and a high level of education giving them a competitive in the world labor market, Filipinos can now be found in every region of the world, in over 200 countries and territories. In 2004, 8.1 million Filipinos, equivalent to nearly 10% of the population, were estimated to be abroad, mainly in the Middle East, Pacific Asia, North America, and Europe. These are divided into three categories: 3.6 million legally working abroad (termed "OFWs"/"Overseas Filipino Workers"); 1.3 million working illegally (mainly in the United States and Malaysia); and 3.2 million residing permanently abroad (termed "balikbayan," "returnees to the homeland). About 1.4 million had settled in the United States, where they constituted the second-largest group among the foreign-born, after Mexicans.

About 20% of all Filipino OFWs work as shipmen, and 25% of all shipmen worldwide are Filipinos. Filipinos are also particularly prominent in health care, (women) domestic service, and (men) construction work. Since 1992, women have outnumbered men among labor emigrants. Estimated at us\$8.5 billion in 2004 and expected to surpass us\$10 billion in 2005, remittances are essential to the economy as a source of hard currency, even surpassing the value of foreign direct investment; the Philippines is the world's fifth largest recipient of remittances (after India, China, Mexico, and France). Establishing a whole agency for the purpose, the government has institutionalized its management of labor migration/labor export, aiming to deploy 1 million OFWs annually. The country has developed a "culture of migration" under which true "ambition" is equated with the willingness to work abroad and 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 2 children 10–12 years of age express the desire to do so.

## 16 SPORTS

*Sipa* is an indigenous game in which two teams of one to four players each hit a wickerwork ball with their knees, legs, or feet over a net or across a circle. Introduced by the Americans, baseball and basketball are popular. The avidly followed professional basketball league pits teams identified by the companies that own them, rather than with cities as in the United States. Fond of watching boxing, many Filipinos also practice *arnis*, an indigenous martial art employing bamboo rods 1 m (3 ft) long. Cockfighting commands a fanatical following. Held during Sundays, public holidays, and fiestas in mini-stadiums, cockfights are the occasion for intense gambling.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In 2000, three in four households had a radio, and one in two had a television (up from two in three households and one in three respectively in 1990). Domestically produced programming is strong on talent shows, comedies, fantasy series, and tearjerker family dramas and romance stories.

Traditional theater consisted of the *comedia* or *moro-moro*, which are verse-plays depicting warfare between Christians and Muslims, usually ending in the conversion of the former. From the end of the 19th century, the *zarzuela*, a Spanish-derived operetta sung in local languages, has become popular. Film tickets are comparatively cheap, and cinema attendance rates are among the world's highest. The Philippines possesses one of the world's most prolific film industries, which turns out mainly comedies, action films (frequently punctuated with shoot-outs and kung fu), and melodramas (for which typical plots would be an ill-fated romance or the reunion of a dispersed family or the reconciliation of a divided one). For both television and cinema viewing, American imports attract a wide audience who generally can understand the dialogue. In recent years, foreign programs dubbed into Tagalog, such as Japanese anime and Korean and Latin American soap operas, have become more and more popular, not least because they express cultural values much closer to those of Filipinos than American shows do.

Children commonly play *sungka*, a game of skill in which players move cowrie shells around a course of two rows of seven holes carved in a wooden board. Every neighborhood will have chess enthusiasts, and the Philippines has produced many world-class players. Card games and *mah-jong*, a rummy-like Chinese game played with ivory tiles, regularly involve the gambling of large sums of money. There are 4 personal computers for every 100,000 people, but internet cafes are common not only in cities but also in provincial towns, where the clientele consists largely of young people playing computer games.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES

A variety of crafts are practiced by individual Filipino ethnic groups, including woodcarving, weaving textiles, baskets, and mats, and tie dying.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Under the civil war conditions during the Marcos and Aquino regimes, human rights abuses were common, with government forces, insurgents, and anti-insurgent vigilantes victimizing noncombatant civilians as a matter of course. Under the Ramos and later regimes, the more prominent problem was violence

by criminal elements, and by supposedly noncriminal elements such as corrupt law-enforcers and elected officials. Filipinos have little faith in their justice system since the wealthy and powerful are able to buy the verdicts they want. Gambling (most notoriously the hugely popular *jueteng* numbers game), drug abuse, and the violence, criminality, and government corruption associated with them are major problems. Population growth has slowed but continues to overwhelm the country's economic, educational, ecological, and other systems. In 2008 a reproductive health bill mandating government funding for contraception and sex education was being hotly debated. Opponents, in addition to invoking Catholic moral principles, argue the economic benefits of a large, young population and the negative practical consequences of a shrinking, aging population as well as assert that calling for population control is a substitute for seeking genuine structural social reforms.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Filipino women have approached equality with men more closely than in most Asian countries. The country's Gender-Related Development Index is 0.768, slightly less than its HDI of 0.771. Although Filipino men often project machismo, women wield considerable power. Filipino wives manage family finances, dispensing pocket money to their husbands just as to their children. In terms of literacy and primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment, rates for Filipino women (which are high) have surpassed those for men (most dramatically, a fourth more women are in tertiary education than men). Because of the gender preferences of jobs such as factory work and domestic service (as well as, unfortunately, prostitution and nightclub work), rural women are freer than men to find urban employment to support their families. Women are well represented in the professions, business, and the government, although women are still in the minority among the holders of top positions (women hold 22.1% of the seats in the national legislature and 25% of ministerial level positions). The country has had two woman presidents, Corazon Aquino and Gloria Arroyo, and Imelda Marcos, in addition to being first lady, served as governor of Metro-Manila, minister of human settlements, and special envoy to foreign leaders.

Reflecting the pervasive influence of Catholicism, both abortion and divorce are prohibited (Muslims, however, may divorce as permitted by their religion). In 2000–2005, the fertility rate stood at 3.5 births per woman. 92% of women from the richest 20% of society were attended by a skilled health professional while giving birth; the proportion was only 25% for the poorest 20% of society. About 170 women died in childbirth for every 100,000 live births during the period 1990–2004. For the richest 20% of society, infant mortality ran to 19 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to 21 per 1,000 live births; for the poorest 20% of society, the figures were respectively 42 and 66.

Despite enjoying empowerment in many contexts, in others many Filipino women continue to face exploitation and abuse. In export-processing zones where young women form the major component of the labor force in factories owned by multinational corporations, the government does not enforce laws protecting workers' rights. Filipino women working abroad as domestic servants often suffer inferior working and living conditions as well as physical brutality and sexual harassment

from employers. Coerced prostitution, human trafficking, and domestic violence are significant problems.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# GAOSHAN

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Milin; Sanmei; Liuqiu; Amei; Taiyar; Paiwan; Bunong; Lukai; Beinan; Zou; Saixia; Yamei and Pingpu

**LOCATION:** China; Taiwan

**POPULATION:** 500,000

**LANGUAGE:** Taiyer, Saide, Zou, Sha, Ka, Paiwan, Ameisi, Bunong, Lukai, Saixiate, Beinan, Shao, Chinese

**RELIGION:** Traditional beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Gaoshan belonged to the Min-Yue people (inhabiting part of present-day Fujian and Guangdong provinces) and, more remotely, to the Baiyue of ancient China. The history of the Gaoshan is closely related to that of Taiwan, because the Gaoshan are the aboriginals of that island. According to historical documents of the Three Kingdoms (220–265), their ancestors were divided into tribes, the members of which were called "Milin." Public affairs were administered by the tribe members themselves. Agriculture and livestock husbandry appeared in the 7th century, complementing hunting and fishing.

The historical records of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) describe their trade with the coastal inhabitants of mainland China. Between 1563 and 1603, the Japanese army invaded Taiwan several times, but it finally was defeated by the military forces of the imperial Ming. In 1624, the Netherlands' army intruded into southwest Taiwan, where it established fortresses and occupied the land. The Spanish army made incursions into the northern part of the island in 1626; however, the Dutch vanquished the Spaniards in 1642 and replaced them in northern Taiwan. An uprising led by Guo Huaiyi against Dutch domination in 1652 failed. In 1661, a former general of the imperial Ming, Zheng Chenggong, better known as Koxinga (1624–1662), setting out from Xiamen and Jinmen on the mainland, succeeded in landing his army on Taiwan. After nine months of fierce fighting, the Dutch invaders were compelled to lay down their arms.

In 1683, the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) unified Taiwan. At that time, there were approximately 300 villages of Gaoshan people who had preserved important aspects of their primitive family type, clan organization, and religious beliefs. From the 17th century onward, there was a continuous flow of Chinese migrants to Taiwan, mainly Minnan from southern Fujian Province and Hakka (or Kejia) from Guangdong Province. In 1786, an armed conflict between the Gaoshan and the Chinese erupted and continued for more than one year but ended in a stalemate. Japan occupied Taiwan after the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. The Gaoshan and the Chinese united in opposing Japanese domination, uprisings flaring up every other year. An uprising in 1930 wiped out more than 4,000 Japanese soldiers. Following the end of the Second World War (1939–45), Taiwan returned to China in 1945.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Gaoshan people number about 500,000, living mainly in mountainous areas, in the eastern coast plains of Taiwan,

and on Lanyu Island; they are also found in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Fujian. They form a small portion of Taiwan's overall population of 24 million. The Taiwan Mountain chain extends from north to south, exerting a strong influence on the weather. Large areas of Taiwan, especially in the center and in the south, boast spring-like weather year-round. The abundant rainfall and rich soil make it possible to reap two rice crops a year and even three in the central and southern parts of the island. Taiwan is famous for its abundant production of sugarcane, tea, and fruits. There are vast forested areas; the production of camphor accounts for 70% of the world's output. The fishing industry, especially on the Pacific coast, is thriving. Mining is also an important economic activity. Since the 1970s Taiwan has become a leader in the productivity of its manufacturing sector, including both light and heavy industries. It is obvious that the Gaoshan have not benefited as much as could have been desired from this economic boom.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Gaoshan languages are classified as belonging to the Austronesian family, Indonesia group. They have no writing system. The Gaoshan who have different names speak different languages. More than 20 languages have been identified, of which 13 are still in use. These languages can be divided into three groups: the Taiyar group, including Taiyer and Saide languages; the Zou group, including Zou, Sha, and Ka languages; and the Paiwan group, including Paiwan, Ameisi, Bunong, Lukai, Saixiate, Beinan, and Shao languages. In addition, there is a Yamei language on Lanyu Island. Most of these language groups are mutually unintelligible. The Pingpu branch of the Gaoshan now speaks Chinese.

Chinese historical documents recorded some of the ancient names of the early inhabitants of Taiwan: Sanmei during the Three Kingdoms, Liuqiu in the Sui Dynasty (581–618), etc. After the Tang Dynasty (618–907), Malays and other nationalities migrated to Taiwan successively and assimilated with the aboriginals. They were called Dongfan and Yi in the Ming Dynasty and Fanzhu and Tufan in the Qing Dynasty. During the Japanese occupation, they were called Fanzhu and Gaobushaozhu. The inhabitants of Taiwan other than Gaoshan usually call them Shandiren or Shanbao, which means “mountain people.” Because of their different languages and locations, they were divided into the Amei, Taiyar, Paiwan, Bunong, Lukai, Beinan, Zou, Saixia, Yamei, and Pingpu.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The Gaoshan have a rich mythology. On Lanyu Island, it is said that the Yami are the offspring of two male gods, one of whom appeared from the splitting of a rock, the other from a bamboo rent in two by a seismic sea wave. When the gods' knees bumped against each other, there emerged a man and a woman, the remote ancestors of the Yami. According to the legend of the Saixia, a long time ago the almighty God created a number of men and women who led peaceful lives in the mountains. One day, a violent typhoon attacked them. Torrential rains poured down for days. Suddenly, an avalanche of water and mudflow rushed down the mountain. People, engulfed, disappeared in an instant. Only one man was lucky enough to escape. Viewing the bodies of the people, the almighty God was very sad. When he saw the only man alive, an aspiration to recreate mankind welled up in his heart. He put the man's skin

and flesh into the sea, and these became a multitude of people swimming to the land, setting up villages and settling down. God called them “Sasite,” the ancestors of the Saixia. He then put the intestine of that man into the sea. Another group of people appeared. They were the ancestors of the Chinese who dwell in Taiwan. They lived a long (*chang*) life because they came from the intestine (*chang*) of that man.

There is also in the legends of the Gaoshan a hero called Ali. He was a brave and good-natured hunter. One day, he saw two girls attacked by a tiger. He saved them from its jaws. Then came an old man, who seized the girls. When Ali drove him away, the sky turned dark all around, with lightning accompanied by peals of thunder. The girls told him that they were fairy maidens. Since they had stayed too long in the world, they would suffer a cruel punishment; his rescue had only made matters worse. Subsequently, the Jade Emperor ordered the Thunder God to kill all the people as well as the plants and animals in the area where Ali had saved the girls. The girls sought to draw the thunder against themselves at a barren mountain not far away, where the fire could not spread. Thinking that it was he who stirred up all the trouble, Ali ran to the barren mountain. He cried loudly to the Thunder God: “It is all my fault, so punish me if you want!” A deafening thunderclap smashed the body of Ali to pieces. Since there were no trees or bushes on the barren mountain, the fire died out quickly. After his death, the barren mountain was covered by a thick forest. Deeply moved by his heroic behavior, the two fairy maidens turned themselves into grass and flowers. In memory of this nice young man, the mountain has been called “Alishan” since then. It is now a very famous tourist resort.

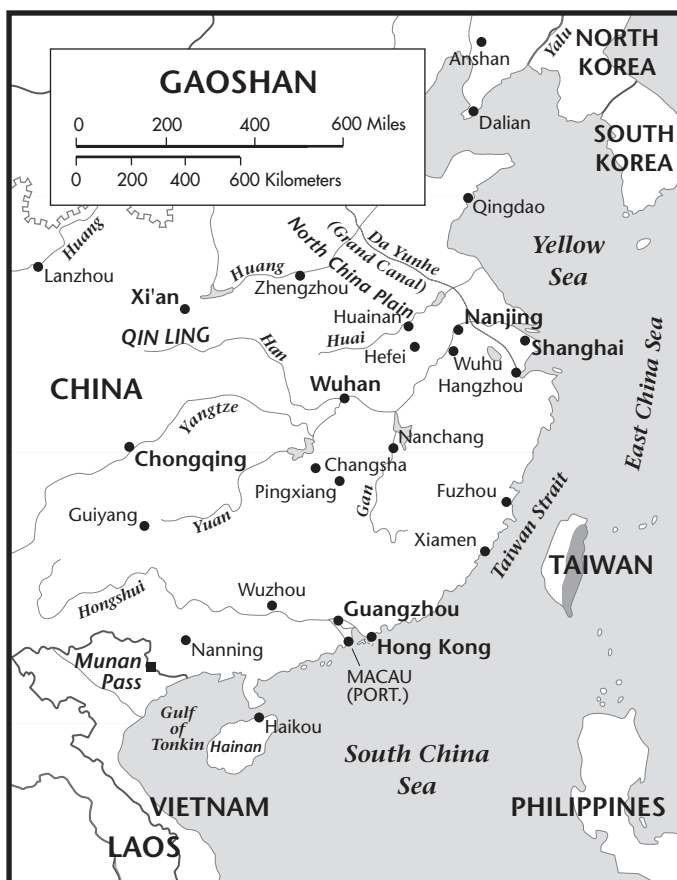
### **5 RELIGION**

The Gaoshan have preserved many primitive beliefs and rituals. They believe the spirits are in all things around them and revere a great many gods, such as the gods of the universe, of Heaven, of nature, as well as a variety of spirits and goblins. However, the gods they worship are not the same from one district to the next. Witchcraft is widespread. There are various talismanic scriptures. Methods of divination include birds, dreams, water, bamboo, rice, and the wooden dipper.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Gaoshan holidays, based on the lunar calendar, are closely related to their work and to their religion. On lunar New Year's Eve (Western calendar, between January 20 and February 19), members of each household are reunited for a dinner party held around a large table, on which a chafing dish is the central dish. People are entertained with drama in the temple. It is humorously called “creditor avoiding drama,” because some people hide themselves among the spectators to dodge the creditors at the end of the year—the time for settling accounts. On the Spring Festival (Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20), they call on each other's family, saying a few auspicious words, and participate in recreational activities. The Good Year Festival coincides with traditional holidays in August, lasting for about 10 days. They offer sacrifice to ancestors. Many centuries ago, the sacrifice included a human head. Later on, it was replaced by a half-year pig. Actually, a series of sacrificial rituals are held, including the family ritual, the village ritual, the road ritual, the rally ritual, the moon watching ritual, the god touring ritual, the god greeting ritual, the sing-





ing and dancing ritual, etc. The ceremonies are presided over, in turn, by the headmen of the clans. On the first day of the festival, matches should not be used for lighting the stove; they are replaced by drilling wood to make a fire. Grand performances of dancing and singing are held for entertainment. The Bumper Harvest Festival is held in October, lasting for three or four days. More than 100 wine jars are placed in an open space. The ceremony is presided over by the headman of the tribe, who dips his fingers in the wine and sprinkles it to his left and right, in the air and on the earth. This is the libation for the gods and ancestors. Then all of the participants dance hand in hand while singing and drinking. The Fifth Year Festival is so named because it is held only once every five years on a selected date after the autumn harvest. For the occasion, a sacrificial rite for the ancestors is held. Participants celebrate the bumper harvest and enjoy the entertainment.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

A tradition handed down from the ancient Yue on the mainland requires that youngsters reaching adulthood should have one or two canine teeth extracted. This rite of passage, which also includes tattooing, is still practiced in some districts today. In other areas, lovers will each extract two incisors and exchange them as a token of their lasting affection.

The Gaoshan generally practice ground burial. In some areas, however, the body is buried inside the house beneath the bed of the deceased. They put the body inside a box made of wooden planks, which also contains half of the deceased's clothes, a dark blue cloth three meters (about one yard) in

length or a deer skin. In other districts, the box is made of stone slabs, cubic in shape, and the body is put in a sitting posture with the knees flexed. In certain districts, they practice naked burial. The clothes are completely taken off and the body is wrapped with deer skin. Four relatives carry it to the mountain. They open the deer skin, put the body inside a cavern, wrap it with a few pieces of the dead person's clothes, and finally cover it with earth. They consider that the dead body does not need clothes any more, which should be offered to the soul.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Gaoshan are very hospitable. Guests are received by the host and offered not only a cup of tea, but also some bread or biscuits.

Every youngster is free to express his or her affections. For instance, the Taiyar young man conveys his feeling through whistles. Some Amei girls go to a young man's family to present a gift and to express their love-sickness. In some districts, a girl's parents build up a room for their daughter when she reaches adulthood, where she may live by herself. The young men will come to play musical instruments to express their passions. One of them will be invited to her room to talk about love. Before long, they will go hand in hand to her parents, announcing that they have decided to be life-long companions. A wedding ceremony will be held.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most Gaoshan houses have wooden structures, thatched roofs, and small square windows. The beds encircle the room. Some houses are built of stone, roofed with flags and floored with slab stones. Coastal Gaoshan double the wall thickness of their house with planks inside and cobbles on the exterior. The floor is two-to-three meters (about two-to-three yards) below the ground. This is an ingenious means devised by the Gaoshan to withstand the typhoons, which yearly hit the east coast with formidable strength.

Communications and transport are very difficult for Gaoshan inhabiting the high mountains. They throw sliding ropes, suspension bridges made of rattan and bamboo, and arch bridges, across the canyons. They live in compact communities, each consisting of 60–70 families. A large village community may accommodate 600–700 households. There is public land, a part of which may be used freely by the community members. There are also collective activities, such as sacrificial rites, hunting, fishing, and farming. Therefore, one notices hardly any difference in the living standards of the villagers of a given community.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

One finds patrilineal, matrilineal, and bilateral families among the Gaoshan. The Bunong and the Zou belong to a patrilineal family structure, with a man as the patriarch and only men have the right of inheritance. The Amei and the Beinan are matrilineal, with a woman as the head of the family. The pedigree follows the matrilineal line, the eldest daughter inheriting the family property and married men live with their wife's family. Families of the Paiwan are bilateral: the family property is inherited by the eldest son or eldest daughter. Therefore, the size of the family varies, 6–7 members on average, 30–40 in some cases.

The Gaoshan are monogamous. The youngsters select their spouses, but marriage of close relatives is prohibited. Young men of the Amei and a part of the Paiwan live in a public meeting place for a period of time before their marriage—until they reach adulthood.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Gaoshan clothes are mostly made of linen and cloth. They vary in style in different areas. The men usually wear capes, vests, short garments, shorts, head wrappings, and puttees (leggings). Some of their vests are made of rind of rattan or willow. The women usually wear a short garment (with or without sleeves), trousers or skirts, an apron, and a cloth (or linen) wrapping the body and tied over the shoulder. The cloth or linen is woven and dyed by women. They like to do embroidery on their scarf, apron, sleeves, and garments. The Taiyar sew strings of shells in transverse rows on their clothes. Some of them sew strings of pearls or shells on a cloth and sell it as “pearl cloth” or “shell cloth.” Women like to wear ornaments made of shell or animal bone. Men carry a bag containing a smoking set and areca for chewing. Some of them like to decorate their hair with eagle feathers. Tattooing is practiced in some districts. As for the Gaoshan living in cities, their lifestyle is hardly different from that of the Chinese.

### **12 FOOD**

The staple foods of the Gaoshan include rice, millet, and taro. They take three meals a day, some only two. Rice is taken at breakfast and dinner. They like glutinous millet cakes. Some of them add peanuts and animal meat in glutinous millet, rolled up in leaves and steamed. The diet proteins come from pork, beef, and chicken, sometimes from wild game, which is taboo for pregnant women. The Gaoshan take roasted meat and rice in bamboo tubes and chafing dishes on festivals. They produce their own utensils, mostly potteries. Drinking and smoking are prevalent.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Urban Gaoshan have a high level of education, while peasants in the mountainous regions have a rather low one. The Pingpu receive the same formal education as the Chinese do.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Gaoshan gather to sing and dance on festivals. Their folk songs include ancestors' songs, hunting songs, cultivating songs, and elegies. The “Pestling Song” of Gaoshan women is unique. They gather around a stone mortar while pestling the rice. The regular rhythm of their pestling sound creates a tempo of percussion, which accompanies their melodious songs.

Besides the “Drinking Dance” performed by a few dancers, the “Sacrificial Rite Dance” of both sexes and the “Hair Swinging Dance” of the girls are group dances. The “Hair Swinging Dance” is popular on Lanyu Island. Girls in rows sing a traditional song while dancing. They swing their long hair slowly in the beginning. Following the acceleration of tempo, they bend their body to touch the ground with their hair, then swiftly stretch their body to swing their hair behind their head. They dance in this way until they are exhausted.

Myths, legends, and folk songs form the main body of their literature, which was handed down orally.

### **15 WORK**

Generally speaking, the Gaoshan mainly engage in agriculture. Those dwelling in the mountainous areas hunt as a sideline. The Amei and the Beinan hold large-scale hunting expeditions once or twice a year. Guns, arrows and crossbows, nets, and pitfalls are used. The Yamei of Lanyu Island fish and raise chickens and pigs. The main economic activity of the Paiwan is ox-raising. The Zou and Bunong, living in mountainous areas, are good at tanning hides. The Amei and the Beinan build canoes out of tree trunks, while the Yamei of Lanyu Island make a unique fishing boat with both ends rising high above the water. The Taiyar are adept at fishnet and string bag weaving, as well as at wood carving of mortar and pestle.

### **16 SPORTS**

Spectator sports are usually held on festivals. The sports include wrestling, tug-of-war, arrow shooting, and a series of competitions related to their daily life, such as rice pestling, thatched cottage building, and weight lifting. In the rice pestling competition, a young man and girl representing the village pestle an equal amount of paddy. Those who attain the best quality in the shortest time win the match. Thatched cottages as shelter are necessary in hunting; therefore, cottage-building competitions are meaningful for young men. It begins with bamboo-strip paring and concludes when a thatched cottage is built. Time, quality, and external appearance are the main standards of evaluation. The weight lifting competition, held right after harvest, is quite exhausting. The ears of rice are tied up into two bundles (altogether 450–550 lbs) and put on the two ends of a bamboo pole. Several young men lift the pole to one shoulder of a contestant, who marches on at once. The distance the contestant can carry the load is the main criteria for determining the winner.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Movies and television are already popular and easily accessible for the Gaoshan in Taiwan. But most Gaoshan still prefer their rich fount of traditional songs and dances, in which they excel and which plays an important social function, especially on festive occasions. There are quite a few “social” games that retain their appeal for the community at large. For instance, a girl carries a basket on her back and runs ahead in twists and turns while a young man, chasing her, tries to throw areca or oranges into her basket. He who has placed the largest number of areca or oranges inside the basket within the prescribed time is declared the winner. Flower crown weaving is a game for girls. They must weave the most beautiful flower crowns during a given time. The crowns are offered as gifts to the spectators.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Gaoshan, especially the Paiwan, excel at painting and carving. The columns, thresholds, wall planks, and lintels of their house, daily-used artifacts and ornaments, implements and canoes, are frequently adorned with painting or carving of personages, animals, flowers, figurines, and geometric designs. They like to engrave the image of snakes with human heads. Articles made of bamboo and rattan, such as baskets, hats, vests, or suits of armor, are solid and artistically made.



*Chiu Ku and A Pei-lung of the Gaoshan tribe play together as they wear traditional Gaoshan costumes and crowns made of millet and leaves during an aborigines harvest festival, Taipei, Taiwan. Taiwan's aborigines represent nearly 2% of the population and are divided in ten main tribes. (AP Images/Jerome Favre)*

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The different Gaoshan groups have profited in a very unequal manner from the tremendous economic development of Taiwan: Those residing in the plains near the cities (Suao, Hualien, Pingtung, Kaohsiung, Taichung, etc.) have experienced unprecedented economic development, while those inhabiting high mountainous areas or barren coastal areas have become relatively poor (in terms of purchasing power). Although attempts have been made to improve the education of the Gaoshan, no effective school system has been set up, especially for the poorer and more disadvantaged Gaoshan groups.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. While the nationwide gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing (with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students), the Gaoshan have not participated significantly in higher education.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau

can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. While minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. As of 2008 minority couples living in urban areas may have two children, while minority couples living in rural areas are permitted three or four children.

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—by C. Le Blanc

## GOANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** GO-uhns

**LOCATION:** India (Goa state)

**POPULATION:** 1,343,998 (Census of India, 2001)

**LANGUAGE:** Konkani; Marathi; some English and Portuguese

**RELIGION:** Hindu; Christian; small numbers of Muslims

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: People of India

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Goans are the inhabitants of the former Portuguese territory of Goa, which is located on the west coast of India some 400 km (250 mi) south of Bombay (Mumbai). Although Goa is now an Indian state, Goan culture and religion reflect nearly five hundred years of Portuguese influence.

Goa is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* epic, and the *Purānas* refer to it as Govapuri, "the Paradise of India." During the third century BC, Goa formed part of the Mauryan Empire. After the decline of the Mauryans, the area was ruled by a series of Hindu dynasties that arose in west central India. The most notable of these were the Satvahanas, the Chalukyas, and the Kadambas. Goa was held briefly by the Muslims during the fourteenth century before it was incorporated into the Vijayanagara Kingdom. The Muslims reconquered Goa in 1469, but in turn they were ousted by the Portuguese under Afonso de Albuquerque in 1510. Goa was the first Portuguese territory in Asia and remained under Portuguese control for the next four and a half centuries. Its natural harbors and location on the shipping routes to the Far East gave it great strategic significance for the Portuguese. Goa eventually became the capital of all the Portuguese territories in Asia.

After Britain's departure from India in 1947, Portugal came under increasing pressure to cede Goa and its other territories on the subcontinent to India. The matter was resolved in 1961, when India's armed forces invaded and "liberated" Goa, Daman, and Diu. Goa was a Union Territory administered by the central government until 1987, when it became a state of the Indian Union.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Goa's population is currently estimated to be just under 1.5 million persons (the 2001 census reported a population of 1.34 million). Sizable emigrant populations of Goans are found in Bombay and also overseas in the Gulf States, Britain, and North America (particularly in Toronto, Canada).

The ethnic makeup of Goans reflects the many peoples that have contributed to the population of the Konkani (the coastal region between Bombay and Mangalore). These include Proto-Australoid tribal groups, Dravidian speakers, and, later, Indo-Aryan peoples. Of particular significance over the last 500 years has been the Portuguese presence in the region. The Portuguese encouraged intermarriage of settlers with local women, and today Fernandes, Pereira, Gomes, and de Souza are common family names in Goa.

Goa is one of India's smallest states with an area, of only 3,702 sq km (1,429 sq mi) and ranks as 4th smallest in terms of population, behind Sikkim, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. The original Portuguese colony was centered on the estuaries of the Mandavi and Juari Rivers, and today Goa's capital, Pan-

aji, is located on the south bank of the Mandavi. The modern state has 100 km (62 mi) of coast, lined with coconut palms and sandy beaches, along the Arabian Sea. Inland, the coastal plain gives way to rolling hills before rising to the peaks of the Western Ghats. These mountains reach an elevation of 1,034 m (3,393 ft) in the area of the Sahyadri Hills.

The climate is hot and humid. Annual rainfall varies from 240 cm (about 94 in) on the coast to over 400 cm (157 in) in the Ghats, which receive the full force of the summer monsoon. Temperatures average close to 26°C (79°F) through much of the year.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Hindus and the majority of Goan Christians speak Konkani, the language of the Konkan region. Many also know Marathi, which is commonly used for correspondence. Although Konkani is the state's only official language, Marathi can also be used for any official purpose. Both Konkani (which has borrowed words from Portuguese) and Marathi belong to the Indo-Aryan language family and are written in the Devanagari script. When Christians write Konkani, however, they use the Roman alphabet. Many Goan Christians speak English, and members of the older generation of Goans may also speak Portuguese.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Goan proverbs, songs, dance-music and folktales hold the key to the social history of pre-Portuguese Goa. Perhaps the most honored of all artisans in Goa are the goldsmiths. The belief in Goa was that the metal was a representation of the Sun and that the yellow metal also had therapeutic properties. In pre-Portuguese Goa, Brahmans, goldsmiths, and merchants were exempted from being flogged even if they had committed heinous crimes. It is small wonder then that the goldsmiths of Goa became the butt of jokes in Goan folklore. Despite the honor and the ridicule accorded to the village goldsmith, it was simple jasmine flowers that came to be seen as a Goan girl's best friend. Mardol village in North Goa is supposed to be famed for its supply of fresh jasmines. In a folk song from this region a dancer says to her Lord, "I shall buy flowers in profusion, I shall deck my hair with them. I shall sit in front of my Lord. Yes, I shall sit."

In another story titled *The Girl in the Straw Hat*, a poor girl is on her way from her wealthy husband's house to her grandmother's when she is accosted by three water nymphs who give her a grain of rice each. "Throw this grain of rice on your grandmother's hut and it will turn into a palace," says the forest water nymph. "Throw this grain into your grandmother's room and it will be filled with riches," says the second water nymph. "Throw this grain of rice in the kitchen and it will be filled with a hundred servants," says the third. This is a symbolic illustration demonstrating to the young girls of pre-Portuguese Goa that a good harvest is the only key to a wealthy and prosperous home.

Although Goa has its own folk traditions, it is better known throughout the Roman Catholic world for a historical personage who has attained almost legendary status, St. Francis Xavier. His tomb is in the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa. A pupil of Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuit Order, Francis Xavier arrived in Goa in 1542 to begin his missionary work in Asia. After several years in India, he traveled to the Moluccas (now in Indonesia) and to Japan to spread the Christian faith.

He fell ill and died on the return journey and was buried in the Moluccas. Later, when his successor opened the grave to pay his respects, the body was still fresh and lifelike. Francis Xavier's remains were sent to Goa, where he was elevated to sainthood, and the body was placed in the Basilica of Bom Jesus. Parts of the body have been removed and sent to Rome and other places for use as relics. It is said that a Portuguese woman who wanted a relic of the saint bit off one toe in 1554. The body of St. Francis is taken out in procession every ten years, the last time being in 2004. An annual festival is also held in Old Goa every December 3, the anniversary of St. Francis's death in 1552.

### **5 RELIGION**

Goans are mostly Hindu (about 66% of the population) and Christian (27%) and there are a small number of Muslims (under 7%). Whatever their religion, Goans tend to be orthodox in their beliefs.

Goan Christians are Roman Catholics, like their Portuguese conquerors. The Inquisition vigorously stamped out any of the older "heathen" customs that converts tried to bring into their new religion. Like all Catholics, Goans believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, worship Mary as the mother of God, and revere the Christian saints. They worship in churches and attend confession and Mass. The many churches and cathedrals of Goa, some active today but many now abandoned, bear witness to the piety of the Portuguese and their subjects in the past.

The Hindus are largely followers of Shiva, although they show the characteristic diversity of beliefs and practices identified with Hindu peoples.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Goan Hindus observe all the major Hindu festivals, but perhaps the most important for them is Ganesha Chaturthi, the birthday of the god Ganesha. Known in Goa as Chovoth, this festival can last up to nine days, and it is a time for worshipping Ganapati (Ganesha) and his parents Mahadev (Shiva) and Gauri (Parvati). Shigmo is the Goan counterpart of the Holi festival.

The Christian community celebrates Christmas, Good Friday and Easter, and the feast days of various saints. Carnival (the equivalent of Mardi Gras) is an important Christian festival held just before Lent. The first day, Sabado Gordo or Fat Saturday, is marked by a parade of floats in Panaji, headed by the character King Momo. People dress in costumes, wear masks, and indulge in three days of revelry and excitement. The Procession of the Saints, when images of twenty-six saints are carried through the streets, is held in Old Goa on the first Monday of Easter week. The Feast of St. Francis Xavier, the patron saint of Goa, is celebrated every year on December 3.

Muslims, as elsewhere in India, keep the festivals of Muharram, 'Id ul-Fitr, and 'Id ul-'Adha'.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Certain social customs appear to be observed by all Goans, whatever their religious community. It is not unusual, for example, for a Christian woman to be sent to her mother's home for the delivery of her first child. This practice is widespread among Hindus in India. Similarly, Christians announce the birth of a child with firecrackers—two for a girl, three for a boy—as do Hindus. In their rites of passage, however, Goans fol-

low the rituals prescribed by their respective religions. These include baptism, the first Holy Communion, and confirmation for Christians; various *samskaras* (e.g. the naming ceremony, the head-shaving ceremony) for Hindus; and birth ceremonies and circumcision for Muslims.

At the time of death, Christians are given the last rites, a funeral service is held in the local church, and the deceased is buried in the cemetery. Masses are held periodically for the soul of the departed. Hindus cremate their dead, except for the Gavli (milkman) caste, who claim to be Lingayats and bury their dead in a sitting position. Their funeral customs conform to those of other Konkani Hindus, with a period of mourning, a *sraddha* ceremony, and the offering of food and gifts to Brahman priests. Muslims bury their dead with rites similar to those of other Muslims in South Asia.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Hindus use the “*Namaste*” to greet each other while Christians, especially in the better-educated upper castes, follow the custom of shaking hands when meeting. In general, social relations are determined by caste status. Even among Christians, who are more flexible in such matters, the upper castes tend to keep the lower castes at a distance.

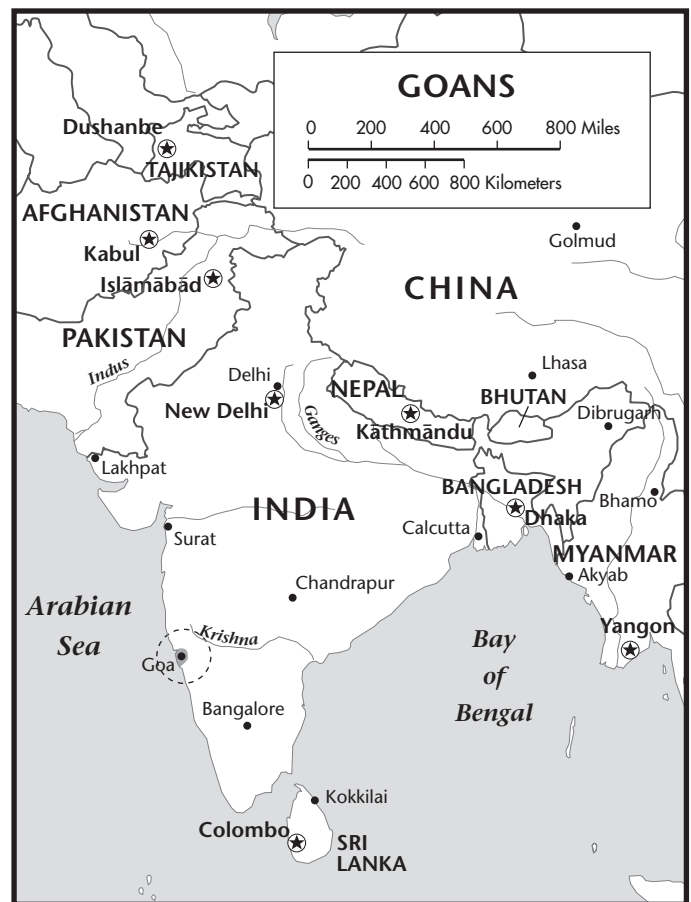
## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions in Goa vary according to locale, caste, and economic status. The old parts of towns such as Panaji preserve much of their Portuguese character, with narrow winding streets, white-washed houses with overhanging balconies, and red-tiled roofs. Wealthy Christian landlords of upper-caste standing have spacious one-story mansions, with antique furniture, mirrors, and European-style chandeliers, and sometimes even a private chapel. The walls of their houses are often tiled, a typically Portuguese custom. By contrast, houses of lower-caste villagers, whether Hindu or Christian, are likely to be much more modest, built of mud with thatched roofs, and more sparsely furnished.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Goan Christian society has a caste system very much like its Hindu counterpart. The high-caste Christians are the *Bamonn* (converts originally from the *Brahmans*), the *Chaddhe* (*Ksatriyas*), and the *Gaude* (*baniyas*). The Christian equivalent of the *sudras* or artisan castes are the *Sudir*, while Christians of aboriginal heritage are called *Kunbis* or *Gaudas*. Christians, just like Hindus, are required to marry within their own caste. A *Bamonn* will marry another *Bamonn*, a *Chaddho* (singular of *Chaddhe*) will marry another *Chaddho*, and so on. Marriages are not arranged; most young men and women select their own partners. Once a suitable match has been found, however, details of the marriage proposal, acceptance of the proposal, negotiation of the dowry, and so forth are left to the families. Marriages are performed in church according to the Catholic rites. The ceremony is usually followed by a Western-style reception and dance. Newlywed couples may live with the groom’s father although the joint family is increasingly giving way to the nuclear family structure.

Goan Hindus and Muslims follow the traditions of their own communities.



## 11 CLOTHING

Christians dress in Western clothes, with men donning pants and shirts for everyday wear and dark suits and ties for formal occasions. Women wear blouses and skirts or dresses, but for special occasions they use the elegant Indian *sari* or long formal gowns. Young girls keep up with the latest in Western fashion. Only Christian women of the laboring classes wear the *sari* as their usual clothing. Hindus wear clothes similar to those of their neighbors in Maharashtra. For men, this is the *dhoti*, or loincloth and shirt. Most men do not wear hats, but some members of the older generation still wear “Gandhi caps,” the type of folding cap that Mahatma Gandhi made popular earlier in this century. Many men have adopted the Western-style pants and shirt. Hindu women wear the typical dress of the Konkani—the short-sleeved bodice or blouse (*choli*) and a *sari* tied in the Maharashtrian fashion (pleats tucked in at the back of the waist, and the end of the cloth drawn under the right arm, across the chest, and over the shoulder). Both men and women seem to enjoy wearing jewelry and ornaments.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of Goans, both Catholics and Hindus, is fish. A typical lunch consists of a prawn or fish curry eaten with rice. The meal is often accompanied by fried fish or shrimp and green vegetables. However, the similarities end there. The Hindu diet appears to have been little influenced by the European tastes, while the food of Catholics shows a strong Portuguese influence. Catholics eat both beef and pork, which are taboo



Dancers from Goa perform during the annual Goa carnival celebrations in Panaji, India. (AP Images/Str)

in most Hindu households. Pork *vindalho* (a type of spicy pork curry) is a typical Christian Goan dish and *sarapatel* is considered a Goan classic. It is thought to be derived from two Portuguese dishes, *sarrabulhada* (a pork stew) and *cabidel* (pork giblets). Another Goan specialty is *chouriço*, or pork sausage. *Sanna* are rice cakes that are soaked in palm toddy (liquor made from the fermented sap of palm trees) before cooking. Prawn *balchao* is a type of spicy prawn condiment that may have originated in Southeast Asia. Goans brew a liquor called *feni* from cashew nuts or coconuts. Christians drink alcohol at their social gatherings.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The literacy rate among Goans seven years and older stands at 82% (as of 2001). The figures for males and females are 88% and 76%, respectively. This rate is second only to Kerala and Mizoram among all the Indian states. There are many private schools in Goa, many of them affiliated with the Catholic Church. Most of them hold their classes in the English language. The benefits of education are apparent to even the lower-caste villagers, who enroll their children in free, government-run primary schools. English and Konkani are the languages of instruction, and Marathi is sometimes being taught as a third language. Most students in Goa, however, complete their high school using English as the medium of instruction. Primary schools, on the other hand are largely run in Konkani. As is the case in most of India, enrollment for vernacular media has seen a fall in numbers in favor of English medium education.

Goa University is the sole university in the state located in Taleigao and all Goan colleges are affiliated with it. The state of Goa contains four engineering colleges and one medical college. In 2004 BITS Pilani university (the Birla Institute of Technology and Science) is located in Pilani in Rajasthan and consistently ranks among the top 5 engineering schools in the country) started its first Indian satellite, BITS Pilani Goa Campus near Dabolim. Unlike other Goan institutes, BITS Goa admits students through a nation-wide aptitude test that it shares with its parent institute. Because of this BITS Pilani Goa Campus is the only college in the state to have a regionally mixed student body.

There are also two national oceanographic science-related centers in Goa, the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) and the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), located in Vasco and Punjim, respectively.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Portuguese heritage is seen in religion, architecture, place names, language, food, and many other aspects of Goan life and culture. There is often a blending of the European and the Indian in Goa. Christians, for example, have borrowed the caste structure of Hindu society. On the other hand, Carnival has become a Goan celebration rather than a specifically Christian religious festival. There is a body of historical literature in Konkani, the local Indian language, but it is mainly of Christian inspiration and is written in the Roman alphabet—a practice introduced by the Portuguese. Even though Konkani is not one of the languages recognized in the Indian consti-

tution, it has the status of a modern literary language in India. Although Goans never developed any classical forms of dance or music, there are many local traditions of folk music and dance-drama. *Mando*—not quite a waltz and not quite a Portuguese *fado* (popular romantic song) but with elements of both—is a dance popular among Goan Christians. The *Khel* is a form of folk-drama that entertains villagers through criticism and caricature of socially prominent people such as the village landlord. Hindus have their own repertoire of Konkani folk songs and dances.

## 15 WORK

Agriculture continues to be the main activity of Goans. Christians are involved in cultivation, but they are also found in a wide range of other occupations: office workers, government employees, accountants, hotel workers, and the tourist industry. Some Goans are engaged as cooks and crewmen on ships. Many Goans work abroad, and the money they send back to their families helps to raise the standard of living of many people.

In addition to the tourist industry, Goa is developing as a center of the high-tech industry. It has been selected by the Union government to be the location of a high-tech park, no doubt based on making use of the educational facilities found in the state. The Info Tech Corporation of Goa Ltd. is setting up the software park on 75 acres of land at Dona Paula, about 30 kilometers from the Goa Airport and about 8 kilometers from the capital, Panaji. The Hi-Tech Habitat is proposed to be a modern, state-of-the-art and high quality IT software park and services unit with necessary infrastructure including roads, services, satellite connectivity, captive power supply, “plug and play” facilities, Internet cafeteria, health and recreational center, and landscaping. It will also have a conference center.

## 16 SPORTS

Young boys play with toys such as rattles, pipes, and whistles, while girls have their dolls. As they grow up, children play tag, hide-and-seek, and similar games. *Kaji* is a popular game in which boys line up cashew nuts (*kaju*) and try and hit them from a distance with a heavier cashew nut. Team games include *kabaddi* (wrestling) and *khokho* (team tag). Modern sports such as cricket, field hockey, and basketball are played, but soccer is by far the most popular sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Modern entertainment in Goa includes movies, radio, and television. Goan Christians have followed Western trends in music, and some have their own rock bands. Many of the hotels have modern discos for tourists. In the villages, however, recreation still centers around festivals and folk traditions.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The main handicrafts of Goa are pottery making, wood carving, and making lacquer ware and brass articles. Goan artisans are also skilled in ivory carving and silver work. A government-run store has been set up in Panaji to promote the sale of local handicrafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

With its blend of Portuguese and Indian culture, Goa is unique among the states of India. While many Goans would have preferred to remain independent in the post-colonial era, it was always likely that India would eventually annex Goa. Liberation in 1961 brought many Hindus to Goa from nearby areas. Goa's relatively small size and population help keep to a minimum some of the social and economic problems that are found in other parts of India. Many Goans have left to pursue opportunities in other places, but they continue to send money back to their families. Goa is an important tourist center, and this not only brings in the tourist dollar, but also provides jobs for the local people. During the 1960s Goa's magnificent beaches were a magnet for the hippie generation from the West. While this era is long gone, drugs (although illegal) are still readily available and something of a problem.

Tourism is still a big part of Goa's economy, but often brings increased levels of crime, prostitution, and drug use into local communities, negatively influencing local cultural norms. For instance, in March 2008 the Minister of Tourism in Goa accused local Indian police of trying to cover up the murder of a British girl. Scarlett Keeling was found dead on a beach in Goa in February 2008. Police initially said she had died after drinking too much and a local man, Samson D'Souza, was charged with rape but not with murder. The statement by the government official was made after the dead girl's mother pressed the issue, the cover-up clearly being an attempt not to impact tourism negatively. Goa's indigenous culture is deeply conservative. But many Westerners think India's poverty and tolerance of outsiders frees them to behave in a way that would be tasteless in London, let alone elsewhere in the developing world. The Times of India said 126 foreigners have died in Goa over the last two years—many from drug overdoses—while Western women have been attacked, sexually assaulted, and even murdered. Goa is also a Mecca for pedophiles with an emerging, though unwelcome, reputation as a center for child sex tourism.

Goa's BJP government is said to be the most corrupt in a long time—corrupt but effective. “Better to have a corrupt government that gets things done than a corrupt one which does nothing,” was a philosophical Goan's observation. Talk has it that key figures in the opposition Congress party, too, have been bought off. A construction boom is underway in Goa and where there is construction and developers, payoffs are inevitable, at least in India. Apparently, the amount that developers have to pay to the concerned ministry has also been fine-tuned. India's National Security Council also claims that the Russian mafia, which is heavily involved in drugs and prostitution, is laundering money by investing in real estate in Goa.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Christian Anglo-Indians of Goa are regarded as “loose” by many Indians, largely because of their Westernized lifestyle. However, ever since the neighboring state of Maharashtra closed its “dance-bars” in early 2005 because they were viewed as a breeding ground for crime and prostitution, there has been a migration of women (mostly Hindu) from Bombay (Mumbai) to Goa where they work in the vice trade.

In May 2005 a national conference on women's issues was held in Goa attended by some 400 registered participants. This reported that rather than being “victims” of the technological



development that has focused on fisheries, many Goan Catholic fisherwomen, in contrast to their Hindu counterparts, have made an economically successful transition from “barefoot, headload peddlers” in the villages to market entrepreneurs. However, the Kharvi caste of fishers (the women do the fishing) have not made the transition so successfully. Though their average working hours are very high, the returns are insignificant. They lament that they “have lost their hold over their traditional occupation.” Surprisingly, this closely knit and vociferous community of fisherwomen has neither institutionalized itself nor claimed minority rights, although the Kharvi are classed as a “backward” Hindu caste.

Christian Goanese women are generally freer than their non-Christian counter-parts, Hindus and Muslims usually being subject to the restraints of their religions. Given the relatively high rates of literacy and excellent educational system, the main issues for women in Goa arise out of poverty, limited access to health care and traditional cultural values.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# GONDS

**PRONUNCIATION:** GAHNDS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Koi; Koitur

**LOCATION:** India

**POPULATION:** About 14 million

**LANGUAGE:** Gondi

**RELIGION:** Cult of the Persa Pen (clan deities); ancestor spirit worship

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: People of India

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Gonds are numerically the most important tribe in South Asia. Strictly speaking, the term Gond is a generic one that refers to numerous tribal peoples who are found over wide areas of the interior of the Deccan peninsula of India. While they are by no means all alike, there is a limited measure of cultural uniformity among these groups. Most significantly, they all describe themselves as Gonds or, in the local Gondi dialects, as Koi or Koitur. The meaning of the latter names is uncertain. It was the Mughals who first used the name “Gond” (hill people) to describe the peoples of the area. Gonds have lent their name to Gondwana (“the Land of the Gonds”), the part of India in which they live. They are found over almost all of India except the northwestern states (Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir) and the extreme south, but have their greatest concentrations in the rugged hill country of central India.

Little is known about the origins of the Gonds. They belong to the strata of aboriginal peoples of India who pre-date the Aryan and Dravidian speakers of the country. They are usually classified as Proto-Australoids by race. As their language is Dravidian, the Gonds may have passed through lands to the south where the Dravidian languages are found. DNA evidence suggests they might have branched off from early Proto-Australoids who apparently traveled from Africa to Australia along the coastal margins of India. But Gond migrations before they reached their present homeland remain shrouded in the mists of time. Scholars believe that the Gonds settled in Gondwana between the 9th and 13th centuries AD. The core region of Gondwana can be considered to be the eastern part of the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, the parts of Madhya Pradesh immediately to the north of it, and parts of the west of Chhattisgarh. From the 14th century onwards, Gond history comes into focus with Muslim writers describing the rise of Gond states in the region. Between the 16th and mid-18th centuries, when Gonds were at the height of their power, Gond dynasties ruled in four kingdoms (Garha-Mandla, Deogarh, Chanda, and Kherla) in central India.

Following the 1740s, the rising tide of Maratha power swept over the Gonds. The Gond *rajās* were overthrown and their territory annexed, except for some of the more remote hill areas that held out against the invaders. Local Gond *zamindaris* or estates survived in the region until relatively recent times.

The recent creation of two new states in central India, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, has increased the relative proportions of Gonds, who are classified as Scheduled Tribes in both states, in the population. Thus, in Chhattisgarh, which was formed in 2000 from sixteen Chhattisgarhi-speaking districts in southeastern Madhya Pradesh, Gonds number over 4 million peo-

ple, of the current estimated state total population of c. 24 million people. They are concentrated in the south, especially in Bastar district, where they account for more than 20% of the district's total population. Jharkhand, created in 2000 from the southern areas of Bihar largely to fulfill the aspirations of its tribal populations (c. 89% of the total state's population), also contains a considerable number of Gonds among its estimated 40 million people.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Gonds form the largest tribal group in the Indian subcontinent and perhaps even in the entire world. The Census of India 2001 did not enumerate caste, so the population figure should be regarded as approximate, since many Gond communities have become Hinduized and are no longer counted as Gonds. Nonetheless, even using conservative estimates of growth rates, the Gond population in India must exceed 14 million today.

Gonds are found over a wide area of central India. Gondwana, their traditional homeland, lies in the eastern part of the state of Madhya Pradesh and western Chhattisgarh, though large Gond populations are also found in Maharashtra and Orissa States. Gond territory lies south and east of the upper reaches of the Narmada and Son rivers and extends to the Godavari River and the Madhya Pradesh–Orissa border. Within this area, there are numerous tribal communities who are designated as Gonds. Madhya Pradesh classifies over 50 Gond groups as belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (communities in India identified as needing special social and economic assistance). A similar number of Gond groups in Maharashtra are designated as Scheduled Tribes. By contrast, there are Gond groups such as the Raj Gonds and the Katholias who claim high social standing and have substantial land holdings. The Dhur Gond, Bisonhorn Maria (so-called because of their distinctive horned headdress worn for dancing), the Muria Gond, and the Paharia Gonds are some of the Gond groups found in the region.

As might be expected with Gond tribes dispersed over so wide an area, the environmental setting in which they live varies greatly. Yet their characterization as “hill people” identifies one of their underlying traits, namely their traditional association with the hills and uplands of the Peninsula's interior. The densest concentrations of Gonds are found in the eastern ranges of the Satpura Hills, the Maikala Range, and the Son-Deogarh uplands. South of this line of hills, the Gond population thins out in the Wainganga Valley and the Chhattisgarh plain. As one continues south, however, the highly dissected plateau of Bastar forms another stronghold of the Gond tribes. A distinct cluster of Gond tribes, somewhat isolated from the main Gond distributions, occurs in the Garhjat Hills of northern Orissa. The upland areas generally lie between 600 and 900 m (roughly 2,000–3,000 ft), with isolated peaks occasionally exceeding 1,200 m (approximately 4,000 ft). The region is drained by the headwaters of many of India's major rivers (e.g., the Narmada, Tapti, Son, Mahanadi, and Godavari). Forest cover is dense in places, and communications are generally difficult. The climate is typical of the northern interior Deccan. February sees the start of the hot season, with temperatures rising to over 40°C (104°F) in early June. The summer brings the monsoon rains, with precipitation amounts varying from 120 cm (47 in) to over 160 cm (63 in) in the more southeaster-

ly locations. Late September marks the return of the cool, dry weather of winter.

## **3 LANGUAGE**

Gondi is the mother tongue of the Gonds. It belongs to the Dravidian family of languages and is closely related to Tamil and Kannada. Clearly, the Gonds are not physically related to the Dravidian-speaking peoples of India, thus at some time they must have abandoned an earlier language in favor of Gondi. There is, however, no evidence of what this language might have been. It is the Gondi language, as much as anything else, that lends a sense of cultural uniformity to the diverse tribal groups that make up the Gonds. Even so, many Gonds are bilingual or trilingual, speaking Hindi, Marathi, or Telegu as well as their mother tongue. Some Gond groups have totally abandoned Gondi and speak the language or dialect common in their locality.

## **4 FOLKLORE**

Gond myths and legends are preserved by hereditary bards and professional storytellers called Pardhans. All Gond traditions are oral and, consequently, numerous variations of the same tales are recounted. Yet it is in mythology and the deeds of Gond heroes that the social norms of Gond society are rooted.

According to the Gond creation myth, when the Gond gods were born they were abandoned by their mother. The goddess Parvati rescued them, but her consort Sri Shambhu Mahadeo (Shiva) imprisoned them in a primeval cave. They were rescued from the cave by the Gond culture hero Pahandi Kapar Lingal, with the assistance of the goddess Jangu Bai. When released from captivity, they came out of the cave in four groups, thus laying the foundations of the basic fourfold division of Gond society. Lingal is also held to be responsible for the creation of the Gond kinship system, as well as the establishment of the great gods (*Persa Pen*) who were to be worshiped by the Gonds.

## **5 RELIGION**

The most distinctive feature of Gond religion is the cult of the *Persa Pen*, or the clan deities. Like many other tribes in the region, Gonds worship a high god known as Baradeo, or Bhagavan, or Sri Shambu Mahadeo (known sometimes, rather confusingly, as *Persa Pen*). Baradeo is the Supreme Being, creator of the universe and giver of life and death, but he is rather remote. He oversees the activities of the lesser gods and he is to be respected and worshiped, but he does not receive the fervent devotion reserved for the clan deities. Each Gond clan has its *Persa Pen*, who extends its protection to all clan members in return for their ritual offerings and worship. The *Persa Pen* is essentially good but can be dangerous and violent. Many Gonds believe that the play of the Pardhan bard on his fiddle is necessary to control the deity's fierce powers.

In addition to Baradeo and the clan deities, the Gond world is populated by numerous other deities and spirits that are to be worshiped at the appropriate time. Each village has its Village-Guardian and Village-Mother who must be worshiped whenever the village community embarks on ritual activities, such as a seasonal celebration or a sacrifice. There are family gods and household gods to be propitiated. Gods of the field and gods of cattle must receive their offerings to ensure a productive harvest. Disease must be warded off by appeasing dei-



ties such as Shitala Mata, Goddess of Smallpox. Every hill, every river, every lake, every tree is inhabited by a spirit who may be benevolent but may also be unpredictable and harmful. The ancestor spirits, who reside with the clan deities, are also to be worshipped.

Gond relations with the gods and the spirits lie mainly in the hands of priests and individuals with special supernatural powers. The village priest (*devari*), whose office is usually a hereditary one, performs the sacrifices and rituals for village festivals. Family ceremonies and sacrifices are carried out by the head of the household. The clan priest (*katora*) has the responsibility of tending the shrine and ritual objects of the clan's Persa Pen. He is the guardian of the sacred spear point, which is never kept in the shrine but rather is hidden in a location known only to himself and a few close kinsmen. He also organizes and officiates at the annual clan festivals.

Virtually all aspects of Gond ritual life, from the greatest festivals to the building of a new cattle shed, are accompanied by sacrifice. The offering depends on the particular deity involved. Certain deities, especially female ones, demand blood-sacrifice. Chickens, goats, and sometimes male buffaloes (and reputedly in the past, humans) are the sacrificial victims. Periodically (every 9 or 12 years), the Gonds sacrifice a pig to the god Narayan Deo in an important ceremony known as the Laru Kaj ("Pig's Wedding"). Not all Gond ritual requires animal sacrifice; offerings sometimes include fruits, coconuts, flowers, colored powder, and strings.

While the village and clan priests perform sacrifices, diviners and magicians deal with the supernatural in another way. Gonds believe that most diseases and misfortunes in life are caused by evil spirits and the displeasure of the gods. They turn to soothsayers and diviners to find out the cause of their problems and the appropriate remedies to be taken. If these practitioners cannot help, the services of magicians and shamans must be sought. Magicians believe that through magic formulas they can control the actions of the deity or spirit who is the cause of a particular affliction. Shamans are individuals who fall into a trance and give voice to the demands of the offended god or spirit. Like many tribes in the area, Gonds believe in the evil eye, black magic, and witchcraft. Witches, usually women, are held to bring sickness and misfortune to the community. They are widely feared and, when discovered, are driven from the village or even killed.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The details of the Gond festival calendar varies from region to region but, as might be expected of agricultural peoples, many of the important celebrations are connected with the agricultural seasons. Some Hindu festivals, such as Holi, Dasahara, and Divali, are celebrated, though often the Gonds have no real understanding of the significance of these feasts. The Gonds, however, have their own explanation for their observance and celebrate the feasts in the Gond manner, complete with sacrifices. Pola, a cattle festival, and Nagpanchami, the snake festival, are celebrated by the Gonds along with the other peoples of the area.

Some festivals, such as the feasts of village or clan deities, are specifically Gond celebrations. One particular custom is the Dandari stick dancing undertaken by young people in the two or three weeks following Dasahara. Bands of young people, dressed in their newest and best attire, travel from village to village entertaining the inhabitants with dancing, music, and singing. In doing so, they are perpetuating a custom initiated by the legendary heroes of the Gond epics. The dancing is seen as a religious duty as much as an occasion for fun and entertainment.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Pregnant women are subject to certain taboos as a protection against magic spells and evil influences. Various rituals, including sacrifice to the household gods, are performed after birth. The baby is named after three to four weeks, with the name-giver usually being the mother's brother for a boy, or the father's sister for a girl. Although sons are preferred, daughters are equally welcomed. There is little to mark the passage from childhood to maturity. Children grow up as part of a family, clan, phratry (one of the four main divisions of Gond society), and village community and gradually learn the ways of their people. At a certain age, they begin to assume some responsibility for household and agricultural chores. Both boys and girls help guard their family's crops from birds and monkeys. Males undergo a ritual shaving of the beard, mustache, and eyebrows as a sign of adulthood, although many boys undergo the rite long before they reach puberty. There is no comparable rite for girls, but a girl is considered full-grown at her first menstruation. Only the Muria Gonds of Bastar have youth dormitories (*ghotul*) that are used for the education of youth in married and civic life.

Gonds cremate or bury their dead, depending on status and the circumstance of death. Children, unmarried persons, and individuals dying an inauspicious death (e.g., in an epidemic) are buried without much ceremony. Elaborate and costly ceremonies, including sacrifice, are performed at funerals by those who can afford it. The Gonds believe that a human being has a life-force and a spirit. On death, the life-force is reincarnated into another earthly existence, but the spirit remains in the other world. All Gond death rituals are undertaken for the welfare of the spirit, performed to ensure its smooth passage through the spirit world and its acceptance by the ancestral spirits of the clan. In times of economic stress, the important *karun* rite may be postponed for up to three years but it has to be completed in order for an heir's obligation to the deceased to be fulfilled. Memorial pillars are erected to honor the dead. Gonds believe the ancestral spirits watch over the moral behavior of the living and punish offenders of tribal law. In this sense, they are the guardians of the Gond community.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Visiting customs vary throughout the region, though Gonds are normally a hospitable people. The visitor is welcomed and presented with small gifts, perhaps some dried tobacco leaves or fruits from the forest. Many villages and homesteads have guest huts where the visitor may stay with some degree of privacy.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Gonds live in villages scattered throughout central India. Each village has a headman (known by local names such as *mukhia*, *mahji*, or *patel*) and a village council (*panchayat*) chosen by the villagers. The council, made up of the headman, the priest, the village watchman, and four or five elders, is responsible for the smooth running of the village and upholding Gond customs and traditions. More important affairs are discussed and decided upon by all the men of the community. In addition to its Gond inhabitants, a village has its service castes such as the Ahir (cowherds), Agaria (blacksmiths), Dhulia (drummers), and Pardhan (bards and singers).

A typical Gond village is made up of several hamlets, each consisting of the homesteads of a group of closely related kinfolk. The homestead (which contains dwellings, stables, and sheds) houses a family, often a joint family, consisting of the parents, married sons, and their families. Houses are usually rectangular, built of mud and thatch. They consist of a living room, a kitchen, a veranda, and a special room to which women retire while they are menstruating. Among many South Asian societies, women in this condition are regarded as ritually polluted and are segregated from the rest of the family. In one corner of the house is the shrine to the clan gods.

Standards of living among the Gonds reflect socioeconomic status. Many Gonds are relatively poor farmers or agricultural laborers, and this is seen in their lack of material possessions. Gond houses contain little furniture, perhaps some cots and a few wooden stools, with mats used for sitting and sleeping. The kitchen contains an assortment of cooking utensils, brass and earthenware pots, and baskets for storage. Today, wealthier Gonds build their houses out of stone and furnish them more lavishly.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Gond society is divided into four exogamous, patrilineal descent groups known in anthropological terminology as phratries. Each phratry (*saga* in Gondi) traces its descent to one of the four groups of gods who emerged from the primeval cave after their release by the hero Lingal. The phratry is divided into a number of exogamous clans (*pari*). A clan consists of a group of people who believe that they are descended in the male line from a common ancestor. Thus, no one can marry a partner belonging to the same phratry or clan. Violation of the rule of exogamy is considered to be incest. Not only would offenders expect to be punished by the gods, but they are also excluded from the tribal community. Many of the Gond clans bear the names of animals or plants, which suggests a totemic origin. Some Gond clans still observe totemic taboos and avoid eating the flesh of certain animals.

Kinship and marriage customs among the Gonds reflect broader regional patterns. The norm is the cross-cousin marriage (e.g., marriage with one's mother's brother's daughter) so typical of South Indian society. Groups that have been influenced by northern peoples such as the Marathas, however, follow northern customs in determining marriage partners. Similarly, northern Gonds allow what are called "levirate" marriages, that is, a widow remarries a brother of the deceased husband. This is not allowed in southern India, and the southern Gonds conform to this prohibition.

Gonds traditionally married on reaching physical maturity, with the selection of mates based on mutual choice, subject to the approval of the tribal council. Nowadays the Gonds increasingly follow the Hindu custom of arranged marriages when the children are still young. A bride-price is paid by the father of the groom. A Gond wedding is accompanied by many significant ceremonies, although, in general, rites conform to the marriage customs of the locality. The central rite of the Gond wedding consists of the groom walking with his bride seven times around a wedding post erected in the center of the wedding booth. Gond society is patrilocal and the newlyweds reside with the groom's family until such time as they move into a house of their own. Although the extended family is traditional among the Gonds, the nuclear family is becoming more common. Inheritance passes down the male line, with all sons receiving equal shares.

In addition to the negotiated marriage, other forms of marriage among the Gonds include elopement of an unmarried girl with a boy, or the capture of a girl and her forced marriage to her captor. Such marriages must later be legalized by the relatives and village councils of the partners. Similarly, divorce is permissible among the Gonds and is relatively easily obtained, but it must be obtained from the panchayat.

### 11 CLOTHING

Gonds differ little from the other cultivating castes of their locality in the area of dress. Men typically wore a small loincloth, but many have now adopted the *dhoti*. This is a long piece of white cotton cloth that is wrapped around the body, with its end drawn between the legs and tucked into the waistband at the back. In the past, the torso remained bare, but today cotton shirts are worn with the dhoti. White or colored turbans complete the outfit. In winter, waistcoats or woolen pullovers are worn for warmth, and sometimes a coarse woolen blanket is used for extra protection. Women and girls wear the



A ruined palace that was built by the Gond kings sits on the Narmada River, Ramnagar, India. (© Brian A. Vikander/Corbis)

cotton *sari*. This is wrapped around the waist, with one end drawn between the legs and tucked in at the back and the other thrown over the right shoulder covering the breasts and stomach, which are left bare. More and more Gonds are wearing the bodice (*choli*) along with the sari, in the manner of Hindu women.

Both men and women wear heavy silver ornaments bought from professional silversmiths. Women also wear colored glass bangles, as well as several types of beads, including their marriage necklaces made of small black beads. They often tattoo their bodies.

## 12 FOOD

The staples of the Gond diet are two millets known locally as *kodo* and *kutki*. These are prepared either boiled to a broth or cooked until all the water has evaporated. Sometimes it is ground and baked into a flat cake. Millet is eaten three times a day, with the broth being preferred for the first two meals and the dry cereal taken with some vegetables in the evening. Vegetables are either grown in the garden or collected from the forest along with roots and tubers. Honey is also gathered from the forest.

Rice is preferred by many Gonds, but for most it is too expensive to purchase and their land is too poor to cultivate it. Rice remains a dish reserved for feasts or festival days. Most Gonds, except for those who have adopted Hindu dietary taboos, like meat. Animals sacrificed at ceremonies are eagerly consumed, and the diet is supplemented by animals hunted in

the forest. Gonds must abstain from the flesh of certain animals, e.g., the tortoise, that are their clan totems.

Gonds are passionate smokers and grow tobacco for their own consumption. They also consume large amounts of liquor distilled from the *mahua* tree (*Bassia latifolia*) as a part of both religious and social celebrations.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education and literacy levels among the Gonds vary but are generally low. Literacy varies from 62.5% in Maharashtra to 50.3% in Madhya Pradesh. Among females in Madhya Pradesh, it drops to only 30.4%. Few children attend school regularly, and girls rarely continue past primary school. Only 1.5% of the population, mainly males, continues on to graduate level studies.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music, song, and dance play an important role in Gond society. Gonds are ardent dancers and all festive occasions are celebrated by song and dance. In some instances, such as with the Dandari dancers, dances celebrate the dramatic retelling of events from Gond mythology. However, dances are not necessarily associated with any particular event or festival and may be performed just for enjoyment. Many of the songs that accompany dances tend to be of a suggestive nature. The Dhulia is the professional musician caste serving the Gonds. Pardhan bards preserve the legends, myths, and history of the Gonds, passing these traditions on from generation to generation. Among the numerous myths of the Gonds, perhaps the most

important is the great epic that celebrates the origins and exploits of the culture hero Pahandi Kapar Lingal.

### **15 WORK**

The Gonds' ties with the forest suggest that, in the past, they were nomadic hunters or food gatherers who took up shifting cultivation. Today they are mainly plough-cultivators whose agriculture differs little from other farming castes in their region. Although some Gond communities have risen to the status of landowners, increasing pressure on land is reflected in large numbers of landless laborers among the Gonds.

### **16 SPORTS**

There are no sporting activities associated with traditional Gond society.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Leisure time is passed with the family or visiting friends and neighbors. Gonds like to assemble on feast days or full-moon nights to sing and dance. Cock-fighting is a favorite pastime of some Gond groups.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Gonds have a rich tradition of tribal arts and crafts that includes pottery, basket-making, body-tattooing, and floor-painting. They are artistically gifted, painting designs on their house walls in red and black on a white background. The drawings are often done to celebrate festivals and include animals and birds, human figures, the hunt, and the dance. The Gonds make musical instruments, and they carve memorial pillars in wood and stone for their dead. They often carve doors and panels to decorate their houses.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Gonds face problems typical of tribal peoples throughout South Asia. As a less sophisticated group, they have faced exploitation and discrimination from their culturally more advanced neighbors. They occupy less productive lands in some of the more remote areas of the country. They are experiencing increasing pressure on their land, a rise in the number of landless laborers, and high levels of poverty. Lack of education and low levels of literacy further reduce economic opportunity.

Beyond this, the very nature of the Gond community is in itself a problem. Despite their numbers, the Gonds are an assemblage of diverse tribal groups. Although they all see themselves as Gonds, there is little to unite them into a cohesive political force. Their wide geographical distribution and degree of tribal fragmentation works against the creation of a Gond political identity. Even if this were not so, the leadership to achieve this is sorely lacking. This places the Gond community at a major disadvantage in India today, where access to resources for socioeconomic advancement is often subject to political patronage.

For instance, some non-tribals, through political jockeying, have managed to gain legal tribal status, that is, to be listed as a Scheduled Tribe. The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh effectively lost their only advantage in trying to protect their lands when the Banjaras, a group that had been settling in Gond territory, managed to get classified in the state as a Scheduled Tribe in 1977. Their newly acquired tribal status made the Banjaras

eligible to acquire Gond land "legally" and to compete with Gonds for reserved political seats, places in education institutions, and other benefits reserved for Scheduled Tribes. Because the Banjaras are not scheduled in neighboring Maharashtra, there has been an influx of Banjara emigrants from that state into Andhra Pradesh in search of better opportunities.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The status of women is markedly better among Gonds than in Hindu caste society. Women play an important role in the domestic economy of Gond societies, they are usually allowed to move freely, and have the right to choose their marriage partners or at least have a large say in this (it is always, at the very least, a family affair). Divorce is possible and much easier to obtain than in Hindu societies, and tribal widows—unlike their Hindu sisters—have no problem in remarrying. But, again, these are generalizations and there are indigenous societies in which child and forced marriages are common. In many tribal societies, paying a bride price is part of the marriage arrangement. This stands in contrast to the dowry practice in Hindu society, which means that the birth of a baby girl represents a heavy economic burden for poorer Hindu families, with enormous repercussions on the status of women, and on the sex ratio in the population. Studies have shown that baby girls are less well-looked after than boys in Hindu society, leading to a higher infant mortality rate among Hindu children. The possibility of pre-natal sex identification has led to a rapid drop in the births of baby girls. But the sex ratio of Gonds is higher than the national average, suggesting that discrimination against female children is totally lacking, or at least less than in other groups.

In hardly any indigenous society do women participate in formal political decision-making and this, too, is true of the Gonds, though women are often consulted, by their husbands or in community meetings. But they are not members of village councils and cannot become the village chief. Women also hardly ever play an important role in religion, although they may be spirit mediums or healers. Generally, Gond women are valued mostly for their productive and reproductive functions.

With the exception of a few matrilineal societies (such as the Garo and Khasi of Meghalaya in the north-east of India), women in the country do not inherit land. And even among the matrilineal societies, the land is in reality managed and controlled by men. But it is very important for unmarried women and widows. Ownership normally rests with their fathers, brothers or husbands. Men therefore tend to have greater control over agricultural production and products. However, Gond women do enjoy spheres in which they retain some control. In India, in particular, the gathering of forest products—which has been very much a female activity—is crucial for women to maintain at least some degree of autonomy since they have control over these products, i.e. they sell them themselves. However, poverty and lack of access to educational and health facilities remain major stumbling blocks in the way of Gond women bettering themselves.

Some Gond women have banded together to help alleviate poverty and promote female empowerment. For instance, in Orissa's Kalahandi and Nuapada districts, life is an endless nightmare of deprivation and hunger for Gonds. The men leave their homes in search of employment, often ending up as

bonded labor in distant places. Left to fend for themselves, the women, the elderly and children have to eke out an existence or starve. Now, thousands of tribal women have, quite literally, spun themselves out of the web of despair in which they were trapped, thanks largely to a local livelihood initiative that employs Gond women to make handmade cotton fabric. Aptly called “Nuakala,” which means “new craft,” the name also incorporates the first two syllables of the districts Nuapada and Kalahandi where the program is based.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# GREEK CYPRIOTS

**LOCATION:** Cyprus

**POPULATION:** 786,800 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Greek and English

**RELIGION:** Church of Cyprus (Greek Orthodox)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 5: Greeks

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The name “Cyprus” comes from the Greek word for “copper” (*kypros*). It was the island’s lucrative deposits in copper, discovered around 3000 BC on the slopes of the Troodos Mountains, which first appealed to many foreign powers along the eastern Mediterranean coast. The conflicts among these rival groups and their rise and fall in power form the turbulent history of Cyprus, which is the third largest island in the Mediterranean and neighbors Syria to the w (100 km/60 mi), Turkey to the s (68 km/40 mi), and the Egyptian coast to the n (343 km/203 mi).

The first inhabitants of Cyprus, who resided in the Khirokitia region and are traceable to the peoples of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), date from the 8th to the 6th millennium BC, as evidenced from samples of obsidian rock which identify these Cypriots of the Neolithic Age as rather impressive Indo-European peoples who possessed a written language. The Greek heritage of the island was introduced through the settlement of Achaean Greeks from 2000 to 1600 BC, as well as Arcadian commercial traders who arrived from the northeastern Peloponnesus region of the Greek mainland after 1400 BC. These settlements and a distinctly Hellenic culture were reinforced by the subsequent arrival of Trojan War heroes in 1184 BC.

In contrast to the distinct Hellenic ethnicity of Cyprus’s early peoples, the conquest of the island by the Egyptian leader Thutmose III around 1450 BC preceded a varied line of eastern and western invaders who seized the island until their defeat by another foreign power. Thus, Egypt lost power to the Assyrians in 800 BC, who then fell to the Egyptians in 550, who in turn were usurped by the Persians in 525. Until Turkey finally dominated the island from AD 1571 to 1878, Cyprus had been claimed and controlled by peoples and leaders as diverse as Alexander the Great (333 BC), the Egyptian Ptolemies (323 BC), Rome (58 BC), and England’s Richard I (AD 1191), who passed Cyprus to the titular king of Jerusalem and Frankish ruler Guy of Lusignan.

Turkey finally claimed Cyprus from its Venetian–Lusignian possessors of AD 1489–1571 and held firm to the island until its own collapse in the Russo–Turkish Wars of 1877–1888. For an annual “lease” of \$500,000, through which Turkey retained formal possession of Cyprus, Britain accepted administration of the island at Turkey’s request in order to curtail the spread of Russian power. However, the annual fee was never received by Turkey, but instead deposited in the Bank of England to compensate for Turkey’s defaulted Crimean War loans; this disturbed Cypriots as well as the Turks. After World War I (1914–1918), the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne was imposed on the Turks as a peace settlement, through which Britain gained formal possession of the island.



Despite Britain's dominance and perceived control over Cyprus, riots erupted in 1931 from the Greek community's petition for and denial of *enosis*, the political union of Cyprus with its Greek mainland. Britain responded by suppressing the island's political parties and activities, as well as dismantling the Cypriot legislative council. Following World War II Britain offered the Cypriots the potential for self-rule; however, *enosis* was a priority to the islanders and both the AKEL party (*Anorthotikon Komman Ergazomenou Laou*—Progressive Party of Working People) and the EOKA party (*Ethniki Organosis Kypriakou Agonos*—National Organization of Cypriot Struggle) were formed as separate efforts to secure *enosis*, the spokesman of which was Makarios III. In response to heightened riots, Archbishop Makarios was elected president on 13 December 1959, while a Turkish Cypriot, Fazil Kuchuk, was elected vice president.

The Greek Cypriot cries for *enosis* were only countered by the Turkish Cypriot movement toward partition (*taksim*). What had optimistically become the independent Republic of Cyprus in 1960, represented by both Greek and Turkish leaders, collapsed only three years later through the dysfunction of bicomunal provisions which were intended to provide equal treatment and representation to both Greeks and Turks. By the close of 1963, the Turks had fully abandoned their political positions and, as the ability to share government power further declined and intercommunal violence increased. United Nations (UN) peacekeepers were sent to the island in 1964.

The peace process fully faltered in 1974 after a Greek coup displaced Makarios and installed Nicos Sampson, formerly an EOKA terrorist, as a more aggressive move toward *enosis*. This

only prompted the response of *taksim* and a Turkish invasion that left 180,000 Cypriot refugees and divided the island at the "Green Line," which spans the area from Morphou through Nicosia to Famagusta. In 1983 the Turkish Cypriots declared independence as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This independent status, however, has only been officially recognized by the government of Turkey. UN peacekeeping forces have continued to protect a buffer zone between the north and south. On 1 May 2004 the Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union (EU), and adopted the euro on 1 January 2008. In March 2007 the Greek Cypriot authorities demolished a wall that for decades had stood at the boundary between the Greek Cypriot controlled side and the UN buffer zone. The wall had cut across Ledra Street in the heart of Nicosia and was seen as a strong symbol of the island's division. In 2008 Ledra Street was reopened in the presence of Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Following Sicily and Sardinia, Cyprus is the third largest island of the east Mediterranean basin. Geologically part of Asia Minor, it measures 9,251 sq km (3,572 sq mi) and stretches 206 km (128 mi) w to e, and 97 km (60 mi) from Cape Gata in the s to Cape Kormakiti in the n. Comparable to the state divisions which comprise the United States, Cyprus is divided into six districts: Famagusta, Kyrenia, Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos, and Nicosia. Nicosia has remained the capital of the island despite the 1974 Turkish invasion and partition of the island.

The topography of Cyprus, flat and largely deprived of forestation, is sculpted by the Troodos Mountains, an igneous rock formation in the southern and western regions of the island which ranges from Pomos Point in the northwest almost to Larnaca Bay. Mt. Olympus, the highest point on the island, which is a haven for skiers in the winter and hikers in the summer, rises to 6,505 feet and is called by islanders Mt. Chionistra (*chioni* meaning "snow"), for its accumulation of snow during the winter. The jagged, steep limestone slopes of the Kyrenia Range, perhaps the most dramatic, spectacular aspect of the topography, extend from Cape Kormakiti to Cape Andreas. These mountainous regions dramatically surround the flatland of Cyprus, the Mesaoria, which receives less rain than regions of higher altitudes. Cypriots endure hot, dry summers from June through September (mid-summer temperatures swelter to 112° F), and they likewise enjoy mild, though rainy winters from October through March (averaging 22° F).

In 2007 the population of the Greek Cypriot controlled area of southern Cyprus was estimated at 786,800 inhabitants. After the 1974 Turkish invasion, thousands of Greek Cypriots were displaced from their homes in northern Cyprus. At the end of 2006 the estimated number of displaced Greek Cypriots and their descendants was 238,000. The same year there were approximately 369 Greek Cypriots living in the Turkish controlled north.

## 3 LANGUAGE

While Greek, Turkish, and English are all official languages of Cyprus, Greek is the primary language spoken by Greek Cypriots. The Greek spoken by Cypriots, however, resembles ancient rather than modern Greek dialects. Greeks from Cyprus therefore seem to speak a different language than those from the mainland, who, for example, say *ti kanete* ("how are



you?”) in contrast to the Cypriot pronunciation of *tambu kanete*; likewise, the commonplace conjunction *che* (“and”) is the Cypriot pronunciation for the standard Greek *ke*. Greek Cypriots strongly maintain English as a second language, largely because the island was a British colony until 1960. In contrast, Greek Cypriots typically have no fluency in Turkish as a result of the political and physical boundaries imposed between the two peoples after the 1974 Turkish invasion and partition of the island.

Despite differences in pronunciation, the Greek Cypriots share the 24-letter alphabet of the Greek mainland, which is pronounced and appears as follows:

Aα	alfa	a as in alfalfa
Bb	veeta	v as in victory
Γγ	gamma	g as in language
Dd	thelta	th as in the
Eε	epsilon	e as in eatable
Zζ	zeeta	z as in zebra
Hη	eeta	e as in eat
Θθ	theeta	th as in thread
Iι	yota	y as in yoke
Kκ	kapa	k as in kitchen
Λλ	lambda	l as in lamb
Mμ	me	m as in meat
Nν	knee	n as in neat
Ξξ	xee	x as in extra
Oο	oh	o as in only
Ππ	pea	p as in pear
Pρ	row	r as in rodeo
Σσ	sigma	s as in seat
Tτ	taf	t as in tax
Υυ	epsilon	e as in bee
Φφ	fee	f as in find
Χχ	hee	h as in hair'
Ψψ	psi	psi sound as in <i>pepsi</i>
Ωω	omega	o as in oat

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Populated by some 30,000 Cypriots on the west coast of the island, Paphos pays tribute to Greek mythology as a landmark for the birth of Aphrodite, the erotic goddess of love and desire who, according to myth, emerged from the foam of the Cypriot waves, as captured in Botticelli's famous *The Birth of Venus* painting. Paphos shares its name with the mythical daughter born of Venus (Aphrodite's Roman name) and Pygmalion, and features of its western landscape symbolically reinforce the myth of Aphrodite's birth: the jagged rocks scattered to the south of Paphos are regarded as Aphrodite's Rocks (*Petra tou Romiou*); the sanctuary of Aphrodite and onetime shrine is located at Kouklia Village within Paphos; the Baths of Aphrodite, a celebrated site of fertility where the goddess of love bathed before her marriage, are found at Polis; and the Fontana Amorosa, the Fountain of Love spring which enamors its drinkers, is likewise in Paphos.

Digenis Akritas also colors the folklore of Cyprus as a figure of an anonymous epic poem who often battled the deathly grip of Charon, the ferryman of death, before succumbing to his mortality. He is also credited with the creation of *Pentadaktylos* (five-fingered), another name for the mountainous Kyrenia Range in northeastern Cyprus, which resembles five fingers

and which resulted from the drowning Digenis' gripping the range from the Mediterranean Sea, leaving the imprints of his one hand in the mountain range.

Folklore which enters the modern-day beliefs and practices of the Greek Cypriots include the existence of *kalikanzari* (little monsters), who, until Christmas, devour the trunks which were believed to hold the earth in place. During Christmas, their respite from this habit allows the earth to heal, as they rise from the depths beneath the earth to participate in and sabotage Christmas festivities. Epiphany, celebrated by Cypriots on January 6, carries this pagan overtone into the common practice of throwing *lokmades* (little doughnuts) atop the roofs of their homes to appease the little monsters and to return them to the depths, where, unfortunately, they continue to devour the trunks of the earth until the Christmas season returns.

#### 5 RELIGION

Nearly all Greek Cypriots belong to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, which is an independent church of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Greek Cypriots are proud of their Christian heritage. Universally, Christians recognize Cyprus as the sacred site at which the first pagan political authority, the proconsul Sergius Paulus, was converted to Christianity by the apostles Paul and Barnabas, who arrived in Salamis and journeyed to Paphos in AD 45. Apart from the impact of these apostles, whose missionary work in Cyprus is documented in the New Testament (Acts 13), Christianity subsisted until the rule of Constantine the Great in AD 313, which resulted in an increased number of dioceses. The 5th century was not only a period of grand basilica construction, as can be seen today in Kourion and Cape Drepanum, but also the time at which the Church of Cyprus earned its privileged status as an autocephalous church free from other patriarchates, a status it powerfully retains today. Cyprus attained this unusual, privileged status through the Archbishop Anthemius of Constantia (Salamis), whose unique vision led him to the tomb of St. Barnabas, where he discovered the Gospel of St. Mark. Thereafter, as endorsed by the emperor Zeno (the recipient of the Gospel), the archbishop functioned as an imperial power, carrying a scepter rather than a pastoral staff, wearing purple robes, and signing his name in purple ink.

Still, during the Byzantine Empire, Cyprus was subject to the Eastern Empire at Constantinople, under which Orthodoxy and its distinctions evolved until the period of Lusignan and Venetian rule (1192–1489). The Church of Cyprus, then acknowledged as different and separate from the precepts of the Catholic faith, was compelled to uphold the Roman pope as a religious authority. When Cyprus was then usurped and controlled by the Ottoman Empire (1571–1878), the Cypriots' religion was overlooked by these Muslim conquerors, whose rule through “millets” or religious communities enabled the Church of Cyprus to gain sovereignty; positions within the church were therefore upheld for their spiritual as well as secular authority. This duality of church and state is embodied in the figure of Mihail Mouskos, later dubbed Archbishop Makarios III, a young monk who was elected president of the republic in 1959 and held the position until his death in 1977. As president, Mouskos heightened the quality and training of priests at the Cypriot seminary in Nicosia, and served as a political activist for the cause of *enosis* (union with the Greek

mainland). His status as both a religious and political authority was succeeded by the conservative Archbishop Chrysostomos, who led the Church of Cyprus until illness led to his removal from office. He was succeeded in 2006 by Archbishop Chrysostomos II.

The constitution allows the Orthodox Church of Cyprus to have full authority over the administration of its own internal affairs and property. The Church is one of the largest landowners in the country and holds significant investment properties in banking, construction, and hotels.

Unlike most Greek Orthodox churches in the United States, the Cypriot Orthodox service doesn't feature a choir, and the balcony area found in most churches is reserved for women (termed *ginekonitis*, which literally translates to mean "women's section"). Segregation likewise exists on the ground level of the church, as men usually sit on one side and women on the other, an observed separation which will even split married couples apart for the duration of the service, though this practice is more common among rural, village churches than in urban ones.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Cypriot holidays revolve around the Orthodox religion, with the celebration of Easter serving as a central event. Religious holidays in the Orthodox churches are celebrated following the Julian calendar, rather than the Gregorian calendar used by Western Christians, therefore the dates of such holidays as Easter and Pentecost are often different than those celebrated in the Western world.

Like the American Mardi Gras, Carnival, most notably that of Limassol, is upheld as a time to feast extravagantly before the fast of Lent. It is celebrated with colorful parades and an abundance of specialties, including *bourekia* (a minty-cheese pastry) as well as the sweetmeats *daktyla* and *kandaifi*. The first week of Carnival is known as *Kreatini*, or Meat Week. The second and final week of Carnival is known as *Tyrini* (cheese week) and extends to Green Monday.

Green Monday, 50 days before the Orthodox Easter, is the first official day of Lent. It is a legal holiday celebrated as a day for picnics and kite flying, when Cypriots head for the hillside or the mountains with a basket of "greens," or a vegetarian meal, to be enjoyed by family and relatives. Freed from work responsibilities, Cypriots optimistically greet this dawning of the Lenten season with the phrase *Tha pame na kopsume ti miti tis Sarakostis* ("We're going to cut the nose of the first forty days") and do so with a Lenten feast which includes fresh vegetables, baked potatoes, pickles, fresh bread, and a sweet called *halva*. Only the most devout Cypriots continue this fast from meat, milk, eggs, and olive oil for the entire 40 days of Lent (Sundays are not counted as fasting days during Lent since the Lord's day is always meant to be a celebration). Most Cypriots will not observe these eating restrictions again until Holy Week.

Holy Week features many lengthy, elaborate services and ceremonies that bring most Cypriots to church each evening. The betrayal of Jesus is observed on Holy Thursday through a lengthy three-hour service which requires Cypriots to stand and listen to the solemn reading of the gospels; with each reading by the priest, a candle is lit. School children also participate in the service through their adorning of the *epitaphion*—a large, ornately carved, free-standing structure which sym-

bolizes Christ's tomb—with flowers they have gathered from the village. The crucifixion is then observed on Good Friday, when the epitaphion is carried by laymen of the church in a funeral-style procession. On this day the women of the village prepare rich pastries called *flaouna*, which are made with a special cheese and which prompt ceaseless discussion among housewives in defense of their special recipe. The resurrection, the climax of Holy Week, is celebrated on Holy Saturday in a midnight candle-light service which closes with the repeated singing of *Christos Anesti* (Christ is Risen), a phrase which is repeated by devout Cypriots in passing 50 days thereafter. After the midnight service, families and relatives return to their homes to feast on an Easter "breakfast," which consists of a lemon-based chicken and rice soup (*avogolemono*), along with boiled eggs dyed red to commemorate the gloriously shed blood of Christ. As among the Greek-Americans in the United States, the eggs are used in a tableside game in which one person holds an egg steady between forefinger and thumb while his "competitor" hits the stationary egg with his own egg; the champion possesses the egg which remains free of cracks.

During the Easter day, the midday meal—which usually consists of a whole lamb, a goat, or other skewered meat—is grilled outside and shared by relatives who visit for the day. The Easter Sunday meal is enjoyed among family and acquaintances, and children often receive a chocolate egg and, more recently, gifts. The festivities and visits of Easter Sunday extend into the week, as many Cypriots are relieved of their work responsibilities on the Monday and Tuesday which follow Easter.

The Day of Ascension, 40 days after Easter, is observed as a holiday of fasting, prayer, and meditation. Pentecost, the Day of the Holy Spirit, is celebrated 50 days after Easter. In Cyprus a holiday known as *Kataklysmos* (which means "flood" is celebrated on the same day as Pentecost. Originally celebrated as a water festival to commemorate Aphrodite, its water theme has evolved into a Christian celebration of the flood story of Noah from the Old Testament and involves music, dancing, and poetry readings in a fair-like setting. The Feast of the Assumption of Mary on August 15 is a public holiday, as are Christmas and Epiphany (celebrated as the Baptism of the Lord).

Secular, more politically inspired holidays include Greek Independence Day (March 25), Independence Day (October 1), and Greek National Day (October 28).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Engagement, marriage and childbirth are events which herald a child's arrival to adulthood. As premarital sex is strongly condemned, girls formally become women and mothers through the vow of marriage and it is only when they have children that they learn how to care for them. Unlike in the United States, grandmothers attend to children and act as babysitters, rather than teenagers.

For men, military service is a rite of passage and is demanded of all males 18 years of age for a period of 26 months. Prior to their service and immediately following their graduation, boys will devote many hours to friends—either making commitments to girlfriends or spending hours with other boys at discos and listening to music which dramatizes their sentiments at this crucial maturation point in their lives. A few weeks following high school graduation, boys begin basic training and learn their location site, the most desired being air artillery and communication units, the worst being the infantry.



A Cyprus farmer stands in a field with his goats and sheep. (Hugh Sitton/Getty Images)

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

To maintain a tourism industry, Cypriots have acquired a national reputation as very hospitable, pleasant people. The islanders themselves, particularly in the 300 remaining villages, sustain close same-sex relations: men often gather together at cafés to play an intense game of *tavali* (backgammon) and to talk politics, though women, except for tourists, are strictly excluded from the café. Male bonding also endures between a groom and his *koumbaro*, the best man at his wedding who also baptizes the first child; women also maintain close relations with their *koumbara*.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The shift of Greek Cypriot living from the village to the city peaked in 1974, when the Turkish government seized the most fertile, productive agricultural regions of the island. The houses and apartments of urban Cyprus are equipped with the amenities found in any modern city. Families are typically situated close to each other within the city and maintain a village house as well.

Despite movements toward a more urban society, a connection between the villages and the cities was made through advancements in transportation; British annexation of the island in the early 1900s introduced isolated villages to the cities through a system of roads. An estimated 10,448 km of highway stretch across the Republic of Cyprus, roughly half of which are paved. The cars which travel those highways—the

most popular being Japanese models as well as Mercedes and BMW—cost Cypriots double what Americans pay; car maintenance and even gasoline are also highly priced. Since the shutdown of the Nicosia International Airport after the 1974 Turkish invasion, the only legal means of entry into the country has been through the Larnaca International and Paphos International Airports, as well as the ports of Limassol, Larnaca, and Paphos.

Despite the 75-year life expectancy for males and the 80-year life expectancy for females, most Cypriots are aged between 15 and 64; a mere 12% are over the age of 65. In 2008 the birth rate averaged 12.5 births/1,000 population, while the death rate averaged 7.8 deaths/1,000 population, with a national population growth rate of 0.52%. As in the United States, good health is maintained through athletic clubs, which largely appeal to young male and female professionals, who will pay a monthly membership to reap both the social and physical benefits of industrialized fitness. Women usually participate in same-sex aerobics classes and perform some weightlifting, which is more common among men, in addition to running and using a punching bag. Older people become members only at the recommendation of a doctor and many heart patients will opt for a morning walk rather than the more modern gym.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, Greek Cypriots define themselves through their family. A Cypriot household will typically house a husband, wife, and unmarried children. Grandparents usually live nearby or within the home of an adult child (usually the daughter) in the event of declining health. Nursing home facilities are seldom used and only when the aged parent is beyond home care. Grandparents in otherwise good health retain a functional, respected role in Greek Cypriot families and are revered in the eyes of their grandchildren. Grandfathers will often take their grandchildren to and from school and grandmothers perform most child-rearing responsibilities while mothers work. Until the 1950s marriages were accompanied by oral promises in which parents contributed to the new lives of the couple through traditional gifts: the bridegroom's family would provide a home which the bride's family would furnish. In some cases a written dowry contract is signed by the couple and their parents and then authorized by a religious party.

The Old World attitudes toward marriage failed to consider love as a viable motivation, as romantic love was disparaged in Cypriot society and marriages were often mediated by a third matchmaking party whose intimate knowledge of the family qualified them and endorsed the match. In modern culture, men and women typically select a mate of their own accord and interests and are largely swayed by feelings of romance. In the past, heterosexual contact was only permitted with parental supervision and within the physical boundaries of the village fountain and the church. Modern-day Cypriot society encourages earlier heterosexual contact within academic settings and the work force. While sexual promiscuity and a relaxing of morals is evident among adolescents and unmarried couples, it is still considered taboo for an adolescent couple to be home or out alone and relationships in general are platonic. Adolescents congregate in groups, though there is virtually no pressure to enter a relationship during adolescence, and boyfriends and girlfriends who are present among teen groups seldom stray off by themselves. Though parents might be aware of their son or daughter's relationship, they usually make no effort to meet the beau, who would not be invited to dinner and whom the adolescent would keep to himself or herself anyway.

Once a Cypriot has completed his or her education, possible university studies, and has secured a job, engagement is the necessary course of action for the bulk of the Cypriot population. Couples may discover each other through the friends and co-workers encountered at their places of employment. For example, a woman who is introduced to a co-worker's brother and considers him a prospect for marriage will ask her co-worker about the bachelor's "eligibility" and potential as a husband. If the woman receives an endorsement from the co-worker, the two families will work together at arranging meetings to determine the viability of the match and to make plans for engagement, which has the same weight and formality as the actual wedding.

Greek Cypriot weddings of the past, in the Orthodox tradition, encompassed an entire week of festivities; modern weddings are performed in only half a day and begin with the elaborate dressing of the bride and groom, who proceed to the church service. The equivalent of the American wedding reception usually begins at 8 pm and includes traditional Cypriot fare (*kleftiko*, *pastitsio*, *resi*, and *kourabiedes*), and is accompanied by traditional music otherwise not usually heard

in modern Cyprus. *Bouzoukia*, the electric guitar, drums, and the violin are harmonized together for dances such as the *tsifteteli* belly dance and the historic *remetiko*, performed by a sole dancer within a circle of clapping acquaintances. The final dance of the evening is the *choros tou androjinou*, which finds the married couple alone on the dance floor strewn with banknotes. Separation and divorce, usually caused by extramarital affairs and abuse, are more common and legally permissible in modern culture than in the past.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Cypriot dress, reserved for some weddings and festivals, finds men in loose, black *vrakas* (knicker-like pants), dark vests embellished with bright designs, and tall black boots. However, styles in Cyprus reflect the modern fashion industry in Europe and America. Jeans and casual shirts are often worn at home and at leisure. Business attire and formal wear are similar to that found across Europe.

## 12 FOOD

The rich food of Cyprus, while largely Greek in flavor, traces its origins to the palates of the island's diverse invaders and settlers, featuring Greek, Turkish, Arabic, and even some British influences. Therefore, one who sits down to a challenging table of *Meze*, which translates as "mixture" and which forms the common fare *Mezedhes* ("little delicacies"), could encounter up to 30 sample cuisines. A common table of *Mezedhes* will include the Cypriot specialties of *halumi*, cheese exclusive to Cyprus and produced from thyme-fed goats; *taramosalata*, a dip of smoked cod's roe; *kleftiko*, slow-roasted lamb; and *moussaka*, a minced lamb and potato casserole which is flavored with bechamel sauce. *Koupepia*, or grape leaves, are a favorite of the village as well as the city:

### Koupepia

Koupepia are basically made in two steps: the first prepares the leaves, the second prepares the filling for the leaves.

#### Leaves

Blanch and rinse in cold water 30 vine leaves (which can be picked from grape vines in June); put them aside.

#### Filling

1 tablespoon finely minced peppermint, parsley, and onion

½ pound diced tomatoes

1 egg white

½ pound ground meat, browned.

Salt and pepper to taste

Mix together the peppermint, parsley, onion, tomatoes, egg white, and ground meat. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Sprinkle lemon juice over 2 tablespoons rice; let stand for five minutes, then add to meat mixture.

Carefully place a blanched and rinsed grape leaf on your work area, and place 1 tablespoon meat filling in the center. Fold the edges of the leaf together so they meet, and then roll the leaf up to resemble a small sausage.

Place all the filled vine leaves in a pot; cover with meat broth, and simmer for 40 minutes.

Common morning fare for Cypriots includes toast topped with a slice of cheese and perhaps honey. Similarly, the older generation awakens to bread with tomatoes, olives, and *hal-loumi*, a cheese only made in Cyprus. This is accompanied for most with instant coffee made with milk and served either cold or hot. Children drink Nesquik, while their grandparents usually drink warm, sweetened milk.

In accordance with the fasting of meat, eggs, and dairy products which is observed under the Greek Orthodox religion, lunch for devout Cypriots consists of dried or fresh beans three days a week. The vegetarian victuals are either dressed in olive oil and lemon juice and eaten with plenty of fresh bread and tomatoes, or cooked with a tomato sauce stew of celery, carrots, and onions. Those who choose not to fast enjoy both traditional fare, which can be sampled at a table of *Meze*, as well as more British entrees such as steak and french fries, as meat is enjoyed by most Cypriots on a daily basis.

### **13 EDUCATION**

While Cyprus bitterly endured British control of the island, it was the presence and initiative of the English, through the Education Law of 1895, which empowered the local government to raise taxes to develop primary schools. The number of schools created through this legislation more than doubled from the 76 that existed in 1897 to 179 only 20 years later. In addition, the British diminished illiteracy on the island. In 2003 the literacy rate was at estimated at 97%.

Like children in America, Cypriot children begin their educational careers at the age of about 5½; unlike American children, they are required to attend school only to the age of 15. The Greek Cypriot school system, which is rigidly governed by the Ministry of Education, potentially spans four levels. Pre-primary education for children aged from 2 to 5½ emerged only after the 1974 Turkish invasion of the island and more than half of the eligible Greek Cypriot students are estimated to attend preschools. Primary school is required and begins for students aged 5½; it covers a six-year, general curriculum program in which English is a required course for the final two years. Students continue their education in secondary school, the first level of which is required, free, and termed "Gymnasium"; the final three years of secondary school, which are optional, is termed the "Lyceum," and it offers five fields of concentration: classical, science, economics, commercial/secretarial, and foreign languages.

Higher education and specialized training for professionals such as teachers, technicians, engineers, hoteliers/caterers, foresters, nurses, and health inspectors is furnished by technical and vocational colleges. The University of Cyprus located in the capital city of Nicosia, was founded in 1989 and enrolled its first students in September 1992. The cost is free for Cypriots who maintain a twelve-credit course load. Most Greek Cypriots seeking a college education will attend schools in Greece, the United Kingdom, or the United States.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Ministry of Education is charged with the cultural enhancement as well as the educational advancement of Cypriots. Cultural Services, established by the Ministry of Education in March 1968, is the branch of government which ensures the preservation of Cypriot culture by financing and promot-

ing such groups as the Cyprus State Chamber Orchestra; the Cyprus State Youth Orchestra; the Establishment of Cultural Centers; the Development of Refugee Settlements; archives for writers, painters, and sculptors; the National Struggle Museum; the National Gallery; and Folklore Culture. Cultural Services also issues state awards for literature, donates Cypriot books abroad, and purchases publications within Cyprus as well as work from Cypriot artists.

The Cyprus Department of Antiquities is another government organization whose excavation and preservation of historic sites and artifacts—including theatres, sanctuaries, castles and churches—allows Cypriot culture to flourish.

As the ancient theatres of Salamis, Soli, Kourion, and Paphos were cultural centers since the Middle Ages, so they have been excavated by the Cyprus Department of Antiquities, and are the modern sites of both classical and contemporary plays from around the world. The Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOC) was organized in 1971, consists of a nine-member panel, and promotes theatrical arts both on the island as well as international exchanges outside Cyprus.

### **15 WORK**

The Greek Cypriot labor force numbered about 373,000 in 2006. Jobs commanding the highest respect are "professional" positions: doctors, lawyers, civil servants, teachers, dentists, and business men. Wealthy "upper class" professionals—typically educated in elite institutions in the United Kingdom, Western Europe, or the United States—enter such professional positions. They typically own manufacturing, construction, and consumer goods companies. As in the United States and other countries, the upper class enjoys increased upward mobility in banks and semi-governmental organizations because of contacts, which are virtually necessary for professional success in Cyprus. The middle class are either educated in the United States and Europe, where exclusive college scholarship opportunities are offered to Cypriots, or in Greece, where free education is available for students who perform well on placement exams. Jobs taken by scholarship-educated, middle class Cypriots are in areas of government, teaching, banking, insurance, and semi-governmental organizations, as well as management within the retail sector. These positions still command adequate respect, unlike the lower class vocations of manual laborers, skilled craftsmen, and manufacturing and construction workers; the sheer scarcity of these workers has actually allowed them to earn high wages, as do many farmers. While considered low class, farmers are usually wealthy because land in Cyprus is valuable, especially if near the sea and zoned for hotels.

In 2006 about 71% of the labor force was employed in service-related industries. About 21% of the work force was employed in industry and 8% in agriculture. Unemployment in 2007 was estimated at 3.8%.

### **16 SPORTS**

Though Cypriots were allegedly numbered among the first Olympians and ancient gymnasiums have been preserved on the island, sports only recently commanded government attention through the creation of the Cyprus Sports Organization (CSO) in 1969. This non-profit, government organization successfully administered its first Five-Year Development Plan

from 1978 to 1982, initiating the construction of stadiums, swimming pools, and sports halls throughout the island. Successive Five-Year Development Plans continued the construction and maintenance of sports facilities and channeled grants to various sports organizations. In addition, the CSO extended its interest in sports to the international level, creating protocols and developing sports relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany. Cyprus also shares sports-related technical and financial interests with Greece. The third Five-Year Development Plan aimed to enhance the performance and competitive aspect of individual sports; consequently, 35 sports federations and 4 cofederations are present on the island and are acknowledged by parallel international organizations, as well as by the International Olympic Committee.

Greek Cypriot men, reflecting the recreational tastes of so many European countries, are most strongly drawn to football (soccer in America) as both spectators and players. Three league divisions composed of 36 teams currently exist under the Cyprus Football Association, and the island has been a participant in World Cup matches. The hunting season likewise attracts a throng of Cypriots, as the countryside will host as many as 40,000 male hunters on Wednesdays or Sundays.

Apart from ballet, dancing, and karate, which are strongly affiliated with the performing and cultural arts, sports are not introduced to young Cypriots by way of arduous training which underlies the development of stellar athletes. Still, many Cypriot children have increasingly participated in sports through the CSO's Sports For All and other programs targeted at children. The natural resources of the island offer Cypriots of all ages diverse sports activities in a variety of seasons. The installment of three ski runs on Mt. Olympus has drawn skiers to the Troodos Mountains from the months of January through mid-March. During the warmer seasons, swimming can be enjoyed throughout the many beaches.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Like many tourists, Cypriots enjoy packing the car with family, relatives, and ample foods, and heading for the mountains. While nightclubs, restaurants, and movie theaters are popular for many, most Greek Cypriots enjoy entertaining family and friends in the home.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

For more than a century, *lefkaritiki* embroidery and linen has been marketed throughout the world, and it takes its name from the city of its origin, Pano Lefkara. Crafted from Irish linen, each piece is unique, requires several weeks of work, and can be quite costly. The art has been somewhat industrialized, however, by four manufacturing companies within Lefkara who together employ more than 600 workers, and have brought much prosperity to the city through this art.

Official Handicraft Centers have been established in Limassol, Larnaca, Paphos, and Nicosia for the purpose of maintaining folk art, which has recently suffered from the cheap reproductions of authentic Cypriot pieces that have been mass-produced and imported from Hong Kong and Greece.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Social and political tensions between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have led to discrimination between the groups, but incidences of major violence have been rare as UN-sponsored negotiations continue. Harassment and acts of vandalism have been reported as effects of discrimination from both sides. Greek Cypriots are particularly interested in resolutions that would insure property and settlement rights and a return of territory under a single integrated government structure. The Turkish Cypriots, however, are in favor of maintaining two autonomous societies with limited contact between the governments and political equality in the eyes of the world. While travel between the two communities is allowed, each side places certain restrictions and regulations on border crossing. For example, Greek Cypriots must have automobile insurance from a company within the Turkish Cypriot administered area in order to drive into the area. The Greek Cypriots place a similar regulation on Turkish Cypriot motorists. At the end of 2006 there were approximately 238,000 Greek Cypriots listed as internally displaced persons as a result of the political conflict. Many of these individuals rely on government financial assistance. The entrance of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004 caused a great deal of tension between the Greek and Turkish Communities, since the Turkish Cypriot administered area is not recognized as an independent government within the European Union. Though the recognized Cypriot government has switched its currency to the euro as of January 2008, the northern Turkish Cypriot controlled government continues to use the new Turkish lira.

There have been some reports of discrimination against other minority ethnic groups within the country, such as the Roma. Homosexuals also face social discrimination despite antidiscrimination laws. While Cyprus was once believed to be a narcotics brokering center for drugs shipped to Europe, Cypriot police have joined with other European centers of justice to curtail drug trafficking and have developed no tolerance policies on drug trafficking issues.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

While women have been granted the same legal status as men and are generally able to find positions in the workforce, there is still a strong belief in society that a woman's primary roles are those of wife and mother. Sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread, even though a majority of specific cases go unreported by women who may fear losing their jobs or simply enduring an increase in harassment. Domestic abuse of women is also widespread, again with many incidences left unreported. While the law requires that men and women receive equal pay for equal work, most women in blue-collar jobs earn about 25% to 30% less than their male counterparts. The percentage is less in white collar professions, but there is still no pay equity.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

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## GUJARATIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** goo-juh-RAH-teez

**LOCATION:** India (Gujarat state)

**POPULATION:** 50,596,992 (2001 Census of India)

**LANGUAGE:** Gujarati

**RELIGION:** Hindu; small populations of Muslims, Jains, Parsis

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: People of India

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Gujaratis are the inhabitants of Gujarat, one of the western states of the Republic of India. The names of both the state and its people are derived from the “Gujara,” a people identified by some as a branch of the White Huns, who ruled the area during the 8th and 9th centuries. The name “Gujarat” has also been linked to the Gujaras, a pastoral caste found throughout northwestern India.

Gujarati history goes back much farther than the Gujaras. Archaeological evidence reveals that the region was settled during prehistoric times. The remains of cities in Gujarat dating from around 2000 BC indicate that the people shared in the cultural achievements of the Harappan civilization. The known history of Gujarat, however, begins around 250 BC. Carved rock edicts in the Girnar Hills in Saurashtra show that Gujarat formed part of Ashoka Maurya’s Empire at this time. In succeeding centuries, the region came under the rule of most of the great dynasties (e.g. the Sakas, Guptas, Gujaras) that arose in western India. The end of the thirteenth century, however, saw Gujarat conquered by the Muslims.

For the next 450 years, Gujarat was ruled by Muslims, either independent sultans or the vassals of the Mughal emperors. Gujarat was overrun by the Marathas in the mid-eighteenth century, but its control passed to the British East India Company in 1818. In the following decades, the Gujarat area was administered variously as a part of Bombay Province, as a province in its own right, and as a States Agency (the region contained many princely states paying tribute to the British). Following India’s independence in 1947, Gujarat was incorporated into Bombay State. In 1960, the Gujarati-speaking areas of Bombay were split off to form the present-day state of Gujarat.

In the years following 1960, the state government of Gujarat was formed by the Indian National Congress, interspersed with rule by the Janata party in its various incarnations (1975–76, 1977–80, 1990–94, 1996–98), but in 1995 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party, took power (the Rashtriya Janata Party ran the state government from 1996–98). In 2008 the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi was serving his third term as Chief Minister—he and his government belong to the BJP—and assumed his office in 2002. Modi has been accused of presiding over what the Indian press has termed the “Gujarat Holocaust.” The story begins with the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992 by Hindu nationalists, supported by the opposition (at the national level) BJP. The mosque was believed by Hindus to have been built on the site of Ram’s birthplace (Ram Janmabhoomi—Ram was a king in ancient India and is held to be an incarnation of Vishnu, an important Hindu deity) in Ayodhya in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Despite a com-

mitment by India's Supreme Court that the mosque would not be harmed, the mosque was stormed and destroyed by Hindu nationalists, who saw its presence as a sacrilege. They were believers in "Hindutva" (Hinduness), a word first coined in 1923 and used to describe movements devoted to Hindu nationalism. Ever since, the site has been a center of pilgrimage for devout Hindus, and trainloads of Hindus, volunteers for the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organization dedicated to serving the interests of Hinduism worldwide, have been making the journey by train from Ahmedabad in Gujarat to Ayodhya for pilgrimage and "*kar seva*" (technically, *kar seva* means "construction of or cleaning of religious sites").

On 27 February 2002, a train carrying Gujarati *kar sevaks* was returning to Ahmedabad from Ayodhya, where they were helping build a temple to Ram on the site of the former *masjid* (mosque), when it was stopped by a mob near Godhra Junction railway station, east of Ahmedabad in Gujarat State: the train was set alight, one car was completely gutted, and 59 people, all Hindus, died in the conflagration. A *bandh* (general strike) was called by the VHP for the next day, even though *bandhs* are generally accompanied by violence and have been made illegal by the central government. The *bandh* was supported by the Modi administration. The next day turned into an anti-Muslim orgy of mass slaughter, arson, and the complete breakdown of law and order in the state. Over the next three months, Muslim shops and homes were destroyed and in Ahmedabad and Vadodra (Baroda) several Muslims, including a former Congress MP for Ahmedabad, were burnt alive. The communal violence between Hindus and Muslims continued until May 2002 and Modi was accused of at best standing by and doing nothing to stop the carnage and at worst of being complicit in the violence.

In September 2004 the Banerjee Committee, a panel appointed by the central government and headed by former Supreme Court judge UC Banerjee to probe the Godhra train fire concluded that the fire was accidental. Its findings, however, were challenged by the BJP and the Gujarat inspector-general of police. A Citizens Tribunal headed by retired Supreme Court justice Krishna Iyer collected evidence and testimony from more than 2,000 riot victims, witnesses, and others. In its report, the tribunal accuses the state government and Chief Minister Modi of complicity in the violence. International organizations estimate over 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed during this period.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 2001 census reported Gujarat's population as 50.6 million persons. Assuming population growth rates similar to those of the 1991–2001 decade, the current population is estimated to be close to 59 million. This figure does not include the sizable community of overseas Gujaratis, mainly pursuing business activities, in Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, and the West.

Gujarat lies on India's west coast, and part of its western boundary is also India's international border with Pakistan. Its coastline runs from just east of the mouth of the Indus River, curves around the great peninsula of Saurashtra that juts out into the Arabian Sea, then swings south to a point roughly 160 km (100 mi) north of Bombay. Geographically, Gujarat falls into three broad divisions, mainland Gujarat, the Saurash-

tra Peninsula, and Kachch. Mainland Gujarat consists of the broad coastal plains east of the Gulf of Cambay. These merge to the north with the lowlands around Ahmedabad and northern Gujarat. Fringing this area on the north and east are the uplands of the southern Aravallis, the western Vindhya and Satpura Ranges, and the Western Ghats. The Narmada and the Tapti are major rivers that flow across the southern lowlands to enter the Gulf of Cambay. Southern areas receive 160 cm (63 in) of rain a year, which, combined with fertile soil, makes them a productive agricultural region. The amount of rainfall declines rapidly to the north and west, however, and most of Gujarat is semiarid or arid.

Saurashtra (also known as Kathiawar) is an important historical and cultural region of Gujarat. It consists of a peninsula bounded by the Gulf of Cambay, the Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Kachch. Broad coastal plains surround a series of low plateaus and hills in the interior. One of these, the Gir Range (about 640 m or 2,100 ft), is home to a wildlife sanctuary for the last Asian lion population in the world. Kachch, in the far west, is another historical and cultural region. Much of its area is taken up by the Rann of Kachch, a vast expanse of tidal mud flats and salt marshes that merges almost imperceptibly with the Thar Desert to the north. Rainfall in the Rann averages around 30 cm (about 12 in). Maximum temperatures in the hot season average over 43°C (110°F) in northern Gujarat.

In the early hours of 26 January 2001, Gujarat experienced a devastating earthquake. Resulting from the release of pressure as two of the earth's major tectonic plates (the Indian and the Eurasian plates) collided, and measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale, the quake had its epicenter near Bhuj, in Kachch, and resulted in the death of at least 20,000 people with more than 150,000 people injured and over 1 million homes destroyed. National and international aid in the form of specialized rescue assistance, medical aid, food and clothes poured in, but the distribution of this aid offered an insight into the partisan nature of both state and society in Gujarat and provided a portent of events to come in early 2002 (the Godhra communal violence). There was discrimination against Muslims in the distribution of aid by both the state government and the Sangh Parivar, the loose association of Hindu organizations in the state, through which much of the aid was administered.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Gujarati, the language of Gujarat, is an Indo-Aryan language derived partly from Sanskrit and partly from Prakrit (an ancient language spoken by the common people of India rather than by Brahmins and scholars). There are several dialects of Gujarati. These include Kachchi, spoken in Kachch, the Kathiawadi of Saurashtra, and the Surati dialect of the southern region around Surat. Bhili, the tongue of the tribal Bhils in the northern and eastern areas of the state, is very similar to Gujarati. An ancient form, Old Gujarati was once spoken in neighboring areas of Rajasthan, and dialects in these areas still show strong connections with Gujarati. Gujarati is written in a cursive script modified from Devanagari.

## 4 FOLKLORE

According to Hindu legend, the hero-god Krishna was forced to abandon his ancestral home of Mathura and moved his capital to Dvaraka (the modern Dwarka) at the western tip of the





Saurashtra Peninsula. Following the events related in the epic known as the *Mahabharata*, Krishna returned to a city beset by ominous signs. The Yadava chiefs, Krishna's relatives, began to quarrel and became engaged in a drunken brawl that had the entire city in an uproar. Soon, nearly all the Yadava chiefs were dead. Krishna's own son was killed, and his brother was mortally wounded. Disheartened by these events, Krishna retired to the forest near the city to ponder the situation. He was mistaken for a deer and killed by a hunter. The city of Dvaraka was then engulfed by the sea.

Writers note that the events of Krishna's later life are quite "un-Indian" in their tragic nature. The drunken brawl, the slaughter of so many people, the slain hero, the city engulfed by the sea—all are themes found in early European literature, but nowhere else in Hindu mythology.

## 5 RELIGION

Gujaratis are overwhelmingly Hindu; about 90% of the population follows Hinduism. The Vallabhacharya sect of Krishna worshipers has a particularly strong following among the Gujarati *bania* (trading) castes. Dwarka, Krishna's famed capital in Saurashtra, is an important place of pilgrimage for this sect, and is regarded as one of India's seven sacred cities. Shiva also has his following among Gujaratis. The Somnath Temple, on Saurashtra's southern coast, is an important Shaivite shrine. Although their religious practices may differ in details, all Gu-

jarati Hindus accept the fundamental beliefs and philosophy of the Hindu religion.

Muslims make up some 8.73% of Gujarat's population. Sunnis predominate, although the Khoja and Bohra form a significant Shiite minority. Jains, although comparatively few in number, have played a major role in the shaping of Gujarati culture. They are mainly of the Svetambara ("white-clad") sect of the religion. Girnar and Satrunjaya Hill, near Palitana, are major centers of Jain pilgrimage. There are small Parsi communities in Surat and Navsari.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The various communities of Gujarat celebrate their own religious festivals. Thus Muslims observe Muharram and the "Ids," Jains celebrate Mahavira's birthday, and Parsis keep their Gahambaras (six seasonal festivals). Hindus observe the major festivals of the Hindu calendar, but Navratri is a special holiday of the Gujaratis. Navratri, literally "nine nights," is celebrated on the nine nights leading up to Dasahara day. It is a time of gaiety, when men and women gather in village squares and temple compounds to sing and dance. The festival ends on Dasahara day, when artisans worship their tools, farmers their ploughs, and students their books.

Janamashtami (Krishna's birthday) and other Krishna festivals are important for Vaishnavas. Of particular significance in Gujarat is the national holiday that marks M. K. Gandhi's birthday. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the great men of the twentieth century, and universally regarded as the father of the modern Indian nation, was born in Porbandar in Saurashtra on 2 October 1869.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Gujaratis follow the life-cycle rituals prescribed by their communities. Thus, although the details of the ceremonies may differ according to caste, Hindus observe the rituals (*samskaras*) set out in the Vedas and other Hindu texts. These include ritual purification after childbirth, the name-giving ceremony, the first-feeding ceremony, and the head-shaving ceremony.

One of the most important rites for the higher castes is the *upanayana* ceremony, the donning of the sacred thread. Virtually all groups have some sort of period of seclusion followed by purification rites for girls at their first menstruation. Jain rituals in general follow Hindu patterns. Muslim practices include whispering the Call to Prayer (*azan*) in a newborn baby's ear, head-shaving and naming ceremonies, and the all-important circumcision (*sunnat*) for males.

Most Gujarati Hindus cremate their dead, although some lower-caste groups bury them. Again, death rites follow procedures set out in the Hindu sacred texts, with Brahman priests officiating at the funeral ceremony. Ashes and bone are collected from the funeral pyre to be scattered, if at all possible, in the sacred Ganges River. Hindus carry out rituals to remove pollution after the funeral, observe a period of mourning, and hold the important death feast (*sraddha*). Jain funeral customs tend to follow the Hindu pattern, while Muslims bury their dead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Gujarati Hindus greet each other with the *namaskara*, which consists of the gesture of joining hands (*anjali*) accompanied

by the words “*Namas*” or “*Namaste*” (an exclamation of homage for the deity). Muslims use the “*Salaam*” when they meet. A handshake or a casual wave of the hand is a common greeting in urban areas.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

A typical Gujarati village consists of a cluster of one- or two-story houses arranged along a central street. A temple, a village square, a few shops, and the well used by higher castes are found in the village center. Around this central area, where the agricultural and trading castes live, are the houses of the artisan castes. In the past, villages were surrounded by mud walls for protection against robbers. The untouchable castes, the *Dheds* (road sweepers) and *Bhangis* (cleaners), live outside the boundaries of the village.

The houses of the cultivators are generally roomy, and built of mud or brick, according to the wealth of the owner. Furniture consists of a couple of strong wooden boxes to hold valuables, wooden bed and coverings, and copper and earthenware cooking utensils. There is usually no stable for livestock, so cattle and goats are kept in the house. Living conditions in a village setting are quite different from those of the affluent business castes in cities such as Ahmedabad, Vadodara (Baroda), and Surat.

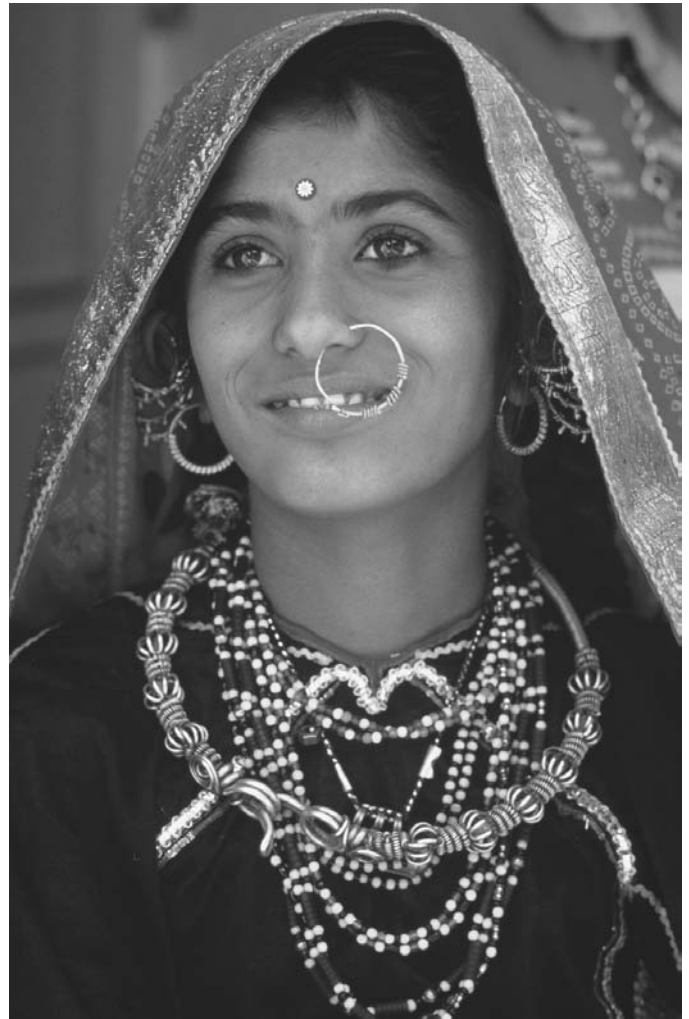
## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In general, Gujaratis conform to northern Indian patterns of kinship, marriage practices, and family structure. The norm is to marry within one's caste, but outside one's clan. Caste divisions and subdivisions among the *Banias* can be quite complex. Descent is determined through the father's line, and newlyweds live with the father's family. Marriages are arranged, and marriage rituals follow the customs and traditions of each individual caste or religious community. The joint family is typical among Gujaratis, with a household consisting of two or three generations of men and their dependents. A woman's main responsibility is the bearing and raising of children, preferably sons. Among the higher castes, women are mostly housewives. Lower caste women are expected to work in the fields or otherwise contribute to the family income.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional dress of a well-to-do Hindu man in Gujarat consists of a loincloth (*dhoti*), over which he wears a shirt (*badan*) and a coat (*angharko*) closed with strings instead of buttons. A length of cloth (*picchodi* or *dupatto*) is worn as a scarf over the shoulders or sometimes tied around the waist. The turban (*paghdi*), often fringed with gold brocade at each end, is tied in a manner that identifies the wearer's caste. Country-made shoes complete the outfit. A woman of high status typically wears the *sadi* or *sallo* (types of *saris*) with the *choli* (blouse). Gujarati women share their fellow Indians' love of jewelry.

As in the rest of India, dress styles vary according to caste and region. A *Bania* merchant from Ahmedabad dresses differently from a *Kunbi* farmer in Saurashtra, who in turn dresses differently from a member of the Bhil tribe of eastern Gujarat. There are also distinct regional patterns of dress. A man from Kachch, for example has clothes and a style of tying his turban that set him apart from someone from Junagadh or Bhavnagar.



A Gujarat woman. (Anthony Cassidy/Getty Images)

While traditional dress is still seen in rural areas, many urban dwellers (particularly men) have followed the modern trend toward Western-style clothes.

## 12 FOOD

Gujarati cuisine is strictly vegetarian, reflecting the strong influence of Jains and the Vaishnavas in the region. Wheat and the two kinds of millet (*jowar*, *bajri*) are the main staples. Flour is made into unleavened bread called “*roti*.” This is eaten with a variety of vegetable dishes. The villager takes a light breakfast of *roti* and milk or curds before setting out for the fields. Lunch is usually *roti* and buttermilk.

The main meal is eaten in the evening and consists of rice, split peas (*dal-bhat*), and vegetables. More substantial meals are served on the *thali*, a metal tray on which *roti*, rice, and small round bowls containing various dishes are placed. The bowls may hold vegetables such as eggplant, potatoes, beans, *dal* (lentils), and *dahi* (curds). *Kadhi*, a savory curry of curds and fried cakes made from pulses, is a popular dish. And no Gujarati would eat a meal without generous helpings of *ghi*

(clarified butter). Milk-based desserts are common. *Srikhand* is a rich dessert made with curds and spiced with saffron, cardamom, nuts, and fruit. Gujarat is also known for its delicious ice cream. There is strong religious-based sentiment against alcohol, and Gujarat has been under prohibition since 1947.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Gujarati emphasis on business activities provides a strong motivation for literacy. Among the *Bania* castes, education in reading, writing, mathematics, and accounting begins early in life. Literacy among males approaches 100%. However, when tribal people and the lower castes are figured into the equation, literacy in Gujarat State drops to 69.97% (80.5% for males and 58.6% for females). These figures were reported in the 2001 census.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Gujaratis have a cultural heritage that can be traced back to the Harappan civilization of three thousand years ago. While the exact nature and extent of Harappan contributions to Gujarati culture are unclear, it is likely that some elements survive in modern folk traditions. The beadwork of Saurashtra, for instance, may well have had Harappan origins. A substantial bead factory was uncovered at the archaeological site at Lothal. Gujaratis have a literature that dates to the twelfth century.

Many other groups have contributed to Gujarati culture. From the Vaishnavas come the legends and mythology of Krishna, to whom are ascribed the popular *Ras* and *Garba* folk dances. Jains influenced temple architecture and developed a distinctive style of painting. The Jain commitment to nonviolence (*ahimsa*) is seen not only in Gujarat's vegetarian cuisine, but in institutions such as animal homes (*pinjrapols*). Muslim architecture in Gujarat combined Hindu elements with its own styles.

### 15 WORK

The trading (*bania*) castes are very important among the Gujaratis. They make up a significantly higher proportion of the population than elsewhere in India. Gujaratis have traveled to Bombay, to other cities in India, and around the world in search of business opportunities. Gujarat is also a leading industrial state. Ahmedabad, often referred to as the "Manchester of India," is a major center of textile manufacturing. Vadodara and Surat are also important industrial towns. Agriculture is more commercial than in many other parts of India; cotton, sugarcane, oilseeds, and peanuts are major cash crops.

### 16 SPORTS

Children in Gujarat are relatively free of responsibilities until about nine or ten years of age and spend their leisure time in a variety of ways. Girls play "house," dress their dolls, and hold mock wedding ceremonies for them. Boys' activities center on playing marbles, spinning tops, and flying kites, and games such as *kabaddi* (team wrestling). *Khokho*, a kind of team tag game, is another popular local pastime. Modern sports such as soccer, cricket, field hockey, and basketball are played throughout the Gujarat region.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Especially in the cities, Gujaratis have access to movies, radio, and television. In the more isolated villages, however, traditional forms of entertainment remain a part of community life. These may be linked to religious fairs and festivals or provided by traveling bands of professional entertainers. A folk drama known as *Bhavai* is performed by Targalas and other castes whose ancestral profession is music and the theatrical arts. The Bhats and Charans are bards and genealogists in Gujarat who have preserved much of the region's folk culture and traditions.

### 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Gujarat is well known for its traditional handcrafted textiles. Fine silk saris are made in Patan, and attractive block prints are produced in Ahmedabad. Surat is famous for its *zari*, embroidery using gold or silver thread. Jumnagar is a center of colorful tie-dyed work, while peasant women in Saurashtra and Kachch produce embroidery containing tiny mirrors as well as beadwork items. The making of jewelry and cutting of precious stones is a traditional handicraft of Gujarat. The artisans of Kachch are known in particular for their silver work. Woodcarving is an ancient skill in Gujarat, as can be seen in the fine carvings found in houses and temples throughout the region. Wooden furniture is also produced in a distinctive Gujarati style.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Although Gujaratis have made great strides in improving the living conditions of their state's population, problems of poverty, malnutrition, and a lack of basic amenities such as drinking water and health facilities remain in some areas. An outbreak of pneumonic plague in Surat in 1994 caused panic among the population and also drastically reduced tourism in India at that time. The Gujarat government is deeply involved in the massive Sardar Sarovar Dam which has been built on the Narmada River. Although it was planned to help provide irrigation and power to the state, a lack of resources combined with squabbling among the partner states (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan) has delayed the project. An anti-dam environmental movement has reached a national and even international audience.

As Gandhi's home state, Gujarat has been identified with the nonviolence movement. However, communal violence erupts from time to time across the normally peaceful state. In December 1992, for example, riots that cost both Muslim and Hindu lives swept Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and Surat. They were triggered by the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh by Hindu fundamentalists. On the positive side, Gujaratis have taken full advantage of the recent liberalization of India's economic policies to attract foreign business and investment to the state.

A major, ongoing issue in Gujarat is the displacement of population from the countryside by the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River, in south-eastern Gujarat. The Dam is part of a network of more than 3,000 dams that will make up one of the world's largest water projects with an extensive canal and irrigation system providing water to, according to government estimates, over 1.8 million

hectares (over 700,00 acres) of the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and (mainly) Gujarat. However, over 25,000 families will be displaced by the dam, their villages and lands submerged under water, and the construction is opposed by organizations such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). Protests against the dam's construction, such as those organized by NBA, played a major role in convincing the World Bank to pull funding from the project in 1993. The displaced families claim that the compensation and land they are due to receive is inadequate, but in 2000, despite this opposition, the Supreme Court of India gave permission for the construction of the dam to proceed.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Hindu women, especially those of lower caste experience the constraints of their religion and, like their Muslim counterparts, suffer from poverty and illiteracy. Gujarat, despite being considered an industrialized, developed, wealthy and cultured state, ranks 21st amongst India's states in the sphere of women's literacy. The Census of India 2001 shows female literacy in Dahod, a town in eastern Gujarat on the borders of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to be only 31.87%. The difference between literacy rate of male and female is over 20%, a difference which the Government of Gujarat and the people of Gujarat cannot ignore. This issue is being addressed as part of the government's Continuing Education Scheme which involves the setting up of Continuing Education Centers (CECs) and Nodal Continuing Education Centers.

According to the 2001 Census of India, Muslims form the largest minority group in Gujarat, numbering over 50 million people and accounting for nearly 8.73% of the population (89.48% of Gujaratis are Hindu). Women in the Muslim community suffer the restrictions of their religion, from *purdah* and wearing the *burqa* to child marriages and "honor killings." In addition to illiteracy and poverty, Muslim women were subjected to "unimaginable inhuman and barbaric" sexual violence during the 2002 Godhra carnage, and some still live in refugee camps, being too afraid to return to their homes.

Fetching and carrying water is women's work in rural India. In the villages of the desert district of Banaskantha, in northern Gujarat, women spend up to six hours a day bringing water from distant sources to their homes. They carry up to 15 liters on their heads on each trip, often walking barefoot. Banaskantha receives less than 7 inches of rainfall each year. The water table has dropped by 6.5 feet a year, as withdrawals exceed natural replenishment. Over 75% of the district's villages no longer have reliable, year-round sources of fresh water. It was not until the end of the 20th century that the government formally recognized the need to involve rural communities in managing water resources, and only in 1999 did it establish guidelines for involving women. However, the women of Gujarat began taking their first steps toward self-governance in water issues long before then.

Guided by an all-women trade union—the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), founded in Ahmedabad in 1972—Gujarati women gradually began to exert their influence over state authorities and secured a greater voice for themselves not only within the community but also inside their own homes. The underlying strategy behind this success has been to link protecting the environment with improving

livelihoods. For rural women, economic benefits often depend on the health of the natural resources they rely on. Governments, however, often treat the environment and economic development as mutually exclusive. For example, Gujarat is home to the massive Sardar Sarovar dam, which is now under construction on the Narmada River. Despite the project's goal of alleviating water shortages in rural communities, an independent review commissioned by the World Bank found that plans for the delivery of water to villagers in the drought-prone regions of Gujarat are not on track and they are not likely to happen any time soon, if at all.

In 1986, the State Water Board of Gujarat invited SEWA to increase its participation in village-level water committees. After three consecutive years of drought, the water board believed that proactive local communities might succeed where more centralized management had failed. The water works in many regions were in complete disarray. SEWA held a number of meetings where villagers expressed two urgent needs: The need to conserve water, revive traditional sources like surface wells and ponds, and create alternative water sources like roof rainwater harvesting structures. The second need was to find non-water based work, as seasonal water shortages caused a loss of jobs.

To push for these changes, SEWA encouraged women to join local water committees, called *pani samitis*. SEWA had already organized women into about 50 business-development groups—with activities from embroidery to timber and rainwater harvesting—to help them earn more money. Giving women a voice on local water committees was the next logical step because women are primarily responsible for fetching and using water.

At first, however, women were reluctant to come forward because water "infrastructure" was regarded as a male responsibility. Most men were critical of women's participation, and several went so far as to say they would not drink water from a source created by women. But women slowly gained confidence as they began to take the lead in water activities, raised their productivity, and saw their incomes increase. The initial 42 *pani samitis* were to take over maintenance of the piped water system in the Santhalpur and Radhanpur sub-districts, including collecting user fees. But after the state government reversed its position on this, the village women turned to reviving and maintaining their traditional community sources of water. *Pani samitis* began constructing check dams, deepening existing ponds, and lining ponds with plastic sheeting to prevent salinization of the water from the region's salty soils.

By 1995 the women's association had accumulated a great deal of experience in the water sector throughout Gujarat, and its projects were yielding tangible economic, social, and environmental benefits throughout the state. The state government, recognizing SEWA's successes, invited the group to lead and implement a state-wide watershed development program. SEWA used this unprecedented opportunity to launch a more comprehensive program than the state had envisioned, one that not only promoted ecological regeneration, but fostered economic development as well. The Water, Women, and Work Millennium Campaign, as it has been called, integrates erosion controls, water conservation measures, tree-planting and forestry initiatives, dryland agriculture, and education, training, and capacity building for communities.

Between 1995 and 2001, the water campaign spread to a total of 502 villages in 9 districts. Women comprised 80% or more of the membership of most of the new water users committees, and committee activities revolved around issues of particular interest to women—fodder growing, nursery plantations, improved agriculture, rain-water harvesting and capacity-building.

Results of the water campaign in Banaskantha District have been impressive. Aquifers in 18 villages have been recharged. A total of 150 wells, including surface wells, tube wells, and farm wells, have been recharged in eight villages. In Porana village alone, a total of 25 wells have been recharged. Salinity has decreased in the treated land thanks to various innovative and low-cost mechanisms for sweetening and recharging the groundwater. Groundwater is lifted with a water pump for irrigation and farmers are able to grow three crops annually instead of one. The investment was just Rs 5,000 (US\$106) for each pump system. SEWA's success has prompted villagers and civilian society groups to question India's trend toward privatizing water distribution services. There is some sign that government agencies are beginning to trust the "people's sector" to handle water supply activities, despite skepticism that poor, illiterate women could prove competent.

Apart from its work in the area of water, SEWA has expanded into other areas. Since the 1990s, SEWA has been involved with banking and providing credit to rural women, the SEWA Mahila Housing Trust helped distribute food and assisted people in rebuilding their homes after the devastating 2001 earthquake, SEWA is involved in providing health facilities, in running craft associations and dairy co-operatives, and is a partner, with the state government and UNICEF, in the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program.

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—by D. O. Lodrick.

# GURUNGS

**PRONUNCIATION:** gur-OONGS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Tamu

**LOCATION:** Nepal (central Himalayan Mountain region)

**POPULATION:** 543,571 (2001 Census of Nepal)

**LANGUAGE:** Gurung; Nepali

**RELIGION:** Mix of Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, and local animistic practices

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Gurungs are a hill people living on the southern slopes of the Himalayan Mountains in central Nepal. In their own language, they call themselves “Tamu” (*Ta* means thunder, *mu* symbolizes sky). Their origins are uncertain, although they are of Mongoloid stock and their ancestors may have migrated to their current location from Tibet around 2,000 years ago.

Gurung tradition maintains that in ancient times a Gurung kingdom, ruled by a “Ghale Rājā,” emerged among the numerous small kingdoms and states that existed in the Himalayan foothills. This kingdom was conquered by a neighboring *Rājā* in the 15th century AD. During the 16th century, it was incorporated into the expanding Gurkha empire of the Shah dynasty. Gurungs served as soldiers in the armies of the Shah kings, including Prithvi Narayan Shah who conquered the Kathmandu Valley in 1768 and completed the unification of Nepal.

The tradition of Gurung service in the army of the Gurkha Kingdom continued into the 19th century, and Gurungs were involved in military campaigns against both the Chinese and British. The British were so impressed with the fighting qualities of the Gurkhas following the 1814–1816 Anglo-Gurkha war that they began recruiting Gurkha soldiers into the service of the East India Company. Gurungs (along with the Magars) make up the bulk of the soldiers serving today in the Gurkha regiments of the British and Indian armies.

The Gurung, like all peoples in Nepal, have been influenced by political events in the region. Nepal was an absolute monarchy until 1990, when, faced with a people’s movement against the absolute monarchy, King Birendra, agreed to large-scale political reforms by creating a parliamentary democracy with the king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of the government. All Nepalese citizens 18 years and older became eligible to vote and in the first free and fair elections in Nepal in 1991, the Nepali Congress was victorious. However, governments in Nepal have tended to be highly unstable, no government having survived for more than two years since 1991, either through internal collapse or parliamentary dissolution by the monarch.

In February 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) began a violent insurgency in more than 50 of the country’s 75 districts. Nearly 13,000 police, civilians, and insurgents are estimated to have been killed in the conflict since 1996. In July 2001 Prime Minister Deuba announced a cease-fire, which the Maoists pledged to observe, as part of a government effort to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict. Although Maoist-instigated intimidation and extortion continued, the killings largely subsided after the cease-fire was announced. The government and Maoists held talks in late 2001.

It is claimed that, hoping to free themselves from dominance by the Brahman-Chhetri-Newar (BCN) elite, Gurungs supported the Maoist insurgency. But Gurungs were also represented in the armed forces and police so they took casualties on both sides of the conflict. An estimated 12,800 deaths are reported during the insurgency, with a further 100,000 to 150,00 people being displaced. The government feared that Gurungs, with their military background, were providing training to insurgents in remote areas of Nepal.

On 1 June 2001, however, Crown Prince Dipendra was officially reported to have shot and killed his father, King Birendra; his mother, Queen Aishwarya; his brother; his sister, his father’s younger brother, Prince Dhirendra; and several aunts, before turning the gun on himself. Gyanendra, Birendra’s brother, succeeded as King, but on 1 February 2005, suspended the parliament, appointed a government led by himself, and enforced martial law. The King argued that civilian politicians were unfit to handle the Maoist insurgency. A broad coalition called the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) was formed in opposition to the royal takeover, encompassing the seven parliamentary parties who held about 90% of the seats in the old, dissolved parliament. A countrywide uprising began in April 2006, resulting in massive and spontaneous demonstrations and rallies held across Nepal against King Gyanendra’s autocratic rule. Eventually, an agreement was reached by which the monarchy was to be abolished. Nepal’s monarchy was abolished at the end of May 2008, thus ending 240 years of royal rule, and Nepal became the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal with the prime minister becoming head of state.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Assuming the population has increased at the national rate for Nepal since 2001, the current Gurung population is estimated at around 620,000 people. This does not include the small number of Gurungs who live in Sikkim, Bhutan and the Indian state of West Bengal. Traditional Gurung territory extends along the mountain slopes north of the Kali Gandaki River between the towns of Gorkha and Baglund. Some Gurungs are found in the upper Kali Gandaki valley itself and along the Marsyandi and Buri Gandaki rivers. Recent migrations towards the south have seen Gurungs settle in the hills of the Inner Terai zone.

The highland, or *lekhāli*, Gurungs retain a lifestyle closely tied to older traditions. They are dependent on high-altitude pastoralism and are strongly Buddhist in culture. The southern Gurungs, however, have a cereal-based economy and show a significant accommodation to Hindu cultural systems. In addition to this highland-lowland division, it is possible to distinguish between western, central, and eastern Gurungs, largely on the basis of linguistic differences.

Gurung villages are located at elevations between 1,050 and 2,150 m (approximately 3,500–7,000 ft). They often lie at the top of a hill or cling to the slopes of the steep gorges that rivers in the region have cut into the mountains. Above these, the terrain rises to the ridges and sheer cliffs that mark the southern slopes of the Annapurna, Lamjung, and Himalchuli ranges. Winters are cold and dry, although the temperature rarely drops below freezing. Differences in altitude and aspect, however, create considerable local variations in temperatures and precipitation. Mean monthly temperatures at Gorkha (elevation 1,667 m or 5,469 ft) range from about 8° to 30°C (approx-



mately 46°–86°f). Rainfall at Gorkha averages 193.5 cm (76 in) and is received mostly in the summer months. Vegetation is mostly temperate mixed forest, with oak, elm, and conifers. Bamboo and numerous rhododendron species are common at lower elevations.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Gurung, also known as Tamu or Temu, is a Tibeto-Burman language of the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. It is similar to other languages, such as Newari and Tamang, spoken in the hills of Nepal. The Gurungs have a tradition of oral literature, but there is no written form of the language. Most Gurungs are bilingual, speaking Nepali as well as Gurung.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Gurung myth of origin tells of a king of the Surya (solar) dynasty who broke with tradition by crowning his favorite younger son as his successor. As a result, the elder son, Lochan, left the kingdom to seek the life of an ascetic in the Himalayas. He took with him his wife Kali, his priest, a slave, and their wives. On their journey to the mountains, so the legend goes, the group was forced to seek shelter for a night in the company of two prostitutes. During the night, the prostitutes broke Lochan's and the priest's sacred threads, poured wine on the sleeping men's lips, and then fled. On waking, Lochan and the priest thought they had become drunk and had sexual relations with the prostitutes. Ashamed at their behavior, they

continued on to the mountains where they abandoned the usual customs of their upper-caste status.

Over time, Lochan's wife gave birth to 3 sons named Ghale Mahan Gurung, Ghodane Mahan Gurung, and Lama Mahan Gurung, and a daughter. The priest fathered 2 sons—Lamechane Mahan Gurung and Plone Lamechane Gurung—and 3 daughters. The children of Lochan and the priest intermarried, and their descendants form one of the two subtribes of the Gurung, the *Chār Jāt* or "Four Clans" group. These clans are the Ghale, Ghodane, Lama, and Lamechane, in order of rank. The slave and his wife had 16 sons and 10 daughters. These married among themselves and were the forerunners of the *Solah Jāt* or "Sixteen Clans" subtribe. The *Chār Jāt* consider themselves superior to the *Solah Jāt*.

This legend serves to explain why the Gurungs, who have been strongly influenced by Hinduism, do not show the classic features of Hindu society such as a rigid caste structure and commensal (dining) restrictions. The mythical genealogy traced to a *ksatriya* ruler and the loss of former high-caste status is common among tribes who have their origins outside Hindu society. It places a tribal people firmly in a Hindu mold and provides them with a legitimizing Hindu pedigree.

### 5 RELIGION

The Gurungs follow Tibetan Buddhism, a form of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism that has been strongly influenced by the ancient pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. They have also come into close contact with Hindu peoples and have adopted many Hindu religious traits. Gurung religion is thus a mix of Buddhism, Hinduism, and local animistic practices. It clearly reflects the group's tribal origins, as well as its transitional location between the Hindu and Buddhist cultural worlds.

Gurungs believe in concepts such as *karma* (the belief that actions in this life determine the nature of one's next incarnation), and worship Buddha and the *bodhisattvas* (the Savior Buddhas). Buddhist *lāmās* (priests) preside at life-cycle ceremonies such as purification rites for newborn babies, and funerals. The Gurungs also revere the major gods of Hinduism, celebrate Hindu festivals, and sometimes use Brahman priests to cast horoscopes and perform certain rituals. In addition, their world is inhabited by numerous local godlings, village deities, supernatural creatures of the forest, and spirits who have to be worshiped and appeased. Local animist shamans (priests) called *panju* and *klihbri* have the responsibility of dealing with this aspect of Gurung religion. They perform exorcisms, animal sacrifice, and other animistic rites. They help trap and expel witches. They also participate with *lāmās* in many Gurung life-cycle rituals.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Among the Hindu festivals celebrated by the Gurungs are Tihar, Dasain (the Nepali form of Dasahara), and Baisakh (Vaisakh) Purnima. In many instances, however, the Hindu festivals coincide with local Gurung festivals in their timing. This is clearly a part of the process of "Hinduization," by which non-Hindu tribal peoples are absorbed into Hindu society. It lends a degree of legitimacy to tribal celebrations by giving them a "Hindu" form.

One festival that is not of Hindu origin is the Gurung New Year, or *losar*. This is really the Tibetan New Year, but it is observed in late December or early January on a date different

from the Tibetan and Sherpa festival. The Hindu Saraswati Pūjā, which falls in early February, marks the beginning of the dance called *ghāntu*, which is unique to the Gurungs and the neighboring Magar tribe. Ghāntu, which has both religious and social aspects, continues to be performed until the full moon that occurs in late April or early May, which marks the Baisakh Purnima festival. *Jātrās*, or fairs, are occasions on which Gurungs meet to socialize, and the sexes mingle with a considerable degree of freedom. The events usually last all night and are accompanied by dancing, singing, and the drinking of copious amounts of liquor.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Numerous rituals mark birth and childhood in the Gurung community. Brahman astrologers are consulted before the child is named at the *nahurān* (bathing) ceremony. Held on the 9th day after birth (7 for a girl-child), the *nahurān* involves the ritual purification of the mother and announcing of the baby's name. The rice-feeding (*pasni*) ceremony, when the baby begins to be fed solid food, is held 5 to 6 months after birth. The ritual first cutting of the hair (*Chhaewar*) is performed when a Gurung boy is 5 or 6 years old. This is done by the boy's maternal uncle, with a lama or Brahman priest present. After this ceremony, the boy can take part in all religious and social activities of the tribe. All these ceremonies are accompanied by feasting and drinking.

Death is of great symbolic significance among Gurungs, and the funeral ritual (*Pai* or *Arghun*) is the most important observed in Gurung society. Immediately after a death, a white banner is raised on the roof of the house to inform the community of the death. Before rigor mortis (stiffening of the muscles) sets in, the body is placed into a seated posture in a box or a copper vessel. Both *lāmās* and the animist priests are called on to perform various funeral rites. The *klihbri* sacrifices a goat so that a blood offering may be made to buy passage of the deceased to heaven. When the rites have been completed and family, relatives, and neighbors have paid their last respects to the deceased, the body is carried in procession to its last resting place. Corpses are disposed of by cremation, burial, or water burial. On their return journey, members of the funeral procession have to step over a fire burning in the road to prevent evil spirits from following them home.

The funeral ritual is completed by an elaborate, and expensive, ceremony held a year after the death occurred. Astrologers determine an auspicious time for the ceremony, which lasts for 3 days and 2 nights. During this time, numerous rituals in which both *lāmās* and shamans take part are performed for the deceased. Activities include singing and dancing, the chasing away of devils with weapons such as *khukhrīs* (curved Gurkha knives), and sacrifice of animals. An effigy (*pla*) of the deceased is made and dressed in clothes and ornaments. On the last day of the ceremony, the effigy is taken to the edge of the jungle, where the deceased is told that he or she should leave the living and depart to the land of his or her ancestors. The effigy is broken up and thrown away in the jungle. A purification ceremony and a feast mark the end of the funeral rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is considered slightly odd by Gurungs to greet people by their proper names (even if they are known). When address-

ing someone who is not a relative, one calls them grandmother or grandfather, mother or father, sister or brother, depending on their age. A husband or wife is never referred to directly by name.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Gurungs live in villages of around 150 to 200 houses, sited high on ridges and hillsides. The entrance may be indicated by a string of flowers across the path. On the outskirts of the village, there are often temples or shrines to the local gods, with flowers or the remains of sacrifices in front of them. The village itself is a maze of narrow, twisting lanes, though a small shop or a tea-stall may provide gathering places for the inhabitants.

Gurung houses are quite small and may be round, oval, or rectangular in shape. They are built of stone, cemented and plastered with mud. The roofs may be thatched or made of slate. Gurung houses are commonly two-storied, with a veranda running along one side. The upper level is used for storage, while the downstairs room is used for living and sleeping. The walls are lined with shelves to hold pots, dishes, and other household utensils. There is little furniture, and one sits or squats on the floor. People sleep on hard wooden beds or on mats on the floor. Cooking is done over a wood fire in a pit sunk into the floor, with a tripod for hanging pots over it. Few houses have latrines, and villagers go the outskirts of the village to relieve themselves. Although many villages now have piped water, in the past carrying water to the house was a time-consuming household chore.

By Nepali standards, Gurungs are fairly well off. This is largely the result of money sent home by soldiers serving in the British and Indian Gurkha regiments. This extra income, along with military pensions, allows families to accumulate cash surpluses. Many Gurungs in this position migrate from their ancestral villages to towns such as Pokhara where they have access to urban amenities and better economic opportunities.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The division of Gurung society into the Chār Jāt and the Solah Jāt subtribes is explained in the Gurung myth of origin. The two groups are endogamous (i.e., they marry only within the group). The clans within each group are exogamous, marriage partners having to be sought from outside one's own clan. Cross-cousin marriages (i.e., with the father's sister's daughter or the mother's brother's daughter) are preferred, and among some Gurungs a fine is imposed if an available cross-cousin partner is not chosen.

Marriages among the Gurungs are usually arranged, although young men and women are given full opportunity to make their own choices. After a partner has been selected, friends or male relatives are sent to the girl's house with gifts and a bottle of liquor. These are accepted and the intermediaries entertained with food and drink if the girl's family agrees to the proposed match. If the girl's family does not agree, the visitors are turned away and the matter is closed. Once the arrangements for the marriage are complete and the astrologer is consulted over the time and date of the event, the bride is brought to the groom's house for a few days. A feast is given for relatives and the villagers. Within a few days, the bride returns to her parent's home. For the next several years, the couple visits each other in their respective parents' homes. It is only after the girl gives birth to a child that she moves into her husband's





A Gurung woman carries goods in a basket, near Muktinath, Nepal. (Marco Simoni/Getty Images)

home permanently. At this time she receives a dowry from her family. This consists of copper and brass utensils, clothes, ornaments, and livestock.

Gurung family structure and size vary over time. A nuclear family expands as sons marry, bring their wives into the household, and have children. But, as their families grow, sons leave the household and build their own houses nearby. Inheritance is shared equally between sons.

Divorce is permitted in Gurung society and is quite common. There is no social stigma associated with divorce, and remarriage by divorcees and widows is readily accepted.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional dress of Gurung men consists of a blouse-type shirt (*bhoto*) fastened with ties across the front of the body and a kilt-like garment (*jama*) that wraps around the waist and reaches to mid-thigh. A long piece of cloth is tied around the waist like a belt (into which a khukhri may be slipped). The typical Nepali cap (*topi*) completes the dress. A sheep's-wool blanket is used in winter or in wet weather to keep the wearer warm and dry. Western-style clothes are commonly worn by

the younger generation, especially young men who have served in the military.

Gurung women wear a cotton or velvet blouse (*cholo*) that ties at the front, over a long pleated skirt (*phariyā*) that is usually dark red in color. A sash is wrapped around the waist, and a head cloth completes the outfit. The *ghalek* is a cloth hung across from one shoulder to the opposite waist, forming a bag for carrying things. Ornaments include large, heavy, silver earrings that stretch the earlobes, nose rings, and square amulets hung on a string of glass beads called *pote* necklaces. Bangles and anklets are also worn. Many women are now wearing the *sārī*.

## 12 FOOD

Gurungs start their day by drinking sweetened tea. This may be as early as 4:00 or 5:00 am during the summer and around 6:00 am in the winter months. The morning meal is eaten between 9:00 and 10:00 am and consists of rice, or a dough made from millet or maize called *pengo*, with *dāl* (lentils) and vegetables. Although they may snack during the day, they will not eat again until evening, when another meal similar to the morning's is taken. In poorer households, the diet might consist of *jand*, a fermented liquid made from millet or maize, and vegetables.

Sheep are slaughtered and eaten at festival time, but meat is eaten infrequently by most people. Gurungs will not eat pork. The origin of this taboo is uncertain. Some higher-status clans, e.g., the Ghale, observe many high-caste Hindu food prohibitions and will not eat chicken, goat, or buffalo meat. Rice is considered a prestigious food, to be served to visitors and presented as offerings to the gods.

Tea is drunk throughout the day. Gurungs, both men and women, consume large quantities of beer (*chāng*) and liquor (*raksi*) made from maize, millet, or rice. Drinking is common at festivals, fairs, and social gatherings.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education has traditionally been seen by the Gurungs as the means to a desirable career in military service. Long before the Nepalese government assumed responsibility for education at the national level, the Gurung community provided strong support for village schools that prepared young men to join the Gurkhas. Once in the armed services, recruits were required to continue their education. As a consequence, literacy rates among Gurung men are among the highest in South Asia. Studies in Gurung villages place literacy rates at over 72% for the male population and even higher among servicemen and ex-servicemen. Women do not share in this advantage, however, with the corresponding value for females being only around 42.5%.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Artistic expression among the Gurungs reaches its highest forms in music and folk dances. The Gurungs and the Magars of the Gandaki Zone of Nepal have a unique dance-drama called Ghāntu. The dancers are required to be virgin girls (the ghāntu), and they must abstain from eating garlic and drinking alcohol during the period of the dance. During the dance, they are believed to become possessed by the ancestor spirits. There are two forms of the dance. One can be staged at any time of the year, but the other (*Satī Ghāntu*) can be performed only be-

tween Saraswati Pūjā and Baisakh Purnima. Satī Ghāntu tells of various events in the lives of a legendary king and queen of Gorkha, of the death of the king, and of the *satī* (burning on the funeral pyre) and resurrection of the queen. When the last performance of the season is complete, the dancers and the audience go to a nearby shrine, usually that of the mother-goddess Chandi. There they offer the dance regalia to the goddess, along with the sacrifice of a chicken.

The *Sorathī* is another Gurung dance that reenacts an ancient Gurung legend. The story, set in verse, tells of a king who had seven wives but no children. When his youngest queen bore him a daughter, the other wives were filled with jealousy and cast the baby daughter into a river. The baby was rescued by a fisherman and brought up as his own daughter. The tale ends happily as the true identity of the young princess is revealed and she is reunited with her family.

## 15 WORK

The Gurungs have traditionally been peasant farmers, growing hardy crops in fields terraced into hillsides. Millet and maize form their staple cereals. Wheat, buckwheat, barley, and potatoes are also grown, as are pulses, string beans, and other vegetables. Rice is becoming more important in Gurung agriculture. In the higher elevations, sheep are reared for meat and wool. Every Gurung family has a few sheep, and villages employ shepherds to tend the village flocks. The shepherds, who use mastiffs as sheep dogs, migrate with the flocks to alpine pastures in the summer. They return to the villages in time to celebrate the Dasain festival. Every family slaughters a sheep at Dasain and holds a big feast. After Dasain, the sheep are taken down to the warmth of the lower valleys.

Gurungs who do not leave their villages to serve in the Gurkha regiments of Britain and India often engage in the trans-Himalayan trade that historically has been important in Nepal's economy. Salt, wool, and livestock from Tibet are exchanged for food grains and manufactured goods from India. The surplus of cash generated from overseas employment has led many Gurungs to leave their fields and villages to live in the local towns such as Pokhara. There, they invest in property, buy shops, and operate transport companies and other businesses.

## 16 SPORTS

Young children play variations of draughts, hopscotch, and marbles, using stones, nuts, berries, or whatever else is close at hand. They make swings, balls from animal's bladders or old cloth, and hoops to be rolled down the road, propelled by a stick. Older boys race each other and play team games such as soccer and basketball.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Gurungs living in towns have access to urban amenities such as the cinema, but in rural areas the population is restricted to traditional forms of entertainment and recreation. These include the festivities associated with religious celebrations and the formal dance dramas such as the Ghāntu. Jātrās are occasions for socializing and merrymaking. The singing of traditional love songs and duets between young men and women are popular at such gatherings, as is dancing and beer-drinking. Nepali "pop" songs heard on the radio are popular among teenagers.

The *rodī* is an interesting Gurung institution. It is more or less a social club for boys or girls. Unlike the permanent dormitory of Indian tribes such as the Oraons or the Maria Gonds of central India, 10 or 15 young people of the same sex gather under the supervision of an adult. They sleep at the adult's house and work and play as an informal unit through their teen years. Eventually the members marry, and the *rodī* dissolves. Not all children in a village join a *rodī*, and there may be more than one such group in the larger settlements.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Other than their traditions of music and dance, the Gurungs are not known for their folk arts and crafts. Items such as woven baskets and woolen blankets made by women, and bamboo goods fashioned by men, are essentially functional in design. Gurungs rely on local service castes for metal goods, carpentry, and tailoring.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Like many tribal societies in South Asia, the Gurungs are faced with social and economic changes that threaten their sense of community identity. Traditional Gurung society is rooted in the rhythms and rituals of a rural, agricultural society. Today, population pressure and environmental degradation is reflected in declining agricultural production and increasing poverty in rural areas. Even the tradition of service in foreign armies offers declining opportunities, as Britain is eliminating many of its Gurkha regiments. The relative affluence associated with military service and army pensions has resulted in the migration of Gurungs to towns and cities, where they lose much of their traditional culture. This process is hastened by the relatively high levels of education among Gurungs, who prefer the attractions of urban life over the village. Many Gurung children brought up in towns cannot even speak the Gurung language. As two writers put it, "What does it mean to be 'Gurung,' if one no longer practices Gurung agriculture, uses the language, or employs the Gurung priests?" (Macfarlane and Gurung 1990: 36). Whatever happens in the future, it will be many years before old men proudly sporting the crossed khukhri insignia of their Gurkha regiments disappear from the streets of towns and villages in west-central Nepal.

One feature of change, and a source of conflict among Gurungs, is the relative status of the Char Jat and the Sora Jat. The introduction of universal suffrage and the village panchayat system (local self-governing councils) has raised the aspiration of the formerly servile Sora Jat *vis-à-vis* the Char Jat.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although some Gurung groups have adopted aspects of Hindu social values, Gurung women are much freer than their Hindu sisters. Even though marriages are arranged, they have a much greater say in marriage partners, virtually being able to choose their mate (even though cross-cousin marriage is preferred) and no stigma is attached to divorce, which is easy to obtain. Widows are allowed to remarry.

Substantial differences in gender roles exist among ethnic groups in Nepal. Gurung women are still expected to handle household chores and have little say over crop land, livestock and daily wages, but unlike in the Brahman/Chhetri and Tharu communities, Gurung women participate in community meetings and have participated in agricultural training scheme.

Literacy among Gurung women is 42.5% (almost 20 points lower than their Newar counterparts) and this limits their access to health care and inhibits upwards mobility. However, the need for literacy and self-help has been recognized and organizations such as the Nepal Gurung (Tamu) Women's Association (NGWA) (or the Nepal Gurung [Tamu] Mahila Sangh) have been established as independent, social and non-profit making organizations, to serve as a common meeting place for all Gurung women. Set up by the Gurung women themselves, the NGWA serves to promote the interests, welfare and rights of all Gurungs, and helps conserve and preserve the socio-cultural traditions, language and religion of the Gurung people.

The role of women in overall Gurung development cannot be understated. It first started when Gurung women established *Ama Samuhas* ("Mother's Groups") in the villages. The Ama Samuhas played important roles in bringing about social reforms and they have been successful in controlling and eradicating such social evils as gambling and alcohol drinking. They are also involved in the building of roads, schools, conducting literacy classes, sanitation, drinking water awareness programs, and building resting places. The concept of Ama Samuhas has now even spread to major cities such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Butwal Chitwan. Women's roles, initially limited to Ama Samuhas, have now taken a major step forward with the creation of the NGWA. Gurung men have been very supportive of the initiatives and endeavors of Gurung women to improve their literacy and socio-economic status.

Gurung women are aware that in terms of development, they lag far behind the rest of South Asia. Awareness of Gurung culture does not mean just wearing the Gurung dress or singing *dohori* songs (a genre of Nepali folk song). There remains the issue of improving literacy. Newari women in Nepal are far ahead in terms of education and business is dominated by Thakali women. It seems that the majority of Gurung women are contented and do not see any need to come out of their homes to seek any rights. Reasons may be that they are generally economically well taken care of by their husband's and other family members' overseas earnings or that they are simply unaware of the opportunities that they are being deprived of as they remain cocooned in their own homes. One of the main aims of the NGWA remains bringing Gurung women out of their homes and exposing them to society at large. It focuses on developing their intellectual capacity, encourages social interaction at a wider societal level, helps them become better educated, and helps to bring about a sense of self confidence. Being aware and informed will help Gurung women to guide their children properly in education, social norms and behavior.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# HAKKA

**PRONUNCIATION:** HAHK-uh

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Han Chinese

**LOCATION:** China; Taiwan; Malaysia; Singapore; Thailand; Indonesia.

**POPULATION:** 40 million

**LANGUAGE:** Hakka (southern China dialect)

**RELIGION:** Combination of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs; ancestor worship; Christianity.

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Han

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Hakka are ethnic Chinese (Han) who have a distinct history, language and identity. The name Hakka means “guest people,” or sojourner, as if the Hakka were guests in their own land. Hakka is the Cantonese (Yue) pronunciation; the word is pronounced “Kejia” in Mandarin Chinese.

The ancient Hakka homeland was the cradle of Chinese civilization in north-central China (Shanxi and Henan provinces). The people who became known as the Hakka originated in this area and have a very long history of migration toward southern China. The first migration was to south-central China (Hubei and Jiangxi provinces) and occurred in the 4th century AD. A second migration occurred between the 9th and 10th centuries, when the Hakka reached south China (Fujian and Guangdong). Hakka dominated northern Guangdong by the end of the 13th century. The last major migration in China occurred between the 17th and 19th centuries, pushing deeper into southeast China into Fujian, Guangdong, Sichuan, and Guangxi provinces. The name Hakka was first applied by the local people (*bendi*) in this last migration.

The last period of migration included waves of Hakka who migrated from mainland China primarily to Taiwan and South East Asia. The Hakka first arrived on Taiwan in the 17th century during the Dutch occupation of the island. Migration to Taiwan continued until Japan took over the island in 1895. The colonization of South East Asia by European powers opened the region to Chinese immigrants, most of whom originated from southeastern coastal China, including Hakka regions in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The modern states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, and Singapore saw a large influx of Hakka migrants, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, who worked as miners, laborers, and shop keepers. Hakka make up a sizable minority in those countries and individual wealthy Hakka have amassed substantial financial holdings, which has led to resentment against Hakka by the non-Chinese majority. The Hakka also migrated in large numbers in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the British colony of Jamaica and French-controlled Mauritius, as well as the United States, Canada, and parts of Latin America.

Although the Hakka are a distinct ethnic group, they are considered to be Han Chinese by the mainland Chinese and, therefore, have no special minority status in the People’s Republic of China. Hakka are full citizens and receive the same treatment accorded all citizens. In Taiwan and South East Asia, Hakka have developed a greater communal identity, separate from other Chinese migrant populations, and efforts

to define the Hakka as distinct from Han Chinese have been made by overseas Hakka scholars.

Despite their small numbers, many Hakka have become prominent national leaders on the mainland and abroad. In the 19th century many Hakka played prominent roles in the anti-Qing Dynasty Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), including the movements leader, Hong Xiuquan. Hakka regions in Guangdong and Fujian province were hotbeds for Communist insurgents from the 1920s to 1940s. In Taiwan in the 1940s and 1950s, the Hakka were prominent in the anti-Kuomintang resistance, and many Hakka were killed in the anti-Communist crackdown on that island. Modern important Hakka leaders include Deng Xiaoping, the former leader of the People’s Republic of China; Lee Teng-hui, the former president of Taiwan; Lee Kwan Yew, the former president of Singapore; and former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The global Hakka diaspora has sparked a keen interest in Hakka history and culture and, in 1971, the first World Hakka Conference was inaugurated. Three decades later more than 20 World Hakka Conferences have been held and “Hakkaology,” or the study of Hakka history and culture, is studied across the world.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Of a population of 1.3 billion in the People’s Republic of China, the 30 million Hakka are little more than 3% of the total population. Taiwan, with a population of about 22 million, is the home of approximately 2 million Hakka. Large populations of Hakka also live in Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand. Significant numbers of Hakka have also migrated to India, Europe, and the Americas.

Hakka traditionally migrated to rugged, mountainous districts of south China and Taiwan on land that other Chinese found too poor for agriculture. This settlement pattern developed because the best land was occupied by the time the Hakka migrants arrived in south China. The climate is hot in the summer and mild in the winter; rice, tea, citrus fruits, and vegetables all grow well. Although winter frost is uncommon, Hakka areas are subject to the devastating winds, flooding, and typhoons.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Hakka speak a language that linguists classify as a south China dialect. Many Hakka, however, believe that their language is closely related to Mandarin, a major northern Chinese dialect, and that they speak a purer form of Chinese than other dialects because their origin lay in the cradle of Chinese civilization. Language is the most important way that Hakka distinguish themselves from other Chinese. Unlike standard Mandarin Chinese, which has four spoken tones, Hakka has six tones.

Hakka family names (surnames) are transmitted through the father’s line (patrilineally). Individuals have a personal name consisting of two syllables. When addressing someone, the surname is spoken first and the personal name follows. In families keeping a genealogy by generation, boys are often given a “generation” name as part of their personal names. The personal name can thus be used to identify the generation to which he belongs.



#### 4 FOLKLORE

Many traditional Hakka believe in geomancy (*fengshui*), the belief that natural forces in the land and water can affect one's fortune and well being. People can take advantage of these forces by orienting houses, tombs, doorways, and other structures in the proper direction. Hakka also employ the ideas of yin and yang to describe the essential qualities of things. "Yin" things are thought to be chilly and wet, while objects with the "yang" quality are warm and dry. Bringing these qualities into internal balance is thought to benefit personal health. Spirit mediums (shamans) are employed to communicate with ancestors and ghosts; not all Hakka believe this practice is valid.

#### 5 RELIGION

Hakka religion combines Buddhist and Daoist beliefs; no unifying beliefs define a distinct Hakka religion. Hakka practice a form of domestic religion called ancestor worship. They believe that the spirits of their ancestors (*zuxian*) persist and that they require care from the living. Hakka appease the ancestors by lighting incense and offering sacrifices on ritual occasions.

A local god worshipped in many Hakka village temples is the "King of the Three Mountains" (Sanshan Guowang). The legend associated with this god is that spirits inhabiting three mountains in the Hakka region of Guangdong became protectors and saved the people from disasters. People began worshipping these spirits and built temples in their honor.

Outside of mainland China many Hakka are Christian, particularly in Taiwan. In Malaysian and Indonesia a sizable percentage are Muslim.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important holiday in Hakka society is the lunar New Year. People return to their natal homes, and work stops for three or more days. Houses receive a thorough cleaning, and rhyming couplets with lucky phrases may be pasted on doorways. Families eat an elaborate meal featuring traditional dishes on New Year's Eve. New Year's Day is devoted to visiting other relatives, especially those in senior generations. In traditional society children received new clothes for the coming year.

Tomb-sweeping day (*qingming jie*) in April is an important holiday that is dedicated to the ancestors in the father's line (patrilineal ancestors). People prepare sacrificial foods (rice, meats, sweet rolls, and wine) and visit the family tombs as a group. The spirits of the ancestors are invited to feast on the food, strings of firecrackers are lit, and the graves are thoroughly cleaned. This ceremony emphasizes the strong bond between the living and their ancestors.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Mothers who have just given birth are confined to their beds for 30 days and are not allowed to wash their hair. Hakka believe that a woman's joints are prone to damage after childbirth. Newborns are tightly swaddled and are placed on their backs to sleep. The birth of a male infant may be announced to the ancestors as evidence that the family line will continue. Hakka do not mark the teenage years with any special coming-of-age ceremonies.

Hakka practice double burial. When a relative dies, a funeral is performed, and the deceased is buried in a temporary grave. After five to seven years, the skeleton is exhumed, purified, and carefully arranged in a large ceramic vessel. The vessel is then interred in a permanent site. It is not unusual in Taiwan to find large family mausoleums containing the remains of many family members. These tombs are elaborately decorated and are a central focus of family pride.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Hakka value family and friends very highly. The Hakka have a reputation for being reserved and stoic in their interactions with strangers or acquaintances. The standard greeting—"Have you eaten yet?"—is a polite way of inquiring after one's comfort; it is equivalent to "hello." People whose relationship is not close or whose social status is different politely greet each other by using the person's title (Mr., Miss, Teacher, or Dr.) and surname. Because of their reputation for reserve, Hakka body language is not demonstrative.

Etiquette is important. For a formal visit—as on the occasion of a senior relative's birthday, after a long absence, or to discuss personal business—a guest prepares a small gift of fruit, candy, or a local delicacy for the host. The host in turn offers tea and fruit or other light refreshment. Guests are also offered cigarettes.

Western-style dating was unknown in traditional Hakka society. Parents arranged meetings between boys and girls with the intent of finding suitable mates. Courtship was managed by parents to such an extent that the children seldom met

more than a handful of times before marrying. The meetings were arranged as formal visits rather than as dates. As Chinese society changed during the last half of the 20th century, this practice has declined greatly. Young people may now date as members of a school group. This practice allows them to mix freely and gives them opportunities to identify special people. In the cities, seeing a movie, strolling in a park, or buying a small treat are popular places to go on a date.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions vary greatly depending on location. Most Hakka in China are rural dwellers. Until recently running water and public sewers did not exist in many locations, so people depended on wells and streams for water and on outhouses for toilets. Bottled water is now widely available, and modern bathrooms are common even in rural areas. Electricity is ubiquitous, but people still cook with wood and charcoal. Taiwan's economy is more developed; most rural Hakka have running water, public sewage, electricity and, increasingly, natural gas for cooking and hot water.

Hakka go to both traditional Chinese physicians and Western-style doctors. Herbalists operating Chinese-style pharmacies exist alongside Western drug stores. Other types of medical treatments include acupuncture, massage, folk remedies, and dietary changes.

Hakka live in modern, consumer societies and increasingly purchase the many goods that economic development and larger incomes have made possible. In the People's Republic of China, bicycles, televisions, air conditioners, washing machines, electric fans, and motorcycles are common household items. While most Hakka in rural areas cannot afford to own a car, the streets are crowded with vehicles, and many people have access to cars through their employment. In rural Taiwan, cars and air conditioners are common possessions. Living standards are rising for many, especially those who live in the cities, but daily life is not as comfortable as it is for many in the West. Houses are often not heated, so people must wear heavy clothing indoors in the winter. Increased income in China and Taiwan means a greater choice of diet in both rural and urban areas, as well as access to before unheard of luxuries, such as travel to distant domestic destinations and abroad.

A traditional Hakka farmhouse had three connected wings forming a U shape. A courtyard in the middle was used for processing harvests and other tasks. The central wing had a large room in the middle, used for eating, visiting, and household chores. The wings on the sides contained bedrooms, kitchens, storage areas, toilets, granaries, and animal pens. In areas of Guangdong and Fujian where Hakka clashed with other Chinese, an unusual type of house developed called a tulou, or earthen building. Tulou can either be rectangular or square shaped and are three to five stories high. Traditionally, the homes were built of compacted earth with very thick walls, while today the tulou are made of granite or fired bricks. Dozens of rooms built inside the walls of the structure can house as many as 80 families, and the central area functions as a courtyard. On the ground level, animals live side by side with the occupants, and families conduct daily tasks of cooking food and cleaning clothes in a common area. In Fujian province, more than 20,000 tulous have been constructed, often in clusters. Multiple generations and branches of a family often occupy a single tulou. It is thought that the unique architecture

of the tulou, which includes a single entrance and gun holes, developed as a defense against banditry.

Transportation is efficient in Taiwan. Paved roads run throughout the countryside and all areas are served by public bus lines. Many rural Hakka commute to work by bus and motorcycle. Elementary, middle, and high school students also ride these buses to school.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Family life emphasizes cooperation within a hierarchy based on age and sex. Although fathers make major decisions outside the home, the relationship between the parents is more democratic in the family. Before marriage all major decisions affecting children are made by the parents. Sons are obliged to care for their parents in old age; parents usually live in the home of a married son.

Unlike other Chinese, Hakka never practiced the traditional custom of binding women's feet. Foot binding was a procedure using strips of cloth that forced the feet into small shapes. Women with bound feet were effectively crippled. Hakka women have a reputation for industry and stamina and contribute great amounts of labor on family farms.

Ideal family size among Hakka depends greatly on the social context. The population policy of the People's Republic of China allows parents to have only one or two children per family, depending on their location and economic status; abortions are common, and people generally practice birth control. Hakka outside China may have larger families, especially in agricultural communities. However, as economies industrialize and the demand for farm labor decreases, family sizes are also decreasing. A preference for male children exists; boys inherit the family name and have special obligations to the family's ancestors. Girls, it is thought, are lost to the family when they marry.

Hakka marry in their twenties. The bride and groom should have different last names (surname exogamy). Grooms are typically 2 to 10 years older than brides. Ceremonies are elaborate and focus on a sumptuous feast to which relatives and friends are invited. Large wedding feasts may have 300–500 guests. In southern China, young Hakka are allowed to date before marriage and the mass migration of millions of youth for work and school means that many Hakka marry outside of their community.

Urban families consist of parents and children (nuclear family), but parents usually live with one son (extended family). Rural family structure can be very complex, with parents sharing a compound with their married sons' families and unmarried children. Hakka also organize larger kinship groups based on the principle of descent from a common ancestor in the male line (patrilineal lineages). These kinship groups are not co-residential units but do assemble for ceremonial occasions.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Modern Hakka do not wear distinctive clothing. Western-style pants, dresses, shirts and outerwear have replaced older Chinese styles that did not use zippers and buttons. However, women traditionally embroidered intricate, colorful patterns on strips of cloth used to fasten round hats. This style of dress is not seen in Taiwan but occurs occasionally in the People's Republic of China.



*A Hakka woman smoking a pipe in Hong Kong. (Jean-Marc Truchet/Stone/Getty Images)*

## **12 FOOD**

White rice is the Hakka staple. Sweet potatoes are important where the land is not suited to wet rice. The Hakka also consume noodles made from rice, wheat, and green mung beans. Rice is steamed for lunch and supper to accompany stir-fried, steamed, and braised dishes using vegetables, meats, and fish. Rice is consumed in the morning as a thin gruel; it accompanies both pickled and fresh foods. In comparison to other regional Chinese cuisines, Hakka food is plain and not spicy. Soy sauce, salt, rice vinegar, ginger, sugar, and flavors from various preserved and pickled foods are used extensively in cooking. If there is a drink at the meal it is usually a hot soup, either a broth or a meat and vegetable combination. Like other Chinese, the Hakka do not drink tea with their meals.

Hakka have no food taboos, although some women are pious Buddhists who eat a vegetarian diet. In general, Hakka prefer a diet with high proportions of vegetables and moderate to small amounts of meat. Some Hakka will not eat beef because they believe it is morally wrong to consume animals that work in the fields to provide people with food.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Hakka traditionally emphasized educating boys. Before the 20th century, boys studied the Confucian teachings and

other classics to cultivate the virtues associated with literacy. Exceptional students took examinations that could lead to high prestige civil service careers. Before the 20th century, Hakka girls seldom attended school; a bias against girls existed in traditional Chinese society. Modern Hakka live in societies where education is highly prized for both girls and boys; children work very hard to do well in school. In mainland China, Hakka have access to education in some of the top universities in the nation, located in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. Parents often invest heavily in their children's education, and both boys and girls in rural areas receive education through high school. Often parents send their children to distant schools, thus many Hakka youth may spend their teen years separated from their family. Children in Taiwan finish 12 years of education, and many go to college. Both students and parents know that economic opportunities increase with advanced education. Literacy rates are very high among people born within the last 40 to 50 years. Many Hakka migrate to Western countries to pursue educations in technical and scientific fields.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Hakka are famous for folk songs called "mountain songs" (*shan ge*). Romantic mountain songs were sung to each other by women and men working in the fields. Local produc-

tions of famous historical stories presented by itinerant opera troupes also entertained people. Opera performances were often scheduled to coincide with the summer harvest and drew large crowds.

### 15 WORK

Hakka have the reputation of being hard workers who can persevere in the face of adversity. Most Hakka in mainland China are rural farmers living in small villages and towns. In the 19th century, female agricultural labor was especially important in locations from which men migrated to find work. Several examples of occupational specialization exist. In 19th-century Hong Kong many Hakka specialized in stone cutting. People who migrated to Calcutta, India, in the first years of the 20th century became leather tanners. In the present, most Hakka who live in Taiwan work in manufacturing, business, and government. On the mainland, most Hakka are raised in agricultural communities, but a large number of Hakka youth have migrated to urban areas, particularly in Guangdong and Fujian province, to work in manufacturing plants and in low-wage service jobs.

### 16 SPORTS

In school and during their free time, Hakka youth often play table tennis, badminton, and basketball. Soccer is a popular spectator sport, but not often played. Shadow boxing (*taiqi*) is very popular among older people as a form of relaxation and exercise.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

On the mainland, Chinese movies and television programs are popular among Hakka of all ages, but few are presented in the Hakka dialect. Notable Hakka musicians and performers outside of the mainland perform almost exclusively in the language or dialect of their home country or region, usually Mandarin or Cantonese. Well known Hakka artists include Hong Kong actor and musician Jordan Chan, Hong Kong actors Chow Yun-Fat and Leslie Cheung, Hong Kong actress Cherie Chung, Taiwanese film director Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Hong Kong singers Deanie Ip and Leon Lai, Malaysian pop stars Penny Tai and Eric Moo, Hong Kong actor and director Eric Tsang, Taiwanese singer Cyndi Wang, and Singaporean actress and singer Fann Wong.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Friends often gather in the evenings and on weekends to play mahjong (*majiang*); children are introduced to this game in their teens. Many people take an interest in growing rare orchids and in practicing Chinese calligraphy as an art form.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Hakka are recognized in China and Taiwan as Han Chinese. The social problems that Hakka face are the same as the ones faced by other citizens. An active ethnic movement in Taiwan promotes using the Hakka language in radio and television broadcasts and supports including Hakka in public affairs. Human rights issues do not often arise in the People's Republic of China. Because of their status as an ethnic minority in non-Chinese Southeast Asian nations, Hakka may be the target of economic and political discrimination. Periodic anti-Chinese

riots in South East Asia have targeted Hakka communities, including deadly riots in Jakarta in 1998.

Drugs (opium and its derivatives) are not widely abused in Hakka society, but alcoholism is recognized as a potential problem. Excessive gambling is a problem that concerns many.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Since the economic liberalization of mainland China began under Deng Xiaoping in 1978, Hakka women have enjoyed expanded social freedoms and fallen victim to increasingly common vices. Young women from rural areas, such as the Hakka homeland, have flocked to big cities in search of employment. Often these women find low paying jobs in factories or in the service industry. The meager wages they earn at these jobs allows them to provide for their family and pursue entrepreneurial ambitions. In recent years divorce has become both legally more accessible and socially accepted, resulting in an increased number of single mothers. One of the dark sides of Chinese economic liberalization has been a marked increase in prostitution, in particular in the southern provinces where the Hakka reside. Poor young women from the countryside work in brothels for a few hundred dollars a month, exposing themselves to sexual disease and social stigmatization.

In mainland China gay rights are limited and until recently the government classified homosexuality as a mental disease. Among Hakka living outside of the mainland, the most notable gay or lesbian in recent times has been Hong Kong actor Leslie Cheung, who reached international fame before taking his life in 2003.

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—revised by David Straub



# HAN

**PRONUNCIATION:** HAHN

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** None

**LOCATION:** China; Taiwan; (as Overseas Chinese: Southeast Asia, Japan, North America, Oceania, and Europe)

**POPULATION:** 1 billion in mainland China

**LANGUAGE:** Mandarin Chinese

**RELIGION:** Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Chinese Americans. Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities; Hakka.

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Han are the main body of the Chinese nation, having a long history and an age-old tradition. In remote antiquity, the ancestors of the Han lived in the basin of the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. During long centuries of contact, conflict, and assimilation with the neighboring tribes, they formed in that area a community called Huaxia, which expanded gradually to areas along the Yangzi River. The first Emperor of Qin (r. 221 BC–AD 211) conquered the other princes of the Zhou Kingdom (1122–222 BC) and unified China in 221 BC. Shortly after, Qin was replaced by the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220).

It is generally believed that the Chinese, as a unified nationality (with Huaxia as its core), came into being during the period of Han Dynasty. It was due to the political and cultural importance of this dynasty that the Chinese came to be known as the “people of Han” or simply “Han.”

In the long history of China, there were several large-scale migrations of the Han Chinese to south China (south of the Yangzi River), where the population eventually exceeded that of the north about 600 years ago. Lasting for 2,000 years and more, the imperial state was finally overthrown in 1911. Since 1949, two different political systems have existed simultaneously in mainland China and Taiwan.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the 2000 census, the Han in mainland China amount to over 1.2 billion people. They are mainly concentrated in cities and large river valleys where agriculture is most flourishing. The vast majority of people in Taiwan are also Han. In addition, quite a large population of Han ethnics have moved their residence abroad over the years as foreign citizens of Chinese origin or overseas Chinese. Most of them live in Southeast Asia, Japan, North America, Oceania, and Europe.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Han language, usually called Chinese, has been adopted by the United Nations as an official international language. Although there are seven dialects, the written script, invented more than 3,000 years ago, is compatible with all of them.

The popularization of the northern dialect (sometimes called Mandarin Chinese), which has become the common spoken language (*putonghua*) of China, has contributed to better communication and understanding among the various peoples, nationalities, and regions of China.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The ancient books of the Han people recorded thousands of myths that have been further enriched by folk tales among the people. Pangu is the god who created the world; Nüwa, the goddess who fashioned human beings; Ji, the god of all crops; Shennong, the god of herbs. Suirensi invented the method to produce fire; Yu drained the flood; Cangjie created Han characters; Huang Di was the legendary ancestor of the Han people. The *Sanhaijing*, a book written 2,000 years ago, records the legends, folk customs, and geographical features of faraway places, blending together fact and fancy.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Since the concept of patriarchal clan is deeply rooted in Han society, the continuity of patrilineal family is a matter of prime importance, having a great impact on attitudes and behavior even at the present. Another cultural trait deriving from the remote past is the Han belief in the idea of God’s will.

The Han have historically accommodated religions of diverse origins. The first historical writings, the recently discovered inscriptions on “Oracle Bones,” dating from the 14th century BC, testify to the belief of the ruling class in the deified ancestor, ancestor worship, and bone divination (to know the ancestor’s will). Earlier popular oral traditions reflect beliefs in a plurality of nature gods (terrestrial and heavenly) and deified heroes.

The Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), saw the formation of three religious traditions: Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism (based on the respective teachings of Lao zi, Confucius, and the Buddha). Buddhism, a foreign religion, exerted the greatest influence. But most Han paid homage to all three religions, thus avoiding religious conflict.

The inclusive religious attitude of the Han may perhaps be explained by the fact that the three religions were mutually complementary, Taoism centering on man’s relation to nature and the cosmos, Confucianism on man’s relation to society, and Buddhism on man’s relation to the beyond. Islam and Christianity only came to China under the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) and never occupied a prominent position.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Han celebrate many major holidays. Among them, the most important is the Spring Festival (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20). Almost everybody travels back home, even from faraway places inside or outside China; it is estimated that hundreds of millions travel during that festive period. Generations of family members get together to share a dinner party on the eve of the lunar New Year. Fireworks and firecrackers are kindled everywhere (but have been forbidden recently in some urban districts). People dress up and have a good time for days in the cities and for weeks in the rural areas.

October 15 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between November 6 and December 4) is the second most important day of the year for the Han people. People enjoy contemplating the full moon and eating moon cakes (originally an offering to the Moon Goddess), symbolizing the union and reunion of the family. The Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, and Dragon Boat Regatta are performed on this festival.



*A Han funeral procession winds along a country road in Pingtang, China. (© Christophe Boisvieux/Corbis)*

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Since 1980, each Han couple of reproductive age in mainland China has been encouraged to have no more than one child. Childbirth, therefore, is often regarded as a major event in the family. Following the old custom, eggs cooked and dyed red are often sent to relatives and friends for celebration. Quite a number of people will have a dinner party to celebrate their baby's completion of the first month of life.

In the past, burial of the dead underground was the general practice throughout the country. Today, it has been replaced in the cities by cremation. The Qingming Festival, a day of commemorating dead relatives and paying respects to their tombs, is held on April 4, 5, or 6.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Paying a New Year call is a very popular tradition on the Spring Festival. The guests usually bring gifts, such as fruits, candies, cigarettes, or a bottle of wine. They can expect a warm welcome. However, greeting on the phone during festivals is becoming more and more popular in large cities today. Under the influence of Western culture, sending Christmas and New Year greeting cards is becoming a trend.

Although most young people think that the best way to find a partner is through their own efforts, there are still a number

of them who are helped by their parents, relatives, or friends. On most occasions, the males take the initiative. The response of a girl invited for the first time in her life for a date is usually to postpone it until later, unless she is well acquainted with the inviter. Mutual attraction is of utmost importance in selecting a partner. Position and wealth are also important considerations.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Being poor and less technologically advanced, the Han for a long time exerted great efforts to guarantee and improve their means of subsistence. Following the economic development of Taiwan, mainland China adopted in 1978 the policies of reform and opening to the outside world that speeded up its own economic development and increased its gross national product (GNP) twofold and fourfold in the 1980s and mid-1990s, respectively. This ensured a relatively comfortable lifestyle for the Han, especially those living in the coastal areas.

The average life expectancy for the Han has increased to more than 70 years of age, while the mortality rate has dropped to about 7 per 1,000 in 2008. Mortality and morbidity due to infectious disease have dropped significantly. Schistosomiasis has been eliminated in the vast majority of rural areas in south China. On the contrary, sexually transmitted diseases,



especially gonorrhea, have increased markedly since the 1980s. What merits attention is the high incidence of induced abortions (due to contraceptive failure or to sex-selection of the baby), which has had an inevitable negative impact on women's health.

With improved rural and urban incomes, Han consumer demand has turned from basic subsistence needs to various household electrical appliances, upholstery, and jewelry. However, consumers are frustrated by inflation and by the increasing number of counterfeit goods in the marketplace.

#### <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

The roles of men and women in Han society of mainland China are not clearly prescribed. Han are monogamous. Men

and women marry the partners of their own choice. Although marriages are mostly stable, the incidence of divorce has been on the rise. An average Han family in urban areas will consist of a man, his wife, and their only child. In rural areas, three or more generations living together under the same roof is not uncommon. Cats and dogs are popular pets in the countryside, but they are usually forbidden in the cities. Birds are beloved pets everywhere.

#### <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Just two decades ago, city streets were uniformly grey and dark; men and women, young and old, wore clothes of the same style and the same color. Today, in the frozen north, down jackets, woolens, and fur overcoats in red, yellow, or-

ange, and other bright colors liven the bleak winter scene. In the south, where the climate is milder, people choose Western suits, jeans, jackets, sweaters, and other fashionable clothing to wear year-round. Famous brand names and fashions are a common sight in large cities, and they sell quite well. Cheaper and more practical clothing is also available. Similar changes also have occurred in rural areas, especially among the new class of well-to-do farmers. However, in less advanced rural areas, Han peasants still wear their “Mao suits” (the plain, two-pieced utilitarian attire named after the former Chinese leader).

## **12 FOOD**

The main foods of the Han are rice, flour, vegetables, pork, eggs, and freshwater fish. The Han have always laid much stress on cooking skills, making Chinese cuisine (basically Han) well known throughout the world. Dumplings, wonton, spring rolls, rice, noodles, and roast Beijing duck are just examples of traditional foods.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The Han, who invented an original system of writing more than 3,000 years ago, and the university more than 2,000 years ago, always prized education and literacy. The rate of illiteracy and semi-illiteracy in Han society is under 10%. Chinese law mandates children receive 9 years of formal education. About 98% of children enroll in school when they reach school age. More than 80% of the students who graduate from primary school and 45% of those who graduate from junior middle school continue to higher levels.

There are more than 1,000 universities and colleges and 800,000 primary and middle schools at different levels, with a total enrollment of 180 million, including 2.6 million college students and graduate students. In addition, 800,000 students are now taking home undergraduate training courses, while 14 million adult students attend classes of different levels in adult schools.

Despite progress in education, about five million school-age children do not enter school or have dropped out, and the college entrance rate is only 1.8%, below the average for developing countries. Underfunding is the primary reason for this status, and enrollment in the countryside is much lower than that in cities.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The variety of traditional Han musical instruments is sufficient to form an orchestra. The most popular include the two-string violin (*erhu*), the lute (*zheng*), and the *pipa*. Institutions of traditional music and dance were established early in the 1950s.

The ancient literature of the Han, including poems, drama and novels, history, philosophy, and rituals, is a great world treasure. Many works have been translated into other languages and introduced into many countries. The great poets Li Bai and Du Fu, who flourished in the golden age of Chinese poetry (Tang Dynasty, 618–907), have produced works that belong to world literature. The monumental Chinese novels, starting in the 14th century with the epic *Water Margin*, also include *Pilgrim to the West*, *Golden Lotus*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. One should also mention philosophical masterpieces written

around the 5th century BC, namely Confucius' *Analects* and Lao-zi's *The Way and Its Power*.

The Han have also contributed greatly to world civilization by inventing paper (2nd century BC), ceramics (7th century), gunpowder (10th century), porcelain (11th century), movable printing (11th century), and the compass (12th century).

## **15 WORK**

The economic disequilibrium of Han society is very prominent. On the one hand, scientists are engaged in nuclear power plants, while peasants in rural areas cultivate the land with primitive farming techniques. Almost all kinds of work present in both developed and developing countries can be found in China. Among them, three kinds of work go back thousands of years. Porcelain production lent the name “China,” from its birthplace; China is also the homeland of sericulture (the production of raw silk), filature (reeling of silk), and silk knitting; doctors of traditional Chinese medicine prescribe herbs and acupuncture, making a great contribution to the health and population growth of the Chinese nation.

## **16 SPORTS**

As the main ethnic body of the Chinese nation, the Han have participated in almost all the athletic contests of the Olympic Games and performed brilliantly in many sporting events. Soccer, volleyball, basketball, table tennis, badminton, jogging, and swimming are popular sports played by children and adults. *Wushu* and *Taijiquan* are two kinds of traditional shadow-boxing of the Han, which have become world-famous as methods of gymnastics and meditation.

The Chinese Government has set up a Federation of Chinese Sports to train Chinese athletes for world Olympics and for Asian Olympics. Athletes from China have performed brilliantly in many sports, especially swimming, diving, gymnastics, ping-pong, and volleyball.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Watching television is almost a daily entertainment of the Han family in the evenings. In addition, the video cassette recorder is now very popular in urban areas. The Han go to the movies just on occasion. Youngsters are often enthusiastic about dancing, karaoke, and rock music, while the aged are likely to be enchanted by Beijing opera, local drama, classical music, and mahjong tiles. Travel has become a new entertainment since the five-day work week was adopted in 1995.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Calligraphy and traditional Chinese painting are the most popular folk arts of the Han. Paper cutting, embroidery, brocade, cloisonné, colored glaze, jade ware, clay sculpture, and dough figurines meticulously made by craftsmen are famous around the world. Chess, kite flying, and potted landscapes are hobbies among people of various ages.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

China is in a period of transition, moving from a traditional to a modern society. The coexistence of the old social structure and the new, immature social system produces a number of contradictions. The widening gap of living standards between

rural and urban areas draws a surplus rural labor force of 100 million and more into the coastal areas looking for jobs. This situation, which favors mobility and exchange, entails serious social disturbances. The disequilibrium of the economic development between the coastal areas and the inland, the irrational income for different occupations, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the inflation year after year, bribery becoming more serious day by day, and the reappearance of other ugly phenomena such as gambling, drugs, prostitution, and abduction of women, are all worrisome and perplexing to the public.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students. China has strict family planning laws, and it is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# HANI

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Huoyi

**LOCATION:** China (Yunnan)

**POPULATION:** 1.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Hani

**RELIGION:** Polytheism; ancestor worship; some Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Huoyi tribe inhabiting the south of Dadu River (in north-west Sichuan) in the 3rd century BC was probably the ancestor of the current Hani. The Huoyi were a branch of the southward-migrating ancient Qiang. From the 4th to the 8th century, they reached southward to areas in Yunnan Province between the Lanchang Jiang River and the Yuan Jiang River where they now dwell. Since the Tang Dynasty (618–907), they paid tribute to their own elected officials. In the 18th century, the chiefs of the Hani tribes lost their authority and were replaced by Manchu or Chinese officers appointed directly by the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Hani are mainly distributed in the southwest of Yunnan, between the Lanchang Jiang River and the Yuan Jiang River. There are four autonomous Hani counties; there are also large Hani populations in the Dai districts of Xishuangbanna. These areas are located in the subtropical zone, with fertile land and abundant rainfall, suitable for growing rice and other wet crops. The Hani population was 1.5 million in 2000.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Hani language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Tibeto-Burman group, Yi branch. There are three dialects and no written language. In 1957, a writing system based on Latin was created. Hani is a self-given name. The other branches have self-given names of their own. Hani is the general designation of the whole group.

## 4 FOLKLORE

According to Hani mythology, there was a chaotic fog in the universe in remote antiquity. It seethed silently for a long period of time and ultimately turned into a vast expanse of water. A big fish grew up, but its head and tail were not clearly visible. The fish swung its right fin up, which turned into the sky. It swung its left fin down, which turned into the earth. When it swayed its body, 14 gods and goddesses, as well as two human beings, were sent out from its back. The man and the woman married. Later on, the woman gave birth to 21 children. The eldest was a tiger, the second an eagle, the third a dragon. The rest were men and women. The dragon brought three big bamboo tubes to its mother as gifts for her loving kindness. The first tube contained gold, silver, copper, iron, and jewelry, which she ordered to stay underground. The second contained rice, corn, cotton, grass, and trees, which she ordered to grow on earth. The third contained oxen, horses, pigs, poultry, and other animals. She ordered all the animals, except the oxen, to



be led into the forest. The oxen were to be reserved as sacrificial offerings to the gods.

The Hani believed that seeds of the food crops were taken from the gods by a hero called Mamai, who had to pay with his own life to obtain them. That is why the Hani hold a commemorative ceremony in honor of Mamai in May or June of each year.

## 5 RELIGION

The Hani are polytheistic. They believe that there is a Heaven God, an Earth God, a Tree God, as well as a Village God and a House God to protect them. They offer sacrifices to obtain their blessing and protection. Ancestor worship is also an important form of religious belief and practice. The Hani believe that some ghosts and gods bring about misfortunes; they seek the mediation of the shaman to ward off their influence and to expel them.

In Xishuangbanna District, the Hani offer sacrifices to the Village Gate, asking for the protection from the Village Gate God. There are public trees in the village as well as family trees. The shaman is usually mandated to perform the sacrificial rite for the Tree God in the context of a festive celebration of the community under the trees; on that occasion, members of the community express their best wishes for the future.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, a number of Hani have converted to Christianity.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

For the Hani, just as for the Chinese, the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival are the most important celebrations of the year. They regard the month of October (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between October 24 and November 23) as the beginning of the year. The October Festival, therefore, is their New Year. It lasts from 5 to 15 days, depending on local custom. All members of the local community participate, each household providing a course for the lively communal dinner party.

The June Festival (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between June 23 and August 20) lasts for three to five days. On the last day of the festival, in addition to sacrificial offerings, a dinner party, and recreational activities, every family lights a torch and chases the ghosts out of the home; the torches are then taken in a procession to the limits of the village so as to drive out the evil spirits from the community.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A rite of joint naming of the newborn son or daughter is held on the fourth day after the infant's birth. The parents prepare rice rolls covered with cooked beans and a little piece of chicken and put them on a table for the villagers. If the infant is a male, a boy will be invited to carry a bamboo tube of glutinous rice and a hoe; he should hoe the ground three times in front of the mother and the son. If the infant is a female, a girl should be invited to hold a chopper and carry a bamboo tube of glutinous rice; she chops the firewood three times in front of the mother and the daughter. These gestures show that the boy will be good in farming and the girl good in household work when they grow up. The ritual is completed by asking for the village elder to name the baby.

The girls comb their hair into braids before marriage, but coil the braid into a bun on the top of the head after the wedding; after childbearing, they wrap their head with a turban.

They dispose of the dead by cremation.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When receiving a guest, the host usually holds out a bowl of wine with both hands and offers a toast. He then takes the teapot from the firepool and pours a cup of strong tea for the guest. The guest is not free to refuse.

There are quite a few ways for boys and girls to seek each other. During breaks from manual labor, boys and girls sit in two different rows, face to face, and throw small pine twigs at each other for fun. In this playful atmosphere, they may throw the pine twigs intentionally to their preferred partner. There is then formal dating. In some areas, when a young man reaches marriage age, he will carry his knapsack and journey to different villages to look for a spouse. If he has found someone, he will have a heart-to-heart talk (mostly about love) with the girl in a public house specially provided by the village for this purpose. They might even sleep there together if they wish. If they find each other congenial, they will agree on a wedding day. When the time comes, the boy's friends will help him to steal the girl to his house and get married. In some areas, if he takes a fancy to a girl, he will snatch away her small hat from her head. The hat is made of black handwoven cloth, silver ornamented, six angles in shape. If she agrees, they will start dating. If not, she might ask him to return the hat.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most of the Hani live half-way up in the mountains. Some villages are small, with dozens of households, while others are composed of hundreds of families. Hani houses are usually made of wood and adobes, thatched with straw and built on stone foundations. Most of them have three stories: the uppermost is for storing groceries and vegetables; the second, for living and food storage; and the first, for livestock. There are variations in building styles from region to region. For instance, in the Muojiang area, houses are flat-roofed and built on adobes; but in the Xishuangbanna area, they are made of wood and bamboo and provided with a balcony. Men and women live in separate rooms; the man's is in the front, which is also the place for guest entertaining.

Different districts are connected by highways, but people have to walk in mountainous areas. Fully equipped hospitals have been established in the counties and medical clinics in the small towns.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Hani family is patrilineal. They practice the "joint name system," by which they can trace back dozens of generations along the patrilineal family tree. The last one or two syllables of the father's name are the beginnings of the sons' and daughters' names.

By tradition, the Hani family is monogamous. However, the strength of the custom varies from region to region; for instance, in Xishuangbanna District, monogamy is stringent. A man abandoning his wife and marrying again will be condemned by public opinion. In general, a concubine is allowed, though illegal, if the legal wife has had no son. Young people have full freedom to date, but marriage should be agreed to by the parents. For instance, in the Mujiang area, there is a custom called "stepping on the road." When the boy and the girl find each other congenial, their parents must walk a certain distance on the road. If they do not come across a rabbit, wolf, or some other animal, the girl is betrothed to the boy. Two or three days after the wedding, she should return to her parents and live there until the time of rice transplanting in the spring.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Hani usually wear clothes made of dark navy cloth that they weave and dye themselves. Wrapping a black or white cloth on the head, the men usually wear long pants and a garment with buttons down the front. The women's clothes vary in different districts, but usually consist of long pants and a petticoat made of a single piece of cloth and opened at the right side without any collar. The sleeve openings and the bottoms of the pants are all piped and laced. In Xishuangbanna District, the women wear barrel-like long skirts, multi-pleated skirts, or pants reaching over the knees. Earrings, necklaces, and bracelets are daily ornaments. The marital status of women can be judged by the design and color of their waistband, as well as by their hairstyle. For example, single or double braids hanging down means the girl is unmarried, while a bun made of coiled braids indicates a married woman. In some areas, when a girl becomes 17, she may wear an ornament called *ouqiuqiu* behind her head. After 18, she may keep her hair on the temples, which denotes that she is "marriageable." Married women must cover the *ouqiuqiu* with a black cloth.



Three women from the Hani dine in Yunnan Province, China. (Yann Layma/Getty Images)

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

The staple foods of the Hani include rice and corn. Proteins are obtained from chicken, duck, eggs, pigs, and oxen. Glutinous rice and *baba* (a cake made of cooked black rice with pestle) are indispensable during festivals. Edible wild herbs and wild fowls are taken on holidays. In the second part of June (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between July 7 and August 20), the Hani celebrate the Locust Festival; all the villagers go to the fields to catch locusts, which are a delicacy for the Hani. They like sour and spicy dishes. In some areas, they pulverize brown sugar, glutinous rice, potatoes, and sophora (nut of the sophora japonica, or “scholar’s tree”) into a powder. They then add water to obtain a thick dough and form the mixture into balls or shapes of animals; these are fried until crispy. This delicacy is served during the New Year Festival.

## <sup>13</sup>EDUCATION

Illiteracy was prevalent in the past. Since the 1950s, many primary schools have been established in the larger villages. There are middle schools and technical schools in the small towns. The great majority of children reaching school age are enrolled in school. Although education among the Hani has developed quickly, their educational level is still below average among the national minorities.

## <sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among the traditional musical instruments of the Hani, the *bawu* is unique. It is a bamboo pipe with eight openings on the shaft and a copper reed at one end. The deep notes of this oboe-like instrument are beautiful in timbre and very pleasant to the ear.

The “Wooden Sparrow Dance” was created in a village at Yuanyang in Yunnan. According to legend, a sparrow cured a boy who was seriously ill. Thereafter, whenever a boy was born, the villagers would perform a special dance to celebrate the occasion; the dancers are usually four to six males holding a sparrow carved in wood. There is another bird dance, called the “Silvery Pheasant Dance,” performed in the Hani District along the Honghe River. The silvery pheasant has been regarded as a symbol of peace and liberty by the Hani. The dancers, wearing white, with feather fans in both hands, move softly and gracefully, imitating the bird’s movement in the air.

In addition to myths, legends, poems, folk tales, fables, children’s folk rhymes, proverbs, and riddles, the Hani have preserved an ancient epic narrating their migrations called “Hani Ancestors crossing the River,” which is the common heritage of most Hani communities.

## <sup>15</sup>WORK

The Hani are good at building terraced fields. They are able to build them in line with the local topography and the soil tex-



ture. The uninterrupted water from the streams and ravines is channeled into the terraced fields. In Hani districts, tiers upon tiers of terraced fields greet the eye on every side. Some terraces are made of hundreds of tiers, like a huge ladder stretching to the sky.

## 16 SPORTS

The traditional sport of the Hani is to play on the swing. It is not an ordinary swing but rather like a small windmill. Serving as a swing seat, a board is fixed at each end of the rotating arms. Four youngsters, sitting on the boards, rotate the arms in a full swing, rising and falling with each rotation.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Listening to the “Drinking Song” is a traditional entertainment. The song, performed by an old singer, is about stories of their ancestors.

The Hani of Muojiang in Yunnan enjoy a special recreational dance: The participants dance while beating a drum; the young men swing their arms with a rolling gait, while the girls shake their handkerchiefs and swing their legs. They often interrupt their dance to propose a toast to the surrounding people.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Hani girls are adept at embroidery. Various figures and flowers are embroidered on hats, clothes, leg wrappings, and waistbands. Silver ornaments, such as earrings, eardrops, necklaces, and large bracelets are carved exquisitely.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Hani’s cultural and educational level is below the average of the national minorities of China. This is due to the low starting point, to the little attention paid to education, and to the very low income of the teachers as a result of underfunding.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. The Hani have not achieved the same levels of education as the majority population in urban areas, but as of 2008, most Hani children were enrolled in school as of 2008. There is no significant gap in education between boys and girls.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. As of 2008 urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# HAZARAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** huh-ZAH-ruhzh

**LOCATION:** Afghanistan

**POPULATION:** 6–7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dari (Khorasani Persian); Pastu; Baluchi; Turkic

**RELIGION:** Islam (Shia Muslim)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Hazaras are one of the many different ethnolinguistic communities living in Afghanistan. Some of the other major ethnic groups include the Tajik, Pashtun (or Pushtun), Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, and Nuristani. The Hazaras, with strong Mongoloid features, consider themselves to be Moghuls (descendants of the Turko-Mongol tribes of Inner Asia). Local legends and some native historians trace their ancestry to the biblical figure Yafith (or Japheth), the son of Noah. Their ethnic origins and the exact time and historical circumstances of their appearance in Afghanistan, however, remain little understood.

Although there appears to have been considerable curiosity about the Hazaras among foreign researchers, especially during the decades preceding Soviet intervention and the civil war, a systemic and comprehensive study of their history and ethnography is yet to be attempted. For political reasons, most historians writing about Afghanistan have left out any discussion of the Hazaras in their works. Similarly, the government of Afghanistan has neglected the Hazara regions as targets for economic development and social change. It is important to note that Hazaras (excluding those in central Afghanistan) live amid a variety of different ethnolinguistic communities in the country. Hence, their cultures display some variations reflecting adaptation to local conditions and ways of living.

The Hazaras are for the most part a tribally organized society. The names of some of their major tribes and tribal units are Shaikh All, Turkuman, Qarluq, Kahgadai, Qarabatur, Daymirdad, Behsood, Jaghoori, Daychoopan, Daykhita, Aymaq, Khawjameri, Nayman, Chaichka, Daykandi, Dayzangi, Tatar, and Fooladi Hazaras.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The exact number of Hazaras, like other ethnic communities in Afghanistan, is not known due to the fact that no complete national census has ever been taken in that country. The estimates of Hazara population in Afghanistan range from about 7% (or 1,519,000 people) to well over 20% (or 6,000,000–7,000,000 people) of the total Afghani population of 31 million people. Spatially, the Hazaras are more concentrated in central mountainous regions of Afghanistan, but they are also found in smaller numbers scattered in other areas of the country. In addition, a population of Hazaras dwell in Baluchistan, Pakistan. Many Hazaras have also moved to Kabul to seek a better life and today comprise about half of the population of that city.

The central portion of Afghanistan in which a high population of Hazaras live is called Hazarajat. Hazaras can be found in many different provinces. Major locations of the Hazaras include Bamyan, Ghazni, Uruzgan, Ghoor, and Zabul. Other major areas with somewhat lower Hazara populations include



Kabul, Badghees, Logar, Parwan, and Samangan. Helmand, Qandahar, Baghlan, and Joozjan are also populated with Hazaras to a lesser degree. Small populations of Hazaras can also be found in other provinces of the country. The location of the Hazaras can be found in a geographical circle in central Afghanistan and an area extending west of the circle as well. The territories inhabited by the Hazaras lie completely within Afghanistan and do not share borders with any neighboring countries.

Hazarajat generally has a cold climate, and snow lasts long on the mountains. Because Hazaras raise animals, they must prepare and store food during the summer to meet their necessities for the cold winters. Until recently, the major means of transportation among Hazaras were donkeys and horses. Motor vehicles have only recently become common in their region.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Most Hazaras today speak Persian (known as Dari in Afghanistan). Because of the importance of Persian for communication, economic, and educational reasons in Afghanistan, Hazaras were influenced by the language and began speaking it. In addition to Persian, some Hazaras also speak Pashtu (or Pushtu) and Baluchi. The traditional Turkic language is also used in some areas. Professor Shah Ali Akbar Shahrustani, a well-known scholar of Hazaras, wrote a book comparing Turkic and Mongolian languages. He found 1,400 Turkic and Mongolian words that were used in Hazaran Persian. Of these,



*A Hazaras family in their cave in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. They were displaced from their home by the Taliban and were on the move for three years. (Tyler Hicks/Getty Images)*

more than 1,000 were pure Turkic words. The Persian spoken by Hazaras is known as Khorasani Persian.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Hazaras historically have less formal education than people from other parts of the country. Hazaras believe in the superstitions that are common in the country. Some beliefs include the evil eye, ghosts, and several other superstitions about animals and nighttime.

Storytelling is a traditional Hazara habit. They tell stories of their history, their ancestors, and their heroes. Music is commonly used with poetry, epics, and love stories. The *dambura* is used to provide music. This is a bowl lute with a long neck and two strings that are plucked.

Hazaras' customs and traditions are unique. They have many different *dubaitis* (which are sung). An example of a *dubaiti* is:

The stars shone and I lay awake  
I was behind the broken wall  
As the damned cock began to crow  
I was still waiting for my love.

Hazaras also have many proverbs. Examples include:

If your father owns the mill, you still must wait your turn to grind your flour.

Mirrors are not necessary at a meeting of the blind.  
Don't make plans for your life on the advice of false astrologers.

The sons of wolves will be wolves.

Two people are afraid of an empty rifle: the one with the rifle, and the one without it.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The Islamic religion has two major sects, the Sunni and the Shia sects. Sunnis recognize the four khalifs that followed Prophet Muhammad and believe in four imams: Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi, and Hanbal. The Shias give more significance to the fourth khalif, Ali, and his family. The Hazaras are Shia Muslims. During the beginning of Islam in Afghanistan, the Shias were divided into three different groups: the followers of the 12 imams, the Ismaili Shias, and the Zaidi Shias. Because the Zaidi Shias were very close to the Sunni sect of Islam, they are no longer present in modern-day Afghanistan. The Shias following the 12 imams exist throughout the country.

In the past, the Sunnis and Shias of Afghanistan had very good relations with each other, including marriages between sects. Recently, however, politics have stressed their differences

and have divided the two to a greater extent. During Afghanistan's civil war years (1992–1996) and the preceding years of the Soviet invasion, Hazara resistance groups were generally not allied with those of Sunni background. Hazaras were supported by Shia Iran while other Sunni groups were supported by Sunni Pakistan, and the politics involved served to further drive apart Shia Hazara and Sunni groups in Afghanistan. The majority of Muslims in the world are Sunnis, considerably outnumbering the number of Shias.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As Shia Muslims, Hazaras celebrate the two major Islamic holidays: *Ayd-Al-Fitr*, a three day holiday following Ramadan, the month of fasting; and *Ayd-Al-Adha*, a festival (at the time of pilgrimage) in which animals (usually goats, sheep, cattle, or camels) are sacrificed in the name of God. 'Ashura celebrations also take place among the Hazaras. One other holiday celebrated among Hazaras is Nawruz, the Afghani New Year traditionally celebrated throughout most of the Turkic-Persian world. This holiday has developed into a religious one since the advent of Islam in the country. For example, people in Mazar-i-Sharif celebrate Nawruz at the place in which the tomb of Ali is believed to be located. In Kabul, the celebration takes place around an area called Sakhi. Trees are also planted on this day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Little girls wear bright colors and are free to go outside while they are young, but as they mature and reach puberty, they are required to cover their hair with scarves. They are also required to stay in the house more often. There are also special celebrations and practices during weddings, times of circumcision for young boys, and funerals.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Hazara people are very hospitable and friendly to guests. They prepare special food for their guests, and the guests are honored with the best place to sit. Most of the Hazaras in Kabul and the countryside eat with their hands, rarely using utensils such as forks and knives.

Hazara women perform many household tasks, including sewing, cooking, milking animals, cleaning, and raising children. They also perform some outside tasks with the husband as well. Women are respected among men and the Hazara community, and the men are respected by Hazara women.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of Hazaras vary considerably depending on their locations. Those living in cold climates have more difficulties than those living in warm areas. In cold areas, more clothing is necessary, there is more of a need for wood to keep warm, travel is more difficult, and agriculture is poor. (Fruits are not common in some parts of Hazarajat. They also lack vegetables as well.) Generally speaking, Hazaras are poor people, and there is little business interaction among them. In Kabul, they usually have low-paying, menial jobs such as janitorial work and are relegated to living on the outskirts of the city, with less access to clean water and electricity and other amenities than other groups.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

It is customary for entire Hazara families to live together in one house. This includes grandparents and women married to the sons of the household. Daughters-in-law contribute to the household work when they move in, easing the workload of their mothers-in-law. Newborn babies are usually named by the older people of the household. Grandparents show much interest in the raising of their grandchildren. Fathers and grandfathers teach boys male tasks, while mothers and grandmothers teach girls the tasks assigned to females. Marriages are arranged, and when a daughter is married, she moves in with her husband's family. After the death of the grandparents, especially the grandfather, the sons usually begin living independently.

## 11 CLOTHING

The most common clothing among the Hazaras is *perahan-u-tunban*, a type of clothing somewhat resembling the Western world's pajamas. Women's designs differ from those of the men. Men wear turbans, vests, overcoats, and sweaters over their *perahan-u-tunbans*. Their clothing is usually made from wool and/or cotton. Unlike the men, who wear simply colored clothes, the women usually wear clothes with varying bright colors and designs. The women usually wear lighter-weight clothes because they remain indoors more often. Hazaras do not have a large quantity of clothes.

## 12 FOOD

The Hazaras' diet includes a large proportion of high-protein food such as meat and dairy products. They use plenty of oil when cooking. They usually eat only one type of food during a meal, not having wide selections of food at once. Exceptions are among the wealthy and at times when guests are visiting.

## 13 EDUCATION

Hazaras have two systems of education. The first one is the traditional system, which includes religious studies at mosques, education by family members at home in gender-appropriate tasks, and learning basic reading and writing skills from the local religious leaders of the villages. The second system is official education, in which the schools are administered by the Ministry of Education (from the capital of the country). After the sixth grade, only the best students are sent to Kabul to continue their education. Afghanistan has a centralized system of education.

In the years of rebuilding Afghanistan since 2001, Hazaras are often more likely to take advantage of educational opportunities than other groups in Afghanistan. Nearly all Hazaras attend school, including girls, and the literacy rate among this group is growing and is thought to be higher than the national average. Bamian State University is operating in Hazarajat, after being closed until 2004. However, marginalization does continue to exist and entrance to esteemed universities such as Kabul State University is difficult and uncommon for Hazaras.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In times of celebration, Hazaras have social gatherings during which music is played and dancing takes place. Women and men dance separately, each having different styles. Poetry is read and *damburas* (lutes) are played.

Many Hazaras are proud of their cultural links to Mongols and Genghis Khan. In fact, the word Hazara comes from the Persian meaning “one thousand” and is thought to be derived from Genghis Khan’s division of troops into groupings of this number. However this same heritage also creates some tensions with other Afghans of different background.

One of the most notable features of Hazarajat were the giant Buddha statues located at Bamian, constructed 1,500 years ago by the Kushan Empire. Although the Hazara of today may not be direct descendents of those that created the Buddhas, the Buddhas for many years dominated the landscape of the homeland of the Hazaras. In 2001 the Buddhas were destroyed by the Taliban due to the fundamental Islamist proscription against idols in the human form.

### 15 WORK

Excluding housework, men are held responsible for managing and financially supporting the household. They work in the fields growing crops. Because of their low standard of living, Hazaras are required to perform more laborious jobs to support their families. This is apparent in Kabul, where many Hazaras have migrated and taken up menial jobs. It is common for Hazara labor migrants also to migrate to nearby countries such as Pakistan and Iran and send remittances home to support their families.

### 16 SPORTS

In some Hazara areas such as Bamyan, Samangan, and the northern parts of Afghanistan, *buzkashi* takes place. This is a game in which horse-riders attempt to carry a dead goat into the opposing team’s goal, a marked circle on the ground. Hunting, wrestling, archery, horse-races, and a variety of children’s games also take place in some areas. Because of little spare time from work, Hazaras do not spend a great deal of time playing sports.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

During the winters, when they do not have as much work to do, Hazaras have some time for entertainment and recreation. They tell stories, visit with each other, and drink tea in the evenings.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Hazaras are very well known for making handicrafts such as coats, overcoats, sweaters, jackets, shoes, hats, gloves, and scarves. Embroidery is common. These are mostly made by the women and are sold in shops in Kabul and other cities.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Despite being very social among themselves, Hazaras have many social problems in the country. Because of the level of marginalization experienced by Hazaras, they are generally not socially involved with other groups. Despite being a native group of Afghanistan, Hazaras have some differences from the other ethnic groups of the country. As Shia Muslims, they are in the minority in the largely Sunni population of Afghanistan. The Hazaras are also generally poorer and less educated than other Afghans. These differences create tensions between the Hazaras and other Afghans, and also limit the progress Hazaras can make in improving their standard of living. During

the years the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan (1996–2001), Hazaras were victims of ethnic cleansing and by some accounts, genocide. A fictionalized portrayal of the relationship between a Hazara boy and an Afghan boy of the upper class can be found in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) and the movie of the same name (2007).

Hazarajat has, comparatively, avoided the large opium poppy production endemic in much of Afghanistan. However, many development projects are also not introduced to this region as to other parts of Afghanistan.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In many ways, Hazara women are able to achieve many more rights than women in other parts of Afghanistan. While nationwide numbers of girls who attend school remains low, among Hazaras the number is as high as 80%. Hazara women are not subject to the strict social mores of Pashtun and other ethnicities, and are not required to practice seclusion. As a result, they have been more likely to join the workforce and to take up farming. The first female governor in Afghanistan, Habiba Sarobi, was a Hazara and was appointed in 2005.

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—revised by M. Kerr

# HILIGAYNON

**PRONUNCIATION:** hee-lee-GUY-nohn

**ALTERNATE NAME:** ILONGGO

**LOCATION:** Philippines (Western Visayas)

**POPULATION:** 5.8 million (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Hiligaynon

**RELIGION:** Catholicism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

In 1569, the Spanish conquistador Legaspi transferred his headquarters from food-poor Cebu to Panay, where rice was available in abundance. Long before this time, the island's fertility permitted the Hiligaynon people to develop one of the archipelago's most advanced societies, one that engaged in international trade (as evidenced by large finds of Chinese porcelain) and that created fine work in gold and semiprecious stones. The textiles of Panay remained in high demand throughout the archipelago into the 19th century; the industry thrived until overwhelmed by cheaper British manufactures.

Among Christianized regions, the Western Visayas has been noteworthy for the persistence of pre-Christian systems of belief; here, it was *baylan*, leaders in the indigenous religion, who led revolts against the Spanish (rather than of Christian millenarian sects as in the Tagalog and other regions). Nonetheless, the church-adorned city of Iloilo on Panay became one of the great centers of Hispanicized culture in the colony (in 1993 Iloilo's baroque Miag-ao church was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site). Large-scale sugar production for the world market created a small, initially largely *mestizo*, elite who enjoyed an opulent lifestyle on vast plantations (and who may have provided the basis for the stereotype of Hiligaynon hedonism, also attributable to the natural bounty of the land). At the same time, economic dislocations (such as the demise of the textile industry) forced a flood of landless Hiligaynon to take ill-paid, backbreaking labor on these plantations of the formerly under populated island of Negros to the immediate east of Panay.

With the recent decades' drop in the price of sugar, much of the region has entered a steep economic decline; Negros has become one of the most impoverished regions in the country and particularly ripe for communist insurgency. Though to a lesser extent than Ilocanos and Cebuanos, Hiligaynon have settled in more sparsely populated parts of the country, such as Mindoro and Mindanao. Economic growth since the 1990s has benefited Iloilo as it has other comparable cities in the country, and one of the country's preeminent destinations for domestic and foreign tourists has developed on Boracay off Panay.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Panay is one of the major rice-producing areas of the Philippines (and the most important one by far in the Visayan islands). The landscape consists of broad plains stretching between mountain ranges. Large rivers deposit the volcanic sediments that make the lowlands so fertile. The island of Guimaras in the strait between Panay and Negros is an exception; it is a coral platform.



The Western Visayas region of the Philippines includes the provinces of Iloilo, Aklan, Capiz, Antique (all on Panay island), Negros Occidental, and Romblon; it includes two of the country's largest cities, Iloilo in eastern Panay and Bacolod on western Negros. The region's population numbered 6.2 million in 2000 (up from 5.4 million in 1990 and 3.6 million in 1970), of which 61.57% were speakers of Hiligaynon, concentrated on the facing coasts of Panay and Negros (72% of population of Iloilo province and 77.68% of Negros Occidental province).

According to the 2000 census, Hiligaynon speakers constituted 7.6% of the national population (5.8 million people). Beyond the Western Visayas, they can also be found in southern

Mindoro and (as recent migrants) on Palawan (13% in 2000) and Mindanao (11% of the Caraga region and 10.83% of Southern Mindanao—more than half [52%] of South Cotabato's population was Hiligaynon-speaking, and almost half [46.92%] of Sultan Kudarat's).

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Hiligaynon language is the language of Iloilo province, which has come to be spoken throughout the Western Visayas region. Hiligaynon (as the name of both a language and an ethnic group) is also called "Ilonggo," though this generally refers specifically to the dialect and people of Iloilo. Hiligaynon intonation is noted for its gentle lilt under which, it is said, a curse may go unrecognized.

Other regions of Panay have their own distinct languages, including Capizeño, Aklanon, and Kiniray-a. Narrow straits link Panay and western Negros, and Hiligaynon is spoken on both shores. Mountains separate western from eastern Negros, whose inhabitants speak Cebuano, a language that Hiligaynon cannot readily understand.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The *Maragtas* epic, an imaginative 19th century reworking of Panay folk memories, tells of the migration to the Philippines in 1250 of the Bornean *datus* (chiefs) Puti, Sumakwel, Bangkaya, Balakasusa, Paiburong, Dumangsil, Lubay, and Dumalogdog. They had led their followers there to escape the tyranny of the Srivijayan empire. The *datus* bought the coastal lands of Panay from the indigenous Negritos with gold, pearls, and other ornaments (the Negritos then withdrew to the interior). The meeting of the Negritos and the Borneans is commemorated in many carnival-like local festivals, foremost of which is the Ati-Atihan of Kalibo in Aklan province.

### **5 RELIGION**

Among the Hiligaynon, a pre-Christian belief system coexists with the Catholic one brought by the Spaniards. The two exert mutual influence on each other, as when the Santo Niño, the image of the Child Jesus as World Sovereign, is bathed to summon rain or attract good luck. The indigenous cosmogony divides the universe into three parts. The upper world houses at its zenith (*ibabaw*) the *udtohanon*, i.e., God and his favorite angels who will pass the final judgment but are otherwise remote from human affairs. Lower down in the upper world reside the *langitnon*, angelic beings that live above the clouds. In the *awan-awan* (between the clouds and the earth) live the spirits of the wind, rain, thunder, lightning, typhoons, and whirlwinds; supreme among them is the *tagurising* who lives where the sun rises. The middle world (the earth) is the home to the *dutan-on*, spirits expelled from the upper world for rebelling against God; they differentiated according to where they first landed, for example, in trees, the river, or the sea. The underworld includes hell, in front of whose gate is a hollow pit where the *engkanto*, the malevolent spirits, live with their reptilian pets; the nether regions are connected to the middle world through a tunnel called the *bungalow*.

Each community has specialists who are able to communicate with spirits and heal diseases thought to be caused by spirits, for lack of any other explanation; they also recover lost objects, predict the future, and discover the causes of misfortunes. The most important of these is the *baylan*, a medium

whom a spirit has befriended and granted powers; to augment the potency of his rituals, the *baylan* often adds Latin prayers and Catholic sacred objects.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Persons wanting to marry consult with their siblings and other relatives before approaching their parents for consent and support. The boy's kin arrange a meeting with the girl's kin to discover if the girl has already been promised to another; this serves as a public announcement to discourage other suitors. The boy's kin employ a spokesperson using allegorical language to ascertain whether the girl's parents have accepted the proposal. If they have, the arrangements, including the prospective groom's term of bride-service, are arranged at another meeting, the *padul-ong*, after which the wedding becomes binding and the girl is no longer to be seen in the company of other boys.

On the night before the wedding, both sides attend a party at the bride's parents' house. The church ceremony itself includes ritual acts that are meant to ensure the wife's subservience and fertility. Formerly, a *sinulang* (a machete dance) accompanied the couple out of the church. Arriving at the house, the couple proceeds straight to the family altar to ensure future prosperity; a feast follows. The marriage is not consummated until the second night at the groom's parents' house; on the third day, the couple returns to the bride's parents' house.

When a person is dying, relatives say prayers for the deliverance of his or her soul and to ward off evil spirits (men wave machetes in the yard). The body is washed with water mixed with ginger or bark juice to prevent odor and is laid out in the house next to an improvised altar and a tin can, in which mourners put contributions. The deceased's family refrains from making excessive noise, fighting, combing their hair, and bathing until three days after the burial. Only unmarried men may take the body out of the house; water is thrown on the threshold so that another death will not follow. The entire funeral procession must return to the deceased's house and wash their hands and feet.

Nine days of prayer follow the burial; as many as nine more days may be added, depending on the family's wealth (as all attending must be served food and drink). At a midnight ceremony on the ninth night, all family members must be awake to bid farewell to the deceased's spirit. On the death anniversary, nine days of prayer again take place. On the ninth night, a *patay-patay* (a dummy of the dead) is set up, consisting of pillows laid on a wooden trunk upon which the deceased's clothes are laid.

See also *Filipinos*.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Hiligaynon share the general Filipino behavioral values, such as *hiya* (*huya* in the Hiligaynon language). Violating norms (such as insulting mediums) will earn *gaba*, supernatural punishment. Those who humiliate others will suffer the same amount of humiliation in turn, a principle called *ulin*.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Houses are raised 3 to 4 m (9–13 ft) off the ground; walls are of plaited bamboo, and roofs are of nipa or coconut palm leaves or cogon grass. *Sulay*, bamboo, or timber props, are placed against all sides of a house to keep it from being blown away by typhoons. The room for receiving guests is separated from the rest of the house by a wall; a sofa and two side chairs occupy the space immediately inside the front door. Small children of both sexes sleep together, but once they are older, boys sleep near the door and girls sleep in a bedroom at the back. Animals are kept under the house, and rice is stored there (if not in a separate granary structure). The house lot is enclosed with a bamboo fence or a hedge of ornamental plants; fruit tree groves and gardens are nearby.

Average family income in the Western Visayas region amounted to 130,000 pesos (us\$2,549) in 2006, relatively low for the Philippines (ranking 10th out of 17 regions), cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog's ₱198,000, and Central Visayas' regions, ₱144,000.

According to the 2000 census, the proportion of houses in Negros Occidental province with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum reached 61% (up from 26.1% in 1990), with a roof of grass or palm thatch 30%; 24.2% of houses had wooden outer walls, 40% outer walls of bamboo or thatch, and 12.9% outer walls of concrete, brick, or stone (5.21% in 1990). In 2000, 13.8% of households in the Western Visayas had access to a community faucet, 14% to a faucet of their own, 22% to a shared deep well, and 17.3% to a dug shallow well, while 9.8% obtained their water from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. Well over half of households (57.9%) disposed of their garbage by burning it, 10.9% by dumping it into a household pit, and 7.8% by feeding it to their animals; only 14.4% had it picked up by a collection truck. 57% of houses were lit with electricity, 37.8% with kerosene lamps, and 4.2% with firewood. 725.5% possessed a radio, 42.2% a television, 23.8% a refrigerator, 15.5% a VCR, 9.2% a telephone or cell phone, 9.4% a washing machine, and 8.5% a motorized vehicle.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Hiligaynon family structure conforms to the general Filipino pattern [See the article entitled **Filipinos** in this volume]. In wealthier families, the Spanish terms *papa* and *mama*, or even the English *mommy* and *daddy*, are preferred over the native *tatay* and *nanay*. Educated people may address their spouses with such English expressions as *honey* or *darling* (often shortened to *ling*) rather than the native *nonoy* (for the husband) or *neneng* (for the wife). Uncles and aunts are addressed as “*tay* + [name]” (“Papa \_\_\_\_\_”) and “*nay* + [name]” (“Mama \_\_\_\_\_”), respectively.

A peasant couple share work responsibilities, e.g., a husband plows while the wife plants; he fishes but she sells the catch. Husbands are the dominant partner outside the house (i.e., in public or in the fields), whereas wives reign supreme within the house. Spouses refrain from showing affection publicly, exchanging only casual greetings. While village people disapprove of a man taking a mistress, saying it will bring bad luck, elite men take mistresses for the sake of prestige.

Family members lavish much attention on a child but also discipline him or her from an early age. Children will gang up on a sibling to whom the parents show favoritism. As they

get older, sons become more formal with their mothers and daughters with their fathers (but with puberty, daughters become closer to their mothers). At the age of seven, a boy will start to help his father with farming or fishing.

Parents discipline children by telling them frightening tales (mentioning the *aswang* or names of old people) or by spanking or whipping them with a stick. When children misbehave, all are punished, even if only one initiates the misbehavior.

## 11 CLOTHING

For fieldwork, men wear worn-out short pants and often go shirtless. On formal occasions, however, they wear long pants, shirts, and shoes (otherwise they go barefoot).

Married women wear either a *bestida* (dress), or a *patadyong* (tube skirt) with a blouse. Traditional weaving is nearly extinct, having been a thriving industry before the 19th-century import of British manufactured cloth. For *pangalap* (magical protection), many older men wear tattoos (a crucifix, initials, or female figures). At the time of the Spanish arrival, all Visayans wore elaborate tattoos, earning them the name *Pintados*, “the painted ones,” from their conquerors.

## 12 FOOD

The eating pattern is either three meals a day or two meals (at 10:00–11:00 am and 4:00–5:00 pm). Between-meal snacks consist of rice cakes, boiled roots, or bananas. Family members eat at their own convenience but are encouraged to eat together. Ordinarily, people eat with their hands while sitting on the floor; silverware and tables are reserved for the use of guests. Men do not eat breakfast unless, as a gesture of hospitality, they are joining visitors who are being served breakfast.

Around 6:00 pm, men gather for *tuba* (palm wine) drinking sessions in the tree groves between houses (some women may also join) them.

## 13 EDUCATION

The literacy level (population 10 years and older) in the Western Visayas was 93.02%, close to the national figure. See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Hiligaynon have an epic, the *Hinilawod*. (See also **Filipinos** in this volume).

## 15 WORK

The Western Visayas region is dominated by two very different types of agriculture: rice cultivation by small holders, and sugar cultivation in large plantations. Swidden (shifting-cultivation) farming is still practiced in the highlands.

Tobacco has been growing in importance. Other crops grown include maize, bananas, coconuts, sweet potato, cassava, *singkamas* (jicama, similar to turnips), squash, tomatoes, beans, and red peppers. Fishing is an alternative means of livelihood. Some Hiligaynon engage in various forms of petty trade: *libod*, making the rounds of one's village, selling a product; *pahumay*, selling from one's house; *tinda*, selling at fiestas and other local events; and *tiyanggi*, operating a small variety store (*sari-sari* in Tagalog-Pilipino).



## 16 SPORTS

*Tumbang patis*, popular with both boys and girls, involves two or more children throwing rocks at a tin can while someone who is “it” watches the can, putting it back in place when hit; if a player is caught retrieving the stone he or she has thrown, he or she becomes “it.” Other popular games include: “gunfighting” with bamboo popguns; beetle- and spider-fighting; and *huyup-huyup*, blowing rubber bands out of a circle for bets. Young children catch dragonflies, dig holes in the ground, pile sticks, measure sand with bottle caps, and pull empty coconut shells or sardine cans.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

According to the 2000 census, in the Western Visayas, the ratio of men to women was 102 to 100. Literacy was higher for women than for men (93.58% vs. 92.45%). While, overall, more overseas workers from the Western Visayas were men than women, 63% of those aged 10-24 were female.

In the past four centuries, Hiligaynon notions of gender differences have been influenced by Spanish Catholic and, later, American and modernizing national secular norms. Urban elite women, especially Spanish and Chinese mestizas, have more closely imitated foreign ideals than women of the rural lower classes. Women and men are recognized as having different characteristics, but in contrast to the case in Mediterranean gender ideologies, these differences are viewed as complementary, not as associating men with good and women with evil, nor as automatically conferring superior power to men or. Men feel no shame in deferring to an elder sister or to a strong-willed and capable wife. In colonial times, Hiligaynon men often sent their wives to discuss community issues with male Spanish officials, showing none of the concern to keep women in seclusion for the sake of family honor that was so important in Spanish culture. Hiligaynon culture generally regards women as innately more reliable and industrious than men, and there is no cultural preference for having a boy over a girl.

Female virginity is valued, but losing it does not condemn a young woman to permanent exclusion from respectable society, nor does having been a man’s mistress (*kerida*) at one time. Premarital pregnancy is common and, if the couple marries, hardly any stigma is attached to it. Tolerance of this has been a characteristic of Hiligaynon society from earlier times, not a modern development. Modernization has brought both the model of the “liberated woman,” new employment opportunities for educated women, and the removal of Spanish patriarchal legal restrictions and disabilities. However, it has also brought the realities of women being objectified in diverse contexts: U.S. military prostitution (a major phenomenon until the end of the 1980s); international mass-tourism; global consumer culture; and overseas labor recruitment, especially

of domestic workers and entertainers. Government-led development programs have sought to mobilize women, highlighting the crucial role women play in society while emphasizing women’s roles in the domestic sphere.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# HINDUS

**PRONUNCIATION:** HIN-dooz

**LOCATION:** India; Nepal; Bangladesh; Sri Lanka; Pakistan; Bhutan; many other countries worldwide

**POPULATION:** over 1.1 billion followers

**LANGUAGE:** Sanskrit (sacred language); language of the region in which they live

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Hindus are followers of a religion that has its origins on the Punjab plains in northwestern India over 3,000 years ago. The western boundary of early Aryan settlements in the region was the river called Sindhu, an Indo-European word meaning “river.” The Persians pronounced the word as “Hindu,” a term that came to be applied to the peoples of the area. “Hinduism” described the religion of these peoples. “Hindu” passed into Greek usage as “Indos,” from which is derived the names of the Indus River and India itself.

Hindus themselves have no specific name for their religion. One of its designations is *sanātana dharma*, which can be loosely translated as “eternal truth.” Hinduism has no founder, no common set of beliefs or practices, no established “church,” and no uniformity of worship. Over the centuries, Hinduism has absorbed beliefs ranging from primitive animism to the most sophisticated abstract philosophy. It is less of a religion than a collection of faiths linked by some common traits. Yet there are certain broad, distinguishing characteristics that set Hinduism apart from other religions. These include reverence for the *Vedas*, acceptance of the existence of God, belief in reincarnation and related doctrines, an emphasis on ritual, and the caste system.

For many years, India was under the rule of first, the Muslim Mughals, who established themselves in northern India (Delhi and Agra) and then the British, but the masses remained true to Hinduism. There were conversions of Hindus, mainly from the lower and untouchable castes to Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, largely to escape the inequities of the Hindu caste system, but even then Hinduism retained its tolerance for other religions. When the British left India in 1947, they had hoped to leave a successor state that encompassed all British possessions in mainland South Asia. However, the intransigence of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League in demanding a homeland for Indian Muslims and the haste of the British withdrawal from the region meant that the subcontinent was partitioned, on the basis of religion, between a Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India. Regions of the subcontinent with a Muslim majority fell to Pakistan, which was made up of a West and East Wing (now Bangladesh), separated by hundreds of miles of Indian territory, areas with a Hindu majority were to become India, and the rulers of the numerous princely states that were scattered across British India were to decide which country they would join (the problem of Kashmir dates from this time). The migration of Hindus and Muslims between India and Pakistan that accompanied this partition is estimated to have numbered around 10 million people and is thought to be the largest the world has ever known. Partition in 1947 was also accompanied by an es-



timated one million deaths of both Muslims and Hindus. Pakistan was established specifically as a homeland for Muslims in the South Asian subcontinent. On the other hand, India, even though it was essentially a Hindu land, remained steadfast in its objective of remaining a secular state. Under the Nehru dynasty and, after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, under her son Rajiv Gandhi, India, even though it contained most of the world's Hindus, remained a strongly secular democracy.

However, the rise within the last couple of decades of national political parties committed to “Hindutva” has changed the situation. Hindutva means “Hinduness” and the word was first coined in 1923 by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his pamphlet entitled *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* There have been political parties and groups, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), that have espoused Hindutva but, prior to the 1990s, these never had power on a national scale. However, two events that occurred towards the end of the 20th century attracted a large number of mainstream Hindus to the Hindutva movement. The first of these was the Shah Bano case (1986) in which Rajiv Gandhi's government, under pressure from conservative Muslims, used its large parliamentary majority to overturn a Supreme Court verdict granting alimony to an old Muslim woman that had angered many Muslims. (Muslims in India are subject to “The Muslim Personal Law (Sharia) Application Act, 1937,” whereas Hindus are subject to Hindu Law.) The second was the dispute over the 16th century Mughal Babri Masjid (Mosque) in Ayodhya—built by Babur after his



*Indian Hindu devotees wait in line to make offerings to Shiva as part of Maha Shivaratri, a Hindu festival, in Amritsar, India. Hindus mark the festival by fasting and offering special prayers to Shiva, the lord of destruction. (AFP/Getty Images)*

first major victory in India. Many Hindus saw it as a sacrilege that a mosque should stand on the site of the birthplace of Ram (Ram Janmabhoomi), the Hindu deity seen by many Hindus as an incarnation of Vishnu. For centuries, the mosque was a cause of tension between the Muslim and Hindu communities, with legal actions over the mosque dating back to the 19th century. In 1990, however, Lal Kriskna Advani, a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Indian People's Party, founded in 1980), undertook a *rāth yātrā* with the professed objective of building a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. (Technically, Rath Yatra [*rāth* means "carriage" and *yātrā* means "journey"] is a Hindu festival associated with Jagannath [origin of the English word "juggernaut"] of Puri in Orissa involving a procession of towering raths being pulled through the streets of Puri by devotees, but in this case it refers to a "symbolic religious caravan" across the country) The yatra, which was accompanied by violence and bloodshed and is estimated to have been responsible for 3,000 Muslim deaths across India, failed in its avowed objectives, but in late 1992 a huge number of nationalist Hindus from all parts of India razed the mosque to the ground. The destruction of the mosque and subsequent conflict arguably lifted the BJP and Hindutva to national and international prominence. The 2002 Godhra violence in Gujarat, which pitted Hindu vs. Muslim, originated largely from the communal feelings raised by the Babri mosque issue.

The BJP was briefly in power in New Delhi during May 1996, but, having gained widespread support in the country for its political platform as a result of the events of the preceding two decades, formed the Union government between 1998 and 2004, with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as prime minister. The deputy prime minister, LK Advani, the same Advani who supported the destruction of the Babri Masjid and led the 1990 rath yatra, attributed the BJP's shocking loss of the general election in 2004 to the party straying from its platform of Hindutva.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Hinduism is one of the world's major religions, with over 1.1 billion people among its followers. Hindus make up 80% (approximately 905 million people according to the 2001 Census) of India's population. Nepal has another 22.5 million Hindus (80.2% of the population). Elsewhere in South Asia, Hindus number 11.4 million in Bangladesh (2001 Census), 1.5 million in Sri Lanka (according to government sources, though this may be a serious undercount) 30 million in Pakistan (c. 2%), and 0.25 million (25%) in Bhutan. All the preceding figures are based on 2001 census data, so allowing for population growth at the rate of national averages, and including Hindus overseas, the estimate of 1.1 billion is realistic.

Hindus have taken their religion to other parts of the world as well. Following the beginning of the Christian era, Indian

colonists spread into Southeast Asia, where Hinduism strongly influenced local cultures. Although later replaced by Buddhism and Islam, Hinduism still survives in the Indonesian island of Bali. In the colonial period, the British introduced Indian labor (and thus Hinduism) into the Caribbean and Fiji. Indians also emigrated to South Africa, East Africa, and other British possessions. The later decades of the 20th century have seen a sizable immigration of Indians into Britain, Canada, and the United States.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Sanskrit (*samskrta*, “refined”) is the sacred language of the Hindus. It is a later form of Vedic, the tongue in which the sacred literature of the Āryans was composed. Sanskrit dates to about 300 BC. It belongs to the Indo-Āryan branch of the Indo-European family of languages. There is a vast literature in Sanskrit, ranging from the early Vedic hymns to the numerous works (religious treatises, dramas, stories, poetry, etc.) associated with the flowering of Classical Sanskrit from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD onward. The script used today for writing Sanskrit is Nagari or Devanagari.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Hindus have an immensely rich tradition of myth and legend, ranging from the creation myths of the Vedas to the animistic beliefs surrounding local godlings. Of this vast treasury of material, only two works can be mentioned here. The *Mahābhārata*, composed probably sometime after 200 BC, is the world’s longest epic poem. It tells of a great civil war in the region of modern Delhi and of the struggle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas for control of the kingdom. The centerpiece of the epic is the battle of Kurukshetra, but interwoven with the main story is a collection of myths, folk tales, and legends of Vedic gods mingled with discussions of statecraft, the science of war, and philosophy. One of the most famous sections of the epic is the *Bhagavad Gītā* (“Song of the Lord”). On the eve of the conflict, Arjuna, one of the Pandava princes, is surveying the opposing armies drawn up ready for battle. Distraught at the thought of killing his kinsmen, he seeks guidance from his charioteer, who is the god Krishna (Kṛṣṇa). Krishna replies that it is his duty as a *ksatriya* (warrior) to fight his foes, and that this duty comes above all else.

The *Rāmāyana*, the second great Indian Hindu epic, relates the story of Rama and his wife, Sita. Sita is abducted by Ravana, who carries her off to his kingdom of Lanka (Ceylon). Rama and his brother Lakshman set out for Lanka to rescue Sita. There, with the aid of Hanuman, the monkey king, and his monkey people, they burn Lanka and free Sita. However, Sita has been associated with another man and Rama refuses to have her back as his queen, despite her protestations of innocence. After many years, Rama and Sita are reconciled. Rama is viewed as a god and his worship is universal in India. Sita is upheld as the ideal of the faithful wife.

Of all the heroes and myths of India, none are more deeply embedded in the Hindu mind than those of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*. During recent broadcasts of the epics as long-running serials on Indian television, the entire country came to a standstill. Villagers even turned their television sets into shrines, performing *pūjā* (worship) before their ancient gods and heroes.

## 5 RELIGION

Central to Hindu philosophy is the concept of the soul (*ātman*). Each individual has a soul, which is a fragment of the Supreme Soul, Brahma. As such, it is the only part of human beings that is eternal and indestructible. It is, however, bound by the physical body and further surrounded by illusion (*māyā*). Furthermore, the soul is caught up in an endless cycle of rebirths (*samsāra*). The nature of each birth or incarnation is determined by actions in one’s last existence (the law of *karma*). Bad deeds hinder the progress of the soul on its journey and result in rebirth as a lower form of life—perhaps as a member of an untouchable caste or as an animal. On the other hand, if one pursues righteous behavior (*dharma*), the soul returns as a higher life form, moving up the ladder of existence towards the obliteration of the physical self. Practicing noninjury to living things (*ahimsā*) is a means to this end. The ultimate aim of the Hindu is total release (*mokṣa*) of the soul from the physical world and its merging with the universal soul.

Such beliefs are uniquely Indian, yet other aspects of Hinduism have their origins among the Indo-European peoples who entered South Asia around 1700 BC. These invaders called themselves *Āryas* and were part of the great migrations of people that carried Indo-European culture over much of the Old World. In India, the urban civilization of the Indus Valley gave way before the simpler—though no less vigorous—Āryan culture. The Āryans were seminomadic pastoralists, depending largely on the herding of cattle. They brought with them the horse and the chariot and spoke a language that was Indo-European in origin. Their gods were male, rather than the female deities of the Harappans. But most important of all, they had a class of priests who had developed poetic techniques for composing hymns in praise of their gods. Over the centuries, these hymns were collected to form the *Veda* (literally “knowledge”), the most sacred scriptures of the Hindus.

There are four Vedas: the *Rg Veda*, the *Atharva Veda*, the *Sāma Veda*, and the *Yajur Veda*. The earliest and most important of these is the *Rg Veda*, composed between 1200 and 900 BC. Vedic religion was based on a primitive animism in which forces of nature were seen as divine and personified as gods. Thus Indra was the great war-god, riding in his chariot at the head of the Āryans against their enemies. He was a slayer of dragons, the god of thunder, and maker of rain. (Indra had replaced the original Indo-European father god Dyaus Pitr, the Zeus of the Greeks and Jupiter of the Romans.) The Vedic pantheon included Agni, god of fire; Surya, the sun god; and Soma, god of the intoxicant *soma*. Animal sacrifice was central to the Vedic religion.

Modern Hinduism, although it embraces Āryans gods and sacrifice, differs from the religion of the Vedas. The worship of mother-goddesses and tree-worship, for example, are non-Āryans and come from the Harappan cultural tradition. Some Hindu concepts appear much later than the Vedic period. But one feature of modern Hinduism can be traced directly to the Vedas, namely the division of society into distinct classes. The Sanskrit word for these categories was *varna*, or “color.” The highest ranked class were priests (*brāhmana*), followed by warriors (*ksatriya*), peasants (*vaiśya*), and serfs (*sūdra*). *Varna* form the basis of the caste system in India today, and many Hindus see caste as divinely ordained because of its Vedic origins.

The historical development of Hinduism is far too complex to be presented here in more than its barest outlines. By the

7th and 6th centuries BC, popular discontent with Vedic religion was widespread. This was a period of religious ferment that saw old ideas reexamined and new ones emerge. Wandering ascetics rejected the authority of the Brahmans and began reexamining the spiritual values of the Vedas. Many concepts fundamental to modern Hinduism (e.g., *samsāra*, karma, and *ahimsā*) first appear at this time in philosophical works known as the *Upanisads*.

This was also the time when Buddhism, which came to challenge Hinduism for supremacy in the Indian subcontinent, had its origins. Buddhism gained the upper hand when the Emperor Ashoka made it the state religion in the 3rd century BC, and the next millennium was one of continual struggle between Hinduism and Buddhism. It was during this period that the sanctity of the cow, a fundamental belief of modern Hinduism, came to be accepted as Hindu doctrine. There is no evidence that the cow was viewed as sacred in the Vedas. Cattle were an important economic asset in Vedic society, they were sacrificed, and their meat was eaten. Some scholars have argued that the Brahmans took the general principle of *ahimsā* from Buddhism and applied it specifically to the cow in their struggle to win over the mass of the population to Hinduism. By the 5th century AD, the sanctity of the cow was firmly established in Hinduism. The cow later came to be a symbol of Hindu religion and culture in the face of challenges from Islam and the Europeans.

The fortunes of Hinduism rose in the early centuries of the Christian era with what has been called the “Brahmanical revival.” This was a period that saw the Brahmans assert themselves as the dominant class in Hindu society. Buddhism entered a period of decline and was to receive its death blow with the arrival of the Muslims after the 12th century AD. A reinvigorated Hinduism, however, was able to face the challenge of five and a half centuries of Muslim rule. It was also able to withstand nearly five centuries of European colonization and remain essentially unaffected by its contact with Christianity.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holi, which is identified as the worship of Krishna, is one of the more important festivals in India. A spring celebration that falls in February–March, it clearly incorporates pre-Hindu fertility rites into its observances. The three-day festival is a time for drinking and the singing of lewd songs. Men dance in the streets, singing and carrying phallic emblems. Men and women squirt each other with colored water and red powder. The usual rules of caste behavior are relaxed, and the festival is seen by some sociologists as a “safety-valve” by which people in the rigid caste structure of Hindu society can let off steam. Bonfires are lit to celebrate the burning of the demoness Holika.

Divali, another major festival, is celebrated in the fall (October–November). The name comes from the Sanskrit *Dīpāvalī*, meaning “cluster of lights.” Houses are decorated with hundreds of oil lamps (nowadays electric lights are often used). In some parts of the country, Divali marks the beginning of the New Year. It is particularly important among the mercantile castes (Jains, Vaiśyas) of western India, who worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, at this time. They close their accounts for the year, begin a new set of books, redecorate their houses, and send gifts of sweets to friends and relatives. In Bengal, it is believed that the lights are intended to guide the souls of the departed ancestors. Other regions have their own legends as-

sociated with Divali. Divali is an auspicious time for gambling, and even the most respectable of women will gamble at this time.

Among other major festivals celebrated by Hindus all over India are Dasahara or Durga Pūjā (called Dasain in Nepal), Shivratri (dedicated to Shiva), and Janamashtami (Krishna’s birthday). The Pongal festival of the Tamils and Kerala’s Onam festival, with its snake-boat races, are important regional celebrations. In Rajasthan, the Teej festival honors the goddess Parvati.

Every Hindu temple in India has an annual festival honoring its presiding deity. Some are local events, but others are of regional, and even national, significance. One such festival is held at the Jagannath Temple at Puri in Orissa. Every year, the temple images, including that of Jagannath (“Lord of the Universe”), a form of Krishna, are taken to a “country house” some two miles away. The images are placed in cars or chariots and pulled by pilgrims. Jagannath’s car is as tall as a three-storied building (roughly 14 m or 45 ft high), with wheels over 2 m (7 ft) in diameter. The English word “juggernaut” comes from Jagannath and refers to the (incorrect) belief that devotees would allow themselves to be crushed beneath the wheels of Jagannath’s chariot.

Periodic fairs (*melās*) and festivals are an integral part of Hindu religious life. The most important of these is the Kumbha Mela, held every three years in turn at Nasik, Ujjain, Hardwar, and Prayag (near Allahabad). An estimated 20 million pilgrims attended the *melā* held at Prayag in 1995. Pilgrimage is one of the main religious duties of the Hindu. There are thousands of holy places in India, each sanctified by association with a deity, saint, or legend. Some may just be local shrines. Others may be sacred to specific Hindu sects (there are six major ones) such as the Vaishnavas, followers of Vishnu, or Shaivites, devotees of Shiva. Still others are of importance to all Hindus. Major sacred centers include Varanasi (Banaras), Mathura, Dwarka, and Rameshwaram. Certain rivers are considered sacred, the most important being the Ganga (River Ganges).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The ancient Hindu law-givers prescribed 12 important rites, from conception to marriage. Though not all of these are observed today, the name-giving ceremony is still usually performed on the tenth or twelfth day after birth. The infant’s name is suggested by the family astrologer. Boys are often named after gods (e.g., Krishna, Rama, Ganesh), and girls after goddesses (Parvati, Lakshmi), flowers (Padma, meaning “lotus”) or precious stones (Moti, or “pearl”). Among some groups, the ears are pierced (and, for girls, the left nostril) at this time. Other important rites at this stage of life are the first feeding of solid food and the first cutting of the hair and shaving of the head. High-caste Hindus may leave a single lock of hair uncut.

One of the most important of all Hindu rituals is the sacred-thread ceremony (*upanayana*). Usually performed between the ages of 7 and 10, it is the initiation ceremony for males of the three higher varnas (caste-groups). The donning of the sacred thread is viewed as a symbolic rebirth, and members of the three higher caste groups are referred to as the “twice-born.” The ceremony is performed by a Brahman, who consecrates the thread before placing it on the boy. The sacred thread is made of three white cotton threads, each made up of three in-

tertwined strands of cotton (the number three is symbolic of the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva). It is draped over the left shoulder and tied under the right arm in a sacred knot.

Ceremonies connected with death also hold great significance for Hindus. The corpse is washed, wrapped in a shroud, garlanded with flowers, and carried in procession on a bamboo stretcher to the cremation ground. In North India, the people who accompany the body chant “Ram Nam Satya Hai,” meaning “The name of [the god] Ram is truth itself.” At the cremation ground, a Brahman performs certain rituals before the body is placed on the funeral pyre. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, lights the pyre. Relatives and friends remain until the corpse is consumed. If the skull does not burst during the burning, it is broken open so that the soul can escape the body. A purificatory bath is taken by the mourners before their return home.

On the third day after the funeral, the pieces of bone are collected from the remains of the funeral pyre. Ideally, these should be taken to the sacred Ganges River, but they may be placed in any nearby stream. Sometime between the tenth and thirty-first day after the cremation, the *śrāddha* is held. This is an important (and often expensive) ceremony involving numerous rituals, a feast for relatives and friends, and the giving of gifts to Brahmans in the name of the deceased. It is believed that if the funeral rites are not performed properly, the soul of the departed will be adversely affected. As some funeral rituals have to be performed by a son, it is important for a Hindu to have male offspring.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Hindus greet each other by saying “Namaste” (“Greetings to you”) while joining hands, palms together and held upright, in front of the body. In parts of India, “Namaskar” is used instead. In northern India, especially in rural areas, people commonly say, “Ram, Ram” (the name of the god Rama repeated twice), when they meet. Children may greet parents, or pupils their teachers, by bowing down and touching the feet. Hindus make the same gesture when meeting their *gurus* or important religious figures. It is usual for the person being honored in this manner to interrupt the gesture before it is complete, implying that he or she is not worthy of such homage.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Hindus mirror the living standards of Indian society at large. At one extreme, the wealthy (e.g., millionaire industrialists or some former princely ruling families) have lifestyles as luxurious as any in the world. In stark contrast is the life of the poverty-ridden rural peasant, or the destitute who live and die in the streets and slums of Calcutta or Bombay. These, of course, far outnumber the rich. An estimated 25% of India’s population live below the poverty level.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

A unique feature of Hindu society is the caste system, the division of the population into a hierarchy of ranked social categories. The term “caste” is a European word, derived from the Portuguese *casta*, meaning “breed” or “race.” Hindus have several terms describing the same social structures. *Varna* refers to the broad division of society into four classes identified in the Vedas. *Jāti* (“birth”) and the South Indian *kulam* are also

used to refer to caste. In its most restricted sense, caste refers to a kin group from which marriage partners must be selected (i.e., an endogamous kin group). There are some 3,000 castes and over 25,000 subcastes found in India.

Castes are ranked according to the number of ritually pure practices they observe. The concepts of ritual purity and pollution are important in understanding Hindu society. One is born into a caste and acquires the ritual status of that caste. This is often determined by the caste’s traditional occupation. Brahmans are priests and are ritually pure, but even Brahman castes are ranked. For example, Brahmans who perform death rituals at cremations are among the lowest of the Brahman castes (but above all other castes because they still are Brahmans). Sweepers who handle human waste, or Chamars who remove animal carcasses, are ritually polluted by their occupations. They rank at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Whether or not sweepers or Chamars follow their traditional occupation, in Hindu eyes they still partake of the pollution of their caste. If they should touch a Brahman or member of a higher caste, their touch is considered polluting. The higher-caste individual would then have to undergo a ritual purification to remove this pollution. This, of course, is the origin of the term “untouchables.” Concepts of purity and pollution thus underlie many aspects of caste behavior. The higher the caste, the greater the restrictions on social activity. Among other things, caste limits the nature of social and physical contact with other peoples; it restricts the food one can eat; it limits the people one can dine with; and it defines the marriage pool from which spouses are drawn.

A Hindu marries within his or her caste or subcaste. There are, however, important differences in the selection of spouses between north and south, reflecting the Āryans-Dravidian division in India. In North India, one marries outside one’s clan (*gotra*), and there is a required degree of separation in blood relations for a spouse. In South India, however, the preferred partner is one’s eldest sister’s daughter, or a cross-cousin (i.e., father’s sister’s daughter, or mother’s brother’s daughter). Such unions are viewed as incestuous in North India.

Hindu marriages are arranged. Though now prohibited, child marriage was common in traditional Hindu society. Once the horoscopes of the boy and girl are cast and deemed suitable, negotiations concerning details of the dowry, date of betrothal, etc., are pursued. A date and time for the marriage is determined by astrologers. There are certain “seasons” when marriages are performed, with spring being considered the most auspicious time for the ceremony. Rituals are performed at the houses of both families, followed by the *barāt*, or procession of the groom to the bride’s house. Among some castes, the groom arrives on a horse (Rajputs may ride an elephant). Both bride and groom are elaborately dressed, with the bride wearing red and gold and bedecked with jewelry. The actual wedding ceremony is performed in the presence of the sacred fire by a Brahman, who recites the appropriate passages from the Vedas. In the central marriage ritual, a cloth is tied to the clothes of the bride and groom, and the groom leads the bride in the “Seven Steps” around the sacred fire. A marriage is a time of feasting and entertaining, and among the rich the ceremonies may last as long as 10 days. For the less fortunate, the marriage of a daughter may result in considerable debt (this is one reason why male children are preferred over females).

Life for the new bride may start out as anything but rosy. She moves into a new household as part of an extended joint family. She is the most junior woman in the household, which is overseen by the mother-in-law. Unless the family is wealthy enough to have servants, she is assigned household chores. The power of the mother-in-law in traditional households was such that she even determined when her married children could have sexual relations (men and women lived in different parts of the house). A woman's status in the family changes only when she gives birth to children, preferably sons. The dearest wish of a Hindu woman is to bear her husband male heirs. Divorce was rare in traditional Hindu society, though failure to bear children was one reason for returning a wife to her family, the ultimate disgrace for a woman. Modern legislation concerning Hindu marriage and divorce contains a more liberal provision for divorce.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional dress for Hindus is the *dhoti* for men and the *sāri* for women. The *dhoti* is a single piece of cotton, wrapped around the waist for half its length and then drawn between the legs and tucked into the waist behind. In southern India, the torso is usually left bare, although in the north a shirt may be worn. Southern Indians tend to go bareheaded, while in the north turbans are common. The style of the turban often identifies the wearer as a member of a particular community (e.g., Pathan or Sikh) or from a particular region or village. The *kurtā*, a long tunic-like shirt, and the *pyjāmā*, loose baggy trousers, are common in northern India, especially in urban areas. Men in the countryside areas often wear a variety of gold or silver ornaments.

The *sāri* is a length of cotton or silk cloth measuring up to 10 m (approximately 30 ft) in length. It is wrapped around the waist, with one end left free and thrown over the right shoulder. This end can be drawn across the head and used to cover the face when necessary. A *choli* a tight bodice that leaves the midriff bare, is worn under the *sari*. There are regional variations in the way the *sāri* is worn. In Maharashtra, for example, rural women draw one end of the *sāri* through the legs and tuck it into the waist at the small of the back. In some rural areas, women do not wear the bodice, using just the end of the *sāri* to cover the upper body. A married woman wears a stripe of red coloring along the parting in her hair and a *tikā* or red dot in the center of the forehead. Nowadays, the *tikā* is often worn as decoration. Women are fond of jewelry and wear a variety of earrings, bracelets, bangles, anklets, and other ornaments such as a jewel inserted in the nostril.

## 12 FOOD

Hindus follow the dietary patterns of Indians as determined by broad agricultural and ecological factors. The staple in northern and western areas is cereals (wheat, millet, barley) made into flat, unleavened bread called *roti*. This is eaten with pulses (*dāl*) and spiced dishes called “curries” (from the Tamil *karī*). In the wetter south and east, rice (*chāwal*) replaces the breads.

For Hindus, however, food is more than mere nourishment. It has ritual and symbolic meaning. The cow, for example, is considered sacred by Hindus, as are its five products (milk, curd, *ghī* or clarified butter, dung, and urine). The cow is worshipped, and its products are used in Hindu rituals. It is considered a sin to kill a cow, and the devout Hindu will avoid

beef. In fact, strict adherence to *ahimsā* means that all animal flesh should be avoided. Yet there are Hindus such as *Chamārs* and other untouchable castes who eat beef, chicken, and pork. Such behavior brings ritual impurity on several counts: eating beef violates the sanctity of the cow; killing animals for food violates *ahimsā*; and animals such as chickens and pigs are regarded as unclean by many Hindus.

Food habits among Hindus are thus closely linked to social status and standing in the caste hierarchy. As a rule, the higher the caste, the stricter are the food taboos one must follow. Brahmins form the highest castes and are strict vegetarians, eating no animal flesh and even avoiding eggs. But they also shun foods such as onions and garlic that grow in the ground and are viewed as unclean. Some will not even eat off plates on which proscribed food has been served at some time. Alcohol is also forbidden. One outcome of this concern of the higher castes for ritual purity is strict rules of commensality (i.e., rules concerning dining with other castes).

Another dimension of food in Hindu society is the concept of “hot” and “cold” in Ayurvedic medicine, the system of medicine found in the Vedas. Foods (and diseases) are classified as possessing varying degrees of heat or cold. Hot foods (e.g., apples, radishes, or honey) are prescribed to treat diseases that are cold, and vice versa.

## 13 EDUCATION

Hindus follow the general educational and literacy patterns of India, with social and economic factors being important in determining access to modern education. In traditional Hindu society, however, formal education was limited to the Brahman male. The nature and stages of this education, which focused on the study of the Vedas, are set out in the Sanskrit texts.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sanskrit literature includes sacred texts such as the Vedas, and the various works attached to them that are called the *Brāhmanas* and *Upanisads*. Later works of importance are the epic *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*. The 18 *Purānas* dating from the 6th to 16th century AD are non-Vedic works that have exerted a strong influence on present-day Hinduism. *Dharma Śāstras* is the collective name of various works setting out laws governing the political, social, and religious life of the Hindus. In the tradition of secular Sanskrit literature, Kalidasa is considered to the greatest of all playwrights and poets.

Classical Hindu music and dance derive from temple performances. A 3rd century AD work called *Nāṭya Ūstra* is the ancient authority for these art forms. Today, the main classical dance in India is Bharata Natyam, while Kathakali is a less formal dance from southern India. Stylized hand and facial gestures are an important aspect of both dance types. Kathak and Manipuri are other dance forms. Classical Indian music attaches more importance to melody than to harmony. The “raga” is a basic melodic pattern that provides a framework within which the musician improvises. Instruments used include the *sitār* (a long-necked lute), *vinai* (a South Indian stringed instrument), *śahnāi* (a wind instrument similar to the oboe), and *tabalā* (double hand-drums).

Architecture and sculpture in the Hindu tradition are religiously inspired art forms. The soaring towers of the North Indian temple style represent the peaks of the Himalayas, the abode of the gods. South Indian temples, with their elaborate

gateways (*gopuram*), are pyramidal in shape and covered with elaborately carved figures from Hindu mythology. Famous examples of Hindu temple are the temples complex at Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu), the Khajuraho temples (Madhya Pradesh) with their erotic carvings, and the Sun Temple at Konarak (Orissa). The rock-cut temple at Ellora (Maharashtra) and the cave temple at Elephanta, near Bombay, are also worthy of note.

Rajput painting is the only body of Hindu painting surviving today. It covers a period from the mid-16th to the early 19th centuries and is comprised of works painted in Rajasthan and the western Himalayas under Rajput patronage. Most of the paintings are “miniatures,” presenting religious and epic themes, episodes from the life of Krishna, hunting scenes, and portraits. Last, but by no means least, is an accomplishment of Hindu science. Although the matter is still debated, it is accepted by many that the concept of zero is a Hindu contribution to mathematics.

## 15 WORK

Hindus participate in all areas of the modern Indian economy. In traditional Hindu village society, however, castes were integrated into an economic system known as the *jajmānī* system. The focus of this system was the *jajmān* or patron, one of the landholders in the village. The patron was involved in relationships with specific families of the service castes in the village. A Brahman priest provided his services for religious ceremonies and rituals. A potter made earthenware pots and jars for the *jajmān*'s household; a carpenter mended his carts and agricultural equipment; a Chamar removed and skinned his dead animals; and a sweeper would remove the refuse from his house. In return, they received as payment grain, food, or cash. The relationship between the patron and the service-provider (*kamīn*) was a hereditary one, passing from generation to generation. It was, moreover, more than just an economic one. The patron, for example, would be obliged to assist the *kamīn* at times of crisis such as sickness or death.

The *jajmānī* system required few cash transactions, integrated occupational castes in the village, and contributed to stability in traditional village life. The breakdown of the system and the emergence of a cash economy is one of the changes that has affected Indian village communities in modern times.

With India's economy growing at over 9% a year, many Hindus are participating in and experiencing the material benefits of this growth. While Hindus are still primarily agricultural, urban Hindus—and especially middle class urban Hindus—have access to a range of conveniences such as automobiles, refrigerators, computers and mobile telephones. This “development,” however, is being achieved at a cost—air pollution is bad in Delhi and throughout northern India, while traffic congestion and environmental degradation remain major issues.

## 16 SPORTS

Children amuse themselves with hide-and-seek, marbles, kite-flying, and other games common among Indian children. Dice and card-playing are popular with adults, and chess is thought to have originated in India. Other pastimes include cock-fighting, camel-racing, wrestling, gambling, and hunting. Hindus, of course, participate in modern sports such as cricket, soccer, and field hockey that are popular in Indian society.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Hindus today have access to modern forms of entertainment such as radio, television, and movies.

In traditional society, entertainment was derived to a considerable degree from participation in religious fairs and festivals and in folk traditions of music and dance.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Hindu tradition identifies nine basic handicrafts believed to have been originated by the divine artisan Vishvakarman. These were gold working and jewelry-making; carving (of ivory, shell, and animal bones); pottery; weaving textiles; garland-making and weaving reeds and rushes; leatherworking; painting and sculpture; carpentry; and metalworking. Many of these crafts are associated with the occupational castes of India. In addition, there is a rich heritage of arts and crafts rooted in the folk traditions and regional cultures of the Hindu peoples.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Hindus, who make up the bulk of the Indian population, face the usual problems of poverty, low standards of living, and unemployment associated with developing countries. There are, however, economic and social problems that are specifically religious in origin. Hindu attitudes towards the cow and reluctance to kill cattle, even nonproductive animals, are seen by some economists as an inefficient use of resources. The fatalism associated with Hindu philosophy, it has been argued, has also been a hindrance to initiative and economic enterprise. But perhaps the most serious problems facing Hindus today are the social divisiveness of caste and the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. Caste has been made illegal in India, but it still provides the context in which Hindu society functions. With the breakdown of traditional social structures and pressure on resources as population increases, conflict (usually between higher and lower castes) has led to violent confrontation. This situation is made worse by rising Hindu fundamentalism and the increasing political strength of fundamentalist parties that would like to see India become a Hindu state. While such an achievement—though unlikely—would be a triumph for some Hindus, it goes against the longstanding tradition of Hindu tolerance for other peoples.

The rise of Hindu nationalism and Hindu nationalist political parties, such as the BJP, which specifically promote Hindu values, has introduced an element of conflict into modern India. “Hindutva” has raised tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as evidenced by the Godhra killings in 2002. The issue of fundamental Islamic terrorism remains, with Muslim groups apparently claiming responsibility for the 13 May 2008 bombings in Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, which killed 63 people and injured several hundred more. Two days after the blasts, a previously unknown Islamic militant group known as the Indian Mujahideen sent an e-mail to the Indian media in which they claimed responsibility for the attacks and said they would “demolish the faith (Hinduism)” of the “infidels of India.” However, Indian Home Ministry sources said that a Bangladesh-based organization, *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HuJI) or “Islamic Holy War Movement,” was suspected of being behind the attack. The bombings were only the latest in a series of periodic acts of violence apparently committed by Muslims against Hindus (though the indiscriminate nature of the blasts



have killed Muslims as well as Hindus), *viz.* the Bombay Stock Exchange bombings (1993), the Delhi market bombings in 2005, the Bombay train bombings (2006) and the 2007 blast at the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer in Rajasthan. In Kashmir, of course, where India is basically fighting a Muslim insurgency, conflict between Muslims and Hindus is commonplace.

Concerns also exist regarding the intentions of a nuclear-armed Pakistan. Muslim Pakistan, after losing the 1971 war with India, embarked on a program of developing nuclear weapons. Under the direction of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, it acquired the ability to carry out a nuclear explosion in 1987. India had already tested a nuclear “device” in 1974. Of major concern is the relatively short distance between the two capitals, Islamabad and New Delhi, which are about 450 miles from each other, a distance that could easily lead to a nuclear mistake. Unlike the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War who had enough weapons to destroy the opposing nation several times over after surviving a nuclear strike, India and Pakistan have relatively few nuclear weapons. Pakistan is generally estimated to have between 25 and 50 nuclear weapons, with some designated for delivery by its F-16s and some outfitted for its missiles. India likely has between 30 and 60 nuclear weapons, also available for planes and missiles. The leaders of each country, despite public assurances to the contrary, may worry that the other nation could destroy its nuclear arsenal with a surprise first strike, necessitating quick trigger fingers. This problem is of greater concern for Pakistan, because without its nuclear weapons, the weaker Pakistani army might be at India’s mercy. In 1999, when Pakistani freedom fighters crossed the Line of Control into Indian-held Kargil, in Kashmir and were repulsed by the Indian Army, Pakistan is thought to have prepared its intermediate-range missiles for nuclear strikes, perhaps to deter India from attacking Pakistani territory. U.S. diplomacy helped persuade then-Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to pull his troops out of India and temporarily head off full-scale war. Experts estimate at least 12 million dead in a nuclear exchange between the two countries and that this would result in a humanitarian crisis so great that every medical facility in the Middle East and Southwest Asia would be quickly overwhelmed.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

It is difficult to generalize about the status of Hindu women, because they belong to a variety of groups, in different levels of society and each having their own customs and practices. Thus, the life of the high-caste urban Brahman woman is likely to be quite different to that of the rural untouchable. Nonetheless, Hinduism traditionally tends to treat women as second-class citizens, whose main purpose in life is to marry and have male children.

In the past, Hindu women were subject to child marriage, arranged marriages, which were often arranged by families with brides never meeting their husbands before the nuptials, the payment of dowries, the custom of *sati*, and bans on widow remarriage. Except in matriarchies, Hindu women do not inherit property, which remains in the name of male relatives.

Many traditional practices have been made illegal by state and national governments. Child marriage has, for instance, been illegal in India since the passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 and, in an effort to curb the practice of

child marriages, the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Himachal Pradesh have passed laws that mandate the registration of all marriages in order to make them valid. But child marriage still occurs in India, mainly in rural villages and areas that usually have little legal supervision. According to the “National Plan of Action for Children 2005,” published by the Department of Women and Child Development of India, a goal has been set to eliminate child marriage completely by 2010, but it is very difficult to monitor all children due to the sheer size of the Indian subcontinent and one only has to read the press on Akha Teej, a time that is favored for child marriages—some brides are as young as one year old—to see that it still goes on. A recent report by UNICEF revealed that 82% of girls in Rajasthan are married before they are 18, 15% of girls in rural areas across the country are married before 13 and a majority 52% of girls have their first pregnancy between 15 and 19. (According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, it is illegal to allow or facilitate marriage of a boy under 21 and a girl under 18.) Consequences of child marriage include anemia, sacrifice of education, domestic violence, and early pregnancies, which weaken the mother and lead to higher mortality in children during their first year of life. Even though the Supreme Court of India has upheld the government’s 1994 Prenatal Determination Act, which bans the use of technology, such as ultrasounds and sonograms, for the purpose of sex-selective abortion, females fetuses are still aborted, resulting in male-dominated sex ratios among Hindus in India.

Though “love” marriages do occur, marriages in India are still generally arranged by the families involved, such marriages often being as much business alliances between families as marriages between a boy and a girl. One only has to read the marriage ads in the Indian Sunday papers to see the extent to which this practice continues. It is customary for the bride’s family to provide a dowry, even though this is banned by law (The 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act). It is not uncommon for the husband or husband’s family to be unhappy with the amount of the dowry (demands often include items such as automobiles, scooters, and refrigerators) resulting in “dowry deaths,” whereby a women’s clothing “accidentally” catches fire in the kitchen. Some estimates place the number of “dowry deaths” in the country as high as 25,000 women with numerous more maimed or scarred for life as a result of attempts to kill them.

The custom of *sati*, when a widow burns herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre, is a thing of the past, although a *sati* in Rajasthan in 1987 resulted in the state government passing the Rajasthan Sati Prevention Ordinance of 1987, which makes the glorification of *sati* a crime.

Many groups now permit widows to remarry, but the general treatment of women in Hindu society and laws of inheritance make the lot of women in Hindu society unenviable.

Attempts to improve the lot of women have made an impact on the place of women in Hindu society. Many of the ancient customs affecting them are now illegal, women have been making strides in accessing education (studies have shown that, because more women are remaining longer in the educational system, they are delaying the age at which they marry), and among the more educated, Western concepts such as feminism and women’s rights are taking root. More and more Hindu women are out in the workplace and are becoming financially more independent. But rural Hindu women still have

to face problems of poverty, illiteracy, and casteism, while even in the cities women exist in a male dominated society, have to face “Eve teasers” (Eve teasing is a euphemism used for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men) and still have to prove themselves by bearing sons when they marry.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# H M O N G

**PRONUNCIATION:** (H)MAWNG

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Meo, Miao

**LOCATION:** Southern China; Viet Nam; Laos; Thailand

**POPULATION:** About 4 to 6 million worldwide

**LANGUAGE:** Hmong

**RELIGION:** Animism; some fundamentalist Protestant Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Hmong Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Hmong (sometimes called Meo or Miao, terms the Hmong consider pejorative) are an aboriginal people of southern China. They are mentioned in Chinese records as early as 2500 BC. Traditionally they were paddy (wet rice) farmers in China. In the past two centuries, groups of Hmong have begun to filter into the mountainous north of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand to escape the persecution and pacification campaigns of the Chinese. In Southeast Asia they settled in higher elevations, usually above 1000 m (3,280 ft), often on mountain tops where they practiced shifting slash-and-burn (swidden) agriculture—clearcutting and burning off an area of the forest, planting crops until the soil was depleted, and then shifting to a new area after a few years. The Hmong usually grow dry rice, corn, vegetables, and opium poppies. Although they traditionally grew opium poppies for their own ritual and medicinal use, they were encouraged by French colonial authorities in Vietnam and Laos to increase production for sale to the colonial opium monopoly and as payment for head taxes. Thus, opium became an important cash crop for the Hmong.

The Hmong are often at odds with the governments of the states in which they reside because of their independence, opium growing, and shifting slash-and-burn agriculture that is destructive to the environment. They are being encouraged to settle in lowland areas where they can be more easily controlled and can practice more productive wet rice agriculture. Mutual suspicion exists, however, between the Hmong and the majority populations, who tend to consider them ignorant and uncivilized.

The Hmong face a special burden in Laos, for they were divided during the Lao civil war, which was in many ways an extension of the Vietnam War. Some joined the Communist Pathet Lao while others served in the CIA-sponsored mercenary army under General Vang Pao, supporting the Royal Lao Government. The Hmong were considered fierce fighters, skillful in guerrilla warfare in mountainous terrain. Thousands of Hmong fled Laos when the Communists came to power in Laos in 1975, seeking refuge in Thailand and China. A small Hmong insurgency continued, and when Lao and Vietnamese forces were unable to secure Hmong villages with regular forces, they turned to chemical and biological warfare. New waves of Hmong refugees fled the country. Perhaps as many as 200,000 Hmong left Laos. Most were resettled in other countries, but the thousands remaining in Thai refugee camps are being unwillingly repatriated to Laos. The Thai government's hard line toward remaining Hmong is based in part on the perception that the remaining refugees are “economic migrants” rather than people fleeing in fear of their lives.



*Performers of the Hmong ethnic origin dressed in traditional costume attend the opening ceremony of the 18th annual Shanghai Tourism Festival in Shanghai, China. (China Photos/Getty Images)*

## **<sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Estimates of the Hmong population vary, but there are probably 4–6 million worldwide. An estimated 3–5 million continue to live in southern China, mostly in Yunnan. There are about 350,000 in north Vietnam, 230,000 in north and central Laos, and around 100,000 in northern Thailand, plus a few Hmong settlements in Burma (Myanmar).

The Hmong tend to live in mountainous border regions of southern China and northern Southeast Asia. They resist government controls and have paid little attention to borders, often trekking from one country to another. This makes the Hmong population a sensitive issue for governments that seek to control their peoples and their borders.

In Laos, the Hmong and others living in the higher elevations like the Akha, Phu Noi, and Mien (Yao), are called Lao Sung, or upland Lao. The Hmong make up two-thirds of the upland Lao population and about 5% of the total population of Laos, the only country where they are a significant minority. The government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) has tried to include the upland peoples and extend services like health and education to them. By using terms like lowland Lao (basically ethnic Lao), midland Lao (Kammu and others), and upland Lao, the LPDR has tried to de-emphasize ethnicity.

There are about 150,000 Hmong in the United States. There are 30,000 Hmong living in Fresno, California, and significant Hmong communities in other parts of California and in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Rhode Island. The change from an illiterate agricultural life in remote mountain villages to an urban setting in the U.S. has been immense. Clan organizations have remained fairly strong and mutual help has eased the transition for many. However, the Hmong-American community is also highly factionalized, and there is a widening gap between the older generation, which tends to cling to Cold War values, and the younger generation, which is more inclined toward reconciliation with the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Some Hmong have also settled in Canada, Australia, France, and even in Argentina and mountainous areas of Surinam.

In keeping with its policy to promote stronger relations with Southeast Asia, China is reaching out to the Hmong diaspora with international conferences and other activities. This has had the effect of strengthening the Hmong sense of identity, but it has also alarmed some countries with Hmong populations, particularly in Southeast Asia.

## **<sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE**

The Hmong language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan group of languages. There are two major dialect and cultural groups — the Green Hmong (sometimes called the Blue Hmong) and the

White Hmong. The colors refer to women's traditional dress. The two dialects are mutually intelligible. In the past there was little intermarriage between the two dialect groups, but it has become common. One's last name is a clan name. About 18 clans have been identified in Thailand and Laos. In Laos, the government supports a Hmong radio news broadcast, the only broadcast in a minority language.

The Hmong did not have an alphabet or writing. Missionary groups have developed a romanized script for the language, but relatively few Hmong are literate in it. However, the first Hmong studies program was established in the United States in 2006 and seeks to promote literature and other works in the Hmong language. The script looks somewhat peculiar: The word "Hmong," for example, is written "Hmoob." The double letter signals a nasalized vowel, and the last consonant is an unpronounced tone marker. There are eight tones in Hmong. Here is a Hmong proverb in romanized script:

*Niam-txiv piv tam lub ntuj*      Parents are like the sky,  
*Tub-ki piv lub tem.*                Children are like the earth.

The Hmong language contains many words borrowed from Chinese, Thai, Lao, French, and English. The Hmong are being educated and becoming literate in the languages of the countries where they reside.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Lacking a writing system, the Hmong have passed down their legends and ritual ceremonies orally and in crafts (especially textiles) from one generation to another.

They have many short rhyming expressions with messages of wisdom and show their outlook on the world. Here are a few examples:

You don't have to sharpen a thorn;  
You don't have to explain to a smart person.

See a tiger, you will die;  
See an official, you will be poor.

Tangled hair, use a comb to unsnarl it;  
Complicated dispute, use an elder to solve it.

Able to weave, don't waste thread;  
Able to speak, don't waste words.

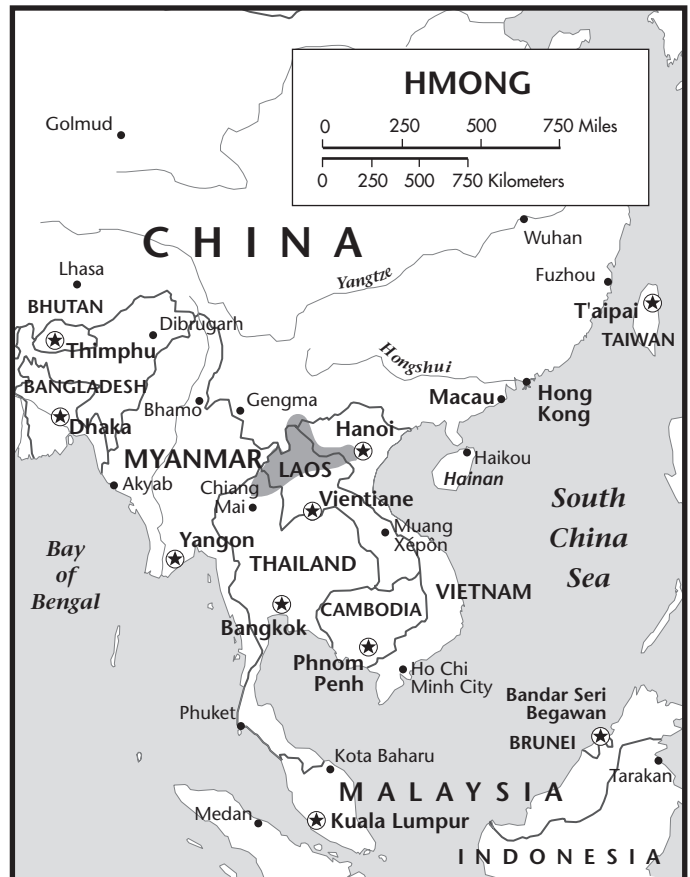
The mouth tastes food;  
The heart tastes words.

If the crops aren't good, you lose only one year;  
If your wife isn't good, you lose a whole lifetime.

#### 5 RELIGION

Most Hmong are animists and believe in a variety of spirits. The spirit of the house provides protection for the family and helps bring prosperity. An altar to this spirit is placed on the wall opposite the front door, and on the first day of the new year, a pig is sacrificed to it. The eldest male in the family conducts the ritual.

Special spirit practitioners deal with the spirits of medicine and conduct magic rituals to exorcise the spirits that cause ill-



ness. Herbal specialists may also treat the patient with herbs and massage.

The spirits of nature are always on the lookout for lost or straying souls. Like the Lao, the Hmong believe that the body has many souls that sometimes stray. The *hu plig* ritual, similar to the Lao *baci*, calls the souls back to the body. The ritual is performed for someone who is sick, for a newborn on its third day of life (when body and soul are believed to come together), and for a new bride three days after marriage (to tie her soul to her husband's clan).

A shaman might be called in cases of illness that don't respond to other curing rituals. The shaman is one who can fall into trance and communicate with spirits in the sky and bargain with them for the soul of the sick person. One or more pigs are sacrificed so the shaman can trade with the spirits for the soul of the person.

At funerals, cattle are sacrificed so the deceased will have wealth in the spirit world. The Hmong believe that the well-being of the living depends on the well-being of the ancestors in the spirit world.

In Thailand and Laos, 10–20% of the Hmong have responded to missionaries and adopted fundamentalist Protestant Christianity. This is seen by other Hmong as a threat to clan solidarity, since Christians destroy their spirit altars, refuse to sacrifice at funerals, and feel less bound by clan ties.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Hmong New Year is the biggest Hmong holiday, a celebration for 7–10 days in December after the harvest. It is a time for new clothes, sacrificing a pig to the ancestors, calling on

the elders for blessings, eating good food, relaxing, and playing games. The household altar has been cleaned and redecorated. On the eve of the new year, the eldest male in the household calls the spirits home—the father's spirit, the mother's spirit, the children's spirits, the animals' spirits, and the spirits of the crops. The elder throws away the evil and bad words of the old year. The new year is welcomed and named after the first animal they hear cry out. The young men visit the elders, taking whiskey and food; they kneel and wish good fortune to the elders, who bless them in return.

On New Year's Day the young unmarried men and women line up opposite each other and toss a cloth ball back and forth while singing. Each person tries to throw the ball to the person who interests him or her, so it is a kind of flirting. Marriages often take place soon after the New Year.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The main rite of passage is marriage. Hmong marry young, usually in their teens. The girl is usually 15–17, the boy 17–20. Traditionally marriage, often between cousins, was arranged by the fathers of the couple. In more recent generations, young people generally choose for themselves. The boy sends a go-between to the girl's parents with a silver coin to ask for her hand and negotiate a bride-price. Should the girl's parents object, the traditional alternative was a mock abduction to the boy's parents' house, which is in effect an elopement. Marriage negotiations would then begin after three days. In the past, it was common for the bride-price to be 3–10 silver bars, each worth about \$100. Communist governments have opposed spending much money on ceremonial and ritual expenses and the Lao government limits the payment to two silver bars. The bride-price recompenses the bride's family for the loss of her productive and reproductive capacity.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The household and the clan are the key units of Hmong life. Primary loyalty is to them, not to a village or region. Hmong like to live near their clan relatives, whom they can call on for social, economic, and emotional support.

Young men and women mix freely, and premarital sex is accepted as the norm, much to the horror of the dominant populations where they reside; women are expected to be chaste even if the men are promiscuous. Pregnancy usually leads to marriage. Men must marry out of their clan. Marriage outside the Hmong community is extremely rare.

Ethnic prejudice against the Hmong complicates their relations with lowland people.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In Laos, living conditions for Hmong are rather poor. Village houses cluster together on barren mountain tops. The house is set directly on the ground with a beaten earth floor. The walls are usually made of split bamboo and the roof of thatch. Usually 6–8 people live in a house measuring 6 x 8 m. Furnishings are minimal—a couple of stools and a table. A sleeping alcove is set a foot or two above the floor. There may be a walled-off bedroom for a couple. Much of the house may be used for storage, with a granary, tools, etc. An open hearth is used for cooking. The pigs and chickens may be brought into the house at night but wander freely in the daytime. There is usually no electricity, no running water, and no sanitary facilities. The

pigs keep the village clear of edible refuse and human waste. Access to health care is limited. Travel is usually by foot, although wealthier families may have pack horses. There are few roads. Each family tries to be as self-sufficient as possible.

Despite these conditions, Hmong villages are often more prosperous than those of surrounding minorities. This is due in part to remittances from overseas Hmong. In some cases, the income discrepancies between Hmong and their poorer ethnic neighbors creates tension, particularly when Hmong are able to buy the ancestral lands of other groups.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Hmong have large extended patrilineal families. The household can include parents, children, wives and children of married sons, and other relatives. As married sons establish their own households, the youngest son is left to care for parents and inherit their property. Polygyny, the practice of having more than one wife, is allowed by the Hmong, though governments discourage the practice. In principle, the first wife must consent and, traditionally, an additional wife is taken only if the first wife is barren or produces only female children. The daughter-in-law rises early and works hard, and new brides sometimes register their unhappiness by returning to their parents temporarily. Divorce is possible but discouraged.

The family works together to provide food. Gender roles tend to be fairly strongly differentiated. Women care for the home, cooking, water and firewood, husking rice, grinding corn, care of pigs and poultry, and weeding the fields. Men cut trees, burn the fields, hunt, care for buffalo and cows, and plow. Men punch holes for seed, which the woman puts in and covers over. Both sexes harvest and thresh and carry the crop from fields to village. Children help from an early age, netting small fish, catching edible insects, helping with the animals and gardens, and caring for younger siblings.

Men are accorded greater respect than women. The husband typically walks ahead of the wife, and if there is only one burden to carry, it is hers. But relations between spouses are generally amiable and husbands are advised to consult with their wives.

## 11 CLOTHING

Hmong are identified by their clothing, which indicates dialect and regional group. The Green Hmong, the White Hmong, and the smaller group of Striped Hmong are known by the traditional dress of their women. Women of the Green Hmong, sometimes called Blue Hmong, wear short, blue, indigo-dyed skirts, each done in intricate batik patterns and containing hundreds of tiny pleats. The skirts usually have cross-stitch embroidery and appliqué as well. The skirt is worn with a black long-sleeved blouse, leggings, and a black apron. An outfit takes about one year to make in one's spare time. Women also wear large silver neck rings. The men wear short, baggy black pants and black shirts, sometimes with embroidery, a long sash around the waist, and a Chinese-style black cap decorated with embroidery.

The White Hmong women wear black pants or white pleated skirts and a black blouse with an elaborately decorated collar piece at the back of the neck. Accessories include embroidered sashes, coin belts, and aprons. The men's pants are not as short and baggy as the Green Hmong outfit. The Striped Hmong women wear blouses with striped sleeves. Women's

headaddresses may be very elaborate and indicate regional differences. Younger people are more likely to dress like the majority population, in T-shirts and sarongs or pants.

## 12 FOOD

The Hmong prefer white rice to sticky rice, but grow both kinds. Sometimes they have to buy additional rice. Other food comes from their fields and gardens, supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering. Corn is always grown along with squash, melons, and greens of various kinds. Tubers, shoots, mushrooms, and other wild plants are found in the forest. Various rodents and insects are also eaten. Most foods are boiled and seasoned with salt and chilies. Meat is rarely part of the diet, although occasionally a hunter gets lucky. The pigs and cattle they raise are largely for sacrifices to the spirits, but they are eaten on ceremonial occasions once the offering has been made. There are usually bananas and other fruit trees and often some sugar cane. Wild foods and fish are abundant during the rainy season, but little grows in the hot dry season.

## 13 EDUCATION

Schools have been extended to Hmong areas only in recent years in Thailand and Laos. Many Hmong settlements are still remote from schools. Most Hmong in Laos attend school only for a year or two. Males are more likely to attend school and study longer than females. Most Hmong men can speak the national language to some extent and may have gained some literacy in it. Females are more likely to be illiterate. Education occasionally is an issue in Hmong families in the United States. Sometimes traditional parents want their teenage daughters to leave school and enter an arranged marriage, while their more Americanized daughters rebel.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Because the Hmong were not a literate people, their cultural heritage had to be handed down in other ways. They are noted for their sung poetry and their story cloths. Hmong songs are poems that the singer makes up as the song is sung using rhyme and clever wordplay. Older songs may be memorized, but the singer adds his own lines to them. There are ritual songs, courting songs, and teaching songs. Songs are passed from one generation to another. Many still contain references to life in China, although the Hmong may have left there generations ago. A skilled singer gains great renown among the Hmong.

The Hmong are known in the West for the exquisite appliqué and embroidery of their story cloths, cloth panels with detailed scenes of daily village life for the Hmong: growing corn, caring for pigs and chickens, hauling rice from the fields, etc. Some have a story line that meanders across the cloth. More recent story cloths tell of war, exile, and going to America.

## 15 WORK

Work revolves around the agricultural calendar of planting rice, corn, vegetables, and opium poppies. Opium was once the biggest cash crop for many Hmong. It is small in volume, high in price, readily portable, and grows well at high altitudes in monsoon climates. However, opium eradication efforts in both Thailand and Laos have unsettled many Hmong communities, despite crop substitution projects. Poverty has forced some

Hmong into wage labor, which is generally frowned upon since the Hmong are used to being self-sufficient. Hmong women have been selling their needlework, and their small embroidered squares are sometimes incorporated by Western fashion designers into stylish modern clothes.

## 16 SPORTS

The Hmong have no time for organized sports. Even young children may work long hours and have little time for recreation. Hmong boys like to play at spinning tops. Fishing is largely a task left to children and can combine elements of work and play.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Hmong sung poetry is a favorite form of entertainment. Often the songs deal with loss—of one's family, one's love, or one's homeland.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Besides the story cloths mentioned above, the Hmong are famous for their traditional needlework squares with intricate appliquéd designs. Traditionally these were presented by a young couple to their parents and parents-in-law with a blessing. These pieces are placed in the coffin with a person after death. This type of needlework has been incorporated into modern handicraft items made for sale.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As governments have extended their control of border regions, the Hmong are under great pressure to give up their traditional way of life and settle down. Settled agriculture, wage labor, and the cash economy are replacing traditional self-sufficiency and have led to more emphasis on the individual and less on clan ties. Children exposed to lowland life are assimilating the dominant culture. Generational contrast and conflict is particularly acute for refugee families living in modern cities in the United States. It is a challenge to maintain Hmong culture and language while adapting to modern life.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although societal discrimination against women exists in Hmong culture, several Hmong women have achieved positions of high rank in the Lao government and the Communist Party. The economic dislocation caused by opium eradication in Laos has pushed some Hmong women into prostitution, but the majority of Laotian women that are trafficked are actually lowland Lao. Nevertheless, the Hmong are suspicious of the intentions of overseas Hmong in this regard and popular folklore tends to view "rich" Hmong in the West as potential traffickers.

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—revised by C. Dalpino

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## HUI

**PRONUNCIATION:** HOO-ee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Huihui

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 9.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Chinese dialect of the area in which they live

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

### <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Hui are the most widely distributed of all the national minorities of China. Early in the 7th century, a great number of Arabic and Persian merchants came to China through the sea route. Setting down in Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and Xi'an (formerly Chang'an), quite a number of them married and multiplied in this land. They built up the first mosques and established the Muslims' graveyard.

In the 13th century, a great number of Muslims from Persia, Arabia, and Central Asia immigrated through the land route and established themselves in various parts of China, in the northwest, the Central Plains, Yunnan and the lower reaches of the Yangzi River. It was at this time that they received the name Huihui.

From the Yuan Dynasty (1271—1368) to the Ming Dynasty (1368—1644), many people of Uighur, Mongolian, and Chinese origin were assimilated to the Huihui due to intermarriage and religious affiliation. In the meantime, there were also many Huihui assimilated to the Chinese for the same reasons. A new Hui nationality gradually came into being from the reunion of Huihui of different origins. The Hui, therefore, are a nationality that took shape in China, but whose history is very different from the aboriginal nationalities living in China from time immemorial.

### <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Hui are widely distributed throughout the country but are mainly concentrated in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region; one also finds Hui in Gansu, Qinghai, Henan, Hebei, Shandong, and Yunnan provinces. Hui population was estimated at 9.8 million in 2000, representing the third-largest national minority of China after the Zhuang and the Manchus.

### <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Hui spoke Arabic, Persian, and/or Chinese in the past. They have no specific language of their own. Today, they use the Chinese language and writing. Retaining some words of Arabic and Persian origin, they speak exactly the same Chinese dialects as the peoples among whom they live.

### <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Most of the Hui myths are related to Allah. The story of "Human Ancestor Adang" described how Hanwu married Haowa, who had 72 successive childbirths. Each time she gave birth to a boy and a girl. At the seventy-third childbearing, however, only a boy was born. Since he had no woman, he went to heaven and asked for the decree of Allah. He was kept in heaven,

while 144 brothers and sisters were carried by a strong wind to all parts of the world. Human beings thus multiplied.

Another myth narrates how the goddess Duor Tea in remote antiquity was banished from Heaven by Allah because she did not fulfill her duty. She was ordered to do philanthropic works to atone for her crime. So she transformed herself into a tea tree, gave a gold axe to a poor man, and ordered him to cut the tea leaves with the axe and use them to treat various illnesses of the villagers. Finally, she returned to Heaven with her axe but not before the Hui had developed the good habit of drinking tea.

The myth of “Adang and Haowa” relates a story similar to that of “Adam and Eve.” There are many other myths dealing with the origin of social and religious customs (for instance, “Adang in search of kindling material,” “The Dragon Plate,” and “Mohammed,” are all connected with Hui belief).

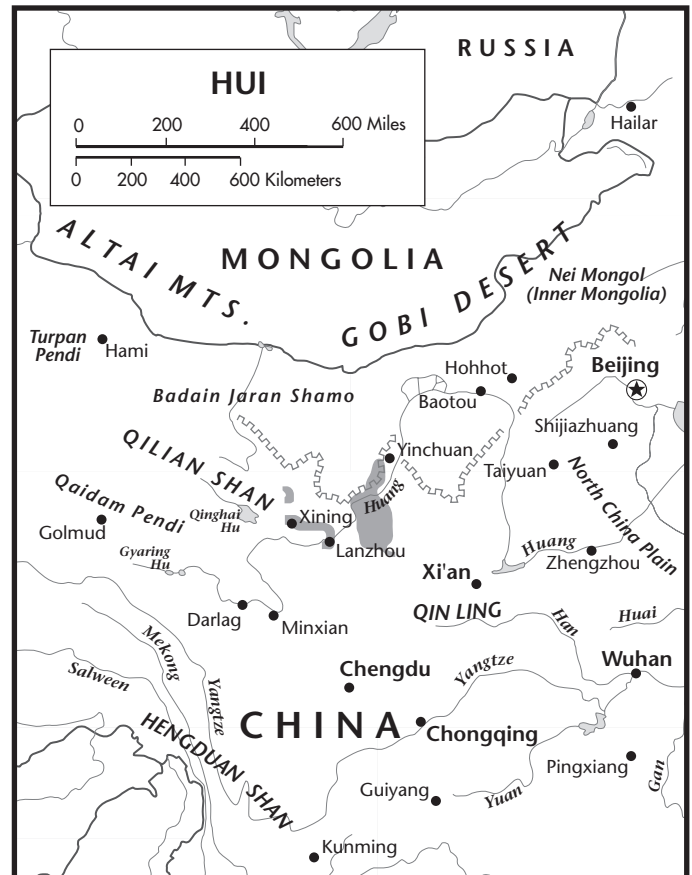
## 5 RELIGION

The Hui believe in Islam (also called Hui religion). The word “Islam” means obedience—to be obedient to the orders of Allah and to be the messenger of Allah. The believers are called Muslims. Islam was created by Mohammed, the messenger of Allah in Arabia in the 7th century. The Koran is the scripture of Islam. It stipulates that Muslims should recite the scripture frequently, hold the Corban Festival, fast in the daytime during September (Islamic calendar), hand in dues and go once to the Holy City Mecca to pay respects. In China, the man who takes charge of religious matters and teaches the Islamic scriptures is called *Ahung* (teacher). He is invited to preside over the ceremonies connected with birth, marriage, and death. The mosque is the place where Muslims recite the scriptures. Because of the shortage of qualified personnel of Hui religion, students have been enrolled in Shanxi and in Shandong provinces to learn the scriptures. Now, there are special universities for students learning Islamic scriptures and doing research in Islamic theology.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival of China, the Hui have three important holidays: the Fast-Breaking Festival (Lesser Bairam), the Corban Festival, and the Shengji Festival. All adult Muslims should fast during September, abstaining from food and drink from daybreak to sunset. During this period, smoking is also prohibited. Everybody restrains one's selfish desires and sincerely believes in Allah. The beginning and the end of the month of fast (Ramadan) depend on the visibility of the new moon. If the moon is not visible, the Fast-Breaking Festival should be postponed until the next day. At the end of the one-month fast, the celebration among the Hui is at its peak.

December 10 (Islamic calendar) is the Corban (sacrifice offering) Festival. Every family must clean the house, kill oxen and/or sheep, pay visits to relatives and friends, and entertain guests for dinner. The Shenji Festival is on March 12 (Islamic calendar), a memorial to Mohammed. The Hui will go to the mosque to greet each other and to participate in religious activities. There will be food and drink in the mosque for the Muslims.



## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

At birth, the infant receives from the *Ahung* an Arabic name usually corresponding to the name of a sage or saint of the Koran. This name is called the “scripture name.” To conform to the brevity of Chinese names (one or two syllables), the polysyllabic Arabic name is usually simplified, adding the Chinese suffix *zi* to the name. This custom is most prevalent in north-west China. Again following the Chinese naming system, the given Arabic name is preceded by the Chinese surname. When the child has gone through the name-giving ritual, he becomes a Muslim. The *Ahung* also presides at the wedding ceremony and at the funeral rites of the Hui.

Funeral rites last no more than three days. The body should be washed and wrapped with white cloth (five layers for the woman and three for the man). The Hui practice burial in the ground without a coffin. They dig a perpendicular hollow, more than 12 ft in depth, then make a pit for the body on the west wall of the hollow. The head of the body points toward the north. The body lies on its side, facing west, the direction of Mecca. The *Ahung* will be invited to recite scriptures during the burying and on the seventh and fortieth day after the death.

The Hui are fond of cleanliness. They take a bath or at least wash their face, mouth, nose, hands, and feet before each religious service.





*Hui Muslim men rest on a roadside in Gongmachuang village, Zhengzhou, China. (AP Images/Greg Baker)*

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When a Hui family entertains guests for dinner, the host will continue pressing more rice into the guests' bowls, even after they have eaten to satiety. The guest should receive the dish or bowl with both hands.

The Hui avoid pork; they also refrain from ox or sheep meat that has not been butchered by the Ahung. Their customs and religious beliefs discourage their young ones from dating and marrying non-Hui people. However, a growing number of young people are becoming indifferent to religious beliefs and customs and tend to adopt the way of life of the Chinese majority. Dating and intermarriage between them are on the increase.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Because of their wide and scattered distribution, the living conditions of the Hui vary a great deal. They are engaged in farming in the rural areas, while in the urban areas, they engage in various trades and professions. Their living standards are similar to those of the majority Chinese. Their housing varies in the different districts.

The Hui have their own traditional prescriptions for illness. They resort both to Chinese traditional medicine and to modern medicine. There are Hui hospitals established in Hui districts and in large cities (modern facilities); these usually take the Hui religious life and customs into consideration.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

The Hui family is patrilineal and monogamous. The position of women in the family is usually lower than that of men. In families where both spouses work, the position of the man and the woman is the same. The aged are esteemed. There are many large families in which the parents live with their sons and daughters-in-law.

Women who work as professionals in urban areas have full freedom to choose their mate. Arranged marriage, however, is still prevalent in rural areas. Chinese law stipulates that to be legal, a marriage must be registered with the proper state authorities; however, according to Islamic customary law, a man can take a wife only if the ceremony is witnessed by the Ahung. The Hui must therefore perform a double (civil and religious) marriage ceremony.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

The Hui scattered in various parts of China usually wear the same clothes as those of the Chinese. Most of the men wear a white or black hat (or turban) in religious services. Some of them, such as those living in Gansu and Qinghai provinces, wear the hat every day. Hui women wear a special *gaitou* (head cover), a folded cloth (only partly sewn) covering her hair, neck, and back, leaving only her face uncovered. These kerchiefs are mainly black. Girls prefer them in green and aged women, white. Hui clothes tend to be fashionable.

## 12 FOOD

The Hui take three meals a day. Their staple foods include rice, flour, corn, millet, and yams. Quite a variety of foods are taboo, mainly the flesh of animals, such as pigs, donkeys, and mules. Furthermore, the Hui do not eat the flesh of ox, sheep, or poultry that died of illness, nor flesh of ox and sheep that were not butchered by the Ahung or other Muslims. They are not allowed to eat in ordinary canteens or restaurants. Therefore, almost all schools, factories, and organizations have established particular canteens for the Hui. Also, cities have a number of Muslim restaurants. The cooks, waitresses, and ordinary workers of the Hui canteens or restaurants are exclusively Muslims.

The Hui like salted beef. They add salt and spice to fresh beef, massage it vigorously, put it in a large earthen container, cover it with a lid, and seal it. Two weeks later, they take it out and let it sit in the open air. The meat may then be fried, stewed, or cooked with rice. This is considered a high-grade dish with which to entertain guests.

The Hui like tea and usually do not indulge themselves in smoking and drinking. They also like a gruel of sweetened, fried flour. They mix flour of wheat, buckwheat, and rice together and fry, then add butter, fry again, and put the mixture in a pot to cool it down. They serve it by adding boiling water and sugar to two or three spoonfuls of fried flour in a glass.

## 13 EDUCATION

The educational level of the Hui in northwest China is lower than that of the Hui living in Yunnan Province and in the cities. Quite a number of Hui professors, scientists, writers, artists, medical doctors, and lawyers are doing well. Some of them are known at home and abroad. The parents fully support the education of their children. Hui middle (junior and senior) schools, even for girls, are established in the urban areas. The Scripture College trains specialists of Islamic teachings. As a result, the educational level of the Hui is, by and large, higher than the average of national minorities in China.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Again, due to the broad regional dissemination of the Hui, their traditional culture has been integrated with that of the local nationalities. On the other hand, some of the Hui cultural traits have been adopted by the nationalities that share a common territory with the Hui. For example, the Huar folk songs, loud and clear, bold and restrained, are nowadays a common favorite of many nationalities of northwest regions. The Hui writers have produced a number of fine works, which, however, failed to attain national prominence on account of their particular features.

## 15 WORK

Hui production is very similar to that of the local people with whom they share a common territory. A number of daily necessities of Hui tradition have been produced by enamel factories managed by Hui people in Ningxia Province. Also, a variety of light refreshments for Muslims appears in the markets of many cities. Muslim cooks and butchers serve their own constituencies, but are sought after by other nationalities because of their professional competence.

## 16 SPORTS

The Hui generally practice the same sports as the Chinese. However, the "Wooden Ball" game is a tradition specific to the Hui of Ningxia. The ball is round or elliptic. The length of the stick is 2 ft, shaped like an ice hockey stick. The court, provided with a center line and two goals, is about 33 yds long and 22 yds wide. Each team has five players. The game lasts half an hour, divided into two periods.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Movies and television are rapidly becoming very popular. The adults like to sing Huar songs to express their dreams about the future and their romantic feelings. The lyrics are mostly impromptu. Some are solos and some are sung in antiphonal style. The Hui often sing while dancing. There used to be gatherings of thousands of Huar fans every year in the northwest region. In recent years, the number of such gatherings has increased, other nationalities joining in for large musical and singsong events.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The mosque buildings have different styles, usually consisting of a main hall, a hall for scriptures, and one for bathrooms, sometimes with subsidiary buildings. The roof ridge of the main hall is usually high. The interior walls are decorated with Arabic writings of artistic quality. There is a shallow cave on the central portion of the west wall, indicating the direction of their religious homage (toward Mecca).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The living conditions of the Hui are very diverse and depend essentially on their specific environment. Those who live in the underdeveloped northwest (Gansu, Xinjiang, Qinghai) share with their immediate neighbors the same need to catch up with the economic development of the coastal areas and areas along the Yangzi River.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws, and it is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age, 22 for men, and it is illegal for single women to give birth. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

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## IATMUL

**PRONUNCIATION:** YAHT-mool

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Nyara

**LOCATION:** Papua New Guinea

**POPULATION:** Approximately 12,000

**LANGUAGE:** Iatmul (Nyara); Tok Pisin; some English

**RELIGION:** Traditional Iatmul; Christianity

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The art of Iatmul people is the most well represented of all the indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea. Few people have much knowledge or understanding of the complex culture that produced such appealing sculptures, carvings, and masks. The Iatmul were cannibals and headhunters in the times before pacification in the 1930s. Although attempts had been made to bring a halt to the violence that was integral to the attainment of status among males in Iatmul society, it was not until public executions of "murderers" took place that men decided to forego those traditions.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The total Iatmul population is around 12,000 people. The homeland of the Iatmul is along the middle course of the Sepik River, in the East Sepik Province of the country of Papua New Guinea. There are approximately 25 Iatmul villages scattered through this portion of the Sepik River. The Sepik is a river that changes face with the change in seasons. During the rainy season that lasts for around five months, the river may rise by 12 to 18 ft and flood the surrounding lowlands. Iatmul villages become a cluster of houses perched on stilts situated within a body of muddy water. All movement has to be done by canoe during this time.

The Iatmul's location in the middle reaches of the vast river has been advantageous to them, since it enabled them to serve as middle men in the extensive trade networks that existed in the Sepik River Basin prior to the arrival of Europeans. It still serves them well, as they are able to attract a large number of tourists to their villages due to the relative ease with which the area can be reached.

A large number of Iatmul have left the Sepik region and now live in other parts of Papua New Guinea. Quite a few Iatmul live in a fishing camp on the edge of a town called Wewak in the East Sepik Province. Some estimates are as high as 50% emigration from Iatmul villages.

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Iatmul refer to their language by the word *nyara*. There are two mutually comprehensible dialects of the Iatmul language, which is classified by linguists as a Papuan, or non-Austronesian language that belongs to the Ndu language family. The name of this language family drives from the common word for "man," which is *ndu* in all of the related languages. The Papuan languages are spoken throughout the island of New Guinea and on a few smaller islands neighboring New Guinea in Indonesia. There is very little information on the Iatmul language, although the New Testament has been translated into Iatmul by missionary linguists. Iatmul children and many



An Iatmul dancing or ancestor mask from the Sepik region of Papua, New Guinea. (AP Images/The (Champaign) News-Gazette, Robert K. O'Daniell)

adults are fluent in Tok Pisin, one of the national languages of Papua New Guinea.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Iatmul mythology states that they originated from a hole in the mud in the present-day territory of the neighboring Sawos

people. Some groups recount stories of a great flood. The survivors floated down the river (the Sepik) on rafts or pieces of grass-covered ground that lodged itself and became the place of the first men's house for the Iatmul ancestors. The present-day men's houses are supposed to be representations of the original piece of earth that was to become the Iatmul world. Other myths recount the formation of the heavens and earth from the great ancestral crocodile that split in two, with his upper jaw becoming the heavens and his lower jaw becoming the terrestrial realms.

#### 5 RELIGION

Traditional religious beliefs of the Iatmul people centered on the spirits of the rivers, forest, and swamps. There was also a concern for the ghosts of the dead and the havoc they could wreck on the living. There is a large body of myth which explains the natural and supernatural world for the Iatmul. Important in these myths are the actors and places where events took place in the mythological past. The names of the actors and places have become important items for the Iatmul and different clans have secret knowledge of the names of the actors and events in their body of myths. Clans would try to obtain the secret names of other clans. To do so was to gain power over the other group. Missionaries have been active among the Iatmul since the 1930s, and there are many converts to Christianity along the Sepik River. Some missionaries went as far as to burn the men's house and the artifacts and art that it contained. A great deal of cultural information was lost in the process.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Christian holidays are celebrated by converted Iatmul, although holidays like Christmas and Easter do not have the degree of commercial emphasis found in the United States. Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny do not visit Iatmul children. National holidays of the country are recognized, but since there are no banks or post offices in the area, most people are not directly affected by public holidays.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Male initiation was a common practice among the Iatmul. It involved extensive ceremonial activities that culminated in the scarification of the upper back and chest of the young initiate. Very few men still undergo this practice, not because of the pain involved, but because of the expense. It costs a few hundred dollars and several pigs to hire the older man to do the scarification. The patterns that are made are said to resemble the skin of the crocodile, the most important animal in Iatmul folklore and mythology. The Iatmul also celebrated important events in the lives of males and females, such as the first time a girl makes a sago pancake or the first time a boy carves a canoe. These celebrations were called *naven*. Naven ceremonies have all but disappeared from Iatmul culture today.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Iatmul have been exposed to Western culture since the 1920s and, as a result, have adopted some of its aspects. Greetings are westernized and consist of the use of stock phrases and handshakes. Traditional greetings that took place between men of different villages who visited each other to trade con-

sisted of formalized ceremonial dialogues where men had well-defined interactional roles. The interactional styles of adult Iatmul men are often described as being aggressive, and tourists are often perplexed because when Iatmul men pose for pictures they do not smile, but instead put on a very fierce face. Iatmul women were in charge of the trade that took place with the Sawos and Chambri, two neighboring groups. The Iatmul women exchanged fish for the sago produced by the women from these neighboring groups. While men were aggressive, combative, and quick to anger, Iatmul women were the ones who maintained the cohesiveness of the community and relations with outside communities.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Iatmul villages vary in size from 300 to 1,200 persons. Villages traditionally centered on a men's house, which is the architectural centerpiece of the village. These buildings are massive structures and were elaborately decorated with carvings and paintings. They also house the majority of the important items of religious paraphernalia including drums, flutes, and sacred sculptures. The role of the men's house has changed over time in Iatmul villages. At the present time, most men's houses are warehouses for the storage of artifacts that are sold to tourists and art collectors, as well as being a meeting place for adult men.

Electricity and running water are not available in Iatmul villages. Without plumbing, dishes are washed in the Sepik, as are clothes and bodies. When the river is swollen but not flooded, bathing is a challenge. A person will walk upstream about 100 yards and then get in the river and wash while the current carries them to the place where they started from. Getting out of the river and staying clean is also a challenge, since the banks of the river are mounds of knee-deep mud.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women play important roles in Iatmul daily life. Women are responsible for catching fish to trade with the neighboring villages to obtain the sago flour to make sago pancakes. Women are also the primary caregivers.

Marriage partners were determined strictly by rules in traditional Iatmul society. The marriage partners for a man included his father's mother's brother's son's daughter (a cousin), his father's sister's daughter (a cousin), or a woman that he would get in exchange for a sister he would give to another man. Anthropologists refer to this last type of marriage as "sister exchange." A married couple will take up residence in the husband's father's house. The house will also be occupied by the father's other sons and their families. Each nuclear family has its own space within the large house. Each family also has its own hearth for cooking. Husbands often sleep in the men's house.

Pet birds are kept by some people. When parrots and lorikeets are kept as pets they are not taught to talk, as most Americans try to do with pet parrots. The wings are clipped and the birds often just sit outside the house. Children sometimes play with the pet birds.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most Iatmul men dress in Western-style clothes consisting of athletic shorts and a T-shirt. Shoes are rarely worn. Women's dress is more varied, ranging from Western-style dresses to

the use of the wrap-around *laplap* to cover the body from the waist down. Women's dress depends on what type of activity they are engaged in and who is around at the time. Children tend to dress like adults but small children go naked.

## 12 FOOD

The Iatmul diet consists primarily of fish and the edible palm tree called "sago." The typical Iatmul meal is not like what most Americans are used to. It is not usually the case that an entire family sits down together to eat at the dinner or kitchen table. Iatmul houses do not have tables and everyone sits on the floor. The midday meal is likely to be the only meal where everyone is together. At other times of day, people eat whenever they get hungry. The food for the day is stored in a woven basket that hangs from a carved and decorated hook near each person's sleeping area. Dried fish and sago pancakes are placed in the basket in the morning. Fruit and greens are sometimes collected from the forest. Canned curry from Indonesia and Malaysia has now become popular, as well as rice and tinned fish. These products are expensive and sometimes difficult to come by.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditional education is still important to the Iatmul. Boys and girls are trained to become competent adults, able to perform the tasks that men and women do to keep the village functioning. Western school is an option for children whose parents want to send them; however, very few communities have their own school and typically children have to travel to other villages.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music in Iatmul culture was an important part of ceremonial life. Men played sacred flutes during parts of initiation rituals. These bamboo flutes were stored in the rafters of houses or in the men's house itself. The sound produced was supposed to be the voices of the ancestral spirits. Women and children were forbidden to see the flutes. The sacred flutes were also played after the death of an important man in the village. A pair of flutists would play during the night under the house of the deceased. During the day, the female relatives would also perform a kind of ritual lament that had a definite musical quality.

## 15 WORK

The traditional pattern of work was divided along lines of sex and age. Adult women were responsible for fishing and gardening. Women also prepared the fish that they caught, preserving a great deal of it by smoking it. Men were responsible for hunting, building, and performing most religious rituals. Boys and girls would help their mothers with her chores, but boys would not long consider performing women's work after they had passed through initiation. During initiation, boys would learn aspects of male work and ceremonial life. In the present, these patterns have remained the same, with the exception that very few boys undergo initiation. Men often seek wage labor outside the village. Some men rent their canoes and their expertise and run individual tours along the Sepik, arranging for tourists to stay with their friends and relatives in villages along the river. In many Iatmul villages, tourism is fast becoming the primary source of income. The manufacture of items for sale to tourists is an avenue for many villagers to secure cash.

## 16 SPORTS

For the Iatmul who still live along the Sepik River, sports are relatively unimportant. Young children play games of various sorts and boys make sling shots and propel hard, dried mud balls at birds and other living targets. Men who live in other parts of the country in towns and cities are more likely to follow rugby and soccer teams.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In an area without access to electricity, television, videos, and movies are virtually unknown. Those people who live in towns and cities with electricity go to movies and some houses have television. Traditional entertainment consisted of storytelling, ritual performances, and music.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Artistic expression in traditional Iatmul society was completely utilitarian, and every item of daily use was decorated with carving, incision, or painting. Tourism has changed art production and appreciation in Iatmul society. Tourist art is an important money-making endeavor for the present-day Iatmul. Masks and sculpture are the most sought after item in the tourist art market.

In men's houses in Iatmul villages, there was an important ceremonial item referred to as a "debating stool." This was a free-standing sculpture with an oversized, stylized human head supported by a small body. On the back of the sculpture was a ledge that looked somewhat like a stool. The stool was used in debates which functioned to settle disputes that might otherwise end in bloodshed. The debaters from each clan would beat a bunch of specially chosen leaves while they made important points in the debate. These objects are now produced for outsiders. While a debating stool purchased in an Iatmul village on the Sepik River might cost around \$100, a stool purchased from a dealer in Australia would cost around \$1,500. Iatmul art has become a lucrative business for dealers in foreign countries.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Cultural change and emigration are major problems for the Iatmul today. Young people are the most likely to emigrate, and, as a result, they do not learn about the culture. They move to cities and towns and begin using Tok Pisin as their primary language. Tourism has brought major changes to the Iatmul traditional way of life. Wage earning has become important and Western items such as tennis shoes and toothpaste are becoming important cultural items for the modern Iatmul.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Iatmul recognize two genders: *ndu* meaning 'male' and *tagwa* meaning 'female'. There are clearly defined roles and actions for men and women. It is the Iatmul men who fish with spears, who stand while in canoes, who engage in wood carving, and who, in the past, took heads and received homicide honors. On the other hand, Iatmul women fish with traps, sit while in canoes, and weave knotless net bags called *bilum* in Tok Pisin. Men and women are differentiated in Iatmul society through dress, bodily decoration, and even ways of speaking.

Iatmul boys and girls are socialized very similarly until they attain puberty. At that time, gender differentiated socialization

becomes more important and boys and girls begin to separate themselves from each other. As mentioned previously, Iatmul boys were initiated into adult status through a painful set of rites involving scarification. Adult status in Iatmul society is signaled through marriage and the birth of children. Adult activities for males and females in Iatmul continue to be gender segregated.

For all members of Iatmul society, there is an idealization of motherhood, especially in its procreative and nurturing aspects. Fathers are not the primary male socializers or role model for boys. Instead, it is a boy's mother's brother (his maternal aunt) who will socialize him and provide emotional support for him. Fathers build longhouses that their sons will inherit before the fathers' deaths. It is interesting to note that upon inheriting the longhouse, a son will banish his father from continuing to live there. Fathers often live out their final years in a small, poorly constructed hut.

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—by J. Williams

# IBAN

**LOCATION:** Malaysia (Sarawak state)

**POPULATION:** 657, 700 (2004)

**LANGUAGE:** Iban; Malay

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Islam; traditional beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The state of Sarawak, or the Land of the Hornbills, is the largest state in Malaysia. Sarawak was a British colony from 1946 until the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Before 1841, Sarawak and its people were under the rule of the kingdom of Brunei. On 24 September 1841, the government of Sarawak was given to James Brooke as a reward for helping Brunei pacify a local revolt against the oppression by its representative in Sarawak. Sarawak was then ruled by a member of the Brooke family, commonly known as the White Rajah, until the Japanese occupation from December 1941 to August 1945. On 1 July 1946, Sarawak became a British Crown Colony. In 1963, Sarawak became one of the 13 states in the Federation of Malaysia.

As a democratic state, Sarawak ran its first general election on 7 July 1970. Since then, a general election has been called every five years to elect the state's assembly from which the state's cabinet is formed, and the chief minister is appointed as the head of the government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Sarawak occupies the northwestern coast of the island of Borneo, the third-largest island in the world after Greenland and New Guinea. The diversity of Sarawak's terrain, the variation of its soil types, and its consistently high rainfall and temperature throughout the year have resulted in the development of the most complex and luxuriant rain forests in the world. The forest is the second-most-important economic resource of Sarawak. Originally, it covered about three-quarters of the land area. Sarawak also has an intense network of meandering rivers that were the main channel of communication for its population in the past. Even though Sarawak about 124,967 sq km (48,250 sq mi) of land, it has a population of only 2.3 million people.

The Land of the Hornbills is home to at least 25 different ethnic communities. These communities can be categorized into four groups: the coastal communities, which include the Malays, Melanau, Selakau, and others; the lowland communities, which include the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, and Kenyah; the upland communities, which comprise the Kelabit, Penan, Lun Bawang, and many other smaller communities; and, lastly, the Chinese community.

The Iban are the largest ethnic group in Sarawak and the single-most-populous indigenous group in Malaysia, aside from the Malays. The Iban account for 29% of Sarawak's total population, while the Chinese make up 25.6%; Malays, 23.4%; Bidayuh, 8%; Melanau, 5.4%; other indigenous groups, 5.7%; and others, 0.2%; Indian, 0.2%; Non-Malaysian citizens 3.4%. The Iban mostly inhabit the lowlands of Sarawak, building their longhouses along the main rivers and smaller streams of the interior of Sarawak. The word *Iban* has various meanings, one of which is "wanderer." The Iban are a very mobile and vigorous people, moving through the hills of Borneo, farming

dry-rice, fishing, gathering, and hunting, expanding in territory and numbers. They are originally from the Batang Lupar and Saribas river system of Sarawak, and from the adjoining Kapuas region of Western Kalimantan. They have gradually moved in through the Rejang Valley, traveling northward and eastward, until today they are present in every district and division of Sarawak, both in urban areas and the countryside.

### SARAWAK'S POPULATION 2004

ETHNIC GROUPS	POPULATION ('000)	%
Iban	657.7	29.0
Chinese	578.7	25.6
Malay	505.8	23.4
Bidayuh	181.5	8.0
Other Indigenous Groups*	128.8	5.7
Melanau	124.3	5.4
Others	4.6	0.2
Indian	4.3	0.2
Non-Malaysian Citizens	77.0	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,262.7</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Department of Statistics, 2004

Note: \* Includes the Orang Ulu communities

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Iban speak their own language called "Iban." However, there was no written form of the language until education was introduced into Sarawak. Formerly, all information was handed down orally from one generation to the next. The Iban had to recall important events through memory, and one of the common ways used to narrate important events was through *berenong* (singing songs).

The Iban language is widely spoken in Sarawak, alongside the Malay language that has been the *lingua franca*, or common language, of the archipelago for centuries. There are significant similarities between the two languages. Although the Iban language is widely used, there are existing vernacular differences between regions or districts. For example, Iban spoken in the Miri-Bintulu region has a different accent than the Iban language spoken in the Kuching-Bau region. Despite the variations in dialects, all speakers of Iban understand each other's speech quite well.

Among the Iban, as among many other natives in Borneo, names consist of two parts: the given name, and the father's name. However, it is common practice among the Iban to insert the word *anak*, meaning "the child of," in between the given name and the father's name, for example, Ugat (given name) anak (child of) Muli (the father's name).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Although a relatively large number of Iban are now Christian, most of their beliefs, traditions, and practices are based on their native beliefs and customs. Their myths, fables, legends, and stories tell of headhunting raids, though these practices have ceased to exist. They also tell of Iban augury, a divination system in which divine guidance is sought in natural events, particularly in the behavior of birds and other natural species. Even though the Iban did not practice human sacrifice, many of them were headhunters. It was believed that the possession of an enemy's head was a sign of bravery, boldness, courage, and leadership qualities. Therefore, Iban folklore includes sto-



ries of great exploits, the opening of new land settlements, and success in warfare and/or headhunting raids. The heroes and heroines of these exploits were respected during their lifetimes and have been remembered for generations in ritual invocations, legends, fables, and stories.

## 5 RELIGION

Over the years, many Iban became Christian, while some others became Muslim. However, a large percentage still keeps their traditional beliefs of animism, in which all beings possess a soul. This understanding underlies various rituals of the Iban. They revere mythical and legendary heroes and deities. In the past, as with many other native groups in Sarawak, the Iban relied on dreams and bird augury, particularly through the banded kingfisher, rufous piculet, and maroon woodpecker, as guidance before commencing any undertakings. For instance, they would observe the behavior of these birds and other animals, reptiles, and insects before farming, hunting, or becoming involved in a trading deal. They would not proceed with any of those undertakings if these natural events were thought to be bad omens.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Besides celebrating other Malaysian major holidays, Christmas, Hari Raya, and Chinese New Year, the Iban in Sarawak celebrate various religious festivals known as *gawai*. There are a number of *gawais* that are very important in the Iban society. These are the *gawai batu* and *gawai memali umai* (rice culti-

vation), *gawai nyintu orang sakit* (health and longevity), *gawai kenyalang* (warfare and bravery), and *gawai antu* (festival for the dead). The rituals for these festivals include *miring* (offering of food), *biau* (chanting), and *timang* (incantations) by *lemambang* (ritualists). The Sarawak government has set aside two or three days each year to observe the most important and interesting festival—the *gawai dayak*. It is a thanksgiving celebration to end the harvest season and to mark the beginning of the next farming cycle. It is an occasion to seek the blessing of the gods and spirits for the New Year. Besides observing certain rituals, this festival involves much merriment and the drinking of *tuak* (locally brewed rice-wine), as well as the display of elaborate traditional costumes.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A child is not immediately named when born, but will be called *ulat* (baby). A baby is normally named after his or her grandparents and/or grandparent's cousins. The bathing ceremony is performed at the river after a name is given. A girl reaches puberty when she is 10 years old and is expected to sleep by herself until she is married. Meanwhile, a boy at the same age will move to sleep in the gallery with the other bachelors. In the past, a boy had to undergo circumcision, although it is not a ceremonial event. Girls are taught to cook, pound, or unhusk rice when they attain the age of seven, while boys are expected to accompany their fathers on hunting trips. At the age of 13, girls learn to weave and boys learn to gather and split firewood with an axe. This training prepares them for marriage.

The birth of a first child marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood and signifies a change in status. The new parents cease to be called by their personal names, but are now known by relational names, that is, *apai*, “the father of,” and *indai*, “the mother of,” so-and-so.

When an Iban dies, she or he is said to become a spirit (*antu*). Complicated death rites are observed after a death, to ensure the harmony of the temporary presence of the spirit among the living, and also for the future welfare of the living and the dead. Many series of rites are observed. The final rite, the *gawai antu*, is the most important of them all. At this rite, a tomb house is erected over the grave of the deceased, as a house for the dead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social interactions in the Iban community, like other communities in Sarawak, are governed by *adat*. *Adat* includes a variety of customs, practices, basic values, and the religious system that governs life in the longhouse, shapes relations between people and their environment, and forges a path between humans and the spirit world. It also governs interpersonal relations between individuals. Among the Iban, it is considered indecent to blow one's nose, or to spit, or even to mention something dirty while someone else is eating. When walking in front of someone who is seated in the longhouse, it is considered polite to bow one's head, place one's hands between one's knees, and say, “Please excuse me. I wish to walk in front of you.” The Iban have great respect for visitors. It is polite to ask a visitor, who happens to pass the longhouse or landing place, to come up into the house and be served a snack of betel nuts. Offering betel nuts is the traditional welcome that the Iban accord to visitors in the gallery. If the visitor has not dined, she





A local Iban tribesman looks over a smouldering forest, cleared and burned for new plantation, near Balaiberkau, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. (AP Images/Mark Fallander)

or he is served food. An Iban who does not take care of visitors is considered greedy.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Many natives in the interior of Sarawak, including the Iban, live in longhouses. However, today there are significant differences in living conditions between Iban who live in urban areas and Iban who still live in longhouses in the interior of Sarawak. A longhouse is much like a row of terraced apartments, except that the longhouse is erected on wooden pillars, 1.2 m to 2 m (4–7 ft) above the ground, for safety's sake. It consists of a series of family *bilek* (apartments) joined laterally and connected by a communicating passageway, gallery, and *ruai* (open-air veranda). Each apartment is separately owned and maintained by a single family unit, including its gallery section and the veranda. Each longhouse is governed by a *tuai rumah* (longhouse elder), who has to be a man of skill and prestige.

Even though many longhouses are supplied with tap water and electricity, some do not have these basic amenities, and have to get water from the nearest river and burn kerosene for light in the night.

From childhood, the longhouse provides a sense of belonging for the Iban. Therefore, most still owe loyalty to their longhouses after allegiance to the family unit.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

An Iban family is normally small, very similar to those in European and American society. However, an Iban family is organized as an enduring group. Continuation of the Iban family or *bilek* (section of the longhouse) is highly regarded. Thus, in each generation, a son or daughter is to remain after marriage in possession of the *bilek*. This is to continue the family unit and to take over the temporary management of its ritual and economic estate. The family is a basic social and economic unit. It is also a very close unit, with the head of the family (normally the father) responsible for defending its interests against any encroachment. He also represents its members, should they be involved in litigation with members of other families. If any family members are found guilty of an offense, fines are usually paid out of family resources. This is because individuals have interrelated interests and are bound by kinship connection. As such, each member of the family bears the responsibility to uphold family honor.

Keeping animals as pets is very uncommon, not only among the Iban but also among many other natives on Borneo. Animals such as pigs and chicken are reared for meat, while dogs are kept for hunting. Even cats are reared as work animals, to keep mice away from the farm and the longhouse.

## 11 CLOTHING

Today, most Iban men and women wear Western- or Malay-style clothing. The men wear shirts and pants, while the women wear blouses, skirts, or *baju kurung* and *kebaya* [see “Malaysian Malays”]. These current and daily dressing codes are very different from their traditional costumes.

The Iban prefer earthy colors of brown and brick-red, with accents of indigo-blue color pigments obtained from tree roots and leaves, as can be seen in their famous weaving of *pua kumbu* (a handspun cotton textile).

A traditional Iban woman's costume includes the *bidang* (tubular sarong-type skirt), *kain pandak* (short skirt), or *kain tating* (weighted short skirt). She may also wear a *rawai* (corset made from rattan or brass), a *sugu tinggi* (headdress made of silver), a *marik empani* (a beaded collar), a *selampai* (sash or shawl), and silver necklaces, bracelets, and anklets. The man's costume includes a *kelambi* or *baju burung* (woven cotton jacket with decorative designs) and the *sirat* (loincloth). Other accessories include the *labong* (a turban of embroidered cloth) or a rattan cap with feathers, the *dangdong* (shoulder shawl), a sword, silver bracelets, and ivory armllets.

At the *Gawai Dayak* festival, one can witness the full display of Iban traditional costume. Several young women and men are dressed in all their finery for the costume parade. A *kumang gawai* (festival princess) and a *keling gawai* (festival prince) are chosen during the parade.

The traditional woman's *rawai* is a closely fitting corset made of a series of cane hoops covered with tiny silver or brass rings, pinned together with brass wire. This encased the hips, waist, and abdomen, thus limiting body movement so that the body remained stiff and rigid. However, it was considered extremely elegant, particularly when the silver was well-polished.

## 12 FOOD

As in many other Asian communities, rice is the staple food among the Iban in Sarawak and is eaten three times a day. It is normally served and eaten with wild vegetables or wild meat from the jungle. While the women collect vegetables, such as mushrooms, fern tops, and/or other young leaves of edible wild vegetation, the men are responsible for bringing back any form of meat, either from hunting or fishing activities.

The family normally gathers for dinner in the evening. They will sit together in a circle on a mat, and the dishes, which include at least a vegetable dish and a meat or fish dish, are placed in the center. The rice can be served on a plate or in leaves and can be taken by hand or spoon. The vegetable and meat dishes are served with a communal spoon from which nobody eats. Water is served and drunk after the meal. Normally, it is the women's responsibility to wash up and clean the kitchen after every meal.

Besides using brassware as cooking utensils, the Iban use bamboo and leaves to cook and serve their traditional food. Cooking meat or vegetables in bamboo is one of their exotic cuisines. The meat is marinated with salt, ginger, and lemon grass before being stuffed into a bamboo pipe 38 cm (15 in) long. The end is covered with young tapioca leaves to give a special aroma to the meat inside. The meat in the bamboo is placed on the fire and has to be constantly and consistently turned in order to avoid being burned. This dish is served with rice.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Iban know the importance of education as a means to excel in the modern world. Education is seen as a means for social security and mobility. In line with Malaysian government educational policy, the Iban children are required to go school when they are six years old, and both male and female children are deeply encouraged to attend school. As a result, the literacy rate among the Iban has increased from 3% in 1947 to 35% in 1980 and to 48.7% in 1990. Today, many Iban are literate and have obtained degrees both from local and overseas universities. With these qualifications, many Iban today are holding high positions in the public and corporate sectors. They are policy makers, corporate managers, professors, lecturers, doctors, and lawyers.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Many of the musical instruments of nearly all indigenous peoples in Sarawak are made from bamboo, rattan, and woods native to the local area. However, the bronze-knobbed *gong* is widely used by the Iban and other indigenous communities in Sarawak. It is an ancient instrument appearing in many sizes and styles and used in a variety of ways at both musical and nonmusical events. The *ketebong* is another musical instrument popularly used by some Iban communities in Sarawak. It is a slightly hourglass-shaped single drumhead that is carved from the trunk of a tree. Various dances are performed to *gong* and *ketebong* music. These include the *ngajat* (performed by women), warrior dances, and the sword dance.

The Iban do not have a strong literary tradition. Most of their stories, legends, and myths are passed down orally from one generation to the next. Only quite recently have efforts been made to document and compile these stories.

## 15 WORK

Most Iban who live in town areas are involved in formal paid employment. This is partly as a result of Iban traditional custom known as *bejalai*, which encourages young Iban to leave their longhouses in search of prestige and new experiences. As a result, many have become professional workers and some are factory workers in places like Singapore and Johor. There are others who work on offshore oil platforms, not only in Malaysia and Brunei, but also in the Middle East and other parts of the world. This is quite different from those who still live in longhouses in the interior; they cultivate hill rice, gather wild vegetables, and fish and hunt for meat. They also rear chickens and pigs for home consumption. They are self-sufficient and self-reliant. However, some do take their produce to the market to be sold.

## 16 SPORTS

Various native sports and games include cock-fighting and spinning tops. Other games are played too, particularly soccer, which is becoming very popular. Individual tug-of-war (*batak lampong*), team tug-of-war, arm-wrestling, and long-jumping, are played in the open space in front of longhouses and are also staged during festivals.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

As there are no televisions or movie theatres in the villages, Iban normally entertain themselves with traditional music

and dance. After working under the hot sun the whole day, the longhouse is filled with the sound of *gong*. This is very common, except during mourning periods. Women and men, old and young, dance to the music. Various dances are performed, such as sword dancing, dancing with castanets, saucer dances, war dances, and shield dances. It is considered a time to display one's dancing talents.

Among the Iban, cock-fighting is not only a sport but a form of recreation and entertainment. An annual cock-fighting season was held in the past, until it was banned because it had become a place to gamble money. Cock-fighting also has some symbolic connotations. It is a symbolic form of supernatural fights between two rivals.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

A pride of Iban cultural heritage is the *pua kumbu*. The *pua kumbu* is a handspun textile that is made from a locally grown cotton plant called *taya*. The weaving of *pua kumbu* is an art that requires great skill, technique, and rich and complex ideas. Thus, Iban women are considered to be Borneo's most-skilled weavers, producing artistic masterpieces on simple backstrap looms. The secrets of making *pua kumbu* are passed down from mother to daughter. Producing a *pua kumbu* requires skill at every stage, from the preparation of the cotton yarn to the tying of threads, the dyeing process, and the selection of design. *Pua kumbu* is used for the women's *bidang*, the men's *kelambi*, and also as blankets.

The Iban also spend their spare time making pottery, producing clay pots for cooking. They also produce other important handicraft items such as baskets, mats, and caps from rattan, bamboo, nipah palm, bemban, screw-pine, and many other plants native to their area.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The issue of land rights is one of the most crucial social problems faced by the Iban in Sarawak. The rapid economic development currently taking place in Sarawak, which requires the Iban to give up their land for land development, has put the Iban and the other ethnic communities in a dilemma. To be involved in "progress" and "development" requires them to give up their land to be developed into agricultural plantations. This is exacerbated by a high rate of rural-urban migration among the Iban. Many longhouses are often left empty, except during the festive seasons of *gawai dayak* and Christmas. Many Iban return to their longhouses on special occasions.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Egalitarianism is one of the most central values among the Iban. It permeates almost all social relations, including relationships between men and women in the society. Therefore, as with the men, Iban women play a major role in preserving the family as a unit. Their main duties and responsibilities are to nurture the family, which includes looking after the children when they are young. Besides managing the home, Iban women are also required to work in the fields, particularly during the planting season and the harvesting season. They manage their farms together with their husbands.

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—by P. Bala

# IFUGAO

**PRONUNCIATION:** EE-foo-gow

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Igorots, Kiangan

**LOCATION:** Philippines (northern Luzon)

**POPULATION:** Over 133,000

**LANGUAGE:** Ifugao

**RELIGION:** Native beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos; Kalinga

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Among highland peoples of the insular Southeast Asia, the Ifugao enjoy the rare distinction of becoming widely known not under some originally generic term for “[savage] mountaineer,” but under their own name for themselves as mispronounced by their Christianized Gaddang neighbors: *i-pugaw*, “the people of the known earth.” The Ifugao belong to a group of peoples inhabiting northern Luzon’s Cordillera Central who are collectively known among Filipino lowlanders as “Igorots,” a term that first appears in Spanish records as a label for mountaineers who came down to Pangasinan to trade gold. As these Igorots resisted Spanish colonial rule, acculturation, and Christianization for three centuries, the Spanish referred to them as infidels and fierce and independent tribes, distinguishing them from the *indios*, the tribute-paying, trouser- and dress-wearing, and church-going lowlanders.

Including the Ilongot of the Caraballo range and Sierra Madre, the Igorots are far from homogeneous, dividing into eight linguistic groups and four broad cultural types. The southern group includes the Ibaloi and the Kankanai, whose gold mines attracted more concerted Spanish attention and exposed them to more lowland influences, such as upper garments for their women; elsewhere in the highlands women traditionally went bare-chested. The northern group includes the swidden-farming (shifting-cultivation) and relatively egalitarian societies of the northern Kalinga [see **Kalinga**], Isneg (or Apayao), and Tinggianes (meaning “highlanders,” a name that used to apply far more broadly). The Ilongot (“forest people,” [see **Ilongot**]) comprise the Southeast group and are known for their extreme conservatism and isolationism.

Known to their mountain neighbors as “Kiangan” after their ancestral locality, the Ifugao themselves belong to the Central group along with the Bontok (“mountain”), northern Kankanai, and southern Kalinga, peoples who are world-renowned for their mountainside rice terraces. Even within this group, there are significant variations. For example, whereas Bontok society uses a village-ward (*ato*) system to subordinate individual and kin-group interests to those of the wider community, Ifugao society gives free play to competition among individuals of forceful personality and great wealth; this contentious spirit has even precluded the emergence of a Kalinga-style interregional peace-pact system [see **Kalinga**]. Ifugao culture (like Cordillera and non-Christian cultures more generally) has contributed key icons to the national identity of the predominantly Christian and Hispanized Philippines: in 1995 the rice terraces of the Cordillera (the most renowned of which are those built by the Ifugao at Banaue) were declared UNESCO World Heritage sites and in 2001 the Hudhud chants of the

Ifugao were put on the UNESCO list of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

The Cordillera peoples hardly lived in absolute isolation. Spanish military expeditions seeking gold or punishing lowland-raiding Igorots, as well as Catholic missionaries, penetrated the highlands from time to time, generally making little lasting impression. Of greater regularity and significance was the circulation of Ilocano traders; in the 18th century, this vigorous highland–lowland trade subverted the colonial tobacco monopoly. Ilocano towns often contracted peace-pacts with highland groups. Lowlanders and highlanders killed each other in blood feud cycles much as went on among highlanders themselves.

Possessing no gold mines and notoriously “unmanageable,” the Ifugao largely escaped Spanish attention until 19th-century scholars disclosed the wonders of the rice terraces to the wider world. The Ifugao’s main outside conflict was not with the Spanish directly but with the Gaddang over control of the upper Magat valley; the latter retained slave-holding chiefs for half a century after accepting Catholicism and allying with the Spanish against the Ifugao.

It was American colonial troops, followed by American schoolteachers and Protestant missionaries, who began the “integration” of the Cordillera peoples into the wider Filipino nation, though at the same time institutionalizing their status as cultural minorities. During the Japanese occupation during World War II, many Ifugao suffered from violence, hunger, and displacement; fighting extended into the Ifugao highlands. The Japanese general Yamashita surrendered to U.S. troops at Kiangan in 1945. In 1966, in recognition of highland diversity, the central government broke up the American-created Mountain Province into four separate provinces: Benguet, Mountain (Bontok), Kalinga-Apayao (now two separate provinces), and Ifugao. Currently, grouped together as the Cordillera Administrative Region, these provinces (now including Abra) enjoy a measure of autonomy that may increase to the level of that of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The highland peoples face diverse and increasing pressures from lowland society. Most threatening (through the early 1990s) have been dam projects that intend to flood ancestral valleys and the spread of fighting between NPA (communist) guerrillas and the Philippine government; these have been less of an issue since the early 1990s. Agrarian reform has affected few Ifugao because landholdings tend to be very small, but the government has begun to recognize highland peoples’ rights to their ancestral lands. In the past 87% of land in the Cordillera region was classified as state property and much was awarded by politicians to logging companies. International tourism, as elsewhere, has been a mixed blessing, eroding much of traditional culture at the same time as promoting certain aspects of it. In some areas, the rice terraces are falling into neglect as young people, attracted by work in cities or abroad, become less and less willing to stay in their home villages to do the arduous work of maintaining them.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Ifugao inhabit 1,940 sq km (750 sq mi) of rugged uplands in northern Luzon’s Cordillera Central (which includes peaks of 2,440 m or 8,000 ft), an area drained by tributaries of the Magat River, which in turn joins the upper course of the Cagayan River. Supporting themselves on rice grown on terraces



carved into the steep mountainsides, the Ifugao constituted 67.9% of the population of the province of Ifugao in 2000, numbering almost 110,000 (Ilocanos were 13.7%). Over 23,000 Ifugao lived in Nueva Vizcaya province. Estimates for the various Ifugao dialect-groups are as follows: Amganad, 27,000 (1987); Batad, 43,000 (1987); Mayoyao, 40,000 (1998); and Tawali (Kiangan), 50,786 (1990). Population density is as high as 155 persons per sq km (400 per sq mi) in some locales.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Ifugao language is an Austronesian language, belonging to the Northern Philippine branch whose most numerically

important member is Ilocano. Ifugao's immediate relations, however, are with the neighboring Cordillera languages Bontok and Kankanay from which, linguists estimate, it began to diverge 1,000 years ago.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Ifugao have a verse epic, the *Hudhud*; individual episodes are sung to relieve the tedium of harvesting, a female soloist leading and the other harvesters answering in chorus. The heroes of the epic are *kadangyan* (wealthy, high-status people), such as Bugan, a female *kadangyan* who fights as bravely as her brother Dinulawan and who seeks for her mate only the man who can fit her brother's sword belt. Daulayan, a poor man, fits the sword belt and eventually turns out to be of *kadangyan* lineage after all.

Part of the Ifugao marriage ceremony is the myth of Balitok and Bugan of Kiangan, a brother-sister couple who survive the great flood and become the ancestors of the Ifugao. In one variant, Bugan is so ashamed of becoming pregnant by her brother that she goes downstream (*lagod*) to seek destruction from the spirits there; the spirits, however, teach her how to sacrifice a male and female pig from the same litter in order to lift the curse for incest. According to another variant, Bugan is so distraught from childlessness that she goes downstream to seek death, encountering in turn Fire, a crocodile, and a shark, all of whom she impresses with her boldness and beauty. The shark passes her on to Umbumabakal, who lives in a terrifying house covered with gigantic ferns. There Bugan offers herself for Umbumabakal to devour. Umbumabakal, too, takes pity on her and takes her to Ngilin and the gods of Animal Fertility; they all return to Kiangan where they teach the priests there how to perform the *bubun* ceremony in which sacrificial meat is divided between Ambahing, the spirit who steals semen from the womb, and Komiwa, the spirit who stirs semen up in the womb.

### 5 RELIGION

The Ifugao traditional religion recognizes as many as 1,500 named gods, divided into 35 categories associated with, to name the most prominent, hero ancestors, celestial bodies, natural phenomena, diseases, and agriculture. Each possesses specific attributes and powers. All are immortal, can change form, become invisible, and travel through space. They inhabit all of the five divisions of the Ifugao universe: *kabunian* (the sky world); *dalum* (the underworld); *pugao* (the "known earth," the land of the Ifugao); *daiya* (the upstream region); and *lagod* (the downstream region). Particularly exalted is the sky world deity Lidum; the uncle of Balitok, ancestor of the Ifugao, Lidum is their great teacher and lawgiver. One example of minor deities is the class of *halupe*. A person may send a *halupe* to harass another person by forcing an idea constantly on the latter's mind, e.g., a creditor may send a *halupe* to a debtor in hopes of making the latter respond peacefully to a request for repayment, or a youth may commission a *halupe* to make a pretty girl more receptive to his romantic overtures.

Being a priest (adult males only) is not a full-time occupation but rather a voluntary vocation learned through apprenticeship, during which one must memorize the names and characteristics of the 1,500 gods. Since the American colonial period, priests can practice beyond the circle of their kindred to which they had formerly been confined. In exchange

for their services, priests receive meat and rice wine but more importantly enjoy the reputation of having a “good voice.” Because ritual chanting provides an opportunity for masculine exhibitionism, as many as 15 priests can participate in a ceremony, as compared to only one or two among the Bontok.

Rituals fulfill a wide range of functions. Omens are read by examining the bile sac or livers of pigs or chickens or by interpreting birdcalls. Some rituals are used to ensure the success of hunting, farming, headhunting, peacemaking, and debt-collection, and rituals accompany prestige feasts, divorce proceedings, and sorcery. Performed under a house or granary (less commonly in a field or forest), rituals involve several hours of chanting in a fixed protocol: invoking the deities; praying to the deities; inviting the deities to possess the priests; having the deities possess the priests; and exhorting the deities to action. Priests gain power over particular deities by reciting a myth that mentions them. Invocation entails “pushing” (*tulud*) deities from their homes in kabonian, dalum, daiya, and lagod to the village where the ritual is taking place; this requires a long time as each locality (as many as 40) through which the deities must pass is named in turn. Offerings range from a little betel or a chicken claw to sacrifices of pigs or chickens; in the course of a ritual, spirits (through the drinking priests) constantly consume rice wine.

Priests also perform curing rites. Disease can be caused by sorcery or the displeasure of ancestral spirits who may allow malevolent deities to inflict suffering on offending descendants.

According to the 2000 census, 17.6% of the population of the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Ifugao province is a part, is classified as “Other” in religious affiliation, meaning adherents of indigenous religion. The rest followed a form of Christianity: 65.8% of the region’s population is Roman Catholic (much lower than the national percentage of 83%), 8.9% Evangelical, 2.9% Iglesia ni Cristo, 1.6% Jehovah’s Witness, 0.8% Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan). In the early 1990s, 54% of ethnic Ifugao identified themselves as Roman Catholic.

Thanks in particular to Christian churches’ establishing schools in the Ifugao region, Ifugao associate Christianity with modern civilization and especially with the education that confers high status (and even upward mobility for some non-elite Ifugao) as well as equality with the nationally dominant lowland Filipinos. Elite, educated Ifugao identify themselves as Christian even though they continue to perform or participate in traditional Ifugao rituals (*baki* or *bfuni*), from those for healing to those for earning higher social status. Though there were Christians in all social levels among the Ifugao, those who practiced traditional religion exclusively belonged to the non-elite strata. Fundamentalist Protestant churches tended to be more condemnatory of traditional Ifugao culture than the Catholic Church. For instance, Protestant leaders strongly oppose the performance of traditional Ifugao healing rites; local Catholic Church authorities are ambivalent towards such practices, with some priests even encouraging people for whom modern medical treatments are ineffective to sponsor traditional healing rites at their homes.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An adolescent boy is free to visit an adolescent girl in her *agamang* dormitory and have sex with her (a girl is not supposed to have more than one lover at a time). An individual usually experiences several “trial marriages” before committing to a permanent union. Employing *monbaga* (go-betweens), wealthy families are more careful to arrange their children’s marriages with partners of equal status and to determine inheritance beforehand. The betrothal ceremony involves the exchange of pigs and gifts and initiates a close liaison. The marriage bond is formalized over a series of four wedding ceremonies including pig and chicken sacrifices, feasting, bile sac augury, and, in the last ceremony, the presentation of jars, cloth, and knives by the groom’s family to the bride’s. Fines for breaking off the marriage are higher after each successive wedding ceremony.

Deities may take a person’s soul, causing the body to fall ill; if they do not return the soul, the person dies. With all its orifices plugged, the corpse of a person who has died a natural death is seated, tied to an honorary death chair, and guarded by fire and an undertaker. The deceased remains there for as many days (up to 13) as the family can afford to hold a nighttime wake and then is either carried by the undertaker to a hillside family sepulcher (a chamber at the end of a tunnel cut into soft rock) or put into a sealed coffin beneath the house or in a granary-like mausoleum. Children are buried in jars. Three to five years later, a second burial may be performed if the deceased is unhappy and is disturbing or harming the living. In case of wrongful death, the corpse is seated, bound to a house post, and neglected so that its spirit will seek revenge.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Ifugao society looks to no chiefs, councils, or other supravillage political institutions but rather governs itself through a highly complex system of customary law. An individual identifies with the kinship group and “local area,” corresponding more or less to the *himpuntona’an* (traditional agricultural district) to which he or she belongs; this core circle of trust and mutual dependence shades off gradually through areas of less and less affiliation until reaching “enemy territory,” from whose alien populations heads traditionally could be taken. Wider regional solidarities began to form only with the American occupation of the highlands.

Wealth constitutes the base of status and influence in Ifugao society. The following categories are distinguished: *kadangan*, the rich or those inheriting large areas of irrigated rice fields and prestigious heirlooms; *tumuk*, those who have sufficient rice year-round but have yet to earn the status of *kadangan*; the *namatuk* or *mabitol*, poorer people, “those who may hunger” and be forced to incur debts with the wealthy; *nawatwat*, the “disinherited” or “passed by,” who become servants or tenants of the wealthy; and, formerly, slaves, generally children sold by poor families to lowlanders to discharge debts. If bought by fellow Ifugao, they eventually were freed and their children were in any case born free.

In recent times, a new category of wealthy has emerged. The *bacnang*, a loanword from Ilocano meaning “rich,” are people who have become rich in non-traditional ways, primarily in commercial or agricultural ventures, such as owning hotels or restaurants, by which they amass large amounts of cash. According to government statistics on family income from 1988,



*A group of Ifugao women take a break from planting rice, Banaue, Philippines. (AP Images/Pat Roque)*

4% of the population of Ifugao province fell into the upper-class category (earning over 60,000 pesos) and 75% in the lower-class category (earning under 30,000 pesos).

An individual qualifies for *kadangyan* status by amassing wealth in the form of rice lands and water buffalo (in the past also slaves). Rice lands must be of an extent sufficient to produce a surplus that can be loaned to *namatuk* families at high rates of interest, so high the debtors can never reach *kadangyan* status themselves. While hornbill headdresses, gold beads, swords, gongs, and antique Chinese jars are all signs of distinction, the essential mark of having become a *kadangyan* is the *hagabi*, a massive lounging bench carved from a hardwood trunk, sitting beside the house. The *kadangyan-to-be* must provide food and rice wine to the makers of the *hagabi* for the duration of the work and must hold a lengthy and expensive *uyawe* feast to install it.

*Kadangyan* compete in the number and quality of ritual feasts they can hold. *Kadangyan* status confers no formal political power, but the wealth inherent in it earns considerable influence. Community decision-making requires a consensus among all the *kadangyan*; this consensus is only reached after the personalities of the *kadangyan* have had the chance to contend in public debate.

Since there is no higher traditional authority to whom an Ifugao can appeal for redress of grievances, each must obtain his or her own justice, or rather kin-groups of injured parties seek compensation from the kin-groups of injuring parties. For instance, a kin-group could traditionally avenge the murder of one of its own by killing any member of the murderer's kin-group. To witness transactions, resolve disputes, and punish crimes, Ifugao rely on *monbaga* (go-betweens), individuals knowledgeable in genealogy and customary law who can moreover call on a large kin-group to enforce the decisions they make. Fines consist of valued goods, such as livestock (e.g., water buffalo for sacrifice at the victim's funeral), blankets, kettles, knives, and clothing and are divided between the injured party, his or her kin, and the *monbaga*. Fines are assessed according to the status of the parties as well as the crime's nature and intentionality. For example, a *kadangyan* who has committed a crime against a fellow *kadangyan* pays a higher fine than if the two parties are *tumatuk* and higher still than in a case between two *nawatwat*. If a *kadangyan* commits a crime against a person of lesser status, he or she pays a lower fine than for injuring a peer, while a *nawatwat* wronging a social superior will pay a higher fine than if he or she had wronged an equal.

Cases between inhabitants of the same “local area” were usually settled by imposing fines, but crimes committed by one party against a party from a different “local area” generally led to feuding on the principle that “might makes right.” Warfare entailed hunting for heads by ambushing a member of an enemy group found walking alone at the edge of his or her territory; raiding for women and child slaves was also common.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Ifugao live in small, named hamlets of 8 to 12 houses sitting on several levels of terracing amid hillside rice fields. Hamlets may also cluster to form more extensive communities of hundreds of houses. Toward the northern edge of Ifugao territory, a village’s houses are scattered over broad valley bottoms, separated by fields.

With some variation in size reflecting the wealth of the owner, houses are square, raised on four posts (with cylindrical fenders to block climbing rats), accessible by ladder, and have pyramidal roofs of thatch. The well-built wooden structures last for generations. They have few furnishings or decoration other than occasional human figures carved on the doors and, formerly, a shelf for displaying skulls of enemies and sacrificial animals. Larger communities may have stone platforms at their center on which communal celebrations are held and prestigious houses are raised. Less permanent structures, such as the *agamang*, dormitories for girls and unmarried women, are built on the ground.

Average family income in the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Ifugao province is a part, amounted to 192,000 pesos (us\$3,765) in 2006, among the highest in the country, cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region’s ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog’s ₱198,000, and those of the neighboring Cagayan Valley and Ilocos regions, ₱143,000 and ₱142,000 respectively. In 2000, Ifugao province, however, had the fourth lowest Human Development Index, 0.351 (combining measures of health, education, and income) in the country (above provinces in the Sulu archipelago, cf. the Philippines’ national HDI of 0.656).

According to the 2000 census, 35.2% of households in Ifugao province had access to a community faucet, 11.5% to a faucet of their own, and 8.2% to a shared deep well, while 17.4% obtained their water from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. Almost half of households (46.3%) disposed of their garbage by burning it, 30.2% by burying it in a pit, and 9.1% by feeding it to their animals; only 6.5% had it picked up by a collection truck. 58.5% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 36.8% with electricity, and 3.5% with firewood. While 34% of households lacked basic appliances of any kind, 64% possessed a radio, 15.4% a television, 10% a refrigerator, 5.4% a VCR, 1.5% a telephone or cell phone, 17.4% a washing machine, and 6.3% a motorized vehicle.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

An individual’s kin-group extends as far as great-great-grandparents and third cousins on both the mother’s and father’s sides. In theory, marriage within this group is taboo, although second and third cousins can marry after the payment of fines in livestock and the performance of propitiatory sacrifices. The kin-group also assumes collective responsibility for wrongs committed by its members and is obliged to avenge wrongs done to its members.

Rice lands, forestlands, and heirlooms (e.g., jewelry, gongs, Chinese jars) are held by individuals only in “trust”; such property formally belongs to a group of persons who can claim, through either maternal or paternal lines, descent from a common ancestor. Such property can only be sold under extreme circumstances, as when needed to obtain water buffalo to sacrifice for the cure of the gravely ill or the sustenance of the deceased in the afterlife; it can only be sold, however, with the consent of other relevant kinfolk and with the performance of an *ibuy* ceremony. Houses, valuable trees, and crops of sweet potatoes are regarded as personal property whose sale demands no *ibuy* ceremony. Untilled grassland and forests distant from any settlement belong to anyone from the local area who clears and tills them; sweet potato swidden fields revert to the “public domain” after falling fallow.

Showing no preference for residence with or near either the wife’s or husband’s family, a couple sets up house near the largest concentration of inherited rice fields. In a house dwell the couple and their young children; children old enough to care for themselves live in an *agamang* (same-sex dormitory). Because of the severity of the incest taboo, siblings of the opposite sex deliberately avoid each other, being careful to sleep and even be buried apart, as well as refraining from making sexual jokes in each other’s presence.

As marriage is considered to be a union of indefinite duration, a couple may agree to divorce at any time, although this is rare after the birth of the first child. Motives may be bad omens, childlessness, cruelty, desertion, adultery, or change of affection. Upon divorce, if there are no children, partners retain property inherited from their respective kin. If there are children, the property is assigned to the children. In the case of minors, the parent who takes the children, usually the mother, manages the property until the child marries.

Children may receive inheritances, including debt obligations, from either parent. A widow or widower may remarry after paying his or her original parents-in-law a *gibu*, the fine for extramarital relations.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

Traditional attire for men is the G-string, a loincloth that leaves the side of the thigh bare but hangs down in front. Women wear a short sarong (waist to knees) and formerly went bare-chested. Men who had yet to avenge the murder of their father let their hair grow long. Tattoos were also common.

*Kadangyan* (the wealthy) display their status in clothes and accessories restricted to their class: for men, an elaborate G-string, a tasseled hip-bag, kidney-shaped gold earrings, and a headdress consisting of a turban-like cloth, hornbill skull, and water buffalo horns; for women, an elegant skirt, a tasseled belt, golden earrings, four bead necklaces, strings of white and red beads to secure their long hair, and a little brass statuette.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

Agricultural products provide 84% of the Ifugao diet. Rice and sweet potatoes are the staple foods, although rice is by far the more highly regarded. Ground into meal, maize (grown on the sweet potato swidden fields) is also important. Ifugao consume a wide variety of vegetables and fruits: beans, radishes, cabbage, lettuce, peas, taro, yams, cowpeas, lima beans, okra, greengrams, and other legumes, jackfruit, grapefruit, citrus, coconut, and banana. About 10% of the diet is animal protein



from flooded rice fields: tilapia minnows, frogs, snails, and especially *ginga*, a kind of water clam. Sources of meat include domesticated pigs, goats, chickens, and the occasional water buffalo sacrificed in rituals, as well as wild game such as deer, buffalo, pig, civet cat, wild cat, python, iguana, cobra, and bat (only the monkey is hunted for sport alone). People also eat locusts, crickets, and ants.

The heroes of the *Hudhud* epic are often described as staggering, for the ability to withstand heavy intoxication is rare and much admired. Alcohol consumption is integral to feasts and rituals. While only the poor dilute rice wine (*bayah*) with water, the rich *kadangyan* mix *bayah* with sugarcane juice to make *bahi*. A press extracts the juice from the cane.

### 13 EDUCATION

In 2000, literacy stood at 90.5% for the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Ifugao province is a part. Of the population of Ifugao province over the age of five, 46.2% had attended elementary school, 21.9% high school, and 8.9% college or university (see also the article entitled *Filipinos* in this volume).

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Cordillera peoples play a wide range of instruments: nose-flutes (*kalleleng*), lip-flutes (*paldong*), whistle-flutes (*olimong*), panpipes (*diwas-diwas*), buzzers (*balingbing*), tube zithers (*kolitong*), half-tube percussion (*palangug*), stamping tubes (*tongatong*), and jaws harps (*giwong*). Reflecting the primacy of Chinese over Southeast Asian trade contacts, gongs (*gangsa*) are flat rather than knobbed (strokes, slaps, and slides produce the different tones).

One important male dance is the cockfight dance performed before battle. Other male dances feature the men banging gongs as they move in circles. Female dances emphasize a rigid posture and raising outstretched hands.

### 15 WORK

Although modern education, administration, commerce, and tourism offer some Ifugao the opportunity for nontraditional occupations, most remain farmers. The wet-rice terraces built by the Ifugao and the neighboring peoples, such as the Bontok, are engineering marvels, climbing 300 m (1,000 ft) up steep mountainsides and held up by walls of earth and stone sometimes as high as 15 m (50 ft). A grouping of adjacent fields forms a *himpuntona'an*, a traditional agricultural district (as many as 25 in a 104-sq-km or 40-sq-mi area) that is named and includes a ritual plot that is the first to be planted and harvested. Several *himpuntona'an* share a single water-catchment area and cooperate in regulating irrigation and land use.

Rice is the high-prestige staple, and possession of rice fields is the prime measure of status (all the more so since the end of headhunting). When flooded, rice fields also provide animal protein in the form of small minnows, frogs, etc. After the harvest, cotton, beans, radishes, cabbage, lettuce, and peas are grown on the soggy rice stalks.

In addition, Ifugao cultivate sweet potatoes, the low-prestige staple, on hillside swidden fields that also support a wide variety of vegetables as well as sugarcane and tobacco. Tree crops complete the picture: coffee, jackfruit, grapefruit, rattan, citrus, areca, coconut, and banana. Ifugao raise pigs, goats, and chickens, keeping the last in baskets under the house at night; they also import water buffalo from the lowlands to sacrifice

to their ancestors (never to use as draft animals). Hunting and the gathering of wild plants make only a minor contribution to subsistence.

Many men go down into the lowlands to trade. Coffee is the main export while imported goods include livestock, cotton, brass wire, cloth, beads, crude steel, and Chinese jars and gongs. Ifugao trade knives, pots, spears, and salt among themselves. Market gardening is increasing in importance. While in the city of Baguio (50 km [30 mi] southwest of Ifugao territory), lowlanders, including tourists from as far away as Manila, make a point of buying vegetables grown by mountain peoples.

### 16 SPORTS

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Ifugao practice metallurgy (using the lost-wax process), basketry, weaving, and *ikat* (tie-dyeing). Their woodcarving traditions are noted for *bulol*, cowrie-shell-eyed images of male and female gods in fighting position, weapons ready, or squatting with bowls in their outstretched hands. Other noteworthy products are canes with intricately carved handles, polished dining bowls with side compartments for condiments, chests with handles in the shape of pigs' heads, and shelves with crocodile snouts and tails worked in the design. Today, craftsmen produce objects specifically for tourist tastes (Western, generic Filipino, Chinese, Japanese), e.g. ashtrays and cell phone holders.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In 2000, the literacy level was slightly lower for women (90%) than for men (90.8%) in the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Ifugao province is a part. In Ifugao province itself, males comprised 55.5% of those attending elementary school but only 51% of the population at large; women, however, were more numerous than men in all levels above high school; 55% of those attending college or university and 64% of academic degree holders were women.

Women's roles in Ifugao society are not conceived of as limited to that of mother; women's labor is understood as complementary to the labor of men (as in the different, but equally essential, tasks each sex takes in rice cultivation); even financially secure elite women work outside the home, and elderly women continue to do farm work, not only out of necessity but also out of love for it. Industriousness in a woman is valued over beauty. At the same time, women are considered the "weaker" sex, whose work is "lighter" than men's work and deserves less pay. In the early 1990s, the wage for a woman's agricultural labor was half that for a man's and thus well below the minimum wage. Women control family finances but feel less free to spend on themselves than do their husbands, who often spend money on drinking sessions with their male friends or on gambling, for which their wives freely criticize them.

Traditional leadership positions are monopolized by elite men. Men are believed to be inherently superior at the oratory believed necessary for leadership, and most high-ranking government officials are men. Women do serve on local community councils but are in the minority. An individual women's status is determined by more than her gender; a female *kadangyan* or an older woman is perceived as having more power than a man of a lower class and younger age. The influence of Christianity is reinforcing the inferior status accorded to women by traditional culture, and the spread of a cash economy where men have more opportunities to earn wages, or at least to earn higher wages, outside the home is devaluing further the unpaid work women do in the house and on family plots.

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—revised by A. Abalahin

# ILOCANOS

**PRONUNCIATION:** ee-lo-KAH-nohs

**LOCATION:** Philippines (northern Luzon)

**POPULATION:** 6.89 million (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Ilocano

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Philippine Independent

Church; Iglesia ni Kristo (Church of Christ); Protestantism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

When the Spanish first encountered them in 1572, the inhabitants of Ilocos (then called "Samtoy") were living in large villages at sheltered coves or river mouths and were trading with the Chinese and Japanese. Although massive churches in a distinctive style give evidence of Spanish-Ilocano collaboration, the colonial period was marked by frequent revolts; the most famous of these was that led by Diego and Gabriela Silang during the British occupation of Manila in 1762–63.

Ilocanos were prominent in the nationalist movement, and many have risen to high office in the central government. The greatest of these Ilocano success stories was President Ferdinand Marcos, who ruled for 20 years. During this time, development funds poured into the Ilocos region.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The three provinces of the Ilocano homeland (Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, and La Union) stretch from Cape Bojeador at the northwestern tip of Luzon down to the Gulf of Lingayen. Most of the population is concentrated along a narrow coastal plain that has only a few good harbors. This environment yields sustenance only with difficulty, forcing Ilocanos to be hard working and thrifty and very often compelling them to seek employment outside from their homeland.

According to the 2000 census, Ilocanos numbered 6.89 million (9% of the national population). Among all Filipino ethnolinguistic groups, the Ilocanos are the most famed as migrants, settling since the 19th century in sparsely populated expanses of the northern Central Plain of Luzon (provinces of Pangasinan, Tarlac, and Nueva Ecija) and of the Cagayan Valley in the northeast. In addition, many Ilocanos have established themselves in Manila and other major cities of the country, as well as in frontier lands on Mindanao. In 2000, Ilocanos were the majority group in the Ilocos region at 66.36%. They were the largest single ethnic group in the Cordillera Administrative Region, 39.83% of the population, twice the largest indigenous group, the Kankanay, and formed 11.48% of the population of Central Luzon, with 40.9% in Tarlac, almost as numerous there as Kapampangan, and 19.3% in Nueva Ecija. In Southern Mindanao, Ilocanos formed 11.48% of the population (as high as 17.7% in Sultan Kudarat).

Working as migrant laborers on sugar plantations in Hawaii and Guam and on farms in California since the first decades of the 20th century, Ilocano males constituted the first major influx of Filipinos into the United States; every Ilocano town has its "Hawaiianos," returned migrants who set up households with wives from their native place whom they have often courted by letter. Out-migration continues, though now

women working as domestic servants in Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Gulf States are a significant component as well.

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Ilocanos speak a Western Austronesian language of the Northern Philippine group, whose closest relatives are the languages of neighboring mountain peoples. Ilocano has become the lingua franca of northern Luzon, with as many as 2.3 million second-language speakers, as Ilocano traders have long provided highland peoples with their primary link to the commerce of the outside world.

### <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

According to one Ilocano origin myth, a giant named Aran built the sky and hung the sun, moon, and stars in it. Under their light, Aran's companion, the giant Angalo, could see the land, which he then molded into mountains and valleys. The giants found the world they had created windswept and desolate. Angalo spat on the earth, and from his spit emerged the first man and woman. He placed them in a bamboo tube that he tossed into the sea. The bamboo washed up on the shore of the Ilocos region, and from this couple came the Ilocano people.

Like other Filipinos, Ilocanos recognize an array of supernatural beings [see **Filipinos**], such as the *katawtaw-an* (the spirits of infants, who died unbaptized and who in turn victimize newborns). The *karkarma*, the souls of living persons, leave the body at death but linger in the house until after the post-funerary offerings of food are made to the deceased; sensed as a scent of perfume, the odor of a burning candle, or a strange draft of wind, they visit relatives who have failed to come to the sickbed of the deceased. The *al-alia*, the spirit doubles of humans, appear at their human doubles' death as the groaning of the dying, the cracking of glass, the rattling of beds, and the banging of doors, or in the form (at night) of a grunting pig, howling dog, or a crowing chicken. These signs remind the living to pray to God for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins (otherwise, the *al-alia* may visit misfortunes upon them).

### <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

### <sup>6</sup> MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

### <sup>7</sup> RITES OF PASSAGE

Although today they are free to choose their own marriage partners, young people seek to secure the approval of both sets of parents. After gaining the consent of his own parents, who are to pay the dowry and finance the wedding, the boy makes a formal announcement (*panagpudno*) to the girl's parents of his and their daughter's intention to marry. The next stage is for the boy's parents to visit the girl's parents in order to set the date for the wedding with the aid of a *planetario*, an almanac identifying auspicious days. At a further meeting (*palalian* or *ringpas*), the boy and his kin come to the girl's house to finalize the wedding arrangements; each party employs a spokesperson who negotiates for his or her side in formal, metaphorical language. The families set the choice of wedding sponsors (an equal number [10–50] for each side), the dowry (land for the



couple, or the money to buy such land), the *sagut* (the wedding dress, jewelry, and accessories, which the groom is to provide for the bride), and the *parawad* (cash that the groom gives the bride's mother as a reward for raising his bride).

The wedding feast (following the church ceremony) includes a ritual where the groom offers the bride a plate of mung beans (symbolizing fertility). The bride refuses the dish several times before finally accepting it. Then the bride offers the beans to the groom who in turn refuses the dish until an old man calls an end to the ritual (the pleadings and feigned refusals greatly amuse the onlookers). Another highlight is the *bitor*: guests contribute cash to the newlyweds either by dropping money

onto plates held by two men seated on a mat (representing the bride and groom, respectively) or by pinning bills to the couple's clothing while the two dance (groom's kin on the bride and the bride's kin on the groom). After the wedding, offerings of rice cakes are made to the spirits of departed family members.

To announce a death formally, a piece of wood (*atong*) is lit in front of the deceased's house and kept burning until after burial, at which time it is extinguished with rice wine. The corpse (kept in the house) is dressed in its best clothes and a kerchief is tied around the jaw to prevent the tongue from showing; a basin of water mixed with vinegar is placed under the bed to remove the odor of death. Money is placed in the coffin to pay the "ferry man" who brings the soul to the other world. In the days before burial, relatives keep vigil over the body, wailing and recounting the deceased's good deeds. Sometimes, professional mourners perform the lamentation (*dung-aw*).

Before the funeral itself, each of the relatives pays their last respects by kissing the deceased's hand or raising it to his or her forehead. Extreme care is taken in bringing the body from the house to the church; any mishap or faux pas could cause premature death. After the church ceremony, the relatives pose as a group for souvenir photos with the coffin. Everyone in the procession to the cemetery must return to the deceased's home by a different route from the one taken there. Upon arrival, they must wash their faces and hands in order to remove the power of death.

See also the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## **8** INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Ilocanos share the same basic values as other Filipinos [see **Filipinos**], such as *bain*, which corresponds to *hiya* or *amor propio* ("face" or "sense of shame"). The fear of gossip and the desire to avoid the envy of others serve as strong pressures for conformity. Before pushing through with his or her own plans, a person feels *alumiim*, the need to figure out how others will react first in order to avoid embarrassment. It is essential to show *panagdayaw*, proper respect for the sensitivities of others; this requires that individuals speak about themselves only in the humblest of terms. Although Ilocanos are group-oriented, they also value a certain individualism (*agwayas*): one should not reveal his or her inner intentions to others, since it is unwise to be too trusting. A person is expected to overcome life's challenges through his or her own hard work, limiting his or her dependence on others to obtaining aid from close kin. However, Ilocanos do form savings associations (including as many as 50 women in a neighborhood), mutual-aid associations (financing members' major celebrations), and labor-exchange arrangements.

Life-passage parties and fiestas provide teenage boys and girls their main opportunity to chat and joke, as girls are confined to work in the house rather than the fields. For a boy to initiate a courtship is a serious matter, as the only proper end is marriage. On his first visit to the house of the girl of his interest, the boy brings one or two companions so that he can get their opinion of the girl later. During the second visit, the companions excuse themselves to allow the boy to confess his feelings to the girl (afterwards, he visits her alone). Love notes are also an important means of courtship. A girl is careful to

preserve her chastity in case the courtship does not end in marriage.

## **9** LIVING CONDITIONS

Raised 0.6 m to 1 m (2–3 ft) off the ground, houses have beams of wood, walls of bamboo, and roofs of rice straw or cogon grass. Sometimes, newly married children may live in roofed extensions. On the *bangsál*, a landing on the staircase, guests wait before being admitted and wash or wipe their feet before entering the receiving room. Curtains or bamboo partitions separate the living room from the bedroom areas (most have beds but prefer sleeping mats). A separate storage room also serves for a place to change clothes. In traditional dwellings, outhouses provide toilet facilities.

Average family income in the Ilocos region was 142,000 pesos (us\$2,784), while that in the Cagayan valley, the other region with an Ilocano majority, was ₱143,000 (us\$2,804). These ranked respectively eighth highest in the country out of 17 regions and sixth (tied with Northern Mindanao), cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog's ₱198,000, and SOCCSKARGEN's (Southern Mindanao)'s ₱114,000. In 2000, Ilocos Norte province in the Ilocos region and Isabela province in the Cagayan Valley had Human Development Indices (combining measures of health, education, and income) that were among the top ten in the country. Ilocos Norte ranked seventh at 0.689, higher than the national HDI of 0.656, and Isabela ranked tenth, slightly lower.

According to the 2000 census, in Ilocos Norte province (Ilocos Sur and La Union provinces have similar statistics), the proportion of houses with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum reached 86.3% and with a roof of grass or palm thatch 10.12% (cf. 76.3% and 20.6% respectively in 1990). Over half of houses (52%, up from 27.1% in 1990) had outer walls entirely of concrete, brick, or stone, 22.9% of houses had outer walls that were half wood and half concrete, brick, or stone, 7.3% of houses had wooden outer walls, and 15.3% outer walls of bamboo or thatch.

In 2000, 8.9% of households in the Ilocos region had access to a community faucet, 16.8% to a faucet of their own, 25.7% to a shared deep well, and 23.3% to a household deep well, while 2.3% obtained their water from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. A third of households (66.4%) disposed of their garbage by burning it, 12.5% by dumping it in a household pit, and 4.9% by composting it; only 11% had it picked up by a collection truck. 17.1% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 79.3% with electricity, and 2.5% with firewood. Four out of five households (79.9%) possessed a radio, over three out of five (62.3%) a television, over one out of three (34.4%) a refrigerator, one out of five (20.4%) a VCR, nearly one out of seven (13.9%) a telephone or cell phone, and one out of six a washing machine (16.5%) and a motorized vehicle (16.9%).

## **10** FAMILY LIFE

The structure of the Ilocano family conforms to the general Filipino pattern [see **Filipinos**]. The father is the formal head of family, backing up the mother who disciplines the children and manages the house finances. The eldest child divides the chores equally among siblings. Grandparents tend to be more indulgent of grandchildren than the parents themselves.

## 11 CLOTHING

Dress inappropriate for one's age or perceived wealth or status attracts gossip: "mabiag ti ruar ngem matay ti uneg" ("outwardly alive, but inwardly dying"); "uray napintas no inutang" ("even if it is nice, it is acquired through credit"). Still, one should dress well for special celebrations. Everyday wear, especially at home, consists of short pants for boys, and dusters, loose skirts, shirts, and short pants for girls. Those working in the fields wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and a wide-brimmed hat as protection against the sun and mud.

During the rainy season, people wear a headdress of labig *leaves* extending well down the back. Older women wear their hair long and knotted in a bun, while men keep it short and apply pomade on special occasions.

See also the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 12 FOOD

Ilocano food essentially resembles that elsewhere in the country [see **Filipinos**], but Ilocanos are especially fond of *bagoong* (a salty shrimp or fish paste). One regional specialty that has entered national cuisine is *pinakbet*, which is eggplant, bitter melon, okra, and green beans cooked with bagoong, tomatoes, and a little water (dried or broiled fish, meat, or shrimps can be added to enhance taste).

Other favorites are *dinardaraan* (cooked pig's blood, called *dinuguan* in Tagalog-Pilipino) and *kilawen* (the lean meat and intestines of water buffalo, cow, sheep, or goat, eaten raw or partially cooked with a sauce of vinegar, salt, hot pepper, and pig's bile).

Eating with their hands, family members squat around the food laid out on the floor or take food and eat in different parts of the main room. As food is regarded as a symbol of God's grace, there should be no noise, laughing, singing, or harsh words (including parents scolding children) while eating is going on. One should not drop food on the table or floor, or the food "will be angered and leave the household." Similarly, no one should leave the house while someone is still eating, for God's grace will go with him or her, out of the home.

## 13 EDUCATION

In the Ilocos region, the literacy level was 95.23% in 2000, higher than the national figure; in the Cagayan Valley, it was 91.75%. See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ilocanos have an epic, the *Biag ni Lam-ang* ("The Life of Lam-ang"), which, however, exists only in the form of a highly Hispanicized metrical romance composed in the 19th century. Ilocos is also the only place in the country where the *zarzuela* (operetta) is still performed.

See also the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 15 WORK

Almost all farmers (the major occupation) own the land they till, except for those who are tenants of owners who are urban professionals. The staple crop is rice, though poorer people must mix cheaper maize with their rice. Root crops are also grown both as a supplement to the diet and for sale. Watered by wet-season rains or irrigation, wet-rice fields range from small plots that can only be worked with a hoe or dibble stick

to those large enough for a water-buffalo-drawn plow; dry-rice agriculture is also practiced in the hilly areas between the flatlands. Crops grown for market include tobacco, garlic (both Ilocos specialties), onions, and vegetables. Petty traders may travel as far as Manila to sell such products.

Farmers fish during the lull between planting and harvesting, usually in close offshore waters, rivers, or fishponds. An important part of the catch are *ipon*, small fish for *bagoong* (fish paste).

Cottage industries include salt making, *basi*-making (alcohol from molasses), pottery making (20 different types are produced in San Nicolas), weaving, basket- and mat-weaving, woodworking, and silversmithing.

## 16 SPORTS

One uniquely Ilocano game is *kukudisi*. A stick (the *an-anak*) is placed on a baseline scratched into the ground. One player makes the stick jump in the air; the other player tries to catch it before it hits the ground. If the latter cannot do so, a second, longer stick (the *in-ina*) is laid across the baseline; the player then tries to hit it with the *an-anak*. The next two phases of the game involve competing to see who can hit the *an-anak* (which has been tossed in the air and stuck into the baseline, respectively) with the *in-ina* the furthest.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Children enjoy such games as *balay-balay* (playing house), hide-and-seek, team-tag, jumping "hurdles" (sticks or outstretched arms or legs), and jacks.

See also the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

According to the 2000 census, in the Ilocos region, the ratio of men to women was 100.76; in the Cagayan Valley, the ratio was 104.98 (possibly reflecting the latter area being one of in-migration that has been more male than female). In Ilocos, overall literacy rates were nearly as high for women (95.04%) as for men (95.41%). In a major change from the pattern from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1980s of male sojourning abroad for work, the majority of overseas workers from Ilocos in 2000 were women (61.75%); in the age bracket 20-24, 71.8% were women. Women, including female migrants from Ilocos, also heavily predominate in the work force of multinational corporations' factories in export-processing zones in other regions of the Philippines itself. With drops in the prices of the region's cash crops such as garlic and tobacco and in the demand for construction workers in the Gulf States and the continuing failure of the Philippine economy to generate sufficient urban jobs, unemployment among young men has been high in recent decades: many joke about becoming mail-order "house husbands" for Filipinas in the United States.

There is no cultural preference for having boys instead of girls. Indeed, families prefer girls because one can marry them off to other families, thereby expanding their networks of in-

fluence and assistance, without incurring the burden of paying the “male dowry” (sab-ong) for sons. Traditional Ilocano ideals of manly and womanly behavior do not entirely fit stereotypes of machismo/hyper masculinity and femininity seen in many other societies. In courtship, women appraise men’s physical characteristics as freely and frankly as women do men’s. Women are thought of as no less vulnerable to the seductions of male beauty and charm as men are to women’s. For Ilocanos, ideal manliness includes the possession of verbal grace, used to woo a potential bride or displayed to keep an appearance of good humor when provoked in public. Young boys, who are competitive with each other, are not allowed to act aggressively towards girls. Masculinity is defined by emotional availability, rather than distance and coldness, even towards other men. It is common for groups of unmarried men in their twenties and thirties to sleep together without this thought of as homoerotic. Women share in agricultural chores, and men in household chores, including sweeping, cooking, and childcare. Women’s entrepreneurship, to which women are trained from when they are little girls playing managerial games, contributes indispensably to most households, and some families are even supported primarily by the wife/mother’s earnings with the husband/father staying at home to performing most of the domestic tasks.

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—revised by A. J. Abalahin

# I LONG OT

**PRONUNCIATION:** ee-LAWN-goht

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bugkalut

**LOCATION:** Philippines (northern Luzon)

**POPULATION:** 50,786 (1990)

**LANGUAGE:** Ilongot

**RELIGION:** Native beliefs; Protestantism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos; Kalinga; Ifugao

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Although sharing certain affinities with the swidden-farming (shifting-cultivation) Northern group of Cordillera peoples [see **Kalinga** and **Ifugao**], the Ilongot stand apart even from them in their extreme egalitarianism and relative cultural simplicity (in some ways comparable to the Dumagat Negritos with whom some of them have mixed). The question remains whether the culture of the “Bugkalut” (as they call themselves; the lowlander name “Ilongot” comes from *irungut*, “forest people”) is actually a largely unchanged survival of ancient north Luzon, culture or rather a version of a more complex culture pared down to the essentials in the process of the people’s self-isolation.

Although Spanish soldiers and missionaries had penetrated the upper Cagayan valley by the beginning of the 17th century, they had little impact on the Ilongot whose reputation as a fierce, wild, and unsubjected people endured well into the American period and the Japanese occupation, when a third of the group are said to have perished in fighting the new invaders. The Ilongot even avoided the trade relations with lowlanders that other independent tribes deemed indispensable.

The latter relationship is very concisely reflected in an Ilongot creation myth recorded by Laurence Wilson in the 1940s. According to this myth, the creators and guardians of all things are two quarreling brothers, Caín and Abál (the biblical Cain and Abel in Spanish). Caín is the ancestor of the Ilongot, who like him are killers and headhunters. Abál, on the other hand, is the ancestor of the lowlanders, who have inherited his mastery of water buffalo and other domesticated animals. In the Ilongot telling, Abál is the stronger of the two brothers, which explains the superior power of the lowlanders.

The arrival in recent decades of the lumbering industry and the airstrips of the New Tribes Mission (Protestant) have ended Ilongot isolation. In any case, farmers of Christian ethnic groups are encroaching inexorably upon Ilongot territory. Violent confrontations between Ilongot and settlers have been frequent and even reached the notice of the national press in the 1960s. In Nueva Vizcaya province, the Ilongot now comprise a tiny proportion of the population, less than one half of one percent in 2000 if one counts only those self-identifying as Bugkalut; though that year’s census’ category of “Other,” largely composed of groups indigenous to the province itself, amounted to 8.2%.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Ilongot (numbering 50,786 in 1990) inhabit an 840-sq-km (325-sq-mi) area of rolling hills 0.3 m to 900 m (1–3,000 ft) above sea level in southern Nueva Vizcaya province at the point where the Cordillera Central through the Caraballo

Range connects to the Sierra Madre running down Luzon's east coast; these lands are drained by the headwaters of the Cagayan. A group of modernized Ilongot live along Baler Bay. Christian Gaddang, Isinai, Tagalog, and Ilocanos have settled the surrounding lowlands.

1970s figures estimated the number of Ilongot at around 2,500. According to the 2000 census, 1,180 inhabitants of Nueva Vizcaya province identified themselves as Bugkalut (i.e. as Ilongot). Another 2000 estimate counted 50,786 Ilongot (the discrepancy among the figures may be attributed to different criteria for defining an Ilongot—almost 30,000 people in Nueva Vizcaya province and over 14,000 in Quezon province were classified as “Other” [indigenous ethnicity] and not as Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Ifugao, Ibaloi, Ayangan, or Bugkalut, suggesting that people who might be classified as Ilongot did not identify themselves as Bugkalut).

### 3 LANGUAGE

By linguists' estimates, the Ilongot language has developed separately from other Philippine languages for over 3,000 years (in comparison, Bontok and Ifugao were a single tongue only 1,000 years ago). Among its peculiarities is its numeral system that counts thus: numbers one through five are each expressed by distinct words, but six through nine are expressed as “five and one,” etc. Higher numbers are composed along similar lines: 49, for example, is “fifty and five and four,” 60 is “fifty and ten.”

### 4 FOLKLORE

Folktales (*dimolot*) are the principal entertainment of the Ilongot, either in a short form told by individuals taking a short rest together or otherwise meeting each other by chance, or in a long form reserved to pass long evenings or periods of torrential rains. The long form involves an old woman or man with a wealth of lore at her or his disposal singing tales that freely mix supernatural, human, and animal characters and highlight practical jokes. The storytellers embroider the basic plot with repetitions and minor happenings (often for comic relief) and draw out final syllables or add meaningless words to conform to the fixed melody; listeners enjoy the style of presentation rather than the mere content.

### 5 RELIGION

Ilongot recognize a range of supernatural beings including a creator-overseer deity associated with the sun, as well as ancestral spirits. They are most concerned, however, with nature spirits and illness-giving spirits. The most powerful and feared is 'Agimeng, the “companion of the forest,” guardian of hunting and headhunting but also a giver of disease; his female counterpart holds dominion over cultivated fields. Usually associated with geographical features, disease-giving spirits are identified with typical symptoms and the plants that cure them, and, as familiars, may develop an association with particular individuals.

While dreams may lead a person to health or hunting charms, visions and illness itself introduce many people to such spiritual familiars. Only a few such people become shamans qualified to perform diagnostic and curing rites, preside over special chants, and summon the souls of future headhunting victims. Those cured by a shaman can share in the power of the spiritual familiar and thus can conduct minor



rituals themselves. Other supernatural skills that individuals may possess are sucking out disease and using a bow to tell the future.

Disease usually arises from spirits licking or urinating on a victim, although harm may also come from deceased ancestors who long for the company of the living, or from guardian spirits of field and forest who feel abused by humans in some way. Healing rites first invoke the spirits and then expel them by manipulating plants (of which 700 kinds are in use); they may also entail threatening the spirits, blowing them away, steaming them out, bathing to wash them out, beating them out, or drinking to purge them out. One can also burn or beat a conta-

gious plant in order to eliminate the symptom. Rites may also turn a sickness back on the spirit that had caused it.

Since the 1950s, Protestant missionaries have been making conversions among the Ilongot.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Harvest rituals are the only regular communal rites. Others include occasional headhunting and peacemaking rites.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A first ear-piercing takes place for girls when they are babies and for boys before their teens. At age 15, boys and girls may choose to have their teeth filed and blackened; one has this done only to beautify oneself, although feasting and oath-taking accompany the operation. As headhunters, all young men should succeed in taking a head, preferably before marrying.

Adolescents of the opposite sex may exchange betel and sleep together before being recognized as couples. An informal association involving casual field help (from the male), gifts, and sex is the prelude to formal wedding negotiations. A pregnancy generates tensions between the families, leading to both gift-giving and threats of violence, which are usually only resolved through marriage.

The *langu* or bride-price is meant to quell the anger of the woman's kinfolk and may include payments to members of distant *behrtan* that can claim a connection to her. The negotiation of *langu* and the protracted period of paying it gives kinfolk a chance to air grievances and settle them by mollifying the aggrieved parties with *langu* goods. Beginning with a *pu'rut*, an initial (often hostile) confrontation between the man's and the woman's parties, *langu* installments include guns, bullets, metal pots, cloth, jewelry, and knives. At a series of *pi'yat* meetings, the man's side presents meat and goods to the in-laws and finally "buys the woman." The woman's side then returns this by an *arakad*, bringing pounded rice and liquor to the man's kin.

Each person possesses a spirit that roams away from the body during sleep and survives death as an entity dangerous to the living. Funerary rites aim to banish the deceased's spirit through ritual sweeping, smoking, bathing, and invocation.

The corpse is wrapped in bark or put in a box to be buried near the home in a sitting position or curled on its right side; valuable goods are hung on a post at the foot of the grave. The corpses of young children are enshrouded in bark and placed high in trees, for proximity to the earth is thought to be painful and perilous for them.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Ilongot society has been described as an ordered anarchy where all persons are equal and recognize no authority figures. In practice, leadership in a community tends to come from a set of brothers who are skilled in oratory (*purung*) and possess knowledge of genealogy and customary law. There is no organization encompassing more than an individual community, although several settlements may recognize a common *behrtan* (local community) allegiance; in all, there are 13 such *behrtan*, each with its own name and dialect.

As Ilongot society has no hierarchy in which superiors command the obedience of inferiors, each man must rely on his personal eloquence to persuade his fellows to follow a course of action that he desires. At public gatherings, a man attempts to

move those present toward a consensus, one to which they may individually already be inclined, as he finds out in prior discussions with each one; consensus is essential since no sanctions can be applied to compel anyone to do anything. Such discussions are exclusively a male affair, as women claim not to understand *purung*, much less to be capable of it.

The settling of disputes or grievances involves the exchange of betel, swearing by salt, and animal sacrifices. The victim of petty theft may demand that the accused submit to trial by ordeal.

In conferences between settlements (such as for peacemaking), those most adept at *purung* in one settlement pit themselves against their counterparts in the other. Bride-price negotiations provide an occasion for parties to demand redress of past grievances or recompense for contributing to previous bride-prices.

Among the Ilongot, every male is expected to headhunt, preferably before marrying, and most contemporary men have done so. Unlike in other headhunting cultures, the Ilongot do not take heads as magic to increase the fertility of the soil, to gain personal spiritual potency, to gain social distinction, nor exclusively to pursue a vendetta. A man takes heads in order to "relieve his heart" from an anxiety, the source of which may be a death in his own household or an unsettled feud. Often, a man makes a *binatan*, an oath of personal sacrifice, e.g., not to eat rice from the granary or to avoid sex until taking a head. Taking a head gives a young man the right to wear prestigious cowrie shells, feathers, and red hornbill ornaments. The act does significantly raise the young man's status, but as all males have experienced it, this merely maintains the egalitarianism of society as a whole.

Men may headhunt solo or in raiding parties of up to 40 individuals. Prior to setting out, the men gather in front of a house, and a shaman summons the souls of the victims into a bamboo receptacle. In the forest, the men listen for bird omens and may play the death-associated violin or reed flute. Distinctions to be sought include being the first to strike or shoot, to reach a felled body, to cut a head, and/or to fling the head away. The heads are not kept as in cultures where the skulls would be preserved as a status symbol or source of spiritual power, although the men may bring victims' hands back for the children to chop up. The return of the headhunters to the settlement is celebrated with singing, dancing, and slaughtering a pig.

Peace between warring parties is achieved through a series of debates and exchanges, after which members of the two groups may visit each other, enter into marriage with each other, or even go on joint raids on other groups. However, if no intermarriage takes place, hostilities resume within two generations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

A settlement consists of four to nine households (five to nine nuclear families, totaling 40 to 70 persons). Initially, the houses are rarely adjacent but always within calling distance of each other. Over time, as each household abandons old fields and opens new ones, the houses relocate nearer the new fields, until the settlement becomes more and more dispersed (by the same token, as long-fallow fields are reclaimed, the houses may approach each other again). The only instance of concentrated



settlements is the clusters of houses near the New Tribes Mission's airstrips.

A house (*kamari*) has a square floor plan, is raised 2 m to 5 m (6–15 ft) off the ground, and has walls of woven grass or bamboo and a pyramidal or single-ridged roof. An unpartitioned central space is edged by a slightly raised wooden platform where the hearths are located (up to three hearths, one for each resident nuclear family). The Ilongot also build smaller, temporary field houses (*'abun*).

*Nueva Vizcaya province is poor compared to other provinces of the Cagayan Valley region, itself tied with Northern Mindanao for sixth highest in average annual family income. According to the 2000 census, 50.8% of houses were lit with electricity, compared to 70% in neighboring Isabela province. 15.3% of households obtained water from springs, lakes, or rivers, compared to 1.9% in Isabela.*

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Marriage between second cousins is the preferred pattern. As it is usual for a particular set of brothers to offer leadership in a community, marrying that set of brothers with a set of sisters (also their close cousins) is also common.

Peculiarities of Ilongot kinship terminology include a single term covering grandparents, parents-in-law, and children-in-law (*'apu*) and a single term for a sibling's spouse and a spouse's sibling (*'aum*). One must not refer to one's 'aum by name and must treat her or him with particular respect. Although sex with one's 'aum is forbidden, a surviving spouse often weds a sibling of the deceased spouse.

One to three nuclear families live under a single roof, each with its own hearth and sleeping area. These nuclear families tend to consist of the parents' family and the families of the youngest married daughters. Sons leave home when they marry, but daughters stay in the parental home, leaving only when younger daughters marry and bring in their husbands. A married couple can only return to the man's birth community when he has paid up the bride-price.

In situations such as attempting to make persuasive arguments in public debates (e.g., bride-price negotiations), an individual finds it useful to claim affiliation with one or more *behrtan*. At its simplest, the *behrtan* is a grouping of several settlements that has a collective name, usually referring to a landmark, a plant, a color, or a place, and its own dialect; it is the local group within which one tends to marry and upon whose members revenge (head-taking) can be taken for the crime of one of its members. An individual inherits the right to claim connection to a *behrtan* from either parent and may claim as many as four such connections (via the four grandparents). A woman prefers to take her mother's *behrtan*, while a man prefers not only to take his father's *behrtan* but also to pass it on to his children, which is only possible after he has paid up the bride-price. The *behrtan*, it should be stressed, is not a corporate group of any kind; very often it is merely a way of defining an interest group of the moment (such as the two parties in bride-price negotiations), and a stranger entering a discussion and asserting solidarity with one of the parties may claim a *behrtan* connection that no genealogy grants him or her.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Ilongot clothing consists of lengths of bark pounded to the consistency of soft leather. Men wear a length of cloth passed between the legs and secured with a belt of rattan or brass wire. Women wear a short sarong (waist to knees) along with earrings, bead necklaces, and brass wire spiraling over the arms. Children go naked.

### **12 FOOD**

The staple food is rice eaten with vegetables (root crops are a secondary source of starch). Wild plants, such as fruits, ferns, and hearts of palm, are also gathered for food.

For animal protein, Ilongot eat wild pigs, deer, and fish but do not eat the meat of the pigs and chickens that they raise for sale to lowlanders; domestic animals are said to eat excrement and thus should not be consumed. Essential to hunting, dogs live inside the house and are never eaten.

While eating with the hands from flat lengths of leaf is found widely in Southeast Asia, the Ilongot also fashion disposable cups for vegetable broth from the *anahao* leaf.

Ilongot make *basi*, alcohol from sugarcane, and the men often get together to have drinking sessions.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Ilongot isolation has meant that modern education has not reached them as it has most other Filipinos, lowlanders, and highlanders, Christian and non-Christian alike, although Protestant missions are offering some Ilongot exposure to it.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Musical instruments include the bamboo flute, brass gongs, a bamboo-tube zither, and a kind of violin with a body of bark and animal skin and strings of women's hair. Young men play such instruments while courting young women. Gatherings feature singing with alternating groups (antiphonal) and dances of which there are many kinds, e.g., female group dances, a male solo, or men dancing while beating hand-held gongs.

### **15 WORK**

Ilongot cultivate dry-rice, maize, and cassava side by side on swidden fields. After the harvest, they plant such fields with tobacco and vegetables. When the field is about to be abandoned, it is given over to sweet potatoes, bananas, and sugarcane. A given field may be worked from one to five years, depending on its fertility. When its fertility is exhausted, the farmer moves on to clear another plot out of the forest, going as far as 32 km (20 mi) away and returning to the first spot only after 8 to 10 fallow years. Land belongs to the individual who clears it for use and may be reopened and cultivated by anyone else at a later date. In general having little inherited property, Ilongot do not bequeath agricultural lands. Because of low population density in their territory, wild land is always available. Gathering forest plants also contributes to the diet.

Twice a week, groups of men hunt game with dogs, dividing the meat equally among the householders. The meat obtained in three- to five-day hunting expeditions without dogs is the personal property of the hunter and is dried in strips to be sold or traded. Fishing ranges from individuals using nets, traps, and spears to groups of up to 250 men cooperating to catch

fish by damming streams or employing poisons. The catch is divided equally.

The Ilongot trade baskets and metalwork among themselves, but most such wares circulate as part of bride-prices or inter-kin gifts. Ilongot barter dried meat, captured fawns, pigs, and chickens for bullets, liquor, cloth, salt, and knives from lowlanders. To conduct these exchanges, Ilocano or Tagalog traders come to the borders of Ilongot territory, and Ilongot go down to the lowland towns.

## 16 SPORTS

While girls play with rag dolls, boys enjoy shooting contests with miniature bows and arrows made by their father for them when they reach the age of four. Boys also like to climb trees and play tag in them.

Adult Ilongot are known to use a 12-m (40-ft) length of rattan with a hook at one end and a loop at the other to move through the trees. Clinging to one tree, they cast this flexible "rope" to catch on to another tree. In this way, Ilongot can travel through dense forest very rapidly. This, however, is not a sport so much as an efficient way of working (as when a man wants to cut branches from trees that will later be felled to open a field).

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Ilongot entertain themselves primarily by telling folktales.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Among the Ilongot, there are no specializations: each man forges his own knives, hoes, and picks and weaves his own rattan baskets; each woman weaves and sews clothing for her own family.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The increasing invasion of Ilongot territory by other ethnic groups sparks violent confrontations between the Ilongot and the new settlers. This violence is bound to continue for some time to come.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Discussions that seek to build consensus on a common course of action are regarded as exclusively a male affair, since women claim not to understand, much less be capable of, the purung (oratory) necessary to persuade other.

According to the 2000 census, among the Ilongot self-identifying as Bugkalut, men slightly (51.7%) outnumbered women. In the Nueva Vizcaya population as a whole, more women had a college undergraduate education or higher and received more academic degrees than men by a substantial margin; elementary school completion, a measure likely more relevant to the Bugkalut, was lower for girls than for boys (53.3% of elementary school graduates were male while only 51% of the population was male). Women tend to invoke connections with their mother's behrtan, men with their father's (see "Interpersonal Relationships").

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—revised by A. Abalahin

# PEOPLE OF INDIA

**PRONUNCIATION:** IN-dee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Indians

**LOCATION:** India

**POPULATION:** About 1.32 billion (2007 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Hindi (majority official language); English (co-official language); the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, modified by several constitution amendments the most recent of which was in 2003, lists 22 official languages, namely Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, cMaithilm, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. In addition, states can have their own official languages that are not necessarily listed in the Constitution. Several states have adopted official languages that are not so listed, including Kokborok in Tripura, Mizo in Mizoram, Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia in Meghalaya, and French in Pondicherry.

**RELIGION:** Hinduism (80.5%); Islam (13.4%); Christianity (2.3%); Sikhism (1.9%); Buddhism (0.1.5%); Jainism (0.5%); some Jews, Parsis (Zoroastrians), and animistic tribal peoples

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Asian Indian Americans; Hindus in Guyana. Vol. 3: Ahir; Andras; Anglo-Indian; Brahmans; Chamar; Gonds; Goanese; Gujar; Jain; Jat; Khasi; Koli; Vol. 4: Lingayat; Maratha/Kunbi; Minas; Mundas; Nagas; Punjabi; Rajput; Santals; Sikh; Syrian Christians; Tamils; Todas; Veddass.

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Indians are citizens of the Republic of India, the largest country in South Asia. In the past, however, the name was used for inhabitants of the entire Indian subcontinent. The word “Indian” comes from *Sindhu*, the local name for the Indus River (now in Pakistan). The Persians called the river *Hindu*, which passed to the Greeks as *Indos*. “India” was thus the region of the Indos, and “Indian” came to describe the peoples of the area. The words *Hindu* and *Hinduism* are also derived from this source. The ancient Indians called their land *Bharat* or *Bharatavarsa* (“Land of the sons of Bharata,” a legendary emperor). *Bharat* is now the official Hindi name of modern India.

The peoples of India have a long and complex history that extends over 5,000 years. They are successors to the advanced urban civilization that flourished along the Indus Valley during the 3rd millennium BC. This Harappan civilization disappeared in the years following 1700 BC when nomadic tribes from Central Asia settled in northwestern India. These groups, referred to (somewhat loosely) as the Aryans, evolved religious, social, and economic structures that give Hindu civilization its distinctive character.

The subsequent history of India is one of waves of invaders sweeping through the northwestern mountains onto the Indo-Gangetic plains. The Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Kushans, and White Huns were some of the groups that left their imprint on the region. At times, powerful Indian states such as the Mauryan (321–181 BC) and Gupta (AD 319–c. 500) empires stemmed the flow of invaders. When they weakened, however,

their frontiers again came under threat from the northwest. It was through these same mountains that Muslim conquerors entered India at the beginning of the 11th century AD. The earliest of these incursions were merely raids led by Mahmoud of Gazni, a Turkish leader who invaded India no less than 17 times, to pillage the wealth of the Indian plains, but under Mahmoud of Ghuri, the Muslims sought to establish themselves in India. Resisted at first by the Chauhan Rajputs who controlled the northwestern India, the Ghurids eventually defeated Prithviraj Chauhan at the 2nd Battle of Tarain in 1192 and captured Delhi. For almost eight centuries from this date, Muslims ruled in north India, with their capital in Delhi. Invasions of various peoples continued through the northwest passes until 1526, when Babur captured Delhi from the Lodis and founded the Mughal dynasty. Although they were based in Delhi, the Mughals made Agra their capital from 1526 to 1685 with nearby Fatehpur Sikri, later abandoned largely because of lack of water, being Akbar’s capital from 1571 to 1585. Mughals reigned in northern India until the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, was deposed in 1857 by the British and sent into exile in Burma (Myanmar). Under the Mughals, and particularly Akbar (reigned 1556–1605), Islam made important contributions to South Asian civilization. The Taj Mahal in Agra, perhaps the finest architectural achievement of the Muslims in India and named a World Heritage Site in 1982, was completed by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1648. India achieved an imperial greatness under Mughal rule virtually unmatched in the country’s history.

The Europeans reached South Asia by sea in 1498 when the Portuguese landed at Calicut on the southwest coast of India. Their prime motivation was trade, and within the next two centuries the maritime nations of Europe (Portugal, Holland, Britain, and France) had established trading posts or “factories” on India’s coasts. By the middle of the 18th century, the British East India Company had gained the upper hand over the French in India, but French (Pondicherry) and Portuguese (Goa, Daman & Diu) colonies survived on the subcontinent until the mid-20th century. Britain ultimately gained control of the entire region, either by directly administering Indian territory or by being recognized by independent native rulers as the paramount power in the region.

The political map of the Indian subcontinent, and many of its problems, originates in the country’s colonial past. The inability of the British, Hindu, and Muslim leaders to reach agreement on the nature of the successor state to the British Indian Empire resulted in the partition of the subcontinent into the separate nations of India and Pakistan in 1947. A direct consequence of this has been several wars between the two countries and the ongoing problem of Kashmir. The princely states of India, of which there were several hundred in 1947, were to decide at Partition to which country they would accede. Most Hindu states joined India and Muslim states joined Pakistan. But, while the population of Kashmir was primarily Muslim, its ruler was a Hindu Rajput. The Maharaja of Kashmir, one of the largest and most powerful of the Indian princely states, wished to remain independent and delayed signing the instrument of accession as long as possible. In October 1947, however, the newly constituted nation of Pakistan sent irregular Pathan tribesmen into Kashmiri territory, at which the Maharaja appealed to Lord Louis Mountbatten for help. The Governor-General of India agreed to provide help if Kash-



mir acceded to India, which the Maharaja did. Once the papers of accession to India were signed, Indian soldiers entered Kashmir with the order just to stop any further occupation by Pakistan but they were not allowed to drive out the invaders (by now the regular Pakistan army was involved) from the state. India took the matter to the United Nations. A UN resolution asked Pakistan to vacate the areas it had occupied and requested India to assist the UN Plebiscite Commission to organize a plebiscite (vote of the people) to determine the will of the people. Pakistan has refused to vacate the occupied areas and India has never held a plebiscite (understandably, since the majority of the Kashmiri population is Muslim). The Line of Control (LoC) divides the areas of Kashmir occupied by the two countries, with India controlling most of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan controlling some 30% of western areas of the region, in addition to what is known as the Northern Areas and Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir). For intermittent periods between 1957, when the state approved its own Constitution, to the death of Sheikh Abdullah (Chief Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir) in 1982, the state had alternating spells of stability and discontent. In the late 1980s however, simmering discontent over the high-handed policies of the Indian government and allegations of the rigging of the 1987 assembly elections triggered a violent uprising that was backed by Pakistan. Since then, the region has seen a prolonged, bloody conflict between Islamist militants and the Indian army. Both the militants and the army have been accused of widespread human rights abuse, includ-

ing abductions, massacres, rape, and looting. In 1999 Pakistani troops and Kashmiri militants infiltrated across the Line of Control in Kargil, resulting in conflict between India and Pakistan. U.S. diplomacy, and perhaps the threat of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, kept the conflict from expanding beyond Kargil.

A similar situation developed in central India in 1947. Hyderabad was an important Muslim state in central India and its ruler, the Nizam, wanted to either remain independent or to join Pakistan, neither of which the new Indian government could allow. In 1948, India sent its military into Hyderabad and integrated the state into the Republic of India.

Regular Indian and Pakistani troops fought wars in 1947–48, 1965, 1971 (when Bangladesh was created from East Pakistan) and the Kargil conflict in 1999.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The modern Republic of India occupies the greater part of the Indian subcontinent. Its area (3,166,414 sq km or 1,222,559 sq mi) is just over one-third the size of the United States. India's population of 1.32 billion people (2007 estimate) is the second largest in the world, behind China. The population of India is expected to exceed that of China by the year 2030.

India stretches from close to the equator to subtropical latitudes. Cape Comorin, the Indian peninsula's southern tip, lies at 8° N latitude. From there, the country extends northwards for 3,000 km (1,900 mi) to its border with China in the Himalayas and Karakoram Mountains. Pakistan lies to the west, with the international border running from the Arabian Sea through the Thar (Great Indian) Desert to the northern mountains. Some 2,900 km (1,800 mi) to the east, India shares borders with China and Myanmar (Burma). India also controls Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar islands, island groups lying in the Indian Ocean.

India falls into three broad geographical zones. In the north lie the majestic mountain ranges of the Himalayas. They run northwest to southeast for more than 2,400 km (1,500 mi) and contain many of the highest peaks in the world. Mt. Everest (on the Nepal-China border) is the world's highest mountain at 8,848 m (29,028 ft). The Himalayas are a transitional zone where the cultures of India and Central Asia meet. South of the mountains lie the Indo-Gangetic plains. With elevations mostly below 300 m (1,000 ft), these lands run in a broad arc from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal, along the valleys of the Indus and Ganges rivers. Except for the Thar Desert in the northwest, the plains are well watered and support the bulk of India's agriculture and population. The plains continue southwards along the coastal lowlands of the Indian peninsula and also eastwards along the valley of the Brahmaputra River. The third geographical region is formed by the Deccan Plateau, the uplands bordered by the Eastern and Western Ghats (mountains) that make up the interior of the Indian peninsula.

Every aspect of life in India is dominated by the seasonal rhythm of the monsoon. The winter sees bright, pleasant weather in most of the region. Mean monthly temperatures in northern areas drop below 21°C (70°F). Beginning in late February, temperatures rise steadily until May and June, when daily maximums in the northwestern plains exceed 46°C (115°F). The hot season ends with the onset of the rains. The monsoon reaches southwest India in late June and sweeps northwards, bringing torrential rains to much of the country. Cherrapun-

ji, in the northeast, is on record as the wettest place on earth, averaging nearly 1,150 cm (450 in) of rain annually. For three months, water is plentiful and the land is green with crops and vegetation. As September comes to a close, the rains die out and temperatures begin to drop with the approach of the cold season.

India's diverse environments are matched by the ethnic and cultural diversity of its peoples. All of the major physical types of the human race are present in the country's population. The Negritos, Negroids of small stature, are represented by the Andaman Islanders. The Proto-Australoid strain is seen in the tribal populations of southern and central India (e.g., the Mundas, the Oraons, and the Santals). The tribal peoples of the mountain belt show distinct Mongoloid features, as seen among the Bhutias of the Himalayas or the Nagas of the northeastern hills. By far the largest element in the population, however, is the Caucasoid group. The earliest Caucasoids to reach the subcontinent were moderate in stature and relatively dark complexioned. They are associated with the Dravidian languages and Dravidian culture of South India. The tall, fair, pastoralists who entered the subcontinent during the 2nd millennium BC and brought the Aryan languages with them are later Caucasoid elements in the population. They settled in northern India and are responsible for the Aryan culture of the north. Considerable mixing of peoples has occurred throughout the centuries and few "pure" racial types are found among the Indian population today.

India's ethnic diversity is accompanied by a complexity of culture that is unmatched anywhere in the world. India is less a country than a collection of countries, in the sense that there are many groups whose commitment to a regional cultural tradition is as great as, if not greater than, their identification with the nation. Thus one is a Bengali, a Tamil, a Punjabi, or a Gujarati. One speaks Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi, or Gujarati and shares in the literary, cultural, and historical traditions of the region. Each region has its own particular mix of religion, religious sects, castes, and economic and social relations that extends back over centuries.

Sizable Indian communities are found today in Nepal, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and the Middle Eastern countries. Further afield, Indians have emigrated to South Africa, Fiji, the West Indies, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Linguistic complexity is a distinguishing characteristic of Indian society. According to a Hindi proverb, "Every two miles the water doth change, and every four the dialect." The 2001 Census counted several hundred "mother-tongues." Even though this figure may include variants of the same dialect, or tongues spoken by only a small number of people, it does give some sense of the linguistic diversity of the region. Some 29 languages in India are each spoken by more than a million people.

Indian languages belong to four major linguistic families (i.e., groups of related languages that have a common ancestor). Austro-Asiatic languages (e.g., Munda, Ho, and Khasi) are spoken by tribal groups in central India and the northeastern hills. Bhotia and other languages in the mountain belt belong to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. Most Indians speak tongues belonging to the Aryan branch of the Indo-European family (e.g., Hindi and Bengali) or the Dravidian linguistic

family (Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam). The Aryan languages are found in northern India, while the Dravidian tongues are spoken in the South. Strictly speaking, "Aryan" and "Dravidian" are linguistic terms, though they are sometimes loosely used in the context of peoples or culture.

Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 41.03% of the population. English has associate official language status and is widely used for national, political, and business purposes. In addition, India has 21 other official languages: Assamese, spoken by 1.28% of the population, Bengali (8.11%), Bodo (0.013%), Dogri (0.22%), Gujarati (4.48%), Kannada (3.69%), Kashmiri (0.24%), Konkani (0.24%), Maithili (1.18%), Malayalam (3.21%), Manipuri (0.14%), Marathi (6.99%), Nepali (0.28%), Oriya (3.21%), Punjabi (2.83), Sanskrit (0%), Santhali (0.63%), Sindhi (0.25%), Tamil (5.91%), Telugu (7.19%), and Urdu (5.01). Sanskrit is listed in the 2001 Census as the mother tongue of only 14,000 people, but it is widely studied as the classical language of North India. Tamil has recently been classified as a classical language. Urdu, while written in the Arabic script, when spoken sounds the same as Hindustani, a bazaar dialect of standard Hindi-Urdu developed in northern India.

Hindi is written in the Deva Nagari script that is the same as that used for Sanskrit. Many other languages, e.g., Gujarati and Punjabi, have their own scripts and alphabets, some derived from Deva Nagari (mainly in north India) and others, such as Tamil and Kannada, using the cursive scripts more common in the south.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The myths and folk heroes of the Indian peoples tend to be associated with specific religions or regional cultural traditions. Thus Hindus have the elaborate mythology and folklore associated with their deities and epic literature. Muslims revere their Sufi mystics, and the Sikhs have their martyred Gurus. Tribal groups have their own myths and legends. Many folk heroes are identified with specific regional folk traditions. A few historical figures such as Shivaji, the 17th-century Maratha leader who challenged Mughal power and carved out the last important Hindu empire in India, have achieved the status of heroes among Indian nationalists.

The freedom fighters involved in the struggle against British imperialism in India are viewed by many Indians as national heroes. Subhas Chandra Bose led the Indian National Army (INA), made up of Indian soldiers captured by the Japanese, against the British during World War II. Others, many of whom were jailed by the British, were supporters of Gandhi's civil disobedience movement. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, known as Mahatma ("Great Soul"), is surely one of the most influential world figures of the 20th century. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, and his daughter Indira Gandhi (no relation to Mahatma Gandhi) are also among the most important Indian national leaders in the post-Independence era.

### 5 RELIGION

Few regions in the world show the religious diversity of India. Some 80.5% of Indians are Hindus, and certain Hindu values such as cow-protection are addressed in the Indian Constitution (Article 48). India, however, is a secular nation. Despite a rising tide of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) that would like



*Indian models display wedding dresses during a press conference in Calcutta. (Deshakalyan Chowdhury/AFP/Getty Images)*

to see Hinduism become the state religion, the country prides itself on the freedom of religion guaranteed by its constitution. Religious minorities include Muslims (13.4%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (1.5%), and Jains (0.5%). Among the remaining religious groups are Jews, Parsis (Zoroastrians), and animistic tribal peoples.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

India officially celebrates the holidays of all the major religious communities present in the country. Thus Hindu festivals observed as holidays include Shivratri (dedicated to the god Shiva), Holi (the spring festival), Janamashtami (birthday of the god Krishna), Dasahara (the festival of the goddess Durga), and Divali (the Festival of Lights). The Muslim Id festivals (Id-ul-Fitr and Bakr-Id) and Muharram are holidays. The Christian holy days of Good Friday and Christmas are also observed, as are the birthdays of the founders of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

Two national holidays mark the recent emergence of India as an independent nation. Independence Day on 15 August, commemorates the day in 1947 that India achieved its freedom from colonial rule. Republic Day, held on 26 January, marks the inauguration of India as a Republic in 1950. Although the holiday is celebrated throughout the country, the most spectacular festivities occur in New Delhi, with an impressive military parade and cultural performances.

The birthday of India's greatest leader of modern times, Mahatma Gandhi, is observed as a national holiday. Born on 2 October, 1869, Gandhi became a leading figure in India's independence movement and saw his ambitions realized before his assassination by a Hindu extremist in 1948. People gather at the Samadhi (cremation site) of Gandhi in Delhi to offer wreaths of flowers, pay homage to his memory, and offer prayers in his name.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Rites of passage for Indians are determined in broad outline by religion and in detail by caste, community, and region. As a predominantly Hindu population, most Indians are subject to customs and rites prescribed by the Hindu religion. For example, all Hindu groups have some form of naming and head-shaving ceremonies. Hindu males belonging to the higher castes undergo the important "Sacred Thread Ceremony" initiating them as a full member of their community. For Muslims, the circumcision of male children is the symbol of commitment to their religion, while for Christians it is baptism. Sikhs and Parsis have their own initiation ceremonies, and even tribal groups mark the passage from childhood to adulthood with certain rituals. Marriage customs conform to the norms of each community, as do methods for disposal of the dead. Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists cremate their dead, whereas Muslims and Christians inter their dead in cemeter-



*A rickshaw puller takes children to school in New Delhi, India. (AP Images/M. Lakshman)*

ies. Parsis and some Buddhist groups in the Himalayas expose their corpses to vultures. Tribal funeral customs include both cremation and burial.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Methods of greeting among Indians vary according to religion, social status, and the particular context of the meeting. A common greeting among Hindus is the “Namaste.” This means “Greetings to you” and is said while joining one’s own hands, palms together and held upright, in front of one’s body. In parts of India, the word “Namaste” is replaced with “Namaskar.” This form of greeting has the advantage that the persons meeting do not touch each other, which is important for Hindus. In the caste system, the mere touch of someone of a lower caste can cause one to become ritually polluted and require purification ceremonies to be undertaken. The Namaste allows one to greet a person without necessarily knowing his or her caste. It also allows one to greet a woman without touching her hand, which is considered impolite under certain circumstances. Nowadays, of course, shaking hands in the Western manner is becoming increasingly acceptable.

Another form of greeting is common between persons of unequal social standing. Children may greet their parents by bowing down and touching their feet. Pupils greet teachers in the same manner, and so do people meeting important religious figures. The person being greeted usually interrupts

the gesture before it is complete, implying that he or she is not worthy of such homage.

“Salaam” or “Salaam alaikum” (Peace be with you) is the typical greeting among Muslims, while the Sikh form of salutation is “Sat Sri Akal” (God is Truth).

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The general health of the Indian population has improved dramatically over the last half-century. Medical advances, immunization, and public health programs have raised the average life expectancy of the Indian to 64 years. However, this still lags behind the United States, where people can expect to live to 78 years of age. Leading causes of death in India include diseases of the circulatory system, infectious and parasitic diseases, respiratory diseases, and childhood diseases (measles, diphtheria, whooping cough). Some 125,000 cases of full-blown AIDS were reported from India in 2006, though this number is probably much higher, many cases being misdiagnosed or not reported at all. Inadequate sewage disposal, contaminated drinking water, and poor nutrition contribute to the health problems. Infant mortality rates are high, numbering 58 deaths per 1,000 live births (compared to 6.5 for the United States). The total fertility rate (i.e., the average births per woman of childbearing age in the population) is 2.9. The rate of natural increase of population is 1.6% per year. The last two demographic indices have been declining in recent years,

an encouraging sign that the rate of India's population growth is slowing. However, the country's large base population means that the number of new mouths to feed increases by roughly the number of residents of New York State (approximately 18 million people) every year.

Although nearly three-fourths (72.2%) of Indians live in rural areas, India contains some of the largest cities in the world. Greater Bombay [Mumbai] (over 18 million people), Delhi (over 15 million) and Calcutta [Kolkata] (c. 14.5 million) rank among the top 20 urban centers of the world. Yet India is essentially a country of villages. Rural house types, settlement patterns, construction materials, furnishings, and creature comforts vary greatly according to region and economic status.

Indian standards of living range from the most luxurious to the poorest in the world. Although the world of the ruling *Mahārājās*, with their lavish lifestyles, palaces, servants, and tiger hunts, is a thing of the past, the wealthy in India still live very comfortable lives. A growing middle class is sharing in this prosperity, with access to cars, televisions, VCRs, refrigerators, and other modern conveniences. By contrast, Indians are living and dying in the streets and slums of cities such as Bombay and Calcutta (where the late Mother Teresa, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, was known for her work with the poor). Estimates of the percentage of the population living in poverty range from 25% to 40%, although this figure is dropping. Per capita income stands at us\$3,800 per year (2007). Ever since Rajiv Gandhi, with current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as his Finance Minister, abandoned Nehru's socialist economic policies and "liberalized" India's economy in 1991, India's economy has been growing at a remarkable rate, averaging 8.5% from 2004–08. Economists have estimated 300 million Indians now belong to the middle class, one-third of them having emerged from poverty in the last 10 years, and if such growth rate can be sustained, the numbers of Indians living in poverty will decrease dramatically. At the current rate of growth, a majority of Indians will be middle-class by 2025. Nonetheless, poverty is still an issue for many Indians, especially in rural areas: a 2007 government report found that 25% of Indians lived on less than 20 rupees per day (c. \$0.50) with most working in "the informal labor sector with no job or social security."

India has 3,383,344 km (2,114,600 mi) of road, 54% of it paved. Construction of the "Golden Quadrilateral," when complete, will link India's four major cities, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay with high-speed, divided highways. Roads around Delhi are being improved for the Commonwealth Games, which are being held in that city in 2010. State-run and private bus services provide access to most parts of the country. The railway system, inherited from the British and further developed in the last 60 years, is a common means of long-distance travel today and, along with trucks, a major means of moving goods across the country. India's rail network is one of the densest outside of Europe. Since liberalization, a number of private airlines such as Jet Airways and Kingfisher Airlines are providing competition for the state-owned airlines, Air India and Indian Airlines. The government of India is undertaking a program of modernization of its major airports in conjunction with private companies.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Despite recent modernizing influences, the traditional joint family remains the norm among Indians. However, distinct differences in family structure and kinship patterns exist between northern and southern India. In the north, the family is patriarchal. A household consists of two or three generations of males and their dependents. In southern India, the joint family is matriarchal. It consists of one's grandmother and her brothers and sisters, one's mother and her brothers and sisters, and one's own brothers and sisters. The children of one's mother's sisters and the offspring of one's own sisters live in the household. The husbands of the women in the family live in the houses of their mothers, visiting their wives and children on occasion.

The first criterion in the selection of a marriage partner is caste. Although caste is Hindu in origin, virtually all South Asian groups (including Muslims and Christians) show its influence. Castes are endogamous groups, and as a rule one must marry within one's caste. After this, however, differences again appear between northern and southern Indians. In the north, marriage partners are usually unrelated and there are specific rules determining how close a blood-relationship is permitted. In southern India, however, cross-cousin marriage is the norm. The preferred match for a man is his maternal cross-cousin—his mother's brother's daughter. Virtually all Indian marriages are arranged and, although child marriage is prohibited by the Indian government, marriage at a young age is not uncommon. Marriages are performed according to the customs of one's community and invariably include payment of a dowry or bride-price. Marriage is essential for a woman, and any girl who is not married by a reasonable age is thought to have something wrong with her. A woman's role in Indian society is incomplete until she bears children, preferably sons. Traditionally, women have occupied an inferior social position in Indian society, although this is slowly changing as the country modernizes.

## 11 CLOTHING

The common dress for Indian men is the *dhoti*. This is a long piece of white cotton wrapped around the waist for half its length and then drawn between the legs and tucked into the waist at the back. In southern India, the chest is usually left bare, while in the north a shirt may be worn. Turbans or some form of headdress are common in northern India. The style of the turban often identifies the wearer as a member of a particular community (e.g., Pathan or Sikh) or as being from a particular region or village. The *kurtā*, a long tunic-like shirt, and the *pyjāmā*, loose baggy trousers, are also commonly worn, especially in urban areas. People wear leather sandals, a variety of locally made shoes, or even go barefoot. Because leather is considered unclean, shoes are always taken off before entering a temple. It is also polite to take off one's shoes before entering an Indian home.

Women typically wear the *sārī*, a length of cotton or silk cloth (nowadays synthetic fabrics are also used) wrapped around the waist, with one end left free and thrown over the right shoulder. The *choli*, a tight bodice that leaves the midriff bare, is worn under the *sārī*. Regional variations exist in their manner of wearing the *sārī*. In Maharashtra, for example, rural women draw one end of the *sārī* through the legs and tuck it into the waist at the small of the back. In some rural areas,



women do not wear the bodice, using just the end of the sārī to cover their upper body.

Regional variations in dress occur throughout India, reflecting differences in caste, community, and locality. In urban areas, however, Western-style clothing has become the norm, especially for males. Although women in cities, especially the younger generation, wear Western fashions, the sārī is still the preferred form of dress for most females.

## 12 FOOD

A typical Indian meal consists of around five or six dishes, served all at once on a *thālī*. This is a round metal tray or plate with a rim on it, on which are placed several little bowls (*katorīs*) to hold each individual dish. In some areas, food is served on banana leaves. No utensils are used. Food is eaten with the right hand, the left hand being used for personal hygiene and considered unclean.

Westerners tend to think of Indian food as “curry and rice,” but this does not do justice to the rich and varied cuisine of India. The term “curry” was used by Europeans to describe the spicy dishes they found in India, but curries do not necessarily have to be hot. The “heat” in Indian food comes from chilies, which were introduced into Asia by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Other spices commonly used include cumin, coriander, turmeric, black pepper, cardamom, and cloves. Curries can be made of meat, eggs, poultry, or vegetables and are eaten with lentils (*dāl*) and an assortment of pickles and chutneys. In northern and western areas, meals are taken with flat breads (*rotī*). These breads are replaced by rice (*chāwal*) in the wetter east and south. Yogurt (*dahī*) may be taken with the meal, which often ends with a variety of sweets (*mithāi*). Milk and milk products are an important part of the Indian diet. *Pān* or betel nut served with lime and wrapped in a betel leaf is commonly taken after a meal.

Regional cuisines are as diverse as the peoples and cultures of India. Mughal-style cooking is found in the north, while *dosās* (thin pancakes of rice-flour) and *idlis* (steamed rice-bread) are popular southern dishes. Madras is known for its fiery curries, while Bengal is famous for its fish dishes. Goan cooking shows the influence of its Portuguese past. Among Indians, food is as much a part of regional culture as dress and language.

As well as being a means of sustenance, food in India acquires ritual, religious, and even social dimensions. The Hindu view of the sanctity of the cow leads to an avoidance of beef, and many Hindus are totally vegetarian. Those Hindus who do eat meat are regarded as socially inferior, and low-caste groups try to raise their social status by abandoning meat-eating. Muslims, though meat-eaters, do not eat pork. Tribal groups avoid the flesh of animals that are their clan totems.

## 13 EDUCATION

The literacy rate among Indians seven years of age and over is 65.38% (2005). However, this figure masks considerable variations between males and females, urban and rural populations, and among different social groups. Primary education is free and, in most Indian states, compulsory. The poor quality of state-run secondary schools has led to an expansion of private (often English-language) schools that serve as feeders to institutions of higher education. There are numerous colleges and universities in India, some with excellent reputations.

Many of the graduates of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are viewed as better trained than their contemporaries in the West and are highly sought after overseas.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Indians are heirs to one of the oldest continuous cultural traditions in the world. South Asian civilization has its roots in the complex urban society that flourished along the Indus Valley some 5,000 years ago. Harappan traits such as worship of mother-goddesses or trees survive in modern India, especially in the Dravidian cultures of South India. However, much of India's cultural heritage is linked in some way to the later religions of India. It is to these, and especially to Hinduism, that one must turn to see the full flowering of the Indian artistic genius.

Hindu literature written in Sanskrit includes sacred texts such as the *Vedas*: the two great epics known as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*; political treatises such as the *Laws of Manu*; and the works of the greatest Sanskrit playwright and poet, Kalidasa. Music and dancing are the subjects of a 3rd century AD work called *Nāṭya Śāstra*, which is the ancient authority for these art forms. Today, the main form of classical dance in India is Bharata Natyam, while Kathakali is a less formal dance from southern India. The Raga forms the basis of classical Indian music.

Indian architecture and sculpture are monuments to Hinduism and the other religious traditions of India. North Indian temples replicate the peaks of the Himalayas in their soaring towers. South Indian temples on the other hand, are pyramidal in shape and covered with elaborately carved figures from Hindu mythology. Famous examples of Hindu temples are the temple complex at Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu), the Khajuraho temples (Madhya Pradesh) with their erotic carvings, and the Sun Temple at Konarak (Orissa). Buddhists have their own religious monuments, with the cave paintings at Ajanta being among the most impressive. The temple city of Palitana in Gujarat and the white marble temples at Dilwara (Mt. Abu) in Rajasthan are examples of Jain temple-building in India. Although Islam's contributions are seen more in miniature painting than in architecture, the distinctive blend of styles known as Indo-Islamic or Indo-Saracenic architecture can be seen throughout northern India. The Taj Mahal, built as a mausoleum by the emperor Shah Jehan for his wife, stands as the greatest architectural achievement of Islam in India.

Not all of India's artistic accomplishments lie in the distant past. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a Bengali whose work was highly regarded in Western literary circles in the early decades of the 20th century, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913.

## 15 WORK

Some 61% of India's labor force is engaged in agriculture, with many farmers being subsistence cultivators. Despite this, India inherited most of the subcontinent's industrial resources and ranks among the leaders of the world's developing countries in industrial output. India's industries range from nuclear power production and nuclear research to manufacturing garments for export. Economic growth in the first 40 years after independence was slow, hampered by restrictive government economic policies and an unwieldy bureaucracy. Liberaliza-

tion of the economy since 1991 under Manmohan Singh, Rajiv Gandhi's Finance Minister at the time, has seen faster growth, greater foreign investment, and expanding trade, although the direction and pace of economic change remains a matter of internal debate. The current rate of economic growth is 8.5% during the year ending March 2008, and at this rate a serious dent is being made in poverty in India. Economists estimate that, if this rate of growth can be sustained, poverty will be all but eliminated by the year 2025.

India's economy is diverse, encompassing agriculture, handicrafts, textile, manufacturing, and a multitude of services. Although nearly two-thirds of the Indian workforce still earn their livelihood directly or indirectly through agriculture, services are a growing sector and play an increasingly important role of India's economy. The advent of the digital age, and the large number of young and educated populace fluent in English, is gradually transforming India into an important "back office" destination for global outsourcing of customer services and technical support. There are many call centers in India, in locations such as Bangalore (Bengaluru) and Noida (near Delhi). Indian "techies" from the West are returning to tech centers such as Bangalore where, despite lower wages, they can live a life-style unattainable in the West.

But India still remains a major exporter of highly-skilled workers in software and financial services, and software engineering. Other sectors like manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, nanotechnology, telecommunication, shipbuilding, aviation, tourism, and retailing are showing strong potentials with high growth rates.

## 16 SPORTS

Chess is thought to have originated in India, and dice and card-playing are of considerable antiquity. Traditional sports include pastimes such as cock-fighting, camel-racing, and wrestling. Hunting (*shikār*) was a favorite sport among the upper classes. Kabaddī, team wrestling, is very popular. Children's games include kite-flying, spinning tops, yo-yos, and hobby-horses. Indians have enthusiastically adopted modern sports, with cricket and field hockey being the most popular. India participates in cricket at the international level, and although its field hockey team has recently fallen on hard times, for years it was a power in international competitions. Games such as soccer, tennis, badminton, squash, table tennis, and golf are also widely played.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Until recently, all radio and television in India was controlled by the government. Programming was limited largely to Indian productions and often described as "drab and unimaginative." One smash hit, however, was the serialization of the epic *Maharabharata* on television. The whole country stopped to watch the program. There are reports that trains would interrupt their schedules to stop at a station so that passengers and crew could watch the latest episode. The advent of satellite TV and availability of VCRs and videotapes have led to a change in viewing habits. Soap operas, sports events, and movies are the most popular television programs today.

India has the world's largest film industry. Regional language films are produced in centers such as Calcutta and Madras, but the center of the industry is Bombay. "Bollywood," as it is known, produces Hindi films that fill movie theaters in

cities all across India. The films tend to be melodramas, with much action, singing, dancing, and predictable plots. Film music is immensely popular. Film actors and actresses are pop idols and trend-setters, and their lives are followed with much interest. Few Indian filmmakers have achieved recognition outside of India, except for the late Satyajit Ray, who gained an international reputation.

India has a thriving, and relatively free, press, with newspapers and magazines published in Hindi and English as well as regional languages.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk arts in India range from wall-painting to puppetry to regional music and dance forms. India is well known for its textiles, rugs and carpets, metalwork, bronzes, copper- and brassware, ivory and hard stone carving, pottery, woodwork, gemstones, and gold and silver jewelry.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many of India's social problems are related to population. Despite efforts at population control, India will be the world's most populous nation sometime early in the 21st century. Existing problems such as poverty, high unemployment, illiteracy, and malnutrition can be expected to worsen, especially as over a third of the population (35.2%) is still under 15 years of age. Failure of the monsoon rains can cause famine and hardship for millions of people. An as yet unacknowledged problem is that of AIDS in India. Conservative estimates predict 1 million AIDS cases and 10 million people infected with HIV in India by the year 2000. The potential scope of the epidemic and its cost in resources and human suffering is staggering.

Another set of problems originates in the diversity of Indian society. Communal and sectarian unrest is common and ongoing. Groups in Assam, Kashmir, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and other areas have been involved in armed conflict with the Union government, with demands varying from a greater degree of regional autonomy to outright secession from the Republic. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism on the political scene is seen by Muslims as a threat to India's commitment to secularism. It has resulted in violence between Hindus and Muslims and contains the seeds of further conflict. There is also conflict based on class distinctions. At independence, the Indian Constitution created three categories of disadvantaged groups that needed special representation and assistance. These were the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes (mostly "untouchables"), and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), underprivileged groups that did not fit into the first two categories. Attempts in 1990 to implement the recommendation of the Mandal Commission that 27% of central government jobs be set aside for the OBCs led to widespread unrest among caste Hindus. This "reservations policy" is as controversial in India as affirmative action policies are now in the United States. Demonstrations continue to occur both for and against, such policies. For example, in May 2008, an agitation, called by All India Gujjar Mahasabha, in support of the community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status in Rajasthan, resulted in violence, some deaths and disruption of traffic in Jaipur, Rajasthan State's capital, in the nation's capital, New Delhi, and in neighboring areas of northwestern India that have a strong Gujjar presence.

The BJP formed the national government from 1998 to 2004, with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as prime minister, when it shockingly lost a general election, some say by abandoning the principles of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism. The central government in 2008, with Manmohan Singh as prime minister, is formed by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), a coalition of 12 political parties, led by the Indian Congress, but which only retains power with the support of the Left Front (which is not a part of the coalition), a group of Indian Communist parties. This has caused problems. For three decades, India has been under a nuclear trade embargo by the United States, primarily because it is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The United States has tended to favor General Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan as a result of their help in the War on Terror. In early 2006, however, President George W. Bush visited India and negotiated a treaty, highly favorable to India, which would allow for U.S. nuclear trade with India and co-operation in the areas of domestic nuclear development. However this treaty has to be ratified by the Indian Parliament, and the Left Front has threatened to withdraw its support from the government if the UPA were to bring the treaty to a vote. So, it seems that the treaty will die a natural death when Bush leaves office at the end of 2008.

Despite the problems of a weak central government and current charges of corruption in high places, Indians can approach the future with confidence. The country has survived the early decades of nationhood intact and, above all, with a continued commitment to the principles of democratic government. India is still a parliamentary democracy (the largest in the world), it has brought its birth rate under control, there is rapidly expanding middle class, its economy is flourishing, and, largely because of this, poverty is being rapidly eliminated.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues among the peoples of India arise largely from the nature of the societies found in the South Asian subcontinent. Buddhists and Christians espouse equality between men and women but, unfortunately, many adherents of these religions are of low caste converted from Hinduism and are treated very much as if they still belong to Hindu society. Even tribal societies, in which women have much greater equality and freedom than their counterparts in Hindu and Muslim societies, have been influenced by the societies amongst which they live.

Shariah (Islamic law), under which Muslims in India live, provides for differences between women's and men's roles, rights, and obligations. Muslim-majority countries give women varying degrees of rights with regards to marriage, divorce, civil rights, legal status, dress code, and education, but as a secular state, the Republic of India promotes the equality of men and women. The Constitution of India promotes equal rights and opportunities for men and women in the political, economic and social sphere, prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, caste, or gender, empowers the State to take affirmative measures for women and provides for equality of opportunities in the matter of public appointments.

Despite this legal protection, women are generally powerless in the face of prevailing patriarchal traditions. Women lack power to decide who they will marry and are often married off as children. Legal loopholes are used to deny women inheritance rights. Women receive less health care than males.

Many women die in childbirth of easily prevented complications. Working conditions and environmental pollution further impairs women's health. In recent years, there has been an alarming rise in atrocities against women in India, in terms of rapes, assaults, and dowry-related murders. Fear of violence suppresses the aspirations of all women. Female infanticide and sex-selective abortions are additional forms of violence that reflect the devaluing of females in Indian society. Families are far less likely to educate girls than boys, and far more likely to pull them out of school, mainly to help out at home or in the fields. Women work longer hours and their work, usually as unskilled labor in agriculture, is more arduous than men's, yet their work is unrecognized. And, in 2006, a UN survey reported malnutrition among children in India is increasingly becoming a problem because tradition requires that women eat last, even when pregnant and lactating. Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children, thus perpetuating the cycle.

India has a long history of activism for women's welfare and rights, which has increasingly focused on women's economic rights. A range of government programs have been launched to increase economic opportunity for women. For instance, the National Commission for Women was set up as a statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act of 1990 to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women, to recommend remedial legislative measures, to facilitate the redressing of grievances and to advise the government on all policy matters affecting women. However, there appear to be no existing programs to address the cultural and traditional discrimination against women in India.

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—by D. O. Lodrick.

# INDO-FIJIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** in-do-FEE-jee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Fiji

**POPULATION:** 311,591 (38% of total Fijian population) in 2007

**LANGUAGE:** Fiji Hindustani (Fiji Hindi); Tamil; Punjabi; Gujarati; English

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; Islam; Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The majority of the present-day Indo-Fijians are the descendants of indentured laborers who were brought to Fiji during the 19th century. The Indian indenture system was established to provide labor for British colonies after the abolition of slavery in Britain and her colonies in 1833. The first indentured laborers from India arrived in Fiji in 1879 and the indenture system in Fiji lasted until 1916. Other immigrants from India arrived in Fiji in the early 20th century, although they were not indentured laborers. Most of these immigrants were Punjabi or Gujarati, from northwestern India, while a number of the indentured laborers had been from southern India. The Gujaratis and Punjabis opened small shops in the coastal towns of colonial Fiji. The Indo-Fijians are part of the South Asian Diaspora that includes the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, Trinidad in the Caribbean, Guyana in South America, South Africa, and North America.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Fijian archipelago is located in the western Pacific Ocean. The climate of Fiji is tropical with plenty of rainfall, sunshine, and high humidity. The largest islands within the 800-island group are Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. These two islands account for about 85% of the total land mass of Fiji. Around 100 of the islands in the Fijian chain are either inhabited or inhabitable. The vast majority of Indo-Fijians reside on Viti Levu.

According to the most recent population statistics, Indo-Fijians make up around 37% of the total population in Fiji. At the time before the military coup of 1987, Indo-Fijians made up close to 48% of the total population: a significant portion of the decrease is attributable to immigration to Australia, Canada, and the United States. It has been estimated that over 100,000 Indo-Fijians have left the country since the first Fijian-backed coup in 1987. In the 1960s, Indo-Fijians outnumbered the indigenous Fijians.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The overwhelming majority of Indo-Fijians speak a language referred to as Fiji Hindustani, or Fiji Hindi. A very small number speak other south Asian languages such as Tamil, Gujarati, Punjabi, Malayalam, and Telugu. Fiji Hindustani developed out of contact between speakers of different dialects of Hindi/Urdu and their overseers on the colonial-era sugar plantations. Although the Indian laborers could communicate fairly well across dialect boundaries, they still encountered some idiosyncratic problems. Over time, a unified dialect emerged that became the language of Indo-Fijian identity. There have been several academic studies of Fiji Hindi, and there are existing course materials available in many university libraries. Some Chinese and Fijians speak a simplified form of Fiji Hindi that

differs from that spoken by the Indo-Fijians themselves. Indo-Fijians also speak English, and many older Indo-Fijians also spoke Pidgin Fijian when they were younger.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The folklore of the Indo-Fijians derives from traditional Indian folklore. Important cultural epics such as the *Râmâyana* and the *Mahâbahârata* are read, chanted, and recounted by Indo-Fijians at ceremonies and celebrations. The epic drama of Rama and Sita is performed at most religious festivals.

## 5 RELIGION

The Indian laborers brought their religions with them to Fiji. Hinduism and Islam both exist on Fiji today, alongside Christianity and indigenous forms of Fijian religious practice. The majority of indentured laborers were Hindu, and as a result, Hinduism is the major religion among Indo-Fijians. A total of approximately 77% of all Indo-Fijians follow Hinduism. The caste system is an important component of Hinduism as it is practiced in India. The caste system is one of ascribed status, whereby an individual is born into a particular socio-occupational grouping. There are restrictions on the interactions between certain groups, especially in the areas of marriage, touching, and the sharing of food. The system of indenture fundamentally modified the Hindu caste system in Fiji. Restrictions were relaxed and Indo-Fijians were able to interact more as a group. The caste component of their religion was almost completely obliterated. Temples and mosques have been constructed for religious gatherings and rituals.

Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. Hindus believe in a variety of deities, each with specific attributes, domains, functions, and powers. There are sects that are devoted to the worship of a particular deity, and shrines are created to provide offerings for the deity. These practices continue among the Indo-Fijian communities in Fiji and abroad. Although there has been considerable Christian influence in Fiji in terms of missions and mission schools, the Indo-Fijian population has not been very receptive to conversion. Less than 5% of the Indo-Fijian population is Christian.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major holidays for Indo-Fijians center on the religious calendars. Hindus celebrate Diwali (the festival of lights) in early November and Holi (a festival of singing and light-hearted play). Families also sponsor *pujas*, which are ceremonies that include prayers, offerings, and feasts. Pujas take place on birthdays and other special occasions when it is appropriate to give thanks for good fortune and blessings. Muslim Indo-Fijians observe the fasting and prayer practices during the month of Ramadan. Other secular holidays include the Queen's Birthday, Boxing Day, and Fiji Day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Indo-Fijians perform rituals at important transitional stages of the life cycle: birth, marriage, and death. The exact nature of these rituals is dictated by the religious faith of the families involved.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The standard greeting in Fiji Hindi is *namaste*. This greeting derives directly from Hindi as spoken in India.

Dating was unknown among unmarried Indo-Fijians until late in this century. Marriages were always arranged, as they are in most Indian communities throughout the world. Arranged marriages still continue now, but dating is seen as a means to create a marriage. Interracial dating among Indo-Fijians and Fijians is disapproved of by both groups, though Indo-Fijians do have dating relationships with other non-Fijians.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Fijian law dictated that non-Fijians could not live in Fijian villages. This established a precedent for segregation between the Fijians and Indo-Fijians in Fiji. Indo-Fijians established their own communities or moved to the coastal towns, which would later become the centers of commerce and trade that would provide for the economic prosperity of the Indo-Fijians.

Western-style housing made from concrete blocks or wood is the preferred style of housing for Indo-Fijians. Wattle and daub houses were built by the first waves of indentured laborers to Fiji.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In most traditional societies of India, marriages are arranged by the parents of the prospective bride and groom. In the most extreme cases, the couple had no say in the matter whatsoever. Caste distinctions and restrictions guided the arranged choices in most cases. In colonial Fiji, caste distinctions were broken down and became much less of a factor in marriage negotiations. Men greatly outnumbered women in the colonial period. In the present day, couples have more choice in their selection of mates. Male offspring generally inherit the majority of their parents' property and are expected to divide it among themselves.

## 11 CLOTHING

Indo-Fijians men have adopted Western-style trousers and shirts for some time now. Some women, however, still wear the traditional saris (a garment of draped cloth). Older women in particular only wear saris. Indo-Fijian women, like Indian women almost everywhere, are adorned with jewelry.

## 12 FOOD

Indentured Indian workers brought their styles of cooking and some of their food crops with them to Fiji in the 19th century. Roti, a staple bread served with every meal, and rice and curry dishes form the basis of Indo-Fijian cuisine. The traditional eating utensils are the hands. Pollution taboos require that only the right hand be used when eating; the left hand remains in the person's lap. Roti is used like an eating utensil to scoop up pieces of food and rice.

Indo-Fijian immigrants to Australia have opened restaurants that are popular with Indians, Australians, and Indo-Fijians alike. The spices and the use of coconut products in many of the curries belie the south Indian ancestry of many of the Indo-Fijians.

## 13 EDUCATION

Formal education for the children of indentured Indian laborers in Fiji did not begin until 1898. These schools were opened by the Catholic and Methodist missionaries who had also opened mission schools for the Fijian children much earlier. Indo-Fijians stress the importance of education with their children and many go on to complete advanced degrees at universities and colleges abroad.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional music and film music are both important in Fiji among Indo-Fijians. Almost all of the cultural entertainment that Indo-Fijians consume is produced outside of Fiji. The importation of Indian film music provides the latest hits from the most popular film stars of India. Most shops carry a wide selection of cassettes and videos, along with imported Indian foods. Traditional music and dance are also performed in certain contexts.

## 15 WORK

After the period of indenture, Indo-Fijians began to specialize in certain occupations in Fiji. They grew sugar cane, which was and still is an important cash crop, controlled transportation, and also were in charge of most of the craft and retail trade. Although they held little land, the Indo-Fijian population acquired control of the Fijian economy. This situation did not please the traditional Fijian chiefs and ultimately led to the 1987 military coup. The majority of those Indo-Fijians that left following the coup were shop owners and other retail merchants and bankers.

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket is a popular spectator and participant sport among Indo-Fijians. Other sports that have large followings in Fiji, like rugby, are not as important to Indo-Fijians.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional south Asian forms of entertainment, including classical forms of music and dance, are enjoyed and practiced within the Indo-Fijian community. Music and dance academies have also been established by the Indo-Fijians that have left Fiji and moved to Sydney, Australia.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Rural folk arts accompanied those south Asians that came to Fiji as indentured laborers. Artistic specialization was caste-associated in India and few ascribed artists were present in the early society. On the plantations, there was little time for the production of painting and sculpture. Pottery production and the painting and sculpting of religious images for local consumption were minimal during the early stages of Indo-Fijian settlement history. Nowadays, religious images and other Indian products are imported directly from India.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Indo-Fijians still face difficulties living in Fiji. Although relations between the Indo-Fijians and Fijians have improved considerably since 1988, there is still resentment and anger on both sides. The coup adversely affected the tourist industry, which has to yet regain the ground it had prior to the coups.

The exodus of Indo-Fijians resulted in loss of over one-third of the nation's doctors, one-half of its lawyers, and a great number of teachers and nurses.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Many occupations in Indo-Fijian society are traditionally held by males only. Musicians, religious functionaries, and cooks for public functions like weddings and pujas are typically male. There is a marked preference for male offspring since daughters incur more costs at marriage, and also leave the family at marriage to live with their husbands. Male children are also usually given much more freedom and independence than are female children. Like the societies in India from which Indo-Fijian society sprang, descent is traced through the father's line and offspring become members of the patriline.

The cultural construction of gender in Indo-Fijian society is influenced by the conceptualization of gender in Hinduism. While in Indo-Fijian society there are two recognized gender categories, male and female, in the Hindu pantheon these two categories are mixed and transformed. In Hindu myths, there are several accounts of deities who transformed genders, who are bisexual, and who are transsexual and transgendered.

The onset of menstruation marks puberty for females in Indo-Fijian society. Depending on the family and the sect of Hinduism that the family follows, rituals may follow a girl's first menstruation and a set of restrictions will be placed upon her during her menstrual periods. Many of the strict observances that were part of rural life in India have been relaxed in Indo-Fijian society. However, for rural families, the observances can still greatly restrict the movement and actions of menstruating women.

For both males and females, adulthood is symbolized by marriage. The state of marriage is characterized by increasing responsibilities to family and work. By middle age, children should be grown and married, with married sons perpetuating the father's lineage.

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—by J. Williams

# INDONESIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** in-do-NEE-zhuns

**LOCATION:** Indonesia

**POPULATION:** 238 million

**LANGUAGE:** Bahasa Indonesia (official language); otherwise, the languages spoken by the various ethnic groups

**RELIGION:** Islam (88%); Protestantism (5%); Catholicism (3%); Hinduism (2%); Buddhism (1%)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Achenese; Ambonese; Balinese; Banjarese; Batak; Bugis, Makassarrese, and Mandarese; Javanese; Vol. Madurese; Malays in Indonesia; Minahasans; Minangkabaus; Ngaju Dayaks; Niasans; Sasak; Sumbanese; Sumbawans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Who are the Indonesians? This is no easier a question than "Who are the Americans?" Although administration and mass education have made all but the most isolated peoples of Indonesia aware of being "Indonesian," it is still true that as one moves outwards from the national capital, Jakarta, into the rural areas where almost 55% of Indonesians still live, an individual's ethnic group (*suku bangsa* in the national language) determines more and more his or her identity and way of life. By one estimate, there are more than 250 distinct cultural groups (*sukus*), speaking as many as 700 mutually unintelligible languages, and representing a wide range of physical types. Striving to maintain a delicate balance between preserving each *suku's* distinctive heritage and propagating a modern, development-oriented national culture, the republic takes as its motto, "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*," an Old Javanese expression meaning "The Many Are One."

In addition to being crossed by the world's prime trade routes, the archipelago was itself the source of the world's most coveted commodities: spices. Beginning as early as the 2nd century AD, leaders who controlled the flow of trade goods and the production of rice (especially in Java and Bali) established kingdoms whose civilizations freely integrated foreign influences with indigenous traditions. For the antecedents of their nation, Indonesians look beyond Dutch colonialism to the greatest of those Hindu-Buddhist states, the empires of Srivijaya (South Sumatra, 7th–12th centuries) and Majapahit (East Java, late 13th–late 15th centuries), which stood as overlords of many lesser kingdoms in the archipelago.

In time, these same trade routes also introduced Islam and Arabo-Persian culture. From the late 13th century until the early 17th century, kingdom after kingdom converted to Islam. Beginning in the early 16th century, the spices of the Moluccas and the stranglehold the Malayan port of Malacca, Srivijaya's successor, held on international commerce attracted first the Portuguese and Spaniards and later the Dutch and English. The modern state of Indonesia had its beginnings in a scattering of fortified outposts established by the Holland-based VOC (Dutch East India Company) in the early 17th century. The VOC eventually succeeded in excluding European competitors from the spice trade and in dominating native rulers, but not without getting mired in a territorial expansion, which would bankrupt it by the end of the 18th century.

By the 1830s, the modern Dutch colonial state was founded, initially as a royal monopoly intent on squeezing as much prof-



it as possible out of Java's peasants under the infamous Cultivation System. Over the next century, the power of this state and of a global capitalism hungry for the Indies' sugar, oil, rubber, and other natural riches expanded throughout the archipelago and penetrated deeper into the lives of more and more indigenes. It was within the framework of a common Dutch administration and European-style education that in the early years of the 20th century a small but rapidly growing group of "natives" began to imagine a community encompassing all the archipelago's peoples and to struggle to free an "Indonesian nation."

In early 1942, the Japanese, fresh from defeating the Americans and British elsewhere in Southeast Asia, took the Netherlands Indies with hardly any resistance from the Dutch; while brutally exploiting the colony for the resources needed by its own war effort, the new occupier gave Indonesian nationalist leaders, suppressed under the Dutch since the 1920s, opportunities to mobilize the population. On 17 August 1945, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the two most prominent, Sukarno and Hatta, proclaimed Indonesian independence. It would take years of bloody struggle before the re-

turned Dutch formally recognized the Indonesian republic on 17 December 1949.

In the 1950s, an experiment with parliamentary democracy failed amid the economic chaos produced in the previous two decades by world depression, world war, anti-colonial revolution, and post-revolutionary rebellions. President Sukarno attempted to restore stability through "Guided Democracy," a highly personalized style of rule wherein Sukarno's charisma was supposed to reconcile the differences among increasingly antagonistic political parties (Muslim, secular nationalist, and Communist) and a politicized army. As hyperinflation drove millions to the edge of starvation by the mid-1960s, this political competition intensified, sharpening rural conflicts over land. On the night of 30 September 1965, leftist junior officers abducted and killed six prominent generals. Major General Suharto stepped in to save the nation from what the military termed a "Communist coup," eventually forcing the left-leaning Sukarno to hand supreme power over to him on 11 March 1966. A nationwide bloodletting followed the coup and counter-coup, one of the 20th century's worst: local vigilantes under army sponsorship massacred as many as 400,000 Communists,

leftist nationalists, and the victims of local mass “settling of scores.”

By 1997, after more than 30 years of Suharto’s “New Order,” Indonesia had gone from being an economic “basket case” and diplomatic “renegade”/“pariah” to becoming a favored destination for foreign investment and a regional power whose voice carried ever more weight. However, social changes generated by rapid development were already threatening the stability of the very authoritarian system that had fostered economic growth. Despite massive corruption (most notoriously that of Suharto’s own children) and pervasive repression of labor activism and other opposition, the general population seemed willing to recognize the regime’s legitimacy as long as it delivered rising standards of living. When the Asian/global emerging markets financial crisis of 1997–98 threw millions of Indonesians into poverty, massive popular protests forced Suharto to resign. The sudden end of the New Order regime unleashed interethnic and interreligious conflicts that government suppression (as well as manipulation) had only intensified (riots against ethnic Chinese, including murder and rape, drove many to emigrate). In many parts of Indonesia, as the nation began experimenting with shifting more power into the hands of local governments, Christianized indigenous communities and Muslim transmigrants shed each other’s blood, the latter often at the instigation of military factions and of international radical Islamist networks.

Since 1998, economic growth has resumed. The unemployment level, however, has not been substantially reduced and food and fuel prices are rising, making the lot of the poor even harder. Corruption, moreover, remains a massive problem: according to Transparency International, in 2007 Indonesia ranked 143 in a scale of 179, the same as Russia and only slightly better than Angola and Nigeria. Nonetheless, democracy has taken root, with free parliamentary elections held for the first time in almost four decades in 1999 and free direct presidential elections in 2004 (with an impeachment in between). The sequence of Indonesia’s post-Suharto presidents represents the contemporary political spectrum: Muslim technocrats (B. J. Habibie), moderate Islamic parties (Abdurrahman Wahid), Sukarnoist secular nationalists (Megawati Sukarnoputri), and the military (ex-general Bambang Yudhoyono). Tensions persist, inherent in the discrepancies between Indonesia’s realities and the ideals embodied in the Pancasila (the Five Principles), the state ideology: (1) belief in one Supreme God; (2) a noble and civilized humanity; (3) the unity of Indonesia; (4) democracy guided by the principles of consensus and representation; and (5) social justice for the entire Indonesian people.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

In the Indonesian national language, the usual expression for the “homeland,” *Tanah Air Kita*, translates as “Our Land and Water.” This phrase expresses most succinctly the central fact of Indonesia’s geography: the country consists of more than 17,000 islands, of which 6,000 are permanently inhabited (the total land area equals that of Mexico). The principal islands and island groups are Sumatra, Java, Bali, the Lesser Sundas (in Indonesian, *Nusa Tenggara*, the “Southeastern Islands,” including Lombok, Sumbawa, Flores, Roti, and Timor), Irian Jaya (Indonesian New Guinea), the Moluccas (including Ambon and Halmahera), Sulawesi, and Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo).

The extraordinary fertility of much of the country’s soil derives from the fact that the archipelago belongs to the “Ring of Fire,” which circles the Pacific Ocean with a chain of insular and continental volcanoes. Indonesia’s islands straddle the equator in a broad belt, which is actually longer than the east-west span of Europe or the continental United States. Proximity to warm water ensures that the overall climatic temperature varies little, remaining hot and humid all year round. Most of Indonesia experiences only two seasons: a dry season and a wet season. In January and February for western Indonesia, and April to July in the Moluccas, the monsoon winds bring torrential rains.

Indonesia, with its 238,000,000 inhabitants (September 2008 estimate), is the fourth-most populous country in the world (after China, India, and the United States). The most striking characteristic of Indonesia’s population is its radically uneven distribution: Java, whose area (about that of New York State) amounts to no more than 7% of the Indonesian total, possesses nearly 60% of the population, and population densities overall vary from 980 people per sq km (1,550 per sq mi) in Central Java to less than 12 in Central Kalimantan and 6 in Papua. Because of the government’s vigorous promotion of contraception over the past three decades, the population growth rate has been reduced to 1.18% per year. Nonetheless, the population (33.6% under age of 18) is still predicted to increase by nearly a quarter in the next four decades, reaching 294 million by the year 2050. The population, moreover, is becoming increasingly urbanized: the proportion of Indonesians living in cities rose from only 30% in 1990 to 45.6% in 2003 and is estimated to increase to 67.7% by 2030. Teeming with 15.1 million people (12,635 people per sq km [2000]) and sprawling over a vast stretch of coastal northwestern Java, the urban agglomeration centered on Jakarta, Indonesia’s capital, ranks as the world’s 14th most populous megacity, ahead of Beijing and London. Indonesia possesses seven other cities with populations of over a million; of these cities, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar (Ujung Pandang) serve as regional centers for east Java/eastern Indonesia, Sumatra, and eastern Indonesia respectively.

Throughout Indonesia, rapid population growth has increased human demands on land and water, resulting in severe ecological problems: deforestation (with its inevitable companions, soil erosion, river siltation, reef death, and massive wildfires spewing heavy smog that affects not only western Indonesia but also Malaysia and Singapore); water pollution from sewage, pesticides, and offshore drilling; and depletion of fishing stocks. Ironically, “transmigration,” the government-organized transfer of landless peasants from Java and Bali to sparsely peopled regions of Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Indonesian (western) New Guinea (Papua, formerly Irian Jaya) has all too often introduced a method of agriculture that is ruinous of the local soils.

## **3 LANGUAGE**

Although Indonesians speak between 250 and 700 distinct mother languages, there is only one official language of government, commerce, education, and mass media: Bahasa Indonesia (literally, the “Indonesian language”), a dialect of Malay. Although Malay is the mother tongue of less than 10% of the population, forms of Malay had long been in use throughout the archipelago as a medium of interethnic communica-



tion, a fact recognized by the Dutch colonial administration and by Indonesian nationalists' 1928 "Youth Oath" (*Sumpah Pemuda*).

For the majority of Indonesians, Bahasa Indonesia is the language of the public sphere, while a regional language is used for private, family, and local community life. Outside of Jakarta, where 90% of households report Bahasa Indonesia as the primary language of the home, monolingualism in Bahasa Indonesia is growing rapidly in the major multiethnic cities of the archipelago, such as Medan and Ujung Pandang, as well as in regions of traditionally great linguistic diversity, such as the Minahasa area of North Sulawesi and many islands in the Moluccas.

While Malay was and (to a limited extent) still is written in Arabic script, Bahasa Indonesia uses a Latin script. In 1972, a spelling reform was promulgated to unify the orthographies of Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia.

Except for several separate families of Papuan languages spoken in Irian Jaya and some other eastern islands, the tongues spoken in Indonesia belong to several branches of the Austronesian language family. This language family includes the closely related languages of Madagascar, Malaysia, and the Philippines, as well as the more distant tongues of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and aboriginal Taiwan. Austronesian languages were brought by Southern Mongoloid farming and seafaring peoples who entered Indonesia from the Philippines beginning 5,000 to 4,000 years ago. However, the farther east one travels in the Moluccas and the Lesser Sundas, the more pronounced becomes the Papuan genetic and linguistic legacy.

The major ethnolinguistic groups in Indonesia were as follows (population figures from the 2000 census, whose criterion for membership in an ethnicity was self-identification, supplemented by estimates from the 1990s if these are significantly different):

*Java:* Javanese (83.9 million people, in the center and east, 41.7% of the national population, the first largest ethnic group, western Java's 4.1 million Bantenese and 1.9 million Cirebonese, who speak dialects of Javanese, were counted as separate ethnicities in the 2000 census); Sundanese (31 million, in the west, 15.4% of the national population, the second largest ethnic group); Madurese (6.7–14 million in the east and on the nearby island of Madura); and Betawi (5 million), the "indigenous" people of Jakarta ("Batavia" under the Dutch), descended from slaves settled there by the VOC.

*Sumatra:* Acehese (3 million, on the far northern tip); Gayo (in the highlands immediately south of the Acehese); Toba Batak and Dairi Batak (respectively, 2 million and 1.2 million, in the highlands of the north, other Batak subgroups are the Karo, Mandailing, Angkola, and Simalungan, all groups total 6.1 million); Minangkabau (5.5–7.5 in the west); Nias and Mentawai (on islands off the west coast); Rejang and Lampung (respectively, 1 million and 1.5 million in southernmost Sumatra); and Malay (7–10 million, the third largest ethnic classification, scattered from the east coast of Sumatra through the Riau archipelago and on to the coasts of Kalimantan; also the dominant population of West Malaysia and present on the coasts of East Malaysia

and in Brunei and Singapore; the Riau-Johor dialect is the basis of Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia).

*Kalimantan:* Banjarese (3.9–5 million people in southeastern Kalimantan); and a great diversity of inland, animist peoples generally known as "Dayak" but who can be subdivided into such distinct groupings as the Ngaju, Maanyan, Ot Danum, Penan, and Kenyah.

*Sulawesi:* on the southwestern peninsula, Bugis (5 million in South Sulawesi), Makassarese (2 million), and Mandar; in the central highlands, a great diversity of groups, of which the best known are the Sa'dan Toraja and Pamona; on the northern peninsula, the Tomini, Gorontalo, Bolaang Mongondow, and the nationally prominent Minahasa; and in the east and on offshore islands, the Mori, Bungku, Muna, and Butonese.

*The Lesser Sundas* (only the better-known groups, names roughly corresponding to islands except as noted): Balinese (3–4 million people); Sasak (2.6 million, on Lombok); Sumbawans; Bimanese; Sumbanese; Savunese; on Flores, Manggarai, Ngada, Endenese, Sikanese; and on Timor, Tetum, Atoni, Helong; Rotinese.

*The Moluccas:* Non-Austronesian, Ternatans; Tidorese; and in northern Halmahera, Tobelorese, Galelarese, and other small groups; Austronesian, in southern Halmahera, small language groups such as Sawai; in the southern islands, Tanimbarese, Aru, and Kei; and the most important culture in the central islands, Ambonese.

*Papua (Irian Jaya):* although this province is home to less than 1% of the national population, the number of mutually unintelligible speech forms there may well approach the number in all the rest of the archipelago. Austronesian languages are spoken along the north and west coasts, while Papuan languages are spoken elsewhere (e.g., Asmat and Dani).

*Chinese:* numbering 1.7–7.5 million, they form the most important "nonindigenous" group (though most have resided in Indonesia for generations). The great majority are urban, although there are sizable rural populations in West Kalimantan and in the Riau Archipelago. Chinese-Indonesians are far from homogeneous, divided between the nonindigenized and the indigenized (i.e., acculturated to various local societies, the most prominent example being the *peranakan* of Java) as well as among home-region language groups (Hokkien, Teochiu, Cantonese, and Hakka). Under both colonial and post-colonial regimes, the Chinese have been set apart from the indigenous population. They are both granted privileges and subjected to discrimination and controls. Their economic prominence and cultural distinctiveness have long been the target of popular resentment; the 2000 census likely under-reports the number of Chinese because many Chinese were reluctant to identify themselves as such.

#### Names

Practices of naming vary from ethnic group to ethnic group as well as across class and religious lines. The most commonly encountered type of name is an Arabic one associated with Islam.



*Indonesian workers paint traditional Javanese textile, batik, in central Java. (AP Images/Tatan Syuflana)*

On Java, however, names of Sanskrit origin are favored, either alone or in combination with Arabic ones. Similarly, throughout the country, Christians add European names to names from their own ethnic languages. Outside of a few suku, such as the Batak and the Minahasa, family names are not used. In recent decades, Chinese have been under pressure to adopt “Indonesian” names for official purposes; in keeping with their own traditions, Chinese often pass on these adopted names as surnames to their children.

In general, Indonesians are fond of nicknames, usually based on the last syllable of the full name, e.g., the male name “Hermawan” becomes “Wawan,” or the female name “Hermawati” becomes “Titi.” On the other hand, etiquette requires that titles be used at all times to indicate respect. In Bahasa Indonesia, one addresses persons of greater age or status with the word “Bapak” for men and “Ibu” for women (literally, “Father” and “Mother,” but meaning “Sir” and “Madam,” and used instead of words for “you,” which imply the speaker’s equal or superior rank). The shortened forms “Pak” and “Bu” precede names and nicknames.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The nationalist movement and, later, the central government have honored a long list of “national heroes,” who are commemorated not only in monuments but also in pictures hung in elementary school classrooms and in the names of streets, airports, universities, and other public institutions. Below are a few of the best-known figures:

Gajah Mada, the 14th-century Majapahit prime minister who is reputed to have prefigured Indonesian nationalism by vowing not to rest until he united the entire archipelago; the Javanese prince Diponegoro (1785–1855) and the Minangkabau cleric Imam Bonjol (1772–1864) who led an armed resistance to Dutch power; and Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1905), a Central Javanese noblewoman who advocated modern education and women’s emancipation, and who is revered as a pioneer of Indonesian nationalism.

#### 5 RELIGION

Religion plays a central role in defining individual identity and community life throughout Indonesia. One’s religious affiliation is an essential fact noted on all official documents, including identity cards. All Indonesians must register as adherents of one of five recognized religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Atheism, associated with the banned Communist movement, is not an option. An elaborate bureaucracy oversees the operations of each of the five religious communities. No Indonesian Muslim may leave for the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) without joining an official travel group (to avoid this constraint, some Indonesian Muslims depart for Mecca from other countries, such as Egypt). Legislation discourages marriage between members of different religious communities: one of the prospective partners must officially convert to the religion of the other. In the interests of confessional harmony, religious communities are forbidden to seek converts from each other’s memberships, though they are

welcome to proselytize among peoples “who do not yet have religion,” e.g., animist tribespeople or many ethnic Chinese.

The vast majority (88%) of the population adheres to Islam, making Indonesia the largest Muslim nation on earth, with more Muslims than all the Arab countries put together. Practice ranges from “purist” (conforming to the standards of Middle Eastern orthodoxy) to “syncretist,” including a wide range of pre-Islamic beliefs, especially characteristic of much Javanese Islam (for *kebatinan*, Javanese mystical sects, which often distinguish themselves from Islam, see **Javanese**). Among purists, there is a further distinction between “traditionalists” and “modernists,” the former supporting and the latter rejecting local Muslim practices, as well as being open to techniques of Western education and organization.

Protestantism claims 5% of the population. Although the VOC was by no means a missionary enterprise, some populations associated with the Dutch converted to Calvinism: Minahasa, Ambonese, and Indos (Eurasians). In the 19th century, the colonial government permitted Protestant proselytization among the remaining non-Muslim peoples, with the most significant successes among the Batak of North Sumatra and peoples of Central Sulawesi. Catholicism (3%) was first introduced by the Portuguese in the 16th century; Flores and Timor are surviving enclaves. Missionary work in the 19th–20th century has propagated the religion in West Kalimantan and Papua. Especially in the last few decades, great numbers of Chinese have converted to either Protestantism or Catholicism.

Hinduism (2% of the population) in Indonesia means almost exclusively the religion of Bali, which is not a direct transplant of the Indian religion but rather a synthesis of indigenous and Indian elements. In addition, some ethnic groups have succeeded in legitimizing their own animist religions by having them reclassified as “Hinduism,” e.g., the Aluk To Dolo of the Sa’dan Toraja, and the Kaharingan of the Dayak. Buddhism (no more than 1% of the population) claims mostly Chinese adherents, whose traditional practices combine Mahayana Buddhism with Taoism and Confucianism.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Department of Religion authorizes a list of 12 public holidays (on which government offices and schools are closed). Two are purely secular: New Year’s Day and Independence Day (August 17). The others are feasts observed by the five recognized religions: Nyepi, the Hindu-Balinese New Year; Waisak, the birth of the Buddha; Christmas, Good Friday, and Ascension Thursday for Christians; and five Muslim holidays, including the Islamic New Year, the Birth of Muhammad, the Night of the Ascent (Muhammad’s visit to heaven), Idul Fitri (the end of the fasting month of Ramadan), and Idul Adha (recalling Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael at God’s command).

Every year, Independence Day is celebrated with great fanfare. Each village and city neighborhood is decorated with red and white national flags, ceremonial gateways, and colorful paintings commemorating the Revolution. Parades, speeches, and performances of traditional music, dance, and theater also mark the day.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims may not eat, drink, or smoke during the daylight hours. The end of these four weeks of self-denial is marked by a great celebration, called variously Idul Fitri, Lebaran, or Hari Raya. Through-

out Indonesia, special feasts are prepared, heralded by the mass weaving of *ketupat*, small palm-leaf containers for rice cooked in the previous days. Idul Fitri is the occasion for family reunions: migrants return to their hometowns (all intercity roads and the buses on them are packed at this time) to clean ancestral graves and sprinkle them with flower petals. Even non-Muslims observe the custom of making calls on family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and superiors to ask forgiveness for the offenses of the past year.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Life cycle rituals differ greatly according to ethnic group, religion, and social class. Although for many, particularly the urban poor, modernization in everyday life has simplified the rites of passage, the trend, beginning during the New Order, has been for affluent families to display their status by holding traditional rituals as elaborately as they can afford, often reviving forgotten customs with the help of ritual experts. Celebrations are public affairs to which the extended family (who often assist the hosts), friends, workmates, professional associates, and local officials are invited; indeed, they are generally open to the entire neighborhood or village, all of whom must be fed. The most important celebrations accompany births, circumcisions (for Muslim boys), weddings, and funerals. Weddings usually consist of the legally required religious ceremony (usually Muslim or Christian) and rites following ethnic custom, followed by a large reception held in a family home, a hotel, or a rented hall. Among the Muslim majority, funerals tend to be somewhat more uniform from ethnic group to ethnic group, including washing and enshrouding of the body and burial within 24 hours. Mourners in truckloads accompany the body to the cemetery and, after collective prayer, each mourner tosses a handful of earth into the grave.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Although traditional codes of behavior differ considerably from ethnic group to ethnic group (and group stereotypes exaggerate these differences), interpersonal relations throughout Indonesia are governed by a concern to preserve social harmony and personal honor (“face”); respect for hierarchy is considered essential to both. In their interactions with others, Indonesians take great care to show deference to those of higher status, whether from greater age, nobler ancestry, superior educational attainment, or higher organizational rank.

In general, Indonesian life tends to be group, rather than individual oriented. In a society where individuals have little personal space, rarely having even a bed to themselves, privacy is largely an alien concept; solitude is most commonly associated with defenselessness. Subordinating one’s interests to the group’s interest is a village value that has been carried over into many aspects of modern urban life. Great care (more in some regions, like Java, than in others) is taken to avoid the overt expression of disagreement within the group. Fear of bringing shame upon one’s family and other groups to which one belongs in the face of outsiders powerfully conditions personal decisions. Indonesian etiquette stresses the interdependence of individuals, not their independence of one another.

### Greetings and body language

The Islamic greeting, “*Wassalamu alaikum (warakhmatullahi wabarakatuh)*,” which means “Peace upon you (and God’s



A vendor cooks traditional snacks in downtown Jakarta. (Bay Ismoyo/AFP/Getty Images)

blessings),” has become the standard greeting in public life, even for non-Muslims, often accompanied by the shaking of hands, concluded by bringing the right palm to one’s own chest. The most common informal greeting is “*Dari mana?*” (“Where are you coming from?”) which is a question that is not felt to be intrusive and that no one is obliged to answer in specifics. Even in relatively informal situations, great importance is placed on asking leave to depart (a common phrase is the Dutch-derived “*Permisi?*”).

In offering or receiving things, one extends the right hand, showing particular deference by placing the left hand under the right elbow while doing so. While passing in front of older or higher-status people, it is customary to bow low, extend the right hand in front of oneself, and walk forward slowly. The left hand, used with water for cleaning oneself after defecation, is taboo for the above purposes; when one is forced to use the left hand in front of others, one excuses oneself (“*Ma’af kiri,*” “Forgive, the left.”). Especially in Java, the index finger is taboo; pointing is done with the right thumb, and one beckons others to come with a downward, inward movement of the right palm. Similarly, it is offensive to point the soles of one’s feet at others while sitting, a situation avoided by traditional modes of sitting cross-legged (*bersila*, men) or with legs folded to one side (*bersimpuh*, women). Folding one’s arms over one’s chest or holding them akimbo while speaking can appear to be aggressive.

#### Visiting and dating customs

Unannounced visits may be made in the late afternoon between siesta and dinnertime (4:00–6:00 PM). Visitors are served tea and snacks; one leaves a little food on the plate to show one wants no more. Indonesian attitudes toward punctuality are reflected in the expression “*jam karet*” (“rubber time”). Lateness to appointments is the norm; however, Indonesians tend to rise early, as well as retire early, perhaps as a function of the tropical climate.

Although there is considerable variation in this regard, interaction between members of the opposite sex tends to be closely monitored by elders and peers: dating and premarital sex are not condoned (early marriage is the traditional outlet). In many regions, the honor of the family is invested in its women’s reputation for chastity (which may entail the women avoiding any eye contact with males who are not their relatives), and the family’s men take quite seriously their responsibility to protect that honor. Public displays of affection between the sexes (such as holding hands or kissing) are taboo. Physical contact between members of the same sex, however, (such as walking arm in arm) is common, not being considered homosexual. One common way teenagers meet is for the boy to loiter by the front gate of the girl’s house, hoping to be admitted by a servant or family member who will chaperone the ensuing conversation.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

At US\$3,843 per year, Indonesia's per capita GDP (adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity, all figures are from 2005, unless otherwise noted) places it in the category of lower middle income nations. Its ranking in the United Nations Human Development Index is 107 (out of 177 countries ranked). Countries with similar HDIs are Vietnam, Syria, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Turkmenistan, and Nicaragua. Its HDI ranking is six places higher than its ranking according to GNP per capita (PPP), indicating that its population is somewhat better off in terms of health and education than per capita income alone would provide for (South Africa's per capita GDP, adjusted for PPP, is almost three times that of Indonesia's, yet South Africa's HDI index is slightly lower).

More than half the population (52.4%) lives on less than two dollars equivalent a day, and 7.5% on less than a dollar a day. The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line (earning less than the amount needed to provide oneself a daily intake of 2,100 calories and other basic needs) has declined dramatically over the years, from 40.1% in 1976 to 16.58% in 2007. As measured by its Gini coefficient of 34.3, income inequality in Indonesia is not particularly severe by world standards. It is greater in the United States (40.8), far greater in Brazil (57), and not much less in Japan (29.9). Still, the richest 20% earns 5.2 times as much as the poorest 20%. (a slight improvement over seven times in the 1990s). Moreover, there is wide variation in the standard of living from region to region and between urban and rural areas. For instance, on average, rural people spend more of their income on food than urbanites do, despite higher food prices in cities (in 2005 residents of the national capital region spent 37.72% of their income on food, while residents of heavily rural Nusa Tenggara Timur spent 62.24% (the national average had been 54.59% in 2004).

Given the high average family size, Indonesian houses tend to be crowded; in 2006, 44.9% of houses were under 50 sq m in size, 21.3% under 9 sq m (1990s figures record 6% of houses as having no separate bedroom). Some 37.78% had walls of materials other than brick (down from 51.77% in 1990). Roofs are of tile (66% of all houses according to 1990s figures), zinc, or thatch (4.65%, down from 8.75% in 1990). About 16% of houses had an earthen floor in 2006 (down from 24% in 1990). The layout of a well-off family's house does not differ from that of Western houses, having separate rooms for receiving guests, eating dinner, etc. About 60% of houses had their own toilet in 2006, up from 47% in 1990. Most bathrooms, however, differ from Western ones in having squat toilets and an open tank to scoop water out of for bathing and flushing. Many poorer Indonesian homes lack such facilities, forcing their owners to use public areas such as riversides. While nearly all houses in Jakarta have electricity, the national figure is only 54% (47.3% in the 1990s). 28.5% of households use biomass (firewood, etc) or waste material for fuel. Overall, per capita carbon dioxide emissions are still low, at 1.7 tons in 2004 (up from 1.2 in 1990).

In the early 1990s, just over 11% of houses had their garbage picked up by sanitation workers. The rest disposed of it themselves by burning or piling it in their yards, or throwing it in public dumps, gutters, canals, or rivers. Only 13% of houses (mostly urban) enjoyed running water (not generally drinkable); most people obtained water from streams, canals, ponds,

and wells that were usually polluted to some degree (in 1990, only 16.37% received piped or bottled water). By 2006, 46.6% had access to safe drinking water from pump, well, or spring.

Life expectancy (according to 2008 figures) has been rising: 67.98 years for men and 73.07 years for women; 58.4 years for men and 62 years for women in 1990, up from 51.1 years for men and 54.4 years for women in 1980. Infant mortality is also falling: 31.04 from 105 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 75.2 deaths in 1990. Modern pharmaceuticals and physicians are expensive, so most people use traditional herbal remedies (*jamu*, much of which are now mass-manufactured) and consult traditional healers (*dukun*) more frequently. As part of an extensive public clinic system stressing preventative care (immunization, contraception, and natal care), doctors make weekly visits to villages.

Ownership of an automobile (25 per 1,000 people in 2005) or motorcycle (130 per 1,000 people) is a luxury unavailable to all but upper class and some middle-class families (up from 1990s figures of 5 and 30 respectively). Most people rely on buses for travel within and between cities; Java also has a well-used rail network. Minivans run within cities and through the countryside (where horse-drawn carriages are still common). Except in Jakarta where *bajaj* (motorcycle cabs) are used instead, *becak* (tricycles with a seating carriage in front of the peddler) carry people and goods through side streets and roads. As an alternative to expensive airplanes, large passenger ships provide the principal means of interisland travel for most people; sailing ships are still in wide use for fishing and carrying merchandise.

Telephone access is spreading rapidly; the number of telephone landlines per 1,000 people rose from 6 in 1990 to 213 in 2005. More than 1 out of 5 people had a cell phone subscription in 2005. The number of Internet users is growing fast, tripling from 11.2 million in 2004 to 33.2 million in 2008 (UN figures estimated 73 Internet users for every 1000 people in 2005).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is the central institution of Indonesian society, and the model for other social relations. Although kinship patterns differ from ethnic group to ethnic group, some common features can be seen throughout the country. The family household includes not only parents and children but also grandparents, other unmarried relatives, and servants. Child care responsibilities are shared among mothers, grandmothers, older daughters, and others. The father is often the ultimate authority figure, though often a distant one, while the mother manages the family money. Remaining at home, children remain dependent on their parents until, and often well into, marriage. Children are duty-bound to take care of their parents in old age, and older siblings likewise help their juniors, even going as far as financing the latter's education.

Indonesians keep cats and dogs as well as songbirds as pets.

## 11 CLOTHING

Context and class determine the choice between modern and traditional clothes. For instance, while a male office worker wears a Western-style shirt and trousers to work, he often relaxes at home, does his prayers, or is wed in some kind of sarong. Shorts are not worn by adults, except by *becak* drivers and other low-status laborers. In their everyday clothing, members of the elite follow Western fashions closely. For ex-

ample, young people commonly wear jeans and t-shirts. For ceremonial purposes, however, they lavish great expense on traditional costumes. A small number of Muslim women wear a head covering in public (i.e., in the presence of men who are not their kin or very close friends): this may be either a more traditional scarf (*kudung*) or, the modernist preference, a full veil exposing only the face (*jilbab*) and often worn with items of Western-style clothing like jeans.

Under the New Order, a standard “national costume” came into vogue for use on formal occasions. For men, the black felt *peci* cap, originally associated with Muslims, was first popularized as a symbol of nationalism by Sukarno in the 1920s. In current practice, this is worn with a batik shirt (untucked) and trousers. Women wear a sarong and a *kebaya* (tight-sleeved, collarless shirt) and put their hair up into a bun (or tuck it under a wig of the required shape). For work, many jobs require a uniform: soldiers, elementary school students, and civil servants all wear uniforms.

## 12 FOOD

Indonesian cuisine has been influenced by Indian, Middle Eastern, Chinese, Portuguese, and even Dutch cooking.

Throughout the country (with the partial exception of dry eastern islands where maize, cassava, taro, and sago are important, if not esteemed, starch sources), rice is the staple, the definition of a “full meal” being “cooked rice (*nasi*) with side dishes (*lauk-pauk*).” Depending on one’s budget, these side dishes can range from the most modest (some boiled vegetables with or without a piece of dried fish) to the most extravagant (several fried and stewed dishes including meat curries, heavily spiced, especially with chilies). Outside of well-off families, meat (goat, mutton, beef for Muslims, also pork and in some regions dog for non-Muslims) is consumed only on special occasions. Chicken, seafood, and soybean products provide a cheaper protein source acceptable to all.

The traditional mode of eating for all ethnic groups has been to scoop up food from flat dishes with the fingers of the right hand (the left hand being reserved exclusively for washing oneself after defecation). An alternative associated with sitting at a Western-style table is to use a spoon and fork (i.e., using the fork in the left hand to push food on to the spoon in the right hand). Individual portions are not separated; rather, everyone takes from common dishes laid out at once in the center of the table or dining mat. Ordinary meals are usually consumed quickly without conversation.

Most Indonesians do not eat a distinct breakfast, apart from leftovers of the previous evening’s meal, should there be any. Middle-class people will eat bread with coffee or tea; this bread is usually bought from men sent around neighborhoods by bakeries at dawn. For lunch and dinner, upper- and middle-class people eat rice and side dishes prepared by their maids. For lunch, office workers and students will either go to *warung* or *kedai* (small food stalls) or buy dishes like *bakso* (meatball soup) from mobile street vendors. For those who can afford them, afternoon snacks (e.g., *rujak*, a fresh fruit salad) are also common. In city neighborhoods, a great variety of street vendors make the rounds well into the night. Especially popular are stalls that set up for the evening around plazas or along major thoroughfares, closing up after midnight. Throughout the country, Chinese restaurants can be found, as well as those

serving Padang food (that of the far-migrating Minangkabau of West Sumatra).

Outside animist and Christian areas, because of Islamic strictures, the consumption of alcohol (mostly beer) is limited to some particularly Westernized members of the elite. As untreated water is usually unsafe, tea and coffee are drunk in great quantities, usually with sugar and sometimes milk. Soft drinks, including bottled tea and bottled water, are also popular. 58% of men and 3% of women smokes (up from 30% in the 1990s); Indonesians favor cigarettes (*kretek*) flavored with cloves.

## 13 EDUCATION

Literacy (2004 estimate) stands at 90.4 % overall, 94% for males, and 86.8% for females, a substantial increase from 1990s figures of 77%, 84%, and 68% respectively. Schooling is free of charge and compulsory for ages 7 to 15. About 81% of the age-eligible students are enrolled in all levels of education; 94% of age-eligible students are enrolled in elementary education, and 61% in secondary education (2005). About 75% of students reach fifth grade (2004). Between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of the population that had graduated from senior high school doubled, reaching 13.7%.

Curriculum in primary and secondary schools is determined by the central government. Major goals of the educational system include teaching the national language, instilling the state ideology of Pancasila, and supplying religious instruction. Teaching methodology stresses rote memorization. For poorer families, sending a child to a public school is often a financial burden because of supplementary fees and other costs, such as textbooks and uniforms (a uniform costs Rp10,000 or us\$9, almost one-eighth of the average monthly industrial wage).

Over 2.58 million were enrolled in tertiary education in 2007. Only one in five applicants to state institutions is admitted (a decrease from one in four in the 1990s). The requirement of a written thesis (*skripsi*) prevents most students from earning their degrees on time. Many must interrupt their study in order to work to support themselves and finance further coursework.

While only about 7.6% of students enrolled in primary education attends private (mostly Islamic schools), about 40% of students enrolled in secondary education does (2007). At *pesantren* (Islamic schools of the traditional type), students learn the Arabic language, scripture, and religious law but without specific graduation requirements; students who live at the usually rural schools may leave study at any time.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

No dance styles can be said to be truly national, but three urban-based music genres have won nationwide popularity. *Kroncong*, a melancholy music for voice and strings, ultimately of Portuguese origin via the Eurasians of the VOC towns, is still widely heard though considered old-fashioned (during the Revolution, it was the medium for patriotic songs). Favored by the self-consciously “cosmopolitan” upper and middle classes is *pop Indonesia*, modeled on American-European pop music. *Dangdut*, characterized by high-pitch vocals and an insistent beat derived from Indian film music, on the other hand, has its base in the urban poor. Holiday fairs will feature large tents

where hundreds of young people crush together gyrating to live *dangdut* singing.

Literature in Bahasa Indonesia (as distinct from writing in Classical Malay) had its beginnings in late 19th-century “penny dreadfuls” produced for the Sino-Indonesian and Eurasian urban market. More substantial novels, such as Marah Roesidi’s *Sitti Noerbaja* (1922), as well as poetry, have been written since the early years of the 20th century, often published by Balai Pustaka, a still extant printing house established by the Dutch government in 1908. Indonesia’s internationally famous writer has been Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006), a leftist author, imprisoned for years under the New Order, whose tetralogy, “This Earth of Mankind,” “Child of All Nations,” “Footsteps,” and “House of Glass,” explores the birth of Indonesian nationalism.

### 15 WORK

With more than 70% of the population living in rural areas, agriculture employed more than half of Indonesia’s workforce. Only 13% of cultivated land belongs to large plantations, the rest divided among tens of millions of smallholders. Although the high economic growth of recent years has benefited many rural families, many peasants do not own enough land to survive, or have none at all and are forced to work others’ land. One out of four rural families has at least one member working in the cities.

Rice grown in irrigated fields (*sawah*) is by far the most important food crop, particularly in Java and Bali, but maize, cassava, taro, sago, soybeans, peanuts, and coconuts are also widely grown. Sugar, coffee, tea, cloves (for domestic cigarettes), and rubber are important cash crops. Cattle, goats, chickens, and, in non-Muslim areas, pigs are the main livestock species. In the Outer Islands, a decreasing number of people still practice slash-and-burn agriculture (*ladang*). Fishing employed 1.5 million in the 1990s.

Official figures put the unemployment rate at 8.46% in 2008, but many of the “working” can be classified as “underemployed,” engaged in small tasks for minimal pay. In 2005–2006, the nominal monthly wage in a manufacturing job ranged between Rp 876,600 to Rp1,029,200, in a hotel job between Rp 723,900 and Rp 931,700 (at an average of Rp10,800 per US\$1). Over 43% of the work force works in the “informal sector,” at jobs requiring little skill or capital. In the 1990s, petty traders, including half of all non-farming women, make up most of the 16% of the work force then engaged in commerce. In 2005, 44% of the population was employed in agriculture. Industry employed 18% (up from 11% in the 1990s), including great numbers of young women who work in textile factories. 38% work in the service sector (compared to only 13% in the previous decade); these include those employed in the bureaucracy and the military. With only a little over 300,000 active duty personnel, this is a relatively low proportion by world standards. Indonesia, though the fourth largest country by population, only has the fourteenth largest military, approximately the same size as Thailand’s, a country only one-fifth as populous.

According to government figures from 2006, 2.7 million Indonesians were working legally abroad (only 2.8% of the labor force), mostly in the Middle East but also increasingly in neighboring Asian countries with labor shortages, such as Singapore and Taiwan. The world’s second largest flow of illegal

workers (after that from Mexico into the United States) is from Indonesia into Malaysia.

### 16 SPORTS

Part of the Dutch colonial heritage, the most popular modern sport is soccer, which is played on large open spaces in towns throughout the country. In 1994, the whole nation stayed up night after night to watch live telecasts of the World Cup being played in Atlanta. The other two most widely played sports are basketball and badminton, the latter often played in the middle of the street without a net.

Martial arts are also widely practiced, be they the indigenous *silat* or imported East Asian forms, such as *kung fu* or *taekwando*. With the government stressing calisthenics, many people can be seen jogging or otherwise exercising in streets and public squares and parks, particularly on Sunday morning. A common excursion for young people is to go hiking in large groups through mountain areas.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There were 130 radios and 57 televisions for every 1,000 people. Numerous radio stations broadcast programs in the national and regional languages and play regional (traditional), national, and foreign music (Heavy Metal, for instance, appeals to a wide teenage audience). Until 1989, only one government-run channel was available, beamed in by Indonesia’s own Palapa satellite, but at present there are 11 national broadcast channels (all but two are private) and many more local ones. Programming includes the government-produced news, comedies set in middle-class Jakarta homes, historical dramas, music concerts, and old movies; dubbed or subtitled foreign imports consist of American series, Japanese anime and melodramas, and Latin American soap operas. Many well-to-do households receive a wide selection of foreign channels through a satellite dish (*parabola*) or *cable* and often allow neighbors to pay to tap in. In the countryside, families wealthy enough to purchase a television set regularly invite fellow villagers to watch.

In cinemas, elite audiences prefer to watch subtitled American movies, or dubbed or subtitled Hong Kong kung fu films (all censored of sexually explicit footage). The masses watch Indonesian, Hong Kong, and Indian movies. Films produced by the declining Indonesian film industry resort to predictable plots, violence, and as much exposed flesh as the censors will allow.

Other popular urban pastimes include window-shopping in malls and department stores, browsing in night markets, and eating at evening-only food stalls.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

A variety of crafts are practiced by individual Indonesian ethnic groups, including woodcarving, weaving textiles, baskets, and mats, metalworking (gold, silver, copper, and iron), pottery and stone carving, leatherworking, tie-dyeing and batik-ing, glass painting, boat building, and gardening.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Rapid development has not brought comparable benefits to all sectors of the population. Despite the success of contraception programs, the large and growing population continues to strain national resources. Although living standards have

risen, economic growth has widened the gap between the rich and the poor, especially the rural landless. The security net provided by traditional social networks is weakening, exposing many people to exploitation. The conflict between traditional values and those of modernity, both as defined by the national state and by international consumer culture, is intensifying, leading many to espouse religious fundamentalism as an alternative.

Political liberalization since the end of the New Order has given an opening to groups seeking to impose Sharia (Islamic law) on many localities. In October 2008, a national anti-pornography bill was passed in the face of strong opposition, including from women's groups and from non-Muslim ethnic groups, such as the Balinese (who felt their religious images might be threatened); the legislation's targets include public displays of affection, such as kissing relatives in greeting and public performances that "excite sexual desire," as well as pop concerts where dangdut stars' dancing involve gyrating on stage. Many feared that the law would legitimize violent actions taken by radical Islamist vigilante groups against places deemed "immoral," such as brothels and pool halls.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The country's Gender Related Development Index (2005) is 0.721, slightly less than its Human Development Index of 0.728. In comparison with their counterparts in Middle Eastern Muslim societies, Indonesian women play a more prominent public role, from petty trading to the professions. Under bilateral kinship, the mother's line is potentially as important as the father's line in channeling inheritance and status. Women are active in organizations, such as those for the wives of civil servants or army officers. In Indonesian Islam, women are not segregated from men in the mosque. Indonesians are currently debating the legality of polygamy (allowed by Islam but not common and even forbidden to civil servants).

Life expectancy for women is higher (71.6 years) than for men (67.8). Adult literacy, however, is lower for women (86.8%) than for men (94%), as is enrollment in all levels of education (67% vs. 70%, there are about 8 women for every 10 men in university and other tertiary educational institutions). The country has had a woman president (Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's first president), and women hold 11.3% of the seats in parliament. On average, women earn 46% of the income that men do. 1 million women are employed as domestic workers overseas, most commonly in Saudi Arabia or Malaysia, and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse from their employers.

Abortion is prohibited except in the case of danger to the life of the mother. In 2000–2005, the fertility rate stood at 2.4 births per woman (down from 5.3 three decades earlier). 89% of women from the richest 20% of society were attended by a skilled health professional while giving birth; the proportion was only 21% for the poorest 20% of society. During 1990–2004, 310 women died in childbirth for every 100,000 live births. For the richest 20% of society, infant mortality ran to 23 per 1,000 live births and under five mortality to 29 per 1,000 live births; for the poorest 20% of society, the figures were respectively 78 and 109 (population overall, 28 and 36).

The government's approach towards prostitution is ambivalent. On the one hand, prostitutes (officially termed "WTS," short for "wanita tuna susila," "women without morals") are

concentrated in government-supervised "lokalisasi," brothel districts; on the other, these lokalisasi are subject to being shut down by the same government, and the prostitutes are subject to harassment. Enforcing anti-prostitution regulations, however, very often means that police detain non-prostitutes simply for being out on city streets at night. The trafficking of women and children within the country and to foreign countries is a major problem (entertainers and mail order brides often suffer abuse). Underage marriage is common (the legal age for marriage is 16 but exceptions can be made with parental consent, 33% of marriages in rural areas and 15% in urban areas are underage). High rates of underage marriage and of divorce leave many women with few options other than going into prostitution or falling prey to human traffickers holding forth promises of jobs in cities or abroad.

Human Rights Watch regards Indonesia as failing to back up fully its rhetoric in promoting women's rights.

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—by A. J. Abalihin



# IRANIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** i-RAHN-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Iran

**POPULATION:** 69,400,000 (2005 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Farsi (Persian)

**RELIGION:** Islam (Shia Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Iran, known since ancient times as Persia, has had a long and turbulent history. Iran's location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia resulted in many invasions and migrations. Cultural influences have thus been great, with Afghans, Arabs, Chinese, Greeks, Indians, Russians, and Turks all leaving behind traces of themselves.

Archaeologists have determined that Iran was inhabited as far back as 100,000 BC. Knowledge about this era is sparse, however. There is evidence that Iran played a role in the emergence of civilization 10,000 years ago. It is known that settled communities and villages had engaged in farming, pottery, metalworking, and other activities on the Iranian plateau around 6000 BC. A kingdom known as Elam dominated southwest Iran around 3000 BC, establishing a very advanced culture. This culture could write, and had a system of kingship and an organized priesthood. During the Iron Age, around 1500 BC, members of the Aryan (Indo-European) peoples began migrating in waves through the Caucasus Mountains across Central Asia into Iran. Around 1000–900 BC, the forerunners of present-day Iranians began arriving in the country. These included the Bactrians, Medes, and Parthians. A group settled in the southern area then known as Parsa. They were given the name of Persians, and Persia then became the name of the entire region of Iran. In 553 BC, the leader of the Achaemenid clan of Parsa, Cyrus the Great, established the first Persian Empire, which extended to Egypt, Greece, and Russia. Under the Achaemenids, Persia extended the realm of civilization, giving distant countries the opportunity to learn art and culture from one another and to trade goods.

The Achaemenids were overthrown in 336–330 BC by Alexander the Great, of Greece. Persia became part of the Greek Empire and, for several centuries, was the focus of much fighting between the Greeks and Romans. Upon Alexander's death in 323 BC, control of Persia was seized by General Seleucus, who established Seleucid rule for almost a century. In the 3rd century BC, a group known as the Parni (immigrants from Central Asia) assumed power and set up the Parthian Empire, which later collapsed in the 3rd century AD. From AD 226 until 641, Iran was ruled by the Sassanids, a dynasty of local rulers who encouraged Persian art and literature to flourish. Sculptures commemorating Sassanid military victories still adorn hills and cliffs in Iran.

From the 7th through the 9th centuries AD, Iran was conquered by Muslims from Arabia whose goal was the spread of the Muslim religion. They were successful in converting many Persians from their native religion of Zoroastrianism (which dated from the 7th–6th centuries BC) to Islam. Most of the Zoroastrians who did not convert to Islam left the country and settled in India. The Arab rulers were followed by various Turkish Muslim rulers. Then, in the 13th to 14th centuries,

Mongol leader Genghis Khan and his army subjected Persia to fierce destruction and killing. Between 1220 and 1258, one-fourth of Iran's population died as a result of the Mongol conquest. In 1380, Tamerlane (Timur the Lame), one of the last Mongol leaders, established the Timurid dynasty over Iran and Afghanistan. This was replaced centuries later, during the 16th century, by the Safavids, a local clan who were finally able to rid Iran of outside control. Under the rulership of these native Iranians, the arts once again flourished. Mosques and palaces built by the Safavids in their capital city, Esfahan, still stand in Iran. The Safavids were then conquered by Afghan invaders in 1722. An Iranian named Nadir Shah drove them out and established the Afshar dynasty in 1736. Another Turkish tribe, the Qajars, took power in the late 18th century.

The periodic foreign rule ended in 1921, when Reza Khan, an Iranian army officer, deposed the Qajars and established the Pahlavi dynasty. He became the emperor or *shah*, with the name Reza Shah Pahlavi. In 1935, the Shah changed the country's name to Iran, a variation on "Ariana," which means "country of the Aryan people." During World War II (1939–45), Shah Pahlavi, angered by British and Russian troop deployments in Iran, sided with Germany instead of with the Allied powers. In 1941, the Allied powers forced him to abdicate his throne. Pahlavi's son, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, then ruled Iran until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Under the Pahlavis, Western cultural influences grew, and Persia's oil industry was developed. By the 1950s, Iran was a world leader in petroleum production.

Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was a staunch advocate of Westernization. In the 1960s he introduced Iran to the "White Revolution," which replaced many of Iran's traditions with Western influences. He tried to propel Iran out of its traditions of agriculture and Islam into modern industrialization and Western culture. While the Shah enacted many measures for the benefit of Iranians, he also became increasingly dictatorial and restricted many freedoms. In 1975, the Shah outlawed all political parties except his own. His secret police force (SAVAK) became increasingly repressive and cruel. People who opposed the government, such as religious opponents, were jailed and tortured.

In 1978, Islamic opposition forces and Communist forces acted together to demonstrate and riot for political change in Iran. Their rebellion grew into a major revolution against the Westernization and oppression inflicted on Iran by the Shah. Shah Pahlavi fled the country and abdicated his throne under pressure. After a stay in the United States, he sought refuge in Egypt, where he and his wife were welcomed by President Anwar Sadat. The ailing Shah later died in July 1980 in Egypt. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was organized under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a prominent religious leader who returned from exile in Paris. On 11 February 1979, the twenty-second day of the Muslim month of *Bahman*, Khomeini and his supporters succeeded in replacing the secular government of the Shah with an Islamic republic. Symbolically, the words "God is Great" are repeated 22 times on the Iranian flag.

The Islamic Revolution targeted Western influences for having corrupted Iranian Islamic traditions. The United States, in particular, was seen as the evil nation whose culture was pervading Iran. In November 1979, revolutionary students seized control of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held 53 Americans



*Iranians play ball in a park to mark the 13th day of Norouz, commencing the start of spring, in Tehran, Iran. Norouz is the first day of the new year according to the Persian calendar and is a Zoroastrian tradition, still celebrated by Iranians even after Islam.*  
(Behrouz Mehri/Staff/Getty Images)

hostage. In response to the hostage crisis, the United States froze Iranian assets that were banked or invested in the United States. The hostages were held for 14 months, and the crisis created extreme hostility between the two countries. The hostages were released in January 1981 following an agreement negotiated by Algeria, as the United States' leadership was changing hands from President Jimmy Carter to President Ronald Reagan.

Under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran became a theocracy with the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Religious standards thus became the guiding principles for the government and society, and religious leaders known as *mullahs* led Iran along the Islamization route. Many Iranians holding secular views saw the strict religious system as an infringement on their personal liberties. Those who wanted to protect their Western ways of life left Iran and went to Europe and the United States. Khomeini was ruthlessly intolerant of those who opposed his theocracy, and thousands of his opponents were assassinated or arrested during his 10-year reign. Most Jews and Christians, fearing religious persecution, fled the country during the 1980s.

From 1980 until 1988, Iran fought a severe and costly war with its neighbor Iraq. The war began when Iraq invaded Khuzistan, in southwestern Iran, to resolve a longstanding dispute over control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Iraqi forces

seized southwestern Iranian territory and an oil refinery along the Shatt al-Arab, resulting in a full-scale war between the two countries. More than 500,000 Iraqis and Iranians died, and, although Iran was able to expel Iraq from Khuzistan, neither side could really claim a victory. International access to Middle Eastern oil was adversely affected, as both Iran and Iraq attacked one another's oil freighters in the Persian Gulf. The United States and the Soviet Union, in the mid-1980s, arranged for Kuwaiti oil freighters to operate in the Gulf under protection of the American and Soviet flags, with both countries' naval forces positioned in the Gulf. The United States got involved in the battle in the late 1980s. First, an Iraqi bomber accidentally attacked a U.S. ship in 1987. Then, a floating mine damaged an American tanker, and an Iranian passenger plane was accidentally shot down by a U.S. warship in 1988. The war ended in the summer of 1988, with Iran and Iraq signing a cease-fire agreement arranged by the United Nations.

In June 1989, spiritual leader and head-of-state Ayatollah Khomeini died. Some 2 million Iranians attended Khomeini's funeral in Tehran. Thousands of mourners were injured, and several died in the chaos and hysteria that filled the streets. Shortly after Khomeini's death, Ali Khamenei replaced him as spiritual leader, and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani became president. Rafsanjani was reelected to the presidency in June 1993 and remained in office until 1997.

Struggles for power between reformists and conservatives in Iran grew increasingly bitter during Rafsanjani's presidency. Rafsanjani favored economic and political reforms, but conservatives in Iran's legislature, known as the Majlis, often prevented his policies from taking effect. In Iran, the president, prime minister, and cabinet ministers do not make decisions on their own. They answer to the *faqih*, or spiritual leader, and to a group of religious scholars and judicial authorities whom the *faqih* appoints. In addition, the Majlis, which is elected by the people every four years, enacts laws that must be in keeping with the Islamic faith. A council made up of six clergy and six lawyers oversees the work of the Majlis. The power of religious leaders in Iran's government slowed the effort to introduce reforms through the mid 1990s.

Conservatives suffered a defeat in 1997 when reformist Muhammad Khatami won a landslide victory in the presidential election and when his supporters gained a majority in the Majlis in 2000. Khatami was then re-elected in 2001, despite conservative clerics who used their power to bring many of the reformists to trial on alleged political charges. Clerics then began a concerted effort to stop reforms. Nearly 100 reform proposals were blocked between 2000 and early 2004. Conservatives regained control of the Majlis in 2003, and Iranian voters began to regard the reformists as individuals who could not effectively create change.

While reformists and conservatives battled for political power in Iran, U.S. president George W. Bush began to accuse Iran of developing nuclear weapons. The American president labeled Iran as a member of an "axis of evil," a statement that turned many of the conservatives in Iran against the United States. Rafsanjani ran for president in July 2005 in an effort to regain support for the reformist movement. However, he was defeated by a hardline conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Soon after taking office, Ahmadinejad assumed a strident anti-American stance and announced in April 2007 that he was enriching uranium, a process that often leads to the building of nuclear weapons. The United Nations has responded by imposing sanctions on Iran. The election in August 2007 of Rafsanjani to the Assembly of Experts ensures that the reformist movement has not died out entirely because the Assembly of Experts has the power to dismiss Iran's highest authority. However, Ahmadinejad remains popular among Iranians who have embraced the conservative stance of their president.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Iran is located in southwest Asia. It is bordered to the north by Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian Sea, by Turkey to the northwest, Iraq to the west, and by Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates are to Iran's south and southwest, separated from Iran by the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf. Oman is to the southeast, separated from Iran by the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Iran's location led to invasions and cultural influences by many ethnic and national communities. One of the major influences was a direct result of Iran's proximity to Saudi Arabia, known in the 7th century AD as the Hejaz. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab Muslims from the Hejaz spread their new Islamic religion to Iran, converting most Iranian Zoroastrians to Islam by the 9th century AD.

With an area of 1,647,063 sq km (635,932 sq mi), Iran is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Alaska. Iran's geography



has three types of terrain. A vast, dry plateau in the center of the country is encircled by a ring of snow-topped mountain ranges that cover about half of Iran's area. Outside of the mountains to the north and south is coastal lowland. The rocky central plateau is a high plain with an average height of 1,200 m (4,000 ft) above sea level, covered with low hills. In northwest Iran, streams flowing down the slopes of mountains have facilitated the establishment of large cities. This region is the location of the capital city, Tehran, and Isfahan and Qom.

To the south and east of Tehran, on the plateau, lie two deserts: the Dasht-e-Kavir (Great Salt Desert), and the Dasht-e-Lut. The deserts, which make up about 25% of Iran's total land area, consist of very salty soil. Following rain, the soil dries into a white crust of salt crystals. Below the surface is salty quicksand, making travel over the desert dangerous. The Dasht-e-Lut has been described as a hostile wasteland, whereas the Dasht-e-Kavir has an occasional oasis. Iran has three major mountain ranges. The Zagros Mountains in the west have a height of up to 4,242 m (14,000 ft). The Elburz Mountains in the north have the highest peaks, with Mount Damavand reaching 5,736 m (18,934 ft). The Khorasan Mountains in the east have productive farmland and grasslands. Small mountain ranges are located in the south and southeast.

The climate of northern and eastern Iran is generally more moderate than in the southern and western parts. While the summers get very hot nationwide, in the areas of high elevation the evenings are cool and breezy, and even the days are comfortable. In the lower elevations, the climate is hot in the summer. It is hottest around the Persian Gulf, where temperatures

reach 60°C (140°F) in the summer. In the winter, the Persian Gulf region sees high temperatures of 20°C to 30°C (70°–85°F).

Iran, considered an arid country, has several creeks, rivers, and lakes, many of which fill up with rain and melted snow in the spring, and then dry up during the summer. Even the Caspian Sea loses much of its water to evaporation. Lake Urmia in the northwest, Iran's largest inland body of water, covers an area of 5,200 sq km (2,000 sq mi). The three principal rivers are the Karun, the Atrek, and the Safid. Of these, only the Karun is navigable. It travels from the Zagros Mountains to the Shatt al-Arab, and then into the Persian Gulf. The lakes are salty and thus of little use for irrigation or drinking, but the rivers provide usable water. Underground irrigation tunnels carry water from springs, streams, and snow-topped hills. These canals are critical to this country with a water scarcity.

The name "Persian" is now used to refer to all Iranians (with a total population of about 69,400,000 people). Only 51% (or 35,954,000) of Iranians, however, are actually Persians, i.e., descendants of the Aryans who emigrated from Central Asia. Persians, the largest ethnic group, live either in the developed farm areas or in the large cities of the northern and western plateau. Another large ethnic group is the Azerbaijanis, descendants of Turkish settlers from the 10th century AD. They live in the northwest part of Iran and make up 24% of the population (or 16,600,000 people). The Zagros Mountains are home to several ethnic groups, such as the Kurds, who make up 7% of the total population (or 4,848,000 people), and the Lurs and the Bakhtiari, each of whom makes up 2% of the population (or 1,380,000 people).

The Kurds are a nomadic people whose origins are located in territory that extends into parts of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, with 33% of the Middle East's Kurdish population residing in Iran. They are also part of a political dilemma involving all of these states, because they wish to establish their own state of Kurdistan over Kurdish-populated territories. In fact, the Kurds, who are Sunni Muslims, demanded independence from Iran following the Shia Islamic Revolution of 1979. Relations between the Kurds and the government have gotten better.

The Lurs (or Luri) live in an area known as Luristan, and the Bakhtiari live west of Shiraz, in the mountains. Both are nomadic peoples, although the Iranian government since the 1960s has tried to modernize their lifestyle by settling them in farming villages. Another 2% of the population (or 1,380,000 people) are of the Baluchi tribe—farmers living in the Baluchistan region in southeastern Iran. Arabs make up 3% of the population (or 2,082,000 people). They live in Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf and in Khuzistan. Other ethnic groups include the Qashqai, Turkomans, Khamshah, Mamasani, Shahsevan, Armenians, Brahui, Syrians, Afghans, and Pakistanis. The overwhelming majority of Iranians are Muslims, belonging to the Shia school of Islam. However, there are a significant number of minority religious groups in Iran, including Sunni Muslims, Zoroastrians, Armenian and Chaldean Christians, and Jews. The 1979 constitution guarantees religious freedom, and is widely respected.

Iran had as many as 3 million refugees residing within its borders in the 1990s, as a result of the civil war in Afghanistan. The total number was less than 1 million in 2007. This drop in the refugee population resulted from the government's effort to return refugees from Afghanistan, following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2002 in that country. Other refugees were

Shia Muslims from Iraq, who began returning to Iraq after the fall of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who was Sunni. Refugees from southeastern Turkey and Azerbaijan also have entered Iran.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Iran's official language is Farsi, which is also known as Persian. Farsi, also spoken in parts of Turkey and Afghanistan, was brought to Iran when the Aryan people of Central Asia migrated across Iran's northern border. Farsi has since been influenced by other languages, predominantly Arabic. The Farsi alphabet is very similar to the Arabic alphabet and, like the latter, is written from right to left. Many Iranians understand Arabic, an important language since the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, is written in Arabic. The Azerbaijanis speak a Turkish dialect known as Azeri. The Lurs and Bakhtiari both speak the Luri language. The Baluchis speak an Indo-European language, and the Kurds speak a language known as Kurdish.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Many Muslims believe in *jinns*, spirits who can change shape and be either visible or invisible. Muslims sometimes wear amulets around their necks to protect them from jinns. Stories of jinns are often told at night, like ghost stories around a campfire.

### 5 RELIGION

Shia Islam is the state religion of Iran. Shia is one of the two schools of Islam. Sunni Islam is the major school, with a far greater number of adherents worldwide. Followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century AD engaged in a dispute, after his death, as to who the rightful successor to the Prophet's leadership was. Those who believed that the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali should become *khalifa* (caliph), the Islamic leader, formed the Shia school, which took root in Iran and has dominated religious thinking there through the present day.

The overwhelming majority of Iranians (about 98%) are Muslims. Most Iranians (about 89%) belong to the Shia school of Islam, while the remaining population is Sunni Muslim (9%) or Zoroastrian, Armenian and Chaldean Christian, or Jewish. The latter groups make up about 2% of the population. The 1979 constitution guarantees religious freedom and is widely respected. However, non-Muslims must follow civil laws in Iran that are formed on the basis of Islamic principles.

Before the advent of Islam, most Iranians were Zoroastrians. The Zoroastrian faith developed in Iran around the 7th to 6th centuries BC. Zoroastrians followed a teacher named Zoroaster or Zarathustra. They worshiped a god of good known as Ahura Mazda and believed in a god of evil known as Ahriman. Most Zoroastrians converted to Islam starting in the 7th century AD. Over the centuries, most of the remaining Zoroastrians fled Iran and resettled in India.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major secular holiday is Now Ruz (or Nawruz), the ancient Persian New Year. The festival begins on March 21, which is also the first day of spring, and continues through March 24. Much socializing takes place on this very festive day. A gong is sounded or a cannon is fired in the cities to signal the begin-

ning of the new year. Children are given money and gifts, and dancers perform at festivals. Oil Nationalization Day (March 20) commemorates the day in 1951 when Iran assumed ownership of the Iranian oil industry, which had been controlled principally by Great Britain. Other national holidays include Islamic Republic Day (April 1) and Revolution Day (June 5).

Iran is on the lunar Islamic calendar, so the dates of religious holidays change every year. Some of Iran's major religious holidays commemorate the birthdays of imams, or religious leaders, who were famous in history. One of these is the birthday celebration of an imam of particular importance to Iranians, known as the Twelfth Imam.

One major Muslim holiday comes at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. During the month, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sexual relations during the daytime in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate who do not have enough food. Another major Muslim holiday commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham, as well as his son, to obey God's command in all things, even when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son. This holiday signals the end of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or *hajj*, which every Muslim must undertake at least once during his or her lifetime.

Another significant month, particularly to the Shia Muslims of Iran, is the Islamic month of Muharram. During this month, the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, Husayn and Hasan, were killed. Iranians mourn their death throughout the month, sometimes mourning in street processions in which they beat themselves. Those who can afford to do so give money, food, and goods to the poor. No weddings or parties can be held during the month of Muharram.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Marriage is the most important stage in a person's life, marking the official transition to adulthood. In the Islamic Republic, a woman traditionally could have been betrothed at age nine and a man at age fourteen. Iran's present day Civil Law sets the minimum age of marriage at fifteen for women and at eighteen for men. However, the law also allows for earlier marriage if a woman's legal guardian, and a judge or medical doctor felt that she was mature enough for marriage. For these reasons, most Iranian men and women marry between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Although dating is not common in rural areas, college students and other couples who live in cities often will get to know a future spouse by going to movies, eating out in restaurants, or socializing together before marriage. Iranian laws also allow for couples to have a *sigheh* or temporary marriage in which men and women are able to test whether they wish to remain together. Many women enter such marriages for the sake of financial support.

There are two ceremonies in the marital tradition: the *agd*, and the *arusi*. The engagement is the *arusi* and is usually a very intimate and private affair among the families involved. The actual ceremony is the *agd*, which can involve the entire community. Iranian society is built on the importance of the family, and marriage is often arranged among families that have long-established ties. A potential suitor must seek the approval of the father before even speaking to his prospective wife. Women and men are raised to see marriage as their social and religious obligation, and it is valued as such.

The birth of a child is an important event. Relatives and friends typically will bring a gift. Children's birthday parties are attended mostly by adults, and children gather to eat and play traditional games. Girls traditionally will have a party at school at age nine and fifteen.

Respect toward the deceased is also an important ritual. Loved ones gather at the home of the recently deceased to sit and quietly pray or reflect. Those who knew the deceased casually pay their respects at the mosque. The death of a community member in urban areas is announced in the local paper. Mourning lasts for 40 days, and special dark attire is worn to show grief for the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is customary to greet others with a handshake and slight bow of the head in Iran. Men, however, will not shake the hand of a woman unless the woman offers her hand first. It is also customary to stand when an elder individual or prominent person enters the room.

Most people in Iran employ an elaborate system of courtesy, known in Farsi as *taarof*. Polite and complimentary phrases are used to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. For example, when an Iranian finds he or she has had their back to someone, which is considered offensive body language, he or she will apologize. The other person will usually reply, "A flower has neither back nor front." At times, *taarof* can complicate or delay things, such as when two people each insist that the other should proceed first through a door. Since it brings honor to the one who insists, there could be a long struggle before one person finally gives in.

Another aspect of *taarof* is the elaborate display of courtesy when one entertains a guest. For example, a host will always offer a guest food or other treats, even on a brief visit. Hungry or not, a guest will most often take the offering in order to please the host. A host will make sure to make the guest feel comfortable and well-liked. The host will go to great lengths to please the guest, but the guest also must behave with the utmost courtesy and politeness toward the host.

Iranians, like many people of the Middle East, are very hospitable. They serve their guests as much as they can afford. Iranians typically place a large basket of fruit on their table for guests and family to consume. This display symbolizes abundance and mirth, which all Iranians want to share. Women in the family cook for the enjoyment of their guests. Tea is boiled in a metal (usually copper) urn known as a *samovar* and is served to guests in small glasses with lots of sugar. Visitors return the courtesy by removing their shoes when they enter the carpeted areas of a home.

Iranians are very demonstrative with their facial and hand gestures. Some gestures that have specific meanings in the United States are interpreted differently in Iran. For example, the American hand gesture meaning "come here," with the forefinger pointed outward and waved toward one's body, in Iran is a gesture used by men to beckon suggestively to women. The American "thumbs up" gesture, indicating something well done, in Iran is an aggressive gesture that can create ill feeling.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Almost 70% of Iran is uninhabited because of the harshness of the deserts and mountains. The population density is about 148 persons per sq km (92 per sq mi). Most of the population

lives in the western and northern parts of the country, with the highest concentration of people in Tehran, the capital city, which has a population of 7,315,000. The second-largest city is Mashhad, with a population of 2,150,000. The third-largest cities are Tabriz and Isfahan, each with a population of about 1,350,000. Other highly populated areas are in Azerbaijan in the northwest and along the coast of the Caspian Sea in the north. The population of more than 69,400,000 is highly urban. About 67.5% of Iranians lived in cities in 2007 compared with about 31% in 1951. The cities, however, are finding it difficult to keep up with the needs of the migrants. Sanitation and housing in the cities are thus inadequate.

A rise in the number of young Iranians has accompanied the migration of people from rural to urban areas. The average life expectancy at birth for Iranians was 70.7 years in 2004 compared with 55.3 years in the early 1970s. As a result, nearly one-third (29.8%) of the population was under age 15 in 2004. This large percentage of youth has created a large workforce, with 23.1 million workers as of March 2007. About 600,000 new job-seekers enter the labor market each year. Although Iran's economy is rich with oil reserves, the country is finding it difficult to employ its young people. As a result, more than 200,000 Iranians leave the country each year in search of better work opportunities in Europe and the United States.

The cities of Iran are very spacious, and the streets are lined with trees. Despite the space, city streets are often very congested with automobiles. Larger cities have many high-rise apartments built during the Shah's renovations, and some have modern supermarket complexes that are several stories high. Tehran underwent extensive modernization during the 20th century, resulting in modern skyscrapers overlooking ancient mosques. Tehran is the industrial and cultural center of Iran. Cities also have marketplaces, or bazaars. Tehran's bazaar has more than 6,000 businesses. Wooden houses are common along the Caspian coast and square houses made of mud brick are found on the slopes in the mountain villages. Nomadic tribes in the Zagros Mountains live in round black tents made of goat hair. The people of Baluchistan, in the southeast, are farmers who live in huts.

Although Iran exports oil, fuel for use in homes is not always available. Appliances used for cooking include grill-like charcoal heaters and coal stoves. Hydroelectric power has increasingly been made available in the country.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In the cities, the family unit is the extended family, including one's aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. The concerns of all members of the extended family have a bearing on the nuclear family, consisting of the mother, father, and children. Although large families were traditionally prized, the Iranian government has been taking steps to reduce the country's population. Couples must now attend a family planning course before they marry, and men are only allowed more than one wife if they are able to provide for each spouse equally. Government policies have helped reduce the average size of the nuclear family to about six children per family.

The tribe ruled by a tribal chief is the basic social unit among nomads. Tribes have elaborate customs that govern individuals' behavior. In the villages, clans and families are the most important social units. This creates a strong sense of belonging in the villages, as all the families share much in common.

The father is the head of the Iranian household, yet there is a tacit recognition of the mother's role and preeminence. There is a respect within the family for males and a ranking by age, with the young showing respect toward older siblings. Respect, especially toward one's elders, is an integral part of the family structure. However, Iranians extend their respect beyond their immediate and extended families. For instance, an Iranian is expected to rise to her or his feet when any person of equal or greater age or status enters the room.

There is no pension system and little state welfare for the elderly. Aging parents are taken care of by their children until death. The elderly are venerated for their wisdom and place at the head of the family. Thus, taking care of them is seen as their children's responsibility.

Because most workers and students take two-hour lunch breaks, families are able to spend time together in the afternoons, as well as in the evenings. They also see much of each other on Fridays, the Muslim day of rest and prayer. It is typical on Fridays for families to go on an outing, usually to the park to watch children play, talk about current events, and eat prepared food. Schools and government offices close early on Thursdays to honor this tradition.

## 11 CLOTHING

Iranians value personal cleanliness, a value that is reflected in how they dress. Western clothing for both men and women was popular until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Since then, women have been forced to cover their hair and wear the Iranian *chador*, a long cloak, when in public. Although the chador most often seen in Western images of Iran is black, many Iranian women wear very colorful chadors. Some women wear only a head-covering or use the chador to cover more fashionable, Western-style clothing. It also is common for Iranian women to wear make-up.

Most men wear slacks, shirts, and jackets. Most usually do not wear ties, because religious leaders have condemned the accessory as a symbol of Western influence. Some men, especially religious leaders, wear floor-length, jacket-like garments, and cover their heads with turbans.

Mountain-dwellers continue to wear their traditional clothing. For Kurdish men, this consists of a long-sleeved cotton shirt over baggy pants that taper down to fit tightly at the ankles. A thick belt of cloth, much like a cummerbund, is wrapped around the waist, and a turban adorns the head. Some tribal women wear long, embroidered vests, and skirts or dresses adorned with beads. They wear an elaborate head covering with coin trimming. In general, great importance is placed on one's presentability. This being the case, both women and men dress in their best clothing to create a good impression.

## 12 FOOD

There is no doubt that the multitude of invasions and migrations by foreign peoples contributed to Iranian cuisine. The influence of Turkey, Greece, India, and Arab countries is seen, respectively, in shish kabob, stuffed grape leaves, spicy curry stews, and dishes made of lamb, dates, and figs. Iranian bread and rice are a must at the table. Breads come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. *Sang-gak* is made of whole meal flour and baked over hot stones. *Nan* is a round, flat bread that can either be baked or cooked over a bed of small stones. Iranians make a popular skewered kabob known as *chelo kebab*. Boneless cubes

of lamb are marinated in spicy yogurt and arranged with vegetables on metal skewers. These are then grilled over hot coals and served on a bed of rice.

One of Iran's most popular dishes is sweet orange-peel rice, also known as "wedding rice." The color and taste of the rice make it an appropriate dish to serve to wedding guests. The cook prepares a sauce made of orange peel, shelled almonds and pistachios, sugar, butter, saffron, cinnamon, nutmeg, and orange juice. The sauce is cooked for about five minutes and then added to partially cooked (steamed) rice. The rice is then cooked for another 30 minutes.

Yogurt is a main part of the Iranian diet. It is rich and creamy and is used in many different ways. It can be used to marinate meats, it is added to salads, it is used in soups, and it is enjoyed as a cool drink in the summer. Tea, the national beverage, is grown in the Caspian region and on the slopes of mountains. Tea is made in metal urns called *samovars*. It is served in glasses. Iranians have a particular tea-drinking method: they place a cube of sugar on the tongue and sip the tea through the sugar. Pork and alcoholic beverages are forbidden in Islam.

### 13 EDUCATION

Iran underwent large-scale educational reform in the 1960s, building many schools and colleges. Emphasis was placed on training teachers, and by 1968, some 35,000 Literacy Corps teachers had been trained to teach adults and young children. Illiteracy has dropped from 70% in the 1960s to about 33% as of 2002. There is a gender gap in literacy rates, with only about 70.4% of women able to read and write, compared to 83.5% of men. Iran's younger children enjoy much higher literacy rates than adults, with 96.5% of those between ages six and twenty-nine able to read and write as of 2005.

The school year begins in September and ends in June. There is a two-week holiday in March. July and August are the months of summer vacation. Students attend school from Saturday morning until Thursday at noon. Elementary schooling lasts five years and is required for children between the ages of seven and twelve. Schools are operated by the state. Elementary schools are free, with pupils also receiving free textbooks.

After the compulsory period ends, students take a major qualifying examination to determine if they qualify to attend secondary school. These schools are free except for small fees. Secondary schools are academically demanding, and students take a major examination at the end of each school year. Failing one of the subjects could mean repeating the whole year. About three-fourths of all children enter secondary school, which consists of three years of general education and three years of high school. After completing the six years of school, students have the option to take a seventh year of "pre-college" schooling.

Universities in Iran also are free. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, two Islamic universities were built: the Free Islamic University, and the International University of Islamic Studies. The universities have suffered from financial problems, and many wealthy Iranian families send their children overseas for education.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Iran is known for its magnificent mosques and architecture commissioned by rulers throughout history. One of the most

beautiful of these buildings is a mosque located in the city of Mashhad that was built by Tamerlane's daughter-in-law. The mosaics of tile that embellish the mosque are brilliantly colored. The city of Isfahan is known for the blue tiles of some of its historic buildings, such as the mosque named Masjid-i-Shah. This 17th-century mosque has an intricately patterned domed ceiling that is intensely geometric in design.

Iran also has palaces and monuments built centuries ago that document both the tremendous influences of foreigners and the power of the ancient Persian Empire. Carved stone structures depict various aspects of Persian life and history. The ruins of Persepolis, the capital city of the Persian Empire that was built in 520 BC, are located near Shiraz in south-central Iran. The ruins consist of rock slabs and pillars with elaborate carvings. One stone pillar is topped with a large sculpture of an animal's head. Carved soldiers and courtiers bedeck some of the stone remains, providing much information about the ancient customs of Persia.

One of the most fascinating items of Iranian artwork is the *Peacock Throne*, on which all Iran's kings since the 18th century have sat. It is part of the priceless crown jewels collection, which is now the property of the state. The throne bears more than 20,000 precious gems and serves as the backing for Iran's currency.

Many writers known around the world have contributed to a very rich literary tradition among Iranians, and Iranian music is often inspired by the country's rich heritage of poetry. By far the most famous of Iranian poets was a man named Firdawsi (AD 940–1020), who wrote Iran's national epic, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings). A fictional poem based on facts, the 120,000-line story relates the adventures of four ancient Iranian dynasties. Many of the copies made of this epic are illustrated with miniature art. Another internationally known Iranian poet was Omar Khayyam (11th century AD), who was also a mathematician and astronomer. His four-line rhyming verses, known as *rubai's*, became famous when Edward Fitzgerald, a British writer, translated 101 of the poems in his volume *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. One of the more famous of the translated verses is:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on; nor all the Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

The city of Shiraz was home to two other great poets: Sadi (13th century AD) and Hafez (14th century AD). Sadi's poems were among the first examples of Persian literature introduced to Europe. Hafez wrote a collection of about 700 poems, which is known as the *Divan*.

### 15 WORK

About one-fourth of Iran's work force is composed of industrial employees. They engage in petroleum extraction and refinery; mineral mining (coal, chromite, copper, iron ore, lead, manganese, salt, sulfur, and zinc); production of steel; food processing; and many other industries. One of the most important industries is cement production.

About one-third of the work force is employed in agriculture. This category includes farming, raising livestock, forestry, and fishing. Fishers off the Caspian coast provide about 20% of the world's supply of caviar. Iran's major cultivated crops in-

clude barley, cotton, dates, raisins, rice, sugar beets, tea, tobacco, and wheat.

The remainder of Iran's work force is engaged in the service sector. The typical Iranian urban work-day is eight hours long, often starting at 7:00 am. Workers commonly take a two-hour lunch break. During the hot summer months, workers might take longer lunch breaks and then work later into the evening when it is not so hot. Farmers and herders work from sunrise to sunset. They rely predominantly on manual labor; modern mechanical equipment is uncommon. While some farmers have the luxury of animals to assist in plowing and other fieldwork, in some regions such animals are unavailable, so the farmer relies on his own and his family's efforts.

## 16 SPORTS

Iran's most popular sports are wrestling, weight lifting, soccer, martial arts, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, and horse-racing. The *Zur Khaneh*, or House of Strength, is a physical training and wrestling center where young men undergo vigorous training with heavy clubs and perform in wrestling matches for spectators. Tennis and squash are popular, especially among urban Iranians. Gymnastics is encouraged in schools and is becoming popular. Camel- and horse-racing are popular in rural areas.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In rural areas, people are entertained by traveling groups of actors who recite poetry and perform plays. Generally, the plays tell stories about Iran's history, reliving important episodes and highlighting the lives of famous Iranians.

In urban areas, men enjoy spending their leisure time in teahouses, socializing and smoking the *hookah*, or water pipe. Going to movies also is becoming more popular. Women enjoy entertaining family and friends in the home. They often spend time engaged in leisurely craftwork. Iranians enjoy the game of chess, and many argue that chess was invented in their country. Many Iranians attend the mosque every Friday, both for prayer and to socialize with friends.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Iranians have long been recognized as a people of artistic distinction, renowned for the crafts made by their goldsmiths during the Sassanid dynasty of the 3rd to 7th centuries AD. The city of Isfahan is famous for its abundance of artists and craftspeople. The cities of Shiraz and Tabriz are famous for their rugs. Iran's handwoven carpets and rugs are made of either silk or wool and use special knots dating from the Middle Ages. They come with many designs and patterns that vary from region to region, with geometric shapes being the most common. Persian carpets are sold in all parts of the world. Shiraz and Isfahan are famous also for their tradition of crafting metal, such as silver and copper, into ornamental plates, cups, vases, trays, and jewelry. Picture frames and jewelry boxes are embellished with a form of art known as *khatam*. This involves the use of ivory, bone, and pieces of wood to create geometric patterns.

Calligraphy (ornate writing) is also a fine art in Iran, as it is in much of the Islamic world. Verses from the Quran are skillfully handwritten and painted in beautifully flowing lettering. The calligraphy has adorned many books and manuscripts produced in Iran through the centuries. Iranians, influenced

by a Chinese art style, developed an art of painting very detailed small images on their manuscripts. Known as "miniature painting," this art form was especially prized during the 15th century. Masterpieces created at that time by an artist named Bihzad are now prized the world over.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Iran's development has fluctuated considerably since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the early 21st century, the government's opposition to the United States and its war against Islamic terrorists has led to many reactionary practices. The 2008 Amnesty International report on the state of the world's human rights noted that Iranian authorities shut down media outlets critical of the Islamic regime, jailed journalists, and closed many non-governmental organizations operating in Iraq. Nearly 350 people were executed in 2007 and harsh punishments of flogging, stoning, and amputation were handed down by the courts.

One of Iran's greatest challenges in the early 21st century has been balancing the country's older cultural and social traditions against the attitudes of its younger citizens who are more influenced by Western ideas and globalization. Nearly one-third of Iran's population is under age 25. Young people often challenge the Islamic clergy's rules on attire and socialization between the sexes by wearing Western clothing and gathering together in streets, particularly in Tehran. The government has responded by arresting those who defy Islamic based laws.

The war in Iraq (begun in 2003) has made Iranians vulnerable to external threats, as well as to threats from militants who are said to be hiding in Iran. Despite a modest increase in per capita GNP, unemployment is a severe problem, swelling the numbers of urban and rural poor. Women in rural areas particularly have suffered from the economy, where handicrafts and other commodities are given a small market value and where they have to compete with men for work. In addition, U.S. pressure on Iran's economy (through sanctions) has curbed Iran's potential for investment and growth. Overall efforts are being made by the Iranian government to compensate for this loss of revenue.

The state of the Iranian press and intellectuals in Iran today is a source of concern for human-rights activists both within and abroad. Members of the Iranian intelligentsia are frequently arrested and tortured for their so-called "un-Islamic" writings, and most live in fear for their lives. In spite of this, visitors to Iran have observed the active efforts within the intellectual community to solve various problems in the Islamic Republic, and to contribute to a lively discourse.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Information on the status of women in Iran can often be colored by Western prejudice against the Islamic Revolution. However, numerous accounts documented the repression of women accused of such things as improper veiling. The condition of women in Iranian society began to improve in the 1990s and women have gained more educational opportunities, employment options, and rights to seek compensation from their former husbands in the event of divorce. In addition, rules on the dress code for women began to relax in the 1990s. In 1995, a journalist asked President Rajsanjani why women's veils had to be black. The president suggested that women could wear



veils in any color of their choice. Iranian women responded by donning veils of numerous colors, including light blue and pink. The example illustrates how many women are willing to push for more social freedoms while still remaining respectful of Islamic traditions.

The advances have been pushed back with the new dominance of conservatives loyal to fundamentalist Islamic clerics in Iran. Amnesty International reported that thousands of women were arrested in 2007 for not complying with the Islamic dress code. In early 2008, the Iranian government shut down the feminist magazine *Zanan* for publishing articles that the government found detrimental to Iranian society. The magazine had been in circulation for 16 years and was among 42 publications that the government had suspended since 2005.

Iranian women continue to seek an end to legalized discrimination through the Campaign for Equality. The activist group has been trying to collect a million signatures in Iran in support for their cause. The government responded in 2007 by arresting several women working with the campaign.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson

# IRAQIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** i-RAH-keez

**LOCATION:** Iraq

**POPULATION:** 28,221,180 (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; Kurdish; Turkoman (a Turkish dialect); Assyrian; Armenian

**RELIGION:** Islam (Shi'ite, 60-65%; Sunni, 32-37%); Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Iraqis are among the world's most economically devastated peoples. Iraqis have lived under conditions of war nearly continuously since 1980. Nevertheless, the people have a long and proud history and some of the world's oldest civilizations originated in what is present-day Iraq.

Iraq (the Arabic word for “cliff”) contains the ancient land of Mesopotamia, or “the land between the rivers.” The rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates, which originate in the mountains of Turkey and flow southward through Syria into Iraq. Between these two rivers lies a fertile plain where, as far as is known, the first human civilization flourished. By 4000 BC, the Sumerians had established cities and government institutions, the earliest known on the planet. Writing, mathematics, and science also began in Sumer. The Akkadians conquered Sumer in 2334 BC, but a mere 200 years later, the Sumerians regained control of the region. From then on, a series of peoples invaded and conquered this fertile land. The Babylonians gained control in 1900 BC and ruled for 300 years, during which King Hammurabi developed his famous law code. The Assyrians followed the Babylonians, then the Chaldeans took over in the 7th century BC. Perhaps the best-remembered Chaldean leader was Nebuchadnezzar II, who reigned from 605 to 562 BC from the capital city of Babylon. The Persians invaded in 550 BC, then Alexander the Great conquered the Persians and claimed Mesopotamia for the Greeks in 331 BC. The Greeks introduced metropolitan cities and scientific rationalism and improved irrigation methods, trade, and commerce. In 126 BC, the Persian Parthians took command and ruled for about 300 years. The Romans occupied the land briefly two different times: once from AD 98–117 and again from AD 193–211. The next conquerors were the Iranian Sasanids, who took charge in AD 227, and then Islamic troops, who entered the country in AD 636. Arab tribes, some of whom were Christian, lived in the area at that time and often acted as paid armies for the Persians. The Arab tribes from the Arabian Peninsula, having recently converted to Islam, were sent to invade the area now known as Iraq. The Christian Arab tribes and others switched allegiances en masse and “converted” to Islam. They then joined the Arab troops from the Arabian Peninsula in attacking the Persians. By AD 650, Iraq was an Islamic state.

The Golden Age of Iraq occurred during the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate, from AD 750 to 1258. In 762, Baghdad became the capital and the center of political power and culture in the Middle East. The Abbasids, however, tried to control more territory than their resources would allow. This problem was further complicated by the inherent problems of hereditary rule. By the time of the Mongol invasion of the Middle East, the Abbasid empire had fragmented into many small realms that showed allegiance to Baghdad in name only. This

made it easy for the superior military forces of the Mongols to formally bring to an end the Abbasid Caliphate with the sacking of Baghdad in 1258. The Ottoman Turks eventually added Iraq to their empire in the 16th century. Iraq remained part of the Ottoman Empire until World War I, when Britain invaded and conquered it in 1917–18. In 1920, at the end of the war, an Iraqi Arab state under British mandate was created. Twelve years later, in October 1932, Iraq was recognized as an independent monarchy.

Independence did not spell the end of Iraq's troubles, however. Beset by internal conflicts and plagued by foreign powers, the monarchy finally fell to a military coup on 14 July 1958. A series of coups followed over the next 10 years, until the Ba'ath Party seized control in 1968. Saddam Hussein, named vice-president in 1968, became president of what was renamed the socialist Republic of Iraq in 1979. Iran and Iraq were at war from 1980–1988. Although Iraq declared itself the victor, the war destroyed the country's economy, heavily militarized the society, and spurred rebellion among Kurds living in the country's northern mountains. Hussein responded to the Kurdish rebellion with a chemical weapons attack that killed several thousand Kurdish civilians.

Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, but a U.S.-led coalition acting under United Nations (UN) resolutions launched an invasion of Iraq in January 1991 and expelled Iraqi troops from Kuwait by February 1991. After the war, known as the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Kurds in the north and Shia Muslims in the south rebelled against Hussein's government. Hussein responded with a brutal military assault. Over the next decade, Hussein ruled Iraq as a dictator, and repressed both Shia Muslims as well as Kurds. His Ba'ath government also enacted several damaging environmental and agricultural policies that resulted in a draining of Iraq's southern marshes and extinction of a people known as the Ma'dan (or Marsh Arabs). Hussein's actions caused the United States, Great Britain, and France to set up no-fly zones over the country and requirements from the United Nations' Security Council to surrender weapons of mass destruction. Hussein refused to cooperate with the U.N. orders, and international sanctions were imposed against the country. These measures led to a U.S.-led invasion of the country in March 2003, and removal of the Ba'ath regime from power. Hussein went into hiding but was captured in December 2003 and was brought to trial and executed in late 2006. A U.S.-led coalition established an occupational government in 2003 known as the Coalition Provisional Authority and established what was initially an interim Iraqi government and, as of 2008, a transitional government. A new constitution was approved in 2006, but U.S. troops continue to occupy Iraq and war-like conditions continue to plague Iraq. Serious conflicts between the country's Shi'ite majority, Sunni minority, and Kurds threaten Iraq's long-term stability and as of 2008 the country remained at risk of falling into civil war.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Iraq is located in southwestern Asia, in the heart of the Middle East. It is bounded by Turkey to the north, Syria and Jordan to the west, Iran to the east, and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south. There is a short coastline in the southeast on the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf. The total land area is about 437,072 sq km (168,754 sq mi), including half of a neutral zone that Iraq administers with Saudi Arabia to make it easier for the no-



madic Bedu to move between the two countries. For comparison's sake, Iraq is just a little larger than the state of California. Within Iraq are four distinct regions. The Delta region of the southeast is a broad alluvial plain. West of the Delta are the Steppe-Desert Plains, part of the dry Syrian Desert, made up of sand and stony plains. The northern foothills between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers contain a fertile area of grassy flatlands and rolling hills. In the Kurdish Country of the northeast, the land rises steeply into the Zagros Mountains where the Kurds live.

The climate varies from region to region. In the north it is temperate in the summer and freezing in the winter. The east and southeast have a tropical climate with high humidity. The west is dry and desert-like. Temperatures also vary by region, with summer highs ranging from 22°C (72°F) in the north to 43°C (110°F) in the south and west, and winter lows of 0°C (32°F) or less in the north to 15.5°C (60°F) in the south and west. Iraq has two seasons. Summer lasts from May to October and is generally hot and dry, and winter stretches from November to April and is cooler and wetter. About 90% of the yearly rainfall occurs during the winter. On average, Iraq is a dry country. In most regions, the annual rainfall averages only 10–18 cm (4–7 in), although up to 101 cm (40 in) can fall in the mountains. Even the fertile lands between the rivers receive only 38–63.5 cm (15–25 in) of rain per year. In the summer, a dry, dusty northwesterly wind known as the *shamal* frequently blasts the landscape, lasting for several days at a time, and it is often accompanied by fierce dust storms. A winter wind called

the *sharqi* comes from the south and southeast, bringing cool, moist air from the sea, which is a welcome change.

Plant and animal life differs by region. For its size, Iraq has very little wildlife. The most common tree is the date palm. Before the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war, Iraq had more than 30 million date palms, each of which produced about 1,000 dates per year, and more than 80% of the world's date supply was grown in Iraq. Two decades of war have harmed the country's date industry seriously, and fewer than 3 million date palms are estimated to remain in the country.

The people who live in Iraq include a number of ethnic groups, physical types, and languages. According to 2008 estimates, the total population of Iraq was 28,221,180. About 75% to 80% of the population is Arab, and Kurds make up the largest ethnic minority at 15% to 20% of the population. Other ethnic groups in Iraq include Turkoman and Assyrian peoples. About 40% of the total population of Iraq is under the age of 15. Most Iraqis (75%) live in cities. Baghdad, the capital and largest city, has a population of 6 million people. The next largest cities, in descending order, are Basra, Mosul, and Kirkuk.

A distinct subgroup of Iraqi Arabs called the Ma'dan, or Marsh Arabs, once inhabited 15,540 sq km (6,000 sq mi) of marshy area just above the point at which the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow together. Their lifestyle, however, has become virtually extinct as a result of the wars and Iraqi government programs to drain the marshlands.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official languages of Iraq are Arabic and Kurdish. Kurdish is spoken primarily in the mountainous regions of the north. Other languages spoken in Iraq are Turkoman, Assyrian, and Armenian. Arabic has two different forms, spoken and written. Spoken Arabic has developed many dialects that often differ from one country to another, and those who speak different dialects may not always be able to understand each other. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken forms are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that has no distinction between upper and lower cases. It is not necessary for the letters to be written on a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation conventions are also quite different from English. Kurdish uses an Arabic-based alphabet, but it is an Indo-European language in origin.

Arabic speakers tend to use emotional appeal, exaggeration, repetition, and words instead of action (for example, making threats with no intention to follow through on them). They are more interested in the poetry of the language than in communicating cold, hard facts. "Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Walaykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran* and "You're welcome" is *Afwan*; "yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are: *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba'a*, *khamsa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *tamania*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

Iraqi Arabs have very long names, consisting of their first name, their father's name, their paternal grandfather's name, and finally their family name. Following Islamic custom, a woman does not take her husband's name when she marries, but maintains her family identity. First names usually indicate

an Iraqi's religious affiliation. Muslims use names with Islamic religious significance, such as *Muhammad* and *Fatima*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The most famous collection of Arab folktales, *The Thousand and One Nights*, was probably put together in Iraq sometime around AD 1000–1500, during the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate. The premise of the collection is that a king keeps killing his wives until the beautiful woman Scheherazade marries him. She tells him a story each night with a cliffhanger ending so that he must keep her alive to find out the ending. This goes on for one thousand and one nights, until finally the king decides to let her stay alive forever as his wife. Among the stories she tells are the well-known tales of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," and "The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor."

Another famous story originating in ancient Iraq (then known as Mesopotamia) is the Akkadian hero-tale, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Gilgamesh was the name of a ruler of Erech, but it is unknown whether this is the same Gilgamesh as the one in the epic poem. The poem tells of Gilgamesh's struggles to achieve immortality.

Some common superstitions in Iraq are beliefs in omens and signs. For example, it is considered good luck if a stork chooses to build its nest on the roof of your home. Also, precautions are taken at birth celebrations to ensure the protection of the child from bad luck, such as not allowing women who have had no children or people with blue eyes to attend.

### 5 RELIGION

The majority of Iraqis, about 95%, are Muslim. Of these, 60% to 65% are Shi'ite, and the remainder is Sunni. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslim but consider themselves distinct from Iraq's Sunni Arab population. Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, Mandaean, and Yazaidis also live in Iraq. Ancient Mesopotamia was originally a Jewish region, and the Jews actually left and returned to Mesopotamia many times with various conquering armies, including the Greeks and the Persians. The few Jews who stayed on in Mesopotamia created a small band of descendants in Iraq, most of whom migrated to Israel when it became an independent Jewish state in 1948. Iraqi Christians are mostly Catholic. They consider themselves the original Iraqis since they were there before the Islamic invasion. When Islam arrived in the 7th century AD, many gods and goddesses were being worshipped by the people of present-day Iraq. The Islamic conquerors brought most of the people together under one god, Allah.

The difference between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, which has played such an important part in Iraqi history, has to do with the early history of the religion. After Muhammad's death, the entire Muslim community was divided over who should become the first political successor, or caliph. A strong minority believed that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, should be caliph. The rest accepted Abu Baker as the first caliph. Abu Baker assumed the caliphate and eventually obtained the allegiance of Ali.

Ali did not become caliph until after the death of Uthman, the third caliph. At that time, Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria and a relative of Uthman, challenged Ali for the caliphate using Syrian troops personally loyal to him. The battles between the caliph and Mu'awiyah were inconclusive, and Ali remained

in control over most areas except Greater Syria until his death. At that time, Mu'awiyah was able to defeat a number of challenges from Muslims of Muhammad's family and friends to firmly establish himself as caliph. He instituted a system of hereditary rule for his family, thus establishing the Umayyad dynasty. Those Muslims who continued to refuse to recognize the legitimacy of Mu'awiyah's caliphate and the Umayyad dynasty were called the followers of Ali, or *Shi'iat Ali*. The supporters of the Umayyads were known as *Shi'iat Uthman*. Eventually the followers of Ali became known as the Shi'ites.

Although there are doctrinal differences, the fundamental difference between the sects is an argument about authority, not doctrine. The Shi'ites believe that the successors of Muhammad should have been from his close family (or *Ahl al-Bayt*) and that Ali should have been first caliph. The Sunnis believe that, although Ali was justified in defending the caliphate from Mu'awiyah, once the Umayyads took control, it was more important to maintain political stability than to risk the chaos that might have resulted from a civil war. These political differences have developed into substantial theological differences over the centuries.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Iraqi Muslims celebrate Muslim holidays, and Christians celebrate Christian holidays. Because Iraq is not officially an Islamic state, Muslim holidays are not official state holidays. But, since the overwhelming majority of Iraqis are Muslim, their holidays become essentially state holidays. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by 11 days each year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar.

The main Muslim holidays are: *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations—celebrated by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month; *Ayd Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of *Ramadan*; *Ayd Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (known as the *Hajj*)—families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *Mawoulid An-Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Ayd Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj*, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven.

*Ahura*, which is only commemorated by Shi'ites, is a formal day of mourning for the anniversary of when Muhammad's grandson, Husayn, and a small band of loyal followers were massacred by Yazid, the son of Mu'awiyah, who was named caliph by the Umayyads after Mu'awiyah's death. Yazid was almost universally despised by the Muslims for his impiety and oppression but maintained a strong army personally loyal to him. The massacre occurred at Karbala' in Iraq. The Muslims who had asked Husayn to oppose Yazid failed to show up at Karbala' to help him against Yazid's army. Today, the holiday has political overtones as Shi'ites cry and lament the failure of the Muslims to defend Muhammad's family and celebrate the bravery of Husayn in opposing an unjust ruler despite terrible odds. For this reason, Iraq's former leader Saddam Hussein had outlawed the commemoration of this important Shi'ite holiday.

Christian holidays center on Christmas (December 25) and Easter (depending on the lunar cycle, occurring sometime in late March or early April). Several secular holidays that were celebrated under Saddam Hussein's regime are no longer officially observed, and the government of Iraq had not established new national holidays as of 2008.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a child is an occasion for a big celebration, especially if the child is a boy. Boys are usually circumcised at birth. Three days after the birth, family members and friends come to visit and bring gifts for the child. Sometime between 9 and 13 years old, children begin the *al'Khatma*, or the "reading of the Quran." A child studies for a year or more to prepare for this difficult task. When ready, boys read to men and girls read to women. Those who read without an error earn the title of *hafiz*. After a successful reading, the family holds a celebration in the child's honor, usually a luncheon or a tea. Relatives give the child gifts and money, and everyone wears colorful clothes.

After children reach puberty, they generally are segregated by gender. Young men and young women attend separate schools and are rarely seen together in public. Early marriage is encouraged, and marriage is considered the start of adulthood. Unmarried daughters and sisters are carefully protected by the male members of their families, and marriages are often arranged. Marriage is considered a contract between families. Dating is relatively rare. In all circumstances, the groom is required to pay a large dowry to the bride's family, but this money is often used to buy furniture for the new couple. Weddings consist of a brief ceremony and several days of parties. After the parties, guests escort the newlywed couple to their new home or to a hotel. Cars following in a procession, honking horns, and in rural areas, bullets are sometimes fired into the air.

Islamic law allows men to have up to four wives, but most Iraqi men have only one wife. Divorce is rare.

Young Iraqi adults expect to take care of parents as they age. As a result, few retirement homes exist in Iraq. When an Iraqi Muslim dies, the body is buried in a grave facing Mecca. After burial, a collective prayer seeking forgiveness for the deceased is offered.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Iraqis are very generous and loyal, and very polite to their friends. If a friend asks for a favor, it is considered very rude to say no. It is taboo to wish bad luck on someone because it might come true. While having a conversation, it is rude to turn one's foot out so that the sole is facing the other person. The left hand is considered "unclean" so it is never used when eating. If someone praises one of an Iraqi's possessions, he or she will insist that the other take it; therefore, it is rude to praise another's things too much.

When talking, Iraqis touch each other much more often and stand much closer together than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking, even if they are virtual strangers. (Members of the opposite sex, even married couples, never touch in public.) Iraqis talk a lot, talk loudly, repeat themselves often, and interrupt each other constantly. Conversations are highly emotional and full of gestures. Some common Iraqi gestures are:

eyebrows raised and head tilted back = “No.”  
 clicking the tongue = “No.”  
 right forefinger moving right-to-left repeatedly = “No.”  
 right hand moving up and down with the palm facing down = “Be quiet!”  
 right hand moving away from the body with the palm down = “Go away!”  
 right hand out while opening and closing the hand = “Come here!”  
 right hand on heart after shaking hands = show of sincerity  
 fist with thumb pointing upwards = sign of victory

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions among Iraqis are in disarray as a result of nearly three decades of war. Iraqi society typically consisted of three classes: the upper class, composed of well-known, influential families and government officials; the middle class, composed of government employees, professionals, merchants, small landowners, etc.; and the lower class, comprising the peasants and laborers, rural farmers, and the unemployed. The middle and upper classes traditionally have lived in much better conditions than the lower class. The lower class, mostly rural people, lived in reed and mud huts, generally without electricity or running water. However, all classes have suffered greatly from the war.

Most Iraqis still decorate their homes with religious art, including Quranic verses written in Arabic calligraphy, religious icons, and pictures of the holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Homes usually are set up so that a husband and wife occupy one bedroom, and so that girls and boys each sleep in separate quarters. Homes are built of stone and fired bricks. In more peaceful times, Iraqis would sleep on their roofs on hot nights.

Before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, about 60% of Iraqis relied on the United Nations’ “oil-for-food” program for basic nutrition. This program allowed Iraq to bypass economic sanctions that had been imposed against Saddam Hussein’s government in order to sell oil to purchase food, medicine, and other basic supplies. Since the beginning of the 2003 war, much of that relief has come from humanitarian aid agencies. The country’s hospitals are understaffed, and many basic medications are in short supply. Drinking water has been contaminated, and diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, are common. Widespread poverty, malnutrition, and pollution have caused infant mortality to rise in recent years. The infant mortality rate was estimated at 45.43 deaths for every 1,000 live births in 2008, with males less likely to survive childhood than females. Iraqi life expectancy rates also are lower than that of much of the world. The average life expectancy is 68 years for men and 71 years for women. These factors have produced a very young population of Iraqis, with a median age of 20.2 years.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is the most important social unit in Iraq, and family loyalty is one of the most important values. Honor, both personal and family, is also very important. It is considered a disgrace to speak badly about a family member, or tell non-family members about bad things that have happened in the family. A “family” consists of all related kin and can include hundreds of people. Rural families live with or near each other.

Although urban families do not always live together, they are always willing to help out a family member in need. The traditional household of a typical man in his 40s consists of himself, his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters, their married sons with their wives and children, the man’s mother if she is still alive, and frequently his unmarried sisters, if he has any. Very probably, the most powerful force in the household is the man’s mother: her sons revere her, and her daughters-in-law must do her bidding. The structure of Arab society is such that financial power is in the hands of the husband, although his wife is not completely without influence. Women have a great deal of power at home and over their children, including their grown sons. Sex roles are very clearly defined in Iraq. Men wield public authority and are the stern disciplinarians at home, whereas women rule in domestic affairs and are the loving, nurturing force at home (often to the point of spoiling their children). In rural areas, this strict division of labor and sex roles causes the sexes to be almost completely segregated except when eating and sleeping.

Most marriages are still arranged by families, but a couple must approve a match. Traditionally, first or second cousins are preferred for marriage partners. Divorce is fairly easy under Islamic law and has no stigma attached to it; even so, it rarely occurs. Children belong to their father’s family, and in the case of divorce the father is automatically awarded custody.

Young children are adored and indulged, though they are strictly punished for misbehavior. Older boys are allowed to attend the gatherings of the men, and by listening they absorb many of the cultural values and attitudes that will shape their public behavior. Older girls are very carefully protected. They learn domestic skills through participation. Children are expected to obey their parents and grandparents. Iraqis believe that wisdom increases with age, so the elderly are deeply revered.

## 11 CLOTHING

Urban Iraqis, for the most part, wear Western-style clothing, although there is a resurgence of fundamentalism that has led some to return to more traditional Arab dress (such as veils for women). Most rural Iraqis wear traditional clothing. Traditional dress for women consists of a veil, which girls begin to wear after their first menstrual period, and a dark robe called an *abaaya*, which is an outer cloak that covers the body from head to ankle. Under the *abaaya*, they wear brightly colored dresses. Veils are only removed at home or in female-only groups. For men, traditional dress consists of a caftan and a head cloth. A caftan is an ankle-length robe with long sleeves. Caftans used to be colorful but are plain-colored now. Light cotton caftans are worn in summer, and heavy woolen ones in winter. Head cloths are either wrapped around the head like a turban (rural men) or draped over the head and held in place with a cord (urban men). Kurdish women wear pants under their dresses, while men wear baggy trousers tied with sashes.

## 12 FOOD

Staple foods in Iraq are wheat, barley, rice, and dates. Iraqis cook almost every part of an animal, including the kidneys, liver, brain, feet, eyes, and ears. The meat is usually cut into strips and cooked with onions and garlic, or it is minced for a stew served with rice. Sheep and goats are the most common meat animals, although cows, chickens, fish, and camels are

also eaten. Islam forbids the eating of pork. Lamb and mutton are traditionally used for special feasts.

Coffee is prepared in a unique way in Iraq. The beans are ground, then the drink is heated and cooled nine times before it is served. It is believed that this process removes all impurities from the imported product. Iraqis usually drink their coffee with sugar and cream or milk. Coffee and tea are the favorite drinks, served before and after (not during) meals. Ice water is drunk frequently in the summer, and Western soft drinks are popular in the cities. Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol.

An Iraqi meal has several courses, starting with appetizers, such as *kebabs*, which are cubes of marinated meat cooked on skewers, and soups, which are drunk from the bowl and not eaten with a spoon. A simple main course follows, such as lamb with rice, and ends with a salad and *khubaz*, which is a flat wheat bread served buttered with fruit jelly spread on top. Iraqis love desserts, especially one called *ma'mounia*, dating from the 9th century. A recipe for ma'mounia follows.

### Ma'mounia

3 cups water  
2 cups sugar  
1 teaspoon lemon juice  
½ cup sweet butter  
1 cup semolina  
whipped cream  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Put sugar and water in a large saucepan over low heat, and stir constantly until sugar dissolves. Bring mixture to a boil while adding lemon juice. After the syrup boils, reduce heat and let simmer until syrup thickens slightly (about 10 minutes). In another saucepan, melt butter and add semolina. Stir until semolina is lightly fried. Then add the syrup from the other pan, and let the mixture simmer another 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and let cool 20 minutes. Spoon ma'mounia into individual serving bowls, top with whipped cream, and sprinkle with cinnamon.

Makes 4 servings.

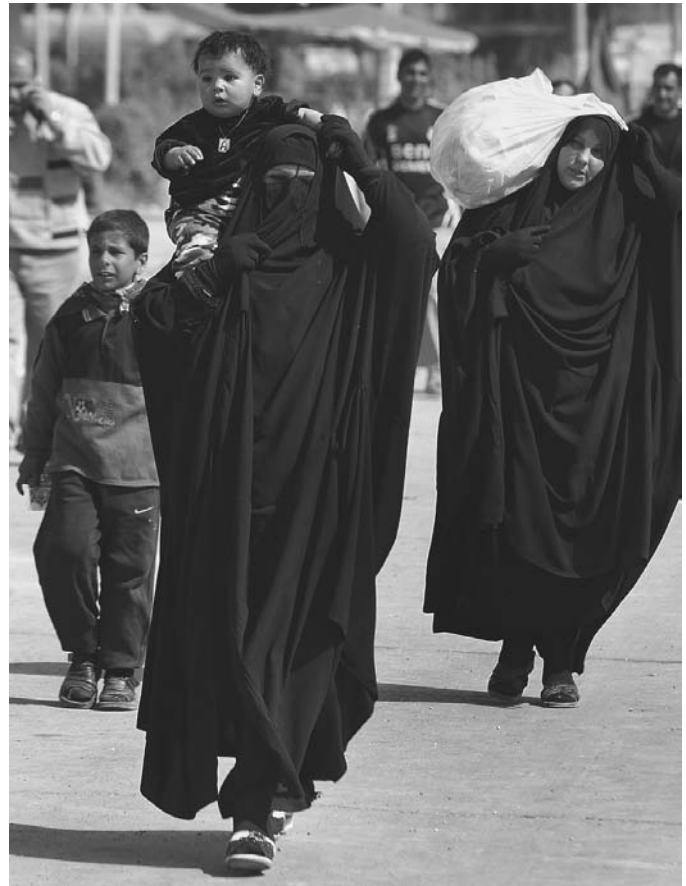
(Adapted from Susan M. Hassig, *Cultures of the World: Iraq*, p.119.)

### 13 EDUCATION

Before the 1991 Gulf War, the government invested heavily in Iraqi education. Literacy rates increased substantially and more Iraqis had access to higher education. Since then, schools have fallen into disrepair and teachers have been forced to leave jobs that often pay only a few dollars a month. When schools have been able to operate, students sit in overcrowded classrooms and share books. In addition, security concerns have prompted many families to keep their children at home. About one in six students who are eligible to receive free public education are able to do so under the war-like conditions. As of 2000, about one-quarter of the adult population was illiterate.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Iraq has a rich cultural history dating back to the Sumerians, thought to be the first advanced civilization on Earth. Story-telling has been important since the very beginning. Mesopo-



*Iraqi Shiite pilgrims march to the holy Shiite city of Karbala, Baghdad, Iraq. (Wathiq Khuzaie/Getty Images)*

tamian stories have influenced other literature and art in the world, including Biblical stories, such as Adam and Eve, the Song of Songs, and the Psalms, and Greek epics and myths, such as *The Iliad* and *Aesop's Fables*. The most famous literary works to emerge from this vast cultural history are the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (an Akkadian hero-tale) and *The Thousand and One Nights* (a collection of Arab folktales). Modern Iraqi literature is becoming Westernized in its form and content, turning from the romantic, poetic epics of traditional Arabic literature to short stories about everyday life and non-rhyming poetry on personal subjects.

Visual art in Iraq has been greatly influenced since the 7th century AD by the Islamic prohibition against depicting human or animal forms. Iraqi visual art has, therefore, focused on intricate geometric and floral patterns, as well as calligraphy. The rich legacy of Islamic architecture can be seen particularly in Iraq's mosques, with their detailed mosaics, graceful lines, and beautifully carved golden domes and minarets. Iraq is also famous for its carpets, woven from fine threads in brilliant colors. Painting and sculpture have traditionally been the favored visual arts in Iraq, with television and film-making gaining popularity in recent years.

### 15 WORK

Iraq was once an agricultural nation, but after oil was discovered it quickly grew to become the principal industry. More

than 90% of Iraq's exports are now in the form of crude oil. By 1986, only 30% of Iraqis were still farmers. Wheat, barley, tobacco, and dates are the major crops. Only 10% of the population works in small manufacturing. These industries include textiles, cement, paper products, food processing, and leather. Rural children usually follow in their parents' footsteps. The son of a blacksmith, for example, will become a blacksmith.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the favorite sport in Iraq. Besides soccer, there is growing interest in boating, basketball, volleyball, weightlifting, and boxing. The continual warfare of the past few decades has prevented Iraq from developing competitive international sports teams.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Outdoor activities are popular in the mountains of the north, and swimming and fishing are favorite recreations in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers during the summer. Rural men hunt and fish with friends and shop together for food and drinks at the markets and bazaars of the towns. Rural women visit with each other and talk, cook, or make handicrafts. In the cities, people visit museums, haggle over prices in the bazaars, or shop in large shopping complexes with their families and friends. Men frequent teahouses, and everyone enjoys watching television. The most noteworthy fact about Iraqi entertainment and recreation is that it is nearly always done in the company of others. Iraqis are extremely social people.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Handicrafts are very popular in Iraq, and there are hundreds of arts and crafts fairs each year to handle the volume of handicrafts produced. Most crafts are in the form of jewelry, rugs, blankets, leather, and pottery. Village women love to make handicrafts in their leisure time. Several households may chip in together to buy a pottery wheel and share the use of it.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 U.S.-led invasion have produced poverty and social upheaval for Iraqis. It remains to be seen whether the country will recover and thrive under its 2005 constitution or whether internal strife between Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurdish factions will force Iraqi society to crumble under civil war. Since 1991, the Iraqi middle class has virtually collapsed.

Violence continues in Iraq. The human rights group Amnesty International noted in its 2008 *Human Rights Watch Report* that thousands of civilians, including many children, were killed in sectarian fighting. Human rights violations were committed by armed militias, Iraq's military forces, and U.S.-led forces. An estimated 2 million Iraqis are believed to have been killed in war-related violence, and about 2.8 million Iraqis are living as refugees within the country. An additional 2.2 million have fled the country in search of safer living conditions abroad. Among those who have stayed, unemployment rates are approximately 40%.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Ongoing violence in Iraq has made conditions in the country increasingly unsafe for women. Although Islamic principles

have long enforced such practices as public segregation of individuals by gender, many Iraqi women worked outside the home and enjoyed a great deal of authority in the running of households. This independence has been hampered by death threats, domestic violence, and "honor killings." Many women have been forced to leave jobs or seek refuge abroad. Early marriage continues to be encouraged for women, especially in rural areas, and women who marry outside their religious sect face an increasing threat of violence.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson

# ISRAELIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** iz-RAY-leez

**LOCATION:** Israel

**POPULATION:** 7.2 million (2007 estimate, includes approximately 350,000 settlers living in Palestinian territories of Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as in the Israeli-occupied territories of East Jerusalem and Golan Heights)

**LANGUAGE:** Hebrew; Arabic; English

**RELIGION:** Judaism; Islam; Christianity; Druze

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3 Palestinians; Vol. 4: Traditional Orthodox Jews

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the land of Israel and the Jewish people spans 35 centuries, although the state of Israel is only a few decades old. The modern state of Israel was established in 1948 as a homeland for the Jewish people, who had been living in exile for 2,000 years. Jews from all over the world have been encouraged to immigrate to Israel in what is known as the “ingathering of exiles,” thus creating a very diverse society. The population of Israel more than doubled in the first four years of its existence (1948–1952) as Jews from Eastern and Western Europe flocked to a land where they would no longer be persecuted. From 1989 to 1992, some 500,000 new immigrants arrived, mostly from the former Soviet Union, plus almost the entire population of Ethiopian Jews. In terms of percentage of population, this would be the equivalent of the United States taking in 25 million more people.

Israel also has a sizable population of non-Jews to integrate into its society, most of whom are Arabs: Muslim, Druze, and Christian. The world center for the Baha’i faith is in Israel, and there is also a small but significant population of Bedouin Arabs (former nomadic herders who are now trying to make the transition to a settled life). Arabs in Israel are challenged to create and maintain a sense of identity. They are Israeli, but they have family, cultural, and religious ties to Arabs (especially to West Bank Palestinians) in other Middle East states. Yet, Arabs in other states are sometimes wary of Israeli Arabs because they are citizens of Israel, a country with which neighboring Arab states have been at war for many, many years. Muslim and Christian Arabs feel that they also have claims to the land of Israel, as it is the historical and spiritual center of their religions as well, and struggles for statehood and land rights have dominated Israeli politics through the early 21st century. These struggles have created tremendous tensions within Israeli society. Many programs are in place to try to reduce these tensions by breaking down stereotypes, encouraging cooperation among different elements of the Israeli population, and improving conditions for disadvantaged minorities.

The Holy Land, of which the present-day state of Israel is a part, has a long history of rule by different powers. A Hebrew kingdom was established from 12 tribes of Israel that left Egypt with Moses. King David ruled this kingdom some three thousand years ago. After his son Solomon’s reign, the kingdom split into two states: Israel and Judah. These states were subsequently destroyed by Assyria and Babylonia. At this point, the peoples living in the area were forced to disperse. Jews re-



turned to the Holy Land after the Persian conquest of the Middle East but suffered great persecution under Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and eventually Muslim rule until World War I.

In the 1890s, a Hungarian named Theodor Herzl founded Zionism. The ideology grew into an international movement to restore the Land of Palestine to the Jews. The British gained control of the territory after World War I when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. During World War II, as Jews suffered genocide in Germany, many immigrated to Palestine, seeking safety. Some 600,000 Arabs also resided in the territory, and when the war ended, the international community faced the task of trying to reconcile claims for statehood by the Jews with the traditional practices of Arabs living in the area. In 1947, the United Nations voted to divide the area into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. In May 1948, Israel was proclaimed an independent state. Neighboring Arab nations almost immediately declared war and attacked the new nation. Subsequent wars were fought in 1956, 1967, and 1973. Israel occupied territories conquered in the 1967 War: the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. A series of peace agreements have resulted in Israel giving up some of those lands. Israel returned Sinai to Egypt in 1982 surrendered much of the Gaza Strip and West Bank to Palestinians through a withdrawal process that began in 1993, and withdrew troops from southern Lebanon in 2000.

Treaties with Egypt and Lebanon have helped restore some relationships between Israel and its neighbors. However, relationships between the two groups who reside in Israel, the





*Israeli ultra-Orthodox Jews wear sac cloth in order to appear humble before God during a religious ritual at the Wailing Wall in east Jerusalem. (Yoav Lemmer/AFP/Getty Images)*

mostly Jewish Israelis and the mostly Muslim Palestinians, remain tense. Much of the tension stems from the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel itself. The state was created through international treaties that paid little attention to the Arab communities, who now are known as Palestinians, living in the land. Palestinians often have experienced discrimination in educational and workplace facilities in Israel and began a long, often violent movement known as *intifada* in 1982 to establish a permanent state. As part of that effort, U.S. President George W. Bush and other diplomatic leaders created a treaty that called for the eventual creation of a Palestinian state within Israeli territories. As part of that process, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and that area, along with parts of the West Bank, has been known more recently as the Palestinian territories. However, the efforts to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians have been stalled through the first decade of the 21st century.

Israelis have regarded their nation-state as a place of refuge for diasporic Jews, and Israeli law allows all Jews to immigrate to Israel, provided that they can prove that they either were born into a Jewish family or have been recognized as converts to the religion. However, for the first time in 2,000 years, a generation of Jews is growing up as the majority in their homeland. Known as *Sabras* (native-born Israelis), this new generation is developing a very different understanding of themselves than that of their parents and grandparents. Many *Sabras* think of themselves not as Jews, but as Israelis. Their nationalistic identity has further fueled tensions between Jews residing in Israel and their Palestinian counterparts. That identity also has be-

gun to make more Jews outside of Israel regard the nation as spiritually uninviting.

## **<sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Israel is a small, narrow country, and its continually disputed borders are constantly subject to change. As of 2008, Israel is approximately 20,770 sq km (8,020 sq mi) in size, which makes it slightly smaller than the U.S. state of New Jersey. The tiny country shares borders with Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories of Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The area, despite its size, contains an amazing diversity of landscape, from mountains (Golan Heights) to desert (Negev) to a fertile river valley (Jordan). The lowest point on Earth is in Israel; the Dead Sea is 400 m (1,300 ft) below sea level. The waters of the Dead Sea are the saltiest and densest in the world. (It is almost impossible to sink in the Dead Sea.) Located at the junction of three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—and their natural life zones, Israel has a tremendous variety of plants and animals for its small size. The rainy season, from November to March, does not provide enough moisture to last through the dry season, from April to October, so lack of water is always a problem. Sophisticated irrigation and water-transportation and conservation techniques have been developed, highlighted by the National Water Carrier—a huge system of pipes, aqueducts, canals, reservoirs, dams, and so on—to carry water from the fertile north to the drier south. Through these sophisticated techniques, Israel has managed to create enough arable land to grow almost all the food needed by its people.

Approximately 7.2 million people live in Israel, the Israeli-occupied territories, and the Palestinian territories. Within the current boundaries of Israel, more than 90% of residents live in cities. The other 10% live in *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* (communal farms) or in small villages. There are about 110,000 Bedouin Arabs (former nomadic herders who now live mostly settled lives) scattered throughout the Negev desert, living in tents and cooking over open fires. The median age in Israel is about 28 years old. About 82% of the population is Jewish and 16% is Arab. The largest cities are Jerusalem, a mixture of ancient and modern; Tel Aviv–Yafo, the commercial and financial center, located on the Mediterranean coast; and Haifa, a busy Mediterranean port city.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official languages of Israel are Hebrew and Arabic. English is widely used in commerce. Hebrew is the language of the majority, and more Arabs speak Hebrew than Jews speak Arabic. Most Israelis also speak English, particularly in business dealings.

Both Arabic and English are taught in schools, beginning in the fifth grade. The Israeli government sponsors classes for immigrants to Israel to learn Hebrew. However, proficiency in the language is no longer considered crucial for survival in Israel. Most Israelis speak at least two languages, often because they or their parents emigrated after 1948, and languages such as Russian often appear on food labels and in ads.

Modern Hebrew is a very young language, born only about 100 years ago. After the Exile of the Jews from ancient Israel, Hebrew was used only for religious writings and liturgical purposes for 2,000 years. For everyday use, Jews learned to speak the language of whatever country they ended up in. In the late 19th century, Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858–1922) moved to the Holy Land with his family and decided that they would never speak a word in any language but Hebrew again. This forced them to coin many new words, and modern Hebrew was born. Yehuda compiled the first modern Hebrew dictionary and is considered to be the “father” of modern Hebrew. The Orthodox Jewish community of his time excommunicated Yehuda for “defiling” the holy language by bringing it into everyday use, and some ultra-Orthodox Israelis still refuse to speak modern Hebrew. Other Hebrew purists are frustrated by the Israeli people’s persistence in using cognates from other languages, such as *democratia*, *sveder* (“sweater”), and *breks* (“brakes”). But in a language that was used for two millennia solely for religious communication, a great deal of borrowing from other languages for modern and technological terms is to be expected.

Hebrew uses a unique alphabet with no vowels. It is read from right to left, except for numerals, which are read from left to right. Some common words in Hebrew are *toda*, (“thank you”), *ken*, (“yes”), and *lo* (“no”). The numbers from one to ten in Hebrew are: *ehad*, *shtayim*, *shalosh*, *arba*, *hamesh*, *shesh*, *sheva*, *shmoney*, *taysha*, and *esser*. Common male names are *Menahem*, *Avraham*, *Moshe*, *Benyamin*, and *Shlomo*. Common female names are *Esther*, *Hannah*, *Sareh*, *Rachel*, and *Galit*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Most of Israeli folklore and legend reflects their history of exile in other lands, their return to the land of their ancestors, and the modern-day battles over establishing and maintaining

statehood. The traditional stories, rooted in the Jewish faith, give prominence to the Jews as God’s Chosen People and to their yearning for the Promised Land.

For example, the story of Passover, or *Pesach*, is a reference to the deliverance of the children of Israel from over two centuries of bondage in Egypt. It refers to the Jewish exodus from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. Exodus (chapters 1–15) recounts the story of the Israelites’ oppressive servitude to the Pharaoh of Egypt and their escape with the help of Moses and his brother, Aaron. The Torah calls Passover the “season of our freedom,” for it is the time when the plague that struck Egypt passed over the Israelites without destroying them.

Another important event in the history of Judaism is the *zman matan Torateinu*, “the season of the giving of our Torah.” This commemorates the Revelation of the Ten Commandments, seven weeks after the Israelites escaped from Egypt, as they camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. The exact nature of God’s communication with Moses has been subject to various opinions, but the event itself is considered to have given the Jews their unique character.

Some modern-day Israeli heroes include Theodor Herzl, who convened the first Zionist Congress, held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, and the author of *The Jewish State*; Chaim Weizmann, Israel’s first president; and David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, who announced the independence of Israel in 1948.

### 5 RELIGION

The modern state of Israel was established in 1948 as a homeland for Jews, so it is not surprising that 82% of the population is Jewish. Nevertheless, the city of Jerusalem and many other areas in Israel played an important role in the development of three of the world’s major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jerusalem is holy to all three religions and is a source of conflict among them. Of the 18% who are non-Jews, 77% (or 13.8% of the Israeli population) are Muslim Arabs, most of them Sunni Muslims. About 130,000 Israelis (2.6% of the population) are Christian, most of them Arab, and the other 1.6% (or 80,000 people) are Druze. The Baha’i world center is also located in Israel, in the Mediterranean coastal city of Haifa. The Baha’i religion developed out of the mystical Islamic movement around AD 1850. Religious freedom is guaranteed by the state, but there is little separation between “church and state,” as the Jewish faith and rabbinical law are intricately entwined with the political and public spheres. Consequently, there is constant tension between the religious and secular worlds in Israel.

Jews, Muslims, and Christians all view the land of Israel as their birthplace and the first five books of the Bible as holy scripture. Despite this common foundation, these three religions have developed in very different and often contradictory ways that bring them into almost constant conflict with each other. For example, the Muslim day of rest is on Friday, the Jewish on Saturday, and the Christian on Sunday. Muslim men and women pray separately, Jewish men and women sit separately while praying, and Christian men and women sit and pray together. Jews worship in a synagogue, where a quorum (*minyan*) of 10 adult males is needed to begin. All heads are covered, and prayers happen three times daily. In contrast, at a Muslim mosque, prayers occur five times a day, facing Mecca, with shoes removed. During prayer, men bare their heads,

while women cover theirs. In contrast to traditional Christian services at a church, which have music and choral singing, Jewish and Muslim worship (while it similarly includes a sermon) features unaccompanied chanting. Holy days for the three religions differ, although some occur at similar times of the year (such as the Jewish Hanukkah and Christian Christmas). Because Muslim holy days follow a lunar calendar, sometimes they occur around Hanukkah and Christmas, and sometimes they do not.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Because the majority of the Israeli population is Jewish, Jewish holidays become, in effect, state holidays. During the Jewish *shabbat*, or Sabbath, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday each week, almost all public and commercial enterprise stops. On *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, which occurs ten days after *Rosh Hashana*, the Jewish New Year, the whole country comes to a standstill while observant Jews complete 25 hours of total fasting and prayer. No Jewish hotels or restaurants will serve bread or fermented foods during the week of *Pesach*, or Passover, which commemorates the exodus of the Jews from Egypt during Biblical times.

At *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* (communal farms), a distinctive cultural life has developed with celebrations based on traditional Jewish holidays combined with ancient earth-cycle customs, such as first fruits and harvest feasts.

Independence Day is observed on May 15.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Israelis observe Jewish rituals and traditions. Boys are named after eight days, at the time of circumcision. The *brit milah* (circumcision ritual) is both a Jewish and Muslim ritual that has been performed for 4,000 years, since the days of the prophet Abraham. The ritual Jewish circumcision, performed eight days after birth, involves prayers, is performed by a Jew, and expresses the intent of bringing the son into the covenant with God. The son is named at circumcision. Muslim circumcisions take place either at birth or during the boy's youth. They are followed by a feast in celebration. Girls are generally named three days after birth and are given their names in a synagogue.

Both boys and girls celebrate the onset of adolescence with a formal ceremony. For girls, the celebration is known as the Bat Mitzvah (literally, "daughter of the commandments") and generally takes place at age 12. For boys, a Bar Mitzvah ("son of the commandments") takes place at age 13. Bar Mitzvah also means "he who is subject to the commandments" and signifies a boy's attainment of maturity. During the service, the boy reads from the Torah and speaks on a Biblical theme from memory. Both ceremonies are festive affairs attended by many extended family members and friends. All Israeli youth, regardless of their gender, serve in the military for two to three years. Although the mandatory military service is required of Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs also are encouraged to volunteer for military service.

Dating is quite common among Israelis, but marriage is a highly religious matter. No civil marriages are permitted in Israel; all couples must be married by an authority within their religious faith. For Jews, the religious authority performing marriages is a rabbi. Muslim marriages are performed by a khadi and Christian marriages are performed by members

of their clergy. A Jewish bride remains veiled until after the wedding ceremony. During the first part of the ceremony, the sanctification or *kiddushin*, the groom places a ring upon the bride's finger and recites, "Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel." The bride gives her consent in the presence of two witnesses and thus becomes the man's wife. At weddings, a glass is broken to symbolize the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem (AD 70) by the Romans. A wedding contract requires a husband to support his wife. Both men and women attend the ceremony, but during the feast and afterwards, the two sexes are separated by a *mehitzah*, or dividing wall. Muslim marriages in Israel are similar to those among the Palestinians. They consist of a religious ceremony and a wedding reception at which guests and family eat, sing, and dance.

When a Jew dies, the body must be cleansed and then dressed in white robes. Males are also wrapped in a *tallit*. Embalming is forbidden because blood must be buried as part of the dead individual. Burial must take place as soon as possible following death, but Jews cannot be buried on the Sabbath. The deceased is mourned during three consecutive periods. The first period, the *shiva*, lasts seven days. At its end comes the *shloshim*, a 30-day period. The *avelut* period of mourning then begins, and it ends after the conclusion of 12 months from the day of death. To comfort a bereaved family, Jews recall the loss of Jerusalem with the following prayer: "May the Lord comfort you, together with all who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem." A son must recite the *Kaddish* prayer each day for an 11-month period after a parent's death. Sons and daughters are expected to contribute to charity in memory of a deceased parent.

Muslims also bury their dead as soon as possible. Generally, only the men attend the funeral procession. There is a three-day mourning period, during which condolences are given and Quranic verses are recited. This is followed by another Quranic recitation after 40 days. Black (unsweetened) Turkish coffee is traditionally served during mourning.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Given the extremely diverse population of Israel, it is difficult to define any standard Israeli ways of relating to one another. Native-born Israelis (known as Sabras), however, tend to be very straightforward, plain-talking people, even to the point of rudeness. They detest sentimentality of any kind and love a good argument. They are fierce and articulate, friendly and hospitable, self-confident, ambitious, and proud. Sabras are high-achievers. "Creative" drivers, Sabras make their way through the seriously congested streets of Haifa and Tel Aviv-Yafo by using their horns frequently. Because Sabras love to argue and drink coffee so much, it is considered perfectly acceptable to sit at a streetside caf  (the center of Israeli social life) and talk for hours over just a cup of coffee and a piece of cake.

Other Israelis are known for showing respect toward each other and taking an active role in their communities. The early years of Israel's existence as a nation-state focused on the cooperative spirit of nation building through *kibbutzim* development. The *kibbutzim* are communities where land and the means of production are commonly owned. Decisions are made by a general assembly of members, meals are prepared and served in a common dining hall, and children live, eat, and study together. About 3% of Israelis live in *kibbutzim* today, but the community spirit lingers even in urban apartment



An Orthodox Jewish mother and daughter swim in the Mediterranean Sea at the religious beach for women in Tel Aviv, Israel. The beach has a separate area for men and women, which is required by the Orthodox Jewish religion. (Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)

complexes. All residents are likely to know the other inhabitants by name. Most Israelis view the family and community as more important than its individual members. Most Israelis view material possessions as less important than a strong family.

The common greeting is “*Shalom*,” which means both “hello” and “goodbye” as well as “peace” and “good health.” For the Arabs of Israel, “*Salam*” also means “peace and good health,” and “*as-salamu ‘alaykum*” means “peace be with you,” also used as a common greeting. “*Toda*” means “thanks,” to which the reply is usually “*bevakasha*” (“please”) or “*alo davar*” (“it’s nothing”). “*Lehitra’ot*” is “See you!”

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Israeli government oversaw construction between 1948 and 1970 as vast numbers of Jews immigrated to Israel. Most government housing was of low quality, and today, most homes are built by private companies. A typical home has so-

lar heating panels, large windows, and a *merpeset* (balcony or patio) on which people often relax in the late afternoon and evening. In the crowded urban corridor between Tel Aviv and Haifa, most people own or rent apartments in low-rise buildings. Houses are generally covered with ceramic tiles or plastered and painted white or a pastel color. A law that dates back to Ottoman rule requires that the front of all buildings in Jerusalem be made of white, cream, or rose-pink limestone.

About 3% of the population lives in some 270 *kibbutzim*. *Kibbutzim* were traditionally the backbone of Israeli agriculture, but they are now branching out into some light industry as well. Another rural communal arrangement is the *moshav*, where about 60 individually owned family farms cooperate in purchasing, marketing, and community services. There are some 450 *moshavim* in Israel, totaling about 3.5% of the population. These supply much of Israel’s farm produce.

Small villages in Israel are mostly inhabited by Arabs. In northern Israel, there are a few villages of Druze. Bedouin Arabs live in tent communities in the Negev desert, cooking over open fires and tending sheep and goats. Bedouins used to be nomadic but are now making the shift to a more settled lifestyle.

The quality of health care in Israel is high, with high-tech medical equipment and facilities. About 95% of the population has health insurance, and there are clinics for the disadvantaged. Health problems are basically the same as in the Western world: cancer and heart disease cause 66% of the deaths in Israel. Water pollution is a serious problem, with efforts underway to rehabilitate the waterways, but the water is drinkable. Air pollution is not a major problem because most of Israel’s heavy industry was initiated after the awakening of environmental awareness. Life expectancy for Israelis is comparable to most industrialized nations, about 79 years for men and 80 years for women.

Almost all areas of Israel, even the most remote, are accessible by roadways, and most people drive wherever they want to go. Highways are very congested in the major cities, however, so many people use public transport there. Haifa has the only subway system, which is a line with only six stops that takes nine minutes to travel from one end to the other.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Religious and cultural traditions shape family relationships. There are four types of Jews in Israel: ultra-Orthodox, national religious, traditional, and nonobservant. Each of these four types follows rabbinical law to a different degree and interprets religious and cultural traditions in a different way. The ultra-Orthodox family lives in a separate neighborhood with other ultra-Orthodox families, follows religious law and tradition strictly, sends its children to a school run by ultra-Orthodox Jews, dresses in traditional clothing, and has well-defined, separate roles for men and women. National religious Jews follow rabbinical law closely as well, but they are fully active in the public life of the state (political, economic, and social), rather than living separately as the ultra-Orthodox do. The majority of Jewish Israelis are traditional Jews who follow rabbinical law to a greater or lesser extent and treat women and men as equals in all areas of life. Nonobservant Jews live an essentially liberal Western way of life with varying degrees of respect for religious ideas.

Traditional Arab families have been exposed to huge changes since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. New laws protecting the rights of women and prohibiting polygamy and child marriage, plus compulsory education, have ripped into the age-old cultural practices of many Arabs and created turmoil in their families. New participation in the economic and political life of the state, and the shift from an agricultural way of life to one based on employment in industry, business, and the professional sector, have also upset the former balance of Arab families. The new generation is growing up very different from the old, and this puts tremendous pressure on the family.

Generally, the family is highly important to Israeli life, and children receive much care and attention. Parents work hard to prepare and provide for a child's future, and married children often expect to care for elderly parents. Families come together on holidays, especially Passover, and for big celebrations.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Daily wear in Israel is generally informal and Western-style. Few men wear suit jackets and ties in the summer, except for important business occasions. Ultra-Orthodox Jews wear traditional clothing every day. Some Orthodox males wear their hair in sidelocks called *payes*. It is an Orthodox custom to give a boy his first haircut at the age of three. Married Orthodox women often wear a wig called a *shitel* and a scarf tied to the back. Men wear long black or gray coats over a shirt and pants and a black hat on their heads.

Muslim men and women dress similarly to Palestinians, with the *kaffiyeh* (scarf-like headdress) worn by many of the more traditional and elderly men. The *kaffiyeh* is folded in a triangle, laid over the head, and then secured to the head with a double-coiled rope called an *Igal*. Most Muslim women in Israel no longer wear the traditional *thob* of the Palestinians, choosing Western attire instead.

### **12 FOOD**

Because of the great diversity in the Israeli population, there is no such thing as Israeli cuisine. The meeting of cultures in Israel has brought about some interesting food combinations, such as felafel (or falafel) and chips, goulash and *couscous*, or chicken soup and *kubbe*. Israelis love to eat and do it often, starting the day with a huge breakfast and continuing to eat frequently throughout the day. Because of kosher restrictions, Jewish Israelis tend to eat a main "meat" meal at midday and a lighter "dairy" meal in the evening, since meat and dairy cannot be eaten together. Eggplant is eaten in many different ways by all Israelis, and pita bread (a flat bread with an air pocket in the middle) has become a favorite. The dietary restrictions of Judaism, known as *kashrut* ("right" or "fit"), are considered a personal matter in modern Israel. Meat and dairy products cannot be consumed at the same meal or from the same utensils. Camels, pigs, and hares are forbidden in the Jewish diet. Animals that have cloven hoofs and chew cud are permitted, such as sheep, cattle, and deer. Similarly, lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams, and crabs are forbidden. Only fish with both fins and scales are permitted.

By far the most widely popular food in Israel is *felafel*, which is deep-fried balls of ground chickpeas. All along city streets, one finds felafel stands (not unlike hot dog stands in the United States) where a large variety of things to put with felafel in pita bread are available. The best-known felafel center is Tel Aviv's

Shuk Betzalel, where there is an entire street of felafel vendors, offering the largest selection of salads east of the Mediterranean. Other popular foods include pizza, open sandwiches, hamburgers, *kebab* (skewered meats and vegetables), and Russian borscht (beet soup). A vegetable salad, often mixed with olive oil, lemon juice, or spices, is usually eaten daily. Poultry and fish are eaten more frequently than beef. Fruits and vegetables are plentiful, and fruit juices are often part of lunch or dinner. Milk products, such as yogurt and cheese, are eaten with breakfast or dinner.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Israel is a land of the educated. Schooling is highly valued, and Israeli students are high achievers. According to 2004 estimates, 97.1% of Israelis were literate, and most complete at least 15 years of schooling prior to attending college. The government of Israel provides both religious and secular school systems, and Israelis are allowed to choose between schools where the instruction is in Hebrew and where the instruction is in Arabic. Many schools hold classes six days a week, and education is free through the 10th grade. Israel has eight colleges and universities, which enroll approximately 350,000 students. Most Israelis are over 21 when they begin college because of the compulsory military service required of them after high school.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Israel has become one of the most active music centers in the world, with a dynamic and unique folk-music scene stemming from the diverse backgrounds of its various immigrant groups. Israeli folk dance is also a unique blend of Jewish and non-Jewish folk dances from around the world. Classical "art" dance was not introduced in Israel until the 1920s, when Moscow-trained ballerina Rina Nikova moved there. Classical music did not appear as a professional activity until the 1930s, when it arrived with European immigrants fleeing Nazism. Now, it is an extremely popular pastime, with subscriptions to the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra handed down from parents to children as a coveted inheritance.

Visual artists struggle to define an Israeli style, although the content of their artwork is often based on the Israeli environment. Israeli cinema is also struggling to define itself and move beyond the local market to a more global involvement. Poetry and literature, on the other hand, are vibrant and vital expressions of the Israeli spirit, despite the fact that modern Hebrew is such a new language that only 4 to 5 million people speak it and even fewer read it. An estimated 10,000 new poems are published each year in Israel. In 1966, Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970) was the first author writing in modern Hebrew to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Amos Oz, the author of *Perfect Peace*, *The Slopes of Lebanon*, and *In the Land of Israel*, and other Hebrew writers have become known worldwide. A number of Arab Israeli authors have also achieved success.

### **15 WORK**

Working conditions have minimum requirements established by law, such as a 47-hour maximum work week, minimum wages, overtime compensation, severance pay, and paid vacation and work leave. Laws also exist to protect working women, particularly those with children or giving birth. Women are legally entitled to equal pay as men, but in practice it does not

always work out that way. Wages for everyone are determined through negotiations between the government (Israel's largest employer), the Histadrut (a federation of trade unions—Israel's largest nongovernment employer), and the Bureau of Economic Organizations (representing all other employers). At the end of 1991, the average monthly wage was NIS (New Israeli Shekels) 2,911, or about us\$1,200.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer and basketball are Israel's most popular sports. Training takes place mostly at sports organizations, such as Maccabi, Betar, Hapoel, and Elizur. The Tel Aviv Maccabi basketball team has won the European championship twice. Mass sporting events, such as the Jerusalem March, the swim across Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), and various marathons are also very popular. Jewish athletes from around the world compete in the Maccabiah Games (also known as the "Jewish Olympics"), which have been held in what is now Israel every four years since 1932. Israel sent its first delegation to the International Olympic Games in 1952. Twenty years later, at the 1972 Munich Games, eleven Israeli athletes were killed by PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) terrorists. Despite this tragedy, Israeli athletes continue to compete in the Olympic Games.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many of Israel's urban centers, most notably Tel Aviv, are home to dozens of art galleries, theatrical companies, movie theaters, and concert halls. The Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv is the home of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPA). The IPA has more subscribers and supporters per capita than any other orchestra in the world. Classical music is a favorite in Israel, and Israelis take pride in their native musicians, such as violinists Yitzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman. Hebrew pop music is also popular. In it, one senses a merging of the many Israeli ethnic backgrounds, including Arabic, Latin, and North American.

One of the favorite Israeli pastimes is eating out. Outdoor vendors and sit-down restaurants offer a wide range of food choices, from Middle Eastern *felafel* to pizza and McDonald's. Israelis of all cultures enjoy strolling through the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, cracking the shells of sunflower seeds and watermelon seeds between their teeth.

Reflecting the diversity of the Israeli population is the diversity of sporting activities. European soccer is one of the most popular sports, and the population gets quite excited over national tournaments. Basketball has been brought to Israel by North American immigrants, and cricket arrived with Australians, English, and Indians.

Israelis are beachgoers, enjoying swimming in Eilat in southern Israel and at Tel Aviv's beach, as well as floating on the salty waters of the Dead Sea, where the concentration of salt helps even non-swimmers remain buoyant.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Not surprisingly, Israel is the world center for the production of Judaica, crafts relating to Jewish religious life. There are no design restrictions in Jewish law on these objects, so artists can exercise their own creativity. Hanukkah lamps, wine cups, candlesticks, and spice boxes for the Sabbath and other holidays, and *mezuzot* (parchment scrolls hung on every Jew-

ish doorpost) cases, are found in abundance in Israeli craft and folk-art shops.

The national hobby is archaeology. With more than 3,500 archeological sites in an area the size of the state of Maryland, there is plenty of opportunity for amateur and professional archaeologists. Finds date back as far as 150,000 BC. Many Israelis are amateur archaeologists, and all have an opinion about it.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Israel's social problems stem primarily from the newness of the state (60 years old, as of 2008), the tensions between the Jewish and Palestinian residents, and the tremendous diversity of its population. The huge, ongoing influx of immigrants creates overcrowding, unemployment, and cultural confusion. Schools constantly have to accommodate more and more students who speak different languages and come from different backgrounds. Some of the immigrant groups come from illiterate, subsistence-farming communities and have a very difficult time adapting to a fast-paced technological society. Ashkenazi (European) Jews founded the modern state of Israel and so have traditionally occupied the top positions in society. When the Sephardic ("Oriental") Jews arrived in the 1950s, they were ghettoized and finally rebelled in the 1960s. Since then, programs have been put in place to improve conditions for Sephardic Jews, and they are now becoming a more integrated part of Israeli society. The Ethiopian Jews who were brought in during the 1980s are still marginalized due to their nontechnological background and the continuing debates among the rabbinical authorities as to whether or not they are "true" Jews.

The other major problem in Israel is the lack of resolution over Palestinian statehood. The human rights group Amnesty International notes that the Israeli government continues to use military force in the Palestinian territories, even as the two groups attempt to negotiate a path to peace. In 2007 alone, Amnesty International reports that Israeli forces killed more than 370 Palestinians and destroyed more than 100 Palestinian homes. A blockade on the Gaza Strip prevented 1.5 million Palestinians living in the territory from leaving, even in search of urgent medical treatment. In the West Bank territory, Israeli authorities are building a wall separating Palestinian land from Israel, despite protests that the measure violates international law. Israeli jails also held approximately 9,000 Palestinians, some who had not been charged with a crime or brought to trial for years. Despite efforts to promote Jewish-Arab friendliness, many Israeli children grow up with the same prejudices that their parents held toward Arabs. Overcoming these prejudices in all sectors of society is the biggest challenge facing Israelis in the early 21st century.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The equality of women is protected under law in Israel, but in some cases, religious and cultural traditions constrain how much power women have. The traditional *kibbutzim* placed a great deal of emphasis on the equality of all individuals, and cooperation among all to build a strong nation. That spirit of equality and cooperative effort continues to exist among Israeli Jews today. Women make up about 35% of the labor force. Women also are required to serve two years in the Israeli military alongside men. Although the head of the Israeli family is

considered to be the father, women make many decisions on family matters.

In November 2005, an Israeli court ruled that a lesbian spouse could officially adopt a child born to her current partner by artificial insemination from an anonymous sperm donor. Although Israel has not yet sanctioned gay marriage, it does recognize same-sex marriages that have been performed elsewhere.

Judaism does allow for divorce, but a civil court divorce is not enough to dissolve a religious marriage. If one remarries without having attained a religious divorce performed by three rabbis, the new relationship is considered adulterous, and any children born of the second marriage are considered illegitimate.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson.

# JAINS

**PRONUNCIATION:** JINES

**LOCATION:** India

**POPULATION:** 4,225,043 (Census of India 2001)

**LANGUAGE:** Language of the region in which they live

**RELIGION:** Jainism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Jains are followers of Jainism, a South Asian religion that predates Christianity by over five centuries or more. The Jains derive their name from *Jina* (conqueror), or “one who conquers worldly passions.” Although it has much in common with Hinduism, Jainism emerged during the 6th century BC as a reaction against the Hindu religion as practiced at the time. The geographical origins of Jainism lie in the Indian state of Bihar and southern Nepal, a region that also saw the emergence of Buddhism at about the same time. Unlike Buddhism, however, which has spread around the world, Jainism is an ethnic religion. Ethnic religions have little appeal outside their immediate cultures, and most remain localized in the lands of their birth. Jainism remains today a religion of India.

Over the centuries, the center of Jainism gradually shifted from eastern India, first to Mathura and Ujjain to the west, and then southwards. With the patronage of kings and ruling houses, Jainism firmly established itself throughout much of the Indian peninsula (Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra). For over a thousand years, it was the principal religion among the Kannada-speaking peoples of Mysore. Western areas such as Rajasthan and Gujarat also became strongholds of Jaina beliefs.

Jainism reached its greatest geographical extent, as well as its highest levels of scholarship and intellectual activity, in the period from roughly the 8th to the 10th centuries AD. The impact of Jaina thinking and the Jain way of life was felt in all parts of the country at this time. Thereafter, the religion entered a period of decline, especially in the south. Jains gave ground before a strong Hindu revival movement in what are now Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Karnataka, even facing persecution from Brahmans. But Jainism continued to make gains in the west. Kumarapala, King of Gujarat in the 12th century, is said to have established Jainism as the state religion and to have promoted Jaina values. The end of the 13th century, however, saw western India invaded by Muslim powers from the north. Gujarat was conquered by Ala-uddin Khalji around 1298, and Jainism, its followers persecuted and its temples destroyed by the Muslims, was never to regain its former prominence.

Jainism accounts for only 0.5% of India's total population (2001 Census of India). Mere numbers, however, reveal little of Jainism's influence on the philosophy, art, history, and culture of India.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There are problems in determining the exact number of Jains in India today. The Census of India reports a population of c. 4.2 million people in 2001 and if that figure is accurate, the population of Jains in India is either declining or has been

enumerated inaccurately. However, if Jains account for 0.05% of India's population, as reported by the Census, the numbers for 2008 would be around 6.5 million. Some estimates place the population at 10 million, which one suspects is too high. A realistic estimate of the current Jain population in India would be between around 5 million, assuming growth rates reflect the national average, or, at most, just less than 6 million people. Jains have a strong presence in Gujarat and Rajasthan and are also found in the northern region of Madhya Pradesh around Ujjain. Another area of high population concentration is the region of Mysore (the modern Karnataka State) that has historically been a Jain stronghold. The city of Bombay has a large Jain community, and Jains are found throughout much of the rest of Maharashtra State. It is interesting to note that today there are few Jains in eastern India, where Jainism had its beginnings.

During the last century, a number of Jains have migrated to East Africa, Great Britain, and the United States. They are mostly Gujarati in origin and are engaged in business and commercial ventures. Jains living in the West are often quite successful, and in many areas they have set up temples and associations to promote Jain culture.

### 3 LANGUAGE

There is no specific language associated with the Jain religion. Jains use the language and script of their region.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Jainism holds that the universe has existed through all eternity and will continue to exist forever. Thus, there is no need for a creator-god, or a creation myth. Indeed, in its original form Jainism had no gods and did not worship idols (in direct contrast to Hindu practices). The 24 Jain *Tirthankaras* ("fordmakers") were to be revered, but they were men, not gods. They had attained perfect knowledge, and their appearance in the world was tied to the moral and religious decay of the people and the need for a reawakening and revival of religious values.

Lacking gods, the Jains soon raised the Tirthankaras to deified status, and their literature describes the mythological lives of these saints (only two are known to be historical personages). Today, many Jains have even adopted gods from the Hindu pantheon, although they are ranked lower than the Tirthankaras. The Jaina world of myth and legend is perhaps best illustrated by a display in an imposing two-story hall behind the Jain temple (the Lal Mandir or "Red Temple") in Ajmer in Rajasthan. The hall shows scenes of the birth and death of Rishabdeva, the first Tirthankara. Included in this display, which takes up the entire hall, is the sacred city of Ayodhya, with its palaces and mansions for the nobles. The Tribeni, the sacred confluence of three rivers at Allahabad, is also shown, with the sacred banyan tree, and Rishabdeva in contemplation. Suspended from the ceiling are gods sailing the skies in brightly colored airships. This is, in fact, a huge model of the mythological world of the Jains.

### 5 RELIGION

The founder of Jainism is generally regarded to be Mahavira, who was born in Vaisali (in Basarh in northern Bihar) in the 6th century BC. *Mahavira* literally means "great victor" and is the name given by Jains to Vardhamana, the son of a *ksatriya* (warrior-caste) chieftain. Mahavira most likely lived from



599 to 527 BC, although some sources give 549–477 BC as his dates. The Jains claim that rather than being the founder of their religion, he was but the twenty-fourth in a line of prophets and teachers stretching back through time. There is historical evidence for the existence of Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara, who lived in the 8th century BC. Some Jain scholars even claim that Jainism was present in the Harappan civilization, a thousand years earlier (the swastika, a religious symbol of the Jains, is found in Harappan culture).

As his parents were followers of Parsvanatha, it seems certain that Mahavira was brought up in the Jain tradition. Even though he married and had a daughter, at the age of thirty he became an ascetic. He gave up his family, his high caste status, and all his worldly possessions, and for 12 years he wandered the countryside, naked, meditating, and searching for the truth. Mahavira was a contemporary of Buddha, who was born and lived in the same region, but as far as is known the two never met. At the age of 42, Mahavira achieved a state of perfect knowledge. One who attains this level is certain to achieve the state of ultimate perfection (*moksa*) upon death. Mahavira continued to travel through parts of what are now northern Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, preaching his message. He died at the age of 72 in Pavapuri in Bihar.

In the years following its appearance, Jainism experienced the divisions that are so common in the history of any religion. One, dating to the very beginning of the 3rd century BC, continues to divide the Jain community today. During a 12-year famine, a prominent Jain teacher led a migration of Jains to southern India, eventually reaching the hills of Shravana Bel-



gola in Mysore. This site remains a holy place for Jains today. On their return to their homeland, the migrants found that the monks they had left behind had abandoned the rule of nudity and other observances taught by Mahavira. They regarded this as heretical, and the subsequent dispute led to the division of the Jains into the *Svetambara* (“white-clad”) and *Digambara* (“sky-clad”) sects. The Svetambara sect are the descendants of those who remained behind during the great migration south and took to wearing clothes. They are found today mostly in northern India. The Digambara continue to go naked, although in practice only ascetics adhere strictly to the rule of nudity. The Digambaras, who are found mainly in South India, also hold that women can never achieve sainthood. They are not allowed to become nuns or even enter Digambara temples.

The central themes of Mahavira’s teachings were truth, non-violence, and nonattachment to the material world. For the Jain, all living things (and even some inanimate objects) have an immortal soul (*jiva*). This soul passes through a never-ending cycle of rebirths, acquiring a spiritual and even material presence because of the accumulation of *karma*. Karma is envisaged as a form of atomic matter that is attracted to the soul in this and past lives through desires and actions. To free the soul from this endless cycle of reincarnations, one has to eliminate existing karma by following an austere lifestyle. The accumulation of new karma can be avoided by nonattachment and lack of desires. Only then can the state of ultimate perfection be reached.

Nonviolence (*ahimsa*) is a means by which Jains can avoid the accumulation of karma. Technically, ahimsa means the “negation of the desire to injure any living thing,” and the concept is found in Hinduism and Buddhism as well as in Jainism. But it is in Jainism that ahimsa has its greatest impact. The philosophy underpins almost all aspects of Jaina life and society. The first of 12 vows taken by the Jain layperson is that of ahimsa. This and the vows taken against falsehood, dishonesty, unchaste behavior, and covetousness form the code by which the Jain lives.

The “Five Great Vows” taken by Jaina ascetics, though similar to those of the laity, hold them to much stricter standards of behavior. For instance, even the accidental death of an insect caused by inhaling it is a sin. To prevent this, Jain monks (or nuns) wear a mask over their mouth and nose. They must not eat after dark in case they accidentally eat an insect. They should not travel after dark in case they tread on an insect they cannot see. When traveling, monks and nuns often sweep their path to avoid violating ahimsa. Hair is pulled out rather than cut, to avoid accidentally harming life. Jains are, of course, vegetarians, but the dietary restrictions on ascetics can extend beyond the eating of animal flesh. In Jaina belief, even plants have life and many vegetables are forbidden them as well. Though rare, strict adherence to ahimsa has led monks and nuns to suicide through starvation, an act that is seen as meritorious.

Jainism in its original form was a sect of wandering holy ascetics. It had no temples or idols. Today, however, Jains worship in temples that contain images of the Tirthankaras (in Digambara temples the idols are nude, while in Svetambara temples they are adorned with loincloths). Temple rituals are similar in form to those of the Hindus and include *puja* (worship), ritual bathing of the idols, anointing of the idols with colored powder, and the offering of special foods. *Arati*, or the

ritual waving of lamps around the idols, is performed during evening worship. Unlike Hindus, Jains have no priestly caste to officiate at religious ceremonies, though some groups employ Brahmans (Hindu priests) for this purpose. One modern sect, the Sthanakavasis, continues the traditional Jain ideal of having no temples or idols.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Jainism is a religion with a strong element of asceticism and it is therefore not surprising that Jain festivals often lack the gaiety, color, and elaborate rituals characteristic of many Hindu celebrations. Jains observe their religious holy days with fasting, offerings of prayer, pilgrimages, and sober feasting.

Pajjusana, which is celebrated in August and closes the Jain year, is an important Jain festival. It is observed by fasting and meditation for a period of 8 to 10 days. On the last day, Jains ask forgiveness of all living things for any harm that they might have done them in thought, word, and deed. It is customary for Jains to seek forgiveness from neighbors and friends, for family elders to ask pardon from younger members, and for employers to seek the forgiveness of their workers. Alms and food are distributed to the poor, and Jain idols are taken through the streets in elaborately decorated *rathas* or processional carts.

Mahavira Jayanti celebrates the birth of Mahavira. Jains offer prayers at temples, worship the Tirthankaras, and make pilgrimages to sacred places. Images of Mahavira are carried through the streets in processions. The death of Mahavira is celebrated at Deva Divali, which falls soon after the Hindu Divali festival. One unusual ceremony is Jnana-Panchami, when all the Jain sacred texts are dusted, cleaned, and worshipped.

An aspect of Jain religious observances that is often undertaken to coincide with major festival days is pilgrimage to Jaina sacred sites. These include Vaisali (Mahavira’s birthplace), the Hill of Parsvanatha in Bihar, Mt. Abu in Rajasthan, Girnar and Mt. Shatrunjaya in Gujarat, and the ancient Karnatak site at Shravana Belgola. At Shatrunjaya, with its temple-city built on top of a hill, the most meritorious pilgrimage involves climbing the thousands of steps to the summit, circling a temple, and descending again, 99 times. This takes about three months to complete. Every 15 years, a major ritual takes place at Shravana Belgola involving the anointing of the head of a statue of Gomatesvara, a Jain saint. The statue is over 17 m (57 ft) in height, or nearly as tall as a six-story building. Jains from all over the country make the journey to be present at the ceremony. Pilgrimages are not undertaken during the monsoon months, however, as the Jains believe that traveling might result in harm to the abundant insect life that flourishes during the rainy season.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Jains follow regional customs; thus, rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death vary around the country. There are broad similarities—for instance, Jains cremate their dead, and their death ceremonies in general follow Hindu patterns—but in detail their death rites differ from region to region. Similarly, in some areas no special ceremonies mark the attaining of adulthood, but in others boys undergo the sacred thread ritual as would a high-caste Hindu. Essentially, Jains in Gujarat follow Gujarati practices, those in Rajasthan follow Rajasthani customs, and so on.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Jains follow regional patterns in matters of interpersonal relations, greetings, and visiting customs. They are enjoined by their religion to be truthful and compassionate in social and business dealings, not to lie, and to live chaste, humble lives.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Jains, as a prosperous urban community, generally enjoy much higher standards of living and greater material comforts than the average Indian. They have access to all the amenities available in modern Indian towns and cities. They also have a strong tradition of involvement in charitable giving, supporting welfare organizations, educational institutions, and even homes and hospitals for animals (*pinjrapols*).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Although it originated, in part, as a reaction against the Hindu caste system, modern Jainism has its own castes. They are social rather than religious divisions, however, and lack the hierarchy of the Hindu caste system, yet they are still important in matters of marriage. The Agrawala, Oswala, Srimali, Chaturtha, and Panchama are some of the more important Jain castes. Some castes such as the Oswala are divided into major endogamous groups such as Bisa and Dasa, and these are even further divided into exogamous clans or *gotras*, and over 500 subclans. In marriage patterns, family size, and family structure, Jain communities tend to follow regional patterns and practices.

## 11 CLOTHING

Jains dress according to local customs and are hardly distinguishable from local peoples of similar social standing. However, they are still subject to the restrictions of the ahimsa philosophy. Jains do not wear furs, feathers, silk, or wool because the obtaining of these products causes harm to insects, animals, and birds. They are required to restrict the use of leather goods to a minimum, and to ensure that such leather they do use comes from animals that died a natural death and not from slaughtered animals. There are no restrictions on the wearing of ornaments, however. Given the Jains' involvement in the jewelry business, women usually wear quite spectacular gems and gold ornaments when dressed for formal occasions.

It is the custom of Digambara ("sky-clad") monks to go naked, while Jain monks and nuns often wear masks to prevent the accidental inhalation of insects and use brooms with which to sweep the road, so they do not tread on insects and thus accidentally do harm to living things.

## 12 FOOD

As a consequence of the vow of ahimsa, Jains are strict vegetarians and avoid all animal flesh, eggs, and even certain types of root vegetables (e.g., potatoes, carrots, onions, and beetroots) and fruits. They are enjoined to drink strained water and are prohibited from using intoxicants and stimulants. Honey is not eaten because bees are killed when it is collected.

Fasting, though an ascetic practice, is also popular among the Jaina laity, especially women. It is undertaken as a vow rather than a penance and is a means of demonstrating one's piety and commitment to Jain ideals. It is common at the time of festivals, on full-moon days, and during the four-month rainy season.

## 13 EDUCATION

Jains have a tradition of education and have schools (*gurukuls*) that provide both a religious and a secular education for Jains. Jains are also open to modern education and have achieved great prominence in areas of business and industry, finance, scholarship, and government service.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mahavira preached his message in Ardhamagadhi, the language of the area of his birth (which was called Magadha). The Jain scriptures originally were written in this language so that the common people could have access to their sacred texts without the need for a class of priests or scholars to interpret them. Jain scriptures are called *Sutras* and the most important of these, the *Kalpasutra*, contains the life and teachings of Mahavira. Jain sacred texts have been written in other vernacular languages and also in Sanskrit, the classical language of North India. The Jains have some of the oldest libraries of ancient manuscripts in India. Jain writings have also enriched regional literary traditions such as those of Gujarat and Karnataka.

Architecture is another area where Jains have left their imprint on India. The past commercial success of the Jain merchant community in western India is reflected in the numerous *havelis* (mansions) and temples they constructed. The intricately carved white marble temples of Dilwara and Ranakpur in Rajasthan, the temple complex of Girnar, and the walled, temple-city atop Mt. Shatrunjaya are part of a Jain tradition of temple-building that goes back to the 11th century AD. The earliest surviving examples of a Jaina school of palm-leaf painting in western India also date to this time.

## 15 WORK

The Jains' commitment to ahimsa effectively bars them from activities that might result in injury or death to living creatures. Thus, occupations such as butcher, leatherworker, or flour-miller are prohibited. Pastoralism violates ahimsa, since it takes sustenance out of the mouth of calves. Agriculture is prohibited, because ploughing the land could result in harm to insects and other creatures living in the soil (although the Chaturthas of southern India are an agricultural community). Similarly, the operating of machinery could result in harm to insects and flying creatures, so manufacturing industries are avoided.

As a result of such occupational restrictions, Jains have devoted their energies to business, trade, and similar urban professions. They are typically an important and prosperous element in the "Bania," or business community, of any Indian city. They are mainly bankers, moneylenders, jewelers, traders, cloth-merchants, and, more recently, highly successful industrialists. They have entered the legal, medical, teaching, and engineering professions and also hold important positions in state and central governments.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no sports uniquely associated with the Jains.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are no forms of entertainment or recreation identified specifically with the Jain community.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Given their emphasis on commercial activities, the Jains are not engaged in folk arts and crafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Jain community in Delhi, where there are almost 500,000 adherents to the religion, is currently agitating for minority status on par with the Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, and Parsis, listed as notified minority groups under the Delhi Minorities Commission Act, 1999. Members of the community say they want minority status primarily because they want to incorporate Jainism, the religion of the community, as a subject in Jain schools. The capital and its adjoining areas have eight Jain schools. They are not able to teach Jainism to their children because most of the Jain schools in Delhi are partially funded by the government, which doesn't allow the teaching of any particular religion at schools unless it belongs to a minority community. Delhi is one of the few states in India where the Jain community has not been granted official minority status. According to Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, non-Hindu groups are entitled to certain benefits that Hindus are not. The most important of these is the exclusive right to run state funded educational institutions free of governmental interference. In light of this, many religious sects that are typically classified as Hindu have tried to obtain the non-Hindu status in order to be able to obtain state funding for their private institutions. "Hindu," as defined in the Constitution, originally included Jains, and there has been a debate in the Jain community as to whether or not to seek minority status.

As a relatively small, affluent, urban community, the Jains do not face the social and economic problems so typical of many groups in India. Rather, the problem—if it can be called a problem—is one of identity. As an offshoot of Hinduism, Jainism has retained many Hindu characteristics and Jains are often seen as just another caste of Hindus. Some observers argue that Jainism, as a small minority religion, is rapidly losing its separate identity. Others see in Jain religion and society a distinctiveness that will ensure its continued survival. For the Jains, however, there is no question. Mahavira gave Jainism its current existence. Mahapadma, the next Tirthankara or ford-maker to come, will ensure that it lives forever.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Theoretically, in Mahavira's Jainism, there was no distinction of caste, color, creed, or sex. Thus, for some, Jainism is a religion of equality, but for others, a woman's very femaleness creates spiritual inequality. The Digambara Jain sect believes that women cannot achieve liberation without being reborn as men first. Digambara Jains hold this view because they believe that nakedness is an essential element of the road to liberation. Since women are not allowed to be naked in public they cannot achieve liberation directly and so are seen as second-class citizens. This ban on female nakedness is partly intended to protect both men and women: if women went around naked it would cause men to experience sexual desire and the desire produced would hinder the man's progress to liberation. Digambaras also believe that women are inherently *himsic* (which is best translated as harmful). This comes partly from a belief that menstrual blood kills micro-organisms living in the female body. The killing of the micro-organisms is said to show that a female body is less non-violent than a male body—

although that idea doesn't have any scientific support and isn't found in modern Jain thinking.

Some Jain texts say that menstrual blood is a sign of impurity (this view is mirrored in Hinduism also), but the idea that women are spiritually impure because of menstruation is a rather odd basis for a Jain argument, since Jainism usually concerns itself with thinking, speaking, and acting rightly—there isn't any other area where Jainism says that involuntary bodily functions are a spiritual obstacle.

Another argument is that because a woman's nature is to care for children and other dependents, she will find it much more difficult to break free from these earthly attachments, and unless she does this, she cannot achieve liberation.

The Svetambaras have a different view of women, and indeed, there are famous nuns in both the Svetambara and Digambara traditions. Sadhvi, for instance, is a modern Svetambara nun well known for social reform and for her charitable works.

Jains exist in a specific social context, however, and, especially away from areas of Jain concentrations, have come to be influenced by local (usually Hindu) societies. When this author was talking to Jain families in the Brahmaputra River Valley of Assam, where Jains are few in number, they expressed the view that they were but another caste of Hinduism, whereas in Rajasthan and Gujarat, Jains saw their religion as quite distinct from Hinduism.

As one author observes, Jain women in India have legal and constitutional protection and that, whereas in the majority of Jain families in Uttar Pradesh the status of women used to be inferior to that of men, the impact of education, western culture, and the breakdown of the joint family have tended to loosen the stranglehold that "outmoded social mores" exerted over the freedom of Jain women. Literacy rates among Jain women at 90.6% are the highest of any religion, but female work participation (9.2%) is the lowest of any group, suggesting that education is a means of attracting good husbands, and that the primary role of Jain women in society remains, in general, taking care of the home and their husbands, and raising male children.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# JAPANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** jap-uhn-EEZ

**LOCATION:** Japan; small numbers in Hawaii, North and South America

**POPULATION:** 127 million

**LANGUAGE:** Japanese

**RELIGION:** Shinto; Buddhism; Confucianism; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Japanese Americans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Japanese islands have been inhabited by humans since Paleolithic times and archaeologists have discovered there some of the oldest pottery known; below is a summary of Japan's centuries of history.

### Neolithic Japan

10,000 BC–300 BC: Jomon Period

300 BC–AD 300: Yayoi Period

### Early Japan

300–710: Yamato Period: Political consolidation; Chinese cultural influence; Literacy and Buddhism introduced.

### Civilian Court Rule

710–794: Nara Period: Emperor-centered court at the first permanent capital city, Nara. Buddhist influence is strong.

794–1185: Heian Period: Court at the new capital, Heian-kyo (Kyoto), dominated by Fujiwara clan, which legitimizes power by intermarriage with the imperial family. There is great production of literature.

### Warrior (samurai) Rule

1185–1333: Kamakura Period: After Gempei War (1180–85) between rival warrior clans, head of victorious Minamoto Clan claims the title Shogun, which implies he is an agent of the emperor, and establishes a military government (bakufu) in Kamakura. Power shifts to warriors. Zen is introduced and two Mongol invasions are repelled (1274, 1281).

1333–1336: Kemmu Restoration: Emperor Go-Daigo attempts to reclaim political power for the emperor.

1336–1568: Muromachi Period: Warrior Ashikaga Takauji forces abdication of Go-Daigo and replaces him with a new emperor. Takauji becomes Shogun and bases bakufu in the Muromachi section of Kyoto. This era is also called the "Ashikaga Period," for the family of shoguns. Art (ink painting) and literature (Noh theater) flourish. Bakufu loses control of the warriors. Protracted civil war called "Warring States Period" (1467–1573). The first Europeans reach Japan in the 1540s.

1568–1600: Reunification: Three warriors, Oda Nobunaga (d. 1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (d. 1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (d. 1616) reunify Japan. Hideyoshi launches an invasion of Korea (1592–98).



1600–1868: Edo Period: Tokugawa Ieyasu is victorious at the Battle of Sekigahara (1600). Ieyasu becomes Shogun and founds bakufu at Edo (now Tokyo). This era is also called the "Tokugawa Period," for family of the shoguns. Severe laws imposed to prevent relapse into anarchy include secluding Japan from contact with outside world, ferocious suppression of Christianity, and division of society into four classes (samurai, peasant, artisan, merchant). Peace allows rapid economic growth and the spread of literacy. Merchants dominate culture, producing haiku, novels, theater (kabuki, puppet drama), and art (woodblock prints).

### Modern Period

1868–1912: Meiji Period: Matthew Perry reopens Japan to the outside world (1853–54). The ensuing crisis over Japanese response to the challenge of Western powers leads to the overthrow of Tokugawa bakufu and a return to emperor-centered government (Meiji Restoration, 1868), although the actual political role of the emperor is limited. The teenage emperor Mutsuhito (d.1912) moves the imperial capital from Kyoto to Tokyo, takes the title "Meiji." The government launches a modernization campaign to master Western technology, military developments, education system, business practices, and governmental structures. The samurai class and institutions are swept away, Japan creates a cabinet style government, promulgates its constitution (1889), holds its

first national election (1890) of representatives to a new national parliament (Diet). Japan defeats China (1894–95) and Russia (1904–05) and takes Taiwan and Korea as colonies.

1912–1926: Taisho Period: During the reign of the son of the Meiji Emperor, Japan experiments with relatively liberal concepts of democracy but suffers a post-World War I economic crisis. Tokyo and Yokohama are devastated by earthquake (1923).

1926–1989: Showa Period: Here begins the reign of the Showa Emperor, Hirohito (d.1989). In 1926–40 economic depression and reaction against liberalism lead to a repressive political climate. Military aggression in China leads to war. Japan attacks the United States and Great Britain in 1941. Defeat in World War II (1941–45) strips Japan of its overseas empire and military, devastates its economy and most of its large cities, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were destroyed by atomic bombs. Allied (overwhelmingly American) military forces occupy Japan (1945–52) and impose sweeping reforms to democratize and demilitarize Japan. A new constitution (1947) declares the emperor as the symbol of Japanese unity, vests sovereignty in the people, and gives women the right to vote. After the occupation Japan rebuilds and rejoins the family of nations. The Tokyo Olympics (1964) are viewed by the Japanese as the end of post-war recovery. Japan grows dramatically as an economic force, its gross national product (GNP) now the world's second largest and its standard of living very high. In the 1980s Japan becomes the world's leading creditor nation and the biggest donor of foreign aid. Much of the Japanese economic success involves large-scale exporting, often disrupting importing nations' industries, embroiling Japan in trade confrontations. Japan's Asian neighbors benefit from massive Japanese investment, but worry about great Japanese influence. Despite rejecting military power, Japan is once again a major power due to its economic impact abroad.

1989–present: Heisei Period: Akihito becomes emperor in 1989. Economic stagnation begins in 1990, which, combined with scandals, undermine confidence in the government. In 1993 the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) loses its majority in the Diet's lower house after 38 years. In 1995 mismanagement of relief efforts for the Kobe earthquake and poison gas attacks on the Tokyo subway by the Aum Shinrikyo cult further unsettle Japanese self-confidence. Beginning in the early 1990s the Japanese economy has been mired in a period of slow growth, recession, and occasional deflation, while facing with a resurgent China, which threatens to eclipse Japan as the economic and military regional power. While social order and high standards of living remain intact, Japan is undergoing a major self examination, seeking answers to domestic problems and a new role in the world at large.

Migration has not been a major feature in Japan's history. Since the dawn of history the Japanese have been a mixture of northeast Asians with others from the China coast, Southeast Asia, and Polynesia. By the Heian Period the dominant

Japanese population extended control over northern Honshu, displacing the indigenous Ainu. Hokkaido was settled by the majority Japanese in the 19th century.

Politically, Japan is a parliamentary democracy modeled on the British system. Representatives are elected to the Diet, a parliament with two legislative chambers. The majority party in the lower house, the House of Representatives, elects its Prime Minister, who forms a cabinet. The conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is the largest party. In 1993 the Social Democratic Party broke the LDP's longstanding monopoly on power and ruled under a coalition government. In 1996 the LDP regained control of the government and today holds the largest number of seats in the Diet. An elite career bureaucracy manages most of the operations of the government and has considerable influence over policy in their ministries' fields of competence.

Mythology says that the imperial line descended from the Shinto sun goddess; since the late Yamato Period, one family has occupied the throne—the world's oldest dynasty. During most of that time the emperor exercised no political power but served to validate the rule of others who claimed to act in his name. The Meiji government created a state cult around the emperor to rally popular support and focus nationalist sentiment. This culminated in the excesses of emperor worship in the wartime 1930s and 1940s. Since World War II the emperor has publicly denied his divinity, mythology has been removed from school history texts, and the emperor is defined as the symbol of Japanese unity in the 1947 constitution. The current crown prince is Naruhito, son of Emperor Akihito, who is anticipated to succeed his father to the throne.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Japan's population is about 127 million. Practically all Japanese speakers live in Japan. Small communities have emigrated to Hawaii and North and South America, but most of their descendants no longer speak Japanese.

Japan is an archipelago of approximately 3,000 islands off the eastern coast of Asia. Throughout history the main islands of Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku have been the homeland of the Japanese. During the 17th century political influence was extended southward over the Ryukyu Islands, including Okinawa. These are occupied by a closely related population that speaks a variant of Japanese. The Ryukyus became part of Japan in the 19th century. Hokkaido was fully annexed in the 19th century.

Approximately two-thirds of the land area is too mountainous for development. This compresses the population into a few large plains, the Kanto (around Tokyo), the Kansai (around Osaka), and the Nobi (around Nagoya), mountain basins, and coastal strips. The population is overwhelmingly urban, drawn by jobs and city life.

Japan suffers great seismic activity. It has many active volcanoes and experiences numerous earthquakes. Most earthquakes cannot be felt but major quakes can be deadly. A huge earthquake on 1 September 1923 destroyed Tokyo and Yokohama and killed approximately 130,000 people. Kobe was devastated by an earthquake on 17 January 1995, which took over 5,000 lives. In 2007 a 6.8 magnitude earthquake triggered a fire at the Kashiwazaki nuclear power plant; though the fire did not lead to a leakage of nuclear radiation, it sparked fears of a nuclear disaster in a nation that is still haunted by the Hi-

roshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings that ended WWII. Earthquakes off the coast of Japan and in the Pacific Rim occasionally result in tsunamis that can devastate coastal communities and cause massive loss of life. The deadliest tsunami in the history of Japan occurred on 15 June 1896 when an earthquake off the coast of Sanriku triggered a tsunami that destroyed 10,000 homes and killed more than 20,000. Japan also endures seasonal typhoons. While often destructive, these storms cause little loss of life.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Japanese language is essentially limited to Japan. It is an Altaic language and its nearest relative is Korean. It is not related to Chinese.

Japanese words are polysyllabic and agglutinative—that is, they are composed of many syllables, and endings are attached to change tense, form a negative, or otherwise modify meaning. The standard sentence order is subject, object, verb. Grammatical particles are placed after words to indicate the topic (*wa*), subject (*ga*), and object (*wo*), or to serve like prepositions in English (*kara* = from; *ni* = in and on). Modifiers precede the words they modify.

Writing was learned from China, and Chinese characters (*kanji*), each with a meaning and multiple pronunciations, are part of the writing system. Two phonetic syllabaries (characters representing syllables) of 48 characters each allow particles, inflections, and words not well represented by kanji to be written. These syllabaries are called *kana*, and include fluid *hiragana* and angular *katakana*. They are two duplicate systems that represent the same sounds. Katakana is used for borrowed words and proper names from foreign languages. Written Japanese is a mixture of kanji and the two kana systems.

#### STANDARD PHRASES AND WORDS

<i>Ohayoo-gozaimasu</i>	good morning
<i>Kon-nichi wa</i>	good day
<i>Kon-ban wa</i>	good evening
<i>O genki desu-ka</i>	How are you?
<i>O-kagesama de</i>	I'm well, thank you.
<i>Sayoonara</i>	goodbye (formal)
<i>Doozo</i>	please (when offering something)
<i>Onegaishimasu</i>	please (when requesting something)
<i>Arigatoo-gozaimasu</i>	thank you
<i>Doo itashimashite</i>	you are welcome

Family names come first and given names second. Hence, Tanaka Junko is a female name for Junko of the Tanaka family. Titles of respect follow a name. *San* is a universal title of respect equal to Mr., Miss, Mrs.; therefore Tanaka-san could mean Mr. Tanaka, Ms. Tanaka, Miss Tanaka, or Mrs. Tanaka.

The Ainu language is spoken by the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido Island. Ainu is considered a *language isolate* that has no proven affiliation with other extant languages. During the Meiji period the use of Ainu was actively discouraged as part of an official policy to assimilate the Ainu and the language was gradually replaced by Japanese. Standard Ainu vocabulary includes words that are distinct from Japanese, including *habo*, or mother, and *ihabo*, father. In recent decades, Ainu language and culture have experienced a revival, reinforced by Ainu language schools, and the Ainu population speaks both Japanese and Ainu.



A father takes photos of his wife and children in kimono as they visit Tokyo's Hie Shrine on Culture Day. Japanese families mark the day by visiting shrines and offering prayer for the healthy growth of their children. (AP Images/Koji Sasahara)

### 4 FOLKLORE

Japanese folklore combines Shinto religious myths, stories of nature spirits, Buddhist tales, and historical figures to whom mythical deeds are attributed. For example, Minamoto Yoshitsune helped his half brother, Minamoto Yoritomo, win the Gempei War (1180–85). He was a brilliant general, who supposedly learned warrior skills as a boy from *tengu*, half-man, half-bird figures that live in mountain forests. Later, Yoshitsune used these skills to defeat a giant Buddhist warrior-monk, Benkei, in a duel on the Go-jo Bridge in Kyoto. Benkei, overwhelmed by Yoshitsune's skill, surrendered and became his loyal follower. Benkei has become a paragon of loyalty. They died in a battle against Yoritomo, who became jealous of Yoshitsune and turned against him.

Japanese folklore is rich in strange beings that inhabit nature. *Tengu* were mentioned above. *Kappa* are water demons about three feet tall, which have bird beaks and turtle shells on their backs. They often lure people into the water to drown. They love cucumbers, and you can protect yourself from kappa by carving your name on a cucumber and tossing it into the local stream. When out of the water, kappa carry water in a depression on their heads. If you encounter one, bow, and it

will return your bow, spilling the water, becoming too weak to harm you.

Myths include Shinto tales collected in the oldest surviving Japanese book, the *Kojiki* (712). These describe the creation of the world and the Japanese islands by Izanagi and Izanami, a pair of male and female deities. The primary deity is the sun goddess, Amaterasu. Upon her descendant's departure to rule Japan, she gave him three sacred treasures: a bronze mirror, a sword, and a string of comma-shaped jewels called *magatama*. These imperial regalia are still associated with the imperial family. Amaterasu is honored at the Ise Grand Shrine, where the original mirror is supposedly enshrined.

## 5 RELIGION

Traditional Japanese religion includes Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Shinto (“The Way of the Gods”) is the name given to religious practices that were indigenous to Japan before Buddhism was introduced. It is not a systematic body of beliefs, but includes nature worship, animism, shamanism, fertility cults, ancestor worship, and creation myths. It is concerned with humanity's relationship to nature, to agriculture, and to society. Prayers and offerings petition deities (*kami*) for health, a good crop, children, and safety. Harvest festivals are Shinto events. Shinto also concerns itself with community relationships; hence, marriages are usually Shinto ceremonies.

Shinto is more concerned with pollution than morals. For this reason Shinto offerings are free of blood and include rice wine (*sake*), rice cakes (*mochi*), and entertainments such as dances and wrestling. Shinto shrines are marked by a *torii* gateway. The deity is usually represented at a shrine by a symbol such as a mirror.

The richness of Buddhism and its ties to Chinese culture helped it gain support at the Japanese court. Buddhism also answered spiritual needs that Shinto neglected, such as questions of morals and life after death. By the Nara Period, the court supported the spread of Buddhism and sought to link secular government to the grandeur of institutional Buddhism. Thus the emperor, who claimed descent from the Shinto goddess, also supported the spread of Buddhism. This was possible because these religions were not seen as mutually exclusive. Shinto deities were explained as being local manifestations in Japan of the universal beings represented by the many Buddhas. In addition, while Shinto dealt with issues of this world (crops, social relations, clan ancestors), Buddhism concentrated on ethical and metaphysical issues. This division still works for many Japanese. Weddings may be Shinto ceremonies, but Buddhism deals with morality, funerals, and questions about the future life of the human soul.

Confucianism is a social ethic imported from China. The Tokugawa bakufu based its social order on Confucianism. There is little institutional evidence of Confucianism in Japan, but its values have powerfully influenced Japanese society. Confucianism emphasizes the need for one to find one's place within the greater social order, starting with one's own family, and to be a responsible member of the social units to which one belongs. Confucianism is hierarchical: in social relations one party is superior, the other inferior. It is the duty of the superior to teach, protect, and nurture the inferior. The inferior should respect and learn from the superior. Ideally, Con-

fucianism leads to a highly ethical, supportive social order. It also stresses study, a value widely accepted in Japan.

Christianity was introduced to Japan by St. Francis Xavier in 1549. Catholic missionaries had considerable success for nearly one century before the bakufu expelled them in 1587, slaughtered the local Christian population, and made Christianity a crime punishable by death. Christianity was again made legal in the 1870s. At that time Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox missions were established, and they are active throughout the country today, especially in education and charity work. Only 1% of Japanese are Christians, but Christian teachings, especially its social ethics, have influenced Japanese thinking.

Many new religious cults have arisen in the past century. Most are devotional cults centered around a charismatic figure and blend ideas from Shinto and Buddhism with features inspired by Christianity, Hinduism, and other faiths. They attract devoted followers and are appealing, in part, because of the sense of dislocation suffered by many people in Japan's urban society. In 1995 the cult movement Aum Shinrikyo carried out a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway that resulted in a dozen deaths and hundreds of injuries. The movement incorporated aspects of Yoga, Buddhism, and Christianity as interpreted by its leader, Shoko Asahara, who in 2004 received a death sentence for the attack. At the time of the attack the movement claimed a global following that numbered in the tens of thousands and today Aum Shinrikyo is estimated to have several thousand members.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Holidays celebrated by the Japanese include the following:

1 January, New Year's Day: The major holiday of the year with three days off from work. Buddhist temple bells are rung 108 times at midnight. People eat noodles for long life and visit Shinto shrines, friends, relations.

15 January, Coming of Age Day: Honors all who have become legal adults at age 20.

11 February, National Foundation Day: Anniversary of the enthronement of the mythical first emperor, Jimmu Tenno.

3 March, Hina Matsuri: Not a legal holiday, but girls display elaborate sets of dolls representing a prince, princess, and their court.

21 March, the Vernal Equinox: Has Buddhist origins, is used to visit and tend family graves.

29 April, Greenery Day: Previously marked the Showa Emperor's birthday; later it was changed to foster appreciation of nature after his death.

3 May, Constitution Day: Commemorates the 1947 Constitution.

5 May, Children's Day: Celebrates Japan's children. Families with children fly carp-shaped streamers. Many companies take off 1 May. This concentration of holidays, 29 April through 5 May, is called “Golden Week.”

13–15 July (13–15 August in some areas), Bon Festival: Not a legal holiday but traditionally considered second only to New Year's Day. This Buddhist festival honors de-



*A vendor checks crabs at Nijo Ichiba market in downtown Sapporo, Japan. Local residents and tourists can buy fresh seafood and vegetables in the market. (Toru Yamanaka/AFP/Getty Images)*

ceased family, and visits to the ancestral home, tending family graves, and prayer services are part of the celebrations. Publicly there is the bonodori, communal dancing during the three evenings of the festival.

15 September, Respect the Aged Day: Honors Japan's elderly.

23 September, The Autumnal Equinox: Similar to 21 March.

10 October, Sports Day: Commemorates the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and encourages good health through sports.

3 November, Culture Day: Fosters cultural activities.

23 November, Labor Thanksgiving Day: Commemorates those who work and expresses thanks for the fruits of their effort.

23 December, the Emperor's Birthday: Current emperor's birthday.

In this non-Christian country Christmas is celebrated as a gift-giving holiday for children, though it has no religious sig-

nificance for the majority of the population. In the Japanese version of Valentine's Day (February 14) women give presents, usually chocolate, to men. On March 14 men in turn give gifts to women on "White Day," the male equivalent of Valentine's Day.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

One hundred days after birth an infant is presented at a local Shinto shrine for blessing.

15 November is "Shichi-Go-San," or "7, 5, 3," on which children of those ages are taken to a Shinto shrine to be blessed. Originally this was for girls three or seven years old and boys five years old.

The beginning of formal schooling is celebrated. The child is presented with a leather backpack for books and may receive a private study desk. School entrance ceremonies are attended by formally dressed parents. Graduations are also celebrated and considered significant social events. University entrance examinations are a major turning point in a teenager's life. Admission to a good university can be critical to an individual's future, and much is made of preparation, the exam, and the results.



15 January is “Coming of Age Day.” All who have turned 20 are recognized as legal adults. Fancy dress, usually a kimono for young women, is worn to ceremonies that are often followed by celebration parties. The new adult usually receives significant gifts.

Most people join a company as employees on 1 April following high school or university graduation. Formal company ceremonies induct new employees.

Marriage is usually celebrated at a commercial wedding hall that orchestrates the event. Shinto ceremonies are conducted in private with the couple, priest, witnesses, and parents. In place of vows, cups of sake are exchanged and drunk. Christian church weddings strike many Japanese as romantic, and many wedding halls have an imitation church in which a church-style ceremony can be enacted before guests. The ceremony is followed by an elaborate dinner with multiple speeches and the formal cutting of a Western-style wedding cake.

Retirement is usually marked with some ceremony, and 15 September is a holiday honoring the elderly.

Death is usually associated with Buddhist rituals. Visitors honor the dead at a wake, in which guests dressed in white burn incense in front of a photo of the deceased. The body is cremated. Ashes are placed in a family grave, which has space for numerous urns under a single tombstone. A plaque bearing the posthumous Buddhist name of the deceased is added to the family Buddhist altar, and memorial ceremonies are held over several years to pray for the person.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Japan is more ceremonial and formal than in Western countries, and phrases and forms of polite exchange are more fixed. Manners require that the speaker use honorific language to elevate the other party, while being self-denigrating. Japanese society pays great attention to who is superior to whom in any relationship. This is reflected in language and gestures.

Japanese bow to greet each other. The person of lower status bows lower and should initiate the greeting. Shaking hands is rare among Japanese, who usually do not engage in physical contact. Distinctive gestures include pointing to one’s nose to indicate oneself. Women cover their mouths with their hands when laughing. Men, when embarrassed, scratch the back of their heads.

Because houses are very small, Japanese usually entertain outside the home. Home visits are usually confined to a brief meeting over tea. The guest brings some gift such as flowers, fruit, or pastries. Such gifts are used to reinforce relationships with relatives, friends, teachers, doctors, business contacts, etc. Two gift-giving seasons, New Year and midsummer, are marked by a large-scale buying and giving of gift packages.

Dating is usually confined to high school students and young adults. Schools actively discourage it. Group dating is common and takes the form of outings, picnics, karaoke parties, or visits to amusement parks. Japanese students rarely work (many schools forbid it) and often have limited disposable incomes. This and busy study schedules restrict dating options. Dating among working adults is common. Most marriages today are based on romantic attachments rather than the arranged marriages that were the norm in the past.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Japanese generally enjoy good health and have the greatest life expectancy in the world—77 years for men and 82 for women. Medical care is generally good and includes both modern scientific and traditional Chinese-style herbal medicines. A national health insurance system supports low-cost care but labors under massive debt.

Ninety-five percent of the Japanese population is urban and housing is a major problem in the country’s crowded cities. While Japanese prefer independent houses, the enormous cost of land prevents them from having any real yard; as many as 40 houses are built on one acre. Small apartments are very common. The average dwelling space for a middle-class household in 2001 was just above 350 sq ft. Traditional housing was furnished with wall-to-wall straw mats (*tatami*), but recent trends are toward carpet or wooden floors and Western-style furniture.

The country’s aging population and low number of births had led to wide predictions that Japan will experience a demographic decline by the middle of the 21st century. In 2006 Japan’s fertility rate was only 1.29, far below the 2.1 needed to prevent a population drop. The Japanese ministry of health has forecasted that the country’s population could fall below 90 million by 2050, at which time more than 40% of Japanese are expected to be older than 65 years of age.

The Japanese standard of living is very high. Material possessions are comparable to those in the United States and the general safety of Japanese city streets adds a sense of well-being. The major problems are the restricted living space and the limited personal time left by demanding work and study hours. Japanese consumers are conscious of fads and fashions and major Japanese cities host large shopping districts.

Japan has excellent public transportation, which most people use for commuting to work and school in the major cities. Trains and subways are very crowded but reliable. Long distance travel is dominated by the Bullet Trains and other expresses, and there is a network of domestic air routes. Most Japanese households own a car and many have two, but roads are often heavily congested.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, Japanese families have conformed to the nuclear family structure, but in recent decades, as Japan has modernized, family trends have followed patterns similar to Western nations. Economic prosperity has led to couples marrying at later ages, fewer children per couple, and a higher divorce rate, all of which have contributed to a decline in traditional Japanese social mores.

In the last century Japanese family size has dramatically declined, due in part to Japanese couples marrying at a later age and thus having fewer children. In 2004 the average age of first marriage in Japan was 29.6 years for husbands and 27.8 for wives, compared with 28.9 and 27.5 respectively in 1995, and there were only 5.7 marriages per 1,000 people, the lowest on record. The practice of the eldest son’s family living with his parents in a three-generation household is rapidly declining.

Women traditionally played a subservient role in the family, but modern Japanese wives have increasingly sought independence from their husbands. The divorce rate in Japan has nearly doubled since 1990 to 27%. This is due in part to the increased freedom Japanese have obtained. As women have en-

rolled in the workforce in greater numbers, they have resisted the role of housewife, leading them to marry at a later age and leave their husbands at an increased rate.

Some Japanese have pet dogs and cats, but many are prevented from having them by small living space. Goldfish and birds are popular. Some keep crickets for their song.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional clothing is the kimono, a robe that is wrapped around the body, left side over right, for men and women, and tied with a sash (*obi*). Women's kimonos vary from the simple everyday designs preferred by older women, to the elaborate painted silk robes worn for ceremonial occasions. Traditionally Japanese kimonos were made of fine silk and included embroideries of gold and silver thread. A kimono style known as *junihitoe*, or a "twelve-layer robe" with elegant and complex designs, was worn by court ladies in historic times. Men rarely wear kimonos except for formal occasions and when performing traditional arts. The light summer cotton style (*yukata*) remains very popular for relaxing at home, resorts, and summer festivals.

Traditional footwear is sandals (*zori*) or wooden clogs (*geta*) with a thong that passes between the big toe and the second toe. *Tabi*, a split-toed sock that accommodates the thong, is worn with these. In the past, the standard footwear of the common people of Japan was the *waraji*, or sandals made from straw rope, which today are mostly worn by monks.

Most Japanese wear Western clothing for daily use. Japanese tend to dress more formally and neatly than Americans. Jeans are popular with the young. Middle and high school students wear dark blue or black uniforms with badges that indicate their school and grade.

## 12 FOOD

Japanese eat a wide range of foods, including imports from China and the West, as well as traditional Japanese cuisine. The staple of their diet is rice, which is usually eaten plain from a bowl without seasoning, butter, etc. Rice (*gohan*) is complemented with other dishes: fish, meat, vegetables, various pickled vegetables, and soup. Japanese eat much seafood. Some fresh fish is eaten raw with soy sauce as *sashimi*, or combined raw with rice in *sushi*. However, most fish is cooked, often grilled or deep fried in batter (*tempura*).

Buddhism discouraged the eating of meat, but this taboo has largely disappeared. Japanese eat chicken, pork, and beef, but servings are small. Soup is made from fermented soy bean paste (*miso*) or dried bonito shavings (*katsuobushi*). *Men-rui* (noodles) in various forms are a common main dish. Traditional dishes derived from Buddhist cuisine are known as *kaiseki* and only include salt as seasoning.

Popular styles of cuisine include *teppan-yaki*, or frying beefsteaks and a variety of seafoods and vegetables prepared on a large hot-plate in front of the diners; *teriyaki*, foods broiled or grilled in a sweet soy sauce marinade; and *oden*, traditional stew that consists of chunks of seafood and vegetables cooked in soy-based soup stock.

Japanese food is served in numerous small dishes. Pieces are cut to be eaten with chopsticks. Soup is drunk from the bowl and often takes the place of beverages during meals. It is very impolite to stick chopsticks upright in your rice bowl or pass food from one pair of chopsticks to another as these are

gestures associated with cremation ceremonies. The national beverage is green tea, and there are elaborate ceremonial tea traditions developed in accordance with Shinto and Buddhist practices. *Sake*, or wine made from fermented rice, is consumed along with *sakana* side dishes, which consist of grilled skewered meats and vegetables and pickled dishes.

Sweets are served separately with tea or coffee. Japanese sweets are often based on sweet bean paste. Western baked goods are widely available. Milk and dairy products, a recent addition to the Japanese diet, are ubiquitous, as are other western imports, such as soda, coffee and beer.

Most Western foods can be found in Japan. Hamburgers and pizza are popular and many American restaurant chains are well represented. Meals do not include desserts. Japanese brand fast-food restaurants are numerous, including Ajisen Ramen, which specializes in ramen noodle soup dishes, and Yoshinoya, which is popular for its *gyudon*, or rice bowl topped with beef and onion. Many of these chain restaurants have opened branches overseas.

## 13 EDUCATION

Japanese place great value on education and see it as the major path toward self-improvement and launching a successful career. This reflects Confucian values and the degree to which education has created a true meritocracy in Japanese society. Japan claims a 100% literacy rate.

The academic year begins in April and ends in March. Japanese children begin kindergarten at age four and elementary school at age six. Compulsory education covers only elementary school (six grades) and middle school (three grades), but 94% go on to high school (three grades). Most schools are co-educational. Elementary education stresses basic skills, especially reading and math, and seeks to develop the individual into a socially responsible group member. Elementary school teachers establish strong ties with their students, and children often find early education an enjoyable experience.

Middle and high school becomes increasingly rigorous as emphasis shifts to intensive study with limited electives. For a white-collar career a university degree is essential, but university entry is by competitive examination. Preparation for these exams, called "examination hell," drives much of Japanese middle and high school education. Students often supplement regular classes by attending a "juku" (cram school) after hours. Parents, particularly mothers, support their children's educational endeavors. Critics rightly charge that Japanese education stresses memorization for university examinations, but Japanese schools also cultivate problem-solving and group work skills more than is usually recognized.

One-third of high school graduates enter college or university and most of those graduate. Two-year colleges are common for women and for studying vocational subjects. Four-year universities are similar to those in the United States, but many students arrive burned out by "examination hell" and exert minimal effort. Graduate study is not as common as in the United States. English language classes are common in Japan and native-English speakers are often recruited to teach in schools and language training centers. Though Japanese students begin English instruction in elementary school, English language proficiency remains low.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Japan is part of the Chinese sphere of cultural influence; its traditional culture includes many areas in which a Chinese model has been adopted and adapted to suit Japanese tastes. There is also a dynamic folk tradition that has its origins in Japan.

Classical musical instruments include the *koto* (13 string, horizontal harp), the *shakuhachi* (vertical bamboo flute), and the *shamisen* (three-stringed banjo-like instrument). The *shakuhachi* usually plays solo or with the *koto*. The *koto* is frequently played solo or in group ensembles. The *shamisen* is a popular folk instrument that is played solo, accompanies vocalists, appears in ensembles, and accompanies theater performances.

Western instruments such as the piano, violin, or guitar are more popular now than traditional instruments. Modern popular music reflects strong Western influences and Western classical music is well known in Japan.

In dance, stately classical forms continue to be studied, while a dynamic folk tradition preserves lively dances, including recent additions to the repertoire. The annual Bon Festival includes communal dancing open to all.

Japan's literary heritage is very rich. The oldest surviving text, *Kojiki*, blends Shinto myth and history. Poetry anthologies date back to the Nara Period *Manyoshu*. The Heian Period produced a rich outpouring of literature, especially by court women. Sei Shonagon wrote a lively compilation of miscellaneous observations, the *Pillow Book*; her contemporary, Murasaki Shikibu, wrote the Heian masterpiece novel, the *Tale of Genji*. During the Middle Ages military tales were popular, the greatest being the *Tale of the Heike*. The Muromachi Period produced poetic Noh play texts that often reflect Buddhist values. Most poetry was written in the *tanka* form, five lines of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. The first three lines of the *tanka* gave rise to the 17-syllable haiku, the most famous author of which was Basho. The Tokugawa Period gave rise to the *bunraku* puppet drama and kabuki theater, for which Chikamatsu wrote tragedies. In the 19th century, Western influences inspired many autobiographical novels. Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro* is an early 20th-century favorite. Japanese writers are read overseas in translation and Kawabata Yasunari and Oe Kenzaburo have won Nobel Prizes for literature.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, most men joined a company directly after graduating from high school (for blue-collar jobs) or college (for white-collar work) and were expected to remain with one firm until retirement at about 60. In return for loyalty and long hours of work, the company made a commitment to preserve the jobs of their employees. This "lifetime employment" ideal has become increasingly uncommon as Japanese companies have adjusted to stagnant economic growth and have begun to lay off workers. In addition, many younger Japanese question the lack of mobility required by lifetime employment and seek more risky and potentially rewarding career paths over security.

The work environment in Japan is group-oriented, and employers expect employees to put company interests before personal concerns. Long hours are characteristic of office workers and it is not uncommon for employees to be expected to work six days a week and excessively long hours. Underlings must demonstrate a great deal of respect for superiors in the work

place and it is common for workers to bow to their boss. The workplace is a male-dominated atmosphere. Popular forms of entertainment for businessmen include karaoke and golf.

Wages start very low and rise with longevity; the average per capita income in Japan is higher than in America, but many things, especially housing, are more costly than in the United States. Japan has seen increased unemployment as companies have moved manufacturing facilities overseas, mostly to China and South East Asia.

## 16 SPORTS

The Japanese are great sports enthusiasts. High school physical education classes include an elective in one of Japan's traditional martial arts such as judo, karate, and archery. Baseball is extremely popular, and the annual national high school baseball tournament in August is followed throughout Japan. The teams of Japan's universities compete in baseball, rugby, martial arts, and other sports.

The most popular professional sport in Japan is baseball. Games in the two leagues, the Pacific and the Central, draw large crowds including noisy but well-organized fan clubs. In the past decade some of Japan's top baseball stars have joined Major League Baseball teams in the United States. Noted Japanese baseball stars in America include Hideki Matsui of the New York Yankees, Daisuke Matsuzaka of the Boston Red Sox, and Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners.

Sumo wrestling is a native sport centered upon six annual fifteen-day tournaments. Two wrestlers seek to force each other out of a circle or to touch the ground with some part of their bodies (other than the soles of their feet). A striking feature is the huge size of the wrestlers; top ranked wrestlers usually exceed 300 pounds and can weigh over 500 pounds. In recent decades foreigners have risen to the top ranks in Sumo and in 2007 the grand champion was a Mongolian. Judo, translated as "gentle way," is a martial art developed in the 19th century from traditional Samurai defense techniques. Judo practitioners wear a white uniform called a *judogi*. In a match Judo competitors attempt to throw or trip a player to the ground and use grappling and choking to force an opponent to concede victory.

Popular participatory sports include golf, tennis, skiing, hiking, swimming, and fishing. Gateball, similar to croquet, is popular with elderly Japanese.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Japanese are fans of television and have more television sets per capita than the United States. Song and variety shows and celebrity quiz shows are popular, and there are extensive sports and news broadcasts. Movies are a popular entertainment form, but depend heavily upon imports. Japan's own movie industry is productive but has faded since it achieved international fame for its art and sophistication in the 1950s and '60s. The director Akira Kurosawa made a lasting international impression with films such as *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai*.

Traditional live theater forms survive. Stately Noh drama has a small but dedicated following. The Bunraku puppet plays and live kabuki theater attract a broader audience and mix traditional fare with more current experimentation. The Japanese also attend concerts, including classical Western music and pop groups.

A popular form of participatory entertainment is karaoke. This form of singing along with recorded orchestral accompaniment to popular songs began as entertainment in bars and has since spread overseas. Japanese children are prolific fans of computer video games and the companies Sony and Nintendo dominate the video game industry in Japan and abroad.

Major festivals attract huge crowds, and famous sites for admiring plum and cherry blossoms, irises, azaleas, chrysanthemums, and the bright leaves of fall draw many visitors who come to view the sights and to party outdoors among the flowers.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Japan is a land in which many handicrafts have been raised to the level of arts. Japan has many regional variations on pottery. While some fine pottery is noted for delicate form and finely detailed decoration, there is also a strong tradition of heavier folk pottery that aspires to a rustic simplicity of color and shape. The aesthetic values of "*wabi cha*" (poverty tea) of the Tea Ceremony encourages this style of pottery.

Handmade paper, produced from mulberry bark, remains a popular art form, and special papers with distinct textures and patterns are prized for letter writing, calligraphy, and wrapping. Decorating the panels of silk used for women's kimonos has produced a variety of dyeing, painting, and decorative styles and methods. Tie-dyeing is also employed.

In the late 19th century, as Japanese rapidly modernized, traditional craftsmen were forced to adapt their skills to develop new art forms. Many smiths and artisans were traditionally employed in producing swords and armor for the Samurai class. These artisans turned their skills towards making elaborate bronzes inlaid with gold and silver that were sold for export and today are prized by collectors around the globe. Japanese ceramics have a long tradition and range in design from *satsuma* ware, earthenware pottery with highly decorative motifs, to *bizen* ware, noted for its reddish brown color and coarse surface.

The Japanese government cherishes these arts, recognizing masters as "National Living Treasures" to honor and support their work.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Social problems in Japan mostly stem from the fact that Japanese society is largely homogenous and governed by strong social mores that encourage conformity. Civil rights are a problem for some small minority groups. Resident aliens (less than 1% of the population), primarily Koreans, may have been born and raised in Japan but are required to register as foreign residents and have been excluded from certain jobs. A campaign to remove these barriers is gradually moderating restrictions.

Another minority group (about 2% of the population) is the *burakumin* (hamlet people). Physically indistinguishable from the majority Japanese, these are descendants of outcasts who suffered severe discrimination in pre-modern times. Despite attempts to legislate equality, they are subject to widespread discrimination. The tiny population of Ainu on Hokkaido are an indigenous people who were swamped by the majority Japanese population. Most have intermarried with the majority Japanese.

The resident Koreans, *burakumin*, and Ainu have formed groups to end discrimination and promote pride. Though

progress has been made, these groups are small, relatively invisible in Japanese society, and not given much attention by the national press.

Japanese society tolerates and even encourages considerable drinking, and alcoholism is a problem. Relieving stress and renewing personal bonds over a drink after work is common in Japan, and leads to heavy drinking. Japan's island geography has helped to restrict the inflow of hard drugs and firearms to very low levels, but there are signs that these problems may be on the rise.

Suicide remains a stubbornly lethal problem that takes more than 30,000 Japanese lives each year. In 2003 Japan's suicide rate was the second highest in the industrialized world, at 25.5 per 100,000. The high profile suicide of Japan's farm minister in 2007 prompted government officials to call for more measures to curb Japan's suicide crisis. Japan has long had a tradition of taking one's life, which was seen as an acceptable method of responding to public shame. As Japan's economic crisis worsened in the 1990s, suicides grew to record rates and the trend has yet to abate. The advent of the Internet has led to a problem of "suicide clubs," websites where those contemplating suicide can find a pact partner who will agree to take their lives together.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In traditional Japanese society women are relegated to a secondary status, but even in families that conform to customary mores, women enjoy considerable autonomy and power. Japanese schooling treats boys and girls equally, guaranteeing well educated women. Traditionally the wife has charge of the house and oversees the children. This is her full-time job and includes two important responsibilities, money and education. The wife keeps the family's budget, manages savings and large purchases, and even gives her husband his weekly allowance. She also monitors the children's education. Most Japanese children have few household chores, but devote regular time to study under their mother's watchful eye.

In modern Japanese society most women work outside of the home in retail, service, or clerical jobs. They are expected to quit work upon marrying or when their first child is due. These women represent an affluent portion of the Japanese public and many enjoy their status prior to marriage. After raising children, many return to work. Until recently, true career options were not open to many women in corporations. Teaching and some government offices provided careers, but corporations only began to recruit women executives seriously in the 1980s and they are still rare in many industries.

Legally, Japanese women enjoy considerable protection. However, Japanese society discourages confrontational litigation and this restricts the use of the law as a tool for force social change. Social values tend to emphasize gender-based career paths. While many Japanese women appear content with their status, those who wish to pursue careers previously limited to men find the door only partially open.

In Japan there are no laws that prohibit homosexual activity. Historically homosexuals have not been socially ostracized, and same-sex relationships have been depicted in art and literature. Civil rights laws have not been extended to gays and lesbians at the national level, but some local governments have banned discrimination based on sexual orientation.

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# JATS

**PRONUNCIATION:** JAHTS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Baluch; Pathan; Rajput

**LOCATION:** India; Pakistan

**POPULATION:** About between 33 and 43 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Language of the region in which they live

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; Islam; Sikhism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Jats (Jâts) are a peasant caste widely distributed throughout northern India and Pakistan. They form geographically separate endogamous groups that have become integrated into the local community as distinct castes. These groups are possibly of differing origins and go by various names. In some regions they call themselves Baluch, Pathan, or Rajput, rather than Jat. They are, however, quite separate from the communities of peddlers, artisans, and entertainers of Afghanistan who are also designated by the name Jat.

The origin of the Jats is a matter of much conjecture. Some authorities see them as being of Aryan stock and entering the subcontinent as part of the great Aryan migrations of the past. Others hold that they are Indo-Scythians who arrived from their home along the Oxus River during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. Still others argue that they are a Rajput tribe. Whatever their origins, they spread across a wide area of the northern plains and rapidly emerged as the dominant cultivators in the regions they settled.

In 1699, the Jats around Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh, rebelled against the powerful Mughal rulers in Delhi, essentially as a result of political provocation aggravated by the economic discontent, and further aggravated by religious persecution and discrimination. Although defeated by the Mughals, Jat resistance resumed in 1707 in the disorder following Aurangzeb's death. The Jats under Badan Singh (1722–1756) established a kingdom centered at Deeg, from which Jat rule was extended over Agra and Mathura and much of the neighboring area of the Ganges plain. Suraj Mal, described as one of the greatest Jat rulers, moved his capital from Deeg to Bharatpur in 1733 and Rustam, a Jat king of the Sogariya clan, laid the foundation of the modern city of Bharatpur. Bharatpur has the distinction of being one of the few states in India to defeat the British, who unsuccessfully besieged the city under Lord Lake in 1805. During the British Raj, the princely state of Bharatpur covered an area of 5,123 square kilometers, and its rulers enjoyed a salute of 17 guns. The state of Bharatpur, now a part of Rajasthan State and site of the famous Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary, which was designated a World Heritage Site in 1985, acceded unto the dominion of India in 1947.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There is no accurate data available concerning the number of Jats in South Asia. In the late 1980s, the Jat populations of India and Pakistan were estimated at 8 million and 13 million, respectively. Assuming these initial estimates are accurate, and that growth rates for the Jat communities has approximated that for their respective countries, Jats in India must number around 12 million, and in Pakistan over 21 million, for a total Jat population of over 33 million. However, some es-

imates place the Jat population in 1988 at 31 million, which would place their current population at around 43 million. At best, these are crude estimates.

Jats are distributed across the northern and western plains of the Indian subcontinent in a belt extending from the middle Ganges valley to Sind. They form the bulk of the population in the Punjab (both Indian and Pakistani), in the land between the Ganges (Ganga) and Jumna (Yamuna) rivers, and in a belt extending through the western and central districts of Uttar Pradesh. They are the most-numerous caste over much of the western half of Rajasthan. Significant Jat communities are also found in northern Kashmir and in Sind (in Pakistan). The physical environments occupied by the Jats consist mostly of the alluvial plains and *doab* (land between rivers) of the Indus, Ganges, and Jumna rivers, or the semiarid and desert regions of Rajasthan and Sind. Climate and vegetation conform to the broad patterns found in these areas of the subcontinent. In recent years, increasing population pressure has led to significant emigration of Jats to North America, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and the Middle East.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Jats speak the languages and dialects that are current in the regions where they live. Thus, Jats in Sind speak Sindhi, an Indo-Aryan tongue with a large number of Persian and Arabic words, written in a script similar to that used for Urdu. In Pakistan's Punjab Province, they speak Punjabi and use the Perso-Arabic script introduced to the region during the Muslim conquests. Jats in the Indian Punjab speak Punjabi but write in the Lahnda script, which is related to Devanagari, or the Gurmukhi script in which the Sikh sacred books are written. In Rajasthan, local Rajasthani dialects are spoken and written with the Devanagari (Hindi) script.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Tejaji is a local folk hero revered by Jats in Rajasthan. Tejaji, it is said, was a Jat who lived about 900 years ago. One day he noticed that a Brahman's cow was in the habit of going into the jungle, where milk from her udder fell into the hole of a snake. Tejaji undertook to supply the snake with milk every day so that the Brahman would not suffer a loss. One day, when Tejaji was preparing to visit his father-in-law, he forgot to give the snake any milk. The snake appeared to Tejaji and declared he would have to bite him. Tejaji asked for permission to complete his visit, to which the snake agreed. On his journey, Tejaji rescued the village cattle from a gang of robbers but was desperately wounded in the encounter. With much difficulty he presented himself to the snake, as he had promised. However, he was so badly wounded that the snake could not find a spot on his body to bite. Tejaji put out his tongue for the snake to bite, which he did, and Tejaji subsequently died. Today, Tejaji is worshiped as a protector against snake-bite. He is represented as a man on horseback with a snake biting his tongue, and this image is common on local shrines throughout the region. Tejaji is revered not only by Jats but by the local population as well.

### 5 RELIGION

Jats may be Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh by religion. Hindu Jats (47% of all Jats) know and worship the gods of the Sanskrit tradition and, like all Hindus, hold the cow in high regard. But



they also follow many local religious practices and observances, and worship local deities. Ancestor worship is also an important part of Jat religious life. The Jats of western Uttar Pradesh pay homage to their ancestors during the festival of Kanagat (September-October). At this time, offerings of water are made to the spirits of the deceased. The head of the family, assisted by a Brahman priest who performs rituals and recites Sanskrit hymns, presents offerings (*pindas*) to the clan ancestors, who are believed to look after the welfare of their descendants. Jats in the Indian Punjab are mostly Sikh (c. 20% of Jats), though they preserve many Hindu elements in their ritual life. The tradition of *pir* (saint) worship is widespread among Muslim Jats (c. 33%), who belong mainly to the Sunni sect of Islam.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Jats throughout South Asia observe the holidays and festivals of their respective religious communities. Thus, Muslims celebrate the two great religious festivals of Id ul-Fitr, celebrating the end of Ramadan, and Bakr-Id, the Feast of Sacrifice. Sikh festivals include Vaisakhi, which marks the beginning of the new year in the Punjab, and the gurburbs, holidays related to events from the life of the gurus. Hindu Jats keep Holi, Divali, and other festivals of the Hindu calendar. In addition, many regional festivals such as the Urs of Sufi saints are celebrated at the saints' shrines. These local festivals are often celebrated by the community at large. Sakhi Sarwar, for instance, is a Jat saint worshiped in the Punjab, but he is revered by Hindus and Sikhs as well.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage conform to the customs of the community to which each Jat belongs. Thus, male babies among Muslim Jats are circumcised, Sikhs are baptized into their religion, and Brahmans officiate at Hindu rituals. However, many ceremonies are common to all Jats, whatever their religion. Many Sikhs, for example, follow Hindu marriage rites and even use Brahmans for some of their ceremonies. Sikhs and Hindus cremate their dead, while Muslims resort to burial.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Jats use greetings such as “Salaam,” “Sat Sri Akal,” or “Ram Ram,” according to their religious affiliations and local customs.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Jat settlements and house-types conform to broad regional patterns. Over much of the northern plains, villages are compact clusters of houses situated in the middle of agricultural land. In Pakistan’s Punjab, grid-patterned “canal colony” villages are added to the mix. Houses are *kacca* (built of mud or unfired brick) or *pukka* (made with fired brick), reflecting the economic standing of their owners. In mixed villages, the houses of different castes (including Jats) are segregated into distinct neighborhoods. A Jat house in the *doab* (land between rivers) of the Sutlej and Jumna (Yamuna) rivers typically consists of a courtyard around which are the women’s quarters, a room used exclusively by men, and cattle sheds. The more-prosperous villagers may have two-story houses and refinements such as studded wooden doors and Moorish-style arches. By contrast, nomadic Jats in Sind live in tents or flimsy, easily collapsible structures built of reed mats. Household furnishings vary according to the resources of the individual.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Jats are organized into clans, with clan members living in villages in a fairly compact area. Each clan has a hereditary leader called a *Chaudhry*. Clans are divided into lineages (*thok*), sub-lineages, and minimal lineages (*khandan*). The minimal lineage comprises the families of living brothers whose father is deceased. The Jat family may be an independent nuclear family or an extended joint family. Among Sikh and Hindu Jats, one cannot marry a woman if any of her four grandparents comes from the same clan as oneself. Muslims Jats, however, are not subject to such restrictive rules of exogamy. Until recently, Jats practiced polygyny (i.e., a man could have more than one wife at the same time), but in India this has been declared illegal. Under Islamic law, however, a man may have up to four wives. Today, most Jats are monogamous. Marriage ceremonies follow Muslim, Sikh, or Hindu patterns. Divorce is not common and often leads to conflict between the two lineages involved. Widow remarriage is permitted by all Jat groups.

## 11 CLOTHING

Jat clothing reflects regional dress-styles. Punjabi men wear tight-legged trousers covered by a long shirt (*kurta*) worn hanging down outside the trousers. This is accompanied by a turban, the style of which is determined by where one comes from and whether one is a Sikh, Muslim, or Hindu. Women of all denominations wear trousers and a tunic (*salwar-kamiz*),

accompanied by a scarf (*dupatta*) thrown over their shoulders or around their heads. In Uttar Pradesh, men wear Western-type shirts over trousers or a cotton *dhoti* (a long piece of cloth wrapped around the waist, then drawn between the legs). Women in Uttar Pradesh dress in full, wide, colorful skirts (*ghaghri*), a kurta or a bodice, and a shawl. Their clothes are sometimes decorated with rhinestones and mirrors.

## 12 FOOD

The Jat diet is determined in part by agricultural ecology, and in part by culture. As Jat populations are found in the drier wheat-growing areas of the subcontinent, wheat and other cereals form their staple starch. *Roti* (flat bread made from wheat or millet) is eaten every day, along with a vegetable curry, lentils, curds, and—for those who can afford it—*ghi* (clarified butter). Hindu Jats are usually vegetarian, while Sikhs and Muslims eat meat. Many Sikhs, however, share Hindu attitudes towards beef-eating, while pork is banned by the Muslim religion.

## 13 EDUCATION

Attitudes toward education vary among Jat populations. A study in a village near Delhi, for example, showed 92% of Jat boys between 6 and 15 years of age attend school. The percentage dropped to 40% for girls, this difference reflecting the relative positions of males and females in Jat society, and indeed in South Asian society in general. Yet even the figure for Jat girls compares favorably with those of the Bhangis (0%), Kumhars (10%), and other castes in the village. Access to educational facilities for groups such as the nomadic Jats of Sind in Pakistan is clearly limited.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism all have ancient traditions of music, dance, and literature. Jat communities share in this cultural heritage. They also share in the folk culture of the regions in which they live. Thus, Hindu Jats living in the middle Ganges valley are familiar with the great traditions of Brahmanical Hinduism. But in regions such as Braj, southeast of Delhi, where folk culture is closely tied to the life of Krishna, they also participate in Krishna-related rituals and practices that are localized in nature. Similarly, the writings of the Sikh gurus, Sikh sacred music, and Sufi mysticism are part of the heritage of the Punjabi Jats—as are dances such as the Bhangra, and the Punjabi folk tunes that are popular in the region. Muslim Jats are the successors to centuries of Islamic cultural dominance in northwestern India. This is seen not only in religious practices and social customs, but in areas such as the Indo-Islamic style of architecture, and the poetry and music of the Sufis. Music forms such as the *qawwali* and *ghazal* continue to be popular among the Muslim population today.

## 15 WORK

Jats are known throughout northern India and Pakistan as skilled and industrious agriculturalists. They are the dominant landowning caste in many areas. Jats make up the bulk of the farming community in the Punjab, one of the most agriculturally productive regions in the entire subcontinent. They are open to change and receptive to innovation in farming techniques. It is no accident that the advances in agriculture of the



*A Jat girl smiles at the camera in Orissa, India. (© Tiziana and Gianni Baldizzone/Corbis)*

late 1960s and early 1970s known as the Green Revolution were implemented in the Punjab. Some Jats are pastoralists, raising water buffaloes and camels for sale. The Jats were viewed by the British as one of the martial races of northern India, and many served in Jat regiments in the British Indian Army. This tradition of military service has carried over into the armed forces and police forces of India and Pakistan. Today, many Sikh Jats are heavily involved in the trucking business.

In Pakistan, the word “Jat” is used as an occupational term for “landlord,” so the Sikh and Muslim Jats in Pakistan who originate from the Punjab may be different in appearance from “Jats” in the rest of the country, who belong to local communities.

## **16 SPORTS**

Games played by children are typical of those found throughout India. These include hide-and-seek, various games of tag, marbles, kite-flying, spinning tops, and *gulli-danda* (Indian cricket). Wrestling and team wrestling (*kabaddi*) are popular among youth and young adults. Traditional rural pastimes among men include gambling, cockfighting, partridge-fighting, and camel-racing. Hunting (*shikar*) is a favorite sport among the well-to-do classes. Young people have taken enthusiastically to modern sports such as cricket, field hockey, and soccer.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

With the advent of the mass media, Jats throughout northern and western India are able to receive radio and television broadcasts. Moreover, with the advent of cable and satellite television, those who can afford it can access overseas networks such as CNN. Movies and sports events are the most commonly watched programming. Movie theaters are found in almost all towns of any size. It is only the most isolated and economically depressed Jat groups, such as the nomadic pastoralists of Sind, who have to rely heavily on traditional pastimes for their entertainment.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Folk arts and crafts vary from region to region. The nomadic Jats of the delta region of the Indus are known for their elaborate embroidery work and mirrored textiles.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Problems facing the Jats vary according to location and the specific communities involved. Relatively affluent landowning Jats in Uttar Pradesh, for example, do not face the problems of economic hardship, illiteracy, and lack of access to schools and other amenities that confront the nomadic Jat pastoralists in Sind. In such communities, internal factions and caste relations are often of greater concern than social ills. In Sind,



expansion of agriculture has reduced grazing areas, and many pastoral Jats have had to turn to other occupations. Sikh Jats in the Punjab, on the other hand, have had to live through the unrest, violence, and political instability generated by the Sikh separatist movement over the last two decades (many Sikh Jats actively supported the movement, as well).

As agriculturalists, Jats in India, especially in the upper Ganges plains where they are concentrated, were negatively affected by Prime Minister Jawarhala Nehru's agricultural policies. Chaudhary Charan Singh opposed Nehru's socialistic and collectivist land use policies. A politician from Uttar Pradesh, Singh was born into a Jat family in 1902 and served as India's sixth prime minister from 28 July 1979 until 14 January 1980, leading the Bharatiya Lok Dal party. His association with the causes dear to farming communities in the North caused his memorial in New Delhi to be named Kisan Ghat (in Hindi, Kisan is the word for farmer).

The Jat people have a discrete and distinct cultural history that can be historically traced back to ancient times. However, to a large extent, because of their diversity, the question of a Jat identity remains an issue. Several religious traditions played an important role in shaping Jat identity. The Jats had no patience for the intricate symbols and elaborate practices of orthodox Hinduism. They described their religion as "kachha mazhab"—simple and earthy—as contrasted with the "pukka mazhab" of the high castes. Second, the reformist tradition in the Jat community had a pronounced non-Brahmanical orientation. There was nothing sacred about the Ganga or the Yamuna for them. Idols and temples were emblems of superstition, and the Brahmans had no role to play in their rituals and ceremonies. The Naths, followers of Gorakhnath, an 8th century Hindu sage, who are well-represented among the Jats in some areas, eat meat and drink alcohol. Such practices resulted in Jats being placed on the lower rung of the Hindu social order and they had no illusion of belonging to the twice-born Hindu varnas till the advent of the Arya Samaj (Ārya Samāj), which tried to engineer a basic shift in the Jat psyche. Whatever the current notions about the superiority of the Jat "quom" (community), Jats were stigmatized by the higher castes. The Brahmans treated the Jats as Shudras and denied them the right to wear the sacred thread. The Jats were largely free from the Brahmanical orthodoxy and caste rigidity. The Arya Samaj's attack on Brahmanical rituals, orthodoxy, superstitions, and caste rigidity had a natural appeal for the Jats and they easily took to it.

The Arya Samaj is a Hindu reform movement, dating back to the late 19th century, that denies traditional Brahmanical dominance in Hindu society, but that also promotes Hindu values. For instance, cow-protection societies form a major plank of the Arya Samaj movement in north India and the cow-slaughter theory is specifically used to justify violence against the Dalits and Muslims by Jats. The brutal lynching in 2002 of five Dalits in Jhajjar in Haryana State by Jats reflects the growing success of the Hindutva forces in the State. The "cow" has suddenly emerged as the principal symbol for the mobilization of dominant caste groups into the Hindutva fold. The Dalit victims have become the culprits; the Jats have emerged as warriors, like the Rajputs, defending the cow against the depredation of non-Hindus or low caste Hindus. Popular ballads and stories abound, highlighting the virtues of kshatriya values embodied in acts of saving the cow from the

assaults of Muslim butchers, who were allegedly supplied cows by Chuhras and Chamars (low caste Hindu groups). One of the most powerful images in the Jat belt is that of a gaurakshak (cow-protector), who is venerated for protecting the community through an act of saving the cow, and killing the "culprits" and "infidels." Protection of the cow has become a centerpiece of the emerging Jat identity.

Many Jats see themselves as equal to the martial Rajputs and some regard themselves as belong to the "twice-born" castes, i.e. the three upper levels of the Hindu caste system, but in general they are looked down upon by the higher castes in India. In fact, in 1999 the Vajpayee government in New Delhi included Jats in the Center's list of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and they are also classed as OBCs in the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Designation as an OBC indicates a caste needs assistance in the sphere of socio-economic development and gives a group access to reserved quotas (27%) in public sector employment and places in educational institutions, as well as special political representation. Such as designation is, of course, subject to political patronage and causes much resentment in the community at large, other castes having to compete with the Jats, whom they see as successful and economically prosperous. The agitation in 2008 amongst Gujars in Rajasthan for classification as a Scheduled Tribe stems, in part, from Jats being classed as an OBC in the state and the Gujars having to compete with them in the areas of employment and access to education.

In general, while there are some who live in poverty and are economically disadvantaged, Jats are a prosperous farming caste who form the backbone of the rural communities where they are found.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues among Jat depend to a large extent on the community to which women belong. Thus among Hindu Jats, traditional Hindu constraints prevail. A recent study in Shahargaoon, an urbanizing Jat village just south of Delhi in Haryana State, found that sex-selective abortion was practiced within a system of patriarchy, manifested in terms of preference for sons over daughters. Although the overall impact has been a decrease in family size, the sex ratio in the village increasingly favors males. Even among Sikhs, whose *gurus* preached gender equality, there is a preference for sons. In Nanowli village, part of Fategarh Sahib district in Punjab State, in which 70% of the families are landed Jat Sikhs, 18 boys and six girls were born in 2003, the latter all belonging to the Scheduled Castes. According to the 2001 census, Fategarh Sahib district recorded the country's lowest sex ratio of 754 girls per 1,000 boys in the age group of 0–6 years. The State of Punjab has legislation preventing ultrasound sex-determination being used for sex-selective abortion, although clearly this does occur.

Literacy among Hindu Jat women is only 27.5 % though it is even less for Sikh Jats (20%) and Muslim Jats (14%). In Pakistan, of course, Muslim Jat women are subject to *pardah* and wearing the *burqa* in public. While many Jat communities are quite prosperous, poverty and illiteracy are problems among rural groups of lower socio-economic standing, where women tend to be actively involved in agricultural activities.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# JAVANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** JAHV-uh-neeZ

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Java)

**POPULATION:** 100 million

**LANGUAGE:** Javanese

**RELIGION:** Islam; Protestantism: Catholicism; folk religion

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol 3: Indonesians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

To medieval geographers, the name “Java” was virtually synonymous with the entire sweep of islands between China and India. From Mecca’s viewpoint, every Muslim from “below the winds,” that is, Southeast Asia, was “*jawi*.” While Bali might monopolize Indonesia’s tourist brochure image, Java and the Javanese in many ways dominate Indonesia’s reality. Non-Javanese Indonesians often complain of a Javanese “colonialism” having replaced the Dutch version, but, from the viewpoint of a multiethnic Jakarta elite oriented towards development and modernity, Javanese culture is just another regional culture, albeit one with far greater power than others to influence national culture in its turn. More importantly, Javanese culture is riven (and enlivened) by the same tensions that obsess Indonesian society as a whole. Javanese Muslim purists find kindred spirits more easily among Malays, Minang, or Bugis than among fellow Javanese whose secularism or syncretism allies them rather to the Balinese, Dayak, or Torajan.

The Austronesian ancestors of the Javanese arrived perhaps as early as 3000 BC from the Kalimantan coast. The name “Java” may have itself originally meant “outlying island,” from the point of view of Borneo or Sulawesi. Having acquired metallurgical skills about 2,000 years ago, the Javanese developed complex supra-village polities before choosing to adopt (and recombine and transform) elements of Indian religion, art, and statecraft. From the 7th century, inscriptions and Chinese annals record kingdoms in central Java (two centuries later than in west Java). Despite the value of maritime trade, Mataram, the first great kingdom on Java, emerged in the agrarian interior of central Java, powerful and wealthy enough to raise the “holy mountains” of Borobudur (Mahayana Buddhist) and Prambanan (Sivaite Hindu), monuments surpassing in scale any in India itself. By this time, Java’s influence radiated as far as Indochina; the Khmer prince who founded the Angkorean empire had been a captive in Java.

In the 10th century, the vital political and cultural heart of Hindu-Javanese civilization shifted to the Brantas valley in eastern Java, driven from central Java by some unknown (volcanic?) calamity, as well as drawn by greater access to maritime trade. By the end of the 13th century, centered not far inland from modern Surabaya, rose Majapahit, a kingdom whose glorious memory inspired not only Javanese of later centuries but also the Balinese and other peoples of the archipelago. Since Majapahit, like all native Javanese states before and after, was a fragile coalition of regional lords under a paramount dynasty often embroiled in bloody succession struggles, its effective authority could hardly have extended as far as its propaganda claimed. Nonetheless, the list of its far-flung “tributaries” indicates that Majapahit at its height was at the center of a trading network that the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the

direct forerunner of modern Indonesia, would later enter and colonize.

In the 15th century, Java's north coast ports fell into the orbit of Muslim Malacca (then the center of international commerce) and under the rule of the descendants of non-Javanese Muslim merchants. These Islamized states, led by Demak, vanquished the remnants of a by then already declining Majapahit and propagated the new religion in the interior. By the following century, in central Java, a new Mataram emerged with a hybrid culture that integrated Islam with the legacy of the old Hindu-Buddhist civilization.

The greatest Mataram ruler, Sultan Agung, might have achieved the unification of Java had it not been for the opposition of the VOC, newly established on the coast. After Agung's death in 1646, Mataram slipped into over a century of civil wars and foreign invasions. The only long-term beneficiary was the ever-intervening VOC, which acquired the north coast and finally oversaw the permanent division of the remaining realm into two equally subjected courts at Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta (Yogya) in 1755.

After the over-extended VOC declared bankruptcy in 1799, the Dutch government took firm control of Java only in the 1830s, after taking half a decade to subdue a rebellion led by the Javanese prince, Diponegoro. Colonial pacification deprived Javanese rulers of political power, leaving them the arts as the only theater in which to express authority. Under the Cultivation System, the Dutch, utilizing the native aristocracy and Chinese intermediaries, forced peasants to discharge their tax obligations by growing cash crops (especially sugar) on a portion of their rice lands. Coupled with a population explosion that turned 3 million Javanese in 1800 to 28.4 million by 1900, these exactions impoverished the peasantry.

Resistance took diverse forms: the elite retreated into a world fashioned of arts and etiquette where Javanese refinement remained superior to Dutch "brutishness"; peasants in the Samin movement practiced nonviolent noncooperation, recognizing no obligation to pay taxes. In time, however, the steamship, the railroad, the telegraph, the newspaper, and European racism created an arena for struggle stretching far beyond Java, even beyond the Netherlands Indies. Javanese took the lead in the Islamic, communist, and nationalist movements that challenged colonialism from early in the 20th century. Surakarta was the birthplace in 1911 of Sarekat Islam, the first mass political organization in the Dutch East Indies, and Surabaya was the site of a communist revolt in 1917 among the soldiers and sailors at the naval base there and of fierce resistance in 1945 to British forces come to reimpose Dutch rule after the Japanese occupation. Under the new republic, Yogyakarta, out of recognition for its sultan's support for the struggle for independence, was not integrated into the province of Central Java but rather was granted province-level status in its own right. All but one of Indonesia's presidents have been Javanese, the exception being B. J. Habibie, a Bugis. Sukarno was a partial exception, being half-Balinese.

Java, along with Bali, suffered the great majority of the killings during the anti-leftist massacres of 1965-1966; one of the most important factors leading to the bloodshed was conflict over land in rural Java between landowning peasants aligned with Islamic parties and landless peasants aligned with the Communist party. In promoting the growth of export industries in Java's cities, development under Suharto's New Order

regime increased the importance of Java in Indonesia's overall economy, long heavily dependent on the export of petroleum and other natural resources from the Outer Islands. Despite much small-scale, "routine" collective violence (including vigilante exercises of "popular justice" against "immoral elements," attacks on black-magic practitioners [dukun santet], and church burnings), more than in other parts of Indonesia, Java has not seen episodes of ferocious ethnic/religious conflict resulting in thousands of dead and tens of thousands displaced as have occurred in the Moluccas and Kalimantan, though Surakarta was the site of major anti-Chinese rioting in May 1998.

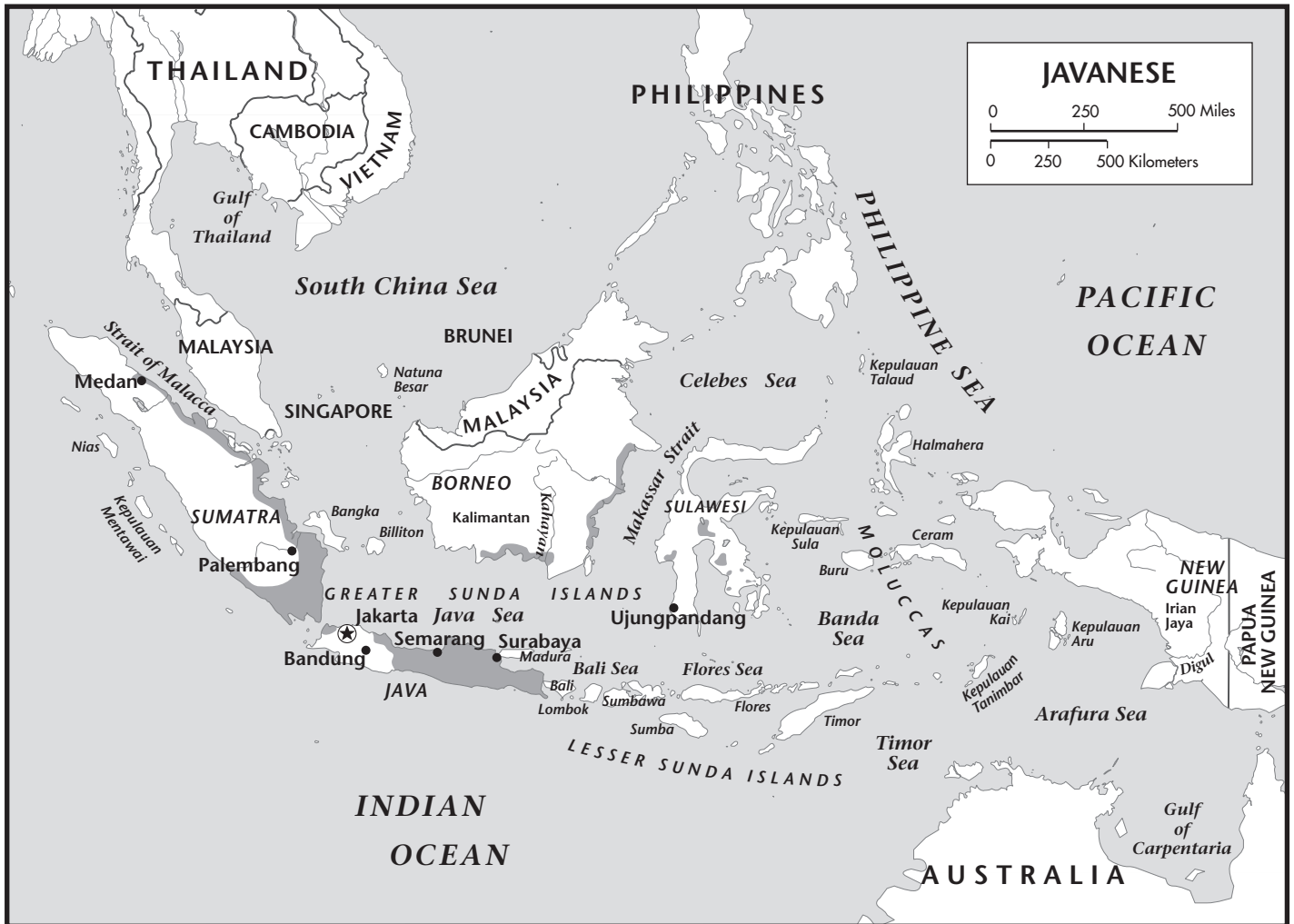
See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## **2** LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Britain-sized island of Java formed eons ago along the line where the Indo-Australian plate meets the continental shelf of Asia. Their collision folded Java along two parallel east-west lines of plateaus and hills. Along the intervening trough, a series of volcanoes broke through; well-spaced, their peaks slope gradually down to broad plains, ideal for rice terraces. Some 63% of the island is cultivated (as compared to 10–20% of the other Indonesian islands); 25% of the surface is devoted to wet-rice paddies. Fragmented into rice-fields that give way to fish-ponds and salt pans and dotted with ports, the northern coastal plain faces the shallow and busy Java Sea. Along the southern shore, in contrast, plateaus fall sharply down to a deep and desolate Indian Ocean.

According to the 2000 census, Javanese comprised 41.7% of Indonesia's total population, thus numbering 83.9 million. No other Southeast Asian national population and no European one outnumbers them. Speaking dialects of Javanese but counted separately were the Bantenese (4.1 million) and Cirebonese (1.9 million) of western Java. Java's population density ranges from 850 persons per sq km (2,200 per sq mi) to as high as 2,000 persons per sq km (5,180 per sq mi) in the countryside around Yogyakarta. According to 2005 figures, Central Java's population density stood as high as 982 per sq km, East Java's at 757, far higher than West Sumatra's 106 for West Sumatra and Central Kalimantan's 12. Urban crowding is even more striking, given that single-story housing rather than high-rises is the norm.

The Javanese homeland consists of the provinces of Central Java and East Java, minus the island of Madura, and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Javanese have also settled for centuries along the northern coast of West Java, particularly in the area of Cirebon and Banten. Javanese perceive several regional subcultures. The major division is between the *kejawen* and the *pesisir*. Extending over the north coast and including distinct centers, such as Cirebon, Demak-Kudus, and Surabaya, the *pesisir* is more oriented towards maritime commerce and partakes more directly in Islamo-Malay civilization. Centered on the old royal cities of Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta (Yogya), the *kejawen* of the interior, on the other hand, emphasizes an indigenous synthesis of Islamic and the older Hindu-Buddhist cultures. This subculture includes the "outlying territories" (*mancanegara*) of the Bengawan Solo and Brantas valleys, as well as the Banyumas area bordering the Sundanese cultural zone. Depopulated by Mataram's wars, much of contemporary East Java presents a highly mixed landscape, including Madurese, "Westerners" (*tiyang kilenan*, migrants from cen-



tral Java), Hindu-Buddhist Tenggerese, and the Balinese-influenced *tiyang Osing* of the eastern salient.

Migration from Java is a longstanding phenomenon. Javanese, from merchant princes to artisans and servants, filled 15th-century Malacca. Since the 19th century, the land scarcity attendant upon overpopulation has driven tens of thousands to emigrate, first as coolies, later as transmigrants, to the southern and eastern coasts of Sumatra, to Kalimantan, and to Sulawesi. For instance, Javanese comprise 62% of the population in Lampung province (on Sumatra across the Sunda Strait from Java), 32% in North Sumatra, 30% in East Kalimantan, and 12% in Papua; more than one in three residents of the national capital Jakarta is Javanese. Transmigration is in part responsible for the reduction in the proportion of Indonesia's population living on Java and Madura—from 68.5% in 1960 to 58.7% in 2005. In the late 19th century, different colonial powers imported Javanese labor (like Chinese and Indian) to work in Malaya, South Africa, Suriname, Curaçao, and New Caledonia. About 15% of Suriname's current population is Javanese. After more than a century, some of these communities retain their ancestor's language and culture.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Javanese language is Austronesian, most similar to neighboring Sundanese and Madurese (less so to Malay). It divides into several regional dialects. The people of Solo and Yogya regard their own speech as the most refined and view other dialects as corruptions (other Javanese often agree).

To a level comparable only to Japanese and Korean among major languages, every exchange in the Javanese language systematically defines the hierarchical relations between the speakers. A speaker must adjust his or her “speech level” according to the status of the person addressed, expecting the same courtesy in return. Although there are many fine gradations between them, there are basically two “speech levels”: *ngoko* and *kromo*. *Ngoko* is the language in which a person thinks and, thus, is only appropriately used with people of equal status whom one knows intimately and with social inferiors. *Kromo* is spoken to older people, people of higher status, and those whose status relative to one is not yet known.

While the great majority of vocabulary items do not change between levels, the ones that do are the most common. Thus, the most basic sentences differ completely, e.g., “where [are you] coming from?” is “*Soko ngendi?*” in *ngoko* and “*Saking pundi?*” in *kromo*. “I cannot do [it]” translates as either “*Aku*



Two Indonesians ride a bicycle past an abandoned old Dutch-era building in Jakarta's Old Town, Jakarta, Indonesia.  
(Dimas Ardian/Getty Images)

*ora iso*” or “*Kulo mboten saged.*” Moreover, the very texture of the two levels contrasts: *ngoko* can sound rough, even harsh, and is very precise (as in numerous onomatopoeic words, such as *gregel*, “nervous to the point of quivering and dropping things”); *kromo*, on the other hand, is always spoken softly and slowly and is deliberately vague.

Mastering *kromo* is an acquired skill; in the past, peasants with little *kromo* kept silent in front of aristocrats or communicated to them through *kromo*-fluent intermediaries. Today, when unable to speak *kromo* or unwilling to elevate other people over themselves, all but the most uneducated and village-confined Javanese can avoid clearly insulting others by resorting to Indonesian (which takes on the character of a new *kromo*).

Although Islamo-Arabic names are common (e.g. Abdurrahman Wahid, the name of a recent Indonesian president), Javanese just as typically takes names of Sanskrit origin. Javanese do not use surnames and, as with Sukarno and Suharto, go only by a single personal name. Many Muslims combine Arabic and Sanskrit names, and the Christian minority generally combines Latin names with Sanskrit ones, e.g. the name of the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Indonesia, Yulius Riyadi Dharmaatmaja (Latin-Arabic-Sanskrit).

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Javanese recognize several classes of supernaturals. *Memedis* are frightening spirits, such as *sundal bolong* [see **Banjarese**] and the playful *gendruwo*. The latter appear to people as familiar relatives in order to abduct them, making them invisible; if the victim accepts food from the *gendruwo*, he or she will remain invisible forever. *Lelembut* are possessing spirits. *Tuyul* are spirit familiars one can enlist through fasting and meditation. *Demit* are the spirits of spooky spots, and *danyang* are the guardian spirits of villages, palaces, and other places. The greatest spirit is Ratu Kidul, the Queen of the South Sea, believed to be the mystical bride of Java’s rulers; her favorite color is green, so young men should avoid wearing this color while at the Indian Ocean shore, otherwise, they may be pulled down into Ratu Kidul’s underwater realm.

In the past, parents inculcated values in their children through tales from the *wayang* shadow play. The characters provided a wide range of personality types and behavioral models and anti-models: e.g., the pure king Yudistira who has a gambling problem; the refined Arjuna, the perfect warrior and lover; the mighty and irreverent Bima; and the headstrong Sri-kandi and the retiring Sumbadra, both female paragons. The more laughable human follies appear in the clown-servants (not part of the original Indian epic) Petruk, Gareng, Bagong,

and their father Semar. The last is an ugly and rotund old man, who is actually the supreme god in disguise (as well as *danyang* of all Java). There are also two female clown-servants, the tall and thin Cangik and her short and fat daughter, Limbuk.

Another set of legendary figures are the *wali songo*, the nine holy men (variously of Arab, Egyptian, Persian, Uzbek, and Chinese origin) who brought Islam to Java (from Malacca, Champa, and the Middle East); they are credited with magical powers, such as flying and with developing ways to propagate Islam to the Javanese through their own cultural forms, such as Sunan Bonang who used Javanese sung poetry and the music of the Javanese gamelan orchestra to communicate Islamic teaching. To this day, their graves, located in cities all along Java's north coast, are popular sites of pilgrimage, especially those of Sunan Giri at Gresik near Surabaya, of Sunan Kudus in Kudus, and Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon. Another Muslim figure who attracts pilgrims to his shrine is the spirit of Sam Po Kong (Zheng He), the Yunnan-born admiral of the massive Ming Chinese fleets that made seven voyages to lands around the Indian Ocean in the early 15th century; both non-Muslim Chinese and Muslim Javanese visit his temple in Semarang, the great port on the north coast of Central Java.

## 5 RELIGION

All but a fraction of Javanese are Muslim. However, only a portion regularly follow the "five pillars of Islam" and other practices of orthodox, Middle Eastern Islam; they have come to be called *santri*, a term originally referring only to those taking formal instruction from Islamic teachers. These "purist" Muslims divide further into conservatives, those who keep to orthodox Islam as it has been practiced in Java for centuries; and modernists, who reject local traditions and espouse a more scriptural faith supported by Western-style educational institutions. Both groups have strong organizations (once functioning as official political parties), Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, respectively.

Non-santri Javanese Muslims, popularly termed *abangan* or *Islam kejawan*, revere Gusti Allah and Kangjeng Nabi ("the Venerable Prophet," Muhammad) but do not perform the five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadan, or go or want to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. Their religious life focuses not on communal prayer in the mosque but on *slametan*, ritual meals held during rites of passage, village "spiritual cleansings" and harvest festivals, Islamic holidays, and special occasions, such as the inauguration of a new house or rites to protect an only child from the ogre Batara Kala (*ruwatan*). They also leave offerings, such as flowers, incense, coins, and rice cakes on a bamboo tray or banana leaf, for the spirits at crossroads, under bridges, in big trees, and elsewhere. They respect the spiritual potency (*kesakten*) residing in respected heirloom objects, such as gongs, *kris* swords, and royal carriages. *Abangan* believe paying homage to rulers and other exceptional people of the past at their tombs will confer spiritual and material benefits. These notions and practices are, however, widespread among *santri* as well. For example, conservatives regularly make pilgrimages to the graves of Islamic "saints" (legendary holy men), something modernists denounce as "idolatrous." Both *abangan* and *santri* consult *dukun*, diverse magical specialists, including spirit mediums, masseurs, acupuncturists, herbalists, midwives, sorcerers, and numerologists.

Fatalism suffuses much of Javanese thinking. One must be accepting (*nerimo*), have fortitude (*sabar*), and free oneself from emotions and desires to reach serenity (*ikhlas*). Earthly life is but a moment in eternity, the soul "stopping to have a drink" (*mampir ngombe*). Mystical practices, such as meditation in a secluded place, are common ways to accumulate spiritual power and a major preoccupation of the aristocracy. Explicitly distancing themselves from conventional Islam, numerous mystical sects command a considerable following and have sought unsuccessfully to have the government recognize their beliefs (called *kebatinan*, "innerness") as an official religion.

As much as 12% of the population of the island of Java (including Chinese and migrants from other islands) adhere to religions other than Islam. There are several hundred thousand Christians. Roman Catholics are particularly numerous; their church has used *gamelan* in the mass and taught biblical stories through *wayang*, and Javanese make the traditional sign of homage, palms placed together over the forehead, at the moment of Eucharistic consecration.

On the slopes of the east Javanese volcano Bromo live the Tenggerese, an archaic Javanese subgroup, who practice a folk religion derived from Majapahit Hinduism and highlighting the honoring of Joko Seger, Bromo's guardian spirit.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Javanese combine the seven-day Islamic-Western week (Saturday to Friday: *Sabtu, Minggu, Senin, Selasa, Rebo, Kamis, Jum'at*) with a five-day indigenous week (*Legi, Paing, Pon, Wage, Kliwon*). Each day is identified by its place in both weeks (e.g., *Selasa Pon* or *Rebo Legi*), a conjunction that recurs every 35 days; birthdays, rituals, and performances are celebrated every time a particular day-pair returns.

The first day (beginning at sunset) of the Islamic year (1 Sura) is regarded as mystically charged. On this night, people stay up all night, watching processions, such as the *kirab pusaka* (parading the royal heirlooms) in Solo or meditating on mountains or beaches (one means of gaining spiritual potency is to stand in the cold water of a stream all night). The birthday of Muhammad (12 Mulud) is celebrated in Yogyakarta and Solo by the holding of the Sekaten fair (the whole preceding week), the playing of ancient *gamelans* brought out only for the festival, and, on the day itself, a procession of three or more glutinous rice "mountains" ("male," "female," and "baby").

See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Arranged marriages still occur in villages, but most people choose their own partners. The process begins with the man making a formal inquiry of the father or the *wali*, a paternal relative who can take a dead father's place, as to whether or not the woman is spoken for, followed later by the presentation of the gifts to the woman's side. On the night before the wedding (*midadareni*, when heavenly nymphs descend to bless the marriage), the woman's kin visit the graves of their ancestors to ask for their blessing, and the woman's kin, neighbors, and friends come for a *slametan* feast; the kin stay up all night, making palm-leaf decorations (*janur*). A *dukun manten* dresses and adorns the bride for the ceremony.

The wedding ceremony itself is the conclusion of the Islamic marriage contract between the groom and the bride's father or

*wali*. The groom, with his party, proceeds to the bride's house, meets the bride, and is seated on the bridal dais. The groom's parents then arrive to the sound of the *gamelan* piece "Kebo Giro" (nowadays usually from a cassette). The couple bows (*sungkem*) to their parents and to other older relatives. The guests then eat and watch dancing by young female relatives of the couple. The groom can take the bride away only after five days; then, they can visit his kin and neighbors for a simpler reception (*ngunduh temanten*). Immediately after Indonesian independence, the move was to simplify wedding ceremonies, but under the New Order the trend reversed, with wealthy families displaying status through reviving the more elaborate traditional ceremonies (including rich costumes).

Javanese hold *slametan* for the repose of the deceased on the third, seventh, fortieth, 100th, and 1,000th day after death. On every Selasa Kliwon and Jum'at Kliwon, offerings (flower petals in a half-full water glass) are made to the spirits of the dead. On Ramadan, people go to strew flowers on the graves of their departed.

## **8** INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In the old Javanese kingdoms, descendants of rulers formed the elite (*ningrat* or *priyayi*). During the colonial period, *priyayi* came to refer to all educated people, generally those employed in white-collar jobs, whatever their descent. This term distinguished them from the *wong cilik* ("little people"), peasants and laborers. *Ulama* (Islamic scholars), their students, and merchants formed a distinct *santri* elite of their own.

Peasants recognized their own hierarchy with *wong baku* (house-owners and the descendants of village founders) at the top, followed by *kuli gandok* (married men continuing to live with their parents) and *joko* or *sinoman* (unmarried men living with parents or others). Heading each village is a *lurah* (also called *petinggi*, *bekel*, or *glondong*), elected by the villagers, and receiving the right to use communal land to support himself and his staff. The villagers cooperate on common works, such as the construction and upkeep of roads, bridges, and public buildings, and the village spiritual (*bersih desa*) cleansing rites.

Javanese say of children who have not yet learned to control their emotions and to behave in a dignified and respectful way that they are *durung jawa*, "not yet Javanese." The ideal condition of the individual and society is an uneventful tranquility. Thus, Javanese avoid confrontation at all costs, reacting even to disturbing news with a resigned smile and soft words and never giving any request a direct refusal (Javanese are adept at giving and taking hints). In addition to polite speech, proper respect requires appropriate body language: bowing and slow, graceful movements.

## **9** LIVING CONDITIONS

Javanese villages (*desa*) may cluster amid fields (in the highlands) or stretch out along roads (in the lowlands), the individual houses and yards enclosed by bamboo fences. Paths no wider than 2 m (6.5 ft) connect the *dukuh* (its various constituent hamlets). Each village has a *balai desa* (community meeting hall), several *langgar* (prayer halls) or a mosque, and a school. Entrance gates are seen everywhere, also defining city wards. There are open areas for a weekly market, stops for buses, and parking for minivans (*bemo*, *kol*, *daihatsu*) and pedicabs (*bekak*) waiting for passengers.

Village houses sit on the ground and have earthen floors. They have a framework of bamboo, palm trunks, or teak; walls of plaited bamboo (*gedek*), wood planks, or bricks; and roofs of dried palm leaves (*blarak*) or tiles. Inside, rooms are made with movable *gedek* partitions. Traditional houses have no windows, light and air entering through chinks in the wall or holes in the roof. Roof shape was used to reflect social status. Ordinary villagers had a *serotong* roof with two slopes on two sides only. Descendants of the village founders possessed a *limasan* roof with a double slope on four sides. Marking an aristocratic house was the *joglo* roof with three slopes on four sides; such residences also had a large pavilion (*pendopo*) in front for receiving guests and petitioners.

Central Java has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 69.8 (2005 score), just above Indonesia's national HDI 69.6, while East Java's HDI is significantly lower, 68.5 as is Banten's, 68.8. However, the Special Region of Yogyakarta (province-level status) had among the highest HDI's in the country, 73.5. Central Java's GDP per capita is us\$6,293, relatively low for Indonesia (for instance, below West Sumatra's us\$9,784 and North Sulawesi's us\$8,360, though above East Nusa Tenggara's us\$3,427). East Java's GDP per capita, however, is relatively high, us\$ 11,090. The level of infant mortality (2000 figures) in East Java, 47.69 deaths out of 1,000 live births, is almost twice that in Jakarta; Central Java's figure is a little better, at 43.69, and Yogyakarta's is the same as the national capital's (compare all these with 88.55 for West Nusa Tenggara).

## **10** FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family (*kuluwarga* or *somah*) is the basic unit of Javanese society, including a couple, their unmarried children, and sometimes other relatives and married children and their families. Javanese recognize kin obligations on both the mother's and father's sides. Descendants of a common great-grandparent form a *golongan* or *sanak-sadulur*, whose members help each other hold major celebrations and gather on Islamic holidays. Larger still is the *alurwaris*, a kinship group directed towards the care of the graves of a common ancestor seven generations back; a descendant living in the village where the grave is located is responsible for mobilizing the scattered kin for this work.

Marriages between first cousins, especially the children of two brothers, and between a man of a younger generation than the woman's, are taboo. A married couple prefers to set up a separate household if they can afford to; otherwise, they usually move in with the wife's parents. Taking more than one wife is rare (kings and other aristocrats formerly kept harems). The divorce rate is high among village folk and poorer city folk; after divorce, children follow the mother or, if she marries again, they may go to live with other relatives. An inheritance may be divided through *perdamaian*, by deliberation among the children and close kin with the object of providing for those who have the least. The child who has remained in the family home to take care of the parents may also inherit the bulk of the property.

While Javanese mothers continue to provide direct emotional support to their children throughout life, fathers become more distant after children reach the age of four. They become the first "public authority" figures to whom individuals must be reserved and respectful. Although fathers are regarded as

the heads of the house, the mother exercises more real control, being able, as a woman, to be more direct; the inevitable display of emotion would compromise a man's image of dignity, the source of his power. Two-thirds of Javanese are reported as speaking *kromo* (the language of respect) to their parents while greeting or asking for help, and half use *kromo* even during relaxed conversation with them.

While parents are supposed to be constantly correcting and advising their children, however old the child is, children never criticize or correct their parents except in the most indirect ways.

## **11 CLOTHING**

For everyday wear, Javanese follow the Indonesian style of dress; men and women wearing sarongs in public are also common. Ceremonial clothing for men includes a sarong, high-collared shirt, jacket, and a *blangkon*, a head cloth wrapped to resemble a skullcap. Women wear the sarong, *kebaya* (long-sleeved blouse), *selendang* (sash over the shoulder), and *sanggul* (long hair in a thick, flat bun at the back, often achieved with a wig addition); handbags have become obligatory. One variation for both sexes is to wear a short sarong over pajama-like trousers (men add a high fez). Traditional dance costumes and wedding attire leave the chest bare for men and the shoulders bare for women.

## **12 FOOD**

Meals consist of rice and, at their simplest, stir-fried vegetables, dried salted fish, *tahu* (tofu), *tempe* (a bar of preserved whole soybeans), *krupuk* (fish or shrimp crackers), and *sambel* (chili sauce). Common dishes include *gado-gado* (a salad of parboiled vegetables eaten with a peanut sauce), *sayur lodeh* (a vegetable and coconut milk stew), *pergedel* (fat potato fritters), and *soto* (soup with chicken, noodle, and other ingredients). Regional specialties include Yogya's *gudeg* (chicken and young jackfruit stewed in coconut milk), Solo's *nasi liwet* (rice cooked in coconut milk), and *nasi rawon* (rice with a rich beef soup). Dishes of Chinese origin are very popular, such as *bakso* (meatball soup), *bakmi* (fried noodles), and *cap cay* (stir-fried meat and vegetables). Snack foods include crackers: *emping* (from the *mlinjo* nut) and *rempeyek* (from peanut). Common desserts are *gethuk* (cassava that is steamed, mashed, mixed with coconut milk and sugar, and colored pink, green, or white) and various glutinous rice preparations (*jenang*, *dodol*, *klepon*, and *wajik*). Javanese often buy prepared food from peddlers making the rounds of neighborhoods and enjoy *lesehan*, late-night dining on mats provided by sidewalk food vendors.

## **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005, the level of literacy in Central Java stood at 87.41%, in East Java at 85.84%, and in Yogyakarta at 86.72%, low by Indonesian national standards (the national level is 90.4% according to 2004 figures) but comparable with other provinces with large numbers of poor, such as Bali and South Sulawesi (see also the article entitled **Indonesians** in this volume).

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

An integral part of traditional rituals, festivities, and theater, the classical Javanese orchestra (*gamelan*) consists of bronze gongs, keyed metallophones, drums, a flute, a spike-fiddle (*re-*

*bab*), and a zither (*celempung*), along with male and female vocalists. Making little use of recently invented notation systems, the music (either loud or soft styles) includes hundreds of named compositions (*gending*) in diverse forms. Street performers can also play *gamelan* music with a bamboo-tube gong and box-and-rubber-band zither. *Kroncong* ensembles can also interpret *langgam jawa*, folk and contemporary songs in the Javanese scale. Finally, there is also *pop* and *dangdut* in the Javanese language [see **Indonesians**].

Traditional dance emphasizes precise and measured control of the body, particularly in exquisitely graceful hand movements. Once confined to the palaces but now widely taught outside, the most revered dances are the *bedoyo* and *srimpi* in which young women enact unrecognizably stylized combat. Other female dances are the coquettish *golek* and *gambyong*, which are refinements of the dances of *taledek* or *ronggeng* (itinerant performers, generally regarded as little different from prostitutes). The latter consist of flirtation dances (*tayub*) in which the performer dances in front of a male audience, coaxing individual men to join her. Male dancing includes the *tari topeng* in which solo performers portray refined as well as violent characters from the Panji tales. A very common popular dance form (and mini-drama) is the trancelike *kuda lumping* (*jarang kepong*), which highlights hobby-horse dancers.

Although Javanese today use the Latin alphabet to write their language, some use is still made of *hanacaraka*, an Indian-derived script that can be traced back to the 8th century, and *pegon*, a modified Arabic script. Javanese literature goes back to the 11th century, beginning with adaptations in Kawi, the Old Javanese language, of the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. By the 14th century, original masterpieces, such as the *Nagarkrtagama*, describing a royal tour of Majapahit, were being produced. The earliest surviving literature in modern Javanese (though still impossibly archaic to modern ears) dates from well into the Islamic period and includes *babad*, semi-mythical poetic chronicles, such as the *Babad Tanah Jawi* on Java's history. Once commonly heard, the singing of verse (*tembang macapat*) is a dying art. Novels and short stories are produced in Javanese but must compete with more widely marketable works in Indonesian.

## **15 WORK**

Some 60% of Javanese earn a living from agriculture, growing wet-rice and dry-field (*tegalan*) crops (cassava, maize, yams, peanuts, and soybeans); in mountain areas, many peasants engage in market gardening (vegetables and fruits, including temperate-zone species like carrots).

Traditionally, Javanese disdain manual labor and commercial occupations, preferring white-collar jobs and, most of all, aspiring to bureaucratic service. However, most nonfarming Javanese work as artisans or as petty traders (most of the latter are women). Although on Java, the bigger business owners tend to be Chinese or sometimes Arab, in much of the rest of Indonesia not only the civil servants and soldiers but also the merchants tend to be Javanese. With Indonesia's recent rapid economic development, more Javanese (especially young women from the villages) are taking factory or service jobs. Landlessness and underemployment have compelled many Javanese to take low-status work, such as being a maid, prostitute, beggar, street-peddler, *kenek* (fare-collector on a minivan or bus, usually young men or boys), "parking attendant" (men, usually



old, who help people parallel park their cars on Java's crowded streets), or *ngamen* (street musicians who play on sidewalks or on buses between stops).

## 16 SPORTS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

On the whole, urban middle-class Javanese prefer to spend their leisure time enjoying the products of international and national pop culture rather than the traditional performing arts, which many have only glimpsed on television. Court circles (and those wishing to connect themselves to them, members of the new elite and the Indonesian state as a whole) and the peasantry (and by extension many of the urban poor), however, are still attached to the traditional performing arts

Java's master art form is the *wayang kulit* shadow-puppet play, an adjunct to life-passage ceremonies as well as either ritual or entertainment in itself. In it, a *dalang* manipulates flat, highly stylized puppets against a screen lit by a lamp or electric bulb over his head. Sitting from mid-evening until near daybreak without getting up, he speaks all the parts, intones narration, sings, and conducts the *gamelan* orchestra that provides background and accompaniment. Based on the Hindu epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and improvised within set frameworks, the plays encompass intrigues, romance, philosophizing, comic interludes, subtle social commentary, pitched combat, and heartbreaking tragedy. Watching either the puppets or their shadows, spectators are free to come and go according to their taste in scenes. Today, wayang is broadcast on the radio, blaring from open-air eateries, and people giving celebrations can play recorded wayang (several cassettes) to approximate the atmosphere.

The most traditional of Java's theater forms is *wayang orang*, which substitutes human actors or dancers for the puppets. Far more popular today is central Javanese *ketoprak*, which emphasizes spoken comedy and melodrama over music and dance and draws stories from Javanese history, Chinese, and Arab tales. Employing male performers for female as well as male parts, the east Javanese *ludruk* is even earthier and more contemporary.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Alongside *gamelan* and *wayang*, batik textiles are the signature art of Java. The intricate designs are created in several dyeings, with the space not to be dyed in a particular color covered with wax. The wax can be applied with copper stamps or, far more laboriously and beautifully, with a *canting* dipper. Batik styles differ radically between the *kejawen* (Yogya-Solo) and the *pe-sisir* (Pekalongan), the former emphasizing dense geometric patterns in brown, indigo, and white, while the latter prefer delicate floral patterns in red and other bright colors.

Other important or noteworthy crafts are leatherwork (wayang puppets), woodcarving (dance masks, furniture, and screens), pottery, glass-painting, and ironsmithing (*kris* swords).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

With the clearing long ago of the last virgin land, an equal inheritance system has meant that Javanese peasants must sup-

port themselves on small landholdings. Many lose their land altogether and must enter tenancy, sharecropping, or wage-labor arrangements with richer peasants who can afford fertilizers and some machinery. Customs, such as permitting the poorest to glean grains that remain in fields after reaping, are being abandoned. During the New Order period (1966-1998), the government pushed ahead with dams and other development projects despite the opposition of the peasants who would be displaced by them. Similarly, the military assisted industrialists in suppressing labor unrest in the factories multiplying in Java's crowded cities.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Central Java's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 58.7, East Java's 56.3, and Banten's 54.9, significantly below Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. Yogyakarta's, however, was higher, at 65.2, a little lower than Jakarta's. Gender Empowerment Measures (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) are 51 for Central Java, 54.9 for East Java, 48.6 for Banten, and 56.1 for Yogyakarta (cf. the national GEM of 54.6).

Javanese notions of gender difference are complex. Men, particularly *priyayi* (elite) men, on the one hand, are regarded as more capable of the emotional and behavioral self-control (including the intricacies of Javanese linguistic etiquette) so valued in Javanese culture, self-control that grants the individual the spiritual potency to attract the deference and submission of others without overt coercion. At the same time, men on the other hand are regarded as far less capable of controlling their desires, especially for sex and money, than women are, thus, for instance, making women more successful as traders in the marketplace and in financial matters in general (for this reason, husbands hand over most or all of their earnings to their wives who single-handedly manage the household). Javanese women have available to them contrasting, but equally legitimate, models for behavior, both a submissive and demure one (epitomized by Sumbadra, a wife of the wayang hero Arjuna) and an aggressive and bold one (epitomized by Srikandi, another of his wives). Differences between women and men are often described as a contrast between women as *kasar* (coarse) and men as *halus* (refined), and, yet, the male ideal (as represented by heroes like Arjuna) is characterized by the same grace and gentleness that the female ideal projects; both are the fruits of inner discipline and can in no way be confused with mere passivity.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

## JEW S OF COCHIN

**PRONUNCIATION:** Jews of KOH-chin

**LOCATION:** India (state of Kerala)

**POPULATION:** FEWER THAN 5 (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Malayalam; Hebrew for religious purposes

**RELIGION:** Judaism

### 1 INTRODUCTION

South Asia is home to several distinct communities of Jews. Some, such as the Baghdadi Jews, are relative latecomers, arriving in the late 18th century. They came mostly from Iraq, but also from Syria and Iran. They spoke Arabic and Persian, and reflected a continuation of Jewish interests in trade between the Middle East and South Asia. Baghdadi Jews settled mainly in the great port cities of the subcontinent. Two other Jewish communities, however, are of greater antiquity. The Bene Israel are descended from immigrants whose arrival is dated anywhere between 800 BC and AD 1300. They settled in the Konkan region around Bombay (Mumbai), spoke Marathi, and integrated with the local village populations. The other Jewish community of South Asia is found in Cochin in Kerala, on the Arabian coast of the Indian peninsula.

The Cochin Jews have differing traditions concerning the date of their arrival in India. One view suggests that Jewish merchants reached there during the reign of King Solomon (10th century BC) and took back ivory, monkeys, apes, and peacocks for his temple. Some Hebrew words for these objects appear to be derived from Sanskrit or Tamil. For example, the Hebrew for "ivory" is *shenhabbim*, or "elephant's tooth," a literal translation of the Sanskrit *ibhadanta*. Another account suggests the Cochin Jews were descendants of Jews taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century BC. The most likely theory, however, holds that the Jews reached the Malabar coast sometime in the 1st century AD, following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

The earliest certain reference to the Cochin Jews is found on the famous "Jewish copperplates" that are now in the care of the Paradeshi synagogue in Cochin. The Jewish community traditionally assigns them to AD 379, although recent scholarship dates them to around AD 1000. Written in Tamil and inscribed on sheets of copper, they record various privileges granted by the local ruler to Joseph Rabban, leader of the Cochin Jews and "proprietor of the Anjuvannam." This last name is taken to identify a trading corporation or a Jewish guild. The copperplates gave Joseph Rabban and his heirs numerous rights, including exemption from certain taxes and the right to collect tolls from boats and other vehicles.

The Cochin Jews existed as a thriving community until the middle of the 20th century. Deteriorating economic conditions in India after 1947, however, combined with the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, led to the mass migration of Cochin Jews to Israel. In 1953–54, some 2,400 Cochin Jews—almost the entire population—left India, leaving only about 100 Jews behind. In Israel, Cochin Jews settled in several *moshavim* (agricultural settlements). Nevatim, Mesillat Zion, Ta'oz, Aviezer, and Kfar Yuval are still primarily Cochin population. At first, adjustment to an agricultural life was difficult, but the Jews from Kerala soon prospered in Is-



rael, Nevatim even constructing its synagogue in the Kerala style. But Cochinitis, originally being part of the Sephardic diaspora, stated that they could more easily follow their religion in India than in Ashkenazi-dominated Israel. This view was also expressed by Jews who remained behind in India, even though dwindling numbers have precluded them from holding daily prayers and more recently, most Shabbat services, in the synagogue. Although exact numbers are not available, it is estimated some 4,000 Cochinitis live in Israel today. Cochin neighborhoods are found in Rishon LeZion, Ashdod, Beer-sheeba, and Jerusalem, and in some of these neighborhoods there are synagogues in which the traditional Cochin liturgy is followed. Cochin Jews in Israel get together to celebrate Simhat Torah and other holidays that are Cochin in character. Some feel that even though the Jewish community in Cochin is disappearing, the Cochin community is thriving in Israel.

In Kerala, the 2001 Census estimated around 8,000 Jews in the population, but this included “Black” and “Brown” Jews, as well as “White” Jews. The ancient Jewish community of Cochin, the “White” Jews, has all but died out today, with at most five members of the community left.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

In 1948, there were about 2,500 members of the Jewish community of Cochin. They lived mainly in coastal towns, such as Ernakulam, Mallah, Mattancheri, and Parur. Jews in the city of Cochin, the so-called “White Jews,” lived in an area called “Jew Town.” By the early 1990s, the population had fallen to 22

people, and today, Jews have all but disappeared from Cochin (Kochi).

The Cochin Jews are traditionally divided into two castes. The “White” Jews (also called Paradeshi or “foreign” Jews) are descendants of immigrants who arrived from the Middle East and Europe from the 16th century on. The “Black” Jews, or Malabar Jews, are converts from the local population, or the offspring of marriages between the Jews and the local people (“Brown” Jews). Ironically, virtually all of the Black Jews emigrated to Israel, where their numbers are increasing. They continue to preserve the traditional religious customs they took with them from Cochin. The few White Jews who remained in India are rapidly disappearing as a community.

Cochin Jews live on the Malabar coast, the lush, fertile, tropical lowlands that lie along the shores of the Arabian Sea in India’s southern state of Kerala. The coastal plains are well watered, with inland lagoons, backwaters, and canals forming a network of waterways that crisscross the area. Inland, the Western Ghats form a barrier to eastward movement, so Malabar has always looked west to the sea. The monsoon wind patterns across the Arabian Sea were “discovered” by the Greek Hippalus in the 2nd century BC, but must have been known to experienced navigators in the region long before this. Ships could sail from Africa to India on the southwest monsoon and return on the northeast monsoon. Known in ancient times for its spices (cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, and especially pepper), sandalwood, and teak, the Malabar coast has long attracted merchants and traders seeking to share in the country’s riches. Arab, Greek, Roman, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British are among the many peoples who have trod the shores of Malabar. The Jews of Cochin are one of these communities that stayed and made India its home.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Cochin Jews speak Malayalam, the Dravidian language that is the native tongue of the peoples of Kerala. Hebrew is used for religious purposes.

## 4 FOLKLORE

A series of 10 paintings were commissioned for the celebrations in 1968 of the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Cochin synagogue. In essence, they are a record of the myths, legends, and history of the Jews of Cochin. The first painting shows a bazaar filled with spices and ivory, a trading port of the ancient world. It is the Jews’ ancestral home in Kerala, known to them as Shingly and actually the modern port of Cranganur. It establishes a link between the Jews of India and the splendor of King Solomon’s Palestine. The next 3 paintings capture the birth of the Cochin Jewish community—Herod’s Temple ablaze in AD 70, a ship full of Biblical-looking Jews about to land at Shingly, and the Raja of Cranganur waiting to greet them. The fifth painting shows Joseph Rabban receiving the “Jewish copperplates” from the Maharaja of Cochin.

The sixth painting addresses internal strife in the Jewish community. According to tradition, two of the original silver trumpets used in the Second Temple at Jerusalem had been brought to Shingly. They were blown by Levites on the eve of the Sabbath. On one occasion the Levites were late, and non-Levites blew the trumpets. In the ensuing quarrel the trumpets were destroyed. This may well be an allegory for the loss of Shingly as a result of internal conflict among the Jews and



Rabbi Leah Novick, leader of the Jewish Renewal Movement, lights a traditional lamp as part of the inauguration ceremony of an Interfaith Conference at the venue of the Amritavarsham 50 festival in Cochin. (AFP/Getty Images)

the move of some of the Jewish community to Cochin. The remaining paintings show the building of the Cochin synagogue, the sack of Shingly by the Portuguese in 1524, and various audiences between the Jews and the Cochin *Maharajas*.

## 5 RELIGION

The religious beliefs of the Jews of Cochin conform in every way with the norms of the Jewish faith as set out in the *Halakha* or Jewish Legal Code. They accept the concept of one true deity, Yahweh, whose will is revealed in the Torah, and who exists in a special relationship with his “chosen people.” They observe the Sabbath, worship in synagogues, and observe the Jewish dietary codes. The community maintained its Jewish identity through frequent contact with the main centers of Judaism over the centuries. However, the Cochin Jews adopted certain features of local society that make them as much Indian as Jewish. At least one of these traits, the acceptance of a caste structure, violates and even defies the standards of the Halakha.

The life of the Cochin Jews centers around their synagogues. Each synagogue—known in Malayalam as *Juta-palli*, “gather-

ing-place for Jewish worship”—has three functions. It is a legal body that owns common property; it is the place where the Beit Din, the religious authority in matters of marriage, inheritance, etc., is convened; and it is a place of worship. The Cochin Jews have no rabbis; each synagogue is run by the elders of the community. Each community has its cantor, scribe, Hebrew teacher, and ritual slaughterer.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Cochin Jews observe all the festivals of the Jewish calendar, from Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) to Tisha be-Av (the Fast of Av). However, in Cochin there are festivals that are found only in India, or that are celebrated in a manner unique to the country. Simchat Kohen, for example, is a little-known Sephardic holiday that may be kept only in India. It is explained as a celebratory feast of the priests (*kohanim*) at the time of the Temple after their arduous ritual activities of Kippur. It is the custom of the Cochin kohanim to host a party for their friends on the day after Kippur. In days past, when the Jewish community was at full strength, Simchat Torah, a non-Biblical celebration of the end of the yearly cycle of Torah reading and the beginning of the new cycle, was celebrated with great style. Perhaps one of the most distinctive Jewish celebrations in Cochin, Simchat Torah was observed by one Sassoon Hallegua in a unique way. People recall he mixed up a “milk punch,” which, of course, was not milk at all but arrack and a mixture of other spirits. Then, early in the morning of the day of Simchat Torah, he would visit his friends on Synagogue Lane, insisting they partake of the “punch.”

For the Cochin Jews, Passover or *Pesah* has the usual Jewish meaning, i.e., the celebration of the Exodus from Egypt. Jews in Cochin would also incur great expense at this time in the annual repainting or whitewashing of their homes, the stripping and repolishing of their furniture and draining and scrubbing of their wells and water tanks. However, *Pesah* also has meaning in the context of the community’s integration into broader Indian society. Passover practices throughout the Jewish world involve avoiding leaven (any substance such as yeast that causes dough to rise). But Cochin customs concerning food taboos and ritual concerns for purity at this time go far beyond normal Jewish practices. This has been interpreted as a Jewish co-option of Indian concerns for caste status. By displaying the same restrictive dietary practices as high-caste Hindus, the Cochin Jews periodically reassert their high-caste status in the local community.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth rituals of the Jews of Cochin are the same as for any Jewish community. A male undergoes circumcision and passes through the usual stages in the life of a young Jewish boy. His education begins at the age of 3. His first public reading takes place at the age of 5 or 6, unlike in most Jewish communities where this occurs at the boy’s *bar mitzvah* around 13 years of age. This provides another example of the role of South Indian belief and custom in the life of the Cochin Jews. In Hindu thought, 5 years is a complete cycle and by this age a child is seen to have passed infancy and the dangers associated with it. The *bar mitzvah* (known in Cochin as the *bar minyan*) and ordination as a lay cantor complete the rituals of childhood.

Burial practices among the Cochin Jews closely follow those of the Middle Eastern Sephardic community. The body

is washed and dressed in fine clothes, and lit candles are placed around it. Members of the family gather for the funeral, which takes place within a few hours. After a second washing, bits of earth from Jerusalem and Cranganur (Shingly) are placed in the eyes and mouth of the corpse. The body is then dressed in a white linen shroud, sprinkled with rose water, and placed in a wooden coffin. The coffin is carried to the cemetery, to the accompaniment of dirges and Psalm 91. Following the burial, the family begins a seven-day period of mourning called *sheva*.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Cochin Jews use typical Jewish greetings (e.g., “Shalom”) among themselves, and Malayalam forms in their dealings with others.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Cochin Jews are urban-dwellers, often residing together in a particular neighborhood near their synagogue. In Cochin’s Jew Town, the Paradeshi synagogue lies at the end of a narrow cul-de-sac known as Synagogue Lane. The street is lined with large, Dutch-style colonial homes, a throwback to medieval times. At one time, higher-class White Jews lived at the end of the street closest to the synagogue, while the socially inferior Malabar or Black Jews had their homes at the other end. Today, most of these buildings are no longer occupied by Jews but are used as warehouses or for other purposes.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The system of local observances (*minhag*) of the Cochin Jews contains many borrowings from their Hindu neighbors. Like most of the other non-Hindu communities that have survived for any length of time in India, the Cochin Jews evolved a social structure that mirrors the caste system of Hinduism. The White Jews and Black Jews function very much like castes—they do not enter each other’s synagogues, they do not inter-dine, and they do not intermarry. Even the subgroups that exist within the White and Black Jews, the *meyuschasim* (the “privileged”) and non-*meyuschasim* (“non-privileged”) do not intermarry. There are separate cemeteries for White and Black Jews.

Marriage is perhaps the most important social occasion for the Cochin Jews. In the past, marriages were arranged, with the typical South Indian pattern of cross-cousin marriage being favored. The actual marriage ceremony follows the Jewish rite, but the celebrations accompanying marriage show a definite Hindu influence. This ranges from the lavish scale of the event (in the past, it often involved the entire Jewish community and lasted as long as 15 days) to the singing of traditional Malayalam wedding songs by women. The Jewish tradition of smashing a glass is conspicuous by its absence, the bridal couple having ashes smeared on their forehead instead. This is interpreted as a sign of mourning for the Temple, but it also mirrors the Hindu custom of wearing sacred ash on the forehead. The Cochin wedding, an occasion for much joy, revelry, singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking, continues for a week.

## 11 CLOTHING

Everyday dress for both men and women is the *mundu*, a long piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and reaching to the ankles. Men put on a shirt with this, while women wear a

blouse or jacket. For festive occasions, women wear colorful and elaborately embroidered mundus, often of silk and worked with silver or gold thread. In the synagogue, men wear prayer shawls and skullcaps (*yarmulkas*) known in Cochin as *kippa*. Western-style dress is commonly worn by men, and women may adopt the Indian *sari* for formal occasions.

## 12 FOOD

Cochin Jews observe the normal Jewish dietary taboos, avoiding pork and eating kosher foods. Otherwise, they are nonvegetarian, eating meat, poultry, and fish (to ensure such food is kosher, however, it is eaten only in the home or at community gatherings). The food is prepared in curries and eaten with seasonal vegetables and dishes such as yellow rice and *biryani* (rice mixed with meat or vegetables). Fish, a symbol of fertility, is often served at wedding banquets. Sweet dishes and fruits such as pineapples, bananas, guavas, melons, and pomegranates complete the meal. Cutlery and napkins may be placed on the table before a meal, but they are removed before the meal starts. The diners eat with their hands, as is the local custom. *Arrack* (a local liquor), beer, rum, brandy, and whiskey are popular drinks, especially on festive occasions.

There are many special foods prepared for ritual occasions. Specialties at Rosh Hashanah, for example, include rich “wedding cakes” and baked goods made from semolina. *Massa* (matzoh) is prepared at Passover. *Pastels*, a pastry filled with chicken or egg, are a special Sabbath treat. Eggs, a symbol of rebirth, are eaten at the feast celebrating the rite of circumcision, as well as during the period of mourning following a death.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education was always part of the Jewish tradition in Kerala. Girls as well as boys were registered in Jewish schools in Cochin as early as 1821, and most learned English as a second language.

Children become proficient in Hebrew at an early age, taught by a Hebrew teacher supported by the community. In general, Cochin Jews are open to secular education and take advantage of the opportunities available to them. Literacy among the community is high, and in modern times many individuals have obtained university degrees or professional qualifications.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The heritage of Cochin Jews reflects a unique blend of Jewish tradition and Indian culture. The community’s memories and legends, tales of antique origins, and symbolic identification with the ancient Jewish homeland are combined with customs that clearly assign the Jews the status of a high caste in Kerala society. This is exemplified by the theme of royalty that underlies the Jew Town wedding observances, a theme that is borrowed from the Hindus. Certain unique Hebrew prayers and hymns, known as “Shingly tunes,” hark back to the community’s early home and perhaps even to Mesopotamia. At the same time, folk songs are sung in Malayalam at weddings and other festive occasions. It is in large part their adaptation to local society that has allowed the Cochin Jews to maintain their identity for almost 2,000 years. It is also the longstanding memory of the community’s origins that has led to their emigration to Israel.

Some community elders privately hold the view that the “curse” of Jew Town is responsible for the exodus of Jews from Cochin. After all, they argue, with no experience of ill-will or persecution in India, what else can explain the Jews’ departure from the land they loved?

Cochin Jews adopted many Hindu practices, yet scrupulously ensured that their religious patterns did not violate any Jewish legal or ethical principles. In doing so, they did what Jews around the world have done—adapted to their cultural milieu while maintaining a distinct identity. Some of their customs, such as dietary codes, the existence of a sacred language, concern for family purity and the avoidance of menstruating women, are found in both the Hindu and Jewish tradition, but some customs have clearly been borrowed from the Nambudiris, Kerala’s Brahman caste. Jew Town mimics the various “Brahman Towns” found in Kerala, with houses aligned in a particular way and the houses interconnected on the second story. Jews, like the Nambuduris, placed great emphasis on purity of descent, the corporate identity of the community and the importance of networks.

### 15 WORK

Many Cochin Jews engage in trade, keeping small shops in front of their houses and selling foodstuffs, dry goods, and other wares. Some work as artisans—carpenters, masons, and the like. A few have become successful and prosperous merchants. During the early decades of the 20th century, for example, the Koder family emerged as the owners of a leading business house, providing employment for a considerable number of Cochin Jews. They also were one of the leading families in the Jewish community.

### 16 SPORTS

A unique custom of Tisha be-Av is a board game for men, played with colored cowry shells. Known as “the royal game of Ur,” it is believed to date to the Babylonian captivity.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The social life of the Cochin Jews centers on their synagogues and on the celebrations accompanying religious festivals and life-cycle events.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There are no arts, crafts, or hobbies found specifically among the Cochin Jews.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Cochin Jews, like other foreign communities in Kerala, were received cordially by the local *rajās*. They enjoyed royal patronage and lived as a high-caste community among the local people. There is no record of anti-Semitism in their relations with their Hindu neighbors. However, internal differences between White and Black Jews often led to discord and bitter disputes within the community. Though never very numerous, the Cochin Jewish community has existed in India for nearly 2,000 years. Mass emigration to Israel, however, has reduced the numbers of the “White” Jews to a handful of elderly people. It is doubtful that the community will survive long into the 21st century.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The major problem with the White Jew community of Cochin is one of numbers rather than of gender. The community has sunk below the population level that makes it viable. In the recent past, an issue for females has clearly been finding suitable husbands within the community with the result that women have been marrying local Indian males and leaving the Jewish community for others. The remaining few (less than five) people are quite elderly and are mainly women, so one suspects that the White Jews, despite their long and storied history in Kerala, will be extinct within the next few years. Jew Town and the Jewish synagogue in Cochin will become just another tourist attraction.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# JORDANIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** jawr-DAY-nee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Jordan

**POPULATION:** 6.1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; English

**RELIGION:** Islam (majority Sunni Muslim)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The land of Jordan lies along an ancient and well-used trade route, making it very valuable geographically. Many powers have ruled the land, under many different names. The modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, however, was established relatively recently, on 25 May 1946, when it finally reached full independence and King Abdullah Hussein, of the Hashemite line descended from the prophet Muhammad, took the throne. The current King Abdulla is Abdullah's great grandson and has reigned since his father's death in 1999. His father King Hussein's rule lasted 46 years and began when he was barely 18 years old. King Hussein survived many near-disasters and threats to his rule to create a fairly stable, growing nation based on a constitutional monarchy with a democratically elected parliament. Both King Hussein and King Abdulla have pushed for further strides toward democracy because they know that long-term stability and progress for Jordan depend on the participation of its people, not on military strength, foreign aid, or the personal and political contacts of its monarch.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Jordan is located on the East Bank of the Jordan River, with the Palestinians as its neighbors on the West Bank. South of the West Bank, Jordan shares a border with Israel. To the north lies Syria, and to the east and south lies Saudi Arabia. Iraq shares a northeastern border with Jordan. Jordan has three distinct natural zones: the Jordan River valley, which is green and fertile; mountainous regions in the north and south, which have a cool, Mediterranean climate; and the main bulk of the country, which is an arid desert. Among the 6 million people who populate Jordan, there is a centuries-old distinction between the peoples of the desert (descended from fiercely independent desert tribes who strictly controlled and protected their territories) and the people who live in the Jordan River valley, the "valley people" (taller and more heavily built than the desert people, believed to be descended from the ancient Canaanites with a blending of other cultures). The desert people are believed to be "pure" lineage, thought to be indistinguishable from the desert populations of Syria and Saudi Arabia. This difference of "blended" versus "pure" extends also to the local national culture: the valley people have absorbed aspects of the surrounding cultures, whereas the desert people have remained firmly committed to their own traditions. Those considered the "truest" Jordanians are the Bedouins (see *Bedu*), the nomadic sheep and goat herders of the desert, who are regarded as Jordan's indigenous people. In addition to this native Jordanian segment of the population, there is a large population of Palestinians in Jordan. Tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees were either forcibly exiled or fled to Jordan following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, during the ensuing war and again following the Israel annexation of the

West Bank in 1967. They lived in tent camps that were eventually replaced by homes of galvanized steel, aluminum, and asbestos. Most of the refugee camps are located in northwestern Jordan near major cities.

The land of Jordan was not always so arid, but serious deforestation has led to desertification. During the 7th century AD, the Omayyad caliphs (who ruled from 638–658) built castles in the midst of the forest as big-game hunting lodges. Now, those castles stand in barren desert. The severe water shortage became even worse after a drought of the 1970s. Surface water, wells, and streams are extremely scarce. A new environmental awareness is beginning to take hold in Jordan, and it has declared a National Environment Strategy, the first Middle East country to do so. The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature puts a high priority on reforestation and saving what woodlands are left, and a severe shortage of water has led to urgent studies on water conservation and preservation. Jordan has also played a key part in saving the Arabian oryx from extinction through a program of captive breeding and reintroduction to the wild.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official and most commonly spoken language of Jordan is Arabic, a language spoken by up to 422 million people worldwide, both as native and non-native speakers. Arabic has many distinct dialects, so that people living as few as 500 km (about 310 mi) apart may not be able to entirely understand one another. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic, or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken dialects are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that makes no distinction between capital and lower-case letters. It is not necessary for the letters to be written in a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation rules are also quite different from those of English.

Many Jordanians also speak English. "Hello" in Arabic is "*marhaba*" or "*ahlan*," to which one replies, "*marhabtayn*" or "*ahlayn*." Other common greetings are "*As-salam alaykum*" ("Peace be with you"), with the reply of "*Walaykum as-salam*" ("and to you peace"). "*Ma'assalama*" means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is "*Shukran*," and "You're welcome" is "*Afwan*." "Yes" is "*na'am*" and "no" is "*la'a*." The numbers one to ten in Arabic are: *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba'a*, *khamisa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *tamania*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

Common names for boys are *Talal*, *Muhammad*, and *'Abdullah*. Common names for girls are: *Fadwa*, *Leila*, *Fatima*, *Noor*, and *Reem*. The queen's name is *Rania*.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Jordanians are superstitious people and firm believers in fate and omens. When someone is sick or injured, it may be attributed to *ghire* (jealousy) and *hassad* (envy). "Coffee ladies" read fortunes in the dregs of a cup of coffee, and to ward off the "evil eye," incense is burned, a lamb is offered to the poor, and a blue eye-shaped amulet medallion is worn around the neck. This is also common to many Middle Eastern cultures. To fend off *hassad*, some families guard their homes by stamping the exterior walls or doors with a palm of lamb blood.

Jordanian folk tales, particularly those of the Bedouin (Bedu), often feature themes of honor, generosity, and hospitality, all considered important Arab attributes. One folk story



revolves around the legendary Hatim al-Ta'i, whose name is synonymous with generosity. Before Hatim's birth, when his mother was newly married, she dreamt that she was offered a choice: She could either bear ten brave sons or she could have one son, Hatim, who would possess superior generosity. She chose to have Hatim, and indeed he proved to be highly generous. When Hatim was sent to take the family's camels to pasture, Hatim proudly returned to tell his dismayed father that he had given away every one of the camels, and that this no doubt would bring fame to the family name. This story typifies the importance that Jordanians place on generosity.

There are several dances and musical genres specific to Jordan, most of which are adaptations of the *dabke* (a group line dance that involves stomping and jumping in unison) and various tribal dance sequences that incorporate the sword. The bagpipe has quickly become a symbol of the Jordanian army's regalia and is often played at ceremonies to indigenous and folkloric tunes.

Also much of the Jordanian folklore of the past several decades has been greatly influenced by the large Palestinian population in the country.

## 5 RELIGION

More than 90% of Jordanians are Sunni Muslim, the majority sect of Islam, whose followers believe that the caliph (ruler) must be a member of the Koreish, the tribe of Muhammad. The remaining minority belong to a wide range of Muslim and Christian sects.

Islam is the youngest of the world's main monotheist religions, having begun in the early seventh century AD when the prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah, the one true God (according to Islam). Within just a few years of Muhammad's death in AD 632, Islam had spread throughout the entire Middle East, gaining converts at a dynamic rate.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570), Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his outspoken denunciation of the pagan idols worshipped there (idols that attracted a lucrative pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca, called the *Hegira*, is counted as Year One in the Muslim calendar. Eventually, Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the *Kaaba*, or Cube, building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship), and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam. All prayers are said facing Mecca, and each Muslim is expected, and greatly desires, to make a pilgrimage there (called a *Haj* or *Hadj*) at least once in his or her lifetime.

Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living. It is a total way of life, inseparable from the rest of one's daily concerns. Therefore, religion and politics and faith and culture, are one and the same for Muslims. There is no such thing as the "separation of church and state" or any distinction between private religious values and public cultural norms in an Islamic country such as Jordan. The Hashemite family of King Hussein traces its descent from the prophet Muhammad himself and, in the Muslim mind, it is this lineage that makes the Hashemites qualified to rule.

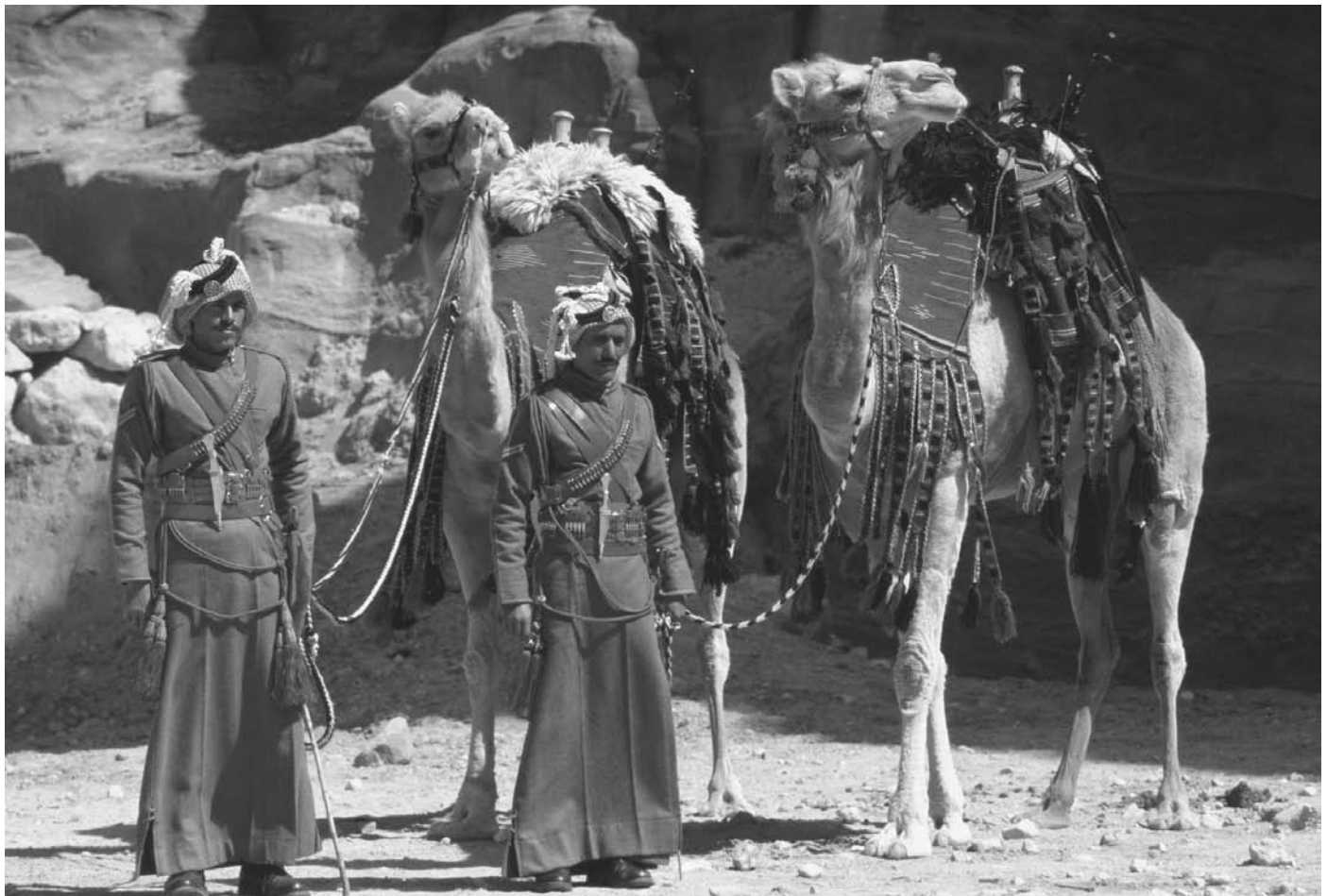
The lack of separation of religion and politics is exemplified by the recent inclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood party in parliamentary elections. The Brotherhood wishes to see more Islamic legislation enacted in Jordan. Members of the party have won parliamentary seats and have been placed in political positions within which they can influence national policy on education and social matters.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back 11 days each year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are: *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations, celebrated by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month; *Ayd Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of *Ramadan*; *Ayd Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (known as the *Haj*)—families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *Mawoulid An-Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Ayd Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj*, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven.

Fixed public holidays in Jordan include the secular New Year on January 1, Tree Day (January 15), Arab League Day (March 22), Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (May 25), Arab Renaissance Day (commemorating the Arab Revolt) and Army Day (both on June 10), King Hussein's accession to the throne (August 11); King Hussein's birthday (November 14); and Christmas (December 25).





Members of the camel corps stand in front of the archaeological site of Petra in Arabah, Jordan. Petra has been a World Heritage Site since 1985 and was named in 2007 as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World by the New Open World Corporation.  
(Tim Graham/Getty Images)

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Weddings are the most important event in a Jordanian's lifetime, and the cost of the celebration is second only to that of buying a home. The guest list can number anywhere from 200 to 2,000 people. Even though social and religious customs encourage people to marry when they are in their 20s, many men from middle- and low-income families must wait until they are in their 30s because they cannot afford the cost of a wedding until then. Births are also joyfully celebrated, with the mother's family providing the child's first wardrobe and furniture. The circumcision of males used to be part of the rite of passage into adulthood, performed by a local barber when a boy was 13 years old, followed by a huge party. Now, it is usually done in a hospital shortly after birth.

The *aza*, or condolence period, following a death is a very important ritual in Jordanian society. It is essential to attend the *aza* of a neighbor or colleague, or even the relative of a neighbor or colleague. During the *aza*, men and women sit in separate rooms in the house of the deceased or a mosque and drink black, unsweetened Arabic coffee. For 40 days after the death, the *aza* is reopened every Monday and Thursday at the deceased's home. Jordanians wear black for mourning, contrary to the Islamic custom of white or beige.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Jordanians may appear to foreigners as introverted and conservative, yet they are extremely hospitable. *Marhaba* and *Ahlan wa-sahlan*, words for "welcome," are a constant refrain. When invited to a Jordanian home, a guest is not expected to bring a house gift. In personal encounters, Jordanians are formal and polite. Saltis (people from the city of Salt) are the frequent butt of jokes because of their unique mannerisms, as are the people of Tafilie, who have a similar reputation.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before 1979, few houses had piped water. Most houses have home storage tanks and rely on water deliveries by truck. Because of a severe water shortage, rationing is in effect. A major water and sewage improvement project was initiated in 1979 with an emphasis on long-term needs.

Today, Jordan has a good highway network. Most roads are paved, and international roadways connect Jordan to Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Bridges connect Jordan with the West Bank. Most Jordanians live in stone masonry houses called "villas" or cement-based apartments. Most of the villas are modest in appearance, but many are large and luxurious and reflect the wealth of their owners. Hotels, including Marriott

and Sheraton, are plentiful throughout Jordan, catering to the tourists who come to see the Dead Sea, Petra (Biblical Sela that is now one of the modern world wonders), and the Gulf of al-'Aqaba on the Red Sea, and to ease their aches and pains in the spas and springs of the Ma'in Spa Village resort area, located southwest of Amman.

Although it is a relatively young country, Jordan has managed to develop quickly into a technological society with decent housing, excellent roadways, efficient postal and communications services, and good health care. About 70% of Jordanians live in urban areas, most of them in the capital city of Amman (considered one of the cleanest and most efficient cities of the Arab world). Jordan is among the top 10 countries of the world in reducing infant mortality, and life expectancies are fairly high: 67 years for men and 71 years for women.

However, unemployment and poverty are widespread problems, and many Jordanians must struggle for a living. Because of the difficulty in finding employment in Jordan, particularly for skilled workers, many Jordanians go abroad in search of work. The majority go to the Gulf oil states, whose small populations require them to import laborers from neighboring states. Working in the Gulf allows Jordanians to earn steady incomes, which are sent in the form of remittances to family members in Jordan, thus helping the Jordanian economy. Similarly, Jordan allows laborers from neighboring states such as Egypt, to seek employment in Jordan. It has been found that the income derived from remittances sent to Jordan far exceeds that sent out by foreign workers; thus, the exchange has been favorable for Jordan. Jordan is a technologically advanced country.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family values are of top priority to Jordanians, leading to a strict moral code that ensures a low crime rate. Prostitution is illegal (and the law is strongly enforced), public drunkenness is not tolerated, gambling is illegal, and even belly dancing is restricted to a few large hotels. Very few nightclubs exist, and a "good family" would never allow a daughter to marry a man seen frequenting them. Marriages usually result from family introductions, if not outright matches, but couples are almost never forced to marry against their will. Upper-middle-class couples court each other in the Western style. Suitable brides and grooms must be from proper families with a respectable lineage, have decent wealth and education, be of the same religion, and never have been married before. Brides also must be "virtuous" (never had sexual intercourse), although this restriction may not apply as rigorously to the grooms. Less than 1% of marriages today are polygamous, largely because of the prohibitive cost of weddings.

One out of five marriages ends in divorce, and divorced women are faced with the uphill battle of combating the stigma of a failed marriage to go into wedlock again. The average Jordanian family has seven children, giving Jordan one of the highest birth rates in the world. Because sons are often more spoiled than daughters, girls tend to grow up and become independent more quickly than boys. Women are guaranteed equal rights in the Jordanian constitution, but social custom and religious interpretation often undermine this. There are a few women in the Jordanian Parliament, suggesting their improved status.



Two men chat outside their shops at a market in central Amman, Jordan. Poverty, unemployment, and inflation are fundamental problems in Jordan, but King Abdallah has undertaken some broad economic reforms in a long-term effort to improve living standards. (Jewel Samad/AFP/Getty Images)

Homes are built so that floors can be added when sons marry; the son brings his bride home and they raise their family there. Most Jordanians live in three- or four-story homes containing extended families that eat together. Daughters-in-law are expected to do most of the cooking. Until recently men were not expected to cook or share in the household labor.

## 11 CLOTHING

The tradition of women covering their faces with veils is being revived as a result of a spiritual quest for identity on the part of Arab women and as a rejection of Western values. Everyday Jordanian dress is generally conservative, particularly for women, who do not wear tight clothes, sleeveless blouses, shorts, short skirts, or low-cut backs on shirts or dresses.

There are basically three styles of clothing for women in Jordan. "Westernized" women, of whom there are many, dress in the typical Western style with dresses, skirts, and slacks, while avoiding overly revealing or suggestive clothing. Very religious women (increasingly more common in Jordan), wear an outfit called the *libis shar'i* or *jilbab*. This is a floor-length, long-sleeved, button-front dress worn with the hair covered by a scarf. Stores catering to religious women have sprouted up all

over Jordan, and women from other parts of the Middle East, particularly from the West Bank, purchase *shar'i* clothing while visiting Jordan. The third type of attire is the traditional dress or national costume. This is a hand-made dress with embroidered and cross-stitched patterns that vary from region to region. In northern Jordan (around Irbid and Ramtha), women wear a black cotton dress whose bodice is stitched with triangular, multicolored borders. In central Jordan (i.e., in Salt), women's traditional dresses are made of 16 m (52 ft) of fabric, with sleeves measuring 3 m (10 ft) in length. Around the sleeves and the hem, blue panels are stitched. The costume of southern Jordan is made from a variety of silk fabrics in a combination of colors. A silk cloak, called a *'abaya*, is draped over the head.

Jordanian men dress in basically Western clothing, with suits and ties being the preferred attire for the office, and casual slacks and shirts worn for informal socializing. Some men wear a Jordanian *kaffiyyeh*, or scarf-like headpiece. The Jordanian *kaffiyyeh* is red and white, in contrast to the black and white Palestinian *kaffiyyeh*. The *kaffiyyeh* is folded in a triangle and laid over the head. It is secured to the head with a double-coiled rope called an *i gal*.

## 12 FOOD

Jordan has one of the world's most elaborate and sophisticated cuisines, largely borrowed from its neighbors. Few dishes are unique to Jordan; one unique dish is *mansaf*, chunks of stewed lamb in a yogurt-based sauce served with rice. *Mansaf*, also called *fatiyyeh*, is the traditional Jordanian meal served for special occasions. *Jameed* is required for the preparation of *mansaf*. *Jameed* is made of yogurt seasoned with salt. The yogurt is drained, molded or shaped into balls that fit into the palm of a hand, and then allowed to dry until the balls harden into rocks. A recipe for *mansaf* follows.

### Mansaf

- 3 balls jameed
- 3 pounds lamb chunks
- 2 quarts water
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 4 loaves pita bread, or 2 loaves shraj bread
- 3 cups cooked white rice
- ½ cup sautéed pine nuts
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- dash of salt

Soak balls of jameed overnight to soften; purée them in a blender with a quart of water and a dash of salt. Cook lamb chunks in a quart of water. Once the water boils, add chopped onion to the water and meat. Add black pepper and ground allspice. When the lamb chunks are tender (about 1 hour), add the puréed jameed to the stewed lamb and water. Cook for another hour.

In the meantime, cut up pieces of thin pita bread (or, if available, shraj, a paper-thin bread). Spread the bread in 2 layers in a large round pan until the bottom is covered. Cover the bread with about 2 cups of the cooked jameed sauce, and allow to soak 10 minutes. Spread rice over the soaked bread. Sprinkle another cup of jameed sauce over the entire pan, and cover the rice with all of the lamb

chunks. Sprinkle pine nuts over the lamb.

At home, all courses are served together, but in restaurants, *mezze* or *muqabalat* (appetizers) are brought first. Typical *mezze* are *hummus* (puréed chickpeas with tahina [sesame paste], lemon juice, and garlic), *baba ghanouj* (puréed eggplant mixed with tahina, lemon, garlic, and salt), and *taboula* (a salad of chopped fresh parsley, tomatoes, green onions, and fresh mint mixed with soaked bulgur wheat and lemon juice). Then, a meat or fish course is served. The meal usually ends with seasonal fruit.

Jordanians love sweets and eat lots of them. A favorite kind of sweet is layers of filo pastry filled with nuts or creams, similar to *baklava*.

## 13 EDUCATION

Jordanians are very well educated, and their country has the highest number of university graduates per capita in the Arab world. Its main export is skilled labor and professionals to other Arab countries. At 82% (with a target of 95% by the year 2005), Jordan also has one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab world. One-third of Jordan's population is students, partly due to the fact that more than half of Jordan's population is under the age of 16. Education is free and compulsory from grades one through ten, and then it continues to be free for another two years. Literacy training is free to all Jordanian residents. To make sure that Jordan keeps pace with the rest of the world, computer studies are mandatory in the 10th grade and optional in the 11th and 12th grades. Girls must attend school through the 10th grade and are encouraged to finish secondary and even higher education. More than half of the 39,000 students at the University of Jordan in Amman are women, whom enroll in 18 faculties.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Islamic prohibition against the depiction of the human figure has significantly shaped Jordanian art. Western-style fine arts became popular in the late 20th century as more Jordanians traveled abroad. Recently, however, there has been a revival of more traditional Jordanian art forms, especially stylized Islamic calligraphy.

The traditional dance of Jordan is the *dabkeh*, a group dance performed by both men and women, either together or separately. Traditional musical instruments include the *qassaba* and *nay*, woodwinds; the *rababa*, a one-stringed instrument; the *kamanja*, resembling a violin; the *oud* (lute), with five double strings; the *qanun*, a zither-like instrument with 26 strings; and the *daff* and *durbakkeh*, percussion instruments.

Arabic literature abounds with stories of love, honor, generosity, hospitality, exile, political turmoil, war, lost lands, and lost identities. The Arabic word for poet is *sha'ir*, which translates literally into "he who feels."

## 15 WORK

Working conditions are regulated by law, including minimum wages, minimum age for employment, vacation and sick leave, maternity leave, health benefits, social security and retirement pensions, maximum hours and overtime compensation, advance notice before firing or layoffs and severance pay, worker's compensation for job-related injuries, and labor disputes. There is no compulsory retirement age. Unions are legal.

Although women are guaranteed equal rights in Jordan's constitution and are just as well educated as men, women make up only 12.5% of the labor force due to the traditional belief that a woman's job is to marry well and have many children (particularly sons). Unemployment has become a serious problem since about 300,000 expatriates returning from Kuwait in 1991 (after the Gulf War) glutted the labor pool. Many Jordanians now take jobs for which they are overqualified simply to survive.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular sports in Jordan are soccer and basketball. Also enjoyed are horse and camel racing. The Royal Jordanian State Stud is a stable devoted to maintaining the purity of the Arabian breed of horse. Stud services are offered worldwide in a highly regulated way in order to prevent the breed from being lost through crossbreeding.

In the 1950s, car rallying was begun as a weekend sport attracting a few spectators. It has since developed into one of Jordan's major sporting events. The royal family strongly supports the car races, with King Hussein himself having raced in the rallies. King Hussein's eldest son, Prince 'Abdullah, also competes in the national rallies. Competitions are international, with most racers representing countries of the Middle East, such as Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

All films in Jordan, both in cinemas and in video form, are censored for kissing and sex scenes. Martial arts and low-grade action movies are popular among Jordanian youth.

Jordan has two domestic television stations, one providing Arabic entertainment and news, and the other providing foreign-language programming. The latter features predominantly English-language programming, but also provides French cartoons, dramas, and news broadcasts. Jordanians film many of their own shows. A particular favorite is a soap-opera-like drama, called a *musalsal*, which is shown in sequels every night. Often, the theme of the drama is love and honor among the Bedouins, and the stories take place in Bedouin tents. Jordanians also produce dramatic shows with religious themes, which are predominantly nonfiction representations of prominent figures and stories in Islamic history. Jordan is also a major hub for the production and translation of Arabic language children's programs. Most animations from Japan and the United States are translated in Jordanian studios and then broadcast to all 22 Arab countries.

English-language programming includes domestically produced news and a myriad of American and British shows. These include *Dynasty*, *Murder She Wrote*, *The Benny Hill Show*, *90210*, *24*, *The Bill Cosby Show*, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Cartoons, including Disney productions and classics, such as *Tom and Jerry*, remain popular among Jordanian children.

Jordan receives Arabic radio broadcasts from around the Middle East and also has its own domestic stations. A favorite among young people is the English-language Jordanian station, for it plays all of the latest music that is enjoyed in the West. "Radio Monte Carlo" and U.S.-based Radio Sawa also play Western music. Jordanians listen more to European-based pop music than American, but the billboard top hits remain popular among teenagers. Today, Jordanians have access to hun-

dreds of satellite stations from around the world that makes their options for entertainment television virtually unlimited.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There are many traditional folk arts and crafts in Jordan, among them pottery, silver and gold jewelry making, glass blowing, and basket weaving. Textile arts are women's crafts, particularly embroidery and cloth weaving. As young girls learn embroidery stitches from older women, they are initiated into the culture. Patterns, colors, and fabrics show the village, tribe, social status, wealth, and period in which the woman lives (or lived). Until very recently, almost every Jordanian girl embroidered her own trousseau, consisting of six to twelve loosely cut robes to be worn over a lifetime, her bridal dress (which would also serve for other special occasions), cushions and pillows for bed and sofa, and often even her burial shroud. It is often said of Jordanian women that they are never idle, their hands ever busy stitching and sewing while chatting with each other.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Jordan's economy is struggling due to a lack of resources, the sudden influx of expatriates and refugees after both the 1967 war with Israel (in which Jordan lost the West Bank territory) and the Gulf War in 1990–91, and massive foreign debt. Almost one-third of the population lives below the poverty level, and the percentage is increasing. A severe water shortage also causes difficulties in both the public and private sectors.

There is an ongoing conflict between the government's desire to maintain ties with Western powers and popular support for the Palestinians and Iraq. Support for the Palestinians is necessary because more than 60% of the population is Palestinian, about 2.7 million inhabitants of Jordan. Palestinians serve on the parliament, thus exerting an influence over political policies. Because Jordan is on the East Bank of the Jordan River and Palestine is on the West Bank, there is a strong emotional bond that makes Jordanians particularly sensitive to the plight of the Palestinians. This makes the forging of peace between Israel and Jordan a sensitive matter to Jordanians, who wish to see justice for the Palestinians enacted in any peace agreement. Jordan has now signed a peace agreement with Israel and, generally speaking, this has gone smoothly. Some emotionally sensitive matters, such as whether or not Jordan should permit Israelis to purchase Jordanian land while Palestinian land remains under Israeli control, lead to fervent debate in the parliament. The king's father, Hussein, also found himself in a complicated situation with the Palestinian population in his country. In his opposition to the growing Palestinian resistance within his country, he took several drastic measures to eliminate this presence. The outcome led to the killing of many Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) members and militias by the Jordanian army, often described as "Black September," which drove the organization out of Jordan and into Lebanon.

The U.S.-led war in Iraq, which commenced in March 2003, is similarly important to Jordanians. Iraq has been home to thousands of Jordanian and Palestinian expatriates, providing jobs that have been vital to the Jordanian and Palestinian economies. Historically, Iraq has also been a major source of oil for Jordan. Thus, when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Jordanian government announced its opposition to the invasion and refused to participate in Operation Desert Storm, which was

organized by the United States. Jordan wished—and wishes—to maintain its good ties with Iraq, and this has caused tension between Jordan and the United States, an important ally.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Jordanian women have received much media attention in the last two decades for several notable examples of honor killings, which were strongly condemned by the human rights groups and the international community. This topic has since subsided as several high profile campaigns against honor killings have been launched nationwide.

Today, the public visibility of women in the Jordanian royal family has changed the tone of discussion about Jordanian women. Queen Noor, the wife of the late King Hussein, and Queen Rania, the wife of King Abdullah, both have very public portfolios and are extremely vocal and involved in issues pertaining to women's rights domestically, regionally, and globally. They serve on the board of advisors of many organizations working in the area of public awareness and advocacy for women's issues. Queen Rania recently created her own online video channel, allowing people worldwide to post videos responding to her questions or allowing her to respond to the world's questions. This is thought to be a unique way of bridging the intercultural divide.

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—revised by Amal Daraiseh and Adel Iskandar

# KACHINS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAH-CHINS

**LOCATION:** Northern Myanmar (Burma); China; India; Thailand

**POPULATION:** 1.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kachin

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Baptist and Catholicism); Buddhism; Animism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The people known collectively as Kachins, who live in mountainous northern Burma (renamed Myanmar by the military government in 1989), are a group of seven tribes: the Atsi, Jinghpaw, Lashi, Lisu, Maru, Nung, and Rawang.

The tribes share similar Tibeto-Burman languages, a clan system, and many customs. They migrated into Burma from China to the northwest and established highland settlements governed by independent chieftains. The Kachins were fierce warriors who never acknowledged the dominance of Burma's various empires until the arrival of the British. Initially the Kachins fought the colonizers, but then joined Britain's Imperial Army. Kachin guerrillas proved indispensable to the Allied forces in the Second World War, fighting in their native forests against the Japanese invasion.

Some rebellion, aimed at establishing an independent Kachin nation, occurred soon after Burmese independence, but it was after the military takeover of Burma's government in 1962 that large-scale Kachin insurgency occurred. One of Burma's biggest anti-government armies was recruited from the hill people and financed by trade in locally-mined jade and gold. Called the Kachin Independence Organization, it continues to hold considerable territory, although it has observed a ceasefire with government forces since 1994. A much smaller militia called the Kachin Defense Army also has a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government.

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) was allowed to participate in constitutional conventions held by Myanmar's military government. KIO participation in the conventions was seen as a political compromise by many former supporters in Kachin State and overseas exiles. The KIO issued statements supporting the Myanmar government's policies and engaged in commercial joint ventures in logging and gold mining, which gave the KIO the image of having abandoned its original revolutionary goals. A few small Kachin underground or exile political and environmental groups have emerged in recent years as potential alternatives to the KIO.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kachin State of Myanmar borders China, Tibet, and India. Myanmar has an estimated 1.5 million Kachins, about 100,000 of whom live in the Shan State. Kachin-related indigenous people also live in China, India, and Thailand.

The huge Irrawaddy River flows south from Tibet through Kachin State, past the main cities of Myitkyina and Bhamo. Ranges of Himalayan foothills rise as high as snowcapped Hkakabo Razi (19,314 ft), Southeast Asia's highest mountain, near the border with Tibet.



A Kachin couple look out from a hut during the celebration of Myanmar's national festival of Shapawng Yawng Manau Poit near Gauhati, India. Kachins from Myanmar joined Kachins from India for the two-day festival. (AP Images/Anupam Nath)

### 3 LANGUAGE

Kachins speak a Tibeto-Burman language, in seven main dialects, and with many regional variations. A written version of Kachin using the Roman alphabet (without F, Q, V, and X) was devised by American missionary Olaf Hansen in 1895. The writing system is hard to use because of the lack of accents showing the different tones of voice that alter the meanings of words in Kachin.

The typical greeting in Kachin's Jinghpaw dialect is "*Kaja ai I?*" meaning "Are you well?" Another common greeting expression is "*Shatsa sa ni?*" (Have you eaten?). To take leave, you say, "*Naw wa sa na*" (I am going), and the reply is "*Angwi sha wa u*" (go back slowly).

### 4 FOLKLORE

Kachins traditionally believed that the original ancestor of their tribes was a blacksmith. They thought that the moon was the spirit of a young girl, and some girls are thought to be able to foretell the future by communicating with the moon. Particularly among Animist Kachins, there is a belief in malicious witches called *phi*, including the *Yu Phi*, who disguise themselves as animals or insects to harm people or animals.

### 5 RELIGION

About two-thirds of the Kachins are Christians, mostly Baptists and Catholics. The rest are Buddhists or Animists, who worship the spirits in nature. Spirits are always present in the Kachins' mountain homeland, and even Christian or Buddhist Kachins often believe in a group of spirits called *Nats*. There are good and bad Nats: the good ones include a merciful spirit called *Hpan wa ningsan chye wa ning san*, who (known as *Karai Kasang*) is also the god worshipped by Christians. This Nat accepts only live offerings that the worshippers set free, such as birds. There are also good Nats of the earth and heaven, and household Nats. A series of bad Nats bring harm to hunters, fishermen, or women in labor and cause accidents or other misfortune.

The Kachins have intermediaries to the world of the Nats, such as high priests who know a special vocabulary and take part only in major ceremonies, including weddings; priests who conduct ceremonies with offerings; and assistants who perform animal sacrifices. There are also interpreters of the Nats' wishes, spirit mediums, and interpreters of the natural world, who function like Chinese *Feng Shui* specialists.

Missionaries from the United States and Europe introduced the Kachins to Christianity during the British colonial days, and Kachin evangelists then spread the new religion through the hills. Christianity was adopted without discarding Kachin traditions such as the clan system. Actual churches are rare outside of the few cities and towns, so church services are held on Sundays and holidays in village meeting halls or homes. Kachin Christians sometimes have difficulties holding large meetings or conventions, as those need to be approved by the military government, which is suspicious of Christian gatherings.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In traditional Kachin society, ceremonies were held in connection with the planting of rice and other crops. Before planting the fields, offerings were made to the spirits of the earth, and the farmers rested for a few days. Harvest ceremonies were also held. Because Christianity is now so widespread among the Kachins, holidays such as Christmas and Easter are important celebrations, with music, community feasts, and church services in cities, towns, and villages.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Many Kachin mothers now give birth to a clinic or hospital, if there is one nearby; otherwise, their babies are born at home. Infant and child mortality rates are high in most areas of the Kachin State, mainly due to malaria, except where the elevation and cold temperatures prevent malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

Young people help their parents in the fields or shops. In the towns and cities, it is common for teenagers to be active in church groups, and some even travel to other parts of Burma for church meetings and to seek converts to Christianity.

Traditionally, Kachins are buried a week after death. For Animists, special ceremonies are performed to make sure that the spirit of the dead person goes away from the living. Funeral music may be played on slightly broken instruments. Christians hold a prayer service and often mark graves with a cross.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Kachins shake hands when introduced and when greeting or saying goodbye. They are generous hosts and always offer food, or at least tea, to visitors. The guest is expected to politely refuse the refreshments at least once—perhaps several times to be “overcome” by the hosts’ insistence. Then they will please the hosts if they eat large amounts of the food offered. Particularly honored guests, such as those who have endured great difficulty to travel from far away, may be given a special welcoming ceremony. They are presented with bamboo cups of rice wine and a basket containing cooked chicken and rice wrapped in leaf packets, to be shared, and may be given a sword and shoulder bag (if male) or Kachin clothing (if female).

Kachins are raised to value cooperation and an uncomplaining spirit. Children are discouraged from fighting with each other and encouraged to share their possessions and food. Although they have been known as brave, tough warriors in battle, adult Kachins rarely seem to argue among themselves.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Kachins are living in an ongoing health crisis. They have been subject to unchecked epidemics of cholera, plague, and HIV/AIDS. Malaria, including the deadly blackwater fever, is rife in low-lying areas, as are tuberculosis and other lung diseases throughout the Kachin State. With very few trained doctors available, fake “injection doctors” roam the hills in their place, giving malnourished people vitamin shots with dirty needles, thereby spreading the HIV/AIDS virus and other ailments among unknowing people. Traditional healers can be more beneficial, and the many medicinal plants of the Kachin State provide the hope of cures for many diseases—if logging does not destroy the forests before they can be properly studied.

A massive increase in logging in recent decades has decimated the great temperate rainforests of the Kachin State in all but the most remote regions of the far north. Logging trucks move back and forth, day and night, carrying hardwood logs from Kachin forests for sale in neighboring China and India. Environmental concerns have also been raised about gold mining by companies from China that enter Kachin State in joint ventures with Myanmar’s military government or the KIO. The gold miners use highly toxic mercury when processing ore dredged from the rivers, and gold mining also erodes river banks.

Most Kachins live in houses built of bamboo and wood, up on stilts or low to the ground with dirt floors. The hills are cold and foggy, sometimes even snowy, so houses have wood stoves or open hearths inside them. In stilt houses, people sit and sleep on the floor; in the single-level houses, they sit on wood or rattan chairs and sleep on bamboo platforms. Much of what is used by the Kachins is crafted by them of bamboo or wood, but trade goods do enter from China and India. The Kachin State has few road, railway, or air links. Heavy trucks, motorcycles, elephants, ponies, and mules are typical modes of transportation over the many hills and mountain passes.

What wealth Kachins manage to acquire is usually in the form of jewelry, which is easily portable. A family’s “bank account” takes the form of rings or earrings made of the gold and colorful jade or amber found in Kachin State, and sometimes elaborate silver wedding jewelry. In general, the Kachins place more value on friendships and kinship than on material pos-

sessions, and even small children would usually rather play games with other children than play with toys.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage usually occurs in the late teens or early twenties. Few Kachins remain single and large families—six or more children—are the norm. Some Kachins believe that since their ethnic group is few in numbers, having many children is important to their survival as a culture. The clan system determines who marries whom. With everyone belonging to one of the main clans, it is common knowledge which clans a girl or boy can marry into, and which are taboo. When outsiders are adopted as Kachins, they are assigned to one of the clans and given a Kachin name that, in part, comes from their birth-order in their family.

Some Kachin families own pack-ponies or even elephants, and they take good care of them. Many keep dogs for hunting and as pets.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Kachin tribes traditionally wear homespun thick cotton jackets with baggy trousers for men and wrap-around sarongs for women. The special occasion outfit for Jinghpaw women, which is nowadays worn for weddings and dance performances, is highly ornamented. Large silver disks decorate a black velvet jacket, worn with an embroidered red sarong and leggings, many silver necklaces and bracelets, and rattan wrapped around the waist and hips. These heirloom costumes are becoming quite rare.

For everyday wear, most Kachin men now wear shirts, trousers or sarongs, and often sweaters or heavy jackets, as the climate can be quite cold. Kachin women in most areas wear sarongs with blouses or T-shirts. They often knit their own sweaters with yarn imported from China, and also knit warm outfits for children and babies. Children often wear several layers of clothing to school in the mountains because the buildings are unheated. Girls wear lipstick and either cut their hair short or style it in intricate French braids. A type of Kachin sarong with traditional embroidery on a black cotton background became a symbol of democracy throughout Myanmar when opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi wore it.

## 12 FOOD

The Kachins grow some cold-climate foods such as potatoes, which are not so common elsewhere in Myanmar. These crops are combined in Kachin cooking with wild game such as boar and venison, domestically raised chicken and goat, and edible plants gathered in the forest. Rice is grown in hillside fields or brought as a trade commodity from China. The Kachins are known for eating large quantities of rice and whatever accompanying curry they can afford. If they can afford it, they typically eat a few bowls of rice with their late-morning breakfast and a few more with the late-afternoon supper. Tea or coffee (a luxury) is served with fruit, crackers, or cookies during the rest of the day.

## 13 EDUCATION

Educational opportunities are few in the Kachin State. There is a severe shortage of schools, teachers, and educational materials, especially in rural areas. There is discrimination against

Kachin students in Myanmar's educational system, and few opportunities for higher education exist in the Kachin State. Some high school graduates attend Bible study academies in the cities. Little is written in the Kachin language, so most of the school texts are in Burmese and very outdated. Kachin parents often express the hope that their children will get more of an education than they were able to. In 2008 Kachin students in Myitkyina were active campaigners for a "No" vote on a national constitutional referendum held by Myanmar's military government, which was pressuring the population to vote "Yes."

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Kachin traditional music, using the repetitive rhythms of metal gongs, is played mostly for dancing. The best-known dance is the *ton-kha*, in which lines of men and women form a circle and step in and out holding kerchiefs in their hands. Western-influenced hymns are sung at Christian church services. Some churches have electronic keyboards, and guitars may accompany the hymn-singing. International pop and rock songs are also well-liked by many Kachins. The Kachin rebel forces had small marching bands with bagpipes, like those of Scottish troops who served in Burma in the days of the British Empire.

The centerpiece of traditional Kachin culture is the *Manau* ceremony, which combines religion, dance, and visual arts. This elaborate celebration is usually sponsored by a *duwa*, a member of the traditional aristocracy. They hold a Manau for various reasons: celebrating prosperity or warding off ill-health or evil spirits, and inviting a good *Nat* to a new community. The Manau involves all members of society from throughout a district and provides a place for young people to meet and for distant relatives to reunite. It is an expensive production and takes a year to prepare (and a year to recover from it, say the Kachins).

The Manau is led by high-ranking Animist priests who make offerings for the good of the community. The priests wear elaborate robes of brightly-colored embroidered silk and woven rattan headdresses topped with tall peacock and pheasant feathers. Offerings, prayers, music, and dance take place in an open ground. The area is decorated with pennants and streamers, and Manau poles are set up where the priests preside. The poles, 10 ft tall or higher, are painted in bright colors with abstract patterns of triangles, diamonds, and spirals.

#### 15 WORK

The Kachins are mostly farmers. The mountainous climate and rocky soil make agriculture hard work in most areas, although a variety of cold-climate crops could profitably be introduced in the future. In Putao's valley (warm although far in the north) oranges and other fruits are grown.

Joining the military has long been a favored occupation for young Kachins. In the colonial period they joined the British Army, and at independence, the Burmese Army. Thousands still are enrolled in the Kachin Independence Organization's armed forces, although a ceasefire is in effect. For those less interested in the military life, religious studies are popular.

Jade is very important to the Kachins. Jadeite, the most precious kind of jade, is found in large quantities only in Kachin State. The bright green jade is best known, but it also comes in white, lavender, blue, and honey-colored shades. Huge boulders and tiny pieces of jade are brought out through govern-

ment controlled areas, for sale around the world. Kachins working at the big jade mines have often been mistreated and are especially susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse.

#### 16 SPORTS

Kachins enjoy playing and watching soccer, volleyball, and badminton. Some study martial arts such as kung fu. Children run races and play jump-rope games, making their own ropes by looping together collections of rubber bands.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In some areas people have DVD players and karaoke machines, which are usually powered by a small generator, as electricity is in short supply in Kachin State. They often show "homemade" DVD dramas produced and acted by people in Myitkyina or Bhamo. In some places satellite dishes have been rigged up, so Kachins can watch international television such as the BBC World News and Asian MTV. Otherwise, short-wave radios are relied on for information on the outside world, as well as word on developments in Myanmar. There is very little Internet access in Kachin State, but the cities have some cafes where computer games can be played. Kachins also enjoy getting together to sing hymns or pop songs, accompanied by guitar players. Sometimes church youth groups will travel from village to village presenting Christian music shows.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Kachins are talented jewelers, making ornaments from the local gold, silver, amber, and jade. They also make traditional swords with embossed silver scabbards, baskets, and bamboo drinking cups. Kachin embroidery, often using diamond-shaped designs that symbolize the mountains, is distinctive, and different patterns can identify tribes or regions.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

During the late 20th century, widespread human rights violations by Myanmar's military, including massacres, village burnings, rape, torture, and forced labor, uprooted tens of thousands of Kachins. While these abuses have been less widespread since the KIO 1994 ceasefire ended open warfare, they do continue in many parts of Kachin State, and refugees still flee to other countries.

In the cities and jade mining region, many have turned to heroin abuse. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has spread through the most remote parts of the Kachin State, largely from injections of heroin and other drugs with shared needles. The Kachin Independence Organization responded in 1991 by banning opium growing and heroin trading; they successfully substituted food crops for opium poppies, but in the Burmese government-controlled areas, the drug trade is still carried on openly. There is little educational material about AIDS in the Kachin language, and the whole population of the ethnic group is under threat from the epidemic.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In old Kachin society, women's status was considerably lower than men's, but this is changing as women seek more education and stand up for themselves. Kachin women often own small shops or restaurants, and in KIO-controlled areas they are particularly active in education and healthcare, as well as



serving as soldiers. In those areas they have formed a women's organization that runs kindergartens and promotes good nutrition and economic empowerment. In the cities and towns, women are active in church activities and some are in popular Christian singing groups. Kachin society tends to be conservative and somewhat disapproving of gender identities other than heterosexuality.

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—by E. Mirante

# KADAZAN

**PRONUNCIATION:** kah-tah-CHAN

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Dusun

**LOCATION:** Malaysia (Sabah state)

**POPULATION:** 514,400 (2004)

**LANGUAGE:** Kadazandusun

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Islam; animistic beliefs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Sabah, known as "The Land Below the Wind," is the second-largest state in Malaysia. It is situated on the northern tip of the island of Borneo, bordered by Sarawak on its southwestern side and by Kalimantan to the south. Archeological findings show that Sabah was inhabited by people as early as 28,000 years ago. Certain scholars believe that about 5,000 years ago Sabah was settled by Mongoloid-type peoples, and by the 1st millennium BC, Malayic and other related Mongoloid groups migrated from mainland Asia.

It is believed that Sabah's early inhabitants settled in the coastal areas but were slowly driven inland by the later arrival of other settlers. These later settlers were mainly from Malaya and neighboring islands, settling along the coast and along the banks of rivers when they arrived. The descendants of the displaced groups are believed to be today's Kadazan of Sabah, sometimes known as the Dusun. These displaced peoples over the years remained isolated and insulated from outside influences until the late 17th century.

Prior to the formation of the North Borneo Company in 1877, by an Austrian baron in partnership with a British firm, Sabah was divided under the influences of sultans of Brunei and Sulu. In 1881 the North Borneo Company was upgraded into a Chartered Company, giving it official recognition to rule the 73,300 sq km (28,300 sq mi) of North Borneo until the Japanese invasion in 1942. After the war, Sabah became a British Crown Colony until 31 August 1963, when it obtained self-government from the British. On the 16 September 1963, Sabah, together with Sarawak, Singapore, and Malaya, became the Federation of Malaysia.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Sabah is not only rich in natural beauty and resources, but also in the cultural heritage of its people. It is endowed with a heterogeneous population and is considered to be a melting pot of many indigenous and immigrant groups. It is estimated that there are some 30 indigenous communities using more than 50 indigenous languages and not less than 80 dialects in Sabah. The largest ethnic group is the Kadazandusun, numbering about 514,400 in 2004, who make up 25% of Sabah's population. The group consists of both Kadazan and Dusun and other subgroups. The other main ethnic groups are the Muruts, Bajau, Paitan, and Chinese. The largest non-indigenous group is the Chinese. They dominate trade and commerce. Nonetheless, many of these ethnic groups share similar oral histories, languages, and traditions.

The Kadazandusun are a collection of ethnic groups who speak similar languages and dialects known as Dusunic family, as well as share a common belief system with variations in customs and practices. Within this group exist at least 10 dis-

tinct languages with possibly 30 or more dialects. This includes the various subgroups such as the Kadazan of Penampang and Papar, the Lotud, Dusun, Kwijau, Bisaya, Dumpas, Mankaak, Minokok, Maragang, Tangaah, Liwan, Tatanah, Sino-Natives, the Rungus, and other subgroups from Tempusuk, Tambunan, Ranau, and other districts. The Kadazandusun can be found in all districts, but they are mainly in the western half of Sabah.

#### POPULATION OF SABAH 2004

ETHNIC SUBGROUPS	('000)
Kadazandusun	514.4
Other Bumiputera	421.7
Bajau	381.5
Malay	330.6
Chinese	277.3
Others	127.4
Murut	94.0
Indian	10.7
Non-Malaysian citizens	704.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2862.3</b>

Source: Department of Statistics, 2004

### 3 LANGUAGE

The various subgroups of Kadazan are speakers of the Dusunic languages with dialectical differences in pronunciation and description of words. The differences are a result of poor communication facilities and environmental evolution in the past. Like most other indigenous groups on the island of Borneo, the Kadazan did not possess a written language until the introduction of formal education in the 18th century, therefore oral traditions were very important among the Kadazan. Most of their knowledge was passed down by oral tradition from generation to generation.

The structure of a Kadazan's name is divided into two parts: the first name is the child's name, and the second is the father's first name. Some common male names are Gimbang, Kunul, Kerupang, Galumau, Gantoung, Empurut, Ampingan, and Sangan. Typical female names are Semitah, Rangkumas, Ansayu, Baimin, Salud, Amin, Halimah, Nani, and Mainah.

### 4 FOLKLORE

As is true with many other indigenous people on the island of Borneo, Kadazan folklore plays a major role in Kadazan traditions, customs, and worldviews. One of their most popular folk tales is the myth of their origin. According to legend, all the tribes are believed to have come from one common place called Nunuk Ragang, meaning "Red Casuarina Tree," a fig tree located at the confluence of the Liwagu and Kogibangan rivers in the heart of Sabah. Nunuk Ragang grew in plenty at the Liwagu River in Ranau. It is believed that their ancestors used to swim in the river and climb on the branches of the Nunuk Ragang to sun themselves. Red sap from the Nunuk Ragang roots was thought to have curative elements for different kinds of diseases. The Kadazan lived in abundance at Nunuk Ragang, and as their numbers increased, it became difficult to find enough food for every family within the limited area. In order to solve the problem, the leaders exhorted their followers to move and spread out in search of land and space.

### 5 RELIGION

Today, the majority of the Kadazan peoples are Christian, though some profess Islam, while others are followers of their ancestors' animistic beliefs. Even though a large number have converted to Christianity and Islam, many Kadazans still have ritual specialists to perform certain ceremonies. This is particularly true during the Harvest Festival. On the other hand, many of the old customs and traditions, such as headhunting, have ceased among the Kadazan.

According to the Kadazan's traditional beliefs, the spiritual universe is presided over by two supreme deities: *kinohorangan* (male/husband) and *umunsumundu* (female/wife). They are husband and wife. Under the command of these two deities are the lesser good and evil spirits that dwell within all objects and the natural environment—the forest, mountains, rivers, caves, and the earth itself—that need to be respected. These spirits must be appeased by means of ceremonial observances. Otherwise, the *rogon* (evil spirit) will inflict sickness and disease on the people or interfere and withhold blessings in secular world. Therefore, the spirits are presented with offerings and are called to attend the feast. These spirits can be encountered in the forest or sought in sacred places, and they also can be contacted in dreams and through mediums, ritual specialists, or priestesses who are called *Babalian* or *Bobohizan* (depending on dialect).

Bobolians or bobohizans play a major role in Kadazan ceremonial rituals. Incantations, prayers, singing, trances and animal sacrifices are common practices at these rituals, some of which can last for days. A bobolian plays a variety of roles. As medium, she beseeches spirits to stay away from newborn babies. As healer, she is engaged to exorcize sicknesses brought by evil spirits. At funerals, she heads the rites that guide the deceased spirit towards its final journey up Mount Kinabalu, which stands at 4,101 m (13,455 ft). It is one of the highest mountains in Southeast Asia. It is believed to be the resting place of the souls of the departed Kadazan peoples.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Harvest Festival, known as *Magavau* among the Kadazan of Sabah, is celebrated annually on May 13 and 14. In 1960, the festival was proclaimed as a public holiday by the state government. It is a festival of celebration in honor of the spirit of rice called "Bambaazon," giving thanks to the spirit for the good harvest. It is both a public and private celebration that involves huge parties, traditional dancing, and beauty contests in various parts of town. However, it is important to note that the celebration of Magavau varies in accordance with the different dialects and districts of the state.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past, childbirth was usually done at home with the help of a local midwife or experienced elder. Today, many Kadazan babies are born in hospitals or clinics, though there are others who are still delivered in the traditional method. It is a common practice that when a child is born, a *bobolian* (priestess) will invoke the spirits and pray over the child for its well-being. This is particularly true among those who still practice the traditional religion. When the newborn child is about a month old, the hair-cutting (*momuga*) ceremony takes place. It is an announcement of the arrival of a new member in the commu-

nity. Goats, pigs, and chickens are always slaughtered for this occasion.

Traditionally, there are three stages to a marriage. A marriage enquiry known as *monohuku* is made when the boy is only 12 years old and the girl is 11. The second stage is *momuaboi* (engagement) when the proposal is accepted. The final stage is called as *matod* by the Kadazan. When the parents think that the time has come for their children to be married, normally when the girl is 16 and the boy is 17, the wedding date is fixed mutually between both sets of parents and the couple. During the engagement period, the couple stays with their respective parents. During this time, the boy is obliged to help in his future mother-in-law's house, doing chores, such as collecting firewood, plowing the field, etc. Similarly, the girl is expected to help her future mother-in-law in the kitchen and in planting rice in the fields. This is done to prepare the couple for their life together.

A death in a family or village is announced to relatives and neighbors by the monotonous, fast beat of the gong, or by firing a carbide or kerosene bamboo cannon at frequent intervals. The corpse is draped in a clean white cloth and laid on a mat on the floor in a convenient place in the house. Relatives, neighbors, and friends are expected to pay their last respects to the dead person. Usually, a buffalo is killed and portions of the meat are distributed to visiting mourners, or it is cooked to be served with rice to those present at the funeral.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is considered impolite to walk upright in front of those who are seated in the house or longhouses. The usual way is to walk with knees slightly bent, holding both hands stiffly at the sides to avoid one's clothes touching other people, or to put both hands palm-to-palm between your knees, and wedge yourself in.

Visitors and friends are always welcome in a Kadazan home. There is no fixed time for visiting, especially among relatives and friends. Upon arrival at the house, a visitor is expected to take off his or her shoes unless told otherwise. He or she will then be offered betel nut, tobacco, or a cigarette. A visitor is usually asked to stay for the night, even if the visitor does not indicate his or her intention to stay. It is to be noted, however, that when a male visitor pays frequent visits to a house where the house owner has a daughter, it may be taken to mean he is interested in marrying the daughter.

Dating among the Kadazan differs from dating in the West. Even when they are engaged, a boy and a girl are "supervised" or observed by their parents and older siblings. A boy may visit his fiancée's house whenever he likes. The girl may do likewise, but she has to be accompanied by her mother, an aunt or an elder sister. If the boy has an elder sister, the boy is allowed to invite his fiancée to stay a night or two at his parents' house. At the same time if either one of them breaks the rules, a penalty will be exacted. However, it is important to note that many of these customs have changed over the years.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Modernization, education, and improved infrastructure have begun to have impact on Sabah's population. Nonetheless, living standards and conditions among the Kadazandusun vary according to their location. Many continue to live in their traditional areas and maintain a longhouse lifestyle, whereby sev-

eral families live together under one roof. Meanwhile, those who live in suburban areas have living standards comparable to those found in suburban areas in the United States. They have access to modern health services, tap water, electricity, good public transportation services, and other modern amenities. Most Kadazandusun who live in villages, however, have yet to experience a high standard of living. They still rely on the river for water, kerosene for light, and their feet to get from place to place.

Except for Kadazan and Rungus in Kudat, most have long abandoned their longhouses for individual homes, although the houses are still built of wood, bamboo, and thatch. In recent years, a growing affluence is changing this, replacing thatch with tiles and zinc. However, in places where bamboo is in abundance, some houses are made entirely from bamboo, including the pillars, the roof, the walls, and the floor. This is true in the Tambunan District.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family generally provides the basic social unit of Kadazan society and the basis of the household. It is close-knit in terms of personal obligation and responsibility toward one another. The misfortune or disgrace of one member of the family is deeply felt by all kin; likewise, the good luck and prosperity of one are shared by all. Nonetheless, the high rate of rural-urban migration has led to more intermarriage with other non Kadazandusun groups.

A family consists of a husband, a wife, and their children. Sometimes a household includes other members of the extended family, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts. A woman's primary role is to raise her children and to see daily that the family has enough food to eat. She is responsible for collecting jungle vegetables like fern tops, mushrooms, and young leaves for the evening, while her husband contributes fish or meat to the pot. Every evening the wife is responsible for preparing a good meal for her family.

Like most other native marriage customs in Borneo, the Kadazan marriage is fiercely monogamous. Adultery committed by either the husband or wife is severely punished.

A family may rear chickens, pigs, dogs, and cats not as house pets but for other purposes. Pigs, ducks, and chicken are reared for domestic consumption, while dogs are reared for hunting and cats to chase or kill rats and mice in the house and farms.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most of the traditional costumes worn by Kadazan men and women are predominantly dark or black in color. However, today a modern adaptation to the original attire is rich decoration done with colorful embroidery, glittering sequins, and imported gold lace trimming, as well as handmade lace from imported gold thread or yarn. The women's skirts reach down 5 cm (2 in) above the kneecap, with red embroidery running down the sides. Silver coin belts, rattan or beaded waist bands, beaded necklaces, and other silver ornaments and accessories are worn with these costumes. The color of the rattan waist band worn around the waist holds special meaning. Red denotes that the wearer is not a mother, while black denotes that she is, and white signifies that the wearer is a grandmother.

For their headgear, the women wear hats and/or scarves, while the men wear a head cloth called *sigah* or *kain dasar*, a

piece of cloth draped, folded, and tied according to the style and pattern of the district. It is important to note that dress codes vary from one district to another.

Today, Kadazan women and men wear Western-style clothing for everyday use. This includes skirts, blouses, shirts, pants, tank tops, etc.

## 12 FOOD

As in most societies in Asia, rice forms the staple food of the Kadazandusun diet. Rice is eaten at every meal, with meat and/or vegetable dishes. In the village the woman is responsible for collecting vegetables such as young ferns, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, etc., for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The man is responsible for bringing meat or fish for the meals. Young ferns are one of the Kadazan's traditional foods. There are normally stir-fried with garlic, onion, and shrimp paste, and are served with steamed rice. Nowadays, most Kadazan's kitchen utensils include pans, pots, plates, forks, spoons, etc., which are available in department stores. In the old days, most of their utensils were made from bamboo, wood, and rattan.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Kadazan have responded positively to the Malaysian government's effort to encourage education. This is because education can raise living standards by creating wider job opportunities. Consequently, many are able to read and write in both Malay and English. Children at the age of six are required to go to elementary school, and continue on to lower and upper secondary schools. Many obtain the Malaysian Education Certificate, which is equal to a high school diploma in the United States, and some go on to obtain degrees from local or foreign universities or other higher learning institutions. Parental support and encouragement have been driving forces behind the academic success of many Kadazan. Formal education is seen as an avenue toward success in the modern world.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance are closely related among the Kadazan. Both are vital parts of nearly every social event, particularly at the village level. Music is played during wedding celebrations, engagement parties, harvest festivals, first birthday parties and animistic religious ceremonies. A Kadazan wedding sees a rare airing of traditional instruments such as the bronze *kulintang* (gongs) and *gendang* (drums made from wood and leather or calfskin). The *sompotan*, a mouth organ, is another instrument that is popular among the Kadazan. Made from a dried bitter melon, it is produced in Tambunan and traded throughout Sabah. Sumazan is a dance between a male and female performed by couples or a group of couples to a symphony of *kulintang*.

Since the Kadazan did not have a written language in the past, their stories, songs, history, legends, and myths were passed down orally. Only in recent years have measures been taken to document these stories in books, articles, and journals.

## 15 WORK

Although the Kadazan were originally farmers or agriculturists, many have migrated to urban centers and have become prominent figures in the civil service and other professions.

In the interior, rice planting is the most common occupation, although, with the introduction of other cash crops such as rubber and coffee, this is likely to change. In hilly areas, some Kadazan still practice shifting rice cultivation. However, this is gradually dying out. Government efforts to modernize and improve socioeconomic status have enabled the Kadazandusun to become part of mainstream society. As a result, a number of them are now political leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals.

## 16 SPORTS

In the past, swimming in the river and climbing trees were the popular sports among the children. Today, both children and adults are becoming more acquainted with sports such as soccer, volleyball, and basketball. In the evening, after they return home from their farms, they get together to play a game in the yard.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The type of entertainment or recreation that Kadazan enjoy depends on their locality. Kadazan in urban areas have easy access to movies, television, etc., comparable to residents of major cities in the United States or United Kingdom, and their forms of entertainment are very different from those Kadazan who still live in the village. Traditional music, songs, and dance are some forms of entertainment that are still very popular in the village. However, television and videos are becoming an increasingly widespread form of entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The availability of local materials, such as bamboo and wood, has greatly influenced the nature of handicrafts of the Kadazan. Bamboo is used for making different kinds of household utensils, baskets, and mats. It is also widely used to build houses and fences. Wood and rattan are two durable materials widely used by the interior people for making huts, baskets, and decorative wall hangings. Rattan is also useful for tying pieces of wood or bamboo together. The weaving of baskets, mats, and other household utensils is done mostly by women during their free time.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Kadazan and most natives of Borneo are facing one common problem: obtaining legal rights over their ancestral lands. They are faced with the dilemma of having to give up their rights to the land in favor of land development programs, usually initiated by the state or federal government. Although the socioeconomic status of the Kadazandusun has improved in recent years, they have to cope with changes to their traditional values. For instance, extended families with several generations staying together are being replaced by nuclear families. This has implications on traditional social and support network.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Like the Iban of Sarawak, the Kadazandusun maintain an egalitarian society with a bilateral descent system. In this sense, men and women has equal standing in the society. However, there is a clear sense of division of labor between men and women. In the village, for instance, the woman is responsible

for collecting vegetables, such as young ferns, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, etc., for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The man is responsible for bringing meat or fish for the meals.

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—by P. Bala

# KALINGA

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-LING-uh

**LOCATION:** Philippines (northern Luzon)

**POPULATION:** 112,000 (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Kalinga

**RELIGION:** Native spirit beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos; Ifugao; Vol. 4: Manuvu'

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Although at present speaking mutually intelligible dialects and possessing a strong sense of ethnic identity nurtured by a peace-pact system, the Kalinga display much cultural diversity among themselves. This is because of their division into small endogamous territories (*boboloy*) and perhaps also to their disparate origins as relatively recent refugees from the lower Abra valley to the west and the Cagayan valley to the east. The name Kalinga itself is a negative marker. It comes from the word for "enemy" in Ibanag, the language of Christianized Cagayan lowlanders. Major differences exist between the Kalinga north and south of the Pacil River; the southerners grow wet-rice on terraces and share many cultural elements with the Bontok and Ifugao, who depend on the same type of agriculture.

Substantial external influence commenced only in the 19th century with the opening of a Spanish trail between Abra and Cagayan through Kalinga territory; this trail introduced Tinggianes (fellow highlanders) and lowland Ilocano traders. Replacing spears, machetes, and axes, guns obtained from these increased contacts made the endemic feuding infinitely more murderous and threatened to annihilate Kalinga society. This fear motivated the emergence of the peace-pact system that the American colonial regime, intent on abolishing head-hunting, was to endorse.

The Americans introduced sanitation and schools, and educated Kalinga were soon able to fill the local administrative positions initially occupied by lowland Filipinos; the Kalinga passion for individual distinction predisposed them to enthusiastic participation in Filipino electoral politics. World War II flooded the highlands (as it did the Philippine countryside in general) with firearms, and since then "mutually assured destruction" has kept the peace between well-armed Kalinga groups. As a substitute for headhunting, private revenge continues to be part of everyday life. With some of their lands threatened by government dam projects, the Kalinga, along with the Bontok, have been among the most assertive of what are currently termed "cultural communities" (formerly "cultural minorities" or "non-Christian tribes").

See also the article entitled *Ifugao*.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kalinga occupy a northern section of northern Luzon's Cordillera Central, which is drained by the middle Chico River and its tributaries. The territory of the Isneg people of the Apayao basin intervenes between the Kalinga and the sea. Towards the southern edge of Kalinga territory, ridges rise to 1,830 m (6,000 ft), while the mountains are lower in the northern area. Pine trees crown the ridge tops, cogon grass blankets the steep slopes, and dense semitropical vegetation covers the



valley bottoms where settlements are located (still 610 m or 2,000 ft above sea level).

In the 1970s, the Kalinga numbered 40,000, with the heaviest concentration in the south where wet-rice is grown. According to the 2000 census, the population of Kalinga province stood at 174,023, of which 64.4% (or nearly 112,000) identified themselves as Kalinga (24% identified themselves as Ilocanos, 2.5% as Kankanay). Estimates for various Kalinga dialect groups are as follows: Limos, 20,000 (1977); Mandukayang, 1,500 (1990); Butbut, 8,000 (1998); Lower Tanudan (1998); Upper Tanudan (1998); Lubuagan, 14,003 (2000); Southern Kalinga, 13,000 (2000).

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Kalinga speak mutually intelligible dialects of the same Austronesian language; Kalinga is more closely related to Tinggian, Isneg, Gaddang, Ibanag, and Ilocano than to Bontok, Kankanai, and Ifugao. The dialects may currently be converging under the influence of a phonetically simplified, heavily Ilocano-influenced form of Kalinga. In fact, Ilocano is so widely understood that it is used to record the terms of peace-pacts between Kalinga groups (instead of or along with English, a language in which a few people in the larger communities are literate).

Children are given the name of a dead or living grandparent, in order to receive qualities of that person.

### <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Among supernaturals, Kalinga believe in the *ngilin*, a malevolent water spirit in the form of a human pigmy who prevents women from conceiving; it also victimizes newborns. Also feared are the *alan* or *kotmo*, giant ghouls who feed on corpses.

### <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

*Anito* are supernatural beings in general. The Kalinga recognize a creator god, Kaboniyán, but invoke him only in moments of extreme and sudden crisis, such as an accidental death or the destruction of the rice crop by a storm. They take for granted the good will of the *mandodwa* (benevolent spirits) and focus their prayers, chants, and sacrifices on appeasing malevolent spirits who, if neglected, bring illness and misfortune on humans by capturing their souls. Kalinga must also show respect to their village guardian spirit, *sangasang*, who resides in a *podayan* shelter housing sacred *bayog* stones. In addition, they make offerings to deceased ancestors at funeral ceremonies, which are more elaborate among the southerners who follow the Ifugao and Bontok in emphasizing the ancestral cult. While fear of witchcraft is weak, that of poisoning is widespread and often attributed as the work of old childless women, who are believed to be vindictive because of their misfortune.

Formerly, male priests officiated at headhunting rites, but now female mediums (*mangalisig* in southern Kalinga and *mandadawak* or *manganito* in northern Kalinga) are more prominent, leading rites for curing, community welfare, and the life-cycle. Before receiving instruction from a practicing medium, a future medium must be called first to her vocation (by disturbing dreams, trembling fits, or nausea after eating certain foods like eel or dog). A medium possesses spirit helpers (familiar), a repertoire of chants, and standard paraphernalia, which includes a *bayobong* turban, a Chinese plate and a bamboo stick to beat it with during rituals, and a basket to contain everything.

In the 1990s, Christian conversion (mostly to Catholicism) remained limited because of the daunting geographical barriers to missionary penetration. According to the 2000 census, 17.6% of the population of the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Kalinga province is a part, was classified as "Other" in religious affiliation, meaning adherents of indigenous religion. The rest followed a form of Christianity: 65.8% of the region's population is Roman Catholic (much lower than the national percentage of 83%), 8.9% Evangelical, 2.9% Iglesia

ni Cristo, 1.6% Jehovah's Witness, 0.8% Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan).

## <sup>6</sup> MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## <sup>7</sup> RITES OF PASSAGE

For a month after a birth, the family refrains from eating beef, cow's milk, eel, frogs, taro, and dog meat; the father may not leave the village; and no one who does not habitually sleep in the house may enter it. At the end of the month, a medium sweeps the house with an *anaao* (a palm-frond raincoat) and removes the four reeds that have been placed at the four corners of the house as a sign of the taboo period. Over the first year and a half of its life, six *kontad* ceremonies are held for the child, involving pig and chicken sacrifices, chanting, the taking of pig's liver omens, and the erecting of a spirit house or platform.

Now that free-choice matches are more prevalent, the traditional contract marriage proceeds in the following stages. In some regions soon after a boy's birth, his parents pick a suitable girl and commission go-betweens to take omens and present valuable beads to her family at a *banat* feast. The go-betweens return with gifts for the boy's parents and for themselves (henceforth, the two families invite each other to their respective feasts and give each other a share of the meat). At the age of 12, the boy may begin light bride-service for the girl's family. At the age of 17, the boy's uncles and aunts escort him to the girl's house because for the parents to do so would appear to be indifference toward the boy and would invite victimization by malevolent spirits, i.e., illness. The girl's side prepares a feast and gives the escorts meat to take back to the boy's kin. Two weeks later, after the boy's family gives the girl's family Chinese beads and plates, the couple begins to sleep together. The Kalinga apply less pressure on the couple to consummate the union than other highlanders, such as the Ibaloi go-betweens, who strip an unwilling pair, bind them together, and wrap them in a water buffalo hide. Five months later, a feast to which both kin groups are invited seals the marriage contract; this includes competitive gift-giving between the sides and the handing over of a portion of the inheritances coming to the newlyweds.

After death, the deceased is seated on a death chair for up to 10 days, with the surviving spouse guarding it and relatives preparing rice wine for the wake, which also requires the slaughter of pigs and water buffalo. While children are buried near the house or under the granary, adults are interred in graves faced with small stones smoothed over with lime plaster; big stone slabs are laid over the body, the slabs are then covered with dirt, and a thatch arbor is then erected on top of the dirt for offerings (rice bread hung for the dead, and betel, charcoal, and lemon leaves to repel malevolent spirits). Today, wealthy southerners raise concrete family mausoleums. Nine days later, in some areas, personal belongings are placed on the grave. A year of mourning follows an adult's death, during which relatives may neither sing nor dance, must wear a black or brown strip, and let their hair grow long and unoiled. A surviving spouse may not remarry during this period and may eat only fruits and greens and may neither gather food nor cook. A morning-to-morning *kolias* feast concludes the mourning; singing, dancing, and boasting keep the mood fes-



A Kalinga couple wear traditional dress in Luzon, Philippines. The Kalinga are known for their bright colors and accessories. (© Paul Almasy/Corbis)

tive, for weeping would attract another death. If individuals cannot stop grieving, they restore themselves to normal life by exhuming the bones and reburying them or by taking a long journey that includes crossing a wide river.

## <sup>8</sup> INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Beyond the immediate kin, an individual traditionally identified only with the *boboloy*, the area inhabited by overlapping kin-groups, within which one generally married and outside of which no one could be trusted. In recent times, peace-pacts have weakened this localism to a considerable extent but have far from eliminated it. Northern *boboloy* consist of 10 to 12 hamlets (500–700 people), while southern ones encompass even larger numbers.

In former times, authority gravitated towards *mangngol*, renowned warrior-headhunters (also wealthy and well-spoken) who avenged wrongs done to their kinfolk [see **Manuvu**]. Currently, regional power issues from the ability to arbitrate disputes (imposing fines that take into consideration public opinion and the kin-groups involved) and serve as a pact-holder; individuals with the required wealth, wisdom, and charisma are called *pangngat* (*lakay* in the north). Despite distinguishing poor (*kapos*) from rich (*baknang*; in the south, also *kadangyang*), Kalinga culture stresses equal treatment for all individuals irrespective of status (e.g., servants are treated as well as adopted children and may even appeal to *pangngat* if mistreated by their masters). At the same time, Kalinga exhibit a strong drive towards personal distinction, as expressed in the boasting sessions that are integral to all gatherings (though rice-land and livestock wealth have replaced headhunting exploits as the source of pride).

Within the *boboloy*, *pangngat* arbitrate disputes. Between *boboloy*, however, conflicts generally escalated in the past to

reciprocal headhunting raids (feuding for blood vengeance). Since the colonial abolition of headhunting, pitched battles (*botad*) now provide the outlet for revenge-taking; their firearm-increased murderousness has led to the peace-pact (*bodong*) system.

A *bodong* is contracted between two individuals (generally *pangngat*) but is binding on both *boboloy*. The first stage is a “tasting” (*simsim* or *singlip*) where the sides gather, review grievances, and settle disputes. After this, at a large gathering (*lonok*) the *pagta* or provisions of the *bodong* are written out, detailing how to punish crimes committed by a member of one *boboloy* against a member of the other, e.g., punishing killings or woundings by fines, counter-killing, or symbolic counter-injury. Also set down are rules of courting, the return of lost or stolen articles, and hospitality, including how to handle the death, accident, or illness within one’s territory of a person from the other *boboloy*. Renewed at *dolnat* gatherings and transferable to new pact-holders, peace-pacts permit trade and even migration between *boboloy* territories.

The southern Kalinga follow the Bontok-Ifugao practice of having children from the age of six or seven sleep in a unisex dormitory (girls sleep in a widow’s house and boys in a vacant house [*obog*]). Boys may visit the girls at night, but only engaged couples may have sex. The northern Kalinga, on the other hand, expect their adolescent children to stay in the home of a close relative; sexual contact must be kept secret from parents. A girl who has sex with a boy with whom she is not contracted to marry, or a man who is already married, will be whipped (the male, unless he raped the girl, is only fined).

Courting procedures leading to love-match unions have long coexisted with contract marriages. A boy may intercept a girl on her way to fetch water. As talking to each other would violate etiquette, they exchange signals, the girl expressing approval with a subtle wink, a raised eyebrow, or a sudden lowering of her eyes. Thus encouraged, the boy presents himself at her house in the evening, serenading her with courting songs or flute-playing in the presence of her parents. Afterwards, the girl arranges to meet the boy while parents are away.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Kalinga live in hamlets of 6–30 houses in the north and of over 200 in the south. The wood-plank or bamboo-plaiting houses are on piles, are entered by stairs or a ladder, and have thatched grass or reed roofs. The floor plan is rectangular or square in the north, and octagonal in the south, with a single room. In more traditional homes, floors consist of split-bamboo mats over a grating of slender beams; the mats are removed and washed in a stream every two or three days. A bit off-center in the single room is a fire pit enclosed in a 10–15-cm-high (4–6-in-high) wooden box full of sand and ash; above it hangs a rack for drying wood, food, and clothing. Today, each village has at least one or two houses of hewn-wood planks with galvanized iron roofs. These are more prestigious, but hotter than a thatched one. A traditional house may be kept alongside for use as a kitchen; this new house-type will eventually dominate.

Average family income in the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Kalinga province is a part, amounted to 192,000 pesos (us\$3,765) in 2006, among the highest in the country, cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region’s ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog’s ₱198,000, and those of the neighboring Cagayan Valley and Ilocos regions, ₱143,000 and

₱142,000 respectively. In 2000, 32% of households in Kalinga had access to a community faucet, 12% to a faucet of their own, and 21.6% to a shared deep well, while 11.7% obtained their water from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. Almost half of households (48.6%) disposed of their garbage by burning it, 21.9% by burying it in a pit, and 11.7% by feeding it to their animals; only 6.3% had it picked up by a collection truck. 50% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 44.3% with electricity, and 3.5% with firewood. While 29% of households lacked basic appliances of any kind, 68.9% possessed a radio, 21.9% a television, 12.9% a refrigerator, 7% a VCR, 2% a telephone or cell phone, 6.6% a washing machine, and 8.2% a motorized vehicle.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Each individual recognizes his or her personal kindred as including the descendants of both paternal and maternal great-grandparents (i.e., counting second cousins) among the northern Kalinga. In the more densely populated south, kindred includes only grandparents and first cousins, although the wealthy there may recognize bilateral descent groups [*see Ifugao*].

The nuclear family includes a married couple, their younger children, and occasionally grandparents and, among the wealthy, servants. Adolescents live together in same-sex dormitories. Two to four related nuclear families work together in agriculture and other economic activities; this extended household is actually emphasized more than its components. Face-to-face interaction among more distant kin is diminishing with the greater mobility of modern times. In the south where larger towns offer individuals greater economic independence from kin, people tend to address relatives with personal names rather than with kinship terms such as are still regularly used in the north.

Formerly, it was a strongly enforced rule for an individual to marry within his or her *boboloy* (*barrio*); third-cousin marriage was permitted, but second-cousin marriage met with disapproval. Marriage by contract between the parents while the children are still young was the norm but is now giving way to free-choice matches. The ideal, still followed in the south, is for a new couple to join the wife’s parents’ extended household. Wealthy men might take concubines (*dagdagas*), especially in order to seal peace-pacts with other localities. Half of the marriages in north Kalinga end in divorce. The primary reason for the divorce is childlessness (and occasionally the poor hospitality or laziness of the wife).

Relations between parents and children are markedly less prolonged and intense among the Kalinga than among other highland peoples, but grandparents and grandchildren are very close, often given to mildly teasing each other. The grandparents act as babysitters while the parents are working away from the house (a still strong grandfather will carry his grandchild in a sling to roam about watching the activities in village and field). Grandchildren also learn ritual procedures from grandparents and take care of them as well as their own parents in old age and, via offerings, in the afterlife. Parents regard safeguarding inheritance and making a good match for them as their main duties to their children. Children tend to be indulged; adults rarely resort to whipping and prefer to scare children into behaving with stories about “strangers” (indeed, inflicting corporal punishment on another’s child would incur fines from the incensed relatives).



## 11 CLOTHING

Northern Kalinga traditional male clothing is of brightly colored cotton and consists of a G-string with beads or buttons, a short jacket with beads and tassels, a tube sarong worn over one shoulder, a turban with blossoms and feathers stuck in it, earplugs, an agate-bead choker, and an ornamental betel-bag. Women's traditional clothing includes sarongs, shirts, agate-bead necklaces, and brass and mother-of-pearl earrings, and hair grown long (augmented with switches of hair from departed or living relatives).

Today, northern Kalinga men wear lowland-style trousers and cut-offs with or without an old shirt, and the women wear cotton dresses. Traditional clothing is still commonly worn in the south, where colors are more subdued and accessories are kept to a minimum [for southern women's attire, *see Ifugao*].

## 12 FOOD

The staple food is rice supplemented by vegetables and some meat.

## 13 EDUCATION

*In 2000, literacy stood at 90.5% for the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Kalinga province is a part. In Kalinga province itself, of people five years or older 45.79% had attended elementary school, 23% high school, and 11.19% college; 4% held academic degrees. (see also the article entitled **Filipinos** in this volume).*

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

*See the article entitled **Ifugao**.*

## 15 WORK

Although some Kalinga receive enough modern education to become schoolteachers (a most esteemed profession among them), municipal employees, or Baguio or Manila office workers, most Kalinga remain subsistence farmers. Only in the southern area adjacent to the Bontok has wet-rice cultivation on terraces been the dominant form (though now it is spreading in the north); Kalinga terraces slope gently at an angle and are not held back by stone walls as are those of the Bontok or Ifugao. The northern Kalinga grow dry-rice on swidden (shifting-cultivation) fields along with beans, sweet potatoes, maize, sugarcane, taro, betel, tobacco, and coffee.

Animal protein comes from a variety of sources: wild pig, deer, fowl, dogs, birds, fish, mussels, and eels. Livestock includes a few horses and cattle as well as pigs and chickens for sacrifice and meat distribution at ritual celebrations. Kept for slaughter, water buffalo are also important as a measure of wealth and the means to buy rice-land.

Guaranteed by highly formalized and ritualized pacts (*abuyog*) between potentially warring regions, traditional trade patterns resembled those of the Ifugao [*see Ifugao*].

## 16 SPORTS

Children between the ages of 3 and 10 play at the riverside bathing place while their older female relatives wash and do other chores. A common game for single- or mixed-sex groups is hide-and-seek. Boys between 7 and 15 enjoy spinning tops.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Kalinga are fond of putting on plays or skits at public gatherings; the source material derives from school lessons, such as the life of Filipino national hero Jose Rizal. Parents teach their children to perform public recitations of pieces that they themselves learned in school.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

*See the article entitled **Ifugao**.*

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

*See the article entitled **Filipinos**.*

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although Kalinga couples do not automatically prefer boys over girls, not to have any sons at all is regarded as a great misfortune, because men, through combat, can defend the family and win it prestige. From an early age, girls assume the heavier tasks, such as taking care of younger children, pounding and winnowing rice, scrubbing mats, toting water, and helping in the fields. By contrast, when boys are not fetching firewood from the potentially dangerous forest, they just sit around and gossip. A boy already promised in marriage, however, may also help around his in-laws' house. In the past, this was so that the young men could be ready to defend the community at any time, but in these relatively peaceful times, they have little to do and fall into insulting relatives, quarreling, vandalizing, and theft. As adults, women work year-round all day and into the night, whereas men work only in the daytime, clearing and plowing fields, and in the dry season, they travel to increase the family's wealth and prestige.

In 2000, the literacy level was slightly lower for women (90%) than for men (90.8%) in the Cordillera Administrative Region, of which Kalinga province is a part. Of those who had attended elementary school, 54.03% were males, slightly higher than their proportion of the population, 52.8%. Of those who had attended college and those who held post-baccalaureate degrees, the majority were women.

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—revise by A. Abalihin

# KAMMU

**PRONUNCIATION:** kah-MOO

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Khamu; Khmu

**LOCATION:** Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and China.

**POPULATION:** About 500,000

**LANGUAGE:** Kammu

**RELIGION:** Animism; some Buddhism and Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Kammu (also written Khamu, Khmu, and Kmhmu), who make up the largest minority group in Laos, are believed to be the original inhabitants of the country. They are an Austro-Asiatic people who moved north from the area of Indonesia in prehistoric times. The Kammu practiced paddy rice agriculture in the valleys along the Mekong River until they were displaced around the 14th century by the Lao moving southward from what is today southern China. Pushed out of the fertile river valleys where wet rice agriculture was possible, the Kammu settled on mountain slopes and in small, narrow upland valleys in northern and central Laos and in northern Thailand. There they practiced swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture, clear cutting and burning off areas of the forest, farming the fields for a few years until the soil was depleted, and then burning off a new area and letting the old fields lie fallow. Sometimes they relocated their villages to find suitable land.

The Kammu have traditionally been at the bottom of Laotian society. Members of the ethnic Lao majority frequently refer to the Kammu with contemptuous terminology, including the word *kha*, or slaves. Ethnic Kammu regions of the country have historically received less funding for roads, schools, and government services than Lao majority areas. Many Kammu joined the Communist Pathet Lao (Lao Nation) movement and the Lao People's Liberation Army in the 1960s and 1970s, during the Lao civil war because the Communists promised them respect and education and technical training in Vietnam if they joined the cause. During the war years some Kammu areas were heavily bombed by the United States as the Laotian civil war was linked to the Vietnam War, which was also being fought in Laos. After the Pathet Lao won control of the country in 1975, some Kammu Communist cadres gained positions of prestige within the government. However, the majority of ethnic Kammu have remained impoverished and have had few opportunities for economic or social advancement.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR), established in 1975, has tried to do away with ethnic labels and now refers to "lowland Lao," "midland Lao," and "upland Lao." The Kammu are classified as midland Lao because they tend to live on the mountain slopes. The LPDR government has tried to end slash-and-burn agriculture and has encouraged the Kammu to resettle in lowland areas. Some Kammu had already relocated to escape war related violence. The Kammu, like other midland Lao, are among the poorest people in what is already a very poor country. Their low levels of education and geographic isolation, together with continued prejudice from the ethnic Lao, have been barriers to their integration.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kammu are considered as one of the indigenous populations of Laos and represent the country's largest minority group. There are roughly 500,000 Kammu in Laos and smaller numbers of Kammu in northern Thailand, northern Vietnam, and southern China. A few thousand Kammu fled as refugees after the Communists came to power in 1975, and they have resettled mostly in the United States.

The Kammu live in scattered villages in mountainous areas of north and central Laos and in border regions of neighboring countries. Often villages are small, with only 20–30 families, but some villages can include several hundred households. Neighboring villages may belong to different ethnic groups lumped together with the Kammu as midland Lao, but with their own cultures and languages that are mutually incomprehensible. Young Kammu men often leave their mountain homes to find unskilled jobs in towns and cities for a few years to earn money for a bride-price. During the Lao civil war, many young men went to Thailand to escape forced conscription into the Laotian armed forces. The government has pressured Kammu to switch to settled lowland farming rather than shifting slash-and-burn cultivation, but the land offered to Kammu farmers has often been poor for agricultural cultivation.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Kammu have their own language, which belongs to the Mon-Khmer family of languages, but it is not a written language. Kammu words are mostly monosyllabic, though disyllabic words are still numerous. The normal word order in Kammu is subject-verb-object, though the object may appear at the beginning of a phrase for emphasis. Kammu contains many Laotian and Thai loan words, and Kammu who live in Thai urban areas often adopt the more simplistic syntax of Thai.

The Laotian government's efforts to reclassify Kammu as "midland Lao" has resulted in few references to Kammu in Laotian historical texts and, until recent decades, there were few significant works about the Kammu in Western literature. Variation in the Kammu language is common, as the Kammu are spaced over a wide area with limited contact with more distant settlements. The language includes an increasing number of loan words from Lao.

The majority of Kammu are illiterate, as few have had access to education. Agreements are oral and are made before village elders, who memorize the terms and will arbitrate any disputes. Children use their father's first name as their last name, so last names change every generation. Once a person becomes a parent, he or she is referred to as the father or mother of their child.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Kammu have a rich folklore that has been transmitted orally. They are well regarded by other groups for their knowledge of folk medicines made from plants gathered in the forest.

The Kammu consider Luang Prabang, which served as the Lao royal capital, as their city, and they have a legend that explains how the city was founded by a Kammu.

The old people say that long, long ago people wished to build the city of Luang Prabang, but an enormous tree grew on the site that nobody was able to cut down. Each

man that tried fell ill and fled. Then a man by the name of Wang said, "I will cut the tree if you will taboo the day of my death forever." The people promised and Wang cut the tree, but he dropped dead when the tree fell. Once they buried Wang, the Kammu began to build the city of Luang Prabang.

When the city was finished, they looked for a man to be their king. They all went to a cliff overlooking the place where the Ou River flows into the Mekong River, and the people said, "Any man brave enough to jump off this cliff, we will elect king."

The people boarded seven boats and seven rafts in the waters below the cliff and called for the men who wished to be king to jump. Looking down from the dizzying heights, one man after another was afraid and ran away. Finally just one man remained, a relative of Wang, who had cut the tree. This man had tucked a quiver into his belt, and as he leaned over to look down from the top of the cliff, his quiver struck against something and he lost his balance and fell into the river. The people hurried to help him get in a boat, and they praised his courage and elected him king. To this day the Kammu taboo the day Wang cut the tree and the day Wang was buried, and on these days no work is undertaken.

The Kammu played a significant role in annual ceremonies in the Lao court of Luang Prabang until fairly recent times. The ceremonies indicated the Kammu's prior claim to the land through a symbolic payment to the Kammu representatives, who in turn acknowledged the legitimacy of the King of Luang Prabang.

## 5 RELIGION

The majority of Kammu are animists, with smaller numbers of Buddhists and Christians. The Kammu believe there are hundreds of different spirits, helpful and harmful, that reside in natural settings. An important aspect of Kammu spiritual beliefs is the notion of reincarnation based upon merit. Individuals are engaged in a struggle between good and evil forces that plays itself out through the interaction of spirits.

Each village has its own shaman to propitiate the spirits that cause illness and accidents, and a priest (*lkuun*) to perform the village ceremony for the ancestor spirits. A shaman can be either male or female, but the priest holds a hereditary office passed on to the eldest son of the priestly family, even if the individual is only a child at the time. One becomes a shaman by apprenticing to a shaman and learning the magic formulas to be recited on different occasions. The shaman must also be a person of good character who follows many specific rules or the magic formulas will not work to drive away evil spirits.

Living far from health centers and access to modern medicine, the Kammu often attribute illness to evil spirits and call on a shaman to exorcise them and bring back the soul of the patient. Minor diseases are treated by a medicine man, an expert in herbal remedies. It is believed that conception of a child is determined by the ancestors of the wife. If a woman does not become pregnant after marriage, then her father will sacrifice a pig as an offering to his ancestors.

Rituals and taboos are a common part of Kammu spirituality and daily life. The Kammu have a calendar that operates on a 60-day cycle that includes many taboo days when various



kinds of work cannot be done and strangers cannot enter the village. During special ceremonies, woven wicker squares and bamboo arrows are placed along paths and trails leading to the village to warn outsiders not to enter. The Kammu also believe that spirits in important places must be placated. For example, before setting out traps or beginning to hunt, a man must perform a ceremony to ask permission from the spirits that reside in the hunting grounds.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important holiday for the Kammu is the three-day series of ceremonies once a year to sacrifice to the village ancestor spirits, remake the village common house where the spirits reside, and ritually renew the village. The village spirits are considered benign, helping people lead good and happy lives so long as proper rituals are observed. There is no set day to sacrifice to the village spirits, but the ceremony is usually performed just after sowing the rice so the spirits will bring rain, or just before harvest, so they will chase away evil spirits like the spirits of accidents or the spirits of waste. The house where the spirits reside is cleaned and remade with a new thatched roof, then a black pig is killed and its blood smeared on the altar. The spirits are offered pork, rice, and rice wine, and then the whole village eats and drinks.

The next day a sacrifice is made to the water spirits. Villagers dress up and parade to the village well with drums and gongs. There is a ritual cleaning of the well, and fresh water is fetched

from the well in a decorated water container and placed in the house of the spirits.

On the third day each family places a basket under the water container, which the priest shoots with an arrow from a crossbow. Those baskets sprinkled with a lot of water are a sign of luck and a good harvest, while those baskets the water does not reach presage a poor harvest. There is then a procession to a stream to float away the bad spirits. The young people engage in horseplay with mud fights and pushing each other in the water. A communal meal is eaten at noon, and in the evening the villagers parade home and celebrate with lots of food and rice wine.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

For most men the main rite of passage is preparing for marriage, usually by leaving home to work as a laborer for a few years to get money for a bride-price. Each family has a totem and is grouped by totems (plants, birds, four-legged creatures) into a system of marriage alliances. There are three such groups in each village, with a circular pattern of one group taking wives from a second group and giving wives to a third group. The man can choose a bride only from the wife-giving group in his marriage alliance system, or it is believed dire misfortune will result. Ideally there is matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, in which a man marries his mother's brother's daughter (the brother might be a real brother or a clan brother). Within the constraints of the marriage alliance system, the bride and groom are free to choose, but their parents will negotiate the bride-price. Sometimes a man can work for his bride's parents for a few years in lieu of a bride-price.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Kammu interpersonal relations are based on family lineage. The eldest man in the family is treated with great respect. The marriage alliance system also involves patterns of respect. For example, the father of the bride has a higher ritual status than the father of the groom because the wife brings children to the family. A father-in-law must be treated with great respect. It is even common to call an elderly man father-in-law as a term of respect.

Living in isolated villages, the Kammu must depend upon their neighbors for mutual help—so relations are relatively egalitarian. Although most families farm individually owned plots, in some Kammu villages the land was owned collectively. After the rise to power in 1975 of the communist LPDR government, numerous Kammu communities were successfully converted to collectivized farms, while communal agriculture proved a failure in many other Kammu villages. The closure of all stores resulted in the development of a barter system among the Kammu for trading foodstuffs.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Laos is one of the poorest nations in East Asia and living conditions are harsh for most Kammu. The Kammu tend to be among the most impoverished people in the country and Kammu communities in Thailand, Vietnam, and China live far below the national economic average. Governments have been slow to extend roads, education, and health services to the hill areas. In the aftermath of the Communist takeover of Laos, diseases like malaria, dysentery, and pneumonia were common, and there were high rates of infant mortality and

malnutrition. Most Kammu are subsistence farmers, and each day is spent farming, hunting, or fishing. People don't go into the forest alone, however, because they worry about wild animals, snakes, and accidents.

Kammu houses are built close together on pilings in the villages, located on a hilltop or halfway up a mountain at elevations near 1,000 ft. The village is usually surrounded by a thick band of old forest, which separates homes from the fields. The large old trees are believed to have souls, and they serve to protect the village from storms and from fire when the fields are burned off. Houses are built on piles 1–2 m (3–7 ft) above the ground, usually with frame and floors of wood, walls of bamboo matting, and a roof of thatch. There is an open porch on one side of the house and a kitchen hearth built over a box of dirt toward the back. Domestic animals, including chickens, ducks, and pigs, are raised underneath the house in fenced areas. Buffalo are highly valued for plowing fields, as food, and for sacrifice, though few Kammu can afford to own them. Dogs are commonly kept as pets. In most Kammu villages there is no running water or electricity, nor are there any sanitary facilities.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

A household usually numbers 6–7 people but can be much larger. A single dwelling may include parents, children, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. Much of the work of the household is gender-specific, with women working longer hours than men and responsible for the hard work of hauling water and firewood and husking the rice. Traditionally, young boys left the family home between age six and eight, to live in the nearest village common house with older boys, unmarried men, and male guests in the village. However, newer villages set up in lowland areas have dispensed with common houses for men. Children are engaged in helping the family get enough food from an early age. Boys learn to fish and make snares to catch rodents and small game. Girls help their mothers garden and go in a group to the forest to look for edible shoots, tubers, and other plants. It is the responsibility of the women in the household to ensure there is enough water and firewood, while men provide for the family's meat and fish. The family could not function without the labor of all, so there is mutual respect for the contribution each person makes to the household.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the past, clothing was most often rough homespun cloth made from their own cotton that the women spun and wove, but today manufactured fabric or store-bought clothes are increasingly common. Women wear a long-sleeved blouse that fastens to one side and a sarong, while men wear a shirt and pants. Rubber sandals serve as shoes. Both sexes may carry woven or knit bags. In addition, there are special clothes for ritual occasions.

## 12 FOOD

The staple food of the Kammu is sticky (glutinous) rice, which is eaten at every meal. The Kammu generally do not purchase food, but grow or hunt what they eat. Besides rice, Kammu farmers grow corn, tobacco, maize, sugarcane, and occasionally cotton and opium. The men fish, hunt small game with rifles and crossbows, and set snares for rodents and other small animals. Frogs and various insects are also eaten. Fish and

meat are smoked and dried over the fires that are continuously maintained in common houses reserved for men. Large game is usually shared within the community. The women gather bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and other wild plants in the forest. Deforestation has made supplementing the daily diet through hunting and gathering more difficult. Although most families have a water buffalo or cow, these animals are rarely eaten except on ceremonial occasions, when an animal is sacrificed to propitiate the spirits. Fruit trees, including bananas, citrus, and jackfruit, are planted around the village. Eggs are considered a special food, and gifts of eggs are given to a bride's family. Black sticky rice is used for traditional ceremonial meals. It represents safety, so a small packet of black sticky rice is always carried by people when they travel. Kammu meals tend to be rather simple and are seasoned with salt and chilies.

### 13 EDUCATION

Few Kammu have had any formal education in a classroom. Although schools are being extended into Kammu areas, schools remain scarce and tend to have very low standards. Lessons are conducted in Lao, a foreign tongue to many of the pupils. Teachers sent to Kammu areas often consider the assignment a hardship. Compulsory school attendance laws, such as those in Thailand, are rarely enforced and do not apply in any case to children living at a great distance from a school. More than half of the Kammu never attend school. Kammu boys are more likely to be sent to school than girls. Few Kammu are able to afford the cost of sending their children to schools in urban areas.

In villages Kammu receive practical education in daily chores from their parents and older siblings. Boys learn from older male residents, while girls hone their skills with the family's females. Because of the pattern of males leaving the village to work in cities or in northern Thailand for a few years, men are more likely to speak a national language like Thai or Lao.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Kammu have a musical tradition, but instruments are usually played for ceremonial purposes in conjunction with prayer and sacrifice. Their instruments include long wooden drums, kettlegongs, knobbed gongs, cymbals, bamboo beaters, flutes, and buffalo horns. Musical instruments are often ritual gifts. Bamboo clappers are a gift from the bride's family to the family of the groom, while the highly valued long wooden drum is usually a gift given by the groom's family to that of the bride.

There are songs appropriate to various ritual occasions, and different types of music for every season of the farming year. Music thus plays a ritual role in securing a sufficient supply of food.

### 15 WORK

The majority of Kammu are subsistence farmers and fishermen who reside in villages in mountainous regions. While Kammu are unable to accumulate great wealth, most villagers are able to provide for their daily needs, and some villagers are capable of keeping dozens of animals, including highly prized water buffalo. Within the villages, men tend the fields, hunt, and fish, while the women raise children and sew clothes. Children help their parents and both boys and girls may help with the care of young siblings. When the rice develops ears in the autumn, young people stay in small field huts for days to scare away the

birds and wild animals that come to eat the rice. Teenagers enjoy this period away from the village and grownups. Grandparents help with cooking, childcare, and small chores near the house.

In recent decades, Kammu men from Laos have increasingly migrated to Thailand in search of work. Young Kammu men find employment in Thai factories and shops, as well as in the logging industry. During the war years, many youths fled to Thailand to avoid military conscription. Traditionally, men would work abroad until they saved sufficient money for a bride price and then return to their home village, but now many Kammu men have married Thai women and have become Thai citizens.

### 16 SPORTS

The regions of South East Asia that the Kammu reside in are impoverished, and there are no traditions of organized sports among the Kammu. For children, play typically involves preparation for adult tasks. Thus, boys are often found fishing, catching insects, and practicing with bows and arrows, and children of both sexes often swim in rivers and streams.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Singing and storytelling are popular forms of entertainment. Folk tales include creation stories, tales of magic and the supernatural, stories of plants and animals, and tales of mischief and trickery.

Music plays an important role in Kammu ceremonies. During the ritual calling of spirits by shamans, chanting and the playing of gongs are used to communicate with the deceased and natural spirits. Songs and the playing of musical instruments often accompany weddings, the building of new houses, harvests and New Year celebrations. When Kammu entertain guests in their home, grain alcohol is consumed, songs are sung, and musical instruments are played. Bronze drums are often played during ceremonies, especially for summoning rain.

Kammu in urban areas have access to the kinds of entertainment enjoyed by the majority population, including theater, bars, and festivals.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Kammu are very skillful in the use of bamboo, which they use to make a wide variety of objects ranging from baskets, musical instruments, water containers, and snares to a complete house. Traditional Kammu musical instruments (constructed by Kammu villagers) include two kinds of bamboo flutes (pii and tot), lutes (saw), Jew's harps, bamboo beaters (klt), clappers (taaw taaw), gongs, and bronze drums.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Lack of education and geographic isolation has resulted in economic and social stagnation in Kammu populated regions. While the economies of Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and China have experienced double digit growth in the last two decades, the Kammu villages situated in the rural mountains remain underdeveloped and have seen a lack of government investment in infrastructure. The Kammu tradition of slash-and-burn agriculture has fallen out of favor for environmental reasons, and local governments have pressured the Kammu to

resettle in lowland areas. In addition, illegal loggers and corrupt local officials have colluded to expel Kammu villagers from the forests adjoining their villages that have traditionally been used for hunting and gathering. The Kammu still face prejudice and discrimination. Many ethnic Lao still casually use the pejorative term “slave” in speaking of the Kammu and other midland minorities, despite the efforts of the LPDR government to call all people “Lao” and to stress the multiethnic nature of Lao society.

The Kammu who have settled in lowland areas are threatened by cultural assimilation by the majority culture. Kammu children in these regions are educated in the national language and gradually adopt the culture of the dominant group. Acculturation and assimilation are common among Kammu migrants in towns in northern Thailand who work and marry local women. Their children are raised as Thai, and the Kammu migrants adopt the language and culture of the Thai.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In Kammu villages work tends to be gender-specific. Men clear and burn the swidden fields, weave baskets, repair farm tools, care for large animals, trap, and hunt. They are also more likely to be involved in trade, selling livestock, forest products, and, more recently, scrap metal left over from the war. Men often migrate to find work as farmhands on Lao-own farms and as laborers in urban areas. Many Kammu men find work in Thailand, where they can earn comparatively higher wages and purchase goods otherwise unavailable in their home villages. Women cook, care for children, husk rice, haul water, and firewood, care for gardens and pigs and poultry, gather edible plants, weave cloth, and sew. They may engage in small trade with vegetables and chickens. One area of labor where men and women work together is in the planting of crops. Men poke holes in the field to plant seeds, and women follow after to drop in the seed and cover it over. Both sexes weed, although this hard and fairly continuous chore is more likely to be done by women. Both sexes also harvest.

Sexuality is overtly expressed in Kammu folk tale traditions. In the Kammu language, sexual imagery does not elicit shame and folk story tellers freely mention the sexual lives of characters in stories. In one folk tale recorded in Thailand, *The Orphan Makes a Field*, the hero succeeds in successfully tricking his seven wives into going to bed with him. Despite sex not being a taboo subject, Kammu folk tales lack explicit and graphic sexual descriptions.

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—Revised by David Straub

# KARAKALPAKS

**PRONUNCIATION:** kar-uh-kuhl-PAKS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Qoraqolpoqlar

**LOCATION:** Uzbekistan (territory of Karakalpakistan);  
Kazakhstan; Russia; Turkmenistan

**POPULATION:** 350,000

**LANGUAGES:** Karakalpak; Russian  
Religion: Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Karakalpak* means "black hat" in the Karakalpak language. When the ancestors of present-day Karakalpaks (who call themselves *Qoraqolpoqlar*) settled in the area during the 10th and 11th centuries ad, they came upon Turkic Qipchoq (sometimes spelled Kipchak) people, who referred to the newcomers from the Irtysh River areas in southern Siberia as "Karakalpaks," supposedly because they wore black wool or high felt hats. From that time onward, the development of Karakalpak language, religion, and cultural practices has been influenced by the extremes of harsh desert and steppe existence as well as by military attacks by invading peoples such as the Mongols, Timurids, Kalmyks, Khorezmian Uzbeks, and Russians. With the exception of the Russians, who colonized the Karakalpak during the latter half of the 19th century, the other invaders were all Central Asian peoples of similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds who had formed themselves into diverse political states and conquering armies.

Various historical records prove that a Karakalpak people living essentially in today's Karakalpak lands existed by the 16th and 17th centuries. These people became a part of the Noghai horde ("Army" or "Confederacy" in Mongol), whose forefathers had come into the area with Genghis Khan's forces from Mongolia. Scholars today acknowledge that the Karakalpaks are a composite of three cultural-geographical areas: the Khorezm oasis of southern Karakalpakistan; the Qipchoq desert steppe along the lower course of the Syr River, which is a part of Kazakhstan today; and the east European cultural areas including parts of the Ural mountains, the Volga river area, and the North Caucasus mountains.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Karakalpak are a people of Central Asia, who lived within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic of the USSR until it was dissolved in 1991. Today their territory is under the rule of independent Uzbekistan. Approximately 2.3 million people reside in Karakalpakistan, of whom approximately 350,000 are Karakalpaks. Most Karakalpaks live concentrated in the southern part of their republic in the Amu River delta. Other Karakalpak people live in the surrounding countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. Karakalpak territory occupies nearly 40% of Uzbekistan's overall territory. Karakalpakistan (*Qoraqolpoqiston*) lies in the northwestern part of Uzbekistan and is bordered by Kazakhstan to the north and Turkmenistan to the southwest. Much of its geography was dominated until recently by the Aral Sea, which took up a large portion of north-central and northeastern Karakalpakistan. Today, however, the Aral is drying up at a very fast rate.

The Aral Sea desiccation (evaporation) has become an international tragedy, so much so that any mention of the Karakalpaks immediately causes people to ask about the Aral. Indeed, the death of the Aral has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of tens of thousands of Karakalpaks, who depended both directly and indirectly on the sea. Its degradation has affected the lives of nearly 2 million people in both the Karakalpak and Kazak areas. Agricultural chemicals that were transported to the Aral via the Amu and Syr Rivers now blow across the land. Much of the fertilizer, pesticides, and defoliants used in agricultural production for decades eventually washed into the artificial network of canals that has served much of the primary farming lands of Central Asia, and those chemicals were deposited into the Aral Sea. In addition, salts from the sea have blown across farm lands and into local drinking supplies. Although many international agencies and experts have researched and attempted to solve the problem of the slow death of the Aral Sea, no real solution has been found, and health problems and economic decline continue to plague the region.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Karakalpak language is part of the Turkic linguistic family, so it shares structural and grammatical similarities, as well as a vocabulary, with modern languages such as Turkish, Kazak, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbek. However, the Turkic family of languages is quite varied, and differences between them may be as pronounced as differences between the Romance languages. Therefore, there are further linguistic subdivisions. Karakalpak is part of the Western branch of this family and is considered a part of the Noghai-Qipchoq subgroup, so that its roots are found in the languages spoken by much earlier inhabitants of the Karakalpak area. Modern Karakalpak most closely resembles modern Kazak in the north and Khorezmian Uzbek in the south. Although there was no written Karakalpak language until the 1920s, the contemporary language is written in a modified Cyrillic alphabet (the alphabet used by Russians, Serbians, and Bulgarians).

Because language was always learned and passed on orally, literacy among Karakalpaks included a developed knowledge of songs, poems, and tales. Through such artistic oral expression, Karakalpak people were able to preserve their history and customs from generation to generation. This was not merely a matter of repetition and memorization. Those who learned well were able to engage and excite others as they spoke of the subjects and events important to their own people.

Nearly all adult Karakalpaks can read and write their language, and most people learned some Russian in school as part of the Soviet educational legacy. Newspapers, journals, and books are printed in the Karakalpak language. Although Russian remains an important second language for educated Karakalpak people, many young people are now studying other foreign languages such as English, French, and Arabic because they are international languages of commerce and diplomacy.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Folklore is divided into the lyrical tales and epics (*zhyr* and *dostan*), and Karakalpaks consider themselves among the first poets and singers of the steppe. Most folkloric tales deal with realistic matters. In the famous tales of Tarzshi, a bald orphan with few impressive qualities is able to pull the wool over the eyes of greedy and arrogant landlords and corrupt leaders. A



similar set of stories make up the tales of Aldarkose, who is another boy everybody tries to outsmart, but who always comes out on top. There are also allegorical tales about animals such as the cunning fox, who can trick just about anyone and anything. Other tales involve wolves, tigers, and occasionally even God himself.

What makes the epics different from the tales is not only their length and poetic construction, but also the fact that they almost always concern historical events and heroic figures—political leaders and rulers—as well as the mythical origins of Karakalpak triumphs over invaders. The most famous examples of these epics are *Kyrk Qiz*, *Er-Shora*, *Koblan*, and *Maspatsha*. Epic heroes often turn out to be women. In *Kyrk Qiz* (The Forty Maidens), the heroine Gulaim defends her homeland from invading Kalmyks. *Maspatsha* is the story of Aiparshir, a woman of rich beauty and unparalleled courage. Themes and values from Karakalpak life, such as love of one's homeland, defense of one's people, and a willingness to sacrifice on behalf of others, are all emphasized. An epic is typically composed of more than 20,000 lines of verse.

## 5 RELIGION

The religion of the Karakalpaks is Sunni Islam, which is the dominant school of Islamic belief throughout the world. As early as the 7th century, Arabs entered Central Asia to spread and propagate Islam, to which they had converted themselves only a century earlier. The first large-scale conversions in Central Asia were concentrated in cities and oasis areas, and the

process was relatively rapid in comparison to the conversion of Central Asian peoples who lived in more remote or inaccessible areas. Deserts, mountains, and the steppes of Central Asia, historically home to nomadic pastoralist and semi-nomadic peoples such as the Karakalpaks, converted to Islam gradually. Among the Karakalpak, most conversions probably occurred from the 10th to the 13th centuries.

The Karakalpaks observe disciplined piety and have long been influenced by Sufism, which is a very tolerant and ecstatic branch of Islam. Universal Muslim holidays such as Ramadan (the month of fasting) and *Kurban Bayram* (The Feast of the Sacrifice based on Abraham) have long been among the most important. Until the collapse of the USSR and the economic and health consequences associated with the Aral Sea destruction, one could argue that religious practice and teaching played a minor role in the lives of most Karakalpaks. This has begun to change, however, as people search for answers, solutions, and comfort during a terrible period of deprivation and illness. Faith in Soviet Communist ideals is being supplanted by faith in the Muslim religion.

Many Karakalpak beliefs relate to the natural world. These are not a part of the Muslim religion, but rather connect to cults of saints or patrons who watch out for herds, fisherman, farmers, and so on. Many people believe that each type of herd or flock has its own patron. For cattle, the patron is Zangibaba, and people concerned for their herd may visit his grave outside Nukus to pray for help. Another example of a traditional belief here concerns the time at which shepherds release their flocks onto open meadows to graze for the summer. Many will not do so until they have been blessed by women who bring them yellow sashes to tie around their overcoats. They believe this provides protection for their flocks.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Four major nonreligious or state holidays are celebrated by the Karakalpaks and Uzbeks together. *Novruz* (New Day), celebrated throughout Iran, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, coincides with the beginning of spring on March 20 or 21. Although many Central Asians believe *Novruz* to be a Muslim holiday, its origins date back more than 2,000 years, long before there was a Muslim religion. The holiday is marked by festivals, contests, game playing, and especially eating. Schoolchildren celebrate with their teachers and put on a variety of skits. Afterwards, communities gather in the central square of their towns to continue the celebration. People dress in their very best clothing. Speeches commemorate the cultural heritage of the Central Asian peoples who are linked through this holiday. The favorite food of this holiday is *sumalak*, which is made from young wheat plants that are boiled communally in huge cauldrons. It takes about 24 hours to prepare this sweet, tasty pudding. Each year, one family will take on the responsibility of preparing enough *sumalak* for several families, and members of each family gather where the *sumalak* is being prepared, to take turns stirring the thick, bubbling mass and feeding the enormous fire needed to keep it boiling for so many hours. *Sumalak* parties are a standard part of the *Novruz* festivities. This particular food is considered vitamin-rich and portends the coming of all the new agricultural foods that warmer weather will bring.

Victory Day celebrations commemorating World War II take place on May 9. This day is associated with both solemn



nity and merriment. Parades of military personnel and World War II veterans take place. Later, people go off with family and friends to celebrations of their own. Victory Day is celebrated by all the former Soviet peoples because of the enormous sacrifices and suffering they endured in their defeat of Nazi Germany.

Uzbekistan Independence Day, September 1, has been celebrated since 1991. This day features parades and carnival-like events in all cities and towns throughout Uzbekistan. Political speeches, poems, songs, dances, and games are featured. Everyone in the community participates in the town square and outside municipal administrative buildings. Food is served to all, and most people dress in fine clothes out of respect for and pride in the new independent status of their nation.

Constitution Day, December 8, is another holiday that commemorates the creation of the Uzbekistan constitution in 1992. Most people treat this day simply as one to relax, and most workplaces and businesses are closed.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Parents with newborns visit relatives constantly for the first few months as they introduce the infant far and wide. Boys undergo circumcision at approximately age five, and a big celebration known as the *sunnat toi* occurs.

The most major event of adulthood is one's wedding. Called the *kelin toi*, this is the biggest celebration and rite of passage an individual ordinarily experiences. Marking the joining of families and the continuation of family lines, the *kelin toi* is marked by feasts, dances, music, and speeches that continue for days at various locations of both the groom and bride's families.

Death and funerals are marked by ritual wailings and outpourings of grief at the home of the deceased. Mourners come and cry purposely to empathize and commiserate with the bereaved. Afterward a local clergyman called a *molla* leads a procession of men or women (depending upon the sex of the deceased) to the local cemetery, where the closest relatives perform the actual burial after prayers are said.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is customary for one person approaching another at rest or in a stationary position to offer the first greeting. This practice is typical of Karakalpaks and other Central Asian semi-nomads. Typically, the greeting is "*Assalomu alaikum!*" (Arabic for "May peace be upon you!"). The person being greeted responds with, "*Valaikum assalom!*" ("And may peace be upon you, too!") Then men will shake hands, using either one or two hands, depending upon their personal closeness or the respect they have for one another. Women typically hug one another after greeting. Ordinarily, men and women may exchange greetings, but there will be no further physical contact between them. A rapid succession of questions concerning health and family usually follows. A younger person typically bows slightly and may cover the lower part of the chest with the right hand to show reverence for an older person. Respect for older people, even those who are only a few years older, is an extremely serious matter in Central Asia. Another common gesture, associated with leave-taking, is for the person leaving to wrap his arms around himself as he nods to the person exiting. This is a gesture of deference and respect.

Visiting neighbors, friends, and family members is an essential part of Karakalpak life. It expands the concept of the home. Karakalpaks enjoy guests and, like other Central Asians, are always ready to welcome any number of guests into their homes. When visiting, Karakalpaks always bring presents or food. Neighbors constantly visit with one another to chat and snack, and sometimes to borrow food or bring food to families who may be in need. Dating, especially among teenagers and young adults, is rare among the Karakalpaks, save for in large cities such as Nukus. Ordinarily, parents keep a careful watch over the children's outside activities.

The health of the Karakalpak population began a steady decline more than 30 years ago. All of the problems have been associated with the drying of the Aral Sea, intensive irrigation for cotton, and the use of pesticides such as DDT and defoliants. The residues from these chemicals, along with the salts from the evaporating sea, have led to a variety of cancers, eye illnesses, internal organ poisonings, and so on. Hospital facilities are poorly staffed and stocked, and neonatal care is practically nonexistent. The major result of the ecological devastation is that Karakalpaks have moved away from the worst zones, especially near the sea, to other cities in Uzbekistan, including the capital Tashkent.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The economic deterioration of post-Soviet Karakalpak life has affected nearly everyone, and few people are able to afford more than the bare essentials such as tea, rice, vegetables, occasional meat, and the most necessary housewares and clothing. It used to be that people spent a great deal on wedding parties, but even those elaborate celebrations have become a thing of the past. Today most of the monies are spent on foodstuffs, and the diet is heavy in carbohydrates, including rice, bread, pasta, and potatoes.

The people of Karakalpakistan suffer from acute health problems due to the spread of fertilizers, pesticides, and defoliants that have been blown about from the dry parts of the Aral Sea bed. These chemicals were transported to the Aral via the Amu and Syr Rivers, the main sources for artificial irrigation throughout much of Central Asia. Diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, and leprosy have increased at unprecedented rates among the Karakalpak compared to other peoples of the former Soviet Union. The latest statistics show that more than 70% of Karakalpaks suffer poor health and illnesses. Karakalpakistan once had the highest growth rate of any Soviet territory, but it now has the highest death rate.

Traditionally, Karakalpaks lived in flat, clay homes resembling those of southwestern Native Americans. Most homes had two or three central rooms with an attached kitchen area. The house would be surrounded by a wall of mud that enclosed a small garden plot. Within the enclosure, there was also space for the dome-shaped felt tent, known as a *yurt*. Yurts contain a wooden-lattice frame over which huge pieces of felt are thrown and then carefully arranged. They are ideal for summer living, because they keep people cool indoors and they keep mosquitoes away. The felt acts as a good insulator. Inside Karakalpak homes, some European-style furniture is found, but most people relax and sleep on thick, dense quilts called *kurpas*. Kurpas are often placed on raised platforms built into the home, and this is where a family will take its meals, listen to music, and watch television. Kurpas are easily moved and stored. Large



Young women who have been affected by agricultural chemical and salt damage stand for the camera in Karakalpakistan, Uzbekistan. (© Kazuyoshi Nomachi/Corbis)

wooden cabinets known as *sandal* are used as storage chests. Sometimes the sandals are decorated with carvings or painted designs.

Buses have served as the chief means for traveling from village to village as well as between cities and villages. Developed rail travel also exists, but it is more expensive, less frequent, and does not make nearly the number of stops as buses do. Uzbekiston Havo Yolari is the new national airline company, and flights from major Uzbekistani cities such as Tashkent, Andijon, and Samarqand to Nukus are available, although they are too expensive for the average citizen. During a period when gasoline and spare parts are increasingly expensive and hard to come by, many Karakalpak people are turning to bicycles, piling into friends' cars, or riding on the backs of motorcycles.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Karakalpak families are generally large, with anywhere from 4 to 10 children; however, most women prefer to have 4 or 5 children. Extended family living is common, and a family of four generations may reside in a single home. Beyond the extended family is the *koshe*, a loose organization uniting a number of families who claim descent from a common male ancestor four or five generations ago. The *koshe* enables people to claim a common territory. Several *koshe* make up an *uru*, a kind of

clan. One finds these formations on modern Karakalpak collective farms today. More than 20 clans claim origins to ancient tribes that are among the ethnographic groups of today's Karakalpaks. People marry exogamously, which means to people outside of their own clans. This may be very difficult for the brides, who often are treated as servants initially by their new in-laws.

The residence patterns after marriage are uxorilocal, which means that the bride moves in with her husband's family. This often makes the situation for young wives difficult as the husband's mother often rules her life with a strong hand. In the domestic sphere, women do most of the work that deals with cooking, cleaning, and rearing children. Women work outside of the home, too, in agricultural fields and as teachers, doctors, accountants, and so on. The working sphere for men is in agriculture and administration, but men are also usually responsible for most market shopping, the preparation of certain feast dishes, and fixing up or repair work that needs to be done around the house, especially electrical or carpentry work.

Girls marry early, usually from the age of 16, and these marriages are arranged through consenting sets of parents. Women are given dowries by their parents and are presented with all sorts of bride gifts by the groom's parents, including clothing, porcelain tea sets, jewelry, and household wares. Boys

and men are usually of the same age or a bit older than the girls they marry. Although polygyny (the practice of marrying more than one woman) is illegal, some men do it secretly. On the whole, this is rare because it costs a great deal. A second wife entails a great deal of extra economic support.

Karakalpaks may keep dogs or cats, but they don't treat them as pets. They are instead working domestic animals, serving the purposes of guard duty and pest control. Some men train eagles to hunt rabbits and other birds on the steppe and in the Kyzyl Kum (Red Sand) desert.

## 11 CLOTHING

Karakalpaks often wear a mix of traditional and European-style clothing. Boys do not wear shorts, even in the hottest weather. Girls never wear dresses cut much above their knees; nor will they wear sleeveless dresses. Some sort of headwear for both men and women is almost always essential due to the extreme temperatures and merciless sun. Men wear silk or cotton embroidered skullcaps (*duppi*) or thick sheep hair hats (the namesake *karakalpak*). Women wear long cotton or woolen scarves (*rumol*) that cover their heads, ears, backs, and shoulders. The usual foot coverings for older people are leather boots and rubbers (*etik va kalosh*), whereas younger people wear more fashionable sandals, sneakers, and dress shoes.

*Koilek* (a long, loose white shirt with an open collar and no buttons) and loose trousers tucked into boots compose the man's typical summer outfit. If men spend a great deal of time outdoors during the winter months watching cattle or flocks of sheep, they wear an enormously heavy *pustin*, which is a sheepskin and sheep hair overcoat with extremely long sleeves. Lighter, long quilted coats known as *sholpan* are worn around the home and outdoors when the weather is not quite so cold. These come in numerous colors and patterns.

Women wear the *kiimeshek*—white is worn by older women and red by the younger. This is a long dress with a head covering but no sleeves whatsoever. It has a cape-like quality and is made of wool with geometrical patterns. Tunic-like shirts and baggy trousers are also typical women's garments. Many Karakalpak women today wear the famously colorful *atlas* tie-dyed silk dresses in summer. These patterns and styles come from the Uzbeks.

## 12 FOOD

Historically, the Karakalpak diet is quite varied. People have tended to rely on grains, especially rice, sorghum, barley, and millet. From these grains, wonderful breads, noodles, and dumplings are made. Bread-baking (*Nan-iapish*) is done in the *tandir*, the ubiquitous outdoor, spherical oven that is used throughout Central and South Asia. Women stick bread dough on the internal curved clay walls of the fiery ovens, and when the bread is ready, it practically falls off the sides of the oven.

Fruits and vegetables, while not quite as plentiful in other oases areas of Uzbekistan, still include onions, carrots, plums, pears, grapes, apricots, and all kinds of melons and squashes. Pumpkin is often included in turnovers prepared in the *tandir*, and they are known as *samsa*. Milk products include yogurt, butter, cream, and curd cheeses. Cow's milk is the preferred type.

Meats have never been a part of ordinary daily fare but were eaten in honor of guests or during wedding and male circumcision parties. Boiled beef, mutton, and smoked horsemeat are

among the favorites. Beef and mutton are also ingredients in *palov*, which is the favorite dish of millions of Central Asians. The best *palov* recipes consist of rice, meat, carrots, garlic, steamed quinces, and mutton tail fat (*dumba*) (The fat ranks as a real delicacy.) In the past, Aral fish were very popular, and fried dishes included bream, grey mullet, wild pike, and sheat fish. Today breakfast is an important meal, but it is often very simple. Children often head off to school with tea and bread in their stomachs and occasionally cream, raisins, grapes, or a few almonds. Summer and fall breakfasts feature a richer variety.

Following is a recipe for *durama* (shredded mutton):

Use sorghum groats and mutton and boil separately. Next, the men begin carefully shredding the meat. Then carefully shred the boiled dumplings separately. After that, carefully combine your shredded foods. You are now ready to add a bit of broth to the top, and for extra flavor add *duzlyk*, a mix of chopped green onions and boiled fat.

As Muslims, Karakalpaks do not eat certain foods, with pork being one of the most prominent dietary restrictions. Other food taboos have little to do with religion, but more to do with customs. For example, a pregnant woman must not eat a rabbit's head for fear her newborn will have a harelip, and the consumption of camel meat for a pregnant woman may result in a longer than normal term pregnancy. Children must not use large spoons for eating liquids, as the result may be marriage to someone with a large and unattractive nose.

Karakalpaks eat most meals with their hands, so ritual washing beforehand is imperative. After three washings, one must use one's own hands to wipe off the excess water. To shake off the excess is a sign that one's hands are dirty and one is spreading uncleanness. No one should begin to eat until the eldest person at table begins.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Soviet educational system remains in place, so almost all children receive a high school education. Some then go on for technical and university training. Karakalpakistan has only one university, located in Nukus. Recently, *medresses*, schools for higher religious instruction, have opened. Most parents want both boys and girls to obtain higher education, or receive some technical training, if possible. A small percentage of parents would rather their girls get married and start a family directly after finishing high school. In recent years, Karakalpaks have received less and less education in Russian and more in English as their primary foreign language. However, the overall education decline since the Soviet period has led many to speak only Karakalpak or Karakalpak and some Uzbek.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

For a people who had no literacy until relatively recently, the Karakalpaks have a rich oral tradition of folktales and epic poems. Select and talented individuals would roam from village to village as bards, reciting stories and verses to music performed on the stringed instruments such as the two-stringed *dutar*, and the *qobyz* and *ghypzhek*, which were played with bows. In fact, music, singing, and storytelling were usually one in the same thing.

Two of the greatest traditional Karakalpak literary figures—Azhiniaz Kosybai uly and Berdakh Kargabai uly—have been

ranked among the greatest Central Asian litterateurs. Both poets lived during the 19th century. Azhiniyaz's famous work is *Boz-Atau*, a poem that recalls the capture and enslavement of the Karakalpak people at the hands of Khivan (of the Khivan Khanate or Kingdom, located in Khorezm) and Turkmen invaders. Berdakh-shair wrote many verses dedicated to the dark side of life that affected poor people. Modern writers have adopted Western literary genres such as novels, short stories, and plays.

Dance was never a part of Karakalpak cultural heritage, although the Soviets created a dance for them.

## 15 WORK

Prior to the Soviet period, the economy of the Karakalpaks was characterized primarily by agriculture, cattle herding, and fishing, depending on the terrain and climate of a particular area. Those living in the oases near the Amu river in the south practiced agriculture, which included cultivation of grains and fruits, such as rice, sorghum, wheat, millet, melons, and squashes. Those living out on the steppe and in desert regions kept herds of sheep, goats, camels, and cattle. Those living in the Aral region fished.

The majority of work in Karakalpakistan is agricultural, and almost 70% of the population is rural. The only real industrial jobs are centered around the cotton industry, and these jobs include ginning, baling, and pressing cotton seeds for their oil.

Silk manufacture also plays a significant role in the local agricultural economy. Farming people feed silkworms mulberry leaves from nearby trees. The worms in turn create cocoons, which people then bring to regional cocoon collection centers. Profits, depend on the quality of the cocoons. Silkworm feeding is very arduous. The insects require constant attention, and most people would rather not spend the long hours this work requires, but in today's economy every extra bit of income is vital. Death of the fisheries industry has led to rising unemployment.

Agricultural workers work 12 to 15 hours a day at harvest time. They will work seven days a week, no matter how inclement the weather. Work for the Karakalpaks is cyclical: during late fall, winter, and part of spring, work is minimal and takes place primarily around the household. Professionals and administrative workers work year-round and receive about six weeks paid vacation each year taken during July and August.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports for the young are similar to those of Westerners. Volleyball and soccer are popular at school, and boys also test their strength at a kind of wrestling that involves grabbing one another around the back of the neck and thigh. The object is to force one's opponent to lose his grip, and thus his balance. This is known as *Qurash*. Unfortunately, girls and women are rarely if ever encouraged in sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Movies and television are popular and have become dominated by imports from the West, especially action movies and Latin American soap operas. Karakalpak television tends toward the lackluster, with much in the way of folk, music, documentaries about refining cotton planting techniques, and long-winded talk shows with camera-shy scientific guests. Theatrical plays

on humorous or historical themes that are Karakalpak-centric are popular and well-attended.

Adults entertain themselves by getting together with friends at rap sessions known as *gap*, which means Ötalk. Ö Here men and women meet separately, perhaps twice monthly, to eat, play games, sing songs, catch up on community happenings, and offer advice to one another.

Pop music is as important to Karakalpak young people as it is throughout the world. Both international and local stars are widely appreciated. Iulduz Usmanova is one of the most popular young singers, and many of her songs deal with the human condition in contemporary society.

Children enjoy an elaborate game of riddles called *askiia*. Two children try to outsmart one another with a series of questions about a particular thing. One child starts with a description, and the other must ask relevant questions about what is being described or else be quickly lead astray by the describer.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Some of the greatest traditional representations of Karakalpak folk arts are in the applied arts, especially in rug-making and jewelry production. Most rug materials are used to adorn yurts. A number of geometrical and antler-horn motifs reflect regional styles that in some way parallel the development of famous Turkmen tribal rugs. Karakalpak rugs are narrow and not usually used as floor coverings. They are hung as doors to the entrance of yurts and used as wall coverings or saddlebags. Vibrant blues, yellows, and greens are common colors.

Jewelry is mostly silver, consisting of various plaited or mesh patterns from which baubles dangle. Muted blue and red stones, such as lapis lazuli, are often inlaid. Necklaces, earrings, and bracelets are most common. Men never wear jewelry.

Men specialize as smiths, woodworkers (especially carvers), and shoemakers. Hat makers may be either men or women, but almost all sewn skullcaps are made by women. Some of the most revered craftsmanship goes into the woodcarving of house doors and on the top and bottom of building support beams. Central Asian wood carving distinguishes itself by unique floral and geometric patterns that require incredible dexterity and concentration on the part of the craftsmen.

Hobbies are common among Karakalpaks as they are among Westerners. Stamps, coins, pop star photos, and tape and CD collections are the stuff of young people's hobbies. Some young people have pen pals.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

During the Soviet period, agriculture and fisheries were developed and emphasized to the detriment of cattle rearing and the raising of food crops. In agriculture, cotton became a major industrial cash crop at the expense of food crops and the area's water supply, much of which was used for the intensive irrigation required for cotton growing. During the 1950s, the Aral Sea provided about 7% of all the fish consumed in the USSR. Unfortunately, a non-diversified economy, combined with the intensity of the effort, has left Karakalpakistan in a ruined state. Few people have safe drinking water, and local food production is inadequate. Not only do people suffer from acute health problems associated with their poisoned environment and inadequately balanced diet, but alcoholism and drug addiction (primarily heroin) are growing problems for the middle aged and young, many of whom suffer from depres-

sion. Criminal activity—from petty theft to organized drug smuggling and mafia-style murders—is dramatically higher than it was before the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The Uzbekistani state is itself a police state, and the government is authoritarian. There is little tolerance for dissent with official views or for independent political activity. Since 2001 the Uzbek government has become increasingly repressive toward any expressions of economic or religious expression, and minority groups, such as the Karakalpak, face discrimination. For this reason, when Karakalpaks are among Uzbeks they often try to hide their identity. For the tens of thousands of impoverished Karakalpaks, the only real relief from the stagnation of the economy in Uzbekistan has been to seek work abroad; labor migration is the latest social phenomenon in this area. Unconfirmed reports indicate that more than half of the able-bodied population spends at least some part of the year working abroad, in countries such as Kazakhstan and Russia. The future of the population of Karakalpakistan—especially its cultural continuity—hangs in the balance now, and the near future does not seem to be particularly positive. The government of Uzbekistan has shown very little inclination to maintain the distinctiveness and territorial integrity of these people.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Because Karakalpak culture is similar to the Kazakhs, there historically has been slightly greater gender equity among Karakalpak men and women than one finds, say, among the Uzbeks. Nevertheless, older girls and women are hardly treated as equals by men. Domestic chores still remain the purview of women, and, as mentioned above, Karakalpak women fare poorly when first married, especially as they no longer live among their own clansmen. While most girls receive an education just as boys do, there is little expectation that girls should go on to university or enter professions, although one certainly finds more professional women in the capital Nukus as opposed to the countryside.

The historical and Soviet gender relations have given way of late because of the mass exodus of Karakalpak owing to labor migration. This process causes the breakdown of gender relations to some extent as women necessarily are more in control of what they do if they decide to go abroad for work. While migration gives women greater autonomy as well as wealth, its effects also can cause havoc within families, especially when children have to do without a mother and father for lengthy periods of time.

One phenomenon that has been on the increase since the late 1990s, and that we also see among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, is bride kidnapping. Just as the term implies, young women are taken by men in order to marry with no courtship or formal family arrangements. To some degree, this is due to the terrible financial predicament most people find themselves in. Weddings are costly affairs, and by kidnapping a young woman many of the expenses of traditional weddings can be avoided, and a family gets a new member for its own workforce. Still, young women can and do successfully resist these efforts. If the value of education continues to wane, it is unlikely to see any gains in gender equity soon.

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—by R. Zanca

# KARENS

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-RENS

**LOCATION:** Southern and eastern Myanmar (Burma); Thailand

**POPULATION:** 5 to 7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Pwo and Sgaw dialects of Karen; Burmese

**RELIGION:** Buddhism; animism; Christianity (Baptist, Catholicism)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Karens are a large and dispersed ethnic group of Southeast Asia. They trace their origins to the Gobi Desert, Mongolia, or Tibet. Karens settled, perhaps as far back as the 8th century, in Myanmar's southern Irrawaddy Delta area and in the hills along the Salween River in eastern Myanmar. In the 1700s, Karens also began living in neighboring Siam (now called Thailand).

There are numerous Karen sub-groups: the Pwo Karens (mostly delta rice-growers), the Sgaw Karens of the mountains; and the Kayahs (also called Karennis), Pa-Os, and Kayans (also called Padaungs), who live in the Karenni and Shan States of Myanmar. These varied people lived mainly in tribal societies, governed by chiefs or princes. They sometimes came into conflict with the Burmese (Burman) dynastic rulers, or with other ethnic groups inclined to wage war.

The advent of British colonization in the mid-to-late 19th century brought a new sense of security to the Karens. Contact with American and European Christian missionaries, and associated literacy and education, was welcomed. The British administrators recruited many Karens into their police and armed forces. When the Second World War came to Myanmar, those Karens became loyal guerrilla fighters for the Allies against Japanese occupiers.

As Britain granted Myanmar independence after the war, Karen politicians hoped for their own nation. Karennis, who had never ceded authority, enjoying "protectorate" status with the British Empire, also expected their nationhood to be recognized. Instead Karens, along with other ethnic populations, were to be absorbed into the new Union of Burma (renamed Union of Myanmar in 1989.) Problems began almost immediately, when troops of the predominantly Burmese (Burman) government killed Karen villagers. A Karen insurgency sprang up and rapidly gained momentum until it threatened to seize control of the capital, Rangoon. The Karen rebels were driven back by the government troops, and the military came to dominate the country, eventually taking over power in 1962, pledging to quell rebellion and unify the country by force.

Counter-insurgency tactics intended to subdue the rebellion by denying it support from civilians actually drove more Karens into joining the rebel Karen National Union, and other Karen peoples such as the Karennis and Pa-Os took up arms against the central military government as well. A consistent pattern of deliberate human rights violations by the government forces against the ethnic minority civilians has continued to this day, driving tens of thousands of Karens to Thailand as refugees and making the Karen conflict the world's longest running insurgency. Sporadic attempts to broker a ceasefire arrangement between the Karen National Union and Myanmar government never bore results, and low-intensity rural guer-



rilla warfare continued into the 21st century. General Bo Mya, the longtime chairman of the Karen National Union died at age 79 in 2006. In 2008 Padoe Mahn Sha, the rebel group's Secretary General was assassinated near the Thailand/Myanmar border.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Estimates of the Karen population of Myanmar vary greatly, as there has been no census in decades. Perhaps as many as 6 million Pwo and Sgaw Karens live there, along with some 150,000 Kayahs, 600,000 Pa-Os, 80,000 Kayans, and other related groups. Another 400,000 Karen-ethnic peoples have roots in Thailand, and thousands of others live there as refugees. In the early 21st century, Karen refugees have increasingly settled in the United States, with a large community coming to live in and around St. Paul, Minnesota.

Karen people live in several parts of southern and eastern Myanmar. The largest Karen population is in the Irrawaddy Delta area, a vast agricultural lowland whose main city is Bassein. On 2 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy Delta region, killing tens of thousands of people, making over a million homeless, and flooding rice-growing land with saltwater. Myanmar's government delayed aid delivery after the cyclone, and there were reports that Karen villagers in the Delta were discriminated against in relief distribution.

Another significant region for the Karens is the eastern border with Thailand, where the Dawna Mountain Range stretches down to the Tenasserim River. The area along the Salween also is inhabited by Karens. Thaton, Papun and Pa-an are towns with major Karen populations. Kayahs and Kayans

live in a rugged, mountainous area where the main city is Loi-kaw. The Pa-Os live on the plateau of the southern Shan State. According to international human rights organizations, as many as 3,000 villages in predominantly Karen areas of eastern Myanmar were destroyed by Myanmar government forces between 1996 and 2006, with the civilian inhabitants hiding as internally displaced people or fleeing as refugees to neighboring Thailand.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The languages of the Karens are generally considered to be of the Tibeto-Burman family, and the main dialects are Pwo and Sgaw. Many Karen people in isolated hill areas remain illiterate, and those in the Delta region often can speak only Burmese. Their language does, however, remain a feature of Karen cultural pride. Baptist missionaries developed scripts based on Burmese for Pwo Karen (with 25 letters) and for other Karen languages. An old Pwo script known as “chicken scratch,” because of the shapes of its letters, was devised by Karen Buddhists as well.

In Sgaw Karen, an informal greeting (“How’s it going?”) is “*Madee leh?*” and a farewell is “*Leh mu mu*” (“Go pleasantly”). “Thank you” in Sgaw Karen is “*Dah bluet.*”

### 4 FOLKLORE

Karen folklore impressed early Christian missionaries with its similarity to the Book of Genesis in the Bible. The tribal mythology also told of the Karen language being kept in a book, which was lost in the mass migration south from “the river of sand.” There is a sense in their old stories of being preyed upon by other ethnic groups, and of wishing to regain some past glories through miracles or supernaturally gifted leaders. Sometimes Karens have become cult followers of messianic leaders who assure them that special clothing or tattoos will make them impervious from harm. In traditional animist, spirit-worshipping belief systems, the Karens must make offerings to natural forces such as “the Lord of Land and Water.” Even Christian Karens still have their skin adorned with tattoos as a form of magical protection. Buddhist Karens often wear amulets (small metal, stone, or clay Buddha images) around their necks.

The Kayan people are known for the neck rings made of brass worn by girls and women. Over time, more and more coils are added to the rings, which pushes the collarbones down, giving the appearance of an elongated neck (hence their Burmese name, Padaung, meaning “long-neck”). Kayan society is traditionally a matriarchy and the rings around necks, arms, and knees are sometimes explained as a traditional protection against tiger bites. Many Kayans have become refugees in recent years, and women with neck rings have been exploited as “freak show” tourist attractions in Thailand and Myanmar.

### 5 RELIGION

Most of the Pwo and Sgaw Karens are Buddhists or animists. There are also significant populations of Christians, mainly Baptists, and the Karen National Union leadership is largely Christian. Many Kayahs and Kayans are Catholic, and most of the Pa-Os are Buddhists.

There is considerable interplay between animist rituals and Buddhist practices among the Karens. Animists believe

in helpful female guardian spirits called “*ther myng khae,*” the “lord of land and water,” and local spirits, as well as beneficial and malicious ghosts. The Christians emphasize Bible study and prayer services with hymn singing. Villages tend to be predominantly one or the other of the three religions, while there is a mixture of faiths and houses of worship in the towns. Christian Karens have tried to convert the Buddhists and animists, and Myanmar’s military government has encouraged conflict between Buddhist Karens and the Christian-led Karen National Union.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Karen New Year in January is celebrated as a national holiday in Myanmar and is often the occasion for traditional dances and music. Christian Karens celebrate Christmas with parties and caroling trips from village to village. Buddhist Karens hold festivals to mark their religious New Year (mid-spring) and the end of Lent (post-monsoon). Animists hold crop-protection festivals during the monsoon and after harvest.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional Karen society has various taboos for pregnant women, such as not drinking liquor and not going to funerals. Births usually take place at home, assisted by family members or a village “midwife” (often a man). After the birth, the mother eats a special diet of rice and chicken, and the baby has strings tied around its wrists to protect it from evil spirits. Deaths in childhood and infant mortality are very common among the Karens. In rural areas there is little understanding of hygiene and mother-child nutrition, but Karen medical practitioners are working to spread information that can save lives.

Among Buddhist Karens, young boys often become novice monks for a short period of time. Teenaged Karen boys sometimes get tattooed with magical symbols to show their bravery and protect them from harm. Kayan girls may begin to wear coils of brass around their necks as young as six years old, and keep adding to the coils during their teenage years until the neck piece stretches as long as 10 in.

Karens have a variety of funeral customs, according to their religions. The animist Karens believe in an afterlife and dress the corpse to be accepted in the land of *Khu See-du*, the Lord of the Dead. The body may be cremated or buried. Buddhist Karens hold cremation ceremonies with prayers to ease the deceased person into the next incarnation. Christian Karens hold a funeral prayer service and bury the body, usually with a wooden cross to mark the grave.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

For a polite greeting, a Karen holds his or her right elbow in their left hand, and shakes hands with the right. They use the same gesture to give or offer objects to other people. Introductions will include the honorifics Karens use with their names, usually “Saw” for men and “Naw” for women.

Karens are very hospitable and will expect any guests to eat with them and, if possible, stay overnight or longer at their house. In traditional Karen bamboo houses, sleeping quarters for guests are on the verandah.

Boys and girls usually meet in school, at Buddhist festivals, or in Christian youth groups. In traditional animist villages, funerals have been the scene of much boy-girl socializing.



*A Karen family, refugees from Burma, came to Thailand to escape the civil war and now reside in Thailand. (AP Images/Ben Bohane)*

When a young couple gets involved, love letters and secret messages are often exchanged. Sometimes a game is played between groups of boys and girls, with the boys asking poetic questions and the girls replying with a rhyming answer. The questions and answers are about romance, but are subtle and symbolic.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Warfare and forced relocation campaigns by the Myanmar government have displaced much of Myanmar's Karen population. Villagers are compelled to leave their family homes and move to resettlement camps near government army bases (where they are used for forced labor), or they flee to forest areas or across the border to Thailand. As they leave their towns and villages, the rate of infection with malaria, typhoid, cholera, hepatitis, dysentery, and other diseases increases. Many Karens, especially children, die from such infectious illnesses. Several foreign non-governmental aid agencies assist Karen refugees in Thailand's camps, and some aid groups of Karen exiles and foreigners risk crossing the Thailand/Myanmar border to try to help displaced Karens hiding out inside Myanmar. Also, a few foreign aid organizations have attempted to reduce diseases such as malaria among Karens in the Delta region.

Malnutrition is widespread among the Karens, many of whom subsist on rice with chili pepper, and perhaps some fish

sauce and greens gathered from the forests. Anemia and vitamin deficiency are common. In addition to forced relocation, the widespread taking of farmers for forced labor by the government military has made it hard for them to grow their crops. Rampant deforestation as the Myanmar government sold off frontier teak forests to Thai logging firms has decreased the Karens' sources of wild game and edible and medicinal plants, as well as causing climate changes and landslides.

For many generations, the Karen people had lived in harmony with the forest. Only if teak trees reached a certain size could they be harvested. They were replanted and the logs were transported by elephants and river rafts. Forest-dwelling Karens built their houses from bamboo with some wood, on stilts with a thatched roof. The stilts are said to be especially high if it is the house of an elephant-owning family, so that the verandah can be used for loading and unloading the animal. In the bamboo houses, the family will sit and sleep on woven mats on the floor. In larger houses of teak or other wood, they sit on benches at tables and sleep on raised wooden beds with mosquito netting. Baths are taken, wearing sarongs, in a river or by pouring water from a village pump or an urn of rainwater. Sections of bamboo or plastic buckets are used to carry water from nearby streams for cooking and washing. Toilets are usually small pit latrines with a bamboo shelter.

The ox-cart is still the usual means of transport for goods and people, along with motorized river long-boats, motor-



bikes, and elephants. The Karens are well known for their work with elephants, which they capture, train, and use for hauling and transport. Pa-Os and Kayahs often raise ponies or mules for transportation.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditionally, either a boy or girl can propose marriage, and the whole village is allowed a say in whether their marriage would be appropriate and not offensive to any spirits. Weddings are festive occasions when both the bride's and groom's villages come together. The bride changes from her unmarried woman's long dress to a married woman's two-part outfit. Marriage is considered to be for life, and among Karens of all faiths, adultery is considered extremely taboo—as an unnatural act that can bring catastrophe on the whole village. Karens have an average of four or five children, but infant and child mortality rates are very high.

Karen families keep dogs for hunting and as pets. Sometimes they have birds or baby forest animals such as squirrels or gibbons. Karen elephant tamers “adopt” one elephant, train it, and take care of it for life.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Many Karen men now wear mass-produced shirts and T-shirts with trousers, and women wear sarongs of factory-woven batik cloth. Younger women sometimes wear blue jeans or long skirts, especially if they are in a town or city. However, traditional Karen clothing is still popular, especially in mountain areas and for special occasions. Traditionally, Pwo and Sgaw Karens wear tunics and sarongs of homespun cotton, dyed red, blue, and black. Men and married women wear a loose tunic over a wrapped sarong. The women's tunics are often elaborately embroidered with colored thread and seed-beads. The men's are plainer with fringed hems. Unmarried girls wear simple long white dresses called “*hsay mo htoo*” in Sgaw Karen. Men and women often wear turbans, and Pwo men sometimes have very long hair worn in side swept ponytails or loose. Pwo and Sgaw women wear masses of bead necklaces and a great many silver bracelets on their wrists and upper arms.

The Kayans wear similar clothing to the Pwo Karens, but usually in natural off-white homespun, and the Pa-O people dress in black cotton tunics with trousers or sarongs. Kayahs are often known as Karennis (“red Karens”) because of their predominantly red homespun clothing. The women wear a short sarong wrapped up over one shoulder with a belt or sash and cords of thin black rattan wrapped around their legs.

### **12 FOOD**

Karens are known for eating a huge variety of foods, including jungle products such as snake, bat, monkey, grubs, bee larvae, ants, palm sugar, wild honey, forest herbs, frog, and lizard. Many types of birds and fish are consumed, and Karens raise chickens, ducks, pigs, cattle, corn, and pumpkins for food. A favorite dish for Karens in the forest is *takataw*, made by adding a handful of rice and some shreds of dried meat (such as venison or wild boar) to boiling water, letting it cook until the meat and rice are soft like porridge, and then adding some chopped vegetables.

Because of deforestation, crop confiscation, and rural displacement, nowadays many Karens have trouble obtaining enough nutrition for their families. Karen refugees and poor villagers

typically live on rice, chili peppers, some fish paste, and whatever greens they can gather. The Karens normally eat several helpings of rice at meals and for snacks. They eat mostly polished white rice now, which is less nutritious than red or brown rice. For flavoring, many people use monosodium glutamate powder, which comes from Thailand.

Karens often chew betel nut, which comes from a species of palm and is combined with leaves and lime paste; it is a mild stimulant and stains the mouth bright red.

### **13 EDUCATION**

During the British colonial period, missionaries in Bassein and elsewhere helped the Karens to start Christian-staffed village schools, which were supported by Buddhist and animist parents as well. Myanmar's military government took over those schools in the 1960s, changing to a national rather than Karen curriculum. In Karen National Union-held areas, a series of schools up to the secondary level was established, but most of these are gone now, as the rebels have lost most of their territory to the government. Even in refugee camps, the Karens try to have formal education for their children, but those makeshift schools, like the refugee health clinics, have mostly been destroyed in cross-border raids. Textbooks, often decades old, and school materials are in very short supply, and what schools there are tend to be understaffed. Another difficulty in Karen education is that the schoolchildren are often traumatized by their experience of human rights abuse and are malnourished and beset by malaria and other diseases. In recent years, some young people have been able to receive “backpack medical” or alternative technology training while in refugee camps.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Karen music includes traditional songs (many of which were love songs) and Western-influenced Christian hymns. In the rebel areas there are also political songs and military marching music played by drum and flute corps. Music that uses the repetitive beat of metal gongs accompanies such dances as the rice-planting dance and the bamboo dance, as well as wedding processions. In the bamboo dance, sets of 8 to 12 long bamboo poles are placed in a grid. Participants kneel on the ground and bang the poles together in time to the music, while dancers step in and out of the openings in the grid.

The Karens have several musical instruments of importance. The Karen drum is a symbol of the people's culture. It is round and made of cast bronze, often with figures of frogs and elephants decorating it. The Karens play a harp called the *t'na*, which has five or six strings and is tuned with pegs along the neck. Another stringed instrument is the large, wooden guitar-like *haw tu*. The *pa ku* is a bamboo xylophone played with hammers, and there are bamboo panpipes and mouth-harps of various sizes. Karens also use imported instruments such as guitars and electric keyboards, especially for Christian church music.

The Karen literary tradition is mostly in oral form. Folktales abound, often about a poor orphan boy who falls in love with a girl of a wealthy family. Books by Karens written since World War II include *Memoirs of the Four-Foot Colonel* by Smith Dun, a high ranking officer in the British Army, and *The Golden Book*, a Christian interpretation of ancient Karen prophetic poems. Kayan writer Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, a memoir of his childhood and life

as a refugee won acclaim when it was published in Britain in 2003. Foreign aid workers have also written about their experiences with the Karens. Sylvester Stallone's 2008 movie *Rambo* was a fictional depiction of the war and human rights abuse affecting Karen villages. A 2002 Thai movie, *Blissfully Yours*, directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, featured a Karen refugee protagonist. *Total Denial*, a 2006 film documented the efforts of Karen environmental activist Ka Hsaw Wa, founder of EarthRights International, and his group's lawsuit against Unocal, a petroleum company doing business in Myanmar.

### 15 WORK

The Karens have long been rice farmers in wet, irrigated fields in the Delta or in hill fields in the mountains. To cultivate rice in the highlands, villagers burn down plots of forest. This system, called "swidden cultivation," worked well when populations were small and stable, and forests were hardly touched by logging. Now, with the forest size drastically decreased by voracious timber companies and large segments of the Karen population involuntarily on the move, this slash-and-burn method contributes to erosion and loss of wildlife habitat.

Karens also make their living through fishing in coastal areas, working in tin or wolfram mines, and gathering forest products like rattan and honey. There are some educated professionals among the Karens, but many of them live overseas as exiles. When they reach other countries, they often have to take any job available, in spite of their education.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer, volleyball, and a type of kickball called *chinlone* are popular with Karen young people. Even in mountainous areas, Karen villages often have one flat open space where such sports can be played. Karens sometimes play a game they call *mahket* in which the large seeds from a vine are rolled to knock over other seeds. In places where television is available, soccer is the favorite spectator sport.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In their free time, Karens enjoy musical activities, movies and DVD shows, and taking walks around their town or village in the evening when the air cools down. People rise at or before dawn and often take an afternoon siesta.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Karen women are known for their fine cotton weaving of clothing, blankets and shoulder bags. The weaving is usually done on a small loom set up with a strap that wraps around the waist at one end, but in some areas there are large wooden frame looms as well. The thread is dyed with natural or artificial colors, sometimes with a pattern tie-dyed in. Some woven items are now produced for overseas sale as a means for refugee women to support their families. The Karens also produce etched silver jewelry, baskets, and embroidery.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Karens feel particularly persecuted after several decades of widespread abuse by military forces of the Myanmar government. The consistent pattern of human rights violations includes forced labor as army equipment porters, human mine-sweepers, human shields, and road and railway builders;

destruction of entire villagers; torture of civilians suspected of rebel sympathies; and massacres and executions without trial. Government military abuse of Karen women, particularly rape of village girls by troops, is especially common. These events have made the usually stable Karens into terrified nomads and have turned many into stubborn rebel fighters. Some are third or fourth generation guerrilla soldiers who have grown up knowing nothing but war. For many Karens, the highest priority has become finding a way to escape Myanmar as a refugee, and then obtaining resettlement from Thailand's camps to a third country, in order to start a new life with hopes of peace and education for their children. For others, staying close to their homeland is the goal, even if that means hiding in the forest and moving from place to place to avoid the Myanmar government's soldiers.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Karen societies, other than the Kayan matriarchy, women have been considered inferior or subservient to men. Women did a great deal of difficult farm work, but had little status or decision-making power. This has been changing since World War II, as more Karen women have become educated and have taken noteworthy roles in fields such as teaching and health. Dr. Cynthia Maung, a Karen physician, is admired for her brave work in bringing medical care to remote, war-torn regions. Many older women have become village leaders when men have been taken away for forced labor. Refugee women's groups have been formed, emphasizing self-help programs and economic empowerment through the sale of weaving and other crafts. Although Karen society is rather conservative, some individuals who look or behave in ways unconventional to their gender behavior have been tolerated and accepted.

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—by E. Mirante

# KASHMIRIS

**LOCATION:** Kashmir in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent

**POPULATION:** Greater Kashmir c. 15 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Kashmiri (including the Dardi, Shrinaya and Khowar dialects)

**RELIGION:** Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Kashmiris occupy the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent. Until the mid-19th century, the term “Kashmir” referred only to the Vale of Kashmir lying between the Great Himalayas and the Pir Panjal range. Since then, however, it has been used to refer to a larger area that includes the Indian-administered state of Jammu and Kashmir (consisting of the Kashmir valley, Jammu, and Ladakh), the Pakistani-administered provinces of the Northern Areas (including Gilgit and Baltistan) and Azad Kashmir (“Free Kashmir”), and the Chinese-administered region Aksai Chin.

In the Indian Epic (15th-10th centuries BC), Kashmir is mentioned as a focus of Sanskrit learning and, by the first half of the first millennium BC, Kashmir was an important center of Hinduism. However, the Indian Emperor Ashoka, who converted to Buddhism, is credited with having founded the city of Srinagar, and Kashmir became a seat of Buddhist learning, with the Sarvāstivādan school dominating. East and Central Asian Buddhist monks are recorded as having visited the kingdom. In the late 4th century AD, the famous monk Kumārajīva, who helped take Buddhism to China, studied in Kashmir.

Islam was introduced into Kashmir in the 8th century AD, when Muslims started gaining high positions in the Kashmiri army. The Hindu ruler Chandrapida gave territory to the Arab military commander Muhammad Alafi to live along with his hundreds of followers. The employment of hundreds of Muslim captains in the armies of the Kashmiri Kings at the turn of the 11th century alludes to the presence of a sizeable Muslim population in Kashmir more than 200 years before the establishment of Muslim rule. By the beginning of the 13th century Muslims formed an important section of the Kashmiri population and had made great strides. However, the conversion of Buddhist ruler Rinchana Sadr-ud-Din (AD 1320–1323) to Islam marked a turning point in the history of Kashmir. He converted after having discussions with Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim religious personages of the period. His conversion was followed by that of a large number of people including the prime minister, Rawanchandra.

During the 14th century, Islam was the dominant religion in Kashmir. The Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir lived in relative harmony, since the Sufi-Islamic way of life of ordinary Muslims in Kashmir complemented the Rishi tradition of the Hindu Kashmiri Pandits. This led to a syncretic culture where Hindus and Muslims revered the same local saints and prayed at the same shrines. However, some Muslim Kashmiri rulers were intolerant of Hinduism. For instance, the *Tarikh-i-Firish-ta* records that Sultan Sikandar Butshikan of Kashmir (AD 1389–1413) persecuted Hindus and issued orders proscribing the residence of any other than Muslims in Kashmir.

The Princely State of Kashmir and Jammu (as it was then called) was constituted between 1820 and 1858 and was “somewhat artificial in composition and it did not develop a fully coherent identity, partly as a result of its disparate origins and partly as a result of the autocratic rule which it experienced on the fringes of Empire.” It combined disparate regions, religions, and ethnicities: to the east, Ladakh was ethnically and culturally Tibetan, and its inhabitants practiced Buddhism; to the south, Jammu had a mixed population of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. In the heavily populated central Kashmir valley, the population was overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, however, and there was also a small but influential Hindu minority, the Kashmiri Brahmans or Pandits. To the northeast, sparsely populated Baltistan had a population ethnically related to Ladakh, but which practiced Shia Islam, while to the north, also sparsely populated, Gilgit Agency, was an area of diverse, mostly Shia groups. In the west, Punch was Muslim, but of different ethnicity than Muslims in the Kashmir valley.

The British acquired Kashmir from the Sikhs (who had annexed the state in 1820) in 1846 following the First Anglo-Sikh War and allowed the Dogra (Rajput) Maharaja Gulab Singh, ruler of Jammu, to purchase the state for a large sum of money. So, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, in which the majority of the population was Muslim, came to be ruled by a Hindu maharaja.

At the time of Independence in 1947 the princely states of India were to accede to either Muslim Pakistan or India. It was anticipated that, with a Muslim population of some 77% and a common border with Pakistan, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir would accede to Pakistan, but when Maharaja Hari Singh, ruler of one of the most powerful princely states in India, hesitated, perhaps trying to attain an independent status, Pakistan sent Pathan and Pashto tribesmen into Kashmir in a guerrilla onslaught meant to frighten its ruler into submission. Instead, the Maharaja appealed to Louis Mountbatten for assistance and the Governor-General of British India agreed to provide this on the condition that the ruler accede to India. Once the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession, Indian soldiers entered Kashmir (only one road from Jammu provided access to the Vale of Kashmir) and drove the Pakistani-sponsored irregulars from all but a small section of the state. Pakistan responded by sending in its regular army, and a full scale war was fought between India and Pakistan (fortunately it did not spread beyond Kashmir). India approached the United Nations Security Council to mediate the quarrel. In a UN-sponsored cease fire, the opposing forces stopped in 1949 at what is now called the Line of Control, which is today the de facto border between Pakistan and India in Kashmir. Thus, although there was a clear Muslim majority in Kashmir before the 1947 partition and its economic, cultural, and geographic contiguity with the Muslim-majority area of the Punjab (in Pakistan) could be convincingly demonstrated, Pakistan was left with territory that, although basically Muslim in character, was thinly populated, relatively inaccessible, and economically underdeveloped. The largest Muslim group, situated in the Vale of Kashmir and estimated to number more than half the population of the entire region, lay in Indian-administered territory, with its former outlets to the Punjab, via the Jhelum valley route, blocked. The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promised a plebiscite under UN supervision, which never happened because one of the pre-conditions for this was that Paki-



stan should withdraw all military forces from the region of Kashmir.

Every time India and Pakistan have fought a war since 1949 (i.e. in 1965, 1971), Kashmir has remained a focal point of the conflicts. Most recently, in 1999, Indian and Pakistani forces fought each other in Kargil, India, claiming that regular Pakistani troops and Kashmiri militants, in a plan devised by the then Pakistani Army Commander, General Pervez Musharraf, entered Indian territory in Kargil. Later in 1999, Musharraf seized power in Pakistan in a military coup and became president.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The heart of Kashmir is the Vale of Kashmir, an ancient lake bed lying between the Pir Panjal mountain range and the main Himalayas to the northeast. The valley is 85 mi (140 km) long, 20 mi wide, and set at an altitude of 1,620 m (5,300 ft) high. Drained by the upper Jhelum River, the valley is lined by 3,600–5,000 meters-high mountains (c. 12,000–16,000 ft) that help shelter it from the wet southwest monsoon. It is the centre of population for Kashmir. The main city in the Vale, Srinagar, is the capital of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The fertile alluvial soil yields rice, corn (maize), fruit, and vegetables, and the scenic mountains and lakes (notably Wular and Dal) used to attract many tourists to the region.

To the east lie the mountains of Ladakh and still further to the east is the Aksai Chin, physically a part of the Tibetan Plateau claimed by India but, since the 1962 Indo-Chinese War,

occupied and administered by China. To the south of the Pir Panjal range lie the lowlands of Jammu, an extension of the Indo-Gangetic plains to the foot of the mountains.

To the west of the Vale is Azad Kashmir (“Free Kashmir”), Pakistani-occupied territory separated from Indian-controlled Kashmir by the Line of Control. To the north lies the Northern Areas of Pakistan, Baltistan and Gilgit, mountainous terrain crossed by the Karakoram Mountains and containing some of the highest mountains in the world (K-2, at 6,811 m [28,251 ft] second only to Everest, and Nanga Parbat, 8,125 m [26,658 ft]), ranked the 9th highest peak in the world.

Kashmir occupies a region where Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and China come together and thus has been strategically important in the history of the subcontinent. The 2001 Census of India reports the population of Jammu and Kashmir as 10,143,700 persons. Add to this perhaps 3 million people in Azad Kashmir, the population of the other areas of Pakistan that fall into “greater Kashmir” and factor in natural increase, and the population of greater Kashmir is close to 15 million people.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Kashmiri is a Dardic language, a linguistic sub-grouping belonging to the Indo-European Language Family. It is spoken primarily in the valley of Kashmir and has about 5 million speakers in India. The 105,000 or so speakers of Kashmiri in Pakistan are mostly immigrants from the Kashmir Valley to Pakistan. Traditionally, Kashmiri was written in the Perso-Arabic script but today is written in either the Perso-Arabic script (with some modifications) or the Devanagari script. It is the official state language of Jammu and Kashmir and is also one of India’s 23 national languages. Some Kashmiri speakers use English or Urdu as a second language, though in the past few decades Kashmiri has been introduced as a subject at the university and the colleges of the valley. At present, attempts are underway for inclusion of Kashmiri in the school curriculum.

Kashmiri has a literary tradition that dates back to the 14th century AD. Kashmiri literature consists largely of poetry particularly rich in the lyrics of life and nature, besides compositions in the mystic vein of both the Brahmanical (Shaivite) and Islamic (Sufi) traditions. There are works of modern Kashmiri literature, with Ghulam Ahmed Mahjoor (1885–1952) considered to be one of the greatest of modern Kashmiri poets, short story writers such as Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din, Hari Krishnan Kaul, and Amin Kamil, and contributions in the area of non-fiction by the likes of Jawaharlal Nehru.

## 4 FOLKLORE

As is to be expected, the diverse regions of “Kashmir” each have their own traditions of folklore. Thus, areas like Baltistan and Ladakh have their own folklore, with the former having a veneer of Islamization and the latter reflecting its Buddhist character. Similarly, the folklore in southern areas shows the influence of the Pakistani Punjab, with variants of the epic *Heera Ranjha*, in addition to ballads, folktales, folk music, and dance

In Kashmir proper, however, perhaps Hatim’s Tales are in a class by themselves in the folklore tradition. A spell-binding story-teller, Hatim Talawon was a legend in his lifetime. He recited, intoned, sang, and talked to his listeners in the towns and villages of the picturesque Kashmir valley. His tales were

drawn from history, mythology, traditional narratives, and original stories devised by Hatim himself. They were part of the Kashmir's oral tradition that survived in memory and by word of the mouth and were gathered and published by Sir Aurel Stein in 1918.

## 5 RELIGION

Over three quarters of Kashmir's population is Muslim, mainly following the Sufi customs commonly found in India. Kashmiri Muslims fall into four groups: the Sheikh, the Sayed, the Mughal, and the Pathan. The Sheikhs are by far the most numerous and are thought to be descended from Hindus. They have clans, which are called *krāms*. There appear to be few marriage restrictions according to *krām*, though many scholars suggest that the *krām* are descended from Hindu groups and, indeed, in some ways there appears to be a kind of hierarchical structure not unlike the Hindu caste system. The Dar boatmen and the Dums, gardeners and butchers by trade, are, for instance, viewed as being socially inferior. But, as some writers observe, the social system is very plastic, and prosperity and a little wealth soon erase humble origins. The Sayeds tend to marry among themselves. They are either holy men, in which case they are given the title *Mir*, or (and this includes the bulk of the Sayeds) they are agriculturalists, in which case the name *Mir* is used as a suffix. There are a few Mughals, who settled Kashmir at the time of Mughal rule and the Pathans, found in the southwest of the valley, and date to Durrani rule (18th century), or who were brought in to Kashmir by Maharajah Gulab Singh (1846–1857) for service on the frontier. The Pathans tend to speak Pashto, maintain their own dress, and carry weapons, although they are now rapidly assimilating into Kashmiri society.

Numerous Hindu groups are found in Kashmir, the most important of which are the Kashmiri Pandits (the first Prime Minister of an independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, belonged to this community). Of the Brahman caste, the Pandits have played a long and important role in the history of Kashmir. Even though they follow Hindu rituals, the Pandits, for many years, co-existed with the Kashmiri Muslims in the spirit of *Kashmiriyat* (Kashmiri tolerance). Other Hindu castes, who tend to be found mainly in Jammu, include the Dogra Rajputs, the Gaddis (sheep and goat herders), Khatris (traders), and Thakkars.

It is often difficult to distinguish, from a religious perspective, between Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus. They respect the same saints and worship at the same shrines. However, another distinctive element in the population is Buddhism. The religion was introduced into the Vale of Kashmir when Ashoka conquered the region in the 3rd century BC and even though today Buddhists make up only just over 1% of Kashmir's population, the region has, in the past, been an important center for the development and spread of the religion. Numerous Buddhist monks from Kashmir were responsible for carrying Buddhism north of the Himalayas and into China and Tibet.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major festivals in Kashmir reflect the mix of Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh peoples found in the region. Thus, typical Hindu festivals include Navaratra, or New Year's Day, which is celebrated on the first day of the new moon in the month of Chaitra (March/April). In every Hindu home, it begins with an invoca-

tion to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. In all families, a young lady lays a large plate with paddy, sugar, curds, fruits, walnut, coins, a mirror, ink-holder, and the New Year scroll and shows it to every family member, thus seeking the blessings of the goddess for moral and material development of members of the family. In April, Durga Ashtami, Ramnavami (Rama's birthday), and Baisakhi (the Spring festival) are observed. Holi, Diwali, and Dussehra, major festivals on the Hindu calendar, are also kept in Kashmir. Some festivals are observed by both Hindus and Muslims. For instance, the anniversary of Rishi Pir, a Hindu saint, held on the fifth day of the full moon of Baisakhi at his home in Srinagar is attended by Muslims also.

The Navroz festival of the Shia Muslims falls a week after the Hindu New Year's Day. The Urs (or Ziarats) is a typical Kashmiri festival. It is held annually at the shrines of Muslim saints on their death anniversaries. There is a saying that goes, "It snows when the Urs of Meesha Sahib is held, it is windy when the Urs of Batamol Sahib takes place, it rains on the occasion of the Urs of Bahauddin." These Urs are popular despite the rigors of weather. They are celebrated in different parts of Srinagar, not only by Muslims but also by Hindus and Sikhs. An interesting feature of the Urs celebrations at Batamalo (the locality in Srinagar named after the saint Batamol Sahib) and in Anantag (Rishi Mol's anniversary) is that both Muslims and Hindus abstain from taking meat during the course of the festival.

Muslim festivals that are celebrated nationally include Shab-i Mairaj, which is followed by Shab-i-Barat, Muharram, the month of Ramadan, and the Ids. The dates of these festivals change in accordance with the appearance of the moon and shift by 10 days each year. During the night of Shab-i-Barat the Muslims keep vigil. Legend goes that on this night the Holy Prophet visits each house and relieves the pains of suffering humanity.

The Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev in November is a very auspicious day for the Sikhs of Kashmir. They visit Chati Patshahi near Hari Parbat. Epistles from the Granth Sahib (the Sikh scripture) are recited throughout the day.

A typically Kashmiri festival known as Khichri Amavasya falls in the month of Posh (December/January). Kashmir is believed to have been the abode of Yakshas in ancient times. The Yaksha spirit is invited to relish *khichri* (rice cooked with dal and ghee). Kashmiris leave *khichri* out along with a fish, and it is believed that during the night the yaksha comes and tastes the food.

The festival cycle in other parts of Kashmir differ slightly. Thus, in Jammu, in addition to the usual festivals celebrated by Hindus throughout India (e.g. Holi, Diwali, Dussehra), the Lohri festival, marking the culmination of the cold season, is celebrated with zest every where. The Gurupubs, birthdays of the Sikh saints, are celebrated in the region, as is the anniversary of the birth of Buddha. In Ladakh, the festival calendar is, naturally, dominated by Buddhist festivals, such as the one held at Hemis, near Leh.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage of the Kashmiris follow those of the specific community to which an individual belongs. Thus, Muslims, whether in Pakistani or Indian Kashmir, follow the outlines of ritual prescribed by Islamic law (the *Shariah*), but they often combine these rites with local customs. Newborns are sancti-



Kashmiri Muslims row on the waters of Dal Lake in Srinagar, Kashmir. (Rouf Bhat/AFP/Getty Images)

fied by prayer and undergo head-shaving and naming ceremonies. All males undergo the ritual of circumcision (*sunnat*). Among some Muslims, a ceremony known as *Bismillah* marks the beginning of a child's education in religious matters. Ceremonies associated with death and burial combine practices from the *Shariah* with local customs. The body is ritually bathed and wrapped in a white shroud in preparation for burial. The body is brought out of the house and the face of the deceased person is shown to relatives and neighbors. Mourners, led by a priest, say prayers over the body, which is then taken in procession to the graveyard and buried facing Mecca.

Hindus follow Hindu practices. Thus, for the Kashmiri Pandit, life is ruled by the Hindu concept of *dharma* (known locally as *bhattil*). In the name-giving ceremony, the donning of the sacred thread, the marriage ceremony and the various stages of a householder's life, the Pandit is governed by the Hindu scriptures. At the time of death, the body is washed with water to which some Ganges water has been added, cotton balls are inserted into the ears and nostrils, and a coin is placed at the lips. The corpse is placed in a white shroud, which is tied with a thread, and the body taken in procession, led by the eldest son, to the cremation grounds to be burned. Various rituals are performed on certain days after the death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Again, greetings in Kashmir are determined by the ethnic communities to which the individuals involved belong and

whether the context is formal or informal. In the former case, the response is virtually pre-determined. Thus, a Hindu greeting a Hindu would, as elsewhere in India, say "namaste" or "namaskar," while bringing the palms together in front of the body and making a slight bow. The reply would be the same. A Hindu meeting a Muslim, and *vice versa*, would say "ādāb" ("brother") and expect the same response. A Muslim greeting a Muslim would use the traditional greeting "Salaam Aleikum" ("Peace be with you"), to which the response should be "Vailaikum Salaam" ("And unto you be peace").

But in an informal context, the usual greeting is "vāray chivā" ("Are you fine?"), which indicates concern about the health and prosperity of the individual. It can elicit a variety of responses, which, from elders, usually involves the invocation of blessings from the Almighty, gods and goddesses, and saints.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions vary according to where in Kashmir one lives. In Ladakh, for instance, houses are built of mud brick and are similar in appearance to houses in Tibet, reflecting the strong Tibetan cultural influence in the region. In Baltistan, the villages are in clusters of huts, usually located where-ever flat land exists near sources of water and built of stone and wood. In many hamlets, there is a tower three stories high. Most of the huts are diminutive, with rooms only eight or ten feet in diameter and an entrance door two feet wide and two-

and-a-half feet high. In the lower rooms one can barely stand up, but there is a notched pole used as a ladder to an upper room, which is less cave-like. Many of the upper rooms are made in wattle, sometimes plastered over with clay.

In the Kashmir Valley, however, the typical dwelling in a village is a two or three-storey house made of wood and unburned brick with a thatched roof (the region is relatively dry, so keeping out rain is a minor issue). In Srinagar and in urban areas, modern construction uses fired brick and corrugated iron for roofs. The dimensions, decoration, and quality of materials used in the construction of the rooms vary according to socio-economic status. People generally prefer to keep cattle in the lower rooms at night (as protection against the weather), though it is not uncommon, where large numbers of the animals are involved, to see cattle sheds and stables scattered around the landscape. The room in which cattle and other livestock are kept is called *gan*. People live on the upper floors, but generally do not make use of furniture and sit and sleep on the floor, which is covered with rugs or carpets. Houses are not heated, but Kashmiris use a *kangra* (firepot filled with burning charcoal) for individual heating. This is worn under one's clothes and, as might be expected, the potential for accidental burns is considerable.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Customs regarding family life also vary according to one's community. Thus, the life of most Kashmiris is governed by Muslim law, while Kashmiri Pandits are ruled by Hindu law, and Sikhs, Buddhists, and Christians follow the dictates of their religion. Traditionally, the joint extended family was the norm, but the situation is changing, with the nuclear family becoming more common. The majority of the people in the valley are Muslims, many of them being converted Hindus, and while they have no formal caste system, the custom of the payment of a dowry (*mehar*) is common. It is usual among the Muslim peasants to marry a daughter to a near relative (this keeps property within the family) but, if this is not possible, a go-between, or *Manzimyur*, is used. Muslim (and Hindu) laws of inheritance do not allow women to inherit land or property.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional dress of Kashmiris is simple, and there is not much difference between that of a man or a woman. Both wear a *phiran*, a kind of gown that is made of wool during the winter and of cotton during the summer. Muslim and Pandit men wear the gown differently, while the *phirans* of Muslim women may be brocaded on the chest with attractive designs. Hindu women wear a cotton *lungi* around the waist over the top of the *phiran* and the outfit is completed by headgear, a brocaded cap (*qasaba*) in the case of Muslim women, or a woolen *taranga* by Hindu women. Men often wear a brocaded cap, though typical headwear for the modern Kashmiri male is the *qaraguli* (karakal) cap made of lamb's wool, the kind often sported by Jawaharlal Nehru. A *kurta*, *pyjama*, or *shilwar* is worn by all under the *phiran*. In winter, the personal *kangra* is worn under the *phiran* for warmth. Of course, modern western clothes are becoming quite popular and are commonly seen in urban areas and amongst the young.

## 12 FOOD

Kashmiri cuisine is famous for its vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian dishes. There are also variants between Hindu and Muslim cooking. Traditional Kashmiri food includes *dum aloo* (boiled potatoes with heavy amounts of spice), *tzaman* (a solid cottage cheese), *rogan josh* (lamb cooked in heavy spices), *zaam dod* (curd), *yakhayn* (lamb cooked in curd with mild spices), *hakh* (a spinach-like leaf), *rista-gushtava* (minced meat balls in tomato and curd curry), and, of course, the signature rice that is particular to Asian cultures. Even Kashmiri Pandits, who are Brahmans, enjoy mutton and fish. Muslim cooking makes heavy use of onions and garlic, though this was traditionally avoided by the Kashmiri Pandits. Meat is almost always cooked in curd. The traditional *wazwan* feast involves cooking meat or vegetables, usually mutton, in several different ways.

Alcohol is not widely drunk in Kashmir. There are two famous teas from the region: *nun chai*, or salt tea, which is pink in color and popular with locals and *kahwah*, a green tea made with spices (cinnamon, cardamom, and saffron), nuts, such as almonds or pistachios, sweetened by sugar or honey, and presented without milk.

## 13 EDUCATION

Educational standards vary throughout Kashmir. In Pakistani areas, distance, the lack of quality schools, and the dominant socio-cultural ethos of the tribal peoples in the area result in low levels of literacy and generally poor levels of education. Some authors have suggested the influence of Islamic fundamentalism has had a negative effect on education, especially for women. In the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, where the 2001 census return was notoriously unreliable, only 60% of the men were recorded as being literate, with the corresponding value for women being 45%. This, of course, is not only below the average for India as a whole, but it also masks considerable variations between urban areas and the more remote outlying districts.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Communities in the different regions of broader Kashmir have their own cultural heritage. Thus, for Ladakhis, the devil dance, performed by monks dressed up in elaborate costumes at the time of Buddhist festivals to drive away evil spirits, is part of the heritage of Tibetan, or *Mahāyāna*, Buddhism. Muslims living in Baltistan or Gilgit share the views of honor and proper behavior that are held by tribal peoples in the north west of the Indian subcontinent.

However, in Kashmir proper, i.e. the Vale of Kashmir, history tends to shape the cultural heritage of the people. Thus, up to the 14th century, Buddhism and Shaivism dominated the Kashmir region and strongly influenced the region's early cultural history. The role of Buddhist monks from Kashmir in carrying the religion to China has already been noted. Kashmir has a rich architectural tradition that dates to this time, as well as having its scholars contribute to Sanskrit manuscripts (e.g. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and Somadeva's collection of stories called *Kathasaritsagar*). Even today, Shaivism *bhakti* (devotionalism) and *Tantrism* form a distinct undercurrent in the ritualistic worship of the Pandit community. The arrival of the Muslims in the early 14th century and the conquest by the Sikhs in the 19th century also added distinctive elements

to the cultural heritage of Kashmir. Though some writers see *Kashmiriyat* as a myth, the peaceful co-existence of four of the world's great religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism), at least until the communal troubles that followed Partition, is seen by many as one of the great achievements of Kashmiri culture.

The existence of branches of the Silk Road across Kashmir is another aspect of the region's history. Not only did silk, ivory, gold, and gems move along this great Trans-Asian highway linking Rome with distant China, so did art, culture, and religion. Buddhist and Christian missionaries traveled along the Silk Road into Central Asia, as did aspects of Kashmiri art and sculpture. Many centuries later, Kashmir played a significant role in the "Great Game," that reflected British concerns that Russia would move into the region. The modern version of the Great Game, reflecting Kashmir's strategic location, is seen, perhaps, in the continued confrontation of India and Pakistan in Kashmir.

## 15 WORK

The traditional occupations of the Kashmiri were agriculture, tourism, and handicrafts. However, overseas tourism has virtually dried up since the communal troubles began in Kashmir in the 1980s and even though tourists from India still visit the region, the arts and crafts industry has basically been eliminated from Kashmir. Foreign tourists used to stay on houseboats on Lake Dal, but no longer. One consequence is that now Kashmir's economy is centered around agriculture. Traditionally, the staple crop of the valley is rice, which forms the chief food of the people. In addition, Indian corn (maize), wheat, barley, and oats were also grown. Given its temperate climate, Kashmir is suited for crops like asparagus, artichoke, broad beans, beetroot, cauliflower, and cabbage. Fruit trees are common in the valley and the cultivated orchards yield pears, apples, peaches, and cherries, and a variety of nuts.

Agriculture in Kashmir faces many problems, not the least of which is the average size of land-holdings. One result of the inheritance system is extreme fragmentation of the land with the average land holding in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir amounting to 0.66 hectares (just over 1.6 acres), a figure that has declined in recent decades. According to the 2001 Census of India, 49% of the labor force in Kashmir is either a cultivator or agricultural laborer, even though only 5% of the land in Kashmir can be farmed.

In Pakistani Kashmir, virtually the entire population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, cultivating whatever flat land is found near in the river valleys, or terracing the land along the lower portion of the valleys and bringing water from the slopes to the fields using small scale, home-built irrigation systems. With the land in most of Pakistani Kashmir occurring at higher altitudes, the crops grown (and the length of the growing season) reflect the climatic environment. These include maize, barley, potato, buck wheat, and millet, while the mainstay of the livestock population are goats, sheep, and types of cattle such as the yak or dzo that are adapted to high altitudes.

In Ladakh, subsistence irrigated agriculture similar to that of Tibet is practiced, while agriculture in Jammu mirrors that found on the nearby Indo-Gangetic plains.

## 16 SPORTS

Although polo is popular in Baltistan, and Gilgit and Ladakh have their devil dances, there is no sport that is unique to Kashmir.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Before hunting was banned throughout India by the government, hunting (*shikar*) was popular in Kashmir, with groups coming in from around the world to shoot local wildlife. In the Vale of Kashmir, the Bhands or minstrels are professional actors and singers (and beggars), who entertain the people, and they even travel as far afield as the Punjab to perform before Kashmiri audiences. Religious festivals are a main source of entertainment among the different Kashmiri communities. For instance, in Ladakh, the Buddhist devil dances performed at various festivals are popular. During the summer, young children in Kashmir play *Zangtār* and *Guti*, the latter involving tossing coins or nuts into a shallow hole in the ground (the *guti*) from a distance of 10–12 feet. Kite-flying is a popular pastime during certain seasons of the year while, as everywhere in India, Hindi movies are popular in urban areas.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Kashmir is renowned for its arts and crafts the world over. It is known for its textiles, carpets made from silk or wool, which take families months to make. It is also known for its lacquered *paper maché* work and painting on paper maché goods or on wood. Kashmiris are also known for their delicate wood carvings. An entirely indigenous form of woodwork, known as *khatam bandi*, is used for the decoration of ceilings and is usually done in panels of pinewood in various geometrical designs fitted together in grooves. Wicker objects, *pashmina* shawls (made from fine cashmere wool that comes from the *pashmina* goat), embroidery, wooden boxes and toys, metalwork, and fine woolen goods round out the handicrafts for which Kashmiris are famous.

One problem facing traditional craftsmen in Kashmir is that with the decline of tourism due to the unrest in the state, they have difficulty accessing markets, and many have had to abandon their traditional occupations. Some have adjusted by moving to places such as Delhi where they do have access to tourists and continue in their traditional activities, but clearly this is not an ideal solution.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

An ongoing problem in Kashmir is the continued conflict between Muslim and Hindu and the partition of Kashmir into Pakistani and Indian territory. With a majority Muslim population, any plebiscite would see Kashmir opt for Pakistan, but India cannot afford to see Kashmir accede to Pakistan. However, elections held in Indian Jammu and Kashmir brought to power the popular Muslim leader Sheikh Abdullah Muhammad, who with his party, the National Conference, by and large supported India. The elected Constituent Assembly met for the first time in 1954 and confirmed the accession of the state to the Union of India. The state's own Constitution came into force on 26 January 1957 under which the elections to the State Legislative Assembly were held for the first time on the basis of adult franchise the same year. This Constitution also ratified the state's accession to India. However, this was not recognized



by Pakistan, which has continued to press for a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the people.

Though sporadic violence occurred before this, 1989 is usually the year assigned the beginning of the insurgency in Kashmir. This coincides with the end of the Afghan-Russian conflict and saw Afghan *mujahideen* fighters enter Kashmir (India claims with active Pakistani support). Since then violence has increased significantly in strength and separatists have carried out attacks on Indian civilians and Indian army installations in response to what they see as an Indian army of occupation. Estimates of deaths during the conflict vary from 35,000 to more than 85,000, with 1994 representing a peak in militancy and over 6,000 incidents in that year. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have reported numerous human rights violations by both sides in the conflict. Some groups, such as the All Parties Hurriyat Conference and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, demand an independent Kashmir. Other militant groups, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad (organizations that no longer operate under these names after they were banned by the Indian and Pakistani government) favor a Pakistani Kashmir. Of the larger militant groups, the Hizbul Mujahideen, a militant organization based in Indian-administered Kashmir, is believed to number thousands rather than hundreds. Several new separatist organizations have also emerged.

In 2005 a 7.6-magnitude earthquake hit northern parts of Pakistan and India and left an estimated 80,000 people dead and more than 3 million homeless. The epicenter was located near the city of Muzaffarabad in the Pakistani region of Azad Kashmir. Areas of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and India's Jammu and Kashmir state were also heavily damaged by the quake. Many countries, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations offered relief aid to the region, in the form of donations as well as supplies of food, medicines, tents, and blankets, and rescue and relief workers were sent to the region, along with their equipment, including helicopters and rescue dogs, from different parts of the world. However, the remoteness of many areas affected by the earthquake and the onset of winter in the mountains (the earthquake occurred in early October) hampered relief efforts and no doubt led to even more casualties, who were not able to access aid or medical supplies.

Violence continued in Kashmir in 2008. Commentators saw the pitched battles between civilians and the police in the Kashmir Valley in June 2008 and the paralysis of the administration as a throwback to the turbulent 1990s, when Kashmiri resentment against the Indian government's policies led to a virtual civil war in Kashmir. The immediate cause of this violence was the transference of some forest land to a Hindu shrine by the Kashmiri government.

The civil unrest in Kashmir has virtually seen an end to Kashmiri tourism and has impacted the market for the sale of arts and crafts.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Kashmiri women, in addition to having to face restrictions imposed by their own Hindu and Muslim communities, have had to deal with the civil and communal unrest that has affected the state since the 1980s. Militant Islamic separatist guerrillas have tried to ban beauty parlors, cinema halls, and wine shops and demanded that Muslim women follow the Islamic dress

code and wear *burqas* or the veil. The Indian Army is viewed by many in Kashmir as an army of occupation, and it has been accused of numerous violations of human rights. In fact, an Islamic women's separatist group said it would begin training Muslim women in martial arts and called on them to carry daggers to fend off sexual attacks by Indian soldiers. More and more Kashmiri women are being seen as *mukhbirs*, or informers, and becoming targets of the militants.

Thus, not only do women in Kashmir have to live in dominant patriarchal social systems, they have to face poverty, illiteracy, arranged marriages, dowry deaths, a lack of inheritance, and economic discrimination. In addition, they have to live with the depredations of both soldiers of the Indian army and the militants in Kashmir in the context of the ongoing civil unrest.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# KAZAKH CHINESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-ZAHK chigh-NEEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Wusun, Turks, Geluolo, Huihu, Kerei, Naiman

**LOCATION:** China; Kazakstan; Uzbekistan; Turkmenistan; Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan

**POPULATION:** 1.25 million

**LANGUAGE:** Kazakh

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities; Kazaks

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Kazakh have common historical origins with the ancient tribes of the Wusun (2nd century BC–2nd century AD), Turks (mid-6th century), Geluolo and Huihu (10th-12th century), and Kerei and Naiman (12th-13th century). They all lived in the Ili River Valley and areas around the Lake Issyk, which had been governed in the past by the central government of China. Up to the present, there are still tribes of Kazakh that retain the ancient tribal names. In the 13th century, conquering a number of countries in central and west Asia, Genghis Khan had established quite a few Khan dependencies. Later on, some of the tribes moved to the Talas River Valley and established there a Kazakh Khan. After the 17th century, a part of the Kazakh was conquered by Russia. The other part became one of the national minorities of China.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kazakh live in the northern part of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, including Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, Mori and Burqin Kazakh Autonomous County. The rest of them are distributed in Aksay Kazakh Autonomous County. The population was 1.25 million in 2000.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Kazakh language belongs to the Altaic family, Turkic group. There is not much difference among the various dialects. The Kazakh living in the above-mentioned countries could have a lively conversation without any serious language problems. The name Kazakh was self-given, meaning “free man,” “refugee,” and “separator.” Kazakh writing, based on Arabic characters, has been used since the last century. Owing to the difference between the phonetic systems of Arabic script and Kazakh language, the People’s Republic of Kazakh of the former USSR reformed the writing system quite a few times, based on Arabic (1917 and 1924), based on Latin (1929), and based on Russian (1940). In China, a new writing system based on Latin was designed in 1959, but it proved unsuccessful. In 1982, they reverted to their original writing system.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The folklore of the “White Swan” has been so widespread that some believe that it was created by the Kazakh. It was said that there was an orphan shepherd who dreamed one night of a white swan coming from the sky singing and dancing before him. The next day, his dream came true. Unfortunately,

a windstorm appeared from nowhere and dispersed all his sheep. With the help of the swan, he finally found them. In fact, he was also rescued by the swan. To his surprise, the swan turned into a beautiful lady, who married the shepherd and gave birth to a number of children, the Kazakh. A similar story states that a general was rescued by a white swan from the desert. It turned into a beautiful lady. They married and had a son who grew up, married, and had three sons—the ancestors of the three largest tribes of Kazakh.

In addition, a myth describes how the Kazakh God of Creation made a man and a woman from mud. But, a demon thwarted their marriage. The God shot the demon with his bow and arrow, thunder being the sound of his shooting and lightning being the sparks flying from the arrows. The God planted the Tree of Life. Every leaf represented a soul. A new leaf appeared on somebody’s birth, and a fallen leaf indicated somebody’s death.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The Kazakh believe in Islam, although remnants of primitive shamanistic beliefs and reverence for the fire and sun still exist. In pastoral areas mosques are few, but the Muslim priest, called *mulla*, should be invited to recite scriptures on festivals, weddings, and funerals, or in case of illness. Of course, he will be paid.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The main holidays of the Kazakh are related to their religion. According to Islamic stipulations, December 10 (Islamic calendar) is the Corban Festival. The word *corban* in Arabic means sacrificial offering. When the day comes, the Kazakh kill oxen or sheep as sacrifice. They all dress up, extend greetings to each other, entertain guests, and present gifts to their friends or relatives. A variety of traditional sports will be held. The Festival of Fast-Breaking (Lesser Bairam) is the day ending the Ramadan. In September (Islamic calendar) every year, every adult Kazakh abstains from food and drink from daybreak to sunset. The beginning and the end of the month of fast depend on the new moon being visible. On the next day, all festive activities will be held in a lively atmosphere. The Nuoluzi Festival in January (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and March 19) is also ceremonious. It is similar to the Spring Festival of the Chinese. To ring out the old year and ring in the new, every family will take *kuji*, a meal made of seven ingredients including beef, barley, wheat, and milk products.

## <sup>7</sup>RITEs OF PASSAGE

The birth of a baby is a particularly happy event for the Kazakh and a reason to entertain guests at dinner. The Kazakh, men and women, are adept in horsemanship; horsemanship, therefore, plays an important role in their festivals. One particular festival, extremely popular with the young people, is called “Women’s Pursuit.” Young men and women, each mounting his or her own horse, stride slowly in pairs toward a designated place; the lad is allowed to tease the girl whom he likes, and she should not get angry. But, as soon as they arrive at the designated place and start to get back, the girl pursues the lad in mock revenge. The game is designed to foster love between the two.

The Kazakh funeral follows Islamic stipulations. The body should be washed with clean water, wrapped in white cloth,

and buried three days after death. On the seventh day and the fortieth day after the funeral, sacrificial offerings are mandatory. The horse used by the deceased during his or her lifetime is not allowed to be mounted any longer. The horse tail should be cut after the master's death. The horse should be killed one year later for sacrifice. When Kazakh migrate to new pasture lands, the hat and clothes of the deceased should be put on horseback and moved with the family. The women of the household sing a mournful song when they pass each nomadic colony.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Long-separated friends usually embrace when meeting again. Usually, they talk about their livestock first, then the families greet each other. The Kazakh are warm, sincere, and straightforward. They will spare no effort to assist a member of the clan who is in trouble. A traveler, no matter what his nationality may be, will be put up for the night in any Kazakh's *yurt*. On account of Kazakh hospitality, one finds no beggars among them. "As long as there are Kazakh on the way, you may travel for a year without a cent or a grain in your bag," goes a saying. Another proverb states: "One could never wipe out the disgrace of letting guests leave at sunset." They offer their best food to the guests; for distinguished ones, they will kill a live sheep with yellow head and white body. Respectfully, the host will offer a tray containing the sheep head. The guest receives it, cuts a slice of meat from its right cheek and puts it on his own plate. He should then cut an ear, give it to the youngest one at the banquet, and return the sheep head to the host. The guests sit cross-legged on the felt rug. They must not straighten their legs. It is very impolite to take off one's shoes and point the sole of the foot to people.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The great majority of the Kazakh engage in nomadic animal husbandry; only a small number engage in agriculture and settle down. The herdsmen move from place to place in search of water and grass. In spring, summer, and autumn, they live in a *yu*, a round-shaped yurt that may be dismantled and carried on horseback when they migrate. The framework of the yurt is made from locally grown Chinese tamarisk. They enclose the paling (fence-like framework) with splendid achnatherum, a kind of grass with long, narrow leaves, grown in grassy shoals. Then, they cover the side with a layer of felt rug. There is a skylight for ventilation at the top of the conic roof of the yurt. The yurt usually opens to the east. Inside the yurt, the horse gear, hunting gear, food and cooking utensils are placed on each side of the door, with the plank beds overhead. Opposite the door are the suitcases, covered with sitting cushions.

After the fall, they move to their adobe house for the winter pasture.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Before 1950, the well-to-do and the nobles were polygamous. Now, they practice monogamy. The man is the person of authority in the family. The wife must obey her husband. Sons and daughters must obey their father. The women have neither power nor property. The marriage of children and the distribution of property are all decided by the father. As soon as a male has grown up and married, he leaves his parents, builds his own yurt, and receives a part of the property from his fa-

ther. The family property will ultimately be inherited by the youngest son.

In the past, a wedding required betrothal gifts from the bridegroom to the bride's family—in particular, dozens of heads of livestock. As a result, poor families would exchange their daughters, thus canceling the need for betrothal gifts. A widow had to marry her brother-in-law or another member of the clan. Although a married woman had no right to ask for divorce, a man was allowed to abandon his wife any time at will. Nowadays, according to the new dispositions of the law, Kazakh women are free to marry and to divorce.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The herdsmen's clothes are mainly made of fur, usually loose for the convenience of horse-riding. In winter, the men usually wear a durable, single-layered, sheepskin overcoat or camel's wool waded topcoat. They have a leather belt with figures on the waist and wear a sword on the right. Their trousers are mostly made of sheepskin. The women wear dresses, mostly red. In winter, they add a cotton-padded overcoat. Young girls like to wear silver ornaments or coins and embroidered cotton trousers. Men in different districts wear different hats. Married women almost always wear a long scarf with colored figures. All Kazakh like to wear boots, with a pair of felt stockings in winter.

## **12 FOOD**

Most foodstuffs come from livestock. There are a variety of milk products, including cheese, butter, and skin on boiled milk. In spring or summer, the herdsmen pour a mare's milk into a leather bag, stir frequently, and wait for fermentation. The final product is a semi-transparent sour mare's milk wine, a favorite beverage in summer. Another popular beverage is a special hot milk tea made of tea, butter, salt, and cow or camel milk. Food made of rice and flour includes crusty *nang* (shaped like bagels and pancakes), "rice taken by hand" (cooked and steamed rice with raisins, sliced onions and carrots, and small cubes of fried beef), fried dough, etc. The Kazakh eat a lot of mutton, mostly cooked in water and taken by hand. They make smoked meat in the late fall. Sausage made of mare's meat has a special flavor and can be preserved for a long time. The herdsmen eat fewer vegetables and fruits.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Because of the nomadic way of life of the Kazakh, there are many mobile primary schools. The teacher visits the yurt and teaches the children on the spot. This explains the high rate of illiteracy in pastoral areas. In farming areas close to the cities, there are many schools for formal education. High schools and universities have been established in Tacheng, Altay, and Ili. Overall, the cultural and educational level of the Kazakh is higher than the average level of the national minorities in China.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Kazakh music and dance have distinctive features and are noticeable by the large number of participants in each performance. The Kazakh are good at singing and dancing. A two-stringed, guitar-like instrument, the *dongbula*, is very popular with the men. Because of illiteracy in the past, the ancient po-

ems, stories, proverbs, and fables were all handed down orally. A group of folksingers, called *aken*, visit the grazing lands to collect and collate oral literature. Kazakh writers have begun the publication of their ancient literature.

### 15 WORK

For centuries the Kazakh have led a nomadic life, their main occupation being animal husbandry (ox, sheep, horses, and camel). Only a small number of them engaged in farming. There were very few craftsmen and very little handicraft industry. Almost all productive tools and daily necessities were fashioned by family members at home or purchased through barter for grains, tea, cloth, and household utensils. In the last few decades, the Kazakh have begun to combine agriculture and stockraising, gradually settling down and abandoning their nomadic ways. Small-scaled tannery, wool mill, and oil press factories have been established. The mode of production of the Kazakh is now in transition.

### 16 SPORTS

Wrestling and "Snatching the Lamb" (*diaoyang*) are popular sports that attract large crowds; they are part of every festival. In the game of "Snatching the Lamb," a venerable elder puts a headless lamb on the grass. At a full gallop, five to eight horsemen try to grab the lamb with one hand. The winner is the first horseman who brings the lamb to a designated place.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

With the gradual introduction of movies and television into Kazakh colonies, villages, and towns, their traditional singing and dancing have become more and more restricted to festive occasions. Film projection teams frequently visit the herdsman's colonies, thus enabling them to enjoy the modern entertainment of movies.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Kazakh artisans are well-known for the quality of their felt products (hats, shoes, and boots) and embroideries (especially women's clothes and hats). Folk art also includes wooden articles, ironware, bone implements, and ornaments made of gold, silver, and jade.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The grassland environment of the Kazakh does not favor a diversified economy. The combination of agriculture and stockraising has already improved the living conditions of the Kazakh. One promising avenue for further development is border trade with the Kazakh on the other side of the Chinese border.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, among the Kazakhs certain traditions persist to deny women equal rights in practice.

Since 1950, the practice of polygamy has been discontinued, but the man of the household retains ultimate authority and all family members, including the wife, must obey him. While according to law, women have equal rights, in Kazakh society women traditionally hold no property and the family property

is inherited by the youngest son. As China modernizes, these traditions are changing slowly. In the past, married women had no access to divorce, while a man was free to abandon his wife. With the guarantees afforded by Chinese law, Kazakh women are increasingly taking action to marry and to divorce according to their own interests.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# KAZAKHS

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-ZAKS

**LOCATION:** Kazakhstan

**POPULATION:** 10.8 million

**LANGUAGES:** Kazakh; Russian

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Kazakh Chinese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

At the foundation of traditional Kazakh culture was the nomadic way of life, which was typical until the early 20th century. The Kazakhs are closely related to the Kyrgyz in ethnicity, culture, and language. The Kazakhs traditionally divided themselves into three territorial *zhüz* (tribal unions, or hordes): Greater, Central, and Lesser. The Greater Horde occupied much of what is now southern Kazakhstan and consisted of the Sary Uisin, Kangli, Dulat, Alban, Suan, Zhalayir, and other smaller tribes. The Central Horde occupied the northern and eastern parts of modern Kazakhstan and consisted of the Argyn, Naiman, Kerei, and Kongrat tribes. The Lesser Horde was composed of three united tribes—Zheti Ru, Alim Uly, and Bai Uly—who migrated in 1801 to the land between the Ural and Volga Rivers. Since the Kazakhs were nomads, during the 1800s it was possible for large numbers of Slavic settlers to move into and seize the land inhabited by the Kazakhs.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kazakh homeland, although covering 2.6 million sq km (more than 1 million sq mi) is not topographically diverse. Approximately 80% of the area consists of lowlands, plains, and plateaus, and strong winds often sweep through these flat lands. The only mountains are the Tien Shan and Altai ranges in the east and southeast. The climate within Kazakhstan varies significantly, which means that the types of plants and animals found in Kazakhstan also vary significantly from region to region. Parts of Kazakhstan become bitterly cold in the winter and intensely hot during the summer. The massive Kara Kum Desert occupies much of central Kazakhstan. The Kara Kum (“black sand”) is the world’s fourth largest desert, and much of it extends into other nations of Central Asia. There are two large inland seas, the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea. Both of these great seas, however, contain significantly less water than in the recent past because of heavy irrigation use during the Soviet era. From 1960 to 1975, the shores of the Aral Sea moved more than 100 km (60 mi) inward as the total volume of water shrank (and became more salty). The Aral Sea today is only one-third of its original size and is divided into two parts. The larger part lies in Uzbekistan and is considered a dead sea; there is some hope for revitalizing the smaller part that lies in Kazakhstan, and efforts have been made to separate the two. As of 2008, these efforts had not been successful.

There are currently more than 10 million Kazakhs, 80% of whom live in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs were for many years a minority within their own homeland, accounting for only 42% of the population as recently as the mid 1990s. Today the Kazakh government has been successful in creating policies to encourage growth of ethnic Kazakh population, including policies to encourage ethnic Kazakhs to move to Kazakhstan.

This combined with out-migration of Russians and other non-titular nationalities has contributed to an increase in the Kazakh population, to 60%. Ethnic Russians have been settling in the Kazakh homeland since the 18th century and presently account for about 30% of the population in the Kazakh homeland. Approximately 100 other nationalities account for the remainder of the population; many of them were deported to Kazakhstan during World War II. The birth rate of Kazakhs is higher than that of Russians in Kazakhstan, which means that the percentage of Kazakhs should continue to rise. There are approximately one million ethnic Kazakhs living in the Sinkiang-Uygur Autonomous Region of China.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Kazakh is a central Turkic language. More specifically, it belongs to the Nogai group in the Kipchak division of the Turkic branch of Ural-Altai languages. Modern Kazakh has many words borrowed from Russian, Arabic, Persian, Mongol, Chinese, Tatar, and Uzbek. There are three primary dialects that correspond to the three historic Kazakh hordes. Written Kazakh, which dates back only to the late 19th century, is based on the dialect of the Central Horde.

The Kazakh language was originally influenced by a nomadic way of life. A person who did not migrate, such as a *balykshi* (fisherman) or a *eginshi* (grain-grower) was atypical. Livestock, such as the *at* or *jilqi* (horse), *qazaqi qoy* (fat-tailed sheep), *ayir tüye* (Bactrian camel), and *yeshki* (goat) also played a central role in the development of the Kazakh language, with numerous terms and idioms focusing on livestock and their breeding. A traditional Kazakh greeting that is still sometimes used in rural areas literally translates as: “Are your livestock and your soul still healthy?” A traditional Kazakh wish for good fortune is literally translated as: “May God give you one thousand sheep with lambs, eighty camels, and eight married sons.”

The Kazakh language used Arabic script until 1930, when the Soviet government replaced it with the Latin alphabet. Just before World War II, the government switched from the Latin to the Cyrillic alphabet, which is used for the Russian language. With the Cyrillic alphabet came the large-scale incorporation of Russian terms and Russian-sounding place-names among the Kazakhs. Today, approximately 40% of all ethnic Kazakhs speak Russian as a second language. Approximately 70% of Kazakhstan’s population regularly speaks Russian. Since independence, the government of Kazakhstan has declared in the constitution that Kazakh was the state language and Russian the official language. The government has begun to change the Russian names of some places back to the original Kazakh names.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

As with the folklore of other nomadic peoples, the oral tradition forms the basis of Kazakh folklore. Over the centuries, sagas were passed down by memory from one generation to the next. Most of the stories are heroic epics where the *batir* (warrior) and his trusty horse save the clan and its livestock from danger. There are also stories about Alash, the legendary first Kazakh. The most famous heroic stories are *Koblandy-Batir*, *Er Sain*, and *Er Targyn*, all of which are from the 15th or 16th century and involve clashes between the Kazakhs and the Kalmyks. The most famous lyric epics are *Kozy Korpesh–Bain Sulu* and *Aiman–Sholpan*. The most famous Kazakh love story



in the lyric tradition is *Kiz-Jhibek*, which contains historic information about Kazakh betrothal and marriage customs and ceremonies.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Kazakhs are Sunni Muslims. Islam, however, has not historically been as centralized among the Kazakhs as it has among other Central Asian peoples. Even though Islam had been adopted by the Kazakhs as early as 1043, it was not until the late 1700s that many of the popular Islamic religious practices became common among Kazakhs. Islam was historically most popular in the cities and towns of Central Asia, where there were mosques and seminaries. However, since the Kazakhs were primarily nomads and had minor contact with urban areas, many of them had little knowledge of the religion. The Kazakhs were introduced to Islam through contact with the Tatars, who traditionally were not as conservative as other Muslim peoples in Central Asia. For this reason, the imperial Russian government preferred that the Kazakhs associate with the Tatars.

Because the Kazakhs were wanderers who depended on livestock for their survival, animals were at the core of the ancient Kazakh religion. Until the mid-1800s, elements of this ancient animist belief system (including shamanism and ancestor worship) were still widely practiced among many Kazakh Muslims. This historical background, together with the fusion of Russian and other cultures, means that the Kazakh society of today is perhaps more secular than elsewhere in

Central Asia, although there has recently been a religious revival among young Kazakhs.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Republic of Kazakhstan celebrates the following national holidays: New Year's Day (January 1), celebrated in the Russian fashion with the decorating of the tree and a visit from a Santa Claus-like *Ded Moroz*; International Women's Day (March 8), *Nauryz* (the day of the vernal equinox), the traditional Persian-Turkic new year; May Day or Unity Day of the Kazakh Nation (May 1), Victory Day (May 9), celebrating the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, Capital Day (May 10), Constitution Day (August 30), Independence Day (October 25), and Democracy Day (December 16). Additionally, Muslim Kazakhs celebrate the traditional Muslim holidays Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha (Kurban Eid in the Kazakh language) and many choose to observe Ramadan as well.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Kazakhs typically have large birthday parties with many relatives and friends, and several Kazakh festivities mark various rites of passage during a person's life. Celebrations are held for a birth, a baby's fortieth day of life, the first day of school, and graduation. Voting and driving privileges come at 18 years of age.

Weddings are very important in Kazakh society, not only for honoring the married couple, but also as an event to assemble an extended family or clan together. The traditional wedding festival ceremonial is called the *toi*. In the past, arranged marriages were common, and the payment of *kalym* (a dowry) was expected upon betrothal.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Hospitality is an important part of Kazakh culture. A Kazakh host will be quite offended if the guest does not have some refreshments or at least a cup of traditional tea. Asking a guest lots of questions is considered bad manners. Guests in a Kazakh home are customarily allowed to rest after their journey and given some fermented mare's milk to drink. When a Kazakh host has finished attending to the guest, cordial conversation can then begin.

When a Kazakh greets an elderly person, both hands are used in a handshake as a sign of respect. It is considered impolite for a young person to shake hands with an elder using only one hand. Cohabitation without marriage is considered a dishonor to both families. Women and men are expected to stay chaste until marriage, but a double standard is common, with women held more accountable than men.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

During the Soviet era, medical care was provided by the government. The medical system now is in a state of transition.

At one time, the nomadic Kazakhs lived in *yurts*, cone-shaped tents of white felt stretched over a framework of wooden poles. Yurts are light and easy to assemble, dismantle, and transport. Today, yurts are only used as temporary shelters by shepherds in remote, seasonal pastures. The modern Kazakh home is typically an apartment in the city or a permanent single dwelling in rural areas. Kazakh interior design emphasizes

es the use of stucco artwork and wall facings as well as ornate carpets.

The main means of transportation is public bus. In larger towns and cities, people often use trolleys and streetcars. However, in villages and rural areas it is not unheard of for people to travel short distances by horse. People commonly take trains when traveling long distances within Kazakhstan. Kazakhs have international air service from their homeland through foreign airlines such as Lufthansa, Aeroflot, and Turkish Airlines.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women play a significant role in economic, social, and cultural life in Kazakhstan. Most married women work outside the home. Within the family, Kazakh women have equal rights with men, but they usually consider the husband the head of the family. In Kazakh custom, women prepare and serve the meals and watch over the children. The husband's role in assisting with housework varies from family to family.

The average urban Kazakh family has two children, and the typical rural one has three or four. By tradition, every Kazakh is supposed to know the names of his or her ancestors going back seven generations. Many Kazakhs today might not know all seven generations, but they are sure to know from which tribe and *zhüz* (tribal union) they are descended.

Before the Soviet period, there were several possible ways for Kazakhs to get married. One of the most famous was the tradition of a man to "steal" the girl from her parents. This type of elopement is still practiced in some of the southern regions of Kazakhstan. Another traditional method of marriage was for parents to seek a fixed marriage when they thought their son was an adult. The parents of the bride usually tried to find a bachelor who came from a family with a financial position similar to their own. According to custom, a Kazakh girl is supposed to compose her own wedding song before getting married. A popular tradition at weddings, anniversaries, and holidays is the *kız-kuu* (girl chase). A *kız-kuu* is a light-hearted social event involving a man and wife or a boyfriend and girlfriend. A man on horseback chases a woman on horseback and tries to catch her in order to steal a kiss. The woman tries to flee, and even uses a small horsewhip to keep the man or his horse away from her.

Extended families are common in the country, less so in the cities. Children, regardless of age, typically live with their parents until marriage. Elderly parents usually move in with children, as it is considered dishonorable to permit one's parents to live in a nursing home. Men who reach their thirties without having married are often looked upon with suspicion, and may even suffer from discrimination in society and the workplace.

## 11 CLOTHING

In the past, women typically wore long dresses with stiff collars and loose baggy pants cinched at the ankles. Men traditionally wore robes made of wool or cotton over large white shirts and broad trousers. Today, some women in rural areas wear the traditional dress, but most young women and men wear European-style clothes. The clothes worn today are often brightly colored and very stylish, with a greater emphasis on form than on function.

## 12 FOOD

*Kymyz* is a fermented beverage made from mare's milk and served in a *piala* (Oriental teacup). Other Kazakh drinks include *boza*, an alcoholic beverage made from millet, and *mus-alla*, a nonalcoholic type of grape juice. Fruit is mainly grown in *mewäzar bagh* (orchards). *Orik* (apricots), *shäftali* (peaches), *qawun* (melons), and *uzum* (grapes) are the most popular fruits. *Almä* (apples) are not as popular a fruit among Kazakhs as they are for export. (The name of the former capital and largest city of Kazakhstan, Almaty derives from its previous name Alma Ata or Alma Aty, means "mountain of apples.") A unique Kazakh culinary custom is the *dastarkhan*, a feast for special occasions consisting primarily of meat dishes and dairy products. For a *dastarkhan*, an entire animal (usually a sheep) is slaughtered, and the oldest member of the family gets the honor of carving the head and serving the family. The various parts of the animal symbolize desired traits for those eating them. For example, children are often served the ears as a symbol to be better listeners. Someone who is served the tongue should be more eloquent, and the person who receives the eye should seek wisdom.

Horse meat and mutton are popular items, because those animals were historically raised when the Kazakhs were nomadic herders. Examples of Kazakh dishes include *shuzhuk* (a type of kielbasa made from fresh or smoked horse meat); other horse meat dishes such as *kazy*, *karta*, *zhaya*, and *zhal*. *Kuir-dak* is prepared from a freshly slaughtered horse, sheep, or cow and consists of the animal's liver, heart, kidneys, and other organs cut into pieces, boiled in oil, and served with onions and pepper. *Beshbarmak* is a type of boiled dough. The dough is rolled into thin strips and cooked in the broth that is left over from boiled mutton. It is served with mutton on top, and is garnished with garlic and onions. *Beshbarmak* is a light dish that many Kazakhs eat when they are sick.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Kazakh educational system consists of the following stages: kindergarten (not required), secondary school (11 years), higher education institute (4–5 years), graduate research program (2 years), and post-graduate program (3 years). There also is a system of professional three-year colleges. Kazakhstan has more than 60 higher education institutions, including the Kazakh National University, Almaty State University, the Kazakh University of World Languages, Polytechnical University, and others. In the early 1990s, approximately 1,000 Kazakhs were studying abroad, and this number has grown, as the Kazakh government promotes study overseas through a program that provides scholarships. Higher education carries much prestige, and parents strongly encourage children to earn their diplomas. In Kazakhstan, 90% of boys and girls attend primary school, and nearly that many attend secondary school. Over 99% of the population is literate. The Kazakh educational system is currently in a state of transition, because the values of society have drastically changed since Kazakhstan became a democratic state. Many schools' language of instruction is Russian; however, Kazakh is becoming more prevalent.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The ancient Kazakh homeland has produced numerous talented musicians and singers. Music is a part of everyday Kazakh life from birth to death. Music is played for military expedi-

tions, weddings, funerals, parties, and games. Almost every Kazakh knows how to sing and play a musical instrument by ear. A traditional form of Kazakh music is the *sazgen*, a folk music quintet that includes traditional string and percussion instruments. The most popular folk instrument is the *dombra*, which has two strings and is played by plucking. Other traditional instruments include the *sybyzgy* and *uran* (wind instruments), the *dangyra* and *dabyl* (percussion instruments), and the *sherter* and *kobyz* (other stringed instruments). The *aitys* is a musical tradition in which two poet/composers duel with each other. This tradition remains very popular in Kazakhstan. The most popular contemporary Kazakh singers are Bibigul Tulegenova, Vermek Serkebaev, Alibek Dnishev, R. Bapov, and Roza Rymbaeva.

The 15th-century poetry of Asan Kaigy, and the 17th-century poems of Zhyrau and Dosmambet are highly revered among the Kazakh people. The founder of modern Kazakh literature was the humanist and poet Abai Ibragim Kunanbayev (1845–1904), who wrote the famous *Teachings* during 1890–98 as a collection of philosophical thoughts and proverbs. Prominent Kazakh writers during the Soviet years included Zhambyl Zhabaev, Saken Seifullin, Mailin, Ilias Dzansugurov, Sabit Mukanov, and Mukhtar Auezov, who wrote *Abbay*, a famous novel about 19th-century Kazakh life on the steppe. During the Soviet era, however, the names of many talented dissident writers, poets, and scientists (such as Ahmed Baitursunov, Makzhan Zhumabaev, and Zhusibek Aimaurov) were buried in oblivion. Contemporary writers who have enriched Kazakh literature since the 1960s include I. Esenberlin, M. Makataev, O. Suleimenov, K. Myrzaliev, and F. Ongarsynova.

## 15 WORK

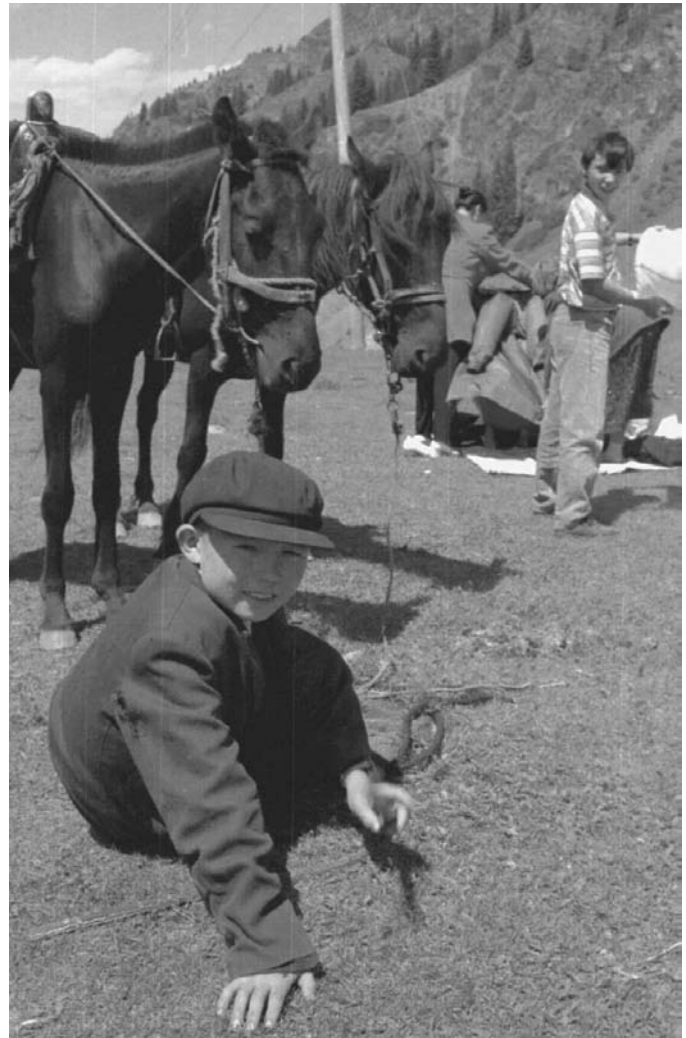
During the Soviet years, many Kazakhs worked on large state-run farms growing *maqta* (cotton). A very high birth rate among the Kazakhs during the 1980s has led to a large rate of unemployment in the late 1990s, creating a large labor force of young Kazakhs but not enough entry-level jobs for them. Since 2000 the unemployment rate in Kazakhstan, while still high, dropped considerably, and in 2006 was at 7%. This may be in part due to an economy stimulated by oil revenues, although this wealth is not shared by the entire population. However, by 2008, the worldwide economic downturn was causing a new rise in the numbers of unemployed in Kazakhstan.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is a popular sport to play in the warmer months, and hockey is popular during the winter. The national sport of Kazakhstan is Kazakh-style wrestling, which is similar to judo. In the country, horse racing and equine events are common. Although the risk of an avalanche is fairly high, skiing in the Tien Shan Mountains is becoming popular. Recently, the slopes have received international attention as a future site for expert and world-class skiing. Skiers are flown by helicopter to the tops of slopes.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

City dwellers often spend the weekends with their families in recreational parks, which can be found in almost any Kazakh town. Urban Kazakhs frequently go to the movies or watch videos. (Pirated videotapes of current movies are popular as well.) A popular Kazakh event for entertainment is the *itys*, a



A young Kazakh boy waits for customers on the Tianshan Mountain, Xinjiang, China. Kazakh herdsmen in Xinjiang make money by offering their services to tourists.  
(AP Images/Xinhua)

formal or informal competition of wit between two singers of either gender. During the *itys*, each singer plays the *dombra* (a two-stringed instrument) and cleverly makes up the lyrics as he or she sings, which requires a rich knowledge of the Kazakh language. Usually the singer will brag about aspects of his or her hometown or region (e.g., the fattest sheep, the best milk, the most beautiful people), and make fun of the other person's. The loser is the first person who can't sing a comeback quickly enough. Rural and city Kazakhs often visit in order to relax. Kazakhs enjoy drinking tea with neighbors or family.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In recent years, there has been a revival in Kazakh folk art and crafts, including carpet and jewelry making. Jewelry with traditional Kazakh symbols and designs is popular among women, especially silver jewelry. Collecting stamps and small pins are also popular hobbies.



## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since the 1970s, nationalist attitudes among the Kazakhs have been on the rise, leading many times to violence. In 1979, Kazakhs rioted in Tselinograd because there were rumors that the government was going to set aside land for local Germans who wanted to create their own autonomous region. Suspicion and antagonism against ethnic Russians increased during the late 1980s because the Soviet Union had often given them preference in leadership positions. Today, the situation is in many ways reversed and ethnic Russians resent new Kazakh language policies.

Atomic testing in northern Kazakhstan in the 1950s weakened the health of many residents. These people and their descendants are often born with deficient immune systems, a condition similar to AIDS. Some researchers have estimated that it will take another 50 years for the condition to reverse through intermarriage with people from unaffected families.

Narcotics use has become a serious social problem for Kazakhstan since independence. This is in part because of its location between the major producer of the world's heroin, Afghanistan, and the markets in Russia and the rest of Europe. As Kazakhstan became a trafficking route, the number of drug users increased. In 2006 there were 53,172 registered drug users, with the actual numbers of drug users projected to be as much as four times as high. Along with the increased numbers of drug users has come an increased number of HIV/AIDS infections. In 2003 as many as 23,000 people were thought to be living with HIV, although because there is a strong stigma against those with the disease, actual numbers are difficult to confirm.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In many ways the situation of women in Kazakhstan is better than that in many parts of the world, and especially better than that in some other Central Asian countries. Women are active in the workplace, they hold government positions, and they can be successful in business. This is possibly due to the traditionally nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakhs, which required that women be more active in everyday life for survival of the family. The introduction of Soviet values also encouraged women to join the workforce alongside men. The Kazakh constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex. However, women generally do not hold the highest government positions. Women are often victims of domestic violence, and there are few resources for these women to turn to for help. Bride kidnapping is practiced in some rural areas. Women are more likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts in the workforce, despite the fact that women tend to be better educated than men.

Gays and lesbians should also be protected under the Kazakh constitution's prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexuality, but in practice this is not the case. While there is a small gay community in large cities such as Almaty, homosexuality is still very much stigmatized by relatively traditional Kazakh society. Reports have surfaced of gay men being fired from their jobs. The community is so secretive that it is difficult to make contact with members to obtain information about the community.

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—revised by M. Kerr

# KELABIT

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-LAH-buht [biht]

**LOCATION:** Malaysia (Sarawak state)

**POPULATION:** About 5,200 (in 2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Kelabit

**RELIGION:** Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Iban

## 1 INTRODUCTION

See the article entitled **Iban**.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kelabit, with a population of approximately 5,200 people in 2000, is one of the smallest ethnic groups in Sarawak. They are highland people that inhabit the Kelabit Highlands area, which is located at the farthest reaches of the Baram and Limbang rivers in the remote interior of northern Sarawak. The unofficial capital of the Kelabit Highlands is Bario with 16 villages in the area. This includes Pa'Umur, Pa' Ukat, Pa' Lungan, (located along the Depbur basin), Long Dano, Pa Dalih, Ramudu (located along Kelapang basin), and Pa Ramapuh Benah, Pa Ramapuh Dita, Pa Derung, Ulung Palang Dita, Ulung Palang Benah, Padang Pasir, Kampung Baru, Arur Layun, Bario Asal, and Arur Dalan, in the Merariu river basin. There are four other Kelabit settlements located further down the tributaries of the Baram River: Long Peluan, Long Seridan, Long Lellang, and Long Napir.

Like many other indigenous communities in Sarawak, the Kelabit used to live in longhouses in the highlands of Central Borneo. However, due to economic and social factors, many have migrated to live in urban areas since the 1980s. It is estimated that only about 1,200 Kelabit are still living on the highlands. Many of the younger generation have moved out, mostly to get further education and to get jobs that suit their qualifications in towns and cities like Miri, Kuching, Sibul, Bintulu, Kuala Lumpur, and other places overseas.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Kelabit speak their own language, which is called "Kelabit." Today, many have learned to speak English and Malay languages. Unfortunately, this has affected the usage of the Kelabit language very badly. It is decreasingly used, particularly by the younger generations. The Kelabit did not have a written form of their language until education was introduced on the highlands in the 1950s and 1960s. A recent effort was made to document the language in a dictionary, partly to preserve the language.

Basically, a Kelabit name has two parts: the given name, and the father's name. Some common male Kelabit names are Lian, Agan, Giak, and Apui. Some common female names are Supang, Sigang, Rinai, Dayang, and Ruran. A common Kelabit name would be Supang (given name) Lian (father's name).

The Kelabit practice an elaborate and fascinating relational-name system, thus distinguishing them from the other tribes in Sarawak. This practice requires new parents and new grandparents to change their names completely and permanently, making their old names redundant. These new sets of names

have to be announced to the community at the *Irau Mekaa Ngadan* (Changing Name Ceremony).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Over a century ago, the Kelabit were involved in headhunting raids, not so much for ritual purposes but as a means to prove one's courage, bravery, or valiancy, and to get even with an enemy. Thus, a person who succeeded in headhunting exploits was hailed as a hero and looked upon as a role model. Stories of successful exploits are narrated in various forms of oral stories. One of these heroes is Agan Tadun. His fame and achievement are recounted in legends, myths, and traditional songs.

One popular myth among the Kelabit is that all humans were originally from the highlands, until a big flood covered the whole earth. Many people had to build rafts to survive and were brought to the coastal areas by the water. However, some had built big and heavy rafts and were therefore stranded on the highlands. That is why and how the Kelabit remained on the highlands.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Kelabit are fervent Christians. A spiritual revival arose among them in 1973, causing the whole tribe to embrace Christianity. As a consequence, they have abandoned most of their traditional beliefs. They believe that Christianity has brought them freedom from the old religion which restricted their activities.

Formerly, the Kelabit had to rely on bird augury and dreams as guidance before beginning an important journey or starting the agriculture cycle. Certain rituals and practices were observed before commencing any undertaking. Sometimes these rituals required them to abandon a field that had been cleared for farming, or to leave their ripened rice to rot. With their conversion to Christianity, these rituals ceased to be observed by the Kelabit. Instead of these rituals, today many Kelabit say (Christian) prayers before embarking on major tasks on their farms.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Two major holidays for the Kelabit are Christmas and Easter. They celebrate both occasions as a community, not merely as a family affairs. Opening one's home to visitors is one of the main features of Christmas. Visitors are served with a variety of cakes, cookies, and drinks. Longhouse communities also get together for a meal either on Christmas Eve or for Christmas lunch, or both, after Christmas services.

The Easter celebration lasts for four days at least. The whole community will get together at the central church to worship and socialize together. Special speakers are invited to give sermons. It is an occasion most people look forward to attending. In addition to Christian holidays, and like other Malaysians, the Kelabit also observe other national public holidays or festivals which include New Year's Day, Hari Raya Puasa or Hari Raya Aidil Fitri (end of Ramadan), Thaipusam (celebrated by Hindus on the 10th month of the Hindu calendar), Chinese New Year (celebrated over 15 days beginning on the first day of Chinese Lunar Calendar), Wesak Day, Gawai Dayak (harvest festival), Deepavali, and Christmas.



## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An infant is normally delivered by a midwife or an experienced older woman. In the past, a child was required to go through different stages of ceremonies or rituals as she or he grew to be a teenager. One of these ceremonies was the Initiation of the Child. It involved the slaughtering of one or more pigs, and the examinations of the livers and gall bladders to discern the fate and fortune of the child concerned. Today, these ceremonies are not observed at all, except for the *Irau Mekaa Ngadan* (Name Changing Ceremony).

As a teenager, a child is trained by her or his parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles to do chores. While a girl is trained by her mother, grandmother, and aunts about cooking, washing, and working on the field, a boy is trained by his father, grandfather, and uncles how to hunt, fish, collect firewood, and build huts or houses.

The birth of the first child among the Kelabit signifies a transition in an individual's life. This is marked by the *Irau Mekaa Ngadan*, which is held to affirm one's transition to parenthood and grandparenthood. The new parents and grandparents are required to take up new names to mark their new status. These new names are chosen and announced at the *Irau Mekaa Ngadan* which involves the whole community. Guests at the ceremony are served a big feast by the hosts (the new parents and grandparents).

A death among the Kelabit is often followed by a lot of mourning and weeping. Relatives and friends come from all over to pay their last respects. A dead person is normally buried within 24 hours.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A hospitable and friendly person is highly respected and valued by the Kelabit. It is considered rude not to offer hospitality to any visitors at the longhouse. Everybody is expected to greet one another by shaking hands and asking simple questions like "Where are you going?" "Where are you from?" "Who came with you?" and "How are you?" A person who does not greet others, particularly elderly people, is considered rude, unfriendly, and, to a certain extent, bad-mannered.

It is considered improper to wear shoes or slippers in the house. Helping the host or hostess with cooking or cleaning up is most welcomed. Taking gifts when visiting a friend or relative is highly favored.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Kelabit, like many other ethnic groups on the island of Borneo, used to live in longhouses. This situation has changed and continues to change since more and more Kelabit in the Highlands are residing in detached-single houses. Furthermore, many Kelabit have migrated to live in towns and cities. The longhouses and houses in the villages are always kept clean. This is encouraged by constant inspections by the health officers. All the longhouses have tap water, and some longhouses have generators to give light in the night, while the others have to depend on kerosene lamps or candles. In order to be safe to drink, the tap water must be boiled.

Most Kelabit in the highlands are free of common diseases that can be found elsewhere in the tropical interior. Their constant involvement in vigorous work on the farm keeps most of them physically fit. The consistent supply of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, and fish keeps them healthy. They buy or barter these goods from each other. This said, it is important to note that there is increasing dependence on foodstuff from nearby cities and towns. These groceries are air-flown to Bario on a daily basis.

A government clinic with a hospital assistant is stationed in the highlands. The villagers have a constant supply of medication, except for major or serious illnesses and accidents. In these cases, the patients are sent down by aircraft to the nearest town for better medical care.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family life is highly valued among the Kelabit. The family is not only a social unit, but also an economic one. A large family consists of 6 to 12 children. Often the grandparents will live with the family, and sometimes other members of the extended family live with the family as well. Consequently, there are cases where a family consists of 12 to 15 members. However, this has changed over the years, as many children have migrated to urban areas.

The husband is considered the head of the household. He is responsible for making political or leadership decisions for the family. This involves being the spokesman for the family. If any members of the family have problems, e.g., misunderstandings with other members of the community, the father is responsible for making peace. The wife, however, makes most of the economic decisions. She decides when to start the farming each year. While the husband is responsible for bringing back meat and fish for the family meals, it is the wife's job to collect vegetables and mushrooms for the meals. Their children are trained from a young age to help carry out these tasks. A



*A young girl of the Kelabit tribe of Sarawak dances at the 6th Rainforest World Music Festival in Malaysia. The festival brings together renowned world musicians from all continents and indigenous musicians from the interiors of Borneo. (© Reuters/Corbis)*

son will help his father, and a daughter is expected to help her mother.

Not many families keep animals as pets. Some raise cats to keep pests away, and some raise dogs for hunting. Poultry such as chicken and ducks are kept for their meat and eggs. Water buffalo are kept to prepare the fields for farming and also to carry heavy loads.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditionally the Kelabit wore very simple clothing. A man used to wear a loincloth and a jacket made from tree bark. A woman used to wear a knee-length skirt, and adorned herself with bead necklaces and a bead cap. However, today the Western style of dress is very common among the Kelabit.

### **12 FOOD**

The Kelabit always have a supply of fresh meat and vegetables from the jungle or garden. They collect wild vegetables from the jungle and hunt or fish for their protein. Each family also has farms for growing their own rice, not only for domestic consumption, but also for sale. Poultry such as chicken and ducks are reared for domestic consumption. The encroachment of urbanization is changing the food supply chains among the

Kelabit. With easier access to cash and modern transportation, the Kelabit in Bario are also getting their daily food supplies from nearby towns like Miri and Marudi.

The Kelabit also produce their own salt, called Kelabit or Bario salt. This salt is obtained by evaporating salty water from salt springs which are found in the highlands. The salty water is boiled until all the water is evaporated, leaving the salt at the bottom of the *kawang* (big cooking utensil). The remaining water is completely dripped from the salt before it is put in bamboo pipes to be burnt in the fire. This is to harden the salt, which is later wrapped in big leaves to be kept in dry and safe places. The salt is used in cooking and also to preserve meat.

Traditionally the Kelabit used clay pots, made locally by women, to cook or prepare their food. However, today most of their kitchen utensils, such as spoons, forks, plates, and metal cooking pots, are obtained from urban areas.

*Labo Belatuh* (smoked meat) is a traditional Kelabit food. Meat, particularly wild boar and venison, is salted and smoked over an open fire. The meat will later be boiled and pounded into small strips and eaten with rice.

### 13 EDUCATION

The first school was opened in the highlands in 1946 by Tom Harrison, a former British soldier who lived with the Kelabit for two years after World War II. He was assisted by Paul Kouhan who was originally from the island of Roti but later married and settled in Bario. There were only 46 students in the school when it first started. A few other schools were opened later on to cater to the needs of the Kelabit, who were coming to see the importance of formal education. Both sons and daughters were encouraged to go to school. Some students had to walk five to seven days through the thick rain forest to get to the nearest school. Access to education is one of the main reasons why many young people have migrated to urban areas.

The literacy rate among the Kelabit is quite high, particularly among the younger generations. Many of them have at least obtained a Malaysian Education Certificate. Of the 5,200 Kelabit, about 250 have obtained university degrees locally and abroad. Many others have attended professional courses and are working with governmental and private sectors across the country. In other words, the Kelabit, considering the difficult terrain of the highlands and the fact that they must leave their homes as soon as they go to school, have been very successful in their quest for formal education. Many have had to leave their home at the age of six or seven to attend boarding school.

Kelabit parents have played a crucial role in promoting formal education for their children. They see education as the means to improve their children's social condition. As a result, many highly educated Kelabit attribute their success to the encouragement of their parents.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Even though the Kelabit have gone through rapid social and economic changes within the very short span of 50 years, they have managed to maintain certain aspects of their culture which are still very unique, particularly their music and dance. A traditional musical instrument is the *sape*, a plucked lute instrument. It is carved from a tree trunk in an elongated rectangular shape, with a neck extending from one end of the body. Formerly, its three or four strings were made from finely split rattan, but today they are made of wire.

The Kelabit also play the *pagang* (tube zither), which is made from a length of bamboo tube, closed at both ends by its natural bamboo nodes. The strings are finely cut strips from the surface of the bamboo tube itself, which are still attached to the tube at either end.

The Kelabit use the *sape* and *pagang* music to dance their lovely hornbill and warrior dances, long dances, and single dances. The hornbill dance is performed in imitation of the hornbill bird. Hornbill birds are beautiful, shy, and very gracious. Many natives in Sarawak adore them, so they try to imitate their movements.

The Kelabit, like many other indigenous people in the Borneo island, do not have a written language. So most of their stories were passed down orally. However, recent efforts have been made by the local people to record this invaluable knowledge.

### 15 WORK

Most Kelabit in the highlands are rice cultivators. Historically, the Kelabit permanent wet-rice cultivation has distinguished them from the other natives in Sarawak, except for the Lun Bawang. They cultivate the famous Bario rice, which is well

known for its sweet aroma and pleasant taste. Besides cultivating rice, they also grow citrus fruits for domestic consumption. Unlike those who remain in the highlands, Kelabit migrants to cities and towns are professionals, religious leaders, and intellectuals who play important roles in the wider Malaysian society.

### 16 SPORTS

Most Kelabits' traditional games and sports are slowly being abandoned by the younger generation. They have learned new games like basketball, volleyball, and soccer. In recent years, these sports have been promoted within the Kelabit community through and during the annual Highlanders Games Carnival. During the carnival, game competitions are carried out to ensure participation by Kelabit from different cities, towns, and villages. In the past, children spent most of their time swimming in the river, or playing in the shrubs surrounding the longhouses. Unfortunately, today most of these games are abandoned.

Soccer as a sport has become very popular among the Kelabit. Most Kelabit young men and boys are enthralled with the game. Another sport which has become popular among the Kelabit is golf. Tournaments are often organized to promote and maintain interests in the sport among urban Kelabit.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Since the highlands are quite isolated in the interior of Sarawak, television and movies were unknown in the highlands until recently. The installation of generators in most Kelabit longhouses has enabled them to watch movies on television and video. Some families do have satellite dishes, which make it possible for them to receive television channels from all over the world.

Occasionally, the Kelabit get together in the night to sing, dance, and talk, after working hard in the rice field during the day. Various dances are danced to the *sape* music. The women sometimes get together to sing Christian songs, or traditional songs. These occasions are always joyous and delightful.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Kelabit make many handicraft items, many of them for everyday use. Most of these items, however, are made with little ornamentation and no carving. Nonetheless, many of them are beautifully made, with great skill.

Bamboo and rattan are the two common materials used to make Kelabit crafts. Rattan is easily obtained from the primary forest, and bamboo is acquired from the secondary forest, i.e., from areas which have at some time in the past been used for agriculture. Many cooking utensils, tools in the kitchen, baskets for storage and carrying, fish traps, and rice winnowing trays are some items that are made of these materials.

The Kelabit also use other materials like grass, bark, or other plant materials to make mats, brooms, sun hats, knife sheaths, and rain capes. Nylon cord and thread are sometimes used together with the other materials.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One of the acute social problems faced by the Kelabit in the highlands is the increasing and rapid migration of the younger generations into urban areas. This inevitable trend has left

the old people to tend the rice fields. In order to overcome the shortage of labor to work in the rice fields, the Kelabit are hiring laborers from their neighboring communities.

The rapid economic progress in Sarawak has benefited the Kelabit in many ways. However, the increasing encroachment of commercial logging and demand for agricultural land development has put the Kelabit in a dilemma. They have to decide whether to give up their land for large-scale land development and timber concessions, or to maintain their traditional farming system.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Kelabit stress the fundamental equality of the sexes and the complementarities of their work. Nonetheless there are differences between men and women. This is especially with regards to their roles, responsibilities, functions and activities in the society. Female's functions and feminine roles include nurturing the family through cooking, cleaning, and working on the household farm, activities which reflect and at the same time reinforce feminine qualities such as motherliness, gentleness, friendliness and kindness. In contrast, activities which demand greater physical prowess, such as hunting, travelling and headhunting, are deemed to be men's activities. They involve and develop qualities that are considered to be masculine traits, such as strength industriousness, and physical ability and prowess. In its essence, the Kelabit gender system reflects a pattern, in which roles and activities are assigned for the purposes of accomplishing particular tasks and with a view to each individual's differing abilities and opportunities in performing them. Social differences between men and women in this case are defined by and based on the activities that they are engaged in. Nowadays gender roles have changed as a result of high rate of rural-urban migration and the arrival of formal education which facilitated women's increased labor force participation.

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—by P. Bala

# KHASI

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAH-zee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ki Khasi; Ri Lum

**LOCATION:** India (Meghalaya state)

**POPULATION:** 1.34 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Khasi

**RELIGION:** Christianity; native animist beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The name *Khasi* identifies a group of tribes and subtribes presently inhabiting the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya State in northeastern India. The Khasi call themselves Ki Khasi or Ri Lum. The name *Khasi* was probably given to them by the people of the surrounding plains. In its broad sense, Khasi includes several neighboring groups such as the Jaintia, Pnar, Lyngam, Bhoi, War, and Khyntiam. In Bangladesh, in the hills of Sylhet, Khasis sometimes refer to themselves as the Hyniewtrep, the "Seven Huts," which refers to the original seven families from which all Khasi believe they are descended.

Early Khasi history remains a mystery, although linguistic and other evidence suggests a probable Southeast Asian origin. By the mid-16th century, numerous small Khasi chiefdoms existed in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. British expansion into Assam in the early 19th century led to contact with the Khasi tribes. Periodic conflict with the Khasi eventually led to the British extending their control into the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Between 1826 and 1835, the 25 Khasi states in the region accepted British protection. Relations were formalized in 1862, when treaties were signed between the British and the Khasi, granting the latter autonomy and freedom from British taxation. Shillong was made the capital of the British province of Assam in 1874, exposing the Khasi to significant Western cultural influences. At India's independence in 1947, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were designated an autonomous tribal area under the administration of the government of Assam. The region achieved full statehood as Meghalaya State in 1972.

The majority of the Khasi population live in Meghalaya State, although there is a significant minority (c. 29,000) found in Assam. Small numbers of Khasi are also found in Bangladesh and in the Indian states of West Bengal, Mizoram, Tripura, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Aunachal Pradesh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to census returns, the Khasi population in Meghalaya numbered 1.12 million in 2001. The current estimated total population of the Khasi is around 1.34 million. The homeland of the Khasi lies on the Assam or Meghalaya plateau, an upland area some 240 km by 100 km (150 mi by 60 mi) located between the Brahmaputra Valley to the north and the alluvial plains of Bangladesh to the south. With summit levels at 1,370–1,830 m (4,500–6,000 ft), the region experiences a temperate climate. Maximum temperatures during the hottest month average around 27°C (80°F), while during the winter months temperatures rarely drop below 5°C (40°F). The plateau stands right in the path of monsoon winds blowing in from the Bay of Bengal, and the region experiences heavy rainfall dur-



ing the summer months. Cherrapunji, southwest of Shillong and on the south-facing slope of the hills, is on record as the wettest place on earth, averaging nearly 1,150 cm (450 in) of rain annually. As a result of the heavy rains, much of the plateau is deeply dissected and is also covered with dense forests.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Khasi language and its dialects belong to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Mon-Khmer languages are widely spoken in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma, indicating possible Southeast Asian origins for the Khasi tribes. Khasi represents the westernmost occurrence of the Mon-Khmer group. Some scholars see it as a link between the Southeast Asian languages and those of central India belonging to the Munda branch of the Austro-Asiatic family, spoken by the Munda, Santals, and other tribes.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Khasi possess a rich and varied folklore. The dog is considered the friend of humans and, unlike some of their neighbors, the Khasi do not eat dog flesh. One tale tells of how the dog came to live with humans. Many, many years ago, when the world was very young, so the legend goes, all the beasts lived happily together. They bought and sold goods at a market located at Luri-Lura in the territory of the Bhoi Khasi, in the northeastern part of the region. One day a dog came to the market to sell rotten peas. The animals around the dog's stall objected to the unpleasant odor of his wares, knocking over

the stall and trampling on his goods. The dog complained to the principal beasts at the market and also to the tiger, who was priest of the market. He was told he would be fined for selling such foul-smelling goods in the market, and they, also, kicked and trampled his wares. The dog eventually went to a human, who said, "Come and live with me, and I will arise with you to seek revenge on all the animals who have wronged you." Since that day, humans have hunted with the assistance of the dog. Dogs know how to track animals because they can scent in their footprints the rotten peas that they trampled at the market at Lura-Luri.

### 5 RELIGION

Khasi religion may be described as animistic, focusing on the propitiation of spirits—both good and evil—especially in times of trouble. The particular spirit to be appeased is identified through an egg-breaking ritual, and the appropriate sacrifice is performed. Fowl and goats are the principal sacrificial victims, although human sacrifice was not unknown in the past. The priest (*lyngdoh*), who is appointed from a special priestly clan, is the principal person responsible for performing ritual functions. However, the presence of a female priest (*ka-soh-blei* or *ka-lyngdoh*) is necessary at all sacrifices. This is, perhaps, a reflection of the matriarchal nature of Khasi society, as is the assigning of a feminine gender to the Khasi creator goddess. Other religious practitioners, such as diviners and elders skilled in sorcery, play a role in Khasi religious life. Family ceremonies are performed by the head of the family or clan. Ancestor worship and the worship of natural forces and gods and goddesses of nature form an integral part of Khasi religious practices.

Although many aspects of traditional Khasi religion survive, the majority of Khasi have adopted Christianity. Missionary work began in the region during the late 19th century and has been so successful that today over 80% of Khasi profess to be Christian, belonging mostly to the Presbyterian or Roman Catholic churches, although there are a few Unitarians in the mix. There are a few Hindus and Muslims among the Khasi, the latter coming primarily as traders from other parts of India and intermarrying with local Khasi women.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important of the many festivals celebrated by the Khasi is the Nongkrem Dance. This is held in late spring (usually in May) and is part of a ceremony performed by the Syiem (chief) of Khyrim State (one of the former Khasi states) and his priests. Goats are sacrificed to Ka Blei Synshar, the ruling goddess of the Khasi, for an abundance of crops and for the prosperity of the people. Various ritual dances, some performed by the chief and his entourage, are part of the ceremonies. This is followed by the great dance by Khasi girls and men before the house of the high priestess. People come from all over the region to participate in the festival and its activities.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The naming ceremony for a child is held the day after its birth. Several names are suggested to the elderly man who is called to perform the naming *puja* (ceremony). He recites the names while pouring liquor from a gourd onto the ground. The name on his lips when the last drop of liquor adheres to the spout of the gourd is the one selected. Certain other rituals complete

the naming ceremony, including the placing of the placenta in a pot and hanging it on a tree outside the village. Among some groups, egg-breaking forms part of the naming ritual. Traditional rituals associated with birth are not observed by Christians.

Death rituals of the Khasi are quite elaborate and involve the sacrifice of several types of animals. At death, the body is washed, dressed in white cloth, and laid out with an egg placed on the stomach. A cock is sacrificed to scratch a path for the spirit to the next world. A bull is then sacrificed for a man, or a cow for a woman. On the day of the funeral, pigs are sacrificed by relatives and friends of the deceased. The dead are cremated, with pieces of bone collected from the funeral pyre and placed in the clan bone repository (along with some bones from the sacrificed animals). For three days after cremation, the family is in mourning and under various taboos. After a month, a pig or fowl is sacrificed to complete the funeral rites. Among Christian Khasi, the dead are buried according to the rites of the Christian Church.

An unusual feature of the Khasi is their custom of erecting memorial stones. These are huge, upright stone monoliths, some as high as 8 m (27 ft), that may be seen standing in groups throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. They serve as memorials to the dead or to mark places of particular importance or sanctity to the Khasi.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Khasi are a cheerful people by nature. They seem to thoroughly appreciate a joke, and even women are not reluctant to indulge in lighthearted exchanges with total strangers. It is customary not to mention names of immediate relations, perhaps for fear of attracting the attention of evil spirits. A person may be addressed as the “mother of so and so” or the “father of so and so” rather than by their real name. Actual names may eventually be entirely forgotten through lack of use.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Khasi villages are built a little below the summits of hills to protect them from the elements. A marketplace and a sacred grove of trees may be found outside the village, along with numerous Khasi memorial stones. The village itself may contain schools and Christian churches, as well as homes. The Khasi house is an oval-shaped, thatched structure, with walls of timber or stone. It is usually divided into three rooms: a porch, a living room, and sleeping quarters. Furnishings are a mixture of traditional and modern, reflecting the strong influence of the British in the region. Wealthier families have more substantial houses, with comfortable European-style furniture.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Khasi are divided into a number of clans, each of which trace their descent from an ancestress known as *kiaw* (grandmother). The clans are exogamous, with marriage within a clan strictly prohibited. Members of a clan are bound together by ties of religion, ancestor worship, and funeral rites, and even Christian Khasi preserve their clan structure. Descent is traced through the female line. Marriage is by choice and usually takes place during early adulthood. Omens are read and an auspicious day fixed for the marriage ceremony. The ceremony itself is performed by a priest and is accompanied by animal sacrifice, feasting, and much drinking. In the Christian

community, the marriage ceremony is performed according to the rites of the Church.

The newlyweds usually reside with the bride’s mother until children are born, when they set up their own household. The Khasi are monogamous in their marriage relationships. However, divorce is frequent and easily obtained, and remarriage of divorcées is permitted. The youngest daughter inherits ancestral property, and daughters receive preference in any division of property.

Women enjoy a high social status and play a significant role in managing the household’s social and economic affairs.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional dress of a Khasi man consists of a sleeveless coat (*jymphong*) that leaves the arms and neck bare. It fastens across the front with frogs (braided loops that slip over buttons) and has tassels on the chest and a fringe at the bottom. This is worn over a loincloth that wraps around the waist and is drawn through the legs, with one end hanging down in front like an apron. A black cap completes the outfit. Elderly men sometimes replace the cap with a white turban. Males wear earrings, armlets, and necklaces made of gold, silver, and semi-precious stones.

For women, typical clothing is a short piece of cloth wrapped around the waist that hangs to the knees. Over this is worn a long piece of cloth, knotted at the shoulders, that hangs down to the ankles. Another long piece of cloth, often striped or brightly colored, is thrown around the shoulders like a cloak and tied at the front. A wrap is worn over the head and shoulders. Women wear a variety of jewelry made from gold, silver, and stones such as coral and carnelian.

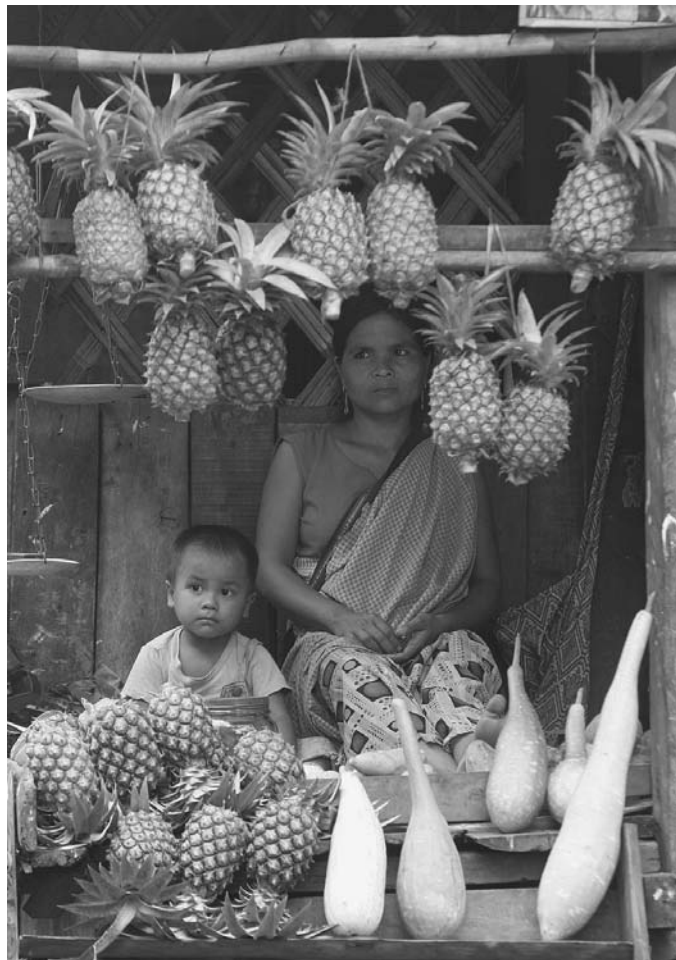
## 12 FOOD

Khasi usually take two meals a day, one in the early morning and the other in the evening. They are nonvegetarians, eating pork, beef, and chicken, as well as the flesh of many wild animals. They are said to enjoy a curry made from a particular kind of green frog. Dried fish with rice is a staple of the Khasi diet. When rice is not available, millet or Job’s tears (the seeds of the grass *Coix lacryma-jobi*) is used instead. The inner bark of the wild sago palm is dried and made into a sweet, reddish flour and mixed with rice or eaten in the form of cakes. Milk and milk products are not used, a trait common among peoples of Mongoloid descent. This no doubt reflects the high incidence of lactose malabsorption (the inability of the body to use milk) that is found among peoples of this ethnic background. Beer made from rice or millet is widely consumed by the Khasi, as well as being used for ritual purposes. Some clans among the Khasi have specific food taboos originating, most likely, from totemic considerations.

## 13 EDUCATION

Compared to other tribal peoples in the Indian subcontinent, the Khasi have made good progress in the field of education, partly, perhaps, a result of the influence of missionaries in the past. Nearly two-thirds of the population is literate (66.1% in 2001), with women having a slightly higher literacy than men (the reverse of the norm in South Asia) and participating more in the educational process, although their involvement in higher education declines relative to men.





A Khasi woman and her child waits for customers to sell fruits in Nongpoh, Gauhati, India. (AP Images/Anupam Nath)

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Having no written script until 1842, when the Roman alphabet was introduced by a missionary, the Khasi lack any significant body of literature. However, this is more than made up for by their oral folk traditions. Singing and dancing are of particular importance, accompanied by music played on drums, pipes, flutes, and stringed instruments like guitars. Dancing accompanies all Khasi festivities and plays a role in some of their religious ceremonies. Only unmarried girls participate in the dance of the women. They don spectacular costumes, dressing in rich silk clothes that extend from their neck to the ground. They are laden with a profusion of jewelry, bead necklaces, silver and gold chains, bracelets, and earrings. On their heads, they wear a gold or silver crown. The girls dance in a circle, taking tiny steps to the beat of the music, barely lifting their feet off the ground. The hands are held straight down at the sides, with the eyes downcast. The men dance around the circle of girls, waving fly-whisks and prancing around with huge, ungainly steps. There are also dances performed only by men.

#### 15 WORK

Although many Khasi have entered other occupations, agriculture remains the main economic activity among the community. A variety of crops, produced by methods ranging from

intensive paddy cultivation to shifting agriculture (*jhum*), are cultivated for consumption and sale. Crops grown by the Khasi include rice, maize (corn), millet, pulses, chilies, potatoes, vegetables (e.g., eggplants, pumpkins, and gourds) and fruits (pineapples and oranges). Agricultural produce is sold at weekly markets and through marketing societies. The Khasi raise livestock for economic and ritual purposes (goats, pigs, and chickens are important sacrificial animals), and also engage in hunting and fishing. Bees are kept for larvae, wax, and honey.

#### 16 SPORTS

Games played by children include spinning tops, a kind of hopscotch, kite-flying, marbles using stone pebbles, and wrestling. The principal sport of Khasi men is archery. The Khasi believe that archery originated at the creation of the world, when the first Khasi woman taught her two sons to shoot arrows. Villages challenge each other to archery meets, and archery competitions accompany many festivals. Betting on the outcome of a contest is commonplace.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Khasi enjoy pastimes such as hunting and archery, as well as their folk traditions of singing and dancing. Modern mass media such as radio and television are becoming increasingly popular.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Although they manufacture items ranging from simple metal agricultural implements to cane baskets and sieves, Khasi can hardly be said to have any distinctive arts or crafts. They are skilled in basketry, net-making, carpentry, weaving cotton and silk cloth, and the manufacture of various utilitarian goods.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Khasi, like many other tribes in India, are undergoing changes that have led to internal social stresses as well as to problems in relations with other ethnic groups. The community is designated as a Scheduled Tribe and is entitled to the benefits that accompany this status under the Indian Constitution. The predominantly "tribal" nature of Meghalaya, however, has led to problems with nontribal groups. Aggressive organizations such as the Khasi Students Union (KSU) and the Federation of Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo Peoples (FKJGP) actively support policies that are aimed at preventing nontribal peoples from living and working in the state. The need to present a united tribal front, however, has to some degree clouded internal social tensions. The undifferentiated Khasi society of former times has now become stratified, with new classes of landlords, white-collar professionals, and agriculturalists all competing for limited resources. There is particular resentment by traditional Khasi against the Christian Khasi, who are seen as becoming increasingly dominant in the political, economic, and social arenas. This accounts for the rise of movements such as Seng Khasi, aimed at preserving the traditional Khasi religion.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Khasi society is matrilineal and so women enjoy many advantages they lack in other South Asian societies. A 2007 study from Germany concluded that the tribes of Meghalaya, such

as the Khasi, whose societies are organized on matrilineal and matrifocal principles have obtained much greater gender equality than the other societies of South Asia (e.g. Hindu and Muslim) that are organized on the patriarchal principles. Khasi women enjoy a high social status and play a significant role in socio-economic matters and household management. Many Khasi women have taken up professions in the civil service and in industries besides agriculture.

Khasi women are divided into several matrilineal clans such as Mawlong, Khongweer and Symley. The youngest daughter inherits the ancestral property and daughters are given preference in the division of property while males can own only self-acquired property. Even Christians are known to pass down their ancestral property through the female line.

Even so, there are many male heads of families among the Khasi and women tend to lag behind in terms of socio-economic standing. It is possible for males who have no living female relatives to adopt a female as a younger daughter (a Khasi custom known as *Rap-iing*) to ensure property passes down from generation to generation (viz. Khasi Hills Autonomous District [Khasi Social Custom of Lineage] Act of 1997).

Though females in Meghalaya are aware of their rights and position in society, hardly any Khasi women actively participate in the world of politics. Khasi society does not even allow women to participate in political decision-making. Few women are heads of a *dorbar* (the equivalent of a panchayat in the plains) and only recently, despite their status in society, have women been allowed to participate much in a *dorbar* meeting. The *dorbar* continues to be dominated by males.

Though women in Khasi society are relatively free, with authority, title, inheritance, the right to maintain matrilineal residence after marriage and succession traced through the female line, still there is discrimination (for instance, many Khasi women wait to eat until after their husbands have eaten) and in rural areas many Khasi women feel that the reservation of a seat for them in a *dorbar* is not beneficial to them. Of course most females exercise their franchise in the elections and that percentage increases with the rise in educational levels.

However, in general, women in Khasi society enjoy an enviable freedom and equality vis-à-vis males compared to other women in South Asia.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# KHMER

**PRONUNCIATION:** kuh-MER

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Cambodians

**LOCATION:** Cambodia

**POPULATION:** About 8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Cambodian

**RELIGION:** Theravada Buddhism; Islam; Roman Catholicism; traditional beliefs; Taoism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

For much of the past century, the State of Cambodia has been largely unknown to most of the world except as the home of Angkor Wat, one of the wonders of the world. Not until the Vietnam War did Cambodia come to the world's attention, when its strategic location to the west of Vietnam, where it shared a border hundreds of miles long, brought it unwanted involvement in the War.

Cambodians are called Khmer and their language, culture, and appearance reflect many centuries of Hindu influence from India, Chinese from China, and other groups from prehistoric Cambodia, Malaysia, and Europe.

Cambodians value tradition, as revealed in a common proverb that states, "Don't choose a straight path and don't reject a winding one. Choose the path your ancestors followed." Cambodians eat rice and fish, raise pigs and water buffalo, and live in stilt houses, as have their ancestors for millennia. It is also probable that present-day Cambodian practices, such as wearing tattoos for protection, chewing betel, and games played at the New Year, have been part of daily life for centuries, perhaps for thousands of years. Some beliefs, such as believing in water spirits, associating ancestor spirits with the lunar calendar, and natural phenomena like rocks and soil, may be thousands of years old.

Cambodians are quick to note that their nation was once the heart of a great empire that stretched over much of Southeast Asia. In the late 1800s the French colonized Cambodia in an effort to protect its holdings in Vietnam, which it considered potentially more lucrative than Cambodia. France was also interested in having Cambodia serve as a buffer between France's possessions and Thailand, also interested in the resources of Cambodia.

In 1953 Cambodia gained independence with King Norodom Sihanouk as head of state. For the next decade and a half, Sihanouk tried to keep his country neutral and out of the war that was spreading in neighboring Vietnam. He was unsuccessful and was overthrown in 1970. Cambodia has been ruled by four governments since 1953, each having gained power by overthrowing the previous one until the 1993 election, supervised by the United Nations. The first government was run by General Lon Nol, who allowed the United States to fight the Vietnam War from Cambodia. As the war continued, corruption, bombing, economic disruption, and the displacement of over half the population from their homes destroyed much of Cambodia and facilitated the overthrow of the country in 1975 by Communist rebels.

The Communists or "Khmer Rouge" attempted to remake society. Intent on a Maoist "cultural revolution," they evacuated the cities, turned everyone into laborers, dissolved banks, the



postal service, the airlines, and other institutions. They closed schools and hospitals and tore down temples and churches. In three and a half years of Khmer Rouge rule, at least one million Cambodians died from execution, starvation, torture, and disease, and the numbers are still being revised upward as new gravesites are uncovered with the help of satellite mapping.

In December 1978, Vietnam invaded and chased the Khmer Rouge to the Thai border. For the next decade the country was ruled by a government installed by the Vietnamese. Resistance armies including the Khmer Rouge—one led by Sihanouk and another led by non-Communists—attempted to take over the country. In 1993 the United Nations oversaw reconciliation between resistance groups and the government and held elections. Cambodians are now experiencing more peace, security, and prosperity than most have since at least 1970.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The population of Cambodia in 2008 was approximately 8 million people, although the continued war between government troops and the Khmer Rouge make a complete census of the country impossible.

Approximately 90% of the Cambodian population is ethnic Khmer. Another 5% of the population is Chinese-Cambodians.

There is also a significant Vietnamese minority, although observers differ on the number. This is because virtually all birth records were destroyed during the Khmer Rouge era and, in the post-KR years, ethnic Vietnamese have been reluctant to come forward and identify themselves. Most Vietnamese live

in the capital of Phnom Penh or near the border with Vietnam. They are still subject to considerable discrimination, particularly during Cambodian election campaigns, when politicians seem all too willing to play the “racist card.”

Hill people, called “Khmer Loeu” by other Cambodians, also live in Cambodia. These are scattered tribes who live in remote plateaus and mountainous areas on the Western, northern, and eastern periphery of Cambodia. There are also Cham, the descendants of a once-great empire that dominated from central Vietnam. The Cham speak their own language and practice Islam. Most are fishermen or rice farmers.

Cambodia is a small country, about the size of Oregon, hugged between the two larger, more populous countries of Vietnam and Thailand. Physically, three-quarters of Cambodia lie in a flat basin that forms the center of the country, surrounded by plateaus and mountains.

This central plain is Cambodia’s “rice bowl.” The rice bowl has fed Cambodians for millennia, for it is home to rice fields in the flooded areas and vegetables and fruit in the drier areas.

Cambodia is a monsoon country with two seasons. The monsoons from the southwest bring the rainy season from May to October. During the wet season, there are torrential downpours almost every day. The rest of the time is generally cloudy and humid.

From November to April, the monsoons come from the opposite direction, the northeast, bringing sunshine and little rain. The weather is dry and hot, with the heat increasing into April making the coming of the rainy season a welcome event.

During the rainy season, Cambodia is home to a truly amazing phenomenon. Tonle Sap Lake is a long narrow lake located in west central Cambodia connected to the Mekong River by the Tonle Sap River. During the rainy season, the Mekong swells with flood waters as it travels over 4,023 km (2,500 mi) from its source in China. The surplus water is pushed up the Tonle Sap River, reversing its normal southward rush to the sea and pushing it back into the Tonle Sap Lake. However, this pattern has been disrupted by changes to the Mekong as the upper riparian nations—especially China—construct dams in keeping with their economic development plans. The Cambodian government and environmental groups are beginning to express concern. Fish from the lake provide Cambodians with a quarter of their protein.

Cambodia’s population of wild animals includes spotted leopards, tiger, black panthers, bears, boar, and many species of monkeys. These animals frequent the forests, which are avoided by most Cambodians. Snakes abound. Three of the world’s most dangerous—the cobra, king cobra, and banded krait—also live in Cambodia but are rarer. Numerous species of birds also reside in Cambodia. These include peacocks, wild duck, and pheasant. A land of water, Cambodia is also home to fish-eating birds, such as cormorants, egrets, and pelicans.

Between 500,000 and 700,000 Khmer live in southern Vietnam, where most continue to speak their language and practice Cambodian Buddhism. Most are rice farmers, as were their ancestors when southern Vietnam was part of the large Khmer kingdom. Another quarter-to-half-million live in Thailand just across the border from west and northwest Cambodia.

In addition, Cambodian migrants now live in more than 20 countries throughout the world. This diaspora of the Khmer people began before the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975 as Cambodians fled to Vietnam and Thailand. Most fled in 1979,

after the Vietnamese chased the Khmer Rouge from power. Approximately 150,000 Cambodians have been resettled in the United States. In contrast to the Vietnamese and Laotian diasporas, which are hampered by political tensions born in the Cold War, many overseas Cambodians are involved in Cambodia's recovery and development, and some have returned to work in the country. This is due in part to policies by the United Nations and Western donors to try to use overseas Khmer as consultants and project managers whenever possible.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of the State of Cambodia is Cambodian. It is probable that 2,000 years ago the inhabitants of Cambodia were speaking a language related to the modern Cambodian language that the Khmer speak. Pockets of people speaking languages related to Cambodian exist all over Southeast Asia and probably represent an older linguistic and cultural tradition that was eventually pushed into the highlands by invading lowlanders.

Cambodian has borrowed extensively from the administrative, military, and literary vocabulary of Sanskrit. Theravada Buddhism brought additional Pali words. In addition, Cambodians have borrowed words from Thai, French, Chinese, and Vietnamese. English words are becoming more common.

The Cambodian language is atonal in contrast to both Vietnamese and Thai. Cambodian also has a number of disyllabic words, adding prefixes and infixes to modify the basic syllable.

The Cambodian script is quite exotic looking to Westerners and is based on an ancient Brahmi script from South India. The earliest evidence of this script comes from the 2nd or 3rd century. The widespread destruction of books and other documents during the Khmer Rouge period created a great deficit in available Cambodian literature, but international projects to return materials in Khmer that had been held overseas have helped to address this deficit.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The first hero of Cambodia was Kaundinya, who is also the legendary first Cambodian. Cambodians trace their origin to the marriage of a handsome prince who traveled to Cambodia with a magical bow. When a dragon princess rowed out to meet him, he shot an arrow at her boat. Frightened, she agreed to marry him. In exchange for the clothes he gave the naked princess, her father drank up the water that covered the land that became Cambodia.

It has been more difficult for Cambodians to admire present-day leaders, especially for any length of period. Undoubtedly the most important and most revered Cambodian in recent times has been Norodom Sihanouk. Appointed King by the French in the 1940s, he later became Prince so that he could continue to act as a political rather than a monarchical leader. In 1970 he was deposed and continued until 1993 as a leader around whom opposition groups of various persuasions collected. After the United Nations-sponsored elections, he returned to Cambodia as its figurehead leader. Especially honored by older peasants, Sihanouk continues to be a pivotal figure in his country.

### 5 RELIGION

Most Cambodians are Theravada Buddhists. Theravada Buddhism is one of the two main Buddhist sects and is practiced

also in Thailand and Laos. Cambodians are so Buddhist that they often say, "To be Cambodian is to be Buddhist." Khmer Buddhists believe in karma and reincarnation. They believe that the acts they do today will affect their lives in the future, either in this or future lives. The Buddhist religion allows Cambodians a way to gain merit so they may be reborn to a better life. They gain merit by a myriad of good acts and religious deeds, which include acting properly, celebrating holy days, and taking food to the monks at the temple. No one can earn as much merit as a man who becomes a monk, whose merit accrues to him and his relatives, primarily his parents. Both Buddhism and some Hindu influences, which continue to be seen in Cambodia, originated in India and were brought into Cambodia at the beginning of the Christian era.

Most Cambodians also follow the traditional practices of their forefathers, which have probably been practiced in Cambodia for millennia. Most believe in a wide pantheon of spirits. These spirits must be fed, placated, and informed of family events; thus, every wedding includes a ceremony to notify family spirits that a new member is joining the family.

Cambodian Cham are Muslims, many Vietnamese are Roman Catholic, the hill tribes are primarily traditionalists, and the Chinese Cambodians are Taoist or Buddhists.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

All holidays in Cambodia are both religious and secular events. The most important festivals are Buddhist festivals. Among them are the celebration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha, the monks' entry into and exit from the rainy season retreat; the Festival of the Dead; and offerings to the monks, called Kathin.

One of the most important holidays of the Cambodian year is New Year, which is celebrated at the beginning of the lunar month, usually in April. This is the time when most Cambodians begin preparing their rice fields for planting and sowing their rice seedbeds. The New Year celebration lasts several days and is an extremely joyous time. There are religious ceremonies, dancing, music, and games.

The Festival of the Dead, or Prachum Ben, occurs in the fall. During the fortnight of celebration, offerings are made to the ancestors in the hope they will protect their descendants.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a child is a wonderful and dangerous time for Cambodian families. While they welcome the coming of a new member of the family, they worry about spirits who are especially threatening to pregnant women, women in childbirth, and newborn babies. Women, and often their husbands, especially in rural areas, observe a number of rules to protect their family. After the birth, the woman drinks a special concoction of herbs, water, and alcohol to help her regain her physical equilibrium, while bracelets and anklets blessed by the monks or healers are placed on their babies.

Toddlers are nursed until two to four years of age and are treated with considerable lenience. At about four, children are expected to feed, bathe, and control themselves, and shortly thereafter to care for their younger siblings.

For many Cambodian children, parents continue to exert almost complete control over them until they are married. Even then, the influence of their parents is heavy. Children are expected to show great respect to their parents and elders and

are severely punished for any lapse. While the Khmer Rouge loosened the traditional control of parents over their children, and modernization in urban areas continues to threaten traditional respect and obedience toward parents, most Cambodians continue to observe traditional family behavior. Children become full adults when they have jobs and their own households, spouses, and children. Even then, they are expected to follow the advice of their elders.

Most Cambodians are cremated at death and their ashes are put in a repository, or *stupa*, at the local Buddhist temple. If initially buried, the body is exhumed after several years, and the bones are taken to a stupa. In addition to having a funeral, Cambodians celebrate anniversary ceremonies after the death of a family member.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When Cambodians meet, they greet each other with the *sampeah*: joining their palms together, their fingers pointing up or slightly tilted toward the other person, they bring their hands up to their chest or forehead. The higher the status of the person they are greeting, the higher their hands go. They may also bow their head as they *sampeah*.

Cambodians place great importance on hierarchy and proper behavior. Women must respect men, children must respect their elders, and everyone must respect their superiors, which includes anyone with higher status, greater wealth, or a more important job. Inferiors greet their superiors with greater respect, a deeper bow, or greater stoop when offering food or passing by. Cambodians thus tend to be more reserved before those they consider their superiors, or with strangers. Visitors, both familiar and strange, are treated to the best the household has to offer.

Few young people date. Virginity remains highly valued for brides, although premarital sex is becoming more accepted in urban areas, especially among young professional Cambodians. Girls and boys have the opportunity to talk and flirt only on special occasions, surrounded by relatives and neighbors.

Most men marry between 19 and 25 years of age; women are slightly younger, usually between 16 and 22. Most young people continue to court as did their parents. It remains much more common for a young man to ask his parents' permission and assistance in obtaining a wife than to do so on his own. His parents, or a matchmaker, approach the young woman's family to see if they are interested in a match. If the response is positive, the families negotiate the terms and time of the marriage.

After an exchange of gifts, the young couple marry. It is still common for many young couples to spend the first year of marriage in the home of the woman's parents. After the parents are assured of their son-in-law's stability, or after the birth of the first child, the young couple commonly moves into a new house built for them by their families.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Health care in the country has been devastated by the events of the past decades. Unable to obtain health care during the second half of the 1970s, the inadequate food, cruelty, and horrors of those years has had dreadful consequences on Cambodians, both physically and mentally. One legacy from this period is the high level of personal violence seen in Cambodia, which runs the gamut from spousal relations to politics. The

subsequent isolation of Cambodia from much of the international community and the embargo against most imports and aid meant that Cambodians went another decade without even reaching minimum standards of modern health care.

International health assistance has improved services to many people, but much of this aid has been cut back in recent years. Cambodians continue to patronize local healers and spiritual leaders for most health needs. Modern medicine is expensive, with patients having to pay before being seen for services and medicines supposedly offered without fee.

While Cambodians long for the amenities of modern culture, with which they are becoming increasingly familiar through television and periodic visits or work trips to the larger cities, most cannot afford these items. The most important and frequently seen consumer items are imported from Vietnam, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries and are generally inexpensive. Most Cambodians own few objects they have not made themselves, while a tiny percentage of the urban population enjoy luxuries, including expensive villas, furnishings, cars, servants, clothing, and liquors.

Most rural Cambodians live in small villages of 200 or 300 people. Their houses are typically aligned along a river, stream, canal, or road. Houses are built on stilts to keep them above the floods of the rainy season. Poorer Cambodians live in single-room dwellings with thatched roofs and walls. With additional money, Cambodians add wooden walls, another room or two, windows, and tile roofs. Newer houses may have sheet metal roofs. The kitchen is attached to the side of the house.

Furniture is simple. Beds are woven plastic or thatch mats, rolled up and stored leaning against the wall or up in the rafters during the day. There may be a small desk, a chair or two, and a storage cabinet. Most families have little furniture, instead sporting baskets, water jugs, kitchen utensils, and a book or two. An altar to the spirits and ancestors, also high on the wall, may have a small glass of alcohol or water, a dish of fruit or sticky rice, a candle, and incense sticks.

Much living occurs under the house, where platforms provide sitting and siesta space. Both humans and animals benefit from the shade during the hot season and protection from the rain during the rainy season. Cambodians work, visit, eat, and sleep under the house during the daytime and retreat to their houses in the cool and darkness of the evening.

In the cities, Cambodians live in houses ranging from villas to a rag on the sidewalk. Wealthier Cambodians live in two- and three-story houses and apartments with electricity and running water. Less affluent Cambodians live in smaller apartments, often with many family members to a room.

The vast majority of Cambodians have never ridden in an airplane, car, bus, or motorized boat. Most, however, have paddled a boat. Many consider themselves lucky if their family owns a bicycle, and the dream of most youth and adults is to be able to purchase a motorbike. It is not unusual in the cities to see a whole family out for a ride, all on one motorbike: the father driving, a child sandwiched between him and his wife behind him, another on the handlebars, another in his wife's arms, and yet another in his lap. Everywhere in Cambodia, however, the commonest form of transport continues to be by foot.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The husband is the head of the family and its public spokesperson. He is responsible for providing the family's shelter and food. In the countryside, his duties include plowing and harrowing the rice field, threshing rice, caring for animals and household tools, and working at additional jobs if necessary to support the family. In the city, he generally works outside the house.

The Cambodian wife controls her family's purse strings, handling money and determining income and expenditures. In the countryside, her duties include caring for children and home, transplanting, harvesting and winnowing the rice, and caring for the garden. In the city, she may work out of the home, most commonly as a tradesperson. The Khmer wife is also considered the ethical and religious heart of her family. Cambodians say as she acts, so do her children.

Cambodian families have traditionally been smaller than Chinese or Vietnamese families, with the ideal of most being to have about five children. Cambodians value children and rely on them for assistance with supporting the family when they are young and their parents when they are old. Women especially, however, appreciate birth control information and contraceptive technology, if only to better control the timing of their family's growth.

Like the first Cambodian, Kaundinya, in much of Cambodia a young man is expected to gain the approval of his future parents-in-law by living and working with them before or after his marriage to their daughter. The traditional wedding is long and elaborate; Cambodians complain that expenses now cause weddings to be much shorter, cut from three to one or one-and-a-half days. The ceremony, which includes a blessing by the local healer, monks, family elders, and neighbors, is followed by a banquet as elegant as the family can afford.

In the past, both divorce and multiple wives were the luxury of rich people. Now, however, divorce is more common. It continues to be easier for men than women, and, since the relative number of women is higher than men, men are able not only to abandon a wife, they may have multiple wives.

The primary economic, cooperative, and emotional unit is a husband, wife, and their children. The nuclear family is surrounded by the personal kindred of the husband and wife, which extends back two or three generations. Beyond that are the *nek ta*, or family spirits, who continue to watch over their descendants. Cambodians form close relationships also with neighbors and hold monks and healers in high regard.

Few Cambodian children have pets; instead, animals, like people, have jobs. Domesticated animals, such as water buffalo, oxen, pigs, and fowl, are used to support the family, and children are thus discouraged from treating them as pets. Even cats and dogs have jobs: dogs to guard the home, cats to kill the rats. Only a few of the wealthier people in the cities view animals as pets.

## 11 CLOTHING

Many Cambodians continue to wear traditional clothing. Women wear a sampot and men a sarong. Both are wrap-around cotton or silk skirts that fall to the knee. With the sampot Khmer women wear a white blouse or shirt, while men go bare-chested or wear a light-colored shirt over their sarong.

Many Cambodians, especially men, prefer to wear Western trousers and shirts, usually short-sleeved. Women also, es-

pecially in urban areas, are shifting to Western-style dresses, trousers, and tops.

The quintessential Cambodian piece of clothing is a *krama*, a long slender scarf worn in a multitude of ways. *Krama* is most commonly worn around the neck, but also as a head turban or scarf, a skirt, blouse, purse, or baby sling. The everyday *krama* is usually checkered, but fancier ones may be made of silk and come in a variety of colors and styles. Nearly every Cambodian owns a *krama* and many Western visitors as well.

Since the terrible Khmer Rouge years, when people were forced to wear dark clothes and were punished or killed for wearing colors or jewelry, and the years following, when they were too poor to buy what they wanted, Cambodians have delighted in the return of a prospering economy and brightly-colored and printed fabric and clothing in the marketplaces. Still, poverty is widespread, and most Cambodians can purchase only imported second-hand clothing.

Most Cambodian children wear Western-style clothing: their best shorts or skirts and shirts for school, old ones for home and work. Children go barefoot, while their parents wear rubber thongs or sandals.

## 12 FOOD

Rice is the most important Cambodian food. Eaten at virtually every meal, it forms the basis of most Khmer dishes. Cambodians distinguish rice by species, taste, area, and growing season.

Fish is almost as important and is eaten fresh, dried, and salted. Cambodians fish for lake chub, carp, eels, and numerous other species. The Tonle Sap itself is one of the richest freshwater fisheries in the world. Fish abound in these waters and can be easily taken, especially when the waters begin to recede, and the fish are left literally high and dry. When the Tonle Sap River again begins to flow to the sea, tens of thousands of fishermen rush to the Lake. With dams and traps, they capture the millions of fish caught in the area of decreasing water. As noted above, however, recent changes to the lake threaten this important source of food and livelihood for Cambodia.

Vegetables are a vital part of the Cambodian diet. Cambodians grow a number of crops in their gardens, including onions, peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, and potatoes. Many homes are also surrounded by coconut and banana trees and numerous other plants. An especially loved treat is the durian fruit, horrid-smelling but delicious in taste. Other fruits include mangoes, papayas, jack fruit, and palm fruit. The sugar palm also yields syrup, which is used in cooking.

A typical traditional meal that continues to be part of Cambodians' main diet is a bowl of steamed rice eaten with a sauce containing bits of fish, fowl or meat, eggs, vegetables, and spices, such as onions, chilies, garlic, mint, ginger, or lemon grass. On special occasions Cambodians eat fried rice, noodles, Vietnamese pou soup, chicken curry, barbecued shrimp, duck eggs served with the almost-hatched ducklings still inside, roasted sunflower seeds, and rice cakes containing beans or banana. Tea is served by everyone who can afford it, although soft drinks and beer are becoming more common, especially in urban areas.

The most traditional of Cambodian foods is *prahok*, fermented fish, which is used as a thick sauce condiment with other dishes. Betel nut is another favorite, a seed that is wrapped in leaves and chewed for its mild narcotic effect. Chewers, pri-

marily older women, are obvious from the dark red juice they spit, which stains their gums and teeth.

Cambodians usually eat an early meal of left-over rice, cakes, or fruit either at home or in the field. The big meal of the day is lunch around midday, followed by supper at twilight.

Cambodians eat together, usually with the family seated in a circle on the floor of their house. Each has a bowl of rice, and all take bites of food from several dishes sitting in the middle of the group. When eating on the job, away from the house, or under the house, Cambodians may eat sitting in a squatting position, their feet flat on the ground, their knees bent sharply, and their bottoms hanging almost to the ground. Whether squatting or sitting on the ground, the men cross-legged or, like the women, with their legs folding back to one side, Cambodians can sit for hours in positions that are uncomfortable for Westerners after just a few minutes.

Most Cambodians eat with two basic eating utensils, a spoon and a fork. Others, however, including some urban Cambodians, Chinese Cambodians, and Vietnamese living in Cambodia, use chopsticks. Many urban Khmer use spoons and forks at home, and chopsticks at restaurants and at Vietnamese soup shops on the street.

Cambodians seldom fail to share a bit of their meal with the spirits, putting a small amount of food, fruit, or liquid in a receptacle before the indoor altar or outdoor spirit house.

### 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, education was provided primarily to boys at temple schools. There they were taught religion and the religious language of Pali by Buddhist monks. After independence and before the 1970s, Cambodia developed an educational system built on the French model. Elementary and secondary schooling was expanded enormously for both boys and girls throughout the country. Colleges and technical schools were built in large numbers and attendance increased from a mere handful to over 9,000. Most boys and some girls learned to read and write a little Khmer.

During the war of the early 1970s and Khmer Rouge rule, traditional and Western-style education came to a virtual standstill. Schools were destroyed, and those who had been teachers or students and those caught attempting to teach or learn religious or Western knowledge were severely punished or killed. Cambodia had to begin again to build a system of education.

Most children begin school at age seven or eight and receive some schooling for at least several years. While parents want their children to become educated, seeing education as the path to better employment and freedom from poverty, families can ill afford to pay their children's school fees, books, or clothing, or to free their children from household chores.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

During the Khmer Rouge regime of the late 1970s, Cambodians were not allowed to sing or dance on pain of death. It was a loss that hurt them deeply, for Cambodians say that to dance and to listen to Cambodian music is one of life's sweetest pleasures. Most Cambodians sing, and traditional orchestras, with their various kinds of guitars, xylophones, violins, gongs, and drums, are greatly appreciated.

Traditional dance has been the pride of Cambodians for a thousand years. Children undergo years of training in order to

execute the intricate moves of court and classical dance. Their costumes are elaborate and expensive, so tightly fitted that the dancers must be dressed, even sewn into their outfits of silk and velvet. Their hand gestures and body movements mirror those seen on buildings of Angkor built over 800 years ago.

In the villages, troupes of costumed young men and women perform various folk dances. Everywhere throughout the country on special occasions, Cambodians dance the traditional circle dance, moving slowly several steps forward, then back, all the time twirling their arms and hands in the air.

Cambodian plays, which include both dance and music, tell ancient stories of Hindu gods and heroes, folktales about beautiful and wealthy royalty, greedy merchants, and noble youth, and comic stories that delight everyone.

Cambodian literature begins with inscriptions from the 7th century and continues through the classical work of the 16 and 17th centuries. Traditional texts were memorized by professional storytellers, who traveled from place to place performing. Many of these oral traditions were written down in the mid-20th century and used as textbooks in classrooms. Cambodian literature also includes tales of the Buddha's lives, verses that contain advice for daily life called *chbap*, and folktales.

Traditional Cambodian literature is being overshadowed by modern radio and movies, and especially by television and videos. From city-dwellers to inhabitants of the more remote villages, most Cambodian youth would rather watch a martial arts video from Hong Kong than listen to a storyteller relate ancient stories.

Cambodian pride in ancient heritage has resulted in sharp tension with neighbors in recent years. A remark by a Thai soap opera actress impugning the origins of Angkor Wat resulted in anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh that ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Thai embassy and led the Thai government to evacuate Thai citizens from the city. Cambodia and Thailand have also taken a dispute over ownership of an ancient temple to an international court.

### 15 WORK

Most Cambodians are rice farmers who also grow vegetables and fruit in family gardens around the house. Others cultivate cash crops, either on a small scale or on large plantations. Most Cambodian farmers also raise domestic animals, most commonly water buffalo or oxen, which are used to plow the fields, pigs, ducks, and chickens.

Cambodians spend much of the slack season from cultivating rice in crafting items they will use to support their family in the coming seasons: stringing fish nets, twisting vines into string or rope, and making pots for carrying water or cooking.

As the economy improves, however, more Cambodians are buying plastic or metal tools and utensils in the marketplace rather than making them for themselves from the vines and wood around them. Thus, colorful plastic utensils and enduring metal tools are replacing the handicrafts Cambodians have practiced for centuries. A village that has "since long ago" made earthenware pots is now selling them for pennies to tourists because, as the people say, Cambodians can buy modern pots imported from Thailand and Vietnam cheaper in the market.

In the cities, Cambodians hold all the jobs seen in most cities of the world: government officials, construction workers, taxi cab drivers, waiters and maids, retailers. However, in contrast to some Southeast Asian countries, there are few Cambo-

dian financiers. This is because the financial sector had been dominated by ethnic Chinese prior to 1975. Many Cambodians are soldiers, many coming from former resistance armies. Demobilization of the armed forces only began in earnest in the late 1990s and reintegrating soldiers into Cambodian society has proved to be a complex undertaking. This has been made more difficult by political struggles between Cambodian politicians, all of whom are reluctant to give up the forces that had been pledged to them during the decades of civil war.

## 16 SPORTS

In Cambodian villages, children spend a few years of their lives in school. The rest of their time is spent helping their families make a living. Even the smallest children help their parents fish, cook, gather firewood, and do a variety of chores. Both boys and girls help with younger children, and it is not uncommon to see boys carrying a baby sister for hours at a time.

Children are often responsible for caring for the animals. Boys herd the water buffalo and oxen when they are not being used for plowing, and girls feed the pigs and chickens. Boys climb up sugar palm or coconut trees seeking syrup or coconuts. In some parts of the country they hunt for rats, lizards, snakes, small fish, and crabs to supplement the family diet.

Children usually turn these subsistence activities into play and games. In addition, they enjoy swimming and running. A popular village game is played with rubber thongs. The boys draw a line in the dirt, then stand back and throw their sandals at the line. The boy who gets the closest is the winner. Girls and smaller children play a similar game with rubber bands, and the winner wears his captured bands around his wrist. Girls also play hopscotch.

The most popular spectator and participant sport is soccer. Volleyball is also a favorite and both are seen frequently in rural and urban Cambodia. Other sports include boxing, basketball, and bicycle races. A few Cambodians in urban areas also play tennis and swim. Kite-flying and canoe-racing, although not as popular as before the Khmer Rouge period, remain desirable activities, and communities not yet able to afford either look forward to the day when they can.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Movies, television, and videos are extremely popular in both the urban and rural areas, although they are more accessible in the cities where people have more money and there are numerous theaters. Televisions are becoming more common in the villages, most battery-operated since electricity in rural areas is nonexistent or rare. Villagers carry their batteries to a recharging store with a generator and pick them up again in the early evening so the family may watch television together at night.

Also popular are videos, which circulate from family to family. Village cafes and bars charge patrons to watch videos. These draw large crowds, many including children standing outside and into the roadway hoping to catch a glimpse of martial arts films made in Hong Kong, Singapore, and other neighboring countries.

Karaoke is popular and can be found in the fanciest clubs in the capital of Phnom Penh to the humblest village. For the price of a beer, Cambodians, usually men, sing along to the music and lyrics printed on the video and played over the television set.

In the villages, local festivals remain the most common and popular leisure activity. Eating, music by local or traveling bands, videos, games, drinking, and dancing fill the hours.

Government officials estimated that by 1967 almost every Cambodian home had a transistor radio. This vastly increased the contact Cambodians had with their government and their sense of being one nation. The Khmer Rouge destroyed virtually all of these radios, and it has taken some time for Cambodia to regain the communication network it had prior to the 1970s. This process was given a boost by the United Nations in the early 1990s as the UN relied upon radio to communicate with the population in the lead-up to the 1993 election. As of 2008 television and radio link most Cambodians to their government, popular culture, and imported entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The greatest handiwork of Cambodians was crafted during the Angkorean Period, from the 9th to the 14th centuries, when Angkorian rule spread from Vietnam to Burma. During those centuries, Cambodian architects designed and Cambodian slaves built a number of temples and palaces in the Angkor region of northwest Cambodia. Included in these is what most consider to be the grandest of all, a priceless jewel of artistic work, the temple mausoleum of Angkor Wat.

Traditional crafts include carvings in stone and wood, jewelry-making, and gold-and-silver working. Artists often copy ancient religious designs: statues of the Buddha, Hindu gods, scenes from the Ramayana, an ancient Hindu epic, and designs from the ancient temples of Angkor. Silk weaving is another craft practiced by many Cambodians, who weave gorgeous and colorful fabric for *sampot* and *karma*, which are sold in the marketplace to both Cambodians and tourists.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Members of a hierarchical Buddhist society, Cambodians have always viewed their lot in life as the consequence of activities in previous lives. Thus, Cambodians have traditionally accepted their position in life with more equanimity than non-Buddhists.

During the Khmer Rouge regime, human and civil rights in Cambodia were nonexistent. Most nations consider the Democratic Kampuchean government to have been one of the cruelest of modern times. With the end of the Khmer Rouge as a political force and efforts by the United Nations to bring the remaining KR to a war crimes tribunal, Cambodians have found themselves reliving some of the Khmer Rouge era days—at least psychologically—as the trials go forward.

Most Cambodians view politicians as venal and rapacious and often take a resigned approach to corruption. The dominant party, which dates back to the Vietnamese occupation of the 1980s, has managed to regain almost total control. This is due not only to the party's own authoritarian practices but also to the weaknesses of other parties. Although human and civil rights are still under siege in Cambodia, the legacy of the United Nations period is still seen in terms of human rights advocacy groups, the press, and the overall non-governmental sector, all of which compare favorably to some other states in the region. Apart from these issues, however, Cambodians are experiencing more peace than they have for decades and value that highly. In 2003 a public opinion survey showed that



a majority of Cambodians associate peace with the concept of democracy, rather than electoral politics.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

There are two distinct problems involving gender issues in Cambodia. First, despite the influence of Western donors and the fact that decades of war have made Cambodia a female-majority country, in comparison to neighboring countries, Cambodian women have not achieved high positions in government, commerce, or education. This implies a lack of social mobility in the country as a whole. Secondly, although both domestic violence and human trafficking are illegal, Cambodia suffers from high levels of both problems. Rape is more common than in other Southeast Asian countries. Although trafficking of women has been a serious problem since the 1990s, many accounts of this problem do not reflect that fact that more ethnic Vietnamese women in Cambodia are forced into prostitution than ethnic Khmer.

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—revised by C. Dalpino

# KOLIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KOH-leez

**LOCATION:** India (primarily Maharashtra and Gujarat states)

**POPULATION:** About 12 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dialects of Marathi or Gujarati, or the language of the region of India in which they live

**RELIGION:** Hindu; small numbers of Muslims

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; People of India; Vol. 4: Muslims in South Asia

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Koli* is a vague term covering the tribal populations living in parts of western India. Although traditionally classed as a tribe inferior in status to the Kunbis, the cultivating caste of the region, Kolis have now been designated as a Hindu caste in some areas. It is possible that the name of the tribe is derived from the Sanskrit *kula*, meaning "clan." There are numerous groupings and sub-groupings among the Kolis, who tend to be endogamous, i.e. they do not intermarry with the Kolis of other regions. Kolis are thus a group of tribes or castes, rather than a monolithic entity. Some writers suggest that the English word *coolie*, meaning porter or hired laborer, comes from *Koli*.

The origin of the Kolis remains a matter of debate. One view holds that they entered the region from Sindh and were part of the White Huns. Another theory links them to the Kol and Munda tribes of east-central India. One branch of the Kolis, the Son Kolis or Sea Kolis, are thought to have settled in the region of Bombay (Mumbai) during the 12th century ad, where, today, they are usually fishermen. The other branch of the Kolis, the Hill Kolis, acquired a widespread reputation as "hill robbers." Kolis are generally held to be of low social status and are classified either as Dalits ("Untouchables"), Sudras or as a Scheduled Tribe. In some localities, however, Kolis claim Rajput blood, follow Rajput customs, and have a relatively high social position. Thus the Khant, Bariya, and Thakore Kolis of Gujarat give brides to Rajputs, converted Rajputs, and Muslims, but never give their daughters to lower caste Kolis such as the Pagis and Kotwals.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kolis form one of the largest tribal groups in the western part of India. A current estimate of total Koli population is about 12 million, though this figure may well include groups that once were Koli but are now considered as other castes. Kolis are spread through the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, with small communities also found in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa. The Son Kolis are concentrated in the coastal areas around Bombay. Other Koli groups are found in the interior of Gujarat and the upland regions of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Kolis are also found in Sindh and areas of the Thar Desert east of the river in the lower Indus Valley in Pakistan. They are primarily Hindu, a relic of pre-Partition days, and culturally and linguistically they are very similar to the nomadic Rabari and other peoples in the region. Kolis in that region of Pakistan include the Parkari Koachchi, the Wadiyara Koli, the Kutchhi Kohli (or Lohar), and the Tharadari Koli. Koli communities in Pakistan also view their social standing somewhat differently. Thus the Kutchhi Kohli,

even though they are classed as a Scheduled Tribe in Gujarat State, consider themselves to be superior to other Hindus, and at least equal with Brahmans.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Kolis speak the language of their localities. Thus, most speak one of the numerous dialects of Marathi or Gujarati, both of which belong to the Indo-Aryan language family. These languages are written in the Devanagari and Gujarati scripts, respectively.

### 4 FOLKLORE

According to legend, the Kolis are the descendants of the black dwarf who is believed to have emerged from the body of King Vena. The *Mahabharata* and other ancient texts tell that Vena was a wise and just king who ruled many tribes and peoples in eastern India. However, he became corrupted and abandoned the true faith, prohibiting all worship and sacrifice, except to himself. His religious advisers tried in vain to reason with him, but to no avail. Finally, in exasperation, they killed him with blades of the sacred *kusa* grass that miraculously became swords in their hands. To secure a successor to rule the country, the rishis rubbed Vena's thigh and there emerged a dark, dwarfish man, representing the evil nature of the King. This dwarf is said to be the ancestor of the Kolis.

### 5 RELIGION

Except for a small number of converts to Islam, Kolis are Hindu and their religious practices conform to Hindu norms. They retain, however, many aspects of their former animism. For instance, the Talapada Kolis of Gujarat worship numerous *devi* or goddesses who appear tribal rather than Hindu in origin. These goddesses protect against various kinds of diseases and ailments, and their help is sought in making decisions in daily life. Goddess-worship has acquired aspects of the *sakti* cult, and every household has its family goddess or *Mata*. These family goddesses may be known by different names, but they are all represented by terra-cotta figures that are basically triangular in shape and smeared with red coloring. Swords kept alongside the figure are supposed to belong to the goddess, being used by her to drive away evil. In Gujarat, individuals known as *bhua* go into a trance and are thought to communicate directly with the goddess, answering questions put to her by the gathered audience. The *bhua* are also consulted in the case of sickness, as the Kolis believe that disease is caused by malevolent spirits.

Regional deities are of some importance. The Son Kolis of Maharashtra, for instance, worship the god Khandoba, who is believed to be an incarnation of Shiva. The Kolis of Nimar in Madhya Pradesh worship the goddess Bhawani, and every family has a silver image of the deity in the house.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Kolis celebrate the important festivals of the Hindu calendar cycle. In addition, they observe various festivals that are agricultural in nature. There are, however, festivals that are exclusively Koli. Among the Talapada Kolis of central Gujarat, for instance, Attam is the occasion when special foods and prayers are offered to the family goddess. People gather at the family *math* or shrine, which is redecorated for the event. Special food



(molasses, rice, lentils, wheat, and peanut oil) are offered to the deity and then cooked for a family feast. Coconuts are broken open to ensure health and prosperity for the family. Other Koli celebrations, such as Hutasni, are Hindu festivals to which the Kolis have attached their own beliefs and rituals.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

No special diet or restrictions are imposed on Koli women in Gujarat during pregnancy. The child is delivered with the aid of the village midwife. After delivery, the umbilical cord is cut with a sickle, and the afterbirth is buried in the courtyard of the house along with some salt. Mother and child are subject to a period of ritual pollution (*sutak*) lasting 37 days, after which various purification ceremonies are undertaken. Subsequently, the child undergoes the naming ceremony and the ear- and nose-piercing ceremony. It is common for both boys and girls to be tattooed, usually between the ages of 8 and 12, but definitely before marriage.

After death, the corpse is bathed. A sacred *tulsi* (basil) leaf and a piece of silver are placed in the mouth to purify the body. The body is dressed in white clothes and, if the deceased was unmarried, anointed with turmeric as a ritual of marriage. Marriage is necessary for the departed to be a full-fledged member of the community. Those who have not achieved this status are symbolically married as part of the funeral rites. The body is carried to the cremation grounds and placed on the funeral pyre facing north, the direction in which Paradise is believed to lie. On the eleventh or thirteenth day after death,

the final rites of *karj* are performed. This expensive ceremony requires that various goods such as food, cooking utensils, clothes, and household items be offered to the deceased through a Brahman priest. It is through the Brahman, the purist of caste, that these goods will reach the dead. The funeral rites are completed by a lavish feast for friends and relations. The eldest son feeds a crowd of delicacies prepared on this occasion. It is thought that this bird is the only creature that can reach the city of the dead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Although Kolis are often forced to leave their native villages in search of employment, they exhibit strong kinship ties with deep roots in the worship of family deities. It is usual for family members to return to the family home at the time of festivals honoring the family goddesses.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The typical Koli house is enclosed by four high walls, with access from the street through a wooden door that opens into a courtyard. Along one side of the yard is a shed for cattle and other livestock, and areas for storing fodder and the cowdung cakes used for fuel. On the opposite side of the courtyard from the cattle sheds, steps lead up to the family's living quarters. The focus of this is the *math*, the shrine where the family gods and household idols are kept. In addition, there are the kitchen and rooms used for living and sleeping. Most rooms in Koli houses are lined with shelves holding household utensils. Wooden cots (*charpai*) are used for sleeping and resting. Women are not segregated to any particular part of the house, and married men sleep with their wives and children in the same room. Daughters-in-law maintain *pardah* (seclusion) from male members of the family by covering their face.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Kolis are divided into numerous branches such as the Talapada Kolis, the Mahadeo Kolis, and the Dhor Kolis. These are essentially regional groupings that are endogamous and do not intermarry. Each endogamous group, however, is organized into exogamous clans. One does not marry within one's clan, and before a marriage Kolis ascertain that the families are unrelated up to four ascending generations. Marriages are arranged, and girls marry at a young age. The actual ceremony is performed by a Brahman and in general follows Hindu rites. A bride-price is commonly paid to the family of the girl. Sometimes a wealthy father refuses to accept the bride price, an action that raises his social standing in the community. The new bride enters the household of her husband, where she assumes her role as the dutiful daughter-in-law.

## 11 CLOTHING

Koli clothing reflects regional patterns in dress. In the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, for example, Koli men wear pants like pajamas that are skintight from the knee downwards and loose and baggy above. A sleeveless waistcoat called a *bandi* is worn in the summer. In the winter, however, this is replaced by a full-sleeved, high-necked blouse. This is fitted under the armpits but then flares out to the waist in pleats. This dress, which is typically Gujarati, is invariably white in color. A white

turban or *pagri* is worn on the head. Men wear heavy leather shoes, with pointed toes, that are heavily sequined with brass.

Traditional dress for Koli women consists of a blouse and a full-length, slitted skirt with an embroidered edge. A length of cloth 2.5 m (8 ft) long known as *odhni* is tucked in at the waist and drawn over the head. Sometimes women wear the traditional Indian *choli* and *sari*. Koli women are fond of jewelry and cosmetics and wear an assortment of ornaments in the ear and nose and bangles on the arms and legs. The most prominent feature of Koli personal adornment is tattooing, although this is more extensive on women than on men. The motifs vary from flowers, birds, and figures of gods and goddesses to geometric designs. A girl who is not tattooed before marriage reflects poorly on her family.

## 12 FOOD

Kolis in Gujarat eat a light breakfast and two meals during the day. Breakfast, taken in the early morning, consists of *bajra-kirroti* (unleavened millet bread) left over from the previous evening's meal and tea. Goat's milk is used for the tea because it is cheaper than cow's milk. The afternoon meal consists of millet bread and vegetables. Poorer families eat a paste of garlic and chilies with the bread rather than vegetables. In the evening, *khichri* (a dish of lentils and rice boiled together) is eaten with the bread. If available, buttermilk is taken with both meals. For festive occasions, *puris*—deep-fried bread made with wheat flour and stuffed with potato curry—are prepared. In Gujarat, most Kolis are vegetarian, but elsewhere they eat meat. Kolis eat chicken and pork but usually abstain from beef. The Dhor Kolis, however, eat beef and carrion. Fish is a significant element in the diet of the Son Kolis. Fermented liquor and opium are used by Koli men.

## 13 EDUCATION

The traditional concept of education among Kolis was essentially functionally oriented. Boys were given full freedom to play until they were about five years, at which time they were sent to school—assuming the village had a school and the parents wanted a formal education for their child. Even then, boys were allotted domestic duties, which taught them the basics of cultivation. When farm work became heavy, they used to leave school and work in the fields. As girls were to be married, education for them was deemed superfluous. They used to stay at home, carrying out domestic chores.

Educational levels vary among the Koli tribes, depending on their location and their status. For example, even though literacy among the Dhor Koli (or Kholi Dhor) group in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, a Union Territory on India's west coast, has improved over the last few decades, it is still quite low, especially among females. The Koli in Dadra are classed as a Scheduled Tribe and female literacy among Scheduled Tribes is only 27%. By contrast, literacy among the Mahadeo Koli in Maharashtra is 62.8%, and among females, the 52.9% literacy recorded by the 2001 Census is the highest among the Scheduled Tribes in the State.

Figures for attendance at school are generally quite low for Kolis—in Gujarat State this is 33.4%, the lowest value for any of the Scheduled Tribes. Even though free schooling is provided by the state through the secondary level, for many Koli it is more important to have children help in the field. In Gujarat literacy levels among Kolis are also very low according

to the 2001 Census (38.4% and 12.8% for males and females, respectively).

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Kolís have their own traditions of song and dance and also share in regional cultural traditions. The Kolís of Gujarat, for instance, have incorporated the Gujarati *garba* and *dandya ras* dances into their religious and social ceremonies. Unmarried girls participate in the *garba*, dancing in a circle while balancing a lighted oil lamp on their heads and singing *garba* songs. *Dandya ras* is a stick dance usually performed by men.

#### 15 WORK

The Kolís fall into two main groups: the Son Kolís, who are skilled fishers, and the Hill Kolís, who engage in numerous occupations. The Chunvalia Kolís were once known for their criminal activities but today are mainly engaged in cultivation or work as agricultural laborers. The traditional occupation of the Dhor Kolís is the tanning of animal hides. Some Kolís have taken to occupations as domestic servants, village watchmen, baggage-handlers, and porters. A few, who have some education, work in government offices and schools.

#### 16 SPORTS

Games played by children include blind-man's bluff, skipping, and "jacks" played with pebbles or stones. Boys enjoy fighting with bamboo sticks. Males play various board games with cowry shells as game tokens. The "boards" are often just drawn with the fingers on the ground. Hockey and cricket are popular games learned by children in school.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Mass media such as radio, television, and movies are available throughout India. However, access to this entertainment is often limited by economic resources. For many of the poorer classes, and especially those living in more isolated areas, the main forms of recreation are still to be found in festivals, folk traditions, and social events such as marriages.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

KolÍ women are particularly adept at embroidery. Girls are taught various types of stitching at a young age. They decorate clothes and make mirrored wall hangings. They also engage in decorative beadwork.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

While some Koli groups are successful peasant cultivators, many suffer the problems of the depressed classes in any developing society—landlessness, poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, the burden of rural debt, and lack of the means to escape their situation. Some have left their villages and joined the migration of the rural poor to cities such as Bombay, where they swell the ranks of the urban underclasses. However, a recent study in Pune in Maharashtra State suggests that some Kolís have bettered themselves by moving to the city. The sample Koli population studied in Pune was characterized by a higher standard of living, effective use of birth control, better educational levels, and better nutrition than other groups. While this suggests that for some the flight to the city may be a positive move, it remains to be seen whether this is the exception

to rule. The Kolís remain a tribal community ranked near the lowest economic and social levels of Hindu society.

Although Kolís are primarily agricultural, in Bombay the fishing Kolís face competition from other fishing groups. Thus in the spring of 2004 several fish vendors from the north of India brought a legal suit in the Bombay high court claiming that Koli women did not allow them to enter Bombay's wholesale fish market and that the police had failed to redress their grievances. The Koli Mahila Sangharsha Samiti, a Koli women's organization, had launched an agitation in Mumbai demanding the boycott of North Indian fish vendors at the city's wholesale fish markets. Koli women observed a day-long strike and held several meetings to protest against the entry of the North Indians into the trade.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The relative position of Koli women varies from place to place. In states where Kolís are classified as Scheduled Tribes (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and the Union Territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli), Koli women are better off than amongst groups that have been Hinduized. They reap the benefits of being classed as a Scheduled Tribe for which they are eligible (whether or not they take advantage of this) and are generally much freer in their personal lives than their Hindu counterparts.

Even so, marriages among the Koli are usually arranged and the females are often legally children, being married below the age of 18 years (the traditional age for Koli marriage was 5 to 10 years for the girl). Since a bride price is paid to the girl's family it is important that the girl is appropriate and that her family is in good economic standing. In Pakistan even Hindu Kolís adopt *purdah*, and there is considerable friction between the Muslim and Hindu communities.

Hinduized Kolís tend to show patterns of behavior that reflect society at large. Thus there have been reports of bride burning amongst the Kolís, often for failing to bear male children. In 2005 the press reported a case of a pregnant Koli woman who was burned to death because her unborn fetus would have been her third girl child. The husband and mother-in-law were subsequently arrested for murder. Even among Christian Kolís, bigamy—for the purpose of having a son—is not uncommon.

The central government passed the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act in 1996, but abortion of females is still a major issue amongst Kolís. The 2001 Census of India show the Koli Mahadeo to have the lowest sex ratio for over 6 year-olds (964 women to 1000 males) of all the Scheduled Tribes in Maharashtra State, this despite the state passing legislation in 1988 banning selective sex abortion.

Poverty, illiteracy, low socio-economic standing, and cultural norms remain the main obstacles facing Koli women in their attempts to better themselves.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

## KOLIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KOHLS

**LOCATION:** India (Madhya Pradesh region)

**POPULATION:** c. 200,000 (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Local dialect of Hindi; Kol

**RELIGION:** Hindu; small numbers of Muslims

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; People of India; Vol. 4: Muslims in South Asia

### 1 INTRODUCTION

At one time, the name "Kol" was used to identify a group of primitive aboriginal tribes thought to be descended from Negro and Australoid peoples who had entered India in prehistoric times. These tribes are concentrated in central India and the northeastern regions of the Deccan plateau. They speak related languages described as "Kolarian," which are known today as the Munda languages. The tribes include the Santal, Munda, and Ho. But in modern usage, the term "Kol" is used in a more restricted sense to identify a specific tribe among these Munda-speaking peoples.

The name "Kol" may come from the Mundari word *ko*, meaning "they." Alternatively, it may be derived from *koro* or *horo* (meaning "men,"), a term the Kol use to identify themselves. In legend, the Kol trace their origins to a Sheori or Savari, calling her the "Mother of all Kols." Some try to relate the name "Savari" to the Savaras mentioned in the *Mahabharata* epic, but the name most likely comes from the *Ramayana*. There once was a woman named Sheori, so the story goes. Some people called her "Kolni" (*-ni* is a feminine suffix, so "Kolni" means "a Kol woman") and others called her "Bhilni." Sheori was a devotee of Bhagwan ("God"), gathering jungle plums for him. Pleased with her devotion, one day Bhagwan offered Sheori favor: she could have a kingdom or a family. Sheori chose a family and gave birth to five sons. The sons eventually went away to various regions and founded the various subdivisions of the Kol. It is interesting to note that some Kol believe they once inhabited the hills of Rajasthan where, with the Bhils, they helped Rana Pratap Singh in his struggle with the Moguls (Mughals).

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Reliable data on the Kol population is unavailable. The 1981 census reported a population of 132,232 persons. The current population would be approximately about 200,000, assuming growth rates that mirror the national average. The Kol are concentrated in the northern districts of Madhya Pradesh around Jabbalpur and Rewa. Small Kol populations are also found in Orissa and Maharashtra. The region of Madhya Pradesh occupied by the Kol lies in the highlands that define the northern edge of the Indian peninsula. It includes the eastern Vindhya Range, the Bhandar Plateau, and the Kaimur Range. The plateaus and escarpments of the region are crossed by the upper reaches of rivers such as the Narmada, the Son, and the lesser streams draining north to the Ganges. Rainfall averages around 120 cm (47 in). Because the area lies in the interior of the subcontinent, temperatures reach extremes of both heat and cold. Maximum temperatures in May, the hottest month, average over 40°C (104°F), and winter minimums drop below

10°C (50°F). Before roads were built, the terrain and the heavy forest cover made travel to the region difficult. Because of this, it has served as a refuge where some of the oldest peoples in India have survived relatively undisturbed until modern times.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Kol language belongs to the Munda languages. However, few Kol speak the Kol language today. In the 2001 census, only some 12,200 persons were identified as Kol speakers, and this total had probably dropped considerably by 2008. The Kol speak local dialects of Hindi and use the Devanagari script for writing. A few Kol are bilingual, speaking Kol and another language such as Hindi or Oriya.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Kol have a myth that explains how the cat became a household pet. Once upon a time, so the story goes, Mahadeo (the god Shiva) sent a cat to spy on a certain home. He wanted to know if there was a fire in the house at that time. The cat, which had been staying with Mahadeo for a long time, went to the house. There, she found a fire burning and milk warming beside it and butter on the floor. Eating the butter and drinking the milk, the cat curled up by the fire and went to sleep. She never left the home; she preferred it to the treatment she had received while living with Mahadeo. Since that time, the cat has been a household animal. It is considered a great sin to kill a cat, since it came directly from the god Mahadeo.

### 5 RELIGION

The Kol identify themselves as Hindus, although their religion has little in common with the higher forms of Hinduism. The Kol believe in a Supreme Deity, Bhagwan, but he is seen as a passive, distant entity. On the rare occasions when he must be approached, the Kol employ Brahmans to intercede on their behalf. Worship of Hindu deities and even of forces of nature is secondary to the worship of village and household gods (*deotas*) and goddesses (*devis*). These deities are believed to influence every aspect of life, and they are central to Kol religious life. They are too numerous to mention by name, but the one most frequently worshipped by the Kol is Khermai. She protects the village, wards off evil spirits, guards against disease, and helps the Kol in their business ventures. Other Kol deities include Shitalamai, the goddess of smallpox, Shardamai and her six sisters, and Gwalbansa Baba, a household god. Each village has its priest (*panda*), who officiates at religious ceremonies, performs sacrifices, and when possessed by the goddess becomes her mouthpiece. Animals (chickens, pigs, goats, and occasionally sheep) are offered as sacrifices to village and household deities. The Kol believe in magic and witchcraft, spirits and ghosts, and the evil eye.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Kol observe Hindu festivals such as Holi, Dasahara, and Divali. The Jawara festival, however, appears to be an ancient Kol agricultural festival that later acquired some Hindu characteristics. The name is derived from the *juari* plant, a type of millet. Jawara is held twice a year, in the fall just before the sowing of the winter crop, and in the spring after it has been harvested. The festival lasts for nine days and is celebrated with feasting, singing, and dancing. People worship the village gods



and sacrifice animals at their shrines. Jawara is a time when, it is believed, possession by spirits is common. The focus of the fall festival is the ritual growing of seedlings in the house, partly to predict the coming harvest and possibly as magic to ensure a good one.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Kol have adopted Hindu life-cycle rituals, although older traditions are often apparent in their actual customs and practices. For instance, the Kol take precautions to protect mother and child from the influences of evil spirits. The Kol greatly fear the nightjar, a bird they believe drinks milk from the nursing mother's breast, sometimes causing the death of both baby and mother. Doors are kept closed and branches of the *nim* (*margosa*) tree are hung over the doorway to protect against the bird. The Chhatthi, or Sixth Day, ceremony marks the end of the period of impurity believed to follow childbirth. Other childhood ceremonies include the naming ceremony, the hair-cutting ceremony, and the first feeding ceremony. Girls have their ears and nose pierced and they are tattooed when they are between the ages of ten and twelve. No particular initiation rites mark the reaching of puberty, although girls are kept in seclusion during their first menstruation.

When a person is dying, he or she is usually placed on the ground so there is close contact with Mother Earth. The Kol utilize both burial and cremation in their funeral rites, which take place as soon as possible after a death. The body is carried to the burial ground or burning ghat in a procession. Lamen-

tation and weeping are expected to occur, but there should be no singing, chanting, or music of any kind. Once at the place of burial, the body is washed, anointed with oil, and dressed in new white clothes. The grave is dug in a north-south direction, and the body is buried with its head toward the north. The feet point south because that is the direction in which the soul must travel to the land of the dead. If it is cremated, the body is aligned in the same direction on the funeral pyre. The ashes are to be scattered in a sacred river such as the Ganges or the Narmada. If this is not possible, they are placed in a "tank" (reservoir) or a stream, with a small amount kept to be taken to one of the holy rivers in the future. Various purification and mourning rites are carried out. These include the custom of "feeding the dead" for ten days, during which the spirit of the dead person is believed to return to familiar places. A feast on the tenth day (the ninth for a woman) ends the funeral observances.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Kol greeting takes the form of an embrace. When two men meet, they put their arms around each other and touch the left shoulder to the left shoulder, and then the right to the right. Next they touch each other's knees, first the left and then the right, usually using both hands. As a final gesture, they grasp each other's right hand. Because their houses are small, the Kol do not entertain frequently. A visiting relative is given a place to sleep, eats with the family, and is made as comfortable as possible. Hospitality is usually not extended to or expected by strangers.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Kol village is set in a clearing in the forest and consists of a few houses built on either side of a winding pathway. Each village has its central shrine, an open platform built around the base of a tree, preferably a nim tree. There may also be shrines to other deities in other places in the village. The graveyard is located on the south side of the settlement. The boundaries of the village are usually not clearly defined.

Situated immediately in the front of each house, facing the path, is a small courtyard plastered with mud and cow dung. The houses themselves are rectangular and small, usually no more than a single room in which as many as five or six people may live. The walls are of grass or mud and the roof is thatched, although the better-off people have tiled roofs. There may be a small veranda, or porch, and a shed for cattle. One enters the house through a single door, and there are no windows. Inside the house, there is an area set aside for cooking, with a hearth, a stone mill, and a few cooking utensils. A large earthen jar holds grain, and baskets and discarded cans and bottles are used for storing other things. Furnishings are sparse. The Kol do not use beds and chairs, and they sleep on the floor on mattresses. One corner of the room is devoted to the household's shrine.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Kol are divided into numerous subgroups called *kurhis*, which form the basic divisions of the tribe; people must marry within their own *kurhi*. There is little agreement on exactly how many *kurhis* there are, and the marriage rules are not always strictly observed. The Rautiya consider themselves to be the highest ranking *kurhi*. Some groups, such as the Rautiya,

who are married by Brahman priests, are more Hinduized than others. Marriages are arranged (although elopement is possible), and brides usually come from outside the village. A bride-price is paid, although the dowry is now becoming common. Many of the rituals related to marriage appear to be borrowed from the Hindus. A man who can afford it may keep more than one wife. The nuclear family appears to be the norm among the Kol, with households averaging four persons. The main duties of the wife are caring for the house, cooking food, and raising the children. In addition, she is expected to contribute to the family income by working for wages, gathering wood and so forth. Kol society permits divorce and the remarriage of widows.

## 11 CLOTHING

Although in the past they may have worn little in the way of clothing, today Kol resemble their Hindu neighbors in dress. Men wear the *dhoti*, sometimes going bare-chested, sometimes with a *kurta*, or shirt. They sometimes wear a turban. The sari, worn with or without a bodice, or blouse, is the standard dress for women. Among the more Hinduized Kol, the end of the sari is used to cover the head. Women wear whatever necklaces, earrings and other jewelry as they can afford. They also often have tattoos on their bodies as another form of ornamentation. This is said to have some religious significance.

## 12 FOOD

Like most villagers in India, the Kol have two meals a day, one around noon and the other late at night. Early in the morning, they may eat leftover chapatis or rice. There is little variation in the menu. A meal consist of rice or of chapatis made from wheat or millet, whichever is cheaper, with a small amount of vegetable curry and some *dal*. The vegetables include *sag* (leafy greens such as spinach), eggplant, pumpkin, potatoes, and certain roots and leaves gathered in the jungle. The Kol are not vegetarians, but the high cost of meat means that it is rarely eaten. Almost any animal flesh is consumed, although the Kola avoid beef in deference to Hindus and avoid carrion, because it is a food of the untouchable castes. Although the more Hinduized Kol avoid pork, a pig is sometimes sacrificed to the goddess at Kol festivals and then eaten ceremonially. The parrot, crow, sparrow, and kite (a hawklike bird) are never killed or eaten. The Kol use liquor at feasts and festivals; they buy it rather than distill it themselves.

## 13 EDUCATION

In recent years, the Kol have begun to send their male children to school. However, dropout rates after the middle-school level are very high, and around half the Kol population (47.9%) do not have any formal schooling at all. Only 6.6% of Kols complete high school. The 2001 census showed a literacy rate for the Kol in Madhya Pradesh of only 35.9%. Literacy among males is considerably higher than for females (the census reports literacy among females to be 22.2%).

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Kol have a legacy of legend and tribal lore. But the highlight of Kol culture is a passion for music, song, and dance. The Kol use mainly percussion instruments such as drums and cymbals. Their songs include songs of worship (*bhagats* and

*bhajans*), obscene songs performed at the Holi festivals, love songs, and songs to be sung at the time of childbirth, marriage, or other festive occasions. Dancing is also important at social events and festivals. Among the Kol, only the women dance, while the men play instruments and sing along with them. The *dadra*, accompanied by the appropriate songs, is the most popular of the Kol dances.

### **15 WORK**

The Kol are mostly a landless people, and nearly three-quarters of them (70.4%) work as agricultural laborers for local landowning castes. Some work in factories, mines, quarries, and construction. A 2004 report by the International Labor Office in Geneva indicates that some Kols have lost their land, are in debt and serve as bonded labor. A few make a living by gathering forest products and wood for fuel. Rather than purchasing wood from forest department depots, merchants from Jabalpur recruited Kol tribals as suppliers of cheap illegal timber. Kol tribals, who are adept at cutting timber, responded to this new economic activity with enthusiasm. Some members of Kol Lohar, a small Kol community in Orissa, follow their traditional occupation as blacksmiths.

### **16 SPORTS**

No sports or games are known to be identified with the Kol community.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The main source of entertainment for the Kol is their festivals and the music, song, and dance that accompany religious and social celebrations.

### **18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Arts and crafts are poorly developed among the Kol. Their houses are occasionally decorated with crude paintings of peacocks and other figures, but these are also found on the houses of non-Kol peoples. There are no taboos associated with the peacock, and the designs appear to be purely decorative. The Kol seem to be lacking handicrafts of any sort: they make no baskets, cloth, ornaments, or musical instruments.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Kol are designated a Scheduled Tribe, that is, a disadvantaged community recognized as needing special representation and assistance in the context of modern India. The greatest challenge facing the Kol is poverty and its related problems. The Kol possess little land, and the land they do own is relatively unproductive. Many live in conditions of near-starvation. The forests, once a major resource for the Kol, are increasingly subject to government restrictions on their use. Debt is widespread, and once they are in the hands of moneylenders, it is hard for the Kol to get out of debt. The attitude of caste Hindus toward the Kol has traditionally been a desire to dominate and exploit them. Many Kol have no health care facilities, or even basic amenities such as safe drinking water. Illiteracy and a lack of education make it extremely difficult for the Kol to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty in which they live.

Many Kols are landless. The government of India allows landless tribals who have been "squatting" on land for a period of time to be regularized under the new Recognition of Forest

Rights Act of 2006. However, on 19 April 2008, in the remote Ghateha village in the Rewa district of the Madhya Pradesh, a large contingent of police and forest department personnel descended on some 1,500 landless tribal families who had settled on a stretch of land near the village and evicted them using firing and tear gas. The local group Birsa Munda Bhumi Adhikar Manch and activists of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers claimed that the settlers had been on this land since 2003, but local forest officials have denied this point, stating that the settlers had moved on the land only a month earlier. Landlessness and poverty, as well as lack of social assistance (such as welfare) and political representation, remain issues for the Kols.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

As is the case with most tribal women in South Asia, Kol women are, except where they have been Hinduized, considerably freer than women in the Hindu societies amongst which they live. Although they are responsible for the household, experience arranged marriages, and suffer sometimes from child marriage, Kol society allows divorce and widow remarriage. Payment of a bride price, which is usually quite low, is more common than the dowry system found among Hindus.

However, partly as a result of the areas where they live and partly because women are expected to contribute to the household income, women have a low literacy rate and are generally limited access to education and health facilities.

Tribal women are specifically targeted by the Madhya Pradesh Government's District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP). The DPIP takes affirmative action in favor of tribal people within project structures and processes at the village, district, and state levels, focuses on activities of immediate relevance and importance to the income security and livelihood portfolios of tribal people in villages and makes strategic linkages with development organizations working with tribals and development programs or opportunities specifically addressing the needs of tribal men and women. Kols are one of the major tribes represented in Rewa, Panna, and Sidhi Districts, which fall under the DPIP scheme.

The critical role women play in collecting and processing forest products and the contribution of their activities to the household economy means that local governments are becoming increasingly aware of the need for their participation in the success of forest management projects. The government of Madhya Pradesh, for instance, has made provisions for women's representation on certain executive committees. However, many of the activities under joint forest management (JFM) in Jabalpur District, in Madhya Pradesh State, actually operate against women. (Joint forest management [JFM] is a system adopted by the government of India in 1990, in which forestry departments and local communities share both responsibilities related to forest management and benefits in terms of the proceeds.) Most non-timber forest products (NTFP) collection is conducted by women, but their efforts are disproportionately taxed under the JFM scheme.

Part of the proceeds of JFM are placed in a collective fund that is used as a source of credit to villagers, lending money to them at up to 5% lower interest than the local money lenders. The fund is a source of pride for many villagers and is used to construct temples and make purchases, such as musical instruments, for the community as a whole. But as yet the collec-



tive fund has not provided any specific benefits to Kol women, and the purchase of cooking utensils for providing meals for community gatherings has in fact increased their costs. Although gender inequity may not endanger the JFM process in the short term, if the concerns of women—and in particular Kol women—are not addressed, this could lead to disproportionate costs being shouldered by this segment of the community and consequently the creation of a dynamic that facilitates the rejection of both conservation and equity goals.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# KONDS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAHNDS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Khond; Kondh; Kandha; Ku (self-reference)

**LOCATION:** India (Orissa region)

**POPULATION:** 1.8 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Kui; Kuvi

**RELIGION:** Animism; small number of Christians

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Konds are a tribal group found in the hills and jungles of Orissa in eastern India. The name *Kond* (also *Khond*, *Kondh*, or *Kandha*) translates as "mountaineer" and probably comes from the Dravidian word *konda* meaning "hill." The Konds refer to themselves in their own tongue as *Ku*.

Several theories have been put forward to explain the origins of the Konds. The Konds themselves believe they originated in Orissa and have always lived in their present location. Based on this, some scholars have argued that the Konds are remnants of the pre-Dravidian aboriginal population of the subcontinent who have survived subsequent Dravidian and Aryan invasions because of their physical isolation. Another theory sees the Konds as Dravidians who were pushed back into the hills by Aryan invaders as they occupied the fertile coastal plains of eastern India. Still another view proposes that the Konds were a Dravidian tribe from South India who were expelled by superior agricultural peoples and settled in their current locale around 500 BC.

Today, Konds fall into two broad divisions. The Hill or Maliah Konds, who are numerically the dominant group, inhabit the interior uplands and have retained much of their original tribal culture. The Plains Konds have had extended contact with the Oriya-speaking peoples of the lowlands and have adopted many aspects of Hindu religion and culture. The Kond tribe has a number of sub-tribes, for instance, the Dongria, Kovi, Kuttia, Languli, Penga, and Jharnia. Raj Konds are virtually a caste or sub-caste of Konds who are landowners.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 2001 Census of India records just over 1.4 million Konds in Orissa. Currently this figure is closer to 1.5 million of the nearly 1.8 million Konds in the country. The Kond population is concentrated in the southern hills of the state and the Mahanadi River basin, and some are also found in the Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Visakhapatnam districts of the neighboring Andhra Pradesh State. The Eastern Ghats in southern Orissa form a hilly tract up to 200 km (125 mi) wide. The land varies between 450 m and 900 m (1,500–3,000 ft) in altitude, with a maximum elevation of 1,515 m (4,970 ft) near the headwaters of the Nagavali River. The rugged hills, expanses of trackless jungle, forests, and deep water courses of the region provided a safe refuge in which the Konds were able to preserve their traditional way of life relatively untouched by outsiders (until recently). The climate is typical of India, with a winter cold season, summer hot season, and monsoonal rains from mid-June to September. Higher altitudes experience low-

er temperatures than do the neighboring coastal plains. Annual rainfall varies between 120 cm and 160 cm (47–63 in).

### 3 LANGUAGE

Konds speak a language called Kui and its southern dialect, Kuvi. These belong to the Dravidian language family and have strong similarities to Telugu, Tamil, and Kannada. The language has no script of its own, with the Oriya script used for writing Kui, and the Telugu script used for Kuvi. Some Konds speak only Oriya, having lost all knowledge of their mother tongue. Other Konds are bilingual, speaking Oriya or other regional languages in addition to the Kond language. In more remote areas, people may speak only Kui or Kuvi.

### 4 FOLKLORE

A mythical account of Kond origins relates that, once upon a time, the ground was all wet, and there were only two females on earth. They were named Karaboodi and Tharthaboodi, and each was blessed with a single male child. The two children were named Kasarodi and Singarodi. All of these individuals had sprung up from the interior of the earth. They depended for their existence on two plants, called nangakoocha and badokoocha, which had also sprung up from the earth's interior. Subsequently, the wet soil dried up, and from it all kinds of animals and trees came into existence. Kasarodi and Singarodi were given in marriage to the two daughters of Buru Pennu, the supreme being and Creator God of the Konds. The Konds believe that they are the children resulting from this union.

### 5 RELIGION

Kond religion is animistic in nature. The Sun is worshiped as Bura Pennu, the chief of the Kond deities and the source of all good in the world. Tari Pennu, the Earth-Goddess, is his consort, though she later became the source of all evil. All the Kond deities (*Pennu*) are said to be descended from Bura Pennu and Tari Pennu, who are also responsible for creating the universe and all that is in it. The gods and goddesses are believed to be very sensitive to neglect, disobedience, and violation of taboos. They react by ruining a crop, sending a tiger to attack cattle, or making the offender sick. They have to be propitiated by blood-offerings, and so sacrifice is an integral part of Kond religion. Priests officiate at sacrificial rituals, which in former times included human victims as well as animal ones. The Meriah or human sacrifice was stamped out by the British in the late 19th century.

Worship of the spirits of dead ancestors is also an important aspect of traditional Kond religion. Contact with Hindu peoples has led the Konds to adopt Hindu deities into their pantheon. For instance, Kali and Durga are worshiped in a variety of guises, but always with the sacrifice of buffaloes, goats, or fowl. Christian missionary activity among the Konds is reflected in the roughly 3% of the population who claim the Christian faith.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Important festivals (*jatras*) are celebrated to mark events such as the gathering of the new bean crop in November (Semi Jatra) or the beginning of the rice harvest in September (Chawal Dhuba Jatra). All important festivals are accompanied by animal sacrifice. Following the suppression of the Meriah human



sacrifice, the Konds accepted buffaloes as substitute victims. Thus the Meriah festival, which is held between March and May, is still celebrated with buffaloes sacrificed as an offering to the Earth Goddess.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage are occasions of ceremony and solemnity among the Konds. The birth of a child is cause for celebration (although some Kond groups practiced infanticide until this was suppressed by the British). A few days before the expected delivery date, husband and wife leave the house and move to a separate room specially built for the purpose. In the case of a first confinement, the husband or his father sacrifices a pig and offers rice and strong drinks to the spirits of the ancestors so that nothing goes wrong. After birth, the cord is cut and the placenta buried near the house. Among the Kuttia Konds of the interior hills, the head of an arrow is used to cut the cord of a male child. Birth rituals include smearing the infant with paste made from oil and turmeric until she or he reaches one month old. Many Konds name children after one of their ancestors, although how the name is selected varies from group to group. In the Kuttia Kond ritual, the father or a priest holds a bunch of leaves while reciting the name of the child's ancestors. When the baby touches the leaves, it is felt that the soul of the ancestor whose name is being spoken at the time enters the child's body, and the infant takes on that name.

The Konds feel that death is not the direct responsibility of Bura Pennu, but rather is caused by Jomereri Pennu, evil spir-

its, or through a person's sorcery and witchcraft. Corpses are burnt, although infants, women who died in childbirth, and those who die of smallpox or cholera are usually buried. Funeral rites include the sacrifice of buffaloes and pigs, dancing, feasting, and drinking.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Konds believe that the first duty imposed on them by the gods was hospitality. Any neglect of this duty, violation of an oath, or denial of a debt is seen as sinful and likely to bring down divine retribution through poverty, disease, and even death.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Konds build their villages on the slopes of valleys, overlooking their cultivated fields. The houses usually form two rows, built along a curved road and closed at both ends by strong wooden barriers for defense. At the center of the village is a cotton tree, planted by the priest and dedicated to the village. Houses or huts are rectangular in shape, with the walls made of timber and plastered over with mud. The floor is of hardened dirt, and the low roof is built of bamboo thatched with grass. The huts are small, consisting mostly of one room, which is shared with the livestock. Furnishings are sparse, with the occupants sleeping on wooden cots or reed mats. Only the father, mother, and younger children sleep in the house. Around the age of eight or so, Kond girls and boys leave home to live in segregated village dormitories under the supervision of an elderly female. As in many tribal societies, the dormitory system lends itself to a somewhat casual attitude to premarital sex among Kond youth.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Konds are divided into exogamous clans, each of which claim descent from a common ancestor. As a rule, these groups inhabit villages in a limited geographical area. All the families in a village may be members of a subclan, which are commonly named after their totems. These may be plants, animals, or natural objects. Typical names of subclans are Hikoka (horse), Kelka (kingfisher), and Kadam (a tree). The Konds are a warlike people, and in the past clans were continually fighting one another. Conflicts were usually over land or women. Various eyewitness accounts are available of Kond battles in the 19th century.

The Kond family is typically patrilineal and nuclear in structure. Women are highly respected and are entitled to almost the same privileges as are men. Women manage the household, plant and weed the rice paddies, and raise the young, but they are also consulted before decisions are made in domestic affairs. Women attend the village council, where they can voice their opinion on matters relating to community affairs. Wives are acquired in several ways—by mutual consent, by purchase, by elopement, by capture, or through an arranged marriage to which both parties consent. Kond marriage rituals show the assimilation of many Hindu customs into traditional tribal practices. Both divorce and widow remarriage are permitted.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional dress of Kond men is a long cloth, a few inches wide, that is wrapped around the waist and drawn between the

legs. The ends of the garment are brightly colored, and hang down at the back like a tail. Although the head is left bare, the hair is oiled and combed and tied into an elaborate knot. The feathers of the peacock, blue jay, or white crane, colored combs, and ornamental hairpins are used to adorn the hair. Women wear a short skirt reaching from the waist to the knee, leaving the breasts bare. Married women have their ears pierced in 8 to 10 places and wear the corresponding number of earrings. A variety of necklaces, bangles, and anklets complete the ensemble. Men also wear jewelry. Girls of marriageable age have designs tattooed on the face, arms, and legs.

## 12 FOOD

Rice is the staple food of the Konds. It is eaten with lentils and with wild leafy vegetables gathered in the jungle. The diet is rather bland compared to the spicy curries eaten by other peoples in India. Konds are nonvegetarian, eating eggs, chicken, buffalo, goat, pork, and even beef. The Konds do not use milk. Wild game is hunted in the forest to supplement the diet. Konds enjoy alcohol, drinking rice-beer, sago palm toddy, or liquor made from *mahua* flowers (*Bassia latifolia*).

## 13 EDUCATION

Access to educational facilities has always been a problem for Konds living in the remote interior of the Eastern Ghats. Although some 30% of Kond children attend government schools today, many drop out because of economic hardship and the need to help support their families. The drop-out rate by Grade 5 is close to 80%. Literacy among Konds is low, with the rates (2001) among the Dongria Konds, who live in the Niyamgiri ranges of Orissa, being 29% for men and 14% for women, respectively. Yet, as noted elsewhere, many Kond are bilingual, speaking the local dialect as well as Kui.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music, song, and dance play an important role in traditional Kond culture. Instruments include trumpets, drums, and the shepherd's pipe. The *deka*, a two-stringed violin made with a bamboo stick and gourd, provides the musical accompaniment as the poet sings, or rather chants, the verses. There are songs for every occasion—love songs, songs to be sung on the eve of the Meriah sacrifice, at marriages, at the time of plowing, and at the time of death. Of greater importance is the Kond dance. Every village has a place set aside for dancing. In a dance of the Kuttia Konds, boys and girls stand in a row facing each other. They link arms and shuffle back and forth in time to the music, getting more agitated and excited as the tempo of the dance quickens. Konds arm themselves with weapons for the war dance, in which they mimic a battle scene. In a hunting dance, a man wearing the horns and skin of a wild animal is chased and captured by a party of "hunters." Dancing accompanies festivals, marriages, and other important events and may continue day and night until the dancers are exhausted.

## 15 WORK

Although originally hunters and gatherers, most Konds are now engaged in agriculture. They practice shifting cultivation, as well as settled cultivation and animal husbandry. Rice, maize (corn), and pulses are important food crops, while turmeric, mustard seed, and legumes are grown as cash crops.

Many Konds work as agricultural laborers, while some still hunt or gather forest products such as teak. Of particular interest are the relationships of the Konds with the Panas and Doms. These are peoples who live in the Kond hill country, sometimes even in Kond villages, who act as traders, money-lenders, and intermediaries between the Konds and the Hindus. They also carry out certain ritual functions, which the Konds are forbidden to perform themselves.

In the past, Konds sacrificed humans for the good of the crops, though today buffalo are substituted for humans in this blood sacrifice. The practice of human sacrifice, which occurred until the middle of the nineteenth century, was stamped out by the British.

## 16 SPORTS

The Konds are fond of hunting, using bows and arrows and battle-axes as their weapons. They are skilled at tracking and pursuing deer and other large game.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Konds find their entertainment in their festivals and the singing, dancing, and revelry that accompanies their celebration of social occasions.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Kond folk arts include tattooing, the carving of hairpins and similar objects out of animal bone, and jewelry-making. Konds are known for their skill in creating figures of animals and people out of brass and bronze. Other examples of Kond art are masks carved out of wood or gourds, elaborately carved wooden pillars formerly used in the Meriah sacrifice, and carvings on the doors of Kond houses.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As a tribal people inhabiting some of the more isolated hills and jungles of eastern India, the Konds are typical of the country's many underdeveloped communities. They are classified by the governments of Orissa and other states as a Scheduled Tribe and as such are deemed in need of special help in overcoming their economic and social problems. While social evils of the past, e.g., infanticide and human sacrifice, have long been abandoned, other tribal customs have survived. Today, many Konds are landless and locked in a cycle of poverty and illiteracy from which escape is difficult. The community remains socially marginalized and essentially isolated from the social and economic gains that Indian society in general has achieved since the time of independence.

Orissa has abundant mineral resources, and a major social issue for the Dongria Konds in the Niyamgiri ranges is the intrusion of mining companies into traditional Kond territory. Even though construction of refineries creates jobs and advances the local economy, Konds object to the accompanying pollution and destruction of their pristine, and sometimes, sacred lands (the Konds worship the Nyamgiri Mountains as a living deity). Thus, in 2004, in anticipation of official permission being granted by the Indian government, a bauxite company constructed a refinery in the Niyamgiri hills, which contains an estimated 73 million tons of bauxite. The 10,000 tribal Konds who live in the area view the plan to mine bauxite in their territory as a threat to their way of life. Conserva-

tionists predict the bauxite mine will pollute the eco-sensitive Niyamgiri hills, causing mass displacement and the end of a traditional livelihood based on farming millet and beans, hunting and gathering fruits. In the past decade, more than 1.4 million Indians have been removed from 10 million acres of land in four states to pave the way for industry and infrastructure projects, according to a recent report by ActionAid, an international anti-poverty agency. Kond tribals made the trip to Orissa's state capital, Bhubaneswar, in eastern Orissa to lobby state officials. The establishment of the refinery was taken all the way to the usually business-friendly Supreme Court of India, which rejected the mining company's proposal and fined it for "blatant violation" of the law, but also invited it submit another proposal, which included environmental safeguards and channeling some of the operation's profits into tribal welfare. NGOs are skeptical of this, saying similar safeguards have been enacted before, but are rarely implemented. Vedanta, the company involved, says that it is giving tribals more generous compensation than the law requires, has built rehabilitation camps for the displaced villagers, and that much of the area's water sources and rare plants and animals will be protected.

Vedanta Alumina's plans hit another snag at the end of 2007 when environmentalists filed an intervener petition with the Supreme Court, highlighting the plight of the local Dongria Konds. However, even though a ban on mining has been sought in view of social, cultural, religious, and ethnic rights of Dongria Kondhs and also their livelihood, which protected under Article 21 and other provisions of the Constitution, related laws and international conventions to preserve tribal communities, the project has commenced "trial production," although it is yet to be granted a mining lease in Kalahandi, pending decision in the Supreme Court. The state-owned Orissa Mining Corporation intends to mine 3 million tons of bauxite annually to sell the same to Vedanta, its joint venture partner, for its alumina refinery at Lanjigarh and smelter plant at Jharsuguda. In September 2004 the ministry of environment and forests had granted environmental clearance for the refinery, but the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), appointed by the Supreme Court, noted that the clearance was obtained by concealing material particulars, principally that no forest land was involved in the project whereas about 660 hectares of forest land was involved.

Similar situations arise elsewhere in Orissa and also in neighboring mineral-rich Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar, with protests by tribals often turning violent and involving fatalities.

Local agencies such as the Dongria Kond Development Agency (DKDA) and the Kutia Kond Development Agency are involved in representing the Konds on local tribal and environmental issues.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As with many tribal groups, women among the Kond are respected and are virtually on an equal footing with men, even though Kond society is patriarchal. Divorce is allowed, as is widow remarriage. Even with arranged marriages, both parties must give their consent. Kond girls are tattooed on their face at 10 years of age—if they do not submit to this, they are viewed as unsuitable for marriage. Although child marriage was common among some Kond groups, real gender issues are to be found among plains groups that have come into close

contact with their Hindu neighbors and adopted many of their customs, such as demanding dowries at the time of marriage.

Another problem for Kond women arises from displacement and loss of traditional land due to mining activities. Not only have there been deaths among the menfolk, but in the post-displacement landscape, women and girls often end up working for daily wages or as domestic helps or prostitutes. The women also have to cope with alcoholism and domestic violence.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# KOREAN CHINESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** kaw-REE-uhn chigh-NEEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** None

**LOCATION:** China (Jilin province)

**POPULATION:** 2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Korean

**RELIGION:** Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities; Vol. 4: South Koreans

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The immigration of Koreans into China began at the end of the 17th century. At that time, they were limited in number. In the mid-19th century, due to widespread famine in north Korea, a sizable Korean population crossed the border and settled in Yanbian and adjacent areas of northeast China, mixing with the native Manchu and Chinese residents. Later on, new waves of Korean immigrants settled in the same area. Under the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the Koreans in Yanbian district amounted to more than 10,000 and those who dwelled in Jian, Linjiang, and Xinbin counties numbered more than 37,000. In 1885, the Qing Dynasty allotted to the Korean immigrants an area of about 3,500 sq mi along the north bank of the Tumen River. After the annexation of the Korean peninsula by Japan in 1910, vast numbers of Koreans entered China, reaching more than 360,000 by 1918. At first, the Qing Dynasty imposed restrictions on their immigration, but changed to a policy of "recruiting for land reclamation" shortly after. Land reclamation bureaus were set up in cities and counties near the border; Korean immigrants recruited to reclaim wastelands were recognized as Chinese. From then on, they opened up virgin soil and built up large Korean communities in northeastern Manchuria. This policy continued under the Republican government after the demise of the Qing Empire in 1911.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Koreans dwelled mainly in Jilin province. They also scattered in Heilongjiang and Liaoning provinces, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and some inland cities of north and northeast China. Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin Province is the most populated area among the compact Korean communities. It is located in hilly land around Baitou, the highest peak in Changbai Mountains, which dominate one of China's largest forest reserves. The forest, covering 494,000 acres, is divided into a semiprotected area and an area off-limits to both guns and axes. More than 300 species of medicinal herbs, including ginseng, grow in habitats that range from alpine to heath. Ethnic Korean population in the People's Republic of China reached 2 million in 2002.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Korean language belongs to the Ural-Altai family, Tungusic branch. With the spread of Confucianism and Buddhism, Koreans began using Chinese characters as a writing system from the 4th century AD. Scholars estimate that about 70% of present-day Korean vocabulary is of Chinese origin. From the

10th century onward, the Koreans devised their own phonetic alphabet and syllabary and gradually abandoned the use of the Chinese ideographic characters. The official alphabet used in the Korean Peninsula, called Hangul, was developed in the 15th century and consists of 24 phonetic signs; these are sometimes combined with Chinese characters. However, Koreans living in China use a 40-character phonetic alphabet and have completely abandoned Chinese characters.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Tanjun myth, narrating the origin of the Korean people, is widespread among the Koreans living in China. The youngest son of the Emperor of Heaven wished to move down to the earth. His father acquiesced and awarded him a blessed parcel of land. The gods of winds, rain, and clouds ensured the prosperity of all living things on this parcel of land. Now, there was a tiger and a bear living together in a cavern. The son sent the two animals each *lingzhi* (glossy ganoderma—a type of fungus) and 20 bulbs of garlic and told them that whichever had eaten them within 100 days would become a human being. A few days later, the tiger, unable to eat anymore, abandoned the contest, while the bear continued and ultimately turned into a girl. She prayed to the gods to give her a man. The son of the Emperor of Heaven changed himself into a man and married the girl. From this union Tanjun was born and, thereafter, human beings multiplied. Tanjun built up a country called Korea and made Pyongyang the capital. He lived to be 1,908 years of age and was finally transformed into a mountain god.

#### 5 RELIGION

There have been four major religions among the Koreans of the Korean Peninsula: Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. Most Koreans who migrated to China in the 19th and early 20th centuries shared in the beliefs of one or more of these religious traditions, but since the Communist takeover many have abandoned religious beliefs and practices. Large segments of Koreans living in rural areas still hold the Christian faith, while the older generations still believe in Confucianism; geomantic beliefs (divination by means of geographic features) related to the location of a house or a tomb are widespread among the ethnic Koreans living in China.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

On the Spring Festival (lunar New Year; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20), in addition to singing, dancing, and dinner parties at home, people add to the fun by kindling bonfires in the fields and engaging in outdoor activities.

The fifteenth of January (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between February 6 and March 6), the Chinese Lantern Festival is also an important holiday for the Koreans, especially in the rural areas. Each household cooks five kinds of rice, barley, red beans, and husked sorghum and puts a small quantity of each before an ox to see which one is eaten first; this will indicate which variety of grain will have a bumper crop this year. An important activity will be held in the evening: “greeting the moon.” More than 10 oak rods, each 12 ft in length, tied up at one end, are erected in the form of a circular cone before the village. Pine branches are piled up at the bottom. As soon as the moon appears, they kindle the cone. In a moment, a deafening sound of gongs and drums welcomes the



full moon. Children have long, thin bags filled with charcoal, made by their parents beforehand. At this moment they light them up and hang them on the trees. The girls move around holding odd-shaped paper lanterns.

September 3 is the anniversary of the founding of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Families dress up, call on their relatives' homes, and participate in various recreational activities.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

On a child's first birthday, relatives and friends are invited to dinner. A rite of “putting on the hat” will be held when a boy comes of age at 20. According to Korean custom, the rite should be held three times within a few days. During the first rite, the boy should take off his clothes and wear a garment made of white linen trimmed with black silk. Then, his hair is combed into a bun, covered by a hairnet, and finally by a hat. During the second rite, his hat and garment should be changed again. During the third rite, a kerchief is added to the hat. The boy should go to the ancestral hall and salute the elder members of his family.

A family will hold a special celebration on a person's sixtieth birthday because of the symbolism of the 60-year cycle obtained by combining the 12 “Heavenly Stems” and the 10 “Earthly Branches.” This computing system was invented by the Chinese in the second millennium bc. For the same reason, the sixtieth wedding anniversary is an important family festival. On this occasion children, grandchildren, relatives,

friends, and neighbors all come to celebrate, usually for two days.

When a senior person dies, family members should wear mourning dress and abstain from eating cooked rice, haircutting, and face washing for three days. Paying homage to the dead, the visitor should kowtow twice, then exchange kowtow twice with the family members. The burial should be held within three days and strictly on odd days. New clothes should be put on and the old ones burned. The location of the tomb is usually selected by a geomancer, often on the sunny side of a slope. After the funeral, the memorial ceremony should be held for three successive days and repeated on the deceased's birthday, on the anniversary of the death, the Festival for the Dead (*Qingming*), and the Mid-Autumn Festival. Most of the customs surrounding funerary rites were borrowed by the Koreans from the Chinese long before they migrated into China.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Koreans are very warm and courteous. When celebrating at home, all the family members sing and dance, making for very lively entertainment. On June 20 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between July 13 and August 12), everybody dresses up in the Korean national costume and crowds gather on the square. They express good wishes to the aged, commend parents-in-law who live in harmony with their daughters-in-law, and vice versa. This festival shows the attention and importance the Koreans pay to interpersonal relations among the generations. Young people have full freedom to choose their spouses. They find many opportunities to meet each other during social meetings.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Ethnic Korean villages are usually located on the flatlands below mountain slopes. Villages, a few kilometers from each other, are usually rather small, comprising a few dozen households. Houses have no courtyard, face south, southeast, or southwest, and are whitewashed both inside and outside. The roof, covered with straw or tiles, slopes down on all four sides. There are four doors at the front that also serve as windows. The house usually consists of a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen and a storeroom. The platform bed, made of adobe bricks and stones covered by wooden boards, also serves as a table. The interior is usually tastefully furnished. Koreans are particular about tidiness and cleanliness. When entering the house, everybody takes off his or her shoes at the door. The chief modes of transportation are bicycle, motorcycle, car, or train. Highways and railways crisscross in all directions from the districts inhabited by the Koreans.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Families may be as small as three or four or as many as a dozen. Men engage in agriculture, while women take care of household chores. Usually, it is the responsibility of the eldest son to live with the parents, even after marriage. The younger sons live apart after marriage. The eldest son inherits the legacy, but a part is reserved for the younger sons, while the daughters have none. Korean families are monogamous. According to their customs, marriage is not allowed between people of the same clan, the same surname, or between close relatives. Marrying too early is still a problem. Following age-old traditions, women rarely ask for divorce and widows rarely remarry.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The Koreans are fond of white or plain-color clothes. Women's blouses are very short. Adult women wear long, multi-pleated skirts or a sari-like cloth winding down their bodies; young girls wear short skirts cut well over the knees. Both men and women like their traditional boat-like shoes all made of rubber. Men wear loose pants, short tops, and vests. They usually wear a long overcoat outdoors. "Mao's suits" and Western-style clothes are popular today.

## **12 FOOD**

The Koreans' staple foods include rice and millet. They are fond of rice, glutinous rice cakes, cold noodles in sauce, soup made from soya beans and flour, pickled vegetables, and dog flesh. They like sour and spicy dishes. Meals are seldom without pickles and the soup mentioned above; the pickles are made of Chinese cabbage, radish, garlic, pepper, ginger, and salt. Cold noodles are made of buckwheat and sweet potato powder, together with beef, chicken, pork, eggs, pepper, sesame and its oil, pears, and apples. They like tea and wine.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Because of their long-standing Confucian tradition, the Koreans value education very highly. Since the 1930s many schools have been established. Yanbian University was set up in 1949. Currently, there are six universities and five adult colleges in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Education in primary school and middle (junior and senior) school is practically universal. There are newspapers and broadcasting in the Korean language. The educational and cultural level of the Koreans is first among all nationalities in China, including the Chinese, and compares favorably with the world average, being lower only than that of North America and Europe.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

*Jiayeqin* is a traditional plucked stringed instrument, said to have been prevalent in a small country called Jiaye as early as the 6th century. The player (usually a woman) puts the left end of the instrument on her knee and the right end on the ground. It may be used for solos as well as for accompanying songs. *Changgu* is a long drum, narrowing toward the middle, usually hung over the front of the chest. The player beats the drum with his left hand and with four bamboo twigs held in the right hand.

Koreans make it a point of honor to master their traditional dances. They dance on every happy occasion. For example, a Korean wedding begins with feasting and ends hours later with prolonged dancing. There are quite a few unique dance styles for specific occasions.

## **15 WORK**

The area of northeast China inhabited by the Koreans is in the "cold belt." The frost-free period lasts only about one-third of the year. Rice and other grains must be grown and harvested during this short period. So, the Koreans developed special irrigation techniques, which are very productive. The rice they produce is white, tasty, and nutritious; it is famous throughout China. Another important contribution of the Chinese Koreans is the raising of sika deer, whose pilose antlers (covered

with soft hair) are sought for their curative and strengthening virtues.

## 16 SPORTS

Korean men are fond of soccer and wrestling. The former is the most popular sport of men. From primary school to university, each class organizes a team of its own. Soccer games held on every festival and holiday attract large numbers of people, sometimes living dozens of kilometers away. The favorite sport of women is the springboard game. Five meters in length, the board is about one meter above the ground. Two girls standing on each end of the board jump alternately, propelling the each other higher and higher in the air. The highest jumper is the winner.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Korean community has been very active in producing Korean-language movies and television programs. Chinese and foreign films and television programs dubbed into Korean are also popular. The Koreans like to actively participate in many forms of entertainment. For instance, during breaks in their manual work, as soon as a person sings or beats the drum, fellow workers will spontaneously join in the singing or dancing.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

One of the most sophisticated crafts of the Chinese Koreans is the handmade musical instrument *jiayeqin*. There were originally two types. The standard instrument was 67 in long and 12 in wide with 12 strings. The popular instrument was shorter and narrower. Both instruments had some limitations, including weak volume and incomplete scales. After 1949, a new version of the *jiayeqin* with 18 strings corrected these limitations.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The success of Chinese Korean education and economic development is in sharp contrast with the low position of Korean women. Chinese Korean society is male-oriented both in public and at home. The revolution does not seem to have modified in a significant way the traditional social values based on patriarchal structures and Confucianism.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. While Chinese Koreans rank first in educational attainment among all Chinese ethnic groups, a gap in educational level persists between women and men. Though the statistics for ethnic Korean women are above the average, they still face significant gender stereotypes in their private and professional life.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc



# KURDS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KURDS

**LOCATION:** Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Syria

**POPULATION:** 30 million to 35 million (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Kurdish

**RELIGION:** Islam

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Kurds are an Indo-European people and constitute the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. However, they have never had their own nation. The traditional life of Kurds was nomadic. Tribes would move throughout the Mesopotamian plains and Turkish and Iranian highlands on a seasonal basis, herding sheep and goats. The end of World War I and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire led to the development of nation-states in the Middle East. This geo-political change forced the Kurds to abandon their traditional ways.

Although Kurds called the land they traveled through Kurdistan, they historically have been incorporated into either the old Islamic empires or the new Middle Eastern nation states. In AD 1514, their lands were divided between the Ottoman Turkish and Shi'ite Persian Empires, who kept control of them for the next 400 years. After World War I, the Kurds had a brief taste of self-rule. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920, recognized an independent Kurdistan. Unfortunately, the European powers dividing the Middle East after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire decided to divide the area known as Kurdistan among various states, in which Kurds would be the minority. The Kurds were forced to rely on foreign European support for protection, which guaranteed the promotion of European policies. Thus, three years later, on 24 July 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, once again dividing Kurdistan between the Turks and Persians in the states now known as Turkey and Iraq. The Kurds had another taste of independence after World War II when they were allowed a small homeland in western Iran in 1946, with the capital at Mahabad. The Shah of Iran soon came into power, however, and crushed the Kurdish state less than a year after it was established. Once again, the Kurds were without a land to call their own.

Kurdish history since 1946 has been a continuation of the struggle to maintain their cultural identity in the face of persecution and pressure to assimilate in every country where they live. Guerrilla fighters called *peshmerga* ("one who faces death") hide in the hills and fight for Kurdistan. A peshmerga uprising in Iraq in 1991 led to a disastrous defeat, and many Kurds fled to Iran. The long years of war and hostility between Iran and Iraq have put the Kurds in a very difficult position, because they live in both countries, and are constantly caught in the middle of the fighting. Kurdish resistance fighters have sometimes tried to use the hostilities between the two countries to their own advantage, so far without success. In Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is a radical communist paramilitary group campaigning for Kurdish independence. Not all Kurds agree with the methods and political aims of the peshmerga or PKK, but all want to have homes where they are safe and free to be themselves. Nearly 44,000 people had died in activities related to the PKK.

Kurds generally have had more national rights in Iraq than in the other modern nation-states in which they currently reside. Iraqi governments beginning in the 1930s allowed the use of Kurdish in schools, recognized the existence of a distinct Kurdish ethnic identity, and allowed for some political autonomy in the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq. Kurds suffered brutal repression under the Ba'ath political regime led by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. The overthrow of Hussein's government in 2003, however, has created a sort of "nation within a nation" for Kurds in three northern provinces. The Kurdistan Regional Government allows for Kurd leaders to make decisions for the provinces with limited interference from Iraq's new government. Kurds also have been given equal voice in Iraq's central government with the country's Arab Sunnis and Arab Shi'ite populations. In addition, Iraq recognizes Kurdish as one of its two official national languages.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Population estimates for the Kurds range from 30 million to 35 million. It is difficult to get an accurate count because the Kurds live in remote mountain areas, many are refugees and flee from one place to another to escape persecution, and governments want to downplay their numbers and significance. The largest numbers of Kurds live in Turkey (approximately 15 million to 20 million, according to estimates from the *CIA World Factbook*). Large numbers of Kurds also live in Iran (8.5 million), Iraq (5.5 million), Pakistan (2.6 million to 3.9 million), and Syria (1.6 million to 1.9 million). Kurds are the second-largest ethnic group in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. They are the third-largest group (after Azerbaijanis) in Iran. Kurds also live in Lebanon, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, as well as Germany (about 400,000) and other places across Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. Although they live among them, Kurds are unrelated to Turks, Arabs, and Iranians.

"Kurdistan" is generally thought of as the mountainous area at the junction of the Iraqi, Iranian, Turkish, Syrian, and Armenian borders. The average altitude is 6,000 ft and much of the territory is so convoluted that it is inaccessible. The climate is severe: temperatures can range from  $-29^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-20^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in winter to  $38^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $100^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in summer. What little precipitation there is usually falls in winter in the form of snow. The mostly barren hillsides are seriously overgrazed and, as political restrictions on the Kurds' traditional nomadic herding increase, the problem only worsens. River valleys in the Kurdish lands are fertile, supporting fruit orchards and vineyards.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Kurdish language is related to Persian (or Farsi), the language spoken in Iran. The main Kurdish dialects are the northern Kurmanji, spoken in Turkey, Syria, and the Caucasus region (of the former Soviet Union); and the southern Sorani, spoken in Iraq and Iran. Kurmanji is more widely used than Sorani. Kurdish, like Persian, has also borrowed many words from the Arabic language. Written Kurdish differs from region to region: Iraqi Kurds use a written form of Sorani; Syrian and Turkish Kurds write Kurmanji with the Latin alphabet; and Kurds of the Caucasus region finally settled on Kurmanji written with the Cyrillic alphabet, after trying Arabic, Armenian, and Latin alphabets. Kurdish has no "th" sounds; they are considered very un-Kurdish.

Most Kurds also speak the official language of the nation-state in which they happen to live. Arabic, Turkish, and Persian are two of the most common second languages used.

The skillful use of language is highly valued by Kurds. Witty repartee and a command of poetry are considered important social assets. In Turkey, however, it was illegal to speak Kurdish, except at home, until 1991. It is not illegal to speak Kurdish in Iran or Iraq. Iraq, until recently, allowed the Kurds a greater range of cultural autonomy than did Turkey or Iran. At school and in public, Kurds must use the language of the country where they live. So they can only practice their Kurdish language arts at home.

Modern Kurdish names are mostly Arabic with Islamic significance, or Persian names of heroes of Persian history and legend. There are very few uniquely Kurdish names. A mother usually names a child. Kurds did not traditionally use surnames, so most modern surnames are tribal designations or geographic locations.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Modern-day Kurds are descendants of ancient Indo-European peoples known as the Medes who moved into the Middle East 4,000 years ago. The Medes were fierce warriors, and the Kurds continue in that tradition. The Muslim hero Saladin (Salah Ad-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub, AD 1137–93) was a Kurd, as were many of his soldiers. Saladin and his army fought against the Crusaders, and Saladin became the sultan of Egypt and Syria in 1174.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Kurds at first resisted the Islamic invasion during the 7th century AD. But they eventually gave in after the Islamic victory near the modern-day Iraqi city of Sulaimaniya in AD 643. Most Kurds are now Sunni Muslims. About one-fifth is Shi'ite, especially in Iran. Many Kurds also belong to Sufi (Islam mystic) brotherhoods and meet to chant and dance together to worship Allah. The Sufi brotherhoods are very important in Kurdish village life. There are a million or so Kurdish Alevis in Turkey, and 40,000–70,000 Yazidis (an independent sect combining aspects of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity), mostly in Armenia and Azerbaijan. A very few Kurds are Christian.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important Kurdish holiday is the *nwerroz*, or Persian New Year, at the time of the spring equinox (21 March). There are special foods, fireworks, dancing, singing, and poetry recitations, all with an emphasis on Kurdish ethnicity. Even though many Kurds no longer live the nomadic life of herders, Kurds continue to have seasonal celebrations at lambing time, before moving the herds to summer pastures, shearing time, and the time of return to the village in the fall. Islamic holidays vary in importance among individual Kurds, although the Prophet Muhammad's birthday is the most important.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The greatest occasion for celebration in a Kurd's life is marriage. Kurds marry at a relatively early age (17 or 18). The bride is decked in gold bracelets, earrings, and necklaces, with new dresses and shoes. The highlight of the wedding is the public procession from the home of the bride to the home of the



groom. Everyone joins in the parade, with lots of fanfare. After they reach the groom's home, the bride enters the house and sits quietly veiled in a corner of the room while the guests feast and dance outside. In some areas, there are horse-riding displays.

Parents and relatives hold a feast for the birth of a child, especially the birth of a first son. Boys are circumcised by the local religious leader during the first week after birth. In some more traditional Kurdish communities, boys are circumcised at age 10, followed by a huge party.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Kurds are a patrilineal society whose various lineages have been preserved over the generations by a high degree of endogamy resulting from the frequent marriage of first cousins (a man generally marries the daughter of a paternal uncle). This practice promotes unity among kin but allows distance to develop between different lineages.

While tribal leadership among the Kurds is inherited, local leaders are chosen for their personal qualities, including integrity, generosity, and skill at dealing with government officials.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Kurds live in small villages in remote mountain regions. Some live in the valleys or on the plains. A typical Kurdish house is made of mud-brick with a wooden roof. In the summer, Kurds sleep on the roof where it is cooler. In some mountain villages, the houses are built so close together that those



Kurdish children in the village of Sierye, Iraq. (Safin Hamed/AFP/Getty Images)

on higher elevations use their lower neighbors' roofs for extra living space. Some homes have underground rooms to use in the winter to escape the cold. There is rarely indoor plumbing; water is carried into the house in jars and cans from a central village well. There is no central heating. The few remaining nomadic Kurds live in tents made of blackened hides, and extended family members cluster their tents together in small communities.

Kurds are generally sheep- and goat-herders. Breeding horses used to be important, with the horses used for transportation, but mules and donkeys have become more common now. Families grow wheat and barley for subsistence, or rice in some areas, and raise chickens for eggs and meat. There are only a few Kurdish towns: Diyarbakir (a sort of capital for Kurds) and Van in Turkey; Erbil and Kirkuk in Iraq; and Mahabad in Iran.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Kurds marry fairly young and choose their own marriage partners. Few Kurds marry non-Kurds. Couples may continue to live with one or the other's family after marrying, but they have rooms of their own and separate housekeeping arrangements. Men and women both work in the fields, and boys and girls start helping at an early age. Kurdish women were traditionally not veiled except during parts of the marriage ceremony. They freely associated with men in most social interactions.

If there was no qualified male heir, a woman assumed tribal leadership. Even today, when Kurdish women have had to bow to the more conservative Islamic conventions of the countries where they live, many Kurdish women fight alongside the men as *peshmerga* (guerrilla fighters). More than 1,000 *peshmerga* are women. The radical Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) encourages freedom for women.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditionally, Kurdish women wear colorful skirts and blouses, and men wear baggy pants, vests, a red sash around the waist, and a blue silk turban on the head. Men also like to wear daggers. The typical Kurdish hat used to be a conical shape made of white felt, but today it is usually only worn by children. Nomadic Kurdish men shave their heads and wear long moustaches.

Traditional dress is becoming rarer as Kurds choose to dress like the people of the countries where they are living. In Iran, they must obey the laws of the Muslim government, so women must wear the black *chador*—a cloth covering their hair and clothes. In contrast, the government of Turkey has banned women from covering their hair in universities and public jobs, and so women are forced to wear more Western-style clothing. In Iraq, men wear woolen coats and vests, checkered headscarves, and baggy pants. Women wear the Muslim-style dress, often with baggy trousers underneath.

## 12 FOOD

Bulghur (cracked wheat) used to be the staple food for Kurds, but rice is becoming more popular where it is available. The Kurdish diet includes a wide variety of fruits and vegetables (cucumbers are especially common). In the valleys where grapes are grown, raisins and grape jam are common. Meat is only eaten on special occasions. The usual beverage is tea. Particular Kurdish specialties are a type of wafer bread eaten for breakfast and any kind of grain cooked in whey. A recipe for Bulghur Bread follows.

### Nane Casoki (Bulghur Bread)

2 cups bulghur  
1 teaspoon salt  
½ cup minced onion  
2 cups boiling water  
approximately 2 cups unbleached white flour

In a medium-sized bowl, combine the bulghur, salt, and onion. Pour the boiling water over the mixture and let stand for 30 minutes. Put in a food processor and process for about 20 seconds. Add 1 cup of flour and process again until it is a smooth texture. (You can also work the flour in by hand, if you do not have a food processor.) Turn the mixture out onto a well-floured surface and knead it, adding flour as necessary to keep the dough from sticking, for about 3 to 4 minutes. Cover the dough and let it rest for at least 15 minutes, or up to 3 hours.

Place a large baking sheet (or two small ones) on the bottom rack of the oven, leaving an inch of space between the sheet and the walls of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450°F. After the dough has rested, divide it into 8 pieces and flatten each piece on the well-floured surface. With a rolling pin, roll out a piece of dough to a very thin round about 8 to 10 inches in diameter. Place the bread on a baking sheet and bake for 1½ to 2 minutes. Turn the bread over and bake for another minute, or until the bread begins to brown around the edges. (If you like a crispier bread, you may bake it longer, until it is spotted with brown all over.) Stack the baked bread and wrap in a clean kitchen towel to keep warm while you roll out and bake the rest of the dough. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Makes 8 breads.

(Adapted from Alford & Duguid, *Flatbreads & Flavors*, p. 175–6.)

## 13 EDUCATION

Schools are not widely available in most of the Kurdish territory. Where they are available, they are not much help. Because classes are taught in the official language of the Kurds' countries of residence, not in Kurdish, many Kurdish children find school very difficult and drop out. The Kurdish literacy rate is therefore very low. Girls often do not attend school at all because tradition holds that they are needed at home.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Kurdish culture has a rich oral tradition, especially in epic poetry called *lawj*, which often tells of adventure in love or battle. Kurdish literature first appeared in the 7th century AD. In 1596, Sharaf Khan, Emir of Bitlis, composed a history of the

Kurds in Persian called the *Sharafnama*. Almost 100 years later, in 1695, a great national epic called the *Memozin* was written in Kurdish by Ahmed Khani.

A Kurd named Ibrahim Mawsili founded the first Muslim Conservatory of Music after introducing Kurdish music to the ruler's court in the 8th century AD.

## 15 WORK

Most Kurds are farmers and sheep- and goat-herders. They sell products from their flocks such as leather, goat cheese, and wool. Women make crafts to sell such as carpets and cloth. Some Kurds grow tobacco to sell, and Turkish Kurds grow cotton for the market. A few mountain Kurds are still nomadic herders.

In towns, Kurds work as shopkeepers, plumbers, teachers, bankers, and so on. Kurds work as unskilled laborers in large Turkish cities, as well as in Baghdad and Mosul in Iraq, and Tehran in Iran. Some urban Kurds build on their traditional skills and specialize as bricklayers, butchers, cattle dealers, and small traders. The oil fields in Turkey and Iraq have attracted many Kurdish workers in recent times. Those Kurds who are able to go abroad find a variety of jobs and send the money back home.

## 16 SPORTS

See articles entitled **Armenians**, **Iraqis**, **Syrians**, and **Turks**.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Only men go out at night. They often sit at teahouses and cafés and play backgammon or dominoes. A favorite pastime is to listen to tapes or live singers at cafés. Singers have only recently been allowed to sing publicly in Kurdish.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Carpet weaving is by far the most significant Kurdish folk art. Other crafts are embroidery, silk-weaving, leather-working, and metal ornamentation (especially copper inlay).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The greatest problem for the Kurds is the unwillingness of nations in which they live to allow them cultural autonomy. Although some Kurdish groups continue to fight for an independent Kurdistan, most Kurds wish only to be allowed to maintain their own language and culture within the states in which they live. Persecution of the Kurds has been especially traumatic in the age of nation-states. The concept of one nation with one people and one language has been adopted by the governments of Turkey, and this has led to great oppression of the Kurds in an attempt to make them conform. In Iraq, Kurds also faced persecution, although the Iraqi government did recognize their cultural autonomy. During the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88), the government engaged in systematic genocide to stop the Kurds from allying with Iran. Thousands of villages were destroyed and tens of thousands of Kurds were murdered and buried in mass graves. The Iraqi government also used nerve gas purchased from European governments against Kurdish civilians and Iranian troops, killing thousands more. One of the worst massacres occurred in the Iraqi Kurd town of Halabja, in which the entire population was killed by nerve gas. Because most countries tacitly supported

Iraq against Iran, no substantial pressure was placed on the Iraqi government to stop its offensive. After the Gulf War and the unsuccessful Kurdish and Iraqi rebellion against Saddam Hussein's power, thousands more Kurds were forced into refugee camps, although part of the Kurdish territory in northern Iraq has been declared off limits by Western countries. Since 1991, Turkey has attacked Kurdish civilian centers inside the "safe haven" zone in Iraq to punish Kurds for supporting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Because Turkey is needed to enforce the embargo against Iraq, little pressure has been placed on its government to stop these invasions. Many thousands of Kurds have now fled to Iran, and the government there is hard-pressed to provide support to literally millions of refugees from Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan. Compounding the humanitarian tragedy is the fact that Kurdish leaders remain politically divided and unsure of a common strategy to demand their rights.

At least 44,000 people, mostly Kurds, had died in clashes between Kurdish rebels and the Turkish government as of 2008, and Turkey had spent \$300 billion battling the terrorists. Kurds in Syria are not allowed to assert a sense of identity. Legal restrictions in Syria prohibit them from using their language in public, while the Iranian government continues to arrest Kurd journalists and activists for asserting rights for independence. The situation for Kurds has improved considerably in northern Iraq, where Kurds are building a regional government and encouraging tourism. Despite the instability in the rest of Iraq, the Kurdish regions are peaceful and offer hope for a future Kurdistan.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

An international conference on Kurdish women in 2007 raised many issues that challenge Kurdish women in the early 21st century. Most of the conference attendees emphasized that equalizing relationships between men and women was an important aspect of the international struggle for Kurdish independence.

Kurdish women lack educational opportunities and often face discrimination in workplaces. Because most Kurds are Muslim, religious practices also constrain women from working independently and from expressing themselves in the literary and creative arts. Kurdish women often face domestic abuse and suffer the risk of honor killings not only in the Middle East but also in the European countries that many have migrated to. The conference established a steering committee to organize future activities, passed resolutions to urge the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq to make services for domestic violence available, and to work to increase social and political rights for women.

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—revised by H. Gupta Carlson

# KUWAITIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** koo-WAIT-eez

**LOCATION:** Kuwait

**POPULATION:** 3.2 million (30% of whom are Kuwaiti citizens)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic (official); English

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni, 70%; Shi'ite, 30%)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Kuwait has one of the world's largest proven oil fields, an oil field that the Iraqis did their best to control and later attempted to destroy in their 1990-91 invasion and occupation of Kuwait. One of the wealthiest nations in the world before the invasion, Kuwait has undergone a significant recovery from the widespread infrastructural and cultural destruction inflicted on the country by six months of Iraqi occupation.

Archaeological study shows evidence of human settlements in Kuwait dating back to 5000 bc. The Dilmun civilization occupied the area from 4000 to 2000 bc, controlling the trade route to India. The Babylonians took over, then the Persians; after this, the Greeks established a colony on Falaika Island and then expanded inland around 300 bc. Greek rule lasted about 200 years, after which the Romans entered. The Islamic revolution swept through the area during the 7th century AD. Not much is known about Kuwait from the time of the Islamic revolution until the 18th century.

Modern-day Kuwait was founded in 1722 by the Utub tribe of Arabs, who moved there to flee the drought across the inland Arabian Peninsula at that time. The name Kuwait is the diminutive form of the Arabic word *kut*, meaning "a fortress built near water." The few native inhabitants already there mingled with the Utub, and they all made their living by trading, fishing, and pearling. Sabah bin Jabir was elected sheikh (leader) of the Kuwaiti Utub in 1756, and the Sabah family has ruled Kuwait ever since.

Kuwait has a history of friendly relations with Britain, and it became a British-protected state in 1899. Kuwait was granted self-rule in 1914, but it remained a British protectorate until 19 June 1961, when it became officially independent. The Kuwaiti government is a constitutional monarchy that has a provision for an elected parliamentary body, the National Assembly, but the monarchy has rarely allowed it to exist. In 1992, elections were held for a new Assembly, and a majority of those elected are considered to be in opposition to the monarchy.

A small but wealthy state, Kuwait has suffered continual conflicts with its larger neighbors, Iraq and Iran. On 2 August 1990, Saddam Hussein led an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, occupying the country until 26 February 1991. Relations between the two nations had soured some months prior to the invasion over disputed border oilfields and growing Iraqi discontentment with an economically-crippling military debt to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia amassed during Iraq's eight-year war with Iran. During the occupation, Iraqi soldiers ravaged the country, and much of the nation's wealth was looted and transferred to Iraq. There are conflicting accounts regarding the extent of the human rights violations committed by the Iraqi military invasion, with Kuwait claiming that the arbitrary arrest, beating, torture, rape, and murder of Kuwaiti citizens was widespread. Iraqis have contested this and argued

that these claims were exaggerated by the Kuwaiti regime in exile to make a more compelling and emotionally-appealing case for UN-backed military intervention. Following the passing of a landmark resolution in the Security Council, a United Nations coalition force from 38 nations (including eight Arab countries) came to Kuwait's defense on 16 January 1991 and drove out the Iraqis a month later. On their way out, the Iraqis conducted a scorched earth campaign, bombing and burning Kuwait's oil wells, roads, buildings—virtually everything in their path. Most of Kuwait's oilfields were set ablaze and took months to extinguish. This has had a severe toll on the Kuwaiti environmental conditions, both marine and terrestrial. Since the invasion, Kuwait has made a significant leap forward and recovered from all but one of the traumas of the invasion—the emotional one. Kuwait's currency stands unrivaled as one of the strongest in the world, the nation's population has swelled to twice its size two decades ago, and with souring oil prices, the country has been experiencing an economic renaissance.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Kuwait is located in the desert on the northwestern coast of the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf. It is bordered to the north and west by Iraq, to the south and southwest by Saudi Arabia, and to the east by the Gulf. Directly across the Gulf is Iran. Kuwait's total land area is about 17,820 sq km (6,880 sq mi), just slightly smaller than that of the U.S. state of New Jersey. Several islands are included within Kuwait's borders; the island of Failaka is the most densely populated. The largest island is Bubiyan, but it is uninhabited because it is low-lying and marshy. Kuwait Bay is a protected harbor on the Gulf that has been much used for millennia. Kuwait's capital city, Al-Kuwait, is located at the harbor. The rest of Kuwait is flat desert, with a couple of low ridges (about 122 m, or 400 ft above sea level) where the oil is located. Because the oil is in ground that is higher than the rest of the country, it does not have to be pumped, but simply flows with the force of gravity into collecting tanks.

What little plant and animal life there was before the Iraqi invasion is now almost totally destroyed. Military vehicles churned up the delicate desert soil, and oil flooding from bombed wells and spreading in a slick on the Gulf waters has killed most wild sea, land, and air life. Recovery efforts are slow, and some damage may never be repaired. Oil spills, significant percentages of acid precipitation, widespread ordinances, and residues of the war arms continue to pose significant threats for the revival of the country's terrestrial and marine flora and fauna.

The climate in Kuwait is hot and humid, with summer temperatures reaching as high as 49°C (120°F) or more. Frequent sandstorms occur from May to July, and August and September are extremely humid. Winters are cooler, with temperatures ranging from 10° to 16°C (50°–60°F). Average rainfall is only 2.5 to 18 cm (1–7 in) yearly, all of which falls during the winter months, from October through April.

Kuwait's total population, based on a 1999 census, is 2,273,842 persons, of whom only 792,000 are Kuwaiti citizens. The rest are foreign workers in the oil, medical, educational, and construction industries, as well as significant numbers in skilled labor. Foreign workers are not allowed citizenship, even if they work in Kuwait all their adult lives. Even children born in Kuwait to foreign workers are not granted Kuwaiti citizenship. After a career of service in Kuwait, a foreign



worker is asked to leave the country immediately after retiring or upon the expiration of their work permits. Of the foreigners, about 35% are Arab; 10% are Iranian; 10% are Indian; 15% are Bangladeshi and Pakistani; and 10% are Egyptian, 10% are Palestinian (numbers halved following the liberation due to political reasons); and the remaining 10% are from a variety of countries. In May 1991, following liberation from the Iraqi invasion, it was reported that 900 persons were being investigated for their activities during the Iraqi invasion. The Kuwaiti prime minister acknowledged that non-Kuwaitis had been abducted and tortured. Some were arrested and tried as collaborators with the Iraqis; many were forced to leave the country.

Most of the Kuwaiti population is urban, with estimates reaching 96%. According to the 1999 census, 30,958 people live in the capital, Kuwait City. The largest town is Salmiyya, with a population of 150,452. Jalib al-Shuyukh has 160,289 persons, and Hawalli has 93,000. Before the Iraqi occupation, new towns were being built to house the growing population. Since the liberation, reconstruction has rebuilt much of the country's destroyed areas and new residential areas, both urban and suburban enclaves have emerged throughout. The demographic distribution of the country shows a geographic and socioeconomic disparity between residential areas for Kuwaitis and those for expatriates, with the latter occupying smaller urban apartments whilst the prior live in luxurious suburban property.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Arabic is the official language of Kuwait and is the language spoken by all Kuwaiti citizens. Kuwaiti students are taught English as a second language. Arabic, spoken by 422 million people worldwide, has many distinct dialects, so that people living as few as 500 km (about 310 mi) apart may not be able to understand one another. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic, or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken dialects are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that makes no distinction between capital and lower-case letters. It is not necessary for the letters to be written in a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation rules are also quite different from those of English.

"Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam 'alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Wa 'alaykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is 'Afwan; "yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba'a*, *khamasa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *thamanyā*, *tisa'a*, and 'ashara.

Arab names consist of their first name, their father's name, and their paternal grandfather's name. Women do not take their husband's name when they marry but rather keep their father's family name as a sign of respect for their family of origin. First names usually indicate an Arab's religious affiliation: Muslims often use names with Islamic religious significance, such as Muhammad and Fatima, while Christians often use Western names, as well as Arabic Christian names, such as Elias and Butrus.

Kuwaitis speak a dialect of Arabic known as Khaleeji (Gulf Arabic) that is spoken with some variation throughout the Gulf countries including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Oman. Khaleeji dialects are comprehensible to all their speakers but may not be understood completely in other regions of the Arab world, such as the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine) or the North Africa region. These dialects are spoken rather than written although there is a move towards textually documenting these oral languages in the form of literature and poetry for fear of their loss due increased reliance on foreign-produced media content.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Kuwaiti folk beliefs and rituals are strongly linked to Islam, to which Kuwaitis turn for daily guidance, as well as explanations for many aspects of their current lives and past history. Prior to the discovery of oil, the people of Kuwait relied primarily on desert herding and fishing for sustenance. These have had a substantial impact on the country's folklore and culture with many songs, theatrical performance, literature, and poetry and musical compositions and often serve as inspiration for the stories in these artistic expressions. Bedouin and desert nomadic culture has also left its mark in the traditional garb worn by men and women both casually and on special occasions including weddings, funerals, ceremonies, celebrations and formal meetings.

## 5 RELIGION

The original inhabitants of Kuwait were pantheistic, worshipping various goddesses and gods. A temple to Artemis, the Greek virgin moon goddess of the hunt, was located on the island of Falaika. In AD 313, the emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, of which Kuwait was then a part, so Kuwait became a Christian state. When the Islamic revolution swept through the area in the 7th century AD, virtually all Kuwaitis converted to Islam. Today, about 70% of Kuwaiti citizens are Sunni Muslims, while 30% are Shi'ite Muslims.

Islam is the youngest of the world's three Abrahamic religions, having begun in the early 7th century AD when the prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah (God). Within just a few years of Muhammad's death in AD 632, Islam had spread through the entire Middle East, gaining converts at a dynamic rate.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570), in what is now Saudi Arabia, Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his vigorous denunciation of the pagan idols worshiped there (idols that attracted a profitable pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca, AD 622 (July 16), called the *Hijra*, is counted as the year one in the Muslim calendar. Muhammad fled to the city now known as Medina, another of the holy sites of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Eventually, Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the Kaaba, or Cube, building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship), and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam.

The Islamic religion has five so-called "pillars": (1) Muslims must pray five times a day; (2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakat*, to the poor; (3) Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; (4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca; and (5) each Muslim must recite the *shahada*: "*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashhadu an Muhammadu rasul Allah*," which means "I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." Muslims say all their prayers facing in the direction of Mecca. Both men and women are expected, and greatly desire, to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations, is observed by complete fasting from dusk until dawn each day of the entire month.

Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living; it is a total way of life, inseparable from the rest of one's daily concerns. Therefore, religion and politics and faith and culture, are one and the same for Muslims. There is no such thing as the separation of church and state. In theory, there should be no distinction between private religious values and public cultural norms in an Islamic country; in actuality, history, geography, and daily life have influenced the cultures of Islamic countries, resulting in standards of social behavior and interaction that are not always in agreement with religious codes of conduct.

The difference between the Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, which has played such an important part in Arab history, has to do with the early history of the religion. After Muhammad's death, the entire Muslim community recognized the legitimacy of the next three successors, or caliphs. The fourth caliph was 'Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. His legitimacy was

challenged by Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria, and after the Battle of Siffin in 657, 'Ali was forced to withdraw. He moved his capital to Iraq and was murdered shortly thereafter. His followers refused to recognize the legitimacy of Mu'awiyah's caliphate and established the Shi'ite sect. Although there are doctrinal differences, the fundamental difference between the sects, therefore, is an argument about authority, not doctrine: the Shi'ites believe that caliphs must be direct descendants of Muhammad and that 'Ali was the legitimate fourth successor, while the Sunnis believe that caliphs should be elected by the people and therefore that Mu'awiyah and his successors were legitimate. Because there are more Sunnis than Shi'ites worldwide, the Sunnis refer to themselves as the orthodox sect.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Secular holidays in Kuwait include New Year's Day (January 1) and National Day (February 25). Liberation Day (February 26), commemorating the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, is not recognized as an official holiday, but Kuwaitis seem to treat it as one. In deference to Kuwaitis still missing in Iraq after the occupation and to their families, no ceremonies or celebrations are held to mark the National Day or the Liberation Day.

Because Kuwait is an Islamic state, its official religious holidays are Muslim ones. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by eleven days each Western year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are *Eid Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of Ramadan; *Eid Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca, during which families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *al-Mawlid An Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Eid Al-Isra' wa Al-Mi'raj*, a feast celebrating Muhammad's nocturnal visit to heaven. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. All government offices, private businesses, and schools are closed also during *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Births are the occasion for celebration, particularly if the child is a boy. Kuwaiti boys are circumcised on the seventh day after their birth. This is usually accompanied by a banquet (*Aqiq*), for which sheep are slaughtered and relatives and friends are invited in for a festive meal. After giving birth, a mother is expected to stay in bed for 40 days (*nifas*), to recuperate and regain her strength.

Weddings are perhaps the most elaborately celebrated occasions, with great feasts and dancing. In the past, girls could be betrothed at the age of 14. Today, the average age for marriage is 20 to 25. There are two rituals in the marital tradition, the *milka*, or marriage contract, and the *'urs*, or marriage ceremony. Kuwaiti society is built on the importance of the family, and marriages are often arranged between families with long-established ties.

Respect toward the dead is also an important ritual. The burial takes place on the same day as the death. The body is washed and wrapped in a white shroud and then taken to a nearby mosque, where special prayers (*Salat al-Janaza*) are recited. After the burial, the relatives, friends, and acquaintances gather at the home of the grieving family to pay their respects



and read aloud parts of the Quran. Mourning lasts for three days.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

During the Iraqi invasion and occupation (1990–91), the usual social barriers and divisions, such as age, religious differences, and gender segregation, disappeared as Kuwaitis banded together to resist and/or survive. During more peaceful times, men and women do not mix socially, except in family groups, and Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims keep their distance from each other.

The *diwanias*, private clubs for men, played an important role during the Iraqi occupation. Traditionally, functioning as meeting places where men sit and talk over coffee or tea, making business contacts, discussing government policy with influential persons who can then make the suggested changes, and making deals with each other, the *diwanias* became the hub of the resistance movement. Men gathered there (as well as in mosques) and organized their resistance efforts against the Iraqis. In post-liberation Kuwait, these congregations have become a forum for political organizing that has led to recent crackdowns on some of the *diwanias* that reflect opposition to the Al-Sabah family rule.

In general, Arab hospitality reigns in Kuwait. When talking, Arabs touch each other much more often, and stand much closer together, than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking or walking. (In earlier days, members of the opposite sex, even married couples, never touched in public; this is changing today.) Arabs tend to be social, gregarious, highly conversant, and insistent and have different conversational and interpersonal rules than Westerners. Interrupting a person speaking is not seen as offensive, and speaking with a high volume is acceptable. Most conversations appear to involve emotion and are replete with non-verbal gestures.

With a new generation of Kuwaiti youth being influenced by foreign travel and exposure to international media, there is greater mixing between males and females, with a growing number of private co-ed British and American schools and universities setting the standards in education and creating an environment where popular cultural youth trends are explored. Large shopping centers have become a place where youth meet, congregate, or simply people watch and now serve as some of the most public spaces for socialization.

Given the high income levels in Kuwait, the country has a very hierarchical system of socioeconomic classes, which affects interpersonal relations. Interactions between Kuwaiti and other nationalities are governed by this hierarchy. Domestic workers are common in Kuwait, and most citizens have several employees in the household who are expatriate laborers sponsored by the host/employer family. Most such workers are citizens of countries in South Asia, East and North Africa, or the Philippines. With more than half the population of the country being comprised of non-Kuwaitis, communication between various ethnic, national, and racial communities makes for an intriguing intercultural interpersonal environment.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

During the Iraqi invasion and occupation (1990–91), conditions in Kuwait were horrendous. During the incredibly hot summer months, most of Kuwait's citizen population is given extended

leaves from work and permitted to travel to more temperate climates. With a high GDP, most Kuwaiti citizens own property or second homes outside of their country that serve as places of summer vacation. The Iraqi invasion occurred during the summer of 1990 when the population of Kuwait had shrunk to half its size. For the small numbers of Kuwaitis and the remaining expatriate population that remained and had not fled, life was extremely difficult and dangerous. There was little food and no running water. Utilities (electricity, gas, water, and so forth) were cut off and other services closed down. The Iraqis stole everything that could be hauled away—from homes, stores, offices, even hospitals. Kuwaitis and anyone deemed suspicious were arrested arbitrarily with many cases of rape, torture, or murder reported. When the UN forces drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait, the Iraqis conducted a scorched earth campaign: they bombed and/or burned everything in their path as they were leaving. Kuwait was left in flaming rubble. In the years since, a massive rebuilding effort has brought Kuwait back to its modern, well-developed, pre-invasion state.

Health care and education through the university level are free to all Kuwaiti citizens. Foreign workers are entitled to most of the benefits but are restricted from admission to some programs. The infant mortality rate is low; life expectancy is high: 73 years for men, and 77 years for women. Modern health-care centers are conveniently located throughout the country and tend to be of high quality. Several exceptional medical research and service facilities have emerged in the last quarter century including a world-class medical genetics center, a top cancer treatment center, and a network of rehabilitation and support agencies for those with mental and physical disabilities. The government sponsors social welfare programs for disabled persons, the elderly, students' families, widows, unmarried women over 18, orphans, the poor, and prisoners' families. Housing is subsidized, as are utilities. Telephone services are free. TV broadcasting began in 1961, with satellite communications established in 1969.

Kuwaitis' per capita (per person) income is one of the highest in the world. About one-fourth of all Kuwaitis own a car, usually an expensive one. On the other end of the economic scale, some laborers receive small earnings and live in dormitory-like apartments, sending most of their incomes as remittances to their families in their home countries.

Kuwait has an advanced highway system that connects all corners of the country but tends to be dangerous with high frequencies of accidents due to reckless driving. However, as the population of Kuwait continues to swell, the government is considering building a rail system within the capital city of Al-Kuwait and its suburbs to alleviate traffic congestion.

The press is censored less in Kuwait than in other Arab countries, but it is still controlled by the government. Kuwait has a ministry of information that monitors, advises and occasionally censors all forms of media in the country although the print press tends to be independent both in ownership and in coverage with several daily newspapers espousing clear oppositional views to the government. Recently, Kuwait was ranked the freest of all Arab media systems but remains hopelessly behind many countries in the world. Nonetheless, Kuwait has made a name for itself in the Arab digital and video media industry, producing several cutting-edge animation television series, producing high-end children's programming and leading the dubbing industry along with Jordan and Lebanon.



A Kuwaiti woman buys straw baskets and trays at a shop in downtown Kuwait. Kuwaitis use baskets to distribute sweets during the holy month of Ramadan. (Yasser Al-Zayyat/AFP/Getty Images)

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

The family unit is more important to Kuwaitis than the individual, the larger community, or the state. Families tend to be large; the government encourages large families in its effort to increase the percentage of native Kuwaitis in the overall population. The government even pays over \$7,000.00 to each couple at the time of their marriage and offers child support to families for every child born, with a sliding scale if the child has a disability or is in need of special medical care.

Extended families usually live together, except in some urban areas where the houses are too small. In this case, relatives live near each other. A typical Kuwaiti household consists of a husband, his parents, his wife, his sons and their wives and children, and his unmarried sons and daughters. Parents arrange marriages, usually between extended-family members. First cousins are an acceptable match among urban Kuwaitis and preferred among Bedouin Kuwaitis. Marrying and having children, particularly sons, increases a woman's status in society. Most girls marry young; 29% of Kuwaiti women are married by the time they are 20 years old.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

In Kuwait's urban centers, Western-style clothing is becoming popular, particularly with young people. However, many

Kuwaitis still wear traditional Arab clothing, such as the *dish-dasha* (ankle-length robe) with a *ghutra* (head scarf), usually white, worn over a skull cap and held in place with an *'aqal* (wool rope) for men. Women are veiled according to Islamic law, with the covering being of varying degrees, from hair-covering, to the *niqab* (showing only the eyes), to the *burqa'* (full face and head-cover). Kuwaiti men and women are very fond of luxury products and commodities, often preferring the most expensive western designer accessories for watches, sunglasses, perfume, etc. Today, Kuwaitis comfortably and delicately balance the complexities of traditional attire with high-end western style in an often unique amalgam.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

As a wealthy country, Kuwait is able to import foods from all over the world. Their desert climate supports almost no agriculture, making importation absolutely necessary. As Muslims, Kuwaitis cannot eat pork or drink alcohol, and all meats must be slaughtered according to Islamic tradition to ensure purity and cleanliness, which is known as *halal* (meaning permitted). Coffee and tea are the most popular beverages and are often mixed with spices, coffee with cardamom and tea with saffron or mint. Food and drink are always taken with the right hand. Etiquette of hospitality requires that hosts continue offering refills on drinks and food regardless of the guest's wishes.

The Kuwaiti cuisine offers a variety of dishes that reflect the country's Bedouin traditions and long history of contacts with other cultures, such as those of India, Iraq, and Iran. In addition to the simple Bedouin meals of dates and yogurt, Kuwaitis favor meat, fish, and rice. Spices are an essential part of the Kuwaiti cuisine. Among the most commonly used spices are coriander, cardamom, saffron, and turmeric. Most Kuwaitis eat in large groups and enjoy entertaining others including neighbors, extended families and clans. In the household and for traditional meals, Kuwaitis share food from a colossal single serving plate and customarily prefer using their bare hands over utensils.

When it comes to non-traditional foods, Kuwaitis' hefty budgets have led to discerning palates. As they prefer only the best of world fare, restaurants in Kuwait are exceptional compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education is a primary focus of the Kuwaiti government. It puts a tremendous amount of money into providing good, free education for all its citizens. Because of this emphasis, the literacy rate in Kuwait is quite high compared to those of other Arab countries: 74% of Kuwaitis are literate. The percentage is significantly lower for older women who grew up during a time when girls were not encouraged to obtain a formal education. The literacy rate is higher for young Kuwaitis: 87% of Kuwaiti children age 10 to 14 can read and write.

Education is compulsory for all Kuwaiti children 6 to 14 years of age. Schools teach in Arabic, and English is taught as a second language to all students 10 years of age and older. Boys and girls attend separate schools. Every child is trained to become computer-literate in primary and early secondary school. Since the mid 1970s the number of English language private all-grade schools has grown exponentially. These institutions differ from public schools in being co-ed and multinational in composition as they attract many children of expatriates. They also follow the British or American school curricula rather than that of the state's Ministry of Education.

Education is free through the university level; the government also pays for students to study abroad. All expenses, including books, tuition, transportation, uniforms, and meals, are paid by the government. The government also pays families of students an allowance to help cover any other education-related expenses. This has led to an explosion in the number of Kuwaitis with graduate degrees and upper-level qualifications in all industries and supported the government's campaign of *takweet* (Kuwaitization) of all sectors to ensure that reliance on expatriate expertise declines.

A law passed in 1981 in Kuwait requires all adults who cannot read to attend literacy classes. To round out Kuwaitis' education, the government has put in place a strong arts program.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

To help promote and encourage the arts in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti government founded the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters in 1974. Painting and sculpture are relatively recent developments on Kuwait's cultural scene. The National Museum building formerly contained the Al-Sabah Collection, which was considered one of the most important collections of Islamic arts in the world. During the Iraqi invasion, however, the entire museum was looted by the occupying forces.

The Sadu House is a cultural foundation and a museum that is entirely dedicated to the preservation of Bedouin art heritage, particularly weaving. In all other respects, Kuwait shares the cultural heritage of other Arab countries generally.

Arab music is rich and diverse. The oud, a popular instrument, is an ancient stringed instrument that is the ancestor of the European lute. Another traditional instrument originally from southern Egypt is the *rebaba*, a one-stringed instrument. The sea chantey is the most distinctive Kuwaiti folk song; chan-teys were traditionally sung as work songs on pearling ships.

A traditional Arab dance is the *ardha*, or men's sword dance. Men carrying swords stand shoulder to shoulder and move forward and to the sides together to the rhythm of drums, while verses are sung by a poet. From among them a poet sings verses while drummers beat out a rhythm. Traditional Bedouin dances performed by men and women in national attire incorporate sheep and camel-skin drums, elaborate rhythmic clapping, various unique dance movements including the swinging of Kuwaiti women's long black hair from side to side to the beat of the music. Most nationalistic songs proclaim reverence to the ancestors of Kuwait and their minimalistic lifestyle, love and commitment to the nation and its sovereignty, and loyalty to its royal family, while proclaiming a desire to develop and progress.

Compared to that of other Gulf states, the Kuwaiti theater is highly professional.

Islam forbids the depiction of the human form, so Kuwaiti Islamic art is based on geometric and abstract shapes. Contemporary art in Kuwait has recently flourished with a growing faculty of fine arts at the country's national university. Traditional Islamic calligraphy is a sacred art, with passages from the Quran being the primary subject matter. Muslim visual art finds its greatest expression in the adornment of mosques.

The Islamic reverence for poetry and the poetic richness of the Arabic language inform much of Kuwait's cultural heritage.

### **15 WORK**

The main source of employment and income in Kuwait is the oil industry. At the current rate of production, proven reserves are expected to last another 250 years. Kuwait was the first OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) nation to explore outside its national boundaries for oil. Along with the oil are huge reserves of natural gas.

Even with these sources of substantial guaranteed income for perhaps another two centuries, Kuwait is trying to encourage the development of other industries so that it will not remain entirely dependent on oil and natural gas. The government offers low-interest loans, tax breaks, and subsidies for electricity and water to businesses that are starting out. Other industries remain small, however. Fishing is one of the oldest industries in Kuwait, as are pearling and shipbuilding.

Trade unions are not permitted in Kuwait, and the oil industry is totally government-run. In the 1990s over 43% of non-Kuwaiti women in Kuwait worked outside the home, while fewer than 14% of native Kuwaiti women did. Recent changes in Kuwaiti society have transformed these numbers completely and now qualified Kuwaiti women are represented in almost every industry.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular sport in Kuwait. The National Soccer Team has won both Arab and international competitions including a notable appearance in the 1982 World Cup in Spain. Kuwait has also had international success in the traditional sport of horse racing. Other traditional sports include falconry and camel racing. Water sports are popular in the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf, although jellyfish prevent swimming there. Kuwaitis tend to enjoy summer months by the many pools in their homes or public clubs. These government-run sports clubs have facilities for swimming, tennis, equestrian and other sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Kuwaitis, as well as tourists to Kuwait, spend a great deal of time relaxing on the beaches along the Gulf coast. Water sports are a popular form of recreation. One of the biggest attractions in Kuwait is Entertainment City, modeled after Disneyland in the United States and several other theme parks of comparable quality service every part of the country. These tend to house recreational and educational facilities as well as exhibits. There are several movie theaters in Kuwait cities, which show Arab, Indian, Pakistani, and English-language films, although most of these Hollywood and Bollywood films are heavily edited for anything deemed offensive to Islam or local culture by the state's censorship office.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The best-known folk art in Kuwait is that of the Bedu (or Bedouins—see **Bedu**), particularly weavings done with brightly colored wool on a loom called a *sadu*. Other popular artifacts, ornaments and gifts include the argila (waterpipe used to smoke flavored tobacco), traditional engraved incense burners, miniatures of wooden fishing boats (boom), and elaborate fragrant and scented extracts forms of herbs and plants.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Even before the massive, widespread destruction caused by the Iraqi invasion and occupation (1990–91), Kuwait suffered from severe ecological problems caused by human population growth, industrialization, and especially the oil industry, which has leaked about 250,000 barrels' worth of oil into the Gulf each year. Only 3 out of 27 species of mammals in Kuwait are not endangered. They are the house rat, brown rat, and house mouse.

Following the scorched earth campaign accompanying the Iraqi retreat from Kuwait in 1991, the ecological catastrophe has worsened greatly. The Iraqis deliberately spilled four to six million barrels of oil into the Gulf, creating the largest oil slick ever on the planet. The slick covered about 1,550 sq km (about 600 sq mi) of sea surface and coated about 480 km (about 300 mi) of coastline. The Iraqis also bombed 749 oil wells, many of which caught fire. It took almost a year to put out the flames. The plume of oil smoke from the burning wells rose over 6,700 m (about 22,000 ft) into the air and spread for more than 2,400 km (1,500 mi), dropping soot and oil in its path. When the fires were still burning, everything in Kuwait was covered with oil and soot, including the people. Children who played outside became black with grime. It was impossible to keep clean.

The sulfur dioxide released in the smoke is a major component of acid rain. The blasted wells also leaked oil into lakes on the desert surface. At least 20,000 wild birds were killed by the oily lakes and the oil slick on the Gulf (when birds become coated with oil, they cannot fly and are no longer able to take care of themselves). The lakes of oil also killed all plant and animal life beneath them, and it is feared the oil may have seeped into the groundwater, allowing toxic metals to enter the food chain. These toxic metals can cause brain damage, cancer, and cardiac problems in humans and other animals. Medical research in Kuwait's centers has confirmed a significant and alarming rise in all these conditions in the past 17 years.

Another casualty of the war with Iraq was the fragile desert soil, churned up by the heavy military vehicles. It may take centuries for the soil structure to repair itself—if it can. This damage may lead to drifting sand dunes and more severe sandstorms. What little agriculture the desert land could support before the war has been made nearly impossible now. In other places, oil and soot dropped by the plume of smoke from the burning oil wells turned the desert surface into a blackened, brittle crust. Where the oil slick washed ashore, entire beaches turned black and grimy.

Before the Iraqi invasion, there was a sharp division between Kuwaiti citizens (the minority) and foreign workers (the majority). After the war, those tensions increased. The Kuwaiti government rounded up many foreign workers and forced them to leave the country. Those who remain still cannot become citizens, even children born in Kuwait to foreign workers. After a lifetime of working in Kuwait, a foreigner is asked to leave the country immediately upon retiring. This creates a great deal of ill will among the long-term foreign workers in Kuwait.

Since the Iraqi invasion, another division has occurred in Kuwaiti society, between the “insiders”—those who stayed in Kuwait during the occupation—and the “outsiders”—those who fled the country and have since returned. Insiders feel that they should have more say in the running of the country now, since they stayed to defend their homes. Outsiders include the royal family and ruling members of the government, who hesitate to give up much of their power. The government did finally allow elections for a new National Assembly in 1992, giving the people a greater say in their governance.

One of the most difficult social problems in Kuwait is the emotional and psychological scarring from the horrors of the Iraqi invasion and occupation. At least 100,000 persons—Kuwaitis and others—died in the war, and another 300,000 were wounded. Many Kuwaitis were kidnapped and taken to Iraq. Others were arrested, tortured, raped, killed, or forced to watch members of their family being raped or killed. Some Kuwaitis simply “disappeared,” never to be seen again. Most of the reconstruction effort in Kuwait has focused on physical and industrial reconstruction, ignoring people's emotional wounds. These wounds will take far longer to heal, and no amount of money will cure them.

However, the most complicated of all social problems in Kuwait has been the perennial condition of a subset of Kuwaitis who have been denied citizenship. Known commonly as the Bidoon (the withouts), they are descendents of tribes that have lived and roamed the land that is Kuwait for decades, if not centuries. While numbers vary, estimates are often listed around 120,000 persons. The Bidoon receive few of the privi-

leges afforded to citizens and have been increasingly vocal in their protests of this disparity. During the Iraqi invasion, their loyalty to the sovereignty of the Kuwaiti state and its independence was called into question as some chose to align themselves with the Iraqis at the expense of the Kuwaiti royal family, which they hold reservations about. In the post-liberation period, the government has adopted various measures to try and integrate this population and allowed a small proportion to become citizens. Despite this, the issue remains a sore often aggravated by various issues.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

For decades, girls received training in home and child care as well as vocational training for jobs considered acceptable for women: secretary, receptionist, teacher, and so forth. If they continued through to a college education, they were not encouraged to take engineering courses and other vocations perceived as masculine, but they were able to become medical doctors. This resulted in an upsurge of women doctors, with about one-third of all Kuwaiti doctors being women. Interestingly, Kuwaiti women exceed men in every faculty at Kuwait University and at several new private accredited American and British universities. Women have attained some of the top professional positions in the country including judges, deans, engineers, and notable literary figures.

Women are more independent in Kuwait than in most other Arab countries, but they are still usually segregated from men and were not allowed to vote until 2005. In a recent upsurge of gender equality, suffrage and candidacy were decreed universal for all able eligible Kuwaiti citizens of age. This resulted in several Kuwaiti women running in the first parliamentary elections in 2008. Although none secured a seat in the all-male parliament, it led to wide-ranging debates in the country about the role of women in a rapidly-modernizing Kuwait, with support from progressive citizens and sharp criticism from traditionalists and Islamists. Today, women have also built networks of solidarity in the form of diwanias, which are increasingly popular and common given the growing influence of women in the Gulf emirate. Recently, the emir of Kuwait appointed to his cabinet two women ministers, which was considered a significant move towards incorporating women into the political system.

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—reviewed by S. Abed-Kotob; reviewed by Adel Iskandar

Worldmark  
Encyclopedia of  
**Cultures and  
Daily Life**

VOLUME 4 Asia & Oceania  
Second Edition

Editors

Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby



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Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

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# KYRGYZ

**PRONUNCIATION:** KIR-ghiz

**LOCATION:** Kyrgyzstan; China

**POPULATION:** 5.3 million

**LANGUAGES:** Kyrgyz; Russian; English

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tracing the origins and history of the Kyrgyz people is difficult because, until recently, they used no written language. Therefore, much of what is known about the early Kyrgyz is based on archeological discoveries and oral stories passed down over the generations. The Kyrgyz people were nomads throughout much of their history, initially living in the region of south-central Russia between the Yenesei River and Lake Baikal about 2,000 years ago. The ancestors of the modern Kyrgyz were probably not Turks at all, but either Yeniseyans (ancestors of the modern Kets) or South Samoyedic peoples, and they exhibited European-like features (such as fair skin, green eyes, and red hair). During the 6th through 9th centuries, the Kyrgyz mixed with the various invading Mongol and Turkic tribes. At some time between the 12th and 16th centuries, they settled in the Tien Shan Mountains.

During the era of Mongol rule, the Kyrgyz were loosely governed until the Kokand Khanate lost control in about 1850. At that time, imperial Russia was expanding its control in Central Asia by moving Russian colonists into the area. The Russians finally gained control over the Kyrgyz in 1876. The new Russian settlers staked claims on the most fertile land, and the nomadic Kyrgyz were given minimal attention by the Russian government. In 1916, ethnic Kyrgyz inhabitants revolted against this practice, but the rebellion was crushed by Russian forces.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the area inhabited by the Kyrgyz was made part of Soviet Turkistan. In 1921, its status changed by becoming part of the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1924, the region was split away from the Turkistan ASSR and assigned as an autonomous area (*oblast*) within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In 1924, the region became the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the RSFSR. In 1936, the territory finally became a full-fledged republic of the USSR.

During the Soviet era, from 1917 to 1991, the way of life for the Kyrgyz people as residents of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) changed significantly. Forced collectivization of farming quickly ended nomadic life. Mechanization, irrigation, and mining were introduced, but many Kyrgyz wanted to keep farming or raising livestock. As a result, the Kyrgyz became ethnic minorities within the industrial and urban areas of the KSSR. The economic and political restructuring that occurred in the Soviet Union during the late 1980s under Soviet leader Gorbachev never made it to the KSSR. In 1990, ethnic tensions along the border with Uzbekistan resulted in 200-400 deaths. The chaos created by that event caused the ruling Kyrgyz Communist Party (KCP) to lose any credibility that it had with the people. During the attempted Soviet coup of August 1991 in Moscow, there was a similar coup taking place in the KSSR. When the attempted coup failed, the KCP voted itself

out of existence. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, the KSSR became independent Kyrgyzstan.

Since 1991, Kyrgyzstan has been led by an elected president and parliamentary form of government. The government has concentrated on elevating the status of Kyrgyz culture in Kyrgyzstan without alienating persons of other ethnic backgrounds. Unlike in some of the other former Soviet republics, a citizen of Kyrgyzstan does not need to be Kyrgyz. In 2005 Kyrgyzstan experienced its "Tulip Revolution," which resulted in the mainly peaceful ouster of the former president, Askar Akayev and the parliament elected during his rule. Today it is somewhat politically stable, but faces a very dissatisfied population because of its very poor economy.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There are approximately 5.3 million Kyrgyz living throughout the former Soviet Union, with about 88% of them in Kyrgyzstan. Ethnic Kyrgyz constitute slightly more than half of the population of Kyrgyzstan. There are also about 80,000 Kyrgyz living in the Sinkiang-Uygur Autonomous Region of China and a few tens of thousands in Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan is located in Central Asia along the western range of the Tien Shan Mountains. This area was known as the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic during the Soviet era. The boundaries with neighboring countries (Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) run along mountain ranges, and about 85% of Kyrgyzstan itself is mountainous. In the southwest, the Fergana River Valley is the largest expanse of lowlands in the country. The only other lowland areas are in the north, along the Chu and Talas valleys. Most of the lowland area occupied by Kyrgyz people is arid, receiving less than seven inches of rainfall per year. Although the climate is dry where the land is cultivated, mountain lakes and streams provide ample water through irrigation.

The largest mountain lake, Issyk-Kul, is located high in the mountains of eastern Kyrgyzstan, and many Kyrgyz fishing villages are located around the edge of the lake.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Most Kyrgyz people speak the Kyrgyz language, which is a distinct Turkic language with Mongolian influences. The Kyrgyz language is a member of the Nogai group of the Kypchak division of the Turkic branch of Ural-Altai languages. Until 1926 the Kyrgyz and Kazak languages were considered as one. The Kyrgyz literary language was therefore heavily shaped by Kazak, with some Mongolian influences in the vocabulary. Although the Kyrgyz language is spoken in the home, most Kyrgyz also speak Russian, which is the language of business and commerce. English is the third language of communication. The Kyrgyz government had begun a program to gradually switch over to the Kyrgyz language for all state institutions and educational establishments by 1998, but this has been delayed because of its impracticality. The written language originally used Arabic script, but the Roman alphabet was introduced after World War I. The written Kyrgyz language was formally organized in 1923 and was modeled after the northern dialects. In 1940, Stalin forced all Central Asian republics to switch to the Cyrillic alphabet (which is used by the Russian language). Since independence, there has been discussion of switching back to the Roman alphabet.



The Kyrgyz people have many proverbs and sayings related to horses, such as: “A horse is a man’s wind.” Some proverbs deal specifically with pacers. Two examples of such are: “Don’t let your horse run beside a pacer” and “If you have only one day left to live, you should spend half of it riding a pacer.”

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The telling of traditional oral tales dates back about 1,000 years among the Kyrgyz people. One of the most famous epics tells the saga of *Manas*, the father of the Kyrgyz people, his son Semetey, and his grandson Seytek. The entire poem is about a million lines long is (twice as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined) can take up to three weeks to recite, and went unwritten until the 1920s. Here is a translated example of some of the epic’s verse: “The mighty *Manas* resembles a tower built of silver. His snow-white steed *Ak-Kula* carries him swiftly over the mountain tops. The horse looks like a bird hovering over the sharp peaks of mountains.” In the epic, the 40 Kyrgyz tribes strive for freedom and unity. Under the leadership of *Manas*, the people, who were the slaves of various tribes, are gathered as a nation. *Manas* is believed to be interred at a small mausoleum near the town of *Talas*, in western Kyrgyzstan near the border with Kazakhstan. Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the *Manaschi* (reciters of the *Manas*) have made tours with Central Asian artistic groups all over the world, including many performances in the United States.

#### 5 RELIGION

Horses figured prominently in the traditional spiritual beliefs of the early Kyrgyz. It was believed that a horse carried the spirit of a dead person to a higher spiritual world. Most Kyrgyz today are Sunni Muslims, but many ancient shamanist and animist traditions persist.

Since the 8th century, Islam has been the dominant religion in the Fergana Valley. By the 10th and 11th centuries, the Kyrgyz had built many beautiful mosques and mausoleums in that region. During the 13th and 14th centuries, however, the development of Islam among the Kyrgyz slowed considerably, due to the conquest by the Mongols. Islam extended to the nomads of the northern regions over the next few centuries at first by force, but later through Islamic missionaries. Therefore, Islam did not gain a strong presence among all the Kyrgyz until the 19th century.

The Kyrgyz are generally more secular in daily life than some of the other Islamic peoples of Central Asia. This is probably because the religion was only firmly established in some areas of the country in the last century. Kyrgyzstan also has a large proportion of non-Muslims, and the government is not oriented toward incorporating any religion into the political structure. Outside Islamic influences from the Middle East and South Asia have featured in the creation of some radical Muslim movements in Kyrgyzstan, especially in the Osh and Jalalabad provinces, located in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan—its Fergana valley region. Some of these mainly younger people are part of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir radical international movement. They wish to establish a theocratic government throughout the entire Muslim world. Overall, radical or extremist Islam is not a major threat to Kyrgyz sovereignty at the moment.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

New Year’s Day (January 1) and Christmas (January 7) are official holidays in Kyrgyzstan. Holidays with their origins to the Soviet era include Women’s Holiday (March 8), International Day of Solidarity Among Workers (May 1), and the Day of Victory over Fascism (May 9). The vernal equinox (around March 21) is called *Nooruz* and is an important holiday among the Kyrgyz people as it marks the start of the Muslim new year. *Kurban Ait* (Remembrance Day, June 13) and Independence Day (August 31) are also official Kyrgyzstan holidays. Generally speaking, people do tend to celebrate religious holidays, especially the Muslim days of remembrance more now than during the Soviet period.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Kyrgyz rites of passage are similar to those of other Turkic-influenced peoples of Central Asia. Large birthday parties with many friends and relatives are important social occasions, and these feasts often last five or six hours. Celebrations are held for a birth, for a baby’s 40th day of life, for the first day of school, and for graduations. A wedding serves to honor the married couple and assemble together an extended family or clan. In the past, arranged marriages were common, and a dowry payment was expected upon betrothal.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Kyrgyz people typically greet one another with handshakes or hugs if they are women, and then proceed to ask a series

of questions about one another's lives. Male-female relations among the Kyrgyz are far less formal and rigid than, say, among the Uzbeks or Tajiks. Men and women eat together and share many work burdens together. Like many other peoples of Central Asia, the Kyrgyz are very hospitable, although more reserved and low-key than the Uzbeks or Tajiks. If you were invited to have tea in Kyrgyz *yurta*, you would not feel yourself quite the focus of attention as would be true in the case of an Uzbek village home. Kyrgyz often honor their guests by serving them a cooked sheep's head.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The traditional Kyrgyz home is a *yurta*—a round, felt-covered structure built upon a collapsible wooden frame. Most Kyrgyz today live in individual permanent homes, but about 40,000 Kyrgyzstani citizens still live in *yurtas*. The arched opening of a *yurta* is called the *tundruk*. The flag of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan features a *tundruk*.

One legacy of the Soviet era is a chronic lack of urban housing in Kyrgyzstan. In the late 1980s, housing space was equivalent to 12 sq m (129 sq ft) per person.

Irregular service with public transportation occurs frequently. In Bishkek, for example, evening bus service is erratic. There are a sufficient number of taxis in the city, but people looking for a ride will often stop a private car and pay the driver because it is cheaper than using a taxi.

Since the mid- to late-1990s, it has become increasingly common to find shanty-town type dwellings in major cities, such as Bishkek and Osh, because poverty has caused many people to take up urban residence in hopes of making a more prosperous life.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Women in Kyrgyz society still perform the bulk of household chores, but there is far more egalitarianism practiced between the sexes among the Kyrgyz than among nearby peoples such as the Uzbeks or Tajiks. The Kyrgyz and Kazaks are very similar in this regard. Women hold all manner of professional jobs and are encouraged to be professionals as well as mothers. Both forms of polygamy are legal in Kyrgyzstan, and the custom is not limited to ethnic Kyrgyz but is practiced by ethnic Russians and other residents in Kyrgyzstan. Polygyny (one man having multiple wives) is most common, and a husband must financially provide each wife with her own separate household as well as provide for all the children each wife bears. In order for a woman to have multiple husbands (polyandry), she must have substantial wealth or influence.

Kyrgyz families are large, with an average of four to six children, although they are slightly smaller in the capital city of Bishkek. In the countryside, it is common for three generations to live together in a patrilocal residence, which means that a married woman moves in with her husband's family). Thus, 10 to 12 people may share a home during the cold months and a yurt when the people go to the *zhailovs* (summer pastures) with their animals in the summer. Genealogical knowledge is very important to the Kyrgyz, and some older people are able to recount their ancestors stretching back as far as seven generations or two centuries.



*A Kyrgyz girl in traditional attire offers tourists snacks near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. (AP Images/Xinhua, Wei Zhongjie)*

## **11 CLOTHING**

One of Kyrgyzstan's oldest cities, Osh, was once an important trading point along the historic Silk Roads—the ancient overland trade route of commerce between China and the Middle East. Osh is the center of Kyrgyzstan's silk industry.

Traditional everyday clothes were made of wool, felt, and fur. Ornate silks were, and still are, used for special occasions and ceremonies. Since the Soviet era, cotton denim and other fabrics have become popular for everyday wear. Headgear figures prominently in Kyrgyz culture, although during the Soviet era women were prohibited from wearing their large traditional hats, which were a symbol of Kyrgyz culture. There is also a traditional hat proudly worn by men as a symbol of Kyrgyz culture, the *ak-kalpak* ("white hat"). This is a dome-shaped white felt hat with a black brim, black piping, abstract curved stitching, and a black tassel on top. The basic design of the *ak-kalpak* has been the same for generations.

## **12 FOOD**

Because many Kyrgyz live in areas with little precipitation, the variety of crops grown depends on irrigation from the mountains. Sugar beets and cereal grains are the main crops. Livestock is an important source of food, with sheep, goats, cattle, and horses most common. Pigs, bees, and rabbits are also raised in the uplands.

Examples of traditional Kyrgyz fare include *manti* (mutton dumplings), *irikat* (a type of pasta salad made with noodles, carrots, and radishes), and *koumiss* (fermented mare's milk). A great Kyrgyz delicacy reserved especially for guests is a combination plate of fresh sliced sheep liver and slices of sheep tail fat. It is often boiled and salted and tastes far more delicious than it sounds. At the breakfast table, one often finds bountiful amounts of yogurt, heavy cream, butter, and wonderful honey along with bread and tea. Dairy products are an essential part of Kyrgyz life.

Along with traditional cooking, the Kyrgyz also enjoy Russian, Korean, Ukrainian, German, and Chinese cuisine. The dishes of both local and European cooking dominate the menus in Bishkek's restaurants and cafés.

### 13 EDUCATION

For the most part, Kyrgyz people have poor native language proficiency except in the remote *auls* (villages). Kyrgyzstan has been heavily Russified, and most high school and university instruction is in Russian. Although this is slowly beginning to change, rural Kyrgyz are often ill-equipped to compete at the national level on university entrance exams. The whole educational system requires overhauling. Parents tend to favor a broad educational development for their children, but it is impossible for many parents to send their children to universities and technical schools because education has become privatized and the costs are prohibitively expensive. Today, along with the Kazakhs, more and more Kyrgyz speak competent English than people in any of the other Central Asian countries. This is partly due to American influence and teaching in Kyrgyzstan as well as the people's own desire to add English as a part of their international focus, especially as a means toward increasing one's chances in the professional world.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The *kyiak* and *komuz* are traditional musical instruments used by the Kyrgyz. The *kyiak* resembles a violin and is played with a bow but has only two strings. The three-stringed *komuz* is the favorite folk instrument among the Kyrgyz and is played by strumming. The Kyrgyz have several titles of honor that are given to various musical performers. A *jirchiü* is a singer-poet, whereas an *akin* is a professional poet and musician-composer. The *jirchiü* is primarily a performer of known music, while the *akin* is a composer who plays original compositions as well as traditional music. A special performer called a *manaschi* performs the famous saga of *Manas*. There are also several types of Kyrgyz songs, such as *maktoo* (eulogies), *sanat* and *nasiyat* (songs with a moral), and *kordoo* (social protest tunes).

### 15 WORK

Work hours vary depending on the type of business and state institution. As a rule, people work between seven and eight hours a day. Most often work runs from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, with lunch taken sometime between noon and 2:00 pm. Mills and factories operate on a relay system, with shifts set up by the management. Retail shops are usually open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm, with an afternoon lunch period. Department stores, book stores, and other shops usually open according to state institution hours. Bazaars are open from 6:00 am until 7:00 or 8:00 pm.

### 16 SPORTS

Equestrian sports are very popular among the Kyrgyz. Racing and wrestling on horseback are especially enjoyed. Wrestling on horseback for a goat's carcass, called *ulak tartysh* or *kok boru*, is a common game among the Kyrgyz. (*Kok boru* means "gray wolf"). The game may have its origin in ancient times, when herds of cattle grazed in the steppes and mountains and were exposed to the threat of attack by wolves. Shepherds would chase after a wolf on horseback and beat it with sticks and whips and then try to snatch the dead carcass away from each other for fun. *Kok boru* was later replaced with *ulak tartysh*, played with a goat's carcass on a field measuring 300 meters by 150 meters (about 328 yards by 164 yards). The opposite ends of the field are the two goals. A goat's carcass, usually weighing 30 to 40 kilograms (66–88 pounds), is placed in the center of the field. Each game lasts 15 minutes, and the object is to seize the goat's carcass while on horseback and get it to the goal of the other team. Players are allowed to pick up the carcass from any place within the limits of the field, take it from opponents, pass or toss it to teammates, carry it on the horse's side, or suspend it between the horse's legs. Players are not allowed to ram other horses, take an opponent's horse by the bridle or remove its reins, whip another's horse, or talk with the opponent.

Falconry (the sport of hunting with trained falcons) while on horseback is another part of Kyrgyz culture that has been practiced for centuries. In addition to falcons, sakers and golden eagles are also trained for the sport. *Jumby atmai* is a game that involves shooting at a target while galloping on horseback. *Tyin enmei* is a contest to pick up coins from the ground while riding at full speed on horseback.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Bishkek has large parks, public gardens, shady avenues, and botanical gardens enjoyed by people traveling on foot. Opera, ballet, and national folklore groups are also popular forms of entertainment. The most popular form of relaxation for city dwellers is to spend a weekend in a country cottage. Tens of thousands of these cottages are located on the outskirts of Bishkek, the capital. In recent years, Bishkek and other cities have added many taverns, restaurants, and casinos, so city life has become nocturnally raucous, and part of these businesses cater to the tastes of expatriates from China, Europe, and the United States.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Kyrgyz are best known for crafting utensils, clothes, equipment and other items used in everyday life and making them beautiful. Many articles are made of felt: carpets (*shirdak* and *alakiyiz*), bags for keeping dishes (*alk-kup*), and woven patterned strips of carpet sewn together into bags or rugs (*bashtyk*). Ornate leather dishes called *keter* are also made.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

After years of life under the Soviet system of central planning and socialism, the transition to a market-oriented economy is a difficult undertaking for the Kyrgyz. The poor service and uninspired work ethic that were results of the Soviet era will take a long time to change. Alcoholism and public drunkenness are now a visible social problem, partly because of rising

unemployment. Even though Kyrgyzstan was supposed to have developed a large tourism industry, its development has been slow and not very lucrative; getting to Kyrgyzstan remains difficult and expensive.

From 2000–2005, Kyrgyzstan's economy stagnated and allegations of sizable political corruption brought down the government that had been in power since 1991. The much heralded "Tulip Revolution" did little to improve the politics or economics of the country, and since then the population has only become more disgruntled as most people become more impoverished. This has raised crime rate in urban areas and led to a more oppressive political environment than was true of the 1990s. The new government is perceived to be weak in the face of more powerful Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Close to one million Kyrgyz now seek at least temporary housing and employment abroad to help bolster their household budgets, and this has led to very trying conditions for many families. With the exception of Kazakhstan, labor migration is the social problem as well as "social solution" story to emerge from contemporary Central Asia.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Along with the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz long have featured a high degree of gender equity. Many scholars attribute this to their pastoral nomadic heritage. While there naturally is a division of labor between the sexes, many men and women do many things together, such as yurt erection and packing up as well as cooperative milking and food production activities. Men consider women to be their literal fellow travelers (*yoldash*) rather than simply the "wife" or the "mother of their kids." When it comes to education, Kyrgyz girls long have been seen almost as the equal of boys, but again with the exception that boys will be seen favorably to pursue higher education and advanced professional degrees. However, this is definitely not the rule in all families.

Since the early 2000s, gender issues have changed because of the increase in bride kidnapping, which is more and more common among the Kyrgyz, Karakalpaks, and Kazakhs. This relieves pressures on young men to make a bride wealth payment or *qalym*, just as it obviates the need for in-law arrangements in the first place, but it puts young women in a terrible position because they rarely can exercise their own free will once kidnapped. However, divorces often ensue shortly after these unhappy marriages take place. Still, it is a kind of traditional social institution that shows up as one very unfair aspect of gender relations.

Moreover, labor migration is changing the nature of gender relations as many men and women now work abroad to try and increase family wealth. While it provides young women with opportunities and a kind of freedom, it puts great pressure on mothers and wives who sometimes go abroad despite the disapproval they face from other family members, including husbands. Labor migration, generally speaking, puts huge pressure and stress on people willing to take what they consider to be a crucial step in making a better life for themselves and their families.

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—by R. Zanca

# LAO

**PRONUNCIATION:** LAH-OO

**LOCATION:** Laos; Thailand

**POPULATION:** About 23 million

**LANGUAGE:** Lao

**RELIGION:** Theravada Buddhism; animism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Kammu

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Lao originated in southern China and moved southward into present-day Laos, forming a kingdom in the Mekong River valley in the 14th century and pushing the earlier inhabitants of the area, the Kammu, into more mountainous areas. After three centuries, however, disputes over succession to the throne and foreign invasions split the country into three rival kingdoms in the north, center, and south. Caught between the growing power of the Siamese and the Vietnamese, the Lao lost power and territory so that most Lao people now live in Thailand (formerly Siam).

Laos was colonized by the French in the 1890s and treated as the hinterland to their colonies in Vietnam. The French preferred to work with the Vietnamese and used many of them as officials in Laos. Laos was unified after World War II and achieved independence within the French Union in 1949 and full independence in 1953. However, regional divisions were replaced by political ones. The Lao were divided into three factions: a right-wing group backed by the United States; Thailand, a neutralist group; and a Communist group backed by Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China. After a devastating civil war fought with heavy American bombing on behalf of the right, and with Vietnamese troops on behalf of the left, the Communist Pathet Lao (Lao Nation) took control of the country in 1975, abolished the monarchy, and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). In the political, economic, and social upheavals that followed, about 10% of the population fled as refugees, draining the country of skilled and educated people. Although the aging Lao leadership maintains one-party control and continues to assert Communist ideology, it has loosened social and economic controls and now invites foreign investment and tourism.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Laos is a small landlocked country in Southeast Asia bordering on Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Laos has an area of about 236,800 sq km (91,400 sq mi), roughly the size of Idaho. It runs about 1,126 km (700 mi) from N to S and averages about 240–320 km (150–200 mi) across. The country is extremely mountainous, with only about 4% of the land suitable for farming. Different ethnic groups tend to be located at different altitudes. It has a tropical monsoon climate, and most people engage in subsistence rice agriculture. The Lao (usually referred to as “lowland Lao”) make up two-thirds of the population, or somewhat over 3 million of the population of 4.8 million. They occupy the most desirable land in the river valleys and live clustered along the Mekong River across from northeast Thailand, most of whose people are Lao, and in the southern plateau. The Lao of northeast Thailand, together with Lao groups in northern Thailand, represent one-third

of the whole population of Thailand, or about 20 million people—many times the number of Lao in Laos itself. The Mekong River has always been a cultural bridge, not a barrier. However, the Thai government has tried hard to assimilate the “north-east Thai” (it never uses the term “Lao”) to central Thai culture and language, a process that is occurring rapidly through education, mass media, and greater geographic mobility. Both the Lao and the Thai belong to the Tai linguistic group, have related languages, and share many cultural features. The two cultures have distinctive features, however, and the Thai have tended to consider themselves superior to the Lao.

After the Communists seized power in Laos in 1975, about 360,000 refugees left the country. Refugees were predominantly Lao, but included many Hmong and smaller numbers of other minority groups. Many of the French-speaking elite went to France, but most Lao came to the United States and live scattered across the country, although southern California is a favorite location because of the warmer climate. Canada and Australia also took thousands of Lao refugees, and thousands of others stayed illegally in Thailand, blending in with the Lao population of northeast Thailand.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Lao belongs to the Tai family of languages and is related to Thai, but Lao has its own alphabet and numbers. Many words have Sanskrit and Pali roots, especially terms relating to religion, royalty, and government. Most Lao words have one syllable and the grammar is very easy. However, Lao is difficult for Westerners to speak because it is a tonal language. There are six tones, and words that sound similar to a Western ear may be very different depending on the tone. For example, the word *ma* in mid tone means come; *ma* in a high tone means horse; and *ma* in a rising tone means dog.

Lao is written from left to right, but no space is left between words, only between phrases or sentences. You have to know where one word ends and the next word starts. Vowels can appear before, after, above, or below the consonants they go with, or in various combinations thereof. Relatively few people, probably only just over two million people, can read Lao. While the Lao in Thailand speak Lao, their education is in Thai, so they are literate in that language.

Girls are often given names of flowers or gems, while boys might be given names that suggest strength. However, many have simple names like Daeng (red) or Dam (black), or might be called by nicknames like Ling (monkey). Family names were made compulsory in 1943 but aren't as important as first names. The phone book is alphabetized by first names, and a man named Sitha Sisana would be addressed as Mr. Sitha.

Some common expressions are: *sabai dee* (greeting), *la kon* (goodbye); *khob jai* (thank you); *kin khaw* (eat—literally, eat rice, the most important food); *bo pen nyang* (it doesn't matter, never mind, it's nothing).

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

A Lao legend explains the origins of the Lao and Kammu, the original inhabitants of the land:

Once upon a time three chiefs settled the earth and began rice farming with their water buffalo. After a few years the water buffalo died, and from his nostrils grew a creeping plant that bore three gourds that grew to enor-

mous size. Hearing a loud noise from inside the gourds, one of the chiefs took a red hot iron and pierced each gourd. Crowds of men came squeezing out of the narrow openings. The chief then used a chisel to carve out new openings for the men. This is the origin of the different people in Laos. The Kammu, a dark skinned people who wore their hair in chignons, came out the holes made with the red hot iron; and the Lao, a lighter skinned people who wore their hair short, came out the openings made by the chisel.

Lao proverbs give us an idea of their cultural attitudes.

To judge an elephant, look at its tail;  
To judge a girl, look at her mother.

If you love your cow, tie it up;  
If you love your child, beat him.  
(In fact, the Lao are very indulgent towards their children, but they like to threaten them with this proverb.)

Flee from the elephant and meet the tiger;  
Flee from the tiger and meet a crocodile.  
(Their version of “out of the frying pan into the fire.”)

When the water level falls, the ants eat the fish;  
When the water level rises, the fish eat the ants.

When the buffalo fight, it is the grass that suffers.

## 5 RELIGION

The first Lao king, Fa Ngum, made Buddhism the state religion in the 14th century, and almost all Lao are Theravada Buddhists. Buddha is regarded as a great teacher—not a god, a creator, or a savior. He taught that suffering is caused by desire, anger, and illusion. Each person is responsible for his own salvation. A person’s karma, the balance of good and bad deeds, will affect this life and future reincarnations.

When the Communists took over in 1975, they did not dare do away with something so central to Lao identity as Buddhism. Rather, they continued state control of the Buddhist hierarchy and tried to manipulate religion for political purposes. Many monks fled as refugees or disobeyed rather than promote government policies. In recent years government controls have eased and there has been a revival of Buddhism. This revival is due not only to changes in government policy but also to the infusion of funds from foreign tourists—primarily Thais who share the Buddhist religion—for the restoration of Buddhist temples.

Animism, a belief in spirits, co-exists with Buddhism for the Lao. Ancestor spirits, the local guardian spirits of each village, are appealed to at the beginning of the agricultural year for successful crops. These spirits should also be informed of major changes in a person’s life—sickness, a move, a marriage.

The Lao believe the body contains 32 spirits, and illness can result if a spirit leaves the body. A *baci* ceremony is held to call the spirits back to the body in order to cure illness, to protect someone about to make a major life change, or to bring health, happiness, and prosperity. A beautifully decorated tray filled with ritual offerings is presented to the spirits. Cotton strings are tied around the wrists of the person who is sick or who is



being honored, and blessings are recited when the strings are tied.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important Lao holiday is Songkarn, the Lao New Year, which is celebrated April 13–15. After several months of drought, the first rains of the year begin in April, bringing the start of the agricultural year. Water is poured over Buddha images and elders as a blessing. After this is done very decorously, Songkarn turns into one big water fight, with water splashed on everyone in sight. Since the temperature is over 32°C (90°F) at that time of year, the water feels good. People try to return to their home villages for Songkarn to visit friends and relatives and to join in the fun.

The Rocket Festival is a popular traditional Lao holiday, although not an official holiday. It is celebrated on Wisakha Bucha, the day celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and death of Buddha; but the Rocket Festival is based on a fertility rite that predates Buddhism in the area. Village men build bamboo rockets packed with gunpowder, and villages compete to see whose rocket can fly the highest. The men hold boat races on the rivers, and the village women hold folk dance contests. This holiday is based on a lunar calendar and falls sometime in May.

Independence Day on July 19 celebrates the granting of autonomy, or independence, within the French Union in 1949.

National Day on December 2 celebrates the proclamation of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in 1975, a one-party Communist state.



*Lao women pray at Pha That Luang during the Wai Thatluang festival in Vientiane, Laos. Hundred of thousands of Laotians visit Vientiane to pay homage to a Buddha relic they believe is kept inside a pagoda. (AP Images/David Longstreath)*

The That Luang Festival occurs on the day of the full moon in the twelfth lunar month and celebrates the most sacred Buddhist monument in Laos.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

The main rite of passage for a Lao man is ordination as a Buddhist monk. In the past most Lao men spent at least one three-month period of Buddhist Lent as a monk, learning about religion, chanting Pali texts, and practicing self-control and meditation. The man to be ordained reenacts the life of Prince Gautama, who renounced the world and became Buddha, the Enlightened One. He is dressed in finery and escorted with pomp to the monastery, where his head and eyebrows are shaved. Then, he changes into a simple robe, renounces the world, and takes his vows as a monk. There is no set period for ordination, so a monk can disrobe and return to lay life at any time. Fewer men become ordained today and often for shorter periods, but it is believed that a man gains maturity by doing so, and women consider it desirable for a male. There is no ordination for women.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Lao tend to be warm, personable, friendly, and have a nice sense of humor. They enjoy having people around and are quick to invite people to share a meal or sit and talk for a bit. They try to avoid confrontation and appreciate a person with self-control.

It is considered improper for men and women to touch in public. However, if men hold hands with each other or women

hold hands with other women, it is considered friendly, and there are no sexual connotations.

In the past both the spoken language and body language showed relative social position, with the inferior person bowing to the superior person, but the Communist government insisted on more egalitarian relations, at least overtly. Still, a Buddhist will prostrate himself and bow his head to the floor three times in front of a Buddha image or a monk as a sign of respect.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated per capita income in 1996 of \$325, or the equivalent United States purchasing power of \$2,071 per person. The population is overwhelmingly rural with 85% depending on agriculture, mostly subsistence rice cultivation. The Lao are largely engaged in wet rice agriculture, depending on seasonal rains to flood their fields.

Water buffalo are used to plow, and agricultural practices have changed little over the centuries. Mechanization in the form of water pumps and small tractors is just beginning.

Rural homes are built on stilts to avoid flooding. They are made of wood or bamboo, often with walls of bamboo matting and roofs of thatch or corrugated tin. Lao houses generally have little or no furniture. One sits and eats on the floor and sleeps on a mat on the floor. Village houses are built close together, and farmers walk to their fields outside the village. There are no secrets in a small village, and gossip is a potent weapon to keep people in line.



Villages rarely have electricity or running water. Laos has great potential for hydroelectric power and currently exports electricity to Thailand. But the Lao buy electricity back from the Thai for their cities across the Mekong River from north-east Thailand, as Laos has no national power grid.

There are few roads, and some of these are impassable quagmires in the rainy season. Much transportation is by boat along the rivers. Ox carts are still common.

Health facilities are limited. Malaria, dysentery, malnutrition, and parasites are major problems. In Laos there is one doctor for every 23,000 people (compared to one per every 3,000 people in Vietnam and one per every 300 people in the United States). Life expectancy is about 50 for men and 53 for women in the country. The Lao undoubtedly do better than minority populations, as they are more likely to live in or near the cities or along transportation routes, and they continue to favor themselves at the expense of minorities. In addition, the construction of a bridge across the Mekong, linking the Lao capital Vientiane to the northeastern Thai city of Nongkhai, gives urban Lao access to the Thai medical system, which is decidedly superior to Laos.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Lao families are close and children are welcome. The LPDR government had banned birth control devices until fairly recently, but few people have access to birth control services. Women have many children but there is high infant and child mortality.

There is no dating, but groups of young men in the village go from house to house in the evening to call on families with young women and engage in banter with them and their parents. Traditionally, the young man is expected to pay a bride-price and move in with the wife's family on marriage. When the next daughter marries, the couple might set up housekeeping on their own with help from the wife's parents. Ultimately, the youngest daughter is left to take care of the parents and inherit the family home and remaining farm plot.

Women are responsible for much heavy work—hauling water for the household and pounding the rice in big mortars of hollowed out logs to husk it where rice mills aren't available. The men plow and deal with draft animals, while women tend to be responsible for pigs and poultry and vegetable gardens. The animals usually live under the house. Everyone, including the children, helps with transplanting and harvesting rice.

Children rarely have toys but enjoy catching fish, frogs, insects, etc., to supplement the family diet. Boys are skillful with slingshots and blowguns in bagging small birds. Young girls help with child care and often carry a younger sibling astride a hip while they play with their friends.

## 11 CLOTHING

When the Communist government came to power in 1975, it tried to ban blue jeans, calling them bourgeois Western decadence. It even tried to do away with the *sin*, the traditional sarong-like women's lower garment, but the government soon had to back down. The *sin* is a very practical garment—one size fits all. It is a tube of cloth folded with a pleat to fit the waist and secured with a belt or a tuck in the waist. Worn above the breasts, it makes a modest garment for bathing in public at the stream or well, necessary as few village homes have bathrooms. A dry garment is slipped over the wet garment that is

then dropped without any loss of modesty. Lao women continue to wear the *sin*, sometimes adapted into a skirt, with a blouse. On special occasions women wear handwoven silk *sin* with beautiful tie-dyed patterns and a colorful woven and embroidered strip added to the hem.

Lao men wear shirt and pants, but bathe and relax around the house in a *phakhawma*, a length of cloth about 1.8 m (6 ft) long and 76 cm (30 in) wide that can be worn as a skirt-like garment or wrapped into shorts. Little children often go naked or wear only a shirt. It is common for people to go barefoot or wear rubber sandals. In the cities, of course, Western dress is common.

## 12 FOOD

The Lao love to eat. Their staple food is sticky rice, also known as glutinous rice or sweet rice. The rice must be soaked for several hours before being steamed in a basket over a pot of boiling water. It is then put in another basket that serves as a serving dish or lunch pail. Sticky rice is eaten with the fingers, so one doesn't need dishes or silverware. One takes a bit of rice from the basket and shapes it into a small ball and dips it into the serving dish for whatever other food is offered, most likely a hot sauce of chilies, garlic, fish sauce, and lime. The Lao have two categories of food—rice and “with rice.” Foods other than rice are limited and serve more as condiments, something to add flavor, so they tend to be very hot or very salty so that one will eat a lot of rice with them.

Dried salty beef is a favorite dish if meat is available. Beef is sliced thin and liberally doused with fish sauce (a salty liquid made from salt and fish) or salt and placed on a tray to dry in the sun to preserve it. You can deep-fry the meat to cook it and drive out most of the moisture. If the meat is very, very salty, you can eat a lot of sticky rice with it.

Papaya salad is a common dish. Shred a green papaya (lacking that, shredded cabbage or rutabaga, sliced green beans, or grated carrots can substitute). Pound two or three cloves of garlic with two or three fresh, small, hot Thai chilies in a mortar. Gradually add about 3 cups of shredded vegetables and a few cherry tomatoes and pound together. Add fresh lime and fish sauce (or salt) to taste and a teaspoon of sugar. Lao salad is hot, sour, salty, and sweet all at once. Serve with lots of sticky rice.

## 13 EDUCATION

Literacy in Laos is estimated at 45%. The Lao are much more likely to be literate than minority peoples, and men are more likely to be literate than women. The LPDR government is the first to make a serious effort to extend education beyond the Lao areas to minorities. However, with the loss of about 90% of its most educated population as refugees, education has perhaps been set back a generation, and already low standards have declined further. Universal primary education has been declared a goal by several leaders but remains elusive. Many village schools have only one or two grades and little in the way of books, paper, or school supplies. Teachers are paid little and often infrequently, so they often have to farm or hold a second job to support their families. School sessions, therefore, tend to be sporadic.

There are five years of primary school, but probably only half of primary school children finish fifth grade. This is followed by three years of lower secondary school and three years

of upper secondary school. Secondary schools are few in number and located in cities and provincial capitals. One must pass a test to enter secondary school. School uniforms and supplies are too expensive, the distance to schools too great, and village education too rudimentary for many village children to continue their education. There are a few colleges and technical institutes in Vientiane, the capital.

In the early days of the LPDR, teenagers from “bad” family backgrounds, as defined by the Communists (children of officials from the old regime or of shopkeepers), were often denied entrance to secondary education. Some teens fled the country on their own, risking shooting or drowning as they swam the Mekong River to Thailand. They were hoping to be resettled abroad and have a chance to continue their education.

Private schools have been allowed and are preferred to public schools by parents who can afford school fees. Lack of financial resources and trained teachers remains a problem for Laos. The government has cobbled together a basic university system—the National University of Laos—formed by consolidating teacher training colleges. This university has attracted foreign assistance and attempts to keep pace with Laos’s economic reform program. Because of its proximity to Laos and the linguistic similarities, Thailand is a popular venue for overseas study, along with Vietnam, which has provided scholarships for Lao students since 1975.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The most distinctive Lao instrument is the *khaen*. According to a popular saying, those who eat sticky rice, live in dwellings mounted on piles, and listen to the music of the *khaen* are Lao. The *khaen* is a collection of bamboo pipes of different lengths, each with a small hole for fingering and a metal reed, preferably of silver, all attached to a mouthpiece. There are 6-hole, 14-hole, and 16-hole instruments. A *khaen* musician accompanies a *mohlam* performance, a traditional Lao entertainment that usually involves two singers, a man and a woman, and offers courting poetry, suggestive repartee, and dance. The songs and poetry represent oral literature passed on to performers by their teachers. Relatively few have been written down. Ability to add witty and rhyming repartee on the spot is valued. Males and females never touch in Lao dance.

A great work of Lao literature is *Sin Xay*, an epic poem. Sin Xay (he who triumphs through his merits), the hero, is rejected by his father, the king. He sets out to rescue his aunt, the beautiful Sumontha, from a giant who has carried her off. After many trials and combat with giants, demons, monstrous beasts, and magical beings, plus treacherous attacks by six half-brothers, Sin Xay rescues his aunt and reunites her with her brother, Sin Xay’s father. The king regrets his previous rejection of Sin Xay and now recognizes his nobility of character.

#### 15 WORK

The vast majority of people are engaged in agriculture, especially subsistence rice farming on small family plots. Children help with farm chores from an early age, and most are engaged full-time in farming after leaving primary school. There is little industry. With the New Economic Mechanism, a loosening of controls by the LPDR government, some people have gone into business and there is increasing interest in developing tourism and handicraft. Major foreign investment in Laos—in mining and hydroelectric power—does not lend itself to wide-

spread job creation. The Lao predominate in the government bureaucracy.

#### 16 SPORTS

Few Lao have time for sports, but those that do enjoy soccer, volleyball, and *takraw*, a Southeast Asian sport that involves keeping a rattan ball in the air without touching it with the hands. The feet and head are used as in soccer. Nevertheless, with its increasing participation in the international community, Laos aspires to participate in international and regional sporting competitions and receives some assistance from neighboring countries for this purpose.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The biggest entertainment for the Lao in Laos, especially in the cities, is tuning in to Thai radio and television stations from across the Mekong River. However, with the advent of Star TV, which is relatively inexpensive, many urban Lao have access to television programs beyond the region. Even some Buddhist temples in Vientiane have satellite dishes on their rooftops. The Lao government worries that Lao language and culture is being corrupted by the popularity of these programs and that youth are learning the wrong values from the commercialism of Thailand. Mass media in Laos are under tight Communist party control and tend toward heavy-handed propaganda. They have nowhere near the influence of Thai mass media on the Lao. In Thailand itself, mass media are spreading Thai language and culture to Lao-speaking areas.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Lao are becoming increasingly better known for their exquisite hand-woven textiles in cotton and silk with intricate tie-dyed designs. Basketry is another Lao specialty.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Discrimination by the Lao against the minority groups that make up one-third of the population of Laos remains a problem. In Thailand, on the other hand, the central Thai feel superior to the Lao of the Northeast. Human rights are an issue as the LPDR government will not tolerate criticism of the one-party Communist control. Disaffection is widespread with the aging ideologues who hold power and an increasingly corrupt bureaucracy and military. The youth seem particularly disaffected and attracted to the alternate vision of society offered by Thai television. Even the Communist leadership of Laos is now calling for a return to Buddhist values, and leaders of the early Communist regime that took power after 1975 are often cremated in high-profile Buddhist ceremonies. Poverty and lack of health and education will continue to hamper development and make life difficult, especially in the rural areas.

Although the Lao monarchy was abolished, the government is increasingly aware that it lingers on as a social institution, albeit a lost one. Many urban Lao express admiration for the Thai monarchy and visits by members of the Thai royal family—especially the king—draw a great deal of attention. To counter this, the government has attempted to revive interest in Laos’s ancient monarchs—particularly the kings of the Lan Xuan era—with new monuments and celebrations.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Lao constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of gender, but social dynamics and tradition, particularly in some of the poorer ethnic groups, often place women at a disadvantage. Although rape meets with strong disapproval from both society and the law, spousal battery is widespread. Nevertheless, Laos has a higher proportion of women in positions of authority—in government, education, and commerce—than in neighboring Vietnam or Cambodia. Several factors may account for this. Laos is highly donor-dependent, and Western aid agencies tend to emphasize income generation and leadership training for women. In addition, women tend to dominate handicraft and textile production, which attract foreign investment and the tourist trade, giving them an advantage in the commercial sector.

On the other side of the coin, Laos is increasingly plagued by trafficking of women, particularly into Thailand. The eradication of opium production has left some areas with resulting deficits in income and the short-term response has been to sell or otherwise push women into prostitution. In addition, the influx of foreign business—particularly Chinese investment—and new infrastructure projects (especially new transnational roads) have unfortunately provided new markets for trafficking.

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—revised by C. Dalpino

# LEBANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** leb-un-EEZ

**LOCATION:** Lebanon

**POPULATION:** 3,971,941 (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian

**RELIGION:** Muslim 59.7%, Christian 39%, other 1.3%

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Lebanon is a small country on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Throughout its history, Lebanon has been the stage for conflicts between city-states, world powers, and local tribespeople. Located in what is known as the Fertile Crescent (a curved band of green, fertile lands along the eastern Mediterranean coast, bordered by the Arabian and African deserts) and at the juncture of three continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe—Lebanon is a valuable and highly desired territory.

Historically, Lebanon has been known as the home of the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were Semitic traders whose maritime culture flourished in the Fertile Crescent for more than 2,000 years (c.2700–450 BC). Lebanon's mountains also served as a refuge for Christians during the early years of Christianity. During the Crusades, Christian warriors established strongholds in the mountains. One area, known as Mount Lebanon, continued to be a Maronite Christian enclave within the Ottoman Empire, which ruled much of the Middle East from the 16th century until the end of World War I.

After World War I, Britain and France divided the Middle East between them. Mount Lebanon and several surrounding areas became known as Greater Lebanon and was organized as a French protectorate. The rest of the Fertile Crescent became known as Syria and fell under British control. Although Lebanon became a republic in 1926, French troops remained in the country until 1946. At the time, Christians made up a slight majority of the population, but other religious groups also had a strong presence. In an effort to make sure that all of the major religious groups had representation, a power-sharing arrangement was established for the Lebanese government. The president was to be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the president of parliament a Shia Muslim. All religious groups were to receive representation in the National Assembly according to their numbers. In many ways, this power-sharing arrangement created the tensions that culminated in the long and brutal civil war that Lebanon endured from 1975 to 1990.

Tensions between religious groups began in 1932 when Christians refused to acknowledge the results of a census that showed Christians holding a majority but significant numbers of Muslim Lebanese. Then, Palestinians who were pushed out of present-day Israel with the formation of the Jewish state in 1948 began settling in Lebanon. By 1967, more than 500,000 Palestinians lived in the country. Many Muslim and Christian Lebanese protested the arrival of Palestinians and accused Israel of trying to displace the native Lebanese populations with Palestinians who had long lived in Israel.

Civil war erupted in 1975, and Syrian troops entered Lebanon in 1976, largely to protect Christian interests. A cease-fire that year maintained partial peace until 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon and occupied the area south of Beirut. During



a siege of Beirut, a multinational peacekeeping force (MNF) evacuated members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the city. The MNF remained in Lebanon until 1984. Then, civil war broke out again, and continued until 1990. Elections were put on hold, although a Maronite leader, Michel Aoun, took control of the government in 1988 and dissolved the parliament. Muslim groups aligned against Aoun, defeated his troops in 1990, and forced him into exile in Paris, where he remained until 2005.

Aoun's departure from Lebanon allowed for a peace treaty to be signed. The Taif Accord reorganized Lebanon's government so that representation in the parliament was divided equally between Christians and Muslims. It also left intact the dictate that the president of Lebanon be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shi'ah Muslim. Fighting ceased in 1990. At that point, it was estimated that 100,000 Lebanese had been killed, 100,000 were permanently maimed, and nearly 1 million had been forced to leave their homes to settle abroad.

Efforts to rebuild Lebanon's economy and restore political stability to the country have preoccupied the country through the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century. Syria formally withdrew its troops in 2005 and Israel pulled out in 2006. Lebanon, however, remains vulnerable to attack from both countries, as of 2008. It also has been a target of violence by militant groups fighting for Palestinian rights.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Lebanon is a tiny country, with an area of only a little more than 10,400 sq km (4,000 sq mi)—about the size of the state of Connecticut. It lies on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea, north of Israel, south of Turkey, south and west of Syria, and southeast of Cyprus. Although it is only about 200 km (124 mi) from north to south and averages only 50 km (30 mi) east to west, Lebanon has two mountain ranges (Mount Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon), a coastal strip, an inland plain, dozens of rivers (the two major ones being the al-Assi and the al-Litani), and four lakes. Lebanon was famous in previous times for its cedars, but due to centuries of cutting and herds of goats eating the seedlings, less than 5% of its land contains the trees. Those that remain are now protected.

The rainy season lasts from mid-November through March, with very heavy rains at times causing flooding due to poor drainage. Summers on the coast are hot and humid; the mountains are somewhat cooler and breezier. Plant and animal life is quite varied because of the diverse terrain. Because Lebanon is located at the juncture of Europe, Asia, and Africa, it is home to species from all three zones. The most important cultivated crops are citrus fruits, apples, grapes, potatoes, sugar cane, tomatoes, wheat, vegetables, tobacco, oats, and olives. The biggest cash crop in the Beqa'a valley is hashish, which is illegal.

The human population of Lebanon is as varied as its terrain. So many different peoples have lived in and traveled through the land of Lebanon over its turbulent history that the current population contains quite a mix of cultures. In 2008, the population of Lebanon was just under 4 million. Most Lebanese (95%) are Arab, and about 58% of the population consists of Muslims of various sects. The rest are Christian, also of various sects. The vast majority (85%) of Lebanese are urban dwellers, with about one-third of the population living in the Beirut area. Beirut has a population of approximately 1.5 million. The three next largest cities are Tripoli (population 210,000), Zahle (60,000), and Sidon (50,000). The Bekaa Valley still contains many rural villages.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The first language spoken in the area that is now Lebanon was Canaanite. Since then, the common languages have been, in succession, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and French during the French mandate years. Upon independence, Arabic became the official language, but many Lebanese also speak English, and some still consider French to be the more "sophisticated" language. Armenians who live in Lebanon speak Arabic as well as Armenian and Turkish. It is not uncommon for Lebanese to speak three or more languages fluently.

"Hello" in Arabic is "*marhaba*" or "*ahlan*," to which one replies, "*marhabtayn*" or "*ahlayn*." Other common greetings are "*As-salam alaykum*" ("Peace be with you"), with the reply of "*Walaykum as-salam*" ("and to you peace"). "*Ma'assalama*" means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is "*Shukran*," and "You're welcome" is "*Afwan*." "Yes" is "*na'am*" and "no" is "*la'a*." The numbers one to ten in Arabic are: *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba'a*, *khamsa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *tamania*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

One of the most popular characters in Arab folklore is Jeha the Fool, who figures in many stories, from teaching tales to purely humorous anecdotes. Also popular are the real-life lovers,

Ablah and Antar. Antar was a 6th century Arab who was born a slave but became a heroic warrior. He was also a poet (poetry is considered the highest art in Arab culture). Antar fell in love with Ablah, the daughter of the chief, and she fell in love with him; but, of course, a slave could not marry the chief's daughter. Eventually, after many tragic and star-crossed struggles, Antar was given his freedom, and he and Ablah married.

Other Lebanese folktales that Westerners usually do not associate with Lebanon are the story of the Greek hero Adonis and the Christian legend of Saint George and the Dragon. In Greek mythology, Adonis was a handsome young man loved by Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. Adonis was later killed by a wild boar. The story of Adonis takes place at Byblos, in Lebanon. Also Saint George, who later became the patron saint of England, lived in Lebanon and fought the famous sea-dragon at the mouth of a river near Beirut. Most likely, the Christian Crusaders brought Saint George's tale back with them to the West.

The Lebanese are very fond of proverbs and can quote one for almost any situation. Proverbs usually teach a lesson or give a nugget of wisdom in just a few words, such as, "Better blind eyes than a closed mind," and "The one who took the donkey up to the roof should be the one who brings it down."

## 5 RELIGION

The original inhabitants of the land now called Lebanon were worshippers of the fertility goddess known as Asherah, Astarte, or Anat. Christianity arrived during the Byzantine Roman era (AD 4–636), and its followers in Lebanon have since become divided into a variety of sects including Maronite, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, and Protestant. The Islamic revolution of the 7th century ad took hold in the land of Lebanon as in other Arab countries. Muslims are now divided into Sunnis, several types of Shi'ites (including Ismaeli), and Sufis (Muslim mystics). Other religious sects in Lebanon include the Alawis and Druze, as well as the Baha'is. A total of 17 religious sects are recognized in Lebanon today.

The Lebanese government practices a system called "confessionalism" in which it keeps a record of every citizen's religious affiliation. A person may belong to any religion, but each person *must* belong to one. No Lebanese can be religiously unaffiliated. As of 2008, about six out of 10 Lebanese were Muslim, and about three out of 10 were Christian. Because seats in the government are based on religious representation, the number of followers each faith commands is of significance. When the 1932 census was taken, Christians were in the majority, so they were given greater representation (and, therefore, authority) in the government. Now that it is becoming apparent that Muslims are the majority, they are demanding more representation. In 1995, Lebanon conducted its first census in more than 20 years.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Lebanese love a good party, so they all celebrate all of the holy days—both Christian (including Greek Orthodox who have different dates for the festivals than other Christians) and Muslim—plus a couple of secular public holidays. Islam uses a lunar calendar, so Muslim holidays occur on a different date of the Gregorian calendar each year. The major Muslim holidays are *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim year, dur-

ing which Muhammad received his first revelations, celebrated by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month; *Ayd Al-Fitr*, the end of Ramadan, a three-day festival; *Ayd Al-Adha*, a feast at the end of the *Hadj* (the pilgrimage month to Mecca); the First of *Muharram*, the Muslim New Year; *Ashura*, a Shi'ite commemoration and day of mourning; and the prophet Muhammad's birthday.

The Christian holiday of Easter is also movable. Being calculated on a lunar basis, it always occurs sometime during March or early April. Two Easters are celebrated in Lebanon: the Greek Orthodox date and the date for the rest of the Christian population. Other Christian holidays are: New Year's Day (January 1); St. Maroun's Day (the patron saint of Maronite Christians, February 9); the Day of the Ascension (May 15); the Feast of the Assumption (August 15); and Christmas and Boxing Day (December 25 and 26). Three secular public holidays in Lebanon are: Labor Day (May 1); Martyr's Day, which honors patriots killed by the Turks during World War I (May 6); and Independence Day (November 22).

The Christian New Year's Day (January 1) is celebrated in Beirut by shooting tracer bullets out over the Mediterranean Sea. Since tracer bullets are multicolored, they look like fireworks but are much louder. It is also customary to go "strolling" along the coast road in one's car after midnight on New Year's. Such "strolling" is a Lebanese tradition for almost any festival.

Both Muslim and Christian children play a game with colored (hard-boiled) eggs at Easter time. One child taps the tip of his or her egg against the tip of another child's egg. One shell will crack; the other will not. The child whose egg stays intact while cracking everyone else's eggs wins the game. The children then eat their eggs. On Lebanese television, films that re-enact the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are played throughout Easter weekend, interspersed with live coverage (by satellite) of the Pope's festivities in Rome.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Lebanese mark major life events, such as birth, marriage, and death, within the Islamic or Christian religious traditions. Regardless of religion, Lebanese parents celebrate the birth of a child by cooking *meghli* (a spiced rice pudding, topped with nuts and coconut). The family serves the sweet dish to visitors who come to the household to congratulate the family. At birth, it is common to bring gifts of clothing and gold for the new baby. Boys born to Muslim and Druze families are circumcised at the hospital just after the birth. Christian babies are dressed in white and baptized. A major event for a Christian child (usually before age nine) is First Communion.

Lebanese in cities typically date, but families in rural areas continue to arrange marriages. Lebanese men place a great deal of importance on being financially independent and often wait until their late twenties or early thirties to marry. Women, however, marry in their early twenties. Christian weddings generally take place in churches and Muslims are wed before a cleric and two witnesses. Lebanese of all faiths celebrate weddings with a first dance between the bride and groom, a belly dancing performance, and a dinner buffet. The bride and groom, however, cut the wedding cake and have a toast before the meal.

Funeral rituals for the deceased vary by religion. Muslims typically bury the deceased before sunset on the day that the

person has died. Christians often wait several days. Followers of both religions set aside the fortieth day after the death for prayer and an offering of condolences to the family of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Most Lebanese people are very hospitable, generous, and polite, although Arab politeness sometimes means saying what one thinks the other person wants to hear. Most Lebanese will greet each other with handshakes and will inquire about a person's family and health. Formal titles, such as "Dr." or "professor" are used when appropriate.

The Lebanese lifestyle is relaxed, but by no means lazy. The Lebanese are typically entrepreneurs; men and women have a "get ahead" attitude and lots of ambition to go with it. Opinions are strongly held and fiercely defended with vigorous gestures in heated discussions. At the market, the same vigor is used to haggle prices, something the average Lebanese is quite good at. The same attitude prevails on the road, where there are few (if any) traffic signals or stop signs, and drivers simply "get ahead" as they need to. Fortunately, the Lebanese do not generally drive at high speeds, so few accidents occur. Pedestrians also cross the road whenever and wherever they choose, leaving it to drivers to stop for them.

Traditional Arab hospitality reigns in Lebanon, where hosts provide feasts for their guests and then smoke the *nargile* after dinner. The *nargile* is a pipe in which Persian tobacco called *tumbak* is filtered through water before being inhaled, like a hookah or "hubble-bubble" pipe. Smoking from a *nargile* varies as a fad, but smoking in general remains a strong constant. Visits are not planned in advance but rather happen spontaneously, usually between the hours of 4:00 and 8:00 pm. An Arab will never ask personal questions, as that is considered rude. However, exactly what is considered personal in Lebanese culture varies somewhat from in Western culture. For example, asking how much rent someone pays is not normally considered a personal question but asking about a marital dispute is. A person is expected to say what he or she wishes without being asked. Lebanese are very affectionate with friends and family, touching each other often, holding hands, and men even kiss each other on the cheeks.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Lebanon has been rebuilding its economic infrastructure by borrowing heavily from banks. The rebuilding effort has drawn many Lebanese to cities such as Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, where educational and employment opportunities abound. Most of those who live in cities reside in apartments in concrete buildings. Free standing houses are rare. Electricity remains unreliable, and water often is scarce. Many families have access to water for only a few hours per day, so they pump enough for their daily needs into rooftop storage tanks. Although most Lebanese have migrated to cities, the people remain proud of their village heritage. Some families still own a dwelling in their ancestral village and will use it for vacationing and other activities. Rural homes generally are much larger than the urban apartments, with rooms for hosting guests, living areas, and bedrooms.

Even though Lebanon is covered by an extensive system of roadways, most of which are in fair condition, traffic is highly congested in major cities and along popular travel routes

(such as the coast road or roads heading to mountain resorts on weekends). Buses and taxis are the primary means of public transport. Lebanon's rail system became unusable during the war and still has not been rebuilt.

Health care in Lebanon is modern and fairly accessible. Although public facilities exist, those who can afford to pay for higher quality care in private clinics generally do so. Malaria is prevalent but native Lebanese have generally built up a resistance to it, so it is not a serious problem for them; only visitors have difficulty with it. In addition, water shortages often mean that not all water is drinkable. As a result, most families have two water systems. One contains water that has been chlorinated and is safe to drink, and the other contains untreated water. The average life expectancy for Lebanese men is 71 years, which has increased from 65 years in the mid-1990s; for Lebanese women, the average life expectancy is 76 years, compared with 70 years in the mid-1990s.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Strong family ties are the rule in Lebanon. Most businesses are family-owned and run, and the revenue sent back by family members working abroad has kept the Lebanese economy afloat during the difficult war years. That revenue reached \$5.5 billion in 2007 and has increased steadily each year, according to the World Bank. City dwellers in Lebanon have a fairly Western lifestyle, although with a very high cost of living. Most city families are small, averaging two children each. Children are cherished in Arab families and are treated well. Most children live with their parents until they get married, and it is not unusual for more than one generation to live in the same household. Cousins are considered to be as close as brothers and sisters, and children grow up understanding that if they do not show respect for their elders, they will be disciplined.

Mothers play an important role in caring for home and family. Although many women work outside of the home, that work often is done out of necessity rather than choice. Lebanon also contains many class distinctions, which limit opportunities for advancement to the wealthier. In the past, Maronite Christians were the most privileged class, but other Christian and Muslim groups have gained more economic power and social status in recent years.

Rural families generally live on small family farms and have many more children—usually between 10 and 15—to provide help with the farm work. Farmhouses are made of stone or concrete with tile floors, have only a few necessary pieces of furniture and use a small wood-burning or kerosene stove for heat in the winter. Most rural houses have running water. The social center of rural life is the *foorn*, the village bakery where the women bake their loaves of bread. Women on the farms have a very busy life; they do all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry (in old-fashioned washtubs, with no electric dryers), plus they work in the fields when needed. Men work in the fields.

## 11 CLOTHING

Western-style fashions are popular in Lebanon's cities. Urban women are very fashion-conscious and want to wear the latest styles from the West. More traditional clothes are still worn in some villages. Women wear long dresses for and men wear black pants and jackets. Men's pants are full and baggy from the waist to the knee and tightly fitted from the knee to the

ankle. Their jackets have fancy, brightly colored, embroidered trim. Traditionally, Lebanese men wore a short, rounded, cone-shaped brown felt hat, which some older rural men continue to wear. Most modern Lebanese men, however, have traded it in for a *keffiyah*, the common Arab headscarf.

## 12 FOOD

Lunch is the big meal in Lebanon, and almost everything is eaten with bread. Two types of unleavened Lebanese bread are *khub*, which resembles pita bread, and *marqouq*, which is paper thin. Lebanese do not eat fish and dairy in the same meal, and restaurants do not serve sweets. The usual dessert in a Lebanese restaurant is *fawakeh*, a huge bowl of whatever fresh fruit is in season. *Mezze* are widespread in the Middle East, including Lebanon; the closest Western equivalent is appetizers, though this hardly does them justice. Often a whole meal is made of *mezze*, which really just means any food served in small portions. Dinners are not served in set courses as in the West, but rather are put out all at once on the table for people to pick and choose from as they wish. *Kibbeh* (or *kibbe*) is the “national dish” of Lebanon—a concoction made of either lamb or beef and cracked wheat (bulghur, or *birghol*), of which there are as many variations as there are Lebanese cooks.

Lebanese pantries generally stock allspice, anise, Arabic coffee, cracked wheat, chickpeas, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, various dried beans, grape leaves (which are served stuffed with various things, such as rice or meat), *laban* (homemade yogurt), lentils, mint, nutmeg, olive oil, orange blossom water, oregano, parsley, pine nuts, pistachios, ghee (clarified butter), rice, rose water, sesame seeds, and tahini (sesame paste). These are the most common ingredients in Lebanese cooking.

Wine has been made in Lebanon for thousands of years. A unique Lebanese alcoholic creation is *arak*, a colorless, 100%-alcohol beverage flavored with anise. (Anise seed is used quite a bit in Lebanese cooking; it has a licorice-like flavor.) *Arak* turns white when diluted with water, which is how it is served; the Lebanese call it “lion’s milk.” The other popular beverages are coffee served very thick, tea with lots of sugar and no milk, and local spring water from the mountains, which the Lebanese drink from special spouted decanters (pouring it into their mouths from a short distance away—a skill which must be developed).

## 13 EDUCATION

Lebanon’s educational system is still undergoing reconstruction following the civil war. Education is highly valued in Lebanon, so parents send their children to private schools when they can afford to do so. Schools usually teach a combination of Lebanese, French, and U.S. curricula, and all children are required to attend at least eight years of school. Lebanon’s literacy rate was 87.4% in 2003, a significant improvement from 75% in the mid-1990s. Children are strongly encouraged to prepare for college, and Lebanon has six major universities and several technical institutions.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Lebanon was known as a center for Arabic culture before the civil war. The country is slowly regaining that reputation. Each year, international artists gather at the Baalbek International

Festival (popularized by the Lebanese superstar Fairuz), at the ruins of Roman temples in the Bekaa Valley.

Lebanon also has long been known for its high-quality book publishing, and a flourishing film industry produces high-quality films. There is some serious dramatic theater, but most of the energy in the last two to three decades has gone into a folk art and music and dance revival that began in the late 1960s. The national folk dance of Lebanon is the *debki*, a line dance in which people hold hands and step and stamp to the beat of a small drum called a *derbekki*. Classical belly dancing also plays an important role at weddings, and instrumental music is experiencing a revival. Lebanese craftsmen also are known for their glassmaking, weaving, pottery, embroidery, and brass and copper work. Many authors write in French, English, and Arabic, and celebrate a coming together of cultures through a form of poetry known as *zajal*, in which several poets sing in an improvised dialogue.

## 15 WORK

Lebanon traditionally has had a higher proportion of skilled labor than other Arab countries, but the civil war caused many of those skilled workers to seek better opportunities abroad. Those who have remained in the country often have difficulty finding work that is equal to their skills. The Lebanese economy relies on services, but agriculture and industry are important contributors, as well.

Many educated Lebanese do not take their government seriously. Government workers, as a result, tend to keep erratic hours. Remittances from Lebanese abroad contribute substantially to the economy, but the country’s long-term progress depends on whether it is able to attain long-term political stability. Post-war rebuilding also has widened the economic divide between Lebanon’s rich and poor. A strong middle class has yet to emerge.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports are taken very seriously by the Lebanese. The war made it difficult to pursue organized or professional sports in recent years, but soccer, basketball, and volleyball are popular. Horseback riding was popular before the war closed the clubs, and horse-racing still occurs in the Beirut hippodrome. Cross-country running, particularly in the mountains, and the martial arts are widely practiced. Skiing, rock-climbing, and caving are also enjoyed in the mountains. Many Lebanese go swimming and fishing in the lakes, rivers, or visit beaches along the Mediterranean coast.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Lebanon has numerous television stations, and television is a more common media source than newspapers. Some of the television stations devote their time completely to Christian programming, while others emphasize Muslim programming or offer a mix. Lebanese cinemas tend to show violent and/or sexy American and European films, although Lebanon itself also has a vital filmmaking industry. Dramatic theater, particularly comedies that poke fun at government leaders and Lebanese society is popular, as are nightclubs and pubs. At home, besides watching television, Lebanese enjoy playing board games (especially *Monopoly*), chess, checkers, card games, and backgammon, which is called *tawleh* (translating literally as “table”). The national pastime in Lebanon, however, is talking.



*A Lebanese police officer patrols as customers sit at a sidewalk café on Hamra street Beirut, Lebanon. Hamra Street fills with people rediscovering its cafés, bars, and restaurants. (AP Images/Hussein Malla)*

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Traditional Lebanese crafts include basketry, carpet-weaving, ceramics and pottery, copper and metalworking, embroidery, glass-blowing, and gold- and silver-smithing. Lebanon is also known for its finely crafted church bells. Wine-making can also be considered an art, dating back for thousands of years in Lebanon.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Lebanon's civil war caused widespread destruction and a huge social upheaval. It will take several decades for the country to recover from its effects. At least 120,000 people were killed and 300,000 wounded in the fighting, most of them civilians. Another 800,000 or so left the country, mostly the wealthy and well-educated. As many as 1,200,000 Lebanese—almost half the population—had to move from their homes and neighborhoods during the war. Those who remain face a future of high unemployment and a widening gap between the very rich and the poor.

Unrest in the Middle East continues to leave Lebanon vulnerable to attack, even with the end of the civil war. A 2006 eruption of violence between Israeli troops and Hizbullah militants in Lebanon offers ample evidence of the outside threats

that face Lebanon. Although most Lebanese Christians and Muslims maintain cordial relations with each other, some hostility from the war still lingers. Each religion maintains a separate court system under Lebanese law to handle matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and marriage between persons of different religions is strictly forbidden.

Lebanon also faces the question of how to handle Palestinian refugees who fled Israel in 1967. Several hundred thousand refugees still reside in decaying and overcrowded camps in Lebanon, and many of them have lived without adequate healthcare, education, housing, or opportunities for employment for their entire lives. The Lebanese government restricts Palestinians from seeking economic and social aid. In addition to the long-time Palestinian refugee community, Lebanon now faces growing numbers of Iraqis fleeing their war-torn country.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Lebanese laws and court systems do little to help women. As a result, women face widespread discrimination in both public and private life. Lebanese laws allow for each religion to have a separate court system to handle matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Frequently, the religious customs fail



to protect women from domestic violence. The human rights organization Amnesty International reported in its 2008 Human Rights Watch report that female domestic workers who had migrated from other countries also face violence in Lebanese households. At least six female migrant workers died in 2007 under suspicious circumstances, according to Amnesty International.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson

# LEPCHAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** LEP-chuhz

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Rong

**LOCATION:** Nepal; Bhutan (Mt. Kanchenjunga in the Eastern Himalayas)

**POPULATION:** 75,000 (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Lepcha; Nepali

**RELIGION:** Animism and Buddhism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Sikkim, formerly an independent kingdom situated in the Himalayas between Nepal and Bhutan. *Lepcha* is the name given to this group by their Nepali neighbors and is interpreted by some as a derogatory word meaning "nonsense talkers." The Lepchas call themselves *Rong*.

The Lepchas are of Mongoloid stock, and some anthropologists trace their origins to Mongolia or Tibet. However, the people themselves have no traditions of past migrations and place the home of their ancestors (Mayel) near Mt. Kanchenjunga. The early history of the Lepchas is obscure, their isolation no doubt limiting contacts with the outside world. The Bhutias began moving into the region from Tibet in the 14th century AD. Sometime before the beginning of the 17th century, Sikkim became subject to Tibet. Internal upheavals in Tibet early in the 17th century led to three "Red Hat" lamas (monks) fleeing to Sikkim, where they converted the population to Buddhism and created a Sikkimese Tibetan king. For the next three centuries, the Lepchas of Sikkim were dominated by the Bhutias, the Nepalese, and later the British. In 1950, although it remained independent under its ruling *chogyal* (king), Sikkim became a protectorate of India. Following a plebiscite in which Hindu immigrants from India made the difference in the voting, Sikkim became the twenty-second state of the Indian union in 1975.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Lepchas occupy the southern and eastern slopes of Mt. Kanchenjunga, in the eastern Himalayas, and parts of neighboring western Bhutan and of Nepal. Population estimates for the Lepcha vary wildly. Some sources claim a total Lepcha population of around 50,000, while others see 85,000 in western Bhutan alone. Given the fact that the Lepchas are known as the "Vanishing Tribe," 50,000 to 75,000 seems a reasonable estimate for the current Lepcha population. The region Lepchas inhabit varies in elevation from 230 m (750 ft) in the Sikkim basin to the summit of Kanchenjunga at 8,586 m (28,168 ft) above sea level. The land has been dissected by the River Tista (Tista) and its tributaries into a jumble of steep-sided valleys separated by precipitous hills that rise northwards to the majestic peaks of the Himalayas.

Most settlements and cultivated land lie between 1,070 m and 2,285 m (3,500–7,500 ft) above the hot, steamy river valleys. Above this zone, fields give way to forests and mountain pastures. Mean temperatures range from 4.4°C to 30°C (40°F–86°F). Rain is almost continuous from June to September, with snow lying on the ground throughout the year above 2,440 m (8,000 ft).



### 3 LANGUAGE

The Lepcha language, known as *Rongring* to the Lepchas, is classified as a Tibeto-Burman tongue. It is placed by some in the Naga group of this language family. Rongring is written in an alphabet that was derived from a Tibetan script by King Chador of Sikkim sometime at the end of the 17th or beginning of the 18th centuries. The purpose of this was apparently to enable the Lepchas to read the Buddhist scriptures. Today, few Lepchas speak the language or are familiar with the Lepcha script. Most Lepchas, instead, speak and write Nepali.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Lepcha myth of origin tells that Itbu-mu, the Mother-Creator, made the earth and the heavens and all that they contained. She shaped the mountains and the lakes and the animals that inhabit the earth. Last of all, she took pure snow from the top of Mt. Kanchenjunga, shaped it into a human form, and infused it with life. This first man was known as Fudong-thing. Perceiving his state of loneliness, the goddess took marrow from his bones and created a partner for him, a woman called Nuzong Nyu. The first two humans lived in Ne Mayel Kyong, the ancestral home of the Lepchas that supposedly lies in an inaccessible valley near Kanchenjunga. Though commanded by Itbu-mu to live as brother and sister, the two commenced having sexual relations. The offspring of this forbidden union were devils and evil spirits that plague the Lepchas even today. When the gods discovered the transgression, they punished the offenders by casting them out of their idyllic

home and sending them down to the mundane world. There, Fudong-thing and Nuzong Nyu were blessed with children and became the ancestors of the Lepcha people.

### 5 RELIGION

Animism survives today side-by-side with Buddhism in Lepcha society. The older Mun religion, named after the *mun* or male priest, focuses on appeasing or warding off evil spirits (*moong*) who bring sickness and misfortune upon people. The spirits are appeased by the sacrifice of animals, or by the direct intervention of the priest or one of the lesser religious practitioners among the Lepchas. The Lepchas acknowledge the existence of various deities and benevolent spirits, but rarely make regular offerings to them.

Overlying the beliefs and practices of Mun are the formal structures of lamaistic Buddhism. It is said that Buddhism was introduced to the region from Tibet around 1641, with the first monasteries founded towards the end of the 17th century. While the Lepchas have accepted certain aspects of Tibetan Buddhism (e.g., the ritual, the mythology, and the hierarchy of lamas), concepts such as asceticism and individual responsibility for one's spiritual welfare are totally alien to them. For the common person, the *mun* is of far greater importance in daily religious life than is the lama. (*Lama* is a Tibetan word; the Lepcha term for a lama is *yook-mun*, literally, "honored Mun.") However, the ceremonies of the two religions are usually performed simultaneously. Some writers have gone so far as to describe the Lepcha religion as "animistic Buddhism."

A small number of Lepchas have converted to Christianity.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Mun ceremonies are performed for the benefit of individuals or households, although some important events are communal celebrations. The Cherim ceremony is held twice a year to keep the Lepchas free of illness. Both *mun*s and *lamas* perform various rituals, which include offerings to the devils and the gods, and animal sacrifice. Buddhist *lamas* have to visit the monastery twice a month for festivals held in honor of Guru Rimpoche (the monk Padmasambhava who introduced Buddhism into Tibet) and the god Kanchenjunga. The feasts accompanying these celebrations may last up to 36 hours. The *lamas* also observe regular calendrical festivals such as the exorcism of the quarrel demon or the three-day *Boom koor*.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

During the later months of pregnancy, Lepchas take certain ritual precautions for the safe delivery of the baby. This includes various taboos as well as sacrificing chickens to appease Sor *moong*, the demon who causes miscarriages. The Lepchas believe that on the third day after its birth, a baby is visited by a fairy who writes out its future on its forehead. At this time an animal, preferably an ox, but failing that, a pig or a goat, is sacrificed to mark the birth of a male, though not a female. A horoscope is cast by a *mun* (male priest) or *bonthing* (female priest), and the child is given a temporary name, often the day of the week on which it was born. The "sacred name" of the infant is recorded in the horoscope but never used. Names are unimportant to the Lepchas, and one may grow up with a variety of nicknames or pet names that are liable to change from time to time.



Two Lepcha women stir large pots of potatoes in a village in Sikkim, India. (© Earl and Nazima Kowall/Corbis)

Until a child is old enough to walk, it is carried in a cloth tied to the back of the mother or another adult. Children are treated as “little adults” and expected to behave accordingly. At the age of about four, a child is given a plate, a cup, a set of clothes, and a small haversack to carry objects just like an adult. Life is somewhat difficult and dull for adolescents. Boys farm or hunt with their fathers, while girls share the household chores with their mothers.

For the Lepchas, death is terrifying. All funeral rituals are performed to get rid of the dead and to ensure that they do not return as evil spirits. At the time of death, a lama is consulted to determine what spirits caused the death, how they should be appeased, and what means of disposal of the body should be followed. Ordinary women and men are usually buried, lamas and nuns are cremated, and children are placed in a river. Animal sacrifice and purification ceremonies are performed as deemed necessary. Both muns and lamas are called on to conduct the funeral rites, the former usually outside the house and the latter in the house. The body is then taken to the burial ground where it is placed in a grave, invariably facing north. Following the disposal of the corpse, the *sanglion* ritual or “speeding of the soul” is performed. This is an expensive ceremony involving a feast, distribution of gifts, animal sacrifice, and reading from the scriptures.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Lepchas are identified by many who have had dealings with them as a gentle, unselfish people, who are extremely shy in

their dealings with strangers. They are peaceful in nature, and every effort is made to prevent or stop personal quarrels, which are seen as unsocial behavior. Casual visitors to a Lepcha house are always presented with refreshment. Gift-giving forms an important part of daily life. A guest attending a feast takes a gift with her or him, and also departs with a gift (usually uncooked meat). Any visitor takes a gift for the host, and in turn is given a gift when he or she leaves. Children are taught from an early age that it is good manners when receiving a gift from an elder to accept it with joined hands.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Lepcha villages consist of up to 15 or 20 houses, scattered across a hillside or in a forest. One writer notes that it is possible to walk through a village without ever knowing it is there. A Lepcha dwelling (*li*) is rectangular in plan, with a circular or rectangular roof made from straw. The floor is made of wood, raised 1 m or so (3 or 4 ft) above the ground, with the space underneath used to keep domestic animals. Walls are built of thatch covered by clay. The entire structure is built without nails or screws. A house typically contains three rooms: a bedroom, guest room, and kitchen/store room. Furnishings may include low wooden stools, or built-in wooden benches padded for comfort. Water is drawn from streams, waterfalls, or natural reservoirs.

Most villages have a *gompa* or place for Buddhist worship, and Buddhist prayer flags fluttering in the mountain breezes are a common sight in villages throughout the region. Villag-

es are linked by mountain tracks, rather than roads, and the people are adept at crossing the hills and carrying loads over tracks that are often too steep even for mules.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Lepchas are divided into patrilineal clans known as *ptso*. There is no ban on marriage within the same clan, although the rules of incest clearly define the closeness of the blood relationship acceptable between spouses. Uncles play an important role in matchmaking and the negotiations preceding a wedding. Marriages are arranged by the parents, and usually occur when the boy is around 16 and the girl 14 years of age. Following the betrothal ceremony, the boy is allowed to remain in the girl's house and little attention is paid if she conceives during this period. The actual wedding takes place anytime from a few days to several months later, on an auspicious day of the month. Both muns and lamas are required to officiate at the marriage ceremony, which is accompanied by the presenting of gifts to the bride's family, feasting, and other rituals. The bride returns to live with her husband's family. Divorce or separation is very rare and when it occurs is usually for incompatibility or the refusal of the wife to work properly.

## 11 CLOTHING

The original dress of both Lepcha men and women consists of knee-length drawers and an undershirt or bodice, over which a long piece of striped material is worn like a cloak. This coarse, homewoven outer garment is fastened at the shoulder by a brooch and is belted at the waist by a sash. The sash of ordinary people is usually red or purple, while that of lamas is yellow. The Lepcha hat (*thaktop*) is loaf-shaped and made of leaves attached to a bamboo frame and decorated with a feather. Men traditionally always carried a long knife slung from the belt in a bamboo scabbard.

Women adorn themselves with a variety of ornaments—silver hoops or rings in the ears; necklaces made from gold, silver, semiprecious stones, or even silver coins; and charm boxes and small idols. Today, many Lepchas, especially women, have given up their indigenous dress in favor of Tibetan-style clothes.

## 12 FOOD

The Lepcha day begins at dawn with a substantial meal of cold rice and any leftover meat or other food from the previous evening's meal. This is taken with Tibetan-style tea (served with salt and butter). Popped corn or cold rice may be carried to the fields for snacks during the day, but the next full meal is taken in the evening when the family returns to the house. The evening meal is invariably accompanied by *chi*, beer made from millet or other grains. Rice is the staple food, though wheat or maize may be eaten if rice is not available. Buckwheat is ground into flour and baked into cakes. Lepchas, despite their Buddhist religion, are nonvegetarians and eat the meat of both domesticated and wild animals. They supplement their diet with vegetables and a variety of forest produce such as wild yams. Lepcha dishes are less spicy than Nepali or Indian food.

## 13 EDUCATION

Levels of literacy among the Lepchas vary according to location, but generally are low. Few speak, let alone read, Rongring. Demands that the language be introduced into the curriculum

have been met with deaf ears by the government of Sikkim. As a consequence, the Lepcha language has all but disappeared. Children are taught Nepali in the schools, and this is the language in which both children and adults conduct their daily affairs. Lepchas favor formal education for both boys and girls, with literacy rates in the Indian state of Sikkim standing at c. 65% (2001), though again, women, with rates of 58.6%, lag far behind men, of whom over 72% are literate. In Sikkim, almost three-quarter of children between the ages of five and fourteen attend school (72.8%), but the discrepancy between male and female becomes very clear at the level of higher education. By contrast, in Nepal literacy varies between 44% for men and 34% for women (2001). Although specific data as regards literacy is not available for Bhutan, one suspects that, with an overall literacy rate of 44% for women in Bhutan, literacy for Lepcha women in Bhutan is closer to the value for Nepal than for Sikkim.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and dance, as well as oral traditions of myth, legend, and folk songs, form an integral part of Lepcha culture. Instruments such as drums, bamboo flutes, and various stringed instruments are used to accompany songs (*vam*) and dances at various social and ceremonial occasions. Love songs are popular, while other songs focus on themes such as marriage, agriculture, and war. Lepcha dances (*lok*) fall into six categories: nature dances, war dances, agricultural dances, dances on historical themes, the mystic *yaba* dances, and dances presenting incidents from Lepcha mythology.

## 15 WORK

Though originally hunters and gatherers, Lepchas are now primarily engaged in farming and rearing livestock. Their principal food crop is rice, with other cereals and vegetables also grown for consumption. Millet is cultivated for making beer, not for eating. Cardamom is the most important cash crop and an important export of the region. Cattle, goats, pigs, and chickens are raised, as much for ritual sacrifice as for their food value.

## 16 SPORTS

Lepcha children have no toys and do not participate in any organized games. Older boys amuse themselves by snaring small birds and imitating bird calls, or by making and playing bamboo flutes. Adults usually do not engage in organized or spectator sports, although in towns like Darjiling they have access to sports facilities.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Although festivals and folk traditions remain a major source of entertainment for the Lepchas, radio, television, and the movies have all had their impact on Lepcha life. It is not uncommon to find the walls of Lepcha houses decorated with photographs of Hindi and Western movie stars, with Bruce Lee being among the most popular.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Although Lepchas are skilled in activities such as basketry, weaving, spinning, and carpentry, there are no distinctive arts

or crafts that can be identified specifically with the Lepcha community.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Lepchas are classed as a Scheduled Tribe under the Indian constitution. However, largely as a result of their small numbers and the cultural dominance of the Bhutias and Nepalese, they are clearly in danger of losing their cultural identity. The Lepchas' position as an ethnic minority would become even more tenuous should Nepalese demands for a "Gurkhaland" in the region of Darjiling ever succeed. Some Lepchas see conversions to Christianity as a threat to the traditional character of the community. It is, however, the loss of the Lepcha language—combined with intermarriage and assimilation with the local Nepalese population—that is the most serious threat to the continued survival of traditional Lepcha culture in the eastern Himalayas.

This is further threatened by development projects such as the Tista Valley hydroelectric project Stage V at Dzonghu. All three 170-megawatt power stations involved were commissioned in early 2008, but numerous concerns were expressed during the planning and development stage of the project. Not only have local Lepcha communities lost agricultural land that has been submerged, though one argument put forward for the project was that it was designed to use only 67.75 hectares of land, the project also brought along with it a large number of laborers who were seen to have the potential for an irreversible negative impact on the Lepcha communities residing in the area. It was feared that the influx of large number of laborers would affect the culture and way of life of the community, and cause a "sense of deprivation and loss of ethnic identity" resulting in "dilution of [Lepcha] social customs and practices" and affect the availability of labor for work on the Lepchas' remaining fields. The presence of a large number of people in an area that was earlier sparsely populated, it was also feared, might also result in health problems and outbreak of diseases, including those that may not have occurred in the past within the community. However, the environmental clearance letter that allowed the project to move forward stipulates that the labor camps should be located outside the Lepcha settlements and that when the project is completed, the labor force must not be allowed to settle anywhere in Sikkim. The conditions laid down are easier to put on paper than enforce and may not go very far in protecting local tribal communities from the influx of a large population of migrant workers for a several years. Problems that have occurred in the area since the project commenced include a considerable increase in STDs among the local population as well as the creation of illegal housing on forest lands. Local Lepchas, members of ACT (Affected Citizens of Teesta) went on a hunger strike to protest the Tista Project, which, when complete, envisages 26 dams along the Tista River in Sikkim and is part of a broader government development plan that affects the entire north-east.

This problem is not unique to the Lepchas, but is faced by tribals all across the subcontinent—development projects that threaten to damage what is, in many cases, a fragile ecosystem and disrupt a traditional way of life. It is of special significance, however, in the case of the Lepchas because of the relative small numbers of the community, whose way of life is already under threat. Once traditional Lepcha society is destroyed, it is gone forever and will never be revived. Most Lepchas in Sik-

kim see an uncaring central government in Delhi that places its own developmental needs ahead of the needs and desires of its citizens.

In Bhutan, the threat to Lepchas comes from a different quarter. After centuries of protecting local cultures by limiting contact with the outside world, the Bhutanese government has allowed satellite television to enter the country, and is also trying to encourage tourism, thus exposing its people to Western influences. Experience has shown that wherever the Western way of life comes into contact with more "primitive" cultures, the latter soon lose their character and adopt Western ways.

As minority groups in all three countries in which they live, the Lepcha lack any serious political representation. In Sikkim, they do share 12 seats in the state assembly with the Bhutias, but in general they lack any political voice—this seems to be the fate of minority ethnic groups everywhere. The recent political changes in Nepal and the dominance of the Bhutias in Bhutan, combined with the Lepchas relatively small numbers, leave them out in the political cold.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though Lepcha society is patriarchal and patrilineal, women are accorded a degree of respect that is the hallmark of tribal societies in the sub-continent. Marriages are arranged by families and marriage customs are strongly influenced by Tibetan practices, but divorce is very rare. This is possibly because Lepchas are highly tolerant of one another's sexual activities, and they feel very little jealousy toward each other. When disputes arise because of an extra-marital liaison to which one partner objects, the causes are blamed on the uncontrollable temperaments of individuals. However, when adultery occurs discretely, the aggrieved spouse will generally not pay attention; only if it is practiced openly and flagrantly will the other spouse appeal to the elected leader of the village.

Lepcha agricultural tasks are not sexually segregated, fathers play an important role in the care of children, the Lepcha give great emphasis to the role of the female in their conceptions of origin, and female deities occupy center stage in Lepcha mythology.

Yet, poverty, involvement in traditional economic activities (i.e. subsistence agriculture), and lack of access to education remain issues facing Lepcha women, who follow a way of life that is disappearing rapidly under the pressures of contact with the outside world.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# LI

**PRONUNCIATION:** LEE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ha, Gei, Zun, Moi-Fau, and Shai

**LOCATION:** China (primarily Hainan Island province)

**POPULATION:** 1.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Li

**RELIGION:** Ancestor worship

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Li were included in the ancient “Luoyue,” the general term for the minorities in southern China during the Western Han Dynasty (206 bc–AD 8). The name of Li, however, appeared in the ancient historical documents at the end of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and has remained unchanged since the Song (960–1279). The Li continuously paid tribute to the imperial dynasties. Entering the Li’s districts rather early, the Chinese developed marketplaces and towns. The development increased significantly under the imperial Tang (618–907), which became interested in trading with countries in the south by way of Hainan Island. At that time, 5 districts and 22 counties were set up. Since the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Li headmen were appointed to rule their people by the imperial government. In the following centuries, the economic development of the Li districts was on par with their Chinese neighbors. They planted “double-harvest rice,” made use of iron farm implements invented by the Chinese, and even learned to set up and operate bamboo-tube waterwheels for irrigation. Country fair trade at regular intervals flourished for centuries. Exports to the Chinese mainland represented an important part of the Li economy; among the main items exported were a local brand of oxen, coconut, and areca. Yet, oppression from the feudal government and native officials was so intense as to arouse quite a few uprisings of the Li in the last centuries. In contrast to the Li farmers, who adopted Chinese methods of agriculture in most Li districts, the rest of the population still lived in abject poverty. A primitive co-cultivation system, *hemu*, had been prevalent in these areas. A piece of land was owned and co-cultivated by several families bound by ties of blood and led by a senior member, the *hemu* “head.” After the payment of common expenses and the reward for the *hemu*, the crops were divided equally.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Li population was 1.2 million in 2000. They live in Hainan Province, dwell together with the Chinese, Miao (Hmong), and Hui in Baoting, Ledong, Dongfang, Qiongzong, Baisha, Wanning, and Danxian counties. Hainan Island is located in the subtropics and boasts abundant rainfall and rich soil. In some areas, the hot climate yields three crops of rice annually. Corn, sweet potato, and cassava can be planted all year round. Coconut, pineapple, mango, cocoa, coffee, rubber, and areca abound in Hainan.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Li language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Zhuang-Dong group, Li Branch. There are five dialects. An alphabetical system of writing based on Latin was created in 1957. The self-

given names of the Li include Ha, Gei, Zun, Moi-Fau, and Shai. Shai has been most popular; however, most now use the term Li, a traditional Chinese given name.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The Li myth of origins is closely linked to the culture of pumpkins and to the history of the flood. A long, long time ago, so the story goes, there were two brothers. Both of their wives were heavy with child for three years already. One day, a white-headed old man advised them to plant a pumpkin in front of the door in order to hasten childbirth. The brothers followed his advice. Subsequently both wives gave birth to a child. The elder brother had a son, the younger a daughter. The pumpkin continued to grow year after year. Then the flood came. The brothers were barely able to put their children inside the huge pumpkin in time to save them from the flood. When they got out of the pumpkin, the flood had already receded, but all the other people had drowned. They made a double-deck bed for the brother and sister. Before long, the sister got pregnant. The god in Heaven angrily cleaved a stone into two and struck a tree down to the ground, saying: “Any brother and sister who marry will be condemned to death.” Thereafter, the brother and sister lived separately. The sister bore a fleshy lump, which was cut into three by the brother. One piece was enclosed in a piece of hemp cloth, put on a board, then driven by the current of the Nandu River. Ten months later, it became a Chinese child. That is why the ancestors of the Chinese wore clothing made of hemp. The second piece was wrapped in four smaller pieces of cloth, put on a leaf of a herbaceous plant, and left to drift about on the Wanqian River. Ten months later, it became a Miao child. That is why the Miao women’s skirts are made of four pieces of cloth. The last piece was bound up in linen, put on a leaf of coconut, and sent adrift along the Changhua River. Ten months later, it became a Li child. That is why Li women wear linen. After the brother and sister gave birth to the Han, the Miao, and the Li in Hainan Island they became the local gods of the land.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Ancestor worship and belief in ghosts and gods are widespread among the Li. They pay special attention to witchcraft. Witchcraft may cause great harm in the guise of disease or even death. A man practicing witchcraft is called *jingtai*, and a woman *jingpo*. There are two kinds of ancestor spirits, one evil and the other good. The good ensure safety and prosperity, while the evil bring about misfortune. On the death of a senior person, a grand funeral with all the trappings of ancestor worship will be held. Whoever falls sick must invite the shaman, *daogong*, or shamaness, *niangmu*, to exorcise the ghost; the shamans are also adept in divination and play a role of intermediary with the ghosts and gods. The Li have a number of taboos. For example, it is not auspicious to point one’s head toward the door in one’s sleep, because that is the position of the body of the dead before a funeral. If a guest lies in that direction, the host will be most unhappy.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Li celebrate the Spring Festival from the last day of the old lunar year to January 15 (Western calendar, between January 21 and March 7). The dinner party on the eve of the lunar New Year is the occasion for the whole family to reunite. Songs

of New Year greetings will be sung. On the first and second of lunar January (Western calendar, between January 21 and February 21), the men of a village organize a group hunt. Half of the kill belongs to the hunter who first hits an animal in the hunt. The rest is divided among the villagers. A pregnant woman may have two portions. A traveler who happens to be in the village will also have his share.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Elaborate funeral rites among the Li are related, as mentioned before, to ancestor worship. People announce a death by firing a shot. In areas bordering on Chinese settlements, the Li practice geomancy (divination by means of geographic features) for location of the tomb. In areas of *hemu*, the coffin is buried underground at a common burial ground. No tumulus or gravestone is set up, nor are there sacrificial offerings or grave sweeping after burial. However, after the funeral the family should receive guests with beef or pork. On the occasion of funerals, family members are allowed to drink and eat as usual, except for rice, which is then taboo. They bury the dead hastily. In general, if a person dies in the morning, the burial will take place in the afternoon; if death occurs in the afternoon, the deceased will be buried the following morning. Because of belief in the "Five Element Theory," burial is never held at noon, lest it lead to disaster. After the date when a person passed away, every twelfth day is celebrated as a commemoration; on "commemorative days" family members are not allowed to work in the field. Such observances last for as long as three years after the death occurred.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

If a guest calls in, the host will serve him areca; if the guest is not accustomed to areca, he should explain to the host. It would be a very impolite behavior simply to refuse.

Formerly, there was a dating custom called *fangliao*. Reaching adulthood, girls would go in groups to chop wood in the mountain; they carried the wood back to the outskirts of the village or to their family house. Helped by their parents, they built up a house (or an adjacent room) called *liaofang*, where the girls stayed every night from then on. A young man would sing or blow an instrument to express his affection to the girl. If they found each other congenial, a token showing his affection would be given to her. The young man would then be received by the girl in the *fangliao* house or room. The *fangliao* relation did not always lead to marriage. The illegitimate child often born from the *fangliao* relation was not discriminated against by the Li people. Today, the *fangliao* custom is waning and is practiced only in remote Li villages. The vast majority of Li youngsters choose more modern ways of social intercourse.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In rural areas Li houses are built in the shape of a short-domed cylinder. The frame is laid out with bamboo or wood and is covered with a thatched roof. The walls are built with bamboo poles or branches of trees covered with mud. The floor is made of bamboo or rattan, about 20 inches above the ground. Some of their houses are two-story, provided with a gable roof. People live upstairs, the ground floor serving for livestock and storage. In urban areas, Li houses are the same as the Chinese.

The cities in Hainan Island are modernized. Highways are well developed. A railway makes a circuit around the island.



An integrated bus system links the main towns and villages on the island. Haikou (the capital, in the north) and Sanxia (main tourist resort, in the south) boast fully-equipped international airports.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most families in a village are of the same surname. The family is patrilineal and small. Reaching adulthood, the son or daughter moves to the *fangliao* room beside the house or in the common house. As soon as they marry, they cook separately from their parents. Since the women do a lot of fieldwork with the men, they have a rather high position in their family. According to traditional custom, women mediated conflicts in or among the villages. Even in cases of armed fighting among villages, women intervened in the dispute and helped negotiate a settlement.

## 11 CLOTHING

In mountainous areas, men wear a kerchief over the head, an edge-to-edge buttonless linen top and, instead of pants or shorts, two pieces of linen front and back below the waist (as a skirt). Fewer and fewer men still wear this traditional garment, the majority having adopted Chinese-style dress. Women wear an embroidered kerchief on the head, an edge-to-edge buttonless trimmed top with underwear, and a tight straight skirt woven with multicolored cotton threads and adorned with figures and designs. Some of their straight white skirts may reach down to the ankles. Almost all women like to wear earrings—

sometimes a wide and heavy array—as well as bracelets and necklaces. Tattoos also serve as feminine ornaments. Some women have designs tattooed on their faces, others over their hands, feet, neck, and chest. The designs vary in different areas, ranging from rather simple figures to very intricate ones. A growing number of Li women now wear Chinese clothes and ornamentation. Urban Li women are not different in outward appearance from those of other nationalities. The men are not tattooed, but they like to wear earrings.

## 12 FOOD

Rice, corn, and yams are the staple foods of the Li. They eat three meals a day. Pottery is used for rice cooking. Meat is roasted or preserved in salt with ground rice and edible wild herbs. Vegetables are rare. Men have a passion for hunting, and meat is an important source of dietary protein. Men like drinking and smoking, while women are fond of chewing areca. The eating habits of the urban Li are the same as those of the Chinese.

## 13 EDUCATION

Nearly 1,000 primary schools have been set up in Li areas. Over 90% of children reaching school age are enrolled. Besides formal schooling, literary classes, reading groups, and cultural rooms in the villages contribute to the elimination of illiteracy. Middle school students and college students are quite common. Their cultural and educational level is higher than average for the minorities, but it is still below average for the whole country.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Li are well known for their natural talent for singing. In fact, folk songs are their principal means of expressing their emotions. Lyrics spontaneously flow from their mouths when they are touched by feelings. Folk songs may be performed as solos, as antiphonal singing, in unison, or in chorus. There are quite a few traditional musical instruments. The “Mouth Bow” is made of a thin piece of bamboo or copper, which is played by flicking the fingers. There are at least four kinds of vertical bamboo flutes particular to the Li, one of which is played by nose-blowing. The Li also have a wide array of dances accompanied by music and song, the most popular being the “Cutting Firewood Dance,” the “Rice Husking Dance,” and the “Double Sword Dance,” all of which are colorful and have a rich flavor of life.

Li literature is mainly oral and includes lengthy epics handed down through many generations, all praising their heroes and founders; among the most popular are “Brave God of Unusual Strength,” “Legend of the Five-Finger Mountain,” and “Brother’s Constellation.”

## 15 WORK

The Li mainly engage in rice planting, gathering, and hunting to complement their main economic activity. Li women excel in weaving textiles, especially silk cotton. Early in the Song Dynasty (1127–1279), Li brocade was already famous and was sought after by the Chinese. Tradition has it that the legendary expert of textiles, Lady Huang Daopo, lived in Li areas for 46 years. She dedicated herself to the improvement of textiles. Li women benefited considerably from her teaching.

## 16 SPORTS

“Bamboo Dancing” is very popular among the Li. People sit on the ground in two rows, face to face, in pairs. Each pair holds two bamboo sticks by the ends. They rhythmically separate the bamboos and bring them back together. The dancers, following the rhythm, must jump in and out of the gap before the bamboo sticks are brought back together, or the foot will be caught between the bamboos; it is then almost impossible for the dancer to find his rhythm again and his feet get caught at almost every beat. The competition is open to all participants, young and old, and always attracts large crowds.

“Shooting a buffalo’s leg” is another traditional sport. Each village selects a good archer. The buffalo leg is hung beneath a tree, about 30 m (100 ft) away from the shooters. Whoever hits the leg is allowed to take it back to his village and share it with the villagers.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Although available, movies and television are not yet popularized among the rural Li. Their entertainment and recreation gravitate toward singing and dancing. In urban areas, however, a wide array of recreation and entertainment is available. Beach activities, especially on the southern shores of the island, have recently begun to attract more and more Li youngsters.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Li brocade is an important craft. Ornaments made of silver and animal bones have a unique style. Some women wear a few earrings in different patterns and also bracelets in different styles.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since Hainan Province is now the largest special economic zone of China, the social economy has developed rapidly in an integrated way. The current problem among the rural Li is the intense conflict between their traditional agricultural and rural culture and the modern industrial urban culture. The process of modernization seems inevitable, but there is no way to ensure a smooth and peaceful transition between traditional and modern values.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. Li women, in traditional household, have a relatively high position. Women were the traditional mediators of community conflicts. As the Li become more urbanized, this tradition is changing somewhat, with men taking stronger roles.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. LeBlanc

## LINGAYATS

**PRONUNCIATION:** lin-GAH-yuhts

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Virashaivas

**LOCATION:** India (Karnataka state)

**POPULATION:** 15 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Kannada

**RELIGION:** Lingayat

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Lingayats are members of a religious sect in India that dates from the 12th century ad. The name is derived from *linga* and *ayta* and means "the people who bear the *linga* (phallic symbol)." This is a literal description, as members of the sect wear a small stone phallus somewhere on their body. Men carry it in a silver box suspended on a thread or scarf around the neck, while women wear it on a neck-string under their clothes. The *linga* is the symbol of the god Shiva, and Lingayats are also called Virashaivas because of their passionate devotion to this deity.

The Lingayat movement began as a revolt against Brahmanical Hinduism. It is based on the teachings of Basava (c. 1125–c. 1170), who lived in Kalyana, a small town in central India in what is now northern Karnataka State. A Brahman himself, Basava (also Basavana) rejected the supremacy of Brahman priests, ritualism, concepts of ritual pollution, caste, and many other features of contemporary Hindu society and religion. He preached instead a populist message of equality, fraternity, and individuality. Basava's teachings spread through the region, where they became deeply entrenched among the local population. Even today, over 800 years later, Lingayats form a significant element in Karnataka culture and society.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Lingayats are distributed throughout Karnataka, with their greatest concentrations in the northern regions. Census returns in 2001 indicated that around 20% of the state's population were Lingayats (estimates made early in the 20th century place the percentage of Lingayats between 14% and 20% of the population). Assuming this proportion did not change much by 2008, the number of Lingayats in Karnataka would be close to 12 million. With Lingayats in Maharashtra numbering several million and several hundred thousand in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, a current estimate of around 15 million people is reasonable. In the Lingayat heartland, as many as 67% of the people follow the religion. Small Lingayat communities are also found in the states of Goa, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. A few Lingayat families are to be found among Indian immigrants in the United States and Canada.

The cultural heartland of the Lingayats is located in the interior of the Deccan Plateau. In the north of the region lie the hills and escarpments of the southern edge of the Maharashtra plateaus. These soon give way southwards to the lower lands of the middle valley of the Krishna River and its tributaries (the Bhima and the Tungabhadra). Further south, the terrain begins to rise towards the Mysore Plateau. The western margins of the region are defined by the Western Ghats, but there is no clear physical boundary on the east. Elevations of the plateaus



vary from around 455–760 m (1,500–2,500 ft) in the north to over 1,100 m (3,600 ft) in the south. Climate is of the tropical monsoon type. Mean monthly temperatures at Bellary in eastern Karnataka vary from 23°C (73.4°F) in winter to 33°C (91.4°F) in summer. Annual rainfall averages between 40 cm and 80 cm (16–31 in) throughout the entire region, except for the extreme western areas. Areas not under cultivation carry a poor scrub cover or open deciduous or thorn forest, except for a narrow belt of evergreens in the more humid west.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Lingayats fully identify with Kannada, which may be seen as the language of Lingayat culture. Basava, the founder of the sect, specifically set out his teachings in Kannada rather than in Sanskrit so that he could reach the common people. The boundaries of Karnataka State (called Mysore at the time) were redrawn in 1953 and 1956 to unite the Kannada-speaking peoples in a single administrative division. Kannada is one of the four major languages of the Dravidian language family. It is related to the other Dravidian tongues of South India (Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam) but is written in its own script.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Basava, the founder of the Lingayat movement, and the other saint-mystics (e.g., Basava's nephew, Cennabasava; and Allama Prabhu) who helped spread its teachings are enshrined in the lore of the sect. Their own sayings and legendary accounts of their lives have entered the folk idiom of the Kannada people. The imagery and ideas presented in these works provide in-

teresting contrasts between Lingayat beliefs and those of the Brahmanical tradition. The crow, for instance, is a messenger of death in Brahmanical Hinduism. Many Hindus feed crows as part of their death rites, believing they are ancestors returned from the dead. In Lingayat culture, by contrast, the crow is an auspicious symbol of fellowship and sociability, known for its deep commitment to its community.

## 5 RELIGION

The Lingayats do not label themselves as Hindu. Their beliefs have been drawn from Tamil Shaivism and other Indian sources, but they have evolved a uniquely Lingayat character. Their doctrines represent a sweeping departure from those of orthodox Hinduism. Lingayats revere the *Vedas* (the sacred texts of Hinduism) but they do not accept the Brahmins' authority to interpret them. They reject the caste system and proclaim all wearers of the *linga* to be equal. They do not believe in rebirth and, consequently, have abandoned the doctrine of *karma* (the principle that actions in one life determine the nature of subsequent incarnations). Lingayats recognize the spiritual power (*śakti*) of Shiva; they worship him as the only god and do not recognize the other deities of Hinduism. In modern practice, however, Lingayats have taken to worshipping many gods in addition to Shiva. The doctrines and ideals of Lingayat religion and society are set out in the eight supportive systems (*ashtavarna*), the five principles of conduct (*pañcha-âchâra*), and the six-stage path (*sat-sthala*).

The Lingayat guru (spiritual leader) and *jangama* (priest) exert a considerable influence in the community. Priests, who can be male or female, officiate at life-cycle rituals. Some are also itinerant healers and astrologers, administering to the needs of the local people. Lingayats have their own temples, and their monasteries (*matha*) are flourishing centers of religious culture and education. Pilgrimages are undertaken to places such as Kalyan and Ulive, which are held sacred because of their association with Basava and other Lingayat saints.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Lingayats celebrate the birthdays of their saints, that of Basava being of particular importance. Two religious processions reported to be unique to the Lingayats are Nandi-kodu (Nandi's horn) and Vyasantol (Vyas' hand). Nandi is the sacred bull of Shiva, and the story goes that Nandi once lost a horn in a fight with a demon. His followers found the horn and triumphantly paraded it around. Lingayats follow the custom of carrying Nandi's horn (a long bamboo pole on which two brass bulls are fixed) through the streets in procession. On another occasion, a cloth hand is made and tied to Nandi's horn and paraded in the streets. This represents the hand of Vyas, reputed to be the author of the *Purânas*. In addition to their own celebrations, Lingayats also observe Hindu festivals such as Holi, Divali, and Ugadi (New Year's Day).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

After birth, the family guru ties a *linga* around the neck of the newborn child, smears the child with ashes, and places on the child a garland of rudra beads (seeds of the tree *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*). These are said to be the tears of Shiva. The guru recites a prayer to Shiva in the baby's ear. The priest is sent for, and when she or he arrives, her or his feet are washed by the child's parents. The water is poured over the *linga* tied to the

baby, who is then presented to Shiva by the priest. The priest is fed, and a small portion of food from the priest's dish is placed in the baby's mouth (this ceremony is known as *prasâd*, i.e., sacred offering). These rituals involve each of the elements in the eight supportive systems and symbols of the Lingayat religion (guru, linga, ashes, rudra beads, prayer, priest, the water that washed the priest's feet, and sacred offerings). Even today, the marks on the forehead (usually in white lime rather than ashes), the strings of rudra beads, and the linga around the neck serve to identify a follower of the Lingayat faith.

Death for the Lingayats is a cause of gladness because the dead person has exchanged the cares of this life for the joys of Shiva's heaven (*kailâs*). The body is bathed and laid out in the home. A priest reads passages from the Lingayat scriptures to help the soul in its flight to heaven. A feast is thrown for *jangams* (priests), and they are given money and clothes. The body is then placed on a gaily decorated chair and carried in procession to the grave. Lingayats always bury their dead, with the corpse seated cross-legged in the grave. Funeral rites end when the mourners return home and take purifying baths.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Lingayats conform to the customs of their local communities in their interpersonal relationships. Villagers meet in the streets, at tea shops, and at the *panchâyat* (village council) building to gossip and exchange news. Available leisure time is closely tied to the agricultural cycle.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Lingayat dwellings reflect regional house-types and rural settlement patterns. Northern Karnataka is an area where North Indian and South Indian patterns meet, with the shapeless, nucleated villages of Maharashtra giving way to the compact, square settlements—often with a tributary hamlet—found in southern areas. Houses are typically built of mud and stone, though cement is becoming more common. The house of a well-to-do Lingayat farmer typically has a roofed veranda in the front, built on a raised platform. This is used for resting and entertaining visitors. A doorway, with carved figures of Basava, leads into the living quarters, which include the kitchen, a room set aside for worship, and stalls for cattle. Hay, cow dung for fuel, and other goods are stored behind the house. Furnishings reflect the occupation, taste, and resources of the occupants.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Although Basava preached against caste and proclaimed all persons equal, the Lingayats have a complex system of social stratification that functions very much like a caste system. Women have a higher status than in traditional Hindu society. They exercise equal religious authority with men in household rites and festive ceremonies. In village communities, however, women still tend to occupy a subservient role. Considerable emphasis is placed on having male children, who are seen as essential for security in old age and salvation in the life to come.

The extended family is common in rural areas, but urban Lingayats tend towards the nuclear family. Marriages are arranged, though marriage practices are becoming much less restrictive among Lingayats with the spread of education. Residence is patrilocal (i.e., the bride and groom become part of

the father's household) in rural areas, but newlyweds in urban areas often set up independent households. Divorce is uncommon. Widow remarriage is permitted.

## 11 CLOTHING

Apart from the *ishta-linga* ("personal" linga) worn around the neck, Lingayat dress resembles that of the region where the community lives. Thus, in central Karnataka a Lingayat farmer wears the *dhoti* (Indian loincloth), a long, collarless shirt, and a turban. He may throw a shoulder cloth across one shoulder. Women wear a bodice and *sâri*, with the upper end passed across the front of the body and draped over the head. Ornaments include a variety of necklaces, nose rings, earrings, bangles, and anklets. The wealthy prefer gold, while the poorer classes wear silver. Men, also, are fond of jewelry. In urban areas, men tend to follow the trend of wearing Western-style shirts, pants, and jackets.

## 12 FOOD

Lingayats are strict vegetarians, their staple food being *roti* (flat breads) made from millet, eaten with pulses, vegetables, chilies, onion, garlic, and condiments. Wheat, maize (corn), and rice also form part of the diet, as do milk, curds, and *ghi* (clarified butter). The use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs such as opium is forbidden. Although theoretically an egalitarian sect, Lingayats have dining restrictions similar to those found among Hindus. For instance, members of the higher castes from which the *jangams* (priests) and leading merchants come do not eat with lower-ranked Lingayats who are primarily from various artisan groups. In the past, if a Maratha, a Muslim, or anyone not wearing the linga came into one's house and saw food, it would have to be thrown away.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education and literacy levels vary considerably among the Lingayats depending to a considerable extent on where they live. Literacy provides access to the professions, and thus the Lingayats appear to be well represented in law in Bombay compared to Lingayats in Karnataka. In a rural context, however, the typical attitude towards formal education among Lingayats is one of indifference or resistance. Although the Indian Constitution makes provision for free and compulsory education—from ages 6 to 14, attendance at school is low. Children, especially in a rural setting, are seen as much more valuable in helping support the family than in learning to read, write, and do arithmetic. A recent study in two villages in northern Karnataka (Dharwar District) dominated by Lingayats showed extremely low literacy rates (30.2% and 25.7% for the two villages, with the rates for women being 18.5% and 12.9%). This is in contrast to the overall literacy rates in Karnataka, reported as 67.4% by the 2001 Census of India (76.29% for males and 57.45% for females). Lingayat monasteries, such as the Manvi Monastery in Belgaum, play an important role in modern education. Found in towns, both large and small, across Karnataka, the monasteries run schools and colleges and have provided many poor people with free board and lodging in urban centers to help them acquire an education and better themselves.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Lingayats have a literary tradition that dates back to the 12th century AD. Their sacred literature includes the short lyrical sayings (*vāchanas*) of Basava, as well as the poetry and devotional hymns of over 200 writers. Of particular note is the fact that these are in the Kannada language rather than in Sanskrit and are accessible to the common people without reliance on Brahmanical interpretation. Lingayat literature is thus an important element in the regional culture of Karnataka. Several important Lingayat writers, such as Basava himself, writing in Kannada, have made important contributions to Karnataka culture, while Karnataka folk culture, in turn, forms part of the environment in which Lingayats live and work.

## 15 WORK

Lingayats are involved in a wide range of activities. Many are farmers, living in villages and leading lives not too different from other agriculturalists in northern Karnataka. Others provide the services on which the agricultural economy depends, such as carpentry, blacksmithing, leatherworking, and oil-pressing. Lingayats with the necessary educational background are also represented in government service and the professions, as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and professors. In urban areas in Karnataka, Lingayats dominate small trade, commerce, and the textile industry.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no games or spectator sports associated specifically with the Lingayat faith.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Lingayats have access to the same entertainment and recreational facilities as the general population of Karnataka. In villages, much of their enjoyment is derived from traditional pastimes (e.g., wrestling, bull-chasing, and folk-singing) associated with periodic fairs, festivals, and folk culture. In urban areas, television, movies, and modern sports activities are also available.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There are no specific arts, crafts, or hobbies identified with the Lingayats. Lingayats share in the broader currents of folk traditions in Karnataka.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Lingayats face many of the problems of the general population of northern Karnataka. In rural areas, there are some Lingayats who have to deal with low living standards, poverty, and debt. Many, however, own land, and Lingayat villages are an integral element in the rural landscape of northern Karnataka. The Lingayat movement originated as a reaction against feudal Brahmanical society and rejected many aspects of traditional Hinduism. Lingayats do not wear the sacred thread and, even though they reject the caste system, they have a social stratification system that is akin to caste and, to all intents and purposes, are placed in the Shudra *varna* by Hindus. Although they have reacquired some aspects of the Hindu religion (a process for which there are many historical precedents), the Lingayats preserve a distinct identity in central India. Their commitment to populist ideals stands in direct contrast to the rigid hier-

archy of traditional Hindu society. This has helped Lingayats modernize and in many ways achieve a status as one of the more progressive religious communities in modern India.

Despite rejecting the Hindu caste system of India, Lingayats have emerged as the dominant caste in many areas of Karnataka. Not only that, but they have managed to obtain political power and representation by getting themselves classified as an OBC (Other Backward Class) in Karnataka and thus gaining the benefits of this status (Lingayats, along with the Vokkaliga, another group classed as an OBC, have cornered the lion's share of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and OBCs). It does not matter how wealthy or educated one is, if one is classed as belonging to an OBC, one is entitled to apply for a reserved seat. On 30 May 2008 a Lingayat (B. S. Yeddyurappa) was sworn in as Chief Minister of Karnataka State. Lingayats formed a major voting bloc that put Yeddyurappa's party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in power.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Lingayat religious ideology encompasses the principles of individuality, equality and fellowship and rejects inequalities based on gender, class or occupation. Therefore, Lingayat women do not occupy the subordinate role in which they tend to be placed in Brahmanical society. Women exercise equal religious authority with men in household rites and festive ceremonies, and can even become priests. Lingayats traditionally do not favor child marriage and widow remarriage is allowed, although divorce is uncommon. In village communities, however, women still tend to occupy a subservient role, with considerable emphasis being placed on bearing male children, who are seen as essential for security in old age and salvation in the life to come. It is not uncommon for a Lingayat woman to wear a gold fertility necklace as a charm for obtaining a son, the necklace having thirty pendants, each with symbolic meaning connected to fertility.

Lingayats follow the Hindu law of inheritance and succession, but if a family does not have a son, a woman can inherit from her mother, whether gold, money or land. If a woman does not have a son, she tends not to adopt a male, as is the custom among Hindus, and passes on her wealth to her daughter.

Given their lack of commitment to Hindu principles of caste, Lingayat women tend to be in the forefront of modernization. However, in rural areas, they are still subject to poverty, low living standards, illiteracy, debt and lack of access to educational facilities—in fact, they suffer from the same problems as low caste Hindus.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# MA'DAN (MARSH ARABS)

**PRONUNCIATION:** mah-DAH-N

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Marsh Arabs

**LOCATION:** Iraq (marshes at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers)

**POPULATION:** Fewer than 20,000 (2003 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam (Shia Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Ma'dan, or Marsh Arabs, is a distinct group of people who originally inhabited the marshy area at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq before the marshes were destroyed by irrigation projects developed by the Iraqi government. A seminomadic tribal people, the Ma'dan once lived in reed huts built on floating islands of reeds, and made their living by herding water buffalo, fishing, and hunting wild boars and waterfowl. Their houses were elaborately woven with Gothic-like arches made of bundles of reeds tied together at the top. This same kind of house had been built since the 4th millennium BC.

The term, Ma'dan, means "dweller of the plains." The tribal form of the Ma'dan took shape during the 17th century AD. Ma'dan culture is based on the culture of the Bedu (or bedouin, *see Bedu*) nomads of the desert, adapted for life on the watery marshes. Until the late 20th century, the Ma'dan way of life had changed little in thousands of years. However, the Ma'dan people encountered prejudice from other Arabs, and beginning in the 1970s, the marshes they had inhabited for 5,000 years were slowly destroyed for political and economic reasons by the Iraqi government. The waters of the Tigris and Euphrates were diverted in order to irrigate lands converted to agriculture and, after the 1991 Gulf War, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein systematically drained the waters as a form of punishment for the Shia Muslims who opposed his regime.

The U.S.-led invasion in 2003 removed Saddam from power and efforts to restore the marshes are underway. However, the damage done to the Ma'dan way of life in the 1990s is expected to take several decades to repair. In addition, the marshes have become extremely dangerous to inhabit as fighting among rebel groups in Iraq has intensified and moves the country toward civil war. In 2008, the marshes in a war-torn Iraq were used as a hiding area for criminals and rebels opposing the provisional Iraqi government installed by U.S. occupation forces. Many Ma'dan are believed to have joined insurgent movements in Iraq. Some are followers of the Iraqi Hizbullah organization, while others belong to Moqtada al-Sadr's movement and wield control in provincial areas under the provisional government organized by U.S. forces occupying Iraq.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The marshes where the Ma'dan once lived were created by the annual floods of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The marshes covered about 15,540 sq km (6,000 sq mi) and were divided into three parts: the Eastern Marshes east of the Tigris, the Central Marshes west of the Tigris and north of the Euphra-

tes, and the Southern Marshes south of the Euphrates and west of the Shatt al Arab (the river formed by the union of the Tigris and Euphrates). Melting snow on the mountains of Iran and Turkey would cause the waters to rise on the rivers and in the marshes. The annual flood on the Tigris River typically reached its height in May. On the Euphrates River the floods peaked in June. From June on, both rivers would begin to fall, reaching their lowest levels in September and October. The water levels then would begin to rise slightly in November, increasing gradually throughout the winter.

The marshes were covered with rushes and reeds. Qasab, a kind of giant grass that looks like bamboo, covered most of the land and grew as tall as 7.6 m (25 ft). Natural islands, some floating and some anchored, dotted the waters, and the marshes were alive with wildlife, including turtles, frogs, various waterfowl, wild boars, and herds of mosquitoes in the summer. Eagles were a common sight, soaring in the skies above the marshes. Summers were hot and humid; in the winter, the water was icy and the winds were cold. A strong wind, called the "forty days' wind," blew throughout the month of June. Some historians believe the marshes were the Garden of Eden from the Bible.

In the 1970s, the Iraqi government began to expand irrigation projects that disrupted the natural flow of water into the marshes. The efforts were continued more aggressively after the 1991 Gulf War, partly to punish Shia rebels who had risen against Saddam Hussein. By 2003, the marshes had become a desert, villages of Ma'dan had been attacked and burnt, and the water was reportedly poisoned. Most Ma'dan today are believed to live in lower income Shia communities in Baghdad or have emigrated to Iran, with a few thousand believed to have returned to their traditional homeland. Those Ma'dan who have returned to the marshes lack clean drinking water, sanitation, health care, and nutrition.

Some human rights experts have estimated that the Ma'dan population in 2003 was less than 20,000, compared with 500,000 in the 1950s.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Ma'dan speak a form of Arabic that is generally considered a "lower" form by other Arabic speakers. Arabic, spoken by 422 million people worldwide, has many distinct dialects, so that people living as few as 500 km (about 300 mi) apart may not be able to understand one another. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic, or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken dialects are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that makes no distinction between capital and lower-case letters. It is not necessary for the letters to be written in a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation rules are also quite different from those of English.

"Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam 'alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Wa 'alaykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is *'Afwan*; "yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba'a*, *khamasa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *thamanya*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

Arab names consist of their first name, their father's name, and their paternal grandfather's name. Women do not take their husband's name when they marry but rather keep their father's family name as a sign of respect for their family of origin. Many Ma'dan have rather unusual names, especially for Muslims. The names Chilaib ("little dog"), Bakur ("sow"), and Khanzir ("pig") are common, even though Muslims consider those animals unclean. Other names include Jahaish ("little donkey"), Jaraizi ("little rat"), Wawi ("jackal"), Dhauba ("hyena"), Kausaj ("shark"), and even Barur ("dung"). Ma'dan often give unattractive names to children to ward off the evil eye, particularly to sons whose brothers died in infancy.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The traditional Ma'dan believed in *jinn*, bad spirits who could take the form of humans or other animals. Unique to Ma'dan folklore are two marsh monsters: the *anfish*, a giant serpent with hairy skin, and the *afa*, a giant serpent with legs. Both were said to live somewhere in the heart of the marshes, and both were deadly.

The Ma'dan also believed in a place called Hufaidh, an island of paradise located in the southwest part of the marshes, although no one knows exactly where. According to legends, the *jinn* could hide the island from human sight. On this island were palaces, palm trees, pomegranate orchards, and huge water buffalo. It was believed that anyone who saw Hufaidh was bewitched, and no one would be able to understand the person's words afterward.

#### 5 RELIGION

Today, most Ma'dan are Shia Muslims, although they are not strict about following Muslim practices, such as praying five times a day facing Mecca. Karbala and Najaf are the Ma'dan's holy cities: Husain was killed and is buried in Karbala, and Ali the Saint's tomb is in Najaf.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Ma'dan observe Islamic holidays, such as Ramadan, Id al-Adha, and Id al-Fitr, which are based on a lunar calendar and thus fall on slightly different days every year. Most Ma'dan wish to make a pilgrimage to the city of Meshed, where the shrine of the eighth imam, Ali ar Ridha, is located. Anyone who makes this pilgrimage is given the title of *Zair*. Few Ma'dan have the economic resources to make the traditional Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Ma'dan boys are traditionally circumcised at puberty, but many boys refuse because of the frequent occurrence of infection afterward.

After a death, some Ma'dan dye their turbans dark blue to signify mourning. Others put mud on their heads and clothes.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Ma'dan follow the traditional Arab code of honor, but with somewhat less dedication than other Arabs. Hospitality is considered a point of honor, and the Ma'dan welcome all guests and provide food and housing without expecting or accepting any payment. It is considered an insult even to thank a host for a meal, let alone pay for it, because it implies that the host is

not considered generous enough to simply offer a meal (or bed, or other hospitality) to a guest. A host also never helps to carry a guest's belongings out of the house (although he or she will help to carry them in) because that would imply that the host wanted the guest to leave.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before the destruction of the marshes, the Ma'dan marsh villages consisted of houses built of reeds, with reed mats covering the floors. These houses were built on artificial islands created by enclosing an area in the water, large enough for the house and a yard in front, with a fence of reeds about 6 m (about 20 ft) high. Reeds and rushes were packed inside of this fence. Then, when the stack of reeds and rushes reached above the level of the water, the original fence reeds were broken and laid across the stack. More rushes were piled on top and packed down tightly. The house was then built on this foundation. This type of house was called a *kibasha*. A more permanent site was produced when mud from the floor of the marsh was used to cover the foundation. The mud was then covered with more layers of rushes. This more permanent type of house was called a *dibin*. If the family that built a *dibin* left it unoccupied for more than a year, they lost their right to it and anyone could take possession of it. Shops within the village were marked by a white cloth fastened like a flag to a reed stuck into the roof of the building.

Traditional Ma'dan marsh houses had no electricity heat, running water, or indoor plumbing. Water was drawn from the marshes around the home. The Ma'dan did not build latrines. People simply squatted among the rushes, or over the side of a canoe, to urinate or defecate. In spite of this lack of sanitary conditions, the Ma'dan were a remarkably healthy people and experienced few occurrences of dysentery or cholera.

Food consisted of the wild boars and birds hunted with the gun, as well as crops, such as rice, that could be grown in the marshes. Personal possessions included a few water buffalo, a gun, some blankets and cooking utensils, and a reed canoe coated with bitumen (tar).

Within the marsh village, there was almost always a guest house, or a *mudhif*. The *mudhif* was usually owned by the village sheikh, or leader, and was often built on a grander scale than the simpler huts of the villagers, although the basic design was the same. No visitor was ever refused hospitality and, as in villagers' homes, no payment was accepted for lodging and meals in the *mudhif*.

All transportation in and around the marsh village was by canoe, either paddled or, more often, punted with a long reed. Called *mashuf*, the canoes were made of reeds covered with bitumen (tar). Children four or five years of age had their own *mashuf* and could pilot them skillfully. The Ma'dan created "roads" in the marshes by driving water buffalo through the reeds when the water was low to make a track. As the water rose, the track was kept open by the coming and going of the *mashuf*.

Unfortunately, these traditional marsh villages were destroyed as the marshes were drained by the government. Most of the Ma'dan who have migrated to Iraqi cities or to Iran now live in more urban dwellings. Some have converted their marsh lifestyle to a more conventional form of agriculture and rural living. A few thousand Ma'dan are believed to have returned to the marshes since 2003. However, many Ma'dan seem to have



*Ma'dan children play in water canals that still are left in what is now mostly dry land in Qurnah, southern Iraq. Saddam Hussein diverted water away from this area, drying up the heart of the Fertile Crescent. (AP Images/Elizabeth Dalziel)*

no wish to return because of the difficulty of the traditional lifestyle.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The traditional Ma'dan way of life was organized as a tribal society made up of various groups of families who shared a common lineage, with each family group headed by a sheikh (leader). Marriages were arranged by parents, although a couple had some choice in the matter. Paternal first cousins had the first claim to a young woman for their bride. Another who wished to marry her must have her paternal first cousin's father's agreement to give up his son's right to her. In traditional Ma'dan homes, men and women did not eat together and all meals were conducted in silence. All talking was done before and after the meal, never during it. Men and women were generally segregated in public life as well, although young children would play together.

Today, very little is known about the family life of the Ma'dan since their displacement from the marshes. It will take time for the marshes to recover and to learn whether or not the Ma'dan traditional way of life will be restored.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditionally, men wore a long, thin shirt that reached to their calves or ankles. In the winter, they sometimes wore a jacket

over it. They also wore the traditional Arab head cloth, usually without a rope to hold it in place (they simply tie it around the head). All grown men had short mustaches. Women wore dark robes that covered the entire body. Ma'dan women were generally not veiled, although they did cover the head with a long cloth or shawl. Only children wore colorful clothes; adults always wore plain light or dark clothes. Men usually wore white and women wore black.

Since their displacement from traditional marsh villages, it is not clear whether most Ma'dan prefer the traditional garments of their culture, or if they, perhaps, have fully adopted the styles popular in their new home towns.

### **12 FOOD**

The traditional staple foods were fish and curdled water-buffalo milk. Some Ma'dan also grew rice. Bread was cooked over a fire on round clay platters. Today, Ma'dan diets are most likely linked to what foods are available in their new home towns.

### **13 EDUCATION**

There were no schools in the marshes. While most Ma'dan parents wanted their children to have the advantages of a modern education, not all could afford to send them to the schools in the surrounding cities and towns. At the town and city schools, Ma'dan children were taught that their life in the marshes was

primitive and backward, and some became become discontent at home. Many ended up living marginal lives in the cities and towns, too well educated to be satisfied within the marshes, yet not well enough educated in the ways of town life to be successful there. These prejudices against the Ma'dan way of life have prompted many of the now displaced Ma'dan to integrate more fully with the Arab traditions, including those of formal education, that flourish in the areas to which they have located.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Ma'dan culture was been largely inherited from the Bedu (or bedouin—see **Bedu**). A traditional dance of the Ma'dan is known as the *hausa*. It is a type of war dance performed by men in which they dance in a circle holding their rifles over their heads and firing them.

#### 15 WORK

In the marsh villages, Ma'dan traditionally supported themselves by fishing and by hunting wild boars and birds. They also kept small herds of water buffalo, which they used for milk. Some Ma'dan also grew rice. Fish were traditionally caught with a five-pronged spear thrown from the bow of a canoe. A more modern method was to stun them with poisoned bait, usually shrimp, laced with datura (a member of the nightshade family) that would be tossed onto the surface of the water. Only professional fishers, referred to as *berbera*, used nets. In the traditional marsh villages, collecting the grass used as fodder for the water buffalo was a constant chore, usually assigned to young boys. Weaving reed mats for sale in the surrounding towns was a common source of extra income for the Ma'dan.

#### 16 SPORTS

In the marsh villages, hunting was both a necessity for survival and a favorite sport among the Ma'dan.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Ma'dan love to sing and dance and often entertain each other in this way. They also play a game called *mahaibis*, or "hunt the ring." The players divide into two teams. The team that has the ring sits in a row with their hands under a cloak. One member of the other team stands in front of them and tries to guess who has the ring and in which hand. The game often ends in noisy disputes and accusations of cheating.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The most common crafts among the traditional Ma'dan are the building and repairing of canoes, the weaving of reed mats, and blacksmithing. Ma'dan blacksmiths make fishing spears, reed splitters, sickles, and nails for the canoes. Some of the Ma'dan weave cloth. They make woolen cloth that both men and women use for cloaks.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Ma'dan historically have been despised by other Arabs and suffered much abuse in the course of their history. The marshes are a perfect place to hide out, so soldiers and criminals are constantly invading the Ma'dan's territory. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88), many Ma'dan were driven out of

their homes, their few possessions were stolen, and their water buffalo were slaughtered for food by the armies. These practices continued through the 1990s, and much of the Ma'dan way of life has disappeared.

Most Ma'dan are believed to live in lower income Shia communities in Baghdad or have emigrated to Iran, with a few thousand believed to have returned to their traditional homeland. Those Ma'dan who have returned to the marshes lack clean drinking water, sanitation, health care, and nutrition.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The displacement of the Ma'dan from their homeland in the marshes has caused the traditional tribal structure to deteriorate. Little is known about the conditions of Ma'dan women. Nearly 4.2 million Iraqis have fled the war-torn country and an additional 2.2 million have left homelands within the country for cities and urban areas. The Ma'dan are among this group of displaced individuals and, until the situation in Iraq can be stabilized, the survival of both Ma'dan men and women is highly at risk.

Sex roles in many Arab cultures are clearly defined: women manage the household while men tend to affairs outside of the home.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson



# MADURESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** MAHD-oo-reez

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (islands of Madura and Java)

**POPULATION:** 6.8 million (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Madurese

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians; Javanese

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Despite their ancestral island's proximity to Java (at the closest point, only a short ferry ride from the great Javanese port of Surabaya), the Madurese, Indonesia's fourth-largest ethnolinguistic group, have maintained an identity distinct from their neighbors. Although itself of little economic value, Madura's strategic location guarding the approaches to the deltas of Java's greatest rivers, the Brantas and the Bengawan Solo, ensured an intimate involvement in Javanese history. As early as the 15th century, the kingdom of Arosbaya, a vassal of the east Javanese Majapahit court, united Madura's petty states. Arosbaya adopted Islam in 1528; in later years, a reputation for greater devotion and stricter practice to this religion would set the Madurese apart from the Javanese.

In 1624, Sultan Agung of the central Javanese kingdom of Mataram conquered Madura, which by then had fragmented into five principalities. Forty-eight years later, the Madurese prince Trunojoyo returned the favor by revolting against Mataram, getting as far as destroying the latter's capital with the help of Makassar mercenaries. However, the Dutch East India Company put an end to his venture, eventually overseeing a division of the island into two principalities, the western one placed under the Cakraningrat dynasty.

In 1743, eastern Madura passed from the suzerainty of Mataram into the control of the Dutch East India Company. Well into the 19th century, the Madurese rulers served as virtually independent allies of the Dutch; the last portion of the island to come under direct Dutch rule did so in 1885. While the Dutch never subjected the arid island to the Forced Cultivation System, the Madurese rulers contributed to Dutch imperialism by enlisting from among their subjects recruits for Dutch armies fighting elsewhere in the archipelago.

Under direct colonial rule, Madura's welfare continued to decline. A 1918 report indicated that the economy was poor and famine was widespread, and a heavy tax burden compounded these difficulties. In response, the colonial government established a special fund for Madura relief, maintaining it until 1937. Madura suffered under the Japanese occupation of 1942–45 with peculiar severity. The returning Dutch attempted to establish a client state on Madura, but this was integrated into the Indonesian republic in 1950.

In comparison to many other regions of the country, Madura has continued to suffer from economic stagnation, forcing many Madurese to migrate off-island (for the 1997–2001 Madurese-Dayak conflicts in Kalimantan that killed many Madurese transmigrants and displaced many more, see the article entitled **Ngaju Dayak**). There is some evidence that a certain percentage of the younger generation of Madurese resident in East Java are switching over to the Javanese language as their primary language. Other trends affecting Madurese tradi-

tional culture include: modernization, which has brought the lifestyle of well-to-do urban Madurese into conformity with the Jakartan national model; and Islamic reformism, which seeks to bring Madurese life in general into line with orthodox (often Middle Eastern rather than indigenized) Muslim standards. A bridge connecting Surabaya and Bangkalan on Madura is nearing completion (as of 2008) that will accelerate the integration of Madura's western tip into the Surabaya metropolitan area; already only a short ferry ride away, Bangkalan city has been evolving into a commuter suburb and alternate location for industrial and service firms for Indonesia's second largest city (population, approximately 3 million).

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In contrast to much of neighboring Java, the island of Madura offers few areas suitable for the irrigation essential to wet-rice cultivation. Besides depending on rainfall, Madurese farmers must contend with the soil's high calcium content (the island has long been a major source of lime). Because of such limits on agricultural productivity, the island has often failed to sustain its population, many of whom have migrated to the opposite coast of East Java and beyond in search of a livelihood. After the wars of the 17th and 18th centuries decimated the native population of East Java, Madurese (along with Central Javanese) were brought in to repopulate large stretches of it. Already by 1930, there were more Madurese on Java than on Madura itself (2.5 million versus 2 million, respectively). According to the 2000 census, Madurese numbered 6.8 million. 2005 figures put the population of the island of Madura itself at 3.5 million. In many regencies along the north coast of East Java, Madurese are the numerically dominant ethnic group; they constitute 18% of the province's overall population (Javanese are 79%). In addition, Madurese have settled in many of the cities of Java, as well as in transmigrant communities on other islands.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

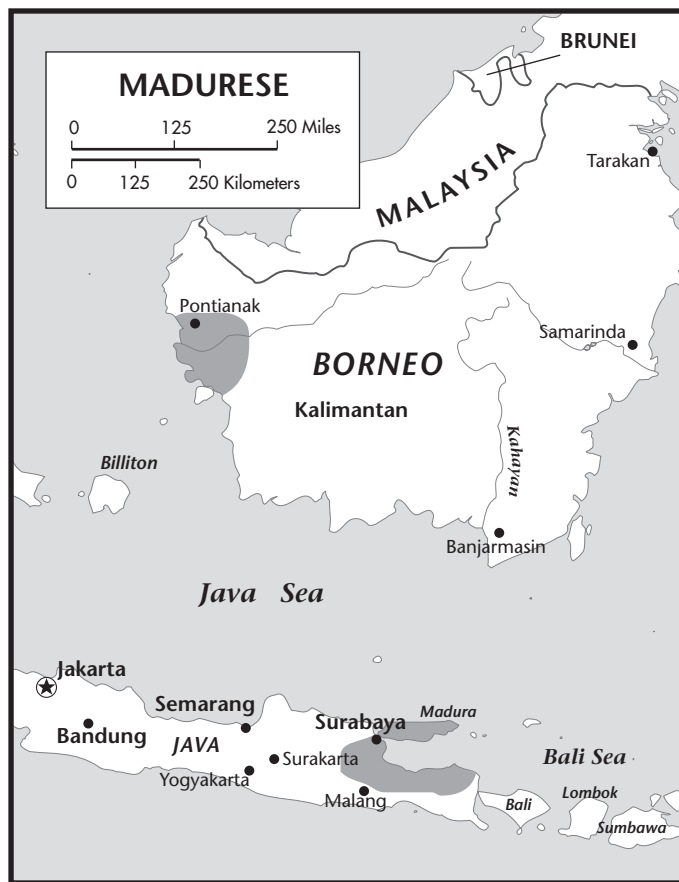
Although closely related to the fellow Austronesian tongues of the Javanese and Sundanese, the Madurese language is far from mutually intelligible with them. It is itself divided into three major dialects, centered respectively from east to west on Bangkalan, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. The language's traditional script, a version of the Javanese, is now in decline in the face of competition from the Latin alphabet used for Bahasa Indonesia. Like Javanese, Madurese possesses three language levels, ranging from the informal (named *Enja'-iya* after the words for "Yes" and "No"), to the polite (*Enghi-enten*), to the highly deferential (*Enghi-bhunten*).

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

First introduced with the conversion of the petty kingdom of Arosbaya in 1528, Islam is central to Madurese life. Indeed, the Madurese as a group pride themselves on adhering to the tenets of Muslim orthodoxy (such as the five daily prayers) more strictly than the Javanese, many of whom practice rituals and profess beliefs more compatible with an earlier animist and Hindu-Buddhist heritage. *Pesantren*, Muslim religious schools



[see **Indonesians**], and *tarekat*, Muslim mystical brotherhoods, enjoy a special prominence. *Kyai*, religious scholars, often combine the role of reformist with that of traditional healer.

Nonetheless, the Madurese retain belief in the power of ancestral beings, ghosts, and other spirits who have the power to harm or help humans. Offerings and ritual feasts are prepared for these supernatural beings to ensure village welfare and a bountiful harvest, to celebrate important Islamic festivals, and to obtain success in upcoming business trips or bull races. Ritual feasts, or *kenduri*, that correspond to the Javanese *slametan* and center on huge cones of rice, are dedicated both to Allah and the ancestors. Only men partake in the feast itself, although a man always takes a portion of the dishes home for his wife and children. Other types of ceremonies include rites requesting rain and honoring the spirits of springs and wells (held annually, with *ojhung*), and those honoring sacred swords (*kris*) or spears, a type of chanting called *gumbek* accompanies weapon veneration.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Important ritual celebrations mark the following life passages: the seventh month of pregnancy, an infant's first contact with the earth (several months after birth), a boy's circumcision, a girl's first menstruation, and the funeral and subsequent commemorative ceremonies. As in other Muslim cultures of Indonesia, a circumcision procedure may also be performed on

girls, ranging from token rubbing of the clitoris to excision in some cases, often combined with their first ear-piercing.

Wedding customs resemble those of the east Javanese, differing for the most part only in terminology. In a first step known as *nyalabar* or *ngembang nyamplong*, the boy or man's family sounds out the possibility of marriage with a prospective girl's or woman's family. Next, the male's family formally asks (*narabas pagar*) whether the female has already been promised to another. If not, the male's parents request the female's hand by offering her food and presents (which for the rich will include jewelry and batik fabric). The engagement is confirmed when the female's family agrees (*balee pagar*). After this, the male's family delivers (*lamaran*, *saseraan*) the bride-price to the female's side; according to tradition, cattle are an indispensable part of the goods to be handed over. Only now can the formal wedding ceremony (*akad nikah*), conducted by a Muslim religious official, take place.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In Madura's old principalities, aristocratic lineage provided a small part of the population with claims to deference and obedience from non-aristocrats. In more recent times, position in the colonial and later national bureaucracy has offered similar status. Concentrated in the towns, this highest class of nobles and civil servants patterns its lifestyle on the Javanese *priyayi* elite [see **Javanese**] (although, in accordance with the general Madurese religious orientation, focusing far less on unorthodox forms of mysticism). Similarly, modern well-to-do townspeople follow the lead of the Jakarta middle and upper classes. Far more significant in the perception of the rural population is the elevation above the "ordinary people" (*golongan biasa*) of the "children of the *kyai*" (*golongan bhindara*, including religious scholars, their students [*santre*], village religious officials (*modin*), and others well-versed in Islam [*orang alem*]). In addition to these religious elite, the group to whom "ordinary people" traditionally owed respect included various village authorities: the *kelebun* or village head; the *carek* or village clerk; and the *apel* or neighborhood (subvillage) head.

The Javanese and Sundanese have long applied certain stereotypes to their Madurese neighbors, which Dutch colonial and Indonesian national governments, academia, and popular media have adopted and perpetuated. These stereotypes portray the Madurese as more energetic and less constrained by etiquette than the Javanese or Sundanese and as more hot-tempered and quick to take offense and exact revenge; for this purpose, all Madurese men are said to carry a weapon, either a *kris*, a *celurit* [sickle], a *calo'* or *wadung* [machete], or a crowbar. On the "positive" side, the Madurese are appreciated as hardworking, particularly in the manual jobs left to them by other ethnic groups.

What can be said without exaggeration is that Madurese prize their personal honor. For instance, a man will not go to a party to which he has not been explicitly invited. In working his fields, a man will not ask the assistance of anyone outside his immediate family. Men will not cooperate with each other before fixing the precise division of labor and terms of compensation. They prefer to use go-betweens in conducting negotiations and will have these go-betweens witness any exchange of money. This sense of personal dignity may account for the aloofness many villagers display towards foreigners (isolation also breeds a certain wariness).



Madurese refugees arrive in Kamal, Indonesia. The Madurese were fleeing violence in Borneo after indigenous Dayaks rampaged the area killing nearly 500 people in early 2001. (AP Images/Charles Dharapak)

An important feature of Madurese life is the *aresan*, a regular gathering in which one of the attendants wins by lot the contents of a pot to which all the others have contributed—eventually, previous winners being excluded one after one, every member of the *aresan* association will have his or her turn to receive the pot. Women often have their own *aresan* clubs, called *diba*.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

The average of the 2005 Human Development Indices (combining measures of income, health, and education) for the four regencies of Madura was 59.25, far below that for Indonesia as a whole (69.6) and East Java as a whole (68.5). In Pamekasan regency, GDP per capita stood at us\$2,065, less than a third of East Java's as a whole (us\$7,046), and Sampang regency's Human Poverty Index was 38.3, almost twice that of East Java's as a whole (21.7). Sampang's level of infant mortality (2000 figures) was 89.55 deaths per 1,000 live births, almost twice East Java's as a whole (47.69) and four times that in Jakarta.

The classification of traditional houses distinguishes between houses consisting of a single room (*slodoran* or *malang are*) and those with more than one room (*sedanan*). Furthermore, traditional houses differ according to roof type: a *gadrim* with a two-ridge roof; a *sekodan* with four central pillars supporting the roof; and a *pacenanan* where the gables pro-

jecting from the two ends of the roof are carved in the shape of serpents, a style of Chinese inspiration. Traditional houses are windowless and oriented either north–south or in the direction of the rising sun.

Influences from outside Madurese tradition include the addition of a porch in front for sleeping and a porch in back for sitting and relaxing. Each household has a room or detached structure for praying. In the 1990s, modern utilities were much less common than on Madura than elsewhere in East Java: only 3.5% of households had access to hygienic water, and 15.8% to electricity.

Villages are laid out in no distinct pattern, houses being clustered together in the middle of fields. In upland areas, one type of village, the *kampung meji*, consists of the houses of 20 families related back to five generations. In Sumenep, another type of settlement, the *tanean lanjeng*, consists of five houses facing a common center and inhabited by kin related back to the third generation. Ownership of land in Madura is individual, although some village land falls under communal possession and is used to support the village headman and his aides.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

For the Madurese, the distinction between kin (*bhala*) and all other people (*oreng*) is a paramount one. Kinship is bilateral, including both paternal and maternal sides, although noble ti-

ties pass exclusively through the male line. Marriage between cousins, which preserves the purity of the lineage, is the preferred match. Solidarity between kin is expressed in one type of extended family, the *koren*, in which the descendants (up to 10 households) of a common great-grandfather occupy a single compound.

Under ideal circumstances, a newly married couple establishes its own household at once; if this is not possible, it is also common for the couple to live with the bride's parents first. According to custom, one of a family's daughters, along with her husband and children, remains in her childhood house to take care of her parents in their old age. Madurese marriages are reputed to end less frequently in divorce than those among the neighboring Javanese and Sundanese.

A family's honor rests heavily on the respectability of its women, something which the family's men will fight to defend. A corollary of this is that men may harass women traveling without male kin escorting them (such as foreign female tourists).

In the old kingdoms, although a woman could not occupy the throne, she could exercise de facto supreme power as the mother or guardian of the heir, particularly if she herself were the daughter of a former ruler.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Women wear a *kebaya* (long-sleeved blouse) and a sarong extending below the knees, along with bracelets and anklets (*bingel*). Men's traditional clothing, generally of dark-colored fabric, consists of: a distinctive headdress (*destar*); an undershirt with horizontal stripes, often red and white; a long-sleeved, collarless overshirt; trousers that end just below the knees; and a wide sash tied around the waist.

### **12 FOOD**

Boiled rice mixed with ground maize is the primary food, supplemented by dried salted fish or side dishes of dried meat and vegetables, all accompanied by chili sauces. Meals are washed down with water or tea (since colonial times, prohibitions have been placed on indulgence in *tuak*, palm wine).

Specialties of the island of Madura include *perkedel jagung* (shrimp and corn fritters), *la'ang* (the regional beverage), *blak-en* (fish paste sold in old handmade jars), yam taffy, and the fruits guava and *salak* (the latter has a dark brown, scaly skin; white, sourish fruit; and a large pit). Famous outside the home island are Madurese chicken dishes, *soto* (a type of soup), and *sate* (barbecued skewers of goat meat, dipped in a mixture of sweet soy sauce and chili before being eaten).

### **13 EDUCATION**

The level of literacy on Madura is low by Indonesian national standards. The average of 2005 figures for literacy for its four regencies stood at 76.19%, considerably lower than that of East Java as a whole (85.84%). One out three people in Sampang was illiterate, a greater proportion than in Papua province where 28.42% was illiterate. According to 1990s figures, elementary school attendance on Madura was at 88.2%, lower than that in southern East Java (whose Madurese-speaking population is not large). See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

With plots also taken from the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, *wayang topeng* resembles the Javanese shadow play in that a single narrator (who is also director and musical conductor) performs all the speaking parts, but it replaces the puppets with masked dancers or actors. *Wayang topeng* has come to be regarded as the consummate symbol of Madurese culture, despite the fact that it has declined in popularity. Much more vital is *loddrok*, an earthier dramatic genre in which the actors are unmasked, speak their own parts, and sing Madurese-language songs (*kejhung*); it often replaces *wayang topeng* as an adjunct to village ceremonies. Yet another type of popular theater is *drama* which combines "Islamic" (Arab-Persian) stories with Indian dance numbers; the performances include women and professional transvestites, and admission is charged.

The Madurese have *gamelan* (percussion) orchestras similar to those of the Javanese, although the instruments are more frequently of iron rather than expensive bronze, and the sole singer is often a female impersonator rather than a woman. *Gamelan* accompany *wayang topeng*, *loddrok*, and *tayub* (in which a single female performer dances for a male audience and invites individual men to dance with her). Another, highly sophisticated performing art is *mamaca* or *macapat*, in which one person sings Javanese-language poetic texts while a second translates them into Madurese for the listeners; it is still heard in the old palaces and at village ceremonies and *aresan* meetings.

Many village occasions, such as the various bull contests, are accompanied by the *kenong telo* ensemble (including a drum; one large, vertically hanging gong; two differing sets of smaller, horizontally lying gongs; a rattle of metal plates on a string; and, most characteristically, the *saronen*, a high-pitched oboe). Substitutes for the *kenong telo* ensemble are the *bak beng* (bamboo instruments) and the *ngik-ngok* (a violin and modified brass instruments). On Ramadan nights, village youths stroll about striking wooden slit-gongs (*tuk-tuk* or *tong-tong*).

Stricter adherents of Islam strongly disapprove of traditional music forms, associating them with "idolatrous" rituals, such as the veneration of *bhujju'*, sacred tombs, or with the "morally corrupt" *wayang topeng* or *loddrok*. On the other hand, a number of genres exist whose greater "respectability" derives from clear Middle Eastern origins. The *haddrah* is a type of male group singing that incorporates Madurese songs and martial arts moves. In mosques, men also perform *saman*, which arrived from Yemen via Aceh in 1902; they dance in formation while chanting with dramatic waves of intensity.

### **15 WORK**

On Madura, the dominant crops are nonirrigated, such as maize. The island is also famous for its fruits and for medicinal plants. In recent years, tobacco has become a prime cash crop; Madura contains one-fifth of Indonesia's land planted with tobacco. Traditional exports included lime and salt (from sea water evaporated in pools on the long, sun-scorched beaches). Given the often meager returns from farming, livestock-raising is essential to the Madurese. Goats, horses, water buffalo, and cattle are raised, with cattle as the major export. Fishing is also very important. Madurese outrigger boats with triangular sails do an active business in shipping, particularly of timber from Kalimantan to Surabaya factories.

Many Madurese work as migrant laborers, working seasonally on East Java's plantations. Many also go far afield to conduct petty commerce, for example, in cattle, tobacco, fruits, and coconut palm sugar. In East Java's cities, others make roof tiles, shovel sand, pedal *becak* pedicabs, work in harbors, or sell Madurese specialties, such as *soto* or *sate* on the street. Some of Madura's excess labor is being absorbed by factories in Bangkalan, which is being developed as an annex to the Surabayan industrial area.

## 16 SPORTS

*Penca' silat* (an Indonesian martial art) is practiced in clubs and for competitions (women participate only as amateurs). One sport, now played in secret, is *ojhung*, in which men duel with rattan sticks. Training homing pigeons is also a popular pastime.

During the dry season (September–October), but also at other times for tourists, bull races (*kerapan sapi*) are held. Only village leaders and other rich peasants can afford to maintain a bull-racing team (a skilled jockey, bull-masseurs, and other personnel, not to mention the animals themselves, which are of the best breed and, unlike draught oxen, are pastured everyday). Elaborately carved wooden yokes, painted in bright red and gold, and other racing equipment are often passed down as family heirlooms. Winning a bull race, especially the island championship, is an intensely coveted honor. Competitors resort to spying or black magic to gain an advantage over opponents, while a full contingent of police is present at the races to suppress any outbreaks of violence.

On the days leading up to a race, specialists feed the bulls a special diet of fresh grass, eggs, coffee, and herbal potions. On the preceding night, the racing team holds an all-night vigil accompanied by continual *gamelan* music. Before the race itself, the *tari pecut* is danced, representing the steps in caring for racing bulls. The race itself involves pairs of bulls drawing sleds and jockeys down a 100-m (328-ft) or more racecourse at as much as 36 km (22 mi) per hour.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Such reading as takes place is of religious works, such as the Qur'an, sung poetry texts, comic books, and booklets of legends (a source for *drama* plots). In comparison with their urban counterparts, rural people listen more frequently to the radio (regional and national music, especially *dangdut* and *pop Indonesia*) and to cassettes of *con-locon* (clown) acts. Villagers watch television at the village head's house or at a *warung* food stall and see movies in outdoor cinemas and traditional performances sponsored by richer fellow villagers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Woodcarving is highly developed, as seen in bull-racing gear and in locally made furniture (beds, screens, chests, cupboards, and cake-keepers showing Chinese and European influence). Madurese batik cloth is in rich, bold reds, red-brown, and indigo and has designs depicting winged serpents, sharks, airborne houses with fish tails, and other fantastical sea animals. It is also customary for women to wear large silver bracelets; black-coral bracelets are another regional specialty, believed to prevent illness and cure rheumatism.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The average Gender-Related Development Index for Madura's four regencies (2002 figures) is 46.43, dramatically lower than that for East Java as a whole (56.3). Gender Empowerment Measures (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) for the four regencies average to 35.9, lower by an even greater proportion than 54.9 for both East Java as a whole and for Indonesia as a whole.

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# MALAYS IN INDONESIA

**PRONUNCIATION:** muh-LAYZ or MAY-layz

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sumatra and its eastern offshore islands; Borneo coast [also outside Indonesia on the Malay Peninsula])

**POPULATION:** 7 million on Sumatra (2000 census). Another estimate runs to over 13 million; the combined total of Malays living in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, and Singapore may be over 25 million.

**LANGUAGE:** Malay

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians; Vol. 4: Malaysian Chinese; Malaysian Indians; Malaysian Malays

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

One possible origin for the term “Malay” (*melayu*) may be a Dravidian (south Indian) expression *mala ur*, “hill people.” It is ironic, therefore, that it should come to refer to a maritime people with a sophisticated urban Islamic tradition (highlanders throughout the archipelago are considered most tenacious in their paganism). Of course, popular usage in English extends Malay’s scope to include all the indigenous inhabitants of Indonesia (other Papuans), Malaysia, and the Philippines, who share, at the very least, Austronesian languages and Southern Mongoloid physical features. This article will focus on the specific ethnic group in western Indonesia known as “Malay.”

Malays have identified, and to a great extent still do identify, more with the diverse small regions (once independent sultanates) to which they are native than with a broader “Malay” ethnicity. For centuries in the archipelago, converting to Islam was known as “*masuk melayu*,” literally “entering Malayness.” Thus, being “Malay” meant sharing in a cosmopolitan culture including as its key ingredients Islam and the maritime lingua franca called *bahasa Melayu*; common ancestry was *not* the decisive factor, as individual Malays might count Batak, Kubu, Javanese, Bugis, and others (as well as Arabs, Indians, Siamese, and Chinese) among their forebears.

According to the latest scholarship, around the time of Christ the ancestors of the Malays and other closely related groups began migrating from Kalimantan to the Sumatra coast, where they absorbed or displaced fellow Austronesian peoples who had settled there centuries before (forerunners of, among others, the Batak). In the early centuries AD, Malay seafarers played the role of the first intermediaries between China on the one hand and India and the Mediterranean on the other. Sumatra itself was famous as Suvarnadvipa (the “Gold Island”) and as the source of camphor and other exotic items. As early as the 5th century, various Sumatran port-kingdoms enjoyed relations with China.

By the late 7th century, one of these states came to overshadow all others and would establish the tradition around which a Malay identity would grow. Centered near the present-day city of Palembang in south Sumatra, the kingdom of Srivijaya dominated the Straits of Malacca region until its decline in the 11th century (partly due to a devastating attack from the south Indian Chola state). In its heyday, Srivijaya was legendary as a center of international trade and of Buddhism.

After shifting to the rival state of Malayu (modern Jambi), leadership of the Malay world came to rest in Malacca on the west coast of the Malay peninsula, founded by a refugee prince from Palembang in 1400. Like Srivijaya, Malacca controlled traffic through the Straits and promoted a universal religion, though it was Islam which it, most successfully, propagated. Meanwhile, Palembang itself became first an enclave of Chinese pirates and then the home of a highly Javanized version of Malay culture.

The Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1509 encouraged the rise throughout the region of small sultanates, often founded by Bugis, Minangkabau, and Arab adventurers, and prospering on the pepper trade until the mid-17th century (first linguistically non-Malay Aceh and then Riau-Johor inherited Malacca’s leadership of the Malay world to a certain extent). In the 18th century, Dutch, British, and even French maritime power began to limit the freedom of the Malay states. In the early 19th century, British and Dutch colonialism split the Malay world into Malayan and a Sumatran halves, a division with cultural consequences that persist to this day despite renewed post-colonial interchange and participation in a common regional economy centered on Singapore, the present-day successor of Srivijaya and Malacca.

Along the east coast of Sumatra by the late 19th century, a flourishing plantation economy (tobacco and rubber) developed under Dutch rule, the product of collaboration between European capitalists and Malay sultans—and thousands upon thousands of Chinese and Javanese coolies. This region experienced considerable upheaval during the Indonesian struggle for independence, which included violence against the native aristocracy, one victim of which was prince Amir Hamzah, the greatest poet in Bahasa Indonesia in the 1930s and 1940s. Since that time, Sumatra’s east coast and adjacent islands have experienced rapid development, fueled by oil and tin wealth as well as proximity to Singapore and Malaysia.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the 2000 census, Malays (self-identifying as such) were Indonesia’s third largest ethnic group, constituting 3.4% of the population and numbering almost 7 million. Indonesia’s Malays lived primarily on Sumatra in the provinces of North Sumatra (east coast), Riau (islands and mainland, where they equaled 38% of the population according to the 2000 census), Jambi (38%), South Sumatra (31%), Bangka-Belitung (72%), and Bengkulu; the interior of these provinces is largely inhabited by non-Malays, such as the Kubu and the Rejang. In the coastal regions, non-Malays are also numerous, especially Javanese transmigrants. Figures from the 1990s estimated the number there to be as high as 13 million, obviously based on different criteria than the 2000 census.

In addition, Malays inhabit the Malay Peninsula as well as communities along the Borneo coast (Indonesian Kalimantan, Malaysian Sarawak and Sabah, and Brunei). Half of Malaysia’s 2006 population of 26.6 million, or about 13.3 million, was Malay, while Pattani and three other provinces in southern Thailand were over 80% Malay. A 1998 estimate put the number of speakers of the Pattani Malay dialect at 3.1 million.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Malay is most closely related to Minangkabau, Iban (the “Sea Dayak” of Borneo), and Acehnese, less closely to Sundanese,



Madurese, and Javanese. It is spoken in several divergent dialects; the dialect of Riau-Johor, considered a direct legacy of the Malacca sultanate, is esteemed as the “purest” or “finest” Malay and has become the basis of the official languages of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and (after English and Mandarin Chinese) of Singapore. The Malay spoken in Sumatra differs from that of Malaya in employing Dutch rather than English loanwords, and it lacks the Javanese and other influences characteristic of the Malay spoken in Jakarta and the cities of Java that is so influential on modern colloquial and written Indonesian.

Long before European colonialism, one could make oneself understood throughout maritime southeast Asia, and as far away as ports in south China and Persia, in Malay. In its own right and as a vehicle for Sanskrit, Arabic, and Portuguese loanwords, Malay has had a profound impact on languages throughout Indonesia and the Philippines.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Though weaker today under the pressure of modernist Islam, belief in spirits is still widespread. Every spot has its *penunggu* (guardian spirit), *hantu* (ghost), or *jembalang* (gnome). *Penunggu* inhabit graves, houses, or trees, and protect a village from other “outsider” spirits; they manifest themselves as a *harimau tengkis*, a tiger with one short leg. *Puako* (spirits) occupy specific places, such as river mouths, deep spots in streams, or certain parts of the sea; they may appear in animal form as a white crocodile, a snake, or a *gajah meno* (an aquatic elephant).

Upon entering a spirit’s “territory,” one asks permission of the spirit, saying “*Tabek datuk nenek, cucu menumpang lalu*” (literally, “Hello, honored grandparent, your grandchild is passing through”). Offending spirits cause illness (referred to as *ketegow* [*ketegoran*], a “warning”). One asks pardon through making an *ancak*, a basket full of offerings (eggs, turmeric rice, grilled chicken, cigarettes, etc.—as the spirit has requested through a *bomo*); one places this in a tree (for a forest spirit) or floats it on the water (for a water spirit). More orthodox Muslims distinguish *jin* (good spirits) from *setan* (devils), and instead of uttering “*Tabik*” declare in Arabic, “*A’uu zubi’llahi nibasy-syaitoni rrajim*” (“I am under the protection of Allah from cursed devils”).

The power of magic is widely recognized. Amulets (*azimat*) are worn, such as a piece of iron (*tangkal*) hung from a necklace or wristband (children) or worn as a hairpin (women). Weapons, thrones, and banyan trees, and individuals, such as sultans or *ulama* (religious scholars), possess mystical power. For instance, a curse will befall those disloyal to the sultan; only confessing the disloyalty to the sultan and begging him for forgiveness will lift the curse. People ask the aid of the spirits of powerful individuals, visiting their graves and vowing to sacrifice a goat or chicken upon realization of the wish.

#### 5 RELIGION

Islam has been integral to the Malay identity since at least the 14th century, if not as early as the 12th; as such it enters into every aspect of the culture [see **Malaysian Malays**]. Although it is regarded as virtual “idolatry,” *bomo* (shamans) are still known to invoke the Hindu Batara Guru and other figures, not as gods but as powerful supernatural beings.

The chanting of Islamic texts, such as the Quran and the *Barzanji* (tales of the life of Muhammad), often accompanied by the playing of tambourines (*rebana*, *berdah*, or *k[er]lompong*), accompanies ceremonies, such as circumcisions and weddings. At seven years of age, children begin to learn how to read the Quran, mastering the proper pronunciation, emphasis, rhythm, and tone; however, they usually do not understand what they are reading word for word. This is a prized skill, and especially expert readers compete in regional and national contests (*Mushabaqah Tiliwatil Qur’an*) that are televised with “pre-game/intermission shows” of folk dances of an “Islamic spirit” (*bernafaskan Islam*).

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

To ensure a successful delivery, a ceremony (*tolak due* in Riau, *nuak* in Jambi) is held in the seventh month of the pregnancy. As soon as the child is born, prayers are said over it (*azan* for a boy and *qamat* for a girl; a drop of honey is dabbed on the girl’s tongue, so she will grow up with a personality sweet in its virtue). The placenta is wrapped in a white cloth, placed in a small basket, and buried in the backyard. Some days later, a name-giving ceremony occurs, including the child’s first haircut and the sacrifice of two goats for a boy and one goat for a girl. At three months of age, the child is made to step on the earth for the first time in a *turun tanah* ceremony (for girls, the first ear-piercing precedes this). As their passage to adulthood, boys undergo circumcision (*sunat rasul* or *khitanan*) after learning the

skills of reciting the complete Quran, performing *silat* (martial arts), and dancing the *zapin*.

Getting married involves the following steps. The young man's side (parents usually do the choosing) makes an initial inquiry into the availability of the young woman. If the woman's side signals its openness to an offer, the man's family sends its *sesepuh*, the most senior kinsman and his wife, to deliver the proposal; they bring betel-chewing paraphernalia and use poetic language. The next step is for the man's kin to present the agreed-upon wedding goods to the woman's house. As a sign of the formalization of the engagement, the palms and soles of the betrothed are reddened with henna (*inai*).

In the evening, the *akad nikah* (Islamic wedding ceremony) is held, led by an *ulama*; an odd number (3–11) of relatives line up to bless the couple with a dab of a special flour mixture. On the next afternoon, a procession takes the groom to the bride's house to the playing of *rebana* and the performing of *silat*. The bride's kin greet the groom's group by showering them with yellow-dyed raw rice; the two sides go back and forth declaiming *pantun* (structured poems) to each other. Once on the ceremonial dais (*pelaminan*), the couple enacts a ritual of mutual feeding (*suap-menyuap*); in Riau, they must refuse to eat food from each other's hands as a sign of self-respect. Later, the couple bows before their parents and asks for their blessing. With this, the wedding feast can begin.

Funerals follow the general Islamic form [see **Indonesians**]. Post-funeral prayers (*tahlil*) are held for three days after the burial and on the seventh, twentieth, fortieth, and hundredth day after the death.

## **8** INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Originally, a village was composed of people of the same lineage (*suku*), but, as outsiders have come to settle there, the bond of a common living place has taken precedence over lineage ties. These communities are small, such that everyone knows each other well and works together in daily activities, e.g., helps each other in emergencies or in holding each other's major celebrations. Villagers are careful to "weigh" each other's feelings (*timbang rasa*) and appeal to the *imam* or *penghulu* to resolve conflicts quickly. Each individual's internal sense of shame (self-respect, or personal and familial face), rather than external coercion, maintains social harmony. A person endeavors to avoid being marked as a person "who does not know custom," i.e., who offends by appearance, word, and action.

Community leadership includes a *penghulu*, a village head, now selected according to government regulations from among the heads of the various *suku*. An *imam* serves as the head of the mosque; leader of Qur'an recitation and religious education; authority in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance; and collector of the tithe (*zakat*). A *datuk* is a *suku* head who has become a territorial chief with power over other *suku* heads.

Since Indonesian independence, social relations have been democratized, with personality, position, and material situation carrying more weight than hereditary rank alone. In the kingdom of Siak (Riau mainland), society was traditionally divided into four classes: the sultan (or *raja*) and his consorts; descendants of the present or former *rajas*: the "good people" (*orang baik-baik*), the heads of prominent *suku*; and commoners. Using Javanese terms, such as *priyayi* (aristocrat), Palembang society distinguished the following upper strata: the

*Raden* (men)/*Raden Ayu* (women), descendants of royal consorts; *Mas Agus/Mas Ayu*, descendants of royal concubines; *Kemas/Nyimas*, descendants of (perhaps less-favored) royal concubines; and *Ki[ai]agus/Nyiayu*, the *ulama* or religious scholars.

## **9** LIVING CONDITIONS

Houses are raised on posts, and their walls are made of wooden planks, their roofs of dried leaves or shingles; the exact plan differs from region to region. In Riau, two kinds are known: the *rumah melintang* or *rumah bubungan Melayu*, with a rectangular plan and a long ridgepole; and the *rumah limas*, with a square plan and a short ridgepole (the four sides of the roof slant towards the top). In the front, often at a lower level than the floor of the main part of the house, is a *selaso*, a veranda that may be enclosed with a low wall of sago palm latticework. A kitchen structure stands behind the main house, connected to it by an intervening chamber (*telo*).

Aristocratic houses in Jambi and Palembang are basically similar but divide into several specialized chambers. At the front of the house is the *jogan*, a veranda where the family relaxes. From front to back, the rooms of a Jambi house have the following respective functions: an area for receiving male guests; the sleeping area for family's older boys; a room for newlyweds; the sleeping room for the family's older girls; and an area for receiving female guests. The interior of a Palembang house divides into sleeping areas for: young male kin who come to help with celebrations; middle-age guests; and older and highly respected guests. The kitchen is at the back. Houses built on stilts over the water are a common sight, for instance, along Palembang's Musi River or at Medan's Belawan port.

In 2005, the provinces with substantial Malay populations had higher Human Development Indices (combining measures of income, health, and education) than Indonesia's national score of 69.6: Riau's, the third highest in the country (after Jakarta and North Sulawesi) was 73.6, the Riau Islands' 72.2, Jambi's 71, Bangka-Belitung 70.7, and South Sumatra's 70.2 (all higher than Java's provinces and Bali). GDP's per capita (even subtracting income from petroleum and natural gas from GDP, important for Riau, Jambi, and South Sumatra) are very high by national standards: us\$29,348 for the Riau Islands, us\$6,982 for Jambi, us\$7,774 for South Sumatra, us\$12,234 for Bangka-Belitung, and us\$17,264 for Riau. Infant mortality rates (2002), however, were not particularly low: 47.66 deaths per 1,000 live births in Riau (islands and mainland) and 52.66 in each of the other three provinces (cf. 35.72 in Bali and 43.69 in Central Java).

## **10** FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family (*kelamin*) is the basic unit of Malay society, consisting of a husband, a wife, and their unmarried children. Polygamy is permissible under Islam (up to four wives) but it is rare. Newlyweds may live for a time with the bride's parents before establishing their own house nearby. While in the parents' house, the couple obeys the father and contributes their labor or earnings to the larger household. Kinship is reckoned on both the mother's and father's sides, though the male line transmits noble titles. The inhabitants of a village or of neighboring villages may belong to a single clan (*suku*), but these connections have generally lost importance for Malays.



Terms of address distinguish birth order among siblings. In Riau, these are: *long* (from *sulung*, the first-born); *ngah* (*ten-gah*, second); *cik* (*kecik*, third or fourth); *cu* or *ucu* (*bungsu*, the youngest); even an only child is specified, as *nggal* (*tung-gal*, single). These terms also apply to siblings of grandparents (*datuk*) and of parents (*ayah/bapak*, father; and *emak*, mother); thus, the eldest granduncle (or grand-aunt) is called *tuk long*, the second-oldest uncle *yah ngah* or *pak ngah*, and the youngest aunt *mak cu*. In Palembang, the terminology differs: *kak-cak* is the eldest sibling; *kakcek*, the second-born; *kakcik*, third and younger. Uncles (*mamang*) and aunts (*bibi*) are specified as *mangcak*, *mangcek*, *mangcik*, *bicak*, *bicek*, and *bicik*.

Although interactions between elder and younger kin should not be stiff, respect for the former must be palpable; relations between in-laws tend, however, to be rather formal. On the major religious holidays, one pays visits to one's elders and (for the nobility) those kin of higher-ranking lineages. One should always seek the guidance of one's parents; otherwise, one earns a reputation for arrogance. During ritual celebrations, a son-in-law must show his submission to his parents-in-law by obeying any command, however great or small.

### **11 CLOTHING**

For everyday use, men wear pants and a long-sleeved shirt (*baju kurung*, sometimes with a high collar, in which case it is called *cekak musang* or *teluk belanga*); over the pants, with or without the *baju* tucked in, a cloth can be tied around the waist, extending down to the knee. Nowadays men wear a *peci* cap instead of the traditional turban-like headcloth, and Arab-style sandals.

Women wear a long *kebaya* or *baju kurung*, a sarong, a veil, and slippers (or go barefoot). Although Indian fabrics were once popular, now sarongs are made of plaid cloth in Bugis (Sulawesi), Trengganu (Malaya), and Samarinda (Kalimantan) patterns.

Ceremonial clothing for women differs only in the materials: sarongs of silk, decorated with motifs (such as flowers) in gold thread or gold leaf; and *baju* of satin. Men's attire is similar, though the predominant color is black; an additional cloth worn over one side of the torso (*kain samping*) must be of a color contrasting with the other pieces (to wear clothes all of one color, especially yellow, is the privilege of royalty). In addition, men wear a headdress, the style depending on rank, and shoes or sandals.

### **12 FOOD**

Rice is the heart of the meal, accompanied by fish, vegetables, and *sambal* (chili sauce). The fish may be stewed with coconut milk, chili, and spices to make a curry, or boiled with chili and tamarind or most simply coked with salt and garlic; it may also be fried or grilled. Vegetables (amaranth, eggplant, string beans, and squash) are boiled with *terasi* (shrimp paste) or salt fish for flavor. The ubiquitous condiment is *sambal terasi*, red or green chili ground with salt and mixed with roasted *terasi* and tamarind or some other souring agent. Breakfast consists of boiled cassava or sweet potato, eaten with grated coconut and sugar or salt fish and *sambal*.

Foods for special occasions include *lempok* and *emping* [see **Banjarese** *dodol* and *amping*] as well as *wajik*, black sticky rice cooked with coconut milk or palm sugar until dry, then cut into parallelogram shapes. *Asidah* is wheat flour mixed with

water, spices, and sugar, cooked until thick, formed into flower or *candi* (Hindu temple) shapes, and finally bathed in cooking oil and sprinkled with fried garlic. *Roti canai* is Indian-style fried flat bread, eaten with meat or chicken curries. *Nasi minyak* resembles Indian *biryani* rice.

The food of Medan is particularly rich in Indian- and Arab-influenced dishes that use dried seeds and aromatic spices, e.g., the not-very-pungent yet rich goat curries, *gulai kumah* and *gulai bagar*. Specialties of Palembang include: *empek-empek*, fish dumplings (sometimes stuffed with egg), served with a spicy sauce of chili, garlic, dried shrimp, palm sugar, soy sauce, and vinegar; and the local *kerupuk* (fried tapioca crackers flavored with seafood and spices), renowned because of its higher-than-average proportion of fish or shrimp. Palembang drinks include ginger tea, fruit juices, and *air rebusan kumis kucing* (literally, "water boiled with a cat's whiskers"), a diuretic.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005, the level of literacy for provinces with substantial Malay populations was high by Indonesian national standards, standing at 94.54% for Jambi, 95.44% for Bangka-Belitung, 95.63% for South Sumatra, 95.97% for the Riau Islands, and 97.76% for Riau (cf. 87.41% for Central Java and 78.79 for West Nusa Tenggara). (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

As with other aspects of Malay culture, musical traditions reflect ties to the Middle East and Islamized India. The *rebana* (tambourine) is a prominent instrument; a group of rebana players usually accompany various forms of chanting and dancing. In addition, there is a tradition of popular song (*lagu Melayu*) inspired by Arab and Indian models; in a modernized version (*orkes*, "orchestra"), influenced by Indian film music and employing Western instruments, such as the saxophone and accordion, *lagu Melayu* became the basis of the nationally popular *dangdut* [see **Indonesians**].

Malays perform numerous folk dances, the function of many of which is to greet guests. Traditional celebrations include *joget* (also called *ronggeng*): the original form begins with a single female singer-dancer (or several) performing in front of a group of men; if a man wants to dance with a woman, he must pay—this has evolved into a couple dance for young people. Another dance form accompanying rite of passage celebrations is *zapin*, a pair or pairs (formerly only men but nowadays also women and male-female couples) dancing to the accompaniment of the *gambus* (an Arab lute-like instrument), two-headed drums (*marwas*, plural *marawis*), and sometimes violins or accordions. Also popular is *zikir*, in which the performers combine unison chanting of praise to Allah with dynamic arm movements while seated. Until the mid-20th century, several forms of sung theater, some highly eclectic (combining Malay, Javanese, Indian, Middle Eastern, Indian, and Western influences) were popular in the Malay world: *mak yong*, *mendu*, *bangsawan*, and *stamboel*.

While the writings of Hindu-Buddhist Srivijaya have been lost, victims of the tropical climate, the rich literature of the later Islamic courtly tradition has been transmitted down to our time, in manuscripts that have been copied and recopied (and reworked) over the generations. These include verse chronicles of a semi-legendary character, such as the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, the *Sejarah Melayu*, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*,

and the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*. The last great center of classical Malay literary production was the Riau island of Penyengat in the 19th century. The majority of Malays has, however, until very recently been illiterate; memorizing and improvising rhymed poetry in the short *pantun* and *syair* forms is still a common skill.

### **15 WORK**

Living in a region dominated by thick forests and swamplands, Indonesia's Malays have traditionally depended more on the sea than on the land for their livelihood, either as fishers or as traders. In the limited areas where it is feasible, they have also practiced wet-rice as well as swidden (shifting-cultivation) farming. Since the 19th century, the region has become known for plantation crops in high world demand such as tobacco and rubber, as well as for petroleum and tin (the latter has been mined since ancient times). The huge work force required by these enterprises has not for the most part been derived from the local Malays, but rather from Chinese and Javanese immigrants.

### **16 SPORTS**

Malays have long practiced their own form of martial art, called *silat*; it is characterized by graceful arm movements (reminiscent of kung fu or t'ai chi) that lend themselves easily to performance as dance.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Spinning tops (*gasing*) is a popular pastime among males of all ages. A game begins with five or six players spinning their tops simultaneously; the player whose top stops spinning first becomes the lowest "slave," the next one to fall becomes the next higher "slave," and so on until the last, who is then named "king." In the next stage, only a player and the next-higher-ranking player spin their tops at a time; the lower-ranking attempts to strike his superior's top with his own, in which case the former gets promoted and the latter demoted.

See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The most developed crafts are woodcarving (motifs decorate a house's pillars and walls) and weaving *songket* (cloth into which dense designs have been woven with gold thread).

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

One of the provinces with a substantial Malay population, Riau (including the now separate province of the Riau Islands) was among the provinces experiencing the highest occurrence of collective violence in Indonesia between 1990 and 2004: 100 people died in 165 incidents (cf. West Java with over 11 times the population but only 5 times the number of incidents). Most of the incidents involved intra-village brawling, often provoked by land-grabbing; a few were instances of vigilantes exercising "popular justice." One anomalous incident was the major riot that broke out due to a gambling dispute in the town of Selat Panjang in 2001: many Chinese houses were burned, 16 Chinese were killed, and hundreds of Chinese fled to a nearby island; except for this case, all anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia between 1990 and 2004 was confined to 1997–1998 (see also the article entitled **Indonesians**).

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In 2002, despite very high GDP's per capita, the provinces with substantial Malay populations had lower Gender-Related Development Indices (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) than Indonesia's national score of 59.2: Bangka-Belitung was 59.2, Riau's 56.9, South Sumatra's 55.5 and Jambi's 53.3 (all lower than North Sulawesi, Bali, Central Java, and Central Kalimantan). Gender Empowerment Measures (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) were quite low by national standards: 46.8 for Jambi, 40.4 for Riau, and 38.9 for Bangka-Belitung—only South Sumatra's, 56.9, was higher than the national GEM (54.6).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# MALAYSIAN CHINESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** muh-LAY-zhun chigh-NEEZ

**LOCATION:** Malaysia

**POPULATION:** 5.4 million (in 2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Malay; Chinese; Tamil; English

**RELIGION:** Buddhism; Islam; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Ethnically known as Orang Cina or Kaum Cina in Malaysia, the Malaysian Chinese are the descendants of Chinese who arrived between the 14th and mid-20th centuries. The first wave of Chinese emigrants in the 14th century were mostly merchants, who were partly attracted to the economic potential of the country and partly fleeing from the persecution of the Ching government of Chung Kuok (China). The latter waves were mostly poverty-stricken peasants who hoped for a better livelihood for themselves and their families.

It was only in the 19th century, particularly after the 1820s, that a great number of Chinese migrated to Malaya. This was due to colonial occupation, which caused rapid economic and land development in the region. This development included the opening up of large tracts of land, which created opportunities for mercantile expansion, which in turn attracted emigrants from China. Most of these emigrants were from rural villages and small towns of the southeastern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. Upon arrival in Malaya many worked as indentured laborers known as coolies.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In 2000 it was estimated that there were about 5.4 million Chinese in Malaysia, making up 30% of the entire population. The Malaysian Chinese are made up of eight dialect groups which include Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochew, Mandarin, Hainanese, Min Bei, and Foochow.

DIALECT	POPULATION
Hokkien	1,848,211
Hakka	1,679,027
Cantonese	1,355,541
Teochew	974,573
Mandarin	958,467
Hainanese	380,781
Min Bei	373,337
Foochow	249,413

Most Malaysian Chinese live in urban areas, dominating the commercial and business areas of the country. A large number also live in areas called *kampung baru* (new villages). These "new villages" were set up by the government during the Communist insurgency in the 1940s and 1950s in order to keep the Chinese community from getting involved with any subversive movements by the Communists against the government.

Nowadays, the Chinese form the majority of the population in almost all cities and towns throughout Malaysia such as Georgetown, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Petaling Jaya, and Klang. Most of them are found on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, the most urbanized part of the country, as well as in the major cities and towns of Sabah and Sarawak.



## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Even though Malay is the national and official language of Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil, and English are also widely spoken. Mandarin is taught in Chinese schools in Malaysia (along with Malay and English). Since most of their ancestors were from southern China, Malaysian Chinese speak Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka dialects, which are very similar to each other. Other dialects include Teochiu, Hainanese, Hokchui, and Hinghwa. With this many Chinese in Malaysia are trilingual, speaking and writing in Malay, English, and at least one of the Chinese dialects.

A Chinese name consists of three parts: the family name, the generation name, and the personal name. In contrast with the Western manner of putting the Christian name first, the middle name second, and the surname last, the Chinese put the family name first, the generation name next, and the personal name last. An example of a Chinese name is Foo Sing Choong. However, there are a few Chinese names that consist of only two parts; for example, Chin Peng. In either case, the first part is the family name. Western-educated or Christian Chinese usually add a Christian name to their names. As a result, some of their names consist of four parts; for example, Alex Goh Cheng Leong.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The Chinese have many folk tales and myths. Some of these myths and tales reveal their view of the world, such as their myth of the creation of the universe and the origin of humankind. According to this myth, heaven and earth were created

by *Pan'gu*, the origin man. The existence of humans is made possible by the complementary nature of two opposites: heaven and earth, or *yang* and *yin*. Besides that, the harmony of three—heaven, earth, and humans—makes the fixation of the four cardinal directions possible. Once these four directions are defined, life forms and inanimate objects are derived from the five basic elements of *wuxing*: water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. The ethereal force of the sun and the moon is required to regulate these elements in harmony. It is the true harnessing of elements, and forces of nature, that enables humankind to flourish to the eight polar points, which are only limited by the boundaries of the nine heavens and the 10 hells. The birth of the Chinese cosmos, and with it the subsequent idea and formulation of the soul, are based on this elementary arithmetic.

## 5 RELIGION

A small percentage (9.6%) of Chinese in Malaysia are Christian, while most are Buddhist and Taoist. Some, (0.7%), have converted to Islam through marriages with Malay Muslims. Although Buddhism originated in India, and early Malays in Malaysia were Buddhist, the Buddhism practiced in Malaysia today was brought by the Chinese who migrated to Malaysia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Once in a new environment, the immigrants adopted a practical approach to religion, embracing pragmatic aspects of Buddhism, Taoism, and ancestor worship. Although the religion was rooted in Chinese tradition, once transplanted it was adapted to the current needs of the immigrants.

By the turn of the 20th century, Buddhist temples in Malaysia had increased in number to cater to the moral needs of the population. Most of these temples today promote a “folk version” of Buddhism, peopled by a multitude of gods and goddesses. These temples are concerned with putting forward the views of special Buddhist scriptures, which are connected with an individual’s salvation. Special problems and requests may be brought before the deities by presenting them with joss sticks, flowers, or fruits. Devotees at Chinese temples usually burn incense to give thanks and to ask for blessings. There are times when wealthy persons may bequeath some of their estate for the upkeep of an old temple or the endowment of a new one. This will help ensure the donor’s blessings in the afterlife and perpetuates her or his descendants’ prosperity.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Chinese New Year begins on the first day of the lunar calendar and falls anywhere between January 21 and February 19. It is one of the major holidays in Malaysia when schools and offices are closed for two days. The celebrations may go on for 30 days, starting two weeks before New Year’s Eve. It is the most joyous time for the Chinese, a time of new beginning. It is celebrated with feasts, fun, gambling, lion dances, lighting of firecrackers, and “Open House” [see **Malays**]. Friends and relatives visit each other to eat, drink, and wish each other good luck and prosperity during the “Open House.” This is usually done on the first, second, and fourth days of the celebration.

Besides being a time for family reunions, Chinese New Year is a time when one’s debts are paid up, new clothes and shoes are worn, the entire house is cleaned and renewed, and old arguments are forgotten and peace is restored between family and friends. It is also a time to pay one’s respects to the elders and to worship the gods and ancestors. Children pay respect to

their elders and are given *ang pows* (“red packets”) containing money. Various festivities go on until the 15th day, *chap go mei*, at which the time Chinese New Year officially ends. The family will get together again for another reunion dinner. On this day, many unmarried women used to throw oranges into the sea or rivers as prayers to get a good husband. However, this is becoming a very rare practice among the Chinese community today. Besides Chinese-based holidays, Malaysian Chinese also consider other Festivals of Malaysia as major holidays. The list includes New Year’s Day, Hari Raya Puasa or Hari Raya Aidil Fitri (end of Ramadan), Thaipusam (celebrated by Hindus on the 10th month of the Hindu calendar), Chinese New Year (celebrated over 15 days beginning on the first day of Chinese Lunar Calendar), Wesak Day, Gawai Dayak (harvest festival), Deepavali, and Christmas.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past, women gave birth at home with the help of a midwife, whereas today the majority of women give birth in hospitals with the help of a gynecologist. During her confinement, a young mother is prohibited from eating “cold” food such as fruits. Instead, she is encouraged to eat “warm” food, particularly *kachang ma*, a chicken soup stewed in distilled rice-wine and herbs.

The most important occasion on the birth of a baby is the “first-month” celebration. Friends and relatives are invited to celebrate the occasion. A variety of food is served in abundance, and hard-boiled eggs with red-stained shells are distributed. Gifts are given to the baby during this occasion. However, this celebration is only of great importance for the first son and the first daughter. Subsequent children will have some ritual celebration, but not the elaborate affair accorded to the first-born. In the past, at this celebration, the child’s hair was ritually cut off and kept in a jar along with the dried umbilical cord. This was ritually used to stop fights between the child and his or her other siblings.

During their childhood, Chinese children are expected to help their parents at work. Many boys can be found helping their parents in the shops or working on the farms, while girls help their mothers with household chores or take care of younger siblings.

Unlike the Malays and Indians, the Malaysian Chinese do not have a tradition of puberty rituals. Even though dating was never part of their cultural tradition, it is becoming a common practice among the Chinese community in Malaysia. The young people are influenced by practices they see on television, in movies, and in the magazines and novels they read. A Chinese girl starts dating when she is 17 or 18 years old and gets married at least by the age of 24, while a boy would be a few years older. A married man and woman are automatically considered adults and are expected to act accordingly. Since Malaysia does not operate on a welfare system, the children of elderly parents are expected to take care of them until they pass away.

Death among the Chinese is marked by lengthy, colorful, and traditional ceremonies. A departed relative is sent off by his or her relatives with full ceremonial honors, partly to prevent the deceased from coming back to haunt them, and partly to “save face,” that is, to prevent people from talking negatively about the ceremony. Therefore, death is sometimes an expensive affair that can run into thousands of dollars. Funerals are



*A Malaysian Chinese father with his baby visits a shop for colorful Chinese New Year decorations. For decades, Chinese in Malaysia have silently endured government policies giving the country's majority ethnic Malays preference in education and politics. (AP Images/Howe GOH, File)*

sometimes held at home in large open spaces, or in funeral parlors.

The body of a deceased person is ceremonially washed, usually by the eldest son, before being dressed in an odd number of suits of clothing and laid in a coffin. This is followed by an elaborate ritual observation. It is important that the coffin is placed in a prominent position in the house, surrounded by the deceased's favorite possessions and refreshments. Candles are kept burning throughout the period so that the spirit of the deceased can view the surroundings. Offerings, incense, and paper money may be burnt close by. The coffin is never left unattended throughout this period. Relatives are expected to donate money for the occasion in odd denominations of RM10, RM30, or RM50, and never in multiples of RM20.

On the morning of the funeral, mourners come together for one last gathering. Sometimes stilt-dancers may perform before the coffin is taken to the graveyard. The funeral procession leaves the house at a predetermined time, often 2:00 PM. The hearse, usually a truck, is driven slowly from the house. The chief mourner and other relatives of the deceased follow the hearse on foot. Immediate members of the family dress up in shapeless garments of unbleached calico, indigo, or black cotton. Colorful attire and jewelry are unsuitable even for friends

who come to visit. This procession is preceded by trucks carrying banners and wreaths of condolence from associations or sympathizers, the local drums and gongs ensemble, and sometimes also by one or more brass bands. Therefore, a funeral procession can sometimes be heard from quite a distance. Funeral processions of prominent Chinese can be very elaborate and may last a long time.

After the funeral, the family continues to mourn the deceased by wearing black patches or black armbands with their somber clothes. Prayers are read every evening by Buddhist monks until the seventh day after the death. On a set day, the family visits the graveyard bringing a grand house, a car, some temple money, servants, a TV set, and a video player, all made from paper, to be burned at the graveyard for the deceased to receive and use in the other world. Usually the family is in mourning for 100 days.

## **<sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Chinese normally greet each other with "Have you eaten your fill?" or "Have you taken your food?" The response is always "Yes, thank you," even if one is starving. This greeting is similar to the Western "How are you?" "Fine, thank you." In business a polite Chinese will say, "Is your business prosperous?" The response will be, "My business is moderate."

Unlike the Malays and Indians, shaking hands as a form of greeting between a man and a woman is acceptable among the Chinese. Chinese men often greet each other with a friendly pat on the arm, while hugging or kissing is prohibited except in a close relationship.

Even though the Chinese do not have religious restrictions about wearing shoes in homes, it is considered inconsiderate to wear shoes in the house. This is because they may mar or soil the floor. Chinese usually entertain their guests in the living room and seldom show the entire house, particularly the bedrooms. Even family members do not enter each other's rooms without permission. It is proper to bring gifts such as fruit, sweets, or cakes on the third and fourth visit. However, gifts should always be given in an even number, as this is a sign of happiness and good luck.

A Chinese girl does not date until she is about 17 or 18 years old, and a boy would be a few years older. Even though it is not part of their tradition, dating as understood in the West is becoming very common among the Chinese, as compared to the Malay Muslims. One of the reasons is that most Chinese live in urban areas that make them more liberal.

## **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

The Malaysian Chinese populate most of the urban areas in the country. This is because most of them are traders and businesspeople who are very much involved in the commercial and professional sectors. In fact, they are considered the richest ethnic group in Malaysia, possessing 40.9% of Malaysia's total wealth.

Many Chinese in urban areas live in shop houses: the second floor is the living quarter, while the first floor is for business. In recent years an increasing number live in housing estates or suburban areas. They either live in condominiums, bungalows, and/or terrace houses. This is also due to the establishment of "new villages" at the fringes of urban areas in the 1940s and 1950s, which forced many rural Chinese to be relocated to urban areas.

Since the standard of living in Malaysia has increased tremendously during the past decade due to an economic boom, most Malaysian homes have consumer items such as cars, a television set, a VCR, and a refrigerator. This is particularly true among the Chinese who are economically better-off than the other ethnic groups. They have easy access to better sanitation, electricity, water supply, and efficient public transportation. Nonetheless, Chinese who live in rural areas do not have access to these basic amenities. They are still burning kerosene for light, and depending on wells and rivers for water.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Marriage and raising a family are vital elements in the life of a Chinese. A basic Chinese household unit includes a husband, a wife, and their children. Since Chinese are expected to take care of close relatives, sometimes a household may include extended members of the family, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Among the upper- and middle-class households, the unit may include a live-in servant or nanny who looks after the young children. A middle-class couple usually has two or three children, while lower-class families have more children.

Female members of a family are expected to know how to cook, clean the house, and take care of elder relatives. However, nowadays many Chinese women have professions that keep them away from their homes; therefore, they have to hire maids to take care of household chores. A husband's main responsibility is to provide shelter and financial support for his family.

Chinese families usually keep dogs and/or cats as pets. Dogs are partly kept to guard homes from burglaries. Sometimes parrots and other "singing birds" are kept as well. These birds are kept for their beautiful sounds and their ability to talk, and also for bird competitions.

### **11 CLOTHING**

*Cheongsam*, a tight-fitting, high-collared, slit-skirted dress, is the traditional Chinese women's dress, while *yi fu* is the traditional Chinese men's dress. However, most Malaysian Chinese nowadays wear ordinary Western clothes, such as t-shirts, pants, skirts, jeans, dresses, shorts, blouses, etc. The color red is considered lucky by Chinese, and they never wear black except to funerals, although nowadays some youngsters dress in deep black at New Year's celebrations. Also, some elderly Chinese women, especially if they are widows, wear black silk clothes for weddings and other ritual occasions. Older men, particularly the "shop houses Chinese" men, often wear long baggy shorts and tank tops.

### **12 FOOD**

The Chinese saying, "Anything that walks with its back to the sky can be eaten," shows that eating and drinking are their favorite pastimes and that they have a way to prepare and make tasty every edible object. Their staple foods include rice and a variety of noodles. While rice is usually eaten with meat and vegetables cooked in various ways, noodles are often prepared in broth or stir-fried. Noodles are usually eaten for breakfast, while rice is eaten for lunch and dinner. Most of these foods can be easily obtained from food stalls and cart vendors selling foods by the roadsides.

The Chinese consider certain foods as "cooling" or "heating." Heating foods such as chocolate, granola, and most meats

make the body feel too hot, too full, and uncomfortable. These foods also cause certain illnesses such as sore throats. While cooling foods are the opposite of heating foods, they can also cause or aggravate illnesses such as colds and coughs. Watermelon, tea, and yogurt are a few examples of cooling foods and are not supposed to be taken on cool days.

Unlike the Malays and Indians, the Chinese eat their food with chopsticks. The Chinese observe certain taboos and manners when eating with chopsticks. Chopsticks are not to be rested on the dinner plate or rice bowl; rather, they are to be placed on a rest stand or a bone plate. Sticking a chopstick in a rice bowl is considered a bad omen as it signifies death, pointing with chopsticks and waving them in the air is considered bad manners.

One Chinese traditional food is *Yee Sang*. It is basically raw fish served with salad and is usually eaten on the third or fourth day of the Chinese New Year's celebration. *Yee Sang* may consist of several types of finely shredded vegetables, colorfully placed in small portions and mixed with different condiments and a few flakes of raw fish.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Malaysia's literacy rate is about 92%. This is because primary and secondary schools are mandatory in Malaysia, which means children from the ages of 6 to 15 have to attend school. The Chinese are noted to be high achievers in education. This is partly due to their tradition that emphasizes education above everything else.

When the Chinese arrived in Malaysia, they brought along with them their schools. The first Chinese school in Malaysia was set up in 1815, and today there are about 1,300 fully and partially government-assisted Chinese primary schools which form an integral part of the Malaysian education system (salaries of teachers in these schools are paid by the government while the upkeep of school buildings and facilities is funded through donations by local communities). Most Chinese parents send their children to Chinese or English primary schools. In 2004, 90% (600,000) of all Malaysian Chinese schoolchildren were enrolled in Chinese schools. It is important to note that the Chinese schools are not solely for the Chinese, but are open to other communities in Malaysia. For instance in 1994 it was estimated that a total of about 32,000 non-Chinese students attended Chinese primary schools.

By the time a Chinese child is 4 or 5 years old, she or he is sent to kindergarten. At age 6, the child continues on to primary school. After the age of 12, some of these children will transfer to Malay and English high schools, while the others remain in Chinese medium secondary schools. However, they are all required to master the national language, Malay, since the national examinations for students at the age of 15 and 18 are conducted in Malay. Outstanding students in the examinations are allowed to go to Form Six or directly into the university. Due to a limited number of universities in Malaysia, many of these students go to universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

Parents expect their children to do very well in school and will do whatever is necessary to ensure that their children are able to receive an education. Having said that, it is estimated that about 25% Chinese students usually dropout from school before reaching 18 years old. Many of these leave school to be-

come apprentice as plumber, mechanic, builder, and running family or personal enterprise.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

When the Chinese came to Malaysia, they brought their dance, music, and literature with them. However, due to Malaysia's multiracial society, most ethnic groups in Malaysia, including the Chinese, have adopted or assimilated each other's culture. Today, the Malaysian Chinese do not only speak the Chinese language, eat Chinese food, wear Chinese clothes, and appreciate Chinese classical songs, but they also eat Malay, Indian, and Western food, wear other clothes, and enjoy the music of other communities. Nonetheless, the Malaysian Chinese still keep their many traditional celebrations, which form a large part of Chinese cultural heritage in Malaysia. These celebrations include the Lantern festival, the Dragon Boat festival, the Tomb festival, the Hungry Ghost festival, and the Moon Cake festival.

Chinese traditional music and dance are usually aired and performed during festivities such as the Chinese New Year or when there is a funeral. One of their most popular dances is the Lion Dance, which is usually performed during the Chinese New Year's celebration. Literature such as *The Eight Immortals*, *The Monkey God*, and *Na Cha the Dragon Slayer* are ancient children's stories which are as popular in Malaysia as Mickey Mouse is in the United States.

#### **15 WORK**

Initially the Chinese came to Malaya as traders, shopkeepers, planters, and miners. They worked in tin mines and opened up plantations of pepper, rubber, gambier, coconut, and sugar. But today most Malaysian Chinese are prominent professionals and businesspeople. As a result they make up of the majority middle and upper income classes in Malaysia's multiethnic society. They are economically more progressive—dominating the Malaysian economy—resulting in an economic imbalance between races. This imbalance led to race riots on 13 May 1969. In order to rectify this economic imbalance, particularly between the Malays and Chinese, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was formulated by the government with the twin-pronged objectives of eradicating poverty and restructuring society. This increased the Malays' share of the economic pie by 20% during the period of 1970 to 1990, and the Chinese managed to advance from 28% to 45% over the same period.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Like most other ethnic groups in Malaysia, the Chinese have become acquainted with sports such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, swimming, ping pong, badminton, tennis, squash, etc. Three of the most popular spectator sports among the Chinese are soccer (known as "football"), basketball, and badminton. Some of the top national athletes, both men and women, who represent the country in international competitions or events are Chinese.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Since most Chinese live in urban areas, their forms of entertainment and recreation are very similar to those of residents in suburban or city areas in the US and UK. They attend movies, watch television and videos, listen to radio and music (on

cassettes and compact discs). They watch Western, Chinese and Malay movies, and listen to recordings of both local and imported traditional and modern music, which are available at local music stores. This includes Western, Chinese, Malay, and Indian music. Besides watching movies and listening to music, gambling with *mahjong*, a game similar to playing cards except that it is played with tiles, is a popular form of entertainment among the elderly Chinese.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Malaysian Chinese both in Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo are fine potters. They produce clay vessels, jars, vases, tall narrow jars wired as standard lamps, round containers with and without lids, ashtrays, plates, mugs, etc.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Due to the existence of the Internal Security Act (ISA) in Malaysia, the country has received plenty of criticism from human-rights activists in the West. The Act provides for detention without trial for individuals deemed detrimental to the harmony of the nation. Many prominent Chinese leaders have been detained under the Act since its enactment in 1950s.

Even though Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, and Malay is the national language, the basic rights of the Malaysian Chinese to practice their faith, speak their dialects, and keep their traditions and cultures are virtually secured by the constitution.

There is a high rate of school dropouts before the age of 18. The situation has created major concern since there is a tendency among dropouts to also engage in illicit trades and related activities.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Traditionally, female members of a family are expected to know how to cook, clean the house, and take care of elder relatives. However, nowadays gender roles in domestic realms have changed as a result of women's increased labor force participation. There is a more relaxed attitude in gender issues which can be gauged by the different roles husband and wife play in their duties to one another.

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—by P. Bala

# MALAYSIAN INDIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** muh-LAY-zhun IN-dee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Tamils

**POPULATION:** 1.8 million (2004)

**LOCATION:** Malaysia

**LANGUAGE:** Tamil; Malay; Chinese; other ethnic Indian languages

**RELIGION:** Hindu (majority); Sikh; Buddhist; Muslim; Christian

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India; Vol. 4: Malaysian Malays; Tamils

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Indian traders came to Malaya as early as the 14th century. Through trading, they introduced Islam to the locals, particularly to the Malays. This was also done by marrying into the various royal families, consequently achieving positions of great influence. It was only in the latter half of the 19th century that an influx of Indian immigrants came to Malaya, due to its rapid economic development. The largest annual flow into Malaya occurred during the period of 1911–30, when more than 90,000 persons landed each year. They were recruited and solicited by the British, mostly as indentured laborers to work on rubber plantations. A large number of clerical workers were also brought in from Ceylon, while a number of professionals, doctors, and teachers were brought in from India, particularly after World War I. Almost every Indian ethnic subgroup is represented in Malaysia. This includes the Tamils, Gujaratis, Malayalis, Punjabi, Sindhis, Pathans, Telegus, Kannarese, and the Sri Lankan Tamil and Singhalese. They came from many parts of India and belonged to different faiths. Nevertheless, Malaysian Indians are mostly Tamils, forming 87.6 per cent of the population in Malaysia.

### INDIAN ETHNIC SUBGROUPS IN MALAYSIA (2000)

Group	Population	%
Indian Tamil	1,396,480	87.6
Malayali	35,809	2.3
Telugu	38,993	2.4
Sikh	33,231	2.1
Punjabi	23,147	1.5
Other Indian	41,477	2.6
Pakistani	11,313	0.7
Bangladeshi	2,951	0.2
Sri Lankan Tamil	8,735	0.5
Singhalese	1,641	0.1
Total	1,593,77	100

Source: R. Rajkrishnan and Manimaran Subramaniam 'The Indians: Classification, origins and social organization,' IN Hood Salleh (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia, Peoples and Traditions*. Kuala Lumpur: Editions Didier Millet, 2006 (pg.59)

Even though the number and power of the Indians in Malaysia are far inferior to those of the Malays and Chinese, they are well represented in Malaysia's political arena. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) plays an important role as a vehicle of political representation among the Indian Malaysians. It represents the Indians in the interethnic grouping of political

parties called the Alliance. It was brought in as the third partner of the Alliance after the elections of 1964.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Since most Malaysian Indians were brought in by the British government to work as laborers on the plantations, most of them live in the major plantation states of Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Johor, with spillover in other states, such as Kedah, Perak, Penang, and Pahang. Even today, plantations still provide employment for most of the Indian population. Gradual urbanization, however, continues among Indians, as with other Malaysians, with many drifting from plantation areas to neighboring cities and towns. This rural-urban migration has increased since the 1980s as a result of a shift in plantation agriculture from rubber to the less labor-intensive oil palm. This is also due to improved education and industrialization. The latter has generated employment opportunities in urban areas. All of this has led to a decrease in the rural population from 65% in 1970 to 30% in 2000.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Besides being able to read, write, and speak in their mother tongue of Tamil, or other Indian languages, almost every Malaysian Indian is also able to speak and write Malay. A large number are able to speak and read Chinese characters as well.

Unlike Western names, the Malaysian Indians do not have surnames. Their names consist of two parts: their given name, and their father's name, with "s/o" ("son of") or "d/o" (daughter of) to append the father's name. For example, Dorai, the son of Sivam s/o Ramesh, is not Dorai Ramesh, but Dorai s/o Sivam. The same principle applies to a daughter's name, except that upon marriage she has to take her husband's name. Therefore, Dorai's wife, Suseela, will be known as Mrs. Dorai or Madam Suseela. There are times when the initial of the father's name is placed in front of a person's given name. For instance, Ramesh s/o Arul will be known as A. Ramesh, "A" being the initial of the father's name, while Ramesh is the person's given name.

While the more traditional families will name a son after a Hindu god and a daughter after a Hindu goddess, the Christian Indians, such as the Thomian Christians in Malaysia, have biblical surnames like Abraham, John, Samuel, or Jacob that are perpetuated in the family. There are others who adopted Portuguese names, such as Rozario, DeSilva, and Santamaria, as family surnames. These are descendents of Indians from Ceylon, Goa, and Malacca, which were colonies of Portugal.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The Malaysian Indians have many folk tales and myths that are closely related to their majority religion, Hinduism. One of their legends is the story behind the celebration of the Festival of Lights, or Deepavali, as a celebration of Nagarasuran's death. Nagarasuran was a Hindu tyrant and an extremely cruel king. As a result, his people appealed to Lord Krishna to remove him from the kingdom. Lord Krishna favored their appeal by having Nagarasuran defeated and fatally wounded in a battle. However, before his death, Nagarasuran repented from his cruelty and begged Lord Krishna for forgiveness. He also asked for a favor from Lord Krishna, that is, to let his people celebrate his death instead of weeping for him. Lord Krishna granted his request by letting them celebrate the Festival of Lights, the Deepavali.





*Malaysian ethnic Indians take part in a hunger strike to protest alleged discrimination against the minorities in Port Klang, Malaysia. (AP Images/Lai Seng Sin)*

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Indian Malaysians are of different faiths. However, most of them are Hindu, while others are Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian. For most Indian Malaysians, the Hindu religion is a way of life. They believe in the ultimate reality, which appears in many forms and for different purposes such as for life, creation, energy, and protection. They also believe in reincarnation that one's life and actions will determine one's next life and that the actions of one's previous life have determined one's present life. Since the spiritual goal of a person is to reach a state of perfection and enlightenment, she or he is given an opportunity to make up for any harmful deeds during her or his previous existence by being reborn.

Malaysian Indians have a deep faith, which is woven into their everyday lives. An Indian mother offers prayers and burns incense at the family altar every morning before the sun is up. This is done to greet her god and the new day. She may perform the same ritual at sunset, too.

Friday is a special day for Hindus in Malaysia. This is the day the Malaysian Indians flock to temples to offer prayers. At the temple, they make several different kinds of offerings. One of these offerings is the "banana" offering or "half-coconut" offering. This is done by giving a donation of 30 cents for a banana or 80 cents for half a coconut and by writing their

name on a small slip of paper that will be read out loud by the priests during their formal prayers. After the formal prayers, the devotees are given holy ash to put on their foreheads and betel nuts that can be chewed by the older folks or placed on the altar at home. The blessed banana or coconut is then taken home, either to be eaten or to be placed on the family altar. If the offerings are not eaten, they will not be thrown away, even after they have become rotten. Instead, they will be placed under a tree or into a river.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Two of the Malaysian Indians' major holidays are the Deepavali and Thaipusam. The Deepavali is known as the Festival of Lights and is usually celebrated in October. The exact day of the celebration is, however, determined by astrologers. It is largely a day for family reunions and also a time for non-Hindu friends to come visit during the Open House.

While Deepavali is a family celebration, Thaipusam is a very public celebration and takes place in late January or early February. It is a festival connected with penance, atonement, and thanksgiving for favors granted by the gods. It is dedicated to Lord Murugan, a god personifying the virtues of courage, youth, power, and endurance. At this festival, a person who had received answers to prayers will reciprocate by doing some



sort of penance to show his or her gratitude. This act of gratitude is usually accomplished by carrying a *kavadi* on his or her shoulder on the procession day. Although a *kavadi* can be any form of offering to the gods, it is usually a large semicircular object, almost like half of a bicycle wheel, which is carried on the shoulder. Metal hooks and spikes are attached to the *kavadi*, which are fastened onto the devotee's skin.

Thousands of Hindus take part in the Thaipusam procession, which usually takes place at the Batu Caves in the State of Selangor. As a result, it enhances the social identity of the community and reinforces the spirit of "communitas." It is on this day that every Indian is equal in the sight of every other Indian. Women have equal status with men, lower castes have equal status with higher castes, and there is no distinction made between individuals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An Indian couple always hopes for sons, as only sons can perform certain rites during the father's funeral. A mother and her child are considered unclean and in a state of danger for 28 days after the birth of the child. Therefore, many restrictions are placed on the mother throughout this period. The child's birth is celebrated on the twenty-eighth day, with friends and relatives invited to the celebration. The child is dressed up in fancy clothes and jewelry for the occasion. A child will be named on this day by placing the child on the father's lap, or on the lap of some relative, while his or her name is whispered gently into his or her ears. From then on, the child will be known and called by that name.

Like many other communities in Malaysia, the Malaysian Indians increasingly observe their birthdays in the Western way. Some Indians have puberty rituals, particularly for their daughters. The Ceylonese Tamils have a ritual called *Chamati Chadanja*, which is usually carried out at the time of the girl's first menses, though it may be done just before the girl marries. This ceremony is usually held on an odd-numbered date, i.e., the seventh, ninth, or eleventh day of the month. Unlike the girls, Indian boys do not normally go through puberty rituals or circumcision.

Marriage in the Indian community is seen as sacred and eternal, lasting through life and even after. An Indian girl is expected to be married between the ages of 22 to 23, while a boy usually marries between the ages of 25 to 28. Even though young Indians have more freedom to choose their life partners than in the past, arranged marriages are still widely practiced among Malaysian Indians. Normally, two related families would arrange a marriage between their children. However, an Indian boy can only marry his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter, but not his father's brother's daughter or his mother's sister's daughter. It is preferable to marry a girl of the same class, caste, and community.

A marriage is arranged by calling a priest from each side of the family to compare the horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom. If all is well, then the marriage is agreed upon. Once a match is made, the dowry is settled. It is important to note, however, that a marriage proposal usually comes from the girl's side. This is because, by tradition, a female has to provide a male with a dowry. The amount of the dowry depends on the eligibility (in terms of affluence and profession) of the young man.

There are certain marriage symbols used by Indian women once they are married. While South Indian women wear *pottu*, a red dot on the forehead, and *thali*, a necklace tied by their husband around their necks at the wedding, North Indian women wear bangles on their arms and red streaks on the parting of their hair.

The sixtieth birthday is the landmark age for an Indian gentleman. A celebration is held to pray for his longevity and good health. Malaysian Indians believe that when a person dies, the soul leaves the vicinity of the house only on the sixteenth or fortieth day, if the soul is very attached to his or her family. In respect for the soul, an oil lamp is left burning in the home day and night throughout that period. Although the soul may linger for a longer period, the body of the deceased is usually removed from the house within 12 hours. While most adults are cremated, children are not. When a woman's husband dies, she has to remove the *thali* from her neck and wipe off the *pottu* from her forehead. This symbolizes the end of her married life.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditionally, handshaking as a form of greeting is not widely used by the Malaysian Indians. Their usual form of greeting is to put the palms together in the prayer position and raise the hands to chest level in front of their face, with their head slightly bowed. However, today handshaking is an acceptable form of greeting, though it is best to let an Indian woman extend her hand first for a handshake.

When entering an Indian home, it is customary to remove one's shoes, unless told otherwise. Shoes are never to be worn

in kitchen and prayer areas. The right hand should be used for any social purposes, such as to give and receive items. It is considered polite to bow slightly when passing in front of people, saying, "Excuse me, please."

Conversations between members of the opposite sex are normally kept to a minimum. Coarse jokes and sex talk are not to be spoken in the presence of any woman. Even though dating has never been part of their culture, it is becoming a common practice among young Malaysian Indians. They are partly influenced by mass media—television, magazines, novels, etc. It is also a result of young Indians mixing more freely with their friends in schools and universities.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Among Malaysia's Indians, there is a clear distinction between the urban middle class and the rural poor. While Malaysian Indians in urban areas have easy access to a better standard of living, the Malaysian Indians on the plantations have to cope with a lower living standard. Many children on the plantations do not receive proper nutrition before being sent off to school in the morning. Many families could not afford to buy even the basic necessities for their children's education, such as uniforms, shoes, notebooks, pencils, etc.

Unlike most other industries in the country, the plantation industry has built houses to accommodate its workers. This is because the plantations are usually located far from inhabited centers. Most plantation workers are currently living in "line-site" houses. There are two types of line-site house: the wooden barracks and the raised brick cottage. The wooden barracks are old and are arranged usually in rows of five. The walls are made of planks, and the roof is usually made of aluminum. Each dwelling in a row occupies an area of roughly 3 m by 6 m (10 ft by 19 ft), and is about 3 m (10 ft) high. It has a small veranda, a living room, a bedroom measuring roughly 3 m by 2.5 m (10 ft by 8 ft), and a tiny kitchen of 1 m by 2 m (3 ft by 6 ft). The raised brick cottages have a covered floor of roughly 5 m by 6 m (17 ft by 20 ft) and consist of two living quarters inhabited by different families. The two quarters are partitioned by a brick wall, but share a common tile roof. Each quarter has a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, a toilet, and a bath.

Unlike the urban areas, basic amenities, such as water, sanitation, and electricity in the plantations, are seriously below legal standards. The plantations get their water supply either by water piped to each house, stand-pipes shared by a few families, well or pond water, a river, or through the JKR (Department of Public Works) water supply. While some plantations are provided with electricity by an estate generator, others obtain electricity by running their own generators, and others use gas or oil lamps.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

Like many communities in Malaysia, the Malaysian Indian families are organized in relation to nuclear family units. It is through the family unit that values, culture, and religion are imparted to younger generations. Many of these nuclear families, however, are linked together into extended families. Family size among Malaysian Indians varies according to standards of living, education level, and location. There are households in the plantations that contain as many as 9, 10, 11, or even 12 family members. Living conditions for most people are crowded, but all members of the household benefit from the mutual

support of parents, children, and grandchildren living under the same roof.

Malaysian Indian women in some ways are still highly conservative. This is mainly because of a strong emphasis on male line descent and a patrilineal system. The father is ranked highest in the hierarchy of authority. He commands the family. Although the mother's position is respected, she is expected to be subservient to all of the males in the family.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

A *sari*, the traditional dress of an Indian woman, is a flowing silk or cotton wrapped dress worn over a short, tight-fitting, elbow-length-sleeved blouse. An Indian girl usually starts wearing a sari when she turns 13 years old. While Indian women wear a sari, Indian men wear a *dhoti*, a wrapped white skirt worn either with or without a shirt or white tunic.

Besides the sari, a Hindu Indian woman may wear a *pottu* (dot) on her forehead. A pottu can be worn in one of three traditional colors: red, yellow or black. These colors have certain significance among Indian women. While red is worn by married women, black is traditionally worn by unmarried women. However, red and yellow can also be used simply as an auspicious color. While these two colors are thought to have a calming effect when put on the forehead after prayers, black is used to counteract the effect of the evil eye. A black dot is able to protect a girl from harm by repelling evil influences, particularly when a young girl receives too many compliments.

Except during festivities and other celebrations, it is very common to see Malaysian Indian women dressed in blouses, jeans, skirts, dresses, or shorts. Malaysian Indian men commonly wear pants, shirts, shorts, and tee-shirts. Even the color of the pottu on the forehead is worn simply to match the color of women's attire these days, regardless of their marital status.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

As in most Asian communities, rice is the staple food of the Malaysian Indians. Breads, such as *chapati* (a thin, flat, unleavened wholemeal bread), *naan* (leavened white bread), *puri* (a deep-fried wholemeal bread), and *rothi paratha* (a flaky wholemeal bread), are also staple foods among the Malaysian Indians. While these breads are usually eaten with hot curry gravy, rice is eaten with curries, sauces, vegetables, and other dishes. Since most Indians are Hindu, they tend to be vegetarian. Their foods are usually cooked in coconut milk or yogurt and are seasoned with hot peppers and spices, thus making them very spicy. They normally add colors to their food by adding chili powder for red, curry powder for brown, and turmeric for yellow. This helps enhance the appearance of their food. They also have a variety of snacks. These snacks include *vadai*, deep-fried cakes made with ground lentils, green chilies, and ginger; *muruku*, crispy and crunchy pretzels; *pakhora*, mixed vegetable fritters; and *samosa*, deep fried pastries containing meat, onion, and spices.

Like the Malays, the Tamils traditionally use the fingers of the right hand for eating. A popular traditional style of dining among the Malaysian Indians is by eating off banana leaves. A variety of curries, vegetables, and sauces are placed around a pile of rice on the banana leaves. Even the dessert after the main meal is served on the same banana leaf. The banana leaf is folded in half after the meal, to indicate that one has finished one's meal. Sometimes, foods are served on a *thali*, a metal tray

with several small matching bowls for food. This is particularly true in traditional Indian homes. All the food, including the desserts, is served at the same time, with the rice or bread placed in the center of the tray.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Indian community is the poorest of the three major communities in Peninsular Malaysia. Because of this, Malaysian Indian youth have relatively low rates of enrollment in schools. Their enrollment rates in both urban and rural areas are lower than those among Malays and Chinese. Furthermore, in comparison with the Malays and Chinese, more Indian youths drop out of school due to low motivation. As a result, the position of the Malaysian Indians in reference to education is comparatively poor in Malaysia.

However, the government has taken impressive measures to uplift the standard of education among the Indian community in Malaysia. Since it is mandatory for Malaysians to attend schools between the ages of 6 and 15, the government has made an effort to build primary and secondary schools on the plantations across the country. After the age of 15, youths are encouraged to attend vocational or technical colleges and other institutions of higher learning. They can obtain loans and scholarship programs from the government, the NUPW (National Union of Plantation Workers), and the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress). An increasing number of Malaysian Indian parents see education as a means for their children to gain better employment than plantation work. Through and increased emphasis on education, many young adult Malaysian Indians are now working as professionals, managers, and clerical staff in all sectors of modern economy.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Malaysian Indians' dance, music, and literature revolve around their religion, Hinduism. Their dances are greatly influenced by the two great Indian poetic epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabhrata*. These two epics do not only influence Indian dances and music, but also the Malays' dance and theater performances, such as the *wayang kulit* and *makyong* (see **Malaysian Malays**).

Since most Malaysian Indians are Hindu, the Vedas (Hindu scriptures) play an important role in the community. They are ancient writings that explain the mystery of life. They contain some simple parables, which are easily understood by the common people, but which can also be read and understood at the highest levels of abstract philosophy.

### **15 WORK**

Even though the majority of Malaysian Indians work on plantations as laborers, there are many who are doctors, lawyers, trade unionists, police and army personnel, small shopkeepers, teachers, etc. Basically, they are found in every strata of the society class structure. As traders, they usually sell textiles, perfumes, and jewelry. Many are successful professionals, traders, and businesspeople. At the other end of the scale, however, the Indian laborers on the rubber estates are among the poorest Malaysians.

### **16 SPORTS**

Like among many other ethnic groups in Malaysia, sports such as soccer, rugby, basketball, badminton, and cricket are becoming very popular among the Malaysian Indians in rural and urban areas. The most popular spectator sport is soccer (known as football in Malaysia), particularly among the youth. Both on the plantations and in the cities, it is not unusual to see Indian youths and adults get together to play soccer on any open field.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Forms of entertainment among the Malaysian Indians depend greatly on where they live. Those who live in urban areas have the same forms of entertainment that people have in suburban areas in the United States and the United Kingdom. They have easy access to movies and theater, while those who live on the plantations do not have the same privileges. In urban areas, the Malaysian Indians do not only attend Indian movies and theaters, but also have access to Chinese and Malay movies and theater. They also have access to video arcades, parks, etc., which are popular places for recreation among the youth. Televisions, radios, compact discs, and cassettes players are common forms of entertainment in Malaysian Indian homes in urban areas. Some homes on the plantations do have television sets and video players as forms of entertainment. This is, of course, only true in homes that have access to electricity.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Like most parts of their cultural heritage, Malaysian Indian arts and crafts are closely related to Hinduism. Their fine art and carvings can be seen in stone carvings and terra-cotta sculptures, inset tile work, and other colorful details in their temples across Malaysia. Their painters have also produced hundreds of paintings (or, in recent times, colored prints) of gods and goddesses. These paintings are usually for devotional use in home shrines.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The persistent poverty and political powerlessness of rural Indians in Malaysia is one of the country's best-known and most-severe social problems. Even though the plantation industry is a major source of income for Malaysia, low wages and poor working conditions for its plantation laborers have caused the Indians to be one of the poorest communities in Peninsular Malaysia. Most of them, like their contract-laborer ancestors, are rubber workers, though some are now small farmers. Poor budgeting and excessive drinking seem to aggravate the problem of low incomes and savings among the Indian poor. Furthermore, features such as low self-respect, apathy, poor parental responsibility, and weak community cooperation seem to reinforce one another and worsen the economic hardship faced by the Malaysian Indians.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The strong emphasis on the patrilineal system among the Indians shapes gender issues and relations in the community. Women usually do not sit with the men at any function. In some homes, the wife does not even sit down when male guests are present. In some cases a wife is not to call her husband by name nor openly object to his decisions and ideas. This is par-

ticularly true in many traditional homes. A wife may serve the guests, but otherwise she will stay in the kitchen or in some other part of the house. A wife usually stays at home, except for the occasional shopping trip to the department stores. However, these traditional values are changing with modernization, educational opportunities, and equal rights of women. In the plantations, women tap rubber and weed alongside men and receive wages at identical rates.

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—by P. Bala

# MALAYSIAN MALAYS

**PRONUNCIATION:** muh-LAY-zhun MAY-layz

**LOCATION:** Malaysia

**POPULATION:** 12,893,600 (2004)

**LANGUAGE:** Malay; Chinese; Tamil and other Indian languages; tribal languages; English

**RELIGION:** Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Malay is a self referent term used by the people of the Malay Archipelago who have occupied the region since Prehistoric era. They are comprised of various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural variations, but all are speakers of the Austronesian group of languages. In Malaysia today, the term Malay is defined by the federal constitution to specify one who is Muslim and practicing Malay culture. The Malay comprise the largest group of indigenous peoples (bumiputera) and constitute 53% of the country's population. Although a homogenous group, differences exist between Malay subgroups in terms of territorial location, adat (customary) practices, lineage, and the kinship system. Examples of these subgroups are the Javanese, Bugis, Minangkabau, and several other groups who are descendants of interisland migrants of the Malay Archipelago who have settled in the peninsula since the early Malay kingdom.

One of the Malays' foremost successes in the early years in Malaya was the founding of Malacca Sultanate. It thrived in the 15th century as a popular trading port where traders from East (China) and West (India, Middle East, and Europe) met to trade commodities such as spices. Unfortunately, in 1511 Malacca was conquered by the Portuguese. It was then taken over by the Dutch in 1641, and in 1811 it was handed over to the British. The British, from Malacca, gradually expanded their influence to the rest of Malaya. By 1919 the entire Malay Peninsula had been brought under the British administrative system. They eventually occupied Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo by the late 19th century.

The 11 Malay states in the Malay Peninsula only gained independence from the British on 31 August, 1957. In 1963, the Malay Peninsula joined Singapore and Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo Island to form the Federation of Malaysia. However, Singapore left the federation two years later. Currently, Malaysia is made up of 12 states and a federal territory. Sultans rule nine of the states, and three are ruled by governors. While each state government is headed by a chief minister and the state Cabinet members, the Malaysian government is headed by the prime minister and his Cabinet ministers. Malaysia practices a constitutional monarchy similar to what is practiced in England. Unlike in Britain, however, the king is chosen as the head of state by nine Sultans once every five years. Elections are also called every five years to elect members of the parliament, which include the prime minister and his Cabinet ministers; and the state assemblies, which include the chief minister and the state Cabinet. Usually the leader of the victorious party in an election becomes the prime minister or the chief minister.

Malaysia has been ruled continuously since independence by a coalition of political parties—the National Fronts—representing various ethnic groups. This coalition includes the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), representing



the Malays; the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), representing the Chinese; and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), representing the Indians; along with a few other political parties representing other ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak. The Malays, making up about 53% of the country's population, have the most representatives in the parliament and state assemblies. Other than the Communist insurgency in 1948 through 1960, and the communal riot between the Chinese and the Malays on 13 May, 1969, Malaysia has been a calm and peaceful country.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

Malaysia consists of Peninsular Malaysia, which includes the states of Penang, Perlis, Kedah, Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Malacca, and Johor; the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan; and Sabah and Sarawak, which are situated on the island of Borneo. Malaysia has a land area of 329,758 sq km (127,320 sq mi), making it slightly larger than the U.S. State of New Mexico. More than half of its land area is covered with tropical rain forests. Unfortunately, large areas of these rain forests are being depleted by logging. Malaysia's climate is monsoon tropical with an average annual rainfall of about 240 cm (95 in). It is warm, sunny and humid throughout the year with temperatures ranging from 23° to 31°C (73° to 88°F).

The Malays are found in all 13 states of Malaysia. While most Malays live in traditional villages, an increasing number of them have moved to cities, especially since 1970. Malaysia is a multiracial country with a population of over 25 million

people in 2004. Its multiethnic society consists of more than 70 ethnic groups. In Peninsular Malaysia there are four main groups: Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Orang Asli. Others include Eurasians, Chinese Peranakan, Chitties, Nepalese, and Sino-natives. In Sarawak, besides the Chinese and Malays, there are Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, and the Orang Ulu groups, which include the Kelabit, Lun Bawang, Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang, Bisaya, Penan, Sekapan, Lahanan, Punan Bah, Seping, Bemali, Beketan, Berawan, Buket, Lisum, Punan Busang, Saban, Sihan, Tabun, Tring, Tagal, Tanjong, Kanowit, and Tatau. In Sabah there are Bajau, Murut, Suluk, Iranum, Tidong, Belabak, Bonggi, Kagayan, Ubian, Orang Sungai, and many others. Also included in this ethnic diversity in Malaysia are the Cocos Islanders, Thais, Myanmar, Indonesians, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and Europeans. The Bumiputera, "sons of the soil" who include Malays and various ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak, make up 58% of the population. The Chinese account for about 30% of the total population and the Indians account for about 10%. Despite their linguistic, religious, and cultural differences, these ethnic groups live in harmony with one another.

### POPULATION OF MALAYSIA 2004

Malays	12,893,600
Chinese	6,074,700
Other Bumiputera	2,808,100
Indians	1,806,800
Other Malaysians	304,400
Non-Malaysian Citizens	1,693,800
Total	25,581,400

Source: Hood Salleh, 'Introduction' In Hood Salleh (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia, Peoples and Traditions*. Kuala Lumpur: Editions Didier Millet, 2006 (pg.59)

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Malays speak Malay, the Malaysian national language. The language belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian language family. Since Malay is Malaysia's national language, it is widely understood by the other ethnic groups, though other languages such as Chinese, Tamil and other Indian languages, and numerous tribal languages are spoken widely too. Malay as the first language, and English as the second language, are taught in almost every school throughout Malaysia.

Although the Malay language is widely spoken in Malaysia, dialects vary between the states. Generally, words are pronounced the way they are spelled, thus it is a very easy language to learn. Malay also borrows heavily from Sanskrit, Portuguese, Persian, Arabic, and English.

Malay names are basically Arabic names, since Malays are Muslim. Malay names do not have surnames. Instead, a name consists of the person's given name, followed by *bin* (son of) or *binti* (daughter of) and the father's first or full name. For example, Helmy, the son of Ismail Nik Dali, would be Helmy bin Ismail or Helmy bin Ismail Nik Dali. The same principle applies to a woman's name, except that her given name is followed by *binti*. Some common women's names are Fatimah, Lattifah, Zaiton, Aminah, and Zaleha while some common men's names are Ahmad, Sulaiman, Jamalludin, Zakaria, and Ismail.



A couple looks at share prices at a private stock market gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (AP Images/Andy Wong)

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Traditionally, the Malays had a number of folk tales and myths, especially those associated with the Hindu belief that was prevalent before the coming of Islam in the 16th century. Even as late as the 1970s, some of these folk tales were evident in the Malay Muslim society. However, with Islamic revivalism in the late 1970s and the migration of many Malays to urban areas around the same time, these folk tales and myths were gradually abandoned, since they stand in conflict with Islam.

The Malays regard Hang Tuah from the old Malacca sultanate as their traditional hero. He was noted to be a courageous warrior who fought the Siamese attacks on Malacca, and also a symbol of loyalty. His loyalty to the throne was proved when he killed his best friend, Hang Jebat, who rebelled against his sultan.

Another famous folk tale is about Mahsuri, a princess from the island of Langkawai who was wrongly accused of adultery and was executed. Upon her death, Mahsuri spilled white blood and cursed the whole island for seven generations.

#### **5 RELIGION**

In the past, the Malays, like most other ethnic groups in Malaysia, were animists. They believed in the power of natural order. Trees, rivers, and caves were homes to *penunggu* (the vital force residing in a particular location) and the existence of se-

mangat (the vital force in all living things). To respect these spirits, annual rites were performed during foods were offered to them. Important figures like Shamans, ritual specialists (*pawang*), and medicine men (*bomoh*) were the mediators between the spirit world and people. These animistic beliefs and practices have decreased among the Malays, largely because most Malays in Malaysia are now Muslim. This is because the Malaysia Constitution decrees that all Malays are born Muslim. Even though Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Confucianism are given freedom to be practiced. Islam's influence on the Malays goes back to the late 15th century when a sultan of Malacca was converted to Islam. Islam at that time was mostly spread by traders from India and the Middle East.

Malays are devout but tolerant Muslims. Most, especially the elderly and those in villages, pray five times a day, fast in the month of Ramadan, and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims believe in only one God, Allah, and in Muhammad as his last messenger. While the basic beliefs are similar to those of Muslims in the Middle East, some Malay culture and Hindu influence has blended with the practices of Islam in Malaysia.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Being a multiethnic society, there are various religious and secular holidays celebrated in Malaysia. There are three differ-

ent New Year's celebrations and holidays: Muslim New Year, Christian (Roman) New Year, and the Chinese New Year. The Malaysians celebrate other religious holidays such as *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* (Id ul-Fitr) and *Aidil Adha* (Id ul-Adha) for the Muslims, *Wesak Day* for Buddhists, *Deepavali* for Hindus, and Christmas for Christians. Both government and private offices are closed on these days. All Malaysians also celebrate Independence Day, which falls on August 31, during which large-scale parades are held in cities throughout Malaysia.

Hari Raya Aidilfitri is a celebration to mark the end of the fasting month (Ramadan). Its celebration includes a two-day official holiday for all Malaysians. This is a time for joy and happiness after an exhausting month of fasting. It involves a lot of eating and a variety of special foods are prepared for the occasion. This is also a time for family reunions where children who are working in the cities visit their parents. It is also an occasion where relatives, friends, and acquaintances are invited for a visit during the Open House. The Open House is a time and day that is set aside for a person to invite her or his relatives, friends, and acquaintances to the Hari Raya celebration. Special food and drinks are prepared and served to the visitors. Hari Raya Aidilfitri provides an opportunity for Muslims to ask for forgiveness for all wrongs done the previous year.

While Hari Raya Aidilfitri marks the end of the fasting month, Hari Raya Aidil Adha commemorates the pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca and is celebrated the same way as Aidilfitri, albeit on a smaller scale.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There are some important rites of passage in traditional Malay society. After birth, a baby and a mother are in a confinement period (*dalam pantang*) of 44 days. Two common ceremonies during the infant years are *naik buaian*, a ceremony to introduce the baby to his or her cradle; *bercukur jambul*, an event when a seven-day-old boy's head is shaved to "cleanse" him; and *bertindik telinga* (ear-piercing) for a baby girl.

One very important rite of passage for a Malay male is the circumcision ceremony. It is an elaborate event where relatives and villagers are invited to share the occasion. Circumcisions are performed on boys when they reach puberty between the ages of 7 and 12. Circumcisions are performed on girls when they are still infants, but the event is not as elaborate as that for boys. Traditionally, or even today in the villages, the circumcision was performed with a knife by a *mudim*, a person who specializes in performing circumcision ceremonies. A boy is carried around his house to the accompaniment of traditional *kompang* (small drum) music and is then seated on a banana tree trunk where the circumcision is performed. Usually it would take about two to three weeks for the wound to be healed. Unlike the traditional method, circumcisions in urban areas are now performed by physicians in hospitals, and the ceremonies are not as elaborate as those of traditional circumcisions.

Marriage is perhaps the biggest event in a Malay person's life. Although close family friends still arrange marriages, the couple involved must give their full consent. A boy is expected to be married when he reaches the age of 25 to 28, while a girl is a few years younger. Once a couple agrees to get married, a certain amount of preparation has to be done by both families.

In the villages, wedding feasts are usually attended by all the villagers, including friends and relatives. A wedding is usually a two-day affair; on the first day it is held at the bride's home, and the following day at the groom's house. Friends, relatives, and villagers normally help with the preparation. At about noon, the groom and his entourage arrive at the bride's house with a group of *kompang* musicians. A *bersanding* ceremony, which is open to the public, is held in which the bridal couple sit on a raised dais (*pelamin*). Two attendants (equivalent to the bridesmaid and best man) stand next to the bridal couple to attend to their needs. The same ceremony will be held again at night for family members, close friends, and relatives. At this ceremony, the couple receives blessings from their parents and relatives. This is done through the scattering of scented leaves and scented flower petals (*bunga rampai*) onto the open palms of the bride and groom. A similar feast and ceremony is repeated at the groom's house on the second day. Nowadays among the affluent in Malay society, weddings are held in hotels or large community halls.

Death is a very somber and religious affair in a Malay community. Visitors are expected to show respect to the dead and his or her family by dressing appropriately. The time between a death and the funeral is very minimal, since Islam requires the deceased to be buried as soon as possible. Before burial, the body of the deceased is placed in the center of the living room to give everyone a chance to offer prayers and pay their last respects. The deceased is then wrapped in white cloth and carried to the graveyard to be buried. The normal mourning period is 100 days, although special prayers are held only on the first three nights, on the seventh day, the fortieth day, and on the hundredth day.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The common Malaysian Malay greeting when meeting friends in public is, "Where are you going?" The answer is, "For a stroll" or "Nowhere of importance." However, many urban Malays greet each other with "How are you?" (*Apa khabar?*)

Shaking hands is the most common way of greeting among Malays, but with some restrictions. It is not customary for men and women to shake hands with each other. Ideally, a Malay woman can only shake hands with a man if she covers her hand with a cloth. A Malay man normally greets another man with a handshake without grasping the hands. He offers both hands to touch lightly the other man's outstretched hands, then brings his hands to his breast, meaning "I greet you from my heart." This is done with both hands to show respect to older people. A Malay woman may use a similar form when greeting another woman.

While pointing at a place, object, or a person with the right forefinger is considered rude among the Malays, pointing with the thumb of the right hand by folding the four fingers into the palm is considered polite. It is also considered polite to bend over slightly from the waist, extend the right hand in front of you, touch the right wrist with the fingers of the left hand, then say "May I please pass," when crossing in front of another person.

Upon arrival at a Malay home, shoes must be removed before entering, for religious purposes. Shoes are considered "unclean" and may soil the living room floor, making it unsuitable for prayers (Muslims pray on a mat laid out on the floor). When





A fisherman loads fish into a container at Kudat Fishing village in Sabah, Malaysia. The rising demand for reef fish from Hong Kong and China has caused the population of the fish to plummet throughout Asia. (AP Images/Vincent Thian)

visiting relatives or friends, it is appropriate to bring food or fruit as gifts.

Public displays of affection between people of the opposite sex are discouraged, even between husbands and wives. This is particularly true among conservative Malay Muslims. In the villages, one can only visit one's lover's house when the parents are around. Unlike in the villages, Malay dating practices in urban areas are quite similar to those in the United States.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

During the 1990s, the standard of living in Malaysia increased tremendously because of an economic boom. Between 1990 and 2002, Malaysia made remarkable progress in eradicating poverty. The number of poor households decreased by 25.6%. This spectacular success was credited to the New Economic Policy (NEP), which aims to reduce the economic gap between different communities in the country and has uplifted the quality of life for all Malaysians. The per capita income increased from RM775 in 1957 to RM7,000 in 1992, and from RM15,819 in 2004 to almost RM22,345 in 2007. Strong economic growth

has reduced the unemployment rate to 4%, a figure considered to signify full employment. Malaysia is now rated as an upper-middle-income country. Much of the infrastructure and many of the services found in developed countries are now common in Malaysia, particularly in urban areas.

Historically, the Chinese dominated the urban areas. However, in the 1970s, many Malays migrated from the *kampungs* (villages) to urban areas, resulting in a better ethnic balance of city residents. In 2000 slightly more than 62% of Malaysia's population lived in urban areas, compared to 51% in 1991 and 34% in 1980. Meanwhile the rural population decreased from 66% of total population in 1980 to 39% in 2000. Both in the urban and rural areas, the *kampung* is the center of Malay life. It is a tightly knit community united by ties of kinship, marriage, or neighborliness, where consensus, compromise, and traditional values reign supreme.

The Malays in urban areas possess consumer items such as cars, television sets, VCRs, and refrigerators. They have access to good, economical, and well-maintained public transportation, such as express buses, trains, and light-rail transits. They also have access to higher standards of basic amenities such as water supply, sanitation, and electricity in comparison to those who live in the villages. In the villages, some Malays still have to rely on kerosene for light, and wells and rivers for water supply.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

The Malays regard marriage and raising a family (*keluarga*) as the most important aspects of life. The family is an autonomous unit in which the husband-father is the head. The unit promotes responsibility to family, friends, and the community takes precedence over the accumulation of profit and material goods. The average family size of urban Malays is smaller in than that of Malays in rural areas. This is partly because of the nature of professions and occupations, which keep them away from their families. In the past, it was quite common for a couple to have more than six children. Today, the average number of children is four.

In Malaysia, where the welfare system is almost nonexistent except for extreme cases, e.g., extreme poverty or disability, the extended family is still a vital unit of society. Family members are expected to care for each other, particularly those who are poor, sick, and old. Children are expected to look after their parents.

Cats, fish, and sometimes singing birds are reared as pets by Malay families. Dogs are considered "unclean" by Muslims and, therefore, are not usually kept as pets by Malays in Malaysia.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

Traditional Malay dress for men and women is based on a simple rectangle of batik cloth, wrapped and worn as a skirt. However, the style of wrapping is different for men and women. The women wear the skirt with a long blouse, while the men go shirtless but wear a tied headcloth.

Nowadays, since Malays are Muslim, they have a strict dress code. The women's customary dress covers the whole body, except for their face, hands, and feet. They usually dress in the *baju kurung*, a long-sleeved, loose blouse worn over an ankle-length skirt, and they cover their heads with a scarf as a sign of humility and modesty. A married woman may often

wear a *baju kebaya*, a close-fitting lace blouse over an ankle-length skirt. While Malay women wear *baju krung* or *baju kebaya*, Malay men wear *baju Melayu*, long-sleeved shirts over an ankle-length *sarong* or pants. A Malay man who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca usually wears a white skull-cap, and a woman who has made the pilgrimage wears a white scarf.

Some Malays dress in Western-style clothing. However, they are discouraged from wearing shorts, miniskirts, or strapless or sleeveless tops. This is particularly true for Malay women.

## **12 FOOD**

Rice is the Malaysians' staple food and is eaten at least once a day. Malays eat rice with fish or meat curry and vegetables cooked in various ways. It is absolutely forbidden for Muslims to eat pork in any form as it is considered unclean. Muslims, for religious reasons, are also prohibited from eating any meat that has not been slaughtered by a Muslim.

Malays usually eat with their fingers. Therefore, hands are always washed before and after meals. This is done by using the *kendi*, a water vessel that is either put on the table or passed around from person to person. While meals are always eaten with the right fingers, the serving spoons provided for all the dishes can only be used with the left hand. The left hand is also used for passing dishes of food and for holding a glass.

One of the Malays' popular breakfasts is *nasi lemak*, rice cooked in coconut milk and served with hot and spicy *sambal* (shrimp or anchovy paste), fish, eggs and vegetables.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Malaysia has a literacy rate of 92%. It is mandatory for all Malaysians to attend school until the age of 15. Therefore, many Malaysians have gone to school at least up to Form Three, which is equivalent to the ninth grade in the United States. Because of greater educational opportunities under New Economic Policy, the number of Malays that have obtained degrees from local and foreign universities has increased over the last 30 years. Many of them were sent on government scholarships and loans to universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

Since education is seen as a means to raise a family's reputation, parents always encourage and expect their children to do well in school. They will do whatever is necessary to ensure that their children are able to receive a formal education.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Traditional Malay music is normally aired during special occasions such as the grand annual festival of Hari Raya, wedding celebrations (*bersanding*), and *makan selamat* or *kenduri* (thanksgiving meal). One of their most popular musical ensembles played during such occasions is the *gamelan*. It is an instrumental ensemble or orchestra containing drums, xylophones, metallophones, tuned gongs, and bamboo flutes. An ensemble can be small or large, and its music can cover a wide range of styles, from slow and stately, to sad and haunting, to lively and cheerful. It is played either as an instrumental ensemble purely for listening, or as an accompaniment to dance.

Traditional Malay dances are sometimes performed on festive occasions, accompanied by the *gamelan*. These dances are usually ensemble dances for men only, for women only, and for men and women together. This includes dances such as *Kuda Kepang* (a trance dance), *joget* (a courtship dance), *ghazal* (a

dance based on Middle Eastern music that is performed by young women for the enjoyment of sultans and other members of the royal houses), and *mak yong* (a dance-drama performed by actors and actresses in imitation of heroic tales of sultans and princesses of olden times). Unfortunately, traditional dance is something of a dying art among the Malays in Malaysia. Nevertheless, a number of young choreographers have attempted to revive these dances in order to create Malay modern dances.

Unlike most indigenous people in Malaysia, the Malays have a good collection of literature written about their community going back to the 16th century. The oldest of these literatures is *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Chronicle), a history of the kingdoms of the Malay Peninsula, with an emphasis on Malacca. Other works include *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Hang Tuah's Life Story) and *Hikayat Abdullah* (Abdullah's Life Story). These works describe the old Malay society.

## **15 WORK**

Traditionally, the Malays dominated government and agriculture, while playing a relatively small role in commerce and industry. In the rural areas they were likely to be farmers, tending vegetable farms or small holdings of rubber or oil-palm trees. Others were fishers. Since the late 1970s, however, many Malays have migrated to the cities upon completing high school and college in search of jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors. This is a result of direct government economic policies that aim to encourage Malay involvement in business at various professional levels. Consequently, they are often civil servants, laborers, transport workers, or industrial workers. Many also have risen to the national elite, holding high-level posts in the government and military. Many others are holding posts in institutions and corporations like MARA, PERNAS, PETRONAS and HICOM, which have been set up to establish opportunities for the Malays in employment, business, capital accumulation and corporate participation.

## **16 SPORTS**

A large number of Malaysian populations regularly take part, as players or spectators, in both Western and traditional Malay sports and games. One of the Malays' popular native games is *sepaktakraw*, or kickball. It is played with a round ball made of rattan that must be kept in the air as it is kicked around or across a net (like volleyball played with the feet) by a group of players standing in a circle. A point is lost whenever the ball touches the ground.

The most popular spectator sport among Malaysians is soccer, known as football in Malaysia. The country has an annual semiprofessional soccer league, involving a team from each state in Malaysia plus Brunei. This league attracts large crowds for matches in major cities. In addition to that, there are other soccer leagues played at the regional level, and even in the smallest town. It is a common sight everywhere in Malaysia to see youngsters and adults flocking to the soccer fields either to play or to watch a soccer game.

Another popular sport among the Malays is badminton. In fact, badminton is a national passion in Malaysia, where top Malaysian players are usually among the contenders for world badminton championships. Other Western sports such as volleyball, field hockey, basketball, rugby, squash, and cricket are played not only by the Malays, but also by all the other eth-

nic groups in Malaysia. These sports are played both for casual recreation and in organized competitions.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There is a vast difference between the forms of entertainment and recreation in rural and urban areas in Malaysia. The Malays in rural areas still relish the traditional music such as *gamelan* (musical ensemble), *kompang* (small drums), *serunai* (flute) and others; traditional dances; and traditional pastimes such as kite-flying and *gasing* (spinning tops). Kite-flying is particularly popular among people in coastal villages. Kites are flown mainly as recreation, but sometimes competitions are organized to see who can fly their kites the highest. Spinning tops is a popular pastime, particularly in Kelantan and Trengganu. These tops are made of wood and can spin for hours. The person whose top spins the longest wins.

Unlike rural Malays, in urban areas the Malays watch Western (Hollywood), Hindi, and Chinese movies and theater, besides watching Malay movies that are locally produced. Besides movies and theater, other forms of entertainment and recreation, found in urban areas in the United States can be found in Malaysia's urban areas as well. Malaysia has three basic television channels, which are monitored by the government.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Malays of Malaysia have various folk arts and crafts. One of their most exotic folk arts is the *wayang kulit*, a traditional shadow-puppet show. These puppets are made of water-buffalo hide, stiffened by a central spine of buffalo horn, and they have movable arms manipulated by a *dalang*, the puppeteer, with thin rods. The puppets are seen only as shadows cast by an oil lamp upon a screen of stretched-cotton cloth. The *dalang* both recites the narrative of the play, and speaks the parts of each character. The show is usually accompanied by a small *gamelan* (musical ensemble).

Malays are renowned for their refined and delicate wood-carvings. These artistic carvings can be seen on their fishing boats and house panels and walls. In the past, the Malays were dependent on the sea for their food and livelihood. Boats were built for fishing and for long sea journeys. These boats were decorated and carved with ornamental embellishments not solely for elegance, but also to fulfill the Malays' aesthetic needs and to equip the boats with spiritual power. Traditional Malay houses have rich decorations and carvings, primarily as decorative pieces on doors, windows, and wall panels.

The weaving of *kain songket* is another fine handicraft made by the Malays. It is made from yarn, formerly silk but now usually cotton, and is woven using a shaft treadle loom made from wood. The loom is about 2.5 m (8 ft) long, and 1.5 m (5 ft) high. The making of *kain songket* involves seven long and complicated stages. These stages are the preparation of the yarn (spooling), warping process, winding of the warp thread on the warping board, inserting the warp thread through the reed, making string loops for the long wooden rods called heddles, making the *songket* pattern, and weaving.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Even though Malaysia is a democratic country, it still retains its Internal Security Act (ISA), which provides for detention without trial for individuals deemed detrimental to the harmony of the nation. Therefore, Malaysia has received criticisms

from human-rights activists for its political actions against individuals who were alleged to be a threat to Malaysia's racial and religious harmony. Other than the ISA, Malaysians basic human and civil rights are virtually secured by the constitution. Women are allowed to vote, work, and hold high positions in the professional field.

Since Islam forbids its followers from drinking alcohol, alcoholism is not a major problem among the Malays.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

As in most countries, there are more males than females in Malaysia. There is a ratio of 103 men for 100 women of the total population. There are equal opportunities for education and professional careers for men and women in Malaysia. As a result, there are a number of women who hold high positions in professional fields. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the traditions that govern relations between men and women are still maintained among the Malays. For instance, women must sit apart from the men in the main portion of the mosque, and are not allowed to mix casually with men or to eat with them. Women give deference and respect to their husbands, and love and compassion to their children. On the other hand, a Malay husband plays as much of a role in rearing his children as does his wife.

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—by P. Bala

# MAN (MANCHUS)

**PRONUNCIATION:** man-CHOOZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Jurchens, Manzhou, Manchus

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 10.68 million

**LANGUAGE:** Chinese, Manchu

**RELIGION:** Some shamanism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Dwelling mainly in northeast China, the Man, better known as the Manchus, have a long history. In addition to their direct relation with the Jurchens, their historical origins may be traced back to the Mohe of the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, to the Wuji of the Han (206 BC&ndash;AD 220) and, more remotely, to the Sushen of the Zhou (c. 12th century–256 BC). Ancient Chinese books began to record the name Jurchens as early as the Five Dynasties (907–960). In the beginning of the 12th century, led by headman Aguda of the Wanyan tribe, the Jurchens established the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234). Before long, they destroyed the Kingdom of Liao (916–1125) and the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) and threatened the Southern Song (1127–1279). A great number of the Jurchens came to the Central Plains (the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River), but they were gradually absorbed into Chinese culture over a long period of time. Following the destruction of the Jin Dynasty, the Jurchens themselves were conquered by the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) and later on ruled by the Ming (1368–1644). Since the 15th century, the headmen of various tribes of Jurchens were appointed by the central government. In the 16th century, a hero of the Jurchens, Nurhachi (1559–1626), unified all the tribes by military force. He built up an organization that integrated military function, government administration, and production management, providing a sound basis for the later establishment and consolidation of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). His eighth son succeeded to the throne. In 1635, he changed the name of his nationality to Manzhou (origin of the Western term “Manchu”). The name was simplified to Man in 1911, at the end of the last dynasty of China.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Mans are scattered all over China. The largest concentration is found in Liaoning Province. Smaller communities live in Jilin, Heilongjiang, Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, and Shandong provinces or regions, as well as in Beijing, Tianjin, Chengdu, Xi’an, and Guangzhou cities. This wide distribution is related to the dominant position of the Mans in the Qing Dynasty. During the dynasty’s 250 years or so, Mans holding important positions lived in different parts of China, and many members of their families took root and remained there. The Man population was 10.68 million in 2000, second only to the Zhuang among the minorities.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Their language is classified as belonging to the Altaic family, Manchu-Tungusic group, Manchu branch. It has withered since the end of the 18th century and is used only among a limited number of the Mans in a few counties of Heilongjiang.

The written language was created on the basis of the Mongolian writing system and was used extensively under the Qing Dynasty. Now, almost all of the Mans use Chinese characters.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

A large part of the rich Man corpus of mythology revolves around ancestors. According to one myth, three fairy maidens descended to take a bath in Tianchi (Heavenly Lake) of the Changbai Mountains. The youngest of them ate a small red fruit carried by a golden bird in its bill. She got pregnant and bore a boy who could speak right after birth. She gave him the surname of Aixinjueluo (the surname of emperors of the Qing Dynasty). When he had grown up, she told him the story of his birth and then ascended to Heaven. Drifting down the streams, the young man arrived at a place where three clans fought fiercely with each other. Taking advantage of his status, he stopped their fight and was selected to be their headman. This place was the hometown of the Jurchens, which means “the root of Man.”

Another myth concerns their god and a hero. It was said that the Man god Abukainduli was very powerful. The rosy clouds were his breath, and the twinkling stars were the droplets from his cough. Unfortunately, he was so lazy that the northern lands froze in a world of snow and ice most of the year. Following an epic combat, the god defeated a demon and flattened him under the weight of a mountain. Not to be outdone, the demon transformed himself into a large elm, which obstructed the head of the river and it dried up. Unwilling to die of thirst, the tribe living there had to offer children in sacrifice to the demon. A young man, Mudan, met the god Abukainduli after innumerable hardships. The god gave him an axe and told him that he should chop down the elm by striking it 81 times with the axe and that Mudan himself would turn into a rock after doing so. To deliver his clan from evil and misery, Mudan lifted the axe and chopped fiercely at the elm. Every nine chops, he suffered a disaster. After the eighty-first chop, the demon fell, and Mudan was transformed into a mountain. At the same time, a vast amount of water sprang from the ground and flowed toward the north. Since then, people have called the river after the name of the hero, Mudan.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The traditional beliefs of the Mans are rooted in Shamanism. According to the Mans, a shaman means “a wildly dancing man capable of magical feats.” The shaman’s duty is to help women bear children, to cure illness, and to shield them from misfortune. Dancing in a trance is the usual way to cure the diseased. This is done by a professional shaman; each village only employs one. He has a variety of props: a shaman’s hat, clothes, shoes, drum, stick, and sword. When he performs, he wears his special hat, on which hang many long strips of multicolored cloths so that his face and even his whole head is covered. Several copper plates cover his back and the front of his chest. He wears a long skirt and a waistband with small copper bells hung on it. Muttering incantations, he beats a drum while dancing. If the diseased recovers, the family should redeem the vow made beforehand to the gods; if not, the shaman will say, “You did not come with a true heart.” If a family wishes to have a son, the shaman is invited to pray to the god called Fuolifuo-duorhanximama. Another shaman is responsible for sacrificial offerings on religious festivals or when a major event occurs.

Shamanism still exists in traditional Man villages but has disappeared from cities a long time ago.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Chinese Spring Festival (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20) is a major holiday for the Mans. They put on the door red, yellow, blue, or white banners, indicating their “bannerman” status among the “Eight Banners.” Some of their festivals are related to their sacrificial offerings. For example, every family offers sacrifice (usually a black male pig) to their ancestors in autumn. There is a *kang* (a heatable brick bed) in their house. The kang on the west side is the best place to lay offerings to their ancestors. Before the butchery, the butcher should sharpen his knife on that kang. Three pieces of cooked pork are put in front of their ancestors’ memorial tablets. A box containing their family tree is placed on a small, short legged table near the kang. The family members kowtow, one after another, in proper order according to their position in the family hierarchy. Then, the invited shaman begins his dance, asking for protection and blessing for the family. The next day, the family will offer a sacrifice to Heaven. Again, a black pig is killed. The internal organs and neck bone are hung on an outdoor post. If the flesh is all eaten by crows, it is a lucky sign. The pork is chopped and cooked with millet. Relatives, friends, neighbors, and even passers-by are invited to take a bowl of gruel. Three days later, the leftovers, if any, should be buried. The bones are also buried at the foot of the post.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In order to obtain the gods’ blessings, a small bow and arrow is hung at the gate when a boy is born. The ancestors of the Mans were good at archery, and a bow and arrows were always worn by men in outdoor activities. When a girl was born, three cloth bands, each 1.5 in wide, were tied outside her swaddling clothes. This was regarded as beneficial to horsemanship in the future. For this reason a strip of cloth is still hung when a girl is born. Habitually, they make the baby lie on its back and put a pillow padded with millet under the back of the baby’s head. The flattened back of the head is regarded as pretty.

In the eyes of the Mans, the north kang is for senior persons and the western one is reserved for the ancestors. Therefore, nobody is allowed to die on it. The coffin is brought in and carried out through the window instead of through the door. The funeral must be held on an odd-numbered day, because a funeral on an even-numbered day would mean that two people have died. Before the funeral, a post is erected in the courtyard. A long narrow flag made of red and black pieces of cloth is hung on it. During the funeral, relatives and friends scramble to take pieces of the flag, which they will use to make clothes for their children. The clothes are believed to protect the children from evil and nightmares. After the funerary ceremony, the deceased is buried in the ground.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Since it is common knowledge that the west kang is reserved for the ancestors, guests avoid sitting there while visiting. Otherwise, guests are warmly welcomed in a Man home.

When the bride-to-be visits for the first time, a small heart-shaped bag for carrying money and odds and ends is usually offered as a token of love. Actually, it is a combination of two



bags exactly of the same size and figures. The girl would keep one half and give the other half to her boyfriend.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There is usually a screen wall facing the gate, inside a traditional Man courtyard, where a post is erected for sacrificial offerings. The house is made of wood and adobes. The central room opens to the south. The room in the west part of the house is usually the bedroom, in which the north, west, and south sides are provided with kang. The parents and the senior persons (if any) sleep on the north kang, the children on the south kang. The inside of the kang is connected with the cooking stove and is always warm in winter.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Man family is patrilineal. A house of three or more generations is not uncommon. The Mans have great esteem for their elders. The position of men and women is more or less equal in the family. Men engage in farming. Although women also work in the fields, they usually spend most of their time doing household chores. The family is monogamous. Arranged marriage is prevalent. When young people reach 16 or 17, they are allowed to be engaged. The matchmaker, representing the male side, usually visits the female side three times before getting an answer. Each time she pays a visit, a bottle of wine is presented. As the saying goes: “Just to ask: Is it all right? Is worth three bottles of wine!” If it is all right, the parents of the girl will ask for betrothal gifts (pigs, wine, money, clothes, ornaments),



Manchu women wear traditional Manchu dress during a festival in Fushun, China. (AP Images/Xinhua, Zhang Yanhui)

which will belong to the girl. On the wedding day, the bride is carried to the groom's house on a bridal sedan chair.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

In the past, men's clothing was adapted to the requirements of horsemanship and marksmanship. They shaved the fore part of their hair and combed the latter part into a braid hung on the back. The tight cuffs of the sleeves, the long vents on both sides of the robe, the waistband, the boots, and their long trousers were all designed to facilitate fighting in a cold climate. Women's costumes include a long robe (*cheongsam*), a wooden pad about 2.5 inches high placed under the middle part of the sole, and a flat bun hung behind the neck. These customs intended to stress the nobility of Man women. Except for long robes for both sexes, the other stylized clothes are not worn today. The robes, however, were prevalent in the first half of the 20th century. Then, they gradually disappeared. But, women's robes are still worn on festive occasions, although they are quite different from the originals. Today, Man clothing is not much different from the Chinese.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

The Mans like to eat millet and glutinous millet. "Cooked mutton held in the hand" is absolutely necessary on the Spring Festival. Mutton is chopped in big pieces with bone and half-

cooked with a little salt. The piece is held with the hand while eating. Sometimes a knife is needed. The most famous light refreshment is *saqima*, a kind of candied fritter. It is made by mixing flour with eggs, cutting the paste into noodles, and frying. It is then taken out, covered with syrup, and stirred. It is finally put into a wooden frame, pressed, cut into squares, and served.

### **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Because of the need to train large numbers of young people (mainly men) to serve as officials during the Man Qing Dynasty, the Mans have traditionally had a relatively high level of literacy. Even more important for the development of education in the recent past is the advanced urbanization of the Man people. As a result, their educational and cultural level is higher than the average for the whole country and even exceeds the average for the whole world. In China, they are second to the Koreans.

### **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

One of the main traditional art forms of the Mans is dancing. A traditional choreography entitled "Hunting Dance" needs actors with a strong physique. Half of them wear leopard skin, ride on horseback, and pursue and attack prop-animals. The

Man songs are accompanied by a vertical bamboo flute and a drum. The rest of the actors dress as tigers and leopards.

A form of dance still popular in northeast China developed from an ancient wedding ceremony dance; it is still performed during festivals. Both men and women, host and guests, take turns dancing. The dancing movements are simple but quite vigorous.

The Octagon Drum Opera is a traditional Man adaptation of Peking opera. The tune and melody and the musical instruments accompanying the narrative are comparable to the styles used in Tianjin, Tangshan, Beijing, and Shenyang cities. The octagon drum is the leading instrument used by the actors.

Some artists and writers of great achievement and reputation are Man, including the famous writer Lao She, the master of comic dialogue Hou Baolin, and the outstanding actor of Peking Opera, Cheng Yanqiu.

### 15 WORK

In the remote past, the ancestors of the Mans were hunters. Later, under Chinese influence, they turned to agriculture. In the modern era, especially since late 19th century, former Manchuria became the most important base of heavy industry in China and a very large part of the Man population became workers, technicians, and managers in large factories. This has remained so. Heavy metals, coal, hydropower, agriculture, forestry, and stock raising are the main industrial and economic resources of the Mans.

### 16 SPORTS

Ice skating has a long history for the Man people and is linked with their Nordic habitat. Centuries ago, Man warriors tied felled animal bones under their boots to march on ice. Later, they exchanged the bones for iron bars inlaid in the sole. Still later, an iron sheath was fitted on a board, which was then tied beneath the boot. In the 19th century, skating was part of the military training of the "Eight Banners" army. Today, Man people still take advantage of the long, cold winter in northeast China to go skating on rivers and lakes or in skating rinks. Some Man skaters are renowned internationally.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For urban Mans, watching television is a daily entertainment in the evenings. They go to the movies once or twice a month. Beijing opera, chess, gardening, pet birds, storytelling, comic dialogues, and "clapper talks" are favorite pastimes of the aged and middle-aged persons. Youngsters like dancing, popular songs, and karaoke. Recreational activities are not different in the rural areas; however, access to television programs and movies is more restricted and the style of dancing and popular songs is different.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Mans excel in jade sculpture, bone carving, clay and dough figurines, and snuff-bottle interior painting. They are also world-renowned for their ice carving and sculptures and have won many international competitions.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Urban Mans have one of the highest economic levels in China, but they have lost much of their cultural identity. Because of

the long and cold winters, rural areas remain economically undeveloped but have preserved many of their traditional ways.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# MANGGARAI

**PRONUNCIATION:** mahng-GAH-rai

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (island of Flores)

**POPULATION:** 575,000 (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Manggarai; Bahasa Indonesia

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic majority; traditional animism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Manggarai are the largest ethnic group on Flores, an island whose Catholic majority sets it apart from the rest of Indonesia. Chinese documents record trade for the sandalwood of neighboring Timor as early as the 12th century. Flores itself is mentioned in a 14th century Javanese poem, the “Nagarakrtagama.” The Portuguese founded a fort at Solor in 1566 and a mission school at Larantuka in 1570, both far to the west of the Manggarai lands. Minangkabau immigrants had probably already made some Muslim converts along the coast. In 1666, the Makassarese attempted unsuccessfully to conquer the southern Manggarai coast. From the 17th century on, the sultanate of Bima in eastern Sumbawa dominated the northwest coast of the Manggarai region, organizing villages into *dalū* (regions) and *glarang* (lineages) and establishing the head of the Tolo *dalū* as *raja* (king) of the Manggarai. Early accounts reported that the native kingdom of Cibal existed in the interior.

After the Tambora eruption of 1815 weakened Bima, the Manggarai with Dutch aid, were able to drive out the Bimane, who gave up their last claims only in 1929. In 1859, the Dutch bought the last of the Portuguese claims to the island on the condition that Catholicism would not be threatened. Dutch Jesuits followed in 1862, converting thousands, particularly from the leading families. In 1913, the Society of the Holy Word (SVD) succeeded the Jesuits in this territory and focused on education. Meanwhile, formal colonization by the Dutch commenced in 1907. In 1917, Catholic missionary activity among the Manggarai began in earnest; the strategy stressed similarities between traditional beliefs and the new religion, as well as tolerating indigenous dance and other customs. In 1930, under the advice of the Catholic hierarchy, a Dutch-educated Catholic Manggarai, Alexander Baruk, was appointed as the “first king” of the Manggarai.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Dutch and German Catholic organizations sponsored a “Flores-Timor” development plan. The Roman Catholic Church cooperated with the New Order government’s development plans. Nusa Tenggara Timur province, of which Flores is a part, remains one of the poorest regions in the country, largely due to the limitations the dry climate imposes on agriculture.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The mountainous island of Flores is part of the Lesser Sunda chain that stretches from Bali in the west to Timor in the east. Inhabiting the western third of the island, the Manggarai are the largest single ethnic group, numbering 575,000 (8% of the population of East Nusa Tenggara province in 2000—Flores as a whole was estimated to have 1.6 million people in 2003). Among them, Malay-Mongoloid physical features appear with

fewer Melanesian/Papuan traits than among peoples farther east on the island. The Ngada people to the immediate east show many similarities to the Manggarai, while the more distant Endenese, Sikkane, and Solorese show much less resemblance. On the west coast of the Manggarai region, long-standing Bajau and Bugis fishing communities exist; Bimane farmers also pass through to sell produce.

The volcanic origin of the soil and relatively abundant rainfall favor agriculture in the Manggarai region over other parts of Flores. However, recent deforestation has led to erosion and the drying up of streams.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The languages of Flores, like most of Indonesia’s, belong to the Austronesian family, specifically to the Central Malayo-Polynesian sub-branch that includes most of the languages of the archipelago east of Sulawesi and western Sumbawa. The Manggarai language is mutually unintelligible with that of the peoples farther east on the island; in fact, it has more in common with the languages of Bima and Sumba. There are three major dialects, the Western, Central, and Eastern, as well as a number of minor ones. Most Manggarai cannot understand the type of language employed in ritual. Bahasa Indonesia is the language of education, administration, and the Catholic church, but village people prefer to speak Manggarai among themselves. In some coastal regions, the Bugis *lontara*’ script was known.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Ghost stories are numerous. Many folktales focus on Mori Karaeng, the supreme being. Some describe how he created the earth, humanity, the spirit world, animals, and plants like maize and rice. Others tell how he caused wind and earthquakes, punished the moon with an eclipse and the *jin* (evil spirits) with thunder. Yet, others recount how he handled those who transgressed against custom, murdered, committed incest, defied parents, and neglected rituals. Still more show him teaching humans how to weave or make palm wine.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The island of Flores as a whole is 85% Catholic, an anomaly in the world’s largest Muslim country. Earlier in this century, however, Catholicism, most firmly based in Larantuka and Ende far to the east, dominated only the eastern part of the Manggarai region. Islam was strong in the west due to the influence of the Bima sultanate and the presence of Bugis and Bajau communities. The central Manggarai lands adhered to the traditional animist religion. In recent years, this pattern has changed, with Catholics now the majority throughout the region. The Catholic religion has even become an identity marker in relation to Muslim outsiders, which now include Javanese bureaucrats and merchants in the towns.

In churches, schools, and shrines, Catholicism has transformed the landscape. On Sunday mornings, families on their way to and from Mass fill the streets, church bells ringing overhead. Rosaries, crucifixes, and other religious objects are displayed in homes, shops, and vehicles and are sold in stores alongside consumer goods. On Flores, the Catholic Church works closely with the government and supports its development plans. Townspeople have a lifestyle informed by a Catholic outlook, while rural people tend to incorporate the new religion into their traditional life.





In addition to Mori Karaeng, the traditional religion recognizes several classes of spirits. *Empo* or *andung* are ancestral spirits who inhabit the environs of the village and who are invoked in life-cycle ceremonies. The *darat* or *ata pelesina* (“people of the other world”) are spirits of nature (forests, rivers, springs). Among these, the *naga tana* guard the soil while the *ngara tana* watch gardens, fields, and the crops themselves. Evil spirits are known by the originally Islamic terms *jin* or *setan*. Wooden altars in the shape of traditional houses are erected in gardens.

Leading rituals is a priest, the *ata mbeko* (male or female). One acquires this role not through heredity but through learning by assisting an experienced *ata mbeko*. He or she performs or guides life-cycle rites in the home, as well as public ceremonies, such as the inauguration of a village hall or those for the fertility of the soil. The *ata mbeko* also provide *dukun* services, such as healing, predicting a person’s future, or giving amulets or holy water for people to use against their enemies. Clan members return to their ancestral villages to participate in major ceremonies, which may include ritualized whip fights.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to national holidays [see **Indonesians**], Catholic feasts are an important part of the cycle of the year.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A *jambat* ceremony, involving the offering of young betel nuts and a chicken with no black feathers, is held in the sixth month

of pregnancy. A *tenda* rite is held if a mother and her daughter-in-law are pregnant at the same time.

Most marriages today result from courtship or dating. The man’s family applies (*cangkang*) for the hand of the woman. The girl’s family asks for a high bride-price (*paca*), which includes water buffalo and horses, but they will also give a large gift to the boy’s family.

Frequently, parents seek their child’s ideal partner in the mother’s brother’s daughter, a type of marriage called *tungku*, which does not require a large bride-price because of the already existing informal relationship between the families. In the past, one family would by custom take wives from a particular family, while that family in turn would take wives from a third family; relations between “wife-taking” families (*anak rona*) and “wife-giving” (*anak wina*) families would be formal, expressing status distinctions.

Elopement (*roko*) is a common alternative if a young man cannot or will not pay the bride-price, or if the young woman’s family does not consent to the match. Both sides can also agree to the elopement beforehand in order to save the face of the man’s family if the bride-price is too high. The man’s family makes a marriage application after the “abduction,” waiting until the girl’s family’s anger has subsided to ask forgiveness. The woman’s family goes through the formality of stating a high bride-price even though their daughter is already living with her new husband and his family.

After finalizing the amount of the bride-price, the woman’s family hosts a feast where they charge the man’s family twice the value of what the latter has consumed. An elder inspects the liver of a sacrificed pig to learn the ancestor’s opinion of the match.

In lieu of a bride-price, the groom may do service for the bride’s family for a specified time. After living with the bride’s family for five days (ending with the *wega mio* ceremony), the new couple moves in with the groom’s family. A man may marry the widow of a deceased brother without paying a bride-price. Aristocrats used to practice polygyny, but this is now banned under Catholicism.

Burial and mourning rituals are complex. Tradition required that bodies be buried with their limbs drawn close to the body. However, a coffin now replaces the former mat. A wake is held for three nights and includes gambling. The person is buried in his or her home village. The burial is held at night because in the other world everything is opposite; thus, night here is day there, and dishes and glasses for the use of the dead are broken because they will be whole in the other world.

At first, the deceased’s spirit (*ase-kae de weki*) roams around the house, especially by where it slept when alive, and then it occupies the well, big trees, house posts, or nearby crossroads (during this period, it can help its kin if they are in danger). Five days after the death, the family holds the *kelas* ritual, sacrificing animals. With this, the spirit becomes a *poti*, who is released from this world and leaves for the other world; there it lives with Mori Karaeng and intercedes for the descendants with him.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Manggarai society still preserves traces of the traditional political order. The Manggarai people used to be divided among 39 *dalū*, small regions, most of which were subordinate to either Reo or Patta, the two halves of the Cibal kingdom. Each

dalus were dominated by a single *wa'u*, whose members considered themselves aristocrats. The head of the dalu was a *kraeng* (from the Makassarese word for “king”), and other prominent leaders were *sangaji*. The dalu encompassed several often unrelated *glarang*, lineages that were autonomous from the dalu in matters of land rights (including rights to hunting and fishing grounds). The *glarang* had a *tu'a tenu*, a hereditary specialist on the customary laws on land tenure, who distributed lands to lineage members to use; he was usually from a different family from the lineage head. Each *glarang* was in turn composed of *beo* (villages).

Members of the dominant lineages within dalu and *glarang* territories formed the *kraeng* (aristocratic class). The *ata leke* were the ordinary people: artisans, peasants, and laborers; these commoners controlled small tracts between the lands of aristocrats. Before the Dutch abolished the practice, war captives, debtors, and exiles could become slaves, which were also bought from foreign traders. The stigma of slave descent is still felt today. However, the sharpest distinction today is between townspeople and villagers.

In the past, warfare was endemic; warriors in rattan war helmets and feathered war cloaks fought with spears, knives, and shields. Through marriage, aristocratic clans formed alliances, regarding all other dalus as enemies. Before battle, warriors splattered their swords with the blood of a sacrificed pig, goat, or chicken and marched around the village center.

Among the Manggarai, adolescents of the opposite sex can associate freely, chatting at wells or dancing at feasts.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Raised on 1-m (3-ft) stilts, the traditional house has a circular floor plan. Made of bundles of rice straw, the conical roof rises from the edge of the floor (i.e., there are no walls as such) to a center post that may be as high as 6 m (20 ft). Inside, a corridor separates the rooms, four to five on either side. The space immediately under the roof is the place for spirits, and heirlooms and food are stored there. The middle space is for human living. The space under the house is for storing tools and keeping animals (pigs, goats, sheep, and chickens). Before Dutch regulations early in the 20th century placed the maximum occupancy to three families, these houses could contain as many as 200 people.

Traditional houses are rare, as Manggarai now prefer houses with walls, modeled on those of other regions of Indonesia; a zinc roof has become a status symbol.

Until the Dutch began pushing for settlement in the plains, villages used to be built on hilltops for defense. In a pattern that can still be seen in modern settlements, a village had three parts: a front (*pa'ang*), a middle (*beo*), and a back (*ngaung*). Formerly, each section of a house had a sacred spot, a pile of big stones where guardian spirits could descend. Still today, the center of each village has a *kota*, a pile of large stones arranged in a step-pyramid with a table of flat stones on the top. A great banyan tree shades the *kota*. In front of the *kota* stands a sacred village hall called *mbaru gendang* (after the large sacred drum inside). Bamboo stockades 2 to 3 m (6.5–10 ft) high once encircled hilltop villages, now replaced by a dense barrier of thorny bushes (but modern villages at the foot of hills lack stockades altogether).

For occupation during the cultivation of swidden (shifting cultivation) fields, small houses called *sekang* are built. A clus-

ter of these may become a new village if it acquires a *kota*, a banyan, and an *mbaru gendang*.

Townspeople with office jobs can afford consumer goods and dinners in restaurants, particularly at the beginning of the month right after salaries are paid. Rural people are generally well-fed but low on cash. When they take their produce to the town market, they may treat themselves to a meal from a food stall, indulge in small-time gambling, and buy cigarettes and bread or candies to take home to relatives.

The Manggarai regency has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 65.2 (2005 score), somewhat higher than that of East Nusa Tenggara province as a whole (63.6) but well below that of Indonesia as a whole (69.6). The regency's GDP per capita is us\$2,174, the second lowest in East Nusa Tenggara, which in turn has the second lowest in Indonesia (cf. us\$9,784 for West Sumatra, us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, and us\$6,293 for Central Java, and us\$3,427 for East Nusa Tenggara as a whole. GDP figures do not include income from petroleum and natural gas production, negligible in any case for these provinces). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality stood at 55.65 deaths per 1,000 live birth, only slightly lower than the rate for the province as a whole (56.65), comparable to much more developed provinces such as South Sulawesi and West Java.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

The *cak kilo* is the nuclear family. The most important unit, however, is the extended family, the *kilo*, including the parents' sons, their wives, and children. A group of *kilo* with a common patrilineal ancestor five to six generations back is a *panga*; often *panga* that shrink due to death will enter into other larger *panga*. In the past, the *panga* was responsible for mourning rites, the cremation of ancestral remains, and the raising of stone pillars to honor ancestral spirits, but now it serves only to give its members a surname. The *wa'u*, a unit larger still than the *panga*, has lost its functions by now but used to have animal totems and hold rituals that were taboo for outsiders' participation.

Kinship terminology exhibits some peculiarities. *Empo* refers to both grandparents and grandchildren. A father, his brother, and the mother's sister's husband are all *ema*. The mother, her sister, and the father's brother's wife are all *ende*. *Inang* is for the father's sister and the mother's brother's wife while *amang* is for the mother's brother and the father's sister's husband. *Weta* applies to a sister, a father's brother's daughter, and a mother's sister's daughter. *Kae* applies to an elder brother, a father's brother's son, and a mother's sister's son. *Kesah* refers to a father's sister's son and a mother's brother's son. The same word, *wina*, applies to a mother's brother's daughter and to a wife, while *rona* refers both to a father's sister's son and to a husband.

The terminology expresses the patrilineal bias of the kinship system, as when the term for father applies to the father's brother but not to the mother's brother. Moreover, a man who marries a sister of the father, thus taking a wife from the same family as the father, is also called father (*ema*).

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

Traditional women's upper-body clothing resembles the Bugis-Makassar *baju bodo*, a blouse with wide, short sleeves. A rural woman now wears a sarong and a blouse or tee-shirt. A rural

man wears a headcloth, short pants under a sarong, and a machete tied to his waist. Both sexes wear rubber thongs or go barefoot. Going into town, male villagers may carry a *peci* (the national brimless cap of black velvet) with a colorful piece of Manggarai cloth added, a cloth bag for tobacco or betel nut, and occasionally a carved cane. Female villagers wear skirts rather than sarongs into town and carry a handkerchief.

Teenagers wear jeans and tee-shirts, boys adding baseball caps and running shoes. Because of the cost and perhaps out of greater conservatism, rural teenage girls are less likely to wear jeans. Village teenagers dress traditionally at home but adopt modern clothes for visits to town. Townspeople dress like other urban Indonesians.

## 12 FOOD

Roasted whole or made into cakes or porridge, maize is the staple food, eaten with vegetable side dishes. Rice and chicken or pig meat is reserved for special occasions. Ceremonies also require the consumption of great quantities of palm wine. Several decades ago, betel chewing was very popular (though it is much less so now).

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2005, the level of literacy stood at 85.95% in Manggarai regency, slightly higher than that for East Nusa Tenggara as a whole but somewhat low for Indonesia, though comparable to more developed provinces with higher population densities and high numbers of poor, such as South Sulawesi, Bali, and East Java (see also the article entitled **Indonesians**).

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Oral literature consists of poetry (*renge* and *tudak*), requests to the gods for prosperity. This poetry forms part of nighttime rituals. An *ata molor tudak*, a storyteller, or the *tu'a tenu* of the *glarang* recite folktales.

## 15 WORK

Slash-and-burn agriculture is the major occupation. Fire is used to clear land, and the partially burned trunks are piled up to form borders between fields. Farmers cooperate in clearing land and divide the cleared land according to an agreement. Traditionally, fields were arranged radiating from a center (creating a spider-web-like pattern); these *lingko randang* fields are rare now. The main crops are maize and rice.

In 1918, the Dutch brought Balinese prisoners to establish wet-rice fields; years later, they sent Manggarai to study wet-rice techniques in Bima. The valleys around Ruteng constitute Flores' largest wet-rice area (swidden, or shifting-cultivation, is still the dominant form of farming on the island as a whole).

The Manggarai region is also one of the country's largest coffee areas (grown on permanent hillside farms and in house gardens). The export of oranges, jackfruit, *salak*, cacao, and cashews is just beginning to grow.

Water buffalo are status symbols, slaughtered for consumption at customary ceremonies. Horses are kept for transport and traction and constitute part of the bride-price. Water buffalo and horses are pastured on village common land and kept in a village pen. Alternately, horses are left to roam free in the surrounding grasslands to be caught when needed and later released. Pigs, goats, sheep, and chickens roam about the house

yard by day and are kept under the house at night. Livestock export is another young industry.

Many young Manggarai men work in the towns for cash to be sent back to their families in the village.

## 16 SPORTS

*Caci* are whip fights that accompany ceremonies, but are now also performed to entertain tourists. The whip is of water buffalo hide, as is the shield (the latter can also be of bamboo rods). The whip leaves large scars that are attractive to women. Every young man has a fighting name, e.g., "Wild Boar," "Rearing Horse," "Naughty Rooster," or "Gone Around the World and Have Yet to be Bested."

Cockfighting with intense gambling accompanies many rituals. Despite an official ban, local police do not interfere.

Soccer is the most popular modern sport. The Catholic diocese divides Manggarai into four parts, each of which fields a team for a diocesan tournament.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

*Ikat* (tie-dyed) cloth is produced for family use. Basketry is highly developed: typical pieces are hats and betel- and tobacco-chew holders. For these, young palm leaves are split into fine fibers, dried, and dyed with store-bought colors, often green, red, and yellow.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) for Manggarai regency (2002 score) is 59.9, slightly above Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2 and significantly above that of East Nusa Tenggara as a whole (56.3). The residency's average Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, is 33.33, far lower than the national GEM of 54.6 and the provincial GEM of 46.2).

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—revised by A. J. Abalahin

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## MANGYAN (HANUNO'O GROUP)

**PRONUNCIATION:** mahng-YAHN (hah-noo-NO-oh)

**LOCATION:** Philippines (island of Mindoro)

**POPULATION:** 7,000-13,000 (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Hanuno'o

**RELIGION:** Traditional animism; some Catholicism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

### <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Hanuno'o are the best known of the various groups called "Mangyan" living in the interior of the island of Mindoro. To an even greater extent than other such outsider-given names, "Mangyan" covers a wide range of meanings. In the Tagalog, Bikol, and Visayan languages of the central Philippines, the term combines the ideas of "savage," "mountaineer," and "pagan Negro," apparently once referring to Negritos rather than to Mangyan, who physically do not differ from lowland Filipinos. The word even came to mean "servant" or "debt-slave," much as, among the Tausug, captive slaves in general were called *bisaya*. In the usage of most Mindoro highlanders themselves, "Mangyan" equals "a person," a fellow "tribesperson," or "pagan." The exception is the Buhid who use it only to refer to other highland peoples and not to themselves. The Hanuno'o, on the other hand, insist that they are the "authentic" Mangyan (*hanuno'o* means "true" in their language).

Mindoro presents one of the great anomalies of Philippine history. Whereas Cebu, Panay, and, above all, Manila retained and increased their regional importance under Spanish colonial rule, Mindoro lost its pre-Hispanic prominence. Finding mention in Chinese accounts of the 13th century, the island was the first place in the Philippines to enter the historical record under the name Mait (Ma-yi in modern Mandarin pronunciation). To exchange for beeswax, musk, sandalwood, kapok, and the leather of the *tamaraw* (a wild and smaller version of the water buffalo), Chinese traders brought porcelain, metal, cloth, and silver coin; the Mait people themselves carried these goods to other islands and returned with the products the Chinese desired. Shaded by umbrellas, the Southeast Asian emblem of royalty, the chiefs of the coastal towns were powerful enough to deter pirate attacks, to exact customs duties from the Chinese traders, and to vouch for their own people, whom the Chinese regarded as "trustworthy."

Based on Panay and groping towards Manila, the Spanish first came to Mindoro in 1570. They called the coastal people "Moros," noting their connections with Muslim Brunei, which they would discover the Tagalogs farther north also enjoyed. The coastal towns were defended by moats, 4.25 m (14 ft) thick walls, and culverins (small cannons). Their inhabitants were rich in gold and savvy enough to present the greedy Spaniards with fake gold pieces that deceived even the most expert. In addition, the Spaniards also recorded that "Chichimecos" inhabited the interior. This was originally an Aztec term for the nomadic bands who lived far to the north of the Valley of Mexico; here it would generally be applied to Negritos. This is a reversal of the transfer of terminology that named the Aztecs and other American natives *indios*, "Indians." This distinction

between sophisticated coast-dwellers and “primitive” interior peoples would widen through the coming centuries.

Because of its strategic position between Luzon, Panay, and Palawan, coastal Mindoro became a battleground between the Spanish and their Muslim enemies from the far south. From the 17th to the early 19th century, the Muslims controlled the entire west coast of the island, using it as a base from which to conduct piracy and slave-raids throughout Spanish Christian territory. The Spanish themselves attempted with only limited success to extend their control over the rest of the island, exacting tribute, gathering the natives into compact settlements (*reducciones*), and establishing missions. The end result of this conflict was the Spanish evacuation of much of the coastal population to the more securely held province of Batangas on Luzon and the withdrawal to the interior of the rest whom slavers had not taken.

By the 19th century, the island that had been the Philippines’ first recorded window to the outer world gained a reputation as a wild, mysterious, and inhospitable land. When Christian lowlanders (Tagalogs and Hiligaynon) began to settle the coasts, they looked on the natives as alien heathens ripe for exploitation. For a machete, Christians could demand rice crops from Mangyan in payment; Christian men would enter into sexual liaisons with Mangyan women, only to abandon them. The American colonial regime deepened the division by labeling the Mangyan as inferior to other Filipinos and designating Indian-style reservations for them. However, as many Filipinos pointed out, American interest in the Mangyan was inseparable from their desire to exploit the island’s resources. Settling the coasts and penetrating the interior, Christian Filipinos have continued to exert pressure on the Mangyan.

The Mangyan response has been to seclude themselves even further and to avoid entering into any “reciprocal” relations with lowlanders, which they have long learned end up one-sided. They even distrust hierarchy among themselves, preferring egalitarian social structures. These characteristics have left them less able to assert their political rights in the manner that Cordillera and Muslim peoples have done in gaining a measure of autonomy. As the American regime in the end abandoned the policy of isolating the Mangyan, the Filipino government has favored simple integration, which would ultimately end the Mangyan existence as separate peoples. For instance, the Iraya of the northern highlands have been settled by the government in towns and have become wage laborers for Christians.

Although they are the only Mangyan group that traditionally maintained trade relations with lowlanders, re-trading the goods to the other groups, the Hanuno’o still keep to themselves, an all-the-more-striking feat since they live rather close to Hiligaynon settlements. Whereas other groups (particularly to the north), who are hunter-gatherers that grow root-crops only intermittently, may indeed be descended from the Spaniards’ Chichimecos, the Hanuno’o, who not only grow dry-rice, weave cloth, make pottery, and forge metal but also possess a script, probably lived on the coast in earlier times. Many elements of their present culture correspond to those of pre-Christian Visayan culture as described by Spanish writers.

Some Hanuno’o have begun to integrate with wider Filipino society with the assistance of Antoon Postma, a Dutch Catholic priest who began work in 1958. Having failed to attract Hanuno’o to settle near lowland schools, he established a



school-clinic-chapel complex in the mountains. The Hanuno’o living around it have even begun to elect their own leaders (rather than deferring simply to age and experience), a move that will allow them to participate in Filipino politics.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Hanuno’o live inland from the southernmost tip of Mindoro. In the 1970s, the Hanuno’o numbered 6,000 out of a total of 20–30,000 Mangyan, already a minority on an island inhabited by 300,000 Tagalog and Visayan settlers. One 2000 estimate numbers the Hanuno’o 13,000. According to the 2000 census, 7,702 identified themselves as Hanuno’o in Oriental Mindoro province, 19,001 there identified themselves as simply “Mangyan,” and 13,899 in Occidental Mindoro province identified themselves as “Mangyan.” The other groups include, on the one hand, the Buhid and Batangan of the southern highlands, who with the Hanuno’o form a group linguistically close to Visayan and, on the other, the Iraya, Alangan, and Tadyawan, who speak languages more similar to Tagalog. In 2000, the Mangyan were proportionately an even smaller minority on their ancestral island; its total population surpassed 1 million.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Mangyan groups speak mutually unintelligible languages. The Hanuno’o language is similar to the Visayan tongues of the central Philippines. Along with the neighboring Buhid and the Tagbanua of central Palawan (see *Tagbanua*), they still use the script, ultimately of Indian origin, that was employed by the

Tagalogs and other Filipino peoples at the time of the Spanish conquest. Incised into lengths of bamboo, this script is used to write messages and courtship verse; only recently has it been used for any other purpose, namely, in election materials.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

See the following section on religion.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The Hanuno'o recognize certain named deities of creation, but these play only a minor role in everyday life. Ordinarily more significant to them are nature spirits living in mountains, rocks, the forest, etc., who all can be transformed into *labang*, evil spirits who can attack a person's soul, causing illness or death. Benign spirits (such as ancestors) may allow their evil fellows to do harm to humans who have violated custom.

Each person has three *karaduwa* (souls), a good one located to the right of the chest, a neutral one in the center, and an evil one to the left. The center-soul keeps both sides in balance. If the left soul gains the upper hand, the person may lie, steal, or kill. If the right soul fails to return to the body temporarily, this causes illness; if it leaves permanently, death occurs. *Kalag* are guardian spirits, the ghosts of the recently deceased or the souls of the living who have supernatural powers, such as becoming invisible or making others invisible.

Part-time specialists, such as masseurs, herbalists, and mediums (*balyanan*), perform curing rituals. The balyanan send their spirit familiars to combat evil spirits or extract harmful objects from a victim's body. The spirit familiars reside in stones that the balyanan carefully guard. Mediums also wave leaves or other plant parts over the patient's body. Balyanan are present at ceremonies for deceased kinfolk, area spirits, and swidden (shifting-cultivation) fields, especially for rice. Spirit offerings consist of cooked rice, pig's blood, and prepared betel chew, but spirits especially appreciate glass trade-beads.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

See the sections entitled "Religion" and "Rites of Passage" in this article.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Hanuno'o marry by mutual agreement of the two partners' families; the man must provide some form of bride-service to his in-laws. In contrast to non-Mangyan groups, there is no bride-price, formal ceremony, or exchange of goods between the sides. Elopement is an alternative.

For a year after death, the right soul remains in the underworld, neither dead nor alive. The left soul remains with the body, however, and may bring misfortune to surviving kin. During the first year, the body is buried with its head turned towards the west, so the face will get sunlight. After a year, the bones are exhumed (*kutkutan*) and bundled in two blankets, with two ends tied together to make the "head," while the other two make the "arms." The relatives feed, talk to, and dance with the bones at a large, expensive socioreligious festival called a *panludan*, now also called by the Hispano-Visayan term, *punsiyon*. This is an occasion for merry-making, courting, singing, and dancing. Not being able to use the former house of the deceased, the relatives build a ritual house; upon entering the ritual house, they beat each other with branches



*A pregnant Mangyan tribeswoman with her daughter. (AFP/Getty Images)*

to drive away the center- and left-souls of the deceased. During 24 hours of chanting, a priestly exhumation specialist (*panugkutkutan*) reconstructs the bleached bones in the form of a person and puts clothing on the "body."

Afterwards, the bones are cleaned, and certain valuables are placed in a cave niche with the remains of other relatives. The three souls become one and go towards *agsalim*, the spiritual world, situated on Mt. Aliwliwan. Before passing on to *agsalim*, the unified soul must pass through a checkpoint where a woman judges the soul. One's deeds, character, relations, and debts are believed to continue unchanged into afterlife. If the soul is good, the woman teaches it the way to Aliwliwan. If the soul is bad, the woman keeps silent and a big man with seven dogs appears and drives the soul into a boiling pond. These beliefs reflect the influence of Buddhism.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Hanuno'o live in autonomous, named settlements largely corresponding to a kin-group. Society is egalitarian with some prestige accorded to age and special skills, such as weaving, smithing, spirit mediation. Individuals and families possess wealth in the form of ritual glass beads, bronze gongs, porcelain jars, and cattle, but accumulated property does not give

rise to social differentiation. The eldest member of a kinship group acts as a caretaker or consultant. Disputes are settled by the eldest relatives of the disputing parties. Some cases are resolved by ordeal by hot water. Penalties take the form of fines in glass beads. Although the closest relatives of a murder victim will avenge the death, the Hanuno'ο, like other Mangyan groups, have no recent tradition of warfare; their response to attack by outsiders (such as Moro slavers) has been evasion.

At *panludan* funerary feasts, young men and women engage in a highly stylized pattern of courtship involving the exchange of love songs (*ambahan*). The boy starts and the girl answers, both aiming to choose the wittiest or most appropriate verse.

## **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

Villages are semipermanent, traditionally autonomous, and consist of five to six single-family houses (50–60 persons maximum). They are generally built on valley slopes or hill spurs overlooking a water source. The sites are identified by a geographical landmark, and the settlement itself by the name of its eldest resident. Settlements within an hour's easy walking distance form a "local area" to which a person maintains a life-long affiliation and ethnocentric attachment, no matter where he or she moves.

Houses are raised on piles, sturdily constructed of wood or bamboo, and roofed with thatch. They include a veranda that may connect to the verandas of other houses, linking several in a chain. Granaries resemble houses but are smaller and lack a veranda. Some Hanuno'ο live in tree houses for protection.

Average family income in the MIMAROPA region (Mindoro, Masbate, Romblon, and Palawan islands) amounted to 109,000 pesos (us\$2,137) in 2006, the second lowest in the country (above the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, and those of the neighboring regions, Southern Tagalog, ₱198,000, and the Western Visayas, ₱130,000.

In Oriental Mindoro province, the proportion of houses with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum increased from 27% in 1990 to 52% in 2000, with a roof of grass or palm thatch from 67.1% in 1990 to 40.7% in 2000. Houses with outer walls of concrete, brick, or stone reached 27% in 2000 and with wooden outer walls 16.2%; the proportion of houses with outer walls of grass or palm thatch remained high, 33.9% in 2000, though substantially down from the 1990 figure of 54.4%.

## **<sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE**

A family consists of a man, his wife or wives, and their unmarried offspring. This may be extended to form a local family group with married daughters, and their families usually live in adjacent houses. Such a group always respects its oldest male member. A single family may move away from the settlement but will always set up its residence near the kin of either the husband or wife.

The Hanuno'ο use the body as a metaphor for the extended family, whose members cannot intermarry without infringing the incest taboo and who do *arawatan*, i.e., aid each other in farming. The husband is equated with the right breast, the wife with the left. The right upper arm represents the husband's siblings, and the left represents the wife's. The forearms are the cousins of the respective spouses, the hands are the second cousins, and the spaces between the thumb and forefinger are the third cousins. The right neck-cheek area signifies the father

and the left symbolizes the mother, while the top of the head indicates the grandparents and all the ancestors. The two sides of the abdomen represent the husband's and wife's siblings, the right thigh represents the children, the left thigh symbolizes the nephews and nieces, the knees are the grandchildren, and the lower legs are great-grandchildren and all other descendants. This imagery parallels the terminology in other Filipino and Indonesian languages, such as the Hiligaynon *apo sa tuhod*, "grandchild at the knee" or great-grandchild; *apo sa umang-umang*, "grandchild at the thumb" or great-great-grandchild; and *apo sa ingay-ingay*, "grandchild at the smallest toe" or great-great-great-grandchild.

As most people marry within their locality, they often have to wed cousins; this is permissible after performing a cleansing ritual. At first, most couples settle with the wife's family, moving on only later. A set of brothers is allowed to marry a set of sisters, and a widow or widower is encouraged to marry the sibling of the deceased spouse.

## **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Hanuno'ο are noted for long hair, men as well as women. They weave and dye (indigo) their own clothing, which consists of short shirts and short sarongs.

## **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Rice is the food of prestige and ritual importance, but half of all calories in the Hanuno'ο diet comes from bananas and tubers (sweet potatoes, yams, and taro). Most animal protein comes from fishing, less from game or livestock.

## **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

With the exception of those attracted by Father Postma, the Dutch Catholic priest who established a school-clinic-chapel complex in the highlands, Hanuno'ο avoid modern schools to a greater extent than do other minority groups.

## **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Large repertoires of verse (*ambahan*) are incised on bamboo strips. Consisting of seven syllables with rhyming endings, these highly metaphorical verses are in an archaic poetical language that is quite distant from everyday speech. An integral part of courtship, they are chanted with or without the accompaniment of guitars, jaw harps, nose flutes, and *git-git*, a locally produced small wooden fiddle with strings of human hair. One example translates: "The honey-eater bird,/Not yet having left the nest,/A blinking trembler,/Began to be tempted/ By a pretty dear,/In the *ulang* bushes of the *cogon* meadow." Another goes: "Though I love your body,/I love not to intrude on two./If one accompany a married woman/Who shall obey his wink,/His head shall have a nightmare/Up there in the mountains."

Another mood is expressed in an *urukay* song of the neighboring Buhid: "Like a tree overgrown with branches and leaves,/My mind is full of turmoil./Though loaded with pain and grief,/My dreams continually seek for an end,/Let it be known that I am on my way./Perchance you'll catch up with me."

## **<sup>15</sup>WORK**

The Hanuno'ο rely on swidden agriculture. To ensure the success of their efforts, they employ not only astronomical lore,

augury, and dream interpretation but also extensive pragmatic knowledge of soil types, crop rotation, erosion, and a knowledge of plants more precise than a Western botanist's. They recognize 1,625 mutually exclusive plant forms in 890 categories, of which 600 are edible, 406 are medicinal, and the rest have no use but are classified in order to complete their understanding of an ordered environment. By contrast, Western botanists distinguish only 1,100 plant species.

The Hanuno'o practice intercropping—before harvesting one species, they plant another. In this way, they grow maize, rice, beans, sugarcane, bananas, and papayas. They do not acknowledge permanent ownership of land but rather usufruct, the rights of those tilling it at any given time; fallow land may be reopened by another party. Individuals do own trees, spears, and beads, while families own heirloom gongs and porcelain.

For consumption at ritual feasts, the Hanuno'o keep pigs, chickens, and humped cattle (the last are also used as draft animals). Using spears, traps, poisoned arrows, dogs, and formerly fire-surrounds involving 50 or more men, they hunt wild pig, deer, monkeys, and in the past *tamaraw* (small, wild water buffalo). They also catch fish and crustaceans.

The Hanuno'o make occasional trips to the lowlands to trade their surplus rice, maize, bananas, cacao, and tobacco for salt, metal (scrap, needles, kettles), ritually important glass beads (also the standard of value in the south Mindoro pagan interior), red cloth, Moro gongs, and Chinese porcelain (for ancestral offerings). They trade these goods obtained from lowlanders to the neighboring Buhid, their fellow highlanders, for clay cooking pots.

## 16 SPORTS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Because of their isolation, Hanuno'o have less access to modern entertainment forms than other "minority" groups.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Using double-piston bellows, men forge knives and other articles from scrap metal obtained through trade with lowlanders. Women plant, pick, gin, and weave cotton into clothing and blankets and also grow indigo for dyeing. Basketry is highly developed, using red-dyed rattan and displaying fine geometrical designs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

According to the 2000 census, among the Hanuno'o, men and women are nearly equal in number (50.2% vs. 49.8%). In the Oriental Mindoro population as a whole, more women had a college undergraduate education or higher and received academic degrees than men by a substantial margin; elementary school completion, a measure likely more relevant to the Hanuno'o, was lower for girls than for boys; 52.6% of elementary school graduates were male while only 51.5% of the population was male.

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—revised by A. Abalain



# MANUVU' (UPLAND BAGOBO)

**PRONUNCIATION:** man-NOH-bo

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bagobo

**LOCATION:** Philippines (island of Mindanao)

**POPULATION:** About 30,000

**LANGUAGE:** Manuvu'/Bagobo

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Manuvu' are one of the many Mindanao groups to whom Visayans, Spanish, and Moros apply the name *Bagobo* (anthropologists specify the Manuvu' as the "Upland Bagobo"). The term is a contraction of *bago*, "new," and *obo*, "man." Originally, the term Bagobo referred to the peoples of coastal southwestern Mindanao who converted to Islam. However, its scope was extended to include unconverted hill tribes such as the Manuvu', whose name means "native people." They are themselves not a homogeneous group, displaying dialectal differences and occupational and artistic specializations.

The Manuvu' *Tuwaang* epic locates their origin in the valley of the Kuaman river (a tributary of the Pulangi). This region's present population speaks a dialect that Manuvu' can understand, and who are otherwise culturally similar. Little Islamic influence (or, rather, the culture of the Islamized lowlanders such as the Maguindanao) can be found in Manuvu' culture. In the 19th century, Moro warriors struck into the uplands, compelling the Manuvu' to ally with their traditional enemies, the Matigsalug, in order to mount a resistance. At the same time, by the middle of that century, external trade was making an impact on Manuvu' life. The Manuvu' received woven clothing from the coastal Attaw in exchange for boar and deer meat. The Attaw also delivered gongs, horses, and water buffalo to the Manuvu' who in turn "reexported" them to the Matigsalug in exchange for long-bladed knives. Another lucrative business for the Manuvu' was the sale of Matigsalug slaves to the Attaw.

Seeking to end the warfare endemic to the region, the American colonial administration (fully imposed on Mindanao only in the 1910s) discouraged the Manuvu' from carrying arms. The Manuvu' gradually abandoned ambush weapons such as the blowgun and the bow and arrow; only individuals willing to pay a special tax were issued with licenses to carry the *palihumas* long-blades (after World War II, one still brought a spear on trips but otherwise left spears stacked in the house). Having adopted the crops from Japanese and American planters, the Attaw introduced abaca and coffee to the Manuvu', many of whom came to rely on them, especially after World War II. During that war, hoping to flush out Filipino guerrillas taking refuge among the Manuvu', the Japanese built the first roads into the uplands. In later years, on these roads and those cut by logging companies, Visayan settlers poured in, displacing Manuvu' from more and more of their ancestral lands.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Manuvu' (population estimated at about 30,000) inhabit an extensive region between the Pulangi and Davao rivers in

central Mindanao (southern Bukidnon, northeast Cotabato, and northwest Davao provinces). This territory begins as rugged, mountainous terrain in the east, then flattens into gentler slopes and wider valleys towards the west. Although the soil in the western valleys is more suitable for rice, the Manuvu' prefer the eastern hillsides where swidden (shifting-cultivation) farming strains the back less.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Manuvu'/Bagobo language belongs to the Manobo subgroup of the Southern Philippine branch of the Austronesian family; as such, its closest relatives are other indigenous languages of Mindanao.

Relatives select a name for a child that refers to natural phenomena or memorable events accompanying the birth (e.g., an earthquake or a visitor's arrival); physical peculiarities of the child; or persons known to the relatives personally or by reputation (including Christians such as the Filipino president). Manuvu' do not have surnames, adding their father's name for further identification if necessary.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Consisting of 100 sung episodes, the *Tuwaang* epic recounts the adventures of the hero of that name. *Tuwaang* is a *bahani*', one of whose marks of distinction is the possession of 200 wives. The epic provides the Manuvu' with their mythology as well as behavioral ideals, such as the characteristics of the proper leader; Manuvu' even see in it predictions of the future, e.g., airplanes are believed to have been prefigured in the *sinalimba* boat that carries *Tuwaang* and his followers into heaven. The Manuvu' believe there is a creature in the mountains named the *busao/buso* that eats their children.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

According to Manuvu' belief, there are two parallel universes, one good and the other bad, each divided into a skyworld, an earthworld, and an underworld. While the bad universe is only vaguely delineated, the good universe's skyworld consists of nine layers, at the topmost of which resides *Manama*, the supreme deity. *Manama* is little involved in earthly affairs, although eventually he will take the souls of the good from the underworld to live with him. Lesser gods (*diwata*' and *anitu*) inhabit the lower layers of the skyworld. Some lesser gods are those to which a hunter prays before setting off on the chase: *Timbaong*, god of animals; *Mahumanay*, goddess of the mountains; and *Tahamaling*, goddess of the forest. Another is *Anit*, the deity who punishes incest and inflicts deformities on those who mock dogs, cats, and frogs.

Household heads, artisans, and hunters make offerings to ensure the success of their endeavors. The most common religious specialist is the *walian*, who leads agricultural and healing rituals. More prestigious is the *tumanuron*, who enjoys curative and predictive powers through the patronage of an *anitu*. Most revered of all is the *pohohana*', a diviner who can perform rainmaking and other miracles. *Datus* (chiefs) very often function also as ritual leaders.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are no holidays as such, but there are regularly held ritual celebrations.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Nowadays regarded as too painful, tattooing and tooth filing no longer mark the transition to adulthood for boys and girls. Boys, however, still undergo circumcision.

In a young person's life, marriage is the most important rite of passage. The family of the groom is required to pay the bride's family a dowry, which may take years to accumulate. Before the bride-price negotiations, the sides reconstruct their genealogies in order to check whether the union might be incestuous. Once incest is ruled out, the boy's family sends an intermediary to negotiate the bride-price. This consists of the *panamung*, goods for the girl's parents and kin, plus the *pan-tun*, goods for the girl herself. She makes a great show of refusing the proposal, often holding out for a bigger *pantun*—if the boy's kin can't afford it, they have to withdraw.

The wedding celebration opens with the groom's parents presenting a spear to the bride's parents, an act to propitiate Dohanganna Karang, the god of marriage, so that the couple will prosper. The groom's parents then hand over a gong set and a *palihumu'* blade to the bride's parents to appease Kayag and Pamua', gods who will guarantee the success of the couple's farm work. Following is a tedious assessment of each item of the bride-price. After this is a ceremony in which the bride and groom simultaneously feed each other lumps of rice with chicken. Brothers or uncles then perform the rite of knocking the bride's and groom's heads together. Finally, relatives give the couple advice on how to have a happy marriage.

Tree burial was once common, but now the deceased's relatives leave the body in his or her house, then abandon the house. In abaca- and coffee-growing areas, burial is now in the house yard with a thatch hut raised over it (which the relatives leave to rot).

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditional Manuvu' society knew no social classes because the obligation to contribute to the bridewealth and blood money needed by kinfolk prevented individuals' permanent accumulation of wealth. Moreover, the status of slave, acquired through being captured in a raid, was hardly a permanent one, being little more than a prelude to being married into the captor's village.

Nor was there any authority above the village chief or *datu*; larger villages would even have three or more *datu*, none of which was superior to the others. The *datu's* role is to arbitrate disputes within the community and to represent it in dealings with other communities. A *datu* must possess *goro'*, the charisma that wins people's trust and obedience. More concretely, he must be skilled in negotiating, expert in customary law (*batasan*), and have wealth (rice, maize, cloth, gongs, blades, water buffalo, and horses) enough to provide hospitality to his followers who come calling and to underwrite the penalties they may incur. *Datus* train their sons to succeed them, but any individual fulfilling the above criteria can win the status. Since World War II, the threat posed by loggers and Visayan settlers has led the Manuvu' for the first time to recognize a single *datu* as spokesman for their entire ethnic group.

Preserving honor is of paramount concern. Even teasing (*sollog*) can lead to conflict and is permissible only among children and old people; parents can tease younger children but cannot tease adolescents. Feuds arise most often from verbal insults and disputes over bride-wealth. *Datus* judge cases that

conflicting parties themselves cannot settle. He determines which side must compensate which side and by how much (even paying first what the fined party cannot immediately cover) and, in the most serious cases, holds a *pagkitan* (the sharing of ceremonial food by both sides) in his house. In the endemic feuding before World War II, villages sent raiding parties or commissioned a *bahani'*, an independent warrior (and such companions as he might recruit), to exact revenge. Feuds could be concluded with a *pakang*, a peace-making ritual, in which a slave was killed to make the sides "even" in deaths.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Houses are raised on piles and have windowless walls of bark and a roof of bamboo, grass, or bark. Parents, children up to eight years old, and guests sleep on the *lantawan*, a raised portion of the floor. Unmarried daughters, however, occupy a separate bedroom, the *sinavong*, while boys and unmarried men sleep on boards suspended from and close to the ceiling. An extension may be added for a married daughter. Rice is stored in granaries, which are also raised structures but smaller than houses.

In more violent times, settlements grouped two or three tree houses linked by bamboo bridges. In the mountainous east, villages consist of a few widely scattered ground houses on hill spurs or on the edge of deep ravines; house floors are 6–8 m (20–26 ft) off the ground, beyond the reach of a spear-thrust from below.

Such settlements are impermanent, moving with the opening of new swidden fields (though within a fixed territory). In the broader valleys of the west, permanent villages of as many as 100 families living in low houses is the norm.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In raising bride-wealth or blood-money or forming a vengeance-taking party, an individual can rely on the assistance of kin from both paternal and maternal sides.

Strict enforcement of incest taboos (the deity Anit punishes perpetrators and their kin, e.g., by petrification) means that persons marry outside their village of birth, as fellow villagers are nearly always kin. Initially, a new husband lives in his in-laws' house before establishing his own—still within his wife's village. Surrounded by his wife's people, a husband is in effect a hostage, ensuring no feuding breaks out between the two kin groups. In such a position, a husband can never become too dominating a partner (he makes the decisions outside the home, such as for farming, while the wife makes decisions inside the home).

If one spouse dies, a same-sex cousin substitutes, preserving the intergroup relations established by the original union. A few men who can afford it take additional wives to demonstrate their sexual prowess, gain political influence, or even to provide the first wife (who must approve beforehand in any case) with assistance in her work. Either spouse can initiate a divorce by issuing a formal complaint (of infidelity, insult, abuse, nonsupport, etc.) to the *datu* for his judgment.

Manuvu' terminology equates fathers and uncles, mothers and aunts, and siblings and cousins. However, a person addresses a sibling or cousin of the same sex (*suwod*) differently from a sibling or cousin of the opposite sex (*tabbay*).

Aging parents move in with a married daughter, usually the one with the least children. The eldest son inherits the great-

est part of the property (including the heirlooms), but he is obliged to support younger siblings to the extent of providing bride-wealth for his brothers (but he also receives part of the bride-wealth due for his sisters).

Manuvu' keep cats and dogs as pets, and *limukon* doves for predicting the future.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Manuvu's wore bark-cloth until the mid-19th century, when they adopted the costume of their Attaw trading partners. In addition, captured women and children from other groups brought the art of weaving. Traditional clothing consists of tight knee-length trousers and long-sleeved jackets for men, and tube skirts and blouses for women. Family members commonly borrow or exchange clothing and extra clothing is seen as communal property.

### **12 FOOD**

Manuvu's subsist on a basic diet of corn; *salog*, (an indigenous rice); vegetables, and cassavas. Seeds are derived from the farmer's own saved seeds from the previous season that have been dried and stored. Unhusked corn cobs are hung on clotheslines and corn cobs are hung above the cooking area (*abuhun*) after harvest until the following planting season. Threats to Manuvu' agricultural traditions include a rapidly changing environment, depletion of the soil, and the opening of the Manuvu' homelands to commercial markets.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Traditional Manuvu' education takes place in the home. From a young age Manuvu' children stay by their mother's side. Young girls are taught household chores and agricultural tasks reserved for females, while boys assisted their fathers in the fields. After puberty, girls are eligible for marriage. In the 1950s and 1960s government-operated public schools were established, but student enrollment remains low as students drop out of school at a young age.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Dance and music traditions (including gong-playing and the singing of the *Tuwaang* epic, a highlight of most social gatherings) resemble those of other Mindanao-Sulu peoples.

Traditionally tattooing was common. Men wore tattoos on the chest, upper arms, forearms, and fingers, while women had tattoos on the same parts of the body as well as on their calves, where the most elaborate tattoos were done. Tattoo designs mimicked the embroidered patterns on clothing, with the addition of figures of *binuaja* (crocodile), *ginibang* (iguana) and *binuyo* (betel leaf).

Traditionally men carry *bolos*, knives with long blades and a wooden handle that are used to clear vegetation in agricultural land or cutting trails in the forest.

### **15 WORK**

Before World War II, agriculture provided about 75% of food, while hunting, fishing, and gathering provided the remainder. Since then, as commercial logging (by non-Manuvu') depletes game and otherwise upsets the ecology, the proportion of food obtained through hunting, fishing, and gathering has fallen to 5%.



Families own two or more swidden fields, rotating their cultivation in two- to three-year cycles; tools consist of machetes, wooden spades, and digging and dibble sticks. The staples are maize, rice, and sweet potatoes, supplemented by squash, beans, sugarcane, bananas, and tubers. Some areas have begun to grow abaca and coffee as cash crops in recent decades. Families keep chickens for food and sacrifices. Wild boar having once been abundant, Manuvu' had no need to keep domestic pigs and learned hog-raising from Visayans only recently. Horses, water buffalo, and now cattle are obtained from coastal peoples as measures of wealth used in the paying of bride-wealth, debts, and fines. Game includes wild boar and deer (speared or trapped), and monkeys, small game, and birds

(shot with arrows or blowdarts, or trapped). Fishing techniques include damming, poisoning, and piercing with spears and arrows.

Traditional society held blacksmiths, weavers, healers, midwives, and epic singers in high esteem.

## 16 SPORTS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Manuvu's practice a subsistence agricultural economy and the chores of daily life leave little time for recreation. A common form of entertainment is music played on traditional instruments, including the *dwagay* (violin-like instrument), *togo* (bamboo guitar), and the *kubing* (harp).

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES

Though Manuvu' wear modern clothing and have access to mass produced goods, they continue to utilize traditional crafts.

Common ornaments include brass or silver rings, bracelets, anklets, and earrings. In addition, beads, mother of pearl, wild cat's teeth, and the seeds of the *saguya* tree are used in traditional ornaments.

Many Manuvu' crafts are utilized in agriculture. Large containers named *lukong* or *liwit* are made from the bark of the red lauan tree and can store five to six sacks of rice. A single tree can produce three to five pieces of *lukong/liwit*. The bark is sewn together with *uway*, a variety of calamas plant, and the bottom of the *lukong/liwit* is made of *uway* mesh. The *lukong/liwit* are placed in a traditional storage house (*payag sa humay*) constructed of wood or bamboo and covered with a grass roof. The *payag sa humay* is elevated several feet off the ground by four posts that have milk cans or flat, round wooden discs placed on them to prevent rats from climbing into the storage areas. The structures have only one door, no windows, and a removable ladder. The Manuvu' keep separate storage houses for rice and corn.

Another seed container is the *laban* or carrying basket. This is made of *uway* and is used to carry harvested crops or firewood. Other seed containers include the *tabungos*, which can carry two *taros* (45 lbs) of rice seeds, and the *langkap*; both are made of bamboo.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The most pressing social problem for the Manuvu' is the civil war that has taken place on Mindanao since the late 1960s. The local Muslim population of Mindanao rebelled against the central Filipino government because of land distribution inequalities and official corruption. The mountainous homeland of the Manuvu' is ideal terrain for an insurgency, and both the rebels and government have attempted to recruit Manuvu' villagers. In 1993 the government used the military to force the Manuvu' to back down from opposition to a geothermal project on Mount Apo. In the late 1990s the government armed a village of Manuvu' who in 2000 engaged in a battle with insurgent forces from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The civil war has pitted the Manuvu' against their neighbors, and Manuvu' villages have negotiated *dyandi*, or peace pacts, with their neighbors.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Manuvu' society is male-dominated and men and women are assigned distinct social roles.

When preparing for marriage, women have little choice in choosing their future husbands. While females may express resistance to an initial marital suggestion, it is the role of the male suitor or the parents to decide a match. Marriages can be arranged in any of the following ways: (1) either the man's or the woman's family makes the proposal (sometimes, a man will hint at his preferred bride); (2) parents arrange the betrothal of a child (or even a fetus); (3) the woman's family holds the man prisoner in their house until the marriage is consummated or the man's family "buys" him back or provides a replacement; (4) the man abducts the woman (sometimes with her consent); (5) the man provides his prospective in-laws with live-in bride service; (6) the man courts the woman (clandestinely, as she is not supposed to talk to men); or (7) a senior wife selects a junior wife for her husband.

New brides are directed by their fathers to not quarrel with their husbands, talk to any male strangers, and to be faithful to their partner until death. In marriage there is a division of labor according to gender. The activities of the wife are centered in the home: house cleaning, cooking, raising children, making clothes, and weaving baskets and mats. Men work in the fields, hunt, and fish. When the family leaves home to visit relatives the woman usually is loaded with a child or goods in her carrying basket, where as the man carries a weapon and is responsible for defending the family against attack. While both men and women may on occasion exchange assigned gender roles, hunting is exclusively assigned to the husband. Women do not even play a part in preparation of the carcass. Historically, wife-stealing took place between villages and tribes. *Datus* who had more than one wife were often the victims, and incidents of wife-stealing could ignite inter-communal warfare.

Women play a large role in the Manuvu' agricultural economy. They tend to rice plants, removing weeds and picking crops. An important task of Manuvu' female farmers is the selection of seeds for the following year's crop. Storing and preserving seed material for the next planting season is exclusively the role of women in the Manuvu' community.

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—revised by D. Straub

# MAORI

**PRONUNCIATION:** MOW-ree

**LOCATION:** New Zealand

**POPULATION:** 565,329 in 2006 census

**LANGUAGE:** Maori; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity; traditional Maori, based on ancestor worship

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol 3: New Zealanders

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the present-day Maori created an outpost of Polynesian culture on the North and South islands of New Zealand. They remained relatively isolated from external contact until 1769, when Captain James Cook initiated a permanent European presence in New Zealand. In less than a century, Maori culture changed dramatically as a result. The Maori have been striving to revive aspects of their traditional culture, reclaim artifacts of their cultural history from foreign museums, and regain their ancestral homelands. As of 2006, the Maori of New Zealand numbered over 565,000, or about 15% of New Zealand's total population. While the overall number of Maori has risen over the past decade, the percentage of the total population has remained the same. The term "Maori" covers a number of different tribal and sub-tribal groups that view themselves and each other as very distinct. The Maori word for each tribal unit is *iwi*, and there are well over one hundred Maori *iwi*. The largest Maori *iwi* is Ngapuhi, which had a total enrollment of 122,211 according to the 2006 census. Not all Maori know their *iwi*; a situation that parallels Americans of American Indian descent who do not know their tribal affiliations.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The islands of New Zealand are the present-day homeland of the Maori. New Zealand consists of two islands, the North Island and the South Island. The topography of the North Island is hilly with areas of flat, rolling terrain. The South Island is larger and more mountainous than the North Island. The vast majority (86%) of present-day Maori live on the North Island. Prior to human habitation of the islands, there were extensive forests. These forests provided a resource for the ancestors of the Maori that ventured there from parts of present-day French Polynesia.

Maori oral history states that the original homeland of the traditional Maori was in the Society Islands of Polynesia, and that the Maori migrants left to escape warfare and the demands of excessive tribute. Archaeologists refer to two branches of Maori, the archaic and the traditional. The archaic Maori were likely the original inhabitants of New Zealand who relied on the moa, a large, flightless bird that they hunted into extinction. The artifacts that remain of this culture can be dated to around AD 1000 and are significantly different from those of the traditional Maori. The traditional Maori are believed to have migrated to the North Island around the 14th century. This is confirmed by archaeological dating techniques as well as the genealogical histories of the Maori.

In 1840, some 500 Maori chiefs signed the so-called Treaty of Waitangi with the British government. The treaty promised



the Maoris that they would keep their lands and property and have equal treatment under the law as British subjects. However, the British later confiscated Maori lands and made the people move to reservations. As a result of war and disease, the Maori population fell to 42,000 by 1896. Since World War II, the government's policies have been more favorable to the Maoris. In recent years, the government of New Zealand has acknowledged its responsibility after a series of protests and court rulings. Since 1991, negotiations over specific claims have been underway. In October 1996, the government agreed to a settlement with the Maoris that included land and cash worth \$117 million, with the Maoris regaining some traditional fishing rights.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Maori belongs to the Tahitic branch of Eastern Polynesian; Eastern Polynesian is, in turn, a branch of the larger Austronesian language family. Maori and Tahitian are very closely related, and earlier European explorers to the region commented on the similarity of the two languages. In fact, these were the first two Polynesian languages to have printed books in the early 19th century.

The Maori of today speak English and Maori. Prior to European colonization of New Zealand, there were two distinct Maori dialects: North Island Maori and South Island Maori, which is now extinct. Preschools that offer instruction in Maori language have sprung up all over the country at a rapid rate



*A Maori warrior with moko (facial tattoo) waits for the coffin of Maori Queen Te Arikiniui Dame Te Atairangikaahu near the sacred Taupiri Mountain near Hamilton, New Zealand. Thousands gathered along the funeral route to bid farewell to the queen. (AP Images/NZPA, Wayne Drought)*

as a result of Maori activism. In 2006, nearly 25% of the Maori population indicated that they could hold a conversation in Maori.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Traditional Maori folklore describes an original couple, Rangi (sky) and Papa (earth), who were locked in copulation until the god Tane was able to push them apart and provide for the creation of human life. The god Tane was responsible for the creation of the first woman and the first man. Maori folklore focuses on oppositions between pairs, such as earth and sky, life and death, and male and female.

#### **5 RELIGION**

Like other New Zealanders, many Maori today are Christians (primarily Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics). Precontact Maori religion was based on the important concepts of *mana* and *tapu*. Mana is an impersonal force that can be both inherited and acquired by individuals in the course of their lives. Tapu refers to a sacredness that was ascribed by status at birth. There was a direct relation between the two: chiefs with the most mana were also the most tapu. The English word “taboo” derives from this general Polynesian word and concept. Ancestor worship was important in traditional religion.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Christian Maori celebrate the major Christian holidays as do other New Zealanders. Holidays as Westerners view them did not exist in precontact Maori society. Rituals were performed according to the religious calendar and the harvest and collection of foodstuffs.

A controversial New Zealand national holiday for the Maori is Waitangi Day (6 February), which commemorates the 1840 signing of the treaty that was supposed to guarantee their rights and privileges. In 1994, Maori radicals disrupted the Waitangi Day national celebration, forcing the government to cancel the festivities.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Modern Maori rites of passage are similar to those of other New Zealanders, but specific Maori traditions are still practiced at certain events. At weddings, for example, a relative of the groom traditionally challenges the father of the bride to a fight. The bride’s father then approaches the challenger and is welcomed.

The Maori once practiced what anthropologists call “secondary burial.” Secondary burial involves two interments of a corpse or its remains. When a person died, the body would be

laid out on ceremonial mats for viewing by relatives and other members of the village. After a few days, the body was then wrapped in mats and placed in a cave, a tree, or buried in the ground. Different Maori groups had different practices. After one year had passed, the body was removed from the primary burial and the bones were cleaned and painted with red ochre. These remains were taken from village to village for a second period of mourning. Following that, the bones were interred in a sacred place.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Maoris today, like other New Zealanders, typically address each other informally and emphasize cordiality in relationships.

Feasting, called *hakari* in the Maori language, was an important aspect of precontact Maori culture. The Maori feasts brought together a number of different families and other social groups where a man of status would provide food and gifts for those who attended. In the end, he and his family would be left with very little in the way of material possessions or reserves of food, but instead would have gained enormous enhancement to his status.

Premarital sexual relationships were considered normal for Maori adolescents. Both males and females were expected to have a series of discreet relationships before they were married. When Maori females became sexually active, they were to publicly acknowledge this so that they could become tattooed. Tattooing marked their ritual and public passage into adulthood. It was also considered extremely attractive and erotic.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Today, 80% of the Maori live in the urban areas of New Zealand. However, until the 1920s, they lived almost primarily in rural areas. Maori housing today therefore typically reflects that of other urban New Zealanders [see *New Zealanders*].

In coastal areas, Maoris traditionally relied on travel by canoes of various types, including both single-hulled outriggerless canoes as well as large double-hulled canoes. *Waka taua* were large Maori war canoes that were powered by both sail and paddles. As with other New Zealanders, travel today is by modern road, rail, water, and air transport.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Since most Maoris live in urban industrialized areas, family life is similar to that of other urban New Zealanders. Inter-marriage between Maoris and Pakehas (the Maori term for whites) is common. Most Maoris have Pakeha cousins or other Pakeha relatives. Maori households may include relatives besides the nuclear family, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts.

The traditional social unit of Maori society was the *whanau*. The *whanau* included both the nuclear and the extended family, oftentimes including up to four generations within on large social unit. Within the *whanau*, the grandparents were primarily responsible for the cultural socialization of their grandchildren. A special relationship holds between grandparents and grandchildren that is called *mokopuna* in Maori. The concept of *mokopuna* is that when a grandparent looks at a grandchild, the grandparent sees his/her reflection. *Mokopuna* is a powerful concept that guides the care and upbringing of grandchildren by their grandparents.

There were four distinct levels of descent groups in traditional Maori culture. The highest ranking was called *waka*,

meaning “canoe,” referring to a group of people who share descendants on both their mother’s and father’s sides who came on the same canoe in the historical migration to New Zealand recounted in Maori oral history. The lowest level was the *whanau*, which were households that represented as many as four generations of people related through the male line. Individuals chose their spouses from outside this group, but usually from within the village.

The system of naming members of the immediate and extended family in Maori culture differs from that found in American culture. In the Maori system, a person’s brothers, as well as the cousins on both the mother’s and father’s side, would be called by the same term “brother.” A person would call his or her sister, as well as his or her cousins, by the same term “sister.” This lumping of relatives together within a generation continues across the generational divisions. Therefore, a Maori child would have as many mothers as his biological parents had sisters.

## 11 CLOTHING

Maoris typically wear modern Western-style clothing, but still wear their traditional clothing for special occasions. Traditional Maori clothing was some of the most elaborate in Polynesia. Elaborately decorated cloaks were an important item of dress for individuals of high status within Maori society.

## 12 FOOD

Maoris typically eat the same kinds of foods as other New Zealanders [see *New Zealanders*]. The traditional Polynesian foodstuffs of taro, yams, and breadfruit were not well adapted for cultivation on the temperate islands of New Zealand.

## 13 EDUCATION

Public education has now become the norm for most urban Maori, although a number of preschools based on Maori cultural education have been established throughout New Zealand. Education is state-supported and compulsory in New Zealand between the ages of 6 and 15. Students planning to attend one of the country’s six universities continue their secondary education until the age of 17 or 18, when they have to take university qualifying exams.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The *haka* dance of the Maori is one of the best-known cultural traditions of Polynesia. These dances are accompanied by song and body percussion created by clapping hands, stamping feet, and slapping thighs. There is a leader and a chorus that responds to his lead vocal line. The dance itself involves energetic postures, which represent warlike and aggressive poses.

Maori chanting follows very strict rules for performance and rhythmic structure and continuity. To break a chant in midstream would be to invite disaster or even death for a community. These chants often recounted genealogies or the exploits of ancestors.

## 15 WORK

Maoris today work at the same types of jobs and professions typical to any urbanized industrial economy, with about two-thirds engaged in services.

Traditional Maori culture developed a high degree of specialization in terms of the division of labor in society. Craftsmen in the form of tattoo artists, canoe builders, house builders, and carvers, were all classified as *tohunga* in Maori—a title that conveys the qualities of sacredness and translates best into English as “priest.” These craftsmen paid homage to the gods of their various occupations and were initiated through a series of rituals into their craft. All craftsmen were descended from chiefly lines in traditional Maori society.

## 16 SPORTS

New Zealand, like its neighbor Australia, has rugby and cricket as national sports. Maori boys and men participate in and follow rugby in New Zealand. New Zealand Maori is the name of a rugby league team that traditionally plays teams touring New Zealand. The prerequisite for being a member of this team is that the player has to be of at least 1/16th Maori descent. New Zealand Maori competes in international competitions and it has participated in the Rugby League World Cup. There were traditional competitions among men in Maori society that stressed aggressiveness and provided practice for real-life conflicts.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The modern Maori have become not only consumers of video, television, and film, but also producers of their own stories in these media. Traditional storytelling and dance performance have been preserved by the Maori and serve as form of entertainment at the present.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The New Zealand Maori are accomplished artists in a number of media. Collectors and the general public are most familiar with Maori carving and sculpture. However, the Maori also have a tradition of figurative painting dating back to the late 19th century. Each Maori sub-tribe is an art-producing and art-owning unit. Therefore, while there are certain similarities in style in Maori art, there are also a number of differences between the styles of different sub-tribes.

Large meeting houses of the Maori were decorated with elaborately carved facades containing figures of their ancestors. The entire structure was conceived as representation of an ancestor.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The vast majority of all contemporary Maori are urban dwellers. The social problems that accompany urban life in conditions of poverty continue to beset the Maori. In some urban areas, Maori unemployment rates exceed 50%. The critically acclaimed film *Once Were Warriors* (1994) provides a Maori perspective on the social problems of alcoholism, domestic violence, and underemployment/unemployment.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Tattooing among the Maori was highly developed and extremely symbolic. Male facial tattooing, called *ta moko*, was done in stages in a male's life through adulthood. Maori facial tattoos were not only created by piercing and pigmentation of the skin with a tattooing comb, but also by creating permanent grooves in the face with a chisel-like instrument. Females were

also tattooed in Maori society and there has been an increasing revival of the art among younger women nowadays. Female facial tattooing was known as *ta ngutu*. Designs were placed on the chin and lips. *Ngutu* means “lips” in Maori and *ta* means “to strike.”

A controversial gender topic in modern Maori society is that of role of homosexuality in precontact times. *Takatapui* is a Maori word that is defined in the earliest dictionary of the Maori language as “an intimate companion of the same sex” (Williams 1834). The word had fallen into disuse following colonization and the impact of Christian missionaries, but in recent times, *takatapui* has become part of the vocabulary of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community in New Zealand. The controversy revolves around whether or not homosexuality was part of precontact Maori gender relations. The most current and comprehensive accounts clearly demonstrate the important roles of *takatapui* in precontact Maori society, and their incorporation into *iki* and *whanau*.

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—by J. Williams



# MARANA O

**PRONUNCIATION:** mah-ruh-NOW

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Meranao or M'ranao

**LOCATION:** Philippines (island of Mindanao)

**POPULATION:** 1.1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Maranao

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Maranao, the largest non-Christian ethnic group in the Philippines, have lived around Lake Lanao in western Mindanao since at least the 13th century, having separated from kindred coastal people at that time. Some Maranao maintained relations with these Ilanun, joining them in slave-raiding in the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos. Legends, however, locate Maranao origins in Bembaran, a kingdom that sunk to the bottom of the sea because it rejected Islam. Sarip Kabongsoan of Johore (in Malaya) converted the neighboring Magindanao; his descendants went to the Lanao region and intermarried with descendants of refugees from Bembaran.

In contrast to the Magindanao and Tausugs, the Maranao never established a single state but rather divided into a great number of small "sultanates" in continual warfare with each other. They, however, successfully resisted incorporation into the Spanish colonial state, and only the Americans early in the 20th century managed to subdue them. The influx of Christian Filipino settlers, particularly from the nearby Visayas, has threatened to marginalize the Maranao in much of their ancestral land. The region has been one of the hotbeds of the Muslim (Bangsa Moro) separatist movement since the 1970s. A major episode of that struggle was the 1972 MNLF attack on the Maranao city of Marawi (Dansalan before 1956). Under the Marcos' martial law regime, many traditional activities virtually ceased due to curfews strictly enforced by a government army suspicious of all Maranao gatherings. The influence of the many Maranao educated in the Middle East in recent decades has constituted an even greater challenge to Maranao customs, which often do not conform to standard Islamic practice.

The separatist movement notwithstanding, prominent Maranao participate in Philippine national politics, and, under the Aquino administration, an Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao including Lanao del Sur province (but not now Christian-majority Lanao del Norte province) was established in 1989. Maranao culture (like Moro and non-Christian cultures more generally) have contributed key icons to the national identity of the predominantly Christian and Hispanized Philippines: the Maranao epic, the Darangen, was put on the UNESCO list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005, and the artisan village of Tugaya was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

*Maranao* (in their own pronunciation, *Meranao* or *M'ranao*) means "people of the lake," referring to Lake Lanao, which lies 670 m (2,200 ft) above sea level in western Mindanao. Numbering 776,000 in 1990 and as many as 1.1 million currently

(2008), the Maranao, the largest non-Christian ethnic group in the Philippines, inhabit the lands around the lake, dominating the province of Lanao del Sur (609,000 or 91% of the population in 2000) stretching to its south. However, Visayan immigrants now outnumber Maranao in Lanao del Norte province (169,000 or 35.8% of the population). About 61.8% of the Visayan immigrants are of people speaking closely related Visayan dialects, such as Cebuanos, Binisaya, and Boholanos. The Maranao in turn are moving into the highlands to the south of the lake, which are already inhabited by other peoples. 21.9% of households in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (to which Lanao del Sur belongs, but not Lanao del Norte) identified Maranao as their first-language. Small Maranao communities can be found in towns throughout Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. In recent years, many Maranao have settled in Manila (as many as 35,000 by 1984).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Maranao language is an Austronesian language whose closest similarities are to other indigenous languages of Mindanao (though not to the Visayan-type language of their fellow Muslim Tausugs). In the past, a version of the Arabic script was used to preserve genealogies (*salsila*), religious literature, and Islamic tales.

Most names derive from Arabic, but native Maranao words referring to desired traits or lucky objects (e.g., Macacuna, "robust," or Bolawan, "gold") are also chosen (now usually as an addition to an Islamic name). Some Maranao have even named their children after prominent Filipino national leaders (e.g., Marcos). Young people often take American nicknames, e.g., "Mike" for Ismail or Macacuna. Among themselves, Maranao do not use surnames, but in dealing with Philippine educational or bureaucratic systems, individuals use the name of a father, grandfather, brother, or prominent ancestor as a second name. In one community, a person may register under one relative's name as a surname; in another, he or she may register under another. This allows Maranao to vote in different jurisdictions, something they understand not as electoral fraud but as a right of descent.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

According to legend, Radia Indarapatra married the water nymph Potri Rainalaut and sired two children: one became the ancestor of the Maranao and the other the ancestor of the *tonong*, invisible beings that protect the Maranao from illness and their crops from pests. Traditional Maranao place offerings of food and betel nuts for the *tonong* in the *lamin*, a 1-m (3-ft-long) long box wrapped in yellow cloth and hung from a house beam. The *tonong* have names (e.g., Tomitay sa Boloto, Apo a Bekong) and inhabit bodies of water, mountains, and especially the *nonok* (a tree that wraps around other trees like a vine). Maranao who have been educated or influenced by Middle Eastern Islamic universities equate appeasing the *tonong* as honoring the offspring of the Devil.

Other spirits include: *saytan*, evil spirits; the *inikadowa*, a person's invisible double; the *malaikat*, an angel who guides a person in his or her work; *arowak*, the souls of the dead who visit their kin on Muslim holidays; *gagamoten*, a human poisoner; *langgam*, a ghoulish creature that eats the insides of fresh corpses; and the *balbal*, one type of which at night splits into a lower



half that stays in the house and an upper half that flies off. Tales abound of people being led off by spirits, never to return.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The Maranao are Muslim. In recent years, Maranao who have studied in Islamic universities in the Middle East have worked towards the elimination of traditional spirit beliefs and associated rituals. In addition to the religious merit, much social prestige comes from sponsoring the construction of religious buildings, such that every community now has a mosque and *madrasah* (Islamic school). Moreover, large numbers of Maranao make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In addition to Muslim religious officials, such as the *imam* (prayer leader) and *kali* (judge), there are *pandarpa'an*, usually old women, through whose possessed bodies spirits speak and *pamamantik*, practitioners of magic and counter magic.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

On certain Islamic holidays, the souls of the dead visit their kin; the latter offer the souls food, which is later distributed to neighbors or given to the *tuan*, who recite prayers for the dead. At the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, people clean their family graves and at night light them with candles. They also light candles or lamps in their houses so that they might catch a glimpse of the Lailatol Kadr, an angel with a turban and a long white beard who has the power to grant wishes (some enter trances in order to see him). This is the "night of power" when God will answer any prayer.

## <sup>7</sup>RITEs OF PASSAGE

After birth, the umbilical cord is kept to ward off evil spirits. The placenta is buried near the house, as a guardian for the child, or cast into a body of water, where it can save the child from drowning. On the third or seventh day after birth, the child receives his or her name. After this, a boy can be circumcised, although he may be as old as 10 years of age when this takes place; clitoridectomy for girls persists as well.

Many marriages are still arranged by the parents; even if partners select each other, family approval is necessary. The man's side sends an intermediary to initiate the negotiations. If the woman's side's response is positive, the go-between, the man's parents, and the man visit the woman's family. The parents express the proposal in indirect language, and the go-between mentions the *betang* (bride-price) that the man's side is willing to pay. The woman's side defers the decision (perhaps for months) but claims a cash fee for opening the discussion. Subsequently, the man's parents gather the money or convene a meeting where other kin will contribute to the *betang*. On their part, the woman's relatives (who have a right to a portion of the *betang*) gather to decide the amount to be asked, considering also what advantages an alliance could provide their kin-group. They also investigate the man's genealogy; finding an ancestor who was a slave, a *balbal* or *gagamoten* (evil spirits), or a non-Maranao could cancel the wedding. The go-between carries on the bargaining on the *betang* and the setting of the wedding date.

During the engagement period, the man's relatives may give food to the woman's family, which the latter will share with fellow villagers and, if possible, with neighboring villages. The man may now eat with the woman in her house (though someone else will always be somewhere in the house); he may also sleep there (but not with her), using for a blanket a *malong* (a type of sarong), which his prospective in-laws give him. The future bride now must ask her fiancé for permission to go out of the house; he must accompany her and cover her expenses.

Some families hold the wedding ceremony in hotels or rented halls (the richest even use hotels in Manila and invite national figures); most build a stage by their house and decorate it with lots of flags. The groom and his kin may travel to the bride's house in a motorcade filmed on a video camera. The groom wears a *malong* and a shirt (possibly a *barong tagalog* [see **Filipinos**]) or a Western coat and tie (or, following a new fashion, he may adopt Arab or Pakistani clothing). The bride

dresses traditionally or puts on a Western wedding gown. She is not present at the wedding ceremony itself, which does include the groom, the *imam* (prayer leader), and four witnesses, one for each grandparent's lineage. After this, the groom goes to the bride's room and, after paying a fee to the attendant girls, he touches her for the first time. During the ensuing feast, more cash is given out to guests who do not share in the *betang*.

Following Islamic regulations, a dead body cannot stay overnight in the house and is buried as soon as possible. Close kin wash and enshroud the body while other relatives arrive to give monetary aid; the immediate family serves food to the relatives. In the graveyard, the imam asks the deceased the questions that an angel will ask him or her later; this is an unorthodox custom, as is the planting of flowers, laying of stones, or laying of cement to mark the grave. The imam reads a prayer and pours water on the four corners and center of the now-sealed grave to "awaken" the deceased. Relatives may guard the grave so that *balbal* or *langgam* (corpse-eating ghouls) will not defile the body.

The dead soul lingers on earth for 100 days. Mourning rituals last for three (formerly seven) days; these include having *tuan* (the community's religious men) recite prayers for the dead and receiving guests in the evening, who entertain themselves with eating, playing parlor games, or sometimes gambling with cards. *Tuan* offer prayers on every Friday or every 10 days until the 100th day after the death, when a large feast is held where several *tuan* recite prayers.

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A Maranao's sense of *maratabat* requires that he avenge wrongs done to him, his kin, and his friends. In the past, this led to public combat in spots marked by a red flag, but now ambush is the common method. Maranao will risk their own lives in defense of a sworn friend (quasi-kindred): "Your blood will be on top of mine," i.e. I will die before I let someone lay a hand on you.

Public image is important: a person who spends little on personal comforts will lavish extravagant sums on a family rite-of-passage celebration or the community *madrrasah* building fund. Maranao use euphemistic language or grant concessions in order to avoid embarrassing or humiliating others. Maranao tend to flatter people by addressing them with the highest title associated with their profession (e.g., one might call a schoolteacher "professor").

Each hamlet has two or more descent lines (*bangsa*), one of which claims superior status to the others and is led by a titleholder (often "Sultan"; there are as many as 43 "royal houses"). Hamlets are grouped into ever-larger associations, which culminate in one of the *pat a pangampong a ranao* ("the four encampments of the lake") into which the Maranao people are divided.

Although titles are inherited by descent lines, only the most qualified member can hold the title (by virtue of wealth, knowledge of customary law, and the ability to settle disputes without shaming any parties). Today, individuals win titles by surpassing others in contributing to mosque and *madrrasah* building funds. A title-holder must also be prepared to hold a *kandori* where food is served and cash is distributed. The formal receipt of a title is an occasion of great ceremony preceded by *kalilang* (traditional music), *kambayoka* (singing contests),

*kasipa* (kickball), other games, and the slaughter of cattle or water buffalo for feasting.

Boys and girls are strictly segregated, even in school activities. In the evening, a boy visits a girl he likes at her house, but directly courts her kin rather than her. It is older relatives who entertain the boy; both sides display their skill in delivering short love poems in classical Maranao (*panonoroon* or *tobad-tobad*), though today the former may simply tell stories. The boy, the girl, and often the girl's relatives may play music together. A boy can also send the girl a poetic love letter, which she shows her parents for their advice. It is also common for them to exchange notes secretly at school.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Houses are made of wood, raised 0.3 m to 2 m (1–7 ft) from the ground and have steep roofs of galvanized iron. From 2 to 20 families reside in a house; each has its own sleeping area, though there are no partitions. Traditional structures included a separate room for unmarried women. A kitchen shed contains a large hearth.

A descent line has a *torogan*, a large house where the senior kin-group lives and gatherings are held. Having names such as Bantog (Honorable), Kompas (Guide), Lumba (Center), or even Malacañang (after the presidential palace in Manila), the *torogan* boasts intricate prow-like carvings on the external beams. However, most traditional *torogan* were destroyed in a 1955 earthquake.

Hamlets include 3 to 30 multifamily homes strung out along a road or river, along with a mosque and at least one *torogan*. Until the American conquest, each hamlet contained a fortress of earthen walls reinforced by thorny plants and trees.

Average family income in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, of which Lanao del Sur province is a part, amounted to 89,000 pesos (US\$1,745) in 2006, the lowest in the country, cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog's ₱198,000, and those of the neighboring Davao and Zamboanga regions, ₱135,000 and ₱125,000 respectively. In 2000, Lanao del Sur had the fifth lowest Human Development Index, 0.464 (combining measures of health, education, and income) in the country (above Ifugao and the provinces in the Sulu archipelago, cf. the Philippines' national HDI of 0.656); Lanao del Norte was ninth lowest (at 0.512).

According to the 2000 census, the proportion of houses in Lanao del Sur with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum reached 81.1%, with a roof of grass or palm thatch 5.8%; 54.9% of houses had outer wooden walls, and another 11.9% outer walls of bamboo or thatch. In 2000, 11.7% of households in Lanao del Sur had access to a community faucet, 12.7% to a faucet of their own, and 4.8% to a shared deep well, while 53.3% obtained their water from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. Almost half of households (47%) disposed of their garbage by burning it, 11.9% by composting it, and 10.5% by burying it; only 2.3% had it picked up by a collection truck. 42% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 49% with electricity, and 5.9% with firewood. 72.8% possessed a radio, 31% a television, 12.7% a refrigerator, 8.3% a VCR, 7.5% a telephone or cell phone, 4.9% a washing machine, and 5.1% a motorized vehicle.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

An individual's kin-group comprises paternal and maternal relatives up to and including third cousins, although the most important relationships do not go beyond the circle of first cousins. For kinship solidarity, marriage is preferred with second and third cousins (but taboo with first cousins). A person can also claim as many as 15 descent lines for the purpose of inheriting titles.

Until the bride-price is paid in full, the groom lives with the bride's family, only later establishing his own house. Within the multifamily dwellings, a single family eats together and has its own sleeping area. At least one married child remains in the house to take care of the parents.

Because fathers are the disciplinarians, children tend to be closer to their mothers. Close relatives may also correct or punish a child. Parents will not physically punish an older child in public. Children learn skills by assisting their parents in work.

Though permitted under Muslim law, taking more than one wife is not common because it would shame the first wife's family. Physical abuse by a husband or an insult from him in public are grounds for divorce. If a husband cannot tolerate his wife's actions, he is supposed to appeal to her relatives or to community leaders. Because families mediate conflicts, and custom stipulates a "cooling off" period before the finalization of divorce, which requires return of the bride-price if the wife has no sufficient grievance, divorce is rare.

## **11 CLOTHING**

In towns, many Maranao wear nontraditional clothing, not just Western clothing but also the Filipino *barong tagalog* [see **Filipinos**], Malay fashions, and most recently Arab and Pakistani garb. The *malong*, a sarong whose edges are often connected by a *langkit*, a second piece of cloth of contrasting design, is the main article of traditional clothing for both sexes. Ceremonial apparel for a *datu* (male title-holder) consists of an embroidered coat and long, tight-fitting pants; a *tobao*, a matching silk cloth; and a dagger tucked into a 12-cm wide (5-in-wide) waist sash. A *bai* (female title-holder) wears a long-sleeved blouse (often embroidered); a *malong* of locally woven silk; a necklace of gold coins; and a *kobong* veil (formerly, a crown and a special coiffure). Colors range from yellow for sultans to red or maroon for other titles. An attendant holds a large umbrella over the title-holder, while others carry a *kris* (sword) and a brass basin, symbols of authority and wealth, respectively.

## **12 FOOD**

With rice as the staple, Maranao food resembles that of other Filipinos, particularly Muslim groups [see **Filipinos**].

## **13 EDUCATION**

A *madrasah*, a school stressing the reading of the Quran, stands in every community, built with community funds, sometimes with additional money from Arab countries. Suspicious of English-language schools as institutions for Christianization, Maranao initially avoided them. Nowadays, however, parents send their children to such schools, often making great sacrifices to do so. Formal education used to be so rare that families celebrated graduations very lavishly. Considerations of family prestige exert high pressure on individuals to obtain degrees. Degree-holders are so numerous that many cannot obtain ap-

propriate employment. Many Maranao have obtained degrees in Middle Eastern Islamic universities, which qualifies them to teach in madrasah.

According to the 2000 census, the literacy level in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was 68.9%, very low by national standards. In Lanao del Sur, nearly one in three (32.8%) had completed elementary school, over one in five (21.5%) high school, and nearly one in eight (11.8%) college or university, though the percentage for elementary was somewhat lower, those for secondary and tertiary education were dramatically higher than in fellow ARMM province, Sulu. See *Tausug*

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Musical instruments include the *kulintang* (a horizontal series of eight knobbed gongs played with two sticks), a *dabakan* (a wooden drum also played with two sticks), various hanging gongs (*agong*, *pamulsan*, and *babandir*), the *insi* (a bamboo flute), *kobing* (jew's-harp), and *kotyapi* (a two-stringed instrument with a soundbox in the shape of an abstract crocodile). In the *kalilang* ensemble, females play the *kulintang* with its subtle melodies while men strike the hanging gongs. Formerly, all girls and boys learned to play so they would be proficient by the time they were of marriageable age. Girls could display their expertise to boys; a boy would accompany a girl he was courting, considering it a shame if rivals outdid him in skill.

Among Maranao dances, the *singkil* is the most famous, mastering it having once been a requirement for aristocratic girls. Two pairs of bamboo poles are crossed; the dancer, maintaining a grave expression and waving a fan, steps in and out of the poles as they are rapidly clapped together. Another well-known dance is the *sagayan*, a male war dance.

*Kambayoka* are all-night contests in oratorical singing held as part of the celebrations of high-status people. The Maranao also have an epic, the *Darangen*.

## **15 WORK**

Mostly relying on rainfall for irrigation, wet-rice is grown in the lowlands. Other crops are maize and sweet potatoes on marginal lands; taro, squash, cassava, peanuts, and chilies in gardens; and betel nut, papayas, and bananas on trees. Livestock include water buffalo, goats, chickens, and ducks. As lake stocks are now depleted, most fish is obtained from trade with the coast.

Maranao peddlers, particularly of brassware, frequent town markets throughout Mindanao and have long been the commercial link between pagan hill peoples and maritime traders.

Acquiring an aristocratic title or bureaucratic job that frees one from manual labor is greatly esteemed.

## **16 SPORTS**

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Of all non-Christian people of the Philippines, the Maranao are the most famous for their crafts. Male artisans produce *okir*, intricate carving for household objects, canoes, and the

projecting beams (*panolong*) of *torogan* (senior kin-group) houses. Emphasizing plant and floral motifs in delicate scrollwork, there are numerous named designs, including the *nia-ganaga* (a stylized dragon) and *pako rabong* (representing a growing fern). The *sari-manok* is a stylized bird situated, among other places, on the top of banner poles. Contemporary artists incorporate “Bugis” (i.e., Bornean or Malay) designs and Arab forms, such as the *borak* (a flying horse with the head of a beautiful woman); they also produce lions, eagles, and peacocks for the tourist market. High-status families will commission famous artists to decorate their *torogan*.

Women weave cloth with complex geometric patterns (which have poetical names), often using *andon*, a tie-dyeing technique (*ikat*). They also produce mats and baskets.

Metalwork is another art, encompassing gold- and silver smithing as well as the production of swords, such as the *son-dang* (a short dagger) and *kampilan* (a long-bladed sword), both of which are longer and larger than their Malay-Indonesian counterparts. Much artistry is lavished on the handles, which may be in the shape of a hornbill beak or a swallow tail.

## <sup>19</sup> SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Filipinos**.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

In 2000, in Sulu the ratio between men and women was 94.27 men for every 100 women, though women were more numerous in the age group from birth to 35 years (which may be partly the result of male insurgent casualties). Literacy levels in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, low by national standards, were somewhat higher for men (69.8%) than for women (67.7%). In Lanao del Sur, however, more of those completing all levels of education were women than men. In contrast to other parts of the country, such as Southern Tagalog, more overseas workers from the ARMM were female (56%) than male; the median age of those female overseas workers was 24 years (there are hiring quotas for Muslim domestic workers employed in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim Middle Eastern States).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# MARĀTHAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** muh-RAHT-uhz

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mahrattas; Mahrattis

**LOCATION:** India (Maharashtra state)

**POPULATION:** c. 70 million (estimate) (50% are of the population of Maharashtra belong to the Marātha and Kunbi castes)

**LANGUAGE:** Marāthi

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Marāthas (also Mahrattas, or Mahrattis) are a people of partly non-Aryan stock inhabiting the Deccan Plateau of western India. Outside the area, the term Marātha loosely identifies the entire regional population who speak the Marāthi language. Within the region, however, it specifically refers to the dominant landowning and cultivating castes, the Marāthas and the Kunbis. The precise distinction between these two groups is unclear, though some believe they are descended from the same stock. All Kunbis are Marāthas, but not all Marāthas are Kunbis. Marāthas typically have *ksatriya* status, that is, they trace their origins to the chieftains and warriors of ancient India and see themselves as superior to the Kunbis. The Kunbis are mainly cultivators and predominantly *sūdras* (the lowest of the four major caste groups) by caste, though some also claim *ksatriya* descent. There is some hypergamy (i.e. intermarriage between the two groups), but this tends to be one-way. Thus a Kunbi female, provided her dowry were large enough, might be married into an impoverished, aristocratic Marātha family, but Marāthas would never give a daughter in marriage to a family of the Kunbi castes.

The Marāthas first rose to prominence in the 17th century. One writer characterizes them as a hardy, capable, and rough-hewn people who lived in a poor country and had achieved little of note prior to that time. This was all changed by the meteoric rise of Shivaji (1627–80), who united the Marātha chieftains against the Muslim rulers of India. By the time of his death, Shivaji had carved out a Marātha kingdom in the Konkan (the coastal and western areas of Maharashtra State) and laid the grounds for further Marātha expansion. During the 18th century a powerful Marātha Confederacy arose. Led by the Peshwas and including the houses of Bonsla, Sindhia, Holkar, and Gaekwar, the Marāthas extended their territories as far as the Punjab in the north and Orissa in the east. Marātha power was greatly weakened by the shattering defeat inflicted on them by the Afghans at the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761. Nonetheless, marauding bands of Marātha horsemen, feared by Muslim and Hindu alike, continued to raid as far afield as the Punjab, Bengal, and southern areas of the Indian peninsula. A series of defeats by the British in the early years of the 19th century led to the final collapse of the Marātha Empire.

The sense of Marātha identity generated during the 17th and 18th centuries survives in modern times. After India's independence, Marāthas were active in promoting the formation of states based on language. Popular sentiment led to the creation of Maharashtra State in 1960 to include the bulk of the Marāthi-speaking peoples within its borders. A major plat-

form of the Shiv Sena, a modern regional political party, is the ouster of non-Marāthas from the state.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The population of Maharashtra in 2001 was 96.9 million people, making it the second-largest state in the Indian Union in terms of population (it is third largest in area). Of this total population, perhaps 50% belong to the Marātha and Kunbi castes. Only 11 countries in the world (including India) have populations greater than Maharashtra's.

The Marātha homeland, i.e., Maharashtra, falls into three broad geographic divisions. The Konkan is the coastal lowland running from just north of Bombay (Mumbai) to Goa. Inland from this are the Western Ghāts, the line of hills that parallels the entire west coast of India. Generally between 760 m and 915 m (2,500–3,000 ft) in elevation in Maharashtra, they reach a height of 1,646 m (5,400 ft) inland from Bombay. These hills are actually a steep escarpment facing west, making access to the interior difficult. Many isolated peaks in the Ghāts are crowned by hill-forts that were strongholds of the Marāthas in their struggle with the Muslims. To the east of the Ghāts lie the plateaus and uplands of the Deccan lava region, at elevations varying between 300 m and 550 m (1,800–1,000 ft). This region is drained by the eastward-flowing Godavari River and tributaries of the Krishna. In the extreme north is the Tapi River, which flows west to the Arabian Sea.

Average monthly temperatures at Bombay range from 24°C to 30°C (75°F – 86°F), with annual precipitation totaling 207.8 cm (82 in). The west-facing Ghāts receive the full force of the summer monsoon, and some hill areas receive as much as 660 cm (260 in) of rainfall. East of the Ghāts, however, there is a rain-shadow effect, and rainfall over much of the plateau region is in the range of 50–100 cm (20–40 in).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Marāthi, the language spoken by Marāthas, is a member of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. It is derived from Maharashtri, a form of Prakrit (or language spoken by the common people, as opposed to the classical Sanskrit). According to the 2001 Census of India, 62,481,681 people in Maharashtra spoke Marāthi and its dialects, which include Konkani, Varadhi, and Nagpuri. The standard form of Marāthi is spoken in the Pune area. Marāthi is written in the Devanagari script or a cursive form of Devanagari called Modi.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The greatest folk hero of the Marāthas is Shivaji, who is seen as the champion of the Hindu peoples against the oppression of the Muslims. Developing guerrilla warfare to a fine art, Shivaji challenged the might of the Mughal Empire and founded the last of the great Hindu empires in India. Many incidents in his life have entered local lore. A Muslim general, feigning friendship, arranged a meeting with Shivaji in order to kill him. In an incident still remembered by both Hindus and Muslims, Shivaji embraced the general and killed him with steel claws attached to his hands before the Muslim could stab him with a concealed dagger. On another occasion, a prisoner of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, Shivaji, escaped by being concealed in a fruit basket. Shivaji's men are reputed to have captured the hill-fort of Singadh (southwest of Pune) from the Muslims by



sending trained lizards up its perpendicular walls, carrying ropes for the attackers to climb.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The Marāthas and Kunbis are Hindu. Although most worship one or more gods as a “family deity,” Shiva is of particular importance among the group. In villages, Shiva is worshiped in specific incarnations, e.g., as Khandoba, the guardian of the Deccan, or as Bhairav, the protector of the village. Khandoba has an important temple at Jejuri, not far from Pune. Shiva's consort Parvati is also revered by the Marāthas. She is worshiped in the form of Bhavani, Janni Devi, or one of the other local mother-goddesses found throughout the region. It is common for a goat or a cock to be sacrificed as an offering to these deities. Maruti is the monkey god, and no village in the Deccan is without a shrine to this kindly deity who provides protection from evil spirits. The Marāthas believe in witchcraft, the evil eye, and in ghosts and evil spirits, who can harm the living. Mashoba is the most widely feared of the evil spirits and when wronged can bring sickness and ill-fortune to the village. Some Marāthas worship Vishnu as well as Shiva. The temple of Vithoba at Pandharpur, for example, is an important Vishnu shrine and a major pilgrimage center. Though Brahmans officiate at most temples, some deities are served by non-Brahman priests. A Khandoba temple generally has a Marātha or Dhangar priest, while Lingayat or Gurav priests serve at shrines dedicated to Shankar (a form of Shiva).

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Although Marāthas observe all the major Hindu festivals, they also have their own regional celebrations. At Divali, for example, they sing hymns in praise of the Asura king Bali and worship cow-dung images of this demon-god. The birthday of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of the Hindus, is a major event in Bombay. Specially made images of the god are worshiped for the three days of the festival (Ganesha Chaturthi) then carried to the seashore to be immersed in the ocean. Nag Panchami, when snakes are worshiped, is celebrated widely in Maharashtra. Bendur or Pola, a festival at which bulls are decorated, worshiped, and taken in procession through the villages, is popular in the interior of the state. The Marātha hero Shivaji's birthday (Shivaji Jayanti) has been declared a public holiday by the government of Maharashtra.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Among the rituals of the Marāthas is the birth ceremony (*jātakarma*), held a few days after a child is born. Marāthas believe the fifth and sixth days after birth are particularly dangerous for the newborn child, who may be attacked by evil spirits during this time. Thus, "Mother's Fifth" and "Sixth" are extremely important and are accompanied by rituals to protect the infant. The period of ritual pollution after birth lasts for 10 days, after which a purification ceremony is performed. The first anniversary of the child's birth is celebrated by a feast, at which the hair-cutting ceremony (*chaula karma*) is often held. Marāthas who claim *ksatriya* (warrior) status will perform the sacred-thread ceremony for their sons between the ages of 10 and 12.

The death rites of the Marāthas closely follow those of the Brahmins. The corpse is bathed, wrapped in a white shroud, and placed on a bier. The funeral procession, sometimes led by musicians of the Mahar caste, makes its way to the burning *ghāt* (cremation ground), which is usually on the banks of a river or stream. In the days following the cremation, the ashes are gathered and taken to some holy place or river where they are thrown in the water. A purification ceremony is undergone by the relatives of the deceased on the eleventh day, and the funeral feast (*srāddha*) is held on the thirteenth day following the death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Marāthas use the "Namaste" greeting common among Hindus in India. This is accompanied by the gesture of joining of hands, palms together, in front of the body.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There are regional variations in settlement patterns and house types between the coastal areas of Maharashtra and the upland plateaus. Plateau villages are tight clusters of houses, with no gardens or compounds. Smaller houses are simply a rectangular block of four walls forming a single room. Larger houses are made of several such blocks arranged so they make a hollow square, with a sun-court (*chowk*) in the middle. Rooms include living quarters, a kitchen, storerooms, and the *devgarh*, a room where images of the family gods are kept. Such village houses are in sharp contrast to the expensive luxury tower apartments that line the oceanfront along Bombay's Marine Drive.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Although Marāthas claim to have *gotras* (clans), they are of little importance and appear to have been adopted from north India. The basic kin unit for Marāthas is the *kul*, literally "family," which is a lineage made up of extended families. Members of the *kul* worship a common totemic symbol called *devak*, a term that is also used as an alternative for *kul*. The *devak* symbol is a material object such as a bird, a tree, or an artifact. Examples of *devak* include the cobra, the elephant, and the blade of a sword. One cannot marry someone who worships the same *devak*. Other than *kul* exogamy, Marāthas have few of the marriage restrictions common among Hindus in northern India. They can marry within the village, cross-cousin marriage is allowed, and a man may have more than one wife. Marriages are arranged, and a bride-price is paid to the girl's family. The actual marriage is elaborate, involving 24 separate ceremonies. The most important of these is the installation of the *devak*.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional clothing for Marātha men is the turban, a coat, a shoulder cloth, and a *dhotī* (Indian loincloth) or short trousers known as *cholnās*. The coat is distinctive, fitting tightly around the arms and chest. The sleeves are longer than the arms and form numerous small folds between the elbow and wrist. The coat is fastened by tying it in front, below the right shoulder. From the chest, the coat falls in loose folds to the knee. Formerly, a sword was a regular part of the Marātha dress. Women wear the bodice (*choli*) and *sārī*. Peasant women, especially when working in the fields, often draw one end of the *sārī* through their legs and tuck it in at the back of the waist. Marātha women share the characteristic fondness of South Asian women for jewelry and ornaments.

## 12 FOOD

The standard diet of the Marāthas consists of flat, unleavened bread (*rotī*), with pulses and vegetables. Among the poor, a typical meal consists of millet bread eaten with chopped chilies and lentils (*dāl*). Among the more-affluent, bread is made from wheat flour, while rice and a greater variety of vegetables are served at meals, along with condiments and *ghī* (clarified butter). Marāthas are nonvegetarian, eating fish, mutton, and chicken, although only the better-off eat meat on a regular basis. For the poor, meat is a festival food, to be eaten only on special occasions and religious holidays. There are no specific caste rules prohibiting the use of alcohol or narcotics.

## 13 EDUCATION

According to the 2001 Census of India, literacy in the state of Maharashtra is 77.27%. As is to be expected in South Asia, significant differences in literacy rates exist between males and females (86.27% and 67.51% respectively) and between urban and rural populations. In Bombay, for example, literacy is over 86%, but only around 60% of women in rural areas are literate, although among some rural, female Kunbis, this figure drops below 40%. Bombay, with the University of Bombay, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), and the Tata Institute of Social Science, is one of the country's major educational centers. Maharashtra State provides free, compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 years, with attendance at the primary level being above 90%. Maharashtra State has numerous universities and institutions of higher learning, though actual partici-

pation in this system is largely a matter of economics and the choice of the population.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Marāthi regional literature dates from around AD 1000. The devotional poetry and songs of Maharashtrian saints such as Namdev (1270–1350) and Ramdas (1608–81) are among its greatest achievements. The 18th century saw the rise of two other literary forms: the love lyric and the heroic ballad (*powada*), based on the exploits of Shivaji and other Marātha heroes. The 19th-century paintings of the Peshwa period were derived largely from the Rajasthani tradition. It should be remembered that these form part of a regional cultural tradition that the Marāthas did not develop themselves, but adopted from the traditions of others. The poet-saint Ramdev, for example, was of the Brahman caste. Marātha history in western India abounds with the military exploits of the great Marātha dynasties. But the overall Marātha record is more one of destruction than of construction.

#### **15 WORK**

In the past, the chieftains, nobles, and landowners of Maharashtra were drawn from the ranks of the Marāthas. Some were soldiers, and the Marātha cavalry was renowned throughout the subcontinent during the 17th and 18th centuries. Many Marāthas continue this tradition of military service in the armed forces of modern India. The bulk of the Marāthas and Kunbis were cultivators and continue to be so today. Many of the village headmen (*patels*) in the central Deccan are of the Marātha caste. Maharashtra is one of the most heavily urbanized Indian states. Its cities include Bombay, one of the world's major urban centers (with a population of over 18 million people), Pune, and Nagpur in the eastern part of the state. This fact is reflected in the numbers of Marāthas who now live in cities and towns and follow urban occupations, e.g., commerce and government service, and professions such as teaching, medicine, and law.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Marātha children play games that are common in Maharashtra and the rest of India. Young children enjoy role-playing, boys pretending to be horse-drivers, engine-drivers, etc., while girls play with dolls or at housekeeping. Organized games include various versions of tag, blind man's bluff, and hide-and-seek. Traditional Indian games such as *Gullī dandā* (Indian cricket) and *Kabaddī* (team wrestling) are popular. Cricket is perhaps the most important spectator sport, with other modern games such as field hockey, soccer, tennis, and badminton played in cities and towns. Popular indoor games include chess, cards, and *carrom* (a board game in which counters are used to knock one's opponent's counters into pockets).

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Many Marāthas depend on local festivals, fairs, and traditional folk entertainment for their recreation. The Nandivala, for example, is a traveling performer who entertains village audiences with sound effects, tricks, soothsaying, and trained-animal shows. The Bahrupi, literally "one with many disguises," is a professional entertainer known for humorous impersonations. Modern forms of entertainment such as radio, television, and

movies are readily available to those who can afford access to them. Bombay, India's equivalent of Hollywood, is one of the world's largest centers of movie-making and produces films in both Hindi and Marāthi. Bombay is also one of India's major intellectual and cultural centers, with museums, performances of modern and classical music, theater, and other cultural activities.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

As landowners and cultivators, the Marātha and Kunbi castes are not themselves involved in arts and crafts. Within Maharashtra State, however, traditional crafts include weaving and metalwork, as well as local specialties such as Kolhapuri leather sandals, and the Muslim *himsa* (weaving) and *bidri* (metal inlaid with silver) work of Aurangabad.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The dominant landowning and cultivating caste in their region, the Marāthas and Kunbis are unified by a shared history and a common culture rooted in the Marāthi language. This sense of identity resulted in agitation for a linguistic state that led to the creation of Maharashtra as a Marāthi-speaking state. Though Marāthas essentially make up the bulk of the rural peasantry in the state, a Marātha elite has risen to positions of political power in Maharashtra. Marātha nationalism has led to anti-foreigner sentiments, with calls for non-Marāthas such as Gujaratis and Tamils to be expelled from the state. The recent renaming of Bombay as Mumbai, the Marāthi name for the city, is another expression of this sense of Marātha consciousness.

When Maharashtra State was created as what was primarily a linguistic state, there was an upwelling of pro-Maharashtrian, anti-foreigner sentiment fuelled largely by the Shiv Sena, a conservative, Hindu, regional political party with strong Marātha support, which was founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray (a relative of the English writer William Makepeace Thackeray). Feeling against Gujaratis, of whom there were many in Bombay, and the Gujarati language were strong, and between 1956 and 1960, protests, sometimes accompanied by fatalities, occurred in favor of a Marāthi-speaking state. The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti demanded unification of all Marāthi speaking regions in one state, and on 1 May 1960 the current Maharashtra state was formed from Marāthi-speaking areas of Bombay State, the Deccan states (the Deccan State Agency, an association of princely states, was an administrative unit of British India, which was incorporated into Bombay State at Independence in 1947) and Vidarbha (which was then part of Madhya Pradesh). There are various interpretations as to what the term "Maharashtra" means. Some say it translates as Great (*mahā*) Country (*rashtray*), others that it probably derived from *rathi* meaning "a chariot driver," referring to drivers and builders of chariots who were called "Maharathis" or "fighting force," while still others say it means "Country of the Mahars," an untouchable caste found in the area.

The Shiv Sena gained in strength in Maharashtra in the last decades of the 20th century, and, although the state has traditionally been a stronghold of the Indian National Congress, even formed the State government from 1995–1999. With Bal Thackeray as one of its leaders, it continues to promote its policy of "Maharashtra for Maharashtrians." However, Maharashtra's government remains in the hands of the Indian National



Congress. Vilasrao Deshmukh serves as chief minister, even though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu nationalist party committed to Hindutva ("Hinduness"), won 54 out of 288 seats in the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha (lower house) in the 2004 elections.

The Shiv Sena appears to be in a state of decline, even though it once proudly claimed to be the only genuine Hindutva party in India, and Bal Thackeray even asserted publicly that his boys struck first blow at Babri Masjid. The Shiv Sena came to power by trashing minorities and was responsible for the Bombay riots of 1992-93 that, like the Gujarat riots of 2002 in which numerous Muslims were killed, shook the conscience of the whole nation in the concept of India as a secular state. Bal Thackeray's hold on the Marāthi people, however, has been seriously weakened and his followers, in whom he took great pride, are deserting him. The Shiv Sena vote base is fast being eroded, and it may soon find itself on the margins of Maharashtra politics.

Despite their position as the dominant cultivator caste in Maharashtra, Kunbis are classified as Other Backward Castes (OBCs), whereas other groups such as the Marāthi Brahmins are not. Kunbis reap the benefits of this status and, being upwardly mobile, tend to dominate the other groups, like the Malis and Ahirs, which are accorded the same OBC status. In addition, Kunbis and Marāthas dominate politics in Maharashtra. As recently as June 2008 the Sambhaji Brigade, a militant pro-Marātha organization whose membership consists primarily of Marātha youth from the interior of the state and which is named after a son of the warrior Shivaji, has demanded Other Backward Classes status for Marāthas in Maharashtra. Taking a cue from the Gujjars in Rajasthan, the brigade has warned of a violent agitation if Marāthas are not granted OBC status soon.

## <sup>20</sup>GENDER ISSUES

The status of women in Maharashtra from the rise of the great Marātha hero Shivaji to the present was basically not different from that of women in other parts of India. Here, too, women were dependent on men and had to play a secondary and subordinate role. Yet, in certain respects, the situation in Maharashtra was different from that in other parts of India. Women belonging to aristocratic and ruling families were taught the art of horse-riding. They not merely used swords effectively on the battlefield but also led armies. Englishmen such as Captain Thomas Broughton admired the Marātha women for their bravery and courage. Broughton—in 1809—wrote "At no time is the difference in the treatment of women between the Marāthas and other natives of India more strikingly displayed. Such as can afford it here ride on horse without taking any pain to conceal their faces; they gallop about and make their way through the throng with as much boldness and perseverance as the men. The Marātha women have a bold look that is to be observed in no other women of Hindustan." Though women belonging to the aristocratic families had to observe *pardah* in the presence of strangers, the practice was relatively less rigorous in Maharashtra. The Rani of Jhansi, who, with her armies, opposed the British during the 1857 sepoy uprising, was a Marātha.

Being Hindus, Marātha and Kunbi women, especially in rural contexts, experience the social restraints typical of Hindu society. Thus, arranged marriages are common, child marriage

(once the norm and now illegal) still occurs, and a dowry is often demanded by the groom's family among Marāthas who claim an upper caste status. However, among some low caste groups a *dej* (bride-price) is paid to the girl's father. Except for the Deshmukh families of the Sirole sub-caste, Kunbis allow the remarriage of widows. However, Marāthas do not allow widow remarriage or divorce.

The President of India in 2008, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, is a Maharashtrian. She is the first female President of the country.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# MARONITES

**PRONUNCIATION:** MA-ruh-nites

**LOCATION:** Lebanon

**POPULATION:** 1.5 million (2006 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; French; English

**RELIGION:** Maronite (Uniate Catholicism)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Lebanese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Maronites take their name either from the 5th century AD saint, John Maroun, or the 8th century AD monk who took his name and became the first Patriarch of Antioch. Although their origins are obscure, the Maronites believe that their heritage goes back to the time of Jesus. Their ancestors lived when Jesus did in the land then known as Palestine, heard him preach, and were among the first Christians. Whatever their origins, they were one of the Christian sects in the Middle East to remain intact after the Islamic revolution of the 7th century AD. (For the first 100 years of Islamic rule, Arabs more often than not considered Islam an “Arab” religion and did not expect non-Arabs to convert.) The Maronites were the only Christian sect to use Arabic for their church records right from the start.

To distinguish themselves from “Arabs,” Maronite versions of their history claim that they fled Muslim persecution during the Islamic revolution. Records show, however, that at first the Maronites welcomed the Muslims as saviors from the hated Byzantine rulers of that time, and the Muslims in fact treated the Maronites fairly well. The Maronites ingratiated themselves with these new overlords and set up tax-farming arrangements that provided the Maronites with a decent living. It was not until the European Crusaders sacked Alexandria and the Maronites supported them that the Muslims questioned Maronite loyalty and punished them along with other Christians. The Maronites eventually fled to the hills of Mount Lebanon to escape persecution by the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century. They stubbornly survived there for the centuries to follow.

Maronite support of the Crusaders established ties to the West that became a defining factor for the Maronite community. They entered into partial communion with the Roman Catholic Church in the 12th century AD and came into full communion in 1763. During the Ottoman rule of the mid-19th century, Lebanon had been divided into two states, one Christian and one Druze. The Druze religion dates back to the 11th century and is separate from Christianity or Islam. Its adherents were often persecuted as heretics by Muslims. The French supported the Maronites in their war with the British-supported Druze. After the Druze massacred a large number of Maronites in 1860, an international commission decided to reunite the country under a non-Lebanese governor. The French later allied themselves again with the Maronites during the French mandate years (1920–1943), cementing the Maronite identification with the West, particularly France. This Western identity has led to a sense of separateness from other Arabs on the part of the Maronites and resentment toward them on the part of their Arab-identified neighbors. In the last ten years, however, Maronites have become more comfortable with a Lebanese identity as nationalism has increased among Lebanon’s population.

The Maronites have campaigned for an independent homeland since the 7th century AD, but they are no longer attempting to convert Lebanon into a Maronite state today. Based on the confessional system of government (where political authority is divided up according to population percentages of religious faiths), the Lebanese presidency is designated as a Maronite post because Maronites were in the majority at the time of the 1932 census. A civil war began in Lebanon in April 1975 due to increasing instability of a system of government that allowed Christians majority rule despite the fact that Muslims had become the majority of the population. This was especially true after the influx of Palestinian refugees from Palestine and Jordan in 1948, 1967, and 1970. The unwillingness of the French and the Maronites to consider the concerns of the majority in a period of strong Arab nationalism led to increasing conflict, which was promoted in part by outside players. Initially, the Muslims had the upper hand in the fighting, but Syria, with the support of Israel, the United States, and most Arab states, entered Lebanon with a “peacekeeping” force to maintain the status quo. With Syria’s support, the Maronites were able to preserve their position in Lebanon until a new government was formed at Taif (in Saudi Arabia), which, under Syria’s tutelage, formally ended the civil war. Maronite Christians still retain the presidency position in Lebanon’s governing structure. However, the sect’s political power has diminished considerably since the 1990s as the Druze and Shia Muslims has grown more united.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Most ethnic groups living in the Levant region have intermingled with other groups. The territory known as Lebanon today has a diverse society, due in part to numerous foreign armies passing through over the centuries. Some Maronites claim descent from the European Crusaders, such as the major northern families of Franjehs and Douaihies. The Franjehs say their name means “Franks,” and the Douaihies link their name to the French city of Douai, the home of some of the knights of the Crusades. It appears from what records exist that the Maronite sect began in northern Syria in the valley of the Orontes River, near the present-day city of Hama, in the 6th century AD. The Maronites moved south to the coast of northern Lebanon in the 8th century, then fled into the hills of Mount Lebanon to escape persecution by the Ottoman Turks in the mid- to late-15th century. Hiding up in small, isolated communities, the Maronites became clannish and fiercely self-protective. After surviving in the high mountains of northern Lebanon for many centuries, the Maronites then spread south throughout the mountain range during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Maronite Church acquired a great deal of land and became the largest, most organized, wealthiest institution in the Mount Lebanon area. By the mid-19th century, the Maronite Church owned one-fourth to one-third of all the land in Mount Lebanon. During the 20th century, some Maronites began to move out of the mountains to the cities and coastal plains, especially to Beirut, but they continued to be clannish and isolated from their neighbors in their new locations.

During the Lebanese civil war, more than 600,000 Maronites were driven out of their homes and off their lands. Of the 850,000 inhabitants of the Maronite enclave in Lebanon sometimes called “Marounistan,” 100,000 fled abroad, and 150,000 fled to other parts of Lebanon. As Muslims gain more political



dominance in Lebanon, more Maronites are emigrating from their homeland to Europe and the United States.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Although Arabic is the official language of Lebanon, many Maronites also speak French. Economic and military ties have led most residents of Lebanon to learn French and English in addition to Arabic. Syriac is used for the church liturgy, but Maronites have used Arabic for church records since their beginnings.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The door of the Maronite church in Beit Meri is never locked because it is believed that the hand of any thief there would be miraculously paralyzed.

### 5 RELIGION

The Maronites are Uniate Catholics: they recognize the authority of the Roman Catholic Pope, but they have their own form of worship. Their priests can marry, and monks and nuns are housed in the same building. Even after becoming a Uniate church in AD 1180, the Maronites continued to use the Syriac language for their liturgy instead of Latin (as in the Roman church). Syriac is the Maronite liturgical language to this day. The Maronites did quietly drop their belief in monothelism, branded heresy in AD 680 by the Roman church, after becoming a Uniate church in 1180. Monothelism proposes that Christ has two natures that are so blended with each other that they produce one will. The orthodox view, called dyothelism,

holds that Christ has two natures and two wills, one human and one divine, which are inseparable, yet unconfused: Christ is at one with God in his divine nature and at one with humanity in his human nature. The Qadisha (Holy) valley is the Maronite spiritual center.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Maronites celebrate the usual Christian holidays, such as Christmas (December 25), Easter (moveable, in March or April), the Feast of the Ascension (40 days after Easter), and the Feast of the Assumption (August 15). On the Festival of the Cross (September 14), Maronites set fires on high places all over Mount Lebanon and light candles at home and in churches. A special Maronite holy day is St. Maroun's Day (February 9), the feast of the Maronite patron saint, St. John Maroun of the 5th century AD.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Maronites mark major life events, such as birth, marriage, and death, within the traditions of Christianity.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Centuries of life in isolated mountain communities, hiding out from persecution by various attackers, has led to the development of clan loyalties and fierce feuding among the Maronites.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Maronite villages have a style of architecture common around the Mediterranean area. Homes are small and simple, yet elegant, often with a balcony overlooking the mountains or the Mediterranean Sea. Since the 18th and 19th centuries, the Maronites have been fairly affluent. During the Lebanese civil war, many Maronites fled from the cities (especially Beirut) back to their ancestral homes in Mount Lebanon. As a result, business boomed there, housing construction soared, and the area became quite prosperous.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Although modernization has led to an increased emphasis on the nuclear family, the Maronites, like other Arabs in Lebanon, still have a strong sense of extended family. Men spend quite a bit of time at home with the women and children. There is some intermarriage between Maronites and members of other religious groups. Divorce is forbidden by Maronite law.

### 11 CLOTHING

Maronites wear Western-style clothing, as do the Druze, Shiites, Sunnis, Armenians, and Greek Orthodox in Lebanon. The more devout Maronites tend to wear conservative clothing. Apart from slight differences in headgear, even the religious leaders of all the communities in Lebanon tend to dress alike.

### 12 FOOD

Maronites eat typical Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food, with French and European elements blended in. For example, breakfast might consist of either Lebanese flatbread or French croissants with cheese and coffee or tea. Lunches and dinners usually consist of meat (mutton is a favorite) with onion, spices, and rice. Mutton is often ground and served as meatballs or in stews, or mixed with rice and vegetables and rolled in grape

leaves. The Middle Eastern tradition of *mezze* (small portions of a wide variety of foods served all at once for diners to pick and choose from) is popular with Maronites, as is *arak*, the anise-flavored alcohol produced in the region.

### 13 EDUCATION

By the 17th century, European missionaries had established Catholic schools in Lebanon. The Maronites had an initial advantage with the missionary schools established for them, but eventually the schools began accepting Muslims as well. In 1788, a monastery was converted to a secondary school that taught secular subjects, and American Protestant missionaries set up schools for both boys and girls in Lebanon in the 1820s and 1830s. However, the Uniate Catholic Maronites were more inclined toward the schools set up soon after by French Catholic missionaries. Most Maronites today still receive their primary and secondary schooling in French-language schools, then generally go to the University of St. Joseph in Beirut, founded by French Jesuits in 1875 to compete with the Syrian Protestant College (now called the American University of Beirut) established in 1866.

The Lebanese government requires students to have a functional knowledge of Arabic in order to graduate from secondary school but only recently has this been enforced. Many older Maronites speak only French.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The poet Maya Angelou published an essay on the Maronites in Lebanon in 1984. At the time, civil war had been raging in Lebanon for nine years and would continue for six more years. Angelou described the Maronites as a people with “a split personality.” “They are Arabs who often look to the West for inspiration and assistance,” Angelou wrote. “A minority that insists it must rule in order to survive and nationalists in a land that is so fracture it can hardly be called a nation.”

Angelou’s words continue to describe the cultural heritage of the Maronites today. Lebanon contains people of many different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Maronite leaders have joined with leaders of other factions within Lebanon to try and unify the country. Yet, the Maronites also wonder where they fit in the Lebanon of the early twenty-first century. They are an Arab people, but they have strong cultural ties to the West, and many have ancestral ties to the West as well. In 1585 a religious school for Maronite men was established in Rome. A short time later, European Catholic missionaries settled in Lebanon and began schools there. To this day, Maronites continue to send their children to French-language private schools in Lebanon [see **Lebanese**]. As former president Camille Chamoun, a Maronite, told Angelou: “We are part of the Arab world, but we are also apart from the Arab world because so much of our identity comes from the West.”

### 15 WORK

Many Maronites are wealthy, and Maronites have long held powerful positions in Lebanese government, business, and education. With the aid of the French, the Maronites developed Mount Lebanon’s greatest money-making venture of the past—the silk industry. The mountainsides are dotted with old silk-reeling factories.

### 16 SPORTS

Maronites enjoy the same sports as other Lebanese. These activities include soccer, basketball, volleyball, horseback-riding, cross-country running, martial arts, skiing, rock-climbing, and caving. Maronites, like other Lebanese, also go swimming and fishing in the lakes, rivers, or visit beaches along the Mediterranean coast.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Maronites, like other residents of Lebanon, watch television avidly. Many stations emphasize all Christian programming, though others offer a mix. Maronites also watch American, European, and Lebanese films in theaters, and enjoy the dramatic theatre tradition of their home country.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional crafts among Lebanese Maronites include basketry, carpet-weaving, ceramics and pottery, copper and metalworking, embroidery, glass-blowing, and gold- and silver-smithing. Lebanon is also known for its finely crafted church bells. Wine-making can also be considered an art, dating back for thousands of years in Lebanon.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Maronites suffered under Ottoman rule from the 16th century to the end of World War I. The arrival of European colonizers in the early 20th century worked to their advantage, especially because the Maronites shared the same Christian faith as the Europeans. The privileges that the Maronites acquired under European colonial rule are treated with disdain by other Lebanese who see their acquisition of wealth as a product of their favorable access to Lebanese politics. Although other communities (such as the Sunnis and Shiites) have also benefited from the traditional Lebanese system of government created by the French, there have been tensions as these groups seek more equitable representation in the Lebanese government. Within the Maronite community itself, centuries of clannish mountain life has led to perpetual feuding and in-fighting, continuing today among the different Maronite militias.

The long civil war damaged Lebanon’s economic infrastructure. National output was cut in half, and the country has struggled to rebuild its economy through heavy borrowing from domestic banks and international sources. The economic difficulties have made the plight of the Maronite minority more precarious, especially since many Lebanese Muslims see the Maronites as hostile to their people. The end of the civil war and the end of Maronite political dominance has made many Maronites uncertain about their future place in Lebanon. As a result, many Maronites have begun to migrate out of Lebanon in recent years.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Maronite women experience the same kind of discrimination in public and private life that other Lebanese women face. In general, Lebanese laws and court systems do little to help women. Lebanese laws allow for each religion to have a separate court system to handle matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Frequently, these religious customs, whether they

are Christian or Muslim, fail to protect women from domestic violence.

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—revised by H. Gupta-Carlson

# MELANESIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mel-uh-NEE-zhuns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Papuans

**LOCATION:** [Papua] New Guinea, Vanuatu (the former New Hebrides), New Caledonia, the Solomon Islands, and some smaller neighboring islands

**POPULATION:** Unknown

**LANGUAGE:** English; Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu (Papua New Guinea); Bislama (Vanuatu); Solomon Islands Pidgin English (Solomon Islands); Bahasa Indonesia (Papua and West Papua provinces of Indonesia); other native languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity; some native religions

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Melanesia is not a socio-political unit, but instead a *culture area*. Culture area is a term used by anthropologists to refer to a geographical region where people share many of the same cultural traits, such as family structure, marriage rules, socio-political organization, or subsistence strategies. Melanesia itself is part of a larger culture area called Oceania which includes Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia, and Australia. The native inhabitants of Melanesia, called Melanesians, are characteristically dark-skinned with frizzy hair. They are sometimes referred to as "Papuans," from the Malay word "papua" meaning "frizzy haired."

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Melanesia includes the islands of New Guinea, Vanuatu (the former New Hebrides), New Caledonia, the Solomon Islands, and some smaller neighboring islands. The island of New Guinea is divided politically down the middle. The western half of the island is comprised of two provinces of Indonesia called Papua and West Papua, while the eastern half is the independent nation of Papua New Guinea. New Caledonia is a *departement* of France, and Vanuatu became an independent nation in 1980. All of Melanesia lies within the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and is south of the equator. Melanesians migrate locally to other nearby islands or to Australia. A small percentage does leave the region entirely and take up residence in the United States, Canada, or Europe.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

In many of the island nations that comprise Melanesia, there is more than one official, national language. For instance, Papua New Guinea has three official languages: English, Tok Pisin, an English-based pidgin language, and Hiri Motu, an Austronesian-based pidgin language. Tok Pisin has a history based in colonialism and forced plantation labor in the 1800s in the South Pacific. The language ultimately derives from a kind of nautical English that was spread throughout the Pacific by sailors. The structure of the language is somewhat like English and somewhat like the Austronesian languages that were spoken by the plantation laborers. A sample sentence in Tok Pisin looks like this: "Bai mi kaikai wampela kaukau" (translated, "I will eat a yam.").

Within the region of Melanesia, the island of New Guinea alone has over 1,000 different languages. Some of these lan-

guages have as few as 50 speakers, while others, such as Enga, have a few hundred thousand. Many of these languages remain undocumented and undescribed. Melanesia is truly a linguistic frontier.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Oral history is important to the peoples of Melanesia since none of these cultures ever developed a native writing system. In the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, the origin myth of many groups tells of a mythical crocodile that split in two, with his upper jaw becoming the heavens and his lower jaw becoming the earth. For many of these groups, there was also an original pair of humans that sprang from the mud and are responsible for populating the Earth. In this origin myth, however, the original pair are brothers.

#### **5 RELIGION**

Christianity has spread throughout Melanesia. Missionaries are very active in this region, learning the native languages and translating the New Testament into those languages. Native religions are still practiced, although in modified form, by many groups. In many societies in the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, the original belief systems incorporated aspects of both headhunting and cannibalism. The two practices have been illegal in the region since the late 1920s. Most groups believe in a variety of spirits which inhabit the forests, mountains, and swamps. They also believe that the ghosts of their ancestors inhabit the same plane of reality that they do. In fact, in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, when Melanesians saw the first Europeans they believed them to be the ghosts of their dead ancestors returning to the community. Some groups jokingly refer to "white" tourists in the same way.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Independence Day is a major holiday for the independent Melanesian nations of Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. For those that belong to the Commonwealth, British holidays such as the Queen's birthday are celebrated in urban areas. Banks and schools are closed for those holidays, but in areas where there are no banks or schools, these holidays have little meaning.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

There are many important rites of passage in Melanesian societies. Puberty is an especially important rite in all Melanesian societies; however, these societies differ in regards to which sex undergoes initiation rites. In the Sepik River region, males used to undergo extreme and elaborate initiation rites. These involved extensive scarification as well as brutal treatment by older males. Scarification has all but disappeared in the Sepik region, except for the few males who can afford to have the process done. It is an expensive proposition to pay the fees of the scarification experts who perform the operations. In some societies, males were expected to commit a homicide and take their first head at puberty. This process was halted by colonial administrators in the 1920s, soon after the first European contacts in the region. Girls generally had less harsh puberty rites, often undergoing only a brief period of seclusion with the onset of menstruation. Funerals were also important rites of passage in Melanesian societies involving much feasting and display of emotion.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

There are extreme differences between urban Melanesians and rural Melanesians in terms of how they greet and take leave of each other. In parts of the highlands of Papua New Guinea, males would greet each other by rubbing each other's groin region. In most of these cultures, the Western handshake has replaced this traditional form of greeting. Since trade was such an important part of daily life in parts of Melanesia, special ceremonial greetings took place when one group went to trade with another. Special languages were used and the participants placed specific roles with each other.

Many groups require that marriages occur between persons who come from different villages. Special courtship rituals still take place between men and women in these instances. Among the Chimbu of Papua New Guinea, men woo women through their ability to sing. They would also decorate their bodies in elaborate ways to look beautiful for the women whom they are trying to court. Marriages, however, have to be negotiated between the families and usually involve the payment of a "bride price" to the bride's father by the prospective son-in-law.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Melanesia is a tropical region and its inhabitants experience the hardships of life in an environment where rain, heat, and mosquitoes are ever-present. Malaria is endemic to the region and most local inhabitants of the low-lying areas are afflicted with this debilitating disease. Healing is a long process in the tropics and, as a result, infection is a serious problem. Most of Melanesia, though, is a relatively healthy region of the world.

Transportation varies from region to region within Melanesia. In areas where flooding is common, roads are of little value in the rainy season. During that time of year almost all transportation is by dugout canoe. Some people are wealthy enough to buy outboard motors for their canoes so that they do not have to paddle. In the cities of Melanesia, automobiles are common, especially taxis and minibuses which transport people as far as the roads will allow. In rural areas there are no posted speed limits, and travel by bus can be considered a dangerous activity. Drivers with a schedule to keep seem to have little regard for hazardous road conditions or the possibility of oncoming traffic. Small propeller aircraft are an important means of travel between the cities and the isolated mountain valleys. It is not uncommon to share a row on a plane with an individual in traditional dress.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

In many Melanesian societies, there is a great deal of antagonism between men and women. It is common in many villages to have men's and women's houses. In the Sepik River region, men's ceremonial houses are off-limits to all women and to uninitiated (non-adult) males. Men would traditionally spend most of their time in this large house where matters of ceremonial importance were often planned. Men would also often take their meals here. There were no real "family meals" in traditional societies along the Sepik. Food for the day is often placed in a woven basket that is suspended from the house rafters. People just eat when they get hungry.

Women are the primary caregivers of children and the primary food producers. Women play important roles in ceremonial and political life in many Melanesian societies. In some



*Melanesian children float on a bamboo pontoon on the Coral Coast, Fiji. (AFP/Getty Images)*

societies, a child's maternal uncle is the most important male figure.

Households vary in size from society to society. In some very small societies, everyone in the group lives in one house. Antagonism between the sexes is not as dramatic among these groups as it is among larger groups. In all societies, however, the domestic space is divided between males and females.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Traditional clothing in Melanesia was scant by Western European standards. In the highland societies of New Guinea, men went naked except for their "penis sheath" made from the gourd of a vine. Nowadays, in only a few remote societies do men continue to dress in this manner; instead, they wear Western-style shorts or long trousers and shirts. In these societies, women wear skirts made from handmade fiber. An important aspect of adornment in these societies was body decoration, which involved elaborate painting and the use of various headgear, wigs, and other items. The most elaborate adornment took place when exchanges between groups were to occur. These were a time of feasting and boasting and beauty was an important aspect of the event. Some individuals still adorn themselves in this manner at these events, while others choose to refrain from the traditional activity.

In many parts of Melanesia the all-purpose *laplap* has become the standard unisex item of clothing. Laplap refers to a piece of cloth, usually store-bought, which can be wrapped around the waist or up under the armpits to cover the body, somewhat like a sarong. In the lower altitude areas, women still prefer to not wear any covering on their upper body; however, when tourists are in the village, they can adjust the laplap to cover their breasts.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Food varies in Melanesia but there are some similarities. In parts of the lowland areas of the region, the sago palm is an important foodstuff. The pith of the palm is processed into a starch which can be made into pancakes or dumplings. A sago pancake has the appearance of a freshly cooked soft tortilla and the consistency and texture of a rubber-soled shoe. They are, however, very filling and taste quite nice with peanut butter. In the higher elevations, yams are the staple diet, with pork being consumed on ceremonial occasions.

### **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Many parts of Melanesia do not have access to formal, European-style education. Education focuses on traditional ways of life and the values of the society. Schools have reached some remote areas and are part of urban life for Melanesians. Ed-

ucation in schools revolves around literacy in the national language(s) and preparation for urban life, such as civil service careers. In Papua New Guinea, the educational system is based on the Australian model, where formal required education ends at grade 10. Grades 11 and 12 are not mandatory; they are only for those students who have a desire to pursue higher education at the university level. The University of Papua New Guinea offers a variety of degrees in a number of fields. Many of its faculty are indigenous Papuans who trained both in foreign and domestic institutions. Literacy in Tok Pisin is growing among the urban population in particular, while literacy in English is lower. Children who attend school have at least basic proficiency in written English.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

There are a number of musical traditions within Melanesia. In the Solomon Islands, there is a tradition of panpipe orchestras that is well-known to ethnomusicologists (scholars who study the role of music in its cultural contexts). These panpipes look and sound very similar to those played by the Aymara and Quechua of the Andean region of South America. Drums are nearly universal in the musical traditions of Melanesia. Melanesian drums are usually hand-held, hourglass-shaped, and single-headed. The Tok Pisin word for this type of drum is *kundu*. In many highland societies of Papua New Guinea, large groups of men play drums together at large ceremonial gatherings called *sing sing*.

Dance is an important part of ritual life in Melanesian societies. Both men and women dance; however, in many societies there are separate men's and women's dances.

Written literature is a recent development in Melanesia. Many pieces of written literature are the transcriptions of folklore and oral history. Nationalism in island Melanesian nations has resulted in the production of modern literatures in the national languages of the countries, such as Tok Pisin and Bislama.

#### 15 WORK

Wage labor was introduced to Melanesia by European colonists. Prior to this, work was often cooperative and reciprocal, and for village-based projects it still remains so to this day. Individuals have certain responsibilities to their relatives and in-laws which typically include working for them on cooperative projects such as house building. In some societies, a son-in-law has to work in his father-in-law's gardens for a fixed period of time after his marriage. This practice is called "bride service" by anthropologists.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer, rugby, and cricket are important sports in Melanesia. Some societies have transformed these sports in unique ways or adapted them to meet local conditions. In a well known case in the Trobriand Islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea, cricket is played by local rules which do not allow for a winner. In many other remote villages of the various islands in the region, these sports are no more than names to the people.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Electricity does not reach many Melanesian homes, so television is a luxury of the urban folk. There is one television sta-

tion in Papua New Guinea called *Em TV* in Tok Pisin, one of the national languages of the country. *Em* in Tok Pisin means "it, he, or she," so the station's name means something close to "It's TV." Australian, American, and locally produced shows are aired during a restricted viewing schedule. Cable and satellite service are available to the wealthy locals as well as the expatriates of the islands.

Traditional recreation involves storytelling and performances of music, dance, and song. No recreational event is complete without betel nut chewing, a favorite recreation of most Melanesians.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Art in most Melanesian societies is utilitarian: there is no saying "art for art's sake." In the Sepik River region, there is an extremely well developed tradition of artistic expression involving sculpture and painting. Every item is elaborately decorated with important animals and birds as well as geometric and abstract designs. Masks were an important aspect of ritual performances, but have now become important items of tourist art. Every year, several thousand tourists visit this area of New Guinea to purchase the art and artifacts of these people. It is not an industry that creates any wealthy Papuans, however.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Like every other group of people, Melanesians are dealing with the modern world. Alcoholism is becoming a more serious problem in parts of Melanesia where males have access to money and find time on their hands. AIDS poses a serious health threat in Papua New Guinea, where condoms were not available until recently, and again, more predominately in the urban areas. The social phenomenon of "rascals" in parts of Papua New Guinea is a cause for concern for locals and visitors alike. Rascals are unemployed, disenfranchised youth who rob people as well as businesses, often assaulting their victims. Guns are rarely used in these robberies since they are difficult to come by and ammunition is illegal by Papua New Guinea law.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The relationships between males and females are highly varied within the Melanesian culture area. While initiation for males certainly dominates the cultural landscape of Melanesia, there are several societies in which female initiation is found. One complaint that has leveled in feminist anthropology is that the male-bias of most modern ethnography has obscured the roles of women in Melanesian societies.

Among the Abelam of the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea, there is both male and female initiation. For a female, adulthood is marked through a public ritual that celebrates the girl's first menses. For a period of a month or two after that, the young woman is called *naramtaakwa*, meaning "decorated woman." During this time, she wears particular decorations, follows a set of social restrictions, and avoids work. At the end of the *naramtaakwa* period, a young woman is called *taakwa* and is now eligible for marriage. For a male in Abelam society, on the other hand, adulthood is attained through a gradual social process that does not reach completion until a man is in his forties.

Segregation of the sexes is common throughout Melanesia and recent interpretations of the ethnographic data provide



new insights into the reasons why this pattern is common. Previous explanations focused on the concept that women, and by extension children, were seen as polluting to men. This pollution stemmed from menstruation and fear of male contact with menstrual blood. Recent ethnographic studies in parts of Papua New Guinea have shown that men are believed to be equally polluting to women. Among the Abelam, for instance, virile men are seen as dangerous to certain female activities. The Abelam believe that sexual intercourse is detrimental to the growth of yams, which are their staple crop. During yam growing season, the young men and women are kept apart to insure their adherence to the prohibition on sexual intercourse. The reinterpretation of the ethnographic facts place a dual equality on the “dangerous” aspects of male and female in Abelam society.

Gender differences are also signaled through grammar in some of the languages spoken in Melanesia. The language of the Trobriand Islanders, Kilivila, has a complex system of gender. In Kilivila, every noun—even inanimate nouns—has a defined gender that is signaled by the use of a suffix that is attached to the noun.

In 2005, the Melanesian island nation of Vanuatu instituted a law that girls and women could be fined for wearing trousers or jeans in public. The law stemmed from concerns that traditional dress is being abandoned by ni-Vanuatu girls and women in favor of western styles. A further deterrent is that the family of the female violating the law will have to kill one pig, and pigs are items of wealth for ni-Vanuatu families.

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—by J. Williams

# MELPA

**PRONUNCIATION:** MEL-pah

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Medlpa; Hageners

**LOCATION:** Papua New Guinea

**POPULATION:** 130,000

**LANGUAGE:** Melpa; Tok Pisin

**RELIGION:** Christianity; native Melpa religion

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Melpa (also spelled Medlpa) are some of the first Papuans that tourists and visitors to the island of New Guinea see when they step off the plane in Mount Hagen. “Hageners,” as the Melpa are often called, frequent the airport at Mount Hagen offering modern “stone axes,” colorful string bags, and other artifacts for sale. Some of them also provide taxi and bus service to the local hotels and guesthouses. Historically, the Melpa were the first highlands group to be encountered by Europeans in 1933. Up until this time, the highlands of New Guinea had been unknown to the outside world, and, conversely, the highlanders had never before seen people who lived beyond their mountain valleys and plains. The first contact between these two groups was recorded on film and provides an invaluable and extremely interesting record of this monumental time of discovery for both groups.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Melpa live in the Western Highlands Province of the independent Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea. They are highlands-dwelling people with most of the area they inhabit ranging between 1,200 and 2,000 m (4,000–6,500 ft) above sea level. The Melpa occupy the areas north and south of the important town of Mount Hagen. There are about 130,000 Melpa, with the greatest area of population density just outside Mount Hagen in the Wahgi Valley and nearby Ogelbeng Plain. The climate in the area is relatively mild, especially by tropical standards. The temperature rarely exceeds 30°C (86°F) in the summer months and rarely falls below freezing in winter. Rainfall is heaviest between October and March, with a dry period from April until September. Mosquitoes are nonexistent here and malaria is, therefore, not a problem.

## **3 LANGUAGE**

The Melpa speak a Papuan language belonging to the East New Guinea Highlands stock. Melpa is closely related to the well-known Chimbu language spoken by the people of the same name located to the east of the Melpa region. Melpa has over 130,000 speakers and a portion of that population speaks Tok Pisin as a second language. Tok Pisin is one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea. Melpa is not under threat from Tok Pisin, as some other languages in the country are. It is still the case that most Melpa children grow up speaking Melpa as their first language.

## **4 FOLKLORE**

Myths relating the origins of the clans were and still are told within Melpa society. Sacred objects or living beings associated with these myths and clans are called mi. Extended or-



A Melpa tribe member has a head scarf adjusted at a SingSing festival. (Sylvain Grandadam/Getty Images)

atory and epic stories are performed to recount the deeds of clan heroes and ancestors. “Female Spirit”—called *Amb Kor* in Melpa—stories are important and widespread in Melpa oral literature.

## 5 RELIGION

Ghosts are the focal point of non-Christian religious practice among the Melpa. Pork sacrifices are made to placate the ghosts of dead family, lineage, and clan members on the occurrence of illness within the village or prior to the undertaking of any dangerous event. The Melpa have religious experts who are responsible for curing the sick and act as intermediaries between the human world and the spirit world. Women are not allowed to be curers but can be possessed by spirits and can also foretell the future. Christianity has existed in the Melpa region ever since the founding of Mount Hagen as an administrative, trade, and missionary center after the first Leahy expedition in 1933. A number of the Melpa are now practicing Christians and attend the local churches on a regular basis.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Mount Hagen Show is an important local holiday for Hageners. At the show groups from all over the highlands re-

gion attend to perform traditional songs, music, and dance adorned in ceremonial attire. Body decoration reaches its pinnacle for this event. The Mount Hagen Show takes place every two years. National holidays such as Independence Day are recognized by the Melpa who live and work in Mount Hagen. More rural Melpa do not recognize these events since they do not directly affect their daily lives.

The most important and well known ceremonial event in traditional Melpa society was the *moka*. The *moka* was an exchange process in which an individual male gave an initiatory gift to another male, who in turn gave a gift back to that individual plus something more. Exchange partnerships developed in this way continued through the adult lives of men. Before the introduction of European goods into the highlands, the major items of exchange in the *moka* were pigs, both living and cooked, and pearl shell necklaces. In the post-colonial period, cash, machetes, and even four-wheel drive vehicles were exchanged in increasingly competitive *moka* ceremonies. The goal of the exchange was to gain status and prestige in the eyes of the larger society by giving more than one received. Men who are accomplished at achieving this goal are known as “big-men” in the community and viewed as leaders, and although the traditional *moka* has all but disappeared from Melpa society, “big-manship” is still important. Within the *moka* system, true “big-men” were able to arrange large-scale, multiple *moka* exchanges involving many pairs of exchange partners. Anthropologists refer to this type of exchange as “redistribution.” In redistributive exchange, the goal is not to accumulate goods or wealth for personal use, but instead to accumulate items to redistribute them within the community. Modern-day taxation is also classified as a type of redistribution.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In most societies in the world, a female’s passage into adulthood is marked by the onset of menstruation. This event is usually recognized by the community through ceremony, seclusion, or a set of initiation/maturation rites. The Melpa people are different in that they did not socially recognize or celebrate a girl’s first menstruation. Most other highland groups from Papua New Guinea have rites centered on a girl’s first menstruation. The Melpa are like other groups in the area that do focus on the necessary segregation of males and females due to the fear of pollution of males by females, especially through menstrual blood.

In the past, the Melpa did have elaborate initiation rites for males, although through contact with the outside world these have been greatly modified and have all but disappeared.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In some parts of the highlands, hamlets are separated by valleys and mountain ridges. Especially in the more rural Melpa region, hamlets may be widely separated from each other. In these areas greetings are accomplished long distance via yodeling. Requests, directions, commands, and challenges are often yodeled back and forth by men across a ravine or a ridge, completely out of visual range of each other.

Inheritance is based on patrilineal principles: sons inherit from their fathers. The most important item for inheritance is land. A father’s land is parceled out to his sons at the time of their marriage. His daughters may receive cultivation rights to a parcel of land after they are married.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There are two main types of traditional Melpa houses: men's and women's houses. Men's houses are round with conical roofs. This is where men and pre-teenage boys live once they have been separated from their mothers around the age of eight years old. Women and their unmarried daughters live in the rectangular-shaped women's house. There are pig stalls built inside the women's house to keep the pigs from wandering off at night or being stolen. A hamlet consists of at least a men's house and a women's house. Members of a clan resided in the same territory, which was near gardening areas and linked together by paths. Missionaries advocated the building of family homes among the Melpa where a husband, a wife, and their children would sleep together. Some Melpa have adopted this new form of residence while others have chosen not to. Roads often link hamlets together and further link these to the Highlands Highway, which bisects the Highlands Range.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage involves the exchange of valuables by both families. The majority of the goods are given by the groom's family to the bride's family and constitute what anthropologists refer to as "bride wealth" or "bride price." Traditionally, the groom's family and kinfolk would provide a number of pigs and shells to the father of the bride in compensation for the loss of his daughter. Nowadays, cash payments are included in the calculation. The bride's family provides a number of breeding pigs that their daughter will have control over in her new family. The negotiation of a "bride price" is a significant part of the marriage transaction and can derail a potential marriage.

The Melpa trace their genealogies through the male line. Clans are created through common descent from a shared male ancestor. Individuals choose their spouses from clans outside their own. After marriage, the couple moves into the groom's father's hamlet. Later, they will build a new women's house for the bride near the groom's men's house. Divorce consists of repayment of part of the bride price, especially if the woman is seen to have been at fault.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Melpa that live or work in Mount Hagen wear Western-style clothing. Men usually wear shorts, a T-shirt, shoes if they own them, and a knitted cap, and carry a string bag. Women wear A-line dresses often made of a floral print fabric. They also carry string bags, but much larger than those of the men. Women also wear shoes if they own them, but one is much more likely to see a man with shoes than a woman. Concepts of owning a wardrobe of clothing do not exist for the vast majority of Melpa. In fact, most people own only one change of clothing. It is still possible to see Melpa dressed in traditional attire, including the traditional wig made from human hair that adult Melpa men wear on important occasions. In some cases, Melpa from rural hamlets will take a plane to another highland community traditionally dressed and carrying implements of traditional life, such as stone axes and digging sticks. The airport at Mount Hagen is truly a meeting place of the jet age and the Stone Age.

## 12 FOOD

Like other Highland cultures in Papua New Guinea, the Melpa traditional subsistence was based primarily on sweet potatoes and pork. Sweet potatoes are still an important staple, although Western-style foodstuffs have gained in importance due to their ready availability in trade stores and the central marketplace in Mt. Hagen. There is also a prestige associated with their consumption.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditional education consisted of socializing young boys and girls to become competent members of adult Melpa society. Although this is still true today, public and parochial educational venues are also open to Hageners. In the highlands region, Western-style education has been integrated with traditional ways of life to create individuals who seem to exist in two very different worlds.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Vocal music is especially important in Melpa society. Courtship songs are prevalent in many highland cultures in New Guinea. Men woo their mates by composing and performing songs that have double entendre lyrics. When men go to sing to women in other villages they paint and decorate themselves very elaborately.

Mt. Hagen hosts the annual Mt. Hagen Cultural Show, which has been in existence since 1961. The Mt. Hagen Cultural Show is a form of friendly competition in which performance groups from dozens and dozens of tribes from across the country perform traditional songs.

## 15 WORK

The traditional division of labor was between the sexes. Men are responsible for creating gardens and fencing them. The fences serve to keep out the pigs that graze and root in the area. Women tend the pigs, plant the staple crop of sweet potatoes and other foodstuffs such as greens and taro, and weed and harvest the garden plot. Beyond small-scale subsistence farming, coffee is the primary cash crop for Hageners.

The modern Melpa work in a variety of jobs in the town. Driving taxis and buses, porting baggage at the airport, and working in shops are only a few of the types of employment that the Hageners pursue.

Tourism is one of several areas of economic growth and development that the regional governments within the Melpa traditional homeland targeted after the 2000 national census.

## 16 SPORTS

As in other parts of Papua New Guinea, rugby is an important sport in the area around Mount Hagen. Mount Hagen is the venue for many rugby games involving Hageners and other Papuans from throughout the island.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Town-dwelling Melpa have access to electricity and many of them enjoy watching television. There are very few locally-produced television shows in the country and only one local television broadcast station, EMTV. Satellite television broadcasts a wide range of Australian, British, and American programs.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Body decoration is the major art form in the Hagen region. The body is painted with paints produced from local dyes mixed with pig fat. Traditional materials such as feathers and shells are used to decorate elaborate headdresses. Relics of the modern world have become part of the traditional headdresses, including the labels of various products and the tops of cans. The American product Liquid Paper has also become a favorite substitute for pigmented white paint; the intensity of whiteness is cited as the reason for the switch. In the past, *moka* exchanges were important times for elaborate decoration to take place.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Revenge was the basis for many violent actions taken by the Melpa in the time before pacification. Revenge murders often pitted the male members of one clan against those of another. This mentality has not completely faded from Melpa culture. Hundreds of men dressed in full war regalia can occasionally be seen running along the Highlands Highway toward a neighboring village to exact revenge for a death or wrongdoing that took place in the past. Events like these alarm tourists and government officials and warnings are sometimes issued regarding travel in the region as a result.

Mortality rates are very high among the Melpa. The infant mortality rate is 57 deaths per 1,000; the child mortality rate is 15 deaths per 1,000; and the maternal mortality rate is 80 deaths per 1,000. The main causes of death among the Melpa are pneumonia, malaria, and typhoid. Life expectancy for the Melpa as derived from the 2000 national census are 53 years for women and 54 years for men.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Like many of the groups in Papua New Guinea, Hageners exhibit sexual opposition and separation. Differences between males and females are often exaggerated to the point of ambivalence, antagonism, mistrust, and even fear. Nevertheless, Melpa girls have considerable autonomy in choosing a spouse. Although a girl's family might want her to marry into a particular family, they know that forcing their daughter will only result in unhappiness for everyone. Women control the production in Melpa society, including the cultivation of gardens and the all-important pig husbandry that is the center of the Melpa exchange universe. Men must rely on their wives as producers and as such, women wield considerable political power in Melpa society.

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—by J. Williams

# MIAO IN CHINA

**PRONUNCIATION:** mee-OW

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Hmong; Hmu; Meo

**LOCATION:** China [also Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Thailand, Myanmar and about 1 million migrants to the West]

**POPULATION:** 8.94 million

**LANGUAGE:** Miao

**RELIGION:** Shamanism; ancestor worship; Catholicism and Protestantism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Miao have a very long history. They are mentioned in the most ancient Chinese sources, dating from about the 12th century BC. The events related are even more remote. According to these legends, the Miao lived along the Yellow River Valley and the Yangzi River Valley as early as 5,000 years ago. It was said that they were defeated in a fierce battle by the Yellow Emperor (Huang Di, the legendary ancestor of the Chinese people) and had no alternative but to migrate south of the Yangzi River. Nonetheless, they continued to fight against the rulers. Once they were defeated, they moved again. After tens of centuries, they entered the deep forests and mountainous regions of southwest China, especially Guizhou Province. It was from there that they dispersed, under military pressure during the 18th and 19th centuries, especially into the adjacent provinces of Guangxi, Hunan, Hubei, and Yunnan and even across the Chinese border into Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Thailand, and Burma. From time immemorial, the Miao engaged in primitive farming, practicing slash-and-burn cultivation. Families lived in the same house no more than five years. As the soil of the nearby land became impoverished, families would then move away. This method of cultivation required repeated displacement. The Miao have been famed for their "perpetual motion." However, since the mid-20th century, the great majority of the Miao have settled down.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Miao are distributed in more than 700 cities and counties of 7 provinces of south China and numbered 8.94 million in 2000. The main characteristic of their inhabitation is "wide distribution and tiny colonies." Their largest area of concentration is the Wuling and Miaoling mountain range in Guangxi Autonomous Region, where nearly one-third of the Miao population of the Peoples' Republic of China lives. "Birds nest in trees, fish swim in rivers, Miao live in mountains," says an adage of the Miao. Generation after generation, the Miao have dwelled in mountainous areas with mild climate and abundant rainfall both in China and in countries on the southwest Chinese border. In the 1970s and '80s, more than 100,000 Miao migrated from Laos to the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and Guyana. The Miao expatriates amount to more than one million.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Miao language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan system, Miao-Yao family, Miao branch. It is typologically akin to the Thai

language. There are 3 dialects, 7 subdialects, and 18 regional idioms. A written language was created by an English missionary about 100 years ago, but its use was limited to only a few counties. In the 1950s it was revised and another three written scripts were created in correspondence with the three dialects. Today, the Miao use the Chinese *pinyin* phonetic system based on the Western alphabet. Language is an important criterion to distinguish the many Miao groups. Each has its own self-given name, such as Kanao, Mo, Mao, Guoxiong, Daisou, Shuang, and Daji. The ancient Chinese books, identifying these groups by clothes and hairstyles, described them as Red Miao, White Miao, Black Miao, Flower Miao, Blue Miao, Long-skirt Miao, Short-skirt Miao, Red-head Miao, Tip-top Miao, etc.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The creation of nature, the existence and development of every animal, plant and artifact, the origin of the Miao people, and the battles and migrations they experienced are all illustrated in Miao mythology. For example, the ancient "Maple Song" said that White Maple was an immortal tree that gave birth to Butterfly Mama. She married a water bubble and thereafter laid 12 eggs. The treetop changed into a big bird, which hatched the eggs during a period of 12 years. The eggs finally hatched, giving birth to a Thunder God, a dragon, a buffalo, a tiger, an elephant, a snake, a centipede, a boy called Jiangyang, and his sister. Thus, Butterfly Mama was the mother of God, animals, and human beings. Then the flood came, which destroyed everything. As it receded, Jiangyang and his sister, alone in the world, were confronted with the dilemma of human progeny and incest. To know Heaven's will, they rolled down from the mountain two millstones. Since the millstones laid one on top of the other when they came to rest, the brother and sister were bound to marry. Three years after the marriage, the woman gave birth to a fleshy lump. Her husband cut it into pieces and spread them apart. Every piece of the fleshy lump turned into a man or a woman. Human beings thus multiplied.

The Miao folklore and mythology contains a great wealth of stories. Shelang and Ayi are the hero and heroine of a love story. The woman Naliaowan invented pottery. Meishan is a female hunter. Wumoxi is the heroine of an insurrectionary army. There is an endless stream of tales and songs about heroes and heroines.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Miao believe that there is a supernatural power that exists in everything surrounding them and dominates or influences their destiny. They also believe that everything that moves or grows has its own spirit. They revere the sun, moon, lightning and thunder, fire, rivers, caverns, large trees, huge stones, and some animals, praying for their protection. According to the Miao, the spirit of the dead will become a ghost, which may come to haunt their families and livestock, make them sick, or even cause death. The shamans play the role of intermediary, allowing people to communicate with ghosts; they resort to magic arts, practice divination, treat various illnesses, eliminate personal misfortune, and bring about good luck. The earliest shaman was one of the Miao's ancestors, whose name (Xianggao) was frequently mentioned in the shamans' incantations. The Miao also worship their ancestors because they are deeply grateful for having been granted life; they also pray for protection and for the multiplicity and prosperity of their off-



spring. Since the 19th century, a sizable number of Miao have converted to Catholicism and Protestantism.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are dozens of Miao festivals. Among the most important is the offering of sacrifice to ancestors, performed at fixed dates during the year. Other sacrifices are for the purpose of social intercourse and collective celebration after a busy farming and hunting season. Chiguzhang is a grand ceremony held every 13 years in certain Miao districts, accompanied by the sacrificial slaughter of buffalo in honor of the ancestors. The Miao use their own calendar as well as the Gregorian and lunar calendars. The main purpose of the Miao calendar now is to fix the Miao New Year, a very jubilant festival. The Spring Festival (lunar New Year; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20) is now a major holiday common to all of China's nationalities. There are songs, dances, horse races, reed-pipe wind music, and dating.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

To the Miao, a huge stone is a symbol of a strong child. As the child grows to three years of age, the parents will bring offerings to a huge stone, burn joss sticks and kowtow, and pray for blessings and protection. This rite is repeated three times annually. If it does not work (for example, if the child is unhealthy), the parents will turn to a large tree or cavern.

There is an ancient custom that right after a boy is born, his father would bury a piece of iron equivalent to the body weight of the baby, forge it every year, and finally hammer it into a



*Miao people in Yunnan, China. ((c) Panorama/The Image Works)*

sword when the child reached the age of puberty. Miao girls learn embroidery early at five or six years of age. When they reach adolescence, they are good enough to brocade, cross-stitch, and tailor clothes and skirts. Thereafter, they begin sewing their embroidered bridal clothes.

Miao boys and girls are allowed to date from 13 or 14 years of age. In some districts, when a girl reaches 12, she is believed to have passed through childhood and thus is allowed to participate formally in any dating activities.

According to custom, the Miao bury the dead underground. The family announces the sad news to all the village people, who spare no effort in the funeral arrangements. A shaman is invited to sing the mournful songs, to lead the soul of the dead back to live with the family, to bless and protect the offspring and, last but not least, to tell the dead how to be reunited with their ancestors in the future.

## **<sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Miao are a very hospitable people, always keeping their house open for guests, who are greeted with wine and song. The host comes outdoors to greet the guests and proposes a toast immediately. Then they sing, drink, and eat, enjoying themselves to the fullest. On the fifteenth of February or March (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between March 8 and April 6 or between April 7 and May 5) each year, the whole

village will receive young males from outside. This so-called Sisters' Feast Festival lasts about three days. The parents prepare meals, which their daughters will offer to the boys. Girls dress up, use makeup and wear a yellow flower in their hair. Blowing the reed-pipe wind instrument (*lüsheng*), peculiar to the Miao, boys come to the village and wait for the girls to come and meet them. The group dating of the Miao is called *youfang* (*yaomalang*), *tianyue*, *zuoyue*, or *caiyueliang* in different Miao districts, but the meaning of the words and the ritual patterns are similar. Singing in antiphonal style and dancing form the initial rite through which a boy and a girl might gradually pay tender regards to each other and fall in love. Group dating is held on many occasions, especially during festivals. During the Sisters' Feast Festival, each girl offers food to the boy of her desire, who sings for his meal. He may find in the rice a token of affection. If he is not the boy chosen by the girl, a little food will be carelessly offered.

## **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

Engaged in agriculture, the Miao are self-sufficient for their livelihood. They live in houses of one or two stories, the rear built on the mountain slope and the front resting on stilts. The roof is made of straw. The grain is stored in the ceiling. The bottom of the house is for the livestock and poultry. There are three to five rooms. Sons and daughters are separated. The in-

fants live with their parents. Their furniture includes a bed, cupboard, case, table, and stool, all made of wood. In addition, there are big bamboo baskets for food storage and pottery vessels for water and wine. The living conditions of the Miao residing in urban areas are not very different from their neighbors of other nationalities.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Miao family is monogamous and patrilineal, consisting of parents and their children. The property is inherited by the man, but the housewife has power in the family. There is enough freedom to allow young people to choose their spouses, and marriage is usually the result of dating and falling in love. Although an old custom favored arranged marriages or cousin marriage, the union took place only when the boy and the girl both agreed. There is a custom that the bride goes back to her own family immediately after the wedding ceremony and will return to live with her husband only during festivals or after the busy season. If she gets pregnant, she will then move to her husband's house. Otherwise, she should move three years after the wedding. A rite will be held for the change of dwelling. The Miao enjoy a healthy demographic growth, and, like the other national minorities in China, are not restrained by the one-child policy of the Chinese state.

The Miao are fond of pets, especially dogs, cats, and birds.

### **11 CLOTHING**

There are a variety of costumes corresponding to the numerous Miao branches (in fact, the difference in costumes and hairstyles is the best symbol to distinguish one branch of Miao from another). As a result, there are hundreds of styles that have no parallel among the other nationalities in China. Brilliant embroideries and silver ornaments are a distinctive national feature. The accordion-pleated skirt is a cultural trait of Miao women.

### **12 FOOD**

The Miao's principal food is rice (glutinous rice during festivals), supplemented by yams, millet, corn, wheat, buckwheat, and sorghum, all cooked in a rice steamer. The Miao like hot pepper. In fact, every dish is spicy. They also like sour condiments. Proteins come from poultry, eggs, beef, veal, pork, frog, fish, snail, eel, snake, crab, and shrimp, but their diet is mainly vegetables. No food is taboo. They use chopsticks and bowls. Wine is made at home with rice. The kitchen is provided with a cooking range, burning firewood, or sometimes coal. Filling the bowl with rice is the duty of the housewife, her unmarried daughter, or a daughter-in-law who lives in the house. Men and guests should not do it. A married daughter still staying at her parents' home can fill the bowl, but not if she has already lived at her husband's house.

### **13 EDUCATION**

All children are able to receive formal education. Miao scholars, professors, and other intellectuals are not uncommon. Some parents, however, hold the traditional view against girls' education: "It would be better to send a girl to a piggery than to send her to study," "Girls eventually marry and leave," etc. Quite a number of girls drop out of school after puberty. That

is why female intellectuals are so few and the rate of illiteracy and semi-illiteracy among Miao women is as high as 95%.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Song and dance are deeply rooted in Miao life. Without them, one is no longer a Miao. In addition to songs sung on specified occasions (love songs, funeral songs, wedding songs, sacrificial offering songs, etc.), a great variety of songs are sung impromptu to express in a touching manner an individual's true feelings. On the occasion of a wedding ceremony, aged persons are invited to sing in antiphonal style, continuing for days and nights. In antiphonal singing during group dating, the appropriate answer, unique metaphor, beautiful voice, and poetic wording of a singer will definitely attract attention from the opposite sex.

Just like their songs, dances also display the distinctive features of Miao culture. Dance is not only an expression of joy, but also of grief. The Miao dance not only for entertainment and recreation, but also for physical health and sentimental expression. Blowing the wind reed-pipe, accompanied by the graceful movement of the performer, is a unique combination of music and dance.

The Miao have a rich tradition of folk tales, represented mainly by ancient songs; an ancient song, *Jia*, sung in ancient Miao language, is considered a gem of ancient Miao culture.

### **15 WORK**

All the work of Miao is dedicated to ensuring a constant supply of food and daily necessities. They are self-sufficient agriculturists, with rice as their staple crop. In addition, they grow corn, yams, millet, sorghum, beans, wheat, buckwheat, fruits, vegetables, cotton, hemp, tobacco, indigo, castor, peanut, sunflower, rapeseed, and sesame. They grow an abundance of hot peppers. In the past, weeding was thought to be women's duty and plowing was left to men. Nowadays, women also work with the plough. Needless to say, many other farm chores are also done by women. Only harrowing and building raised paths through fields are men's duties. In addition, all the housework, including cooking, laundry, spinning and weaving, tailoring, and livestock and poultry raising, is left to the females, while the males sometimes join together for hunting in the off-season.

### **16 SPORTS**

The Miao like horse races, which are usually held on festivals. Teenagers love basketball, table tennis, and Chinese chess. The dragon boat regatta is a traditional competition of the Miao. The participants of a team usually come from the same village. The distance of the race is about 2 km. Other popular sports are kicking the shuttlecock and Chinese shadowboxing (*wushu*).

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Dancing and singing for nights and days only takes place during festivals and wedding or funeral ceremonies. In normal times, dining together, chatting, calling on relatives, and the visit of a married woman to her parents' home are the joys of life. Movies, television, videos, libraries, and cultural centers are popular in cities, counties, and small towns.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Embroidery, wax printing, brocade, and paper-cuts are four famous crafts of the Miao. Silver ornaments elaborately wrought by craftsmen display their great attainments and sophisticated artistic conceptions.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Because of their mountainous environment, the Miao are still confronted with the problems of poverty and isolation. Migration of Miao youngsters from their villages to urban and coastal areas is a widespread and ambivalent phenomenon. The positive aspect is that the migrants may bring back new knowledge and experience, which is helpful to their native place; the negative aspect is that their migration runs counter to the immediate needs of talent and skills for local development. Today, the trend of migration to the outside world grows stronger and stronger.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc



# MICRONESIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mye-cro-NEE-zhuns

**LOCATION:** Federated States of Micronesia (comprising Guam, Republic of Belau, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, Chuuk State, the Northern Mariana Islands, and thousands of smaller islands)

**POPULATION:** Approximately 108,000

**LANGUAGE:** Chukese, Pohnpeian, Yapese, Kosrean, Ulithian, Woleaian, Nukuoro, Kapingamarangi, English (official language)

**RELIGION:** Catholicism; Protestant sects

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Most of the nearly 2,500 islands that comprise Micronesia were administered by the United States until 1986, when the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was dissolved into four constitutional governments. The Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Belau (Palau), the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands all still retain political and economic relationships with the United States, some to a greater degree than others. However, each of these constitutional political units relies economically on the United States almost completely.

The name “Micronesia” comes from the Greek, meaning “small islands.” The culture area of Micronesia is a parallelogram-shaped region in the North Pacific Ocean. Its corners are formed by the Republic of Belau in the southwest; Kiribati, formerly the Gilbert Islands, in the southeast; Guam in the northwest; and the Marshall Islands in the northeast.

The capital of the Federated States of Micronesia was relocated in 1989 from Kolonia, Pohnapei to Palikir, only about six miles west of the former capital.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Volcanic and coral islands make up Micronesia’s islands. The largest of these is Guam, with 225 sq mi and about half of the total population of Micronesia. Only half of Guam’s total population is indigenous; the other half are mostly American military personnel. Guam has been a territorial possession of the United States since 1898, when the island was acquired from Spain.

Almost all of the islands within the region of Micronesia are located north of the equator. As it happens, the richest and poorest islands of the region are the only ones located south of the equator. The Republic of Nauru is one of the smallest countries in the world with a total area of nine sq mi. It is also one of the least populous, with only around 13,500 people, and an island rich in phosphate rocks that provide almost all of the national income for the country. Nauruans have lived in a virtual welfare state with no taxes but an extremely high unemployment rate (nearly 90%).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The languages of the Micronesian region belong to the large family of Austronesian languages that are spread throughout the Pacific Basin. Micronesian languages fall into two types, nuclear and nonnuclear languages. The nonnuclear languages

show close affinities to other Austronesian languages outside of Micronesia such as Philippine languages and languages of Indonesia. The nuclear languages are all closely related to each other and create a chain of languages across the middle of Micronesia. Linguists look at these patterns of relationships to help determine the prehistoric settlement history of the area. From this pattern we can posit that there were at least two migrations into the region: one from the Indonesian archipelago into the western section of the region and a second from the eastern Melanesia. The migrations from eastern Melanesia were later than those from the Philippine and Indonesian regions.

The Pacific and Asian Linguistics Institute of the University of Hawaii administers a program that provides linguistic documentation of the languages of Micronesia in the form of dictionaries and language learning materials. The work of this institute has vastly increased knowledge of the languages of the region.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

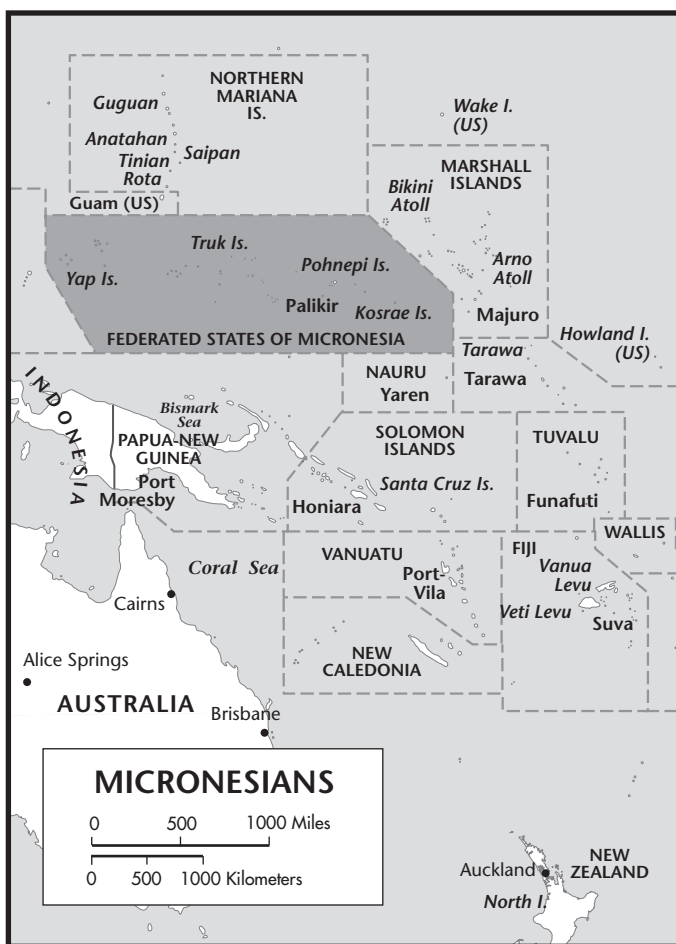
Micronesian mythology reflects concern for the social and natural order of things. One Palauan myth recounts the story of a magical breadfruit tree that the child of sun provides for his mortal mother. In order to provide fish for her to eat, the son cuts a hole in the center of a breadfruit tree that grows outside his mother’s house and next to the sea. Fish were thrown through the hole by the waves of the sea and the mother need only walk out of her doorway to collect fish. Her neighbors became jealous and cut down the breadfruit tree, which caused a catastrophic flood engulfing the whole island. Only the mother was saved by her son, who flew her through the sky on a raft.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Christian missionaries in Micronesia have converted most of the indigenous population to either Catholicism or Protestant sects. Religion in traditional Micronesian cultures involved beliefs in ghosts, in ancestor worship, and in spirits that inhabit places and natural objects and that are associated with specific activities. Canoe builders, for instance, had patron spirits who would control the outcome of their work on canoe construction. Chants and offerings were directed to these patron spirits to help insure their successful participation in human projects.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major religious holidays in Micronesia now revolve around the Christian calendar. Many Micronesian states celebrate Christmas, Easter, Ash Wednesday, and All Saints Day. On the Republic of Nauru, Angam Day is held on October 26. Angam Day celebrates the threshold births of the 1,500th Nauruan at two points in the island’s history. The first was in 1932. The population was recovering from two major epidemics that had reduced the population to an all-time low of just over 1,000 in 1920. The second cause for celebration came in 1949, when the 1,500 mark was reached again following a decline in 1941. American secular holidays are all observed in many parts of Micronesia and some islands even recognize American Thanksgiving. Precontact holidays would likely have been occasions of celebrations for auspicious events or the accomplishment of certain feats. A major event for the display of traditional culture is the South Pacific Arts Festival, which rotates



between venues in the Pacific Ocean. At this festival performing groups from a number of Pacific Island nations come together to put on shows for the enjoyment of tourists, the local populations, and the participants themselves.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Christianity has altered many of the traditional celebrations associated with changes in social status that accompany events like birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Birth on the island of Belau was accompanied by a series of ritual exchanges prior to and following the birth of the first child of a wealthy couple. The attainment of puberty by males on the island of Yap is accompanied by a hair cutting ceremony that has been retained to the present day. In other parts of Micronesia, the passage through puberty was marked only by a change in attire. In Chuuk State (formerly Truk), following puberty both males and females were permitted to engage in sexual relationships. Trial marriages were also permitted. Christian ideology has altered these patterns of sexual relationships considerably, and they do not continue in the present time.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Long distance exchange was part of the life of some Micronesian groups. Definite rules of etiquette dictated the behavior of visitors to another island or atoll. However, little is known about precontact behavior in most Micronesian societies. Social class dictated marriage rules and likely influenced pat-

terns of day-to-day social intercourse. In most societies, there were three distinct social classes that individuals were born into; however, in some societies, individuals could “marry up,” while the converse was not possible. Status still determines social etiquette in Micronesian societies. Greetings in many societies translate into English as “welcome.” In the Chamorro language of the Northern Marianas, the greeting is *hafa adai*.

### 9 Living conditions

Micronesian communities are located near the coastline on both the “high” volcanic islands and the “low” atolls. Some islands have several types of houses that served different functions. In the era before European influence on Ponape, where there was a fairly large population and a highly stratified polity, there were guesthouses for visiting dignitaries.

Many Micronesian societies also have canoe sheds where canoes are stored. These structures function as men’s clubhouses where men could congregate and would occasionally sleep. These structures are not like the Melanesian men’s houses where women are prohibited. Western-style housing has become common in Micronesia, although some houses are still constructed out of traditional materials save the corrugated tin roof.

Electricity and running water are present in those Micronesian islands where the European and American presence is most heavily felt. Gasoline-powered generators are also owned by families to run electrical appliances.

Traditional transportation in Micronesia is by canoe and by foot. Automobiles and buses are now common on most islands in the region. Micronesian cultures are famous for their highly specialized and technologically sophisticated outrigger canoes.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families in traditional Micronesian societies are based on a husband, a wife, and their unmarried children. In many societies such as those in precontact Belau, a woman would move away from her traditional land and into a house that her husband had built on land he had inherited from his mother.

In Belau, there are women’s councils and women’s clubs organized in an identical fashion to those of the men. The only difference is that women do not have elaborate ceremonial houses in which to conduct their business. Women’s councils continue to play an important role in village decision-making in Belau.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Micronesian cultures typically made use of some sort of clothing. Early Spanish accounts of the Marianas Islands describe the population there as going naked. Typical attire involved either a loin cloth for men or a type of fiber skirt for women. In the Marshall Islands women wore plaited skirts that resembled mats spanning the waist to the ankles.

A number of items of body adornment were also manufactured in Micronesian societies. Carved combs and flower arrangements often decorated the hairstyles of Micronesian men and women. Coconut oil was also spread on the skin to make it shiny and sweet smelling. A yellow dye made from the root of the turmeric plant was also applied to the skin in some Micronesian cultures. Turmeric, a relative of ginger, is an important ingredient in Indian curry, giving the food its distinctive color.

In parts of Micronesia, tattooing was an important part of body adornment. The most extensive tattooing occurred in the Caroline Islands, now the Federated States of Micronesia.

Colonization has changed clothing patterns among most Micronesian groups. Western-style clothing now predominates on almost every occasion. However, ceremonial occasions often warrant a return to traditional styles of dress.

## **12 FOOD**

Traditional foodstuffs in Micronesia are fairly uniform across the region. There are some local differences due to patterns of rainfall and island topography. Taro root, breadfruit, coconuts, and yams were the most important in precontact times and continue to be staples in many households throughout the region. Since European contact with the region, corn, sweet potato, and manioc (cassava) have also become important staples. Fish is the most important source of protein in all parts of Micronesia. Since animal life was limited on most islands, hunting played a very small role in the subsistence of Micronesian peoples. Although rats and lizards were omnipresent, they were not utilized as a source of food by any groups.

Western foodstuffs have become important, especially to younger people. Prepared and packaged American foods such as breakfast cereals are part of many Micronesian daily meals.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Western-style education has been introduced throughout Micronesia. The American presence in the region has produced a number of American schools where expatriates send their children. Graduation ceremonies often include addresses from high-ranking American military personnel present on the island. Opportunities for higher education must be sought in the United States or in other developed countries.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Micronesian music is dominated by the human voice; there are very few musical instruments produced by Micronesian cultures. The shell trumpet and the nose flute are the most common instruments in the region. The Marshall Islands also made use of the hourglass-shaped drums that were common in most of Melanesia.

Gesture was important in traditional Micronesian vocal music. Dances were often only gestures performed while in a seated posture. In other instances, line dances were performed by a number of individuals in unison.

Musical traditions of other cultural regions of the world have gained importance in Micronesia. Polynesian-style music from Hawaii has become popular in parts of Micronesia. American music and dance has been introduced via television and the resident American population in the islands.

## **15 WORK**

Traditional patterns of work entailed a division of labor along gender lines. In some islands, males engaged in fishing and harvesting the products of trees such as breadfruit, coconuts, and betel nut, while females were responsible for gardening and activities that took place in the household including plaiting mats and making clothing. In some other islands, women provided most of the fish. However, in all parts of Micronesia women were forbidden to fish from canoes.

Wage labor in a variety of industries is now the norm in Micronesia. Both women and men are in the wage-earning workforce in Micronesian society. Many states have set minimum wage standards that are at odds with the U.S. federal minimum wage standards. In the Northern Marianas Islands, the minimum hourly wage for 2007 was \$3.55, which was less than the federal minimum wage of \$5.85.

## **16 SPORTS**

Traditional forms of competition in Nauru consisted of singing and dancing competitions and kite flying. The competing "teams" were organized along lines of genealogical descent. These activities have all but ceased in most parts of Micronesia. Sports introduced from other nations, such as the United States and Japan, have become important.

A traditional sport on the island of Nauru is catching Noddy birds. The Brown or Common Noddy bird (*Anous stolidus*) is a member of the tern family. Noddy birds feed on fish caught out and sea. At sunset, when the birds return to land after feeding at sea, Nauru men stand on the beach ready to throw their lassos on the returning birds. The Nauruan lasso is constructed of supple rope and weighted at one end. When a bird flies over, the lasso is thrown up to knock the bird from the sky. The fallen Noddy birds are then cooked and eaten.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Television and videos have become important forms of entertainment in many Micronesian societies. Most of the programming is foreign and often out of date, coming from the United States and, in some cases, Japan. Local programming for news and community information is limited. Television and videos have made an impact on traditional ways of life in Micronesia. Movie theaters in many islands run current American and other foreign releases; however, the runs of these movies are often very short, only a few days in many cases.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Belau, in western Micronesia, is well known for the elaborately incised and painted facades of the chiefly collective houses, called *bai*. The degree of decoration and ornamentation was directly related to the degree of status and amount of wealth the group possessed. Each plank of the facades at either end of the house was painted with a separate narrative relating aspects of cultural history or mythology. Beginning in the late 1800s, planks were cut away from *bai* to give to foreigners. In the 1930s, the Palauans began to create replicated as well as new "storyboards" for sale to tourists.

Carved bowls of various shapes and sizes were utilitarian in function but decorative in design. These are now produced for the tourist industry in Micronesia. Finely plaited mats for sleeping and sitting were items of status among many Micronesian groups. These items are now also produced primarily for sale to tourists.

The construction of single outrigger canoes was the outstanding technological achievement of Micronesian cultures. Many were over 40 ft long and their hulls were made of hewn planks lashed together with coconut fiber rope. The production of canoes has greatly diminished in post-contact times in Micronesia.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Economic self-sufficiency and cultural survival are two of the major problems facing Micronesian countries. Creating compromises between various factions both within islands and between islands is a challenge that will continue for many years to come. The immense differences that separated the various islands linked together through the weak infrastructure of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands have been diminished through the creation of independent socio-political units in the mid-1980s. Success of the islands will be a balancing act between modernization and the maintenance of traditional cultural patterns and institutions.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Micronesian culture area exhibits considerable variation in terms of gender. At the highest level of social organization, eastern Micronesia societies trace descent matrilineally and form clans based on these principles. In western Micronesia, societies are patrilineal both in descent and social organization. Under the social influences of Western societies, the strong principles of matrilineal social organization have been gradually eroding in eastern Micronesia.

Rank and status are important concepts that interact with the cultural construction of gender in Micronesian societies. On Yap, gender is conceptualized as part of the bipartite distinction between “pure” or “sacred” and “polluted” or “profane.” Males and females and members of the nuclear family are placed into this scheme, which exhibits a degree of relativity. In general, males are *tabugul*, “pure” or “sacred,” while females are *ta’ay*, “polluted” or “profane.” Fathers are *tabugul* to their wives and children; women are *ta’ay* to their husbands and post adolescent sons, but *tabugul* to their other children. As in so many other societies in the Pacific, menstrual blood is the source of *ta’ay* in Yap society.

Village space in Yap is also gender specific. Every village has at least one men’s house as well as at least one menstrual house. Menstrual houses are restricted to menstruating women who spend at least one week per month there. Upon a girl’s first menstruation, she enters the menstrual house (*dapal*) for a period of time ranging from six to 18 months. The men’s house is restricted to adult men and the post adolescent boys who reside there and are socialized into the roles of adult males.

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—by J. Williams

# MINAHASANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mee-nah-HAH-suns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Menadonese

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sulawesi)

**POPULATION:** 650,000 to 1.25 million

**LANGUAGE:** Malay (Manado dialect and Bahasa Indonesia); various indigenous languages (Bantik, Ponosakan, Tombulu, Tonsawang, Tonsea, Tondano, Tontemboan).

**RELIGION:** Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

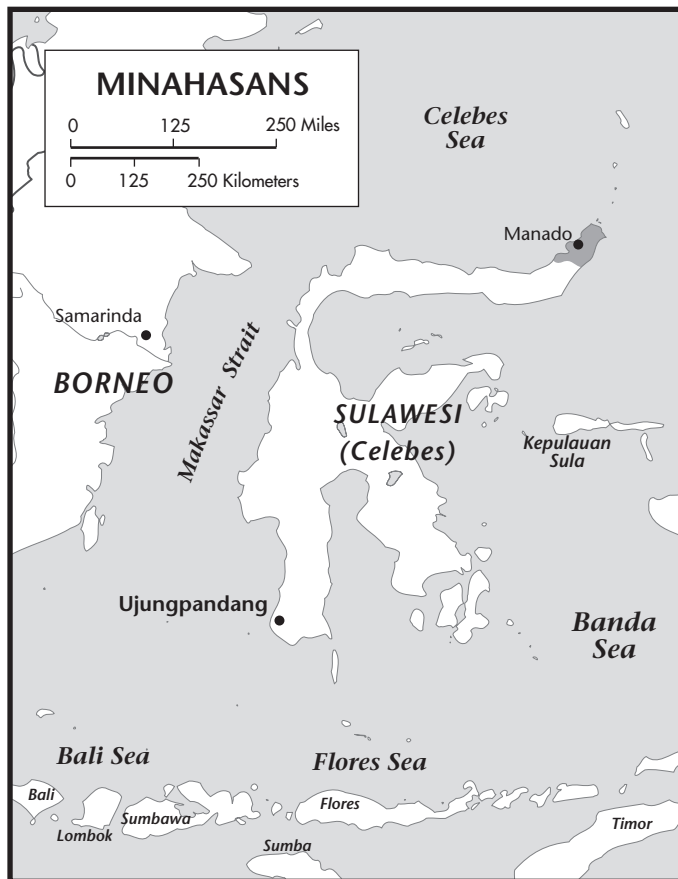
## 1 INTRODUCTION

Although the Minahasans produced no pre-colonial kingdoms, as other Indonesian ethnic groups can boast, since the Dutch period they have enjoyed one of the highest standards of education and economic development in the whole country. The term *Minahasa* itself means “made one,” referring to an early confederation of tribes formed to resist the neighboring Bolaang-Mongondow people. Deriving from these nine tribes are the sub-ethnic groups recognized among the Minahasa today: Tonsea, Tombulu, Tontemboan, Tondano, Tonsawang, Pasan Ratahan, Ponosakan, Babontehu, and Bantik. The people of the regency (*kabupaten*) are also commonly called Manadonese, after the principal city, Manado.

Such as it is known, early Minahasa history is one of constant warfare among clans and villages, marked by headhunting. The Muslim sultanate of Ternate to the east exercised some influence on the Minahasans, though the latter, unlike the Gorontalo farther west, resisted Islamization. In the mid-16th century, the Portuguese, with the first Christian missionary, a Catholic priest, among them, visited the region. From bases in the Philippines, the Spanish also made contacts among the Minahasans, leaving American food crops and horses (the local Malay lingua franca takes its word for the animal from the Castilian *caballo*).

In the 1650s, the Dutch East India Company drove the Spanish out of Minahasa in pursuit of the spice monopoly. They built Fort Amsterdam in 1673, around which would grow the city of Manado. However, it was only in 1808–09 that the Dutch penetrated very far beyond that strategic outpost; in those years, they subjugated the surrounding highlands. This opened up lands for the forced cultivation of coffee and began a cultural transformation, which would include rapid mass conversions to Christianity. While losing a great part of their indigenous culture, the Minahasans took advantage of the opportunities offered by the Dutch colonial government and European missionaries. By 1930, the region had the highest literacy rate in both Malay and Dutch in the whole country. In disproportionately high numbers, Minahasans staffed the bureaucracy throughout the colony. They also served in the colonial military, feeling more solidarity with the Christian Dutch than with their Muslim fellow “natives.”

Indeed, the struggle for independence from Dutch rule in the aftermath of World War II received a far from unanimous welcome in the region. However, despite its reputation as the “twelfth province of Holland,” Jong Minahasa (“Young Minahasa”) was one of the early 20th century regional associations that merged into the Indonesian nationalist movement. Dur-



ing the revolution, Sukarno and Hatta sent a Minahasan, Dr. Sam Ratulangie, to establish a republican administration for all of Sulawesi. Today, the Minahasa region is well integrated into the Indonesian nation, at a distance from the Java and Islam-dominated mainstream but without separatist ambitions. According to one official index, North Sulawesi, of which Minahasa is the most advanced part, ranks only after Jakarta and Yogyakarta in quality of life. Already an increasingly popular tourist destination, particularly for its spectacular venues for scuba-diving, Manado is slated to become one of the principle nodes in a “growth triangle” that will include Malaysian Sabah and Philippine Mindanao.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

The Minahasa region occupies the very tip of the Sulawesi’s northern peninsula (corresponding to Minahasa regency within the province of North Sulawesi). The landscape is mountainous, dominated Mt. Klabat, which is 1,995-m (6,000-ft), and Mt. Soputan (which erupted in 1989). There is also a sizable upland lake, Tondano, along whose shores wet-rice cultivation flourishes. According to the 2000 census, Minahasans made up 33% of the population of Sulawesi Utara (North S.) province, equaling over 650,000; the province’s total population had risen to 2.85 million in 2008. The population density of the Minahasa region, at 750 persons per sq km (1,940 persons per sq mi) is half of Java’s but exceedingly high for the Outer Islands. Many Minahasans have settled in Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia, as well as in the Netherlands.

The region, especially the city of Manado, has long attracted outsiders. The common physical stereotype of the Minahasans is that they are strikingly attractive examples of racial blending, though this may not accurately apply to the generality. There is a small community of mixed European and indigenous descent, the Borgo. Intermarriage with Chinese has also been very frequent with noticeable results; anti-Chinese feeling seems to be much lower in Minahasa than in the rest of the country.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Like most other Indonesian languages, those of North Sulawesi are Austronesian. However, they display closer affinities to the Austronesian languages of the Philippines to the north than to their neighbors farther south on Sulawesi. Despite the Minahasa region’s small size, seven distinct languages are spoken, each associated with a particular district (Bantik, Ponosakan, Tombulu, Tonsawang, Tonsea, Tondano, and Tontemboan).

The regional lingua franca is a localized dialect of Malay called “Manado Malay” after the multiethnic provincial capital. Daily speech in the indigenous languages is freely mixed with Manado Malay and, increasingly, with Bahasa Indonesia. The lingua franca may drive the Minahasan languages into extinction over the course of the next few generations.

In a pattern atypical of Indonesia, Minahasans use family names, with married women placing their maiden names after their husband’s surname.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

According to legend, the ancestress of the Minahasans, Lumimuut, was born from foam thrown up by the sea. Lumimuut was impregnated by the wind and bore a son, Toar. Hoping to find mates, the two set out in different directions. After years of wandering, they met again but failed to recognize each other. They married and had many children, among whom Lumimuut divided her realm, the Minahasa land. The sacred stone, Watu Pinawetengan, to which she summoned her offspring for this division, can still be seen, covered with carvings of unknown meaning.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Some 90% of the population of Minahasa is Christian (the majority subscribe to several Protestant sects led by the [Dutch] Reformed Church; a small minority is Catholic). Catholicism was first introduced in the 16th century by a Portuguese priest, Father Diego Magalhaens. Protestantism arrived with the Dutch in the 17th century but massive conversion occurred only in the 19th century.

Belief persists in a wide range of supernatural beings that are believed to have memory, feeling, and energy: *opu* or *dotu*, ancestral spirits; *murku*, the spirits of the dead, which remain near human dwellings; and *panunggu*, *lulu*, *puntianak*, and *pok-pok*, various categories of demons or ghouls. Good people are believed to become benevolent spirits; evil people, suicides, and accident victims become malevolent ones. Propitiatory rituals attend important life events, times of danger or disease, and the full moon. These rituals are led by mediums (*tonaas* or *walian*) and require offerings of eggs, betel nuts, palm wine, cigarettes, and rice. Mediums heal with potions of water in which magical objects have been soaked; they locate these herbs, stones, or wood pieces in places indicated by

ancestral spirits through visions. Divination is performed by examining an animal's gall bladder. Some shamans specialize as midwives, thief-detectors, and spell-casters; they are often consulted on political strategy.

## <sup>6</sup> MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## <sup>7</sup> RITES OF PASSAGE

Whereas formerly parents arranged their children's marriages, nowadays young people choose their own spouses. Preliminary to the wedding, the man's family sends a representative to meet with an intermediary named by the woman's family. The delivery of the bride-price formalizes the engagement. On the Sunday before the wedding, representatives of both families announce the wedding and reception in church. On the day itself, the groom goes to the bride's house, knocks on the door of her room, and, usually very embarrassed, they kiss each other in front of onlooking family and friends. The groom escorts the bride to the church, where the wedding ceremony takes place, to be followed by a reception at the bride's house. After church the following Sunday, the groom brings his bride for a visit to his parents' house.

## <sup>8</sup> INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Since the Minahasans never knew an indigenous kingdom, high status was traditionally not inherited but had to be won by demonstrating excellence to one's fellows (who in turn were always eager to challenge those who had managed to win prominence). In conditions of constant petty warfare, this meant personal prowess in battle and the ability to recruit fighters. Agricultural success was also a sign of divine blessing. A man seeking recognition would mount a great feast; completing a cycle of nine such feasts would qualify a man for a *waruga* stone burial chamber (carved with human figures, whose shape suggests a house with a gable roof). *Waruga* are no longer being built, but modern people still leave coconuts in front of them, said to be a substitute for human heads; replacing these are ostentatious modern mausolea, sometimes in the shape of boats or cars to reflect the source of the deceased's wealth.

According to Minahasan mythology, three status groups were distinguished: the *tonaas* or *walian*, religious specialists; *makatelupitu*, the leaders and warriors; and ordinary people. In addition to respecting *walian* and now Christian ministers, modern Minahasans recognize informal social status based on government office, wealth, inheritance, and education (a basic classification is between *tou siga*, "clever," i.e., educated, people and *tou lengei*, the "still stupid," i.e., uneducated).

A village (*kampung*) headed by a *hukum tua* is traditionally divided into subvillages headed by a *kepala jaga*, which break down further into groups of houses led by a *meweteng* who distributes work duties. Other village officials include a clerk, a land surveyor, an irrigation supervisor, a town-crier, and a police chief.

People belong to mutual aid associations (*mapalus*) that assist their members in holding funerals, weddings, and other major celebrations, as well as with agricultural tasks. Similarly, organizations for kin and people from the same locality play an important role, flourishing among Minahasans in Jakarta and elsewhere outside their homeland. In hotly contested vil-

lage-head elections, these organizations provide support for candidates who must mount large feasts to win votes.

## <sup>9</sup> LIVING CONDITIONS

According to 17th-century European accounts, ancient Minahasan villages were fortified, consisting of dwellings built on massive pillars and housing six to nine related families, each in a separate room with its own kitchen; the eldest, who was the head of the kin group, possessed the largest room.

Modern houses are built on smaller wooden or limestone piles (2.5 m or 8 ft high) and house a single family. An unwallied front room as long as the rest of the house is edged by a simply carved railing. A corridor with rooms on either side runs down the middle of the walled part of the house. The space under the house is walled in for storage or left open for a cart. Roofs are made of palm thatch or zinc; the latter, along with glass windows, expensive woods, and a cemented undercroft floor, is the mark of a richer family's house. Separate outbuildings are used for cooking, bathing, and toilet functions. Reminiscent of Europe, local houses are renowned for their hedged yards, well-tended gardens, and potted plants adorning window sills and porch railings.

As fields may be some distance from the family house, rural Minahasans make use of *sabuwa*, small, simple houses for shelter from the rain, storing produce before taking it to market, and cooking and sleeping when crops need to be guarded from animals for days at a stretch.

Villages (*wanua*) consist of houses arranged along a main road (or also down side roads in larger settlements); the church, market, headman's office, police, shops, and food stalls are concentrated on this axis. Ox- and horse-drawn carts are still common.

The Minahasans' home province, North Sulawesi, has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 74.2 (2005 score), far higher than Indonesia's national score of 69.6 and second only to that of the region of the national capital, Jakarta (76.1). North Sulawesi's GDP per capita is US\$8,360, moderately high for Indonesia (cf. US\$10,910 for North Sumatra, US\$6,293 for Central Java, and US\$2,919 for North Maluku). In 2000, the level of infant mortality, at 27.77 deaths per 1,000 live births, was the third lowest in country, after the national capital region of Jakarta and the highly urbanized Yogyakarta region.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

Kinship is bilateral, with equal emphasis on connection to maternal as well as paternal relatives. The family includes parents and their unmarried children; a daughter and her husband may live with the parents before setting up their own house. A couple, their children, and their children's families constitute the basic kinship unit, the *patuari* or *famili* (a Dutch term), which is exogamous (wider kin-groupings have lost their function in modern times). Divorce is common, governed by modern laws. Inheritance is divided equally among heirs, who may include surviving spouses and biological, adopted, and stepchildren; the eldest son oversees the rotation of non-divisible property.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Heavily Europeanized, modern Minahasa is not known for distinctive costumes, because indigenous weaving died out in the 19th century.

## 12 FOOD

Maize is the staple food for most Minahasans. While papaya fruit is fed to pigs, people eat the cooked leaves. Dishes are accompanied by *rica-rica*, a mixture of chili peppers, tomatoes, onions, garlic, and ginger. Regional specialties include pork *sate*, *tinoransak* (another pork dish), *kawaok* (fried forest rat), *kelalawar pangang* (bat stew), *RW (rintek wuuk*, “fine hair,” a euphemism for spiced dog), and cat (*tusuk* or “*eveready*” as in the battery with the cat logo). Fish is common fare, the best-loved preparations being fried carp dipped in *dabu-dabu* sauce (chili, tomato, onion, and lime) and smoked tuna (*cakalang fufu*), fried or cooked in coconut milk. *Tinutuan*, famed throughout Indonesia as *bubur Manado*, is a rice gruel with greens and dried fish. *Milu* is a clear soup with young corn kernels and small shrimp, slightly sour from lime. A common snack is *panada*, Iberian-style meat-and-vegetable turnovers. Desserts include *halwa kenari* (kenari nut with brown sugar), various confections (*bagea* and *wajik*), and fried ice cream.

## 13 EDUCATION

Compared to other ethnic groups, Minahasans have long enjoyed superior access to modern schooling. The Dutch colonial government and Christian churches promoted education; by 1900, there was 1 school for every 1,000 people in Minahasa, while Java's ratio was 1 school for every 50,000 people. Because of this educational advantage, Minahasans have been disproportionately represented in the bureaucracy. Disdaining manual labor and commerce, Minahasans migrate to fill positions in areas with a shortage of civil servants.

In 2005, North Sulawesi's level of literacy stood at 98.87%, high by Indonesian national standards and even higher than in the region of the national capital, Jakarta (see also the article entitled **Indonesians** in this volume).

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Throughout Indonesia, Minahasans are famous for their singing skills (which they readily display at parties), as well as for the *kolintang*, an orchestra of wooden xylophones; their music, widely available on cassette, is Western in style. A legacy from the Dutch colonial military of which Minahasa, along with Ambonese, formed an important component, marching band music on bamboo versions of brass and other wind instruments (trumpets, trombones, tubas, saxophones, and clarinets) accompanies festivals. Early Spanish influences survive in a tradition of Christmas mumming (masked dance) and *katrili*, a kind of square dancing. For competitions and the reception of important guests, a number of dances of a more indigenous character have been secularized and modernized. Group dancing (*maengket*) includes: the *maowey kamberu*, depicting the rice harvest; the *marambak*, depicting housebuilding; and *lalayaan*, a dance offering the sexes a chance to interact. Also performed in the Moluccas, the *cakalele* (also called *kabasaran* or *mahsasuh*) is a war dance consisting of red-clad men waving swords and shields and emitting fierce cries.

## 15 WORK

Some 76% of the population earns a living from agriculture. Inland valleys with volcanic soils support wet-rice, but swidden (shifting-cultivation) field maize is the staple food, grown along with tubers and peanuts. Cabbage, Chinese cabbage, onions, tomatoes, water spinach, and chili are also grown for

market. Important cash crops are coffee (declining in importance since the 19th century), coconut for copra and oil, and, since the 1970s, cloves. The domestic cigarette industry's demand for cloves has enriched many farming families; the short harvest time pulls in all available labor, closing schools and offices. Most land is owned by individuals (aside from a diminishing amount of land owned by kin-groups), and conflicts over inheritance frequently erupt. Sharecropping is common. Villagers may use communal lands after informing the village head.

Other occupations include livestock-raising and fishing (usually by families, from outrigger and non-outrigger canoes). Each village has a carpenter. *Tibo* brokers sell produce purchased from farmers, transporting it in carts.

## 16 SPORTS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Gardening is a major leisure activity; roses, hibiscus, bougainvillea, and citrus are grown.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Minahasan women enjoy among the highest levels of wellbeing and empowerment in Indonesia. North Sulawesi's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 62.1, higher than Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) is 55.1, also higher than the national GEM (54.6).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# MINANGKABAU

**PRONUNCIATION:** mee-NAHNG-kah-BOW (as in “bow down”)

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sumatra and other areas)

**POPULATION:** 5.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Minangkabau

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Minangkabau (also called “Minang”) are one of the few matrilineal cultures surviving into modern times (and the largest currently existing), a distinction even more striking as theirs is virtually the only such society within the Islamic world. Their very name (“victorious [*menang*]” “buffalo [*kabau*]”) reflects their independent spirit. According to legend, for a bullfight held in lieu of battle, the Minangkabau pitted a tiny water buffalo calf against the giant beast representing the Javanese invaders. The Minangkabau secretly affixed blades to the calf’s horns; the calf, taking the larger animal as its mother, knifed it to death while seeking an udder.

Wet-rice agriculture made its earliest debut on Sumatra in the Minangkabau home valleys, but it was the region’s gold that first attracted foreigners. In the 14th century, the half-Javanese, half-Sumatran prince Adityavarman established the first kingdom near the coveted mines. This was probably the distant ancestor of the Pagurruyung monarchy (actually, three co-rulers of limited power) of later centuries.

Increased external trade, with Gujerat (India), Aceh, and Malacca, brought Islam to the Minangkabau by the 16th century. By the end of the 18th century, the new religion had spawned the Paderis, puritanical reformers bent on purging the Minangkabau lands of everything contrary to Islam as they understood it, including the matrilineal Pagurruyung aristocracy. Although, after more than three decades of war (1803–1837), the reformers largely succeeded, the upheaval invited the intervention of the Dutch. The Dutch East India Company had made its first appearance in the Minang region in 1663.

Under Dutch rule, the Minangkabau, to a greater extent than most other Indonesian peoples, pursued modern education. Minangkabau intellectuals were to play key roles in the nationalist movement; one of them, Muhammad Hatta, became Indonesia’s first vice-president. Nonetheless, independence disappointed Minangkabau desirous of regional autonomy and an Islamic state. In 1958, Minangkabau and Toba Batak military leaders backed the establishment of the “Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia” (PRRI); Jakarta crushed the rebellion swiftly but left Minangkabau feeling no better than a conquered people. Stability and prosperity under Suharto’s New Order reconciled the once-disaffected with the central government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Numbering 5.5 million (2000 census), the Minangkabau locate their original homeland in the fertile volcanic highlands of West Sumatra, specifically in three valleys, Tanah Datar, Agam, and Limapuluh Kota. From there they spread outward into neighboring mountainous areas, reaching into other Sumatran provinces and down into the swampy western coast-

al plain as far north as Meulaboh in Aceh and as far south as Bengkulu. In addition, Minangkabau can be found in cities throughout the archipelago, particularly Jakarta. Minangkabau constitute 88% of the population of their home province of West Sumatra (3.74 million out of 4.25 million) and are the sixth largest ethnic group in Indonesia; a 1.76 million-strong diaspora lives in other provinces (constituting 15% of the population in North Sumatra, 11% in Riau, and 5% in Jambi). Crossing the Straits of Malacca as early as the 15th century, they founded Negeri Sembilan in the 18th century, now one of Malaysia’s states; 300,000 Minangkabau were estimated to be living in that country in 1981.

This wide distribution results from the *merantau* tradition: because women possess the rights to village lands, men wanting to acquire wealth for themselves have long migrated from the Minangkabau homeland to do so, either temporarily or permanently. Increased land scarcity beginning in the 19th century has led more and more Minangkabau to *merantau*.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Minangkabau speak a language very close to Malay, but it is readily distinguishable from Malay, e.g., cognates differ usually in the final syllable: Malay *pusaka*, *pasisir*, *perut* versus Minang *pusako*, *pasisie*, *paruik*. The important Malay particle *yang* (“that” or “which”) is *nan* in Minang.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Remote mountain or jungle spots may be *tampek-tampek nan sati*, places charged with supernatural power. Spirits feared by the Minangkabau include *puntianak*, women who from afar suck the blood out of an infant through the soft spot in its skull (the fontanel). *Palasik* are women who have an innate power (which, however, they cannot control) to render children sickly. People may enlist the services of *dukun*, practitioners of magic and herbal medicine, to combat malevolent spirits or to victimize others (as in *menggasing*, sending poison to another’s bloodstream through the air). As a defense, many carry amulets, a particularly potent one being crystallized elephant sperm.

## 5 RELIGION

The Minangkabau are among the peoples most-committed to orthodox Islam in the archipelago. Despite conflicts between that patriarchal religion and their own matrilineal traditions, Minangkabau consider both integral to their culture. Islamic reform movements over the last two centuries have eliminated virtually all traces of pre-Islamic beliefs, although there are Minangkabau who recognize various types of spirits as well as the power of magic.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Minangkabau observe the major Islamic holidays [see *Indonesians*]. One festival, which because of its Shi’ite character has very few counterparts elsewhere in predominantly Sunni Indonesia, is the colorful and lively *tabuik* (*tabut*) of the West Sumatra coast, a celebration in commemoration of the death of the Prophet Muhammad’s kinsmen Hassan and Hussein at the battle of Karbala (AD 680).





## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Surrounding birth are several rites (of waning importance nowadays): one at the sixth month of the pregnancy; the playing of the *talempong* (metallophones) to greet the birth; the burial of the placenta; the infant's first touching earth (at 40 days of age); its first haircut; and, at three months of age, a formal visit to its father's family. Corresponding to circumcision for boys, a "doing up the hair" (*menata kondai*) ceremony is held for a girl who has experienced her first menstruation.

Because of matrilineal traditions, the wedding process among the Minangkabau does not conform to the pattern general to Indonesia. Not only men but also women may issue a proposal (via intermediaries, as usual elsewhere). Despite the requirements of Islamic law, a Minangkabau man does not pay a bride-price. On the other hand, the bride's family may pay the groom's an *uang jemputan* (handed over during the ceremony). Of greater importance is the exchange of symbolic goods, such as krisses (short daggers), between the two families.

Funerals follow general Islamic guidelines. Before the deceased is carried to the cemetery, the coffin is raised so the deceased's children may pass under it three times in order to prevent excessive grief (and dreams about the dead) from afflicting them.

See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Villages (*nagari*) consist of clusters of houses belonging to different matrilineal lineages (local branches of far-flung *suku*). A lineage that descends from the original founders (*urang*

*asa*) of the village possesses rights to more land than other lineages, and its head has the exclusive privilege of bearing a title. Among the lineages that settled later, those (usually related to the *urang asa* line) that enjoyed some status in their native place were eventually able to buy land and gain equality, except for being barred from holding the above title, with the dominant lineage. Other lineages, on the other hand, suffer an inferior status in the village, obliged to serve the dominant lineages in various capacities, and, in the case of those lineages with known slave ancestry, their members may be shunned as marriage partners.

A council composed of the heads (*penghulu*, males) of all the lineages manages village affairs (though under the modern Indonesian state this amounts to little more than dispute arbitration). Traditionally, four groups share leadership responsibilities in the village: *niniek mamak* (heads of *paruik*, the extended matrilineal family); religious officials (*imam* and *khatib*); the *cerdik pandai* (individuals with education); and *bundo kanduang* (senior women). Wealth and education, both secular and religious, have become as or more important than hereditary titles in determining status. Indeed, only some of the Minangkabau traditionally recognized aristocratic principles (those following the Koto-Piliang norms, as well as those in Aceh-influenced Pariaman); others, those adhering to the Bodi-Caniago pattern, preferred egalitarian practices, such as having elected rather than hereditary *penghulu*.

Etiquette requires that one's language and behavior express deference to older people, a careful formality to relatives by marriage, and affectionate patience to those younger; people of the same age, even strangers, should show mutual respect. Parents prefer to correct a child out of the hearing of others, though sometimes they may judge it suitable for these others to hear. Women who are blood relations or on intimate terms may embrace each other after a long separation, but it is not proper for a man to greet even a related woman with an embrace. According to some, a man and a woman should never shake hands. Women should not squat as men do, nor sit unaccompanied on the roadside or elsewhere frequented by men.

Traditionally, young men and women (e.g., a boy and his uncle's daughter) could exchange glances only at large celebrations. One opportunity for interaction (in the Pesisir Selatan area) is afforded at weddings where young men enter a house playing tambourines while the young women, sitting above in the *pagu* (open attic), rain flowers down on them. A young woman lowers a flower and a cigarette on a string down to the young man of her desire; he replies by sending her a ring or other valuable wrapped in a cloth.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Raised 2 m (6.5 ft) off the ground on numerous pillars, the traditional Minangkabau house, or *rumah gadang* ("big house"), is famous for the ridge beams of its roof sections that sweep up to a sharp point at both ends, evoking water buffalo horns. Stretching out north to south, the house is entered through a roofed staircase to the door on one of the long sides. A room for receiving guests runs the length of the house. Behind it along the back wall are the rooms (*bilik*) for the married sisters of the family (added when each weds); the house pillars, 3 m (10 ft) apart, determine where the partition walls of each *bilik* will be. At one end of some houses, the floor is raised to provide a sitting place (*anjueng*) for those of superior status. Where there



*Minangkabau children play with kites in Belubus, Indonesia. Anthropologist Pegge Reeves Sanday has studied and lived among the Minangkabau people for 16 years. She calls the group the largest and most modern matrilineal society in the world. (AP Images/Peggy Reeves Sanday, File)*

is no anjueng, the spot is occupied by a room for the youngest sister and her husband. The kitchen occupies a small building, usually at the back, accessible by a small bridge.

Nowadays, most people occupy single-family houses; traditional ones are called *tungkuih nasi* (“rice packet,” referring to the hornless roofs).

The village (*nagari*) consists of the *nagari* proper (houses and wet-rice fields) and the *taratak* (forests, dry-crop fields, and sometimes the dwellings of non-owning caretakers). The *nagari* proper includes a mosque, a village council hall, a place for a weekly or twice-weekly market, and *surau*, halls for daily prayer that is also where the community’s unmarried men sleep.

West Sumatra has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 71.2 (2005 score), higher than Indonesia’s national score of 69.6 and the ninth highest in the country (out of 33 provinces). West Sumatra’s GDP per capita is us\$9,784, very high for Indonesia (cf. us\$10,910 for North Sumatra, us\$6,293 for Central Java, and us\$2,919 for North Maluku). In 2000, the level of infant mortality, at 52.66 deaths per 1,000 live births, was moderate for Indonesia, worse than provinces on Java but better than most in eastern Indonesia.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

A Minangkabau belongs to his or her mother’s clan (*suku*) and traditionally lives in an extended family (*paruik*, meaning “[common] stomach or womb”), which consists of all individuals who trace their ancestry back to a common great-grandmother matrilineally.

The 96 named *suku* trace back to an original four: Bodo, Caniago, Koto, and Piliang. One must marry outside one’s *suku*. Custom preferred a man to marry his maternal uncle’s daughter, though he might also choose his paternal aunt’s daughter or the sister of his sister’s husband; today, the choice is not so restricted). Within the *paruik*, children’s interaction with their mother’s siblings is hardly less close than that with their parents.

Formerly, a husband visited his wife only at night, retaining residence in his mother’s village; these days, he moves into her house after the wedding. If a man takes more than one wife (a practice condemned by younger people), he commutes between their houses, which may mean between one house in his native place and another where he has migrated. For children, it was the mother’s eldest brother (*mamak*) who served as the male authority figure; the *mamak*, moreover, managed the affairs of the *paruik* in general. The *mamak*’s relations with his sister’s husband tends to be formal. Parents-in-law, on the other hand,

are known to spoil their children-in-law. If a man migrates with his wife, his parents-in-law may join them, while his own parents will not. After divorce, the husband must move away, leaving the children with his wife.

As the nuclear family increasingly displaces the extended family as the norm, the role of the father and his kin grows proportionately. It has become common for a deceased man's wife and children to challenge his sister's children's traditional claim to his property. Custom traditionally distinguished between *harato pusako*, property (mainly land and heirlooms) retained by the suku or its branches in perpetuity, and *harato pacarian*, (usually moveable) property earned by a man that he could bequeath as he wished.

### **11 CLOTHING**

As everyday wear, men wear shirts, trousers, and a *peci* cap [see **Indonesians**]. Older men still wear *serawa* (long pants with a drawstring) and a *teluk belanga* (tunic) or a "Chinese" shirt and sometimes a head cloth rather than a *peci*. Women wear a sarong and *baju kurung* (long-sleeved *kebaya*) and a *tingkulak* (head wrap covering the hair); urban women who wear modern clothing put on traditional clothing while in the village.

Ceremonial attire for men consists of: a tunic with short sleeves that widen towards the opening; trousers; a *songket* (gold- and silver-embroidered) cloth wrapped around the waist to hang just below the knee; a sash over the shoulder; a *saluak* headdress; and a *kris* (short dagger) tucked in the front. Women wear the *baju kurung*; a *songket* sarong with a matching sash over the shoulder; earrings; several necklaces, one on top of another; and bracelets on both arms. Most distinctive is the women's headwear: the cloth is folded (the precise manner is unique to each village) to look like horns (*tanduk* or *tilakuang*). Brides don elaborate headdresses of gold.

### **12 FOOD**

Rice is the core of the Minangkabau meal. The usual side dishes (*samba*) are (often salted) fish and boiled vegetables, such as cabbage, water spinach, cassava or papaya leaves, eggplant, amaranth, and banana blossom. Less often, Minangkabau eat dishes of meat (except pork) fried in coconut oil or stewed in coconut milk and heavily spiced with lots of chili and such seasonings as garlic, onions, ginger, galangal, pepper, salt, turmeric, and lemon grass. The most renowned Minangkabau dish is *rendang*, chunks of water buffalo meat stewed for hours in coconut milk and spices until the liquid reduces to a thick coating; the meat keeps for a very long time and sustains travelers on long journeys. Other dishes are *gulai kambing* (goat meat in a coconut milk sauce), *dendeng* (spicy dried beef), and *singgang ayam* (fried chicken). Drinks include *kopi daun*, a "tea" of dried coffee leaves.

"Padang" restaurants throughout Indonesia serve Minangkabau food. A waiter lays out several dishes at once on the customer's table; the customer is only charged for the portions that he or she has taken. Their great popularity among non-Minangkabau in Muslim-majority Indonesia is partly due to the assurance that the meat served there is *halal*, prepared in conformity with Islamic dietary regulations.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005, West Sumatra's level of literacy stood at 95.98%, high by Indonesian national standards (see also the article entitled **Indonesians** in this volume).

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Vocal music includes *dendang* (singing), *zikir* (Arab-style chanting), and *selawat* (invocations from the Qur'an). Instruments include bamboo flutes (*saluang* and *bansi*), the tambourine (*rebana*), the drum, the *kecapi* (a zither), and the violin.

Dances (all dynamic) include: the fan dance, portraying the interaction of young men and women; the umbrella dance, depicting a couple's love, often danced by a bride and groom; *rantak*, consisting of martial arts moves; and *sauik randai*, representing the happy mood upon finishing a day working in the fields or fishing. *Dabus* is *pencak silat* martial arts movements performed as an artistic expression.

At ceremonies such as weddings, people are quick to improvise poems (*pantun* and *syair*) and aphorisms. Traditional literature includes an epic, *Kaba Cindur Mata*. Although writing in Malay for publication by the Dutch colonial government's Balai Pustaka publishing house, early 20th century Minangkabau writers produced novels depicting conflicts between tradition and modernity within their native Minangkabau society; many of these became the first classics of modern Indonesian literature.

### **15 WORK**

Agriculture provides the majority with a livelihood. Rice from irrigated fields is the main subsistence crop, while dry-field vegetables (peanuts, potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, and chili) are grown for the market. In outlying hilly areas, Minangkabau open the land with swidden (shifting-cultivation) methods, planting first dry rice, maize, cassava, pumpkins, or the like, then leaving the plots fallow for a couple of years, and finally planting perennials, such as rubber, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, coffee, and coconut, sugar palm, or fruit trees. With these perennials, farmers are able to participate in the cash economy.

Minangkabau raise chickens, ducks, cattle, water buffalo, and goats for meat. Fishing (in the sea, lakes, and artificial ponds) provides farmers with supplementary income.

Lacking sufficient land, or unsatisfied with the limited returns from farming, and, because of the merantau tradition (migration to acquire wealth), open to an itinerant lifestyle, many Minangkabau seek wealth through commerce. Minangkabau business owners, rather than Chinese as elsewhere in Indonesia, dominate the local economy, marketing agricultural products and the craft specialties of individual villages.

### **16 SPORTS**

The local form of martial arts is called *kumango*, a version of the pan-Malay-Indonesian *silat*. One common game played by 5–15 year olds is *galah*, in which one team (variable numbers) attempts to block the members of the other team from running a course from a starting point to the end of the playing field and back to the starting point. Males (very rarely females) of all ages enjoy *catur harimau* ("tiger chess"), a board game with stone playing pieces where one player's "tigers" attempt to eat up the other player's "goats" (the moving and placing of pieces requires skill and strategy).

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Intricate carving, often painted, decorates the pillars and walls of the *rumah gadang* (the traditional Minangkabau house). Particular (usually plant) motifs correspond to different parts of the structure and symbolize virtues (e.g., the *tungguak lamah* design signifies humility and courtesy).

A few villages continue to produce the ceremonially important *songket*, cloth brocaded with gold and silver threads.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

West Sumatra's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 60.7, higher than Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) is 54.2, almost as high as the national GEM (54.6).

Contemporary Minangkabau notions of gender relations are influenced by distinct and often conflicting discourses: Minangkabau matrilineal values and customary law (see *Interpersonal Relations* and *Family Life*) and patriarchal pan-Islamic and Indonesian nation-building/modernizing ideologies. Mothers, for instance, continue to advise and guide their children even when they are adult, and, if they are senior women (*bundo kanduang*) within their lineage, they wield authority beyond their own immediate household (Islamic values, however, do not extend her power into children's adulthood and to households other than her own). As the ultimate controllers of property (most importantly of rice lands), women regularly speak up in kinship group and community decision-making gatherings, as they would not generally in other Indonesian cultures. At the same time, as in many other Indonesian cultures, aggressive verbal self-assertion is looked down upon as displaying powerlessness rather than power, with the result that male elders can have their way simply by saying as little as possible.

The genuinely central place of women and especially of mothers in Minangkabau culture is countered by the authority positions traditionally given to men (a man would have authority over his sister's property but not over his wife's) and by Islamic notions. For example, the idea that women unlike men attain adulthood before learning to master their passions, or that a person gets his or her essential character and status from his father's sperm, and, therefore, family's seek men of "good seed" for their daughters. Dutch colonial and later Indonesian national governments have favored the male lineage head (*penghulu*) over other types of community member traditionally participating in community decision-making processes, including the *bundo kanduang* through whom property was inherited. The Indonesian national government recognizes the father as the head of the household and channels forms of development aid, such as instruction in new agricultural techniques, to men rather than to women. It has applied the title "Bundo Kanduang" to "model mothers" judged according to an Islamic/Western patriarchal framework, shifting it away

from its traditional Minangkabau meaning of a senior woman with great power and authority within her lineage. Women who are junior according to traditional matrilineal lineage hierarchies may raise their status by invoking their husbands' rank within non-traditional hierarchies, such as the Indonesian bureaucracy. Modernization, including increased emigration and the increased value of remittances from migrants, is increasing the importance of the nuclear family as the expense of the extended family and of the lineage and proportionally reducing the power of senior women.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# MINAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** MEE-nuhs

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Meos; Mewati

**LOCATION:** India (primarily Rajasthan state)

**POPULATION:** 5 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Various dialects of Rajasthani

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; some Islamic practices

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Minas, also known as the Meos, or Mewati, are a tribe and caste inhabiting parts of western and northern India. Early views of the Minas held that they were among the oldest inhabitants of the region and represented pre-Dravidian elements in the population. More recently, however, it has been suggested that the Minas may have migrated to this region from inner Asia in the 7th century along with various Rajput groups. Some Minas even claim Rajput descent.

According to Mina tradition, the Minas ruled most of what is now eastern Rajasthan, an area they referred to as “*mind-esh*” (country of the Minas). They subsequently were replaced by Rajput clans, the most recent being the Kachhwaha Rajputs who founded the state of Amber, later known as Jaipur. The last important Mina ruler, the Raja of Naen, was defeated by the Rajputs in the 16th century. However, the Minas continued to play a prominent role in the affairs of the region. Like the Bhils in Mewar (Udaipur) State, it was formerly the custom for a Mina to participate in the *tika* ceremony, placing a ceremonial mark with his own blood on the forehead of a new ruler of Amber State. Minas held important positions in Amber, guarded the person of the prince at night, and were given charge of the women’s quarters.

In the 11th century, when Muslim invaders gained control of northwestern India, some Minas converted from Hinduism to Islam. This branch of the Mina tribe is called the Meos. Further conversions to Islam occurred among the Minas during the 13th and 17th centuries. Despite their conversion, however, Meos continued to follow many of their original Hindu practices, and their culture remains a blend of Hindu and Muslim traits.

Political events since the middle of the 20th century have seen the Meos take on a stronger Muslim identity. British India was partitioned in 1947 and Pakistan was created as a separate country for Muslims. At this time, many Meos migrated from territory that was assigned to the Republic of India to West Pakistan, the western “wing” of the new Islamic state. The Meos who remained in India, a Muslim minority in an overwhelmingly Hindu population, found themselves facing pressures to abandon Hindu traits and conform to traditional Islamic customs.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Minas, along with their allied groups, number some nearly 5 million people and rank among the largest tribes of South Asia. The current estimate of the Mina population is 4,482,000, of which 3,834,440 are found in Rajasthan. The main concentrations of Minas lie in eastern Rajasthan, in Alwar and Bharatpur Districts, spilling over into the Gurgaon District



of Haryana State. This area is known as Mewat, reflecting the prominence of the Meos in the region. The name Mewati, i.e., a resident of Mewat, is sometimes used as a synonym for Mina and Meo. Considerable numbers of Minas are also found in Madhya Pradesh State.

The Minas of Rajasthan identify 12 *pals* in the state. Pals are historical territorial units settled by Minas who shared a common ancestry and, often, similar cultural and linguistic attributes. Beyond this geographic distinction, there are several divisions among the Minas based on factors such as occupation and status. In addition, all Mina groups are divided into numerous clans (*gotras*), which are exogamous social units.

The Mers, the hill peoples of central Rajasthan, are also considered to be a branch of the Minas. They trace their descent to Rajput chiefs who married Mina women and are known as Rawat Minas. Like the Rajputs, the Mers are divided into clans. Some Mer clans converted to Islam, while others remained Hindu, but in the past all Mers intermarried. It was only with the introduction of communal representation in British India, and the events leading to independence in 1947, that the two groups began to move apart. Significant numbers of Minas also live in southeastern areas of Rajasthan.

In Rajasthan, Minas are second in number only to the Bhils and are classed as a Scheduled Tribe. Mina populations have spread from their Rajasthani homeland to adjacent states, although there they are less numerous, may not be recognized as a tribal group, and are sometimes called by different names. In Uttar Pradesh, the state lying to the northwest of Rajasthan, for

instance, Minas are known as “Pardeshi Rajputs.” This literally means “Rajputs from a foreign land,” and no doubt refers to the claims of Mina groups migrating from Rajasthan to Rajput descent. In Madhya Pradesh, Minas are known as Rawats and are regarded as a Scheduled Caste because they eat meat and consume alcohol. Minas are also found in small numbers in Haryana and Punjab States. The Meos who migrated to Pakistan after partition in 1947 settled in the eastern region of that country’s Punjab Province.

The areas of Rajasthan inhabited by the Minas include the Aravalli Range and the semiarid plains lying to the southeast of these hills. The Aravallis are the most prominent relief feature of Rajasthan, a narrow belt of precipitous hills and ridges running northeast–southwest through the center of the state for a distance of over 600 km (approximately 375 mi). Ridges in the north, in Mewat, scarcely reach 400 m (approximately 1,300 ft). In the south, however, the mountains increase in width and elevation, rising to 1,722 m (5,650 ft) at Mount Abu. The Aravalli Range separates the arid lands of the Thar Desert in northwestern Rajasthan from the slightly more humid regions to the southeast, which are drained by the Banas and Chambal rivers. In the extreme southeast of Rajasthan, rainfall exceeds 80 cm (30 in), but over most of the area it averages around 65 cm (25 in). As is true of all semiarid climates, rainfall is highly variable and the region is prone to frequent droughts and famines. Mean maximum temperatures in May, the hottest month, exceed 40°C (104°F). Natural vegetation, where land has not been cleared for cultivation, is drought-resistant scrub forest.

Minas in Rajasthan are divided into the Mina Zamindar, the landowning Minas, and the Mina Chowkidar. Both groups claim *ksatriya* status, and the 2001 Census of India puts their number at between 2,800,000 and 3,000,000 (the estimate given above includes natural increase since 2001, Bhil Minas, Meos, and related groups). The Zamindar Minas occupy a higher ritual status in the Hindu caste system than the Chowkidar Minas. The Bhil Mina are said to be descendants of Bhils and Rajputs who fled Muslim domination elsewhere in northern India.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Mina homeland lies in the “Hindi belt” (the area where Hindi, an Indo-Aryan language descended from Sanskrit, is widely spoken) of northern India. However, linguistic patterns in India are such that people commonly speak the dialect of their immediate locality rather than the “proper” or official form of the regional language. Minas, depending on where they live in Rajasthan, speak various dialects of Rajasthani, which itself is a regional variant of Hindi. The major dialects spoken in the Mina areas are Mewati, Shekhawati, Harauti, Talhati, Dhundari, and Pachwari. Minas living in other states speak the dialect of their local region.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The derivation of the name Mina is uncertain, but some suggest it means “fish.” The Minas claim an association with *Matsya* or *Minavatar*, the first incarnation of Vishnu in which the Hindu god assumed the form of a fish. According to a legend related in several ancient texts, a *ksatriya* king named Manu was fishing in a river when he caught a small fish. The fish promised to protect Manu from coming misfortunes if he took

it home rather than return it to the river. The king placed the fish in a small earthen vessel, but it started growing and eventually had to be moved to a pond, then to a lake, to the sea, and finally to the ocean. By now, King Manu realized that the fish was an incarnation of a god. The deity warned the king that a devastating flood was coming and that he should build a boat and embark on it with the seeds of all living things. Forewarned, Manu survived the flood. After the waters subsided, Manu performed a sacrifice to the gods. A woman was created from this sacrifice, and the entire human race is descended from the union of this woman and Manu.

The legend of the flood is found in many cultures, but the Mina tradition that they are descendants of King Manu achieves two goals specific to the Indian context. First, it gives a degree of legitimacy to the Mina claim of *ksatriya* status and, therefore, to an advantageous place in the caste structure of Indian society. Thus, where Mina groups have assumed a caste identity, they rank just below the Brahman caste and above the service castes and hill peoples. Second, identification with Vishnu through his Matsya incarnation confirms the Minas as Hindu, an important goal for tribal groups that may have their origins outside Hindu society. Even today, Minavatar remains a major deity for the Minas.

### **5 RELIGION**

The Minas are Hindus, and worship at the temples and shrines of Hindu deities is an important part of everyday life. Most Minas are Shaivites, meaning they are followers of the god Shiva. But, like all Hindus, they also worship other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. These gods and goddesses include Rama, Sita, Hanuman, and Bhairon. In addition, Minas revere local deities and construct shrines to these lesser gods on the outskirts of their villages. Daily prayers are offered to Balavji, who represents Hanuman and protects the inhabitants of the village. Shitala Mata (the goddess of smallpox), Pipla Mata, and other lesser village goddesses are also worshipped. The Minas pay special attention to the presiding deities of their clans.

Minas are highly superstitious people and place great meaning on omens. For example, the braying of an ass on the left, the hooting of an owl on the left, and the cry of a jackal on the right mean good fortune. Hearing the cry of the Saras crane, or meeting a cat, sheep, or hyena, is unlucky.

The Meos, the Muslim branch of the Minas, follow Muslim practices, such as male circumcision and burial of the dead. They celebrate Muslim festivals, such as Id and Muharram. But in many other aspects, the Meos in India continue to preserve elements of their Hindu past. Meos often worship at the shrines of Hindu gods and goddesses and keep Hindu household deities. Hindu epics, such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are as well-liked as readings from the Quran. Popular given names for both males and females are often Hindu names, with the Muslim title “Khan” added. Sometimes the Hindu name “Singh” is added to a Muslim name, as in “Fateh Singh.” Until recently, Meos’ dress differed little from their Hindu neighbors. In addition, despite pressures for change, the Meos continue to follow traditional Hindu kinship patterns and marriage rituals. The Meo community is divided into at least 800 exogamous clans, and its clan structure resembles that of the Hindu Minas, Rajputs, Jats, and other Hindu castes.

Meos do not follow *purdah*, the custom of secluding women, which is the practice in Muslim society.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As Hindus, the Minas observe many of the major festivals of the Hindu calendar. The spring festival of Holi is celebrated in typical fashion, with the burning of the demoness Holika and the throwing of colored water and powder. Dasahara is celebrated in October. The Divali festival, the Festival of Lights, occurs in the fall after the summer harvest has been collected. Hundreds of lamps are placed around the houses, which are often newly plastered and decorated with designs. Men indulge in gambling and drinking. Govardhan Puja, a festival dedicated to the welfare of cattle, is celebrated a day or so after Divali. At this time, cattle are bathed in the village pond and decorated with ornaments and colored paint. Women pray to the cattle for wealth and feed the animals special food. Cow dung, a symbol of wealth, is placed on the steps of each house and offerings are made to it.

In addition to these Hindu observances, Minas celebrate certain festivals that are specific to the Mina community. The Minas go to great lengths to appease their ancestors and set aside a special day for ancestor worship. On this day, special foods are cooked in each household, and the village priest is invited to the house to receive an offering. Another day is set aside to honor local village deities.

Two local festivals in Rajasthan—Tej, the Festival of Swings, and Gangaur, which honors the goddess Gauri—are popular events. Fairs held at various religious shrines in eastern Rajasthan are regularly attended by the Minas. The fair of Mata near Rewasa in Sikar district is a Mina fair marked by offerings of liquor and the sacrifice of buffaloes to the Goddess.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As with other Hindus, the first shaving of a male child's head (*handukadi*) is a major ritual for the Minas. But perhaps the most important Mina ceremony is the funeral feast (*nukta*). As is the custom in Hindu India, the Minas cremate their dead. At the end of a period of mourning after a death, the bereaved family holds a feast for relatives and the entire community. In the Mina tradition, the *nukta* is obligatory, and the scale of the feast a mark of a family's economic status. Thus, in addition to its ritual function, the feast fulfills social and economic obligations. However, the heavy expenditure involved in holding this feast has resulted in many Mina families acquiring a lifelong burden of debt. This has become such a problem that some Mina tribal associations have attempted to ban the ceremony in their communities.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Minas follow the traditions of hospitality that are found throughout rural India. Guests are received cordially and served tea and other refreshments. During events such as marriages and death feasts, however, Minas maintain a social distance between themselves and other non-Mina communities.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Mina villages are usually comprised of the members of one or more clans or gotras, along with service castes essential to an agricultural settlement. The village is generally unplanned,

with a wide, unpaved main street cutting through its center. Houses of both Minas and other castes are constructed along this street. The village temples are often located in this central area. Minas who own land may build their houses on the edges of the village to be close to their property. In some areas, small hamlets (*dhani*) made up exclusively of the members of one family are scattered around the outskirts of the village. A council or *Panchpatel*, composed of the headmen (*patels*) of the various lineages (*kutumbs*) and settlement groups in the village, looks after community affairs.

The typical Mina house has mud walls and thatched roofs. A thick mud wall with only one entrance encloses a central courtyard around which are found rooms, one for each married male member of the household. These living rooms are used for storing family possessions and food grains and contain a niche for the family deity. On cold winter nights, the men sleep in these rooms, but otherwise they lie in the domain of the women of the household. Kitchen hearths are built under a thatch shed outside each living room. A large room containing a few wooden cots built outside the walls at the entrance to the main courtyard, acts as the men's living quarters. Behind the courtyard, and with a separate entrance, is the cattle shed where animals are kept and fodder and agricultural implements are stored. Fuel, in the form of cow dung cakes, is kept outside the walls of the house near the cattle shed.

Many Mina villages are located off the main communication routes, and transportation in these areas is difficult. A few private buses keep to somewhat unreliable schedules, but even then villagers may have to walk several kilometers to reach a drivable road. Transport is commonly undertaken by bullock cart, camel cart, and bicycle.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The basic family unit among the Minas is the extended family. It may include several brothers, often of advanced age, along with their married and unmarried children. As many as three or four generations of a family may be in residence in a single household. Mina society is patrilocal and married daughters reside with the family of their husbands. Child marriage is the norm among the Minas, who believe that the ideal age for marriage is between 6 and 10 years old. A newly married girl remains with her family until she reaches puberty, when she moves to her husband's home. A typical Mina household may also contain divorced and widowed daughters.

Minas are endogamous and marry within the tribal group. Marriage partners have to be found outside one's own clan and thus often come from another village. Most marriages in Mina society are arranged by the parents of the prospective bride and groom. The girl's father negotiates a bride-price to be paid by the family of the husband. This used to consist of a cash sum or a specific number of cows, bullocks, or camels. More recently, however, marriage negotiations in India have expanded to include consumer goods such as watches, radios, and household appliances. In addition to the bride-price, Mina marriage is accompanied by the exchange of gold and silver ornaments between the two families.

Marriage rites as practiced by the Minas are similar to Hindu marriage rites. Brahman priests are used to fix an auspicious day and to officiate at the marriage rites. The groom travels to the village of the bride, accompanied by some elders of his family. The bridal party receives the hospitality of the

bride's family for the one or two days it takes for the marriage rituals to be completed. At the appointed hour, a fire is lit and the bride and groom walk around it in the circumambulation rite. On the following day, the newlywed couple and their party return to the groom's home. Within a few days, the female relatives of the bride visit the groom's family and bring the girl back from her in-laws. The bride stays with her family until she reaches puberty, when she returns to live with her husband permanently.

Widow remarriage is accepted by the Minas. The preferred partner is a deceased husband's brother or paternal cousin. Another type of marriage accepted by Mina society is one in which a woman with a living husband can remarry another man, with the second husband paying compensation to the first husband. Both men and women are allowed to seek divorce on grounds ranging from adultery to the inability to have children.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

The dress of the Minas differs little from that of other Hindu groups in eastern Rajasthan. Men wear a *dhoti*, a single piece of white cloth about 5 m (16 ft) long and 1 m (3–4 ft) wide. About half the length is wrapped around the waist, and the remainder is drawn through the legs and tucked into the waist behind the body. A loose shirt or *kurta* and a turban complete the outfit. Women wear a skirt, a blouse that leaves the midriff bare, and a long wrap that can cover the head and be pulled across the face if necessary. Young children generally go naked, wearing a type of shirt during the colder winter months.

Meos traditionally wore similar dress until relatively recently, when they adopted Muslim style clothes. These are typically loose pants (*salwar*), a long tunic (*kamiz*), and a scarf (*dupatta*) for women, and a kurta and *tahband*, a long piece of cloth wrapped around the waist in the manner of a sarong, for men.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Rajasthan lies in that part of India where cereals rather than rice are the main food crops grown, and this is reflected in the food of the Minas. The typical meal consists of unleavened bread (*roti*) made from wheat, or millets called *jowar* and *bajra*. This is eaten with pulses such as lentils, which provide protein in the diet. Locally grown vegetables include onions, potatoes, spinach, and eggplant. The food is seasoned with chilies and other spices. Milk and curds and clarified butter (*ghi*) form part of the diet, although the cost of these products limits their use. Mustard oil is used for cooking. Tea is consumed at all times of the day.

Like all Hindus, especially those who aspire to higher caste status, the Minas are vegetarian and do not eat beef. The killing of a cow is considered by most Minas to be a heinous crime and subject to punishment. But some groups such as the Melia Minas or the Dhedia Minas are said to eat beef. The Padihar Minas received their name because of their supposed practice of eating buffalo meat (*pada* means buffalo calf). Mina groups that eat meat are regarded as socially inferior by other Minas, who will not intermarry with them.

### **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Despite the availability of state-supported schools, illiteracy and lack of education remain problems among many rural communities, including the Minas, in India. Distance, poor

transportation facilities, inadequate resources in local primary and secondary schools, and a reluctance among many Minas to send their children to school result in low levels of education among the community. The literacy rate for Rajasthan in 2001 was 60.41%. However, this average masks a tremendous variation in literacy in the state. In the Virat Nagar block of Jaipur District (a rural area), for instance, literacy among girls is only 4.6% (2001). Among the Mina community, literacy is 52.2%, while for females, this figure drops to 31.8%, which is higher than the Bhils and most tribal communities in Rajasthan except for the Dhanka. Some Mina community associations have attempted to impose fines on Minas who do not send their children to school. The high costs of sending a child away for higher education is prohibitive for most Mina parents. But 62% of Mina children between the ages of 5 and 14 years attend school, although only around 5% ever graduate from high school.

### **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Minas do not have a written literature but share in the regional traditions of Rajasthani folk culture. They participate in local fairs and festivals, and women sing appropriate folk-songs at ceremonies, such as weddings. The Minas are fond of social gatherings and celebrate these events with song and dance. Many of the songs and dances of the Minas are considered to be obscene, and modern reformers have tried to ban these activities.

### **<sup>15</sup>WORK**

The Minas are primarily agriculturalists, depending on cultivation and animal husbandry for their livelihood. The Minas themselves make distinctions between the Zamindari Minas (agriculturalists) and Chowkidari Minas (watchmen), who in the past made their living as village night watchmen. The Chowkidari Minas have traditionally been associated with theft and robbery. Under the British, they were classified as criminals under the Criminal Tribes Act and required to report to the nearest police station every day. Some reportedly continue to follow a life of crime, but the old distinctions between the two communities are blurring. The Zamindari Minas see themselves as socially superior, and in the past the two groups did not intermarry. Such marriages do occur today.

Some Minas, especially those who have large landholdings, are fairly prosperous. They have accepted agricultural innovations and use modern equipment such as tillers, tractors, and irrigation pumps. Many Minas, however, have small, uneconomic holdings and lack modern equipment. Their agricultural efforts are greatly hampered by the frequent droughts of the region, and they often must supplement their income by working as laborers. It is common for all able-bodied men in a village to work at building roads once their seasonal agricultural activities are completed.

Small numbers of Minas are engaged in service and other occupations, but an overwhelming 75% are recorded as cultivators in 2001 census returns.

### **<sup>16</sup>SPORTS**

There are no sports, in the modern sense of the word, associated with traditional Mina society.



## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Until recently, many Mina villages lacked electricity, and entertainment and recreation was derived primarily through traditional village festivities. With the development of rural areas and the advent of radio and even satellite television, such entertainment is available to those who can afford it. Urban areas provide access to popular Hindi movies, though again this is a luxury few villagers can afford.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Minas are known for their skill in areas such as basketry, rope-making, embroidery on cloth and leather, and wall-painting. One Mina community living near Agra, in Uttar Pradesh State, makes its living from crafting the brightly colored, embroidered shoes and sandals worn by Rajasthanis. They are known as the Chamaria Minas, the Chamars being the traditional leatherworking castes of India.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Minas face many problems typical of tribal or conservative rural communities attempting to deal with the modern social and economic environment of India. Until the mid-20th century, the Minas lived under a feudal system that placed little emphasis on the social improvement of the people. Partly due to the indifference of their former rulers and partly due to their own resistance to change, the Minas continue to face problems of illiteracy and lack of education. Alcoholism is a problem among some Minas. Customs such as the paying of the bride-price and the death-feast have resulted in a considerable debt burden for many Minas.

Though they achieved little success, movements for social reform among the Minas date back to the 1920s, when Mina chiefs in Jaipur State founded the Mina Reformist Committee. Since then, many Mina associations aimed at social reform have been started. A summary of the social problems facing the Minas as perceived by the Minas themselves is provided by a list of offenses, to be punished by fines, set out by a Mina association in 1974. These included holding the death feast; distilling, selling, or drinking alcoholic beverages; taking work as a guard; failing to send children to school; and participating in group singing and dancing.

In 1950, when the president of India announced the list of peoples who were to be categorized as "Scheduled Tribes," the Minas were surprised to find they were not on it. However, following representations to the Government of India through the Mina Mahapanchayat and a visit to Mina country by a member of the Backward Caste Commission, the Minas were included on the list, giving them reserved government jobs and places in educational institutions. The Minas have generally made good use of the advantages accorded to them by Scheduled Tribe status and rank among the highest in the state among tribal groups in most socio-economic indicators.

Minas in Rajasthan object to the agitation by Gujars to be reclassified as a Scheduled Tribe (ST), as was promised by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Such agitation was taking place in 2008. Because of caste politics people vote en bloc as a community and they benefit as a bloc. This is what happened when Jats in Rajasthan were granted Other Backward Classes (OBC) status in 1999. Since they are powerful and generally well off, they cornered the benefits of reservations. The Gujars, who also have OBC status had to compete with the Jats, were later

promised ST status by the BJP. The community voted and BJP came to power in Rajasthan. The Gujars now want the promise fulfilled. Now, if Gujars get included as an ST then the other ST communities, including the Minas, suffer because someone else will come to share the ST reservation pie. Hence they protest to maintain their benefits. "Meenas in Rajasthan are the only Scheduled Tribe and we would not tolerate any inclusion into our community," the president of Rastriya Meena Mahasabha is supposed to have said. However, even though Minas have cornered most of the reservations for Scheduled Tribes in the state, groups such as the Bhils and Garasias are also classed as Scheduled Tribes in the state.

Rajasthan State has reservation quotas of 49% (16% for Scheduled Castes, 12% for STs, and 21% for OBCs). In June 2008 the state legislature was to meet to consider enacting a 14% job and education quota for the Economically Backward Category (EBC), which would make Rajasthan the first state in the country to have this quota. The Rajasthan government offered a 5% special reservation to the Gujar, Banjara, Gadia Lohar, and Raika communities, bringing an end to a nearly month-old stand-off over the Gujar community's demand for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes category. If enacted, the additional 5% and 14% would bring the total of reservations in Rajasthan to 68%, one of the highest in the country.

The Gujar-Mina confrontation in Rajasthan, which has turned violent at times, has prompted a nationwide rethink of India's policy of reservations based solely on caste. Yet, this is not just a case of Gujars or Minas wanting to gain more reservation privileges. It is also the story of how politicians are attracted to quotas and reservations as vote banks. Once contemplated as a temporary measure to ensure equality for historically disenfranchised communities, reservations have become a permanent tool for vote-bank politics—and have, in the process, been excessively divisive.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women among the Mina have a lower status than their men. A woman has no right to inherit property, though she does have an important role in the socio-economic area. She has a strong influence in family decisions, although the final decision is always made by the head of the family, who is invariably male. Women involved themselves in matters like school enrolment (education is seen by most Minas as a means to better oneself), diarrhea management and campaigning for safe drinking water. Where there is no supply of safe drinking water in a village, it is the women who have to sometimes walk miles to get it, carrying the water in pots on their head—a common scene in Rajasthan. And women do important agricultural work in the fields.

The Minas have been strongly influenced by the Hindu groups amongst whom they live, which leaves them open to the usual abuses (occasionally the press reports the death of a Mina woman, though this is clearly more of a problem among caste Hindus). Thus Mina women observe *purdah* and marriages are arranged, though divorce is rare and usually has to be sanctioned by the local *panchayat*. A woman's family pays a dowry (which is quite high for a suitable match). A widow or widower may remarry, a junior levirate or junior sororate type of union being considered the most appropriate arrangement. Child marriage, though now technically illegal in India, is tra-

ditional among Mina groups, who think the ideal age of marriage for a girl is between 6 and 10 years of age.

Tuberculosis and death during delivery is common in the villages, which often lack adequate medical facilities. As income from agriculture is meager, many Mina women suffer the consequences of poverty and illiteracy. Yet they are open to modernization, seeing education and development as a way out of their situation.

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—by D. O. Lodrick.

# MONGOLS IN CHINA

**PRONUNCIATION:** MAHN-gohls

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mengwushiwei

**LOCATION:** China (primarily Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region)

**POPULATION:** 5.81 million

**LANGUAGE:** Mongol

**RELIGION:** Lamaism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The expression "Mongol" originated from a tribe called Mengwushiwei in the Chinese book *Jiu Tang Shu* (The Ancient History of the Tang Dynasty), written in the 10th century. It seems the term was transliterated "Mongol" for the first time in the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). It gradually became the common name of many tribes. The east bank of the Erguna River (in central Inner Mongolia) was the cradle of the ancient Mongol people. Around the 7th century, they started to move toward the grassland in the west. In the 12th century, they dwelled in the upper reaches of Onon River, Kerulen River, and Tola River, east to the Kente Mountains. They made up a tribal group in which a large number of aristocrats gradually emerged from the nomads. Their leader, Temujin, was a powerful man whose strength came from the loyalty of his army and his own ability to command it. He conquered the other tribes and set up the Mongol empire. He took the title of Genghis Khan, Mongolian writings were created, and laws were codified. From 1211 to 1215, Genghis Khan expanded his territory to Central Asia and to the southern part of Russia. From 1227 to 1241, his successors swept west as far as Vienna. From 1253 to 1258, the Mongolian cavalry pushed deep into the Middle East. Before long, the occupied territory split into independent countries, including the Chinkai Empire, the Chagatai Empire, the Ogedei Empire, and the El Empire. In 1260, Kubilai (grandson of Genghis Khan) became the fifth supreme Khan and founder of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), which had its capital in China (in present-day Beijing). He destroyed the Southern Song Dynasty in 1279 and established China as the center of his immense empire. After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, the Mongols suffered from internal division and conflict for a very long time.

Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism, entered the Mongolian society in the 16th century. Thereafter, it had a strong impact on the Mongolian culture and socio-economic situation for centuries.

Under the influence of Soviet Russia, a revolutionary government was set up in 1921. Three years later, a large part of the traditional homeland of the Mongols became the People's Republic of Mongolia, established with the support of Soviet Russia, but it did not receive diplomatic recognition from many countries for decades. The other portion of the former Mongolian homeland remained within the Chinese border and was called Inner Mongolia. After 1949, it became the "Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region."



## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Mongols living in China numbered 5.81 million in 2000. They are mainly concentrated in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, but many also live in autonomous prefectures and counties in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning. There are also Mongol communities scattered in Ningxia, Hebei, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Beijing. The territory of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region covers some 460,000 sq mi, mostly hilly grassland and desert.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Mongol language belongs to the Altaic family, Mongolian group. There are three dialects. The writing system was created in the 13th century. Kubilai Khan ordered a Buddhist monk from Tibet to reform an ancient writing system, which

had been used to record oral literature but had ultimately been abandoned. The Mongolian writing system was revised several times by native Mongol linguists so as to conform to the spoken language. The Mongols in Xinjiang have used a variant of the Mongolian writing system since the 17th century.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

A large number of Mongolian myths are related to the origins of the Mongol people. One of their more important myths describes a tribe called Mongu fighting with other tribes for many years. Finally, the Mongu was defeated and all their people were killed, except two men and two women who escaped death by sheer luck. They went through many hardships and ultimately took refuge in a remote, thickly forested mountain, where only a narrow winding trail led to the outside world.



*Mongolian herders emerge from a polling booth in a yurt (a traditional nomadic tent) at Birjin, Mongolia. The polling station was set up to allow herders in the area to vote without the inconvenience of riding their horses long distances to the nearest city. (AP Images/Greg Baker)*

This was a place with plenty of water and lush grass. They married. Many years later, the population grew to such a size that the land could not produce enough grain to nourish all the people. They had to move but, unfortunately, the narrow trail was obstructed. However, an iron mine was found by surprise. They cut down the trees, killed bulls and horses, and made a number of bellows. Then, they exploited the mine. This way, they not only opened an outlet to the outside world but also got plenty of iron. A vast expanse of grassland awaited them. They are the ancestors of the Mongols. To commemorate their heroic undertakings, the Mongols used to smelt iron at every year-end.

Some myths about the flood and sun-shooting are Mongolian versions of Chinese or Tibetan mythology.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Originally, the Mongols believed in Shamanism. The shaman is a witch doctor, a dream reader, and an intermediary between the living and the spirit world; he is also skilled in divination and astrology. Up to the present, the remnants of Shamanism, such as sacrificial offerings to ancestors and reverence for the sun, moon, and nature, still exist.

Lamaism brought about a strong influence from Tibet, such as the integration of religion with politics. Built here and there,

Lamaist temples became independent manors possessing land, livestock, and manpower. The Mongols gradually turned to Lamaism. They sought the counsel and help of the *lama* for every aspect of their life: migration, marriage, childbirth, disease, and death. During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the number of lama increased to almost one third of their population. Since the lama were not engaged in material production and not allowed to marry, the economic and demographic development of the society was greatly inhibited. Since 1949, Lamaist beliefs and practices have decreased drastically.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Spring Festival (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20) is an important holiday for the Mongols, as it is for the other nationalities of China. In preparation for this holiday, the Mongols tailor new clothes and store large quantities of mutton, wine, and dairy products. On the eve of the lunar New Year, all members of the family sit cross-legged in the center of the *yurt* and begin their dinner at midnight. They offer toasts to the senior persons, eat and drink extravagantly, and listen to storytelling all night long. Early the next morning, they dress up and call on relatives' and friends' homes. They kowtow to the senior persons. According to their custom, it is the duty of the son-in-law of the host to propose

the toasts, which are never refused. Heated with wine, they dance while singing.

The Feast of Genghis Khan is April 23 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between May 17 and June 16). On this occasion there are commemorative activities, exchange of commodities, theatrical performances, and sport games.

In June or July of each year, the Mongols celebrate a special ritual, called Aobao, which seems to go back to an ancient shamanistic practice. Aobao is a kind of altar or shrine made of a pile of stone, adobes, and straw, believed to be the dwelling of the gods in shamanism. During the ritual, tree branches are plucked into the Aobao, which is surrounded by lit joss sticks. Wine and horse milk are sprinkled over the mound, and mutton and cheese are placed on it as sacrificial offerings. While performing the ritual, the shaman dances and enters into a trance. Wrestling and horse racing follow the religious ceremony.

The "Nadam Rally" is a traditional holiday of the Mongols. *Nadam* means recreation and play. It is a happy festival of the herdsmen, held annually on a selected day in the summer or in the fall.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Depending on local custom, the Mongols practice cremation, burial in the ground, or funeral in the wilderness. In the west nomadic area, the last form of burial is the most common. The body of the dead is placed in an open horse-drawn cart and carried over rough terrain until the corpse drops down due to the bumps. Then the body is laid in the wild. It is believed that when it is eaten by wolves or vultures, the soul of the dead rises to heaven. If the body is still there after a week, it is regarded as unlucky: the soul was not accepted in heaven. A lama is then invited to recite the scriptures and pray for the dead. A donation is necessary. In case of the burial in the ground, the deceased is wrapped in white cloth and put in a plank cabinet or in a wicker basket, then buried.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

There are no inns in the boundless grasslands, but one can always count on the Mongols for help. Their hospitality displays the lavishness that is characteristic of nomadic peoples. The master of a *yurt* will put up a stranger for the night. He offers milk tea, mutton, and wine. Surrounding the guest, the whole family will show its concern by making detailed inquiries. Upon leaving, the guest will be accompanied for quite a distance and then told the direction of his destination. If a herdsman calls at his friend's home, the host will offer his snuff-bottle to the guest, who will offer in turn his bottle for exchange. Each takes a sniff at the bottle of the opposite side and then gives the bottle back.

The Mongols in Yunnan have a special custom called "to meet the firewood-cutter." When it is about the time for someone to return home after cutting firewood for a whole day, one member of the family will go ahead to meet the tired person halfway, showing loving care for the family member engaged in hard labor.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The *yurt* is the traditional housing of the Mongols. It can be dismantled and transported on horseback, thus being suitable for nomadic life. The *yurt* is like a cylinder covered by an um-

brella. The wall can be split into several pieces. Each is about 2.75 yards long and 1.5 inches high, made of long narrow pieces of wood arranged in networks. To set it up, one connects the separate pieces into a cylinder, which is covered by an umbrella-like roof also made of separate pieces. The wall exterior is covered with large pieces of felt, which are tied together by ropes. Only a round skylight and a doorframe toward the southwest are left open. The *yurt* may be as small as 4 yards in diameter, but the large ones may house hundreds of people. Stationary *yurts* are common in semi-nomadic districts and are mostly made of wood and adobes. In agricultural areas, the Mongols usually dwell in one-story houses like the Chinese, within the confines of a village. The Mongols living in towns and cities have, to a large extent, adopted the Chinese way of life.

The Mongols are adept at horse riding. Whenever they can ride instead of walking, they do so. Recently, however, bicycles, motorcycles, and cars have entered Mongol towns and villages, transforming the mode of transportation.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

A Mongolian family generally consists of a man, his wife, and their young children. The sons, after wedding, move out of their parents' home. However, their *yurts* are relatively close to each other, so that they may move together with their parents in search of new pastures. In semi-nomadic districts, one finds large families, including parents, sons, and their spouses.

The Mongols are monogamous. The family is dominated by the man, but herdsmen usually consult their wives when matters arise. Furniture, clothes, and ornaments brought to the family by the wife during the wedding ceremony remain her own property.

A custom of "denying entrance on wedding" has been prevalent among the nomadic and semi-nomadic Mongols. The bridegroom, accompanied by relatives, rides to the bride's *yurt*. He finds the door slammed in his face. After repeated requests, the door is finally opened. He presents a *hada* (a ceremonial silk scarf) to his parents-in-law on entering and is given a banquet with a whole lamb. After the meal, the bride sits with her back to the others. The bridegroom kneels behind her and asks her pet name in childhood. He drinks at her house all night long. The following day, the bride leaves the *yurt* first. She rides a horse and circles the *yurt* three times, then speeds along to the bridegroom's house. The bridegroom and his relatives ride after her. The door is also slammed in her face and is only opened after repeated requests.

## 11 CLOTHING

Mongol dress varies with the environment and the seasons. In winter the Mongols living in pastoral areas usually wear a worn-out sheep fur coat with silk or cloth on the outside; in summer, they wear loose robes, usually in red, yellow, or dark navy, with long sleeves and a silk waistband. Knives with beautiful sheaths, snuff-bottles, and flint are worn as pendants at the waist. Long leather boots are often worn. All these items are related to the nomadic style of life. Mongolian peasants wear a cloth shirt, underwear and robes, or cotton-padded clothes and trousers. Felt boots are worn in winter. The old habit of wearing a waistband has been retained. Men like black or brown hats. Some of them wrap their heads with silk.

Women wrap red or blue cloth on their heads and wear a cone-shaped hat in winter.

## **12 FOOD**

The main traditional foods of the Mongols include beef, mutton, and milk products, supplemented by grain and vegetables. Roasted mutton and yogurt are popular. Breakfast usually consists of stir-fried millet with milk tea. Butter and salt are always added to the milk tea. Beef, mutton, and noodle soup are eaten for lunch and dinner. They drink the milk of horses, cows, and sheep, as well as brick tea and wine. Rice and flour are the staple foods of the peasants. Common dishes include dumplings, steamed stuffed buns, and meat pie.

## **13 EDUCATION**

According to data collected in 1978, there were 15 universities and colleges, more than 80 technical schools, about 5,000 middle (junior and senior) schools and 30,000 primary schools in Inner Mongolia. The cultural and educational level of the Mongols is higher than average among the national minorities of China.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

There are quite a number of Mongolian folk songs, which may be divided into two different groups. One is prevalent in pastoral areas, slow in tempo and free in rhythm. The other is popular in semi-nomadic districts, with quicker tempo and regular rhythm. Haolibao is a style of singing performance, very popular in Mongolian areas. The melody is rather fixed, but the words are impromptu, usually inspired by a sudden event that touches the singer. Songs are usually sung by two singers in an antiphonal style but sometimes by a single performer. Matouqin ("horse-head stringed instrument") is a traditional instrument of the Mongols. The Chopstick dance and Winecup dance, soft and gentle, are frequently seen during festivities. The Horse dance and Saber dance, bold and generous, reflect well the nomadic styles.

Literature in the Mongolian script includes a heroic epic "Life of Jiangger" written in the 15th century and a "Historical Romance" written in the 19th century.

## **15 WORK**

Most of the Mongols are engaged in livestock husbandry, raising mainly sheep, cows, and horses. Mongolian horses, small and tough, serve the herdsman for transport, as a source of milk, and as subject of dance and songs. The Mongols develop a reverence for horses from childhood. It seems the expression "flying horse" is of Mongolian origin.

## **16 SPORTS**

In addition to horse racing and arrow-shooting, wrestling is one of the favorite pastimes of the Mongolian men. After a day of work, kids, young fellows, and male adults under 50 frequently gather before the yurt and wrestle under the sunset. For a match, they wear a black vest and sing as they wrestle.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Movies and television have become popular and widespread over the last decades. Publications, broadcasts, drama, and films in the Mongolian language are flourishing. The Inner

Mongolia Autonomous Region boasts a state-of-the-art film studio. Cultural centers and libraries disseminate the Mongolian language and cultural productions in cities, towns, and even in the pastoral areas.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Snuff-bottles are treasured among the Mongolians. They are made of gold, silver, copper, agate, jade, coral, or amber, with fine relief of horse, dragon, rare birds, and animals. Another artifact is the pipe bowl, made of five metals, with delicate figures and designs. Supplemented by a sandalwood pole and a red agate holder, it is considered very precious. A Mongolian saying states: "A pipe bowl is worth a sheep."

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

One notices a strong trend among the Mongols to engage in trade. An urgent problem facing the Mongols at present is how to stabilize livestock husbandry and how to introduce scientific methods to breed the livestock. As breeding livestock is the mainstay of the Mongolian society, the modernization of their traditional mode of production is one of the keys to economic success.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students. Mongols have achieved higher-than-average levels of education when compared to the national minorities of China.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

## MONS

**PRONUNCIATION:** MOHNS

**LOCATION:** Myanmar (Burma)

**POPULATION:** Estimated 5 to 8 million in Myanmar

**LANGUAGE:** Mon; Burmese

**RELIGION:** Buddhism; some Animist and Hindu beliefs

### **1**INTRODUCTION

Mons were among the original inhabitants of the lands now known as Thailand (formerly Siam) and Myanmar (called Burma until 1989), migrating south from the Mongolian steppes as far back as the 3rd century BC. The kings and queens of the ancient Mon civilization founded the cities of Thaton, Bassein, and Pegu in Burma. Their empires spread as far as northern Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam, and their trade routes stretched to India and Malaysia. Absorbing cross-currents of Asian culture, the Mons embraced the new Buddhist religion and then spread it to neighboring states. Conflict with those neighbors—Burmese (Burmans), Shans, and Siamese—was always a feature of Mon life. Sometimes expanding their territory, the Mons also endured periods of conquest. When the rulers of Upper Burma vanquished the Mons in the 11th century, Mon craftsmen and scholars were brought north to enhance the Burmese city of Pagan. Lower Burma retained its predominantly Mon character until the Burmese King U Aungzeya conquered it completely and began killing thousands of Mon Buddhist monks and other civilians. Many Mons fled to Thailand, and they became a minority group in central Burma.

The Mons had formed alliances with the French and later with the British against the Burmese, but found themselves increasingly marginalized. After World War II, when Burma gained independence from Britain, Mon dissatisfaction led to Mon nationalist insurgent groups taking up arms. Based in a narrow strip of southern coastline now called the Mon State, those groups fought a guerrilla war for decades, while trying to promote a revival of Mon culture. As human rights abuses of Mon civilians by the Myanmar military government became extremely widespread, the main Mon rebel group, the New Mon State Party entered into a ceasefire agreement in 1995. Many Mon dissident politicians and Buddhist monks have been imprisoned in Myanmar. Prominent Mons born in Thailand have actively supported their cause.

The related tribespeople of the Shan State, the Was and Palaungs have had turbulent histories as well. Buddhist tea growers, the Palaungs have had small insurgent groups, which are now in ceasefire agreements with the government. The Was, notorious for their headhunting in the past, were exploited as troops for the Burmese Communist Party insurgency after World War II. An opium-growing area from the British colonial days, the Wa homeland now produces the biggest share of Myanmar's opium poppies, the raw material for heroin. A large Wa nationalist group, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), involved in the narcotics trade, has a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government. The impoverished region controlled by the UWSA has been Southeast Asia's main source of opium refined into heroin as well as methamphetamine production, and casinos there are patronized by Chinese gamblers from across the border.



## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Mons are an Austro-Asiatic people, closely related to the Khmers of Cambodia. Estimates of Mon population in Myanmar range from 5 to 8 million (no proper census has been done and many people of Mon ancestry only speak the Burmese language), and as many as 3 million Thais of Mon ancestry, as well as Mon populations in coastal Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Thousands of Mons from Myanmar live as refugees or migrant workers in Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries. Other Mon-Khmer ethnic groups include the Palaungs (about 400,000) and the Wa mountain people who number perhaps 1 million, half in Myanmar's Shan State and half in China's Yunnan Province.

While the old Mon empires covered immense areas of Southeast Asia, today Myanmar's Mon State is the only official Mon homeland. Located in Myanmar's southern Tenasserim region, the Mon State has a string of mountains separating it from Thailand, and flat coastal plains with farmland, fruit orchards, and mangrove wetlands. Numerous small islands lie offshore in the Andaman Sea, which has huge reserves of natural gas. The main cities of the Mon State are Thaton, Moulmein, Amherst (Kyaikkami), and Ye, all on or near the sea. Since the 1990s, deforestation has affected the Mon State as rainforest and mangroves have been cleared for timber and agricultural development.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Mon-Khmer language group is distantly related to some in India and the South Pacific. It is very different from the neigh-

boring Sino-Tai and Tibeto-Burmese groups. As learning Mon is discouraged by the current educational system of Myanmar, many Mons are only Burmese-speakers. To greet each other in their own language, Mons say "*Mange rayaw*," meaning "prosperity." They also ask, "*Mo'ng mip ha?*" ("how are you?"). "Thank you" in Mon is "*Tang kun*."

The Mon alphabet, based on the Sanskrit-related Pali script, has 35 letters. Mons taught their script to the Burmese, who devised an alphabet later adapted by many of Myanmar's ethnic groups.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Mons believe in a supernatural world, inhabited by spirits of the trees and fields, household and village spirits, ghosts of ancestors, and demons such as the "*kalok daik*," a spirit from the sea that devours children. A yearly "spirit dance" may be held to honor village spirits, with trance dancing by women possessed by the ghosts of their ancestors. Mon shamans, witches, and astrologers interpret messages from the spirit world and bad omens such as the cry of an owl. Buddhist monks may be called on to exorcise ghosts or other bad spiritual elements.

## 5 RELIGION

The Mons discovered Buddhism through contact with India. They practice a conservative form of Theravada Buddhism, emphasizing the study and interpretation of scriptures. Meditation, uncluttered ritual, and the merciful rule of law are important features. The monasteries are important centers of learning in Mon villages, and many young men and women become Buddhist monks or nuns for a short period or for life. During the September 2007 "Saffron Revolution" protests by Buddhist monks throughout Myanmar, Mon monks and their supporters marched in the towns and cities. In spite of their faith in a rigorous form of Buddhism, many Mons believe in old Animist or Hindu elements as well, such as possession by ghosts, and astrology.

The Shan State's Mon-Khmer relatives, the Palaungs, practice Buddhism along with the worship of *Nats* (guardian spirits), and the Was are largely animists with some Christians and Buddhists. In past times, the Was cut off the heads of victims who crossed their paths, leaving the skulls on posts leading to their villages. This was thought to protect the village and ensure a good rice crop. Their headhunting gave the Was a reputation as fearsome warriors that has lasted through their service in various insurgent groups and drug-trade militias.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Mons celebrate Buddhist holidays, including the full moons that begin and end Lent (a three-month period of Buddhist prayer and study that coincides with the monsoon season). At the Buddhist New Year in the Spring, Mons enjoy the Water Festival with music, dance, and playful water-throwing. There are also individual festivals held yearly for the temple structures called pagodas. These have all-night dance and theater performances, sports events, and special foods. Overseas Mons celebrate Buddhist holidays and Mon National Day, a commemoration of the founding of the last Mon kingdom.



## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, after a baby is born, the Mon mother and baby have turmeric, a yellow spice, rubbed on their skin as a healing potion. The mother rests near a fire for three days afterwards. Babies have their ears pierced, and women wear earrings all their lives. Boys stop wearing them at around age 10, when most become novice Buddhist monks for one to three months. At age 20, most Mon men become monks again for a short period. Some choose after age 21 to take vows and remain monks for life. The monks are greatly respected in Mon society for their self-discipline and learning. Some girls and older women become Buddhist nuns. Both monks and nuns keep their heads shaved, wear simple robes, and eat only vegetarian food.

Mons believe that the soul can leave the body, even when someone is asleep. Sometimes, it is said the soul takes the form of a butterfly. The soul leaves for good when someone dies, which is considered a step on the way to rebirth through reincarnation. If they can afford it, Mons prefer large funerals for family members, with music and a feast for guests and the Buddhist monks who chant prayers. The body is usually cremated.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Mons use honorifics in front of their names, usually *Nai* for men and *Mi* for women. When they meet, they put their hands together in a “prayer” position and bow slightly. If greeting an older person or a monk, the hands are held up in front of the face and there is more of a bow.

Guests are served tea or at least water. People take their shoes off inside the house. Older people are to be treated with the respect that you would show your own parents or grandparents, and should not be touched on the head or spoken to impolitely.

Boys and girls meet at festivals, and sporting or school events, which they attend in groups. Rather than dating, a boy usually visits a girl at her parents’ house. Once a relationship has begun, love-letters are often exchanged.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Mons in rural areas have suffered from efforts by the Myanmar military government to control their region for resource exploitation. Logging companies from neighboring Thailand decimated forests in the Mon State, and a pipeline bringing natural gas from offshore to Thailand traversed the area. Human rights groups accused the Myanmar military of abusing local people while securing the pipeline route, and a lawsuit was filed in the United States on behalf of affected villagers against one of the petroleum companies involved, Unocal. During the 1990s, Mons were moved to new settlements near Myanmar army bases and were used for forced labor as military porters and road/railway builders. Many thousands fled this treatment to Thailand, only to be pushed back across the border. Others have gone to Malaysia and other countries, seeking safety and work. The displaced Mons in rural Myanmar are especially susceptible to tropical diseases such as malaria, typhoid, and dysentery. Even in the cities, there is a severe shortage of medical facilities, personnel, and medicines. Malnutrition has been increasing steadily. In 2007–2008, steep increases in prices of essential commodities including fuel and rice further narrowed the margins of survival for the Mons in Myanmar.

In the countryside, Mon houses are built of wood or bamboo. On short or tall stilts, they are one or two stories high, with a sloping thatched roof and a verandah along the front. In the cities, Mons live in wood, brick, or cement houses, with ornamental carvings and balconies. Families with money now prefer brick or cement houses, as seen by people on trading journeys to Malaysia or Singapore, even though the electricity supply is not reliable enough to keep them cool with fans or air conditioning. Often there is a shop on the first floor and family living quarters upstairs. Mon-related ethnic groups, the Palaungs live in multi-family wood and bamboo longhouses, and the Was live in houses of woven bamboo.

A railway line runs through Mon State as far south as Tavoy. A highway runs parallel to it. Much transport is by shared jeep or truck, small riverboats, or ocean-going vessels. In the countryside, ox-carts and small motorbikes are the main forms of transportation, and travel in the mountains is done on foot.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

When a Mon couple wants to marry, they usually ask their parents’ permission. A simple ceremony is held in which the couple joins hands. The couple may exchange vows. Buddhist monks often attend, but it is not a religious ritual. Friends give wedding gifts and refreshments are provided.

Mon families are large, especially in the village. Having six or seven children is average. Child mortality is now high because of malnutrition and infectious diseases. Divorce is allowed in Mon society, and any children usually live with the mother.

Mons keep cats in their houses as pets, as well as colorful songbirds in bamboo cages. Dogs are considered very low and dirty animals and so aren’t considered good household pets. Stray dogs sometimes live in the monastery yards.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Mons, living in a tropical climate, wear light-weight cotton clothes. Men dress in shirts with trousers or sarongs called *nein*, often with a checked pattern. Mon women wear short jackets, blouses, or T-shirts with sarongs called *kloit*. For special occasions, they wear silk sarongs embroidered with gold or silver threads and a matching sash that crosses over one shoulder. The sarongs are made by simply sewing the fabric with one seam into a wide tube. Men knot theirs at the waist, and women wrap theirs tightly and then tuck them in at the waist. Mon girls decorate their hair with orchids and other flowers, and use a sunscreen or face powder made from a fragrant wood. Mon men used to have their legs and arms elaborately tattooed with Buddhist inscriptions and symbolic animals, but this practice is now uncommon.

The Mons’ relatives in the mountains of the Shan State, the Palaungs and Was, have their own distinctive styles of dress. Palaung men wear loose trousers and jackets of homespun indigo with bright-colored sashes and turbans. The women wear short cotton jackets with striped sarongs. Rattan, bamboo, and silver hoops circle their waists, and they wear masses of beaded necklaces and large, circular silver earrings. More beads are wound around their turbans. Wa men, when not in olive drab military uniforms, wear dark homespun cotton clothing. The women wear sleeveless jackets, short wraparound sarongs, and bracelets and headbands made of silver.

## **12**FOOD

Mons who can afford to enjoy curries of beef, pork, or chicken served with many dishes of rice, and seafood including crab, lobster, shellfish, prawns, and many varieties of river and ocean fish. *harrok*, a paste made of fermented fish, is a favorite accompaniment to any meal. Fish soup with noodles is a popular breakfast. Plain tea is served with meals, and tea or coffee with sweetened, condensed tinned milk is served between meals. Cookies, small cakes, and orange- or coffee-flavored hard candies can be bought in the shops. Fruits are the most popular snacks, especially mango, durian (a pungent large fruit with a hard spiky shell), pineapple, and watermelon. Mons make a cooling snack by mashing watermelon pulp in a bowl and mixing in sweetened condensed milk. Mon cuisine influenced Burmese cooking in the days of the royal courts and has in turn been influenced by the dishes of India, Thailand, and Malaysia. Mons consider their food spicier than that of the Burmese (Burmans).

## **13**EDUCATION

In villages, Mons rely on the local monasteries to teach their children. There is a shortage of schools, teachers, and educational materials in the government schools, and instruction there is carried out in Burmese. The Mons value literacy and education highly, and resent what they consider to be the deliberate suppression of their language and culture by the predominantly Burmese (Burman) government of Myanmar. The idea that the Mons are an assimilated people who have become absorbed into the Burmese mainstream has been promoted by the government. Mon schools supported by the New Mon State Party following the 1995 ceasefire have been shut down by the Myanmar government. Nonetheless, many Mon people, especially in the Thai border area, still speak and read their ancient language, which is mostly taught at monastery schools. The Mon political underground promotes Mon literacy and the study of ancient history.

## **14**CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mon classical music is played by ensembles of horns and percussion instruments. Two distinctively Mon musical instruments are a U-shaped frame with a series of metal gongs suspended along it, and the *mi-gyaung*, a long zither in the shape of a crocodile. "Mon songs" are one of the categories of Burmese classical music and are usually faster in tempo than other compositions. Mon dance, influenced by Indian classical dance, includes solo forms and the group "candle dance," performed by girls holding lit candles in each hand to reenact a courtly welcome to the Buddha.

Most of Mon literature is Buddhism-related. In centuries past, Mon monks wrote detailed interpretations of Buddhist theory and hid them away when rival ethnic kingdoms were in power. In the 20th century, Mons revived and published these old works. Religious texts in Mon are tolerated by the Myanmar government, but other Mon writing is discouraged. Underground writers, and those in exile, have written essays about Mon history. Exiled journalists formed the Independent Mon News Agency and Kaowao News Group to provide updates online. An exile group, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, publishes a newsletter called "The Mon Forum."

Mon woodcarvers, metal sculptors (specializing in Buddha images), mural painters and architects deeply influenced Bur-

mese, Shan, and Thai culture. Their work can be seen in the ruins of Myanmar's ancient capital, Pagan, and in art museums around the world. The famous Shwedagon Pagoda, a massive golden spire in Myanmar's largest city, Rangoon, was established by a Mon queen, Shin Saw Bu, in the 15th century.

## **15**WORK

The Mons have traditionally been wetland rice farmers, although forced relocation and demands for crop quotas by the Myanmar military have greatly disrupted their agricultural production. Mons also raise coconut and betel palms and other fruit trees. On the coast, Mons have fished and gathered shellfish, but this occupation has been diminished by overfishing by foreign trawler fleets. Logging of the remaining forests by foreign timber firms has made it difficult for Mons to hunt or gather rattan and other forest products. Mon farmers have had their land confiscated for military-owned plantations and the cultivation of *jatropha*, an introduced bio-fuel crop, which takes away land that was used for food production.

The economy has also been depressed in the cities, where people try to make their living in shops or offices, or through sea trade with Malaysia and Singapore. Many people have to hold more than one job just to buy enough rice for their families. Numerous educated Mon professionals have emigrated to Thailand or elsewhere overseas.

The Palaung people are known for their tea growing and are also hill rice cultivators. The primary cash crop for the Was has long been opium poppies. They gain a minimal profit from raising heroin's raw material, the value of which increases the more it is refined and the further it is transported. A great many Wa men serve in the United Wa State Army (20,000 strong), while the women raise and harvest hillside rice and opium poppies.

## **16**SPORTS

Young Mons enjoy practicing a style of kick-boxing similar to Thai boxing, but even less restrained. Soccer is extremely popular, as is *chinlone* (a game like "hacky-sack" played with a woven rattan ball).

## **17**ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

All-night theater shows, with comedy and musical performances, are a traditional form of entertainment. Cities, towns, and some villages have "video parlors" that show foreign movie DVDs, or homemade productions in the Mon language. Numerous Mon pop music groups make and distribute their own recordings. Songs by some Mon recording artists, like the pop band *Anat Ghae*, have been purchased and released with Burmese-language lyrics by Burmese (Burman) singers for national sales. With satellite television and the Internet severely restricted by the government, shortwave radios are still important sources of news and international music.

## **18**FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Mon woven cotton blankets from the town of Mudon are well-known in Myanmar. Mons in Myanmar and Thailand make pottery, often of a red-orange clay. The Mons are also skilled goldsmiths. The Palaungs craft lacquered baskets, textiles, and silver jewelry.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Heroin addiction is quite widespread among young people in the Mon cities and in the Palaung and Wa regions where opium is refined into heroin. Along with the trafficking of young women to Thailand and China for prostitution, intravenous heroin use has contributed to an extremely high rate of HIV/AIDS infection. There is still not enough educational material available about the disease and not enough medicine to treat those who have contracted it.

The Mon people have long resented the downfall of their ancient civilization and the suppression of their culture at the hands of outsiders, but now, due to Myanmar military government efforts to push them aside and obtain their natural resources, many of the Mons of Myanmar have struggled for their daily survival.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Mon society is tolerant of gay and transgender individuals. The status of women among the Mons is traditionally high, and the ancient Mon empires were from time to time ruled by queens. However, warfare and human rights abuse have left many Mon women victimized. Rape by the Myanmar military forces has been common, and Mon refugee girls and women have been forced into prostitution in Thailand.

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—by Edith Mirante

# MORO

**LOCATION:** Philippines

**POPULATION:** 2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Marano, Maguindanao, Tausag, other Malayo-Polynesian languages

**RELIGION:** Islam

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Moro are the indigenous Muslim population of the Southern Philippines and are composed of more than a dozen ethno-linguistic groups of Islamic faith that occupy Mindanao Island, the Sulu archipelago, and Palawan Island. The Spanish were the first to refer to the Muslim Filipinos as *Moros*, derived from the name used to describe Spanish Muslims, *Moors*. The term Moro held a derogatory meaning until the 1970s, when Islamic insurgent groups embraced the appellation.

The history of the Moro is traced back to the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia. Beginning in the 9th century, regional trade between the Philippine archipelago and Southeast Asia expanded rapidly. Muslim traders from Arabia and India situated in Southeast Asia were the first to introduce Islam into the southern Philippines. By the 1300s the conversion to Islam was in progress among the western most islands situated nearest to the sultanates of Melaka and Johor in modern Malaysia. The first Islamic sultanate in the modern day Philippines was established around 1450 on Jolo by an Arab named Syed Abu Bakr. According to Moro legend, Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan, a prince from the Sultanate of Johor, first introduced Islam to Mindanao Island in the early 1500s. By the early 16th century, Islam had spread across the Philippine archipelago, from Mindanao in the south to Luzon Island in the north. During this period the Moro were ruled by local leaders known as *datus* or *sultans*.

In the early 16th century, the Spanish began to colonize the Philippine archipelago. The new possession was named the Philippines after the Spanish King Phillip II. In 1565 Miguel López de Legazpi arrived in the Philippines, overthrew the Sultanate of Manila, and commenced the conversion of the northern Philippine islands to Catholicism. The Spanish zeal to extinguish Islam from the Philippines led to stiff resistance in the southern Islands, particularly on Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. Military bases were established on the southern islands, and Catholic missionaries succeeded in converting some of the population, in particular in the northeastern sections of Mindanao, but the Spanish presence in the Moro homeland remained minimal, and the Catholic and Muslim communities remained divided.

In 1898 the United States defeated Spain in a brief war and took control of the Philippines. The United States adopted secular rule, and the new colonial government maintained the territorial unity of the Philippines. The 1899 Kiram-Bates Treaty granted the Sulu Sultanate political and cultural autonomy, while recognizing that the island chain remained part of the Philippines. Over the next several decades, the United States initiated development projects throughout Moro territory in order to integrate the region into the Philippines.

The Philippines gained self-rule in 1935 and control of the Moro homeland came under the control of the Catholic-domi-



nated government in Manila. That year, the new Filipino government passed the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act, opening Mindanao to mass immigration of Catholic settlers. In 1903 the census recorded that 78,000 non-Muslim immigrants lived in Muslim majority regions. Official government support of migration ensured that by the end of the 20th century more than 9 million non-Muslims resided in what had been Moro-majority territory. In addition, the Filipino government abolished the sultanates and ended Moro political autonomy. The Muslim Moro population came under the direct administration of Catholic bureaucrats appointed by Manila, which only inflamed Moro resentment against Filipino rule.

By the 1960s, official corruption, economic underdevelopment, and increased Catholic migration led to deep resentment towards the Filipino government and the Catholic majority. Control of economic resources lay in the hands of non-Muslims and international conglomerates dominated the agricultural industry. The abolition of the traditional sultan-based rule and the social hierarchy that supported it had led to a power vacuum, which was filled by Moro insurgent groups who espoused a revival of Islamic beliefs. The relations between Muslims and Christians worsened considerably during the administration of Ferdinand Marcos, who ruled the Philippines from 1965–1986. Corruption reached extreme levels under Marcos, and Christian settlers aggressively pushed Muslim tribes off their land on Mindanao, which often resulted in violence. In the 1970s, in Cotabato province, Mindanao, the Filipino military armed Christian militias, which attacked Muslim villages. Violence

escalated on both sides and tens of thousands of Moros and Christians became internally displaced.

The most prominent anti-government organization was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which was comprised of Moro nationalists and Islamic revivalists. By 1972 the conflict on Mindanao had worsened to the point that the Filipino government declared martial law. The Libyan government lent its support to the MNLF and by the mid-1970s as much as a third of the Filipino military was deployed to Mindanao. In 1976 Marcos signed the Tripoli agreement, which granted autonomy to the Muslim-majority areas of Mindanao. The Marcos regime adopted a conciliatory stance towards the Moro. The Moro autonomous regions were determined by plebiscite. Regions in Palawan and Mindanao opted not to join either of the two autonomous regions.

The MNLF continued their resistance against the Marcos regime into the 1980s. This was in spite of the government development projects implemented in the late 1970s and early 1980s that were meant to alleviate the economic hardships suffered by the Moro. In 1987 a new constitution provided for a second round of autonomy plebiscites, but only four of thirteen regions opted to join the new Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. In 1996, President Fidel Ramos signed a major peace accord with the MNLF, yet the issues of land rights and Christian settlers on traditionally Moro tribal territory remained unsettled.

In the early 2000s, the Islamist fundamentalist group Abu Sayyaf (al-Harakat al-Islamiyya) grabbed headlines with bombings, kidnappings, and killings of Filipinos and foreigners, and through daring battles with the Filipino armed forces. Situated in western Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, Abu Sayyaf has fought to establish a Muslim homeland in the traditional Moro homeland. After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the U.S. military began assisting the Filipino military in their fight against Abu Sayyaf. In 2006 Abu Sayyaf's leader was killed in battle, and the government's counter insurgency campaign succeeded in expelling the group from a number of their strongholds. In spite of these setbacks, Abu Sayyaf remained capable of carrying out lethal raids and, in 2008, Filipino intelligence agencies revealed a plot by the group to assassinate President Gloria Arroyo.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Moro occupy the southern islands of the Philippines, including Mindanao Island, the Sulu archipelago, and Palawan Island, as well as numerous smaller islands. The Moro homeland is referred to as Bangsamoro, or nation of the Moro. The term Moro refers to Filipinos of Islamic faith and encompasses communities that are divided by long distances and speak distinct languages. While the Moro are the indigenous inhabitants of the Southern Philippines, the arrival of a large number of Christian migrants from the northern islands has reduced the Moro to a minority across much of their homeland.

The Moro ethno-linguistic group includes the Tausag, Badjao and Sama of the Sulu archipelago; the Magindanao, Maranao, Iranun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, and Sangil of Mindanao Island; the Yakan of Basilan Island, off the coast of Mindanao; the Palawani and Molbog of Palawan Island, and the Jama Mapun, situated in southern Palawan and the Sulu archipelago. Of these groups, the largest populations of Moros are the Maranao and Maguindanao, both over 700,000, and the Tausug, more



A Filipino boy stares at a former member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF) rebels, who are now integrated with the Philippine military while he patrols in Basilan province. (© Reuters/Corbis)

than 300,000. In addition, there are Moro migrant communities located in major urban centers across the Philippines.

The islands occupied by the Moro are mountainous and traversed by tropical forests, rivers, and lakes. The regional climate is dry during the winter months and receives heavy rainfall in the summer, when monsoon rains inundate the Philippines. The region is often struck by typhoons, which can cause extensive damage. Hydropower stations along regional river systems provide the majority of electricity on Mindanao. The Moro homeland also has potential for geothermal energy and may contain substantial petroleum deposits.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Moro speak more than a dozen languages. With the exception of Chavacano, the Moro languages fall within the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. Marano, Maguindanao and Tausag are spoken by more than 1 million individuals each, though not all native speakers of these languages are Moro. There are several Spanish Creole languages, which are known commonly as Chavacano. In addition, English is widely spoken as a second language.

The Austronesian languages of the Moro share a high degree of intelligibility. The intelligibility between Marano and Maguindanao speakers is more than 50%. Common terms shared across several languages include *ina* (mother), *ama* (father), *isa* (one) and *dua* (two). Common Tausag phrases include *Hisiyu*

*in ngan mu?* (What's your name?), *Maunu-unu nakaw?* (How are you?), and *Daing hain kaw?* (Where are you from?).

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Moro folklore has been preserved in oral epics that are composed of communal histories, genealogies, origin stories, and tales of ancient heroes, as well as stories of the Prophet Muhammad and other Islamic figures. Epics are often sung and epic singers undergo lengthy apprenticeships that often include memorization of the Quran and training in traditional music instruments.

Epics are known to only a small minority who have been trained by elders. Among the Sama of the Sulu archipelago and Yakan of Basilan Island, epic poems called *kata-kata* are only recited by important individuals who have the authority to conduct rituals. During communal festivals and holidays epics are recited for days on end. The *kata-kata* is sung by Sama narrators during a period over several nights that coincides with a full moon and serves as the main highlight of an important public gathering.

Moro epics often share striking similarities with non-Islamic epics. The epic *Tutolan ko Radia Mangandiri* (*Story of Radia Mangandiri*), first recorded by modern scholars in 1939, contains components of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. In the epic, the hero Mangandiri searches for Tuwan Potre Malano Tihai, who has been kidnapped by Maharadia Lawana. Lawana has himself transformed into a golden goat and Mangandiri is aided by his son Laksamana, who takes the form of a monkey. Other epics include the *Radya Indara Patra* and the *Diwata Ksalipan* of the Maguindanao, and the *Darangen* of the Maranao.

### **5 RELIGION**

The Moro are adherents of Islam and their religion is a defining characteristic of their ethnicity. The Islamic-Christian divide in the Philippines is both religious and cultural in nature. Once an individual or community has left Islam, they are no longer considered Moro.

In the 14th century, Islam was introduced to the Philippine archipelago by missionaries from Southeast Asia. Sufi missionary Makdum Karim is credited with Islamizing the population of Jolo in the Sulu archipelago. The Islamic concept of *din wa daula*, or unity of religion and state, was adopted by pre-colonial Moro leaders, who held positions of both political and religious significance.

The Moro are Sunni Muslims and Moro communities observe common Islamic norms. Friday is the holiest day of the week in Islam and Muslims must conduct prayers at specific hours of the day, from dawn until dusk. The Friday noon service *zabor* (prayers) open with a *adhan* (melody) sung by the imam. Prayers are often accompanied by singing and chanting. Common religious musical texts include poetic verses that recount the lessons of Prophet Muhammad. On Jolo Island the *lugh Maulad* is sung commemorating the birth of Muhammad. Islamic education prescribes the memorization of the Quran and Moro who are able to recite the entire Quran are held in high regard. Annual Quran-reading competitions choose Filipino representatives to international competitions, where Filipinos have won major prizes in recent decades.

The Moro, as is the case with Muslims across the world, practice a mixture of Shariah (sacred Islamic law) and *adalat*

(customary pre-Islamic traditions). Filipino Muslims hold common beliefs with their animist and Christian neighbors that appear to contradict Islamic teachings. This includes the notion that the world is filled with sprits (*dewas* and *hantus*) that are to be feared and must be appeased through offerings. It is commonly believed among the Tausag that *mangilit* (a head ghost) haunts humans and that precautions must be taken to prevent *lagtaw* (evil beings) and *balbalan* (witches) from harming infants. On Mindanao, illness and mental disorders are attributed to evil spirits that can only be appeased through *kalilang* (honorific ceremonies). Among the Tausag, local imams (Islamic religious leader) participate in food offering ceremonies meant to excise sprits from the body. The Moro also often fail to observe basic Islamic customs, including *salat* (ritual daily prayers) and *zakat* (annual alms-tax).

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Moro holidays are Islamic, and their date is determined by the lunar calendar, thus the days of celebration fall on different dates each year. Ramadan (*puwasa*) is a major Islamic holiday that celebrates the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad and takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this period Muslims refrain from eating or drinking from dawn to dusk. Pregnant women, children, the elderly, and the ill are exempt from fasting. Eid is the celebratory feast held at the end of Ramadan.

The Kabunsuan Festival is celebrated on December 15 in Cotabato City on Mindanao. The day celebrates the arrival of Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan in the early 16th century and the introduction of Islam to Mindanao Island. During the harvest season, celebrations are held throughout the agricultural areas of the Moro homeland. Music is played on percussion beams, bamboo clappers, and log drums and starts immediately after the planting of rice seedlings until the time they break from the ground.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

While the Moro are composed of various ethno-linguistic groups with distinct cultures, the Moro as a whole share some traditions of rites of passage, including the initiation of children into a community, circumcision, and marriage.

Among the Moro there is no particular ritual for naming newborn children, but local Moro have ceremonial acknowledgement of an infant as a member of the community. The Tausug of Sulu practice *paggunting*, or the ceremonial haircut, is conducted on male children around the age of two. The ceremony takes place in the father's home, and a pillar of woven leaves or a pot of rice is placed in the center of the room. Imams are invited, and passages from the Quran are chanted. At the end of the ceremony, perfume is poured on the child's head, and a lock of hair is cut. The child's head is kept shaven for several years following the ritual.

Circumcision is performed on pre-pubescent children around the age of 12. The male circumcision includes the cutting of the foreskin and religious ceremonies. Among the Tausug, quasi-circumcision is practiced on females, whereby a knife is rubbed on the girl's genitalia but no incision is made. Circumcisions may be performed by imams or laypeople, though the practice of circumcision was introduced along with Islam.

Moro youth are often married at a young age, in the mid to late teens. Negotiations are initiated by the groom's father and a go-between is frequently employed to negotiate the dowry. The value of the dowry is determined by the social class of the bride's family, with upper class brides receiving the most money. The dowry is considered compensation to the bride's family for the time and effort spent raising her.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In traditional Moro society, interpersonal relations are determined by a hierarchy of relationships. These relationships help establish alliances and regulate conflicts when communities resort to communal warfare, which still occurs between Moro groups. Among the Tausug of Sulu, relations can vary from *bagay magtaymanghud* (blood brother) and *babay* (good friend) to *tao ha'ut* (neutral) to *tao hansipak* (opponent) and *bantah* (personal enemy). *Bagay magtaymanghud* swear a personal allegiance on the Quran that, in theory, cannot be broken without risk of supernatural sanctions. A *bagay magtaymanghud* relationship can be established either by two friends who decide to cement their friendship to prevent betrayal and increase solidarity or on the order of a legal official who finalizes an amiable conclusion between enemies. Blood brothers have strong obligations to support each other in fighting, assisting with debts, and providing food and shelter. Conversely, *bantah* are sworn enemies that hold personal grudges and seek vengeance for a past wrongdoing. Often, a *bantah* is a person held responsible for the killing of a kinsmen or a friend. In battle a man should seek out and kill a *bantah*. Through mediation, *bantah* can become blood brothers. In a lifetime, relations between individuals experience numerous changes.

Among Moro youth, courtship between men and women is played out in part through music. Young men play narrower rimmed-gongs called *gandingan* to communicate their love to young women. Common love songs include the *baqat* of the Tausug, which incorporates archaic language, and the *kapranon* of the Maranao, a highly sentimental ballad. The Jew's harp, a bamboo wind instrument called *kubing* by the Maguindanao and Maranao and *kulaing* by the Yakan, is a favorite instrument of courtship and recreation. Nearly every young Yakan has a *kulaing* tucked in their headband.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Seventy-five percent of the Moro live in rural areas and are primarily employed in agriculture, while a quarter of Moro live in urban areas. Poverty is widespread among the Moro, and even those who find employment subsist off of meager wages. In many Moro communities, multiple families, as many as five, may live in a single household. The majority of Moro are subsistence farmers and fishermen and Moro families can afford few amenities.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The diversity of culture among the Moro precludes drawing a stereotypical image of Moro family life. The division of labor within the family runs along gender lines. The task of raising the children is primarily the responsibility of the females in the family, while the males in the household work in the fields or fish. One important aspect of many Moro communities is that women often have an equal role in decision making within the household. On the island of Sisangat, near the town of Siasi

in Sulu, the Sama women are recognized as the heads of the households. Women on the island marry in their early teens and, in the first years of marriage, the wives play a more obedient role and follow the model of the elders in the home. But, as women mature, they take on more responsibilities, including handling money and making purchases; men on the island must ask their wives for permission before making purchases.

Childrearing is primarily the responsibility of women, though men do assist in caring for the children. Among the Tausag, lullabies are sung by both mothers and older men in the family. Among the Maguindanao, special lullabies (*sangel*) are sung for either male or female children. The Sama *aembo-aembo* lullaby is sung by the mother while rocking the baby between the mother's raised feet. At the end of the song, the mother's legs are straightened, and the baby slides into the mother's lap.

Divorce is sanctioned among the Moro, and both women and men can initiate divorce proceedings. Among the Sama of Sisangat, the community will attempt to reconcile the couple seeking a divorce, but if reconciliation is not possible a local agama court will judge and settle the divorce proceedings. The *panglima* (religious functionaries) will divide the communal property and decide who is at fault for the divorce. The guilty party pays the *panglima* a fee. Divorces can be initiated because of adultery, stealing from one's spouse or their relatives, quarreling, domestic violence, the husband's gambling, and when a man does not surrender his earnings to his wife. The community does not ostracize divorcees; however, adulterers and those who steal from spouses or relatives are frowned upon.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Until recent decades, the Moro maintain traditional styles of clothing, including sarongs, scarves, sashes, and headdresses made of traditional fabrics, weaves, and designs. Materials used in clothing included cotton, silk, grasses, and bark. Designs were composed of plaid, stripes, and cloud-like backgrounds of various colors and images. Each community had their own distinct styles of clothing, and across the entire Moro homeland there was a wide diversity in clothing. The making of clothes was the responsibility of the women in the household and pieces of elaborate weaving could take months to complete. Today, mass-produced clothing has displaced traditional homemade Moro textiles.

### **12 FOOD**

The diet of the Moro homeland consists of rice, fish, and sago, a powdery starch made from the pith of the Sago palm tree. Food is not eaten with utensils, but by hand. Common crops produced on Mindanao are banana, coconuts, mango, coffee, durian fruit, seaweed, and pineapple. In coastal areas fish provide the bulk of the daily diet, and fisherman may spend many days on fishing expeditions in search of reef fish and deepwater fish.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Moro education generally lags behind non-Muslim Filipinos. Only 66% of Moro are literate, compared to more than 80% of non-Muslims. Less than 40% of Moro graduate from elementary school and only 18% have achieved a high school degree. The number of Moro university degree holders is very small.

Traditionally, the Moro educated their children in Islamic religious schools (*madrasahs*). The Spanish colonial government actively discouraged Moro from sending their children to madrasahs and went so far as to close Islamic religious schools and destroy their materials. Children were encouraged to attend Catholic missionary schools, which contributed to the social and economic inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In the early 20th century, the U.S. government introduced modern schools into Moro territory. These schools were for the children of the Moro elite who cooperated with the U.S. administration and only a small minority of Moro received an education. In 1900, about 25 such schools with 2,000 pupils operated in Moro areas. In 1903, that number had increased to 52 schools and by 1918 over 8,000 Moro children received a public school education. One factor limiting enrollment in public schools was that the administrators were often Christian missionaries and, thus, parents were reluctant to enroll their children in schools. Girls were encouraged to attend school and in 1916 a girl's dormitory was established in Jolo.

In the post-colonial era, new madrasahs and Muslim private schools opened to serve the Moro. The Muslim private schools, which are operated by religious organizations and private foundations, offer six years of elementary course work, four years of secondary schooling, and a two-year collegiate degree that includes courses in reading, writing, math, history, Arabic, and Islamic studies. The Egyptian government has supported these schools by sending Egyptian religious scholars to work in the madrasahs and private schools. In addition, Cairo has awarded hundreds of scholarships to Moro students.

One of the earliest Muslim private schools is Kamilol Islam Maahad Ulom in Marawi City, capital of Lanao del Sur province on Mindanao. The school was opened in 1938 by the Kamilol Islam Society and in 1952 it began to offer both Islamic and western style education. The institute's Arabic department was upgraded to an independent institution, the Jamiatul Philippine al Islamiya. Other notable schools in the Mindanao Arabic Institute, a madrasah in Marawi City run by the Agama Islam Society. Many of the teaching materials used in the schools have been donated by Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

The first university on Mindanao, Mindanao State University, opened in Marawi City in 1961. The institute offers dozens of graduate and undergraduate degree programs.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Moro communities in the Philippines share rich musical traditions. The principle musical instrument of the Moro is the *kulintang*, a set of graduated gongs laid in a row in a wooden frame. The number of gongs in a set can vary according to culture, with the Tausug using 11 or 13 and the Yakan on Basilan island utilizing as few as 5. The musical tone of each kulintang set differs. The lowest (*pangandungán*) and the highest (*pamantikan*) gongs are cast first and the tones of the other gongs are then adjusted accordingly. Young boys and girls practice on a *sarunay*, a miniature copy of the kulintang made of metal plates with rounded protrusions. The kulintang is important social property owned by individual families and ownership indicates high social status and cultivated taste. The value of a kulintang set is high and can serve as marriage dowries.

Other gong instruments include the *agung*, a large, deep-rimmed gong; the *gandingan*, gongs with narrower rims that are played in pairs, and the *babandil*, a gong with a narrower, turned-in rim. In addition, a drum called the *dabakan* often accompanies gongs. In Lanao del Sur province on Mindanao the Maranao people play deep-rimmed gongs called *pumalsan* and the *penanggisa-an*, and the Tausug people on the island Jolo play a pair of hanging gongs called *duwahan*.

### 15 WORK

More than 80% of the Moro population is employed in the forestry, agriculture, and fishing sectors or as laborers. Only a quarter of Moro live in urban settings, where it is more common to open small shops or trade goods. Few Moro work in mining, manufacturing, construction and finance, forms of employment dominated by non-Muslims. Unemployment among Moro is just below 60%, which is slightly above the national average. Non-employed Moro are mostly subsistence farmers who work a small plot of land and have a higher standard of living than their urban, unemployed counterparts. In coastal areas, especially in the Sulu archipelago, many residents are subsistence fisherman.

Unemployment on Mindanao has been exacerbated by an electricity crisis that struck the island in the early 1990s. The hydroelectric plants that supplied 90 % of the regions electricity had their production cut in half when water levels in a lake that fed one of the main plants reached dangerously low levels, which was caused by abnormally hot weather and deforestation in the watersheds that fed the lake. The result was that the region suffered frequent brownouts, causing factories in the region to run at lower capacity. The ongoing conflict between the local Moro and government forces on Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago has further hindered economic development and frightened off outside investment.

### 16 SPORTS

Basketball, a legacy of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, has a strong following in the Philippines and several teams from the Mindanao Visayas Basketball Association are situated on Mindanao. The Filipino marital art *Eskrima*, also known as *Kali*, putatively has its origins in Moro culture and history. The sport has its origins in the tribal warfare that was widespread across the Philippines in the pre-modern period. The term *Eskrima* is derived from the Spanish word for fencing. *Eskrima* practitioners strike with their hands, feet, swords, and sticks and grapple or throw opponents.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Moro have a mix of traditional and modern forms of entertainment and recreation. In larger cities, particularly on Mindanao, all forms of modern entertainment are available, including theaters, bars and professional sports. In rural areas and remote islands, traditional music remains a popular form of entertainment. Music is often performed at weddings and other social gatherings.

Music frequently accompanies agricultural work and it is believed that songs not only pass time but also encourages plant growth. Farmers often employ music to pass the time, including drums and wind instruments. The Yakan utilize a log drum (*tuntungan*), while the *oniya-niya* wind instrument of the Maranao is made of a coconut leaf and a stalk of rice,

which when blown on produces a sound thought to frighten away wild animals. Sama children sing the *puk lara* while sitting in a circle and playing a game of catch.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Until the mid 20th century, Moro artistic creativity was expressed through in traditional weaponry, namely swords and daggers. Moro edged-weapons often were ornate, carved from fine woods, and included silver and gold overlay and inlay. Weapons made for wealthy elite had handles made of ivory, inlaid jewel, and were formed in the shape of birds or spirits.

The *kris* is a double-edged dagger that is more than a foot in length and has a blade with multiple curves that form a pattern of waves, which enhances the blade's ability to cut flesh. The *kris* was a common weapon among Moro warriors, who used the daggers to slash their enemy. *Kris* blades contain nickels, which form grainy patterns, and the finest blades are reportedly made from iron extracted from meteoroids. *Kris* swords were commonly thought to hold spiritual powers that could be good or evil in nature. Other common Moro weapons include the *kalis*, a sword similar in style to the *kris*, and the *kampilan*, a single edged sword several feet in length.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The primary social problems amongst the Moro remain lack of economic opportunities and violence tied to the Christian-Muslim conflict and anti-government insurgency. Since the traditional Sultanate system of government in Moro territories was abolished in the 1930s, the Filipino government has favored the consolidation of arable land into the hands of non-Muslims with close ties to the government. Wealth derived from large plantation style agricultural projects on Mindanao often is not reinvested in the local community and is funneled into the hands of non-Moro elite. The local Moro population remains impoverished and has little access to higher education.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In Moro society there is a clear division of gender roles. While 75% of all employed men work in agriculture, only 40% of employed women are engaged in agriculture; 45% of employed women are employed in retail business or social services, mostly in urban areas. Women are more likely than men to have no educational degree and are much less likely to have a higher educational degree.

The division between genders carries over into musical traditions. Among the Sama of Sulu, women play the *kulintangan* gongs, while men play the hanging gongs. Wooden castanets are used exclusively by female dancers. The *tariray* dance is performed by young women with subtle erotic movements of the hands and body, the *titik tabawan* is usually performed by older women. The Maranao *kulintangan* is composed of two principle instruments: the *kulintang*, played by a young woman, and the *dubakan*, reserved for men. The musical performance is likened to a dialogue or courtship between the performers.

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—by David Straub

## MOTU

**PRONUNCIATION:** MOH-too

**LOCATION:** Papua New Guinea

**LANGUAGE:** Motu (Hiri Motu); Tok Pisin; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Motu are an Austronesian-speaking group who live on the southern coast of the independent nation of Papua New Guinea. They occupy a stretch of coastline that was the first area of permanent European settlement on the island of New Guinea. The Motu are well represented in literature because of their elaborate annual trading expeditions in distant parts of the Gulf of Papua. The Motu men constructed large sailing craft called *lagatoi*. The *lagatoi* were multihulled rafts built out of large logs and lashed together. These rafts were propelled by crab claw-shaped sails made of coconut fiber. The crew needed to sail one of these vessels was around 30 men. Although the annual *hiri* expeditions are no longer undertaken by the Motu, there are annual ceremonies and events that commemorate the tradition.

### **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Motu homeland is in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea has been an independent nation since 1975 and occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, the third largest island in the world. The capital of Papua New Guinea is Port Moresby, a city that divides the traditional Motu territory in half. Port Moresby is built on the land traditionally belonging to two peoples, the Motu and the Koitabu. The Motu were the subject of one of the earliest ethnologies of the region that was published in the latter half of the 19th century. The first European accounts of the Motu record the same 14 villages that are still occupied by the Motu today. The Motu coastline has two distinct seasons: a hot, dry period from April to November, and a wet, humid period from November to March. Some Motu have left their villages and moved to small settlements on the outskirts of Port Moresby, while others live in the city itself in modern homes with running water and electricity.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The language of the Motu is related to the other Austronesian languages of New Guinea and the South Pacific region. Austronesian languages are in the minority in Papua New Guinea, and speakers of these languages are usually only found in coastal regions. The Papuan languages are the majority languages of this island nation and found mostly in non-coastal areas. The distribution of these two language families reflects the prehistoric migration of these two populations to the island. The ancestors of the present-day Austronesian speaking populations, such as the Motu, were later migrants to the island.

During their annual trading expeditions, the Motu used a special form of their language referred to now as "Hiri Motu." Recognizing the importance of this language in the south coastal region of the country, the government made Hiri Motu one of the three official languages of Papua New Guinea. Hiri

Motu is losing ground to Tok Pisin, another one of the official languages of the country.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

The existing body of folklore and mythology of the Motu is dwindling at a rapid rate due to urbanization and, in some cases, education. In many cases, children no longer have the opportunity to learn the traditional stories of the past. Many Motu stories recount conflict between the Motu and their neighbors. Stories of the successes of ancestors in raiding neighboring villages are still remembered by some older Motu. Traditional myths concerning the origins of the Motu, the development of fire, the history of the hiri trading expeditions, and others have been written down and published as small booklets. Many other groups in Papua New Guinea have done the same thing in an effort to preserve the traditions, although in an altered form.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The vast majority of Motu are regular church-going Christians. Missionaries have been active in the area since the earliest history of Motu-European contact and the London Missionary Society dominated this activity. While some of the traditional beliefs and ceremonies are maintained in Motu society, the United Church—the descendant of the London Missionary Society—has transformed much of traditional Motu practice. For instance, the Motu once believed in witchcraft and sorcery, but they did not practice it; instead, they believed that neighboring groups had this power and the Motu would have to enlist the services of outsiders if they wanted to inflict illness or death on one of their own.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The Motu celebrate Christian holidays. Most Motu also recognize and, in some cases, celebrate the secular national holidays since they participate in the nation's wage-earning work force. The Hiri Festival is also an important holiday. It gives the Motu a chance to celebrate their traditional heritage and enjoy the dress and entertainment of traditional Motu society.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

The Motu have experienced the effects of modernization more than many other groups in Papua New Guinea. As a result, many of the traditional aspects of their culture have been lost. The traditional stages of life that were part and parcel of Motu traditional society no longer exist. Only the payment of "bride price" still exists as part of a traditional rite of passage. The transitions from infant to adolescent, adult, and then onwards to death, are marked more in the European manner. Birthdays are celebrated in Motu homes in Port Moresby. Traditional mortuary practices are no longer observed, although a traditional mourning period of about four weeks is observed in regards to non-essential activities.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Since many Motus live and work in the capital city, greetings and leave-takings are based on urban patterns of social interaction. The choice of language for the greetings is the most important aspect of the interaction. Motus will usually greet each other in Hiri Motu. They can choose other languages as well,

usually choosing either English or Tok Pisin. In each case, the choice of language directly reflects the nature of the social relationship between the parties involved.

The kinship terminology of the Motu is the "Hawaiian" type. A kinship terminology is the set of terms that a person uses to refer to or address a relative. In American English, one distinguishes between one's mother and one's aunts, but typically does not distinguish between maternal aunts and paternal aunts. In the Motu system, there is no distinctive word for "mother" and another for "aunt." Instead, both are referred to by the same term. The Motus do distinguish between relatives on the father's side from relatives on the mother's side.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Traditionally, the Motu built their houses in lines connected to each other by walkways over the tidal shallows. The line of houses corresponded to a descent group—that is, a group of people related to each other by shared descent from a common ancestor. Some Motus have chosen to remain in the village area but have built houses on land. Motu village houses often have corrugated sheet metal walls and thatched roofs with plank floors. Some of the Motu who live in traditional villages do not have electricity and rely on kerosene lanterns for lighting and battery-operated radios to keep in touch with the larger society and the outside world. The urban Motus live in a range of styles of house. Wealthy, professional Motus have large houses with all of the amenities that most Americans are accustomed to having in their homes.

Before Europeans colonized the Motu region, transportation between Motu villages was by canoe and sometimes by foot. Now, all Motu villages are connected by road to Port Moresby. Many Motus still use canoes to visit other villages. The Motus are well known to anthropologists for their large ceremonial canoes used in the hiri trading expeditions.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The nuclear family is the basic unit of social organization among the Motu. Households were linked together by a shared walkway and a shared cooking area.

Marriage among the Motu today has changed from when Europeans first encountered them. Today, the Motus are monogamous. In pre-colonial times, men of status and wealth often had several wives. Motu marriages were arranged in traditional times, and there were many restrictions on potential spouses. Child betrothal was quite common, and gift exchange occurred often until the final bride price was paid and the marriage was finalized. The modern Motus are free to choose their marriage partners; however, wealthy Motu families have inflated bride prices and it now often takes quite some time for a marriage transaction to become finalized. The Motu have garnered a reputation in Papua New Guinea for demanding the highest cash bride prices in the country, topping 60,000 kina.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional clothing for Motu women consists of a grass fiber skirt. They did not wear any footwear or any covering on their upper bodies, which were frequently tattooed. For ceremonies and other important occasions, both men and women would oil their skin. Feathers, flowers, and the leaves of croton plants were used to decorate women's hair and were also placed in armbands that they wore on their upper arms. Traditional

dress is still used by the Motu for ceremonial events such as bride price payments, weddings, and canoe races. Urban Motus wear Western-style clothing all the time.

## **12 FOOD**

The traditional foods of the Motu were fish, yams, and bananas. They also collected shellfish and crabs. The Motu traded with their neighbors and also on trading expeditions to farther villages for food. A vibrant tuna fishing industry exists in some Western Motu villages, based on an important myth regarding its origins. Nowadays, Western foodstuffs have become staples. Tinned fish and canned Indonesian curry dishes are popular foods. Rice and tea are also important foods that are purchased in local shops and grocery stores in Port Moresby. American food products such as boxed cereals, soft drinks, and hot dogs can be purchased in the Port Moresby stores. Although families often pool their foodstuffs and cook communally, the Motu nuclear families eat separately.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Traditional education was structured along sex lines. Boys learned adult male activities from their male relatives and females learned adult female activities from their female relatives. Nowadays, public education is available to the Motu and almost all families take advantage of it. Some Motus go on to college at one of the national colleges or universities, such as the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Traditional Motu dances were very impressive. Men and women wore elaborate face paint and feather headdresses. The dancers performed intricate group dances. Dancing was accompanied by drumming and sometimes singing. The Motu use hand-held, hourglass-shaped drums called *kundu* throughout Papua New Guinea. Dancing was discouraged by Christian missionaries, and, as a result, many of the traditional ceremonial dances are no longer performed and are lost to memory. Some dances are still performed on important occasions and for the tourists that regularly visit Motu villages.

## **15 WORK**

The traditional division of labor in Motu society was along sex lines. Men built houses and canoes, constructed fishing nets, and did the fishing and participated in the trading expeditions. Women made the pottery that the men took to trade on the hiri voyages. Women also cooked, fetched water, and gathered terrestrial foodstuffs and marine resources. Both men and women tended the garden where the Motu grew limited crops. Today, both men and women seek wage labor outside the village, usually in nearby Port Moresby. Many of the Motus hold white-collar professional jobs. Traditional industries are all but lost and only few still remain for resuscitation at festivals and ceremonies.

## **16 SPORTS**

Rugby is both a spectator and participant sport all over Papua New Guinea. The Motus are able to watch league (semi-professional) rugby since many of them either live or work in Port Moresby.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Canoe races are an important form of recreation for the Motu. The canoes are modeled on the traditional styles, but are constructed out of modern materials. For the Motu who live in the surrounding areas of Port Moresby, movie houses, clubs, and pubs are places for entertainment of various sorts. The national beauty pageant that crowns “Miss Papua New Guinea” for her competition in larger, regional pageants is an important event for all of those living in Port Moresby. The Motus are always well represented in this event.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Art among the Motu was limited to the styles of pottery that were manufactured by women and the elaborate body tattoos of women. Although many Pacific societies have given up the practice of tattooing, some Motu girls and young women are still being tattooed. Patterns are geometric in nature with some Christian motifs having become part of the imagery.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Maintaining the distinctiveness of their culture in the shadow of urbanization and modernization represented by the capital city of Port Moresby is a challenge for the present-day Motu. Their language has lost some ground to the popularity of Tok Pisin among young people, especially those that migrate to the city and its suburbs. Larger problems that face the entire nation are alcohol and drug abuse, the spread of HIV, and enforcement of laws which forbid the importation, sale, or possession of ammunition and pornography of any kind. The law against pornography exists in an effort to maintain respect for the traditional dress of women. In fact, every participant in the Miss Papua New Guinea must dress in traditional attire as part of the competition. For most, this will mean that they will have to appear topless. The government and society are striving to maintain the appreciation of this form of dress for its cultural value, and to not allow for its objectification.

The Motu Koitabu are the group of people indigenous to areas in and around the coastal city of Port Moresby and the National Capital District. They are the traditional owners of the land upon which the city of Port Moresby is located, and number about 30,000. After Papua New Guinea (PNG) obtained its independence from Australia, on 16 September 1975, Port Moresby became the nation’s capital. Large numbers of people from other provinces moved into the city, making it the business, commercial and administrative center of the nation. Increasingly all aspects of the lives of the Motu Koitabu—political, economic, social and cultural—have become marginalized. In 1999 the Inaugural Summit on Motu Koitabu was held in Baruni village. Recommendations for social, economic, and ecological change were unanimously agreed upon and adopted by the members of the summit, and those are now referred to as “The Baruni Declaration.”

Garbage build-up and pollution are increasingly serious problems in Port Moresby and in the surrounding villages. These problems directly impact the Motu Koitabu.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

As a coastal culture of Papua New Guinea, the Motu do not evidence the types of sexual antagonism and segregation that are common in the Highlands cultures of the nation (see the *Dani* and *Melpa*). The extensive tattooing of Motu women is partic-

ularly noteworthy. While men were only tattooed across their chests in recognition of exploits in headhunting raids, Motu women were tattooed from head to toe. The elaborate patterns of the tattoos are handed down from mothers to daughters. As early as the age of five, Motu girls would receive the first tattoos on the backs of their hands. From then on, and following a strict age pattern, further tattoos were added to a girl's body until she would be completely tattooed by the time the girl married after puberty. Nowadays, many Motu girls use felt markers to draw the elaborate designs on their bodies instead of undergoing the painful and permanent traditional inking.

Men and women had distinct roles in the important hiri trading expeditions. Women would make the pots that were in turn traded for sago as part of the trade. While the men were away on a hiri trading expedition, the unmarried females would remain secluded in their homes until the men returned. During that time, these girls would continue receiving elaborate tattoos and they would be instructed in the ways of being a proper Motu woman by their elderly female relatives. During their seclusion, the young women were not allowed to bathe, comb their hair, and were required to eat only vegetables using special chopstick-like utensils called *diniga* in Motu.

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—by J. Williams

# MOUNTAIN MON-KHMER GROUPS

**PRONUNCIATION:** mountain MOHN kuh-MER groups

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Hill tribespeople

**LOCATION:** Cambodia; Laos; Thailand; Vietnam

**POPULATION:** 210,000 (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Mon-Khmer; Austronesian

**RELIGION:** Traditional spirit-based beliefs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

As well as the ethnic Khmer, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other groups who live in Cambodia, there are the hill tribespeople who are not ethnic Khmer, as are the vast majority of Cambodians. Numbering less than 2% of the Cambodian population, they add a colorful and fascinating chapter to Cambodian life.

The tribespeople of Cambodia were originally called, by the Khmers, *phnong* or *samre*, meaning "savage." The Cambodian government began calling them Khmer Loeu ("Upper Khmer," or "Highland Khmer") in the 1960s, ostensibly to create unity among the highland tribal groups and the lowland Khmer. The French often referred to all the mountain people in Cambodia and Vietnam as *montagnards* ("men of the mountains"), and some Communist Cambodians called them the *Khmers Daeum* ("original Khmers") highlighting that they had been "untainted" by western civilization. While some hill groups speak languages related to Khmer, most come from a very different language and cultural background. Most have very different appearance, customs, survival strategies, and religion from lowland Cambodians.

Among the hill tribes of Cambodia are the Brao (or Lave, Love), who numbered about 18,000 in 1984. The Kui (Kuoy, Soai) number more than 100,000 in east-central Thailand, northeast Cambodia, and Laos. The Saoch numbered about 500 in 1981. These are located in southwest Cambodia and are closely related to the Pear and the Chong. The Pear numbered about 1,000 in 1981. Also known as the "Bahr" or "Pohr," they live in southwest Cambodia. The Krung and Kravet totaled about 12,000 in 1984. The Stieng of Cambodia number approximately 25,000, with about double that number in Vietnam. According to official Cambodian government figures for 2002, there were 211,851 hill tribespeople in the country.

The origins of the hill tribes are not clear. Some scholars think that the tribes who speak Mon-Khmer languages, such as the Kuy, Mnong, Stieng, Brao, and Pear, were originally part of the long-term migration of peoples from the northwest. The Austronesian-speaking groups of Rade and Jarai may have migrated first to coastal Vietnam and then west into the highlands of Cambodia. The Suoi may be the remnant of the population who lived in Cambodia before the Khmer. Some scholars think they could be the original Cambodians.

During the French Protectorate which started in 1863, the colonizing French recruited some tribesmen to serve as soldiers with the French army, mainly as trackers and to help locate Communist jungle hideouts. Some young men continued this tradition after independence in 1953 by joining the Royal Cambodian Army.

During the 1960s, the Cambodian government had the army take part in a broad-based civic action program among the hill tribes, which included teaching them the Khmer language and culture in an effort to eventually assimilate them into Cambodian society. Most of this involved making schooling compulsory for all children including those of the Khmer Loeu.

Many tribespeople resented these efforts, as they had resented lowland Khmer for many decades. In 1963 when he fled the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, to go into the jungles and organize a Communist resistance group, Saloth Sar, later better-known as Pol Pot or "Brother Number One," found refuge in the tribal areas of the province of Ratanakiri. Three years later he had gained the trust and confidence of some of the hill tribespeople and established his office for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in Ratanakiri. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Khmer Communists, or Khmer Rouge, were able to recruit a number of young tribesmen to their cause. The illiterate tribal youth, unfamiliar with any element of civilization, became the prototype of the Khmer Rouge army, first a target of ridicule and then an object of fear after the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia in April 1975.

Although they had supported the Khmer Rouge, largely because of their marginalization during the Khmer Republic (1970–1975), many tribal groups suffered at the hands of Democratic Kampuchea, the government established by the Khmer Rouge. Like other Cambodians, tribespeople were forced to abandon their traditional religious rituals, customs, and activities which Communist rulers thought took tribal attention away from the revolution being conducted by Democratic Kampuchea.

In December 1978, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and by mid-January they controlled most of the country. The new Vietnamese-backed government of Cambodia then struggled through the 1980s to reestablish institutions and a society destroyed by the Khmer Rouge who mounted attacks at them from jungle strongholds.

The Khmer Rouge gradually regained control of much of northeastern Cambodia in the 1980s, and the Kuy in particular, helped protect Pol Pot's jungle base at Anlong Veng. In most areas, however, the tribespeople were allowed to live in their village societies, with the new pro-Vietnamese Communist government of Cambodia also eager to incorporate tribes into mainstream Cambodian life. An attempt is now being made to teach the Cambodian language and culture to the various tribespeople, although the government claims that tribal languages and customs will continue to be respected.

At the same time, both legal and illegal harvesting of timber in the forests of northeastern Cambodia have brought many tribespeople into Cambodian culture as they are deprived of the forest areas needed for agriculture. As their homeland rapidly shrinks, their way of life is changing also.

For centuries, tribal peoples have recognized the political superiority of the lowlanders surrounding them. Highlanders acknowledged the domination of the lowland people by rendering obeisance to the lowland political leaders in exchange for lowlanders' recognition of them being the descendants of the region's first residents. Between 1600 and 1860, this relationship was symbolized in a triennial exchange of gifts between lowlanders and highlanders, specifically the Cambodian king and Jarai sorcerers, called "Lords of Fire and Water."

More tangible relationships also existed between many highland tribes and lowland Cambodians. Highlanders traded products which they gathered from the forest to the lowlanders, such as wild animal skins, herbs, exotic flowers and feathers, beeswax, lac resin used for shellac, and tusks and horns used as medicine. In exchange, the hill groups received metal, pottery, salt, and bronze drums. Tribal peoples were also frequently used by the lowlanders as voluntary or involuntary laborers. Lowlanders raided the tribes themselves or pitted tribes against one another in a search for slaves.

In some areas and for much of the past, however, tribal peoples were able to live in isolation from lowlanders.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In the late 1960s, the hill people were estimated to number between 70,000 and 100,000. Present-day estimates of their number are much higher, around 210,000. Population figures are difficult to determine because of the geographical roughness of the terrain and its isolation from lowland Cambodians.

The hill tribes live in remote highland areas in the plateaus and mountainous areas on the western, northern, and eastern periphery of Cambodia. Most highland people are located in the northeast provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondulokiri, Kratie, and Stung Trung. Indeed, most of the population of Ratanakiri and Mondulokiri are still highland peoples.

The Khmer Loeu of Cambodia include 13 distinct minority groups. The major tribal groups are the Kuy, Mnong, Stieng, Brao, Pear, Jarai, and Rade. Each group resides not only in Cambodia but in a neighboring country, Laos, Vietnam, or Thailand. This is possible because of the isolation and ruggedness of the terrain, making political control of the plateaus and mountains difficult. Hill people down through the centuries have been able to avoid contact with lowlanders and to travel fairly freely across political boundaries.

Some 14,186 Kuy, according to the 1995 Census, live in north central Cambodia in the provinces of Kampong Thom, Preah Vihear, and Stung Trung and in neighboring Thailand. Maybe half that number live in Cambodia-proper.

The Brao tribes live in northeastern Cambodia and just across the border in Laos. The total Brao population is between 10,000 and 20,000, about evenly divided between Cambodia and Laos.

The Mnong live in eastern Cambodia along the border with Vietnam. They number between 20,000 and 25,000. The Stieng also number between 20,000 and 25,000 and live along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.

The Pearic group is made of numerous smaller tribes totaling about 10,000 people. The Pear live in north central and Western Cambodia. The Chong live in the Cardamom Mountains in Battambang Province in northwest Cambodia and in neighboring Thailand. The Saoch live in southern Cambodia. The Samre live in northwestern Cambodia and the Suoi live in central Cambodia.

The Jarai people live in northeastern Cambodia and are related to even larger numbers of Jarai in central Vietnam. The 1995 Census identified 11,549 Jarai in Cambodia, while over 200,000 Jarai live in Vietnam. The Rade are closely related to the Jarai. Approximately 20,000 Rade live in Cambodia with more than 100,000 Rade living across the border in Vietnam.

The turmoil of the Vietnam War and rule by Democratic Kampuchean that followed has deeply affected the hill tribes

of Cambodia. While some groups were recruited by the Khmer Rouge as soldiers, others fought to escape conscription and control by the Communists. Many tribal people escaped the war and horrors of Cambodia by slipping over the border into neighboring countries where they lived with fellow tribespeople with whom they shared culture, language, and often family ties. When conditions improved in Cambodia, they moved back across the border.

Some tribal people escaped to Thailand to live with fellow tribespeople or were placed in refugee camps and were then eventually resettled in the United States or other Western countries.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The hill tribes of Cambodia belong to two very different language groups. The Mon-Khmer speakers include the Mnong and Stieng. The Brao language is also a Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic language, and is closely related to Krung and Kravet languages also spoken in Cambodia. The Chong, who numbered approximately 5,500 in 1984, are related to the Pear and Saoch, all three of whom speak Mon-Khmer languages.

Austronesian language speakers include the Rade, Jarai, both closely related to Cham. Each is spoken by the several thousand members of both tribes in northeastern Cambodia.

Names vary greatly from group to group. A person may carry an individual name, a nickname, and may change names frequently according to life situations and events. In some groups, people are called by the name of their father, mother, child, or spouse. Sometimes the name of a relative is added to the individual's name.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The heroes and myths of the hill tribes of Cambodia are religious and familial in nature. Heroes are actual or fictional ancestors whose deeds and characteristics are passed down from generation to generation. Many of these heroes are considered to have originated particular clans and are respected, even worshipped, by their descendants not only as great people but as the founders of their tribal or descent group.

The myths of particular groups relate largely to these founding ancestors. Other myths relate stories of the spirits, landscape, animals, and flora of a group's environment and explain their surroundings. The myths of the highland groups thus form part of their traditional religious beliefs.

### **5 RELIGION**

The Mountain Mon-Khmers continue the traditional beliefs and practices of their ancestors. They believe that magical spirits live in the natural world, thus inhabiting rocks, mountains, rivers, and trees.

Most religious leaders are also spirit healers who lead ceremonies to cure illness and other physical and mental misfortunes. They do so by communicating with the spirits who have caused the difficulty or have allowed it to happen.

Among Pearic tribal groups, each village has two important sorcerers whose main duty is to control the weather. By so doing, they protect the community from natural calamities and aid in the timely development of the crops.

Sorcerers among the Jarai and Rade of northeast Cambodia in the past held extensive religious and political power. These became known as "kings of fire and water," and their power

extended beyond an individual village and over numerous villagers. Stieng religious beliefs focus on spirits and are conducted at the family level.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The holidays of the tribal groups of Cambodia are primarily religious celebrations. Festivals are held to propitiate the spirits and exorcise evil spirits. The beginning of the lunar New Year is always an important festival. Life-cycle events such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death are celebrated by families and villages. These are often major festivals involving multiple families and villages and considerable money and preparation.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Among most hill groups, infants and small children are greatly desired and are treated with great indulgence. Seldom reprimanded or hit, they are carried constantly by parents, siblings, or extended family members.

The children of most hill groups are socialized primarily by the immediate family, with assistance from extended family members and fellow villagers. By the time girls are five or six years of age, they are assisting their mother in the home and with younger siblings, and boys are assisting with garden duties and caring for the family's livestock. By the age of eight or nine, both boys and girls are helping in the fields.

Many youth marry while they are still teenagers. Among most groups, girls generally marry after puberty, when they reach 13 or 14. Boys marry a little later, at 16 or 17. This is the case because by the time most hill tribespeople have reached their early teens, they are fully socialized into adult life. By 13 and 14 years of age, boys and girls are acting as adults. After marriage, then, they have the skills to support their new family.

The lives of adult hill people center on family, making a living, and dealing with the spirits or gods who rule the earth.

At death, ceremonies are held to help the soul of the deceased as it makes its move to the afterlife. These consist, for most people, of prayers and ritual offerings made at regular intervals. For people who die unnatural deaths, special ceremonies must be conducted to exorcise their spirit and prevent it from doing similar harm to living relatives. Some tribal groups bury their dead, others cremate them. Among the Saoch of the Pearic group, the corpse of a dead person is buried and not cremated like among the neighboring majority Khmers who are Buddhist.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

For tribal people, like most traditional people living in small villages, interpersonal relations are based on fairly strict rules of etiquette. Since most villagers have known one another since birth and will continue living with one another for years to come, people treat one another as extended family and try to avoid conflict in their everyday relations.

Greetings are important, for they assist villagers in acknowledging one another, keeping harmony, and preventing conflict. With strangers, most tribespeople are usually modest and reserved. With family and fellow villagers, they are more demonstrative. Always, however, there is an emphasis on getting along with one another. Men and women, even closely related, seldom display affection openly. Women must be respectful and cautious, especially with strangers.

Visiting among hill peoples is a major activity and predominant form of entertainment. Visiting between families within a village appears casual, but is less so than it appears. While neighbors go to one another's homes often and apparently without announcement, they are careful to go only at acceptable times. Visiting between villages is even more formal. While relatives may visit from one village to another fairly casually, visits by larger groups of people for ceremonies or festivals are arranged ahead of time as to place, time, and the obligations of both hosts and guests.

Young people do not date as do youth in the West, or indeed in Phnom Penh. Courtship may be brief and involve little contact between the future bride and groom in some groups, with parents or matchmakers doing most of the visiting and arranging. In other tribes, courtship may occur over years and involve relatively frequent contact between the couple. Usually, contact between young men and women is careful, supervised, and understood to be leading to marriage.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most hill groups live in regions remote from the lowland cities and towns and denser population areas of Cambodia. In Ratanakiri Province, for example, the only way into much of the province during the rainy season is by airplane and elephant: the airport transports travelers to a town, where travel is halted unless one can find elephants. In the elections from 1958 when Long Boret, then a novelist (and later prime minister), was campaigning for his seat in Sung Treng (the province which at that stage included Ratanakiri), he conducted much of his electioneering from an elephant. Motor vehicles are still virtually unusable for much of the year because the roads are too muddy or flooded. Even foot traffic is difficult.

The distance from the centers of Cambodian life and the difficulty in travel, especially at certain times of the year, have isolated many tribal groups also from governmental services, including health and education.

Health facilities remain much less available to hill tribes than to Cambodians of the central plains, and life expectancy is lower than among fellow countrymen. Most hill groups attribute illness and physical and mental misfortune to supernatural causes, especially spirits, and much health care is directed at preventing and curing spirit action. Most illness and accidents thus continue to be dealt with through local healers rather than medical clinics which operated well in towns in the 1960s, but were destroyed in the war and not rebuilt until the early 1990s.

In all tribes, most people have extensive knowledge of traditional medicinal plants and herbs which are grown in backyard gardens or gathered in the nearby forest. Among some groups, in addition, community specialists are available to treat serious illness.

The Khmer Loeu live in widely scattered villages near their fields. When they abandon their fields to seek new ones, they also abandon their village sites, sometimes returning a generation or two later when the nearby fields have regained their productivity.

Houses vary in size from huge dwellings in which many families live to small single-family structures. The multi-family longhouses generally are divided into sections, one per family, with each family also keeping its own hearth for cooking

its own food. Houses may be built close to the ground or high on stilts.

The Brao, for example, live in a communal house in large villages. The Mnong live in villages, each of which contains several longhouses. Each longhouse is divided into compartments and each compartment is occupied by a nuclear family consisting of father, mother, and their children.

The Jarai and Rade in northeast Cambodia on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border live in longhouses, between 20 and 60 to a village. Each longhouse is divided into family compartments.

Most hill people have few consumer items and live much as their ancestors did without the electricity, running water, and appliances available to many Cambodians who live in the central plains, especially those in urban areas and people who live in industrialized countries.

The degree of contact with the ethnic Khmer of the plains determines the kind of transportation: the more contact, the greater the reliance of hill people on motor vehicles, motor scooters, and bicycles. For many groups still living in isolated villages, transportation is primarily by foot.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Hill tribespeople observe a strict division of labor. Women have the primary responsibility for domestic chores, child care, carrying water, and looking after the domestic animals. They also gather food and weave. In agricultural villages, they are also involved in some rice cultivation chores, such as transplantation, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, and husking. Men, on the other hand, do the hunting and the heavy agricultural tasks. They clear the ground, plow, and thresh. They also make and repair tools and build and repair houses.

Families tend to be large, for most hill people continue to rely on their children to assist with household and subsistence activities. As their contact with ethnic Khmer increases, along with the expense of educating their children and the availability of family planning and contraceptives, more tribal people are choosing to have smaller families.

Marriages tend to remain traditional. In many groups, for instance, the choice of a partner and wedding arrangements are made by parents, often before the youth reach puberty. The family of the groom gives large quantities of pork and alcohol and a few silver coins to the bride's family. Among the Mnong in eastern Cambodia, most marriages are monogamous.

Among the Jarai and Rade of northeast Cambodia, marriage is initiated by women, who also do the marriage negotiations. Residence is matrilineal, so the new couple goes to live with the parents of the wife.

Two of the Mnong subgroups also recognize matrilineal descent, with family recognition and property inheritance descending through females rather than males. Residence among the Mnong is predominantly matrilineal, with the young couple going to live with the wife's parents after marriage. The Jarai and Rade of northeast Cambodia also have matrilineal descent groups. These groups are exogamous, so they do not marry within the matrilineal group.

The Stieng, also straddling the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, differ from the Mnong in being patrilineal and patriarchal. Descent is recognized through males and property is inherited through the male line. After the bride-price has been paid to the family of the bride, the young couple then moves

in with the husband's family. In contrast to both the groups above, the Brao have a bilateral kinship system.

The Pearic groups have totemic clans, which are kin groupings that trace their descent to a common ancestor generally believed to be a legendary figure with supernatural powers. Each clan is headed by a chief who receives his office through inheritance from his father. The Pearic tribes recognize patrilineal descent, so children belong to their father's clan and inherit through their father. Young married couples observe either matrilocal residence until the birth of the first child or patrilocal residence, as among the Saoch.

Villages among the hill groups of Cambodia traditionally have been the basic political unit of social life—thus autonomous and self-governing. Each Jarai and Rade village, for instance, is autonomous and is governed by its leading families. In some villages, the basic unit is even smaller than the village. Among the Stieng, for example, the family constitutes the basic social and political unit and there is no political organization at a higher level.

The Mnong along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border measure status by wealth, and wealth is measured by the number of buffalo a person sacrifices on funeral or other ceremonial occasions. The greater the number sacrificed, the greater that person's standing in his and neighboring communities. In the past, slavery existed among the Mnong; under certain conditions, a slave could gain his freedom.

Most tribespeople have little regard for pets although they keep domesticated animals, such as buffalo, pigs, and chicken, but these are kept to trade, eat, or sacrifice on special ritual occasions. Dogs are kept by some for protection both from other humans and from wild animals. Some families keep cats as a countermeasure to rats.

### **<sup>11</sup> CLOTHING**

Most Khmer Loeu continue to wear traditional clothing. Men wear a short loincloth and strings of beads, while women wear a variety of skirts.

The hill tribes of Cambodia weave their traditional colorful clothing on homemade looms. Each tribe has a different style of clothing and jewelry. Clothing is made of cloth which repeats thousands of tiny patterns, with decorations such as silver hoops added. Just one dress can take weeks to make. In addition to their colorful dress, some highland groups file their front teeth and also wear tattoos just as their ancestors did.

The decrease in isolation from ethnic Cambodians has resulted in the use of imported clothing, so that tribespeople increasingly wear a combination of traditional, Cambodian, and European clothing.

### **<sup>12</sup> FOOD**

The primary food of a group depends foremost on its major means of subsistence. Hill groups who are primarily rice cultivators have rice as their central food. Groups who raise root crops, such as cassava, taro, and yams, depend primarily on those crops as well as maize, eggplant, beans, sugar cane, bananas, and other fruits and vegetables.

Rice and vegetable crops are supplemented by greatly valued meat either from domestic animals, such as pigs and poultry, or game and birds from the neighboring forests. Additional valued foods include fish and eggs. Every group has a method for making beer or rice from the products close at home. Rice

wine and cassava beer are common and are consumed primarily on ritual occasions.

Because modern appliances are few and packaged goods a rarity, much time and energy goes into the growing, preservation, and preparing of a family's daily meals. Women are primarily responsible for everyday food preparation, while men often bear the responsibility for making alcoholic beverages and cooking ritual foods.

The preparing of food is also important for ritual. Virtually every ceremony includes an offering of food and drink to the spirits and a communal feast by the participants. A sacrifice of a valued animal, such as a buffalo or pig, marks an important ceremony. Buffalo, in fact, are kept primarily for ritual sacrifices and become the central food at religious festivals.

Food taboos are common among all the tribal groups and vary considerably according to group, age, sex, and situation. Thus, pregnant women, women after childbirth, and hunters, to mention just a few, may be required to consume or refrain from consuming particular foods for specific periods of time.

### **<sup>13</sup> EDUCATION**

Formal schooling for the hill people started after independence in 1953 when King Norodom Sihanouk sought to make education compulsory and available to all the people in the country. These programs continued until 1970, but many school buildings were destroyed in the war and it was not until the 1990s—ironically when Sihanouk returned to rule the country—that new school buildings were erected. While schools and teachers from the lowlanders are increasingly available for highland children, most continue to be taught traditional skills in traditional ways by parents and relatives. The more contact a village has with Cambodians from the central plains, the more likely their exposure to schools and education in Cambodian subjects and language.

The hill groups were traditionally oral rather than literate societies, in which tradition and knowledge were passed on verbally rather than through writing. Recently, however, several of the hill languages have been put into romanized form: the Rade and Jarai are two of these. Several epic tales in the Rade language have been transcribed and published.

### **<sup>14</sup> CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Music among hill people is played primarily in the service of religion, but also on ritual occasions such as marriage and funerals, and for popular entertainment.

Musical instruments include drums, flutes, gongs, xylophones, and horns of various kinds, traditionally made from wood or horn. More recently, instruments have been made of modern metals and some plastic ones are also used.

The literature of the hill tribes has traditionally been oral, consisting of the myths, legends, stories, and entire body of group knowledge passed on from generation to generation. In the absence of writing and modern entertainment, youth learned the beliefs and events of their past from their elders, in turn passing them on to their children.

### **<sup>15</sup> WORK**

The hill people of Cambodia are either sedentary or nomadic. Sedentary groups, which are more populous, are primarily wet rice cultivators. Some are engaged in growing industrial crops.



Nomadic groups, on the other hand, are swidden farmers growing their own crops. The system used for agriculture is also called slash-and-burn agriculture which is a better description of what happens. After finding a good garden area, the men cut the trees down or cut them severely enough so that they die. The large logs are often used to build houses. The rest of the fallen trees are then burned so that the bush cover is to ash. The ashes help enrich the soil in which sticky rice, root crops, and cash crops are then sown.

The hill men tend their crops and harvest them over the next two to four years using hand implements, for they have no plows or other modern tools. Over a few years, the soil loses its nutrients, and the group moves on to establish new garden areas, following the same slash-and-burn techniques. After a few decades, the original plot of soil has regained its nutrients and can again support crops.

Thus the hill people move through the forest over the years, stopping to build a village in which they live for several years, moving on when the soils are exhausted to reestablish a village some miles away near their new gardens. Some groups raise primarily rice, others primarily root crops. Groups who raise root crops, such as cassava, taro, and yams, also raise maize, eggplant, beans, sugar cane, bananas, and other fruit and vegetables.

The Brao on the Cambodia-Laos border, for instance, cultivate dry season rice, while the Mnong along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border practice dry season rice farming. The Mnong also cultivate a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, and other plants for use as food and in handicrafts. The Stieng, Pearic, Jarai, and Rade tribes are also swidden farmers, growing primarily rice. They also hunt, gather, fish, and grow secondary crops such as maize and root plants to supplement their diets.

In addition to horticulture, hill men also raise a few domestic animals, including pigs, poultry, and buffalo. Among the Lahu, for example, pigs are the most important domesticated animal, but chickens are everywhere. They also raise ducks and geese. The Mnong are noted for trading pigs and poultry for buffalo.

Men hunt game and birds in the surrounding forests, obtaining almost everything they need by their own hand. Muong men hunt with guns, crossbows, traps, snares, and nets. Men organize communal hunts on festival days. A successful hunt is seen as a good omen for the rice harvest. In addition, Muong men fish with scoop nets, lines, bows, and knives.

Women do most of the vegetable and herb gathering. Muong women collect edible tubers, leaves, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, vegetables, berries, and fruit. When food is scarce, they gather breadfruit and eat it as bread. They also collect wood for fuel, materials for building houses, medicinal plants, and other products such as feathers and skins for trade.

## 16 SPORTS

Tribal children spend much of their time assisting their parents in hunting, gathering, horticulture, and rice cultivation. Whatever ways of making a living are followed by their village and parents, those are their major activities. Boys learn from an early age to help their fathers, and their play centers on learning to do what their fathers do. Thus, boys practice with tiny bows, shooting small animals, trying to catch birds and fish, and in numerous ways imitating the activities of their

elders. Girls, also, learn from their elders, assisting their mothers and other village women in caring for smaller children, looking after the house, and preparing food.

Children spend many nighttime hours listening to the stories and legends of their people. As they sit around their homes in the evening, they may listen to a story from a grandmother, an ancient tale from an older man, or hear the hunters relate their hunting experiences.

From the late 1950s, with the introduction of compulsory education, children at schools started learning to play soccer and also volleyball. Both sports, especially soccer, have continued to be popular, with boys from hill tribes in schools often playing against lowland Khmers, all participating barefoot.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Music is a major form of entertainment. The Kmhmu, for example, have a number of instruments on which they play any number of songs. Their instruments include flutes, mouth organs and harps, and percussion instruments, most made from bamboo. The bronze drum is not only a musical instrument but a symbol of wealth and status used in important communal ceremonies. Kmhmu songs are unique in featuring elaborate poetic verses with reverse parallelism.

Movies, television, videos, and other popular entertainment of Westernized countries—even radios—remain rare in much of highland Cambodia. Tribespeople rely on singing, dancing, and instrumentation for much of their entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Hill women weave clothing such as skirts and blouses for themselves, loincloths for their men, and blankets. Using cruder materials, men weave mats and baskets. Embroidery and appliqué work is also done. Hill tribespeople make a number of musical instruments which include gourd flutes, mouth harps, guitars, and banjos. Men make agricultural, hunting, and gathering tools. The Kuy of northern Cambodia have a reputation for being excellent blacksmiths, while the Brao are noted for their pottery-making skills.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The hill tribes continue to struggle for more autonomy from the lowland Cambodians. They continue to be viewed by many ethnic Khmer as inferior, with strange customs that are best abolished. Their isolation has been lessened by the migration of lowland peoples into the highlands, but continues for many in slowing the spread of medical and educational facilities. The major threat to the culture and lifestyle of the hill tribes is, however, the logging which has reduced the jungles considerably.

Many Khmer Loeu and observers fear that within a few years, their cultures will have disappeared along with their environment. Many are gradually being incorporated into lowland Cambodian life. They have adopted many Khmer customs, clothing, and practices. Many of the youth are now being taught the Khmer language and are working on Cambodian farms.

Many tribal groups now practice wet rice cultivation rather than horticulture and frequently intermarry with Khmer. Most Chong and Pear, for example, are now assimilated into Cambodian society. Once hunters and gatherers, the Saoch are also now mostly assimilated into Cambodian society. Most

Kuy living in Cambodia have been assimilated into Cambodian culture, as Kuy living in Thailand have been incorporated into Thai society. Most Kuy practice wet rice cultivation, have converted to Buddhism, and speak both the national language and their tribal language.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Generally in Mountain Khmer communities, women remained in the villages and were involved in traditional home-making. In recent years some have been involved in craft-work for sale in local towns.

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—revised by J. Corfield.

# MUNDAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** MOON-duhz

**LOCATION:** India (Bihar state)

**POPULATION:** 3 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Mundari

**RELIGION:** Traditional animism; Hinduism; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Mundas are one of the aboriginal peoples found in the Chota Nagpur region of eastern India. The tribe has lent its name to the Munda branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family, and sometimes *Munda* is used to designate the many tribes of the region (e.g., Munda, Santal, Ho) that speak Munda languages and share common spiritual and cultural values. These tribes are also sometimes called *Kolarian*. The following discussion, however, focuses specifically on the one tribe among this group that is identified as Munda.

The name *Munda*, which means "headman of a village," was originally applied to the group by outsiders. The tribe's own name for itself is *Hor-on*. The Mundas are a people of considerable antiquity, some scholars identifying them with the Mundas mentioned in the epic *Mahābhārata*. The origin of the Munda people is a matter of much uncertainty. Their own traditions indicate that they migrated to their current location from areas to the northwest. Linguistic evidence, however, suggests ties to northeastern India and Southeast Asia. Wherever they originated, the Mundas settled in the forest-clad uplands of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, perhaps as early as the centuries preceding the Christian Era. Here, they have remained in relative isolation until modern times.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In 2000, the state of Jharkhand (*Jhārkhand*) was created out of the southern districts of the state of Bihar, largely to satisfy the aspirations of the local tribal population. Thus, over half of the Munda population of the subcontinent were included within the boundaries of the new state, Mundas being numerically the third largest tribal group in Jharkhand, after the Santals and Oraons. The 2001 Census of India reported over one million Mundas (1,048,886) in the state, with an equal number living in the state of Assam, and a considerable population in Bangladesh. Small numbers of Mundas are also found in Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Allowing for natural increase, and the numbers of Mundas living in other northeastern states, the Munda population is estimated to be around 3 million today.

The Mundas occupy the southern areas of what used to be Bihar State, but is now Jharkhand. The name Jharkhand comes from the Sanskrit "Jharikhanda," which is the ancient name of the region's dense forest. The demand for a separate Jharkhand state can be traced back to the early 1900s, though according to some historians, there was already a distinct geopolitical, cultural entity called Jharkhand even before the period of Magadha Empire (c. 6th century BC). In ancient days the northern portion of Jharkhand state was a tributary to the Magadha (ancient Bihar) Empire and southern part was a trib-

utary to the Kalinga (ancient Orissa) Empire. According to a legend, Raja Jai Singh Deo of Orissa was accepted as the ruler of Jharkhand by its people in the 13th century. The Singh Deo's of Orissa have been very instrumental in the early history of Jharkhand. The local tribal heads had developed into barbaric dictators who could govern the province neither fairly nor justly. Consequently, the people of this state approached the more powerful rulers of Jharkhand's neighboring states, who were perceived to have a more fair and just governance. The turning point in the history of the region came when rulers from Orissa moved in with their armies and created states governed with the people and for their benefit. With this act, the barbarism that had marked the region for centuries ended. The good tribal rulers, known as the Munda Rajas, continued to thrive and exist to this day. Later, during the Mughal period, the Jharkhand area was known as Kukara. After the year 1765, it came under the control of the British Empire and became formally a state, under its present name, "Jharkhand"—the Land of "Jungles" (forests) and "Jharis" (bushes), at the beginning of the 21st century.

Mundas played a significant role in the creation of Jharkhand State. The Jharkhand movement was spearheaded by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, which sought to create a tribally-dominated state from the southern area of Bihar state. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Santals, Chero, Hos, Oraons, and Kols staged tribal revolts against the British, who were trying to destroy the traditional Adivasi (the "original inhabitants," or tribal people in India) institutions of self-governance and self-regulation. One such system the British tried to destroy was the *Munda-Manki* system. A *Manki* is an association of 12 villages that historically controlled the villages' land and resources. But in 1895, the last tribal revolt against the British overlords, the Birsa Munda Revolt, led by Birsa Munda (1875–1900), broke out throughout Munda country. It was the longest and greatest tribal revolt in Jharkhand history. During the 20th century, the Jharkhand movement was considerably more moderate, with the Adivasi Mahasabha, an association of tribals founded in 1939, being renamed the Jharkhand Party at Independence. Despite being denied a state in 1947, the Jharkhand Party never lost sight of its goals, and the state of Jharkhand came into being over 50 years later. Arjun Munda, formerly of the Jharkhand Party, served two terms as chief minister of the state (2003–2005 and 2005–2006), though as a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). As of 2008 he was leader of the opposition in the state legislature.

Munda territory lies on the Ranchi Plateau of Chota Nagpur, extending south from the Damodar River Valley to the extreme northern part of Orissa State. The land is a jumble of plateaus and hills between 300 m and 760 m (1,000–2,200 ft) above sea level, with individual peaks reaching as high as 1,505 m (3,445 ft). The region is crossed by the valleys of numerous rivers draining south towards the Bay of Bengal. The area is heavily forested, with vegetation ranging from scrub jungle to denser subtropical and tropical deciduous forest. Rainfall, received mostly during the three months of the summer monsoon, averages between 120 cm and 160 cm (47–62 in). Humidity is high in summer, with maximum temperatures varying between 35°C and 40°C (95°F–104°F).

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Mundari is the mother tongue of the Munda peoples. Mundari, along with the languages of neighboring tribes, such as the Santal and Ho, belongs to the Munda branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Mundari thus forms part of the group of isolated languages of eastern India that are linguistically related to languages spoken in mainland Southeast Asia rather than to the major language families of the Indian subcontinent. Historically, the Mundas had no system of writing. The Roman script and regional scripts are now used for this purpose. Many Mundas are bilingual and use Hindi, Sadri, or other local languages for intergroup communication.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

A Munda legend explains the creation of the Earth in the following way. In the beginning of time, the Earth was covered with water. Sing Bonga, the Sun God, brooded over the waters and created the first creatures: a tortoise, a crab, and a leech. Sing Bonga commanded these animals to bring him a bit of clay from the ocean depths. Both the tortoise and the crab tried and failed, but eventually the leech managed to bring up a piece of clay from the deep. Out of this clay, Sing Bonga fashioned the Earth. At his bidding, the Earth brought forth all kinds of trees and plants. Sing Bonga next filled the Earth with birds and beasts of all sorts and sizes. Then a memorable incident occurred. The bird *Hur* or swan laid an egg, and out of this, there emerged a boy and a girl, the first human beings. These were the ancestors of the *Hor-on Honko*, or "sons of men," as the Mundas still call themselves.

### **5 RELIGION**

Although their religion is basically animistic, the Mundas believe in a supreme being they call Sing Bonga. He is widely revered but only invoked at the time of major calamities, when a white fowl is sacrificed to him. Two lesser classes of deities (*bongas*) are the village gods and the household gods. The former influence every aspect of Munda life, from their daily activities to their agriculture. The village priest, the *pāhān*, is responsible for presiding over the worship of these gods at the sacred grove of the village. The blessings of the household gods—who are the spirits of deceased ancestors—are sought at every social and religious ceremony. The head of the family leads the worship of the household gods in the *āding*, the room set aside for this purpose in every Munda house. There are, in addition, several types of lesser godlings and spirits inhabiting the Munda universe. Some, such as deities who guard the family or protect the interests of married women, are benevolent. Others are evil and bring disease and misfortune to the Mundas. These have to be identified and appeased by the ghost-finders or shamans, who are often drawn from non-Munda groups. Animals are sacrificed to the gods, and the Mundas are reported to have offered human victims in the past. The Mundas are great believers in magic, witchcraft, and the power of the "evil eye."

Some Mundas have accepted Hinduism and Christianity, although they preserve many of their earlier religious practices. Census data regarding religion in India is unreliable, because specific data has not been collected since 1951. However, according to the 2001 Census, some 73% of Mundas are Hindu, 17% follow Christianity (this figure is much higher than the average for India [around 2.5%] and reflects the work of Chris-

tian missionaries among the Munda), and the remaining 10% are animists following the traditional religion.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Two important Munda festivals are the Magh Porob and Sarhul. The first of these is dedicated to honoring the spirits of deceased ancestors. It is held on the full moon day of January, after the winter harvest has been gathered. Sarhul, also known as the "Flower Feast," is celebrated in the spring when the *sāl* trees (*Shorea robusta*) are in flower. All the gods of the Munda pantheon are worshiped in the village's sacred grove, where chickens are sacrificed by the priest. The villagers return home dancing and singing, carrying *sāl* blossoms in their hands. Garlands of *sāl* flowers are hung around the houses, and people wear *sāl* flowers in their hair.

Some festivals of the Mundas are clearly borrowed from the Hindus, though celebrated with rituals that are traditional in nature. The Phagu festival corresponds to the Holi festival of the Hindus, while Dasai is the Hindu Dasahara. Sohorai is another festival of Hindu origin, when a black fowl and rice-beer are offered to the deity presiding over cattle.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When a woman is discovered to be pregnant, the Mundas sacrifice a chicken to Garasi Bonga. This is the deity who protects both women and children during pregnancy and birthing. A woman is considered unclean for eight days after childbirth, after which the relatives gather for rituals to purify the mother, the newborn child, and the house. On the following day, the baby is named (the *sākhi* ceremony), and a girdle of thread is tied around its waist. Within a year or two, the baby's ears are ritually pierced. All of these ceremonies are accompanied by feasting and drinking.

Young unmarried Mundas generally do not sleep in their family residences but, rather, in village dormitories. While these institutions are not exactly like the dormitories of the nearby Oraon tribe, boys and girls will gather separately at a house in the village designated for this purpose. There, during the evening they will pose riddles, listen to songs and fables, and acquire knowledge of the customs and beliefs of their community until it is time to retire to bed.

In the past, Mundas cremated their dead, but many now resort to burial. Traditionally, the corpse was burnt and the bones collected to be interred in the family grave. Every village has its burial ground or *sasān*, or if there is more than one clan in the settlement, one for each clan. Big stone slabs are placed on the ground, and the bones of a family's ancestors are placed underneath the family's stone slab. If a Munda dies away from his village, her or his relatives will convey the bones to his or her ancestral village, where they will be buried in the family grave. No one who does not belong to the clan is allowed to use the burial ground.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Among the virtues of the Mundas are hospitality, respect for elders and those with social authority, affection for family members, and general friendliness.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Munda villages are made up of scattered homesteads built together on the higher elevations of land where there is enough available space. The Munda home consists of at least two huts. One is used for sleeping and, among the poorer families, houses the livestock as well. The other is the eating house and contains the kitchen, a pen for the chickens, and also the sacred room where the family gods reside. The homes of the better-off may comprise three or four huts, arranged around a square and having a compound at the back. The walls of the houses are generally windowless and built of mud, with a tiled or thatched roof. Household utensils and furnishings are simple. The Mundas eat off wooden or metal dishes, while earthenware jars and baskets are used for storage. Wooden stools and a sleeping mat or string bed complete the household belongings.

In addition to its homesteads, a village has its sacred grove (*sarnā*), the public meeting space in the center of the village (*ākhrā*), and the village burial ground. On the outskirts of the village are cultivable uplands, which are regarded as part of the village itself and are used mainly for growing garden vegetables. Lying further down the slopes are the terraced lands used for wet-rice cultivation.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Mundas are divided into totemic clans (*kili*) such as the Nag (Snake) Kili and Bagh (Tiger) Kili. The Mundas are endogamous, i.e., they marry within the tribe, but they practice clan exogamy, i.e., they have to marry outside the lineage. Traditionally, Mundas do not marry before the boy can build a plow and the girl can weave and spin, but instances of child marriage are known to occur. Marriages are usually negotiated and depend on the consent of the involved parties. The actual ceremonies are quite elaborate and appear to have absorbed many Hindu rituals. A bride-price is paid in both cash and goods. Although the newlyweds may take up residence in the husband's father's house, the nuclear family is preferred. Monogamy is the norm, and both divorce and widow remarriage are allowed.

## 11 CLOTHING

Munda dress is very simple. Men ordinarily wear nothing more than a cotton loincloth with colored borders known as *botoi*. A piece of cloth or a blanket may be wrapped around the upper body during cold weather. Young men place a belt of silk or plaited thread around the waist. The dress of Munda women is a long piece of cloth wrapped around the waist, with one end passed diagonally across the upper body to cover the breasts. Young women are fond of ornaments and wear earrings, bracelets, anklets, and toe rings. Ornaments are usually made of brass, with only the wealthier among the population wearing silver or gold. Young girls are tattooed on the face, arms, back, and feet. Men don colored turbans for festive occasions when dancing is performed. Hindu Mundas are often indistinguishable in dress from their Hindu neighbors, while Christian Mundas sometimes wear European-style clothes.

## 12 FOOD

Boiled rice forms the staple food of the Mundas. The more well-to-do eat this with vegetables (e.g., onions, eggplant, radishes, beans, and roots such as the sweet potato) and pulses. Spices

used include turmeric, garlic, and chilies. The poorer Mundas eat their rice with green leafy vegetables and may substitute millets for the rice. Chickens and goats are raised for food, but they are usually killed and eaten only at festivals and sacrifices. The eating of beef, pork, and buffalo meat is not unknown. At each meal, the Mundas drop a few grains of rice on the ground in the name of their deceased ancestors. The Mundas are fond of drinking rice-beer (*ili*), each family brewing its own supply. They also enjoy chewing tobacco and betel leaves.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Mundari is essentially a spoken language, and few Mundas have learned to read and write the regional languages that they use for intergroup communication. Literacy in Jharkhand (54.1% in 2001) is below the average for India as a whole and that for Mundas is still lower, measuring 47.9% for males, and only 34.9% for females. However, these figures usually refer to literacy in a second language. While government schools are available to them, their isolation and the need for children to help in agricultural work means that the Mundas' exposure to formal education is limited. Though 50% of the 5 to 14 year old *Mundas* attend school, only about 17% ever graduate from school and only 3.6% ever continue on to higher education.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Like most tribal groups, the Mundas have a rich oral folk tradition. This includes historical myths (e.g., the Asur Legend), folk tales, riddles, and proverbs. There are love songs, and songs and dances appropriate for specific religious festivals and social events. The Lahsua dances, performed at the time of the Karam festival, are of a kind known as "stooping" dances. The dancers form a circle, join hands, and stoop forward. Keeping this position, they advance towards the circle's center, then retire, all the time circling towards the left. The musical instruments that accompany the singing and dancing include drums, tambourines, various stringed instruments, and bamboo flutes. For weddings, the Mundas employ musicians of the Ghasi tribe.

### **15 WORK**

Although in the past they practiced shifting cultivation, most Mundas are involved in permanent, wet-rice agriculture today. They supplement this with hunting and gathering in the jungle, although this is decreasing in importance. Both men and women work in the field, but some activities—e.g., plowing—are restricted to men. Many Mundas work as agricultural laborers or in the mines and factories of Bihar's industrial area. Those few Mundas who have the necessary education work in white-collar jobs, in government, and in the professions.

### **16 SPORTS**

Munda children play a variety of games, some apparently traditional and others introduced by European missionaries. Pastimes include games of tag such as *Chhūr*. The players divide themselves into two teams. Parallel lines are drawn on the ground, and one team guards the lines. The players on the other team try to penetrate the guarded territory and reach an area designated as the "salt-house" (*non-gharā*) without being touched by the defenders. If they succeed in this, the opposing teams switch roles. Other games include marbles, spinning

tops, hide-and-seek, and blind man's bluff. *Phodi* is a type of indigenous hockey game.

The Mundas also have a type of dramatic game that combines amusement with instruction in which children assume roles and act out situations from real life. One such game is the Jackfruit Game (*Kāntārā-Inū*). The actors pretend to be a jackfruit tree, its fruits, its owner, the owner's dog, and a thief. The game is played out by the thief stealing the fruit, cutting down the tree, and various other episodes that conclude with a mock *pūjā* or worship ceremony.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Living in remote villages, most Mundas derive their entertainment from their religious festivals and social events, which are invariably accompanied by singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Mundas are not known for their arts and crafts. While they weave cloth, spin cotton, and make baskets, they rely on Hindu artisan castes to provide many of their material needs.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Like many tribal peoples in South Asia, the Mundas are faced with conflicting social pressures. It is to their advantage to promote their "tribal" identity because of the benefits of being designated a Scheduled Tribe. On the other hand, those Mundas who overcome the disadvantages of their tribal status (e.g., illiteracy and lack of education) and succeed economically tend to lose touch with their tribal roots. Historically, Mundas have resented what they see as exploitation by outsiders, and such feelings continue today. Many, for example, see current development schemes such as the Bihar Plateau Development Project (BPDP), which now, of course, falls within the area of Jharkhand, as serving the interests of the World Bank and transnational corporations, rather than those of the local tribal peoples.

Ruled by Bharatiya Janata Party-led Arjun Munda government, Jharkhand witnessed serious violations of international humanitarian laws both by law enforcement personnel and Naxalites rebels during 2005. Naxalite or Naxalism is an informal name given to revolutionary communist groups that were born out of the Sino-Soviet split in the Indian communist movement. Ideologically, Naxalites belong to various trends of Maoism (the Communist Party of India-Maoist [CPI-M] is outlawed in many states in India) and recently have spread into less developed areas of rural central and eastern India, such as Chattisgarh and Jharkhand from their state of origin in West Bengal. Naxalites are considered terrorists by the government of India. The Maoist problem continues to plague the state of Jharkhand with the guerrillas reportedly being active in 16 of the state's 22 districts. More than 500 people have been killed in the state by the Naxalites in the early 2000s. At least 15 villagers were killed and six others injured during an attack by alleged Naxalites at Bhelbadari village under Deuri police station in Giridih district on the night of 11 September 2005.

In parts of rural Jharkhand, many Mundas do not have access to health care, while starvation continues to be a problem. The conditions of women and children are deplorable. Mundas believe in witchcraft and the evil eye, and women (and men) are killed and tortured for practicing witchcraft. Despite the

existence of anti-child labor legislation, bonded child labor is still found in Jharkhand. Conditions of Munda child laborers, such as those doing mica mining in the districts of Koderma and Giridih, continue to be grim. Many children have reportedly died due to mine collapse, while diseases such as silicosis, asthma and bronchitis, tuberculosis, and malnutrition are common. Violence often accompanies the electoral process in Jharkhand, with violations of human rights being committed by both security forces and the Maoist guerrillas.

Mundas continue to be victims of development projects and land alienation. The Jharkhand government has signed over 42 Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with investors including Mittal Steel, Tata Steel, and Jindal Steel and Power Company Limited since Jharkhand became a state in 2000 (Jharkhand is blessed with abundant mineral wealth). These projects would require approximately 47,445 acres of land in the mineral-rich Kolhan Region, which could affect about 10,000 families and cause deforestation of 5,715 square kilometers of land. A study by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), a human rights organization, shows that over 740,000 tribals, including Mundas, were displaced in Jharkhand by different projects between 1950 and 1990. Only 184,500 were rehabilitated and the remaining 562,600—over two-thirds of the displaced—have been left to fend for themselves. According to the report, industries had displaced 260,000 tribals, including *Mundas*, while different animal sanctuaries had forced about 500,000 tribals to leave their homes.

*Mundas* are also victims of land alienation through the illegal transfer of land to non-tribals in violation of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act. The most popular method is by marrying tribal girls, buying tribal land in their names and, after dumping the tribal wives, selling the land to non-tribals. The tribals are also victimized under various forest laws. They face forcible evictions, harassment and imprisonment by the police and the forest officials.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

As with most tribal groups in South Asia, *Munda* women tend to have equality with men. Attitudes towards sex among young girls is quite relaxed, and girls often sleep in mixed village dormitories rather than at home. Marriages, though usually arranged, require the consent of both parties involved, a bride price is paid, and divorce and re-marriage are permitted. Given the creation of Jharkhand State as what is essentially a tribal state, the *Mundas* form a significant element in the state population and are quite well represented (Scheduled Tribes make up 26.3% of Jharkhand's population and Mundas account for 14.8% of the ST population).

However, along with taboos and restrictions on women, such as exclusion from rituals and witch-hunts that often target widows, *Mundas* continued to be victims of sexual abuses in Jharkhand. *Munda* girls are easy targets of sexual violence, especially in the context of the current Maoist insurgency. Women cannot inherit land, because they can marry outside the clan. Many women are migrants, leaving their homes to seek work as unskilled labor (*reja*). Poverty, illiteracy, and inheritance laws contribute greatly to the marginalization of *Munda* women in Indian society.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# MUSLIMS IN SOUTH ASIA

**PRONUNCIATION:** MUHZ-luhms

**LOCATION:** Pakistan; Bangladesh; India; Sri Lanka; Nepal; Bhutan; other countries of South Asia and worldwide

**POPULATION:** 1.65 billion worldwide (estimate); 456 million in South Asia

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic (language of Islamic ritual); Urdu (South Asia)

**RELIGION:** Islam

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

For over one and a half billion people in the world today, there is only one God: *Allah*. Allah made his will known to humankind when he revealed the holy scriptures (the *Quran*) to the world through his messenger Muhammad. Muhammad, who is seen as the last in a line of prophets that included Abraham and Jesus, was born around AD 570 in Mecca in the Arabian peninsula. The Arabic word *Islam*, literally meaning “submission,” describes the religion whose followers submit to the will of Allah. One who submits to the will of Allah, as revealed by the Prophet Muhammad, is called a *Muslim* (or *Moslem*).

Islam, one of the world’s great religions, spread rapidly across Arabia and then through the vast expanse of deserts and steppe lands that cuts a path across the Old World from the Atlantic Ocean to the China Sea. It spread along the maritime trade routes and caravan routes that carried the commerce of the times. Islam was first introduced into South Asia in AD 711, when an Arab naval expedition sailed to the mouth of the Indus River (now in Pakistan) to suppress piracy against Arab shipping. The most significant Muslim incursions into South Asia, however, began at the start of the 11th century, when Afghan rulers sent military expeditions into the plains of India. In 1021 the Punjab was annexed by Mahmud of Ghazni to form the eastern province of his empire. Lahore, its capital, emerged as a major center of Islamic culture, and mass conversions to Islam among the common people began at this time. By the end of the 12th century the Afghans had captured Delhi, which remained a center of Muslim power in South Asia for over 650 years. During this period of Muslim domination, large numbers of Hindus and Buddhists converted to Islam. Under Akbar (r. 1556–1605), the greatest of the Mughals, Muslims brought virtually all of the Indian subcontinent under their control. The final remnant of imperial Muslim power in India disappeared in 1858 when the last Mughal Emperor of India was exiled from Delhi by the British. However, independent states ruled by Muslims survived in the region until the middle of the 20th century.

By 1947, Muslims in South Asia numbered an estimated 100 million people, roughly 24% of the peoples of the region. With the withdrawal of the British from their Indian Empire at this time, the political boundaries of South Asia were redrawn. The Islamic state of Pakistan (later to break up into Pakistan and Bangladesh) was created. Mass movements involving as many as 10 million people saw Muslim populations flee to Pakistan, while Hindus and Sikhs migrated to India. This was a period

of communal violence and bloodshed that saw an estimated one million people murdered because of their religion.

Pakistan, an avowed Muslim state, and India, a secular democracy—even though its population is primarily Hindu—have fought several wars since Independence. Independence itself was accompanied by a conflict that saw the Pakistani and Indian armies fighting in Kashmir, a problem that has yet to be resolved. In fact, supposed Pakistani infiltration of Indian-held territory in Kashmir led to the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, which involved air and naval units as well as ground forces in Kashmir and along the entire Indo-Pakistani border in western India. Despite heavy losses in both men and materials on both sides, the war was essentially inconclusive. Not so the next conflict in 1971, which saw Indian forces intercede in the civil war in East Pakistan, the surrender of the Pakistan military in the region, and the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation. The summer of 1999 again saw fighting between India and Pakistan, this time over Kargil in Kashmir. Allegedly the brainchild of the Pakistani Army Commander-in-Chief, General Pervez Musharraf, the plan involved infiltration of Indian-held territory in Kashmir by Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri militants (despite the Pakistan government and military denying any involvement). The resultant Kargil War saw Indian regulars pitted against the Pakistani Army, and it is thought that only the threat of Pakistan’s newly-developed nuclear weapons prevented Indian forces from pressing home the advantage they ultimately gained on the ground in Kashmir. Later in 1999, Musharraf mounted a military coup against Pakistan’s civilian government and took the reins of power, becoming president of Pakistan.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Muslims in South Asia today number around 456 million people, with Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh representing the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th most populous Muslim states in the world. Of these, almost two-thirds live in the two Muslim states in the region. Pakistan, in the west of the subcontinent, has 154.5 million Muslims, while Bangladesh, in the east, has a population of 127.3 million Muslims.

Although only 13.4% of India’s population is Muslim according to the 2001 Census, the total number of Muslims in India today is estimated at 154.5 million, third in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. Muslims in India are concentrated in the areas adjacent to Pakistan and Bangladesh, on the plains of the Ganges Valley, and in the interior of the Deccan. The Moplahs, a Muslim community descended from Arab traders who settled the area in the 7th century AD, are found along the coast of Kerala and also in Lakshadweep, an island group in the Indian Ocean that is Indian territory.

Muslim minorities are found in the remaining countries of South Asia, but in total numbers these communities are quite small. In Sri Lanka, Muslims make up 7.5% of the population, or about 1.8 million people. These include both Sri Lankan Moors (descendants of Arab seafarers) and Malays from Southeast Asia. Nepal has roughly 900,000 Muslims (3.8% of the population), located mainly in the southern lowland belt. In Bhutan, Muslims number around 91,000 (5% of the population).



### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Arabic is the language used for ritual throughout the Islamic world. Outside the Arabic-speaking countries, ritual passages are memorized for the purposes of worship. This is the case in South Asia, where Muslims generally speak the language of their region, community, or cultural group. Thus Muslims in Pakistan speak Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, or one of the numerous other languages current in the country. In India, Muslims speak Urdu or regional languages such as Malayalam or Tamil. Most Bangladeshi Muslims are Bengali speakers.

If there is one language associated with Muslims in South Asia, that language is Urdu. Urdu, which means “language of the camp,” is an Indo-Iranian language that evolved, during centuries of Muslim rule, from the Hindi vernacular spoken in the region of Delhi. It contains numerous Persian and Arabic words and is written in the Perso-Arabic script. In the 18th and 19th centuries it replaced Persian as the language of the upper classes and of administration in northern India. During the early decades of the 20th century, it came to be seen as a symbol of Muslim culture. Figures concerning the number of Urdu speakers in South Asia are unreliable. Estimates vary from 130 to 270 million speakers around the world, though perhaps an estimate of around 60 million individuals speaking Urdu as a first language across northern areas of the Indian subcontinent is reasonable. Urdu is not identified with any specific ethnic group or community, although in Pakistan it is associated with

*muhajirs*, Muslim immigrants from India. In Bangladesh also, Urdu is the language of immigrants from India. Urdu has been adopted as the national language of Pakistan. In India, Urdu is recognized as an official language. Urdu is associated with a tradition of literature and poetry in South Asia that extends back to the 14th century.

### <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

A strictly monotheistic religion such as Islam does not allow much room for the development of myth and legend. However, commentators on the Quran trying to fill in the details of Muhammad’s life inevitably wove strands of myth and legend into their works. Thus Muhammad, his relatives, and almost every person mentioned in the Quran are all associated with legends and miraculous deeds. On his death, for example, Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven mounted on the winged horse Buraq and accompanied by the angel Gabriel.

In addition to beliefs that are common to the entire Muslim community, Islam, as it spread out of Arabia, developed regional mythological traditions. These often focused on the lives of the Sufi mystics, who played such an important role in converting the peoples of South Asia to Islam. The poetical works of the Sufis also blended classical Muslim motifs with popular legends in the folk traditions of Punjabi-, Sindhi-, and Bengali-speaking areas of South Asia.

### <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Islam originated with Muhammad. When Muhammad was about 40 years of age, an angel came to him in a vision and told him he was chosen to be the messenger of God. At frequent intervals until his death, he received further revelations that he believed came directly from God. These were gathered together and written down into a book called the Quran around AD 650. Because the Quran is literally the word of Allah, it is the unalterable source of authority for all matters relating to Islam.

Muhammad began his ministry around AD 610, and gathered around him a group of followers who accepted his teachings. However, the rich merchants of Mecca saw the new religion as a threat to the political and social stability of the city. They persecuted Muslims and eventually forced Muhammad to seek refuge elsewhere. In AD 622, Muhammad and his followers fled Mecca for Medina, an oasis city some 350 km (217 mi) to the north. This event is known as the *hijrah* (“emigration”) and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. The year AD 622 in the Western calendar is AH 1 (Anno Hegirae, or the Year of the Hegira) in Muslim history.

The new religion combined contemporary Arab beliefs with elements of Judaism and Christianity. The veneration of stones and the keeping of many wives (polygyny) were Arab customs of the time. The monotheism (belief in one God) of Islam appears to have its origins in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. The banning of usury (lending money for interest), of gambling, and of the use of human images in mosques also appears to be borrowed from Judaism or Christianity. Some Muslim practices, such as circumcision and avoidance of pork, were traditional among many peoples in the Middle East.

The basic beliefs of Muslims are set out in the “Five Pillars of Islam”: 1) the profession of faith (*shahadah*); 2) frequent prayer; 3) the obligatory religious tax (*zakat*); 4) fasting during the month of Ramadan; and 5) pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).



All those who perform the tasks set out in the Five Pillars are members of the Muslim community, no matter what their nationality, caste, or color.

The profession of faith requires that one make a commitment to Islam. At least once in one's lifetime the following words have to be said with a full understanding of their meaning: "There is no God but God [Allah]; Muhammad is the prophet of God." Muslims are also expected to participate in congregational prayers five times a day. In towns all over South Asia, the *muezzin* in the mosques can be heard calling the faithful to prayer (nowadays the use of microphones and loudspeakers is common). After washing themselves, members of the congregation stand in rows behind the prayer leader (*imam*), facing Mecca. In South Asia, Muslims face towards the west. As the prayers are said, the congregation performs a series of movements involving standing, kneeling, and touching the head to the ground. The words "God is Great" accompany each change of posture. Friday is a day when special prayers are offered at mosques.

The religious tax (*zakat*) was originally intended to be collected by the state to be used for the poor. This has become largely a matter of voluntary contributions to charity, though Pakistan recently introduced a *zakat* tax on savings accounts.

The fourth pillar requires that Muslims fast between daybreak and sunset during the month of Ramadan. Eating, drinking, smoking, and even sexual activity are forbidden during daylight hours, although a light meal can be taken after sunset. It is also customary to make charitable offerings to the poor at this time. The end of Ramadan is celebrated by the festival of Id ul-Fitr.

The Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. It is the duty of every Muslim, if healthy and able to bear the expense, to make the journey to Mecca once in his or her lifetime. In Mecca, the pilgrim participates in various rituals, including walking around the Kabah, the shrine that contains the sacred Black Stone, and kissing the Black Stone itself. The pilgrimage ends with the sacrificial offerings of animals at Mina. Muslims who make the pilgrimage to Mecca are entitled to wear the coveted green turban as a sign that they have fulfilled this duty. For many Muslims in South Asia, completing the Hajj to Mecca is a lifelong ambition.

In its early years, Islam experienced divisions that saw the emergence of several sects and subsects. The most important split occurred at the end of the 7th century over the question of succession to the caliphate. *Sunnis* claimed that the caliph, the head of the Muslim community, should be elected. *Shias*, or *Shi'ites*, held that the caliph should be a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. The majority of South Asian Muslims are Sunnis, though there are significant Shia minorities in the region. In Pakistan, some 25% of the population are Shias, belonging mostly to the Ismaili and Ashariya sects. The Ahmadiya sect originated in the Punjab in the late 19th century and today forms a minority group in Pakistan. The Shias are represented in India by the Khoja and Bohra communities of Gujarat. Sizable Shia communities are found in Indian cities such as Bombay, Hyderabad, and Lucknow.

Islamic mysticism, called *Sufism* in Western literature, played a significant role in the spread of Islam in South Asia. Wandering Sufi ascetics brought Islam to the common people and are held to be responsible for mass conversions in the region. Sufi saints and their poetry and music are particularly

important in the cultural traditions of the Punjabis, Sindhis, and Bengalis. Sufi shrines are major centers of pilgrimage for Muslims in South Asia.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Muslim New Year begins with the sighting of the new moon in the month of Muharram. This month is associated with the period of mourning Shias observe for the martyrdom of Hussein, Muhammad's grandson, on the 10th day of Muharram in the year AD 61 (AD 680). Observances continue over 10 days, with the last day marked by processions with *ta'zias*, wooden towers decorated with tinsel, colored paper, and flowers that are meant to represent Hussein's mausoleum. The use of these towers is a particularly Indian tradition. Young men in the procession, stripped to the waist, will beat themselves with whips or even cut themselves with knives and razor blades in a ritual of mourning for Hussein.

Id ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan. It begins with the sighting of the new moon. People make the prescribed offering of alms to the poor then proceed to the *'idgah* (a special place of worship for the Id festivals) or the mosque for prayers. At the end of prayers, members of the congregation embrace and salute each other by saying, "Id Mubarak" ("Blessed Feast"). The rest of the day is taken up with giving gifts to children, visiting relatives and friends, and entertaining guests. Id ul-Adha, known in South Asia as Bakr-Id, is celebrated in the last month of the Muslim year during the time of the Hajj. Muslims throughout the world sacrifice animals (goats, sheep, camels) at the time that pilgrims to Mecca are performing the sacrifice at Mina. The Feast of Sacrifice commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son, Ishmael, to God.

Whereas Muharram and the Ids are celebrated throughout the Muslim world, South Asian Muslims have festive days linked to the veneration of Sufi saints. These are celebrated at the shrine (*dargah*) where the saint is buried and may last several days. The annual *urs* (literally "wedding" because the Sufi believes at death his or her soul is united or wedded to Allah) festival commemorates the death anniversary of the saint. Worshipers file before the tomb in the mausoleum; they say prayers and offer money, incense, flowers, sweets, and sometimes a *chaddar*, a decorated cloth used as a covering for the tomb. The Quran is read in its entirety, and *qawwalis* are sung through the night. Free food is distributed to the poor. The most important *urs* in all South Asia is that of Khawaja Mu'inud-din Chishti, a 12th-century Sufi saint, held at Ajmer in India's Rajasthan State. As many as 300,000 people attend this annual festival.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In their rites of passage, Muslims in South Asia follow the outlines prescribed by Islamic law (the *Shariah*), but they often combine these rites with local customs. At the birth of a baby, a *mullah* (Muslim priest) or a family elder repeats the Call to Prayer (*azan*) into the baby's right ear and a similar prayer into its left ear. On the seventh day after birth, or soon thereafter, the head-shaving ceremony is performed, often accompanied by the sacrifice of sheep or goats. At this time, the child is usually named as well. Some names are common throughout the Muslim world. Children may be named after the Prophet or his family (e.g., Muhammad, Ali, Hussein) or after the prophets (Ishmael, Ibrahim, Yusuf). Some common

Muslim names have the prefix “abd” (servant), as in Abdullah, the servant of Allah. There are, however, certain local South Asian traditions followed in naming children. The names of revered saints or shrines might be used, as in Sabir Bakhsh or Qalandar Bakhsh. Bakhsh means “bestower of gifts,” and the first part of the name refers to a local saint. In southern parts of the country, last names such as Desai, Patel, or Majumdar that denote the occupation or office held by one’s forefathers are common to both Muslims and Hindus. In Kashmir, last names such as Pandit that are specifically Hindu names may be used by Muslims.

Circumcision (*sunnat*) is a ritual that every male Muslim undergoes. The operation was normally performed by a barber, although today it is increasingly done in the hospital immediately after birth. Although the ceremonies associated with circumcision vary throughout the region, the rite is seen by many to be an initiation into the Muslim community.

Physical puberty is not marked by any special ceremonies. From this time, however, both boys and girls are expected to observe the customs set out in religious law. The education of both sexes in social and religious practices begins at an early age and is initiated by the *Bismillah* ceremony soon after a child is able to speak and understand things. Older children receive more formal religious instruction. In some Muslim communities, girls reaching puberty adopt *purdah* and are generally secluded from the company of males who are not close family members.

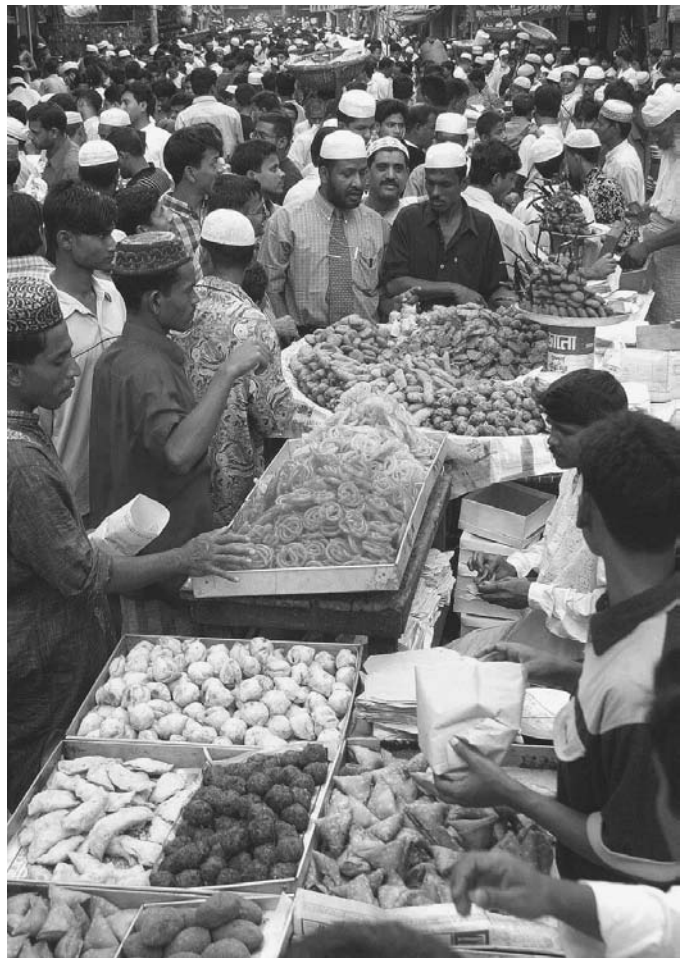
Burial rites follow the rules laid down in the Shariah, although local customs and traditions sometimes result in regional variations. Immediately after death, the body is ritually bathed and wrapped in a white shroud in preparation for burial. Mourners, led by a priest, say prayers over the corpse, which is then taken in procession to the graveyard. The body is buried with its face turned towards Mecca. Various ceremonies are performed for the deceased, lasting a minimum of 40 days and as long as a year after the time of death.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The most common greeting of Muslims in South Asia, and the world over, is “Salaam alaikum” (“Peace be with you”), often accompanied by a gesture in which the hand is touched first to the chest, then to the forehead. The correct reply to this is the sentence, “Wa alaikum as Salaam” (“And also unto you”). In the towns of northern India, especially in Lucknow, the secular phrase, “Adab arz” (“I pay my respects to you”) is common. Less formally, men shake hands and friends embrace each other. “Sahib” and “Begum” are the Muslim equivalents of “Mr.” and “Mrs.”

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Muslim lifestyles in South Asia vary according to factors such as occupation, social status, and regional cultural traditions. For example, the Bohras were a Hindu trading caste who converted to Islam. They remain a prosperous, mercantile community in the towns and cities of western India. The agricultural laborer or peasant farmer in rural Bangladesh, by contrast, has quite a different existence. Muslims living in cities in India tend to gather in distinct neighborhoods. In rural areas, although Muslims may be found in mixed-caste settlements, it is more common to find villages in which the entire population is Muslim.



*Muslim devotees buy food in a market to break the first day of fasting for Ramadan in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Ramadan is the holy month of fasting for Muslims. (AP Images/Pavel Rahman)*

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Despite the doctrine of equality taught by Islam, Muslim society in South Asia shows the caste structure that is typical of other South Asian communities. Though it does not have the religious dimensions of the Hindu caste system, it does influence social and economic relations. The highest-ranked Muslim groups (*ashraf*) include the Sayyid, Shaikh, Mughal, and Pathan, who trace their ancestry to the Muslim invaders who conquered South Asia. Ranked next are Muslim Rajputs, followed by the occupational castes, and then the lowest group, the Muslim sweepers.

Caste groups marry within their own castes, although the specific details of kinship systems and marriage tend to follow regional patterns. For example, Muslim society in South Asia is patrilineal and patrilocal, yet the Moplah community of South India is matrilineal and matrilocal like their Hindu neighbors. Under Islamic law, marriage is a legal contract (*nikah*) and should be an austere and simple affair. Local customs, such as dancing, the use of music, telling bawdy jokes, and ceremonial visits paid by the bride and the groom to each other’s houses, are often followed. Marriages are arranged and a dowry given to the bride by her parents. Islamic law allows up to

four wives, although monogamy is usually the rule. Divorce is also permitted.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The *salwar*, loose baggy trousers, along with the *kurta*, a long tunic-like shirt, is the common form of dress for Muslim men in South Asia. In rural areas, the *salwar* may be replaced by a *tahmat*, a length of cotton wrapped around the lower body like a sarong. A variety of headgear is worn, from different styles of turbans to round cotton caps. On formal occasions, the *kurta* is replaced among the upper classes by an *achkan* or *serwani*, a long tunic-like coat that buttons up to the neck. Women commonly wear the *salwar*, *kamiz*, and *dupatta* (scarf), or the *sārī*. Orthodox women in *pardah* cover themselves from head to foot in the tent-like *burqa* when they go out in public.

There is, however, an infinite variety of dress styles in South Asia that identifies the individual as a Pathan, a Punjabi, a Bengali, or a Sri Lankan. Regional dress is more a facet of regional culture than of religion.

### **12 FOOD**

Muslim food in South Asia reflects broad dietary traditions that are determined by factors like geographical location, climate, and local agricultural conditions. Thus, for Muslims in the north and west, wheat and other grains are the staple. In the wetter regions of the subcontinent, rice forms the basis of every meal. Even within these wheat and rice belts, there are regional variations in cuisine. There are, however, some food customs that are prescribed by religion. Pork is considered unclean and is never eaten by Muslims. Muslims are nonvegetarians and will eat the flesh of goat, sheep, and other animals. However, Muslims will only consume *halal* meat, i.e., the flesh of animals slaughtered by having the throat cut and drained of blood. For many Muslims, the cost of meat is prohibitive, and it does not form a regular part of their diet. Beef is not eaten by Indian Muslims in deference to Hindu feelings concerning the sanctity of cattle. Beef and buffalo-meat are available in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Alcohol is forbidden to Muslims by their religion, though many are lax in keeping this taboo.

In the northern areas of the subcontinent one finds the “Mughal” style of cooking. This emerged from the royal kitchens of the Mughal Emperors of India and uses a blend of herbs and spices rather than the hot spices of regular Indian cuisine. Mughal food includes a selection of meats and poultry served in sauces or cooked in yogurt; tandoori dishes baked in a hot, clay oven; flat breads; and rice dishes.

Muslims use no utensils, consuming food with their hands. Only the right hand touches food because, like all other peoples in the region, the left hand is used for personal ablutions. Unlike other groups, Muslims often take food from communal platters rather than from individual plates.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Muslims form part of a broader social community and share in the educational characteristics of the general populations of South Asia. For example, low literacy rates in Pakistan (49.7%) or Bangladesh (43.1%) result in part from the rural nature of the population and the role children play in the agricultural economy. By contrast, Muslims in Sri Lanka show the same high levels of literacy as the population at large (90.1%). There are certain features that can be attributed to religion. The Mus-

lim tendency to keep girls at home after puberty, for example, results in an imbalance of the sexes in secondary and higher education. This is also seen in lower literacy rates for women than for men.

Muslim institutions of religious education known as *madrasas* are found in most countries in South Asia and provide an alternative to state-run educational systems. Madrasas in Pakistan have been accused of promoting radical Islam and are seen as recruiting grounds for extremist terrorists.

Education opportunities for Muslims vary considerably throughout South Asia. The reform of Muslim education, in particular bridging the gap between “religious” and “worldly” knowledge, has been one of the main focuses of the efforts of a range of South Asian Muslim reformists and revivalists over the past century. Major problems in the countries of South Asia have been the focus on the “religious” and the general neglect of schools. In Pakistan, for example, even though federal government assists in curriculum development, accreditation and some financing of research, public education lies in the bailiwick of the provincial governments. There are reports of public schools that receive no books, no supplies, and no subsidies from the government. Thousands more are “ghost schools” that exist only on paper, to line the pockets of phantom teachers and administrators. By contrast, in the Indian state of Kerala, educationalists estimate that almost all Muslim children are in school, at least up to the 10th standard, numbers that compare well to that of other communities. Even though numerous small madrasas exist throughout the region, South Asia can still boast of institutions of higher education such as Aligarh Muslim University in India, the University of Karachi and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Islam has made significant contributions to South Asian civilization during the 1,000 years it has been present on the subcontinent. Muslims in India achieved their greatest accomplishments under the Mughal emperors, and Akbar ranks among the great figures of India’s past. He united virtually the entire continent under his rule, effected administrative reforms to run his huge empire smoothly, raised many Hindus to positions of high office in his government, and was a great patron of the arts. However, the Mughal Empire is but one thread of Islam in the tapestry of India’s history. Urdu poetic traditions, Mughal miniature painting, Indo-Islamic architecture culminating in the Taj Mahal, the impact of the Sufi saints on Hinduism, and the custom of *pardah* are to name but a few Muslim elements in Indian culture and life. The heritage of Islam in South Asia is to be seen in areas as diverse as language and literature, art and architecture, science and medicine, dress, food, and social customs.

There is also a less positive aspect to the Muslim presence in the Indian subcontinent. Islam contributed to the virtual destruction of Buddhism in the land of its birth. Also, the historical legacy of conflict between Muslims and Hindus continues to find expression in the territorial fragmentation and communal violence of South Asia today.

### **15 WORK**

Religion plays little role in determining the occupation of South Asian Muslims, who engage in activities ranging from

agriculture to nuclear science. The occupational structure in rural society shows the caste hierarchy so typical of South Asia. The upper-class groups are mainly involved in agriculture. Ranked beneath them are the “clean” occupational groups, including the service castes and artisans such as goldsmiths, weavers, and stoneworkers. On the lowest rung of the ladder are the “unclean” menial groups.

## 16 SPORTS

No popular or spectator sports are specifically associated with Muslims in South Asia.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Muslims throughout South Asia have access to the modern entertainment and recreational facilities of the general populations among which they live. Poetry readings and performances of *qawwalis* are popular among educated urban Muslims.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk arts and crafts in South Asia are activities associated with particular occupational castes in specific regions, rather than with religion. For instance, the marble workers around Agra are descendants of stonemasons who were brought to the area by Shah Jehan to build the Taj Mahal. Today, they continue to produce the semiprecious stone-inlay work that graces the Taj itself. The designs are Muslim, the workers are Muslim, but this could hardly be called a Muslim craft. The Patua of Bengal are a Muslim caste that paints pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses for the local population. All that can be said is that across South Asia there are Muslim artisans engaged in carpet-making, weaving, painting, stone-masonry, and the numerous other arts and crafts that form part of the rich folk tradition of the Indian subcontinent.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Among the many challenges faced by Muslims in South Asia are those related to the general social and economic character of the region. The bulk of the population, both Muslim and non-Muslim, live off the land. They face the problems of subsistence cultivators in any developing country—low productivity, land fragmentation, poverty, and illiteracy. Rates of population growth are high, and low standards of living are compounded by high population densities and pressure on available resources. Bangladesh, in particular, ranks among the lowest of the developing countries in many demographic and socioeconomic categories.

South Asian Muslims also face problems unique to their own countries. In Pakistan, for instance, certain Muslim sects are subject to discrimination from others in the Muslim community. Conflict between Sindhis (native Pakistanis) and muhajirs (Muslim immigrants from India) has resulted in violence and a breakdown of law and order, especially in the southern city of Karachi. Kashmir continues to be a problem for both Pakistan and India. Pakistan is also undergoing a political upheaval, with the assassination in December 2007 of Benazir Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People Party (PPP), and the ouster of the Musharraf government in the general election held early in 2008.

Indian Muslims are faced with social and economic discrimination. Increasing hostility from Hindu fundamental-

ists and the rise of Hindu political parties threaten the secular nature of India and the position of the country's Muslim minorities, although the last President of the country, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, belonged to the Muslim community. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which controls six state governments and is involved in a ruling coalition in another six, is a Hindu fundamentalist party that promotes “Hindutva” (Hinduness). It was involved in the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh State) by Hindus in 1992, and the subsequent violence and bloodshed that left hundreds of Muslims (and Hindus) dead across northern India. The BJP, with Narendra Modi as Chief Minister, formed the state government of Gujarat when hundreds of Muslims were killed after the burning of a train containing Hindu pilgrims at Godhra in 2002. Modi was accused of standing by and doing nothing while Hindus killed Muslims in revenge for the train burning. Communal and sectarian conflict remains one of the most widespread problems facing Muslims in South Asia today.

In Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the problems facing Muslims are somewhat different. In Sri Lanka, Muslims are caught up in the civil war between the Sri Lankan government, which is primarily Buddhist, and the Tamil Tigers, Hindu rebels who want a homeland for Tamils on the island of Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, where the majority of the population is Muslim, the situation they face is political instability. The leaders of both major political parties, Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL) and Khaleda Zia of the Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP), are under indictment on charges of corruption and the country is in the hands of a caretaker government that is supposed to oversee elections at the end of 2008.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Muslim women in South Asia face the restraints of the Islamic religion. Thus, even though Islam espouses gender equality, women tend to be treated as second class citizens. Some groups favor *purdah* and many Muslim women wear the *burqa*, a robe that covers the woman's entire body with just netting through which she can see out. Honor killings are quite common in Pakistan—though men can be killed, the victims are usually female, because they have gone outside the community to pursue relationships. Divorce is easy for men to obtain, as Muslims in most South Asian countries live under Shariah law, while widow remarriage is permitted.

At least in Pakistan Muslims do not have to endure the communalism and casteism that is found in India. Despite India being a secular society, Muslims face discrimination of all kinds. With the rise of Hindutva, Muslims have faced hostility and animosity from Hindus. From Moradabad in 1980 to Gujarat in 2002, it is Muslim women who bear the brunt of Hindu anger, being sexually assaulted, raped, and burned to death. Moreover, since many Muslims in India were of the lower castes who converted from Hinduism to escape the inequities of the caste system, they are treated very much like lower caste Hindus. While many Muslim groups qualify for Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Class status, and thus are eligible for reservations, lack of education and political clout put them at a disadvantage. As usual, poverty, illiteracy and socio-cultural customs place Muslim women at a considerable disadvantage in many societies in South Asia.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

## NAGA

**PRONUNCIATION:** NAH-guh

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Specific tribe names

**LOCATION:** India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland states)

**POPULATION:** around 2 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Over 60 Naga dialects

**RELIGION:** Christianity; remnants of traditional religion

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Naga is a generic term used to designate a group of tribes inhabiting the hills and jungles of India's eastern borderlands. The name *Naga* may be derived from the Assamese word for naked (*naga*). Other possibilities are that it originates from *nāg* (mountain) and means hill people, or from *nok*, a local Naga word for "folk" or "people." The peoples of the area use the name of their specific tribe rather than "Naga," and their acceptance of this term is relatively recent.

The origins of the Naga tribes are veiled in obscurity. They are of Mongoloid stock and formed part of the successive waves of peoples who migrated into northeastern India over the centuries. Scholars suggest their original homeland may have been in central China, in the region between the Hwang He (Yellow) and Ch'ang (Yangtze) rivers. The Naga tribes have had prolonged contact with the Ahom peoples of the Assam Valley. Mention is made of them in Assamese chronicles dating from the 13th century AD onwards. British expansion into Assam in the 19th century led to conflict with the Naga and eventual annexation of the Naga region. At India's independence in 1947, the Naga tribes were unwilling to accept New Delhi's rule. On 14 August 1947, one day before India became a nation, the Naga National Council (NNC) declared the Naga people to be independent, and on August 15, when the Indian flag was hoisted at Kohima, headquarters of the then Naga Hills District, it was pulled down by the Nagas. Because of the Nagas' boycott of the first elections held in India, the Naga people were not represented in New Delhi in the first Parliament. During the 1950s, the Nagas set up the Naga Federal Government and took up arms against the Indian government. New Delhi could not allow any of the people on the Union's periphery to unilaterally declare themselves independent and, in 1955, sent in the Indian Army to restore order. Since then, Indian government troops have been fighting Naga rebels demanding an independent Naga state in the region. In 1957 the Indian government began diplomatic talks with representatives of Naga tribes, and the Naga Hills district of Assam and the Tuensang frontier were united in a single political entity that became a Union territory—directly administered by the central government with a large degree of autonomy. In July 1960 a further political accord was reached at the Naga People's Convention that Nagaland should become a constituent and self-governing state in the Indian union. Statehood was officially granted in 1963, and the first state-level democratic elections were held in 1964. This was not satisfactory to the tribes, however, and soon agitation and violence increased across the state—including attacks on Army personnel and government institutions—as well as instances of civil disobedience and non-payment of



taxes. An agreement, known as the Shillong Pact, was reached by the Indian government and the NNC in 1975. However, a section of hardcore militants in the NNC disapproved of the Shillong Pact and decided to go underground to start a more radical separatist movement. This led to the formation of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland or the NSCN in the late 1970s. The nucleus of the group that founded the NSCN included Isaac Chishi Swu, T Muivah, and Khaplang. The NSCN started an underground Naga government, complete with a council of ministers led by a prime minister. The NSCN received plenty of support in the form of arms, ammunition, cash and other resources from the People's Republic of China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. However the NSCN suffered from a split in the late 1980s and broke into two factions, the NSCN (IM), led by Isaac Swu and Muivah and the NSCN (Khaplang). The peace process in Nagaland has been complicated by violence and conflict between the rebel group factions. On 25 July 1997 Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral announced after talks with the Isaac group of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland that the Indian government was declaring a cease-fire or cessation of operations with effect from 1 August 1997 for a period of three months. The cease-fire has been extended (it was in effect in 2008), while talks between the Indian government and Naga rebels continue. However, violence—mainly between Naga and Naga—also continues, with a third armed Naga faction, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Unification), or the NSCN(U), appearing in late 2007. There has been much violence in the Naga-inhabited ar-

reas of India, mainly involving conflict between different rebel factions. The violence between these factions led to more than 40 deaths in April–May 2008 alone.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Naga tribes are present in four states of northeastern India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland), as well as in neighboring areas of Burma (Myanmar). Their main concentrations, however, are in Nagaland where they make up over 90% of the state's population. The 2001 census reported a population of 1,990,036 people on the state of Nagaland, of whom 1,741,992 were Nagas, divided between 16 tribes. The more important of these are the Ao Naga, Sema Naga, Konyak Naga, Lhota Naga, and Angami Naga (the discussion presented in the following pages is based primarily on the Angami Naga). Most of the major ethnographic works on the Nagas have been undertaken by J. H. Hutton, J. P. Mills, and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. Allowing for demographic increases and including Naga tribes outside Nagaland, the current Naga population in India is estimated to be just over 2 million people.

The Naga homeland lies in the rugged hills southeast of the Assam Valley that form the border between India and Burma. Its landforms consist of tightly packed parallel ridges and valleys, covered with dense tropical and subtropical forests, running in a general north–south direction. The elevations of the ridges increase from 600 m (2,000 ft) in the west to 2,100 m (7,000 ft) in the east. Mt. Saramati, located in eastern Nagaland on the India-Burma border, rises to an altitude of 3,826 m (12,553 ft). The region experiences a monsoon climate, with annual rainfall varying between 180 cm and 250 cm (70–100 in). Temperatures are influenced by altitude and in summer range from 20°C to 40°C (68°F–104°F). Winters are relatively mild. The thermometer rarely drops below 4°C (39°F), although frosts can occur at higher elevations.

## **3 LANGUAGE**

Virtually every Naga tribe speaks its own language, and some 60 spoken dialects have been identified. Dialects might even vary from village to village. All of the Naga tongues belong to the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The language used for intertribal conversation is a form of broken Assamese or pidgin called Nagamese. (A pidgin language is a simplified form of speech used for communication by people who speak different languages.) This is widely spoken in the region of Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. Many Naga are also familiar with Hindi or English.

The Naga languages are essentially oral, with the literary tradition being limited to folk songs. However, Christian missionaries in the area developed alphabets and grammars for some of the Naga tongues during the late nineteenth century, with the objective of making the Bible available to the Nagas.

## **4 FOLKLORE**

The Angami Naga myth of origin centers on a village of the eastern Angami Naga called Kezakenoma. There was once an old couple, so the story goes, who lived in the village with their three sons. Every day they used to spread their paddy (rice) on a great flat stone to dry. Because the stone was inhabited by a spirit, their grain had doubled when they came to gather it up in the evening. The three sons used to take turns spreading their paddy on the stone, but one day they quarreled bit-

terly over whose turn it was. The parents, fearing bloodshed, broke eggs on the stone, covered it with wood, and set it on fire. The stone burst with a crack like thunder, releasing the spirit, which rose to heaven in a cloud of smoke, and the stone lost its magical properties. The three sons then left the village and became the ancestors of the Angami, Lhota, and Sema tribes of the Naga.

## 5 RELIGION

The Naga see their world as alive with supernatural forces that influence every aspect of their lives. They believe in a supreme creator named Kenopfu (“birth spirit”). She is always seen as benevolent, and when Angami Naga live good lives, their souls go to her dwelling place in the sky. There are also gods called *terhoma*, who vary from deities with specific functions to vague spirits of nature inhabiting jungles, streams, and stones. Among the more important of these are Rutzeh (the bringer of sudden death), Maweno (the goddess of prosperity), and Tekhu-rho (the god of tigers). Gods and spirits can be either good or evil and have to be worshiped, appeased, or even challenged by humans. The Naga spirit world is also inhabited by the souls of the dead.

There are many kinds of specialists who deal with the religious aspects of Naga life. One of the most important of these is the *Kemovo*, who must be a direct descendant of the village or clan founder. The *Kemovo* directs all public ceremonies and is a source of genealogical and historical knowledge for his village and clan. The *Zhevo*, on the other hand, is indispensable for performing certain personal rituals. The term *genna* refers to the complex of magico-religious ceremonies around which Naga life centers. Some *gennas* are communal, e.g., relating to the agricultural cycle or the prevention of illness, while others are individual and are associated with life-cycle events. Various prohibitions on individual behavior (*kenna*) and community activity (*penna*) form part of the *genna* observances. Ritual acts of offering associated with the *genna* are called *nanu*. The Naga sacrifice both chickens and pigs, but of particular note is their custom of sacrificing the *mithan*, a species of domesticated cattle (*Bos frontalis*).

Although many elements of traditional religion survive among the Naga, most are Christian. Missionaries (American Baptists, in particular) who entered the Naga Hills in the 19th century set out to convert the naked, headhunting tribes they found living there. By 1947, about half of the Naga population had accepted Christianity. This number has been increasing in recent decades, and the 2001 census showed 90.01% of the Naga in Nagaland State as Christian.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

*Gennas* (rites of worship) make up the festival cycle of the Naga. The Angami Naga observe 11 of these annually, with others celebrated at less frequent intervals. *Gennas* vary in duration but are invariably accompanied by *penna* (community restrictions) and *kenna* (personal restrictions). The Sekrengi *genna*, for example, is performed to protect the community from illness during the coming year. At this time, the village is in strict *penna* for five days. Work and travel to and from the village are prohibited. Men are *kenna* and have to eat separately and abstain from sexual relations. Five more days of *nanu* (ritual offerings) are observed, when work in the fields is totally banned. *Gennas* commonly involve animal sacrifice, the

eating of special foods, such as dog-flesh, the wearing of ceremonial dress, and dancing and singing.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Every stage of a person's life is accompanied by individual *gennas* (rites). Immediately after birth, and before the cutting of the umbilical cord, a mother is fed on rice-beer, rice, and the flesh of a hen that has been touched by the newborn child. The husband, and sometimes the entire household, is under *kenna* (personal restrictions) for a period of time. Birth ceremonies end on the ninth day, when the father and mother take the baby to the fields. There, they pretend to work, take some food and drink, and then return to the village. Ears are pierced at a young age, although no formal ear-piercing ceremony is held. A name is given to the child after omens are read. The root *vi* (“good”) is common in Angami Naga names, as in *Vinile* (“keeping good”) or *Viyale* (“let your share be good”).

At the age of about six years, a boy takes his place with the men in the community. He is expected to strangle a cock with all the other males of the village as part of the Sekrengi *genna* and stays with the men in ceremonies where the sexes are segregated. There is no ritual to mark puberty or the first wearing of men's clothes. The *Morung* or dormitory where young, unmarried men sleep is an important institution among tribes such as the Ao Naga and Memi Naga, though less so for the Angami Naga. Youth are allowed a considerable degree of sexual freedom before marriage.

When a death occurs, mourners gather, bringing cattle, rice, and rice-beer. The cattle are sacrificed and the meat distributed in a manner that would reflect the wishes of the deceased. The body is placed in a wooden coffin, along with the seeds of various crops, rice-beer, and the person's own drinking cup. A fire-stick (a piece of wood used for making fire), spears, an ax, and a live chicken are buried with the corpse. These are for the dead person to use in the next life. A bitter seed known as *gadzosī* is placed between the dead person's teeth. This is so the soul may pass by *Metsimo*, the spirit who guards the path to paradise. The Naga dig their graves either in front of the house or along a village path. Burial takes place at dusk. The following day, men come to the grave site in ceremonial dress to challenge the spirit who has carried off the dead person. They place the skulls of slaughtered cattle on the grave, as well as the dead person's shield and weapons (if a man), and personal belongings. Sometimes a life-sized wooden effigy wearing the ceremonial dress of the dead person is erected over the grave. A tomb of stone slabs is often built up over the grave site. Various feasts and animal sacrifices complete the funeral rituals.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Any Naga who can afford it performs a series of social *gennas* (rites) that confers on him or her high social status in the community. These “Feasts of Merit,” each of which is more elaborate and costly than the preceding one, must be performed in a particular sequence. The rituals include ceremonial pounding of paddy rice (from which rice-beer is made) and sacrifices of pigs and *mithan* (cattle) whose flesh is consumed by the entire community. Those who perform the second-most important of these *gennas* (*Lisu*) are entitled to mount massive wooden horns (*kika*) on the roof of their house. The skulls of the sacrificed *mithan* may be hung on the house, and stylized *mithan* horns carved on its walls. Two wooden posts, the man's

being Y-shaped, are erected in honor of the husband and wife who carried out the genna. The highest of the social gennas is *Chisu*, or “stone-pulling.” The young men of the village or clan (sometimes hundreds in number) don their ceremonial dress, go out into the jungle, and pull a large stone back to the village. The stone is erected as a monolith to commemorate the genna. The event is, of course, accompanied by drinking, singing, and dancing.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Naga settlements are located on hilltops. In the past, the villages were heavily fortified against attack by neighboring tribes. Wooden or stone walls and defensive ditches surrounded the village, with access limited to a heavily guarded gate or a few protected entrances. Even within the village, a clan neighborhood (*khel*) would be protected by a wall. Although the need for these is gone, their remains can be seen throughout the region. Near the entrance to the part of a village occupied by a particular clan is often found a large stone that is venerated by the clan and that formerly played a role in the headhunting *genna* (rite). Other features of the Naga village are its graves, as well as the stone pillars erected as memorials to individuals or to commemorate gennas. Angami Naga villages have lookout posts, once used to watch for approaching enemies, which rise over 9 m (30 ft) above the village itself.

In an Angami Naga village, houses are arranged in no particular order (although among some tribes they have an easterly orientation). A typical Angami Naga house has one story and measures 10–20 m (30–60 ft) in length and 6–12 m (20–40 ft) in width. The floor consists of leveled earth. The front half of the house is used for storage and contains a bench for pounding rice. A wooden partition sets this off from a room that contains the hearth and also low platforms used for sleeping. At the very back, there is another compartment extending the entire width of the hut that holds the beer vat, which is made of a hollowed log. Household utensils and furnishings include earthen pots for cooking, baskets for storage, jars for carrying water, wooden platters for eating, and rough wooden stools.

There are four “degrees” of houses that reflect the social position of its occupant. Typically, a house has a frame of wooden posts to which bamboo matting walls and a thatched roof are fixed. The eaves extend low to the ground, so that the structure has the look of an A-frame, but with a less-steeply angled roof. A person who has performed certain social gennas lives in a house of the second degree. He or she is entitled to place bargeboards (ornamental boards that hide the beams) along the front gable. One who has performed the *Lisu* genna may extend these boards to form “house horns” above the roof line that may stand 10 m (30 ft) above the ground. This is a house of the third degree. The rare house of the fourth degree has a roof made of wooden shingles in addition to the house horns. The houses of the wealthy are carved with stylized motifs including *mithan* (cattle) heads and “enemies teeth,” a sign of the successful headhunter.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

The Angami Naga are divided into exogamous clans (*thino*). In modern times, however, the real exogamous unit seems to be a subdivision (*putsa* or “kindred”) of the clan. Marriage may be informal, a man simply taking a woman into his house, where they remain *kenna* (under personal restrictions) for a day.

The ceremonial marriage, however, is a matter of status and is much more elaborate. Marriage negotiations are concluded between the families involved, omens are read, sacrifices are made, and a bride-price is paid. Although individual practices vary among the Naga tribes, there is usually a fair degree of freedom in the selection of a mate. The Angami Naga are monogamous, but divorce is allowed and common. The position of women in Naga society is generally low. Among some tribes, a woman is not allowed to inherit land. On the other hand, a woman is very much an equal partner in domestic affairs and also participates in the family’s agricultural activities and trade.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

There is some variation in the dress of the Naga tribes. Some tribes go naked, like the Naked Rengma. Others, such as the Lhota, wear a type of loincloth called a *lengta*. Worn by males, this is a narrow girdle that is wrapped around the waist. One end is drawn down at the back, brought through the legs, and then tucked into waist at the front, where it hangs down like a flap. The *lengta* widens at the front to conceal the wearer’s genitals.

The traditional dress of the Angami Naga man is a short black kilt that reaches to mid-thigh. Three or four lines of cowry shells are generally sewn on the kilt. In the past, three lines meant the wearer was a warrior; and four, that he had taken a head in battle. A long cotton cloth is wrapped around the body over the kilt. Among the Angami Naga, this is usually black, with broad, vertical red and yellow stripes running down the border. The color of the cloth and the stripes vary among the Naga tribes. Ornaments include a wide, multistrand necklace of beads, ivory armlets, and black cane rings worn just under the knees. The Angami Naga woman wears a type of sleeveless bodice, formed by wrapping a piece of cloth under one arm and fastening it on the opposite shoulder. Another piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and falling to the knees creates a skirt. Necklaces and bracelets are common, but usually there are no ornaments on legs or feet. The hair of unmarried girls is shaved or cropped short. Ao Naga girls are tattooed upon reaching puberty.

For ceremonial occasions, a woman simply adds to her everyday dress two scarlet tassels of dyed goats’ hair hanging down from the ears and puts on as many bracelets as she can find. Ceremonial dress of men, however, is quite striking. A bearskin fringe surmounted by a wheel of hornbill feathers is worn on the head. A warrior might wear a headdress of *mithan* (cattle) horns, boar tusks, tiger claws, and hornbill feathers. Wooden rosettes are placed at the ears, and colored cane armlets and gauntlets, leggings, sashes, and other ornaments and decorations are added. Spears and shields complete the ceremonial dress, which clearly harks back to the warlike character of the Naga tribes in the past.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

Rice is the main food of the Naga, with potato, maize (corn), wheat, and millets also supplementing their starch intake. Meat plays a much more important role in the Naga diet than it does among other rice-eating peoples of South Asia. Pork, chicken, and beef are commonly eaten. The entire community feasts on *mithan* (cattle) after sacrifices, and dog-flesh is regarded as a delicacy. The Angami Naga are essentially om-



nivorous and will eat almost anything that can be hunted and caught in the jungle, from elephant (now rare) to crows and snakes. Some foods are *genna* (i.e., forbidden) because it is believed that some of their qualities pass on to the person who eats them. Thus, the Angami Naga prohibit their women from eating male goat meat because they fear that they will acquire the animal's "lecherous" tendencies. Certain prohibitions also exist on the eating of tiger meat. Meat is usually cooked together with vegetables (e.g., tubers, beans, spinach, gourds, etc.) along with chilies. Food is served on large wooden platters from which people help themselves with their fingers. Rice-beer (*zū*) is drunk throughout the day. Some tribes chew tobacco, while others smoke it through a water pipe.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Christianity is closely identified with modernity by the Naga, and followers of the Christian religion tend to be better educated than non-Christians. This, of course, reflects the importance Christian missionaries placed on education as a means of spreading their faith. Literacy among the Naga tribes varies, but it is on average higher than among other tribal groups in India, being reported as 65.8% in the 2001 Census of India. Literacy among the Konyak Naga was reported as low as 40.2% in the 2001 census, but it reaches as high as 85.9% among the Ao Naga. The value placed by the Naga on education is seen in the fact that some 80% of children below the age of 14 years were attending school in 2001.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Much of Naga heritage focuses on the warlike past of the Naga tribes. The taking of a head was a sign of a warrior's courage and skill and entitled him to the appropriate insignia on his clothing and even on his grave. The elaborate ceremonial dress of the Naga, and some of their dances, also hark back to a time when the Naga tribes were in constant conflict. Singing and dancing are an important part of Naga life. The Angami Naga, for example, have love songs, songs to be performed at particular *gennas* (rites), songs to be sung in the fields, songs for pounding rice, etc. All the Naga tribes have oral traditions of myth, folk tales, and songs that embody the legendary history and beliefs of the Naga people.

### **15 WORK**

The Naga practice shifting cultivation (*jhum*) and terraced agriculture by which they grow crops for trade as well as for their own consumption. They raise animals such as the *mithan* (a species of cattle, also known as the *gayal*), other types of cattle, and pigs for food. Their resources are often supplemented by hunting and gathering in the forest, though this is becoming less important. Dogs are kept for hunting as well as for food, although a Naga will never kill and eat his own hunting dogs. Spears, and now guns, are the weapons used for hunting. Killing fish by poison is common among the Naga tribes. With the spread of education, many Naga have taken to trade, government service, and other professions.

### **16 SPORTS**

Naga engage in athletic contests very much like those found in the West. These include the high jump and the long jump. High-kicking is a game in which young men aim at a mark set

on a tree, using either one leg or both legs. The mark is raised when it has been reached by the contestants. Some sports reflect the warlike past of the Naga. Wrestling is popular, as are spear-throwing competitions. The *Kedohoh* is a type of war dance, in which a young man, armed with shield and weapons, spins and utters shouts as if challenging enemy warriors. Young boys play fighting tops, the object being to set one's top spinning and knock over an opponent's top with it. Gambling with cowry shells is a popular pastime.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Access to modern forms of entertainment is restricted to those who can afford it. Otherwise, the Naga find their entertainment in their rituals and folk traditions. These include tribal legends, ceremonial dances, songs, community rituals, and the observance of religious and social ceremonies. Christians participate in the social activities of their churches.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Naga weave cotton cloth, each tribe having its identifying colors and striped patterns. Their artistic and aesthetic sense is seen in their elaborate ceremonial dress, ornaments, wood-carvings, ritual objects, such as forked (Y-shaped) memorial and sacrificial posts, the abstract designs of animal heads that decorate their houses, and tattoos. The more utilitarian Naga crafts include the making of iron spearheads and weapons, clay pots, bamboo mats, and cane basketwork.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Naga are caught up in the problems of political instability and ethnic conflict that characterize much of India's north-eastern region. The dream of independence is still strong in the minds of the Naga, and separatists in Nagaland continue to resist the presence of India with force. Recently, several insurgent groups have coordinated their activities under the banner of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). Indian security forces are carrying out operations against the guerrillas and have been accused of serious human rights violations by foreign observers. Matters are complicated by intertribal warfare. In Manipur State, for example, numerous incidents have occurred in which Naga have killed members of the Kiku tribe, and the Kiku have retaliated in kind. In addition, corruption and extortion are said to be commonplace in the government. The generally unsettled conditions have reportedly led to an increase of alcoholism and drug use among the Naga population.

The Naga Nationalist Union, a popular underground organization, put forward the following four reasons why Nagas should have a separate state:

- a) the Mongoloid Nagas are physically different from the Aryan Indians
- b) the Nagas are not Hindus and, therefore, do not practice Hinduism's prohibition on beef-eating
- c) the Hindu caste system goes against the egalitarian tribal system of the Nagas
- d) the Nagas should live in a democratic state that allows the free exchange of goods rather than a state that imposes taxes.

All these reasons are based on the differing nature of Naga tribal society compared to the Hindu-dominated Union of India. One of the greatest fears of the Nagas is that they will lose their tribal identity in the face of domination by New Delhi.

The violent conflict among Naga rebel groups that differ on the future of the Naga people and state continues to be a problem. A Naga civil society tired of the ongoing violence continues to denounce the violence and condemns the killings, factional clashes and loss of innocent lives and loss of properties, and appeals for dialogue, peace, reconciliation, unity and good sense continue to pour in from greatly troubled Naga mass-based organizations. As recently as the summer of 2008, the Naga Students' Federation (NSF), an organization of 21 student unions, demanded that the ongoing violence in the Naga family must cease. However, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (IM) General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah has said the group would keep up its agitation as no alternative solution was in sight: "Nagas will have to go on fighting for their rights. This is a hard reality. So, we will have to go on resisting."

It seems no end is in sight to the struggle in Nagaland, though it is unlikely that New Delhi can accede to demands for Naga independence.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Even though Naga society is patriarchal in nature, the rigid hierarchical structure of Hindu society, based on caste is non-existent in Naga society. The Nagas have a marked sense of "equality" based on community participation irrespective of sex, and they have hardly been influenced by the social stratification endemic in Hinduism and the Hindu caste system. By all considerations the Nagas still have a traditional society, although Christianity, education, urbanization have made considerable inroads into Naga society.

Women are regarded as playing a significant role in society. Traditional Naga culture and custom expect women to be obedient and humble, to perform the role of wife, mother, child-bearer, food producer and household manager. The mother is the first to rise before the crack of dawn and start a day's work and has the prime responsibility for looking after the children, caring for the sick, cooking, storing food, feeding domestic animals, fetching water, and cleaning and washing. Women do not inherit ancestral property and, though they do have the vote, are not well represented on the political scene. There is, however, no emphasis on the bearing of male children—in fact, Naga families tend to prefer that their firstborn be daughters.

Naga women have played an important role in keeping the peace process on track in Nagaland. Women have helped stop violence between competing Naga factions and also between Nagas and the Indian security forces. Women's organizations such as the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) and the Naga Women's Union have been actively involved in negotiating and mediating for peace and justice for the Nagas, and, today, the NMA and Naga Women's Union, Manipur (NWUM) are participating in the on-going cease-fire between the government of India and the Naga insurgents. The Indian government and the NSCN (I-M) would find it difficult to walk away from the peace table without provoking widespread public disaffection, largely as a result or pressure brought by organizations such as the NWA and NWUM. Such women's groups were integral to sustaining the current cease-fire, despite the strains following the arrest of Muivah in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2000, tension over the territorial extension of the cease-fire to all Naga areas, and endemic cease-fire violations. The continued support of women's organizations will be critical to the success of any

political solution negotiated between the government of India and the Naga insurgents.

However, despite their advantages, Naga women have to overcome the effects of the ongoing civil war. In addition, like many women in South Asia, they have to struggle with poverty, illiteracy, sexual discrimination, lack of inheritance, poor nutrition, and difficulty of access to health care facilities.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# NAXI

**PRONUNCIATION:** NAH-SEE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Muoshayi, Moxieman, Nari, Naheng,

Malimasha, Yuanke, Bangxi, Muoxie, Moshu, and Wuman

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 308,893

**LANGUAGE:** Naxi and Chinese

**RELIGION:** Dongba, Lamaism, Taoism, and Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

As early as the 4th century AD, the ancestors of the Naxi lived around Yanyuan in south Sichuan. They were called Muoshayi in Chinese ancient books. Later on, they reached the Jinsha River and Yalong River and gradually migrated south to areas around Lijiang and Binchuan in northern Yunnan. There, they became prosperous and called the Moxieman. They established their own political administration, Moxiezhao, which was later integrated into the Nanzhao Kingdom in the first half of the 8th century. Areas around Lijiang, however, became an area of fierce rivalry between Nanzhao and Tubo (the ancient regime of the Tibetans). In the mid-13th century, the army led by Mongolian aristocrats passed the Lijiang area to attack the Dali Kingdom and were welcomed by the Mu clan, ancestors of the Naxi. Thereafter, hereditary headmen of the Mu clan were appointed by the Yuan (1271–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. They represented a great force at the juncture of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet, and played the role of a strong pillar of the Chinese central government to rule over this area. Owing to the close contact with various nationalities over many centuries, the economy and culture of the Naxi have been greatly influenced by those of the Chinese, the Tibetans, the Yi, and the Bai.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Amounting to 308,893 in the 2000 census, the Naxi mainly inhabit Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County; they also form an important part of the ethnically composite population of Weixi, Zhongdian, and Ninglang counties in Yunnan Province and Mangkang County in Tibet. Jinsha, Lancang, and Yalong are three important rivers flowing through the areas inhabited by the Naxi and criss-crossing a varied topography of high mountain areas, plateaus, basins, and canyons, with an average height of 8,800 ft above sea level. Although the climate fluctuates considerably depending on altitude and season, rainfall is abundant and the land suitable for cultivation. The Jinsha River winds through a famous forested area. The Tiger-Leaping Gorge of Jinsha River is one of the deepest gorges in the world. The river cuts a deep course between the Yulong and Haba mountains, which reach an altitude of some 13,000 ft. Powerful torrents gush down a drop of more than 1,000 ft.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Naxi language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Tibeto-Burman group, Yi branch. There are two dialects, eastern and western. Many people are bilingual (Naxi and Chinese). There were two traditional writing systems. The first was ideographic as well as pictographic (Dongba writing); the second

was syllabic (Geba writing). These writing systems were not used by the Naxi people at large but were usually reserved for the priests of the Dongba religion (Bon shamanism originating from Tibet) to record poems, folklore stories, and rituals. An alphabetic writing based on romanization was created in 1957.

Naxi is a self-given name. “Na” means “big and black” and “Xi” means “men.” Different branches of the Naxi call themselves Nari, Naheng, Malimasha, Yuanke, Bangxi, Muoxie, and Moshu. In China, the Naxi were traditionally known as Wuman (Black people). Naxi has been their unified name since 1954.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Tradition has it that the first man of the world, Hengu, had five sons and six daughters. They married each other, incurring the wrath of the Supreme God, manifested by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. All the brothers and sisters died except the youngest brother, Li'en, who hid in remote, thickly forested mountains. The Supreme God sought to kill him. In despair, he met a lesser god who gave him a goat, a dog, a rooster and 10 kinds of cereal crops. Following the god's instructions, Li'en killed an ox, made a bag with its skin, and put the animals and the crops inside the bag. Knowing about it, the Supreme God tried to destroy the bag and its content by fire, thunder, and turbulent streams. The leather bag floated in the air for seven months and finally dropped on a cliff. Li'en cut it open and let out the animals. He busied himself by planting crops and sometimes hunting, but lived in solitude. He sought help again from the lesser god, who told him: There were two celestial women living on the Twin-Star Cliff. One of them was very beautiful but not good, while the other was very good but not beautiful. The god repeatedly admonished him that the latter was the one he should marry. However, when he met the beautiful fairy maiden, he fell under her spell. After the marriage, the beautiful maiden had four children. The first time she gave birth to a pine and a chestnut; the second, to a snake and a frog; the third, to a bear and a pig; and the fourth, to a monkey and a chicken. Li'en was deeply disappointed. He asked for help again. After he implored for a long time, the lesser god finally promised to help him propose to the good fairy maiden. He succeeded in marrying her after innumerable hardships. She gave birth to triplets, but after six years, they still could not talk. Li'en and his wife offered sacrifices to the gods of heaven and earth. One day, the children began to speak, but in different languages. The eldest spoke Tibetan; the second spoke Moxie (Naxi); the youngest spoke Chinese. They became the ancestors of the Tibetan, Naxi, and Chinese peoples.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Most Naxi believe in a religion called “Dongba”; others believe in Lamaism (the Tibetan version of Mahayana Buddhism) or Taoism. Since the 19th century a small number of them have converted to Christianity.

Dongba is a primitive polytheistic religion. Its name comes from its founder, Dongba Shiluo. He was a precocious child, endowed with many supernatural gifts. He killed an ogress and a number of malevolent ghosts, delivering the people from many evils. Another theory, however, says that Dongba is originally a branch of the original, pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, called “Bon” (a form of Shamanism). The Naxi believe that the innumerable spirits that fill the world are ambivalent, hav-



ing the power to bring disaster upon them and to grant them good fortune. They ascribe spirits to the sky, earth, sun, moon, mountain, water, fire, wind, rain, thunder, lightning, wood, snow, etc., and believe that the spirits never die. Therefore, they hold frequent offerings to various gods, even the Livestock God and Crop God. Images of gods appear on the instruments of the shaman (called *dongba*), including drums, bells, swords, chains, forks, bows, arrows, and conch. The religious activities involve almost every aspect of the Naxi's life, such as offering sacrifices to spirits and ancestors, marriage, birth, naming, burial, festival, divination, selection of dates for important events, exorcising ghosts, curing disease, praying for a good harvest, expiating the sins of the dead, etc.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Besides seasonal sacrificial offerings, major holidays are the Spring Festival, the Farm Tools Festival in January, the Dragon King Festival in March, the Torch Festival in June, and the Mule and Horse Meeting in July (all according to lunar calendar).

The Spring Festival (lunar New Year; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20) is a grand holiday. The New Year's Eve is a very important occasion. The traditional custom of cooking a pig's head and butchering chickens is still followed. These sacrificial rituals aim at honoring the Kitchen God and welcoming ancestors to return to celebrate the New Year together with the family. Various dishes and fruits are prepared for the dinner party. If a family member is away, a bowl and a pair of chopsticks symbolizing his/her presence

should be put on the table. Thus, the whole family is reunited. They feed the dog rice and meat; based on the dog's appetite, they forecast the production and the price of rice and pigs. On the first of January, they offer sacrifice for boys and girls who have reached 13 years of age.

The twentieth of January (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between February 11 and March 9) is the Farm Tools Festival. It is a fair of farm tools, originating from a temple fair in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Since the busy spring season is coming, an endless array of farm tools made of iron, wood, and bamboo, a wide variety of articles of daily use, as well as children's toys are exhibited on the square in front of the temple and on side streets.

The fifteenth of March (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between April 7 and May 5) is the Dragon King Festival, originally the date of a sacrificial offering to the Dragon King, now a fair of commodities among different nationalities.

From June 25–27 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between June 22 and August 22) is the Torch Festival. Buffalo fighting, wrestling, and antiphonal singing are held in the daytime. In the evening, each household places a big torch on a nearby tree and many small ones in the courtyard. Children hold torches while dancing. Youngsters gather to dance while playing the reed-pipe wind instrument (*lüsheng*).

July 15 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between August 9 and September 7) is the Mule and Horse Meeting. It is a colorful fair of large animals, among which the Lijiang and Yongning horses account for the greater part of the business (bidding). On this occasion, horse racing, antiphonal singing, and other recreational and sporting activities are also held.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Among the Naxi around Lake Lugu, a rite of "adulthood" for boys and girls having reached 13 years of age is held on the morning on the first day of the lunar New Year. All families having a child of that age kindle a big fire in the firepool. The boy stands by a "male column" and the girl by a "female column." They stand with one foot on a grain bag and the other foot on the fat of a pig. Silver coins are put in their hands. This rite means that they will have endless fortune in the future. Helped by her mother, the girl puts on a new skirt; the boy, helped by his uncle (mother's brother), puts on new trousers; the *dongba* (shaman) recites the prayers. Finally, the boys and the girls kowtow to their mother, uncle, and other elder members of their family. After the rite, they are allowed to participate in some major productive labor and social intercourse.

The Naxi burial customs vary in different districts. Cremation is traditional. Around Lake Lugu, the funeral is organized by the *lama* as well as by *dongba*. As soon as someone dies, the family informs relatives and neighbors. The body is washed. Bits of silver, tea, and butter are put into the mouth of the dead. Butter is also applied to the nose and ears. Linen bands are used to tie the body up into a squatting posture; it is then put inside a linen or white cloth bag. A cave is dug beforehand in the rear of the central room. The bag containing the body is put down into the cave, with its face toward the gate. The cave is covered by a plank or an iron pan, which is further covered by a layer of earth. It is the exclusive duty of the son or nephew of the dead to cover the plank or pan with earth. This is called the "temporary stay of the corpse," the duration of which is decided by the *lama*, but it should not exceed 49 days. During these days, rela-



*Naxi ethnic minority people practice traditional dance in Suhe village near Lijiang, China. Lijiang is a popular tourist destination. (AP Images/Eugene Hoshiko)*

tives and friends bring oblations and offer their condolences. When the days are over, the dongba priest is invited to read the scriptures to open a way for the soul of the dead. At the same time, the body is taken out of the cavern and put inside a cubic wooden coffin. When the coffin is sent to the crematorium, eight lama sit cross-legged while reciting the scriptures. Then, the body is again taken from the coffin and placed on firewood for cremation. They bury the ash in a secluded place. The Naxi in Lijiang District have exchanged the fire burial for a ground burial. There are four or five successive rituals during the funeral, which is organized mainly by the dongba.

### **<sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

When entertaining guests, the host usually offers buttered tea, corn candy, millet candy, and stir-fried sunflower seeds. An alternative is bitter tea, potato, and stir-fried cornmeal. If the host gives a banquet, stewed chicken, fried eggs, pork, bean curd, and wine are served.

The youngsters are free to meet socially. During festivals and fairs, girls band together and prepare to meet boys. Holding catkins in their hands, the young men also get together in groups. According to custom, girls always bring some candies or cakes with them. The young men beg the girls they like for some refreshments. They make an appointment to meet in the evening by the riverside or by the bonfire. They express their passions through singing, but they are not allowed to sit side-by-side or face-to-face. A distance of 2–3 m (7–10 ft) is necessary for their conversation or antiphonal singing.

### **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

There are two traditional types of housing. One is a wood-arris house. The walls are built by piling up logs and roofed with planks, which are pressed by stones. A firepool is at the center of the room. The beds are set up on frames. The second type is a tile-roofed house. The foundation is built by piling up hewn rocks. The lower portion of the wall is built with bricks or adobes, and the upper portion with planks. The roof is rather large, with eaves stretching outward to protect the wooden walls. There are many compounds of houses around a common courtyard, similar to the quadrangle of Beijing. There are also storied houses for large families.

Highways have been built in recent decades. Most of the Naxi townships and villages have bus stops. There are well-equipped hospitals in counties and cities. Pestilence and epidemic diseases have been eradicated since 1949.

### **<sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE**

There are three types of families. One is the patrilineal family, usually an extended family consisting of three to four generations. The property is handed down from the father to his sons. The eldest son will be the patriarch when his father is old and infirm. When they break up the big family and live apart, an “old-age field” is provided for the parents and will be cultivated on their behalf by their sons. The position of women in a family is rather low. They have no right of inheritance. This type of family is now mostly replaced by small monogamous families, and the position of men and women in a family is more or less equal.

Naxi families living around Lake Lugu are matrilineal. For instance, a woman lives with her brothers and sisters, her mother with her mother’s brothers and sisters, and so on for women of each generation. All the family members are generations of women with their sons and daughters. In the family, there are no husbands and wives, because they practice a unique form of friendship marriage called *azhu* (“friend”). An adult man goes to a woman’s house at night and they sleep together. He returns to his mother’s house at dawn to participate in productive labor there. The man and the woman call each other *azhu*. Their relationship is by no means stable. It may last as long as several years, or as short as one or two nights. Most of the men or women have six or seven *azhu* in their lives. The men usually begin to have an *azhu* at 17 or 18 and the women at 15 or 16. If the boy and girl are offspring of the same maternal ancestor of less than five generations, the *azhu* relationship is taboo; if more than five generations, there is no prohibition. Difference in age, seniority in the family or clan, and nationality are not limitations. To renounce the *azhu* relation is easy: either the woman closes her door to the man or the man ceases to call at her house. In some cases a simple message is sent to

the opposite side stating that the azhu relation is terminated. The children born from the azhu relationship are members of the woman's family. The man has no concern for the children. A family usually consists of two to four generations, with an average of seven or eight people. In rare cases, the family members amount to as many as 20 to 30. The head of the family is usually an aged or a capable woman. She is also the organizer of the sacrificial offerings. The work is divided according to age and sex. The property is distributed according to a principle of egalitarianism.

The third type is the bilateral family, in which patrilineal and matrilineal families coexist. The children borne by the woman before and after marriage live in the same family, but only those who were born after her marriage are counted on the paternal side. All the family members have equal inheritance and proprietary rights. The bilateral family appears to be the combination of the matrilineal (linked to the azhu relationship) and of the patrilineal family structure of the Naxi.

In areas where the Naxi do not practice azhu, the wedding is an elaborate ceremony and the matrimonial customs show a marked influence of the Chinese traditional model.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The men's dress is not very different from that of the Chinese. In winter, men wear a short garment of worn-out fur or a wool cloak. The middle-aged and the aged wear a long robe buttoned on the side, which was the traditional male dress of the Chinese and the Manchus during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Men always put on a cap or a hat; if not, they wrap their head with a cloth. Women's clothes vary in different districts. In some areas, they wear a vest and a loose garment over their knees and a pair of trousers that is covered by a multi-pleated skirt. In other areas, they wear a short garment and a multi-pleated skirt with a broad waistband of cloth. Girls comb their hair into braids or wear a kerchief. Married women always wrap their head with a long cloth. The colors of their dress are mostly black, blue, and white.

### **12 FOOD**

The staple foods of the Naxi include wheat, rice, and corn. In mountainous areas, highland barley, buckwheat, and potato are added as a supplement. They usually take rice only at dinner. Wooden tablewares are used. Meat is served in equal portions by the man of the house. Daughters are in charge of other dishes. The Naxi like sour and spicy food, drinking, and smoking. Ham cakes and sour fish are some of their main delicacies; these will be served to guests or offered as gifts.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In Lijiang, 94% of school-age children attend local schools. In areas around Lake Lugu, primary schools have been set up in larger villages and middle schools in the counties. However, school attendance is not as high as that of the Lijiang District. There are a number of college students and scholars of Naxi nationality throughout China and some studying or teaching abroad.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

A major feature of Naxi culture is the combination of poems, songs, music, and dance, such as "Wenmaida," "Arere," and

"Sanduo." There is also ancient orchestral music performed on indigenous or Chinese instruments including bamboo flutes, vertical flutes, reed-pipe (*liusheng*), two- and three-stringed violins (*huiqin* and *sanxian*), plucked string instruments (*pipa*, *zheng*, and *se*) conches, and drums. "Dongba Classic Dance" (performed during rituals) and folk dance follow the general pattern of dancing while singing. A number of Naxi dances are imitations of animal movements: "White Lamb Dance," "White Deer Dance," Lark Dance," "Ox Dance," "Golden Peacock Dance," etc.

The Naxi have a rich literature including myths, folklore, stories, long poems, folk songs, fables, fairy tales, proverbs, riddles, and children's songs. Among them, "The Creation," preserved intact in Dongba scripture, is the most famous. It describes the story of Li'en, the earliest ancestor of the Naxi. Narrative poems, such as "The War of Black and White" and "Hunting Song," are also masterpieces of Naxi literature.

### **15 WORK**

The main occupation of the Naxi is agriculture. Because of their long tradition of livestock husbandry, they are also experts in raising horses. Their horses are small and tough, good for climbing hills and mountains. Some people grow Chinese medicinal herbs. Ludian in Lijiang is the "home of medicinal herbs."

### **16 SPORTS**

Swinging, horse racing, wrestling, and arrow shooting are traditional sports of the Naxi. In addition, there are two unique sports. One is the "Rotating Race" (*damoqiu*), for which the teenagers are most enthusiastic. A pole is erected on the ground. Its upper end is pared in a concave hemispherical pit. A transverse pole is pared at the middle point into a round ball-like shape to fit in the hemispherical pit of the vertical pole. Some vegetable oil is added for lubrication. Two players facing each other prostrate the upper part of their body on the transverse pole. They exert their strength on tiptoe in turn when touching the ground, thus making the ends of the transverse wave up and down as it rotates faster and faster. It requires much skill and is physically quite exhausting. The other sport peculiar to the Naxi is the "Dongba Jump." The athletes dress like warriors, imitating the martial practice of the ancient dongba, who were both priests and warriors.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Movies and television are quite popular in the Naxi districts. The public cultural events in their cities are not different from those of the Chinese. But, the Naxi still prefer their traditional forms of entertainment, singing, dancing, swinging, and *damoqiu*.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Carpets, brass and copper ware, embroidery, ornaments, silver plated wooden bowls, and tanned leather products are famous Naxi crafts. The ancient Naxi architecture (as is found in the governmental offices of local officials, temples, ancestral halls, arches, pavilions, stone tablets, and pagodas) are universally admired. The Naxi talent for sculpture and carving is vividly demonstrated in the wooden statue of the thousand-arm Buddha in Dajue Palace and in the openwork of the doors and

windows of civilian houses. The thousand-arm Buddha in Fuguo Temple, the Sakyamuni in Longquan Temple, and group of warring animals in Beiyue Temple are masterpieces of clay sculpture.

## <sup>19</sup> SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Naxi have succeeded in maintaining their socio-economic sovereignty. They live in quite compact communities, cut off from the main lines of communication and transport in China. There is a marked rural/urban imbalance in their overall development. For instance, the Naxi around Lake Lugu still preserve their ancestral matrilineal type of marriage and family, while the Naxi living in and around Lijiang City have been integrated in the "Chinese way of life."

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# NEGRITO (PINATUBO AETA GROUP)

**PRONUNCIATION:** nuh-GREE-toh (pee-nah-TOO-boh EYE-tah)

**LOCATION:** Philippines (Luzon); Malay Peninsula

**POPULATION:** Over 7,600 (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Dialect of Sambal

**RELIGION:** Traditional animism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of the Austronesians, small hunter-gathering bands of Australo-Melanesians inhabited islands in Southeast Asia and the Malay Peninsula. The modern Negritos (Spanish for “little blacks”) represent a remnant and physical specialization of this stock. “Pure” Negritos differ from the dominant Southern Mongoloid populations of the region in being shorter of stature (less than 1.5 m or 5 ft tall), darker in complexion, and having kinky rather than straight hair. They can be found in the Sierra Madre (Dumagat), in the Ilocos Mountains, and in the greatest numbers in the Zambales Mountains, all on Luzon. Outside the Philippines, they are found on the Malay Peninsula (Semang) and, formerly, in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Possible mixed groups characterized by wavy hair can be found in Panay, Negros, Palawan (Batak), and Mindanao (Mamanua). Of all these, only the Andaman Islanders spoke in historical times a language unrelated to a neighboring Austronesian language (as in the Philippines) or an Austro-Asiatic one (on the Malay peninsula). In the Philippines, lowlanders generally refer to Negritos as “Aeta” or some variation thereof (the word seems to be a garbled form of the Malay word for “black,” *hitam*). Upon the Spanish arrival, Negritos appeared to inhabit the edges of highlands throughout the archipelago (for instance, the Visayan island of Negros received its name because its mountains were particularly, but not uniquely, full of them); legends such as those of Panay [see **Hiligaynon**] honored Aeta as the original possessors of the land.

This article will focus on the Zambales Negritos in general and the Poon Pinatubo Aeta (“the people of the thigh of Mount Pinatubo”) in particular; henceforth, all uses of the word “Aeta” will refer only to this group.

In their reliance on swidden (shifting-cultivation) agriculture, among other characteristics, the Pinatubo Aeta show more prolonged contact and intermarriage with lowlanders than do other Negrito groups. They may have originally lived in the lowlands themselves, as the plants they know are lower-altitude species (most Aeta know 450 types of plants, 75 types of birds, and most types of mammals, snakes, fish, and insects, including 20 kinds of ants). The Aeta have been in particularly intimate contact with the lowland Sambals, adopting the Sambal language, agricultural techniques, spirit beliefs, curing rites, and burial customs, but adapting them to their own culture.

Although older Spanish documents record Aeta working as woodcutters for Sambal and as companions of Sambal chiefs, the relation has overall not been a peaceful one. Sambals regu-

larly made raids into Aeta territory in order to capture slaves (some to be sold as far away as Batangas until fairly recent times); the indemnity for murder could be paid with an Aeta slave. Moreover, as each Sambal man had to prove his worth by killing someone, Aeta often fell prey to their headhunting. To be sure, Aeta also abducted other Aeta in order to sell them to lowlanders, and parents even sold their children (after lowlanders had plied them with liquor).

Lowlanders often dispossessed Aeta of land, buying it with blankets, rice, or machetes. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Pampangans drove Aeta from the lands under Mt. Pinatubo in order to open fields for rice and sugarcane; a Don Angel Pantaleon acquired the forest that would later become Clark Air Force Base in this way.

Some Aeta did submit to Spanish administration, but the unsubjected majority fled deeper into the mountains, particularly after raiding lowland villages that would in turn send revenge expeditions after them. The Spaniards attempted to mediate these conflicts, granting the title of *capitán* to cooperative Aeta leaders but on the whole failing to get the Aeta to settle in the lowlands.

In 1917, the American regime established a 4,720-hectare (11,660-acre) reservation for the Pinatubo Aeta; this, however, in practice remained accessible to lumber companies and sugarcane planters. World War II is a well-remembered time of chaos among the Aeta. Japanese ambushed Aeta, while the Aeta protected shot-down American pilots. In gratitude, General MacArthur himself granted Aeta the right to free movement through the base boundaries so they could scavenge; he also had food distributed to them from time to time. During the Vietnam War, Aeta taught American pilots how to survive in the jungle (e.g., camping in the forest, making fires, cooking without smoke, getting water from vines and trees, hiding from enemies, etc.).

The eruption of Mt. Pinatubo during the Aquino presidency disrupted Aeta life, perhaps irrevocably. A great number of Aeta perished under the falling ash and lava. Many of the survivors drifted to Manila, earning money by selling souvenirs, such as stones from Pinatubo. The conversion of the former U.S. military base at Subic Bay (between Zambales and Bataan provinces) into a resort area, as well as an export-processing zone, has opened up some new opportunities for Aeta, for instance, as guides for eco-tourists exploring the nature reserves on former base lands, or at least giving them the chance to sell souvenirs to tourists in front of hotels, shopping centers, and bus stations much closer to home than Manila.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to 1975 figures, 23,000 Negritos lived in the Philippines. Of these, 15,000 inhabited the Zambales mountains along the west coast of central Luzon, concentrated especially on the lower slopes of the 1,610-m-high (5,280-ft-high) volcano, Pinatubo. Except for the inaccessible places, the mountain was deforested and covered with cogon grass. Its recent eruption has catastrophically changed these Aeta’s homeland. According to the 2000 census, 7647 inhabitants of Zambales province identified themselves as “Aeta.”

In contrast to other Negrito groups whose numbers are declining due to disease, malnutrition, and assimilation, the Zambales Aeta population is actually growing rapidly. The surrounding lowlands have nonetheless come to be occupied



by Sambal, Pampangan, Ilocano, and Tagalog settlers. In Zambales province in 2000, 27% of the population was Sambal, 27.5% Ilocano, 37.8% Tagalog; Cebuano immigrants were already half as numerous as Aeta.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Zambales Aeta speak a dialect of the Sambal, the language of the surrounding Christian lowlanders that is most closely related to Kapampangan.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Other than the *anito* and *kamana* (good and bad spirits, respectively) Aeta recognize a variety of other supernatural entities and phenomena. When traveling beyond his or her local area, a person must pray to the *laman nin lota*, the spirit of the earth; otherwise, he or she might end up walking around the same place forever. A *balanding* is a spirit that, if it catches a person in the forest, immediately kills him or her. A *binagoonan*, another evil spirit, appears as a big man (described as resembling an American) who sits on the bough of a tree and has a body that glimmers like fire.

A benign spirit is the *patianak*, a dwarf resembling a child. The *balandang* is a powerful spirit, leader of the wild pigs and deer, who greatly influences the outcome of hunting. *Timbi* are thunder (*kilat*) attacks whose effects can be averted through medicines; *kilat* strikes when it is angered by people teasing earthworms or laughing at mating animals. Aeta carry talismans, such as stone tools left behind by ancient people.

### **5 RELIGION**

Aeta distinguish generally well-disposed spirits (*anito*) from inherently malicious ones (*kamana*). *Anito* dwell in forests, bamboo thickets, streams, rocks, huge tree trunks, etc., and only harm people when provoked. *Kamana*, on the other hand, have no fixed place and roam around, either victimizing the dead or actually being the dead themselves.

Those violating the property rights of spirits (e.g., by cutting down a tree belonging to one) suffer misfortune and illness; they must compensate the spirits with gifts (*langgad*) of tobacco, wine, and red cloth (procured from lowland traders). Burning certain plants creates smoke that drives off evil spirits (today kerosene lamps are favored for this).

Some Aeta believe that each person has a single soul (*kaelwa* or *kalola*) that can leave the body: if the soul leaves temporarily, it causes sickness; if it leaves permanently, it causes death. Others say that a person has multiple souls: if one leaves, sickness results; if all go, death occurs. The Aeta avoid the spirits of the dead, making offerings to them only at *patay* harvest festivals. The spirits of the dead ascend to Mt. Pinatubo and there lose their individual identity, merging into "all the dead" (*minaci*).

*Manganito* are male or female spirit mediums who can procure the rights from spirits to use land and can cure illnesses through *anituwan* rites. The better-known healers are greatly respected and feared by lowland Filipinos in neighboring areas. Actually, only groups that have adopted much lowland culture have such spirit mediums; in more isolated groups, a person with an ailment simply consults another who is more knowledgeable about medicinal plants.

In order to diagnose a patient's condition, the *manganito* blows on the sick person's body to send his or her guardian



*anito* to the body to find out what is causing the trouble. Later, the *anito* tells what it has learned to the *manganito*, either in a dream or through a sudden visitation while the *manganito* is doing something else; it is at this point that the spirit orders that the *anituwan* séance be held.

During the *séance*, someone plays the *gitara nin lae* (hand-made lowland guitar) in a quick rhythm (*magteteg*); this stirs another person to dance the *talipe* (jumping and making swift hand movements) until he or she tires out, and another dancer replaces him or her. Eventually, the *manganito* joins the dancing and soon dominates it. When the spirits possess the medium, the medium's body stops trembling, and he or she enters

a trance and assumes a somewhat arrogant tone when questioned by those present as to what the spirit causing the disease wants. The séance also provides participants the opportunity to mention sources of group tension that might be causing the disease, which they normally would not be able to express.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

In December or January when food stocks are plentiful, large numbers of Aeta gather together in *iwi* or “fiestas of the spirits.”

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

The ideal pattern for marriage entails a gradual transition between single and married life in three stages: *hogo*, the formal marriage proposal; the *suson*, the negotiation of the bride-price; and *banhal*, the wedding feast. The hogo is made by a man's father or guardian. It is now more common for two people to get to know and like each other before marrying than it is for parents to arrange marriages. However, a man may on his travels meet a woman he likes without declaring his feelings; he will then ask his father to make the hogo to her family. In delivering the proposal, the father brings rice and a pig (or at least a chicken or can of sardines) to the woman's house after sunset.

Members of both kin-groups attend the *suson*, for all the man's kin contribute to the bride-price (*bandi*), and all the woman's kin partake in it. The negotiators use pebbles and twigs to represent the number and height of animals (pigs, chickens, and recently water buffaloes) to be given (delivered one by one as acquired). Formerly, *bandi* consisted of tobacco, maize, rattan, knives, cloth, forest products, *paltik* guns, and even cash. Today, *bandi* includes radios, portable phonographs, and rice, as well as machetes and money. The terms of the *bandi* agreement are generally set by oral agreement and remembered, but now Aeta might ask an Ilocano merchant to write them out in Ilocano.

After the *suson*, the man performs labor for his fiancée's family (bride-service, *manoyo* or *mangampo*) as a voluntary expression of his good will and to show his ability to take care of a family. During this time, the man must appear indifferent to the woman, avoid her, and behave properly. The wedding is sealed at a *banhal*, an expensive feast that is rarely held because of the burden of paying *bandi*.

Disagreements over the bride-price are a major source of conflict between kin-groups. It used to be common for Aeta men to capture women for their brides. Today, if the families do not agree to the union, the couple can elope (*mipowayo*); they hide in a remote hut for a while or go to the man's parents or relatives.

Formerly, Aeta abandoned a house where a person had just died. The corpse was wrapped and buried either horizontally or vertically beneath the house or at a distance. After a death, men would go on a headhunting raid (*mangayau*, perhaps a Sambal influence).

Today when a person dies, relatives, especially the women, gather around the deceased to wail. The family sends messengers to distant relatives and waits to bury the deceased until the relatives arrive or until the body begins to smell, whichever comes first. At least one night of mourning is observed for which the deceased is dressed in its best clothes or wrapped, with a glass of water and a plate placed next to the head. Close

relatives sit around the body, while children and young people sit outside in a circle singing Tagalog or Ilocano love songs to drive away spirits (they pass around a firebrand, the one holding it having the turn to sing). Those Aeta under greater lowland influence observe nine days of mourning, ending with a final banquet (*pamisa*).

More-settled Aeta now use cemeteries, although the paths to them are overgrown because Aeta avoid them. Each mourner throws a clod of earth on the coffin before the grave is covered over, saying to the deceased, “*Agkayna mag-orong*,” “Please don't come back.” Some stamp their feet on the ground to drop their sorrow. The mourners may wash their face, hands, and feet in a river and step over a fire in front of the house to cleanse themselves of death.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

An encampment consists of 3 to 10 related families headed by the eldest male, who is assisted by other closely related males. Among more traditional groups, the encampment is an extended family that farms, hunts, and fishes together and sometimes cooks and eats together, using common utensils. Less traditional groups consist of families that function separately but remain in close association. The encampment is an exogamous unit, i.e., its members marry partners from outside the community, all of whose members contribute to and partake in bride-prices.

Aeta values stress harmony and downplay competition within the local community. Individuals in conflict with others tend to move away from the community before tensions become unmanageable. An informal council of older men resolves disputes through appeal and persuasion. The pressure of public opinion and the fear of supernatural punishment (e.g., for violating spirits' property rights without making a subsequent acknowledgment and offering compensatory gifts) also exert control on individual behavior. An offended party may publicly threaten the offender or his family; the threat pushes the community as a whole to put pressure on the parties to resolve their differences.

Aeta keep dogs for hunting and the occasional wild pig as a pet.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Aeta live in scattered settlements or encampments of rarely more than three to four households (20–40 individuals). They move between a relatively fixed village and shifting swidden sites. The villages relocate every year or so after exhausting local resources or in case of epidemics or bad omens; they do relocate within a defined territory, however. The arrangement of dwellings follows no set pattern, although some anthropologists have noted that some villages take the form of a circle of huts around a central dancing place.

Houses are semipermanent structures of bamboo, banana stalks, and leaves. They are tent-shaped with one walled side where a low sleeping platform stands, with a hearth on the ground at the other end beneath a low sloping roof. Some more-settled Negritos have built houses of lowland style (see **Filipinos**). While traveling or hunting, Aeta use crude, floorless lean-tos for temporary shelter.

Zambales province is the poorest of the provinces of Central Luzon, which itself ranked third out of 17 regions in average annual family income). According to the 2000 census, 78.9%

of houses are lit with electricity, compared to 90.4% in Pampanga. 4.4% of households obtain water from springs, lakes, or rivers, compared to 0.5% in Pampanga. The proportions for those possessing their own household faucet were 20.8% and 27.2% respectively.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Among the Pinatubo Aeta, the *mitata-anak* or nuclear family is less important than the grouping of related families living in the same encampment; this grouping is known by the name of its dominant male individual, e.g., “Hilay Pan Hokli” or “Mitata-Pan Hokli,” which can be extended to include his children-in-law and grandchildren.

Parents traditionally contract marriage for the children while the latter are still young. Marriages are more often between people of different villages than those of the same village. First-cousin marriage is permissible after the performance of cleansing rituals. A man is permitted to take more than one wife, but this is rare. Divorce also seldom occurs because the relatives of the couple prevent it; if the woman is at fault, her family must return the bride-price (*bandi*).

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Aeta clothing was made of bark-cloth, but now people generally wear clothes bought from lowlanders, such as (for adult men) tee-shirts to accompany loincloths. Necklaces made of Job’s tears (hard white seeds) are worn. Men used to wear tight boar’s-hair arm and leg bands as a sign of bravery and as magical protection against injury. Formerly, Aeta beautified themselves with teeth-chipping, -pointing, and -blackening, as well as by cicatrization (making decorative scars, also a protection against disease).

### **12 FOOD**

About 85% of the Aeta diet comes from agricultural products: sweet potatoes, cassava, maize, dry-rice, taro, yams, and bananas. Following lowlanders, Aeta have developed a taste for rice, but, because dry-field varieties are not as productive, they still rely on root crops for the major part of their sustenance. Gathering supplies 7% of the diet: wild bananas and banana flowers, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, poisonous yams (*kalot*, requiring a long soak or several boils before they are safe to eat), fruits, nuts, berries, roots, honey, larvae, small frogs (*egik*), and insects (especially a certain kind of beetle). Hunting and fishing provide the remaining 8% of the diet: wild pigs, deer, birds, fish, and now pigs and chickens.

### **13 EDUCATION**

More-settled Aeta send their children to modern schools [see *Filipinos*].

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Aeta dances include those imitating the actions of animals. They are also fond of telling stories (*istorya*) about their history or personal experiences, as well as those recounting folk legends.

### **15 WORK**

Aeta practice a highly inefficient form of swidden agriculture, intercropping root crops, maize, and rice (traditionally only root crops). They also gather a wide variety of wild plants.

Aeta traditionally hunt wild pigs and deer with dogs, fire, and bows and arrows. Crude homemade shotguns (*paltik*) were coming more and more into use (and nearly exterminating game animals in the process) until the government confiscated all firearms under martial law (declared in 1972). A wide variety of traps are used to catch smaller game and birds. Aeta now keep domestic pigs and chickens.

Fishing techniques include damming off streams, poisoning, trapping, and shooting with bows and arrows. Today, underwater fishing with spear guns has become popular; the swimmers use goggles made of wood and scavenged glass.

Traditional trade consisted of forest products, beeswax, and tobacco exchanged for lowlanders’ salt, rice, metal, ceramics, and cloth. Scavenging from the dumpsites of American bases also provides Aeta with useful materials, such as scrap metal.

### **16 SPORTS**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

More-settled Aeta may have access to modern entertainments; many now have radios and phonographs and enjoy Filipino pop music [see *Filipinos*].

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Smithing is a major specialty, producing arrows, machetes, and even crude shotguns (*paltik*); arrowheads made in the Pinatubo area are traded all over the Zambales range. Aeta smiths follow taboos and rituals no longer observed by lowland Sambal smiths.

The skills to make bark-cloth are widely known but currently little used.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

There is a strict sexual division of labor. Women occupy themselves with agriculture, gathering, and small-scale fishing, men with occasional hunting, and young men with underwater spear fishing. In planting a field, a line of men does make seed holes with dibble sticks, followed by a row of women inserting the seeds. Men spend most of their time away from home, trading, paying visits to relatives and friends, and participating in marriage negotiations. Although spirit mediums can be either men or women, the informal council that arbitrates disputes is composed only of older men, and the encampments to which Aeta families belong are identified by the name of the most dominant man.

According to the 2000 census, among the Aeta, men and women were about equal in number (50.9% vs. 49.1%). In the Zambales population as a whole, there were more females (50.9%) than males in elementary education, even though females were only 49.5% of the population over the age of 5 years—female predominance also characterizes all higher levels except high school.

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—revised by A. Abalain

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# NEPĀLĪS

**PRONUNCIATION:** nuh-PAW-leez

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Nepalese

**LOCATION:** Nepal

**POPULATION:** 30 million (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Nepālī (Gorkhali) is official language; over 36 other languages and dialects

**RELIGION:** Hindu majority (86.2%); Buddhist; Muslim; Christian; Jain

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The term “Nepālī” (also “Nepalese”) describes the peoples of the mountain kingdom of Nepal. It includes a number of distinct ethnic and caste groups that have their own separate identities and customs, but who also share certain common cultural attributes and an historical association with Nepal. Of the modern nations of South Asia, Nepal is unique in that it is the only country of any size to have maintained its independence during the period of British colonial rule.

The Kathmandu Valley is the political and historical heartland of Nepal, and evidence points to cultures centered here as early as the 8th or 7th century BC. Indian inscriptions dated to the 4th century AD refer to a kingdom called “Nepala” in the Himalayan Mountains. Dynasties such as the Licchavis, Thakuris, and Mallas ruled the region at various times, but the birth of modern Nepal can be traced to the rise of the Gurkhas in the 18th century. The ancestors of the Gurkha rulers are thought to have been Rajput princes fleeing from Muslim persecution in Rajasthan in western India. They established themselves in the mountains of what is now western Nepal in the mid-16th century. In 1768, Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ninth king in the Gurkha dynasty, conquered the Kathmandu Valley and moved his seat of power there.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the kingdom of Nepal extended along the Himalayas from Kashmir to Sikkim. However, disputes over its southern border led Nepal into conflict with the British in India. Defeat during the Anglo-Gurkha wars (1814–1816) saw Nepal’s expansion halted and its borders fixed in their present locations. Sikkim, to the east, became a British protectorate. Much of the western part of the kingdom, and some territory in the productive lowlands in the south, were lost to British India. Following 1816, Nepal closed its borders to foreigners and did not reopen them until 1951.

In 1846, a young general named Jung Bahadur Rana seized power in Kathmandu. He appointed himself prime minister and made the office hereditary. For the next century, the kings remained nominal figureheads, but the Ranas were the real rulers in the country. Some instituted social changes, such as abolishing slavery and banning *satī* (suttee), which is the custom of wives burning themselves alive on their dead husband’s funeral pyre. Most of the wealthy and autocratic Ranas, however, did little to improve the lot of the commoners and ruled very much as feudal overlords.

By the mid-20th century, the winds of political change sweeping across India were beginning to be felt in Nepal. The Indian National Congress, the nationalist political party that fought for India’s independence from Britain, had its counterpart in the Nepālī National Congress. This organization



became the focus of opposition to the Ranas. The powerless king, a virtual captive in his palace, emerged as a symbol of the democratic hopes of his subjects. In 1950, the King of Nepal managed to escape to India. At this point, the Nepālī National Congress called for the overthrow of the Rana and proclaimed its own provisional government. After some inconclusive fighting, a compromise between the two rival parties was mediated by India. King Tribhuvan was restored to power and returned from exile in 1951, committed to establishing democracy in Nepal.

Although a representative form of government was instituted in 1959, within two years King Mahendra, Tribhuvan's successor, dismissed the parliament and banned political parties. He introduced a system of indirect government in which the prime minister and cabinet were chosen by the king. This system continued under King Birendra, who succeeded to the throne in 1972. Following two decades of periodic political unrest, a new constitution was proclaimed in 1990. This created a true parliamentary democracy, legalized political parties, and made provisions for a popularly elected legislature. The first general election under the new system was held in May 1991. King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev continued to rule as a constitutional monarch, although his former powers had been severely curtailed.

On 1 June 2001 however, Crown Prince Dipendra was officially reported to have shot and killed his father, King Birendra; his mother, Queen Aishwarya; his brother; his sister; his father's younger brother, Prince Dhirendra; and several aunts,

before turning the gun on himself. Gyanendra, Birendra's brother, succeeded as King. However, on 1 February 2005 suspended the Parliament, appointed a government led by himself, and enforced martial law. The King argued that civilian politicians were unfit to handle the Maoist insurgency current in Nepal at the time. Telephone lines were cut, and several high-profile political leaders were detained. Other opposition leaders fled to India and regrouped there. A broad coalition called the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) was formed in opposition to the royal takeover, encompassing the seven parliamentary parties who held about 90% of the seats in the old, dissolved parliament. A countrywide uprising began in April 2006, resulting in massive and spontaneous demonstrations and rallies held across Nepal against King Gyanendra's autocratic rule. Eventually, an agreement was made for the monarchy to be abolished, which it was on 25 May 2008, therefore ending 240 years of royal rule. Nepal became a Federal Democratic Republic with the prime minister becoming head of state.

The last decade of the monarchy was marked by the "Nepalese People's War," fought between Maoist insurgents and the Nepalese police and, later, the Royal Nepal Army. More than 12,800 people were killed during this conflict and an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 people were internally displaced during this time. The conflict disrupted the majority of rural development activities and led to the emergence of a deep and complex Left Front which, together with the Nepali Congress, was the backbone of the broadbased movement for democratic change in Nepal. In 1994 the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) split, with the militant faction later renaming itself as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The war was started by the CPN (M) on 13 February 1996, with the aim of establishing the "People's Republic of Nepal." For 10 years the country was in the grip of civil war, with the Maoist insurgency initially commencing in the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot in western Nepal and eventually spreading to 68 of the country's 75 districts. At first, the insurgency was seen as a police matter, but after Maoists attacked an army barracks in western Nepal in 2002 following failure of peace talks, the Army was called in to fight the insurgents. A considerable number of retired Gurkha soldiers of the British and the Indian Army inhabit many of the Maoist-affected areas and Nepalese security agencies suspected that these former soldiers along with retired soldiers and deserters from the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) were involved in training the insurgents. Government estimates provided in early 2003 on the CPN-M strength indicated that there were approximately 15,500 combatants, 18,000 militia, 24,500 active cadres, 33,000 hard core followers, and 800,000 sympathizers, with Brahmans and Chhetris providing the political and military leadership. The war ended with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 21 November 2006.

As a result of the civil war, Nepal's greatest source of foreign exchange, its tourism industry, suffered considerably. A travel company, which published rankings of the popularity of tourist destinations based on sales, indicated that Nepal had gone from being the tenth most popular destination among adventure travelers, to 27th. The conflict also forced the young and able to seek work abroad in order to avoid the Human Rights Violations committed by the Government forces and the crimes committed by the Maoists.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Nepal is a landlocked state on the northern mountain rim of South Asia. Its inhabitants number 29.5 million people (2008 estimate), living in an area of 145,391 sq km (56,139 sq mi), which is roughly the size of Iowa. Nepal extends 800 km (500 mi) in a generally east–west direction, but its north–south dimensions vary between only 125 and 225 km (approximately 80–140 mi). The country is surrounded on the east, south, and west by Indian territory, while China lies to the north.

Nepal is truly a mountain kingdom, with a quarter of its land over 3,000 m (9,843 ft) in altitude. The only lowland of note lies in the extreme south, where the country extends into the Ganges plains. A narrow belt, rarely exceeding 40 km (25 mi) in width and at one time a swampy, malaria-infested jungle, is known as the Terai. Over a third of Nepal's population and much of its agriculture and industry are found in this part of the country. The Terai is also the richest wildlife zone in Nepal and the home of several government wildlife reserves. The best-known of these is the Royal Chitawan National Park (now Chitawan National Park), designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984, which is a sanctuary for the endangered Bengal tiger and one-horned rhinoceros.

North of the Terai, the land rises to the Shiwalik Hills (750–1,500 m or 2,450–4,900 ft in elevation), before descending to a series of east–west running valleys known as *dūns*. From the *dūns*, the terrain rises steadily northwards through the Mahabharat Lekh, the Pahar (hill) zone, and the imposing main ranges of the Himalayas. The Nepal Himalayas contain eight peaks over 8,000 m (26,247 ft), including Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain at 8,848 m (29,028 ft). Kanchenjunga, Dhaulagiri, and Annapurna are among the better-known peaks of this group.

The Kathmandu Valley lies north of the Mahabharat Lekh ranges at around 1,300 m (4,300 ft) above sea level. Formed by an old lake-bed, it is intensively cultivated and supports a dense population. It is the cultural and historical heart of Nepal, containing the modern capital of Kathmandu, as well as the medieval cities of Patan and Bhaktapur.

Nepal's climate and vegetation reflect the country's wide range of elevations. The Terai experiences conditions typical of the middle Ganges Valley. The mean temperature in June, the warmest month, exceeds 35°C (95°F), while winter temperatures drop to 10°C (50°F). Rainfall is received during the summer monsoon, with amounts varying from 200 cm (approximately 80 in) in the east to 100 cm (approximately 40 in) in the west. The natural vegetation consists of grasslands and *sāl* (*Shorea robusta*) forests. As one moves northwards into the mountains, temperatures decrease and rainfall increases. Vegetation changes to temperate pine and mixed forests. Above 4,000 m (13,100 ft), the climate is alpine, with short summers and long, severe winters. The higher elevations are under perpetual snow.

The ethnic composition of Nepal reflects its location between South Asia and Central Asia. The peoples of the Terai and southern Nepal are little different from their Indian neighbors. Caste remains the prime factor in social relations, and there is considerable freedom of movement and intermarriage across the border between Nepal and India. The mix of peoples in this area is typical of the Ganges plains. Brahmans, Rajputs, and Kayasths are the main land-owning castes. They are served by occupational castes such as the Nuniyar (trad-

ers and shopkeepers), Ahir (cattle-keepers), Dhobi (launderers) and Chamar (leatherworkers). In addition, there are Muslims and tribal populations (e.g., Tharu, Majhi, and Bodo) in the area.

Nepal's Pahar zone is an area where the Caucasoid populations of South Asia mingle with the Mongoloid physical type of Central Asia. The former category is represented by the Brahmans and Chhetris, upper castes who have dominated Nepāli political and cultural life. The powerful Ranas were drawn from the Chhetri (i.e., *ksatriya* or warrior) caste. The term "Newar" is used to describe the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley regardless of their ethnic origin. Peoples of Mongoloid descent in this Pahar region include the Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, and other groups who traditionally have served as Gurkha soldiers. (Technically, there is no single ethnic group called Gurkha, the name being derived from soldiers of the Kingdom of Gorkha whose ruler conquered the Kathmandu Valley in the 18th century.) Other ethnic groups in the middle hills include the Tamang and the Thakalis.

The northern mountain belt is inhabited by peoples such as the Sherpas and Bhutia who are physically and culturally closely related to the Tibetans.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Nepal's ethnic diversity is accompanied by linguistic diversity, with over 36 languages and dialects currently spoken by the Nepāli people. Groups in the northern mountain belt speak languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. These include Tamang, Magar, Rai, and Limbu. Sherpa and Thakal are Bhutia dialects virtually indistinguishable from Tibetan. Newari, a Tibeto-Burman language written in the Devanagari (Hindi) script, is spoken in the Kathmandu Valley. Nepāli, also known as Gorkhali, is spoken by 49% of the population (2001 census) and is the country's official language. It is the lingua-franca of Nepal and the Indian state of Sikkim, has official language status in West Bengal's Darjeeling district, and is also one of India's 23 official languages. An Indo-Aryan language related to Hindi, it, too, is written in the Devanagari script. Hindi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili, which are languages prevalent in adjacent areas of India, are widely spoken in the Terai. Also in the Terai are groups such as the Tharu and Danawar whose language shows elements of the Austro-Asiatic tongues widely associated with tribal groups in India.

## 4 FOLKLORE

While each ethnic group has its own folk traditions, all Nepālis share in the mythology of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Himalayas, for example, are regarded as the home of the gods. Here, in the "snow-abode" (*hima-ālaya*), is Gauri-Shankar, the peak where the god Shiva and his consort, Parvati, dwell. Annapurna, with her many peaks, is goddess of plenty. Ganesh Himal is named for Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of Hinduism. In Indian legend, every *rishi*, or yogi, who possesses divine power has a retreat in the mountain fastness of the Himalayas.

Another legend has it that, at the beginning of time, the Valley of Kathmandu was a beautiful turquoise lake. On this lake floated a lotus flower, from which shone a magnificent blue light. This was a manifestation of Swayambhu or Adi-Buddha, the first incarnation of Buddha. The lake was so beautiful, and



*Nepalese farmers plant paddy in a field in Kathmandu, Nepal. More than 80% of people in the country make their livings by farming the steep terraced hills of the lower Himalayas. (AP Images/Binod Joshi)*

the flame so sacred, that the devout came from far and wide to live along its shores, to meditate, and to worship. One such devotee was the sage Manjusri, who came from Central Asia to worship the flame. Wishing to approach the flame more closely, he sliced open the valley wall with his sword of wisdom. The waters of the lake drained away and the lotus settled on the valley floor. At this site, Manjusri built a shrine that was to become the sacred site of Swayambhunath.

## 5 RELIGION

Nepal used to be the only Hindu kingdom in the world, before it was declared a “secular state” in 2006. However, although Hinduism is the dominant religion in the state, Nepālis are highly tolerant of other religious beliefs. Freedom of religion is enshrined in law, which makes it illegal to proselytize (i.e., actively try to make converts) in the country. According to the 2001 Census of Nepal, the religious makeup of the population is: Hindu (80.6%), Buddhist (10.7%), Muslim (4.2%), Christian (0.5%), Jain (0.1%), and others, mainly adherents of local religions (3.9%).

Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal have so influenced each other that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two religions. Both Hindus and Buddhists, for example, worship at the Buddhist shrine of Swayambhunath. In addition, religion in Nepal has absorbed other elements that give it a

unique character. These include Tantric beliefs, aspects of the pre-Buddhist religion of Bon, and local animistic cults. Animal sacrifice accompanies almost every ritual and ceremonial event in Nepāli life. Nepālis also worship *Kumārī*, the “living goddess,” a young girl believed to be an incarnation of the Hindu goddess Parvati.

Swayambhunath and Bodhnath are major Buddhist shrines and centers of worship. The temple of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu, dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, is viewed as one of the most sacred in all of South Asia. It is one of the few Hindu temples from which non-Hindus are barred.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Nepal is a land of festivals. All the major Hindu and Buddhist celebrations are observed, as well as many that have their origins in ancient animistic cults. At the Seto Machhendranath festival held in Kathmandu in March, the image of the deity Seto Macchendra is placed in a towering chariot (*rath*) and pulled through the streets by hundreds of young boys. Gai Jatra is a festival when cows are decorated and led through the streets in procession. At Indra Jatra, the *Kumārī* (living goddess) is worshiped and carried through the streets in a special chariot. Many of the Buddhist festivals, such as the Mani Rimdu of the Sherpas, are accompanied by masked monks performing devil-dances.

One of the major celebrations of the Nepāli festival year is Dasain, which is the Nepāli name for Dasahara. It celebrates fertility and the victory of good over evil in the form of the goddess Durga’s slaying of the buffalo-demon Mahisha. The festival lasts 10 days, with numerous rituals and offerings to the gods. The ninth day of the festival is marked by the sacrifice of animals (chickens, ducks, goats, and buffalo) by every household and by organizations such as the police force and military.

In March 2008 the Government of Nepal announced a new line up of public holidays, canceling former holidays such as the King’s birthday and National Unity Day, and adding some such as Christmas, the Muslim “Ids,” and the two Lhosars (Tamu and Sonam). The holiday situation is very much in a state of flux.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Nepālis practice the rituals and ceremonies of their respective communities, with Hindu and Buddhist customs predominating. High-caste Hindu boys, for example, undergo the sacred thread ceremony as an initiation into adulthood. Among Buddhists, on the other hand, this initiation consists of boys adopting the saffron clothes and lifestyle of the novice monk for a short period. Both Hindus and Buddhists cremate their dead, except for important *lāmās* (Buddhist spiritual leaders), who are buried. Some groups at higher elevations where wood is not available dispose of their dead by exposing the corpses to be consumed by vultures and wild animals.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Nepālis have a reputation of being an open and friendly people. The normal Nepāli form of greeting is the “Namaste,” said while joining one’s own hands together, palms touching, in front of the body. A common greeting on the mountain trails is “Khana Khaiyo,” literally, “Have you eaten?” This is an indi-

cation of the difficulties in obtaining the most basic necessities in the country.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Nepal is among the poorest and least developed countries in the world, a fact that is reflected in the nation's health and vital statistics. The average life expectancy at birth is just under 61 years. The leading causes of death are infectious and parasitic diseases and respiratory problems. Infant mortality rates are high, amounting to 62 deaths per 1,000 live births. Fertility rates are also high, with 3.9 average births per childbearing woman in the population. The natural increase of population is over 2% per year.

Nepālīs are a rural people, with over 90% living in villages. These are usually clusters of houses sited on a hilltop or hillside, surrounded by agricultural land, and located near a source of water. Terracing of hillsides is quite common. Typical houses in the Pahar zone are two-story, mud-brick structures with thatched or tin roofs. Stone and wood are the main construction materials in the mountain belt. Creature comforts vary, though standards of living are generally quite low. Per capita income stands at us \$1,630 per year (2008 estimate), considerably less than India's \$3,800 per year.

Nepal's mountainous terrain makes for difficult transportation and communications. Goods are often transported by pack animals or carried by porters over mountain trails. Highways total a mere 17,280 km (10,800 mi), of which only 9,829 km (6,142 mi) are paved. The rail system has only 59 km (37 mi) of track and is of little economic significance. Nepal Airlines, formerly Royal Nepal Airlines, the country's air carrier, operates a schedule of domestic and international flights. Of interest is Nepal Airline's daily mountain flight (weather permitting) from Kathmandu to view Mt. Everest. Regional Airlines include Gorkha Airlines and Yeti Airlines.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Social organization and family life differ among the various ethnic groups of Nepal. However, all practice some form of clan exogamy, with descent most commonly traced through the male line. Hindus follow typical practices in terms of arranged marriages and the extended family structure. Monogamy is the norm, although some Tibetan-speaking peoples practice fraternal polyandry (i.e., two brothers may marry the same woman). Wife-capture is a practice among Tibetan-speaking groups. Customs concerning divorce and remarriage vary according to the community.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Nepālī clothing reflects the variety of peoples and cultures in the country. Each community has its own particular style of dress, although certain broad patterns can be seen. Peoples of the Terai are virtually indistinguishable from their Indian neighbors. Groups in the northern mountain belt wear Tibetan-style clothes. The traditional Nepālī dress is typically worn in the middle hills region. For men, this comprises trousers that taper from the waist to tight-fitting legs. Over this is worn a blouse-type shirt that reaches to mid-thigh and is tied at the waist with a belt and a Western-style jacket. The Nepālī cap, with its peak offset from the center, giving it a slightly lopsided look, completes the outfit. Ex-soldiers wear the badges of their former regiments with much pride. Women wear blouses

and *sārīs*, and they adorn themselves with gold ornaments and jewelry.

## **12 FOOD**

Nepālī food is generally similar to Indian cuisine. Rice, the staple cereal, is boiled and eaten with lentils (*dāl*) and spiced vegetables. Beef, of course, is not available, but poultry, goat, and buffalo meat are consumed. Meat is consumed mainly on special occasions and at festival times. Rice, too, is often out of the reach of the average rural Nepālī family. It is replaced by a dough made by mixing flour with boiling water, which is eaten with one's fingers just like rice. A flat bread (*chapātī*), which is dry-roasted on a hot skillet, is a staple of the diet in the Terai. Milk products such as *ghī* (clarified butter) and curd form part of the diet, and hot, sweet tea made with milk and water is drunk everywhere. Sweets such as *jalebīs* and *laddūs* are popular.

In the mountains, a ground cereal known as *tsampa* takes the place of rice. It is sometimes eaten dry, or sometimes mixed with milk or water into a gruel. In the higher elevations, yak meat is consumed. Among the Sherpas, potatoes have replaced rice as the staple food starch. Tibetan foods include *momos*, a boiled or fried stuffed dumpling, and *thukba*, a thick soup. Tibetans drink their tea with butter and salt added.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education levels in Nepal are low, with over a third of the adult population having no formal schooling. Although primary education is free, government schools are often inadequate and overcrowded. Many schools in remote areas are very basic and sometimes unsafe, and many communities have cultural inhibitions against sending children, especially girls, who often leave school by the age of 12, to school. Enrollment in secondary schools is less than 35%. Literacy among the adult population is low (53.7%) with that for the male population over 15 years being 65.1%, and the figure for females dropping to 34.5% (2001 Census of Nepal). Kathmandu is the site of the Tribhuvan University, until 1985 the only doctoral-granting institution in the country, but since then another five universities, such as Mahendra Sanskrit University and the National Academy of Medical Sciences, have been established.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Past cultures in the Kathmandu Valley have left behind a rich artistic heritage. The magnificent religious stone sculptures of the Licchavi period (4th to 9th century AD) are matched by the elaborate wooden carvings of the early medieval period. The distinctive multi-tiered, pagoda-style roofs so typical of East Asia have their origins with Newar architects of the late 13th century. Nepālī painting encompasses illuminated manuscripts of the 11th century to more recent Tibetan-style *thankas*. Traditions of music range from the sonorous chanting and huge horns, thigh-bone flutes, and conch shells of Tibetan sacred music to the songs and folk music of wandering professional troubadours. Dance forms include the classical *kumārī* of the Newars and the masked devil-dances performed at Tibetan Buddhist festivals to scare off devils and demons.





*Buddhist monks march for peace in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu. (AP Images/Binod Joshi)*

## **<sup>15</sup>WORK**

Nepālīs are overwhelmingly agricultural, with 93% of the labor force engaged in this sector of the economy. Subsistence cultivation dominates, although pastoralism based on the yak, a hybrid bovine, is important in higher altitudes. One unique tradition in Nepal, however, is military service in the Gurkha regiments of the British and Indian armies. The fighting abilities of the Gurkhas were recognized during the Anglo-Gurkha war of 1814–1816, after which they were recruited into the army of the East India Company. The Gurkha regiments of the British Indian Army were divided between Britain and India in 1947. Famous for their curved knives or *khukhrīs*, the Gurkhas have fought with distinction in campaigns around the world.

Historically, trade between India and China was important for the Nepālī economy. Another group that has carved out an occupational niche for itself is the Sherpas, who are well known as guides and porters for mountain-climbing expeditions. It was a Sherpa, Norgay Tenzing, who accompanied Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953 to become the first climbers to scale Mt. Everest. Tourism, trekking, and mountain expeditions are major earners of foreign exchange in Nepal.

## **<sup>16</sup>SPORTS**

Modern sports popular among Nepālīs include soccer, cricket, basketball, table tennis, and badminton. Despite the mountainous nature of the country, altitude and the rugged terrain make skiing impractical.

## **<sup>17</sup>ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Most Nepālīs are restricted to traditional forms of entertainment and recreation, such as festivals, folk dances, and folk music. Radio Nepal broadcasts news and music, and for those who can afford television sets, Nepal Television commenced service in 1985. The cinema is popular in the cities, with most movies being supplied by India. Occasionally, Western films are shown. There is an ancient tradition of theater in Kathmandu.

## **<sup>18</sup>FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Many of the traditional arts of Nepal are practiced today, though often the goods are of lesser quality and are manufactured for the tourist market. These items include woodcarvings, folk objects such as *khukhrīs* (curved knives), prayer wheels, *thankas*, musical instruments, and dance masks. Some

of the Tibetan-speaking peoples are known for their weaving and make colorful clothes, bags, and carpets.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Many of Nepal's social problems are related to poverty, overpopulation, and the nature of the country's environment. Only 17% of the country's land area is arable land, and Nepal has to import food to feed its population. Much of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, but the numbers of farmers unable to meet their basic food requirements is growing rapidly. More than 40% of the population is undernourished. An expanding population, and the added pressure this places on agricultural resources, is likely to increase levels of poverty in the next few decades. Poor transportation and natural hazards, such as flooding, landslides, and drought, intensify the problems of agricultural production.

Low levels of industrialization, lack of mineral resources, a severe shortage of skilled labor, and heavy reliance on foreign aid imposes restrictions on future economic expansion. Even existing resources are being threatened. Reliance on wood for fuel and construction has led to extensive deforestation, which in turn has resulted in widespread soil erosion and severe flooding. The country's important tourism industry may suffer if environmental degradation along trekking routes and at tourist centers continues unchecked. The Kathmandu Valley, for example, is currently experiencing major problems with air and water pollution.

Among Nepal's assets are its magnificent scenery and its newfound tradition of democratic government. However, the country is still dealing with the aftermath of 10 years of civil war, with the resultant decline in the tourist dollar and the associated decline in agricultural production in rural areas. It remains to be seen how the new government will deal with the serious social, economic, and ecological problems facing the peoples of Nepal today.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Gender problems in Nepal differ considerably according to community in Nepal. However, with over 80% of the population of the country professing Hinduism, the problems of women in Hindu society are common to most women in Nepal. Most societies in Nepal are patriarchal, and males dominate. Nepalese women do all the house work, feed the children, clean the house, take care of the livestock, wash dishes, and do laundry. Men don't do dishes and don't do laundry. Girls are usually limited in their access to education and are kept home to help in the house and in the fields. Child marriages are common, with some girls being married before they reach 10 years of age, dowry giving is the norm (incidents of dowry death are occasionally reported, especially from the *terai*), and widow remarriage is prohibited. Low caste women are subjected to sexual and domestic violence and trafficking of young Nepali girls as young as 11 years to the red light districts in Indian cities is common. Many such victims remain until they get sick or contract diseases like HIV; then, they are dumped out of the brothels with nowhere to go. Most commit suicide, though some return back to Nepal to get help from some social organizations, such as the Women Foundation of Nepal, which helps with education, child labor, prostitution, and abuse resulting from witch hunting. In some cases, largely because of poverty, young girls are sold as wives in Indian states, such as

the Punjab, where the imbalance between sexes makes finding a suitable wife difficult.

Nonetheless, women have been prominently involved in the recent civil war in Nepal. Available reports indicate that one-fifth to one-third of the insurgents' cadre and combatants may be women. Reportedly, every village had a revolutionary women's organization. According to a Jane's Intelligence Review report of October 2001, there were usually at least two women in each unit of 35–40 men, and they were used to gather intelligence and act as couriers. Durgha Pokhrel, Chairman of the National Women's Commission, who visited more than 25 Maoist districts, stated on 3 July 2003 during a talk delivered at the Nepal Council of World Affairs that the percentage of women among insurgent cadres could be as high as 40. A women's group, the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), was alleged to be a front for the CPN (M).

In addition to the recently ended civil war, Nepalese women have to deal with poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to medical facilities, poor nutrition, poor education, discrimination, and casteism.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# NEW CALEDONIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** n(y)oo kal-uh-DOHN-ee-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kanaks (indigenous Melanesians)

**LOCATION:** New Caledonia (island chain in South Pacific between Australia and Vanuatu)

**POPULATION:** 224,824 (July 2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** 39 indigenous languages; French (official), Javanese, Tahitian, Vietnamese, Wallisian

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholic, Protestant); Islam

## 1 INTRODUCTION

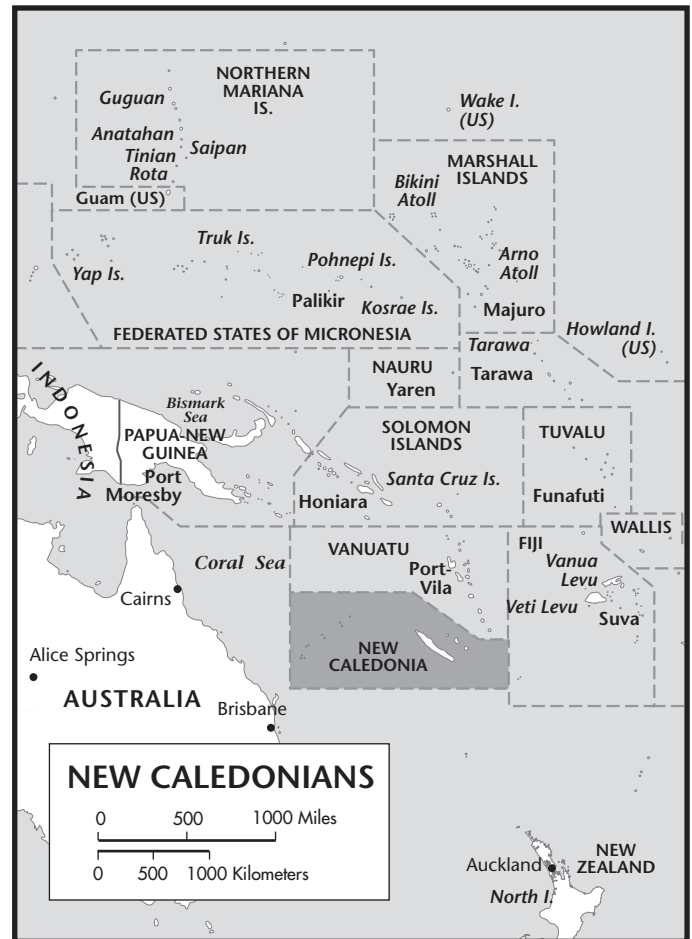
The island chain of New Caledonia presents a cosmopolitan mix of cultures from many parts of the world. The original inhabitants are Melanesians, sometimes called “Kanaks.” The term “kanaks” can have both positive and negative associations, depending on who is using it and in what manner. There have been French settlers in the islands since the 19th century, and their impact in terms of culture, language, and food can be clearly seen. Asians from Vietnam and Indonesia have also settled in New Caledonia and created their own immigrant communities. Lastly, Polynesian migrants from other parts of the French Pacific, especially Tahiti and the Wallis and Futuna islands, have relocated to New Caledonia in hopes of finding economic prosperity.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

New Caledonia is part of the Melanesian culture area of the South Pacific. New Caledonia is situated east of Australia and west of Vanuatu. New Caledonia is the third largest island in the South Pacific following New Guinea and New Zealand. There is a large chain of mountains that runs north and south and divides the island into two regions: a dry west coast area and a wet, tropical east coast area. The entire island is encircled by a barrier reef, creating the world’s largest lagoon around the island. The main island of New Caledonia is referred to as “Grande Terre.” There are several smaller islands and chains of islands that belong to the Territory of New Caledonia and Dependencies. New Caledonia has been an overseas territory of France since 1956. The French have had some sort of political control over the island group since the first French missionaries landed and settled at Balade in 1843. French settlers took land away from the indigenous Melanesians of New Caledonia and relocated them to reservations just as the Native Americans were. This history has left permanent scars for many New Caledonians and can be a source of friction between the two groups. The current population of New Caledonia is nearly 225,000.

## 3 LANGUAGE

By the latest count, there are 39 living indigenous Austronesian languages spoken in New Caledonia. Some of these languages have been described by missionary linguists, are now written, and have been used to translate the New Testament. Many others have not been studied by outsiders. Other languages spoken in New Caledonia include French, Javanese, Tahitian, Vietnamese, the Malayo-Polynesian language Wallisian, and Tayo, a French-based Creole. Tayo has about 2,000 speakers



who live primarily in the village of St. Louis. Over 50,000 New Caledonians speak French as their first language.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Indigenous New Caledonian groups have large bodies of myth regarding their social histories and genealogies. Many groups have totemic myths that recount how the natural symbol of the group, an animal, plant, or mineral, came to stand for that group. These myths also describe the migrations of the splinter groups that have left the original group over time. Indigenous New Caledonians have an unusual metaphor for this relationship. While most Austronesian groups in the Pacific use the branches of the tree as a metaphor for genealogical relationships, the New Caledonians use mounds of earth to describe them. Each clan house is built on a mound that is named. The names of all the clan house mounds are recounted in story form to tell the migration history of the clan and to demonstrate the social ties that bind distant communities.

## 5 RELIGION

Christianity is the majority religion in New Caledonia, with around 90% of the population claiming to be Christian. Of these, 60% are Roman Catholic and the other 30% are Protestant. Islam is the religion of approximately 4% of the New Caledonian population, and the vast majority of the Muslims are from Indonesia. The remaining 5% of the population fol-

lows traditional religious practices and has not been affected by missionary activity.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The only national holiday in New Caledonia is Bastille Day, celebrated July 14. The various ethnic groups that live in New Caledonia all celebrate their own secular and religious holidays. Indigenous New Caledonians celebrate certain rituals that could be considered the equivalent of religious holidays.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Passage through the various stages of life is marked by ceremony and the exchange of commodities among the indigenous New Caledonians following traditional cultural patterns. Other groups on the island recognize culturally significant events such as birth, marriage, and death in their own ways. The Javanese tradition of *slametan*, or feasting, has been brought to New Caledonia. This feast is performed on important days within the ritual calendar and marks the passage of time within certain events. For instance, *slametan* are given seven days after a birth and also seven months after a birth.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Until the French colonial administration pacified hostilities among the indigenous New Caledonians, warfare and raiding were endemic to the island. The New Caledonians hesitated to take control of the land of a group they had beaten in battle because of fear of retribution by the ghosts and spirits of the group. The victors would encourage the village priest to placate the spirits, and only then might they consider taking up residence on the newly acquired land.

Kinship relations dictate the nature of interpersonal relations among the indigenous New Caledonians. The maternal uncle is extremely important for indigenous New Caledonians; he must be given gifts at the occurrence of births, deaths, and marriages.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

There are a wide range of living conditions among the New Caledonians. Those people that live in the capital city of Noumea may experience a very cosmopolitan lifestyle. The amenities of life are essentially the same as those of most middle class Americans. Socio-economic status determines what lifestyle a family will have in the city.

Indigenous groups in New Caledonia have villages arranged around a rectangular plaza that is flanked by beehive-shaped family houses. At the end of each line of family houses is the larger, beehive-shaped clan-house, or men's house. This house is off-limits to women, except during special events. As opposed to other groups in Melanesia, the indigenous New Caledonians do not store their clan artifacts and treasures in the clan house; instead, they build separate small houses to store them. These structures are fenced in to keep women and children from seeing the items of ritual significance that are stored inside. Behind the houses, running parallel with the plaza space, are street-like spaces. Beyond these spaces are small, rectangular-shaped work sheds where the activities of pottery making, wood carving, and mask-making take place. At the furthest point away from the plaza are the huts for menstruating women.

Most of the roads in New Caledonia are unpaved. Railroads do not exist on the island. Transportation for the indigenous New Caledonians that still follow traditional ways of life include travel by foot, by canoe, and, in some cases, by light truck or bus. Airfields have been built in many parts of the islands to facilitate economic development and increase mobility.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Indigenous New Caledonians have separate living quarters for men as opposed to women and children. Men spend most of their time in the clan house. Each married woman has her own separate house where she lives with her unmarried children. Marriage partners are typically chosen from members of the mother's clan, and the preference is for a man to marry his mother's brother's daughter. In the most traditional New Caledonian villages, these arrangements are made by infant or child betrothal. This means that a baby girl will be betrothed to a man or boy much older than she. The marriage will not be formally transacted until after she has reached puberty; however, it does mean that the ages of the married couple will be wildly divergent and the wife will greatly outlive her husband.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The cosmopolitan nature of New Caledonian society presents wide variety in terms of clothing and adornment. In Noumea, a range of styles of dress can be found, in many cases related to the ethnicity of the individual. Modern French fashion coexists alongside peasant attire adopted by some of the resident indigenous New Caledonians of the city. Traditional attire is worn only by a few indigenous groups on the island nowadays.

## **12 FOOD**

The traditional foods of the indigenous New Caledonians are taro root and yams. Taro is classified as a "wet" food and is associated with females, while yams are classified as a "dry" food and associated with males. Yams are the focus of much symbolic and ritual activity for traditional New Caledonians. Indigenous New Caledonians also keep domesticated chickens as a food source for special occasions. Fishing is important, while hunting is far less so.

Urban New Caledonians eat a wide variety of foods and have an extensive array of restaurants at their disposal. There are grocery stores as well as specialty shops that sell specific kinds of foodstuffs.

## **13 EDUCATION**

As a French possession, public education is conducted within a French framework. Noumea has many educational opportunities, especially for the French population. The indigenous New Caledonian population has less access to formal education. The literacy rate among both adult men and women in New Caledonia is approximately 96%. The remaining 4% is constituted by the indigenous New Caledonians that have not been integrated into the larger society.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Traditional forms of dance and music are still performed in indigenous New Caledonian villages. Popular music from France and French Polynesia can also be heard in New Caledonia. The various ethnic groups that have immigrated to the island also

brought their music traditions with them. The culture of compact disk music guarantees a continual stream of new musical influences into Noumea.

### **15 WORK**

Nickel mining and smelting is one of the major industries in New Caledonia. New Caledonia possesses about 35% of the world's total nickel deposits. Many mine workers, however, are not from New Caledonia, but are instead immigrant workers from other parts of the South Pacific, especially Wallis and Futuna Islands. The tourist industry also employs many workers in New Caledonia. The majority of workers in the service area of tourism are New Caledonians. Most of New Caledonia's tourists come from Japan to spend their honeymoons.

### **16 SPORTS**

There is a wide range of sports available in New Caledonia, and, again, socio-economic status dictates the spectra within which any individual can participate. Golf, tennis, and soccer are all popular sports, especially among the French New Caledonians.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

There are broadcast television stations as well as a handful local radio stations in New Caledonia. In Noumea and other areas that have electricity, television, video, and DVDs are popular forms of entertainment.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

New Caledonian indigenous groups are very well known for their distinctive style of masks. The nose of New Caledonian masks forms a hooked beak. This style of mask is very well represented in museums throughout the world.

Indigenous New Caledonians also make carvings and sculptures that decorate the village houses. Some of these items are now marketed for tourist consumption.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Land rights are an important issue for indigenous New Caledonians. A large portion of their traditional lands were confiscated by French settlers in the colonial period. Efforts to reclaim those lands are underway by groups that were displaced. Other groups that were able to maintain their traditional lands and ways of life are struggling to continue their cultural patterns into the next century.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

New Caledonia belongs to the Melanesian culture area, which is characterized by sexual segregation and antagonism. The degrees to which sexual segregation and antagonism were part of precontact culture are not well understood by anthropologists. However, it is clear that in contemporary New Caledonian Kanak society, aggression towards women is a major social and medical problem. One issue of concern is the increasing risk of the transmission of HIV/AIDS and STDs to women through patterns of sexual aggression and assault by men. The emerging pattern is one of gender violence towards women perpetuated by spouses, relatives, and colleagues.

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—by J. Williams

# NEW ZEALANDERS

**PRONUNCIATION:** new ZEE-lun-duhrs

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kiwi (nickname)

**LOCATION:** New Zealand

**POPULATION:** 4,115,771 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Maori

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Church of England, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Baptist); New Zealand Christian sects (Ratana and Ringatu); Buddhism; Hinduism; Judaism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Maori

## 1 INTRODUCTION

New Zealand is an island nation in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, separated from Australia by the Tasman Sea. A small country, New Zealand is also a young one: it was a British colony until 1907 and did not achieve full independence from Great Britain until 1947, although it had been essentially self-governing since the middle of the previous century. New Zealand's history of human habitation is also relatively short. Its original inhabitants, the Maori, migrated from Polynesian islands in three separate waves between AD 950 and 1350. Calling their new homeland *Aotearoa* ("land of the long white cloud"), they settled in communities called *kaingas*, mostly located on North Island, passing on their culture and history orally to succeeding generations. The first European to discover New Zealand was Abel Tasman, a navigator for the Dutch East India Company, who sighted the west coast of South Island in 1642. In the 1790s, the islands began to attract whalers from Europe who established the first settlements on the coast, and in 1814 the first missionary station was set up in the Bay of Islands.

Europeans and Australians began arriving in New Zealand in large numbers in the 1830s. In 1840, the Maori chieftains entered into a compact, the Treaty of Waitangi, under which they granted sovereignty over their land to Britain's Queen Victoria while retaining territorial rights, and New Zealand became a British colony. More settlers arrived after gold was discovered in 1861. After the Maori Wars (1860–70), resulting largely from disputes over land rights and sovereignty, New Zealand rapidly increased in wealth and population. With the introduction of refrigerated shipping in 1882, New Zealand became one of the world's great exporters of dairy, produce, and meat. In 1907, New Zealand was made a Dominion of Great Britain. Its troops served in World Wars I and II at the side of the British, fighting in Europe in both wars and in the Pacific in World War II. In 1947, the New Zealand government formally claimed complete independence while remaining a member of the British Commonwealth. Troops from New Zealand fought with United Nations forces in the Korea conflict and with U.S. forces in South Vietnam.

Since 1984 New Zealand has actively pursued an anti-nuclear policy, refusing to admit a U.S. warship to one of its ports because of the possibility that there were nuclear arms on board. In 1986 the U.S. responded by suspending its military obligations to New Zealand under the 1951 ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) agreement. The U.S. also banned high-level contacts with the New Zealand government, a ban that was rescinded in 1990. In December 1989, a Cab-



net-level committee was established to formulate a government policy toward extensive Maori land claims (the country's entire coastline, 70% of its land, and half of its fishing rights).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Situated in the southwest Pacific Ocean, New Zealand consists of two main islands—North Island and South Island—and several dozen minor ones. With a total area of 268,680 sq km (103,738 sq mi), it is about the size of Colorado. Most of New Zealand's large cities, including Auckland and the capital city of Wellington, are located on North Island, which is home to three-fourths of the country's population. North Island is also known for its volcanic activity, including two active volcanoes as well as bubbling mud pools, hot springs, and geysers. South Island is the larger of the two islands and the location of the scenic Southern Alps, which run almost the entire length of the island from north to south and include New Zealand's highest peak, Mount Cook, which is 12,349 ft (3,766 m) high.

The most recent estimate (July 2008) of New Zealand's population is 4,173,460. The largest urban areas are Auckland (1,158,891 in 2001 census); Wellington, the capital (423,765 in 2001 census); and Christchurch (316,227 in 2001 census). Approximately 70% of the population is of European (mostly British) descent. The Maori, who were New Zealand's first inhabitants, are presently the country's most significant minority group, representing close to 8% of the population. In the 2006 census there were 565,329 Maoris or part-Maoris (those re-

porting a Maori ancestry of 50% or more), about 90% of whom live on North Island. The non-Maori Polynesian population in 2006 was 265,874. People of Chinese, Indian, and Southeast Asian ancestry account for the remainder of New Zealand's population (between 1 and 2%).

### **3 LANGUAGE**

English is the universal language of New Zealand, although Maori, which belongs to the Polynesian language family, is still spoken by the Maoris and taught in Maori schools. Maori became an official language of the country in 1987 through the Maori Language Act. New Zealand English resembles British English in a number of ways. In addition, New Zealanders have many unique words and expressions of their own. Both males and females are addressed informally as “mate,” and the word “she” is used for “it” in a very general sense, as in “she’ll be right,” which means “everything will be all right.”

#### **COMMON ENGLISH WORDS AND PHRASES**

bach (or crib)	cottage or vacation house
fizzy	soda pop
mob	herd of sheep or cattle
rousterer	professional sheep shearer
panel beater	auto body shop
hogget	year-old lamb
gumboots	rubber rain boots
hotel	a public bar
mozzies	mosquitoes
peckish	slightly hungry
prang	car or bicycle accident
sandshoes	sneakers

#### **MAORI WORDS AND PHRASES**

aotearoa	land of the long white cloud (Maori name for New Zealand)
aroaha	love and understanding for others
Maoritanga	the Maori tradition and way of life
marae	a Maori meeting house or the area surrounding it
pakeha	a white, or non-Maori, New Zealander

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Guy Fawkes Day, an institution with English roots, was celebrated by burning an effigy of Guy Fawkes, who in 1605 was discovered lurking in the cellar of the Parliament building with barrels of gunpowder, waiting to blow up Parliament as it opened in the morning. In parts of New Zealand, children would recite Guy Fawkes rhymes in a type of competition and adults would throw pennies to the children who recited the loudest or the best. Sometimes, certain adults would heat pennies on a shovel held over a fire before throwing them. The anxious children would pick up the hot pennies, regardless of the burns they would receive. Some children carried painful reminders of Guy Fawkes Day for weeks.

The Maori have a rich folklore tradition that is reflected in their native art, song, and dance. Some of their legends involving journeys contain highly detailed and accurate descriptions of New Zealand's terrain and of the surrounding waters.

### **5 RELIGION**

The majority of New Zealanders are Christians. In the 2006 census, over 2 million New Zealanders reported Christianity as their religion. The next largest group includes those who reported no religion, with a total of approximately 1.3 million. In the same census, most of the population belonged to one of three main churches: the Church of England, 17%; the Presbyterian Church, 11.0%; and the Roman Catholic Church, 14%. There are many other Protestant groups, and two Christian sects that are native to New Zealand (Ratana and Ringatu). The largest growth in religions reported in the 2006 census was for Hinduism and Buddhism. The number of Buddhists in New Zealand increased by 255% between the 1991 and the 2006 census.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Nationwide legal holidays in New Zealand include Christmas and Boxing Day (December 25 and 26), Easter, New Year's Day, Labor Day (the fourth Monday in October), and the official birthday of Britain's Queen Elizabeth, celebrated on the first Monday in June. A holiday unique to New Zealand is Anzac Day (April 25), on which New Zealanders and Australians who died in both world wars are honored at dawn services throughout the country. Another date with national significance is Waitangi Day (February 6), commemorating the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Maori and Great Britain in 1840.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Rituals marking major life events such as birth, marriage, and death are generally observed within the Christian religious tradition, as well as within Buddhism, Hinduism, and the other faiths represented in New Zealand.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

New Zealanders like to refer to themselves as “kiwis,” a name derived from the kiwi, a rare flightless bird unique to their country. (The distinctive kiwi fruit, with its green center and fuzzy brown skin, was originally known as the Chinese gooseberry and renamed to reflect its connection with New Zealand. However, the popularity of the name “kiwi” comes from the bird, not the fruit.) People from New Zealand also refer to themselves as “En Zedders,” a name based on the abbreviation “NZ” (“Z” is pronounced “zed” in New Zealand, as it is in Britain). The Maori word “pakeha” is used for New Zealanders of European descent.

A common greeting among New Zealanders is “good day,” pronounced so that it sounds like “geday.” New Zealanders often address each other informally as “mate,” a term that reflects the British ancestry that many of the country's inhabitants share. The Maoris have a traditional greeting, called *hongī*, in which they touch faces so that their noses are pressed together. It is believed that their spirits mingle through this gesture.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most people in New Zealand live in single houses with large yards and flower or vegetable gardens that New Zealanders enjoy tending during their leisure time. The average home has three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen, laundry, bathroom, and garage. Most are built of wood and have sheet-

iron or tiled roofs. Besides the garden, a common sight outside a New Zealand house is a clothes-drying rack covered with laundry spinning in the wind. Most families own their own homes. However, high-rise apartment buildings can be found in the major cities. More than half of the total housing stock has been constructed since 1957.

New Zealand's life expectancies showed continued increase since the 1991 census. In the 2002 national data, the life expectancy of non-Maori females was 81 years while that of non-Maori males was 76 years. For Maoris, the average life expectancies were about 8.5 years less than those of non-Maoris in 2002. The principal causes of death are heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Alcoholism and related health problems are significant public health concerns in New Zealand. In a national study whose results became available in 2004, alcohol consumption has decreased for adult New Zealanders. Older New Zealanders (over the age of 55) consume alcohol at the highest rates of all groups that were surveyed. Most doctors practice under the National Health Service, established by the Social Security Act of 1938, but private practice is also permitted. New Zealand's health care system has been undergoing a restructuring since the mid-1980s, when area health boards were established to combine primary and hospital care facilities for each region under a single administrative unit.

New Zealand's mountainous terrain has made the development of rail and road communications a challenge, especially on South Island. The automobile is New Zealand's primary mode of transportation. There is one car for every two people, and teenagers can get their driver's licenses at the age of 15. While there is little traffic on roads in most parts of the country, the major cities have begun to experience the traffic congestion common to metropolitan areas in other countries. People travel between North and South Islands on ferries that can transport both them and their cars. A government-operated railroad system links New Zealand's major cities. Auckland and Wellington are the nation's two main ports, and there are international airports at Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Most families in New Zealand have two or three children and enjoy a high standard of living, often owning a home with three or four bedrooms and an attached garage. Maori families are larger than those of the *pakeha*, or white, population, and Maori households may include relatives besides the nuclear family, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts.

## **11 CLOTHING**

New Zealanders wear modern Western-style clothing. They prefer to dress casually, and men in white-collar jobs sometimes even wear shorts and knee socks to work with their white shirts and ties. Maoris generally dress like other New Zealanders, but still wear their traditional costumes for special occasions. The most distinctive feature of these costumes is the striped, fringed skirt woven from flax that is worn by both men and women (women wear them over brightly colored dresses consisting of snugly fitted bodices with shoulder straps and either knee-length or longer skirts). Over their dresses the women may also wear long white capes decorated with black fringes.

## **12 FOOD**

New Zealanders eat three main meals a day—a hearty breakfast of eggs, sausage, and bacon; lunch, often consisting of a meat pie, hamburger, or sandwich; and a full meal at dinner-time, generally featuring some type of meat dish, often lamb. In addition, it is common to have a mid-morning snack called morning tea between ten and eleven o'clock and a bedtime snack called supper. British-style afternoon tea is still popular, complete with scones, cakes, and other pastries, especially as an occasion for entertaining guests. The most popular traditional dinner entrée is roast lamb with mint sauce, typically served with roasted potatoes, roast *kumara* (New Zealand's sweet potato), and roast pumpkin. A distinctive New Zealand dish that is considered a real delicacy is the dark-green soup made from the *toheroa*, a rare clam found on the country's beaches. For dessert, New Zealanders enjoy tarts and various other pastries topped with fruit, including the distinctive kiwi fruit. Ice cream also comes topped with chunks of fruit. A special favorite is *pavlova*, made of meringue covered with fruit and whipped cream.

The most famous Maori culinary tradition is the *hangi*, a meal prepared in the traditional manner that used to characterize most Maori cooking. The term *hangi* also refers to the cooking method itself: a covered pit filled with red-hot, fire-heated stones on which meat and vegetables are left to steam for several hours.

## **13 EDUCATION**

New Zealanders are a well-educated people, with an adult literacy rate of 99%. Education is free and compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 15, although most children attend school from the age of 5, many at state-subsidized preschools. Most state schools are coeducational, but some private schools are not. For children in isolated areas, there is a public correspondence school, which enables them to send in their homework assignments by mail. In some regions there are special state primary and secondary schools for Maori children, but most Maori children attend public schools.

Although young people may leave school at 15 to work, most stay in school through the eleventh grade (called the fifth form), earning a school certificate. Students planning to attend college continue their secondary education until the age of 17 or 18, when they take university qualifying exams. New Zealand has six universities: the University of Auckland, University of Waikato (at Hamilton), Massey University (at Palmerston North), Victoria University of Wellington, University of Canterbury (at Christchurch), and University of Otago (at Dunedin).

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

New Zealand enjoys the rich cultural heritage provided by both its Maori and European traditions. In recent years Maori weaving and wood carving have enjoyed a revival, and many galleries and museums display Maori art. The Maori also preserve their traditional songs and dances. Since World War II, a lively art scene has grown up in New Zealand, with leading artists including Frances Hodgkins, Colin McCahon, and Sir Toss Woollaston. The New Zealander with the greatest literary reputation worldwide is probably the 20th-century short story writer Katherine Mansfield. Other well-known authors include Frank Sargeson, Janet Frame, and Sylvia Ashton-Warner.





A farmer and his dog look over a valley in Waikato County, North Island, New Zealand. (© Evan Collis/Corbis)

Native New Zealander Kiri Te Kanawa is an internationally acclaimed opera singer. New Zealand's motion picture industry, assisted and promoted by the New Zealand Film Commission, has produced a number of internationally acclaimed movies. Notable New Zealand films include *The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors*, *Whale Rider*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Heavenly Creatures*.

### **15** WORK

In 2003, New Zealand had a total labor force of 1,985,100 people. Due to slow economic growth in the early 1990s, unemployment climbed into the double digits in the early 1990s. The 21st century saw boosts in the New Zealand economy and employment and the 2003 labor statistics show that unemployment hovered around 5% in the first three years of the century. Since 1977 employers have been required to pay men and women the same minimum wage.

### **16** SPORTS

New Zealanders enjoy many kinds of sports. Rugby, a game similar to football in the United States, is the national game. The national team, called the All Blacks (a name that refers to their uniform of black shirt and shorts), plays teams from Australia, France, Britain, and other countries, and is well-known throughout the world. Cricket is also very popular, as are a variety of water sports including sailing, surfing, kayaking, canoeing, and rafting. Bruce Kendall, a New Zealander, won an Olympic gold medal in yacht racing in 1988, and in 1995, New Zealand won the coveted America's Cup yachting trophy. In the winter, skiing is a favorite pastime in New Zealand, where the ski season runs from June to late October.

### **17** ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Almost every household in New Zealand has a television set, and New Zealanders enjoy watching both local programming

and popular shows from Britain and the United States. Camping is a universal summertime activity among New Zealanders, who take advantage of their vacation time to enjoy their country's beautiful scenery, including its national parks. Beach houses (called "bachs" or "cribs") are also popular vacation spots. Most family trips are taken during summer vacations from school, which run from late December to early February.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Maoris are known for their weaving and their intricate wood carving, a skill that is transmitted from one generation to the next. Other New Zealand crafts include stained glass, glassblowing, and pottery.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Free market reform policies instituted by New Zealand's government since the mid-1980s, while lowering inflation and increasing economic growth, have resulted in high unemployment and led to cutbacks in educational spending and social services. New Zealand, a country proud of its traditionally egalitarian ways, has seen a growing division between rich and poor, accompanied by rising tensions between the Maori and pakeha (white) populations and an increase in violent crime.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

New Zealand is generally considered a progressive, tolerant community in regards to sexual and gender expression. Several members of the New Zealand Parliament and Ministers of Cabinet belong to the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community. In the 1999 election, Kiwi Georgina Beyer became the world's first transsexual member of parliament. She retired from parliamentary politics in 2007. In 2004 the Civil Union Act was passed that provides the right for same sex couples a legal equivalent of marriage. The Act took effect in 2005.

In 1893, New Zealand became the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

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—by J. Williams

# NEWARS

**LOCATION:** Nepal (Kathmandu Valley)

**POPULATION:** 1,245,232 (Census of Nepal 2001)

**LANGUAGE:** Newari; Nepāli

**RELIGION:** Mixture of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Hinduism, and older animistic beliefs

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Newar are the indigenous population found in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. The name *Newar* has no ethnic implications, but refers to the mixed peoples of both Mongoloid and Mediterranean stock who have settled the region over a period of more than 2,000 years. Over the centuries, the Newar have evolved a distinctive culture that has come to be seen by many as typically Nepāli.

The beginnings of Newar civilization may date back as far as the 8th or 7th century BC, when the Kathmandu Valley was conquered by the Kirati tribe. Since then, many peoples have settled the area, each making its own contributions to Newar history and culture. In the years following AD 300, for example, the Licchavis brought the Hindu caste system to the peoples of the Kathmandu Valley. Some of the Malla kings (from the 13th to the 18th centuries) were great patrons of art and literature. The Gurkhas gained control of the Kathmandu Valley in 1768. Using the valley as a base of power, in the next few decades they succeeded in establishing the outlines of the modern state of Nepal. The term *Newar* is derived from *Nepal*, and the Kathmandu Valley, the heart of Newar territory, remains the political and cultural focus of the kingdom to this day.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Newars make up roughly 5.5% of Nepal's population, or some 1,245,232 people (Census of Nepal 2001). Allowing for natural increase, the current population is estimated at just over 1.4 million. More than two-thirds of this number are concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley. The remaining Newar are found spread through the eastern and western hill (Pahar) zones and the belt of lowlands in southern Nepal known as the Terai.

The Kathmandu Valley is one of the largest of a series of Himalayan valleys that lie between the foothills and the high ranges of the Great Himalaya. Formed by an ancient lake-bed, the valley is an amphitheater roughly 24 km (15 mi) across and about 1,300 m (4,300 ft) above sea level. The climate is very pleasant, with average temperatures ranging from 10°C (50°F) in January to 26°C (78°F) in July. Most of the 140 cm (55 in) of annual rainfall falls during the summer monsoon period from June to September. South of the Kathmandu Valley, the Mahabharat Lekh mountains bar the route to the Terai and the Ganges Plains. To the north, visible from many places on the valley floor, tower the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Newari, the mother tongue of the Newar, is a Tibeto-Burman language. Several dialects of Newari are spoken in the Kathmandu Valley, with the standard form being that of Kathmandu. There are numerous loan-words in Newari, the result of a long history of contact with Sanskrit, Nepāli, and other Indo-Aryan languages. Today, Newari is written in Devanagari, a

script used to write Sanskrit, although several alphabets derived from ancient Indian systems of writing have been used in the past. Many Newars also speak Nepāli, which is used for official purposes and for inter-group communication. Although other groups in South Asia who speak Tibeto-Burman languages have given up their mother tongues, the Newar appear to be committed to preserving Newari as their language.

Newari is one of the few languages of Nepal to possess a distinct literature. Early works in Newari were translations from Sanskrit, but by the 14th century AD, Newari histories started appearing. There is a tradition of Newari literature dating to that time, a tradition that is being maintained by modern writers such as Dhushwan Salami.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Newars share Nepāli myths and traditions such as those relating to the origins of the Kathmandu Valley and the founding of the sacred shrine of Swayambhunath. There is, however, an unusual story in the Newar Buddhist literature that bears a resemblance to the biblical account of the creation of mankind. According to this legend, the earth was originally uninhabited by humans, but half-male/half-female creatures from the Abode of Brahma used to visit the earth. One day, Adi Buddha (the primordial Buddha of Mahayana Buddhism, the sect of Buddhism that reveres Buddha as divine) created in these beings a longing to eat some of the earth, which tasted to them like almonds. Once they had eaten earth, they lost their power to fly back to their home. Doomed to remain on earth, they ate fruits for sustenance. This aroused in them strong sexual urges that resulted in the earth being peopled with humans.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Newar religion is a mix of Mahāyāna Buddhism (the sect of Buddhism that reveres Buddha as divine), Hinduism, and older animistic beliefs. Buddhists are essentially monotheistic (believe in one god), but Newar Buddhists also recognize the Hindu gods Shiva, Vishnu, and other Brahmanical deities. (Brahma is the Supreme Soul revered in Hinduism.) Newars visit and worship at both Hindu and Buddhist temples. Images of Hindu goddesses, for instance, are found at the sacred Buddhist *stupa* (shrine) at Swayambhunath. Newar Buddhists have castes, or a hierarchy of social classes, just as Hindus do, with the *Gubhaju* being the equivalent of the Brahman priestly class. Likewise, Hindu Newars share Buddhist practices such as the worship of the living goddess, *Kumārī*. Of great significance in everyday life are numerous lesser godlings and their female counterparts, the latter known by terms such as *devi* or *mai* (mother). These are often served by priests from the lower castes, and their worship involves blood sacrifice and offerings of liquor. Surviving animistic beliefs may be seen in the Newars' veneration of frogs, snakes, and other animals. The Newars believe in the existence of witches skilled in the black arts and in demons, ghosts, and evil spirits that haunt cremation grounds and crossroads. Priests and magicians are called upon to deal with this spirit world.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The main festivals of the Kathmandu Valley are inter-caste celebrations held at particular locations. These include many *jatras* (e.g., *Indra Jatra*, *Macchendra Jatra*, and numerous festivals for *Bhairava*), when images of the deities are carried

through the streets in procession. Rituals often include the sacrifice of buffalo or goats, and the festivals are always accompanied by the lavish consumption of rice, meat, liquor, and home-made beer. *Gai Jatra*, when cows are decorated and led through the streets in a parade, is a festival of particular importance to Hindu Newars, as the cow holds a sacred place in Hinduism. A second category of observances includes the worship of clan gods as well as festivals of the Hindu calendar, such as *Holi* (the worship of Krishna) in the spring and *Diwali* (a festival of lights that, in some areas, marks the beginning of the new year) in the fall. As with other Nepālīs, *Dasain* (*Dasahara*, a Hindu festival) is an important occasion marked by animal sacrifices. Newar practices differ slightly from other communities, however, and their offerings are made to the goddess Talleju.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a child is a joyous occasion among the Newar, with a son being particularly welcome. A midwife from the barber caste (*Nau*) attends the birth, cuts the umbilical cord, and completes certain important rituals. Two names are given to the Newar child, one by the astrologer (*Joshi*) based on a horoscope, and the other by the family. Around the age of seven months, a first-feeding ceremony (known as *Maca Jankwa*) is held in the presence of family and priests. Childhood is a care-free time for Newari children, but they are soon initiated into adult life. Before they reach puberty, young girls are “married” to the god Narayan in the *Ihi* ritual. Dressed as a bride, a girl undergoes the symbolic rituals of a typical marriage. As a result, she will never (in theory) be a widow, and divorce in a real marriage thus becomes a mere formality. The puberty ceremony for Newar girls is called *Barha*. The initiation ceremony for boys is called *Kayta Puja*, and among the higher Hindu castes, it is often accompanied by the putting on of the sacred thread, a rite viewed as a symbolic rebirth. Buddhists require a boy to put on saffron-colored clothes and lead the life of a novice monk for a period of four days. After this, he resumes his normal life as a full-fledged adult of his community.

An unusual feature of the Newar life-cycle rituals is a series of ceremonies (*Bura Jankwa*) marking the attainment of old age. The first of these ceremonies is observed when a man reaches 77 years, 7 months, and 7 days (an age few reached in the past). In the last of these rituals, held at 99 years of age, a man enters his house through a window on the top floor (he is placed on a wooden shrine that is hoisted up by ropes). This is symbolic of going to heaven.

Death ceremonies generally follow Hindu or Buddhist rites, although there are some differences in specific practices. Unlike other Hindus, Newars offer *pidnas* (cakes made from barley) to the soul of the deceased before cremation. Musicians from the *Nau* (barber) and *Jyapu* (farmer) castes accompany the procession to the cremation ground, which is usually on the banks of a river. Following ceremonies presided over by priests, the chief mourner—usually the eldest son—walks three times around the pyre before setting it alight. Death-pollution rituals are performed for a period of 10 to 12 days, and the mourning period ends with a feast and a purification ceremony (*ghasu*).



## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When Newars meet, they use the typical Nepālī word of greeting, “*Namaste*,” accompanied by the joining of hands, palms together, in front of the body.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the Kathmandu Valley, Newars are engaged in agriculture, trade, and many traditional service occupations. The *Jyapu* is the farming caste, while *Shresthas* and *Udas* are merchants. Other artisan and service castes include barbers (*Nau*), potters (*Kumha*), blacksmiths (*Kau*), and sweepers (*Chami*). Almost all Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley are built on plateaus above the general level of the valley floor. Houses are built of brick and may be several stories high. Their roofs are of slate or tile, and angled wooden beams support the overhang of their eaves. Houses line the streets and alleys of towns and villages with no gaps between them, their brick walls pierced by many windows, doors, and perhaps a veranda overhanging the street. Houses are often built around squares (*chowks*) that may have temples built in the middle. Elaborately carved windows and wooden doors adorn the houses of the Newar aristocracy. Patan and Bhaktapur are medieval cities with many fine examples of traditional Newari architecture.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Newars marry within their own caste, but lack the clan structure and strict rules of clan exogamy (marrying outside one’s group) associated with other Hindu groups. Descent is patri-

lineal (traced on the father's side), and the *phuki* (a term meaning "brother" but usually applied to cousins and their families) defines what is essentially an exogamous lineage. A man may not marry a woman who is related to him through blood for seven generations on both his father's and his mother's side. Thus the cross-cousin (i.e., father's sister's daughter, or mother's brother's daughter) marriages found among the Gurungs, Bhutias, and other Nepāli groups are not permitted. Marriages are typically arranged, although urban youth are increasingly choosing their own mates. Marriage ceremonies are elaborate and may last for the better part of a week. The groom sends the bride's mother a gallon of milk as a symbolic act of repayment for her having suckled his future wife. Following the wedding, the young couple moves in with the husband's family. The extended family is typical of Newar society. Just above the level of the family is an important Newar socio-ritual organization known as the *guthi*. *Guthis* are associations often—although not always—based on common descent and organized for religious, social, and public-service purposes.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

The traditional dress of Newar men is the same as that of all Nepālis. It consists of tight-fitting trousers (*suruwa*) that flare out to a very loose fit around the upper thighs and seat. Over these is worn a blouse-type shirt (*laa*) tied with string on one side of the chest and falling to mid-thigh, with a cloth belt tied around the waist. Newar women wear the *parsi*, a garment like a *sāri* except that it is wrapped around the waist rather than having one end over the shoulder. With the *parsi* is worn the *misa-laa*, a long-sleeved blouse that fastens at the side of the chest; the *jani*, a wide sash tied around the waist; and the *ga* or scarf. The Indian *sāri* and blouse are also popular with Newar women. Young men typically wear Western-style shirts and pants.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

The Newar follow the Nepāli habit of eating two main meals a day. A light breakfast of tea and snacks may be taken, but the first heavy meal of the day is consumed in the late morning. This typically consists of boiled rice, lentil curry, and one or two dishes such as potatoes and green-leafed vegetables. This meal is accompanied by pickled chilies, radishes, or other condiments. The second main meal of the day is eaten after sunset and is similar to the morning meal but may include some meat dishes. Buffalo, goat, and chicken are eaten, although pork is avoided, as is yak, which is considered as on a par with the cow. The *momocha*, a steamed, meat-filled pie much like the Tibetan *momo*, is popular among the upper castes. Sweet dishes are also popular and tea is drunk at any time of the day. Liquor, mostly brewed at home from rice, is indispensable in Newar social as well as ritual life.

### **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Education levels in Nepal are low, with more than one-third of the adult population having no formal schooling. Literacy among the general population over 15 years old is only 45.2% (2001), but for women it is only 27.6%.

The education system in Nepal is characterized by large disparities in primary and secondary school attendance. School attendance rates are higher among boys, residents of urban areas, and children from wealthier households. Among the

Newar, some 88% of households have children in primary school, while 52.3% have children in secondary schools—both values considerably higher than those for Nepal as a whole. This no doubt reflects the fact that the bulk of the Newar live in the Kathmandu Valley, where access to educational institutions is easier than in the rest of the country.

The 10 years of the Maoist insurgency have played havoc with the education system in Nepal. "The situation with regard to education has become so bad that it will take several decades to restore what we had achieved before the conflict started," said Dipendra Roka, a schoolteacher in Salle village in Rukum district, about 300 km northwest of the capital, Kathmandu. Like many rural hill districts, Rukum has experienced very low school attendance since the conflict started, due to abductions by rebels who have often forced students and teachers to march to the remotest parts of the district to attend their cultural and "revolutionary orientation" programs. Most schools in the district are also running out of books, other teaching materials and even decently-built classrooms, as the government has failed to use the education budget to maintain infrastructure and supplies, local teachers say.

### **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Buddhist *stupas* (shrines) dating to the 3rd century BC are all that is left of the early cultures of the Kathmandu Valley, but numerous magnificent stone sculptures survive from the subsequent Licchavi period. Malla rule ushered in another era of artistic achievement. Under the Mallas (13th to 18th centuries), Newar artisans carried woodcarving, metal work, and stone sculpture to new heights. This work can be seen in temples, palaces, and courtyards throughout the Kathmandu Valley. In the late 13th century, a Newar architect introduced the Valley's distinctive multi-tiered, pagoda-style roof into Tibet, and from there it spread to East Asia. Tibetan influences on Newar art can be seen in the Golden Gate of Bhaktapur, a mid-18th century gilded copper gate considered the single most important work of art in the valley. Newari painting is religious in nature and encompasses the illuminated manuscripts of the 11th century to more recent Tibetan-style *thankas* (painted scrolls). *Kumārī* is the classical dance form of the Newars, and folk songs and dances play an important role in Newar life.

### **<sup>15</sup>WORK**

Newars have traditionally been involved in agriculture, commerce, and crafts, and these remain their main occupations today. With the modernization of Nepal, however, many have found their way into government, administrative, professional, and clerical occupations. An expanding tourism industry has also created opportunities for employment.

### **<sup>16</sup>SPORTS**

Sports and games of the Newars tend to be of the indoor variety, many of them involving gambling. The upper classes enjoy chess and other board games. Cards are popular with both adults and young people. Young boys fly kites, play marbles, spin tops, and also play a game called *khopi*, which involves betting on a coin tossed into a scoop. Girls enjoy playing with dolls. Outdoor sports such as soccer are played in Kathmandu and other major cities.



A young Newar girl and an older relative at the girl's Ihi ceremony in a Buddhist temple in Kathmandu. The Ihi is a mock-marriage with the god Vishnu and every Newar girl goes through the ceremony sometime between the age of five and ten. (© Anders Ryman/Corbis)

## <sup>17</sup> ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Living where they do, Newars have access to the modern amenities offered by the city of Kathmandu and nearby towns. Government-controlled radio and television programming is available to those who can afford receivers. Theaters in the cities show movies, mostly Indian. Many Newar cannot afford modern entertainment, however, and turn to religious festivals and folk traditions of song, music, and dance for their recreation.

## <sup>18</sup> FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Many of the traditional handicrafts of the Newar focus on religious objects. Artisan castes are known for their skill in casting images in bronze, brass, copper, and other metals. Carving in stone and wood is also commonplace. Among the numerous items available are statues of deities, prayer wheels, *thankas* (painted scrolls), Nepali *khukhris* (curved knives), and paper maché dance masks. More utilitarian crafts include weaving, pottery, and basketry.

## <sup>19</sup> SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many of the Newars' social problems are typical of populations in other developing countries. It has been less than 50 years since Nepal, which was closed to the outside of the world since 1816, abandoned its policy of isolation. Despite efforts by

the government, Newars are faced with problems of poverty, overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate health facilities. Political instability and problems with the structure of Nepal's economy (low levels of industrialization, a lack of mineral resources, a severe shortage of skilled labor, and heavy reliance on foreign aid) hinder solutions to many of these problems. Environmental problems are increasing, with the Kathmandu Valley facing severe air and water pollution.

In Nepal, there are certain groups of people who for historical, social, or cultural reasons have become, or remained poor, and the government of Nepal has classed these people as "*janajatis*" (similar to *adivasis* or "indigenous peoples" in India). Janajatis are defined as persons who have their own language and traditional culture and who are not included under the conventional Hindu hierarchical caste structure and are accorded reserved seats in terms of political representation, educational institutions, and jobs. There are umbrella janajati organizations such as Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), which are lobbying for more rights for janajatis to break the dominance of high caste Hindus (i.e. the Brahmans and the chhetris) in the country.

One problem facing the Newars, who are classed by the government as janajatis, is whether or not to take advantage of the benefit offered by this status. "Newars with their proud cultural history and economic status were never janajatis and will

never claim that status,” wrote Pradip Shrestha, a Newar, in the weekly *Nepal Jagaran*. Accepting Shrestha’s views would mean giving up the “special arrangements for education, health and employment” that the Nepali Constitution promises for “economically and socially” disadvantaged janajatis.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Newar women’s roles are both like and unlike those of women in patrilineal households in other cultures in South Asia. They have greater freedom than their Brahman and Chhetri counterparts in Nepal, but nonetheless occupy the same subservient status in society. Newar women’s restrictions at menstruation—a time of impurity for higher caste Hindus—are considerably less. Menstruating Newar women can comb their own hair, and may continue to sleep in their usual place, although they sometimes go to another household woman’s sleeping area to sleep. They can cook all foods except rice to be used for ceremonial purposes and can attend ceremonial family feasts, although they are not supposed to carry water or touch god images, sacred utensils, or priests.

Women are able to move outside the house with greater ease than Brahman and Chhetri women and also are able to start up their own businesses. Newar women cannot inherit property, but retain personal control over their dowry, often investing it in businesses such as money-lending or renting out livestock. There are women’s organizations, such as the Kathmandu Federation of Business and Professional Women, which serve as forums to articulate the interests and problems of women in Nepal, particularly those related to working women.

Nonetheless, Newar women still fulfill the roles of running the household and bearing children, preferably sons to continue the lineage, which are so typical of women in South Asian societies.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# NGAJU DAYAK

**PRONUNCIATION:** NGA-joo DAH-yahk

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Kalimantan/Borneo)

**POPULATION:** About 800,000 (2003)

**LANGUAGE:** Ngaju

**RELIGION:** Traditional animism; Christianity (Protestant, Catholic); Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Originally meaning “inland” or “upriver,” *Dayak* is a catch-all term to distinguish traditionally animist peoples of the interior of Borneo from the Islamized and Malayified coastal population. Despite centuries of cultural exchange through trade and the mixing of populations through migrations across the island, Dayak groups maintain distinct traditions and identities from one another, often more linked with peoples across the seas than those across the mountains. Individuals tend to identify with ancestral valleys; thus, for example, a Ngaju Dayak of Central Kalimantan calls her or himself an *oloh* (“person [of]”) *Kahayan*, an *oloh Katingan*, or an *oloh Serayun*, depending on his or her locality of origin. Even a rough classification of Dayak peoples yields several groupings: the nomadic Punan of the deep interior forests; the Murut-Kadazan of Sabah and adjacent territory in Indonesia, whose languages have their closest relatives in the Philippines; the Lun Dayeh and Lun Bawang, who are linked to Sarawak’s Kelabit; the Kayan and Kenyah of eastern Kalimantan; the Land Dayaks and Sea Dayaks (Iban) of western Kalimantan, who speak Malay dialects but do not share in Islamized Malay culture; and the large Barito-river groups of central Kalimantan, including the Ma’anyan, Ngaju, Ot Danum, Benuaq, and Tunjung.

This article will focus on the Ngaju of Central Kalimantan, the largest Dayak group in terms of population and the most influential politically and culturally. The name “Ngaju” signifies upriver (as opposed to *ngawa*, downriver). The Ngaju distinguish themselves from the Ot Danum, related but more conservative peoples living even further upriver (*Ot* itself means “upriver” and *Danum* means “water” or “river”).

Austronesian peoples from the Philippines, farmers and seafarers, had arrived in Borneo by 3000 BC. Beginning in the 6th century AD, iron metallurgy provided Dayaks with the tools with which they could clear tracts in the dense interior forests for the cultivation of rice and taro, which was more nutritious than their former staple of sago palm starch. Since the early centuries AD, Dayak peoples have supplemented their subsistence agriculture by procuring forest products. These include gold, diamonds, gutta-percha, *illipe* nuts (source of a valued oil), aloeswood (an aromatic), resins, and camphor and bezoar stones (the hardened gall bladders of certain monkeys) and other ingredients for Chinese herbal medicines. Dayak traditionally traded them to coast-based brokers in exchange for such goods as Javanese gongs and Chinese porcelain and silk. The greatest brokers of all were the sultans (such as the ruler of Banjarmasin [see **Banjarese**]) who controlled the river mouths and thus all traffic between the Borneo interior and the outside world. Despite Banjarese claims to suzerainty over the upriver peoples in central Kalimantan, these latter, living

in small semipermanent settlements scattered over a vast area, remained de facto independent.

Beginning in the 1830s, the Dutch colonial government promoted Protestant missionary efforts among the Dayaks; this slowed the progress of Islamization, reinforced among interior peoples a sense of a distinct identity, and created a Christianized Ngaju elite. Included within the Banjarmasin-centered province of South Kalimantan under the newly independent Indonesian republic, animist as well as Christianized Ngaju feared they would end up at the mercy of a Muslim Banjarese majority. After fighting a small-scale guerrilla war against the central government, the Ngaju were able in 1957 to achieve their goal of a province of their own (Central Kalimantan) and toleration of their traditional religion. Their ultimate success can be attributed in great part to the esteem in which the national military held the Ngaju leader Tjilik Riwut, an ex-parachutist and hero of the revolution.

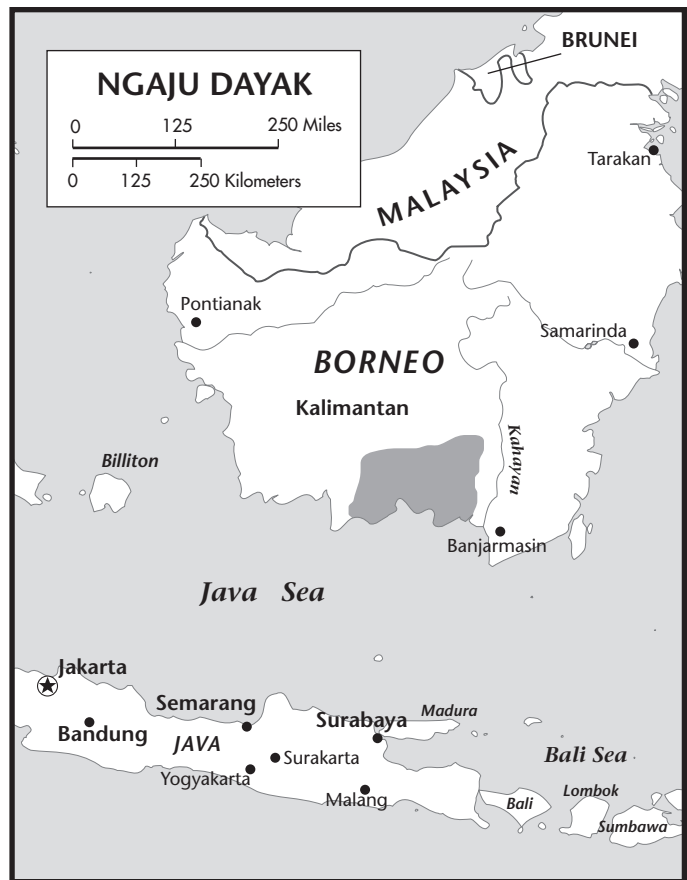
Despite these political successes, the Ngaju still face being outnumbered within their own province. The New Order regime (1966-1998) greatly increased transmigration into Central Kalimantan (as into other parts of Kalimantan) of Javanese, Balinese, Madurese, and others (from 13,000 between 1971 and 1980 to 180,000 in 1981-1990 and a similar number in the following decade). The government's aggressive development program promoted a highly destructive logging industry that reduced forest land from 84% of the total area of Central Kalimantan in 1970 to 56% in 1999, dramatically diminishing the territory available to Ngaju swidden farming.

In 1996-1997, as Suharto seemed to be preparing to retire and a succession struggle appeared eminent, violence erupted in neighboring West Kalimantan where Dayaks targeted one group of transmigrants, the Madurese. Sparked by an incident between Malays and Madurese, fighting resumed between Dayaks and Madurese in 1999 after the fall of Suharto in the wake of the Asian/global emerging markets financial crisis of 1997-1998; the conflict killed 186 people and displaced at least 26,000 Madurese. Dayak-Madurese conflict broke out in Central Kalimantan in 2001, spreading from Sampit, a town that had become majority-Madurese, to the provincial capital of Palangkaraya, 220 km away. From February to May, almost 500 hundred Madurese were killed, and almost the whole Madurese community of over 100,000 fled the province. Dayaks in West and Central Kalimantan were not only exacting revenge on Madurese for perceived grievances but also scapegoating them for all that Dayaks had suffered under the New Order (other groups, Malays [including recently Islamized Dayaks], Bugis, and even Chinese reportedly joined in the anti-Madurese attacks). Central Kalimantan has remained quiet since, but the conflict between the interests of the indigenous peoples of Borneo and the goals of the national government persists.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The terrain of Central Kalimantan province consists of several river valleys running north-south from the Schwaner and Muller Mountains to the Java Sea. Swamps extend from the coast deep into the interior, where they give way to dense jungle.

From a homeland along the Kahayan River, the Ngaju have spread as far west as the valley of the Seruyan. They have settled down to the mouth of the Kapuas, but, as one approaches the sea, they become more and more mixed with non-Day-



ak. The upper courses of the rivers are largely the preserve of the related Ot Danum Dayak. According to the 2000 census, Ngaju constituted 18% of the population of Central Kalimantan, 334,000 out of 1.86 million; they were outnumbered by Banjarese (24%) and equaled by Javanese (18%) transmigrants. A 2003 estimate places the number of Ngaju speakers as high as 800,000.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Ngaju language is one of a group of closely related Austro-nesian languages (the Barito family) spoken from the Schwaner Mountains and the upper Mahakam valley to the southeast corner of Borneo (minus Banjarese-speaking territory). The Kahayan dialect (called Bara-dia after its words for "have" and "not") has become a lingua franca throughout much of Kalimantan. Other major Barito-group languages are Ot Danum, Lawangan, and Ma'anyan. Incidentally, a dialect of Ma'anyan appears to be an ancestor to the languages of Madagascar; apparently, around the 5th century, Barito Dayaks were living closer to the coast and participated in long-distance seafaring under Malay leadership.

For the last five generations, Ngaju have had a system of given and family names (the Ot Danum adopted this only very recently). A man's full name will consist of his given name, the name of his father, and the name of a patrilineal ancestor. Upon marriage, a woman will keep her given name but replace the rest with the full name of her husband, e.g., a woman named Luise H. Tuwe marries Alex Banda Mambay and becomes Luise A. B. Mambay.



#### **4 FOLKLORE**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

#### **5 RELIGION**

According to the 1980 census, 17.71% of the population of Central Kalimantan (and a much larger percentage of the specifically Ngaju portion thereof) adhered to traditional animism, predominating in the more upriver villages. Some 14.27% of the provincial population was Protestant and 1.94% was Catholic. Because the schools were initially established by missionaries, the Ngaju elite is largely Christian. The rest of the provincial population is Muslim. In the past, conversion to Islam meant exchanging a Dayak identity for a Banjarese or Malay one. In recent times, however, many Dayaks (such as the Bakumpai, a Ngaju subgroup) have adopted Islam but remained Dayak in language and culture.

The traditional Ngaju religion recognizes *ganan*, spirits who dwell in house posts, in big rocks or trees, in the dense forest, and in bodies of water. These spirits divide into *sangiang* or *nayu-nayu* (benevolent spirits), *taloh* or *kambin* (malevolent spirits), and *liau* (ancestors). Gods include supreme deities of the upperworld (male) and the underworld (female). Various rituals are performed, from small offerings to the ancestors, to ceremonies marking major transitions in the individual's life, to community rites to ensure abundant harvests or cure epidemics. *Balian* (priestesses) and *basir* (transvestite priests) speak an esoteric language while being possessed by spirits. The abode of the dead is visualized much like that of the living, as a settlement consisting of houses strewn along a riverbank (though in former time the most privileged dead, those whose heirs were able to offer human sacrifices, would enjoy a hill-top estate).

The Indonesian state's requirement that all citizens adhere to a monotheistic religion has threatened the practice of the Ngaju's traditional animism. In response, Ngaju have formalized their religion under the name of Kaharingan (taken by Tjilik Riwut from the name of an "elixir of life" spring, *Danum Kaharingan Belum*) and to have the religion classified as an "offshoot" of Balinese Hinduism [see **Balinese**]. Kaharingan claims 330,000 adherents, including many Dayak who are not Ngaju. There is a 16-member council (almost all Ngaju) to coordinate theology and rituals; however, this does not include *balian* or *basir*. Through a 300-page study book (published in 1981), Hindu-Balinese-style meeting halls, and sermons, prayers, and hymns, the council aims to instill concepts of individual salvation and a supreme being. For instance, it promotes the already widely accepted identification of the important god Tempon Telon with Jesus Christ. Nowadays, no *tiwah* celebration takes place without being registered with the council, which directs the police to issue the required permit.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Men wed at the age of 20, women at 18. Formerly, parents chose a child's partner, but now school-educated young people choose their own spouses. Bringing a sum of cash, the man's parents deliver the proposal for him to the woman's parents.

The woman's parents call their kin together to discuss the proposal. They try to discover whether the man is of good character and has no blood of slaves. If the woman's kin decide to refuse the proposal, they return the money. If they accept it, they arrange the betrothal ceremony and feast, bearing the whole cost thereof.

The two sides negotiate a bride-price (*palaku*), the wedding expenses to be paid by the man's family, and the date of the wedding. The woman's side may set a very high *palaku* as an assertion of its own status; too high a *palaku* may cause the man's side to withdraw the proposal. The man's side must first present *bahalai* (cloth for a woman's sarong), cloth for a *kebaya* (blouse), *perfume*, gold rings, etc., to the woman's side. The *palaku* is often returned to the husband later if he has shown himself to be a good man who loves his wife. In addition, the man presents *saput*, a gift consisting of an heirloom gong or porcelain, to the wife's siblings as a sign of gratitude for their having taken care of his future wife. Moreover, a *panangkalau*, a similar gift, is given to any older sister of the wife who is not yet married; this is to ward off any disaster that would follow upon a younger sister daring to marry before an elder sister. The wedding contract (*surat pisek*) is sealed with the taking of medicinal herbs. From one month to three years may elapse between the betrothal and the wedding itself, depending upon the financial resources of the man's side.

Funerals unfold in two stages. The primary burial rite sends the soul of the departed to the lower part of heaven; the secondary ceremony (*tiwah*) enables the soul to pass into the highest heaven, Lewu Tatau, where it meets the supreme god Ranying and will never again suffer disasters, difficulties, or fatigue. First, the corpse is laid in a wooden coffin in the shape of a boat or a trough for pounding rice. This first burial includes masked performers dancing to ward off evil spirits, and priests chanting to the accompaniment of drumming.

A *tiwah* costs the equivalent of \$6,000–\$12,000; it requires the sacrifice of many water buffalo and pigs, and the feeding of numerous visitors who come in from villages scattered over a wide area. The expense is such that groups of families can mount *tiwah* only every seven years or so; those dying within that interval are given a common *tiwah* that takes from one to three weeks. *Balian* sing legends and genealogies from memory for hours and hours and perform dances. To take advantage of the gathered crowds, individuals set up stalls to sell prepared food and other goods, as well as venues for gambling nearby.

The bones of a deceased person are exhumed from the *raung* (sometimes, the corpses need to be cremated first) and deposited in *sandung*. These are houses, 2 m (6.5 ft) high, intricately carved with representations of the hornbill, symbolic of the upperworld, and of the lower world's *naga* serpent (the Ma'anyan inter the bones of whole families in the larger *pambak* mausolea); modern *sandung* are often of concrete. Sacrificial animals are slaughtered while tied to a *sepundug*, a post carved with images of demons with fangs, huge protruding tongues, and long noses. Another piece of funerary art is the *sengkaran*, a 6-m (20-ft) pole representing the "tree of life" (a symbol of the cosmos); at the top is a hornbill flying over a forest of spears stuck into the back of a *naga* that lies on a Chinese heirloom jar. Also important are "ships-of-the-dead," small, model sailing ships with a crew of benevolent spirits made of gutta-percha (a kind of latex); these are now produced throughout Kalimantan for tourists.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditional Ngaju society was divided into three classes: the *utus gantong* or *utus tatau*, the *utus rendah*, and slaves. Living in the upriver part of the village, the *utus gantong* were people of influence and wealth, status inherent in their possession of gongs and porcelain; the *demang* (chieftains) came from this group. Living downriver, the *utus rendah* were free persons but lacked such prestige goods. *Balian* or *basir* (religious specialists) could come from this group; specializing in, among other duties, chanting at funerals, they did not labor in the fields, and offenses against them were doubly punished. The slaves were either *jipen* (accepting bondage to pay off a debt) or *rewar* (captured in war and sometimes designated as human sacrifices); slavery was abolished in 1892, but the stigma of slave ancestry remains.

Prominent individuals took noble titles of Banjarese (Javano-Malay) origin. Under the current Indonesian government scheme, the *demang* (named for life because of their personal qualities) stand between the village heads (*kepala desa*) and district heads (*camat*). The *kepala desa* is elected for life, has an assistant (*sekretaris*), and a subordinate in charge of agriculture and land holdings (*kepala padang*). A council of elders advises him, but everyone has the right to give an opinion on matters of common interest (individuals who have experience of the outside world are listened to the most eagerly). Many villages, particularly those farthest upriver, are in effect autonomous from higher administration. Unwritten customary law emphasizes fines and rites to propitiate offended spirits; the village council with the village head presiding decides punishments.

The Dayak have had a reputation (often exaggerated by Westerners) for relatively free sexual relations. It is clear that a women's pleasure was given priority, as when men wore the penis pin (*palang*, in historical times known among the Ngaju only in the Katingan valley). Young men and women can interact freely, for instance joke and dance, when older people are watching. A man can speak with another's wife as long as a third party is present. If a man is found alone in a deserted place with a woman other than his wife or sister, he must pay a fine (*singér*).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Villages are on or near rivers (generally the only way to get between settlements) and include a central community house and a place to dock boats.

Most people spend as much as half the year away from the main settlement in smaller ones near their respective swidden (shifting-cultivation) fields, returning only for major ritual celebrations. Houses are built either directly along the river shore or along a road parallel to the river. Long-houses (*betang*) are only found now among the Ot Danum (those of other Dayak peoples may house the equivalent of an entire village in as many as 50 single-family rooms [*bilik*]). Among the Ngaju, longhouses were only built by the rare individuals who were able to amass the capital necessary to build them, and they represented so huge an investment that they were not abandoned even when the owners needed to farm increasingly distant swidden fields. Contemporary Ngaju live in large extended family dwellings (*umah hai*) housing one to five nuclear families (a couple, unmarried children, and their married daughters and their families). Raised on 2.5-m (8-ft) pillars, houses have walls of wooden shingles or pieces of bark. Wealthier families

build houses in a "Dutch" style, complete with chairs, coffee tables, china cabinets, and the like (traditional houses have no furniture).

The Ngaju home province, Central Kalimantan has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 73.5 (2005 score), far higher than Indonesia's national score of 69.6 and the fifth highest in the country (after Jakarta, North Sulawesi, Riau, and Yogyakarta). Central Kalimantan's GDP per capita is us\$10,976, among the highest in the country (cf. us\$10,910 for North Sumatra, us\$6,293 for Central Java and us\$2,919 for North Maluku). In 2000, the level of infant mortality, at 47.68 deaths per 1,000 live births, was the third lowest in country (after the national capital region of Jakarta and the highly urbanized Yogyakarta region).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The basic kin group consists of a nuclear family expanded to include the families of married daughters; kinship is reckoned on both the mother's and father's sides. According to custom, the ideal marriage is between the grandchildren of two brothers; also preferred are matches between the children of two sisters and between the children of a brother and a sister. Taboo, however, are matches between the children of brothers and especially between generations, as between an uncle and a niece. In the latter case, the infringing couple is required to eat from a pig manger with the entire village as witnesses, otherwise, the couple *and* the village will suffer calamities as supernatural punishment.

As taking a second wife is too expensive, polygamy rarely occurs. The divorce rate is high (one Ma'anyan village counted as many as one in four marriages ending in divorce). Infidelity by the husband or the wife is the usual reason; barrenness is not sufficient cause because childless couples adopt. In the case of divorce, younger children stay with the mother, while older children can become the responsibility of other kin of either side, depending on the circumstances.

## 11 CLOTHING

In earlier times, Ngaju made cloth from bark or wove it from cotton. Nowadays, they wear manufactured clothes imported via the coastal ports.

Traditional ceremonial clothing for men includes a head cloth decorated with hornbill feathers; a sleeveless shirt; short pants; two pieces of cloth to cover the front and back of the body down to the knees; a *penyang*, or belt made of leopard claws; bead necklaces; a *mandau* sword; and a richly carved wooden shield. Women's attire is essentially the same, except that gold thread and beads are worked into the front and back cloths, the *penyang* is of copper plates, and numerous bracelets are worn.

Though much less so today than in the past, Ngaju (as other Dayaks) have intricate tattoos and stretch their earlobes down to the shoulders with numerous earrings.

## 12 FOOD

The staple foods are rice, cassava, and various tubers. Cassava leaves are commonly cooked as a side dish, as are river fish (game is eaten only rarely; this includes wild pigs, monkeys, snakes, and wild fowl). Regional specialties include: *sayur rimbang*, a large eggplant cooked with river fish; *sayur ambut*, a

pungent dish combining fish and tender shoots of rattan; and *wadi* and *paksem*, fermented mixtures of meat (fish, wild pig, deer, or deermouse) and rice. Durian is a popular sweet, preserved as *tempoyak* or made into *dodol* taffy.

*Anding*, an alcoholic drink made from glutinous rice, is used in rituals and is an indispensable part of all celebrations. Tea and coffee are drinks for everyday consumption. One makes *barum gula* by fermenting 4 kg (8.8 lbs) of boiled glutinous rice in a jar with cloves, cinnamon, and peppers and adding sugar after a week. Both men and women are fond of chewing betel nut.

### 13 EDUCATION

In 2005, North Sulawesi's level of literacy stood at 98.87%, high by Indonesian national standards and even higher than in the region of the national capital, Jakarta (See also the article entitled **Indonesians** in this volume).

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

All ceremonies feature the playing of an *ije karepang*, an ensemble of five Javanese gongs; to this are added the *tarai* (a flat gong), the *tangkanong* (a xylophone), and *gandang* (drums).

Each of the many traditional dances serves a particular function. The *deder ketingan* offers young people an opportunity to mix at traditional feasts. The *enggang terbang* ("flying hornbill") honors the ancestors. The *kanjan halu*, originally a post-harvest dance of thanksgiving to the gods, serves now as a *tiwah* funeral feast entertainment. The *kinyah kambe* is a trance or possession dance. The *balian bawo* heals sickness. The *giring-giring* greets guests. The *manambang pangkalima* celebrates victory in battle.

### 15 WORK

Most Ngaju support themselves by practicing swidden shifting-cultivation agriculture, growing dry rice and other plants, such as cassava, *ubi rambat* (a kind of tuber with a creeping vine), taro, eggplant, pineapple, banana, sugarcane, chili, gourds, and sometimes tobacco. This requires cooperation between families; men generally do the work in the fields, but women do also, if their family has lost its adult men through death or for some other reason. Among Dayak groups, the Ngaju have pioneered the growing of cash crops on permanent fields, primarily rattan and rubber but also cloves, oil palms, coffee, pepper, and cacao. Pigs and chickens are kept for ritual consumption. Catching river fish provides the main source of protein, more important than hunting wild pigs with spears and dogs and shooting down fowl with blowguns; hunters also use snares, as well as traps employing wooden or bamboo spikes.

Ngaju also sell forest products to brokers from the coast, including valuable woods, such as ironwood (*ulin*), damar resin, *kulit gemur* (used for cosmetics and insect repellent), and *illipe* nuts.

### 16 SPORTS

Cockfighting and *kinyah* (a form of *silat* [see **Malaysian Malays**] martial art) are popular sports.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional arts include mat- and basket-weaving, textile-weaving, canoe-making (especially among the Ma'anyan), pottery, and tattooing. Particularly noteworthy is the production of *mandau* swords and *sumpitan*, blowguns unique because they consist of a shaft of ironwood through which a hole has been drilled. Non-Dayak blowguns consist of split wood or bamboo tied back together. Woodcarving is also highly developed. Dayak artwork features repeated geometrical forms, such as spirals (an influence from the Dong Son culture of ancient northern Vietnam) and densely packed yet harmonious combinations of stylized motifs, especially fantastical animals, reflecting inspiration from Chinese art of the late Zhou dynasty.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Central Kalimantan's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 60.9, higher than Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The province's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, is 51.8, significantly lower than the national GEM (54.6).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# NIASANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** nee-AHS-uns (Nias: “NEE-ahs”)

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (island of Nias, off the northwest coast of Sumatra)

**POPULATION:** over 700,000

**LANGUAGE:** Nias

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Protestant, Catholic); Islam; Pelebegu (indigenous religion)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

While most Indonesian ethnic groups identify themselves with a named place or, at the very least, with a general direction such as “upstream,” the indigenous inhabitants of the island of Nias call themselves *ono niha*, “children of the humans.” Lumping all other Indonesians as *dava*, the language itself reflects the isolation in which Niasan culture has developed over the millennia. The Niasans’ Austronesian ancestors arrived as early as 3000 BC. This inward orientation also manifests itself in the fact that, despite the myth of a common origin in central Nias, each Nias village has virtually been a world unto itself, cultivating traditions distinct from even its nearest neighbors.

From genealogies and myths going back 30 to 40 generations, scholars calculate that Nias’ aristocratic, megalith-raising culture dates back to the 8th century AD. It may well have been fueled by the export of slaves from the very beginning. The first reference to Nias (from an Arab travelogue) dates to AD 851–13th-century Arab sources describe its slave trade as already ancient. When the island first drew the attention of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Muslim Acehese satisfied a Niasan chief’s insatiable appetite for gold in exchange for Niasan slaves, whose paganism made them a valuable commodity in a by then largely Islamized archipelago (Islamic law forbade Muslims to enslave Muslims). The VOC gained entry to the island by concluding pacts with coastal chiefs needing protection from slavers; the slave trade was depopulating the north of the island and militarizing society (slavery would persist long after Dutch abolition in 1860).

Although the Dutch established their first garrison at the port of Gunung Sitoli in 1840 and enjoyed nominal control of the entire island by 1857, it was not until 1906 that, with the costly Acehese war over [see **Acehese**], they achieved a complete subjugation. Of even greater long-term significance was the arrival in 1865 of the Rhenish Missionary Society (German Lutherans). Conversions were few until the crumbling of traditional society in the face of colonialism threw the indigenous ideology into question; South and Central Nias submitted to the new religion only after the devastation of epidemics and brutal colonial repression.

In the mid-1910s, apocalyptic Christian revival movements convulsed Nias, throwing up native prophets to challenge the authority of the German missionaries. Nativist schisms continued after the end of colonialism, and Roman Catholic missionaries came to break the Protestant monopoly. Although the Indonesian state has provided some basic infrastructure and services and the *dava* (non-Niasan) population has grown, Nias remains isolated and underdeveloped. The level of infant

mortality is high, and the incidence of malaria and cholera is very grave despite the operation of government health clinics.

The earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004 and the earthquake of 28 March 2005 (the world’s second most powerful since 1965) devastated much of Nias, leaving hundreds dead and thousands more homeless as nearly every dwelling on the island sustained some degree of damage; the coastline in many places receded as much as 50 meters, and much of the island’s infrastructure of harbors, bridges, and roads was destroyed as well as over 700 schools and 1,000 places of worship. Just as in nearby Aceh, many international organizations are assisting in the reconstruction.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The island of Nias is 130 km (81 m) long by 45 km (28 mi) wide, slightly smaller than Bali (which is about the size of Delaware). Across a 125-km-wide (78-mi-wide) strait, one can see Sumatra’s volcanic peaks. The terrain is rugged, and, with a growing population of 712,000 (2005, up from 200,000 in 1959, an increase of more than 3.5 times), deforestation is becoming a problem. About 200 years ago, Niasans also settled on the Batu Islands to the south.

For Niasans, the important reference points are not the cardinal directions but *raya*, “upstream,” and *yu*, “downstream,” added even in mentioning the house next door. “Left” and “right” are not specified; one simply says *mi sa* or *tan sa*, “to the side” or sometimes *raya* and “*yu*.” The *ulu*, the river source, is considered the origin of all things sacred, while the sea is seen as the abode of monsters and evil spirits.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Nias language is Austronesian and is probably most closely related to Mentawai and Batak, but centuries or millennia of isolated development have given it a coincidentally “Polynesian” phonetic appearance, as in its having only open (vowel-final) syllables. Three dialect-groups (North, Central, and South) are distinguished, of which the Laraga dialect of the North was chosen to translate the Bible, and subsequently became the standard form for all secular publications.

Although most ordinary adult villagers do not have a mastery of Bahasa Indonesia beyond the ability to sing a few patriotic songs, all children, as recipients of an elementary education and listeners of the radio, are fluent in it.

After the birth of a child, his or her parents are no longer known by their personal names but as *Ama* [child’s name, e.g., Rosa] or *Ina* [child’s name] (“Father of ...,” “Mother of ...”).

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

According to the current version of the Niasan creation myth, the god Lovalangi created the world and placed on it Tora’a, the tree of life. Tora’a grew two fruits, cared for by a golden spider. From the fruits hatched out a god and a goddess; their divine descendants populated heaven, living under the kingship of one of their number, Sirao Uwu Zihönö.

Sirao took three wives and sired three sons by each. When he wanted to retire, his nine sons began to quarrel over the succession. So he had them compete for the throne in a contest of dancing on nine spears. The youngest, Luo Mewona, won. In order to avoid further conflict, Sirao sent Luo Mewona’s eight older brothers down to earth.



Of the eight, only four reached the earth (i.e., the island of Nias) safely; they became the ancestors of the Niasan clans. Of the other four, one, being too heavy, pierced the earth, becoming a giant serpent, the “supporter of the earth and the cause of earthquakes.” Another fell into the water and became the spirit of the rivers, to be worshipped by fishers. Yet another was carried away by the wind and became the spirit of the forest, to be worshipped by hunters. The last hit earth at a stony area in the north of the island, becoming the ancestor of experts in invulnerability magic.

## 5 RELIGION

Six out of seven inhabitants of Nias are Protestant; the remainder is about evenly divided between Muslim (mostly immigrants from elsewhere in Indonesia) and Catholic. The folk Christianity that has developed emphasizes a relationship between God and humanity that focuses on prohibitions, which are largely compatible with the traditional value system. Nonetheless, the colonial abolition of slavery, headhunting, and ancestor worship forever changed the context of those values.

A few thousand Niasans register themselves as adherents of Pelebegu, used first by non-Niasans, evidently from the Karo Batak *perbegu*, or Molohe adu, the Niasan expression, both meaning “worshipping the ancestral spirits.” Before iconoclastic campaigns early in the century, the people took reverent care of the wooden statues of the *adu* ancestral spirits, filling shrines and the public rooms of their houses with them and making daily offerings to them. The mythology continues to be handed down in the *hoho* songs sung at feasts, even by

Christians. Originally, the highest god and creator of the world was Sihai. However, Protestant missionaries chose to translate the name of the Christian God with the name of another god, Lovalangi, whom the Niasans worshipped most as the deity responsible for their welfare. Thus, Niasans came to attribute the role of highest god and creator to Lovalangi.

According to traditional belief, a person has two bodies: a physical one (*boto*) and a spiritual one, consisting of “breath” (*noso*) and “shadow” (*lumölumö*). At death, the *boto* becomes dust, the *noso* goes to Lovalangi, and the *lumölumö* becomes a *bekhu*, a ghost. The indigenous conception of the other world described it as opposite to this world in every detail (night here is day there; sentences here run backwards there) except that the rich and powerful of this world enjoyed the same high status in the other world—provided their kin mounted expensive funerary ceremonies (otherwise, *bekhu* remained in the vicinity of the grave). The Christian-influenced scenario that has become current is that a soul reaches heaven (Teteholi Ana’a) only after crossing a bridge blocked by a guardian god and his cat. A person who has sins on his conscience *and* who has not been given the proper ceremonies is pushed off the bridge into hell, which is below.

Priests (*ere*), who are considered to be representatives of Silewe Narazata, one of the high gods, can be either men or women. A person destined to become an *ere* first disappears for a time, i.e., is carried off by spirits. After returning, he or she learns from an experienced *ere* how to perform ritual chants, sacrifice cocks, make spirit images, and cure disease. Also important are *kataruna*, women and girls specializing in trance, who provide oracles and also heal diseases.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In the *boro n’adu* ceremony, traditionally held every 7 or 14 years, priests destroy totemic symbols at the spot where the Niasan ancestors descended from the upperworld, e.g., a giant tiger representing a ruler was carried on a high platform and cast into the Gomo River. Missionaries outlawed the ceremony in 1913, but it has recently been revived as part of Indonesian Independence Day festivities.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Boys undergo *famoto* (circumcision); Christianized Niasans vehemently opposed the German missionaries’ attempts to ban the practice, long predating Islamic influence.

In addition to considering social status, a man tries to confirm that the woman of his choice for marriage is indeed his “predestined match” (*tambali*) by looking for omens. In the past, he would resort to divination to discover whether the ancestors had joined the couple.

The wedding process involves the following stages. The man’s kin issues the proposal, presenting the women’s kin with betrothal wealth of three *pao* (30 g or 1 oz) of gold; the latter gives them in turn a basketry container (*bola*) containing the lower jaw, heart, and liver of a pig. The man’s kin must return the *bola* to them full of boiled pork. Once resources for the wedding expenses have been accumulated, a *fangötö bongi* ceremony is held at which the two sides decide the wedding date and the amount of the bride-price. In some areas, this can still be quite substantial, for example 100 large pigs. Men who cannot afford the bride-price must work for the bride’s family for a specified time. At the *fangowalu*, the wedding ceremony

itself, huge numbers of pigs are slaughtered to serve guests and display wealth. The groom brings the bride back to his house on a litter. In the *famuli nucha* ceremony, the couple, after two weeks, pays a call on the bride's parents, bringing boiled pork and returning the bridal jewelry that had been borrowed earlier. The bride's parents in turn present them with a specially bred sow, seed rice, and a *balewa* (a large machete), the basics with which to start a household.

When a man knows his death is imminent, he gives his blessing to and prays over his sons; this *famalakhisi* ceremony ensures that the sons, who serve the father pork, will not have lives full of obstacles. Customs for handling the corpse differ from region to region. In some areas, bodies are exposed on a platform in the graveyard until the bones are picked clean, at which time a secondary burial can be held. In others, the body is put into a coffin. The bodies of slaves were simply thrown into the forest.

The *fanörö satua*, or secondary burial, is necessary for the soul's passage to heaven (Teteholi Ana'a). Including the slaughter of pigs (and formerly the sacrifice of slaves), these ceremonies are the opportunity for the display of wealth.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

At the end of the 18th century, Nias had more than 50 constantly warring *öri*, independent confederations of villages (*banua*). Leading each confederation was a *tuhenöri*, and heading each village was a *salawa*, drawn from the founding and dominant clan of the community.

Niasan society was composed of a number of the following social strata: aristocrats, priests (*ere*), commoners, and slaves. Among aristocrats, called *siulu*, literally "those of the river source," further distinction was made between rulers (*balö ziulu*) and the rest. Likewise, the commoners (*ono mbanua*, "children of the village") divided into *siila*, commoner leaders and various specialists, and *satö*, the ordinary people. Slaves (*sawuyu*) included three categories: *binu*, those captured in war or through abduction; *sondrara-hare*, those selling themselves to pay off a debt; and *hölitö*, those delivered from a death sentence by another in exchange for servitude. Slaves might end their life as a sacrifice, accompanying their master to the grave.

The aristocrats met together to determine the tasks to be done every Wednesday by the whole community. Moreover, commoners were bound by obligations of debt to the aristocrats (for the most part incurred at feasts).

Although generally an individual could not cross class lines, e.g., a commoner could not become an aristocrat, within the two classes one could raise one's status by mounting "feasts of merit" (still given only in Central Nias). Anyone but the poorest can hold a small-scale feast (slaughtering up to 30 pigs) in order to pay off debts acquired in attending other people's feasts and to gain honor. The much more ambitious *ovasa* feast earns the *ovasa*-holder the position of village elder (*satua mbanua*), with the right to join the *salawa* in governing the village. The host's wife-givers confer on him a title, such as "Lamp of Flame" or "Heard and Obeyed"; the host may erect a stone monument in front of his house. In order to mount an *ovasa*, a man must call on the assistance of relatives and his wife-takers, persuading them to contribute to the feast (actually, to pay off previous debts to the host) through oratorical skill. The *ovasa* itself includes competing poetical speeches; various entertainments;

carrying of the *ovasa*-holder and wife in a procession through the village on a litter; slaughtering pigs; and distributing prestige-payments to the host's wife-givers. As aristocrats serve as channels for fertility-giving power from on high, their feasts benefit the whole community.

Contact between the young of opposite sexes is very difficult and, if dared, requires an intermediary. In the past, sex outside of marriage was punished with death (a couple could be bound and cast into a river). Illicit sex is assumed to damage the woman's kin and her own prospects for marriage. Thus, if the couple is not separated by taboo restrictions, the simplest solution is for the man to marry the woman. Otherwise, the man pays fines to her patrilineal kin (and, should she have one, to her husband's patrilineal kin).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The village (*banua*, also meaning "sky") contains members of several clans (*mado*) and is usually built on a height for defense (for this reason too, villages in south Nias encompass as many as 3,000 people). Each village has a paved rectangular plaza (*evali* or, more poetically, *olayama*, "ceremonial dancing ground") that can be extended into a central avenue. On one end of the *evali* stands the *omo sebua* ("great house") of the chief lineage. On either side of the *evali* leading away from it are the ordinary houses (*omo niha*). The opposite end is left open (graveyards are often located there). By the *omo sebua* stands the village gate, which leads down a flight of stone steps to the valley below.

Niasans distinguish between *omo* (proper houses in the village), *ose* (the temporary huts of exiles from other villages), and *halama* (substantial huts near the fields). "Great houses" and ordinary houses differ only in size. The *omo sebua* are on a monumental scale, supported on massive, almost 1-m-thick (3-ft-thick), vertical and diagonal (bracing) pillars of ironwood, grounded in large foundation stones as proof against earthquake. With its great projecting eaves, the roof reaches much higher than the rest of the house, going as far up as 30 m (98 ft), while the room height would only be 4 m (13 ft). In north Nias, houses are smaller and have an oval plan.

Traditional houses (*omo hada*) possessed in front a large, light, and airy public room (*tavolo*) with a long bench built into the inner front wall for elders to sit on. *Tavolo* are otherwise empty, though formerly they were crowded with wooden ancestral figures. In the back is the private area for the dark, musty bedrooms or apartments for different related families (also separate sleeping areas for boys and unmarried men), and the kitchen with a big wood-framed hearth and utensils and other tools hanging from the walls.

In front of some houses stand various stone monuments. *Behu* are megaliths raised to commemorate feasts of merit. *Daro-daro* or *harefa* are stone slab seats. *Osa-osa* are thrones of honor with monster faces carved into their backs. Simulating the walls of enemy villages, stone pylons are raised for *zawözawö* jumping. Dancing women slap their feet on *ni'ogazi*, mushroom-shaped stones that produce a musical tone.

Central Nias villages used to have an *osali nazu*, a house for idols (as well as sacred weights and skulls taken for rituals) erected on a paved embankment. The chief's house served as the community meeting hall and place for rituals (often with space for 200 dancers); elsewhere on the island these functions

took place in a separate structure called an *osali* (north) or *bale* (south). Churches also go by the name *osali*.

Modern extensions to traditional villages include houses on the general Indonesian model (*omo ndrava* or *omo pasisir*).

The two regencies into which the island of Nias is divided, Nias and South Nias, have Human Development Indices (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 66.1 and 63.9 respectively (2005 score), considerably lower than the national HDI of 69.6 and dramatically lower than the HDI for North Sumatra as a whole (72, in the top third in the country). Nias regency's GDP per capita is us\$3,514, and South Nias regency's us\$3,702, very low for Indonesia when compared with us\$10,910 for North Sumatra as a whole, us\$6,293 for Central Java, and us\$3,427 for East Nusa Tenggara. In 2000, the rate of infant mortality for the whole island stood at 55.66 deaths per 1,000 live births, which was moderate for Indonesia, worse than provinces on Java but better than most in eastern Indonesia and comparable to provinces on Sumatra with higher GDP's per capita.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Niasans belong to *mado* (*gana* in the south), large patrilineal clans that often trace their heritage to a common ancestor 30 to 40 generations back. A household consists of a *sangambatö sebua* (*sangambatö*, "nuclear family"; *sebua*, "great"), which consists of a married couple, their unmarried children, and their married sons and their families all living together.

The ideal marriage is between a man and his mother's brother's daughter. Taboo is marriage between a man and a woman of the same clan related back to 10 generations, as well as between a man and a woman whose mother, grandmother, or great-grandmother, is of his own clan. Marriage creates a relation (expressed in flows of gifts) between a man as a "wife-taker" and the woman's brother, father, and her father's father-in-law and brother-in-law, her maternal grandfather's father-in-law and brother-in-law, and so on, as the "wife-givers." In pre-Christian times, a man might take more than one wife, usually due to the obligation to marry his deceased father's wives (other than his own mother). It was also common, but not mandatory, for a man to wed his brother's widow. If a man has no sons, he adopts one of his brother's sons. Sons, especially the eldest, and not daughters receive inheritance.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Contemporary Niasans follow the mode of dress of other Indonesians, from the Western-style short-sleeve shirts and long pants of the men, to the sarong and *kebaya* combination for women. Colonial authorities forbade the "indecent" traditional clothing (which consisted of a loincloth of beaten bark; Niasans had no indigenous weaving). Today's war-dancer attire consists of a loincloth of brightly colored woven cloth hanging down to the calf at both front and back, an open jacket, and a head cloth. Ceremonial wear for women includes long-sleeved or sleeveless long dresses in solid colors with appliqué trimmings. Women's jewelry (genuine gold or copper imitation) comes in large pieces in simple designs (crowns, broad headbands, pectorals, bracelets, and petal-shaped earrings).

### **12 FOOD**

Currently the staple food is rice, but formerly it was yams (*ubi rambat* in Bahasa Indonesia); on the Batu Islands it is sago.

Supplementary starch comes from yams, maize, and taro. The yam is boiled or roasted and eaten with sliced or grated coconut. Niasans make little use of coconut milk except to stew cassava leaves, a common side dish. Most other preparations, including pork for feasts, involve only boiling the raw food with salt. Snacks made from fruit are becoming common under *dava* influence.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005, the level of literacy stood at 87.77% for Nias regency and 62.49 for South Nias regency. The latter was among the lowest in Indonesia by Indonesian national standards, but the former was comparable to the more developed provinces of Bali and Central Java (*See also* the article entitled **Indonesians** in this volume).

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Funerals and feasts of merit feature *hoho*, narrative poems (hero tales or genealogies) sung by a leader and three two-man choruses in four-tone melodies. A simpler form, the *maena* from north Nias, has become a popular replacement for the *hoho*, consisting of a humorous verse in praise of the feast-giver sung by a leader and answered by a chorus. Various traditional dances are performed by both sexes, the most famous of which is the war dance which accompanies high-stone jumping.

### **15 WORK**

Except for the few who have completed enough education to qualify for government jobs, Niasans support themselves through dry-field, swidden agriculture, growing yams, rice, maize, and taro. Wet-rice is cultivated only in swamps. Every house raises pigs, so as to be able to contribute to the feasts of merit, the funerals, and the bride-wealth needed by kin and wife-givers. In the past, dried pork served as a standard of value, rather like money. Other livestock includes chickens, ducks, water buffalo, goats, and horses. Hunting and fishing are of only secondary significance. Nias' main exports are copra, rubber, and pigs (slaves used to be one of their main exports as well).

### **16 SPORTS**

*Zawözaw* consists of jumping over a 2.1-m-high (7-ft-high) stone structure (these are located in the village's central plaza). Formerly, *zawözawö* was a test of skill for young men, and being able to make it over the stone was a prerequisite to entering the marriageable age. Now, it is performed for government ceremonies or tourist entertainment.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

*See* the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Valued specializations include gold-smithing, copper-working, and woodcarving (house wall panels and statues). Basketry is also a common skill.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

*See* the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In 2002, the Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) for the whole island of Nias was 61.5, significantly above Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2 though the same as that of North Sumatra as a whole. The island's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) was 59.3, dramatically higher than the national GEM of 54.6 and the provincial GEM of 48.4.

While men, particularly older ones, spend much of their time debating points of customary law or just chatting (when not performing occasional or seasonal tasks such as hunting or clearing swidden [shifting-cultivation] fields), women are occupied all day either working in the fields or preparing food. In gatherings, women sit either on the floor or serve betel to the men seated on benches; however assertive they might be in private with their husbands, in public women keep silent.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# NICOBARESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** nik-uh-bahr-EEZ

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Holchu (self-reference)

**LOCATION:** India (Nicobar Islands)

**POPULATION:** 28,785 (2001 Census)

**LANGUAGE:** Nicobarese; Hindi

**RELIGION:** Animism; Christianity mixed with indigenous beliefs; Islam; Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The term Nicobarese describes the dominant tribal peoples of the Nicobar Islands, an island group located in the Bay of Bengal. Although the inhabitants of each island have their own specific name, the Nicobarese refer to themselves as "Holchu," meaning "friend." The people are of Mongoloid stock from mainland Southeast Asia, possibly originating in Burma (Myanmar). The date of their arrival is uncertain. The islands are mentioned in 11th century inscriptions from South India as Nakkavaram, the "Land of the Naked," suggesting that people were present by that time. The Nicobarese were probably not the first inhabitants of the islands. When they arrived, they came into conflict with peoples of Malay descent who were already there and forced them into the interior. The Shompen, another tribal group in the Nicobars, are believed to be the descendants of these earlier inhabitants. Though relatively isolated, the Nicobarese were exposed to contact with various European maritime powers as they expanded into Asia after 1500. Great Britain laid claim to the islands in 1869 and governed them (except for the 1942–45 Japanese occupation) until they passed to India in 1947. Today, the islands are administered by India as part of the Union Territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 2001 Census of India recorded a population of 28,784 Nicobarese in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Because of population pressure, 163 families were resettled from the Nicobars to Little Andaman Island in 1973 by the government.

The Nicobar Islands are a chain of 19 islands in the Bay of Bengal that runs southeast from the Andaman Islands towards Indonesia. Their total area is 1,841 sq km (710 sq mi), though only 12 of the islands are inhabited. The largest of these is Great Nicobar (863 sq km or 333 sq mi), which lies only 145 km (95 mi) from the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Other populated islands include Car Nicobar, Little Nicobar, and Nancowry. Some of the islands have flat, coral-covered surfaces, but others are hilly. Great Nicobar, for instance, rises to 642 m (2,105 ft) and is the only island in the entire group that has permanently flowing streams. The Nicobar Islands lie between 6°N and 10°N latitude and experience a near-equatorial climate. Monthly temperatures vary from 33°C (91°F) to 18°C (64°F). Rainfall totals between 230 cm and 340 cm (90–135 in) a year, with maximum amounts coinciding with the two monsoon seasons. Dense tropical evergreen forest covers Great Nicobar Island.



### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The populations of different islands in the Nicobars speak different languages, which are all considered to be dialects of the Nicobarese language. These are usually classified into four (sometimes six) separate groups. The North Nicobar group, for example, includes the Car, Chowra, Teressa, and Bompaka languages. Nicobarese is a member of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Some linguists place Nicobarese in the Mon-Khmer branch of the family, while others consider the various languages spoken in the Nicobar Islands to form a separate branch of the Austro-Asiatic family. Most Nicobarese understand the Car dialect. A variant of the Roman script is currently used for writing. Hindi is used for intergroup communication.

### <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

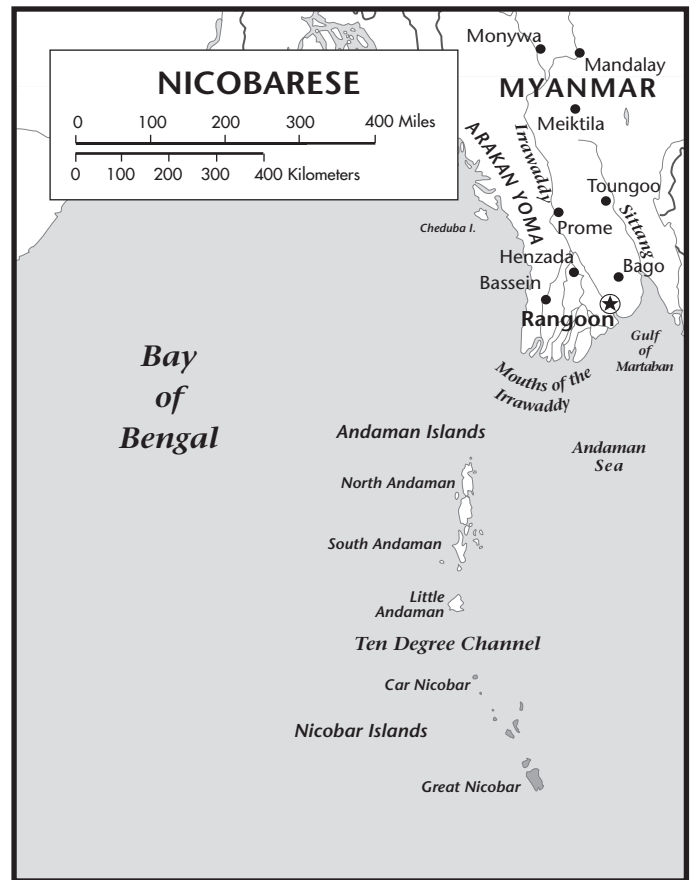
The Nicobarese have many legends concerning their first arrival in the Nicobar Islands. One story relates that when the land was totally uninhabited, a boy came down from the sky and entered the earth. After a few days, the shoot of a lemon tree emerged from the ground. This soon grew into a huge tree, with flowers and fruits. Peoples of the northern islands, e.g., Kondul, Teressa, and Nancowry, originated from the lemon seeds of the northern branches of the tree. The people of Great Nicobar came forth from the seeds of the tree's southern branches. After many years, differences in opinion about how they should live split this southern group in two. Some of them (believed to be the Shompen) retreated to the dense forest of the interior, while the others are the coastal Nicobarese of Great Nicobar.

### <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Traditional religion in the Nicobar Islands is animistic in nature. The Nicobarese of Great Nicobar, for example, believe in the existence of the soul, ghosts, and spirits. The soul (*iyum*) has no form and is immortal. A person turns to a ghost (*huihe*) when the soul leaves the body after death, and there are ghosts in and all around the island. Spirits (*shaitan*) are thought to be the cause of storms, natural disasters, and disease. Shamans are called upon to identify the spirits responsible for a bad storm or an illness and to pacify them with rites that include the sacrifice of a chicken or a pig. The island of Chowra is known particularly for the skill of its shamans. All young Nicobarese males are expected to pay a ritual visit to Chowra for their initiation into manhood.

Few Nicobarese follow their ancient religion today. The 1981 census records that 94.23% of the Nicobarese identified themselves as Christian. The spread of Christianity in the islands was in large part due to the work of the Nicobarese Christian John Richardson in the early decades of the 20th century. He was responsible for the idea of educating the Nicobarese in their own language, produced the first Nicobarese primer, and translated the New Testament into Nicobarese. Richardson emerged as a respected leader of the Nicobarese, particularly during the Japanese occupation, and eventually attained the rank of bishop. However, Christianity in the Nicobar Islands embraces many elements of the pre-Christian beliefs of the people. For example, all Nicobarese keep *kareus* in their huts. These are human figures made from clay, old clothes, straw, and wood that serve to scare away ghosts.

There are small numbers of Muslims and Hindus among the Nicobarese.



### <sup>6</sup> MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter are celebrated by the Christian Nicobarese, while Muslims observe Id-Fitr and Id ul-Adha. On the other hand, traditional festivals are mostly seasonal events, held for the community's benefit and to protect it from evil spirits and from outsiders. In January of every year, for instance, a ceremony is performed by the shaman in the gardens to increase their yields. This is accompanied by a communal feast, along with singing and dancing. Specific rituals are kept to mark events such as the first sailing of a canoe. *Hānu-cheroi* is the worship of the canoe before it sets out on its maiden voyage. The shaman enters the house of the canoe's owner, where he sets out a green coconut and covers it with a betel leaf. He then sacrifices a chicken and marks the coconut and betel leaf with the chicken's blood, at the same time chanting spells. A boy is sent to stand in one end of the canoe. He grasps a stick in the middle with both hands, so that it is horizontal and aligned at a right angle to the hull. Starting at one end, he walks the length of the canoe moving the stick up and down so it touches the two side walls of the boat. He chants incantations while doing this. The coconut and betel leaf are then placed in the canoe. The ritual ends with the slaughter of a pig and a feast for the relatives. The shaman receives a leg of the pig for his part in the ritual.

### <sup>7</sup> RITES OF PASSAGE

Many of the magical beliefs of the Nicobarese come into play during critical times in the Nicobarese life-cycle. Although the traditional idea that pregnancy is caused by a *shaitan* (spirit)

is no longer widespread, a pregnant woman takes precautions to avoid the attention of evil spirits. Among the Nicobarese of Great Nicobar, a woman carries an artistically designed, thin, perforated wooden plaque during her pregnancy. It is given magical potency by the shaman and is used as protection against harmful spirits. A pregnant woman cannot enter a garden, nor can she eat foods such as lemons, eggs, and certain kinds of fish. Delivery takes place in a birth-hut, which is located on the outskirts of the village. Various birth pollution rituals are observed in Car Nicobar, but these are absent among the central and southern peoples. The naming ceremony, accompanied by a feast for friends and relatives, is held when the baby is around one year old.

Boys and girls are brought up together. From the age of 12 onwards they are taught about sexual matters by the village elders and also learn about it indirectly, as the entire family sleeps in the same room. Puberty is known as *cho-cho* among the people of Great Nicobar. The first appearance of menstruation is a cause for grief, because it means the daughter will soon be married and gone from the family. Relatives from distant villages are informed and gather within 25 or 30 days for an elaborate feast to mark the occasion. This is quite unlike marriage, which is not associated with any ceremony. Boys and girls mix freely, and premarital sexual relations are not uncommon. This often leads to marriage, which usually reflects the choice of the girl. As soon as the parents of a boy and girl agree to a match, the couple are accepted as husband and wife. The Nicobarese are endogamous and can marry anyone within the group, although marriage between close relatives is considered incestuous and is forbidden.

At the time of death, the corpse is bathed and dressed in pieces of cloth provided by family members. The body is then placed in a wooden box, along with items such as a basket and a spear that are provided for the future use of the deceased. (It is believed that after death, everyone goes to another world where they hunt, fish, and garden, living very much like they did in this one.) The coffin is taken to the funeral ground, where it is buried. Death rites are performed by the shaman. The mourning period usually lasts for 30 days, and its end is marked by a feast for family and friends. The funerals of Christian and Muslim Nicobarese follow the normal patterns of their respective religions.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Nicobarese of Great Nicobar welcome strangers to their village with coconuts. The village captain greets the visitor by extending the right arm and shaking hands (possibly learned from visiting naval officers in the past!). When kin meet, they raise their right hands above their heads and shout "Ho!" meaning "Hello." Both host and guest partake of food and drink, usually toddy (fermented palm sap). When leaving, Nicobarese again raise their right hands above their heads and say "Kāyengose!" which means "Goodbye."

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS.**

The Nicobarese villages on Great Nicobar Island are strung out along the island's western shoreline. Although tracks link the villages, the only practical means of transport between these settlements is the canoe. Each village has a headman called a captain, selected by the village elders. In the past, the captains of the villages selected one of their number to be the

chief captain, although this has now become a hereditary post. A council, made up of the village captains, is responsible for maintaining law and order in the community.

A village on Great Nicobar is usually a shapeless cluster of huts and also may contain a church, a school, a store, a burial ground, and perhaps a sports field. Traditional huts are round in shape, with the walls and dome-shaped roof built of thatch. They are constructed on poles at a height of about 120 cm to 150 cm (4–5 ft) above the ground and are reached by a short ladder, which is drawn up at night. Each hut consists of only one all-purpose room, with an area set aside for hearth and kitchen. Furnishings are simple and, except for the kitchen utensils, are most likely made by the hut's inhabitants. They may consist of a few stools, a table, and some storage cabinets. Most families sleep on the floor on sleeping mats. There are no arrangements for sanitation; people use the beach or nearby gardens for their daily bodily functions.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Both nuclear and extended families are found among the Nicobarese. Rules of residence after marriage are not closely followed, and both patrilocal (residence with the husband's family) and matrilocal (residence with the wife's family) patterns are found. Women are considered a valuable economic asset, and the birth of a daughter is as welcome as that of a son. Besides her household duties, a woman spends much of her time tending the garden and the coconut plantation. In Nicobarese society, women enjoy almost equal status with men in the social, religious, economic, and political spheres of life.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional dress for the Nicobarese is a brief loincloth for men and a girdle of leaves for women. This has changed, however, and nowadays the usual dress of the male is a pair of shorts called *paijam*, sometimes worn with a vest. Women wear a blouse (*kānjut*) and a long skirt known as a *lungi*. Weaving is not known to the Nicobarese, so they have to purchase clothes or buy cloth and sew the clothes themselves. People commonly go barefoot but may put on sandals when leaving the village. In the past, women wore ornaments made from local products such as wood and bamboo, though cheap costume jewelry is now popular. Both men and women are fond of tattoos and have pictorial designs indicating their name inscribed on their forearms.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple foods of the Nicobarese are the coconut (*koā*) and pandanus (*lārop*). The kernel of the coconut is cut into pieces or grated and eaten with a paste made from the nuts of the pandanus, the Nicobar Island's breadfruit tree (*Pandanus lerrum*). Previously unknown to the Nicobarese, rice and wheat (in the form of *roti* or unleavened breads made from wheat flour) form part of the modern diet. Naturally, for an island people, fish, turtles, and octopus are important foods for the Nicobarese. These are usually eaten with curried vegetables and lentils (*dāl*). Vegetables include yams, eggplant, okra, and various types of gourds. Chicken and pork are also consumed, often after the animal has been offered as a sacrifice. The water of the green coconut is drunk, and so is tea (sometimes with honey), but milk is totally absent from the diet. Toddy, an alcoholic drink made from fermented coconut water and palm sap,



*A Nicobarese tribal woman joins others in prayer at a tsunami refugee camp in Port Blair, India. A devastating tsunami hit India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands in December 2004. (AP Images/Aijaz Rahi)*

is popular with both men and women. Toddy is also drunk as a part of ceremonial rituals. Both men and women chew betel nut and tobacco.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Many of the older Nicobarese are nonliterate. Today, however, education is free and available to the Nicobarese through government-run schools. Education is seen by many as a means of obtaining employment in government service or in local businesses. The 2001 census showed the literacy rate for the Scheduled Tribes in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to be 46% and that for women to be 40%. The last data available for the Nicobarese are in the 1981 census and showed literacy to be 31.46% (38.84% for males and 23.54% for females), though no doubt these values have increased over the last three decades.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Nicobarese have a tradition of oral literature, embodying the legendary history, customs, and beliefs of the people. They also have a complex system of magical beliefs and practices that influence many aspects of their lives and daily behavior. Music and dance are elements of traditional culture and a necessary part of festive and ceremonial occasions. On Great Nicobar, young and old dance together, irrespective of sex, but on some

other islands men and women dance separately. Dancers lock arms with their neighbors and move in a circle with rhythmic steps, lifting the right and left legs alternately. The beat of the dance is kept on the *tallag*, a big metal gong that is struck with a padded stick.

### **15 WORK**

The traditional economy of the Nicobarese is horticulture, based on the growing of coconuts, pandanus, areca palms, bananas, mangoes, and other tropical fruits. In the past, the collection of wild roots and tubers supplemented the food supply. Fishing and hunting wild game are important activities. Dogs are kept for the hunt. The Nicobarese rear pigs, and any important occasion is marked by the slaughter of a pig and a feast of pork (except among the Muslims). The inhabitants of Chowra Island specialize in the making of earthen pots and large seagoing canoes. As more Nicobarese acquire the necessary education, they move into jobs as teachers, clerks, and similar occupations.

### **16 SPORTS**

Canoe-racing, pig-fighting, and wrestling are popular pastimes among the Nicobarese. They have also taken to mod-

ern sports, such as soccer, volleyball, and track-and-field with enthusiasm.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Nicobarese find their entertainment primarily in the music, song, and dance that accompanies their festivals. Some listen to Hindi film songs on their transistor radios, but most Nicobarese do not understand the language well enough to do other than enjoy the music.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

There are no specialist carpenters in traditional Nicobarese society, and everyone develops skills in woodworking. Men build huts and make spears, harpoons, digging implements, furniture, and other wooden objects (the metal heads are purchased from traders). They are efficient canoe-builders, constructing dugout outrigger canoes that are capable of crossing the stretches of ocean that separate the islands from each other. The outer hulls of the canoes are decorated with carved geometrical designs. A sense of aesthetics is seen in the miniature canoes they carve for pleasure and in the wooden effigies made for various ritual purposes.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Largely because of their isolation, the Nicobarese have managed to preserve much of their traditional way of life. They have maintained a sense of cultural and linguistic identity, as well as their social and political institutions. They have not yet experienced the dramatic changes brought about by rapid contact with outsiders that other tribal peoples in South Asia have undergone. Change, however, is inevitable and is occurring. The advent of Christianity has brought new religious beliefs and practices. The traditional barter economy has been replaced by a cash economy. Contact with the outside world has brought with it schools and better health facilities, but it has also brought concerns such as alcohol addiction and fear of theft. Only time will tell how well the Nicobarese will adapt to the modern world they are now entering.

In December 2006, as a result of the *adivasis* of India's long struggle for rights, the Indian Parliament passed the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2005, seeking to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation of the land in forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest-dwellers. Yet some see the act as a potential disaster for the Nicobarese rather than as one protecting India's forests. The Nicobarese already enjoy total and unfettered rights over the tribal reserves of Nicobar Islands, accorded them by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Protection of Aboriginal Tribes (ANPTR) Act, passed in 1956. The new federal act could pose a potential danger to their enjoying these rights. At a later day, some could argue why can't the Nicobarese be content with 2.5 hectares of land in the forest, as the New Delhi bill allows, like all the other tribes of India? Why should so few Nicobarese have such a large chunk of land available to them? It is even possible that since the central act is being passed to protect tribal rights, the ANPTR could even be declared null and void or rescinded. Even now the Defense establishment is eyeing the Nicobars for possible firing ranges.

Nicobarese tribals are growing increasingly uneasy with people settling on their islands, outnumbering them and put-

ting pressure on scarce land and water resources. They have now formally demanded that thousands of illegal settlers from the mainland leave the islands. Traditionally represented by tribal councils that work along with the government, the Nicobarese have formed an alliance known as the Federation of Tribal Councils of Nicobar. The remote Andaman and Nicobar islands have for long been targeted by poachers and pirates and are geographically much closer to several Southeast Asian nations than to the Indian mainland. Illegal settlements are threatening to overwhelm indigenous people on islands that are supposed to be strictly protected tribal areas. In 2005 the Indian government repatriated 129 Myanmarese fishermen who were involved in poaching, illegal fishing and illegal immigration in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Burma.

On the morning of 26 December 2004 the Andaman Islands were struck by a devastating tsunami originating as a result of the earthquake of Indonesia. At least 850 people died on Car Nicobar Island and another 3,000 Nicobarese were missing (some put this figure as high as 7,000). Many villages were literally wiped off the map, and the core of the Nicobarese economy was virtually destroyed. Many Nicobarese fled inland to escape the tsunami and still remain there in relief camps. The Nicobarese used to fish, diving from dugout canoes with harpoons and masks, or casting lines in deeper water for bigger fish. Thousands of coconut trees, the lifeblood of the Nicobarese economy, were uprooted by the tsunami, and it will take 10 years for the plantations to grow back. The very cultural traditions—e.g. their economic activities, their villages, and the communal huts where family life was focused—of the Nicobarese are under threat.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Nicobarese women experience the freedom of most tribal women in South Asia and enjoy a status almost equal to that of men.

Although there is no institution such as the dormitory of other tribes, young people mix freely and pre-nuptial affairs are quite common. These often end in marriage. There is no such thing as an arranged marriage, the latter being the outcome of courtship initiated by either sex, although the families of the parties involved make the necessary arrangements, and child marriage is not practiced. There is no payment of either bride price or dowry. Widow re-marriage is permitted, and divorce, sometimes accompanied by payment of compensation determined by the village headman, is not uncommon. Grounds for divorce include adultery, incurable disease, chronic ill-health, a proneness to crime, misconduct, and insanity. Since the payment of a dowry or bride-price is not involved in a marriage, no repayment is necessary.

Women are considered a valuable economic asset, because of their assistance in economic activities. In addition to running the household, they spend much of their time tending gardens and working in the coconut plantations. There is no preference for male children in Nicobarese society, and, though few women enter politics, they have essentially equal status with men. They also have the right to participate actively in religious ceremonies, although there are restrictions during pregnancy and at the time of menstruation.

Property can be considered as communal, familial or personal. Every Nicobarese has the right to fish, hunt in the forest or draw water from a well, as these are considered communal

property. Huts, canoes, gardens, weapons, and livestock are familial property and are to be used by the family. Women maintain the right to personal property such as ornaments, even after marriage, and after marriage they have the right to a share in the products of their parent's garden. A woman has the right to inherit property as long as she remains with the family and the marital tie is intact.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# NI-VANUATU

**PRONUNCIATION:** nee-vahn-(y)uh-WAH-too

**LOCATION:** Vanuatu

**POPULATION:** 218,000 (estimated 2007)

**LANGUAGE:** English, French, and Bislama

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Ni-Vanuatu are the Melanesian inhabitants of the island chain known today as the Republic of Vanuatu. From the time of its European discovery until the time of its independence in 1980, the Y-shaped chain of islands was known as the New Hebrides. Vanuatu is probably best known to Americans as the setting for the James Michener novel that was made into the musical "South Pacific." The American reality-television show "Survivor: Vanuatu" was filmed on the island in 2004. The American view of this island and the South Pacific in general does not do justice to the reality of the cultural diversity of this island group.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Vanuatu is located squarely in the heart of the Melanesian culture area. Vanuatu's nearest neighbors are New Caledonia, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands. A total of 83 islands make up the Republic of Vanuatu. Twelve of the islands are considered the main islands of the group. The islands are both of volcanic and coral formation, providing for a wide range of topography within the country. Some islands are very mountainous and are covered in lush vegetation. The climate ranges from oceanic tropical to subtropical depending on island type and geographical location. November through April is the hot, rainy season for the Ni-Vanuatu. This is also the period of the most hurricane activity that passes through the islands. The three largest islands are Espirtu Santo, Malakula, and Efate. The capital city of Vanuatu, Port Vila, is located on Efate and has a population of approximately 33,700. The only other town in the chain is Luganville, which is located on Espirtu Santo. Luganville has a population of only around 10,700. The total population of the Republic of Vanuatu was estimated to be 218,000 in 2007.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

With over 100 distinct languages spoken in the Republic of Vanuatu, it ranks as one of the nations of the world with the greatest amount of linguistic diversity per square mile. Many of these languages have never been described by anthropologists, linguists, or missionaries. There are three official languages in the Republic of Vanuatu: English, French, and Bislama. The first two owe to the island's colonial history: it was jointly administered by Great Britain and France. Bislama is a contact language that is derived from a form of South Pacific English that spread with European economic activities in the region during the 19th century. The name Bislama comes from the English rendering of the French phrase "beche de mer" that refers to the edible sea slug that was economically important during that time.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

For many traditional communities in Vanuatu, the yam is a secondary source of food after the taro root, but of primary importance in terms of cultural ideology and symbolism. The cycle of yam cultivation in many communities dictates the sequence of ritual activities. Appropriately enough, there are important myths regarding yams. Among the speakers of the Sa language on South Pentecost Island, there is a myth recounting the origin of yams that goes essentially as follows:

In the beginning, there was no food. There was an old man who stayed alone in his hut, lying down and never going out. One day, he was cutting his fingernails and toenails and he threw the pieces out the door. The nails sprouted a plant that grew out of the ground. He tasted the plant and it tasted good. He called to his children and told them to clear a spot in the forest but he would not tell them why they were doing the work. When the spot was cleared, he instructed his children to kill him, cut him up, and bury the pieces in the spot they had cleared. He had given them his buttocks as a charm and it caused the yams that grew from his body parts to be enormous.

Other tribal groups in Vanuatu have similar myths regarding important parts of the natural and supernatural world.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The predominant religion of the Ni-Vanuatu is Christianity. However, a large number of Ni-Vanuatu still practice traditional, indigenous religion and there are certain cargo cults on the islands. The most well-known of those is the John Frum movement that started in the 1930s. The John Frum movement exists in opposition to the Christian church and its followers often see it as a way to better their material lives. The message of the John Frum movement has been to maintain the traditional ways of life that the Christian church tried to abolish, such as *kava* drinking, traditional dancing, and other behaviors that were viewed as “pagan” by church authorities.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The largest national holiday in Vanuatu is Independence Day, celebrated on July 30. There are usually many local as well as national competitions that co-occur with Independence Day celebrations. In the community of Sulphur Bay, on the island of Tanna, John Frum Day is celebrated in February.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

In the tribal societies of Vanuatu, passage from one stage of life to another is often marked with rituals, symbolic behaviors, and overt physical alterations. Male initiation is widespread in the Melanesian culture area to which Vanuatu belongs. Not all tribal Ni-Vanuatu practice male initiation now or in the past. In groups where male initiation is practiced, it usually involves the cutting of the foreskin of the penis. The young man then wears a plaited fiber cover over the penis called a “penis-wrapper.” Males who would refuse to undergo the operation may not be considered adult men.

In the northern islands of the chain, tribal Ni-Vanuatu have a cultural pattern of ranked status grades that primarily men pass through during adulthood. The named stages are entered through the purchase of various symbols associated with the grade and a large sacrifice of animals. Traditionally, pigs

are the currency by which an individual accedes through the ranks. They are all the animals that are ritually slaughtered at the culmination of the event. In some cases, women may also pass through the stages of rank.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The interpersonal relations of traditional Ni-Vanuatu are governed by the nature of the genealogical relationship between the participants. In some communities, there is a strict avoidance between brothers and sisters. They are not permitted to talk or even occupy the same space after passing puberty. Interactions between brothers and sisters in these communities must be accomplished by a young girl who acts as an intermediary.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Over 85% of the population of the Republic of Vanuatu is rural. Most rural villages are now located in the coastal plain regions of the islands. Prior to European involvement in the islands, villages were located in the upland regions to provide for some defense against enemy raids that were endemic. Housing styles vary considerably from region to region. The urban Ni-Vanuatu occupy a range of dwellings comparable to those found in North America. Houses constructed of the remains of other buildings are found on the fringes of the city, while modern homes, apartments, and condominiums are found in the city itself. The rural housing ranges from traditional construction out of locally produced materials to mixed construction that utilizes traditional elements like woven bamboo walls and earthen floors as well as galvanized sheet metal for roofs.

Health treatment is limited for the Ni-Vanuatu. There are only two hospitals in the islands, one in Port Vila and the other in Luganville. These are most accessible to the urban Ni-Vanuatu. The rural Ni-Vanuatu do not have easy access to medical facilities or health care. There are several development agencies that work with the national government in an effort to improve health care delivery systems for the rural population.

The city of Port Vila has many of the amenities that Americans are accustomed to. There are several fine restaurants encompassing a fairly wide range of cuisine including Continental French, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Clubs, movie theaters, and other places for night time entertainment are available.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

For the rural Ni-Vanuatu who still reside in traditional villages, the choice of a marriage partner is determined by considerations of kinship and descent. Some societies divide the entire population into two groups, loosely related by descent, and the marriage partner must come from the opposite group. The marriage itself is usually accompanied by the exchange of certain products including woven mats and pigs. Among the Tannese of the TAFEA district of Vanuatu, sister-exchange marriage is practiced. Sister-exchange marriage requires that a male may not marry unless he has a sister to exchange in return for his prospective bride.

In the northern part of Vanuatu (Espiritu Santo, Sakao, Ambae and others), descent is reckoned along matrilineal lines. In the central and southern islands (Pentecost, Ambrym, Efate, Erromongo, Tanna, and others), descent is reckoned patrilineally.

## 11 CLOTHING

There is a wide range of clothing found among the Ni-Vanuatu. The urban Ni-Vanuatu dress in a style that would be familiar to most Americans. Traditional villages often combine styles of Western dress with more indigenous forms of dress and adornment. Women often wear fiber skirts and go topless, while men might wear a traditional pubic covering or a pair of shorts and a T-shirt.

## 12 FOOD

Food choices and food preparation varies between the rural and urban Ni-Vanuatu. The urban dwellers have a wide selection of food options. Shops sell imported food products while the large marketplace that operates in Port Vila brings in traditional food crops from the rural areas. Restaurants are also available to the urban population. The choice of food depends upon the income of the family. For the rural Ni-Vanuatu, the food choices are much more limited. Traditional food crops such as taro root and yams are prepared in traditional manners without the use of electricity or gas.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education has been provided by the mission schools that were run by the various Christian sects on the islands. Literacy is low for the overall population since many still do not have access to any form of public, institutionalized education.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Dancing is an important part of the traditional culture of the Ni-Vanuatu. In many villages, a person's identity is tied to the family dancing ground called *nasara*. Musical instruments of the traditional cultures of Vanuatu include the slit gong, made from a hollowed-out tree trunk and carved on the ends. The slit gong is used to represent the voices of the spirits and also for long distance communication between the village and people who have gone off into the forest.

## 15 WORK

Ni-Vanuatu engage in a variety of types of work. In Port Vila there are bureaucratic jobs associated with the government and also with the work of foreign development agencies. Traditional forms of work were and, in some cases, still are, divided among tasks for males and tasks for females. Although females are often the main food producers, the work of men is typically more highly valued.

## 16 SPORTS

Tennis and golf are sports that the urban Ni-Vanuatu have some access to in Port Vila. Tennis matches on the international circuit are occasionally scheduled for Vanuatu.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For the majority of Ni-Vanuatu, entertainment and recreation follow traditional cultural patterns. Broadcast television was not available in the Republic of Vanuatu until 1992. Electricity has limited availability for the vast majority of Ni-Vanuatu, so they are not able to watch videos, television, or see movies. These pursuits are reserved for the urban Ni-Vanuatu and the numerous expatriates from other nations that reside in Port Vila.

An important form of traditional entertainment for adult Ni-Vanuatu men is the drinking of the intoxicating beverage called "kava." Kava is prepared from the roots of the domesticated kava plant (*piper methysticum*). This plant is related to the vine that produces peppercorns. The freshly dug root balls of mature plants are cleaned and then pulverized or ground, and the pieces are soaked in water and then strained through coconut fiber to produce the semi-liquid drink. On the island of Tanna, the roots are chewed and then spit out in wads to be placed in water to create the drink. Typically, adult men drink kava nightly. Kava is the favored intoxicating beverage for most Ni-Vanuatu, in part because it does not induce aggressive behavior. In fact, kava drinking is a quiet occasion and is usually completed within a couple of hours.

The popularity of kava drinking has led to the development of local commercial kava bars in the villages, towns, and cities. The "nakamals," as they are called, are a local gathering place for men and women to drink kava. As opposed to the traditional kava drinking patterns, the nakamals permit women to drink, as long as the woman does not come from the same village as the owner of the bar. Large quantities of kava are produced nightly for the customers. Meat grinders are often used to process the large quantities more rapidly than the traditional methods of production. A half coconut shell of kava costs around 50 cents and on average, men only drink two or three rounds an evening.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Tapa cloth was also a traditional product of many groups in Vanuatu. The process has now become part of the repertoire of folk arts that is produced for sale to tourists and collectors.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The maintenance of traditional culture in light of the influences of the outside world is one of the overriding problems facing the Ni-Vanuatu. Broadcast television has also introduced a new set of cultural images to the island nation. The economy is also a cause of concern for the Ni-Vanuatu. As opposed to other South Pacific nations, Vanuatu's tourism industry continues to show significant growth. In the late 1990s, the island nation received only about 35,000 visitors per year. The 2007 figures show that over 150,000 tourists visited Vanuatu in that year alone. Increased airline service, the development of boutique hotels, and a growing backpacker tourism focus has fueled the tremendous growth in tourism that Vanuatu has experienced.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The role of women varies among the Ni-Vanuatu. Tribal groups divide into two main camps. In some areas male domination is manifested by a series of cultural institutions like male initiation, yam cults, and the wearing of penis wrappers. In other areas, especially parts of Espiritu Santo and Efate, women have greater control over their resources and genealogical descent is traced through the female line.

The Tannese, one of the southern ethnolinguistic groups of Vanuatu, recognize two genders: male and female. The opposition of male and female governs the Tannese understanding of most of the natural world. For instance, the two staple food crops, yam and taro, are classified as male and female respectively. The characteristics of maleness that apply to all items in this classification are hardness, dryness, heat, and the state

of being closed. Femaleness is characterized by softness, wetness, cold, and the state of being open, which is equated with menstruation.

Like most other Melanesian groups, the Tannese believe that boys must be transformed into men through complex rituals that remove the female essence that was instilled in them through reproduction and birth and replace it with a new male essence. Circumcision is central to transforming boys into men and replacing the female essence with a new male essence.

There are two public activities that distinguish men from women; those are public speaking and kava drinking at the kava-drinking grounds. Only men are allowed to speak at the regular dispute settlement meetings and only men are allowed to be present at the public kava-drinking grounds.

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—by J. Williams

# OMANIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** oh-MAHN-eez

**LOCATION:** Oman

**POPULATION:** 3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; English

**RELIGION:** Islam: Majority Ibadi sect as well as Sunni and Shia

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Archaeological evidence shows human activity in the present-day land of Oman as far back as 12,000 BC, with fairly advanced civilization showing up at about 5000 BC. From 3000 BC until AD 1500, the Omanis were a prosperous, seafaring, export-oriented people, with most of their wealth coming from the export of frankincense (a tree resin native to the area that was highly valued for medicine, perfume, and religious incense). In the 4th century BC, Oman came under the domination of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire. Arab tribal groups from Yemen migrated to Oman and seized control of the country from the Persians. During the 6th to 7th centuries AD, Islam was brought to Oman by the Arabs. During the 1500s, the Portuguese invaded and built forts in the coastal towns to control the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf trade route.

The Portuguese occupied the area for about 100 years, until the Omanis, led by Imam Nasir ibn Murshid, drove them out. In 1646, the Omanis established friendly relations with the British and signed the first of a series of trade agreements. The strong British influence lasted for the next three centuries. The Dutch East India Company made its presence known in Oman from about 1660 to 1760, and the French became a force to reckon with in the mid-1700s. But except for a brief time during the Omani Civil War in the early 1700s, when Persia took control, Oman has not been under foreign rule since the Portuguese were driven out in the 1600s.

The Omani Civil War broke out after the death of Imam Sultan ibn Saif II in 1718. Two successors vied for the imamate, and then more complications arose. The Persians then took advantage of the situation and invaded. Ahmad ibn Said became an Omani hero when he drove out the Persians, and in 1747 he was elected imam. Small conflicts continued, but the civil war was over.

During the early to mid-19th century, Oman was ruled by Sayyid Said bin Sultan. Oman became an important commercial center for the Gulf area, and relations with other countries were developed. Oman established diplomatic relations with the United States in 1840.

In the 1860s, the invention of the steamship and the opening of the Suez Canal eliminated the demand for Omani sailing ships and the need to stop at Omani ports. Oman entered a time of economic hardship that lasted until oil production began in 1970. Till 1970, Oman had also been kept completely isolated by a succession of rigidly fundamentalist imams and sultans. Finally, on 23 July 1970, Sultan Said bin Tamir was forced into exile by his son, Qaboos, who then became sultan. Sultan Qaboos began the production of oil and used the profits to make much-needed improvements. He loosened the restrictions on contact with foreigners while trying to maintain traditional Islamic values. Sultan Qaboos has brought electricity and running water, free modern education and health



care, and great improvements in housing and roadways to Omanis throughout the country, as well as modern technology, such as telephone and television services and satellite communications.

The first national census took place in December 1993, and its results were published in January 1995. The population of Oman was determined to be 2,018,074. Seventy-three percent are Omanis, and 27% are non-Omanis. The capital is Muscat, located on the northeast coast. Most of Oman's foreigners live in Muscat, where they make up 46% of the capital's inhabitants. The majority of Omanis are Arabs, but substantial minorities are of Persian and Indian descent.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Oman is located on the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered on the west by Saudi Arabia, on the southwest by Yemen, on the east by the Arabian Sea, and on the northeast by the Gulf of Oman, and it is cut off from its northernmost tip by the United Arab Emirates. The northern tip of Oman lies on the east coast of the narrow Strait of Hormuz, the passageway between the Gulf of Oman (and the Arabian Sea) and the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf. The total area of Oman is about 310,000 sq km (about 120,000 sq mi), approximately the same size as the British Isles, or just slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Kansas. Oman has about 1,600 km (about 1,000 mi) of coastline. The landscape of Oman varies from a fertile coastal plain, known as the Batinah, to the mountains of the Al-Hajar range, to the deserts of the Empty Quarter (which covers a vast stretch of the Arabian Peninsula). The small northern tip of Oman on the Strait of Hormuz and the southern province of Dhofar both receive monsoon rains during the months of June through September. Rain also falls in the mountains. The rest of the country receives little or no rain, making water a very valuable commodity. An ancient water-management system dating back 2,500 years still operates, carrying water from the mountains down into the dry plains below. Oman is known for its extreme heat and humidity, with summer temperatures rising as high as 43°C (110°F) in the shade and humidity reaching a drenching 96%.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Omanis speak Arabic, with a few pockets of other languages including Kumzar (an Iranian dialect), and the Modern South Arabian languages, which are related to the Old South Arabian languages. English is taught as a second language to all students beginning in primary school. Other languages that are in usage include Swahili and Balochi (Pakistani dialect).

Arabic is spoken by up to 422 million people worldwide, both as native and non-native speakers. Arabic has many distinct dialects, so that people living as few as 500 km (about 310 mi) apart may not be able to entirely understand one another. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic, or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken dialects are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that makes no distinction between capital and lower-case letters. It is not necessary for the letters to be written in a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation rules are also quite different from those of English.

"Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam*



*'alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Wa 'alaykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is *'Afwan*; "yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba'a*, *khamisa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *thamanya*, *tisa'a*, and *'ashara*.

Arab names consist of a first name, a father's name, and a paternal grandfather's name. Women do not take their husband's name when they marry but rather keep their father's family name as a sign of respect for their family of origin. First names usually indicate an Arab's religious affiliation: Muslims use names with Islamic religious significance, such as Muhammad and Ahmed for men, and Fatima and Khadija for women.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Folktales include the legends of Sinbad the Sailor. There is also a legend that King Solomon of Israel flew to Oman on a magic carpet with his jinn (a spirit who can take on human or other animal form) and built 10,000 channels for the ancient water-carrying system in 10 days.

## 5 RELIGION

The original inhabitants of Oman were pantheists, worshiping various goddesses and gods. Many later converted to Christianity. When the Islamic revolution swept through in the 7th century AD, Omanis were among the first to adopt the new religion. All Omanis are Muslims, most belonging to the Ibadi sect, one of the oldest and most traditional branches of Islam. Ibadis believe in maintaining the original purity of Islam as

conceived by the Prophet Muhammad. Outside Oman, Ibadi Muslims are found only in North and East Africa.

Islam is the youngest of the world's Abrahamic religions, having begun in the early 7th century AD when the prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah (God). Within just a few years of Muhammad's death in AD 632, Islam had spread through the entire Middle East, gaining converts at a dynamic rate.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570), in what is now Saudi Arabia, Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his vigorous denunciation of the pagan idols worshipped there (idols that attracted a profitable pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca, AD 622 (July 16), called the *Hijra*, is counted as the year one in the Muslim calendar. Muhammad fled to the city now known as Medina, another of the holy sites of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Eventually Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the *Ka'aba*, or Cube, building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship), and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam.

The Islamic religion has five so-called "pillars": 1) Muslims must pray five times a day; 2) Muslims must give alms, or *zakaat*, to the poor; 3) Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan; 4) Muslims must make the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca; and 5) each Muslim must recite the *shahada*: "*ashhadu an la illah ila Allah wa ashhadu an Muhammadu rasul Allah*," which means, "I witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." Arabs say all their prayers facing in the direction of Mecca. Both men and women are expected, and greatly desire, to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations, is observed by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month.

Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living; it is a total way of life, inseparable from the rest of one's daily concerns. Therefore, religion and politics and faith and culture are one and the same for Muslims. There is no such thing as the "separation of church and state." In theory, there should be no distinction between private religious values and public cultural norms in an Islamic country; in actuality, history, geography, and daily life have influenced the cultures of Islamic countries, resulting in standards of social behavior and interaction that are not always in agreement with religious codes of conduct.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The one secular holiday in Oman is National Day on November 18. Otherwise, all the holidays are Muslim ones. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by eleven days each Western year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are *Eid Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of Ramadan; *Eid Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca, during which families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *al-Mawlid An-Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Eid Al-Isra' wa Al-Mi'raj*, a feast celebrating Muhammad's nocturnal visit to heaven. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses

and services are closed on Fridays. All government offices, private businesses, and schools are closed also during *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Omani boys are circumcised at either 15 days or 6 years of age. In the past, circumcision was performed at the age of 15 years in a ceremony involving both women and men. After the boy's foreskin was cut off, the boy had to dance around the circle of people to show his threshold for pain. Today, this practice is far less prevalent and circumcisions are often done under medical supervision in a hospital or by a midwife, or *daya*.

Births are an occasion for celebration, particularly if the child is a boy. Weddings are perhaps the most elaborately celebrated occasions, with great feasts and dancing. Ornate decorations for the bride are prepared well in advance. Death is also a complicated ritual that is governed by Islamic code and often adhered to very closely. A dance known as *dan* is the highest expression of grief in Omani culture and is a common genre in Dhofar region. A female dancer moves very slowly to the seven-unit rhythm to express her grief. The performance involves crying and lamentation.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Arab hospitality reigns in Oman. When talking, Arabs touch each other much more often, and stand much closer together, than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking or walking. In earlier days, members of the opposite sex, even married couples, never touched in public; this is changing today. Arabs tend to be very expressive and talkative, often employing many hand gestures in their communication. It is not unacceptable to interrupt one another in a conversation.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before Sultan Qaboos took over in 1970, conditions in Oman were extremely primitive. There was no electricity or running water; houses were built of either mud brick or woven and knotted palm fronds; there were only 10 km (6 mi) of paved roads, and the only means of transportation were camels and donkeys; and there were no newspapers and no television or radio stations. Since the coup in 1970, Sultan Qaboos has introduced electricity and running water to most of the country; built many new buildings of cement block (and started a booming business in cement-block production in many towns and villages); constructed about 35,400 km (about 22,000 mi) of paved roads, including multilane divided highways; and modernized communications, health care, and education, all of which are provided free of charge. In 1970 there was only one trained Omani doctor, and he practiced outside the country. In 1993, almost seven years after the opening of a faculty of medicine in the Sultan Qaboos University, 48 Omani doctors completed their training in Oman; 28 of these were women. Beginning in 1997, Oman had 80 new Omani doctors per year.

The number of Omanis practicing medicine is not sufficient to meet the needs of the population, so Omanis still depend on the services of health workers from outside the country. Today, the total number of physicians working in Oman is 3,478. A major immunization initiative introduced in the 1980s has reduced the prevalence of many diseases and has ended diphtheria, poliomyelitis, and neonatal tetanus. Trachoma and malaria



An Omari camel rider stands confidently on his animal during a show race in a village in Oman. The race is one of the most exciting and interesting traditional races in Oman. It stresses the beauty and breed of camels. (AP Images/Hamid al Qasmi)

remain public health problems although the number of cases has been reduced dramatically. Also, major developments in the field of genetics have made it easier to prevent congenital disorders. There has also been a campaign against marriage of close relatives, a prevalent practice that has often increases the likelihood of genetic disorders in newborns. The estimated life expectancy for Omani nationals in 2006 was 72.4 years for men and 74.1 years for women.

The first earth satellite station in Oman opened in 1975. Today, most Omani homes have access to satellite stations and can choose from hundreds of regional and global stations, both news and entertainment. Some 80% of homes are owned by their occupants. Since Omanis now own cars and trucks, the distance from the capital city of Muscat in the northeast to the city of Salalah at the other end of the country can now be crossed in one day. The same trip used to take two weeks by camel caravan.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

Omanis are a tribal people, and family is the center of their life. Marriages are traditionally arranged by parents, with first cousins being the preferred match. The groom pays the bride a

dowry, or *mahr*, which becomes her property no matter what happens. The *mahr* consists of two stages. The first stage is the *muqaddam*, which is a dowry given preceding the wedding to allow the bride to buy things for herself and her new home. The second stage, the *muta'akhir*, is a form of insurance for the woman in the event of divorce; the groom pledges in a contract that he will pay the bride an agreed-upon amount if he should divorce her. Polygamy is legal though it is rarely practiced. A man may have up to four wives, if he guarantees that all will be equally loved and cared for. Divorce is a fairly simple procedure, but it does not happen very often. In a divorce, the father is given custody of all children over the age of five, and the mother takes the younger ones with her back to her parents' house, where she will live until she remarries. Girls can be betrothed as young as 11 or 12 years of age.

A traditional Omani woman's role is domestic, while the man's is public. Men take care of all business and public transactions, even doing much of the food shopping. Women take care of the home, doing all the cooking, cleaning, and child-care. Women and children do most of the sheep, goat, and poultry herding. On farms, women do most of the work in the fields. Weaving and embroidery are also women's tasks. Al-

though Oman is one of the most traditional Islamic countries, women are actually much less restricted in Oman than in other Arab nations. Today, there is a mixture of lifestyles in Oman, some of which starkly contrast with this traditional domestic labor arrangement. Increasingly, as the sultanate has experienced an economic spurt in the last decade, many Omani families rely on live-in domestic workers from south Asia and east Africa to assist with upkeep, care-giving and other domestic chores.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Omani men wear the traditional *dishdasha*, an ankle-length robe, usually white. Sometimes they wear a *bisht*, a kind of cloak that is usually black with gold trim, over their dishdasha. On their heads they wear a skullcap or a turban. Many Omani men carry a camel stick, which is the length of bamboo with a curved handle, like a cane. Almost all Omani men wear a curved dagger called a *khanjar* through their belt. Khanjars have ornate silver handles and are an expression of traditional folk art. Most Omanis wear leather sandals on their feet.

Women in Oman wear very colorful dresses over loose-fitting pants that are gathered tightly at the ankles. They wear scarves on their heads, and much jewelry everywhere. In public, most Omani women wear a black ankle-length robe called an *'abaya*, and many wear a traditional Islamic veil over their heads. Some opt to wear the *niqab* that covers the entire face, with holes for the eyes.

### **12 FOOD**

Staple foods in Oman consist of rice, dates, fruit, fish, and meat. Most meat is cooked in a *tanour*, a hole in the ground where a fire is built, then allowed to burn down to ashes, after which meat wrapped in leaves is placed on the ashes and the hole is covered with earth. After 24 hours, the cooked meat is dug up, unwrapped, and served. Omanis eat their meals on the floor or ground, the dishes spread on a cloth. Food and drink are always taken with the right hand. Families eat together, except on special occasions when men and women eat separately. The main meal of the day is at noon; breakfast and supper are light meals. A favorite dessert is *halawa* (halvah), a sweet, flaky dessert usually made of crushed sesame seeds and honey. Coffee is drunk strong and black, sometimes flavored with cardamom. Bedu (or bedouin) nomads eat the locusts that swarm over farmers' crops.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Before Sultan Qaboos took over in 1970, there were only three schools in Oman, with a total of 900 students, all boys. Today, there are over 1,100 schools, with a total enrollment of 800,000 students, half of whom are girls. Until recently, girls and boys went to separate schools despite having the same educational curriculum. Education is free to all Omanis from the preschool through postgraduate levels. Children's education goes through three stages: primary, preparatory, and secondary. Primary school begins at six years of age and continues until the child passes a sixth-grade examination. Of all children between the ages of 6 and 11, 86% attend elementary school. Those who pass the examination go on to preparatory school, which is completed after three years with another examination. Passing students then attend secondary school, where the focus of study is determined by the grade they have achieved

in their preparatory-school exam. Some students attend college or technical training institutes after secondary school. The Sultan Qaboos University was inaugurated in 1980 and opened for classes in September 1986. Sixty-five percent of its more than 10,000 students are female who are enrolled in five colleges: Engineering, Medicine, Agriculture, Education, Art and Islamic Studies and Science. The literacy rate in 1995 was determined to be about 59% for those over 15 years of age. Hundreds of adult-education and literacy centers have been established to help eradicate illiteracy. A testament to the success of these programs, the current literacy rate is approximately 82%.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture was established in 1976. By 2000, it had restored more than 100 historic buildings, which included forts, castles, citadels, and ancient houses. Some of these restored buildings have become tourist attractions, such as the castle at Jabrin, built in the 17th century. The Ministry has also built numerous historical museums, libraries, and cultural centers, and organized excavations of ancient remains. Excavations have uncovered pottery jars, beads, and arrowheads dating back to the 3rd millennium BC.

Music is not encouraged by the Ibadi sect of Islam. Yet, some folk music has developed in Oman, and the Oman Center for Traditional Music was founded in August 1983 to collect and document Omani folk music. It serves as a repository of video tapes, audio recordings, and pictures and slides of songs and dances handed down through generations. Folk music is played on traditional instruments, such as drums, a trumpet made out of horn, a straight pipe, and the *rebaba*, a stringed instrument. Sea chanteys have been sung throughout the seafaring Omanis' history. The traditional men's sword dance has its origin in a series of military exercises. In 1985, Sultan Qaboos established the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and a music-training school. The school, located in Bayt al-Barakah, is a boarding school attended by both sexes. Since the advent of satellite television, much of the music scene in Oman has been influenced by popular trends from other countries in the region and English-language music.

Until recently, visual arts in Oman were mostly confined to utilitarian objects, such as kitchen utensils, rugs, ceramic pots, and clothing. However, recent artistic exhibitions have focused on contemporary Omani painters and sculptors whose works now grace many public areas in the capital Muscat.

### **15 WORK**

In the fertile areas of Oman, such as the Batinah (coastal plain) and the inland valleys beneath the mountains, most people are farmers.

About 10% of Omanis are fishers in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Boatbuilding is an ancient craft passed down from generation to generation. Traditionally, boats were built from palm fronds, although larger ones were built from wood. These traditional boats are still used, although recently many fishers have purchased aluminum boats. Sails and oars were the means of propulsion until the past two or three decades; most boats now have motors.

Omani nomads are sheep, goat, and camel herders. Oman is the camel-breeding capital of the world.

Although most of Oman's revenue currently comes from oil, that industry employs only a few thousand Omanis. Out of a total of 730,000 laborers in the work force, only about 260,000 (36%) are Omanis; the rest are expatriates. The government has set the objective of "Omanization" of the labor force, hoping to replace foreign workers with Omani nationals.

## 16 SPORTS

Since 1970, Sultan Qaboos has increased the scope of sporting activities in the country. Sports complexes and sports clubs have been built throughout Oman. The traditional sport of camel racing is very popular, as is horse racing. Hockey was introduced into Oman from India in the 19th century and is very popular. Many Omanis enjoy marksmanship, and some have won regional or international shooting competitions. Omani national teams have also competed in the Olympic games.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Omanis enjoy plays and concerts performed by the national Youth Theater, established in 1980. Boys have joined Boy Scout groups since 1948; girls have been able to be Girl Scouts since 1970. The National Organization for Scouts and Guides, established in 1975, aims to develop in youth a sense of service, self-reliance, responsibility, and public spirit. There are 10 Scout camps in the country.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

All art in Oman is utilitarian and can therefore be seen as folk art. Silver-, gold-, and copper smithing are perhaps the most highly developed arts, although weaving, embroidery, and woodcarving also are highly intricate and require great skill. Pottery is also a well-developed utilitarian art.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Ecologically, Oman is very environmentally responsible in some ways but not in others. Although it is a very clean country, with stiff fines for littering (or even for having a dirty car), there is a great deal of coastal pollution from oil tankers dumping or leaking oil offshore, from the mining of sand to build new roads, which then encroach on wilderness territory, and from the dumping of wastes. The government is attempting to address these problems with various measures, but the problems still exist.

The once nearly extinct white oryx, an antelope, has been successfully reintroduced into the wild in Oman, but several species of sea turtles continue to be endangered by the Omani taste for turtle soup. Groundwater reserves that have existed since prehistoric times, when the climate was much wetter, are being rapidly depleted, and the dry climate of today will not provide enough rain to replenish them. The digging of wells is regulated, but not strictly enough.

Politically, the traditional sultanate structure, in which family members are given all the positions of authority and decision-making, is quickly becoming obsolete and detrimental to Oman's welfare. Many commoners are now much better educated and trained in the skills needed for government posts than members of the ruling family. Since the production of oil began in 1970, the ruling family has kept Oman's citizens quiet by giving them great benefits and subsidies. In return for this lavish treatment, citizens have not questioned the way

the government is run. But those days are quickly disappearing. Oman has very limited oil reserves that are anticipated to run out soon, and the wealth will not flow so freely after that. Omanis are becoming dependent on government handouts that will have to be severely cut back once the oil runs out. Sultan Qaboos is trying to develop non-oil industries, but he has had limited success so far.

Modernization has been new to Oman, but it seems Omanis have developed a culture that is a unique amalgam of both traditional and modern social norms.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

While the *niqab* (full facial covering worn by women) has been increasingly popular throughout the region, in an interesting turn in the expression of religion, Sultan Qaboos has banned the *niqab* by all women in public office. Furthermore, he has decreed that all women are allowed to vote and run for Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council) seats. In the first election of the council in 2003, two women won seats. Furthermore, Qaboos also appointed a cabinet comprised of three women ministers whose portfolios are Higher Education, Social Development, and Tourism. Also, the Omani ambassador to the United States, Hunaina bint Sultan al-Mughairyah, has become the most prominent woman in a diplomatic mission. Various projects to empower Omani woman have proven successful. The Omani Women's Association (OWA) is a very active organization that collaborates with government initiative and local grassroots groups. Notable Omani women include artist Mariyam Mohamed and writer Rafiah Altaiei.

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—revised by Adel Iskandar

# ORANG ASLI

**PRONUNCIATION:** oh-RAHNG ahss-LEE

**LOCATION:** Malaysia

**POPULATION:** 132,873 (in 2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Orang Asli; Malay; Thai; other dialects

**RELIGION:** Animism; Islam; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities; Iban; Kelabit; Vol. 4: Malaysian Malays

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

As a collective, the term *Orang Asli* can be transliterated as “original peoples,” or “first peoples.” The word *orang* means “people” and the term *asli* comes from the Arabic word “*asali*,” meaning “original,” “well-born,” or “aristocratic.” The Orang Asli of Malay Peninsula (or West Malaysia) are divided into a great number of different tribal groups, some of which have very little contact with each other. The various Orang Asli tribes, which include 19 subethnic groups, have traditionally been grouped for administrative purposes under three main categories: the Negritos, the Senoi, and the Aboriginal-Malays (refer to Table 1). Each group is unique in that it has a language and a mode of living quite different from the others. Each group includes a number of related tribes who speak similar languages and who follow a similar way of life, although some of the tribes are rather mixed. Differences between the Negritos, the Senoi, and the Aboriginal-Malay groups are also shown by their physical appearances.

In spite of differences in languages and physical appearances, all Orang Asli tribes share one thing in common, which is that they are the descendants of the earliest known inhabitants who occupied the Malay Peninsula. In other words, the Orang Asli lived in West Malaysia long before the arrival of the other races, that is, the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians. Some authorities claim that the Negritos came to the Malay Peninsula about 25,000 years ago. There are different opinions as to the origin of the Senoi. Some suggest that they are related to present-day Cambodian and Vietnamese mountain tribes, while others propose that they are related to indigenous groups from southern India and Sri Lanka. They are believed to have arrived in Malaysia in a second wave of migration about 6,000 or 8,000 years ago. The third group, the Aboriginal -Malays, is often called “Jakun.” They are thought to have migrated about 4,000 years ago, constituting the third wave of Orang Asli migration to Malaya. Their ancestors are believed to have migrated from the Indonesian islands to the south of the peninsula and, prior to that, are believed to have come from a location in Yunan, in present-day China.

Because of their small population, the Orang Asli are insignificant players in present-day political spheres. One parliamentary seat is reserved solely to look into the affairs of the Orang Asli. Nonetheless, there is a need to have more representatives in both the parliament and state assemblies. This could be done through elections for seats where Orang Asli represent a sizable section in the constituency, or through appointment.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Numbering 132,873 people in 2000, the Orang Asli constitute an extremely small segment of the population of Malaysia,

making up only 0.5% of the total population (21.9 million in 2000). The Senoi are by far the largest subgroup, constituting 53.4% of the Orang Asli population. The Aboriginal-Malays, with a population of 40,117 people, form about 43.3% of the total, while the remaining 3.3% consists of the Negritos, who form the smallest segment of the population. The Semai-Senoi represent the largest subethnic group among the Orang Asli, numbering 34,248 people or 29.4% of the total Orang Asli population in 1999.

The Orang Asli are found in all 11 states of Peninsular Malaysia. Many of the Negrito groups, and most of the Semai-Senoi, live in the northern parts of the Malay Peninsula, while the Aboriginal-Malays are concentrated in the center and southern part of the Peninsula. The Orang Asli subgroups and their locations are:

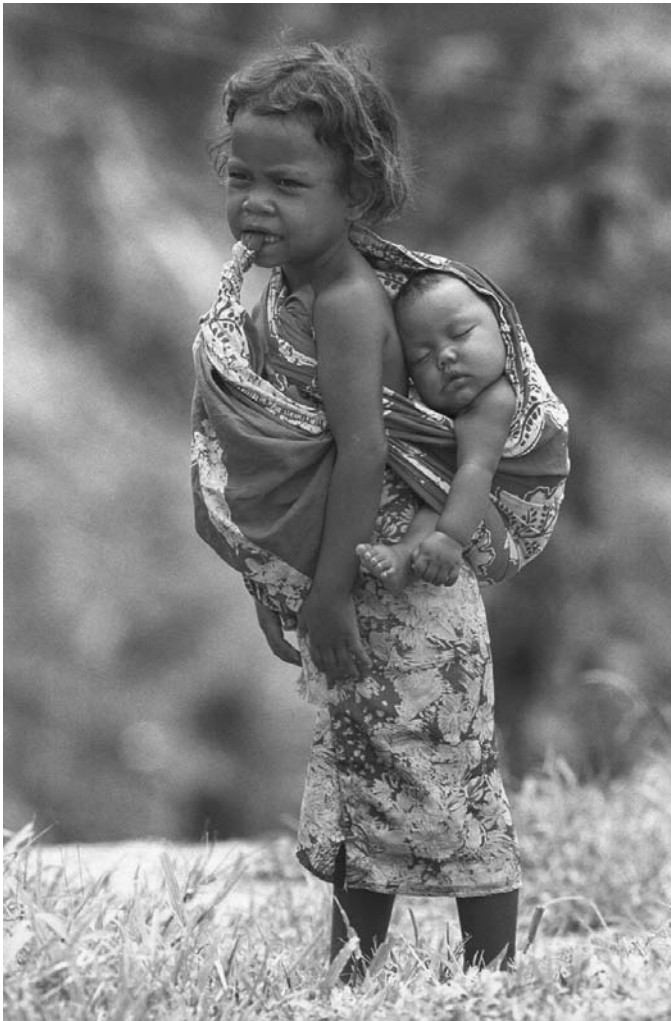
SUBGROUP	LOCATION
<i>Negrito</i>	Northeast Kedah
Kensiu	Kedah-Perak Border
Kintak	Northeast Perak and West Kelantan
Jahai	North Central Perak
Lanoh	Southeast Kelantan
Mendriq	Northeast Pahang and South Kelantan
Batek	
<i>Senoi</i>	
Semai	Northwest Pahang and South Perak
Temiar	North Perak and South Kelantan
Jah Hut	Central Pahang
Chewong	Central Pahang
Mah Meri	Coastal Selangor
Semoq Beri	South Central Pahang
<i>Aboriginal Malay</i>	
Temuan	Selangor and Negri Sembilan
Semelai	Central Pahang and East Negri Sembilan
Jakun	South Pahang and North Johor
Orang Kanaq	East Johor
Orang Kuala	West and South Coasts of Johor
Orang Seletar	West and South Coasts of Johor

Traditionally, most of the Orang Asli were forest dwellers. However, official statistics by the Department of Orang Asli suggest that today not all groups live in the deep jungle. Out of 840 Orang Asli settlements in 1997, 387 were in forested areas, while 440 were in forest fringe areas, and the rest (13 settlements) in urban areas. In a sense urbanization seems to be encroaching faster and closer onto Orang Asli settlements.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

None of the Orang Asli groups have a written language. Therefore, they do not have a written history. Their histories are passed down through generations by word of mouth.

It is very common for Orang Asli to speak more than one language. A great number still speak their own language and practice tradition, while at the same time also speak Malay, Thai, or other Orang Asli languages. Some of the northern Orang Asli groups, for instance, the Semai-Senoi and Negrito groups, speak languages now termed Aslian (Mon-Khmer speakers). Members of the Aboriginal-Malay tribes speak dialects that belong to the Austronesian family of languages (as



*An Orang Asli child carries her brother in the rural village of Lembah Belum, Perak, Malaysia. (AP Images/The Eng Koon)*

does the Malay dialect), with the exceptions of the Semelai and Temoq dialects. Some Aboriginal-Malays speak nothing other than standard Malay.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

The Orang Asli, like many other indigenous people in Malaysia, have a rich folklore tradition. This tradition includes legends, fables, tales, and myths. One of their popular myths is the story of creation from the Jah Hut ethnic group. According to this myth, people originally inhabited an unnamed primeval land. Soon, however, the land became overcrowded, compelling some to leave. Some left in a ship with many decks. Some took with them a pair of every animal species and enough food for the journey. They left without really knowing where they were heading. After a while, turbulent waters caused the ship to break on a coral reef. In the confusion, those who happened to be at the top of the ship managed to cling to a few planks and to their blowpipes. Those inside the ship held onto tools, iron, and cloth and drifted away to other islands and other places. Thus, people were spread through the islands and mainland and moved from one island to another and from place to place.

#### **5 RELIGION**

Unlike other major religions of the world, the Orang Asli religion does not possess any written sacred script. Traditionally, the Orang Asli are animists and believe that there are spirits that dwell in inanimate objects, such as trees and rocks, and also in various natural phenomena, such as thunder and lightning. Beliefs in shamanism are still very strong among some of the tribes. Shamans are ritual specialists who have the gift of going into a trance. A shaman plays an important role in the life of Orang Asli as an intermediary between humans and the world of spirits, to combat evil spirits, cure illnesses, and also to strengthen the morale of the group.

Aside from shamanism, dreams occupy an important place in the spiritual life of the Orang Asli. Dreams are believed to foretell the future and are also used to control social behavior. Everyone in the tribe is encouraged to share their dreams, which are then interpreted by an expert in the community. Children are encouraged to mention their dreams to their fathers. As an agent of social control, a dream bestows obligations on its dreamer to warn his or her friends of any forthcoming danger. For instance, if a person dreams that one of his or her friends is attacked by a wild animal, the dreamer is responsible for warning his or her friend of the danger.

Today, some Orang Asli have embraced other major religions, particularly Islam and Christianity. Aboriginal-Malays have been Muslim for over 100 years.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

See the article entitled **Malaysian Malays**.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Socialization among the Orang Asli is an informal, natural, and gradual process. It is a major concern of the parents. The father is responsible for training the male children, while the mother concerns herself primarily with her daughters. A son is normally under the care of his mother until the age of five or so. At this age, a son begins to look upon his father both as an example and as a teacher. The father teaches the son how to hunt and use the blowpipe, and the son gradually begins to follow the father on hunting expeditions. The mother, on the other hand, is responsible for bringing up her daughters. As her daughters become older, she teaches them how to prepare food and look after the family's dwelling. Also, at this period, they begin to accompany the older women on their food-gathering forays.

In all the tribes, men and women marry at an early age. A man will normally marry at the age of 18 or so, while his bride may be a few years younger. Even though most marriages are informal arrangements and are not marked by any special ceremony, marriage as an institution is still highly regarded by the Orang Asli.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Sharing whatever one can afford with others in the community is highly valued among the Orang Asli. If one has only a little surplus over one's own immediate needs, one shares it with one's nuclear family. If the surplus is larger, it is shared with people in one's house or neighboring houses. If the surplus is very large, it is shared with all of the people in one's settlement.

Besides sharing, all the tribes stress values like cheerfulness, a lighthearted attitude to life, and a willingness to cooperate with others, especially with one's friends and kinfolk. These are very important attitudes for surviving in the Orang Asli's difficult and at times rather grim environment.

The Orang Asli are peace-loving and friendly people. Thus, they set a high value on nonviolence and avoidance of disputes. They are also very shy, and their first response to threat is flight rather than hostility. Respect for older people is also highly regarded, and children are taught from a very young age to respect their elders.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

It is important to note that the majority of the Orang Asli are not jungle-dwellers or nomads although many live in forest or forest-fringe areas. The only exception is the Negritos, who lead a nomadic or seminomadic existence. These people normally live in remote areas of the jungle. Therefore, they are considered materially poorer and less developed than the others. Some of these tribes live together or in bands. Others have settled and live in villages, much like the Malays.

Most of their dwellings, called "wind screens," are made from jungle materials, such as bamboo, wood, leaves, sticks, and rattan. A very simple dwelling usually consists of a small and rather narrow sleeping platform. However, others, such as the Temiar, live in longhouses. Every longhouse has a number of divisions or compartments, each with a separate hearth or fireplace.

The Orang Asli have a great deal of variation in their ways of life. However, as a community, the Orang Asli are not always well-off from a material and a nutritional point of view. There is a degree of malnutrition, as their diet is insufficient in protein. They normally supplement their starchy diet by hunting and fishing. Animals and fish provide the much-needed protein, but normally the amount is insufficient. This is aggravated by the need to share the food among the population.

Certain settlements lack basic amenities, such as piped water and electricity, and have to depend on water from the streams and kerosene for light. Nonetheless, at present, many own transistor radio sets.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The social structure of the various tribes is essentially similar. The most basic kinship unit is the nuclear family; a husband, wife, and their own children. This is considered to be the most important unit of the social structure. Besides being a social structure, the nuclear family is an economic unit and a basic working group. The father is always the leader of the family and will be replaced by his wife only if he dies.

A division of labor between men and women exists within the households. The father and sons are responsible for providing meat for the family and thus go out hunting together, while the mother, accompanied by her daughters, provides the jungle fruits and vegetables. The mother usually cooks the food for the whole family.

The concept of dating in the Western sense does not exist among the Orang Asli. When a young man is in love with a girl and wants to marry her, he will approach her father, but he will only do this after he has already reached a clear understanding with the girl.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditionally, children up to the age of five or so generally went naked, but nowadays all Orang Asli wear clothes of some kind. The traditional skirt of the Negrito women is a short, fringed skirt, which is commonly made from pounded tree bark. Sometimes belts, headbands, and bracelets are also worn. While the women wear skirts, the men's traditional clothing consists essentially of a loincloth, called *chawat* in Malay, which again is made from pounded tree bark. In addition, the men frequently wear rattan belts, which are used for the carrying of knives and other small items such as tobacco pouches. Traditional clothing of this kind has become increasingly rare.

Orang Asli's contacts with other communities, especially with the Malays, facilitated the introduction of a Malay-type of cloth that is made from cotton and is of a Western dress code. For instance, the women today usually wear sarongs made from cotton, and men will normally wear a pair of trousers or shorts, putting on a shirt when he goes into the jungle.

## **12 FOOD**

Some groups of Orang Asli are able to survive in the jungle for years, without resorting to the cultivation of any crops. They rely on varieties of tubers, rattan roots, different kinds of jungle fruits, and many other jungle shrubs and vegetables as their staple diet. For example, for the Negritos, wild tubers are the basis of their diet, cooked in a variety of ways.

Some other tribes, such as the Temiar, cultivate two staple crops: hill rice and tapioca. Other vegetation, such as millet, bananas, maize (corn), and other vegetables, are also grown. Some tribes also domesticate animals, mostly chickens, for domestic consumption.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The government encourages formal education among the Orang Asli, as it does for other Malaysians. The Aboriginal Peoples Act of 1967 and 1974 stipulates that no Orang Asli child should be precluded from attending any school only by reason of being an Orang Asli. As a result, the overall enrollment of Orang Asli in school has increased. Nonetheless, there is still low rate of literacy and proportionally small number have attained tertiary education. For instance, by 1997, only 138 Orang Asli obtained tertiary education with government assistance, while 99 persons were still pursuing their education. Low educational attainment is mainly because of high dropout rate among Orang Asli children at the primary level. For the period 1971–1995, an average of 62.1% of Orang Asli students dropped out annually.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Orang Asli, like many other indigenous peoples across the world, depend partly on the forest for their living. All sorts of jungle products are put to good use as raw materials. Various jungle products, such as bamboo and wood, are used to build houses and to make household utensils and vessels, ornaments, and different kinds of musical instruments (such as flutes made from bamboo, and wooden and bamboo xylophones). Bamboo is used to build houses and for the construction of tools, weapons, baskets, waterpipes, rafts, traps, and hunting implements.



## 15 WORK

The Orang Asli have varied occupations and ways of life. For example, those who live close to the coastal areas are mainly fishermen and women. This includes the Orang Laut, Orang Seletar, and Mah Meri. Others, such as some members of the Temuan, Jakun, and Semai, are involved in permanent agriculture and manage their own rubber, oil palm, or cocoa farms. There are also others who are engaged in traditional economic activities like shifting cultivation, cassava swiddening, and hunting and gathering. These are subgroups who still live close to or within forested areas, such as the Temiar, Chewong, Jah Hut, Semoq Beri, and all the Negrito groups. There are others who also engaged in some trading with the Malays, with jungle produce (such as petai, durian, rattan, and resins) being exchanged for salt, knives, and metal axe-heads. These groups live very close to, or within, the forest area.

As a result of urbanization and migration trends a fair number also live in urban areas and are engaged in both waged employment and salaried jobs. These include the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fishing, and hunting. There are others being employed in production and production-related activities, such as in electronic, textile, and rubber-products factories. Some are employed by the government, and some engage in seasonal work in Malay villages or work as laborers in the tea estates in places like the Cameron Highlands.

## 16 SPORTS

Hunting animals (by men) and gathering wild fruits and vegetables from the jungle are considered sports among the Orang Asli, as is true among many indigenous people in the tropics. Swimming in the rivers is a sport mainly enjoyed by the children. Other games, such as soccer, volleyball, and *sepak takraw*, are becoming popular among the Orang Asli.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most Orang Asli, particularly those who still live close to or within forest areas, do not have televisions, compact discs, or tape players, though some do possess transistor radio sets. Traditional dances serve as a form of entertainment. These dances are always held after nightfall and are accompanied by public singing or chanting. Hunting, besides providing a reliable source of animal protein, generates much excitement for the hunters, who are invariably male, and is thus treated as a form of recreation as much as a task.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Orang Asli material culture consists of various types of household utensils woven by women and tools and weapons made by men. Women weave baskets from various pandanus leaves. This requires skill, knowledge, and experience. Some of the baskets are carried in the manner of a rucksack. Larger baskets are used to carry various household goods and clothes, while small baskets are used as tobacco pouches and for carrying other personal articles.

The blowpipe is an important weapon among the Orang Asli. The construction of a blowpipe is a very skilled job, and it sometimes takes longer to make a blowpipe than it does to build a house. Another work of art that is considered unique, particularly among the Negritos, is the beautifully incised and decorated comb, which is primarily used by women. These

combs, with anywhere from 12 to over 20 teeth, are cut from a piece of split bamboo. The possession of these combs is a source of great satisfaction and pride to their owners.

Wooden statues and carvings, and beautiful wooden masks that are worn during dances and other ceremonies, are also highly valued by the Orang Asli.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Because of their geographical isolation, and also because of their relatively small population, the Orang Asli are economically and politically disadvantaged when compared to the rest of their Malaysian fellow citizens. The official statistics classify 35.2% of Orang Asli as extremely poor, and they lag behind in basic infrastructure and in political representation. However, today, the greatest threat to the Orang Asli culture, identity, and livelihood is their dispossession from their traditional homelands. Their lands are often used for development schemes, plantations, mining concessions, highways, dams, and various other forms of development. Land dispossession is a persistent issue facing the Orang Asli, and insecurity of land ownership is the most threatening social problem the Orang Asli have ever encountered.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Females comprise almost 49% of the Orang Asli population in Peninsula Malaysia. Traditionally there was a sexual division in roles and functions whereby women held important responsibilities as *shamans* and influential leaders in society. However, the spread of sexual differentiation and social inequality through contacts and internalization of external cultures have affected gender relations and the present position of women in Orang Asli society. This is made evident through the exclusion of women in most political functions and official meetings. Since all Orang Asli village heads (*batins*) are men, only the men attend official meetings with government representatives. In other words, Orang Asli women's involvement in the social and political domains is increasingly restricted and limited.

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—by P. Bala

# ORAONS

**PRONUNCIATION:** oh-RAH-ohns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Uraons; Kurukh, Dhangar

**LOCATION:** India (primarily Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh states)

**POPULATION:** Nearly 3.5 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Kurukh; Hindi; other languages of regions in which they live

**RELIGION:** Mixture of magic, animism, and elements of Hinduism; Christianity

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Oraons (Uraons) are one of the five largest tribes in South Asia. They live in the forested uplands of east-central India, occupying the Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand and adjoining states. Scholars have speculated that they migrated there in the distant past from the Konkan coast of South India. In the centuries preceding the Christian era, the Oraons were established around Rohtas, to the northwest of their present home. According to their own traditions, the Oraons were forced out of their lands by invading peoples and migrated to Chota Nagpur, where they settled among the Munda tribes of the area. Historians indicate this may have occurred around 100 BC.

The origins of the name "Oraon" are unclear. Some Oraons say that the name is derived from *Ur* (chest), because they believe they were born of the blood from the chest of a holy man. Many see the name as a disparaging one given by caste-conscious Hindus who considered the tribe to be unclean. The Oraons themselves use the name "Kurukh," possibly after a mythical Oraon king called Karakh.

Oraons are, as a rule, short of stature and dark-complexioned, broad-nosed, and thick-lipped. They are considered to be of Proto-Australoid stock, descended from a race that influenced the peoples and cultures of a wide area of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the islands of Polynesia. In South Asia, the Proto-Australoids form an old, pre-Dravidian element in the population. The physical traits associated with this group are found among tribal peoples and also, to varying degrees, among the lower castes of the Hindu populations of peninsular India.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Population estimates of the Oraon are clearly unreliable. The Joshua Project estimates that Kurukh speakers in India number around 4,390,000 people while Oraons in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan would bring this total to close to 4.5 million. However, by totaling the Oraon populations in the states where they were found for the 2001 Census of India, and allowing for a natural increase in the region of 1.7% per year, this figure is estimated to be closer to 3.5 million people. Part of the confusion may be that in some states the Oraons are called Dhangar, Kisan, or Kuda. So, the total population of Oraons numbers between 3.5 and 4.5 million people. The creation of the new Indian states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in 2000 resulted in the inclusion of over one million Oraon in each state, thus giving them greater political representation. In addition to Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, Oraons are also found in neighboring areas of Orissa and in Madhya Pradesh State. In Mad-

hya Pradesh, they are also known as Dhanka and Dhangad. Numbers of Oraons have migrated from their homeland to areas of West Bengal, with many settling in Jalpaiguri District in the north. A few Oraon live in Tripura State and Assam in northeastern India, where their ancestors were taken in the early 20th century to work as laborers on tea plantations.

Chota Nagpur, the homeland of the Oraons, is the name given to the northeastern section of the great peninsular mass of India known as the Deccan (literally the "South"). In Jharkhand, the Deccan pushes north and east towards the Himalayas, constricting the alluvial plains of the Ganges River to their narrowest extent. The Ganges flows from west to east across Bihar, but once the river leaves the state it turns south-east towards its delta in the Bay of Bengal.

The Chota Nagpur region lies south of the Ganges plains, extending eastwards from the River Son, a tributary of the Ganges, to the lowlands of West Bengal. The terrain assumes the aspect of open plateaus and steep-sided, mesa-like hills between 300 m and 760 m (approximately 1,000–2,200 ft), surmounted by peaks reaching as high as 1,505 m (3,445 ft). Though much of the area has been cleared for cultivation, extensive areas of forest remain. These vary from scrub jungles to denser subtropical and tropical deciduous forests. Rainfall averages between 120 cm and 160 cm (47–62 in) and is received mostly during the three months of the summer monsoon. Humidity is high during the summer, with maximum temperatures varying between 35°C and 40°C (95°F–104°F).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Oraons' language is Kurukh, which is a member of the northern subgroup of the Dravidian language family. However, many Oraons are bilingual or even multilingual. They use Hindi, the widely spoken language of northern India, or Shadri, a local dialect, to communicate with non-Oraon groups. Oraons living in other parts of northern India commonly speak the language of the region in which they live. Thus Bengali, Oriya (the language of Orissa), and Assamese, in addition to lesser dialects, are all reported as second languages spoken by Oraons.

As with many tribal groups, the Oraons originally had no written form of language. (The Oraons themselves believe that at one time they did possess a script but that it was lost during one of the many crises in their history). The Oraons now write in Devanagari, which is the script used by Sanskrit, Hindi, and some related Aryan languages.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Oraon folk tradition tells of how the tribe was driven out of the ancient kingdom of Rohtas (called Ruidas in Kurukh). For many years, so the story goes, the Kurus had attempted to dislodge the Oraons from Ruidas but had never been able to defeat them in open combat. So the Kurus sent a milkmaid into the fort to gain intelligence. When she returned, the spy informed the Kurus that if they attacked while the Oraons were celebrating the Xaddi (Sarhul) festival, the men would be drunk on rice-beer. The plan worked and when the Kurus attacked, all the Oraon men were intoxicated and asleep. But the women, led by Princess Singi Dai, dressed up as men and repeatedly fought off the invaders. It was not until the Kurus discovered that they were fighting women that they succeeded in capturing the fort.

Many Oraons were killed, but one man sobered up and managed to escape. He fled, pursued by Kuru warriors, until he reached Chota Nagpur. The region was already inhabited by the Munda tribe. On reaching a village, the fugitive begged for help from some Mundas who were about to sit down and eat a cow they had just slaughtered. The Mundas told the Oraon that if he threw away the “sacred thread” he was wearing and joined them in their meal, they would protect him from the Kurus. The Oraon remained in Chota Nagpur, and it is his descendants who live in the land to this day.

The ending of this tale is of interest in the Indian social context. High-caste Hindus wear the sacred thread and do not eat meat. By discarding the sacred thread and eating the Mundas’ food, the Oraon was essentially abandoning his caste status. Also, commensal relations (the willingness to eat with people of a particular caste or group) are a symbol of social status in India. People will not take food with others whom they see as socially inferior. By dining with the Mundas, the Oraon was, in effect, accepting them as his equals. This is how the Oraons explain their low standing in the social hierarchy of the Chota Nagpur region. It is also worth noting that the Oraons and Mundas have coexisted for centuries and share many cultural traits.

## **5 RELIGION**

Oraons follow a Hindu form of worship, although their deities are non-Sanskritic, that is to say, they are not found in the sacred Sanskrit texts of Hinduism. Many of their gods, e.g., Chandi, Chauthia, Dadgo Burhia, Gaon Deoti, and Jair Budhi, are local in character and are not found anywhere else in India. Oraon religion can best be described as a mixture of magic, traditional animistic beliefs and practices, and elements of Hinduism.

The Oraons recognize the existence of a supreme being, symbolized by the sun and known as Dharmes. Dharmes is the master of all that exists in the universe and controls the fate of all beings, both physical and spiritual. Beneath Dharmes, there is an array of lesser deities, nature spirits, the souls of dead ancestors, evil ghosts, and impersonal forces of good and evil. Elements of totemism (belief in an ancestral relationship with plants, animals, and other objects) and shamanism (belief that the spiritual world can be manipulated through a shaman) complete the belief system of the Oraons.

The world of lesser deities and spirits is divided into several categories. First, there are the ancestor spirits, souls of departed relatives who protect the living during illness and guard them from mischievous spirits. Ancestor spirits are honored every year at the *Harbora* (“Bone-drowning”) ceremony. At this time, the bones of every Oraon who died during the previous year are laid to rest. Second, there are the tutelary deities (*deotas*) and spirits (*bhuts*) of the village. These include the benign Chala Pachcho, a popular goddess who protects the village and is sometimes known as Gaon Deoti. Pat or Pat Raja is the master of all the village spirits. In this role, he protects the village from disease and other misfortune. In addition, there are six or seven other categories of spirits ranging from Chandi, a goddess of hunting and war, to various household spirits.

Stray spirits that haunt the village have to be driven off by exorcism. This is undertaken not by the village priest (*pahan*) but by diviners who identify the malevolent spirits, and shamans who exorcise them. “Black” magic is known, but its prac-

tioners are feared and detested. They are punished or driven from the village when they are discovered. Oraons also believe in the “evil eye” (*najar*) and the “evil mouth” (*baibhak*), both of which can bring misfortune to their victims.

Many deities and spirits, including the ancestor spirits, are honored or propitiated by the sacrifice of animals. A white fowl or goat is the appropriate offering to Dharmes, the supreme deity. Buffalo, sheep, and pigs are also used as sacrificial victims. The actual sacrifice is carried out by the village priest and his assistants. These offices can be hereditary or elective. The priests are usually Oraons, but in some villages they may be from another tribe, such as the Mundas or Baigas.

One unusual feature of traditional Oraon religion is human sacrifice, a custom also found among the neighboring Gond and Munda tribes. S. C. Roy (1928) writes that the sacrifice was performed by the Oraons to appease a powerful village spirit, who would otherwise bring terrible epidemics and destruction to the villagers. Others suggest the offering was made to a vindictive goddess who controlled the fertility of the soil. In some instances, parts of the victim’s body were buried in the fields and the blood mixed with seed to ensure a good harvest. Human sacrifice was widely reported among the tribes of the region during the 19th century. Though it is now rare and is considered to be murder by the government, human sacrifice may occasionally take place. Killings are occasionally reported to the police that have all the telltale signs of ritual sacrifice.

Oraon religion has clearly been influenced by Hinduism. The purely Hindu name Bhagwan is sometimes used to refer to Dharmes, perhaps because he shares many attributes of the Hindu supreme deity. Mahadeo (literally, “Great God”), which is a name Hindus use for Shiva, has become an Oraon village deity. The village goddess Devi Mai (“Goddess Mother”) is the Hindu mother-goddess who has been absorbed into the Oraon pantheon, complete with her Hindu name. Although the Oraons build no temples for their own gods, they erect a thatch structure over Devi Mai’s shrine as they have seen done by their Hindu neighbors. In the Oraon myth of origin, the wife of the supreme deity is sometimes called Parvati (consort of the Hindu god Shiva) or Sita (consort of Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu). In addition, many Hindu religious festivals have been introduced into the Oraon festival calendar.

There are a number of Hinduized cults, known as *bhagats*, found within traditional Oraon society. The earliest of these date back to perhaps the 18th century AD. Their members have abandoned rituals, such as sacrifice to the spirits or village deities, and have taken up vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, and other Hindu customs. Some use the services of Brahmans for social and ceremonial purposes. They usually will not marry with non-Hindu Oraons. The Kabirpanthi sect (followers of the 15th-century Hindu reformer Kabir) and the Tana Bhagat are two of the more important of these Hindu groups among the Oraons. Census returns show that nearly 60% of Oraons are now Hindu.

Christianity, too, has its followers among the Oraons. Christian missionary activity was discouraged by the East India Company, which administered British possessions in India until 1858. Missionary groups were admitted in the early 19th century, but they met with little success in established Hindu or Muslim society. It was among the tribal peoples of the subcontinent that their work flourished. The first converts among the Oraons were made in 1850. Census returns in Jharkhand



show Christians make up about a quarter of the Oraon population, while the figure for the total Oraon population amounts to 23.66% Christian and 62.32% Hindu, with 13.93% following the ethnic (i.e. original) religion. Conversions of Oraons to Christianity have continued, even though states such as Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh have laws on the books against proselytizing.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important festival of the Oraons is the Sarhul festival, the Feast of the Sal Blossoms (the *sal* is a tree widely used in India for its timber). It is held in the spring when the sal trees are flowering and is, in reality, a spring agricultural festival celebrating a renewal of vegetation growth. Among the rituals associated with the Sarhul are the invocation of the ancestor spirits and a ceremonial procession to the village's sacred grove, where animals are sacrificed to Gaon Deoti and other gods and spirits. After feasting on the flesh of the sacrificed animals, the entire village gathers to sing and dance through the night. Rice-beer is drunk and loose sexual behavior, which is believed to stimulate the fertility of the earth, is permitted.

A unique tribal festival celebrated by Oraon women once every twelve years is the *Mukka Sendra* (also known as *Janni Shikar*). Supposedly celebrated in memory of the role of women in the defense of Rohtasgarh against the Afghans, women of the tribe dress up as males, wear turbans, and equip themselves with arrows, sticks, spears, axes, or any convenient tool that may prove handy during a daylong hunt when they are entitled to kill any animal, anywhere, and carry it back home.

No one is concerned about the ownership, nor can one complain about his pet being killed or carried away. Armed women hunters move from village to village in search of prey.

The former importance of hunting in Oraon life is seen in the Oraon hunting festivals. These are religious ceremonies, dedicated to Chandi, the goddess of the hunt, that are accompanied by hunting expeditions and are held several times a year. They are performed to secure an abundant harvest through the magical influence of a successful hunt.

Other festivals observed by the Oraons have been adopted from the Hindus, although Oraon elements have been added to them. The celebration that marks the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, called Phagu by the Oraons, is really a Hindu festival. But it has been combined with the important ceremonial spring hunt. The Sohori festival is a cattle festival that has been adopted from the Ahirs, a local Hindu pastoral caste. Similarly, the Karam and Jitia festivals are agricultural festivals borrowed by the Oraons from their Hindu neighbors.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Oraon society believes that gods and spirits influence every aspect of an individual's life. It is necessary, therefore, to maintain good relationships with them, especially at the time of major life events, such as birth, marriage, and death. This may be ensured by performing the appropriate rites and ceremonies.

A pregnant woman must restrict her activities to avoid the attention of evil spirits or the evil eye. During a first pregnancy, a sacrifice is performed to sever a woman's ties with the ancestor spirits and village deities of her father. The birth itself is followed by the sacrifice of a chicken. The days following the birth are a period of impurity when special care has to be taken to guard the mother and child from evil spirits. After four or five days, the mother and her newborn child, and the entire house, are ritually purified. The name-giving ceremony is held anywhere from a few weeks to a year after birth. Until this takes place, the baby is called after the day of the week on which it was born, or after a festival if born on a festival day. On the day of the name-giving ceremony, the child's head is shaved except for a small tuft of hair. The name is chosen by divination. A man recites the names of the child's ancestors while another man drops three grains of rice into a leaf-cup of water. When the rice grains touch in a certain manner, the child receives the name of the ancestor being spoken at the time.

When young people reach puberty and before they are married, they leave their family homes to sleep in the village dormitory (*dhumkuria*). The period of residence in this institution involves instruction by elders in folklore, traditions, tribal beliefs and practices, sexual matters, and communal activities. The initiation ceremony when a youth enters the boys' dormitory includes scarring on the arm. The dormitory itself may contain certain emblems and objects of ritual significance. One of the wooden posts supporting the roof of the dormitory may have a cleft, representing the female sexual organ, carved in it. Another ritual emblem found in the Oraon dormitories is the bull-roarer. This is a slat of wood or bamboo up to 23 cm by 7.5 cm (9 in by 3 in) in size, with a hole at one end so a string can be tied to it. When swung around the head, the bull-roarer produces a humming or roaring sound. Although the Oraon no longer remember the ritual or magical uses of the bull-roarer, it is possible it was used to scare away spirits.

Girls have their own dormitories and follow their own initiation rites.

The Oraons cremate their dead, except for young children and pregnant women who are buried. If a death has occurred before the onset of the monsoon rains, cremation takes place immediately. However, if the death takes place during the monsoon months, the corpse is buried in a temporary grave. The body is then dug up after the harvest and cremated in the usual manner. After the cremation, the remnants of bone left in the ashes of the funeral pyre are gathered by women relatives and placed in an earthenware jar. The jars are kept until the Harbora ceremony is held. At this time, they are taken in procession by female relatives of the deceased to a specially designated spot near water. The bones are then “drowned” by being thrown into the river, stream, or pond. After the men and women take ritual purifying baths, they return to the village where the young men and women assemble for a dance-meeting. A few days later, the village priest goes about the village pacifying the ancestor spirits and purifying the village itself. This ritual is accompanied by the sacrifice of a pig or white chicken. Important or elderly Oraons may have memorial stones erected in their honor.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

On meeting relatives and friends, Oraon men raise the right hand slowly to the forehead, saying *Gor-lagi Aba* (father), *Gor-lagi Dai* (sister), or whatever the appropriate relationship is. Like many groups in India, the Oraons have an elaborate terminology for kin relations. “Gor-lagi” can be roughly translated to “Greetings.” Women perform *Gor-lagi* by cupping both hands and raising them towards the forehead, accompanied by the appropriate greeting.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Oraon tribal society is divided into a number of territories (*parha*) containing anywhere from 7 to 20 villages. The territory more or less coincides with clan groupings, although members of several clans may reside in a territory. Each village, however, has its dominant clan. One of the village headmen is chosen to act as chief (*parha raja*) of the confederacy. He and all the other village headmen form a council to deal with inter-village matters. Each village has its own leader and village council to handle its own affairs. The village may also contain members of other castes (e.g., herders, potters, and metalworkers) who provide the Oraons with services essential to the agricultural economy.

A typical Oraon house has mud walls and a tiled roof. Its orientation is east–west, and a veranda runs around the house on the east, south, and west. There are no windows and only one door. Generally, there are two rooms, one used for storage and the other for sleeping. The family sleeps on mats, which are laid out at night and picked up in the morning. One corner of the house is used as a kitchen. Poultry may roost in the house at night, although separate structures are erected close by for pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle. There is no running water, and villagers draw water from streams and ditches for drinking and for bathing.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Oraons practice village and clan exogamy. The family is a patrilineal extended family, but nuclear families are found as

well. A typical family contains five to seven members. In the past, young Oraons would select their own marriage partners, but it is more common for marriages to be arranged. This is, in part, a result of exposure to Hindu practices. The best age for marriage is considered to be between 16 and 20 years for males and 13 and 16 years for girls, which violates national laws against child marriage.

Once a suitable match is found, elaborate marriage negotiations are undertaken between the two families. Omens are watched, and the marriage is often called off if they are seen to be bad. A token bride-price, often a small amount of cash and some clothes, is paid. Among the many ceremonies associated with marriage, the central ritual is the anointing with vermilion (a red pigment). The bride and groom stand on a yoke (the crosspiece used to harness cattle to ploughs) and a curry-stone (a stone used to grind condiments). The groom applies vermilion to the bride’s forehead and to the parting of her hair. The bride, in turn, applies vermilion to the groom’s forehead. Marriage is considered a lifelong undertaking by Oraons, and divorce is rare.

As a tribal group, the Oraons do not possess the caste structure so typical of Hindu society. There is, however, a division into two occupational groups: the *Kisans* (cultivators) and *Kudas* (unskilled laborers). These groups tend to marry among themselves.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional dress for Oraon men is a loincloth—a long piece of cotton fabric with red borders at each end, which is wrapped around the waist. A hair band of brass or silver is worn around the head. Rings are placed in the ears, necklaces (often made of silver coins) are strung around the neck, and a silver bangle is worn on the forearm of the right hand. A shawl is sometimes wrapped around the shoulders.

For the all-important dance festivals, men wear turbans. A feather or a strip of brass or silver is inserted into the turban. A peacock feather or a yak’s tail is tucked into the waistband, and bells are tied around the waist or ankles.

Traditional Oraon dress is being replaced by local Hindu items, such as the *dhoti*, and Western-style shirts and pants.

Women’s dress consists of a white cotton *sari*, with five red lines decorating one end. They wear earrings, necklaces, bangles on the arms and ankles, and toe rings. These ornaments are commonly made of brass, copper, silver, or gold. Tattoo marks are worn on the forehead and temples. Oraon women have no special dress for festivals.

## **12 FOOD**

The Oraons are nonvegetarian and eat the flesh of pigs, goats, chickens, and buffalo. Much of this meat is consumed at feasts following the sacrifice of animals at religious ceremonies. The staple cereal is rice, supplemented by wheat and maize. Vegetables, pulses, and spices are cultivated. Mustard oil is used for cooking. Both men and women consume alcohol. Rice-beer is brewed at home and drunk at many festivals. Men chew tobacco, while women smoke the *hukka* or bubble-pipe.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Literacy levels among the Oraon are higher than those of other Scheduled Tribes. This is particularly true among Oraons who are Christians, whose better education give them access to bet-

ter jobs. The Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic missionary movements in the region have placed great emphasis on the social welfare of their converts. In addition to spreading Christianity, they have opened hospitals and dispensaries and run high-quality schools throughout the tribal area. Ranchi, the largest city of Chota Nagpur, is an important regional educational center. Formal education is also spreading rapidly among non-Christian groups. Literacy rates amongst the Oraon in Orissa exceed 54.2% (2001), although they are less than half this among females. This figure hides considerable regional differences between the north and the south of the state and between genders. Literacy figures from Oraon villages in Bangladesh show a female literacy rate at just over 20%.

One problem faced by the Oraon is that literacy is often in a language other than the Kurukh mother tongue. Many Oraon professionals who have good positions are concerned that the Oraons are losing their mother tongue and have asked parents to teach their children Kurukh, even though it does little to prepare them for competitive employment in the “real world.”

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Like most tribal groups in South Asia, the Oraons have no written literature. Singing and dancing play an important role in their ritual life and accompany almost every social and religious occasion. Musical instruments, such as the pipe or drum, are thought to possess special powers. When they are first acquired, they are “married” by anointing them with vermilion.

Of special interest is the *jatra*, or dance-meeting, of the Oraon. Every Oraon village has its dancing ground (*akhra*) where the dance-meetings are held. They often occur as part of the rituals associated with village festivals, such as Harbora, and thus have socioreligious significance. Sometimes, several villages will participate in a *jatra*. Each village has its *jatra* flags, which are taken to the *jatra* gathering place. Carved images of animals such as the tiger, horse, or tortoise are carried to the dance ground on the shoulders of young men. Both flags and animals are totems before which sacrifices are made and libations of beer and milk are offered.

Oraons believe in witchcraft and sorcery and the power of the evil eye. Even though Jharkhand laws forbids the accusing of people as witches, women who are accused of being witches are often subjected to violence, torture, and even death by the local populace.

#### **15 WORK**

In the past the Oraons were hunters and gatherers, living off game and edible plants found in the forests. However, hunting and fishing have become mostly ceremonial, and the forests play a minor role in the economic life of the people. Most Oraons (around 67%) are farmers and cultivate their own land, or they work as sharecroppers or agricultural laborers. A few have found their way into government service, or work in the manufacturing and service industries.

#### **16 SPORTS**

There are no organized or spectator sports in traditional Oraon society.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Entertainment and recreation among the Oraons is traditionally associated with the socioreligious festivals of Oraon tribal life. For urban Oraons who are Christians, the typical varieties of church-related social and educational activities are available.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Oraons are not particularly well known for any folk arts. Some groups had a tradition of spinning thread from cotton, while modern craft activities include mat-weaving, rope-making, and carpentry.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Oraons have been designated as a Scheduled Tribe, and the problems they face reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, those of tribal peoples throughout India. They occupy less productive lands, are often heavily in debt, and suffer from high levels of poverty. Many lose their land altogether and have to turn to manual labor. Tribal families that move to urban areas to seek work face disruptions and the loss of their traditional village support systems. Discrimination and exploitation are common.

One segment of the Oraon population that has improved its social conditions, however, is the Christian community. Christian Oraons tend to have higher levels of education, possess a greater degree of literacy, have access to better medical facilities, and be more open to modern ideas of health and public hygiene.

Considerable friction exists between the Christian and non-Christian Oraons, largely reflecting the better education and socioeconomic position of the Christians. As recently as 2004, the press reported that Hindus in a village in Ranchi District in Jharkhand State beat and drove out some Christian families, while reportedly police did nothing regarding complaints filed on their behalf. In Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh, some politicians do not want Christians to receive the benefits of being classed as a “Scheduled Tribe.” Similarly members of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believe that Christian converts should not be included in the tribal category and are not entitled to the benefits that belong to that group.

Development in Oraon lands is another cause for social discontent. States like Jharkhand are rich in mineral resources, but development of these resources usually involves disruption of Oraons from their lands and, in addition, projects are designed to generate profits for large companies or to serve the needs of state governments. However, organizations, such as the Jharkhand-Chhattisgarh Tribal Development Programme, focus on tribal people in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, targeting marginal households, women, landless people, hill cultivators and tribal people. Their goal is to empower tribal people to participate in their own development through local self-government. Specific activities promote increased production and productivity of land and water resources, alternative sources of income and sustainable management of natural resources.

Perhaps one of the major problems faced by the Oraons and other tribal peoples in Chota Nagpur is political rather than social—a lack of political unity. Oraons have participated in the various tribal movements that have emerged in the region since the beginning of the 20th century. They have supported political parties such as the Jharkhand Party and the

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, which claim to represent the local tribes. There remains, however, a lack of political leadership among the Oraons (ascribed by some to the egalitarian nature of Oraon society). The local political parties, which have their roots in attempts to end tribal exploitation, have become radicalized. Even the creation of states such as Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand has not helped matters much. Some have argued it is too late to rescue the tribal communities of Jharkhand and their culture, ethnography, lifestyles, and livelihood from slow extinction. The area of Jharkhand, specifically, and eastern India as a whole is of increasing significance for the Maoists (Naxalite) rebels due to its rich forest and mineral resources, and is an area that is seeing increasing Naxalite violence.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As is common among the tribal peoples of South Asia, Oraon women generally are treated with a degree of equality that is rare in Hindu society. Except where they have been Hinduized, they usually have a say in their marriage, lack the preference for male offspring so typical of Hindu society, and do not have a dowry system, a small bride price being paid by the groom's family. Widow re-marriage is allowed and so is divorce, though the latter is rare. (Cases of adultery are uncommon, and the offenders are usually beaten and fined according to their means.) Traditionally, women in Chhattisgarh enjoy a higher status than seen in other states. This is largely due to their tribal culture and greater financial independence through participation in the labor market. Men and women share housework, including cooking, house cleaning, and childcare. However, women disadvantaged by heavy workloads and lack of time, have literacy rates far below those of men and are often excluded from community organizations.

Arranged marriages are the norm among the Oraon, though generally marriage requires the consent of the involved people. However, it is customary among the Oraons for only the family of the male to initiate negotiations, and often women's parents force their daughter into a marriage fearful there will no other opportunity to marry her off. Age is significant because most Oraons look for a young bride. If a woman is not married by a certain age, the parents are blamed for failing in their duty of arranging a suitable match for their daughter. One consequence of this is the number of unmarried Oraon women found in the Chota Nagpur area.

Women are seen as economic assets. In addition to running the household, they help the men in agricultural tasks, though among the Oraon there is a tradition that if a woman ploughs a field, dire consequences will follow. Oraon women sometimes work as agricultural laborers and are commonly found in the tea plantations of Assam, West Bengal and Tripura.

Oraon society is patriarchal in nature, and it is customary that women are not allowed to inherit land or property. However, this situation is changing. The UN ratified the Vienna Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the Government of India ratified and acceded to CEDAW in 1993. The convention reiterates that discrimination against women violates the right to equality and acts as an obstacle to the participation of women on equal terms with men in political, social, economic, and cultural life. Discrimination has been defined as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex that impairs or nullifies the exercise by women (irrespective of their

marital status) of the same rights as men. India's Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, defines human rights as "the right to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution [of India] or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India." The principles embodied in CEDAW and the concomitant right to development thus become enforceable as part of Indian law. The Government of India is obligated to take appropriate measures including legislation and modification of the law to abolish gender-based discrimination in existing laws, customs and practices, but the actual enforcing of such protections is a different matter. For instance, state laws throughout the country prohibit the sale of land in tribal areas to non-tribals, but land alienation (i.e. sale to non-tribals) remains a problem.

Illiteracy and poverty, with their resulting limitations on access to education, good employment, and health care facilities are major problems facing Oraon women in their drive for upward mobility.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# ORIIYA

**PRONUNCIATION:** aw-REE-(y)uh

**LOCATION:** India (Orissa state)

**POPULATION:** 31 million

**LANGUAGE:** Oriya

**RELIGION:** Hinduism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Hindus; People of India

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Oriya are the dominant ethnic group in India's eastern state of Orissa. They speak the Oriya language and share historical and cultural traditions that date to the 6th century BC, if not earlier. The Oriya are identified with the Odra (or Udra), a people mentioned in ancient Sanskrit texts and the *Mahabharata* epic. The lands to the north of the Mahanadi River, which flows into the Bay of Bengal, were known as Odradesha, or the "country of the Odra."

The hilly nature of Orissa allowed the existence of numerous small kingdoms in the region. From the 4th century BC on, however, important regional states, such as Kalinga, extended their control over much of the area. During the 4th and 5th centuries AD, a foreign people (possibly Greeks) rose to power in the region, to be followed by a series of local dynasties. The end of the 11th century saw the rise of the Eastern Gangas, whose rule ushered in a golden era in Orissa's history. This dynasty was able to resist the spread of Muslim power into eastern India. The region remained a stronghold of Hinduism until it was conquered by the Muslim rulers of Bengal in 1568. Orissa subsequently became part of the Mughal Empire, but with the decline of Mughal power, its western areas fell to the Marathas. The British acquired the coastal regions in 1757 and the Maratha-held lands in 1803. Under the British, the region consisted of both directly administered territory and independent princely states that accepted British political rule. Orissa assumed its present form in 1947 when India gained its independence from Britain.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Oriya make up some 75% of Orissa's population, the remaining people belonging to the numerous tribes that live in the state. The 2001 census reported Orissa's population as 36.7 million. Based on projected growth rates and including the small numbers of Oriya who live in adjacent areas of neighboring states, the current number of Oriya is estimated at 31 million people.

The traditional home of the Oriya and the historical core of Orissa State is the alluvial delta of the Mahanadi River and the adjacent coastal lowlands that run along the shores of the Bay of Bengal. Inland from the coastal plains lie the Garjat Hills and the Eastern Ghats, the hills that form the edge of India's Deccan Plateau. Elevations in these hills vary from around 900 m (3,000 ft) in the north to almost 1,525 m (5,000 ft) in the south. To the west of this line of hills are the interior plateaus of western Orissa. The hills and plateaus of Orissa are among the most heavily forested regions left in India. The Mahanadi River flows in a southeasterly direction across the middle of the state. The open basin of the middle Mahanadi Valley forms the only area of extensive lowland in the interior. Climate is

monsoonal, with rainfall averaging around 150 cm (60 in) over the region. The rainy season (July–October) is followed by cool winters, with mean temperatures around 20°C (68°F). In mid-February, the thermometer begins to climb as the hot, humid summer weather approaches. In June, average temperatures approach 30°C (85°F).

The location of Orissa on the Bay of Bengal makes it vulnerable to the deadly cyclones that periodically sweep up from the south from May to November. In October 1999, for instance, what came to be known as the Orissa Cyclone hit Orissa with winds peaking at 250 kmh (155mph), causing the deaths of over 10,000 people and affecting another 12 million. Thousands of cattle were killed and over a million animals were lost. Damage in the path of the cyclone amounted to about \$2.5 million, and 7 million people were left homeless. Relief agencies immediately sent assistance, and operations extended well into 2000. Unfortunately, many people died of starvation and diseases after the storm because rescue workers could not reach everyone in time.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Oriya is an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Bengali, Assamese, and other languages of eastern India. It shows less Muslim or British influence than do other Indo-Aryan languages because the region where it is spoken was one of the last to be conquered by these foreign powers. The language is one of the 23 languages spoken in India that are recognized as official languages and appears in the list of these languages printed on Indian rupee notes. Although written Oriya does not vary, the spoken form differs over the region. Standard Oriya is spoken in the Cuttack and Puri districts of Orissa.

There is a long literary tradition in Oriya, which is written in its own script. It dates back to the 14th century AD, and the early works consist of accounts of the Natha-cult, which replaced the Siddha-cult around this time. The literary tradition in Oriya is almost continuous from this time, consisting largely of songs and poetry, most of which is religious in nature. A major change in Oriya literature occurred towards the end of the 19th century, coinciding with the advent of the British administration and Western education. During the early 20th century, freedom fighters, such as Gopabandhu Das, came to the fore. In the immediate post-Independence era, writers, such as Chandrasekhar Rath, Shantanu Acharya, Mohapatra Nilamani Sahoo, and Gopinath Mohanty, became known for their fiction and short stories. In the 1970s, a reaction to the earlier fiction writers saw the emergence of literary figures, such as Jagadish Mohanty, but the latter part of the 20th century saw the appearance of feminist writers (e. g. Sarojini Sahoo) and new authors of Oriya fiction and drama.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Puri, a town located on the coast at the southern end of the Mahanadi Delta, is the site of a shrine dedicated to Krishna in his form of Jagannath (*jagan-natha*, "lord of the universe"). According to Puranic legend, the god Krishna was mistaken for a deer in the forest and killed by a hunter. His body was left to rot under a tree. It was found by a pious person, who cremated it and placed the ashes in a box. The local king was directed by Vishnu to make an image from these sacred relics. The king approached the divine artisan Vishvakarman, who agreed to do the work, provided he was left undisturbed until its comple-



tion. The king became impatient after 15 days of waiting and went to see how the work was progressing. The divine artisan became enraged and left the image incomplete, a mere stump without arms or legs. The god Brahma gave the image its eyes and a soul and acted as chief priest at its consecration. The king sacrificed 100 horses in honor of the occasion. The image at the temple in Puri, the most important Jagannath shrine in the country, perpetuates this tradition by representing the deity as a crudely carved block of wood.

## 5 RELIGION

The Oriya are overwhelmingly Hindu. They have the caste structure typical of Hindu society, with Brahmans performing their traditional role in ritual and religion. They accept the authority of the Vedas and the other sacred Sanskrit texts of Hinduism. The Oriya worship Shiva, the Mother Goddess, the Sun God, and many other Hindu deities. The most important sect, however, is the Vaishnava sect that reveres Krishna in his form as Jagannath.

In addition to the classical forms of Hinduism practiced by the Oriya, there is a level of popular belief embracing local deities and spirits that influence everyday life and activities. These spirits have to be appeased or otherwise dealt with through the services of shamans (*kalisi*), who identify and mediate with disease-causing spirits. Magicians (*guni*) are skilled in witchcraft and sorcery.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As Hindus, the Oriya observe the usual pan-Indian festivals celebrated by their co-religionists across the country, as well as some that are regional in character. However, there is one festival celebrated in Orissa that is of national importance and attracts pilgrims from all over the country. This is the Chariot Procession (Ratha Yatra) of Jagannath held at Puri in Orissa every year in June or July. The images of Jagannath and two lesser deities are taken from the Jagannath temple to a country house some 3 km (2 mi) away. The images are placed in cars or chariots and pulled by pilgrims. Jagannath's car is roughly 14 m (45 ft) high, with wheels over 2 m (7 ft) in diameter. The other images travel in smaller chariots. The English word "juggernaut" comes from "Jagannath" and refers to the god's massive chariot that crushes all before it.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Certain superstitions are observed by pregnant women in rural areas. For example, they are not allowed to go out in the dark in case they become frightened and have a miscarriage. Most babies are born at home. Village women give birth squatting, with a piece of cloth tied tightly around the abdomen, and gripping a wooden pole during the labor pains. Male babies are greeted with special joy. The entire family is ritually unclean until the seventh day, when rites of purification are observed. The name-giving ceremony is held on the twenty-first day. Villagers are invited to a feast, where the family Brahman performs the necessary *pujas*. Children are the center of family life. They are spoiled and fussed over, until such time as they begin to share in the family household tasks. Girls are usually segregated for a period of seven days at the time of their first menstruation. In some communities, they rub turmeric paste on their bodies and bathe, before resuming their domestic and social activities.



The dead are cremated, although children and unmarried persons are usually buried. The corpse is anointed with turmeric, washed, and wrapped in a shroud. It is carried to the cremation ground by relatives and placed on the funeral pyre with the head toward the north. Some groups place women facing up and men facing down. Funeral rituals follow Hindu customs, with ceremonies being performed on the seventh, ninth, and eleventh days after death. A Brahman priest is engaged to perform these rites. Near blood-relatives shave their heads and don new clothes, and on the eleventh day a feast is held for caste members and Brahmans.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

As is common in India, when people meet a stranger, the first question they always ask is, "What caste do you belong to?" This is the usual practice, and no one feels embarrassed or offended at the question. Caste plays an important role in interpersonal relations, particularly in rural areas, and determines the nature of social contacts between people.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Oriya are a rural people, with only 14.97% living in areas classified as urban (2001 Census of India). Villages are typically linear in form, with houses built along either side of a single street. There is often a tributary hamlet near the village, where members of the Untouchable or service castes live. The Oriya house is rectangular in shape and has mud walls and a gabled roof thatched with straw. Affluent families may have a

double roof (providing insulation and some protection against fire), a small guest house, and a fence enclosing the compound. Rooms serve as cattle shed, grain store, bedroom, and kitchen. In traditional houses, the northeast corner of the kitchen is reserved for family worship. Furnishings include wooden beds, tables, and chairs. Living rooms may be decorated with pictures of gods and goddesses, important political leaders, and even film stars.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Oriya follow the normal North Indian traditions of marrying within one's caste or subcaste and outside one's clan. The preference is to marry outside the village or immediate area. An Oriya proverb states: "Marital relatives from distant places are beautiful, as distant hills are enchanting." Marriages are arranged, and although child marriage was common in the past, the age of marriage is increasing. The marriage ceremony and rituals follow the Hindu form. The daughter-in-law takes up residence with her husband's family, where she assumes various responsibilities in the household. Her status, of course, is considerably enhanced when she gives birth to a son. Divorce is uncommon, although legal under Indian law. In urban areas, there is a trend away from the extended family toward the nuclear family structure.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The usual dress for men is the *dhoti* (loincloth) and *chaddar*, a shawl that is draped over the shoulder. Sometimes a *kurta*, or shirt, is worn as an upper garment. Younger men, especially in the towns, favor Western-style clothes. Women wear the *sari* and *choli* (bodice). Orissa is known for its tie-dyed saris, and these are gaining in popularity across the country. Despite Orissa being known for its silver filigree ornaments, these are not popular among village women but tend to be favored, rather, by urban middle-class women. Village women display the usual array of ornaments and jewelry. Women of lower castes sometimes sport tattoos as decoration.

### **12 FOOD**

Rice is eaten by Oriya at every meal. At breakfast, cold rice, puffed rice (*mudhi*), or various types of rice cake (*pitha*) are taken with molasses or salt, and the meal is completed with tea. Thin rice pancakes are a specialty of Orissa and are frequently served to guests. A typical meal in an Oriya household consists of rice, *dāl* (lentils), and vegetable curry using eggplant, spinach, and seasonal vegetables, such as cauliflower, cabbages, or peas. For those who can afford it and who are not vegetarian, fish or goat meat may be served. Food is cooked in mustard oil, except for offerings to the gods, which are prepared in clarified butter (*ghi*). A particular favorite in villages is a rice dish called *pakhala bata*. Rice is boiled in bulk, and whatever is not consumed is stored in cold water. The rice ferments a little and is later served cold with fresh green chilies. This dish is popular in summer, when it is eaten with curds and green mangoes. Bananas, coconuts, and limes are the main fruits of the region. People are fond of sweets, cookies, and drinks, such as sherbets. Alcohol is avoided by caste Hindus, although the Untouchables drink toddy made from fermented dates. Hashish is made into a drink (*bhang*) and taken socially and at festivals.

Food has an important role in Oriya ritual. At the feast for Shiva, for example, villagers prepare a huge, steamed rice cake

made in the shape of a *lingam* (Shiva's phallic symbol) and stuffed with cheese, molasses, and coconut. It is colored red with vermilion dye and is worshiped before being eaten. Similarly, there are over 50 types of rice cake prepared and offered to the deity at the Jagannath Temple at Puri.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education is seen by middle- and upper-class Oriya as a means to economic advancement. Education levels in Orissa State, however, are among the lowest in India. Literacy rates in 2001 were 63.08% for those seven years of age and older (about the average for India as a whole), but this figure masks considerable differences between rural-urban populations and also gender differences. Male literacy in Orissa is 75.96% where as only 50.51% of females are literate. As against State literacy rate averages, districts like Koraput had only 35.72% literate, Malkangiri 30.53%, and Nawarangpur 33.93%.

Education is free and supposedly compulsory up to age 14, but attendance at schools is very much a matter of family choice. Girls rarely proceed beyond primary school, especially among the tribal populations. As is to be expected, test results from private schools far exceed those of government schools, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are getting involved in educational projects. For instance, Mahila Vikas, an organization with experience in tribal development and one that has successfully executed other social welfare projects in the Gajapati district of Orissa aimed at ameliorating the economic and social status of women, is undertaking a project titled "Promotion of Girl Child Education of Primitive Tribals." The Gajapati District is one of the most backward areas of Orissa and is occupied by Saura tribals. Because of limited school capacity and the inability of parents to send their girl children to government schools located some distance away, an estimated 2,000 girl children in the area are school dropouts. Mahila Vikas has established a learning center for these children and transitions them into a government school. There is a great degree of community support for the project and a strong desire to remedy the situation.

There are numerous government-run colleges and five universities in Orissa. One of these, the Shri Jagannath Sanskrit University at Puri, is devoted to Sanskrit learning and culture.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Chronicles of the Jagannath Temple at Puri, written in Oriya, date from the 12th century AD. The most productive period in Oriya literature began in the 14th century. Important contributions to Oriya literature were made by medieval *bhakti* (devotional) poets. Modern writing in Oriya, however, suffers from comparison with Bengali achievements. Orissa is famous for its traditions of dance, music, and architecture. The classical dance of Orissa, known as *Odissi*, originated as a temple dance performed for the gods. The *Chhau* dance, performed by masked male dancers in honor of Shiva, is another feature of Oriya culture. Cuttack is a major center for dance and music. Painting of icons (*patta* paintings), palm leaf painting, and woodcarving are important artistic traditions in Orissa. Orissan temples, ornamented with carvings and sculptures, are built in a distinct style regarded by some as the climax of North Indian temple architecture. Several important temples are found at Bhubaneswar, though the Sun Temple at Konar-

ak is considered to be the masterpiece of medieval Orissan temple architecture.

### **15 WORK**

Most Oriya are involved in rice cultivation. Orissa State accounts for around 10% of India's total rice output. Agriculture in the region is still fairly traditional, depending on animal power for traction and requiring considerable inputs of labor. Cash crops include oilseeds, pulses, sugarcane, jute, and coconuts. Fishing is important in coastal areas. Many families are engaged in producing traditional handicrafts. Industrial development in the state has occurred only in the decades following independence (following 1947).

### **16 SPORTS**

Children amuse themselves with typical games, e.g., ball, tag, hide-and-peek, spinning tops, and kite-flying. Traditional games for adults include cards, dice, and other games of chance. Body-building and wrestling are common sports for men and *kabaddi* (team wrestling) is very popular. Modern sports, such as cricket, soccer, and field hockey, are played in schools.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Although modern forms of entertainment are found in towns, the Oriya are mostly rural and draw on the rich traditions of folk entertainment associated with Oriya culture. These include folk dances and songs, puppet plays, shadow plays (where the shadows of the characters are projected onto a screen using puppets), and folk opera (*jatra*), as well as the activities associated with fairs and religious festivals.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Orissa is well known for its handicrafts, particularly its little carved wooden replicas of Jagannath and the other gods at the temple in Puri. Painted masks and wooden animal toys for children are also very popular. Local sculptors make soapstone copies of temple sculptures for pilgrims and tourists. Textiles include appliqué work, embroidery, tie-dyed fabrics, and various types of hand-loom cloth. The artisans of Cuttack are skilled in filigree work and the making of gold and silver filigree jewelry. Brassware and items made from bell metal (an alloy of copper and tin) are also produced by local artisans.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Some social problems that plague Orissa stem from the "super cyclone" that affected the region in 1999. Some of the survivors, especially from the Jagatpur District that was hard hit by the storm, suffered from post-traumatic distress syndrome, experiencing symptoms like restlessness and sleep disorders. The number of suicides and attempted suicides following the cyclone was quite high and, in a survey taken in the region after the storm, a staggering 11% of the respondents expressed a death wish.

Access to land is another problem in Orissa. While land reform legislation has reduced the share of agricultural land held under large holdings (more than 6 hectares) in Orissa since the 1950s, the proportion of households operating no land, whose livelihoods are based principally on agricultural labor, increased substantially following the widespread eviction

of tenants from former landlord estates. Around a quarter of all households in Orissa still have no land. In spite of land reforms, formidable obstacles continue to prevent the rural poor from improving their access to land.

Orissa is one of a few states in India that has attempted legally to abolish tenancy (land-leasing), except in the case of persons of disability (the definition of which includes widows, divorcees, and other unmarried women). Land rights may pass to any cultivator who can demonstrate continuous occupation over a period of at least 12 years. However, tenancy remains widespread, and restrictions have led to concealed forms of tenancy (e.g. with oral contracts) that give tenants little or no protection in law. A ceiling on individual land holdings also applies and currently stands at 10 "standard acres" (depending on land quality). In addition to these provisions, which fall under land reforms legislation, three major acts govern land administration and respectively provide the basis for land survey and settlement, land consolidation/prevention of land fragmentation, and prevention of encroachment on government land.

Development also causes problems for rural people in Orissa. For instance, the giant Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) of South Korea's steel plant and port in Jagatsinghpur district of Orissa will displace 471 families in 11 hamlets. For the last several years, local communities have been fighting to retain the land they have been cultivating for generations but which, after Independence, has been deemed government forest land. It is doubtful that the recent Forest Rights Act will give them the ability to assert their rights over this land. The local people assert that their vibrant and self-sufficient local economy based on betel leaf, cashew, and paddy cultivation, pisciculture and fishing will be destroyed, rendering them homeless and jobless if the steel plant and port come up. The government and the company in question have been doggedly pursuing efforts to "clear the land of people," with the argument that the plant, port, and mines together will generate 45,000 jobs and unprecedented revenue for the state. The pressure on local communities is based on the contention that much of the occupation and cultivation in the area is illegal because it is on government land under the jurisdiction of the forest department.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 is a key piece of forest legislation passed in India on 18 December 2006. It has also been called the "Forest Rights Act," the "Tribal Rights Act," the "Tribal Bill," and the "Tribal Land Act." The law concerns the rights of forest dwelling communities to land and other resources denied to them over decades as a result of the continuance of colonial forest laws in India and affects the 25% of Orissa's population that are tribal, though some critics argue that the law does more to harm tribals than to defend their traditional rights.

Land alienation among the tribals of the state, i.e. the sale of tribal land to non-tribal peoples, continues to be a problem, despite the existence of legislation designed to prevent this.

Orissa is one of the poorest states of India, and many of the problems faced by its people reflect this. Illiteracy and poverty in rural areas are commonplace. Much of the region lacks a safe drinking-water supply, adequate schools, roads, and electricity. The use of child labor is common, and of concern to foreign organizations funding development projects in the re-

gion. Alcoholism in rural areas is such a problem that there is a groundswell, especially among low-caste women, for the imposition of prohibition. Modern social conditions, however, can be expected to improve as Orissa modernizes in the future. Today's social problems detract nothing from the important contributions the Oriya have made to Indian culture in the past.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As a predominantly Hindu, rural people, the Oriya experience many of the problems associated with Hindu society. Purdah, child marriage, dowry payment and casteism were traditionally the lot of rural Oriya women and little has changed since the past. Sons are still preferred as offspring and feticide is not uncommon, as seen in the disparity of local sex ratios. Low-caste women are subject to sexual violence and rape, and the sale of poor girl children, either into prostitution or as wives in richer parts of India, is not uncommon.

Oriya women may appear, as in other parts of South Asia, to enjoy certain land rights in law, but legal protections rarely translate into effective control over land in practice, owing to embedded, gender-biased social norms and customs. It has been suggested that women's access to and effective control over land may be enhanced through joint land titling. This measure is rather limited in scope, since ideally what need to be promoted are women's independent land rights. But while the principle of joint titling is readily accepted at the level of the government of India, it has yet to be realized in practice in Orissa.

The life of urban, middle- and upper-class Oriya is, naturally, quite different. However, Oriya women find poverty, illiteracy, lack of rights to inheritance, lack of access to education, poor health services and lack of economic resources as barriers to improving their status in society.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# PAKISTANIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** pak-is-TAN-eez

**LOCATION:** Pakistan

**POPULATION:** 169.3 million (mid-2007 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Urdu (official national language); English; Punjabi (60%); Sindhi (13%); Pushto (8%); Baluchi (2%); more than 20 total

**RELIGION:** Islam (majority); Hinduism; Christianity; Buddhism; Baha'i; Parsi (Zoroastrian)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Brahui; Vol. 4: Pathans; Sindhis

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Pakistanis are citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (*Islam-i Jamhuriya-e Pakistan*). This political identity is relatively recent, because the state of Pakistan only came into existence in 1947. Prior to that time, the region formed part of the British Indian Empire. It has a complex history that extends back nearly 5,000 years to one of the world's first urban civilizations that grew up along the Indus River. Pakistan is settled by peoples of varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds who today find a common sense of unity in their commitment to the Islamic faith. In the Urdu language, the name "Pakistan" translates as "Land of the Pure."

Modern Pakistanis are heirs to a cultural tradition going back to the Harappan (or Indus Valley) civilization, which emerged on the plains of Indus River around 3000 BC. From about 1700 BC onwards, however, nomadic invaders from Central Asia settled on the plains of the Punjab, displacing the Harappans. These peoples introduced the Aryan languages into northern India and eventually developed Hindu civilization. Subsequent history is one of wave after wave of invaders sweeping through the passes of the northwest into the plains of the Punjab. This region saw a succession of peoples come and go, including the Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Kushans, and the White Huns. The Mauryas, Hindu (and later Buddhist) kings whose capital lay far to the east near the city of Patna in India, extended their empire (321–181 BC) to include virtually all of what is now Pakistan. By the end of the 9th century AD, most of the northern region was ruled by the Hindu Shahis.

Islam first reached Pakistan by sea from the south in AD 711, but the more significant introductions occurred in the north. At the beginning of the 11th century, Turkish rulers from Afghanistan (the Ghaznavids and later the Ghurids) mounted military campaigns over the mountain passes into the Indian subcontinent. In 1193 Afghan forces captured Delhi. For over 650 years from this time, a regional or imperial Muslim power based in Delhi ruled much of the area that makes up modern Pakistan. The Mughal emperor Akbar even made Lahore his capital for a short while towards the end of the 16th century.

The early 19th century saw the rise of a powerful Sikh state in the Punjab under Ranjit Singh. Sikhism is a religion combining elements of Islam and Hinduism that originated in the Punjab in the 15th century. However, conflict with the British resulted in wars that eventually led to the annexation of the Punjab by the British in 1849. The British had already conquered Sind in the south. Over the next 100 years, the British government in India gained control over virtually all the lands and peoples that were to make up Pakistan.

The modern state of Pakistan was created in 1947 when the British colonial possessions on the Indian subcontinent were divided between Pakistan and India. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder and leader of the Muslim League, became Governor-General of Pakistan, and to all intents and purposes, the new country's political ruler. But Jinnah, who came to be known as *Quaid-e-Azam* ("Great Leader") and *Baba-e-Qaum* ("Father of the Nation"), died in September 1948. Liaquat Ali Khan, also a leader of the Muslim League, became Pakistan's first prime minister in 1947, but he was assassinated, allegedly by an Afghan, in 1952. The first constitution of Pakistan was adopted in 1956 but was suspended in 1958 by General Ayub Khan, marking the first of several takeovers of the government by the military. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, founder and leader of the Pakistan People's Party, became the president of Pakistan from 1971 to 1973 and was elected prime minister from 1973 to 1977. However, he was ousted by the military in 1977 and was later executed (1979), despite international protests, by General Zia-ul-Haq. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who suspended Pakistan's constitution and declared martial law in 1977, became the president and military ruler of Pakistan from July 1977 to his death in August 1988 in a mysterious plane crash. Benazir Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter and leader of his Pakistan People's Party, was elected prime minister in 1988 and again in 1993, but on both occasions was removed from office for alleged corruption. The only other civilian leader of this time was Nawaz Sharif of the Muslim League, who served two non-consecutive terms as prime minister (1990–1993 and 1997–1999). In 2000, Sharif, also, was convicted of corruption and banned from participating in politics for life.

In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf, chief of staff of the Pakistani army, seized power as president of Pakistan and remains in that office, though his power was much curtailed following elections held in Pakistan in 2007. In an attempt to retain power, on 3 November 2007 Musharraf, who was supported both financially and materially by the United States and the West in the War on Terror, fired the chief justice of the Pakistan Supreme Court, the popular Iftikhar Chaudhury—who was about to declare the 2007 reelection of Musharraf as president unconstitutional—suspended the constitution, and declared a state of emergency. Chaudhury was reinstated and Musharraf—who survived several assassination attempts—stepped down as army chief on 28 November 2007 (appointing General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani as a replacement), hoping his political party would win the general elections to be held in 2008.

Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, who had fled Pakistan to exile in Saudi Arabia, returned to Pakistan to contest the elections to be held early in 2008, but Benazir Bhutto was assassinated—Al Qaeda claimed responsibility—on 27 December 2007, causing the elections to be postponed from January to February. In the 8 February 2008 general elections, the PPP (now led by the late Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari) gained the majority of the popular vote and along with the Muslim League-N [ML (N)], Nawaz Sharif's faction of the Muslim League, formed a coalition civilian government with Yousaf Raza Gilani as prime minister. In June 2008 a Pakistani High Court disqualified Sharif and his younger brother Shahbaz from contesting by-elections, but allowed the latter to continue to hold his office as chief minister of Punjab Province.

In April 2008, much against the wishes of the United States, the Pakistani government signed an agreement with the pro-



Taliban Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) in the Northwest Frontier Province, which has long been regarded as a Taliban safe haven and allows the imposition of Shariah law in Swat and Malakand districts. Similar agreements for South Waziristan and other areas of the border region were being negotiated as of mid-2008.

The Muslim League-N faction of the ruling coalition said in May 2008 that it would quit the government in a dispute over when and how to reinstate judges fired by Pervez Musharraf. The leader of the PPP, Zardari, expressed a willingness to work with Musharraf as president, though with considerably reduced powers, while Sharif wanted Musharraf's ouster. The announcement by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif raised the prospect of the splintering of the alliance that defeated the U.S.-backed Musharraf and his pro-Musharraf political party, the PML (Q) party (Pakistan Muslim League [Quaid]), though Sharif said his party would continue to support the government for the time being. If the PML (N) party were to quit the government, the only way the coalition could survive is with the support of opposition parties, such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and PML(Q). As of July 2008 it remained to be seen how this political crisis in Pakistan would play out.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Pakistan lies in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. It has an area of 796,095 sq km (307,304 sq mi), excluding the territory of Jammu and Kashmir that it occupies. In size, Pakistan is slightly larger than Texas, or roughly half the area of



*Pakistani women sit outside a relief camp as they wait for clothes and food. Pakistan was devastated by a major earthquake in late 2005. (AP Images/Anjum Naveed)*

Alaska. Its southern border is formed by a 1,046-km (650-mi) stretch of coastline along the Arabian Sea. From there, the country extends northwards for 1,600 km (1,000 mi) to the mountains that lie along its northern border with China. To the west, Pakistan shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan. India lies to the east, and in the northeast is the disputed territory of Kashmir.

The political outlines of Pakistan are the result of two historical forces. The western boundaries coincide with those fixed between 1875 and 1900 as the British stabilized the western frontier of their Indian Empire. The eastern boundary, however, reflects events that occurred in the mid-20th century. Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were concerned that they would be a minority in a Hindu-dominated state when the region became independent, and they demanded their own country. Efforts at compromise failed. When the British left India, Muslim majority areas in the northwest and the northeast of the subcontinent were separated to form Pakistan.

This created several problems. Pakistan comprised two "Wings" separated by 1,600 km (1,000 mi) of Indian territory. East Pakistan, even though it had a Muslim majority, was culturally different from the western Wing. Eventually, civil war erupted and East Pakistan broke away (with Indian help) as the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971. In the west, the new boundary between India and Pakistan divided the historical and cultural region of the Punjab in two. Partition in 1947 was accompanied by the mass migration of Sikhs and Hindus into

India, and Muslims into Pakistan, with an estimated 1 million lives lost in the process. Muslims from India who crossed into Pakistan at this time are known, along with their descendants, as *muhajirs*. They form a distinct element in Pakistan's population, and tensions between muhajirs and other ethnic groups have contributed to recent social instability in the country.

The Kashmir problem also has its origins at this time. Even at the height of the British Empire, there were several hundred princely states in the Indian subcontinent that were governed by their own rulers under overall British control. These states were required to "accede" to either Pakistan or India when the countries became independent. Naturally, Muslim states that were located in territory assigned to Pakistan merged with Pakistan, and Hindu states joined India. One of the largest and most important of the princely states was Jammu and Kashmir, located in the strategic northern mountains and having a common border with China. Kashmir had a Muslim majority population but a Hindu ruler, who was reluctant to accede to either Pakistan or India. After Muslim tribes from Pakistan entered Kashmir in October 1947, the Hindu Maharaja of Kashmir appealed to India for help. The Indian government sent military aid, which was in turn countered by Pakistan. A cease-fire was negotiated by the United Nations in 1949, but Kashmir remains divided with Pakistani and Indian troops facing each other across the cease-fire line.

Despite the unifying influence of the Islamic religion, the 169.3 million (2007 estimate) people of Pakistan encompass a

range of distinct ethnic groups, each with its own language, customs, and cultural traditions. Baluchis are found in the southwest, and Sindhis in the south. The Punjabis of the northern plains of the Indus are the most numerous, and politically influential, group in the country. In the northwest, the old North West Frontier of British days, Pathans (also called Pushuns or Pakhtuns) dominate. The largest among the numerous Pathan tribes are the Afridis, Waziris, and Yusufzais. Further north, in the mountains that stretch to the Chinese border, are a bewildering array of tribal groups that include the Khowar, Kohistani, and Shina. Tribal areas are administered federally rather than by provincial governments. Areas of Kashmir occupied by Pakistan include Baltis and Kashmiris. The ethnic mix of Pakistan is further modified by the muhajirs, who represent perhaps 10% of Pakistan's population. During the recent Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, there were an estimated 3 million Afghani refugees (mainly Pathans) in northwestern areas of Pakistan.

Pakistan falls into three broad geographical regions: the Indus plains, the northern mountains, and the hills and plateaus that extend from the Khyber Pass to Baluchistan. The Indus plains, and especially the northern region of the Punjab, form the heart of the country. Despite an arid climate (Karachi receives 20.4 cm or 8 inches of rain a year) and maximum temperatures that may hover above 40°C (104°F) for months at a time, the plains support the bulk of Pakistan's population. Agriculture, of course, is heavily dependent on irrigation and the waters of the Indus River system. The northern mountain zone has some of the most rugged and difficult terrain found anywhere in the world. Nearly all the region lies above 2,400 m (approximately 7,800 ft) and the Karakoram Mountains contain some of the highest peaks in the world. More than 50 peaks are above 6,500 m (21,000 ft) in elevation, and even the passes into China lie above 4,900 m (16,000 ft). The area is a difficult one to cross, especially in the winter months, and is sparsely populated with tribespeople who display a fierce sense of independence from the government in Islamabad. The northwestern hills and western plateaus, too, are barren, rugged regions sparsely populated by tribal groups.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The linguistic patterns of Pakistan reflect the ethnic diversity of the Pakistanis, with over 20 languages spoken in the country. The majority of the languages belong to the Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. Punjabi (including Siraiiki, a Punjabi variant) is spoken by almost two-thirds (58%) of the population. Other languages include Sindhi (13%); Pushto, the language of the Pathans (8%); and Baluchi (4%). Kashmiri is the language of the disputed areas of the former Jammu and Kashmir State. In terms of numbers of speakers, the languages in the tribal areas in the north (e.g., Kafiri, Kohistani, Khowar, Wakhi, and Shina) are relatively minor, although they do have political significance. Balti, spoken in the extreme northeast, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan rather than the Indo-European language family. The origins of the Burushaski language that is spoken in the Hunza region is as yet unknown. Brahui, spoken by some 2.5 million people in Baluchistan Province, is of interest. Unlike most languages of Pakistan, it belongs to the Dravidian language family. It is linguistically related to the languages of southern India. Brahui may be the last survivor of

the languages spoken in the region before the Aryan invasions following 1700 BC.

With this diversity, and especially given the role of language in cultural identity, it is perhaps fortunate that Urdu has been adopted as Pakistan's national language. Urdu, written in the Perso-Arabic script, evolved during the 16th and 17th centuries from the mix of languages spoken by Muslim soldiers (Persian, Turk, Arab, and Afghan) and the local speech. It is thus not identified with any particular ethnic group and avoids the issue of the cultural supremacy of a specific segment of the population. On the other hand, this national language is the native tongue of only the muhajirs and is spoken by only about 10% of the population. It has been adopted by the intelligentsia and the educated, urban elite, but in terms of numbers of speakers, it can by no means be viewed as "national." Urdu and English—the latter a legacy of the colonial era—are official languages in which government and business affairs are conducted.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Given that the "Pakistani" was created by a political decision only half a century ago, it is not surprising that the peoples of Pakistan tend to identify with their communities before their nation. One is a Punjabi, Baluchi, Sindhi, or Pathan before one is a Pakistani, and individuals follow the folk traditions and folk heroes of their own community. However, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1875–1948) has achieved the status of a national hero among many Pakistanis. It was Jinnah, Pakistan's first leader, who demanded a separate Muslim state in India and was ultimately responsible for the existence of Pakistan.

### **5 RELIGION**

Pakistan is an Islamic state, and Pakistanis are overwhelmingly Muslim in religion. There are, however, small religious minorities in the country. These include Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and Baha'is of Iranian descent. There is a small Parsi (Zoroastrian) community, concentrated in Karachi. Minority religions account for only 3.3% of the population.

Within the Muslim community, there are also minority groups. For instance, some 25% of the population are Shia (or Shiite) Muslims, who are often at odds with the Sunni majority. The Shia community is splintered into numerous sects. The Ismailis, a Shia sect that recognizes the Aga Khan as its leader, have a strong presence in the northern mountain region. The Ahmadiyas are a modern Islamic sect whose beliefs are so unorthodox that many Muslims view them as non-Muslim. Numbering over 2 million people, they face considerable discrimination and anti-Ahmadiya sentiment from other Pakistanis.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The two great religious festivals celebrated by the Pakistanis are Id-ul-Fitr, celebrating the end of Ramadan, and Bakr-Id, the feast of sacrifice. Ramadan, the month of fasting, is observed by all Muslims, and Muharram is a major day of remembrance among the Shias. The Urs festivals, commemorating the death-anniversary of Sufi saints, are important festivals celebrated at the saints' shrines. The calendar dates of Muslim religious holidays change because of differences between the Islamic and Western calendars.

In addition to religious holidays, Pakistanis observe certain national holidays. These include Independence Day (August 14), Pakistan Day (March 23), Defense of Pakistan Day (September 6), and the birth- and death-anniversaries of M. A. Jinnah, the Quaid-e-Azam (December 25 and September 11, respectively).

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

As Muslims, Pakistanis follow the rites of passage associated with the Islamic faith. The newborn child is sanctified by prayer and undergoes the head-shaving and naming ceremonies. All males undergo the ritual of circumcision (*sunnat*). Among some Muslims, a ceremony known as *Bismillah* marks the beginning of a child's education in religious matters.

Ceremonies associated with death and burial combine practices laid down in the *Shariah*, the body of Islamic law, with local customs and traditions. The shrouded body is then ritually bathed and wrapped in a white shroud in preparation for burial. The body is brought out of the house, and the face of the deceased is shown to relatives and neighbors. Mourners, led by a priest, say prayers over the corpse, which is then taken in procession to the graveyard. There are certain customs observed by the family during the days and weeks following burial.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Traditional Pakistanis use the formal greeting of Muslims the world over, "Salaam alaikum" ("Peace be with you"). The correct reply to this is the sentence, "Wa alaikum as Salaam" ("And also unto you"). Less formally, men shake hands and friends embrace each other. Pathans embrace twice, once from the left side and once from the right. Men are addressed as "Sahib" (Mr.), though when used with a name, the word "Sahib" comes last (as in "Johnson Sahib"). The equivalent form of address for a woman is "Begum." Khan, although a name, is also a title of respect.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Despite improvements in the nation's health standards since independence, many Pakistanis continue to face major health hazards. Leading causes of death include malaria, childhood diseases (measles, diphtheria, whooping cough), typhoid, gastrointestinal problems, and respiratory infections. Inadequate sewage disposal, lack of safe drinking water, and malnutrition contribute to health problems. Infant mortality rates are high, with 66.9 deaths per 1,000 live births. Fertility rates are also high, with 3.6 average births per childbearing woman. The natural increase of population is 2.3% per year, the highest rate in South Asia.

Many Pakistanis live in cities. Karachi has a population approaching 16 million inhabitants, and Lahore exceeds 10 million people. The modern city of Islamabad was built specifically to be the nation's capital. Yet, Pakistanis are essentially rural, living in villages scattered from the high mountain valleys in the north to the desert areas in the southeast. Rural house types, construction materials, furnishings, and creature comforts vary according to region. Standards of living in Pakistan vary considerably. The prosperous urban elites live in large, air-conditioned houses with the latest modern conveniences, whereas the rural poor live very much in the manner of underprivileged classes the world over. Per capita income stands at \$2,600 per year (2005 estimate).

Pakistan has 259,758 km (c. 160,000 mi) of road, of which some 65% is paved. State-run bus services and private minibuses are available to the traveling public. Pakistan inherited a substantial railroad network from colonial days, and the train still remains the most common means of long-distance travel for Pakistanis today. Pakistan also has a state-run airline that operates scheduled domestic and international flights.

Of special note is the Karakoram Highway. Completed in 1978, this paved road connects Islamabad with Kashgar, in China. For much of its 1,200-km (800-mile) length, it follows the ancient Silk Route along which trade passed between India and China. It crosses some of the highest and most rugged mountain terrain in the world.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Despite the principles of equality embedded in Islam and its specific rejection of caste in South Asia, social relations among Pakistanis are very much influenced by caste. This is less true of urban Pakistanis and the tribal groups of the north and west, but it is quite evident in the main agricultural regions. The system, based on the *jati* (or *zat*) and the *biradari* (patrilineage), does not have the religious dimensions of the true Hindu caste system. But it does define the occupational roles of specific groups in the village economy. It is also important in terms of selecting a marriage partner.

Pakistanis follow the general customs of Islam in marriage (*nikah*), but details vary according to community and region. Parents take great care in arranging marriages for their children. Pakistani society is patrilocal, with the daughter-in-law entering the household of her husband. In the early years of marriage a woman has very little status, but this soon changes with the arrival of children, especially sons. The role of women in traditional Pakistani society is clearly defined. It is to bear sons, to manage the affairs of the household, and to see to the needs of the male members of the family. However, behind the scenes, women do have considerable say in family matters.

Purdah is the Islamic custom of keeping women in seclusion. When practiced to its fullest extent, it prohibits all social contact between women above the age of puberty and men outside the immediate family. Women in purdah who go out of the house wear the *burqa*, the long garment that covers them from head to toe.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The standard dress of men all over Pakistan is the *salwar*, loose baggy trousers, and *kurta*, a long tunic-like shirt. This is worn with a variety of headgear, from turbans to caps. On formal occasions, the kurta is replaced by an *achkan* or *serwani*, a long tunic-like coat that buttons up to the neck. Women commonly wear the *salwar*, *kamiz*, and *dupatta* (scarf), or the sari. Orthodox women cover themselves from head to foot in the tent-like burqa.

There is, however, a bewildering variety of local dress that identifies a person as coming from a particular region or ethnic group in Pakistan. For example, the Pathan man wears a velvet jacket, trimmed with gold braid, over a homespun salwar-kurta. His cap, the *kulah*, is made of finely woven straw and gold thread. Over the cap is wrapped a turban or *pagri*, and the distinctive way in which the turban is tied will identify his tribe. It is not unusual for this outfit to be completed with an assortment of weapons. Men from Hunza and the northern



mountains favor the *pakol*, the flat, round woolen cap worn by the Afghan freedom-fighters so often shown on American television during the Soviet-Afghan war. Sindhi men wear a round, embroidered cap with a section cut out in the front, while fabrics sewn with tiny mirrors are popular with Sindhi women. The kurta of Baluchistan has a unique underarm gusset that gives it extra fullness, while the front, cuffs, and pocket are elaborately embroidered. The Jinnah cap, headgear favored by M.A. Jinnah, is popular among politicians, bureaucrats, and other urban groups in Pakistan.

## 12 FOOD

It is difficult to identify food that is specifically Pakistani because the region shares in broader subcontinental dietary traditions. Perhaps the only broad distinction between Pakistani and Indian food is that the former tends to be less spicy. Pakistani dishes are often made with yogurt, which reduces the effect of the hot spices commonly used in cooking.

Wheat is the staple food for most of the population. It is eaten in the form of flat, unleavened bread called *chapatis* or *roti*, along with spiced pulses (*dāl*), and seasonal vegetables. Sweetened tea, buttermilk, or *lassi*, a drink made from yogurt, rounds out the meal. Those who can afford it eat meat or poultry, although in rural areas this is usually a festival food. Goat meat is a favorite. No Pakistani, of course, will eat pork, which is regarded as unclean by Muslims.

Within Pakistan, there are also numerous regional specialties and dietary preferences. Thus, Sindhis are known for their seafood dishes, Punjabis for their bread and dals, and the northern areas for their fruits. The long life-expectancy of people in the Hunza Valley is ascribed to the importance of apricots in their diet. A favorite of Pathans is *nan-kebab*, a thick bread baked in an oven, eaten with cubes of meat, fish, or poultry. All Pakistanis enjoy sweets, and a wide variety of milk-based sweets are consumed. The giving of sweets to celebrate happy events is very common.

No mention of Pakistani cooking would be complete without mention of “Mughal” dishes. This style of cooking was developed in the Muslim courts of India. It uses a blend of herbs and spices rather than chilis and offers a selection of meats and poultry served in sauces; tandoori dishes baked in a hot, clay oven; breads such as *nan*, and various rice dishes.

## 13 EDUCATION

Despite the expansion of educational facilities since independence, just over one half of all Pakistanis over 15 years of age are literate (49.9% in 2005). This breaks down to 63% for males and 36% for females. The variation in literacy between urban and rural populations is also quite considerable. Attendance at school remains low in rural areas because many children must work in the fields, and the dropout rate is high. Over two-thirds of the adult population have no formal schooling. Only 2.34% of the population between 16 and 23 years of age are enrolled at university campuses (2004). The corresponding figure for the United States is around 75%, although this figure includes two-year colleges, part-time students, and on-line enrollments. The Pakistani figure is quite low, despite a 1999 higher education initiative that provided for scholarships for Ph.D. students studying both at home and abroad.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Pakistanis’ can trace their cultural heritage back 5,000 years to the Harappan civilization. This urban society, with its planned cities, irrigation systems, script, system of weights and measures, complex social and religious organization, and advanced material culture, rivals the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Most scholars believe the Harappans were Dravidian peoples, and that Harappan elements survive mainly in the Dravidian cultures of South India. However, similarities in toys, musical instruments, and pottery suggest that, at least in folk culture, some elements of Harappan traditions may be seen in modern Pakistan.

Buddhism, too, has left its mark on Pakistan. The ancient kingdom of Gandhara, in northern Pakistan, was a major center of Buddhist learning and artistic endeavor from the 1st to the 5th century AD. Exposed to influences from the West, Buddhists developed a tradition of Gandhara art that combined motifs from Persia, Greece, and Rome with Buddhist forms. Early Gandharan sculptures of Buddha had Greek faces and pleated robes patterned after the Roman-style toga.

It is Islam, however, that dominates the cultural landscape of Pakistan. The Indo-Islamic style of architecture, the numerous shrines of the *pirs* (Sufi saints), and mosques such as the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore are visual evidence of the presence of Islam in the land. Literature is perhaps the most important of the art forms. The poetry and music of the Sufis are known in every household in the land. The singing of *qawwalis*, devotional songs, is extremely popular, and some qawwali singers enjoy the fame reserved for pop stars in the West. There is a rich tradition of poetry in Urdu and other regional languages.

## 15 WORK

Pakistan is primarily an agricultural nation, with 68% of its peoples living in rural areas. Government efforts at economic development saw a rapid expansion in the industrial sector and a rise in output in the decades following independence. However, several factors have acted to slow economic expansion. Pakistan’s population has experienced relatively high growth rates, placing a heavy burden on food resources and slowing economic expansion. It has, however, meant a surplus of labor. This has given rise to such unique ventures as the world’s largest ship-breaking operation on the beaches of the Arabian Sea coast that is done virtually entirely by hand. The traditional hostility with India has resulted in several military confrontations, with wars being fought in 1947, 1965, and 1971 and 1999. One consequence of this is seen in Pakistan’s expenditure on its armed forces which, as a percentage of its GNP, is more than twice the world average.

Growing numbers of Pakistanis work in the labor-short, oil-exporting countries of the Middle East, earning much higher incomes than is possible in Pakistan. This forms an important source of outside currency for the country.

## 16 SPORTS

Sports enjoyed by children in rural areas include hide-and-peek, marbles, kite-flying, *gulli-danda* (a stick game played by boys), and *kabaddi*, a wrestling game. For men, cock-fighting, partridge-fighting, and pigeon-flying (and betting on the outcome) are favorite pastimes. Polo, of a much less restrained form than that found in the West, is popular in northern areas such as Gilgit.

Pakistanis also play modern sports. The entire country is addicted to the game of cricket, a relic of British colonial days. In recent years, the Pakistani national (Test) cricket team has regularly defeated the England team, as well as those of other cricketing nations. The Pakistani national field hockey team is also one of the best in the world, a frequent winner of the Olympic Gold Medal in the sport. Games such as soccer, tennis, badminton, and table tennis are also played. Pakistanis have regularly won the world championship in squash, a court game similar to racquetball.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Radio and television are available in Pakistan, although these forms of communication are controlled by the government. Television broadcasts during limited hours, and the programming is often uninspiring. The standard fare includes popular quiz programs, dramas highlighting the country's social problems, soap operas, and reruns of old sitcoms from the West. Urdu- and English-language films are popular and attract large audiences. Many well-to-do households have VCRs, and video rentals are readily available in the bazaars.

Movie houses abound in Pakistani cities and towns, showing Punjabi and Urdu films. The films, starring well-known actors and actresses, tend to be melodramas, with much action, singing, dancing, and predictable plots. Film music is popular and can be heard on the radio, in buses, and in the bazaars at all hours of the day.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Every region in Pakistan specializes in local arts and crafts too numerous to discuss in detail here. These include rugs and carpets, embroidered and appliquéd bedspreads and table linen, colorful fabrics and mirror work, leather goods, copper and brassware, onyx ornaments, woodwork and inlaid furniture, lacquerware, and gold and silver jewelry.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Pakistanis face many of the social and economic problems typical of developing nations. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, inflation, and a widening gap between rich and poor are but a few of the country's ills. These problems have been intensified by wars with India, high expenditures on the military, the continuing conflict in Kashmir, and the current War on Terror. The frequency with which the Pakistani Army has displaced democratically elected governments has added to political instability in the country. There has been some sentiment for the creation of an independent Pashto-speaking state ("Pakhtunistan") on Pakistan's northwest frontier. In recent years, the presence of 3 million Afghan refugees has placed an added burden on the country. Punjabis are viewed as wielding too much power and influence, and discord between muhajirs and Sindhis has led to communal unrest in the south, especially in Karachi. In addition, the government's policy of Islamization, combined with the outspoken fundamentalism of many religious leaders, has resulted in conflict between segments of the Muslim community.

Under Musharraf, Pakistan supported President George W. Bush's War on Terror following 11 September 2001. In return, the United States supported President Musharraf and channeled some \$10 billion in civilian and military aid to help fight Muslim radicals. However, a problem facing Musharraf was

that many Pakistanis, especially those along the border with Afghanistan, tended to support the Muslim radicals and the Taliban because they are Muslim and culturally and perhaps even ethnically related to them. The result has been a virtual civil war pitting the Pakistani government and its security forces against the Pakistani population. In addition, there are those in the United States who claim that Musharraf did not do all he could to aid the United States and who argue that U.S. aid to Pakistan be stopped. It is not unlikely that U.S. support for Musharraf, who as of July 2008 was under pressure from the civilian government to resign as president, led indirectly to the defeat of his political party in the 2008 elections held in Pakistan.

Sectarian conflict is common in Pakistan. Karachi, for instance, has a history of religious and ethnic violence between the minority Shia and majority Sunni communities. The press periodically reports bomb blasts at mosques belonging to one sect or the other.

The most difficult task facing Pakistanis today seems to be creating a sense of "nation" among the diverse communities and ethnic groups that make up the country's population, a task that is complicated by political events in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan itself. On 6 July 2008, a suicide bomber killed at least 11 policemen near the Red Mosque in Islamabad in apparent retaliation for the government's security forces' attack on the mosque in 2007, which was aimed at driving out hard-line Muslim clerics and their supporters.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Pakistani women, because they live in a country that is officially Muslim, suffer from the restrictions of a Muslim society. Some writers argue that the South Asian subcontinent is the most gender insensitive region in the world. Thus, women in Pakistan are not only subject to the norms of Muslim society (*pardah*, the wearing of the *burqa*, arranged marriages and child marriage [called "*vani*" in Pakistan]), they are also discriminated against financially and by being the victims of inhuman customs and laws such as *karo-kari* ("honor killings") and the 1979 Hudud Ordinance (which designated punishment such as stoning for adultery) [this Ordinance has since been amended by the National Assembly of Pakistan in 2006 and replaced by the Women's Protection Bill, which eliminates some of the apparent inequities of the Hudud Ordinance]. Needless to say, the Women's Protection Bill was applauded by women's organizations but strongly opposed by traditional Islamists.

Women are often treated like slaves subject to drudgery, performing chores such as looking after the children, cleaning the house, cooking, washing and many other forms of domestic labor. They are there just to obey their fathers, brothers and husbands. They do not have the right to decide about themselves because women are considered as foolish creatures according to the dominant social and cultural norms. Likewise, marriage is also a sort of trade between different families both in the rural and urban areas.

Women are also subject to domestic violence (one report states that 82% of women in the Punjab are subject to some kind of domestic violence), rape, and trafficking. The legal code discriminates against women and girls (according to law, a female witness in the courts is only worth half a male witness) and creates major obstacles in seeking redress for acts of violence. Proof of rape generally requires the confession of

the accused or the testimony of four adult Muslim men who witnessed the assault. If a woman cannot prove her rape allegation she runs a very high risk of being charged with fornication or adultery, the criminal penalty for which is either a long prison sentence and public whipping, or, though rare, death by stoning.

In general, with obvious exceptions such as Benazir Bhutto who rose to become Pakistan's prime minister before her assassination, women—especially poor women—in Pakistani society are treated (according to Western standards) like second-class citizens.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# PALESTINIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** pal-uh-STIN-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Israel and the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip); Jordan; Lebanon; Syria; worldwide

**POPULATION:** 4.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam; Christianity; Druze

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Palestine is the historical name for the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The land was first inhabited as long ago as 9000 BC on the West Bank of the Jordan. The Hebrews (ancestors of today's Jews) settled in Palestine in 1900 BC and had formed the kingdom of Israel, ruled by King David, by 1000 BC. Palestine was then taken over by a succession of foreign powers, including the Assyrians (722 BC), Babylonians (597–587 BC), Greeks (332–140 BC), and finally Romans (63 BC–7th century AD). Greeks ruled Palestine from 332–140 BC. In 140 BC, Simon Maccabaeus, following an earlier revolt led by Judas Maccabaeus against the Greeks, asserted Jewish theocratic rule over Palestine. From 140 to 63 BC, a Jewish kingdom was in power. The Romans drove the Jews out of Palestine after two revolts, one in AD 70 and the second in AD 135. The Arabs took control of the area during the Islamic expansion of the 7th century AD, and it is from these Arabs that modern-day Palestinians are descended. The Arabic word for Palestine is "Falastine," which reflects the ancestry of the Palestinians, who are believed to be descendants of the "Philistines," who were of Mycenaean origin. In 1516, the Turks invaded, and Palestine became part of the Ottoman Empire for the next 400 years, until the Empire was defeated in World War I (1914–19). During the war period, both the Arabs and the Jews were made promises by the British concerning the future fate of Palestine. In 1915, in the MacMahon-Hussein correspondence, the British pledged support for postwar Arab independence over a region understood by the Arabs to include Palestine. In 1917, in the Balfour Declaration, the British pledged support for a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. These promises ultimately supported the national aspirations of both people to the same land, a situation that resulted in the political impasse that still exists today in Palestine. Palestine was handed over to the British in 1920. The British, as the mandatory power, then controlled the land of Palestine until 1948. Britain relinquished the mandate and withdrew from Palestine on 14 May 1948, following prolonged and sporadic fighting between the Jews and the Arabs and attacks by both groups against the British.

In 1947, the United Nations divided Palestine into two states, one Jewish, and one Arab. When the independent state of Israel was declared on 15 May 1948, the Arab forces of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Transjordan advanced into Palestine. After the ensuing war, the West Bank came under Jordanian rule, the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian rule, and the remainder of Palestine came under Israeli rule. Many Palestinian Arabs fled during this time, but others stayed and continued to live in now-Israeli territory. In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in Jerusalem un-



der the leadership of Ahmad Shukairy. Yasser Arafat became the head of the PLO in 1969.

In the June 1967 war, Israel captured the West Bank (which had been under Jordanian rule since 1948) and the Gaza Strip (which had been under Egyptian rule since 1948). In 1967, Israel annexed East Jerusalem. The West Bank and Gaza Strip have since been called the Occupied Territories. Most of the residents there are Palestinian Arabs. The Israeli government and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles (DOP) in September 1993, resolving that Israeli troops would leave the West Bank and Gaza Strip areas. In 1994, limited Palestinian self-rule was established in Jericho and the Gaza Strip. Fighting continues over the question of a fully independent Palestinian homeland.

The term *Palestinian* used to refer to anyone who lived in the land of Palestine, Arab and Jew included. With the establishment of the modern state of Israel, however, the term *Palestinian* has narrowed to mean only those Arabs (both Christian and Muslim) and their descendants who lived in Palestine during the time of the British mandate (1920–48). For those Muslim and Christian inhabitants of the land who were incorporated into the Israeli state, many continue to identify themselves as Palestinians while holding Israeli citizenship but are often referred to as the “Israeli Arabs” or “1948 Arabs.” Because of the initial exodus of Palestinians following the establishment of the state in 1948 through forced evacuation by Israelis and escape, and through subsequent exiling from their

homeland, up to 6 million refugees and their descendants have a legitimate claim for right of return under international law. With more Palestinians outside of historic Palestine than inside it, a large component of the contemporary political identity is a product of various resistance campaigns, migrant estrangement, and attempts at reinstatement.

The Palestinian territories (now comprising the West Bank and Gaza Strip) have been the site of several democratic elections, including that of January 2006, when the Islamic political militia group Hamas won a majority of the parliamentary seats. Since that time, frequent attacks by Israel on Hamas strongholds and infighting between Palestinian factions has been prevalent. Today, there are two Palestinian parties, the Palestinian Authority (Fatah) and Hamas, each in charge of a territory, the former in the West Bank and the latter in the Gaza Strip. Recent Israeli attempts to oust the Hamas government and gain control in the Gaza Strip have escalated to a full siege of the territory, preventing supplies from entering. Various Human Rights groups and intergovernmental agencies have declared it a humanitarian disaster. In January 2008, effectively the “largest open-air prison,” became impossible to seal as tens of thousands of Palestinians, starved for food, medicine, fuel, and supplies breached a border crossing with Egypt and the border town of Rafah.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There are more than 11 million Palestinians in the world, about half of them in Israel and the Occupied Territories—the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The rest are scattered across the globe, although most live in neighboring Arab countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The United Nations lists 7 million Palestinian refugees. During the war years of 1947–49, 700,000–800,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes. When Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, another 300,000 Palestinians became refugees (and 150,000 who were already refugees were forced to move again).

Refugees live in camps or slums. Refugee camps set up by the UN Relief Workers Agency (UNRWA) originally consisted of simple shacks and unpaved alleys. Today, they are built of concrete, galvanized steel, and aluminum. Most camps are very overcrowded and become more so as time passes, more refugees pour in, and more children are born to the families already there. Some refugee camps in the Gaza Strip have more than 80,000 people living in them.

Many Palestinians continue to live as small subsistence farmers in rural villages. Others have managed to find good jobs and live quite well in the lands to which they have moved. There are also many urban centers in Palestine. The village of Ramallah serves as a commercial center for surrounding villages and is now the main hub of Palestinian economic, cultural, and political life. It houses banking establishments, construction companies, private schools, technical colleges, shops, restaurants, and so on. Ramallah has undergone a construction boom since the DOP was signed, reflecting the hope and conviction that peace would bring stability and prosperity to the West Bank. East Jerusalem is the center of political and intellectual leadership in the West Bank, housing human rights organizations, think-tanks, and the famous “Orient House,” owned by the family of political leader Faisal Husseini, where many meetings of political leaders take place. Over the years, some Israelis protested asking that Orient House should

be shut down because Palestinian leaders should not convene in East Jerusalem, which is not under Palestinian control. In 2001, Israel forces entered Orient House and confiscated most of its contents, effectively shutting down operations from the house.

Because Jerusalem holds symbolic political and religious importance for both Muslim and Christian Palestinians, discussions of its future fate are often heated. Both Jews and Palestinians insist on controlling East Jerusalem and instituting a capital for each of their states in the Holy City. The Israeli government has pledged to maintain sovereignty over it. Starting in 2002 and 2003, the Israeli government began erecting an extensive concrete and reinforced wall to separate the West Bank from Israel, under the claim of ensuring the security of Israelis from Palestinian attacks. The wall, which covers an extensive area of land, severs Palestinian land and cuts some areas off from water supplies and vital transport routes. In some instances, this wall that the Palestinians refer to as the “Apartheid Wall” wraps around cities, such as Qalqilya, and effectively prevents their growth. The wall has become a prominent symbol of Palestinian dispossession and Israeli security, a geographic landmark, and a source of much controversy. The wall itself has become a famous canvas for Palestinian, Israeli, and international artists and activists to express their discontent with the partition.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Palestinians speak Arabic. “Hello” in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam alaykum* (“Peace be with you”) with the reply of *wa ‘alaykum as salam* (“and to you peace”). *Ma’assalama* means “goodbye,” with the literal translation being “go with peace.” “Thank you” is *Shukran*, and “You’re welcome” is *Afwan*. “Yes” is *na’am*, and “no” is *la’a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are: *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba’a*, *khamisa*, *sita*, *sab’a*, *thamanya*, *tis’a*, and *ashara*.

Common names for boys are: Ahmad, Shukri, Isma’il, and Ibrahim. Muhammad is a very common Muslim name. Hanna is a very common Christian name. ‘Isa (Jesus) is used by both Muslims and Christians. Common names for girls are: Samia, Sawsan, Maysoon, Muna, and Fatima. On rare occasions, girls are given politically significant names, such as Al-Quds (Jerusalem).

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Palestinians are very religious people, regardless of their faith or denomination. For this reason, much of the local folklore grows out of religious superstitious interpretations. Many believe in *jinn*s, evil spirits who can take on the shapes of natural forms and cause trouble, and take extra measures to safeguard their homes from these. They also use amulets, household decorations and various rituals to deter jinn and people who are perceived as “evil” or envious.

A famous fictional character is Juha. School children read about Juha’s exploits in fables that teach some sort of lesson. For example, in one story, Juha buries a treasure in the ground and tries to remember its whereabouts by remembering the clouds that hover over it. Naturally, he loses his treasure because clouds move about and disappear.

A famous true story in which Palestinians take pride is the capturing of Jerusalem by Arab Muslims in the 7th century. In

AD 636, a few years after the Prophet Muhammad’s death (AD 632), Muslim armies led by Khalid Ibn al-Walid defeated the Byzantine army at the Battle of Uhud in Jordan. Shortly thereafter, Jerusalem was captured in AD 638.

Many Muslim stories cherished by Palestinians are similar to those in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, the stories of Noah and the Ark and Adam and Eve are important to Muslim and Christian Palestinians. Noah is known as the Prophet Nuh, Adam’s name remains the same, and Eve is known as Hawwa.

Today, Palestinian folklore is tied to feelings of estrangement, exile, and longing for home. Many of the stories from contemporary Palestinian literature and poetry deal directly with losing a homeland, feeling dispossessed, and glorifying resistance to the status quo. Traditional music and dance, Palestinian *dabke*, are a common way of expressing heritage and are enacted in weddings, festivals, and celebrations in Israel, the Occupied Territories, and the diaspora. The rituals continue in every location in the world where a Palestinian presence is prominent.

### **5 RELIGION**

Most Palestinians (75%) are Muslim, the majority belonging to the Sunni sect. Islam is the youngest of the world’s Abrahamic religions, having begun in the early 7th century AD when the prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah, the one true God (according to Islam). Within just a few years of Muhammad’s death in AD 632, Islam had spread through the entire Middle East, gaining converts at a dynamic rate.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570) in the Hijaz (modern-day Saudi Arabia), Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his outspoken denunciation of the pagan idols worshipped there (idols who attracted a lucrative pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina (AD 622), called the Hijra (or Hegira), is the first year of the Muslim calendar. Eventually Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the *Kaaba*, or Cube, building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship), and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam. All prayers are said facing Mecca, and each Muslim is expected, and greatly desires, to make a pilgrimage there (called a *Haj* or *Hadj*) at least once in his or her lifetime.

Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living. It is a total way of life, inseparable from the rest of one’s daily concerns. Therefore, religion, politics, faith, and culture are one and the same for Muslims. There is no such thing as the “separation of church and state,” or any distinction between private religious values and public cultural norms.

About 17% of Palestinians are Christians whose ancestors have lived in that land since the time Jesus Christ was born, ministered, and died there. There are sites in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which are visited by Christian pilgrims from around the world. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the room of the Last Supper, the Via Dolorosa, and the town of Nazareth are all important Christian attractions. Although some of these are located in East Jerusalem, which has been annexed by Israel, supervision of the individual sites is maintained by Palestinians, and Christian Palestinians hold Jerusalem’s holy places to be central to their Palestinian national aspirations. Palestine’s Christian population is com-

prised of many different denominations, from various Eastern Orthodox to Catholic and Protestant.

Palestine is also important to Muslims from around the world. It is believed that the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from Jerusalem on a night's journey known as *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*. On this site, Muslims built the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosques, which also gives Muslims cause to demand Muslim control over East Jerusalem. This site is believed to be the third holiest shrine to Muslims after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Some 8% of Palestinians are Druze [see **Druze**].

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Islam uses a lunar calendar, so Muslim holidays occur on a different date of the Gregorian calendar each year. The major Muslim holidays are *'Eid al-Fitr*, the end of Ramadan (a three-day festival); *'Eid al-Adha*, a feast at the end of the *Hadj* (the pilgrimage month to Mecca); the First of *Muharram*, the Muslim New Year; and the prophet Muhammad's birthday.

*'Eid al-Fitr* and *'Eid al-Adha* are celebrated by visiting close friends and relatives throughout the day. At least one family member, usually the mother, remains home to greet guests, and the rest of the family travels from home to home delivering holiday greetings. Children are usually showered with money from most of the adults they encounter. At every home, pastries called *Ka'k al-Id* are served. These are made of a flour called *smeed*, similar to semolina flour, mixed with lots of butter. The dough is shaped into small round forms and stuffed with a mixture of walnuts, cinnamon, and sugar, or with dates. They are baked and then sprinkled with powdered sugar. During the three-day *'Eid* celebration, everyone eats lots of *ka'k*.

The Christian holiday of Easter is also moveable, being calculated on a lunar basis. It always occurs sometime during March or early April. Other Christian holidays are: the Day of the Ascension; the Feast of the Assumption (August 15); and Christmas and Boxing Day (December 25–26). New Year's Day (January 1) is a secular holiday.

In 1977, an International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was declared as a political observance (November 29). Some politically significant events are observed each year by a general strike and demonstrations. Two examples are November 2, in protest over the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and May 15, in protest over the declaration of the state of Israel.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Males of both Christian and Muslim background are circumcised, and the family holds a great feast to celebrate the occasion. Marriages are another important rite of passage. A simple wedding is followed by a huge feast and celebration attended by family and friends, who bring gifts. Childbirth is considered an important function of marriage, in part because the Islamic religion favors having children, but also because Palestinians feel that reproduction is an important nationalist duty.

Education is highly valued, and families compare the grades of their children. The highest achievers are noted in newspapers. It is a great honor to be the highest achiever on both banks of the Jordan River (i.e., in both the West Bank [Palestine] and the East Bank [Jordan]).

After completing high school, many go on to college, and many get married. A Palestinian wedding ceremony consists of a simple exchange of vows, which is taken in the presence

of a Muslim clergyman and witnesses representing the two families. This ceremony is called the *Katb al-Kitab* or *Imlak*. Following the ceremony, there is a huge celebration and feast attended by families and friends. In some cases, candy is distributed at the reception; in other cases, a dinner is served, which most often features the meal called *mansaf*. This consists of layers of thin bread called *shraj*, topped with a layer of rice, and then drenched in a sauce made with yogurt and lamb stock. This is served in a large round pan and is covered with enough lamb chunks to feed all the guests.

When a Palestinian dies, there is a three-day mourning period for the family of the deceased. During this time, family and friends pay their condolences and recite passages from the Quran. The closest neighbors serve meals to the bereaved family and their guests for the three-day period. The next observance of the death is at the 40-day point, and once again the Quran is recited and meals are served to guests. *Mansaf* is often served as part of the meal.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When two Palestinians greet one another, they usually shake hands. It is also common for two women to kiss one another on the cheeks in greeting.

Neighbors have very cordial relations and look out for one another's interests. Palestinians in the West Bank generally live with their parents in the home of their birth until they are married or move abroad in search of work or education. Once an adult settles down and gets married, it is common for the couple to live out their lives in one house or apartment. Thus, because they do not move from home to home, neighbors get to know one another and establish life-long relationships. They celebrate happy occasions together and share in losses, such as deaths, together. Palestinians are known for their hospitality. One cannot visit a Palestinian home without being offered refreshment, at the minimum a soft drink or a cup of coffee or tea with a pastry.

Despite the hospitality and neighborly relations, it is considered impolite to impose on a neighbor by overextending one's visit. Invitations to dinner are often heartily declined so as to avoid imposing on the host, to which the host responds with an equally hearty insistence on the invitation.

Because Palestinian society is very conservative by Western standards, dating as it is understood in the West is not tolerated. If a man and woman are interested in one another, it is customary for the man to first declare his intentions to the woman's family. Dating to socialize or get to know one another is not allowed; the intent must be marriage. If a woman and her family approve of the prospective husband, there is a formal engagement, followed by a getting-to-know-one-another period. The marriage takes place at a time convenient to both parties. Increasingly, it is becoming common for two people to "fall in love" before approaching the woman's family, but the social norm is to "protect" the woman by having the man "screened" by her family before the courting period.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Palestinians live in a variety of conditions, from refugee camps to comfortable, middle-class (or even wealthy) homes in modern towns and cities. Traditional villages have one-story houses made of white stone, with a kitchen, a room for bathing, a li-

*wan* (sitting room) for receiving guests, and a few small rooms for sleeping.

Floors are covered with pieces of carpet, linoleum, or tile. Some of the wealthier homes now have wall-to-wall carpet. The houses have interior wooden doors, and exterior doors and window frames are usually made of a strong metal. Houses are often surrounded by small gardens separated from the street by a high wall (called a *sur*) with a gate. Wealthier families often have two stories, an upstairs for living and entertaining, and a downstairs area (called a *makhzan*) for storage and utilities. Such homes have indoor plumbing and electricity, whereas other families get their water from local wells and cook on small charcoal stoves. Most urban Palestinians have radios, cassette players, and stoves and ovens for cooking. Most also have refrigerators and television sets. Videocassette recorders are frequently brought into the country by Palestinians traveling abroad. To this day, few Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Gaza have computers and regular, reliable internet access. Most Palestinians of different ages rely on cell phones as an indispensable means of communication.

Refugee camps set up by the UN Relief Workers Agency (UNRWA) provide small, cement-block homes with corrugated metal roofs and doors. Some have no running water or electricity. Families cook on a metal grate laid over a tin container filled with charcoal, sleep on thin mats on the floor (which are then rolled up and out of the way during the day), and bathe and wash their clothes in metal drums filled with water from a hose at community faucets.

In most instances, whether in the cities or refugee camps, Palestinian nuclear and extended families live within close quarters and sometimes even under the same roof. It is generally discouraged for a son or daughter to move out of the family house prior to marriage.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

The family is the central organizing unit of Palestinian society. Traditional village life used to be regulated by the *hamula*—a male-dominated extended family system, or clan-based operation. The *hamula* is disappearing as ancestral clan-controlled lands are taken away or lost, but families are still very important, and extended family members often live near or with each other.

Arranged marriages continue to be the norm in some places, with first cousins or members of the same village being the preferred match. Marriage by individual choice is becoming common in other areas, however, especially as more males and females meet in universities, which are all co-educational. Child-marriage and polygamy still occur, although not in great numbers. Palestinians have one of the highest birth-rates in the world, and approximately 45% of the population is under the age of 14. Children are taught to use good manners and to respect their elders. In fact, the elderly continue to live with the family of their sons or daughters. There are very few nursing homes, and it is rare and a dishonor to send one's elderly parent to a nursing home. Women are expected to fulfill the traditional role of homemaker, doing all the cooking, cleaning, laundry, and so on, as well as taking care of the men's and children's needs. Women are beginning to break out of these roles, however; 44% of the students at the five West Bank universities are women. Particularly under Israeli occupation, as more and more men were arrested by the military government

for political activities hostile to the state of Israel, women were forced to fill in for men who were detained in prison. Women thus assumed jobs and became heads of households. Having attained prominent social and professional roles, many women now insist on equality of the sexes.

Women are to be highly respected in a family. Brothers must show respect for their sisters and are obligated to look out for the welfare of their sisters even into adulthood. On holidays, brothers are expected to give their sisters gifts, although sisters do not have to reciprocate.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Palestinians of the older generation still wear traditional clothing. Men wear a long loose robe called a *jallabiyeh* and the common Arab headscarf, or *kaffiyeh*, held in place with a twisted band called an *ogaal*. Women wear a long black peasant dress, known as a *thob*, with an embroidered bodice, and a shawl over the head and shoulders. Women from different towns can be distinguished by the embroidery and style of the *thob*. The designs are cross-stitched, sometimes by the woman herself, and sometimes by a professional seamstress. The latter can charge hundreds of dollars for each bodice she embroiders, because each one takes days of sewing by hand to prepare. *Thobs* are made either of linen or velvet. A particularly fancy velvet dress, known as the *malaka*, is traditionally worn by brides. It is often made of burgundy and green velvet and has silver or gold embroidery.

Most younger Palestinians wear Western-style clothing, with traditional headscarves that cover the hair for young women. Religiosity increased during the years of the Intifada (beginning 1987), and this has been reflected in an increase in religious attire, known as *shari`a* clothing or *jilbab*, for young women. This is basically a long jacket-like dress that covers the entire body, with a scarf worn on the head to cover the hair.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Palestinians eat typical Middle Eastern food, such as *falafel* (deep-fried chickpea balls or patties), *hummus* (ground chickpeas with garlic, lemon juice, and *tahini*, a sesame paste), lamb, chicken, rice, nuts, and eggplant. A favorite Palestinian candy is *halvah*, a sweet nougat made of sesame seeds and honey. For meals, some rural Palestinians sit on mats or cushions around a cloth laid on the floor and scoop up their food with pieces of pita bread, called *khubz*. They drink lots of strong black Turkish coffee. A recipe for *khubz* follows.

### Khubz (Pita Bread)

2 teaspoons dry yeast  
 1 tablespoon salt  
 2½ cups warm water  
 5 to 6 cups whole wheat flour  
 or 3 cups whole wheat and 2 to 3 cups white flour  
 or 5 to 6 cups white flour

Dissolve yeast in half a cup of warm water. Cover and let sit until yeast ferments, about 10 minutes. Stir 3 cups of flour, salt, dissolved yeast, and remaining 2 cups of water in a large bread bowl or mixing bowl. Add remaining 2 to 3 cups of flour in small portions, kneading well with the hands after each addition. Keep adding flour until the dough holds together well and stops sticking to your hands.

Knead very well on a lightly floured surface for 8 to 10 minutes. The dough should be smooth and elastic. Return the dough to the mixing bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Wrap the entire bowl, including the bottom, in a blanket or heavy towel, and allow dough to rise until doubled in size, about 2 to 3 hours.

On a lightly floured surface, cut the dough into 8 balls. Cover the balls and let rest for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400°F. While the oven is heating, use a rolling pin to flatten each ball of dough into a circle about ¼ inch thick and 8 to 9 inches in diameter.

Beginning with the first loaf you rolled, set each loaf directly on the oven rack. You can bake two loaves at a time, one on each rack. When the loaves begin to brown, turn them so that they brown evenly on both sides (about 3 minutes per side). (If you find it difficult to drop the dough directly onto the oven shelf, use a pizza pan or a pizza stone to lay the loaf on.)

As each loaf comes out of the oven, wrap it in a clean cloth or towel to keep it soft until the baking process is complete. After the loaves have cooled, store in plastic bags.

Other Palestinian favorites are zucchini and grape leaves, both stuffed with a rice and meat mixture. Because olive trees are plentiful in the hilly terrain, Palestinians also enjoy olive oil, and preserved olives, harvested in the summer, are eaten year round. Almonds, plums, apples, cherries, and lemons are enjoyed in many households fresh off the trees in family gardens. Pork is prohibited in the Muslim religion, as is alcohol. Many Palestinians are Christian, however, so alcoholic beverages are served in some restaurants and sold in some stores, generally in urban centers, such as Ramallah and Jerusalem.

The most traditional Palestinian meals are *maqluba*, *musakhan*, and *mansaf*. *Musakhan* is a common main dish that originated in the Jenin and Tulkarm area in the northern West Bank. It consists of roasted chicken over bread, topped with pieces of fried sweet onions and pine nuts. *Maqluba* is a rice and baked eggplant casserole mixed with cooked cauliflower, carrots, and chicken or lamb. Dating back to the 13th century, *maqluba* is eaten throughout the Levant, it has a particular significance among Palestinians. *Mansaf* is a traditional meal in the central West Bank and Negev region in the southern West Bank, having its roots from the Bedouin population of ancient Palestine.

### <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Palestinian children attend schools similar to those in the West. Children begin school in kindergarten and attend elementary, preparatory, and high school. There are many types of school systems, due in large part to the history of foreign rule and influence over Palestine. For refugee children, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) runs schools in which children receive a free education and some assistance with educational materials. The majority of Palestinian children attend free public schools. There are also many private schools for those who can afford them. Private schools tend to be predominantly religious. Islamic schools were established by local Muslims, but Christian schools were established by foreigners with the assistance of local Palestinians. The latter include Friends' schools (run by Quakers from the United

States), and the Frere and Rosary schools (run by French Catholics). All girls, whether in UNRWA, public, or private schools, wear uniforms. Boys dress as they wish within limits reflecting the social norms. Palestinians have the highest percentage of university graduates in the Arab world. The five Palestinian universities on the West Bank have a combined enrollment of about 5,000 students. These universities are hotbeds of social and political activism and have been closed down from time to time by the Israelis to try to put a stop to the students' revolutionary ideas and actions. Today, the most prominent Palestinian university is Beirzeit University outside of Ramallah. Recent high-caliber campuses have developed throughout the West Bank, including the Arab-American University in Jenin.

The average literacy rate for Palestinians is one of the highest in the region and the Arab world. The overall literacy rate is reported at 93%.

### <sup>14</sup> CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional Palestinian dancing is segregated by sex. Men dance in a semicircle with their arms around each other or holding hands as they perform the *dabka*. In the *dabka*, which is performed at all wedding receptions, dancers circle the dance floor following the lead and instructions of a designated leader. Women also perform the *dabka* at social events, and in professional performances men and women do the *dabka* together. Dancing is often done to the rhythm of a drum called a *derbakah*. Other musical instruments are the lute and the *shebabah*, a reed instrument. Afif Bulos is a popular contemporary Palestinian musician.

Contemporary Palestinian writers include literary critical and intellectual Edward Said, who is Palestinian-American. The famous Palestinian poet and short story writer Ghassan Kanafani. His poetry and stories, like much Palestinian literature, features themes of protest against the Israeli occupation and reminiscences of times predating the occupation. Poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote the protest poem "Investigation" and many other poems that have become iconic in Palestinian life. Rashid Khalidi, a historian, political commentator and professor is a renowned voice on the Palestinian-Israeli situation. Numerous radio and television personalities, many of whom work for Arabic satellite stations Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, as well as Western news agencies. Sabri Jiryis, a radio personality, is the author of *The Arabs in Israel*, a book about events in 1956 in the Palestinian town of Kafr Qasim. The famous cartoonist, Naji Al-Ali, is famous for his character *Handala*, a small impoverished Palestinian boy, who is omnipresent in his work and acts as the witness to Palestinian suffering. Painter Jammana al-Husseni is also internationally known.

### <sup>15</sup> WORK

It is difficult for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories to find work. Unemployment is a serious problem among the many refugees. When they do find jobs, they are often paid low wages.

Many Palestinians from Gaza and some from the West Bank cross over into Israel for employment. In Israel, they hold low-wage jobs as restaurant waiters, street cleaners, construction workers, and dishwashers. Since the signing of the DOP, the borders between Israel and the Palestinians have often been closed, causing extreme hardship for the Palestinians who once relied on Israel for jobs.





*Palestinian school children walk back to their home in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip. Because of the shortage of school classrooms and teachers, some Palestinian children have to study in two shifts. (AP Images/Laurent Rebour)*

Although many Palestinians hold college degrees, jobs compatible with those degrees are difficult to find. This leads to much of the frustration that is ultimately expressed in riots and demonstrations against the Israeli occupation. Under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who died in 1995, discussions were underway to develop an industrial complex along the borders to solve the unemployment problem. Under the consecutive governments of Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and now Tzipi Livni, the situation has gotten progressively worse for Palestinians seeking work. The construction of the wall throughout the West Bank has made it more difficult for Palestinians to seek and attend work in once-adjacent areas.

In Jordan, Palestinians who were once escapees from the West Bank dominate the private sector, holding 60 to 65% of the jobs in banking, 60 to 75% in retailing, and 75 to 80% in the import-export business.

## **16** SPORTS

Although Palestinians in the Occupied Territories have little time or space for organized sports activities, soccer is popular. It is played in schools and during free time in the many fields of the West Bank. There has been little attention given to organized, professional sporting events. An Israeli professional soccer team comprised of both Jews and Palestinians

won the Israeli league championship and received much coverage. Fledgling Palestinian athletics and the struggle to succeed under dire circumstances have become topics of several documentary films.

## **17** ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Informal street-side games of soccer are a popular form of recreation among Palestinians. They also enjoy listening to poetry and music and playing the very popular Middle Eastern version of backgammon. Men smoke the *narghila*, or water-pipe (like a hookah) at corner cafés and coffeehouses. Only men go to coffeehouses, where they socialize, make business deals, and play cards and backgammon.

Children play hopscotch, jump rope, and marbles on the sidewalks. Families take evening walks, especially during the month of Ramadan after breaking the fast at sundown. There are outdoor parks, called *muntazahs*, where families order ice cream or a meal and eat outdoors.

Palestinians watch television programs broadcast from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and sometimes Syria. One of the favorite television characters is Ghawar al-Tosheh, a Syrian comedic character who often criticizes government policies in his storylines. Popular music videos are frequently viewed by Palestinian youth along with Arab and international soccer matches. Today, satellite television is immensely popular throughout the

Palestinian territories and is watched for news, entertainment and religious programming. Several Palestinian television and radio stations now broadcast and have gained increasing popularity. On Fridays, the noon prayer is broadcast on television for Muslims.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Some Palestinians are skilled in the art of calligraphy, and they sketch Quranic verses and expressions in beautiful designs. Calligraphy shows are held at universities and associations, and artwork is sold for profit. Other artists draw pictures of political protest, predominantly against the occupation. One popular pastime is to memorize and recite verses of the Quran. Children begin this process at an early age, and it continues through adulthood. Women can often be seen sitting on their front porches knitting for their families, cross-stitching or embroidering the bodices for their traditional dresses, or cross-stitching items for craft shows, such as wall decors or Quranic verses. In Jerusalem, Ramallah, or Bethlehem, tourists can purchase crafts made of olive wood or ivory, two of the most common materials used by craftsmen. Jewelry boxes, crosses, scenes of the Last Supper, camels, mosques, and other items are handcrafted from olive wood and ivory.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The main social problem for Palestinians is the war with Israel over rights to the Palestinian homeland. Palestinians are a people without a country, living at best as displaced persons and at worst as refugees in crowded camps. The war with Israel has been going on for decades, and younger generations of Palestinians have never known a time when their people were at peace. They grow up with a consciousness shaped by conflict and violence. Although the PLO and the Israeli government signed the Declaration of Principles on September 1993, and limited Palestinian self-rule began to be established in Jericho and the Gaza Strip on 18 May 1994, the agreement is opposed by extremists on both sides, and the peace that existed is very shaky. The Palestinian fight for an independent homeland, the tempo of which increased with the *intifada* (or “uprising”) begun in December 1987, continues. The number of casualties has been enormous, and the problems—physical, social, psychological, and spiritual—caused by the perpetual unrest are too numerous to count. The major grievance of Palestinians is that their political and civil rights are not being upheld by the occupation. They assert that the right to self-determination, which has been affirmed by the United Nations, gives them the right to decide their own system of government and to establish statehood. A 1995 poster distributed by a Palestinian human rights organization refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the caption stating: “The Palestinians are also part of this universe.”

The 1994 agreement, which gave Palestinians self-rule, soon crumbled as the Israeli counterparts refused to abide by the accord and discontinue building settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Increasing frustration and anxiety came to a head when the Israeli candidate for prime minister, Ariel Sharon, visited the Old City of Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, which is adjacent to the Dome of the Rock (Mosque) in September 2000. Palestinians revolted and protested his visit, clashes ensued, with casualties sustained by both sides. The violence escalated and spread beyond the holy sites and to other areas in the

Palestinian territories. Sharon was elected as prime minister in 2001 with the agenda of controlling the Palestinians. The period that followed saw ruthless attacks, arbitrary Palestinian home demolitions, an expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, an increase in targeted killing of Palestinian politicians, and the construction of the wall separating Israeli and Palestinian villages and restricting Palestinian movement. Whilst the first Intifada was called on by Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, it is commonly understood that the second Intifada, known as Al-Aqsa Intifada was spontaneous.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

With very large numbers of Palestinian men detained in Israeli prisons, the predicament of Palestinian women is rather complicated. They are often thought of as the symbol of Palestinian resistance and perseverance, as even the nation, Falastin, is often depicted as a woman. The burden of living under occupation is often magnified for Palestinian women, who find themselves as caregivers and breadwinners. The frequency at which they must face the death or lengthy detainment of males in the family and uncertain futures have forced many women to take on enormous responsibilities as spouses, mothers, and the sole source of income.

However, the plight of Palestinian women has not gone unnoticed. Many solidarity groups between women of Israeli and Palestinian background have sprung up in the early 2000s and have become increasingly influential, including some that resist Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, house demolitions, and violations of Palestinian rights.

Palestinian women are now becoming increasingly prominent on both the political and cultural stages. Academic, diplomat, and consummate politician, Hanan Ashrawi, has been a prominent figure of the Palestinian struggle for representation. Also, feminist, activist, and humanitarian, Samiha Khalil (known commonly as Umm Khalil), is among the notable Palestinian women of the late 20th century. A growing number of popular Palestinian women figures, including musicians, artists, and authors such as Ghada Karmi, have been influential in placing their people in the spotlight.

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—reviewed by A. Iskandar

# PAMIRI

**PRONUNCIATION:** pa-MIR-ee

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mountain Tajiks

**LOCATION:** Tajikistan

**POPULATION:** 150,000

**LANGUAGES:** East Iranian language variations; Tajik; Russian

**RELIGION:** Islam (Ismailism and Sunni Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Pamiri peoples, also called the Pamirian or Mountain Tajiks (*Pamirtsy* in Russian) comprise seven ethnic groups of Tajikistan in formerly Soviet Central Asia. They go by the names of Shugnis, Rushanis, Wakhanis, Bartangis, Yazgulemis, Khufis, and Ishkashimis. Although their histories tie in to the history of the Tajiks of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, there are some unique features.

Local tradition has it that the Pamiris are descendants of Alexander the Great from his 4th century BC invasions into the remote and inaccessible Pamir mountain valleys. Pamiris have strikingly European features for people living in so remote an area of Central Asia. Reference to Shugnis and Rushanis of these high valleys shows up in Chinese chronicles by the 2nd century AD. What is also known from the archaeological and historical sources in Classical Greek and Old Persian is that ethnic groups such as the Saka and Dari, who lived in the Pamirs approximately 3,000 years ago, helped give rise to today's Pamiris. Anthropologists refer to such processes as ethnogenesis, or the birth and growth of ethnic groups.

The Pamiris have never really had their own country or lived independently of surrounding powers, although tiny independent kingdoms existed for a short period after Tibetan rule during the 8th and 9th centuries. Pamiri history is marked by conflicts over territory and scarce natural resources. Neighboring Kyrgyz have been a persistent rival. While Afghani and Uzbek rulers vied for control over the Mountainous Badakhshan region where the Pamiris lived throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, so too were these lands coveted by the Russians and the British, whose imperialistic challenges to one another were relaxed by 1905. By 1904 Russia had annexed the Pamiri lands from the Emir of Bukhara.

After three years of incessant struggle, the Pamiri lands were brought under Soviet rule and in 1925 designated the Special Pamir Province. Just a few months later, the area was redesignated the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province that was later joined to the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, created in 1929. From 1992 to 1997, independent Tajikistan was wracked by civil war, and the Pamiris played a major role in fighting against Kuliabi Tajiks of the Kurgan-Tiube region. Pamiris and Garmis are allies in a very complicated and violent conflict that left hundreds of thousands of people homeless, injured, and dead. The dispute concerned political power, the control of economic resources, and organized crime. In the end, the Pamiris gained little from the conflict, but from the late 1990s onward they have benefited from international aid, so while poor and struggling their cultures and identities remain fairly stable.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Small numbers of Pamiris live in Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan, but the vast majority live in their autonomous enclave within Tajikistan. Overall, Pamiris number about 150,000, most of whom live in the high mountain valley of the Western Pamirs, in the southwestern part of the Badakhshan province. These mountains, known as the "Roof of the World" in Persian (*Bam-i Dunya*) are the second highest in the world after the Himalayas. Several peaks there top 7,000 m (20,000 ft). The area's climate is dry and continental: winters are long and cold, and summers short and cool. Snowfalls may block roadways as early as mid-September.

Pamiris live in close geographical proximity to one another. On the south side of their territory runs the Pyandzh River, separating them from Afghanistan. On the west the Afghanistani province of Badakhshan borders, and to the north and east is greater Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Only two major roadways link the Pamiri territory to major centers, connecting Dushanbe and Osh with Mountainous Badakhshan. Few places in the entire former USSR are as remote as this.

Although these harsh lands yield little agricultural production, there is cultivation of cereals, potatoes, tobacco, and melons and squashes in the lowest valleys. Water resources are good and hydroelectric power plentiful. There are few natural resources aside from small deposits of gold, asbestos, and rich pastures for animal husbandry. Sheep, goats, cattle, and yak are the main herds.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Pamiris speak East Iranian languages closely related to the modern Persian of Iran, Tajik, and Pashto/Dari (spoken by the majority of Afghans). These languages are known as the Galcha group. Close relations and geographical nearness aside, most of these languages are mutually incomprehensible. Tajik and the Shugni-Rushan dialect serve as variants of a common language among the people. Yazgulemi, Wakhi, and Ishkashimi are very distinct dialects. Although attempts have been made to create alphabets for these languages, they remain non-literary. Children learn in Tajik and Russian. Across international borders, Pamiris communicate in Persian and Dari. All of the people are multi-lingual. These modern languages display a clear connection to some of the great Iranian languages of the distant past, including Sogdian, Bactrian, and Saka, which had flourishing literary traditions.

Some examples of Tajik phrases include: "*Turo chi lozim ast?*" ("What is it that you need?"), and "*Shumo chi mekhured?*" ("What would you like to eat?").

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Pamiri folklore takes the form of tales, legends, proverbs, and sayings. Heroism relating to bravery in battle and in combating nature's harsh elements commonly appears in the tales and stories. However, most concrete information about Pamiri folklore generally appears under Tajik folk culture.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

National consciousness is strongly based on the Islam of the Pamiris. They are members of the Ismaili sect, which was accepted in the 11th century and spread through the great mystic poet Nasir-i Khoshrow. Ismailism is a secretive sect charac-



terized by the divine worship of Ali, who was the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad. Ali is believed to be Muhammad's divinely inspired successor. Although closely related to Shi'ism, Ismailism broke with mainstream Shi'ism in the 8th century AD. Pamiris do not believe in the need for mosques or clergymen, but there are rather informal houses of prayer and de facto, wandering holy men. These people maintain contact with the principal Ismaili center in the world, located in India, whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan. Most Bartangis and Yazgulemis practice Sunni Islam (through their contact with the Bukharan Emirate), which predominates throughout the world.

Many traditional Pamiri beliefs and rituals relate to agriculture and the herds. All sorts of prohibitions and practices determine when planting and watering may be done and what will lead to the best conditions for agricultural success. Rituals connected with the threshing of grain ensure that people will be full and satisfied with the bread baked from the grain. A scarecrow symbolizing an ancient deity helps purify the area near the piles of wheat while people pour sweets atop the pile and burn sacred grasses around its perimeter. Once the flour is finally made and the first loaf baked, everyone from a given family partakes until they say "*bas*" ("enough"). The bread from the first piles of newly threshed grain is known as *basik*.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Pamiris celebrate *Novruz*, which falls on the vernal equinox (around March 21) and marks the beginning of the Persian new year. *Novruz* is celebrated with music, dances, and a great

deal of feasting. People generally wear very colorful clothes on this day, or new clothes if they have them. The foods served contain the first vegetables or greens, as *Novruz* is a harbinger of the land coming back to life after a long period of dormancy. The celebratory atmosphere of *Novruz* usually continues for two or three days after the initial celebrations.

"First Furrow" marks the beginning of the planting season. People address the saint of farming, known as *Bobo-m-Dekh-tona* ("Grandpa Farmer"). A public feast is held, and people commemorate the origins of irrigation. Another public holiday marks the time in early summer when women take flocks out to be pastured.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage include parties for the circumcision of little boys, and women celebrate a girl's first menstrual period. Other rites include marriages and those marking death. Unfortunately, none of these rites are well documented in the scant literature available about the Pamiris. Specific rites of passage for the Pamiris appear to be similar to those of the Tajiks and the peoples of Afghanistan.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

"*Assalomu alaikum!*" is the standard way of saying hello. After that, people proceed to ask one another about their families and their work. Surprise or pleasure in eating may be expressed by lolling one's head from side to side. If told of something unexpected or strange, people are likely to let out a high-pitched "Uhhhhhhhh!". Use of the hands to emphasize and be descriptive is also common. One favorite gesture that all Central Asians use is moving a cupped hand back and forth across the mouth. This signifies going for something to eat.

Spending time with extended family and friends who live nearby is very common as is visiting relatives who have moved away from Badakhshan. Young people do not date, as this would be considered immoral behavior. However, young people may meet clandestinely while out working in the fields or doing chores on behalf of their families. Intimacy between the young is reserved for marriage.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

As in so many other parts of the former USSR, declining health standards prevail. The overall decline in the economy coupled with the Tajik civil war made it much harder for people to find good foodstuffs, medicines, or medical treatment, although this has taken a gradual turn for the better since about 2000. Basic health care is now provided by relief agencies such as the International Red Cross/ Red Crescent, the Aga Khan Foundation, and the France-based *Medecins Sans Frontiers* (Doctors Without Borders). Under Soviet rule, all public health care was free of charge. Diseases and illnesses of the past, such as leprosy, trachoma, syphilis, and typhus were eradicated after World War II. Opium smoking was also common and created very debilitating conditions. Indications are that some Pamiris have become addicted to opium once again.

Consumer goods have greatly improved Pamiri life, especially with regard to food, since variety has been introduced to the traditional diet. All sorts of housewares and clothing also became available through the Soviet state stores, but this development has since been reversed.

Most Pamiri villages exist at the triangle of a river delta. Main houses are not arranged on streets, but rather stand amid the agricultural fields and orchards. Doors to houses and other farm buildings open inward toward an interior courtyard. From outside the settlement complex, only bare walls are visible. Ordinarily, the inner courtyards contain small gardens and apricot and mulberry trees.

Most homes are made of unworked stone with wooden roofs. Stone workers use clay to cement pieces together. Walls are made either from stone or from the clay from loess soils, which men mold into bricks for the wall construction. The roofs are put together with boards and beams. From outside, the roof appears as a layered vault, and from within it forms a stepped ceiling. The central beam in the house, the most important roof support, is known as the *shashtan*. It is carved and decorated, and plays a role in people's spiritual lives. Upon entering an empty house, one pays respects to the *shashtan*.

One room of a house contains alcoves in which these people eat, sleep, and receive guests when the weather turns cold. Today Pamiri homes always have well-equipped guest rooms with rugs, quilts, furniture, and often a television or radio. Wall niches often serve as a place for drawers, dishes, or knick-knacks.

The standard of living for all Tajiks has decreased markedly since the advent of the civil war, and conditions for the Pamiris would certainly have been even worse over the past few years had it not been for international relief.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Pamiri women traditionally enjoy fewer restrictions than is true of Tajik women. They participate in public gatherings on a par with men and work both outside and inside the home. They never wore veils, nor were they ever relegated to a particular part of their houses. Still, their work in the household is arduous. Among their specialties are pottery (made without potter's wheels) and all aspects of milking and milk product preparation.

In a typical Pamiri living arrangement, several patrilineal extended families would live together and cooperate economically. Often all married sons and their families would live in their father's house. Pamiris traditionally married a first or second cross or parallel cousin of either the father's or mother's lineage. The mother's brother is considered more closely related than the father's, and plays a major role in arranging marriages and helping his nephews and nieces if they encounter hardships. One Yazgulemi saying states: "Wherever you find an uncle on your mother's side, you don't need one from your father's."

Marriages today are increasingly based on Quranic law. Members of the patrilineal group provide all sorts of gifts to ensure an easy start for the newlyweds. Most young women do not marry before the age of 18. Weddings are always accompanied by huge parties.

Pets are not kept, and even shepherds have no dogs to help them protect their flocks from wolves.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Pamiri clothes today are Western in style for the most part. Headwear is important to both men and women. Men are distinguished by Central Asian skullcaps (*toki*), around which are often wrapped thin wool turbans, or by Russian-style fur or

woolen hats, depending upon the season. Women wear either light or heavy woolen kerchiefs and shawls. Summertime kerchiefs are either all white or full of sparkling gold thread. Historically, most clothing was made from rough-hewn cotton or hemp, but some elite Pamiris wore white silk.

In warm weather, farming men typically wore a *kurta iaktagi* (a loose open-necked white shirt) and *tambun* (baggy trousers). In slightly cooler weather, a light woolen robe (*gilim*) was added. Younger men often wore an Afghani-style vest known as a *voskat*, around which a belt (*miend*) was affixed. Boots of wool and leather were handcrafted, as were wooden galoshes for wet and snowy weather. Both men and women wore these.

Women's garments were also quite simple, consisting of woolen, shirt-like dresses with tunic-like outer robes. Women's pants, *sharovari*, were narrower than men's. Although they also wore shawls as head wraps, they apparently never had heavy winter outer garments. Women adorned themselves with jewelry made from animal antlers, along with bronze bracelets and earrings. They braided their hair and kept their braids in different positions and at different lengths depending on their age and the number of children they had.

## **12 FOOD**

Until the mid-20th century, bread was literally the staff of life in the Pamiri diet, and people ground whatever grain or legume was available for bread, including peas, millet, and wheat. Pamiris also ate noodle dishes with occasional pieces of mutton, beef, or yak meat added. Milk products were common in the form of sour cream and butter from cows and yaks. In the lower valleys, some squashes and melons have been cultivated. Salt and tea were relatively unknown until the recent past. During the Soviet period, potatoes and cabbage were added to the Pamiri crop repertoire, and these nutritious foods greatly enhanced local diets. The Soviet administration also introduced canned and fresh goods that were regularly delivered to state stores.

For feasts and holidays, the main culinary specialty is boiled meat, which people tend to eat in large quantities because they dine on it so rarely. Meat and other dishes are ordinarily consumed with one's fingers, but soups or porridges made from peas or mung beans are eaten with spoons or pieces of bread. In the late summer and early fall, fruits such as apricots and plums, along with walnuts and almonds, are available. A typical breakfast includes bread, butter, and tea with perhaps occasional honey, because some small apiaries are kept.

Today, Tajik foods are a regular part of the Pamiri diet. Following is a recipe for a typical Tajik dish, "Beef and Peas":

Cut beef into large pieces and place in a pot. Add water and bring to a boil. Then add chopped onion and pre-soaked peas. Let all of these boil till cooked. Ten minutes before turning off the flame add salt and spices. Serve the peas piled atop the meat, and add green onions and red pepper. Serve a bullion separately.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Most children finish high school, but very few go on to university or technical schools unless they leave Mountainous Badakhshan. Those who do attend university must move to Dushanbe, the Tajik capital. Although parents encourage both boys and girls to finish their required education, they do not necessarily encourage university training as it has little bear-

ing on Badakhshani existence. Recently, the Aga Khan Foundation, an international Ismaili relief organization, laid plans to build the “University of the Mountains” in Central Asia, and they plan to build the first affiliate in Khorog, which is the regional capital of Badakhshan province (Gorno-Badakhshan) in Tajikistan; this university would be a huge boost for higher education among the Pamiri peoples. Nearly everyone is able to read and write Tajik, but a far smaller percentage know Russian well. What Russian they do know is from contact with television and radio.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Singing accounts for the bulk of Pamiri musical culture. Several types of poetical songs are popular among the Pamiris, including the *lalaik* and *duduvik*. Recently renowned Bakakhshani instrumental and vocal ensembles have toured the world, especially the United States. The *zhurni* is a common kind of comic love song among the Shugnis. Pantomime dances accompanied by music, and *bobopirak* satirical dances take place from time to time. The most common instrument is the guitar-like *rubob*. Literature does not exist per se, but storytelling is a common pastime.

#### **15 WORK**

Pamiri work is dominated by collectivized agricultural chores, and there are few tasks that are solely the domain of either men or women. One notable exception is that only women shear sheep, whereas only men shear goats. Women also tend to all of the milking, whereas men act as the shepherds, even though women initially take the animals out to pasture.

During the warmer months, Pamiris practice vertical transhumance—that is, they move their flocks up and down the mountains in accordance with weather conditions and the availability of grasses for their animals. Choice of crops depends very much on the elevation of a particular valley. The lower the elevation, the greater the variety of crops. The few non-agricultural jobs that do exist relate to town life and transportation. Some men and women work in clerical and administrative professions and some as gold miners, power-plant workers, and as long-distance truckers.

The elaborate systems for much of the terraced agriculture that is practiced in the Pamirs require constant maintenance. The canals must be cleared of rocks and debris, especially after the winter thaw. Farmers must work fast after the snow has melted on their fields, and people help one another out to clear the fields of rocks as they dig up and turn the soil over twice.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Soccer was introduced to the Pamiris relatively recently, along with other sports, such as basketball and volleyball. Traditionally, women play a ball game with a roll of tightly wound wool. Slingshots, tag, bow and arrow competitions, and polo are all favorites. Polo is played by two teams with up to 40 people in total, and players use long makeshift sticks and a wooden ball.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

A relatively small number of these isolated people own televisions, but those who do are exposed to world culture via Russian television stations. Movie theaters exist in all of the major settlements, including Khorog and Ishkashim, and these also

serve to broaden people’s perspective on the world “below them.” Much of popular culture today is dominated by grade-B karate movies and violent American cinema.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Pamiris historically produced textiles made of wool and imported cotton. Vertical looms were employed for crafting the *palas*—a local rug. Smiths and metalworkers made decorative jewelry. Millstones were another craft item made by the Pamiris for their water-driven grain mills.

Wakhanis, Yazgulemis, and Rushanis are well-respected for their wooden containers and pots, particularly for large serving plates. Women potters make fine pottery from a unique gray clay that they strengthen by tempering with goat hair. Men create textile threads by spinning and weaving yak and goat hair, and women make heavy socks from camel and sheep hair.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Tajik civil war destroyed thousands of lives and ruined any chance for national economic growth until the early 2000s. Social problems are substantial, and the human rights situation has deteriorated greatly because Pamiris are suspected of being criminals in organized gangs. The Tajik and Russian military forces engaged in the fighting have dealt with many Pamiri communities rather severely. These communities are very loyal to one another, so they are very reluctant to report on the whereabouts or doings of any of their members. Civil rights became a casualty of war, and their full restoration requires a prolonged period of peace and development; fortunately, the signs that this is happening gradually are encouraging.

Along with organized criminal activities and links to criminal groups in Russia, social problems involving drugs and alcoholism have occurred, but this is no indictment of Pamiri society as a whole. The vast majority of the Pamiri population is poor and in desperate need of international food relief, medicines, jobs, and reconstruction. This area was always one of the most impoverished in the USSR, and the outlook for the near future shows that improvements will be incremental but significant. It will be possible that the survival of these remote peoples and languages has some chance, but most depends on the decisions that young people make, either staying in Badakhshan or moving to other parts of Central Asia and Russia.

Tajikistan has experienced a labor migration that includes 10-12% of its overall population, and the Pamiris must be included in these ranks. While people have enjoyed international aid, cultural preservation projects, and development work, they still are impoverished, and this is why many young men and women have taken to traveling to Russia in the main, to try to make better lives for themselves. Many Tajik citizens are now settling permanently in Russia, too.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Pamiri people show few gendered differences from many other Central Asian peoples, although men and women tend to keep less of a separation from one another in social affairs, than say, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen. Owing to the nature of Pamiri dwellings, men and women actually share the same living and sleeping spaces. Their sex segregation in this sense is rather exceptional compared to most other Central Asian peoples.

Culturally, men and women have a division of labor around the home, with women being responsible for most domestic chores, as well as many of those dealing with agricultural work.

Pamiri girls are encouraged to get basic grammar schooling, but usually not much beyond this. Of course, it tends to be similar for boys.

As mentioned above, many Pamiris have joined the ranks of other Tajik labor migrants, but little accurate data seems to be available on just how many Pamiris work abroad, and what the overall effects have been on Pamiri linguistic, social, and economic life. This is an area that needs to be watched.

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—by R. Zanca

# PARSIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** PAHR-seez

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Parsees; Farsis

**LOCATION:** India (mainly Bombay); Pakistan

**POPULATION:** 69,601

**LANGUAGE:** Gujarati; English

**RELIGION:** Zoroastrianism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Parsi (Parsee) is the name by which Zoroastrians in South Asia are known. Zoroastrians are followers of an ancient Persian religion founded in the 7th century BC by Zarathushtra (Zoroaster). The word “Parsi” means “a man from Pars,” or Persia, and refers to the fact that the Parsis emigrated to the Indian subcontinent from Persia (Iran), where Zoroastrianism was the established religion. The Parsi community in India is also known as “Farsi,” Fars being another name for the area from which they originated.

In the 7th century AD, the homeland of the Parsis was overrun by Arabs, who compelled the defeated Persians to accept the Islamic religion or face extinction. Tradition has it that a small band of Zoroastrians, faithful to their religion, fled into the mountains of Khorasan for safety. After a century or more, still facing persecution, they eventually made their way south to the island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. From there, they pressed on eastwards to India. After stopping for two decades at Diu, a port on the Kathiawar Peninsula, they continued to the coast of Gujarat in western India. Parsi tradition gives the date of their arrival as AD 936 (this is subject to debate, some claiming AD 716 as the year the Parsis arrived in India).

The Parsis petitioned the local Hindu ruler for permission to stay, and this was granted subject to certain conditions. These included the Parsis adopting the customs and language (Gujarati) of the country, renouncing the carrying of arms, conforming to Hindu marriage practices, and respecting Hindu sentiments concerning the slaughter of cows. The Parsis agreed to these terms and founded a settlement near the coast where they had landed, about 160 km (100 mi) north of Bombay. They named their new home Sanjan, after their hometown in Persia. The story of the Parsis' migration to India is found in the *Kisseh-e-Sanjan*, a narrative poem dated to around AD 1600.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Parsis in South Asia are a small community, numbering 69,601 people according to the 2001 Census of India. The original settlers at Sanjan were farmers, and though they soon migrated to nearby Navsari and Surat, they remained essentially in rural occupations. With the arrival of the Europeans, however, the Parsis began to assume the role of intermediary agents and brokers, laying the groundwork for their later rise to prominence in the business world. Today, the community is almost exclusively urban, concentrated mainly in the city of Bombay. Lesser numbers are found in the cities of Gujarat State, while some 5,000 Parsis live in Pakistan (mostly in Karachi). Tata and Godrej, two of India's biggest business families, are Parsis.



### 3 LANGUAGE

The original Zoroastrians who settled in India spoke Farsi (Persian)—from which the name Parsi is derived. But most Parsis speak Gujarati, the language of their adopted homeland, although most are bilingual and also speak fluent English. Many Bombayites switch between languages, often employing a mish-mash of Hindi/Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati and English called “Bambaiya,” but Gujarati and English remain the dominant languages used by the Parsis. In Pakistan, Gujarati has been replaced by Urdu as the language in which Parsis carry out their daily business. Religious ceremonies are performed in Avestan, the language of the Zoroastrian scriptures. Some secondary literature is written in Pahlavi or Middle Persian, the official state language of the Persians during the 4th century AD.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The religion of the Parsis has its roots in the beliefs of the Indo-European peoples. As a result, many similarities are found in the mythologies of Zoroastrianism and the Vedic religion of northern India. Both traditions, for example, make a distinction between the “heavenly” gods (*daevas* or *devas*) and those that possess special occult powers (*ahuras* or *asuras*). In India, the *devas* later entered the pantheon of Hindu gods while the *asuras* were reduced to the rank of demons. In Iran, however, it was the *ahuras* (literally “Lords”) who were revered as gods and the *daevas* who were viewed as evil. One particular *ahura*, Mazda or the “Lord of Wisdom,” was eventually elevated to the position of the supreme deity in Zoroastrianism.

The similarities between the ancient Iranians and Indians extend also to their heroes and legends. For instance, the Yama Raja of the *Vedas* becomes Yima Khshaeta (Jamshed) of the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian sacred texts. In the Iranian tradition, Yima was a king of the golden age and happy ruler of the Iranian tribes. Many of the myths and legends of the Zoroastrians are to be found in the *Shahnamah* of the poet Firdausi.

### 5 RELIGION

In many aspects, the ancient religion of Iran resembled that of the early Vedas of northern India. This in itself is not surprising, since the peoples who inhabited the two regions were closely related. They were probably descended from a common ancestral race, they both spoke Aryan tongues, and their sacred books showed many parallels in religious beliefs and practices. These included polytheism, worship of the same gods (the Iranian god Mithra, for instance, is the Indian Mitra), the cult of fire, and the *hoama* sacrifice (*soma* in India). The subsequent development of religion in each area, however, was different. The Vedic religion ultimately evolved into Hinduism, the complex religious, social, and economic system that numbers close to 800 million people among its followers. In Iran, religious beliefs and practices were reformed by Zoroaster. Zoroastrianism rose to become the state religion of three great Persian Empires, but today there are less than 200,000 members of the religion spread throughout the world.

Zoroaster was born in northeastern Persia. His dates are given as 628–551 BC, although some scholars argue he may have lived as many as eight centuries earlier. He is known to us from the *Gathas*, 17 hymns composed by Zoroaster and faithfully handed down through the generations by his followers. These were not works of instruction but rather inspired poetic utterances, many addressed directly to God, attempting to express a personal understanding of the divine. The *Gathas* and a few other ancient texts in the same language are collectively known as the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian scriptures.

The *Gathas* themselves reveal that Zoroaster was trained as a priest, well versed in the rituals, doctrines, and religious practices of the time. Tradition holds that he spent years in a quest for truth. During his wanderings he witnessed much of the violent conflict typical of northeastern Persia in that era, with fierce nomadic bands from the steppes pillaging and slaughtering peaceful farming communities. As a result of this, he developed a deep longing for justice, for the moral law of the *ahuras* (gods) to bring peace to weak and strong alike. Eventually, at the age of 30, he was at a gathering to celebrate a spring festival. He had a vision on the banks of a river, a shining Being who led him into the presence of the god Ahura Mazda and five other radiant figures. It was from these seven Beings (the heptad) that Zoroaster received his revelation, namely that he was chosen to serve Ahura Mazda. He wholeheartedly obeyed this call and set out on the path that was to give the world a new religion.

Though rooted in the ancient Persian religion, Zoroaster’s teachings were fundamentally new. He proclaimed, for example, that Ahura Mazda (one of many *ahuras* worshipped by the Persians) was the one uncreated God, who was the Creator of all things good, even other divinities. Coexisting with Ahura Mazda (later known as Ohrmazd) was another primal Being, Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), the source of all evil. The world is thus a battleground between Good and Evil. Ahura Mazda



evoked six lesser divinities to aid him in this struggle, and together they form the heptad of Zoroaster's revelation. Each of the heptad is responsible for one of the seven creations, including humans. Although humans are the chief creation, they are linked to all other creations, and even to the gods, through their ultimate purpose—the defeat of Evil.

Zoroaster's teachings concerning death also represented a departure from the old religion. According to Zoroaster, at the time of death the individual soul is judged on its ethical achievements. Mithra and a tribunal of gods wait at the Chinvat Bridge that separates this world from the next. Depending on the balance of good and evil deeds performed in life, the soul enters Paradise, Purgatory, or Hell. There it awaits the coming of a Savior who will undertake the resurrection of the dead and a Last Judgment. At this time, all the metal in the mountains will be melted into a glowing river through which all humankind must pass. The good will survive and live forever, but the evil will perish. The demons and their legions of darkness will already have been defeated in a last great battle with the forces of Good. The molten river will flow into Hell and destroy Angra Mainyu, thus removing the last vestige of Evil in the universe.

Zoroaster was the first to teach that the individual would be judged on the basis of his or her deeds, that there is a Heaven and Hell, that a future Savior will resurrect the dead for a final Judgment Day, and that the pure at heart will have life everlasting. These doctrines, monotheism, and the dualism (i.e., the coexistence of Good and Evil) found in Zoroastrianism are now fundamental to the beliefs of many peoples in the world. They spread from Persia to influence Judaism and were inherited from Judaism by Christianity and Islam.

If Zoroaster's teachings were new, many of the devotional forms and practices of his faith were adapted from the old religion. The Zoroastrian reverence for fire, for instance, seems to have its origins in a much older cult of fire prevalent among the Indo-European ancestors of the Persians. It was also, apparently, the custom among these groups for men to wear a cord on their initiation into the religious community. Even today, the upper castes of India wear the "sacred thread" as a sign of their status. Zoroaster appears to have modified this practice: all Zoroastrians, both men and women, wear a sacred cord wrapped around the waist three times as a symbol of their faith. Similarly, whereas the local custom was to pray three times a day, Zoroaster required his followers to pray five times a day. The method of prayer seems to have changed little over the centuries. Believers prepare themselves by ritually washing their hands, face, and feet; they untie the cord from their waist and stand, holding it in both hands, staring into the sacred fire. They pray to Ahura Mazda, they denounce Angra Mainyu while at the same time contemptuously flicking the ends of the cord, and then retie the cord around the waist. Regular prayer is an integral part of humanity's fight against Evil in the world. Zoroaster also made it binding that his followers celebrate the seven feasts of obligation that are the major events of the community's religious calendar.

In its early years, it seems Zoroastrianism had no temples or places of worship. By the 4th century BC, however, the fire temple had emerged as a center of Zoroastrian ritual. All Zoroastrians maintained a sacred hearth fire at home, but now the fire temple became a symbol of the community. The oldest fire temple in South Asia was established at Sanjan, the first Parsi

settlement in India. Soon after their arrival, the inhabitants sent back to Persia for ashes from their original fire temple and the necessary ritual objects to consecrate a new one. This remained the sole Parsi fire temple in South Asia for around 800 years. It contained the most sacred (*Atash Behram*) of three categories of fires in Parsi temples. Today, there are some 35 fire temples (called *agiyari*) around Bombay, but only 4 have the Atash Behram. Parsi temples are tended by hereditary clergy, divided into high priests (*dasturs*) and those of lesser rank (*mobeds*). Non-Parsis are not allowed to enter the fire temples.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The principal Parsi festivals are the six seasonal festivals known as *Gahambars*. Tradition ascribes their origin to Zoroaster, but they appear to be earlier agricultural celebrations he redefined as part of the new faith. They occur irregularly through the year and are: Midspring; Midsummer; Feast of Bringing in the Corn; Feast of the Homecoming, i.e., of the herds from pasture; Midwinter; and a feast honoring Ahura Mazda celebrated the night before the spring equinox.

Each festival lasts for five days and is an occasion for congregational worship dedicated to Ahura Mazda. Religious services are held early in the day and are followed by assemblies devoted to feasting, fellowship, and general goodwill. Rich and poor gather together, quarrels are resolved, and friendships are renewed and strengthened. This is a time for strengthening the ties that bind the Parsi community.

The six Gahambar festivals celebrate one of the creations of the gods (the heavens, water, the earth, plants, animals, and humans), but the seventh creation, fire, stands apart. As the life-force of all creation, fire is honored at the most joyous of the Zoroastrian festivals, *Noruz*. Literally "New Day," Noruz falls on the spring equinox and marks the beginning of the Zoroastrian New Year. At noon on this day, Rapithwina, the spirit of noon who retreated into the earth during the dark days of winter, emerges to usher warmth and light into the world.

Together, the Gahambars and Noruz make up the seven high feasts of obligation whose observance was enjoined on his followers by Zoroaster. Mehragan, the festival dedicated to Mithra, is also an important occasion. Among the Parsis, *jashans* are celebrations of important events (both happy and tragic) observed by prayers and a sacramental meal.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a child is a joyous event in a Parsi household. No particular rites are observed during pregnancy, but at birth a lamp is lit in the room where mother and baby are confined, to ward off demons. The newborn child is given a first drink of consecrated haoma juice (nowadays pomegranate juice), a symbol of immortality. When named, a Parsi child is given three names. The first is the personal name; the second, the father's name, and the third, the family name. Male names end in "ji" (from the Avestan "to live") and female names end in "Bai."

At the age of about 6, a Parsi child begins to prepare for the important *Naojot* ceremony. This is of special significance because it marks initiation into the religious community. In Iran it is performed around 15 years of age, but Parsis hold the ceremony when the boy or girl is around 7. Like all Parsi rituals, the ceremony is performed in the presence of the sacred fire, upon which sandalwood and incense are burned. At this



A Parsi woman and her child at a fire temple on Parsi New Year in Ahmadabad, India. Parsis are descendants of Persian Zoroastrians who migrated to the Indian subcontinent over 1,000 years ago. (AP Images/Ajit Solanki)

time, the child receives the sacred symbols of Zoroastrianism, the *sedrah* and the *kasti*, which must be worn at all times. The *sedrah* is a shirt made of white muslin that represents the garment made of light worn by Ahura Mazda. Sewn into the neckline is a small pocket, a reminder to the wearer that he or she should be continually filling it with good thoughts and deeds. The *kasti* is the sacred cord, a hollow tube made of natural wool that is wrapped around the waist over the shirt. It has 72 threads and ends in several tassels, the numbers of each having specific religious significance. The *kasti* is untied and retied as part of the daily prayer ritual, before meals, and after performing bodily functions.

Parsi death rituals are quite unlike those of any other group in South Asia. After death, a dog is brought to view the corpse. It is preferable that the dog be “four-eyed,” i.e., having spots over each eye. In ancient times, it was believed that the glance of a dog would scare away any demons or evil spirits that might be hovering near the body, and the extra “eyes” increase the effectiveness of its look. Later tradition has it that the presence of a dog will ease the passing of the soul to heaven. By contrast, Hindus and Muslims in South Asia regard the dog as unclean. The rite is repeated five times a day, and after the first time, fire

is brought into the room and kept burning until three days after the corpse is removed.

The dead are placed in Towers of Silence (*dakhma*). These are usually built on a hill, and the interior consists of three concentric circles, one each for men, women, and children. Corpses are exposed naked in the Towers where they are rapidly consumed by vultures. Within an hour or so, the flesh has been stripped from the body, leaving only the bones. After several days, the bones are swept into a central well filled with sand and charcoal. It is believed that the charcoal protects the earth from the pollution of death. Various ceremonies are performed during the next three days. The morning of the fourth day is of particular significance because this is the time of the soul’s final departure to the other world.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Parsi code of conduct may be summarized by the phrase, “Good thought, good words, good deeds.” Living proof of this is seen in the strong tradition of philanthropy found in the community. This includes not only the support and endowment of schools, hospital and charitable institutions, but also

a concern for the welfare of the less fortunate members of the Parsi community.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Parsis have a reputation for prosperity, and indeed they count some of the wealthiest Indians among their numbers. They are a highly-educated, urbanized, Westernized group, who enjoy the high standards of living and consumerism that go along with their social and economic status. They live almost exclusively in Parsi housing estates. There are, however, many Parsis who are not so successful and are supported by charitable contributions from their community. In Bombay, for instance, there are numerous tenements and apartments operated by Parsi-established trusts for low-income and indigent Parsis.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Parsis are an endogamous group, and in such a small community it is not surprising that marriages with close relatives (e.g., cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages) are permitted. Some marriage rites, such as the tying together of the bride's and groom's hands and the recitation of Sanskrit prayers, are clearly borrowings from Hinduism. The ceremony concludes with a visit to the fire temple to pay homage to the sacred fire. Divorce is permitted.

Today, Parsi households are generally based on the nuclear family, although in the past the extended family was the norm. The problem of a low birthrate and declining population means that many elderly Parsis live alone. However, wealthy Parsis have endowed several secular charities and given their community free housing, education, health care, and religious infrastructure worth more than \$500 million as of 2008.

## **11 CLOTHING**

During much of their residence in South Asia, Parsis wore the dress of their Gujarati neighbors, though with small differences that distinguished them from Hindus. For instance, women who wore the *sāri* also covered their hair with a small cloth underneath the *sāri*. Today, the Parsi community is one of the most Westernized in all of South Asia, and Western dress is the norm. Priests wear white robes, white turbans, and a mask while performing rituals, and men generally wear white for religious purposes.

## **12 FOOD**

There are few food restrictions in Parsi culture, though some Hindu customs, such as the prohibition on beef, have been adopted voluntarily. Parsi food blends Persian, Gujarati, and Western influences to create a distinctive cuisine. From Persia comes the tradition of combining meat with dried fruits and a fondness for eggs. Two typical Parsi dishes are *Bharuchi akuri* and *dhansakh*. The former is a dish in which eggs are baked on a layer of herbs, with added ingredients, such as potatoes, tomatoes, almonds, raisins, cream, and butter. *Dhansakh* is a kind of stew made with at least three kinds of lentils, meat, and vegetables.

The Parsi wedding banquet is a veritable feast. It starts with drinks (men like whiskey, while women tend to stay with wine and soft drinks) and continues with course after course of delicious Parsi-style food. A fish dish, usually made from pomfret,

is always served at weddings—fish is considered a symbol of good fortune. Potato sticks and sweets are particular favorites.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Parsis are highly educated, with literacy rates reaching 90% in the community. Literacy among females marginally exceeds that among males, a situation unique among the peoples of South Asia. Both girls and boys are encouraged to pursue higher education in preparation for their careers. Parsis recognized the value of Western education at an early date, and many have earned degrees and advanced degrees in professions such as medicine, law, and engineering. Parsis also supported their own schools, until sectarian education was abolished by the Indian government in the 1950s.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

There are no artistic or cultural traditions associated specifically with the Parsi community. Individual Parsis have made contributions to Gujarati literature and theater and have also written in the English language. In keeping with their Westernized outlook, many have become involved in modern art and classical music. The world renowned conductor, Zubin Mehta, for example, was born in 1936 into a Parsi family in Bombay. He is the son of Mehli and Tehmina Mehta, Mehli being a violinist and founding conductor of the Bombay Symphony Orchestra. Following a stellar career as an international conductor, Mehta was named "Honorary Conductor" by several of the world's major symphony orchestras, including the Vienna Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras.

Rohinton Mistry, who as of 2008 lived in Canada and is considered one of the foremost authors of Indian heritage writing in English, was born into the Parsi community in Bombay. Several of Mistry's novels, which tend to deal with the Parsi community in India, have been short-listed for the prestigious Man Booker Prize.

## **15 WORK**

Unlike Hindus, Parsis are under no religious constraints in terms of their economic activities. This, combined with their openness to Western education, permitted them to enter the modern professions that emerged during the 19th century. Parsis achieved great success in business, engineering, trade, finance, and similar occupations. The Tata family built perhaps the most important private industrial empire in India during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Tata Iron and Steel has formed the backbone of Indian heavy industry for nearly a century, while almost every gaily-decorated, overloaded truck that plies India's roads today carries the Tata name. The Wadias and the Petits were other important industrial families. Dadabhoj Naoroji (1825–1917) was a leading Indian politician of his day. Sir Jamsetji Jejeebhoy, a noted 19th-century philanthropist, made his fortune in the China trade. Other Parsis who have achieved a degree of fame include Dr. Homi Sethna, the nuclear physicist; Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, chief of staff of the Indian Army from 1969 to 1972; and the internationally renowned classical musician and conductor, Zubin Mehta.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no sports linked specifically to the Parsi community, although Parsis readily took to all forms of sports introduced to South Asia by the British. For a community of its size, the Parsis produced a large number of outstanding Indian Test (international) cricketers, including Polly Umrigar and Nari Contractor. In recent years, Parsis in Karachi have made a name for themselves in international yachting competitions.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

As a highly Westernized, urbanized group, Parsis have full access to the modern entertainment and recreational facilities of Bombay and the other cities where they reside.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There are no particular folk arts or crafts associated with the Parsi community in South Asia.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Parsis, a small band of Zoroastrians fleeing Muslim persecution, brought their religion to South Asia over a millennium ago. For over 1,000 years, they have managed to preserve their identity, resisting the all-embracing reach of Hinduism and the coming of Islam to South Asia. Yet today, the Parsis are facing a very real threat to their existence—declining numbers. It is estimated that only 99 Parsis were born in the year ending August 2007, and the Zoroastrian population in India is expected to fall to 25,000 by 2020.

“We must become more broad-minded,” said a reformist priest in Bombay, “we must welcome children of mixed parents and maybe even some new converts into our community.” With the faith losing thousands of would-be members, some priests have started performing the *navjote*, an initiation ceremony for children born of Zoroastrian mothers and non-Zoroastrian fathers. Conservatives reacted fiercely. A coterie of powerful priests called for the excommunication of all Zoroastrians married to non-Zoroastrians. Although the priests backed off their stand after its legality and practicality were questioned, the episode emphasized the chasm within the community and some conservatives still cut their ties with family members who marry outside the faith. “Purity is more important than numbers,” said a Zoroastrian scholar in Bombay. “Our religion is interwoven with our ethnicity [and] can only be passed on through a Zoroastrian father.”

Thus, declining numbers are caused by several factors. At some stage in their stay in India (possibly at the very beginning), Parsis stopped actively seeking converts to their religion. In a sense, this brought the Parsis closer to Hindu traditions, and in some ways Parsis function very much like a caste in Indian society. Parsi women, however, have an equality with men rarely seen in South Asian society, but this is a double-edged sword. Their involvement in higher education and careers leads to later marriage and lower fertility rates. Furthermore, if a Parsi woman marries outside the religion she and her offspring are excluded from the Parsi community. Since the mid-20th century, the Parsi population in South Asia has been decreasing at about 1% per year. With declining economic opportunities, especially after the departure of the British from South Asia, there has been emigration to the United States, Canada, and Britain, further reducing numbers.

There are also other problems facing the Parsi community in South Asia. The sons of priests no longer follow in the footsteps of their fathers, seeking better-paying jobs elsewhere. The advent of electricity means that the sacred fire no longer burns in the hearths of many Parsi households. With the “golden age” of Parsi prosperity in the past, increasing poverty is found in the Parsi community. Young Parsis are asking, “Who is the Parsi?” as well as questioning the traditions of the past. Finally, above all, there is the matter of declining numbers. Should current trends continue, the Parsi community in South Asia may eventually disappear entirely.

The situation is best summarized in the words of one writer discussing the Parsis who have emigrated to the West: “Parsis have found themselves increasingly called upon to articulate their religious faith and practice intellectually in order to explain it to others. A sense of the need for the maintenance of tradition through adaptive change, including the admission of non-Zoroastrian spouses to membership and certainly a sophisticated presentation of Zoroastrian faith and practice, is one of the recent contributions of the overseas Parsis. With them may lie the chapters of Parsi history still to be written.” (Oxtoby 1987: 201).

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Many Parsi women claim that, despite the activities of reformist priests, the one change that could stem the decline in population will never come. When men marry outside the community, their children are considered to be Parsi. But the children of women who enter mixed marriages cannot be considered Parsi. Other than this, Parsi women are highly educated, have a high literacy rate, and are generally treated as equal to men (as far as this is possible in South Asia). Many have emigrated to the West, where they have been highly successful in their chosen careers.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# PASHTUN

**PRONUNCIATION:** PASH-toon

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Pushtun, Pakhtun, Pashtoon, Pathan, Afghan

**LOCATION:** Southeastern Afghanistan; northwestern Pakistan

**LANGUAGE:** Pashtu

Population: approximately 35 million

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Pashtun (also spelled Pushtun, Pakhtun, Pashtoon) are Pakhtu- or Pashto-speaking people inhabiting southeastern Afghanistan and the northwestern province of Pakistan. Outsiders often referred to them as Pathan or Afghan. Pashtun (Afghan) constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan and the term *Afghan* until recently referred exclusively to the Pashtun peoples before it came to denote all citizens of Afghanistan.

Pashtun are traditionally pastoral nomads with a strong tribal organization. Each tribe, consisting of kinsmen who trace descent in male bloodlines from a common tribal ancestor, is divided into clans, subclans, and patriarchal families. Tribal genealogies establish rights of succession and inheritance, the right to use tribal lands, and the right to speak in tribal council. Disputes over property, women, and personal injury often result in blood feuds between families and whole clans; these may be inherited unless settled by the intervention of clan chiefs or by tribal council.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Pashtun have lived for centuries in the corridors between Khurasan and the Indian subcontinent, at the crossroads of several historically great civilizations. Their mountain homes have been overcome by conquering armies repeatedly, and have been subjected to the rule of great empires including the empire of Alexander the Great and the Persian Empire. However, the Pashtun's story has never been put in perspective. There is no true written history of the Pashtun in their own land. Pashtun traditions assert that they are descended from Afghana, grandson of King Saul of Israel, although most scholars believe it more likely that they arose from an intermingling of ancient Aryans from the north or west with subsequent invaders.

The Pashtun are divided into about 60 tribes of varying size and importance, each of which occupies a particular territory. In Afghanistan, where Pashtun are the predominant ethnic group, the main tribes are the Durrani or Abdali south of Kabul and the Ghilzay east of Kabul.

In Pakistan, the Pashtun predominate north of Quetta between the Sulaiman Ranges and the Indus River. The areas of Pakistan in which Pashtuns are prevalent include the North-west Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA. In the hill areas, the main tribes are, from south to north: the Kakar, Sherani, and Ustarana south of the Gumal River; the Mahsud, Darwsh Khel, Waziri, and Batani, between the Gomal River and Thal; the Turi, Bangash, Orakzay, Afridi, and Shinwari from Thal to the Khyber Pass; and the Mahmand, Uthman Khel, Tarklani, and Yousufzay north and northeast of the Khyber. The settled areas include lowland

tribes subject to direct administration by the provincial government. The main tribes there are, from south to north: the Banuchi and Khattak from the Kurram River to Nowshera; and the Khalil and Mandan in the vale of Peshawar.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Pashtu is language of Pashtun. It belongs to the North-Eastern group within the Iranian branch of Indo-European. It is the language of the major ethnic group of east and south Afghanistan adjacent to Pakistan. Pashtun make up 40 to 60% of the population of Afghanistan, but reliable census figures are not available. Pashtu is one of the two official languages of Afghanistan. It is the language of 12 million Pashtun in Pakistan also, the majority of whom live in the North West Frontier Province and the rest in Baluchistan Province.

Two cities in the Pashtu area are important centers of Pashtu language: Kandahar in Afghanistan and Peshawar in Pakistan. In literary works, the trend is to avoid the dialectal differences and use the form of Pashtu used in the urban centers.

Pashtu has always been written in the Perso-Arabic script, with the addition of consonant phonemes of Pashtu. The name of the language, *Pashtu*, denotes the strong code of customs, morals, and manners of the Pashtun, which is also called *Pashtunwali*. There is a saying: "A Pashtun is not he who speaks Pashtu, but he who has Pashtu." Hospitality (*Milmastia*) is important to Pashtun, as is a reliance on the tribal council (*jirga*) for the resolution of disputes and local decision making. Other Pashtu codes include: courageousness (*Tureh*, which is also the word for sword in Pashtu); the spirit of taking revenge (*Badal*); protection of honor (*Ghayrat*); and *nanawati*, a method of terminating hostility, hatred, and enmity (i.e., when a person, family, or tribe goes to the hostile people through elderly people, they will accept their apology and the feeling of hatred and enmity are dissolved). Important elements of Pashtunwali code are personal authority and freedom. Political leadership is based on personalities rather than structures and ideologies.

It is perhaps the power and leadership of individuals that divides the Pashtun not only into tribes but also into numerous sub-tribes, each isolated within its own boundaries. Interference in each other's affairs has caused conflicts among the different sub-tribes throughout history. Yet any external interference—Russian, British, American, etc.—has resulted in immediate unity of Pashtun tribes.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Many traditional stories, thoughts, and beliefs exist among the Pashtun. The numerous clans and families that comprise the Pashtun population have specific characteristics. Famous stories, such as "Adamkhan and Durkhani," are common, and many Persian stories are also used by the Pashtun. Pashtun have characteristic folksongs, marriages, and funerals. Certain quatrains, known as *matal*, are very popular. Chorus singing also exists among the Pashtun.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Pashtun tribes are Sunni Muslims, except for a few tribes or parts of tribes on the eastern border near Waziristan. In this region, the Turi tribe is Shia Muslim, as is the Muammad Khel branch of Orakzai. Islam was introduced to the Pashtun in the 8th century, but the rule of Islam within Pashtun traditional culture is different from other Islamic groups, as it is tempered



by the influence of the *Pashtunwali* code of conduct. Pashtun believe they are more Pashtun than Muslim. Sufism, particularly of the *Naqshbandi* order, maintains an influence among some Pashtun groups.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As all Pashtun are Muslims, they celebrate the two major festivals of the Islamic lunar calendar year. The first of these is *Eid al-Fitr*, which is celebrated for three days after the month of Ramadan (the fasting month)—i.e., the first three days of Shawwal, the 10th month of Islamic calendar. They also celebrate *Eid al-Aa*, which is on the 10th of Dhu-l-ijja (the 12th month of the Islamic calendar). In addition, they observe the 10th of Muarram, which is the first month of the Islamic calendar, in commemoration of the martyrdom of the grandson of the prophet. Pashtuns also celebrate the traditional Persian new year, *Novruz*, a holiday that continues to be observed throughout most of the Persian/Turkic world every March.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Each child of a Muslim family is a Muslim by birth; therefore, all Pashtun are Muslims by birth. After a baby's birth, Pashtun whisper the call for prayer in the baby's ear. The male circumcision ceremony used to be held when a boy was seven years old, but now it is held at the age of about one week and is merged with the birth celebration.

Male and female children are taught the prayers at an early age by parents or grandparents. In addition to the profession of faith and the rituals of prayers, preschool children are taught

about the other obligations of Islam: charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. Prayers and fasting officially start with sexual maturity, but in practice they begin much earlier.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Both tribal society and Islam prescribe the conduct of man to his human environment in so much detail that there is little room for individual variation. Pashtun society is largely communal and attaches tremendous importance to the unwritten tribal code, which defines the way tribesmen should behave lest they endanger the cohesion and therefore the very life of the tribe. So completely is this code transmitted to each child born into the tribe that it becomes an ineradicable structural part of his personality, and to depart from it is almost unthinkable. *Pashtunwali* (the customs and ethics of the Pashtun), *Tureh* (courageousness), *Nanawati* (method of terminating hostility, hatred, and enmity), *Badal* (the spirit of taking revenge), *Mil-mastiya* (hospitality), *Jirgeh* (council of elderly men to decide disputes), liberty, and freedom are some of the characteristics of their interpersonal relationships.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Pashtun belong to different clans and families with varying relationships to each other and differing social statuses. Pashtun migrated to different places during the 18th century due to their increasing population and lack of food, water, and grazing land for their animals. Many Pashtun of Afghanistan are not big landowners but make a living in agricultural fields despite having low incomes. Many groups of Pashtun along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan live nomadic lifestyles.

Many Pashtuns suffer from a low standard of living, particularly due to the many years of conflict suffered by Afghanistan, beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979. Many Pashtuns became refugees during these years of conflict and left for neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan where they were accepted by their co-ethnics. Since the removal of the Taliban from power in 2001, many of these Pashtun refugees are encouraged to return to Afghanistan but often find themselves in a worse living situation as the homes they left were destroyed or occupied.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Pashtun family is an extended family. The household normally consists of the patriarch and his wife, his unmarried children, and his married sons and their wives and children. It is a patrilineal system in that descent is through the paternal side, and family loyalty is to the paternal line. A married woman must transfer complete allegiance to her husband's family. Married sons live in their father's household rather than establishing homes of their own. The eldest male possesses complete authority over the extended family. The preference for marriages is within the extended family or with other close relatives.

Economically, the Pashtun family is a single unit. Wealthy family members contribute to the support of those who are poorer, and the family maintains an appearance of well-being. Old people depend on their children for care and support, and the whole family shares the expense of a child away at school.

Obedience and respect for elders are the main points of an Pashtun child's upbringing. Almost everything an individual does is a matter of concern to the family, for in Pashtun society the family is judged by the behavior of its individual members.



An Pashtun woman helps a girl tie a baby to her back in front of their tent in the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan. The Pashtun are nomadic herders. (AP Images/Tomas Munita)

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Traditional Pashtun dress is a somber-colored, loose-fitting shirt worn to the knees (*qmis*) and full trousers tied at the waist with a string (*shalwar*). Over the shirt there is usually a vest, and for footwear there are thick leather shoes (*chaplai*). Most Pashtun farmers and almost all adult males in tribal areas wear turbans (*pagray*), long lengths of cotton cloth wound around the head and fastened so that one end dangles. They also usually wear a wide, long piece of cloth called a *chadar* on their shoulders.

Country women wear baggy black or colored trousers, a long shirt belted with a sash, and a length of cotton over the head. City women wear the same type of trousers and long shirt (*qmis*) and cotton over the head. They also usually wear a veil, a loose garment that covers a woman from the head to below the knees (*burqa*). Women wear colored clothes printed with flowers and other designs. For footwear, they use sandals, shoes, or embroidered slippers.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Religious prohibitions prevent Pashtun from eating pork and drinking alcoholic beverages. Staples in their diet include bread, rice, vegetables, milk products, meat, eggs, fruits, and tea. A favorite dish is *pulaw*, a rice and meat dish flavored with coriander, cinnamon, and cardamom.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Traditionally, education took place in religious institutes and mosque schools (*madrassa* or *maktab*). In addition to these institutions, free secular education was available in most villages, at least prior to 2001. In Afghanistan, the entire educational system was disrupted due to Russian invasion in 1978, and since the pullout in 1989 to 1992, due to the civil war. During the period of Taliban control (1996–2001), education was again restricted to religious institutions, and girls were not allowed to attend school. Since the Taliban were removed from power, many schools have been rebuilt, and many girls have returned to school. However, schools that allow girls are often targeted by the Taliban insurgency. These problems tend to affect Pashtuns greatly, as they make up the majority of the population in those areas most threatened by the insurgency.

In the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and Baluchistan there are boys and girls schools in almost in every village and government colleges for boys and girls in every town. (These are affiliated with various universities.)

In 2007, half of Afghan children were thought to attend school. Of those who attended, 35% were girls. Eleven million Afghans were thought to be illiterate.

Higher education and universities were available in Afghanistan but were greatly disrupted due to the many years of conflict and by the strict laws of the Taliban. Since 2001 some

universities have again begun to operate, such as Kabul State University.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Pashtun social groups are well-organized. In increasing size, they are: Qabila, Taifa, and Khail. The males are the dominant members of a household. For example, if a husband dies, the widow is required to marry someone within her husband's family, even if the only person available happens to be only one year old. In this case, it appears that culture is given more weight than religion. Pashtun leaders convene to discuss and to solve major problems in the community. The *jirga* is the community assembly that is used to solve disputes and problems. The *shura* is an Islamic council that is also relied upon by Pashtun in Afghanistan for organization. Respect for the elderly is very important to the Pashtun.

#### 15 WORK

Pashtun work at a variety of occupations in agriculture, business, and trade. Women and children also play a role in agricultural work. Generally, the Pashtun of Afghanistan do not have very high living standards. The working conditions of Pashtun in Afghanistan and Pakistan differ, being generally better in Pakistan.

*Naiza bazi*, a game involving riding horses and throwing spears, is a sport enjoyed among the Pashtun. Some Pashtun also have rock-throwing competitions. *Atan* is a famous group folkdance of the Pashtun. Pashtun have also adopted some of the sports of Northern Persian speaking Afghan nationals such as *buzkashi*, a form of polo played with a sheep or goat carcass.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Social get-togethers are the major form of entertainment. The *Eids*, religious holidays occurring twice a year, are also times of celebration and entertainment. Certain card games are played amongst Pashtun as well. Kite flying and pigeon flying were popular among Afghans of many backgrounds including Pashtun. Banned under the Taliban, since 2001 these recreation forms have been revived. One novelistic account of two Afghan boys and their love of kite-flying is Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and the film of the same name (2007).

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pashtun clothes differ from province to province, but they are often highly decorated. The people of Kandahar sew characteristic designs on their clothes and wear small hats made of thread or silk. In Paktia, people generally wear large hats with turbans. Vests are very common among Pashtun, but styles differ from location to location. For example, the people of Nangahar wear vests with bright designs.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Because the Pashtun do not all live within one country, they have differing social conditions, although they generally live in societies with tight religious restrictions. Differences among Pashtun clans and families have led to much violence and killing both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Narcotics, particularly opium, production has become a serious problem in Afghanistan due to the chaos and pover-

ty caused by the years of conflict. Afghanistan was the largest producer of opium in the world in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Much of the production takes place in the predominately Southern Pashtun areas. Use of narcotics has remained minimal among Pashtuns due to religious beliefs.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women have traditionally had few rights under the strict code of Pashtunwali. *Purdah*, or separation of men and women, is traditionally practiced. At times throughout history, such as during the years of Communist rule, women were encouraged to take part in society more openly. However, during the years that the Taliban controlled Afghanistan, women were restricted from participating in almost every form of public life, forced to adhere to a strict dress code that included the wearing of the *burqa*, and were restricted to their homes unless accompanied by a male family member. Since the Taliban were removed from power, such restrictions have been lessened, and some Pashtun women have regained their careers and even hold public office. However, many continue to follow these restrictions due to social pressure or because of their own choice.

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—revised by M. Kerr



# PENAN

**PRONUNCIATION:** peh-NAHN

**LOCATION:** Malaysia (Sarawak state)

**POPULATION:** 14,000 (2004)

**LANGUAGE:** Penan

**RELIGION:** Animism; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Iban; Kelabit; Vol. 4: Malaysian Malays

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Penan are among the last of the nomadic hunter-gatherers living in the world's tropical rain forests today, and have been described as the true aborigines of the island of Borneo. They are believed to have originated from the upper Kayan River, Today the Penan are a subgroup of the Orang Ulu in the state of Sarawak. They can be categorized into two groups: Western Penan (those who settle along the Rajang River) and Eastern Penan (those living along the Baram River).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There are about 14,000 Penan. The Western Penan, which consists of Penan Silat (Baram District), Penan Geng, Penan Apau, and Penan Bunut, are centered in the Belaga District and the Silat River basin in the Kapit and Bintulu divisions. The Eastern Penan, also known as Penan Selungo after the Selungo River, live mostly in the Baram River basin in Miri and Limbang divisions.

About a quarter of the population is settled, half is semi-settled, living part of the time in small, scattered villages, and the rest are nomadic (about 2,000 people). The settled Penan, like many other indigenous communities in Sarawak, lives in either longhouses or single houses in village settlements. Whereas the nomadic Penan, who live in bands, are still practicing a lifestyle by which they rely heavily on the forest to provide most of what they need to live. Each band usually consists of 2 to 10 families, or 20–40 people, who move around together within their own territory. Unless they are invited by a neighboring group to eat a meal of fruit together, other groups are not supposed to encroach on the territory of a nomadic group.

The Penan, like some other tribes in Sarawak, have a Mongoloid cast to their features, but their skin coloring is noticeably lighter than that of most of the locals. This is because of their dislike of the sun and preference for jungle shade. Unlike their neighbors, the settled Dayaks, the Penan have been less influenced by the outside world.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Penan speak their own language, called Penan, with dialectal variations. Even though they do not have a written language, the Penan have a very interesting method of relaying messages. Various items, such as shoots, leaves, stones, sticks, and feathers, are used to leave messages along the paths in the jungle. They are used to show directions, to give instructions to wait or to follow, and to indicate danger, hunger, disease, death, or food. The Penan usually poke sticks in the ground to which they attach leaves or feathers to show direction, time, and number of families passing through.



In the 1970s, missionaries tried for the first time to put the Penan language into writing. One of their accomplishments was to write and compile a Penan Bible.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Penan, like every other tribe on Borneo, have many myths, epics, and legends. *Oia Abeng* is their most popular epic poem. Unfortunately, all but small fragments of the epics have been forgotten. This is both because the lyrics are orally transmitted, and because the younger generations are losing interest in oral traditions.

One of the Penan's popular folk tales is that of the god of thunder, Bale Gau, who has the power to turn people into stone. The Penan believe that when the spirit of an animal, dead or alive, is angered, the spirit may call upon Bale Gau to inflict its curse on people. Most ancient rock formations are believed to have once been people who were punished by the god of thunder for mocking an animal spirit dressed with human clothes.

## 5 RELIGION

Many Penan have chosen to embrace Christianity, with the support of Borneo Evangelical Mission, while the rest remain animist, believing in a supreme god called Bungan, and that nature itself has a soul. They also believe that forests are filled with powerful spirits, and that these spirits must not be disturbed. They get angry and inflict disease on people if they are deliberately disturbed. Therefore, the Penan leave these spirits

in peace, appease them with sacrifices, or threaten them using magic words.

The Penan also believe strongly in taboos and omens. Dreams, animals, such as deer and snakes, and bird sounds and flights are omens indicating the correct course of action. For example, a Penan will turn back if he or she hears a kingfisher's call at the start of a journey. He or she will continue the journey only if the call of the crested rainbird is heard. They believe if they disobey the taboos and omens, they will experience hardships, illness, or death.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

See the articles entitled **Kelabit**, **Iban**, and **Malaysian Malays**.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Childbirth is usually done at home with the help of a midwife or an experienced elder. All children grow up without birthday parties, graduations, or other ceremonies that mark the passage of time.

Since the Penan believe that knowledge is acquired through experience, their children receive training from their elders at a young age. The importance of sharing and showing respect for elders is also instilled at a young age. Since selfishness is considered a serious crime by the Penan, their children are taught to share everything with other people. Even a tiny fruit is sliced in enough pieces so that everyone can have a bite.

Penan children learn how to survive in the jungle at a young age. They learn the names and uses of myriad plants and animals in the forest. They learn how to navigate through the jungle without compasses or maps, how to start a fire, build a shelter, and make tools. By watching and helping his father and grandfathers, a boy learns how to make blowpipes and darts. He learns to hunt with his friends in the forest. A girl learns to weave by watching and helping her mother and grandmothers. She learns to gather fruits, nuts, and fish with her friends.

A person usually gets married at the age of 16, when she or he has mastered the skills and knowledge needed to support a family. A marriage does not involve a ceremony. With the consent of their parents, a young woman and man may simply decide to live together as husband and wife.

When a person dies, the body is wrapped in woven mats, which will later be buried near the camp or under the hearth of the dead person's hut. In order to soften their grief, the Penan will leave the place and build new shelters in another part of the forest. They believe in an afterlife. Their heaven is a rain forest above the sky where human souls hunt and harvest sago palm without illness, hardship, or pain.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Penans are gentle, shy, and timid people, in contrast to their primitive and savage image in the eyes of others. They are the only tribe that never practiced headhunting in Sarawak. They avoid conflict, and resort to negotiation if there is a misunderstanding.

A Penan turns away his or her gaze when greeting someone, and avoids eye-to-eye contact with a stranger. Their normal way of greeting is to shake hands, and the hands are never tightly squeezed. It is taboo to mention someone's real name in his or her presence. Therefore, expressions such as "brother" (*pade*), "father" (*mam*), "respected man" (*lakei dja-au*), and "respected woman" are used.

It is impolite to walk directly towards another person. The Penan bend slightly and make a bow when they pass by someone or a group of people. Usually a bow is also made before a meal. It is taboo to step over food served for a meal, as this pollutes the meal, as well as the host and the person herself or himself.

Sharing is a central value and survival tactic for the Penan, so, all wild game and collected forest products are shared equally within the community. When food is short, a hunter will march for hours to bring food for the group. This will ensure the survival of the children, the old, the sick and less fortunate, and the community as a whole.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The nomadic Penan live in the forest, while the settled Penan live in longhouses and are agriculturalists. While the nomadic are hunters and gatherers of forest products, like fruits, mushroom, game, and wild sago, the settled Penan are farmers. The settled Penan grow hill rice and rear chicken and pigs for domestic use. There are some groups that are now cultivating cash crops, such as rubber, pepper, palm oil, and cocoa. These groups settle in villages and do have access to the market and modern infrastructure. Meanwhile, the nomads do not have permanent houses but live, rather, in simple shelters or huts (*selap*) that are built to last only for three to four weeks. By that time, they will need to move on. These huts are constructed with wooden sticks as supports, palm leaves for roofing, and split bamboo pieces or small sticks for flooring. Strips of rattan are used to hold these materials together. The huts in the settlement can be built very close together or very far from each other.

A nomadic "village" usually consists of about 30 persons, though the number may vary from 5 or 6 to as many as 160 persons. These temporary settlements are built on the tops of hills to avoid the risk of being hit by a falling tree. Thus, water has to be carried some distance in bamboo containers. These settlements will be moved when the supply of sago palm, their staple diet, is exhausted, or when game or jungle produce becomes scarce and difficult to find in the area.

The nomadic Penan household goods and personal possessions are very few and most are carried in backpacks made from rattan. They include a spear, a bamboo container of wooden darts, a small gourd containing the dart heads, one or two machetes encased in wooden sheaths, a couple of cooking pots, several rattan baskets, and a couple of woven rattan mats.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Penan women never hunt. Most foraging is done by men, while the women's primary sphere is the encampment. A woman is responsible for raising children, preparing food, gathering wood and water, and weaving baskets and mats from rattan and bamboo strips. A Penan woman exercises her influence through relating with her husband, who will in turn relate her wishes to others. However, she is allowed to indicate her desires to the community when necessary.

The family size of nomadic Penan is smaller in comparison to those of both the settled Penan and other tribes in Sarawak. The rate of infant mortality is high, due to the rigors of their existence. There are, on average, three children per family among nomadic Penans, while settled Penan families may average five



Members of the Penan tribe sit in the village of Long Block in the Baram district of Sarawak on Borneo Island. The Penan are fighting to preserve their culture, waging a war against the government and loggers. (AP Images/Richard Vogel)

children. A family consists of a mother, a father, and at least one child. Sometimes a family is joined by the grandparents.

Traditionally, polygyny and polyandry were practiced, whereby a man could have two wives and a woman could have two husbands. However, monogamy is the norm today. A marriage may happen without any celebration or ceremonial event. Two people are considered married as soon as they establish their own household.

Each Penan family owns about a dozen dogs. Dogs are important in the life of the Penan. They are neither kept as pets nor eaten. They are, rather, used in the hunting and tracking of wild game. Some other animals are kept as pets. There are times when a hunter will return with a live baby animal, such as a bear, a monkey, or a bat. These animals are kept as pets by the children. A Penan will never kill and eat an animal that has been fed, even when the animal is mature, ready for slaughter, and the Penan are hungry. It is unthinkable for a Penan to keep and raise an animal for the purpose of living off its meat or its milk.

### **11 CLOTHING**

There is no known Penan group that ever went about totally naked, although the primary, and sometimes only, article of clothing for most Penan groups is the loincloth or *chawat*. Even though loincloths traditionally were made of bark-cloth, today they are made of cotton. These materials are obtained

through trade with other tribes such as the Kayans, Kenyahs, Kelabit, and the coastal Malay and Chinese traders. These days, few Penan go barefoot. In fact, only Penan elders still maintain traditional dress of *chawat*, bands on their legs and wrists, and large holes in their earlobes. Many others are wearing Western-style clothes of T-shirts, shirts, pants, and shorts.

### **12 FOOD**

The semi-settled Penan depend partially on rice and tapioca from their plantations for food, while the nomadic Penan depend entirely on the forest for their survival. Their staple food is wild sago palm, which is supplemented with wild game and wild fruits gathered from the jungle. With their blowpipes and hunting dogs they roam the forest in search of wild sago while hunting animals, fishing, and gathering wild fruits for their daily existence. The wild game hunted by the Penan includes mousedeer, wild boar (Bornean bearded pig), five different kinds of monkey, barking deer, birds, and occasionally bear and python. The wild boar is the most valuable catch, as it is a source of both protein and fat. Other food includes the pith of the sago palm, fish, and shrimp from the river.

Sago flour is usually cooked with water. The starchy flour is poured into the water and is cooked until it congeals into the consistency of paste. It is then eaten with wooden "forks" out of a common pan. Sago can also be baked or fried in lard, and

it is also used to thicken soup. The Penan eat sago with wild game, like Americans eat potatoes with meat.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Traditionally, the Penan did not go to school. However, through the government's persuasions, more and more Penan are attending government schools. In 1987, about 250 Penan attended primary schools, while about 50 others attended other schools farther away. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was estimated that less than 12 Penan youth attain a tertiary education. These are mostly the children of the settled Penan. While the children of the settled Penan are attending government schools, the children of the nomadic Penan get their lessons from their parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. The elders are perceived as full of knowledge and wisdom that need to be imparted to the younger generations. The Penan also believe that knowledge is taught by experience; therefore, from a young age a child is taught the skills to survive in the forest.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Even though they have a very simple lifestyle, the Penan are a musical people. All their musical instruments are made of wood and bamboo. There are five different kinds of musical instruments that are widely played: the mouth organ (*kellore/kelure*), jaw-harp (*oreng*), flute (*kringon*), four-stringed instrument (*pagang*), and lute (*sape*). The *kelure* is made from a dried gourd with six bamboo pipes, three long and three short, each with finger holes at the base. It produces a sound similar to a flute. The *oreng* is made of wood, about 18 cm (7 in) long and 2.5 cm (1 in) wide. The wood is well carved and weighted with resin. Slots are cut in the wood to make a long tongue for vibration. More slots are cut in the tongue to enhance the sound. While the *oreng* is made of wood, the *pagang* is made from a piece of bamboo about 60 cm (24 in) long and 10 cm (4 in) wide and is only played by women. Group and solo dances are danced to the rhythmic strumming or sound of these various instruments.

Part of Penan cultural heritage is their wide knowledge of nearly everything they need in the forest. They use about 30 different kinds of plant drugs to dress wounds and treat headaches, stomachaches, poisoning, rashes, and other ailments. Although some have a slower effect compared to chemically derived drugs, there are others that have an immediate effect on certain ailments. For example tongue and mouth rashes in small children disappear within a few minutes after chewing a leaf stem of *benua-tokong*. Different kinds of vines and barks are crushed and used as soap. More than 20 kinds of fruit leaves, bark, and skin are used for dyeing rattan. The Penan also know more than 30 different kinds of rattan, which are used for weaving and handicrafts.

### **15 WORK**

The nomadic Penan earn their living primarily by hunting and gathering. They are considered to be the real masters of the forest, being expert hunters and trackers. Hunting is done with dogs and with simple weapons such as spears, blowpipes, and poison arrows. It can be done in small groups, pairs, or alone, depending on the kind of animal they are seeking. Large animals such as deer and wild boars require a group of hunters and their dogs.

Besides hunting, the Penan gather a wide variety of nuts, fruits, mushrooms, and leaves. These provide them with additional foods. They eat more than 100 different kinds of fruits, and 30 different species of fish. Fishing is usually done by the women. There are several ways this is carried out. Fruit-eating fish are lured into the fishing nets by throwing stones that make the same size splash as falling fruit. Another way is to dump poison made from crushed plants into a slowly moving stream. This will cause the fish to die and float to the surface of the water, where they can be picked up.

Weaving mats and baskets is also work done mostly by the women. They spend a large amount of their time slicing rattan into strips of various sizes, dyeing the strips, and then weaving them by hand into intricate geometric patterns.

### **16 SPORTS**

Hunting and gathering are not only tasks that need to be done daily, but the Penan also treat them as sport or as forms of entertainment and recreation. While the older people spend most of their time away from the camp, the children play games within the settlement areas. They climb trees, splash in the streams, and slide down muddy slopes.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Deep in the jungle where a supply of electricity is impossible to obtain, movies, and television as forms of entertainment do not exist. Therefore, the nomadic Penan's forms of recreation and entertainment are very different from those of settled tribes in Sarawak. Hunting and gathering food are their major forms of recreation in the daylight. In the night when all their tasks for the day are complete, musical instruments are played, accompanied by dances and songs. They have good reason to be merry when their surroundings are safe and they are in good health. Every wild boar caught during this time provides a reason for a party at night.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Penan are some of the best craftspeople in Borneo. They produce superb handicrafts, and some of Borneo's finest rattan mats and baskets are woven by the Penan women. While their women weave fine rattan mats and baskets, their men are excellent blacksmiths and make the best blowpipes, which are much coveted by members of other tribes in Sarawak. Besides baskets and mats, the Penan women weave intricate and beautifully patterned artifacts such as backpacks, arm and leg bracelets, and ornate mats, which are adorned with lively black and white designs.

These handicrafts are traded, along with jungle products such as camphor and gaharu (a scented wood), for salt, metal, clothing, and cooking utensils. Like most of the tribes in Borneo, the Penan adopted the custom of having elongated and perforated earlobes with earrings.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Like many other indigenous people worldwide, the Penan's traditional lifestyle is threatened by so-called modernization. Modern government policies promoting settled agriculture and systematic logging may gradually force these forest-dwellers to abandon their way of life. The nomadic Penan have been affected by large-scale selective logging since late 1970s. They

have find it more and more difficult to survive in the forests because of the relentless encroachment of logging companies and the creation of palm oil and acacia wood plantations. They have to cope with a new or modern lifestyle that is making its way along newly built roads into the most remote areas. Their once self-sufficient lifestyle is slowly being replaced by a dependent one.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Penan are well known for being highly egalitarian with little gender division. Nevertheless, there is a clear division of labor in certain areas. Among the nomadic Penan, women never hunt and most foraging is done by men. The women's primary sphere is the encampment while the men are free to roam the forest to hunt game and to collect forest products. At home, a Penan woman is expected to raise the children, prepare food, gather wood and water, and weave baskets and mats from rattan and bamboo strips. However, a Penan woman can exercise her influence through relating them to her husband, who will in turn relate her wishes to others. Furthermore, she is allowed to indicate her desires to the community when necessary.

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—by P. Bala

# **POLYNESIANS**

**PRONUNCIATION:** PAHL-uh-nee-zhuns

**LOCATION:** Polynesia, a vast string of islands in the Pacific Ocean, including Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter Island, Tonga, Tuvalu, and French Polynesia

**POPULATION:** Unknown

**LANGUAGE:** Native languages of the islands; Maori; Tahitian; Hawaiian; Samoan; French; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity with elements of native religion

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Polynesians are the original inhabitants of a vast string of islands in the Pacific Ocean that spans from New Zealand in the south to Hawaii in the north. The western boundary is Easter Island, and the Fiji Islands are generally considered to lie just beyond the western boundary of the region. Polynesia means "many islands" in Greek and the cultures of the region share many traits with each other. This does not mean there is no diversity within Polynesia; however, the differences are often subtle and not readily perceived by outsiders.

Independence for Polynesian peoples under colonial rule began with Western Samoa in 1962. Many other island nations have followed suit, the main pocket of colonial possessions being the territories of French Polynesia, which includes Tahiti and the Marquesas. The Kingdom of Tonga is unique in Polynesia since it is a constitutional monarchy and was never a colonial possession. Tonga was a British protectorate during the first half of this century. In 2006 the Tongan king of 41 years died and was succeeded by his eldest son Siaosi Tuou V.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

In the Pacific region, there is an important distinction made between "high" islands and "low" islands. Tahiti is a typical high island in Polynesia, being relatively large with steep slopes, luxuriant vegetation, and abundant waterfalls and rushing streams. Coastal plains are absent or extremely limited on high islands. Low islands are of a few different types. Atolls are the most common low islands in Polynesia. These are typically "desert islands" that are low-lying, narrow, and sandy with few, if any, surface streams. Low islands have less biodiversity than do high islands.

At the time of the first known European contact with the Polynesian world in the 1500s, there were probably around half a million people scattered throughout the region. European powers vied for ownership of most of the inhabited islands of Polynesia. The indigenous populations suffered at the hands of the Europeans, with the loss of their traditional lands and resources, as well as discrimination against their cultures and languages. On the North Island of New Zealand, increasing European encroachment into interior lands inhabited by the Maori led to a decade of armed conflict referred to as the "Maori Wars" of the "Land Wars." The result of the conflict was the decimation of those Maori who sided against the Europeans and the absorption of their traditional lands into the larger pool available to European settlers.

Polynesians migrate within the region, especially to New Zealand, where there is a large population of Cook Islanders resident in Auckland. In fact, there are more Cook Islanders

resident there than in the Cook Islands themselves. Polynesians also immigrate to California, parts of Europe, and Australia. Samoans migrate to Hawaii and California. Residents of French Polynesia immigrate to France.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Polynesian languages are part of the larger Austronesian language family that encompasses most of the languages of the Pacific Basin. Polynesian forms a sub-group of this extensive language family; all of these languages are more closely related to each other than they are to other languages spoken in the Pacific. Linguists believe that Proto-Polynesian, the ancestral language of all the current Polynesian languages, was spoken in the area of Fiji-Tonga-Samoa around 300 to 400 years ago. At that time, the original speakers began to migrate to different islands and, as a result, the proto-language began to diverge and change. This movement is responsible for the current language situation in the Polynesian area.

Many Polynesian languages face an uncertain future. Attempts have been made to revitalize the Hawaiian language through educational initiatives at the university and the elementary school levels. Tahitian has been used as a lingua franca (common language) throughout the Tuamotuan Islands, the Marquesas, the Gambiers, and the Austral Islands since before European contact and is threatening the viability of the native languages of those islands. In New Zealand, all speakers of Maori—the indigenous Polynesian language of the island chain—are bilingual in English. There has been considerable progress in the revitalization of the Maori language, and a bilingual Maori-English television station was launched in New Zealand in 2004. Maori Television has undertaken a block of completely Maori broadcasting for three hours each evening.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Polynesian societies have an exceptionally rich body of folklore and mythology. There are myths relating the origins of human beings as well as the origins of cultural practices and institutions. There is a considerable body of mythology regarding the origins of tattooing in Polynesian cultures. Some origin myths describe the process of migration via ocean-going canoes from one island to another. Cultural heroes are important figures in the folklore of Polynesian societies.

### **5 RELIGION**

Polynesian religion changed dramatically with the coming of European missionaries to the region in the early part of the 19th century. From what we do know of precontact practices, there was considerable variation in religious ideas and practices throughout Polynesia. In Hawaii, for instance, priests performed sacrificial rites at monumental temple complexes to provide legitimacy for the authority of the chief. Chiefs were genealogically related to gods and, as a result, were believed to possess sacred power called *mana*. The Hawaiian system recognized four major gods and one major goddess. Ku, the god of war, fishing, and other male activities, ruled the ritual calendar of ancient Hawaiians for eight months out of the year. Ku was the patron god of the well-known Hawaiian king Kamehameha.

The concept of *tapu*, English “taboo,” was important in all Polynesian societies, generally meaning forbidden or prohibited due to sacredness. There were things that were *tapu* such

as certain body parts of particular individuals—the head of the first-born, for example. There were also rules that served to protect through the prohibition of certain actions. In the Marquesas Islands, a woman’s menstrual cloth was not *tapu*; however, it was *tapu* to touch it.

Today, most Polynesians are followers of Christianity, both Catholicism and Protestantism. Some traditional beliefs and mythologies have been incorporated into Christian ideology.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Holidays in most contemporary Polynesian societies are events related to the state or the church. In the French possessions like the Marquesas, Bastille Day (July 14) is an important holiday. Many islanders now celebrate a number of Catholic holidays due to influence of missionaries in the colonial era.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

From the novels of authors such as Herman Melville, we know a considerable amount about the ways of life in Polynesian societies at the advent of European influence and colonization. For example, we know that the Marquesas Islanders had a birth feast on the day a child was born. On that occasion, the maternal uncles and the paternal aunts of the newborn would cut their hair and an ornament maker would fashion hair ornaments for the child to wear later in life. The newborn was brought presents by family and friends and a type of shrine was built by the infant’s father.

Passage into puberty was often accompanied by tattooing rituals in many Polynesian societies. In some societies, such as Samoa, only men were tattooed. In others, both men and women were tattooed, but one group less elaborately than the other. The practice of tattooing in Polynesia is very complicated. It carried with it a number of cultural meanings. There have been recent revivals of the art of tattooing in societies such as the Maori of New Zealand.

Another puberty ritual performed in some Polynesian societies was fattening. Male and female youths were secluded, kept inactive and out of direct sunlight, and fed excessive amounts of food for a period of time to make them more sexually desirable. In the Society Islands these young people were called *pahio*, which derives from the word for “lazy.” These puberty rituals are no longer performed.

Death was accompanied by ritualized wailing on the part of women and the performance of formalized chanting on the part of men in the Marquesas. Women would also perform a specific dance called *heva* in which they would shed all of their clothes and move in an extremely exaggerated manner. Finally, the female relatives of the deceased would do physical harm to themselves by cutting their hands and faces with sharks’ teeth and other sharp implements. Christian missionaries saw these behaviors as “pagan” and quickly found ways to put a stop to them.

### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Greetings in Polynesian societies vary from island to island. Status determines the nature and extent of the social interaction of individuals in these societies. In rural Tahiti, for example, the standard greeting is, “Where are you going?” There are two expected responses: either “Inland,” if the person is headed away from the coast, or “Seaward,” if the person is headed towards the coastline. The interaction can continue with a fair-

ly standard second level of interchange that includes the question, “What’s new at the inland/seaward end?” This is usually an opener for a conversation.

Premarital relations between the sexes are typically very relaxed in most Polynesian societies. However, once a permanent relationship is established, unconstrained sexual relations are not permitted. The choice of a marriage partner is less fixed than in many cultures of the world. In the times before Christian influence, the preference in some Polynesian societies such as the Marquesas Islands was for cross-cousin marriage. In other words, a woman would marry one of her mother’s brother’s sons or her father’s sister’s sons: in English kinship terms, a cousin. Missionaries forbade this type of marriage pattern and the present patterns allow for freedom of choice in marriage partners, not unlike that found in American society.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Traditional Polynesian societies did not possess large villages. Instead, families clustered together in neighborhoods that focused on a set of shared structures that were at the center of social, ceremonial, and religious life. Like many Melanesian cultures, many Polynesians had separate sleeping quarters for bachelors. However, Polynesian bachelor houses were not off-limits to females as they were in most parts of Melanesia. In some parts of Polynesia, households were built on elevated stone platforms. Religious shrines, whether communally- or family-owned, were important parts of the household structure.

Households of the nobility had carved items of furniture including headrests and stools. Sleeping mattresses were also available for members of noble households. In many parts of Polynesia, illumination by torches or coconut oil lamps was common inside houses at night. Polynesia seemed like a virtual paradise to Europeans who ventured there.

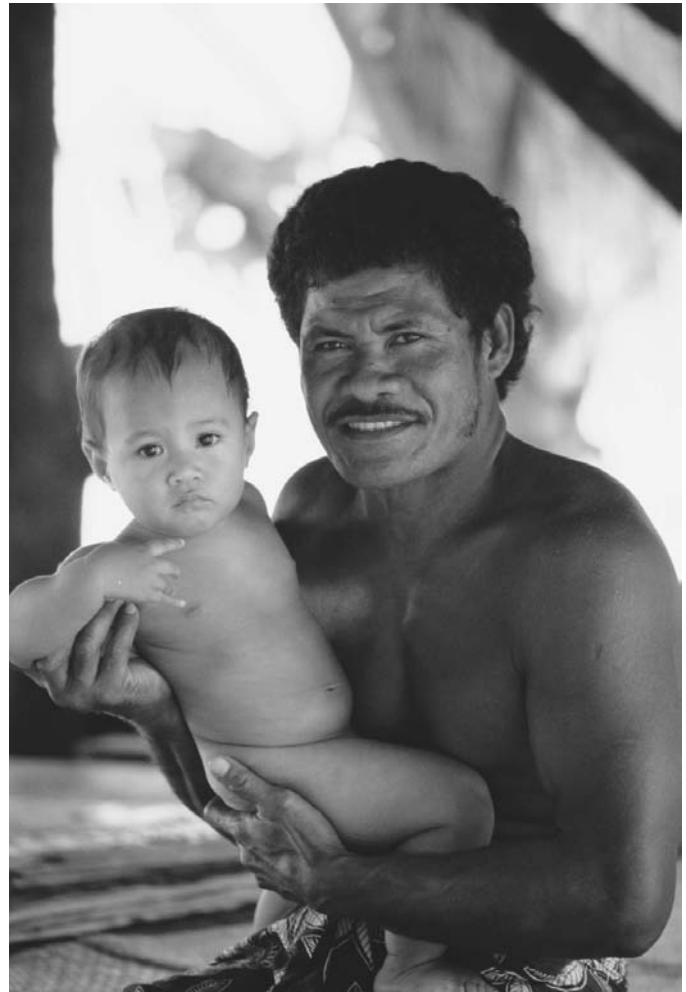
Nowadays, Polynesian houses and communities are the products of indigenous design and Western materials. Houses constructed of modern materials are frequently found in Polynesian communities. In rural communities, Polynesian houses may be made in the traditional manners of precontact times, yet utilizing some Western building products.

Transportation was by foot and canoe in precontact times. There were many different types of canoes in Polynesia, and Polynesians are especially well-known for their navigational skills. Polynesians spread throughout the Pacific Basin via ocean-going canoes. War canoes were elaborately decorated and treated with special care when not in use. The war canoes of chiefs were stored in special structures on land in times of peace. Although outrigger canoes are associated with Polynesian seafaring, they probably did not originate in that region, but in Micronesia.

Polynesians enjoy typical modes of transportation, such as driving cars, riding buses, bicycling, boating, and walking.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

In societies like Tahiti where there were discrete social classes, marriage was prohibited among individuals from different classes. Children born of sexual relations between members of different classes were killed at birth in traditional Tahitian society. Again, these practices were discontinued as a result of missionary activity in Tahiti.



*A Polynesian man with his baby son on Tuvalu, South Pacific.  
(Tim Graham/Getty Images)*

In many Polynesian societies, polygamy was practiced. The Marquesas Islanders were unique in the region because in traditional society, a woman could have more than one husband at a time, a practice called “polyandry” by anthropologists and fairly rare in the cultures of the world. It was very uncommon to find a man who had more than one wife in the Marquesas. Monogamy, having only one spouse at a time, is now the universal practice in Polynesia.

The role and status of women in relation to men varies between island societies in Polynesia. In a place like the Marquesas, women have always enjoyed a status nearly equivalent with men. One evidence of this equality is in the extent of tattooing that was permitted for both sexes in the precontact society. Men and women were tattooed almost equally as much. In many other Polynesian societies, this was not the case, as women held positions of lower status than men.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Typical Polynesian attire in precontact times was similar for men and women. A section of bark cloth that was worn as a loincloth by men or a waistcloth by women was the standard piece of clothing. The bark used to make the cloth came from various types of trees including the mulberry, banyan, and

breadfruit trees. In some cases certain classes of women would protect themselves from exposure to the sun by wrapping themselves in a sheet of bark cloth. On ceremonial occasions, men of high status would also wrap up in sheets of decorated bark cloth. Decorated bark cloth known as *tapa* was the main item of traditional clothing in Tahiti, although it is no longer manufactured there. There were a number of ornaments that were worn for ceremonial events. Elaborate feather headdresses were signs of nobility. Ear ornaments were worn by both men and women in Polynesia. Traditional patterns of dress have disappeared except for performances or special ceremonial or cultural events. Fashion in Polynesia spans the range that it does in any Westernized developing country.

## 12 FOOD

Most traditional Polynesian societies rely on fishing and horticulture. We know from early European accounts of the region that the Marquesas Islands were unique, for they relied on the production of breadfruit. Breadfruit was preserved and fermented in deep pits. Each family had its own pit for making the fermented breadfruit called *ma*.

Taro root is another important foodstuff in Polynesia. Early Hawaiians relied on taro as a staple starch in their diet. In Hawaiian mythology, the taro plant originated from the corpse of the first-born of Wakea, a high god in Hawaiian cosmology who had died from premature birth.

In some parts of Polynesia, Hawaii, Tahiti, and the Marquesas in particular, men and women ate separately. In general, this pattern is no longer followed except in the most traditional communities and in certain ceremonial contexts. In rural Tahitian society, young women are not allowed to eat food that has been prepared for adult men. The idea is that male interaction with the spiritual world could have some residual effects that would pass via the food to the young, vulnerable women.

## 13 EDUCATION

Western-style education has become the standard in Polynesia. Many Polynesians attend colleges and universities both inside and outside the region.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Polynesia has a rich tradition of vocal and instrumental music. Some genres of musical expression have been lost and some new ones have been created as a result of missionary activity in the region. Christian hymns have had considerable influence in the style of vocal music in Polynesia. The Tahitian vocal music known as *himene* (from the English word "hymn") blends European counterpoint with Tahitian drone-style singing.

One of the most well-known Polynesian musical instruments is the Hawaiian *ukulele*. It is the Hawaiian version of the Portuguese mandolin that came to the islands with Portuguese immigrants in the 1870s.

The primary use of Hawaiian flutes and drums was to accompany the dance known as the *hula*. There is a complex structure to the musical accompaniment to the graceful and erotic dance that most Westerners think of when they think of "hula dancing." Hawaiian hula were usually named after the instruments that accompanied them: *hula ili ili* was accompanied by a pair of smooth lava pebbles that are clicked together like a pair of castanets called *ili ili*.

## 15 WORK

Throughout the Polynesian world there is a traditional division of labor along the lines of gender. Men are responsible for fishing, construction, and protection of the family units, while women are responsible for collecting and processing horticultural products and the manufacturing of basketry items and bark cloth. Both sexes participate in gardening activities. Throughout Polynesia, modern contexts of employment are to be found in the cities and towns. As in American society, the type of employment a person has depends on the level of education and training they have received.

Tourism is not a major source of economic support for most modern nations within the Polynesian culture area. Samoa, for example, receives less than 14% of its GDP (gross domestic product) from tourism and tourism accounts for just under 10% of all employment in Samoa. French Polynesia and Hawaii are the two most active participants in global tourism in Polynesia, although their tourism profiles differ considerably. Bora Bora, in particular, has become an exclusive tourism destination where rates for hotel rooms range from \$1,000 to \$15,000 per night.

## 16 SPORTS

Arm wrestling was a traditional Polynesian form of male entertainment as a competition of strength. Other forms of competition between males were common throughout the region as ways to prepare for battle. These forms have either disappeared or been modified, since indigenous warfare is no longer practiced in Polynesia. Surfing was also popular in many parts of Polynesia, although it was only in Hawaii that surfers stood on their surfboards. The world-wide sport of surfing originated through European observation of this traditional Polynesian past-time.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most parts of Polynesia have running water and electricity. Television has made its way into most Polynesian communities. In some parts of the region, Polynesian peoples are taking control of the images of themselves presented in the popular media, producing popular films as well as documentaries.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Decoration of objects of utilitarian nature is common in most Polynesian societies. Wood carving has been particularly well developed among the Maori of New Zealand. In most Polynesian societies, the designs and patterns that appeared on bark cloth or wood carvings also appeared on the human body in the form of tattoos. In some societies, tattooing was the primary art form. Many traditional art forms, including tattooing, are being revived in many Polynesian societies.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The right to self-determination is important for many Polynesian peoples. Increased nuclear testing in French Polynesia has been a central concern for the region and the world. In September 1995, France sparked widespread protests by resuming nuclear testing on the Mururoa atoll, which is part of the Tuamotu Archipelago, after a three-year moratorium. Nuclear testing was suspended in January 1996. As a result of wide-



spread international pressure and extensive social protests, French Polynesia's autonomy has been greatly expanded.

Many Polynesian groups like the Maori continue to deal with the social problems of alcoholism and domestic violence. The 1994 film *Once Were Warriors* is a moving, insightful portrayal of modern, urban life for the Maori.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

There is some debate in the scholarly literature about gender roles in traditional (precontact) Polynesian societies and their manifestations in post-contact environments of urbanization and a wage economy. Most scholars agree that in traditional Polynesian societies, the concept of *tapu* governed the interactions of males and females. *Tapu* dictated that men and women should eat their meals segregated from each other to prevent any form of pollution. The *tapu* system did not, on the other hand, stipulate that women were subservient to men. There were several mechanisms by which women attained high status in traditional Polynesian societies.

Traditional Tahitian society has recognized a transgendered role for men who dressed and assumed the social roles of women since precontact times. *Mahu* as the role is called in the Tahitian language also observe the taboos and restrictions of women; however in modern Tahitian society, *mahu* no longer dress like women although they do engage in occupations that are considered as female, such as household care. The category of *mahu* is considered to be natural in Tahitian sexual ideology, although an individual does not have to remain *mahu* throughout the course of his entire life. *Mahu* are not socially stigmatized in Tahitian society and neither are their heterosexual male partners.

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—by J. Williams

# PUNJABIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** puhn-JAHB-eez

**LOCATION:** Pakistan (Punjab province); India (Punjab state)

**LANGUAGE:** Punjabi

**RELIGION:** Hinduism; Islam; Buddhism; Sikhism; Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Punjabis derive their name from a geographical, historical, and cultural region located in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. "Punjab" comes from the Persian words *panj* (five) and *ab* (river) and means "Land of the Five Rivers." It was the name used for the lands to the east of the Indus River drained by its five tributaries (the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej). Culturally, the Punjab extends beyond this area to include parts of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, the foothills of the Himalayas, and the northern fringes of the Thar (Great Indian) Desert in Rājasthān.

The Punjab is an ancient center of culture in the Indian subcontinent. It lay within the bounds of the Harappan civilization, the sophisticated urban culture that flourished in the Indus Valley during the 3rd millennium BC. Harappa, one of the two great cities of this civilization, was located on the Ravi River in what is now Pakistan's Punjab Province. The Punjab has also been one of the great thoroughfares of South Asian history. Aryan-speaking nomadic tribes descended from the mountain passes in the northwest to settle on the plains of the Punjab around 1700 BC. Subsequently, Persians, Greeks, Huns, Turks and Afghans were among the many peoples who entered the Indian subcontinent through the northwestern passes and left their mark on the region. Punjabis, who are of Aryan or Indo-European stock, are the modern descendants of the many peoples that passed through the region.

At times in the past, the Punjab and its population have enjoyed a distinct political identity as well as a cultural one. During the 16th and 17th centuries AD, the region was administered as a province of the Moghul Empire. As recently as the 19th century, much of the area was united under the Sikh state of Ranjit Singh. Britain administered the Punjab as a province of its Indian Empire. However, the redrawing of political boundaries in 1947 saw the Punjab divided between India and Pakistan. Punjabis, despite their common cultural heritage, are now either Indians or Pakistanis by nationality.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Punjabis number about 120 million people, of whom around 90 million live in the Pakistan Punjab and just over 30 million in the Indian state of Punjab. Migrant Punjabis form important communities in Indian cities, such as Delhi, as well as overseas in Southeast and East Asia, Australia, Africa, Europe, and North America. Punjab Province in Pakistan includes virtually all of the Punjab (i.e., West Punjab) that was assigned to Pakistan in 1947. The Indian Punjab (East Punjab) State extended from the international border with Pakistan to Delhi. In 1966, however, agitation for a Punjabi-speaking state saw the creation of the present Punjab State. This is less than half the size of the former East Punjab and only 14% of the area of the undivided Punjab. The location of India's Punjab State



along the border with Pakistan and only some 40 km (25 mi) from the city of Lahore, gives it great strategic significance.

The Punjab is an agricultural region and Punjabis, whether in India or Pakistan, share the agrarian social structure based on caste that is found throughout South Asia. The Jats, mainly landowners (*zamindars*) and cultivators, are the largest caste in the Punjab. Other agricultural castes include Rājputs, Arains, Awans, and Gujars. Among the lower-ranked service and artisan castes are the Lohars, Tarkhans, and Chamars.

The homeland of the Punjabis lies on the plains of the upper Indus Valley, covering an area of roughly 270,000 sq km (104,200 sq mi). It stretches from the Salt Ranges in the north to the fringes of the Thar Desert in the southeast. The western margins lie along the base of Pakistan's Sulaiman Range. The Shiwaliks, the outer foothills of the Himalayas, define the Punjab's eastern boundary. The region is a vast alluvial plain, drained by the Indus River and its tributaries. In the northeast, the plain lies at around 300 m (just under 1,000 ft) above sea level, but it declines to under 75 m (250 ft) in elevation along the Indus River in the south. The hills bordering the plain exceed 1,200 m (approximately 4,000 ft) in the Shiwaliks and 1,500 m (approximately 5,000 ft) in the Salt Range.

The Punjab experiences a subtropical climate, with hot summers and cool winters. The mean temperature for June is 34°C (93°F), with daily maximums often rising much higher. The mean maximum temperature for Lahore in June is 46°C (115°F). Dust storms are a common feature of the hot weather. The mean January temperature is 13°C (55°F), although mini-

mums drop close to freezing and hard frosts are common. Rainfall varies from 125 cm (approximately 49 in) in the hills in the northeast to no more than 20 cm (8 in) in the arid southwest. Precipitation has a monsoonal pattern, falling mainly in the summer months. However, weather systems from the northwest bring valuable amounts of rain in the winter.

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Punjabi is the name of the language, as well as of the inhabitants, of the Punjab region. Punjabi belongs to the Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. In Pakistan, Punjabi is written using the Perso-Arabic script introduced to the region during the Muslim conquests. Punjabis in India use the Lahnda script, which is related to Devanagari, or the Gurmukhi script in which the Sikh sacred books are written. Punjabi is spoken by two-thirds of the population of Pakistan. In India, Punjabi is the mother tongue of just under 3% of the population. Punjabi was raised to the status of one of India's official languages in 1966.

There are six major dialects of Punjabi localized on the *doabs*, the areas lying between the rivers, which tend to be cultural and historical as well as geographical regions. Majhii, one of the more important dialects, is spoken in the region of the cities of Lahore and Amritsar. The other important Punjabi dialects are Malwa, Doabi, Powadhi, Dogri, and Bhattiani. To the west, Punjabi gives way to Lahnda, which is also known as Western Punjabi. Urdu, rather than Punjabi, is favored by city dwellers in Pakistan. Seraiki, sometimes called Multani, is a Punjabi dialect (some say it is a separate language) spoken by some 30 million people in Pakistan in the southern Punjab and northern Sindh. Like Punjabi, it is written in the Perso-Arabic script, the Gurmukhi script, or the Devanagari script.

### <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Punjabis have a rich mythology and folklore that includes folk tales, songs, ballads, epics, and romances. Much of the folk tradition is an oral one, passed on through the generations by traditional peasant singers, mystics, and wandering gypsies. Many folk tales are sung to the accompaniment of music. There are songs for birth and marriage, love songs, songs of war, and songs glorifying legendary heroes of the past. The *Mahiya* is a romantic song of the Punjab. *Sehra Bandi* is a marriage song, and *Mehndi* songs are sung when henna (a red dye) is being applied to the bride and groom in preparation for marriage. *Heera Ranjha* and *Mirza Sahiban* are folk romances known in every household in the Punjab. Wandering Sufi holy men, such as Bullhe Shah, are well known in the Punjab for their poetry and music. They contributed a verse form that became distinctive of Punjabi literature. The mixture of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim themes in Punjabi folklore mirrors the presence of these different religious traditions in the region.

### <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

The religious composition of the Punjabis reflects the Punjab's long and varied history. Early Hinduism took shape in the Punjab, Buddhism flourished in the region, and Muslims wielded political power in the area for nearly six centuries. Sikhism had its origins in the Punjab, which saw the existence of Sikh states that survived until the middle of the 20th century.

Sikhism was a syncretic religion combining the monotheism of Islam with many of the social features of Hinduism. Al-

though its founder, Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1539), preached for a classless society and the equality of women, Sikhs have to all intents and purposes adopted the Hindu caste system and treat women in a similar manner. Born into a Hindu caste in a village in the Punjab (now in Pakistan), Nanak founded a religion that today has most of its adherents in the Punjab. The British annexed the Punjab in the 19th century and introduced Christianity to the region. Thus, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Christianity are all represented among the Punjabi population.

Religious distributions in the Punjab were the result of historical processes at work over many centuries. These patterns were, however, dramatically altered by the mass migrations that accompanied the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947. Hindus and Sikhs fled Pakistan for India, while Muslims traveled in the other direction seeking refuge in Pakistan. Communal strife at this time between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims left as many as 1 million people dead. Today, Punjab Province in Pakistan is 97% Muslim and 2% Christian, with small numbers of Hindus and other groups in the population. Sikhs account for 63.9% of the people in India's Punjab State, while 34.7% are Hindu and roughly 1% each are Muslim and Christian. Small numbers of Buddhists, Jains, and other groups are also present.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Festivals in the Punjab are communal events shared by the entire community, no matter what their religion. Many are seasonal or agricultural festivals. Thus, Basant, when the mustard fields are yellow, marks the end of the cold weather. Punjabis celebrate by wearing yellow clothes, organizing kite-flying, and feasting. Holi is the great spring festival of India and a time for much gaiety, throwing of colored water and colored powder, and visiting friends and relatives. Vaisakh (Baisakh), in April, marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year and also is of special importance for Sikhs, as it commemorates the founding of the Sikh Khalsa. Tij marks the beginning of the rainy season and is a time when girls set up swings, wear new clothes, and sing special songs to mark the occasion. Dasahara, Diwali, and other festivals of the Hindu calendar are celebrated with much enthusiasm. The Sikhs have their "gurpurbs," holidays associated with the lives of the Gurus, while Muslims commemorate the festivals of Muharram, Id-ul-Fitr, and Bakr-Id.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Punjabi rites of passage follow the customs of the community to which a person belongs. Thus, among Muslims, the *mullah*, or priest, will visit a house within three days of the birth of a male child to recite holy words, including the Call to Prayer, in the baby's ear. The traditional period of impurity after childbirth ends with a fast. The child is named in consultation with the mullah. Males undergo circumcision (*sunnat*) any time before 12 years of age. Sikh birth rituals are simpler, with the child being taken to the temple for offerings, prayers, and the naming ceremony. The *Adi Granth*, the sacred book of the Sikhs, is opened at random and the parents choose a name that begins with the first letter of the first word on the left-hand page. An important ceremony for the Sikhs, however, is the baptism or initiation into the Sikh religion. This usually takes place in the late teenage years. For Hindus, it is important that a child be born at an auspicious time. A Brahman priest is con-

sulted and, if the time of birth is deemed unfavorable, special ceremonies are held to counter any harmful consequences that might result from this. In the past, a mother remained in isolation for a period of 40 days, though this custom is beginning to disappear. The ritual shaving of the head of the child is usually performed during the first five years of the child's life.

At death, Muslims wrap the corpse in white cloth before taking it to the mosque. White is the color of mourning throughout South Asia. At the mosque, the mullah reads the holy words over the body, which is then buried in the graveyard. Sometimes a stone slab is placed on the grave and each of the mourners places a handful of earth on the grave. This symbolizes the breaking of the link with the deceased. The mullah prays for the dead for three days. Hindus and Sikhs cremate their dead. On the fourth day after cremation, Hindus collect the ashes and charred remains of bones from the funeral pyre and immerse them in the sacred Ganges River, at Haridwar if possible. Sikhs usually immerse the ashes at Kiratpur Sahib, on the River Sutlej.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Forms of greetings and address vary according to circumstances and social context. In rural areas, a man is usually referred to as Bhaiji or Bhai Sahib (Brother) and a woman as Bibiji (Mistress) or Bhainji (Sister). Sikhs are addressed as Sardar (Mr.) or Sardarni (Mrs.). When they meet, Sikhs join the palms of their own hands together and say the phrase, "Sat Sri Akal" ("God is Truth"). Hindus accompany the same gesture with the word "Namaste" ("Greetings"). The common Muslim greeting is "Salaam" ("Peace" or "Greetings"), or "Salaam Alaikum" ("Peace be with you").

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Punjabi villages are compact nucleated settlements, with houses clustered around a mosque, temple, or gurdwara. Typically, the houses on the outside edge of the village are constructed so as to present the appearance of a walled settlement with few points of access. The main entrance to a village is through an arched gateway called a *darwaza* (door or gate), which is also a meeting place for the village. Houses are built close together, often sharing common walls, with rooms built around a central courtyard where animals are tethered and agricultural implements are stored. Most villages are made up of the various communities that are essential to a functioning agricultural economy—landowners, cultivators, artisans, and service castes.

The prosperity brought to the Punjab by the agricultural advances of the Green Revolution in the late 1960s and 1970s is clearly seen in local housing and creature comforts. In the Indian Punjab, houses are now built of brick, village streets are often paved, and every village has electricity. Households commonly have comfortable furniture, ceiling fans for the hot summers, and conveniences like telephones, radios, televisions, and even refrigerators. Many farmers have tractors. Scooters and motorcycles are common, and the more affluent families have cars and jeeps. Although the Pakistani Punjab has not achieved quite the same levels of prosperity, it too is a fertile agricultural region, and Punjabis enjoy some of the highest standards of living in Pakistan. However, being of a considerably larger size, there are areas lacking the transporta-

tion infrastructure and amenities that characterize the rest of the province.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

Caste, or *jati*, is the most important social grouping among Punjabis, defining social relations, marriage pools, and often occupation. Castes exist even among Muslims and Sikhs, whose religions specifically deny the legitimacy of the caste system. Castes are divided into numerous *gots* or clans, which are exogamous social units. One cannot marry into the *gots* of any of one's four grandparents. Among Muslims, castes are known as *qaums* or *zats*, but at the village level it is the *biradari*, or patrilineage, that is the more significant social unit. All males who can trace their lineage to a common ancestor belong to the same *biradari*, and all members of the *biradari* are regarded as kin. Members of a *biradari* often put up a united front in village affairs and disputes, for they share a sense of collective honor and identity.

The family is the primary unit of Punjabi society. The joint family dominates, with sons and their wives and children, along with any unmarried offspring, living in the household of the parents. The men have the responsibility of overseeing the agricultural or business activities of the family. Women, under the direction of the mother-in-law or senior wife, see to the running of the household, food preparation, and the care and raising of children. Among peasant cultivators, women as well as men participate in agricultural activities. Both men and women from laboring castes work for hire, as agricultural workers or at other manual labor.

Marriage and the bearing of children are expected of women in Punjabi society. Marriages are arranged by the parents of the boy and girl, though each community follows its own marriage rituals and customs. Among Muslims, for instance, the best match is considered to be a marriage between first cousins. The months of Ramadan and Muharram are avoided as marriage dates, the former being a month of fasting and the latter being a period of ritual mourning. The Muslim marriage ceremony is termed the *Nikah* ceremony. The girl is given a dowry, which explicitly remains her property. Hindu Punjabis seek marriage partners according to the limitations of caste endogamy and clan exogamy. Dowry is an important factor in negotiating a Hindu marriage. Hindu rituals include the traditional journey of the *barāt* (marriage party) to the bride's house, the garlanding of the bride and groom, and the ritual walking around the sacred fire. Sikhs, on the other hand, do not give or take dowries and solemnize their marriages before the Granth, their sacred book. In all communities, however, residence is patrilocal—the new bride moves into the home of her husband's family.

Different Punjabi communities have different customs regarding divorce and remarriage. Although Islam has provisions for a man to divorce his wife, in rural society divorce is intensely disapproved of and there are strong social pressures against it. Nor do Muslims approve of widow remarriage. Sikhs do not permit divorce, but do allow widow remarriage. Widow remarriage is not common among Hindus, although Jats permit the union between a widow and the younger brother of her husband. Divorce is not customary among Hindus, although there are ways in which marriages can be informally brought to an end.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

The standard dress in the rural Punjab is the *kurta*, *tahmat*, or *pyjama*, and turban. The *kurta* is a long shirt or tunic that hangs down to the thighs. The *tahmat* is a long piece of cloth that is wrapped around the waist and legs like a kilt. The *pyjama*, from which the English word "pajamas" is derived, is a pair of loose-fitting trousers. Turbans are worn in different styles in different localities and by different communities. Among cultivators, the turban is a relatively short piece of cloth, perhaps 1 m (3 ft) in length, wrapped loosely around the head. The formal Punjabi turban worn by men of social standing is much longer, with one end starched and sticking up like a fan. The Sikhs favor the peaked turban found around Patiala. Leather shoes, which are locally made, complete the outfit. During the winter a sweater, woolen jacket, or blanket is added. Men wear rings and sometimes earrings.

Women wear the *salwar* (baggy pants drawn in at the ankles) and *kamiz* (tunic), along with the *dupatta* (scarf). Sometimes a *ghaghra*, a long skirt dating back to Mughal times, replaces the *salwar*. Ornaments decorate the hair, rings or jewels are worn in the nose, and earrings, necklaces, and bangles are popular.

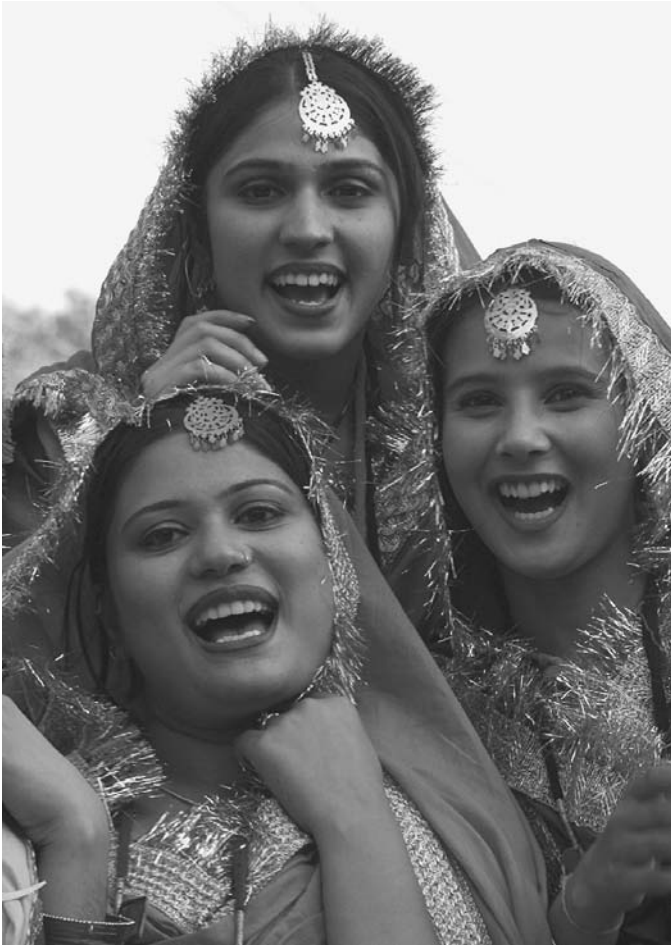
In urban areas, traditional dress is giving way to modern styles. Jackets, suits, and ties may be worn, with women wearing saris, dresses, skirts, and even jeans.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

The basic diet of Punjabis consists of cereals (wheat, maize, or millets), vegetables, pulses, and milk products. Goat meat is eaten, but this tends to be consumed on special occasions, such as weddings or other celebrations. A typical meal consists of flat bread (*roti*) made from wheat, a cup of lentils or other pulses (*dal*), and hot tea or buttermilk. In winter, the bread is made of maize, and vegetables, such as mustard greens (*sag*), may be added. *Dal* and *sag* are prepared in a similar way. Sliced or chopped garlic and onion are fried in butter, along with chilies, cloves, black pepper, and ginger. The vegetables or pulses are added and the food cooked, sometimes for several hours, until it is tender. No utensils are used because the food is eaten with the fingers. Only the right hand is used, with a piece of *roti* torn off to scoop up *dal* or the vegetable and place it in the mouth. Tea, which is drunk in generous quantities at all times of the day, is made with half water and half milk and sweetened with three or four teaspoons of sugar. Fish, chicken, and eggs are rarely eaten.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Punjabis have made great strides in education in recent years, although there is still room for improvement, especially in Pakistan. Assisted by organizations, such as the World Bank, Punjab Province has some 58% (2005 estimate) of the population under 10 years of age attending school, but less than 25% completed high school and only some 3% of this population attended university. The literacy rate in the population over 10 years of age in the Pakistan Punjab was 57% (2005 estimate). However, this varied from 60% among urban males to only 25% among females in rural areas. This is significant as some two-thirds of Punjab's population live in rural areas. 2001 figures for the Indian State of Punjab are 69.7% overall—75.2% for urban males and 57.7% for rural females.



Punjabi women perform Giddha, a traditional Punjab dance for women and girls, during the second heritage festival in Amritsar, India. (© Munish Sharma/Reuters/Corbis)

Both Punjabs have a tradition of education, with many institutions of higher learning. The University of the Punjab and the University of Engineering and Technology are located in Lahore in Pakistan. Among the institutions of higher learning in the Indian Punjab are Punjab University in Chandigarh, Punjabi University in Patiala, and Guru Nanak University in Amritsar.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Though Punjabis never developed any classical traditions of dance, they are known for several forms of folk dance. These are usually performed at religious fairs and festivals or at harvest time. The most famous is the Bhangra, which is identified with the Vaisakh festival. Today, it may be performed at marriages, on the occasion of the birth of a son, or at similar events. Young men of the village, dressed in brightly colored clothes, gather in a circle around a drummer who beats out the rhythm of the dance. Moving around the drummer, slowly at first, then faster as the tempo of the drum quickens, they dance and sing with great abandon. The Giddha is a dance for women and girls. Jhumar, Sammi, Luddi, and the sword dance are all popular folk dances of the Punjab.

In addition to the music associated with folk culture (songs, epics, and dances), Punjabis share in the traditions of Sikh sacred music and Sufi mysticism. The religious compositions of the Sikh Gurus combine aspects of classical Indian music with popular Punjabi folk tunes. Among the mystics and holy men who wandered India spreading the Islamic faith were poets who composed in the language of the region and set their works to music. Their contributions, along with the devotional songs of the Hindus and Sikhs, became part of the Punjabi regional musical tradition. More formal Muslim music forms, such as the *qawwali* and *ghazal*, continue to be popular in the region today.

Folk epics and romances, the Sikh sacred literature, and the poetic compositions of the Sufis are all part of a literary tradition that continues today. Modern Punjabi literature has its beginning in the mid-19th century, with writers like Charan Singh and Vir Singh. Noted modern writers include Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Harcharan Singh, and I. C. Nanda.

#### **15 WORK**

Most Punjabis are agriculturalists. With its development as a center of modern commercial agriculture, the Punjab (both Indian and Pakistani) is one of the most important agricultural regions of South Asia. However, the Punjab also has a proud martial tradition that extends back several centuries and continues in modern times. Between the two world wars, Sikhs made up 20% of the British Indian Army, though they accounted for only 2% of the Indian population. This tradition of military service continues today, with Sikhs making up an unusually high proportion of the Indian armed forces. In Pakistan, too, Punjabis—especially Jats and Rājputs—have a distinguished tradition of military service.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Games that are popular with children include hide-and-peek, kite-flying, and Indian cricket (*gulli-danda*), a stick-game played by boys. *Kabaddi*, a team wrestling game, is played by boys and men. Wrestling, partridge- and cock-fighting, pigeon-flying, and gambling are favorite pastimes of Punjabi men.

Modern sports, such as soccer, cricket, and field hockey, are widely played and watched in the Punjab. Punjab State in India has a government department to organize and promote sports and athletics, and the National Institute of Sports is located at Patiala. Punjabis are well represented in Indian national sports teams. In Pakistan, too, Punjabis have a strong presence on the country's national sports and athletics teams.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In the past, Punjabis derived much of their entertainment and recreation from their traditional sports and games, from religious fairs and festivals, and from their rich tradition of folklore and folk culture. They had their songs, romantic epics, folk dances, and castes of traveling entertainers such as the Mirasi. This has changed in recent times with the advent of radio, television, and movies. Film music is popular and the Indian Punjab even has a small film industry producing feature films in Punjabi.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Contemporary folk arts in the Punjab represent traditions that may extend back several thousand years. Village potters make clay toys that differ little from figurines recovered from Harappan archeological sites. Peasant women follow a tradition of painting intricate designs on the mud walls of their houses for festival days. The Punjab is noted for its elaborate embroidery work. Local crafts include woodwork, metalwork, and basketry.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Despite the Punjab's overall prosperity, problems exist, ranging from alcoholism in rural areas to unemployment in the cities. Illiteracy is still high in villages, especially among women. Punjabis who have migrated from rural areas to cities in search of work form an urban underclass that are cut off from the ties and support system of their families and village communities. The cities are full of high school and university graduates who lack the technical training for success in the modern economy. If they are fortunate enough to obtain employment, it tends to be in low-level clerical jobs. The Indian Punjab has also been faced with civil unrest and disruptions caused by the confrontation between Sikh extremists and the central government over the last several decades. The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of the Khalistan movement in the Indian Punjab to create "The Land of the Pure" as an independent Sikh state in all Punjabi-speaking areas, which include Indian Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and some other Punjabi speaking parts of states like Gujarat and Rājasthān. The 1980s saw militants undertake an insurgency against the government of India. However, under the Constitution of India, secessionism is forbidden, and the Indian government sent in security forces to counter the insurgency. The Indian Army's Operation Blue Star, involving an attack on the Sikh's holy shrine at Amritsar, where some militants had taken refuge, led ultimately to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 and the subsequent indiscriminate killings of Sikhs by Hindus throughout India. Various rebel groups in favor of Khalistan fought an insurgency against the government of India in the early 1990s, an insurgency that was suppressed by Indian security forces. Human rights groups have reported numerous atrocities, especially against Sikh women, carried out by the Indian security forces at this time.

Punjabis in Pakistan are subject to the chronic political instability that affects the state. Punjabis, who are the most populous group in the state, are viewed by other peoples as dominating the state of Pakistan, and Nawaz Sharif, Benazir Bhutto's chief protagonist until her assassination in December 2007, has had his power base in the Punjab. The radicalism associated with militant Islam and Pakistan's (apparently reluctant) involvement in the West's War on Terror is a cause of social problems, as is sectarian conflict and both internal and external disputes over water resources. The dispute with Sindh Province over the use of the waters of the Indus River and its tributaries extends back to the middle of the 19th century, but Pakistan's Water and Power Development Authority's (WAPDA) proposed plan known as Vision-2025 will essentially give Punjab Province control of the Indus' waters, extremely important in a country irrigated agriculture is the dominant economic activity.

When the Punjab was partitioned between India and Pakistan in 1947, a bone of contention remained which country had the right to use the waters of the Indus River and its tributaries. This issue was finally resolved by the Indus Waters Treaty, signed between the two countries in 1960. The Treaty provided that the waters of the contested rivers, the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej would be for the exclusive use of India. However, India would have to make a one-time financial payment to Pakistan as compensation for the loss of water from the rivers in India. The countries also agreed to exchange data and co-operate in matters related to the treaty, creating the Permanent Indus Commission, with a commissioner appointed by each country.

In 1958 the government of India started construction on what came to be called the Indira Gandhi Canal, which carried water from the Harike Barrage, a few kilometers below the confluence of the Sutlej and Beas rivers in Punjab state into desert areas of Rājasthān. While the Canal has certainly succeeded in dramatically changing the face of agriculture in Rājasthān, some see this as stealing water from the water-short Punjab, and this was a contributing factor to the Punjab's resistance to the central government.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The situation facing women in the Punjab tends to vary according to which (i.e. Pakistani or Indian) Punjab they inhabit, although in both locales they are accorded inferior status. In the Indian Punjab, for instance, where Hinduism is well-entrenched, women face all the problems of Hindu society—arranged marriages, child marriages (these still occur even though they are illegal according to both national and state law), payment of dowries, and abuse and even deaths arising from dowry disputes. In 2001 Punjab had a child sex ratio (for 0–6 years) of 874 girls for 1,000 boys, showing the impact of sex selective abortion despite the passage of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique (Prohibition of Sex Selection) (PCPNDT) Act by the government of India in 2003. This is a trend for Hindu India, with the 2001 Census showing a sex ratio of 933 women for 1,000 males. One social consequence of this is the sale of young girls from poor countries, such as Nepal, or states, such as West Bengal or Assam, to wealthy peasants as wives due to the lack of girls of marriageable age in the Punjab. This same situation applies to the Sikhs, who tend to mirror Hindu attitudes towards women, despite the protestations of freedom and equality their religion supposedly grants women. The situation regarding female feticide among Sikhs became so bad that five Head Priests of the "Akāl Takht," the highest seat of Sikh religious authority in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, issued a *Hukumnama* (edict) in April 2001 preaching excommunication of those involved in this practice.

Women face a serious law and order situation in the Indian Punjab, with numerous cases of murder, rape, and attempted rape recorded. Kidnapping and suicides are common, with many cases of dowry deaths reported and still more going unreported. With revenge as their sole motive, a growing number of women in Punjab are landing themselves on the wrong side of law. Police officials say that a rise in the number of cases of well-to-do women getting entangled in murders, attempts to murder, and even in assisting rapes reveals a new trend in the state.

Detriments, such as lack of inheritance and economic discrimination stemming from the patriarchal social systems,

exist on both sides of the border, but women in West Punjab suffer from the general place of women in Muslim society. Under Muslim law, a man can have up to four wives, and divorce is relatively easy for him to obtain. High-class women are required to maintain *purdah*, and village women commonly wear the *burqa*. Women (and men, too) are subject to “honor killings” and, despite passage of the Women’s Protection bill of 2006, live under Muslim law and are sentenced to the legal penalties set out in the 1979 Hudud Ordinance. It is not uncommon for women to be subjected to physical abuse by their husbands and other male members of the family.

Societal norms, poverty, illiteracy, the dominance of a patriarchal society, and the constraints of Hindu or Muslim religious practices influence all but the most affluent women in the Punjab.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# QATARIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KAHT-uh-reez

**LOCATION:** Qatar

**POPULATION:** 907,000 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic; English

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Qataris live on a small peninsula that juts into the Persian Gulf, in the Middle East. Qatar is one of the “oil states,” a country that moved quickly from poverty to riches with the discovery of oil reserves. There is archaeological evidence that the land now known as Qatar was inhabited by humans as long ago as 5000 BC. Pearling in the oyster beds just off shore began back in 300 BC, and continued to be Qataris’ main source of income until the early 20th century. The Islamic revolution arrived in Qatar in AD 630, and all Qataris converted to Islam. For most of its history, Qatar was a sparsely populated land whose people followed three different lifestyles: some Qataris were fishers in the Gulf; others made their living through pearling; and the rest were Bedu (or Bedouin) nomads (see **Bedu**). The modern state of Qatar can perhaps be said to have begun when the Arab tribe of Utub settled there around 1766. The years following their arrival were marked by constant shifts in power between two ruling families: the al Khalifa family, who are now the ruling family of Bahrain; and the al Jalahima family. Other forces who were involved in these centuries of conflict include the Sultan of Oman, Wahhabi Muslims from Saudi Arabia, the Persians, and the Ottoman Turks. When Britain made its treaties with other Gulf states (which then became known as the Trucial States), Bahrain and Qatar were left out because Britain did not want to get involved in the conflicts between them. Qatar, therefore, became a stronghold for the pirates that terrorized the Gulf at that time.

After a series of naval battles between Bahrain and Qatar (initiated by Bahrain) in 1867–68, Britain decided it was in their best interests to try to negotiate a settlement between them. In this settlement, the al Thani family were established as the rulers of Qatar, which they continue to be to this day.

The Ottoman Turks occupied Qatar in 1871 and stayed until August 1915. As soon as they left, Qatar began to negotiate a protective treaty with Britain, and officially became one of the Trucial States in November 1916. When Japan developed the cultured pearl in the late 1920s, Qatar’s economy sank. Cultured pearls were a much easier way to obtain pearls than diving for them in the wild oyster beds, so demand for Qatar’s wild pearls fell drastically. The Qatari people lived in great poverty for the next two decades, until oil was discovered. World War II (1939–45) delayed production of the oil for a few years, until 1947. Since that time, Qataris have become some of the wealthiest people in the world. Qatar became fully independent on 3 September 1971.

Toward the end of the 20th century, Qatar began establishing itself as a reforming, democratizing force among the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE). The country allows no political parties, but does sponsor regional conferences on civil liberties and does allow elections to regional coun-



cils. These reforms were mostly driven by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, who overthrew his father in a bloodless coup in 1995. He introduced municipal elections in 1999 and a new constitution enacted in 2005 created a national assembly, one third of whose members are appointed by the emir.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

Qatar is a small peninsula that juts due north into the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf. The peninsula is about 160 km (100 mi) long, and 88 km (55 mi) across at its widest point. The total area is 11,437 sq km (4,427 sq mi), which is about the size of the US states of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. The north, east, and west sides of the peninsula are bordered by the Gulf waters. To the south lie Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Qatar and Bahrain have long disputed ownership of the Hawar Islands, which lie between the two states.

The climate in Qatar is generally hot and dry. In the winter months it gets somewhat cooler, but much more humid. Temperatures can go as high as 43°C (110°F) in the summer (between May and October). In the winter, the humidity can reach 100%. A hot desert wind, or *shamal*, blows almost constantly all year long, bringing with it frequent sand- and duststorms. There is very little rainfall, only 7.5 cm (3 in) per year on average, all of which falls during the winter months. Qatar's terrain is flat, with some sand dunes in the southeast. There are also extensive salt flats in the south, indicating that the land there was once under the sea, making Qatar an island in the remote past.

Little plant or animal life exists in Qatar, beyond hardy forms of desert life, such as thorn bushes, cacti, and scrub grass; insects, spiders, and some butterflies; and lizards, snakes, and scorpions. Mammals in the desert include fox, rabbits, hedgehogs, gerbils and other rodents, and bats. The Gulf waters support a greater amount and variety of life. Sea turtles, sea cows, dolphins, and an occasional whale can be found there, as well as a myriad of fish. Shrimp are harvested in large numbers as well. Flamingoes flock along the shores, along with other sea and shore birds. The Arabian, or white, oryx is almost extinct in the wild but is being bred in captivity in Qatar and elsewhere. The same is true for the gazelle.

The human population of Qatar is about 907,000. Of those, at least three-fourths are foreign workers. There are only about 173,000 native-born Qataris. Most people in Qatar live in the cities; 80% of the total population lives in the capital city of Doha. Doha is on the east coast of the Qatar peninsula, as are most of the larger towns and cities.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The official language of Qatar is Arabic, the native language of native-born Qataris. Many Qataris are also fluent in English, which is used as the common language for business transactions, etc.

Arabic, spoken by 100 million people worldwide, has many dialects which are very distinctive, so that people living as little as 500 km (300 mi) apart may not be able to understand one another. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic, or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken forms are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet which has no distinction between upper and lower cases. It is not necessary for the letters to be written on a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation conventions are also quite different from English.

Arabic speakers tend to use emotional appeal, exaggeration, repetition, and words instead of action (for example, making threats with no intention to follow through on them). They are more interested in the poetry of the language than in communicating "cold, hard facts." "Hello" in Arabic is *Marhaba* or *Ahlan*, to which one replies, *Marhabtayn* or *Ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Walaykum as-salam*, "And to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is *Afwhan*. "Yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers 1 to 10 in Arabic are *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba'a*, *khamsa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *tamania*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

Arabs have very long names, consisting of their given name, their father's name, their paternal grandfather's name, and finally their family name. Women do not take their husband's name when they marry, but rather keep their mother's family name as a show of respect for their family of origin. Given names usually indicate an Arab's religious affiliation: Muslims use names with Islamic religious significance, such as Muhammad and Fatima, whereas Christians often use Western names.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Many Muslims believe in *jinn*s, spirits who can change shape and be either visible or invisible. Muslims sometimes wear amulets around their necks to protect them from jinn. Sto-



ries of jinns are often told at night, like ghost stories around a campfire.

## **5 RELIGION**

At least 95% of the total population of Qatar is Muslim, and native-born Qataris are mostly of the Sunni branch of Islam and adhere to a modified, slightly less conservative branch of Wahhabism, the fundamentalist and puritanical branch of Islam that is prevalent in Saudi Arabia.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

As an Islamic state, Qatar's official holidays are Islamic ones. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by 11 days each year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are *Ramadan*, the month of fasting from dawn until dusk each day; *Ayd Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of Ramadan; *Ayd Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (known as the *Hajj*; the First of Muharram, or the Muslim New Year; *Mawoulid An-Nabawi*, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Ayd Al-ism wa Al-Miraj*, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to Jerusalem. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. All government offices, private businesses, and schools are also closed during *Ayd Al-Fitr* and *Ayd Al-Adha*.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Qataris mark major life transitions such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death with Islamic ceremonies and feasting.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Arab hospitality reigns in Qatar. An Arab will never ask personal questions, as that is considered rude. It is expected that a person will say what he or she wishes, without being asked. A direct refusal is also considered rude, so one must learn to read the indirect signals that are given. Food and drink are always taken with the right hand because the left hand is used for "unclean" purposes, such as wiping oneself after using the toilet. When talking, Arabs touch each other much more often, and stand much closer together, than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking, even if they are virtual strangers. (Members of the opposite sex, even married couples, never touch in public.) Arabs talk a lot, talk loudly, repeat themselves often, and interrupt each other constantly. Conversations are highly emotional and full of gestures.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Qatar has engaged in a rapid modernization program since the 1970s, when income from the oil industry rose dramatically. All villages and towns can now be reached by paved roads which are well-maintained. The constantly growing population in the cities leads to a continual campaign of expansion and road construction, so travel there is sometimes delayed. There is little public transportation available in Qatar, so nearly everyone drives a car. Housing, utilities, and communication services are all modern. Health care is up-to-date and free to all Qataris. Health clinics, both public and private, are located throughout the peninsula so that medical care is readily available to all. The general health of Qataris is good, although

there are some problems with rat and insect control—and their accompanying diseases—in the larger cities.

The two largest cities, the capital city of Doha and the west-coast city of Umm Said, have a water-main system that provides running water to all residents. In other places, water is delivered by tankers and stored in water tanks in gardens or on roofs, or is pumped into homes from deep-water wells. All foreign workers are provided with free housing. Even the formerly nomadic Bedu (or Bedouin) now live in air-conditioned villas built by the government. The government also provides social welfare programs for the sick, elderly, and disabled.

Qatar's population increased rapidly in the 1990s and early in the first decades of the 21st century. This has caused some housing shortages but the country is rapidly building new housing and is even allowing some foreign ownership in newly developed properties.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The family is the central unit of Qatari society. Qataris are only recently removed from a tribal way of life, so tribal values and customs still prevail.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Qataris wear traditional Arab clothing. For men, this is an ankle-length robe called a *thobe* or *dishdasha*, with a *ghutrah* (a large piece of cloth) on the head which is held in place by an *uqal* (a woven piece of rope). Women tend to wear very colorful long-sleeved, ankle-length dresses, with a black silk cloak called an *abaya* covering them completely in public. Some older Qatari women still wear a face mask, called a *batula*, but this custom is dying out.

## **12 FOOD**

Rice is a staple food for Qataris. It is usually fried (or sautéed) first, then boiled. Saffron is often added during the frying stage to make the rice yellow. Bread is served at almost every meal, especially pita bread (known in Qatar as *khubus arabi*). *Hummus*, a spread made from ground chickpeas, is also eaten at most meals. *Hamour*, a type of fish caught in the Gulf, is frequently served baked, or cooked with rice. Mutton (sheep) is the favorite meat—pork is forbidden by Islam (as is alcohol). Shellfish, particularly shrimp which are caught in great numbers off Qatar's shores, is a popular dish. Tea and coffee are the beverages of choice. Tea is never drunk with milk added, and coffee is always made from Turkish beans and is often flavored with saffron, rosewater, or cardamom. Coffee and tea are usually sweetened with sugar.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education is highly valued by Qataris. Attendance at primary and secondary schools is 98%, and the literacy rate is more than 65% and rising. In the public school system, which was established in 1956, education is compulsory from age 6 to age 16 and it is free all the way through university-level. The government even provides full scholarships (including travel costs) for university students who wish to study abroad. Over 40,000 students, both boys and girls, are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, and another 400 or so study in vocational training institutes and religious schools. Adult education was introduced in 1957, and 40 adult education centers



Qataris play traditional percussion instruments in central Doha. (AFP/Getty Images)

now provide literacy courses to about 5,000 adult students. Qatar University was founded in 1973 and offers state-of-the-art degree programs in many subjects. Computer courses are required for all university students, as is physical education.

Qatar has been developing an international hub of higher education since early in the 21st century. By 2008 the country hosted branch campuses of such US universities as Cornell, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Texas A&M.

#### <sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE

Arab music is much like the Arab language—rich, repetitive, and exaggerated. The *oud* is a popular instrument; it is an ancient stringed instrument that is the ancestor of the European lute. Another traditional instrument is the *rebaba*, a one-stringed instrument. A traditional Arab dance is the *ardha*, or men's sword dance. Men carrying swords stand shoulder to shoulder and dance, and from among them a poet sings verses while drummers beat out a rhythm.

Islam forbids the depiction of the human form, so Qatari art focuses on geometric and abstract shapes. Calligraphy is a sacred art, with the Quran being the primary subject matter. Muslim art finds its greatest expression in mosques. The Islamic reverence for poetry and the poetic richness of the Arabic language inform much of Qatar's cultural heritage.

#### <sup>15</sup>WORK

The most profitable industry in Qatar is the oil industry, and natural gas production. The government runs both. Other industries include cement, power plants, desalinization plants (making drinking water out of sea water by removing the salt), petrochemicals, steel, and fertilizer. The government is trying to encourage private industry by offering grants, low-interest loans, and exemption from customs duties to private entrepreneurs. There is almost no agriculture in Qatar, although irrigation systems are being developed to increase the amount of arable land. Fishing continues to be a way of life for many Qataris, one that they have followed for millennia.

#### <sup>16</sup>SPORTS

Qataris love outdoor sports, both on land and on water. Football ("soccer" in the US) has become the most popular sport, although auto-racing is also a favorite. Basketball, handball, and volleyball are modern sports that are beginning to catch on in Qatar. Ten-pin bowling and golf are also enjoyed by some Qataris. The traditional sports of horse- and camel-racing and falconry are still pursued passionately in Qatar.

#### <sup>17</sup>ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Qataris enjoy playing chess, bridge, and darts. Tea shops and coffee houses are popular spots for socializing. Most are in-

side malls due to the intense heat of the Persian Gulf. Going to the movies is a very popular pastime as is simply driving around. Most modern Qataris have free time and considerable amounts of disposable income (the country has the fifth highest per capita income in the world, higher than the US) and the streets and mall and cinema parking lots are overflowing with the best luxury automobiles in the world.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The national government generously subsidizes folk arts such as rug making and basket-weaving. Goldsmithing is an ancient art among Qataris that continues to be practiced today. Folk music is also performed in Qatar. The National Theater produces both Arabic and English language productions at a modern performance space in Doha.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The rapid modernization of Qatar in the last few decades has created a huge generation gap between the pre-oil boom elders and the post-oil boom young people. Older people who grew up in Qatar before oil wealth made modernization possible do not understand or like many of the changes that modernization has brought about. They often lament the loss of the “good old days.” Young people, on the other hand, have grown up in the more-industrialized era of high technology and are comfortable with it, seeing only the benefits and none of the losses. The two generations often find it very difficult to communicate with each other.

Qatar is a politically and religiously moderate country, but there was at least one incident of a terrorist bombing in Doha in 2005. A British citizen was killed outside of a theater in Doha. The bombing occurred on the second anniversary of the US invasion of neighboring Iraq. The US maintains an enormous military presence in Qatar. The US Central Command is headquartered there and this has caused some unease among some Qataris due to the great unpopularity of the US occupation of Iraq.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The rights of women in Qatar are limited by Islamic teachings and Arab tradition. The wife of the emir, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned, has been a strong advocate for women's rights in the country. Qatar is one of a very few Arab countries with a personal status law, passed in 2007, which codifies personal and family law in such areas as divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Women in Qatar have the right to divorce their husbands and the 2007 personal status law also ended the ancient tradition of “temporary marriage.” Women are represented in the government to a greater degree than in other Gulf countries but their participation is low by Western standards.

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—revised by J. Henry

# RĀJASTHĀNIS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** “Marwaris”

**LOCATION:** the northwest Indian state of Rājasthān

**POPULATION:** 56,473,122 (Census of India, 2001, for Rājasthān state)

**LANGUAGE:** Rājasthānī and various languages and dialects spoken in Rājasthān

**RELIGION:** Hindu

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Rājasthān, the sixth most populous state in India, is inhabited by numerous groups, but it is the Rajputs (*Rājputās*) and Rajput culture that give the region its distinct identity. The state was called *Rājputāna* (“Land of the Rajputs [Sons of Kings]”) in colonial British days, while its present name Rājasthān (“Land of Kings”) reflects the fact that the former states in the region (most are currently districts in the state) were ruled by Rajas (*Rājas* [kings]) who, once they accepted British paramountcy in the 19th century, were allowed to rule their territories from that time with no British interference in their domestic affairs. In the past, the region was also called Rajwara (*Rājwāra*) and Raethana (*Rāethāna*) [“Land of Kings”], reflecting its association with the Rajput rulers. The independent states of Rājasthān virtually remained feudal kingdoms until they were incorporated into the Republic of India in 1947. In the post-Independence era, Rājasthān is known for the success of its Panchayati Raj—a system of local government based on *panchayats*, or local caste, village or tribal councils.

In addition to the Rajputs, who are relatively small in number and make up under 6% of the state’s population, other groups in Rājasthān include Charans and Bhats, castes that provided hereditary services to the Rajputs, tribals (Bhils, Minas, Meos), the nomadic Lohars and Rabari, and Brahmans, Banias, Jats, Chamars and Muslims.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Rājasthān, territorially the largest state in India, covers some 342,239 sq km (about the area of Germany) in the north west of India. The state is bounded by Gujarat to the south, Madhya Pradesh to the south east, and Uttar Pradesh, Hayana and Punjab to the northeast. The western border of Rājasthān is the international frontier with Pakistan, which given the history of India and Pakistan, makes the state, especially Rājasthān’s western areas, important from a military perspective.

Rājasthān is an arid region, with the Aravalli range of mountains running for over 600 km northeast-southwest through the middle of the state. Rising from “the Ridge” at Delhi, the mountains rarely exceed 1,000 m in the north. For much of their length, the Aravallis assume the form of a narrow belt of low, though often precipitous, parallel ridges rather than a continuous mountain system, though they reach a maximum elevation of 1,722 m at Mount Abu in the south. The Aravallis have the distinction of containing the oldest rocks in the world that present any elevation as a mountain system and separate the Thar Desert to the west from the more well-watered, agricultural plateaus of southeastern Rājasthān. The barren plains of the Thar (also known as the “Marusthali” or “Region of Death”) extend north and west from the Aravallis

to the Indus and Sutlej Rivers in Pakistan. This region gets less than 10 inches of rainfall a year, with mean maximum temperatures in summer averaging around 45°C (113° F). To the south and east of the Aravallis, an area drained by the Banas and Chambal Rivers receives close to 25 inches of precipitation a year and, with its relatively fertile soils, provides one of the more environmentally productive regions of the state.

The Rajputs are believed to be descended from numerous warlike clans such as the Scythians, Huns and Gujjars who entered India from the northwest from Central Asia in the years preceding the 6th century AD. Once they established military supremacy over the local inhabitants, they set out to establish themselves as *kshatriyas*, as belonging to the ruling, warrior caste. They accomplished this in Rājasthān by having genealogies developed for them by Charans, a caste whose traditional occupation is as bards and genealogists to the Rajputs. No doubt such genealogies were mythological, but they legitimized the position of the Rajputs in Hindu society, providing them with an ancestry that was linked to the Rajputs in the ancient Vedas. Thus Rajput clans such as the Sisodiyas and Rathors in Rājasthān claim to be descended from the sun (the Suryavansha lineage), the Bhati from the moon (the Chandravansha lineage), and the Chauhans and Pratihara find their origins in the “agnikula” or firepot of a sage on Mount Abu, in southern Rājasthān (the Agnivansha lineage). By the 7th century AD, kingdoms ruled by Rajputs extended from the Arabian sea to the head of the Bay of Bengal. However, the successful invasions of Muslims from the northwest in the centuries following the 12th century AD changed all this. Though resisted by the Rajputs, successfully at first, the Muslims established themselves at Delhi.

The Rajput kingdoms along the Ganges Valley were destroyed, with Rajput kingdoms surviving in the foothills of the Himalaya. The Rajputs of what is now Rājasthān retreated into the barren wilderness of the Thar desert to wage a guerrilla war against the Muslims, who were never able to inflict a decisive defeat on them. Reverses, such as the sacks of Ranthambore and Chittorgarh, accompanied by Rajput *jauhar*, when the men rode out in saffron robes (a symbol of Hinduism) to meet their death at the hands of the besieging Muslim forces and the women burned themselves in a massive funeral pyre, served only to add to the romantic myth of the Rajput. It was from this time that the image of the fearless, Rajput warrior, defender of Hinduism and cows against the marauding Muslims dates. It is also from this time that the political outlines of modern Rājasthān was formed. The Muslims skirted the region and went on to conquer Gujarat to the south, but independent Rajput states such as Jaipur, Jodhpur (Marwar) and Udaipur (Mewar) retained their independence. It was only through a combination of force and marriages that the Mughal Emperor Akbar was able to bring the states of Rājasthān to heel and make them his allies.

The major former independent states of Rājasthān, ruled by separate Rajput clans include Jaipur (founded by the Kachh-waha clan of Rajputs), Jodhpur or Mawar (ruled by the Rathors) Jaiselmer (ruled by the Bhatias) and Udaipur (the Sisodiyas) remained essentially independent feudal kingdoms until India gained its Independence from British rule in 1947. Udaipur is considered the most senior of the former states, because the Sisodiyas never came to an accommodation with the Muslims ruling in Delhi. In fact, though it can be argued there is no

such thing as “Rājasthāni” culture and that the Rājasthān government is trying to promote a sense of being Rājasthāni (most people in the area identify with a particular caste or community rather than the state), some scholars feel that the Rajput imprint on the region is distinctive enough to talk about a “Rājasthāni” culture.

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Numerous dialects are spoken in Rājasthān, most of which form part of western Hindi. Along the borders of the state, the dialects show the influence of neighboring tongues such as Sindhi, Punjabi, and Gujarati. In the “core” of Rājasthān, however, spoken dialects tend to correlate with the boundaries of the former Rajput states. Thus Harauti is the dialect spoken in the areas of the former Rājput states of Kota, Bundi, and Jhalawar, Jaipuri is the dialect of the state of Jaipur. Mewari is spoken in what used to be Udaipur (Mewar), and Marwari is spoken in what used to be Jodhpur and much of the western part of the state. In 1908 George Grierson was the first scholar who gave the designation “Rājasthāni” to the languages of the region. Today, Rājasthāni as spoken is essentially the Marwari form of speech. Although the Union (i.e. central) government does not recognize Rājasthāni as one of India’s official languages, the Sahitya Akademi, India’s National Academy of Letters, and the University Grants Commission do recognize it as a distinct language. It is also taught as such in the Universities of Jodhpur and Udaipur. Since 1947, several movements have been going on in Rājasthān for its recognition as an official language of India, but today Rājasthāni is still considered a “dialect” of Hindi.

A tradition of literature exists in Rājasthān dating back to the 6th century AD. A major element in this tradition is the poetry written by the Charans, hereditary bards and genealogists to the Rajputs, extolling the virtues, accomplishments, victories and sometimes the glorious deaths of Rajput heroes. This bardic poetry reaches its greatest heights in medieval times, when it was strongly influenced by the religious *Bhakti* (Devotional) movements. Mirabai, a 16th century authoress of numerous poems and songs of the Bhakti movement extolling the virtues of the god Krishna, was born in Rājasthān, as was Dadu Dayal, a 16th century saint who founded the Dadu Panth, a sect that still has numerous followers in Rājasthān.

The writings of many of the poets of the Independence period are full of patriotic and nationalistic fervor, while since Independence, traditional romantic, lyrical works co-exist with those that attempt to raise the reader’s consciousness of the plight of the common man.

### <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

While each ethnic group in Rājasthān, (e.g., the Chamars, Bhils, Baniyas, Bishnoi, Meos, and Minas) has its own folk traditions, once can argue that the region’s folk culture is essentially that of the Rajputs. Thus, the view of the brave, martial Rajput as the defender of the faith (Hinduism) and of the common man against the depredations of the Muslims lies at the heart of Rājasthāni folklore.

There is the village tradition, for instance, of the Bhopa, who travels from village to village with his *phad*, a cloth backdrop 30 feet in length painted with episodes from the life of Pabuji, a local folk deity. The Bhopa (priest singer) and his wife tell the tale of Pabuji in front of the *phad*, which itself is a form



of folk art, in a performance that might take a week to complete. Pabuji, himself a Rajput, offered to protect the herds of the Charan woman Deval (again, an example of the ties between the Charans and the Rajputs). Deval asks him to retrieve her stolen herd, and Pabuji leaves his marriage ceremony to do so, but is killed in the process of rescuing the herd. Again, this is a story about honor and responsibility, whatever the consequences. All the villagers are familiar with the Pabuji story, but the Bhopa and the *phad* form a distinctly Rājasthāni element in local culture. Dev Narayanja is another folk deity, though in this case the hero is an incarnation of the god Vishnu. He is revered by local villagers in Rājasthān, and his tale, also, is told by traveling Bhopas before a *phad* depicting his exploits. Tejaji (a Jat whose story is similar to Pabuji’s in that he put his life and family at risk but kept his pride and values like loyalty, freedom, truth, and social reform etc. intact) and Gogaji (a snake god, originally a Chauhan Rajput, revered by Hindu and Muslim alike) are folk heroes with whose tales every villager in Rājasthān is familiar.

### <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Although a sizeable Muslim minority (8.5%) exists in Rājasthān, 88.7% of Rājasthānis are Hindus. This figure, however, glosses over the wide range of religious beliefs among Hindus in Rājasthān. The non-sectarian Dadu-Panth has a strong presence in the state, following the teaching of the 16th century Rājasthāni saint Dadu Dayal, who preached the equality of all men, strict vegetarianism, total abstinence from in-

toxicating liquor, and lifelong celibacy. Although followers of Shiva are found in the state, most Rājasthānis follow Vishnu and, in particular, Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna. A major shrine of the Vallabhacharya sect of Krishna exists at Nathdwara, on the banks of the Banas River, north of Udaipur (Mewar). Tradition has it that, while the image of Krishna was being moved from its home in Brindaban (Uttar Pradesh) to Dwarka in Gujarat, the cart carrying the icon broke down at Nathdwara, and the Rana (ruler) of Mewar gave his permission for the Sri Nathji temple to be built at the site—hence the presence of the temple, which is a major pilgrimage center for Vaishnavas in India. Nathdwara's devotional music and art forms, such as *pīchhavāī*, temple hangings painted with scenes from the life of Krishna, contribute to the uniqueness of Rājasthāni culture.

The Dargah (tomb) of Kwaja Mu'in ud-Din Chishti, an important Sufi saint, in Ajmer is the most important pilgrimage center for Muslims in India outside of Mecca and the annual Urs attracts over 300,000 pilgrims to this city in central Rājasthān, including some from Pakistan and the Middle East. Hindus as well as Muslims visit the shrine. In addition to Muslims, small numbers of Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists contribute to the religious diversity of Rājasthān. Jains, though numerically few (only 1.2% of the population) and concentrated along the borders of Gujarat, have left their mark on the cultural landscape in magnificent temples such as those at Ranakpur, Palitana, and Mount Abu.

In addition, one finds numerous shrines to folk heroes such as Tejaji and Gogaji scattered across the state. There is one shrine to Gogaji near Ajmer, in central Rājasthān, where the head of the snake is in the shrine, and the rest of the snake's body extends several feet beyond the retaining wall in the rear of the shrine.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Rājasthānis celebrate all major holidays of the religious calendar in India. Holi and Diwali are, perhaps, the most important. Holi, a spring festival, is marked by the throwing of colored water and the burning of bonfires. At Diwali, which is the major autumn festival of the Hindus, lights (traditionally butter lamps in small earthenware pots, though in modern times these have been replaced by electric lights) are used to decorate houses, houses are whitewashed or painted, and friends play cards and gamble together. For the Bania castes, Diwali marks the beginning of the New Year—financial books are closed and debts are paid. In villages, Govardhan Puja, a festival related to the Hindu deity Krishna, is celebrated on the day following Diwali. Villagers clean and resurface their hearths with cow dung, and make crude figures (of Krishna), also out of cow dung (in the more important temples of the Krishna sect, such figures of Krishna are much more elaborate). These images are destroyed by driving cattle across them. Different legends are attached to the dung figures in different parts of Rājasthān. According to local tradition in the Udaipur District of Rājasthān, for example, the dung figure represents a local farmer named Govardhan who was sleeping outside his hut. The god Krishna, bent on amorous adventures, attempted to enter the house and disturbed the cattle, which stampeded and trampled the farmer to death.

For the Rajputs in Rājasthān, Dassehra is an important festival. It is the custom at this time for Rajputs to sacrifice male

buffalo by beheading them, the meat being distributed to the local people.

Gangaur is an extremely important festival of Rājasthān. It commences on the day following Holi and continues for 18 days. The festival is celebrated by womenfolk with great enthusiasm and devotion for Gauri, the consort of Shiva. While married women worship Gauri, the embodiment of perfection and conjugal love, for the success of their married life, unmarried women worship the Goddess for being blessed with good husbands. Gangaur Festival also celebrates the monsoon, the harvest and marital fidelity. Numerous rituals, such as the collection of ashes from the Holi fire and burying of wheat and barley seeds in it, the making of clay images of Gauri, to the accompaniment of traditional folk songs sung in praise of the goddess, and processions of women, accompany the festival. Gangaur aptly reflects the rich cultural heritage of Rājasthān and is celebrated with great pomp and show in Bikaner, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer.

Teej is the festival of swings. It marks the advent of the monsoon and is celebrated in the month of Shraavan (July/August). Swings are hung from trees for the enjoyment of girls and brightly-attired women hold processions, sing, and generally engage in much merriment. This festival is dedicated to the Goddess Parvati, commemorating her union with Shiva, and she is worshipped by seekers of conjugal bliss and happiness.

Numerous fairs are held throughout Rājasthān, some coinciding with religious events. Thus the Baneshwar Fair, which is a favorite among Bhil tribals, is a celebration of Shiva. Other events, such as the Nagaur Fair, are primarily a chance to trade in cattle. But perhaps the best known fair in Rājasthān is that held in the fall at Pushkar, near Ajmer in the central part of the state. Pushkar, is an important pilgrimage site, containing the only active temple in all of India dedicated to the Hindu god Brahma. It is also an important event for locals to trade camels and cattle and to experience bazaars, music, and various sports. Pushkar has become an attraction for foreign tourists.

Muslims celebrate Muslim holidays such as Ramadan and Id, Sikhs celebrate the birthday of Guru Nanak, Buddhists observe Buddhist holidays, Jains celebrate the birth of Mahavira, and Christians keep Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter. All of these holidays are observed as public holidays by government offices.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rājasthānis tend to follow the norms of their particular communities in rites of passage. Thus these will be different for Rajputs, Brahmans, Jats, and the numerous other ethnic groups represented in the state. Male babies among Muslims are circumcised, for example, while Sikhs are baptized into their religion, and Brahmans officiate at Hindu rituals. Sikhs and Hindus cremate their dead, while Muslims resort to burial. But, the majority of Rājasthānis being Hindu, rites of passage follow those of Hinduism in general outline (see *Hindus*).

There are, however, differences between communities. The Bishnois, for example, are a Hindu sect found around Jodhpur. They abstain from tobacco, drugs, and spirits, and are noted for their regard for animal life, which is such that not only will they not themselves kill any living creature, but they do their utmost to prevent others from doing so. Among the Bishnois, who are very particular about ceremonial purity, a child, whether boy or girl, is baptized 30 days after the birth by the



A Rājasthāni woman, dressed in traditional attire, smiles for the camera during the annual cattle fair in Pushkar, Rājasthān, India. Pushkar is a popular Hindu pilgrimage spot and tourist attraction for its cattle fair and camel races. (AP Images/Rajesh Kumar Singh)

priest (*sādh*), this ceremony also having the effect of purifying the house that has been made impure by the birth (*sutak*). At the same time, the barber clips off the child's hair. Bishnois do not wear a scalp-lock (*choti*) like other Hindus and when an adult is baptized this is cut off and the head shaved, for the Bishnois shave the whole head and do not leave the scalp-lock like the other Hindus. But they allow the beard to grow, only shaving the chin upon the father's death.

Bishnois marry among themselves only and by a ceremony of their own. Unlike most Hindus, they do not revere Brahmans, but have priests of their own, chosen from among the laity. These priests are celibates. The Bishnoi do not burn their dead, but bury them below the cattle-stall or in a place frequented by cattle, such as a cattle-pen. Bishnois go on pilgrimage to the place where Jhamba-ji, their founder, is buried, in the south of Bikaner, where there is a tomb built over his remains and a temple (*mandīr*) with regular attendants (*pugāris*). A festival takes place here every six months, when the pilgrims go to the sand hill on which Jhamba-ji lived and there light sacrificial fires and make offerings of burnt barley, til, *ghī* (clarified butter), and sugar, at the same time saying the prayers set for the occasion. They also make presents to the attendants of the temple and distribute grain for the peacocks and pigeons that live there in numbers. Another place of pilgrimage is a tomb called Chhambola in the Jodhpur area, where a festival is held

once a year. There the pilgrims bathe in the tank and sing and play musical instruments and scatter grain to peacocks and pigeons.

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Being Hindus, most Rājasthānis use the standard "Namaste", or "Namaskar" to greet each other, the words said while touching one's palms together. However, occasionally, local terms and phrases, such as "Khamaghani," which stands for hello, or "Ram Ram" are used to greet one another. People of the Muslim faith use the traditional greeting of "Salaam Akeikum" ("Peace be with you"), often accompanied with an obeisance, performed by bowing low and placing the right palm on the forehead.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions in Rājasthān reflect the community traditions of Rājasthānis. Thus Rajputs who were rulers and local landowners (*jagirdars* and *istimradars*) live in forts and palaces that may date back to the 14th century or earlier. Village Rajputs who are agriculturalists follow local traditions. In central Rājasthān, a typical farmhouse consists of a square walled structure, with a gateway that can be closed at night, with living quarters and quarters for cattle within the complex. Regular houses in villages have compounds encircled by hedges of

impassable thorns (often from the *khejri* [*Prosopis cineraria*] tree, a local type of acacia) in which to keep livestock at night. Villages are nucleated, with fields of varying quality of soils, scattered around the village lands.

The city of Jodhpur is sometime referred to as the *Blue City*, due to the indigo tinge of the whitewashed houses around the Mehrangarh Fort. The blue houses were originally for Brahmins but non-Brahmins soon joined in, as the color was said to deflect the heat and keep mosquitoes away.

Where Bhils have not adapted *pukka* (i.e. stone) structures for their houses from their neighbors, they build their house from thatch and bamboo. Perhaps reflecting their origins as shifting cultivators, Bhil settlements tend to be dispersed, with houses built near the land they are farming. Similarly, the round mud huts with thatched roofs of Jaisalmer District in the extreme west of the state differ significantly from the modern, stone house being built in Jaipur, the state capital, an urban area of nearly 5 million people.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

This varies according to community. People usually take meals four times a day—a light breakfast, the main meal about 11 AM or noon consisting of bread (*roti*) made from various types of grain, vegetables and curry, *roti* and vegetables in the late afternoon, with dinner after sunset usually including *roti*, chilies, *dāl* (lentils) and *chhach* (buttermilk). Agriculturalists are often so poor they have only two main meals a day.

Rājasthānis follow the customs of their own communities when it comes to marriage. Thus, among caste Hindus, one marries into one's own caste, marriages are arranged, and the giving of dowries is common. Widows may or may not be allowed to marry, but divorce is rare. Marriage rules among tribal groups are different.

Except for the very rich, *purdah* is not kept.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

Reflecting the colorful Rājasthāni culture, Rājasthāni clothes have a lot of mirror-work and embroidery, and Rājasthāni dresses are usually designed in bright colors like blue, yellow, and orange. This forms a striking contrast with the dun landscape and green vegetation of the region.

Turbans, called variously *pagari*, *pencha*, *sela* or *safa* (the *safa* is 39 feet in length and 4 feet wide), are a must for men and one can usually identify caste and community, and sometimes even location down to the village level, by the dress an individual wears. The age-old dress worn in Rājasthān is the turban (white or colored red or orange or multi-colored [bright or spotted turbans signify a birth or marriage in the family]), coat (*angarkha*) and loincloth (*dhoti*), the last two usually being white in color. Men will wear sandals (*chappals*) or a leather shoe (*jutti*), with the toes curled up, that may be bought at a fair or made locally. Traditional dress for females comprises an ankle length skirt (*gaghra*) and a short top, also known as a *lehenga* or a *chaniya choli*, tied in the back with string. In the hot summer, it is common for village women to go bare breasted, omitting the *choli*. A piece of cloth (*odhani*) is used to cover the head, both for protection from heat and maintenance of modesty, peasant women usually covering their faces when in the presence of strangers or males who are not in the immediate family. Tribals tend to wear only a *dhoti* and a *pagari* with the rest of the body being kept bare. Baniyas wear a distinctive

type of *pagari*, as do Rajputs from different states. Thus, the Jaipuri-style turban is tied with a long tail hanging down the back, while the Mewar-style turban is closer to the bania turban in appearance. The Jodhpuri *safa* is quite distinctive. In formal dress, Rajputs wear their own style of turban (usually colored), an ornate, sometimes embroidered *sherwani* (tunic) and *churidar* (tight pants). A sword completes the outfit. Jats usually wear white turbans.

Both women and men are fond of ornaments and wear gold and silver. Women commonly wear bangles and anklets (these used to be made of silver or ivory, but nowadays tend to be plastic).

The usual dress for Muslims is the pyjama, which is sometimes worn by non-Muslims as well. A coat known as an *achkan*, along with a distinctive cap (*topi*) is donned for special occasions. Muslim women may wear the *burqa*, a long robe that covers them from head to toe.

In urban areas, Rājasthānis who work in offices or for the government commonly wear Western style clothing.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

As is to be expected in an area with numerous ethnic and caste groups, cuisine in Rājasthān varies widely, with some areas of Rājasthān known for certain foods. Thus, Jodhpur is known for its *katchori*, a spicy snack consisting of fried gram flour, usually filled with Urad dal. Baniyas, Jains and some Jats in Rājasthān will not eat meat, and so their diet is strictly vegetarian, consisting mainly of *roti* (unleavened breads made from cereals such as wheat and *bajra* [pearl millet] or *jowar* [sorghum]), lentils, local vegetables such as onions, potatoes, eggplant, carrots and cabbage, and milk and other dairy products). Rajputs and some other castes will eat meat—goat, chicken, and pork, but caste Hindus will never eat beef. Rajputs commonly eat game birds, such as duck, partridge, and goose and other animals they bring down in the hunt. Muslims, of course, will eat goat but never pork.

But the typical Rājasthāni cuisine found in the countryside is *dāl*, *bāti*, and *churma*, all of which is made from locally-grown crops. *Dal*, of course, is made from lentils; *bati* is a ball of dough, usually *jowar*, roasted in the fire, and *churma* is coarsely ground wheat crushed and cooked with *ghee* and sugar. Typically, a villager eats twice a day, the man taking vegetables and *roti* out into the field with him for his midday meal.

## <sup>13</sup>EDUCATION

Rājasthān's improvement in respect of literacy has been spectacular during the last decade. In the 1991 Census, literacy in Rājasthān was recorded at a mere 38.5%, but this improved to over 61% in 2001. Among men, literacy (76.5%) actually exceeds the all-India average, though women still lag behind the rest of the country.

Rājasthān is rapidly emerging as one of the most favored destinations for education in the country. Growth in the industrial sector of Rājasthān in recent years has encouraged the government as well as private institutions to pay close attention to the educational infrastructure. Under its Rājasthān Education Initiative (REI), for example, the government of Rājasthān seeks to engage global and local partners from private foundations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships to support edu-



cation in the state. The main educational objectives identified for Rājasthān under the REI are as follows:

100% enrollment in primary education by 2010, 100% enrollment in secondary education by 2020

Increase numbers finishing primary school to 100% by 2010 and for secondary to considerable higher levels

Increase access and retention of girls in primary education near 100% levels and in secondary to levels that will enable them to lead productive lives with employment opportunities

Increase the quality of learning, especially in areas of Math, Science, and English

Expanding curricula to provide ICT skills to secondary school students and to enable formation of human capital for the economy

Many institutes of management, engineering, medicine and, law allow students to pursue higher studies in the state. The University of Rājasthān in Jaipur, for instance, is a premier educational institution in India and attracts students from all over the country. Jodhpur, Kota, Udaipur, and Ajmer also play pivotal educational roles in the state. Ajmer, for example, is the location of Mayo College, one of the major “public” (in the British sense) schools in India. Originally founded by the British to turn the sons of local Rajput rulers into “proper British gentlemen,” it nonetheless continues to provide students with an excellent secondary education.

Many private primary and secondary institutions across the state are “English medium” schools, i.e. they teach their students in English. Knowledge of English is seen as a *sine qua non* for good jobs in government and industry.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Despite the low numbers of Rajputs in the state, elements of Rajput culture, such as *jauhar* and *sati*, have come to be associated with Rājasthān. As one exits the Mehrangarh fort in Jodhpur, for example, one can see the handprints (in stone) of past *satis* who chose immolation, throwing themselves on the funeral pyres of the Maharajas of Jodhpur. The handprints still bear red ochre and silver paper, evidence that local women come to worship the *satis*. Although *sati* was apparently a custom primarily associated with Rajputs rulers, in 1987 Roop Kanwar, a Rajput villager from Sikar district in northwestern Rājasthān, gained international notoriety by committing *sati*. Local people came to the cremation site in Deorala village to worship Kanwar as a *sati mata* (“*sati* mother”) and the government had to ban crowds from the *sati* site. One result was the passing of the Rājasthān *Sati* Prevention Ordinance in 1987 that makes the glorification of *sati* a crime, though the enforcement of this ordinance obviously raises many issues. Women from Rājasthān marched in opposition to the ordinance and local Rajputs plan to build a temple at the site of the *sati*.

Another aspect of Rajput culture that is identified with Rājasthāni culture is Rajput miniature painting. It was a matter of status that the courts of the erstwhile Rajput states be centers of patronage of the arts, and one area for which they are famous is painting. Combining traditions of the Moghul

court, though often depicting Hindu themes or typical Rajput activities, and sometimes employing Persian and Muslim painters as well as local Rājasthānis. Each Rajput court developed its own school of painting, and the cognoscenti can tell at a glance where a particular painting originated. Thus, paintings that are characterized by a dark border are usually from the state of Kota (Kota and Bundi paintings are known collectively as Haudati paintings). More typical is the red borders of the Jaipur and Mewar schools. Though many of the paintings are miniatures, following the Moghul style, in palaces such as the City Palace of Mewar there are paintings that are of mural size.

A feature of Rājasthāni culture is the architecture of the region. The Rajputs developed a unique style of architecture, which incorporated Muslim elements such as arches and domes and came to be known as the Indo-Islamic style, blending features of indigenous architecture with elements of Muslim architecture. Although each of the former Rajput state (i.e. Jaipur, Jodhpur, Mewar, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner) has its own unique style of architecture, the imprint of Indo-Islamic architecture is plain to see throughout Rājasthān. The Rajputs tended to build palaces and forts, while Muslims built tombs and mosques.

Although Rajput palaces, Indo-Islamic architecture, the Rajput ethos, the traditions of *jauhar* and *sati*, Rajput paintings, and relations between Rajputs and Muslims and tribals in the area is a major part of Rājasthāni culture, this is not to say that Rājasthāni culture is the same as Rajput culture—there are other distinctly Rājasthāni elements in the region’s cultural tradition. For instance, there is the traditional performance of puppetry in the villages—narrating an event from history, myths, folklore, or legend, complete with music and speech—usually performed by Bhats, another community in Rājasthān. The performances are the repository of traditional wisdom, knowledge, and social mores and within them are contained the oral history of the region. In addition, there is the existence of caste groups in addition to the Charans and Bhats that fulfill specific roles in Rājasthāni culture. The Manghaniyars (Muslim musicians in western Rājasthān), the Bishnoi (around Jodhpur), the Minas (in the region north of Jaipur) all add to the “Rājasthāni” mystique, as do the wall murals of the Shekhawati region, the banias (many of them Jains), and the Muslims. *Mehndi*, the tradition of painting hands and feet and *Mandana* (a folk tradition of decoration and painting), festivals such as Gangaur, popular dramas (*khyals*), the folk music of the region, folk heroes such as Pabuji and Dev Narayanji, dress, the ethnic mix of the region—all contribute to what might be called a distinctive Rājasthāni culture.

#### **15 WORK**

Rājasthān is primarily agricultural and rural, with 77% of the population living in rural areas, and agriculture—much of which is subsistence in nature—accounting for 22.5% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Cattle, sheep and goat rearing are important activities, while camel herding is found in the more arid areas of the west. The construction of the Indira Gandhi Canal in the west—bringing water from the Sutlej and Beas Rivers in Punjab State to arid regions of western Rājasthān, and terminating near Jaisalmer—has given agriculture in the state a boost. Otherwise, agriculture in Rājasthān is dependent on the monsoon, there being no natural bodies of

water in the state. The state also grows cotton and the textile industry has grown up in several places in Rājasthān.

Rājasthān is also well-endowed with mineral resources, resulting in a large number of small-scale industrial units springing up all over the state. Large deposits of zinc and copper exist and these are being exploited for the development of industries dependent on these metals. It also has large deposits of gypsum and lignite and mica is produced in substantial quantities. The marble industry is significant in places like Kishangarh and Makrera, marble from the latter's mines being used in the construction of the Taj Mahal in Agra. Among the other private sector industries are cement, ball bearings, sugar, caustic soda, and other chemicals.

Rājasthān, in particular Jaipur, forms part of the "Golden Triangle," the commonly traveled tourist trail that includes Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur. As a result, along with the luxurious Palace on Wheels that takes tourists out into the western desert, tourism is a major employer in Rājasthān. With Jaipur being the state capital, the service industries form a significant element in the Rājasthāni economy, accounting for 40% of the state's GDP.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no sports uniquely Rājasthāni. However, Rajputs tend to hunt on their former lands, even though hunting has been banned in India by the government in Delhi. In the past, Rajputs shot tiger and panther, as well as various types of deer and game birds, keeping careful records of each kill in notebooks. Pig-sticking, i.e. killing wild boar from horseback with a lance—a dangerous pastime, tended to develop the military skills so loved by Rajputs. Polo is also a sport played by those who can afford it. (The term "jodhpur," i.e. a type of riding breeches, is taken from the city and state of Jodhpur.)

Jaipur, which is a polo center and has several polo clubs, has the 61 Cavalry Regiment—the only horsed cavalry unit in the Indian Army—with its polo team stationed there.

Kabadi is a traditional Indian sport played throughout Rājasthān, while popular modern sports include soccer, (field) hockey and cricket.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Urban Rājasthānis go to the cinema to see "Bollywood" movies. In villages, where movies are not available, entertainment is provided by traveling entertainers, such as Bhopas and puppeteers. Local fairs and festivals, and religious celebrations are important events in the countryside, and provide recreation and entertainment. Nowadays, almost all villages have television sets, and even satellite dishes to access international TV programming. Almost everyone, even in villages, has a cell phone if they can afford it.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Rājasthān is known for its handicrafts, with every region having its specialty. Thus, Bikaner is known for its woolen fabrics, carpets, and leather vessels made from camel hide. Japiur is an international center for the jewelry trade, with diamond cutting being its *forte*, but is also known for its hand block printed cotton fabrics, gold enamel work, paintings, and blue pottery ware. Areas in the western desert are known for fabrics and mirror work, while weaving, enamel work, lacquer work, embroidery and carving are also Rājasthāni traditions. The paint-

ing of *phad* is done in Devgarh, but the making of puppets, originally associated with the Bhats of Nagaur in Marwar, is now found throughout the state. *Thewa*, gold filigree work on colored glass is associated with Patarbgarh. Mandana is the folk craft of decorating houses. Red sand and chalk powder are used to make designs on floors and walls. This art is quite popular in the rural areas of Rājasthān. Different types of square, rectangular and floral designs are made, appropriate to the particular season or festival. Another popular form of folk art prevalent among women is *mehndi*. The use of mehndi (henna) designs on the palms and feet is symbolic of welfare, artistic taste, and religious attitude. There is hardly a function or festival in Rājasthān when women do not apply mehndi.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems in Rājasthān have their roots in poverty and the large proportion of tribal peoples in the state. Despite efforts at improvement and development by the government, and advances in education, tribal peoples such as the Bhils and Minas are still economically and socially disadvantaged. The arid environment makes agriculturalists dependent on monsoonal rains, and several bad monsoons can lead to famine and farmers going heavily into debt to moneylenders, who often charge exorbitant rates of interest. Land fragmentation, a result of inheritance systems common in the state, is also a problem in rural area. Access to safe drinking water, overgrazing, relations between caste and non-caste Hindus, and the place of women in society remain issues in Rājasthān.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Rājasthān tend to suffer the same discrimination as other Hindu women, a discrimination that has its roots in the religious and cultural practices of India. There are several clear indicators of the fact that Indian women continue to be discriminated against in Hindu society: for instance, the sex ratio is skewed against them. In Jaipur, according to the Census of India, 2001, the sex ratio was 909:1000. A recent study blames this decline in the number of females on sex determination by ultrasound machines, Hindu society placing a premium on male babies. The implication is that female fetuses are aborted. Maternal mortality is high, female literacy is low, female children tend to have a high mortality (even if female infanticide is not practiced any more, this is often the result of neglect of the health of girl children) and crimes against women are on the rise.

It is a paradox of modern Rājasthān that women wield power and hold positions at the topmost levels (in 2008 the Chief Minister of Rājasthān was a woman, Vasundhara Raje Scindia of the BJP) yet large sections of Rājasthāni women are among the most underprivileged. While attempts have been made to address issues such as sati, child marriage, widow remarriage and dowries, the status of women in contemporary Rājasthān is reflected in the state of their health, education, employment, and life in society.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

## RĀJPUTS

**PRONUNCIATION:** RAHJ-puts

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ksatriya caste

**LOCATION:** India (Rājasthān state and elsewhere)

**POPULATION:** 138 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Language or dialect of their region

**RELIGION:** Hinduism (majority)

### 1 INTRODUCTION

“Rājput” identifies numerous castes in northern and western India that claim *ksatriya* or “warrior” status in the Hindu social hierarchy. They trace their descent to the ksatriyas of ancient times and thus legitimize their standing as superior to all social groups except the Brahmans in modern society. The term “Rājput” is derived from *rājapūtra*, literally meaning “son of kings.” Rājputs are famed for their fighting abilities and until India gained its independence, Rājput kings ruled numerous states in the Indian subcontinent. The British grouped many of the largest and most powerful of these states in western India into the Rājputana Province. Rājputana, i.e., “the land of the Rājputs,” survives virtually intact as the modern Indian state of Rājasthān.

The origins of the Rājputs, who appear suddenly on the Indian scene during early medieval times (approximately 5th–7th centuries AD), are obscure. It is generally accepted, however, that they are mainly of foreign stock. They are descendants of the numerous tribes from Central Asia (e.g., the Parthians, Kushans, Shakas, and Huns) that entered India at this time, conquered local peoples, and settled down as part of the ruling political elite. The integration of these groups into Hindu society was accomplished by marriage with high-caste women or by conversion to acquire the benefits of a ksatriya status sanctified by the Brahmans. By the 9th century, Rājputs controlled an empire that extended from Sind to the lower Ganges Valley, and from the Himalayan foothills to the Narmada River. Following the disintegration of this empire in the mid-10th century, various Rājput clans rose to prominence in the region. The Chauhan Rājputs, for example, ruled the lands around Delhi, while the Chandellas controlled the central Indian region of Bundelkhand.

Rājputs in northern India were the first to face the Muslim invasions of the late 12th century. However, the rival Rājput clans were never able to present a united front against the Muslim threat. In 1192, the Rājputs under Prithviraj Chauhan were defeated by Muhammad Ghuri at the second battle of Tarain, near Delhi. This firmly established Muslim power in India and marked the end of Rājput dominance in the region. As the Muslims moved down the Ganges Valley, they conquered the Rājput kingdoms in their path. Muslim penetration south and west to Gujarat isolated the Rājput states in the west. It was here, in the arid regions of the Thar Desert, that Rājput kingdoms survived to challenge the might of the Mughals. For four centuries, states such as Mewar (Udaipur) and Marwar (Jodhpur) were able to preserve their independence from the Muslims. Akbar, the Mughal emperor, succeeded in enlisting many prominent Rājput rulers (e.g. Man Singh of Amber and Jaswant Singh of Marwar) to his cause, using diplomacy rath-



er than force. Mewar, however, claims the distinction of never having submitted to Muslim rule.

With Mughal power in decline during the 18th century, many of the Rājput states in western India came under the control of the Marathas. In the early 19th century, however, following the British defeat of the Marathas, they accepted British dominance. By recognizing Britain as the sovereign power in India, the rulers of these states were able to retain their independence and preserve their feudal way of life until India gained its independence in 1947. Rājput states existed elsewhere in India, for example, Jammu and Kashmir and the Pahari (Hill) states in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is the Rājput states of Rājasthān, however, with their history of resistance to Muslim rule, that have come to be seen as the upholders of Rājput tradition and culture.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Estimates of the Rājput population vary considerably, especially since the last census that gathered data on caste was the Census of India in 1931. Using the average rate of natural increase for India during the last decade, an estimated 138 million people in India belong to the Rājput or ksatriya castes (the low figure given for Rājputs in India is about 65 million). They are distributed throughout northern India, although their greatest concentrations lie in the foothills of the western Himalayas. Here, in a belt extending from the border of Nepal through the former Hill States to southern Kashmir, Rājputs make up as much as 40% or more of the population. Areas where Rājputs

comprise more than 10% of the population include the Ganges Valley in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar and western Madhya Pradesh. Surprisingly, in Rājasthān, with its strong historical and emotional ties to the Rājputs, the caste ranks only fifth in numbers, with less than 6% of the population. Other states with sizeable Rājput communities include Uttaranachal, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Delhi.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Rājputs speak the language or dialect of their region. Thus, Rājputs on the Ganges plains use the local dialect of Hindi current in their locality. The language spoken in the foothills of the western Himalayas is Pahari. In Rājasthān, Rājputs speak one of the dialects of Rājasthāni, which is itself a variant of Hindi. Many of the former Rājput states in this area are historical and cultural regions as well as political regions and have evolved their own distinctive regional dialects. Jaipuri, for example, is the dialect used in the former Rājput state of Jaipur. Marwari, the dialect spoken in Marwar State, has come to be regarded as the standard form of Rājasthāni.

## 4 FOLKLORE

As descendants of the many invaders who conquered local peoples and set themselves up as the ruling class, the Rājputs of northern and western India have no common ancestry. However, various myths have evolved to give legitimacy to their status as rulers and their claims to ksatriya status. One relates that a ksatriya chieftain learned that his father had been killed by a Brahman. Enraged, he embarked on a series of campaigns to eliminate Brahmans from the face of the land. With the depletion of Brahman males, however, Brahman females had to accept ksatriya men as husbands. This gave rise to the various ruling dynasties of Rājputs. (It is interesting to note that the orthodox Hindu would find a union between ksatriya and Brahman totally unacceptable). Another legend tells that the gods created a new order of pure ksatriya clans in the fire-pit of the sage Vasishtha on Mt. Abu in Rājasthān. Their purpose was to help the Brahmans in their struggle against the Buddhists and *mlechchhas* (foreigners). These *agnikula* ("fire-race") Rājputs were the forerunners of clans such as the Chauhan, Solanki, and Ponwar Rājputs. Other Rājput clans trace their ancestry to the Sun or the Moon.

Rājput culture is replete with heroes who accomplished great deeds of honor, bravery, and self-sacrifice. Some of these have entered local folk traditions and have even come to be worshipped in many rural areas. In Rājasthān, for example, Pabuji, Gogaji, and Ramdeoiji are Rājput figures who are revered as gods by the local population.

## 5 RELIGION

Although there are Muslims and Sikhs among the Rājputs, most are Hindu. In fact, Rājputs came to be seen as the champions of Hinduism against the challenges of Buddhism and Islam. In matters of ceremonial purity and caste, Rājputs were as rigid as the most orthodox of Hindus. Writers note that Eastern Rājputs, i.e., those found on the Ganges plains in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, are more strongly subject to Brahmanical influences than the Western Rājputs of Rājasthān.

Today, in their religious practices, Rājputs differ little from other high-caste Hindus. They use Brahmans for ceremonial

and ritual purposes, though they see themselves as inferior only in spiritual matters. They may follow any of the many Hindu sects and they worship all the major Hindu deities. The majority of Rājputs, however, are Shaivites, or devotees of the god Shiva (*S'iva*). These Rājputs are nonvegetarian, smoke opium and tobacco, and are fond of alcohol. In addition, they worship other deities such as Surya (the Sun God) and Durga in her aspect of the Mother-Goddess. It is customary in Rājasthān, for example, when Rājputs open a bottle of liquor, to pour the first few drops on the ground as an offering to the Mother, saying "Jai Mataji" ("Long live the Mother-Goddess"). In addition, nearly every Rājput clan has its own patron deity, to whom it pays special respect and to whom it turns for protection.

In every household, Rājput men and women worship their *kuldevi* (goddess of the *kul* or lineage). This deity, who is always female, is seen as the protector of the household and is also something of a fertility goddess—women of the household worship the *kuldevi* to help them conceive sons, who continue and expand the *kul*. All Rājput women in the household know *kuldevi* stories and foundation myths of the *kuldevi*, which is seen as having the character of the ideal *patrivrata* (husband-protector). Formerly, the *kuldevi* would protect Rājput men in battle, though with the demise of the Rājput states, the domestic functions of the *kuldevi* have become of increasing significance.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Rājputs celebrate all the major Hindu holy days, keeping to the festival calendar of their region. Thus Shivratri ("Shiva's Night"), the holy spring festival, and Divali (the Festival of Lights), are all observed with great enthusiasm. Of particular importance to Rājputs is Dasahara, the festival dedicated to Durga. It is customary for Rājputs to sacrifice a buffalo to the goddess, in commemoration of her victory over the evil buffalo-demon Mahisha. The animal is killed by being beheaded with one stroke of a sword. Although Rājputs are nonvegetarians, they do not eat buffalo and the meat is usually distributed to servants or the lower castes in the area.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The major stages in the life of a Rājput are celebrated by 12 ceremonies called *karams*. These commence before birth and continue through to the final rituals after death. The more important of these include the ceremonies relating to birth, the sacred thread, marriage, and death.

On the birth of a male child, the family Brahman is summoned to record the details for the infant's horoscope and determine if the moment of birth is auspicious. The family barber is sent to inform relatives and friends of the event and there is much feasting and celebration in the family. The Brahman fixes a propitious day for the naming of the infant. The head-shaving ritual is carried out when the child is around two years of age. Among many Rājputs, the birth of a daughter is regarded as a misfortune and is observed with a minimum of ceremony. Female infanticide was a common practice of Rājput society in the past.

As with all higher-caste Hindus, one of the most important rites of passage for the Rājput male is the investiture with the *janeū* or sacred thread. This marks his formal admission to the rank of the twice-born, that is, to high-caste status. Worn over

the left shoulder and under the right arm, the sacred thread is a constant reminder of the Rājput's aristocratic origins and of his duties as a member of the warrior caste. The actual ceremony is rather elaborate and is performed by the family's Brahman priest.

When possible, certain rituals are prescribed for a Rājput when death is approaching. The sick person is laid on a bed of sacred *kusa* grass on a spot that has been circled by cow dung. A sprig of the *tulsī* plant, a piece of gold, or a few drops of Ganges water are placed in his or her mouth. This is to delay the messengers of Yama, the God of Death, until the proper rites have been carried out. A cow is brought to the side of the dying person so that he or she can grasp its tail and be carried safely across the mythical River Vaitarani to the other world. A Brahman recites the appropriate mantras from the sacred literature. After death, the corpse is washed and prepared for cremation. In the case of an important landowner or *thākūr*, the entire population of the region may join the funeral procession to the cremation grounds. The body is seated or laid on the funeral pyre, facing north. Though Brahmans perform the necessary funeral rites, the pyre is lit by the eldest son. He is also responsible for cracking open the skull after the corpse is burnt to allow the soul to depart from the body. After the cremation, the mourners undergo the required purificatory bath.

A death is followed by a period of mourning. On the third day after cremation, bones and ashes are collected from the funeral pyre and taken to be placed in the Ganges or some other sacred river. The *srāddha* ceremonies usually commence on the eleventh day after death. These include offerings to the ancestral spirits, the feasting of relatives and friends, and the feeding of Brahmans. The soul of the deceased is held to depart this world on the thirteenth day. No marriages can take place in the months following a death in the family.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Rājputs follow the customary greeting practices of their religious communities and region.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Rājputs traditionally formed the landowning classes of northern and western India and as such they maintained a lifestyle and standard of living in keeping with their station. In the past, the Rājput rulers of princely states such as Kashmir, Jaipur, and Jodhpur were known for the splendor of their courts. Like the other princes in India, Rājput *Mahārājās* often lived luxuriously in ornate palaces, surrounded by retainers, with servants at their beck and call. Even Rājputs of lesser rank had an enviable lifestyle. One can hardly travel through Rājasthān, for example, without being in sight of the fort (*garh*) of a local *thākūr*. Following India's independence in 1947, however, the princes lost their titles and privileges. Government reforms reduced the amount of land an individual could own, limiting the resources available to the Rājput landowning class.

Not all Rājputs live in palaces and forts, surrounded by weapons and armor and the trappings of the Rājputs' former glory. In the village in Uttar Pradesh studied by Leigh and Minturn (1966), for example, the custom of sons inheriting equal shares of land has reduced landholdings to the point that most Rājputs have to farm the land themselves rather than support tenants or sharecroppers. With their self-image as former warriors and rulers, they regard this as somewhat demeaning.

They have stories to justify this situation, sometimes blaming it on a conscious effort of Muslim conquerors to scatter and subdue their Rājput opponents.

In the Rājput neighborhood of the village, the men's quarters are the most conspicuous buildings. These consist of a courtyard containing a platform about 1¼ m to 2 m (4–6-ft) high, reached by a series of steps and often shaded by trees. The men of the family and their friends gather together on the platform, chatting and perhaps smoking the *hukkā*. At the far end of the platform is a roofed porch, behind which is a large central room used by the men for sleeping during the winter months, and smaller side rooms for storage. Because of the custom of *pardah*, the keeping of women in seclusion, the women's quarters are separate. They are enclosed by walls, with all the rooms facing the inner courtyard and lacking outside windows. A hearth—a mud, U-shaped fireplace about 30 cm (1 ft) square and about 15 cm (6 in) high—is built against one of the courtyard walls for cooking. Stairs provide access to the roof. The interconnecting roofs of the houses provide Rājput women with a means of visiting each other out of the sight of males. Buildings are built of brick or of mud, depending on the economic circumstances of the individual family.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

A distinctive feature of Rājput society is its division into a hierarchy of ranked clans and lineages. Over 103 clans have been identified in all. Among the more important Rājput clans are the Chauhans, whose former capital was Ajmer; the Gehlots of Mewar; the Rathors of Marwar; and the Kachhwaha of Jaipur. These groups are found mainly in Rājasthān. The Bundelas and Chandellas are distributed in Madhya Pradesh and on the Ganges plains. The Gaharwar and the Surajbansi Rājputs are concentrated on the Ganges plains in Uttar Pradesh.

Rājputs follow clan exogamy, i.e., they marry outside the clan. They also practice hypergamy. This means that they marry their daughters into clans of higher rank than their own, while accepting daughters-in-law from clans of lower rank. Although the specific ranking of individual clans might vary from region to region, rank increases as one goes westwards. The Rājput clans of Rājasthān have the highest standing. There is thus a distinct geographical component in the movement of brides in Rājput society. This also raises difficulties in finding suitable husbands for girls in the highest-ranking Rājput clans.

Rājputs traditionally have their own marriage rituals. As is typical in South Asia, Rājput marriages are arranged by the parents, often with the assistance of a professional matchmaker. Once a suitable spouse is identified, certain preliminaries have to be settled. The Bhats or family genealogists verify the pedigree of both parties, while astrologers determine that the horoscopes of the potential bride and groom are favorable. Should everything be in order, a dowry is negotiated and the betrothal (*tilak*) is announced. Marriages among Rājputs are occasions for great pomp and ceremony. The most reckless extravagance is not only permitted but is almost required as a point of honor. Many go deep into debt and spend the rest of their life paying off the moneylenders (the cost of marriage was a contributing factor to the Rājputs' former practice of female infanticide).

The actual marriage ceremony is held on a day determined by the Brahmans to be auspicious and follows the normal Hin-



A folk artist dances during a procession for World Tourism Day. Rājasthān's independent kingdoms created a rich architectural and cultural heritage, seen today in its numerous forts, palaces, and havelis. (STR/AFP/Getty Images)

du rites. The groom, accompanied by male friends and relatives, sets out in the *barāt* (procession) for the bride's house, where he is received by the family of the bride (*Sehla* and *Dhukav* ceremonies). Mounted on a horse, he is dressed in colorful robes, with turban and sword. Among the higher Rājput clans, the groom may be mounted on the back of a gaily decorated elephant. Preliminary ceremonies are carried out, accompanied by the giving of gifts and distribution of money to the crowd of onlookers that usually assembles. At the appointed time, the marriage is solemnized with the *agni pūjā* (fire-worship ceremony). The clothes of the bride and groom are tied together and the couple walks around the sacred fire three times while Brahmans chant the appropriate prayers from the Vedas. Several more days are spent in feasting and celebrating, before the groom and bride return home. In the past, when child marriage was customary, the bride would return to her family after a few days and remain there until an age when she could enter normal relations with her husband.

In the past, certain Rājput groups permitted more than one wife and the keeping of concubines in the *zenānā* (women's quarters). *Purdah* is customary, limiting the outside activities of Rājput women among all but the lowest classes. Among Rājputs, as with most classes of Hindus, women occupy a status inferior to men. Unless she belongs to a wealthy family that

employs servants, a Rājput woman's household chores differ little from those of other Hindu women. Bearing sons is of particular importance to the Rājput woman.

Marriage alliances between the upper classes traditionally were important ritual symbolic forms through which the power and authority of *rajās* (kings and rulers) were established or extended. Women, marriage and power were integrally linked. Thus, during the 16th century, the Mughal Emperor Akbar was able to bring the Rājput state of Amber to heel by marrying the eldest daughter of the Rājput ruler, Raja Bharmal. From this time on, the Rājputs of Amber State were drawn into the Mughal power structure and some, such as Raja Man Singh I of Amber, became trusted generals in the Moghul Army. On 26 August 1605, Man Singh became a *mansabdar* of 7,000, i.e., a commander of 7,000 cavalry in the Mughal forces, which was the maximum command for anyone other than a son of the Mughal ruler. He fought many important campaigns for Akbar and led the Mughal army in the well-known battle of Haldighati fought in 1576 between the Mughal Empire and the Rājput ruler of Mewar (Udaipur), Maharana Pratap Singh. The Mughal Emperor Jahangir married a Rājput princess of Marwar, thus cementing relations between the Mughals and the State of Marwar (Jodhpur). Several of the Marwar rulers were trusted generals of the Mughals and Abhay Singh of Marwar served as the Mughal governor of Gujarat during the 18th century.

Widow remarriage is not customary in Rājput society. Certain Rājput clans that do allow widows to marry a younger brother of the deceased husband are regarded by other Rājputs as degraded and impure. One custom that was formerly widespread among the Rājputs was *sati*, the self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. When a Maharaja died, all his wives and concubines were expected to commit *sati*. Near the gateways to forts in Jodhpur and other cities in Rājasthān, one will find the handprints of Rājput women who followed their husbands and masters to their deaths in the cremation fire. These, along with the stone *sati* memorials that are found all over Rājasthān, are revered as shrines by the local population. The British suppressed the practice of *sati* during the 19th century and it is illegal in India today. But the rite is still deeply embedded in the Rājput psyche, even though the ritual was, in the past, limited to the women of Rājput rulers. In 1987 one Roop Kanwar, a Rājput villager from Sikar district in northwestern Rājasthān, gained international notoriety by committing *sati*. Local people came to the cremation site in Deorala village to worship Kanwar as a *sati mata* ("sati" mother) and the government had to ban crowds from the *sati* site. One result was the passing of the Rājasthān Sati Prevention Ordinance of 1987 which makes the glorification of *sati* a crime, though the enforcement of this ordinance obviously raises many issues. Women from Rājasthān marched in opposition to the ordinance and local Rājputs plan to build a temple at the site of the *sati* a young girl in a village in Rājasthān committed, and within days over 100,000 people had gathered at the site to pay homage to her act. Some authors see *sati* as a means of removing a family's burden of maintain a widow, since widow remarriage is not permitted by most Rājput groups, and suggest that most *satis* in the past were forced rather than voluntary. In the case of Roop Kanwar, 45 people were charged with her murder, though they were later acquitted.

Closely related to *sati* was the Rājput rite of *jauhar*. It was the custom when Rājputs were facing defeat for the women to burn themselves on funeral pyres to avoid captivity or worse. In 1303 when the fort of Chittor in Rājasthān was about to fall to the Muslims, the Rājput Rani and all the women in the fort burned themselves to death before the men rode out for their final battle.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

The principal item of dress for the Rājput male is the *dhotī*, a length of white cotton cloth wrapped around the waist, pulled between the legs, and tucked in at the back. The upper body is covered by a cotton tunic, or a short jacket that fastens on the right side that Rājasthānis call an *angarhkā*. A turban or *sāfā* is worn on the head, tied by each clan according to its own fashion. The turbans may be white, red, or of other bright hues, providing a splash of color against the browns and tans of the Rājasthān desert. Yellow is a favorite color of the Rājputs. In ancient times, when a Rājput donned saffron robes before entering battle, it meant he was prepared to fight to the death. For ceremonial occasions, Rājputs may wear tight *chūridār pyjāmās* covered by a long, embroidered coat similar to the Mughal *sherwani* (*serwāni*). A ceremonial turban and a curved Rājput sword completes the outfit.

In addition to the *sārī*, everyday dress for Rājput women includes loose baggy pants worn with a tunic, or a blouse and long skirt, both accompanied by a headcloth. Rājput women are fond of jewelry, wearing bangles, perhaps a stud in the nose, and a variety of rings on fingers, ears, and toes. Formal dress is invariably a *sārī*, often bright red, with gold thread running through the material. The best gold and silver jewelry is worn on such occasions.

Rājput men, especially in urban areas, have taken to wearing Western clothing. However, one item of Rājput clothing has made its way to the West—the tight riding breeches of Jodhpur State's Rathor Cavalry Corps, introduced by the British as "jodhpurs."

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Rājputs' dietary patterns are determined partly by agricultural ecology and partly by cultural preferences. With their broad distribution in the drier parts of India, the Rājputs' staple diet consists of various unleavened breads (*rotī*), pulses, and vegetables. Rice (*chāwal*), which is usually grown rather than purchased in the bazaar, and milk products are also important. Some Rājputs are vegetarian by choice, but many eat meat. Beef, of course, is taboo. Rājputs are fond of hunting and will eat venison and game birds such as goose, duck, partridge, and grouse. Alcohol, both store-bought and country liquor such as *kesar kastūri*, is consumed in great quantities.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Formal education was of little significance among the ruling and landowning Rājput clans of India. Boys were brought up in the traditions of Rājput culture, trained in the martial arts and in a code of conduct based on valor and honor. The sons of Rājputs became huntsmen and polo-players, horsemen, and swordsmen rather than scholars.

An educational institution of particular note is Mayo College, the "Eton" of India, in Ajmer in Rājasthān. This was founded by the British in the early 1870s as a school for the sons

of the ruling (mostly Rājput) princes and *thākūrs* of Rājputana. Its purpose was to impart the “proper” British values to the future ruling elites in the region. Though many Rājputs still attend the school today, it has become an exclusive private school for the children of the Indian upper classes.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Rājput heritage in India is one of the most colorful of any group in India. Fostering the fighting traditions of their ancestors, Rājputs have developed a mystique of the brave warrior—champion of the Hindu *dharma* (faith) fighting the Muslim invader in the desert sands of Rājasthān. This romanticized view of the past is perpetuated to a considerable degree by Colonel James Tod in his classic 19th-century study of the Rājputs.

However accurate this picture, Rājputs have left their distinctive imprint on India, particularly on the peoples, culture, and landscape of Rājasthān. In fact, Rājasthāni culture is to a considerable degree Rājput culture. For instance, certain castes exist in Rājasthān to serve the specific needs of Rājputs. Bhats are genealogists who keep family records and can trace a Rājput pedigree all the way back to a clan’s mythical ancestors. Charans are bards and poets who for centuries, under Rājput patronage, have recorded the deeds and accomplishments of Rājput rulers. Rājput courts were centers of culture where literature, music, dance, painting, and sculpture flourished with the support of the Rājput elite. A specific style of Rājput painting, often focusing on religious themes, portraiture, or miniatures, emerged at Rājput courts in the Himalayas (the Pahari school) and in the western desert (the Rājasthāni school). Bardic literature such as *Prithvirāj Rāso* recounted the deeds of Rājput heroes of the past. But not all Rājasthāni writing was about Rājputs. Mira Bai, a noted poet born in the 15th century and known for her contributions to the Hindu *bhakti* (devotional) literature, was herself a Rājput princess.

The Rājputs were great builders and took pride in their engineering achievements. They built irrigation canals, dams, and reservoirs throughout their lands. The temples at Khajuraho, best known for their erotic carvings, were built by the Chandellas in the 10th and 11th centuries. The Solankis patronized the Jains and constructed many temples in Gujarat and western Rājasthān. Later Rājput palaces and forts represent a pleasing blend of Hindu and Muslim architectural styles. Among the more notable of these are the forts at Chittor, Gwalior, and Jodhpur, and the Palace of the Winds in Jaipur. Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur constructed astronomical observatories in Jaipur and Delhi in the early 18th century.

#### 15 WORK

Rājputs are hereditary landowners and soldiers and continue to follow these traditional occupations. Many have been reduced to farming their lands themselves, but, where possible, they hire laborers to perform the agricultural work. Agriculture remains the primary occupation of the group today. Opportunities for soldiering are much reduced in modern India, although Rājputs still serve in the Rājput Rifles and other regiments of the Indian Army. Many serve in the other branches of armed forces or pursue careers in the police or other government service.

#### 16 SPORTS

Rājputs participate in modern sports and athletics in India today. However, they are particularly fond of shooting and in the past hunted tiger and panther, as well as deer and game birds. Pig-sticking, the dangerous sport of hunting wild boar on horseback with a lance, was also a popular pastime. Riding skills were sharpened by playing polo.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Historically Rājputs have taken great pleasure in the elaborate rituals and ceremonies associated with their religion and their community. Weddings and other festive occasions are observed with much enthusiasm and are often celebrated with feasting, drinking, and sometimes with the presence of *nautch* (dancing) girls.

#### 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Rājputs themselves are not identified with any specific folk arts or crafts. However, Rājputs are the central figures in many folk traditions. The exploits of Amar Singh Rathor, a Rājput, are a favorite theme of string-puppet shows in Rājasthān. In the same region, professional storytellers called *bhopās* travel around the countryside relating ballads to entertain the villagers. One such ballad tells of Pabuji, a 13th-century Rathor chieftain. A Charan woman lends Pabuji her mare to ride to his wedding, on condition that Pabuji will protect her herd of cows from thieves from the desert. Soon after the wedding ceremony has begun, Pabuji learns that the thieves are making off with the cows. He leaves his wedding to keep his word and recovers all the herd except a single calf. He risks another battle for the calf and is killed by the enemy. When word is brought to his bride, she prepares to commit *sati*, leaving her handprint on the gate of Pabuji’s residence.

This story is sung in front of a cloth backdrop, up to 9 m (approximately 30 ft) in length and 2 m (over 6 ft) wide, on which scenes from Pabuji’s life are depicted. The painting of the backdrop is itself a Rājasthāni folk art. Though the ballad of Pabuji is sung by non-Rājputs for a primarily non-Rājput audience, it embodies Rājput ideals. Pabuji is depicted as the brave warrior, the defender of sacred cows, who puts duty and honor before all else at the risk of his very life. His bride shows the virtues of the dutiful wife in preparing to commit *sati*.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As hereditary landowners of high caste, Rājputs do not face the social discrimination and problems of poverty that confront many of lower status in Indian society. While some may have fallen on hard times, as a result of factors such as land-fragmentation or excessive spending, Rājputs as a community are relatively prosperous. Alcoholism is a problem among some groups. One of the biggest challenges faced by Rājputs in recent years, however, is adjustment to the democratic environment of post-independent India. After over a millennia of rule as feudal overlords, Rājputs have faced threats to their position of power and prestige in the community. Their economic resources have been threatened by government attempts to redistribute wealth. They have faced challenges from castes seeking economic and political independence from Rājput control. Rājputs are beginning to enter politics, from the local *panchāyat* (village council) to the national arena. However,



800 years after Rājput unity might have stemmed the Muslim tide in India, Rājputs still lack the unity that would give them a powerful voice in modern Indian politics.

The historical role of Rājputs as defenders of the Hindu faith against the Muslims and their overt anti-Muslim views have tended to result in the Rājputs supporting *Hindutva* (“Hinduness”) and the political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that espouse Hindu nationalism. Thus in Rājasthān, the BJP formed the state government from 1990–1998 under Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, himself a Rājput. As of 2008 the government in Rājasthān (since 2003) was formed by the BJP, led by Vasundhara Raje Scindia.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

As Hindus, Rājput women (Rājputnis) have to deal with the inequities of the Hindu social system. Moreover, as members of the *ksatriya varna*, the second of the major class groupings of Hindu society, they are expected to maintain the restrictions of “purity” expected of people of their social standing. Thus, there is a tradition that in AD 1303, after she had thwarted the designs of Sultan Ala-ud-Din Khilji, Padmini, the queen of Chittor and the wife of king Rawal Ratan Singh, and the women in Chittor committed *jauhar* rather than be raped and dishonored by the Muslim besieger’s army. In this, they were truly following their roles as *pativrata*, by selflessly serving their husbands and their families.

The concept of *pativrata* is central to the role Rājput women see themselves as performing in society. Literally meaning “one who has taken a vow (*vrata*) to [protect] her husband (*pati*)” and sometimes used loosely to refer to any wife, *pativrata* (or being a good husband-protector) is behind much of the behavior of Rājput women, even the committing of *sati*, and many of their religious rituals.

In the past, Rājput women faced child marriage, *sati*, polygamy, *purdah*, and female infanticide. Though many of these are illegal in modern India, today they still face the issues of dowry death, *purdah*, and female feticide. Again, socio-economic status plays a significant role in the extent to which Rājput women have to deal with such issues. Most Rājputs, as former landowners, do not have to face the problems of poverty and illiteracy that other communities face. The daughters of good Rājput families are sent to good schools and tend to marry into Westernized families. It is the poor village Rājput women who, mindful of their social status, have to face the worst aspects of life in rural India.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# RAKHINES

**PRONUNCIATION:** rah-KINES

**LOCATION:** Western Myanmar (Burma)

**POPULATION:** Estimated 3.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Rakhine dialect of Burmese

**RELIGION:** Buddhism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Living in Western Myanmar (which was known as Burma until 1989), the Rakhines are descended from the Pyu people of ancient Burma and peoples of India. Their coastal land gave rise to the powerful empire of Arakan around the 4th century. They built the fortified capitol of Mrauk-U, which had streams and canals for streets and artificial lakes. A great variety of goods, including precious stones and metals, incense, indigo, and forest products, were bought and sold there. Seafarers and traders from much of Asia frequented Mrauk-U, while Portuguese pirates raided the coast. The kings of Arakan repelled many invaders until a ruthless Burmese ruler, King Bodawpaya, took advantage of internal disorder in Arakan and conquered it in 1784. Bodawpaya took the Rakhine king captive and had many of his subjects massacred. The Rakhines' most cherished treasure, a 12.5 foot bronze Buddha statue called the Mahamuni, was carried off to the Burmese city of Mandalay, where it remains today. The Rakhine capitol, Mrauk-U became an abandoned ruin, eventually replaced by a new city, Akyab, founded by British colonizers.

Resentment of British colonization was strong among the Rakhines, and an articulate Buddhist monk from Akyab named U Ottama organized a pro-independence movement in the first three decades of the 20th century. During the 1930s and 1940s, ethnic tensions grew between the Buddhist Rakhines and the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan. World War II brought fierce fighting to the area and increased inter-ethnic conflict.

Violence continued when Burma became independent following the war. Rakhine and Rohingya insurgent groups were formed to fight the central government. The Rakhine rebels mostly aligned themselves with Burma's Communist underground and hoped for an independent, or at least autonomous, Arakan State. Their ranks increased with the military takeover of Burma in 1962, then waned in later years, dividing into many factions. Some Rakhine rebel groups signed ceasefire agreements with the government in the 1990s. Those that are still active are small in numbers and have few weapons. A Rakhine rebel group, the Arakan Army, attempted to buy arms in 1998 on an island belonging to India, but its leader was killed and 34 of its members have remained in India's prisons ever since.

Numerous Rakhine political dissidents are now in prison in Myanmar or in exile for espousing the cause of democracy for Myanmar and their home state. During the September 2007 "Saffron Revolution," thousands of Buddhist monks and other people participated in mass nonviolent street marches in Akyab and other Rakhine communities. Rakhine students were arrested in 2008 for opposing the regime's constitutional referendum, which was designed to legitimize the role of the military in government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Rakhine population of Myanmar has been estimated at around 3.5 million, but there are no reliable recent census figures. A few thousand more Rakhines live in border villages and cities in Bangladesh and in India. There are many Rakhines in Myanmar's largest city, Rangoon, as well. Because their language and religion are very similar to those of Myanmar's ethnic majority, the Burmese (Burmans), Rakhines have sometimes been considered just a Burmese sub-group. Therefore many Rakhines fear complete assimilation into the ethnic majority. Their pride in the rich history of their people leads them to resent such a cultural absorption. They feel that the Burmese (Burmans) took Arakan by force, and have continually mistreated the Rakhines, so that becoming indistinguishable from the conquering nation would be the ultimate defeat.

Arakan is a long, narrow state, following Myanmar's Western coastline on the Indian Ocean's Bay of Bengal. It shares a northern border with Bangladesh, and Tripura State of north-east India is not far away. The mountain range called the Arakan Yoma runs through the state and separates it from the rest of Myanmar. The coastline is rugged, and rivers including the Kaladan and Lemro flow down from the mountains. Many islands, large and small, lie offshore. Most Rakhines live in villages, on the mainland, or on the islands. Akyab, also known as Sittwe, is the main city, and there is a beach resort town called Sandoway. Some tourists visit the beaches and the ancient ruined city of Mrauk-U.

In 2003 immense natural gas reserves were discovered in deep water off the coast of Arakan, and India competed with China for drilling and export rights, which would be granted by Myanmar's military government. The Shwe Gas Movement, a group formed by Rakhine exiles, voiced concerns that the revenue from gas sales would benefit Myanmar's regime instead of the people, and that transport of the gas might involve pipelines across Arakan to India, Bangladesh, or China. Port facilities in Arakan were upgraded by China and India to facilitate natural gas extraction and shipment.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Rakhines speak a language that is considered a dialect of Burmese. The Rakhine alphabet has 33 letters, which are the same as the Burmese alphabet. There are some significant differences, mainly in pronunciation, such as the fact that Rakhines pronounce the letter "r," while Burmese do not (they use "y" in its place, calling the Buddhists of Arakan "Yakhines").

The Rakhine greeting is *Nay Kaung pha laa* ("How are you?"), and "thank you" is *Chyee zu thon ree*.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The pre-Buddhist culture of the Rakhines survives in a widespread belief in *Nats*, which are spirits of the sky and earth. Locations such as villages, fields, and bodies of water can have resident guardian Nats who may behave beneficially or harmfully. Ancient temples of Arakan are said to still be a place where rites of *yattara*, magic to ward off misfortune, are performed by spirit-mediums called *Nat kadaws*.

## 5 RELIGION

The Rakhines are an overwhelmingly Buddhist people. Buddhism seems to have appeared in Arakan around the 6th cen-

tury bc. The Rakhines were Animists prior to conversion to Buddhism and were also influenced by India's Hindu Brahmanism. Buddhist missionaries from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) are thought to have brought the faith that now pervades Rakhine culture.

The ancient kings of Arakan built huge temple complexes and fortified them against invaders. Rakhines have continued to build Buddhist monasteries and pagodas and to maintain many of the old ones. Each Rakhine community has a Buddhist monastery that shelters a population of monks, including those putting on the robes for a short period of time. Rakhine Buddhism is very close to that of the Burmese, including study of Buddhist scriptures, respect for life, the importance of feeling compassion, and the inevitability of a cycle of reincarnations.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Rakhines celebrate festive occasions at least once each month, using the lunar calendar. Gatherings are held at temples, with food booths and theatrical entertainments. Some festival features are: boat races on the river (April and September), watering banyan trees (May), a tug-of-war between men's and women's teams (February), a contest of weaving robes for monks (October), parades of elephants and horses (January), and honoring the elders (October).

A festival of lights occurs in October, with people's houses lit by candles or (for those who can afford it) strings of electric lights.

The Rakhine New Year, Thorn Garan, is the highlight of the festival calendar. At the height of the hot season, usually in April, this Buddhist New Year is celebrated for a week with singing, dancing, and feasting. Buddha statues in monasteries are bathed in scented water on the first day. Later, boys and girls meet to splash each other with water. A girl may dress up in her best outfit, only to end up soaked with water thrown by a boy who has been admiring her. Rakhines who live overseas like to gather as a community for the major traditional holidays such as the New Year water festival.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Rakhines have several taboos for pregnant women: they should not attend weddings or funerals, or even send gifts or donations to them. A pregnant woman is advised not to sit in the doorway, plant trees, or bathe after dark. After giving birth, the mother stays by a fire for seven days in the room where she gave birth. Then a naming ceremony is held. A female elder carries the baby out of the house and shows it the earth, the sun, and the moon. Baby girls then have their ears pierced.

Between age seven and the early teens, all Rakhine boys become monks for at least a few days. An elaborate feast is held, and the boys are dressed like ancient princes and paraded to the monastery. Then their heads are shaved and they put on the unadorned red robes of Buddhist monks.

When Rakhines die, they are cremated or buried. Accident victims or those who died from violence are traditionally buried in separate cemeteries, away from the village. The most elaborate funerals are those of senior monks, whose bodies are kept, embalmed, at their monastery, until an auspicious (according to astrology) day when they are cremated.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Rakhines shake hands when they meet. Guests are welcomed into a house with tea or a cold beverage. People always remove their shoes when entering a home or a Buddhist temple.

Young people meet at festivals, religious occasions, and at school. Friends introduce boys and girls to each other, or a boy who is interested in a girl may visit her at her parent's house. Traditionally, he'll stay outside and try to talk to her; she may ignore him or she may show that she likes him by deciding to converse with him. Few people have telephones, so love notes, passed along by friends, are a typical way for a couple to communicate. Rakhines have a special vocabulary called *zaam*, which is used only for romance.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Rakhines suffer from a lack of health care, due to a shortage of trained doctors and nurses and a lack of medical facilities. In Arakan's hot, rainy climate, malaria (spread by mosquitoes) and other tropical diseases are common. Malnutrition is serious in the countryside and even in the cities, where workers struggle to earn enough to buy rice, the staple food. As a worldwide food crisis took hold in 2008 and the price of rice soared in Asia, Rakhines found it harder and harder to feed their families. The May 2008 Cyclone Nargis disaster in Myanmar affected Arakan indirectly with drastic increases in the price of rice, other foods and fuel.

Traditional Rakhine houses are built above the ground on stilts. They are usually made of bamboo, many varieties of which grow in Arakan, or of wood. The houses generally have a shaded verandah in the front and sleeping quarters in the back. Those who can afford it use mosquito nets to keep away the carriers of malaria. Meals may be prepared and eaten in the cool area under the elevated house.

Living standards for the Rakhines tend to be low. Farmers are harassed by the Burmese government forces to turn over major quotas of their rice crop. Whole villages are forced to relocate, sometimes to predominantly Muslim areas that the military wants to surround with Buddhist "settlers." The inland and coastal forests of Arakan are under some threat from logging enterprises, and new shrimp farms set up by the government along the coast cause pollution and the destruction of mangrove forests.

Travel within Arakan is mainly by riverboat. Arakan has no railway, and few road links exist to the rest of Myanmar. To travel to regions outside of Arakan, Rakhines usually go by boat. There are some airplane flights in and out of Akyab and Sandoway, but plane tickets are too expensive for most Rakhines. There are few roads in the state, although the Burmese government has used Rakhines and Rohingyas as forced laborers to build more.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families with five or more children are the norm among the Rakhines, who tend to marry in their late teens or early twenties. Parents often arrange marriages, but unarranged "love matches" are very common as well. The groom's family gives a dowry, and the couple's horoscopes must be found compatible. Before the wedding, Buddhist monks recite prayers at the homes of the bride and the groom. A well-off married couple with children is asked to perform the actual wedding ceremony by tying the hands of the bride and groom with a thread.

Then the newlyweds bow to their parents. Gifts of money are put in a silver bowl by parents, relatives, and other guests. A feast follows, with the married couple eating food in pairs: two prawns, two eggs, and so on. The couple afterwards lives at the bride's parents' house for a while. If a couple has problems, they may be counseled by village elders. Divorce is permissible, but rare.

Rakhine families sometimes have cats and caged songbirds as pets, and dogs are kept outside to guard the house.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Rakhines wear an ankle-length sarong called a *cheik thamein*. For men it is knotted at the waist, and women wrap it tightly and tuck it in at the side. The fabric is heavy cotton or silk, woven in a thick, brocade-like pattern. Men wear shirts or T-shirts, and women wear traditional or modern blouses or T-shirts. Women's clothing is often vividly colored, especially at festival times, and they decorate their hair with orchids and other flowers. For formal occasions, a long jacket of thin material is worn. Girls wear lipstick, nail polish, and *thanaka*, a sunscreen and face powder made from a fragrant wood. People often carry umbrellas as shelter from the sun as well as from the monsoon rain. They wear flip-flop sandals made of velvet and straw, or plastic or rubber.

### **12 FOOD**

Rakhine cuisine is closely related to that of the Burmese and has strong Indian influences. The Rakhines eat two or three rice-based meals a day. Soups, vegetable dishes including string beans, squash, and baby eggplant, and curries accompany the rice. Popular curries include chicken, beef, fish, and prawns, but these ingredients are becoming increasingly hard for most people to afford. Unlike the Muslim Rohingya people of Arakan, the Rakhines eat pork in the form of curry, pork chops, meatballs, or sausage. Rakhines use chilies, garlic, ginger, and fish-paste for flavoring. They eat rice dishes by scooping up mouthfuls with the fingertips of the right hand. For a snack or dessert there are tropical fruits such as mangos and sweet cakes made of flour or sticky rice, served with tea. Rakhines who are strict Buddhists avoid alcohol, but others drink toddy palm wine or beer.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Rakhines have traditionally been a learned people, valuing intellectual and artistic achievement. Ethnic discrimination and the general decline in educational standards have made it hard for Rakhines to pursue higher learning elsewhere in Myanmar, and schools in Arakan have often been shut down as a measure by the Burmese government to curtail student unrest. During Myanmar's pro-democracy uprising of 1988, Rakhine and Rohingya students took over government of most of Arakan's towns and cities for several months, until their movement was brutally suppressed by the military.

Elementary to high school education is in bad condition as well. Teachers and teaching materials are in short supply. Buddhist monasteries provide some education, mainly for boys. Some Rakhine student refugees from the 1988 uprising founded and staffed schools for refugee children and poor villagers in India and Bangladesh. Others, including young Buddhist monks, continued their studies at universities and colleges in

India, and have documented the human rights situation and history of Arakan.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The ancient palaces and temples of the Rakhine kings at Mrauk-U and elsewhere were built with elaborate stonework, much of which remains. Stone terraces and bell-shaped pagodas overlook the landscape, along with remains of old fortification walls. These had been surrounded by dwellings made of bamboo or more costly materials, such as fragrant sandalwood. Large Buddha images and carved-stone reliefs abound in these archeological sites, and frescoes depicting Buddhist stories and daily life in past centuries can still be seen.

Rakhine dance, poetry (the lyrical *E-gyin* style), and music are derived from performances at the ancient royal courts. The Rakhines have a variety of songs composed for specific occasions, from courtship to weddings to lullabies. Rakhine orchestral music is similar to Burmese classical music and emphasizes percussion instruments including xylophones, drums, and cymbals. A particularly Rakhine instrument is the *hne*, a shawm (metal horn) with a double reed. Such orchestras play for dramas, comedies, marionette theater, and classical dance. Rakhine dance, influenced by India, includes large ensemble pieces such as the "spider" dance with as many as 40 dancers, and the *Don Yin* dance with as many as 100. There is also a dramatic Rakhine dragon dance.

### **15 WORK**

Most Rakhines make their living as farmers, fishermen, or as shopkeepers and traders in towns. Women often travel by riverboat to bring goods to and from central Myanmar for sale. A highly educated Rakhine elite, including doctors, teachers, and other professionals, lives largely outside of Arakan. Those who have attempted political action within Arakan have been in considerable danger. U Tha Tun, a noted Rakhine historian, died in 1991 in prison in Akyab, where he had been sent while a pro-democracy political candidate. A Rakhine dissident helped to found "Green November," Myanmar's first environmental action group. Rakhine exiles operate the Narinjara News online information service, and several overseas Rakhines have blogs about political, cultural, entertainment, and personal topics.

### **16 SPORTS**

The Rakhines enjoy playing and watching soccer, volleyball, and *chintlone*, a fast kickball game played with a woven rattan ball. Young men sometimes stage a contest to see which team can climb highest up a pole or tree by standing on each other's shoulders. A traditional form of wrestling, *kyun* ("quick like a tiger") can be seen at festivals. Karate, judo, and other martial arts are popular with young people in the towns and cities.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Rakhine young people enjoy listening to pop songs from Western countries or Myanmar and singing them with guitar accompaniment. Towns and cities have movie theaters or "video parlors" where foreign or local video discs are played. Students are avid readers, sharing books, which are in short supply, and many play chess. Satellite television has limited availability, so shortwave radios are an important source of information on

local and foreign news and cultural developments. Internet access is often censored and few people own home computers, but the urban centers have cyber-cafes where computer games are popular.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Rakhines are known throughout Myanmar for their woven, brocade-textured fabrics. Basketry and pottery are other Rakhine crafts.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Forced relocation and forced labor at the hands of the Burmese government military have disrupted traditional Rakhine society in the countryside, while suppression of dissent and economic decline have created a climate of fear and frustration in the towns and cities. In addition to these ongoing problems, ethnic friction between Rakhines and Rohingyas continues. While the groups worked together for the democracy cause in 1988 and afterwards, the Burmese military has played one off against the other, through actions such as moving Rakhines onto confiscated Rohingya land. Animosity from the period around World War II, and farther back into ancient history, have been allowed to resurface. Many, if not all Rakhines will insist that the Rohingyas are an alien people with no real right to live in Arakan. In this matter alone, they agree with the Burmese central government. The Rakhines have their own insecurity, which hinges on the fear of assimilation by the much larger Burmese ethnic group, to which they are so closely related. Many real and perceived wounds will have to be healed before the Rakhines can live in peace and security with all their neighbors.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In the Buddhism practiced by Rakhines, women are considered an inferior incarnation to men, and Rakhine families are dominated by the father, who makes important decisions. Rakhine women are, however, very active in the life of their communities. Rakhine women are active in business as entrepreneurs and market vendors. They own and run shops and travel great distances to trade in rice and consumer goods, often while their husbands stay at home. Rakhine women are also involved in health care, education, and underground pro-democracy political activities. In exile, Rakhine women participate in political life, more often in leadership roles than women from other ethnic groups of Myanmar. A Rakhine women's rights activist, Mra Raza Linn, won the 2007 Yayori Award for human rights. Although Rakhine society is somewhat conservative, gay and transgender individuals are treated with tolerance. Sometimes transgender people perform as *Nat kadaw* spirit-mediums.

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—by Edith Mirante

# ROHINGYAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** roh-HIN-juh-z

**LOCATION:** Western Myanmar (Burma) (

**POPULATION:** Estimated 1.5 million in Myanmar

**LANGUAGE:** Rohingya

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya people of western Myanmar (the country called Burma until 1989) are closely related to the Bengali people of neighboring Bangladesh and India. Like those in Bangladesh, the Rohingyas are Muslims. In addition to their Bengali heritage, the Rohingyas are thought to have descended in part from Persian, Moorish, and Arab seafarers. A coastal people on the trade route between Arabia and China, the Rohingyas converted to Islam around the 12th century. Their knowledge of science and the arts influenced the Buddhist Rakhine kings of Arakan in past centuries, when Bengal and Arakan were allies. The Muslims and their Buddhist Rakhine compatriots generally coexisted peacefully.

During British colonial days, northern Arakan was at first part of India's Bengal province, but then the British decided that Arakan was to be part of Burma. When World War II reached Burma, the Rohingyas helped the British to fight their way back into Burma through Arakan and to repel the Japanese invaders. Anti-Muslim rioting broke out in Arakan in 1942, causing tens of thousands of Rohingyas to flee across the border to Bangladesh (then called East Pakistan). At Burma's independence in 1948, the Rohingyas hoped for their own Muslim state, but they were combined with predominantly Rakhine areas in Arakan State. Tensions between Rakhines and Rohingyas, unresolved from World War II, continued, and government discrimination against the Rohingyas, in terms of travel restrictions within Burma and citizenship laws, commenced.

With the 1962 military takeover of the central Burmese government, conditions worsened for Arakan's Muslims. They were viewed as a threat to the predominantly Burmese (Burman) power structure and a holdover from colonial times when the British brought many workers from India to Burma. In 1978, Operation *Nagamin* ("Dragon King") took place. It was a systematic campaign of human rights violations by the government military against the Rohingyas, who were declared "illegal immigrants." Over 200,000 fled across the border to Bangladesh. Thousands starved to death in deliberately under-supplied refugee camps until the survivors were forced to return to Burma.

After the suppression of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising throughout Burma, Muslims were again targeted for mistreatment. A government military build-up in northern Arakan in 1991 was accompanied by murder, land confiscation, rape, torture, destruction of mosques, and large-scale forced labor. Again, this led to a huge flight to Bangladesh. Over 250,000 Rohingya refugees sought sanctuary in border camps this time. Eventually, most were convinced or coerced to return to Arakan, although forced labor and other forms of abuse have continued there. The estimated 27,000 Rohingya refugees who remain in the official camps in Bangladesh endure miserable

conditions, and there is a constant influx of new arrivals who struggle to survive outside of the camps.

Exiled Rohingyas promote the preservation of cultural identity and support democracy for Myanmar, and a small group of insurgents still fights for political autonomy. Rohingyas have also become "boat people" in recent years, fleeing Arakan by sea for Thailand or Malaysia. In 2008 Thailand's Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej proposed confining all Rohingya migrants on an island detention camp. Rohingyas in Malaysia (a predominantly Muslim country) have been a useful part of the workforce making up for that country's labor shortage, but are subject to abuse, detention and forced repatriation, as they are considered illegal immigrants.

A "third country" program has had some success in sending Rohingya refugees from the Bangladesh camps to other countries, particularly Canada. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency overseeing the camps in Bangladesh, announced in May 2008 that an agreement with the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to repatriate the remaining occupants of official camps back to Myanmar would be revived. With other regions of Myanmar devastated by Cyclone Nargis that month, and the whole country facing a rice shortage, there was some question about the practicality of such a mass repatriation.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

There may be as many as 1.5 million Rohingyas in Myanmar, but no reliable census figures exist for them or other ethnic minorities. Hundreds of thousands more Rohingyas live in exile. At least 127,000 live in Bangladesh, inside and outside of established refugee camps. An estimated 200,000 reside in Pakistan, another 200,000 in Saudi Arabia, and thousands more in the Persian Gulf states and Jordan. Tens of thousands of Rohingyas live as illegal immigrants in Malaysia. Besides the Rohingyas, Myanmar has other Muslim populations of Chinese, Indian, and Burman lineage.

The Rohingya homeland is at the northern tip of Arakan State, bordering Bangladesh's Chittagong and northeast India's Tripura. The main towns are Buthidaung and Maungdaw, a river port. Most Rohingyas live in villages surrounding them. Others live in and around the cities of Akyab and Rathedaung, to the south in Arakan and on islands in the Bay of Bengal. In recent years, the Myanmar government has brought in families of Buddhist settlers, often poor people from other parts of Myanmar, to farm land confiscated from Rohingyas or abandoned by those who left as refugees.

The Kaladan, Mayu, and Seindaung Rivers run through flat farmland surrounded by mountains and the Bay of Bengal coastline. The Naaf River forms Arakan's border with Bangladesh. Forests of bamboo and mangrove exist, but they have greatly decreased due to logging and the government's shrimp farming projects.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Rohingyas' language is closely related to the Bengali dialect spoken in Bangladesh's southern Chittagong Province and has some Persian and Arabic influences. The written language is close to that of Bengali.

The usual Rohingya greeting is to ask "How are you?": *Ken ahsaw?* with the reply, *Balah aasee*, ("I am fine"). "Thank you" in the Rohingya language is *Shu kuria*.



#### 4 FOLKLORE

Because of their adherence to Islam, the Rohingya people tend to reject the serious belief in ghosts and nature-spirits prevalent elsewhere in Myanmar. People do enjoy the “Arabian Nights” fairytales, though, translated into Bengali. Local customs include considering it impolite to point your feet at people or objects and not leaning your forehead on your hands, as this is considered a sign of severe depression.

#### 5 RELIGION

From the 8th to 14th centuries, Islam took hold in northern Arakan. The Rohingya people are a traditionalist Sunni Muslim society, believing that Allah is the only God and adhering to the code of morality set down by his prophet Muhammad. While not obviously “fundamentalist” or “militant,” for most Rohingyas, life revolves around the practice of their faith. Daily prayers and study of the Quran are of great importance, although many religious schools have been closed down by Myanmar’s military government. Each community would normally have a mosque, but many have been destroyed in recent years by the government. Communities donate money and materials to build and maintain the mosques, which are built of wood, or in larger communities, whitewashed cement, but it is very difficult to get the necessary government permission to make repairs. Each functioning mosque has an Imam, in charge of worship, and a Muezzin, who calls the faithful to prayer. They are paid support by the community. The government has banned amplified calls by the Muezzins. The traditional Muslim pilgrimage, the Haj, to Mecca in Saudi Arabia,

is nearly impossible for most Rohingyas due to the cost and government travel restrictions.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Rohingyas observe the Ramadan fast of Islam (according to the lunar calendar) during the first half of the year, when they consume no food or drink during daylight hours for one month. At the end of Ramadan, the celebration called *Eid Al Fitr* takes place. People who can afford to do so buy new clothes and provide food for visitors who drop in. Children go from house to house with bags to collect small gifts of money. Seventy days after Ramadan, *Eid Adha* is celebrated. Animals, usually goats, are bought by those who can afford them. The goats are sacrificed and a third of the meat is given away to the poor. The rest is shared with family, friends, and neighbors.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rohingya mothers usually give birth at home, assisted by a midwife. Traditionally, the new mother would stay by a warm fire for several days after the birth. For about 40 days she stays at home and sleeps apart from her husband. Within a week or two of the birth, the baby’s head is shaved. Children who are sick with fever sometimes have their head shaved because the parents believe the illness will make their hair fall out and shaving will help it to grow back properly.

Boys and girls from ages 4 to 12 attend mosque schools called *madrasahs* to learn to read the Quran in Arabic. From their early teen years, they work alongside their parents, in the home if girls, or farming and fishing if boys. Because of increasing economic hardship, child labor has become common as well, and children have been used for forced labor on military projects such as road or barracks building.

When Rohingyas die, they are, according to Islamic tradition, buried. The funeral is simple, and those who can afford to mark the grave with a stone bearing the deceased’s name. After seven days, recitations of the Quran are held to honor the dead, and families who can afford to sacrifice an animal and give part of the meat to feed the poor.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Rohingyas greet each other by shaking hands, and family members hug each other. People remove their shoes when entering a Rohingya house. The host will bring tea or other refreshments to a guest, without asking, as an inquiry such as “Would you like some tea?” would receive a polite refusal.

Shoes are always taken off, and a person’s head is kept covered when visiting a mosque. Men and women occupy separate sections of the mosque, with a curtain between them.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Throughout Arakan, living conditions are hard; this is particularly so for Rohingyas, who, viewed as less than full citizens, tend to lack access to education, medical care, and other social services. Some outside help from the United Nations and a few foreign voluntary agencies has been allowed as part of the agreement to resettle Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh back in Arakan. Malaria, dysentery, and other tropical diseases are widespread among the Rohingyas, as is malnutrition.

In normal times, most Rohingyas live in thatch-roofed one- or two-story houses built of wood and raised up on stilts. They

use chairs and tables in their dining areas and sleep on platform beds, with mosquito nets if they can afford them. The displaced people built bamboo huts with plastic sheets for roofing material to keep out the monsoon rainfall.

Many Rohingyas have lost the land left to them by their families because of outright confiscation by the military, forced resettlement of Rakhine villagers onto Rohingya land, or the inability to prove ownership because papers got lost during the escape to Bangladesh. A council of elders called the *Samaj* traditionally made important decisions in Rohingya villages, but such authority has now been taken over by Burmese military officers from bases established in the area.

Transportation for Rohingyas is mainly on foot or on small riverboats. Bicycles are a luxury owned by some. Arakan has no railway, and the few roads are in poor condition. Travel for Rohingyas within northern Arakan is difficult because of military checkpoints, and their access to the rest of Myanmar remains restricted.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Under normal conditions, Rohingyas tend to marry and start a family in their late teens or early twenties. Marriage is usually arranged by the parents, so dating is rare and is usually kept secret. If a couple falls in love without parental consent, they might elope. Some couples never meet at all before their wedding. The relatives negotiate for jewelry, usually gold if they can afford it, to be given to the bride by both sides of the family, as the newlyweds' "bank account." On the morning of the wedding day, the bride's relatives attend a lunch and bring gifts for her, and then the groom's relatives attend a dinner in the evening. In Arakan, the Rohingyas are subject to marriage restrictions, as a bride and groom must apply for marriage permission from several government agencies. That permission is often denied, and there are many cases of arrest for illegal marriage between consenting adult Rohingya men and women in Arakan.

Divorce is rare and is considered shameful for women. The children are often raised by the husband's mother in cases of divorce. Widows are looked after by their own family and their husband's family.

Five children is an average size for a Rohingya family. Infant and child mortality rates, due to diseases and malnutrition, are high. Ideally, a Rohingya household is self-sustaining, with its own rice paddy, vegetable garden, and domestic animals such as chickens and goats. Cats and songbirds are popular house pets, and dogs are kept outside to guard the house.

## 11 CLOTHING

Rohingyas wear ankle-length cotton sarongs. The men's sarong is called a *longi* and is knotted in front, and the women's is called a *thain* and wraps tightly around the waist. Cotton shirts and blouses are worn with the sarongs. Women have pierced ears and wear bangle bracelets of gold, glass or plastic. Some married women wear a gold ring called a *Nag-pool* ("nose-flower") in one nostril. In former times, Rohingya women always wore full veils when outdoors. Now, women and older girls generally wear a large scarf that covers most of their hair and wraps around the shoulders. The scarves are often quite colorful, except for those of older women, who wear white. Men over age 40 or so grow beards.

## 12 FOOD

Being Muslims, Rohingyas do not eat pork. They also have their own taboos against eating hawks, eagles, and (from the sea) rays. Many Rohingyas are fishermen, and a variety of river fish are available. Chicken and goat are favorite curries, always served with rice. Common vegetables include potatoes, tomatoes, okra, and eggplant, with chili peppers for flavoring. Rice is served twice a day by those who can afford it, for lunch and dinner. In the morning, tea or coffee is served with flat bread called *roti* or other types of bread and biscuits. *Biryani*, an Indian spiced rice dish with goat or chicken, is a favorite dish for weddings and other celebrations. Rohingyas eat cakes, cookies, and rice puddings, often made with coconut. Fried garbanzo beans are sold as a snack.

## 13 EDUCATION

Aside from the religious schools where boys and girls learn the Quran and some higher-level religious training for men, education in Arakan consists of government schools, where instruction is conducted in the Burmese language. Very few Rohingyas are able to continue their education past primary school, and only 5%, nearly all male, go on to study after high school. The cost of education, the difficulty of going away to school due to travel restrictions, and discrimination against Rohingyas contribute to the current shortage of highly educated people.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

As early as the 7th century, small mosques known as *Badr Moqam* were built along the Arakan coast as shrines to a Muslim saint. Important mosques were built in Arakan during the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. The largest mosque in Akyab, the Musa Dewan, and the Jam-e-Mosque of Akyab, which has many domes and spires, were constructed in the 17th century.

Rohingya literature blossomed in the ancient courts of Arakan, when Muslim poets including Daulat Qazi, Magan Siddiqi, Mardan, and Shah Aloal wrote in Bengali, Persian, or Arabic. The 17th century poet Shah Aloal, who led an adventurous life as a warrior, scholar, and scientist, is considered one of the great poets of Bengali literature. He translated and adapted romances and epics from Hindi and Persian, and composed his own lyrical and mystical poems as well. "Poetry," he wrote, "is full of fragrance. It brings the faraway near, and takes the near to the distant." His romantic poems are noteworthy for being realistic depictions of human emotions rather than the spiritual allegories prevalent at the time. Shah Aloal wrote, "After sifting all matters, I find that love can be compared to nothing. Full of sharp pain is love, yet blessed is he who has been fortunate to experience it."

Little is being written in the Rohingya language at present, although exiled Rohingya dissidents in Bangladesh have been researching the history of their ethnic group. Likewise, Rohingya art, architecture, and music await historical research and contemporary revival. Rohingya exiles have devised a way to write their language in the Roman alphabet for computer use, and have established the Bangladesh-based Kaladan Press Network, which reports news of Arakan online.



## 15 WORK

The Rohingyas are mostly rice farmers and fishermen. Some own cattle for plowing or for meat and milk. Rohingya entrepreneurs run small shops and river transport services. Boat-building is a skilled trade in northern Arakan, producing small wooden vessels to be rowed with oars, for the most part, and some sailboats. The few Rohingyas who have achieved higher education work as doctors, lawyers, and business persons, mainly overseas. Rohingya women are far less likely to work outside the home than those of other ethnic groups of Myanmar.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer and volleyball are the most popular sports for Rohingya young people to play or watch. Arakan's climate is often very hot, so children particularly like to go swimming in the rivers.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In Arakan's towns and cities there are movie theaters and small "video parlors" where Burmese, Indian, and other films are shown on disc. In the villages, people like to go for an evening stroll after dinner and gather on a soccer field or other open space to listen to music, usually Indian pop songs, on portable compact disc players. Old folk songs are sung while working in the rice fields or vegetable gardens. Many communities have tea shops where men gather in the morning or afternoon to talk.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Rohingyas make baskets from cane and bamboo and weave straw mats for their houses. Rohingya women knit, or embroider their clothing. Some of the mosques in Arakan have ornamental tile-work.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Rohingyas have had to endure a concerted campaign of human rights abuse by Myanmar's military government, denial of full citizenship rights, and even routine discrimination by other ethnic minority groups that are otherwise democratic in nature. Mosques and other Islamic religious sites have been burned or desecrated by the government forces and access to Islamic texts and pilgrimage severely restricted. The traditional rural society has been thrown into chaos by demands for forced labor, crop and property confiscation, and the flight to temporary sanctuary in Bangladesh. Rice goes unplanted and children go unfed. The Rohingyas' present poverty and the pattern of risky escape to other countries have made the survival of the Rohingyas in Myanmar very precarious. Even if this ongoing crisis is resolved, relations with the Rakhines, with whom the Rohingyas share geography and history, must be greatly repaired for Arakan to return to any level of peace and prosperity. Government programs settling Buddhist families in Rohingya areas have increased friction between the religious/ethnic groups, rather than understanding or acceptance.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Rohingya women tend to live more homebound lives than most women in Myanmar. Men work in the fields and sell goods in the market, while women take care of children, the home, vegetable gardens, and domestic animals. After age 12 or so, girls

mostly stay at home except when they are attending school. Few Rohingya women in Myanmar have gone on to higher education, but some have become teachers and nurses. In recent years, according to documents by human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Rohingya women and girls have been targeted for rape by Burmese government troops. Such use of rape as a military tactic appears to be intended to humiliate the ethnic minority group and instill fear of the uniformed authorities. This danger adds to the tendency of Rohingyas to keep girls at home and even to keep them out of school.

Homosexuality is generally disapproved of in the conservative Islam that is intrinsic to Rohingya society. However, gay and transgendered individuals are often treated with tolerance and acceptance in Rohingya households.

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—by Edith Mirante

# SA'DAN TORAJA

**PRONUNCIATION:** ToH-RAH-jah

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Toraja

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sulawesi)

**POPULATION:** 650,000

**LANGUAGE:** Sa'dan Toraja (Bahasa Tae')

**RELIGION:** Christianity (64% Protestant, 12% Catholic); Aluk To Dolo ("the Way of the Ancestors")

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since converting to Islam in the 17th century, the lowland peoples of South Sulawesi have applied the term "Toraja" to all highlanders who retained their ancestral animism. Dutch colonial anthropology began to distinguish numerous distinct ethnic groups in the mountains at the heart of Sulawesi, roughly grouping them into "Eastern," "Western," and "Southern" Toraja. Of these groups, only the "Southern Toraja," associated with the valley of the Sa'dan River and the most well known internationally, have taken the originally pejorative term as their own (in this article, "Toraja" will only refer to the Sa'dan Toraja).

While substantial kingdoms developed in lowland South Sulawesi as early as the 14th century or before, the Toraja knew no political units larger than village confederations (*tondok*) until the beginning of the 20th century. The Toraja remember only one fleeting episode of unity: a common front put up against Arung Palakka, the Bugis ally of the Dutch East India Company in the destruction of Makassar, whose hegemonic ambitions reached even into the highlands. The *tondok* was an association that could comprise as little as a cluster of two to three houses or encompass as much as a network of families stretching across the highlands; a *tondok* wove ties of marriage and ritual between often remote settlements while excluding nearby ones. In the highlands, possession of land and the slaves to work it were the key to social prominence, making an individual a *to kapua*, a "big man." The meat from animal sacrifices was (and remains) the medium that affirmed status and represented relations of obligation.

In the late 19th century, population growth made land ever scarcer, leaving the land-poor and land-less vulnerable to enslavement for nonpayment of debts. The slave trade flourished as labor was needed both in the lowlands and for growing coffee, the new and very lucrative export crop, in the highlands; one estimate counts as many as 12,000 Toraja sold into captivity. Slave raiding and warfare over land rights and trade routes became so intense that villages placed themselves on hilltops encircled by fortifications and connected themselves to neighboring settlements with underground tunnels.

As part of their general pacification of South Sulawesi, the Dutch sent armies into the Toraja highlands, by 1908 overcoming resistance led by the *to kapua*, Pong Tiku, master of the coffee traffic to Bone via Luwu (his only rival was the master of the alternate Sidenreng-to-Pare-Pare route to the west). The colonial peace ended the slave trade and introduced schools, clinics, and imported cotton cloth. In a pattern repeated all over the archipelago, the *to kapua* collaborated with the Dutch as officials in the newly imposed bureaucracy.

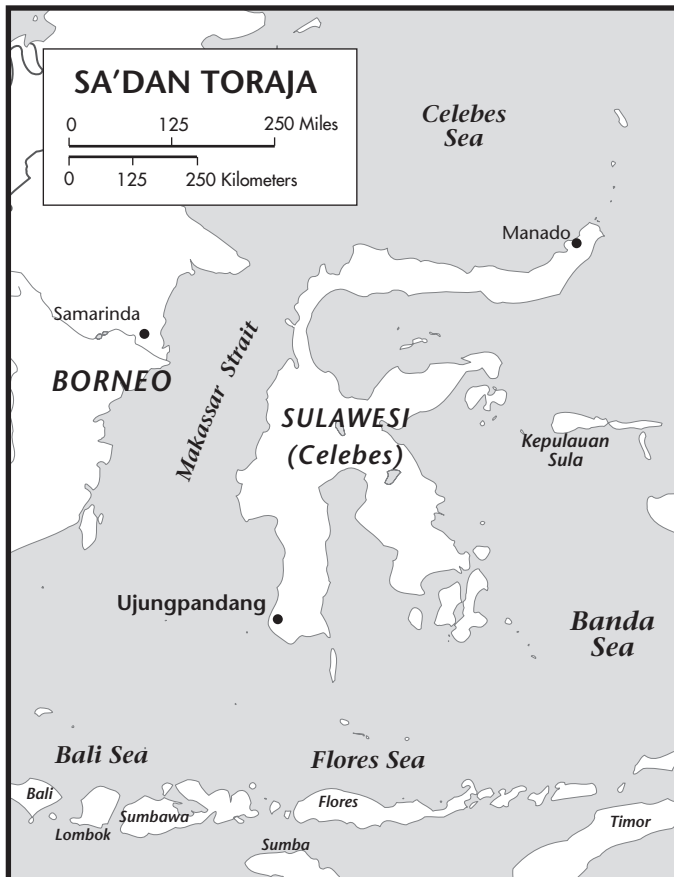
The years since World War II have transformed Toraja society. The lowland Kahar Muzakkar rebellion of 1950–1965 [see **Bugis**] washed up into the highlands. Under the fear of forced Islamization, thousands of Toraja sought the legal protection of conversion to Christianity (a trend accelerated under the New Order's "anti-communist" suspicion of paganism). In recent decades, voluntary emigration, including of educated professionals, has replaced the old efflux of slaves and has brought new wealth back into the Toraja homeland. Beginning in the 1980s, the Indonesian government heavily promoted the Toraja region as a destination for international tourism (even putting traditional Toraja noble houses, *tongkonan*, on the 5,000 rupiah note, about as common as sight to Indonesians as Lincoln on the \$5 bill is to Americans, signaling that Torajan culture, like Balinese culture, had come to be viewed as emblematic of the national identity). Attracted to the dramatic landscape and to "exotic" rituals, mass tourism has also created new opportunities as well as problems for the Toraja.

Since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, political instability in Indonesia, including internationally publicized inter-ethnic/sectarian violence in neighboring Central Sulawesi has caused a sharp decline in tourism to the Toraja homeland, challenging a local society that had become dependent upon it. Torajans have stood against the spread of ethnic violence to their region as when, soon after anti-Chinese rioting had burned down a thousand homes and businesses in Ujungpandang (Makassar), the capital of South Sulawesi in September 1997, Torajans linked arms to block Muslim agitators from outside the Toraja region from attacking Chinese shops in the major tourist town of Rantepao. At the same time, Muslim transmigrants, as elsewhere in Indonesia, started to consider returning to their homelands, fearing persecution by Toraja and Chinese for what other Muslims had attempted to do. In 2001, Toraja identity received international validation when the Ke'te' Kesu', the village showcasing the finest examples of *tongkonan*, was nominated to join the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites, alongside the monumental architecture of Java's Borobudur and Prambanan, also non-Muslim icons of identity for the world's largest Muslim-majority nation.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Sa'dan Toraja's mountain homeland lies in the extreme north of Sulawesi's southwestern peninsula. The highlands begin at 330 m (1,080 ft) above sea level, with the major towns of Rantepao and Makale at above 700 m (2,300 ft) and the highest peak (Mt. Sesean, abode of Suloara, the legendary first priest of the Toraja) at 2,000 m (6,560 ft). Paddy fields cover what patches of flat land there are, usually along the many small rivers, and rise in terraces up the thickly forested mountainsides.

The Sa'dan Toraja number over 650,000, of whom most still live in their homeland in South Sulawesi's Tana Toraja residency (2005 population: 437,000). As many as 200,000 Toraja have migrated, most settling in the provincial capital Makassar and in the national capital Jakarta. These migrants maintain close ties with their ancestral places. Their money has permitted commoner families to hold ritual celebrations that only aristocrats were permitted to perform in previous times. Indeed, the new wealth has increased the frequency and elaborateness of ritual activity to an unprecedented level.



### 3 LANGUAGE

Linguists have reconstructed the Austronesian language, Proto-South-Sulawesi, which is ancestral to Sa'dan Toraja, Bugis, Mandar, and Makassarese. Particularly close to the Sa'dan Toraja language is the speech of people in the neighboring Luwu and Duri regions; the latter are generally regarded as Bugis because of their adherence to Islam. The Sa'dan Toraja language is called Bahasa Tae', "tae'" being the word for "no." The traditional greeting is "Manasumorekka?" ("Have you cooked rice yet?"), to which the standard reply is "Manasumo!" ("The rice is cooked already!").

### 4 FOLKLORE

One of a number of origin myths tells that the Toraja ancestors arrived in eight canoes (*lembang*) from an island in the southwest. According to the Bugis tradition, the Toraja descend from one of the lesser cousins of the supreme god Batara Guru, whose own descendants are the Bugis royalty. For their part, the Toraja claim that the Toraja Laki Padada was the ancestor of 100 noble lines, including the lowland kingdoms of Luwu, Bone, and Gowa; despite their adherence to Islam, surviving Luwu royalty sent pigs to the renovation of Laki Padada's house in 1983.

One tale offers the origin of one of the differences between the Toraja and their Muslim neighbors. The Toraja hero Karaeng Dua' was born of a pig mother. Karaeng Dua' traveled down to Luwu and there married a female chief (*datu*) of Luwu. A mischievous fellow highlander informed the chief that her mother-in-law was a pig. Infuriated, the chief scooped

up all the sunlight into her house, leaving Luwu dark for three days, during which the people indulged in unlimited feasting on pig. After the three days, the chief released the light and all the remaining pigs were let loose in the forest, now taboo for Luwu people to eat.

### 5 RELIGION

Since Indonesian independence, Christianity has grown rapidly among the Toraja, claiming 64% as Protestants and 12% as Catholics. The remaining population practices Aluk To Dolo, "the Way of the Ancestors." Before the 20th century, the Toraja had no separate word for religion, *aluk* meaning the totality of the correct ways of behaving and working, including those that outsiders would consider secular. The Indonesian state tolerates Aluk To Dolo by classifying it as a variant of Hinduism, one of the recognized five religions under Pancasila.

The Toraja distinguish between "smoke-rising rituals" (*rambu solo*), directed to the gods for the benefit of agriculture, and "smoke-descending rituals" (*rambu tuka'*), dedicated to the welfare of the dead. As Dutch missionaries condemned the former but tolerated the latter, funerals have increased in relative importance in modern times. Leading aluk rituals are a range of religious specialists: *to minaa* (priests, conversant in a special ceremonial language); *to burake* (priestesses and "hermaphrodite," i.e., transvestite, priests); funerary experts; healers; and heads of the rice cult.

Traditional cosmology divided the cosmos into three worlds. The upperworld, associated with the direction North, is ruled by the grandson of the supreme god Gaantikembong, Puang Matua, the creator and the giver of aluk. The middle-world (where humankind lives) is under the jurisdiction of Pong Banggairante. The underworld, associated with the direction South, is governed by Pong Tulakpadang, who has a fearful but not otherwise important wife, Indo Ongon-Ongon.

While the East is connected to the gods in general, the West is the direction of the spirits of the dead who are specifically believed to reside on Puya, an earthly island far to the southwest. Another god, Pong Lalondong, cuts the thread of life that determines each individual's fate. He guards the peril-fraught path running through the gravestone to Puya. The dead in Puya are sustained by burial offerings.

"Smoke-rising rituals" include offerings to the gods in paddy fields, at the roadside, and in front of houses. To thank or appease the gods, major animal sacrifices are held every 10 or 12 years on special ceremonial fields, highlighted by the exploding of bamboo stalks in bonfires. *Mabugi* rites are performed to request rain or deliverance from epidemics; going into trance, participants stab themselves with daggers without harm. Other rites such as the *bua' kasalle* ensure the welfare of humans, animals, and crops.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

After a child is born, the father buries the placenta (the child's "twin") in a woven reed bag on the east side of the house; because many placentas are buried by it, a house should never be moved.

Weddings are not as elaborate as funerals, only requiring the slaughtering of pigs and chickens for the feast, not the sacrifice of water buffalo.

If a person dies at sea or in a distant land, the family must still perform funeral rites, using a length of bamboo as a surrogate. The burials of low-status people are very simple; children dying before teething are buried in a tree to ensure the strength of the next child. High-status people, however, receive elaborate two-part funeral rites. The first part (*Dipalamabi'i*) takes place immediately upon death. Treated as merely "sick," the body is given food, spoken to, and put in a sitting position facing east–west. The mourning family fasts, wears black, makes an effigy of the dead (out of wood or bamboo, according to wealth), and sacrifices water buffalo and pigs. After time elapses, the body is considered officially dead and is reoriented north–south. The body is wrapped in cloth, traditionally of pineapple fiber, and banners are hung outside the *tongkonan* (ancestral ceremonial) house.

The second part (*Diripa'i*) takes place only after the deceased's kin have amassed funds for the ceremony and arranged for the arrival of even the most distant relatives. As this requires months and sometimes years, nowadays formalin is used to delay the decomposition of the corpse, which remains in the *tongkonan*. The funeral proper begins with the sounding of a gong and the beating of a drum that officially announces the death. The surviving spouse fasts for several days. Through the night, a circle of men chants *ma'badong*, dirges that commemorate events in the deceased's life, express grief, recount happenings during the funeral celebrations, tell how the deceased will be fashioned in gold like the first human, and describe what the journey to Puya and the life there will be like. At the same time, women chant separately (*ma'londe*).

Extending over several days or weeks, the major celebration takes place in a *rante*, a large field marked with large commemorative stones. A sizable procession brings the body, now in its coffin, to the *rante*, and, jostling it about a bit, installs it on a high tower, the *lakkean*. Singing, dancing, water-buffalo combats, and cockfights follow (the last were officially banned in 1981 but continue, nonetheless, amid furious gambling). Representing social ties and the payment of debts, water buffalo and pigs are brought and sacrificed (the former slaughtered with a single machete blow to the jugular vein); a *to mentaa* distributes cuts of meat to the guests according to their status and the indebtedness of the deceased's kin to them.

Images of the deceased are made; the simplest ones are temporary and made of bamboo and cloth. In some localities, high-status deceased are represented by statues (*tau-tau*) made from the wood of the jackfruit tree, the men dressed in a European shirt and a batik sarong, the women in a *kebaya* blouse and sarong; these *tau-tau* are displayed in cliff-side galleries. However, theft for the international market has forced many Toraja to store their family *tau-tau* under lock and key, leaving only crude concrete stand-ins in the galleries for tourist eyes.

In the final stage, the body is rewrapped amid further pig sacrifices and martial dancing; it is then put into an ornate casket and placed under the family rice barn. From there, a procession carries it to the gravesite, which may be a cave crypt at the bottom or on the side of a cliff, or a boat-shaped coffin suspended from an overhang. The spirits of the dead are believed to become the constellations that indicate phases of the agricultural cycle.

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The traditional social order distinguished three classes: the "big men," *to kapua* (semi-monarchical *puang* in the south, and free farmers, *makak*, elsewhere); the *tobuda*, the unexceptional majority; and the *kaunan*, landless slaves. The nobles possessed the privileges of leadership and the most elaborate types of house decoration and funerary celebration, though now wealthy commoners can enjoy them, too.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Early in the 20th century, the Dutch forced the Toraja to abandon their fortified, hilltop villages and settle in the plains. Toraja villages divide into "high" and "low" halves, each a unit for ceremonial purposes. The poor live in bamboo huts, but the wealthy have elaborate houses raised 2.5 m (8 ft) off the ground on wooden pillars. These dwellings are oriented east–west and consist of several parts: on the north side, a raised floor where guests sleep; on the east, a low floor for the kitchen; on the west, a low floor for the dining area; and on the south, a raised floor higher than the northside floor for the sleeping area of the owner of the house. Animals are kept in the space under the floor. The entry ladder, once on the long side, is now at the short side. In front of the house, facing south, stands a rice barn, raised off the ground on round pillars that rats cannot climb; its decoration consists of carved scenes of death rites and of daily life, such as pounding rice, going to market, and hunting. The platform on which the barn stands provides shade for napping.

The *tongkonan*, an ancestral house (distinct from the *banua*, an ordinary house), symbolizing the living and dead members of a lineage, is the place to discuss important family matters (including upkeep of the *tongkonan* itself) and hold ceremonies. Representing water buffalo horns (but resembling a boat), the front and back ends of the roof project far beyond the house itself, often needing poles for support. The house front is ornately decorated, the center post (*tulak somba*) being hung with buffalo horns. The most prestigious *tongkonan* sport a *kabongo* (a carved buffalo head with real horns) and above it a *katik* bird, representing death and fertility. Carvings on the outside walls are painted in black, white, yellow, and red and consist of geometrical patterns, basket motifs, buffalo horns, animals, and the rooster-and-sun, all signs of prosperity; trailing plants symbolize many descendants. Building (particularly the raising of the *tulak somba*, the first step) and renewal of a *tongkonan* are occasions for sacrificial rituals and require the contributions of all families tracing descent from it.

As traditional houses tend to be cramped and dark, modern people prefer to live in concrete Western-Indonesian bungalows or Bugis wooden houses, though they may add a *tongkonan*-style saddle-roof.

Tana Toraja regency has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 69 (2005 score), higher than that of South Sulawesi province as a whole of 68.1, thus more closely approaching Indonesia's national HDI of 69.6. This is the case despite the fact that, in terms of GDP per capita, Tana Toraja (at us\$2,335) is among the poorest regencies in South Sulawesi (the provincial figure is us \$6,913, itself relatively low for Indonesia, cf. us\$9,784 for West Sumatra and us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, but us\$6,293 for Central Java and us\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality, on the other hand, stood at

34.73 deaths per 1,000 live births, little over half the rate for South Sulawesi as a whole (65.62) and among the lowest in the country.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Kinship is traced back to the tongkonan as the "origin house." As kinship is bilateral, an individual may belong to several tongkonan, though his or her strongest ties will be with parents, grandparents, and in-laws. An individual activates lineage connections when rebuilding a house, staging major rituals, or deciding inheritance (the portion of the inheritance matches the number of water buffalo an heir contributed to the funeral). Tongkonan membership includes right of burial at the ancestral gravesite.

A newlywed couple lives with the wife's family. Early ethnographies reported that divorce was easy and premarital sex common (if a child was born out of wedlock, the father would be obliged to marry the mother). After a divorce, the man must leave the house, though he may claim the rice barn.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Toraja everyday dress follows the Indonesian pattern of alternating sarongs with Western-style clothes, such as trousers. For ceremonial occasions, women wear long, single-color (dark red, green, etc.), short-sleeved dresses with beadwork belts, headbands, necklaces, and other jewelry.

## **12 FOOD**

Toraja food tends to be simpler than that of their lowland neighbors. Rice is the preferred staple, although because of its expense, the poor must supplement their diet with maize and tubers. Meat (water buffalo, pig, chicken, and, more rarely now, dog) is largely reserved for feasts. Some Toraja specialties are *papiong* (rice, meat, vegetables, and coconut milk stewed in a bamboo section), *songkolo* (a mixture of glutinous rice, chili, and coconut milk), and *baje* (fried coconut with brown sugar). Carried in bamboo tubes, *balok* is a popular palm wine whose taste ranges from sweet to sour; a bark extract gives it a red color.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Because of the considerable missionary presence in recent years, many Toraja have had greater access to modern education than (particularly rural) lowlanders in Sulawesi, a fact of which the Toraja are proud. In 2005, the level of literacy in Tana Toraja stood at 79.2%, significantly lower than the South Sulawesi provincial average of 84.6% (itself low by Indonesian national standards), but higher than several other South Sulawesi regencies with higher GDPs per capita (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Traditional instruments include the flute, water-buffalo horn, drum, gong, *geso-geso* (a two-stringed vertical fiddle), and the *karombi* (Jew's harp). For such occasions as funeral vigils, singing is mournful and monotonous, the chorus forming a circle linked by their little fingers or by arms around shoulders. One singer leads, and the chorus repeats the verses verbatim. By contrast, church singing in Western harmonies is spontaneous and lively. At funeral and other ritual feasts, boys and girls

socialize by taking turns singing to each other (*kalinda'da*, *sengo*, *londe*), including riddles in the verses. Contemporary Toraja songs derive from storytellers' refrains and are accompanied by guitar or the Mandar/Bugis zither (*katapi*).

Noteworthy among traditional dances is the *Magellu*, a ceremonial dance in which several young girls in beaded costumes sway and flutter their fingers; and the *Maganda*, in which men attempt to dance wearing a black velvet headdress heavy with silver coins and buffalo horns, usually giving up after a few minutes.

## **15 WORK**

In their homeland, the great majority of Toraja farm for a living. Wet-rice paddies have progressively replaced the traditional swidden (shifting-cultivation) farming; maize, tubers, and vegetables are grown. Coffee, especially the fine local arabica, has been an important export crop since the mid-19th century, now joined by pepper and cloves. Pigs and water buffalo are largely kept for ritual sacrifice, rather than for daily consumption.

Education has allowed many Toraja to become bureaucrats, soldiers, business owners, and scientists, mostly employed outside the homeland. Migrants, known for their energy and ambition, also include mechanics, and shoe- and furniture-makers, for which occupations the Toraja enjoy a high reputation in eastern Indonesia's cities. Less esteemed are the many Toraja domestic servants in Makassar city, whom the Bugis and Makassarese point to as evidence for the "natural servility" of the Toraja (the Toraja region was once the lowlanders' main source of slaves). Tourism has provided new opportunities for employment as guides, hotel and restaurant staff, and makers and sellers of crafts.

## **16 SPORTS**

Although officially banned in 1981 for their association with gambling, cockfighting (for major ceremonies) and kick-fighting (for the harvest festival, in particular) are still enthusiastically pursued, betting and all.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Bamboo carving (flutes, tube containers, belts, necklaces, hats, and baskets) is a major craft, producing the most common souvenirs. Others are *ikat* (tie-dye) weaving and blacksmithing (local smiths make machetes from scrap metal such as automobile springs). Carved wooden panels integrating Christian iconography into traditional Toraja scenes and adapting traditional Toraja design motifs (such as the *pa' barre allo* sunburst motifs) to Christian uses have become popular in recent years as Indonesia's secular identity faces challenge from assertions of Islamic identity; Toraja Muslim artists (10% of the Toraja are Muslim) have responded by integrating Islamic symbols, such as the crescent and star into their carvings.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Tana Toraja's Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) is 60.9, substantially higher than South Sulawesi's provincial GDI of 56.9 and slightly surpassing Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. The regency's Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) is 50.8, also higher than the province's (45.6), but lower than the national GEM of 54.6.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# SAMOANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** suh-MOH-uhns

**LOCATION:** Polynesian archipelago comprising Samoa (former Western Samoa) and American Samoa; west coast of the United States (including Hawaii)

**LANGUAGE:** Samoan; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic, Mormon)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Samoans are the residents of a chain of islands within the Polynesian culture area of the South Pacific. The Samoan archipelago is politically divided into the independent nation of Samoa and the unincorporated United States territory of American Samoa. In 1962, Samoa became the first Pacific Island nation to gain independence. The population of Samoa in 2007 was estimated at around 186,000 people, while that of American Samoa was only around 66,900 in the last (2006) census. There has been an extensive migration (an estimated 65,000) of Samoans from American Samoa to the west coast of the United States; another 20,000 have left American Samoa and now reside in Hawaii. However, since 2002 there has been no official record keeping of either migrations or returns. This chapter will focus on the Samoan way of life, or, as it is called by Samoans themselves, *fa'a Samoa*.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Samoa is located about 2,300 mi southwest of Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean. Samoa is made up of two main islands, Upolo and Savai'i, and a few smaller surrounding islands. Samoa was a possession of the Germans, the British, and a trustee of New Zealand before gaining its independence and setting a political model for many other South Pacific societies. Samoa is located in the heart of Polynesia and, as such, has many cultural and historical ties with neighboring Tonga, the Cook Islands, and Tahiti.

The two main Samoan islands are of volcanic origin and, as a result, are mountainous with rocky soil and lush vegetation due to the tropical climate and ample rainfall. The average humidity in the Samoan archipelago is 80%. Of the two main islands of Samoa, Savai'i is more rural and has a much smaller population than Upolo. The only city in Samoa, Apia, is located on Upolo.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Samoa is Samoan. Samoan belongs to the Polynesian group of the Austronesian language family and is closely related to the other languages of Polynesia including Tahitian, Tonga, Maori, and Rarotongan. Although English is spoken by educated Samoans in the city of Apia, it is rarely spoken by rural Samoans.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Samoans have a creation myth very similar to that of the Christian faith. The creator god in Samoan cosmology is Tagaloa. Many of the traditional myths have been forgotten due to the massive conversion to Christianity in the islands. An im-

portant figure in Samoan history is the Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who spent the final years of his life there and is buried there.

## **5 RELIGION**

Christianity is the dominant, if not the only, religion practiced in Samoa. Ninety-eight percent of Samoans are professed Christians. Samoans are extremely proud of their devotion to the Christian faith and their adherence to its practices. Several Christian denominations including the Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, and Mormons coexist within Samoan villages.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Samoans celebrate holidays in the Christian calendar as well as some secular holidays. Samoan Mother's Day is celebrated on May 15 and is a public holiday. There are elaborate song and dance performances by the Women's Committees throughout the country in recognition of the contribution of mothers to Samoan society. Samoan National Independence celebrations are multi-day events.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Child rearing in Samoan society is hierarchically organized. Children, from the time they are toddlers, are expected to obey their elders without questioning or hesitation. There is no tolerance for misbehavior or disobedience. Older siblings are expected to take care of their smaller brothers and sisters. Adulthood in traditional Samoan society is marked by the tattoo.

In traditional Samoan belief systems, death was marked by the separation of the body and soul. The soul was believed to live on as an "ancestor spirit" called *aitu*. The placation of the *aitu* was an important part of religious life in precontact Samoa.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Status governs every interaction in Samoan society. Greetings are determined by the relative status of the individuals involved. A very informal greeting in Samoa is *talofa*. More formal greetings at a household dictate that neither party speaks until the visitor is seated. Then the host will begin a formal greeting and introduction with, "Susu maia lau susuga," which translates roughly as "Welcome, sir."

Individuals who have left their villages to take up residence in Apia will return to their villages for important ceremonial occasions.

Unmarried females are almost always chaperoned in Samoan society. Premarital sexual relationships are very difficult to arrange. "Sleep crawling," *moetotolo* in Samoan, exists as one solution to this problem for young Samoans. Typically a young man with an interest in a young woman will wait until her household and her chaperones are asleep and then crawl on all fours into her house and hope to have a sexual encounter with her. In some cases, the young woman will send the suitor away. In other cases, the woman will become pregnant and marriage may ensue.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Large amounts of foreign aid have come to Samoa since its independence. This aid has modernized even the most remote parts of rural Savai'i, where there are many European-style houses with wooden frames, corrugated iron roofs, and louvered glass windows. Some homes even have pickup trucks. There are, however, still traditional Samoan-style houses to be found in Samoa. Traditional Samoan houses are rectangular and built on black, volcanic boulder foundations. Traditional roofs are high-peaked and covered with thatch. There are no walls on traditional Samoan dwellings, but shutters or blinds of plaited coconut leaves can be lowered to keep out the blowing rain.

The Samoan standard of living is hard to describe. On the one hand, food is plentiful and the atmosphere is relaxed. On the other hand, people are always striving to find ways to make money. The economy of the country is very limited, with most money coming from foreign aid and private aid sent by relatives who work overseas. This third source of money accounts for the majority of the income of the average Samoan. Cash crop exportation is practiced widely, but it only accounts for a very small portion of a family's income.

Samoa has a chiefly socio-political system called the *matai* system. *Matai* is the Samoan word for "chief." Every Samoan extended family has a *matai*. In Samoa, there are two types of chiefs: high chiefs and talking chiefs. Talking chiefs are skilled in special forms of the Samoan language and are responsible for making public speeches. Talking chiefs are of lower rank than high chiefs. Within Samoan villages, the various *matai* from extended families meet regularly to discuss problems and issues and also to determine resolutions.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditional marriage in Samoan society consists of an exchange of goods between the two families with the bride and groom cohabiting afterwards. In the early period after the final exchange, the couple is likely to live with the bride's family, although later the couple will move near the groom's father's household. Marriage within the village is discouraged, and anyone from either the mother's or father's descent group is a prohibited partner. Prior to their conversion to Christianity, high-ranking Samoan men practiced polygyny (having many wives at once). Church weddings are important in Samoan society today, but they are expensive and not every family can afford to provide one for their children.

Households in traditional Samoan society were centered on the extended family. The nuclear family has now become the most common domestic unit. Nuclear families can be very large by American standards. Many women have as many as a dozen children. Couples want to have as many children as possible, and improved health care and nutrition have contributed to lower infant mortality rates.

The Samoan kinship terminology is of the Hawaiian type. This means that there is a single term for the mother, mother's sisters, and father's sisters, and a single term for the father, father's brothers, and mother's brothers. This pattern persists through each generation, so that female cousins (in the American sense) are called "sisters" and male cousins are called "brothers."



A Samoan man wearing the lavalava. Traditional Samoan tattoos can be seen on his legs and back. (© Neil Farrin/JAI/Corbis)

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Samoan attire has been adapted to modern life in Samoa. The wraparound skirt called *lavalava* is worn by men and children. Even important village leaders that work in the city may choose to wear a formal lavalava, a sport shirt, and a wide leather belt around their waist. Women wear dresses or matching long blouses and skirts called *puletasi*. Civil servants, both male and female, often wear uniforms of dark colors. Tattooing is an important aspect of body adornment in Samoa. Samoa is one of the areas of Polynesia that has seen a resurgence of the tradition of tattooing. Young men more than young women have returned to the custom of tattooing.

## **12 FOOD**

Traditional Samoan foods included taro root, yams, bananas, coconuts, breadfruit, fish, turtles, and chicken. Even though pigs are raised, pork is reserved for ceremonial occasions. Samoan meals are invariably accompanied by a salted coconut cream condiment called *pe'epe'e*, which is poured over boiled taro root and heated before serving. For many rural Samoans, this is the staple foodstuff and is served at the two daily meals. Coconut meat is not eaten in Samoa. For a Samoan, eating coconut meat indicates poverty and a lack of food. The favorite Samoan beverage is *koko Samoa* which is made from ferment-

ed cocoa beans, water, and brown Fijian sugar. It is an essential component of the village meal in Samoa. Imported American foods can also be purchased in Apia and in small village shops in the rural areas.

## **13 EDUCATION**

The literacy rate in Samoa is approximately 90%. Education is seen as essential by parents for the success of their children. Even in the most rural villages, parents will send at least some of their children off to school. Those that do not go to school will stay at home and help with the household chores and gardening.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

In Samoa, as opposed to American Samoa, traditional Samoan songs are the favorites of young and old alike. In American Samoa, American popular music sung in English is the favorite form of music among young people. Polynesian dancing is still practiced in Samoa. Oratory is considered a verbal art among all Samoans. Political deliberations required well crafted oratory from senior male village leaders.



## 15 WORK

There are a number of occupations that Samoans engage in today. The urban center of Apia provides many of the modern careers that Americans are familiar with such as bureaucrats, teachers, nurses, clerks, entrepreneurs, and secretaries, to name a few. Men hold approximately 60% of the wage-earning jobs.

## 16 SPORTS

Cricket is an important game for Samoans and every village has a cricket pitch laid through the middle of the village green. Samoan-style cricket is a modification of the British form, in which the cricket bat now resembles a traditional war club and the teams number around 30–40 per side. Rugby is also a very big spectator and participant sport in Samoa. Boxing, wrestling, and American football are also important sports in both parts of Samoa. There are a number of professional football players in the United States who are of Samoan descent.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

For Samoans that live in or near Apia, most of the amenities and pleasures of modern, urban living can be found. Long-boat races called *fautasi* are enjoyed at important festivals and public celebrations. Dominos are a favorite pastime of Samoan men in rural and urban areas alike.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The traditional art of barkcloth (*siapo*) manufacturing has been all but lost in Samoan culture today. The artists who specialized in house construction, canoe building, and tattooing were organized into guilds in traditional society. These individuals worked for families of high status who could afford to pay them.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Migration out of the area is a major problem for both Samoa and American Samoa. Over 60% of the American Samoan population has immigrated to the mainland and Hawaii. Samoans have immigrated to American Samoa and now, as a group, form the majority portion of the population. Limited economic opportunities are a problem for Samoans. The chance of finding economic prosperity in the United States drives Samoans to leave their home islands.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Samoans conceive of gender as being a social role that an individual plays. In the Samoan conception of gender, there are five gender roles: boy, girl, man, woman, and male transvestite (*fa'afafine* in Samoan). The distinction between a girl and a woman in Christian Samoa centers on sexual activity. *Teine* (girls) are not sexually active while *fafine* (women) are sexually active. Although male transvestites are called *teine*, there is an assumption especially in urban areas of Samoa that *fa'afafine* are sexually active. There is no comparable female transvestite role for women in Samoan society.

Samoan gender is not seen as a temperament. Instead, Samoan gender is seen as a social role to be played by individuals. As a result, differences between the sexes are less significant than in societies where gender is a temperament. All adults are expected to be respectful, dignified, and strong. Adulthood

is informally marked by the starting of a family and formally marked through the awarding of a title. In Samoa, status is determined by an individual's titles.

Brother-sister relations are the most important cross-sex relationships in Samoan society. It is important to remember that in Samoan kinship, all cousins are brothers and sisters. The Samoan word for the brother-sister relation is *feagaiga*. There was no word for the relationship of marriage in pre-Christian Samoa.

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—by J. Williams

# SANTALS

**PRONUNCIATION:** suhn-TAHLs

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Santhal; Hor ko; Hor hopon ko; Manjhi

**LOCATION:** India; Bangladesh; Nepal

**POPULATION:** Over 6 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Santali

**RELIGION:** Native Santal religion with influences of Hinduism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Santals form the third largest tribal group in India. Their ancestral homeland is believed to lie in Southeast Asia, where they are associated with the old Champa Kingdom of northern Cambodia. The Santals are thought to have migrated to the Indian subcontinent long before the Aryans entered the Indian subcontinent around 1500 BC. They most likely reached their homeland, the Chota Nagpur Plateau of east-central India, through Assam and Bengal.

According to Santal traditions, following the famine of AD 1770, large numbers of Santals migrated from the Chota Nagpur Plateau and the plains south of the Damodar River and established a colony (Damin-i-koh) in what was later to become the Santal Parganas District, now in eastern Jharkhand. In June 1855, Santals in Damin-i-koh began protesting their mistreatment by landlords, moneylenders, and traders. Failing to get any redress from government officials (the settlement was located in territory administered by the East India Company), the protest turned into a full-scale rebellion. The uprising was quelled by British troops at the cost of hundreds (some say thousands) of Santal lives. Although unsuccessful, the rebellion eventually led to administrative reforms that saw the creation of Santal Parganas District. This has always remained at the center of Santal tradition and activities.

The Santals accept the designation “Santal,” which is a term used by outsiders, but they call themselves *Hor ko* (“Man”) or *Hor hopon ko* (“sons of Man”). They are also known as Manjhi. In Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal, the Santals are classed as a Scheduled Tribe, but not in Assam.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

With a population of over 6 million the Santals are surpassed in number only by the Gonds and the Bhils among the tribes of India. The Santal heartland lies on the Chota Nagpur Plateau in Jharkhand, with large Santal populations also found in neighboring areas of West Bengal. This area of concentration extends southwards into the Mayurbhanj District of northeastern Orissa. Migrant communities are found working in the tea plantations of Assam and Tripura. Some 65,000 live in northeastern Bangladesh and a few thousand are found in the *terai* (low-lying swampy plains along the Himalayan foothills) of Nepal.

In 2000, as a result of popular pressure to create a state which reflected the aspirations of tribals in the region, the new state of Jharkhand was formed by the Government of India out of 18 districts of southern Bihar and became the 28th state of the Indian Union. Although the modern movement to create a state of Jharkhand dates to the 1900s, according to some historians, there was already a distinct geo-political, cultural entity called Jharkhand even before the period of the Magadha Em-

pire (c. 6th century BC). In ancient times the northern portion of Jharkhand state was a tributary to the Magadhan (ancient Bihar) Empire and southern part was a tributary of the Kalinagan (ancient Orissa) Empire. Subsequently, much of the area came under the Munda Rajas. During the Mughal period, the Jharkhand area was known as Kukara. After 1765 the region came under the control of the British and became formally known under its present title, “Jharkhand”—the Land of “Jungles” (forests) and “Jharis” (bushes).

The Santals occupy the easternmost segment of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, where the uplands jut out into the Gangetic plain. There is a great bend in the Ganges River as it skirts the edge of the uplands before swinging southeastwards towards the Bay of Bengal. Chota Nagpur lies on ancient, hard, crystalline rocks that have eroded into hills and undulating plateaus. In the Santal areas, these lie at elevations between 400 and 600 m (approximately 1,300–2,000 ft), with isolated peaks rising to 850 m (approximately 2,800 ft). In the northeast, along the Ganges River, the Rajmahal Hills rise steeply from the alluvial plains. At one time the whole area was extensively forested, though much of the forest cover has been cleared for cultivation. To the south, the land falls away towards the basin of the Damodar River Valley and the low-lying plains of West Bengal. The climate experienced is typical for this part of India—hot summers (maximum temperatures in May average over 35°C or 95°F), with three or four months of heavy rain associated with the summer monsoon (June–September) and cooler and drier winters.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language of the Santals is Santali, which belongs to the North Mundari group of the Austro-Asiatic language family. The Santals had no written form of the language until Christian missionaries introduced the Roman script during the late 19th century. As a consequence, many Santali works are written in the Roman script. Many Santals are bilingual, speaking the predominant regional language as well as their mother tongue and using the regional script for writing purposes. Thus the Bengali script is used in West Bengal, the Oriya script in Orissa, and the Devanagari script in Bihar. Recently, in an attempt to generate a sense of tribal identity, some Santals have begun advocating the exclusive use of a script called *Olchiki* for writing. The Olchiki script, also known as Olcemet (“language of writing”) or simply as the Santali alphabet, was created in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu for the Santali language. Ol Chiki, which is written from left to right, has 30 letters, the forms of which are intended to evoke natural shapes. The Latin alphabet is better at representing some Santali stops, but vowels are still problematic. Unlike most Indic scripts, which are derived from Brahmi, like the Latin alphabet, Ol Chiki is a true alphabet, with vowels given equal representation with consonants. Additionally, because it was designed specifically for the Santali language, one letter could be assigned to each Santali phoneme (i.e. the smallest structural unit that distinguishes meaning).

## 4 FOLKLORE

One of the legendary figures of the Santals is Kamruguru, who figures in many of their folk songs and myths. The details of his exploits differ from region to region, but all Santals believe Kamruguru was a great medicine man and sorcerer in ancient



Santal society. A popular legend is told about Kamruguru's death. At the end of his life, according to this story, Kamruguru became seriously ill. Confined to his bed, he called his two disciples and ordered them to bring some herbs from the jungle of a distant hill. Only these herbs could effect a cure. While crossing a river on the way to the hill, they met an old woman who informed them that Kamruguru was already dead. They abandoned their search and returned, only to find their master alive. Kamruguru sent them out again to fetch some special fish from the river to make a medicine. At the river they met the old woman catching fish and she told them to go back as their master was no longer alive. This time, the disciples returned to find Kamruguru dead. Some Santals say that Kamruguru was killed by a witch and that the songs and dances of the Dansae festival are symbols of lamentation for his death.

One ritual of the Dansae festival requires that young men participate in the dancing and singing dressed as women. They place peacock feathers in their headgear and carry peacock feathers in their hands (in Santal belief, peacock feathers give protection from evil spirits and black magic). According to a Santal legend, a great Santal warrior named Hodor-Durga met a white-complexioned woman in battle. After a prolonged struggle, the woman killed Hodor-Durga. As was the custom of the time, the victor took the name of the vanquished warrior and became known to all as the Goddess Durga. Her warriors plundered every Santal village, killing all the men. To save their lives, the men disguised themselves as women and fled into the hills and jungles. The Dansae dancers dress as women in emulation of their ancestors.

## 5 RELIGION

The Santal universe is inhabited by supernatural beings and powers, both good and evil, which influence every aspect of Santal life. The Santal religion revolves around maintaining the correct relationship with this supernatural world through the appropriate rituals and magical practices.

Preeminent in the Santal pantheon is Thakur Jiu (also called Sin Bonga or Dharam), the Creator and Preserver of the universe. The Thakur (this is not a Santal word and is probably adopted from the Hindus) is a benevolent deity who receives no specific worship but is remembered at all religious festivals and important social occasions. He is invoked particularly at the time of famines and drought, when white fowl are sacrificed to him.

In addition to Thakur Jiu, the Santal recognize a host of spirits or *bongas*, estimated to be between 150 and 180 in number. The bongas are to be revered, feared, called upon to intercede for the welfare of the Santal, and propitiated with blood-sacrifice and other offerings. They must be worshiped at regular intervals, but also at religious festivals, at times of major life events, and during important economic undertakings. Bongas fall into several categories: village spirits, hill spirits, ancestor spirits, the deity of agriculture, mischievous spirits such as Baghut Bonga (the tiger spirit), household deities, and the secret deity of the family or subclan. Maran Buru, for example, is the most powerful of the Santal Bongas. He is identified with both good and evil spirits and is worshiped with the sacrifice of a white fowl or a white goat and offerings of rice-beer. He taught the first Santal couple how to engage in sex and how to brew rice-beer. Maran Baru (literally "Bonga of the Great Mountain") is propitiated at all festivals. He resides in the village's sacred grove of sal trees (*Shorea robusta*), along with other important bongas. The Santals have no temples but perform many of their religious ceremonies in this sacred grove, the *Jahirstan*.

Like the Oraon and Munda tribes, with whom they have much in common, the Santals have a number of individuals who perform specific roles in their religious and ritual life. The village priest (*naeke*), along with his assistant (*kudam naeke*), is responsible for rituals at festivals and religious ceremonies. He consecrates offerings to be made to the spirits and performs sacrifices. The medicine man or shaman (*ojha*), however, drives away malevolent spirits; he also diagnoses and cures diseases, either by magical incantations, exorcism, or administering medicines. An *ojha*, not the village priest, is selected to preside at the annual Dansae festival. The witch-finder (*Janguru*) divines which evil bonga or witch is responsible for diseases that no one else can cure. The annual hunt festival is led by the *dihru* or hunt-priest.

As with other tribal peoples who have been exposed to Hindu culture, the Santals have been influenced by Hinduism. They have adopted Hindu deities such as Shiva, Rama, Kali, and Durga in their pantheon of spirits and worship them along with their own deities. Festivals such as Pata, Chata, and Jatra are festivals borrowed from the Hindus, but they are celebrated in the Santal manner with sacrifice, drinking rice-beer, singing, and dancing. Santals may also participate in Hindu festivals such as Durga Puja. In the past, Hindu reformist movements such as the Kharwar movement gained some following among the Santals.



*Bangladeshi aborigines from the Santal tribe perform a traditional dance to mark the 150 anniversary of rebellion in Dhaka. Two Santal brothers started a movement for social justice in 1855. Although the movement was suppressed, it brought about a shift in colonial policy. (Farjana K. godhuly/AFP/Getty Images)*

Christian missionary efforts among the Santals began during the 19th century and just under 3% of Santals are now Christian.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important of the Santals' festivals is the Sohrae festival, a harvest festival held in December or January after the winter rice crop is harvested. The festival usually lasts five days. On the first day, after fowl are sacrificed, the village cattle are driven over a hen's egg. The animal that treads on it is caught, washed, and its horns are decorated. The owner of the cow, it is believed, will have good luck. On the second day, each family in the village performs a *puja* (worship ceremony) in its cow shed, sacrificing chickens and a pig to Maran Buru, the household gods, and the ancestor spirits. The third day, a wooden pole with straw tied to the top is erected in the village. A bull is washed, its horns are anointed with oil and vermilion, and the animal is tied to the post. The bachelors and young boys of the village then proceed to bait the bull, drumming, dancing, and screaming to get it excited and make it buck. The remaining days of the festival are given over to feasting, dancing, and singing. Traditionally this a period of sexual license, although

taboos against adultery and liaisons between members of the same clan are strictly followed.

Other important festivals celebrated through the year are Baha (the Flower Blossom Festival), Magh Sim, Erok Sim, Hariar Sim, Iri-Gundhi Nawai, and Janthar. These are all festivals connected to agriculture. Festivals such as Jom Sim and Mak Mor are dedicated to specific deities. Karam is celebrated to ensure increased wealth and progeny and to drive out evil spirits. The Dansae festival is held in the fall and corresponds to the Hindu Durga Puja. The annual hunting festival, Disom Sendra, is an important event for the Santals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A pregnant woman is subject to certain taboos to avoid harm from malevolent spirits or witches. Birth is attended only by female relatives and a midwife. After a birth, both the house and village are considered polluted. On the fifth day after birth (or third day if the baby is female), ceremonies are performed to remove this pollution and also to name the child. A male child takes the name of his father's father; a second son, that of the mother's father; a third son, that of a brother of the father's

father; and so on. Girls take the names of their female relatives in the same sequence.

Santals have to undergo the Chacho Chetiar ceremony before they can take their place in society. No Santal can be married or cremated, participate in ceremonies, or claim any social rights without this. There is no prescribed age at which this occurs and Santals often perform the ceremony for several children at the same time. All the village officials and villagers attend the festivities, which are accompanied by singing, dancing, and drinking, and the retelling of the mythical history of the Santal people. The naming ceremony and the Chacho Chetiar are two of the rare Santal rituals that are not accompanied by animal sacrifice.

Around 8 to 10 years of age, boys are initiated into the tribe by having the five Santal tribal marks branded on their forearms by a maternal uncle. Girls are tattooed on their faces, foreheads, chests, and arms after they start menstruating, at which time they are considered to be sexually mature.

The Santals believe that the souls of the dead eventually become bongas, provided the correct rituals have been performed. The dead are cremated, but young children and pregnant women are buried. Bones are taken from the funeral pyre and kept in the house, where they are ritually fed with milk, rice-beer, and sacred water by female mourners. Periodically, the Santals take the bones of their dead relatives to a stream or river (many go to the Damodar River) and deposit them in the water. This ritual is completed by the sacrifice of a male goat. After returning from the river, the relatives of the deceased hold a feast for the entire village.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Santal children are taught proper manners at a very early age. When a son greets his father, he bows low, touches his left hand to his right elbow, raises his right fist as high as his forehead, and pauses slightly. The father responds by touching his right arm with his left hand, moving the right fist downwards and opening his hand. A daughter salutes her mother by bowing before her and touching the ground. Her mother returns the greeting by extending her hands, palms turned up, flexing them a few times, and raising them over her head.

These are the standard forms of greeting used not only between parents and children but by the community at large.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Santal villages usually consist of up to 30 or more houses built on either side of a single, wide, unpaved street, planted at intervals with shade trees. Villages are generally neat and clean, kept so by the villagers and also by scavenging dogs and pigs. The house of the village headman (*Manjhi*) is built close to the center of the village near the Majhistan. This is a raised platform, covered with a thatched roof supported by poles, on which the business of the village is carried out. Every village also has its sacred grove of sal trees located within the village boundaries.

A typical Santal house is rectangular in form, roughly 5 m by 4 m (16 by 12 ft) in dimension, divided into two rooms. The floor is packed earth, while the walls are made of earth and cow dung, some 45 cm (18 in) thick, plastered over branches placed vertically between the wooden posts supporting the roof. The roof is gabled, made of a split-bamboo frame covered with paddy straw or grass, fixed on rafters. The sleeping

room is also used to store rice and other possessions and the chickens are penned in there at night. Although most activities, including cooking, take place outside the house or on the veranda under the eaves, there is a hearth for cooking indoors during the cold season. Every Santal house has a special area, banned to outsiders, that is sacred to the ancestors. A separate shed is constructed to house cattle and pigs. Santals keep dogs, primarily for hunting, and also cats to catch rats.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Santal are divided into 12 patrilineal totemic clans, which are further subdivided into subclans. Violation of rules of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy are severely punished, with the offenders being expelled from Santal society. Clan names are commonly used as surnames.

Households can contain nuclear or extended families, although the latter is more usual. Though women are theoretically subordinate to their husbands, in practice they are almost equal partners in the economic affairs of the family. Matters of trade and the sale of agricultural products are entirely in their hands. Wives are acquired through negotiation (the preferred method), elopement, or capture. Girls are married between 16 and 18 years of age, while boys are anywhere from 16 to 22 years old. The consent of both parties to the marriage is sought. Marriage (*bapla*) is one of the most important of the Santal life-cycle rituals and it is celebrated with much dancing, singing, and drinking. Traditional Santal practices involved payment of a bride-price, but among the more affluent, urban communities today the dowry is becoming popular. Residence patterns are patrilocal and the bride moves into the household of her husband's family. Divorce is permitted with the sanction of the village council. Women have no rights of inheritance, with sons sharing equally in the property of the father.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The traditional dress of the Santal male is the *lengta* or "little apron." This is a piece of white cloth, over 1 m in length and 25 cm wide (4 ft by 10 in). A string is tied around the waist, one end of the cloth is tucked into the string at the back, and the rest is drawn through the legs and tucked into the string at the front. Sometimes a larger piece of cloth covering the body from the waist to the knees is worn. Santal men generally wear no headgear and the upper body is bare, except in winter. Males wear no ornaments except small silver earrings.

Santal women wear two pieces of clothing. One is wrapped around the waist and lower body; the other, about 1 m by ¾ m (3 ft by 2½ ft) is worn over the torso so as to cover the breasts. This cloth, usually white in color, was formerly spun and woven by the Santals, but nowadays it is purchased in local markets. Women wear silver earrings, bead necklaces around the neck, and silver rings and ornaments in the nose. Heavy brass bracelets are worn on the arms and also brass or sometimes silver anklets on the legs. Every Santal girl wears flowers in her hair.

Dress styles are changing and Santals, especially those who live and work in towns, have adopted regional dress, such as the *sāri* for women or Western-style clothes for men.

## **12 FOOD**

Rice is the staple food of the Santals. It is typically eaten boiled, with spiced vegetables such as sweet potato, eggplant, pump-

kin, beans, radishes, and onions. Dishes are also prepared from edible roots, leaves, and mushrooms collected in the forest. The Santals cultivate a variety of pulses, which they boil in water and mix with spices and salt. This dish is called *dāl*. Fruits eaten by the Santal include jackfruit, guava, plantain, blackberry, tamarind, and papaya.

The Santals are fond of meat and eat beef, pork, and the flesh of wild animals, fish, and birds. The cost of meat is prohibitive, however, and the Santals usually subsist on a vegetarian diet. At festival times, the meat of sacrificed animals is eagerly consumed.

Milk is not an important element in the Santals' diet, although it is used for preparing curds and butter, from which *ghi* is made. The liquid left after the butter has been churned is drunk and considered to be very nourishing.

Rice-beer is brewed and drunk in large quantities. The Santals also distill liquor from the fruit of the Mahua tree (*Bassia latifolia*), although this is now banned by the government.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Levels of educational achievement among the Santals is generally low, except among the Santal Christian community. Despite the availability of government educational programs, Santals show literacy rates below the average for the Scheduled Tribes. In Jharkhand, for example, the 2001 Census returns show overall literacy among Santals standing at only 40.5%, with female literacy being less than half that of men. A recent study in a rural area of West Bengal showed literacy among local Santal women to be around 10%.

A major conflict in Santal education relates to the use of the Santali script. The Christian Santals are in favor of the Roman script whereas the non-Christian prefer the locally developed Ol Chiki script. However, Santali has already been recognised as one of India's 23 official languages by the central government and the state governments of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, and Orissa have already initiated action plans for imparting education in their mother tongue for the Santal students in primary schools. The University Grants Commission in Delhi has started teaching and conferring Post-Graduate degrees in Santali language and literature, while universities in Jharkhand and Bihar are offering post-graduate courses in Santali language and literature. In government schools in Bihar, Santali students are provided primary and secondary education in Santali, although there is a problem with obtaining the appropriate texts.

Despite these advances in Santali education, a flourishing modern literature in Santali, and the fact that many Santals see education as a way out of poverty and low socio-economic status, illiteracy is high among the Santals—especially women—and education is not high on the Santal priority list. Only some 37.6% of 5- to 15-year-old Santals attend school and only 13.2% of the population graduates from high school.

Even though Santali is known primarily for its oral traditions and despite the issue of which script is to be used, there is a modern tradition of Santali literature—especially poetry—with writers such as Nirmala Putul composing their works in Santali.

### **4 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Santals have a rich tradition of oral literature. Myths tell of the creation of the world, of the first Santal man and woman (Pil-

chu Haram and Pilchu Burhi), of the wanderings of the tribe, and of Santal heroes. Folk tales, riddles, and village stories add to lore of the Santals. Much of this material has been gathered and published over the last century. A tradition of modern Santali literature has also developed, with poems, novels, short stories, and plays being written by authors such as Raganath Murmu, Balkishore Basuki, and Narayan Soren. Newspapers, literary magazines, and even school texts are now published in Santali.

Traditional songs are an integral part of Santal life and represent the very essence of Santal culture. There are songs for every occasion—songs to be sung at specific rituals, to accompany dancing, and for the worship of bongas. There are love songs, obscene songs for the licentious spring festival, songs for the ceremonial hunt, and songs expounding on Santal social customs. Dancing, too, is an important part of Santal life and there are specific dances that accompany the songs. Men and women dance separately, except when love songs are being performed.

In the past, Santals preserved knowledge of their traditions through institutions along the lines of "guru" schools. Every clan had its school headed by a *guru* (teacher), usually an elder who had intimate knowledge of the myths, lore, and customs of the people. It would be he who would pass on traditions of music, dance, and song from generation to generation. Similarly, the Santals have an extraordinary knowledge of folk medicine and herbal healing. The Raranic, or herb-doctor, learns his trade as an apprentice to an older man, jealously guards his secrets, and in turn passes his knowledge on to the next generation. Even today, Santals often seek the services of both the herb-doctor and modern medical doctors to treat illnesses.

### **15 WORK**

Santals were once hunters and gatherers, subsequently adopting the slash-and-burn cultivation still practiced by the Paharias (hill tribes) in the hills of Chota Nagpur. Today, the Santals are primarily settled cultivators, growing paddy rice and cereals, and keeping cattle, goats, pigs, and poultry. They fish where they have the opportunity and supplement their diet by hunting. Many Santals have left the land to work as agricultural laborers. Some work in the mines and factories of the Damodar Valley industrial region, while others have migrated further afield to find employment on tea plantations or as gardeners or domestic servants. Seasonal labor is important, even for those who cultivate their own land. More educated individuals work in government offices, schools, hospitals, and other service-sector industries, and a small elite have entered the professions as lawyers, doctors, engineers, and politicians.

### **16 SPORTS**

Boys play with bows and arrows, just as their fathers hunt with these weapons. Hide-and-seek is a popular pastime. Another game involves two small, semicircular pieces of wood and a stick about 1 m (3 ft) in length. A hole is dug in the ground and one of the semicircular pieces is placed standing on its straight edge by the hole. The other piece is stood on edge about 1.5 m (4–5 ft) away from the first piece. A batter takes the stick and tries to strike the second piece so that it knocks the first into the hole. The loser is penalized by having to run a short distance on one leg.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The boundary between entertainment, recreation, and traditional life in Santal society is never very clear. The dancing, singing, music, and feasting associated with religious festivals and social occasions provide entertainment as well as strengthening village and family ties. Even the ceremonial hunt combines ritual meaning with a favorite pastime of the Santals.

Access to modern forms of entertainment, however, depends largely on individual circumstance. The more prosperous Santals living in urban areas, with the means and inclination to do so, can share in the radio-television-movie culture of the modern urban scene. Many Santals, however, living in relative isolation and faced with poverty and a lack of education, do not have access to such modern entertainment.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Santals have a rich tradition of folk arts and crafts, including designs painted on walls, woodcarving, and the making of jewelry. Design motifs include figures of animals, birds, and trees, and scenes of humans hunting and dancing. Among the woodcarvings are representations of deer, peacocks, small sparrow-like birds, fishes, and frogs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A major problem faced by the Santals over the last few decades is land fragmentation. Smaller land holdings and the resulting poverty have led to the displacement of cultivators and increasing numbers of landless laborers. Many workers have migrated to towns to seek work, losing the immediate support provided by their traditional social environs. Emerging educated elites living in urban areas have lost contact with their roots in rural areas, depriving their communities of potential leadership. Alcoholism and belief in witchcraft remain a problem in traditional Santal society.

The Santals see themselves as neglected and exploited by non-Santals (*dikus* or outsiders). This was the driving force behind the 1855 Santal rebellion and it remained the driving force of Santal involvement in modern demands for a separate tribal state called Jharkhand. However, the creation of Jharkhand State was not a panacea for all tribal ills. Although Santals make up about 10% of Jharkhand's population (the total tribal population of Jharkhand is about 28%), Santals by no means have proportional political representation in the 81-seat legislature. Furthermore, in its short history, Jharkhand has seen it all: Naxalism, bribery cases and murder, not to mention five chief ministers in seven years as of 2008.

Jharkhand and central India is an area which has recently seen a surge in Naxalite activity—Naxalism is the communist-inspired insurgency in India that takes its name from Naxalbari, a small village in West Bengal that saw a violent Maoist uprising in 1967. Naxalites are said to be active in 15 of the original 18 districts of Jharkhand, with their activities ranging from attacks on villagers and Indian police and security forces and assassination of politicians to encouraging opium production to fund their operations. Some Santals, resenting their exploitation by “outsiders,” naturally felt that the Naxalites sympathized with their condition on their side and joined them in insurgency, which is most pronounced in the “Red Corridor” of eastern India that includes Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh States. The vast gap between poor and rich and the underdevelopment of the tribal areas has fueled the insur-

gency and has revived and encouraged the ethnicity, indigeneity, and sub-nationalism so typical of the region.

Development itself has created problems for the Santals. Jharkhand is rich in mineral resources and to access this mineral wealth requires operations that inevitably result in the displacement of tribals from their ancestral lands. Thus Santals complain that at no point of time in the planning for the Pachwara Coalmines Project in Santal Parganas, which affected some 130 villages, did consultation in any form take place, either with the villagers or with the Gram Sahbas. Between 1950 and 1990 it is estimated that some 740,000 tribals were displaced by development projects in the area of what is now Jharkhand State. Even though compensation was offered, fewer than 200,000 of the displaced persons have been resettled.

Loss of tribal land to non-tribal peoples is a major problem facing Santals in Jharkhand and continues with the government turn a blind eye to it. Thus, the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) was able to acquire the land for its Pachwara mining project in the Scheduled Tribal area, even though there are certain provisions in the Santal Parganas Tenancy Act of 1949 (SPT Act, 1949) prohibiting the transfer of tribal land through sale or mortgage or lease or any other agreement. Santals found out the hard way that their traditional rights over land meant little to the new government. Adivasi populations and also other poor peasants have routinely lost land for decades throughout India. This has been well documented. The Santals in Jharkhand are no exception.

In the years following the creation of Jharkhand, the state experienced unrest over what was termed the “domicile” controversy. At issue was who could be called a resident of Jharkhand and thus be eligible for “reserved” government jobs. Local residents, objecting to a Jharkhand High Court verdict that said that the state could conduct a country-wide search for qualified teachers, instituted a *bandh* (strike) that led to police firings and violence and even deaths. The chief minister at the time, Babulal Marandi, decided that 1932 would be the cutoff date and certificates of domicile would be issued to anyone who could provide documentation—e.g. land records—of residency at that time. Of course, many Santals, who had been in the area much longer, had no such documentation. Even the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006, passed by the government of India in 2008 does little to protect the rights of Santals to their lands. Land alienation (i.e. the sale of tribal lands to non-tribal peoples) is a major issue in Jharkhand.

Santal religion, however, is a potent force in strengthening the social solidarity of the people. The Santal concept of righteousness is bound up with its social or tribal consciousness. They have an excellent and well-ordered village organization with a hierarchy of village officers and courts for dispensing their unwritten law.

The search for a new identity, both political and cultural, is a distinguishing feature of Santal society today.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Despite living in a patrilineal society, the Santal woman is not subject to the negative elements usually associated with Hindu caste society. However, she does not have political or religious rights and cannot be a member of the village *panchayat*. In most cases, she runs the household as well as works with the

men in fields, farms, and forests. She goes to the market and strikes bargains for the surplus produce of the family.

In the matter of inheritance Santals follow their own customs and do not follow the practices of the (usually Hindu) societies amongst which they live. A Santal woman does not have a share in her father's property but she can hold moveable property like money, goods, and cattle, and usually gets a cow when her father's property is divided between the sons. A widow may remarry, but it is thought the right thing for her to do is marry her late husband's younger brother (junior levirate). Divorce is allowed, although if a woman demands a divorce without just cause, the father returns the bride-price to the aggrieved husband and often pays a fine that is determined by the local *panchayat*.

Despite these disadvantages, Santal society is highly democratic and the Santal woman's social status is relatively high, though she still suffers from poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to education or health care.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# SASAK

Pronunciation: SAH-sahk

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (island of Lombok)

**POPULATION:** 2.6 million (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Sasak

**RELIGION:** Native variations of Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians; Balinese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Until the recent boom in tourism, the Sasak people of Lombok have remained among Indonesia's least-known ethnic groups, even in comparison with some of their more "exotic" eastern neighbors in the Lesser Sundas, not to mention the Balinese. Nonetheless, Sasak culture is fascinating on its own terms, having developed along several cultural "fault lines," sharing much with the Sumbawans and Bimanese to the east but receiving strong influences from the Balinese, Javanese, Malays, and Makassarese as well.

The Sasak call their island *Bumi Gora*, or "Dry Farmland." *Selaparang* is another name, that of their earliest recorded kingdom, which lay on the eastern coast. In the early 17th century, the Balinese kingdom of Karangasem on the one hand, and the Makassarese kingdom of Gowa in alliance with the sultanate of Bima on Sumbawa on the other, established competing footholds on Lombok. The Balinese eventually prevailed, driving the Makassarese out in 1678 and completing the subjugation of the island by 1750. While the Sasak in the western half of the island lived harmoniously with the Balinese, sharing much of the same ritual life despite adhering to different religions, the Sasak aristocracy in the east resented this domination and led three peasant revolts under the banner of orthodox Islam against their "infidel" Balinese lords in the 19th century. The last of these rebellions invited the intervention of the heretofore distant Dutch colonial state. This ended in 1894 with the mass suicide of the Balinese Mataram court after heroic resistance. Although the Dutch built new dams for irrigation, the increased rice production could not sustain a rapidly growing peasant population in the face of an increased burden of taxes owed to the colonial government, in addition to obligations to traditional aristocrats. The average daily consumption of rice fell by 25% over the years 1900–1930, from 400 g to 300 g (14–10.5 oz).

Lombok still suffers from one of the highest illiteracy and infant mortality rates in the country, although conditions have improved with the rapid national economic development beginning in the New Order regime (1966–1998), temporarily interrupted in the wake of the 1997–1998 Asian/global emerging markets financial crisis, and the local growth of international tourism, a spillover from Bali, which has experienced temporary downturns due to instability in Indonesia as a whole and due to local outbreaks of communal violence. During the period 1990–2004, West Nusa Tenggara suffered 198 incidents of communal violence, almost all of them on Lombok with the exception of the riots that destroyed much of Kota Bima on Sumbawa in 1998. This is a high level if one considers that West Java, with over nine times the population of West Nusa Tenggara, only had 4.4 times the number of incidents and 2.3 times the number of resulting deaths (256 vs. 109). However,



the scale of the communal violence on Lombok was miniscule compared to the conflicts in the Moluccas and Kalimantan and consisted mostly of vigilante groups exercising “popular justice” and intra-village brawling. A new type of communal violence has emerged since 2006. Members of the Sunni Muslim majority on Lombok (as in West Java) have launched mass demonstrations and attacks against members of the Ahmadi sect, including burning of mosques and houses. Ahmadis do not accept that Muhammad was the last prophet and recognize Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who founded the sect in Punjab in India in 1889, as the Mujaddid, the “reformer” prophesied to come during the end times. Many Ahmadis continue to live in a refugee camp on Mataram.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Lombok is about 80 km (50 mi) north to south and 70 km (44 mi) east to west, for a total of 5,600 sq km (1,815 sq mi). Gunung Rinjani, Indonesia’s highest volcano and second-highest peak, dominates the north of the island. To its south is a rich agricultural plain, broadest along the western coast, which rolls up into hilly country in the south, which in turn breaks off abruptly in cliffs that fall down to the Indian Ocean. The rainy season runs from October to March.

The Sasak number around 2.6 million, forming 80% of Lombok’s population (the rest being mostly Balinese in the extreme west) and 68% of the population of West Nusa Tenggara province as a whole. Overpopulation and rural poverty have included Lombok among the sources of transmigrants: Sasak transmigrants can be found on Sulawesi, and Sumbawa received its first Sasak transmigrants in 1930. In 2006, a total of 32,835 people from Lombok were registered with the Indonesian government as working in foreign countries (see below the section entitled “Work”).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Sasaks speak Western Malayo-Polynesian, an Austronesian language most closely related to the neighboring Balinese and Sumbawan languages. There are three caste-related language levels. Sanskrit vocabulary is prominent in the high level. Arabic words are more frequent in the speech of orthodox Muslim villagers.

The language has traditionally been written in the *jejawan* script derived from Java, which is virtually identical to Balinese letters. It is also written in Arabic script and increasingly in Latin script. Traditional writing was done on lontar palm leaves, though it is now also written on factory paper, and includes literature, records, chronicles, grants, wills, and village regulations.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Seen most strongly among Wetu Telu Muslims, belief in a wide array of supernatural beings continues. These beings include village founders; past rulers; ancestral spirits; spiritual doubles (*jim*); and personified spirits of forest, mountain, and water (*samar*, *bakeq*). In addition, witches (*selaq*) are believed to exist; *balian* can communicate with spirits and heal. Wetu Lima Muslims are also known to fear *jim* and *bakeq*. Illness can result from spirit possession, black magic, and breaching taboos. Mystical power is held to reside in heirlooms, such as old weapons.



## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Most Sasak adhere to Islam, introduced from Java (according to legend), by a Javanese holy man, either Sunan Giri or Pangeran Sangopati, in the late 15th century. It is claimed that Islam as initially introduced was already syncretic, as suggested by the fact that Pangeran Sangopati is also known in Bali as Pedanda (Priest) Bau Rau. There is a cleavage between syncretists who combine Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, and purists who conform more strictly to Islamic orthodoxy. The former are referred to as *Wetu Telu* (“Three Time”) Muslims and the latter as *Wetu Lima* (“Five Time”) Muslims.

Because of persecution during the upheavals of 1965–66, exact figures for the *Wetu Telu* population are elusive; they may number as much as 30% of Lombok’s inhabitants and are concentrated in the mountainous northern part of the island. The *Wetu Telu* religion stresses the veneration of ancestor and local spirits through village feasts. *Wetu Telu* observe only three days of Ramadan fasting, recognize three cardinal duties (to God, to the community elders, and to one’s parents), and do not go on the *Hajj* pilgrimage, although they do bury their dead with the head towards Mecca. Many believe Gunung Rinjani to be the abode of ancestors and the supreme being and fast there for the three nights of the full moon. Religious specialists include village priests who perform rituals and fast at the beginning of Ramadan on behalf of the entire community, as well as *pemangku*, male or female spirit mediums and guardians of holy sites.

*Wetu Lima* Muslims, the majority, follow Islamic orthodoxy, such as the five daily prayers from which the label de-

rives. Avoiding sinful acts (*haram*) that will be punished in the afterlife is the central concern of Wetu Lima, whereas for Wetu Telu it is avoiding the breaching of taboos that will be punished in this life. The organization Nahdatul Wahtan has been active since independence in combating Wetu Telu.

Approximately 8000 Sasak adhere to indigenous non-Islamic beliefs, similar overall to those of the Wetu Lima Muslims; this community (going by the name “Boda”) has succeeded in having its religious traditions officially recognized by the Indonesian government as a form of Buddhism. The Boda prefer to be classified as Buddhists rather than as Hindus (as, for instance, the animist Ngaju Dayak have done) in order to keep themselves separate from the Hindu Balinese, despite the fact that their own religion has very little in common with the Mahayana Buddhism of their only fellow Buddhists on Lombok, who are members of the Chinese community.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Once during the Wetu Telu ritual cycle of eight years, the Alip Festival is held to honor the supreme being. Among Sasak Muslims in general, Maulid, the birth of Muhammad, is a major celebration.

A major festival unique to Lombok is the *Bau Nyale*, which takes place at the February appearance of the sperm and ovum segments of a sea worm (*nyale*) on the beaches. Legend has it that the worms are the transformed hair of a beautiful princess, Putri Nyale or Putri Mandalika, who, beset by too many suitors, threw herself into the sea. Separate groups of young men and young women gather at the beach to collect the *nyale*, which are eaten raw with grated coconut, grilled, or partially fermented in bamboo tubes. This is a rare occasion for the young of both sexes to meet in groups unsupervised by their elders: flirtation takes the form of poetic songs and subtle word play (if a girl accepts a present from a boy on this occasion, she is obliged to marry him).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

After birth, Wetu Telu fathers bury the placenta (thought to be the spiritual twin and guardian of the child) in a special place. A priest gives the child a name while scattering ash. The first haircut, 105 days after the birth, as well as tooth filing and, for girls, the first ear-piercing, are occasions for specific rituals and celebrations.

For his circumcision, a boy is first dressed in an elaborate costume and paraded on a wooden horse or lion with palm frond tails. No anesthetic is used for the actual operation, and the boy makes obeisance to an unsheathed *kris* (short dagger). As all life-passage rituals are held after the harvest, the party following often recycles glasses, chairs, and decorations from a previous wedding reception. The circumcision party is accompanied by bloody ritual fights.

For the wedding ceremony, which tends to be more complicated for aristocrats and Wetu Telu, the couple is carried on sedan chairs. The bride-price rises with the caste of the girl. The traditional inventory consists of strings of old Chinese coins; ceremonial gilt-tipped lances; rice bowls containing Chinese coins, covered by a large square of cloth with a small knife on it; and coconut milk and brown sugar.

Marriage by elopement is cheaper. The boy secretly takes the girl away to another village where he reports to the headman, receives 44 lashes as punishment, and is required to wear

a black string on his wrist as a public sign. The village head informs the girl's family through their village's headman. The boy sends a delegation to the bride's family to set the bride-price, which will be distributed among members of the bride's family.

The coordinated pounding of rice mortars announces a death and solicits contributions of rice and labor for the funeral from fellow villagers. In addition to the conventional Muslim funerary rites [see **Indonesians**], Wetu Telu place offering trays of food and other goods on the grave. Hand carved pieces of wood for a man and decorative combs for a woman are also placed on the grave (after 1,000 days these are replaced with stones and a sprinkling of holy water). Wetu Telu hold a special feast at the graveside. At 3, 7, 10, 40, and 100 days after the death, ceremonies are held, which include Quran readings. Kinsfolk report to the ancestors before all important rituals. The bones are exhumed after 10 years and reburied elsewhere; the initial grave will be reused.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditional society recognized three castes: aristocrats (two grades: *raden* and *lalu*); commoners (*bapa* or *buling*); and, in pre-colonial times, serfs and slaves (*jajar karang*). One properly married within one's caste (and especially not below it). Aristocrats may well be poor. Wetu Telu villagers all own land and possess roughly equal amounts of other goods.

Village authorities include the village head (*pemekel* or *pemusungan*), neighborhood heads (*keliang* or *jero*), the irrigation official, the chief religious official (*penghulu*), the clerk, the village guard, messengers, and others knowledgeable in *adat* (custom). Traditional punishments include ostracism and lectures by village elders. Villagers join together to perform collective tasks.

Houses are owned individually, while the land under them is village property.

Titles change upon marriage or the birth of the first child, e.g., a lower-level male aristocrat is addressed as “Lalu” before the birth of the first child, and “Mami” thereafter. Older or higher-status people are addressed as “Side” or “Epe” and are spoken to in respectful language, e.g., for “Please eat,” “Silaq medaran” or “Silaq ngelor” is used instead of “Ke mangan.” Younger siblings, or cousins whose parents are younger than one's own, are addressed as “Ante” or “Diq.”

When greeting an older person, the younger person takes the older one's right hand with both of his or her hands; one kisses the hand of parents, uncles, and aunts. Disrespectful speech to parents and other elders will earn a child misfortune or disaster.

If a young man wants to meet a girl, he must visit the girl at her house under the eye of her parents. He sits at the *beruqag* meeting hall or on the house porch, talking around the subject, often joining the girl in whatever work she happens to be doing. They may chat using a special love language, or the boy may announce his feelings through an adult woman acting as intermediary. Tradition stipulates heavy fines on a man and his family if the man touches a woman in the sight of others. Aside from the *Bau Nyale*, harvest time was traditionally an opportunity for village boys and girls to meet; they approached in same-sex groups from opposite ends of the paddy field, singing to each other and flirting.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

The three regencies comprising Lombok, the home island of the Sasak, have an average Human Development Index, combining measures of income, health, and education, of 58.4 (2005 score), dramatically lower than that of West Nusa Tenggara province as a whole (62.4) and of Indonesia as a whole (69.6); though the HDI of Mataram, the capital of West Nusa Tenggara that is on Lombok, is only slightly under the national score. Lombok's GDP per capita is us\$3,347.33, very low for Indonesia (cf. us\$9,784 for West Sumatra, us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, us\$6,293 for Central Java, and us\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara as a whole). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality stood at 96.2 deaths per 1,000 live births on Lombok (minus Mataram), the highest in the country.

Traditional houses enclose a raised platform of clay, dung, and straw with walls of bamboo or palm leaf ribs and a thatch roof. There is an open veranda and two rooms, a lower one for cooking and receiving guests and a higher for sleeping and storage. *Lumbung*, rice barns with a horseshoe profile, have largely disappeared.

Villages are laid out in a rough grid with a *beruqaq* (meeting hall), family houses, rice barns, a mosque or a few prayer houses, a cemetery, and sometimes a playing field. Larger villages are marked off into neighborhoods (*gubug*); aristocrats sometimes live in a separate compound.

*Cidomo*, hand-drawn or horse-drawn carts that carry goods and passengers, are a common sight on Lombok's roads.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

Kinship is bilateral, although the paternal line is emphasized, particularly as concerns the inheritance of noble rank or other offices. Most privileges and obligations derive from the *wirang kadang*, comprised of the paternal grandfather, father, paternal uncles, and paternal cousins. The basic household unit is the nuclear family, sometimes including a widowed parent, a divorced child, and adopted children. Aristocratic brothers and their families often remain in the same compound after their parents' death.

The preferred marriage is between cousins, but marriage is taboo between uncles and nieces or aunts and nephews. Newlyweds live with either the bride's or the groom's family or establish their own separate house, though aristocratic couples stay with the man's side as a rule. Three divorces per lifetime is average. For Wetu Lima, children stay with the father after divorce; for Wetu Telu, they stay with either parent. One means of divorce is for the wife to leave her husband's house and return to her parents as a sign of dissatisfaction with a husband who is an adulterer or a deficient provider. She may refuse to talk to the husband when he comes looking for her, thus frustrating him and making his family lose face, such that a divorce becomes inevitable.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

For everyday wear, Sasak men traditionally wear a batik sarong in blackish colors, whose longer front-hanging edge is held up while walking. To this is added a breast cloth of white or gold thread and an open short-sleeved shirt. Above a sarong and a sash for the waist, women wear a black *baju lambung*, a shirt with wide sleeves that is cut short in the back. Old people and big smokers carry around containers for cigarettes and tobacco, while many women carry holders for betel-nut chew.

Ceremonial clothing for men adds a *sapu*, a head wrap of batik cloth, which is white down the middle. Women wear a batik sarong, a long-sleeved *kebaya* shirt, and a belt of gold thread. A *kris* sword tucked into the belt often completes the ensemble.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

Rice is the central item of the Sasak diet, supplemented by boiled cassava and sweet potatoes. The main meals are lunch between 12:00 and 2:00 PM and dinner from 7:00 to 8:00 PM. For those who can afford to have it, breakfast consists of rice, maize, or boiled bananas with coffee. A warming food for the rainy season is fried maize with coffee. Fruits are not yet a regular part of the peasants' diet, being sold in town instead.

For celebrating Muslim festivals, *reket rasul*, yellowed glutinous rice with chicken, is prepared, as are *jaja tuja*, steamed glutinous rice cakes with grated coconut. *Berem*, a kind of rice wine, is still consumed by Wetu Telu villagers.

## <sup>13</sup>EDUCATION

In 2005, the level of literacy stood at 74.65% on Lombok (average of the three regencies, not including the city of Mataram), which is very low for Indonesia, significantly below that for West Nusa Tenggara as a whole (78.79%), and dramatically below that for other densely populated provinces with large numbers of poor such as East Java and Bali (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

## <sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE

Indigenous performing arts are encouraged in "traditional" villages and by tourism-promoting government policy but are discouraged in "modern," orthodox Muslim villages. The Sasak *gamelan* (metallophone) orchestras resemble their Balinese counterparts from the scales down to players' costumes. Processional gamelans similar to the Balinese *beleganjur* accompany many dances. The *gamelan gong Sasak* combines the modern Balinese *gong kebyar* with a native *oncer* ensemble. Another orchestra is the *gamelan grantang* of bamboo xylophones. An Islamic taboo on bronze instruments (which represent the voices of ancestors in pre-Islamic belief) has yielded both iron ensembles as well as an ensemble of *rebana* (Middle Eastern flat drums) that can play the gamelan repertoire.

Various types of sung poetry are performed: *cepuk*, the recitation and singing of the Panji legend to *suling* flute, *rebab* fiddle, and a chorus imitating the sounds of the gamelan; *tembang Sasak* and Malay *hikayat* (verse), the latter simultaneously translated into Sasak; readings of the *Barzanji* (lives of Muhammad and Islamic saints) in a call-and-response format; and popular Sasak poetry accompanied by a *cilokaq* (or *kecimol*) ensemble of a piercing *preret* oboe, plucked lutes, and rebana. Finally, the Jew's harp, played in duets, is a popular instrument.

Sasak dance includes the *tari oncer*, where two drummers play interlocking rhythms and strike dramatic poses; the *batek baris*, which imitates a Dutch military parade coupled with female *telek* dancers who play the roles of kings, ministers, and soldiers; the *barong tengkok*, where men inside a mythical lion play kettle gongs; the *pepakon*, a trance dance meant to cure the ill; and the *gandrung*, where a single female dancer invites men from the audience to dance with her.

Theater forms include the *kemidi rudat*, which depicts tales from the “1,001 Nights,” resurgent despite strong orthodox Muslim disapproval; the *teater kayak* masked dramas (*Cupak Grantang*, *kayak sando*, and other forms); and *Wayang Sasak*, the shadow puppet play introduced from the western Javanese city of Cirebon in the 17th century.

## 15 WORK

Wet-rice is the primary crop, now grown in rotation with soybeans. Tobacco is an important export as are betel nuts, cinnamon, chilies, coffee, medicinal plants, and more recently pepper, vanilla, cloves, pumice, pearls, carrageenan algae, and sea cucumber. Most fish is obtained by trade as the Sasak are not seafarers. Fruit, honey, edible leaves, and bamboo shoots are gathered from the wild. Chickens, ducks, and goats are raised; water buffalo are reserved for feasts. Wetu Lima villages have formal marketplaces, and itinerant peddlers are Wetu Lima Muslims because the Wetu Telu Muslims look down on trade. The recent growth of international tourism on Lombok has provided altogether novel opportunities for work.

In 2006, a total of 32,835 people from Lombok were registered with the Indonesian government as working in foreign countries. The largest number was found in Malaysia, where the overwhelming majority were men (26,142 compared to 690 women). Very few men, however, were working in the Middle East: 5,610 women (domestic servants) in Saudi Arabia (only 84 men), 108 in Kuwait, and 55 in Jordan (no men in the latter two countries). The gender ratio was more even in South Korea: the 108 Lombok workers there (all from Mataram city) numbered 64 men and 44 women.

## 16 SPORTS

One traditional children’s game still commonly played is *bawi ketik* (“kicking pig”). This game imitates a wild sow protecting her piglets from hunters. It is played in the daytime after chores are done. On all fours in the middle of a circle, the designated “pig” bends over a number of stones representing the “piglets,” one for each of the “hunters.” From five to eleven “hunters” attempt to grab their respective stones from under the “pig” who, remaining on all fours, can only ward them off with kicks to their calves. A “hunter” who gets kicked in the calf becomes the “pig.” This continues until all “piglets” have been captured whereupon the “hunters” hide their “piglets” while the “pig” closes his or her eyes. The “pig” must then search for the “piglets,” the owner of the first one that he or she finds becoming the next “pig.” Thus, it continues until the children become bored or tired.

The Sasak are particularly fond of competitive sports, such as soccer and volleyball. *Lanca* is a type of boxing originating in Sumbawa in which two men use their knees to strike one another. The *peresehan* is a ritual fight that accompanies wedding celebrations and the rain ceremony. It commences with two men, finely attired in turbans and sashes, feigning combat with rattan sticks and buffalo skin shields to the accompaniment of a *gamelan*. The two then invite members of the crowd to fight, taking care to match them well. It is permissible to refuse, but winning brings great honor. The matches can get very bloody.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Sasak are famous for their *ikat* (tie-dyed) textiles, basketry, and pottery. Women weave cloth and sleeping mats. Men make baskets, traps, hide containers, tools, painted house posts and doors, as well as the wooden horses used as ceremonial mounts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women’s health, education, and income relative to men’s) for Lombok (average of the three regencies, not including Mataram city) is 44.7, dramatically below Indonesia’s national GDI of 59.2 (Mataram’s HDI is slightly higher, 60.2). The Sasak regencies’ average Gender Empowerment Measure (reflecting women’s participation and power in political and economic life relative to men’s) is 37.33, also far lower than the national GEM of 54.6 (Mataram’s GEM is only slightly lower at 52.3).

In some villages, women cannot inherit land; in others, they inherit it only at the ratio of one to three with men. Inheritance may include land, houses, and heirlooms, such as cloth, jewelry, and *kris* or daggers. Jewelry is the common property of the women of a family (see also “*Family Life*”).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# SAUDIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SOWD-eez

**LOCATION:** Saudi Arabia

**POPULATION:** 28,161,417 (July 2008 estimate; includes 5,576,076 non-nationals)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Modern-day Saudis are descended from ancient nomadic tribal peoples of the desert who were fiercely independent. One tribal family, the Al-Saud, finally rose to dominance. By the early 1800s, they ruled much of the Arabian Peninsula from their base in the city of Diriyah. When the Ottoman Empire captured Diriyah in 1818, the reign of the Al-Saud family was ended, but only for a few years. By 1824, they had regained control of central Arabia and ruled again, this time from the city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's modern-day capital. In 1891, the Al-Saud family was forced into exile in the Empty Quarter (Rub Al-Khali) by the Al-Rashid family with the support of the Ottoman Turks. The Al-Saud family then moved to Kuwait. In 1901, Abdul Aziz Bin Abdul Rahman al-Saud left Kuwait, at the age of 21, to recapture the Arabian Peninsula. Retaking Riyadh in 1902, Abdul 'Aziz-Saud used it as his headquarters from which to unite the different regions of the peninsula into one nation.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially declared on 23 September 1932, with Arabic as its official language and the Islamic holy book, the Quran (or Koran), as its constitution. When King 'Abdul 'Aziz died in 1953, his son Saud Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz took the throne, followed by Faisal Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz in 1964, Khalid Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz in 1975, and Fahd Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz in 1982. A major trade route that has been used extensively since 3000 bc lies across the western part of Saudi Arabia, generating significant wealth for Arabians in that part of the country. The discovery of oil in the 1930s led to rapid economic growth and development for the entire nation. Saudi Arabia is a founding and principal member and largest supplier of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), established in 1960. With months of strong sunlight each year, Saudi Arabia is also developing the technology of solar energy. The land receives 105 trillion kilowatt hours of sunlight per day, the energy equivalent of 10 billion barrels of crude oil.

King Fahd ruled from 1982 until 2005, when he was replaced by his son, Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz. Fahd devoted much of his energy in the 1980s and mid-1990s to establishing himself as well as his kingdom as a leading player in the Arab and Islamic world. His initiatives included the Middle East plan in 1982 and the 1989 Taif Agreement, which ended a long-running civil war in Lebanon. He also founded the World Muslim League and declared himself the custodian of Islam's most holy places, specifically the cities of Mecca (or Makkah), which is where Islam was founded around ad 610, and Medina, which the Prophet Muhammad established as the first Islamic capital. Mecca continues to be the spiritual center of Islam, and Saudi Arabia plays host each year to millions of Muslims who make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Saudi Arabia's leaders remain powerful politically in the Arab world, but the nation faces threats from militants and the leaders of other Middle Eastern nations. These threats were heightened first during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and intensified during the U.S. invasion of Iraq during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The nation depends on the United States for military protection, and the United States has used bases in Riyadh as staging grounds for military personnel since the 11 September 2001, terrorist attacks. King Abdullah has initiated democratic reforms, and the first nationwide municipal elections took place in 2005. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia remains tightly controlled by the ruling family.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia makes up almost four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi government estimates the size of the country to be 2,217,949 sq km (856,350 sq mi). Other estimates vary from 2,149,690 to 2,240,000 sq km (829,995 to 864,864 sq mi). It appears about one-third the size of the United States, yet the population is less than that of New York State. Most of the land is barren and harsh, unable to support large numbers of people; less than 1% of the land is suitable for cultivation. The national average for rainfall is four inches per year, with as much as 20 inches per year falling in the mountains of the southwest, and as little as none for 10 years or more in the Empty Quarter (Rub al-Khali), the largest contiguous sand desert in the world. Most rain falls in the winter, between October and April. There are only a few permanent streams and natural lakes in Saudi Arabia. In the desert, summer temperatures can reach as high as 44–50°C (111–122°F), with winter temperatures in the northern and central regions dropping to below freezing. Along the coast, humidity can approach 100%. In the midwinter and early summer, the *shamal*—a north wind carrying sand and dust—blows fiercely. The *kaus*—a southeast wind—blows less frequently.

Saudi Arabia is surrounded on three sides by water: the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman to the east, the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden to the south, and the Red Sea to the west. Lying at the junction of three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—Saudi Arabia has a wide variety of plants and animals, despite its vast areas of desert. The earliest human settlements in Saudi Arabia discovered so far date back to 5000 bc, on the Persian Gulf coast. Modern-day Saudi Arabia is bordered on the north by Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait, on the south by Yemen and Oman, on the east by the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain, and on the west by the Red Sea.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The official language of Saudi Arabia, spoken by virtually all Saudis, is Arabic. Arabic, spoken by 100 million people worldwide, has many distinctive dialects, so that people living as little as 500 km (310 mi) apart may not be able to understand one another. Written Arabic, on the other hand, is classical Arabic and is the same for Arabic writers the world over. It is written and read from right to left.

"Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam alaykum* ("Peace be with you") with the reply of *Walaykum as-salam* ("and to you peace"). *Ma'assalama* means "goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is *Afwan*. "Yes" is *na'am*, and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic



are: *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba'a*, *khamasa*, *sita*, *sab'a*, *thamanya*, *tis'a*, and *ashara*.

Saudis generally speak English in business dealings. About 5.6 million foreign workers also reside in Saudi Arabia and generally speak Arabic as well as their native languages.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Arabs of Saudi Arabia, being Muslim, have much folklore in common with the rest of the Islamic world. Of particular significance to the Saudis, however, is that much of the common folklore glorifies the city of Mecca, the holiest place in Islam. The myths and legends concerning pre-Islamic Mecca were recorded during the early years of Islam. One such story tells the tale of the creation of Mecca and, following this, the creation of Adam and Eve. According to the tale, in creating the earth, Allah (God) first shaped the area around Mecca, laying the rest of the earth around Mecca to make this sacred city the center of the world. He then made the angels from light and the *jinn* from fire. The angels remained in heaven, circling Allah's Sacred House, and the *jinn* were sent to the earth. When Allah decided to create Adam as His vicegerent over the earth, the angels objected, making Allah angry. To gain His favor, the angels built on earth an imitation of Allah's Sacred House in heaven. This replica was the *Ka'ba* in Mecca, to which all Muslims should go for pilgrimage. Allah then created Adam from dry clay, molded him from black loam, and breathed His spirit into him, giving him life. When Allah ordered the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam, all but one angel, Iblis (Satan), did so. Iblis was then banished from paradise because

of his defiance. Allah created Hawwa (Eve) for Adam and allowed the couple to enjoy all the fruits of paradise except the fruit of one tree, which was forbidden. The resentful Iblis made his way back to paradise and tempted Adam and Hawwa to eat the fruit that Allah had warned them against. Both Adam and Hawwa ate from the fruit, and in return for disobeying Allah He ordered them to descend to the earth, where they and their descendants must remain until the Day of Judgment. Adam and his people worshiped Allah at the *Ka'ba*, and when the *Ka'ba* began to fall apart, Adam built a permanent House of Allah in the same spot. Centuries after the prophet Nuh's (Noah) flood, the prophet Ibrahim rebuilt the House of Allah.

There are many such legends illustrating the importance of the Saudi city of Mecca to the Islamic world. The Arab world also has thousands of proverbs and fables, many originating in ancient Arabia. Some are attributed to an ancient wise man known as Lukman, "the Aesop of the Arabs." According to Lukman: "He who does good has good done unto him"; "Walk quietly, lower your voice, for the voice of the jackass is the loudest and most ugly of voices"; and "A woman once owned a hen that laid a silver egg every morning. The woman thought, 'If I give her more food, she will surely lay more eggs.' She doubled the amount of food, but the hen, unable to take it, died of overfeeding."

#### 5 RELIGION

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state and no other religious practices are allowed by law. About 90% of Saudis are Sunni Muslims, and the remainder is Shia Muslim. Non-Muslim religious services were tolerated in Saudi Arabia for a long time. Although they were discouraged, they were not prohibited outright until after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Christian prayer services used to be held in the country, including in the palace of King 'Abdul 'Aziz in the 1920s. From the 1960s until the 1980s, Christian services were held in private homes and foreign housing compounds. Since 1991, however, Christian services have been broken up by police, perhaps in response to the protests against the overwhelming Western presence in the country during and after the Gulf War.

The Al-Saud family supported the Islamic preacher Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab in the 18th century, who advocated for the return of Islamic practices to their original "pure" state. The Wahhabi form of Islam is still followed in Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabis have been called the "Muslim Calvinists," for their literal interpretations of the Quran and *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The Wahhabis decreed that the commands of the Quran must be enforced. For example, men are required to pray in a ritual manner, music and dancing are at times forbidden, and the type of clothing women wear is specified. This differs from Islam in other countries in that choices are not left up to the individual Muslim, but must follow the rules as they are interpreted by Wahhabis. In other countries (e.g., Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, etc.), the nature and extent of religious observance is more an individual matter.

Islam is the youngest of the world's Abrahamic religions, having begun in the early 7th century AD when the prophet Muhammad received his revelations from Allah, the one true God (according to Islam). Within just a few years of Muhammad's death in AD 632, Islam had spread through the entire Middle East, gaining converts at a dynamic rate.

Born into the Koreish tribe of Mecca (c. AD 570) in what is now Saudi Arabia, Muhammad was later driven from the city because of his outspoken denunciation of the pagan idols worshiped there (idols who attracted a lucrative pilgrim trade). The year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca, AD 622, called the Hijra, or *Hegira*, is counted as Year One in the Muslim calendar. Muhammad fled to the city now known as Medina, another of the holy sites of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Eventually Muhammad returned to Mecca as a triumphant religious and political leader, destroyed the idols (saving the Black Stone, an ancient meteorite housed in the *Ka'ba*, or Cube, building, which has become a focal point of Muslim worship), and established Mecca as the spiritual center of Islam. All prayers are said facing Mecca, and each Muslim is expected, and greatly desires, to make a pilgrimage there (called a *Haj* or *Hadj*) at least once in his or her lifetime. A central religious holiday is *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muhammad received his first revelations—celebrated by complete fasting from dawn until dusk each day of the entire month.

Islam is a simple, straightforward faith with clear rules for correct living. It is a total way of life, inseparable from the rest of one's daily concerns. Therefore, religion, politics, faith, and culture, are one and the same for Muslims. There is no such thing as the separation of church and state or any distinction between private religious values and public cultural norms in Saudi Arabia.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The one official secular holiday in Saudi Arabia is National Day (September 23), commemorating the founding of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. The rest of the official holidays are Muslim. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by 11 days each year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are: *Id al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of *Ramadan*; *Id al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (known as the *Haj*)—families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *Mawlid An-Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *Id al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven from Jerusalem. Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. All government offices, private businesses, and schools are also closed during *Id al-Fitr* and *Id al-Adha*.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Saudis traditionally have had their marriages arranged and often marry within their extended families. Although the practice of arranged marriage is changing among some Saudis in urban areas, dating remains unacceptable. A Saudi marriage contract must be signed by witnesses. The contract specifies an amount of money known as *mahr* (dowry) that the bridegroom pays to the bride. It might also specify a second amount of money known as *muta'akhir* (a postponed dowry), to be paid to the wife in case of divorce. In some cases, the requirement of an advanced dowry (which can range between 25,000 to over 40,000 riyals) makes it difficult for many young men to afford marriage. Some couples, however, stipulate only a token amount of *mahr* to fulfill the legal requirements. In case of di-

vorce, the woman not only receives the postponed dowry, but also her father and brothers are responsible for her well-being.

A Saudi woman does not take her husband's last name. She keeps her own family name because she is legally considered to belong to her own family for life. Chastity is regarded as the most important thing that a woman can bring to a marriage. Despite the fact that Saudi society is patriarchal, many Saudis interpret the retention of a woman's maiden name as an indication of her independence from her husband's control.

Upon the death of a parent or spouse, Islamic inheritance laws go into effect. A brother receives twice the share of his sister. Males are considered to be responsible for their families and thus need the larger inheritance, but a woman's inheritance, as with any personal property she owns, is hers to keep and do with as she wishes.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Arab hospitality reigns in Saudi Arabia. An Arab will never ask personal questions, as that is considered rude. A person is expected to say what he or she wishes without being asked. A direct refusal is also considered rude, so one must learn to read indirect signals. Food and drink are always taken with the right hand because the left hand is used for "unclean" purposes, such as wiping oneself after using the toilet.

The most widely used greeting in Saudi Arabia is *as-salamu 'alaykum* ("peace be with you"), to which one responds *wa 'alaykum as-salam* ("and peace be with you"). Men either shake hands or kiss on the cheeks during a salutation. Women do the same. However, a man and woman who are unrelated do neither.

Chastity and sexual modesty are highly valued, and many of the social restrictions on women in Saudi Arabia are said to be for the purpose of protecting a woman's honor and virtue. For example, the practice of preventing women from driving cars is not considered a restriction but is rather a means of protecting women from the indignity of driving.

Saudi values emphasize generosity and hospitality and helping those in need. Saudi society is tribal in nature, with a tribe consisting of groups of relatives traced through males. Members of the tribe take an interest in one another's well-being, and the more wealthy come to the aid of the indigent if the need arises. Each tribe has a leader known as a *shaykh*, who serves as a mediator in conflicts between tribal members. The *shaykhs* and their tribes give allegiance to the royal family—Al Saud—as a matter of loyalty.

It is very important to Saudis that they be hospitable to their guests. Respectability is maintained by extending generosity during a dinner party. Throughout dinner and dessert, (indeed, until the guests leave), the host or hostess acts as a server, continuously refilling plates and urging the guests to eat more. Serving the guests is known as *al-mubashara*. Even if the host or hostess has a domestic staff, it is his/her place to perform this service for guests.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Since the discovery of oil in the 1930s, money has been available for modernization and technological development, resulting in dramatic improvements in the Saudi standard of living. An extensive network of roadways makes almost every corner of Saudi Arabia accessible, and most families own at least one car. Camels are still used for transport in some desert areas.



*Saudi men leaving a mosque after midday prayers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP Images/Hasan Jamali)*

Bus services link cities and towns and provide public transport within cities. Saudi Arabia has the only rail system on the Arabian Peninsula. The national airline, Saudia, was established in 1945 and is now the largest in the Middle East, with domestic and international flights to many destinations. In addition, two other Saudi airlines, Sama and Nas, operate in the country.

The Hajj Terminal at the King 'Abdul 'Aziz International Airport in Jeddah was built exclusively to handle Muslim pilgrims making their way to Mecca. (More than 2 million Muslims make the pilgrimage annually.) Saudi Arabia has many modern ports, the five largest being at Jeddah, Dammam, Yanbu, Jizan, and Jubail. The communications network is quite modern, with one of the world's best telephone systems. Telex, pager, and cellular phone services are also available. In 1985, Saudi Arabia launched the first- and second-ever Arab communications satellites. A well-developed postal system relies on post office boxes, rather than door-to-door delivery.

Modern health care and education are available free of charge to all Saudi citizens and pilgrims. Social services provide for workers and families in case of disability, retirement, or death. There are also provisions for social security pensions;

elderly, orphans, or widows without incomes; home health care; rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents; nursing homes for the elderly; and orphanages for children. Low-income housing is available for public employees and students. The government also offers no-interest, long-term loans for the construction of homes. All adult Saudis, if not independently wealthy, are entitled to a plot of land and a loan to build a home.

Saudi homes traditionally were built for extended families, and this practice continues in rural areas. However, in cities, more married couples are living separately from their families. Houses are quite large and usually have separate quarters for men and women. Saudi architecture tends to use traditional Islamic designs. Adobe is common in Riyadh, the Nadj region, and the eastern province. Stone and red brick are generally used in the western districts. In Jeddah, corals from the Red Sea make for colorful buildings and homes.

There are at least 10 privately owned newspapers published in Saudi Arabia, 7 in Arabic and 3 in English. *Ar-Riyadh* and *al-Jazirah* have the highest circulation. Editors exercise self-censorship over their newspapers, in keeping with an unwritten press censorship code that restricts articles expressing



opposition to the government. Foreign newspapers are heavily censored before entering the country, both to restrict politically sensitive material and to remove morally offensive items. There are millions of televisions and radios in the kingdom, hundreds of television stations, and dozens of radio stations. Internet access has been available in the country since 1999 and, as of 2006, approximately 26% of Saudi households had Internet access.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is central to Saudis. Extended families often live together in the same house. Marriages are usually arranged by families. A man is allowed up to four wives by Islamic law, if he can treat and love them all equally, but men rarely marry more than one woman at a time. Divorce is easy for men and possible for women and, since 1993, it has become commonplace. Women may write their own provisions into the marriage contract, and they may own and dispose of property freely.

Socially, women are very restricted. They must not mingle with men who are not close family members, at any time, in any way. They must wear a black veil over their heads, faces, and clothing whenever they are in public. Traditionally, women do not drive cars, and they are forbidden to travel alone. A woman may not attend a university lecture given by a man, but she may watch it on closed-circuit television; in this way, women may now earn advanced degrees at universities formerly closed to them.

## 11 CLOTHING

Saudis generally wear traditional clothing. Men wear a *thob*, a simple ankle-length robe of wool or cotton, usually in white or earth tones. On their heads they wear a *ghutra*, a large, diagonally folded cotton square worn over a *kufiyyah* (skull-cap) and held in place with an *i'gal*, a double-coiled cord circlet. Sometimes men wear a flowing floor-length outer cloak called a *bisht* over their thob; the *bisht* is made of wool or camel hair in black, beige, brown, or cream colors.

Women's traditional dress varies by region, but it always covers the body from head to toe. It is often embellished with coins, sequins, metallic thread, or brightly colored fabric appliques. Some women wear a *shayla*, a black gauzy scarf wrapped around the head and held in place by a variety of hats, head circlets, or jewelry. In public, women sometimes wear a black outer cloak called an *'abaya* over their dress. In the southwest district known as the *Asir*, women wear brightly colored, long-waisted dresses and no veils.

## 12 FOOD

Traditionally, dates were the staple food of the Saudis. Dates form an integral part of many Saudi (and other Middle Eastern) sweets. To celebrate `Id (or `Eid) al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan, Saudis cook a sweet dish called *dubyaza*, which consists of cooked dates, dried apricots, dried figs, sultanas, and almonds. For `Id al-Adha, commemorating the end of the Haj, Saudis make a pastry known as *ma'mul*. *Smeed*, a semolina-like flour, is mixed thoroughly in butter to make a granular pastry. This is then shaped into small balls and filled with either dates or almonds. The *ma'mul* is baked until golden in color and, after cooling, dusted with powdered sugar.

Although dates are still a supplement to the Saudi diet, with the modernization of agriculture and expanded trading oppor-

tunities, a wider variety of food is now available. A typical Saudi dish is lamb (or chicken) on a bed of seasoned rice. Pork is forbidden by Islamic law, as is alcohol. The possession of harmful drugs can actually carry the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. Tea and coffee are served at all gatherings, large or small. Buttermilk, camel's milk, and *laban*—a yogurt drink—are favorite beverages. Dessert generally consists of one or more types of seasonal fruit. A unique Saudi food is *arikah*, a bread from the southwest region (the *Asir*) that is broken off and formed into a spoon shape to be dipped into a dish of honey. Locusts, although terribly destructive when swarming, are considered a delicacy in the Saudi diet.

Meals that commemorate religious events, such as the birth of the prophet Muhammad, are served on a white tablecloth on the floor. Forks and knives are not used at these meals; either the right hand or a spoon is used on religious occasions. Everyday meals are served at tables and forks and knives are commonplace.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education is highly valued by the Saudis. It is a central aspect of family and community life, and parents are very involved in their children's education. Public education—from preschool through university—is free to all citizens. Government scholarships are also available for study abroad; most students go to the United States. Primary schooling begins at age six and continues for six years. Intermediate schooling begins at age 12 and lasts for three years. High school lasts from age 15 to 18 and is geared toward either the arts and sciences or vocational training.

Despite the importance placed on education, recent reports show that Saudi enrollment in schools lags that of other Arab nations. In 2004, for instance, the UN Development Program Human Development Report found that only 59% of Saudi children were enrolled in primary schools and only 52% in secondary schools. Nevertheless, the report also found that Saudi children had a literacy rate of 95.9%, which indicates that some children might be schooled at home or at private institutions.

Islamic studies are at the core of Saudi public education, but modern studies are also pursued. Formal primary education began in the 1930s, and the first university (now known as King Saud University) was founded in 1957 in Riyadh. A growth in the population of young Saudis and a need to equip Saudi youth with marketable skills prompted the government to increase the number of universities in Saudi Arabia from seven in the late 1970s to twelve as of 2008. Saudi Arabia also has 113 technical and vocational colleges and more than 18,000 schools. Boys and girls are educated separately; the first school for girls was built in 1960 under Crown Prince Faisal. About 58% of the 603,757 Saudis attending colleges or universities in 2005 were female.

Most Saudi Arabian schools are run by the government, which provides free tuition, books, and health services. There are a few private elementary schools. Government schools are also available for children and adults who are blind, deaf, or physically or mentally challenged. The Saudi Arabian government wants to eradicate illiteracy and has adult literacy programs in place across the country. As of 2003, literacy rates among men had reached 84.7%, compared with 73% in 1990. Among women, the literacy rate in 2003 had reached 70.8% compared with 48% in 1990.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The national dance of Saudi Arabia is the *ardha*, or men's sword dance. Men carrying swords stand shoulder to shoulder, and a poet among them sings verses while drummers beat out a rhythm. The dance consists of a ceremonial procession and symbolizes the unity of the kingdom. *Al-mizmar* is the name of both a folk dance involving skillful stick movements and a musical instrument resembling an oboe. Other traditional instruments are the *oud*, or lute, and the *rebaba*, a one-stringed instrument.

Islam forbids the depiction of the human form, so Saudi Arabian art focuses on geometric and abstract shapes. Calligraphy is a sacred art, with the Quran (Koran) being the primary subject matter. The Islamic reverence for poetry and the poetic richness of the Arabic language inform much of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage.

## 15 WORK

The Saudi work week runs from Saturday through Wednesday, with Thursday and Friday as the weekend. Working hours are usually 8:00 am to 7:00 or 8:00 pm, with a long break in the afternoon. Government offices are open from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm, and banks are open from 8:00 to 11:30 am or 8:30 am to noon, and again from 4:00 to 6:00 pm or 5:00 to 7:00 pm.

As part of the economic development plan, new industrial cities have been built near sources of raw materials and easy access to domestic and international markets. Eight such cities have been built so far, with the two major ones at Jubail on the Arabian Gulf, and at Yanbu on the Red Sea. Jubail is the largest industrial city, accommodating 30,000 workers at 15 large factories and other industrial facilities. It also has a desalination plant, a vocational training institute, and a college. All industrial cities are constructed with an emphasis on environmental and wildlife conservation.

The government offers many incentives to private businesses, including no-interest loans (with a 25-year repayment plan) to start up new businesses. Many jobs are not open to women because women are not allowed to mingle with men who are not close family members, even in the workplace, according to Wahhabi Islamic tradition. However, this is slowly changing, and women are beginning to enter all ranks of employment, from skilled labor to professional positions.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the national sport of Saudi Arabia. Volleyball, basketball, and tennis are also popular modern sports. The traditional sports of horse- and camel-racing are still enjoyed as well. The annual King's Camel Race that began in 1974 draws 2,000 competitors and 20,000–30,000 spectators each year. Many other horse and camel races are also held throughout the country. Hunting with guns has been banned for the sake of wildlife conservation, but traditional hunting, with dogs or falcons, is still avidly pursued. The Saluki hound used for hunting is probably one of the world's oldest breeds of domesticated dogs.

Sports training programs are available to all Saudis in a wide range of activities. The government promotes sports through physical education in the public schools and the establishment of huge Sports Cities in large urban centers, smaller neighborhood Sports Centers, and Sports Clubs in rural areas. Fifteen Sports Cities already exist, and more are being built. Each

contains a multipurpose stadium that seats between 10,000 and 60,000 people, a 5,000-seat indoor stadium, Olympic-size swimming pools, indoor and outdoor courts and playgrounds, cafeterias, conference facilities, and sports-medicine clinics. Exceptional athletes go to sports camps for serious training, and the best of the camp trainees enter international competitions such as the Olympic Games.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Entertainment is largely a private matter—there are no public cinemas, for example. Camping is very popular, and there is an extensive network of local and national parks and campgrounds across Saudi Arabia. Water sports are enjoyed in the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea. Many Saudis watch movies on video in their homes.

Saudi Arabia has more than 5 million radio receivers and 4.5 million television sets. There are more than 112 television stations and dozens of radio stations. The Saudi Arabian Broadcasting Service transmits programs to other countries in Arabic, Farsi, French, Indonesian, Somali, Swahili, and Urdu. Many of the domestic broadcast stations transmit English-language programs; the rest are Arabic-language. The strict Saudi moral standard restricts what can be broadcast, and programs are screened for scenes that contradict the codes of sexual chastity and religious observance.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Saudi Arabia is famous for gold and silver handicrafts, particularly jewelry fashioned as both a decorative art and as a status symbol. Jewelry is treasured both for its beauty and for the monetary value it bears. Because jewelry can be traded in or sold for currency, it is regarded as insurance against hard times. One of the finest examples of gold and silver handicrafts is on the *kiswah*, a black cloth embroidered in gold and silver with verses from the Quran. The *kiswah* measures approximately 28,500 sq ft and covers the four sides of the *Ka'bah* (cube building). The *kiswah* is replaced every year and made in Mecca.

Pottery making is another Saudi craft. Using a pottery wheel, craftsmen fabricate beautiful storage and water urns. Urns are made with narrow necks to prevent the evaporation of water. Brass and copper crafts are also abundant. In the city of Riyadh, craftsmen can be seen making brass coffeepots over open flames. Since ancient times, Saudis have crafted goods from leather, including handbags, saddlebags, sandals, and shoes. Wood carving is another prized art. Geometric designs and religious inscriptions are carved with sharp knives to create both artwork and fixtures such as wooden plates and engraved panels for doors. Straw is also used in artwork, with straw hats, mats, containers, and cooking lids available at the *souk*, or market.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Crime rates have risen in Saudi Arabia with the presence of foreign workers and ongoing hostilities in the Middle East following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Amnesty International reported in its 2008 human rights report that the Saudi government arrested hundreds of people suspected of terrorism in 2007 as well as activists pressing for political reforms. At least 158 people were executed in

2007 and many others received punishments of flogging or amputation.

In the past, Saudi Arabia's severe penalties helped prevent severe crimes from occurring. Repeated theft is punishable by amputation of the right hand, and drunkenness and gambling are punishable by flogging with a cane. Many sentences are delivered in secrecy and information about individuals detained in Saudi prisons often goes unreported to the public. Saudi Arabia has been criticized by Amnesty International for its human rights record concerning prison conditions, and asked permission to visit the country in 2007 to discuss human rights. The government has initiated some reforms in its justice system and has indicated a willingness to discuss its human rights records. However, the government had not agreed to a date for an Amnesty International visit as of late 2007.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Saudi Arabia suffer extreme legal discrimination. Women cannot study, work, travel, marry, testify in court, file a legal complaint, or even undergo medical treatment without the consent of a male guardian, such as a husband, father, grandfather, brother, or son. Saudis justify these restrictions on the basis of Islamic principles. However, women are beginning to protest the discrimination and human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, are bringing the plight of Saudi women to international attention.

The lack of legal rights has caused many Saudi women to suffer violence and abusive treatment from husbands, and has led to a rise in beatings, rapes, and non-payment of wages to foreign female workers in the kingdom. The government has signed international charters supporting women's rights, but has not significantly modified its laws. Although more than half of all college graduates in Saudi Arabia are women, few women enter the workforce or have the opportunity to use their education outside of the home.

Women's rights groups have formed in Saudi Arabia. One such organization petitioned King Abdullah in September 2007 for the right to drive vehicles and to compete in international sporting events. The government has indicated a willingness to allow women more rights, but has not put policies to end discrimination into place.

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—revised by Himanee Gupta-Carlson.

# SHANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SHAHNS

**LOCATION:** Myanmar (Burma); India; China; Laos; Thailand; northern Viet Nam

**POPULATION:** 5 to 7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Shan; Chinese; Burmese

**RELIGION:** Buddhism, with elements of Animism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A people known as the Tai have inhabited a vast area of Asia, including Thailand, Laos, and northeastern Myanmar (formerly called Burma.) The name for the Tai ethnic group of Myanmar is “Shan.” The Shans migrated into Myanmar from China, to the north, many centuries ago, and settled in the valleys. They established kingdoms and expanded their territory, often in conflict with other ethnic groups such as the Burmese (Burmans). From the 15th century on, the Shan Plateau was their main homeland. The people were governed by hereditary princes called Sao-Phas in as many as 40 different principalities.

When the British Empire annexed Burma in the late 19th century, the Shan princes negotiated protectorate agreements which allowed them to continue to rule their domains, while acknowledging British supremacy. With time, the Sao-Phas became more educated and more willing to work together, and in the 1920s they formed the Federated Shan States. After World War II, the British granted independence to Burma, and Shan leaders participated in the Panglong Agreement with Burmese independence hero, General Aung San, ensuring a great deal of autonomy for the Shan aristocrats. The independent constitution of Burma created a Shan State and granted it the right to secede after 10 years.

Many Shans, including pro-democracy Sao-Phas, became disillusioned with being part of the Union of Burma. They felt that their culture was being suppressed by the majority Burmese and there were conflicts with central government troops. A military government took over Burma in 1962, and Burma’s president—a Shan—Sao Shwe Thaik, was put in prison, where he died. Burma’s military rulers renamed the country “Myanmar” in 1989.

Armed rebel groups promoting Shan nationalism sprung up throughout the Shan state. The Shan rebellion was characterized by many factional splits and by “warlords” who took advantage of the State’s lucrative opium trade to form their own narcotic-trafficking armies. In the 1990s, some armed Shan groups surrendered to Myanmar’s central government or reached ceasefire agreements. Khun Sa, the notorious warlord of one of the surrendered armies, died of natural causes in Myanmar in 2007. The Shan State Army led by Colonel Yod Serk has continued to fight a hit and run guerrilla war against the Myanmar government’s army. Yod Serk has often spoken out against the narcotics trade.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Although there are no sure census figures in Myanmar, the Shan population there has been estimated at more than 5 million, perhaps as many as 7 million. There are Shan-related ethnic people in India’s Assam, China’s Yunnan Province (the

Dai people), Laos, Thailand, and northern Vietnam as well. Myanmar’s Shan State has a border with Yunnan in the north, Laos to the east, and Thailand to the south. The region is often called “The Golden Triangle” and is associated with trade in opium, the raw material for heroin. In addition to the Shans, numerous other ethnic groups live in Myanmar’s Shan State, mainly in the hills: Palaungs, Pa-Os, Was, Lahus, Akhas, and other tribal people, and the Kokang Chinese.

The Salween River flows from China down through the Shan State, and the Mekong River forms the border with Laos. Major cities include Taunggyi, Keng Tung, and Lashio. In the southeast of the state is Inle Lake, where the Intha people live in stilt houses above the water and grow vegetables on floating gardens. The Shan State has been green and fertile, but deforestation in recent decades, as Myanmar’s military government sold off teak wood to neighboring countries, has badly degraded the terrain. Major population displacement took place in the Shan State during the late 1990s, as the Myanmar government’s forces destroyed villages, confiscated or burned crops, and moved masses of civilians around for forced labor projects. These events and related rural poverty caused tens of thousands of Shans to flee to Thailand, where they sought work and safety in a land whose language and people were related to their own.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Shans speak a language classified as Sino-Tai. It is distantly related to Cantonese and other Chinese dialects, and closely related to Lao and Thai. There are considerable regional differences in the Shan spoken in various areas. Throughout northeast Burma, Shan is used as a common language for trade among various ethnic groups. Many Shans speak some of the Yunnanese dialect of Chinese and some Burmese, as well as Shan. The traditional Shan alphabet has 18 consonants and 12 vowels; more letters have been added in a modernized version. The letters have a circular shape, like those of the Burmese language.

To say “Thank you very much,” Shans say *Yin lii nam nam*. The usual greeting in a Shan village is *Kin khao yao ha?* meaning, “Have you eaten?” The reply is probably yes, so the follow up question asks what you had for lunch or dinner. A popular expression is *Am pen tsang*—meaning “No problem,” because the Shans value a relaxed lifestyle. Sometimes you’ll hear *am pen tsang* even during a crisis, as Shans try to stay calm to deal with any situation.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Shans often believe in ghosts and demons who haunt forests, graveyards, and other lonely places. Shamans or Buddhist monks can be called on to exorcise such ill-intentioned spirits. The forest can be inhabited by animals which are actually ferocious human ghosts, such as *were-tigers*.

## 5 RELIGION

Shans, like most Tai peoples, are Buddhists. They practice a religion based on compassion for all beings and the search for enlightenment within a reincarnation cycle of birth and death. Buddhist monks, revered for their learning and self-discipline, are important to Shan communities. Some Shan monks are particularly well-known throughout Myanmar for their teachings, and Shan monks participated in the “Saffron Revolution”

against Myanmar's government in 2007. The power that stems from keeping precepts (abstaining from violent acts, intoxication, and other negative forms of conduct) can prevent evil and bring good fortune. Shan Buddhism also incorporates many Animist elements, such as belief in a fertility goddess known as "the Rice Mother," and local spirits known as "the Lord of the Village."

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Shans observe Buddhist holidays and more animist-related ones such as an annual "repairing the village" ceremony called *mae waan*, meant to drive away dangerous beings. On holy days, everyone is expected to keep the five main Buddhist precepts: no killing, no stealing, no improper sexual conduct, no lying, and no use of intoxicants.

Because generosity, especially to the Buddhist monasteries, is an important virtue for Shans, gifts for the monks are a feature of many special occasions. Often a "money tree" will be paraded through the village, its branches decorated with banknotes and small household items for the monks to use. Dancers and musicians accompany the tree on its way to the monastery.

Shans sometimes hold a "Rocket Festival" in hopes of bringing on the rainy season to provide water for the rice and other crops. Large homemade fireworks are launched into the sky. Buddhist Lent occurs during the monsoon season, for three months. The monks stay at their monasteries, concentrating on their prayers and studies. Marriages and other festivities do not take place during Lent.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

It was the old Shan custom for a mother to spend a month indoors, near a fire, after giving birth. When that month was over, the baby would be given a special bath in water that had coins and pieces of gold dropped into it.

Young boys usually become novice monks for one to three months. A colorful ceremony called *Poy Sang Long* is held as Buddhist Lent begins. The boys are costumed as little Shan princes. They are carried through the village on relatives' shoulders, or on ponies (sometimes even on elephants). Golden umbrellas shade them from the sun. At the monastery, the boys' heads are shaved, and they put on plain orange robes and begin learning the Buddhist scriptures.

In their mid-teens, many Shan boys get their first tattoos, usually from a *sayah* who uses a brass-tipped stick to inject magical ingredients in symbolic patterns. The chest, back, arms, legs, and tongue are common places for tattoos. The ink and designs can give the wearer various powers against illness, evil-doers, or weapons, or for cleverness. The tattooed person should keep Buddhist precepts of self-restraint to ensure the power. Men may continue to be tattooed, sometimes making their entire arms and legs blue-black from the ink. Shan women also get tattooed, but usually to a lesser extent than men. Other ethnic groups often seek out the Shan *sayahs* as the most powerful tattooists.

Death is considered the path to another existence, perhaps a better one. The dead are usually buried in a wooden coffin. Cremation ceremonies are held for monks and those who can afford to pay for the elaborate ritual. Musicians accompany the body to cremation site or burial grounds.



## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When visiting a Shan home, you remove your shoes to go inside. Traditionally this even applies to small shops. You also take your shoes off at Shan Buddhist temples and monasteries, and it is the usual practice to make an offering of money, flowers, or food for the resident monks. Shans treat the monks with respect, especially older monks or those known for their strict self-discipline.

Visitors to homes, or even offices or shops, are served tea. Shans are usually introduced using an honorific with their name, most often "Sai" for men and "Nang" for women, and it is polite to address them that way.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Currently there are many severe health problems among the Shans. There are few doctors or medical facilities, especially in rural areas. Malaria is prevalent, and children often die from it. Villagers suffer from tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, and goiter (caused by iodine deficiency). Medicine is too expensive for most people, and traditional "spirit doctors" cannot keep up with the present health crisis. HIV/AIDS has spread through Myanmar's Shan State because of widespread injection of narcotics (heroin refined from the locally grown opium and locally manufactured methamphetamine) and because of the trade in young girls and boys to neighboring Thailand and China for prostitution. Generally ignorant about the disease, these young people forced into the "sex industry" have a very high rate of infection.



*Shan women participate in a ceremony to celebrate the 61st Union Day in Yangon. (Khin Maung Win/AFP/Getty Images)*

Military rule in Myanmar has caused a decline in living standards for the Shans. Many have fled their original towns and villages because of forced labor, or have had their homes burned down by government troops seeking to secure the area. To get away from the conflict, they often settle in the hill country where it is hard to grow any crop other than opium, or find their way to a neighboring country, usually Thailand. There are no refugee camps for Shans in Thailand; instead the Shan migrants try to find any kind of work and attempt to fade in among the Thai population.

In peaceful times, the marketplace is a center of Shan life. The markets are held quite early in the morning, and men, women, and children go there to buy food for the day, drink tea, and exchange information. Most of the vendors are women. Another center is the Buddhist monastery, where many occasions are celebrated. Often the monastery is located on a hilltop overlooking a village or town. Larger settlements have several, with tall whitewashed pagodas.

Shan houses are traditionally raised up on stilts, with the area underneath used for storage or a cool, shady place to sit. The roofs are thatched with leaf material. Inside, the Shans sit

on the floor, eat at low tables, and at night sleep on mats. Cleanliness is very important to Shans, so yards and village streets are swept often. In villages, Shans bathe in nearby streams or with buckets of rainwater.

The Shans like to travel a lot, visiting friends and relatives or trading goods from town to town, but few have their own cars or motorbikes. Ox-carts are used for carrying farm products, and mules or ponies still carry loads and riders up in the hills. There are some flights into the Shan State and railway connections to Taunggyi and Lashio. A more common way to cover long distances is to share a ride on a truck, which may be carrying goods from China or Thailand.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Shans have monogamous marriages, although in the old times of the aristocracy the *Sao-Phas* often had more than one wife. A “bride-price” paid to the bride’s parents was traditional. Horoscopes are still important for determining if a couple is really meant for each other, and if so, when the wedding should take place. Shan weddings are not Buddhist ceremonies, although monks may attend. Usually, village elders

or other respected persons will tie blessing strings around the couple's wrists. A feast is then held for families, neighbors, and friends. Married couples live on their own with their children, but may be joined by aging relatives or others needing help. Divorce is permissible in Shan society, especially in cases of domestic violence.

Shan families in Thailand have an average of two children, with parents hoping for one boy and one girl. In Myanmar, where birth control is rare, six children or more is a typical Shan family size. Shan families keep dogs, cats, and birds as pets. The dogs are used to guard houses and for hunting. Shan Buddhist monasteries often have many cats living there.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Shan men traditionally wear baggy trousers, usually of indigo-dyed homespun. Called *koon*, the trousers have a huge waistband which is gathered and knotted in front. Women wear sarongs, called *phasin*, which are striped cotton or fancy embroidered silk sewn in a tube and wrapped tightly at the waist. There are traditional jackets and blouses to go with these, but younger people often wear them with T-shirts and denim jackets for a comfortable mix of old and new. Blue jeans and other western clothing are gradually replacing wrapped trousers and sarongs in the wardrobes of younger Shans, with traditional outfits saved for festivals and other special occasions.

Large conical bamboo or straw hats called *kup* provide shade for Shan men and women working in the fields or walking in hot sunlight. Older Shan men and women often wear large turbans wrapped from long lengths of cotton or bright terrycloth towels.

### **12 FOOD**

Shans are fond of sticky rice, called *khao niw*. Eating with the right hand, they make a little ball of sticky rice and use it to soak up accompanying curry. *Khao niw* is also featured in the special treats the Shans make for seasonal festivals. In the cold season they cook *khao lam*, sweetened sticky rice, in bamboo tubes. A hot season specialty is *khao yak ku*, brown sugar-sweetened sticky rice with peanuts and grated coconut on top. As well as their fondness for sweets, Shans are known for their taste for sour foods, such as a spicy pickled cabbage similar to Korean *kim chee*.

Numerous varieties of fruit are grown in the Shan State, including temperate climate fruits like apples and strawberries not found elsewhere in Myanmar. Mango (*mak muang*) is a favorite fruit, both ripe and unripe, and is combined with meat such as pork for a Shan curry. Disks of fermented soybeans, called *thoo nao khep*, flavor many dishes. Corn and potatoes, originally from North America, are grown by Shan farmers.

*Khao soi*, Shan noodles with chicken-coconut curry, has become popular throughout Myanmar and Thailand. You can make a "fast-food" version of *khao soi*: prepare chicken-flavored ramen noodles according to the directions on the package. Mix in three tablespoons of canned unsweetened coconut milk, a half teaspoon of turmeric, a half teaspoon of paprika, a dash of hot chili sauce, and some diced cooked chicken. On top of the noodles put sliced green onion, chopped fresh cilantro, and some crunchy "chow mein" noodles; squeeze some lime juice before eating.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Being able to read and write in their native language has been a political cause for many Shans, who feel that the Burmese-dominated central government of Myanmar has deliberately suppressed Shan culture as a way to control Shan rebellion. Very little material is being published in Shan, as even Shan children's books and health pamphlets are considered suspect by the government. In many villages there are *sayahs*, men or women who can read old Shan texts on subjects such as astrology and herbal medicine, and use them to make predictions, cast spells, or treat illness. The sayah's power comes from book-learning as well as from the self-discipline needed to keep many Buddhist precepts.

Educational standards in the Shan State are low, with schools and teachers in short supply at every level. In many villages, the monastery is a source of education, at least for young boys. Children who do attend schools run by the Myanmar government are likely to learn in Burmese rather than Shan.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Shan literature has largely consisted of texts relating to Buddhist scripture, books of astrological and herbal lore, and histories of the aristocracy. "The Padaeng Chronicle" and "The Jengtung State Chronicle" are examples of such histories from the Keng Tung area which have been translated into English. In recent years, women of Myanmar's Shan aristocracy, including Sao Hearn Hkam and Sao Sanda have told their life stories in books published in other countries. Chinese-American author Amy Tan's 2006 best-selling novel, *Saving Fish from Drowning* was set around Inle Lake in Myanmar's Shan State.

Typical Shan dances include one in which two young men in a costume portray a lion or yak-like creature, and another in which children dance dressed as mythical birds. Solo dance is a part of ceremonies involving ghosts and other special occasions. A popular social dance is the *ram wong*, from Indochina. Couples move around in a large circle, using simple steps and graceful hand motions. Dance music can be played by musicians walking or dancing in a procession, and it features long drums, gongs, cymbals, and bamboo flutes. There is also the ensemble music of the old Sao Pha courts, which was influenced by Burmese classical music and is played by seated musicians. A framed series of gongs which can be hit all at once with a bamboo mallet is a particularly Shan instrument for such music.

Shan singers and musicians have had much influence on contemporary music in Myanmar. Their songs sometimes include political commentary disguised as love lyrics. Rock singer Sai Htee Saing died in 2008; his band The Wild Ones was popular throughout Burma and promoted Shan culture and a Shan point of view in urban settings. Popular Shan female singers include Nang Khamnong, who sings up-tempo pop ballads, and Nang Sara who belts out hard rock tunes.

### **15 WORK**

The Shans have traditionally been an agricultural society, producing bountiful crops of rice and vegetables including soybeans, garlic, and corn. Villagers exchange labor to plant and harvest each others' rice fields. Government quotas, confiscation, and forced relocation of farmers have brought on a severe decline in agricultural productivity, however, and increases in cultivation of opium poppies for the heroin refineries.

In addition to farming, the Shans have been noteworthy traders. Men and women travel from village to village, peddling cloth, medicines, forest products, tools, and a great variety of other goods. Much of the trading stock is brought into Myanmar illegally from neighboring countries. Commodities including gemstones (rubies, sapphires, and jade), gold, cattle, and heroin, are smuggled out of the Shan State. Shans who cross the border to Thailand often find work on construction sites or as domestic servants. Some work in northern Thailand's orchards, where there are health concerns about their exposure to agricultural chemicals.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer and volleyball are popular sports in the Shan State, as is *takraw*, in which a lightweight woven rattan ball is kept in play with the feet. Many Shans learn Lai Tai, their indigenous martial arts form, or a traditional Shan martial art in which swords are held with both hands. A more sedate game is *maknim*, in which the large seeds of the mucuna vine are set up in rows. Players take turns trying to knock them down by shooting another seed like a marble, kicking it off the top of the foot or rolling it off their clothing.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Shans, like other people of Myanmar, enjoy marathon theater and dance performances that often last long into the night. Sometimes a traveling movie show comes to a Shan village, projecting a film (usually from Thailand) on an outdoor screen for everyone to watch. In recent years, the larger villages and towns have mini-movie theaters, small shops with a DVD player set up to show foreign movies or locally produced videos. Radio is very popular in the Shan State, especially short-wave broadcasts such as the BBC or Voice of America programs in Shan or Burmese. Satellite television is available in some towns and cities, although the Myanmar government sometimes cracks down on owners of satellite dishes. Towns and cities in Myanmar's Shan State have computer shops where games can be played, but Internet access is extremely restricted.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In some areas, Shan women weave colorful silk fabrics. Embroidered cotton shoulder bags (useful, as Shan clothes usually don't have pockets) are made by Shans and used all over Myanmar. Silverware, including decorated knives and swords, and basketry are other Shan crafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

While the Shans have a strong sense of themselves as a "free people" and the inheritors of a vibrant culture, they are also endangered by the breakdown of their society under military rule. In the late 1990s, tens of thousands of Shan villagers were driven out of their homes by Myanmar government troops, and the flow of refugees to Thailand from the Shan State has been steadily increasing for decades. Constantly under the threat of forced labor and caught in the crossfire of government troops, insurgent groups, and opium armies, normal life has been nearly impossible for Shan farmers. In Myanmar's towns and cities, Shan intellectuals and politicians have been imprisoned, killed, or exiled. The young people are in particular danger from the HIV/AIDS epidemic spread through the

sex trade and narcotics injection. Drug abuse is particularly rife in ruby-mining areas of the Shan State.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Shan society, women had equal rights, although Buddhism viewed their status as somewhat inferior. Shan women took significant roles in commerce and family decision-making. Some Shan women, such as Sao Hearn Hkam, a member of parliament, were active in politics in Myanmar before the military government took over, and in rebel groups afterwards. Shan culture is usually tolerant of transgender, gay, and lesbian individuals.

During the time of military rule in Myanmar, the political status and security of Shan women has decreased and human rights organizations have documented a pattern of rape targeting Shan women and girls by the Myanmar government's army. In 2002 a group formed in exile, Shan Women's Action Network, released a report, "License to Rape," which brought international attention to the situation. One of the report's authors, a young Shan woman named Charm Tong, met with US President George Bush in Washington DC in 2005 to discuss human rights issues. Charm Tong received the Reebok Human Rights Award in 2005 and a Vital Voices Global Leadership Award in 2008.

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—by E. Mirante



# SHERPAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SHER-puhs

**LOCATION:** Nepal

**POPULATION:** 55,000

**LANGUAGE:** Sherpa (or Sherpali); Nepali

**RELIGION:** Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Sherpas are a tribe of Tibetan origin who occupy the high valleys around the base of Mt. Everest in northeastern Nepal. In the Tibetan language, *Shar Pa* means “people who live in the east,” and over time this descriptive term has come to identify the Sherpa community.

According to Sherpa tradition, the tribe migrated to Nepal from the Kham region of eastern Tibet. Over a thousand years ago, the Sherpas say, a great chieftain named Thakpa Tho was instructed through visions and divine oracles to lead his people on a journey from their homeland. The tribe traveled west to Tingri. After a brief stay there, Thakpa Tho and his people turned south, crossed the Himalayas through the Nangpa La (“La” means “Pass” in Tibetan), and settled in the fertile valleys around Namche Bazaar.

Historians present a slightly different view. They suggest that the Sherpas were nomadic herders who were driven out of their original homeland in eastern Tibet by warlike peoples sometime between the 12th and 15th centuries AD. They migrated to the area around Tingri, but conflict with the local inhabitants caused them to move on in search of fresh pastures. They crossed the Himalayas and settled peacefully in their present homeland in northeastern Nepal.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The current Sherpa population is estimated to be around 55,000 people. They are found mostly in the Khumbu and Solu-Khumbu regions that lie to the south of the Everest massif. Sherpa populations also occupy lands to the east of this area in Kulung. In addition, Sherpas inhabit the valleys of the Dudh Kosi and Rolwaling Rivers west of Solu-Khumbu, and they are also found in the Lantang-Helambu region north of Kathmandu. Kathmandu itself has a sizable Sherpa population, while small numbers of Sherpas can be found throughout Nepal, even in the Terai. Sherpa communities are also present in the Indian state of Sikkim and the hill towns of Darjiling and Kalimpong. Small numbers of Sherpas are also found in Bhutan. However, Khumbu and Solu-Khumbu can be viewed as the traditional homeland of the Sherpa people.

The Sherpas are of Mongoloid stock. They are quite small in stature, relatively fair in complexion, with the distinctive facial features associated with peoples of Tibetan origin.

The Sherpas are a mountain people, living on the flanks of the hill masses that jut south into Nepal from the crestline of the high Himalayas. Rivers, such as the Dudh Kosi and Bhote Kosi, have carved deep gorges into the mountains, leaving a complex terrain of steep ridges and narrow valleys. Sherpa villages cling to the sides of sheer mountain slopes or sit on top of steep escarpments. Wherever Sherpas are found, their settlements lie at the highest elevations of any human habitation. In Khumbu, their villages are found between 3,000 and 4,300 m



(approximately 10,000 to 14,000 ft). Winters at this altitude are severe, with snow covering the ground between November and February. No work can be done in the open. Most able-bodied Sherpas descend to lower elevations for the winter, leaving only the elderly in the villages. February sees the onset of spring, with warming temperatures and clear skies. People return to their villages for the New Year festival in late February and the next three months are spent preparing fields and sowing crops. Summer temperatures vary according to altitude. At Nauje village (elevation 3,440 m or 11,287 ft) in Khumbu, the July mean temperature is 12°C (53.6°F). May to August is the rainy season, with most of Nauje’s annual precipitation of 104.8 cm (approximately 41 in) falling during this period. August to November heralds another period of fair weather, when the harvest is gathered in. Vegetation at lower elevations is dominated by mixed broadleaf and pine forests and rhododendrons, degraded in many places to scrub. This gives way to alpine tundra at higher altitudes.

As residents of Nepal, the Sherpas have been influenced by the communist uprising in the country, as well as by the dramatic political events that have occurred there recently. Though formerly the only Hindu Kingdom in the world, the country is now a secular state, becoming the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal on 25 May 2008. This was largely the result of the “Nepalese People’s War” fought between Maoist insurgents and first the Nepalese police and later the Royal Nepal Army. Almost 13,000 people were killed during this conflict and up to an estimated 150,000 people internally displaced

during this time. The war was started by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN [M]) on 13 February 1996, with the aim of establishing the “People’s Republic of Nepal.” For 10 years, Nepal was in the grip of civil war, with the Maoist insurgency initially commencing in the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot in western Nepal and eventually spreading to 68 of the country’s 75 districts. At first, the insurgency was seen as a police matter, but after Maoists attacked an army barracks in western Nepal in 2002 following the failure of peace talks, the Army was called in to fight the insurgents. The war ended with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 21 November 2006. The Sherpas make a lot of money from tourism and were generally unsympathetic to the rebel cause because the insurgency caused tourism to decline, but they were occasionally forced to provide young recruits to the rebels. Khumbu, at the base of Mount Everest, was generally considered as safe, though the lower Solu-Khumbu saw frequent rebel activity.

On 1 June 2001, Crown Prince Dipendra shot and killed his father, his mother, his brother and sister, one of his uncles, and several aunts, before turning the gun on himself. Gyanendra, Birendra’s brother, succeeded as king. On 1 February 2005, Gyanendra suspended the parliament, appointed a government led by himself, and enforced martial law. The king argued that civilian politicians were unfit to handle the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. A broad coalition called the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) was formed in opposition to the royal takeover. This coalition included seven parliamentary parties that had held about 90% of the seats in the dissolved parliament. A countrywide uprising began in April 2006, resulting in massive and spontaneous demonstrations and rallies held across Nepal against King Gyanendra’s autocratic rule. Eventually, an agreement was made for the monarchy to be abolished, which it was on 25 May 2008, ending 240 years of royal rule.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The language of the Sherpas, called Sherpa or Sherpali, is a dialect of Tibetan, although it has borrowed heavily from neighboring languages. It belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Though Sherpali is primarily a spoken language, the Sherpas use the Tibetan script for writing. Sherpas use Nepali in their dealings with other peoples.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

A unique element in Sherpa folklore is the Yeti, better known in the West as the “Abominable Snowman.” According to one tale, Yetis were far more numerous in the past and would attack and terrorize local villagers. The elders of the village decided on a plan to eliminate the Yetis. The next day, the villagers gathered in a high alpine pasture and everyone brought a large kettle of *chāng* (maize beer). They also brought weapons, such as sticks and knives and swords. Pretending to get drunk, they began to “fight” each other. Towards evening, the villagers returned to their settlement, leaving behind the weapons and large amounts of beer. The Yetis had been hidden in the mountains watching the day’s events. As soon as the villagers left, they came down to the pasture, drank the rest of the beer, and started fighting among themselves. Soon, most of the Yetis were dead. A few of the less intoxicated escaped and swore revenge. However, there were so few left that the survivors retreated to caves high in the mountains where no one would find them. Occasionally, they reappear to attack humans.

### **5 RELIGION**

The Sherpas belong to the Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism. The oldest Buddhist sect in Tibet, it claims to adhere to the original teachings of Padmasambhava, the Indian monk who founded Tibetan Buddhism in the 8th century AD. It emphasizes mysticism and incorporates shamanistic practices and local deities borrowed from the pre-Buddhist Bon religion. Thus, in addition to Buddha and the great Buddhist divinities, the Sherpa pantheon embraces numerous gods and demons who are believed to inhabit every mountain, cave, and forest. These have to be worshiped or appeased through ancient practices that have been woven into the fabric of Buddhist ritual life. Indeed, it is almost impossible to distinguish between Bon practices and Buddhism.

Many of the great Himalayan mountains are worshiped as gods. The Sherpas call Mt. Everest *Chomolungma* and worship it as the “Mother of the World.” Mt. Makalu is worshiped as the deity Shankar (Shiva). The Sherpas believe Mt. Khumbila is a white-faced deity who rides on his magical horse and protects the Sherpa people. Each clan recognizes mountain gods identified with certain peaks that are their protective deities.

The day-to-day religious affairs of the Sherpas are dealt with by Buddhist *lāmās* and other religious practitioners living in the villages. It is the village *lāmā*, who can be married and is often a householder, who presides over life-cycle ceremonies, undertakes purificatory rites, and occasionally conducts exorcisms. In addition, shamans (*lhawa*) and soothsayers (*mindung*) deal with the supernatural and the spirit world. They identify witches (*pem*), act as the mouthpiece of gods and spirits, and diagnose illnesses.

An important aspect of Sherpa religion is the monastery or *gompa*. There are some two dozen of these institutions scattered through the Solu-Khumbu region. They are communities of *lāmās*, or monks, (sometimes of nuns) who take vows of celibacy and lead a life in isolation searching for truth and religious enlightenment. Their presence brings merit to the community at large, and they are supported to some degree by offerings from the general population. Their contact with the outside world is limited to the annual festivals to which the public is invited and the reading of sacred texts at funerals. One of the most famous and respected gompas is at Tengboche, north of Namche Bazaar. It is known for its *avatari*, a reincarnation of an important lama from a past life, as well as its library of religious texts and collection of objects, such as *thankas* (religious paintings).

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The major festivals of the Sherpas are Losar, Dumje, and Mani Rimdu. Losar, which falls towards the end of February, marks the beginning of the New Year in the Tibetan calendar. It is celebrated with much feasting and drinking, dancing, and singing. Sherpas who leave their villages to travel to lower elevations during the winter months hurry back to their homes in time for Losar.

Dumje is a festival celebrated for the prosperity, good health, and general welfare of the Sherpa community. It falls in the month of July, when the agricultural work is complete, the trading expeditions to Tibet have returned, and the Sherpas are preparing to take their herds into the high pastures. Over a seven-day period, Sherpas visit their local gompas to offer prayers to deities, such as Guru Rimpoche, Phawa Chere-



*A Sherpa mother and daughter in the village of Ghat, Nepal. Thousands of climbers planned assaults on the summit of Mount Everest in 2003 to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the conquest of Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. (Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)*

si, and Tsampa. Lāmās perform their devil-dances and villagers gather in the evenings to enjoy the occasion. There is much eating and drinking, and members of the younger generation participate in singing and dancing.

Equally important are the colorful Mani Rimdu celebrations, which are attended by enthusiastic onlookers from throughout the Sherpa country. These are held four times a year, twice in Khumbu (at the Tami and Tengboche monasteries) and twice in Solu-Khumbu (at the Chiwong and Thaksindu monasteries). Monks don colorful costumes and elaborate masks to impersonate gods and demons and perform the religious dances intended to strike fear into the hearts of evil spirits.

Feasting and drinking accompany all Sherpa festivals and celebrations except for Nyungne. This is a penance for sins committed during the previous year. For three days, laypeople abstain from drinking and dancing and may even undergo a complete fast. They visit the gompa to recite sacred texts with the lāmās, or repeat the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*. The principal mantra of the Buddhists, it is also found inscribed on prayer wheels. It has many interpretations, one of which is "Om, the Jewel of the Doctrine is in the Lotus of the World." Monks and nuns keep to the restrictions of Nyungne for a full two weeks.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Although a birth is not an occasion for formal observances among the Sherpa, the name-giving ceremony of the child is an important event. The local lāmā is informed of the birth and the time that it occurred. On the basis of this information, the lāmā determines the child's name and when the naming ceremony should take place. Children are often named after the day of the week on which they were born. Thus, a baby born on Friday would be called "Pasang." The lāmā, relatives, and neighbors are invited to celebrate the name-giving at a feast.

Children are usually brought up by their mothers, as the men are often away from home for much of the year. Young girls are introduced to household chores at an early age, while boys tend to have greater freedom for leisure and play. Boys undergo an initiation ceremony between 7 and 9 years of age, which is presided over by the lāmā and accompanied by feasting and drinking.

At the time of death, the body is washed and covered with a white shroud. The lāmā is sent for to commence the funerary rites. These include cutting off a lock of hair from the corpse so that the life breath (*prān*) of the departed may leave the body and reading from the sacred texts. Rituals include the making of *tormas*, conical dough figures that are placed on an altar set up behind the corpse. Both Buddhist and Hindu astrological

books are consulted by the *lāmā* to determine in which direction the body should be taken and the manner of its disposal. The *lāmā* determines if the deceased is to be buried, cremated, or given a water-burial. The *lāmā* also decides when the time is auspicious for the removal of the corpse, which may not occur for several days. At the appointed time, the body is seated on a bier in the lotus position and taken for cremation or burial. The funeral procession is accompanied by flags and novice *lāmās* blowing conch shells and playing drums and cymbals. After death, the family performs rites for the benefit of the departed and undertakes a ritual purification of the home. Sherpas believe that the soul remains near the house for 49 days, and on the last of these days a grand feast is held to complete the last of the funeral rites (*gyowa*).

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Sherpas are a social and hospitable people. The cardinal rule of hospitality is that a visitor, even a casual one, must not leave the house with an “empty mouth.” Guests are entertained with Tibetan tea or beer. Visitors of high standing will be served a snack, or even a complete meal. Unlike some communities in South Asia, guests in Sherpa homes have complete access to both the kitchen and the area set aside for worship.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Sherpa settlements range from villages with a few houses to towns, such as Khumjung or Namche Bazaar, with more than a hundred houses. In the higher elevations, a house is usually built in the middle of its owner’s fields. Where more flat land is available, however, houses are clustered together in a group at the center of the village’s agricultural land. Larger villages may have a community temple, a community mill, and religious monuments called *stūpas* and *chorten*. There are few proper roads, and villages are connected by tracks and trails. Goods are transported by pack animals or on the backs of the people.

Sherpa houses have two stories and are built of stone. The roofs are flat and usually made of wood, weighted down by heavy stones. The lower level is used to house livestock, fodder, food, and firewood, while the upper story holds the living quarters. The floor of this room is wooden, covered with carpets and rugs. The hearth is placed at the side of the room. It contains a simple woodstove used for cooking that also provides heat. Drawers and shelves line the walls and are used to store utensils, bedding, and personal effects. There is no furniture; platforms and benches are used for sitting and sleeping. One corner of the room holds a latrine and refuse-dump that opens into the stables below. A small area of the house is set aside for an altar. Here, one finds icons of the Buddha and various bodhisattvas and pictures of the Dalai Lāmā, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists. Incense and butter lamps are kept burning before the shrine.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Sherpa society is divided into a number of exogamous clans called *ru*. A person is required to marry outside his or her clan, but beyond this the clan is of little significance in Sherpa social organization. Although there is no ranking of individual clans, they fall into two endogamous groups, the *khadeu* and *khamendeu*. The former are of higher status and anyone marrying into the lower group loses this standing.

Sherpas choose their own marriage partners. The marriage process is a lengthy one that may stretch over several years. Following a betrothal, the boy has the right to sleep with his fiancée in her parents’ house. This arrangement may continue for several years, during which the relationship may be broken off. Once the respective families feel that the marriage will be successful, a ceremony is carried out that formally confirms the marriage negotiations. Several months or even years may pass again before the wedding date is fixed. For the wedding ceremony (*zendi*), the boy’s family dress in their best clothes and go in procession to the girl’s house. There, they are entertained with food and drink and are expected to dance and sing in return. They visit houses of relatives, where the procedure is repeated. The feasting lasts for a day and a night, before the party returns home with the bride. The actual marriage is solemnized by putting a mark of butter on the forehead of the bride and groom. The bride is given a dowry by family and friends that usually consists of rugs, woolen carpets, yak-wool mats, and even cattle.

Sherpa families are small by South Asian standards. The nuclear family is the norm in Sherpa society, with households consisting of parents and their unmarried children. A newly married son is supposed to receive a house on completion of the marriage. Interestingly, a man does not return home until he has a child; he lives with his in-laws until such time as his wife gives birth. Most marriages are monogamous, although fraternal polyandry is permitted and is even considered to be prestigious. According to this practice, two brothers marry the same woman. Divorce is quite frequent among the Sherpas.

## 11 CLOTHING

Sherpa dress is similar to that worn by Tibetans. Both men and women wear a long inner shirt over a pant-like garment, both made out of wool. Over this, they wear a thick, coarse, wrap-around robe (*bakhu*) that reaches to below the knees and fastens at the side. A sash is belted around the waist. Both males and females wear high, woolen boots with hide soles. The uppers are colored maroon, red, and green (or blue), and the boots are tied on with colored garters. An unusual feature of women’s dress are the multicolored striped aprons worn to cover the front and back of the bodies below the waist. Both married and unmarried women wear the rear apron, while the front apron is worn only by married women. Various ornaments and a distinctive cap called a *shyamahu* complete the dress of the Sherpa woman.

Traditional Sherpa dress is rapidly disappearing among Sherpa men. With the reduction in the availability of wool and woolen garments from Tibet, it is increasingly difficult to replace worn-out woolen clothing. Many younger men who have worked for mountaineering expeditions have acquired high-altitude clothing of Western manufacture. Older men, however, often have to make do with cotton clothing that is ill-suited to the cold climate of Sherpa country.

## 12 FOOD

The Sherpa diet is dominated by starchy foods, supplemented by vegetables, spices, and occasionally meat. In addition, Tibetan tea (tea served with salt and butter) is taken at all meals and throughout the day. A typical breakfast consists of Tibetan tea and several bowls of gruel made by adding *tsampa*, a roasted flour, to water, tea, or milk. Lunch is eaten in the late morn-

ing and may include boiled potatoes that are dipped in ground spices before being eaten. Sometimes a stiff dough made from a mixture of grains (*sen*) is eaten with a thin sauce made from spices and vegetables, or meat if it is available. A typical dinner is a stew (*shakpa*) consisting of balls of dough, potatoes, and vegetables cooked in spices, butter or animal fat, and water, and thickened with flour. Dairy products, especially butter and curds, are important in the Sherpa diet.

Sherpas eat meat, although they will not kill animals themselves in keeping with Buddhist beliefs. Meat and rice are special foods, eaten on special occasions. Often these foods are available only to the more affluent Sherpas.

A favorite beverage of the Sherpas is *chāng*, a beer made from maize, millet, or other grains. This is consumed not only at meals, but also at most social and festive occasions. It has considerable symbolic and ritual significance in Sherpa society. An anthropologist studying food among the Sherpa collected over 50 different names for *chāng*, depending on the context in which it is used. For instance, *lāmās* drink *chachang* when they put on a costume, but the beer they drink when they take it off is called *silchang*.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Although primary schools are slowly being introduced into Sherpa areas, few Sherpas have any formal schooling. As might be expected, literacy rates are low, as are parental expectations for their children. According to the census of 2001, the adult literacy rate (aged 15 years and above) of Sherpas is 37.4% (for women, this figure is in the low 20 percentiles) and attainment of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) and above (16 years and above) is only 5%, which is very low in comparison with other ethnic and caste groups of Nepal (e.g. Kayastha [50.2%], Newar [24.7%], and Thakali [16.1%]).

The first modern schools were only introduced in the Sherpa areas in the 1960s, with the help of Sir Edmund Hillary, the New Zealander who, in the company of Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, became the first man to climb Mount Everest in 1953, and who devoted much of the remainder of his life to the welfare of the Sherpas. Prior to that, education was only available in the monasteries and was essentially Buddhist in nature.

The government school system in the Sherpa area is rather backward and consists mostly of primary schools. In recent decades, small schools have been established in a number of villages, but they are in a miserable condition: leaking or partly missing roofs; missing doors and windows or windows without panes; clay soil floors; missing or insufficient tables, chairs and benches; no drinking water and sanitary facilities; no electricity; no blackboards; insufficient teaching materials; curricula totally strange to Sherpa culture; insufficiently educated and badly paid teachers who usually don't speak the mother tongue of the children; no accommodations for teachers; and poor school participation, especially of girls. The poor and often irregular school attendance can be explained by many reasons—lack of understanding by parents who themselves did not have the chance to go to school; feelings against the teachers in general and especially toward those coming from far away villages and belonging to other population groups; the need for the children to work at home and in the fields; poor conditions of the school building and the resulting inefficiency of the classes; and missing perspectives after finishing school (hardly any chance to join secondary schools; no chances in

the administration or other government services dominated by Hindus). As it is typical for rural Nepal, Sherpa girls, too, are rarely sent to school. This is partly caused by the generally low social status of Nepali women that has been legally sanctioned by laws based on Hindu values, making women second-class citizens and depriving them of economic, property, and inheritance rights.

There are, however, organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) whose objectives are to promote education among the Sherpas. For instance, the Sherpa Association of Nepal (SAN) lobbies the Nepali government for reserved seats in government jobs for Sherpa candidates, scholarship for education of Sherpa students, and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years for Sherpa children. Some NGOs, such as The Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation of Canada and The Himalayan Trust, offer scholarships specifically for Sherpa students.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Tibetan tradition of religious dance-dramas, known as *'cham*, can be seen in the Mani Rimdu festivals of the Sherpas. Elaborately choreographed, with monks dressed up in costumes and masks, the Mani Rimdu dances enact the triumph of Buddhism over the demons of the Bon religion. The temple orchestras that accompany these dramas are unique in the makeup of their instruments, which include drums, cymbals, handbells, conch shells, 10-foot telescopic horns, large oboes, and flutes made from human thighbones. The distinctive chant used by monks in their religious observances is also in the tradition of Tibetan sacred music.

### **15 WORK**

Traditional Sherpa economic activities were centered on agriculture and trade with Tibet. Now, largely as a result of Trans-Himalayan trade having dried up as a result of the Chinese government's policies, agriculture is the mainstay of the Sherpa population. At lower elevations, such as in Solu-Khumbu, where conditions allow cultivation, Sherpas raise maize, barley, buckwheat, and vegetables. Potatoes were introduced to the Sherpas only 80 years ago but have now become the mainstay of their diet. In Khumbu, with its higher altitudes, farming gives way to pastoralism. Khumbu Sherpas raise cattle and the yak (*Poëphagus grunniens*), a bovine-like animal that does well at higher elevations. Hybrids of domestic cattle and the yak are known as *dzo* (male) and *dzum* (female) and play an important role in the economy. Yaks provide wool and milk by-products such as butter, which are sold or bartered for grain. Dzo are used as pack animals and are easily trained to the plough.

Despite the formidable physical barrier posed by the Himalayas, trade between Nepal and Tibet is of considerable historical importance in the region. Sherpas, because of their location and ability to handle high altitudes, have traditionally played a major role in the trade that moves through Nangpa La and other passes across the mountains. Salt, sheep's wool, meat, and yak are still brought from Tibet into Nepal, in exchange for food grains, rice, butter, and manufactured goods. Namche Bazaar, located at an elevation of 3,480 m (11,418 ft), is the main trading center on the route to Tibet.

Sherpas were first used as high-altitude porters in 1907, but it was Tenzing Norgay, Sir Edmund Hillary's companion on the first ascent of Everest in 1953, who was to bring the Sherpas to the attention of the world. Their role as porters and guides

on mountain-climbing and trekking expeditions has brought the Sherpas a new source of income and, for some Sherpas, a comfortable living. There are Sherpas who have emerged as world-class mountaineers in their own right.

## 16 SPORTS

Sherpas enjoy playing cards and gambling with dice. Wrestling and horseplay is popular among the young of both sexes.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Sherpa entertainment and recreation is largely limited to their traditional pastimes of singing, dancing, and drinking beer.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Sherpas rely on the artisan castes to provide the material necessities of life. Some Sherpas have developed skills in religious painting and in liturgical (religious) chanting. The Sherpas have a tradition of indigenous folk songs and dancing.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are social problems that originate within Sherpa society itself. There is a high incidence of alcoholism, for instance, and the related medical problems that go with it. Similarly, although the situation is beginning to change, the lack of education among the Sherpas reflects to a large extent their isolation and the low level of development in Nepal as a whole. Perhaps the single greatest threat to traditional Sherpa society has been the coming of the tourist. Tourism in Sherpa country has been a double-edged sword. Its economic benefits helped compensate for the loss of the Tibetan trade in the 1950s; it helped spur development in the Khumbu region; and it provided many Sherpas with wealth far beyond their highest expectations. But this has occurred at a cost that goes far beyond the serious environmental degradation associated with tourism. Inflation, increasing dependence on a tourist-based economy, problems with drug-running, and the flight of wealthy Sherpas to Kathmandu are but symptomatic of broader changes in Sherpa society. How well the Sherpas adjust to these changes will determine the nature of the Sherpa identity they leave for future generations.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Despite a generally low social status reflecting the influence of Hindu society, Sherpa women have become central to preserving centuries-old customs and traditions of Sherpa culture. In traditional Sherpa society, women assume the role of head of household for up to 10 months of the year while their husbands are away working as porters for foreigners. In addition to rearing the children, women are often left to farm and tend the livestock.

Social position is influenced by Hindu values. Thus, inheritance, ownership of property, and access (or the lack thereof) to education mirrors the situation of women in Hinduism. In recent years, women have tended to break the male monopoly on climbing. Thus, in 2000, Lhakpa Sherpa, from the village of Sankhuwasabha, scaled Everest in a historic all-woman Sherpa expedition and has since successfully climbed Everest several times. However, only a few Sherpas—men or women—benefit from working with as porters or guides with foreign tourists (a top Sherpa guide can earn up to \$10,000 per expedition).

Generally, however, Sherpa women suffer from the poverty, illiteracy, poor education, overwork, and low socio-economic standing that is the lot of most women in South Asia.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# SIKHS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SEEKS

**LOCATION:** India (Punjab state)

**POPULATION:** 19,215,730 (Census of India, 2001)

**LANGUAGE:** Punjabi

**RELIGION:** Sikhism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Sikhs are members of a religion that has its origins on the plains of the Punjab in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. Founded by Nanak (AD 1469–1538) at the very end of the 15th century AD, Sikhism was a branch of the Hindu *bhakti* (devotional) movement that combined aspects of Hindu religious thinking with elements of Islam, in particular Sūfi mysticism. The word *Sikh* comes from the Sanskrit word for “disciple” (*sisya*), the Sikhs being disciples of Nanak and the nine other Sikh *gurus* (teachers) who followed him.

Although in its early years Sikhism was nonviolent in nature, the history of the Sikhs after Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and last guru, is one of continual strife and bloodshed. The 18th century saw the Sikhs in continual conflict with the Mughals in northern India, with bloody uprisings in the Punjab met with equal ferocity by Muslim imperial forces. Sikhs faced invasions by the Persian ruler Nadir Shah in 1738–39 and the Afghans between 1747 and 1769. In the power vacuum following these conflicts, Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) created a powerful Sikh state in the Punjab that extended from the Sutlej River to Kashmir. This marks the apex of Sikh power and prestige in northern India.

Following Ranjit Singh’s death, the Sikh kingdom rapidly disintegrated, and the Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849. After almost a hundred years of relative stability, the Punjab again erupted into violence when British India was partitioned in 1947. Some 2.5 million Sikhs fled western areas of the Punjab that were to become part of Pakistan and settled in India. The communal strife that accompanied the creation of the independent states of India and Pakistan pitted Hindu and Sikh against Muslim, and an estimated 1 million people were killed attempting to cross the borders of the newly formed countries.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Some 19.2 million people, or 1.9% of India’s population, are Sikh. Sikhs (there are estimated to be c. 23 million world-wide) are concentrated mostly in and around the Indian state of the Punjab, in the northwest of the country. The general location of this homeland reflects the historical association of the Sikhs with the Punjab, but the political outlines of the Indian state of Punjab have come about relatively recently. The Punjab, literally meaning “Land of the Five Rivers,” refers to the fertile plains in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent drained by the five great tributaries of the Indus River—the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej. This region was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947, with Sikhs migrating to the Indian Punjab, or “East Punjab” from Pakistani territory. Agitation over the next two decades by the Sikhs, who regarded themselves as culturally quite distinct from their Hindu neighbors, caused

the Punjab State of India to be divided in two in 1966 by the central government. The northwestern area was separated to create a smaller Punjab State in which Sikhs formed a majority, and the rest became Haryana State. Sizeable communities of Sikhs, i.e. greater than 200,000 people, are found in the Indian states of Haryana, Rājasthān, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttaranchal, and Jammu and Kashmir.

The land occupied by the Sikhs today is but a remnant of their former homeland (the present Punjab State in India retains only 14% the size of the original, undivided Punjab territory). It is located on the Indo-Gangetic divide, an area of flat alluvial plains that separate the drainage systems of the Indus and Ganges rivers. Western areas are drained by upper courses of the Beas and Sutlej rivers, but most of the “Land of the Five Rivers” now lies in Pakistan. The region has fertile soils, and agriculture, based on canal and well irrigation, is extremely productive. Punjab is a major producer of wheat and other grains and is considered the “bread-basket” of India. Sikh farmers are regarded as among the best in India.

Sikhs are found in all the major cities of India, although their largest concentration is in Delhi. Sikhs have also migrated to East Africa, the United Kingdom, North America, and commercial centers of Asia, such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The language of the Sikh religion, as well as of Sikh culture, is Punjabi. A member of the Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family, Punjabi is written in the Gurmukhi script. This was developed during the 16th century by Angad, the second Sikh guru, for the purpose of recording the scriptures of the Sikhs.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Sikhism, as a recent, monotheistic religion with a relatively complete recorded history, lacks the elaborate mythology and legend that characterize some other South Asian religions. However, a body of *sakhis* (stories) has grown up recounting the supposed miracles performed by the gurus. The “Hundred Stories” (*Sau Sakhi*) is a collection of prophecies ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh heroes are the gurus who died for their beliefs, and Sikh temples (*gurdwaras*) often have paintings or murals of the two gurus who were martyred by the Muslims. Sikhs, who are Sikh by religion, are also Punjabi in culture, and they share in the folklore and traditions of the Punjab region.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

All Sikhs are united by the common bond of religion, in particular their reverence for the Ten Gurus and the teachings that are set out in the sacred scriptures.

Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and its first guru, was born into a Hindu caste in a village in the Punjab. At the age of 30, he underwent a revelation that led him to commence his ministry among the peoples of the region. In his teachings, he embraced the concept of one God, the lack of any need for priests or ceremonial rituals, a classless society, and the equality of women. He worshiped at both Hindu and Muslim holy places and is even said to have gone on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

At Guru Nanak's death, he was succeeded by Angad (1538–1552), who was followed by Amardas (1469–1574). Amardas appointed his own son-in-law, Ramdas (1534–1581), to succeed him and from this time, all the remaining gurus came from the same family. The fifth guru, Arjun Mal (1563–1606), son of Ramdas, began the compilation of the *Adi Granth*, the sacred book of the Sikhs, in 1604. This was a collection of verse containing the writings of the earlier Sikh Gurus, as well as that of Hindu and Muslim saints from northern India. This eventually led to Arjun Mal's death. He was ordered by the Mughal emperor Jehangir to remove all passages of the Granth that contradicted orthodox Muslim belief. Arjun Mal refused and was tortured to death in 1606.

The martyrdom of the fifth guru saw the beginning of the Sikh tradition of militarism. Hargobind (1595–1645), Arjun Mal's son, organized the Sikhs into a military brotherhood and often came into conflict with the ruling powers in northwestern India. Although the next two gurus, Har Rai (1630–1661) and Har Krishnan (1656–1664) are of minor importance, the ninth guru, Tegh Bahadur (1622–1675), was imprisoned and executed by the emperor Aurangzeb.

Gobind Singh, Tegh Bahadur's son, succeeded his father at a young age, becoming the tenth and one of the most important of the Sikh gurus. He announced that there were to be no more gurus after him because the Sikhs had an eternal guru in their scripture (the *Adi Granth*, also called the *Guru Granth Sahib*). But, as important, he was also responsible for converting the formerly pacifist Sikh religion into a powerful military and political movement. In 1699, he formed the *Khalsa* (the "Pure"), a fighting fraternity of Sikhs who all took the surname "Singh" ("Lion"). He required the *Khalsa* to wear their hair long and keep their beards unshaven and also to carry a sword on their person. The *Khalsa* were forbidden to smoke or drink alcohol. These, and other rules established by Gobind Singh, form part of the Sikh religion today.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. There is only one God, who is the Creator of the universe and all things in it. Humans alone in the universe have the ability to enter into a voluntary relationship of love with God. However, attachment to the physical world (*maya*) leads to rebirth (*samsara*) as a result of past actions (*karma*). The only way to achieve liberation (*mukti*) is to become God-conscious and God-filled (*gurmukh*). This can be achieved by following the path set out by the Gurus and the scriptures.

Worship, either at home or in the temple, is central to the Sikh community. At the gurdwara, Sikhs bow before the Granth with great reverence. The holy book is placed on a special altar, it is offered flowers, and a temple attendant fans it day and night. On special occasions it is carried in procession, accompanied by the singing of sacred songs. Gurdwaras are more than just places of worship, for they have meeting rooms, and kitchens (*langar*) for providing free food. Surmounting the building is a flag-staff flying a triangular yellow flag bearing the symbol of Sikhism, a quoit with a dagger in the center and two swords crossing beneath. Gurdwaras are found wherever there are Sikh communities, even outside of India. However, the Golden Temple at Amritsar in the Punjab is the most sacred site in the Sikh religion. It was the storming of the Golden Temple by the Indian Army in 1984 in an attempt to dislodge Sikhs opposing the central government that led to the assassination of India's then prime minister, Indira Gandhi.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In the 16th century, Guru Amardas initiated the custom of assembling the Sikhs at the time of three important Hindu festivals (Vaisakhi, Divali, and Holi). His purpose was to wean them away from Hinduism, and today these occasions continue to be celebrated as Sikh festivals (*melas*). Vaisakhi, which falls in the middle of April, marks the beginning of the New Year in the Punjab. It is of particular significance in Amritsar, the traditional gathering place of the Sikhs, where it remains an important religious, political, and social occasion. Divali, the Festival of Lights for the Hindus, has much the same meaning for the Sikhs. Gurdwaras are decorated with oil lamps or electric lights, fireworks displays may be held, and small children receive presents. Holi, the spring festival of the Hindus, was originally a time for the Sikhs to gather and undertake military exercises. Today, the principal location of the Sikh Holi is Anandpur, where a fair is held, pilgrims gather, and the flags of all the local gurdwaras are taken out in procession.

The Sikhs also observe a number of *gurpurbs*, holidays related to events in the lives of the gurus. Many of these are local affairs, but three are celebrated worldwide: the birthdays of Guru Nanak (November) and Guru Gobind Singh (December) and the martyrdom of the fifth guru, Arjun Mal (May–June). At these times, the Granth is taken out in procession in the streets of the village or city, bands and speakers are arranged for entertainment, and free food is distributed. A complete reading of the Granth, which takes about 48 hours, is often held at this time.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a boy or a girl is equally welcome among the Sikhs. After a baby is born, the entire family visits the gurdwara with traditional offerings of money, sweets, and a *rumala*, a piece of brocade or silk for the Granth. After readings from the Granth, the book will be opened at random, and the first word on the left-hand page is read aloud to the parents. The parents will then choose a name beginning with the first letter of the word. The *granthi*, the scripture reader, then announces the chosen name to the congregation, adding Singh ("Lion") after a boy's name and Kaur ("Princess") after a girl's.

In a strict sense, Sikhs are not born Sikhs but are baptized into the religion. (Converts to Sikhism in the West are known as *gora* Sikhs, or "white" Sikhs). Initiation rites are the same for Sikhs and non-Sikhs. Initiates should be over 14 years of age and in possession of the five "Ks" of Sikhism. These are the five symbols Guru Gobind Singh instructed his *Khalsa* to wear: uncut hair (*kesa*), a comb in the hair (*kanga*), a steel bracelet (*kara*), a sword (*kirpan*), and shorts (*kachha*). The ceremony includes readings from the Granth, an explanation of the principles of the Sikh faith, and the ritual preparation of *amrit* (nectar or sugar water), which is given to the initiates. A newcomer to Sikhism is given a Sikh name in the same manner as a child.

Sikhs cremate their dead, although burial is permissible. Ashes are usually placed in the nearest river. Death rituals are a family affair with the body being washed by members of the family, who ensure it is wearing the five symbols of the Sikh faith. Prayers may be offered in the gurdwara and, when the mourners return home, it is customary for a complete reading of the Granth to occur. The final act is the sharing of a meal by family and mourners, symbolizing the continuity of life and



normal social activities in the face of death. Sikhs do not build funeral monuments.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The proper form of address for Sikhs is Sardar (Mr.) or Sardarni (Mrs.). If one does not know a man's name, he is addressed as Sardarji, or Sardar Sahib. Among the peasantry and the working class, a man is usually referred to as Bhaiji, or Bhai Sahib (Brother) and a woman as Bibiji (Mistress), or Bhainji (Sister). The title Giani is used for a scholar or a theologian.

Two forms of greetings are traditional among the Sikhs. In the more common one, a Sikh joins the palms of his or her hands and says "Sat Sri Akal" ("God is Truth"). The second form is practiced by men, especially when addressing large gatherings. The palms are joined and the man says "Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa" ("The Sikhs are the Chosen of God"). The response to this is "Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh" ("God be Victorious").

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most Sikhs in the Punjab live in comfortable homes, built around a central courtyard. All villages in the Punjab are electrified, and most households have radios and televisions. Refrigerators and other conveniences of modern living are available to those who can afford them. Road and rail transportation facilities in the region are excellent.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Guru Nanak rejected the caste system of the Hindus. Features of the Sikh religion, such as the common surnames, the common kitchen, and the absence of priests, were intended to remove the distinctions of caste. Yet, Sikh converts were drawn from local Hindu castes, such as the Jats, and caste (*jat* or *zāt*) has not been completely eliminated from the Sikh community. Sikhs will eat together and worship together, but marriages are still usually arranged among the same subgroup or caste, such as Jat, Arora, or Ramgarhia.

Among Sikhs, marriage is not so much an arrangement as it is a joint decision based on considerations like the desires of the couple, caste, social status, and economic considerations. The Sikh family structure is based on the extended family, so the compatibility of the bride with her potential in-laws is a concern. Above all, however, a Sikh should marry a Sikh. The bride and groom may meet each other before the wedding but never alone; Sikhs disapprove of dating. An engagement may occur, but this is not necessary. Child marriage has always been shunned by the Sikhs. The legal age for marriage in India is 18 for women and 21 for men, and Sikhs generally adhere to this practice. Sikhism does not condone the taking or giving of a dowry.

The marriage ceremony is usually held before sunrise. It takes place in the bride's village and can occur anywhere, as long as the Granth is present. The ceremony is accompanied by the chanting of hymns that give advice on marriage, and readings from the Granth. The bride and groom give their consent to the union by bowing towards the Granth. The bride's father ties the end of his daughter's scarf to one worn by the groom, and the couple, led by the groom, circles the Granth four times. At the last circling, flower petals may be thrown. Following the marriage ceremony and further celebrations at the bride's home, the marriage party leaves for the groom's home where



the bride begins her new life. Sikhism does not recognize divorce and has no restrictions against widow remarriage.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional dress for the Sikh is tight-legged trousers, covered by a long shirt (*kurtā*) worn hanging down outside the trousers. This is accompanied by a turban, most commonly the peaked "Patiala" style, the most distinctive item of a male Sikh's clothes. The turban, which is a symbol of religious and social identity, may be of any color. White is often worn at a time of mourning, pink at weddings, and yellow at the spring Basant festival when the mustard crop is flowering. The hair is uncut, tied into a topknot under the turban, and the beard is worn full. Traditional Sikh dress is completed by the remainder of the five "Ks," the comb, the bracelet, the sword, and the shorts. (The wearing of traditional Sikh dress has sometimes raised legal issues in the West, for instance, in countries and states that have motorcycle helmet laws or laws against carrying concealed weapons.)

Sikh women wear the trousers and tunic (*salwar-kamiz*) that is usually associated with Muslims but that is really the regional dress of the Punjab. Along with this, they wear a scarf (*dupattā*) over their shoulders or around their heads.

Western-style dress (pants, shirts, and suits) has become common among men, although the turban is still worn with it. Women have taken to wearing the Indian *sārī*, although only the elites in large cities have adopted modern women's styles of clothing.

## 12 FOOD

The staple diet of the Sikhs is typical of the Punjab—wheat, buffalo milk, and milk products. A typical meal consists of flat bread (*roti*) made from wheat or maize, a cup of lentils or other pulses (*dāl*), and hot tea or buttermilk. In winter, vegetables made from mustard or other greens and served with butter may be added. Though Sikhs are nonvegetarian and are particularly fond of goat meat, the cost of meat means it is only eaten on special occasions. Sikhs are forbidden to eat *halal* meat, that is, meat from an animal whose throat is ritually cut (Muslims can only eat *halal* meat). Sikhs share the Hindu view on eating beef, and many devout Sikhs will not eat meat, fish, or eggs.

Most Sikhs observe the prescribed taboo on tobacco, but not on liquor. Opium and hashish (*bhang*) are also widely used in rural areas.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education, both traditional and modern, has come to be an important aspect of Sikhism. One of the aims of the Singh Sabha, an organization founded in the late 1800s, was to promote education. The Singh Sabha opened hundreds of schools and a college in Amritsar where Sikh religion and Khalsa traditions were included in the curriculum. The Sikh Educational Conferences, meeting annually since 1908, are responsible for promoting education in the community.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Sikhs have their own traditions of music, painting, and architecture. The sacred music of the Sikhs is called *Kirtan*, which means singing the praises of God in melody and rhythm. The gurus based their compositions on classical Indian music, combined with elements of popular Punjabi folk tunes. Importance is placed on vocal music, although hymns are accompanied by the drum, the harmonium, and other musical instruments. Although there is no distinct Sikh school of painting, Sikh artists have been part of the Pahari, Kangra, and other traditions of painting that have flourished in northwestern India. A Sikh tradition of portrait painting flourished for a short while under the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Sikh architecture, as seen in the gurdwaras, represents a combination of Mughal and Hindu styles, developed in a uniquely Sikh manner.

Beyond their own traditions of sacred literature, Sikhs have also made important contributions to modern Punjabi literature. Sikh writers include Vir Singh, Nanak Singh, and, more recently, the poets Purana Singh, Amrita Pritam, and Prabhjot Kaur. Khushwant Singh, a noted author and journalist, has devoted much of his life to the study of Sikh culture.

## 15 WORK

The majority of Sikhs are peasant farmers living in hamlets and villages scattered across the Punjab plains. It was the Sikhs and other peasant farmers in the Punjab who were largely responsible for the success of the Green Revolution in India during the 1960s, when India went from “famine to plenty, from humiliation to dignity.” The Green Revolution tripled food production, and the Punjab became known as the “breadbasket of India,” with Sikh farmers adapting their farming methods to more mechanized techniques, using high-yielding hybrid seeds, the application of fertilizer, and irrigation. One consequence of this was an increase in the material wealth of the Sikhs—the

Punjab had the highest per capita income of any state in India during the 1960s. However, many Sikhs are now leaving the land. India’s 2001 Census found that only 39% of the working population of Punjab State was employed in agro-business.

There is a strong martial tradition among the Sikhs dating to the formation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The fighting qualities of the Sikhs were acknowledged by the British after the Anglo-Sikh wars of the 19th century when the British incorporated the Khalsa regiments into their fighting forces. The Sikh regiments remained loyal to the British during the 1857 sepoy uprising and saw distinguished service during the two world wars of the 20th century. At this time, Sikhs made up 20% of the British Indian Army, though they accounted for only 2% of the Indian population. The tradition of military service continues today in the police and armed forces, in which Sikhs have reached the highest officer ranks. Today, Sikhs make up an element in India’s armed forces, which is out of all proportion to their population in the country.

Sikhs have also achieved high office in politics and government service. Swaran Singh was appointed to Prime Minister Jawarharlal Nehru’s cabinet after Independence and served in various ministerial capacities in several Indian governments. Manmohan Singh, the prime minister in 2008, was finance minister in the Union (central) government from 1991 to 1996, and Giani Zail Singh was president of India from 1982–87.

Manmohan Singh was born in the Punjab in 1932. He is considered one of the most influential figures in India’s recent history, mainly because of the economic liberalization he had initiated in 1991 when he was finance minister under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Manmohan Singh, as of 2008, headed a rather weak government formed by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), a coalition of 12 political parties led by the Indian Congress, but which only retained power with the support of the Left Front (which was not a part of the coalition), a group of Indian Communist parties. This caused problems for the prime minister. Since the 1980s, India has been under a nuclear trade embargo by the United States, primarily because it is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The United States has tended to favor General Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan as a result of their assistance in the War on Terror. In early 2006, however, President George W. Bush of the United States visited India and negotiated a treaty, highly favorable to India, which would allow for U.S. nuclear trade with India and cooperation in the areas of domestic nuclear development. Ratification of this treaty by the Indian Parliament, was blocked by the Left Front, which threatened to withdraw its support from the government if the UPA were to bring the treaty to a vote. But Manmohan Singh persuaded the Samajwadi Party (SP), a former adversary based in the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh, to back it over the nuclear deal. So as of 2008, the treaty might be salvaged after all.

## 16 SPORTS

There are no sports associated specifically with the Sikh religion. However, Sikhs, who as a group are of impressive physical stature and among the more imposing of the peoples of India, have excelled in the sports arena. Bishen Singh Bedi, the Test (international) cricketer, and Balbir Singh, the Indian field hockey player, are just two of the many Sikhs who have achieved national and international honors in Indian sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are no forms of entertainment and recreation associated specifically with Sikhs, although they enjoy Punjabi games, folk songs, and dances. In keeping with the Sikh martial tradition, sword-play is a popular pastime among men. Sikhs are also fond of telling jokes about themselves.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

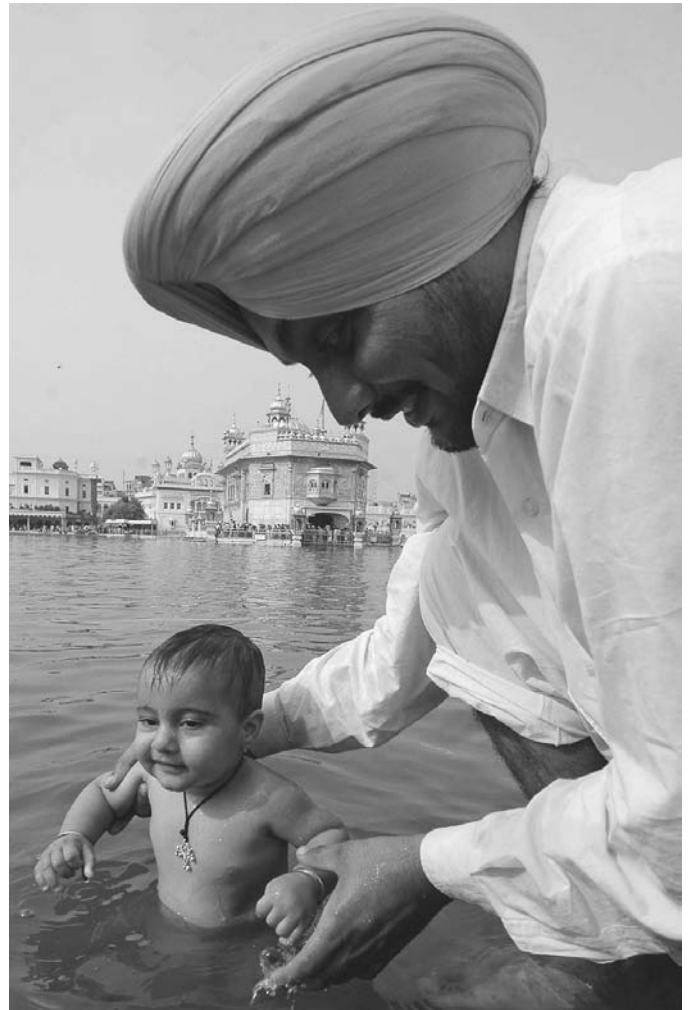
Among the arts and crafts for which Sikhs are known is hand embroidery work on cloth known as *Phulkari*. The Rumala offered to the gurdwara on the occasion of a birth is a piece of brocade or silk embroidered with religious symbols and lettering that is used to decorate the Guru Grant Sahib. In Amritsar there is a tradition of ivory-carving, with images of Hindu deities, Sikh portraits, and replicas of the Golden Temple being offered to the pilgrim visiting the city.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A major problem that the Sikh community faced in the recent past was that of Sikh separatism. Despite the creation in 1966 of a Punjabi-speaking state with a Sikh majority, a section of the Sikh community continued to demand a greater degree of autonomy. The Akali Dal, a religious movement originally founded in 1920 to gain control of the community's gurdwaras but that has since developed into a political party, set out its demands in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973. Implicit in this resolution was the idea that the Sikhs were a nation separate from the Hindus, and this eventually led to extremist demands for an independent Sikh state of "Khalistan."

For over 20 years, the Punjab was the scene of a struggle between Sikh militants and the central Indian government, with moderates from both sides caught in the deadly crossfire. In the 1970s and 80s, a movement, which was probably not supported by most Punjabis, began in the Punjab to secede from the Indian Union and create a separate, sovereign Sikh state of "Khalistan." Allegedly supported by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the movement reached its peak during mid 1980s under Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. It then slowly ebbed, primarily due to the loss of popular support. The movement also hindered economic investment, became increasingly militant, and threw Punjab into a state of anarchy with increased levels of terrorism. The movement resulted in counter-terrorism operations conducted by the Indian Army and the Punjab Police which caused the deaths of thousands of innocent Sikhs according to Human Rights Watch. Politicians and leaders were assassinated, the lives of common people were disrupted by terrorism, and hundreds—if not thousands of Sikhs were murdered. In Operation Blue Star, the Indian Army was sent to attack the Golden Temple in Amritsar to dislodge the followers of Bindranwale, the extremist Sikh religious leader who opposed the government in Delhi. This violation of the most sacred of Sikh holy places led directly to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh security guards. In reprisal for her death, hundreds of Sikhs were killed by Hindus in Delhi and other northern cities. After the bombing of Air India Flight 182, an alleged attack by Sikh separatists that claimed the lives of 329 Canadian civilians over the Irish Sea in 1985, support for Khalistan lessened considerably.

However, the anti-Sikh riots across Northern India in 1984 had repercussions in Punjab State. Thousands of innocent Hindus and Sikhs were killed by extremists of both religions,



*An Indian Sikh devotee dips his son in the holy waters of the Golden Temple in Amritsar on the occasion of Bandi Chhor Divas. Bandi Chhor Divas commemorates the return of the sixth guru to the holy city of Amritsar after his release from detention. (Narinder Nanu/AFP/Getty Images)*

trains were attacked, and people were shot after being pulled from buses. In 1987, 32 Hindus were pulled out of a bus and shot, near Lalru in Punjab by Sikh militants. According to Human Rights Watch, "In the beginning of the 1980s, Sikh separatists in Punjab committed serious human rights abuses, including the massacre of civilians, attacks upon non-Sikhs in the state, and indiscriminate bomb attacks in crowded places." Indira Gandhi's son, Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded his mother as India's prime minister, tried unsuccessfully to bring peace to the Punjab. In 1985 an Accord was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, president of the Akali Dal, yielding to many of the Sikhs' demands (e.g. transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab as its state's capital), but Longowal was assassinated in 1985. Few of the Accord's terms were implemented by New Delhi. Between 1987 and 1991, Punjab was placed under the president's rule and was governed from the center. Elections were eventually held in 1992 but the voter turnout at 24% was very poor. A new Congress (I) government was formed, and it gave the police chief of the state K. P. S. Gill a free hand to quell the insurgency. Gill was ruthless against the insurgents, and his methods severely weakened the insurgency

movement. However, Gill's reign is also regarded as one of the bloodiest in the history of the country: thousands of innocents were killed in fake encounters and countless disappeared from their homes. The Punjab police were also accused of crimes, such as rape and torture of women and children, according to several reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Life in the Punjab is slowly returning to normal. Sikhs and Hindus have lived side by side for almost 500 years, and many deplore the violent events of the last several decades. But a lasting solution to the Punjab problem seems to depend on at least two fundamental issues: Sikh recognition that no Indian government could ever grant independence to such a strategically important region, and New Delhi's willingness to resolve legitimate grievances of the Sikhs. The third and, perhaps, unknown factor in this equation remains the Sikh religion itself.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Although the Sikh gurus preached gender equality, in actual fact in Sikh society women are treated very much as they are by Hindus and Sikh women face many of the same issues as are found in Hindu society. Thus, Sikh families have a preference for male children and boys tend to be treated much better than girls. Female infanticide and sex selective abortions are a problem and the Census of India 2001 shows that the Sikh community has the lowest ratio of females to males of any religious community in India. The ratio of men and women in Punjab is so out of balance that young, light-skinned girls from poor areas such as Nepal are being brought to the Punjab where they are sold as wives to wealthy peasant farmers.

Women cannot participate in *Panj Piaray* and other Sikh rituals and the way they are treated by men certainly belies their theoretical "equality." Only in 2005 did the religious promotion and affairs committee of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)—the governing body for Sikh shrines—decide that Sikh women would be allowed to perform *kirtan* (singing hymns) and *palki sewa* (carrying the Sikh holy book Guru Granth Sahib in a palanquin) on religious occasions, a decision that caused an outcry in the Sikh community.

It is not uncommon for Sikh women to be subjected to physical and sexual abuse by their husbands, while rape, torture, and killings—committed by both militants and Indian security forces—was a problem during the recent "troubles" in the Punjab.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# SINDHIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SIN-deez

**LOCATION:** Pakistan (Sind province)

**POPULATION:** 35 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Sindhi

**RELIGION:** Islam (majority Sunnī Muslim)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Sindhis are inhabitants of Sind (or Sindh), the region of arid plains and deserts located along the lower course of the Indus River as it flows on its journey from the Himalayas to the Arabian Sea. Both the terms Sindhi and Sind are derived from "Sindhu," the ancient name of the Indus. Modern Sindhis are descendants of the many peoples who have settled in the area from earliest times.

The Indus is central to the history of the Sindhis. It was along this river that the Harappan (or Indus Valley) civilization developed during the 3rd millennium BC. Usually identified with Dravidian peoples, this sophisticated urban culture matched the achievements of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. The Harappans left an archeological record of contemporary life in Sind, but we know less of the centuries following their decline. From around 1700 BC onward, successive waves of Aryan invaders entered the Indian subcontinent from the northwest. The earliest of these nomadic tribes settled in the Punjab, where the outlines of Hindu Vedic religion and society emerged. This was quite different from urban Harappan culture. It was nonurban, based on the herding of cattle; its religion was dominated by male deities and sacrificial ritual; and its society was organized into a hierarchy of classes (castes), with the Aryans at the top and local non-Aryan peoples at the lowest levels. As the Aryans pressed steadily southward along the Indus Valley, their culture replaced that of the Harappans. The Harappan towns and cities disappeared, with Aryan (Hindu) civilization emerging as the dominant culture of Sind. Subsequently, groups such as the Persians, Greeks, Scythians, and White Huns who entered the region were absorbed into the existing structure of the Aryan-dominated society. During the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, Sind formed part of the Mauryan Empire. At this time, Buddhism was the main religion in the region, though it was subsequently reabsorbed by Hinduism.

Arabs reached the mouth of the Indus by sea in AD 711 and within a few years gained control of Sind. From this time on, the region was dominated by Muslims and the culture of Islam. Around AD 900, the Arab governors of Sind—at first subject to the Caliph in Baghdad—established their own dynastic rule. Of mixed Arab and local blood, Sumra and Samma chieftains governed for several centuries, eventually being replaced by invaders from Afghanistan between 1518 and 1522. By the end of the 16th century, Sind was annexed by the Mughals. It remained part of the Mughal Empire until the mid-18th century. Sind was conquered by the British in 1843. (The British General, Sir Charles Napier, in charge of the operation, garnered a degree of notoriety when, after his successful campaign, he sent his superiors the one word dispatch "Peccavi," which is Latin for "I have sinned.")

Sind formed part of the Bombay Presidency of British India until 1937, when it was made a separate province. Following

Pakistan's independence, Sind was integrated into West Pakistan in 1955. In 1970 Sind was reestablished as a province of Pakistan.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Sind lies in southern Pakistan. It shares a common boundary with the Republic of India on the east. The Pakistani province of Baluchistan lies to the west and north, while the Punjab is located to the northeast. Sind covers an area of 140,913 sq km (54,407 sq mi), which is slightly larger than New York State. Geographically, Sind falls into three distinct regions. In the west lies the Kirthar Range, a steep wall of mountains rising from 1,220 m (4,000 ft) in the south to nearly 2,400 m (approximately 8,000 ft) in the north. This forms a sharp line of separation between the rugged hills of Baluchistan and the fertile Indus plains. The Indus River flows in a southwesterly direction through the heart of Sind. It is here that agriculture and population, as well as Sind's major cities, are concentrated. To the east of the Indus plains, Sind extends into the Thar or Great Indian Desert.

The climate of Sind is subject to extremes. The mean maximum June temperature in Jacobabad in northern Sind is 45.5°C (114°F). Jacobabad has also recorded the highest temperature in the subcontinent, at 53°C (127°F). Temperatures drop to 2°C (36°F) in winter and fall below freezing at higher elevations. Annual rainfall averages less than 20 cm (approximately 8 in) and in some areas falls below 10 cm (4 in). This extreme aridity is reflected in the natural vegetation, which consists mainly of thorn scrub, acacias, and tamarisk.

Population statistics for Sind are notoriously inaccurate. In 1998 Pakistani government sources placed the population of Sind Province at 30,439,893, which, given natural increase since the beginning of the 2000s, led to 35 million as an estimate of the population of Sind by 2008. With several millions of Sindhis living in India and elsewhere (Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States, etc.), the world-wide population of Sindhis is estimated to be over 40 million. Although unified by religion and language, this population reflects the diversity of Sind's past in its ethnic composition. Many Sindhis are descended from Rājput and Jat groups of western India and are known as Samma Sindhis (descendants of Yadavs) and Sumra Sindhis (descendants of Parwar Rājputs). The Bhutto tribe, which gave Pakistan two prime ministers (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and more recently his daughter, Benazir), are Sumras. Other Rājput and Jat groups are more recent converts to Islam. Some Sindhis, such as the Sayyids and Pathans, trace their ancestry back to Muslim invaders of the past. The Mallahs are fishing peoples settled along the river and in the delta region. The Talpurs, former rulers of Sind, are Baluchs from Baluchistan. However, they now speak Sindhi as a mother tongue and have been assimilated into Sindhi society.

Most Sindhis are Muslim, but before the creation of India and Pakistan some 20% of the Sindhi population was Hindu. In 1947, when the successor states to British India gained their independence, there was a mass exodus of Hindu Sindhis to India. Sindhi communities in India are concentrated in Delhi and the states of Gujarat, Rājasthān, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. At the same time, many Muslims in India fled their homeland and settled in Sind. Known as *muhājirs*, these immigrants and their descendants are culturally quite distinct from the Sindhis.



## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The peoples of Sind speak the language known as Sindhi. It is an Indo-Aryan tongue but has a large number of Persian and Arabic words, reflecting centuries of Muslim influence in the region. Vicholi is the standard dialect of Sindhi, while Sir-aiki, Thareli, and Lari are other local forms of the language. Kachchi, a dialect of Sindhi, is spoken in neighboring areas of India (the Rann of Kutch, and the Kathiawar Peninsula). The Sindhi script is similar to that used for Urdu, yet different enough not to be read easily by a person who has learned Urdu. The script is Perso-Arabic in origin, even though Sindhi is an Indo-Aryan language. Hindus use a form of the Devanagari script for writing Sindhi. Some 2.5 million Sindhi-speakers lived in India as of 2008.

Perhaps the language closest to the original Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the tongues of north India, Sindhi has a literary tradition that extends back to the 11th century. The earliest Sindhi works were poetry showing both Islamic and Hindu influences, though later epics emerged as important. Perhaps the best known Sindhi poet, Shah Abdul Latif (1690–1773) emerged during the early 18th century, while modern Sindhi literature consists of works of both poetry (dominated by the giant figure of Shaikh Ayaz [1923–1997]) and prose.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Sind has a rich and varied folklore. One folk tale addresses the relations between Hindus and Muslims in the region. In the 10th century AD, so the story goes, a Muslim ruler in Sind be-

gan forcibly converting Hindus to Islam. The Hindus panicked and prayed to Darya Shah (Varuna, god of the Indus) to protect them. The answer to their prayers was Uderolal who, riding a horse and with a sword in his hand, struck terror into the hearts of the Muslims. He told people that there was only one god—Allah or Ishwar—and that both Muslims and Hindus should worship that one god. The Muslim ruler was suitably chastened and stopped his forcible conversions to Islam. Uderolal is identified with Zindapir (Sindhu Pīr), who disappeared into the river Sindhu along with his horse and sword. This water deity is worshiped by both Muslims and Hindus, who depend on the waters of the Indus for their livelihood.

## **5 RELIGION**

Over 93% of the population of Sind is Muslim, mostly belonging to the orthodox *Sunnī* sect. As such, their religious practices and social customs follow the dictates of Islam as set out in the *Quran* (Koran) and summarized in the Five Pillars of Islam. Their modes of worship, religious festivals, rites of passage, family law and customs, and food taboos reveal the importance of Islam in Sindhi culture.

The worship of Muslim saints (*pirs*) is one aspect of Sindhi religion that deviates from orthodox Islam. Historically, the region has been extremely receptive to the Sūfī movement, and one of the most revered saints of Sind today is Lal Shab-haz Qalander, a 13th-century Sūfī. Saint worship and its attendant rituals reflect Hindu influences in Sind, and indeed in the past—especially at the level of folk religion—there was a great deal of mixing of Muslim and Hindu religious practices. It is not unusual for Muslims and Hindus to venerate the same saint. The patron saint of the Indus River, for example, is revered by Muslims as Khwajah Khidr, or Sheikh Tahir, and by Hindus, as Darya Shah, or Uderolal.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

As orthodox Sunnis, Sindhis celebrate all the major Muslim festivals (e.g., Muharram, Ramadan, Id ul-Fitr, Id ul-Adha). However, festivals of particular importance in Sind are the death-anniversaries (*Urs*) of three local saints. Lal Shab-haz Qalandar, who is said to have died in AD 1345, is buried in the village of Sehwan, near Lake Manochar in central Sind. People from all over the country attend his *Urs*, which is an occasion for the gathering of musicians, *qawwālī*-singers, and dancers. The *melā* held to observe this *Urs* is, in effect, a festival of Sindhi culture, folk music, and dance. The *Urs* of Shah Abdul Latif, a mystic poet born in AD 1689, and Sachal Sarmast, an 18th-century poet, are also major festivals celebrated by Sindhis.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Three ceremonies are associated with birth in Sindhi life: naming, head-shaving, and circumcision. Naming takes place soon after birth, immediately after the father or an elderly male relation has whispered the Call to Prayer into the baby's ear. The head-shaving ceremony is held in the first few weeks after birth. Goats are sacrificed (one for a girl and two for a boy), and the meat is cooked and given to relatives. The goats' bones are buried with the infant's hair. Circumcision (*sunnat*) usually takes place in early boyhood. The boy is garlanded and taken around the town in procession before the circumcision

is performed by a barber at the family home. When the boy has recovered, a celebration is held for family and friends.

When a death is about to occur, relatives gather to participate in the death rituals. Passages from the Koran are read, the Muslim creed is repeated, and prayers are offered for the dying person. After death, the body is washed, the big toes are tied together, and the corpse is wrapped in a shroud in preparation for burial. The body is carried to the cemetery on a bier by close relatives. At the graveside the mourners, led by a *maulvī* (religious teacher), pray for the departed soul. The body is placed in the grave on its side with the face towards Mecca. Prayers for the dead, followed by a feast, are held on the third and tenth days after the death. The mourning ritual is completed with a feast for all relatives on the 40th day after the death.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Sindhis follow forms of greeting (“Salaam,” “Salaam alaikum”) used by Muslims throughout the Islamic world. Many, however, still use the Hindu “Namaste,” echoing the former presence of a large Hindu population in the region. No visitors are allowed to enter a Sindhi home without the consent of the head of the family. A special room or building called an *otak*, which is often outside the walls of the house compound, is the center of Sindhi men's social life. Inside the *otak*, friends join together to pass the time chatting, discussing politics, drinking refreshments, playing cards, and in modern times listening to the radio or watching television.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Architecture in Sind has a pronounced Arab flavor. Villages consist of clusters of houses, surrounded by compounds, and walled for privacy. Wooden gates often shut off the compound from the outside world. Houses themselves are generally built of unbaked mud bricks, roofed with straw or bamboo. Poor people have a single room for eating and sleeping, and their houses are sparsely furnished. The houses of the landowners are more elaborate and may be built of brick and have tiled roofs. They have several rooms, with a cookhouse and a latrine in the compound (the poor go into the fields to perform their bodily functions). The *otak* of the wealthy are furnished with carpets, overhead fans that are swung by servants, tables, and chairs.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Sindhi society is predominantly Muslim. However, it shows the influence of its Hindu past in its organization into *zāts*. These are hereditary, occupational groupings (e.g., cultivators, blacksmiths, weavers, barbers) that function very much like Hindu castes. *Zāts* are further subdivided into *birādarīs*, groups of individuals within the *zāt* who can trace their lineage on the male side to a common ancestor. The *biradari* is an important social unit within the village.

The family is the basic unit in Sindhi society. It is organized along the lines of the patriarchal joint family. The male head of the family is the dominant authority, responsible for the family's affairs. His wife or wives, as Sindhis may have more than one, run the household. The wives of sons reside in the household, while daughters live with their husband's family after marriage. Marriages among Sindhis are arranged, with partners sought from within one's *zāt* or *biradari*. The ideal marriage is between first cousins (i.e., a male marries his fa-



Women of the Sindhi community carry earthen pots during a religious procession to mark the end of a festival in Ahmadabad, India. (AP Images/Ajit Solanki)

ther's brother's daughter). If a suitable bride is not available, a male can marry outside his clan, even into a *zāt* that is socially inferior to his. However, no father would allow his daughter to "marry down" into a *zāt* of lower social standing. Betrothal of infants was common in the past, although this is no longer practiced. The marriage ceremony (*nikāh*) is preceded by several days of festivities. The groom and his party travel to the bride's house in an elaborately decorated transport (car, donkey, or camel). The actual ceremony involves each partner being asked three times if he or she will have the other in marriage. The marriage settlements are agreed to and witnessed, and the ceremony is completed by readings from the Koran by a *maulvī*. (Hindus in Sind perform their marriage ceremonies according to the Vedic rites.) Divorce is permitted by Muslim law.

The custom of *purdah* is strictly observed by landowners and other groups who claim high social standing. Sindhi women are secluded behind the clay walls of the house and compound. If they leave the house, they go veiled or covered from head to toe in a cloak so that they are not exposed to the sight of men. In some rural areas, women are followed by a small boy ringing a hand bell and calling "Pass!" Men hearing the signal turn toward a wall until the party has hurried past. By contrast, *purdah* is ignored by many in urban areas.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

The original dress of the Sindhi male is the *dhotī*, a type of coat (*jāmā*), and a turban. A round, embroidered cap, cut away in the front, is commonly worn by Sindhi men. As with many societies in South Asia, different communities within Sind have developed their own distinctive style of dress. Thus, Amils have adopted flowing pyjamas, high-topped caps, and leather slippers with their toes curled up. They follow the custom of tying a *kamarband* (i.e., cummerbund) around the waist. Muslim influence can be seen in the *salwar* (loose baggy trousers) and *serwānī* (a long, tunic-like coat). Hindu communities have their own styles of dress. Traders and businessmen, for example, favor the Marwari-style turban of Rājasthān.

Traditional dress for older Sindhi women consists of a white cotton tunic and a thick white or red skirt that reaches the ground. The head is covered with a thin muslin scarf that is larger than the modern *dupattā*. Slippers complete the ensemble. Sometimes, a white sheet (*chāddar*) is worn covering the entire body, with only a small peep hole (*ākhiri*) left open so that the wearer can see. Younger women wear the *salwār-kurtā*, or the *sūthan*, a pyjama-type outfit, along with slippers and the scarf. Mirrorwork on the kurtā is typical of Sind. Ornaments include ivory bracelets and bangles, silver anklets, and gold earrings and nose rings.

Sindhis, especially in urban areas, have abandoned traditional dress in favor of modern styles. Men wear Western-style jackets and pants, or the popular safari suit. The *sārī*, or *salwār-kurtā*, is the dress of choice for women. Young women, especially in the cosmopolitan city of Karachi, are very style-conscious and adopt the latest fashions.

## 12 FOOD

Sindhi food is typical of Pakistani Muslim cuisine, with distinctive Sindhi regional touches. Thus, wheat made into flat unleavened bread called *chapātīs*, or *rotī*, is the staple food for most of the population. It is eaten with spiced pulses (*dāl*), vegetable dishes (*sabzī*), and yogurt (*dahī*). Few poorer Sindhis can afford meat, except on special occasions. Lamb, goat, and chicken are eaten, though no Muslim Sindhi will eat pork. Fish is eaten by Sindhi communities who live along the Indus River or near the coast (Karachi is famous for its seafood). Sweetened tea, buttermilk, or lassi, a drink made from yogurt, rounds out the meal. Sindhis also prepare Mughal-style dishes such as *tandoorī* lamb or chicken, *biryānī* (lamb or chicken cooked with rice), and rice pilaf.

## 13 EDUCATION

Though Sindhi literacy (56%) is higher than the Pakistani average (50% for Pakistanis over 15 years of age), Sindhis still face problems in education typical of the country as a whole. In rural areas, children must work in the fields, the school drop-out rate is high, and there is a Muslim antipathy to education for females. Literacy among males in rural areas is 39% but among women it is only 13%. However, urban males have the highest literacy in the country, with that in Karachi being over 90%, and reaching 100% amongst communities, such as the Parsis. Among the elite, education—even of daughters—is seen as a matter of prestige and a means of political power. For example, Pakistan's former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, was educated at Harvard and Oxford. Sind University, located in Hyderabad, and Karachi University are the major academic centers in the province.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Important sites, such as Mohenjo-Daro, Amri, and Kot Diji, have left a record of the achievements of the ancient Harappan civilization in the areas of city-planning and building, economic production, social organization, and religion. It is generally held that there is little direct continuity of cultural tradition between the Harappans and modern-day society. However, some writers trace elements of modern Sindhi folk culture to Harappan times. They argue, for example, that the bullock carts used by farmers along the Indus today, or the pipes played by Sindhi shepherds, differ little from those used by the Harappans, as revealed by the archeological record.

Sindhis have a rich tradition of folk literature and mystical Sūfī poetry dating to the 14th century AD or even earlier. The legend of Dodo Chanesar, for example, an early Sindhi folk tale, is thought to date to the time of the Sumras. The most famous Sindhi poet, however, is Shah Abdul Latif, whose work, *Shāh Jo Risālo*, is known and recited throughout Sind. Sachal Sarmast (AD 1739–1829) is another eminent Sūfī in the Sindhi literary tradition. In addition to poetry, Sindhi folk culture embraces music, using instruments, such as the *sahnāī* (a wind instrument), dances, songs, and riddles.

## 15 WORK

Traditionally, Sind lacked the pan-Indian four-tiered caste system (*Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra*). Brahmins, who elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent enjoyed high ritual status, were numerically insignificant. They were neither learned nor affluent, functioning only as priests to the Hindu trading castes. There was no question of royal patronage as the region was under Muslim rule. Since no Sindhi Hindus formed part of the nobility or army, Kshatriyas were notably absent from the region, as were Sudras, the castes who were tillers of the soil (these were mainly Muslims) or the service castes. The main Hindu communities in Sind were, thus, of the trading caste—e.g. the Lohanas, Bhatias, Khatris, Chhaprus and Sahtas—and social hierarchies among these groups were primarily based on wealth. This social structure was unique to Sind, and regional identity became more pronounced than caste identity.

Around 70% of Sindhis, the majority of these being Muslims, derive their living from cultivation. Given the meager rainfall totals in the region, agriculture is dependent almost entirely on irrigation. The principal source of water is the Indus River, on which there are three major irrigation dams (called “bar-rages”) in Sind. They are the Ghuddu and Sukkur Barrages in the north, and the Kotri Barrage in the south near Hyderabad. The major crops grown include wheat, millet, maize, rice, cotton, and oilseeds. Fruits, such as mangoes, dates, and bananas, are also cultivated. Away from the Indus Valley, herding sheep, goats, and camels has become the dominant economic activity. Fishing is important along the Indus River and the Arabian Sea coast, where prawns, shrimp, pomfret, shad, and catfish are caught.

Although Sind is essentially a rural province, the provincial capital, Karachi, is Pakistan's largest city, with a population of over 13 million inhabitants. Karachi is Pakistan's leading commercial and industrial center, giving Sind an important role in the country's economy. Industrial plants include cotton mills, sugar refineries, cement factories, steel mills, and automobile manufacturers.

## 16 SPORTS

Sindhi children play local variations of games, such as hopscotch, marbles, and tag. Wrestling is a popular spectator sport in villages, while men indulge in traditional pastimes, such as cock-fighting, pigeon-racing, and camel-racing. Sindhis also play modern games, such as cricket, field hockey, tennis, and squash.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Sindhis enjoy watching television or videos, seeing movies, playing cards, and socializing at cocktail parties. Such pastimes are, of course, more common among the Westernized Sindhis living in urban areas. Life is more restricted in the traditional village context.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Sind is particularly noted for its textiles, embroidery, pottery, and lacquered woodwork. Mirrorwork, the sewing of tiny pieces of mirror onto cloth, is typically Sindhi and decorates the brightly colored clothes of many Sindhi women. Blue-glazed tiles from Sind decorate mosques and shrines all over the country.



## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Sindhis face many of the problems suffered by all rural, agricultural populations in developing countries. Population pressure, poverty, lack of education, and rural indebtedness contribute to low standards of living for the mass of the people. Migration of the rural poor to the cities has created huge squatter populations in Karachi and other towns, as well as an inadequate agricultural labor force in rural areas.

The most serious problems, however, relate to ethnic conflict in Sind and the volatility of Pakistan's politics. Sind's political fortunes have been closely linked to those of the Bhutto family. Sindhis have long resented the concentration of political power in the hands of Punjabis, along with perceived threats to Sindhi cultural identity. Attempts to replace the Sindhi language in schools with Urdu, and the national government's policy of Islamization, have both been strongly resisted. Conflict between Sindhis and Urdu-speaking muhājirs, who comprise an estimated 25% of Sind's population (and 70% of Karachi's population), has led to violence and many deaths. Murders, kidnappings, drug gangs, sectarian violence, and ethnic conflict are commonplace in Karachi, where even Pakistan's security forces have been unable to restore law and order.

Access to adequate supplies of water, both for drinking and irrigation, remains a major problem in Sind. The area is essentially desert, with precipitation averaging less than 8 inches a year, and the major source of water is the Indus River. However, the Punjabis seem to control most of the Indus water, and lack of water has provoked hundreds of angry demonstrations in Sind, with farmers and politicians alike charging that "water robbery" has been committed by Punjab Province. Even the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), created by Pakistan after the 1960 Indus Basin Waters Treaty was signed with India, appears to be violating the 1945 Sind-Punjab agreement on water sharing, with total disregard for the lower riparian rights of Sindh. Virtually all of the crops grown in Sind (rice, cotton and cereals) depend on irrigation, and when water is not available, they are lost.

In addition to these economic losses, the reduced flows that characterize the River Indus as a result of water withdrawals in its Upper Basin, has resulted in severe water pollution. The river receives raw sewage from about 40 cities and hundreds of small towns and villages, untreated industrial wastewater from hundreds of industrial facilities, and irrigation returns from the millions of acres of agricultural lands spread along the riverbanks. Although it is attempting to reduce use because of health hazards, Pakistan still uses around 25,000 tons of chemical nutrients and pesticides in a year. With population growth and reduced water flows, Indus pollution is worsening. Levels of oxygen depleting organic contaminants from sewage, toxic compounds from industrial discharges, and pesticides and chemical nutrients from irrigation returns are increasing. Water borne diseases are on the rise. Many fish and other aquatic species have declined in number and diversity. If the situation is not reversed further water degradation will continue to occur, and its impact on aquatic life, public health, and other uses of water will be very significant.

The lakes and wetlands of Sind are being degraded at an alarming rate. The lakes in Sind are an important source of drinking water, recreation, fish, edible vegetables that grow in them, and employment for many people. With the lower Indus basin receiving reduced flows, the lakes and wetlands of the

Sind are losing their inflow and slowly becoming polluted, and smaller ones are even drying out. Manochar, for instance, the largest lake in Sind is a source of drinking water and irrigation, but has become a dumping ground for discharge from salinity outfalls originating in Punjab and Baluchistan. Millions of people have been affected and thousands of Manochar fishermen have migrated to other areas of Pakistan. Furthermore, salt water intrusion into the plains of lower Sind is directly related to the decrease of flow in the Indus River. Salt-water intrusion has been witnessed inland up to 100 kilometers (over 60 mi) north of the sea.

In 2008, a breach appeared in the Rohri Canal at Tehsil, New Saheedabad, District Matiari, Sind Province, resulting in heavy losses to local peasants, including damage to standing crops, houses, roads, bridges, water courses, and embankments. The breaches inundated many villages nearby and caused extensive damage to houses in the vicinity. The floods affected 90% of the population of 50 villages involving over 19,000 persons. Over 300 houses were destroyed completely, and over 2,000 hectares (c. 5,000 acres) of cultivated land were inundated. The crops lost included both commercial and food staples, including rice. This was the third time in ten years that breaches occurred in this area, and the ministry of irrigation, which is responsible for checking the stability of the canal embankments on a regular basis, was tardy in providing assistance to the affected people. June 2007 saw torrential rains and flooding in Sind Province as it was hit by cyclone "Yemyin." The latter left vast areas of the region flooded with several hundreds dead and missing and substantial collateral damage to houses, livestock, and crops. Such natural disasters are not unique. In January 2001, when Gujarat—to the east—was hit by a devastating earthquake, Sind also experienced some deaths and significant damage to buildings.

On the political scene, Sindhis are outnumbered by Punjabis, who are seen as dominating the politics of Pakistan. However, Benazir Bhutto, a former Prime Minister of Pakistan, was a Sindhi and her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was widely expected to win the 2008 elections outright. However, Bhutto was assassinated on 27 December 2007 and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, replaced her as leader of the PPP. The elections in Pakistan were postponed for a month as a result of the assassination and the PPP emerged as the leader of an anti-Musharraf coalition. The PPP won a majority of seats in the National Assembly, though not enough to form the government by itself. However, the PPP, in association with Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League (N), formed the Pakistani government, with Yousaf Raza Gilani (Gilani was born in Karachi and thus is a Sindhi), a loyalist of slain leader Benazir Bhutto, as the nation's new prime minister.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Sindhī women live in either Hindu or Muslim societies, both of which are patrilineal in nature. As a consequence, they are generally prohibited by law from inheriting property and see their role in society as wife and home-maker, subservient to the wishes of their children, husbands, and in-laws. Marriages are typically arranged, according to local customs, and—even though it is illegal in India (Pakistan has no legal proscriptions against the practice)—dowry is usually given. Bride burnings are commonly reported in both India and Pakistan, and the press occasionally reports "honor" killings in Sind. In 1998 the

adult sex ratio (i.e. among people over 6 years of age) in Sind was 891:1000, indicating the importance of males in Sindhi society. The low number of females is explained largely by sex selective abortion and neglect of young girl children.

Even though Sindhi women have emigrated to other parts of the world where they may be involved in business, Sindhi attitudes towards the role of women in society are mirrored in a marked lack of ambition.

Poverty, illiteracy, lack of education, and cultural attitudes are the greatest problems faced by women in Sind.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# SINHALESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** sin-huh-LEEZ

**LOCATION:** Sri Lanka

**POPULATION:** 14.5 million (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Sinhala, Tamil

**RELIGION:** Buddhist (Theravada); small numbers of Christians and Muslims

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Sinhalese are the majority ethnic group of Sri Lanka, an island situated off the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. Sinhalese are descendants of peoples believed to have come from northern India and settled the island around the 5th century BC. The name *Sinhalese* reflects the popular myth that the people are descended from the union of a mythical Indian princess and a lion (*sinha* means “lion” and *le* means “blood”).

The ruler of Sri Lanka converted to Buddhism during the 3rd century BC, and since that time the Sinhalese have been predominantly Buddhist in religion and culture. Ancient Buddhist texts provide accounts of the early history of the Sinhalese people. By the 1st century BC, a thriving Sinhalese Buddhist civilization existed in the northern area of Sri Lanka. For reasons as yet uncertain, this civilization collapsed in the 13th century. Like many other peoples in South Asia, the Sinhalese later came under the influence of European powers. The Portuguese landed on Ceylon (the English name for Sri Lanka) in 1505 and soon gained control of much of the island. The Dutch replaced the Portuguese in the mid-17th century, but were driven out by the British in 1798. The island and its inhabitants formed part of Britain’s Indian Empire until 1948, when Ceylon was granted its independence. The country adopted the name *Sri Lanka* in 1972.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the 2001 Census, the Sri Lankan population was 16,864,544 people. The Sinhalese make up roughly 80% of Sri Lanka’s population, so, allowing for natural increase at the average national rate of 0.078% per year, the current population of Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is estimated at around 14.5 million people. When overseas Sinhalese are added to this total, the world-wide population of Sinhalese is estimated at just over 15 million. Sinhalese are distributed over most of the island except the extreme northern districts near Jaffna and eastern coastal areas where the Hindu Tamil minority is concentrated.

Sri Lanka, an island 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq mi) in area, is separated from the Indian mainland by a strait only 35 km (22 mi) wide. The island is dominated by the Central Highlands averaging more than 1,500 m (5,000 ft) in altitude and reaching a maximum altitude of 2,524 m (8,281 ft) at Pidurutal Peak. The southwestern flanks of these mountains and the adjacent lowlands are known as the island’s “wet zone.” These areas receive as much as 500 cm (196 in) of rain a year from the southwest monsoon. The northern and eastern lowlands lie in the rain shadow of the mountains and form Sri Lanka’s dry zone. In this area, rainfall averages less than 200 cm (79 in) and drops below 100 cm (39 in) in places. The island has an equatorial climate with little variation in temperature throughout

the year. Mean monthly temperatures at Colombo range from 22°C (71.6°F) in the winter months to 26°C (78.8°F) in May.

Politically, the Sinhalese, who form the majority of the population and the government in Sri Lanka, have been engaged in what amounts to a civil war with the Tamils in the north of the island since the end of the 1970s. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), an association of Tamil political groups that advocated a separate state for Tamils in the north of the island, was formed in 1972. Although TULF tended to be relatively conservative and consisted of Tamils who felt that Tamil objectives could be achieved without violence, TULF was frequently blamed by nationalist Sinhalese politicians for acts of violence committed by militant groups, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), during the 1970s and 1980s.

Violence in Sri Lanka became so bad that in 1983 the government declared a state of emergency. In 1987 Sri Lanka signed an agreement with India to provide security forces (the Indian Peacekeeping Force [IPKF]) to control the Tamils, but this was withdrawn in 1990. In 1994 Chandrika Kumaratunga won the presidential election, but a resurgence of violence led to a government offensive to secure the Jaffna peninsula, the Tamil stronghold in northern Sri Lanka. Despite the success of this operation, the LTTE reemerged in 2000 and, even though a cease-fire agreement was signed in 2002, the LTTE continues to bring pressure on the government, with random acts of violence and terrorism occurring. Bomb blasts on buses and trains are common, and in July 2008 several Sri Lankan police were killed in Colombo by a suicide bomber.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Sinhalese speak Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language brought to Sri Lanka by the north Indian peoples who settled the island in the 5th century. Being geographically isolated from other Indo-Aryan tongues, Sinhala developed in its own way. It has been influenced by Pali, the sacred language of southern Buddhism, and, to a lesser extent, by Sanskrit. It also has borrowed words from Dravidian languages, mostly Tamil. Sinhalese is written in its own script (*abugida*) which, like other South Indian writing systems, is derived from the ancient Southern Brahmi script. Sinhala and Tamil are official languages in Sri Lanka, though English is also used.

Sinhala literature dates back well over 2000 years and is heir to the great Aryan literary tradition as embodied in the hymns of the *Rig Veda*, the collection of Sanskrit verses composed by the ancient Indo Aryans around 1500 BC. There is literary evidence to show that the *Mahavamsa*, the great chronicle of Sinhalese royalty composed in Pali in the 5th century AD, has drawn heavily from the ancient commentaries in the Sinhalese languages known as the *Sihalatthakatha*. It is evident that many of the early Sinhala prose works, the earliest of which dates to the 9th century, were intended as accessories for Pali works. However, the golden age of Sinhala literature is widely considered to be the 13th century, with many stories and tales from this time dealing with the life of the Buddha. Sinhalese scholarship has traditionally been the domain of the clerical establishment, which accounts for the scarcity of good secular works in the language. It is not until the beginning of the late 19th century that we notice a surge in secular Sinhala literature—the novel appears during this period—with the works of writers, such as Albert Silva, Adara Hasuna, and W. A. Silva. Twentieth century Sinhala literature was based primarily on



the Western model, with novelists like Martin Wickramasinghe (1891–1976) and his protégé G. B. Senanayake making names for themselves, but the situation changed in 1956, when Sinhala was adopted as the language in which education was carried out. Works of the late 20th century in Sinhala tended to return to Sinhalese religious roots though many assumed a political flavor in light of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Sinhalese have many legends about heroes and kings. When Prince Vijaya first came to the island of Lanka from northern India, so the tale goes, his men were imprisoned by the demon Kuveni. Kuveni was the queen of a Yaksha clan, the Yakshas being a class of often evil mythological creatures, who possessed magical powers. When Vijaya went to search for his men, he found Kuveni and threatened to kill her. Kuveni, who had assumed the guise of a beautiful maiden, pleaded for her life. She promised to release the men, give Vijaya a kingdom, and become his wife. Using her magical powers, Kuveni helped Vijaya destroy the Yakshas. Vijaya ruled as king in Lanka, the couple lived together for many years, and Kuveni gave birth to a son and a daughter. However, when a marriage was arranged for Vijaya with an Indian princess from the mainland, Vijaya banished Kuveni from his life. As she was leaving, Kuveni cursed the king for his act, and, as a result, he and his successor remained childless. It took a magical dance to remove the effects of the curse.

## 5 RELIGION

Most Sinhalese follow Buddhism, accepting the religion's fundamental concepts of *dharma*, *samsara*, *karma*, and *ahimsa*. *Dharma* refers to the Law (the teachings of Buddha); *samsara*, the life cycle of birth-death-rebirth; *karma* relates to the effects of good or bad deeds on a person's rebirths and *ahimsa* is the doctrine of nonviolence toward living things. They believe that these Four Noble Truths point the way to achieving *nirvana* (the Buddhist equivalent of salvation). However, the Sinhalese follow the southern or *Theravada* (also called *Hinayana*) form of Buddhism. This form remains true to the original teachings of Buddha, holding that there is no God, that Buddha was an ordinary mortal who should be revered but not worshiped, and that everyone is responsible for working out his or her own salvation. Buddhism is reflected in every aspect of daily Sinhalese life. Buddhist monks (*bhikkus*) play an important role in the Sinhalese community and often wield considerable political power. Monks serve the religious needs of the people, but Sinhalese also worship at the temples (*devale*) of Hindu gods. The Sinhalese also believe in demons, ghosts, and evil spirits and have a number of folk practitioners to deal with such beings. Small numbers of Sinhalese are Christians (mostly Roman Catholic) or Muslims.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major festivals for the Sinhalese include the Sinhalese New Year in April and the *Vesak* festival in May, which commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Buddha. During the *Esala Perahera*, a two-week festival held in the city of Kandy, the Tooth Relic of the Buddha is paraded through the streets on the back of an elephant. Thousands gather to see the relic and its accompanying procession of decorated elephants, temple officials, schoolchildren, dancers, and acrobats. A fire walking festival held at Katagarama attracts pilgrims from all over the island, as do other sacred centers of Buddhism.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Sinhalese rites of passage involve a mix of Buddhist customs and folk traditions. In rural areas, difficulties in pregnancy are often ascribed to evil spirits or black magic, and a magician (*kattadiya*) may be called in to deal with the situation with charms and mantras. The birth of a child is eagerly anticipated, and male babies are preferred. The newborn is given a few drops of human milk with a touch of gold to endow it with strength and beauty, and offerings are made both at the temple and to Buddhist monks. There are few formal ceremonies, although the occasion when a child is taught to read letters (at about three years) is an important one. No special rites mark a boy's reaching puberty, but the first menstruation of a girl is observed with appropriate ceremony.

Death rituals are fairly simple. The Sinhalese do not believe in the existence of a soul, but rather that a human is an aggregate of five elements. At the time of death, these elements are dispersed and the most important one, consciousness, becomes reborn in a new existence according to the laws of karma. If possible, *bhikkus* (Buddhist monks) are called to the bedside of a dying man to chant from the Buddhist scriptures. After death, the deceased's face is covered with a handkerchief and the big toes tied together. Oil lamps are lit, flowers are spread on the bed, and religious books are read during the night. Bodies are prepared for disposal, then either cremated or buried.

*Bhikkus* preside at the funeral ceremony, and a white cloth is offered to the leading *bhikku*, who delivers a brief sermon. All those who attend the funeral take a bath to rid themselves of the pollution of death, and relatives gather for a simple meal. Close relatives wear white clothes, a sign of mourning in South Asia.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

"*Ayubowan*" ("Greeting") is the word used by the Sinhalese when meeting or parting. This is usually accompanied by holding one's hands clasped in front of the body, with a slight stoop of the body and head. The European style of shaking hands, however, is replacing traditional forms of greeting, and women often kiss friends and relatives on both cheeks. The Sinhalese are well known for their hospitality in entertaining guests. Typically, Sinhalese do not say "thank you," but something along the lines of "May you receive merit."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Although many Sinhalese live in cities and towns, and their living conditions differ little from other urban populations in South Asia, the Sinhalese are by and large a rural people. They live in villages, hamlets, and isolated farmsteads scattered across the island. A typical agricultural village is made up of a cluster of houses situated on slightly elevated land and surrounded by paddy fields. Nearby, especially in the dry zone, may be one of the many "tanks" constructed over the centuries to store water for irrigation. The village itself will typically have a well, a temple, and perhaps a school and dispensary. Traditional building materials of mud and thatch are being replaced by cement and tiles. Each house stands in a garden in the midst of coconut, mango, papaya, and other trees. In front of the house is a veranda, where men sit during the day and sleep at night. A single door provides access to the house, where women and children sleep. There are typically two rooms and a kitchen, although sometimes the hearth is a lean-to attached to the back of the house. Most villagers sleep on mats, and only the more affluent have beds and simple wooden tables and chairs. Some households have their own well. Many houses have pit-latrines dug in the garden.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Sinhalese have castes based historically on occupation, but the system is much less rigid than its Hindu counterpart. There are no Brahmins (priests), caste rankings are less significant, and in urban society caste observance is rapidly disappearing. Caste is, however, important in marriage. About half the Sinhalese population belongs to the agricultural *Govigama* caste. Other castes include washermen (*Hinna*), metalworkers (*Navandanna*), and drummers (*Berawa*). The *Rodiya* (formerly itinerant beggars) are considered by Sinhalese to be among the lowest castes.

Sinhalese marry within their caste, but also are subject to further limitations. Each caste is subdivided into microcastes (*pavula*), and women must marry men of equal or higher status within the caste. Marriages are usually arranged, with cross-cousin (i.e., father's sister's daughter, or mother's brother's daughter) marriages preferred. Preliminaries include the casting of horoscopes and negotiation of the dowry (if any is to be paid), but the actual ceremony is relatively simple. In some instances, there may be no formal ceremony. The bride usu-



A Sri Lankan Buddhist monk applies oil on an elephant during a religious observance to mark the traditional Sinhalese New Year in April. (AP Images/Eranga Jayawardena)

ally moves in with the husband's family, although couples with the resources to do so prefer to set up their own household. A woman assumes the responsibility of running the household and perhaps contributing to the family income. Her prime role, however, is to bear and raise children, preferably sons. In general, women are treated with a considerable respect in Sinhalese society.

### **<sup>11</sup> CLOTHING**

The traditional dress of the Sinhalese is the *sarama*, a type of sarong. Men may wear a shirt or, when they go bare-chested, throw a scarf around their shoulders. Women wear a tight-fitting, short-sleeved jacket with the *sarama*. Urban Sinhalese have adopted Western-style clothes. Women wear skirts and blouses, although they prefer the Indian *sārī* for formal and ceremonial occasions.

### **<sup>12</sup> FOOD**

Rice, eaten with helpings of curry, is the staple food of the Sinhalese. A family usually has three meals a day, although "morning tea" may be nothing more than that—tea, perhaps taken with rice cakes, fruit, or leftovers from the previous evening's meal. Lunch consists of rice served with vegetable and

meat curries and sauces, such as *sambol*, a spicy mix of grated coconut and chili, pickles, and chutneys. The evening meal is rice eaten with as many curry dishes as a family can afford. Although orthodox Buddhists are strict vegetarians, many Sinhalese eat meat, poultry, fish, and eggs. Many Sinhalese dishes are cooked in coconut milk. A meal is usually followed by fresh fruits or the sweets so popular among South Asians. Tea and coconut milk are common drinks. *Pan*, or betel nut (seed of the betel palm) eaten with lime, is taken after meals and often throughout the day.

### **<sup>13</sup> EDUCATION**

The Sinhalese literacy rate is around 92% (2001 Census), among the highest of any community in South Asia. Education is compulsory up to the age of 14, and it is the parents' responsibility to ensure a child's attendance. Schooling is free from kindergarten to the university level, although there is a shortage of places for qualified university entrants. Unusual for the region is the number of girls who remain in school to complete their educations. Because of the variety of ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, many schools teach only in either Sinhalese or in Tamil, though the elite schools also use English.

The University of Colombo is the island's most reputed university, while the Open University of Sri Lanka allows students to complete their degrees online. Sri Lankan universities include, among others, the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, the University of Kelaniya, and the University of Moratuwa.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The heritage of the Sinhalese is essentially that of Buddhist civilization in Sri Lanka. This includes early literary works (the *Dipavamsa* [AD 350] and the *Mahavamsa* [AD 550]) chronicling the history of Buddhism in the island, architecture, temple and cave frescoes, and massive sculptures such as the 14 meter long (46 foot long) reclining Buddha at Polonnaruwa. The Sinhalese evolved their own form of classical dance, usually performed by men, with rapid footwork and acrobatic movements. The “devil-dancing” of the southern coastal lowlands evolved from folk rituals to exorcise demons. *Kolam* is a form of dance-drama involving masked dancers retelling stories from myth and legend.

#### **15 WORK**

About 80% of the Sinhalese people are rural and engaged primarily in subsistence agriculture. Sri Lanka's commercial plantations (producing tea, coconut products, rubber, cinnamon, cardamoms, and pepper) provide some employment for the population. Industries in Sri Lanka are poorly developed and show only slow growth. However, the recently established clothing industry in a free trade zone near Colombo now accounts for nearly half the value of Sri Lanka's exports. Urban Sinhalese are engaged in government work, the professions, business, trade, and the service industries. Nonetheless, unemployment is a severe problem in Sri Lanka.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Sinhalese children play games typical of other young people in South Asia—tag, hide-and-seek, dolls, marbles, and so on. Indoor activities include board games and various string games, such as cat's cradle. Gambling is popular among adults, although many traditional sports, such as cock fighting, have been banned. Buffalo fights and elephant fights are still staged as part of Sinhalese New Year celebrations. Sports, such as cricket, soccer, field hockey, and track-and-field, were introduced by the British and are played in schools and colleges. Cricket is by far the most popular spectator sport.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Sinhalese have radio and television programming and can also see English and Sinhala movies. In rural areas, however, there is often little surplus income to spend on such activities, so villagers relax in more traditional ways. They spend time gossiping with their neighbors and visiting local fairs. They go on pilgrimages and watch religious processions, folk dances, folk theater, and puppet shows.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Sinhalese crafts include wood and ivory carving, stone working, and metal work in brass, gold, and silver. Pottery and basketry are traditional cottage industries. Sri Lanka has been known for centuries for its gemstones, and jewelry making and

the cutting of sapphires, rubies, and semi-precious stones continue to this day.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Sri Lanka suffered its worst natural disaster in centuries when it was hit by the December 2004 tsunami that originated in South East Asia. The Sinhalese areas in the south suffered severely from loss of life and livelihood, although the brunt of the tsunami was borne by the east and north-east coasts, populated mainly by Muslims and Tamils. Although sufficient relief funds were available, government mechanisms for distributing these funds to those in need were woefully inadequate, and the government received extensive criticism for its relief efforts.

Although in terms of certain social characteristics (e.g. health and education), the Sinhalese are atypical of South Asia, they nevertheless face problems endemic in the region. Sri Lanka is essentially an agricultural country, but self-sufficiency in food is a problem, and landlessness in rural areas is increasing. Unemployment and underemployment are serious problems, and slow industrial growth limits economic expansion and job creation. None of this is helped by the continuing ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil on the island. Tamil separatists in northern areas around Jaffna are engaged in an armed insurgency against the Sinhalese-dominated government. This has resulted in random terrorism, the assassination of a prime minister, considerable loss of life, and charges of human rights violations. Not only does this insurgency pose an economic burden, but millions of valuable tourist dollars have been lost. Until this conflict is resolved, it is unlikely that social and economic problems can be fully addressed.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Sinhalese are Buddhists by religion, and theoretically women in Buddhism have equal status with men. But Sinhalese women live in a patriarchal society that tends to subordinate women to men. There is, moreover, a caste system among the Sinhalese and while this division of society into strata differs somewhat from the classic *Varnas* of North India, it is similar in nature to the *Jāti* system found in South India. The fourfold caste model in Sri Lanka's pre-British period was: *Raja*, *Bamunu*, *Velenda* and *Govi*. Thus marriages among the Sinhalese are arranged and caste plays a significant role in the selection of potential partners. While inheritance laws are quite different from the rest of Asia—property is divided equally among all children, including daughters—it may be controlled by the family as an instrument of marital alliance; among wealthy families, dowry may be paid in lieu of inheritance. There is a strong preference for male children, who may receive better care, and the infant mortality rate for girls is higher than for males (21.2 deaths/1,000 live births for females and 17.63 deaths/1,000 live births for males [2007 est.]). There is a slight dominance of males in the sex ratio for the Sinhalese.

One problem Sinhalese women have to face is the civil war in Sri Lanka. The Tamil terrorists started a campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide by killing Sinhalese in Jaffna and supposedly cut off the breasts of Sinhalese women. Reported human rights violations against Sinhalese women include both rape and murder. The conflict has also seen a change in women's role in traditional society, with women becoming heads of households with the loss of their spouses, through the conflict,

divorce (which is relatively easy to come by), or desertion. The conflict has also seen a rise in alcoholism among men.

Nonetheless, the primary role of women in Sinhalese society is reproductive and to run the household. Despite high levels of education, Sinhalese women live in a male-dominated society and males make all the important socio-economic decisions. The plight of women is even worse in rural areas where poverty and obtaining enough food are major problems.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# **SOUTH KOREANS**

**PRONUNCIATION:** sowth kaw-REE-uns

**LOCATION:** Republic of Korea (South Korea)

**POPULATION:** 49 million

**LANGUAGE:** Korean

**RELIGION:** Mahayana Buddhism; Christianity (Protestantism and Roman Catholicism); Ch'ondogyo (combination of Christianity with native pre-Christian beliefs)

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Republic of Korea, generally called South Korea, lies south of an artificially demarcated line that divides the Korean peninsula in two, separating South Korea from the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north. Centrally located between China, Japan, and Russia, the Korean peninsula has been subject to foreign invasions throughout recorded history. Historically it was known as "the Land of the Morning Calm" (*Choson*), and some of the Korean Peninsula was ruled by the Chinese for several centuries until the end of the Bronze Age (c. 200 AD), a period when China established a lasting influence on Korean culture, especially through its language and the Confucian belief system. Over the following centuries, the three Korean kingdoms that emerged after the long period of Chinese rule—Paekche, Silla, and Koguryo—were alternately unified and divided.

In 1876 the Kanghai Treaty opened Korea to Japan and to the West. Japanese pirates had attacked the country since Medieval times, and Japan occupied it from 1910 to 1945. After World War II, the 38th parallel became the line of demarcation between the Soviet and United States occupation zones and, with some important changes, between the two Koreas that emerged after their governments were unable to reach a reunification agreement. In the Korean War (1950–1953), South Korea, with the aid of United States and United Nations multinational forces, repulsed an attack by the north and fought to maintain its independence from communist rule.

After a long period of successive military regimes, South Korea has undergone a series of political and economic reforms in recent years. However, North Korea—now one of the world's few remaining Communist countries—remains a secretive, authoritarian and relatively closed society. The border between the two nations is still guarded around the clock by armed troops, and reunification—the subject of continuing bilateral talks over the past 50 years—remains a distant dream, and technically there is still a state of war between the North and the South.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

South Korea is located in the southern half of the Korean peninsula in East Asia. Occupying 45% of the peninsula, which it shares with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), South Korea has an area of 38,023 sq km (98,484 sq mi). Hills and mountains cover about 80% of the country's terrain, separating its eastern and western regions. The east has a rugged coastline where the mountains meet the sea. The country's cultivated land, much of it planted with rice, is found in the south and west, where rivers flow westward to the Yellow Sea.

South Korea is one of the most densely populated countries both in Asia and in the world, with a population density of 438 persons per sq km (or 1,134 per sq mi). The nation's population estimate for July 2007 listed the population as 49,044,790, more than twice that of North Korea. In 2007, 9.8 million people—nearly a quarter of the total population—lived in Seoul, the capital and South Korea's largest city. Other major cities (with their 2007 populations) are Pusan (3.5 million people), Incheon (2.45 million), and Taegu (2.3 million). The Korean people are one of the world's most ethnically homogeneous nationalities, consisting almost exclusively of the Han, a people believed to be descended from the Mongols of Central Asia. There are no numerically significant ethnic minorities in South Korea.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Korean is generally thought to belong to the Altaic language family, along with Turkish, Mongolian, Japanese, and other languages. China's far-reaching influence on Korean culture, especially in the form of Confucianism, is reflected in the large number of Chinese words found in the Korean language. Until the 15th century, Korean was written using Chinese characters. Then, in 1446, a mostly phonetic Korean alphabet, called Han'gul, was developed and it has been used ever since.

#### **SOME COMMON KOREAN WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS ARE:**

How are you?	<i>anahasiyo?</i>
Hello	<i>yoboseyo</i>
Goodbye	<i>aniyong ikeseyo</i>
Yes	<i>ye</i>
No	<i>anio</i>
Thank you	<i>kamsa kamnida</i>

#### **NUMBERS:**

one	<i>il</i>
two	<i>ee</i>
three	<i>sam</i>
four	<i>sa</i>
five	<i>o</i>
six	<i>yuk</i>
seven	<i>chill</i>
eight	<i>pal</i>
nine	<i>ku</i>
ten	<i>sip</i>
100	<i>paek</i>
1000	<i>chon</i>

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Korean folklore celebrates human longevity and the survival of the Korean people. A number of folktales involve either animals or heavenly beings who either become human or long to do so, and many have similar plots to those of early northern China. Others celebrate the figure of the wise hermit living a simple, secluded existence on a mountain top. Koreans have traditionally used special drawings called *pujok* as talismans in and around their houses to bring them luck and ward off evil. These talismans are usually printed in red, a color believed to have special beneficial properties and often seen in shamanistic rituals.

### **5 RELIGION**

There is a great deal of diversity in South Korean religious life. Koreans have traditionally combined elements from different belief systems, such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Today, about 25 million people are thought to be Christian, and most of these are members of the approximately 160 different Protestant denominations, with about 4.3 million being Roman Catholics. Some 24.5 million of the population are Mahayana Buddhist, approximately 1.5 million are Confucian, and there are also about 500,000 who follow Shamanist pre-Christian beliefs, or belong to newer religions that combine Christianity with native pre-Christian beliefs. The most widespread is Ch'ondogyo ("the Heavenly Way"), founded in 1860.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Holidays in South Korea are celebrated either by the date on the modern solar calendar, or, in some cases, according to the lunar calendar that Koreans used for thousands of years in the past to reckon time. The New Year is one of South Korea's most important holidays, with bells usually ringing out at midnight. For the lunar New Year (*Sol*), which is either in late January or early February, there are three days set aside for family celebrations that include honoring parents and grandparents, shooting off firecrackers to frighten away evil spirits, and eating holiday foods.

The birthday of the Buddha (the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, usually early in May) is an important holiday for Korean Buddhists, who hang lanterns in the courtyards of Buddhist temples throughout the country. These lanterns are then carried through the streets in nighttime processions. *Tano*, held during the fifth month of the lunar calendar (around the beginning of June) is a major holiday in rural areas, where it is the traditional time to pray for a good harvest. It is celebrated with a variety of vigorous games and competitions, including wrestling matches for men and swinging contests for women (the holiday is also called Swing Day).

Other national holidays include Independence Movement Day (March 1), Arbor Day (April 5), Children's Day (May 5), Memorial Day (June 6), Constitution Day (July 17), Liberation Day (August 15), National Foundation Day (October 3), and Christmas (December 25). Mention should also be made of important festivals such as that of Snow, in January, and Cherry Blossoms in April.

### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

The harvest festival of *Chusok* in early September, often called the Korean Thanksgiving, is a legal holiday, although it, too, is based on the lunar calendar. Time-honored *Chusok* customs include exchanging gifts and staying up all night to watch the full moon. Another important holiday is *Hansik*, a special day for honoring ancestors, which is observed early in April (the 105th day of the lunar year). People carry food and wine to the graves of deceased relatives and picnic at the gravesite, during which time they ensure that it is well-tended.

Traditionally, Korean marriages were arranged, especially among the elite. Today, however, the popularity of arranged marriages, particularly in urban areas, has declined considerably, although many Koreans still follow the practice in a modified form: parents and other relatives locate prospective marriage partners, but the young people have the final say in approving their choices. Among the urban upper classes, the



services of highly paid semiprofessional matchmakers are also becoming increasingly popular.

Ancestor worship plays a prominent role in Korean folk belief, which regards death as a rite of passage to a new state rather than a termination. Christian, Buddhist, and Confucian concepts also affect Korean attitudes toward death.

## <sup>8</sup> INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Respect for parents and for elders in general is a central value for Koreans, and much of this and related tradition comes from Confucian values. There are detailed and elaborate rules governing one's speech and actions in the presence of older persons (although these rules are less rigidly observed than in the past). Even when not in the presence of their elders, Koreans are generally very courteous and emotionally reserved. Proper etiquette forbids strong displays of happiness, distress, or anger. When at home, Koreans have traditionally sat on the floor, although today chairs are becoming increasingly common. The most formal and polite posture when seated on the floor is to kneel with one's back kept straight and one's weight on the balls of both feet.

## <sup>9</sup> LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Korean house was made of wood or clay with a thatched roof (later replaced by tile or slate). Today, most South Koreans in urban areas live in high-rise, multi-story dwellings, and most homes are built of concrete. Houses are generally built low, with small rooms. In order to keep out the cold, there are few doors and windows. The Koreans have a unique traditional heating system called *ondal* that is still found even in many of the most modern homes. Heat is carried through pipes installed beneath the floors, a system geared toward the traditional Korean custom of sitting and sleeping on mats or cushions placed on the floor.

Health care in Korea has improved substantially since the 1950s. Average life expectancy has risen from 53 to 77.4 years (2008). However, the infant mortality rate is still relatively high, and many doctors tend to emigrate after completing their training. Traditional causes of death, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia, have been replaced by conditions more typical of industrialized societies, such as cancer, heart disease, and stroke.

South Korea's transportation system has been continually modernized and expanded. Roads and highways, especially in the area of Seoul, underwent major improvements in the 1980s in anticipation of the 1988 summer Olympics. The country has an excellent rail network, and Seoul has a modern subway system which is gradually replacing buses as the major means of transport in the city and its environs. There are bus lines between all major cities, and bicycles are also a popular means of transport. Korean Airlines flies between the country's major cities and foreign destinations including Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

The typical South Korean household consists of a nuclear family with two children. Although young children are nurtured and indulged, respect for one's parents—and one's elders, generally—is a central value in Korean life, and fathers in particular exercise a great degree of authority over their sons. Although divorce was not tolerated in the past, today it has be-



come quite common and no longer carries the stigma it once did.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

The majority of South Koreans wear modern Western-style clothing most of the time. During the country's very cold winters, warm clothing is a must, and most Koreans begin wearing long underwear early in the fall. Traditional garb (called *hanbok*) is still worn on a daily basis by some rural dwellers, and by all Koreans on special occasions such as weddings and holidays. For women, this type of clothing includes a long, full skirt called a *chima* and a short jacket (*chogori*) with a wide bow at the side (the entire outfit is also called *chimachogori*). The men's outfit is white and includes pants (*baji*) and a long coat or jacket (*turumagi*) worn over a sleeveless vest and adorned in front by a wide bow like that on the women's costume. In past times, the most distinctive item of male clothing was the *kat*, a high black horsehair hat with a wide brim and a chin strap. Today seen only occasionally on elderly men, it was once standard headgear for married men, who wore their hair in a braided topknot underneath it.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

The Korean national dish is *kimchi*, a spicy, fermented pickled vegetable mixture whose primary ingredient is cabbage. A dietary staple, it is prepared in large quantities in the fall by families throughout Korea and left to ferment for several weeks in large earthenware jars buried in the ground. A typical Korean meal includes soup, rice served with grains or beans, and kim-

chi served as a side dish. (A recipe for kimchi follows.) Other common dishes include *bulgogi* (strips of marinated beef), *kalbi* (marinated beef short ribs), and *sinsollo* (a meal of meat, fish, vegetables, eggs, nuts, and bean curd cooked together in broth). Koreans eat with chopsticks and a spoon, often at small, collapsible tables that can be moved to any room of the house.

### Kimchi

\*Note: Kimchi needs to be prepared at least two days ahead of time so it can ferment and develop its full flavor

1 cup coarsely chopped cabbage  
 1 cup finely sliced carrots  
 1 cup cauliflower florets, separated  
 2 tablespoons salt  
 2 green onions, finely sliced  
 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped, or 1 teaspoon garlic granules  
 ¼ tablespoon crushed red pepper  
 1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger or ½ teaspoon ground ginger

Place cabbage, carrots, and cauliflower in colander and sprinkle with salt. Toss vegetables and set in sink for about one hour. Rinse with cold running water, drain well, and place in a medium-sized bowl. Add onions, garlic, red pepper, and ginger and mix thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate for at least two days, stirring frequently. Yields about four cups.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Koreans' Confucian heritage has provided them with a great reverence for education, and literacy rates are some of the highest in the world: 97% for women and 99.3% for men. Education is free and compulsory in the primary grades between the ages of 6 and 12, and the great majority of students go on to six more years of middle school and high school. Discipline is strict, and children attend school five-and-a-half days per week. South Korea has over 200 institutions of higher education, including both two- and four-year colleges and universities. Ewha University is one of the world's largest women's universities. The leading public university in South Korea is Seoul National University.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Chinese art, Confucianism, and Buddhism have all had a major influence on the arts in Korea. Some 80,000 art objects are collected in the National Museum and outstanding examples of Korean architecture can be seen in historic palaces and Buddhist temples and pagodas. The National Classic Music Institute trains its graduates in traditional Korean music and Korean folk painting (*min'hwa*) is still practiced. Western art forms have been very influential in South Korea. The Korean National Symphony Orchestra and the Seoul Symphony Orchestra perform in Seoul and Pusan. Western-style drama, dance, and motion pictures have also become very popular among South Koreans.

### 15 WORK

In 2005 some 6% of South Korea's labor force was employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing and 27% in manufacturing, with the service sector employing 67% of the people. Unem-

ployment was 3.7%. South Korea has been subject to continued labor unrest in recent years as living costs have outpaced wages, especially for manual laborers. Workers have struck for higher wages, shorter working hours, and improved safety conditions on the job. Working hours in South Korea are among the longest in the world, averaging nearly 55 per week.

### 16 SPORTS

Koreans enjoy a variety of internationally popular sports, including baseball, volleyball, soccer, basketball, tennis, skating, golf, skiing, boxing, and swimming. Baseball is especially popular, and South Korea has a professional baseball league, whose games are broadcast on television, as are competitions at the college and high school levels. The best-known traditional Korean sport is the martial art of *taekwondo*, taught by Koreans to people throughout the world as a popular form of self-defense. The 1988 summer Olympic Games were held in Seoul, and South Korea was the co-host of the 2002 F.I.F.A. Football World Cup.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Both traditional Korean forms of recreation and modern Western pastimes are enjoyed in South Korea. Age-old games and ceremonial dances are still performed at festivals and other special occasions. These include mask dances (*Kanggangsullae*), the *Chajon Nori* ("juggernaut") game, in which participants ride in wooden vehicles, and mass tug-of-war games involving as many as a hundred people.

Among more modern forms of entertainment, television is enjoyed throughout the country. Soap operas and detective programs are among the most popular types of programming. Outside the home, South Koreans enjoy gathering in the country's numerous coffeehouses (called *tabang* or *tashil*) and bars. Koreans enjoy Western classical music, and their country has produced many fine performers. They are especially fond of singing and it is common for Koreans to sing for each other at dinners and other social occasions. In addition to instrumental music, ballet and opera are also popular and South Korea's motion picture industry releases dozens of new movies every year.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Fine Korean furniture, including wood and brass chests and lacquered items with mother-of-pearl inlay, is valued by collectors worldwide. Korean craftspeople are also known for their celadon ceramics, a term that refers to a type of greenish glaze that originated in China.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Most South Korean families face the common economic concerns of low wages, long working hours, and high rates of inflation. Few can afford to own their own homes. Korea's land has been eroded by poor farming practices and by deforestation during the country's occupation by Japan in the first half of the 20th century. In recent years, regional tension between Cholla and Kyongsang provinces has been a cause for concern.

In the 1980s, growing numbers of Koreans began to use the illegal substance crystalline methamphetamine, known as *hiruppon* in Korea and "speed" in the United States. By the end of the decade there were thought to be as many as 300,000 using



A South Korean family visits Changdeokgung Palace in Seoul, South Korea. (© Atlantide Phototravel/Corbis)

the drug, including many ordinary working people attempting to cope with high-pressure jobs and long work hours. Asian gangs were also engaged in shipping hiroppon manufactured in South Korea to other countries, including Taiwan, Japan, and the United States.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

The role of women in South Korean society has changed dramatically although much of South Korea is still very conservative. Women are not expected to smoke in public or in many areas drink alcohol in public. Many more women are in the work force than ever before—women make up some 34% of the total workforce—with women being found in all sectors, including the armed forces. There are some businesses run by women, although this remains rare, and there are some prominent women members of the National Assembly.

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—revised by J. Corfield

# SRI LANKANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** sree-LAHNG-kuhns

**LOCATION:** Sri Lanka

**POPULATION:** 20.1 million (2007 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Sinhala; Tamil

**RELIGION:** *Theravāda* Buddhism (70%); Hinduism (15%); Islam (7.5%); Christianity (7.5%) (2001 Census)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Veddas

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankans are inhabitants of the large island, formerly known as Ceylon, which appears to hang off the southern tip of the Indian peninsula like a teardrop. The modern name Sri Lanka is taken from the Indian epic *Ramayana*, in which the island is called Lanka. The prefix “Sri” is a common term of respect in South Asia. The island was named Taprobane by the ancient Greek mariners. Arab seafarers called it Serendib, from which has evolved our word “serendipity,” meaning the ability to find good fortune without really looking for it. The English name Ceylon is derived from a Sanskrit word that means “Island of the Sinhalese.”

Sri Lanka lies at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean. Its early history is one of repeated migrations of peoples from the Indian mainland. The first inhabitants of the island most probably included aboriginal peoples of Proto-Australoid stock who crossed the narrow straits from the southern tip of India. Peoples of Indo-European descent from northern India settled on the island around the 5th century BC, later evolving into the Sinhalese. Tamils from southeast India began to arrive in the early centuries AD and these migrations continued until about AD 1200. At times, kingdoms in South India were powerful enough to extend their control over parts of Sri Lanka.

At the beginning of the 16th century, Sri Lanka entered a new period in its history. This brought contact with the expanding maritime powers of Europe, and later domination by them. A Portuguese fleet landed on Sri Lanka in 1505, and in just over 100 years the Portuguese controlled most of the island. The Dutch replaced the Portuguese and, in turn, gave way to the British. From 1796 to 1948, Sri Lanka, called Ceylon by the British, remained a colony of Britain, forming part the British Indian Empire.

Ceylon achieved its independence from Britain without the communal violence that swept through the rest of the Indian subcontinent at the time. However, tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations were later to lead to a full-fledged civil war. The island nation of Ceylon was officially renamed the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean lying off the southern tip of India. It is separated from the mainland by the narrow Palk Strait. A string of shoals and islands known as Adam’s Bridge crosses the strait, and here Sri Lankan territory is separated from India by only 35 km (22 mi). Sri Lanka is 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq mi) in area, roughly half the size of New York State.

Sri Lanka’s topography is dominated by the central highlands, located in the south-central part of the island. Elevation

in the highlands averages more than 1,500 m (approximately 5,000 ft) and reaches 2,524 m (8,281 ft) at Pidurutala Peak, the highest point on the island. The mountains play an important role in the human geography of the country through their effect on rainfall. The southwestern flanks of the mountains and the adjacent lowlands are known as the island’s Wet Zone. These areas face the full force of the southwestern monsoon and receive as much 500 cm (196 in) of rain a year. The northern and eastern lowlands, the Dry Zone, in contrast receives less than 200 cm (79 in) with totals in some areas dropping below 100 cm (40 in). The island lies close to the equator, between 6°N and 10°N latitude, and so experiences an equatorial climate. There is little seasonal temperature variation, with daytime temperatures on the lowlands reaching between 29°C and 33°C (85°–92°F). Vegetation ranges from equatorial rain forest in the wetter upland to grasslands in the drier north.

The country’s population is 20.1 million people (2007 estimate). Sinhalese form the bulk of this population, with 81.89% of the total (2001 Census). Within the Sinhalese community, a distinction is made between “up-country” and “low-country” branches. The former are Sinhalese in the interior mountains around Kandy who clung to their independence while the low-country population came under the influence of the Portuguese and the Dutch. Tamils, who make up 9.43% (2001 Census) of the island’s people, are concentrated in the north and the eastern coastal lowlands. In Jaffna, on the northernmost tip of the island, they comprise over 90% of the population. Tamils, too, make a distinction in their own community. Sri Lankan Tamils trace their ancestry on the island back to the early centuries of the Christian Era, while Indian Tamils arrived during the 19th and 20th centuries to work on the tea plantations.

There are other minority communities present on the island. The Sri Lankan Moors are descended from Arab seafarers who arrived on the island in the 9th and 10th centuries. Moors, who have strong fishing and trading interests, form 8% (2001 Census) of the population. They are found along the coast, particularly in the southeast of the island. The Burghers, descendants of Dutch colonists from the 17th and 18th centuries, are a small but distinctive ethnic group. The term is also used to refer to Eurasians, i.e., any Sri Lankans of European descent. There is a small group of Malays in Sri Lanka. The Veddas, a primitive tribal people, are remnants of the oldest settlers of the island. They are Proto-Australoids, with racial affinities to groups such as the Bushmen of Africa and Aborigines of Australia. A primitive hunting and gathering people, they are rapidly being assimilated into Sinhalese society. In addition, there are bands of gypsies wandering the island, making their living from snake-charming, monkey-training, and tattooing.

Following Independence from Britain in 1948, Ceylon was ruled by Stephen Senanayake and his United National Party (UNP), which dominated the country’s parliament in the immediate post-independence era. Ceylon, as a former British colony, inherited the British political system with power vested in the prime minister. It was fully expected that the new government would be threatened from the Left, but the island’s Marxist parties were too divided to mount an effective challenge. A deteriorating economic situation combined with a rising Sinhalese nationalism, which was identified with Sri Lankan nationalism—a view that was rejected by minorities such as the Tamils—saw Solomon Bandaranaike sweep to

power at the head of the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1956. Bandaranaike's government was unabashedly Sinhalese and Buddhist, but he was assassinated in 1959 and replaced by his wife, Sirimavo. Sirimavo Bandaranaike made a determined bid to secularize education, thus alienating the Roman Catholics, while her policies towards language alienated the Tamils. The Bandaranaiques created a new balance of political forces in Sri Lanka which saw the dominance of the Sinhalese and a decline in the status of minorities.

Despite a move to the left, Bandaranaike's United Front, a coalition of the old SFLP and several communist parties in Sri Lanka held power from 1970 to 1977. A combination of factors, such as unemployment, rising prices, and food scarcities, brought down the Bandaranaike government and in the general elections of 1977 the UNP under Junius Jayawardene won handily. In 1978 a new constitution was adopted, establishing a presidential form of government with Jayawardene as president. The constitution also improved the lot of minorities such as the Tamils. Nonetheless, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), formed in 1972 from various Tamil political groups, became the main opposition and began advocating a separate state for Tamils on the island, a position to which the government was strongly opposed. The years 1983–1988 saw a period of ethnic violence and the emergence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as the main Tamil separatist group. The period was marked by numerous incidents of violence, with government security forces engaging the LTTE, and many civilians killed in the conflict. However, in 1987 Rajiv Gandhi visited Sri Lanka and agreed to provide military assistance in the form of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF). At first it seemed as if the Indian-Sri Lankan accord would be a success, with Tamil groups surrendering their weapons, but the Tamils continued their opposition, and the IPKF was withdrawn in 1990.

In 1988 presidential elections saw Ranasinghe Premadasa of the UNP returned to power and he repealed the state of emergency that had existed since 1983. Violence continued through the 1989 general elections and into the early 1990s, with the LTTE being banned in India, following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991 (Gandhi was supposedly killed by a LTTE suicide-bomber). Chandrika Kumaratunga of the People's Alliance (a political grouping consisting of the SLFP and various leftist parties), daughter of the Bandaranaiques, became prime minister in 1994 and immediately made overtures to the LTTE concerning unconditional peace talks. Kumaratunga won election to the presidency in late 1994 and resumed peace talks with the LTTE, which resulted in a formal truce between the government and the LTTE in 1995. However, following several rounds of deadlocked talks, the Sri Lankan government launched military offensives against the Tamils, while at the same time developing proposals for devolution, which would give Tamils in Jaffna a degree of autonomy. While successful at first, the Sri Lankan Army was frustrated by a resurgence of the LTTE in 1999–2000. In the meantime, violence continued, with an attempt on the life of President Kumaratunga herself. However, at the end of 2000 the LTTE declared a unilateral cease-fire as a prelude to talks with the government, and in 2002 Norway and several other Scandinavian countries agreed to monitor the implementation of the peace.

December 2001 saw the victory of a UNP-led coalition in general elections, with Ranil Wickremasinghe as prime min-



ister. One of the political consequences of this change in government was a strengthening of the peace process, which saw Norway's involvement. However, in 2004 the UNP coalition was defeated, and Mahinda Rajapakse became head of a rather unstable minority government. In 2005 Rajapakse secured a narrow victory in the presidential elections.

Despite a continued commitment to the peace process by the government and the Tamil separatists, acts of violence (probably carried out by the LTTE) still occur in Sri Lanka. In July 2008 a suicide bomber killed several people (both police and civilians) in Colombo. Even though the Sri Lankan government presented its proposals for devolution in 2007, by 2008 it was unlikely that peace would come to Sri Lanka in the near future.

### <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The linguistic patterns of Sri Lankans broadly mirror the ethnic composition of the island. Thus, Sinhalese speak Sinhala, an Aryan language of the Indo-European language family. This was introduced to the island by the peoples from northern India who settled in Sri Lanka around the 5th century BC. Tamils speak the Tamil language, a Dravidian language that is spoken in Tamil Nadu State on the Indian mainland. Arabic is the language of prayer and religious instruction for Sri Lankan Muslims, though the Moors use Tamil for everyday purposes and the Malays still speak their mother tongue. Although English was used in the past by the Burghers and Eurasians, these

communities have now adopted the Sinhala tongue. The language spoken by Veddas is very similar to Sinhala.

Language has emerged as a symbol of the political struggle between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. In 1972 Sinhala was made the sole official language of Sri Lanka. This enraged the Tamils, who were denied the use of their own tongue for official purposes, and provided fuel for Tamils who wanted a separate Tamil state on the island. Today, both Sinhala and Tamil are official languages of Sri Lanka.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

The ethnic communities of Sri Lanka have their own traditions of myth and legend. The Sinhalese, for example, believe they are descended from a lion (*sinha* means “lion” and *le* is “blood”) whose grandson, Prince Vijaya, came to the island from North India. The *Mahavamsa*, an important Buddhist work, relates how Vijaya conquered the demoness Kuveni and made her his queen, presenting the history of the island up to AD 350. Much of the Sinhalese folk tradition has its roots in Buddhism. Sri Lankan Tamils, however, take pride in being descended from South Indians who invaded the island nearly 2,000 years ago. As Hindus, their mythology embraces epics such as the *Ramayana*, which tells how the god Rama, assisted by the monkey-king Hanuman, destroyed the evil Ravana in his kingdom of Lanka (Sri Lanka).

#### **5 RELIGION**

The ruler of Sri Lanka was converted to Buddhism during the time of the Indian Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BC), and since then the peoples of the island have been predominantly Buddhist in religion. Most, though not all Sinhalese are Buddhists, who make up 70% of the population. Buddhism in Sri Lanka is of the southern type, Theravāda Buddhism, which virtually requires becoming a monk to achieve salvation. The Buddhist Sangha, or order of monks, is an important element in Sri Lankan society.

Hindus make up 15% of Sri Lanka’s population, and Muslims another 7.5%, or just over 1.5 million people. The effects of colonialism are seen in the 7.5% of Sri Lankans who are Christian (mostly Roman Catholic).

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Sri Lankans officially celebrate many Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian holidays. In addition, most businesses are closed on full moon days, which are considered holidays.

One of the most colorful of the many Sri Lankan festivals is the two-week Esala Perahera that is held in Kandy, the ancient hill capital of the island. It is the occasion on which the Tooth Relic of the Buddha is taken out in procession (*perahera*). Thousands gather to see the sacred tooth (nowadays a replica), carried on the back of an elaborately decorated elephant, pass through the streets. The colorful procession consists of dozens of elephants, temple officials, school children, dancers, and acrobats. The festival held at Katagarama, an ancient place of pilgrimage, is attended by Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians, as well as Hindus. The regular festival calendars of all the religions present in Sri Lanka are observed by their respective communities.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Although modernization has had its effect, many Sri Lankans still follow traditional customs in their life-cycle rituals. In rural areas, for example, when a Tamil girl experiences her first menstruation, she is kept isolated in a specially built hut for at least 16 days before she undergoes a ritual purification. For Muslims, the circumcision of male children is an important ritual. Christians solemnize baptisms and weddings in church. Hindus and Buddhists cremate their dead, while Muslims and Christians practice burial.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Sinhalese are well known for their hospitality to friends, relatives, and even strangers. Guests are invited into the house and offered food and refreshment. This tradition of hospitality originates in Buddhist ideals of charity and compassion. Among the Sinhalese, the same general greeting, “Ayubowan” (“Greetings”) is used both when meeting and parting from a person. “Vanakkam” is the Tamil greeting.

#### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Demographic and health statistics set Sri Lankans apart from the other peoples of South Asia because they are not typical of a developing country. Life expectancy for a man, for example, is close to 75 years, compared to 63 in Bangladesh. The annual rate of population increase is 0.78%, quite low when viewed against Pakistan’s 2%. The infant mortality rate among Sri Lankans is only 11 deaths per 1,000 live births, whereas among Indians it reaches 58. Per capita income, however, is only us\$4,100 (2007 estimate), which is below the average for Asia.

Sri Lankans living in major cities such as Colombo, Kandy, and Trincomalee have access to all the amenities of modern urban living. However, most people (78%) live in villages in the countryside. The typical Sinhalese village is built near a “tank,” a reservoir that collects rainwater for irrigation. Houses are mud-walled, thatched, one-room huts, with no windows and a single door. A veranda runs along the front of the hut. Each hut stands on its own plot with a fence marking its boundaries, surrounded by a garden of fruit trees.

Town and country are linked by a network of paved roads and are served by a state-run bus system as well as by private mini-buses. A rail network, though not as extensive as in the past, serves many areas of the island.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Sinhalese, like their Tamil counterparts, have a caste system which determines ritual status, marriage partners, and even occupation. Marriages are generally arranged, and marriage rituals follow the customs of the community to which one belongs. The woman’s role in the family is typical of South Asian societies—managing the household, preparing food for her husband, and above all, bearing children. Average household size is 4.3 persons.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Standard dress among the rural Sinhalese is the sarong (*sarama*), which probably has its origins in Southeast Asia. Men wear this with a shirt, and today women use a jacket, though in the past they are reputed to have gone topless. Urban Sinhalese have adopted Western-style clothes. Women wear skirts and



A young Sri Lankan girl writes on a blackboard in Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka. (© Keren Su/Corbis)

blouses, though they prefer the sari for formal and ceremonial occasions. Muslims wear the shirt and sarong, although the men can usually be distinguished by the caps they wear. In public, Muslim women cover the head and face with their sari in deference to the Muslim custom of *purdah*, the keeping of women in seclusion. Among Tamils, men wear the *verti*, a long length of cotton wrapped around the waist and falling to the ankles, with a collarless shirt. Tamil women wear the traditional Indian sari, though in a slightly different manner to the Sinhalese.

The “national” dress of Sri Lankans is basically a white *verti* and a long-sleeved shirt with a Nehru-style collar. It was popularized by politicians in the late 1950s but is hardly worn by anyone else.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

The standard fare of Sri Lankans is rice, which is eaten at every meal. The rice is served on a plate, along with helpings of curry. A curry is a dish made with meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or vegetables, prepared in an assortment of spices. Sri Lankans cook their curries in coconut milk. The rice and curry is accompanied by an assortment of spicy sauces (*sambol*), pickles, and chutneys. The meal is usually followed by fresh fruits or, on special occasions, by the sweets so popular among South Asians. Hot tea and coconut milk are popular beverages. *Pan*,

or betel nut, is consumed after meals or, indeed, at any time of the day.

There are regional and also ethnic variations in diet among Sri Lankans. Muslim food, for example, is usually much sweeter than Sinhalese or Tamil dishes. Pork is never eaten because of Muslim religious beliefs. Food is also eaten differently, especially on ritual or ceremonial occasions. Men eat separately from women, sitting in groups and sharing food from a single plate. Among orthodox Buddhists, meat is never eaten because of the belief in the concept of nonviolence (*ahimsa*). It is common for housewives to offer a sampling of the food prepared for the noon meal (nothing containing meat, of course) to the statue of Buddha. Tamils, who regard the cow as sacred, will not eat beef. Rice cooked with coconut milk is an important festival food and is frequently an offering to the gods. At the time of Thai Pongal, a festival honoring the Hindu sun deity, Tamils prepare and ceremoniously consume a specially prepared dish of spiced and sweetened rice.

## <sup>13</sup>EDUCATION

Sri Lankans are unique among South Asians in terms of literacy and educational levels. The overall literacy rate among the population over 10 years of age was 97.3% in 2003. This is the highest of any developing country, and of particular note is the high proportion of girls who remain in school. This figure drops only among Muslims, who tend to keep girls at home af-

ter puberty. Education is free, from kindergarten through the university level.

Ironically, the high level of education among Sri Lankans is the cause of some dissatisfaction. Many educated people cannot find suitable employment; they are often unwilling to accept lesser jobs and, therefore, add to the ranks of the unemployed on the island.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The cultural heritage of Sri Lanka is closely linked to the traditions of Theravāda Buddhism. An important event in the early history of Buddhism on the island was the arrival of a cutting taken from the sacred Bo tree under which the Buddha found enlightenment. The Emperor Ashoka sent it to the Island, and it was planted in the ancient capital of Anuradhapura. The tree still survives and, as the original Bo tree in Bodhi Gaya no longer exists, it is the only living link with the Buddha. The tree is viewed with great reverence by Buddhists from around the world. The *Dipavamsa* (AD 350) and the *Mahavamsa* (AD 550) are two important works, written by Buddhist monks, chronicling the early history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The artistic heritage of Sri Lanka is also strongly Buddhist in nature. The famous “cloud maidens” of Sigiriya, painted on a ledge high on the walls of a rock fortress, are Buddhist paintings that have survived from the end of the 5th century AD. Numerous Buddhist monasteries, temples, and sculptures are found all over the island. The Gal Vihara at Polonnaruwa, with its statue of the reclining Buddha (14 m or 46 ft long), represents one of the highest achievements of Sri Lankan art.

Sinhalese dance differs from Indian classical dance forms in its reliance on body movements, rapid footwork, and acrobatics to tell its story. It is usually performed by males. “Low-country” dancing, performed in the southern coastal lowlands is sometimes called “devil-dancing” because it evolved from folk rituals to exorcise demons. The “up-country” dancing found in the central highlands around Kandy is performed by women as well as men. *Kolam* is a form of dance-drama involving masked dancers retelling stories from myth and legend.

#### **15 WORK**

On gaining independence, Sri Lanka inherited a well-developed plantation agriculture which remains a mainstay of the country's exports. Tea, coconut products, rubber, cinnamon, cardamom, and pepper are the major crops. For centuries, Sri Lanka has been known for gemstones and today still exports sapphires, rubies, semiprecious stones, and pearls. A relatively recent development has been the establishment of a Free Trade Zone near Colombo, the country's capital. Ready-made clothing produced there now accounts for nearly half the value of Sri Lanka's total exports.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Sri Lankans are very fond of sports. Cricket is by far the most popular game, with many clubs participating in league play during the season, which lasts from September to April. Club matches draw large and enthusiastic crowds of spectators. On the international cricketing scene, Sri Lanka is emerging as a major power. In 1996 Sri Lanka achieved an important international honor by winning the World Cup of Cricket, beating countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Pakistan.

Other popular sports include rugby, tennis, and soccer.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Sri Lankans have access to radio and television, although television programming is scheduled only in the evening hours. Programs are broadcast in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Sri Lanka has a small film industry producing movies in Sinhala.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Artisans in Sri Lanka carry on a tradition of fine craftwork that extends back many centuries. Woodcarving; lacquer work; ivory-carving; metalwork in brass, gold, and silver; jewelry; pottery; and basketry are all represented in the arts and crafts of the island.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Sri Lankans have faced many of the problems typical of newly independent countries, for instance, the need to develop self-sufficiency in food, conversion of a colonial economy, inflation, and high unemployment. Heavy military expenditures, deficit financing, and high petroleum prices on the global markets increased inflationary pressures. Inflation was running at 19.8% in May 2008, the highest level in five years.

A number of Tamil refugees have fled the island to India and the West in order to escape the violence associated with the civil war.

The December 2004 Asian tsunami was an economic disaster for Sri Lanka. Not only were an estimated 40,000 lives lost, fisheries and tourism along the coasts were disrupted, and many people lost their livelihoods. The tsunami, along with political developments, interrupted promising economic policy initiatives and the progress of economic reconstruction.

In some areas, such as health and education, Sri Lanka is a model for the Third World. But the most divisive problem in the country is the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils. After independence, Tamil resentment at Sinhalese nationalism eventually led to armed insurgency on the part of Tamils in the northern areas around the Jaffna peninsula. Organizations such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Eelam is the Tamil name for Sri Lanka), which has received support from Tamils in India, have been fighting for an independent Tamil state in the northern part of the island. India even sent a peacekeeping force to the region for a short time in the late 1980s. The problem remains unresolved today, with continuing armed conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and Tamil separatists.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The majority of women in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese, and as Buddhists they have theoretical equality with men. But like their Tamil counterparts, they live in patriarchies and thus tend to occupy subordinate roles in Sri Lankan society. Tamils are Hindus and share many characteristic of Hindu societies—arranged marriages, casteism, dowries, and the occasional dowry death. Many of these features are mirrored in Sinhalese society. Some Tamil teenagers marry when they are below the legal age in Sri Lanka (18 years) to avoid recruitment by the LTTE.

Sri Lankan women overall enjoy more equitable inheritance rights than women in many other parts of South Asia. The constitution provides for equal inheritance rights for men and



women, but Islamic law discriminates against women in the area of property and grants them smaller inheritance shares than male heirs. A daughter, for example, inherits half as much as a son. In Kandyan law, males are also given precedence over females in inheritance of agricultural land.

Violence against women continues to be a problem and to a large extent is due to the long-running conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. For the duration of the conflict—almost two and a half decades—women have experienced rape, detainment, harassment at checkpoints, and other violations of their personal security. Domestic violence, including marital rape, is another area of concern where legal protection, although strengthened through amendments to the Penal Code, is insufficient and incidents of domestic violence rarely reported.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# SUMBANESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** SOOM-buh-neeZ

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (island of Sumba, Lesser Sunda chain)

**POPULATION:** 611,000 (island, 2005)

**LANGUAGE:** Wewewa (or Waidjewa) in the west, and Kambera in the east

**RELIGION:** Protestantism; Catholicism; traditional belief system

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The export of sandalwood and horses has linked Sumba to international markets since the earliest times; the 14th-century Javanese poem, the “Nagarakrtagama,” lists Sumba as a Majapahit “vassal,” though in actuality this meant little more than a commercial relationship. In the 17th century, the sultanate of Bima (on Sumbawa) extended a loose hegemony over the island's chiefdoms; at the same time, Makassarese influence also reached the island. Local rulers amassed great wealth, particularly in gold, through the sale of slaves to Muslim dealers from off-island. Reaching its peak in the 18th century but continuing well into the next, the slave trade virtually depopulated the center of the island.

In 1756, the Dutch concluded a contract with a coalition of Sumbanese chiefs. However, it was only around 1900 that the Dutch began to intervene in local politics, controlling the island through the chiefs already in power, renaming them “rajas.” In 1886, a Catholic mission was established but soon abandoned. In 1906, the Dutch commenced the formal pacification of the island, installing an administrator six years later. The situation remained unsettled for some time, the garrison troops being replaced by police forces only in 1933. The Dutch ruled (and taxed) the island through its traditional elite, whose power colonialism actually increased; the elite also perpetuated their dominance by accessing the modern education newly introduced by Christian missionary organizations, education that gave their children the credentials to be appointed as officials. In 1962, the Indonesian republic replaced the old administrative divisions based on traditional “kingdoms” with a system of districts under district heads (*camat*).

Although the island remained the least developed part of one of Indonesia's least developed provinces, Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1978) did invest in schools, roads, electrification, and healthcare. Since subsistence agriculture has remained the primary means of livelihood (tourism grew but only minimally because of the limited infrastructure), infusions from the central government, particularly in the form of bureaucratic salaries, represent a relatively large portion of the local GDP. Thus, securing a government job not only for the salary itself but also for the opportunities for corruption, is the main way available for a person to lift himself and his extended family out of the poverty endured by the general population. Competition for government positions has been fierce between ethnic groups (“tribes,” clans) on Sumba.

In the uncertain conditions after Suharto was forced to give up power and amidst national economic collapse and a regional drought, this competition erupted into one case of mass violence: in November 1998 in Waikabubak, the capital of West



Sumba regency, a protest against corruption in the civil service exams directed against the regency's current *bupati* (head administrator), a member of the Wewewa tribe, evolved into a battle between the Loli and Wewewa tribes, in which over a hundred people were killed. The *bupati*'s chief opponent had long been the head of the regency parliament, a Loli. The town, once a magnet for tourists because of the traditional hilltop villages around which it had grown, was devastated. Traditional reconciliation ceremonies, appeals to Christian brotherhood, and police reinforcements from the East Nusa Tenggara provincial capital of Kupang in West Timor attempted to keep the peace thereafter.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The island of Sumba (area: 11,153 sq km or 4,306 sq mi) belongs to the Lesser Sunda chain, lying south of Flores and Sumbawa across a narrow strait and east from Timor across the Savu Sea. Like Timor, the island lacks volcanoes. Much of the interior, especially towards the west, consists of irregular hills; the eastern part, in particular, is very hot and dry. The population (611,000 in 2005, up from 415,000 persons in 1988 and 250,000 persons in 1960) is concentrated in an interior plateau whose extensive grasslands can support grazing and small-scale agriculture. In the 19th century, the Dutch sponsored the settlement of Christians from the neighboring island of Savu; Muslim Endenese from Flores had already settled at points along the coast, originally engaged in the export of Sumbanese slaves.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Sumbanese speak several closely related Austronesian languages: Wewewa (or Wejewa), Anakulangu, Kodi, Lamboya, Laura, Mamboru, and Wanukaka in the west, and Kambera (divided into numerous dialects of its own) in the east. Outside the island, the Sumbanese languages find their closest affinities with Manggarai (Flores), Bimanese (Sumbawa), and Savunese.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Traditional beliefs and mythology are still prevalent among the Sumbanese, even though Christianity has come to be the dominant religion. Sumbanese mythology includes many spirit figures, from the Creator to the ancestors (see *Religion*).

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

In recent decades, Protestantism has come to claim 51% of the population in East Sumba and 34% in West Sumba, while the Catholic population now includes 20% of the total in West Sumba. Adherents of the traditional belief system, however, still number a relatively high 39% in East Sumba and a similar percentage in West Sumba.

*Marapu* is the generic term for the spirits and the spirit world. The highest deities include a Creator figure, a Mother Moon, and a Great Mother/Great Father. In addition, innumerable "Lords and Protectors" (of fields, houses, wells, etc.) are recognized. Some ancestral spirits are deified. Clan priests (*ratu*) communicate with the *marapu* through blood sacrifices, food offerings, and invocations at altars (racks, posts, or stones in houses, fields, and the bush). For instance, before hunting, one sacrifices a rooster to *Marapu Ponda*, the god of hunting. Religious celebrations accompanying hunting, house-building, weddings, and funerals provide an occasion for gift-exchange among linked kin-groups. Lengthy all-night recitals transmit stories (*li ndai*) about the creation of world, the descent of humans to a mythical mountaintop, the dispersal of ancestral clans, and the wanderings of clan founders.

Sumbanese social life is still in great part regulated by the *Marapu* religion and its rituals, and so even Sumbanese Christians living outside the clan "mother villages" where traditional practices are maintained continue to respect the authority of the *ratu*.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The New Year's festival (*Wula Padu*) is celebrated at the beginning of the agricultural year (the start of the rainy season); a "first fruits" celebration is held at harvest time. Every four to eight years, village renewal festivals take place; ancestral spirits are invited to join.

The culmination of the annual fertility rites is the *Pasola*, timed for the first appearance of multicolored *nyale* seaworms (a delicacy) on shore (after the second or third full moon of the solar year). The worms are said to be the transformed body of *Nyale*, the beautiful daughter of the Moon King; taking pity on the sufferings of humanity, she threw herself into the sea as a sacrifice. The *Pasola* includes the ritual plowing of a sacred paddy field. Young men and women gather at the beach to watch boxing matches meant to draw blood to appease the spirits. Priests observe how abundant the worms are in order to determine prospects for the harvest. The highlight of the festival is a battle between two teams of 150 mounted warriors



A Rato (priest) of the Sumbanese culture is seen dressed for the Pasola ceremony in Sumba, Indonesia. The Pasola is a ceremony that is part of a fertility ritual. This culture remains one of Indonesia's last native groups to practice their traditional animist beliefs. (Getty Images)

each. Although the warriors use blunted spears, the fighting can get bloody. In the past, death was common and regarded as punishment meted out by the *marapu* for infractions of custom. The wounded could expiate their transgressions through sacrifices of chicken and pigs. The spilled blood purifies the participants' villages for the coming year and ensures the health of the crops.

## <sup>7</sup> RITES OF PASSAGE

A child receives his or her name when one day old. Prayers to the *marapu* for an infant's safety and longevity accompany his or her first haircutting; an uncle brings a pig for the following feast, receiving a horse from the father in return. Boys undergo circumcision, while girls undergo tattooing and tooth filing.

Elders arrange marriages; for aristocrats, complicated negotiations are required. A representative of the boy's side, the *wunang*, delivers the proposal in euphemistic language, referring to the prospective bride as a "bundle of rice." Marriage by elopement is also common. Before taking the girl to his house, the young man leaves a gold chain under her pillow and a horse in the yard to inform her parents of the abduction. Upon arriving home, he beats a gong and distributes gifts to his relatives as a sign of the union. If amenable, the girl's side sends a *wunang* to negotiate, sending a cloth symbolizing their hav-

ing raised the girl; the boy's side replies by sending them water and wild figs. Now, the families can set the bride-price and the wedding date. Weddings entail the exchange of goods between the families: the groom's side gives "masculine" goods (gold, spears, slaves, horses), and the bride's side gives "feminine" goods (textiles, beads, pigs, ivory).

For the funerals of nobles, large numbers of water buffalo are slaughtered, and textiles and other valuable goods are destroyed as a display of status. Government regulations limit animal sacrifice to five animals so that no one bankrupts themselves. The rites extend over several years in order to accumulate wealth for a secondary burial. Aristocratic tombs consist of huge stone sarcophagi under enormous slabs; in West Sumba, 40 men labored two years to carve a 30-ton grave slab. The largest tomb on the island was built in 1971 at Gula-bakul; 2,000 men were needed to drag the 70-ton slab.

## <sup>8</sup> INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In East Sumba, an individual's identity traditionally derives from the independent domain (*tana*) to which he or she belongs (of which there are 50). Each *tana* has a fortified hill-top ceremonial center, the *paraing*. Within a *tana*, four clans share the title of *kabihu mangu tana* ("those who possess the land") and have the right to lead agricultural rituals. The *Tamu*

*Umbu*, the ruler of the tana, is determined theoretically by primogeniture, but oratorical skills and other leadership qualities may favor a younger son or other relative. The ruler's dwelling houses the treasure coming down from the *marapu* and serves as the temple for the whole tana. The ruler is empowered to deal with other tana and with foreign traders, on whom he levies duties on horse and cattle exports.

Society was traditionally divided into two broad endogenous classes: the *tau kabihu* ("humans") who possess land rights based on kin-group membership and clanless *tau ata* (slaves). The latter included *ata ndai* (servants) and *ata bidi* (war captives and violators of custom) and ranged from well-off household servants and artisans to field-hands and, formerly, the objects of human sacrifice. The elite (*maramba*) were descended most directly from the *marapu*, a status inheritable through paternal and maternal lines. This class had greater access to land, being able to afford to maintain wet-rice fields, as well as sumptuary privileges; lower-ranking *tau kabihu* were clients of *maramba*. An elite family traditionally gained prestige through sponsoring religious festivals at which it could display wealth in the form of water buffalo, horses, textiles, and jewelry, sometimes involving the potlatch-like destruction of these goods while extolling praise of the clan. Many former rulers have taken positions within the local administration under the Indonesian republic.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In 2005, the two regencies of Sumba had an average Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 59.7, significantly less than that of East Nusa Tenggara province as a whole (63.6) but dramatically below that of Indonesia as a whole (69.6). East Sumba's HDI was much lower than West Sumba's in 1999, and now the former's GDP per capita is much higher than the latter's, US\$3,507 vs. US\$2,236, the third lowest in East Nusa Tenggara, whose provincial GDP per capita in turn is the second lowest in Indonesia (cf. US\$9,784 for West Sumatra, US\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, and US\$6,293 for Central Java; and US\$3,427 for East Nusa Tenggara as a whole). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality stood at 56.65 deaths per 1,000 live births for West Sumba, only slightly lower than the rate for the province as a whole (56.65), comparable to much more developed provinces, such as South Sulawesi and West Java. East Sumba, on the other hand, had an IMR of 65.62, comparable to Central Kalimantan and Banten, also more developed provinces.

Half of the year, people live away from the main village in scattered settlements near their swidden (shifting-cultivation) fields, although today more Sumbanese are living in riverside villages, while maintaining their clan ties and ritual obligations to the ancestral village. This fortified hilltop home village (the *paraing*) serves also as a ceremonial center. Clan houses face a central square containing the stone slab graves of prominent ancestors and a dead tree upon which skulls were formerly hung (the slabs are also used for tasks such as drying rice). Tombs, taking the shape of the canoes that brought the ancestors to Sumba, are also built on hillsides.

The clan house (*uma kabihu*) is a large rectangular structure supported on piles. Supported by four massive center posts, its thatched roof rises gently from all sides then rises sharply to a center ridge; a statue of a chicken (a fertility symbol) stands on the roof. High up under the roof is the place for storing the

*marapu* heirlooms. A veranda runs along the front side. There are separate entrances for the sexes, as well as a gender-divided interior.

The *uma kabihu* housed members of a patrilineal clan segment and served as a clan temple; the right front corner post is where offerings are laid and the officiating priest stands near it at ceremonies.

Ordinary houses (*uma kamudungu*) are of wood and have nonpeaked roofs of plaited grass or bamboo (today often of corrugated iron).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The *kabihu* is a patrilineal clan whose segments are scattered in different locales. Each clan has a senior branch, the "great house," most directly descended from the *umbu*, the founder who first obtained the right to settle the land of a given area (often in a mythical age).

A peculiarity of the kin terminology is that one's father's sister's daughter and one's mother's brother's daughter are distinguished from other cousins. At least one son in a family should be wedded to his mother's brother's daughter, although the uncle could be fictive kin. Each *kabihu* is exogamous, but marriage exchange is between *kabihu* within the same village with one clan wife-giving (*jera*, higher in status) and the other wife-taking (*laija*). Marriage links over generations impose numerous ritual and economic obligations. If a man dies before the bride-price is paid, his brother fulfills the obligation by marrying his brother's widow.

East Sumba regency has a Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 59.6 (2005 score), lower than that of East Nusa Tenggara province as a whole (63.6) but far below that of Indonesia as a whole (69.6). East Sumba's GDP per capita is US \$3,507, above that of East Nusa Tenggara as a whole, US\$3,427, the second lowest in Indonesia the second lowest in East Nusa Tenggara (cf. US\$9,784 for West Sumatra, US\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, and US\$6,293 for Central Java). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality in East Sumba stood at 77.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, the highest in the province (provincial rate was 56.65). The corresponding figures for West Sumba regency (2005 HDI, 59.8) differed somewhat, with GDP per capital substantially lower yet the infant mortality also lower.

## 11 CLOTHING

Female attire consists of the *lau*, a tube skirt that includes some bands of warp *ikat*, a type of tie-dyeing (ceremonial skirts include other types of decoration, e.g., beadwork). In the villages, younger women are now wearing blouses. Men wear a *hinggi* consisting of two rectangular pieces of cloth sewn together; one piece is wrapped around the hips, the other draped over the shoulders as a mantle. One type is the *hinggi kombu*, a cloth of blue and rust *ikat*. Deeper shades are produced by tedious multiple dyeings. The dyes are derived from indigo and *kombu* tree bark; the cloth is treated with plant oils.

## 12 FOOD

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In 2005, the level of literacy stood at 72.93% for West Sumba and 81.14 for East Sumba, both lower than that for the East Nusa Tenggara as a whole (84.95) and quite low for Indonesia (West Sumba's was only a little higher than Papua's, and East Sumba's was between West Nusa Tenggara's (78.79) and South Sulawesi's (84.6) (*See also* the article entitled **Indonesians**).

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Among the better-known performing arts are the *Kataga*, a war dance of West Sumba; and the *Lii Marapu*, tales of the creation of the first humans and the ancestors of the Sumbanese told during the *Wula Padu* (New Year) celebration by clan leaders.

### **15 WORK**

Sumbanese engage in small-scale farming supplemented by stock-raising and the exchange of goods. Rice is the staple food and is also ritually important, grown in aristocrat-owned irrigated fields in the valleys. Maize is cultivated in swidden fields. People keep year-round gardens and fruit trees. Large herds of wild horses roam the island; Sumbanese capture them for mounts or to trade off-island. Since the 1920s, Bengal cattle have been raised for export. Water buffalo provide meat for ritual feasts and serve as a measure of wealth. Sumbanese traded horses, buffalo, and *ikat* textiles for gongs, coins, gold jewelry, ivory, beads, and porcelain from Makassarese, Bimanese, and Endenese merchants. The intra-island exchange system, operating along ties of kinship and marital alliance, circulated regional craft products, rice, and imported goods.

### **16 SPORTS**

*See* the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

*See* the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES**

Sumba is famous for its *ikat* (tie-dyed) textiles, exported off-island since the 19th century. Using home back-strap looms, women weave patterns from memory (learned from their mothers). Among the great variety of motifs are horses and buffaloes in profile, birds, lizards, open-mouthed dogs, climbing monkeys, rampant cats, Chinese-derived dragons, lions of Dutch origin, Indian patola patterns, standing human figures with arms akimbo or praying, and skull trees. Traditional colors were blue-and-white fabrics for commoners; nobles' cloths added reds. *Ikat* shrouds protect the body waiting for burial and ensure a safe journey and well-being in the afterlife.

Tombstones are often ornately carved, often with human figures.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

*See* the article entitled **Indonesians**.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) for West Sumba (2002 score) is 51.6, far below both that of Indonesia as a whole national (59.2) and that of East Nusa Tenggara

as a whole (56.3). The two regencies' Gender Empowerment Measures (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's) were, respectively, 42.2 and 48.5, also far lower than the national GEM of 54.6 but close to the provincial GEM of 46.2).

Sumbanese culture, like those of eastern Indonesia generally, is characterized by allied clans exchanging brides and valuables. A Sumbanese woman's life is shaped by the experience of being moved from her father's house to her husband's house (as opposed to the case in many western Indonesian cultures where it is very often the husband who moves in with the bride's family or even remains virtually a temporary sojourner in his wife's family house). Men have access to the ancestral spirits of the patrilineal clan; women, as outsiders who have married in, do not have such access. On the other hand, women's ritual activity (including what is termed "witchcraft") focuses on "wild" spirits resident in forests, streams, coral reefs, and the depths of the sea and promotes the welfare of individuals and individual families rather than not that of the larger corporate groups defined by worship of common patrilineal ancestors.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# SUMBAWANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** soom-BAH-wuhns

**LOCATION:** Indonesia (Sumbawa)

**POPULATION:** About 320,000 (2000)

**LANGUAGE:** Sumbawan

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Indonesians

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The name “Sumbawa” originally referred only to the western part of the island of Sumbawa, to the home of the *Tau Semawa*, the Sumbawan ethnic group. The eastern part belongs to the distinct Bimanese people; relations between the regions were distant. As late as 1920, there was no intermarriage between the Sumbawan and Bimanese sultanates. The island received some early Hindu-Javanese influence; four places on the island appear in the 14th-century Javanese poem *Nagarakrtagama*. In the 16th century, the Balinese kingdom of Gelgel extended its hegemony to the Semawa, while Bima entered the Makassarese sphere of influence; both peoples adopted Islam.

On 12 June 1674, the sultanate of Sumbawa made an agreement with the VOC, which included ceding territory to the Dutch company, thus enabling it to monopolize the island’s most renowned export, sappanwood (an ingredient in dyes). In 1820, an adventurer from Banjarmasin (South Kalimantan) seized the sultanate’s regalia; his descendants ruled as sultans of Sumbawa until Indonesian independence. Dutch direct rule only began in 1905. The island had suffered from frequent famine before the 1980s, when the Indonesian government succeeded in doubling rice production.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The island of Sumbawa (area: 15,448 sq km or 5,965 sq mi) lies between Lombok and Flores in the Lesser Sunda chain. The Gulf of Saleh virtually splits the island in half but for a narrow isthmus. Originating in the region of Sanggar, the Sumbawan ethnic group inhabits the land west of the gulf; their old sultanate was centered near the volcano Tambora before its catastrophic eruption in 1815 caused major population losses and displacements. Much of the island is covered by grasslands dotted with occasional clumps of trees and shrubs, partly the product of slash-and-burn agriculture. Wet and dry seasons contrast sharply.

According to the 2000 census, Sumbawans comprised 8% of the population of West Nusa Tenggara province or over 320,000; the two regencies of Sumbawa and West Sumbawa had a population of nearly 500,000 in 2006. Population is concentrated on the northern plains where wet-rice agriculture is possible; population density (2006 figures), at 59 persons per sq km (95 persons per sq mi, more than double 1990s estimates), remains low. By contrast, eastern Lombok counts 656 persons per sq km or 1,056 persons per sq mi. Although the coastline is highly indented, Sumbawan culture is not sea-oriented (most villages lie at least 5 km or 3 mi from the coast). A Southern Mongoloid people with minimal Papuan admixture, the Sumbawans are lighter in complexion than the more mixed Bimanese. Sumbawan communities can be found in eastern Lombok.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

A Western Austronesian language, Sumbawan is most closely related to Sasak and Balinese, while Bimanese links with the Central Austronesian tongues of Savunese and Manggarai. For example, “people” in Sumbawan is *tau*, but in Bimanese it is *dou*. In the past, Sumbawans used an Arabic-derived script (now little used) to set down charters and documents pertaining to the administration of land and livestock ownership. In addressing social superiors, one employs deferential language, such as substituting *kaku* for *aku* (“I”), and using aristocratic titles, such as *ruma*, *rato*, *dari*, and *ada*.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The Sumbawans are reputed to be more orthodox in their practice of Islam than the highly devout Bugis-Makassarese and even more than the Bimanese who are widely seen as “fanatical.” No Christian missionaries have ever been allowed to gain a foothold on the island. Southern Sumbawa, however, has only been Islamized for 100 years.

The sultan of Sumbawa retains his religious role despite having lost political power with the Dutch takeover at the beginning of the 20th century. Other religious officials include the *lebe*, the head of the mosque who is also responsible for leading agricultural rites; the *penghulu*, his assistant; the *ketip*, who delivers sermons at the mosque and otherwise directs worship; and the *marbat*, who is in charge of the mosque building and administration.

Remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs include *berempuk*, ritual boxing to spill blood to appease the spirit, and consulting a *sanro*, a healer who dispenses invulnerability treatments. The villages of Tepal and Ropang firmly maintain traditional customs, such as having heirlooms displayed to protect a bride and groom from witchcraft.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## <sup>7</sup>rites of passage

Some parents still arrange *samulung*, marriages between their underage children, although this violates Islamic law. More usual is for a young man to propose marriage to a girl by sending a *penati*, an eloquent woman, to deliver his request in highly figurative language to the girl’s representatives. The *pebeli* or bride-wealth is gauged to the bride’s status and can be very high. *Adat* (customary) ceremonies precede the Islamic rites. On the eve of the wedding, there is all-night singing and *rebana* (Arab tambourine) playing.

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Traditional Sumbawan society consisted of the following classes: the *datu* or *dea*, aristocrats (divided further into upper and lower categories); the *tau juran(an)*, the descendants of immigrants from Gowa (Makassarese), once influential at court; *tau kamutar*, subjects of the sultan; *sanak*, free commoners; and *ulin*, slaves. Like aristocrats, free commoners could own land but were obliged (though not compelled) to do labor for the kingdom as compensation. Among slaves, there were sharp

distinctions between native Sumbawan debt-slaves (*tau mari-si*) and outsiders. Commoners were divided into “task groups” (often corresponding to kin-groups because of the tendency to endogamy), e.g., military or religious specialists, craftspeople, etc.

A village is defined by the presence of a mosque and is divided into wards, each with its own headman. These wards are often ethnically distinct, as in the case of the *kampung* Bugis in the capital of Sumbawa Besar. Under the sultanate, villages united into groupings headed by a *kepala gabungan*. A *wakil kepala* (“headman’s deputy”) governed each village with the help of a *mandur* (an enforcer) and a *malar* (an official in charge of distributing land titles and, formerly, a leader of agricultural rites).

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

The two regencies that comprise the homeland of the Sumbawan people, Sumbawa and West Sumbawa on the island of Sumbawa, have an average Human Development Index (combining measures of income, health, and education) of 63.7 (2005 score), considerably lower than the Indonesian national HDI of 69.6 though a little higher than that for West Nusa Tenggara as a whole). Sumbawa regency has a GDP per capita of us\$5,248, very low for Indonesia (cf. us\$9,784 for West Sumatra, us\$8,360 for North Sulawesi, but us\$6,293 for Central Java and us\$6,151 for West Nusa Tenggara as a whole). In 2000, the rate of infant mortality stood at 87.55 deaths per 1,000 live births, among the highest in the country, though slightly less than the rate for West Nusa Tenggara as a whole, 88.55.

Houses on the coast resemble Bugis-Makassarese houses, consisting of four to six rooms with easily movable partitions; a room can be added for a newly married daughter and her husband. In the interior, houses are similar though smaller, resembling those in the eastern parts of the island.

A village is surrounded by its hamlets. Until harvest-time, the population lives in settlements near their swidden (shifting-cultivation) fields.

## <sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE

The Sumbawan lives within concentric circles of kin: his or her nuclear family; relatives up to and including first cousins on both paternal and maternal sides; relatives up to and including second cousins on both sides; and relatives up to and including third cousins on both sides. In the isolated mountain villages of 60–100 families, many people are third cousins, but villages do not correspond exactly to an individual’s bilateral kinship group.

The desire to keep wet-rice lands in the family makes marriage between kin (first to third cousins) the preferred pattern. In 1967, only 19% of marriages were between non-kin in villages around Sumbawa Besar. A newlywed couple resides with the bride’s parents at first while the husband performs bride-service. Divorce is common because many partners were brought together by their parents while still children.

## <sup>11</sup>CLOTHING

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## <sup>12</sup>FOOD

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.



## <sup>13</sup>EDUCATION

In 2005, the level of literacy stood at 86.59% for Sumbawa regency and 88.4% for West Sumbawa regency, substantially higher than for most other parts of West Nusa Tenggara and is comparable to that for more economically developed if far more densely populated provinces such as East Java and Bali (See also the article entitled **Indonesians**.)

## <sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## <sup>15</sup>WORK

Since the Dutch takeover in 1905, there has been a significant expansion of wet-rice cultivation. Dry-rice (swidden farming) has become increasingly confined to the highlands where fields are worked for five years then left fallow for eight to ten years. Surrounding the villages are gardens with perennial crops, such as fruits and vegetables. The island exports onions, beans, and some tobacco and coffee.

Sumbawans raise small, sturdy horses (their export goes back at least to the 14th century). Some individuals own hundreds of cattle, and the island is one of the major areas in the archipelago for the raising of water buffalo. Sumbawans do not hunt the numerous wild boar (because of Islam) but often take deer. They leave fishing to Buginese, Bajau, and Selayar immigrants but do raise fish in fish ponds (alternately used for salt-making in the dry season). Arabs monopolize the horse and cattle trades, as well as money lending, while the Chinese buy

up produce for resale and sell merchandise. Before the 1905 opening of a steamship line, Bugis-Makassarese sailing ships carried Sumbawa's trade (horses, water buffalo, hides, onions, beans) to its two main destinations, Surabaya in eastern Java and Makassar in southwestern Sulawesi.

In 2006, 10,280 people from Sumbawa and West Sumbawa regencies were registered with the Indonesian government as working in Saudi Arabia; almost all were women working as domestic servants (there were only 56 men among them).

## **16 SPORTS**

The racing of water buffalo yoked to a sled or plow through flooded fields has now become a spectator sport, though its original practical aim was to churn the mud before planting. A *sanro* helps prepare the buffalo with special oils and incantations on the night before the race.

Another sport is boxing after the harvest. The fights follow no rules and consist of wild flailing moderated by self-appointed referees. As no judges preside over the contests, each fighter assumes his own victory.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, HOBBIES**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

See the article entitled **Indonesians**.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Gender-Related Development Index (combining measures of women's health, education, and income relative to men's) for the ethnic Sumbawan region (average of the Sumbawa and West Sumbawa regencies) is 57.4, somewhat below Indonesia's national GDI of 59.2. Mataram's HDI, the average of the two residencies' Gender Empowerment Measures (reflecting women's participation and power in political and economic life relative to men's), however, is 45.4, far lower than the national GEM of 54.6 and slightly lower than the GEM for West Nusa Tenggara as a whole.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin



# SUNDANESE

**LOCATION:** Island of Java in Indonesia

**POPULATION:** 35 million

**LANGUAGE:** Sundanese, Indonesian

**RELIGION:** Orthodox Muslim; Catholic, Protestant

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

As the second largest ethnic group in Indonesia, the Sundanese have a complex history that has given rise to rich traditions of literature, music, dance, and other arts. This history can be traced with certainty back to the 5th century, when the Tarumanagara dynasty established its power and built up trade links extending as far as China. A succession of Sundanese kingdoms, with centers in various parts of western Java, was followed by 350 years of colonization by the Dutch, during which time Sundanese lands became an important source of exports of spices, coffee, quinine, rubber, and tea.

Dissatisfaction with colonization led the Sundanese to join with other peoples under Dutch rule to struggle for the formation of an independent, united Indonesian nation. They achieved independence on 17 August 1945, following a brief but painful period of occupation by the Japanese during World War II. Not all Sundanese were in favor of this unification, however, and some worked with the Dutch or Islamic rebel groups to try to establish an autonomous land for the Sundanese. These efforts were suppressed by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, and by the late 1950s "Sunda-land" had been fully integrated into Indonesia as one of its richest provinces, called West Java.

Since that time the Sundanese have watched as urbanization and industrialization, punctuated by periods of civil unrest, have completely transformed their lives. Many of these changes took place during the authoritarian rule of President Suharto, who ruled the country from 1967–1998. He aimed to keep up this pace of change for West Java by building new industries, expanding communications services, and reducing the birth rate. Many Sundanese were skeptical of these plans, as a small minority of wealthy individuals gained enormous wealth while the majority remained poor.

In May of 1998, students rose in protest against the government. On May 12 soldiers in Jakarta opened fire on student protestors, killing more than a dozen individuals. This act elicited public outrage against the government and for days the capital was engulfed in rioting that left hundreds dead. The Sundanese homeland in Western Java suffered some of the most severe violence and President Suharto was forced to resign from power. A multiparty parliamentary democracy replaced the dictator and in the last decade Indonesia has seen expansive political reforms. The policies of the new government have permitted greater expression of rights for minority groups, including reform of the Sundanese language.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Sundanese number more than 35 million people, the vast majority of whom live on the island of Java. Java is the administrative and economic center of the immense Indonesian archipelago, it absorbs a large amount of traffic from other islands and other nations, so the Sundanese have grown quite accus-

tomed to living and working alongside other peoples. This is especially so in the larger cities like Bandung and Cirebon, and in the area surrounding Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta.

Administratively, Java is divided into three provinces, with the central and eastern provinces inhabited predominantly by the larger Javanese ethnic group, and the Sundanese constituting a majority in West Java. West Java itself spreads over an area of 43,177 sq km (16,670 sq mi) and has a high population density, including a large rural population.

Ecologically, West Java enjoys a tropical climate and averages 125 days of rain per year, making it an extremely fertile place for agriculture. While the northern coast is flat and the southern coast is hilly, the central area is mountainous and is marked by spectacular volcanoes. The northwestern coast of Java island was devastated by the 1883 volcanic eruption on Krakatoa Island, which lies in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands. The volcano released a large quantity of debris into the air and tens of thousands of people were killed in the ensuing tsunamis that devastated coastal areas.

The ecological diversity of the region makes it a good place to grow a variety of crops, such as rice, tea, coffee, coconuts, rubber, cloves, and vegetables. Western Java is an important center of biodiversity. Ujung Kulon National Park, located on the western most tip of Java Island, is home to more than 50 Javan rhinoceros, one of the most critically endangered mammals on the planet, as well as a stunning array of flora and fauna.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Like other Indonesians, most Sundanese are bilingual, speaking both their mother tongue, Sundanese, and the Indonesian national language, Bahasa. Frequently, Sundanese is the language of choice among family members and friends, while in the public sphere, Bahasa Indonesian is used. Both languages are part of the Austronesian language family.

Sundanese is an extremely diverse language, with different regional dialects taking on words, intonations, and styles of their own. One thing that these dialects share is a division into different language levels. Each language level refers to a different social status. Thus, words used to address parents and elders will be different than those used when speaking to younger siblings and children. There is also a difference in verb usage. For example, Sundanese speakers use several words for the verb "to eat" depending on who is doing the eating. In everyday life, only two levels are used, or sometimes three, but some older people make use of four.

Latin script is primarily used in written Sundanese, but in 2003 the West Java government officially supported the use of the modern Sundanese script in daily activities. Adapted from historic scripts used by the Sundanese from the 14th to 18th centuries, the new script is associated with a revitalization of traditional Sundanese culture.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Myths and heroic stories are an important part of Sundanese culture. Such stories are told through films, puppet shows, oral poetry, novels, and even comic books. Some of these stories are regional in character, explaining the history of a local kingdom, or the mythical origin of a lake or of a strangely shaped mountain. Others, like the Ramayana, are Hindu in origin but have been adapted over many centuries to suit the local culture.

If there is one myth that the Sundanese think of as distinctly their own, it is the legend of Nyi Loro Kidul, the Queen of the South Seas. This legend has been around for centuries and is told in a number of old Javanese chronicles. As the story goes, there was a princess in the Pajajaran kingdom in the 14th century whose thirst for power was so great that her father placed a curse on her. This curse gave her more power than he himself had, but it allowed her to wield it only over the South Seas. The princess was then reincarnated as the exquisitely beautiful Nyi Loro Kidul, who is said to live off West Java's south coast. More powerful than all the spirits, Nyi Loro Kidul is said to have received nighttime visits from Javanese kings and Muslim saints in her palace beneath the waves. Men who swim or fish off the south coast are warned not to wear green, for those who do are often spirited away by Nyi Loro Kidul and never return.

## **5 RELIGION**

The overwhelming majority of Sundanese are Sunni Muslim, although some are Catholic or Protestant. Many Muslims pray five times a day, perform the pilgrimage to Mecca at some point in their life, and fast during the month of Ramadan. In towns and cities, there is a mosque in every neighborhood, and each day the calls to prayer are broadcast over public loudspeakers. It is estimated that Islam was first introduced to Java Island in the early 14th century. While embracing Islam, Javanese Muslims retained many of their pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. There are still many non-Islamic elements in Sundanese ceremonies and rituals, particularly in those surrounding the growing of rice. Such elements probably have their origins in the Hindu influence that preceded the spread of Islam, or in pre-Hindu Sundanese culture.

A minority of Sundanese are followers of the Sunda Wiwitan and Ahmadiyah faiths. Considered to be a religion that predates the arrival of Islam and Hinduism, Sunda Wiwitan incorporates traditional animistic beliefs with the belief that there is a God, or *gusti*, known by many names, including Sanghyang Kersa (the All-Powerful), Batara Tunggal (the One), Batara Jagat (Ruler of the Universe), and Batara Seda Niskala (The Unseen). Followers of Sunda Wiwitan worship the sun and believe that spirits reside in stones and trees. Most of the 3,000 practitioners of Sunda Wiwitan reside amongst the Badui tribe in West Java. Sunda Wiwitan is not recognized by the Indonesian government as an official religion, and followers of the faith have had difficulties obtaining identity cards and marriage registrations.

Ahmadiyah is an Islamic sect considered heretical by many Sunni Muslims. The Ahmadiyah faith originated in India in the late 19th century when the founder of the faith, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, declared himself the promised Messiah of Islam. The Indonesian government has refused recognition of Ahmadiyah as an official religion, and followers of the religion have become victims of violence in recent years. In 2007, in the village of Manis Lor in West Java where Ahmadiyah have lived for generations, a number of mosques and homes were burned by extremist Sunni Muslims. In 2008, Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed a decree banning Ahmadiyah followers from practicing their religion or face arrest.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The Sundanese follow the calendar of Indonesian national holidays. In addition to holidays for each of the official religions,

this calendar includes New Year's Day (January 1), celebrated the evening before with parties, street performances, and fireworks. Kartini Day (April 1) marks the 1879 birthday of one of Indonesia's most famous feminists and nationalists. Pancasila Day (October 1) is a holiday that celebrates the five founding principles of the Indonesian nation. Armed Forces Day (October 5) celebrates the anniversary of the founding of the Indonesian Armed Forces with military parades.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

When a Sundanese child is born, a *paraji* (midwife with shamanic powers) is usually present to entertain and provide advice to the woman giving birth. The *paraji* also prays and says mantras so that the mother and the newborn get through the ordeal safely. Once the baby is born, its umbilical cord is cut with a special instrument called a *hanis*, the placenta is buried beneath a window at the rear of the house, and a ritual party is held in which family and neighbors gather to wish the child well and to thank God for its safe birth.

At the age of 7 or 8 years, boys undergo a circumcision ritual to usher them into adulthood. Before the circumcision takes place, the boy is bathed and dressed in a *sarung*. Two men then lift his legs, and a specialist performs the circumcision. The entire ceremony takes place at the boy's home and is frequently accompanied by a party. It is an event boys often look forward to, as it provides them with new found respect and responsibility.

Marriage is the most elaborate of Sundanese rites of passage. Formally, it involves nine stages. First, the parents of the groom visit the bride's parents to inquire whether the girl is eligible to marry. When it is clear that she is, the parents ask each other questions to determine whether it is a good match. When both sides are in agreement about the match, the groom comes with family and friends, bringing gifts and money, and then a representative of his family proposes to the bride's family. If the bride's family agrees, the couple is engaged and is subject to a whole set of restrictions on their interactions. A few days before the wedding, the groom is "given" to the bride, along with clothing, jewelry, and money. One day before the wedding, the parents of the couple formally provide them with advice about how to have a good marriage. On the day of the wedding, the groom is picked up at his home by representatives of the bride's family and taken to her house where he presents her with an agreed-upon amount of gold. Invitees of the bride's family come to see the couple, share food, and leave gifts. The parents of the couple ceremonially feed them the last bites they will receive from their parents' hands, as they are now independent and responsible for finding their own food. One week after the wedding, a gathering is held at the groom's house for his family and friends to meet the bride.

When death occurs among the Sundanese, friends and family immediately gather at the house of the deceased, bringing gifts of money and rice for the bereaving family. The women work in the kitchen, getting ritual offerings ready, while the men make a coffin and prepare a plot at the cemetery. Flowers are soaked in water, and this mixture is used for washing the body of the deceased. A religious leader (*kiai*) then reads a prayer over the body before it is carried in a procession to the cemetery. The death is later remembered, and the sins of the deceased lessened, by holding ritual gatherings on the third,

seventh, fortieth, one-hundredth, and one-thousandth days after the person has passed away.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The important thing about Sundanese interpersonal relations is to show people the respect they deserve by following an unwritten code of behavior. Formal greetings, for example, are made by bowing the head and upper body, holding the hands together in front of the chest with fingers outstretched, and touching the tips of the fingers to the tips of the other person's fingers. In business settings, handshaking is quite acceptable. It is done with the right hand, and as one disengages one ought to touch one's heart briefly with that same hand.

When visiting someone, a person must ask permission to enter. The host will then invite the visitor to sit and offer something to drink and eat. It is considered polite to refuse such offers, although one will usually be given a drink anyway; however, the visitor should not drink it until specifically invited by the host to do so. A visitor should always announce his or her intention to leave, to which the host will inevitably reply that the visitor is leaving too soon, and has not even eaten yet (even if the visitor has been there for hours and the host had hoped to be doing something else).

The unwritten rule of dating is that a man must treat the woman he asks on a date with respect. This means he must pick her up at home, converse with her family, pay for any food and entertainment, and escort her home. The woman's family is involved from the beginning and will intervene if they feel a man is not appropriate or is taking too many liberties.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions in West Java are extremely diverse, with a small minority living in extreme wealth and many Sundanese residing in squatter settlements with no running water or electricity. Most people live somewhere between these two extremes, but the disparity in wealth among Sundanese is great.

Beginning in the 1980s, Indonesia has permitted a greater number of Sundanese to purchase cars, televisions, jewelry, and fashionable clothing. In urban areas, motorcycles and cars have become common, though a majority of the population continues to take public transportation for daily activities. Unemployment remains a widespread problem, and Sundanese are often forced to migrate in search of a job.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Kinship among the Sundanese is bilateral, meaning that descent lines are traced through both the mother and the father. There are special terms for seven generations of ancestors and descendants. For example, *gantung siwur* means the father's father of one's great-great-great-grandparent. In principle, all the descendants of a seventh-generation ancestor are members of one's extended family. While this extended family is the largest kinship group, the smallest is a nuclear family of parents and their children. Members of a nuclear family usually live in their own house, although it is not uncommon for relatives of either the husband or the wife to stay with them for a time.

Marriages are sometimes arranged by parents in the nine-step ritual, although this is becoming increasingly rare. More common is for the parents of a woman to prevent her from seeing someone they do not approve of, in the hope that she will find someone more to their liking. The preferred marriage

partner should come from the same neighborhood and be a descendant of a common ancestor. Such a marriage is called *perkawinan gulangkep*. Urbanization has made such matches increasingly rare, as couples often meet at school or in the workplace rather than at family or neighborhood gatherings.

Sundanese society draws a clear line between male and female gender roles. Generally, this line places women in charge of the home and men in charge of earning cash. In rural areas, where life is sustained by subsistence agriculture, women are thus quite powerful. But, in cities where there is no space for gardens and all food must be bought, women find themselves economically dependent on their husbands. To combat this dependence and to increase their standard of living, many women have taken on careers or part-time jobs to help earn cash to support their families. It is now quite common for women to enter the workforce before they marry to help support their parents. If they marry, most stop working, but some do not. Even if they do not formally have a job, most women are engaged in informal income-generating work at home, such as catering or selling clothing.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Sundanese clothing for women consists of a *kebaya* and a *sarung*. The kebaya is a long-sleeved, fitted lace blouse that is worn over a brassiere or another blouse. The sarung is a length of cloth, often batik, which is wrapped around the waist and hangs down to the ankles. Men also wear a sarung, but instead of a kebaya, they wear a long-sleeved batik shirt or a fitted, embroidered jacket.

Increasingly, such traditional clothing is worn only on formal occasions, such as weddings. Everyday dress follows either Western or Islamic styles.

## **12 FOOD**

The Sundanese like to say, "If you haven't eaten rice, then you haven't eaten." While there are hundreds of different ways in which rice is prepared, it is simple boiled rice that serves as the centerpiece of all meals. Side dishes of vegetables, fish, or meat are added to provide meals with variety. These side dishes are spiced with any combination of garlic, *galingale* (a plant of the ginger family), turmeric, coriander, ginger, and lemongrass. Usually the food itself is not too spicy, but is served with a very hot sauce made by grinding chili peppers and garlic together using a mortar and pestle.

The contents of the side dishes depend on what region a Sundanese lives in. On the coast, saltwater fish are common, whereas in the mountains, fish tends to be either pond-raised carp or goldfish. The Sundanese, being Muslims, do not eat pork, but do eat the meat of goats, sheep, water buffalo, and cows. Preferred fowl include chickens, ducks, geese, and pigeons. A dish for which the Sundanese are known is *lalapan*, which consists only of raw vegetables (papaya leaves, cucumber, basil, eggplant, bitter melon, etc.).

Traditionally, Sundanese sit on the floor and eat using the fingers of their right hand. Guests and men are served first, with others following in shifts. Breakfast is generally eaten before the sun comes up, lunch before noon, and dinner about 5:00 PM.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Sundanese follow Indonesia's national education system, in which nine years of compulsory primary and middle school may be followed by three years of high school, four years of college, and then studies toward graduate degrees. In the 1980s inadequate education was a wide spread problem. The percentage of the population that had, in 1985, finished primary school was 31%, while 15% had finished middle or high school. Data from 1987–88 indicates that the highest dropout rates occurred after primary school and after high school. In all, 42.8% of graduates from primary school went on to middle school, 75.6% of graduates from middle school went on to high school, and 20% of high school graduates enrolled in college. In 2003, the government of Indonesia mandated that all pupils complete nine years of education. In the post-Suharto era, a greater number of non-governmental organizations have been active in promoting and supporting education in poor regions of the country.

In general, education is very highly valued among the Sundanese, and parents will sacrifice a great deal to pay for their children's education. This is reflected in the better literacy rates in West Java compared with other areas of Indonesia. For example, in 1987, only 16.3% of people over 10 years of age were still illiterate in West Java, compared with over 20% in other provinces. The higher literacy rate may also be a reflection of the better facilities available in West Java, which has been a center of education since colonial times.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Sundanese have an extremely rich cultural heritage with highly elaborate forms of music, dance, literature, and other arts. Musically, there is a whole range of styles, ranging from traditional orchestral music to Sundanese pop. One of the more traditional varieties is called *degung*, performed by a simplified *gamelan* orchestra blending soft-sounding percussion instruments with the melancholy sounds of a flute. Another type of orchestra is made up of an instrument called *angklung* (consisting of suspended bamboo tubes in different lengths that sound when shaken). The *angklung* is an ancient Sundanese instrument that once accompanied storytelling and marching but is now used to perform anything from a traditional tune to a melody by Beethoven. Indeed, the Sundanese are not conservative when it comes to the arts but are willing to try anything new that comes along. Many of Indonesia's most famous pop stars are Sundanese, and local music is sometimes set to the beat of House music.

Sundanese dance generally consists of movements that are smaller and fewer in number than in Western dance. Movements of the hands, fingers, eyes, head, and feet are very controlled and precise. Much of Sundanese dance is influenced by the martial arts, and some is accompanied by *gamelan* music. Some dances tell stories, like the Mask Dance, which tells of a king's hatred after his love was rejected. Other dances are more social, like *jaipong*, which combines elements of a number of different dances into an erotic whole.

Sundanese literature has traditionally been closely tied to oral storytelling culture. One of the oldest forms of literature still in existence is the *pantun cerita*, a kind of traditional poetry in which each verse consists of two couplets, the first of which suggests the second by sound, or by some other similarity. Such poetry tells of Sundanese heroes from ancient times,

often focusing on the age of Sundanese kingdoms. Such stories have been passed down for centuries. More modern forms of literature, such as the novel, have also emerged among the Sundanese. Unlike in the West, however, these novels have always been popular in character, as there is no "high" literary tradition. They are thus just as likely to be read by townspeople as by urban intellectuals.

### **15 WORK**

Unemployment is not as great a problem as underemployment in West Java. Most people have some way of generating income, either in the formal or the informal sector, but have a hard time making ends meet. This is particularly true for a new generation of college-educated youth who are having a hard time finding work. When a job does open up, it is often for very low pay at one of the new factories that produces sneakers, televisions, clothing, or furniture. Such positions are usually filled by young women and uneducated men, and often by migrants from Central Java who are more willing to work long hours without vacations than are the family-oriented Sundanese.

### **16 SPORTS**

The most popular sports in West Java are soccer, volleyball, badminton, and a martial art called *pencat silat*. Most neighborhoods have a small field in which kids play volleyball and soccer. Badminton is usually played in neighborhood front yards or in courts at a community center. Although all these sports draw spectators, soccer pulls in large crowds of local supporters. In larger cities like Bandung, riots are not unheard of when the local team meets with a team from another province.

*Pencat silat* is a martial art that blurs the line between dance and self-defense. It is usually taught to groups of children at Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) by a guru. *Pencat silat* emphasizes both the spiritual and the physical dimensions of the art and is sometimes tied to mystical practices that are said to give practitioners magical powers.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The central form of entertainment in West Java is called *sore*, or "evening." People go out to movies, take strolls, eat in open-air cafes, and watch public performances. It is a chance "to see and be seen," so people put on their best clothes, women put on makeup, and motor vehicles become objects of envy and pride.

Going to the cinema can mean different things. Cinemas in West Java show a mixture of Indonesian and foreign movies, with the former being slightly more popular. While in city centers cinemas are air-conditioned and have plush seats, marginal areas of the country sometimes have open-air cinemas, which are like drive-ins without the cars. For those who prefer public performances, there is music and theater. One performance that always draws a crowd is *sinten*, in which magicians exhibit their powers. One can see, for example, people turned into birds, eggs cooked on someone's head, and people who are invulnerable to the stab of a sword. Another is *wayang golek*, a type of puppet show in which stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are performed, accompanied by singing and *gamelan* music.

At home, there is always television. Broadcasts include a peculiar blend of Indian movies, Latin American soap operas, American dramas, and Indonesian shows of all varieties. Tele-

vision is sometimes considered a background entertainment like radio, with people going about their business while watching. It provides entertainment while people do their chores, and the soap operas make a great subject for discussion.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Like the neighboring Javanese, the Sundanese are known for the art of batik. Batik is a technique used to create patterns on textiles in which bee's wax is used to facilitate resist-dyeing. Originally, batik was made by painting the wax on by hand, using a special implement for that purpose, and then bathing the whole cloth in a dye. Using such a technique it could take up to six months to complete one *sarung*. Beginning in the mid-19th century, however, an industrial technique of stamping the cloth with wax was developed. This allowed for mass production and today, batik can be found in American and European stores.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

West Java has the usual problems associated with a society in which there exists a large gap between the rich and the poor. As in other urban environments, there is a certain amount of crime, a large number of industrial strikes, and occasional riots in which masses of people wreck and burn symbols of wealth and state power. During the Suharto years, the Indonesian government was known internationally for its high levels of corruption and its infringements on human and civil rights. The repressive and corrupt aspects of government made it almost impossible to improve social justice. In the last decade, political reforms have permitted unprecedented political and social freedoms for all Indonesians. Though corruption and poverty remain a problem, an independent judiciary has taken root and minority groups have been permitted to petition the government for reforms.

One persistent problem in West Java is alcohol and drug abuse. While alcoholism is not a serious problem, drug use in all segments of the population appears to be on the rise. Individuals of all religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups have been affected by substance abuse.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Sundanese women in urban areas enjoy a great deal of social freedom, and West Java's modern cities ensure educational and career opportunities for middle class women. The situation in rural areas is quite different, where poverty is rampant, which fuels a sex trade crisis that entraps thousands of Sundanese women each year. High unemployment in West Java provides few job opportunities for young women. A cultural acceptance of prostitution has resulted in many families encouraging their daughters to enter the sex trade. Prostitution is endemic in Indonesian cities, and Sundanese women are found in brothels across the Indonesian archipelago. Local governments have attempted to crack down on the sex trade by refusing to issue identification documents to young women. Non-governmental organizations assist young women escape the sex trade.

In Indonesian society, homosexuals and transvestites neither enjoy legal protections nor are subjected to extreme forms of bigotry. In West Java, as in much of Indonesia, gay men and transvestites do not hide their sexual preferences, yet also have not achieved general social acceptance.

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—revised by David Straub

# SYRIAN CHRISTIANS IN INDIA

**PRONUNCIATION:** SIHR-ee-uhn Christians

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Malabar Christians

**LOCATION:** India (Kerala state)

**POPULATION:** 3,083,884 (2001 Census)

**LANGUAGE:** Malayalam

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Syrian Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Syrians

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The term “Syrian Christians” is sometimes used to refer to the total Christian population of Kerala, which lies on the southwestern coast of the Indian peninsula. The presence of Christianity in most parts of India largely reflects the work of missionaries during the Western colonial period, particularly after the early 1800s. In a more restricted sense, however, Syrian Christians trace their origins to the 1st century AD, when St. Thomas the Apostle is believed to have landed in Kerala. As a result of this, they are also known as Christians of St. Thomas. The community derives its designation as Syrian Christians from its early association with the East Syrian Church of Christianity, and its traditional use of the Syriac language in church services. Syrian Christians are also called Malabar Christians, Malabar being the name for the coastal region of this part of India.

According to local tradition, St. Thomas landed on the coast of Kerala in AD 52 near Cranganur, some 30 km (20 mi) north of Cochin. He began to preach the gospel and is said to have established seven churches in the region. St. Thomas found a receptive audience among the local Hindu and Jewish populations, many of his converts coming from the high-caste Nambudiri Brahmans, the dominant landowning caste of Kerala. Many Christians in the region claim descent from these early converts among the local peoples. One group, however, traces its ancestry to Thomas of Cana (Knaï Thoma), a merchant who led a party of Syrian Christians to Kerala in the middle of the 4th century AD. Some authorities, however, question the historical accuracy of these accounts. They suggest that Christianity was introduced to Kerala by Nestorian missionaries (a sect named after an heretical 5th-century bishop) during the 6th century. Further migrations from Syria during the 9th century invigorated and revitalized the Christian Church in Kerala. The Christian community in Kerala maintained its ties with the Christian homeland by continuing to get its bishops from Antioch, an ancient center of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The arrival of the Portuguese in India in 1498 introduced the old conflicts of Christendom to the Indian subcontinent. As the Portuguese presence in India grew, so did the power of the Church of Rome. Condemning both the Syrian rites and many practices of the Syrian Christians, the Portuguese set out to “Latinize” the Church in Kerala. By the early 17th century, the Roman Catholic Church was dominant in the region. In 1653, however, some Syrian Christians reasserted their traditional beliefs, swearing before an open-air cross (an event known as the “Coonen Cross Oath”) that they would never ac-

cept the supremacy of the pope and Western Christianity. One consequence of this and later splits within the community is that the Syrian Christians of Kerala are now divided between the Syrian Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Christians in Kerala are currently estimated to number over 6 million people. Around half this number are Christians who belong to non-Syrian Christian churches, for instance, the Protestant Church of South India (CSI). Syrian Christians (3,083,884 in the Census of India 2001) thus represent about 10% of the state’s population (31,841,374 according to the 2001 Census), while Christians in Kerala make up nearly 30% of the total Christian population of India. It is by far the largest concentration of Christians found in the Indian subcontinent.

Kerala is a narrow, elongated state located in the extreme southwest of India. It extends for some 576 km (360 mi) along the shores of the Arabian Sea. The state’s southern boundary lies a mere 55 km (35 mi) from Cape Comorin, the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. The state falls into three distinct geographical zones. In the west lie the fertile, alluvial lowlands of the Malabar coast. This is an important, densely populated, agricultural area, with lagoons, backwaters, and canals forming a network of waterways that are the region’s main transportation routes. As one moves inland from the coastal plain, the land rises to low hills and plateaus at elevations between 60 m and 180 m (200–600 ft). Further to the east are the rain-swept and forested slopes of the Western Ghats, the range of hills that parallels the entire west coast of the peninsula. The Ghats in Kerala average around 900 m (3,000 ft) in elevation, but peaks in the Cardamom Hills exceed 2,500 m (8,200 ft). The hills catch the full force of the summer monsoon blowing in from the sea, so that extremely high rainfall totals are received in the uplands. Annual rainfall amounts on the coast vary from about 300 cm (120 in) in the north to 100 cm (40 in) in the south. Because of its location between 8°N and 13°N latitude, Kerala experiences an equatorial climate. It is humid and hot all year, with maximum temperatures rarely exceeding 32°C (92°F) and minimums rarely falling below 21°C (70°F).

Kerala has given its name to the Kerala model or the Kerala phenomenon, which refers to a set of economic practices that have resulted in the state attaining a high level of standards in human development (no doubt influenced by the strong Christian presence), while compromising on its industrial development. Thus, Kerala has high literacy, a low birth rate, and demographic indices, such as life expectancy and infant mortality, that would place it among the developed nations, but it ranks behind many states in India in terms of industrial and economic development and in per capita income. Kerala also has the distinction of being one of the few states in the world that has regularly voted communist governments into and out of power. The state government in 2008, led by Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan, was formed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Malayalam is the language spoken by the Syrian Christians of Kerala. It is a Dravidian tongue, closely related to Tamil. Malayalam was, in effect, a dialect of Tamil until the 14th century, when it began to assume its own discrete identity. Both the written and spoken forms of the language use many words

borrowed from Sanskrit. It differs from Tamil in aspects such as the absence of personal endings on verbs. Malayalam is thus the most recent of the four major Dravidian languages of South India (Kannada and Telegu are the remaining two) in terms of its development. Malayalam is the official language of Kerala and is spoken by 96% of the state's population. It is written in its own script, which is derived from the Tamil writing system. English is widely spoken as a second language. In fact, the winner of the 1997 Booker Prize (now the Man Booker Prize) for Fiction was Arundhati Roy, whose mother is a Syrian Christian and who was brought up in the Syrian Christian tradition.

**4 FOLKLORE**

As a devout Christian community, the Syrian Christians lack the elaborate mythology and legendary heroes of their Hindu neighbors. Much of their lore centers on the important figures of their past. St. Thomas the Apostle, of course, occupies the major place in the traditions of the group. There are numerous stories of the miracles he performed through which many high-caste Hindus were converted to Christianity. It is said that St. Thomas was martyred in AD 72 near Madras, now called Chennai, in Tamil Nadu State. He was passing a temple dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali, when the temple priests forced him to go inside. As he approached, a strong light shone from the temple, and it was destroyed by fire. The infuriated priests fell on St. Thomas and one of them thrust a spear into his heart. The Apostle died three days later. The Gothic San Thomé Cathedral stands on the site of his tomb on St. Thomas Mount.

**5 RELIGION**

Whatever its origins, the Syrian Christian community was well established in Kerala by the 6th century AD. It is thus the oldest among the various Indian Christian groups found in the sub-continent. It also differs from the other Christian communities in the social categories from which its converts were drawn. The Portuguese, for instance, encouraged intermarriage with the local population. The early Christian communities of Goa and other Portuguese colonies were thus of mixed descent and derived primarily from Portuguese males marrying Indian women. Converts to Christianity during the 19th century, on the other hand, came largely from the lower and Untouchable castes or tribal peoples. The former were seeking to escape the Hindu caste system, while the latter were marginal to mainstream Hindu society. Many Syrian Christians, however, came from the landowning upper castes, and the community came to rank as equal to the Nairs, who claim warrior (*ksatriya*) status. Their social position was further enhanced through service to local rulers. Though Christian in religion and beliefs, Syrian Christians have managed to preserve many aspects of their Indian culture.

**6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Syrian Christians celebrate all the Christian holy days, with Christmas and Easter being especially important. Christmas is preceded by fasting for 25 days, although nowadays only the older generation follows this custom. During this period, no meat, fish, or eggs are eaten. Smoking, chewing betel nut, and drinking alcohol are totally forbidden. On Christmas Day itself, church services begin long before dawn. As part of the service on this day, the congregation goes in procession to



the churchyard, where a hole has been dug in the shape of the cross. Worshipers throw incense on a fire lit in this pit, a rite said to commemorate the offering of gifts to the child Jesus by the Three Wise Men.

Easter is another important festival. The Lenten fast is observed for 50 days prior to Easter. Easter Week itself is marked by church services the entire week. Good Friday is called *Dukka Valliacha*, which translates as "Friday of Sorrow" in Malayalam. Easter Sunday is a day of joyous celebration, when families gather to break the Lenten fast.

**7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Immediately after a child is born, a priest or male relative will whisper "Moron Yesu Masiha" (Jesus Christ is Lord) in the baby's ear. The child is given a few drops of honey in which some gold is mixed to ensure prosperity. The birth of a son is an occasion for great joy and is announced by the *kurava* (a shrill sound made with fingers moved up and down in the mouth). Care is taken to record the exact time of birth so that a horoscope may be cast. Baptism may take place soon after birth or be delayed for some months. Children are usually given Biblical names, though these have often been Indianized. Thus, Matthew becomes Mathai or Mathu, and Elizabeth becomes Eliamma.

A child's education begins at the age of three or four, when a ceremony initiating him or her to the world of learning is performed. From this time on, the child usually attends the local school. The ceremony was traditionally performed by a teach-

er who might be either Christian or Hindu. In modern times, however, a Christian priest is often called upon complete this ritual. Children are brought up to respect teachers and value education. They also attend church regularly with their parents, a practice that continues into their adult life.

In the Syrian Christian Church, there is no such ritual as the “last rites.” Prayers are said for the dying person, and a priest is usually at the bedside. When a death occurs, women weep and wail and beat their breasts. The kitchen fires are extinguished, and no cooking is done in the house until after the funeral. The body is washed, dressed, and anointed with oil. When the funeral procession is ready, the body is placed in a coffin and carried to the cemetery on the shoulders of friends and mourners. The women of the household usually do not accompany the procession. A simple meal known as *Pashni Kanji* is served to the relatives and mourners on their return from the churchyard. A *Qurbana* (Holy Communion) and a feast are held on the fortieth day after the death to complete the period of mourning.

## **8** INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Though Christian by religion, Syrian Christians are Indian in culture and use the traditional “namaskar” greeting. Despite the growing numbers of nuclear households, extended families keep in close touch with each other. They regularly get together to celebrate birthdays and religious holidays. There are no restrictions on consuming alcohol (except during fasts), and drinks are commonly served to guests or at social gatherings.

## **9** LIVING CONDITIONS

As a highly educated and literate community, Syrian Christians enjoy standards of health, housing, and material comfort that are among the highest in India. Houses are built facing east, in a compound abounding with mango, plantain, coconut, and other fruit trees. Traditional houses were built of heavy timber, such as teak, with the walls ornately carved and decorated. The roof resembled an inverted boat, to shed the heavy monsoon rains of the area. The people of Kerala have high standards of hygiene and houses have toilets, in contrast to much of India where villagers use the fields for their personal needs. All houses have a roofed entrance gate known as a *padipura*, a simpler version of the more elaborate gates leading to temples and churches. Settlements are dispersed, rather than forming nucleated villages.

## **10** FAMILY LIFE

Women are held in high esteem, reflecting perhaps the traditional matriarchal nature of society in Kerala. Education and opportunity mean that some women enter the professions and can lead relatively independent lives. However, many women continue in their traditional roles of wife, homemaker, and mother. Strict endogamy is maintained, with Syrian Christians marrying within their own community. Monogamy is the rule, and divorce is rare, in keeping with Christian traditions. The nuclear family consisting of husband, wife, and children is replacing the multigenerational extended family.

Arranged marriages are typical, although more and more young people are selecting their own spouses. There is no cross-cousin marriage. Girls were formerly married before puberty, although child marriage is now illegal in India. A dowry was paid to the bride’s father, with a percentage going to the

church as a tithe. A betrothal feast is usually held on the day the banns, the formal proclamation of an intended marriage, are read by the priest in church. The actual marriage is solemnized in church according to the rites of the Syrian Christian Church. Some parts of the ceremony, however, such as when the groom ties a knot in a thread placed around the bride’s neck, reflect local Hindu rituals. This is one instance of the many Indian customs that have been absorbed into Syrian Christian life.

## **11** CLOTHING

Syrian Christians dress in the same manner as do other people in Kerala. Men wear the *dhoti*, the long, white cotton cloth that is wrapped around the waist, then pulled between the legs and fastened at the back. Alternatively, they may wear a *mundu*, which falls to the ankles rather than being passed through the legs. In the past, the chest was left bare, but now shirts are common. A folded cloth known as a *kavani* is draped around the neck.

Women’s clothing is generally white. It typically consists of three items: a mundu wrapped around the waist and reaching the ankles, a V-necked jacket or blouse, and a kavani with a narrow gold border draped on the left shoulder. This is used to cover the head when in church. One end of the mundu is folded and tucked into the back of the waist, to fall in the shape of a fan. Women wear earrings, necklaces, and bangles, but usually do not put rings in the nose.

Western dress is common in urban areas, especially among the younger generation. Young women favor the *sari* over traditional dress styles.

## **12** FOOD

Rice and fish are the staple diet of Syrian Christians in Kerala. Fish abounds in the rivers, lakes, and coastal waters of the region and is cooked in a variety of ways. It is made into fish curry or a fish *moillee* (stew), served in a *masala* (spicy) sauce, rubbed with spices and fried, and stuffed, to name but a few. What are seen as “Christian-style” fish dishes are cooked in tamarind and coconut sauce. A peculiarity of Kerala is that all food is cooked in coconut oil. Meals are eaten with an assortment of sauces and pickles. *Kalan*, for example, is a sauce made from yams, yogurt, and coconut. Rice flour is made into *vellappam* (known as *appam* elsewhere in South India), a mixture of rice and coconut similar to the “hoppers” of Sri Lanka. Tapioca and fish, boiled together with turmeric and chilies, provides a nourishing meal for the poorer classes in the region. Coconuts, plantains, jackfruit, mangoes, and other tropical fruits form an important part of the local diet. Wafer-thin banana chips are a specialty in many areas of Kerala.

## **13** EDUCATION

Syrian Christians have a strong commitment to education, and the community has virtually 100% literacy. Christian schools have the reputation of being among the best in the state, and parents encourage children—girls as well as boys—to pursue further education or professional qualifications. This is in keeping with, and no doubt contributes to, the educational characteristics of the general population of Kerala. Kerala has the most highly literate and educated population of any state in India. It has eight universities, including the Universities of Kerala and Calicut (Kozikode), numerous arts and sci-



ences colleges, professional colleges, engineering colleges, and training institutes such as the Indian Institute of Management (Kozikhode).

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Religious dances and songs are part of the Syrian Christians' cultural heritage. However, they are rarely performed, and few still know them today. Songs told of the life of Christ, St. Thomas the Apostle, and other figures from the community's past. Folk dances presented dramas on Christian themes, or harked back to the days when Christians served in the armies of the local *maharajas* (princely chiefs).

#### **15 WORK**

Agriculture is the primary occupation of Syrian Christians. Many Christians own land, while labor is provided by low-caste Hindus. Christians dominate the plantation industry, growing cardamom, tea, coffee, and rubber. They are also successful entrepreneurs, owning factories that process agricultural goods (e.g., coconut fiber or coir, rubber, and cashews) and small businesses. Syrian Christians are well represented in government service, teaching, and professional fields, such as science and medicine. Many women enter nursing. Unlike other parts of South Asia where they have less access to education, women compete on relatively equal terms with men. The Gulf States provide high-paying job opportunities for many people from the region, and they regularly remit funds back to their families in Kerala.

#### **16 SPORTS**

In terms of sports, Syrian Christians are no different from their neighbors. They participate in modern games, such as soccer and cricket, and in traditional activities of the region. Many Christian families, for example, own "snake" boats that take part in regattas held to celebrate events like the Onam festival.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Syrian Christians enjoy all the amenities available to the people of Kerala—radio, television (color TV for the more-affluent), newspapers, and movies in Malayalam. Much of their social life revolves around church-related activities and events.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

No folk arts or crafts are identified specifically with the Syrian Christians of Kerala today. In the past, however, they were noted for their skill as woodcarvers, brass- and metalworkers, and jewelry designers and manufacturers.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Unlike many Christian communities in India, Syrian Christians are literate, educated, and relatively affluent. They rank high in the caste structure of Kerala and have a powerful voice in the affairs of the state. They do not suffer from the poverty, discrimination, and political underrepresentation that characterize many other minorities in South Asia.

One problem facing the community is that of fragmentation. There exist, for example, four denominations in the Syrian Church: the Romo-Syrians (Catholics), the Jacobites (Eastern Orthodox), the Reformed Syrians (Mar Thoma), and the Anglican (Protestant) denominations. The Syrian Chris-

tians are divided between these churches and often do not marry outside even their own branch of the Syrian Christian Church. Syrian Christians are also divided into two major sections, those that come from the north (Vadukkumbagars) and those from the south, Thekkumbagavars, also known as the Knayana Christians. Several theories exist as to the origins of these sects. One holds that Knai Thoma (Thomas of Cana) had two wives, one a Persian and one a Hindu from Kerala. On his death, he left his possessions north of Craganur to the children of his Hindu wife and his possessions in the south to the offspring of his Persian wife, hence the existence of the two sects of Syrian Christians. Another theory suggests the division came about as a result of two distinct migrations, with the Vaddakumbagars in the north reflecting the work of Knai Thoma on his original arrival in Kerala, and the Thekkumbagavars in the south being the followers of two Nestorian Persians, who led a second immigration to Quilon in AD 822.

Whatever the origins of Syrian Christians in Kerala, they definitely do not interact with neo-Christians, recent converts from the low castes (some Christian churches in Kerala have separate pews for low-caste and high-caste members of the congregation). Conflicts between churches have sometimes ended up in the courts. Nonetheless, the Syrian Christian community has existed in Kerala for nearly 2,000 years, and no doubt will continue to do so for centuries to come.

Caste remains a problem among the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Early writings place them at the level of the matrilineal Nairs but below the patrilineal Namboodiris. Following efforts by the Christian Missionary Society in the 1880s to enhance the rights of "New Christian" low-caste converts, and their demands to equal status with Syrian Christians, the "delicate bonds" tying Syrian Christians to high-caste Hindus were broken. The effect of Hindu fundamentalist organizations and other upper-caste Hindus in regarding Syrian Christians as a polluting caste and banning their entry into Hindu temple grounds combined with Syrian Christian attempts to affirm assumed *savarna* (i.e. caste Hindu) status—which some were denying—to create a situation in which riots and mob attacks on Syrian Christians occurred. This led to a "chasm" opening between Syrian Christians and their high-caste neighbors. Anthropologists have noted that the caste hierarchy among Christians in Kerala is much more polarized than the Hindu practices in the surrounding areas, due to a lack of jatis. Also, the caste status is kept even if the sect allegiance is switched (i.e. from Syrian Catholic to Syrian Orthodox).

One way in which Syrian Christians differ from the society in which they live is that, unlike the matriarchies that dominate in South India, they are patriarchal. Thus, as in the North, cross-cousin marriage is not permitted, although Kerala is one of the few regions in India in which females outnumber males. However, by the end of the 20th century, the fertility rate among Christians had dropped below that of Hindus and Muslims, largely because of the increasing age of marriage and the pursuit of education.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Syrian Christian women have high social status, reflecting perhaps the traditional matriarchal nature of society in Kerala. Education and opportunity mean that some women enter the professions and can lead relatively independent lives. However, many women continue in their traditional roles of wife,

homemaker, and mother. Strict endogamy is maintained, with Syrian Christians marrying within their own community. Monogamy is the rule and divorce, though possible, is rare, in keeping with Christian traditions.

Christian society in Kerala mirrors many aspects of Hindu society. At one time, for instance, it was common for women to be married by the age of 15 years. Marriages are still arranged, though often this is done at the request of the individuals involved, and the custom of demanding (and giving) a dowry is well entrenched among the Syrian Christians. Traditionally, a woman received one quarter of the property sons received if a father died intestate, but, given some Supreme Court decisions regarding a woman's right to inherit equal shares, this is rapidly changing.

Syrian Christian women from Kerala, such as Nayantara, are suddenly hot items in the Tamil film industry. As Syrian Christian families are progressive and educated, they are not averse to the idea of the cinema as a career option for young girls.

Syrian Christian women tend to dominate the nursing profession in India. This is explained, in part, perhaps, by the fact that, unlike high caste Hindu women, Syrian Christian women do not have to deal with concepts of ritual purity and pollution relating to bodily secretions.

In general, Syrian Christian women in Kerala exist in a cultural milieu and have the socio-economic independence to allow them to follow their lives without the restrictions that circumscribe other women in South Asia.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# SYRIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** SIHR-ee-uhns

**LOCATION:** Syria

**POPULATION:** 19,747,586 (2008 estimate/includes approximately 1.5 million refugees from Iraq and 500,000 long-term refugees from the Palestinian Territories)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic (official); French; English

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni, Alawi branch of Shia, Druze); Christianity; Judaism; Baha'i

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Syrian Christians in India

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Syrians live in the Syrian Arab Republic, more commonly known as Syria, a land that has been inhabited for more than 7,000 years. The earliest human artifacts found in Syria date from the Middle Paleolithic age. Syria gets its name from the Assyrians, who controlled the area in the 14th through 10th centuries BC and again in the 8th century BC, until the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar, conquered them in the 7th century BC. The city of Damascus has been continually inhabited longer than any other city on Earth, from as early as 3000 BC. The fertile land of Syria—lying at the crossroads of great trade routes between the East and West and the site of many holy places for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—is a very desirable piece of property. It has been invaded, conquered, and occupied by many different peoples over its long history, including the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, European Crusaders, Mongols from Central Asia, Turks, French, and British.

The modern Syrian Arab Republic came about in 1946 when the French gave up the control they had been granted over an area known as Bilad al-Sham (the land of Syria) by the League of Nations in April 1920 at the end of World War I (1914–19). When the French gave up control, the area was divided into two countries, Lebanon and Syria. Damascus was named the capital of present-day Syria. In 1970, Hafez al Assad (*al Assad* means “the lion” in Arabic), the then-minister of defense, took over the country in a bloodless coup and established himself as president. Hafez held control of Syria until his death in 2000. Although he was called president, Hafez was actually more like a dictator, wielding all significant authority in the republic and quashing any opposition. That tradition continued under the helm of Syria's leader, Hafez's son, Bashar al Assad. Bashar was elected unopposed to a second seven-year term, in 2007 in an election that international observers regarded as a sham poll. The dictatorial power held by the al Assad family led the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2008 to rank Syria 157th out of 167 nations in democracy. Syrians have few elections, civil liberties or opportunities to participate in the political system.

Syria's relationships with other Arab states are strained. Tension between Syria and its neighbors grew in September 2007 when Israel attacked an alleged nuclear facility in Syria. A peace agreement that was negotiated in May 2008 was hoped to help ease tension between Syria and its neighboring nations.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

The Syrian Arab Republic is a small country located on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israel and Lebanon to the southwest. With a total area of 185,180 sq km (71,500 sq mi), Syria is just slightly larger than the state of North Dakota. Two-thirds of Syria is desert; the other third is part of the Fertile Crescent (or Levant) along the Mediterranean coast. Most of the population—about 80%—lives in that fertile region, within 80 miles of the sea coast. One Mediterranean island, Arwad, belongs to Syria. The country has a Mediterranean climate with four distinct seasons, milder along the coast than in the inland areas. Temperatures along the coast range from 10–21°C (50–70°F) in January, and 21–32°C (70–90°F) in July. The inland desert areas are much colder in the winter and hotter in the summer. Syria has several large rivers, the Euphrates being the most important. The largest river in western Asia, the Euphrates starts in Turkey and flows 3,360 km (2,100 mi) through Syria and into Iraq to join the Tigris River at Basra. Most large wild animals are now absent from Syria because of overhunting, habitat destruction, desertification, and the use of DDT and other pesticides. Lion-hunting used to be known as “the sport of kings” in the upper Euphrates area, but lions disappeared from the Syrian desert about a century ago.

The Syrian people are one of the most ethnically mixed of all Arab peoples, blending characteristics from their many conquerors and invaders. Most Syrians are a genetic mix of Phoenician, Babylonian, Assyrian, French, and Turkish. Syrians generally have olive skin, dark brown eyes, and black hair, but a wide variety of other physical characteristics exists as well: blond hair and pale skin; black hair and dark brown skin; blue eyes and brown hair; and even red hair and freckled, pinkish skin. The total population of Syria is nearly 19 million. About 90% are Arab, and the rest are Kurdish, Turkish, Armenian, and Circassian. Some Palestinian refugees also have made their home in Syria, and nearly 1.5 million Iraqi refugees have fled into Syria since the start of the Gulf War in March 2003. Half of the people live in cities, 4 million in Damascus alone. About one-third (36.2%) of the population is under age 14. In addition, several thousand Syrians have been internally displaced as a result of Israel’s occupation of the Golan region.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Ancient Syrians spoke Syriac (a Semitic language) and Greek. Later Syrians spoke Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. (Modern-day people in the small hill village of Maalula still speak Aramaic, and it is used in church liturgies there.) The earliest phonetic alphabet in the world, Ugarit, was discovered in Syria in ruins dating from the 14th century BC. Arabic is now the official language of the Syrian Arab Republic and the language spoken by nearly all Syrians. French is the second most common language, but it is beginning to be rivaled by English. Both French and English are taught in Syrian schools. Other languages spoken in Syria include Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, and Circassian.

Arabic, spoken by 100 million people worldwide, has many dialects that are so distinctive that people living as little as 300 miles apart may not be able to understand one another. Written Arabic, on the other hand, is classical Arabic and is the same for all Arabic writers the world over. It is written and



read from right to left. Oddly, Syrians do not use standard Arabic numerals but instead use numerals that came to them from India.

“Hello” in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam ‘alaykum* (“Peace be with you”), with the reply of *Wa’laykum as-salam* (“and to you peace”). *Ma’assalama* means “goodbye.” “Thank you” is *Shukran*, and “You’re welcome” is *Afwan*. “Yes” is *na’am*, and “no” is *la’a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are: *wahad*, *ithnayn*, *thalatha*, *arba’a*, *khamisa*, *sita*, *sab’a*, *thamanya*, *tis’a*, and *‘ashara*.

At least half of Syria’s men and boys are named Muhammad (they often use their middle names to distinguish themselves from each other). This name is common because of its association with the Prophet Muhammad. The next most popular male names are: Ahmad, Khalil, Khaled, Yassir, ‘Imad, and Samer. Women’s and girl’s names commonly are Amal, Basima, Huda, Iman, Fatima (nicknamed Fatoum), Majd, and Sana.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Syrians are great believers in fate and frequently resign themselves to it. They also love proverbs, many of which reflect their strong attachment to family and intense involvement in social relationships. For example, “One who has no good for his/her family has no good for any other,” and “Where there are no people, there is Hell.”

One of Syria’s heroes is Queen Zenobia of the ancient city of Palmyra who took control in AD 267 when her husband and

her son were both assassinated. She managed to achieve full independence from Rome, then went on to attack Roman territories, taking over lower Egypt and all of Asia Minor before she was stopped by the Roman emperor Aurelius in AD 273. Aurelius took Zenobia back to Rome in chains the following year, where she lived as a respected former warrior and head of state until her death.

## 5 RELIGION

The majority religion in Syria is Islam: 91% of the population is Muslim. About 74% of Syrians follow the Sunni faith; however, many Syrians also follow Shia, Alawi, and Druze traditions of Islam. The Alawi branch of Islam is in the Shia tradition and is the branch to which Syria's leader belongs. The remaining 9% of Syrians are mostly Christians of the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, and Maronite sects. Small numbers of Jews, Baha'is and others also reside in Syria. The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and it is illegal to try to convert others to your faith.

Syria was one of the first lands conquered by the Islamic expansionists in the 7th century AD. Damascus was taken by the Muslims in AD 635 and became the first capital of the Islamic empire in AD 661. Muhammad had earlier made Medina, Saudi Arabia, the first Islamic capital. Damascus, named the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate in AD 661, is also an important city for Christians. St. Paul was on the road from Palestine to Damascus when he was converted to Christianity by a miraculous blinding light, and he lived in Damascus for almost 20 years.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Muslim holidays, Christmas and Easter (both the Western and Orthodox dates), and the Christian New Year (January 1) are official holidays in Syria. There are also several political holidays, celebrated with fireworks, parades, military air shows, and/or Baath Party (the ruling party) speeches. Political holidays include: Union Day (February 22), Revolution Day/Women's Day (March 8), Arab League Day (March 22), Evacuation Day (commemorating the day French troops left in 1946 to give Syria full independence, April 17), Martyr's Day (May 6), Security Force Day (May 29), Army Day August 1), Marine's Day (August 29), Veteran's Day (October 6), Flight Day (October 16), Correction Movement Day (November 16), Day of Mourning (November 29), and Peasant's Day (December 14).

Friday is the Islamic day of rest, so most businesses and services are closed on Fridays. Muslim holidays follow the lunar calendar, moving back by 11 days each year, so their dates are not fixed on the standard Gregorian calendar. The main Muslim holidays are: *'Id Al-Fitr*, a three-day festival at the end of *Ramadan*; *'Id Al-Adha*, a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (known as the *Hajj*)—families who can afford it slaughter a lamb and share the meat with poorer Muslims; the First of *Muharram*, or the Muslim New Year; *Mawlid An-Nabawi*, the prophet Muhammad's birthday; and *'Id Al-Isra wa Al-Mi'raj*, a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven from Jerusalem.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Marriage is the main goal in nearly every Syrian's life, so weddings are a major social event and rite of passage. The actual marriage, or exchange of vows, often takes place a few days or

weeks before the wedding reception in the presence of a religious leader, the imam. A marriage contract is signed before witnesses, and a *mahr* (dowry) is paid by the groom's family to the bride's family. Christian marriages also require that a *mahr* be paid to the bride. The wedding reception is a festive event for which the groom's family provides dinner and sweets.

Children live at home until marriage and sons might bring their wives to live with their families. While some Syrians date before marriage, most are careful to choose a potential future mate whom their families would approve of. Marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims in Syria are rare.

Upon the death of one parent, an adult child, usually a son, is required to take care of the surviving parent until death. After a death, there are three days of mourning during which friends, relatives, and neighbors visit the family of the deceased. Close women relatives of the deceased wear black for many months, and then they can start wearing half black and half white. For traditional families, it can be up to a year before the women can wear colors again; more modern families wait only six months.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Syrians are generally very loud, aggressive people who may be very polite in their greetings but then cut in line, bump into people without apologizing, drive offensively, honk their car horns constantly, and blast music and talk loudly late into the night (right under someone's bedroom window). They love to laugh, joke, eat, talk, and dance, and will get a party going at any excuse. Hagglng is a way of life; punctuality is of little concern. Both men and women are very affectionate with others of the same sex, often touching and holding hands, or even kissing on the mouth in public; this is not considered sexual behavior. Syrians are very interested in personal relationships, and they like to be part of a group. It is not a nation of fierce individuals; in fact, most Syrians hate to stand out in a crowd. Men enjoy a game of insults, where the object is to come up with an insult that is both clever and eloquently expressed.

Most Syrians are proud of their country's cultural heritage. Political opinions vary, however. Many Syrians would prefer to live under a more democratic regime, while others approve of the president's strong leadership.

Syrians stand close together, talk loudly, and use extravagant hand gestures. Holding the hand out with the palm facing up and the fingers together like a tent over the palm, then pumping the hand and forearm up and down, means "Wait a minute." Moving both open hands up quickly above the shoulders, palms facing the other person, means "That's my point!" or "That's my excuse!" Brushing the open palms together quickly as if to brush off dirt means "I'm finished with it (or you)." Patting the hand over the heart when meeting someone expresses affection for that person. A quick upward movement of the head with raised eyebrows, often with closed eyelids and a click of the tongue, means "No." A downward nod of the head to one side means "Yes." Shaking the head from side to side, often with a puzzled look on the face, means "I don't understand" or "I didn't hear you."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Nearly one-fourth of Syria's economy is agricultural. As a result, the country does not have a highly skilled labor force, which has made industrial development difficult to achieve.



*A Syrian man buys nuts at a shop in Salhiya market in Damascus. (Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty Images)*

Unemployment was about 9% in 2007, compared with higher rates of 35% in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although traditional Syrian homes were built around large courtyards, most Syrians today live in apartments. It is not unusual for a family of five people to share a unit that is 650 square feet or less. Those who are wealthy enough build villas or large vacation homes in the mountains or on the sea coast. There are no financing options for Syrians who wish to buy their own homes. All such transactions are paid for fully at the time of purchase in cash. Cities were once divided into ethnic and religious residential sections, but today they are divided more along lines of wealth and class: the wealthier people of all backgrounds move into the more modern sections of the city.

Syria's road system expanded in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, and the nation has built two major ports and two international airports. Public transportation, however, is inefficient. Plumbing and telephone systems are unreliable. Trains are slow and crowded, and taxis and buses vary greatly in quality.

Health care is free for Syrian citizens but is somewhat limited. There are only 1.2 hospital beds per 1,000 people in Syria. The infant mortality rate is high at 26.78 deaths for every 1,000 births, and life expectancy is fairly low (69.5 years for men, 70

for women). Villages are poorer than cities and have even fewer modern conveniences available. Very few village residents own cars. Villagers live in small one- to three-room houses with a small courtyard, the older ones made of adobe bricks and plaster. The focal point of a village house is the front door, which is often huge and painted with multicolored geometric patterns. The interiors of all but the most modern Western-style Syrian homes are ornate and highly decorated. A favorite Syrian decoration is a massive crystal chandelier that hangs so that it can be seen from outside.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The family is the center of life in Syria. Children live with their parents until they marry and sometimes after. There are no nursing homes in Syria; the elderly are cared for at home by their families. There is some child abuse, and children are sometimes punished harshly, but children and parents also show a great deal of affection for each other. Getting married and having children is the top priority for almost all Syrians. Arranged marriages are still common, with first cousins being the preferred match. Polygamy is legal, although it is uncommon in the cities. Divorce is rare; when a divorce is granted, the father almost always gets custody of the children.

Women do practically all of the cooking in Syria; few Syrian men know how to cook. Most kitchens have no modern appliances, such as dishwashers, food processors, or microwave ovens, so food preparation and clean-up take much time and energy. Groceries are usually bought fresh every day because of limited refrigeration and the vast quantities of food required to feed a large family. There is a separate shop for each type of food and four different kinds of bakeries: one that sells only flat bread (a Syrian staple), one that sells baguettes and rolls, one specializing in European pastries, and one that sells Syrian sweets. Consequently, it can take most of the day just to purchase and prepare food and then clean up afterwards. Women are constitutionally guaranteed equal rights, but in actuality, traditional expectations and duties usually keep them from enjoying those rights.

### 11 CLOTHING

Syrians wear a mix of traditional Arab and Western-style clothing. However, casual Western clothes, such as jeans, T-shirts, and running shoes are rarely seen. Syrians, both men and women, almost always cover their legs to at least below the knee, and their arms to below the elbow. Women almost never wear their skirts or hair short, and men never have long hair or earrings. Neither men nor women wear shorts. Middle- and upper-class women, especially younger ones, tend to wear bright colors, lots of jewelry and make-up, high-heeled shoes, and “big” hair (teased and sprayed into bouffant styles). Young men have very short, closely-cropped hair and also dress stylishly.

The first royalty ever to wear purple robes were in Syria, the dye coming from a type of mollusk that is unique to the Mediterranean shore in that area.

### 12 FOOD

Syrians eat typical Middle Eastern food, such as *hummus* (a ground chickpea paste with lemon juice, tahina [sesame seed paste] and garlic), *falafel* (fried, spiced, ground chickpeas), and *shish kebab* (lamb chunks on skewers) or *shish tawouq* (chicken chunks on skewers). Unique to Syria is a dish called *farooj*, which is roasted chicken with chilies and onions. Ice cream is called *booza*, and fruity soft drinks are known as *gazooza*. All other soft drinks are called “cola.” Syrians drink their coffee (*qahwa*) strong and sweet; tea (*shay*) is also drunk frequently. In general, Syrians love their food either very sweet or very sour. Most Syrian food uses some combination of the same basic ingredients: lamb, chicken, chickpeas and other dried beans, eggplant, rice, burghul (cracked wheat), olives, yogurt, Syrian cheese (white, salty cheese made of sheep’s or goat’s milk), garlic, and olive oil. Burghul (wheat that is parboiled, dried, and cracked) is a staple in the Syrian diet. It is cooked a variety of ways and is used as a cheap substitute for rice. When boiled, burghul can be combined with vegetables or meats or stews. Another use for burghul is in the making of *kibbeh*. To prepare *kibbeh*, burghul that has been presoaked in warm water is strained thoroughly and then combined with ground meat to form a paste. The paste is formed into small ovals the size and shape of an egg. A hole is poked down the center of the oval and is stuffed with a mixture of chopped onions, spices, ground meat, and pine nuts. The hole is then sealed by pinching the burghul paste over the top. Each unit of *kibbeh* is then

fried in vegetable oil until brown and crispy. *Kibbeh* is served at social gatherings of all types.

Damascene gardens are known for their grape vines, and use of the grape leaf in Syria, as in all of the Middle East, is common. Leaves from the vine are picked, washed, and dipped briefly in boiling water. Each leaf is laid out on a flat surface. A mixture of rice, margarine, spices, and ground meat is prepared. A small portion of this is laid in a straight line across the bottom of the leaf, and the leaf is then rolled up over the rice mixture. The stuffed grape leaves are set in a pot, covered with water, salt, and tomato sauce, and cooked on the stovetop until tender, about ½ hour.

Meals last a long time in Syria, two to three hours or more. Most food is eaten by hand or is scooped up with flatbread. French fries are one of the few potato dishes eaten. They are served with every meal at restaurants and are eaten with a fork. Potatoes are also sometimes sliced and cooked in a pan with meatballs and onions. Syrians eat all parts of an animal, including the brains, sexual organs, and intestines. Small eggplants stuffed with spiced meat then pickled, or artichokes stuffed with meat but not pickled, are a Syrian specialty.

### 13 EDUCATION

Schooling is mandatory for six years, and higher education is paid for by the government at the four Syrian universities. These universities, however, have huge classes and outdated teaching methods, so those who can afford to study abroad. School children wear green, military-style uniforms and attend school six days a week. In high school, students must study either English or French for two years. The literacy rate in Syria is 83% for men, and 76% for women

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Syria’s literary heritage includes mostly theologians, philosophers, and scientists, such as Jacob of Edessa (late 7th century AD), who is best known for his *Syriac Grammar*, and the philosopher Bar Hebraeus (mid 13th century AD), who wrote on logic, physics, mathematics, and astronomy. Only recently has there been any significant development of Syrian fiction writing. The Arab tradition of poetry remains strong in Syria. Ali Ahmad Said (1930– ), pen-named Adunis, is an influential Syrian poet who was exiled to Beirut in 1956 and now makes his home in Paris. He uses poetry to inspire revolutionary change to create a new society, and he was considered for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006 and 2007. One of the most popular modern women writers in Syria is Ghada al-Samman, who was born in a Syrian village in 1942, studied in Damascus and London, and then moved to Beirut.

Arab music is much like the Arab language—rich, repetitive, and exaggerated. The ‘*oud* is a popular instrument; it is an ancient stringed instrument that is the ancestor of the European lute. The Islamic prohibition against depicting the human form has greatly shaped Muslim visual art, which finds its greatest expression in mosques.

During the Middle Ages, sword-makers in Damascus became famous throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, and southern Europe for their extremely high-quality swords made from a secret alloy called Damascene steel. The hilts were elaborately decorated by a process known as “Damascening” in which the hilts were incised with intricate patterns and then inlaid with bronze, gold, and silver. In the 14th century, howev-

er, one of Damascus' conquerors captured all the sword-makers and put them in his own service, and the art of Damascene steel died out. The process of inlaying lives on, though, in Syrian woodworking.

### 15 WORK

Syrians worked mostly for the government or in agriculture until the mid-1990s when government efforts to privatize the economy opened up more opportunities. However, private companies have been slow to invest in Syria. Lafarge, a French company, is building a cement factory with the Syrian MAS Group, and oil and related industries are developing in the Deir al-Zour region. Most Syrians, however, continue to work in the government in large, inefficiently operated companies.

### 16 SPORTS

Syrians enjoy soccer as a spectator sport and also play the game in friendly street-side competitions. One can regularly spot boys playing soccer in open fields, school playgrounds, and streets—anywhere there is enough space for a game. Martial arts are very popular, with classes offered in many districts. Syrians also enjoy swimming (in both outdoor and indoor pools), tennis, track meets, and ping-pong tournaments. Bodybuilding and weight-lifting clubs are frequented by the higher social classes. There are soccer and basketball teams, and camel-racing is a popular spectator sport.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Eating and socializing in coffee houses are the main forms of entertainment. Social activities involve whole families, only men, only women, or women and children. Some public activities are considered socially unacceptable for women. Men sit for hours in all-male tea houses drinking tea or Turkish coffee, smoking the water-pipe, talking, and sometimes playing a favorite board game—a Turkish form of backgammon. Young men often hang out on the streets, or if they have cars, they cruise the streets. Women generally spend their leisure time talking with other women or family members, exchanging recipes, doing crafts, or dancing together. On Fridays, the Islamic day of rest, Syrians with cars often drive to mountain resorts where they eat, talk, and stroll along the streets. When strolling through the streets at night, Syrians wear their finest clothes.

Cinemas show either tear-jerker Egyptian films or super-violent American or Asian action films. These are only attended by rowdy young men. Wealthy Syrians own VCRs and like to rent videos. All Syrians enjoy music concerts, from jazz to classical, and they love parties even more. Women will not belly-dance in public (they will sometimes dance in front of each other at home), but men at a party will show off their best moves in a hilarious belly-dance routine, laughing uproariously at each other's attempts to shake their bottoms and bounce their breasts. At celebrations such as weddings, both men and women, either separately or together, perform the *dabka* dance. The *dabka* is a line dance performed to the music of a band or a hand-held drum called a *tabla*. A leader guides the dancers by shouting out moves that they must make as he or she dances ahead of them.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Syrian crafts include jewelry-making, characterized by extravagant gold- and silver-work (gold is considered higher class); mosaic, inlaid woodworking; glass-blowing; and weaving and embroidering textiles, such as clothing, tablecloths, pillow covers, and carpets. A special brocaded fabric called damask is named for the city of Damascus where it originated. Damask used to be made of silk with silver and gold threads woven through it by hand into a raised pattern that appears on both sides, making it perhaps the first reversible fabric. Modern damask is made from a variety of cloths but is still woven by hand. Syria is known for an alum charm that is supposed to ward off evil. The charm is colored blue and has a triangular shape. It is adorned with strands of beads and a symbolic blue hand that protects its owner. Taxis and buses have the charms hanging from their rear-view mirrors.

There is a well-attended international folk festival of music and dance every September in an ancient Roman amphitheater in Busra.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A struggling economy and the war in Iraq have made life difficult for many Syrians. Syria's population has doubled in 25 years and has been further swelled since 2003 by increasing numbers of Iraqi refugees, who now number around 1.5 million, almost 8% of the population. Syria's infrastructure has been expanding rapidly but remains poor by regional standards. The transport and energy sectors are antiquated and bureaucratic. The telecommunications and Internet sector is expanding rapidly, from a low base, following the easing of government restrictions. Many of the brightest students (particularly medical and engineering students) go abroad to study and never return. Syrian society is a fragmented one, made up of separate groups defined by language, region, religion, and ethnicity. There is little social cohesiveness or national loyalty. Violent acts of racism are rare, but there is pervasive stratification along skin-color lines, with the lightest-skinned people at the top and the darker-skinned at the bottom.

The chief of military operations for Hizbullah, an Iranian-backed Lebanese Shia group, was killed in Damascus on 12 February 2008. This action called attention to Syria's lack of internal security. The assassination followed an air raid by Israel five months earlier on an alleged nuclear facility in Syria.

President Hafez al Assad's dictatorship was brutal and oppressive to those who did not support him. Although his son, Bashar al Assad, has promised reforms, democratic participation is virtually non-existent in Syria. Opposing voices are silenced by imprisonment or death (or exile for the lucky ones), so few dare speak openly against the government. Nevertheless, some activists are beginning to fight for political reform. Several dozen opponents of Bashar were arrested in late 2007 and early 2008 for promoting the Damascus Declaration, a 2005 document that sought reforms.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

When a Syrian man tells a woman that she cannot do something because women are not capable of it, she is said to retort, "What about our Queen Zenobia?" The reference is to Syria's legendary female warrior and national hero. Most Syrian women, however, do not have the power of Zenobia, and are confined to more traditional domestic roles. Women have few

rights within marriages and often are at risk of violence from their husbands or other males.

The United Nations has begun to call attention to the poor status of Syrian women and, in June 2007, called on the government to reform its laws regarding marital rape, citizenship rights, and honor crimes. The UN also has called for the establishment of shelters and services for victims of violence. Little effort has been made by the government to improve the conditions for women, and there are some indications that conditions may be worsening. In January 2007, Syria's minister of social affairs and labor declared the Syrian Women's Association illegal and dissolved another women's rights group known as the Social Initiative Organization a month later. The government also has refused to license non-governmental organizations that support women's rights and services for victims of domestic violence.

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—revised by Himanee Gupta-Carlson.

# TAGBANUA

**PRONUNCIATION:** tahg-BAH-nwah

**LOCATION:** Philippines

**POPULATION:** around 20,000

**LANGUAGE:** Tagbanua; Tagalog/Pilipino

**RELIGION:** Indigenous animist religion; some Catholicism and Protestantism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The name Tagbanua derives from *tiga banua*, meaning “people of the village.” There is evidence of early influence from Hinduized Brunei. In more recent times, Muslim traders and aristocrats, chiefly Tausug from Sulu, dominated Palawan. Although Magellan's expedition made a landfall on Palawan, and its chronicler Pigafetta recorded an impression of the natives, intense Spanish contact did not begin until the 1872 founding of the town of Puerto Princesa at the northern edge of Tagbanua territory. American contact with the Tagbanua only commenced with the 1904 founding of the Iwahig penal colony. Catholic and Protestant missionaries have had only limited success in converting the Tagbanua, even in comparison with the neighboring Palawan ethnic group. Like most peoples in the southern Philippines, the influx of immigrants from the overpopulated Tagalog and Visayan regions has had a profound impact on Tagbanua life, though the relationship in their case is not one of armed conflict.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tagbanua inhabit both the eastern and western coasts of the central portion of Palawan Island, which lies between Mindoro and Borneo. The greater concentration of population is in the more extensive lowlands to the east of the island's mountain range that rises 760 m to 900 m (2,500–3,000 ft). The few mountain villages date from only the 18th century. Tagbanua also live on the Calamian Islands off the island's northern tip. The ethnic group numbered 14,000 in the 1980s (an 1985 estimate counted 2,000 speakers of the Central Tagbanua dialect). In 1990, speakers of the Agutaynen dialect of Tagbanua (Agutaya island and nearby points in northern Palawan) numbered almost 10,400 and of the Calamian dialect almost 8,000. According to the 2000 census, 2.15% (over 16,000) of the population of Palawan identified themselves as Tagbanua.

The Tagbanua have much contact today with other ethnic groups, such as the Palawano and the Batak (not the same as the Sumatran people), both of which are animists like the Tagbanua themselves, as well as the Muslim Jama Mapun and Christian Tagalog and Visayan immigrants.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Tagbanua speak a language of the Central Philippine sub-branch of the Western Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian family. Significant differences exist between the dialects spoken on Palawan and that of the Calamian Islands. The Tagbanua on Palawan are one of the three groups (the others are in Mindoro) who use the pre-Hispanic alphabet (ultimately of Indic origin) once used by the Tagalogs and other Filipinos. They scratch the letters with a knife on pieces of bam-



boo. Many Tagbanua also speak the languages of neighboring peoples as well as the national language, Tagalog/Pilipino.

There is a strong taboo against mentioning the names of grandparents, especially deceased ones. Nor does one ever call parents by their names; this applies also to non-kin of the parents' generation, whom one addresses as "Amey" or "Manung" (uncle), or "Iney" or "Manang" (aunt). One even avoids using the names of adults of the same generation, calling them "Ungkuy" (friend) instead. One calls young boys "Duduy" and young girls "Nini."

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Diseases are caused by the *salakep*, small, dark, kinky-haired beings who once lived among the Tagbanua in the mythical past. Men who marry into a village fear magical poisoning (*ratyun*) by village natives. Against this and other harmful forces, men carry *mutya*, or amulets.

#### 5 RELIGION

Named deities dwell in a multilayered sky-world. The highest is Mangindusa, the "punisher of crime" (namely, incest). Upon clearing a forest for planting, offerings (*pagdasag*) are made to the *tawu tung talun* ("people of the forest"), spirits who will protect crops from pests and animals. Moreover, the rice plant itself has a soul (*kalag*), which is respected by the use of a special knife called the *kayed*. In the Calamian Islands, the *tek-beken*, a giant octopus, appears when someone is under a spell or breaks the incest taboo.

The *tiladmanin*, ancestral spirits, cause illness. The *pag-salaknan* ritual is performed for small children, entailing the sacrifice of a pig and six young chickens (*pitung kulu*, "seven heads") in an appeal for ancestral protection. Ceremonies for the ancestors are held from the level of the family to those of the entire Tagbanua people (by the Masikampu). Offerings include rice, chickens, and betel nuts placed on platforms or rafts decorated with leaf streamers affixed to upright poles. Ritual drink fests attract the spirits with rice wine; this is also an occasion for dancing, blood pacts, and courtship.

There has been some conversion to Catholicism and Protestantism in the Calamian Islands.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Tagbanua participate in the fiestas of non-Tagbanua communities.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A pregnant woman observes numerous behavioral and dietary taboos lest the fetus become ill; certain plants are kept in the house as protection against witches and evil spirits (*mangaluk*). The midwife (a relative) puts the placenta in a bamboo tube and puts it on a tree or buries it under the house. The new mother continues to observe food taboos and on the third day after the birth bathes in water prepared by the midwife with boiled leaves. The new baby receives five secondary souls at another ceremony. The Tagbanua do not celebrate birthdays, but a father may swear to hold a *panaad* feast on the seventh birthday if he has lost many children already.

The Tagbanua are monogamous and marry early—as arranged by parents or other relatives, or today more often by picking their own partners. Parents must use a *talunga*, an in-



termediary, to negotiate a marriage. The man's side initiates the first meeting with the woman's side; at this time, they settle the bride-price (*begay*). The *begay* is delivered before the wedding and consists of two steps: the giving of money and fabric, symbolic of the anchor and back of a boat, and the payment of wealth ideally not less than the groom's father paid for his mother (knives, pigs, rice, cash, and recently coffee, sugar, gin, bread, and biscuits, and a sarong for the bride's mother and trousers for her father). Both sides share the cost of the *uglun*, a dancing party that lasts a whole day and night.

The sides exchange visits, beginning with the groom's kin to the bride's house; each time the visitors bring double the num-



Indigenous Tagbanua tribal elders perform a ritual to drive away evil aboard the Greenpeace flagship *Rainbow Warrior* in Puerto Princessa, Palawan, Philippines. (AFP/Getty Images)

ber of rice sacks they received before as hosts, until the bride's side decides to call it quits. The wedding can then follow. Each family holds an all-night dancing party to which relatives contribute. The groom's family asks for permission to enter the bride's house, which they get after they pay a ritual fee. They are greeted with a war dance (*saad*). Only at midnight does the groom himself enter. On the floor, he sits with his back to the bride. Everyone sits in silence waiting for an animal to make a sound; the longer the silence, the better the omen. After this, the bride holds a coin between her fingers, an old man puts the groom's hand on the bride's hand, and asks the groom if he will treat his wife as his own body. After the groom answers yes, the old man asks the bride the same question, to which she says yes. Then, he pours gin over their hands onto a plate. The couple drink from the plate, and the bride takes the coin for safekeeping.

A cheaper and faster alternative to the above process is *sudir*: the couple act intimate in front of the parents, who are thus pressured (for fear of scandal) to speed up the wedding process. Older people regard the children of such marriages as under a stigma.

In the Calamian Islands, upon death, the body is kept in the house on a mat. The family stops work, summons distant relatives, and keeps a vigil by the body. A large carrying pole is secured to the coffin. During the *pagtaliman* ceremony, an

older man asks the deceased questions as to the cause of death. The old man tries to lift the carrying pole: if it feels light, the deceased's answer is yes; if heavy, it is no. This aims to allay feelings of guilt relatives and friends may have toward the deceased. Music accompanies the carrying of the coffin to the burial site. Three days after the burial, people gather in the yard of the deceased's home for a simple meal of rice and fish, then enter the house to listen to the singing of the *Dumarakul* epic, taking numerous breaks for coffee and gin.

Among the Tagbanua on Palawan, the surviving spouse is secluded for seven days; on the last day, a ceremony is held to sever the soul's connection to the world of the living. The soul then goes to *basad*, the underworld. If an epidemic caused the death, the soul travels in a spirit canoe to a special afterworld. Formerly, a second burial transferred the body to large earthen jars.

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Tagbanua society is composed of autonomous villages recognizing an ethnic leader, the *Masikampu*. *Ginu'u*, community leaders, possess titles bestowed centuries ago by the Tausug rulers of Sulu and handed down father to son. The *ginu'u* base their power on a thorough knowledge of customary law and on the possession of supernaturally powerful heirlooms, such as old Chinese jars. Retaining their ritual and judicial authority, they have conceded political power to Philippine government officials. Villages are integrated into the national system of local administration via elected *barangay* captains and councils. *Surugudin* councils headed by *ginu'u* determine fines under a complex system of customary law and kinship obligations.

The traditional social order distinguishes between "high bloods" (the *ginu'u*, *bawalyan* [shamans], and their kin) and "low bloods" (everyone else). In the past, there was also a small number of debt-slaves (*uripen*). Personal qualities could qualify an individual born of a high-blood father and a low-blood mother for community leadership.

A boy may not visit a girl in the home or speak to her in public but must try to meet her secretly or give her small presents. Because of the grave consequences of incest, men and women avoid each other, feeling *inglaw* (discomfort) with each other, even with parents or children of the opposite sex. Brothers and sisters must observe formality with each other.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Consisting of a single room, houses are raised on 1.5 m to 2-m (5- to 6-ft) piles (0.5-m or 1.5-ft in the Calamian Islands). The floor, walls, and gabled roof are made of bamboo, rattan, and palm fronds. Cooking is usually done outside or under the house; if inside, it is done in a tin bucket filled with earth. The smoke drives away mosquitoes. Larger houses may have chairs on the veranda and benches in the yard. Household articles include baskets, a mortar, and wooden trunks or cardboard boxes for clothes. Today, Tagbanua use town-bought aluminum cookware, chinaware, plastic water containers, and tin cans for storing rice. Valued heirlooms consist of ritually important Chinese jars, brass betel nut boxes and trays, gongs, knives, and spears. Flowers are planted around the house. Houses used to be burned upon the death of an occupant.

More nomadic groups that live off the sea build houses of light materials and carry the roofs with them when they move, using them as a windscreen or sleeping place on the beach.

A village contains from 45 to 500 persons, usually around 150. It is divided into smaller units comprising the families of sisters. Water is taken from wells and springs.

Visits from government medical personnel are very rare. *Bawalayan* (shamans) and midwives provide most health care.

Average family income in the MIMAROPA region (Mindoro, Masbate, Romblon, and Palawan islands) amounted to 109,000 pesos (us\$2,137) in 2006, the second lowest in the country (above the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, and those of the neighboring regions, Southern Tagalog, ₱198,000, and the Western Visayas, ₱130,000.

In Palawan province, the proportion of houses with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum increased from 11.63% in 1990 to 24.68% in 2000, with outer walls of concrete, brick, or stone from 4.31% in 1990 to 7.23%; this meant that the great majority of houses were still constructed of wood or of grass or palm thatch.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Kinship is reckoned on both the mother's and father's sides; the incest taboo extends to third cousins on both sides. People tend to identify with a prominent patrilineal or matrilineal ancestor. Nuclear families have one to two children, in contrast to the national average of four children per family. A household consists of a couple and unmarried children (sometimes also other relatives). A newlywed couple will live with the bride's family at first; exceptions to this rule for economic reasons cause friction between in-laws. The nuclear family remains under the influence of other kin in close residence.

Terminology distinguishes between older and younger siblings and among uncles and aunts with reference to birth order. In the Calamian Islands, mothers and aunts are addressed as "Nanay," fathers and uncles as "Tatay," siblings and cousins as "Putul," siblings-in-law and cousins-in-law as "Ipag," and grandparents and grandchildren as "Apu." When the mother is out, grandparents, older siblings, or other relatives take care of the children; fathers also watch the children after work. Children do not join adult conversation and are taught to respect authority and age. Childless couples do not adopt but rather "borrow" relatives' children for a day, returning them at night. Formal respect must be shown in-laws at all times, even in the midst of a drinking party.

Divorce may be demanded at the slightest incompatibility. Village elders try to mediate. If the husband is at fault, he pays a fine equal to the bride-price. If the wife is at fault, she pays back the bride-price.

The Tagbanua keep dogs for hunting and for guarding the house, as well as cats for catching mice.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional men's wear consists of fabric loincloths. In living memory, men wore *takwil*, loincloths of bark cloth. In town, men wear polo shirts and jeans or trousers, like other Filipinos. Women wear colorful sarongs (*gimay* or *patadyong*). It is not rare to see older and married women without a blouse on in the village, but schoolgirls always wear one. Female hair is kept long and in a chignon. In the village, earrings and chains of pearls are occasionally worn.

## 12 FOOD

Rice, a divine gift, is the most prized food and is the source of *tabad* (the "perfect drink," a ritually important alcohol). Tagbanua now buy rice in town. In the Calamian Islands, however, the *kurut*, a wild yam, is the staple food. It is poisonous, so hours must be spent processing it to get rid of the poison. In dried form, *kurut* can last for two years. Dried fish is the usual accompaniment to the main starch.

## 13 EDUCATION

To punish disobedience or disrespect, parents scold, pinch, beat, or lock up their children or put a curse (*gaba*) on them, threatening that the ancestors will cause the child illness or misfortune.

Children learn by observing and participating in the daily activities of adults. Illiteracy is high because school expenses (often requiring travel to a distant town) prevent most Tagbanua from sending their children to school, although Tagbanua value education. The first elementary school in the Calamian Islands dates to 1939. If parents can send their children, the children participate in school activities and celebrations, while the parents join in the P.T.A. Honors ceremonies are major events for such families.

According to the 2000 census, of persons over the age of five years in Palawan province, 47.5% had completed elementary school and 24.6% high school, but only 2.14% college or university (cf. 4.3% in Aklan province and 7.8% in Iloilo province, both on Panay in the neighboring Western Visayas region).

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

*Pasigem* (riddles) and *ugtulen* (folk tales) serve not only as entertainment but also teach children social norms and history (explaining conflicts with other ethnic groups and the relationship with the Muslim peoples). The epic of *Dumarakul* (the hero's name) is sung after burial; all know the general story but few fully understand the archaic language of this long work. Traditional songs (*daluwasa*, *sablay*, *bagreng*) are gradually dying out. Today, people mix in lines in the languages of neighboring peoples and even prefer to sing entire songs in these languages. Also in decline are the playing of the Jew's harp, drum (*tambul*), and bamboo flute (*tipanu*), while great interest is shown in the guitar. Dancing to gong music is an important part of celebrations.

## 15 WORK

The Tagbanua practice slash-and-burn agriculture, growing dry rice, maize, millet, sweet potato, cassava, and taro. They build huts (*tangkungan*) near their fields so they can watch them. For this same purpose, tiptay, platforms light enough for children (who do the watching) to carry around, are set up in the fields. Yard gardens grow vegetables.

Fishing is the other important occupation. Methods include pole and line, poisoning with plant extracts, damming and drying up streams, and attracting fish with torches at night. Various types of harpoons and spears are being displaced by fishing guns. In addition to *barutu* (small outrigger canoes), motorboats are now used by the wealthiest Tagbanua.

Spear-wielding men hunt wild boars with the help of dogs. Fowl are also caught. It is customary to share game with relatives and neighbors. Water buffalo, perhaps only introduced in

the 20th century, are kept for transport, as are cattle. Cattle and pigs are kept for ritual feasts. Certain types of chickens are raised solely for cockfighting or for their feathers, which can be made into fish bait.

The Tagbanua trade “Manila copal” (a mountain tree gum), split rattan, local rice, forest honey (as well as edible young bees and ritually important wax), and (in the Calamian Islands) edible bird nests taken at considerable risk from caves. For these, they obtain Moro goods (gongs, betel boxes, and stoneware) from Chinese or Christian shopkeepers.

Specialists include *bawalyan* (shamans), midwives, and drum- and flute-players. Some young men and women work as servants in non-Tagbanua houses, returning home to get married. Non-Tagbanua hire Tagbanua men to do carpentry or construction work.

## <sup>16</sup>SPORTS

Children play with toys they make themselves, such as boats and bamboo knives. They catch birds or butterflies. Girls weave small mats and play *sungka* with stones or shells; boys spin *ebeg*, wooden tops, as well as catch fish in shallow water with toy bows and arrows. Older children combine play with helping their parents.

## <sup>17</sup>ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Radios are now common, the most popular broadcasts being amateur singing contests and soap operas. Tagbanua watch films in town, mostly action and love stories in Tagalog/Pilipino, the national language, but also Westerns, kung fu movies, and the occasional pornographic film.

## <sup>18</sup>FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Tagbanua weave their own clothing from yarn bought in town.

## <sup>19</sup>SOCIAL PROBLEMS

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## <sup>20</sup>GENDER ISSUES

According to the 2000 census, Palawan province had a sex ratio of 107.07 men for every 100 women. Among those completing primary and secondary education, there were somewhat more men (53.6%) than women with an even greater gap than between percentages of men and women in the population as a whole. In tertiary education, the reverse was the case: women were more numerous than men (e.g. 59.7% of academic degree holders were women).

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# TAHITIANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** tuh-HEE-shuns

**LOCATION:** Tahiti, in the Society Islands chain

**POPULATION:** 262,000 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Native languages of the islands; Maori; Tahitian; French; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity with elements of native religion

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

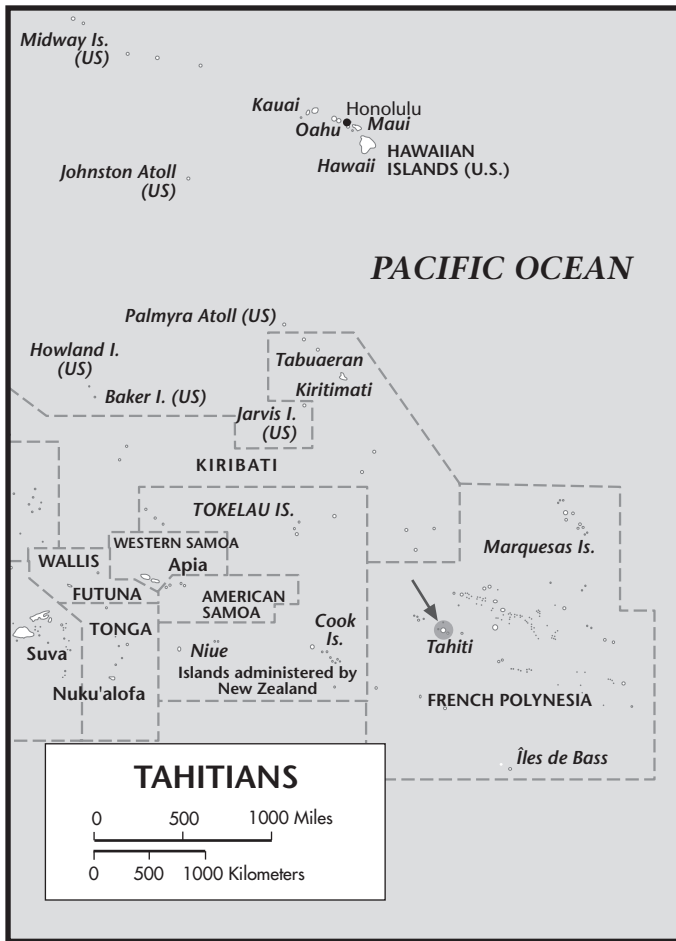
The Tahitians are a Polynesian group inhabiting the island of Tahiti, the largest of a chain of islands called the Society Islands. The Society Islands are part of a larger sociopolitical unit called French Polynesia, an overseas territory of France. French Polynesians, including Tahitians, are citizens of France with certain voting rights and privileges.

Polynesians are thought to have first settled in the Society Islands in the 3rd century BC. The first contact by Europeans was made in the 16th century AD. In the late 1760s, both English and French seamen landed on and claimed control of Tahiti: the British Captain Wallis in 1767 and the French Bougainville in 1768. The first Protestant missionaries arrived in 1797 and began teaching the local populace to read and write and converting them to Christianity. In the 19th century Tahiti became an important distribution center for American and European whalers. In 1843 the ruling monarch of Tahiti's Pomare dynasty, Queen Pomare IV, signed a treaty making the island a French protectorate. In 1880 the last Pomare ruler abdicated and Tahiti became a French protectorate. It became a territory in 1957 and achieved internal self-rule in 1977. With the completion of Faaa International Airport in 1959, tourism became an important factor in the island's economy. French nuclear testing in the area began in the 1960s but ended in 1996. However, concerns about damage to local people's health resulting from the testing continued to reverberate in the 21st century. In 2006 it was revealed that French governments covered up for 40 years the fact that Tahiti was subjected to repeated fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests between 1966 and 1974.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Society Islands are divided into two geographical and administrative clusters of islands: the windward group and the leeward group. Tahiti is part of the windward group. Tahiti is a “high” island in the typology of Pacific islands, having a volcanic origin. The landscape of Tahiti is punctuated with high peaks and a number of waterfalls. The climate is mild and tropical with an average temperature of about 25°C (77°F). The temperature rarely drops below 18°C (65°F). The rainy season lasts from November to April and the city of Papeete has an average yearly rainfall of 178 cm (70 in).

Tahiti had a total resident population of about 262,000 people as of 2007. The capital and largest city is Papeete, with a population of approximately 80,000 people. Persons of Polynesian descent made up the largest ethnic group in French Polynesia, accounting for 78% of the total population. The Chinese, who were originally brought to the islands in the 19th century to work in the cotton industry, accounted for 12% of the popu-



lation and Europeans (primarily French) accounted for about 10%.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

French and Tahitian are the official language of Tahiti. French is spoken widely and is the primary language used in official documents and in schools. Both social and economic status are affected by one's proficiency in French. However, most Tahitians speak a Tahitian dialect of French rather than Continental French. The Tahitian language, or Maohi, which is the official regional language of the Society Islands, is still used by a majority of the population and is the primary language spoken at home by older Tahitians. However, many young Tahitians have begun to use French exclusively. Tahitian is part of the larger family of Polynesian languages, which in turn belongs to the very large Austronesian language family. The Tahitian alphabet has 13 letters and all syllables in Tahitian end in a vowel. Forms of Pacific English are also spoken by Tahitians. Although there are a number of speakers of Chinese languages in the Society Islands, most Tahitians do not speak Chinese. Two popular Tahitian expressions are "*Aita e peapea*" ("no problem") and "*fu*" ("fed up," or "bored").

### **4 FOLKLORE**

The history and lore of Tahiti's native people was passed down from one generation to the next in an oral tradition that included creation myths and stories of gods, heroes, and ances-

tors (many Tahitians can still list their ancient lineage). Epic poetry recounting the Polynesian past was recited in rhythmic chants and some legends were expressed in ritual dances accompanied by the beat of drums. A belief in ghosts (*tupapau*) still survives and some people leave lights on all night in their homes to protect themselves against these spirits.

### **5 RELIGION**

The conversion of the Tahitians to Protestantism occurred early in the history of European-Tahitian contact. In 1797 the London Missionary Society sent a group of evangelical Protestant missionaries to the island of Tahiti. By 1830 the vast majority of Tahiti and the whole of the Society Islands were Protestant. Even after the French takeover in the 1840s Protestantism remained the religion of the Tahitians. As of 2007 Protestants accounted for about 55% of the population and Roman Catholics for 30%. The largest single Protestant denomination was the Maohi Protestant Church (formerly known as the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia), which was established as an autonomous church in 1963. Services at the Maohi Protestant Church are presented in Tahitian. About 6% of the population was Mormon (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and 2% was Seventh-day Adventists. Some of the Chinese on Tahiti practice Buddhism.

The elements of the Christian faith, the church, and the pastor are central features of Tahitian village life. The church building and accompanying schoolhouse are reference points in every village. The village pastor shares in the political decision-making with the village chief. The Tahitian pastor is usually a native of the village where he or she holds a parish. The pastor presides over all of the religious activities of the village, conducts the Sunday school, teaches the Bible, conducts weddings and funerals, and provides communion. Some Tahitian church congregations are very well known for their hymn singing, which mixes European vocal style with traditional Tahitian style. Catholic services are conducted in French, while Protestant services are usually held in Tahitian.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Tahiti's national holidays include New Year's Day (January 1), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Victory Day (May 8), Ascension Day, Whitmonday (Pentecost Monday), Bastille Day (July 14), Assumption of the Virgin Mary (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), Armistice Day (November 11), and Christmas. The biggest event of the year is Heiva I Tahiti, a celebration of Tahitian culture and the heroic Polynesian warriors of the past. Festivities last for about two weeks, beginning at the end of June, and include dancing, parades, dancing and singing competitions, sporting events, and feasting. On Bastille Day (July 14) there is a military parade in the capital. March 5 is celebrated by the Protestant communities throughout the island as Gospel Day, the day on which the first members of the London Missionary Society landed in Tahiti in 1797. The celebration includes religious services, discussions and religious and social issues, and banquets followed by singing and dancing. The Chinese New Year is also considered an important holiday in Tahiti.



A Tahitian woman in headdress in Tahiti, French Polynesia. (© Jean du Boisberranger/Hemis/Corbis)

## <sup>7</sup> RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past, major life events were celebrated at religious gathering places called *marae*. Today rites of passage are generally observed within the Christian religious tradition.

## <sup>8</sup> INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Tahitians, like other French Polynesians, are known for their *joie de vivre* (literally, “joy in life”), relaxed attitude, and unpretentious, courteous behavior. A favorite saying is, “If you act like old friends when you first meet, you will soon feel that you are.” Visitors to Tahiti might receive a lei made from the Tiare Tahiti flower upon their arrival.

Tahitians typically greet each other by shaking hands, and women often exchange kisses on the cheek. The handshake is considered so important that if a person’s hands are dirty, it is common to offer a wrist, elbow, or even a shoulder. Unless there are a large number of people present in a room (over 30), it is considered impolite not to shake hands with all of them. It is considered impolite to keep one’s shoes on when entering another person’s home. When guests are invited for a meal, the hosts are not necessarily expected to eat and may just sit and watch the guests eat. French greetings, such as “*Bonjour*” (“Good day”), are common in formal situations. A traditionally used Tahitian expression of welcome is “*La ora!*”

<sup>9</sup> Living conditions

Health conditions on Tahiti are generally good. Life expectancy for all of French Polynesia was about 76 years in 2008 with 74 years for men and 79 years for women. The rate of infant mortality was 7.7 deaths per 1,000 births (compared with a U.S. rate of 6.3 per 1,000). Medical care is paid for by the government.

Most Tahitians live in modern European-style homes with electricity and indoor plumbing. Housing styles range from the ultra-modern homes, townhouses, and condominiums of the wealthy in Papeete to the cement-walled, tin-roofed houses of the middle class. Wood-walled houses with thatch roofs can still be found among some of the poorest communities on the island.

Automobiles are commonly used for private transportation in Tahiti, and motorbikes are also popular. A widely used type of public transportation is called *le truck*.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

The traditional extended family has increasingly given way to the nuclear family in Tahiti, although it is not unusual for newly married couples to live with one set of in-laws for a period of time. Grandparents often play a prominent role in childrearing, and turning children over to adoptive parents (*faamu*) is also not unusual.

## **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Tahitians wear Western-style clothing as well as more traditional clothing consisting of simple cloths wrapped around the waist. Women ordinarily wear dresses rather than shorts. Thongs or sandals are commonly worn by both sexes without socks or hose. Traditional Tahitian dance costumes include grass or cotton skirts, necklaces, and headdresses made from local plants and grasses.

## **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Staples of the Tahitian diet include pork, chicken, fish, and shellfish; root crops including yams and taro; coconut milk; breadfruit; rice; a type of spinach (*fafa*) and other locally grown vegetables; and fruits including papayas, pineapples, mangoes, and bananas. Bananas and papayas are pureed to create a popular dessert called *poe*. Cooking in the traditional earth oven (*hima*) remains popular in Tahiti. The food—which may include pork, chicken, fish, taro, or yams—is wrapped in leaves, placed over heated stones, covered with earth, and steamed for several hours. Also popular is *poisson cru*, a salad made with raw fish marinated in lime juice.

Village fare is basic. Breakfast typically consists of pancakes made from flour, coconut milk and sugar, coffee, and reef snails. Leftover pancakes accompany the other meals. Lunch is usually eaten around 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon and the meal centers on fish, usually fried, with taro root and cooked plantains. Supper is eaten around 7:00 P.M. Leftovers from lunch and breakfast, as well as rice and canned vegetables, may form part of the evening meal. Coffee is an important part of supper.

In Papeete, lunch is the big meal of the day. Men and women arrive home from work about 11:30 A.M. to prepare the meal. After lunch, people typically sleep for an hour and then return to work by 1:00 or 2:00 P.M. Supper in the city also consists mainly of leftovers or Chinese takeout food that is brought home by household members returning from the day's work. The Chinese are a major ethnic minority in Tahiti and as a result Chinese food is popular throughout the Society Islands.

## **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Tahiti has a 98% literacy rate. Primary, secondary, and vocational schools were established on Tahiti by the French and conform to French educational standards. Schooling is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14. There are also private schools, run by churches and subsidized by the government, that teach the same curriculum as the public schools. Adult education is also popular and offered at no charge. Tahitian students often attend college in France or other countries.

## **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Performing arts competitions held in Tahiti every July during the Heiva I Tahiti festivities help preserve the traditional performing arts of song and dance in the Society Islands. The Society Islands also send performing troupes to compete in South Pacific arts festivals. Traditional Tahitian dances were once considered so lascivious by 19th-century Protestant missionaries that they were banned in the 1820s. In modern culture Tahitian dancing is extremely popular, with numerous dance competitions featuring troupes of between 20 and 50 dancers held during Heiva I Tahiti. In the *aparima*, the hands of the dancer express the story through movements and positioning.

The dance is generally performed in a standing posture and resembles the Hawaiian hula. It is accompanied by drums, guitar, and ukulele. Also popular is the sexually provocative *tamure*, in which young men and women dance around each other. The *o'tea*, performed by dancers lined up in two columns and accompanied by drums, consists of gestures based on specific themes, such as spear throwing. The *pata'uta'u* involves beating the ground with open palms.

The Tahitian word *himene* is used to denote all types of song. The word is borrowed from the English word *hymn* and shows the extent of the influence the early Christian missionaries had on the traditional culture of Tahiti. *Himene tarava* are songs performed by groups of approximately 100 male and female singers. In former times, the songs would recount the deeds of kings and gods, but now they tell popular tales from the Bible, sung in Tahitian. Guitars and ukuleles are important musical instruments for Tahitian males, as are a variety of drums including the *toere*, a slit drum made of tamanu wood and hit with a stick; the *ofe*, a split-bamboo drum; and the *pahu*, made from a hollowed section of coconut tree and covered with shark skin. Another traditional instrument is the bamboo nose-flute, or *vivo*.

The word tattoo originated in Tahiti. According to legend, Tohu, the god of tattoo, was responsible for painting the colors and patterns of all of the fish in the ocean. In Polynesian culture, tattoos are considered to be a sign of beauty.

## **<sup>15</sup>WORK**

Since the establishment in the 1960s of France's *Centre Experimental du Pacifique*, which administered France's nuclear testing program, and the growth of tourism that began during the same period, the bulk of employment on Tahiti has shifted from subsistence agriculture to public and private services, each of which employs about 40% of the labor force. The Chinese are primarily employed in retail trade.

## **<sup>16</sup>SPORTS**

Soccer is the most popular sport among Tahitians. Other favorites include basketball, volleyball, boxing, and cycling. Water sports are popular and include swimming, fishing, diving, canoeing, and windsurfing. Canoe races are the most popular sporting event of the Heiva I Tahiti festivities in July.

## **<sup>17</sup>ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The leisure-time pursuits of Tahitians include movies, music, dancing, and television. Radio Tahiti broadcasts programs in the Tahitian language.

## **<sup>18</sup>FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Many traditional handicrafts, such as weaving, quilting, and carving, are learned and passed on from one generation to the next by "mamas," who are considered the guardians of such sacred traditions. In the past, the Tahitians used cloth made from the inner bark of mulberry, breadfruit, and banyan trees for clothing and other items. After being stripped from the tree and separated from the outer layer of bark, the inner layer was beaten with a mallet, dried in the sun, dyed, and hand-painted with floral or geometric patterns. A traditional craft still practiced is the making of two-layer patchwork quilts called *tifai-fai*, often decorated with colorful floral patterns. Other crafts

include needlework, seashell jewelry, and straw hats, mats, and baskets. *Pareu*—lengths of cotton cloth wrapped and tied to form sarong-like garments—are screened, blocked, and printed by hand with colorful patterns. Natural skin products, called *monoi* oils, are made from the oils extracted for the Tiare flower and tree fruits.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The topic of independence has been part of many political debates since the 1970s. The island has a semi-autonomous government with an elected president and a great deal of control concerning internal affairs. However, the people are still dependent on France for services such as education and security and France offers economic stability as well. In 2004 the status of Tahiti was changed from an overseas territory to an “overseas country.” While those groups promoting full independence are rather prominent, some reports indicate that only about 20% of the general population is in favor of independence.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In traditional villages, men and women shared somewhat equally in the necessary tasks for daily life, particularly in finding and preparing food for the family. Both men and women assisted in maintaining the family gardens and fruit trees. Men were most often in charge of hunting and deep-water fishing while women were in charge of building and maintaining the outdoor ovens made of volcanic rock. Women worked by weaving baskets, mats, and other household items out of coconut leaves and creating jewelry out of shells. Handicrafts for men included carved tiki statues, drums, and other household items. In modern culture, both men and women have opportunities to work outside of the home, particularly in tourist-related services. Many men and women continue the tradition of making handicrafts, with products offered for sale to tourists.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

## **TAIWAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Formosan Aborigines, Taiwan

Austronesians

**LOCATION:** Taiwan

**POPULATION:** 460,000 (2008)

**LANGUAGE:** 13 Austronesian languages

**RELIGION:** Christianity, Traditional Religions

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

*This article examines the place of the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan in contemporary society and political processes. For an ethnographic description of the traditional culture of one of these groups, please refer to the entry on Tao.*

The 460,000 Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan (Taiwan Yuanzhuminzu) are several Austronesian Peoples who inhabited all of Taiwan before Chinese settlement began in the 1620s. Approximately 7000 years ago, horticulturalists making corded pottery and using polished stone tools began to cross the Taiwan straits from coastal areas of the Asian continent south of the Yangtze River. Their “proto-Austronesian” languages evolved in Taiwan along with cultural adaptations. Some 5000 years ago these cultures and languages began to spread through insular Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, becoming the large Austronesian linguistic and cultural family which extends from the Maori of New Zealand to Madagascar off the coast of Africa. Linguistic, archaeological, and genetic evidence now confirm that Taiwan is the original homeland of Austronesian languages and cultures. Some of the contemporary groups in Taiwan (Kavalan, Tao) appear to have been later migrants back to Taiwan from the Pacific or the Philippines.

What is beyond debate is that there were Austronesian peoples in Taiwan for centuries before they entered written history, and that they are very different from the Chinese, who now constitute 98% of Taiwan’s population. These two traits make them “aboriginal” or “indigenous,” and give them a collective identity beyond their varied languages, cultures, and forms of social organization. Although these differences are significant, it is their common historical experience and legal status in Taiwan today which allows us to discuss them together.

Through three centuries of Chinese immigration, the Austronesian peoples inhabiting the plains and hills of western Taiwan were gradually assimilated and intermarried with Chinese immigrants, so that today people whose ancestors were “Pingpu” (Plains Aborigine) are a major part of the “Taiwanese” population. The “savages” (*hoan-a*) who inhabited the mountains and east coast were feared as headhunters, and survived as distinct tribes who are today’s Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan. Until 1875 Chinese sought to cordon off this area, but valuable camphor forests and the threat of Japanese designs led the Chinese to expand into the mountains, starting decades of “camphor wars” in which thousands of Aborigines and Chinese were killed.

In 1895 Japan took Taiwan from China. After 1908 they sent over 100 military campaigns into the mountains, ending with the conquest of the Truku in 1914. The Japanese excluded the



Chinese from Indigenous areas. Villages in the high mountains were moved out to facilitate control, modernization, and for shaping them into Imperial subjects. Indigenous people were used as forced labor in lumbering. In 1930 a large Tayal uprising at Wushe in central Taiwan was crushed with the use of poison gas.

After taking Taiwan in 1945 the Republic of China pursued a policy of economic improvement and cultural assimilation of the Indigenous People. Thus, while Indigenous People are poor and marginalized, their economic and educational situation is better than most indigenous peoples in the world.

## **2** LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Traditional Indigenous territories are the rugged mountains and valleys which take up all of central and eastern Taiwan. Taiwan is a small island, 13,000 sq km (5,019 sq mi) (the size of Vancouver Island), and so even a “remote” village is never far from the densely populated western plain. Over one-third of Indigenous Peoples now live and work permanently in cities such as Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Taichung. But many retain homes in their villages, to which they return regularly.

The 460,000 Indigenous People make up only 2% of Taiwan’s 23 million people. They are classified into 13 self-identified and officially recognized tribes, each with its own language and distinctive culture. They can be geographically and culturally grouped into six areas:

North: Tayal, 79,000; Truku, 22,000; Saisiat, 5,400

Central: Bunun, 47,000; Tsou, 6,200; Thao, 500

South: Rukai, 11,000; Paiwan, 82,000

East Coast: Pinuyumayan 10,500; Amis, 167,000,

Lanyu Island: Tao, 3,400

Plains Aboriginal: Kavalan 1000, Sakizaya 5000

(another 40,000 do not identify themselves with any one group, in part because of intertribal marriage)

Basic social structure roughly follows this geographic division.

The northern groups were simple band societies, based on hunting and semi-permanent hamlets. The central groups lived in larger villages organized into large extended households and clans that united people among many villages. The southern groups were unequal, chiefly societies divided into commoners and aristocrats who produced local hereditary chiefs. The Amis and Pinuyumayan were plains agriculturalists and fishermen, who lived in large settled villages organized into age group systems under village elders. Because of their unique features and location on a small island in the Pacific, the Tao are discussed in a separate entry. Two Plains indigenous groups, which were assimilated into Taiwanese culture in the late 19th century, and considered to have “disappeared,” have now been revived, and achieved state recognition in 2003 (Kavalan) and 2007 (Sakizaya).

## **3** LANGUAGE

There were at least 23 Indigenous languages in Taiwan in earlier times. Some 11 remain as living languages. The rest have died out or are limited to few speakers. These languages were

highly diverse, but there are many cognate (shared) words such as *mata* (eye), *ina* (mother), *ama/tama* (father), *babui/vavui* (pig), *tulu/toro* (two), *pat* (four), *lima/rima* (five), etc., which are often found in languages of other Austronesian peoples.

As with all languages there are many borrowings, especially from Japanese. Names also reflect much diversity, such as Li’ Bai (Amis F), Kui (Paiwan M), Walis Yugan (Tayal M) Yibu (Bunun F) Aroladen Pale (Rukai M). “Aroladen” means “river keeper,” which shows that this family originally was responsible for collecting tribute for the chief from people fishing. Yohani (Bunun M) reflects Christian influence (John), while Sa’ folo (Amis M) is from Japanese “Saburo” (third son).

## **4** FOLKLORE

One myth shared among most Taiwan Indigenous cultures is about two suns. There are many versions, but the basic myth is that in early times there were two suns, so that there was no night and the world was very hot, and people were never able to rest. Life was hard. An archer travels to a high mountain and shoots one of the suns as it rises. The sun is wounded and becomes our moon. People now have day to work and night to sleep.

## **5** RELIGION

The traditional religions included belief in various spirits. The northern group worshipped mainly ancestral spirits, the central and southern groups added many natural spirits, which involved many taboos. The eastern groups also believed in universal creator spirits, and the Pinuyumayan, influenced by Chinese folk religion, developed a hierarchy based on individual gods and spirit houses.

All groups had taboos and omens centered on hunting. A Bunun omen was that if you passed gas or sneezed while preparing to hunt, you should not go. Certain kinds of birds flying in front of you or singing were also good or bad omens for hunting among many tribes. All groups had women spirit mediums (shamans) and healers. In addition, there were ritual groups, usually based on extended kinship, for special ceremonies, including planting and harvesting of crops. The annual Amis harvest festivals (see below) are the best example of this. One of the most unusual rituals is the Saisiat “Dwarf Sacrifice” held every two years to honor the spirits of a race of small people whom Saisiat legend says their ancestors wiped out. It is suggested this is evidence that in prehistoric times there were Negrito peoples in Taiwan, as there still are today in the Philippines.

The Japanese forbade Christianity or Buddhism among Indigenous People, but in the early 1930s a Truku woman named Chi-oang became a Christian, and the new faith spread in secrecy. In 1945 Taiwan became part of the Republic of China, and with involvement of Taiwanese Christians and foreign missionaries, some 70% of the Indigenous People soon became Christian, mainly Presbyterian and Catholic. Christianity is now a significant marker of Indigenous identity in Taiwan, distinguishing them from the Chinese population, which is 90% folk religion, or Buddhist. Their churches, led by native clergy, and among the Presbyterians organized under self-governing tribal presbyteries, have played a key role in preserving Indigenous identity and promoting Indigenous rights. Clergy are often local political leaders.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Today Indigenous People share the same public holidays as the Taiwanese, but Christmas and the Harvest Festival are uniquely important for them. Christmas is a major celebration in Indigenous villages. Almost everyone who is able will return from the city, some remaining to harvest and plant until the Lunar New Year in February. Christmas is marked with special services in churches, parties, and often a village sports day.

The Amis Harvest Festivals, marking the summer millet and rice harvest, are annual festivals, for which everyone must return to the village for several days. People who do not return may be fined by the village elders. The many rituals are capped by nightly majestic circle dancing accompanied by chanting. For younger men the dancing is compulsory and lasts all afternoon and all night. It marks a graduation into a higher age group status. Older men supervise this training and whip the legs of youths who are not putting enough effort into it. The festival is also a time for much feasting, drinking traditional millet wine, and for young people to begin courting. Boys dance wearing a small embroidered "lovers bag." If a girl is interested in a boy she will put some betel nuts into his bag during the dancing.

Other groups have their own harvest festivals, but none are as highly developed as the Amis ones, which are now big tourist attractions in Taiwan and have become the iconic symbol of aboriginality.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past the birth of twins was considered very unlucky, and among the Bunun, twins were killed immediately at birth. This custom is no longer practiced, and births are generally occasions for many gifts.

Today Christian rituals mark the life passages of most Indigenous People in Taiwan. The disciplines of industrial work and school have replaced many traditional patterns. Older children take care of younger siblings, and young girls often carry infant brothers or sisters bound to their backs while parents work. Children are expected to take on responsibility from an early age. With many people in the village being kin, daily life is shared with cousins, and children may live with aunts and uncles as much as with parents.

In the past, relations between the sexes were closely controlled by many taboos, and premarital sex relations were completely forbidden. Ironically, the conversion to Christianity broke down these traditional taboos and many Indigenous youth follow Western-style patterns of dating and sex relations. Because the Taiwanese generally, and most Indigenous cultures, are strongly male-dominant, this often works to the disadvantage of Indigenous girls, who are seen as objects of male enjoyment and were even sold into prostitution.

Coming of age was marked in many ways. Tayal and Bunun would remove the front teeth of children, and the Tayal and Taroko tattooed the faces of both sexes. At a later age, taking a head was a sign of entry into adulthood for men in most tribes; this represented courage and skill in hunting. For women, it was ability to weave using a backstrap loom that marked adulthood. Both of these achievements were marked in the Tayal by additional facial tattoos which signaled readiness for marriage. Pinuyumayan had young men's houses where boys would live for their teens, receiving training and serving as the soldiers of the village. Coming of age was marked by a demanding series

of tests of endurance. These customs have been revived in recent years, though the young men's house is now transformed into a summer camp. In 2008 a Tayal couple had their faces tattooed in the traditional way, so reviving this ethnic marker.

The typical day of a rural Indigenous high school student living in a village might involve getting up before 6:00 AM to do chores and study and to put lunch into a metal tin which will be heated at noon. They put on their student uniform, and then take the bus from their village to the high school in the nearby town. High schools in Taiwan are often separate for boys and girls. Students care for the school grounds and clean their classrooms before the morning assembly for flag raising at 8:00 AM. Classes usually last until 4:30. Arriving home after 5:30, they may have a bowl of noodles, and then go to the village basketball court to play basketball for a couple of hours. This is a time when boys and girls can socialize. There is much homework to do every night, and tests are frequent. Students may study until late at night or go to bed early and get up to study at 3:00 AM.

Compulsory military service is the universal rite of passage into adulthood for men in Taiwan. This occasion is more highly honored in Indigenous cultures than among the Chinese, and is usually marked by a special banquet for the male kin of the departing youth. For young women there is a quiet entry into the labor force, going to work in the city. Marriage usually takes place after a man's return from military service.

Traditional marriage customs differ from tribe to tribe, but all marriages are outside the kin group and monogamous. The Amis are a matrilineal culture, and the man marries into his wife's family and moves to her village. Betel nuts are an important part of the wedding gifts from the groom's family to the bride's family. Among the Rukai, the wedding includes a ceremony in which the groom pushes the bride on a rope swing, the directions of which were omens of a bad or good marriage. Learning how to position herself on the rope so as to move in the right direction was an important skill that a bride needed to learn. In the Bunun the new couple would usually live and work as part of a large household of an extended patrilineal lineage. Even today many young Bunun working away from home will give their earnings to the father, who then allots them an allowance.

In old age grandparents live with their children and are important caregivers for the grandchildren. As they become older, their children and grandchildren will sometimes carry them on their backs, thus completing the circle of life. Death is still a natural fact of life and often occurs at home, so that most Indigenous children have a much more mature understanding of death than Americans.

Traditional burials were under the floor of the house, except for the Paiwan and Amis, who buried the dead outside but near the house. If a person died unnaturally in the house (rather than by natural causes), then the house would be abandoned, as it would become haunted by the ghost of the victim.

Today most Indigenous People follow Christian funeral customs, but often with the adhesion of traditional rituals integrated into or added onto the Christian ceremony. Non-Christians may follow Taiwanese funeral rituals with similar adhesions. Burial is now in a cemetery. Most Indigenous People now follow the Taiwanese custom of wearing a small patch of mourning cloth on their clothes after a parent's death. A memorial is usually held one year after the death.

## **8** INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Indigenous People are much more easygoing and openly friendly than their more formal Taiwanese neighbors. Even in the cities, they tend to associate most of the time with other Indigenous People, and will identify each other on the street by greeting a stranger who looks like a member of their tribe in their mother tongue. Generally Indigenous People make much use of body language, touching, and horseplay among friends. They are usually direct in speech, in contrast to the reserved Taiwanese, and visitors are often asked about things which Americans would never ask a stranger.

Dropping in unannounced for a visit is an important part of daily Indigenous social life. When visitors arrive, most homes immediately host them with beer, rice wine, and food. One problem with this is that many people become heavy drinkers, as the socializing may go on for hours. Unscrupulous merchants have often taken advantage of the openness and hospitality of the Indigenous People, tricking them into signing bad deals or even selling their land once enough bottles have been emptied.

## **9** LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditional housing varied greatly, from the bamboo or wooden huts of the Tayal to the large stone houses of the Bunun extended family, to the Amis bamboo longhouse, to the substantial single family slate homes of the Paiwan. Today, urban Indigenous People tend to live in small concrete apartments in industrial areas, but may have used their savings and labor to build a nice home on their own land in their native village. Most Indigenous homes are a mix of Chinese and Japanese styles, the inhabitants often sleeping on tatami platforms. But in Indigenous villages there is a great variety of housing, with very poor and drafty wooden housing with rough cement floors beside new, two-story modern tile homes. However, these are often linked to high debt or the sale of land or of daughters into prostitution.

Motorcycles usually serve as the family car, and most Indigenous children can ride motorcycles by the time they are 12. This, and winding mountain roads, means that the rate of death and injury due to accidents is very high among Indigenous people, a rate made higher by industrial and mining accidents. Because of heavy social drinking there is a high rate of alcohol-related health problems. In some villages tuberculosis is still active. Gout is a common problem.

Thus, while in many ways the Indigenous People of Taiwan have a high standard of living for Asia, the quality of their lives is still poor compared to Taiwan generally. In 2006 average Indigenous household income in Taiwan was reported to be 47% of non-indigenous income (approximately US\$17,000 to \$36,000). This is a significant improvement over previous decades.

## **10** FAMILY LIFE

Marriage in all Taiwan Indigenous groups is monogamous (one man and one woman) and exogamous (outside of the extended kin group). Marriage, past and present, is generally not arranged. All mountain-dwelling groups are patrilineal (kinship traced through the father), while the Pinuyumayan and Amis on the east coast are matrilineal (kinship traced through the mother), Tayal families are small and do not go beyond local lineages (kinship traced to a few generations), while Bunun

families are organized into large patrilineal kinship groups extending across many generations and villages. Bunun nuclear families tend to be very large—seven children being quite common. Paiwan and Rukai families are clearly divided into the aristocrats, who traditionally married only other aristocrats, and commoners. In the Rukai the oldest son inherits the title of the father, while in the Paiwan the oldest child, male or female, inherits the position of chief.

Despite this, and the continuing strong matrilineal tradition of the Amis, the position and role of women in Indigenous society is still the homemaker, and, in many ways, under male domination. Indigenous women are generally more active in local political and church leadership than Taiwanese women, but in the home inequality. For example, often when guests come for dinner the husband and older sons will eat with them, while the wife and children wait until they are finished, and then eat the leftovers. Otherwise leftovers usually go to the dog. Tayal and Bunun households almost universally keep dogs used in hunting. Because monkeys are often caught in traps, many homes have pet monkeys.

## **11** CLOTHING

Today Indigenous People wear the same clothes as everyone else in Taiwan. Because Taiwan is warm much of the year, traditional Indigenous clothes were quite simple, and 19th-century travelers reported that people often worked almost naked in their fields. Women in all groups wove ramie or hemp cloth on backstrap looms, the Tayal and Truku being famed for the quality of their weaving, which is still done today, but using commercial yarn. Bunun hunters wore leather caps and leather leggings. Amis men wore short kilts and vests, while Amis women are famous for their colorful red skirts and bodices with bells and fine needlework. The most exquisite clothes are black full-length dresses worn by Paiwan women, richly embroidered with beads in traditional patterns and small bells. Indigenous People are proud of their traditional clothes and almost everyone has a handmade set for special occasions.

## **12** FOOD

For all tribes the principal traditional food staples were millet, taro, sweet potatoes, and rice. Meat was hunted, mainly wild pig and deer. The Amis especially eat a lot of fish. These are supplemented by wild greens, ginger, and wild fruits. Traditional utensils were wooden or bone spoons for soup. Meals were generally taken collectively from a large central pot. Many traditional Indigenous foods are still part of the daily diet. One of the most prized is Paiwan *avai*, meat in a soft cake of millet steamed in pandanus leaves. Tayal *tmmyen* is a delicacy of pickled raw meat.

A century of Japanese and Chinese rule have made their foods part of the daily diet of Indigenous People. Sashimi is a favorite food. Chicken and pork have replaced wild game, but when some is hunted it is an occasion for great celebration and everyone gets a share. In many homes a large Chinese dinner, often with wild greens and sweet potatoes, is the main meal. Breakfast is often a sweet potato and rice gruel eaten with leftovers from dinner. Rice and leftovers are packed in metal lunch tins for a noon meal, but people often eat at a noodle stand. In the last decade or so white bread and instant coffee have become very popular, and many now have coffee and toast for breakfast. Indigenous People tend to eat more meat and saltier

food. This has led to widespread gout, high blood pressure, and heart problems as people eat heavy meat meals every day rather than only when game was available as in the past.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Before missionaries created scripts after 1946, there was no Indigenous writing system. Today, however, Indigenous People in Taiwan actually have a slightly higher literacy level than the Taiwanese, mainly because of the high rate of Christian converts who learn to read the Bible and hymns in their own romanized writing, and often read Japanese as well. Most Indigenous People are multilingual, speaking their own language, Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, and often Japanese. School is taught in Mandarin, but Indigenous language classes are now a required course in Indigenous elementary schools. This is a great change from only the 1980s, when students were forbidden to speak their own language in school. However the hours dedicated to teaching mother tongue and the quality of teaching is less than ideal. There is now indigenous language television programming through the Public Television System. There is an Indigenous Peoples College located at National Tunghua University in Hualien.

After junior high school there is a high drop-out rate among Indigenous students, who end up in factories and construction jobs. Those that continue must take highly competitive entrance exams, and Indigenous children do not usually have the advantage of well educated parents or expensive urban tutoring schools to gain an advantage in these exams. Many Indigenous young people go to commercial or industrial schools, and far fewer into academic high schools. Many Indigenous young women go to nursing school. Those who graduate from high school also must face university entrance exams. While the government does allow them a 20% handicap on these exams, and free tuition in public universities, the proportion of Indigenous People with university education in Taiwan is much lower than Taiwanese with university education. In 2005, 28% of Indigenous People had some postsecondary education, up from 20% in 2000.

For these reasons, many Indigenous parents do not encourage their children to take the risky and costly route of postsecondary education, but to learn a technical skill and find a job. In school many Indigenous youth excel in athletics. A few lucky ones get athletic scholarships to universities and become physical education teachers.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Group dancing and singing connected with Indigenous festivals are one of the great cultural contributions of the Indigenous People of Taiwan to the world. The circle dances and melodic songs are major cultural attractions in Taiwan and have been performed around the world. Amis and Paiwan dancing, Bunun eight-part harmonic singing, and Paiwan nose-flutes are some of the best known traditions. Many Indigenous singers have become top artists in Taiwan, often drawing from their traditional songs. The inclusion (without permission or compensation) of an Amis song in the music for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics became national news in Taiwan, and heightened awareness of the rich Indigenous musical tradition (and issues of intellectual property). In 2001 a Pinyinumayan pop singer, Amei, sang the national anthem at the inauguration of President Chen. Indigenous song and dance have become a

standard part of Taiwan's international self-representation and all public cultural events. There is a growing body of published Indigenous literature.

### **15 WORK**

Indigenous people are at the bottom of Taiwan's socioeconomic ladder. About 40% of Indigenous households are considered farmers, though they may work off the farm as well in forestry and construction. But with the exception of highland temperate fruit farmers, the income of Indigenous farmers is much lower than the Taiwan average. Over half of all Indigenous People work in urban areas. Most of them are factory labor, construction workers, or miners. In construction whole families often move from site to site, living in temporary sheds. The large importation of foreign labor during the 1990s led to increased unemployment among aboriginal people (though the rate remained low by even American standards). Legal measures now guarantee preferred hiring of Indigenous People in many areas.

### **16 SPORTS**

Sports are a major obsession in Indigenous society. Basketball is the universal sport, played daily in every village. Every social institution—schools, governments, churches, etc.—have endless rounds of basketball competitions for men and women, as well as frequent village sports days or county competitions. After basketball, baseball is most popular. This is especially so among the Amis and Pinyinumayan, who live on the east coast plain. A number of Amis players are stars in professional Japanese baseball teams. The first Little League world champions from Taiwan were from a poor Bunun village where they made gloves from newspapers and practiced batting rocks. Indigenous youth have also excelled in track and field and produced two of Taiwan's few Olympic medalists.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Sports are the most popular recreation, but television and especially Japanese wrestling videos are very popular. In the late 1980s, video games invaded Indigenous villages, and by the late 1990s satellite dishes receiving stations from Japan and China, and computers with Internet access were found in every village. Trapping, fishing with javelins and nets, and hunting with homemade muskets are now recreational activities, but ones which are an important affirmation of continuing Indigenous cultural identity in modern Taiwan.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

In the decorative arts, the stone and wood carving of the Paiwan, created to decorate the homes and utensils of the aristocratic families, are the best known example of Taiwan Indigenous art and are purchased for high prices from Taiwanese and Japanese collectors. The dominant motifs in these carvings are ancestor figures, faces, and curled hundred-pacer snakes—symbols of aristocratic power. Weaving by Tayal and Taroko women is another highly prized art, but few women learn the use of the difficult and tiring backstrap loom today. However, weaving traditional textiles using modern looms is widely taught in some indigenous areas, becoming an income source for many women. Amis and Paiwan women's clothes have been developed by a few Indigenous women into elegant

contemporary fashions. Many contemporary items made using traditional Indigenous crafts are widely marketed in Taiwan.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Loss of their land, destruction of their cultural systems, and dislocation arising from rapid, enforced social change at the hands of an invader culture—the Chinese—are the basic experiences of the Indigenous People of Taiwan. The symptoms of high suicide rates, alcoholism, family breakdown, and low self-esteem are widespread.

Politically, they were militarily conquered and kept in subservience to the successive regimes ruling Taiwan. There are no treaties, and traditional leaders were rendered powerless. The government classifies some Indigenous land as “Mountain Reserve Land,” presumably held in trust for Indigenous People, but much has been lost to the Forestry Department and illegal speculation. There are 30 Indigenous townships in which the mayor must be Aboriginal, but they have no autonomous fiscal or legislative power. Indigenous seats are reserved at every level of government, with Indigenous People as a separate electorate, so that they do have a voice in lawmaking.

In the 1980s the end of martial law (1987) and rapid democratization in Taiwan made a renewal of Indigenous culture possible. Indigenous leaders began actively advocating the rights of their own people. The 1987–89 “Return our Land” movement marked the beginning of Taiwan’s Indigenous rights movement and identified the issues which continue to be the focus of Indigenous politics today: language, education, constitutional rights, and self-government. In 1996 a cabinet level “Indigenous Peoples Council” was established with a representative from each tribal group and a Chair who is a cabinet minister. Though it does not have administrative control over Indigenous affairs, it relates to all government departments which do, and develops policies implemented through them. It also provides generous funding to education, culture, research, international indigenous exchange, and infrastructure in Aboriginal Townships. The Council website [www.apc.gov.tw](http://www.apc.gov.tw) is a rich source of information.

In 1999 Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian signed a “New Partnership” agreement with Indigenous representatives during the election, promising to promote aboriginal self-government, recognize natural Indigenous rights, define Indigenous collective land rights etc. He was elected, and since 2001 a number of laws towards these goals were passed, including the Indigenous Education Law, Indigenous Job Protection law, and Indigenous Peoples Basic Law (2007), which mandates Indigenous self government and control of land and resources. An Indigenous self-government law was proposed in 2003 but opposition control of the legislature stalled its passage. Many of the principles established in these laws await actual implementation, with political struggles between the DPP administration and mostly Kuomintang (KMT) local governments being a major problem. With the election of a KMT president in 2008 it remains to be seen whether things will change. Nonetheless, even for the KMT, Indigenous policy has changed from assimilation to multiculturalism, and the affirmation of Indigenous culture and identity is an important part of Taiwan’s future.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The appointment in 2008 of the first woman to be Chair of the Indigenous Peoples Council by KMT President Ma represents an important recognition of the role of Indigenous women as leaders and the continuing issues of gender equality in Indigenous cultures. As noted above, Indigenous cultures are male dominant, and even in the matrilineal Amis, decisions are made by male relatives. The status of women was helped by conversion to Christianity (women becoming leaders in churches and by extension in their communities) and state policies emphasizing formal gender equality and education for all. This is also reflected in the election of women to political office at all levels from town council to national legislature. Nonetheless, politics in Taiwan is a boys club, with much drinking and clubbing in which women are demeaned and marginalized. The sale of daughters into prostitution was a longstanding problem in indigenous villages until a major public campaign and enforcement of child protection laws in the late 1980s made it a national shame. On the other hand the incorporation of Indigenous People into the labor market and cash economy has made many women the financial managers in their households and so tended to equalize marriage partnerships. Especially with the development of local tourism in Taiwan, based on bed-and-breakfasts in indigenous villages, production and sale of aboriginal crafts, and Indigenous song and dance performance, while not without problems, have all highlighted and strengthened the role of women in traditional culture as well as contemporary society.

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—by M. Stainton

# TAJIKS

**PRONUNCIATION:** tah-JEEKS

**LOCATION:** Tajikistan

**POPULATION:** More than 7 million

**LANGUAGES:** Tajiki; Russian; Uzbeki

**RELIGIONS:** Islam (Sunni and Shia); Orthodox Christianity; Judaism; Nonreligious

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Tajiks are an Indo-European people who, after the breakup of the Indo-Iranian tribal confederation, occupied the upper reaches of the Amu River (territory of present-day Uzbekistan). In the 9th century AD, through the efforts of the Samanids (an Iranian family promoted by the Abbasid caliphs against Turkish invaders), they came to prominence and formed the Tajik nation. After the fall of the Samanids (999 AD), they became clients of the Turks and the Mongols.

During the latter part of the 19th century, the Tajiks were divided. Most of the population occupied what would become the republic of Tajikistan in the former Soviet Union and the rest became an integral part of Afghanistan. The Tajiks' desire to maintain their ethnic unity has made them vulnerable to manipulation by their neighbors, especially Russia and Uzbekistan. On 5 December 1929, Tajikistan became an independent republic in the USSR.

After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, clashes among clans and between Muslims and communists resulted in five years of civil war (1992–97) as a result of which thousands lost their lives, and more than 100,000 fled to Afghanistan. More than 35,000 homes were destroyed, either in battle or as a result of ethnic-cleansing actions. At present, the insecurity of the war has all but disappeared. The political situation, however, remains tense.

In November 1994, Tajikistan held its first presidential election. Imomali Rahmon (formerly Rahmonov), a former communist and the Head of Tajikistan's Supreme Soviet since 1992, was elected president. Elections of the Tajik Parliament (Majlisi Oli) have been held regularly and charges of ballot fraud and other irregularities have been leveled against the government (1999, 2000, 2005).

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Tajikistan covers 55,250 sq mi (143,100 sq km), an area slightly smaller than Illinois. Geographically, Tajikistan can be divided into two regions, north and south. The Zarafshan Mountains with their lush valleys and flat plains form the northern *kulturbund*, where Tajik and Uzbek cultures have become fused. The Hissar, Gharategin, and Badakhshan mountains form the southern *kulturbund*. Here, Tajiks live as members of major clan organizations. During the 1924 administrative divisions of Central Asia, the centers of the old Tajik culture (i.e., Samarqand and Bukhara) were given to Uzbekistan. Restoration of these cities to Tajikistan remains a goal.

Khorog, the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan and the up-and-coming cultural center of the south, is active in the development of Tajik culture, Badakhshani style. Aided by the Agha Khan, it has the potential to become a trendsetter for the region. The diverse peoples of Badakhshan—*Ishkashims*,

*Roshans*, *Shughnans*, *Wakhis*, and others—add color and zest to the linguistic and cultural developments of the region.

The major geographic feature in the south is the Panj River, which separates southern Tajikistan from northern Afghanistan. The river collects the waters of the Badakhshan and Gharategin highlands, irrigates a network of cotton plantations in Kulab and Qurqanteppe, and feeds the Aral Sea. At present, increasing use of the water upstream is creating chronic water shortages in Tajikistan.

Since the 1980s, the population of Tajikistan has grown from 3.8 million to more than 7 million. In addition, considerable numbers of Tajiks live in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and China. With a birth rate of 4.1 (per woman) and a death rate of 8.4 (per 1,000 people), the population of Tajikistan is expected to rise dramatically. This will no doubt put a great deal of strain on the Tajik economy, especially when prices are geared to world markets and salaries to Tajik scales.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Tajiki is an Indo-European language, a close kin of Farsi and Pashto. The subtle semantic and structural differences often form the substance of interesting conversations; in fact, an ability to compare languages and explain oddities determines a person's grasp of the culture.

In 1989 Tajiki became the sole official language of the country, displacing Russian and Uzbeki. The act boosted Tajik morale, but failed otherwise. Viewing the future job market in Tajikistan, Russians, Ukrainians, and other Soviet contributors to Tajik prosperity left the country. Since 1995, Russian, which had retained its status as the language of international communication, has regained its previous status. Uzbeki, too, is allowed to flourish in regions predominantly inhabited by Uzbeks.

The current Tajik alphabet (in use since the 1940s) is a modified version of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. Since the adoption of Tajiki as the national language, instruction in the Arabic-based Persian alphabet has been encouraged in schools. Materials for teaching the "language of the ancestors" are provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is unlikely that the Tajiks will distance themselves from either the Russian language or the Cyrillic alphabet in the foreseeable future. The economic and security needs of the state require that Russian language and culture remain as a positive force in Tajik society. There is, however, an increasing use of the Latin alphabet for using email and Internet systems.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan enjoy a unique cultural heritage. Over the centuries, however, each has modified or developed new aspects of this culture. The major contribution to this shared heritage is the magnificent *Shahname* (Book of Kings) of Firdowsi—an account of the prehistory of the region, including the cosmic battle between Good and Evil, development of the "divine right of kings," and the dynastic reign of pre-Islamic Iranian monarchs. The exploits of Rustam, for instance, inspired a number of films produced by the Tajik Film Studios during the 1960s and 1970s.

Lesser myths, mostly based on Turkish prototypes, include the story of Nur, a young man who, to attain his beloved, tamed the mighty Vakhsh River by building a dam on it, and

the story of a sacred sheep that was lowered from heaven to help the Tajiks survive.

## 5 RELIGION

In ancient times, present-day Tajikistan was a part of the empire of the Achaemenian Persians. The religion of that empire was Zoroastrianism. After the Arab conquest in the 8th century, Islam was introduced and remained unchallenged until the rise of atheism in the early years of the 20th century. Today atheists, Muslims, Jews, and Christians live together. The majority of the Muslims are Sunni (80%) of the Hanafi sect. The Shia (5%), primarily Isma'ili, live in Gorno-Badakhshan. There are also some Nonreligious groups (10%), and others (5%).

The Tajiks' religious beliefs dictate their choice of clothing. The more orthodox Muslims wear the *hijab*. Less orthodox Muslims wear modest, traditional Tajik attire. Those who work in offices wear typical Western clothing.

Sufism grew in strength during the Soviet era and, by creating a conduit between the Muslims of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, promoted Islamic teachings at the expense of the Society of the Godless. In 1992, the two ideologies clashed but the Communists, due to their access to the media and a competent propaganda machine, won.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Tajiks observe three different types of holidays: Iranian holidays that date back to the Zoroastrian times; Muslim holidays that, to a large degree, are the same as those elsewhere in the Muslim world; and Soviet holidays. The most important Iranian holiday is the *Navruz* (New Year). It begins on March 21 and continues for several days. This holiday, celebrated by Iranians, Afghans, and most Turkic peoples of the region, dates back to Iranian mythic times. It celebrates the victory of the forces of Good (warmth) over those of Evil (cold), marks the beginning of the annual sowing season, and commemorates the memory of departed ancestors.

The major Islamic holidays are *Maulud al-Nabi* (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad), *Id al-Adha* (celebrating the ancient account of Abraham offering his son for sacrifice), and *Id al-Fitr* (celebration of the end of the Ramadhan fast). These celebrations, observed in secret during the Soviet era, are now held in the open. Their dates are not fixed due to the rotating nature of the lunar calendar.

Holidays with origins in the Soviet era include the New Year's Day (January 1), International Women's Day (March 8), Labor Day (May 1), and Victory Day (May 9). This latter commemorates both the end of World War II and the victory over the 1991-attempted coup. Tajik Independence Day is celebrated on September 9.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There are both traditional and Soviet rites of passage. Boys are circumcised at the age of five. After marriage, Tajik women traditionally pluck their eyebrows and wear special ornate hats and distinctive clothing. Many connect the eyebrows together (*qosh*). Married Soviets, both men and women, wear their wedding rings on the third finger of the right hand. A ring on the middle finger indicates separation, or the death of a spouse.



## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Tajiks recognize three privileged groups: children, the elderly, and guests. Children, like adults, participate in most gatherings and, within limits, contribute to the life of the party. The elderly, often referred to as *muysapid* (white hair) or *aksakal* (white beard), are highly esteemed, consulted in important affairs, and obeyed. Guests fall into various categories depending on the nature of the relationship.

Family visits and visits by colleagues and acquaintances require the preparation of a *dasturkhon*, a tablecloth spread over the floor or on a low table. Bread, nuts, fruits, various types of *halvo*, preserves, and homemade sweetmeats are placed on the *dasturkhan*. The guest of honor is seated at the head of the *dasturkhon*, farthest from the door. Tea is served by the host who serves himself first. The host offers the *piyola* to the guest with the left hand while placing the right hand on the heart. The guest drinks two or three less-than-half-full *piyolas* (cups). A *piyola* turned upside-down is the sign that a guest does not want it refilled. The offer of a full *piyola* indicates that the guest should drink and leave. Meetings outside the house occur in the *choikhona* (teahouse), where guests gossip, learn the news of the day, and listen to music.

When Tajiks meet, they shake hands and place their left hand on the heart or, if they are family or close friends, hug. Very close friends kiss each other on both cheeks. Holding hands among boys and young men is normal, a casual sign of friendship. The Tajiks have many unique and interesting customs. For instance, certain items such as money, keys, needles, and scissors are not passed from hand to hand. Rather, they



*Two Tajik men talk in a square on the outskirts of Dushanbe, Tajikistan. (AP Images/Sergei Grits)*

are placed on a table for the other person to pick up. It is believed that standing in the doorway will make a person go into debt, and spilling salt in the house will cause a person to get into a fight. A person who whistles in the house is likely to lose something valuable, and a person who twirls a key chain on his or her finger becomes a vagabond. If someone sneezes during a departure, the party should wait a while before leaving, and if one returns home for a forgotten item, one should look in a mirror before leaving the house again.

### **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions in Tajikistan, especially in Dushanbe, are challenging. The difficulty stems from shortages of water, gas, and electricity for everyday use. This, a nuisance for the visitor, is a nightmare for the Tajiks who lack purchasing power to buy commodities at exorbitant prices. The difficulty is compounded when the steady rise in prices is not compensated with a raise in salaries.

Housing in Dushanbe, the largest urban area, consists of many high-rise Soviet-era apartment complexes. In these complexes, which are usually surrounded by large courtyards and common spaces, elevators rarely work and water pressure is weak on the higher floors and the buildings in disrepair. Hous-

ing shortages were a factor in the February 1990 uprising in Dushanbe. In recent years a vigorous program of urbanization has demolished many of the traditional houses, especially near the center of Dushanbe. The inhabitants are either relocated to new state-built apartments or are compensated with land on which they can build.

Transportation in urban areas, although far better than in the early years after independence, has suffered recently, primarily because supplies of gasoline from Russia and natural gas from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have become unreliable and expensive. In addition, roads connecting the residential suburban areas with the city are not designed to handle a large volume of commuter traffic. This leaves the citizens no option but public transportation. Dushanbe has a system of electric trolleys and gas-powered buses, as well as a large number of taxis and *mashrutkas*, small vans that carry 4–5 passengers and larger vans that carry up to about 10 passengers.

Telephone service is also very deficient. International calls must be made through a centralized office, which requires a two-day notice and advance payment. Express mail reaches Dushanbe in 10 days. Now, however, the cell phone, although pricey for the Tajik budget, has become available and calling cards have helped bypass the difficulties of the state service.



The medical infrastructure has deteriorated so significantly that many trained personnel have left the country. There is a general scarcity of medical equipment and medicines and a potential for significant disease outbreaks (such as hepatitis A, diphtheria and polio) due to inadequate immunization and sanitation.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

The Tajiks are family oriented. Families are large but do not necessarily live together. Some may live in the city and some may live in the *qishloq* (village). In fact, the more widely the family is spread, the more opportunities it has for drawing on resources for collective use. This kind of orientation allows outsiders to become a part of a family and expand it into a clan. These clans compete for political power, social reform, educational opportunities, and economic initiatives. There are at least four or five major clans in Tajikistan. The most prominent are the Khujand clan in the north and the Kulab clan in the south. During the Soviet period, the Khujand clan was paramount. At present, the Kulab clan is at the helm. The rivalry between the two has long been a major source of discontent, especially in relation to the expenditure of international aid.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Traditional Tajik clothing for men consists of a *joma* (a knee-length jacket) tied at the waist with a colorful *mionband* (kerchief), an indicator of status. The paisley design of the Tajik *toqi* (skullcap) distinguishes the Tajiks by region (e.g., four-cornered, tall *toqis* are worn by men from Gharm).

Women wear a *kurta* (blouse), usually made of soft, colorful, bright silk and *shalvor* (long pants) with decorative cuffs (*sheroz*). Women also wear hats with their national costume. Their hats, especially those from Bukhara and Badakhshan, are either embroidered or decorated with precious stones. Village women wear colorful *rusaris* (scarves). This latter is tied in the back and worn in a decorative manner more like a hat than a veil.

Men and women, especially in urban centers, wear European clothes. Rarely are European and traditional styles mixed, except perhaps that a traditional hat might be worn with a European suit. Traditional clothes for both sexes are particularly important in distinguishing ethnic groups—Kulabis, Hissaris, and Badakhshanis. Each region has a particular dance and a special fashion for its male and female dancers. Farmers and herders wear a special heavy boot over their usual shoes. Older Tajik men wear long Islamic cloaks and turbans. They also wear beards.

Students, especially during the Soviet era, wore uniforms with kerchiefs and other distinctive decorations. In recent times, the wearing of uniform and kerchief is being reestablished.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

The generic word for food is *avqot*. As is the custom elsewhere in the world, various courses are served. *Pish avqot* (appetizer) includes *sanbuse* (meat, squash, or potatoes with onions and spices wrapped in bread and either deep-fried or baked), *yakh-ni* (cold meats), and salad.

The *avqot* is either *suyuq* (broth based) or *quyuq* (dry). Examples of the former include *shurbo nakhud* (pea soup), *khom shurbo* (vegetable soup), and *qurma shurbo* (meat and vegeta-

bles sautéed in oil and then simmered in water). The main national dish is *osh*, a mixture of rice, meat, carrots, and onions fried and steamed in a deep pot or *deg*, preferably over an open fire. *Pilmeni* (meat and onions in pasta and cooked in water or meat stock), *mantu* (meat and onions in steamed pasta), and *shishlik* are examples of dry *avqot*. Following is a recipe and cooking directions for *osh*:

### Osh

1 small onion, diced  
200 gr (almost ½ cup) oil  
500 gr (just over 1 lb.) meat, cut into medium pieces  
500 gr (just over 1 lb.) carrots, julienned  
1,000 gr (4 cups, 3 oz.) rice, soaked for 40 minutes before adding  
pinch of cumin seeds

Heat oil, then add meat and cook until brown. Add onion, continue cooking until meat is done. Add enough water to cover the meat and simmer until water is gone. Add carrots and sauté for 2 or 3 minutes. Add one cup of water, cumin seeds, and pepper. Add the rice. Add lukewarm water to cover the rice by about 1 cm (nearly ½ inch). Add salt to taste. Increase heat and simmer until all water is evaporated. Turn the rice over so that cooked rice comes to the top. Make 5 or 6 holes or steam vents in the rice, cover, decrease the heat and cook for 15 to 20 minutes. Serve by dishing out the rice onto a platter and then arranging the carrots and meat on top.

Desserts include *tortes*, various types of *murabbo* (jam) and fruits. *Chakka* (drained yogurt) and lamb kabob are favorite treats served on special occasions. Everyday food is less elaborate. Students running to school, for example, might have *shirchoi* (sweetened warm milk and tea poured over bread and butter), *shirberenj* (rice custard), or bread and eggs.

Tea and vodka are common drinks for adults. Black tea is served during winter, green tea during summer. Tea is served ritually in *piyolas* (small cups). Vodka is drunk amid music, dance, and long, cheerful speeches delivered by members of the family and guests. Other drinks include *koumis* (fermented mare's milk) and *kefir* (a thick yogurt drink).

Fruits and vegetables grown in the country form a major subject of conversation. It is important, for instance, to know which part of the country produces the best melon, apple or grapes.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Until the fall of Bukhara (1920), Bukharan schools taught the *Quran* and the *Shariah*. Attempts by the intellectuals and *jadids* to introduce new-method schools met with severe penalties.

During the Soviet era, Tajik educational establishments became subservient to the educational system of the Soviet Union. Rather than learning about the greats of Tajik culture, Russian literary figures such as Maxim Gorkii and Vladimir Mayakovskii were taught. Sadridin Aini (d. 1954), the father of Tajik literature, gained his fame by extolling the socialist way at the expense of traditional values. Soviet education transplanted both the Tajiki language and the Tajik culture. In the long run, however, due to the instability of the Soviet sys-

tem itself, a vacuum was created. By the 1970s, the anti-Russian efforts of the Muslim educators bore fruit and, eventually, ousted the communist regime.

The 1992–97 civil war, devastated southern Tajikistan. In the process, schools were destroyed, many teachers and students were killed, and many non-Tajik educators left the country.

Soviet education had both positive and negative effects on the Tajiks. On the positive side, it essentially eliminated illiteracy by 1960 and acquainted the Tajiks with Russian literature. On the negative side, it alienated most Tajiks from their own cultural heritage. At present, a gradual reversal of that trend is taking shape.

Today, the English language and American culture are finding their way into Tajikistan. English is stressed in schools because many people, including those who intend to emigrate, want to learn English for its role in international business.

Tajik parents expect their children to make steady progress toward a respectable marriage and a good, responsible job. They feel that they owe their children a good education, a respectable wedding *tuy*, and partial expenses for rearing their grandchildren. (They pay for the *gahvorabandon*, a cradling ceremony for a newborn child, for instance.) In return, they expect their children to take care of them in their old age and to see to their needs at the end of their lives.

A painful aspect of Tajik education is a lack of funds for teachers' salaries. This leads, in many cases, to bribery both in finding ones way into schools and in exiting school with an unearned degree.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Tajik music varies by region. In the north, especially in Samarkand and Bukhara, the *shashmaqom* is recognized as the chief musical form normally played on a tanbur. There, the cycle of songs known as *naqsh* plays a prominent role in the festival of the tulips (*sairi guli lola*). In the south, *falak* and *qurughli* predominate. The national *hofiz* (singer) is respected by all.

Various regions have reacted to the new wave from the West differently. The Badakhshanis, for instance, have adopted Western musical innovations; but the Gharmis have not.

Tajik literature covers a wide range of genres over many centuries. Most of the literature, however, is poetry. Rudaki and Firdowsi are prominent classical authors, and Aini and Turanzadah are well-known Soviet Tajik authors. In the 1990s, a division took place whereby poets such as Layeq Shir'ali and Mu'min Qana'at were distinguished for their affiliation with the communist government, whereas Bozor Sobir and Gulrukhsor Safieva were identified with the Opposition. Bozor Sobir was imprisoned for more than a year (1992–93) for his anti-Uzbek views. Other Tajik writers include the scenarists Saif Rahim and the science fiction author Adash Istad.

A recurring theme in Tajik literature is the exploitative measures of a *bai* (rich man) who "helps" an orphaned boy meet the expenses for his father's funeral. The young man ends up working for the *bai* for the rest of his life to pay the debt.

#### 15 WORK

The makeup and circumstances of the work force in Tajikistan have changed drastically in recent years. Many youth who would traditionally have worked on cotton plantations have migrated to the cities and become involved in trade; they im-

port goods from Pakistan, Japan, and China and sell them in makeshift shops or in stalls alongside the street.

A large number of Tajiks work in the lower echelon of industry—mining, machine-tool factories, canneries, hydroelectric stations—in non-managerial jobs. In general, about 50% of the population is under 20, and over one half of those are not in the labor force. As a result, there are a number of groups in the population that are neither employed nor in school.

In general, work can be divided along agricultural and industrial lines. Work in agriculture revolves around work in *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*. These collective and state farms produce most of the cotton, fruit, and vegetables consumed in the republic, and some is also exported. Work in the fields entails digging canals, planting, irrigating, and harvesting.

Women's roles vary widely. Sovietized Tajik women participate in all aspects of society and a few are even members of parliament. Muslim wives, on the other hand, stay at home and take care of the children.

Most marriages are arranged. After negotiations, the father of the groom pays most of the expenses for the *tuy* (celebration). Women can initiate divorce procedures and receive half of the family's assets.

Tajik women are fully acquainted with the silk culture, a labor-intensive operation that begins with feeding silkworms mulberry leaves and ends with extracting the silk. The care of orchards and vineyards as well as sheep breeding in the highlands falls on men. Both men and women work in the entertainment business, but mostly women work in textile factories as machinists and administrators.

Alongside the traditional jobs, the growing Tajik bureaucracy employs many youths, as do the burgeoning foreign businesses established in Tajikistan by Turkish and Iranian concerns.

#### 16 SPORTS

The national sport of the Tajiks, *gushtingiri* (wrestling), has a colorful tradition. When the towns were divided into *mahal-las* (districts), each district had its own *aluf* (tough) who was also the best wrestler. The position of the *aluf*, usually an upright and respected individual, was often challenged by those of lower rank.

*Buzkashi* (which means, literally, "dragging the goat") is a sport involving strenuous bodily exertion. In this game, the carcass of a goat is dragged by horsemen who grab it from each other. The aim of the riders is to deposit the carcass in a designated circle in front of the guest of honor. *Buzkashi* is usually performed as part of the *Navruz* celebrations.

In recent years, many European sports have also found their way into Tajikistan. Soccer is so popular that, in the eyes of many, it rivals *buzkashi*.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

As early as the 9th century, Avicenna compared man's existence on earth with that of a puppet in a puppet show. This tradition, retained over the centuries by the *maskharaboz* (clown), is now expanded by professional troupes.

During the Soviet period, special attention was paid to the arts, both as a means of reducing the Tajiks' demand for jobs in the heavy industry and as compensation for the daily drudgery of the workers on the cotton plantations. Barring the purpose, the result was culturally stimulating. The Tajik cinema, for in-

stance, produced a number of worthy films based on Firdowsi's *Shahname*. They are called *Rustam and Suhrab*, *The Story of Siyavosh*, and *Kaveh the Blacksmith*. Similar advances were made in the production of stunning spectacles on the lives of Rudaki, Umar-i Khayyam, and others.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the arts lost their primary means of support. Producers, directors, actors, and writers either joined the ranks of the jobless or became involved in business. Many left Tajikistan. This fall of the cultural center has not been altogether bad, however. It has given regional groups the opportunity to showcase their talents and abilities. Troupes from Badakhshan, Kulab, and Khujand appear regularly on the national scene.

Not long ago, programs such as *Maria* (a Mexican rags-to-riches soap opera) or the American soap *Santa Barbara* were the only shows that really kept the Tajiks entertained. Local broadcasting was very limited in scope, dealing mostly with regional matters, especially agriculture. Videos allowed Tajik youth a wider choice of programs. The introduction of satellite programming has changed all that.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Traditional Tajik crafts include the embroidered Bukhara wall hangings and bedcovers popularized in the 19th century. The Tajik style of the tapestries typically has floral designs on silk or cotton and is made on a tambour frame. Woodcarving and ceramics are also honored Tajik crafts.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The social problems of Tajikistan are too numerous to list. Perhaps the most important social problem has to do with authority and control. Since the 10th century, when the Samanid dynasty lost its hegemony over Central Asia, the Tajiks have been ruled by the other peoples of the region, especially the Turks. Since 1868, when the Turks became subservient to the Russians, the Tajiks' situation has become even more precarious. In the 1870s, taxes imposed by Russia drove the Tajiks to revolt a number of times. One such revolt, the Vaase uprising, which was mercilessly put down, is still remembered.

The 1992 Tajik bid for independence was also met with severe reprisals. This time, however, the democratic nature of the age did not allow an open assault on the opposition. The indirect means employed turned into a civil war, crippled the administration in Dushanbe, ruined the economy, and totally destroyed the infrastructure. Russia, on the other hand, achieved its goal. The same set of circumstances that spell out social discontent in Tajikistan gains Russia a steady revenue for defending the Tajik border, places Tajikistan's foreign affairs in Russian hands, and allows Russia to reassert itself forcefully in Tajikistan's internal affairs.

Tajikistan's problems stem from dependence on Russia for military, economic, and foreign policy matters and on the international community for the rest of its needs. This is compounded by a 60% below-poverty-line economy, a high rate of population growth, and a lack of skilled workers. Ethnic tension and regionalism often bring the country to the verge of disintegration.

To remedy this situation, clan wars between the North and South must stop and the mafias of Dushanbe, Khujand, and Kulab must be deactivated. Barring this, Tajikistan cannot achieve its goals of economic and military independence, rais-

ing per capita income, decreasing unemployment, stopping population growth, improving transportation to move food and fuel, and introducing meaningful medical and educational reforms.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Under the Soviet system, women were treated very differently than they are today. They enjoyed equal civil rights, participated in the labor force, and were very active in politics. Most importantly, they had a considerable degree of independence. In Tajikistan, the fall of the Soviet Union was followed by five years of civil war that affected Tajik women the most. In addition to losing sons and husbands to the war and becoming refugees in neighboring lands, the textile factories were closed. That meant loss of livelihood as women were the primary labor force in that industry. Destruction of agriculture and the educational and health services further affected women as they worked in the fields, were teachers, doctors, and nurses. Male chauvinism that prevented women from the decision-making positions also subjected them to harassment and discrimination.

With 60% of the population living below the poverty line, about a million Tajik men seek work in Russia. Women whose men go to Russia stand to lose their husband as he might marry a Russian and stay, as well as their source of income and security, not to mention being burdened with childcare and provision for children.

Men who return from Russia, along with money, bring HIV. This prepares the ground for women to deal with a health system that is virtually nonexistent, fees that are exorbitant, and drugs. Soon, they are engaged in drug trafficking and prostitution to pay their bills.

Instances of domestic violence in Tajikistan are many. Nevertheless, women accept to get married even as a second wife. Those who refuse to be humiliated end up taking their own lives by either self-immolation or drug overdose.

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—by I. Bashiri

# TAMILS

**PRONUNCIATION:** TAHM-uhs

**LOCATION:** India (Tamil Nadu region); Sri Lanka

**POPULATION:** 71 million in India; 4 million in Sri Lanka

**LANGUAGES:** Tamil

**RELIGIONS:** Hindu majority; Muslim; Christian

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Tamil are a people of southern India, speaking the Tamil language and unified by a common culture. Their name is derived from “Damila,” the name of an ancient, warlike non-Aryan people mentioned in early Buddhist and Jain records. The Tamil language is Dravidian in origin, with its roots in western India, Pakistan, and areas farther to the west. The peoples of the Indus Civilization spoke a Dravidian language around 2,500 BC. Dravidian speech and associated cultural traits spread into southern India, especially in the centuries after 1,000 BC. By the early centuries BC, a complex and distinctive culture had developed in what is now *Tamil Nadu*, the “land of the Tamil.”

In the following centuries, dynasties, such as the Pandyas, Cheras, and Pallavas, rose to power in Tamil Nadu. An impressive Tamil civilization emerged under the Cholas, who ruled from the 10th to the 13th centuries. Chola sea power allowed them to bring Sri Lanka and even parts of Southeast Asia under their control. The fourteenth century saw virtually the entire region incorporated into the empire of the Telugu-speaking Vijayanagara kings. The region experienced relative peace and prosperity for several centuries under Vijayanagara rule. In the seventeenth century, both the British and the French established themselves in the Tamil region. The British built a trading post at Fort St. George (later Madras, and now called Chennai) in 1639, and the French at Pondicherry in 1674. The British later gained control of all of Tamil Nadu, which became part of the Madras Presidency until India’s independence in 1947. In the 1950s, there was a realignment of political boundaries in South India. The French possessions were ceded to India, to be administered as a Union Territory by the national government in New Delhi. Madras was broken up to form the language-based states of Andhra Pradesh (for speakers of Telugu), Kerala (Malayalam), Mysore (Kannada), and Madras (Tamil). The name of Madras State was changed to Tamil Nadu in 1969.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The 2001 census records 62,405,679 persons in Tamil Nadu, of which some 60.8 million belonged to the Tamil people. In addition, there are about one million Tamils in Pondicherry and another 5 million elsewhere in India. Allowing for population growth, there are currently an estimated 71 million Tamils in India. This figure does not include the nearly 4 million Tamils in Sri Lanka and the Tamils found in Asia, Fiji, Africa and the West Indies. The world-population for Tamils is estimated to be around 77 million.

The ancient literature describes the land of the Tamils as stretching from Tirupati, a sacred hill northwest of Madras, to India’s southern tip at Cape Comorin. This basically defines the modern Tamil region. In the east, a broad coastal plain

runs along the shores of the Bay of Bengal. The basin of the Kaveri (Cauvery) River lies in the center of the state, with the river flowing eastward to enter the ocean in a delta in Thanjavur (Tanjore) District. The Western Ghats (a mountain range) form the western boundary of Tamil Nadu. The Ghats exceed 2,600 m (about 8,500 ft) in elevation in the Nilgiris and the Palni Hills. The climate of the region is tropical, with moderately hot summers and mean winter temperatures that rarely drop below 24°C (about 75°F). Unlike most of India, the Tamil region has its maximum rainfall between October and December, associated with the northeast monsoon. Totals range between 80 and 120 cm (31–47 in) over most of the area. However, around Coimbatore and the southeast coastal section, rainfall dips to 60 cm (about 24 in) or below. Forests, found mainly in the western hills, cover only 15% of the state’s area.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Tamil is the language of the Tamil people. It belongs to the Dravidian language family and is considered by Tamils to be the “purest” of the Dravidian tongues. Several regional dialects (e.g., Pandya, Chola, Kangu) are spoken in the area, and the Tamil spoken in northern Sri Lanka may also be considered a dialect of this language. Different forms of Tamil are used by Brahmans and non-Brahmans. There is also a sharp distinction between spoken and literary Tamil. Tamil has two written forms, the modern Vattelluttu (“round script”) in everyday use and Grantha, a classical script used in Tamil Nadu for writing in Sanskrit.

Tamil, one of India’s 23 official languages, is the official language of Tamil Nadu. It has also recently been designated one of India’s two classical languages, the other being Sanskrit.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

A figure highly venerated in South India is the sage (*rishi*) Agastya. According to legend, all the sages once assembled in the Himalayas. Such was the weight of their wisdom that the earth started to sink. The sages asked Agastya, who was heavier than the rest, to go south so that the earth could rise to its original position. Agastya took with him on his journey some water from the sacred Ganges. One day, after he had arrived in the South, it is said, the sage stopped to bathe. A crow knocked over his water pot, and the water began to flow, forming the Kaveri River. This link with the Ganges helps explain Tamil views toward the Kaveri. The river is regarded as sacred, and it is seen as the duty of every pious Tamil Hindu to bathe in the Kaveri at least once in his or her lifetime.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

Tamils are mostly Hindus, although there are some Tamil Muslims and Christians. Hindus follow the rites and practices of the Hindu religion. Devout persons of all castes perform daily prayers (*puja*) at home or in the temple. Shiva is the most important deity, although Vishnu and other Brahmanic gods and their consorts are worshipped. Vinayaka, a form of the god Ganesha, is particularly popular. Brahmans officiate at major temples, although lesser deities may have priests drawn from other castes. One characteristic feature of Tamil religion is the importance given to the Mother Goddess. This tradition predates Hinduism, and most likely has its origins in the Dravidian culture of the Indus Valley Civilization. The Mother Goddess is worshipped as Durga, but also assumes the

form of local *ammans*, or goddesses, like Mariamman, who protects against disease. Fire walking is a ritual performed at Mariamman temples. In fact, although Brahmanic Hinduism flourishes in Tamil Nadu, there is also vibrant popular religion based on the worship of village deities. In addition, there is a widespread belief in spirits and ghosts, in the evil eye, and in sorcery and witchcraft. Rituals needed to deal with this spirit world include blood sacrifice, the chanting of sacred *mantras*, and exorcism by sorcerers. People consult mediums, temple soothsayers, and *nadi* leaf readers (fortune-tellers who read ancient palm-leaf manuscripts) to predict the future.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Although Tamils celebrate the major Hindu festivals, the most important regional festival is Pongal. This three-day celebration falls in mid-January and marks the end of the rice harvest. It also coincides with the end of the northeast monsoon in South India. Newly harvested rice is ceremonially boiled in milk and offered to Surya, the sun god. On the third day of the festival, cattle are decorated and worshipped, and bullfights and bull races take place. The Tamil New Year, in mid-April, is celebrated widely. Temple festivals such as those held at Madurai and in the Srirangam Temple near Tiruchchirappalli (Trichinopoly) are an important aspect of Tamil religious life. The chariot of the Thiruvavur Temple, in which the image of the god is taken in procession around the streets, is reputed to be the largest in the country. It is said that 10,000 people were needed to pull it in days gone by. Numerous shrines in Tamil Nadu are centers of pilgrimage for the pious. Kanchipuram, southwest of Madras, is one of India's seven sacred cities. The island of Rameswaram, between India and Sri Lanka, is the southern *dham*, or shrine, that defines the borders of Hinduism. It is considered almost as sacred as Varanasi.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Tamils have various superstitions that influence the behavior of a pregnant woman. For example, she is not supposed to cross a river or climb a hill during pregnancy. During the fifth or seventh month of her pregnancy, she is given bangles or bracelets, by her husband's family. After the baby is born, the mother and child are kept in seclusion for about two weeks and undergo rituals to remove the pollution believed to accompany childbirth. Then usual naming and hair-shaving ceremonies are performed. A child might be named after the grandparents, some dead relative, or the family deities. Children are brought up in a loving atmosphere, in which they are pampered by their family and adult relatives. As they grow older, girls are expected to help with the housework, and boys are expected to help with the work of farming.

Customs marking the coming of age of children vary. There are no initiation rites for males except for the sacred thread ritual of the higher castes. The Chettiars, however, have ceremonies for both boys and girls reaching adulthood. When a girl reaches puberty, the Tamils mark the occasion with a feast for the family and friends.

Tamil tradition requires people to avoid saying that a person is dead. Instead, the person is said to have reached the world of Lord Shiva, or attained a position in heaven, or reached the world of the dead. A funeral is an occasion when family and caste members come together to mourn the departed. Failure to make a formal visit to console the bereaved family is almost



considered a crime. Tamils both cremate and bury the dead, with burial being more common among lower castes. The body is prepared for the funeral by being washed, perfumed, and dressed in new clothes. Funeral music is played as the procession makes its way to the cremation ground or graveyard, except among the Brahmans. A period of mourning is followed by purification rites and a feast for family and caste members. Families observe the anniversary of a death by gathering together of kin, giving gifts to the Brahman priests, and feeding the poor.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Tamils use the typical Hindu *namaskar*, the joining of the palms of the hands in front of the body, as a sign of greeting and farewell. Expressions such as "please," "thank you," and "excuse me" are rarely used. This is not a sign of rudeness or impoliteness; it is just the custom. A typical welcome on the arrival of a visitor is a straightforward "come in." Every guest is entertained with coffee and snacks. When a visitor leaves, he or she generally says "I'll go and come back," to which the host will respond, "Go and return."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Tamil villages are compact, either square or linear in shape, and often have a tributary hamlet where the untouchable castes live. Each village is built near, or around, a temple, with the priests (usually Brahmans) living close to it in areas known as *agraharam*. Other castes have their own distinct neigh-

borhoods in the village. The village is likely to have a school, shops, shrines to local deities, and a cremation and burial ground. Wells provide water and a nearby “tank” or reservoir, catches and stores rainwater for irrigation. Most villages in Tamil Nadu now have electricity. Individual houses vary from the one-room, thatched mud huts of the lower castes to large two-story brick and tile structures surrounded by their own compounds. Furnishings reflect the economic standing and tastes of a house’s owner.

## <sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE

Tamil family relations are strongly influenced by the Dravidian emphasis on matrilineal ties, that is, links with the wife’s relatives. Marriage between cousins is common, and the preferred match is with a man’s mother’s brother’s daughter. In some castes, the marriage of a man to his sister’s daughter is customary. Tamils marry within their caste. Only a few Brahmanized castes have clearly defined exogamous clans (*gotras*), that is, those that marry outside their own clan. Marriages are arranged, and the bride’s family usually pays for the wedding and a dowry. Details of marriage rituals vary according to caste. Some groups use Brahman priests for the ceremony, while among others marriage is performed by respected community elders. The actual ceremony is usually carried out on a marriage platform with a canopy of thatched coconut leaves. Rituals include walking around the sacred fire, the blowing of conch-shells, and the throwing of rice and colored water. The newlywed couple typically sets up its household in the husband’s village. A Tamil family usually consists of parents, children, and elderly or unmarried relatives. Many lower castes permit divorce and the remarriage of widows, but these practices are generally not found among Brahmans and other high-caste communities.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

Traditional dress for Tamils consists of the *dhoti* or loincloth, for men and the *sari* and blouse for women. Women wear their hair long, keeping it oiled and plaited, often with jasmine blossoms braided into it. They also wear various amounts of gold jewelry. College educated or career women may adopt Western styles, and many young men now wear shirts and pants.

Dress is an important indicator of caste in a traditional society, and many groups have their own distinctive manner of wearing clothes. For example, ritual provides for the male Tamil Brahman style of wearing the dhoti with the ends tucked in at five places (*panchakachcham*). Non-Brahmans do not use this style. Similarly, there are differences between Brahman and non-Brahman women in the length of clothes and the way they are worn. Orthodox married Tamil Brahman women wear a sari eighteen cubits long (a cubit is an ancient measure equal to about half a meter, or roughly eighteen in), with the *kachcham* (the ends tucked in various ways). Non-Brahman women wear a shorter sari, without the tuck, but also reaching to the ground as with the Brahmans. Tribal women, the Adi-Dravida, wear a considerably smaller garment that reaches just below the knees, and they often leave the upper body bare.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Factors influencing food habits among the Tamil include the local ecology, economic standing, caste, and religion. In drier areas where rice cannot be grown, millet is the main grain.

In other places, rice or a mixture of rice and millet provides the basic starch in the diet. The region around Madras, for instance, is a rice consuming area.

Most people eat three meals a day. Breakfast consists of coffee and items such as *idlis* (steamed rice cakes), *dosas* (pancakes made of rice and lentils), and *vadas* (fried doughnuts made from lentils). Lunch is boiled rice, curried fish or mutton, vegetables, *sambar* (a sauce made with lentils, vegetables, and tamarind) and *rasam* (a thin, peppery soup). The last dish served is usually curds, which is mixed with the rice. The evening meal is a repetition of lunch, but with fewer dishes. People drink both coffee and tea, but coffee is the more popular. Milk is also an important part of the diet. People who are not vegetarians eat poultry, eggs, fish (including prawns), and mutton. Some low castes eat pork, but this is taboo for Muslims. Vegetarian groups among the Tamil include Brahmans, Jains, and devotees of Shiva (the Shaiva Pillai). Some Chettiars (a mercantile caste) and Vellalas (agricultural workers) also avoid meat.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Tamils have had their own traditional centers of learning that date back to Buddhist times. Modern education, with an emphasis on English, was introduced by the British colonial government and Christian missionaries during the nineteenth century. Education is seen as a step to a better job. The state educational system offers up to 12 years of schooling, beginning with primary school, followed by three years of undergraduate study, and graduate school. In addition to numerous colleges, there are 19 universities, including the University of Madras and numerous other schools, including the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, in Tamil Nadu state. The literacy rate in the state in 2001 was 73.47% (82.33% for males, 64.55% for females). While this does not approach the literacy rate in Kerala, it is above the national average for India and compares favorably with the literacy rates of other heavily populated states in the country.

## <sup>14</sup> CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Tamil have an important literary tradition that dates back to the centuries preceding the Christian era. Three great literary academies, called *sangam*, flourished in the early period, probably between the first and fifth centuries. Writings include epics and secular poetry, but the glory of Tamil literature lies in the religious works of medieval saints and poets. These involve two distinct traditions, one devoted to the worship of Shiva and the other consisting of the Vaishnavite hymns written by poets known as the Alvars. The 10th to 13th centuries mark the Golden Age of Tamil literature.

The Tamil can be proud of major achievements in other areas of the arts. *Bharata-natyam*, one of the four great Hindu classical dance styles, evolved in the Tamil region. Carnatic, or South Indian, music, is also widely practiced. In the field of architecture, Tamils developed a distinctive style of South Indian temple building. The towering *gopurams* (gateways) of Tamil temples are unique to southern India. Covered with elaborately carved, often life-size statues of gods and figures from Hindu mythology, *gopurams* dominate the landscape of Tamil cities. The temples at Madurai, Kanchipuram, and Thanjavur (Tanjore) are classic examples of this architectural style.

Tamil folk culture includes a body of oral literature, ballads, and songs performed or recited by bards and minstrels. Songs



Sri Lankan Tamil refugees line up to enter government-held areas of eastern Sri Lanka. Tamils fled rebel-held areas of the eastern region to escape fighting between the troops and Tamil Tigers. (STRDEL/AFP/Getty Images)

and dances are accompanied by music played on instruments such as the *tharai*, an S-shaped horn, and the *thambattam*, a type of drum. Folk dances include *Kolattam*, performed by young girls with sticks in both hands who rhythmically strike the sticks of the neighbors as they dance. *Kavadi* is a dance form as well as a religious act, in which pilgrims carry a symbolic structure (the *kavadi*) on their shoulders as they dance their way to the shrine of Subrahmanya, Shiva's son. In one dance, the dummy-horse show, the actors don the costume of an elaborately decorated horse and look as if they are actually riding on horseback. Various forms of folk drama and street theater are also performed for the amusement of the people.

### 15 WORK

Although cities such as Madras and Coimbatore are manufacturing centers, Tamils work predominantly in agriculture. Agriculture is more commercial in Tamil Nadu than in other parts of the country. Canal irrigation is used in some areas, although most of the region relies on "tanks" or reservoirs,

for its water. Rice and millet are the main food crop, and oil-seeds and cotton are the important cash crops. The Vellala are an important group of farming castes. In addition to cultivators, Tamils have a full range of trading, service, and artisan castes that pursue their traditional caste occupations. Fishing is important in coastal areas. As India develops, however, more Tamils are moving into modern sectors of the economy.

### 16 SPORTS

Tamil children play games typical of children throughout South Asia. They amuse themselves with games of tag, leap-frog, and hide-and-seek. One particular game requires a player to stand on one leg and try to catch the members of the opposing team within a square playing area marked out on the ground. Another game is something like "Simon Says". An adult, says *Kombari*, *Kombari* ("They have horns"), and the children repeat this statement. The leader then goes on to list animals with horns. Occasionally a statement such as "elephant has horns" is made, and the children who repeat the incorrect statement are "out". Adult games include stick fighting (*Silambam*), wrestling, and a board game (*Thayam*) similar to chess. The Tamil also engage in modern Western sports.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The movies, and, more recently, television are the leading forms of entertainment for Tamil. Even in rural areas, people tend to prefer them to the more traditional folk dances or street-corner theaters. In the late 1980s, there were 2,364 movie theaters in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil movie industry is centered in Madras, although film studios are located in other cities in Tamil Nadu.

### 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Every young Tamil girl tries to be fully accomplished in a form of folk art known as *kolam*. This involves using the thumb and the fore-finger to draw intricate geometric designs and floral motifs with a white powder. *Kolam* is drawn on the ground in front of houses, particularly on festive occasions. Among the best known handicrafts of the Tamil region are handmade silk saris from Kanchipuram, pottery figures of various gods, bronze work, and silver inlay on brass and copper. Painted wooden toys and cloth dolls are popular. Tamil artisans are skilled in the art of carving materials such as shell and horn. Woodworkers have made the massive, elaborately carved doors of temples, and they produce furniture such as tables with legs in the form of elephant heads. Stone carving is also highly developed. Soapstone figures of gods and religious items are available in nearly all of the temple towns of the region.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Tamils face the usual array of social, economic, and political problems that one finds in India today.

Many of India's social problems are related to population pressure. In Tamil Nadu, however, population growth appears to be slowing. The increase in population between 1981 and 1991 was 14.94%, compared to India's overall rate of 23.5%. The growth rate in Tamil Nadu in 2008 was 1.15% per annum. Obviously, there are differences within the various communities in the region, and some groups still face problems such as poverty, high unemployment, and illiteracy. Agriculture in

the state is more commercial than in many other parts of the country, but farmers still rely to a large extent on good monsoons for their harvests. And periodically cyclones from the Bay of Bengal hit the region, bringing widespread destruction.

Although India was by no means the country worst hit by the December 2004 tsunami, in Tamil Nadu, according to estimates from officials in Chennai, 8,031 people are known to have lost their lives and 1,000 disappeared. Almost a million more—around 300,000 families—were affected through bereavement, injury or loss of job or home, and more than 100,000 families ended up in camps. Local industries such as fishing were so disrupted that sought other occupations. Both national and international agencies provided relief in the form of cash aid, and relief supplies, as well as activities such as constructing homes to replace those lost in the disaster.

Corruption in high government circles seems to be endemic in India, and has apparently been a problem in Tamil Nadu. In late 1996, the former Chief Minister (Jayalitha Jayaram, a former film actress turned politician) of the state and several of her cabinet ministers were arrested (and later convicted) on various charges relating to the misuse of public funds. An ongoing problem is Tamil involvement in the ethnic conflict between Tamil and the Sinhalese in nearby Sri Lanka. In addition, a small group of Tamil separatists is campaigning for Tamil independence from India. In 2008, the government, led by Dr. Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi, was formed by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) (literally “Dravidian Progress Federation”), a regional political party in the state of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu’s record with respect to caste discrimination is fairly poor. The state, during the peak of the Dravidian movement, experienced strong anti-Brahmin sentiments. The government’s 69% reservation policy in educational institutions for the backward castes is, in general, resented by many for being a policy of reverse discrimination. Tamil Nadu’s record of tolerance towards linguistic minorities has, however, been exemplary, despite provocative incidents occurring in other states and despite the state having been the epicenter of anti-Hindi agitations.

In January 2008 the Tamil Nadu government announced its intent to nationalize cement companies in the state, claiming a report following an internal investigation of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission revealed cartelization leading to “exorbitant” increases in cement prices. It may be noted that the price of cement in Tamil Nadu (perhaps in other states in India, too) is approximately 50% higher than the price of imported cement when it is offloaded at ports. Apparently such a high price differential between the international prices and the domestic prices is *prima facie* indication that all is not well within the cement industry. Crucially, it highlights the soft underbelly of the Indian economy. Tamil Nadu’s economy grew at rate of 12.1% in 2007 and it possessed the fifth largest economy (2005–2006) among states in India. It is also the most industrialized state in the country. The price of cement in Tamil Nadu has declined, but whether a government takeover of the industry is the answer remains to be seen. Neither Tamil Nadu nor its cement industry is an exception in the Indian context. Rather they are the rule and are responsible for many of the ills plaguing the Tamil Nadu economy.

While India ranked 128 in the human development index calculated worldwide with 0.619, Tamil Nadu has performed

well with an index of 0.736 in 2006, only 0.041 less than 81st ranked China. HDI is calculated using measures including population, sex ratio, density of population, per capita income, people below the poverty line, infant mortality rate, literacy rate, and women’s empowerment. The life expectancy at birth for males is 65.2 years and for females it is 67.6 years. However, Tamil Nadu has a number of challenges. Significantly, poverty is high, especially in the rural areas, though poverty in the state had dropped from 51.7% in 1983 to 21.1% in 2001. For the period 2004–2005, the trend in incidence of poverty in the state was 22.5% as against the national figure of 27.5%. The World Bank is currently assisting the state in reducing poverty. High drop-out rates and low completion of secondary schools continue to hinder the quality of training in the population. Other problems include class, gender, inter-district, and urban-rural disparities.

Despite these problems, Tamils have a strong sense of identity and take great pride in their cultural and historical traditions. Nearly two thousand years ago, Tamils evolved a distinctive regional culture in the southeastern part of the Indian peninsula. Today, Tamils and Tamil culture remain a significant element in the complex of peoples and cultures that make up Indian society.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Tamils are mainly Hindus, and Tamil women suffer from all the problems of traditional Hindu society. Arranged marriages, child marriages (though technically illegal in India), payment of dowry by the bride’s family, and bride burnings and dowry deaths—are all issues faced by women in Tamil society. The traditional preference for male offspring is found and female infanticide (illegal, though rarely prosecuted) and sex selective abortion is not uncommon (in Salem District, the sex ratio in 2006 was 912 females to 1000 males). High castes do not permit divorce or widow remarriage, although this is allowed among some low caste groups.

Cases of domestic violence (though rarely reported) are on the increase, and Tamil women are subject to sexual and physical abuse. Security forces in Sri Lanka, both the Sinhalese and the IPKF, have been accused of rape and murder committed against Tamil women, who are often involved in combat roles in the civil war.

There are, however, women’s groups such as the Tamil Nadu Women’s Forum which have been formed to fight for women’s rights and gender justice and which stand against gender based discrimination, including caste based discrimination, and of course discrimination against Dalit women (low caste or Untouchables). The Tamil Nadu Women’s Development Project provides low-cost loans and other financial assistance to women to help them develop a degree of economic independence.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

## TAO

**PRONUNCIATION:** dow-OOH

**LOCATION:** Island of Lanyu in western Pacific

**POPULATION:** 3,400 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Bashiic; Mandarin Chinese

**RELIGION:** Christianity combined with traditional Tao beliefs

### <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Tao are one of the currently 13 officially recognized Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan, but are the only ones not on Taiwan proper. Because of their relative isolation on the island of Lanyu, the Tao have best maintained their Austronesian traditions, language, and culture of all these groups. Named Yami early in the 20th century by Japanese ethnologists, the Tao have now persuaded the state to accept their self appellation as the official name of the group.

Linguistic chronology and oral traditions suggest that the Tao migrated to Lanyu about 800 years ago from the Batanes Archipelago north of Luzon. They maintained communication by boat, trading pigs, goats, and millet for weapons, beads, and gold. These exchanges ceased about three centuries ago, after a fight in which most of the Tao visitors on Batanes were killed. However, the languages spoken by Tao and Batanes are mutually intelligible.

Since 1945 Lanyu has been part of Taiwan (the Republic of China), where it is classified as a township that includes four administrative villages. There is an elected township mayor (who by law must be Tao) and a village head in each village.

### <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Lanyu (known as Orchid Island or Botel Tobago in English, and *Pongso no tao* in Tao) is a small island, 46 sq km, located 40 nautical miles SOUTHEAST of Taiwan. It is hilly, with eight mountains reaching over 400 m (1,312 ft) above sea level. The only flat area is a narrow, uneven belt lying between the mountains and the coast. Because of the lack of level ground, Tao situate their six villages on gentle slopes at the foot of mountains along the alluvial fans of creeks. Most of the island mountain area is covered by rain forests or dense scrub where the islanders obtain lumber to build houses and boats.

Lanyu climate is tropical. Humidity is often over 90%. July temperatures reach 32°C (90°F) and drop below 20°C (68°F) only in January. Rainfall is high, averaging over 2,600 cm (1,024 in) annually, with just over 100 rain-free days per year. It is also quite windy. From October to January or February, the climate is dominated by northeastern monsoons. Days are often cloudy, windy, and rainy, and the sea is rough. The strong winds not only prevent islanders from fishing at sea, but at times blow sea water far ashore, damaging crops. From February to June monsoons gradually dissipate, and the northern tropical current brings flying fish and the larger fish that prey on them near the island where they can be caught. July to early October is typhoon season. When there are no storms, the weather is clear and very warm. Tao take advantage of the good weather to build or repair houses, boats, and irrigation channels and to open new fields. Fishing takes place both day and night. Fruit also ripens in this summer period. Tao are busiest at this time, preparing for the coming winter.

In 2004 the resident population of Lanyu was 3,094, about 90% of whom are Tao. The others are Chinese from Taiwan, among them soldiers, police, civil servants, and shopkeepers. The Tao population has remained relatively stable for most of the 20th century, but grown slowly in recent years. There are several hundred temporary non-Tao residents. About 30% of the Tao population now live and work off the Lanyu in urban Taiwan.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Tao language is Bashiic, an Austronesian language. It is still spoken by the older generation, those over 50. The younger Tao speak Mandarin Chinese, the official language of Taiwan; many have lost competence to speak their ancestral language. The use and promotion of Bashiic in their churches has been an important factor in the preservation of the language. Bashiic has been put into writing through church initiatives.

Tao naming customs differ greatly from English names. First, Tao distinguish the living from the dead through names. A man named Konpo is *Si-Konpo* while living, *Simina-Konpo* after death. Second, husband and wife keep their own names until they have a child, after which they rename themselves to reflect their offspring. For example, when a child called *Si-Manowi* is born, his parents change their names to *Siaman-Manowi*, father of *Si-Manowi*, and *Sinan-Manowi*, mother of *Si-Manowi*. Later, when *Si-Manowi* marries *Si-Awan*, and later has a child, *Si-Lotem*, he must change his name to *Siaman-Lotem* and his wife to *Sinan-Lotem*. His parents must also take on new names becoming *Siapun-Lotem* or grandparent of *Lotem*. If *Si-Awan* is her parents' first child, her parents' names also become *Siapun-Lotem*. When their first great grandchild is born and named, all elders become *Siapun-Kotan*. This custom of noting parentage is known as *teknonymy*.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Myth has it that the Tao ancestors were sent to earth by the Supreme God in the form of two boys, one in a stone, the other in a bamboo, after a flood that destroyed most of the half-human, half-ghosts who had inhabited Lanyu. When the two emerged from their shells and met, their knees became swollen and eventually split open. Their right knees bore baby boys and the left knees baby girls. When they grew older, brothers married sisters, but their children were crippled, blind, or otherwise handicapped. Later, they married each others' sisters and had many healthy offspring.

Tao gods also bless people—for example, transforming an ugly or deformed individual into a handsome one, presenting a man with a wife from heaven, or showering someone with treasure. They do this only out of sympathy for the person or at the request of a man's ancestors, not because individuals sacrifice or pray to them. Tao believe that the gods are indifferent to direct pleas.

The most important Tao cultural hero is the king of flying fish (flying fish are the most important source of animal protein), and all Tao customs and ceremonies are centered on him. He once appeared to an old man in a dream and arranged to meet next morning on the beach. He then taught him everything proper for a Tao to do, which has since been passed to each generation. Because of this, flying fish are sacred to the Tao. Every year they perform solemn rituals during the flying

fish season, and they observe many taboos when catching and eating flying fish.

### **5 RELIGION**

The Tao cosmos has eight levels supported by five massive tree trunks on the lowest plane. Humans occupy the middle level, which is Lanyu or *pongso no tao* (island of humans) in the Tao language. Gods of different ranks reside on higher planes, with ghosts and underground people on lower ones.

Tao gods are responsible for natural phenomena, catastrophe, and bounty alike. Tao only have vague images of their gods. They know there are several ranks of deities, but they do not agree on how many ranks there are, on which god dwells where, or on which god is responsible for what.

Tao see their gods as distant, yet they refrain from talking lightly about them. Once a year, on the yearly praying festival, they present offerings to the gods. It is also the only day on which the gods can be freely discussed. Although Tao gods will punish bad individuals such as robbers, they are generally more concerned with an entire village or with all the Lanyu Tao. The gods may favor Tao groups, blessing them with good weather and bountiful harvests (both agricultural and aquatic), or they may inflict disasters upon them.

By contrast, Tao are daily concerned with ghosts who cause such woes as death, injury, sickness, bad harvests, infertility, poor fishing conditions, and so on. The most fearful ghosts are the recently deceased. A dead man in his new condition may feel lonesome and decide to come back to the living to fetch a relative or friend to serve as a companion, thus causing another death or even a chain of deaths. Occasionally a Tao will dream of the spirit of a dead person. If, after a time, the living individual becomes ill, others will believe that the spirit caused it.

Almost all Tao became Christians in the 1960s. There are six Presbyterian and two Catholic churches and an independent Protestant chapel on the island. Tao Presbyterian clergy are important local leaders, having previously been the only educated Tao on the island who were not beholden to the Kuomintang (KMT) party and holding state sponsored jobs. Christian festivals, church events, and church-sponsored social services are an important part of local culture. However, Tao Christianity has not completely replaced their traditional beliefs. Instead, the two systems coexist.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Tao mark the year with festivals and ceremonies marking the beginning or end of productive activities. Traditionally most ceremonies centered on group millet-cultivating and catching flying fish, the two most important sources of food. However, this has changed. Millet-cultivating groups no longer exist, and the Tao now celebrate some Chinese and Christian holidays. All Tao holidays, regardless of origin, are celebrated by stopping work for one or two days and serving lunch, a meal that is not generally eaten. Moreover, relatives and friends often visit each other.

The first ceremony of the flying fish season is performed at the landing beach in the tenth Tao month (March on the solar calendar). A chicken or a piglet is killed on the landing beach and its blood collected. Each male must wet his finger with the "magic" blood, smear it on a pebble around the tide line, and pray for a year of health and good harvest. After this ceremony

ny the big boats owned by fishing groups may start nighttime fishing by torchlight.

The second phase of the flying fish season begins in the twelfth Tao month (May). This event includes many rites held beside the fish-drying rack and the small boats, which may be put out to catch migratory fish after the ceremony.

The “good month” ceremony announces the end of the flying fish and millet-growing seasons. Two important activities, exchanging gifts and group millet-pounding, take place on that day. In the morning, families prepare tubers and other food to send to their relatives. The standard gift includes three taro and one dried flying fish.

The millet-pounding ceremony used to be performed separately by individual millet-growing groups, but since such organizations no longer exist, millet pounding has become a village-wide ceremony in which all participate. The sponsor of the millet pounding brings some millet and a wooden mortar to the village plaza. Men who want to participate bring their own pestles. Four or five elders lead the pounding, and then younger people take turns. The participants surround the mortar, bent over at the waist, and pound the millet in turn.

The yearly praying festival is the only occasion on which the Tao make offerings to the gods. The first offering is communal. Several old men represent the village, each bringing a rattan tray to the beach. The offerings include betel nuts, gaud vines (Piper betel), pork, and chicken feathers—every essential Tao food item except fish. They pray to the gods for health, longevity, and a good harvest. Upon returning home, they put similar offerings on the ridge of their roofs, setting out trays on the right side for the gods and on the left side for the ancestors. After praying, they leave the offerings on the roofs.

The ceremony for goats is a two-day festival. On the first, Tao exchange gifts with their relatives and friends. On the second they perform a ritual: a goat herder picks two kinds of abundant wild plants and prays that his goats will be as numerous as the plants.

Finally, Tao celebrate new holidays, including Lunar New Year, Christmas, and Easter. Lunar New Year is the longest holiday, lasting three or more days, and Tao working in Taiwan return for a family reunion. Tao celebrate Christmas and Easter in the same way that other Christians do, adding Tao songs and dances.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Tao rites of passage are relatively simple. Tao mark three events: marriage, birth, and death. Tao weddings lack festiveness and the boisterous merriment of the Chinese. Only a few close relatives of the bride and groom attend. The ceremony is simple, private, and exclusive. Couples attracted to each other typically live together for several years before formally marrying. However, the community regards the pair as a couple despite the lack of a wedding. Young Tao may change sexual partners several times before eventually settling down and establishing a family; however, when deciding to live together, by cultural tradition they must be faithful to each other. Because a marriage becomes stable only after a child is born, Tao view the first child’s naming ceremony as more significant than a wedding.

The ceremony performed for a newborn is the naming ceremony. On a chosen morning several days after the baby is born, the baby’s father carries a knife and a coconut shell bowl

to a running spring to collect water. On the way home, he must not speak to or even greet anyone. He must also be very careful not to fall or spill the water, as this would be a very bad omen, foretelling the baby’s approaching death. At home, he sprinkles the water onto his baby’s hair, touches the top of the baby’s head with his moistened finger, and gives it a name and a blessing. This ceremony is especially important to the baby’s parents and grandparents if the baby is the first child and if one or both parents is also a first child.

Death and funerals are very private events in Tao society. Only close kin and the most intimate of friends attend a funeral. The corpse is wrapped in cloth and bound into a bundle by the son. If a young man does not know how to wrap a body, he may ask one of his uncles for help. The reward for this service, as well as other funeral services such as pall bearing and grave digging, is a flake of gold or a plot of land. Corpses are buried as soon as possible after death, some within a few hours. The graveyard is a taboo place after sunset; when the death happens in the late afternoon or at night, the burial must wait until dawn. While the body remains at home, men must remain vigilant to prevent ghosts making the body heavy and hard to handle. Some spears and other weapons are placed around the house to keep evil spirits at bay.

Inauguration ceremonies for new houses and new boats are distinctive and important in Tao society and may be viewed as a type of rite of passage. Inaugurations primarily involve the display and distribution of large quantities of pork, goat, and water taro. Because a host family needs about one ton of taro, enough to cover the roof of the new house or bury a new boat, prior to the ceremony they collect water taro for about five days.

Although there are several different kinds of inauguration ceremonies, they follow roughly similar scripts. On the first day, the huge taro pile and domestic animals are displayed. After sunset, guests from other villages gather in the host’s house and sing ritual songs to admire his achievement until the sun rises the next morning. Then the taro and butchered pigs and goats are distributed to every guest and every village family.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In daily greetings, the Tao emphasize generation and age differences. The most popular greeting includes a kinship term plus *gon* (be well). On meeting someone, a person has to be aware of his generation relative to that of the other. A younger speaker says *maran* (uncle) *gon* to a male, *kaminan* (aunt) *gon* to a woman. The other responds, *anak* (son or daughter) *gon*. If the other is younger, the greetings and responses are reversed. To an elder peer, he says *kaka* (elder brother or sister) *gon* and to a younger one *wali* (younger brother or sister) *jon*. The kinship terms used here are honorific and do not imply real kinship relations.

There is no need for a Tao to make an appointment before visiting friends or relatives living in other villages. One may arrive at the destination some time before dusk, at which time the host should be on the way or at home. As visits are not expected, the host may not have enough food for guests. Not wanting to inconvenience the host, the visitor brings gifts, usually tubers and dried fish or other meat, eliminating the problem.



*Tao tribesmen from Orchid Island row their traditional handmade boat on the Keelung River, in Taipei, Taiwan. (AP Images/Wally Santana)*

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

Since the 1980s a market-based economy has developed in Lanyu, with commercial goods imported and obtainable only with money. However, Tao still have a subsistence economy—that is, they produce most of their food, build their own houses and fishing boats, and make some of their clothing. Many goods they produce do not enter the market. However, the development of tourism from the 1980s, and demand for Tao handicraft has led to significant production of traditional goods for these markets.

Tao have less access to modern medical care than they have to commercial goods. A small public clinic is staffed by two doctors and several nurses, but the limited facilities permit them to treat minor problems only. Islanders afflicted with serious illnesses have to go to a hospital on Taiwan. Although the public clinic is free and Tao have public medical insurance, some live with serious illness because they cannot afford transportation to Taiwan.

Construction of homes is important in Tao culture. The traditional house is a complex consisting of a main residential dwelling, a workshop, and an open, roofed platform each built on separate terraces and descending to the beach. The residential dwelling is built inside a large pit with the roof level with the surface of the terrace. The workshop, on the other hand, is

built on top of a somewhat smaller pit so that its floor is level with the terrace ground. The open platform is erected on heavy posts, its floor about 2 m (6.5 ft) above ground. The residence and workshop also rest just off the earth supported by thick posts. Tao residences face the sea, their roofs uniformly parallel to the coastline, while workshops and platforms are perpendicular to the shore.

In the 1960s the local government replaced these traditional houses with small, confining concrete houses. Each family has limited living space. This created many problems and difficulties, and in the hot season these concrete boxes were almost unlivable, so most people built traditional roofed platforms in front of them. Starting in 1995 the government paid for construction of new houses for the whole island. Few people rebuilt traditional houses (unsuited as they are for modern utilities) but chose to design their own versions of modern rural Taiwanese homes.

Tao construct boats almost exclusively for fishing and for carrying harvested millet or taro. Because Lanyu is small, islanders used to get around on foot. Recently, the number of motor vehicles has increased. Many Tao families own motorcycles or even cars. The island has a public bus service. Tao travel to Taiwan is by airplane or steamer.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The family is the most important social unit and the basic economic unit in Tao society. Most Tao families are nuclear, which means that they consist of wife, husband, and unmarried children. Some children may be from previous marriages. Average family size is four persons. In the typical Tao family, relationships between parents and children and spouses are very close. This closeness will endure even after a child marries and establishes his or her own family.

Husband and wife are not only very close emotionally, but also economically reliant on each other, working together to support their families. For religious reasons, Tao women are not permitted aboard fishing boats, so men provide seafood. Women mainly work in their fields, weeding, digging, and hauling heavy loads of tubers back to the village. A man with no wife or with an incapacitated wife will be unable to accumulate enough taro and pigs to hold socially important inauguration ceremonies and unable to reciprocate the gifts of meat received from relatives and other villagers at ceremonies they sponsor. He falls into debt and his status declines.

Although remarrying is both common and easy for the divorced or the widowed, the Tao emphasize monogamy, spiritual loyalty, and sexual fidelity in marriage. Extramarital affairs are unacceptable and rare, and polygyny (multiple wives) is unheard of. As suggested earlier, unstable relationships in the early stages after marriage will result either in separation or, after several children, evolve into more stable unions recognized by the community.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Tao clothing is simple. Men wear nothing but a loincloth. Women wear woven skirts tied around the waist with two bands and a breast covering or vest. In summer, older women may wear only skirts, leaving their upper bodies bare.

Men and women traditionally share responsibility for clothing production, but there is a sexual division of labor, with women weaving abaca and other fibers into fabrics from which Tao clothing is made. Men engage in weaving as well, but use different materials such as tree bark, large leaves, bamboo or rattan to create helmets, vests, raincoats and wide-brimmed hats. However, with the recent trend toward the purchase of clothing, Tao weaving skills are slowly disappearing.

Tao women continue to weave certain fabrics to make clothing worn exclusively at ceremonial events. These articles include loincloths, vests, skirts, and lightweight gowns made of white fabric decorated with woven blue stripes. Tao clothing traditionally was simple in construction and style. Women cut and sewed together pieces of fabric from woven sheets 3 m (10 ft) long and 20 cm (8 in) wide. The making of ceremonial vests is a very solemn undertaking. Before Tao can wear these items, they must make offerings of goat or pork to their gods. By these offerings the ceremonial clothing acquires magical powers. Tao wear their ceremonial garments on visits to other villages as a way of showing respect for their hosts, and because they believe that the ritual clothing will protect them from evil spirits to which they are vulnerable whenever they journey outside the safe confines of the village.

## **12 FOOD**

Tao generally eat two meals a day. They go to work after breakfast but rarely take anything other than tobacco and betel at

midday. Dinner is their main meal. They eat lunch only when they stay at home for festivals or because of bad weather.

Tao classify food into two categories: staples and supplements. A regular meal includes both. Ordinarily women are responsible for obtaining staples and men for supplements. The two important staples are sweet potato and water taro. Other basic crops include taro and yams. Millet is also grown but is exchanged as a gift and consumed only on ceremonial occasions. In recent years, rice and noodles have replaced tubers in the daily diet of young Tao.

There are many kinds of supplements, obtained mostly from the ocean. Fish are most important, fresh when available, but otherwise dried and salted. Other types are crab and conch, as well as various kinds of seaweed and an assortment of edible wild plants. Families with little male labor have to depend more on plants.

Pork and goat meat are also supplements, but are generally eaten only on ceremonial occasions; neither is eaten on a daily basis.

Fish is very important in the Tao diet and is classified into good fish that everyone can eat, bad fish (not good for women), and old men's fish, which neither women nor young men are allowed to eat. This classification deeply affects eating etiquette, daily fishing activities, and other aspects of life. Some Tao insist that women will vomit if they eat bad fish or will become ill if they fail to. Every family has two sets of cooking and eating utensils, one for each of these two types of fish.

## **13 EDUCATION**

There is now an elementary school in every Tao village, and a secondary school, grades 7 through 12, is located in the town. Tao children have compulsory schooling for nine years, and most continue through senior high school. Students board and lodge in the high school five and half days per week, except in winter and summer vacations. Despite special government assistance, few Tao qualify to enter universities.

Prior to the 1980s only poor-quality teachers and public servants were sent to Lanyu, although capable volunteers also went there occasionally. Children learned very little from their teachers, and were often ordered out of their classrooms to gather highly valued wild flora and fauna for their teachers and principals. Most Tao over 60 are hardly able to read. Not surprisingly, when the high school was established, most Tao did not want their children to attend, and soldiers had to pick up students during the first two years. As the generation who began receiving more progressive education beginning in the 1980s become parents, Tao are concerned to invest in education, sometimes sending their children to Taiwan or even moving there to access better schools for their children. There are numerous government and private programs and subsidies for education of Tao children. Computer education in the schools and government provision of computers and Internet linkage for free to each village have made most young Tao computer users, so numerous Internet sites now serve Lanyu and present it to the world.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Tao music consists only of singing; musical instruments are unheard of. There are eight categories of Tao songs, including ritual songs, love songs, lullabies, and work songs. Since most Tao songs use the three-tone or four-tone system, melodies

sound more like chanting than singing. However, Tao singers may improvise, adding grace notes or changing the tempo, so that the same song sounds different when sung by different singers. Most well known are ritual songs, sung all night long in inauguration ceremonies.

Most Tao songs, lullabies included, are sung by men, but hand-clapping songs can be performed together by men and women, whereas only women dance in Tao tradition. *Ganam*, a category of songs, is exclusively for females and always accompanies dancing. A famous Tao dance is the hair dance. The dancers swing their hair to and fro while singing and dancing. Since the 1990s men's dances have been created for indigenous cultural festivals and tourism.

### **15 WORK**

Until the 1960s, Tao living on Lanyu relied upon a subsistence economy, consuming primarily, if not exclusively, what they produced. Recently, however, the island population has become increasingly incorporated into Taiwan's market economy. Young people in particular prefer working in Taiwan as wage laborers to staying home and growing tubers or fishing.

Tao youth began to enter the off-island labor market in large numbers during the 1970s. At that time, Taiwan experienced impressive growth in labor-intensive industries that required large numbers of workers. Tao youth worked in construction and factories manufacturing shoes, clothing, electronic goods, etc. On Lanyu, there are not enough good job opportunities; thus at least a third of the Tao population lives and works in Taiwan. Part of the wages earned working in Taiwan comes back to Lanyu to support elderly parents invested in local economic initiatives generally linked to the tourist industry. These include purchase of cars for taxis, investment in a store or upgrading their house to a bed and breakfast. Many people produce traditional artifacts for the tourist industry. In addition there are now job opportunities in government services, schools, or church-operated social services.

### **16 SPORTS**

Lanyu has very few sports facilities, but basketball courts can be found in every village. This sport is popular among young men and children. Although Tao are rarely seen playing softball, there are annual township softball tournaments. Teams organized by villages compete with each other for the prizes. Swimming is the favorite sport of children and teenagers in summer time.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

There are no theaters on the island, but television and videotapes are popular. In Tao culture reference to sex in the presence of parents, children, or a sibling of the opposite sex is taboo. They feel uneasy when obscene footage appears. Thus, watching television is not "family entertainment" on Lanyu except for sports programs.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Tao used to make almost everything they used; thus, they were skilled in carpentry, wood sculpture, gold and silver smithery, pottery, and weaving. Recently, they have begun to buy goods they used to make themselves; except for carving miniature

boats and pottery idols sold as souvenirs, the only remaining traditional Tao handicraft is boat construction.

Tao make two sizes of fishing boats, 2–4 m (6.5–13 ft) long for 1 to 3 persons, and 5–8 m (16–26 ft) long for 6 to 10 persons. Boats may be propelled by oars and sails, but sails are rarely used. The typical boat, shaped like a Venetian gondola, requires several grades of wood that are joined together by means of dowels, dovetailing, rattan roping, and glue. The keel must be made of a very hard, abrasion-resistant wood because the shores where Tao beach their boats are strewn with rocks. Many Tao boats are beautifully sculptured and painted in black, white and red. This intricately decorated boat has become a Tao cultural symbol.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

A hundred years ago, Tao did not smoke or drink alcohol. Since the early 1980s, usage of both has skyrocketed. Cigarettes are enjoyed on a daily basis, but alcohol is considered a luxury and is limited to ceremonial occasions or when guests come to visit. Tao families now spend significant proportions of their income on these products. Drinking has brought many problems to Tao society such as marital problems, traffic accidents, and loss of the will to work.

The Tao are a minority people, Lanyu being part of Taiwan (the Republic of China). Their experience with the Taiwan government has often been frustrating. Until the late 1980s human rights were ignored, not just for the Tao but for everyone. Some of the problems have been resolved, but others continue to exist. For example, in the 1950s much land was seized to establish cattle ranches for demobilized Chinese soldiers or for a prison farm. The cattle uprooted Tao crops, and inmates stole Tao property and raped Tao women. Because authorities rarely observed such transgressions first-hand, Tao complaints were seldom taken seriously. In 1982 low level radioactive waste from Taiwan's nuclear power stations began to be stored on the island. The radioactive material is put into drums and stored in concrete trenches. The government neither sought permission from the Tao to establish this facility, nor told them what was being built on their land. The radioactive waste has become the defining issue that shapes Tao relations with the state and the rest of Taiwan since then. Supported by the anti-nuclear and environmental movement, the Tao did obtain a promise from the state that this waste would be removed, but local resistance from other areas in Taiwan chosen for a new site means that the waste is still there (2008). Meanwhile the Taiwan Power Corporation has paid large amounts of subsidies and compensation monies for local infrastructure and welfare, as well as providing free electric power for all Tao on Lanyu. Ironically, it is opposition to the facility that is the strongest basis for island-wide unity in a culture that tends to be highly fragmented by family and village loyalties.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Tao only recognize two genders, there being no categories other than male and female. Because the traditional economy depended on close co-operation based on a gendered division of labor, and because affines were often as important in economic and ritual life as kin, there tends to be more basic gender equality in Tao culture than in other Taiwan Indigenous Peoples, or Taiwan as a whole. Nonetheless, the primacy of the male in the household, economic life and ritual life was uncontested. Con-

version to Christianity, public education, and development of economic opportunities in the tourist industry have all contributed to problematize gender equality, as well as provide more avenues for women to achieve status as independent social actors. Women now have strong roles in the modern sector as teachers, church leaders, locally elected politicians, small store operators, and cultural performers for tourism and competitive festivals.

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—revised by M. Stainton

# TAUSUG

**PRONUNCIATION:** TOW-soog (“-ow” as in “how”)  
**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Joloano, Suluk (term in Sabah)  
**LOCATION:** Philippines (Sulu archipelago)  
**POPULATION:** 1.1 million  
**LANGUAGE:** Tausug  
**RELIGION:** Islam  
**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The powerful currents (*sug*) flowing around the Sulu archipelago give the Tausug their name (Sulu itself is from the cognate word *sulog* [used in modern Visayan, for instance]). Beginning in the Song dynasty, an increase in Chinese trade with Southeast Asia attracted the Tausug to their present home in the commercially strategic islands between Mindanao and Borneo. From the 15th to 18th centuries, the Tausug state, the Sulu sultanate (whose hegemony extended to northeastern Borneo, impinging on the sphere of Brunei) maintained close relations with China, sending numerous missions to the imperial capital. Other crucial contacts were with Islam, which the Tausug adopted in the 15th century. The Sulu sultanate relied on slaves taken in wide-ranging raids to harvest marine products (especially, sea cucumber and bird nests) for the Chinese market.

Although the Spanish established a fort early on in Zamboanga at the western tip of Mindanao, they did not take Jolo, the Sulu capital, until 1878 (“Jolo” [hoh-LO] is the Spanish pronunciation of Sulu, the “j” being pronounced as a “sh” in the 16th century). By the late 19th century, the Muslim Tausug and the Christian Spaniards had been engaged in almost continual warfare for 300 years (the Spaniards applied the term “Moro,” originally referring to the Muslim Moors of North Africa, to Muslims in the Philippines, a label that continues in use to this day). Tausug aristocrats regularly commissioned fleets to raid for slaves among the Catholicized populations to the north.

The Americans took the Spanish fort at Jolo in 1899 but did not subjugate the entire island until 1913 (Tausug communities fought to the last man, woman, and child in mountain redoubts). In 1915, Sultan Jamal-ul Kiram II abdicated his secular power to the American colonial administration. The relative stability of the following years came to an end with the World War II dissemination of firearms throughout the Philippine countryside, which for Sulu meant a return to the traditional pattern of endemic violence. After the war, the Filipino government exercised minimal control over Sulu, and the population and the Philippine Constabulary, and later military, viewed each other with hostility.

During the 1970s, Sulu became a major center of the Moro separatist movement. Headed by Jolo native Nur Misuari, the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF, a secular movement emphasizing a regional rather than a religious identity) was dominated by Tausug; it came to field a force of 300,000 insurgents, and the conflict ultimately killed 80,000 to 200,000 people. In 1981, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front split off from the MNLF: this was due not only to the break-away faction’s commitment to an independent Bangsamoro state under Islamic law (at a time when the MNLF was considering accepting only regional autonomy) but also



to resentment by Maguindanao of Tausug dominance of the MNLF. The Moro are composed of several distinct ethnicities, of which three equally matched groups, the Tausug, the Maguindanao, and the Maranao, are the most important in size and power. A plebiscite under the Aquino administration led to the establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in 1989.

Since then, the MILF has also moved towards compromise with the Philippine government, concluding a peace agreement in 2001, though fighting by (largely non-Tausug) militant groups, including terrorism and kidnappings, the radical Abu Sanyaf continues. Because of some of these groups' links with

Al-Qaeda and the Southeast Asian Jemaah Islamiya militant network, the United States military collaborates with the Philippine military in the region.

Tausug culture (like Moro and non-Christian cultures more generally) has contributed key icons to the national identity of the predominantly Christian and Hispanized Philippines: Tausug dances, for instance, are taught in high schools throughout the country and included in showcases of Philippine national culture abroad (including those staged by Filipino-Americans).

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tausug dominate the Sulu Archipelago, a chain linking western Mindanao in the southern Philippines to Sabah on Malaysian Borneo. Having totaled 325,000 in 1960, the Tausug numbered around 900,000 in the Philippines and over 120,000 outside the country. More than half of the Tausug (a total of 325,000 people in 1960) reside on Jolo, a rugged island of 950 sq km (367 sq mi). Benefiting from the volcanic soil, agriculture occupies half the land. The rest is mountainous, covered either by rain forest or by the grasslands left behind by slash-and-burn cultivation. Along the coast, mangrove swamps alternate with white sand beaches and coral reefs just off shore. Tausug also occupy the neighboring islands of Pata, Tapul, Lugus, and Siasi, as well as Lahad Datu and Tambisan on the Sabah coast.

In Sulu province itself, 528,000 Tausug constitute 85.3% of the population; in Tawi-Tawi province, they number 114,745 or 35.6% of the population (almost as many as the largest ethnic group, the Sama Dilaya), and in Basilan 76,000 or 23%. There are 98,000 Tausug in Zamboanga City, 38,500 in Zamboanga del Sur province, and 6,700 in Zamboanga del Norte province. Because of the turmoil of the past four decades, a considerable community of Filipino Muslims has grown in northeastern Borneo (a 1981 figure of 12,000 for Indonesian East Kalimantan and a 1982 figure of 110,000 for Malaysian Sabah, where they are called "Suluk").

In addition to the cardinal directions, Tausug orient themselves with reference to direction "towards the interior" (*gimba*) or "towards the sea" (*higad*).

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Tausug language is most closely related to the Visayan languages of the central Philippines, particularly to the speech of Butuan in northeastern Mindanao, which archaeologists have identified as a major trading center in earlier times. Linguists estimate that the ancestors of the Tausug left Butuan and migrated to their present homeland within the last 1,000 years. The Tausug language has long been written in a version of the Arabic script and contains numerous loanwords from Malay (many of which are themselves of Arabic or Sanskrit origin). The language remains a lingua franca for ethnic groups (Sama/Samal, Mapun, Yakan) that were once vassals of the Sulu sultanate.

A newborn child receives a temporary name. If it is sickly, the parents may try out different names until they find a lucky one. Because of Islam, these names are usually Arabic, but Tausug parents have been known to pick the names of famous Americans, such as George Washington, or to select a nonsense string of syllables for their sound alone.



#### 4 FOLKLORE

Though ubiquitous, spirits tend to congregate at road crossings, rocky shores, large stones, and trees, especially the balete tree, which twines itself around larger trees (white flags mark such magical spots). *Jin Islam* (Muslim spirits) are distinguished from *jin kapil* (infidel spirits): the latter reject God's commandments and cause human illness, whereas the former obey God and fight evil spirits (*saytan*). Malevolent spirits reside in legendary animals, such as a goat with a man's head or in an owl that blinds with its claws. Particularly feared are *barbalan*, which take the form of deformed people by day but which at night turn into flying creatures who eat the livers of fresh corpses. One must resist *Ibiris*, similar to the Christian devil, which is present in each person and is the source of all evil deeds.

*Mangubat*, traditional healers, deriving their expertise from contact with spirits (including, in some cases, marriage with one), employ herbal medicines and symbolic magic. Tausug often carry amulets that can grant them invulnerability to weapons.

#### 5 RELIGION

Since its introduction as early as the 15th century by a combination of traders, Arab and Chinese Muslims, and mystics from Malaya and Sumatra, Islam has been the Tausug religion. Religious leaders are careful to distinguish between orthodox Muslim practices and those that derive from a pre-Islamic heritage or represent local innovation; the Tausug pride themselves on being more orthodox in their Islam than the Sama peoples whom they have traditionally dominated. The sultan serves a key function as the sanctifier of mosques and appointer of the *imam muwallam* who preside over them. Other religious officials are, in ascending order of seniority, the *bilal* who intones the call to prayer, the *hatib* who delivers sermons, and the *imam* who leads communal prayer. For the most part, only the elderly engage in pious behavior, such as fasting for the entire month of Ramadan, because young men must display "manly behavior" that often violates Islamic moral standards.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

On successive Wednesdays in the second Islamic month, communities perform the *pagtulak bala* ritual. All community members gather at the beach to cast a stone into the sea, an act (particularly exciting for children) that ejects the previous year's accumulated evil. In addition, rafts with aromatic food are sent out to sea in hopes of drawing evil spirits away forever.

On *Maulud al-Nabi*, the birthday of Muhammad, each mosque resounds with all-night Arabic chanting. Although the assembled community spends most of the time chatting, smoking, and waiting for the following feast, at certain points in the chant everyone touches special flowers representing the Prophet, a merit-earning act.

On the full moon of the month before the fasting month of Ramadan, people offer prayers and hold a feast for the repose of the dead at the mosque; several days later, they clean the family graves and have a feast there.

*Haylaya*, marking the end of Ramadan, is an occasion for people to wear their finest clothes and pay visits to each other; the holiday includes gambling, feasting, and watching movies in town.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

If his newborn is a girl, a man will let off a few gunshots into the air; he will fire many shots if it is a boy. Placing the placenta in a green coconut shell, the father buries it on the full moon. At the age of one year, the child receives his or her first haircut and is ritually weighed; the equivalent of its weight in uncooked rice is later given to the presiding clergy. Usually at around 10 years of age, boys are circumcised. A slight scraping of the clitoris is also performed on girls.

Men generally marry around the age of 18, women between 16 and 18 years of age. Marriage can be by negotiation between the respective kin-group, elopement, or abduction.

In a negotiated marriage, if the parents approve of a girl suggested by their son, they gather their kin and march to the girl's house to ask for her hand. With the girl's parents, they schedule a formal conference for a few days later when the bride-price (*ungsud*) is set. All the boy's paternal and maternal relatives contribute to the *ungsud*, and anyone who contributed to raising the girl has the right to ask for a portion of the *ungsud*.

The wedding takes place only after the bride-price has been gathered and delivered. On the wedding day itself, each side's relatives and allies gather at the respective houses to eat and chat to the sound of *kulintang* music. In the late afternoon, the groom, accompanied by a procession of his guests yelling and shooting off guns, rides or is carried to the bride's house. The groom does not see the bride until after the wedding ceremony itself, which is essentially a contract between him and the bride's father, solemnized by a religious official. Then the bride is brought out, and the groom touches her forehead, declaring his right to touch her. The couple sits motionless and expressionless for the rest of the ensuing party.

Abduction (*pagsaggau*, "capture") and elopement differ only in that theoretically a woman consents to the elopement, while the man's desire alone motivates an abduction. If either set of parents does not permit a match, a man may abduct his bride, who must at least pretend to resist by screaming loudly. Avoiding capture by her relatives, the man takes the woman to the village headman's house. In order to marry, the man must pay an abduction fine set by the sultan to the woman's family, as well as extra money to "cover their shame."

Though grieving in private, a person's loved ones receive his or her death with a public expression of resignation to fate. The family washes and enshrouds the corpse in the Islamic fashion. In the evening, women take turns chanting from the Quran. On the following afternoon, the burial takes place, accompanied by rituals informing the deceased that he or she is dead, otherwise the soul wanders and visits the living in dreams.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The ideal to which men aspire is being *maisug*, willing to defend his honor without hesitation. In order to erase his shame (*sipug*), a man must take revenge on anyone who has, for example, murdered a kinsman, made advances on his female kin, or insulted him in public. As cowardice is shameful and mercy is only shown by those clearly strong enough to take revenge if they so choose, conflicts tend to escalate to killing. Although arbitration (by a village headman, by the sultan according to Muslim law, or, in the last resort, by a judge under Philippine national law) is available, each man maintains the firepower to obtain his own justice. Thus, firearms take a large chunk of a

rural family's budget, though half of ammunition is expended in festive noise-making.

Reciprocity is a key value. One feels rejected (*pangdada*) if a person one has helped does not spontaneously return the favor. One is particularly anxious to reciprocate favors (*buddi*) that the other was not obligated to give. If one cannot pay one's debts, one feels *luman*, the need to maintain a respectful distance from, even defer to, the party whom one owes. Refusal both to pay debts of gratitude and to demand recompense for offenses is described as a grave insult, *way sipug* (shameless).

In traditional society, the sultan, believed to be a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, was the political, judicial, and religious authority of highest appeal. The rival candidates for the sultanate today retain the last type of authority. Although the sultan awarded various ranked titles that could be passed on to sons, actual wealth and power depended on a title-holder's own abilities, particularly in amassing a large following, such as would constitute a slave-raiding party. Ties of alliance remain crucial to winning election campaigns, carrying on feuds, or mounting rites-of-passage celebrations (*paghinang*). In theory, aristocrats (*datu*), forming 2% of the population, were descendants of former sultans. The rest were free or debt-slave commoners. Some 10% of the population consisted of bought or captured non-Tausug slaves. Moreover, various alien groups, such as the Samal or Bajau, acknowledged the sultan's authority and entered into client relationships with Tausug communities. For example, a boat-dwelling group may supply fish to a Tausug group in exchange for protection and agricultural products.

Assumed to be a prelude to sex, touching between the sexes outside of marriage, even as slight as a man touching a woman's arm in the daylight, is subject to fines imposed by the sultan. A young man staying overnight in a house may attempt to grope for (*kap-kap*) the family's daughter in the dark while her parents are asleep (the parents may only care to avoid a public scandal). A young man may have a female relative befriend the girl he wants. On some pretext, the female relative invites the girl to her house or into the forest, where the man can seduce her. Often, the girl desires this, too, as long as they are not publicly discovered.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Consisting of a single rectangular room, a traditional house is raised on 2-m to 2.5-m (6- to 8 ft) piles and has a thatched gable roof. A series of elevated porches leads from the house to a separate kitchen building. On land, a fence may surround the house; animals are kept under the house. In coastal villages, houses are often raised above permanent water and connected to each other by gangplanks. Furniture consists of sleeping mattresses, mosquito nets, reed mats, wooden chests, brassware, and large rice containers that are kept above high beams.

While houses in coastal villages cluster together, in the interior houses are dispersed because farmers choose spots that are most convenient to scattered holdings. Villages encompass from 20 to 100 houses, but proximity does not bond households to each other in the absence of kinship or alliance ties. *Lungan*, hamlets bound by overlapping kinship ties, combine into *kauman*, communities led by the holder of title from the sultan and held together by attendance at a common mosque.

Average family income in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, of which Sulu province is a part, amounted to 89,000 pesos (us\$1,745) in 2006, the lowest in the country, cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog's ₱198,000, and those of the neighboring Davao and Zamboanga regions, ₱135,000 and ₱125,000 respectively. In 2000, Sulu had the lowest Human Development Index, 0.351 (combining measures of health, education, and income) in the country (cf. the Philippines' national HDI of 0.656).

According to the 2000 census, the proportion of houses in Sulu with a roof of galvanized iron/aluminum reached 27% (a great increase over just 9.3% ten years earlier) and with a roof of thatch 56.7% (down from 83.8%); 32.3% of houses had wooden outer walls, and another 53.4% outer walls of bamboo or thatch. In 2000, 12% of households had access to a community faucet and 14.3% to a faucet of their own, while 28.7% obtained their water from a well, and 24.4% from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. More than half of households (54.6%) disposed of their garbage by burning it, 21.6% by dumping into a household pit, and 7.8% by feeding it to their animals; only 6.4% had it picked up by a collection truck. 64.7% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 17.2% with electricity, and 11.7% with firewood. 61.7% possessed a radio, 9.1% a television, 4.8% a refrigerator, 4.5% a VCR, 2.5% a telephone or cell phone, 2.1% a washing machine, and 3.6% a motorized vehicle.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Kinship extends to both the father's side (*usbaq*) and the mother's side (*waris*) and focuses on ties back three generations, i.e., up to and including second cousins. However, children tend to have more contact with their paternal relatives because they usually grow up in the father's community. The bond between brothers and first cousins is the most important in determining support in feuds and political action, only approached by quasi-kin alliances sealed by an oath on the Qur'an.

Tausug address equals by their names but use kin terms with parents (*inaq* and *amaq*) and preferably with uncles (*bapaq*) and aunts (*babu*), although they extend such kin terms to non-kin as well. Children show respect to parents; fathers are more affectionate to children than mothers are. Grandparents and grandchildren have more playful interaction. Siblings are expected to help each other.

Marriage is preferred with kin, especially with a first cousin, in order to preserve landholdings. Taboos prohibit marriage between kin of different generations, however, and between half-siblings. Incest between parent and child was traditionally punished by putting the couple into a fish trap and sinking it at sea. Anonymous notes posted in the mosque accuse grave sexual offenders, such as a man who has made love to his wife's sister. Ritual whipping is the punishment.

A newlywed couple spends one year with the woman's family then moves back to the man's parents' house, from which they will later move to establish a household also in the man's community. Extended households are rare, usually consisting of two married sisters. Adoption of orphaned kin is common.

Divorce is strongly condemned and affects less than 10% of marriages. Village headmen will try to resolve marital conflicts first. A husband's excessive gambling, his proposal to take a second wife, or disagreements on the treatment of children are the usual grounds for divorce.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Both men and women wear the *patadyung*, a tube skirt that can also be folded into a headcloth, a sash, a baby sling, a pillow, a blanket, or a flag. While jeans and tee-shirts are common, traditional male apparel, now confined to ceremonial uses, consists of loose, round-necked shirts and loose or tight trousers held up by a waistcloth, completed by a black velvet rimless cap, a palm-leaf conical sun hat, or a head cloth. Women's traditional wear includes blouses (loose for daily wear, form-fitting for formal occasions and *pangalay* dancing), brocaded shawls, and the *patadyung*. At least one simple piece of jewelry accompanies everyday wear.

## **12 FOOD**

Rice is the prestige food, served at feasts and to guests. For everyday fare, it is supplemented by maize (fresh, as a gruel, or mixed with rice) and cassava. The simplest meals add dried fish and sautéed vegetables to the starch (*kaunan*). A more elaborate side dish (*lamay*) is fish (fresh or dried) and vegetables stewed with onions, tomatoes, ginger, and lemon grass (*tiula sayul* and *liakbuan*). *Tiula itum* is a broth made from beef ribs spiced with a *pamapa* mixture (onions, lemon grass, garlic, chili, salt, turmeric, and burned coconut). Coconut-milk curry dishes (*kari-kari* and *kurma*) are also popular. Tausug dishes tend to be highly spiced and pungent. Tausug also make several types of sweet cakes from rice flour and eggs. Drunk with coffee (even by children), breakfast consists of anything from boiled or fried sweet potatoes or bananas to fried leftover rice and fish.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Many children spend seven or eight years learning to read the Arabic script and recite the Qur'an. A ceremony is held to celebrate the completion of this training, where the children in ornate costumes demonstrate their ability in front of guests.

According to the 2000 census, the literacy level in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao was 68.9%, very low by national standards. In Sulu, only a little over one in three (35%) had completed elementary school, barely one in six (15.38%) high school, and one in thirteen (7.88%) college or university.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Tausug music and dance share many similarities with Javanese, Malay, and Siamese forms. Musical instruments include the *kulintang* (a series of 8–11 horizontal knobbed gongs), hanging gongs of various sizes, drums, the *gabbang* (a wooden xylophone), the *gitgit* (a two-stringed instrument with a coconut-shell soundbox and a long handle), the violin-like *biula*, a *sawney* (a high-pitched reed instrument), and the Jew's harp.

*Pangalay* dance stresses hand movements (in some dances accentuated by *janggay*, metal claws, also worn in Siamese dance) and a reserved facial expression. *Langka* are dances incorporating graceful martial arts moves. Other dances depict work tasks such as catching catfish, or imitate animals, such as flying birds in the *linggisan*, originally sung to *Pagsangbay* ballads. Other dances aim at exorcising evil spirits.

## **15 WORK**

Unirrigated rice on permanent plowed fields is the main crop (only the poorest practice shifting cultivation in forested high-

lands). Farmers consult an expert on the Islamic calendar to decide when to plant. Tillers of neighboring fields cooperate in harvesting. Maize, millet, sorghum, sesame, cassava, yams, and peanuts are grown. Women tend gardens of tomatoes, onions, and eggplants. The gathering of wild mangos, durian, jackfruit, oranges, and lanzones contribute significantly to the diet. Manila hemp and coconuts are cultivated for cash. A recent shift from rice- to coconut-planting has made many Tausug dependent on unpredictable world market prices and has caused land scarcity (rice-farmers could lay claim to only as much land as they personally could work; coconut-farming, requiring less labor, can take up more land under a single owner). Cattle, water buffalo, chickens, geese, and ducks are kept.

Coastal people fish full-time or as a supplement to agriculture (Samal client groups also supply fish to Tausug). Among other methods, large rattan traps are put into the water and picked up several days later with a full catch. Although officially banned, reef-damaging dynamite has come into vogue as a means to an easy haul.

## **16 SPORTS**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Obtaining both everyday and luxury articles through trade with such peoples as the Samal (mats) and Maranao (brassware), the Tausug are not known as craftspeople. The forging of swords and their decoration (including mother-of-pearl designs on scabbards) are important arts. Weaving is mostly of head cloths.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The sexes keep apart at social gatherings: women and young children stay inside the house while men and older boys sit on the porch. In work, men and women have a clear division of labor; for the former, plowing, fishing, harvesting trees, and tending livestock; for the latter, caring for chickens, gathering fruit, tending vegetable gardens, and preparing food.

In 2000, in Sulu the ratio between men and women was 96.16 men for every 100 women, though women were more numerous in the age group 15 to 39 (which may be partly the result of male insurgent casualties). Literacy levels in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, low by national standards, were somewhat higher for men (69.8%) than for women (67.7%). However, in Sulu somewhat more of those completing high school were women than men, and the same was true of those attending or completing tertiary education. In contrast to other parts of the country such as Southern Tagalog, more overseas workers from the ARMM were female (56%) than male; the median age of those female overseas workers was 24 years (there are hiring quotas for Muslim domestic workers employed in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim Middle Eastern states).

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—revised by A. J. Abalahin

## T'BOLI

**PRONUNCIATION:** tuh-BOH-lee  
**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Tagabili; TauSebu  
**LOCATION:** Philippines  
**POPULATION:** 100,000-120,000 (2000)  
**LANGUAGE:** T'boli  
**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs  
**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: Filipinos

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The T'boli (Tagabili to lowlanders) are an animist ethnic group inhabiting highland areas in southwestern Mindanao, centering on Lake Sebu (*TauSebu* is another of the people's names). Their immediate neighbors are the Manobo and Bilaan, other animist upland peoples (with whom they are often in conflict). The T'boli rely on Muslim traders for contacts with the lowlands and maritime trade.

The Muslim Magindanao (who founded a powerful sultanate) raided for slaves among the T'boli; Muslims appear as villains in T'boli folklore. The resistance of Muslim lowlanders shielded the T'boli from Spanish political and cultural influence. This isolation ended with the imposition of American military control on Mindanao, completed in 1913. Since that time, Christian migrants from the Visayas and elsewhere have greatly increased the local population, pushing the T'boli from much of their traditional territory, a great part of which is also being appropriated by logging companies. Some protection and development aid has been offered by government institutions (such as the controversial PANAMIN) and Catholic missionaries. Adopting as a common designation "Lumad," the Cebuano term for "indigenous," the T'boli and other non-Islamized/non-Christianized ethnic groups in Mindanao are beginning to develop a collective identity and mobilize in their common interests.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The T'boli inhabit a 1,940-sq-km (750-sq-mi) territory in southwestern Mindanao, where the coastal mountain range joins the Cotabato Cordillera at an elevation of 915 m or 3,000 ft above sea level. The region has three major lakes, Sebu, Lahit, and Siluton, which drain off through large waterfalls.

Precipitation levels are sufficient for agriculture, the driest period running from December to March.

In 2000, the total number of T'boli stood at 95,000 to 120,000. The T'boli in South Cotabato alone numbered nearly 72,000 (10.4% of the population); this was an increase over the 1978 estimate of over 60,000 T'boli. The province's largest ethnic group, the immigrant Hiligaynon/Ilongo from the Western Visayas, constituted 52.4% of the population.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Like the other indigenous languages of Mindanao (such as Maguindanaon and Maranao), the T'boli language is a language of the Southern Philippine sub-branch of the Western Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian family.

It is taboo to call parents, grandparents, and parents-in-law by their name instead of the kin term; it is also improper to address uncles, aunts, or children-in-law by their name.



#### 4 FOLKLORE

In the T'boli origin myth, the god D'wata warns humans of a coming deluge. La Bebe, La Lomi, T'mefeles, and La Kagef hide inside a huge bamboo. After the waters recede, the four split their way out of the bamboo. La Bebe and La Lomi married, becoming the ancestors of the Christian Filipinos. La Kagef and T'mefeles also join and go on to produce 10 sons and daughters. Of these, Bou and Umen are the ancestors of the T'boli. The other 8 form couples; their descendants are the other non-Christian peoples of Mindanao, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

The T'boli have an epic, the *Todbulol*, which takes women performers 16 hours to sing. *Todbulol* is the name of the hero (also Samgulang or Salutan) who has many beautiful, fragrant women and a magical winged horse. In addition, the T'boli tell numerous comic folktales, such as "Bong Busaw ne Tahu Logi" ("The Big Aswang [intestine-sucking demon] and the Old Woman").

#### 5 RELIGION

The T'boli believe in a seven-level upper world inhabited by many gods, foremost of whom are the couple, Kadaw La Sambad and Bulan La Magoaw. They had seven sons and seven daughters who formed couples. Of these, S'fedat and Bong Libun could not have children. Despairing of this, S'fedat asks his wife Bong Libun to kill him; his body becomes the earth and its vegetation. D'wata, another of Kadaw La Sambad and Bulan La Magoaw's offspring, obtains the earth for his children, having agreed to give Bong Libun one of his sons in marriage. This son, however, flees; Bong Libun's children by another husband become the gods of disease. Meanwhile, Hyu We and Sedek We, children of D'wata, create humans from clay, laying them on a banana plant (from this, humans get both their fertility and mortality).

In T'boli belief, a spirit or force lives in all objects, animate and inanimate. The T'boli make offerings (including bracelets) to the spirits of rivers and forests. Parents will place a sword by sleeping to children to protect them from evil spirits. Folktales often feature talking crabs, horses, or other animals. The souls of ancestors are part of everyday reality. The various gods mediate between D'wata and humanity. Of these the most important is L'mugot M'ngay, the god of all food plants. The gods can be vindictive and greedy as well as kind and merciful. They speak to humans through the song of the *l'muhèn*, the bird of destiny. When people violate customary norms, they must appease the relevant god by placing a pig, chicken, or goat cooked without salt on an altar where the god resides. A sick person is brought to the altar, and the water that has previously been poured over swords is collected and poured over him or her. Other than this, the T'boli have few set rituals and no religious specialists other than the elders who in general lead the community, though there are *tao d'mangao*, people who can act as spirit mediums.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are no holidays as such among the T'boli. Rites of passage ceremonies and ritual celebrations serve as T'boli holidays.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Parents arrange their children's marriages as early as just after birth. Taking a child's illness as a sign that he or she needs a partner, parents will ask to borrow a bracelet or other object belonging to a child with whom they wish to match their own; they give this to their sick child. Once their child recovers, the family visits the other child's family to propose marriage. The girl's parents visit the boy's for a feast during which they settle the bride-price (gongs and horses or water buffalo). The two children are made to lie down together on a mat and are covered with a blanket. The girl's parents stay the night. A period of mutual house-visits follows before the formal ceremony. As they are already considered married, the children may sleep together, and the boy helps the girl's family with chores. If one of

the partners dies, a sibling takes his or her place. A child-marriage can be dissolved by returning the bride-price; a *datu* (an elder who is an expert on unwritten customary law) may have to oversee disputes over the exact amount to be handed back.

When the children reach puberty (12 to 13 years of age), a final marriage ceremony is held on a bright moonlit night with no rain (rain symbolizes tears). The bride and groom dress in their own houses amid the sound of music and dancing. An old person sprinkles the bride's face, hands, and feet with water; the same is done for the groom. As soon as the bride's preparations are finished, her family sends a messenger to the groom. Then, to the playing of gongs, the groom and his party proceed to the bride's house.

With a blanket over her head, the bride sits on a cushion in the center of the house. The bride's sister or another female relative escorts the groom into the house and takes off the blanket. Careful not to touch the bride, the groom sits down next to her. The old person who sprinkled her with water before the ceremony feeds the groom, just as the one who sprinkled the groom feeds the bride; the couple give rings, bracelets, and other gifts to these old people. After this, all the assembled kin and guests eat in silence, being careful not to drop anything or sneeze, both of which constitute bad omens. After eating, the bride's kin forms a team to sing poetry (*s'lingon*) in praise of the bride's qualities; the groom's kin do the same for the groom. This is an opportunity to haggle over the final bride-price. After the *s'lingon* comes the *klakak*, the all-night singing of the *Todbulol* epic; the story enralls the audience, and some episodes move young women to cry. At daybreak, the groom's family hands over the bride-price. The groom then lives with the bride's family for a time determined by the withering of a branch taken from the forest. Then, another wedding ceremony is held at the groom's house, where the couple stays until they buy their own house.

Important families may choose to hold *mo'minum*, six feasts, alternating between the bride's side and the groom's. All T'boli have the right to attend the *mo'minum*. The bride's side builds a special house for the hundreds of guests, while the groom's side sets up a house-like structure (*tabule*) for the hanging of gifts (especially antique china plates). The bride's relatives hang gift blankets from a long bamboo frame in front of the guest house. The groom's relatives carry the *tabule* and pass it under the wall of blankets. The celebration includes mock combat dances depicting rivalry over women. The singing of the *Todbulol* epic occupies the whole night. The following morning, horsefights are held, involving as many as 15 pairs of horses (the horses represent the bride's and groom's respective kin); gambling over the fights is intense.

A person's soul is believed to leave the body during sleep and reenter it upon waking. Evil spirits or divine punishment cause death, the permanent separation of the soul from the body. After a death, family members do not cry for several hours, lest the deceased's spirit return. Small children who died are wrapped in a blanket or mat and hung up high in a tree. Everyone else is put into a boat-shaped coffin made by the *tau mo lungon*, a person specializing in making them. Paintings on the coffin reflect the deceased's specialty, for instance, stars and moon for a poet. The deceased's personal belongings are placed in the coffin. The coffin is left open to give all the bereaved a chance to stroke the body for protection against a similar fate. The coffin of an illustrious *datu* is suspended over

a fire; the grease that trickles out is made into a dipping sauce for sweet potatoes. Those who eat them acquire the excellent qualities of the deceased. The corpse is never left unattended in the house; those keeping vigil play games, tell riddles, and dance.

For burial, the coffin is placed in a house-like structure in a pit. The burial party returns home by a different route than they originally took to get to the burial site. Once home, to ward off evil spirits that may have followed them, they jump over two swords stuck in the ground to form an upright "X." Later, they bathe to purify themselves. All food of the deceased's is consumed, all marketable objects are sold, and the family abandons the house to build another.

The deceased's spirit returns if unhappy in the other world.

## **<sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The leaders of T'boli communities are *datu*, elders who are consulted on the unwritten customary law and who settle intertribal disputes. A *datu* cannot inherit the position but earns it through winning the esteem of others (for instance, through prowess in combat). The *datu* decides punishment for those who violate custom, imposing fines or requiring the transgressor to do service for the offended party.

T'boli value hospitality so much that they will even kill their last hen to feed a guest. When passing a house, a person calls out; the owners of the house will invite the person to eat. T'boli exchange help with farm work. Families enter friendship pacts, the breaking of which could cause the death of family members.

## **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

For defense from enemies, such as neighboring Manobo groups, T'boli houses are built on hillcrests, with slash-and-burn fields covering the slopes below. Houses are only semipermanent because of the need to open new fields and to abandon a house upon the death of a resident. The *gunu bong* ("big house") resembles a roof on 2-m (6-ft) stilts. The low sloping roof of dried cogon grass overhangs the 1-m-high (3-ft high) bamboo side walls (some of which can open out to extend the floor). The interior is spacious (14 by 9 m or 45 by 30 ft) because of the needs of work (looms are long) and entertaining guests. The central space (*lowo*) is where guests sleep. On either side are the *blaba* where family members sit, work, and chat. On one end is the *desyung*, the place of honor, with a Muslim-style *k'labu* canopy at the center, decorated with piles of mats (a status symbol) and cushions. The sleeping quarters (*dofil*) flank the *desyung*, sometimes raised 1 m (3 ft) above the rest of the house. At the other end of the house is the *döl*, the vestibule floored not with bamboo but with heavy wooden planks. Here is the hearth, a utility area (*fato kohu*) along the wall, and a ladder going down to the ground. Horses are tethered under the house. For a toilet, a low bamboo perch is set up some distance from the house. T'boli bathe in rivers or lakes. Beside the *gunu bong* stands a granary, a similar structure though smaller.

Average family income in the SOCCSKARGEN (Southern Mindanao) region, of which the T'boli's South Cotabato province is a part, amounted to 114,000 pesos (US\$2,235) in 2006, the third lowest in the country (above MIMAROPA [Mindoro-Masbate-Romblon-Palawan] and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), cf. the national average of ₱173,000, the National Capital Region's ₱311,000, Southern Tagalog's

₱198,000, and those of the neighboring Davao and Northern Mindanao regions, ₱135,000 and ₱142,000, respectively.

According to the 2000 census, 15.5% of households in South Cotabato had access to a community faucet, 14.5% to a faucet of their own, 19.4% to a shared deep well, 15.2% to a shallow well, and 14.7% to a household deep well, while 16.4% obtained their water from springs, lakes, rivers, or rain. More than half of households (52.5%) disposed of their garbage by burning it and 21.4% by dumping it into a household pit; only 8.2% had it picked up by a collection truck. 38.7% of houses were lit with kerosene lamps, 57.8% with electricity, and 2.2% with firewood. 68.3% possessed a radio, 37% a television, 25.5% a refrigerator, 10.8% a VCR, 6.4% a telephone or cell phone, 13.7% a washing machine, and 10.6% a motorized vehicle.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Marriages with blood relatives up to and including second cousins are taboo. Those who can afford it may take more than one wife. A household includes from six to eight people, a nuclear family plus other relatives. There are no villages. Houses are scattered, usually an hour's walk from each other, although related families may build houses closer to each other. Weddings and funerals bring together related households who otherwise function independently.

*Tao matunga*, women versed in abortion techniques, assist women who fear loss of face or the pain of childbirth or who have too many children already. During pregnancy, a woman observes many taboos, including avoiding cooking as this will give the child enormous eyes. Husbands assist midwives.

The orders of a husband or father must be obeyed (but wives have the right to argue their point of view). In the past, parents sold a gravely disrespectful child to non-kin; the parent's siblings or cousins, however, were obliged to buy the child back. The eldest male child inherits the father's rights.

Grounds for divorce are sterility, incompatibility, and infidelity (a husband may kill an unfaithful wife). If the wife is at fault, her family returns the bride-price; otherwise, it is divided between the families.

## **11 CLOTHING**

At five to six years of age, girls begin to use cosmetics like older women, plucking and painting their eyebrows, using lipstick and face powder bought from non-T'boli lowlanders, and arranging their hair into the traditional coiffure with a comb stuck into it horizontally. Beautification for both sexes includes filing and blackening of teeth and tattooing. After death, the tattoos on the forearms and backs of the hands are believed to glow as guides to the dead. As an endurance game, men and boys put hot coals on their arms to make scars.

The T'boli use their traditional clothing for daily wear and not for tourist entertainment, as other groups do. Women wear a *luwek*, a tube sarong, and a long-sleeved, tight-fitting blouse. Blouses for manual labor are black or dark blue; otherwise, heavily embroidered blouses are worn. These may also be worn with lowlander skirts or, less commonly now, Magindanao *malong* (sarongs). The finest blouse is the *k'gal binsiwit*, which is covered with shell spangles.

A woman is not properly dressed without jewelry. These include earrings of shell or glass, necklaces, and beadwork chokers. The *köwöl* or *bëklaw* is a chain that runs from earlobe to earlobe under the chin. Women also wear massive chain-mail

girdles, the finest of which include beadwork and have small hawk bells hanging along their lower edge.

Men wear *olew* (turbans) or conical bamboo hats. From a decorative brass belt hangs a sword that may be a long-bladed *sudeng* with a hardwood hilt; a *kafilan*, a large machete; or a 71-cm (28-in) *tok* with incised geometric designs. Narrow shields come to three points at either end. Women also carry knives for work and defense.

## **12 FOOD**

Although an elaborate vocabulary for fruits and other edible plants indicates better nutrition in the past, T'boli meals today are simple, consisting of sweet potatoes, cassava, or maize eaten with vegetables and fish or lake snails. Because of poverty, rice, meat, and eggs are prepared only for feasts or guests.

T'boli prefer dishes that are spicy (using ginger, lemon grass, and onions) as well as pungent (chili, or *male*, is part of every meal). Obtained from Muslim traders, salt and sugar are precious. Wines from palm sap and sugarcane are also bought from lowland traders; the T'boli do not drink to excess. Betel-nut-chewing is an integral part of meetings and gatherings.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Parents train their children through cautionary tales. Because of the region's isolation, access to formal education remains limited, though less so than in the past.

According to the 2000 census, of the population over the age of five years in South Cotabato as a whole, 41.1% had completed elementary school, 29% high school, and 8.4% college or university. 2000 literacy levels in Southern Mindanao ranged from over 95% in Davao City to 80.4% in Sarangani province; the percentage for the T'boli's rural South Cotabato province was likely closer to Sarangani's.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

According to myth, the T'boli's ancestors fashioned musical instruments to imitate the sound of the souls of those who had perished in the deluge. These are the *d'wegey* (a vertically held bamboo violin), the *hagalong* (a spindle-shaped two-stringed guitar), and the *kubing* (Jew's harp). Other instruments are the *t'nongnong* (a deerskin-headed wooden drum), the *agong* (a large gong struck by the household head to ward off evil spirits), the *k'lintang* (a horizontal set of eight graduated gongs, played with two sticks), the *s'loli* (a 0.6-m or 2-ft bamboo flute), the *s'ludoy* (a bamboo zither), and the *feu* (a small horn). Leisure time is devoted to making music. The most popular song is "Ye Daddang," about a husband who hacks up his unfaithful wife.

## **15 WORK**

Hunting with bow and spears used to be important, but now the T'boli rely more on slash-and-burn agriculture and fishing. The main crops are dry rice, maize, and sweet potatoes. Observation of the stars determines the planting schedule.

## **16 SPORTS**

Children make music, dance, and play tag and *sungka* (a game using beads and a long tray with holes cut into it). Adults gamble on cards and cockfights.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

See the article entitled *Filipinos*.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Ginton, son of the god D'wata, was the first metalworker and ranks with the gods of life, death, mountains, and forests. His gifts to humanity include the *singkil* (brass anklets), *blonso* (brass bracelets), *hilöt* (women's chain-mail girdles), *t'sing* (rings), and *kafilan* and *tok* (swords). Men are the smiths, though women often operate the capstans. Smiths recycle old gongs and car parts for metal and use no set proportions in making alloys. Swords are made of *balatok*, tempered steel, and are strong enough for cutting down trees. The lost-wax process is employed to make anklets, buckles, betel boxes, hawk bells, and sword hilts.

The ideal maiden is proficient in weaving. A woman uses tie-dyeing to make designs from memory on handlooms, which are 0.5 m by 3.5 m (1.5 ft by 12 ft). The material is of hemp fiber, and the dyes come from particular leaves and roots. The complex, repetitive, geometric patterns include abstract representations of animals (crabs, birds, frogs, a python's markings). Frogs represent rain, birds the souls of the dead, and a *bangala* (a man in a house) a person's life force (also used as a tattoo design).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Lowlanders with money and guns have been pushing the T'boli farther up into the hills. Because T'boli lack a notion of private property, lowlanders can easily stake legal claims to T'boli land.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Among the T'boli, men slightly (50.7%) outnumbered women. In the South Cotabato population as a whole, more women had a college undergraduate education or higher and received academic degrees than men by a substantial margin; elementary school completion, a measure likely more relevant to the T'boli themselves, was lower for girls than for boys; 53.9% of elementary school graduates were male while only 51% of the population was male.

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—revised by A. J. Abalihin

# THAI

**PRONUNCIATION:** TIE

**LOCATION:** Thailand

**POPULATION:** 65 million

**LANGUAGE:** Thai

**RELIGION:** Buddhism; mix of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Thai in Thailand today are a Thai-speaking group who gradually moved from the north of ancient Southeast Asia or what is now southern China, into the area of the Mekong and Chao Phraya river basins, overcoming Mon and Khmer peoples and mixing with them. The Thai are related culturally and linguistically to other Tai peoples such as the Shan in Burma and the Lao of North and northeast Thailand and Laos. Other Tai-speaking peoples are found in India and Vietnam, but the largest group is in southern China. A Thai kingdom called Siam developed along the lower Chao Phraya River.

Thailand was never directly colonized by Western imperialism. The British and French agreed to leave the country as a buffer zone between the British colonial holdings in Burma and the French colonies in Indochina. However, Thailand suffered many disadvantages from the extraterritorial treaties forced on it by European powers and the United States. A bloodless coup led by Western-educated Thai elites put an end to the absolute monarchy in 1932. A constitutional monarchy and an early attempt at democracy were established, but conflicts within the new government and charges of communism against some political figures who appeared to be "left" led to a successful military coup. Since then, the Thai political scene has oscillated between periods of dictatorship and democracy. Student uprisings in 1973 and 1976 and pro-democracy demonstrations in 1992 tried to halt the power of the military, who have not hesitated to fire on unarmed demonstrators. The right wing used accusations of Communism as an effective tool against their political opponents, especially students and journalists, during the 1960s and 70s, declaring them a threat to the national trilogy—nation, religion, and king. Democracy in Thailand is not yet stable, and the government, both politicians and the bureaucracy, is very corrupt. Although King Phumipol, the present king, is greatly loved and revered and has proved to be very influential in many political crises, the future is difficult to predict. In the late 1990s and into the 2000s, governments were civilian and democratically elected, but in September 2006, the military once again stepped into politics, carrying out a bloodless coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra while he was at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. An interim prime minister was appointed a month later. By December 2007, the military junta had drafted a new constitution and held general elections, marking the beginning of the transition back to civilian rule. The People Power Party (PPP), seen as the reincarnation of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party, was victorious. In January 2008, an elected parliament convened, and Samak Sundaravej was sworn in as prime minister. Thaksin Shinawatra returned from exile.



Thailand has a minority Muslim population, concentrated in its southern ethnic Malay provinces. A decades-old separatist struggle in the region—which abated in the 1980s—emerged again in 2004. The violence has mostly targeted members of Thailand’s majority Buddhist population.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Situated in the middle of mainland Southeast Asia with a tropical monsoon climate, Thailand is approximately 514,000 sq km and shares boundaries with Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. There are three main seasons—the hot dry season, the rainy season, and a short, mild cool season. Thailand has four major regions, roughly divided by geographical and cultural characteristics: the central floodplain nurtured by the Chao Phraya River and its tributaries; the mountainous north whose largest forest areas are rapidly being destroyed; the dry northeast on the Khorat Plateau bordering the Mekong River to the east; and the long coastlines of the peninsula south bounded by the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. The capital city of Bangkok, called Krungthep by the Thais and once called the “Venice of the East,” is divided by the Chao Phraya River. Its location on a floodplain, together with the filling in of the numerous canals to make roads, brings annual flooding and the gradual sinking of the city. The south often suffers catastrophic floods and the northeast often receives insufficient rainfall, or if it does, its poor soils do not hold water. In general, Thailand is a land of abundance, producing and exporting various crops and many varieties of fruit. It suffers relatively few natural calamities.

The Thai population reached 65 million in 2007, with 0.66% annual growth. Around 11 million people are living in Bangkok, the only metropolis. More than 85% of the population speak dialects of Thai, but the Central Thai dialect is the only official language. Life expectancy is 72.5 years.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Many dialects of Thai language are spoken all over the country, and Malay is used in the extreme south. However, because of the government’s effort to suppress and marginalize minority ethnic identities, the Central Thai dialect, or Standard Thai, became the only official language taught in schools and used in all official affairs.

Thai is a tonal language and its alphabet is derived from Mon and Khmer scripts. The language has been influenced by Pali and Sanskrit from the Hindu-Buddhist civilization of India. Last names were just introduced to Thailand in the early 20th century, but calling a person by his or her last name is very unusual. Most Thais like to have elaborate names with Pali-Sanskrit roots and one-syllable nicknames, with or without meanings—for example, Suwanna (given name) Rattanasiri (last name) and Lek (nickname).

“Sawaddee” is used for greeting regardless of time.

“Mai Pen Rai” means “it’s O.K., never mind”. Women add the polite word “Kha” and men the word “khrab” to phrases and sentences when speaking.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Thais had an indigenous creation myth before the arrival of Buddhism. Than is the Spirit of the Sky, the greatest spirit, who first created everything. In the past, there was nothing on earth, no humans, animals, plants, sun, or moon. Than



brought a bottle gourd to earth, then pierced it open with an iron. Five types of human beings came out and all were brothers and sisters. Than taught them the way of life and gave them tools to make a living.

Thai society is based on rice culture, so rice myths are very important to agricultural society and rituals. According to legend, the original rice seed was as huge as five times a man’s fist. But because humans became more and more greedy, the rice seed became smaller and smaller. Mae Phosop is the Spirit of Rice. The old still teach the young, “Don’t leave rice in your dish, Mae Phosop will feel sad.”

Si Thanonchai is a very popular local trickster hero whose witty and cunning character many Thais identify with. The adventurous Si Thanonchai always cleverly survived life crises, engaged in devilry without being caught, and teased and troubled others, including monks and kings, without being seriously punished. The popularity of the story reflects an expression of the suppressed feelings of common people under pressure from a moral and hierarchical society.

## 5 RELIGION

Approximately 95% of Thais are Buddhists, and regional people adhere to their own religious traditions of Theravada Buddhism. The mix of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism is the core of Thai beliefs, cosmology, and cultures. Hindu beliefs and animism are also seen in popular astrology and fortune-telling. Many southern Thais are Muslims. Most tribal people maintain animistic beliefs and some have con-



A Thai woman works in front of her house in Kalasin province, Thailand. (Charlotte McDonald-Gibson/AFP/Getty Images)

verted to Christianity. Many Chinese Thais follow Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, and ancestor worship.

Belief in spirit worship, or animism, is pervasive and intertwined with Buddhism. Spirits are believed to inhabit almost everything—houses, earth, all forms of life, etc.—and can help or harm humans. Large old trees are frequently tied with pieces of colorful cloth and worshipped by local people. Spirit houses are noticed everywhere: in houses, in neighborhood communities, and even in modern office buildings, shopping malls, and hotels.

Because Theravada Buddhism is a scripture-based religion and its teaching rests firmly on wisdom, not faith, it is very difficult for ordinary people to follow. Numerous cults have emerged, especially among the urban middle class, in the increasingly consumerist Thai society to meet the spiritual needs of the people. Some Buddhist sects and temples have become large, politically involved, and business-like organizations.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most holidays are of a religious or royal nature. *Songkran*, the Thai New Year, derived from Hindu astrology, is the longest official holiday of the year, April 13–15. Traditionally, great numbers of people visit their home villages to pay respects

to their parents and elderly relatives. Nowadays, Songkran is mainly celebrated by throwing water on each other like crazy. Some will add white clay or scents to the water for more lasting effect. It is clearly the messiest holiday in Thailand.

The Chinese New Year in mid-February is not an official holiday, but it is a big festival among those who have Chinese ancestors, which includes much of Bangkok and some cities in the South. Some Chinese Thai employers give days off and bonuses to their Thai employees. It is a time for reunion of family members, who gather to worship gods and ancestors. It is also the happiest period for many children, who collect gift money in red or pink envelopes distributed by their elder relatives.

These two grand holidays close down much of Bangkok and empty the roads. Other major holidays are the King's and Queen's birthdays, religious and official holidays.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Thai individual rites, such as birth, ordination into the monkhood, or marriage, are basically associated with *khwan*, the body spirit or life soul. In the past, most young Thai men spent some period in the monkhood. Although the numbers have declined, many Thai men continue this highly valued tradition. Ordination is more common in rural areas and of longer

duration than in the cities. At present, ordination ceremonies are occasions for social display and involve lavish expenditures in rural areas as well as among more affluent urban people.

Being a monk means transcending ordinary life and gaining higher status than most people, including one's parents. Women are not allowed to be ordained, but they play a crucial role in supporting Buddhist communities. Becoming a monk is believed to gain great merit, to the person himself and to his parents, while becoming a nun is often viewed as a way to escape life's problems.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Although they are a relaxed and fun-loving people, the Thais are relatively concerned about manners. The head is regarded as the most revered part of the body. Improper position or display of the feet is always considered impolite. Gesturing with the feet is terribly rude. Ideally, one should keep one's head lower than that of a superior, such as a teacher. Seniority and authority still play an important role in most social relations.

Greeting with kisses is virtually unknown. The most common way of greeting for all, with regard to seniority and authority, is the *wai* (made by putting the palms together at chest level and bowing). Almost all Thais remove their shoes before entering houses and monasteries. It is inappropriate for lovers to hug or kiss in public. However, holding hands or hugging among the same sex does not have sexual connotation.

In general, the Thais are not very time-conscious for ordinary human affairs but, surprisingly, a minute can't be missed when it comes to supernatural affairs or an auspicious time for ceremonies. Being late because of a traffic jam is the most popular all-occasion excuse in Bangkok. The pace of life in rural areas and villages is usually much slower.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

About 68.5% of the Thai population lives in rural areas, but people are being affected by rapid urbanization. Running water, electricity, and health centers have been extended to most rural areas. Wood or thatch houses built on stilts clustered together in villages or strung out along the rivers or canals are common scenes in the upper country. People often sit under the houses during the heat of the day doing small chores. Some farm animals are also kept there.

Consumerism makes many low-income people struggle to possess basic middle-class property such as televisions, stereos, VCRs, DVDs, etc., while it makes the middle class desire even more luxury in life. For example, changing a Toyota to a BMW would be highly desired. A number of Thai middle- and upper-class people have made a worldwide reputation for being shop-aholics.

Housing and land are increasingly expensive. More working people live in apartments and condominiums. Expensive houses may exist on the same street with slum dwellings. Dining out or buying ready-made food to go is more common than cooking among people living in towns, because of the convenience and affordability. Food hygiene varies from excellent in some restaurants to poor for street peddlers. Many slums in Bangkok have poor housing facilities and living conditions.

Millions of people in Bangkok sacrifice several hours every day in traffic and suffer from extremely high air and noise pollution. Leaving home for workplaces or schools before 5:00 AM and getting home after 8:00 PM is routine for thousands

of people. Waterways attract more people who want to avoid massive road traffic jams. Buses and ferries are always dangerously overcrowded, and rush hours extend almost throughout the day. Elevated train and highway projects to alleviate traffic congestion are under construction.

As an unplanned city, Bangkok sometimes has brief periods of water cutoffs and power shortages. Construction work and repairs of water and sewage systems, roads, or buildings are seen everywhere. Uncollected garbage and accumulated sewage are also major problems in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, the second largest city.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

In villages and rural areas, stem families can still be found, although nuclear families are the norm and urbanization and socio-economic change are breaking family bonds. Children are taught to respect and obey their elders, and elderly people in the family will usually be taken care of with gratitude by younger generations. As people's lives are getting more complicated, care for the elderly is becoming a problem.

Until getting married, most young people do not move out of the family, even if they are already working. Many continue to live with their parents after marriage. In the past, Thai men moved to their wife's household or settled in a new household near the wife's kinsmen and worked for their wife's family. The last daughter usually inherited her parents' property. Now that work and economics are the major concern, people do not necessarily follow the old norms. Having live-in maids for house chores and looking after young children was very common in middle-class households, but it is less and less common now that rural women can find alternative employment in factories.

Dogs and cats are normally kept outside the house and generally are not pampered pets.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The most common traditional lower garment worn by women in the fields or at the markets is *pha sin* or *pha thung*. *Pha thung*, literally "bag cloth," is a tube of material that looks like a bottomless bag, about one meter wide. The length is typically from the waist to the ankle. When worn, the extra width will be folded in front and the extra top will be tucked into a roll. One size fits all. *Phakhaoma*, a strip of cloth, usually in a checked design, is comfortably worn at knee length by men in villages, both at home and in public. *Phakhaoma* is a multipurpose favorite garment. It can be worn or just loosely tied around the waist or used as a towel, headwear, belt, sheet, etc.

Jeans, T-shirts, and shirts can be seen everywhere. Western boutique-style attire is preferred by middle- and upper-class people. Because of the hot and humid weather, most Thai wear sandals. Shorts are not generally seen in public, except on young children and as part of schoolboy uniforms.

## **12 FOOD**

For its great variety and tastiness, Thai cuisine is one of the best in the world—not to mention its delicious tropical fruits. Thai food is a delightful mix of native style and adaptations of Mon, Lao, Chinese, and Indian cooking. Regional foods have their own distinctive characteristics. Foreigners acquire a taste for the chilis and spices that are the salient characteristics

of Thai cuisine. Authentic preparation and cooking of many dishes can be very complicated and time consuming.

Rice is usually the main course with side dishes. Glutinous or sticky rice is more identified with the north and northeast. Sticky rice and coconut milk are also used in many wonderful desserts. A spoon and fork are the most common utensils for general food, while the fingers are usually preferred for sticky rice. Chopsticks are also widely used when eating noodles and in Chinese restaurants. In urban areas in Thailand, one can always find something delicious and inexpensive to eat 24 hours a day. Three meals a day is the general idea, but the Thais love to eat whenever they feel like it and have perfected the art of snacking.

The category of *Yum* (mixed hot and sour salads) often fills a page or more in a restaurant's menu. *Yumwunsen*, vermicelli salad usually with cooked minced pork and a choice of chicken, shrimp, squid, or all, is very delicious. Mix boiled vermicelli with minced pork, chicken, shrimp, or squid together with sliced onion in a bowl already prepared with a sauce of fish sauce, lime juice, sugar, and fresh chilis. The real taste of *Yum* comes from the adding of fresh celery, mint, and basil leaves. Many other *Yum* follow the same rule and you can vary the ingredients with different meats or vegetables.

### 13 EDUCATION

Buddhist temples, *wat*, in the past used to be the sole source of most knowledge, both secular and religious. When Western-style education was introduced in the early 20th century, temples rapidly began to lose their educational role. The literacy rate in Thailand is high, about 92.6%, mainly the result of the government's effort to educate people for social and economic development. Education is free and compulsory through the sixth grade, and the government is considering extending it to grade nine.

Choosing good schools at all levels is highly competitive in Bangkok since it is an established value to enter well-known schools. The standards of schools vary and are much lower in rural areas. Even to enter grade one, many private schools set up their own exams for children who are often prepared by their enthusiastic and pushy parents. Other than exams, the most notorious way to enter many famous private schools comes from donations or money under the table.

Many high school students in cities get extra tutoring to prepare for the extremely competitive entrance examination for government universities. About 10% of examinees get seats, and the rest may go to private colleges and universities or make another effort the next year. There are also a number of vocational schools around the country. But because entrance exams are the sole criterion for admission and few rural residents' education is sufficient to pass, an attempt is being made to consider high school performance and other criteria.

At some universities, there is a pervasive practice of upper-classmen taking male college freshmen to prostitutes. Hazing of freshmen has become a popular tradition and is sometimes brutal. Salaries for government civil servants are low, so many university lecturers devote themselves to more well-paid outside jobs and may teach as a hobby. Studying abroad, especially in America, is very popular, and sometimes a fashion among the middle and upper classes.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Masked drama, or *khon* of the royal court tradition, is the most exquisite, stylized, and spectacular of Thai performing arts. Only episodes from the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*, or *Ramakien* in Thai, are performed in the *khon*. The masks, dance, and musical accompaniment are considered sacred. However, some clowns and comic actions are added to attract the audience. The main masked characters are demons and monkeys, whereas principal human characters and celestial beings do not wear masks. Folk dances vary from region to region. Many folk performances involve dance, courting poetry, and witty improvised repartee. The shadow-puppet theater, *nang talung*, is a popular entertainment in the south.

There are many different types of Thai traditional music in the various regions. Originally, Thai music's main function was to accompany rituals, ceremonies, and performances. The most important ensemble is *pi phat*, made up of various melodic percussion instruments, Thai oboe, and drums. The gongs have long symbolized sacredness and power. Music is not allowed in Buddhist teaching but a traditional Thai funeral likes to have a boisterous *pi phat* ensemble to cheer the host and the guests. *Khaen*, a mouth-organ instrument made of tubes of bamboo has a history of more than 3,000 years. This wonderful instrument, which used to be played in the Thai court, later was belittled because of its Lao origins.

The oldest and greatest epic of Thai-Lao literature is a poem of about 20,000 lines called *Thao Hung Khun Cheung*, telling the story of a legendary hero whose deeds were told on both sides of the Mekong River. It was probably written during the 15th century. Thai folk literature is primarily based on oral tradition, so most early literature was written by monks and Thai court elites. Some Thai classics, modern novels, and short stories are also available in English translation.

### 15 WORK

Approximately 49% of the Thai labor force works in the agricultural sector, but this is changing rapidly. Thai society is in transition from an agricultural to an industrialized and service-oriented society. Because of Thai social structure and its cultural system, Thai women have always played an active role in the social, economic, and household spheres. Rice is the most important crop grown throughout the country, while rubber is extensively produced in the south. Thai farmers are still very poor and suffer from relatively low productivity and low prices. About 10% of the population lives in absolute poverty.

The growing economy, urbanization, and industrialization attract people to city jobs, although labor is cheap. Growing landlessness also pushes people to leave villages and crowd into Bangkok. People with technical skills like engineers and computer or technical specialists are in high demand, while social science and humanities graduates are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed unless they turn to business or service careers. As Thai tourism is booming, large numbers of local people are also involved in the tourist business and services. Bureaucratic occupations that used to be regarded as prestigious are increasingly turned down as the private sector offers much higher pay and a more promising future.

Poor children in urban areas may contribute to family income through various activities such as selling newspapers and small jasmine wreaths on the streets. Some survive by finding sanctuary in Buddhist temples, becoming temple boys who

eat and sleep in temples and help with chores. Most middle-class youth, however, are not obliged to take up part-time jobs and are usually supported by their parents all the way through their education.

## 16 SPORTS

Thai kick-boxing is a very popular spectator sport and is regularly televised. Traditionally, Thai boxing is usually accompanied by a small Thai ensemble to stimulate the performance. A well-trained boxer can attack his opponent with his feet, knees, or elbows or a combination of them both effectively and gracefully.

Badminton and soccer are widely enjoyed even in the most densely populated areas. Another popular game is called *takraw*, in which a woven rattan ball is kept in the air by using different parts of the body except the hands. There are two broad types of *takraw*: one like volleyball with a net, and one like basketball with a suspended hoop.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Traditional entertainments are dying and popular culture is booming. *Mohlam*, folk singing in Lao, is perhaps the only surviving traditional art, with large numbers of northeastern and Lao fans coming through the commercial tape and music video companies. Televised Thai soap operas and other television programs are closely followed and enjoyed by most Thais of all ages and occupations, from peasants to prime ministers. Popular Thai singers have a huge following among teenagers and also adults. Most Thai movie stars and singers have exclusively local fame, but a few are known in other Asian countries.

Modern-style entertainment like movies, discos, nightclubs and karaoke bars attract the younger generation in the cities. Almost all Thai films are produced for domestic consumption and the standard is low. There are a few good films that capture some international interest. Hollywood action films always make a big hit and lots of money.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Exquisite Thai hand-woven silk and cotton, wood carvings, silverwork, basketry and lacquer ware are most well-known in the north, especially in Chiang Mai, the center for crafts. Beautiful hand-woven textiles and basketry can also be found in the northeast. Raising turtledoves and other birds especially for singing competitions, is a popular hobby in the south.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Thailand is a rapidly developing nation, with continuously high economic growth. But the costs are enormous and Thailand is confronting numerous social crises. The increasing gap between the poor and the rich is very deep-rooted. Capitalist development and consumerism has led to the collapse of local communities, bringing about many related serious problems. Thailand is notorious for its sex industry and especially its child prostitutes, and has a high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS. Deforestation and environmental destruction continue to be major problems. Bangkok is one of Asia's most heavily-congested cities, and is plagued by high levels of pollution and traffic.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

There are some 300,000 Buddhist monks in Thailand, but Thailand's Theravada tradition does not permit the full ordination of women. Thai women can take religious vows, shave their heads, and wear white, but they have a fairly servile position compared to monks. Women in rural areas have long maintained an important role in family, community, and work life. Thai women in Bangkok, like other Asian women in urban centers, are quite cosmopolitan. Many Thai women have found work in the growing service sector of the economy. As such, they are demanding new rights and opportunities.

Thailand has an ambivalent attitude toward homosexuality. There are significant numbers of gays, lesbians, and transgenders in Thailand. Thailand has three annual gay pride events in Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket. In 1995, the world's first all-gay village, Flower Town, was built in the central mountain area. Cross-dressing and openly gay men are stars in most popular television shows. There are several Bangkok gay neighborhoods and more than 60 gay bars and sex establishments. It is not uncommon to see gay men walking arm in arm in the street. Newspapers carry commitment ceremonies alongside traditional nuptials. However Thai lesbians face far more resistance than their male counterparts. The Thai patriarchal structure has a much more casual attitude toward male sex, regarding experimentation as one way of releasing pent-up energy, while seeing women who do the same as a direct challenge to male control. However tolerant of homosexuality Bangkok seems, there is little public discussion about homosexuality, and the presence of many gay bars has as much to do with maintaining the profits of the tourist industry as with the social acceptance of homosexuals. As such, one expert termed Thailand's ambivalent attitude toward homosexuality as a "curious mixture of tolerance, ignorance, and evasion."

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—revised by J. Hobby

# TIBETANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** tuh-BET-uhns

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bod Qiang

**LOCATION:** China (Tibet Autonomous Region); India

**POPULATION:** 5.4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Tibetan and Chinese

**RELIGION:** Lamaism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The middle reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River in present-day Tibet were the cradle of the Tibetan people and of Tibetan civilization. According to literature written in ancient Tibetan language, the “Six Yak Tribes” of Tibet took shape in the mountainous southern area of present-day Tibet. Ancient Chinese books called them “Bod Qiang.” In the 6th century, the chieftain of the Yarlung tribe became “Gambo” (king) by unifying the other tribes through political alliance and military force. The new kingdom established direct communications with the Chinese and other nationalities in northwest China. In the early half of the 7th century, Songtsen Gampo ruled the whole Tibetan area. He made Lhasa the capital of all Tibet. Under his leadership, Tibetan writing, calendar, laws, weights and measures, etc., were created and set up. He divided his territory into four provinces and put them under the command of Tubo, establishing a dynasty of his own based in part on the slave system. The Tang Dynasty (618–907) of China and the Kingdom of Nepal agreed to be related to Tibet by marriage. It was these matrimonial relations that led to the coming of Buddhism and of Chinese civilization into Tibet. Princess Wenchen, Songtsen Gampo’s Chinese bride, came to Tibet in 641 and exerted a deep cultural influence on the Tibetans. Tibet continued to grow in power, and its armies conquered local chieftains in Yunnan and Qinghai and annexed different tribes in the northwest and southwest Tibetan provinces. On one occasion in 763, they made a breakthrough into Chang’an (present Xi’an). Because of its excessive military activities, internal strife, and slave uprisings, the Tibetan dynasty was weakened and ultimately collapsed in 877. Between the 10th and the 12th centuries, local governments were established in the former provinces, none being able to recreate the political unity. A large part of Tibet submitted to the authority of the Song Dynasty (960–1279). The Emperor of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) put an end to the state of disunity, subordinating all of Tibet under the command of his central government. The administration of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) continued the Yuan policy toward Tibet, appointing Tibetan officials in the northwest and southwest Tibetan areas. Furthermore, the Ming recognized the three “Dharma Kings” and “five nobilities” of Tibet. The central government of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) set up a special ministry to administer matters relating to the main non-Chinese nationalities of China, in particular Tibet, Mongolia, etc. It recognized formally the two Living Buddha of Gelupa (Yellow Sect of Tibetan Buddhism), the Dalai Lama (1693), and the Panchen Lama (1713); established a local government in Tibet; and appointed a resident minister to Tibet, who handled affairs jointly with the local government. This system continued

under the Republic of China until 1949. As for the Tibetans dwelling outside Tibet, they were under the administration of provinces where they lived, namely Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. Following the liberation in 1949, the People’s Republic of China established the Tibetan Autonomous Region, covering all of former Tibet. The political power of the former lamas was abolished and transferred to civilian government, whose Tibetan leaders are nominated by the central government in Beijing.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tibetans are disseminated on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau at an average altitude of 4.8 km (3 mi) above sea level. The Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau extends to the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world, where both the Yellow River and the Yangtze River take their source. The plateau contains a great many lakes, including Qinghai Lake, the largest saltwater lake in China. The Tibetans are mainly concentrated in Tibet Autonomous Region, although considerable Tibetan populations are also found in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. The overall Tibetan population in China was estimated at 5.4 million in 2000. There are about 100,000 Tibetans in India, and tens of thousands living in North America and Europe. The mountain barriers composed by the Himalaya, Gangdise, Kunlun, and Tanggula ranges isolated the Tibetan people for centuries. The Yarlung Zangpo River crosses the length of southern Tibet. Southwest Tibet is called the granary of Tibet because of its damp and mild climate, suitable for growing highland barley, wheat, rice, corn, broad beans, and rape (an herb of the mustard family). Northwest Tibet is rather barren, although some river valleys provide pastureland for nomadic cattle-raising. Tibet abounds with potential hydro-power, solar, and geothermal energy.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Tibetan language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Tibeto-Burman group, Tibetan branch. There are three dialects. Tibetan script, written from left to right, was developed in the beginning of the 7th century. The phonetic alphabet comprises 30 consonants and 4 vowels. Ancient Tibetan script is very important in Buddhist studies, for many sutras originally written in Sanskrit or other languages were lost, and only their Tibetan version is still extant. In urban Tibet, many Tibetans also speak Chinese.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

According to an important Tibetan myth, a divine monkey married an ogress in Yarlung Valley in remote antiquity. They gave birth to six children who multiplied and spread on the earth. However, their descendants lived on wild fruits of the forest and suffered from their hard life until the divine monkey gave them seven kinds of grain. Thereafter, they learned how to farm and speak. It is said that the first descendant who cultivated land in Tibet established himself near Zetang (Tsetang), where some Tibetans still pay homage to their ancestors every year.

Another myth concerns the youngest prince of Jiangsheng (a descendant of God). Having failed to ascend the divine throne, he escaped to a mountain and descended to the Yarlung Valley. A herdsman asked him where he was from. Unable to answer in the language of the herdsman, he could only



point to the mountain. Misunderstanding what he meant by his gestures, the herdsman thought he had descended from the heaven to be king. The boy was carried on the shoulders, given the title Nyentri Tsenpo (king on the shoulders), and became the first king of Tibet.

## 5 RELIGION

Buddhism, originating in northern India, split into two principal schools, *Hinayana* (Small Vehicle) and *Mahayana* (Large Vehicle) after the death of its founder, Sakyamuni. *Hinayana* was stricter and favored monastic life; *Mahayana* was more liberal and addressed itself to society in general. It was *Mahayana* Buddhism that took root in Tibet and interacted with the native Tibetan shamanistic religion, called Bon, to form an original form of Buddhism, namely Lamaism. Many different

lamaist sects arose—the White, the Red, the Flowery, and so on. The Gelupa, or Yellow Sect, which was eventually to dominate Tibet and lead to the establishment of a kind of theocratic state closely allied to the secular nobility, was founded by Tsong Khapa (1357–1419).

Reincarnation was an established Buddhist doctrine. When a high-status lama died, it became the custom to seek his new incarnation (the divine child) among male children who had been born at about the same time. This solved the problem of succession, for monks could not marry and beget heirs.

In western Tibet and pastoral areas in Qinghai and Sichuan, the native religion of Bon still exists. This is a shamanistic faith that worships gods, spirits, and natural phenomena, practicing sacrificial offerings, divination, and shamanistic dance and trance.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are quite a few Tibetan festivals, all established according to the Tibetan calendar (a combination of solar and lunar calendars) and mostly related to their religious traditions. The Tibetan New Year takes place in the first week of January and lasts for three to five days. The Tibetans all dress in their finest clothes. Relatives and friends pay a New Year call to each other and pray for a good year in the monasteries. Tibetan operas are performed. Wearing masks, people disguise themselves as gods; they sing and dance to drive the ghosts away.

The Lantern Festival is held on January 15. Many huge sculptures of birds, animals, and personages made of multi-colored yak butter are paraded in the streets of Lhasa. Various festive lanterns, also made of yak butter, are hung on the trellises. People dance beneath the lanterns all night long.

April 15 marks the double anniversary of the enlightenment of Sakyamuni under the buddhi tree and the date of the Chinese Princess Wenchen's arrival in Tibet. The streets overflow with pilgrims while the monks participate in reciting scriptures and other religious services. People walk round the Potala Palace, go boating on the lake, and then pitch a tent for rest.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

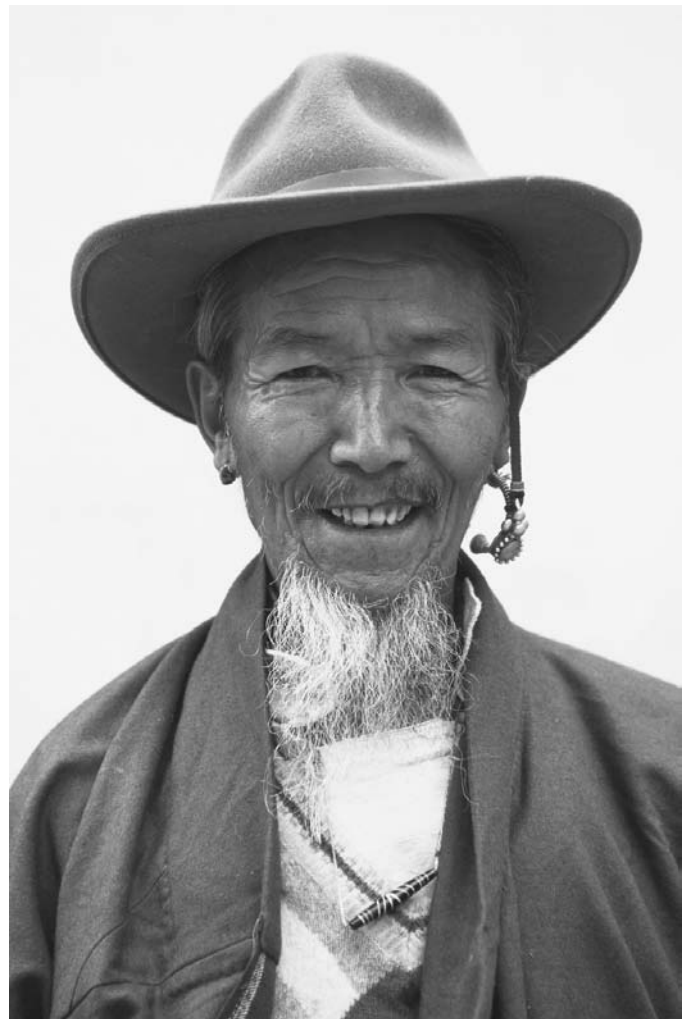
Three or four days after a baby's birth, a tiny piece of *zamba* (the Tibetans' main food) is stuck to the infant's forehead. This is regarded as a purification rite. When the baby completes its first month of life, the parents paint the tip of his nose with soot from the bottom of a pan in order to divert the attention of malevolent ghosts. Accompanied by their relatives, the child's parents go the monastery and pray to the Buddha for protection. They may also call on a wealthy household and ask for their blessing so that the baby may be wealthy when it reaches adulthood.

Girls under 12 comb their hair into two braids; three braids when they are 13 or 14; five braids when they are 15 or 16. When a girl reaches 17, expert female hairdressers are invited to comb her hair into tens of braids to indicate that the girl has reached adulthood.

Tibetan funerary rituals are varied and complex, taking into account the social status of the deceased. "Sky burial" is a common practice closely related to Buddhism. The corpse is placed on a platform on a high, lonely place. Family members are not supposed to be present, while friends of the dead burn piles of pine tree branches nearby. Blood, meat, cheese, milk, butter, and *zamba* are cast over the branches. Heavy smoke rises up to the sky to draw vultures. A professional chops up the body and pounds the bones together with *zamba*. The remains are exposed to the vultures and leftovers are burned into ashes and scattered over the ground. "Water burial" is reserved for widows, widowers, and people of low economic condition; "fire burial" is for lamas; and "ground burial" for those who died of infectious diseases or who were executed as thugs and murderers. "Stupa burial" is a privilege of the Living Buddhas and other high-ranking lamas. The corpse is rubbed with salty water, dried, coated with spices, and then placed in a *stupa* made of gold, copper, wood, or cement, according to the rank of the dead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Tibetans are courteous. When they meet, they stretch their arms, with palms upward, and bow to each other. To show re-



A Tibetan man in Upper Dharmasala, India. (Alison Wright/  
National Geographic/Getty Images)

spect, one nods the head and sticks the tongue out, while the opposite side nods smilingly to return the salute. When people meet for the first time, one must present a *hada*; it is also important on festivals. A *hada* is a long and narrow band of silk (sometimes a cloth), white or light blue, which serves as a symbol of respect. During the presentation, one must hold it on both palms while bowing. If the social position of the two sides is similar, the receiver should take the *hada* also on both palms and return a *hada* of his own. If the *hada* is presented to a Living Buddha, it should be placed before his feet.

Nowadays, young boys and girls are free to meet each other socially. However, some of the restrictions of the past, due to the rigid stratification of society, still influence social behavior between young people of both sexes.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Tibetans build their houses on high ground, facing south, close to water; walls are made by piling up stones or by rammed earth. Houses have two or three stories with a flat roof, many windows, and a courtyard. The living room and bedrooms are located on the second floor, while the first floor is for storage or livestock. Herdsmen dwell in large tents made of canvas or



woven yak wool. The tents are easy to set up and to pack for the nomads' many displacements. The traditional means of transport is the yak or donkey, which may serve as mounts or as draught animals. The Tibetans also use a peculiar yak-skin canoe framed with wood and wrapped by a whole yak skin. The yak is an animal only living in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau; tough and cold-resistant, it is a valuable means of transport. Because of the many rivers criss-crossing the high plateau, bridges are important. The Tibetans have devised different kinds of bridges, such as the chain bridge for walking, the steel cable bridge for sliding, and the simple wooden bridge.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Tibetan family is male-centered. The man inherits and monopolizes the property. Women are subordinate to their husbands, even when he lives with the wife's parents. According to custom, women do have a name, but not a surname. The aristocrats put the house or manor name before their own name. In fact, the title is linked to the property of the hereditary manor and has nothing to do with blood ties. The names are different for different sexes. Most of them originate from Buddhist scriptures.

In the past there was a variety of family structures. Today, most families are monogamous. Polygamy appeared only among the rich and is rarely seen in the present. Polyandry (a woman taking more than one husband) also existed, due mainly to economic factors, such as the inheritance and monopoly of property; it was accepted as part of the social structure. Arranged marriage still exists both among nomads and peasants. Lamas and shamans are usually consulted. The Gelupa, or Yellow, sect of Lamaism strictly forbids its monks from marrying, but those belonging to other sects are allowed to have a wife. In these cases, the wedding follows religious rites and is held in the monastery.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Men living in urban areas wear a felt or fur-trimmed hat, a short vest with sleeves, trousers, and a robe with a long waistband. Those who dwell in rural areas wear a very long robe with very long sleeves and loose collars. They put it on from the top and tie it with a long waistband. The robe has a very large pocket inside above the waistband for storing money and personal articles. The herdsmen wear a worn-out sheep fur all year round and a pair of long trousers. They wear different styles of hats: bell-shaped, tube-shaped, single-peaked, or double-peaked. The hat is made of felt for the summer and of fur or padded cotton for the winter. Tibetan men all wear boots. Women usually wear a robe without sleeves, with a shirt inside and a beautifully designed apron around the waist. A long robe with sleeves is worn during the winter. Women living in pastoral areas wear a worn-out fur over a long skirt. Both sexes wear their hair long and combed into braids. Some males, however, cut their hair short, in particular the monks. In their monasteries, monks wear the *kasaya*, a patchwork outer vestment, usually in purplish-red.

### **12 FOOD**

In rural areas, Tibetans eat highland barley and wheat supplemented by corn and peas. They stir-fry barley and peas and grind them into flour. Then, they mix it with yak butter and tea. This is called zamba. During meals, they knead it with

their fingers in a wooden bowl and make it into a ball before eating. They may alternate and cook zamba into a gruel with meat, wild herbs, and water. Their favorite drinks are buttered tea and wine made of barley. The herdsmen take beef, mutton, and milk products as their staple foods. Buttered tea is also their favorite. In rural areas they take five or six meals a day, while in pastoral areas they usually take three or four. Their tableware includes only a knife and a wooden bowl. The bowl is personal. They do not use chopsticks, but eat zamba and meat with their hands. As a rule, lamas recite scriptures before meals. Meat and fish are not taboo to lamas. However, Tibetan lamas in Gansu and Qinghai provinces prohibit fish, shrimp, chicken, and eggs.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In the past, education was reserved for the monks in the monasteries. Since 1949, a complete educational system from primary school to university (including medical and technical schools) has been developed in Tibet and Qinghai. Furthermore, an increasing number of young Tibetans go to inland cities for various studies. However, the cultural and educational level of the Tibetans is still below average among the national minorities of China.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Anyone who has seen a Tibetan dance must remember the peculiar movements of the dancers' limbs, which differ markedly from the dances of other nationalities. Their long sleeves enhance the charm of their postures. Their songs are high-pitched, mostly in the minor mode. Tibetan opera is usually performed in the street without any stage. Accompanied by a band, they sing while dancing. Most of the singers, if not all, are males. When the melody approaches a climax, the musicians of the band participate in the chorus, heightening the sense of participation. Tibetan literature is rich and diversified, including novels, poems, stories, fables, dramas, biographies, etc.; many works have been translated into other languages and published in other countries. Lamaism has influenced every aspect of Tibetan cultural life: writing, music, architecture, sculpture, etc.

### **15 WORK**

Besides the sheep, goat, yak, horse, and mule, the herdsmen also raise a hybrid ox (from cattle and yak), which is the best draught animal of the plateau as well as a source of milk. The other fine varieties of livestock include the Hequ and Datong horses and the Gongbu mule.

### **16 SPORTS**

Yak racing, comparable to horse racing, is one of the favorite sports of the Tibetans. On account of the yak's eccentric movements, it takes a highly trained expert to mount a racing yak. Tibetans also excel in mountain climbing.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Tibetans have developed their own theater company, opera, music ensembles, ballet ensemble, broadcasting station, television station and film studio, thus ensuring the preservation and development of their cultural life. A great number

of Tibetan newspapers, magazines, monographs, translated works, and literary masterpieces are published each year.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Popular culture has been deeply marked by Lamaism. The figures of Buddha in the monasteries, especially the clay sculptures of the Great Living Buddha (with his “real body” covered by clay) and a great variety of yak buttered figures are all highly skilled sculptures. Gold vessels and silverware include articles for daily use, such as flagons, spoons, chopsticks, bowls, plates, and dishes, as well as ornaments, such as bracelets, rings, and necklaces. *Tangka* is a kind of Tibetan painting for wall hanging, always depicting Buddhist themes.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Lack of formal education is one of the most important social problems facing Tibet today; the problem is due, in part, to the scattering of a thin population over vast expanses of land, making communication and concentration very difficult. However, without new advances in education, there can hardly be any further prosperity and development of the Tibetan nationality.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# TIMORESE

**LOCATION:** East Timor, West Timor (Indonesia)

**POPULATION:** 2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Tetum, Portuguese, Indonesian.

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Timorese people live on the island of Timor in Southeast Asia and also on some nearby islands. Because of their colonial history—the Portuguese occupying the eastern half of the island and several enclaves in the west and the Dutch the remainder—important differences have emerged over time. During the Indonesian Occupation from 1975 until 1999 both West Timor and East Timor were provinces of the Republic of Indonesia, and there were more contacts between the two. However, since 1999 and because of the events that surrounded the move to independence, there has been less contact over the troubled border, with about 1,115,000 living in East Timor, and 1,800,000 in West Timor.

Although there have been archaeological remains dating back to 11,000 BC, the Timorese people are believed to be Austronesians, who arrived on Timor about 5,000 years ago and brought with them new skills in pottery and a tradition of agriculture and domesticated animals. They began to work bronze, and iron and were some of the peoples least influenced, culturally, by Indian and Javanese traders. By about 1,000 BC, the Atoni people arrived. They call themselves the *Atoni Pah Meto* (“the people of the dry land”) and they still live in West Timor, with more groups arriving over the next 2,000 years.

Because of the spices grown on Timor and the presence of sandalwood, Chinese merchants started visiting Timor from the 12th century and some of them stayed, with some of these intermarrying with the local Timorese population. The later arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch traders led to some Timorese marrying with Europeans, and this was the origin of the *Topasse*, or Eurasian population, which by 1600 was said to number about 12,000. Another group that also arrived during this time was the Rotinese from the nearby island of Roti, and these people are now culturally similar to the Timorese, although they speak a different language.

From 1566 the Portuguese started to establish bases on East Timor, and they brought missionaries leading to the early conversion of some Timorese to Roman Catholicism. For the most part the Portuguese preferred to operate through Chinese or *Topasse* middlemen. In the early 17th century the Dutch started taking over parts of West Timor, establishing a fort at Kupang and trading in a similar manner to the Portuguese. It was not until 1913 that the official borders for the Dutch and Portuguese sections of the island were drawn up, leaving the Portuguese with the east, the Oecussi enclave in the northwest, and the Dutch with the rest, which became an integral part of the Netherlands East Indies. This line divided many Timorese tribes in central Timor, but as the border was largely unmarked, people crossed it regularly, often without knowing it. The Timorese attempt to eject the Portuguese in 1887 and again in 1912 had failed, and there were no more major uprisings.

The emergence of Timorese nationalism came in 1933 when some Protestants from West Timor, while studying at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Java, established *De Timorsch Jongeren* (“Timorese Youth”). It led to the formation of the *Perserikatan Kebangsaan Timor* (“Timor Nationalist Union”) four years later. For the Timorese in East Timor, they lacked any central organization, and most of the radicals were exiles from Portugal, who yearned to return to mainland Portugal. However, they did have an important role many years later in educating the Timorese elite.

During World War II the Japanese attacked Dutch West Timor and when the Dutch and Australian forces took East Timor, the Japanese invaded the eastern part of the island. During the Japanese Occupation, the relatively benevolent rule of both the Dutch and Portuguese ended, and the Timorese were persecuted by the Japanese because of their actual and supposed support for the Allies. It is thought that about 70,000 Timorese died under the Japanese, from fighting, retribution, and starvation.

After the war, fighting started between the nationalists and the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies. It saw the Nationalists under Sukarno triumphant, and his assimilation policies started to take hold throughout Indonesia, as the country had become, with many Timorese in West Timor starting to go to primary and secondary schools and being taught in Bahasa, the new national language of Indonesia. With the rise to power of Suharto in 1965 the assimilation policy and that of *transmigrasi* (“Transmigration”), with migrants from Java being moved to West Timor, saw most west Timorese losing most of their sense of separate identity.

By contrast in East Timor, Portuguese rule had led to a “benign neglect” of the eastern half of the island, with most Timorese customs continuing as they had done for centuries, with little in the way of interference in village life. However, the overthrow of the military government in Portugal in 1974 led to the formation of Timorese political parties, notably the pro-Western UDT (Timor Democratic Union) and the left-wing Fretilin. The latter won the civil war that resulted and took control of East Timor. The extremely anti-Communist government in Indonesia was keen to prevent this and invaded in December 1975. In the following year East Timor became an integral part of Indonesia.

For the Timorese, the standard of living vastly improved under the Indonesians, with schools, hospitals, clinics, and roads. However, they resented the Indonesians and especially the Indonesian migrants who arrived. This did more than anything else to ensure the sense of Timorese identity remained strong. A resistance group run by Fretilin operated from then until 1999 when Indonesia agreed to hold a referendum on independence, and the Timorese voted to reject the autonomy offer by the Indonesian government and move to full independence. Pro-Indonesian militia then wrecked much of the country, destroying large amounts of the infrastructure built by the Indonesians, and many of the Timorese fled. An international force led by Australia then occupied East Timor, and in 2002, East Timor became an independent country and a member of the United Nations. It is believed that up to 200,000 East Timorese died as a result of the Indonesian occupation from 1975 until 1999.

The Timorese people have been heavily politicized by the occupation, and also by political infighting and actual fight-



*East Timorese fishermen prepare to catch fish in Dili, East Timor. (Bay Ismoyo/AFP/Getty Images)*

ing that followed. This has led to instability in the capital, but many Timorese have now slowly rebuilt their lives.

## **<sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

Most of the Timorese people live on the island of Timor, either on the eastern half and the Oecussi enclave on the northern coast of West Timor or in the Indonesian province of Timur Tengah (West Timor). Because of the links with Indonesia, historical and geographical, there are many Timorese living in Indonesia; because of the historical ties, there are also some in Portugal. The fighting since 1974 has led to large numbers of Timorese refugees escaping to Australia; they live largely in the cities of Darwin, Sydney, and Melbourne.

Within East Timor itself, about 5% of the population (50,800) lives in the capital Dili, with smaller numbers living in the major towns of Liquica, Manatuto, Suai, Baucau, and Viqueque. The vast majority of the Timorese population, both in East Timor and also West Timor, live in villages scattered around the countryside. Many of these are extremely isolated—indeed many Timorese ensured this remained so, to protect their communities from the Japanese and later the Indonesians and the pro-Indonesian militia.

Of the various groups living in East Timor, the Atoni are the most heavily researched. They descend from settlers who arrived in West Timor, and most of them still live in the west of the island, numbering about 300,000 in 1960 and about 600,000 today. The Helong people, related to the Atoni, live in and around the city of Kupang and in the coastal region in the very west of West Timor, as well as on the island of Semau.

In central Timor most of the people are from Bunak (or Bunaq), as are the Mambai who generally occupy the mountains and valleys. The dominant group in East Timor is the Tetum, whose language is now the official language of the country.

They themselves are divided into the Eastern Tetum and the Western Tetum. Mention should also be made of the Cairui and the Waimaka (Uai Ma'a), who live in remote parts of East Timor and whose lifestyles have been least affected by recent history. There are also the Fattaluku, who live around Lorehe. The Rotinese and the Ndaonese, who came from nearby islands in the early modern period, are now also often regarded as Timorese.

## **<sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE**

For historical reasons, the Timorese in West Timor speak Indonesian, although some older people still speak Dutch. In East Timor, the official language is Tetum, with the second language being Portuguese; however, most young people are interested in speaking English. Those who went to school or who were involved in public life between 1975 and 1999 also speak Indonesian. In addition, there are a large number of other languages spoken by the Timorese, such as Rotinese and Sama Bajau.

## **<sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE**

The folklore of the Timorese varies considerably, depending on the tribe and the part of the island they come from. Traditionally, each tribe had its element of folklore, with the Atoni often talking of their arrival on the island in pre-historic times and the Rotinese talking of their arrival in the early modern period. There are also traditional village stories about rich people, poor people, buffalos, and other elements of morality tales, which are the same all around the world. Some elements of Chinese folklore have also been accommodated in Timorese stories.

In East Timor much of the folklore is concerned with resistance and resistance movements. These include the fighting against the Portuguese in 1887 and again in 1912, during the

Japanese Occupation 1942–1945, the civil war in 1974–1975, and then the fighting against the Indonesians during their occupation from 1975 until 1999.

## **5 RELIGION**

The vast majority of East Timorese are Roman Catholic, with official figures being 98% of the population (in contrast to about a quarter when Portuguese rule ended in 1975). This growth of Roman Catholicism is said to be attributed to the church's role in working against the Indonesian occupation. Some 1% are Protestant and the remaining 1% are Muslim. In West Timor, because of the Dutch influence, only some 56% are Roman Catholic, but 35% are Protestant, and most of the remainder are Muslim. Most of the small Chinese and Sino-Timorese population of East Timor, who followed Taoism and Buddhism, fled in 1974 and have not returned.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The major holidays in East Timor are New Years' Day (January 1), Good Friday, Independence Day (from Indonesia, May 20), the Feast of the Assumption, Consultation Day (August 30), Liberation Day (September 20), All Saints' Day, Santa Cruz Day (November 12), Independence Day (from Portugal, November 28), the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas Day (December 25).

In West Timor the major holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), *Lebaran* (the end of Ramadan), Waicak Day (Buddha's birthday, the eighth day of the fourth lunar month), *Muharram* (the start of the Islamic Year), *Maulad Nabi Muhammad* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad), Independence Day (August 17), and *Isra Miraj Nabi Muhammad*/Christmas Day (the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, December 25).

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

In traditional village life for the Timorese, there were rites of passage ceremonies associated with birth, puberty, marriage, and death. These generally involved ceremonies in the village, with the actual ceremony varying depending on the custom of the tribe. The Atoni had a hereditary nobility, but this has long since died out, although the series of village headmen continues. The Ema people also had a complicated system of social organizations that controlled the ceremonies, most of which worked through community and lineage house structures. The Rotinese had a system of ritual initiation of the youths going through puberty and their method of burial involved people from the village and nearby villages coming for a ceremony that lasted at least three days. Other tribes have similar ceremonies, with one of the major ones for the Eastern Tetum people being "washing the buffalo's leg."

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

All village societies of the Timorese have reverence for the elderly, with village elders being respected by all and being used to teach the young in the tribal customs and folklore. In a similar manner, children are brought up to respect their parents and are taught strict rules of behavior, which they also exhibit in schools. Greetings reflect hierarchical terms but are often based on whether a person is elderly, not just whether they are a village headman or not.

Because of the fighting in East Timor for much of the period since 1975, some of this traditional way of life has broken down, and in 1999—and indeed before—the Indonesians were able to recruit young men to serve in their militia where they were involved in harassing locals, either as a part of the government policy, or because they felt they had the power so to do. With so many East Timorese having missed formal schooling from 1999 until 2001, many lack the discipline that their older (and younger) siblings have had.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

In villages, most people live in houses raised on stilts and with high thatched roofs, animals being kept under the house at night. These houses were made from wood, and, traditionally, people would build new houses as they moved around the jungle, clearing a new area every few years. However, most people do not move around as much as they have done in the past.

In towns and cities, the best houses resemble small Portuguese or Dutch villas and a very few resemble large ones. The walls are often white-washed rendered brick. Smaller houses in towns and cities are made largely or entirely from wood. In Kupang and other urban areas in West Timor, there are modern prefabricated apartment blocks similar to those elsewhere in Indonesia.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Family life in Timorese society revolves around an extended family. Generally a couple would live with their children and the father's—and possibly sometimes the mother's—elderly relatives, such as their parents and occasionally uncles and aunts. Children might stay in the family house after marriage—sometimes leaving after they start having their own children. Much of this depends on the circumstances of the people concerned, and it is not uncommon for a man in a secure job to have as many as a dozen other people living in his house, surviving off his salary.

## **11 CLOTHING**

In East Timor traditional clothing involved wearing, for men, a large cloth similar to the sarong and a large ritual headdress made from feathers, people being ritually bare-chested. Women wear a brightly colored dress. During the Portuguese and Dutch colonial periods men in administrative positions in towns would dress in khaki or white (Dutch) or green (Portuguese), with a bush shirt and shorts. Nowadays, in villages, most men wear a t-shirt or polo shirt and a sarong, with boys often wearing only a pair of shorts. Women and girls wear a blouse and a skirt, often made from bright colors.

## **12 FOOD**

While wealthier Timorese in towns have access to many types of food, most of the cuisine in the countryside and among poor Timorese is similar to that in Indonesia and Malaysia, with chicken, pork, or beef, and noodles or rice, often with an egg, with root crops, such as cassava and yams, supplemented with fruits, such as pineapples and bananas. Maize was often a part of the diet, and now potatoes are grown in Timor. For drinks, those made from sugar cane are popular, with fruit juices and also fizzy drinks consumed by many people. Much coffee is

grown in Timor, but it is largely for export, so few people drink it although drinking of tea is common.

Some tribal groups located near the sea rely heavily on fish for their diet. Among some groups, such as the Bunak, there are a large number of ritual dishes that are prepared only under special conditions. In Ema society there are differences between food that is boiled, which represent main meals, and food that is either grilled or eaten raw, which are regarded as foods for snacks.

### **13 EDUCATION**

During the period of Dutch and Portuguese colonial rule, there was little in the way of formal schooling in the country, with most children being taught at home. Indeed there was only one high school in East Timor when the Indonesians invaded in 1975. Under the Indonesian occupation, large numbers of schools were built throughout East Timor, and, for the first time, schooling was free and compulsory for all Timorese, many of whom were able to go to universities in the rest of Indonesia. However, in 1999, after the East Timorese voted for independence, militia groups destroyed most of the schools, and it took several years before many of these could be rebuilt.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Timorese, through the wars in the 20th century, have managed to retain much of their cultural heritage. This has been especially important in East Timor where the new government has done much to record and preserve the culture of the Timorese people. This has resulted in work by anthropologists and books and government publications being made available in Tetum, now the official language of the country.

### **15 WORK**

The vast majority of the Timorese are involved in agriculture, living in village societies, with 8.2% of the land being arable and over half of this under permanent cultivation. There are also many people who work on coffee plantations and as laborers on large farms. A very small number have office or administrative jobs. There is high unemployment, estimated at 20% in urban areas, and this has led to much discontent among the youth.

### **16 SPORTS**

Many village games were played in pre-colonial time, and some of these, such as cock-fighting, continued during the period of Dutch and Portuguese colonial rule. However, by the mid-20th century, the most played game on the island was soccer, with children and young men playing it throughout the island. Both the first president of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao, and his successor, José Ramos Horta, were soccer players in their youth, with the former briefly being known as the "goalkeeper" because of the position he played in the game. The presence of Australian soldiers in East Timor since independence has led to attempts to introduce games, such as Australian Rules Football. Other games that are played in East Timor include basketball, volleyball, and badminton. In 2000, for the summer Olympics held in Sydney, a small team from East Timor competed, its first ever involvement in an international sporting event.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Because much of the country does not have electricity, the local television station, TV Timor-Leste, founded in 2000 and broadcasting in Tetum and Portuguese, has only a small following. Radio Timor Leste broadcasts are listened to by about 90% of the population, with most villagers having access to transistor radios; this station also broadcasts in Tetum, Portuguese, and English. Three other radio stations also are operating in the country. The highly-politicized nature of the Timorese people has resulted in many newspapers being available, but most of these are only read in Dili and major towns.

Most village entertainment is involved in watching (or taking part in) small sporting activities or cockfighting, as well as hunting and reading.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Many Timorese have been involved in woodwork and the making of models, especially of human or animal spirits. Some of these are now manufactured for sale to tourists. The making of pottery takes place in all villages, as does weaving and the making of baskets. For children, the large aid effort from Australia and elsewhere has resulted in many plastic toys being distributed throughout the country, augmenting kites, spinning tops, and other toys that have been played for hundreds of years.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The Timorese are subject to many social problems; this has largely been the effect of history and politics. The Indonesian occupation alienated large numbers of youths, and although the literacy rates improved considerably, many Timorese resented those who managed to get government scholarships or take up places at Indonesian universities. Others were involved in the resistance struggle or were part of the small group of discontented youth hired by the Indonesians to form their militia groups before the 1999 referendum on independence.

The social dislocation of the Indonesian invasion, occupation, and the moves to independence in 1999 led to alienation of many people, and from 1999 until 2001, many children were unable to attend formal schools because the buildings had been destroyed by the militia. Since independence in 2002 there has also been rising unemployment, which by 2008 was estimated at 20% in Dili. There has been anger at the overseas-educated Timorese, some of whom have taken up senior administrative positions and office jobs. Some Timorese want to achieve reconciliation and a lasting peace with Indonesia, and others want to punish those who collaborated with the Indonesians during their brutal occupation of East Timor.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Although most of the tribal societies of the Timorese are patrilineal, following the father, women dominate in religious ceremonies among the Tetum people. In Bunak villages, women have certain specific roles in the agricultural process and in the preparation of food, not just for eating but especially for ritual. A number of Timorese women now have important political roles in East Timor and their position in society has been helped by the work of the wife of Xanana Gusmao, Kirsty Sword. Although she is Australian by birth, she has done much to improve the legal rights of women and promote women's roles in decision making.

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—by J Corfield

# TODAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** TOH-duhs

**LOCATION:** India (primarily Tamil Nadu state)

**POPULATION:** 1,412 (2000 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Toda

**RELIGION:** Centered on the sanctity of the buffalo

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: People of India

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Todas are a pastoral tribe inhabiting the higher elevations of the Nilgiri Hills of southern India. It is unlikely that the ancestral homeland of the Todas will ever be identified conclusively, though linguistic evidence suggests a South Indian origin for the group. Other evidence, albeit circumstantial, points to Toda migrations from the Malabar coast region lying to the west of the Nilgiris.

The date of these migrations is uncertain, but most likely it occurred in the years following the 11th century AD. Stone circles enclosing cinerary burial sites (sites where cremated remains are buried), probably erected between the 3rd and 11th centuries, are found throughout the present Toda heartland. These structures, however, are associated with a people whose culture was markedly different from that of the Todas and is quite unlikely to be its precursor. While the Toda may have co-existed with these people, it is more probable they arrived in the high Nilgiris after the disappearance of the circle-builders.

Traditional Toda society was linked to four neighboring groups in the Nilgiris (the Kota, the Kurumba, the Irula, and the Badaga) in a complex of ritual, economic, and social relationships. The opening up of the Nilgiris by the British during the 19th century, along with social and economic development during the present century, have brought about profound changes in traditional Toda society.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Nilgiri Hills, located in the northwestern part of Tamil Nadu, are a mountainous massif rising from the plains of southern India to over 2,600 m (8,500 ft) above sea level. They lie roughly 11° of latitude north of the equator, where the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala meet. Maximum temperatures average between 18°C and 21°C (65°–70°F) throughout the year, but at the higher elevations hard frosts may be experienced during the winter months. Standing full in the path of the southwest monsoon, western locations of the Nilgiris receive up to 500 cm (approximately 200 in) of rain a year. Heavy tropical forests cover the lower slopes of the hills but give way above 1,800–2,000 m (approximately 6,000–6,500 ft) to temperate forest and open savanna grassland. It is here, at the higher elevations, that the Todas live and graze their herds of water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*). Some scholars argue that the Todas themselves created these grasslands through centuries of burning off the vegetation and grazing their buffalo herds.

Historical records show that the Todas have never been a numerous group. European accounts estimated a population of no more than 1,000 people at the beginning of the 17th century, a total that had dropped to 475 by 1952. Successful treatment of venereal diseases and other medical conditions



reversed the decline in numbers, and in 2000 the number of Todas stood at 1,412.

Population data regarding the Todas are notoriously inaccurate. The figure given above is the Ethnologue estimate for “ethnic” Toda. However, it is also estimated that only 600 of these speak the Toda language. Murray B. Emeneau, the late Berkeley linguist who did much of his work with the Todas, estimated a population between 700 and 900 during the last century.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Toda language belongs to the Dravidian linguistic family and is thought to have developed around the 3rd century BC. It has affinities with both Tamil and Malayalam, but it separated from pre-Tamil before these two emerged as independent languages. The Todas traditionally had no written form of language; today, they use the Tamil script for writing purposes.

### 4 FOLKLORE

According to the Toda creation myth, humans and their buffaloes were created by the god *Ön* (*Ö-n*). One day, so the story goes, *Ön* and his wife went up to a plateau at the top of the Kundah Range in the Nilgiris. He set up an iron bar stretching from one end of the plateau to the other. *Ön* stood at one end of the bar and brought out 1,600 buffaloes from the earth. Hanging on to the tail of the last buffalo was a man, who was the first Toda. *Ön*'s buffaloes were the ancestors of the Todas' sa-

cred herds. *Ön* took a rib from the right side of the man's body and from it created the first Toda woman. *Ön*'s wife stood at the other end of the iron bar and brought forth 1,800 buffaloes, from which all the Todas' secular buffaloes are descended.

Toda deities in general seem to be anthropomorphic developments of hill spirits, i.e., they are described or thought of as human. They live very much like the Todas, residing on the high peaks of the Nilgiris and tending their herds of buffalo. Some gods, however, appear to be deified Todas. Legends tell of the exploits of *Kwoten*, to whom the origins of many Toda practices are ascribed. *Kwoten* mysteriously disappeared after, so it is believed, intercourse with a female deity. Another Toda, *Meilitars*, is believed to have tricked the gods into eating buffalo-calf flesh and is credited with originating the ceremonial rituals still used in the calf-sacrifice. Both men are now revered as gods.

### 5 RELIGION

The Toda religion centers on the sanctity of the buffalo. Although the Todas have a pantheon of deities, of far greater importance are the buffalo dairies that, along with their contents, pasturage, and water supply, are viewed not only as sacred, but as divine. Toda dairies and their herds are assigned varying degrees of sanctity, each level being subject to more elaborate and complex ritual practices. The most sacred category of dairy is the *Ti* dairy, though the last of these temple-dairies disappeared in the 1950s.

All dairy complexes are served by dairymen who must be ordained, undergoing ceremonies that ritually purify them for their duties. These dairymen-priests are responsible for the care of the dairies, maintaining their ritual purity and the sanctity of the dairying equipment. They also tend the temple herds and, more importantly, milk the temple buffaloes and process the milk into butter, buttermilk, and *ghi* (clarified butter) for distribution to the community. The milk is viewed as sacred, but other milk products have less sanctity attached to them and *ghi* has none at all. In fact, the entire Toda dairying ritual has been interpreted as a means by which the sanctity of milk is dispelled so that the product may be consumed by the general population.

Temple-dairies and their sacred herds of buffalo form the focus of Toda ritual life. In each Toda settlement, weekly observances are kept to honor its dairy, and special ceremonies are performed when necessary to restore its ritual purity. The naming of a female buffalo, the first milking of a temple buffalo, or the giving of salt to buffaloes all require specific rituals. Historical accounts show that, until recently, male buffalo calves were periodically sacrificed and ritually consumed in a ceremony performed to further the welfare of a kin group and its herds. Buffalo-sacrifice continues to be performed at Toda funerals.

The most important goddess of the Todas is *Tökisy* (*Tö-kisy*). Modern Todas believe that she, rather than her brother *Ön*, created the Todas and their buffaloes. The Todas revere the “gods of the mountains,” said to reside on the Nilgiri peaks, and the gods associated with the sacred dairies. The Toda belief system also encompasses elements of Hinduism, especially Hindu concepts of ritual purity and impurity. Today, many traditional Todas worship Hindu deities, such as Shiva, Marriamman, and Aiyappan, and participate in pilgrimages to Hindu sacred places.



Christian missionary efforts among the Todas at the turn of the century have resulted in the emergence of a very small community of Toda Christians. It numbers perhaps 200 persons who follow the Anglican rites of the Church of South India.

## **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Toda festivals center around the ritual ceremonies associated with the sacred dairies. For example, in the past clans honored their dairies at the time of the annual clan prayer festival (*mod fartyt*) in late December or early January. Today, only the Nos clan hold this ceremony, but all Todas try to attend this event. In addition, villages have special days of the week sacred to the settlement and, as noted above, to its dairies. Although they are not marked by any special ceremonies, these sacred days involve restrictions on the normal activities carried out by the village. Many Todas also attend local Hindu festivals, such as that held at the temple of Marriamman in Ootacamund (Udhagamangalam), which is the main center and administrative headquarters of the Nilgiris.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Toda rites of passage vary in their complexity. Birth and death, which are held to be highly polluting and significant threats to the purity of the dairies, are heavily bound by rituals to protect the sanctity of these institutions. Events such as marriage and the attaining of adulthood, on the other hand, do not endanger the ritual status of the dairies and are accompanied by simpler observances.

A woman's first pregnancy is seen as ritually contaminating and, like childbirth, a threat to the dairy or dairies of the woman's settlement. In the past, she had to spend a lunar month (usually around the fifth month of her pregnancy) in a pollution hut constructed outside the bounds of the hamlet. Today, this custom has been abandoned, though the rites associated with the beginning and ending of this period of exile are still followed. In the seventh month of the first pregnancy, the bow-and-arrow ceremony is performed, by which the child-to-be is formally affiliated with the clan of the father (patriclan) and given its place in Toda society. This ceremony, at which the husband prepares and gives his pregnant wife an imitation bow and arrow, is a particularly important communal event and is accompanied by dancing, singing, and feasting.

Childbirth also is considered polluting. In some Toda hamlets, it is not allowed to take place in the settlement, and the soon-to-be mother is sent to a subsidiary hamlet. If a mother is allowed to give birth in her house, she is subject to various restrictions until the appropriate purification rites are held. Between one and three months of age, the face-uncovering and name-giving ceremony is held for the child.

No particular rites mark the attainment of puberty by boys, although they do undergo an ear-piercing ceremony. Traditionally, girls underwent both a symbolic and an actual defloration (loss of virginity) to mark their entry into adulthood, although it is uncertain whether these rites are continued today.

The rites associated with death are among the most significant in Toda society. Friends and relatives gather to pay their respects to the deceased, and a few days after death a "first day funeral" is held. Among the many rituals is the catching of the buffaloes to be sacrificed. For men, both temple and secular buffaloes are killed, whereas only secular animals are sacri-

ficed at the funeral of a woman. Members of every social, kin, and affine (related by marriage) group to which the deceased belonged have specific roles to fulfill in the funeral ceremonies. Following a ritualized mourning and other rites, the corpse is taken to the cremation ground and burned. In the past, a second funeral—complete with buffalo-sacrifice—was held a few months after the first ceremony, but this custom no longer seems to be followed.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Todas have different forms of greetings, depending on the person being addressed. When a woman meets her father or mother, for example, she "bows," meaning that she kneels and touches each foot of the parent to her forehead. She accompanies this with a verbal greeting ("*etyeya?*" "salutations, father") to the father, but not to the mother. A man does not bow to his parents but respectfully says "Salutations, father" or "Salutations, mother." Similarly, the manner in which one greets other relatives is determined by the precise relationship, age, and often sex, of the person being addressed.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The Todas live in small hamlets scattered across the open grasslands of the Nilgiri uplands. A hamlet may have up to five dwellings, its dairy structures, a buffalo pen, and perhaps some calf sheds. The population of the hamlet can vary between 12 and 17 people. Houses and dairy buildings are constructed at some distance from each other and are often surrounded by walls of piled stones. The traditional style of building is a distinctive barrel-vaulted design found nowhere else in India. The rounded roof is made of rattan, supported by crosspieces, and thatched with grass. Heavy wooden planks sunk into the ground form the front and rear walls, with a single opening in the front wall for a door. A raised earthen platform in the one-room hut serves as a sleeping and sitting area. A hearth is placed at the back of the hut, and brass pots and other household utensils are hung along the back wall. A small hole in the center of the hut is used for pounding grain. It also serves the ritual purpose of dividing the hut into "pure" and "impure" areas. The churning of milk, which is a male activity, can only be done in the pure front of the hut; the impure rear half of the structure makes up the women's area.

Traditional Toda housing also includes a front-gabled hut thought to have been adopted from the Badaga. The old-style huts are rapidly being replaced by modern brick or stone housing.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Toda society is divided into two endogamous subcastes (the *To-rOas* and *Töwfly*). Each of these has a number of exogamous clans that are patrilineal (patriclans), i.e., descent is traced through the male line. Inheritance of property, rights and duties, ritual obligations—all are determined by one's patriclan. However, all Todas also belong to an exogamous matrilineal clan (matriclan), which is of equal importance in matters of marriage.

The Toda kinship system, which is quite independent of the descent system, follows the basic pattern of Dravidian-speaking peoples. Parents' siblings of the same sex are considered to be parents. Children of these "classificatory" parents are held to be one's siblings and, therefore, marriage with them would

be incestuous. One cannot, for instance, marry the child of a mother's sister or of a father's brother. However, parents' siblings of the opposite sex are called "aunts" and "uncles," and belong to a totally different category of kin. Their children are potential and even preferred marriage partners. The ideal union in this system is with the child of a mother's brother or of a father's sister.

Toda marriages are arranged when the partners are mere infants, often less than two or three years of age and sometimes no more than a few months old. The children remain with their parents until maturity, when the girl moves into her husband's family home. The girl's father provides a dowry after the couple begins living together. A girl's family may break off the marriage before this time on payment of an agreed-upon compensation (usually in buffalo) to the husband's family. In time, the couple builds a house of their own nearby and set up a separate household.

In the past, younger brothers became cohusbands to the eldest brother's wife, a custom called fraternal polyandry. This was necessary because of the shortage of women resulting from the now long-abandoned Toda practice of female infanticide. A custom that continues today is that of "wife-capture," by which a Toda may make off with another man's wife and formalize the union by payment of the appropriate compensation.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The most distinctive item of traditional Toda clothing is the long cloak (*pu-txuly*) worn by both men and women. Made of thick cotton, its dimensions are about 2.2 m by 135 cm (roughly 7 ft long by 4 ft wide) and in appearance reminds some of the ancient Greek toga. It is off-white in color, with broad red and black bands woven across one end. Women often add elaborate embroidered designs to these bands. The cloak is wrapped around the body with the striped end thrown over the left shoulder. Underneath the cloak, men wear a cotton waistcloth over a breech cloth. Women wrap the waistcloth under their arms so that their whole body is covered.

Dress habits are changing. Today, Toda men may wear Western-style shirts and pants, with or without the traditional cloak. Shoes are commonly worn, whereas previously Todas went barefoot. Women have taken to wearing the sari and blouse. Children are invariably dressed in South Indian or Western-style clothes.

The Todas have no weaving skills and in the past obtained the cloth for their cloaks from weaving castes living in the surrounding lowlands. Today, materials for making cloaks, as well as ready-made clothes, are purchased in the bazaars of Ootacamund.

Another distinctive aspect of Toda appearance is the hairstyle. Both men and women wear their hair long, women letting their hair fall in ringlets. Older men let their facial hair grow into bushy beards. Jewelry is worn by both men and women. Until recently, it was the custom for girls reaching puberty to be tattooed over extensive areas of the body, although this custom has now fallen out of use.

### **12 FOOD**

Dairy products, along with cereals and sugar, are the main items of the Toda diet. Buttermilk is used for drinking and for cooking. In the past, millet was the staple cereal, but this has been replaced by rice. A typical meal consists of rice, either

boiled in buttermilk and served with butter, or cooked in water and eaten with spiced vegetables. The meal is usually followed by a glass of buttermilk or a glass of coffee, prepared with milk and sweetened with *jaggery*, a type of brown sugar. The Todas are vegetarians and consume no meat, although in the past the flesh of the sacrificed buffalo calf was ritually consumed.

The Todas usually eat a light meal at about 7:00 AM and a larger one at mid-morning after the buffaloes have been milked. Various snacks and drinks (including buttermilk and coffee) are consumed throughout the day, with another meal being eaten in the late afternoon. Food is served on leaves, or on brass or stainless steel dishes, and is eaten with the right hand. Special foods eaten on festive occasions include millet balls served with honey and *ghi* (clarified butter) and rice boiled in jaggery water and served with *ghi*.

The Todas are fond of stimulants. Men smoke *bidis*, the small brown cigarettes made from rolled tobacco leaves that are common throughout India. Opium is sometimes added to coffee, and both men and women use snuff, placing it inside the lip rather than in the nose. Locally distilled alcohol is consumed in large quantities.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Though the government school established for Toda children seems to have been well attended, as late as the 1960s few traditionalist Todas advanced beyond an elementary education. The Todas seem open to formal education, however, and their overall literacy rate, according to the 1981 Census, is 43.43% (53% for males and 34.01 for females). Current figures regarding literacy among the Todas are not available, but according to the 2001 census, some 50% of the Scheduled Tribes in the Nilgiris Hill District, where many of the Toda live, were literate. Of course, with a base population of just over a thousand, such figures are virtually meaningless. And literacy among the Toda, for government purposes, essentially means literacy in Tamil.

The Christian Toda community, on the other hand, is highly educated and numbers businessmen, teachers, nurses, and government employees among its ranks. Higher education is favored by parents for both males and females.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Dancing is an important Toda tradition, often occurring at feasts or as part of specific Toda rituals. Only men participate in ceremonial dances, although over the last few decades women have begun dancing for recreation. The men form an inward-facing circle, standing so that their arms are touching. The circle moves in a counterclockwise direction, with each step being taken in unison and accompanied by a shout that marks the beat of the dance. A composer is sometimes invited to the dance. If one is present, he joins the circle and, as it rotates, shouts out standardized phrases appropriate for the festival being celebrated, or perhaps original phrases composed specifically for the occasion.

Singing often accompanies the dancing, and there is a strong tradition of oral poetry among the Todas. All aspects of culture are represented in the songs—milking and dairy rituals, the care of buffaloes, funerals, the sacred names (*kwasm*) of the Toda world, and even (in modern times) anthropologists studying Toda culture.

## 15 WORK

The traditional Toda economy is based on herding water buffaloes. In the past, milk products would be exchanged with the Badaga, Irula, Kota, and Kurumba in return for grains, utensils, forest products, and other items. The Kota, for example, provided articles for Toda funeral rites. Families from the different tribes had hereditary links extending back generations. Such traditional relationships, however, have largely disappeared in the modern cash economy. The Todas sell surplus milk and purchase rice and other goods in the local markets. Few Toda own large enough buffalo herds to subsist entirely on pastoralism, and more and more Todas are becoming involved in agriculture, either leasing their land or cultivating crops, such as potatoes, cabbage, and cereals, themselves. This move towards agriculture has been actively encouraged by the government, though many Todas still show a traditional preference for herding water buffaloes.

## 16 SPORTS

Games popular among children include dry-grass “tobogganing” on an old sack or a piece of wood. Children also like to form lines, with their hands on the hips of the person in front of them and weave through the hamlet. Toda girls imitate their mothers, pretending to cook food over imitation fires of twigs and leaves. Young boys play at being buffalo-herders, constructing miniature buffalo pens and making mud figurines of buffaloes and buffalo calves.

Both children and adults play various team games. One, played by males only, resembles tip-cat. A short stick, pointed at both ends, is placed against a stone in the center of the playing area. Teams, composed of 10 to 20 members, take turns batting. The batter takes a stick about a meter in length and strikes the short stick so that it goes straight up in the air. While it is in the air, he hits it towards the fielding team. If the stick is caught by the fielding team, the teams change sides. If the stick falls to the ground, the batter scores three points. If the batter misses the stick altogether, he is replaced by another member of the batting team. Points are scored in sets of 21, and the team with the most number of sets wins the game.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Beyond their ritual functions, singing and dancing are also forms of recreation among the Todas. Riddling is quite popular. Modern forms of entertainment, such as movie theaters where Tamil films are shown, are available in Ootacamund. Men enjoy passing time together in the coffee shops of the town.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Toda women are quite expert at embroidery, as seen in the decorative patterns they add to their cloaks. Efforts undertaken in the late 1950s to develop traditional Toda embroidery work as a handicrafts industry met with mixed results, although Toda embroidery is still marketed locally today.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

For almost two centuries, the Todas have been the focus of efforts at improving their social and economic condition. The British colonial government, Christian missionaries, and Indian government planners have all, according to their own

perspectives, initiated reforms. The last several decades, however, have been a period of dramatic change. The Todas have shared in the benefits of modern medicine, education, electrification, modern housing, and other social and economic advances. Following 1947, at the instigation of the local forest department, the Toda grasslands underwent forestation, with a series of collectors ending the annual firing of the grasslands by the Todas and restricting the grazing of buffaloes. Moreover, in 1975, as part of its Hill Area Development Programme, the central government assigned funds for the social and economic development of the Toda community. The Toda Welfare Scheme was organized, under the auspices of the Indo-German Nilgiris Development Project, to introduce the Todas to scientific agriculture, so they would not be so dependent on their buffaloes and pastoralism. Today, most Todas have abandoned pastoralism and are cultivators. Tea now covers more than 50% of the cultivated lands in the Nilgiris.

These changes have brought about tensions within the Toda community. Young Todas have been exposed to broader social currents and many see traditional Toda practices as social “evils” to be eradicated. Buffalo-sacrifice, polyandry, wife-capture, and child marriage, all features of traditional Toda society, are identified as practices to be discarded.

The Todas are thus a people in transition. The challenge that faces them is how Toda society, with its emphasis on its buffalo herds, dairies, and traditional rituals and customs, will move into the social and economic world of India as it enters the 21st century.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditionally, Toda women were prohibited from contact with the buffalo or their milk. Their role in society was to reproduce, cook the food, and clean the house.

However, given the increasing difficulty for Toda men to support a family, more and more Toda women are marrying outside the community. Few Todas own the size of buffalo herd (estimated at 12) necessary to support a family, so they go into agriculture to try and make a living. Increasing debt is a serious problem. Women see education as a way out of their community, so many opt out of arranged marriages at an early age to further their education.

Toda women, like women all over India, are still far from achieving sociopolitical and ritual parity with their men. But much change is in the air. For instance, customs such as female infanticide and polyandry are no longer practiced by the Todas. Moreover, Toda society seems always to have permitted greater liberty to its women than is common in South Asia.

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—by D. O. Lodrick.

## TONGANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** TAHN-guhns

**LOCATION:** Tonga

**POPULATION:** 119,000 (July 2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Tongan; English (both are official languages of the country)

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Free Wesleyan Church)

### <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Tonga is an important independent nation located in western Polynesia in the South Pacific. Tonga is one of the world's last remaining constitutional monarchies, currently ruled by His Majesty Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. The current population of Tonga is approximately 119,000 of which 99.9% are Polynesian. Tongans have well-established international family networks that span an entire ocean. Family members often relocate to the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, purchasing property, gaining employment, and, as a result, being able to financially aid their relatives back in Tonga.

### <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Tongans are the indigenous inhabitants of the islands in the Kingdom of Tonga. The Kingdom of Tonga is made up of around 170 small islands with a total land area of 718 sq km (277.2 sq mi). The climate of Tonga is sub-tropical with the warmest months being January, February, and March. Because of its location, Tonga is prone to cyclones.

Tonga has been a constitutional monarchy since 1875, when George Tupou I tried to stave off European colonization in Tonga. Although Tonga was a British protectorate until 1970, when full independence was gained, Tongans are fiercely proud that they belong to one of the few Pacific Island groups that were not a colony of any European nation. Large Tongan immigrant communities are located in the cities of Brisbane and Sydney in Australia and Honolulu, Los Angeles, and San Francisco in the United States. It is estimated that there are as many Tongans living overseas as there are still living in the Kingdom of Tonga.

### <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Tongan is the indigenous language of the islands within the Kingdom of Tonga. Tongan is a Polynesian language very closely related to the Samoan language. The official languages of the kingdom are Tongan and English. English is taught in both elementary school and secondary schools. Most Tongans have some understanding of spoken and written English. The lyrics of the national anthem of the Kingdom of Tonga are in Tongan and the first four lines are reproduced with English translation below:

‘E ‘Otua mafimafi,  
 Ko ho mau ‘Eimi koe,  
 Ko koe ko e falala ‘anga,  
 Mo e ‘ofa ki Tonga;  
 Oh Almighty God above,  
 Thou art our Lord and sure defense,  
 In our goodness we do trust Thee,  
 And our Tonga Thou dost love;

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Tongans have a rich body of folklore, mythology, and oral history. The Tongan creation myth recounts the division of the universe by the offspring of the two original twins. One of the later descendants of the original twins, Maui, is credited with the creation of Tongatapu, the main Tongan island. According to the story, Maui went fishing and hooked something on the bottom of the sea. Thinking he had hooked a very large fish, Maui pulled with all his might and eventually saw that he had brought a large piece of the sea floor to the surface. This was Tongatapu. Maui is also thought to have “created” many of the islands of Samoa and Fiji. There is a large body of stories that recount the various battles of cultural heroes within Tongan history.

#### 5 RELIGION

Christianity is the dominant religion in the Kingdom of Tonga. The largest church denomination on the islands is that of the Free Wesleyan Church, which claims to have over 30,000 members.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important secular holiday in Tonga is the King’s Birthday on July 4. There are a number of celebrations, competitions, and cultural events that take place during the time around his birthday. Emancipation Day is a national holiday that occurs on June 4. It celebrates Tonga’s succession from the Commonwealth and complete independence from Britain.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth in traditional Tongan society was an event that men did not participate in. Children were taken care of primarily by their mothers, although soon they were socialized according to sex. Activities and behaviors were learned according to the status of the family. Children formed play and activity groups with other children of a similar social status. They would remain a part of these groups for life. Tattooing was part of the passage into adulthood for both adolescent boys and girls. Young men were more extensively tattooed than women. Men were tattooed in the area that extended from the lower torso, just above the navel, to the lower thighs, just above the knee. Tattooing is no longer practiced in Tonga.

The death of a relative was accompanied by self-abuse by the surviving members of the family. Bruising, burning, beating, stabbing, and other practices were performed by both men and women. Women had patterns of concentric circles burned into their arms. Men would hit themselves in the head with clubs until they bled, knocking out their own teeth, and even stab themselves with their own spears in the thigh and arm. This practice disappeared quickly after European settlement and missionization of Tongatapu.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A common Tongan greeting is *malo e lelei*, which roughly translates as “a warm welcome to the Friendly Islands.” The “Friendly Islands” was the name given to this chain of islands by traders, explorers, and discoverers in the Pacific region. Traditional greetings in Tongan society involved a mutual touching of the lips by persons of equal status, and among persons of unequal status the inferior would kiss the hand of the higher-



ranking person. In some cases, if the person was of very high status, the inferior person would kiss the feet of the high-ranking person. Western handshakes have replaced traditional greetings except in highly formal ceremonial contexts.

Traditional forms of sitting for men and women of Tonga differ. Men sit cross-legged, while women sit with their legs doubled up and under one side. Mats are the traditional seating items.

Premarital relationships for young men and women in traditional Tongan society did not often lead to marriage, since most marriages were arranged. Courtship did take place and involved an interested young man providing small presents to a young woman. If the woman was of high status, she was expected to remain chaste and refuse his sexual advances. If she was of lower status, then she was less constrained in terms of her response to his advances. The importance of virginity at the time of marriage has been promoted in modern, Christian Tongan society.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Each traditional Tongan village is loosely organized around a central, grassy area for public gatherings. A series of pathways link the households. Household structures vary in shape, size, and decoration depending on social status. Some houses have thatched roofs that come to within 3 or 4 ft of the ground. Some houses have mat walls on some or all sides, while others



Tongans wearing traditional woven bark sarongs line up at a polling booth in Nuku'alofa. (William Nessen/AFP/Getty Images)

have none and are open except for the roof that covers much of the side areas.

Modern Tongan homes of the towns and cities are like most of those in the Pacific area and are made with either block or wood frame with a corrugated iron roof. Affluent Tongans have larger homes with many of the comforts that Americans are accustomed to.

Government-provided medical care is available to all Tongans in the Kingdom of Tonga. Traditional Tongan society viewed illness as being brought about by the acts of supernatural forces. The most common method that Tongans used to propitiate the gods to cure either themselves or a relative of higher status was finger mutilation. Typically, the smallest joint of the little finger was removed. In the cases of chiefs, more severe measures were eventually taken to sway the favor of the gods. The strangulation of small children was reported by early European observers of Tongan life.

There is a road system on the inhabited islands of the Kingdom of Tonga and six airports on the islands, although only one of these has paved runways. Products are transported by trucks to the airports and sea ports. There are no railways on Tonga.

#### **<sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE**

Marriage patterns in traditional Tonga society differed according to social classes. Girls were often betrothed prior to adulthood. Once a premarital agreement was reached between two families, the girl was expected to remain a virgin until she took up residence with her husband. Marriages in almost all

cases were decided by parents. The marriage ceremony itself involved no formal rituals beyond a feast put on by the bride's family. Tongans are now married in Christian ceremonies. In the pre-Christian culture of Tonga, men of the chiefly class often had more than one wife. Although divorce was strictly a male prerogative in precontact Tongan society, both sexes have that option in modern society.

#### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Traditional clothing styles are still worn by both Tongan men and women. Tongan males wear a wraparound cloth called *tupenu* on all formal occasions. Tupenu are also worn to work and for leisure. Tongan women wear a long, wraparound skirt that extends to the ankles. In precontact Tongan society this wraparound cloth, called *ngatu*, was the same for men and women and measured around 8 ft in length and 6 ft in width.

#### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

One of Tonga's major imports is food from New Zealand. Canned fish and meats, flour, sugar, tea, and coffee are some of the more important food imports to the islands. Traditional foods are still prepared and eaten in the Kingdom of Tonga. Traditional feasts involve extensive menus and tremendous amounts of food. Traditional Tongan foods include fish, yams, breadfruit, coconut, arrowroot pudding, bananas, and cooked plantain. Pork and fowl were usually only consumed by the chiefly class or were served if foreign visitors were present. Food was cooked by a variety of methods including the use of pit ovens, boiling, and stewing.

### 13 EDUCATION

Overseas education for the children of well-to-do commoners as well as elite families has been taking place within Tongan society since the 1940s. Tonga has a literacy rate of nearly 100% for both men and women. Most Tongans over the age of 15 can read and write basic words and sentences in Tongan and English. Many children, adolescents, and young adults go to New Zealand to pursue their education.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music and song are very important in Tongan society today. Tongans hold an annual National Music Festival in June. The Festival is a two-week competition that is open to all Tongans with over 10 different categories of performance. The entire event culminates with the national celebration of the King's Birthday on July 4. Traditional Tongan dance is called *laka-laka*; like other forms of dance in Polynesia, it is group-oriented, with the number of participants ranging from 20 to a few hundred. The gestures of the dancers recount the story that is sung. Traditional dances are never accompanied by musical instruments.

### 15 WORK

The Kingdom of Tonga employs Tongans in the range of occupations found in any modern society. Judges, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and other professionals are trained in schools, colleges, and universities overseas. Traditional work was segregated according to sex and social class. Certain occupations were restricted to individuals according to birthright, and this restriction has continued into the present as the norm. Individuals from high-ranking families have more access to opportunities than do those who come from lower ranking families. Nowadays, the majority of rural Tongans are engaged in subsistence farming with a limited production of export crops such as coconuts, bananas, and pumpkin squash.

### 16 SPORTS

Basketball, boxing, cricket, rugby, soccer, and volleyball are all popular sports in Tonga. There are a number of traditional children's games that are played in Tonga. One game, *lanita*, is a simplified form of cricket. Other games involve skill in tossing sticks of various sizes. Most children's games are group games in which the participants have to work as a group to win the contest.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Music provides one of the primary forms of entertainment for Tongans. Singing and music are heard at almost every occasion and every venue in Tonga. American musicians and television and film stars are important icons for members of the modern generation of Tongans.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Tongans produce more *tapa* cloth than any other Polynesian group. *Tapa* is a decorated textile produced from the inner bark of the paper mulberry and breadfruit trees. In the Tongan language, *tapa* refers only to unfinished or undecorated pieces of bark cloth. Finished pieces are called *ngatu*. Traditional clothing such as the *tupenu* was made from decorated bark cloth, or *ngatu*. The bark cloth is an important item for

ceremonial occasions. *Ngatu* is given as gifts at weddings and funerals, used to divide household space at the death of a family member, and has many other important ritual and symbolic functions within the culture.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There is a movement among some Tongans that calls for governmental reform and a change from a monarchy to a democracy. Elite rule on Tonga has always been the pattern and has left many of the commoners out of the financial development and financial successes of the island kingdom.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Rank and gender are important to an understanding of Tongan traditional society. Women always outrank men, and older individuals always outrank younger ones. Females are attributed with a mystical power that provides superior status for them in the rank order system. In the Tongan family, fathers are outranked by their sisters and in particular by their older sisters. Inherited rank is crucial in determining the social roles and rights of specific women. Women of chiefly rank (*hau'eiki*) exerted considerable economic and political power and enjoyed a high degree of individual freedom, while those of commoner rank (*tu'a*) did not.

In precontact Tongan society, women participated in activities that they were prohibited from in other Polynesian societies. For instance, women could drink *kava* in public, eat with men, and go on ocean voyages. Cooking in precontact Tonga was the responsibility of men, except in those cases where a chiefly dish was being prepared. Men were also equally responsible for child rearing in precontact Tongan society. Since the Tongan household was composed of an extended family, grandfathers, uncles, and fathers all participated actively in raising and taking care of children. In modern Tongan society, cooking and child rearing are now within the social domain of women.

Obtaining equal rights and status for women is also seen as a goal by some sectors within modern Tongan society. Women must be 21 years of age and literate to vote. Men must only be taxpayers and literate to vote.

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—by J. Williams

# TRADITIONAL ORTHODOX JEWS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ultra-Orthodox; Hasidic; fundamentalist

**LOCATION:** Worldwide, particularly Israel, North America, Europe, and Canada

**POPULATION:** 1.6 to 1.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Language of the country in which they live; Hebrew; Yiddish; Aramaic (men)

**RELIGION:** Orthodox Judaism

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen a worldwide resurgence in Traditional-Orthodox Judaism, variously referred to as “ultra-Orthodox,” “Hasidic,” or “fundamentalist.” Readily recognizable by their Old-World appearance—full-bearded men in black coats and hats; women in long skirts, their heads covered by kerchiefs or wigs—members of this group differ from most modern-day Jews in their rigorous religious observance, in their conservative political views, and, above all, in their refusal to assimilate into mainstream Western culture. Their rejection of the secular world distinguishes them from the large body of Orthodox Jews—referred to here as “Modern-Orthodox”—whose religious beliefs and practices are very similar, but who participate more fully in the cultures of the countries in which they live, dressing in modern Western-style clothing and enjoying many of the same pastimes as their neighbors of other faiths and backgrounds.

Traditional-Orthodox Jews are generally drawn from two segments of the Jewish population: the Hasidic world and the yeshivas (Jewish institutions of higher learning). The most visible—and most numerous—are the Hasidim, composed of various sects belonging to a movement that began in 18th-century Poland. It took its inspiration from the legendary Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov (literally, “Master of the Good Name”). Hasidism brought new joy and emotional fervor to religious devotion, in sharp contrast to the sober, dry, and often elitist focus on scholarly study that dominated the religious life of Eastern European Jews of the time. Each Hasidic community was led by its own rabbi, or *tzaddik* (holy man), a revered figure whose blessing and advice were sought for virtually all undertakings by members of the community, and whose reputation was spread through tales of his wisdom and holiness. The spiritual leadership of each community was handed down from generation to generation, creating rabbinical dynasties which anchored the numerous Hasidic sects that eventually emerged.

While Hasidism was condemned as heretical and extreme by its opponents (called *Mitnaggedim*), both groups ultimately joined in opposing the greater danger from outside—the growing secularization of Jewry that began with the 18th-century development known as the *Haskalah*, or Enlightenment, that accompanied the growing acceptance of Jews into the mainstream of Western society. The 19th and early 20th centuries saw the growth of Reform and Conservative Judaism, which advocated the adaptation of Jewish tradition to modern life and its reinterpretation in light of contemporary historical scholarship. By the 1950s, only about 10% of Jews in the Unit-

ed States considered themselves Orthodox. A modern secular lifestyle was the norm for the vast majority of Jews worldwide, even in countries such as Israel and Great Britain, where the formal religious leadership remained Orthodox.

The past three decades have seen a revival of Orthodox Judaism of both the more modern, secular kind and the stricter traditional variety. Those remnants of Eastern Europe’s Hasidic community that survived the Nazi Holocaust of World War II have served as the catalyst for the growth of Hasidic communities worldwide. Ironically, Hasidism, which started out as a fringe movement condemned by the religious establishment of its day and virulently attacked by its opponents, is today associated with religious conservatism and learned study. Although the strong historical enmity between the Hasidim and the *Mitnaggedim* is now a thing of the past—and the sharp dividing lines between them have even blurred somewhat—they still form two distinct groups within the Traditional-Orthodox community. The non-Hasidic groups are distinguishable by their focus on scholarly study and their allegiance to the head of a yeshiva (institution of higher learning) rather than to a Hasidic spiritual leader or rebbe.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The total number of Traditional-Orthodox Jews worldwide is estimated at between 1.6 and 1.8 million, out of a total Jewish population of about 13.3 million. Over half live in Israel, mostly in Jerusalem and B’nai Barak, and most of the remainder—between 550,000 and 650,000—live in North America. In Europe, London, Manchester, and Antwerp have relatively large Traditional-Orthodox communities.

Brooklyn, New York, has North America’s largest concentration of Hasidim, located mainly in the neighborhoods of Boro Park, Williamsburg, and Crown Heights. There are also well-established Hasidic communities elsewhere in New York City and in Rockland County, New York, as well as in such diverse cities as Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Miami, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Denver. The largest concentrations of Hasidim in Canada live in Montreal and Toronto.

Hasidic sects take their names from the Eastern European towns in which they originated. Major groups include the Satmar, Lubavitcher, Bobover, Belzer, Vishnitzer, Gerer, Klausenberger, Skverer, and Bratslaver Hasidim. The Satmar are the largest group, followed by the Bobovers and Lubavitchers. The Lubavitchers are known particularly for their spiritual outreach to nonobservant members of the Jewish community through a worldwide network of Habad houses and emissaries called *shlichim*.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Traditional-Orthodox Jews are multilingual. In addition to the languages of the countries in which they live, they all speak and are literate in Hebrew, the language of the Jewish holy books. A substantial portion (usually more than half) of their formal education is conducted in this language, which they begin to learn at an early age. In addition, the young men also learn to read Aramaic, the language of the Talmud, an authoritative compilation of religious commentary.

While a knowledge of Hebrew is also shared by Modern-Orthodox Jews, the Traditional-Orthodox community is distinguished from other groups by the importance it gives to yet another language—Yiddish, the lingua franca that evolved



among European Jews after their expulsion from Germany during the Middle Ages. It combines German syntax with vocabulary from Hebrew, Aramaic, Germanic, Slavic languages, and other languages and it is written in Hebrew characters. Some Traditional-Orthodox children study Yiddish in school, while others pick it up from their parents, and the extent of its use varies among different groups. Other aspects of linguistic practice vary also. For example, members of some Hasidic groups use Hebrew in everyday conversation, while others avoid it, considering it too holy for everyday use.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

Storytelling combining down-to-earth folk wisdom and sophisticated wit is among the most important Hasidic traditions. A wealth of tales and anecdotes handed down over the generations expresses the Hasidim's faith in God and love of humanity. The Hasidic belief in the efficacy of simple, heartfelt religious devotion is expressed in a typical tale about an uneducated wagon driver. Stopping by the roadside, he calls out the entire Hebrew alphabet letter by letter so that God can help him express his devotion, as he does not know the prayers, only the letters from which to fashion them. Tales based on the wisdom of Hasidic sages have always been an especially important part of the folktale tradition. A favorite pastime, these stories provide spiritual inspiration and moral instruction as well as entertainment. They are especially popular at the *melave Malkah*, a gathering held on Saturday night to mark the end of the Sabbath. A famous collection of these tales is *The Legends of the Baal Shem Tov*.

#### **5 RELIGION**

Founded about 2000 BC by the patriarch Abraham, Judaism is a monotheistic religion based on the belief in one God who is the creator and ruler of the universe. His word is revealed in the books of the Bible known to Christians as the Old Testament, and especially the portion—known as the Torah—that was given to the Jewish people through the prophet Moses on Mt. Sinai (about 1300 BC). Traditional-Orthodox Jews belong to one of the three major groups within the Jewish faith, Orthodox Jewry. This group views the Torah as historically revealed to Moses and therefore absolutely binding on believers (the Conservative and Reform groups allow for varying degrees of adaptation to the changing conditions of the modern world). Orthodox Jews also place special emphasis on the Talmud, a compendium of rabbinical commentaries compiled between the 5th and 7th centuries AD, and the legal tradition, called the halakah, that is based on it.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Traditional-Orthodox Jews observe all of the holy days of the Jewish calendar. While their observances are essentially similar to those of the Modern-Orthodox, they may be more elaborate at times. For example, at Passover, when all observant Jews eat unleavened bread, or matzo, some Traditional-Orthodox Jews observe additional prohibitions, such as refraining from wetting the *matzohs*. They may also refuse to eat any processed food at this time, even that which would be considered kosher by less rigorous standards.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

For a Traditional-Orthodox Jew, one's birth date on the Hebrew lunar calendar holds a significance equal to or greater than that of the secular Western date. The major rites of passage observed by Traditional-Orthodox Jews are, by and large, those practiced by the larger community of observant Jews. The first in the life cycle is the *bris*, or circumcision ceremony, for a baby boy when he is eight days old, which formally marked him a part of the Jewish community and affirms his relationship with God. The next rite of passage (also for boys) is one that, in the modern West, has been retained primarily by Traditional-Orthodox Jews: the *upsheren*, or first haircut. A boy's hair is allowed to grow until he is three years old, when he undergoes the ritual haircut which is a ceremonial sign that he is ready to begin the study of the Torah. The next major milestone is the coming-of-age ceremony: the bar mitzvah for boys (at age 13) and bat mitzvah for girls (at age 12). (The Hebrew meaning of "bar/bat mitzvah" is "son/daughter of the commandment.") At the age of 13, a boy is traditionally deemed qualified to be counted as part of a *minyan* (the quorum of ten men needed for public prayer) and can begin wearing *tefillin* (phylacteries), small square leather boxes containing slips inscribed with scriptural passages and worn on the forehead and left arm by Orthodox men during weekday-morning prayers. In addition, the child of 12 or 13 is considered ready to participate fully in the ritual fast days of the Jewish calendar.

Traditional-Orthodox weddings are joyous, festive occasions. Among the best-known features of a traditional Jewish wedding are the *ketubah*, or marriage contract; the *hoopah*, or canopy, under which the ceremony is performed; the tradition of having the bride circle the groom seven times just before the ceremony; and the breaking of a glass at the end of it. At weddings, as at all public events, men and women are seated separately, both at the ceremony and at the reception.

A Jewish funeral takes place as soon after death as possible. The *Kaddish*, or memorial prayer, is recited at the funeral, and should also be recited every day by a relative, or a designated substitute, for the first year following death. The mourners observe a formal week-long period of mourning called *shivah*, when they stay home, refrain from ordinary activities, and receive calls from friends, relative, and acquaintances. The gravestone is dedicated in a formal unveiling ceremony held between one month and one year following the person's death.

#### **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Many facets of public (and private) behavior among Traditional-Orthodox Jews are governed by strict conventions regarding modesty, or *tsniut*. Strict separation of the sexes in public places begins at nursery-school age. Many Traditional-Orthodox Jews will not attend even those forms of secular entertainment to which they have no religious objection—such as an orchestra concert—because that would require them to be part of a mixed male and female audience.

A man and woman who are not related to each other are not supposed to be alone together in a room, and even the public behavior of married couples is restricted by a variety of rules, such as a prohibition against either verbal or physical displays of affection in the presence of others. Among some Hasidic sects, husbands and wives are not even supposed to walk together in the street, at least not until they reach middle age.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditional-Orthodox Jews have often lived crowded together in aging city neighborhoods because of the importance of proximity to their rabbi and synagogue, which is crucial since they are not allowed to drive on the Sabbath or other Jewish holy days. The presence of a religious school in the neighborhood is also a priority. Given these constraints on location, available housing in desirable areas can be overpriced because of the tight market for it. Increasingly, though, Traditional-Orthodox communities are finding suburbanization an acceptable solution to the problem of overcrowded and deteriorating urban housing, as long as the group that relocates is large enough to maintain its cohesion by providing for the continuation of its religious and cultural institutions.

Many Traditional-Orthodox Jews in the New York City area own or rent summer cottages in upstate New York, where they spend part or all of the summer, with the men commuting to the city or spending weekends with the rest of the family. Members of specific Hasidic sects often cluster together in small “colonies” of cottages or bungalows so that they can spend the summer near their friends and neighbors and have the *minyán*, or quorum of 10 men, that is required for prayer services.

Although they reject many aspects of contemporary Western culture, Traditional-Orthodox Jews enthusiastically embrace modern medicine. Their rabbis routinely advise followers about health problems and monitor their treatment by physicians, and their newspapers devote a relatively large amount of space to health-related stories. Money is often raised within the community to help pay the medical expenses of particular members who require expensive surgery or other forms of treatment. There is also a strong interest in alternative, holistic treatments among certain members of the community, and age-old folk remedies are still practiced as well. Traditional-Orthodox Jews use all forms of transportation available to the general public but will not drive or use other forms of transportation on the Sabbath or on holy days.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Arranged marriages are the norm among Traditional-Orthodox Jews. Today, however, the participants in a match, or *shiddach*—unlike their Old-World Eastern European counterparts—have the final say in whether or not they choose to marry each other. Although the two people usually spend some time getting to know one another before becoming engaged, this period seldom lasts more than a few weeks. There is no casual dating among people who are not seriously contemplating getting married in the immediate future.

Hasidic weddings are lively, joyous occasions. At both the ceremony and the reception, male and female guests are separated, as men and women are at all public events. Even the bride and groom sit separately at the reception, and both dance only with members of their own sex until the end of the evening, when the bride dances briefly with her male relatives, holding on to one end of a handkerchief or other cloth because she is not allowed to touch any man other than her husband, with whom she dances last.

After marriage, Traditional-Orthodox Jews adhere strictly to the *taharat hamishpacha*, a code of sexual purity that governs a couple’s sexual practices, as well as other aspects of their behavior toward each other. As part of this code, a woman is

required to frequent a special ritual bath called a *mikvah* at the end of her menstrual period before she can resume sexual relations with her husband. Traditional-Orthodox Jews take the biblical injunction, “Be fruitful and multiply,” seriously. Female birth control is frowned upon unless a potential pregnancy poses medical or psychological hazards, and male use of condoms is forbidden entirely. Families generally have at least five children, and it is not uncommon to have eight, ten, or even more.

The women receive a less exacting religious education than their male counterparts, allowing them to devote a proportionately greater amount of their time in school to secular subjects. Thus they are often better educated than the men in secular fields. Although their large families and the rigorous requirements of their observant lifestyle are more than enough to occupy them at home, some Traditional-Orthodox women hold jobs to help meet household expenses that are increased by the cost of private school tuition.

## 11 CLOTHING

The most visible way in which Traditional-Orthodox Jews differ from Modern-Orthodox and other Jews is in their clothing, which remains similar to that of their ancestors in Eastern Europe. The men wear a black suit and white shirt and sometimes also a black coat. Both Modern- and Traditional-Orthodox men wear a flat, round skullcap called a yarmulke at all times once they reach the age of 13, removing it only when swimming or showering. However, Traditional-Orthodox men also wear various types of hats over their yarmulkes when they pray or go out-of-doors. Probably the most distinctive is the *streimel*, a round, flat-topped fur hat worn by many Hasidic men. Made from up to 26 sable pelts, a *streimel* can cost over \$5,000. Other Hasidim wear the *spodik*, a fur hat that is taller and narrower, while other Traditional-Orthodox Jews, including the Lubavitcher Hasidim, wear ordinary hats. The men also have full beards because the halakah prohibits shaving. Depending on their affiliation, they may wear the hair in front of their ears in earlocks called *peyot*, curly strands that are left to grow long, or, in some cases, tucked behind the ears.

Unlike the men, Traditional-Orthodox women are not restricted to any one style of clothing. They do, however, dress conservatively in keeping with strict religious laws governing female modesty, wearing either dresses or skirts that are long enough to cover their knees when they are standing, sitting, or walking. (In some communities, a stricter length requirement, such as 10 centimeters below the knee, is specified.) They do not wear slacks, jeans, or shorts, and their clothing must have high necklines and long sleeves. Once they are married, they cover their hair with either a kerchief or wig, for only their husband is permitted to see it.

## 12 FOOD

The diet of Traditional-Orthodox Jews is distinguished by the strictness with which they observe the laws of Kashrut, kashruth, or kosher, which are derived from Biblical injunctions against eating foods considered to be impure. It is common for Modern-Orthodox and even Conservative Jews to “keep a kosher home.” In general, this means separating meat from dairy products in their diet—which includes keeping separate sets of *milchig* (milk) and *fleischig* (meat) dishes and cooking utensils—and eating only meat that has been ritually

slaughtered by a qualified Jewish slaughterer, or *shochet*. In addition to these measures, however, Traditional-Orthodox Jews refrain from eating any processed or manufactured food that does not carry a rabbinical *hechsher* (certification) and honor only the *hechshers* of certain rabbis.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Like all Jews, the Traditional-Orthodox place a high value on education. However, they are unique in their concentrated focus on religious studies and in the part that these studies play in daily life. All members of the community—not just scholars or students—regularly spend time studying Jewish religious texts, perpetuating the time-honored tradition of their Eastern European forebears, for whom religious study was the most highly honored of activities. The children attend private religious schools (segregated by sex), which combine the study of religion and the Hebrew language with such secular subjects as English and mathematics. Girls, for whom the religious requirements are less stringent, receive a greater degree of secular education than boys, whose secular studies may or may not meet the minimum required for state certification in some cases, depending upon the school they attend.

The young men attend Jewish colleges called *yeshivas*, where they pursue advanced religious studies in an atmosphere far different from that of the ordinary academic setting of Western universities. Much of the study is conducted in crowded, noisy public study halls by pairs of students reading and debating together over passages in religious texts. The extracurricular activities of ordinary campus life—team sports, theater productions, mixers—are unknown in the *yeshiva*. Sports are frowned upon and casual dating is forbidden. There is an additional institution, the *kollel*, for even more advanced study; it is generally attended by married students.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The cultural heritage of Traditional-Orthodox Jews is basically the religious tradition that they have in common with other members of the Jewish faith. However, the Hasidic background shared by many has produced a rich tradition of folktales and music, especially the lyrical, wordless melodies called *niggunim* that create a feeling of spiritual uplift and closeness to God. Traditional-Orthodox Jews also avail themselves of more modern cultural resources to replace the secular culture that they have renounced. These include contemporary literature for both children and adults by Orthodox Jewish writers. Sets of storybooks for girls are especially popular, notably the *Bais Yakov* series, and many adults enjoy the self-help books of authors such as Miriam Adaham and Rabbi Manis Friedman.

### **15 WORK**

Like Modern-Orthodox Jews, the Traditional-Orthodox do not work on the Sabbath (*Shabbos*)—which begins an hour before sundown on Friday night and lasts until sundown on Saturday night—or on a number of other holy days throughout the year. Given these restrictions, many Traditional-Orthodox Jews prefer to be in business for themselves. In Israel, many of the men continue full-time religious study after they are married, while their wives work, often as teachers or secretaries (or, more recently, in such fields as computers, graphics, and book-keeping). Outside Israel, the men have traditionally gravitated toward the diamond and real estate industries. Electronics re-

tailoring is also popular, and a number of Traditional-Orthodox Jews own nursing homes.

### **16 SPORTS**

Sports are generally frowned upon as a form of recreation for adults but considered acceptable for children. Athletic activities are part of the schedule at Traditional-Orthodox summer camps although the clothing worn during games varies from ordinary uniforms to Hasidic garb complete with long black coats. The strictest groups, such as the Satmar Hasidim, forbid all sports for children past the age of the bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah (13 for boys and 12 for girls), which traditionally signals the formal beginning of adulthood. Swimming, for all Traditional-Orthodox groups, is strictly segregated by sex: men and women never swim in the presence of members of the opposite gender.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Religious considerations play a major role in how Traditional-Orthodox Jews choose to spend their leisure time. They own no televisions, which are seen as a corrupting influence, and most reject virtually all other facets of popular culture, including movies and popular music. Even cultural events such as concerts, to which there is no inherent moral objection, are generally out of bounds, since Traditional-Orthodox Jews are not supposed to mingle with members of the opposite sex in public. For the most part, their recreational needs are met through concerts and other special events organized by the religious community, where they know that the content will not be objectionable and that men and women will be seated separately. It is also considered acceptable to frequent museums and cultural exhibits of other types which do not require mingling at close range with strangers of the opposite sex. Another cultural resource is the variety of recordings of contemporary music by Jewish recording artists such as Mordechai ben David and Avraham Fried, whose songs combine religious content with popular musical styles.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Centuries of skilled silversmithing has gone into the creation of Jewish ritual objects, many of them for synagogue use, including Torah scroll cases and ornaments, pointers for reading the Torah, and a variety of ceremonial objects such as *esrog* boxes for the Sukkot holiday. Probably the most universal ritual object for home use is the *mezuzah*, a small oblong tube containing a parchment scroll inscribed with a Biblical text and affixed to the doorposts of observant Jewish homes. Mezuzahs may be made of silver, brass, wood, ceramics, or other materials. In the Jewish home, embroidery is found on the tablecloths used at festive Sabbath or holiday meals, and also on such objects as the special cloths used to cover the ceremonial loaf of bread, or *challah*, at Sabbath meals.

A favorite hobby of Traditional-Orthodox Jews is gathering for storytelling sessions at which inspirational tales of rabbinical wisdom and miraculous events are recounted.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Although Traditional-Orthodox communities are relatively free from crime, suicide, and the high divorce rates common among other segments of society, their members are not

immune to some of the same problems that plague the world beyond their neighborhoods. The number of Traditional-Orthodox Jews participating in twelve-step recovery programs for drug and alcohol abuse is rising in spite of deep-seated fears of discovery and subsequent ostracism by others within the community. In 1988 the Lubavitcher Hasidic sect, headquartered in Crown Heights, New York, started a drug and alcohol awareness program—a rarity in the Hasidic world—called Operation Survival, which offers referral services and provides counselors to yeshivas.

Other potential sources of tension inherent in the Traditional-Orthodox lifestyle include the universal custom of arranged marriages (*shiddachs*) and the pressure to produce and support large families. In addition, there is the potential culture clash that can occur between men who continue their full-time religious studies after marriage (a practice particularly common in Israel) and their breadwinner wives, who often find employment in non-Orthodox work environments, where they may enjoy easygoing, informal social contacts with co-workers of a type forbidden them in their role as Orthodox wives. Outside employment also means that a Traditional-Orthodox woman may advance professionally while her husband—if he remains a student—has little hope of advancement to a secure teaching or rabbinical position.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Traditional Orthodox Jewish women are to be helpmates for their husbands. That means that the wife is there for her husband and is loving and supportive, especially in his religious studies. It is the husband's obligation to be the breadwinner of the family. However, sometimes the wife will be the breadwinner, so that her husband can further his Talmudic studies. Women also help raise their children, and play a large role in their religious education.

Traditional Orthodoxy has insulated itself from such evolutions as feminism, the gay rights movement, and laxer sexual norms in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Allowing changes in women's religious roles is evidence of unacceptable surrender to the broader secular culture. However, for some Orthodox women, Jewish tradition has always engaged and been influenced by prevailing intellectual and cultural norms, strong enough to incorporate them without compromising its core values or laws.

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—reviewed by J. Hobby

# TUJIA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Bizika, Turan, and Tuming

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Tujia; Chinese

**RELIGION:** Polytheism and ancestor worship

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Tujia were descendants of a tribe called Linjun. Early in the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC), the Linjun migrated from Sichuan and Hubei to the western part of Hunan. The name Tujia reflects the assimilation of many cultural traits of the local aboriginals by the Linjun. From time immemorial, the Tujia lived by hunting, fishing, and slash-and-burn cultivation. Under the leadership of headsmen, they submitted cloth as tribute and tax to the government of successive Chinese dynasties. Uprisings, however, happened frequently. In the 8th century, the Tujia in Xizhou district resisted the rule of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and set up an independent regime by force of arms. Later on, a Tujia clan called Peng became strong enough to unify the Wushi district in western Hunan and to rule over it for some 800 years. In the 17th century they pledged allegiance to the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Tujia headmen were appointed as local officials. Their self-given name was Bizika, which means “native.” The historical records from the Song dynasty (960–1276) to the Qing Dynasty called them Turan (natives), Tuming (native people), and Tujia (native household), which expressed the same meaning as their self-given name. The name Tujia is now prevalent.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tujia population amounted to over 8 million in 2000. They dwell mainly in a vast area at the juncture of Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces. It is a hilly country with mild climate and abundant rainfall, traversed by the Wuling Mountains and criss-crossed by three rivers. The famous Zhangjiajie primeval forest is located in this area.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Tujia language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Tibeto-Burman group; it is as yet unclear whether they form a distinct branch. There are two dialects, one in the north and one in the south, spoken by some 200,000 Tujia. The Tujia have no written language. However, most of the Tujia also speak Chinese and use Chinese characters.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

Among the ancient songs one finds legends about the origin of human beings, which the Tujia share with other national minorities living in southwest China. In brief, human beings were all drowned in a catastrophic flood, except for a brother and sister. They married and gave birth to a fleshy lump, which was divided into pieces and thrown in all directions. Every piece of the fleshy lump became the ancestor of a particular nationality. Another legend narrates the story of a girl (Shexiangxiang) and an eagle. Since the eagle had saved her life, Shexiangxiang

was very grateful. She cultivated the land arduously. Without the help of the eagle, her life would have been even harsher. One night, she dreamed of two small eagles landing in her arms and she became pregnant. She bore a son and a daughter. Years later, Shexiangxiang fell ill and died. Her last words were: “The eagle is your savior, so, never kill the eagle.” In fact, the eagle died shortly after her and was buried beside her grave. Time passed swiftly and the children grew up. Unfortunately, there was no one else with whom to marry. According to Heaven’s will, they got married. Later, eight sons were born and were given Tan as their surname. They are the ancestors of Tan, an important clan of the Tujia, living in a mountainous area of west Jiangxi Province. Tradition has it that they have never killed an eagle.

A story about creation states that the Heavenly King ordered two gods, Zhang and Li, to produce a sky and an earth respectively. Zhang produced a sky that was orderly, bright, neat, and smooth. Careless in handling things, Li made an earth full of bumps and hollows, mountains and caverns, meandering brooks and zigzagging rivers, an environment that corresponds closely to the geographical features of the land of the Tujia.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

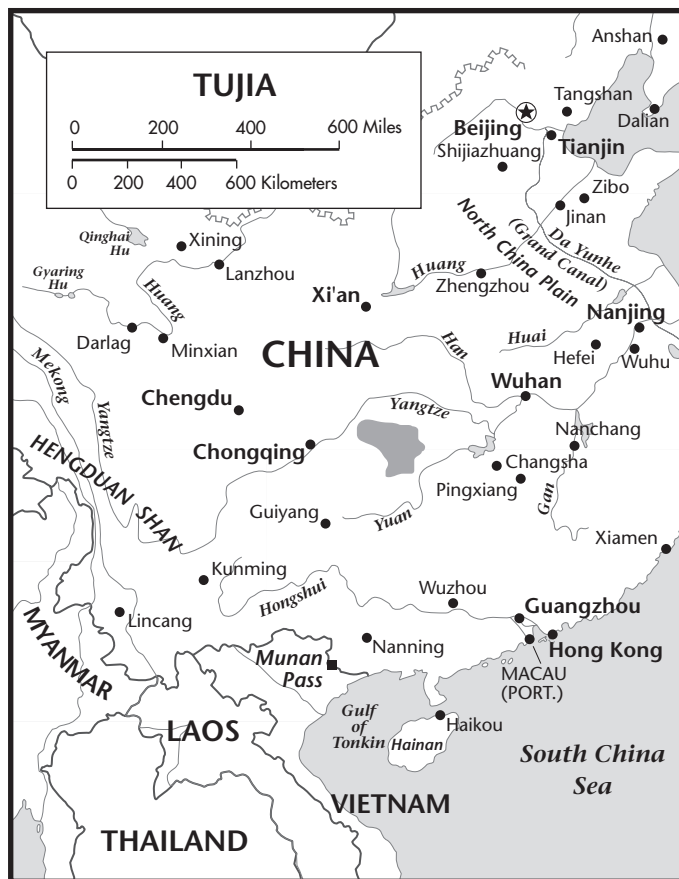
The Tujia believe in many gods and worship their ancestors. Their reverence to the white tiger can be traced back thousands of years and is actually related to the name of their ancestor Linjun (meaning “tiger” in ancient times). At ordinary times, they enshrine and worship the White Tiger God and other gods at home. On the first of November (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between November 24 and December 22), they offer sacrifice and pray for the prosperity of their family.

The Tujia narrate a legend about a brave female hunter called Meishan. She was killed in a fight with a group of wild hogs and was transformed into a goddess who protected the hunters. Shortly after the Spring Festival, the Tujia used to organize a hunt in the forest. Before starting off, they always offered sacrifices to the Hunter Goddess Meishan.

An important belief among the Tujia is that the Heavenly King will, in the final instance, settle lawsuits, reversing unjust verdicts and eliminating calamities. Whenever the Tujia fall seriously ill, they pray and make a vow to the Heavenly King in the temple. As soon as they recover from the illness, they offer sacrifices and redeem their vow. When they suffer an injustice, they also go to the King, drink a mixture of cat blood and wine, and ask that the lawsuit be settled by the god. In order to prepare for the celebration of the July Seventh Festival (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between August 1 and 29), butchery, hunting, fishing, music playing, and wearing red are prohibited for a period of two days. Those who violate the ban will be punished by the Heavenly King and will suffer a misfortune.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Spring Festival (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20) is the most important of the numerous holidays of the Tujia. It is celebrated one day earlier than the true date. In the 17th century, Tujia soldiers were sent to the frontline to fight against the Japanese invaders. One day, they learned from reliable sources that the invaders planned a sneak attack on the lunar New Year. The Tujia organized their



own surprise attack one day before the Spring Festival, which ended in a great victory. Thereafter, the Tujia followed their heroes in celebrating the New Year one day ahead of time. The New Year meal is a casserole of pork, vegetables, carrots, bean starch noodles, deep-fried bean curd, and rice. Early in the morning people scramble to light up firecrackers to “welcome the New Year.”

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As soon as a baby is born, the father announces the good news to his mother-in-law. Before setting off, he should catch a chicken and bring it there as a gift. Depending on whether the baby is a boy or a girl, he catches a cock or a hen. In the western part of Jiangxi Province, if a girl is born, the father will grow peony in the courtyard. Each year he sells the peony roots and deposits the money in view of the girl's wedding. During the confinement following childbirth, the new mother eats a large number of eggs. A pile of eggshells thus retained will be dumped on the crossroad near the house. It announces to the villagers that the baby is a month old now and that mother and child are all safe and sound. A tile-like embroidered hat is woven for the baby. It means the baby will be rich and will live in a tile-roofed house in the future.

In a family, if a woman does not get pregnant for a long time after the wedding, the couple will go to the temple to pray and make a vow. If a baby (especially a son) is born, they will bring sacrificial offerings to redeem their vow.

The Tujia practiced cremation in the past, but nowadays they bury their dead in the ground. A shaman will be invit-

ed to recite the scriptures, while the funeral procession is led by a Taoist priest. The clansmen sing a mournful song while dancing.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Tujia usually receive guests with a gruel of sweetened fried flour. According to custom, they break at least three eggs and drop them, one by one, into the boiling gruel (numbers three and four are regarded as lucky; numbers one, two, five and more are regarded as unlucky). The host will propose three toasts right after the guests' arrival and also before their departure. If a guest does not drink, he should dip his middle finger into the wine three times, each time taking it out and snapping the wine off; this means the guest drank his fill and thanks the host for his kindness. If guests are kept for dinner, the main dish is a bowl of seasoned pork or chops covered by a big piece of fat meat.

On festivals, the host will bake glutinous rice cakes in the firepool for the guests. If a guest takes a cake covered with ash, the host will hasten to help him to pat the ash off the cake; if the guest pats it himself, it might be deemed that he thinks the house is unclean. During the meal, the guest may lay his chopsticks in the form of a cross, indicating he is full.

Singing in antiphonal style is the usual beginning of dating. On a selected day of June, July, or August (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between June 26 and October 21), a “Girls' Meeting” will be held. Singing while dancing, all women of the village participate in the great occasion, wearing their traditional costumes. Dating and lovers' rendezvous are part of this social ritual.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Tujia usually dwell at the foot or on the slope of a hill or beside a stream. Their houses are shaped like a “sitting tiger.” This is probably related to their worship of the white tiger. Whenever they build a house on the slope, they build a platform first. The back side of the platform lies directly on the slope, while the front side is supported by wooden stilts. The living standards of the Tujia, both in urban and rural areas, correspond by and large to those of the Chinese. Only in remote mountainous areas in Hunan do they still live in poverty. Bicycles and tractors provide their main means of transport. Trains and cars are the next. Fully equipped hospitals have been established in counties and townships. There are medical clinics in large villages.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Tujia families are patrilineal, usually small in size, except when two or three generations live under the same roof. Women's position in the family is lower than men's. Monogamy is the rule. Marriages may be arranged by the parents or entered into freely by the couple. Remnants of old customs, such as cousin marriage and levirate (a widow has to marry her husband's brother and the latter also has the duty to marry her) still survive today. “Free marriage” starts with antiphonal singing and dating. If they feel mutual love for each other, boys and girls exchange gifts to symbolize their affection. The girl may give the boy a piece of brocade, and the young man may give her a piece of fur. One week before her wedding, the girl begins her tearful singing. The words in her songs express her grateful feelings to her parents, her unwillingness to leave her family,

her trust that her brothers and sister(s)-in-law will take good care of her parents, and her curse for the woman matchmaker, if any. Her parents, relatives, friends, and especially the girls of the same village participate in the tearful chorus. Their feelings are genuine and heartfelt.

On the day of the wedding, a team from the young man's house comes to the bride's house; the bride's family and friends have already placed a table obstructing the entrance. Antiphonal singing or talking begins. If the bridegroom's side wins (which is usually the case), they are welcome and the table will be removed; if they lose, they are allowed to creep beneath the table to enter the house. They then accompany the girl to her fiancé's house. The ritual is lively and humorous.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Tujia daily dress has come to resemble that of the Chinese. Traditionally, however, women wear a short top with loose sleeves and buttons down the left. Two or three layers of lace are edged to the garment. The skirt is made of eight pieces of cloth or silk. These are still used on festivals, as well as silver earrings and bracelets and gold rings. Silver-made small bells, plates, chains, toothpicks, and earpicks are pinned on the front of their upper garment. Tujia women comb their hair into a bun. Men wear short tops with buttons down the front. Both sexes wrap their heads with a blue kerchief.

### **12 FOOD**

Rice and corn are the staple foods of the Tujia, with urban Tujia eating more rice and rural Tujia eating more corn. Rice is mixed with maize flour and steamed, giving a dry, colored cooked rice, which is taken with vegetable soup. Chicken, duck, goose, and pork, added in varying proportions to the rice-corn vegetable soup, are the principal sources of protein. The Tujia take three meals a day. During the Spring Festival, wild game is added to the regular dishes.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Tujia's cultural and educational level is higher than the average among the national minorities of China. However, education in mountainous areas is still unsatisfactory, illiteracy being widespread. Although 95% of the school-age children do enroll in primary schools, the majority drop out. There is, nonetheless, some progress in the numbers of Tujia students who go through primary and secondary education and continue to college and university. This is possibly due to the fact that the Tujia speak Chinese and write Chinese characters.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Folk songs are so popular among the Tujia that almost everybody can compose a song and sing it by him- or herself. The traditional "Swing Arm Dance" is also very prevalent. The dance is led by someone who knows well the sequence of the movements. People follow him or her in a circle and continue to move around. The dance movement is mainly the movements of arms, mimicking those of hunting, cultivation, fighting, etc. More than 70 dance movements are performed successively and each movement will be replaced by another during a new circular procession. "Maogusi" is a traditional Tujia drama, usually performed in lunar January (Western calendar, between January 21 and March 18). A lot of straw is

bound to the actor's body, indicating the hairy body of the ancestors. It is a play in five acts showing slash-and-burn cultivation, hunting and fishing, spinning and weaving, as well as the marriage ritual.

### **15 WORK**

The Tujia have a mixed economy, based mainly on agriculture and supplemented by hunting, fishing, handicrafts, and trade. Women share fully in the traditional farming chores with men. Since the Chinese revolution, many new industries have been set up in Tujia territory, with the Tujia participating in a kind of "industrial revolution." These industries include metallurgy, machinery, coal, electric power, textiles, paper mills, wine-making, chemical engineering, architectural engineering, and shipbuilding.

### **16 SPORTS**

"Hit the flying stick" is the traditional sport of the Tujia. Usually, it is a game between two individuals, but it may also be played by two opposite teams. Each player holds a bat and uses it to hit a stick thrown from the opposite side. The stick hit back should be caught. The structure of the game somewhat reminds one of baseball. Missing or dropping the stick either by the catcher or by another player is recorded.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Movies and television have grown very popular as new forms of entertainment. However, group music with gongs and drums, especially during the off-season of agricultural work, are still prevalent among the peasants. The "Swing Arm Dance" is even more widespread. Sometimes, tens of thousands of people join in group dancing, making it by far the most important recreational activity of the Tujia.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The most famous handicraft of the Tujia is a kind of cloth brocade called "Xilankapu." Most girls learn to stitch on cloth some one hundred figures and designs. Girls often stitch it on a blanket and or on a piece of cloth, which they offer as a gift to their boyfriend, to show their superb skill. They usually weave several pieces then sew them together. All the figures and designs of the pieces match each other in a very artistic way.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

With education and industrialization, a growing number of young people, mainly in the rural areas, have migrated to the new and developing cities in their autonomous prefectures. This kind of social mobility, which tends to increase with the years, has had a destabilizing effect on the small rural villages, which depend on the younger generation to ensure their future—both economic and cultural.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students. In rural areas, the number of Tujia participating in formal education is small.

Most school-age children drop out of school after just a few years.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# TURKMENS

**PRONUNCIATION:** TUHRK-mens

**LOCATION:** Turkmenistan; northern Iran; northern Iraq; northwestern Afghanistan

**POPULATION:** 7.7 million

**LANGUAGES:** Turkmen; Russian; Persian

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The ethnic origins of the Turkmens are generally traced to the Oghuz, a loose polity of Turkic tribes that coalesced in and around present-day Mongolia in the 7th and 8th centuries AD. By the 9th century, the Oghuz had migrated west and inhabited steppe areas extending north and west from Central Asia's Aral Sea and Syr Darya river. The term *Turkmen* first appears in the 10th century, and it is believed that it was initially used to designate those Oghuz who adopted Islam and migrated southwest with the leader Seljuk into present-day Turkmenistan and beyond. While the first element of the term (*Turk*) is clear, the original meaning of the second element (*-men*) is unknown. (It has nothing to do with the English word *men*, however.)

By the 12th century, Oghuz and Turkmen tribes had migrated into what are now Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and other parts of the Middle East. In these places, they established dynasties and played an important role in political life. In the case of Turkey and Azerbaijan, Turkmen tribes came to form the ethnic base of the populations. In Turkmenistan, the Turkmens never united into one political force and, until the early 20th century, most of the tribes were at least nominally under the control of the Central Asian khanates Khiva and Bukhara or, in some cases, under Persian suzerainty. The Turkmens gained a reputation as excellent fighters and horsemen whose chief occupation was raiding sedentary peoples for slaves and property. In the 1880s, after bitter fighting, Russia conquered the region and, in 1924, the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic became one of the 15 republics of the USSR. Under Soviet rule, the Turkmens endured many drastic changes. Property was collectivized, traditional leaders and (Islamic) religious figures were brutally eliminated, traditional social and political structures were attacked, and the nomadic way of life ceased to exist. Only with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and independence in the early 1990s did the government of Turkmenistan cautiously permit some of the prior traditions. Because most of the political leadership and social and economic institutions are Soviet holdovers, however, genuine and significant change has been slow to materialize.

Between 1990 and 2006, Turkmenistan was governed by Saparmurat Niyazov. Niyazov was known as Turkmenbashi, which means "Leader of the Turkmens." Turkmens living under the rule of Turkmenbashi lacked basic freedoms and were subjected to the watchful eye of the country's secret police force. Most Turkmens lived in poverty, as the government of Turkmenistan spent the profits of state industries on presidential palaces and other massive construction projects. Although Niyazov was replaced by Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedow in 2006, it is unlikely that Turkmenistan will reform its political and economic institutions.



Turkmens maintain a theory of common origin from a mythical ancestor, Oghuz Khan, from whom are supposed to have emerged 22 or 24 original Oghuz tribes—the core of the early Turkmens. Only some of these tribal names are current today, and researchers believe that the present-day Turkmen tribal structure consists of old Oghuz and pre-Oghuz tribes, newer Turkic tribes, and elements of Iranian groups who inhabited the lands taken over by the Turkmens. There are more than two dozen tribal groupings among the Turkmens today, the largest of which are Teke, Yomut, and Ersari. Tribal identity is important among the Turkmens and continues to play a significant role in social relations and politics.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The majority of Turkmens live in Turkmenistan (an estimated 4.4 million) and some 3 million more live in northern Iran, northern Iraq, and northwestern Afghanistan. Because of various ethnic processes that have occurred among the Turkmens, the Turkmens of today may have Indo-European (Iranian) or Mongol-like physical features.

Turkmenistan consists of 488,100 square kilometers (188,450 square miles) and, except for the Balkan and Kopet Dag mountains in the south, the Caspian Sea in the west, and the Amu Darya river in the east, Turkmenistan is a vast arid desert. In fact, Central Asia's two largest deserts—the Garagum (central Turkmenistan) and the Gyzylgum (eastern Turkmenistan into Uzbekistan)—make up from 80–90% of Turkmenistan's territory. The average yearly rainfall in these desert zones does not exceed 150 millimeters (6 inches), and daytime summer temperatures often reach 45°C (113°F). Cold winds from the north bring temperatures well below freezing in the winter, especially in northern Turkmenistan. In spite of the harsh desert environment, the Turkmens have long been known as desert nomads who fully adapted to the environment in their economic pursuits, including sheep, camel, goat, and horse breeding and limited agriculture. They also used the desert to their advantage as an almost impenetrable refuge in time of war and strife.

Because of high rates of poverty and unemployment, thousands of Turkmens have left Turkmenistan to find work. Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey are the main destinations for Turkmen labor migrants. Thousands of Turkmens have fled Iraq since the 2003 invasion of the country by the United States and its allies.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Turkmen is part of the Oghuz group of Turkic languages. Linguistically, it is close to Azeri (Azerbaijani), Turkish, and Uzbek. Aside from the Turkic words in its vocabulary, there are numerous Persian and Arabic elements as well. The Turkmen language in Turkmenistan borrows many words from Russian. While virtually every Turkmen tribe has its own dialect, all are mutually intelligible. Turkmens also speak the languages of their neighbors. For example, many urban Turkmens in Turkmenistan speak excellent Russian due to decades of Soviet rule, while Turkmens in Iran commonly speak Persian. Prior to Soviet rule, all Turkmens wrote their language in the Arabic script. In Turkmenistan, that script was changed to Latin and then Cyrillic prior to World War II. In 1993, Turkmenbashi decreed that the Latin alphabet be used in place of the Cyrillic.



## 4 FOLKLORE

A popular legend among the Turkmen people says that when God made the world, the Turkmens were the first to get a land filled with sunshine, but the last to get any water. Like other Central Asian peoples, the Turkmens have a rich folklore tradition consisting of epic stories, tales, lyric poems, and other genres usually transmitted and performed orally with or without musical accompaniment. Aside from entertaining, the folklore tradition has served to record Turkmen history and genealogy as well as to teach and reinforce Turkmen values, norms, and culture. This oral folklore is replete with heroic deeds performed for the sake of either romantic love or the community or tribe. Each Turkmen tribe and clan has its own series of legends and tales that define tribal genesis and trace genealogy. This folklore continues to play a crucial role in providing the Turkmens with their sense of identity and history and has long served as a basis for the Turkmen written literary tradition as well.

The folklore tradition also includes various "superstitions" that dictate a wide range of social and familial activity. Knowledge of and belief in amulets, charms, lucky and unlucky omens, lucky and unlucky days of the week, as well as spirits and the evil eye are common to almost every Turkmen. In the traditional setting, virtually every act or type of behavior, no matter how mundane, is governed by a certain set of prescribed rules so that it will not bring on misfortune or bad luck. When activity concerns young children, birth, pregnant women, or other "vulnerable" individuals and critical events, such beliefs are especially apparent. Although outsiders often dismiss this

aspect of folklore as mere superstition, many of the beliefs are actually grounded in practical knowledge of the human body, nature, and the environment.

## 5 RELIGION

Nearly all Turkmen are Sunni Muslim, and almost every tribe or clan has a legend or account of how it became Muslim. Although Islam has been present in Turkmenistan since the 8th century, a great deal of Islamization took place after the Mongol invasion of the 13th century. Islam in Turkmenistan includes nomadic traditions and shamanist elements. Many Turkmen observe the rituals of Islam, such as daily prayer, pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting during the month of Ramadan. In addition, the moment or event of conversion to Islam is often the defining element in a tribe's or clan's history, and thus perhaps the most crucial identifying factor for Turkmen society. Each tribe or clan also has its own cemetery and saint's shrine to which members may conduct pilgrimage when the need arises. At the shrine, a pilgrim may appeal to the saint for good fortune, prosperity, the safety of a loved one, a cure for an illness, or the birth of a child. Hundreds of such shrines dot the Turkmen landscape and are important places where Turkmen religious practice is conducted. Years of Soviet rule have lessened the level of religious observance amongst Turkmen, as is evidenced by the popularity of alcohol consumption in Turkmenistan.

In Turkmenistan, the state plays a significant role in religious life. Since the late 1990s, the government has shut down many mosques operating without state approval. The government has also closed foreign-supported *madrāsas*—or religious schools—because it fears the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important religious holidays are celebrated according to the lunar calendar and include the *Gurban bairamy* (Sacrifice Holiday), which commemorates God's trial of Abraham in his willingness to sacrifice his son, and the *Oraz bairamy* (Holiday of the Fast), celebrated at the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan). *Nowruz* (New Year's Day) is an ancient holiday celebrated on March 21 (the vernal equinox) and marks the beginning of spring and agriculture. All of these holidays are marked with feasts, family gatherings, and entertainment. National holidays include Independence Day (October 27) and a series of memorial days to commemorate the end of World War II, veterans, and victims of the 1948 earthquake in the capital city, Ashgabat. Turkmenistan also celebrates Neutrality Day on December 12, a reminder of Turkmenistan's "neutrality" in foreign policy.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As Muslims, all Turkmen males are circumcised (usually between the ages of 3 and 7). The ceremony is accompanied by a great deal of celebration and fanfare as it marks a boy's becoming a member of male community. After circumcision, a boy no longer sleeps with his mother, but rather spends more time with adult males, who school him in proper male behavior, etiquette, and so on. Although there is no one analogous ceremony for girls, they too make a conscious (albeit less publicized) passage into womanhood by wearing head scarves, having their ears pierced, and spending more time with women. Wed-

dings too are celebrated with a great deal of festivity and lavish expenditure. From an early age, girls prepare for married life by sewing and crafting a great deal of clothing and household items that are saved until the wedding. Although funerals are also important events, most mourning takes place long after the actual death of an individual. On the third, seventh, and fortieth day after a loved one's death, there are large gatherings dedicated to the deceased's memory. These often continue on a yearly basis as well.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Much of Turkmen behavior, conduct, etiquette, and other social norms come out of *Adat* (Turkmen customary law), *Sherigat* (Islamic law), and *Edep* (rules of proper etiquette and behavior). Although some aspects of these traditions may have been lost in the Soviet period, their essence (often referred to as *turkmenchilik*, meaning "Turkmenness") provides the Turkmen with a well-grounded corpus of rules and norms that continue to mold social behavior on a daily basis. Some of the more significant aspects of these traditions include elaborate and exact ways of greeting based on age and gender, a heightened sense of hospitality toward guests, a great deal of deference and respect toward elders, and a clear sense of tribal/clan identity.

Turkmenistan's Soviet legacy has left Turkmen society divided. Upper-class Turkmen send their children to Russian schools and live in cities such as Ashgabat. Poorer Turkmen tend to live in rural areas and earn a living from agriculture. Many Russians inhabit the urban working class.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Turkmen dwelling is the felt tent called a *gara oy* (black house), which is often called a "yurt" in western literature. The felt covering is attached onto a wooden frame, and the dwelling may be assembled or disassembled within an hour. It is usually carried by camel. While some Turkmen in Afghanistan and Iran may still live in the *gara oy* year-round, in Turkmenistan it is no longer a primary residence. Instead it is used in summer pasture areas or constructed for recreation or holidays. In rural Turkmenistan, most people live in one-story homes made from clay and straw. Many times these homes are located within a walled courtyard that also contains a family's agricultural plot and livestock holdings. In the cities of Turkmenistan, high-rise apartment dwellings are also common. Although apartments may have modern plumbing and natural gas capabilities, many Turkmen prefer the courtyard residence as it affords more privacy, and a yard, and it is much cooler in the summer.

Under Soviet rule, living conditions in Turkmenistan were "modernized" in a distinctly Soviet way. Technology and industry were introduced and urban areas developed. Today, Turkmenistan is left with an outdated infrastructure in dire need of technical revamping, and there is a severe shortage of trained personnel and replacement parts. Although modern conveniences (telephones, plumbing, sewers, etc.) do exist in the cities, they usually work only sporadically. Cars, buses, and trains have replaced the horse and camel as the main modes of transportation in Turkmenistan, but the cost of new replacement vehicles and a lack of spare parts make travel difficult and expensive. Neglect of infrastructure has also led to short-



A Turkmen woman throws carnations on a monument erected on the memory of Turkmen soldiers who died during World War II.  
(AP Images/Burhan Ozbilici)

ages of clean water and the breakdown of irrigation systems for agriculture.

Since Turkmenistan became independent, the health care system has fallen into disrepair. In 2001 President Niyazov ordered the closing of all hospitals outside Ashgabat. He also replaced 15,000 Turkmen healthcare workers with military conscripts. The rise to power of a new president and high natural gas prices (a boon for Turkmenistan) may lead to improvements in health, education, and infrastructure in Turkmenistan.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

As in interpersonal relations, Turkmen custom (*turkmenchilik*) dictates a host of rules and provisions for family life. Most Turkmen families are extended, and elders live with their adult children. Nursing homes are extremely rare in Turkmenistan. The youngest son bears the primary responsibility for his parents' welfare and usually lives with his wife and children in the home of his parents, but other siblings can also share in such duties. Turkmen families are usually large, and families with

six or more children are the norm in rural areas. *Turkmenchilik* also requires that siblings and close relatives assist each other in times of need. It is incumbent on family and clan members to render each other assistance when building homes, organizing weddings and other functions, entering college, getting jobs, and so on.

Many marriages are arranged, and virtually all must be blessed by the parents. Western-style dating is rare. The motivating factor in arranged marriages is finding a suitable match. Such a match will be based on age, social status, education level, tribal affiliation, and other expectations. The young man should be 20–25 years old and have finished his military service. The woman should be 18–22 years old. One common element in the process is the paying of the *galyng* (bride price), which consists of a transfer of either money or goods to the bride's family. In most cases, a couple knows each other and has met at least several times. After the wedding, the bride usually goes to live with the groom in the home of his parents and must work as a member of the household. Because of the poverty of many Turkmen, the practice of "bride kidnapping" has

become more common. Grooms who are unable to pay dowries may kidnap their perspective brides, and then try to convince the women to marry them. Often, elopements between a consenting woman and a consenting man are carried out using the tradition of bride kidnapping.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

The most prominent feature of traditional Turkmen male clothing is the *telpek*, a high sheepskin hat. Other Central Asian peoples wear sheepskin hats, but only the Turkmen have the large and wide *telpek*, which may be brown, black, or white and is typically very shaggy. Men who wear the *telpek* usually wear a skullcap beneath it and shave their heads. Long, deep-red robes with extended sleeves are also common among men in more traditional settings. In the cities especially, the clothing of the Turkmen male differs little from that of men in the West: no hat, a suit jacket (without a tie), and pants are the norm.

Turkmen women, both urban and rural, typically wear more traditional clothing than men. The main features are a long dress (often made from *ketine*, a silk fabric), a long head scarf, and a cloak-type red robe called a *kurte*, which is worn on top of the head and hangs down off the shoulders. Dresses and skirts above the ankle, sleeveless tops, and other Western-style clothing are considered too immodest by most Turkmen women. Turkmen women also sew a distinct type of embroidery called *keshe*, which adorns the collars and fringes of their clothing.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Although the Turkmen have adopted some foods from the West, on the whole, Turkmen food is fairly unique and retains its traditional quality. Milk products from camels, cows, goats, and sheep are made into a variety of butters, creams, and yogurts. The meat of these animals is used to make the bulk of Turkmen dishes, with sheep and camel being the most sought after. Most meat dishes are baked (in dough) or boiled and combined with a variety of vegetables and sometimes dough or noodles. Soups and meat pie-type dishes make up the bulk of the dinner fare.

One favorite Turkmen dish is *dograma*, a soup thick with diced bread, lamb, onions, tomatoes, and spices. Hot green tea is part of every meal, even on the hottest days. Round flatbread is a staple throughout Central Asia. It is baked in a *tamdyr*—a round clay oven fired by coals that lie at its bottom. The dough is splashed with water and sticks to the oven's sides. The top of the Turkmen-style *tamdyr* has a large hole, which is covered during baking.

When relatives or guests visit, Turkmen hospitality dictates an all-out feast. The food is spread out on plates and dishes on a large cloth on the floor, and it is around this cloth covered with food (called a *sachak*) that the guests and family members sit and have their meal. A typical Turkmen *sachak* will include a variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts, sweets, tea and other beverages, bread, as well as butters and creams—all this before the main meal!

In Turkmen cities, Russian food is found in many restaurants. Popular Russian dishes include cabbage soup, grilled meat balls, and dumplings.

### **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

The government of Turkmenistan reports its literacy rate to be 99%. All children must attend school and receive at least a high school education. Institutes, trade schools, colleges, and a university train those wishing and able to continue training. The economic crisis since Turkmenistan's independence has led to many problems in education. Low teacher pay, meager subsidies, and run-down facilities have resulted in serious problems, especially in rural areas. Children miss many days of school due to a lack of teachers and school space. In some cotton-growing areas, children and teachers are required to work in the fields during school hours for a substantial part of the school year. In addition, the government of Turkmenistan has weakened the national curriculum. The late President Niyazov replaced study of the arts and sciences with the study of a book entitled *The Ruhnama*. The book, written by Niyazov himself, is a mixture of history and pseudo-Islamic theology.

Aside from formal education, Turkmen youth receive a great deal of "practical" schooling at home. Young girls are expected to help out with the household chores, watch over younger children, and learn to cook, sew, and so on. Young boys often take care of livestock and learn basic agricultural and mechanical skills from older males.

### **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The most prominent figure in Turkmen cultural history is the 18th century poet, Magtymguly. The subjects of his poetry include historical events, romantic love, Islam, and a call for Turkmen tribal unity. It is this latter theme especially that is utilized by the government in its nation-building process. Magtymguly's life and works continue to receive much public and scholarly attention, and virtually all Turkmens know his poetry and biography by heart. Numerous pre-20th-century Turkmen poets achieved success by following in the footsteps of Magtymguly. The Turkmens also have a unique musical culture that is tied into the oral tradition (see section on "Folklore"). Turkmen music is characterized by the two-stringed *dutar* and the *gyjak* (a violin-like instrument) accompanied by singing.

Traditional Turkmen cultural traditions were heavily influenced by Soviet cultural policies. Religious and national themes were suppressed, the use of Turkmen language was inhibited, and traditional personal and communal expressions were replaced with propagandistic socialist ideals. Today, in spite of a revival of traditional Turkmen culture, the legacy of the Soviet period is evident, and state control of artistic expression remains tight. For example, the Pushkin Theater in Ashgabat once staged Russian language plays from the Czarist and Soviet era, but now stages productions based on the *Ruhnama*.

### **<sup>15</sup>WORK**

In rural areas of Turkmenistan, virtually all work is centered around agricultural and livestock production. As in the Soviet period, the state owns almost all the land and administers all the farms. Because of Turkmenistan's arid climate, irrigation is a critical industry. *Pagta* (cotton) is Turkmenistan's chief crop. It occupies the majority of the irrigated lands and is concentrated in the eastern areas. Fruits, vegetables, and grains are also grown throughout the country, and Turkmenistan's melons are considered some of the sweetest in the world. Oil and gas deposits are concentrated along the Caspian coast and in

southeastern areas. Turkmenistan is one of the major suppliers of natural gas to Europe, but revenues from natural gas have done little to create jobs in Turkmenistan. In 2007 the unemployment rate in Turkmenistan was estimated at 60%, one of the highest in the world. In some areas of Turkmenistan, there are almost no young men left, because they have all migrated abroad in search of work.

## **16 SPORTS**

Turkmens enjoy numerous traditional and Western-style sports. Soccer is perhaps the most popular sport among young men and is called *futball*. Horse racing is also extremely popular and has become the most celebrated sport in Turkmenistan since independence. The horse has long symbolized the Turkmen spirit and occupies the most prominent spot on the state seal. Equine experts worldwide acknowledge Turkmen thoroughbreds such as the Ahal-teke to be among the swiftest and strongest breeds in the world.

In 2004 Turkmenistan sent eight athletes to the Olympics. They competed in track and field, boxing, weight lifting, shooting, swimming, and Judo.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Socializing and visiting friends and relatives are favorite pastimes among Turkmens. Visits usually involve large meals, some sort of entertainment (such as music), and staying overnight. Gatherings are also connected with holidays and may include pilgrimages to local shrines or simple outings to recreation spots in mountain, lake, or stream areas. Many urban Turkmens own summer houses and gardens on the outskirts of town where they spend vacation time. Turkmens also enjoy Russian television, which is only accessible via satellite. In 2008 the government began to curb the use of private satellite dishes.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Often known as Bukharan carpets or “oriental” carpets, Turkmen carpets are prized as among the world’s best by collectors and experts. Many Turkmen tribes have a distinct carpet ornamentation that identifies their carpets. Some carpets have up to 400,000 knots per square meter (37,000 per square foot). Another characteristic of Turkmen carpets is their deep red color. Almost all of the labor connected with carpet weaving and production is carried out by women. In an era of high inflation in Turkmenistan, Turkmens purchase carpets as an investment and hedge against inflation. Unfortunately, traditional carpet weaving is fading in Turkmenistan because of the rise of mechanized production facilities and the difficulties associated with exporting products from Turkmenistan. Aside from carpets, women also weave a variety of items connected with the nomadic life-style. Adornments for the felt tent, such as storage bags and door coverings, as well as items used for horses and camels, are the most common.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Severe economic problems since the dissolution of the Soviet Union coupled with the legacy of the negative aspects of Soviet rule have contributed to many social problems. High rates of inflation and economic depression has led to a sharp increase in poverty, crime, and unemployment. Corruption is ram-

panant in all government and economic sectors. Another major problem has to do with the fact that some of the wealthiest individuals in Turkmenistan acquired their wealth through questionable or illegal speculation and trade practices. As a result, many people, especially youth, have abandoned attempts to acquire or use education and instead attempt to open small retail businesses. This emphasis on petty retail trade has exacerbated problems connected with Turkmenistan’s low industrial and manufacturing production and has led to a high reliance on imported foodstuffs and consumer goods.

Substance abuse is a problem tied to poverty and economic depression. Turkmenistan lies along the transit route by which heroin from Afghanistan makes its way into Russia and Europe. The government of Turkmenistan estimates that 1 in 10 Turkmens is addicted to narcotics. However, the number of addicts is likely much higher. While addiction to alcohol, heroin, and marijuana has traditionally been confined to men, women are increasingly turning to drugs. Drug addiction and the drug trade lead to higher levels of crime, violence, and prostitution in Turkmenistan. Intravenous drug use also puts Turkmens at risk for HIV.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Gender relations in Turkmen society are influenced by Islam and Turkmenistan’s Soviet and nomadic past. The veiling of women was never widespread amongst Turkmens, even though it was common amongst other peoples of Central Asia prior to the Russian conquest of the region. During the Soviet period, Turkmen women entered the workforce and gained high positions in the government bureaucracy and all of the major professions. Furthermore, laws in Turkmenistan grant men and women equal inheritance and legal rights.

Despite these areas of equality, Turkmen women do not always enjoy the same rights as Turkmen men. Bride kidnapping is still a common practice among Turkmens. In addition, women are expected to do housework and prepare food, while men are not. Finally, the government of Turkmenistan often carries out policies that discriminate against women. For example, in an attempt to combat sex work, the government of Turkmenistan has forbidden women under the age of 35 from flying to Turkey or the United Arab Emirates.

Homosexuality is illegal in Turkmenistan. The Islamic and Soviet influence on Turkmen society contributes to negative attitudes toward homosexual and transgender people. Sexual minorities are often sent to prison or “re-education” camps, which are designed for political dissidents. Even the gays and lesbians who avoid legal action face job discrimination. Turkmen families often force their homosexual relatives to marry individuals of the opposite sex.

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—revised by B. Lazarus

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## TURKS

**PRONUNCIATION:** TURKS

**LOCATION:** Turkey

**POPULATION:** 70.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Turkish

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim majority, Alevi Muslim minority)

### <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Turks' pride in their country and their nationality is expressed in the popular slogan, first coined by the great Turkish nationalist leader Atatürk: *Ne mutlu Türküm diyene* ("How happy is he who can say he is a Turk"). Turkey is a land of opposites, belonging to both the East and the West. It is a Middle Eastern state and a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Historically, it has been a center of both Christianity and Islam. It has been variously regarded as both a first-world economy and a developing nation. In the 2000s, there are many oppositions at the forefront of events in Turkey. One is between the statist-secularist tradition begun by Atatürk in the 1920s and the liberal pro-Islam movement of Justice and Development Party of Prime Minister Erdoğan. Another opposition is between the Turkish state and many of Turkey's Kurds, who seek greater autonomy for the Kurdish-majority provinces of Eastern and Southeastern Turkey.

The land known today as Turkey has only been inhabited by Turkish peoples since the 11th century. Before that, it was home to many different groups, including the ancient Hittites, Greeks, Persians, and Romans. In 330 CE, present-day Istanbul, previously known as Byzantium, was named Constantinople by the Roman Emperor Constantine I and became the seat of the Byzantine Empire (and later of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, when it officially broke from Roman Catholicism). The ancestors of today's Turks, known as the Seljuk Turks, won control of the region from the Byzantines in 1071 CE.

By the 15th century, Turkish culture and the Turkish language had spread throughout Asia Minor (as the region was then called), although the Seljuks themselves had been driven from power in the Mongol invasion of 1243. Turkish power revived under the Ottomans, who conquered Constantinople in 1453, eventually building an empire of some 28 million inhabitants that included not only Asia Minor but stretched as far as North Africa and the Caucasus. The power of the Ottoman Empire reached its height during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent in the 16th century, when the Ottoman armies made inroads into Europe, and the skylines of the empire's great cities, including Istanbul, Mecca, and Jerusalem, were transformed by the mosques and mausoleums of the architect Sinan under Süleyman's patronage.

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, the Ottoman empire suffered a gradual decline, eclipsed by the great European powers to the west. The defeat of the Turks in World War I, which they entered on the side of the Central Powers, signaled the final dissolution of their empire, by then known as "the sick man of Europe." The harsh conditions imposed on the Turks by the victorious Allied Powers helped instigate a nationalist uprising led by Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk), who presided over the formation of a secular democratic republic

in 1923 and, over the 15 years until his death in 1938, implemented many reforms to modernize and secularize the Turkish nation.

Turkey maintained a position of neutrality during most of World War II and became a charter member of the United Nations in 1945. Since the end of World War II, a backlash against Atatürk's secularization measures—known in Turkey as the “Reaction”—has consistently figured to some extent in the country's political life, often exploited by individual politicians for the purpose of gaining votes. Political rule has been marked by coups in 1960 and 1980, neither of which resulted in long-term military rule. In 1974 Turkey invaded Cyprus after a coup that overthrew that country's president, fearing that Greece would annex the island. Turkey's actions resulted in economic and arms embargoes by other nations.

In the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, Kurdish separatists intensified their terrorist activities, resulting in retaliation by the military and international condemnation of human rights abuses. Estimates in 2008 placed the number of Kurds displaced by the conflict at about 1 million. The late 1990s saw the rise of pro-Islam political parties in Turkey. The Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan briefly held power in 1997. Its rule was ended by a request from the secularist military that the party step down. Since 2001, the pro-Western, pro-Islam Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has held power in Turkey. Although more moderate than its Islamist predecessors, the party is facing closure by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that it seeks to overthrow Turkey's secular system.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Turkey, lying partly in Europe and partly in Asia, has historically served as a bridge between the two continents. With a total area of 779,452 sq km (301,063 sq mi), Turkey is a relatively large country, bounded on the west by Greece, Bulgaria, and the Aegean Sea; on the east by Iran and the former Soviet Union; on the south by Iraq, Syria, and the Mediterranean Sea; and on the north by the Black Sea. It is slightly larger than the state of Texas but has three times the population of the American state. The European portion of Turkey, which is separated from Asian Turkey by the Bosphorus Strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles Strait, is commonly known as Thrace and occupies only 3% of the country's area; the Asian portion, called Anatolia or Asia Minor, accounts for the rest.

At the end of 2007 Turkey had a population of 70.6 million. Between 80% and 90% of the population is composed of ethnic Turks, with Kurds forming the country's largest ethnic minority (estimates of the Kurdish population range from 6 to 12 million). The precise number of Kurds is difficult to determine, as many Kurdish speakers identify as ethnic Turks and many monolingual Turkish speakers identify as ethnically Kurdish. Other minorities include Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, and three other groups who have their origins in the Caucasus Mountains: the Circassians, the Georgians, and the Laz.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

More than 90% of Turkey's population speaks Turkish as a first language. In the 1920s the nationalist leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk instituted two major language reforms, replacing the Arabic script used during the Ottoman era with a modified Latin alphabet and attempting to eradicate loan words from



Arabic, Persian, and other languages by substituting Turkish ones. Nevertheless, words with Arabic and Persian origins still remain part of the language. In addition, a number of modern words that had no Turkish equivalents were subsequently borrowed from European languages, such as the English-derived *otomobil*, *tren*, and *taksi*.

Turkish has no gender, so there are no distinct pronouns for *he*, *she*, and *it*, and there are no definite or indefinite articles. Turkish words are formed by adding suffixes denoting action, place, possession, and other qualities to a root that does not change. A root and its suffixes can become comprehensive enough to form an entire sentence, the most famous example being the following, which means “Weren't you one of the people whom we tried without success to make resemble the citizens of Afyonkarahisar?”:

*Afyonkarahisarlılaturamadıklarımızdanmuymustiniz.*

### COMMON TURKISH WORDS AND PHRASES

Hello	<i>merhaba</i>
Good morning	<i>günaydın</i>
Please	<i>lütfen</i>
Thank you	<i>teşekkür ederim</i>
To your health!	<i>afiyet olsun</i> (said at the beginning of a meal)
May your life be spared!	<i>başınız sağolsun!</i> (said when death is mentioned)
May it be in the past!	<i>geçmiş olsun!</i> (said in regard to an illness or injury)

There are two forms of “goodbye”: *allahaismarladık*, said by the person who is leaving; and *güle güle*, said by the person who stays behind. There are also two common words for “no”: *hayır*, and the more emphatic (and less polite) *yok*, which literally means “there is none” and is often uttered with raised eyebrows and pursed lips.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

The Turks have a rich tradition of folktales, some of which can take as long as 30 hours to recite. The most popular and numerous involve the legendary Nasrettin Hoca, a comic figure thought to have been a sage and teacher in Akşehir in the 13th century. The following are typical Hoca stories:

One day, the Hoca was sitting in his garden under the shade of a walnut tree. Looking around his garden, he wondered why Allah caused large, heavy watermelons to grow on spindly vines while little walnuts grew on tall trees. He mused that, if he had been the creator, he would have done just the reverse. Just then, a walnut fell from the tree, hitting him on the forehead, and the Hoca thanked Allah for arranging the world just as it was, grateful that he hadn't been struck by a watermelon instead.

When the Hoca lost his donkey, he prayed and thanked God. Asked why he was grateful for losing his donkey, he replied, “I'm fortunate that I wasn't riding him when he got lost, or I would be lost as well.”

Other famous folktale heroes include Dedeh Horkut, whose exploits, dating back to the nomadic days of the Turkish people, appear in children's books, and Koroğlu, a Turkish version of Robin Hood. Following are several well-known Turkish proverbs:

On a winter's day, the fireside is a bed of tulips.

The only head free of worries is that of a scarecrow.

Success depends on a man's reputation, not on his soul.

If you dig a grave for your neighbor, measure it for yourself.

Other folktales include stories told using the shadow puppet characters Karagöz and Hacivat. Karagöz, whose name means “Black Eye,” entertains the audience with his low-brow humor. Hacivat is the more dignified and educated of the two, but he is always outsmarted by Karagöz. Karagöz and Hacivat shadow plays are often performed during Ramadan.

#### **5 RELIGION**

More than 99% of Turks are Muslims. Most are Hanafi Sunni Muslims. Approximately 15%–25% of Turks subscribe to Allevi Islam, a form of Shia Islam. Allevis pray in prayer houses known as *Cem Evis*. Religious minorities include a small number of Jews whose ancestors fled the Spanish Inquisition in 1492 and found refuge among the Ottomans. There are also small numbers of Armenian, Syrian, and Greek Orthodox Christians. A unique group known as the Dönme are descended from Jews who were followers of the 17th-century false messiah, Shabbatai Zevi, who was ultimately forced to convert to Islam. The religion of the Dönme combines elements of Judaism and Islam.

Although the Turks as a people are Muslims, their country has been a secular state since shortly after World War I, when

Atatürk established a democratic republic ruled by codes of law, ending the sovereignty of Islamic law in the country. Nevertheless, Islam is basic to the fabric of everyday life in Turkey. Many Turks interrupt all other activities five times a day for prayer sessions lasting about 10 minutes. The country's religious heritage is also very much in evidence in its legacy of beautiful mosques and minarets that distinguish the Turkish landscape.

Religion is a major point of contention in Turkish society. The leaders of Turkey's judiciary, military, and educational system are highly secularized and suspicious of overt displays of religious piety, such as the wearing of the Muslim headscarf. As of 2008, the popular AK Party of Prime Minister Erdoğan was locked in a struggle with Turkey's secular elite to create more space for the expression of religious beliefs in the public sphere.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Turkey observes the following secular holidays: New Year's Day (January 1); Children's Day, also known as National Sovereignty Day, which commemorates the establishment of the country's Grand National Assembly in 1923 (April 23); Atatürk's birthday, also National Youth and Sports Day (May 19); Victory Day, commemorating liberation from Greece in 1922 (August 30); Republic Day (October 28 and 29); and the anniversary of Atatürk's death (November 10), a national day of mourning when all forms of entertainment are shut down and the nation observes a moment of silence at 9:05 PM, the hour of Atatürk's death.

The Turks also observe a number of Islamic holidays dated by the lunar calendar. These include Recep Kandili, commemorating the conception of the prophet Muhammad (first Friday of the month of Recep); Miraç Kandili, marking Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and his subsequent ascension to Heaven (26th day of Recep); Berat Kandili, a nighttime holiday similar to All Hallows' Eve in Christianity (14th and 15th days of Saban); and Kadir Gecesi, commemorating the night when the Quran was revealed to Muhammad and he received his calling as the Messenger of God (27th day of Ramazan).

In addition, the Turks, like Muslims in other countries, observe the holy month of Ramazan (called *Ramadan* in Arab countries), a period of fasting when Muslims do not eat or drink during daylight hours. (Irritability occasioned by this fasting is called *Ramazan kafası*—“Ramazan head.”) The end of Ramazan is marked by Şeker Bayramı, a three-day national holiday when families pay social calls and children go from door to door asking for sweets.

#### **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

A number of popular traditional beliefs and superstitions still surround childbirth, including the use of magical formulas to ensure the birth of a son and the belief that a newborn child is especially vulnerable to evil spirits during the first 40 days of life. All male Turkish Muslims are circumcised, either at the age of seven or later as part of an initiation into adulthood.

For Turkish men, military service is another major rite of passage. All Turkish men are required to serve in the military. Before men leave for military service, they often perform a traditional dance with their families.

Wedding ceremonies are performed in the town or city hall and are followed by a private reception with food, dancing,





Thousands of Turks congregate in front of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's mausoleum in Ankara in February 2008. They were there to protest against a government plan to lift a ban on the Islamic headscarf in universities. (Adem Altan/AFP/Getty Images)

and music. Dowries are still paid by the bride's family in some rural areas.

Funerals in Turkey, as in other Muslim countries, are attended only by men. Usually a *mevlud* (a poem in honor of the prophet Muhammad's birth) is recited. Like people elsewhere in the Islamic world, the Turks avoid ostentation in connection with death, both in the funeral service and in burial arrangements.

## **<sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The Turks are an exceptionally polite people, particularly to visitors, and they use many courteous phrases in everyday conversation. They have three different ways of saying "thank you": *sağol*, *teşekkür ederim*, and the French-derived *mersi*. It is considered impolite to hug or kiss members of the opposite sex in public, and a handshake that is too firm is also considered a sign of bad manners. On the other hand, it is acceptable and customary for men to publicly display physical affection toward each other, embracing and kissing when they greet each other and walking down the street arm-in-arm or holding hands. Atatürk introduced the titles of Mr. and Mrs. (*Bey* and *Hanim*) to the country.

A commonly used gesture for "no" consists of raising one's chin and clicking one's tongue, sometimes accompanied by

shutting or uplifting one's eyes. ("No" can also be communicated by raising one's eyebrows.) A sharp downward nod means "yes," and shaking one's head sideways means "I don't understand." Waving one's hand up and down with the palm toward the ground is a gesture that means "come here."

Although Turkey is a modern, efficient, secular society, some traditional superstitions and customs persist. For example, charms to ward off the evil eye can be seen in most cars and taxis.

## **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

Due to its high rate of population growth and the mass migration of the rural poor to cities following World War II, Turkey faces a housing shortage that is among its most serious social problems. Since the 1950s, new urban dwellers unable to afford decent housing have built large numbers of temporary shelters called *gecekondu*s on the outskirts of major cities such as Ankara and Istanbul. The squatter communities created by these dwellings have turned into permanent urban slums, often lacking such standard features as running water, sewer systems, electricity, and pavements. By the 1980s, it was estimated that more than half the residents of many urban centers lived in *gecekondu*s. The government has taken measures to improve life in these shantytowns, including banning the construction

of new *gecekondus* and making provisions to fund the construction of new housing. Between 30% and 40% of Turkey's population still lives in rural areas, where housing types vary by region. Houses in the rural villages of the Black Sea region are made of wood, whereas those on the Anatolian plateau are generally of sun-dried brick. Village houses are generally two stories high with flat roofs. In the eastern part of the country, many lack running water and some have no electricity.

Health care in Turkey is provided by the government through the Ministry of Health. Availability of qualified medical personnel has improved significantly since the 1980s, but it remains better in urban areas than in rural areas, where it is often still inadequate. Persons living in some areas, such as eastern Anatolia, must travel to provincial capitals for medical care. Infant mortality declined from 120 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1980—then one of the highest rates in the world—to 40 per 1,000 in 2008.

By World War I, the Ottoman Empire already had an extensive railway system that included the famous Orient Express line. The country still has excellent rail transportation, although rail service is not available in some parts of southern and southeastern Turkey. There is a modern highway system connected to Europe by the Bosphorus Bridge, and international air service from Istanbul and Ankara. In the 1990s several new highway projects were underway to ease traffic congestion. The main seaports are Istanbul on the Bosphorus and Izmir on the Aegean Sea. In 2008 a new railway linking Turkey with Georgia and Azerbaijan was completed.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, Turkish marriages were arranged, and in rural areas some still are. The extended family is still important in rural areas, but less so in cities, although it is not unusual for an urban household to include parents, children, and paternal grandparents. In rural areas, women still marry at young ages, and financial arrangements between the two families are important in making marriage decisions. Massive migrations of rural Turks from the Black Sea and Eastern and Southeastern regions to cities across Turkey has led to a decline in the importance of the extended family. It has also increased the number of women in the labor force.

## 11 CLOTHING

Modern Western-style clothing has been worn in Turkey since the founding of the republic in the 1920s. In urban areas, both adults and teenagers look much the same as those in the cities of the West, with well-dressed businessmen wearing Italian suits, women taking an interest in the latest fashions from Paris, and young people wearing the universal teen uniform of jeans and athletic shoes. In villages and certain tourist areas, one may still see the traditional *salvar*, the baggy, loose-fitting trousers worn by both men and women. Bright colors and flowered prints are favored by village women. Although they do not wear veils, many women in rural areas cover their faces with a scarf or handkerchief when they are in close proximity to men they don't know.

Traditional male dress consisted of the *salvar*, often worn under a long gown with a wide belt in the middle, and the headpiece called a *fez* (outlawed when Atatürk was in power). In recent years, a style of Muslim headscarf known as the *türban* has become popular amongst observant Muslim women

(this is not to be confused with the head covering worn by males that goes by the same name). Between 1998 and 2008 the *türban* was officially prohibited in Turkey's universities. Even though approximately 60% of Turkish women cover their heads, many in Turkey's secular elite view the spread of the *türban* as a worrying sign of increasing religiosity in Turkey.

## 12 FOOD

Turkey is famous for its food, which has been called the French cuisine of the East. The most famous dish of Turkish origin is the shish kebab, pieces of lamb grilled on a skewer. Today, the most popular national dish is the *döner kebab*, lamb roasted on a turning vertical spit, from which slices are cut as it cooks. Turkey is also famous for its appetizers, called *meze*, made from meat, fish, and vegetables. The most popular include *böreks*, rolled phyllo dough stuffed with white cheese and parsley; *dolma*, various types of vegetables stuffed with rice and meat; and *imam bayıldı*, eggplant stuffed with ground lamb, onions, and tomatoes. (The name *imam bayıldı*, means “the imam swooned,” suggesting that the dish was so delicious it made a religious leader faint when he tried it.)

The Turks are also noted for their desserts, ranging from the well-known *baklava* (small pieces of flaky pastry filled with ground walnuts and dripping in honey) to such exotic creations as “nightingale's nest” and “lady's navel.” The basic ingredients of Turkish desserts are milk, honey, eggs, nuts, and phyllo dough. Desserts made with milk include *muhallabi* (rice pudding with cinnamon) and *keşkül* (a milk, almond, and pistachio mixture topped with dried coconut and pistachio).

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2004 the adult literacy rate was 87.4% (95.3% for males aged 15 and over, compared with only 79.6% for females of the same age group). Primary education has been available to almost all children between the ages of 6 and 10 since the 1980s. Five levels of education are available: preschool, primary school, middle school, secondary school, and university. Education is not compulsory past middle school, and it is estimated that 89% of children attend primary school. Like medical care in Turkey, the quality of education in rural areas varies significantly. Many rural communities do not have high schools, which sometimes makes it necessary for children to travel great distances if they want to continue their education.

There are several hundred institutions of higher learning in Turkey, including 53 state-supported universities and a number of private universities. In 2005, 2.3 million students were enrolled in Turkish universities, almost double the number that were enrolled 10 years earlier. Students are admitted to Turkey's public universities through a central placement system.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The whirling dervishes, whose white-clad, rapidly turning figures in their swirling skirts are known the world over, are part of a religious tradition that seeks a mystical union with God through music and dance. The Turks also have a centuries-old tradition of folk dancing that varies from one region to the next, each with its own distinctive homemade costumes.

Turkish painting dates back to the court painters of the Ottoman empire who, among other skills, developed the specialty of miniature painting. The contemporary painter Rahmi Pe-

hlivanli is known for his portraits of leading political and diplomatic figures, as well as his landscapes of different regions of the country.

Several of Turkey's leading literary figures in modern times have been involved in political controversies and their works subjected to censorship. The works of Nazim Hikmet, a Marxist-influenced poet who died in the former Soviet Union in 1963, were banned for years but are now gaining belated recognition. The left-wing satirist Aziz Nesin, who published excerpts from Salman Rushdie's controversial *Satanic Verses*, was jailed for much of his life. (Nesin died in 1995.) Yaşar Kemal, a leading novelist, has been harassed in recent years over the content of a newspaper article he authored. Turkey's most famous filmmaker, Yılmaz Güney, was imprisoned for most of his career, writing screenplays in prison and smuggling them out through friends, together with detailed instructions for their direction. Orhan Pamuk, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006, was charged by state prosecutors with "insulting Turkishness," although he was never convicted.

Traditional Turkish music is rich and complex both harmonically and rhythmically, incorporating dozens of tonal modes in addition to the major and minor scales of Western music and containing meters with such irregular rhythms (to Western ears) as 7, 9, 11, or 13 beats per measure. Traditional instruments include the *ud* (which resembles a lute), the *santur* (a Persian version of the dulcimer), and another lute-like instrument, the *tanbur*.

## 15 WORK

The services sector, including a growing tourist industry, accounts for 41.2% of jobs in the Turkish economy. Agriculture accounts for about 35.9%, while industry accounts for about 22.8% of employment. In rural areas, all family members participate in agricultural work, with women routinely performing tasks such as hoeing vegetables and digging out potatoes. Unemployment is a serious problem in Turkey; in 2007 the country's unemployment rate was 9.7%. Unemployment and underemployment are most widespread in the Black Sea and Eastern and Southeastern regions of the country.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular sport in Turkey is soccer, with matches played on weekends between September and May. Like their counterparts in Europe and Latin America, Turkey's soccer fans are wildly enthusiastic, often to the point of violence against each other or against members of losing teams. Large-scale betting is associated with soccer games. Soccer is also played by young people for recreation.

Wrestling is another favorite sport in Turkey, and Turkey has sent many wrestling teams to the Olympic Games. A unique Turkish variety (not represented in the Olympics) is greased wrestling, which makes it harder to hold on to one's opponent. Other sports popular among the Turks include hunting and shooting, skiing (the oldest Turkish ski resort is on Mount Olympus, the legendary home of the gods), and *cirit*, a traditional sport that involves throwing a javelin while mounted on horseback.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Among the traditional Turkish forms of relaxation, the best known is the steam bath or *hamam*. Both men and women use

the *hamam*, although they use it separately, either going on alternate days or using separate facilities. Wood-burning stoves are used as heat sources, with bathers absorbing the heat by lying on raised slabs directly above the stoves.

The time-honored leisure-time haunt of Turkish men is the coffeehouse (*kiraathane*), where backgammon is often played and one can find customers smoking hookahs. In recent years, hookah bars have become popular amongst young people.

In the large cities of the West, such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, many young Turks enjoy going to discos and bars. Popular music is also a source of entertainment. Tarkan, Sezan Aksu, and Mustafa Sandal are all famous Turkish pop singers. Turkey has also produced a number of successful rock and rap groups.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Turkey's most famous handicrafts are its carpets, which sport a dazzling array of designs, many connected with a particular town or region. Most are of the flat-woven *kilim* variety. Tiles and ceramics have been produced in Turkey since the 11th century and can still be seen adorning the walls of mosques and other buildings.

Another craft found in Turkey is tile making. Turkey's most famous tiles come from the town of Iznik in Western Turkey. The first Iznik tiles date back to Ottoman times. The turquoise tiles are now produced mainly for tourists.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Poverty and unemployment are among Turkey's greatest social problems. In 2003 over 18% of Turks lived on less than \$2 per day. Much of the extreme poverty in Turkey is concentrated in the East and Southeast of the country. The conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), poor infrastructure, and lack of investment have prevented these regions from sharing in the recent prosperity of the rest of the country.

The internal displacement of approximately 1 million Kurdish Turks is another major social problem. Many displaced Kurds live in shantytowns and lack access to educational and employment opportunities. Growing tension between ethnic Turks and ethnic Kurds is also a problem in Turkey. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds have migrated to ethnic Turkish-majority cities, which has contributed to overcrowding. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) continues to attack the Turkish military. These PKK attacks cause some Turks to view Kurds negatively.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Turkish constitution grants women the same rights it grants men. Turkey had its first woman prime minister in 1993 and women work in nearly all of Turkey's professions.

However, gender inequality is still present in Turkey, just as it is in nearly every other country around the world. For example, virginity is seen as important for women, but not very important for men. In most Turkish families, women are expected to do the housework and prepare meals for the family. Although women participate in politics, they are underrepresented in parliament and in local governments.

Gender inequality is even more pronounced in the rural areas of Eastern and Southeastern Turkey than in other regions of the country. In the East and Southeast, many girls are prevented by their families from finishing high school. Although

uncommon, honor killings of women and girls do occur in conservative areas. Honor killings are murders carried out by male family members against female family members suspected of adultery, pre-marital sex, or other actions perceived to bring dishonor to the family.

Homosexuality is not widely accepted in Turkish culture. Homosexuality is not illegal in Turkey, but gays do not have the right to marry or adopt children. Despite negative attitudes towards Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in Turkey, there are a number of well-known gay and transgender artists in Turkey, such as Bülent Ersoy and Zeki Müren.

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—revised by B. Lazarus

# UIGHURS

**PRONUNCIATION:** wee-GURS

**LOCATION:** China (Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region)

**POPULATION:** 8.4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Uighur

**RELIGION:** Islam

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Uighurs are the main body of the population of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. As far back as 2,000 years ago, the ancestors of the Uighurs lived in an area close to Lake Baikal, to the north of the People's Republic of Mongolia. After the 5th century, a great number of them moved to Xiyu (present-day Xinjiang), which had been governed by the central government of China since 60 BC. Three centuries later, the Uighurs destroyed a country of nomadic Turks and established a dependency under the command of the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Chinese culture was widely disseminated and was accepted. Abandoning their nomadic life, they gradually settled down about 1,000 years ago.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Uighurs were ruled by other nationalities, including the Mongols and troops of Chinese soldiers were sent by the descendants of Genghis Khan to cultivate the land. Thereafter, there were long periods of trouble in the history of Xinjiang. Order was finally established by the Manchu government of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Great numbers of Mongols and Chinese living there were assimilated into Uighur society during this chaotic period. However, there was no peace and tranquility until the mid-1940s.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Uighurs live in their own autonomous region of Xinjiang (the largest administrative territory of China) and are mainly concentrated in the oases to the south of the Tianshan Mountains, though they are also found in some counties of Hunan Province in south China. The Tianshan Mountains partition Xinjiang into two parts. The south is warm and dry, while the north is cold with abundant rain and snow. South Xinjiang is characterized by its huge basin (Tarim) and desert (Taklimakan) at the center. Fertilized by rivers, the oases surrounding the basin are the Uighur's land of cotton and fruits. Uighur population amounted to 8.4 million in 2000.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Uighur language belongs to the Altaic family, Turkic group. There are three dialects. The written language, based on Arabic characters, has been used since the 11th century. The name Uighur was self-given; it means "to unite" and "to assist."

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

A Uighur epic narrates how the Queen of Kala Khan gave birth to a son with a blue face and hairy body. His mother breast-fed the infant only once; he then lived on raw meat and wine. He was able to talk right after birth and to walk 40 days later. Before long, he had grown up to be a heroic man. He killed a wild animal with a single horn, saving many lives from death. He

was called Wugusi. One day, he hunted in the wilds. At night, he saw a beautiful girl after a flash of blue light. They got married, and she gave birth to three sons called Sun, Moon, and Stars. Wugusi married a second wife who also gave birth to three sons called Heaven, Mountain, and Sea. The six sons had a total of 24 children, who became 24 tribes. Wugusi ascended the throne as Khan and united the neighboring nations to form a large country.

According to another myth, two trees grew intertwined with a chamber between them. Some members of Uighur tribes were greatly surprised to find five infants in the chamber. Uighur women breast-fed them. Later, the children asked about their parents. When they knew the story, they went into the forest. The trees taught them to become pioneers in a great undertaking. The Uighurs elected the youngest boy to be their Khan, and, after ascending the throne, he became a very capable ruler. Reference to the title of “Khan” seems to indicate that these myths took shape rather late in history, after the 11th century.

## 5 RELIGION

In the past, the Uighurs believed in Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Nestorian Christianity. Starting with the 11th century, they gradually shifted their beliefs to Islam. Islam in Xinjiang came from central Asia through the land route, the famous Silk Road.

Probably a remnant of their ancient beliefs, the Uighurs traditionally regarded the eagle as a god. They believed that the eagle could see and then peck at the ghost who had made someone sick. If a family member got sick, they placed a falcon in the room and let it clutch and peck at the patient, who was wrapped in a quilt from head to toe.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Uighurs celebrate the two major holidays of Islam, the Corban Festival and the Lesser Bairam. In addition, they have their own traditional holiday, the Naoluzi Festival. The annual Corban Festival is the grandest of all. Each household fries twisted noodles and kills a sheep or an ox. Everybody dresses up and pays visit to the other members of the community. Tradition has it that the Prophet dreamed that Allah wanted him to kill his own son as a sacrificial victim—a trial of his loyalty. Deeply moved by the Prophet’s absolute obedience, Allah sent a black head sheep for substitution. This belief gave rise to a major sacrificial ritual held on the tenth of December by Muslims around the world.

The Lesser Bairam (Festival of Fast-Breaking) marks the end of Ramadan. Muslims practice a month of fasting during September (Islamic calendar), which prohibits food and drink in the daytime. At dusk on the twenty-ninth day after the Ramadan, if the new moon is visible in the sky, the next day will be the Lesser Bairam. If the moon is not visible, the festival will be postponed until the following day. On the festival day, Muslims, after bathing, go to the mosque to pray, participate in rituals, and meet each other. The Uighurs visit each other and offer fried twisted noodles and various delicious foods to the guests.

The Naoluzi Festival is similar to the Chinese Spring Festival. A variety of sports and recreation activities are held during that month-long festival.



## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Uighur family usually celebrates the birth of a child. The Uighurs have a special reverence for the wolf. They speak of “giving birth to a wolf” if a son is born. The mother-to-be lies on a mat of wolf fur. The ankle bone of a wolf is attached to the infant’s neck or hung over its cradle in the hope that the baby will be free from evil and will grow to be a brave man.

Funeral rites follow Islamic regulations. For instance, the body should be cleansed with water, wrapped with white cloth, and then buried underground three days after death. After the funeral, a limited number of sacrificial rites will be performed.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Meeting after a long separation, Uighur friends often embrace each other. Meeting at ordinary times, they bow slightly or shake hands. The Uighurs are fond of bustle and excitement and love to sing and dance. Accompanied by songs and music, their dance on festivals is so lively and entertaining that everybody feels an impulse to dance together. Participants on those occasions may amount to hundreds. The Uighurs are hospitable. Guests are received with roast lamb and milk tea.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Uighur houses are one story, low and small, square in shape, and made of adobes. The door often opens to the north. There are no windows in the side walls, but only a skylight window in the ceiling. Grains, fruits, and melons are piled up on the flat roof, which also serves for drying clothes in the sun



*Uighur women sell yoghurt at a Sunday bazaar in Kashgar, China. Many people come to the bazaar that once made Kashgar a major trading post on the legendary Silk Road. (Robert Saiget/AFP/Getty Images)*

and enjoying the cool evening air. There is a solid platform inside the house, made of adobes, that is one foot tall and is used both for sitting and for sleeping. One also finds a fireplace, used to cook food and to keep the house warm, and a niche for daily necessities. Tapestry is often hung on the wall as decoration. Almost every household has a courtyard where one grows flowers, fruit trees, and grapes; these form a kind of lattice ceiling of bright colors and offer coolness on warm summer days. Both the courtyard and the house are usually very clean. Some Uighurs have a house for summer and a house for winter.

In the past, transport was done with camels and donkeys. Today, these have been replaced by bicycles and motorcycles. Highways radiate in all directions from the cities; some roads cross wide expanses of desert. Travel by train and by air is not uncommon.

### **<sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE**

The Uighur family is monogamous. Sons and daughters leave their parents after wedding. Within the family, the man dominates everything; the position of the women is rather low. The name of the child follows the patrilineal line. As in the West (but different from Chinese custom), the personal name comes first and the family (paternal) name comes second. If the child

is a boy, when he grows to be a man and gets married, his name will be the latter half of his child's name.

### **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Men usually wear a buttonless cotton robe with two color stripes and a belt at the waist. They may put on a dustcoat over the robe. The women usually wear an overdress with underskirt inside and a black velvet vest covering the top.

The girls plait their hair into braids, usually in odd numbers, as many as 41. The braids symbolize that their hair is thick and dense like the trees of the forest.

Almost all Uighur women like to wear earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. Dressed in their holiday best, they often use makeup and polish their nails. A four-edge small hat, embroidered with multicolored or black-and-white silk threads is the girls' favorite headdress. Both men and women wear boots.

### **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Uighur staple foods include flour, corn, and rice. They like a kind of unleavened bread shaped like bagels or pancakes (*nang*), made with wheat flour or corn maize flour. A popular dish during the festivals is the "rice taken by hand." Raisins are boiled with sliced onions, carrots, and small cubes of fried beef, then put on soaked rice and boiled again. The ingredi-

ents are steamed for 20 minutes, then they are served. Before eating, one washes one's hands three times and rubs them dry with handkerchiefs. Sitting cross-legged on cushions, people dish out the rice on the plates and then take the rice with their hand. Roast lamb is a delicacy usually reserved for guests. The Uighurs like butter, tea, and milk tea. Crusty breads (*nang*) with milk tea is their daily breakfast. They take various dishes and staple foods for lunch. Dinner is similar to breakfast, although some dishes may be added. People wash hands and gargle before and after each meal.

### 13 EDUCATION

There are 13 universities and colleges and 2,300 middle (junior and senior) schools in Uighur districts. 95% of children enroll in school when they reach school age. A large number of Uighur scientists and technologists work in various fields of specialization. Generally, the Uighurs strongly support the education of their children.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Uighurs are well known for their talent for singing and dancing. "The Twelve Great Songs" (some 340 pieces) is an epic narrative whose performance includes both classical and folkloric song, music, and dance. There are dozens of Uighur traditional instruments, including strings, winds, and tambourines. The Uighur violin is played on one knee. The long-necked traditional guitar is played with such celerity by the guitarist that his fingers seem to disappear in a blur.

Uighur dance is famous for its spinning. Besides the basic steps, there are skips with raised arms and quickly rotated wrists. Among the large variety of traditional dances, the most popular one is the impromptu solo dance, *pas de deux*, or group dance in random formations, surrounded by a circle of people who clap and sing in chorus.

Uighur literature includes folk tales, fables, jokes, poems, and proverbs. Some of them have a long history. For example, a narrative poem entitled "Fortune, Happiness and Wisdom" has been handed down since the 11th century. The "Story of Avanti" has been widely known in China for decades.

### 15 WORK

The Uighurs are mainly engaged in gardening and cotton growing. Their apples, pears, figs, pomegranates, honey peaches, walnuts, almonds, and especially Hami melons, are renowned at home and abroad. The superb skill of the Uighurs in cotton growing has been widely introduced to other provinces of China. The Uighurs are reputed for their know-how as traders. Since ancient times, Uighur caravans penetrated deep into the Mongolian grasslands and into the countries of central Asia and, thus, played an important role in developing the famous Silk Road. Because of internal conflicts and difficult relations with the central government, Uighur trade has declined from the beginning of the 20th century. However, in recent decades, there has been a rapid growth of Uighur domestic and external commerce. Uighurs are now very active in the restaurant, grocery, and clothing businesses not only in Xinjiang, but also in many provinces. They have commercial ties with the Islamic countries of central and west Asia. The trade along the western Chinese border is very active.

### 16 SPORTS

Ball games like basketball and volleyball are very popular. As a spectator sport, rope walking is the Uighurs' favorite. A pole reaching 120 ft in height is erected on the ground. A 260 ft rope is connected to the top of the pole on one of its ends and hooked solidly in the earth on the other. Holding a rod horizontally, the athlete climbs up the rope and performs jumping, rolling, cross-leg sitting, and other breathtaking movements.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to singing and dancing, movies and television are the most popular entertainment of the Uighurs. Most Uighur districts have their own film studio. A number of local musical and theater groups are supported by the Uighurs.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Uighurs are skilled in crafts. Hotan jade sculpture is a fine art. Ingisa (Yengisar) knives are famous for their sharpness and precious stone incrustations. Uighur carpets, tapestries, silk embroidered hats, copper teapots, and traditional musical instruments are much sought after not only by the Uighurs, but by foreigners.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The absence of natural resources and of an industrial infrastructure explains the very low income of the Uighurs, which must be compensated in part by the goods produced directly by the household. Lack of economic opportunities causes more and more Uighurs engaged in trade or in professional venues to leave their homeland to work in other provinces of China. Often, after some time, they return, benefiting their communities by their wealth and expertise.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

## UZBEKS

**PRONUNCIATION:** OOZ-beks

**LOCATION:** Uzbekistan; Afghanistan; China

**POPULATION:** 27 million

**LANGUAGE:** Uzbek

**RELIGION:** Islam (Sunni Muslim)

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The modern Uzbeks are believed to have originated from a group of tribes called the Kipchak Khanate, whose domain stretched from the Irtish River valley in the north to the shores of the Caspian Sea and Aral Sea in the south. In the 15th century, a southern migration of one of the tribes began. This tribe captured territory in the Syr Darya and Amu Darya (*darya* means "river" in Persian), as well as the city of Samarkand. The Uzbeks mixed with the earlier settlers of the area, including the Persian peoples of Khorezm and Soghdia. This area became consolidated under three separate khanates (Bukhara, Khiva, and Khokand) that ruled as city-states in the region until the 19th century. Uzbeks accounted for more than 50% of the Khiva khanate population and almost 35% of the Bukhara khanate inhabitants. Although originally nomads, most Uzbeks have been sedentary now for more than 300 years. The mixed heritage of the Uzbeks means that their physical features range from East Asian to European. A small percentage of Uzbeks have light hair and light eyes.

Russian encroachment increased in the mid-1800s. All three khanates fell to the Russians between 1865 and 1873. The imperial Russian government renamed the annexed area Russian Turkistan and allowed Bukhara and Khiva to retain some degree of home rule. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Turkestan was created in 1918. In 1924, the Soviet government began a major revision of Central Asian political boundaries based on ethnic populations. Even though the German army never made it all the way to Central Asia during World War II, that war had a profound effect on Uzbek culture. Entire towns were evacuated from the European part of the Soviet Union to Central Asia (along with their factories and workers). This massive influx of people disturbed the native Uzbek culture and legitimized the imposition of the Russian language and culture into the area that had already started by the turn of the 20th century.

The Soviet era brought tremendous cultural changes to Uzbek society. Perhaps the biggest change was the transformation from informal herding and subsistence agriculture to enormous state-operated farms, the collectivized agriculture imposed in the 1930s. Heavy reliance on irrigation combined with the Soviet cotton monoculture (growing only one crop—cotton—at the expense of others) became prevalent. When Soviet power began crumbling in 1990, leaders in the Uzbek Communist Party hesitated to denounce the Soviet system until it was clear that the Soviet Union had indeed dissolved. Since independence in 1991, the government was slow to institute democratization or market-oriented economic reforms, although commercial development and capitalist property relations were accelerated in the late 1990s. Uzbeks live under a very harsh political regime that has functioned as a self-aggrandizing organization where political and economic liberties are



sharply curtailed. Since 2001, thousands of Uzbeks have been jailed and repressed in the name of defense against Islamic extremism, but countless charges against ordinary citizens have been trumped up and prosecuted with little to no evidence of extremist activities. Political oppression is so great today that many Uzbeks claim life was fairer and freer during the late Soviet period.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

After the Turks of Turkey, the Uzbeks are the largest ethnic group of Turkic people in the world. The Uzbeks were the third largest ethnic group of the former Soviet Union when it collapsed in 1991, with a population of more than 16.7 million, of which 85% lived in what is now Uzbekistan. The population of Uzbekistan increased by 7 million from 1970 to the mid-1980s. Its current population growth rate rivals that of many sub-Saharan African countries. There are also more than 1 million Uzbeks in Afghanistan, and about 800,000 living in the Sinkiang-Uygur Autonomous Region of China.

The Uzbek homeland is situated on the site of the ancient Bactrian and Sogdian civilizations. Ancient conquerors who laid claim to the territory included the Persian Empire of Darius the Great and the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great. The region was invaded by Arabs in the 8th century AD, at which time Islam was introduced. In the 13th century, the Mongol Empire controlled the area, and the Empire of Tamerlane gained power thereafter. Around the 15th century, the Uzbeks began to emerge as an organized group of tribes. The modern Uzbek homeland lies much farther south than the region originally inhabited by the Uzbeks centuries ago. Uzbekistan lies between the Aral Sea and the Fergana River valley in the East and includes parts of the Amu Darya River valley and the southern portion of the Kyzyl Kum Desert. The eastern border is in the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains, which surrounds the Fergana River valley in the lowlands on three sides. Much of the landscape of Uzbekistan consists of three feature types: deserts, dry steppes, and fertile oases near the rivers.

The region of Uzbekistan west of the Aral Sea is called the Ust-Urt Flatland. This area is dry steppe that can only be used for light grazing. The Aral Sea, with an area once larger than Lake Michigan, is an important water resource for much of Central Asia. In the last 30–40 years, however, the area around the Aral Sea has become an environmental disaster as the sea has lost about 60% of its water volume.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Uzbek language is considered part of the eastern or Aralo-Caspian branch of the Kipchak group of Turkic languages and is similar to Kazakh and Karakalpak. Contact with the Persian language over the years has influenced the dialect of Uzbeks living near Iran. The Iran-influenced dialect has become the basis of the modern Uzbek literary language. The modern standard for spoken Uzbek is based on the dialects of Tashkent and the Ferghana Valley. The Uzbek language borrowed many words with a Russian or European origin during the early Soviet years but has become more reliant on the incorporation of Turkic and Arabic words into the language since the 1960s.

Names given to Uzbek children, as in other Central Asian cultures, are an important mark of individuality. A person's name was traditionally used to help visitors and residents recognize someone's place of origin. Instead of using a sur-



name, many Central Asian cultures attach the patronymic suffix *-oqli* (son of) or *-qizi* (daughter of) onto the father's or grandfather's name. The Russian patronymics—which are transliterated as *-aw*, *-awnä*, and *-awä* became popular during the 1920s but had fallen out of favor by the 1960s. Families who trace their genealogy to Mohammed will often add the title *Sayyid* after their name, and those who are descended from one of the four Imams add the title *Khoja*. Uzbek Muslims who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca sometimes affix the title *Hajji* before their names.

Everyday terms in the Uzbek language include *salaam aleikhem* (“hello”), *shundei* (“yes”), *yok* (“no”), *markhamat* (“please”), and *rakhmat* (“thank you”). Examples of Uzbek sayings include *Äytän gäp atqan oq* (“A word said is a shot fired”); *Kob oylä, az soylä* (“Think lots, say little”); *Yamandän yäkhshilik kutmä* (“Don't expect good from evil”); and *Yaman yolashän täyaq yäkhshi* (“A beating with a cudgel is better than an evil companion”).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Although the Uzbeks have not existed as a nation for very long, they are fascinated with researching their complex ethnic heritage. In the 4th century BC, Alexander of Macedonia came across the Uzbeks during his campaign to conquer India. He stopped in Maracanda, near the ancient city of Samarkand, and married Roxana, the daughter of a local leader. Over the centuries, the local legends surrounding Alexander (called Iskander Zulqornai by the Uzbeks) grew until he became a larger-than-life heroic figure.

Two historical heroes are often the subjects of modern Uzbek historical novels. One of these heroes of Uzbek culture is Tamerlane (1336–1405), a Turko-Mongol who ruled from Samarkand but conquered parts of present-day India, Syria, and southern Russia. His grandson Ulughbek (1394–1449) has become another legendary, semi-sacred figure owing to his monumental contributions to the sciences, especially astronomy.

## 5 RELIGION

The Uzbeks are among the most traditional people in Central Asia, and religion has an important place in traditional Uzbek culture. Most Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi sect. After the collapse of Communism, religious practices briefly were encouraged, because the new state wanted an antidote to the official Soviet position of atheism. As in other parts of Soviet Central Asia during Soviet rule, the Muslim clergy was persecuted. Since the end of Soviet rule, many new mosques have been built. Tashkent is perhaps the leading Islamic spiritual center in Central Asia, with many Islamic seminaries located there. Sufism (Islamic mysticism) is also practiced by some Uzbeks. A famous Sufi school, the Naqsh-bandi, is located in Bukhara. Today, Namangan in the Ferghana valley is perhaps the most conservatively religious city in all of Central Asia. However, since the late 1990s there has been a steady erosion of religious freedom, both for Muslims and Christians with Muslims bearing the heavier blows. The state claims it opposes religious expression for fear of extremism, but outsiders argue the state's harsh oppression only makes for a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

No holiday is more enjoyable to Uzbeks than *Novruz*, and it is rapidly replacing New Year's Eve as the number one holiday. It coincides with the first day of spring and is an ancient Iranic/Turkic holiday dating back at least 2,000 years. Speeches, school skits, dances, and town square celebrations with lots of feasting characterize this time. At home, people prepare *sumalak*, the beloved food of *Novruz*, a sweet pudding that is thick and brown. People cook young, vitamin-rich wheat plants in huge cauldrons overnight until the *sumalak* is done in the morning. All the holidays of the Islamic fast (Ramadan) and various forms of *Haiit* (days to remember one's departed relatives) are now officially recognized in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistani Independence Day is September 1, and people have been celebrating this holiday with great fanfare since 1991. Victory Day is May 9, and all Uzbekistani citizens pay tribute to the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. This holiday has both solemn and joyous sides.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Births, male circumcision, girls' first menstrual periods, marriage, and death are the primary events around which Uzbeki rites of passage occur. The *sumnat toi* (circumcision party) and the *kelin toi* (wedding) are events for which people spend the most money and celebrate most heartily.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Uzbeks take a great deal of time to greet one another. Simply seeing a friend or acquaintance and saying, "Hi" or "What's up?" as one passes by is not acceptable. It is considered far more

polite to approach each other, shake hands, and rapidly fire off a number of questions about each other's health, family situation, and work. The elements of sociability are very important. Uzbeks also love to invite "guests" (strangers) into their homes and will signal a passerby in with hand gestures, indicating a cup of tea or something to eat. Once one is invited in, it is absolutely obligatory to serve food and tea, even if the food is just bread or nuts and candies.

Traditionally, Uzbek customs have been oriented toward a reserved patriarchal system. The Uzbeks maintain a strong sense of duty to the elderly and to the community. Children are typically taught that openly confronting adults is wrong, that they should be quiet and composed even if they are upset or angry with their elders. Dignity has an important role in Uzbek society. Someone who talks or laughs too much or is a show-off is considered undignified. In a *gap*, an Uzbek custom that continues today, men meet with friends and former classmates to eat, play games of cards or bingo, and discuss social and intellectual issues while helping one another out with personal problems.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Uzbek interior design emphasizes the use of traditional themes. Loomed rugs often cover the floors of Uzbek houses, and traditional folk art, emphasizing motifs from the natural world (such as mountains, deer, and peacocks), or scenes painted by local artists from Navoi's (Uzbekistan's Shakespeare) literature, are common wall decorations. Most homes have two or three rooms. Men (and boys) and women (and girls) have separate quarters. Outside the home stands a large eating and resting platform known as the *sura*, and a great deal of time is spent there during the hot weather. It is usually covered by the shade of the grape lattice. A kitchen area is a separate unit of most homes with a large hearth where all the cooking is done.

Medical services in the cities have suffered since the collapse of the centralized Soviet system. Today people turn to mystic healers and herbalists to treat many ailments once cured with modern medicines, which are now often hard to find. In rural areas, people's general knowledge of proper healthcare is poor.

Transportation systems are extensive but unreliable now, especially in the vast countryside. It is easy, convenient, and cheap to travel from city to city in Uzbekistan by bus, rail, or plane. Urban transportation is good overall, but because gasoline and spare parts are in short supply, all forms of mass transit are often very crowded. Tashkent boasts a beautiful and clean subway system.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The average Uzbek family has five children, but any given home may house two, three, or four generations. Women have a particularly hard time in Uzbekistan because the Soviet era introduced them to the work force, but their duties at home never lessened. The *kelin toi*, or wedding, is the most important joyous celebration in Uzbek social life. Families save for their entire lives to ensure that their children are properly married, and that they themselves enjoy respect among other community members for the wedding party. The bride's family incurs the greatest expense because daughters receive a dowry. A new Uzbek bride will generally move in with her husband's family and do the majority of the work in the home until she has a few children and the next son is ready to marry. If she marries



Uzbeks look at the daily newspapers in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. President Islam Karimov lifted media censorship in early 2002. (Scott Peterson/Getty Images)

the youngest son, she will probably have to stay in her in-laws' household the rest of her life, because it is customary for the youngest son to stay in his father's home.

Women generally eat in a different room (often the kitchen) from men and guests, and they always eat separately at social gatherings. Family size is usually a joint decision between the couple, although Uzbek society, in general, values large families.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The Uzbeks are among the most traditional peoples in Central Asia, and so conventional and national costumes are still commonly worn. Uzbeks are known for wearing the traditional *doppilar*—small, black, square-shaped skullcaps. *Doppilar* are embroidered with elaborate abstract swirling patterns that serve to indicate the wearer's family ties, place of birth, social status, or other personal information. Many men wear European-style clothes or mixed outfits of European and traditional Uzbek clothing, which often utilizes bright colors or patterns. Some men wear the traditional *chopan*, originally a long quilted robe used by shepherds. The *chopan* worn today is often ornamented with pastel designs or sequins. Both men and women often wear long tunics and broad trousers with colorful outer robes. Although many women wear European clothes, some wear the atlas pattern (the traditional silk dress).

Atlas is a boldly colored and patterned tie-dyed style. In summer, women wear white head coverings or brightly colored kerchiefs. During winter, they don large woolen shawls that keep their heads and necks warm. Most ethnic Uzbek women have thick black hair traditionally worn in two braids, but Uzbek girls may wear their hair in dozens of small braids.

### **12 FOOD**

Uzbek cuisine includes a huge variety of baked, fried, and steamed dishes that make frequent use of Eastern spices such as cumin, coriander, and spicy dried red pepper. Traditional Uzbek dishes include *lagman* (homemade noodles with mutton, garlic, and vegetables), *d'ighman* (meat with pastry in a rich broth), *dymlama* (a layered vegetable and beef steamed stew), and the all-time favorite, *plov*. *Plov* is rice with beef (or mutton or chicken), cottonseed oil or *dumba* (sheep tail fat), vegetables, spices, garlic, and quinces. Breakfast fare consists of bread, some fruits or nuts, and tea, with occasional servings of *qattiq* (yogurt).

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education in Uzbekistan is universal and mandatory until age 16. City schools are often much better than rural and, historically the Russian-language schools were of higher quality than Uzbek schools. But this is now changing gradually. Turkish

*lycees* (European-style high schools) and *medresses* (Muslim schools) have opened in all of the major cities, so education has become much more diversified. Aside from conservative parents, who think daughters need only the minimal schooling, almost all Uzbek parents want a high degree of education for their children, and many hope that their children will be accepted to Tashkent State University or be able to study abroad. Overall, Uzbek people greatly revere study and intellectual life.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Classical Uzbek music involves instruments such as the *rubob* *r dutor* accompanying a single singer, whose style is drawn out and plaintive—a kind of wailing. Popular Uzbek music is a mixture of traditional styles with rock and pop. The hand-held *doira*, a tambourine-drum, has a deep, sharp sound, adding very rich beats and rhythms to musical pieces. Some folk singing is accompanied only by the *doira*.

One of the most famous examples of classic literature revered by the Uzbeks is *Baburnama* (the memoirs of Babur), which was originally written in an eastern Turkish variant. Babur (1483–1530) was a descendant of Turko-Mongol warriors who led a military campaign through present-day Afghanistan and India, where he founded the Mogul Empire and became its first emperor. Babur is respected as a soldier and a statesman by modern Uzbeks.

During the 1960s, several prominent Uzbek playwrights produced works that questioned the Soviet policies against the Uzbek cultural and social leadership from the 1930s to the 1950s. The most famous of these dramas are Izzat Sultan's *Iman* ("Faith," 1960) and Rahmatullah A. Uyghun's *Dostlär* ("Friends," 1961), which both show the consequences upon a society when suspicion, malice, and injustice are common in its leadership.

#### 15 WORK

Most Uzbeks continue to work in the agricultural sector; about 65% remain rural. This work has cyclical patterns. Spring, summer, and fall are periods of great diligence, while winter is a time to rest and relax. In addition to working in the collective fields growing wheat, cotton, fruits, and so on, many also raise silkworms for cocoon production (from which comes silk) and labor very hard on their small household plots, growing the bulk of the nation's fruits and vegetables. Many people sell these crops in the peasant markets of major population centers. The industrial and service sectors of the Uzbek economy cover everything from aircraft manufacturing to gold mining and oil extraction. Today, retail trade in the form of private shops is growing, and private business is bustling. Women have participated in almost all sectors of the economy, but there is a growing trend to have them work primarily in the non-industrial sectors. Uzbek women themselves have mixed feelings about this.

#### 16 SPORTS

Table tennis became popular during the Soviet era and remains so today. Since the mid-1980s, softball has been a popular women's sport. Soccer is the number one team and spectator sport, and basketball and volleyball are very popular in schools.

*Kurashi* is a unique form of wrestling beloved by Uzbek men and boys. It involves facing and holding an opponent by the

back of the neck with one hand while gripping the back of his thigh with the other.

The martial arts have become especially popular over the last decade, and many children train seriously in local clubs. Another sport is a form of polo in which hundreds or even thousands of horsemen participate. The two huge teams attempt to capture the carcass of a goat or sheep and get it to the opponents' goal. The game is incredibly dusty and can be violent as the stakes are often high. This form of polo is a very popular spectator sport, especially in the areas of Samarqand and Tashkent.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

A popular and ancient form of entertainment among the Uzbeks is *payr*, an unrehearsed public debate that tests the quick-witted abilities of the opponents. Two competitors stand on a platform and exchange witty and clever comments about each other within the context of a topic chosen before the competition. Each speaker must immediately respond to the other one with a crafty remark. The first one who fails to respond quickly enough is the loser, as determined by the assembled crowd. Sometimes a good *payr* match will draw thousands of spectators. *Bakka* (tight-rope walking) also draws big crowds during celebrations or parties; it is one of the most common forms of popular entertainment.

Children love to play games such as *top tosh* and *askiia*. *Top tosh* is equivalent to jacks, except Uzbek children play with rocks or pebbles. *Askiia* is a word-riddle game where one player makes up questions about a given thing, and the other child must answer to show that he knows what the object of the riddle is.

Movies and television enjoy wide popularity. The most popular genres are martial arts movies, action movies, comedies, and Hindu films, also known as Bombay cinema.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pottery is the oldest craft practiced among the Uzbeks. Archeologists have found ornamental pieces of Uzbek pottery that are nearly 3,000 years old. Folk arts have a rich tradition in Uzbek culture. In addition to internal house paintings, silk weaving, quilt-making, skullcap-making, and *suzama* (cloth embroidery) are well-known elements of Uzbek folk art. *Hunarmandlik* (craftsmanship) shines through in *naqsh* (wood carving) and mosaic tile work in architecture. The best examples of carving are seen in the doors of family homes and in the columns that support buildings. Ceramics (especially fine porcelain tea sets), metalworking (especially urns and pitchers), and boot-making are other examples of traditional crafts in Uzbek culture. Stamp collecting and corresponding with pen-pals are favorite hobbies for young people.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Uzbeks currently face two great problems: the stagnation of the economy and a number of serious environmental problems, including the shrinking of the Aral Sea. The reluctance of the government to renounce the old Soviet ways has caused the standard of living to decline since independence. Heavy reliance on the cotton crop coupled with decades of socialist mismanagement has created ecological problems in the Aral Sea, which has lost much of its area since 1960. This loss has occurred because of the central role of growing *päkhttä* (cotton),

which requires copious amounts of water. The irrigation in Uzbekistan (along with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) needed to grow cotton diverted most of the water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the two main rivers that feed into the Aral Sea. Much of the soil around the Aral Sea is now too salty to grow any crops. Pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers have also polluted much of the remaining water supply. In the late 1980s, some Soviet scientists indicated that, unless water usage changed, the Aral Sea would completely dry up and disappear within 20 years. With these environmental problems, it may not be possible to grow as much cotton in the future as in the past, which could impede the economy from developing.

The Uzbek human rights record has not been good, especially because of the repression, in the forms of jailings and beatings, of leading opposition figures. However, some improvements were made during 1995–96, as the economy began to stabilize and the state administration relaxed its grip on power ever so slightly. Unfortunately, this all took a decided turn for the worse from the late 1990s and after 2001. Political and economic freedoms in Uzbekistan now appear to be at an all-time low. The state actually makes good profits from cotton, natural gas and oil, and gold mining, but the benefits rarely are shared with ordinary impoverished citizens. After 2005 political repression reached a new high point when the government shot to death hundreds of protesters in the eastern city of Andizhan. Since then the population has been very reluctant to express their myriad grievances in any organized and public forum. Criminal activity, unemployment, homelessness, and child abandonment all have become serious issues in the new millennium.

Alcoholism, drug addiction, and violent crime are the social diseases of present-day Uzbeks, a direct result of rising poverty since the late 1980s and contemporary political, religious, and entrepreneurial repression.

As is true of many other former Soviet territories, labor migration has become a huge social phenomenon today with millions of Uzbeks seeking work in Kazakhstan, Russia, Europe, and the U.S.A. Perhaps 15% of the entire working population lives abroad at least part of the year, and thousands of these people have been subject to myriad forms of abuse including various forms of slavery. It is still hard to determine the overall consequences of these displacements and forms of abuse on the population as a whole.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Uzbeks are among the most inequitable of the Central Asian peoples when it comes to gender. Strict forms of sex segregation are practiced within the domestic sphere as well as in public life. For example, men and women usually do not eat together, and girls are expected to carry out nearly all domestic chores as well as do almost all of the cotton sowing and harvesting work in the rural areas.

While the Soviet period enabled women to perform all kinds of work and receive a higher education, the great gains that Uzbek women made are in danger of being lost. Increasingly, the value of women's education has been lowered, and even though the state guarantees full equality between the sexes before the law, it seems clear that patriarchal values and practices are holding sway.

Traditionally, Uzbek women always marry exogamously—outside of their own patrilineages—and this long has func-

tioned as a gateway to their oppression. With the collapse of Soviet power, Uzbek patriarchal values have become increasingly ascendant, especially with the very trying economic circumstances in which millions find themselves. Thus new available opportunities should go to men not women.

However, labor migration plays havoc with these traditionally discriminatory values as women leave to work abroad, sometimes legally, sometimes not. And when an Uzbek woman is not supervised by her own male kin, then her behavior simply becomes suspect. On the other hand, the labor migration gives women a new economic power, even if the practice may be greatly harming family dynamics. Overall, it is still too early to know the consequences of labor migration in terms of gender relations, but patterns no doubt are taking shape.

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—revised by R. Zanca

# VEDDAS

**PRONUNCIATION:** VEH-duhz

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Veddhas, Veddahs; Vanniyalato, Vanniyala-Aetto

**LOCATION:** Sri Lanka

**POPULATION:** less than 2,000

**LANGUAGE:** Sinhala; Tamil

**RELIGION:** Traditional religion with elements of Buddhism and Hinduism

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Veddas (Veddhas, Veddahs, also Vanniyala-Aetto) are a small tribal community in Sri Lanka, the island (formerly called Ceylon) that lies in the Indian Ocean off the southern tip of India. Physically, the Veddas are of Proto-Australoid stock, associated with the earliest strata of population identifiable in South Asia. Genetic studies suggest they are related to the tribes of Malaysia. Modern Veddas are believed to be descended from the island's earliest aboriginal inhabitants, though clearly they have been exposed to genetic mixing with later groups. The name "Vedda" is a Dravidian word meaning "one who uses bows and arrows," and Veddas traditionally lived by hunting and gathering in the forests of Sri Lanka. However, the Veddas call themselves *Vanniyalato* or "people of the forest."

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

At one time, it is likely that the Veddas or their ancestors were distributed over much of Sri Lanka. Today, however, Veddas live in three separate areas whose populations have little contact with each other. The largest group is the Anuradhapura Veddas. They are found in Anuradhapura District in the north-central part of the island. This population was estimated at over 6,600 people in 1970. A second group, known as the Coast Veddas, occupies a stretch of the east coast of Sri Lanka extending south from Trincomalee. The third Vedda group is identified as the Bintenne Veddas. Their territory extends from the eastern slopes of the central mountains to the sea, a triangular area roughly defined by the Mahaweli and Gal Oya rivers and the coast. Estimates of the Bintenne Vedda population are not available, but it is thought to be considerably less than that of the other groups.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars concerning the definition of Vedda. There are perhaps 2,000 Veddas remaining in Sri Lanka today. These are people who call themselves Vedda, are viewed by others as Vedda, but are assimilated to varying degrees into Sinhalese or Tamil society. They may be Buddhist or Hindu, live in villages, or practice settled agriculture, but in most ways they closely resemble the rural populations among whom they live. There are no more than an estimated 200–300 individuals following the traditional Vedda way of life today. Unless otherwise stated, the material presented in the following pages is based on the Seligmanns' study of traditional Vedda culture, undertaken among the Bintenne Veddas at the beginning of the 20th century.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Veddas today speak Sinhala or Tamil, depending on whether they live among Sinhalese or Tamil populations. Evidence exists, however, of what at one time might have been a distinct Vedda language. This survives today in what some have described as a dialect of Sinhalese but that others see as a creole, a language that evolved through years of contact between the original Vedda and Sinhalese tongues.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The Veddas claim royal ancestry through their myth of origin. They trace their descent to Prince Vijaya, the grandson of a lion and the legendary founder of the Sinhalese nation (*sinha* means "lion" and *le* is "blood"). Prince Vijaya came to Sri Lanka from North India, so the legend goes. Before sending back to India for a bride of his own social standing, he had sexual relations with a local demon princess named Kuveni. Kuveni gave birth to two children, a boy and a girl. The Veddas, so it is said, are the result of the incestuous union between this brother and sister. This myth, which is widely known among the Anuradhapura Veddas and the Sinhalese accomplishes several objectives. It supports the Veddas' claim to high social status; it establishes them as the original inhabitants (i.e., owners) of the land; and it defines the Veddas as a people distinct from, but having a common origin with, the Sinhalese. In addition, it creates a link with the supernatural world, which occupies a significant role in the Vedda belief system.

This particular myth of origin is apparently unknown among the Bintenne Veddas, whose culture is characterized by a marked absence of myths. Even myths of origin of the Bintenne Vedda clans are to be found among the Sinhalese, rather than among the Veddas themselves. One relates that when the demon princess Kuveni was abandoned by Prince Vijaya, she returned with her son and daughter to her own people. However, her people killed her and the children fled into the jungle where they lived on the fruits of the mora tree (*Nephelium longana*). Some of their descendants gave rise to the Morane clan.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

As far as can be determined, the primitive religion of the Veddas was based on the worship of spirits (*yakku*) rather than of any gods. Some were the spirits of Veddas who were long dead and revered almost as heroes. The chief of these, and indeed the chief of all the yakhu, was Kande Yakka. Kande Yakka and another spirit, Bilindi Yakka, would be invoked to ensure success in the hunt. And, if they were not offered meat after a successful kill, the hunters would expect bad luck to befall them. They might even be bitten by snakes or attacked by bears. A second category of spirits was the *Na Yakku*, the spirits of recently dead ancestors. These are believed to live in hills, caves, and rocks. The *Na Yakku*, including the spirits of the deceased, are invoked on the fifth day after a death. Offerings of coconut milk and rice are made, and the Vedda shaman becomes possessed by the spirits of the deceased, who promises that yams, honey, and game shall be plentiful. The *Na Yakku* must obtain Kande Yakka's permission to help the living and accept their offerings.

Over and above this "Cult of the Friendly Dead," as some have termed it, the Veddas worship foreign spirits who have become naturalized Vedda yakhu. These are essentially protective of the Veddas and their help is sought in various situations.

The Rahu Yakku, for example, are derived from a Sinhalese demon but have been given their own Vedda identity. They are invoked to cure sickness and to obtain success in hunting and in collecting rock honey. Another class of spirits is foreign spirits who are hostile in nature and who are to be feared. Thus, under Tamil influence, yakhu haunting rocks and hilltops are thought of as dangerous immigrants from beyond the Ocean who bring disease to the Veddas. People tend to avoid rocky mountain tops, and if they venture there, they leave offerings of honey. A less dangerous form of these spirits is the *kiriammas* (“grandmothers”), who are seen more as local deities than as yakhu.

Each Vedda community has a shaman (*kapurale*) who possesses the power and knowledge to intercede with the spirit world. The shaman presides at various ceremonial dances, such as the hunting dance (*kirikoraha*) and the arrow dance. He presents the offerings to the Na Yakku after a death. At such occasions, the shaman becomes possessed by the spirits and acts as their mouthpiece, promising favors and good fortune to the community. The shaman also conducts exorcisms of evil spirits. The shaman trains his own successor, passing on his knowledge to a pupil, usually his son or his sister’s son (his actual or potential son-in-law).

Prolonged contact with Tamil and Sinhalese society has resulted in many Vedda groups absorbing elements of Hinduism and, especially, Buddhism. These groups worship gods (*deviyo*) as well as spirits. The Coast Veddas, for example, revere deities that include Hindu gods, such as Shiva, Vishnu, and Bhairava. They have their own temples and shrines where their religious observances and devil-dancing ceremonies take place. Among the Anuradhapura Veddas, the powerful Kataragama is worshipped. The Anuradhapura Veddas are in close contact with the Sinhalese and profess to be Buddhist. They know little of the higher form of the religion, but they have adopted Buddhist rituals. Some invite a Buddhist monk to their burial ceremonies and give alms to Buddhists on behalf of the dead. Such practices fit in well with their own customs relating to death and the spirits of the ancestors.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The worship of ancestral spirits among the Veddas is not subject to any fixed festival cycle. Vedda communities that have adopted Hinduism or Buddhism tend to observe the festival calendar of these religions. However, their participation in such festivals may not necessarily indicate a full understanding of the significance of the event. For instance, Veddas take part in the annual festival at the Buddhist temple at Mahiyangana in the southeastern Badulla district. They approach the temple in a procession (*perahera*), bringing offerings of honey, but they do not follow Buddhist observances. They pray at the temple for protection from “elephants and men.”

The most important ritual events among the Veddas are the ceremonial dances, in which the shaman becomes possessed by gods or spirits.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

There are no particular rituals associated with birth among the Veddas. Birth usually takes place in a cave, with the assistance of a woman of the community. The umbilical cord is cut by an arrow, and the afterbirth is thrown away. Some Vedda groups have food taboos for nursing mothers. For example, the fat of



the monitor lizard and of the spotted deer should be avoided as potentially harmful to the infant being suckled. Among village Veddas, a special hut is built for the birth, as is the custom among the rural Sinhalese.

Children are named by their parents, usually within a month of their birth. Among some groups, a child’s name is never spoken, apparently to avoid attracting the attention of evil spirits who might harm the infant. Children are called “Tuta” (male) and “Tuti” (female), and in many instances their real names seem to be forgotten. Typical Vedda names are Poromala, Nila, and Badena for males, and Hendi, Selli, and Badani for females.

Veddas are affectionate and indulgent parents, and children have few responsibilities during childhood. There are no puberty rites for either sex, although Vedda groups in contact with the Sinhalese or Tamils have adopted local customs, such as secluding girls for a short time at puberty. Virtually all village Veddas and those who have mixed with Sinhalese society isolate menstruating women in a specially built hut for the duration of their period.

When a Vedda dies, the corpse is left in the cave or rock-shelter where the death occurred. The body is not washed or dressed in any way but is covered with leaves and branches. Sometimes a large stone is placed on the chest of the dead person. The cave is then abandoned by the community and avoided for a lengthy period of time (estimated to be around 12 years). Some Veddas claim that if they stayed in the vicinity of the cave, the spirit of the deceased would be displeased, and they



*Sri Lankan aboriginals, also known as Veddas, chat in a mud hut at the village Dambana in central Sri Lanka. Veddas preserve a direct line of descent from the island's original Neolithic community dating from at least 16,000 BC. (Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images)*

would be pelted with stones. Among the more primitive Vedda groups, no particular ceremonies or rituals are performed over the body before it is abandoned. In some instances, however, the person's betel nut bag and its contents would be left with the corpse. On the fifth day after death, ritual offerings are made to the ancestral spirits, including that of the recently deceased.

Among the Anuradhapura and Coast Veddas, beliefs and rituals concerning death have been influenced by Buddhist and Hindu concepts, such as *karma* (belief that one's next life is determined by one's actions in this life), reincarnation, and the transmigration of souls.

## <sup>8</sup>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Every Vedda helps all other members of his or her community, readily sharing game and honey with them. However, a particularly close relationship exists between father-in-law and son-in-law.

Terms of respect are commonly used when addressing the elderly. Thus, although *siya* or *mutta* actually mean "father" or "grandfather," such words are used in addressing any elderly man. Similarly, elderly women are addressed as *kiriamma* or grandmother.

## <sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS

A convenient, though perhaps not totally accurate, distinction has been made by some between "Rock" (or "Jungle") Veddas and "Village" Veddas. The former are held to be closer to the "pure" Vedda culture than are the latter, who are settled cultivators and follow lifestyles resembling those of the Sinhalese or Tamil peasant.

The life of the more primitive Vedda groups is centered on the rock-shelters and caves that are their homes. In the dry season, game gathers around water sources in the lowland forests and so the Veddas are to be found in these locations. However, during the rainy season when the game scatters over the entire countryside, the Veddas move to higher elevations. A single family or several families may occupy a rock-shelter. Veddas sleep on a rock, sometimes lying on a deerskin or piece of cloth, sometimes lying on the bare rock. It is customary for Veddas to keep a small fire burning beside them all night. If living in a communal cave, each family keeps to its own area. Often one woman cooks for the entire group. In communal caves, all the men store their bows and arrows in one place rather than keeping them in their own living space.

The material possessions of people living in this fashion are clearly somewhat limited. The following is a typical list of the objects a Vedda might be expected to own: an axe, a bow and arrows, a deerskin, cooking pots, flints and tinder for making



fire, a gourd for carrying water, and a betel pouch, with betel cutters and a small box for holding lime. To this might be added a digging stick, utensils for collecting honey, and the supply of cloth that most Veddas seem to have. In addition, every Vedda owns one or two dogs. The animals are invariably well fed and treated with a great deal of affection by their masters. They are “country” dogs, i.e., of mixed breed, but they are trained in hunting and are clearly of importance to the Veddas. Dogs partake of the sacrificial offerings made at the Na Yukka ceremony, are anointed with milk at the hunting ceremony, and are given as wedding gifts.

Today, few—if any—Veddas live exclusively in rock-shelters. They may construct temporary shelters of wooden frames covered by animal skins, bark, or leaves, or build huts out of wattle and daub. Among the village Veddas, of course, houses are permanent and reflect local styles in materials and construction.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Veddas are divided into clans (*waruge*) that some have argued are matrilineal exogamous units (this is a matter of debate among anthropologists). Of greater significance in traditional Vedda society, however, is the community. This consists of one to five families who share the rights of hunting, fishing, and gathering honey over a particular tract of land. The community usually does not remain as a single group but breaks down into smaller units of one or two families living and hunting together.

Each family is made up of parents and unmarried children and married daughters and their husbands. Marriage takes place at an early age, though not much before puberty. The male selects his own partner, though the correct marriage for the Vedda is his father’s sister’s daughter. The young man goes to his prospective father-in-law with a gift of honey, yams, grain, or dried deer’s flesh tied to his unstrung bow. If the proposal is accepted, the girl attaches a string she has made herself around the groom’s waist and the marriage ritual is complete. The husband always wears the waist string, and when it wears out he replaces it with a new one made by his wife. Occasionally a charm is placed on the waist string to ensure fidelity. When a girl marries, her father customarily makes over a tract of land, known to be inhabited by the rock bee or *bambara*, to his new son-in-law. Sometimes the wedding gift is a bow and arrow, or a hunting dog. A custom, now dying out, is the gift to the bride of a lock of hair from the bridegroom.

Traditional marriage customs are less strictly followed among the village Veddas, who have been influenced by the Sinhalese and Tamil societies among whom they live. True cross-cousin marriages are less frequent, although the fiction is often maintained by “finding” kin in distant villages where no one can question the relationship. Marriages with non-Vedda spouses are increasingly common.

### **11 CLOTHING**

No Veddas can remember a time when they could not buy cloth, but they state that at one time their clothing was made from the inner bark of the upas tree (*Antiaris toxicaria*). Men wear a strip of white cotton some 22–23 cm (9 in) wide. They pass this between their legs and tuck it into their waist string, letting the ends hang down in front and back. This “white” cotton cloth soon becomes discolored to a dull brown, so it is less obvious during the hunt. Strips can be torn off this thin

machine-made cloth to provide tinder for making fire when necessary. On occasion, such as before ceremonial dances, the Veddas put on a sarong-like garment called a *hangala*. Women wear colored cotton cloth, bought from peddlers, that extends from waist to knee and wraps around like a sarong.

### **12 FOOD**

Traditionally, the Veddas existed by hunting and gathering. Those who continue to do so today gather wild yams, truffles, fruits, and edible flowers from the jungle. This is primarily the work of women. The men hunt for game, mostly deer, monkeys, and iguanas. They will eat fish if it is available. Yams are roasted in the ashes of a fire, and meat may also be cooked this way. The flesh of animals is dried on a rack placed in the sun, but a fire is also built beneath it so it is smoked at the same time. Practically everything else is boiled in a cooking pot over a fire.

Honey plays an important part in the Vedda diet. June and July are the main months for collecting the honey of the rock bee or *bambara* (*Apis indica*). Men clamber up rocks or climb creepers or wooden ladders to the hives, smoke out the bees, and cut down the honeycombs using a long stick (*masliya*). The honey is eaten in large quantities, wax and all, and is considered especially tasty when the comb contains young bees. Honey and meat are used to barter for goods (e.g., cloth, metal axes, etc.) that the Veddas do not produce themselves. In addition to honey, the Veddas are fond of chewing. The betel (areca) nut is their favorite, and every Vedda has a betel bag with a betel cutter and a small box of lime (made from burning the shell of a snail).

The Veddas believe that formerly it was the custom for a man to carry a small piece of dried human liver in his betel bag. The reason for this was not known, but it was thought to be related to increasing a man’s valor. The liver had to come from someone personally killed by the Vedda, and it would be eaten to increase the Vedda’s strength and resolve.

The Veddas avoid eating certain foods, although the specific reasons for these food taboos are unclear. While they consume the flesh of most animals and birds, the Veddas abstain from eating buffaloes, elephants, leopards, and jackals. This avoidance might stem from the dangers of hunting such animals, but the Veddas also do not eat fowl (wild or domesticated) or pigs. It is particularly important for shamans to avoid fowl and pork before ceremonial dances.

Today, few Veddas survive solely by hunting and gathering, and most groups practice shifting cultivation (*chena*) or permanent agriculture. The diet of these populations is generally similar to that of the rural communities among whom they live.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Because of their lifestyle, traditional Veddas have no access to formal education. Vedda populations that are settled can avail themselves of state educational facilities. As a group, however, the Veddas can be considered marginal to the social currents of Sri Lankan society.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Ritual dances, accompanied by chanting, music, and possession by spirits, are central to Vedda ceremonial life. These include the arrow dance, the hunting dance, the Na Yakku

ceremonies, and the invocation of various yakku (e.g., Bam-bura Yakka for the hunt, Pata Yakka for aid in pregnancy, or Dola Yakka to ensure successful honey collection). Only the men dance, usually in a circle, and sometimes beating out the rhythm of the dance on their stomachs. The shaman becomes possessed by the spirit of the particular yakka being invoked. The yakka looks over the offerings made to him and, if pleased with what he sees, pronounces success in the hunt, or a normal childbirth, etc.

### **15 WORK**

The Veddas were originally hunters and gatherers, but many subsequently took up shifting agriculture or even permanent cultivation. They grow crops, such as millet, maize, beans, squashes, and eggplants. Some engage in paddy-rice cultivation. Fishing is important among the Coast Veddas who build their own boats and canoes for venturing out onto the ocean. Prawns are an important catch for the Coast Veddas. In addition, many among the Anuradhapura and Coast Veddas resort to casual labor to supplement their incomes.

### **16 SPORTS**

Among traditional Veddas, children play very simply. Babies have toy bows and arrows made for them by their mothers. By about five years of age, young boys make their own small bows and arrows and learn how to use them. They begin to accompany the adults on hunting trips when they are around 10 years old. Children play with clay and sticks, while little girls pretend to cook using broken pots.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Veddas derive their entertainment from their traditional ceremonial dances and the songs that are sung to invoke the spirits. Songs are also sung as charms, as lullabies, and also for amusement. Vedda enjoy pantomime and often enact scenes, such as hunting and honey-gathering for sheer enjoyment.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Veddas are not well known for their folk arts and crafts. Formerly, they made their own weapons, but they have now come to rely on trade for metal arrowheads and axes. Crude drawings have been found in rock-shelters, but these appear to have no ritual significance and were probably done for amusement.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Like all tribals, the Veddas are facing problems of change brought about by contact with more “modern” neighbors. Their traditional means of exploiting natural resources are relatively primitive, and they continue to experience low standards of living. Socially, they remain isolated and often feel they are exploited by the more advanced peoples around them. Numbers of “true” Veddas are declining as a result of disease and scarcity of food. Some Veddas have opted to be resettled under government programs, adopting paddy cultivation and taking advantage of amenities, such as markets, health services, and educational facilities. Many, however, are reluctant to leave their traditional lands, arguing that they will be leaving behind them the spirits of the forests and mountains. Those

that have taken to settled agriculture have adopted many cultural features of the rural peasantry around them.

Unfortunately, many Veddas have been uprooted by the pressures of modern economic growth. Development projects along the Gal Oya and Mahaweli rivers have inundated Vedda settlements and forced the relocation of their inhabitants. In 1983, Veddas were evicted from the Maduru Oya National Park in the catchment area of the controversial Mahaweli Development Program. Although they had been demanding rights to their lands since at least 1970, the Veddas had never received secure land tenure that recognized their collective custodianship over traditional hunting and gathering ranges. Neither had they been consulted or represented in any decision-making process that affected their daily lives. The creation of the park forced the Veddas to leave their traditional lands in the semi-evergreen dry monsoon forests, and they were transformed overnight into game poachers and trespassers. Barriers, guards, and outposts were stationed along the park’s demarcated borders and the hapless tribals were moved down out of the hill forests to small settlements, where they were provided houses and small irrigated rice paddies. The Vedda—traditionally hunters and gatherers supplementing their subsistence by shifting cultivation—had trouble adapting to a sedentary way of life. Subsequent surveys showed they resented the lack of access to forest produce, game, and land for shifting cultivation and were fast losing their own language. Only one small group, led by the old Vedda chieftain Uru Warige Tissahamy (popularly known as Tissahamy) and his kinsfolk of Kotabakinni village refused to be evicted from the land of their ancestors. Officials considered Tissahamy to be very obstinate and stubborn, for he would not budge an inch no matter how many emissaries went to speak to him. Finally the government had to concede that Tissahamy and seven families could remain on their lands as long as the old man lived. However, according to the 1987 Master Plan for Maduru Oya National Park, the day that aged chief Tissahamy expired, the rest of his kinsfolk would have to evacuate the hamlet immediately. Tissahamy finally died in June 1999 at the age of 96.

Under Sri Lanka’s Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance, 1993, all traditional Vedda occupations, including hunting, honey-gathering, and shifting cultivation, were prohibited within national parks but limited human activities were to be permitted within other areas, defined as sanctuaries, of 1,500 acres. There is concern that 1,500 acres may not be able to sustain more than a few families living by hunting, gathering, and shifting cultivation. As of 2008, the creation of these sanctuaries has yet to be achieved.

Some observers have said Veddas are disappearing and have lamented the decline of their distinct culture. Development, government forest reserve restrictions, the movement of settlers into their ancestral lands, and the civil war in Sri Lanka have disrupted traditional Vedda ways of life. However, cultural assimilation of Veddas with other local populations has been going on for a long time. The term Vedda has been used in Sri Lanka to mean not only hunter-gatherers, but also to refer to any people who adopt an unsettled and rural way of life and thus can be a derogatory term not based on ethnic definitions. Over time, it is possible for non-Vedda groups to become Veddas, in this broad cultural sense. Vedda populations of this kind are increasing in some districts of the island of Sri Lanka.

Today, many Sinhalese people and some east coast Tamils claim that they have some trace of Vedda blood. Inter-marriage between Veddas and Sinhalese is very frequent. They are not considered outcasts in Sri Lankan society, unlike the untouchables.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

There have been reports alleging that young Vedda women are being tricked into accepting contracts to the Middle East as domestic workers, an attractive proposition for young girls who see no future for themselves in Sri Lanka, when in fact they are trafficked into prostitution or sold as sex slaves.

Given the small size of the Vedda community, gender issues are less significant than the disappearance of Vedda culture and the diminishing size of the group that adhere to it. As with most tribal peoples in South Asia, women in Vedda society are relatively free. However, it is increasingly common for women to marry outside the community.

Change is the inevitable result when a tribal society comes into contact with more advanced cultures and economic systems. In Sri Lanka, this has involved the disruption of Vedda life, the disappearance of traditional Vedda culture, and the loss of Vedda cultural identity.

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—by D. O. Lodrick

# VIETNAMESE

**PRONUNCIATION:** vee-et-nuh-MEEZ

**LOCATION:** Vietnam

**POPULATION:** 70–80 million

**LANGUAGE:** Vietnamese

**RELIGION:** Confucianism; Taoism; Buddhism, Roman Catholicism; Cao Daism

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 2: Vietnamese Americans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, known to most as Vietnam, is located in Southeast Asia. The history of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has been shaped by its location between China and India. Straddling a crossroads and lines of trade between north and south, east and west, Vietnam has been a center of human trade, interaction, and conflict for centuries.

Archaeological excavations reveal that the first state in Vietnam, known as the Dong-son period, emerged in the Red River delta around 800 BC. The Dong-son people built dikes and canals to control the rivers and irrigate their rice fields and crafted bronze drums, tools, and weapons.

By 250 BC, a Vietnamese ruler created the Au Lac Kingdom by uniting the Dong-son delta people and the neighboring highlanders. Soon after, a Chinese commander subdued the region and demanded that the new kingdom grant allegiance to China. The country was then called Nam Viet, Nam meaning "south" and Viet referring to the people living along China's southern border.

A century later, Nam Viet became a Chinese province and was ruled by China until 900 AD. Despite this history of domination, the Vietnamese were able to retain a certain level of autonomy. An ancient Vietnamese saying held that "The emperor's power stops at the village gate." Only after numerous rebellions by the Vietnamese and their pledge that they would continue to grant loyalty to China did she become an independent country. Vietnam's legacy from China continues to today and includes ideas about government, philosophy, script, education, religion, crafts, and literature.

Over the next centuries as different families ruled the country, the Vietnamese began moving south in search of new areas for rice cultivation. By the late 1400s, Vietnam had conquered the Champa Kingdom in central Vietnam. By the late 1600s, the Vietnamese had migrated deep into southern Vietnam, an area occupied by Cambodian, or Khmer, people.

The first Europeans in Vietnam were Portuguese and French traders. The Portuguese soon left, and the Vietnamese ejected the French. Some Roman Catholic missionaries stayed on. Over the next centuries, sometimes in the favor of Vietnam's rulers, though often not, the missionaries made a number of converts among the Vietnamese.

The French returned to Vietnam in the mid-1800s, ostensibly to protect their missionaries, but in fact to explore economic and trade opportunities. For the next 80 years, France took out many more resources and taxes than it returned in education or wealth. In the mid-1950s the French were forced to abandon their colony by the Vietminh, nationalist Communists led by Ho Chi Minh.



The Geneva Conference of 1954 divided Vietnam into two entities, pending an election to reunify the country, which never took place. The area north of the 17th parallel became North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh and his Communists; south of the line lay South Vietnam, run by a pro-Western prime minister. Fearful that Communism would take over South Vietnam and that other Southeast Asian countries would fall “like dominos,” the United States sent advisors to help South Vietnam fight Communism. The United States was soon embroiled in war: the more soldiers the United States sent, the more soldiers and assistance North Vietnam sent to the south.

The war continued until the early 1970s, when the United States Congress ceased military funding for South Vietnam. At a cost of 58,000 soldiers and over \$140 billion in military and economic aid, the United States withdrew its last troops in 1973. An estimated 3 million Vietnamese combatants and civilians (North and South) were estimated to have been killed in the war. In 1975, North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam and reunited the country.

In 1975, almost a million Vietnamese left their homeland and were immediately resettled in Western countries. Another million fled Vietnam by sea in 1978. Most eventually were resettled in the United States, France, Canada, and Australia. Vietnamese continued to flee their country for political and economic reasons into the early 1990s.

Peace has been difficult. Isolated by the United States and the international community until the mid-1990s, Vietnam suffered from a stagnant economy and increasing population. In recent years Vietnam has enjoyed strong economic growth

rates and attracted increasing international investment and trade. However, high levels of inflation are threatening Vietnam’s status as Asia’s newest economic star. The government continues to be run by the Vietnamese Communist Party, with the party chairman being the political leader of the country.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Vietnam has a population of between 70 and 80 million people, making Vietnam one of the most populous countries in the world. Most Vietnamese live in the Red and Mekong river deltas. The population continues to grow at a high rate despite governmental efforts to slow its increase, and, thus, much of the industrial and agricultural advances made in the past years have been consumed by the growing population.

Minorities in Vietnam include highlanders, such as the Jarai and Bahnar of the central highlands, and the Tai and Muong of the northern highlands. Approximately 100,000 Muslim Cham live in the central highlands. Over 700,000 Khmer and 500,000 Chinese live in the southern delta of Vietnam.

Sometimes described as a carrying pole with a rice basket hanging from both ends, Vietnam is in fact long and slender, only 80 km (50 mi) wide at its narrowest point. The “carrying pole” of Vietnam stretches in an S-shape more than 1,000 mi in length from China in the north, curving around to Cambodia in the south. A delta sits at either end of the country, the two “rice baskets,” each yielding enormous quantities of rice. In between and along the Western edge of the country are hills and densely forested highlands. Like Cambodia, however, Vietnam is experiencing the impact of changes in the Mekong as more dams are constructed in the upper riparian countries.

Located just north of the equator, Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate. In northern Vietnam, the rainy season extends from April to October, and Hanoi, the capital, has an annual rainfall of 173 cm (68 in). In mountainous areas, the annual rainfall can exceed 406 cm (160 in). In the southern part of Vietnam, the rainy season extends from May to November with annual rainfall of about 203 cm (80 in) in the lowland regions.

Humidity is high throughout the year, although the climate varies considerably from place to place because of differences in latitude and topographical relief. Summers are generally hot and wet and winters are mild and dry. The typhoon season extends from July through November, often causing serious damage to crops and people especially along the central coast area.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

The Vietnamese language has been influenced by classical Chinese more than any other language, although it carries traces of Mon-Khmer, Tai, and other Southeast Asian dialects. Although Chinese was the language used by government officials, scholars, and artists for the thousand years of Chinese domination and following, Vietnamese remained the popular language. More than 1,000 years ago, Vietnamese began devising a script based on Chinese characters in which to write their own literature, and Vietnam adopted the Confucian examination system.

In the 17th century, Portuguese and French missionaries transcribed the Vietnamese language into Roman letters. By the end of the 19th century, this Romanized system, called *quoc ngu*, had replaced the Chinese-based system of writing.

Quoc ngu uses diacritical marks above or below letters to indicate pronunciation and tone. Vietnamese is a tonal language, so that a change in tone alone can change the meaning of a word. The Vietnamese language, with its many tones, sounds strange to many Western ears. To Vietnamese, however, their language has the sound of poetry. In fact, much of Vietnamese literature is in fact poems. Vietnamese is also very difficult for English-speakers to pronounce. Thus, the closest most Westerners can come to saying “Nguyen” is to pronounce it “Win.”

Vietnamese carry their father’s rather than their mother’s family name, as do most Americans. Thus, a child born to Mr. Nguyen will have the name “Nguyen.” But, unlike Americans, Vietnamese use the family name first. Their naming patterns reinforce the importance of family over the individual, with the family name first and the individual’s name second. If Mr. Nguyen names his son Tai, then the boy will be known as Nguyen Tai. If Mr. Nguyen also gives his son the middle name, Thanh, his son will be called Nguyen Tai Thanh, family name, first name, and finally middle name.

#### **4 FOLKLORE**

In folklore, Vietnamese consider themselves to be the descendants of marriage between a dragon and a fairy and many legends depict the birth of Vietnam in these terms.

The most famous Vietnamese of modern time is Ho Chi Minh. Already a legend in his homeland long before his death in 1969, Ho Chi Minh is considered his country’s George Washington. Born in 1880 to a mandarin family, Ho Chi Minh received a good education in Vietnam. After working on a cargo ship and in a restaurant in the United States, he traveled extensively, becoming committed to the goal of freeing his country from French colonialism. After cooperating with the United States to fight the Japanese during World War II, Ho Chi Minh became the president of Vietnam in 1945, before Vietnam was returned to French rule by the Allies. Subsequently, as president of North Vietnam he fought against American troops in an effort to obtain control over southern Vietnam as well. A Communist and a patriot, his prediction that his party would eventually achieve victory in Vietnam came true in April 1975, six years after his death.

Another famous Vietnamese patriot who sought independence for his country was Le Loi, who lived long ago. After leading an elephant-mounted army against Chinese invaders in the 1420s, Le Loi became King of Vietnam. He is remembered as a benevolent ruler, who increased agricultural production and built dams, dikes, and bridges for the Vietnamese people. Over 1,500 years earlier, the Trung sisters also attempted to gain independence from the Chinese. They failed, but they are remembered as great heroines by the Vietnamese people.

#### **5 RELIGION**

The Vietnamese practice a number of different religions, sometimes several at the same time. One philosophy with enormous influence in the country is Confucianism, which came from China over 2,000 years ago. Confucianism emphasizes good behavior, education, and respect for hierarchy. Ancestor worship is an important legacy of the Confucian inheritance. For this reason, the Vietnamese are still deeply bothered by the fact that 300,000 of their people remain unaccounted for from the “American War” and have never received proper burials.

Another religion inherited from China is Taoism, which emphasizes beliefs in the spirit world and ancestor worship. Most homes have an altar to the ancestors holding a small vase of flowers, some incense, a plate or two of food, and candles. Taoism also includes belief in geomancy, which focuses on the importance of aligning human objects and activities with the landscape. Thus, a father’s grave must face the proper direction or his son will suffer. Vietnamese go to geomancers in order to tap the earth’s energy on their behalf and to determine how the stars or winds will affect them at particular times.

In addition, most Vietnamese call themselves Buddhists. Vietnamese Buddhists believe in reincarnation and karmic destiny, which is the belief that humans reap what they sow. If a man is good in this life, he will have a better life the next time round. If he is bad, however, the opposite will happen. Originally brought from India, Buddhism has undergone significant change during its centuries in Vietnam under Chinese domination. Therefore, in contrast to other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnamese follow Mahayana Buddhism rather than the Theravada strain. Different Buddhist sects exist in the country, including a group called the Hoa Hao, each emphasizing a different aspect of the religion.

There are also several million Catholic Vietnamese, who make up roughly 10% of the population. Most Catholics live in Vietnam’s cities, primarily in the south, where the French colonial Catholics had the greatest presence.

A small but important religion called Cao Dai is followed by more than one million people. Cao Daim began in 1919 in southern Vietnam. This religion combines elements of belief and practice from Buddhism, Christianity, and history. Its saints include Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Joan of Arc, and Charlie Chaplin. The importance of the Cao Dai religion has been due in part to its standing army, which was involved in the Vietnam War. While the Cao Dai religion may seem strange to non-believers, its adherents believe they are combining the best beliefs of all the world’s religions.

#### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

The most important Vietnamese holiday is the New Year celebration, which occurs during the full moon that falls in late January or early February. *Tet*, as this holiday is called, is celebrated over a period of three days. The Vietnamese try to return to the home of their parents to unite with family and friends. Tet is a time when Vietnamese honor their ancestors, wrap up the old year, and prepare for a new. People repay their debts and ask for forgiveness from all those whom they have wronged. They put on new clothes, pray for blessings, exchange gifts, and give thanks for being together.

The Vietnamese decorate their homes with peach tree branches and red and gold paper, the colors of happiness. They light firecrackers at night and they spare no expense in preparing the fanciest dishes possible.

Other holidays commemorate important dates in the history of the current government and its victory over South Vietnam. These dates include 27 January, the anniversary of the peace agreement that resulted in America’s withdrawal from Vietnam; 29 March, the actual withdrawal of American troops; and 2 September, the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.



*A motorcycle drives by a pottery market in Bat Trang, Vietnam. Bat Trang is famous for its ceramics, which it ships to many countries.  
(AP Images/Chitose Suzuki)*

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

In Vietnam, the birth of a child is a welcome occasion, especially if the child is a boy. Most children are born to married couples and join a society in which family is valued and trusted above all other aspects of life. A couple without children is pitied, while a family with several offspring is considered fortunate. Children are cared for not only by their parents, but by an extended family of grandparents and aunts and uncles, especially on the paternal side.

In Vietnam, the primary activity of most children is assisting in the support of their family. In the countryside, boys help their fathers with farm work. In the cities, more boys go to school, help their mothers with house chores or errands, or take part-time jobs on their own.

Girls assist their mothers with housework, caring for younger siblings, and helping with work outside the home. For children in rural areas, that is farming, gardening, and caring for animals. For urban children, it is helping their mothers in the shop or preparing food to sell.

Vietnamese value large families and spend much of their time with other family members. Most Vietnamese see parenthood as the ultimate purpose and pleasure in life and look

forward to the day they will wed and have children. However, economic development has brought on intense urbanization in Vietnam, and families are beginning to shrink in the number of children as a result.

After the death of one's parents, Vietnamese honor them by following a traditional period of mourning. Other funeral practices include offering prayers and conducting ceremonies on specific anniversaries of the parent's death.

On all important family occasions, such as the birth of a child, betrothals, marriages, funerals, and the anniversaries of ancestors' deaths, families hold appropriate ceremonies. These include notifying the gods and ancestors of family events by special offerings. The wealth and status of the family determines the elaborateness of the ceremonies.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Vietnamese have great respect for hierarchy and take care to demonstrate respect to all they consider their superiors and demand respect from those they consider their inferiors. Older people are generally considered superior to younger people, men to women, the wealthy to the poor, and those of higher occupation or status to those of lower.

Vietnamese may greet one another with a slight bow and always with a broad smile. Civility is greatly valued and one's true feelings are concealed beneath smiles and amiability. Vietnamese also honor reserve and modesty, attributing loudness and brashness to immaturity and vulgarity.

Dating is virtually unknown in the countryside, where young people are closely supervised by their elders until marriage. There is little touching in public even by married couples, although young people of the same sex often walk about holding hands to demonstrate their friendship.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

The health of the Vietnamese people has suffered from decades of war, upheaval, and population increase. While the infant mortality rate is lower and life expectancy at birth is higher than the average for Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese continue to be plagued by numerous health problems. Malaria and tuberculosis continue to be widespread because many cannot afford medicine to prevent these diseases. Cholera and bubonic plague continue to threaten many Vietnamese. Malnutrition also affects many in the country. An additional legacy of the Vietnam War is a high percentage of birth defects which are linked to chemicals sprayed on Vietnam's forests. Left-over bombs and shells continue to cause injury, especially to children, soldiers, and farmers. Nevertheless, despite its deficiencies in health care, international epidemiologists consider that Vietnam did a good job of handling the SARS crisis, with prompt action and public education campaigns.

Until recently, Vietnam's economy has frustrated many Vietnamese in their desire for consumer goods. While American money was flowing into the country, many South Vietnamese became accustomed to life with televisions, liquors, imported clothes, air conditioning, and other conveniences. When the Americans left and Vietnam was shut off from trade with many Western nations, goods stopped flowing into the country. Many Vietnamese compensated by purchasing goods on the black market. Access to consumer goods is increasing as the country's economy has become incorporated into the global economy. As Vietnam's economy has boomed, luxury goods have become more common. For example, choice—sometimes rare—European wines can be found in hotels in most major cities. Although the Vietnam War and the subsequent economic embargo of Vietnam hurt the economy, in the past decade Vietnam has been able to improve the lives of most citizens. One of the government's proudest achievements is in cutting the poverty rate in half since 1986, when the period of "doi moi" (renovation) began.

Although major cities are growing rapidly, close to 80% of the Vietnamese population still lives in rural areas, primarily in small villages. The housing of northern and southern Vietnam differs due to climatic differences between the two areas. In the cooler north, most rural people live in houses made of wood or bamboo with tile roofs. In the south, which is warmer, most country folk live in houses made of straw, thatch, or palm leaves. Many families now use metal or plastic sheets to roof their houses.

The majority of urban dwellers live in small apartments. Most dwellings are small and cramped, crowding numerous family members into a few small rooms. Building materials are predominately wood, brick, and tile.

In rural areas, few homes have electricity or running water and families carry water to their homes from nearby streams and ponds. Furniture is rare, seldom more than beds on the floor and a low table around which family members gather to eat while sitting on the floor.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s consumer goods remained scarce. While few Vietnamese were starving, most were subsisting on a diet low in protein and calories. In addition, much of a worker's wages went toward buying food. In the early 1990s the situation began to improve with the loosening of international embargoes and increased trade.

American bombing during the Vietnam War destroyed many roads, bridges, rails, and ports, and the country continues to struggle with modern transportation. The major ports are Ho Chi Minh City and Haiphong; other ports for ocean and river travel include Qui Nhon and Nha Trong. Primary rail lines run from Ho Chi Minh City in the south to Hanoi in the north, and between Hanoi and several Chinese cities. The poor condition of the railroads, ports, and roads continue to hamper Vietnam's ability to increase industrial productivity. However, the number of cars, buses, and trucks is increasing in Vietnam, so much so that the country's roads can scarcely handle them. New highways are being built, especially in the south, which contains a greater proportion of the population.

Motorbikes are a popular means of transportation for successful Vietnamese. Most families make do with bicycles and travel any distance at all by bus, ferry, or boat.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditionally, Vietnamese families were large. Today, Vietnamese are likely to marry young and have four or five children, although many continue to have as many as possible either out of desire or the inaccessibility of birth control. Children are highly valued, not least for their potential in helping with family chores and supporting their parents in their older years.

Marriage is viewed as a social contract between two people and their families. It is arranged by intermediaries and approved by parents who may or may not allow their children some choice in their spouse.

Vietnamese say that family is the most important element of their lives and the obligations of children to their parents, wives to husbands, and younger people to their elders are constantly emphasized. Individual interests are less important than family interests and each individual is seen as one in a long family line that includes ancestors already dead and current and future family members.

Vietnamese families are patriarchal. Families generally live in nuclear family groups, although grandparents sometimes share the home with a grown child and family. Families also socialize together, gathering with other extended family members for festivals, marriages, funerals, and other important occasions.

Individuals are identified primarily by their patrilineal ties and larger kin groups are defined through men rather than women. While women are generally viewed as resilient and strong-willed and assume extensive responsibilities in supporting and caring for the family, they continue to be defined primarily by their ties to men: as the mother of a male child, the wife of a husband. In Vietnam, women are idealized, romanticized, and serenaded, but men have more rights and opportunities than women. Women join their husbands' families,

children belong to their father's family, and male children are preferred over female children. Although the government has attempted to equalize relationships between men and women, most Vietnamese continue to hold traditional views of family, marriage, and childrearing.

Pets are not nearly as common in Vietnam as they are in the United States. While many children are surrounded by animals, including dogs, ducks, chickens, pigs, and cats, few of these animals are considered as pets. Instead, children are required to look after the domestic animals that contribute to the family's income. Animals are primarily for eating, selling, or working. Dogs, for example, may be used for guarding the home, hunting, or food. Cats are kept to keep down rats and mice. In Vietnam, as in many countries where children must help support the family, animals kept as pets are a luxury most families cannot afford.

## **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Vietnamese women wear a gown that has been called the most beautiful and flattering garment in the world. This garment, called the *ao dai*, is a dress or long blouse worn over trousers. Usually made of light material, the gown flutters at the slightest movement of the wearer, being both modest and sensuous at the same time.

For everyday wear, most urban Vietnamese wear Western clothes. Men wear short- or long-sleeved and collared shirts, tucked in for a business or more formal look, hanging out for informal activity. Businessmen and students usually wear long trousers, while children and physical laborers often prefer shorts. Shirts are usually light colored, while trousers tend toward dark colors. Because of the heat and humidity of Vietnam, both shirts and trousers are made of much lighter material than most clothing in the West.

In the countryside, farmers often wear baggy pajama-like shirts and pants made of black cotton. Also made of light material, this clothing is the most comfortable for long hours of work in a hot country. Both men and women usually wear sandals. Many Vietnamese, especially in the countryside, wear conical straw hats which are great protection from the sun.

## **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

Rice is to the Vietnamese what bread, potatoes, and pasta are to Americans. It is served at virtually every meal, including breakfast. Fish is almost as important, since Vietnam is a country that has abundant water with vast resources of fish. In addition to being bound on the east and south by the South China Sea, Vietnam is home to two enormously important rivers, the Red River in the north and the Mekong River in the south. Even more importantly, each of these major rivers has numerous tributaries, for Vietnam is covered with smaller rivers, streams, canals, and channels. The monsoons bring additional waters, all of which yield fish and other edible sealife. Fish and other fresh and salt water life is eaten fresh, but is also frequently dried.

Fowl, such as chicken, ducks, and geese, along with eels and eggs, provide additional protein. Beef and pork are enjoyed only by the wealthy or on special occasions such as at weddings or festivals.

A ubiquitous traditional food of Vietnam is *nuoc mam*, a liquid sauce made from fermented fish. Characterized by an extremely strong smell, especially to many Westerners, *nuoc*

*mam* is used in much cooking. It is roughly equivalent to Japanese soy sauce in its use and saltiness.

The typical Vietnamese meal consists of a bowl of rice and vegetables cooked in fermented sauce. Vegetables are mainly grown at home and include bamboo shoots, soybeans, sweet potatoes, corn, greens of various kinds, onions, and other root crops. Fruit includes bananas, coconuts, mangos, mangosteens, and pineapple. Noodle dishes are also popular. A distinctive Vietnamese dish is *pho*, a hot soup containing any variety of noodles in sauce with vegetables, onions, and meat or fish.

Vietnamese also love charcoal-broiled filleted fish, fried and battered frog, and *banh chung*, square spiced cakes filled with rice, beans, pork, and scallions that have been wrapped in banana leaves and boiled for a day. Another favorite dish is *cha gio*, thin rice paper rolls filled with noodles, pork, crab, eggs, mushrooms, and onions. These tightly packed rolls are then deep fried.

Many Vietnamese drink tea at every meal and other times throughout the day and evening. On special occasions or when guests are visiting, the Vietnamese serve rice wine, beer, soft drinks, or coffee. Because of the French colonial period, Vietnam is more of a coffee-drinking culture than other Asian nations. The common drink is water.

Vietnamese cooking has a reputation throughout the world for being one of the greatest cuisines in the world. Combining French and Chinese traditions, it is known for its delicacy of taste.

Most women continue to cook their families' daily meals outdoors over wood or charcoal and to purchase food on a daily basis in the absence of refrigeration.

Breakfast is usually eaten shortly after awakening. The large meal of the day is eaten around noon, after the morning's work, before the lighter work of the late afternoon, and during the hottest portion of the day. A lighter meal follows the day's work. Vietnamese also love to snack frequently throughout the day.

The quintessential Vietnamese utensil is chopsticks, with which they eat most meals and many snacks. Vietnamese typically sit on a mat on the floor, each holding a bowl of rice. In the middle are several bowls of vegetables in sauce and maybe a plate of fried vegetables or meat. Using chopsticks, each member of the family takes a bit from the communal dish, alternating with bites from his or her own bowl of rice. Vietnamese are startled when they eat with Westerners, who consider eating quietly to be good manners: Vietnamese eat loudly, slurping, sucking, chomping. Such table noises are not considered bad manners; they are considered evidence that people are enjoying their food.

## **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

Although it is not the richest country in Southeast Asia, Vietnam has one of the highest literacy rates and most Vietnamese are literate. Children begin school at age five and most children spend some years in school, usually completing at least the five elementary years. More city than country children attend school for more than a few years. If children are able to pass the examinations given at the end of an additional four years of secondary school, they can go to three years of high school or a vocational school. Those who cannot pass go into the military or try to find a job. High school graduates are con-



sidered fortunate, for they receive better jobs, higher pay, and more respect.

Vietnamese have traditionally valued education and long to send their children to school for as many years as possible. The government offers 12 years of schooling for free, but many parents cannot afford the cost of school books and the loss of earning power that occurs when a child is in the classroom.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Vietnamese music is very different from Western music in rhythm, sound, and even scale. Classical music is played on instruments that include a two-stringed mandolin, a 16-string zither, a long-necked guitar, a three-stringed guitar, and a four-stringed guitar. Traditional bands include instruments that most closely resemble Western flutes, oboes, xylophones, and drums.

Many traditional tunes are sung without accompaniment, with each region having its own folk melodies. Western love songs, especially slow, sad songs recorded by Asian artists, are also much loved by the Vietnamese. Popular theater combines singing with instruments and has dance, mime, and poetry. Classical theater or opera which came from China in the 13th century is popular, as are puppet shows. A unique Vietnamese form is water puppetry, with the controlling rods and strings handled beneath water so that the puppets appear to be dancing on the water.

Spoken Vietnamese lends itself to poetry and the Vietnamese prefer their literature spoken aloud rather than read silently. Consequently, most literature is poetry. Poems relate love stories, epic tales from long ago, or discuss love of country. One famous poem, *Kim Van Kieu* (The Tale of Kieu), tells how a young girl struggles to preserve her family's honor. This poem is so important to Vietnamese that many have memorized the entire epic.

Poetry in Vietnam is not just for the highly literate or skilled. Common people also value and write poetry. Thus, a young man courts his girlfriend through poetry, young soldiers write in their spare time, and politicians try to sway their public through poems. Poems were found among the effects of soldiers from both sides of the Vietnamese War telling of their hopes, fears, and love of family and country.

French literature is also readily available and popular among high school graduates.

#### **15 WORK**

Work varies enormously in Vietnam, but a basic division can be seen in the work done in the city versus that done in the countryside. In the cities, men work at construction, in government offices, and as teachers, drivers, retailers, and mechanics. Women are primarily trades people or street vendors, selling clothing and a myriad of other items in the marketplace or cooked food on the streets. Women also work in clinics, as teachers, and as factory workers.

In the rural areas, most men are rice farmers and Vietnam is one of the top rice-producing countries in the world. Men's work includes caring for draft animals, fishing, repairing equipment, and helping clear gardens. Other men are full-time fishermen, merchants, traders, drivers, monks, or officials.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Vietnamese children play a variety of games, but the most popular Vietnamese sport by far is soccer. Because most Vietnamese families continue to struggle to make a living, children spend most of their time assisting their parents or going to school. Watching videos or television or hanging around and chatting with their friends are especially valued leisure activities for most Vietnamese youth.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Vietnam is blanketed by a loudspeaker system and music and programs are offered regularly. Many people now own radios and most of the country also receives television, although televisions are much less common than they are in the United States. The Internet has spread rapidly in Vietnam, as a source of communication, education, and entertainment. Although the government promotes it as a development tool, the Internet is also subject to monitoring, especially when political dialogue is concerned.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Since the 1400s, Vietnamese artisans have been making lacquer ware. Wooden objects are painted and decorated with pearl, gold, silver, shell, and other objects. The objects are then coated repeatedly with a lacquer obtained from the sap of son trees.

Crafts people make block prints on which scenes have been carved, inked, and then pressed onto paper. The Vietnamese also make porcelain and other ceramics, which they learned from the Chinese many centuries ago.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Recently, Vietnam has become less isolated from the international community and is interested in increased contact, trade, and cultural exchange with other countries. The country has consequently made an effort to respond to international concerns about human rights.

Nonetheless, reports of arbitrary arrest, detention, and surveillance over the population continue. Freedom of speech and movement are limited. There is evidence, however, of an increasingly tolerant attitude toward literary and artistic expression. The government has been very concerned with raising the standard of living of the Vietnamese people. A number of political prisoners have been released since the late 1980s and it is generally accepted that all of the prisoners held in post-war "re-education camps" have now been released.

The government of North Vietnam has claimed in the past that its country had no alcohol problem because of the wholesome life experienced by the Vietnamese under Communism. During the same time, however, in the 1960s and 1970s, alcohol and drug abuse were seen as a major problem among South Vietnamese. After 1975, both alcohol and drugs were strictly controlled, and information about substance abuse is severely restricted. Not until the 1980s did the government concede that alcoholism had increased in the cities.

#### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Because Vietnam has often been at war in its history—with the Chinese, French, and Americans—the legend of women warriors has given a particular caché to the female sex in legend.

This was underscored in the Vietnam War when many young women from the North went South to aid the National Liberation Front. Communist mass-based organizations also sought to involve women in all aspects of nation-building and the war. As a result, some women enjoy high-ranking positions in the Party, in the National Assembly, and the executive branch.

However, cultural traditions sometimes mitigated against the rise of women in Vietnam. For example, the Confucian examination system, which enabled bright young men to better their positions in life, depended upon women working in the fields or the shops while their brothers or husbands spent long years studying for the examination. Although the rights of women are guaranteed in Vietnamese law in post-war times, social discrimination has often lagged behind. In addition, trafficking of women has increased as Vietnam has become increasingly involved with the international community.

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—revised by C. Dalpino

# VIETNAMESE HIGHLANDERS

**PRONUNCIATION:** vee-et-nuh-MEEZ HI-land-erz

**LOCATION:** Vietnam

**POPULATION:** (Estimated) Tai, 1.4 million; Muong, 1.2 million; Thai, 800,000; Hmong Meo, 800,000; Nung, 700,000; Yao, 500,000; Jarai, 320,000; Rhade, 280,000; Bahnar, 180,000; others from 175,000 to 600 per ethnic group.

**LANGUAGE:** More than 12 languages

**RELIGION:** Animism; Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 4: Vietnamese

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

At least 12% of the population of Vietnam is comprised of over 50 minority groups. Many of these (estimated 7%) are indigenous peoples who live in the highlands of Vietnam. These indigenous people are significantly different from the Vietnamese who occupy the lowlands.

The hill peoples of Vietnam have long been held in contempt by lowland Vietnamese. Their language, culture, and their appearance struck the lowland Vietnamese as strange and barbaric. The hill peoples had a reputation with the Vietnamese of being independent, nomadic, fierce warriors, and potent magicians. They were all so different from the Vietnamese, who viewed themselves as civilized and cultured.

Until the 20th century and even later, the Vietnamese referred to all highland people as “Moi.” In the 19th century, French colonizers took over the same term. For both Vietnamese and French, the term “Moi” meant “savage.” The ruggedness of the highlands only strengthened the reputation of the indigenous peoples as rough and strange, being a land that to the Vietnamese seemed to be inhabited not only by savages but by wild animals, strange diseases, and mysterious powers. Later, the French began referring to all upland people as *Montagnards*, meaning “mountaineers.” This term was also used by the Americans to refer to the Central Highlands people, who fought alongside them in the 1960s and 70s. Some Central Highlands people refer to themselves collectively as “Degar.”

The people of Vietnam's highlands consist of numerous ethnic groups, many with different languages and customs. They differ not only from the lowland Vietnamese but from one another, being distinguished by architecture types, color and design of dress and ornamentation, style of agricultural tools, social organization, and religion.

The origins of Vietnam's hill peoples are not clear. Some, like the Giay, Hmong, Lolo, Nung, San Chay, and Zao are probably descendants of peoples who migrated from southern China many centuries ago. Other groups are probably descendants of Malay lowlanders forced long ago into the Western hills by immigrants from China, or are related to the Thai people of Thailand and Laos, who originated in southern China.

One group, the Muong, believe their people and culture originated in Hoa Binh Province in northern Vietnam. Other groups probably originated in the same area. Over time and with geographical dispersion and cultural isolation, these tribal groups gradually divided and became unique in many cultural and linguistic characteristics. Despite numerous

similarities with their neighbors, the Thai to the west and the Vietnamese to the east, the Muong continue to exhibit many unique qualities.

In the 15th century and after, lowland Vietnamese moved south into Cham and Cambodian territory. To separate themselves from the highland peoples, their leaders, or Mandarins, established a military line along the frontier between the highlanders in the mountainous area to the west and the plains to the west and south. Except for some trade and tribute payments paid by the tribes to the Vietnamese, this military boundary restricted contact between the hill people and the Vietnamese lowlanders.

The coming of French colonizers to Vietnam affected the indigenous peoples in a limited way. Although the French administered the highlands separately from the rest of Vietnam, contact between the hill peoples and the Vietnamese increased. Along with French administrators came Christian missionaries to set up schools, hospitals, and sanitariums among the hill groups. Despite various French administrative attempts to govern the highlands, either directly through French officials or indirectly through tribal leaders, the net political effect of French rule was negligible. Most hill people remained isolated from the culture and institutions of lowland Vietnam. Those groups who did have contact with the French and their administrators resented exploitation by French administrators and farmers and wanted them gone.

The economic consequences of French rule were more deeply felt. The highlands of northern Vietnam were seen as a source of coal, while the central and southern highlands were suited to the introduction of cash crops. Entrepreneurs opened rubber plantations on land that had been used previously by the hill people to plant their rotating crops. These plantations of rubber and opium provided employment opportunities to highlanders as well as lowlanders. The French also set up extensive tea and coffee plantations, especially in the area inhabited by the Ede and Jarai. The introduction of new large-scale cash cropping led to increased trade with lowlanders for many hill people.

During the long Vietnamese war of independence against the French, indigenous ethnic minority people fought on both sides. The final defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in the Northern Highlands came with the assistance of hill people who fought on the side of the rebelling Vietminh.

After French rule was concluded and Vietnam was divided into North and South Vietnam along the 17th parallel in 1954, administrative handling of the hill peoples changed. In the north, the Communist government recognized the desire of the minorities to be autonomous. To accommodate those sentiments, the government set up two independent zones for the highlanders and allowed them limited self-government. The government did so hoping the minority groups would eventually and without resentment be incorporated into Vietnamese society.

The South Vietnamese government, however, attempted to exert direct control of the minority highlanders, immediately angering them by taking some of their lands for the resettlement of Catholics, who had just migrated from the north. A number of highlanders were also moved from their traditional lands into strategic hamlets, fortified enclaves that were devised to deny food and assistance to the Communist soldiers in the south. Relationships continued with considerable con-



flict, with indigenous ethnic minority soldiers drawn into the war on both sides until the Communist conquest of South Vietnam.

During the Vietnam War, American and Australian Special Forces troops joined with men from the Central Highlands to fight the Vietnamese Communists. These Montagnard troops were valuable allies, although they considered the South Vietnamese their enemies as well. After the Communists gained control of Vietnam in 1975, many indigenous ethnic groups of the Central Highlands suffered retribution for their support of the American war effort.

Since 1975, some highlanders continue their traditional lives, largely isolated from mainstream Vietnamese life. Most, however, are increasingly being incorporated into Vietnamese society. By 1986 over 40% of the hill people had adopted a sedentary lifestyle. That number has increased into the 21st century.

The hill people of the Central Highlands, feeling that their forest land was being encroached on by lowland Vietnamese loggers and plantation interests, held demonstrations in early 2001, calling for land rights protection and religious freedom. This was met with repressive measures by Vietnamese authorities, and in the years since human rights violations against the Central Highlanders, including imprisonment, torture, and executions, have been documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other international organizations.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Many indigenous peoples live in the highlands that cover two-thirds of Vietnam. The landscape in which Vietnam's hill peoples dwell is in startling contrast to the environment of the lowland Vietnamese, which is made up of vast cultivated deltas in the north and south joined by a narrow strip of cultivated flatland along the central coast. The irrigated rice fields, villages, and towns of the lowlanders are replaced by the forests and vegetation of central and northern Vietnam's plateaus and mountains, which stretch from the central coast plain inland to Cambodia and Laos. Here, the rugged hill country is interspersed with narrow deep valleys with luxuriant natural vegetation, many fertile soils, and a subtropical, monsoon climate.

In contrast to the densely populated flatlands of the lowland Vietnamese, the hill people are scattered sparsely through Vietnam's highlands. These highland areas include the Annamite Cordillera, a range of mountains and plateaus, and the Northern Highlands of northwest Vietnam.

In the Northern Highlands of Vietnam, the largest of the minority ethnic groups are the Tai, Thai, Nung, Hmong Meo, and Zao. This area, with a cooler climate than the rest of the country, has the market town of Sapa, which is a cultural center and tourist attraction. One of the larger groups in the Northern Highlands, the Muong, is located along a continuous area of land about 300 kilometers in length, stretching from Yen Bai Province to Nghe An Province. The area is comprised of narrow valleys lying in a mountainous area, with Vietnamese villages to the east and Thai settlements to the west. The area used to be covered with forest, but today much of this wooded cover is gone.

Over a million people live in Vietnam's Central Highlands. The largest number of Central Highlanders are the Jarai, the Ede (including the Rhade), and the Bahnar. Rhade subgroups include the Rhade Kpa, Rhade M'dur, Rhade A'dham, K'tul, Epan, Blo, K'ah, K'drao, and Hwing. The Monom or Bonom and the Hre live in the Central Highlands. The Rengao live in the Gia Lai-Cong Tum Province of the Central Highlands. They may be a sub-group of the Bahnar or Sedang.

Numerous other groups ranging in population from almost 100,000 to less than 100 inhabit either the Northern or Central Highlands. The Chrau are located in Dong Nai Province in Vietnam, and their subgroups include the Ro, Bajieng, Mru, Jre, Buham, Bu-Preng, and Bla. The Katu are located primarily in central Vietnam on the Vietnam-Laos border. The Bru in Vietnam are culturally and linguistically related to the nearby Kalo; in fact, the Kalo may be a sub-group of the Bru. The Ma, also known as the Cau Ma, are located in the highlands of Lam Dong, Dong Mai, and Thuan Hai Provinces in Vietnam. The Stieng are located in Song De Province.

Hill people, particularly those of the Central Highlands, have fled Vietnam as refugees, following the wars. Those who had aided the French were resettled in France. Other hill people who had fought alongside the Americans escaped to Thailand and were then resettled in the United States or other Western countries. Many of those refugees, known as Montagnards or Degar people, live in North Carolina. In the early 20th century, hill people fleeing repression in the Central Highlands were forced back to Vietnam by Cambodia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The languages of the hill peoples of Vietnam reflect the complexity of these ethnic groups. The hill ethnic groups speak more than 12 languages and many more dialects, divided into three major language groups. In northern Vietnam, for example, the language of the Tai is similar to the Thai language of Thailand, the Muong language bears resemblance to the Vietnamese language, and the Hmong Meo and Zao languages are dialects of Sino-Tibetan spoken in China. These languages reveal the various origins of the ethnic peoples of the hills.

Rhade subgroups, including the Rhade Kpa, Rhade M'dur, Rhade A'dham, K'tul, Epan, Blo, K'ah, K'drao, and Hwing, speak an Austronesian language. The Muong, on the other hand, speak an unwritten Mon-Khmer Austroasiatic language.

The hill groups were traditionally oral rather than literate societies, in which tradition and knowledge were passed on verbally rather than through writing. The Lahu language, for example, has no traditional script, and the Lahu people once used notched sticks, sometimes with chicken feathers attached, to communicate with one another. In the 20th century Protestant missionaries, Catholic missionaries, and Chinese linguists romanized the Lahu language, and the exposure of Lahu children to education has consequently increased.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The heroes and myths of the hill peoples are religious and familial in nature. Heroes are actual or fictional ancestors whose deeds and characteristics are passed down from generation to generation. Many of these heroes are considered to have originated particular clans and are respected, even worshipped, by their descendants not only as great people, but also as the founders of their tribal or descent group. The myths of particular groups relate to these founding ancestors. Other oral traditions relate stories of the spirits, landscape, animals, and plants of a group's environment and explain their surroundings, forming part of their traditional religious beliefs.

## 5 RELIGION

Most members of the highland peoples of Vietnam practice traditional beliefs, which they have followed for many centuries. These animist beliefs and practices, which vary significantly from group to group, center on worshipping natural phenomena. Highlanders believe that trees, lakes, storm clouds, forests, and thunder, among numerous other physical elements, have souls. They must be respected and appeased because, upset or irritated, they can cause enormous damage to human beings.

Most highland groups believe that spirits are basically capricious. Spirits are quick to take offense and to punish humans for the slights they perceive. Human beings must therefore take great care to propitiate the spirits, informing them of human activities, sharing with them information, food, and drink in the hope that the spirits will not take revenge on them, and quickly giving apologies and offerings if the spirits appear to have been upset. Other spirits, especially those of people who died unnaturally, are thought to be malicious. These spirits must be protected against, usually by purchasing the preventive or curative services of a shaman.

Among the Mnong, for instance, spirits rule everything in the world, including all domestic and wild animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. There are also the spirits of an-

cestors, heroes, and other legendary characters to be honored. An altar to the ancestors stands in the central living room of a Muong house. Shamans and other spirit-guides who preside over rituals and ceremonies that often include buffalo sacrifice, are extremely influential, acting as intermediaries between the multitude of spirits and human beings.

Many hill people have become Catholic or Protestant during their contact with Westerners. Catholic missionaries came to minister to the hill peoples of Vietnam in the 19th century and were quite successful in converting entire villages to Christianity. Catholic communities were known not only by their religious practices and the health centers and schools established by the missionaries but by their prosperity. Evangelical Protestantism spread through the Central Highlands in the late 20th century. This was viewed as potentially subversive by the Vietnamese government and repression of the Christian churches in the hills took place in the early years of the 21st century.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Virtually all the holidays of hill people are religious celebrations. Rice-growing tribes celebrate annual agricultural rituals, especially the Festival of New Rice. Festivals are held to propitiate the spirits and exorcise evil spirits. The beginning of the lunar New Year is always an important festival. For hill people who have converted to Christianity, Christmas and Easter are major holidays.

Life-cycle events, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, are celebrated by families and villages. These are often major festivals involving multiple families and villages and considerable money and preparation.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Among most hill groups, infants and small children are greatly desired and are treated with great indulgence. Seldom reprimanded or hit, they are carried constantly by parents, siblings, or extended family members.

The children of most hill groups are socialized primarily by the immediate family, with assistance from extended family members and fellow villagers. By the time girls are five or six years of age, they are assisting their mother in the home and with younger siblings, and boys are assisting with garden duties and caring for the family's livestock. Among the Muong, for example, children often pasture the buffalo, spending their days with the buffalo and one another, returning with their animals to the village at night. By the age of eight or nine, both boys and girls are helping in the fields.

Many youth marry while they are still teenagers. Among the Lahu, for example, girls generally marry after puberty, when they reach 13 or 14. Boys marry a little later, at 16 or 17. This is the case because by the time most hill people have reached their early teens, they are fully socialized into adult life. By 13 and 14 years of age, boys and girls are acting as adults. After marriage, then, they have the skills to support their new family. The lives of adult hill people center on family, making a living, and dealing with the spirits or gods who rule the earth.

At death, ceremonies are held to help the soul of the deceased go to the afterlife. These consist for most people of prayers and ritual offerings held at regular intervals. For people who die unnatural deaths, special ceremonies must be conducted to exorcise their spirit to prevent it from doing similar

harm to living relatives. Some tribal groups bury their dead, others cremate them.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

For Vietnam's indigenous peoples, interpersonal relations are based on fairly strict rules of etiquette. Since most villagers have known one another since birth and will continue living with one another for years to come, people treat one another as extended family and try to avoid conflict in their everyday relations.

Greetings are important, for they assist villagers in acknowledging one another, keeping harmony, and preventing conflict. With strangers, most hill people are modest and reserved. With family and fellow villagers, they are more demonstrative. Always, however, there is an emphasis on getting along with one another. Men and women, even closely related, seldom display affection openly. Women, especially, must be respectful and cautious, particularly with strangers.

Visiting among hill peoples is a major activity and form of entertainment. Visiting between families within a village appears casual, but is less so than it appears. While neighbors go to one another's homes often and apparently without announcement, they are careful to go only at acceptable times. Visiting between villages is even more formal. While relatives may visit from one village to another fairly casually, visits by larger groups of people for ceremonies or festivals are arranged ahead of time as to place, time, and the obligations of both hosts and guests.

Young people usually do not date. Courtship may be brief and involve little contact between the future bride and groom in some groups, with parents or matchmakers doing most of the visiting and arranging. In other tribes, courtship may occur over years and involve relatively frequent contact between the couple. Usually, contact between young men and women is careful, supervised, and understood to be leading to marriage. In Christian villages, young couples may meet each other through church groups or activities.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most hill groups live in areas remote from the lowland cities and towns and dense population of Vietnam. Their distance from the centers of Vietnamese life has isolated them also from many governmental services, including health and education. Tourism has brought more outside contact for the indigenous people of the Northern Highlands, but the Central Highlands are off-limits to foreign visitors, including most journalists and human rights investigators.

Health facilities remain much less available to hill people than to lowland Vietnamese and life expectancy is lower than among fellow countrymen. Most hill groups attribute illness and physical and mental misfortune to supernatural causes, especially spirits, and much health care centers on seeking to prevent and cure spirit action. Most illness and accidents continue to be dealt with through local healers rather than medical clinics. Most of the indigenous people have extensive knowledge of traditional medicinal plants and herbs, which are grown in backyard gardens or gathered in the nearby forest. Among some groups, in addition, community specialists are available to treat serious illness.

Highland villages have been traditionally the basic political unit of social life, autonomous and self-governing. Although

the French installed an administrative system of districts and provinces, villages continued to be run as they had been. Today, Bahnar villages are governed by a headman, and neighboring villages are tied together into one administrative unit. Scholars speculate that traditional Bahnar village society may have displayed a class structure consisting of freemen, debtors, foreigners, and slaves. Other groups, such as the Stieng, traditionally have been more egalitarian. Each family constitutes the basic social and political unit, and there is no political organization at a higher level.

Everyday arrangements of space and activity reflected traditional hierarchy and continues to be the case for many groups. Among the Muong, the higher one's status, the closer he sits to the window and the portion of the house that looks to the upper valley. Lower status people sit on the opposite side, where the windows overlook the lower portion of the valley. Hierarchy is maintained even when eating, with men, elders, and those with higher status sitting in favored spots.

Many highlanders continue to live in housing modeled on the traditional and ancient styles of their ancestors. Most highlanders live in stilt houses. Muong houses, for example, stand on posts approximately 6 feet in height. A typical house is 5 to 15 yards in length, and 4 to 7 yards in width. The roof is thatched with elephant grass and the floor is made of wood and bamboo. The house is divided into two rooms by a shoulder-high bamboo screen. The larger room is a guest room, kitchen, and dining area. The smaller room is a bedroom and storage area where women spend much of their time. The rooms are reached by separate stairs. The front of the house is used by men, the back part by women.

The housing of the hill peoples reflects their social structure. Some groups live in longhouses with nuclear families each occupying a section with their own hearth. Rhade live in longhouses arranged along paths. Each nuclear family has its own apartment within the long house. In addition there are apartments also for older people and for women and their guests. Bahnar villages have large communal men's houses, well-built, and located in the center of the village.

In contrast, other hill groups live in single-family dwellings. The housing of the Lahu, a small group in northwest Vietnam, more closely reflects their emphasis on hunting and gathering. Their houses are temporary huts, sometimes just shelters from the wind, made of bamboo or wood and covered with wild banana or bamboo leaves. These huts must be rebuilt monthly.

Most hill people have few consumer items and live much as their ancestors did without the electricity, running water, cell phones, and appliances available to most lowland Vietnamese. The degree of contact with lowland Vietnamese determines the kind of transportation: the more contact, the greater the reliance of hill people on motor vehicles, motorbikes, and bicycles. For many groups still living in isolated villages, transportation is primarily by foot.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families tend to be large, for most hill people continue to rely on their children to assist with household and subsistence activities. As their contacts with the lowland Vietnamese increases, along with the expense of educating their children and the availability of family planning and contraceptives, some highlanders are choosing to have smaller families.

Marriages tend to remain traditional. In many Muong marriages, for instance, the choice of a mate and wedding arrangements are made by parents, often before the youth reach puberty. The family of the groom gives large quantities of pork and alcohol and a few silver coins to the bride's family. Most Muong are monogamous, with second marriages allowed only if the first wife is unable to bear children. In the past, Muong nobles and headsmen often had more than one wife. As contact with lowlanders continues so does change in marriage and other patterns of family life. Inter-marriage between the Muong and neighboring Vietnamese, Thai, and other ethnic groups is increasing, and more Muong parents today allow their children to decide on their choice of a husband or wife.

Many highlanders keep domesticated animals, such as buffalo, pigs, and chickens, but these are kept to trade, eat, or sacrifice on special ritual occasions. Dogs are kept by some for protection both from other humans and from wild animals. Some families keep cats as a countermeasure to rats.

## 11 CLOTHING

The highland peoples of Vietnam weave their traditional clothing on homemade looms and often add colorful embroidery or appliqué work to the textiles. Each ethnic group has a different style of clothing and jewelry. Clothing is made of cotton woven with thousands of tiny patterns, with decorations such as silver hoops added. Just one outfit can take weeks to make. Some highland groups file their front teeth and practice tattooing just as their ancestors did. Men and women wear handmade jewelry of silver and brass, including bracelets, necklaces, and earrings.

The decrease in isolation from lowland Vietnam has resulted in the use of imported clothing, so that highlanders increasingly wear a combination of traditional and modern clothing. It is not unusual today to see a hill resident wearing a traditional loincloth, a European-style shirt, a Vietnamese conical hat, and a towel slung over his shoulders, or some other combination of the ancient and the new.

## 12 FOOD

Some hill groups are primarily rice cultivators. Other groups primarily raise root crops, such as cassava, taro, and yams. Other important food crops include maize, eggplant, beans, sugar cane, and bananas. Rice and vegetable crops are supplemented by greatly valued meat either from domestic animals, such as pigs and poultry, or game and birds from the neighboring forests. Additional valued foods include fish and eggs. Every group has a method for making beer or rice wine from the products close to home. Rice wine and cassava beer are common and are consumed primarily on ritual or life-cycle occasions.

Because modern appliances are few and packaged goods a rarity, much time and energy goes into the growing, preservation, and preparing of a family's daily meals. Women are primarily responsible for everyday food preparation, while men often bear the responsibility for making alcoholic beverages and cooking ritual foods.

Food is vital among hill peoples, not only for sustenance but for ritual. Virtually every ritual includes an offering of food and drink to the spirits and a communal feast by the participants. A sacrifice of a valued animal, such as a buffalo or pig, marks an important ceremony. Buffalo are kept primar-

ily for ritual sacrifices and become the central food at religious festivals.

Food taboos are common among the hill ethnic groups and vary considerably according to group, age, gender, and situation. Pregnant women, women after childbirth, or hunters may be required to consume or refrain from consuming particular foods for specific periods of time.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Schools and teachers from the lowlands are increasingly available for highland children. Government schools usually teach children in Vietnamese, rather than local languages. Few people from the highlands have gone on to university education.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The hill people play music for religious purposes, on life-cycle occasions, such as marriage and funerals, and for popular entertainment. Among the Mnong Gar, for instance, the people gather on the first day of the new year to assure the spirits that they will fulfill the promises they have made by sacrificing buffalo and pigs to honor the spirits of the soil. After blessing the musical instruments, an older man leads the young men playing instruments in and out of each village house, playing, praying, and conducting rituals to protect the villagers in the future. Music is a major form of entertainment. Instruments include flutes, mouth organs and harps, and percussion instruments, most made from bamboo, as well as modern guitars. Traditional bronze drums are not only musical instruments but a symbol of wealth and status used in important community ceremonies. Some of the old songs feature elaborate poetic verses.

The literature of the hill peoples has traditionally been oral, consisting of the myths, legends, stories, and entire body of group knowledge passed on from generation to generation. In the absence of writing and modern entertainment, youth learned the beliefs and events of their past from their elders, in turn passing them on to their children.

### **15 WORK**

The hill people of Vietnam are either sedentary or nomadic. Sedentary groups, which are more populous, are primarily wet rice cultivators. Some are engaged in growing crops for outside sale.

Nomadic groups, on the other hand, are farmers growing their own crops with the swidden method of cultivation. After finding a good garden area, the men cut the trees down or cut them severely enough so that they die. They then set the fallen trees on fire until the trees and brush cover have been reduced to ash. The ashes help enrich the soil in which sticky rice, root crops, and other crops are then sown. The hill men tend their crops and harvest them over the next two to four years using hand implements. When the soil loses its nutrients, the group moves on to establish new garden areas, following the same slash-and-burn techniques. After a few decades, the original plot of soil has regained its nutrients and can again support crops. In that way, the hill people move through the forest over the years, stopping to build a village in which they live for several years, and moving on when the soils are exhausted to reestablish a village some miles away near their new gardens. Because of the small population groups this has usually had little impact on the forests. However, in recent years

forest cover has decreased greatly in Vietnam, due to timber cutting and conversion of forest to large-scale agricultural use. Central Highlands groups have accused the lowland Vietnamese of forcing them off their ancestral lands in order to log the forests and convert the hills to massive coffee plantations for international export.

The Rhade primarily raise rice, which they cultivate in highland swidden gardens or rice fields. When they are fortunate enough to cultivate rice fields, the Rhade usually obtain two harvests each year. Among the Rhade, kitchen gardens are placed behind the house. There, Rhade women cultivate vegetables, spices, and medicinal plants. Their most important kitchen crop is corn. Each village has its own bamboo patch, which is considered sacred. The Mnong also have upland rice as their staple crop. In addition, they cultivate maize, eggplant, taro, yams, beans, sugar cane, bananas, and other fruits, vegetables, and tobacco.

In addition to horticulture, hill people also raise a few domestic animals, including pigs, poultry, and buffalo. Among the Lahu, for example, pigs are the most important domesticated animal, but chickens are everywhere. They also raise ducks and geese. The Mnong are noted for trading pigs and poultry for buffalo.

Men hunt game and birds in the surrounding forests. Muong men hunt with guns, crossbows, traps, snares, and nets. Men organize communal hunts on festival days. A successful hunt is seen as a good omen for the rice harvest. In addition, Muong men fish with scoop nets, lines, bows, and knives.

Women do most of the vegetable and herb gathering. Muong women collect edible tubers, leaves, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, vegetables, berries, and fruit. When food is scarce, they gather breadfruit and eat it as bread. They also collect wood for fuel, materials for building houses, medicinal plants, and other products such as feathers and skins for trade. As the forests decrease under pressure from plantations and timber cutting, these resources are decreasing for the highland peoples.

### **16 SPORTS**

Children who attend school may also play competitive games, such as soccer or volleyball. This is increasingly the situation, as more and more children of the highlands are sent to Vietnamese public schools.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Children still spend many nighttime hours listening to the stories and legends of their people. As they sit around their homes in the evening, they may listen to a story from a grandmother, an ancient tale from an older man, or hear the hunters relate their hunting experiences.

The highland peoples rely on singing, dancing, and instrument playing for much of their entertainment, but radios and CD players now bring Vietnamese pop music to the hills, and market towns have movies to watch on disc, as well as Vietnamese television. Some highland folk music has been recorded to be sold in Vietnam and overseas.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Hill women weave clothing such as skirts and blouses for themselves, loincloths and jackets for their men, and blankets, and embroider or appliqué these items. Men weave mats and baskets and make jewelry, as well as agricultural, hunting, and

gathering tools. Hill people make a number of musical instruments which include gourd flutes, mouth harps, guitars, and banjos. They buy most other domestic items, such as pottery and metal objects, from lowlanders. Textiles and baskets may be traded for such goods, or sold directly to tourists in northern market towns like Sapa.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The indigenous ethnic groups of the highlands continue to struggle for more autonomy from the lowland Vietnamese. They continue to be viewed by many lowlanders as inferior, with strange customs that are best abolished. The Vietnamese government remains suspicious of the loyalty of the Central Highlanders and their religious beliefs, which the government associates with efforts by exiles and dissidents to undermine the Communist state. Land rights remain tenuous for many of Vietnam's indigenous people and their forested mountains are being taken over by powerful economic interests, as Vietnam joins the global marketplace. Indigenous people in the Northern Highlands interact with the tourism industry, causing cultural changes, while those in the Central Highlands are isolated and have suffered persecution.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Hill people in Vietnam tend to observe a strict gender division of labor. Women have the primary responsibility for domestic chores, child care, carrying water, and looking after the domestic animals. They also gather food and weave. In agricultural villages, they are also involved in some rice cultivation chores such as transplantation, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, and husking. Men normally do the hunting and the heavy agricultural tasks. They clear the ground, plow, and thresh. They also make and repair tools and build and repair houses. Village leadership tends to be male, although women, especially elders, participate in decision making.

Among many groups, descent is matrilineal and by clans. While political power is held by men, women control family property and inheritance is passed through females. Residence patterns after marriage reflect kinship arrangements. For instance, among the Rhade in the Central Highlands, young couples live with the wife's family, reflecting a matrilineal emphasis.

The children spend much of their time assisting their parents in hunting, gathering, and cultivation. They follow traditional gender roles in those ways. Boys learn from an early age to help their fathers and their play centers on learning to do what their fathers do. Village boys practice with tiny bows, shooting small animals, trying to catch birds and fish, and in numerous ways imitating the activities of their elders. Girls, also, learn from their elders, assisting their mothers and other village women in caring for smaller children, looking after the house, and preparing food.

The indigenous cultures and pervasive Christian religious beliefs emphasize male/female marriage and tend to disapprove of gay, lesbian, or transgender relations and identities.

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— revised by E. Mirante



# YAO

**PRONUNCIATION:** YOW

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Mian, Jinmen, Bunu, Bingduoyou, Lajia, Pangu Yao, Shanzi Yao, Dingban Yao, Hualan Yao, Guoshan Yao, White Pants Yao, Red Yao, Indigo Yao, Plain Yao, Col Yao, Chashan Yao, etc.

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 2.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Yao, Miao, Dong-Shui

**RELIGION:** Polytheism; ancestor worship

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Yao are historically linked with the ancient “Jingman” and “Changsha Wulingman.” Their ancestors were called Muoyao in ancient books of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589) and Yaoren during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Actually, it seems the Yao and the Miao had common ancestors. From the Tang onward, the name of Yao appeared separately in ancient Chinese books. It seems the Yao were the result of the assimilation of neighboring tribes by one main group.

For a long period of time, the Yao practiced the double system of *yaolao* and *shipai*. The former was practiced inside a village and the latter among the villages. *Yaolao* (Elders of Yao) was an administrative organization consisting of six powerful men. The “number one man” took charge of matters of his village (basically a clan), both inside and outside, including the refereeing of clan quarrels and the command of armed troops to fight against other clans. The “number two man” was his assistant. A third man was responsible for deciding the dates of agricultural activities. Another man took charge of religious affairs. The last man was responsible for water administration for irrigation and drinking. The number one man was chosen among the aged, changed annually, and could hold office only once. The number two man was elected every two years.

*Shipai* (Stone Tablet) was a union of villages. A small *shipai* consisted of several villages; a large *shipai* consisted of several small ones. Each *shipai* made a joint pledge according to customary laws and asked all members of the clan to follow the agreement to ensure order. The joint pledge was carved on a stone tablet, which was erected at the village gate. The executing person was called *shipai* head, and had the power to punish anyone violating the pledge. Up to the present, the remnants of these two systems still exist, especially in remote areas.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Yao population amounted to 2.6 million in 2000. They are mainly scattered in Guangxi, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, and Guizhou provinces. The feature of their inhabitation is “wide distribution and tiny colonies.” They dwell in mountainous areas, most of which are forested and picturesque.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Yao language is classified as belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family, Miao-Yao group, Yao branch. In fact, only about half of the population use the Yao language, while about 40% of the Yao speak Miao. Some use another language, classified as

Dong-Shui branch. There is no Yao writing. Most of the Yao use Chinese characters.

On account of their dispersion, the Yao call themselves by different names, such as Mian, Jinmen, Bunu, Bingduoyou, and Lajia. According to their different styles of clothing, totems, economic activities, and dwellings, the ancient Chinese books called them Pangu Yao, Shanzi Yao, Dingban Yao, Hualan Yao, Guoshan Yao, White Pants Yao, Red Yao, Indigo Yao, Plain Yao, Col Yao, Chashan Yao, and so on. The Chinese, not always realizing that they were dealing with a single ethnic group, traditionally used more than 30 names to designate the various groups. Since 1956, the unified name for all of these groups is Yao.

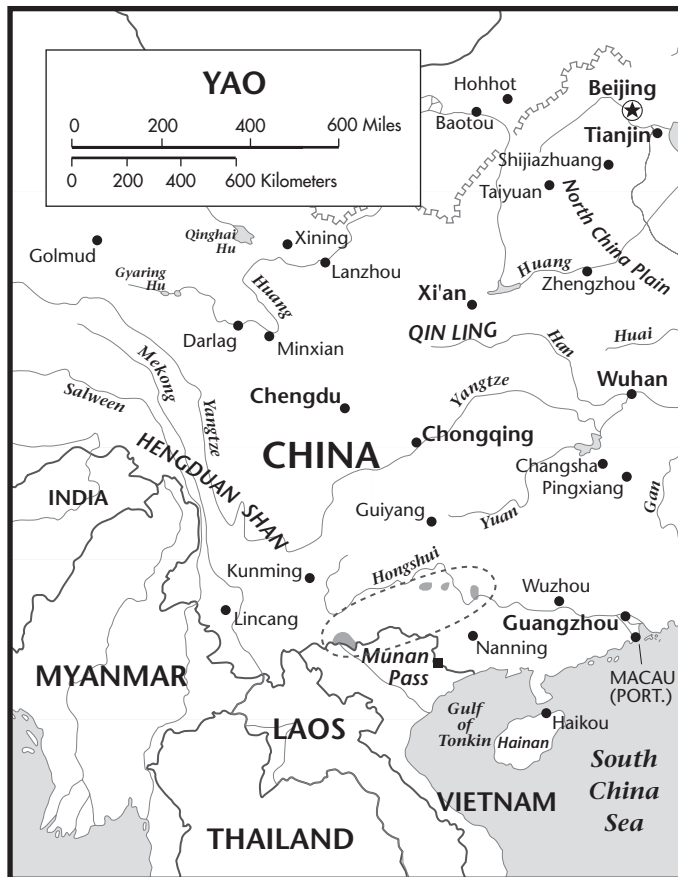
## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The Yao have a rich mythology. One of their origin myths relates that a long, long time ago, King Ping received a dragon-dog called Panhu. It was about 3 ft in length. Its hair was multicolored. At that time, King Ping’s kingdom was frequently invaded by King Gao, and nobody was able to stop him. The dragon-dog told King Ping that he could kill King Gao. King Ping promised that he would give Panhu his princess daughter in marriage if he killed King Gao. The dragon-dog went to King Gao; the king was very happy to have such an exceptional dog and let him stay by his side. One day, King Gao got drunk and the dog seized this opportunity to bite him to death. Holding King Gao’s head in his mouth, Panhu came back to King Ping’s kingdom. Although appointing Panhu to a high position, the king did not redeem his obligation of marriage. On the contrary, he put the dog under a big golden bell. Six days later, King Ping regretted what he did. As the bell was removed, he found the dog had turned into a man. Panhu and the princess married. They gave birth to six sons and six daughters. King Ping was so happy that he appointed Panhu as King Pan, the earliest ancestor of the Yao.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

The Yao are polytheistic. They worship their ancestors, especially their first ancestor, Panhu. Taoist priests and shamans are in charge of religious activities and play the role of intermediary between man and the world of ghosts and gods. Yao beliefs were deeply influenced by the Chinese religious traditions, in particular Taoism. Those who live around Nandan (in northwest Guangxi) revere Pangu (the god who created the world, according to Chinese mythology; there is obviously a connection between Panhu, the first ancestor, and Pangu, the Creator God) and the Jade Emperor (the Supreme Deity of Taoism). They also believe in the god of witchery. In a Pangu temple (actually a straw mat shed) set up in many villages of the Yao, three stones evoking human forms are erected. The stone in the center is Pangu. The Jade Emperor is on the right and the witchery god on the left. This is an illustration of Yao polytheistic beliefs. On March 30 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between March 20 and May 19), a chicken is sacrificed to the three gods. Three months later, a pig or a buffalo is killed and offered in sacrifice for the purpose of obtaining from the gods good weather for the crops and well-being for the villagers and their livestock.

Those dwelling in the Great Yao Mountains (in west Guangxi) sacrifice to King Panhu (originally a dog). The temple of Panhu is actually a pavilion with four high posts and a



roof made of the bark of the China fir tree. There is a tablet on a small platform, but no statue. Community sacrifice is held every year or every other year. Members of the community make a dozen rice cakes beforehand and place them on a dustpan. Then a small cock is killed. Its trunk is cut into pieces and put on the cakes. The head, tail, wings, and legs are then disposed around the cakes so as to reproduce the figure of a live chicken. The head must point toward the tablet. Three shamans dance around the platform while playing drums. The sacrifice may be offered by an individual family faced with particularly difficult problems.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Yao celebrate a large number of festivals, almost one each month. The festivals often differ from district to district. On lunar New Year's Eve (Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20), the whole family reunites around the dinner table. Firecrackers are kindled. Spring Festival pictures are pasted on the walls of their houses. The next day, arrow shooting, dramatic performances, or sometimes buffalo fighting will be held. The youngsters gather on a lawn beside the village. They sing and dance, accompanied by the *lùsheng* (a reed-pipe wind instrument) and the *yueqin* (a four-stringed plucked instrument, similar to the mandolin). Newly married couples pay a New Year's call to the wife's family. At the dinner party, her father sings, wishing his daughter and son-in-law conjugal love and harmony.

The Danu ("keep in mind") Festival is held on May 29 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between June 21 and July 21).

Depending on local economic conditions, it may not be held every year, but put off one or more years. It is a commemorative day for one of their famous ancestors, Milotuo, but has turned into a grand popular festival. People dress up and bring their own dishes and wine to dine together. They play hide-and-seek, dance to the rhythms of the bronze drum, and fire the blunderbuss.

Some festivals are for recreation after a good harvest, such as the Harvest Festival around Jianghua in Hunan; some are for social intercourse of the youngsters, such as the Singing Festival in many areas.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

An adulthood ceremony is held for Yao young men from 16 to 22. The rite is organized by five or seven Taoist priests. The young man has to live at the priest's house. He is not allowed to go outdoors, neither to have a view of the sky, nor to talk with anybody except the priests. In the evening, he is instructed in various religious rites. On the day of the ceremony, he is led to a platform on a lawn. He should swear that he will never commit murder or set fires, never steal or rob, never abduct or rape a woman, never mistreat his parents or wrongly accuse an innocent person, and so on. The priest throws a firebrand into a bowl of water, indicating the misfortune of violating one's vows. Then the young man curls up his body, holds his knees in his arms, and rolls down from the platform. Thereafter, he is allowed to participate in adult society and get married. Moreover, it is believed that only after the adulthood ceremony may a man go to Heaven after death. This rite is considered so important for a young man that a grand feast will be organized by his family in the following days. Since the adulthood ceremonies consumed too much time, they have been recently reformed and simplified to various degrees in different districts.

The burial rite of the Yao has been deeply influenced by Chinese Taoism. The funeral is performed according to Taoist rites. The deceased is not allowed to be put into a coffin until his sins have been expiated by the reciting of scriptures by the priest. Native Yao beliefs are often combined with the Taoist ritual. For example, if an infant dies, it should be wrapped with used clothes or palm leaves, then put inside a bamboo basket and hung on a tree in the forest. The Yao believe that the soul of the infant will go back to its patron saint, Huapo (Flower Woman), and wait for reincarnation. The quick decay of the infant's body will result, they believe, in an earlier reincarnation; here, one also sees the influence of Buddhism on Yao beliefs.

It is a custom to announce a death in the family to the uncle (mother's brother) and to the uncle's uncle.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When calling on a family, the guest should offer greetings to the lady of the house first; otherwise, the host may deem the guest arrogant. In traditional Yao homes, the guest is offered salted meat and oil tea.

Yao youngsters are free to date. Antiphonal singing is the usual way to get acquainted and to fall in love. Around Libo in Guizhou, there is a unique way to talk about love. When a girl reaches 16 or 17 years of age, she is allowed to live alone in a room with a small hole in a wall. A young man may come to her side of the house in the middle of the night, wake her up, and express his affection. She may give a positive answer.

When both of them fall deeply in love, they ask their parents to confirm their will to get married. Around Jianghua in Hunan, there is also a unique way of dating. During fairs and festivals, each girl carries an empty basket (covered by a new towel) in her hand. If a young man likes her, he will take the basket from her and put inside some refreshments. If the girl accepts, they go to the forest and take the refreshments while singing in antiphonal style. Next time, the girl puts nine pairs of cloth shoes in the basket, indicating her lasting love. The third time, he carries the basket and accompanies her to the market where the dowry is selected. If they are satisfied with each other through the three dates, the young man makes an appointment with her parents and proposes.

## **<sup>9</sup>LIVING CONDITIONS**

Yao houses come in different styles, often depending on the physical environment: thatched cottages, bamboo and wooden houses, and, less frequent, tile-roofed adobe houses. Most houses have three rooms. The main room is the central one; one of the side rooms is for sleeping, the other for the firepool and kitchen. The livestock pen is in the rear. Some houses are built on mountain slopes; these are usually two-story stilt dwellings. People occupy the second floor, livestock the ground floor. In some two-story houses, people live downstairs while grain and other commodities are stored upstairs.

Taking advantage of the abundance of water and the availability of bamboo, they often connect long “bamboo pipes” to channel the water from springs to a barrel in their house.

## **<sup>10</sup>FAMILY LIFE**

The Yao live in small patrilineal families. After marriage the son moves out. Parents live with their youngest son. Most of the villagers are of the same clan and same surname. The position of women in families is equal to that of their husbands. The Yao pay much attention to the power of the maternal uncle, who not only is respected, but also takes the responsibility of deciding important affairs.

In Chashan (in south Guangdong), the wedding ceremony is simple and frugal. The bridegroom’s side sends several cousins to the bride’s family in the middle of the night. They congratulate and thank the girl’s parents, then accompany the bride on foot to her husband. The wedding ceremony takes place at his house and lasts all night long. The bride and the bridegroom take a nap at dawn and then resume their work in the fields in the morning.

In some areas, the son of a girl’s maternal uncle has priority in offering to marry her. If the uncle has no son, she is allowed to marry somebody else. A son-in-law may be allowed to live with his bride’s family, usually when her parents do not have a son. Divorce is always a serious matter and the couple is first encouraged by the aged to reconcile. If the couple has no choice but to separate, they go to the mountain, break a bamboo tube into two, each taking one half, depart in opposite directions, and never repent. There is no discrimination against a remarried widow.

## **<sup>11</sup>CLOTHING**

Yao clothing varies according to region. Men’s garments include edge-to-edge, collarless tops and another type with buttons down the left. A waistband is generally used. They wear trousers or shorts covering their knees. All are made of hand-

woven cloth in blue or dark blue. Men around Nandan like to wear white, trimmed, knee-covering knickerbockers. Men around Liannan in Guangdong comb their hair into a bun plucked with pheasant feathers for decoration. There is also a great variety of women’s dress. In some areas they wear collarless tops with buttons down the right side and a waistband. Their skirts come in different lengths. Some of them wear an edge-to-edge long garment with a waistband and long trousers or shorts. Their collars, cuffs, fronts of garments, waistbands, bottoms of trouser legs, and edges of skirts are all decorated with cross-stitches and embroideries. They wear few silver ornaments in daily life, but quite a number of them during festivals, including hair clasps, flowers, strings of beads, curved hairpins (maybe the largest silver ornament among minorities, reaching 1 lb in weight), plates, bracelets, rings, necklaces, and earrings. Young girls are also fond of earrings, hairpins, necklaces, bracelets, and so on. The Yao hang the teeth or claws of wild hogs, leopards, or tigers on children’s waists, with a view to protecting them from evil.

## **<sup>12</sup>FOOD**

The Yao take three meals a day. Their staple foods include rice, millet, corn, yams, and taro. Hot pepper, pumpkin, and soybean are their main vegetables. The proteins in their diet come from livestock and domestic fowl. Their favorite all-season dishes are salted meat and fish. In some districts, dog meat is taboo, being related to totem worship. They drink wine and oil tea. The latter is made of fried tea leaves, cooked in water, and seasoned with ginger, hot pepper, and salt.

## **<sup>13</sup>EDUCATION**

There are now primary schools in large villages and middle schools (junior and senior) in small towns. The majority of children reaching school age are enrolled. Nevertheless, their cultural and educational level is lower than average among minorities. Illiteracy still predominates in remote rural areas. Some mountainous areas have very little contact with the outside world.

## **<sup>14</sup>CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Yao love to sing. Antiphonal singing parties usually last all night long. The lyrics are all-encompassing, from astronomy to geography, from ancient legends about creation to production work and daily life. Ironic or comical songs are well received by the community.

Yao dances comprise two main types: the Bronze Drum Dance and the Long Drum Dance. The long drum is made of wood, about 32 inches long, more slender toward the middle, with animal skin over its ends. It is held over the waist of a dancer, who plays while dancing. The bronze drum is bottomless, with carved figures on its surface and sides. The Bronze Drum Dance is rather unique. It is performed by two men and a woman. One man dances while playing the bronze drum; the other man, standing still, accompanies him with a skin drum; the woman, dancing behind the drummer, cools him with a fan.

Most Yao literature has been handed down orally. Only a small number of poems or mythical tales were recorded in Chinese; among these the “Songs of King Panhu,” thousands of lines long, is a unique literary treasure of the Yao.

## 15 WORK

Yao economy is based principally on agriculture, mainly on rice. Forestry and hunting provide important dietary and economic supplements. Hunting also aims at protecting farmers and domestic animals from the wild animals. The hunting bag is divided evenly among all participants; even a baby on one's back has his own share. However, the hunter who hit or caught the animal receives a double share.

## 16 SPORTS

Whipping a top is a traditional sport of the Yao. The top is made of hard wood, 1 to 3 lbs in weight. Two teams participate in the game. One team sets all the tops rotating within a circle. Then the members of the opposing team throw successively their tops from a distance of 5–10 yds, trying to hit the rotating tops and stop them. If no rotating top is hit, the hitting side loses. If one or several tops are hit, the rotating time of the tops of both teams is recorded and compared to decide the winner.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Quite a number of television stations have been set up in Yao territory. Guangxi, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hunan, and Yunnan provinces are all provided with television broadcasting stations and film studios. These are available for Yao programs. Movie theaters now thrive even in small towns. In addition, various recreational activities are held on traditional festivals. The Spring Buffalo Dance may be compared to the Chinese Lion Dance. Yao artisans build a frame with thin bamboo strips, then cover it with black paper in the shape of a buffalo head. The trunk is made of dark gray cloth painted with black whirlpool-shaped hairs. Two young men prop it up for performance, accompanied by a team of musicians (gongs and drums) and a team of dancers. They make a circuit through the villages. Wherever they go, the villagers dress up and line both sides of the street to welcome the parade. They are escorted by crowds in front and behind. The "buffalo" walks around the performing place, then stamps its hoofs, sways its horns, swings its tail, and rolls on the ground. All the "buffalo" movements are remarkably true to life. That is why it is well received by the villagers, who have had an intimate knowledge of the animal since childhood.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Cross-stitch work, embroidery, brocade, and batik are the better known traditional handicrafts of the Yao. The apron and satchel made of Yao brocade are much sought after by connoisseurs and tourists.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Yao inhabit a rugged mountainous environment, which does not allow significant increases of their traditional crop yields. Physical environment is the major obstacle to the economic development of Yao society. To change their current socio-economic situation would require major decisions about their present territorial settlement.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, there are continued reports of discrimination,

sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and other gender-related problems. The gap in educational level between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of college students in 2005, but only 32.6% of doctoral students.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and 5 million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police, and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# YAZIDIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** YAH-zuh-deez

**LOCATION:** Armenia, Iran, Syria, and Iraq (Zagros Mountains)

**POPULATION:** 100,000–200,000 (some estimates are as high as 500,000)

**LANGUAGE:** Yazidi; Kourmanji; Armenian

**RELIGION:** Yazidi

## OVERVIEW

The Yazidis are members of a religious sect who think of themselves as a totally separate people from the rest of humanity. According to their beliefs, they were created independently; they are not descended from Adam and Eve, as other human beings are believed to be. Because of this belief, they keep themselves isolated from the rest of human society. For this reason, not much is known about them. The Yazidis live in the Zagros Mountains in Armenia, Iran, Syria, and Iraq, with a few scattered settlements elsewhere and small diaspora communities in Europe, particularly Germany. Their religion combines elements from a variety of faiths, including Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorian Christianity. Muslims consider the Yazidis infidels and have persecuted them over the centuries. The Yazidis have fought back, often successfully, leading to a great deal of bloodshed on both sides.

The Yazidis originated as separate groups of people who migrated at different times to the mountains of Iraq from other parts of the Middle East. The first migration may have occurred as early as the 6th century BC. These diverse peoples lived together in isolated mountain valleys, practicing their different religions, until Islam arrived in AD 750. At that time, they added Islam to their mix of religious beliefs and came together as one people, keeping elements of their former religions as well. Shaikh Adi (AD 1072–1161) became their leader, and the Yazidis worshipped him as a god. In 1830–40, a number of Yazidis migrated north to Armenia. Since then, the Yazidis have settled in other places as well, but the largest group outside Iraq can be found in Armenia. The Yazidis and Kurds [see **Kurds**] were lumped together in Armenia as one ethnic group beginning in 1931. Many Kurds and Yazidis speak the same Kourmanji dialect. However, the Yazidis continue to think of themselves as a separate people, and in 1988, the official census takers in Armenia agreed, listing Kurds and Yazidis separately once again. “Yazidi” is the name given to the group by others. They call themselves the *Dasin*.

**Location and homeland.** Most Yazidis live in the Zagros mountain range, which runs north to south from Armenia through Iran and Syria to Iraq. The mountains reach heights of up to 1,500 m (5,000 ft). The Yazidis live in the valleys. Annual rainfall in the valleys is 65–100 cm (25–40 in), most of which falls in December and January. Temperatures in the summer are mild. In the winter, temperatures often drop well below freezing.

Population estimates for the Yazidis vary widely. A 1992 estimate put their population at 200,000, though more recent estimates suggest 100,000 or fewer; some Yazidis insist that they number close to half a million. A 1989 census taken in Armenia counted 5,190 Yazidis in that country; in 2002, censuses in



Russia, Georgia, and Iran counted roughly 31,000 altogether. The difficulty of arriving at a consistent number derives from the persecution the group has endured in many countries, which makes them reluctant to accurately report their numbers to government census takers.

**Language.** Yazidis speak Yazidi, a language with an alphabet of 33 letters. In Armenia, Yazidis speak the Kourmanji dialect of Kurdish. Some Yazidis in Armenia speak Armenian so well that it is difficult to tell them from native Armenians. Some have even adopted the typically Armenian *-ian* suffix at the end of their names.

**Religion.** The origins of the Yazidi religion are unclear. Mistakenly called “devil worshipers,” the Yazidis believe that Satan was once the chief angel in heaven. Because of his pride, he fell (or was banished) from that position. This belief accords with that of other religious groups, such as Christians and Jews. However, the Yazidis go further, believing that Satan repented and was restored to his position as chief angel and now oversees the running of the universe. The supreme God created the universe and then turned it over to Satan (or Melek-Tavous, as the Yazidis call him) and six other angels. The creator God, they believe, has no direct interest in the universe.

The name “Melek-Tavous” means King Peacock, or Peacock Angel. In much of the East, peacocks are revered as symbols of beauty and majesty. Melek-Tavous and the six angels are thought to rule the universe, and they are worshiped in the form of peacocks, represented by seven bronze peacock figures called *sanjaq*. The largest of the *sanjaq* weighs about 320 kg (700 lbs). These seven figures are kept at Lalesh in Iraq. Each



A Yazidi boy tends to sheep on Mount Sinjar, Iraq. The Yazidis originated as a separate group of people who migrated at different times to the mountains of Iraq and elsewhere. (AP Images/Jacob Silberberg)

year they are taken out and paraded around Yazidi neighborhoods to bring wealth and good fortune to all believers. Lalesh is the Yazidis' holy land. The tomb of their principal saint, Shaikh Adi, is located there, as are the sanjaq. Shaikh Adi was a 12th-century Muslim mystic who became the leader of the Yazidis. The Yazidis believe that he achieved divinity through reincarnation, and they worship him as a god. His tomb is the site of an annual pilgrimage.

Each morning, the Yazidis pray to the sun, the source of life, so that there will be health and well-being in the world. Yazidis pray five times a day, facing the holy city of Lalesh at the noon prayer. Each Yazidi is obliged to make a pilgrimage to Lalesh at least once during his or her life.

The holy scriptures of the Yazidi religion consist of two short books in Arabic: the *Kitab al-jilwah* (Book of Revelation) and the *Mashaf rash* (Black Writing). An Arabic hymn in praise of Shaikh Adi is also recited.

The Yazidis deny the existence of evil, sin, the devil as an evil force (they believe that Satan, or Melek-Tavous, was restored to heaven), and hell. What other religions call sin—the breaking of divine laws—is mended, according to the Yazidis, through reincarnation and the progressive purification of the spirit or soul.

Shaikh Adi excused his followers from saying the five daily prayers, as well as from other Muslim practices. Wednesday is the Yazidis' holy day, and Saturday is their day of rest.

*Rites of passage.* Boys are generally circumcised. They are baptized on their first birthday by a *shaikh* (leader of the tribe). The shaikh takes a handful of the boy's hair, recites some prayers, and then cuts the hair.

*Interpersonal relations.* The Yazidis are a very isolated people, choosing to remain separate from their non-Yazidi neighbors. It is traditionally forbidden for a Yazidi to enter any public place where he or she might hear words that are contrary to the Yazidi faith, including schools, theaters, and so on. This restriction has been relaxed as more Yazidis have moved out of their isolated mountain valleys and into towns and cities, where they must interact with nonbelievers.

*Family life.* Yazidi society is organized according to a strict division of castes. Rulers make up the three highest castes. At the top is the prince, or emir, who is a descendant of Shaikh Adi and serves as his sole representative on earth. Next are the *Pesmrreyyah*, cousins of the prince, who act as his advisors. The next caste is made up of the shaikhs of the Yazidi tribes and the elders from the house of Shaikh Adi. Religious leaders make up the next set of three castes: the *faqirs*, who are ascetics (those who deny their bodily needs in order to attain a

higher spirituality); the chanters, who recite religious songs and poems for the people; and the *kochaks*, who serve as spiritual advisors to the people. The *kochaks* also prepare the dead for burial and foretell the fate of the dead person's soul. At the bottom of the caste system are the *Merides*, or believers—the everyday Yazidis—and the commoners, who work as serfs for those in the higher castes. Commoners are either sold to or inherited by higher-caste families.

Yazidis may not marry outside their caste, and marriage to non-Yazidis is forbidden as well. Marriages are arranged by the tribe's shaikh. A young man tells the shaikh which young woman he wishes to marry. The shaikh talks with the young man's father and settles on the bride price, or dowry, to be paid to the young woman's father. Polygamy is legal, and Shaikh Adi's teachings allow adultery. Each Yazidi also has a special relationship with another person who is chosen to be a brother or sister in the afterlife. This brother or sister is with the person in times of sickness or need in this life.

**Clothing.** Unmarried women and girls wear flowers in their hair; necklaces made of grain, coins, or small pearls; and colorful clothing, with a red or black cloth on the head and a white veil that hangs down from the chin. Married women wear white, with a white turban on the head. Women's traditional dress consists of a long dress, ankle-length cotton pants, and a heavy coat in winter. Men traditionally wear a coat and broadcloth pants with a woolen belt and a white cloth with red polka dots on the head. Some men wear a high, brown, cone-shaped hat covered by a black or red turban. In the winter, men add a cloak and furs to their other clothing. Yazidi men must wear mustaches—they are forbidden to shave them. Young Yazidis are beginning to wear Western-style clothing.

**Food.** A staple food of the Yazidis is a dried cream formed into round pieces, which are ground into a sort of meal that is mixed with butter and garlic. Yazidis are permitted to drink alcohol, unlike Muslims.

**Education.** Education was once the sole privilege of descendants of one Yazidi family headed by Shaikh Hasan al-Basri. However, others have begun attending government schools. Traditional Yazidis still live only according to the teachings of their holy books.

**Work.** Most Yazidis are rural farmers, although some nomadic tribes exist. Those who farm and raise livestock do so on communal land. The main crops are wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils, olives, and corn. Livestock animals include mules,

**Social Problems.** Yazidis have been subject to much persecution, particularly by the Muslims who live around them. The Yazidis have fought back, resulting in a great deal of bloodshed on both sides. In Iraq, persecution has been relatively rare, but in August 2007, significant violence was directed against the community in the northwestern Iraqi region of Jabal Sinjar, Ninawa Governate. News reports vary as to the number of people who were killed in the attack. Four separate car bombs were detonated in different parts of the traditional Yazidi area, killing at least 500 and injuring 1,000.

In Armenia, the Yazidis also face conflicts with the Kurds, the largest ethnic minority in that country. The Kurds oppose the Yazidis' separateness and refuse to recognize them as a separate people. Instead, they want the Yazidis to consider themselves Muslim Kurds. The Yazidis, however, insist on maintaining their separate identity. This has led to significant

tensions between the two groups. The group has also faced persecution by Persian Turks.

Because of religious persecution, many Yazidis have fled the Kurdish areas of their traditional homelands and now reside in Germany and in the United States, where their largest settlement is located in the small Midwestern town of Lincoln, Nebraska.

**Gender issues.** Gender roles are highly prescribed among the Yazidis. Polygamy is allowed, although it is restricted to the higher castes. Marriages are typically arranged. In April 2007, a Yazidi girl was videotaped being stoned to death by a Yazidi crowd who believed that she had converted to Islam and married a Sunni Muslim she had been seen with in Nineveh Province of Kurdistan, Iraq. (The truth of the matter is in dispute, and no definitive judgment exists.) Two weeks later, Sunni extremists murdered 24 Yazidis in what some considered a warning to the Yazidi community not to mix with Muslims. In the twentieth century, the Yazidis were ruled by Mayan Khatun, a woman regarded by most historians of the area as a remarkable and astute ruler. She assumed power in 1913 after the murder of her husband, Mir Ali Beg. She held power, along with her son and then her grandson, until 1957.

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—by D. K. D. de Mott

# YEMENIS

**PRONUNCIATION:** YEM-uh-neeZ

**LOCATION:** Republic of Yemen

**POPULATION:** 22.3 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic

**RELIGION:** Islam; Judaism

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

Ancient Yemen was known as “Arabia Felix,” or “Happy (or Fortunate) Arabia,” because of its great wealth from its location on the most important trade routes of the time—both over land and sea—and its lucrative trade in frankincense and myrrh. Made from resins derived from trees growing only in that area, frankincense and myrrh were greatly desired throughout the ancient world to make perfumes and incense used for religious purposes. Today, Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world. When the emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in AD 323 and banned the use of “pagan” incense in Christian rituals, the demand for frankincense and myrrh dropped off sharply. Improvements in sea travel eliminated much of the need for the overland trade route across the Arabian Peninsula. Later innovations (such as air travel) and changes in trading patterns around the world led to Yemen’s economic decline and the poverty it experiences today.

Inhabited for at least 40,000 years, Yemen has seen many rulers come and go. The first-known advanced civilization in the region was that of the Sabeans, who called their land Saba (or Sheba). They occupied the land in the centuries around 1000 BC. The famed Queen of Sheba was a legendary Sabean ruler. The Sabeans were large-scale farmers who lived in close-knit family clans who fiercely protected their lands from other clans. This protective clannish attitude still prevails among Yemenis today. Around AD 300, a series of battles with invaders from Ethiopia, Egypt, and Turkey began that continued on and off for the next 1,300 years. During this time, the Islamic revolution also swept through the Middle East, and the Yemenis converted in large numbers in the early days of the movement, during Muhammad’s lifetime (AD 570–632). Jewish and Christian missionaries had won many southern Arabians to their respective faiths during the 4th and 5th centuries AD, but when the Persian governor of Yemen converted to Islam in 628, most other Yemenis followed suit. This began an era of conflicts between different Islamic caliphates and imamates (religious dynasties) that lasted for several hundred years. The Ottoman Turks eventually took over Egypt in 1517, and had most of Yemen under their control by 1548. Yemen remained under Ottoman rule for more than a century, during which time the Turks developed an extensive trade of superior coffee beans from the Red Sea port of Mocha in Yemen. Although the trade has since suffered from international competition, the *arabica* coffee beans are still considered among the best in the world.

The Zaydi imams overthrew the Turks in 1636, but the Turks regained control of northwestern Yemen by the mid-1800s. Britain had taken over southern Yemen in the early 1800s. The Ottoman Turks and the British drew a borderline between north and south Yemen by 1905, and the region remained di-

vided into North Yemen and South Yemen throughout most of the 20th century. After the Turks were defeated in World War I (1914–18) the Zaydi imamate once again took control of North Yemen, under the rulership of Imam Yahya. The British retained control of South Yemen. In 1962, a military coup in North Yemen led to the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Five years later, in 1967, nationalist fighters ousted the British from South Yemen and established the communist People’s Republic of South Yemen, or as it came to be called two years later, the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). Finally, after two more decades of skirmishes and near-unifications, North and South Yemen united on 22 May 1990 to become the Republic of Yemen, a constitutional democracy. The motivating factor for unification was the discovery of oil along their mutual border in 1988. Rather than fight for exclusive rights to the oil, or split the desperately needed income, the two countries decide to join forces, once and for all.

The Republic of Yemen was threatened by secessionists in the south who triggered a brief civil war in 1994. The secessionists were defeated, however, and all but a small number of instigators were given amnesty. The country has been led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh since reunification in 1990. He was reelected to the post in 2006.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Yemen is located in the Middle East, on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by Oman to the northeast and Saudi Arabia to the north. The boundary with Saudi Arabia has never been clearly defined, but the countries have been negotiating a final marking since 2002. Much of the border lies in the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Desert—a land of shifting sands where it is difficult to mark definitive borders. The Gulf of Aden (part of the Indian Ocean) lies to the south of Yemen, and the Red Sea to the west. The strait of Bab al-Mandab connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, and separates Yemen from the African continent. Across this narrow strait are the African countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Since there is no definite boundary with Saudi Arabia, it is impossible to get a definite total area measurement for Yemen. The Yemeni government claims about 80,000 sq km (207,000 sq mi), just slightly less than the area of the U.S. state of Texas. Yemen’s territory also includes the Hanish Islands and the islands of Kamaran and Perim in the Red Sea, and the island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean.

Yemen’s terrain is made up of mountains and highlands, deserts, and plains. It is cut off from the northern countries of the Arabian Peninsula by vast stretches of desert (the Empty Quarter), so it has always been somewhat isolated. (With the advent of modern communications and transportation, this is beginning to change, but Yemen has centuries of isolated independence to overcome.) Western Yemen has flat coastal plains extending from the south and west coasts inward to fertile highlands surrounded by mountains. Eastern Yemen is a hilly plateau in the south and desert in the north (the southern edge of the Empty Quarter). Some of Yemen’s mountains are volcanically active, and earthquakes occur on occasion. The climate varies with the terrain, from hot and dry in the desert, to hot and humid on the coasts, to mild in the highlands. Rainfall amounts also vary with the terrain, from monsoons (heavy downpours) in the western highlands, to none at all in





the desert. Plant life ranges from desert cacti to tropical palms, depending on the region. The highland forests have nearly all been cut down, and the government cannot currently afford a wide-scale reforestation program. With the lack of forests, wildlife is reduced to small animals, some baboons in the mountains, and a variety of birds.

Traditionally, most Yemenis have lived on farms and in small villages. Urbanization—driven by a long drought, high population growth (Yemen has one of highest rates of population growth in the world, 3.2% annually in 2007), and lack of employment opportunities—began increasing in the 1990s. The largest cities are Sanaa, the political capital, with about 1,750,000 people; Aden, the economic capital, with 600,000 people; Taizz, with over 400,000 people; and Hodeida, with just around 340,000 people. The modern city of Marib is built on the ruins of the famous ancient Sabeen city of Marib, dating to 1000 BC. The ruins are still visible, existing right alongside the modern city structures. Yemen's rapidly increasing population is causing significant economic, environmental and social strains. UN projections anticipate Yemen's population to reach 55 million by 2050. Currently, 47% of the population is under the age of 15.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The official language of Yemen is Arabic. Some Yemenis learn English, and links with the former Soviet Union during the days of the PDRY prompted some Yemenis to learn Russian.

Arabic, spoken by 100 million people worldwide, has many dialects that are very distinctive, so that people living as little

as 500 km (300 mi) apart may not be able to understand one another. Even in the small country of Yemen, different dialects are spoken. The written form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless of how different their spoken forms are. Arabic is written from right to left in a unique alphabet that has no distinction between upper and lower cases. It is not necessary for the letters to be written on a straight line, as English letters must be. Punctuation conventions are also quite different from English.

Arabic speakers are very interested in the poetry of the language. "Hello" in Arabic is *marhaba* or *ahlan*, to which one replies, *marhabtayn* or *ahlayn*. Other common greetings are *As-salam alaykum*, "Peace be with you," with the reply of *Wa-laykum as-salam*, "and to you peace." *Ma'assalama* means "Goodbye." "Thank you" is *Shukran*, and "You're welcome" is *Afwan*. "Yes" is *na'am* and "no" is *la'a*. The numbers one to ten in Arabic are *wahad*, *itnin*, *talata*, *arba'a*, *khamisa*, *sitta*, *saba'a*, *tamania*, *tisa'a*, and *ashara*.

Arabs traditionally have long names, consisting of their given name, their father's name, their paternal grandfather's name, and finally their family name. Women do not take their husband's name when they marry, but rather keep their mother's family name as a show of respect for their family of origin. Given names usually indicate an Arab's religious affiliation. Muslims use names with Islamic religious significance, such as Muhammad and Fatima.

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Yemeni tradition is that Shem, the son of the biblical character Noah, founded the city of Sanaa. Another legendary figure of the land of Yemen is the Sabeen queen Bilqis, better known as the Queen of Sheba. Legend has it that she visited King Solomon of Israel (who ruled from 965–925 BC) to establish friendly relations, since she and Solomon controlled either end of the trans-Arabian trade route. Her visit with Solomon is mentioned in both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles (the Old and New Testaments), and in the Islamic holy book, the Koran. According to some traditions, the Queen of Sheba is the subject of the love poem the *Song of Solomon*, supposedly written by King Solomon. Ethiopians believe themselves to be descended from a child born to King Solomon and Queen Bilqis. It is unknown whether or not the Queen of Sheba of legendary fame was actually an historical figure, but queens did rule in Arabia at that time. The Queen of Sheba as a character of legend has taken on many of the attributes and story lines of pre-Islamic pagan folk tales. She has also become a symbol of Yemen for the poets of Islamic Yemen, particularly those of the 20th century, representing a former highly developed civilization that once existed in the much poorer land of today.

### **5 RELIGION**

The ancient Yemenis were polytheistic, worshipping many different goddesses and gods. During the 4th and 5th centuries AD, Jewish and Christian missionaries converted numbers of Yemenis to their respective faiths. Then, in the 7th century AD, the Islamic revolution swept through the Middle East. The Persian governor of Yemen at that time converted to Islam, while the Prophet Muhammad (570–632) was still alive. Most Yemenis followed suit. About 50% of the population now belongs to the Shafai sect of Sunni Islam. Some 33% belong to the Za-



Yemenis chew qat leaves in the capital of San'a, Yemen. Chewing qat is a centuries-old social custom in this tribal-dominated nation. (AP Images/Paul Garwood)

Yidi sect of Shia Islam. The Zaydis once ruled the country (during the 17th and 18th centuries AD). Although they are now a minority numerically, they still have a great deal of influence in the country. The Zaydis have since reunification occasionally staged revolts in the country's north, seeking autonomy and a more religious government. The revolts have all been successfully put down. Some 2% of the population belongs to the Ismaili Shia sect, a sect that is similar to the Zaydis. The largest non-Muslim group in Yemen today is Jewish, although the majority of Yemeni Jews moved to Israel when it became an independent Jewish state in 1948 (see "Israelis"). There are small Christian and Hindu communities in southern Yemen.

Shafai Sunnis believe the Quran is the word of God as dictated directly by God to the Prophet Muhammad. Zaydi Shias, on the other hand, believe the Koran was created by Muhammad himself; it is his interpretation, or translation, of the word of God.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Since the majority of Yemenis are Muslim, Muslim holidays are the official ones. Perhaps the most significant holiday is *Eid al-Fitr*, which comes at the end of the month of fasting, *Ramadan*. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, or having sex during daylight hours, in order to reflect on God and on the plight of the unfortunate who do not have enough food. At the end of the month, Muslims celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is *Eid al-Adha*,

which commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham, as well as his son, to obey God's command in all things, even when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son.

Secular holidays in Yemen include January 1, New Year's Day; May 1, Labor Day; May 22, National Unity Day; September 26, Revolution Day; October 14, National Day; and November 30, Independence Day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Weddings are occasions for much celebrating. First, there is the betrothal feast, usually held on a Thursday or Friday (Friday is the Islamic holy day), when the future groom and his father visit the bride's father to settle on a wedding date and bride-price. The groom and his father give the bride's father the engagement ring, as well as other gifts (such as clothes and jewelry for the bride and her mother). The bride-price is used to buy fine clothes and jewelry and other valuable items for the bride. These things are hers for the rest of her life, so that if anything happens, such as divorce or the death of her husband, she has some property that is definitely hers.

The wedding itself lasts for three days, usually from Wednesday through Friday. The most public part of the wedding takes place on Friday and is called the *laylat az-Zaffa*. Butchers arrive early in the morning to prepare the meat for the feast, where up to 100 or more guests will be fed. Men have a *qat* party in the afternoon, where they sit together and chew *qat* leaves (a mild narcotic) and smoke the *narghile*, or water-pipe. The women help prepare the food. In the evening, the men go to the mosque, and then return for dancing and singing around the groom, who is carrying a golden sword. Drummers keep the beat. The feast is eaten, more *qat* is chewed, the *narghile* is smoked once again, incense is passed around with blessings, poems are recited, a lute is played, and songs are sung. Some of the women go to the bride's home to help her dress. A special make-up artist paints delicate designs on her hands and feet, and the palms of her hands and soles of her feet are reddened with henna. Eventually, the men line up outside the groom's house, and he walks with them toward the door, leaping over the threshold when he reaches it. The men are singing all the while, and the women have climbed up on the roofs and started making a high-pitched trilling sound called the *zaghrada*. The bride will come to the house later; the guests may or may not wait for her arrival. Once the bride enters the groom's house, she becomes part of his family.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Arab hospitality reigns in Yemen. An Arab will never ask personal questions, as that is considered rude. It is expected that a person will say what he or she wishes, without being asked. Food and drink are always taken with the right hand because the left hand is used for "unclean" purposes, such as cleaning oneself. When speaking, Arabs touch each other much more often and stand much closer together than Westerners do. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking, even if they are virtual strangers. (Members of the opposite sex, even married couples, never touch in public.) Arabs talk a lot, talk loudly, repeat themselves often, and interrupt each other constantly. Conversations are highly emotional and full of gestures. In Yemen, the Western "o.k." sign—touching the thumb to the tip of the forefinger in a circle—is considered obscene. Common acceptable Yemeni gestures are the thumbs-up "vic-

tory” sign (as in the West); raised eyebrows indicating “no”; and both eyes closed at once, indicating “yes.” It is also common in Yemen, and many Arab cultures, to indicate “no” by making a clicking noise with the mouth.

The Arab sense of time is also quite different from that of the West. Schedules are loose and fluid, with the day divided not into hours and minutes but into “morning,” “lunchtime,” and “evening.” There are no clocks in public places. The Western obsession with punctuality does not exist in Yemen.

Yemeni society is strictly structured according to certain divisions of people. *Sayyids* are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and members of the formerly ruling Zaydi sect—a privileged and influential wealthy class. The *qadhis* are descendants of pre-Islamic Yemeni rulers who are traditionally scholars and judges. They are considered wise—a well-educated and well-respected class. The *sheikhs* (leaders) of each clan or tribe are also quite influential. Craftspeople and merchants are divided into guilds: the *manasib* are skilled artisans, such as goldsmiths; *muzayyin* are less-skilled workers, such as bricklayers; and the *akhdam* are unskilled laborers, such as street-cleaners. In recent times, as the economic situation of the country changes, the social structure is changing as well. Previously low-status jobs that now pay well are becoming more respectable.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Since unification, Yemen has been attempting to improve living conditions for its people. However, as one of the poorest countries in the world, it lacks the resources to make many improvements very quickly. Therefore, living conditions remain fairly difficult in most areas of the country. In rural areas, where most of the population continues to live, running water has been made available but sewer systems have yet to be installed. The water is often polluted, and diseases such as dysentery are common. Medical care is limited, if available at all, although the government has begun to establish some rural medical clinics. Few children are vaccinated, thus diseases like measles and tuberculosis spread quickly. Malnutrition is widespread. Buses and cars only recently replaced camels and donkeys as the primary mode of transportation, and few paved roads exist outside cities and large towns. The government has made new road construction a priority. Telephone services are very rare in rural villages, and there is no door-to-door postal delivery anywhere in the country. Yemenis must pick up their mail from post office boxes.

Although life in the cities and larger towns is better than in the rural areas, conditions are still far below modern Western standards. The average life expectancy for Yemenis in 2004 was 59 years for men and 62 years for women. The infant mortality rate in the same year was 75 per 1,000 births. In an attempt to improve health care, the government has built new hospitals in the cities (as well as the rural medical clinics), and has opened a new school of medicine at the University of Sanaa.

In 2007 there were 2.8 million houses in Yemen, 16% of which had access to some kind of sewage network. Homes in Yemen differ by region. In eastern Yemen, they are made of sun-dried clay bricks. People of the Tihama (the western coastal plain) live in round or rectangular huts made of mud-covered reeds and sticks. Each one-room hut serves a specific purpose, such as the cooking hut, sleeping hut, storage hut, the hut where guests are received, etc. The interior walls of the

reed huts have colorful scenes painted on them. In the highlands, houses are six to seven stories high. Stables and storage rooms are on the lower floors, while several generations of a family share the living quarters upstairs, with kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, and other rooms. Every house has one large room called a *diwan*, used for celebrations, and an attic room called a *mafraj* where guests are entertained. In the capital city of Sanaa, many of the houses are more than 400 years old. The original walled city built in the 1st century AD still stands. The old houses are six to seven stories high, made of stone, brick, and mud. The exterior walls are ornately decorated with white plaster. Ancient Yemenis used colored alabaster, a soft stone, for windows. Modern Yemenis use stained glass to achieve the ancient look. The old city homes are being divided up for renters, as wealthier Yemenis move to the suburbs. The rental units are poorly maintained, and many of these historic homes have suffered water damage from leaky pipes. The UN has funded restoration and preservation projects in the old city to protect these fine examples of a unique architecture. As tourism increased in Yemen in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many of these old buildings were converted into hotels.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family, called *'ayla* in Arabic, is the basic social unit of Yemeni society. Most families are large, with 8 to 10 members not uncommon. A Yemeni woman gives birth to an average of 7.7 children in her lifetime—many women bear more than 10. The average age for marriage is 22 for men and 18 for women, although it is not unknown for girls younger than 14 years old to marry. (In rural areas, girls as young as 12 or even 10 may marry.) Parents usually arrange marriages for their children. The groom's family pays a bride-price to the bride's family, which is then used to buy fine clothes and jewelry that the bride will own outright for the rest of her life. These valuables serve as insurance in case of divorce or widowhood. Divorce is fairly simple for both men and women and happens relatively often. Some 15–20% of Yemeni women have been divorced and remarried at least once in their lifetimes.

Several generations of an extended family, or *bayt* (meaning “house”) in Arabic, live together in one home. Several bayts together make up a clan, or tribe. Each tribe elects a *sheikh* (a leader) within the community to solve local disputes. Men and women are segregated in public, and women keep themselves veiled and fully covered when anyone but family is present. Most Yemeni women will not eat in public restaurants. More women are going to school and getting jobs outside the home today, but Islamic traditions of segregation for women make this difficult. Yemeni universities now accept women as students, but men are still given priority for admission.

## 11 CLOTHING

Clothing styles in Yemen, particularly for women, vary greatly by region. Men generally wear one of two styles. In hot coastal regions, men wear a lightweight shirt with an embroidered skirt called a *futa*, with a straw hat or other head covering. In the cooler highlands, they wear a calf-length shirt called a *zanna*, with a jacket. Many men wear a belt with a *jambiyya*, or ceremonial dagger, thrust beneath it. A man's *jambiyya* identifies his clan and is a symbol of manhood. Boys start wearing them at about the age of 14.

Women's styles are much harder to classify, as they are so varied. Yemeni women like bright colors and lots of jewelry, particularly silver. In Sanaa, many women wrap themselves in brilliant cloths imported from India called *sitaras*. In the highlands, they wear baggy embroidered trousers called *sirwals* under their dresses. Women wear black robes and pointed straw hats to work in the fields in eastern Yemen. Many Yemeni women across the country wear the traditional Islamic covering, the *abaya*—a loose black robe that covers the woman from head to toe—when in public. The *sharshaf*—a black skirt, cape, veil, and head covering—is also worn by women throughout Yemen. In line with much of the Islamic world, women's clothing has become much more conservative and traditional in Yemen toward the end of the 20th and into the 21st century. In cities and towns across the country, virtually all women cover their faces either completely or with a scarf that reveals only their eyes. Most women also wear gloves in public so that no part of their body can be seen. In rural areas, women working in fields will often go without face coverings.

## 12 FOOD

The Yemeni diet is quite simple. Staple foods are rice, bread, vegetables, and lamb, with fish in the coastal regions. Breakfast is a light meal consisting of scrambled eggs with tomatoes, or a bean dish called *ful*, served with flatbread. Supper in the evening is very similar. Lunch is the heavy meal for Yemenis. Eaten at midday, it generally consists of chicken, lamb, or beef, with cooked vegetables, and rice mixed with raisins and almonds. Flatbread soaked in buttermilk and covered with tomatoes, onions, and spices is served at almost every meal, as is a spicy green stew called *salta*. *Salta* could perhaps be called the national dish of Yemen. It is made with meat broth, onions, tomatoes, mincemeat, eggs, and *hulba*—a mixture of fenu-greek and grated leeks. Sweet custards with either tea or coffee are usually served for dessert.

Coffee originated in Mocha, a port town on the Red Sea in Yemen, and made its way to Europe on trading vessels during the 16th and 17th centuries. By the end of the 17th century, the Dutch had smuggled some young coffee plants out of Yemen and planted them in Ceylon and Java. Other European countries soon followed suit, planting the smuggled coffee in their colonial territories where the climate was suitable for growing. Until the end of the 18th century, Yemen continued to export some 22,000 tons of coffee each year. But during the 19th century, trade declined sharply due to competition from cheaper coffee sources, and the population of Mocha fell from 20,000 people to 400. Yemeni coffee is still exported and is still considered one of the finest coffees of the world. It is known as *coffee arabica*. In Yemen, both the husks and beans are used to make drinks, as opposed to just the beans (as in Western countries). Traditional Arab coffee, called *bun* in Yemen, is made from the beans. A drink called *qishr* is made from steeping the husks in hot water, then adding ginger, cinnamon, and cardamom for flavor. *Qishr* is milder than bean-coffee and is actually preferred in Yemen. The price of husks is higher than the price of beans in Yemen.

Meals are served on a cloth or plastic sheet spread on the floor. Yemenis eat with their fingers, not utensils. A soup that is popular in Yemen is *shourba bilsen*, made with lentils.

## Shourba Bilsen (Thick Lentil Soup)

1 pound soup bones, beef or lamb  
8 cups water  
2 cups brown lentils  
2 onions, finely chopped  
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
2 cups stewed tomatoes  
¼ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro, or 3 tablespoons dried cilantro  
salt and pepper to taste

Rinse soup bones and put in large saucepan with water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat to simmer. Add lentils, onions, garlic, tomatoes, cilantro, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and cook for 1½ hours, stirring every few minutes to prevent sticking. Makes 6 servings.

(adapted from Albyn and Webb, p. 72)

## 13 EDUCATION

For much of Yemen's history, education was only available to the wealthy. The constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to education, and the government has opened a number of public schools in large cities and towns. Rural areas are still limited to Muslim religious schools. In 2004 it was estimated that 80% of boys and 50% of girls attended primary school. At the secondary level, 55% of boys and 22% of girls attend school. The literacy rate has doubled since the mid-1990s; in 2004, it was about 50%. That year, among men literacy was 70%; among women, 30%.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

There is a strong rural tradition in Yemen of oral literature, poetry, and song. Arab music is much like the Arab language—rich, repetitive, and exaggerated. The *oud*, or *kabanj*, is a popular instrument; it is an ancient stringed instrument that is the ancestor of the European lute. Another traditional instrument is the *rebaba*, a one-stringed instrument. A traditional Arab dance is the *ardha*, or men's sword dance. Men carrying swords stand shoulder to shoulder and dance, and from among them a poet sings verses while drummers beat out a rhythm. A popular Yemeni singer, Badwi Zubayr, is known all over the Arabian Peninsula. Iskandar Thabit (b. 1924) wrote popular songs for the Yemeni revolutions during the 1960s. The most-respected living Yemeni writer is 'Abdallah al-Baraduni, a poet.

Islam forbids the depiction of the human form, so Yemeni art focuses on geometric and abstract shapes. Yemen is famous for its silver jewelry. Stained glass and pottery are also popular art forms. Calligraphy is a sacred art, with the Quran being the primary subject matter. Muslim art finds its greatest expression in mosques.

## 15 WORK

More than half of all Yemenis are small farmers. In cities and towns, there is a staggeringly high unemployment rate. This was made worse in 1990 when Saudi Arabia expelled all Yemeni workers there, after Yemen refused to support the stationing of foreign troops in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War (1990–91). Over 700,000 workers lost their jobs in Saudi Arabia and returned home to Yemen, looking for work. In 1992, thou-

sands of refugees from Somalia arrived in Yemen, also looking for work. Yemen is attempting to expand its industrial base, but poor transportation systems make that difficult.

The industry that exists consists of oil and oil processing; natural gas; salt, limestone, and marble mining; fishing and fish-processing plants; and coffee. The oil and gas sectors are the most profitable sectors of the Yemeni economy. In 2005 the country exported oil worth \$3.1 billion. The government derives 70% of its earnings from the oil sector.

Rural women have very heavy workloads. Not only do they do 70–75% of the work in the fields, but they are also responsible for fetching all the wood and water (which means carrying 20- to 25-kg or 44- to 55-lb loads on their heads for long distances, often uphill); cutting alfalfa to feed the cow (one cow requires six to eight hours per day of labor to care for it); all the cooking and housekeeping; and caring for the children. In addition to this, many women also sell dairy produce, dried cow or sheep dung, animal products, and/or crafts for extra family income. Only 1.5% of Yemeni women are employed in wage-earning jobs.

## 16 SPORTS

Football (or soccer, as it is known in the United States) is the national pastime of Yemenis. Organized sports are rare, and Yemen has few athletes who are skilled enough to compete at an international level. In 2008 the Yemen national football team was ranked 141st by FIFA (International Federation of Association Football), the world governing body of international football. Yemen has sent athletes to the Olympic Games since 1992, but the country has yet to win a medal. The Yemeni Cricket League finished its first season in 1995 and cricket is played primarily by expatriate workers from South Asia.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The favorite form of entertainment in Yemen is chewing *qat* leaves, a mild narcotic. Men gather every afternoon for *qat* parties that last until sunset. Women chew *qat* as well, but not nearly as much as men. Women's afternoon gatherings are known as *tafritas*; here, marriages are arranged, goods sold, and information and experiences shared.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Silver jewelry is one of the most important forms of art in Yemen, and also a traditional folk art. Other crafts include textiles, leather, baskets, and stained glass. Because the *jambiya* men wear is so significant a social marker, many craftspeople specialize in making elaborately decorated knives, leather belts, and jeweled knife covers.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The use of the narcotic *qat* is a significant problem in Yemen, although most Yemenis would disagree. Farmers are growing *qat* on land where they used to grow food crops, because *qat* brings in a much higher price. But then they spend their profits on *qat* to chew, so they cannot buy food to replace what they did not grow in the fields. Malnutrition is an increasing problem in Yemen. Also, men spend so much time chewing *qat* that the women are left to do most of the work to provide for their families. This creates much stress for the women and, consequently, for their families. *Qat* is legal in Yemen, but it is con-

sidered an illegal drug in international markets so it cannot be exported for profit. The national addiction to this drug has also caused severe environmental problems. Yemen is fairly arid and a significant portion of the country's supply of water is being used in inefficient irrigation of *qat* plantations.

The extremely high rate of unemployment is a tremendous problem in Yemen. The sluggish economy is improving very slowly, so it does not appear there will be any significant increase in jobs in the near future. Population growth is so rapid and economic growth so low that many economists predict a bleak future for the country. Oil revenues, while increasing, are not significant enough to help in a substantive way, as they do in all the other countries that make up the Arabian peninsula.

Since 2004 there has been violence in the north of Yemen, where the Zaydi sect has been fighting the government for autonomy and to establish a religious state. Violence has been intermittent with long periods of relative peace followed by uprisings, which the government is generally successful at putting down. Gun ownership is widespread, particularly in the countryside where even boys as young as 11 and 12 are armed. They can be seen carrying military assault rifles as well as the ubiquitous *jambiya*. Because of Yemen's tribal tradition and weak government, many disputes are settled with violence. Small armed skirmishes are relatively common in the countryside.

Yemen is a close military and political ally of the United States, particularly in its War on Terror. Al Qaeda has a fairly strong presence in Yemen and in the early 2000s there were several violent terrorist incidents, mainly targeting western tourists. In early 2008 there were frequent bombings of Western and particularly U.S. housing compounds and embassies.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Yemen face many difficulties, including lack of educational opportunities, forced early marriages, water shortages, and *qat* addiction among male members of the family, which often leaves the women as the only workers in a family. In fact, in 2007 the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report ranked Yemen last (128th out of 128 countries surveyed) in terms of political and economic empowerment of women. In the same year, the international charity organization Save the Children ranked Yemen 138th out of 140 countries studied in its annual Mothers Index, which considers the best and worst countries for mothers and children (1 being the best, 140 the worst) when taking into account maternal mortality, access to contraception, and the percentage of women in national government, among other factors. Yemen has been near the bottom of the list in other years as well.

Although women have the right to vote in Yemen and also have equal access to education by law, the reality is that women in Yemen generally lead difficult lives. The nation is deeply religious, tribal, and traditional. Islamic and Arab customs dictate that women should be covered in public, and in Yemen women are generally completely covered, often simply wearing a traditional sheet pulled over themselves rather than a fitted *abaya* as women do in most other countries on the Arabian peninsula. In the larger cities, younger Yemeni women will sometimes wear the traditional black *abaya* with gloves and a *niqab*, a veil that completely covers their face.

Virtually all marriages in Yemen are arranged by family members. There is a strong historical and cultural preference

for marriages within the clan or tribe, and often between first cousins. Yemeni men are allowed to have as many as four wives at any one time, but because of Islamic rules requiring that all wives be treated equally, few men in Yemen can afford to have more than one wife. Female genital mutilation was outlawed in 2001, but the effectiveness of the law on the practice in Yemeni society is not known.

About 25% of Yemeni women work outside the home, primarily in crafts industries and as domestic help. Although Yemen is culturally very traditional, the government does promote the idea of equality between the genders and there are usually a few women serving in parliament.

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—revised by J. Henry

# YI

**PRONUNCIATION:** YEE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Nosu, Nasu, Luowu, Misapo, Sani, and Axi

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 7.76 million

**LANGUAGE:** Yi

**RELIGION:** Ancestor worship

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Yi were called the Qiang, one of the more ancient national minorities in China. The Qiang originally lived in the north and northwest of present-day China (Shanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai) and raised stock. Some 4,000–5,000 years ago, a part of the Qiang population migrated in successive waves toward southwest China, mixed with the native peoples, and finally settled in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. After settling, the Yi transformed from being nomads engaged in stockraising to farmers. It seems this process was completed under the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 8). It was from this time that they were known under the name of Yi. However, they kept until the 18th century a slave-owning system and resisted any attempt by the imperial government to interfere in their social structure. It was only under the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) that their leaders, who formed a kind of aristocracy, were replaced by Manchu or Chinese officers appointed by the central government. This marked the decline of the slavery system.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

As we have seen, the Yi are distributed in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi provinces. They live in compact communities, sharing their territory with other nationalities. Except for a small number living in river valleys, they reside on high plateaus. Most of them live in mountainous areas as high as 10,000–11,000 ft above sea level, with a varied topography and a changeable climate. They have a saying: “Different skies every five miles.” The Yi population was 7.76 million in 2000.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Yi language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, Tibeto-Burman group, Yi branch. There are 6 dialects, 5 subdialects, and 25 regional idioms. The Yi invented an ideographic writing system, called *chuan wen* (“traditional script”) in ancient Chinese books. Yi script, which is no longer used today, seems to have derived from Chinese characters. The Yi have many self-given names, such as Nosu, Nasu, Luowu, Misapo, Sani, Axi, etc. However, Yi has now become the most common designation.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Yi mythology, like that of many other national minorities of China, centers around the flood and the origin of human beings. However, many aspects of the myths reflect Yi customs and political conceptions. For example, in “The Story of the Flood,” the god Entiguzi and his family live in Heaven and ruthlessly rule the people on earth, who are too poor to pay their taxes. Following a dispute, three brothers beat a tax col-

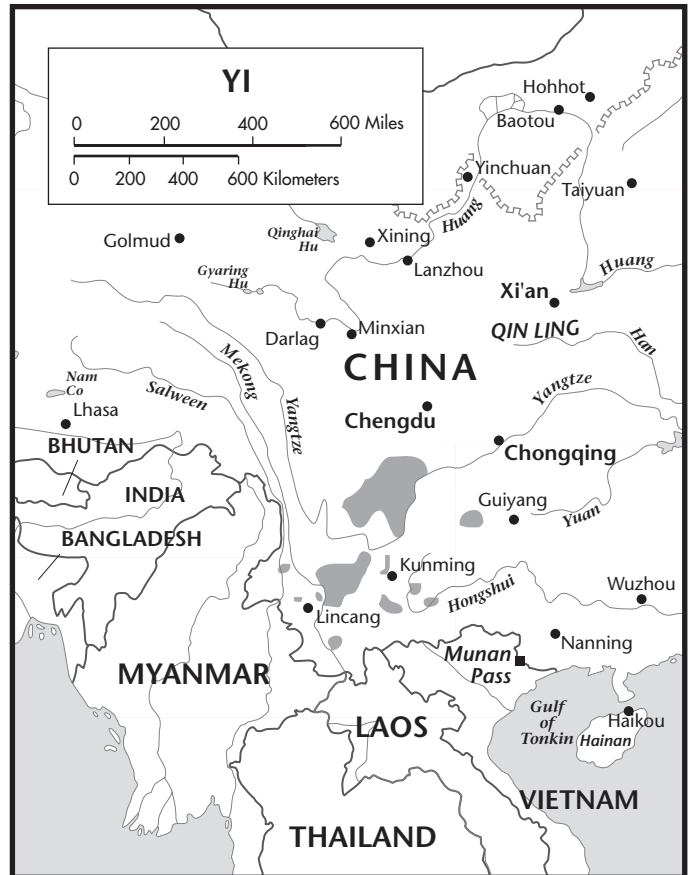
lector to death. Thereafter, when they ploughed their field, the next day the field reverted to untilled soil. They worked hard for three days, but all their efforts were in vain. One night they discovered that it was an old man who restored the ploughed field to virgin land. The two elder brothers wanted to kill him, but the younger brother asked the old man why he was doing this. The old man told them it was useless to plough any more, because Entiguzi in Heaven had decided to flood the earth. They were to build three ships made of iron, copper, and wood, respectively. However, when the flood came, only the youngest brother, Wuwu, escaped death by sheer luck. As the only survivor on earth, Wuwu told Entiguzi that he hoped to marry his daughter. Entiguzi refused. Since Wuwu rescued a great many animals from the flood, they helped him to go to Heaven. He met Entiguzi's youngest daughter. They fell in love at first sight. Entiguzi had no alternative but to agree to their marriage. Later on, she gave birth to three sons. The eldest was the ancestor of the Tibetans, the second of the Chinese, and the third of the Yi.

Another Yi myth of origins, centering on the "Tiger Clan," spread in Yunnan Province. It also begins with a god opening the doors of Heaven to flood the earth. Later, the god opened a calabash and found a brother and a sister inside. Yielding to the god's will, they married. The woman gave birth to seven daughters. One day, a tiger came and asked to marry one of the girls. Only the youngest daughter was willing to marry to ensure the continuation of mankind. The tiger took her away to the mountains. After entering a cave, the tiger was transformed into a good-looking young man. The woman gave birth to nine sons and four daughters. Her nine sons were the ancestors of nine nationalities, among them the Yi. The Yi are described as living in the mountains, as being hunters and pastors, and as being fond of buckwheat and corn. The burial customs of the Yi are linked to the Tiger myth. The Yi still believe that the dead should be cremated, for only cremation will transform the dead into tigers. In some Yi districts, the corpse should be covered with tiger fur to recall that the deceased was the descendent of a tiger and will revert to being a tiger after death. The myth of the "Tiger Clan" is probably the remnant of totemic worship of the tiger in the remote past.

## <sup>5</sup>RELIGION

The Yi believe that everything that moves or grows has its own spirit. They worship their ancestors and revere ghosts and gods. Moreover, the Yi borrowed many beliefs and practices from religious Taoism and Buddhism. The religious rites are performed by the shaman Bimuo and the sorcerer Suye. These two kinds of priests are literate, know the ancient Yi script, and are capable of divination. Beating sheepskin drums, they recite the scriptures, expel the ghosts, offer sacrifices, and perform sacred dances while in a state of trance. It is believed that things left behind by the deceased possess their own spirits and the power to protect the people.

The Yi worship the Buddha of Peace and Tranquillity (*Taip-ing*), considered the God of Grain, three times a year. What is called the "Heavenly Buddha" is simply a braid on the forehead of a man. The braid, about 8 inches long and 1.5 inches around, is wrapped tightly in a piece of cloth and made to stand out. In the eyes of the Yi, this braid is the lord of fortune and misfortune, so sacred and inviolable that anybody who touches it will



be looked upon as an enemy. A man will fight desperately to protect his braid.

In some districts, the Yi worship Asailazi, the god who created the ideographic script of the Yi. There is also a cult to the God of Wind.

Since the 18th century, a considerable number of Yi have converted to Catholicism and Protestantism as a result of missionary work.

## <sup>6</sup>MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Yi celebrate three main festivals: the Spring Festival, the Yi New Year Festival, and the Torch Festival. As the Yi inhabit areas where there are many Chinese, they fully participate in the festivities surrounding the Chinese Spring Festival. Families kill pigs and sheep to prepare special meals and visit each other. On the first of January (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20), the first thing is to carry on a shoulder pole two buckets of water. The family members may use it for cooking or washing, but not for laundry. They go to the countryside for picnicking, singing, dancing, wrestling, and horse racing. The date of the Yi New Year is not fixed (usually in October or November, lunar calendar; Western calendar, between October 24 and January 18) but decided through divination by the shaman. The activities are similar as those of the Spring Festival. The Torch Festival is prevalent in all Yi districts. It is held on June 24 or 25 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between July 22 and August 20). Holding a torch, everybody runs in the fields for fun. Buffalo fighting, sheep fighting, wrestling, arrow-shooting, dancing, singing, swinging,

horse racing, and tug-of-war count among the most important sporting and entertainment activities, which are accompanied by heavy drinking.

## **7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Right after the birth of a girl, her parents will wind a red thread around her head and change it with a new one frequently. It is treasured as a symbol of purity and happiness until the girl's wedding.

A rite of "skirt changing" is held for teenage girls in their odd years of age. The parents prepare lace, a black kerchief, a new skirt, multicolored beads, and silver collar plate beforehand. Old folks will be invited to reckon the lucky day. When it is decided, the household will entertain many guests at a dinner party. During the rite, males must leave the house, while women and girls happily surround the girl, tease her, and express their good wishes. She is combed, helped to wear the new kerchief overhead, and change to a new skirt. Only then are men and boys allowed to come in the house to admire the enhanced beauty of the girl.

The bodies of the dead are usually cremated. The ashes are buried underground or put in a cavern. Because of Chinese influence, some practice burial of the dead in the ground. The funeral rites include "calling back the spirit of the dead." A wooden cross is made, half a foot in length, with wool on the top, plant leaves on the sides, and some grass at the bottom. It is the symbol of the spirit. The shaman recites the scripture and the family offers a sacrifice. For underground burial, a man will dress up like a ghost and lead the way before the coffin while beating a drum. The shaman also walks before the coffin. After the burial, the family should prepare a "mourning plate," which is hung on a wall in the home. The plate, according to ritual prescriptions, should be "sent off" two or more years later. In accordance with the position of the dead, a send-off team consisting of five to seven persons is arranged. They take the mourning plate down from the wall, place it in front of the house, kill livestock for sacrificial offerings, put the plate on a family member's back, then follow the shaman to send it off. They put the mourning plate in the cavern of their ancestors. Moreover, a ceremony is performed to save the souls of the dead.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

When receiving guests, the host will prepare a special meal of oxen, pig, sheep, or chicken, according to the position and familiarity of the guests. Before the meal, the host will present the animal or poultry to the guests, to show that it is live and healthy. After being killed, the animal or poultry will be cooked entirely, including the head, the tail, and the internal organs. These will all be shown after cooking, one by one, to the guests. The meal is very copious, the host inviting the guests to eat and drink without reserve. The host usually asks the guests to take home the head or upper arm of the animal.

The Yi are known for their hospitality. Refusing a toast offered by the host is looked upon as most impolite behavior. The Yi pay much attention to courtesy shown older generations, not on the basis of age, but of seniority in the family or clan.

Young people have full freedom in dating. They take advantage of recreational group activities, such as singing and dancing, as well as country fairs, to meet partners and develop courtship relations. The eighth of February (lunar calendar;

Western calendar, between March 1 and 30) is a special festival for youngsters; one of the rituals is for boys to stick an azalea flower in the hair of one's sweetheart.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Because of rigid social stratification in the past, there are imposing dwellings and spacious courtyards, even with watch-towers. These were the living quarters of the nobles. For the common people, houses are low and damp, made of wood and adobes, without windows. The master's room is usually on the left. The room on the right is for livestock and groceries, usually with a loft for the children or for storage of grain. The central piece is the living room and serves for many functions. Furniture and utensils are mostly made of wood.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Yi family is patrilineal. Sons and daughters leave their parents after wedding. Parents usually live with their youngest son. Males inherit family property. Since ancient times, the Yi have practiced a joint naming system of father and son. The last one or two syllables of the father's name should be put in front of the son's name. A man of noble origin could recite the names of his ancestors up to tens of generations. In the family, the women find themselves in a subordinate position, without the right of inheritance. The Yi lay stress on the power of their mother's brother. Arranged marriage is common. In principle, the Yi family is monogamous. However, there are still polygamy problems left over by history. For older generations that practiced polygamy, the relation between the wife and the concubines is distinct: the wife's sons have the right of succession and inheritance, while the concubines' sons have not.

Cross-cousin marriage (Dravidian marriage) is common among the Yi. The woman, after wedding, will live in her parents' house until she gets pregnant.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Men's clothes vary according to regions. In some districts, men wear multi-pleated loose pants; in others, they wear tight ones. The above-mentioned braid enclosed by cloth on the men's foreheads is their most peculiar symbol of identity. They usually wear a large earring of red or yellow on their left ear. Women wear garments embroidered or trimmed at the edge with cotton lace. They wear multi-pleated long skirts; below the knee, the skirt is made of cloths of different colors. Teenage girls cover their head with a black kerchief; young and middle-aged women usually wear an embroidered square kerchief. Women are fond of wearing ornaments, particularly earrings and a hand-sized, finely carved silver plate attached right below the collar. When they leave home, men and women all wear black wool cloaks, which are decorated by a long fringe at the bottom.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple food of the Yi includes corn, buckwheat, oats, and potatoes. Rice is rare. They raise and grow their own livestock, poultry, and vegetables. Few vegetables grow on the high plateaus, but some of the wild herbs are edible. They like spicy and sour food; this is probably related to insufficient salt intake in the past. They make wine from corn and buckwheat and like baked tea.



### 13 EDUCATION

Illiteracy is still widespread among the Yi, especially among women. Although primary schooling is, by law, compulsory and free of charge, many students in rural areas drop out each year. Few reach middle school (junior and senior) and even fewer go through college.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Dancing is one of the major art forms developed by the Yi. The Moon Dance of Axi is probably their most famous dance and has been performed frequently on stage, at home, and abroad. There are many other dance styles and scenarios. Performers usually sing while dancing.

As we have seen, the Yi invented an original writing system. Hundreds of manuscripts in Yi writing have been published. The Yi also have their own calendar, which divides the year into 10 months of 36 days.

### 15 WORK

The Yi are mainly engaged in farming and raising livestock, which is mostly men's work. Men are also trained as hunters, carpenters, and lacquer workers. Spinning, weaving, dyeing, sewing, designing and making clothes, and embroidering all are done by women at home.

### 16 SPORTS

Wrestling, arrow-shooting, top-whipping, horse racing, tug-of-war, and a variety of ball games are popular sports with the Yi.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Despite the growing popularity of movies and television, the Yi treasure and often prefer their traditional recreation activities. Besides gamecock and buffalo fighting, which the whole community attends, there are two favorite pastimes for the young people, namely *Ganhuachang* (Rushing to the flower place) and *Paohuashan* (Running around the flower mountain). *Ganhuachang* is actually a form of dating. As soon as a young fellow knows that a girl is now visiting a certain family, he arrives there at once and sings a tune accompanied by his traditional full moon-shaped mandolin outside the door. If the girl agrees to go dating, he will invite her to sing and dance at the flower place (a place for outdoor activities). Even married persons might add to the fun on occasion, especially when the dating couple becomes more serious. *Paohuashan* is a group activity organized by the village. Each household invites a guest from outside their village. The young men and girls line up and move round the mountains. They sing as they walk along. Whenever they arrive on a hilltop, they dance. When they return to the village in the evening, they meet the old folks waiting at the gate. Singing in antiphonal style with the old folks, they are allowed to enter the village only after they have won the singing contest.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Yi lacquerwares are renowned internationally. Many domestic utensils, such as wooden dishes, plates, bowls, cups, spoons, and flagons, are painted vividly with decorative figures and patterns in black, red, and yellow. They have become collector's items and are sought eagerly by tourists.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

On account of their environment (high plateaus) and of their mode of production based on artisanal farming, it is very difficult for the Yi to develop a prosperous economy. They face a real dilemma: if they move out of their mountainous terrain, they have to change their traditional professions and risk losing their identity; if they stay, they may retain their traditional ways, but remain relatively poor as China develops economically.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. While the gap in educational levels between women and men is narrowing with women making up 47.1% of all college students in 2005, illiteracy is still widespread among Yi women.

China has strict family planning laws. It is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age (22 for men), and it is illegal for single women to give birth. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

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—by C. Le Blanc

# ZHUANG

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Buzhuang, Bunong, Buyang, Butu, Buyue, Buman, Gaolan

**LOCATION:** China

**POPULATION:** 16.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Zhuang

**RELIGION:** Polytheistic; ancestor worship, Christianity

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 3: China and Her National Minorities

## <sup>1</sup>INTRODUCTION

The Zhuang developed as a branch of the ancient Baiyue people. They are historically linked with the Xi'ou and Luoyue people of the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) and the Warring States (475–221 BC) during the Zhou Dynasty (1121–221 BC); with the Liao, Li, and Wuhu of the Han (206 BC–AD 220) and Tang dynasties (618–907); and with the Zhuang, Liang, and Tu of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), as recorded in ancient Chinese books. After unifying China, the First Emperor of Qin (221–207 BC) sent an army half a million strong to Lingnan (present Guangxi and Guangdong). Having conquered the Xi'ou, he set up three command posts and ordered the local population to dig a canal connecting the Xiangjiang and Lijiang rivers, thus linking the Yangzi River system with the Zhujiang River system. A great number of Chinese moved from the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River to the south to live together with the Xi'ou and the Luoyue. After the fall of the imperial Qin in 207 BC, Zhao Tuo, an ex-general of Qin, proclaimed himself King of South Yue. The rebellion was put down by Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 7). After the fall of the Han Dynasty in AD 220, there appeared in present Guangxi large clans, such as Lu, Xian, Ning, etc., each of whom had large numbers of slaves, extensive property and great political power. The imperial Tang Dynasty appointed local hereditary chieftains as its officials. Thereafter, the ancestors of the Zhuang, despite sporadic restlessness and rebellions, submitted to the rule of the central government.

## <sup>2</sup>LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Zhuang is the largest national minority of China. Their population was 16.2 million in 2000. More than 90% of them live in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. There are also compact Zhuang communities in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture (in southeast Yunnan) and smaller groups in Guangdong, Hunan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces. The Guangxi landscape is typical of southern China. In its central portion, a chain of undulating hills formed by eroded limestone of an ancient uplifted seabed casts a spell on Chinese and foreigners alike. Strings of jadeite-green peaks seem suspended from the blue sky. A number of grottoes have been found inside those hills. Some of them are large enough to accommodate thousands of people. It is also in those hills that one finds the famous “gorge paintings”; there are more than 60 gorges stretching over some 125 mi. The largest one is 130 ft high and more than 325 ft long. In all, more than 1,300 images can be seen. The largest drawings exceed 10 ft, while the small ones are only 12 in.

## <sup>3</sup>LANGUAGE

Zhuang is classified as belonging to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family, Zhuang-Dong group, Zhuang-Dai branch. A writing system was created on the basis of the Chinese script as early as the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) but had only a limited use, recording genealogies, contracts, scriptures, and popular stories; it nevertheless contributed greatly to the knowledge of traditional Zhuang society and culture. A new alphabetical system based on Latin was put in use in 1955 and revised in 1982.

The Zhuang call themselves Buzhuang. “Bu” means “man.” Other self-given names include Bunong, Buyang, Butu, Buyue, Buman, Gaolan, etc., as many as 20 and more. Zhuang has now become the unified name of all these groups.

## <sup>4</sup>FOLKLORE

The Zhuang have a rich mythology, revolving in good part around the question of origins. In one story, it is said that there were no seeds of grains in ancient times, so people had to allay their hunger with wild herbs. Because of the multiplication of mankind, their demand far exceeded supply. Actually, there were seeds of grains in the heavens, but people living there were not willing to give them to people living on earth. The latter had no choice but to send a dog to look for seeds in Heaven. In those days, a dog had nine tails. On arriving on the threshing ground, the dog put its tails on the floor so that many seeds stuck themselves onto the hairs. Unfortunately, the dog was discovered by a guard, who chopped off eight out of its nine tails; but, the dog was able to run away. The seeds stuck on the remaining tail of the dog brought great benefits to mankind. For this reason, dogs are kept at home and fed with rice. Today, dogs have only one tail, but the grains have nine spikes reminding people that dogs formerly had nine tails.

Another story concerning the origins of the Zhuang relates that human beings were few in ancient times. A Carpenter God came to a large forest and made men and women from wood; they were able to talk and move, like real people. There were three groups: the “wooden” Yao were located beside a stream; the “wooden” Zhuang, halfway up the hill; and the “wooden” Miao, on the hilltop. The Carpenter God’s wife did the cooking and his son took the meal to his father in the forest. One day, the Carpenter God wanted to know which of the two sexes was cleverer. When the son called his father to lunch in the forest, the wooden men all responded. The child could not tell who his father was. When he went back, his mother taught him to find the man with sweat on his nose due to manual labor. The child returned to the forest and found his father easily without calling. When the Carpenter God realized that his wife had outwitted him, he made a wooden stick of even thickness for his wife, which was delivered by the child. His wife had to guess which end was the original root and which was the tip. His wife hung the stick by the middle. The weighty end was marked as the root. The Carpenter God was astonished by her wisdom and became so angry that he burned the wooden people on the spot. The wooden Yao were charred and became black. That is why the Yao wear black clothes. The wooden Zhuang halfway up the hill were not seriously burnt, so they wear blue clothes. The wooden Miao were caught unawares by the fire and fled in turmoil. Some of them escaped; some had burns over different parts of the body. Therefore, there are Flowery Miao, White Miao, and Black Miao today.

## 5 RELIGION

The Zhuang are polytheistic. They worship their ancestors and revere big stones, large trees, snakes, birds, and the earth. There are part-time shamans (*daogong*) in the rural areas, frequently solicited by Zhuang people to chase ghosts away. The Zhuang offer sacrifices to the Mountain God, the Water God, the Kitchen God, the Sun God, and so on. For example, they offer glutinous rice and colored boiled eggs to the Crop God beside the fields prior to sowing grain. The third day of lunar March (Western calendar, between March 26 and April 24) is regarded as the birthday of Shennong (Divine Farmer), who is said to have invented agriculture; on that occasion, pigs are butchered for sacrificial offerings. The second day of lunar June (Western calendar, between June 23 and July 23) is the birthday of the great King Muyi, who saved the Zhuang from disasters; not only do they offer a sacrifice every year, but they also hold a grand ceremony in his honor every six years. The numerous sacrifices offered by the Zhuang all aim at receiving the blessings of the gods: well-being of the family, healthy livestock, and abundant crops. The Zhuang were influenced by organized Buddhism and Taoism since the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Since the beginning of this century, a small number have adopted Christian beliefs and practices.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are dozens of holidays among the Zhuang, all according to the lunar calendar. On the Lunar New Year's Eve (Western calendar, between January 21 and February 20), the whole family reunites at the dinner table. They talk cheerfully all night long. On the first day of the New Year, a lot of things will be done. They all dress up. Firecrackers are kindled. The women draw water from the wells or rivers and then boil it with brown sugar, bamboo leaves, shallot, and ginger to concoct a beverage for the family. In some areas, the sacrificial rites to the ancestors are performed in the morning. Then, the children should study seriously for a while, for the day is believed to be propitious for rapid advance in their studies. The lady of the house will place a little fertilizer and seeds in the field and drop some chicken feathers on the village road to beckon a flourishing year for the crops and the livestock. In other areas, the Zhuang offer a sacrifice in a tiny temple housing the Village God. Wooden swords and spears included among the offerings are expected to be used by the god to protect the village. In small towns, sporting and recreational events, such as "tossing an embroidered ball" (a kind of ball game for children), Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, and Zhuang drama will be held. The same festive activities will be repeated on January 30 (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between February 19 and March 18), the "Late New Year." It is said that a long time ago the local people had to fight against an invading army on a lunar New Year and during the whole month of January, obtaining victory only on January 30.

The eighth of April (lunar calendar; Western calendar, between May 2 and May 30) is the birthday of Buffalo God. People clean the pen, wash and brush the buffalo at the riverside, feed it with multicolored glutinous rice, and give it a day off.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Huapo (flower woman) is the goddess of reproduction and also the patron saint of babies. Right after childbirth, a holy tablet dedicated to Huapo and a bouquet of wild flowers are placed



by the wall along the bedside. It is said that all babies are flowers cultivated by the goddess. If the baby falls ill, the mother makes offerings to Huapo and abundantly waters the wild flowers, which symbolize her baby.

The Zhuang's funerary rites are unique. The coffin is made of thin plank and buried about 2 ft from the surface to hasten the decaying of the corpse. Three to five years later (never even-numbered years), the coffin is opened, the bones are cleansed of any remnants of soft tissue; the skeleton is then placed in a sitting posture inside an earthen jar, sprinkled with cinnamon. The name of the deceased and his or her dates of birth and death are written on the inside of the lid, and the sealed jar is finally buried in the clan graveyard.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A straw hat hung on a door is a warning that there is a lying-in woman inside and that no entrance is allowed unless authorized. The guest should pay attention to this warning. This custom is quite common among the national minorities.

Zhuang youngsters enjoy full freedom in dating. Antiphonal singing parties are a popular way to choose partners of the opposite sex; they are held on all festivals. The lyrics include astronomy, geography, history, social life, productive labor, ethics, and, of course, passions. Someone adept in antiphonal singing is much admired and will be the "target" of the opposite sex.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Most of the Zhuang houses are now similar to those of the local Chinese. Some areas, however, still retain traditional “stilt dwelling” housing. The house is built on stilts, keeping the family above the damp earth and away from animals. This type of house is not much different from that of the ancient Baiyue more than 1,000 years ago. It is well adapted to the climate and environment of south China. In Guangxi the house and stilts are made of bamboo and wood. The size of the house may vary from three to seven rooms. Livestock and stored goods are placed on the ground floor.

A number of infectious diseases prevalent in bygone days, including schistosomiasis (a parasitic disease), are now completely eradicated.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Zhuang family is patrilineal, monogamous, and relatively small in size. The women’s position is somewhat lower than that of men. The custom of “not living in the husband’s house” has been prevalent since remote antiquity. Right after the wedding ceremony, the bride, accompanied by her bridesmaids, goes back to her own family. She will only return to her husband during festivals; in the busy agricultural seasons, she will only visit her husband when invited by him. If she gets pregnant, she will then move to her husband’s house; otherwise, she will move three to five years after the wedding.

Among the Zhuang living in compact communities in north Guangdong, the bride and her bridesmaids all wear black. They hold black umbrellas while accompanying the bride from her home family to her husband’s house. The dresses are prepared by the bridegroom’s side and delivered to the bride’s family by the matchmaker. According to tradition black costumes are joyous and auspicious.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Nowadays, the Zhuang’s clothes are, by and large, the same as those of the local Chinese. In some rural areas, however, they preserve ancient traditions. For example, in northwest Guangxi, the aged women still wear a collarless, trimmed garment with buttons down the left side and trimmed loose trousers, with an embroidered apron on their waist. Some of them wear wax-printed straight skirts in dark navy, with embroidered shoes and an embroidered kerchief wrapped around the head. Zhuang peasants put on dark navy blue cloth pants and upper garments.

Zhuang women are fond of wearing gold or silver hair clasps, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. Most of them have abandoned the tradition of tattooing their faces.

## **12 FOOD**

The staple foods of the Zhuang are rice and corn. They like salted and sour dishes. Raw fish fillets are one of their delicacies. On festivals, they make various dishes from glutinous rice, such as cakes, rice-flour noodles, and pyramid-shaped dumplings wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves. Women like to chew areca, especially those in Longzhou near the Vietnam border. In some districts, they do not eat beef because they follow the old custom handed down from their ancestors, who regarded the buffalo as their savior.

## **13 EDUCATION**

About 95% of school-age children are registered in state schools. There are 17 universities in Guangxi. One-quarter of the college students are from the national minorities, the vast majority being from the Zhuang people. The cultural and educational level of the Zhuang is higher than the average for the national minorities but still lower than the average for China as a whole.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

A large part of Zhuang popular culture revolves around singing. For instance, singing is the main activity during festivals. Singing parties are organized on different scales. A grand gathering during a major festival may attract more than 10,000 participants. They form small groups of boys and girls within the larger gathering and engage in antiphonal singing. Song, thus, has a very important social function. Dance is also important but is performed independently from singing. There are a variety of dances, such as the Bronze Drum Dance, the Tea-Leaves Collecting Dance, the Shoulder Pole Dance, the Buffalo Dance, and so on.

Studies of the Zhuang nationality have developed rapidly since the 1960s. The researchers, mainly Zhuang, collected 1,000 ancient Zhuang books concerning ancient writings, literature, art, history, and religions. A dictionary of ancient Zhuang language, an epic relating the origin of the Zhuang, a collection of their folk songs and love songs, a general history of the Zhuang, an encyclopedia on the Zhuang, and books concerning Zhuang culture were published in the past decade.

## **15 WORK**

The Zhuang have traditionally engaged in agriculture and in forestry. The land is fertile and the climate propitious both for wet crops and dry crops. Besides the labor-intensive cultivation of rice and other grains, the Zhuang of Guangxi produce commercial quantities of sugarcane, banana, longan, litchi, pineapple, shaddock, and mango. The coastal area they inhabit abounds in quality pearls.

## **16 SPORTS**

The Zhuang are renowned as outstanding athletes in different fields of gymnastics. Intensive training for young boys and girls is provided on a voluntary basis after school hours.

“Tossing the embroidered ball” is a traditional game. The ball is a cloth bag padded with rice husks or cottonseed, about 1 lb in weight and variable in size. A colored string is attached to it. In a match, youngsters are divided into two teams of opposing sex. They are separated by a paling. The method of tossing the ball is to hold the string in one hand, swing the ball in circles, then release it; it resembles the hammer throw. The opposite side should catch the ball; if not, one member of the opposite team is captured. Whenever the commander (usually the last team member) is captured, the game is over.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Television has become a very popular pastime for the urban Zhuang. Most of the small towns are now provided with television broadcasting stations; rural families with a television set are thus able to watch a wide variety of television programs at home. Guangxi set up its own film studio decades ago.

There are many recreational festivals during the year. A grand fair is held annually in the spring; in addition to the interflow of commodities, a number of recreational activities are held. Commemorative feasts for the ancestors are celebrated twice a year, in spring and autumn; they now contain many recreational elements, such as singing parties, dancing performances, and Zhuang opera.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Zhuang are internationally famous for the antiquity and beauty of their bronze drums. The size of the drums varies considerably. The drums are hollow and bottomless with a flat surface. Artistic figures and designs decorate the drums. They were used as percussion instruments, both in religious and governmental rituals. They became a sign of power and wealth. They are considered as a national treasure by the Zhuang.

Brocade is also a well-known traditional art form of the Zhuang. The brocade is woven with cotton and multicolored silk to form beautiful, sophisticated, and durable designs. Wall hangings, table cloth, cushions, and curtains made of Zhuang brocade are highly appreciated both in China and abroad. Zhuang girls are particularly fond of brocaded knapsacks.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Although Guangxi is an area of fertile soil, warm climate and abundant rainfall, the Zhuang are far from wealthy. The rich mineral resources, coastal areas, and tourism potential of Guangxi are not yet fully tapped. For this reason, large numbers of surplus rural labor of the Zhuang and other nationalities move from Guangxi to its neighboring province Guangdong, which is more developed economically. This population movement poses serious problems both to Guangdong and to Guangxi.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Chinese constitution states that women have equal rights with men in all areas of life, and most legislation is gender neutral. However, Zhuang women's status is regarded as somewhat lower than that of Zhuang men. A wife does not live with her husband until the couple has been married at least three years. For the first three years of marriage, the wife only visits the husband when he invites her. However, if the wife becomes pregnant, she moves into her husband's house.

China has strict family planning laws, and it is illegal for women to marry before 20 years of age, 22 for men, and it is illegal for single women to give birth. The Family Planning Bureau can require women to take periodic pregnancy tests, and enforce laws that often leave women with no real options other than abortion or sterilization. Though minority populations were previously exempt from family planning regulations, policy has changed in recent years to limit minority population growth. Today, urban minority couples may have two children while rural couples may have three or four.

Prostitution and the sex trade is a significant problem in China involving between 1.7 and five million women. It involved organized crime, businessmen, the police and government workers, so prosecution against prostitution has limited success. In 2002, the nation removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses, and though it is still a taboo topic, homosexuality is increasingly accepted, especially in large, international cities.

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—by C. Le Blanc

Worldmark  
Encyclopedia of  
**Cultures and  
Daily Life**

VOLUME 5 Europe  
Second Edition

Editors

Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby



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Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

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# INTRODUCTION

by  
Roger Williams Wescott

Is Europe really a continent? Europe isn't nearly as sharply separated from Asia as the Americas are—or even as Africa is. Geographers often refer to large peninsulas, like India, as subcontinents. In many ways, Europe's relation to Asia is like that of India. It is at least as easy to go by land from the interior of Asia into Europe as it is to go from the interior of Asia into India.

Does this mean that we should call Europe a subcontinent rather than a continent? Maybe. But most Europeans prefer the continental designation. They point out that Europe has a uniquely long coastline, more extensive and more indented than that of any other land mass, including Asia itself. In addition to this strong geographic argument, Europeans also have a compelling historical argument. For most of the past few centuries, Europe has dominated the world in all areas of human endeavor. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Europeans have a subjective reason for calling their region a continent. However limited it may be in area, Europe is their home as well as the center of what is generally called Western Civilization.

One might think that Americans, because they are an ocean away, would be less inclined than Europeans to recognize Europe as a continent. But Americans, from Argentina to Canada (including, of course, the United States) are predominantly European in ancestry. These European-Americans greatly outnumber both Native Americans and African-Americans, so they are inclined to take a rather European view of the geographic status of Europe.

While recognizing that there is cultural bias involved in calling Europe something more than a subcontinent, we shall here follow general practice in referring to Europe as one of our planet's major continental regions.

## EUROPEAN TRAITS

There are two distinctive traits that seem to be characteristic of all the peoples of Europe. One of these traits is physical in nature and the other cultural. The physical trait is racial—all native Europeans are, in technical terms, Caucasoid or, in popular terms, white. In this respect, they resemble the peoples of northern Africa and western Asia but contrast with the peoples of Africa and the peoples of eastern Asia, termed Negroid and Mongoloid, respectively.

European Caucasoids are of three major varieties, or subraces. The most northerly of these is the Nordic subrace, whose members tend to be tall, blond, and blue-eyed. Of the nations of Europe, the one with the highest proportion of Nordics is Sweden. Although Nordics are now common in North America, their ancestors seem to have come exclusively from northern Europe. The most southerly of the subraces is the Mediterranean, whose members tend to be short, dark-complexioned, and brown-eyed. The European nation with the highest proportion of Mediterraneans is probably Greece. Between the

Nordics and the Mediterraneans is a band of peoples of intermediate physical characteristics, known as Alpines. Those of Alpine subrace are typically of medium height, brown-haired, and gray-eyed. The Austrians are representative of Europe's Alpine population.

The cultural trait that characterizes all European peoples has to do with the structure of kinship, or family relations. All Europeans have what ethnologists term an Eskimo kinship system (so called because it is found in its simplest and most distinctive form among the Eskimos of arctic North America). Family life among people with this kinship system has the following characteristics:

Marriage is monogamous. Each married man has only one wife and each married woman only one husband.

Kinship is bilateral. Each individual considers his father's relatives and his mother's relatives equally closely related to himself. (In other parts of the world, many peoples have unilateral systems, which trace kinship only through the father's line or the mother's line, but not both.)

The family is chiefly or exclusively nuclear. The core family consists of a pair of married parents and their children. If the family is extended, it is tri-generational, consisting of grand-parents, parents, and children—although such extended families are becoming rarer.

All of a person's relatives comprise a kindred, which consists of an equal number of mother's kinsmen and of father's kinsmen. (In this regard, a kindred contrasts with a clan, which consists of kinsmen from the mother's or father's side only. Clans were common in early Europe but are no longer found.)

Marriage is neo-local. This means that newlyweds preferentially set up a new and independent household of their own, rather than joining the household of the groom's family (which is known as patrilocal residence), or joining the household of the bride's family (which is known as matrilocal residence).

To compensate for the decreasing frequency of large extended families, many new-born children are assigned "back-up" parents, known as godparents. Ideally, these godparents serve as adoptive parents if neither the parents nor their kindred can care for the children. Godparenthood, however, is becoming both less common and less effective than it once was.

Besides race and kinship, there are other traits—linguistic and religious—that, though not universal in Europe, typify most European countries. The linguistic trait is one of language genealogy. Of the 36 independent countries of Europe, 33 have national languages that belong to the Indo-European family.

The Indo-European family also includes not only English and Spanish, but also such Asian languages as Persian and Hindi. Only three—Finland, Estonia, and Hungary—have national languages that belong to a different family, called Uralic.

There are certain Indo-European personal names that have spread sufficiently far beyond their area of origin as to be considered pan-European (referring to all of Europe). Examples of names of this kind, cited here in their English forms, are: from Germanic, *Frances*, meaning “of the Franks” (the conquering people for whom France was named); from Celtic, *Arthur*, meaning “like a bear”; from Romanic, *Patricia*, meaning “noblewoman”; and, from Hellenic, *Philip*, meaning “lover of horses.”

The religious trait typifying Europe is Christianity. Christianity is the predominant and/or official religion of every European country except Albania and the European segment of Turkey. In both of these, Muslims outnumber Christians. Although Jews are found in every European country, Judaism is a minority religion throughout the continent. In the Americas, where Christianity is also predominant, it was clearly introduced there by European missionaries and colonists.

An archeological trait unique to Europe is the presence there of elaborate pre-urban structures composed of megaliths, or “big stones,” which, unlike the stone blocks used in the ancient cities of Egypt or the Near East, were not cut at right angles or smoothly dressed. It is true that huge, rough-hewn stones of prehistoric age are found on most continents, but none of these constitute great circles like that at Stonehenge in England or mile-long avenues like those at Carnac in France.

Writing systems have developed on most of the world’s continents. Only Europe, however, developed an alphabet of the type that regularly and consistently represents vowels as well as consonants. More specifically, it was the ancient Greeks who created this kind of alphabet by adding vowel signs to the early Phoenician syllabary of Lebanon, a script that contained signs for consonants only. This Greek alphabet was then modified in both western Europe to yield the Latin alphabet used in English and other languages, and in eastern Europe to yield the Cyrillic alphabet used in Russia.

Of all the arts, music has had the most distinctive development in Europe. European musicians were the only ones to create a musical notation that enables performers to read and recreate compositions with great precision. Only Europe has invented large and complex instruments, like the piano and the organ. And only Europe has constructed symphony orchestras involving over 100 instruments of diverse kinds. Probably the most uniquely European of all Western musical features, however, is counterpoint—the art of combining different melodic lines in a single composition. This form is evident in all so-called “classical” music—the Baroque compositions of Bach (1685–1750), the Rococo compositions of Mozart (1756–91), and the Romantic compositions of Beethoven (1770–1827).

If navigation may be called an art, Europeans, who had lagged behind the Phoenicians and even the Polynesians in long-distance sailing, eventually became its leading practitioners. As far as we know, no other people had ever sailed around the earth before the crew of the Portuguese/Spanish naval commander Ferdinand Magellan did so in the sixteenth century. And, by this circumnavigation, Magellan and his crew advanced science immeasurably by demonstrating that the earth must be shaped like a ball rather than flat or square-edged.

In the political realm, democracy is almost certainly a European invention. Outside of Europe, farm-villages were often democratically run, especially in India. But it was only in Europe that whole states, such as ancient Athens or modern France, were based, however tenuously, on such revolutionary ideological principles as freedom and equality. And, to the extent that democracy has become a global political ideal, that ideal stems primarily from the efforts and aspirations of Europeans and European-Americans.

In terms of its effect on the world outside of Europe, however, there was another European innovation that was probably even more transformative than was the democratic ideal. This innovation was the Industrial Revolution, beginning with the invention of a practical steam engine in eighteenth century England and culminating in the establishment of thermonuclear power stations. Although both the ancient Greeks and the medieval Chinese demonstrated the intellectual and mechanical skills necessary to launch this revolution, neither did. Perhaps they realized, or at least feared, that industrialization would destabilize their societies. If so, their apprehension has been justified by subsequent developments. After Europe industrialized itself and then industrialized the rest of the world, human technological and commercial power increased immensely. But warfare became more devastating, population increases outstripped agricultural resources, and pollution began to threaten public health nearly everywhere.

## ENVIRONMENT

For a geography teacher who likes to draw free-hand maps of continents on the blackboard, Africa is a joy. A single broad stroke encloses all of it except the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar. Europe, on the other hand, is not so easy. It has a jig-sawed look, full of tiny twists, protrusions, and indentations. Even a professional wall map fails to show even half of the 80,000 kilometers (50,000 miles) of the intricately filigreed European coastline.

When these coastline complications are enlarged by archipelagos, islands, and peninsulas, the land/sea picture becomes even more elaborate. An archipelago (literally, “a ruler of the sea”) is a collection of islands, like those of the Aegean Sea. A peninsula (literally, “nearly an island”) is a projection of land, most but not all of which is coastal, like Iberia, a block of land politically divided between Portugal and Spain. A glance at these coasts makes it easy to see how the Greeks managed to colonize the Mediterranean region, founding cities like Naples in Italy and Marseilles in France, and how the Spanish succeeded in colonizing Latin America, most of which, before the revolutionary wars, was known as New Spain.

### Topography

Away from the coasts, Europe consists mainly of highlands and plains. If we take the Ural mountains of Russia to be the boundary between Europe and Asia, then the only major European mountain system is the Alpine system. This system includes the Alps, the Iberian Pyrenees to the west and, to the east, the Carpathians of central Europe and the highlands of the Balkan peninsula. The system ends in the Caucasus range, generally taken to constitute a second mountainous boundary between southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia.

Geologists believed that the Alpine system was raised as the result of a collision or series of collisions between drifting

continents—in this case, Europe to the north and Africa to the south. But because the Mediterranean Sea seems to separate these continents and serve as a presumptive buffer preventing collision, geologists have reformulated this collisional scenario in terms of plate tectonics. As they now picture the movements of the earth's surface, both continents and the oceans near them ride on crustal plates. And it is these plates rather than the continents themselves that collide, causing an uplift of land at the point or points of contact. When this uplift is sufficiently high, streams freeze and snow becomes compacted, producing glaciers, such as those in Switzerland. Among the other results of plate collision are earthquakes, of the kind frequently experienced in the Balkan hill country, and volcanic eruption. Among the northern Mediterranean volcanoes that have endangered towns are Mount Vesuvius in Italy and Mount Aetna in Sicily.

Complementary to the Alpine zone of southern and central Europe is the great plain of northern continental Europe, which stretches from the Ural mountains through Russia, Poland, Germany, and the Low Countries to France. This is the long, flat corridor through which wave after wave of migratory peoples have passed from the Eurasian steppes to the Atlantic seaboard during the period between the domestication of horses in Neolithic times and the eastward expansion of Russian peasant farmers in the sixteenth century. Among the many ethnic groups traversing this natural highway were the Indo-European ancestors of modern North Americans, the Uralians (ancestral to the modern Hungarians), the northern Turks (ancestral to the Chuvash of contemporary Russia), and the western Mongols (represented by the Kalmyks of contemporary Russia).

### Climate

Overall, Europe is the least arid of all continents. The only part of the continent that can fairly be described as dry is the steppe country northwest of the Caspian Sea. As one moves north through eastern Europe, the land becomes progressively moister, until, in Finland, a fifth of the surface is covered by lakes.

The three major climatic zones of Europe are the Atlantic Maritime zone, typified by Britain; the Mediterranean Subtropical zone, typified by Italy; and the Inland Continental zone, typified by Russia. The Atlantic Maritime region is rainy and cool, with few extremes of temperature. The Mediterranean Subtropical region is rainy in the winter but dry in the summer. The Inland Continental region is both larger and more variable in climate than the other two, and must be divided into subregions, each with a distinctive climate. The five subregions, reading roughly from north to south, are (1) the subarctic subregion, represented by Finland; (2) the humid short-summer subregion, represented by Poland; (3) the humid long-summer subregion, represented by Hungary; (4) the elevated subregion, represented by Switzerland; and (5) the dry long-summer region, represented by Ukraine.

### Soil, Water, and Forests

Until Europe was intensively farmed and urbanized, it had been heavily forested woodland. In the north, the forests consisted primarily of needle-leaf evergreens, such as pine, spruce, and fir. In the long central belt, they consisted chiefly of deciduous broad-leaf trees, such as oak, beech and ash. And, in the south, they consisted mainly of fruit-bearing trees, such as

palm, olive, and orange. Agricultural and industrial deforestation, however, has turned the great forests of the past into scattered ornamental tree avenues. In more arid areas, such as southern Spain, trees have been largely replaced by scrub growth.

The life of any region depends largely on the quantity and quality of its soil and water. Most of Europe has fertile brown forest soil, now largely converted to agriculture. As one moves northward, the soil becomes increasingly acid, hospitable to needle-leaf trees but not to farming. Eventually, in Lapland (northern Scandinavia), even trees give way to low-growing lichens and mosses. Such tundra country provides good fodder for reindeer, but not for barnyard live-stock.

As one moves south, the soil becomes eroded and clay-like on the Mediterranean coast, where trees grow less tall than inland. The richest soil in Europe is probably the *chernozem*, or black earth, of Ukraine.

Europe has, in most places, a freshwater table that readily yields wells and fountains. Its sea water, by contrast, is saltier than most of the world's oceans. The Mediterranean is saltier than other oceans because evaporation from its surface, especially in the summer, exceeds the inflow of fresh waters from such rivers as the Rhone in France or the Tiber in Italy. And the reason why the northeast Atlantic Ocean is so salty is that it receives a salty surface outflow from the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar between Spain and Morocco. The attractive blue color of the Mediterranean is due chiefly to the fact that its saltiness prevents the accumulation of green plankton, consisting of tiny floating plants, on its surface. The lack of edible plankton, in turn, prevents Mediterranean fish from becoming as large or as numerous as those in the Atlantic.

The relative mildness of the Atlantic coastal climate from Norway south to Spain is due to the transportation of warm, tropical American sea water from the Caribbean region by the so-called Gulf Stream. This stream—which may be regarded as a river in the ocean—moves slowly but steadily in a clockwise direction, assuring that Scandinavia is not nearly as icy as territories at a corresponding latitude, such as Greenland in North America.

The smaller seas of Europe have special characteristics. Both the Black Sea, between Ukraine and Turkey, and the Baltic Sea, between Finland and Denmark, have brackish water—water that is substantially less salty than that of the ocean. These seas receive more water from rivers than they lose through evaporation, and they are too far from the Atlantic Ocean to receive much salt water from it. The North Sea, between Britain and Denmark, would seem to have the potential to produce as much seafood as the Atlantic Ocean. However, because it is surrounded by six of the most active seafaring nations on earth, it is now virtually “fished out.”

### Agriculture

Most of Europe has a temperate climate, favoring growth of the kind of grass most nourishing to grazing animals. Southern Europe produces grapes of the type from which the world's most famous wines are made.

In Europe, as elsewhere, those plants that sustain the largest number of people are domesticated grains. All of Europe's grains, as it happens, originated elsewhere. Its wheat and rye were first cultivated in southwest Asia; its rice, in southeast

Asia; and its maize, in North America. Europe's other staple food crop, the potato, was first cultivated in South America.

Europe, like north Asia and north Africa, belongs to what is called the Palearctic (meaning "old northern") faunal zone. During the Ice Age, Europe was home to a number of large wild animals: the mastodon (an extinct elephant), the woolly rhinoceros, the giant cave-bear, and the Irish elk, whose antlers measured four meters (twelve feet) across. Even in early historic times, Europe still had lions and a type of buffalo called the aurschs.

Of the various animals basic to farming, only the pig was domesticated in Europe. Others now common in Europe—such as sheep, goats, cows, horses, chickens, ducks, and geese—were adopted from cultivators in Asia.

### Fish and Birds

The fisheries of North Atlantic Europe produce an abundance of tuna, bluefish, mackerel, and sole. Those of the Mediterranean yield sardines, anchovy, bass, and flounder. Mediterranean divers harvest sponge and red coral, and southern European gourmets relish octopus and squid. Marine mammals, such as seals and dolphins, are found in both Atlantic and Mediterranean waters, although they are larger and more numerous in the Atlantic.

Such common European birds as sparrows, gulls, hawks, and owls are also wide-spread on other continents. A bird that can be considered distinctively European is the stork, because only in Europe does it nest on roofs and chimney-tops, coming to be regarded as a seasonal household lodger.

Of the many species of European insects, the only one that has a commercial importance comparable to that of the silk-worm moth in China is the honeybee. European bee-keepers have long managed apiaries, in which they construct artificial beehives from which honey can be periodically withdrawn and consumed or sold.

In purely emotional terms, the most important animals in contemporary Europe are undoubtedly the cats and dogs that are kept as household pets. The love and care lavished on them is often second only to that lavished on children.

## THE PREHISTORY OF EUROPE

Of all fossil human beings, the first to appear in Europe was one that scholars formerly referred to as *Pithecanthropus erectus* ("the upright ape-man"). To emphasize its close relationship to us, specialists have renamed this ancestor *Homo erectus* ("upright man").

### Homo erectus

Remains of *Homo erectus* have been found in Spain, the French/Italian Riviera, and Hungary. He lived during the Lower Paleolithic Period, the earlier segment of the Old Stone Age. In geological terms, this was the middle of the Pleistocene Epoch or Ice Age. In chronological terms, *Homo erectus* lived between about 400,000 and 200,000 years ago. He stood about one and one-half meters (five feet) tall, and had a brain volume of around 57 cubic inches (950 cubic centimeters)—slightly smaller than that of most human beings today. His chief stone implement was a core tool of a type that archeologists call an Acheulean biface hand-ax. Besides this manual cutting tool, he may have made wooden spears (to the tip of which the ax could have been attached). It's also possible that he dug pits in the

earth to serve either as traps for hunted animals or as shallow cellars for lean-tos or huts.

What is certain is that *Homo erectus* was carnivorous. In his habitations, excavators have found the remains of many fish, turtles, birds, and rodents. Surprisingly, perhaps, they have also found bones of some large animals—mammoths, woolly rhinoceroses, cave-bears, and even saber-toothed tigers. What is not clear is whether this early man killed such formidable beasts or merely scavenged their remains after they died or were killed by other animals. But he undoubtedly ate their meat and probably also used their bones as supplementary tools.

Men, women, and children of the species *erectus* constructed oval huts—about 10.5 meters (35 feet) long and 6 meters (20 feet) wide—from rocks, logs, and more perishable materials. These dwellings, which contained table-stones usable as either seats or foot-platforms, may have held a dozen or more inhabitants. A part of each hut contained abundant ashes and burnt bones, providing strong evidence that this primal human being used fire to warm his home, to cook food, and perhaps also to repel or stampede animals.

The skulls of *Homo erectus* are sometimes detached from the rest of the skeletons. Sometimes, too, the *Foramina magna*—holes at the bases of these skulls—are artificially enlarged by chopping. What these facts undeniably suggest is that this first European was a head-hunter, a cannibal, or both.

We may infer that *Homo erectus* was a relatively unimaginative creature, concerned primarily with survival. The prehistoric humanity that succeeded him, however, seems to have engaged in non-utilitarian activities of a type that we would call religious or artistic.

### Neanderthals

The earlier of these successors, Neanderthal Man, was known initially as *Cyphanthropus* ("bent-over man"), which derived from the fact that many Neanderthals suffered from crippling arthritis; then as *Homo neanderthalensis*; and most recently, as *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* ("the knowing man of the Neander Valley"). Neanderthal remains have been found in Spain, France, Germany, Italy, and the Balkan countries. Neanderthals lived in the Middle Paleolithic period of the Pleistocene Ice Age, between about 200,000 and 30,000 years ago. Like the *erectus* type, they were short, big-toothed, heavy-boned, and presumably muscular. But, unlike their Lower Paleolithic forebears, they had brains as big as ours. There was, however, a significant difference between their brains and ours—where our brains bulge in front, making us literal "high-brows," theirs bulged in back, in the occipital region believed to control large-muscle coordination. Neanderthals were probably swift runners and powerful wrestlers, but less inclined than we to think and to plan for the future.

Archeologists refer to the main Neanderthal stone-working industry as *Monsterian*. Instead of focusing on core tools like hand-axes, it emphasized flake tools, such as awls and scrapers. Remains of bone and stone toggles suggest that Neanderthals used them to fasten cloaks made from animal hides. Their motive in wearing clothes, we presume, had more to do with protection from ice-age chill than with modesty.

The most distinctive innovation in Neanderthal behavior was burial of the dead and construction of what look like shrines consisting of circles of animal skulls. The burial was

clearly ceremonial, since, wherever graves contain more than one individual, all are arranged in the same ritual position, whether that position is flexed or extended. The skull circles may have been intended to propitiate the collective spirit of whatever animal the skulls came from (most often bears and goats). Pollen found in some graves suggests that flowers may have been placed with the deceased Neanderthals.

Neanderthal Man apparently hunted all the animals that were eaten by his Paleolithic predecessor, but the game that he most consistently killed and consumed was the deer.

Two mysteries remain with regard to the Neanderthals. For communication, did they talk or employ a fully linguistic manual sign language? The complexity of their behavior suggests that they did. Yet, because they left no writing or pictorial representations, we cannot be sure. The other mystery is the cause of their disappearance. Did a natural disaster bring about their extinction? Did members of our subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, make use of superior weaponry to kill them off? Or were the Neanderthals, having a relatively small population, simply absorbed by the much larger population of our subspecies? As yet, there is no clear evidence favoring any one of these explanations.

### Cro-Magnon

The period following the disappearance of the Neanderthals is known, archeologically, as the Upper Paleolithic (recent Stone Age) and geologically, as the Upper Pleistocene (recent Ice Age). Since the beginning of that period, about 30,000 years ago, there has been only one human subspecies on earth, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, known to anthropologists as physically Modern Man. The kind of Modern Man that occupied Europe was Cro-Magnon, typified by fossil remains found in France and believed to resemble contemporary Europeans. Compared to Neanderthal Man, Cro-Magnon Man was tall and light-boned, with small teeth and a pronounced chin.

These Upper Paleolithic people followed the reindeer herds that then populated Europe. In addition to the stabbing and slashing weapons used by the Neanderthals, they made new hunting tools: the spear-thrower, to bring down large mammals; the bow-and-arrow, to skewer birds; and the fish-hook, to catch underwater game.

To cultural anthropologists, the most interesting aspect of Upper Paleolithic European life is the art-work it produced. On the walls of Spanish and French caves, Cro-Magnon men painted strikingly life-like pictures of the many wild animals of their time. And they sculpted figurines, chiefly of buxom, pregnant-looking women. The wall-paintings are thought to reflect their concern for food and the figurines, their concern for reproduction.

Unlike their predecessors, Upper Paleolithic people were not confined to the Old World land-mass of Africa and Eurasia. They spread, presumably by raft, to Australia and the Americas. These and other accomplishments strongly suggest that they had language, even though they did not yet write it.

To the Paleolithic period described above, some archeologists add a Mesolithic, or Middle Stone Age, lasting from about 15,000 till about 10,000 years ago. The chief accomplishments of this period were the domestication of wolves, which became dogs, and the construction of sleds and boats for faster and more comfortable transportation over snow and open water.

The Pleistocene Ice Age ended around 10,000 years ago, giving way to the climatically milder Holocene Epoch in which we now live. The two chief differences between the Pleistocene and the Holocene were a pair of disappearances. The ice-sheet that covered northern Europe and much of North America vanished. So too did the Pleistocene megafauna—a collection of large mammals that we now know only from fossils or from Stone Age cave-paintings. Among these extinct animals are mammoths, woolly rhinoceroses, saber-toothed tigers, and giant cave-bears. Scholars still debate the causes of both the climatic shift and the extinctions. Some maintain that increasingly proficient Ice Age human hunters killed off these huge animals, although human populations were then so small as to make this explanation hard to believe.

### Neolithic Age

By about 5,000 BC, Europe underwent a cultural transformation, initiating the Neolithic, or New Stone Age. This period gets its name from the fact that stone tools, most of which had been chipped, to yield a rough surface, began to be ground, to yield a smooth surface. But the most crucial development of the Neolithic Period was not its stone-working technique. It was, rather, the shift from food extraction to food production, constituting the so-called Agricultural Revolution. Where Europeans had previously hunted game and gathered wild plants, they now began to domesticate both. Sheep, goats, and pigs became livestock. Such grasses as wheat, barley, and rye became crops. The combination of herding and tillage produced the farm-village complex, involving irrigation, food storage, and a rapid increase in population. Farming, in turn, was accompanied by such cottage industries as pottery and weaving, all of which conspired to make a formerly nomadic population sedentary.

One of the most mysterious developments that grew out of the Agricultural Revolution was the megalithic complex, which involved the construction of huge, if crude, stone monuments along most of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. Although the purpose of these monuments remains obscure, it is unquestionable that any society capable of erecting them without metal tools must have been well organized and highly motivated. Such motivation and organization may well have underlain the transformative European expansion of historic times.

### Indo-European Invasion

The last major occurrence in European prehistory was unquestionably the incursion of the Indo-Europeans from the east during the period from about 3,000 to 1,000 BC. The Indo-Europeans are so called because the speakers of their related languages are found from Europe through Iran to India to Bangladesh. The early Indo-Europeans were apparently an aggressive pastoral people who, though they could and did raise crops, more often migrated in search of better pasturage for their horses and cattle. Neither literate nor urban, they nonetheless smelted metals. From these they made weapons which, in combination with their mobility, enabled them to conquer or displace otherwise more culturally sophisticated peoples in southern and western Asia.

The major branches of the Indo-European family of languages are the following eight, each of which is represented here by a language spoken in Europe today. Of the languages that had been spoken in Europe before the Indo-Europeans ar-

rived, the only one that survives today is Basque, the language of Pyrenean sheep-herders on the Bay of Biscay in France and Spain.

Language Family	Representative Language
Germanic	English
Celtic	Welsh
Italic	Spanish
Hellenic	Greek
Thraco-Illyrian	Albanian
Baltic	Lithuanian
Slavic	Russian
Iranian	Ossete

## EUROPEAN HISTORY

Limitations of space prevent our giving Europe's recorded past the extensive attention that most historians would expect and demand. For brevity's sake we shall treat it as a sequence of cultural pulses.

### Minoan Civilization

The earliest of these pulses is the advent of that blend of urbanism, literacy, and metallurgy that culture theorists call civilization. The first civilization of Europe, called Minoan, was centered on the island of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean, beginning about 1000 BC. Minoan maritime culture was spread throughout the Aegean region by Cretan naval and commercial crews. By around 1400 BC, Indo-Europeans from the Balkan area had entered the Aegean shores. We know them as Greeks and their civilization as Hellenic. About 900 BC, a third people from this area apparently migrated westward to Italy, founding the Etruscan city-states of the province now called Tuscany.

### Macedonia and Rome

It is believed that these early southern European civil societies were mostly monarchial in their political organization. And monarchies, even more than other state organizations, tend to be expansionist. When one monarchy absorbs other monarchies or adjoining states, it becomes an empire. Two of the greatest empires of the ancient Mediterranean coasts were the Macedonian and the Roman. About 330 BC, the Macedonians from the northern shore of the Aegean Sea conquered the Greek city-states and then proceeded to absorb the Persian empire, which stretched from what is now Bulgaria eastward to what is now Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Romans were developing a powerful state adjacent to the Etruscans in Italy. By about 150 BC the Romans had annexed Carthage in North Africa, along with its colonies in Spain, Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. Soon thereafter it annexed Macedon and Greece. By about 125 AD the Roman Empire stretched from Scotland to Armenia and had no major military rivals in Europe, Africa, or Asia west of Iran.

### Carthaginians, Arabs, and Others

Despite the fact that Indo-Europeans have dominated Europe for the past 3,000 years, there was never a time when other linguistic groups were without influence on the continent. In Pre-Roman times, the Iberian peninsula was controlled by Carthaginians from what is now Tunisia. And, in post-Roman times, the same peninsula was controlled by Islamic Arabs from Morocco, whose civilization was one of the world's

most brilliant from about 900 to 1200 AD. Linguistically, both the Carthaginians and the Arabs were Semites, speaking languages related to Hebrew. (The Jews, most of whom migrated to Europe after the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD, maintained Hebrew only as a religious language. Their secular language came to be Yiddish, an Indo-European tongue closely related to German.)

Because the early Uralic-speaking peoples were preliterate, it is difficult to date their westward movement into Europe from the Ural mountains and valleys, but at least a dozen are known to have done so. Of these, the only conquering people were the Hungarians, who ruled a Balkan empire for centuries. The same dating problem pertains to the Altaic-speaking peoples, most of whom were Turkic, but a few were Mongolian. Of these, the only ones who are politically influential today are the Osmanli Turks of the Istanbul area who arrived there in the fourteenth century.

Most of these non-Indo-European peoples entering Europe seemed to the urban peoples already established there to be barbarians. It was, however, not so much their linguistic affinities as their nomadic habits that made the intruders seem barbarous. Around 350 AD, when the Roman Empire began to lose control of its northern frontiers, a host of Germanic migrants from the Rhineland and the North Sea and Baltic Sea coasts increasingly infiltrated southward. Chief among these tribal peoples were the Goths, who invaded Spain and Italy; the Franks, who conquered Gaul and changed its name to France; and the Vikings of Scandinavia, who raided the European coasts from the North Sea to the Black Sea. Rome had converted to Christianity in 313 AD, while the Germanic invaders remained pagan. The period of pagan incursions into southern Europe seemed to the people of the collapsing Roman Empire to be "Dark Ages." Between about 500 and 1000 AD, however, all the Germanic conquerors adopted Christianity and ceased pillaging urban churches and rural monasteries.

### Medieval Period

The political system that replaced the central authority of imperial Rome is known as feudalism. The period that was feudally organized is known as the Medieval period or, alternatively, "the Middle Ages" (between ancient Rome and modern Europe). Medieval feudalism was characterized by a weakening of royal authority and an increase in the power of local lords—princes, dukes, and lesser noblemen. The duty of the feudal lords was to protect local peasant farmers from outlaws and invaders. The reciprocal duty of the peasants was to provide food and labor as well as occasional military service to the lords. This system held sway in most parts of Europe between about 700 and 1400 AD.

In 1054, Medieval Christendom underwent a schism, or split, between its eastern and western branches. The eastern branch, centered in Constantinople (modern Istanbul), capital of the Byzantine Empire, is known as Orthodox Christianity. The western branch, centered in Rome, the religious capital of the so-called Holy Roman Empire, is known as Catholic Christianity. Although the Orthodox Byzantine world was in decay, occasioned partly by military incursions of Persians and Turks, the Roman Catholic world was increasing in wealth and power.

Christianity had originated in what was known as The Holy Land (equivalent to contemporary Israel, Lebanon, and Syria).

Since about 630, however, its birthplace had been in the hands of Islamic conquerors from Arabia. Roman Catholic Europe now felt sufficiently strong—and more than sufficiently adventurous—to attempt to reclaim the cradle of Christianity from its current occupants. From about 1100 to 1300, the Normans and other western Europeans launched a series of Crusades, or holy wars, against the Moslem Levant. Although the Crusaders temporarily occupied the Bible's sacred sites, they were eventually expelled. But because Islamic civilization was, during this period, generally more elegant and more sophisticated than Christian civilization, Europe emerged from the Crusades more worldly and less provincial than it had been in Medieval times.

During the crusading period, western European kingdoms reversed the flow of power from royalty to feudal lords. Monarchs began to dominate their nobility, especially in England and France. Recovery of centralized royal power had become evident in Denmark to the north as early as about 1000, and in Portugal to the south by about 1400. By around 1500, most of the subjects of these kings began to think of themselves more as members of national communities than as members of provincial communities. In short, the sentiment that we now know as nationalism had effectively replaced localism along the Atlantic seaboard.

#### Exploration and Colonization

Until the fifteenth century, the world's greatest navigators had been Asian. In pre-Roman times, the Phoenicians of what is now Lebanon had sailed around Africa. About 1400, Chinese admirals crossed the Indian Ocean to trade with East African Muslim rulers. Soon, however, the Portuguese replaced the Chinese in the southern seas. And in 1492 the Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic and made contact with native American Indians in the Caribbean islands.

Contact quickly turned to occupation. About 1500, the Portuguese claimed Brazil, and the Spanish began to colonize the rest of Latin America, enslaving or eliminating many of its indigenous peoples. In the sixteenth century, the French and English began competing for the conquest of North America. By the eighteenth century, English speakers had colonized the Atlantic coast, creating the populations that now constitute most of Canada and the United States. In the nineteenth century many western European nations extended their colonizing to Africa and Asia. Although most of the colonized nations regained their independence in the mid-twentieth century, many of them now employ English, French, or other European languages for official, academic, or commercial purposes.

#### Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation

Meanwhile, a cultural transformation was occurring within Western Europe. Beginning around 1300 in Italy, the otherworldly religious focus of life in Medieval Christendom was giving way to a Renaissance, or rebirth, of classical Greek and Roman learning. This rebirth was not merely intellectual but artistic. Italian architecture began to rival that of the ancient Greco-Roman world; Italian sculpture equaled its prototype; and Italian painting surpassed it.

By the sixteenth century, the Renaissance had moved north of the Alps, producing the humanistic scholarship of Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466–1536) in the Netherlands and the poetic dramas of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) in England. The artistic flowering of Renaissance Europe led, without any cre-

ative interruption, to the development of the seventeenth and eighteenth century styles that are known as Baroque and Rococo. An example of Baroque visual art is the painting of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) in the Netherlands; and, of Rococo auditory art, the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) in Austria.

Parallel to the secular pulse of the Renaissance was the religious pulse known as the Reformation. What they perceived as spiritual laxity and ethical corruption in the Roman Church in the sixteenth century led two northern reformers to create the Protestant movement. About 1520, Martin Luther (1483–1546) in Germany broke with the papacy, abolished monasticism, and created a new church that is now denominationally prevalent in most of north-central Europe. About 1540, John Calvin (1509–1664) in Switzerland abolished the confessional and established a reformed church that is ecclesiastically ancestral to most of the non-Lutheran Protestant denominations of Europe and America.

The Roman Catholic response to Protestantism was to create a self-purifying movement known as the Counter-Reformation. In Spain, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) created the Jesuit Society to reinvigorate the Church spiritually and intellectually. And in Italy, the papacy convened a lengthy church council at Trent, to reformulate Catholic doctrine. While most of northwestern Europe became Protestant and most of southwestern Europe remained Catholic, some countries, such as Germany, were religiously divided. This division led to a Thirty Years' War—from 1618 to 1648—which devastated much of central Europe.

The dramatic rise of experimental science occurred at the same time as both the artistic Renaissance and the religious Reformation. Some salient events in this burst of scientific creativity include the demonstration in 1543 by Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) that the Earth circles the sun (rather than vice-versa, as “common sense” suggests). In 1609, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) demonstrated that planets move elliptically around the sun, describing ovals (rather than perfect circles). In 1628, the English physician William Harvey (1578–1657) discovered the circulation of blood in the body. In 1638, the Italian physicist Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) conducted tests leading to his proposal of the law of acceleration of falling bodies. In 1662, the Royal Society of London was founded in England. Its best known president was Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), who invented calculus, proposed the corpuscular theory of light, and formulated the laws of gravity and motion, between 1669 and 1687.

#### Capitalism, Commonwealth, and Constitutions

During the feudal period of Medieval Europe, the economy was almost exclusively agricultural and barter was the chief means of exchange. When feudalism ended, capitalism made its appearance. Capitalism may be defined as a system in which the means of production are privately owned and prices are determined by free markets. It may be contrasted with state monopolies, in which the government controls both production and prices. During the sixteenth century, capitalism expanded rapidly, largely as a result of the rise of Calvinist Protestantism, which fostered industriousness and favored wealth—provided that wealth was invested frugally rather than expended luxuriously. In eighteenth century Britain, capitalism expanded fur-

ther when its focus shifted from trade to productive industries like textile manufacture.

Until the seventeenth century, every major nation in Europe had a monarchical form of government, headed by a duke, prince, king, or emperor. In 1649, however, the Puritan rebels against the Stuart kings abolished the British monarchy and replaced it with a Commonwealth, which was in effect a republic. Although the monarchy was restored shortly afterward, it was made constitutional—that is, republic-like—in 1685. In eighteenth century France, republicanism became increasingly popular among writers and scholars until, in 1789, the Bourbon monarchy was replaced by a republic. Soon afterward, French nationalism intensified French republicanism to generate a patriotic fervor never previously seen in Europe. A young general named Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) took advantage of this fervor to invade and occupy foreign countries from Spain to Russia. He then declared himself emperor. Until 1815 he ruled half of Europe. Although he was deposed and the old French monarchy restored, in 1870 France became a republic again and has remained so ever since. During the twentieth century, most former European monarchies became republics. Those that did not become constitutional monarchies, which may be described as *de facto* republics with royal figure-heads.

### Romanticism

One of Europe's great artistic movements, which peaked in the early nineteenth century but remains strong, is Romanticism. Romanticism may be defined as an outlook that values feeling above thinking, love above duty, and the extraordinary above the ordinary. It was initiated by the Medieval troubadours of southern France, who wooed aristocratic ladies platonically by singing under their balcony windows. It did not become pan-European until the eighteenth century, when the newly prosperous middle class first defined an ideal marriage as one contracted between a man and a woman who had previously fallen in love. Decades later, Romanticism pervaded music, painting, and above all, literature. It is perhaps most fully exemplified by the lives of the English poets John Keats (1795–1821), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and Lord Byron (1788–1824). Besides being widely read, these three friends made enviable pilgrimages to glamorous Mediterranean shores and died dramatically premature deaths.

### Democracy, Socialism, and Scientism

Modern European ideologies are, for the most part, products of the past few centuries. The political ideal is democracy, as manifest in the parliamentary government of republics and constitutional monarchies. This democracy is usually associated with the economic system known as capitalism. (In 1917, the Russian monarchy was overthrown by republicans whose goal was to empower the proletariat, or working class, not the middle class as in previous revolutions. Their ideology, which separated democracy from capitalism, was Marxism, the doctrine of Karl Marx (1818–83), a nineteenth century German scholar who lived in England. In place of capitalism, Marx advocated public ownership of the means of production. He referred to partial attainment of such ownership as socialism and to total attainment as communism. Though Russian communism was militarily successful and politically influential for seven decades, its national embodiment, the Soviet Union, collapsed in 1991. Since then, there have been no communist states in Eu-

rope. Most Europeans now doubt that democratic government can be effectively separated from a capitalistic economy.)

Outside the realm of politics and economics, the dominant European ideology is probably scientism, or the conviction that most contemporary problems can best be solved by applying to them the rigorously logical and experimental methods of science and mechanical technology. In a broad sense, this scientism can be equated with modernism, the belief that Medieval supernaturalism is impractical and irrelevant to material matters.

With regard to personal problems of an emotional nature, the most inventive response of the past century has probably been psychoanalysis, the therapeutic method devised by the Austrian physician Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) between 1882 and 1939. Freud saw most internal mental conflict as due to repression of unacceptable sexual urges into unconsciousness. For him, therapy meant bringing these unconscious inclinations increasingly into consciousness. Although many psychiatrists reject Freudianism as being no less cultist than Marxism, there is no question that psychoanalytic ideas have deeply influenced literature, psychological theory, and popular thought.

Between 1815 and 1914, scientism and modernism were accompanied by a profound and growing faith in human progress, it being implicitly understood that this progress was spear-headed by western Europe. But the two World Wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45, both of which centered on Europe, shook this faith. So too did the Holocaust, a non-military extermination of millions of Jews and Gypsies by Germany's National Socialist government toward the end of World War II.

Nineteenth century optimism was partially regained during the 1950s, when Europe recovered its prosperity and began to exploit atomic energy and to explore interplanetary space. Apprehension remained, however, over the danger that atomic energy would be used to produce bombs of the type that had devastated Japan and that rockets would be used to deliver those bombs more swiftly and irresistibly.

### European Economic Community

To make the Space Age and the Atomic Age times of promise rather than of terror, Europe's statesmen began meeting soon after the German surrender of 1945. By 1949, they had established the Council of Europe, a continental proto-parliament, in Strasbourg; and, by 1957, the European Economic Community (better known as the Common Market) in Rome and Brussels. The purpose of these and other transnational bodies was ultimately to create a "United States of Europe" or its equivalent, preventing war between the constituent states of the continent. Events in eastern Europe, however, seem to have run against this unifying aspiration: the Soviet Union split into 15 independent nations and Yugoslavia into five. Furthermore, one of the formerly Yugoslavian states, Bosnia, erupted into civil war, which was stifled only by United Nations military intervention. To counter this persistent ethnic separatism and rekindle pan-Europeanism, the continent has little to offer beyond unconquerable hope and the equally persistent yearning for unity.

## THE ECONOMY

Europeans have been farming, trading and engaging in small-scale manufacture since prehistoric times. Today Europe's



farming is mechanized; its trade is accelerated by rapid transportation; and its manufacturing is done on a large scale. Europe is now one of the world's three economic power-houses (the other two being East Asia and North America).

Before the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, Europe's wealth consisted largely of farm produce. Although her arable land was restricted in comparison with that of Asia or North America, her fields were intensively cultivated. And, although her forests were being converted into farmland, her timber yield in the northern and eastern parts of the continent exceeded that of more heavily forested continents like Africa and South America. Moreover, her extensive Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts were the scene of productive fishing enterprises.

After the Industrial Revolution, Europe benefitted greatly from the fact that it was rich in coal and iron. There was oil in the eastern parts of the continent and hydroelectric potential in its northern regions. The first steam trains and gasoline automobiles were of European manufacture. Today, rail lines and highways link all European nations and, along with steamships and airplanes, connect Europe speedily and profitably with other continents, both developed and developing.

About seven percent of the Western European population holds stock in major corporations like Unilever in Britain, Phillips in the Netherlands, Michelin in France, Fiat in Italy, or Volvo in Sweden. Such ownership is only about half as prevalent as stock-holding in North America, but it is twice that found in East Asia. As the cradle of Western Civilization, Europe has, for the past century, profited steadily from tourism. A majority of the cultural pilgrims to Europe come from Japan and the United States.

## TECHNOLOGY AND POPULATION

Ten thousand years ago, all the world's peoples were hunters and gatherers. Their technology was limited to the wooden weapons used to hunt game animals and the woven baskets used to carry edible wild plants. It is unlikely that, with such survival techniques and simple tools, all of humanity could have numbered more than ten million individuals.

In Europe, population began to grow about 5000 BC, when small-scale vegetable gardening increasingly supplemented or replaced foraging. Those who planted crops had a far more reliable source of food than those who merely harvested what nature, unaided, provided. Around 2000 BC, large-scale plow agriculture replaced dooryard gardens, leading to a further jump in population. When farms no longer needed big families, a growing number of rural folk drifted toward temple complexes and market centers, turning them into real cities, with palaces and military garrisons.

Population, however, does not invariably swell. Adverse circumstances can make it decline. The first time such a demographic decline seems to have occurred in Europe was about 500 AD, when the centralized authority of Rome failed to maintain imperial order. Marauding bands of Germanic migrants then crossed the northern borders, disrupting the transportation of food and trade-goods and resulting in depopulation. Many cities, including Rome itself, shrank to village size. Many farms were abandoned, with the land reverting to uncultivated wilderness.

This depopulation was not halted till around 1000 AD, when the Dark Ages were supplanted by a new Medieval order. Me-

dieval Europe grew around cathedral towns and royal capitals like London and Paris. Then in 1347, newly prosperous Europe was unexpectedly devastated by the Black Death, an epidemic of bubonic plague that had originated in East Asia and moved westward with lethal effect through Turkestan (a region of Asia that is now part of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, China, and Afghanistan) to the Black Sea coast. By 1400, this plague had wiped out a third of the European populace.

Since 1400, Europe's population has grown steadily. The first factor leading to population growth was the overseas colonization movement that exploited the resources of Africa and the Americas and brought wealth to all the Atlantic seaboard nations from Portugal to England. The second factor was the Industrial Revolution, which, soon after 1800, made Europe the manufacturing center of the world.

Since World War II, Europe's population growth has slowed despite continued growth in its industry, transportation, and communications. Among other reasons, this demographic slow-down may be due to European realization that small families are usually healthier and wealthier than large ones. Although Europe's total population is nearly a billion, it is now—alone among the continents—close to attaining zero population growth.

## LAW

Although law can be scientific or religious in nature, we shall discuss it here only in its social, political, and economic applications. The earliest European law-giver of whom we have any appreciable knowledge is Solon, an Athenian statesman of the sixth century BC. His great legislative achievement was to abolish enslavement for debt and generally to equalize the rich and the poor in their relationship to public authority.

### Roman and Common Law

The longest lasting of European juridical systems was Roman Law, which began in Etruscan Latium in the eighth century BC and lasted until the fall of the Byzantine empire in the fifteenth century AD. Initially, the Romans administered two kinds of justice—civil law for citizens of Rome and gentile law for conquered peoples. In the third century AD, however, this preferential system was abandoned in favor of a single standard of equal justice for all.

In England and its overseas colonies, Roman Law was largely superseded by Common Law. Common Law was a blend of Anglo-Saxon custom and Norman legislation. Before the Norman conquest of 1066 AD, wronged individuals and families had to seek redress for injustice from the parties who injured them. Thereafter, the courts of the British kings decided whether the law had been violated and how miscreants should pay for their misdeeds.

### Napoleonic Code

In 1804, the French emperor Napoleon promulgated his own legal system, the Napoleonic Code. This code integrated various previous systems—local custom, ecclesiastical standards, royal edicts, and revolutionary justice—into a universalized system of law. The Napoleonic Code has remained prevalent in France and its colonies as well as influential in most of those European countries which the French, however briefly, conquered and controlled.

In the seventeenth century, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and other Dutch jurists began developing a code of international law to supplement the national codes of England, France, and other countries. Although international law is far harder to enforce than national law, it did exhibit coercive power in the Nuremberg trials after World War II, when Germany's National Socialist leaders were tried and, in some cases, executed for war crimes or crimes against humanity. It is the hope of ecumenically minded Europeans that such law will gain strength in the coming century and deter, if not wholly prevent, genocidal warfare.

## GOVERNMENT

The earliest European governments of which we have written records were the limited monarchies of the Greek city-states, such as Athens and Sparta, beginning around 1200 BC. What limited these monarchies was the countervailing power of hereditary aristocracies and free yeoman farmers, who defended their communities in time of war. Like Athens, Rome was ruled by kings until about 500 BC.

Relatively democratic republican governments then replaced the monarchies in both Athens and Rome, with elections by popular assemblies. Within a few centuries, however, these classical democracies were replaced by expansive monarchies of an imperialistic cast. For centuries, much of ancient Europe was controlled by the Macedonian and Roman empires; Medieval Europe, by the so-called Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Turkish empire; and modern Europe by the Czarist Russian empire.

Intermittently, both monarchies and republics have become dictatorships, ruled despotically by men who were neither traditionally nor constitutionally authorized. During the sixth century BC, Athens was so ruled by Peisistratos (600–527 BC) and his sons, who were officially called tyrannoi (whence the English word “tyrant”). The most famous of Rome's dictators was, of course, Julius Caesar (100–44 BC), who was assassinated by the last Roman republicans in 44 BC. During the seventeenth century, England was ruled by Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), who, though entitled the Lord Protector, exercised dictatorial power. In the twentieth century, Europe's two most powerful dictators were the Austrian Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), who held Germany and its conquered territories, and the Georgian Josef Stalin (1879–1943), who held the Soviet Union and most of eastern Europe from a power base in Russia.

City-states are extensions of single municipalities. Although they have sometimes controlled overseas holdings through naval power, they have rarely equaled nation-states or empires in area. In ancient Europe, the most influential city-state was undoubtedly Athens under General Pericles (c.490–429 BC). In Medieval Europe, it was probably Venice, which controlled much of the trade in the Mediterranean Sea. In modern Europe, city-states like Monaco (in France, but not part of it) and San Marino (in Italy, but not part of it) survive mostly as historical curiosities, having virtually no political weight among nations.

### Associations among Nations

Associations of independent nations have not been common. During the fourth century BC, the twelve-state Achaean League of southern Greece tried valiantly but unsuccessfully to prevent the conquest of Greece by the expanding Macedo-

nian Empire to its north. During the Middle Ages, the sea-faring cities of northern Germany created the Hanseatic League, to regulate and control trade in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. In our century, two such associations have been created. The first of these was the League of Nations, headquartered in Geneva, which, after World War I, tried unsuccessfully to restrain Italy, Germany, and Japan from launching the military adventures that led to World War II. The second was the United Nations Organization, headquartered in New York but maintaining offices in Europe. The United Nations has many more members than the defunct League of Nations had. It also has the power to intervene militarily in interethnic conflicts in places like Cyprus and Bosnia. But whether it can exercise comparable control over the major nations remains to be seen.

Occasionally, leagues like these can themselves become nations. An example of such a development is Switzerland, which began as a confederation of Medieval Alpine cantons, or provinces, of the Holy Roman Empire in central Europe.

The type of territorial unit best known in contemporary Europe is, obviously, the nation-state. Nation-states are usually larger than city-states but smaller than empires. They are characterized by territorial continuity and by designation of a single vernacular as the official national language. During the Middle Ages, England and France were the first such nation-states to emerge from the ruins of the Roman Empire. In modern Europe, nearly every large ethnic territory from Spain to Russia has become a nation-state. In recent centuries, the political trend in most of these states has been to move from absolute monarchy through constitutional monarchy to democratically elective republican government.

Of all the states of twentieth century Europe, the most anomalous has been the Soviet Union. In some respects, it functioned as a nation, and in others as an association of nations. In terms of the wording of its constitution, it had the most democratic structure on earth. In practice, however, it was one of the most repressive of totalitarian countries. In the 1990s, it dissolved into a cluster of independent nations with complex relations to one another and to its core nation, Russia.

## WARFARE

Among the positive traits technically cited as typical of civilization are urbanism, literacy, and metalworking. But civilization also has negative traits, foremost among which is war. All civilized societies have military institutions, even if, like Switzerland, some have not actually waged war for over a century.

Like the growth of population, the evolution of warfare depends largely on the development of technology. The earliest military invention to which we can assign even a rough date in European history is the war chariot. This Bronze Age innovation was a horse-drawn two-wheeled chariot that added a speed and mobility to battle that had been lacking in the clash of foot soldiers. About 1400 BC, aristocratic warriors from Mycenaean Greece used chariots in their invasion and conquest of Minoan Crete, which, despite its strong navy, lacked swift and effective ground forces.

Around 1000 BC, iron replaced bronze (a copper alloy) as the metal of choice in southeastern Europe. Although iron swords and daggers are not always sharper than bronze weapons, iron is more widely available than copper and its alloys, such as brass and bronze. The result was a democratization of warfare.

Yeoman farmers who had been unable to afford bronze weaponry could now tip their spears and arrows with iron. Well-armed bodies of foot soldiers soon became much larger than in the Bronze Age.

The next Iron Age military innovation was the creation of the phalanx in Greece in the sixth century BC. A phalanx is a tight formation of foot soldiers with large shields and long spears that is virtually impenetrable to attacks by uncoordinated individual assailants. The city-state that made most effective use of the phalanx was Sparta, which defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War of the late fifth century BC.

About the same time, the Scythians, a nomadic herding people from north of the Black Sea, began riding *on* horses rather than, as Mediterranean charioteers did, *behind* horses. Horsemen without chariots to pull can move even faster and maneuver more agilely than charioteers. By the third century BC, most of the herding peoples of the Eurasian steppes had put leather saddles and stirrups on their horses, making it easier than it had been in bare-back days for riders to hold their seats during raids and battles. This style of riding quickly spread throughout Europe, giving rise to what we know as cavalry.

In the second century BC, the conquering Romans began building stone roads, over which their legions could march easily and speedily from one military theater to another. To prevent erosion of their horses' hooves, they invented detachable horseshoes. The roads were built so well that, in Britain, they remain visible on the moors, and in rural Albania, people still travel on them. The only Roman engineering feat that remains more conspicuous than roads is the system of aqueducts, bringing water to cities and military garrisons all over southern and western Europe. Those in France remain prominent features of the landscape, and one in Segovia, Spain, is still used.

Because they included not only heavy infantry but also light infantry and cavalry, the Roman legions were more flexible and adaptable than Greek phalanxes. But, as Roman discipline began to falter in the fourth century AD, highly mobile horsemen from northern Eurasia were increasingly successful in raiding and looting the urban regions of Europe. From the Huns to the Mongols of the 13th century, steppe nomads put Christendom on the defensive. Heavily armored medieval knights could not move quickly enough to deal effectively with herding peoples who virtually lived on horseback.

Two fourteenth century inventions served to restore Europe's military advantage over the steppe peoples. The first of these was the archery long-bow, used by British yeomen to decimate French cavalry during the Hundred Years War. The second was gun powder, possibly a Chinese invention, that made it feasible to hurl projectiles from muskets and cannons. Thereafter, the only Asians who succeeded in conquering parts of Europe were those, like the Ottoman Turks of the seventeenth century, who adopted Western military technology.

The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century transformed European warfare by the introduction of large-scale steel manufacture. This permitted the making of long-range cannon and steel battle ships, as well as rapid transportation of troops by rail.

Twentieth century technology augmented this armament with battle tanks, machine guns, military aircraft, and long-range missiles. Since 1945, the specter of atomic warfare has haunted all continents, including Europe. The millions who

died in World Wars I and II could become billions in an unrestricted thermonuclear exchange. The prevention of this prospect has become one of the primary goals of contemporary European diplomacy.

## INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Europe's intellectual life unquestionably began in ancient Greece. Before the development of philosophy, Greek education consisted chiefly of memorizing passages from Homer's epic poetry and engaging in gymnastic exercise. The first Greek philosophers appeared in the fifth century BC. Known as Sophists, they were itinerant teachers, who, for a fee, would instruct their clients in the kinds of verbal skills needed to win a law case or an election. The Sophists were soon followed by the most famous ancient philosophers: Socrates (469–399 BC), who employed dialogue to arrive at insights; his pupil, Plato (c.428–c.348 BC), who founded the first academy; and Plato's pupil, Aristotle (384–322 BC), who served as the tutor of Prince Alexander (356–323 BC) of Macedon.

In the fourth century, science began to emerge from philosophy. The earliest Greek physical scientist, in the modern sense of that phrase, was Democritus (c.460–c.370 BC), who originated atomic theory. The founder of medical ethics, as still taught, was the Greek physician Hippocrates (c.460–c.377 BC). The first mathematician was the geometrist Euclid (fl.300 BC).

During the Hellenistic Period that followed the Macedonian conquest, the Greeks developed, and the Romans continued, the liberal arts tradition, which balanced literary with scientific skills. Another intellectual link between Greece and Rome was the philosophy of Stoicism, which provided a pan-European ethic between the time of Plato and the advent of Christianity. Except in the areas of administration and engineering, the Romans were not intellectual innovators. They served rather to convey classical Greek educational standards to the rest of the continent.

During the Dark Ages, after the fall of Rome in 476, scholarship languished. What little remained was preserved in Christian monasteries and in Iberian centers of Islamic learning.

## Birth of the University

The great academic achievement of the Middle Ages that followed was the creation of universities, whose professors were initially all priests. All of those universities remain major educational institutions today. The oldest universities are Bologna in Italy and Oxford in England; Paris in France and Cambridge in England; Prague in Bohemia and Heidelberg in the Palatinate (both at that time included in the Holy Roman Empire, or Medieval Germany).

In the sixteenth century, Europe underwent a Scientific Revolution, beginning with the heliocentric hypothesis of Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, who showed that the earth orbited the sun rather than the reverse. This revolution culminated in the work of Sir Isaac Newton, head of England's Royal Society, who formulated the Law of Gravity.

In the seventeenth century, the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) established the Social Contract theory, which served as the basis of liberal parliamentarianism in Britain, France, and America. In the eighteenth century, the English economist Adam Smith (1723–90) created the theoretical foundation of free-market capitalism. In the nineteenth cen-

tury, for the first time, science became part of the standard curriculum of colleges and universities. And, in Germany, the Kindergarten movement led most European and other Western nations to adopt pre-school training as a means of preparing very young children for formal schooling.

Late in the nineteenth century, the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–82) made evolution part of the intellectual equipment of most scientifically oriented people. Just as Copernicus had removed our planet from the center of the astronomic stage, Darwin removed our species from the center of the biological stage. Both scholars made it harder for the thinking public to continue regarding terrestrial humanity as God's favorites or as lords of creation.

In the twentieth century, ancient Greek atomic theory bore fruit in atomic technology. This technology took two forms—one peaceful and the other military. The peaceful form was the use, in many parts of Europe, of atomic power as a means of generating electricity for domestic and industrial use. The military form was the construction of missile-borne thermonuclear weapons in England, France, Russia, and Ukraine.

The major institutional innovation of the twentieth century is probably the establishment of “think tanks,” such as the Max Planck Institute for scientific research in Germany. Think tanks are designed to be on the cutting edge of intellectual exploration in every discipline, but especially those with medical, agricultural, and other practical applications.

The major technological innovation of the century is probably the computerization of communication, research, record-keeping, and storage of information, including in libraries. The chief purpose of computer use is to free human beings from such tedious tasks as computation and information retrieval and to permit them to devote their time and energy to more creative pursuits.

## RELIGIOUS FAITHS AND PRACTICES

Religion is not easy to define. In its popular form, it cannot readily be distinguished from magic. In its theological form, on the other hand, it scarcely differs from philosophy.

The earliest European religious practices for which we have tangible evidence were the ritual burials and skull-shrine constructions of Neanderthal Man from the Middle Paleolithic Period. In the Upper Paleolithic Period that followed, Cro-Magnon Man painted his caves with animal shapes, which many archeologists interpret as expressions of hunting magic. During the subsequent Neolithic Period, preliterate farmers erected megaliths—huge stone arrangements that seem to have been correlated with the changing movements of stars or planets. Insofar as these celestial objects were regarded as divine beings, megalithic structures may have constituted religious architecture.

In historic times, the Greeks and Romans wrote explicitly about their pantheons of polytheistic deities, many of whom—such as Jupiter, king of Rome's gods—were associated with planets. Others—such as Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love—were associated with human interests and activities. (From her name, we derive the word aphrodisiac, meaning something eaten or drunk to make one amorous.) Although all Europeans are now monotheistic, evidence of ancient polytheism is found in calendric names: Thursday was named for the old Germanic god of thunder, and the month of January was named for Janus, the Roman god of passages. Pagan temples,

such as the Parthenon in Athens or the Pantheon in Rome, also survive to remind Europeans of their early religious beliefs.

When the power of the Roman Empire began to wane in the late second century AD, the authority of traditional Roman polytheism also waned. For spiritual consolation, Romans and their subject peoples turned increasingly to African and Asian creeds and liturgies. Among these were the worship of Isis, the Cult of the Unconquered Sun; Mithraism and Manicheism; and Judaism and Christianity. It was not until the fourth century that Christianity emerged as the official religion of the Roman Empire.

During the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages, Christianity spread northward and westward. By the time of the Renaissance, all of Europe was predominantly Christian in affiliation. Like most successful ideological movements, however, Christianity experienced sectarian divisions. In the eleventh century, Catholic Christianity, centered in Rome, separated from Orthodox Christianity, centered in Constantinople (previously called Byzantium and now called Istanbul). Roman Catholics believed that Rome should be the acknowledged ecclesiastical capital of all Christendom, whereas Orthodox Christians held to the older doctrine that regional patriarchates in such places as Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Russia should be granted ecclesiastical self-rule.

During the sixteenth century, Martin Luther in Germany and John Calvin in Switzerland initiated the Protestant Reformation, separating most of northwestern Europe from the Roman Communion. Protestants went even further than the Orthodox in asserting local ecclesiastical autonomy. The result was that, instead of a single Protestant Christian church, Protestantism produced a cluster of independent churches—Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, and others.

For centuries in most parts of rural Europe there has existed a belief system distinct from (though not antagonistic to) the biblical faiths of Judaism and Christianity. This system, which is strongest in Ireland, is sometimes referred to as “the Fairy Faith.” Its adherents believe in a host of spiritual beings, ranging from playful elves to ghosts of the dead but not equatable with scriptural angels and demons. Jewish and Christian authorities usually respond to this faith by ignoring it. When this proves impossible, they resort, with debatable success, to exorcising those spirits that seem to be possessing members of religious congregations.

Two other systems of thought that appear to have religious aspects are astrology and alchemy. Like the Fairy Faith, they probably antedate Christianity and stem from the ancient Near East. Astrology is the belief that the movements and conjunctions of heavenly bodies, when properly interpreted, foretell future developments in human affairs, both individual and collective. Alchemy is the belief that physical substances can be transmuted (without the use of “atom-smashers”) and, in particular, that lead can be transformed into gold. Most modern opinion leaders—religious as well as scientific—now dismiss these beliefs as superstitions. But it is worth noting that even such a quintessentially authoritative scientist as Sir Isaac Newton not only took these systems seriously, but wrote extensively about them, not as a critic but as a contributor.

A nineteenth century system of thought that seems closer to the Fairy Faith than to biblical tradition is Spiritualism. Beginning in the United States, it quickly spread to England and then to mainland Europe. Spiritualism is the belief that,

through mediumistic seances, one can contact the spirits of the dead and thereby alleviate the grief and loneliness of the bereaved.

In the twentieth century, Humanism has come to replace Judaism and Christianity among many rationalistically minded heirs of the biblical tradition. Although some Humanists consider themselves members of a new religious community while others do not, all agree in placing secular ethics before supernatural beliefs. Most Humanists regard themselves as advocates of the Greco-Roman tradition of “sweet reasonableness” in dealing with the most conflict-ridden issues in human life.

Some European rationalists eschew all of the foregoing labels, on the grounds that religiosity is inevitably irrational. They point to religious differences as the chief cause of wars and atrocities in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and the countries of the Caucasus. Many religious thinkers counter that religious faith, which usually counsels love and social harmony, cannot engender violent conflict. Instead, they say, unscrupulous political leaders use religious differences as a smoke screen to cover their personal or partisan lust for power over rival ethnic groups.

## THE ARTS

Like religion, art overlaps extensively with other spheres of activity. In artifact design, it merges with craft; in architecture, with engineering; and in medicine, with science.

Among the visual arts, painting is preeminent. Although most ancient European painting has been lost, we still have murals from the ancient Aegean islands and vase paintings from mainland Greece. Many art historians hold that the pinnacle of European painting was reached in Renaissance Italy, the most striking example of which may be Michelangelo’s religious works in the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel in Rome. Other connoisseurs prefer the more secular Baroque portraits by Rembrandt in Amsterdam.

Music, when unrecorded (as most has been), is the most evanescent of the arts. Although Pythagoras (sixth century BC) and other ancient Greek scholars developed sophisticated mathematical descriptions of musical intervals, neither the Greeks nor the Romans have left us a written musical notation system adequate for the contemporary performance of ancient musical compositions. Written notation became adequate only in the Middle Ages. The Renaissance developed contrapuntal polyphony, combining diverse melodic lines. The following Baroque Period witnessed the expanded use of keyboard instruments—organ, harpsichord, and, finally, piano. Symphony orchestras reached maturity in the subsequent Rococo style. For many musicologists, the culmination of Western musical art was Classical, or pre-Romantic, composition, exemplified by the early nineteenth century concertos and symphonies of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) in Germany.

Verbal art can be either oral or written. When oral, it is often called oratory. Perhaps the most famous orator in European history was Demosthenes (d.413 BC) of Athens, celebrated for his Philippics—a series of speeches designed to arouse Greek opposition to the imperialistic ambitions of King Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great.

When written, verbal art is known as literature. It takes at least three distinct forms—historiography, poetry, and fiction. Historiography is the recording of historical events. The writ-

er generally regarded as having been Europe’s first historian is Herodotus of Athens (c.485–425 BC), whose *History* was not only a chronological listing of past events, but also a cultural survey of non-Greek peoples, and a travel guide to foreign countries.

Most poetry takes the form of verse, involving regular sound repetition, such as meter or rhyme. One of the greatest European poems ever written is *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) of Florence, Italy. Completed in 1314, it is a long religious narrative describing heaven, hell, and purgatory. In Italy, it defined Tuscan as the standard form of literary Italian. Outside Italy, it provided an authoritative picture of the soul’s afterlife for most of Christendom.

Fiction is a vaguer literary form. Its most popular subform is undoubtedly the novel, which may be described as a prose epic. Many literary critics regard *War and Peace* by Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) as the greatest European novel ever written. Published in 1869, it describes Napoleon’s unsuccessful invasion of Russia in the early nineteenth century.

The only major kinesthetic art, involving expressive body-movement, is dance, which may be the world’s oldest and most universal art. The most distinctively European dance form is ballet, which originated in fifteenth century Italy as dance theatre. Many dance historians believe that ballet reached its peak in St. Petersburg, Russia, under the tutelage of impresario Sergei Diaghilev in the early twentieth century.

Some arts are blends of sensory types. Sculpture, for example, blends visual with tactile art. Sculpture is widely regarded as having reached an early culmination during the Golden Age of Greece in the fifth century BC. By general consensus, the greatest ancient sculptor was Phidias of Athens, who created the 20-meter (60-foot) statue of Zeus at Olympia—considered at the time to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. (The Italian sculptors of the European Renaissance emulated their Greek predecessors. Whether the Italians equaled or exceeded the Greeks cannot be determined, since the Greek statuary masterpieces survive only in small copies.)

Architecture blends visual art with engineering technology. As in the case of sculpture, critics disagree about the relative artistic merits of Classical Greco-Roman temples and Christian European cathedrals. And, even among those who favor cathedrals, admiration is almost equally divided between Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles. Greco-Roman temples, however, strongly resembled those of Pharaonic Egypt and the ancient Near East. In terms, therefore, of a distinctively European (or non-Afro-Asian) style, the palm should probably be awarded to Gothic cathedrals, in view of the fact that the Gothic style was least derivative from Greco-Roman—and hence from non-European—models. The greatest of medieval gothic cathedrals were probably those of Amiens, Chartres, and Reims from thirteenth century France, all of which survive to this day.

Drama blends visual with both auditory and literary art. Literary historians have consistently rated verse drama above prose drama. Poetic drama thrived in ancient Greece as well as in seventeenth century England, Spain, and France. Most critics now consider William Shakespeare the greatest of European dramatists and *Hamlet* the greatest of his tragedies. More traditionally minded classicists, however, continue to maintain the view that no subsequent writer has excelled the Athe-

nian tragedian Sophocles (c.496–405 BC), and that no play has equaled his Oedipus trilogy.

Since the early nineteenth century, European art has become increasingly experimental and decreasingly inclined to emulate older models. Pessimists view this experimentalism as a sign of stylistic decay, while optimists view it as a promise of renewed creativity to come. But few observers deny that European art is in a state of ferment, the esthetic outcome of which remains to be seen.

## FOLKLORE

Folklore is the tradition of the less sophisticated members of society. Until recently, most European folklore came from its peasant farmers. The folklore of Europe is distinct from that of other continents in several respects. Europe has a more homogeneous culture than do Asia and Africa. Unlike other continents, Europe has no professional storytellers to transmit its folklore orally from generation to generation. Because most continents still have preliterate peoples, they maintain a traditional ban on reciting inherited narratives during certain hours of the day or seasons of the year. In Europe, however, traditional tales may be told at any time when people have leisure to listen.

The best-known form of folklore is folk literature. Folk literature takes three major forms: myth, legend, and folktale. Myth deals mainly with supernatural beings, such as the pagan deities of early Europe. Pre-Christian stories about the amorous adventures of the Greek god Zeus are representative myths. Legend deals mainly with human beings for whom no firm historical records exist. Stories about Britain's King Arthur and the knights of his Round Table are legendary. Folktale typically concerns animals with the ability to talk and engage in behavior that can be morally evaluated. Fables such as that of *The Hare and the Tortoise* exemplify folktales.

In addition to these types of narratives, which are found world-wide, Europe has one that is more distinctive. This narrative is the fairy-tale, which combines natural with supernatural beings, humans with animals, and commoners with royalty. Typical of this type are the stories of Cinderella or Jack and the Beanstalk, in which humble youngsters attain regal status or fabulous wealth.

Not all folklore, however, is purely verbal in nature. Some is artistic, involving music, drama, or handicrafts. Examples are European ballad-singing, Maypole dancing, and the cottage manufacture of dolls, toys, or embroidered lace. Some celebra-

tions, such as Christmas miracle-plays or pre-Lenten carnivals, merge several different folkloristic performances.

Some folklorists fear that folk traditions will soon disappear in Europe. Others believe that old rural traditions will be progressively transformed into stories and practices that represent the increasingly urban and mechanized life-style of modern Europe.

## SPORTS

Explicit recognition of public athletic competition began with the Olympic Games of Greece, traditionally dated to the eighth century BC. The core event of the games was the pentathlon, which consisted of foot-racing, broad-jumping, throwing the discus and the javelin, and wrestling. Boxing and horse-racing were added to these events before the ancient games ended in Roman times. The Greeks themselves honored Olympic victors by writing odes and carving statues in their honor.

The imperial Romans had a more brutal taste in competitive sport. They forced slaves and war-captives to engage in physical combat with animals or with one another. The combatants, called gladiators, rarely survived many mortal contests in public arenas like the Colosseum. Medieval sport was more humane only in the sense that people were no longer killed for general entertainment. But bears were publicly baited—that is, prodded and stabbed till they died. This mode of amusement survives in the bull-rings of Spain and Portugal.

Modern Europe has a preference for ball-games—football (known as soccer in America), basketball, and volleyball as well as tennis and golf. But competitive fencing, bicycling, swimming, and rowing are also popular. So too are gymnastic events of various kinds.

Some games remain peculiar to a particular country. Examples are British cricket (similar to American baseball) and rugby (similar to American football).

In 1896 the Olympic Games were revived—first in Greece, later throughout Europe, and eventually on other continents. To the ancient events, archery, sailing, and track-and-field competitions were added. In 1924, Winter Olympics were inaugurated in the French Alps. These new events included skating, skiing, tobogganing, and ice-hockey.

Not all sports, of course, are competitive in nature. European children have long enjoyed swings and hobby-horses as well as playing pick-a-back. Today, increasingly affluent European adults enjoy beach vacations and tours of foreign countries. Those with limited budgets can still back-pack to less populous areas and find inexpensive hostels in which to stay.

# ABKHAZIANS

**LOCATION:** Georgia (de jure within Georgia, de facto independent from Georgia)

**POPULATION:** Unknown but under 100,000 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Abkhazian

**RELIGION:** Islam; Christianity; pagan beliefs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Until the early 1990s, the Abkhazians were best known for their unusually long and active lives and a Black Sea coastal resort. In August 1992, soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Abkhazians made newspaper headlines as participants in a tragic armed conflict that erupted between them and the Georgians, a neighboring ethnic group (see separate entry). The dispute was over Abkhazia's post-Soviet status. The conflict led to the deaths of thousands of citizens, and it generated tens of thousands of refugees. Negotiations persisted in many formats over the years but never resulted in a peace treaty. In August 2008, war broke out again and the remaining Georgians in Kodori Gorge, Abkhazia, were expelled. After the war, which on the Abkhazian side was largely directed by the Russian army, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia. Only Nicaragua followed Russia's example. The international community still considers Abkhazia part of Georgia.

Abkhazians fear their extinction as a people, which has consolidated them as a group and shaped their collective cultural identity. In the 2003 census, which is disputed by the Georgians, there were fewer than 100,000 Abkhazians. The group's shared sense of vulnerability heavily influences their attitudes and behavior in interpersonal relations with each other and with non-Abkhazians, as well as their transmission of cultural values from generation to generation.

The Abkhazians are Caucasians. They typically have narrow faces, fair skin, and dark hair and eyes. Redheads are rare, and blondes even rarer. Gray hair appears quite late, and baldness is uncommon. They tend to be slender and have erect posture. Linguistically, culturally, and genetically, Abkhazians are related to the Abazins (or Abaza), Adyghey, Kabardians, and Circassians. These groups have always been neighbors of the Abkhazians in the Caucasus, but in the post-Soviet era have been separated from the Abkhazians because they live within the borders of Russia, in the North Caucasus. All of these peoples share many cultural traits, and in their large communities outside the former Soviet Union (in Turkey, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States for example), they have a fairly clear collective identity and are commonly known as Circassians.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Abkhazia covers 8,500 sq km (3,300 sq mi) between the eastern shores of the Black Sea and the crestline of the main Caucasus range and from the rivers Psou (in the north) and Inguri (in the south). To the north, Abkhazia is bordered by Russia and to the south by the Georgian provinces of Svanetia and Mingrelia. Approximately 74% of the territory is mountains or mountain approaches. The coastal valleys are humid and subtropical. At higher altitudes the weather ranges from moderately cold to areas with temperatures so low that the snow never melts.

The relatively small distance between the coast and mountains gives Abkhazia a strikingly contrasting landscape.

Abkhazia has prime seacoast resorts that were always crowded with vacationers from all over the Soviet Union. Major cash crops are tea, tobacco, and citrus fruit. The two largest cities are Sukhumi, the capital, with a pre-1992 population of 100,000, but which now looks totally empty, and Tkvarcheli, an industrial center known for its coal. There are three urban resorts (Gagra, Gudauta, and Ochamchira), two rural spas (Pitsunda and Novy Afon), and 575 villages.

Abkhazians describe their country as harsh but beautiful. A legend says that when God was distributing land to all the peoples of the earth, the Abkhazians were entertaining guests. Because it would have been impolite for hosts to leave before their guests, the Abkhazians arrived late, and all that God had left were some stones. Out of these he created a land that was hard to cultivate but paradise-like in its beauty.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Abkhazian language belongs to the northwest Caucasian family spoken by only the Abazins, Adyghey, Kabardians, and Circassians. There are very few words borrowed from other languages. Abkhazian is quite difficult to learn, although the large variety of consonants and vowels enables Abkhazians to pronounce foreign languages fairly precisely. The modified Russian Cyrillic alphabet currently in use does not fully represent the sounds of Abkhazian, which include a wavering trill, whistling noises, and a prolonged buzz. Much of the vocabulary preserves concrete images in the form of metaphor, for example, "helping leg" for staff and "mother's blood" for mother's brother. The language is rich in proverbs that guide everyday behavior and values.

The ability to make eloquent speeches is a highly prized and cultivated skill. It is the primary requirement for elders and community mediators, people held in the highest esteem in Abkhazian society. Ordinary people are also expected to make long and eloquent speeches and toasts at the family gatherings and public events that are a common feature of daily life. Many Abkhazians speak Russian as their first language.

Common girls' first names are *Amra*, *Asida*, *Gunda*, *Esma*, and *Naala*. Common boys' first names are *Adgur*, *Akhra*, *Daur*, *Alkhas*, and *Gudisa*. Prominent surnames are *Achba*, *Agrba*, *Avidzba*, *Kutsnia* (or *Kvitsinia*), and *Adleiba*, *Shamba*.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The oldest folk tales are about the Atzan midgits and the giant Narts. The Atzans were so small that they could walk on the stems of leaves, but they also displayed great physical power and courage. The downfall of the Atzans came when they rejected the existence of any authority, including God. They defiled their water sources and committed other sacrileges that compelled God to destroy them by fire. The Nart epics are shared by peoples throughout the North Caucasus. The Narts were warriors who fought, hunted, feasted, and engaged in martial games. They were the hundred giant sons of the same mother, Sataney-Guasha, who was known for her great beauty, perennial youth, and wisdom. Her husband became old and feeble and was not held in esteem. The brothers had one sister, named Gunda, whose beauty and gentleness drove her sisters-in-law to plot to kill her, and for this they were punished. The Nart tales depict Sataney-Guasha, the mother-in-law, as the



victim of her scheming daughters-in-law, in contrast to European tales, where mothers-in-law are the most likely villains.

## 5 RELIGION

Christianity was brought to Abkhazia from Byzantium in the 6th century, and the Sunni sect of Islam was introduced by the Turks in the 15th and 16th centuries. Neither of these religions, however, ever completely eroded pagan beliefs, which still remain very strong. Families may mark both Islamic and Christian holidays and also conduct pagan rituals. According to the ancient Abkhazian religion, Afy rules the thunder and the weather; Shasta is the protector spirit who rules blacksmiths and the arts; Azhvepshaa is the spirit of the forest, wild animals, and hunting; and Aitar is the protector of domestic animals. The supreme god is Antzva, the plural form of the word for mother. There are several sacred sites in Abkhazia where individuals and families pray to the spirits of the Abkhazian pantheon.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important secular holidays are the New Year (December 31 and January 1) and the Old New Year (January 13 and 14) according to the Julian Calendar (also known as the Old Style Calendar), which was followed until Soviet government was established. This is a time for family gatherings. Another popular holiday, celebrated after the fall harvest, is called the *lykhnashta* (Lykhny Meadow). This brings people from all over Abkhazia to the village of Lykhny, where spectators watch

breathtaking horse races and equestrian games and explore outdoor exhibits that boast produce and crafts from dozens of Abkhazian villages. Since 1993, September 30 has been celebrated as Liberation Day, which marks the routing of Georgian armed forces from Abkhazia. There is a parade of Abkhazian military forces and song and dance festivals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

It appears as though rites of passage were never part of Abkhazian culture. Until Soviet government was established in the 1920s, Abkhazians did not celebrate their birthdays or keep track of chronological ages. There are terms in the language that denote various stages of life. These stages are not defined by age; however, they refer to standards of behavior that fit a certain period in one's life.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

All relationships are guided by an ancient code of honor known in the Abkhazian language as *apsuara*. This code is not merely a set of superficial manners, but rather a code of behavior dictated by a profound concept called Abkhazian *alamys*, or "Abkhazian behavior according to conscience." Such etiquette is typical of peoples who, like the Abkhazians, have survived through the millennia despite constant threats from formidable neighbors. In such cultures a high value is placed on honor befitting a true warrior. Thus, Abkhazian etiquette focuses on showing and expecting respect. This is reflected in the diverse forms of salutations, which vary considerably according to the age, social status, and gender of the parties. The most common greeting is "Good health to you." Other salutations are "Good day," "Glad to see you," and "Welcome." An older person must be the first to greet a younger one, and a person on horseback must be first to greet someone on foot. (It is necessary to raise oneself on one's stirrups, just as it is rude to stay sitting in a chair while saying hello.) Gestures are also important to the Abkhazians. When men meet, they make a hand-fist salute by raising the right hand. Handshakes, although not obligatory, are customary among younger people. It is also necessary to ask about the person's health, affairs, and relatives. Relatives greet each other with a gentle hug and a kiss on the left shoulder above the heart. It is customary to kiss children on the top of the head while placing a hand gently on the back of the neck. A common gesture of greeting for an elderly woman is to gently make a circle with her hand, which is intended as a blessing of safekeeping. Specific salutations are used depending on a person's trade and pursuits. To a blacksmith, one might say, "May your work bless you." To a hunter, the greeting would be, "May your game, good and killed, be waiting for you." The words of welcome spoken to a traveler back from a long journey translate as "Happy homecoming to you always." These words are also addressed to a soldier back from war.

The traditions of generous hospitality are sacred law and binding on every person. All guests must be given a heartfelt welcome, even if they are enemies, and never asked why they have come or for how long. Hosts offer guests their best food, which they reserve for just such occasions, and guests are provided the best sleeping accommodations. Abkhazians believe that guests bring wealth and good fortune, and they go to great lengths to please their company. A common saying is: "A guest brings seven pieces of good luck." Abkhazians maintain a space of at least a foot and a half between one another, and



it is inappropriate to touch in most circumstances other than salutations. Shaking one's finger or similar gestures of displeasure and speaking in a loud voice are considered very rude behavior.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The majority of Abkhazians still live in rural areas in spacious stone or brick single-family homes with several bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen. The homestead is usually shared by three and four generations. Because land is plentiful, additional homes may be built on the same homestead to provide privacy for members of extended families. Traditionally, an Abkhazian kitchen was a separate structure. Now, however, kitchens are usually in the main house, and the old-fashioned kitchen has been replaced by a larger building where dozens of guests can be served at long tables. Abkhazian households are kept neat and clean, and there is usually ample space in the yard for lawns and for growing fruits and vegetables.

Increasingly, Abkhazians have settled in urban areas, where they live in the cramped, high-rise apartments typical of all the former Soviet republics. Apartments range from studios to three bedrooms and often accommodate extended families. In such housing it is difficult to maintain the traditional norms of Abkhazian etiquette, because the avoidance customs between certain family members require more space. The dilapidated water and sewage system inherited from the Soviet government causes the greatest inconvenience and considerable sanitation problems in urban areas. In city apartments, running water is available only a few hours a day, whereas homesteads in the countryside can provide their own water. Most Abkhazian city dwellers have close relatives still living in the countryside where they visit regularly, so they are not completely separated from their rural heritage and traditions.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The average number of children per family is two or three; more than five is rare. Perhaps small family size was an adaptation to conditions of frequent warfare, which made it important to be able to travel quickly and easily. Children are desired, and boys are important in the patrilineal system, but having children does not validate masculinity or femininity. An Abkhazian baby does not belong to its parents but to the family as a whole—to the aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, and sisters. Family life, especially in rural areas, is distinguished by taboos that dictate everyday behavior in the home. For instance, couples do not show affection in public or in front of relatives, including their own children. No matter how old a man is, he must not smoke or shave in his father's presence. A daughter-in-law may not speak in her father-in-law's presence unless he has given her explicit permission, which may take many years and the event is marked by a feast. Although these customs are dying out, many are still practiced and their legacy clearly influences contemporary family relations.

In the public domain, women enjoy fairly equal opportunities with men. In the home, their duties are distinctly different. Men and male children do not cook or clean. Men slaughter animals and usually cook meat for feasts, however, it is common for boys to serve guests. Children and women do not usually join guests at the table, but remain standing throughout a feast, never conversing with the guests, and remaining ever

vigilant that wine glasses and plates are kept full. Wedding ceremonies can involve hundreds of guests who are accommodated at long tables outside the house. The groom and his senior relatives and friends come to the bride's father's house to escort her to the wedding. There they have a feast with drinking and speech making that lasts a few hours. The bride then rides on horseback or travels by car to the groom's household, accompanied only by her bridesmaids and a male friend or relative of her own age to see to it that her rights are protected. No one from her family attends the wedding at the groom's home, where she and the groom remain concealed from all the guests in separate quarters throughout the big feast. When guests visit the bride, she must not smile or reveal any joy over her wedding. The groom may appear briefly, but he also must not exhibit any joy over the occasion. To do so would be considered immodest, especially with regard to the elders. To demonstrate how modest, self-disciplined, and traditional they are, a couple may wait a day or even longer before spending their first night together. For a long time after the wedding, the couple must go to bed later than everyone else in the household and wake up earlier so that no one sees them go into or emerge from their bedroom. Any manifestation of affection or sexual desire in the presence of others is scorned. The prevalent attitude toward sex is that it is good and pleasurable when it is strictly private.

## 11 CLOTHING

Abkhazians wear predominantly Western clothing, but women maintain a few traditional restrictions in keeping with the high value placed on what they consider to be modest behavior and dress. For instance, women never wear slacks, shorts, or blouses with low necklines or straps. It is acceptable to wear swimming suits on the beach, but minimal body exposure is the norm everywhere else. Both men and women wear black clothing after the death of a close relative. Men wear black for a month or so, but women wear a black dress, scarf, stockings, and shoes for a year or even longer. Widows may remain in black the rest of their lives. The number of women in black is so great, especially since the 1992–93 war, that black attire may appear to a visitor to be the national costume. On holidays and during family feasts, the male elders wear the traditional *cherkesska*, a belted black garment with long sleeves, which falls to mid-calf, and has a row of cartridge pouches on the chest. This is worn over a plain long-sleeved shirt. The *cherkesska* is common to all Caucasian peoples.

The traditional headdress for men is a *bashlick*, made of soft brown or black cloth with two long ends hanging from either side of the head to well below the shoulders. In the cold, the cloth can be wrapped around the face, and in the summer the end pieces are tied together at the back of the head. Men also wear a long felt cape called a *burka* to protect them from heat and cold. When a shepherd or hunter sleeps in the open fields, he wraps himself in his *burka*. Pants are tucked into calfskin or kid boots that are so tight they must be soaked in water and grease before being worn the first time. Traditionally, women wore white pantaloons gathered at the ankles and a high-collared, long-sleeved coat of thick material, which flared out as it descended from the waist. From an early age until her wedding night, a girl wore a narrow corset made of soft animal skin or strong linen to shape a narrow waist, flatten the breasts, and



*A street vendor selling small articles in the Abkhazian capital of Sokhumi. (Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP/Getty Images)*

maintain an erect posture. Children and teenagers tend to wear stylish clothing much like their peers in any Western country.

## 12 FOOD

The everyday diet of all Abkhazians consists of homegrown and home-processed foods, including yogurt and cheese, abundant raw fruits and vegetables, moderate meat consumption, and even less fish. This diet is low in fat and calories. Instead of bread, they eat a bland cornmeal mush, and dip it and other foods into spicy sauces made with Abkhazian salt (*ajika*), which is a tasty mixture of ground red peppers, up to a dozen herbs, and salt. Eating habits are formed in early childhood and persist consistently throughout a lifetime. The diet contains elements thought to be associated with low risk of heart disease and cancer. Meals are three times a day at regular times, with the biggest meal in the evening.

## 13 EDUCATION

Children begin school at the age of six and graduate at seventeen. All grades are taught in the same school facility, which is called a secondary school. Some schools are named after historical or literary figures, but most are distinguished only by a number. There are very few elective courses. Schooling in the cities continues to a higher level than in rural areas. Parents regularly supervise and help with homework throughout secondary school. Higher education is valued highly, so parents and teachers strongly encourage students to go on with their schooling. Abkhazia has one university and several colleges.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Song, music, and dance are important to Abkhazian culture. There are wedding songs, ritual songs, cult songs, lullabies, healing songs, and work songs. There are special songs for the gathering of the lineage, for the ill, and songs celebrating the exploits of heroes. All of the arts are represented in Abkhazia. There are drama and dance companies, art museums, music schools, and theaters for the performing arts. Poetry and literature are also held in high regard.

## 15 WORK

Children learn how to work around the house and on the farm before they go to school, but it is like play for them. They are not required to do anything beyond their abilities. Throughout life, work is treated as an integral part of everyday living. An Abkhazian saying goes “Without rest, a man cannot work; without work, the rest is not beneficial.” People continue working as long as they can.

## 16 SPORTS

The favorite spectator sports are soccer and equestrian contests. Every school has a soccer team. Most boys in rural areas learn how to ride horses and play fast-moving ball games on horseback. Traditionally, women also learned to ride, but this is no longer the case. Abkhazia has had two Olympic champions, one in javelin throwing and one in equestrian sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most entertainment is informal, in small gatherings of family and friends at each other’s homes. Whole evenings are spent in

discussions and eating around a big table filled with a variety of tasty dishes, wine, vodka, and cognac. Both young and old participate. Dancing and singing are common at larger gatherings such as weddings, which are quite frequent in the fall. Throughout the year, going to the theater is also a common form of entertainment. People of all ages chat at length over coffee and snacks at outdoor cafes. Men play board games in courtyards until late at night

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Among the oldest crafts of the Abkhazians are basket weaving, pottery, woodworking, and metalworking. The designs are simple and utilitarian because most of the craft items were intended for use in the home. Contemporary craftsmen and artists produce a wide range of sophisticated works based on traditional motifs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The economy has been practically at a standstill since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the armed conflict of 1992–93. This has created unemployment, theft, and drug use, which are the biggest social problems. Some people without jobs and money rob their neighbors, and some who have endured the trauma of war, turn to drugs to forget their pain. The legal system is unable to combat the problems of crime and drugs because the government has problems of a major proportion in rebuilding the country. In some areas of the capital city of Sukhumi there are blocks where two of every three homes and buildings are no more than crumbling walls, and hotels and public buildings have been demolished by the fighting. Nongovernmental organizations have emerged from the grassroots to deal with these problems but do not have significant resources. They focus on healing post-traumatic stress syndrome, promoting conflict resolution training, and the principles of civil society.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Abkhazia significantly outnumber the men. The Soviet legacy has raised expectations of equality among Abkhazian women, but in reality they cannot compete equally for jobs with men and do most of the housework and child rearing. Gender roles in the home are quite rigid. A man would never be seen washing dishes, for example, although he may do them privately. Women are active in the NGO community but are poorly represented in the government and parliament. Many are widowed and families headed by females are among the poorest in the region.

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—revised by S. Jones

# ADJARIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Adzharians; Ajarians, Acharans

**LOCATION:** Adjaria (within Georgia)

**POPULATION:** 376,016 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Gurian dialect in mountains, standard Georgian in cities

**RELIGION:** Mixed Sunni Muslim and Orthodox Christian

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Adjarians (also called Adzharians or Acharans) are seldom mentioned outside of their native land. Adjarians are like Georgians in almost every respect except that a proportion of them are Muslim. By itself this situation does not cause tension and conflict, but it is important to realize that violent conflicts between communities (such as those in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Northern Ireland) are rarely religious but almost always political.

In 1989–90, Georgia was among the first republics of the former Soviet Union where the local communist government effectively surrendered its power under the pressure of popular discontent. The political vacuum that followed was filled by a motley group that included self-serving opposition intellectuals, cunning black market entrepreneurs, and even self-professed honorable bandits. These new leaders had little in common except personal ambition and a strong belief in the cultural supremacy of the Georgian nation. They possessed no economic or state-building program at all. Instead, the new anti-communist leaders adopted nationalistic rhetoric and policies in an effort to gain popular support from common Georgians and to silence potential opponents. The aggressive nationalism of the new Georgian rulers soon led to rebellions in the peripheral parts of Georgia that had sizable non-Georgian ethnic minorities.

Adjaria was an autonomous province of Georgia where the sudden triumph of the new Georgian nationalists was met with grave suspicion. Although most Adjarians considered themselves Georgians, they also knew that many Georgians considered Adjarians “Turks” or at least second-class “Turkicized” Georgians because of their difference in religion. Georgians have been Christian since Byzantine times, at least since the 5th century. The ancestors of Adjarians were once Christian too, but in the 17th century the Turkish Ottoman Empire conquered Adjaria and many people converted to Islam, the religion of the new Turkish authorities. Adjaria remained under Turkish rule until 1878, when it was wrestled from the Turks by the Russian Empire. By that time Adjarians had been Muslim for some 10 to 15 generations and viewed themselves as a separate ethnic group with its own traditions derived from Islam.

After the Russian revolution of 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks created the Soviet Union, and Georgia became one of its 15 constituent union republics. In recognition of its religious and cultural uniqueness, Adjaria was granted limited autonomy within the Soviet republic of Georgia. Many Georgians who saw themselves as national patriots scoffed at Adjarian autonomy as a “foreign creation,” arguing that Adjarians were Georgians just like everyone else. The Adjarians’ Islamic heritage was deemed an unfortunate accident of history that had to



be redressed by making Adjarians once again Christian. While the Soviet Union existed, these Georgian nationalist projects were kept in check by the communist belief in internationalism, or what Soviet propaganda called “friendship among the nations.” In 1990–91, however, abolishing Adjarian autonomy became one of the slogans proffered by the new post-communist government of Georgia. It appointed its own surrogate government in Adjaria, which was as disorderly as the one in Georgia proper. Virtually no one in the new government was a native Adjarian. This fact brought a huge crowd of worried and angry Adjarians into the main square of Batumi, the provincial capital. The demonstrators, both Muslim and Christian, were afraid that the new government would remove Adjarian autonomy.

The problems were not limited to religion, however. Adjarians today are a modern and quite secular people, many of whom consider themselves agnostic. As in any ethnic conflict, the crux of the problem was one of political power. The Adjarians wanted greater powers of self-determination than the new Georgian government would give them. Adjarians wanted to be treated with the same respect as other Georgians, including the right to retain their recognizably Muslim-Georgian names. The recognized organizer behind the Adjarian movement was Aslan Abashidze, who during the 1990s established a separate mini-state in Adjaria. Locally stationed Russian troops gave him support. At the same time, he proved an able diplomat, assuaging fears among some Georgians that Adjaria might secede. After 1990, Abashidze ruled his small country like a

virtual potentate, recognizing Georgia’s authority over Adjaria only on paper. Adjarians credit him for two achievements: a well-armed peace amidst ethnic strife and civil war that engulfed most of the Caucasus in the 1990s and the cultivation of diversity and tolerance inside Adjaria. Compared with the tragic situations in Caucasia and in the former Yugoslavia, the outcome in Adjaria showed that ethnic conflict was not predetermined by religious and ethnic differences, but that political forces can both create and prevent ethnic conflicts. However, the peace was kept in part by Abashidze’s own form of authoritarianism. Elections were rigged and the police suppressed all opposition. Abashidze’s rule came to an end in May 2004, when he was overthrown by a domestic popular revolt inspired and supported by the new and youthful Georgian government that had come to power after the November 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Aslan Abashidze was fond of saying that his land has no useful resources except its geography and the good humor of its people, but geography is strategically important. Adjaria is a tiny land (2,634 sq km/1,150 sq mi) of beautiful mountains and wooded valleys that descend to a thin coastal line of the Black Sea where the capital, Batumi, is situated. More than one-third of Adjaria’s 400,000 people live in the capital. The climate along the sea front of Adjaria is one of the most humid in the world. A total of 160 cm (62 in) of precipitation is recorded annually, often destroying houses and crops. Before the 1930s, Batumi was one of the busiest oil-exporting ports in the world, serving as the main outlet for Baku oil from the landlocked Caspian Sea. In fact, at that time, the then-future Saudi Arabia received much of its kerosene from the Caucasus. The Caucasus is where the Swedish brothers Nobel (of the famous prize) developed a booming oil industry and laid one of the earliest pipelines to Batumi. Batumi, until the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 was a growing oil and container port one again and a major trade hub on the road to Turkey. Adjaria’s agriculture was best known for its tea and tangerines, but in recent years production has declined dramatically because export routes to Russia have been disrupted by wars and economic upheavals in post-communist countries.

It is impossible to know exactly how much of Adjaria’s population consists of ethnic Adjarians, if by that we mean Muslim Georgians. Such a potentially divisive question has not been asked since the population census of 1926. It is no less difficult to tell how many Adjarians live in neighboring Turkey because Turkish statistics do not recognize ethnic minorities, but presumably there are many Georgian-speakers over the Turkish border. They, however, feel themselves to be both Turks and Adjarians.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Adjarians speak the Gurian dialect of the Georgian language (see entry on **Georgians**). This dialect is close to the language of medieval classical literature created in western parts of Georgia. Adjarians have no trouble understanding or speaking standard Georgian.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Adjarians share the same medieval folklore as other Georgians. They have, however, some local folk tales that display Turkish,

Armenian, and especially Laz influences (Lazes are a people of the Georgian language family who are also Muslim and live in North-East Turkey across the Georgian border).

The foremost hero of Adjaria's myths for a while was Aslan Abashidze, a former school principal and, curiously, grandson of the last Muslim ruler of Adjaria, Prince Memed Abashidze. With great admiration and passion, people told fabulous and incredible stories about their leader, whose courage, wit, and diplomatic skills were supposed to be proven by his exploits. His legendary showdown with Georgian nationalist leaders in April 1990 became the pinnacle of his personal legend, when after a meeting with the Georgian nationalists who were about to take over the government of Adjaria, Abashidze emerged from the government building with an AK-47 in hand saying that the meeting had suddenly flared up into a shootout, but that he and his bodyguards had proved better shots. These legends have been discredited after Abashidze fled to Moscow, escaping the wrath of his own people in 2004.

## 5 RELIGION

Although Adjarians have been Sunni Muslims for the past four centuries, today religion has lost much of its salience. After 70 years of Soviet-accelerated modernization, only a small number of elderly men can recite sacred Arabic verses from the Koran. Few people attend mosques even on Fridays, and virtually no women veil their faces. However, after the collapse of communism there was a Muslim revival that focused in most cases on the building of village mosques.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Muslim holidays are observed somewhat, especially the more pleasant ones. Like Lent and Easter in the Christian West, Ramadan is not observed with a month of fasting by many Adjarians, but almost everyone feasts after it is over. Because of Russian influence, which was strong during the Soviet period, Adjarians celebrate New Year's Eve. Many even put up Christmas trees, but nobody attaches any religious significance to this holiday. As in many former Soviet republics, February 23 is still celebrated as Men's Day, and women give small gifts to men. Few people seem to care that this date was meant to commemorate the first battle of the Soviet Red Army in 1918. Likewise, International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8 with flowers and chocolates offered to women, but it is no longer associated with the Socialist International movement. People have transformed these state and political holidays into celebrations of the seasons and gender. After independence, a number of Orthodox religious days have been introduced, such as St George's Day, Mariamoba (St Mary's Day), and others.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Muslim Adjarians follow Muslim traditions, although no longer very faithfully. For instance, male circumcision is still common. Like many other Muslims of Caucasia, Adjarians like to invite a special guest for the circumcision ceremonies. The *kirva*, who must be a Christian neighbor, would traditionally hold the baby boy on his lap during the operation. The special relationship between the Christian *kirva* and the child is akin to that of godparent and godchild in other cultures. Weddings are another major rite and are as lavish in Adjaria as elsewhere in Georgia and Caucasia.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Like all Caucasians, Adjarians are extremely etiquette conscious. They are infallibly polite and courteous under most circumstances, even when bargaining in the bazaar. Hospitality is supreme. A community values its members by their ability to live up to the norms of etiquette, including the availability of disposable income destined for conspicuous consumption. Like most Caucasians, Adjarians would starve if necessary to offer a feast to their friends and guests. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Soviet Union's economy was booming, conspicuous consumption in Adjaria reached grotesque proportions. Corrupt local officials and wealthy peasants trading their citrus in the markets of Russian cities built themselves palatial houses, sometimes with ridiculously sumptuous decorations. In the 1970s, a group of Russian decorators who had previously worked in St. Petersburg in the restoration of the palaces of the tsars were lured to Adjaria with an offer of huge salaries. The mansions they helped to build rival Disneyland in both the purported impression and artistic taste.

Many Islamic norms, especially pertaining to relations between men and women, have been relaxed considerably in recent decades. Women in Adjaria dress and behave more like East European women than do women in many Arab countries or in Iran. Veiling is virtually non-existent.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, most Adjarians lived in log cabins, which is the type of house most easily acquired, given the wooded mountainous environment. There were also houses made of stone and adobe found mostly near the seashore. In the 20th century, many Adjarians moved into towns, primarily Batumi. In the towns and modern villages, they prefer to live in private houses, sometimes very ostentatious two- and three-storied mansions. Such houses are endowed with all modern amenities, from hot water to air conditioning, and often have two toilets—one in a bathroom inside the house and another brick or wooden toilet in the backyard. As an old Adjarian man said resolutely: "no urban fashion will make me do my necessities inside the house where I live."

Many people who could not afford private homes were glad to receive virtually free apartments in the state-built high-rises. Because of centralized planning, these apartment houses look exactly the same in Adjaria as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Old village habits die hard, however, especially in an economy of chronic shortage. Many Adjarians keep chickens, turkeys, and sometimes cattle on the ground floor of their urban dwellings. Cows occasionally roam the streets of Batumi, including its beaches and the downtown area. Private homes are surrounded by fruit orchards of persimmons, figs, quince, tangerines, grapes, and kiwi, the latter of which was added several years ago. As part of the former Soviet Union, Adjaria experienced grave economic difficulties and disruptions after 1990 although since the ouster of Abashidze in 2004 the local economy has boomed as part of a new market-oriented Georgia. Georgia's GDP growth between 2004 and 2008 was in the range of 10–12% and tourism became a major industry in Adjaria. In 2006 the number of tourists in Adjaria increased by 27% compared to that in 2005. The number of new hotels, restaurants, cafes, and entertainment centers is increasing to accommodate the growing demand of tourism. The new inter-

national airport (5 km distance from Batumi port) was completed in 2007.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

As elsewhere in the Caucasus, large extended families are no longer common in Adjaria. Nonetheless, the ties of kinship and neighborhood remain very strong. A modern family normally has two parents, one to three children, and grandparents if they are still living. Divorce is relatively rare, although not unknown. Many households are effectively run by women who also do most of the housework. There are no servants because the practice was considered extravagant in the socialist Soviet Union. Almost all private homes have pets—dogs, cats, and sometimes caged birds (canaries, or exotic parakeets). Wealthy people sometimes keep peacocks and pheasants to impress their guests and neighbors.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditionally, Adjarians dressed like Turks or other peoples of the Near East. This dress was completely replaced by modern European-style dress around the middle of the 20th century. Today, Adjarian men prefer Armani suits or tennis shirts and Levi's jeans (all of the brand names), and women try to follow French and Italian fashions in dress and makeup.

## 12 FOOD

Adjarian cuisine is largely the same as Georgian. To this, Adjarians have added fish from the Black Sea—mackerel, flounder, and anchovies. Dolphins were hunted for meat in the past but mostly in times of hunger. In recent years, Muslim Adjarians began drinking wines and beer previously prohibited by Islamic law. Tea is the customary local drink.

## 13 EDUCATION

Governmental policies of the Soviet Union made high school education mandatory for all citizens including Adjarians. Education was conducted mostly in standard Georgian and in Russian. There are fewer classes in Russian language, as they have been replaced by English classes. At least formally, there are no illiterate Adjarians today. The older Islamic literacy in classical Arabic as well as in old Ottoman Turkish disappeared during the years of Soviet modernization. As in Georgia proper, the per capita number of college-educated people in Adjaria was among the highest in the former USSR. Almost as many women have higher degrees as men.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Little can be described as specifically Adjarian cultural heritage. Most folk traditions (dances and music, for example) overlap with those of the Christian Georgians from the neighboring province of Guria. Islamic traditions are nearly forgotten due to rapid modernization during the Soviet years and hostility from the Georgian authorities. Today, Adjarians differ from other Georgians mostly by their Muslim first names. On several occasions in the past, especially in the 1950s and again in the early 1970s, Georgian officials have tried to change all Muslim names to Georgian Christian ones. For instance, all Memeds were mandated to become Michaels or Mamukas, and Gusseins to become Georges or Ghiorghis (Ghivi for short). A few Adjarians chose to resist, and some even went as

far as to protest at Moscow before the highest Soviet authorities. This kind of discrimination and similar attempts at forced “re-Georgianization” and Christianization of Adjarians fed the anxieties that in 1990 led to protests in the streets against the central government.

## 15 WORK

Adjarians are still mostly peasants with 55.7% of the population living in rural areas (2002). Because the Soviet Union was an isolated economy, it imported very few subtropical fruits from abroad, such as tangerines. Adjaria was one of very few places in the Soviet Union where the climate allowed the growth of tangerines, kiwis, and other tropical fruits. These crops brought monopolistic prices in the markets of Russian cities in the north and accrued never-before-seen wealth to many Adjarians. The reputed wealth of Adjaria was actually one major motivation behind the attempts of various Georgian paramilitary groups to invade what they called “Islamized Georgia” in the 1990s. Thus, nationalist fervor was also a screen for the ordinary desire to plunder. After 1990, hardly anything was produced in Adjaria or grown for export. This changed after 2003 with some investments in tea and citrus fruits. Most inhabitants now derive their income from trading across the Turkish border, or from odd jobs.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditional sports include wrestling, archery, fencing, javelin throwing, horse riding, *tskhenburti* (a form of polo), and *lelo-burti* (a field game similar to rugby). In Adjaria, as in the rest of Georgia, soccer is quite popular. It is played in streets and yards as well as in stadiums.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Commercial recreation includes restaurants, cinemas, and pop music concerts. TV and video remain the cheap alternatives to modern mass entertainment, provided that electricity is uninterrupted in the evening. Many Adjarians now have access to cable. Otherwise, most Adjarians will enjoy themselves feasting in each other's homes.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Adjarian folk art is similar to that of the Georgians. Pottery and rug making are still village crafts. Rugs are either woven in traditional patterns or made from compressed felt with abstract patterns. The colors most often used are deep red, brown, blue, and yellow. Metalworking, particularly with gold and silver, is an ancient skill that is still practiced. Metal chasing, which in Georgian is called *cheduroba*, is a treasured craft, as are enameling and jewelry making.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Adjaria was effectively a separatist state ruled by a benevolent pasha. Its economy all but collapsed, unemployment was very high, and drug abuse soared. The crime rate was relatively low because, under Aslan Abashidze, one out of ten men served in the Adjarian police. This did not prevent massive corruption. Since 2003, employment has increased with the growth of tourism and foreign activity in the port, but most Adjarians still hover around the poverty line.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Adjaria face similar problems to those of their Christian Georgian neighbors. Despite formal equality in Soviet Georgia, women suffered wage and job discrimination and were expected to do the majority of the housework and child-care. In many ways, their position has worsened under new market conditions in Achara; female-headed households are more likely to be poor, women are concentrated in the semi-skilled positions and underrepresented in the senior jobs, and access to natal care has diminished while maternal mortality rates increased. Many Adjarian women support their families with cross border trade with Turkey, and a number have ended up as prostitutes in Turkish towns.

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—revised by S. Jones

# ALBANIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Shqipëtarë

**LOCATION:** Albania; Macedonia; Greece; Kosovo

**POPULATION:** 3.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Albanian

**RELIGION:** Evangelical Christian (Seventh-day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, and others); Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Albanians are the direct descendants of the ancient Illyrians, whose territories in 1225 BC included all of former Yugoslavia—Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and portions of Macedonia and northern Greece. It is from one of the Illyrian tribes, the Albanoi located in central Albania, that the country derives its name. However, the Albanians call themselves *Shqipëtarë* and their country *Shqipëria*—generally accepted to mean "land of the eagles" because two of the Albanian words for eagle are *shqipë* and *shqiponjë*.

Now one of the largest cities in Albania, Shkodra, located in the northern part of the country, was also the capital of Illyria. The Romans conquered Illyria in 227 BC, a conquest for which they had to pay dearly by making frequent expeditions across the Adriatic Sea to quell chronic insurrections. During the civil war between Caesar and Pompeii, Albania served as the battleground in the contest for supremacy over Rome. The decisive battle between Octavius and Antony for the imperial throne of Rome was also fought on the Albanian seacoast. (In commemoration of his naval victory at Actium, the future Emperor Augustus built the new city of Nicopolos on the southernmost part of the Albanian seaboard. Its ruins may be seen in the modern-day city of Preveza, which was taken away from Albania and ceded to Greece by the Ambassadors' Conference of London in 1913.)

When the capital of the Roman Empire was transferred from Rome to Byzantium in AD 325, Albania, then known as the Thema of Illyricum, became a province of the eastern section of the empire. It remained part of the Byzantine Empire until the early Middle Ages, when certain feudal families managed to form independent principalities which eventually evolved into medieval Arberia (Albania), whose population was almost exclusively Albanian-speaking and also Albanian in terms of its history, laws, tradition, and culture. The Ottoman conquest of Europe began in 1354, when the Turks captured the Byzantine fortress at Gallipoli, located on a narrow peninsula where the Dardanelles opens into the Sea of Marmara. This military victory established the first Ottoman stronghold on European soil. The defeat of the Bulgarians at Maritsa in 1371, and also the defeat by the Turks of a Balkan coalition of Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Poles, Serbs, and Albanians on the plain of Kosovo in 1389, marked the eventual collapse of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Albania, which all then came under Turkish rule.

After conquering ethnic Albania, the Turks established a system of administration by dividing it into four provinces or "vilayets"—Shkodra, Kosovo, Manastir, and Janina. Ottoman domination of Europe lasted for more than 400 years before it went into decline, in large measure because of persistent un-



rest and nationalism in the conquered territories. After the defeat of the Turks by the Russians in 1877, the Great Powers evoked the Treaty of San Stefano the following year, signifying the break-up of the Ottoman Empire.

Ethnic Albania, still comprising four vilayets, was penalized by the Great Powers because it had been considered part of the Ottoman Empire for almost five centuries. The Albania of 1878 was divided and forced to cede the major portions of the vilayet of Shkodra to Montenegro, the vilayet of Kosovo to Serbia, the vilayet of Manastir to Macedonia, and the vilayet of Janina to Greece. What remained after the partitioning is, essentially, the nation of Albania as it exists today. Albania's neighbors continued to press for the total partitioning of Albania so that it would no longer exist as a separate political entity. The one person who prevented this from happening was President Woodrow Wilson of the United States, who declared, at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, "I shall have but one voice at the Peace Conference, and I will use that voice in behalf of Albania." The conference eventually confirmed Albania's official boundaries.

Today, there are approximately 40,000 Albanians living in Montenegro, about two million in Kosovo, 100,000 in South Serbia, 600,000 in Macedonia, and at least 250,000 in northern Greece. In other words, there are as many Albanians living just outside of Albania's borders as there are within it, making Albania a country completely surrounded by itself. In February 2008, the Kosovo province declared independence from Ser-

bia. Despite protests from Serbia, the major European powers and the United States recognized independence.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Present-day Albania is a small country located on the Adriatic Sea some 80 km (50 mi) from Italy. In a clockwise direction, beginning in the northwest, it is surrounded by Montenegro, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and, finally, Greece in the south. Albania is about 370 km (230 mi) long by about 144 km (90 mi) at its widest point, making it about the size of the state of Maryland. It has a population of approximately 3.6 million people, or about the same population as Greater Boston. Albania has an exceptionally beautiful seacoast, with white sandy beaches, that runs the entire length of the country, plus picturesque mountainous areas with significant winter sports (and ski resort) potential. The country has a typical Mediterranean climate along its southern part, where palm trees, oranges, and other citrus fruits grow in abundance. Some 36% of Albania is forested—mostly hills and mountains away from the fertile plains that hug the shoreline.

Albania has less land and air pollution than neighboring countries such as Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. It is the world's third largest producer of chromium and has significant natural resources such as petroleum, copper, nickel, and coal. Thanks to the network of high-rise dams necessitated by its mountainous terrain, Albania has transmitted hydroelectric power all over the Balkans and as far west as Austria. Its forests are used essentially for five purposes: for firewood, as grazing land, as a source of forest plants, for recreation, and to supply the timber and paper industries. Although Albania had developed an internal railroad system, it was only in 1982 that it established a link into then-Yugoslavia, thereby gaining direct railway access to the rest of Europe for the first time in its history.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Albanian is not derived from any other language. It does not have a Slavic or Greek base, as is commonly believed, but is in fact one of the nine original Indo-European languages—the other eight being Armenian, Balto-Slavic, Germanic, Hellenic, Indian, Iranian, Latin, and Celtic. As such, Albanian is one of Europe's oldest languages. The Albanian alphabet is Latin-based and similar to that of English except that it is composed of 36 letters, including *ë*, *ç*, and the following nine digraphs, each of which is regarded as a single character: *dh*, *gj*, *ll*, *nj*, *sh*, *th*, *xh*, and *zh*. The Albanian alphabet does not have the letter *w*.

The Albanians are essentially a homogenous people but have been divided traditionally into two basic groups, the Ghegs in the north and the Tosks in the south, the dividing line being the Shkumbini River, which runs west-east almost across the center of the country. Both Ghegs and Tosks speak the same language but pronounce it with some differences. A typical example is the word *është*, which is the Albanian equivalent of the English word *is*. A Tosk would say EH-shtah, whereas a Gheg would pronounce it as AH-sht. The Tosk dialect is the official dialect of the entire country.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Fairies, snakes, and dragons are among the principal figures in Albanian mythology. Phenomena in Albanian folklore in-



clude the *kuçedër* (a snake or dragon with many heads), the *sh-trigë* (a witch) and the *stuhi* (a flame-throwing winged being that guards treasures). To call someone a *kukudh* (goblin) is the ultimate insult, its full meaning being “a dwarf with seven tails who can’t find rest in his grave.” *Zana*, mythological female figures who help mountain folk in distress, are legendary, while the *ore* (fairy) also appears frequently in Albanian folklore, sometimes as an expression of fate—*I vdiq ora* (his luck ran out).

## 5 RELIGION

During Roman rule, in the 1st century AD, Christianity was adopted in the region of Albania, competing with Oriental cults (such as worshiping Mithra—the Persian god of light) and Illirian pagan cults. By the 16th century, almost all of Albania was Christian, the Orthodox religion being dominant in the south and the Roman Catholic in the north. In the 17th century, the Turks began a policy of Islamization by using, among other methods, economic incentives to convert the population. For example, some Albanians who adopted Islam received land and had their taxes lowered. By the 19th century, Islam became the predominant religion in Albania, claiming about 70% of the population while some 20% remained Orthodox and 10% Roman Catholic. These groupings remained stable until the Communist government outlawed religion in 1967, making Albania the world’s only atheist state. Freedom of religion in Albania was restored only in 1989–90. However, the overwhelming majority of Albania’s population was born under the Communist regime, which pursued an aggressively atheistic policy, and observations suggest that the historical 70-20-10 percentages are no longer valid. Following the collapse of the old Communist order, Albania has seen a religious revival of sorts, and some now believe that the religions with the most new adherents are evangelical Christian denominations, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others. The current Albanian government includes Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox members.

Different religious communities live together in harmony, and often religious holidays are celebrated together. For example, in Kosovo, on Aligjyni (Ali Day—August 2), both Muslims and Christians make a pilgrimage to Mount Pashtrik. Muslims do the pilgrimage in the morning, the Orthodox in the afternoon.

Although it is frequently referred to as a Muslim country, Albania has no state religion, and the Albanians are renowned for their religious tolerance. It is a little-known fact that Albania protected its own Jews during the Holocaust while also offering shelter to Jews who had escaped into Albania from Austria, Serbia, and Greece. The names of Muslim and Christian Albanian rescuers of Jews are commemorated at the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem and are inscribed on the famous Rescuers’ Wall at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. At the unveiling of the names of Albanian rescuers, the museum’s director, Miles Lerman, gratefully stated, “Albania was the only country in Europe which had a larger Jewish population at the end of the war than before it!”

A joint Israeli-Albanian concert was held in Tirana on 4 November 1995 to commemorate the Albanians’ protection of Jews from the country’s Nazi occupiers during the Holocaust. Its participants included the Kibbutz Orchestra of Israel, the

Opera Orchestra of Tirana, the National Choir of Tirana, and the Israel-Albania Society.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Albanian Christians celebrate traditional holidays such as Christmas and Easter, while Albanian Muslims observe Ramadan and the other religious holy days of Islam. Whereas other peoples in the Balkans refer to themselves as Christians or Muslims, an Albanian invariably says, “I am an Albanian” rather than a Christian or Muslim. *Dita e Verës* (Spring Day), derived from an ancient pagan holiday, is still celebrated in mid-March in Elbasan. All Albanians, wherever they are located in the world, joyously commemorate November 28 as Albanian Independence Day (*Dita e Flamurit*), for it was on that day in 1912 in the Albanian seacoast town of Vlora, that the venerable Albanian patriot, Ismail Qemali, first raised the Albanian red-and-black, double-headed eagle flag and proclaimed Albanian independence from the Ottoman Turks after almost 500 years.

Other public holidays include May 1 (Labor Day), October 19 (Mother Teresa Day), and November 29 (Liberation Day). If a public holiday happens to fall on a Saturday, then the previous Friday is taken as a non-working day. If a public holiday falls on a Sunday, then the following Monday is taken as a non-working day.

On St. Nicholas’s Day (December 6), Christians and Muslims roast a pig or lamb and light candles for dead souls.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Albanians mark the major life events, including birth, marriage, and death, within either the Christian or Muslim religious tradition.

With the absence of funeral parlors, wakes for the deceased are generally held at home for a period of two or three days before burial.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Albanians are taught early on to respect their elders. To this day in some villages and in the smaller cities of Albania, youngsters kiss the hand of an elder male visitor when first greeting him. An eldest son, almost from the date of his birth, is groomed to become the eventual head of family upon the death of his father. It is the general custom in Albania for men to embrace each other upon meeting and kiss each other on the cheeks, and for them to walk along together with their arms linked.

There is an elaborate protocol of greeting exchanges when entering the home of an Albanian family. For example, after first being served the *qerasje* (treat), consisting of *liko* (a jam-like sweet) along with a drink or Turkish coffee by the hostess or other female member of the family, the visitor will inquire about the health of each member of the hostess’s family in a careful and deliberate manner, and then the hostess will, in turn, inquire about the health of each member of the visitor’s family. Only after this procedure is completed, will people relax and begin normal conversation.

The Albanians are very expressive people, using their eyes (rolling them upwards), hands (gesticulating), and bodies (shoulder shrugging) to reinforce their statements. They are great mimics and have a good sense of humor. Before World War II, dating was unheard of; later, dating one’s betrothed became acceptable, but the couple was almost always chaper-



*Albanians keep dogs mainly for keeping guard or herding sheep and other livestock. Lamb, rather than beef or pork, is the most common meat in the Albanian diet. (Cory Langley)*

oned. Sacrosanct to all Albanians from olden days to more recent times is the concept of the *besa* or pledged word. More respected than a written contract was the verbal *besa-besën* agreement sealed by a handshake or embrace, and woe to the person who violated it! The greatest insult in Albania is to call a man *i-pabëse*, someone who has broken his word or who is disloyal or without honor.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Under the rule of President, and later King, Zog (1925–1939), the first rudimentary attempts were made to establish a system of health care in Albania. The post-World War II government of Albania undertook the construction of hospitals and clinics and expanded preventive health care by draining malarial swamps and instituting the inoculation of children against diseases such as measles and polio. Under rigid Communist rule from 1946 to 1991, many Albanians were forced to live in large, poorly constructed apartment buildings that provided only a couple of rooms to accommodate a family of four or more people. Many dwellings still lack central heating, and there is a shortage of water and frequent electric power outages in the larger cities. With the advent of democracy in 1992, new construction is already under way to rectify these problems.

The standard of living has also improved with the recent availability of household conveniences such as washing machines, dishwashers, and microwave ovens—items many Albanians did without until 1992. Throughout the 1990s and into

the new century, living conditions have improved considerably, mirroring the economic expansion of the country. However, people living in the countryside still suffer from poor health care, an under-developed infrastructure, and lack of services.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Women were previously relegated to a secondary role in Albania, especially in relation to the eldest son of the family. By the age of 10, they were preparing their dowries—a tradition that was largely abandoned by 1950, although still practiced occasionally. During World War II, women came into their own, serving courageously in the partisan forces against the Italian and German invaders. After liberation, they were encouraged to enter the professions. Albanian families tend to be small, with the average being two children. The Albanian husband is not generally a helpmate to his wife, believing that the household is the province of the female. Arranged marriages were once the norm in Albania, but a prospective bride or groom almost always had the option of refusing to accept the proffered candidate and could hold out until a more suitable one was found. Elderly parents still reside with their children, where they are treated with honor and respect. Cats are quite common in single-family homes in larger cities, but dogs are used mainly for keeping guard or herding sheep and other livestock. There is no word for “pet” in the Albanian language.

## 11 CLOTHING

At one time Albanians could identify each other by the way they dressed. Each region had its own characteristic style of clothing, which was influenced by ethnic tradition and religion and differentiated by region, clan (*fis*), sex, and age. Historically, Albanians tended to spend a remarkably high proportion of their income on dress. In 1805 the English poet Lord Byron, visiting southern Albania (where he wrote a good portion of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*), called Albanian dress "the most wonderful in the world." Nowadays, their distinctive traditional clothing may be seen chiefly at theatrical or folk dance performances.

Until 1991, Albanian clothing styles, like those in other former Communist countries, tended to be unfashionable. Albania, in particular, had been isolated from other countries in Europe for almost 50 years. The media were heavily monitored, keeping Albanians unfamiliar with clothing and hair styles popular in the West. Today, Albanian men and women have easy access to the latest worldwide fashion trends through magazines and television, and this can be readily seen in their appearance.

## 12 FOOD

As a result of almost 500 years of Turkish subjugation, Albanian cuisine has been thoroughly influenced by those occupiers (although Italian influences prevail along the coast). Per capita bread consumption is sizable, looming unusually large in the Albanian diet. In fact, the word *bukë* (bread) is the normal word for "meal."

The main meal of the Albanians, as is the case throughout the Balkans, is lunch, which is usually accompanied by salad or fresh vegetables. Typical Albanian dishes include *lakror* (a mixture of eggs, vegetables, or meat, and butter encased in thin, multilayered pastry sheets) and *fërgesë* (a dish frequently made with minced meat, eggs, and ricotta cheese). Lamb, rather than beef or pork, is the most common meat. An unusual (and very tasty) pinkish trout (*Koran*) is found in Lake Ohri at Pogradec. Albania is also blessed with abundant seasonal fruits, such as grapes, cherries, figs, watermelon, peaches, quince, and oranges along with almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, and olive trees. Albania manufactures beer and both red and white wines, although the national drink is *raki*, a clear, colorless brandy produced from grapes. Albania also produces an award-winning, three-star cognac called *Skanderbeg* (after its legendary folk hero) that is prized throughout Europe.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education in Albania has been stimulated and nurtured by nationalism. Under the Ottoman yoke, the teaching of the Albanian language was strictly forbidden, and Albanians of the Greek Orthodox faith were required to attend Greek schools, while Catholics were taught Italian, and Muslims, Turkish. The opening of the first school (*Mësonjtorja*) in which the Albanian language was taught (in Kore in 1887) was a milestone. The first Albanian-language elementary school for girls was opened, also in Kore, in 1892. Higher education in Albania really began with the American Vocational School (*Shkolla Teknike*) established by the American Red Cross in 1921, which eventually became part of the University of Tirana, when the latter was founded in 1957. Other institutes of higher education were located in Shkodra, Gjirokaster, and Elbasan. Since the

overthrow of Communist power in 1992, new universities have been founded in Kore and Vlora. The literacy rate in 2003 was estimated at 87%.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Albanian flag is a deep red color with a black, double-headed eagle at its center. It is derived from the personal standard of Albania's great 15th-century folk hero, Gjergj Kastrioti, surnamed Skanderbeg which, translated into English, means Lord Alexander, after Alexander the Great. Skanderbeg, the leader of the Kastrioti clan, united all of the fiercely independent Albanian clans to fight the Ottoman Turks for some 25 years, until his death in 1468. He prevented the Turks from overrunning all of Europe and postponed the inevitable Ottoman conquest of the entire Balkan peninsula. Such was Skanderbeg's fame throughout Europe that the renowned Italian composer Vivaldi and the French composer Françoise both composed operas about him, and Voltaire believed that the Byzantine Empire would have survived had it possessed a leader of Skanderbeg's stature.

Albanian folk music shows some Turkish and Persian influences. It sounds typically Balkan but is mainly polyphonic in the south and homophonic in north and central Albania. Music is played on folk instruments such as the *çifteli* (a long-necked two-stringed mandolin) and the *gërnetë* (a type of clarinet used for popular music). Other instruments are the *gajda* and *bishnica* (wind instruments) and the *sharkia* and *lahuta* (stringed ones). Before World War II, the Albanian government could not afford to provide education in the field of music. However, Albania eventually saw the establishment of seven symphony orchestras.

Albania has also produced writers of international renown such as Ismail Kadare, Albania's most influential and important writer, whom many believe worthy of a Nobel Prize. Kadare is the author of *The General of the Dead Army*, a novel describing how an Italian general, accompanied by a Catholic priest, returned to Albania after World War II to collect the remains of Italian soldiers who had fallen in battle. In 1982 Kadare's book was made into an Italian film starring Marcello Mastroianni as the general. Other important Albanian writers are novelists Dritero Agolli, Fatos Arapi, Rexhep Qosja, and Xhevair Spahiu, short story writer Naum Prifti, and humorist Qamil Buxheli.

## 15 WORK

During the Communist era, Albanians (especially youth brigades) were often conscripted to provide "volunteer" labor, such as building roads and railway beds, and preparation of new ground for agriculture. Students were required to donate one month of free labor during their summer vacations to terrace the hills, for example, and to plant citrus and olive trees. Although Albania is ideally suited for agriculture and tourism, the Communist government undertook a program of heavy industry that employed many people.

Because there was no real incentive to work, some western observers believe that Communism destroyed the Albanian work ethic. After 1992, however, a new spirit of entrepreneurship surfaced, and Albanians quickly developed a surprising number of private enterprises. Also, in 1992, Albanians finally experienced the five-day work week, a welcome relief from the previous six-day work week under Communism.

In recent years, labor force participation and employment levels have lagged beyond population growth. In 2005 only 57.8% of working-age people were gainfully employed, with men having a considerably higher participation rate (68.5%) than women.

## 16 SPORTS

Without question, Albania's favorite sport is football (the common European term for the game known as soccer in the US). Championship matches in Albania date from 1930, and an Albanian Football Federation was founded in 1932 and became a member of the International Football Federation (FIFA). Albanian teams have taken part in both Balkan and European championship games. For example, in 1965, one Albanian team eliminated Northern Ireland, while another eliminated the Federal German team (by draws in both cases). Today, Albanians fervently follow the fortunes of British, German, and Italian football teams. Second only to football is volleyball, in which both men's and women's teams have become Balkan champions. Basketball is becoming increasingly popular, and many Albanian cities have fielded teams of both sexes, who enter their respective national and international competitions. Chess continues to gain favor, especially with youngsters, and tennis, having long been labeled by the Communists as a "capitalist sport," is steadily winning enthusiasts.

## 17 RECREATION

Albanians are inveterate storytellers, and in coffee shops throughout the country, men are often found regaling each other with humorous stories (especially about the former Communist regime) or listening with reverence to the deeds of Albanian folk heroes. Until 1991, the Albanian film studio, (*Shqipëria e Re* /New Albania) used to produce between 10 and 20 movies each year. Currently, it turns out only documentaries and other short subjects, so television is exceptionally popular.

Albania presents several extensive folk dance/song festivals that attract international visitors, and its citizens are faithful attendees of classical music performances. With the advent of democracy in 1992, Albanians are now more exposed to dramatic and musical performances from other countries in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, which they attend in growing numbers. Albanians are great socializers, and after taking a late afternoon nap, they enjoy a leisurely promenade along their wide streets during the evening on the way to meet friends and relatives before partaking of a late dinner. Discos are extremely popular with the younger set.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Albanian women and even girls as young as eight have always been praised for the intricate embroidery (*qëndisje*) which they create to decorate their dwellings. In the course of preparing their dowries, several young women will get together to make beautiful doilies (*çentro*) to place on furniture. Using a small loom (*vegël*), they create colorful rugs for floors, and with other hand tools they produce sweaters, socks, gloves, and other items, using wool, cotton, acrylics, and fur. *Ounë me grep* (lace making) is a traditional folk art that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Men usually work with metals such as copper, brass, and aluminum to craft decorative plates, wall hangings, and uten-

sils. Portraits of Skanderbeg abound, as well as pastoral scenes featuring the beautiful mountains and lakes of Albania. The capital, Tirana, is becoming well known for its delicate pen-and-ink drawings as well as for its acrylic, watercolor, and oil paintings. An outstanding ceramist, Mira Kuçuku, has a fashionable gallery on Rruga Zhon Dark in downtown Tirana—her beautiful pottery has already been exhibited in several countries in Europe. Hobbies including stamp collecting, bird-watching, gardening, butterfly collecting, and storytelling, are favorite pastimes all over Albania.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Having only emerged in 1992 from almost 50 years under the most repressive and isolated Communist government in Europe, Albanians are learning the ways of democracy. Significant progress has been made in the new century, with Albania openly stating its intent to join the European Union (EU). In June 2007, George Bush was the first US president to ever visit Albania, and noted its position as a close ally of Washington. In April 2008, Albania was invited to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), at the Bucharest (Romania) summit.

For a long time, the main broadcaster of radio and TV was the public station RTSh. Nowadays, the public station is facing fierce competition from private TV and radio stations that have mushroomed in the larger urban centers. Many people own satellite dishes, and Italian and Greek TV can be picked up via terrestrial reception. Sensationalism often defines the articles of the print media. Dependence on outside revenues, as well as ownership that is politically biased, limits the objectivity of these papers.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Throughout Eastern Europe in the 1950s (and Albania was no exception), the newly laid socialist foundations created a desire for more independence for women. The new consumer culture that communism started to define (centered around privatized leisure—like the purchase of a radio or TV, and domesticity—goods designed to assist with housework) reinforced, to some extent, traditional sex roles, but it also challenged them by articulating female aspirations for greater social recognition and independence. The Albanian communist regime emphasized the role of women as an integral part of socialist labor. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, employment levels among women continued to rise, although in predominantly "feminine" sectors. In 1961, women accounted for 73.7% of workers in textiles, 69.7% in the health services, 60% in food processing, and 50% in retail.

In 2004, the Assembly of Albania passed a law that called for the promotion of equal opportunities among men and women. The direct purpose of the law was to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of gender in the country's public life. Homosexuality continues to be a contentious issue.

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# ALSATIANS

**LOCATION:** Alsace, France  
**POPULATION:** 1,817,000  
**LANGUAGE:** French; Alsatian and Frankish dialects  
**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Lutheranism; Calvinism; Judaism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Located between Germany and France and in proximity of other European nations, the region known as Alsace has attracted travelers as well as invaders through history. Alsations survived five centuries of rule by the Roman Empire and Teutonic invaders. Unification of Europe by Charlemagne brought peace to Alsace. However, Charlemagne's grandsons divided Europe again. In 870 the Franco-German border was established on the Moselle River, marking the beginning of the French-German dispute over the region. Alsace was added to France by the Treaty of Rijswijk in 1697. Alsations saw their region annexed by Germany from 1870 to 1918. In 1918 Alsace was returned to France, but was again annexed by the Germans during the period of World War II from 1940 to 1944. When the war ended, Alsace was again returned to France in 1945.

As a result of the periods of German control and influence, Alsatian architecture, cuisine, dress, and dialect have been influenced by Germany. However, despite the constant presence of foreign powers, Alsations developed a strong sense of identity. People there see themselves first and foremost as Alsations, which is reflected in the use of their regional language.

Alsace is one of the regions of France. Politically it is one of the most conservative regions of France, where the conservative right won the 2004 regional elections. Alsatian regional government is an equivalent of state government in the United States. Since 2004 the conservative party has controlled the Alsace regional council. Not surprisingly, the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, nominated by the conservatives in the 2007 presidential elections, amassed the greatest support in Alsace. Alsatian politicians are known for supporting national identity issues. This region is also very supportive of European integration.

One of the most pro-EU regions in France, Alsace is home to numerous European institutions and organizations. The Center for Information on the European Institutions (CIIE) is based in the capital of Alsace, Strasbourg. The CIIE is the official information network of the European Union. Its major task is to inform the general public on the operations of the institutions and to provide news on European policies. Moreover, Strasbourg is one of the three official locations of the European Parliament. This legislative body of the European Union is the only institution to be directly elected by European citizens. The European Parliament in Strasbourg is the official place where the members of the European Parliament come together on a monthly basis to adopt community texts.

Other European Union organizations situated in Alsace include the European Court of Human Rights, the European Pharmacopoeia Commission, the headquarters of EURO-CORPS, the European Science Foundation, the Assembly of European Regions, and others. Additionally, the Alsace Of-

fice in Brussels is the representational tool used by Alsatian territorial associations and local consular bodies to represent their concerns to the European Union. Being the hub of the EU administration, Alsace is situated at the heart of European politics. This strategic position has been extremely good for Alsatian economy and allows the region to keep its distance from the centralized French national government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Alsace is the smallest French region. It is located at the eastern border of France between the Vosges mountains to the west and the Rhine river to the east. It also shares borders with Germany and Switzerland. Stretching along the Rhine, Alsace is 193 km (120 mi) long and 48.2 km (30 mi) wide. Currently, it is divided into two departments: the Lower Rhine and the Upper Rhine.

The climate in most of Alsace is similar to the towns of southern France. The temperature is fairly mild, averaging to 18°C (64°F) in the summer and 2°C (35.6°F) in winter. Colmar is the second driest town of France. An abundance of sunshine and mild winters allow the fertile lands along the Rhine river to produce lavish crops of grains, hops, tobacco and cabbage. Other crops grown in the region include wheat, corn, potatoes, asparagus, and root vegetables, such as beets. The area surrounding the eastern foothills of the Vosges has a warm and sunny microclimate with little rainfall. It is perfect for growing slow-ripening wine grapes.

The small but beautiful region of Alsace is known for its verdant forests, rounded hills, splendid vineyards, serene lakes, and picturesque panoramas. The Vosges mountain range at the west of Alsace is made of old mountains. Its summits are called balloons due to their unique rounded shape. The Grand Ballon peaks, including *Ballon de Guebwiller*, are the highest in Alsace, reaching 1,737 m (5,700 ft). Located at the very south of the region is the Jura mountain range.

Alsace has quite a few lakes. The most famous lake is White Lake located at the high altitude of 1,055 m (3,461 ft). At 955 m (3,133 ft) sits Lake Noir (Black Lake) known for its hydroelectric powerhouse. Lac des Truites, also called Forlen Lake, is the highest lake of the Vosges mountains. It can be found at an altitude of 1,061 m (3,481 ft). Alsace's two longest rivers are the Rhine and Ill. Between those rivers lies the area called the *Ried*, or reed country. This reed country is marked with marshland and wet grassland.

Its close proximity to the capitals of France, Germany, and Switzerland places Alsace at the heart of Europe. The capital of the region is Strasbourg. With more than 263,941 inhabitants, Strasbourg is an important economic and administrative center of Europe. Many people in this city are employed in the banking sector or other businesses. Strasbourg has excellent high speed highways and express trains connecting it with Paris, France; Frankfurt, Germany; and Basel and Zurich, Switzerland. Other large cities of Alsace include Sélestat, which is particularly famous for its city library, its festivals, and its market; Wissembourg, with more than 70 houses built in the 18th century; and Hunawihr, known for its burgeoning vineyards and flocks of storks. Colmar is a spawning industrial town with multi-colored, half-timbered, crooked houses and charming alleyways at the center of the city. Historical buildings are extremely well-preserved here. A fortress town of Neuf-Brisach is acknowledged for its military architecture.

Although the majority of Alsations live in cities, a portion of the population resides in the countryside. Alsatian quaint villages, sparkling with half-timbered houses, sit peacefully among the vineyards. It is customary for traditional country houses to be adorned with elaborate wood carvings. People also decorate their dwellings with flower window boxes, overflowing with geraniums and other colorful perennials.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Since 1945, standard French has established itself as the prominent language of the region. Originally, the name Alsace comes from Alemannic expression "Ell-sass," which means "Seated of the Ill." One of the biggest rivers of Alsace is Ill. After 1996 the German Elsass was prominently replaced with French-sounding Alsace.

Although Alsace is considered a French-speaking area, the traditional language of the region is Alsatian. The Alsatian language is the Alemannic dialect of Upper German and is fairly similar to Swiss German. Frankish dialects of Western Middle German are heard in the north of Alsace. However, neither Alsatian nor Frankish dialects are official languages of Alsace. About 25% of the local population is fluent in the Alsatian dialect. Also, the Alsatian and the Frankish dialects are now recognized as languages of France and are taught in French high schools. Furthermore, the local dialects are seen on shop signs and menus. The desire to safeguard national identity encourages Alsations to preserve the traditional Alsatian language. The overwhelming presence of French media makes the survival of Alsatian among younger generations rather challenging, but since it is an important part of the local identity, people hope that it will survive.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Traditional music, folk dances, songs, games, anecdotes, and legends are among the most popular forms of folklore that can be seen in the region. Many aspects of Alsatian folklore are inspired by or rooted in German folklore and traditions. Thus, Alsatian folk music shares many common features with German folk music. High-spirited melodies played with trumpets, flutes, accordions, and drums prompt the listeners to get up and dance. Most villages and towns have their own folk ensembles with members of all ages.

Alsations have many beliefs, stories, and superstitions related to storks. A stork (*la cigogne* in French) is the national bird of Alsace. Enjoying their special status, these stately birds like to make their nests atop the roofs of tall buildings. They prefer to build their nests high so that young storks can swoop off the roofs as they learn to fly. A stork is considered to be a symbol of good luck, happiness, and fidelity throughout Alsace. In French folklore babies are delivered by a rabbit in a cabbage patch; in Alsatian folklore (like in German folklore) babies are brought by a stork. Therefore, when an Alsatian child wants a younger brother or sister, he or she needs to place a piece of sugar on the windowsill to attract the stork, hoping that the bird would grant a precious package in exchange for a sweet treat.

From Strasbourg to Colmar, from the Vosges mountains to the Rhine, Alsace is saturated with history and legends. One of the well known Alsatian legends is about King Dagobert. Falling in love with a Kuttolsheim beauty, he built a pipeline to bring white wine from her village to Strasbourg. It was such a

commercial success, as well as a demonstration of his love, that Strasbourg built another pipeline for red wine.

In addition many castles, churches, or other places of local importance have fascinating and at times mystical legends about people who lived in them or events that happened there. For example, the village of Andlau has a legend about the foundations of its Abbey of Ste. Richarde in 880. According to the legend, the site for the abbey was chosen by a she-bear, who scratched her paw on the ground designating where the monastery must be built. The abbey's 12 centuries old crypt has a small wooden door above the very ground scratched by the bear. As legend has it, if a person puts his or her sore limb into the niche in the crypt's floor and touches the ground, that person will be cured of these sores. One can also see a stone bear near the door. According to one local belief, any woman who sits by that stone bear shall be assured of many children.

The District of Wintzenheim is another place steeped with legends. Centuries-old lore continues to pervade the Five Castles and Brand wine region. As the legend has it, the Brand hillside was fertilized by a dragon's blood. People also say that the Pflixbourg castle, located near the three castles of Eguisheim, is a home for the ghost of a White Lady imprisoned by a wicked fairy.

Fascinating local traditions and superstitions include a custom called *Andresle* practiced in Illzach. For this ritual, on Saint Andrew's Eve a girl must take an apple from a widow without saying thank you for it. She then must cut it in two and eat one half of it before midnight. The other half must be eaten after midnight. Then, in sleep, the girl will see her husband to be.

## 5 RELIGION

For five centuries (from the 9th century until 1648) Alsace was a part of the Holy Roman Empire, which established Catholicism as the official religion of the region. However, after 1948 Alsace was divided into numerous virtually sovereign lordships, forcing the people to adopt the religion of their prince. As a result, most of the Alsatian population is Roman Catholic, but there is also a considerable number of Protestants.

Additionally, unlike the rest of France, the Alsace and Moselle are the only regions that continue to follow the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801, under which public subsidies are granted to Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist churches, and to Jewish synagogues. Following the concordat also implies that public education in each of those faiths is offered and supported. Since in France religion and state are separate, the religious policies in Alsace and Moselle are the subject of constant disagreement between the two regions and the rest of France.

Alsace is known for its large Jewish community. The set of laws that provide religious equality and ensure that representatives of the deferent religions are treated as civil servants made Alsace a favorable destination of the Jewish people. However, this set of laws was adopted only in the early 19th century, while the Jewish community uninterruptedly existed in this area for over 800 years. The continued presence of Alsatian Jews reflects itself in the numerous ancient synagogues and cemeteries spread across the region, as well as in other aspects of the Jewish heritage.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Alsations are merry people and love to celebrate. Whether it is a religious holiday, a local festivity, or a two-day parade, people here take their time to get together and celebrate. Many religious holidays, such as Christmas, are not distinct to Alsace. Yet, they acquire unique characteristics of the region and feel very Alsatian.

Similarly to most Europeans, Alsations celebrate a number of Christian holidays, such as Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter. The Christmas season traditionally begins with the feast of Saint Nicolas, marked with special songs, legends, and gingerbread. At the wake of Christmas Eve, the streets throughout the region are lit with Christmas lights, the Christmas markets are set up, and the delicious aroma of cinnamon and biscuits fills the streets and homes. Alsatian Easter is particularly loved by children. It is the time of year when children hunt around the gardens in search of jolly-colored Easter eggs, carefully hidden by their parents. To celebrate the Epiphany, Alsatian children dress up as the three kings. A special dish made at Epiphany is the delicious *galette des rois* pastries.

Alsations greatly enjoy festivals and carnivals. The mid-winter Candlemas carnival marks the beginning of the festival season. The size and grandeur of the costumed procession depends on the village or town. For example, in Mulhouse the festive procession marches through the streets of the city for two days. The *corsos fleuris*, or flower floats festival, is another important event in Alsatian holiday culture. During this festival held in September, flower floats are assembled. Decorated with thousands of dahlias, the floats pass through the towns and villages. The most famous *corsos fleuris* parade is held in Sélestat. The first flower parade was organized in Sélestat by the Association of the Outdoor Gardeners of Alsace in 1927. The goal of the event was to attract young people to the gardening profession. This beautiful festival is enjoyed throughout the region, bringing joy and happiness to the hearts of the people.

Additionally, Alsace can boast its culinary and wine-related festivals. Each year multiple celebrations are put together to acknowledge Alsatian culinary, winemaking, and brewing traditions. From spring to autumn, villages and towns celebrate beer making, successful cherry crops, harvesting season, fried carp, or whatever else Mother Nature may grant.

Although there are some festivals celebrated by the whole region, many celebrations are local. Thus, the city of Ribeauvillé marks the end of summer with the Fête des Ménétriers (Musicians Festival). Bringing together artists and performers and offering theatrical and musical entertainment rooted in medieval times, this festival celebrates art and is a spectacle not to miss. In the same manner, each year a major folk festival (the Ami Fritz festival) is held in Marlenheim. Based on an Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian novel (1864), this festival brings to life traditional wedding rituals captured in the novel. During two days, visitors observe the nuptial parade, all sorts of folk entertainment, and a magnificent firework display.

There are a number of festivals celebrated by a given town or village to honor a local saint. They are called *Kilbe* in Upper Alsace and *Messti* in Lower Alsace. In medieval times, these lively events would end with a grandiose mass, followed by funfairs and a country market. Among such local holidays, the *Feux de Saint-Jean*, or the Saint John Fires Day, stands out. This summer celebration takes place in the valleys of Vosges

mountains. People come together to make and light the fires dedicated to St. John. In the past, people lit the St. John fires to celebrate the sun before it begins its annual decline. Honoring St. John and celebrating the bliss of the sun was believed to guarantee a better harvest.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional rites of passage in the villages and towns of Alsace include carnivals, calendar and votive festivals, and other types of folk rites. Varying from village to village, these festive events carry villagers into a new season or signify successful harvest. Also, each religious community in Alsace has its own rites of passages. For example, baptism plays an important role in the Christian community, while *brit milah* (the covenant of male circumcision) and naming ceremonies mark a passage through life in Judaism.

Other rites of passage in Alsace are related to the significant stages of human life, including birth, marriage, and death. Those could be religious or secular ceremonies, depending on a family. Religious or secular, each of these events is surrounded with rich ceremonial culture. Some observers note that Alsations developed a particularly interesting and complex ritual that help them to cope with death.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In general, Alsations are a very outgoing and community-oriented people. There is nothing that Alsations enjoy more than their *fêtes*: the annual village fairs and festivals. Multiple festival and holiday occasions provide Alsations with plenty of opportunities to set out tables and benches on the street and bring food, wine, and the accordion to relax. If one should name a sole major feature of Alsatian people, it has to be their conviviality.

Turbulent historic events, both happy and tragic, have shaped the character of the Alsatian people. Thus, on one hand Alsations are very open and tolerant towards each other and towards the foreigners. On the other hand they are proud of their local identity, so that little things like usage of the Alsatian dialect, telling of a local joke, joining in the singing of an old tune or inviting people for a traditional Alsatian meal really warms people's hearts. In sum, despite their recent tumultuous history, or possibly because of it, one senses a delicate joie de vivre prevailing throughout the region.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

As of 2008 Alsace has a population of 1,817,000 people and it is the third most densely populated region in metropolitan France. By 2030 it is estimated to increase by 12% to reach 2 million. Strasbourg, the capital of Alsace and a major port on Rhine, and other big cities, such as Mulhouse and Colmar, are busy industrial and administrative centers placing Alsace at the center of international trade.

An industrial and banking region at the heart of Europe, Alsace is not immune to the vicissitudes of the global economy. However, the dynamism of its businesses, convenient geographic location, appropriate regional legislature, and the ability of Alsatian businesses to establish themselves as the *sine qua non* of their corporate partners brings the region economic development, stability, and growth.

The thriving economy provides people with employment opportunities so that Alsations have a relatively high standard

of living. The regional government supports an open economy and creates good conditions for international employers. At the same time it provides its citizens with a strong social base, such as free public education and affordable medical care services.

There are approximately 130,000 foreigners residing in a region. Foreigners amount to 7.4% of the total population of Alsace and 4% of the total population of foreigners in France. Germans account for 16,000 residents. Furthermore, Alsace hosts 8.4 million tourists per year, 2.7 million of which are French tourists. The next in numbers stand visitors from Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, and Britain. Tourist accommodations range from luxurious hotels and holiday homes to inexpensive camping sites. Tourist industry annually brings Alsace over 2.5 billion euros.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The structure of the typical Alsatian family is similar to that in the other parts of France. Families usually have one or two children. Unfortunately, over the past decades a significant percent of couples ended in divorce. Especially it is a problem in bigger cities. However, people value their families and turn to close and extended family members for emotional and financial support. Despite the divorces, parents take their role as guardians and providers very seriously.

Both in the countryside and, to a lesser extent in bigger cities, people enjoy spending time with family and friends. Adult children visit their parents and grandparents on regular bases. Such visits usually involve a prolonged meal and a hearty conversation in the family circle.

Over the centuries Alsations demonstrated different attitudes regarding intermarriages. At times communities, including Alsatian Jews, were somewhat secluded and intermarriages were difficult, if not condemned. At the same time located at the crossroads of France and Germany, Alsace has a long history of mixed German-French unions. At present, Alsations do try to maintain their traditions, language, and identity, but it does not preclude them from entering mixed marriages.

Alsations are fairly laid back and hospitable people, and they welcome visitors and foreigners. Yet, it is only with their close friends and family that they are free to completely be themselves. In addition to forming strong bonds with family members, Alsations give their heart and soul to close friends. Friends are expected to be available when needed and it is common for friends to see each other almost every day

## 11 CLOTHING

Contemporary dress code in Alsace is fairly similar to that in the rest of France. However, Alsations are proud of their traditional costumes. These outfits went out of fashion a long time ago, but they are readily worn at festivals and celebrations. For example, folk costumes are the highlight of the 14 July parade. The history of Alsatians costume is presented to the viewer in museums throughout Alsace.

Until the 19th century dress was an important symbol of social status in Alsace. Thus, types of the local outfit were roughly divided into a set of clothes worn by poor peasants, outfits of wealthy city-dwellers, and attire of the nobility. The French Revolution changed that. After 1820 people began to acquire a new sense of identity that reflected itself in one's style of dress. If before the revolution outfit symbolized social sta-





*A boy wearing an Alsatian costume in Alsace, France. (© Steven Vidler/Eurasia Press/Corbis)*

tus, after the revolution it turned into a reflection of political inclinations, religious beliefs, age, and feelings.

Over time, outfits of nobility and bourgeoisie disappeared giving place to modern fashion. However, the attire of Alsatian peasants continues to live on in a new capacity of national Alsatian costume. Interestingly, the various elements of the Alsatian peasant costume were inspired by the style of the French nobility and bourgeoisie and adapted to local needs with variations from one area to another.

Alsace is a big province, and it is hard to pin down a sole traditional costume. Different folk communities such as people from the Munster valley have their distinct dress. However, in general, traditional female costume consists of white shifts with ruffled cuffs and collars and long skirts, symbolizing modest and hard-working peasants. The skirt's length, color, and decoration carry a religious meaning. For the Protestants, the skirt is knee-length. It is adorned with a velvet ribbon and the typical colors are green, purple, brown, blue, and sometimes red. The Catholic woman's skirt is long and the hem of the skirt is decorated with black velvet. It does not have any ribbons on it. As for the color, girls tend to wear bright red-colored skirts and older women prefer other deep colors, but never green.

Another important element of women's traditional costume is an apron. In the Middle Ages it was made of linen and it was always plain white. Since the 1820s women have been making aprons of silk and satin. The apron is tied around the waist with two ribbons that are crossed on the back and tied into a

big bow in front. Initially, aprons of young girls looking for a groom were tied with a big cord with numerous knots showing the amount of land included in the dowry. Stockings and silk shawls are also part of the female costume. Originally, stockings were knitted over the evening gatherings and demonstrated a variety of patterns and elaborate stitches. Today, however, the stockings are mostly machine made.

Traditional male costumes include black trousers and white shorts with long pleated sleeves. Shorts are typically made of linen or cotton. A principal item of the male costume is a waistcoat. Originated during a bloody peasant war in the 16th century, Alsatian vest is often red, although older men prefer darker colors. A final cloth article is a black hat made of felt. It could be easily recognized for its narrow brims and a flat crown.

In the past, Alsatian women put considerable effort and skill into costume making. Certain articles worn during celebrations were made to last the whole life and were handed over from generation to generation. Now, of course, most of the traditional costumes are machine made. Yet, there are few people who continue hand-knit stockings and do embroidery.

## **12 FOOD**

The Alsatian dishes could be described as a unique blend of German and French cuisine with distinct Alsatian flavor. Alsatian charcuteries offer a great variety of delicious hams and sausages such as *cervelat* (smoked pork), or *Montbéliard* (lightly smoked pork). Arguably, the best-known Alsatian

dish is *choucroute*—a dish made of cooked sauerkraut garnished with sausages, smoked meats, and potatoes. Other local variations of *choucroute* are sauerkraut with goose or duck or more modern recipes, such as *choucroute de la mer*, where fish and seafood replace the meats. Another famous Alsatian food is *baeckeoffe*. Originally, this casserole made of three different marinated meats and potatoes was a traditional Monday lunch. Women would drop off all the necessary ingredients at the baker's in the morning where it would cook in the oven for at least three hours. Then, they would pick it up on their way home for lunch.

Alsace is also well known for its traditional *flammekueche*, or Alsatian onion tart, made of cream, onions, and lardoons topped with a thin layer of bread dough and cooked in a wood-fired oven. Another favorite, *tarte flambée* could be roughly described as Alsatian pizza. One might go to the restaurant, place the order, and have the waiter start bringing the small tarts one after another, with a side salad and, of course, wine. When one is full, he or she has to notify the waiter that it is enough. The waiter would mark it down and bring the bill. Another regional specialty, *matelote du Rhin*, is a scrumptious fish stew made of freshwater fish marinated in white wine. The list goes on.

Furthermore, Alsace stands out for its breads and pastries. Alsatian bakers offer their customers different kinds of *bretzels* (Alsatian version of pretzels), *brioche*s (light slightly sweet bread made with a rich yeast dough), *bredele* (Christmas biscuits), gingerbread, and *springerle* (anise-flavored cookies). Ethnic deserts include *kougellhoff*, the famous yeast cake baked in a special mold, *tarte au fromage blanc* (Alsatian cheesecake), *bierwecke* (Alsatian fruit cake), and *glace au miel de sapin aux fruits des bois* (honey ice cream with berries). As the variety and quality of Alsatian food demonstrates, Alsace is believed to produce some of the greatest chefs in the world.

In addition to numerous dishes enjoyed throughout Alsace, different parts of the region carry on their unique food traditions. Thus, a concentration of small ponds in southern Alsace allowed this area to develop its own version of fish and chips (*carpes frites*). Dusted in soft wheat semolina carps or parts of a carp are pan-fried or deep fried. Perfect in their delicious crunchy crust *carpes* are served with French fries or a green salad.

It is true that many Alsatian dishes have their equivalent in France and Germany. Yet, Alsace bestows French or German recipes with their distinct characteristics. For example, French *pot au feu* gets a special twist in Alsace, where this dish of boiled beef is served with distinctly Alsatian array of greens, radishes, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, beets, and horseradish sauce.

Without a doubt Alsations are proud of their wine. There are about 65 miles of vineyards in Alsace, where perhaps the most diverse selection of grapes in France are grown. Preferred white wines are *Riesling*, *Tokay-Pinot Gris*, *Gewurztraminer*, *Muscat d'Alsace*, *Sylvaner*, *Pinot Blanc*, *Klevener*, *Edelzwicker*, and *Crémant d'Alsace*. Main red wines produced in the region are *Pinot Noir Rouge d'Ottrott* and *Rouge du Stephansberg*. Alsace is also one of the major beer-producing regions of France. Famous breweries in the proximity of Strasbourg produce superb *Kronenbourg Beer*, *Fischer Beer*, *Heineken Beer*, *Météor Beer*, *Kanterbräu Beer*, *Schutzenberger Beer*, and other beer varieties. Other traditional alcoholic drinks include a range of

*eau-de-vie* (fruit brandy). Made of local fruits and berries, such as plums, pears, and raspberries, it is sold in tall, slim bottles decorated with labels that look like parchment.

Gourmets in food in wine, Alsations developed a wonderful tradition of pairing regional wines with ethnic dishes. Thus, *Winstubs*, the down-to-earth restaurant-bars offer their customers a perfect combination of a late-harvest *Gewürtztraminer* with *foie gras* (delicacies made of duck or goose liver) or a *Sylvaner* with escargots. Another favorite combination is a *Pinot Blanc* with onion tart or a *Riesling* with *choucroute*.

### 13 EDUCATION

Education in Alsace is similar to that in the other provinces in France. It is compulsory for children aged six to sixteen. Public education is free. However, in comparison to France, in Alsace there is no separation of church and state. Following the set of laws established by the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801, regional government provides subsidies to the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish public schools. There are of course secular schools so that parents are able to send their children to secular public school if they choose to. Additionally, there are some fee-based private schools that include religious schools and international schools. The absence of separation of church and state causes on-going debates between France and Alsace. Some people criticize Alsatian regional government for providing special privileges only to the designated religions. Others argue that since Islam is the second largest religion in France it should thus enjoy comparable status with the four official religions.

At present there are 103 secondary schools and 31 Apprenticeship Training Centers in Alsace. Moreover, Alsace has several strong universities, including the University of Strasbourg. The University of Strasbourg is known for its courses in theology and is particularly famous for its courses on Protestant theology. In addition to offering classic curricula, institutions of higher education are offering new courses in information and communication technologies.

Furthermore, these institutions provide excellent programs in business and business administration. Increasing number of universities form partnerships with local and international businesses. Such partnerships ensure that over the course of his or her studies student acquires relevant skills. It also allows universities provide recent graduates with placement immediately after graduation. Moreover, regional government encourages exchange programs and supports international mobility of the local students. Over the few past years the region allocated a significant amount of financial aid for international exchange programs.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

As it was mentioned numerous times throughout this article, Alsatian culture is greatly influenced by France, Germany, and other surrounding countries. As many other aspects of Alsatian culture, architecture of the region is a blend of various influences. Hence, it is not unusual to see a fine gothic cathedral in Strasbourg and an excellent example of a Romanesque church, such as the Saint Foy de Sélestat in Sélestat. The houses of the little France district in Strasbourg and the little Venice in Colmar add to Alsatian architecture a touch of Renaissance. At the same time, the traditional half-timbered houses are still preserved in most of the Alsatian villages. The village

of Riquewihr, referred to as the pearl of Alsace, is particularly known for this type of structure. Impressively, over 90% of the houses in this village date to the 16th century. Other types of the region's rural buildings reflect the many faces of Alsace's varied geographical and cultural identity. Perhaps it is the elegance with which Alsations are able to blend these influences and mix them with their local traditions that makes this place unique.

Having been a disputed territory in the past, the region experienced lots of grief, but it also marked Alsace with a rich cultural heritage. The birthplace of numerous leading Alsatian celebrities, it is a land of art and culture. Internationally renowned artists from the region include Tomi (Jean-Tomas) Ungerer and Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi. Tomi Ungerer, born in 1931 in Strasburg, is best known for his erotic and political illustrations as well as illustrations for children's books. In 1998 he was awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Award for illustration. In 2007 his hometown dedicated a museum to him: the *Musée Tomi Ungerer*. Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904) is a legendary sculptor and architect from Colmar. His most famous work is the Statue of Liberty presented in 1886 to the United States.

Alsace has 250 museums. Mulhouse is a home for the largest rail museum of Europe called the Cité du Train, and its Museum of Automobiles presents its visitors with the largest automobile collection. *Musée du Jouet* in Colmar exhibits more than 2,000 toys. There are also several museums dedicated to various aspects of Alsatian traditional lifestyle, history, and its admirable gastronomy.

Moreover, Alsace boasts Europe's highest concentration of feudal castles that also bear witness to its turbulent history and display richness and diversity of architectural styles. The legendary Haut Koenigsbourg castle is one of France's most frequently visited monuments. Additionally, Alsace has more than 400 ruined castles. Other prominent cultural sites in Alsace include the 142 meters tall cathedral of Notre-Dame in Strasbourg (the second highest cathedral in France) and le Mont Sainte-Odile monastery ruins (a very popular place dedicated to the patron saint of Alsace) in the Vosges Mountains.

### 15 WORK

Alsace is primarily an urban area rated among the top three of the most urbanized regions in France. 93% of all Alsace inhabitants live in cities and only 7% of the population remains in the countryside. Major cities include the regional capital of Strasbourg with more than 263,941 residents, industrial city of Mulhouse with over 110,000 inhabitants and Colmar being home for over 65,000 people. Main rural areas are Fessenheim with a population slightly over 2,000 and Rhinau with a population of 2,300.

According to statistics, Alsace has a relatively young population. Approximately 69,000 are students. In 2007 8.6% (73,725 people) of the working population were unemployed. Yet, the standard of living is comparatively high with an average salary of 17,457 Euro per year. The greatest source of jobs in Alsace is the service sector with key branches of Commerce, Health, Administration, and Education. Employing more than 303,210 people, the service sector is now the principal driving force of the Alsace's economy. The industrial sector provides jobs for 151,243 people, or a third of the working population. Major industrial branches specialize in mechanical equipment,

textiles, electronics, and plastics. Companies specializing in biotechnology are blossoming. Among the leaders in biotechnology is the Peugeot PSA industrial site in Sausheim, producing over 400,000 vehicles per year. The construction sector employs more than 25,000 people. Nearly 63,100 Alsations living in border areas commute for their work to Switzerland and Germany.

Only 7,187 people are employed in agriculture. At the same time Alsatian rural lands covers 40% of the territory. Furthermore, Agriculture is a sector essential to the regional economy. Consequently, people employed in the agriculture enjoy favorable conditions and subsidies.

### 16 SPORTS

In Alsace, sports bring together tens of thousands of people. Soccer and handball are among the most favorite sports. Professional and semi-professional sports in Alsace include basketball, handball, football, ice hockey, volleyball, and badminton teams. Also, people in Alsace enjoy a great variety of outdoor sports. For example the region is known for its ski resorts. Among the best resorts are the Lac Blanc (white lake), Gérardmer, Markstein, le Bresse and Schnepfenried, Champ du Feu and Grand Ballon located at an altitude of 1424 meters. In the summer many local families, as well as tourists, enjoy hiking. Popular water sports include canoeing, kayaking, and rafting.

Multiple sports clubs are supported by the local government. In fact the number of sports and health clubs is growing, thus contributing to the diversity of athletic activities. To encourage a high level of local sportsmanship, the government provides hundreds of the most talented athletes with generous grants. This support has bought Alsace quite a few champions.

Among such champions is Thierry Omeyer. A handball player, Thierry Omeyer was crowned in the European Championship of 2006 as the best goalkeeper of the tournament. He also won three Men's World Handball Championships (two in 2003 and one in 2007). Other famous Alsatian athletes are Sébastien Loeb, four-time World Rally Champion, and Mehdi Baala, a middle-distance athlete competing mainly at 1500 meters. Baala won two European Championships (2002, 2006), a World Championship (2003), and a European Cup (2008). Paul-Henri Mathieu from Strasbourg is a renowned tennis player and a member of French national tennis team. Arsène Wenger, the most successful manager in the history of French Arsenal Football Club in terms of trophies, is also a native of Alsace. Among Alsatian champion swimmers are Nicolas Rostoucher, Amaury Leveaux, and Aurore Mongel.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to museums, castles, great food and wine, teahouses, pottery workshops, and numerous festivals and parades, Alsace is known for its *rue de vin*, or wine rout. This wine trail has existed in Alsace for centuries, producing one of the most sophisticated Rieslings, Sylvaners and Pinot Auxerrois. Towns and villages along the wine rout are surrounded with picturesque gardens full of flowers. Many villages compete with one another in flower contests for best flower display. Welcoming signs to those places often designate whether a given village is one of the eight most beautiful villages in Alsace. The signs also show villages' flower rating (with four stars indicating a top rating).

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional art pottery and artistic furniture have been produced in Alsace for centuries. This crafts-making was originally influenced by France and Germany, but over the time Alsatian craftsmen developed their unique styles and techniques. The tradition of pottery making in Alsace goes back as far as the Middle Ages. It blossomed until in the middle of the 19th century it was trammled by the onset of industrialization. However, traditional pottery-making never disappeared completely, remaining a cherished aspect of the Alsatian culture.

At present, Soufflenheim and Betschdorf are two acclaimed centers for pottery making. Soufflenheim earthenware could be easily recognized for its colorful designs in the shades of yellow, blue, green, and brown. It is often adorned with illustrations depicting Alsatian folk dressed in traditional clothing, elegant birds and delicate flowers. Betschdorf pottery is of a more simple design. Manufactured from grey clay, it is decorated with cobalt blue. It is particularly known for its grey and blue tones. In fact, Betschdorf's pottery is designed more for storage while Soufflenheim's are especially suited for cooking. Although today traditional pottery is made primarily for the tourists, craftsmen did preserve their skills and techniques and styles. Very little in traditional pottery-making process has changed since 1717. Many potters' workshops are open for visitors, so that people can observe how the pottery is made. Both Betschdorf and Soufflenheim hold special pottery festivals in September to celebrate the wonderful craftsmanship of the area.

Alsace also has a rich tradition of painted furniture making. While this tradition does not originate from Alsace, it has become an integral part of the local crafts production since the Middle Ages. Alsatian craftsman-made furniture includes chairs, closets, four-poster beds, cabinets, and other articles. The furniture either painted in one color, usually a deep red or a color imitating wood or is decorated with various patterns. The decorative schemes range from elaborate floral designs common in the Kochersberg to geometric motifs prominent in Alsace Bossue to stylized roses, animals, and figures used in the south of Strasbourg. Original pieces of Alsatian painted furniture are highly sought after and considered to be invaluable items for collectors of artistic furniture.

Additionally, there is a longstanding tradition of illustrated folklore. Modern artists such as Pat Thiebaut produce various illustrations of Alsace continuing the tradition. Folkloristic images often depict bucolic scenes of rosy-cheeked children in their colorful folk costumes. Other patterns include portrayals of the Alsatian way of life. These folkloric illustrations depict men and women, boys and girls dressed in Alsatian costumes dancing in the village square, picking fruit, herding geese or strolling in the verdant countryside with an Alsatian village of half-timbered houses in the background.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Alsace is one of the most stable and prosperous regions in France. It has relatively low unemployment and a low crime rate. The population growth is an impressive 6.8% per year. The regional government provides a reasonable safety net of benefits to Alsatian citizens and offers favorable conditions and employment opportunities to foreigners. In sum, it seems

on the surface that people in Alsace do not really have glaring social problems.

In reality, however, there are several serious social issues within the region. For one, Alsations are engaged in a constant struggle to create their unique political and cultural niche in the realm of a centralized French state. Having preserved their unique identity through centuries of violence, it is very important to the Alsatian community to stay true to the essence of their culture. Two major aspects of Alsatian identity include the local language and the regional set of laws concerning hunting, social insurance, public holidays, the church, and the retirement system. There is considerable discrepancy between regional and national laws and Alsace is constantly asked to rethink their regional legislature. This naturally triggers negative feelings and anxiety on the part of Alsations. Dissemination of French media and its impact on regional language is another issue that challenges the Alsatian social scene. The Alsatian language is being displaced in the public sphere by the dominance of the French language. To deal with these problems, the Alsatian regional government is attempting to welcome international business and to become closely engaged with the supranational institutions of the European Union. Whether this approach will help Alsations to preserve their identity and their language and establish their place of power in the French political and cultural arena remains to be seen.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In modern Alsatian society, men and women have almost equal opportunities. Women are distancing themselves from the traditional gender roles by pursuing higher education and careers. It has become normal for a woman to combine motherhood with work. Consequently, approximately 80% of the Alsatian women in their thirties are employed and many of them are raising young children. To support women in their educational and professional pursuits, the French national government provides French mothers with generous benefits. In fact, France has one of the most generous childcare systems in Europe. This is one of the factors contributing to the impressive growth rate of the Alsatian population.

Furthermore, in comparison to men a higher percentage of women have degrees from institutions of higher education. Many women are employed in businesses and a significant number of women hold powerful positions in the local government. One of the initial forces that brought women into politics was the Women of Alsace movement in the 1960s. It was during this time that the first two women were elected mayors in Alsace.

In addition to striving for gender equality, Alsatian society is open-minded about gender minority issues. A number of resources are available for members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community (GLBT or LGBT).

The open-minded and progressive Alsatian society has not eradicated gender inequality completely. Women occupy important leadership positions, but there is still a gender-based wage differential. According to the National Statistics Institute report, the average annual net salary of men in 2006 amounted to €20,195 while average annual net salary of women was only €14,320. Alsatian women's gross average hourly wage is also significantly lower than that of men's. The wage issue along increasingly dominates local and national political agenda. In

light of the debates, the French national government passed proactive legislation to combat gender-based discrimination.

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—by A. Golovina Khadka

# ALTAYS

**LOCATION:** Altai Republic in Russia (the Altay Mountains of South Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 68,000 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Turkic Dialects; Russian

**RELIGION:** Russian Orthodox Christianity, Native Altay religion

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Altay (also spelled Altai) is a term used to refer to a number of Turkic ethnic groups in the Russian Federation inhabiting the Altay district (*krai*) located in South Siberia. The Altays are in fact divided into two major divisions, the Northern Altays, comprising the Tubalars, Chelkans, and Kumandins, and the Southern Altays, comprising the Altay proper, or Altay-Kizhi, the Telengits, Telesy, and Teleuts. The Northern and Southern Altays differ considerably in language, history, and material culture. Historically, the Southern Altays were frequently misnamed White Kalmyks, Biy Kalmyks, or Mountain Kalmyks, and the Northern Altays were called "Tatars." Many ethnographers and historians consider the Altays' South Siberian homeland to have been the original homeland of the Turkic peoples in general. Furthermore, the Altays are of special interest to historians, ethnographers, and linguists because of their preservation of very archaic cultural traits.

The Altays are descendants of numerous Turkic as well as Samoyedic and Ketic peoples who lived in the Altay Mountains. The Turkicization of these communities was an ongoing ethnic process completed by the end of the 18th century. The ancestors of the Altays were varyingly subjects and constituent elements in the powerful Inner Asian states that emerged in the Altay and Sayan Mountain regions of South Siberia and came to dominate the steppes of eastern Inner Asia. This area came under Mongol control in the early 13th century, and the Altay region appears to have been a borderland between the lands of the Ulus of Jochi and the Ulus of Tului. As a result, the lands of the Southern Altays became the easternmost territory of the Blue Horde, centered on the lower Syr Darya River in Central Asia, and the lands of the Northern Altays became the northwestern border of the Mongol successor states in Mongolia. In the 15th century, the Altays came under the control of the Junghars, a powerful Western Mongolian confederation, and remained under their control until the annihilation of the Junghars by the Manchus in 1756. It was in that year that the Northern and Southern Altay tribal leaders petitioned to the Russian authorities to put themselves under Russian rule, and since 1756 the Altays have been subjects of Russia.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Numbering only around 68,000, the Altays are a small ethnic minority in Russia; however, by Siberian standards they constitute a relatively large group. The homeland of the Altays is the Altay Mountains of South Siberia in Russia. Most of the Altay population is located within the Altay Republic, which contains within it the so-called Altay Highland Autonomous District (*Gorno-Altayskii avtonomnyi krai*). Although Altays constitute less than 2% of the population of the Altay District (Russians make up the vast majority of the district's popula-



tion) they constitute a much larger proportion of the population of the Altay Highland District. The Altay District shares borders with Kazakhstan to the southwest and Mongolia to the south. Overall Altays constitute about a third of the population of the Altay Republic.

The Highland District has an area of 96,600 sq km (37,300 sq mi), and the district's mountains can reach over 13,000 ft (3,900 m). The mean temperature in January is between  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-22^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $2^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), and in July the mean temperature is  $15^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $62^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Roughly 25% of the territory of the Highland District is covered by evergreen forests.

The traditional economy of the Altays was nomadic stock breeding, supplemented by limited cereal agriculture. A steady loss of pasture land to Russian colonization beginning in the early 19th century has resulted in a gradual increase in the role of agriculture in the Altays' economic life. Nevertheless, stock breeding has always held a very important position in Altay life, especially among the Southern Altays.

The Altay Mountains are very rich in wildlife, especially deer and squirrel, and the Altays have traditionally exploited the area's extensive forests. The hunting and gathering of forest products, especially furs, continues to be an important supplementary activity in Altay economic life.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Altays speak a number of Turkic dialects that are to varying degrees mutually intelligible. The Southern Altays speak dialects of the Kipchak (or Northwest) branch of Turkic, which

are closely related to Kazakh and Kyrgyz. The Northern Altays, on the other hand, speak dialects of the Northeast branch, which are related to Khakass, Tuvan, and more distantly, Yakut. Among both Northern and Southern Altays, Russian is also widely spoken, and substantial numbers of Altays have been linguistically assimilated by the Russians.

Altays typically have a first name, a patronymic (taken from the father's first name), and a surname. To a large degree Altays have preserved old Turkic names such as the men's names *Karga* and *Malchi*, and the women's names *Aylu* and *Sari*. Since the Christianization of numerous Altay communities in the 19th century, Russian names have become more widespread, although it is common for Russian names to be "Altayized": *Temekey* (from *Timofei*) and *Banush* (from *Vaniusha*).

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Altays have rich folklore traditions, consisting of various songs, stories, and fairy tales. The Altays are especially well known for their composition and performance of oral epic poetry. The best known of these epics is entitled *Maaday-Kara*. Epics are typically performed at night, with a bard singing the verses in a style of throat-singing and accompanied by a horse-hair-stringed instrument called a *topshur*. The epic tradition of the Altays (and South Siberian Turks in general) is one of the richest in the world, and Altay epics continue to be collected by folklorists today.

The Northern and Southern Altays possess distinct epic traditions shaped by the peculiarities of each group's historical development. The Southern Altays, who were under the rule of the Golden Horde, retained epics such as *Alip Manash* and *Idegey*, which depicted 15th century political events on the Central Asian steppes and in the Volga Valley. The Northern Altays, on the other hand, retained an epic tradition more similar to that of their South Siberian neighbors, the Khakass, Tuvans, and Yakuts.

### 5 RELIGION

Despite the conversion of numerous Altay communities by Russian missionaries in the 19th century, the Altays, both Christians and non-Christians, have remained firm adherents to their native religious traditions, which persisted even during the Soviet period, when manifestations of religious life were discouraged or suppressed. The resistance of the Altays to adopting Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (all three of which are represented in Southern and Western Siberia) has resulted in the retention of very archaic religious traditions since abandoned by most other Turkic peoples. In the traditional Altay world view, the Universe was divided into three levels (the Upper World, the Middle World, and the Underworld) linked by the World Tree (*Bay Terek*). Altays considered themselves inhabitants of the Middle World, and the community's link to the Upper and Lower Worlds was the shaman (*qam*). Shamans functioned as healers and played other roles in Altay religious ritual. They also functioned as heroic figures, with shamanic journeys serving as the plots for epic poetry and other forms of folklore. In their performances, during which their souls would travel to the spirit worlds, shamans would typically wear a specific costume and accompany their performance with a drum. In the early 20th century a millenarian religious movement emerged among the Altays and other Turkic peoples of the region known as Burkhanism, which existed into the 1930's.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The various communities forming the Altays and their constituent clans had a series of festivals that featured sacrifices and libations to the spirits of the Upper World and the Underworld, as well as to ancestral spirits and tutelary spirits. Such festivals were held at specific times according to the seasonal calendar and often involved the sacrifice of horses to *Erlik*, the spirit of the Underworld, and to *Ülgen*, the supreme deity of the Upper World. Modern-day Altays also celebrate the major Soviet and Russian holidays, including Victory Day (May 9) and New Year's Day (January 1).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, when an Altay woman was giving birth, all men had to leave the *yurt* (tent) and stand outside. During childbirth, men were expected to frighten away evil spirits by making noises and running around the yurt. After the child was born, the head of the family would name the child after the first thing he laid his eyes on.

Young Altay men usually chose their own brides, and a young man's father or a formal matchmaker would go to the bride's father to arrange the match. Once the bride's dowry (*kalim*) was agreed on, a wedding date would be fixed then both parties would sit around the fire and begin to feast.

Altays were commonly buried with grave goods, and it was common for wealthy Altays to be buried with one of their horses. The dead were buried in varying ways, commonly on the third day after death. The Telengits commonly placed the body on the ground and built a wooden structure over it in the shape of a small house. Other Altay groups placed the dead on platforms that were suspended in trees. In more recent times, especially during the Soviet era, the dead were simply placed in graves. A series of memorial feasts was usually held after the death of a family member. The first memorial feast was held on the day of the death, and a sheep or goat was slaughtered. Other memorial feasts were held on the sixth, seventh, or ninth days.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The traditional greeting ceremony among the Southern Altays was as follows. When a guest arrived at the yurt of an Altay, it was customary for him to come in and, without saying a word to the yurt's owner, take out his pipe, fill it, and light it from the hearth fire. The host would then do the same, and the two would exchange pipes saying "*nä tabish bar?*" ("What news is there?"). They would then answer "*Tabish yok*" or "*Tabish yoghila*" ("There is no news"). They would then inquire about each other's health. If there was more than one visitor, the host would greet each one in the same way, in order of rank. Such exchanges generally took place only between men; women usually stayed home or remained silent during the ceremony. Altays are generally reported to have been quiet, polite, and reserved with one another, and observers of traditional Altay society have identified respect for elders as a feature that distinguishes them from their neighbors. Despite the rigid divisions between the sexes, men and women would freely interact with one another, and it was common for young people to arrange their own marriages.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Observers of the traditional life of the Altays have frequently commented on the general state of poverty of this group. The decimation of herds as the result of pestilence or sudden changes in weather frequently led to famine and the impoverishment of whole communities. The integration of the Altays into the Soviet economy probably did not completely liberate them from the economic risks of stock breeding in this remote area.

The traditional housing of the Altays is the yurt, the round felt tent common to most Inner Asian pastoral nomads. Among the Northern Altays, cone-shaped summer dwellings made from felt and tree branches were also common. More sedentarized Altays also constructed log houses similar to those of the Russian peasants who had migrated to the Altay Mountains. During the years of Soviet rule, the Altays were encouraged to move into Russian-style dwellings on collective farms. However, traditional dwellings continue to be used, especially when the Altay herders lead their herds to summer pastures.

While the relative isolation of the Altays has certainly preserved the archaic features of their culture, it has at the same time resulted in a relatively low standard of living.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In traditional Altay society, sex roles were very clearly distinguished. Men were primarily engaged in stock breeding and hunting, while women performed agricultural work, including haying, as well as domestic chores. Child-rearing was also the responsibility of women. Most accounts of traditional Altay society describe respectful and almost formal relations between spouses, especially in the presence of a third party. An Altay man was responsible for the welfare not only of his wife and children, but also for any unmarried female relatives. When a man's father died, the man would not only receive his father's property, but also any unmarried female relatives living in his father's house. Married daughters were considered to have left the family and were not eligible to inherit property from their kinsmen.

Marriage among the Altays was generally monogamous, and marriages could be arranged either between the parents or between bride and groom. A bride would typically bring a dowry (*qalim*) provided by her parents.

The various groups making up the Northern and Southern Altays were themselves divided into clans (*seok*). Clans were not merely collections of related groups. The economic life of Altay society, especially among the Northern Altays, was closely structured along clan lines. Hunting grounds and pastures were divided up along clan lines, and members of one clan were banned from the lands of another.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Altay clothing, generally the same for men and women, consisted of pants and a long shirt that went down below the knee. Over this they wore a long belted robe with wide sleeves. This clothing was often made of Chinese materials. Overcoats were typically made of sheepskin and hats of lambskin with a wide upturned brim of fox or sable fur. Married women also wore a special sort of sleeveless overcoat. Altays wore soft-soled leather boots, into which they tucked their pants. Some northern Altay groups also wove fabric for shirts and pants from hemp.



*Ivan Kobzorenko carries his last surviving hen in Gonukhovo village in the Altai region of the Russian Federation. The bird flu had been confirmed in 36 populated areas in Russia in 2005. (© Andrey Kasprishn/epa/Corbis)*

Over the course of the 20th century, Russian clothing became more common among the Altays. Throughout the Soviet period, however, traditional clothing, which was quite practical for the harsh climatic conditions and the demands of stock breeding, was still frequently worn.

## 12 FOOD

The mainstay of the Altay diet was traditionally the products of their herds—meat and dairy products. Altays prepared various products from milk, including a yogurt-like drink called *ayran*. They also distilled a mildly alcoholic drink of fermented mare's milk called *chegän*. In addition, various sorts of hard cheeses were prepared. The main animals eaten for meat by the Altays were horses, followed by sheep and goats.

The Southern Altays supplemented this diet of meat and dairy products with some cereal crops, primarily barley, which was grown in lowland areas. In areas where Altays practiced agriculture and came into contact with Russian peasants, they also engaged in the growing of vegetables and the baking of bread. The Northern Altays supplemented their diets with a variety of forest products, such as berries and roots, as well

as fish. All Altay groups consumed substantial amounts of tea and tobacco as well.

## 13 EDUCATION

No formal educational apparatus existed for the Altays until the establishment of an Altay Christian Mission in 1868, when efforts were made to create an Altay alphabet and teach Altay converts literacy in translated Altay biblical texts and in Russian. The children of Altay converts could also be sent to Russian Orthodox monasteries. However, the vast majority of Altays had no access to formal education in any language.

With the establishment of Soviet power in the Altay lands, attempts were made to create an Altay literary language, as well as a Soviet-style intelligentsia. The Soviets created mixed Russian-Altay schools, and the current educational system in the Altay region is essentially an adaptation of the system created during the Soviet period. There are a number of higher educational institutions in the Altay region, and a few Altays also study in larger institutions in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and elsewhere.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

One of the most treasured aspects of the Altay cultural heritage is the recording and publication of the Altay oral epics, which are of tremendous value not only for our understanding of the Altays, but of Turkic and Inner Asian peoples in general.

The preservation of Altay cultural heritage is closely linked to the preservation of Altay religious traditions. Despite their partial conversion to Christianity in the 19th century, there is currently a renewal of interest among the Altays in their shamanic traditions, which they have been free to express since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Altay musical tradition is similarly rich and also linked to the epic and shamanic traditions. In addition to epics performed in the style of throat-singing, Altay musical folklore includes genres of a religious nature such as libation and shamanic songs. Despite the prominence of Altay vocal music, especially throat-singing, Altays also had several popular musical instruments. These include horse-hair fiddles, stringed lute-like instruments, and a sort of a metallic Jew's-harp called a *kobis*.

## 15 WORK

Much of Altay life consisted of tending and milking the herds, making felt, and doing agricultural work such as planting and harvesting barley and mowing and gathering hay. Observers of traditional Altay life often comment on the tediousness and monotony of all the agricultural work and chores such as the milking of livestock and the making of dairy products such as cheese, yogurt, and butter.

Altays have continued to work in collective farms created during the Soviet era. The prosperity of collective farms varies considerably from farm to farm, depending on the resources allotted to the collective as well as the efficiency and organization of the collective farm's president and workers.

## 16 SPORTS

Like other Turkic peoples, the Altays enjoy horse racing, archery, and wrestling. The wrestling is a type influenced by the Mongol style in which two competitors square off standing,



grab each other by the shoulders, and try to force one another to the ground.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The performance of oral epics, which typically took place during winter nights and were accompanied by music, not only entertained but instructed the Altays in the values, history, and mythology of their community. Religious ceremonies, with their feasting and songs, likewise had a recreational element to them. Summers were the time of most abundant leisure for the Altays, especially Altay men, whose main recreational activities were drinking fermented mare's milk and hunting.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Altays were known as especially skilled blacksmiths. Altays believed blacksmiths to be vested with religious power. Another important medium of Altay folk art is wood, and many objects intended for everyday use were often carved with elaborate designs. Religious images of ancestral and other spirits were often made of wood, cloth, and animal hair, or combinations thereof. The most elaborate creations of Altay folk art were shamans' drums and other elements of the shamanic costume.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As with many other small, formerly nomadic groups in Siberia, the Altays have experienced numerous social problems as a result of their marginalization in Soviet, and now Russian, society. The Altays have always been plagued by poverty, which, despite Soviet claims, was not only not successfully alleviated, but may actually have been exacerbated during the Soviet era. The assaults of tsarist missionaries and Soviets on the most fundamental pillars of Altay society—particularly shamanism, religious rituals, and the clan-based social structure by which scarce resources were allocated—severely undermined Altay society. Furthermore, the introduction of cheap grain alcohol such as vodka further exacerbated Altay social problems.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Altay society the nomadic economy and dispersion of Altays into small social units limited social segregation of the sexes. At the same time a clear division of labor was evident in nomadic Altay society, with women focusing on child-rearing, food preparation, and textile production.

During the Soviet era, particularly during and after World War II, Altay women began to gain access to Soviet education, and began to enter to some degree the industrial, and to a much more limited degree, the professional workforce.

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—by A. J. Frank

# ANDALUSIANS

**LOCATION:** Spain

**POPULATION:** 8,059,431 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Castilian Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Andalusia, located in southern Spain, has a distinctive culture influenced by its Mediterranean climate and its historical tolerance of diverse ethnic groups. Tartessos, home of the once powerful Tartessian civilization, was founded in Andalusia. Its coastal area was colonized by the Phoenicians during the latter part of the 2nd millennium BC. With the fall of the Phoenicians, Carthage became the dominant sea power of the western Mediterranean. The Romans conquered Andalusia and renamed it Baetica. In the 5th century AD, it was invaded by the Vandals and then by the Visigoths.

The Moors (Muslims who invaded from North Africa and seized control of the region in the 8th century AD) ruled all of Spain for three centuries and Andalusia until 1492. This period was a time of both cultural and economic wealth for the region, which reaped the benefits of Islamic advances in philosophy, medicine, the arts, and other fields, as well as the religious tolerance practiced under Islamic rule. Córdoba had a prestigious university and became the largest and richest city in Western Europe, and one of the largest in the world. In addition, the Moors brought to the region sophisticated irrigation and cultivation techniques, building aqueducts and waterwheels throughout Andalusia and neighboring Valencia and making the land bloom. The word “Andalusia” is derived from the Arabic name for Spain: Al-Andalus.

When Christian forces based in Castile finally drove the Moors out of Granada in 1492, their religion (as well as that of the Jews) was suppressed, and the rich cultural life that had flourished in Andalusia was largely destroyed. Much of the region’s wealth was confiscated, and a long period of economic decline began. The conquering Castilians—warriors rather than farmers—let the extensive irrigation systems of the Moors deteriorate, turning the fertile farms into pastureland. The *latifundio*, or large landed estates, became a way of life; large portions of land were placed under the control of absentee landlords, leaving Andalusia one of Spain’s poorest regions. However, since Spain’s entry into the European Community in 1986, Andalusia has seen economic progress. Since 1985, Andalusia is an autonomous community administered through the Junta de Andalusia, it has a local parliament and president. It is one of the four historic regions of Spain.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Andalusia is located in the southernmost part of the Iberian Peninsula between the Sierra Morena Mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. It is bound by Portugal to the west, the Spanish provinces of Extremadura, Castile-La-Mancha, and Murcia to the north, the Mediterranean to the southeast, and the Gulf of Cádiz to the southwest. The largest region in Spain, Andalusia includes the provinces of Huelva, Seville, Cádiz, Córdoba, Málaga, Jaén, Granada, and Almería. It is a land of contrasts, containing Spain’s highest mountains (the Sierra Nevada chain

that rises to heights of over 3,350 m (11,000 ft), its hottest lowlands (the Andalusian Plains), the white beaches of the Costa del Sol, and the Las Marismas marshes, home of the Coto de Doñana National Park. Andalusia is crossed by the Guadalquivir River, known as the “father” of old civilizations. Seville, located 64 km (40 mi) inland on the river, is Spain’s most important western port.

Andalusia is the Spanish autonomous community with the greatest number of inhabitants and the second-largest in surface. Among its cities, Seville is the third largest in Spain, with a population of approximately 1,813,908 inhabitants.

## 3 LANGUAGE

According to the 1978 constitution, Castilian Spanish, the language of the central and southern parts of the country, is the national language. It is spoken by a majority of Spaniards and used in the schools and courts.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Flamenco is a Spanish style of music and dance that originated in Andalusia by the end of the 18th century. It was developed mainly by the gypsies, although it has several elements that reveal possible Roman, Arabic, Jewish, African, and American substrata. It is expressed by song (*cante*), guitar music, clapping of the hands (*palmas*), and dancing. The greatest performers are said to be distinguished by a type of inspiration that goes beyond artistic technique called *duende*, a mysterious and charming power that cannot be defined.

The name *cante jondo* expresses its deep feeling, and the 20th century Spanish composer, Manuel de Falla, considered it to be the old traditional song, while the *cante flamenco* embodied modern tendencies. Flamenco singing is divided into *cante grande* (with mainly gypsy influence) and *cante chico* (with folkloric and popular roots).

Flamenco music offers a great diversity of songs, with more than 60 different kinds of *palos*, or traditional varieties of *cante flamenco*. Among the best known are the soleá, *seguriya*, *peteneras*, *fandango*, *tango*, and *tanguillo*. The most popular performers include Lola Flores, Manolo Caracol, Camarón de la Isla, and guitar player Paco de Lucía.

## 5 RELIGION

Like people in the other regions of Spain, the Andalusians are overwhelmingly Catholic. The Catholicism of Andalusia has a strong element of belief in the miraculous, and some scholars believe it is possible to trace the region’s devotion to the Virgin Mary to the mother goddesses of pre-Christian religions. They are particularly known for the colorful Holy Week (*Semana Santa*) celebrations held in their cities and towns.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Andalusians celebrate the major holidays of the Christian calendar and Spain’s other national holidays, including New Year’s Day, Epiphany, St. Joseph’s Day (March 19), the Day of St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29), St. James’s Day (July 25), and Andalusia Day, on February 28, to commemorate the date of the successful referendum vote on autonomy. The most famous celebration is Seville’s *Semana Santa*, or Holy Week, celebration, which begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter Saturday. Although each Andalusian city and town has its

own religious processions, the most beautiful and spectacular take place in Seville. Each day up to 11 processions of *pasos* (floats)—some lasting as long as 12 hours—pass through the town, organized by members of religious brotherhoods called *cofradías*. The night-time processions by candlelight, accompanied by special march music, are especially beautiful.

Andalusia is noted for festivals and celebrations of many kinds that take place in the region throughout the year. Carnival celebrations are especially famous in Cádiz, with street parades, fancy dress, and satirical music competitions. Seville is noted for its famous *feria*, held at the end of April. It is held on fairgrounds containing booths called *casetas*. Seville's *feria* lasts an entire week, during which the town is on holiday and almost all normal business shuts down. Other festivities are Jerez's Horse Fair in May; Huelva's *Romería del Rocío*, when horse drawn carriages and processions converge from all the south on el Rocío; Saint John's night and its bonfires; Corpus Christi; the Virgen del Carmen processions in the coastal cities and fishing villages; and many other festivities and celebrations.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism, first Communion, and marriage could be considered rites of passage for Andalusians, like most Roman Catholic Spaniards. These events are the occasion, in most cases, for big and expensive social gatherings in which the family shows its generosity and economic status. At times, families dig into their savings or borrow money in order to pay for such displays.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In the cities, office hours begin at 9:00 AM and traditionally include an extended afternoon lunch break beginning at 2:00 PM. Workers then return to their offices from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. The day typically ends with a walk with friends or family or visits to neighborhood bars for a few drinks, *tapas* (appetizers), and conversation. Dinner is often eaten as late as 10:30 PM. It is customary to shake hands, and in a social setting women usually kiss their friends on both cheeks. Young groups are formed by co-workers, fellow students, or people from the same town to go together to discos, organize parties and excursions, and date among themselves. It is not unusual to have lifelong friends known since kindergarten.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Reflecting the Andalusians' Moorish heritage, houses in the region have traditionally been built of stucco with thick walls and few windows to protect residents from the heat of the sun, although Andalusia's older houses may also be built of stone. Windows overlook patios filled with potted plants, and the house is often built around a shady central courtyard, sometimes including a fountain, in which the family can relax and cool off. Houses in Seville often have intricately carved wrought iron gates over their doors and windows.

Spain enjoys an excellent system of National Health Insurance, and the Andalusians have access to the same level of modern medical care as their neighbors elsewhere in a country with an average life expectancy of 78 years. Rail service connects the region's major cities to each other and to Madrid, including the AVE, Spain's newest rapid train, which was created for the World's Fair in Seville in 1992. Elsewhere in the area,



buses are the most efficient means of transport, with links between most Andalusian villages and towns and the rest of the country. Several airports connect Andalusia with other parts of the world.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most Andalusian households consist of nuclear families (parents and children only), although they do sometimes include one or more grandparents. Male participation in the domestic sphere is limited, and women have almost exclusive responsibility for childrearing, with the father maintaining a more distant and formal role. Because of unemployment and other causes, it is customary for many young adults between the ages of 20 and 30 to continue living with their parents.

## 11 CLOTHING

For everyday activities, both casual and formal, Andalusians wear modern Western-style clothing similar to that worn elsewhere in Western Europe and in the United States. Boutiques and ready-to-wear shops can be found all over. Although young people wear sports clothes and blue jeans, the average Andalusian pays more attention to personal appearance. Businessmen wear a suit and tie, businesswomen dress fashionably in suits or dresses and high heels. However, traditional costumes can be seen at the region's many festivals and in flamenco dance performances. Women's attire consists of solid-colored or polka-dot dresses with tightly fitted bodices and flounced skirts and sleeves worn with mantilla shawls, long earrings, and hair



A young woman in traditional Andalusian dress during Pentecost Festival, El Rocio, Spain. (© Pawel Wysocki/Hemis/Corbis)

ornaments, such as combs or flowers. Male flamenco dancers wear white shirts with black suits and broad-brimmed black hats.

## 12 FOOD

Typical Andalusian dishes include gazpacho, *pescado frito* (fried fish), several kinds of shellfish, *jamón* (cured ham), and prepared olives. Gazpacho is a cold soup made with tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and olive oil that has become common fare in Spain. While today gazpacho is usually prepared using a blender, the ingredients were traditionally pounded by hand in a special bowl called a *dornillo*. *Pescado frito* fried in batter is available throughout the region at special shops called *freidurías*. Some of the types of fish used for frying include sole, whiting, red mullet, and anchovies. A salad of lettuce and tomatoes is served with most dishes, but these are usually the only vegetables that accompany a meal. Andalusia's most popular drinks are white wines, different kinds of *manzanilla* and sherry, and ice-cold beer.

There is a rich variety of Andalusian deserts, heavily influenced by medieval Andalusian cuisine, like *pestiños* (deep-fried pastry bathed in honey), *polvorones* (almond cookies), *amarguillos* (almond macaroons) and *alfajores*. *Tapas*, said to have originated in Andalusia, are popular in all of Spain and include shrimp-fried squid, cured ham, chorizo (spicy Spanish sausage), and potato omelets (called *tortillas*).

The wines of Jerez are famous the world over. Other standouts are the *manzanilla* of Sanlúcar, the white wines of Cádiz, and the Moriles, Montilla, and Málaga wines, among others. The liquors of the region are also popular, included the Rute and Cazalla *anis*, and the rums from Motril.

## 13 EDUCATION

Andalusian children, like other Spanish children, receive free, compulsory schooling from the ages of 6 to 14, when many students begin the three-year *bachillerato* course of study, after which they may opt for either one year of college preparatory study or vocational training. Today, each Andalusian provincial capital has its own university; the one in Seville being highly regarded throughout Spain.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Andalusia has an ancient cultural heritage dating from prehistoric times. It features beautiful examples of Roman architecture, such as the ruins of the city of Itálica, near Seville, and Moorish buildings, such as the Alhambra in Granada, the Mezquita in Córdoba, and the Giralda and Torre del Oro in Seville.

Andalusia is the birthplace of many illustrious people. Philosophers and writers include Séneca the Younger, San Isidoro de Sevilla, Averroes, Maimónides, Luis de Góngora, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Antonio Machado, Fed-

erico Garcia Lorca and Rafael Alberti. Famous statesmen include the Roman emperors Hadrian and Trajan, and former president Felipe González. Manuel de Falla is a famous Andalusian guitarist. Diego Velázquez and Pablo Picasso are the regions well-known artists.

Andalusia hosts numerous cultural events. The International Exposition was held in Seville in 1992. At the end of June, there is an International Festival of Classical Music and Flamenco dancing in Granada. There is also an International Festival in Córdoba in July, and Flamenco contests in September in Ronda.

### 15 WORK

Andalusia is primarily an agricultural region but the service sector, particularly tourism, retail sales, construction, and transportation have grown very quickly. According to the Spanish Institute of Statistics, the GDP per capita of Andalusia, 17401 euros in 2006, is still the second-lowest in Spain. At the same time, the economic growth rate for the 2005–2006 period was 3.72 % one of the highest in the country.

### 16 SPORTS

The Andalusians share their countrymen's passion for soccer (called *fútbol*), especially in Seville, where there is an old rivalry between the Betis and the Sevilla, the two home soccer clubs. Andalusia's other sports include tennis, swimming, hunting, and horseback riding.

Bullfighting is known as the "*fiesta nacional*," the national sport. The sport originated in Andalusia, where Spain's oldest bullrings are located (in Seville and Ronda). At the beginning of the bullfight, or *corrida*, the *torero* (bullfighter) sizes up the bull while performing certain ritualized motions with his cape. Next the *picadores*, mounted on horseback, gore the bull with lances to weaken him, and the *banderilleros* stick colored banners into his neck. Finally, the *torero* confronts the bull alone in the ring. Exceptionally good performances are rewarded by giving the *torero* one or both of the bull's ears.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In a region affected by extremely hot weather much of the year, Andalusian life moves at a leisurely and casual pace. Much social life centers around the neighborhood bars where one can relax with a cold drink and a plate of tapas. However, people also enjoy staying home and watching television, which is found even in the smallest village.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In addition to leather crafts (the word "cordovan" comes from Córdoba), the Andalusians are known for their ceramics, which are distinguished by the geometric designs that originated with the Moors (based on the Islamic prohibition against representing living things in art). The art of Andalusian builders and stone carvers has survived in such famous buildings as the Alhambra Palace in Granada, the Giralda Tower in Seville, and the mosque in the city of Córdoba.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Andalusia is a poor region with high rates of unemployment and much of the land concentrated in large holdings (*latifundios*). Andalusians tend to emigrate to other regions, mainly

to Cataluña, and from the countryside to the cities. Unemployment and poverty are linked to delinquency, alcoholism, and drug dependency, problems that the Andalusian cities, mainly Sevilla, Cádiz, and Málaga, share with other developed countries.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Married women in Andalusia maintain close ties to their mothers. Common-law marriages are not unusual. Only church marriages were formally recognized in Spain until 1968, when civil ceremonies were first allowed by law. Divorce has been legal since the 1980s, although a man is much more likely to divorce his wife than vice versa. While the tradition of *machismo*, the public assertion of masculinity, is seen by many as belittling women, Andalusian women actually have an ever-increasing role in society and a high degree of economic independence, competing favorably with men for the region's jobs. Many women are found holding municipal and government posts and managing businesses. A large percentage of women attend university. Evidence of the secular nature of contemporary Spain can be seen in the widespread support for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Spain. In June 2005 a bill was passed to allow gay marriage, making Spain the third country in the European Union to allow same-sex couples to marry.

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—revised by S. García Castañeda

# ANDORRANS

**LOCATION:** Andorra (Principality of Andorra) (between France and Spain)

**POPULATION:** 81,222

**LANGUAGE:** Catalan, French, Spanish, some English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; some Protestants, Muslims, Hindu and Jews

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The autonomous principality of Andorra is a tiny, mountainous nation in Western Europe. This isolated rustic region was virtually unknown to the outside world until the mid-20th century. Since that time, improved transportation and communications have strengthened its ties to neighboring countries, and it has grown to be a popular tourist destination for vacationers from Spain, France, and other countries throughout Europe.

At one time, the land that is now Andorra formed part of the Roman Empire. The Romans were succeeded by Germanic tribes and, in the 9th century AD, Moorish invaders who entered present-day Europe from North Africa. Charlemagne, the Frankish ruler who challenged the Moors and established the Holy Roman Empire, is credited with freeing Andorra from Moorish rule and is generally considered the country's first national hero. Charlemagne's grandson, Charles II, granted control of Andorra to a Spanish noble, the Count of Urgel. In the 12th and 13th centuries, authority over the region was disputed by the bishops of Urgel and the French Count of Foix, who signed agreements in 1278 and 1288 establishing a system of joint rule over the area. The Count's claim on Andorra eventually passed to France's head of state. Except for a brief period following the French revolution, France's leaders (including all its presidents since 1870) have had the title of Prince of Andorra, sharing official control of the region with the bishops of Urgel. Andorra paid a nominal sum—under \$10 in present-day U.S. currency—to each ruler every other year until the adoption of its present constitution in 1993. (The bishop of Urgel traditionally received part of his payment in produce and livestock, including 12 hens.)

Andorran farmers began raising tobacco in the 19th century, but their country remained isolated and relatively impoverished until the establishment of improved transportation and communication systems in the 1930s, thus laying the foundation for development of the nation's tourist industry following World War II. In the wake of a constitutional crisis in the 1930s, Andorra's General Council ruled that all male citizens aged 25 and over could vote, whereas the vote had previously been restricted to heads of families. In 1970 the voting age was lowered to 21 and women were given the right to vote. Andorra became a parliamentary democracy in 1993 when it adopted its first constitution, which retained the nation's relationship to its French and Spanish princes but limited their powers. Under the constitution, political parties and trade unions were legalized for the first time. Andorra became a member of the United Nations in July 1993.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Andorra is located on the southern slopes of the Pyrenees mountains between France and Spain. With a total area of 468 sq km (175 sq mi), it is one of the world's smallest nations—about half the size of New York City. Much of its terrain has elevations of 2,500 m (8,200 ft) or more above sea level, and its highest peak reaches 2,946 m (9,668 ft). The land also includes picturesque meadows, fields, and lakes, and the Valira River, which flows into Spain. Only about 4% of Andorra's territory is cultivable. The Madriu-Perafita-Claror Valley, in Andorra, was also designated a UNESCO world heritage site in 2004.

About two-thirds of Andorra's 81,222 people live in urban areas, mainly the capital city of Andorra la Vella and the second largest city Escaldes-Engordany. Andorra has one of the highest population densities in Europe: 173 per sq km (449.5 persons per sq mi). Native born Andorrans make up only about 36% of the population. The greatest number of foreign-born residents are Spaniards, who account for over half the population. Other sizable groups include the Portuguese (10%) and French (over 6%). The diverse ethnic mix of people attracted to present-day Andorra also includes Belgians, Germans, Poles, North and South Americans, British, Australians, Filipinos, Moroccans, Indians, and others.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Andorra's official language is Catalan, a Romance language similar to the Provençal spoken in the south of France. Catalan is also the official language of Catalonia, an autonomous region of Spain located in the northeast corner of that country, and is spoken in the Spanish region of Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and the French department (or province) of Pyrenees Orientales. Besides Catalan, most Andorrans also speak French and Spanish, and many speak even more languages, such as English, if they are engaged in tourism or commerce. Official government documents are printed in Catalan.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Andorra's most famous religious shrine, the church at Meritxell, is the subject of a popular legend. It houses a statue—the Virgin of Meritxell—that is said to have been found on a snowy hillside surrounded by blooming plants hundreds of years ago. Travelers who found the statue tried repeatedly to move it to a covered area in town, but each time it disappeared only to be found once again on the hillside surrounded by flowers. Finally, it was decided that the statue was destined to remain in that spot, so a church was built to house it. The statue became Andorra's most important religious emblem and a popular destination for pilgrimages.

The lake of Engolasters is the subject of two more religious legends. One claims that the lake was created by flooding when Jesus Christ, disguised as a poor traveler, was turned away by a woman he had approached and caused a flood to show her the evil of her ways. According to another legend, the stars fall from the sky in order to stay in the beautiful lake permanently.

A famous character from secular lore is Andorra's "White Lady," who is part of all major festivals. According to tradition, she was a princess abused by a wicked stepmother. After surviving her stepmother's attempt to have her killed, she married a man who headed a rebellion against her father and stepmother, and the two became Andorra's most illustrious couple.

## 5 RELIGION

More than 90% of Andorrans are Roman Catholics, and Catholicism influences many aspects of Andorran society. Even today the government of Andorra has a special relationship with the Catholic Church. The importance of Catholicism is reinforced by the fact that one of the principality's two princes is a Spanish bishop. In addition, the church's traditional parish system forms the basis of the country's administrative structure. All public records are kept by the church, and only Catholic marriages are officially recognized in Andorra. The country also has small populations of Protestants (including New Apostolic Church, Mormons, Anglicans, Reunification, and Jehovah's Witnesses), about 100 Jews, and about 2,000 Muslims and Hindus.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Andorra's holidays include New Year's Day (January 1), Good Friday, Easter Monday, the Andorran National Day (September 8), and Christmas (December 25), as well as other holy days of the Christian calendar. The National Day is observed by making a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Meritxell, Andorra's most important religious site. In addition to these national holidays, Andorra's seven parishes all have their own local festivals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Baptism, first Communion, and marriage are considered rites of passage for Andorrans, as they are mostly Roman Catholic.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Life centers around the family for most Andorrans, and fathers traditionally exert tight control over their wives and children. The Roman Catholic Church also plays a central role in the social life of Andorrans. For example, only Catholics are permitted to get married in Andorra.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Many Andorrans still live in traditional slate-roofed stone farm houses, often built against mountainsides to leave stretches of level land free for planting. Most of these rural houses have livestock areas or tool sheds on the ground floor, a kitchen and family area on the second floor, and bedrooms on the third. The country's rapid development in recent decades has led to a boom in both residential and commercial construction. However, due to Andorra's scarcity of flat land, it is difficult to find space for the new buildings. Modern multi-story apartment blocks and rustic village houses crowd in on each other with only narrow lanes in between. While this aspect of Andorra's economic development has drawn criticism, many of its people have regarded it as a necessary price that must be paid for the advantages brought by increased prosperity and closer ties with the outside world.

Before the 1930s, when the first roads to France and Spain were built, Andorra had no vehicles whatsoever—not even horse-drawn carriages. All transport was by pack animals. Over the past half-century, the tiny nation has rapidly joined the modern world; by the 1980s, it had one motor vehicle for every four inhabitants. Although Andorra has no railways, excellent roads provide passenger and freight transport routes to both France and Spain. There are also several cable cars in



operation. With no commercial airports of its own, Andorra must rely on international airports in Barcelona, Spain and Toulouse, France for air connections.

Average life expectancy in Andorra is 76 years. Catholic priests and lay personnel play an active role in the administration of the country's hospitals.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family allegiance and cohesion are central to life in Andorra, although the absolute control traditionally exercised by fathers has diminished over the past half-century due to the social changes brought about by the opening of Andorra to tourism and commerce. A desire for change was already evident in the constitutional crisis of the 1930s that resulted in the granting of suffrage to all men over 25. Previously, the principality's political structure had reinforced its patriarchal tradition by limiting the vote to male heads of households. Women were granted the right to vote in 1970.

## 11 CLOTHING

Andorrans wear modern Western-style clothing like that common throughout Western Europe and in other developed nations. Traditional costumes—still worn for folk dancing and on special occasions—reflect the influence of Catalonia. Women wear full, flowered skirts over white petticoats; blouses (sometimes covered by flowered shawls); long, black, fingerless net gloves; and black espadrilles with white stockings. Men wear white shirts, dark knee-length pants, white stockings,



People look over a lake and hills in the Pyrenees mountains of Andorra. (© Morton Beebe/Corbis)

and black shoes. They may also wear broad red sashes tied at the waist.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

During its centuries of isolation, Andorra evolved its own cuisine, distinct from that of its neighbors, France and Spain. Favorite dishes are often based on farm produce and freshly caught game. One popular type of dish is a stew made from hare, wild boar, or chamois (mountain goat), in which the animal is simmered in its own blood (the hare stew is called *civet*). Other favorite meats include lamb chops (often grilled on hot stones), sausages, and ham (which may be fried in honey and vinegar to create the dish *rostes amb mel*). Common entrees also include *trinxat* (boiled potatoes and cabbage), grilled trout (often caught in a nearby stream and seasoned with garlic and black pepper), and omelettes made with wild mushrooms. Andorra also has distinctive regional desserts, most notably *coques*, flat cakes made with grape syrup, brandy, and other flavorings. The village of Canillo is known for a special dessert called *coca de canel*, consisting of dried fruit simmered in wine and sugar.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

Andorra has a literacy rate of virtually 100%. Schooling is compulsory from age 6 to 16. About 35% of Andorra's primary

schools are French; 35% are Spanish and 29% are Catalan but follow a Spanish curriculum as well. Andorrans who attend college usually do so in France or Spain. However in 1997 the University of Andorra was established. Because the number of students makes it impossible for the University of Andorra to develop a full academic program, it serves primarily as a center for virtual studies, connected to Spanish and French universities.

## <sup>14</sup> CULTURAL HERITAGE

Andorra has an old and rich folk heritage which is perpetuated in its folk dances. One of the most popular dances is the *sardana*, which is also the national dance of Catalonia in northeastern Spain. The dancers—young and old, male and female—form a circle or a long line, holding their clasped hands high in the air to perform this slow, graceful dance. Short, sedate steps alternate with longer, bouncy ones, and the dancers must pay close attention to the music to know when it is time for each type of step. While the *sardana* only attained its present form in the 19th century, it is based on an older dance that was formerly held in the open air after certain church services.

In addition to the *sardana*, which is popular throughout Andorra, various regions have their own dances, including the *marratxa* of Sant Julia de Loria, the *contrapas* of Andorra la Vella, and the *Bal de Santa Ana* of Les Escaldes, all of which



are performed only on special occasions. Folk singing is also a popular pastime, and traditional pantomimes are still performed as well.

## 15 WORK

Until the 1930s most Andorrans were farmers and shepherds. They traditionally followed the Catalan pattern of leaving most or all of their land to one child (usually the eldest son) to prevent it from being split up into smaller holdings. This practice left the other children without a livelihood, forcing many to emigrate—today there are more ethnic Andorrans in France and Spain than in Andorra itself. With the growth of tourism since the 1950s, however, improved employment opportunities have kept more Andorrans at home, as well as attracting immigrants from Spain, France, Portugal, and other countries. Under Andorra's constitution, approved in 1993, the formation of trade unions was allowed for the first time in the country's history. Adoption of the constitution is also expected to create jobs in the newly expanded public sector. Trade has become especially prominent in Andorra because of the lower tax rates for manufacturing and Andorra's Tax free Status. Also, the tourist industry has blossomed because of the number of products that can be purchased duty free, in addition to Andorra's attractive recreational opportunities. Tourism now accounts for more than 80% of Andorra's gross domestic product (GDP).

## 16 SPORTS

Located high in the Pyrenees, Andorra has the perfect climate to make it a prime ski area. It is snow-covered for six months of the year, but its skies are usually clear and sunny, providing a picturesque view of its beautiful scenery as well as safe skiing conditions. Its resorts attract visitors from France, Spain, and other countries throughout Europe. Each resort offers ski lessons through the Andorran National Ski School. Once the ski season is over, Andorra's mountains are still frequented by hikers, mountaineers, and rock climbers. Hunting, fishing, cycling, and horseback riding are other popular outdoor activities. Competitive sports include rugby, soccer, tennis, golf, and auto racing.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Andorrans receive both television and radio broadcasts from neighboring countries. In addition, Andorra has two powerful radio stations of its own, with the highest transmitter in Europe. Andorrans who spend their leisure time in outdoor pursuits have an unusual resource located in the scenic mountains of their country—a series of 21 uninhabited cabins that are open to the public for use as overnight shelters.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Andorran crafts include elaborately carved pine-wood furniture, pottery, and ironwork. A regional specialty is a class of products known as *musicatures*, which are decorated in a distinctive style with a knife point. These designs are found on many types of items, including wooden, leather, and even metal handicrafts, as well as furniture.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

While tourism has brought new economic opportunities to Andorra since the 1950s, it has also marred the country's pristine landscape. In mountainous areas, high-rise residential accommodations for skiers have crowded out older wooden buildings. Towns have been overrun with tourist shops and restaurants and there has been a major increase in heavy automobile traffic. Real estate speculation has driven up property prices, making it difficult for young couples to afford their own homes.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Andorra gained the right to vote in 1973. Today women have the legal capacity to act on equal terms with men. While there remain gender inequalities in the areas of employment and child care, the Andorran government has attempted to close these gaps. Women's rights are protected in the Andorran Constitution as well as the European Convention on Human Rights. However, culturally, those in the 45–65 age range still harbor sexist attitudes. Andorra has very strong laws against prostitution, which can result in imprisonment. Abortion is illegal except in order to save the woman's life.

Homosexuality is legal in Andorra and same sex partnerships were legalized in Andorra in 2005.

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—revised by C. Corrigan

# ARMENIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Hay

**LOCATION:** Armenia (in the southwest of the former Soviet Union)

**POPULATION:** 8–10 million

**LANGUAGE:** Armenian

**RELIGIONS:** Armenian Apostolic Church; some American Christian sects

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The precise origins of the Armenian people, who call themselves *Hay*, are controversial and the subject of debate by historians and archeologists. Regardless of whether Armenians are indigenous to the region they inhabit—appearing there as early as the 28th century BC according to some—or whether they migrated there later, their presence in the Anatolian Highlands and the Ararat valley was documented by the 5th century BC in the writings of King Darius I of Iran (521–485 BC), Herodotus (b.484 BC), and Xenophon (401–400 BC).

Between the 1st and 5th centuries AD, Armenian kingdoms fell alternately under the political and cultural influence of the Roman and Iranian empires, between which they were situated. Between the 7th and 9th centuries AD, Armenia was buffeted by waves of Byzantine influence from the west and Arab invasions from the south. By the 11th century, Armenians who had prospered within the Byzantine Empire and who had settled in the Cilician plain on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor established their own independent state (AD 1080–1375). Because of its strategic location, Cilician Armenia fell within the sphere of European affairs until it was weakened and then destroyed by Mamluk invasions in the 13th and 14th centuries.

From the 16th to the 20th century, much of Western Armenia fell within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, while Eastern Armenia (Transcaucasian Armenia) fell within the Russian Empire. Centers of Armenian culture and learning formed in Constantinople in the West and Tiflis in the East. In the 19th century, Armenian nationalism emerged in both locales. Armenian political parties formed just before pan-Islamic policies in the Ottoman Empire grew to threaten the role of non-Muslim minorities, including Armenians. Massacres of Armenians took place in the 1890s, and Armenians, largely through the medium of political parties, began to organize themselves in resistance.

When Turkey joined the Central Powers against Russia in World War I (1914), Armenians became suspect due to their ties to Armenians in the Russian Transcaucasus, who had supported their political organization. In 1915 Armenians in Anatolia were disarmed and imprisoned and then deported to concentration camps in the Syrian Desert. As many as 1.5 million are thought to have perished, and hundreds of thousands fled to the Russian Transcaucasus, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Since 1948, these events have been referred to as the Armenian genocide. The genocide has occupied a central role in the cultural and political life of Armenians around the world.

Following the formation and dissolution of a Transcaucasian Federation (1918) and an independent Armenian Republic (1918–1920), Armenia succumbed to the Red Army, was

absorbed into the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (1922), and became a union republic of the Soviet Union (The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1936. After the emergence of a powerful national movement in Armenia (1988–1990), Armenians voted in favor of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, just months before its collapse in December. Armenia adopted its national constitution on 5 July 1995 and has held democratic elections for president and parliamentary positions since that time, though the elections have been continually marred by accusations of electoral fraud.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The newly independent Republic of Armenia is located in the southwestern part of the former Soviet Union and shares borders with Iran to the south, Turkey to the west, Georgia to the north, and Azerbaijan to the east. The country is landlocked and largely arid, encompassing the plain of the Ararat valley and cross-cut by small mountain chains. Despite one significant lake, Lake Sevan, Armenia possesses few natural or energy resources. Although the territory of the Republic of Armenia is only 30,100 sq km (11,620 sq mi), Armenians have historically occupied a much larger territory between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, spreading across eastern Anatolia (in modern Turkey) and into contemporary Iran and Azerbaijan.

The Armenian Plateau in eastern Anatolia was included in what is known as Greater Armenia, east of the Euphrates river, while a smaller region, to the west of the river, is known as Lesser Armenia. In the 1st century BC, under the rule of Tigran the Great, Armenian influence extended from the Caucasus mountain range to Cilicia, as far east as the Caspian Sea and as far south as Egypt. For two millennia, Armenian polities and communities have formed and dissolved within this larger area.

As of 2008, estimates of the world-wide Armenian population range between 8 and 10 million, 3 million of whom reside in the Republic of Armenia. Significant diaspora communities exist in the United States, France, former Ottoman territories (Jerusalem, Syria, and Lebanon), formerly communist countries (Georgia, Russia, Bulgaria, and Romania), and Iran. Some diaspora communities are very old, such as the ones in Madras, India and in San Lazzaro, Italy, but many date to the Armenian genocide and the subsequent dispersion of Armenians from their Anatolian homeland.

The Republic of Armenia itself is more ethnically homogeneous than other republics of the former Soviet Union, with Armenians constituting more than 95% of the total population. Large communities of Azerbaijani Turks and Kurds resided in Armenia until 1988, when they began to migrate out as conflict grew between Armenians and Azeris in the neighboring republic of Azerbaijan. Other minority populations in Armenia include Russians, Greeks, Yezidis, and Jews.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Armenian language occupies an independent branch of the Indo-European family tree and has been spoken since antiquity. The Armenian language was written for the first time in the early 5th century (AD 406), when its alphabet was invented by the scribe, Mesrop Mashtots, so that the Christian liturgy and scriptures could be translated and written for an Armenian audience. The alphabet has 36 characters, some of which were modeled after Greek and Syriac cognates.

The Armenian language has numerous dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible. However, two standard printed dialects exist: Western and Eastern. Western Armenian was the dialect of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and was standardized as the literary language of Armenians in Constantinople. Armenian diaspora communities throughout the Middle East, Europe, and North America, which descend from Armenians who fled the Ottoman Empire, use the Western dialect. Eastern Armenian was the dialect of Armenians in the Russian Empire and Iran. It was standardized as the literary language of Armenians in Tiflis in the 19th century and was reformed in the Soviet era. Eastern Armenian is the official language of the Republic of Armenia and is also used by communities in the former Soviet states and in Iran. Western and Eastern dialects of Armenian use the same alphabet and are grammatically similar, although there are some consistent differences between them. Grabar, the classical Armenian language, is the language of the church liturgy but is no longer spoken conversationally.

Armenians everywhere consider the ability to speak the language an important part of being Armenian. For example, a survey of Armenian Americans showed that 81% thought Armenians should speak Armenian. Even though Eastern Armenian, along with Russian, had already been an official language of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, and most Soviet Armenians were bilingual, the growth of a national movement in 1988 intensified sentiment about the language. With independence, Armenian began to replace the Russian language in many official contexts, such as government documents and street names, and the Armenian people began to replace Russian words in their speech with Armenian equivalents.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Armenian folklore is deeply historical, drawing upon centuries of national heroes. Mesrop Mashtots, for example, has often been depicted in works of art and educational and historical publications. A large statue in his image adorns the Armenian Manuscript Library (Matenaderan) in the capital city, Yerevan. Other folk heroes include the mythical ancient King Ara; the 5th-century warrior Vartan Mamikonian, who was martyred defending Armenians against the Persians; and modern guerilla fighters (called *fidayi*). Folklore pertains both to ancient and medieval Armenian kingdoms and to daily village life before the genocide.

Another body of Armenian folklore is biblical or Christian in nature. For example, many people believe that Noah's Ark landed on Mount Ararat—a once-volcanic mountain that sits on the Turkish side of Armenia's contemporary western border. Gregory the Illuminator (Grigor Lusavorich') is the saint and popular national hero credited with bringing Christianity to Armenia by converting its King Trdat III in AD 301, making him the first ruler to adopt Christianity as a state religion. Tradition holds that Gregory the Illuminator saw visions of fire in which Christ himself showed him the site where the first Armenian church should be built. Erected on the site of an ancient pagan fire temple, that church became the cathedral of Etchmiadzin and has remained as the center of the Armenian Church.



#### 5 RELIGION

According to some, Christianity was introduced in Armenia by the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew and is therefore apostolic. But, it was not until King Trdat III's conversion that Armenia was Christianized, shortly before the official Christianization of the Roman Empire. The Armenian Apostolic Church, to which the vast majority of Armenians belong, broke with the Council of Chalcedon in the late 5th century AD and has maintained a monophysitic doctrine since then, attesting to the single, divine nature of Christ. The Armenian liturgy has changed little from its classical form, canonized in the Middle Ages.

Not all Armenians are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, partly due to the pressures of communism in Soviet Armenia and the attraction of other Christian faiths in the diaspora. Nevertheless, the Armenian Church has played an important role in the preservation of Armenian history and culture. Armenian church architecture dating as far back as the 7th century and medieval illuminated manuscripts produced in Armenian monasteries are national monuments and treasures.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Armenians celebrate major Christian holidays, such as Easter and Christmas (which they observe on the Orthodox date of January 6). As elsewhere in the Orthodox world, Christmas is considered to be primarily a religious holiday rather than an occasion for elaborate gift-giving. Like other people of Europe

and North America, Armenians celebrate the New Year on January 1, when it is popular to go from house to house visiting friends and relatives. Birthdays are celebrated with parties for friends and extended family members. In addition, it is customary for the person whose birthday it is to treat classmates or co-workers to a special treat, such as chocolate or brandy.

Other occasions are traditionally marked with celebration in Armenia as well. For example, if someone enjoys very good luck, such as high grades on an exam or a new job or new home, it is customary to treat friends and co-workers to a celebration (*magharich*). On Vardavar, a pre-Christian spring holiday, young boys and teenage men splash water on passersby in the street, a practice which can be viewed as either a playful celebration or an inconvenience.

In the Soviet era, Armenians celebrated state holidays, such as May Day and International Women's Day. Armenians now celebrate the anniversary of their nation's independence from the Soviet Union (declared on 23 August 1990). Around the world, Armenians sadly commemorate the Armenian genocide on April 24. On December 7, the anniversary of an earthquake that devastated northern Armenia in 1988, many Armenians visit cemeteries in mourning.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major rites of passage in Armenian society include birth, marriage, and death. Birth is celebrated by family and friends, as is a baby's first tooth, which is an occasion for gift-giving and a playful ritual in which a baby is presented with a number of items from which to choose, such as a pencil and a pair of scissors. The baby's choice is thought to foreshadow its future choice of a career, so that choosing the pencil might mean that a baby will become a writer or a teacher.

Traditionally, Armenians celebrated engagement as well as marriage, as a symbolic union of two families. A marriage is commonly performed in church as well as in a state registry office and is celebrated with a big party at the home of the groom's parents. When the bride and groom enter the home for the first time as a married couple, Armenian flat bread (*lavash*) is placed over their shoulders and together they break a small plate on the threshold with their feet for good luck. In traditional families, a new bride's parents might visit her in her new home on the fortieth day after marriage, at which time her trousseau (*ozhit*) will be ceremoniously presented to her.

Funerals generally take place on the third day after death, when friends and family gather sorrowfully at the home of the deceased. The funeral procession is often accompanied by sad, traditional music. The seventh and fortieth days after death are commemorated at the cemetery and with a ritual toasting and a meal. After that, death is remembered with visits to the cemetery at each anniversary as well as at the new year.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Relations among kin and friends are very close in Armenia. Friends and family visit one another frequently and without invitation. Unlike the United States, where it is considered impolite to visit someone's home unannounced, in Armenia it is impolite to fail to visit spontaneously. When a guest arrives, it is common to serve food and drink. A meal consisting of hot and cold dishes is appropriate at any time of day, while in the afternoon or late evening, pastries, chocolates, fruit, and coffee are likely to be served. Most social gatherings are accompanied

by toasting with alcoholic drinks. Like other peoples of the Caucasus, Armenians toast one another's families, health, and fortune as a sign of affection and respect. Friends and co-workers also give each other small gifts of food, jewelry, or flowers as gestures of affection.

Armenians greet one another with handshakes or with kisses on the cheek. Women and men alike are physically affectionate with friends of the same sex, and it is as common to see two men walking down the street arm-in-arm as it is to see two women doing so. Teenage boys and girls date one another, but conservatively. Families are concerned about protecting the honor of their daughters before marriage; therefore, dates usually consist of visits to the movies or conversations in cafes. Because Armenians move infrequently, most adults retain their childhood friends and acquaintances.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the Soviet era, Armenians enjoyed one of the highest standards of living among Soviet republics. Armenia was heavily industrialized and urbanized, with a developed capital city, an international airport, and a subway system. More than one-third of the population lives in Yerevan. Another third lives in other industrial and urban centers, such as Gumri (or Gyumri), Vanadzor, Vagharshapat, Hrazdan, and Abovyan. The remaining third lives in villages of varying sizes across the country.

Like other Soviet peoples, Armenians suffered periodic shortages of goods, such as butter, meat, and toilet paper. However, delicious fruits and vegetables are grown locally, including apricots, pears, apples, plums, grapes, peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, and more. Compared to other republics of the former Soviet Union, Armenians enjoyed a wide variety of goods, services, and urban amenities such as public transportation, telephone communications, indoor running water, and electricity.

In urban Armenia, most families live in apartment buildings that range in height from 4 to 15 stories. By American standards, apartments are small, with a kitchen, living room, separate toilet and washroom, one or two bedrooms, and possibly a balcony. Because of these space constraints, children and grandparents rarely have their own bedrooms, but instead sleep together on beds or sofas in the living room or balcony. Parents sleep together in the bedroom, sometimes with one or more children.

In villages, many Armenians have private houses, ranging in size from two rooms with a kitchen to very large houses and, in recent years, mansions of many rooms. Village homes may be attached to small farming plots and small barns where animals, such as cows, pigs, chickens, goats, and sheep, are kept.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In cities, towns, and villages alike, adults live with their parents even after marriage, when a new bride will move into her husband's parents' home. Children care for their parents in old age, and grandparents play a large role in the upbringing of their grandchildren. Siblings and cousins play together as children and usually remain close throughout adulthood. Traditionally, Armenian kinship has been patriarchal, meaning that the eldest man is the head of the extended family household and has authority over the affairs of the entire family.



Armenians carry flowers to pay their respects at a memorial for victims killed under the Ottoman Empire in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, Armenia. Armenians consider their deaths as genocide, yet this is a flashpoint in relations between Turkey and the West. (Hakob Berberyan/AFP/Getty Images)

In villages and towns, marriages are sometimes arranged by older relatives and friends. Divorce is far less common in Armenia than in the United States, but it does occur, as does remarriage. Armenians prefer to have large families, although the birthrate has declined somewhat in the first years of independence. Participation in the extended family is a central part of daily life.

### **11 CLOTHING**

For more than 100 years, urban Armenians have dressed like other urban peoples of Europe. Men wear suits, sweaters, slacks, and leather jackets. Women prefer to wear dresses, jewelry, cosmetics, and high heels. Jeans are popular with young men and young women alike. As elsewhere in the world, Armenians follow Western fashion trends through magazines, television, and movies.

Traditional costumes are worn for dramatic performances and for dance, as well as for occasions of cultural importance. For both men and women, traditional dress includes baggy pants below long shifts or overcoats. Distinctive regional adornments include sheepskin hats, engraved metal belts, and jewelry, sometimes made of coins. Women wear their hair in two long braids.

### **12 FOOD**

Armenians eat many foods common to other former Soviet peoples, including beet soup (*borscht*), roasted meat (*khorovadz*, or *shashlik*), potatoes, and stews. Other Armenian delicacies are fresh trout from Lake Sevan (*ishkhan*), grapevine leaves stuffed with rice, ground meat, and herbs (*dolma*), flat bread (*lavash*), chicken porridge (*harissa*), and yogurt (*madzun*). In the diaspora, Armenians also eat many other foods that are popular throughout the Middle East, such as hummus, tabbouleh, baba ghanouj, and shish kebab.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Armenia has its own state education system. School begins with kindergarten and lasts through the equivalent of American high school, with a total of 13 grades. In the past, both Russian-language and Armenian-language schools existed. The majority of schools have Armenian-language curricula, although there are also specialty schools offering other languages, such as English, French, Greek, and Persian. Even in villages children attend school. The literacy rate is nearly 100%.

After graduating from school, many young adults choose to go to the Yerevan State University, to the State Engineering University, or to one of numerous other state and private institutions of higher learning. Students choose familiar concentrations, such as computer science and physics, and the university offers programs in language, philosophy, history,

and literature. Armenia has a large number of technical and vocational training schools and an American University with English-language graduate programs in business, engineering, political science, and health.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Armenia has rich traditions of church music and folk music alike. Choral arrangements by the Armenian composer Komitas (1869–1935) were inspired by both folk songs and liturgical music and continue to be extremely popular. Folk music performed on traditional instruments and contemporary Armenian pop music (called *Rabiz*) and rock and roll are also popular. Since the language was first written in the 4th century, a vast body of Armenian language literature has emerged, including religious texts, histories, epics, poetry, drama, political writings, and modern novels. In addition, Armenia has established traditions of opera, ballet, folk dance, and cinema. Armenians of all ages take great interest in their musical, literary, and artistic traditions, and these traditions influence popular culture significantly.

Armenians have contributed to international cultural traditions in literature, painting, architecture, music, politics, and science. Novelist William Saroyan, painter Martiros Saryan, physicist Victor Hambartsumian, and composer Aram Khachaturian are a few examples of Armenians who have made significant cultural contributions.

#### 15 WORK

Work in Armenia is much like work in other industrialized and post-socialist economies. Garment and shoe production and computer technology are prominent among Armenia's light industries, while chemical industries include the production of neoprene rubber. Women constitute a large proportion of the work force and are represented among teachers, doctors, musicians, physicists, researchers, factory workers, and governmental and non-governmental administrators, as well as in the service sector. Men predominate in certain professions, such as management, government, transportation, and restaurant service. In addition to wages received for formal employment, many Armenians supplement their salaries through involvement in small-scale trade and investment.

In rural Armenia, farmers work the land and care for livestock, while women are more likely to engage in domestic work. After independence, Armenia shifted away from the large-scale agribusinesses of the Soviet era back to smaller-scale family farms. Men and women alike bring fresh produce to cities and towns for sale in central markets. Even the smallest towns and villages have schools, regional administrative representation, shops, and other kinds of non-agricultural employment.

Despite steady economic growth since independence, unemployment in Armenia remains high and one-quarter of the population continues to live below the poverty level.

#### 16 SPORTS

In recent years, Armenians have particularly excelled in wrestling, weight-lifting, and boxing, for which they have received numerous Olympic medals. Skiing and tennis are also popular sports, but soccer is perhaps the most popular. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Armenian soccer team, Ararat, drew huge crowds and in 1973 became the champion of the Soviet Union.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular forms of recreation include movies, music, and traditional and modern dance. The Armenian symphony in Yerevan gives weekly performances at the Opera House that draw large crowds of all ages. Also performed there are national operas and ballets. Armenian men like to play backgammon and chess at home and in city parks when the weather is nice, and Armenians of all ages enjoy walks and visits to outdoor cafes. In the summer, the most popular forms of relaxation are trips to the beach at Lake Sevan, where it is possible to sun and swim, and picnics in the countryside, where meat and vegetables are roasted over open fires.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Popular Armenian folk arts include woodworking, stone-carving, metalworking and jewelry, painting, embroidery, and rug-weaving. Each of these arts incorporates and embellishes traditional and even ancient motifs, such as the modern production of small salt dishes (*aghamanner*), which may be made of elaborately carved wood or pottery in the form of ancient fertility symbols. In addition to several museums that feature folk arts and crafts, an art fair known as Vernissage is held near the Republic Square in Yerevan every weekend. Vernissage appeals not only to tourists, but also to local artists and the general public, who come to appreciate one another's work.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In February 1988, a national movement emerged in Armenia in support of the national self-determination of Armenians living in the autonomous region (*oblast*) of Nagorno-Karabakh in neighboring Azerbaijan. An ethnic conflict between Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani Turks erupted into a full-scale war for independence. Despite an enduring cease-fire, the conflict does not appear to have a quick or simple conclusion.

In response to territorial conquests of Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani government imposed a total energy blockade on Armenia by disrupting the flow of oil and natural gas to the republic from pipelines passing through its territory. The blockade resulted in an energy crisis of catastrophic proportions between 1991 and 1996, when Armenia restarted its nuclear power plant. During the five-year crisis period, only 30% of Armenia's industry functioned, the gross national product underwent a five- to six-fold decline and citizens received as little as two hours of electricity daily. The impact of this dramatic decrease in the standard of living was reflected in health and marriage statistics. Between 1993 and 1994, the marriage rate decreased by 20% and between 1992 and 1993 the birth rate decreased by approximately 25%.

The social and economic impact of the energy crisis was exacerbated by the after-effects of an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale that devastated three major industrial centers in northern Armenia on 7 December 1988. The earthquake killed 25,000 people, injured 31,000, left more than half a million homeless, and caused approximately \$20 billion worth of damage. The combined effects of the earthquake, the war in neighboring Azerbaijan, and the collapse of the Soviet economy severely reduced the standard of living in Armenia in its first five years of independence, which were also characterized by an increase in crime, disease, and mortality.

Fortunately, the quality of life in Armenia has been improving steadily since then with the growth of a new middle class. In the past decade poverty and inflation rates have decreased dramatically, and the value of Armenian currency has stabilized. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and its political and economic effects remains a serious problem, however.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Armenian culture retains its traditional patriarchal values, resulting in oppressive conditions for both women and homosexuals. Although women are guaranteed equal rights in the Armenian constitution and do, in fact, make up over half the student population in institutes of higher education, Armenia still has the lowest representation of women in its government in the region and women continue to earn less than men in the workplace. Also, there are no laws against domestic violence, although rape and sexual assault are prohibited, and no known shelters exist for victims of domestic violence. Because of the high rate of emigration by Armenian men since independence, Armenian women are left with no one to marry and support them, leaving young Armenian women vulnerable to sexual trafficking. The Armenian government approved a plan for prevention of trafficking in 2004 and continues to work at its implementation.

Although Armenia officially decriminalized homosexual activity in 2003, a strong stigma is still attached to homosexuality. The Armenian Apostolic Church views homosexuality as an illness and homosexual activity as a sin, disallowing practicing gays from receiving communion. Gay clubs remain underground, and the majority of Armenians still view homosexuality with contempt. A recent survey revealed that over 86% of young Armenians would refuse to live near or work with a known homosexual, indicating that societal attitudes towards homosexuality will take some time to change.

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—revised by Dianne De Mott

# AUSTRIANS

**LOCATION:** Austria

**POPULATION:** 8.4 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** German; Italian, Slovene, Croatian, Hungarian, and Czech in the border provinces; English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Protestant

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

From the defense of Vienna against the Turkish Empire in 1683 to the Krushchev-Kennedy summit meeting in 1961, Austria has historically been a place where East meets West. The great 19th-century diplomat Prince Metternich said "Asia begins at the Landstrasse" (the Viennese street that leads eastward from the city's center). A neutral nation since it regained its sovereignty after World War II, Austria is the third home of the United Nations (after the United States and Switzerland) and the seat of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Located at the center of Europe, the landlocked nation of Austria wielded great military and commercial power for much of its history. The Celts who settled there in the middle of the first millennium BC called the area *Ostarrichi*—the empire in the East. (This name was later Germanized to become *Österreich*.) The Celts were followed by Romans in 14 BC, Germanic and Slavic tribes beginning in the 5th century AD, and, in the 10th century AD, the Babenburger dynasty, which helped establish Christianity throughout the area. In 1278 Austria's most illustrious historical period began with the accession of the Habsburg monarchy. With its capital city at Vienna, the Habsburgs' Austro-Hungarian Empire was to rule over much of Europe for over 600 years, expanding through war and marriage. At various times the empire included Burgundy (part of present-day France), Bohemia, the Netherlands, Spain, northern Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and parts of the former Yugoslavia. With good reason, the Habsburgs had the letters *AEIOU*, which stood for *Austria est imperare orbi universo*—all the earth is subject to Austria—inscribed on their tombstones.

After a century of decline, the Habsburgs were defeated in World War I and their empire was dismantled. The newly created Republic of Austria retained only six German-speaking provinces of the former empire plus Burgenland and Vienna—the empire of over 50 million had become a state of 6.5 million. Once occupying an area as large as Texas, it had shrunk to approximately the size of Maine. Although the Allied powers had forbidden a union, or *Anschluss*, between Austria and Germany, it was forcibly achieved in 1938 with the invasion by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler. Following Germany's defeat in World War II, Austria was governed by the Allied powers until 1955, when it returned to independence. In 1995 Austria became a member of the European Union. Permanent neutrality is a part of Austria's constitution, although this stance is becoming increasingly controversial.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Three-fourths of Austria is mountainous, but valleys and Alpine passes allow for domestic travel and also make the country an important crossroads between different parts of Europe. The Alps, divided into three ranges, are located mostly in west-



ern and central Austria; their highest peak is Grossglockner, at 3,797 m (12,457 ft). To the east lie the Carpathian foothills and the lowlands. The fertile Danube Valley lies beyond the Northern Alps and broadens into the Hungarian Plain near Vienna. Still further north is the Bohemian plateau, with elevations of between 351 m and 899 m (1,150 and 2,950 ft).

Austria's population was about 8.4 million in 2007. Unlike the ethnically diverse peoples of the former empire, the Austrians of today are a relatively homogeneous population, with the vast majority of Austrians (91%). There are six ethnic groups officially recognized in Austria: Burgenlandic Croats, Roma, Slovaks, Slovenians, Czechs and Hungarians. These are concentrated in the east and south of the country. Among the population changes wrought by World War II—in addition to the deaths of 280,000 men drafted into the army—was the decimation of Austria's Jewish population, which had numbered nearly 200,000 in a 1934 census count but was, in ethnic terms, far larger.

Cities and towns with populations over 10,000 are home to about half the population—one-fifth of Austrians live in Vienna alone. The main population trends in modern times have been the shift from rural to urban areas and an east-to-west migration pattern.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Nearly 98% of Austrians speak German, although at least four different dialects are in use. The most common dialect is known as the Southern dialect. It sounds similar to the way

people speak in Bavaria. One can also hear Italian, Slovene, Croatian, Hungarian, and Czech spoken in the border provinces, and many people in large cities and resort areas speak English. Croatian and Slovene are official languages in Burgenland. Certain Austrian words—especially culinary terms—differ from those used in Germany, reflecting Austria's diverse ethnic past. These include *Zwetschken* (plums) from the Bohemian *svestka*, *Palatschinken* (pancakes) from the Hungarian *palacsinta*, and *kafetier*, from the French term for a coffee-house owner.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The great German epic, *Das Nibelungenlied*, was written in Austria around 1250 AD. It combined the warrior gods and goddesses of Teutonic myth with the realities of court life in the Middle Ages. Vienna's Museum für Volkskunde houses exhibits on Austrian folklore.

### 5 RELIGION

The religious legacy of the Habsburg empire—whose capital, Vienna, was the seat of the Holy Roman Empire—can be seen in the continuing predominance of Roman Catholicism in present-day Austria. In spite of the official separation of church and state, some 74% of Austrians were Roman Catholic in 2007 and numerous churches, shrines, monasteries, and cathedrals can be seen throughout the country. Other commonly seen signs of religious faith include roofed crosses called *Wiesenkreuz*, which are found in the Tyrol, and, further south, *Bildstöcke*, covered posts decorated with religious scenes. In the country, religious festivals, processions, and pageants take place throughout the year. In urban areas, religious observance is often more casual and typically limited to holidays and major events such as births, weddings, and funerals. About 4.7% of the population was Protestant in 2007, with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church having the greatest number of members. About 4.2% of the population was Muslim. Less than 1% was Jewish.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many Roman Catholic holidays are public holidays in Austria. In rural areas, the eve of Epiphany (January 6) is celebrated by children regaling neighborhood farms with a traditional carol in honor of the Three Kings to bless them for the coming year. Epiphany also marks the beginning of the carnival, or *Fasching*, season, which is celebrated until Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Vienna, in particular, is renowned for its two months of festive balls. Other religious holidays include Easter, Easter Monday, the Feast of the Ascension, Whitmonday, Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Assumption (*Maria Himmelfahrt*) on August 15, All Saints' Day (*Allerheiligen*) on November 1, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, Christmas, and Boxing Day (Saint Stephen's Day) on December 26.

In some cities the evening of December 5 is a night of mischief in the name of Krampus, a devilish figure who, according to some legends, comes to call on naughty children. On this night, youth (particularly teenage boys) will dress in Krampus masks and costumes and run through the streets rattling chains and bells to frighten their friends and neighbors. In some areas, a parade of costumed Krampus characters is held. According to legend, the arrival of St. Nicholas on December 6



sends Krampus away as the saint forgives all the naughty children and distributes presents. Christmas parties and celebrations often begin with St. Nicholas's Day. Many houses and churches display wooden cribs at this time of year. Labor Day is celebrated on May 1 and there is also a national holiday on October 26 to celebrate the 1955 Declaration of Neutrality.

A number of traditional observances, both religious and secular, are carried out in rural areas. The feast of St. Leonard (the patron saint of livestock) is observed in November by festive horse-and-cart processions to mass and many villages still burn the "demon" of winter during Lent; in Vorarlberg, the explosive-filled figure of a witch is blown up at the top of a water tower and it is said that the weather for the coming year will come from the direction in which the head flies. In the Tyrol, *Schemenlaufen* (procession of ghosts) is celebrated every four years by a parade of men in masks ringing out the winter with bells. The feast of St. Martin on November 11 is celebrated as children go door to door with paper lanterns and candles to sing for their friends and neighbors. They are generally rewarded with a small treat.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Because of the strength of Roman Catholic practice in Austria, almost all newborns are baptized. The ceremony provides the parents with the opportunity to extend the bonds of godparenthood to close friends. Godparents are expected to visit on the child's birthday, provide presents on important occasions, and to take responsibility for the care of the child in the event of the parents' death. The godparents hold the child at the baptismal font while the priest sprinkles the baby with water. First Communion is practiced only in those families who are themselves church-goers, a much smaller number than the number of baptisms.

Childhood is filled with a number of firsts, from the first tooth to the first school holiday spent entirely with friends and away from parents. There are no special rites to mark puberty, but graduation from the teenagers' last school is marked with a party and gift-giving. Weddings are gala affairs involving fancy clothes and feasting among family and friends. Church weddings are common but are not required socially.

The experience by adults of the death of a parent is a significant moment. Most relations between parents and adult children are close, as both generations play an active role in raising children. This is marked by adult children calling their parents by the same nickname that the grandchildren call them. When these grandparents die, the loss is deeply felt and friends and family rally to support the mourners. Death is marked by the sending of a formal printed notice by mail to all of the deceased's acquaintances and distant family. In the countryside, the funeral is held in the church, followed by interment in a grave. In the cities, and especially in Vienna, it is held in memorial chapels in the cemeteries themselves. Here, grave interment is available, but cremation is more common.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In public Austrians are both courteous and formal, a legacy from the days of empire when many defined themselves by aristocratic position or by their place in an elaborate civil service hierarchy. A doctor or other professional is generally addressed as *Herr Doktor*, *Magister*, or *Professor*. Civil servants have honorifics consisting of various prefixes and the suffix *rat*

(councilor), such as *Hofrat* (Privy Councilor), *Gehiemrat* (town councilor), and a variety of others. Women are commonly addressed as *gnadige Frau* (madam). The greeting *Grüss Gott* (God bless you) is often used instead of *Guten Tag* (good day). People shake hands when they meet and part, doors are commonly opened for women, and a woman may have her hand kissed upon being formally introduced.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Austria—and Vienna in particular—was known as a center for innovations in medicine. It was here that Sigmund Freud invented psychoanalysis (his former home at No. 19 Berggasse is now a museum). Austrians continue to enjoy a high standard of health care with the help of the comprehensive national health insurance program. Life expectancy was estimated at 79 years in 2008, with 76 years for men and 82 years for women.

The state controls Austria's modern, efficient transportation system, which includes 6,500 km (4,040 mi) of railroad and 11,102 km (6,900 mi) of highway and expressway (*Autobahns*). The Danube River is a means of transporting both people and goods. With Austria's well developed road and rail networks, its people rely little on domestic air travel to traverse their small country. However, when it comes to international travel, Austrian Airlines, the national airline, maintains Austria's tradition as a major connecting point between Eastern and Western Europe. During the Cold War, many foreign airlines used Vienna as a transfer point between East and West.

Because of a population shift from the country to larger towns and cities after World War I, housing in rural areas remains plentiful and cheap. Most city dwellers now live in one- or two-room flats with a separate kitchen; less than one-fourth occupy homes with four or more rooms.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

While the number of marriages has declined and the number of divorces has increased, the most important Austrian family unit is still the nuclear family (*Familie*), which often establishes its own household near one partner's (usually the wife's) family soon after marriage and may eventually be joined by a widowed grandparent or unmarried aunt or uncle. Regular visits are exchanged with the extended family (*Grossfamilie*), consisting of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and first cousins, while a wider network of relations (*Verwandschaft*) comes together for major events such as weddings. Children who go through baptism may have a godparent, with whom he or she maintains a special relationship until adulthood.

## 11 CLOTHING

Modern Austrian dress generally resembles that of the north-eastern United States. The traditional peasant costumes are largely reserved for holidays and festivals, when one can still see women in embroidered blouses, lace aprons, and full dirndl skirts and men in *lederhosen* (knee-length leather pants) with wide suspenders, short jackets without collars or lapels, and green-brimmed hats decorated with feathers or other regional adornments. A traditional costume worn on more formal occasions is the *Stierer Anzug*, consisting of gray or brown breeches embroidered in green, a colorful cummerbund, bright vest, long flared coat with ornamental buttons, and high top hat.



*Traditionally dressed dairy farmer Sepp Hinterseer leads his cattle from the summer pastures in a procession to the city of Lofer, Austria. Austrian farmers decorate their cattle with ribbons, tree branches, and headdresses to celebrate a summer of good fortune and health. (AP Images/Kerstin Joensson)*

## 12 FOOD

The Austrian love of good food and drink dates back at least as far as the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, when sacks of coffee beans left behind by the retreating Turks were used to open Vienna's first coffee-house and introduce the Austrians to the then-exotic brew (after slow initial sales, *mélange*—a local steamed-milk variant still consumed today—was introduced, and the rest is history).

Perhaps the most characteristic Austrian dish is the *Wiener schnitzel*, a breaded and golden-fried veal or pork cutlet. Traditionally, it is eaten with a few drops of fresh lemon juice and a vinegared potato salad. Also popular are Hungarian *goulasch*; a variety of soups with special ingredients; stews, typically served with dumplings; and hot sausages, which are often served with beer as snacks. The justly revered Austrian pastry chefs are the creators of such delicacies as apple strudel (*apfelstrudel*), *milchrahmstrudel* (a cheese crepe swimming in vanilla custard sauce), *Sachertorte* (a rich chocolate cake with a layer of apricot jam under its thick, smooth icing and plenty of whipped cream, or *Schlag*), and *Dobostorte* (alternating layers of sponge cake and chocolate butter cream glazed with caramel). In the 19th century, it became common to eat dinner late in the evening. To assuage their hunger, many city-dwellers would take a break between 4:00 and 5:00 PM for a special meal called *Jause* that consisted just of pastry and coffee. Many still eat this meal today.

Wine is a very important Austrian food. The area around Vienna and the Burgenland produce wonderful dry white wines. In nice weather, Austrians love to visit vineyards to drink the wine right out of the barrels. The vintners provide pleasant gardens with picnic tables and a buffet where people can buy roast meats, raw vegetables, vinegared salads, fresh cheeses, breads, rolls, and sweets to go with the wine. These are called *Heurigen*, which means “this year's vintage.” The atmosphere of these gardens, the wines, and the foods that are eaten with them are distinctively Austrian.

## 13 EDUCATION

Children attend primary school from the ages of 6 through 10, when they are tested and tracked into either a continuing elementary school, a basic high school (*Hauptschule*), or a college preparatory school (*Gymnasium*). Formal secondary education continues through age 14. Some form of secondary training is required through age 15. A majority of students continue with some type of post-secondary schooling, including apprentice training, technical schools, vocational colleges, and universities. After some 200 years of free and compulsory education, Austria has a nearly 100% literacy rate.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Vienna's famed reputation as a center for the arts—particularly music—began and flourished during the Habsburg empire. Maximilian I founded the renowned Vienna Boys' Choir in 1498. The six-year-old Mozart first played for the Empress Maria Theresa in 1762. The musical capital of Europe for much of the 19th century, Vienna was the birthplace or adopted home of many of the greatest classical and romantic composers from Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert to Brahms and Mahler (and continuing on to the 20th-century atonal school of Schönberg). It was also the home of the waltz, which reached the height of its popularity with such works as *Tales from the Vi-*

*enna Woods* by Johann Strauss, Jr. Today, Austria's two great centers for classical music are Vienna—with its world-famous Boys' Choir, Philharmonic, and State Opera—and Salzburg, the birthplace of Mozart and site of an annual festival that draws thousands from around the world every summer.

For much of Austria's history, the works of its authors were considered part of German literature. However, a uniquely Austrian identity was already present in early-19th-century drama, flowering at the beginning of the 20th century with the influential group of writers and poets, including Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmansthal, and Stefan Zweig, who were known as *Jung Wien* (Young Vienna). The Austro-Hungarian empire also claimed two of the greatest contemporary writers in German, Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka, both from Prague.

Spending time at coffeehouse is a cultural tradition that remains strong throughout the country. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the coffeehouses of Vienna were notable as the gathering places for some of the most prominent scholars, philosophers, writers, musicians, and artists in the country. Rather than simply ordering a cup to go, it is not uncommon for patrons to spend a few hours at a coffeehouse, reading, relaxing, or engaging in conversation with friends and colleagues.

## 15 WORK

Each of the three major economic groups—labor, management, and farmers—is represented by its own organization: trade unions, a management association, and the farmers' federation. In 2005 about 70% of the labor force was employed in some type of service related industry. Industry and manufacturing accounted for about 27% of the work force while only about 3% was employed in agriculture. People generally work from the ages of 15 to 60. Retirees enjoy generous pensions and high social status. Social legislation in Austria is very generous to working people. Even the youngest and most inexperienced workers are guaranteed five weeks of paid vacation per year. This number increases with seniority to eight weeks per year. Workers receive an extra month's salary before Christmas season begins and before the vacation season begins. This means that workers are paid for 14 rather than 12 months every year. Austrians receive free medical care.

## 16 SPORTS

Skiing is Austria's leading winter sport, but the natural beauty and variety of the country's scenery are conducive to outdoor activities of all kinds. Other winter activities include ice skating and tobogganing, while popular summer sports include bicycling, mountain climbing, sailing, hiking, canoeing, and swimming. Many Austrians, like their fellow Europeans, are avid fans and players of soccer (which is called *football*).

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Austrians—most notably the Viennese—are legendary for their gaiety of spirit and enjoyment of life. According to a famous saying, “In Berlin, the situation is serious but not hopeless; in Vienna, the situation is hopeless, but not serious.” Austrians are enthusiastic supporters of the arts and participants in all kinds of outdoor activities. Their love of fine food, conversation, and leisure coalesces around the coffeehouses and *Konditoreien* (pastry shops) where many hours are spent reading, socializing, or just relaxing and sipping a *brauner* (coffee with

milk), a *konsul* (black coffee with cream), or one of the more elaborate coffee drinks, such as the *kaisermelange* (black coffee with an egg yolk and brandy).

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Crafts produced by Austrian folk artists include wood carvings, ceramics, jewelry, glassware, wax figures, leather products, and embroidery, as well as items made of wrought iron and pewter. A *Heimatwerk* (local crafts organization) in each province runs shops that sell the products of area craftspeople.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Austria has a relatively low rate of violent crime for an industrialized nation. However, it has a higher incidence of white-collar and property crime. Alcoholism, suicide, and absenteeism from work are also serious problems. The scale of domestic abuse is emerging as a problem as well. In 2007 the Women's Ministry estimated that about 10% of all adult women had suffered from some type of violence while in a relationship. People from Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, the Middle East, and Africa who settle in Austria are subject to employment and housing discrimination and overt racial hostility, expressed verbally and through graffiti. Anti-Semitic and anti-Roma sentiments are still a point of concern. Austria has a small illegal underground right-wing extremist movement which recruits young people (skinheads) who agitate against foreigners and commit acts of random violence.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Male and female roles in the family are not equal, in spite of the increased responsibilities women assumed in Austrian society during the two world wars and the continuing wages that working women bring to the household. For much of the 20th century, Austria had one of the highest proportions of women in the labor force; however, in 2007 it was estimated that women's salaries were about 17% lower than those for men in equal employment. Generally, more women than men were unemployed and women were more likely to have temporary or part-time positions. Women have been underrepresented in the civil service despite labor laws that require the government to hire women of equivalent qualifications ahead of men in areas in which fewer than 40% of the employees are women. Women are eligible for two years of paid maternity leave after the birth of a child. In many families, the woman's early return to work is made possible by grandparents who are willing to care for the child during the day. Women also are eligible to retire five years earlier with full benefits.

Social legislation alone cannot alter centuries of practices that promoted the role of men as fathers and breadwinners within the family. Austrian men continue to be raised, for the most part, in families that do not encourage them to take an equal share of household responsibilities with their sisters. As adults, Austrian men continue to look at the household and child-rearing as inherently female activities, regardless of the wage contribution of their wives. Women have their first child after their own careers are established. This age can vary from 19 to 30, depending on the woman's education.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# BASHKIRS

**LOCATION:** Bashkortostan Republic, in Russia (in the Southern Ural mountains)

**POPULATION:** 1.8 million (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Bashkir; Russian

**RELIGION:** Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Bashkirs are a Turkic Muslim people living within the Russian Federation. Bashkirs first appear in historical sources in the 10th century AD, as the inhabitants of the southern Ural mountains, the area which they still occupy today. The origins of the Bashkirs are obscure. Although today the Bashkirs speak a Turkic language, some historians consider them to have originally been Hungarian speakers who remained in the Ural mountains when the ancestors of modern Hungarians began the migration that eventually led them to settle in Central Europe. Whether or not this is the case, there can be little doubt that there was always a strong Turkic ethnic element among the Bashkirs and that this element became dominant before the end of the Middle Ages. Traditionally, the Bashkirs were a pastoral nomadic people, leading their herds of sheep, cattle, horses, and camels along fixed migration routes, but under Russian rule the Bashkirs increasingly practiced agriculture.

Politically, the Bashkirs have always been subjects of more powerful neighbors. The earliest sources identify them as subjects of the Volga Bulgarian state, centered in the middle Volga region. Before their subjection to Russia in the 16th century, the Bashkirs found themselves subjects of various steppe polities. These include the Mongol World Empire, the Golden Horde, the Noghay Horde, and the Kazan Khanate. Following the Russian conquest of the Kazan Khanate in 1552, the Bashkir leaders likewise became subjects of Russia. Until the late 17th century, subjection to Russia was a largely formal affair, but Russian influence gradually increased in Bashkir lands as a result of Russian peasant and military colonization and increased taxation. Despite a series of violent Bashkir rebellions, over the course of the 18th century, the Bashkirs and their lands became increasingly integrated into the Russian state.

With the advent of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bashkirs found themselves divided among various political forces and embroiled in the Russian Civil War. Although no actual Bashkir independence movement emerged at that time (the Bashkirs were the only Turkic people to voluntarily join the Soviet Union), the Bashkirs were eventually granted by the Soviet authorities in Moscow an “autonomous” territory within the Russian Republic. This territory eventually became known as the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and it has become known simply as the Republic Bashkortostan since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Bashkir territory has traditionally encompassed the southern Ural Mountains as well as adjoining steppe regions to the south and in Western Siberia, that is, straddling the imaginary line separating Europe and Asia. Most Bashkirs live in the Russian republic, where 1.2 million Bashkirs constitute just under 30% of the republic’s population. The remaining Bash-

kirs mainly reside in provinces and republics in neighboring Bashkortostan. Except for the rugged terrain of the central southern Urals, Bashkir territory is characterized by a mixture of evergreen and birch forest with steppe, or prairie. Roughly 40% of the republic’s territory is forest. The northern parts of Bashkir territory are the most wooded and receive the most rainfall, while the southern regions frequently suffer from insufficient rainfall and have much sparser tree cover. The central southern Ural Mountains are largely forested, and the highest point in Bashkortostan is Yamantaw, which has an elevation of 1,638 m (4,900 ft). Much of Bashkir territory is uncultivated and is home to a rich variety of wildlife, especially in the Ural Mountains region, where there are large populations of bears, wolves, deer, and smaller mammals and birds.

The climate of Bashkortostan is markedly continental, characterized by long, harsh winters and cool, dry summers. The mean temperatures for January are  $-16^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-14.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $0^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), and for July  $18.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $69^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $72^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

The territory of the Republic of Bashkortostan encompasses 144,000 sq km (56,000 sq mi), an area slightly smaller than the state of Iowa. According to the 1979 Soviet census, the Bashkirs numbered 1,371,000, but made up less than 25% of the population of Bashkortostan, occupying third place in the republic’s ethnic composition after Russians and Tatars. It is believed that the 1.8 million Bashkirs now account for less than 20% of the republic’s population.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Bashkirs speak Bashkir, which is a Turkic language of the Kipchak, or Northwestern, branch of the Turkic language family. Bashkir is most closely related to, and mutually intelligible with, Tatar, a Turkic language spoken widely by the Tatar population of Bashkortostan as well as in neighboring regions. Bashkir is also closely related to Kazakh. Bilingualism is typical among rural Bashkirs, but Russian is the dominant language in urban areas. In northern and western Bashkortostan, where there is a large Tatar population, the linguistic division between Bashkir and Tatar has essentially evaporated.

The Bashkir literary language is based on dialects spoken in the far southeastern reaches of the republic, dialects that are the most linguistically distant from Tatar and closest to Kazakh. Nevertheless, it is widely used, along with Russian, by the Bashkirs for everyday communication. There are newspapers and books published in Bashkir, as well as radio and, to a lesser extent, television broadcasts.

Because the Bashkirs are Muslims, Bashkir names are commonly adapted from Arabic names, as well as from some Turkic ones. Some common men’s names are *Äkhmät*, *Mökhämet*, *Ildus*, and *Bulat*. Some common women’s names are *Gulnara*, *Gölfiya*, and *Zukhra*. However, Russian and Western given names are increasingly common among the Bashkirs as well.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Like the other traditionally pastoral nomadic peoples of Inner Asia, the Bashkirs have a rich repertoire of folklore which includes songs, poetry and tales. The most remarkable genre in Bashkir folklore, however, is the heroic epic. While Bashkir folklore (particularly the epic tradition) has its roots in the Bashkirs’ Inner Asian nomadic past, the conversion of the Bashkirs to Islam in the 14th century resulted in the insertion of Islamic themes and interpretations into Bashkir folklore.



Some of the more famous epics include *Ural Batir*, an ancient epic about the formation of the Bashkir people, and *Idheügey menän Moradhim*, which describes historical events in the Golden Horde in the 15th century.

Bashkir heroes traditionally corresponded to the heroes of the epics; therefore it is not surprising that historical figures deemed to be heroic became the subjects of heroic epic poetry. The most prominent among these figures was Salavat Yulayev, a Bashkir commander during the Pugachev Rebellion of the 1770s. Yulayev, himself an accomplished poet in the Bashkir language, became the subject of a large cycle of Bashkir folklore. He was canonized in Soviet times as the Bashkirs' national hero and remains so today. A massive Soviet-era bronze statue in the Bashkiriya capital of Ufa is very much a Bashkir national landmark.

Bashkir folklore retains a rich cycle of myth. In addition to myths recounting the creation of the world, the various Bashkir tribes and clans have retained myths of their own groups' formation. The category of myth can also include Islamic legends, particularly those concerning the Prophets and famous Sufi Shaykhs.

## 5 RELIGION

Historically the Bashkirs have been an overwhelmingly Muslim people. The conversion of the Bashkirs to Islam appears to have begun on a large scale in the 14th century, with the conversion of the Golden Horde to Islam. However, Bashkir Islamization legends are quite numerous and vary widely, including

accounts of their conversion at the hands of the Prophet Muhammad himself, Volga Bulgarian missionaries, or to Central Asian Sufis such as Ahmad Yasavi. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the lifting of Soviet anti-religious policies, there has been a resurgence of interest in Islam and a sharp increase in mosque construction in Bashkir villages. Seventy years of Soviet repression of religions, including Islam, resulted in the marginalization of Islamic knowledge and ritual in Bashkir society. The vestiges of traditional Bashkir religious life are most evident in rural Bashkir communities, especially among the older generation. These Islamic practices include reading from the Koran, ritual fasting, and pilgrimages to nearby Muslim saints' tombs.

Traditional, specifically Bashkir beliefs are equally deep-rooted, especially in rural communities. These include beliefs in various spirits thought to inhabit different buildings and natural features, as well as tutelary spirits of livestock, and amulets. Such beliefs are often artificially distinguished from Islamic beliefs, however, since tutelary spirits are often Muslim saints and amulets contain verses from the Koran, and the Bashkirs themselves understand their beliefs to be part of a unified Muslim belief system.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Historically, Bashkirs have observed major and minor Muslim holidays, the most prominent of which among the Bashkirs is *Qorban Bayrami* (the commemoration of the trial of Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his son), which typically takes place in early June. This festival historically involved the sacrifice of animals and large communal feasts. Today, *Qorban Bayrami* is an official holiday and people get the day off from work to relax. Various festivals not of a strictly Islamic character but rather corresponding to the agricultural calendar are also observed. One such festival is *Sabantuy* (also called *Habantuy*), or "the plow festival," which is held after spring planting. *Sabantuy* festivities today involve playing picnic-style games. Another traditional festival is the clan and tribal gathering, called *Yiyin*, usually held in early summer. In the past, these gatherings involved sacrifices of animals, but now there are only feasts and various games and dances. The Muslim season of Ramadan is not strictly observed by most Bashkirs.

While such festivals are still common in rural areas and seen by Bashkirs as being thoroughly "Bashkir," holidays officially promoted during the Soviet era are also widely observed, especially in urban areas, where Bashkirs are integrated into larger, primarily Russian environments. While specifically Soviet holidays such as May Day and the Anniversary of the October Revolution are generally ignored, less political Soviet holidays such as New Year's Day (January 1) and Victory Day (May 9) are widely celebrated.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally the Bashkirs observed numerous and complex rituals to mark the primary life cycle rituals of birth, marriage, and death. Bashkirs believed that a newborn was especially vulnerable to the "evil eye" (*qati küdh*) during the first 40 days after its birth, and a number of amulets were hung around its crib. Another ritual involved the pretended sale of the child to the midwife, as protection against evil spirits who might seek to harm the actual parents. After 40 days, a name was given to the child, traditionally by a mullah. To what extent these ritu-

als are practiced today is unclear. Home births are still common in rural areas, but name-giving is usually carried out by the parents of the child.

Puberty rites *per se* are not well documented among the Bashkirs, but the conscription of young Bashkir men into the army, usually at age 18, has generally functioned as a *de facto* and *de jure* puberty right. Induction into the armed forces also had its rituals meant to protect the life of the young soldier.

Bashkir weddings, especially in rural areas, were traditionally quite complex, involving countless rituals and large-scale feasting. In the past, brides would have been around age 15 and grooms around age 18. Today, the ages of the bride and groom are typically between the ages of 18 and 20. Weddings in rural areas continue to retain older rituals, but urban weddings are usually performed by civil authorities and correspond to the wedding traditions of Russian society.

Death and funerary rituals among the Bashkirs have tended to be the most impervious to the changes brought about by Soviet and Russian society. Today, as throughout the Soviet period, the dead are buried in Muslim cemeteries. The deceased is typically wrapped in a shroud and buried with a headstone with an Arabic or Bashkir inscription. On the third, seventh, and fortieth days and the first anniversary after a death, memorial feasts are held. Remembrance feasts for the dead in general are held during *Qorban Bayramı*, when families go to cemeteries and have a meal at the graveside of relatives or have prayers read.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Superficially, the interpersonal relations of Bashkirs differ little from those of Russian society as a whole, and this is especially true in urban settings. However, especially in rural areas, traditions of Bashkir hospitality are still observed. In traditional Bashkir society, guests were treated with considerable respect, and it is still common in rural areas for elaborate feasts to be held in honor of guests.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In urban areas, Bashkirs generally have access to hospitals, although the quality of care in these hospitals is generally poor. In rural areas, clinics and doctors can be very distant from Bashkir settlements, and it is common for Bashkirs, both urban and rural, to depend to a large extent on traditional forms of medicine, particularly herbal medicine.

Most urban Bashkirs live in large apartment blocks. For urban Bashkirs, as for urban citizens of Russia in general, vacant apartments are hard to find as apartments rarely change hands. Urban apartments rarely have more than two bedrooms, and in many cases consist of only one room with a communal bathroom and kitchen. Apartments often go without gas or hot water for weeks at a time. In Bashkortostan, telephone numbers are assigned to individuals rather than to residences. In order to get telephone service, an individual must register, which usually involves waiting in lines and completing forms for bureaucratic approval. It is then up to an individual to find someone who can install a telephone line to his or her house or apartment.

In rural areas, Bashkirs tend to live in wooden houses. In Bashkir villages, there is typically electricity, but no running water or private telephones. Water is usually obtained from wells. The quintessential traditional Bashkir dwelling is the felt

yurt (*tirmä*), which was the traditional dwelling of Inner Asian steppe nomads. This was a round tent with a conical roof, constructed of lattice-work surrounding long wooden tent poles over which thick felt was draped. Although such tents are no longer used by Bashkirs today, they retain a powerful symbolic significance for Bashkirs.

Very few Bashkirs own private automobiles, and as a result most Bashkirs depend on public transportation. In rural areas bus service is often irregular, and many Bashkirs rely on animals, primarily horses, for transportation.

Generally, however, living standards among Bashkirs have broadly improved since the late 1990's, as the Russian economy has expanded.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In traditional Bashkir society, most men had only one wife, although wealthy Bashkirs could have as many as four wives. Polygamy, especially with more than two wives, was very rare however, and became illegal after 1917. Bashkir women have traditionally worked, either performing agricultural work, or in urban areas holding paid jobs. Before 1917 Bashkir families were typically very large, with a woman commonly bearing 15 or 16 children in a lifetime. Because of high child mortality rates, however, perhaps only four or five children might survive into adulthood. During the late Soviet era, family size among the Bashkirs was generally similar to that of ethnic Russians in general, less than two children per family, which is far lower than the fertility rates for most Muslim groups in the former Soviet Union.

The Bashkirs have retained a large and extended kinship network and a deep-rooted system of clan and tribal identities. Some of the major Bashkir tribal groupings were the Usergan, Ming, Qıpsaq, and Burjan. Tribes are divided into clans and sub-clans, and awareness of one's affiliation with clans and tribes remains high, even though the distinctions between these tribes were blurred during the Soviet years. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, several tribal-based political movements have emerged among the Bashkirs.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Bashkir clothing was strongly influenced by the region's harsh climate, as well as by Bashkir conceptions of Islamic precepts. Traditional Bashkir winter clothing consisted of long, thick hats, usually made from the fur of animals such as wild cats or fox. Coats and jackets were also made of wild animal fur, as well as reversed sheepskin. High boots made from soft leather were also common.

Islamic headgear, especially the skull-cap, was once commonly worn by Bashkirs. Women generally covered their heads with scarves, and before 1917 some Bashkir women wore veils as well. Islamic headgear is still occasionally worn by Bashkir men and women, especially the older generation.

Today the everyday clothing of Bashkirs is thoroughly Westernized and differs in no way from that worn by Russians.

## 12 FOOD

Bashkir staple foods today consist of dark bread, potatoes, meat, and various vegetables, especially cabbage, onions, and beets. Traditional foods include horse-meat sausage, honey, mutton, and fermented mare's milk (*kumys*). Large-scale feasts are an important element in Bashkir dietary custom, both on

religious occasions and to welcome guests. Specific dishes are served for specific religious occasions such as memorial feasts and animal sacrifices.

Bashkirs often eat a *vak-belyash*, a round pastry filled with meat and potatoes, for a quick meal. Tatars in Bashkortostan may eat a *uch-pochmak*, which is like the *vak-belyash* except that the pastry is triangular. The Bashkirs are famous for their *kulama*, a type of soup where each person puts in what they like. Each ingredient is prepared separately in its own dish. Typical *kulama* ingredients include horse meat, onions, *lapsha* (square noodles), and carrots. Each individual puts what he or she wants into a bowl and then pours some broth over the top. The broth, traditionally made with horse meat, is now usually made from beef.

### 13 EDUCATION

Before 1917, most Bashkirs had some sort of access to Islamic education. Nearly every village mosque had attached to it an Islamic primary school (*mäktäp*) and secondary school (*mädräthä*). Although access to instruction depended to a large degree on material conditions of the village and the energy of the village's *imam* (leader of the congregation), children and older students would be taught basic literacy in Arabic and Bashkir. Several large and prestigious *mädräthäs* were also located in Bashkir territory (in Sterlibashevo and Sterlitamak), and it was common for Bashkir students to study in major centers of Islamic learning both in Russia (Kazan and Orenburg) and in Central Asia (Bukhara and Samarqand).

After 1929, Islamic education was for all intents and purposes outlawed, and Bashkir education was taken over by the state. In Soviet times, education became compulsory, and higher education was entirely in the Russian language. Bashkirs typically receive eleven years of schooling, although some opt for higher education in universities in the capital, Ufa, or in other institutions in Russia. Bashkortostan has a controversial affirmative action educational program that encourages rural Bashkirs to seek a university education in Ufa. The program involves a quota system, in which one-third of the students must be from urban areas (such as Ufa), one-third from villages, and one-third from rural areas. There is much competition for acceptance to the university among urban residents (mostly ethnic Russians) because there are so many vying for the limited number of spaces. In villages and rural areas, however, the university must actively recruit just to meet its quotas. As a result, the competition to get in is not as tough for those in the villages and rural areas (who are more likely to be Bashkirs). In order to maintain this program, the university has set up separate remedial education classes. Most Bashkirs who do finish their university studies stay in Ufa to look for a job rather than return home.

Bashkortostan is home to some large educational institutions, including Bashkir State University in Ufa, and a number of technical and pedagogical institutes in Ufa and in the republic's smaller cities. Many Bashkirs also study in larger Russian cities, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as abroad, particularly in Turkey and Western Europe.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Bashkirs have retained a rich cultural heritage, and Bashkir music is especially fascinating because of its retention of archaic Inner Asian traditions. Most interesting is the musi-

cal tradition of throat-singing (*ödhläü*), which exists nowhere else in western Inner Asia, but is well known in Mongolia and South Siberia. In *ödhläü*, the singer is able to produce two notes at once in his or her throat. Another characteristic of Bashkir singing is that it is based for the most part on a pentatonic scale (one with five tones per octave). A particularly characteristic Bashkir musical instrument is *quray*, which is a kind of reed flute held vertically. Traditional Bashkir dance is similarly archaic, and is commonly performed at gatherings and religious occasions.

Although the Bashkirs are well known for their oral literature, especially their oral epic poetry, Bashkir written literature, based on the Arabic script, was well developed before 1917. This literature includes tribal genealogies (*shäzhärä*) containing historical narratives, as well as historical chronicles. Bashkir Islamic literature was also well developed before 1917 and remains virtually unstudied. This literature was written in Arabic as well as in Turkic; in fact, a substantial body of literature produced by Bashkirs was written in Arabic.

Beginning in 1917, the Soviet authorities encouraged the creation of a formal Bashkir culture which includes European-style literature, classical music, classical dance, and so forth. The economic crises of the 1990's and the reduction of state subsidies for cultural institutions severely impacted Bashkir cultural life, from which it is currently recovering.

### 15 WORK

The Bashkir economy was historically based on semi-nomadic stockbreeding, cereal and mixed agriculture, and the hunting and gathering of forest products. Today, stock breeding, agriculture (including beekeeping) together with industrial manufacturing, oil and petrochemical production, and service industries form the basis of the Bashkir economy.

### 16 SPORTS

One of the most popular sports among Bashkirs, as among many other Turkic peoples, is wrestling. In addition, horse racing is quite popular as entertainment during Bashkir festivals. The most popular spectator sports are hockey and soccer.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Contests associated with the *Sabantuy* festivities are a favorite activity among the Bashkirs. One such traditional game is a pillow fight between two contestants who stand on top of short pillars and try to topple each other. There are also potato sack races and a log pole climb (with a prize on the top for the winner). A popular amusement is *nardoy*, a Turkic game similar to checkers that is played on a large board. Traditionally a common feature of public celebrations was competitions of improvised verse, known as *aytis*.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Bashkirs are especially skilled at weaving, particularly woolen carpets. Bashkir carpets are generally flat-woven and feature simple geometric designs. Handicrafts in general are still widely engaged in, partly for supplemental income, but especially because of the lack of retail establishments in rural areas.



## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Bashkirs share many of the social problems being experienced in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union. This includes increasing rates of alcoholism, crime, unemployment, and poverty. In certain areas of the Republic of Bashkortostan rural poverty among Bashkirs is especially severe. Despite the ethnic diversity of Bashkortostan, no single ethnic group constitutes a majority, and ethnic tensions have not exploded into violence. The Bashkir movement for full political independence receives limited support among Bashkirs as a whole.

The most severe social problem facing Bashkirs is without a doubt their republic's environmental degradation. Bashkortostan's position as a moderate oil producer and especially the presence of petrochemical installations in the cities of Ufa and Neftekamsk have caused catastrophic pollution to the region's air and water. Most serious are high levels of toxins such as dioxin in urban areas, especially Ufa.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Bashkir society there were sharp and clear-cut gender divisions in terms of division of labor and social interaction. Before 1917 both Bashkir customary law and Islamic law regulated the rights and obligations of men and women, and Islamic law became increasingly prominent until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Russian law allowed Bashkirs to use Islamic law, or *sharīghat*, to regulate family law and inheritance law. In particular it regulated divorce, the division of household property, and child custody. Similarly, Islamic law allowed for the division of property, both male and female, among heirs. Before 1917 many Bashkir women had access to Islamic education. Small boys and girls were educated together, but older girls and young women were educated separately by women, usually the wives of the village imam. As in much of the Islamic world, women were especially prominent as Quran reciters. Women also participated extensively in specific religious rituals, especially pilgrimage to local shrines.

Child-rearing, traditionally, in Soviet times and since 1991, has generally been relegated to women, as are specific domestic duties. Although women always contributed substantially to farming and stock-breeding, during the Soviet era, during and after World War II Bashkir women entered the service and industrial workforce in large numbers, and obtained greater access to Soviet education.

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—revised by A. J. Frank with acknowledgment to M. Tabatchnik

# BASQUES

**LOCATION:** Northwest Spain and southwest France

**POPULATION:** almost 3 million

**LANGUAGE:** Euskera (Basque language); Spanish; French

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Basques are a single people who live in two countries: northwest Spain and southwest France, where the Pyrenees meet the coast of the Bay of Biscay. The Basques may be the oldest ethnic group in Europe. They are thought to have inhabited the southwestern corner of the continent since before the migration of Indo-European peoples to the area approximately 5,000 years ago. Surviving invasions by the Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, French, and Spanish, they resisted domination by outsiders until the Middle Ages when much of their territory was usurped by Spaniards, Gascons, and Catalans. In 1516 the Basques on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees agreed to Castilian rule but won the right to retain a degree of self-government. By 1876 all Basque lands were divided between France and Spain; however, nationalist sentiments ran high among the Basques—especially on the Spanish side—throughout the 19th century.

In the 1930s the Basques supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War in exchange for promises of autonomy, but their hopes were dashed with the victory of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. During the years of the Franco regime (1939–1975) the Basque language and culture in the Spanish provinces were ruthlessly suppressed, and their local government went into exile in Paris. By the 1950s, resistance groups had formed, most notably the ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, or Basque Homeland and Liberty), which continued its terrorist acts throughout the 1970s and 1980s, even after Spanish rule over the Basques was liberalized following Franco's death in 1975. Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, and Alava, which make up three of the four Basque provinces, were unified in 1980 as the Basque Autonomous Community, and its inhabitants were granted limited autonomy, recognition of their language and culture, and control over their schools and police force. Today, it is one of the most decentralized regions in the world, with more autonomy than just about any other similar region in Europe. The seats of the Basque parliament and government are in Vitoria-Gastei. The parliament elects the *lehendakari* (president), who forms a government following regular parliamentary procedures.

ETA is an illegal armed Basque organization. It was founded in 1959, demanding Basque independence and self-determination from a Marxist-Leninist interpretation. According to official figures and ETA communiqués, since 1969 it has killed over 800 people, maimed hundreds more, and committed dozens of kidnappings. The group is proscribed as a terrorist organization by both the Spanish and French government, as well as the European Union.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Basque country consists of three regions on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees (Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, and Alava) and three on the French side (Labourd, Basse-Navarre, and Soule). These



territories, collectively, are called Euskal-Herria (Land of the Basques) or Euskadi. It has been nearly a thousand years since these regions were unified politically. The area is geographically varied, containing the ridges and foothills of the Pyrenees and a short coastal plain along the Bay of Biscay, as well as steep, narrow valleys and mountain streams. Although Basque nationalists claim Navarre as part of their territory, Navarre is a different autonomous community.

With 2,141,860 million inhabitants (2007), the land of the Basques, with an extension of 7,234 sq km (2,793 sq mi), is a densely populated area (293.73 per sq km). The people are unevenly distributed, with most living in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa provinces. Fewer than 10% live in the region's largest province, Alava, which encompasses about 40% of the land area. About half the people who live in Basque country are Basques. More than 1 million have other ethnic backgrounds.

The port city of Bilbao is its largest city with a population of 354,145, followed by San Sebastián with 183,308. Blood types and other genetic information about the Basques suggest that they are an ancient people (possibly even descended from Cro-Magnon man) who inhabited the region long before the arrival of other European groups. According to a Basque saying, "Before God was God and boulders were boulders, the Basques were already Basques."

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Basque language, also known as Euskera, is Europe's oldest living language. It is unrelated to Spanish, French, or any other

Romance language and belongs to no other known language family. Some scholars have suggested that it may have originated in the Caucasus region of Russia or in North Africa, and others have found similarities to Finnish and Berber. It was the universal language of rural Basques until the end of the 19th century, although it had no written literary tradition and was spoken less frequently by town dwellers. The Franco regime's suppression of all Spanish regionalism in the mid-20th century caused the number of Basque speakers in Spain to decline sharply (as opposed to France, where the figures are higher). In recent years, Basques in both France and Spain have promoted, with some success, the use of their traditional language, mainly by means of the *ikastolas*, or Basque language and culture schools, and it has become more common in literature and the media since Franco's death in 1975. Every province and town in Spain's Basque country has a Spanish and a Basque official name, both of which appear on all road signs.

The Basque language is notoriously difficult (regional folklore has it that the devil tried to learn Basque for seven years and gave up). There are many different grammatical tenses and a variety of possible forms for each word, depending on gender and other factors. In addition, there are a number of different dialects, although a person who speaks one dialect can generally understand the others. Basque is also rather exotic when contrasted with other Western tongues. For example, intensity may be expressed by repeating a word twice ("very hot" is *bero-bero*), a feature unknown among European languages but common among Polynesian ones. The language also lacks generic terms for "tree" and "animal": there are names for specific trees (oak, maple, etc.) but not for trees in general.

#### SAMPLE WORDS AND PHRASES

welcome	ongi-etorri
beach	hondartza
yes	bai
no	ez
see you later	gero arte
hello, how are you?	kaixo, zer moduz?

"Happiness is the only thing we can give without having"  
(proverb): *Izan gabe eman dezakegun gauza bakarra da zoriona.*

### 4 FOLKLORE

Through centuries of storytelling, the Basques have evolved a rich and colorful mythology. In ancient times their land was supposed to have been peopled by a race of giants called *jentillak*, who lived side by side with its human inhabitants until the coming of Christ, when they disappeared, leaving behind only one of their number named Olentzero. Olentzero is a folk character that appears in country festivals and celebrations, and is represented in the form of dolls and straw figures. According to legends, the lamiak were female spirits who looked like beautiful women with long golden hair; they had chicken feet, lived in caverns, and could wield either a helpful or a harmful influence. Besides legends and tales, the Basques have a rich and ancient folklore that encompasses various rituals and dances. The Katcha-Ranka is a dance performed in fishing villages. A person representing St. Peter is carried in a coffin through the village and to the waterfront by dancers who then proceed to symbolically beat him as a threat to ensure a good

catch when they go out fishing. Cultural expressions, such as dancing and singing, often are tied to religious occasions.

## 5 RELIGION

Almost all Basques are Roman Catholics. Traditionally an unusually high percentage chose to become priests or nuns, although this number, together with church attendance generally, has fallen since the Second Vatican Council. Two of the church's most renowned theologians, St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius Loyola, who was the founder of the Jesuit order, were of Basque origin. Basque Catholicism, like that in many other areas of Spain, is characterized by a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As elsewhere in Spain, most Basque holidays are those found in the Christian calendar. Special holidays include celebrations for Saint John, the Virgen de Begoña, the Virgen del Carmen (patroness of sailors and fishermen), and the Virgen Blanca. The celebration for the Virgen Blanca takes place on and around August 16, including weeklong celebrations of the *Semana Grande Donostierra* in San Sebastián and Bilbao. In addition, villages celebrate their own festivals with performances by folk musicians, dancers, and *bertsolariak*, traditional singer/storytellers who can improvise and sing rhymes on any topic.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Besides baptism, first Communion and marriage could be considered a rite of passage for Basques as with most Spaniards. These events are the occasion, in most cases, for big and expensive social gatherings in which the family shows its generosity and economic status.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In rural communities where families often lived on individual farms in relative isolation, a special relationship developed with one's neighbors, especially the nearest neighbor, called the *lehen auzo*, or "first neighbor." The role that first neighbors play sometimes even surpasses that of blood relatives. The best man and chief bridesmaid at weddings are chosen from the household of the *lehen auzo*, and its members are informed of a serious illness or impending death before the family's closest relatives. In an emergency, the *lehen auzo* temporarily takes over the running of his neighbor's farm. When there is a death in the family, custom traditionally requires that the *lehen auzo* be informed before the village bell tolls. The wider neighborhood, or *auzoa*, is also an important source of social support.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

People in the rural regions of Basque country live in large stone farmhouses called *caseríos*, or *baserriak* (the plural of *baserria*). They are often as high as three stories, with animals kept on the ground floor, the family living space on the second floor, and hay and other crops stored on the third. They may either be built at a distance from one another or located in clusters of about 10 or 12. As a result of economical prosperity, cities and towns are much more extensive than a quarter of a century ago, and there are new areas developed with modern apartment buildings.

The Basques have access to the same level of modern medical care as their neighbors in Spain or France, countries with average life expectancies of 78 and 77 years, respectively. However, some Basques, particularly members of the older generation, still believe in the effectiveness of certain types of folk remedies, especially those involving various herbs.

Basque cities and towns are connected by bus and trains. Bilbao, the industrial center of the Basque region, is also Spain's busiest port. Located on the Bay of Biscay, it can accommodate tankers weighing up to 500,000 tons. Bilbao, Vitoria, and San Sebastian have airports. Bilbao's Sondika Airport, a beautiful building, is the busiest in northwest Spain, and the city is connected by rail with the rest of Spain and with France.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In rural areas, Basque households generally include the maternal or paternal grandparents, as well as unmarried aunts or uncles. It is not uncommon for cousins, even first cousins, to marry. The most important concern for rural dwellers is the perpetuation of the family farm, or *baseria*. In every family, one son or daughter is designated from childhood as heir to the farm. When he or she gets married, ownership of the farm is transferred to the new couple as part of the wedding arrangements. All adults in the household participate in child rearing. The whole family helps with the farm work, including children and grandparents, who assist with easier tasks. In urban areas, the nuclear family is the norm, sometimes joined by an elderly grandparent or unmarried aunt. Well-off families may have a live-in nanny or servant. In urban areas, family life is like in other parts of Spain.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Basques wear modern Western-style clothing for both casual and formal occasions. The single most distinctive item of traditional Basque clothing, which is still worn throughout the country, is the flat wide black beret (*boina*) worn by Basque men.

## 12 FOOD

The Basques are known for their excellent cuisine, much of which involves seafood. The Basque version of bouillabaisse, or fish stew, is called *ttoro* and includes mussels, crayfish, congers, and the head of a codfish, as well as three other kinds of fish. Cod itself (called *bacalao*) is also extremely popular; a book entitled *264 Recipes for Cod* is sold in Bilbao. Other specialties include fresh tuna with tomatoes, garlic, and spices; *txangurro* (spider crab); and hake (*merluza*) *kokotchas*, made with garlic and parsley. Red peppers are a dietary staple and find their way into seafood sauces, chicken recipes, and omelettes. "Gateau Basque" (Basque cake) is made from eggs, flour, sugar, and rum. A favorite national beverage is *txakoli*, a fruity white wine produced in coastal areas, often in small family cellars.

## 13 EDUCATION

School for the Basques, as for other Spanish children, is free and compulsory from the ages of 6 to 14, when many students begin the three-year *bachillerato* course of study, after which they may opt for either one year of college preparatory study or vocational training. About one-third of Spain's children are



Traditional Basque dancers hold torches in Bilbao's San Mames soccer stadium during a celebration of the official Basque language, *Euskera*. (AP Images/EFE, Txema Fernandez)

educated at private schools, many of them run by the Catholic Church.

Advanced studies are offered through the University of the Basque Country, founded in 1968, and the universities of San Sebastián and of Vitoria; the private University of Deusto, run by the Jesuits, is the oldest and most prestigious university in the Basque country.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Besides, ancient stories and songs of a folklore, which were transmitted orally, there is not a sizeable literary heritage written in Euskera (the Basque language). Yet, there are well-known Basque authors who wrote in Spanish, such as Antonio de Trueba, Arturo Campion, Francisco Navarro Villoslada, writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, and novelist Ignacio Aldecoa. In the 20th century, along with an upsurge of nationalism, a flourishing cultural, literary, and artistic movement began. Now, a great amount of Euskera-language books are published each year. Outstanding musicians are Juan Crisóstomo Arriaga, called "the Spanish Mozart," and composer Maurice Ravel. Artists include painter Ignacio Zuloaga and sculptor Eduardo Chillida.

Since 1997, when the Guggenheim Museum was opened, Bilbao has become a center of attraction for tourists and art lovers. The building is the work of the Canadian/American architect Frank Gehry. Built with reflective titanium panels, it is considered to be one of the world's most spectacular buildings

in the style of deconstructivism. Other museums are the Museum of Fine Arts in Bilbao and the San Telmo Museum in San Sebastián.

#### **15 WORK**

Fishing and agriculture have long been important occupations for the Basque. The traditional farm holding, or *basseria*, is a family enterprise in which each household raises its own crops (corn, wheat, and vegetables) and livestock (chickens, pigs, cows, and sheep), and certain resources including pasture lands and fuel wood are held in common by each village. The past 50 years have seen an increase in commercialization and mechanization, dictated by the demands of urban markets. However, Basque herders still follow the seasonal patterns of their ancestors, moving herds of sheep, cows, and goats up to mountain pasture lands from June to October while their wives take charge of the family farm.

The Basque country was the first part of Spain to become industrialized, and it has long been known as a center of Spanish industry, especially the city of Bilbao. The region's history as Spain's iron and steel capital led to the development of automobile and machine tool manufacturing, as well as shipbuilding. Although the iron industry and shipbuilding have declined, they still are a source of economy in the Basque country.

Other important sectors of the economy include the manufacture of railway cars, automobiles, and iron construction materials; a sizeable commercial fishing fleet that ventures as far

away as the coasts of Ireland and western Africa; retail businesses; and tourism. Bilbao has traditionally been an important financial center. The Banco de Bilbao-Vizcaya (BBV) bank ranks among the one hundred largest banks in the world. Today, the Basque Autonomous Community is one of the wealthiest in Spain.

The Basque Technological Park in Zamudio is the home of many companies in high-tech industries, including telecommunications, biotechnology, and robotics.

## 16 SPORTS

The Basques have a rich tradition of sports in which skill and physical strength are the main components. Among these are competitions like *aizkolariak* (featuring teams of woodcutters racing to chop a tree trunk in two in the shortest time), dragging or lifting of heavy stones, foot races, and bowling. *Regatas de traineras* are rowing competitions among long narrow boats with a 13-member team. Every fishing town in the northern coast of Spain has its own team and *trainera* to compete at the annual rowing championship in San Sebastián.

The region is known internationally for the game called *frontón*, *pelota vasca*, or *jai-alai*, a handball- or squash-like ball game played at very high speeds. There are several forms of pelota, including some in which the ball travels at up to 241 km/hr (150 mi/hr). The game has been played for centuries in an outdoor court called a *frontón*, which often shares a wall with the village church. Today, it is also played in indoor courts as well. The fastest form of pelote, called *cesta punta*, is played on an outdoor court with a second wall called a *jai-alai*.

Basques are very fond of soccer and Bilbao has its own team, the Atlético de Bilbao, that has consistently been one of the best teams in the country.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like other people throughout Spain, the Basques spend many leisure hours socializing with friends at tapas bars, which serve light food and drinks. They also enjoy each other's company at the more than 1,500 gourmet societies, or *txokos*, in their region. These are private dining clubs that were formerly all-male haunts but now welcome women (although men still tend to do the cooking). Television is a popular form of relaxation, and Spain has a private television station (TV Vasca) that broadcasts in the Basque language. *El mus* is a popular card game.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The traditional Basque decorative arts consist primarily of wood carving and engraving on stone, both practiced mainly on door-lintels and tombstones. The Basques have a well-developed tradition of oral storytelling, which was one of their main forms of entertainment before urbanization (and television); Basques would often invite their neighbors over for an evening of tale-spinning. Basque folk music is sung and played on traditional instruments including the *txistu*, a three-holed flute, and the bagpipe-like *dultzaina*. Dozens of folk dances have been preserved, and many villages have folk-dance groups that perform regularly. Two especially spirited dances are the *Bolant Dantza* (flying dance) and *La Espata Dantza* (sword dance).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The iron, steel, chemical, and paper industries of the Basque region have created a serious pollution problem in its cities, and motor vehicle emissions have aggravated the situation. There is considerable river pollution as well. Bilbao's metals industries must deal with an outmoded infrastructure and increased competition from the new European Union.

The most pressing problems are ETA activities. Although the group represents the views of only a small minority, it continues to fight for full independence, and has killed over 800 people since 1968.

Other problems include alcoholism and drug dependency, mainly in the big cities.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women have an ever-increasing role in society and a high degree of economic independence, competing favorably with men for jobs. Many women hold municipal and government posts, such as councilwomen, mayors, or university professors, and many are employed in or manage business. A large percentage of women attend universities.

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—revised by S. G. Castaneda

# BELARUSANS

**PRONUNCIATION:** Byeh-lah-ROOS-ans

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Byelorussians; “White Russians”

**LOCATION:** Belarus

**POPULATION:** 9.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Belarusian

**RELIGION:** Christian (Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, other sects); minority of Muslim, Jewish, and other faiths

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the name *Belaya Rus* (variously translated as “White Russia,” “White Ruthenia,” “Byelorussia,” “Byelorussia,” or “Belarus”) is quite different from the history of the East Slavic Belarusian people. The name originated in the 12th century and initially designated various parts of northwestern Russia or Ukraine. Since the 14th century it has also been applied to eastern territories of present-day Belarus.

The meaning of “white” in White Russia, as applied to present-day Belarus (pronounced byeh-lah-roos«), is something of a puzzle. Historians have proposed various explanations for the term. “White” could refer to the beauty of the land, for instance, or to the abundance of snow, to the white complexion of the people, or to freedom and independence. The word “white” in those distant times signified “free,” or “independent.” Over the course of many centuries, the Belarusians have stubbornly struggled to defend their independence, language, culture, and national way of life. Another explanation of the color white has a religious context. The term *beloruski* was used for the first time by Prince Andrei Bogolubski who, having sacked Kiev in 1169, assumed the title “Prince Beloruski” to underscore true Orthodox faith.

The name *Belarus*, which in its contemporary meaning signifies either the modern Belarusian state or the entire ethnographic area settled by the Belarusians, dates back only to the last decade of the 19th century, when the Belarusian political movement began to develop. Its earlier variant was *Belaya Rus*.

*Rus*—distortedly translated by many as “Russia”—was a patch of land in the triangle formed by three cities: Kiev, Chernigov, and Perayasavl in present-day Ukraine. But, as a result of the expansion of the Kievan Rus state, which spread during the 10th century over the vast territories of Novgorod, Pskov, Polacak, Muscovy, and other regions, *Rus* acquired a new meaning, and its scope was substantially changed. When the center of power in that empire moved by the mid-14th century to Muscovy, the quintessential Rus went with it.

The ancestors of the Belarusians have been known throughout history under various names. The earliest embodiment of statehood on Belarusian territories were the principalities of Polacak, Turau, and Navahradak (Novohorodak), named after their respective main cities. Ruled toward the end of the 10th century from Kiev, they asserted themselves early on as independent or semi-independent dominions. The Polacak principality, occupying more than half of present-day Belarus, was settled by a tribe of Kryvicians, one of the largest groups of East Slavs who moved into the area in the 6th century AD. The territory occupied by the Kryvicians stretched beyond the confines

of the Polacakian princes. In the 13th century, the territories of Polacak, Navahradak, and other Belarusian cities merged to defend their territories from the German religious order of the Teutonic Knights. This merge established the new duchy, further known as the Grand Duchy of Litva, Lithuania, Rus, and Samogitia (GDL), or simply as Lithuania. At the time of the political union between the GDL and the kingdom of Poland in 1569, when Ukraine was transferred from the GDL to the Polish kingdom, Belarus remained in the duchy. During this period, some Lithuanian princes embraced Eastern-rite Christianity, and Belarusian was the official language of the ducal chancellery and courts. In 1562, during the war with Muscovy, the gentry of the Grand Duchy formed a so-called confederation (i.e., a temporary military-political agreement), exploiting the thrust of the moment, and demanded closer ties with Poland. In 1569 a real federation concluded in the Polish city of Lublin established the new relationship between the two states. When the Polish kingdom fell apart in the last half of the 18th century, Russia took over the Belarusians’ homeland.

The first attempt at independence from Russia began in 1863, when about 75,000 Belarusian farmers and some of the local nobility led a violent rebellion against the Russians. Although the revolt failed, it helped to solidify the national spirit and helped the movement for independence grow during the late 1800s. In 1918, an independent Belarusian Democratic Republic was declared out of the collapse of the imperial Russian government, despite the German occupation of World War I. The new Bolshevik government in Moscow refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new republic and arranged the overthrow of the new Belarusian government. In 1919, the Communists formed the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). In 1920, the Poles occupied much of the new country, but they later withdrew from all but the westernmost parts. The BSSR formally joined the Soviet Union in 1922. For its subservience to the regime, the Soviet Union rewarded the BSSR by focusing on its industrial development. The BSSR was also awarded a large amount of territory in the west that had been part of Poland but was ceded to the Soviet Union in the famous 1939 deal between Hitler and Stalin, the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Much of this “new” part of western Belarus in 1939 was actually the same territory that Belarus had given up to Poland after World War I.

The Soviet plan of restoration and industrialization after World War II initially helped the Belarusians during the 1960s and 1970s. Many factories produced weapons-related equipment and heavy machinery. However, by the 1980s, a lack of consumer goods, poor quality of life, and environmental problems (like contamination and deforestation) caused the Belarusians to distrust the Soviet government. During the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power disaster in nearby Ukraine, the Soviet government delayed telling the people about the situation for several days. By that time, however, hundreds of thousands of people had been exposed to the radioactivity, and about 20% of the farmland was contaminated.

Labor strikes by factory and transportation workers in April 1991 helped further the cause of independence. After the failed coup in August 1991, Belarus became the sixth republic to secede from the Soviet Union. In December 1991, the capital of Belarus, Minsk, became the capital for the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). (The CIS is a loose confed-

eration of some of the former Soviet republics that addresses military and economic issues.

The first constitution of the newly independent Belarus was ratified in March 1994, and Alexander Lukashenko was elected president in July of that year. Since then, Lukashenko has wrested increasing control over the government of Belarus to establish an authoritarian regime. In 1996, Lukashenko manipulated a national referendum to reform the constitution, giving him increased powers over the government and removing term limits on the presidency. He declared himself the winner of presidential elections in 2001 and 2006, both of which were deemed fraudulent by international observers, as were other local and parliamentary elections that solidified Lukashenko's influence. Belarusian opposition leaders and protesters have been harassed, beaten, jailed, or made to "disappear," and the media is controlled by the government. Freedom House, an organization that grades countries on civil and political freedoms, recently gave Belarus the lowest scores possible.

The political situation in Belarus has prohibited the development of international relations, isolating Belarus and inhibiting its economic development. The transition from Soviet republic to independent nation continues to prove difficult for Belarus.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Belarus is situated in the eastern part of the European continent. It borders Russia in the north and east, the Ukraine in the southeast, Poland in the west, and Latvia and Lithuania in the northwest. The Belarusian homeland is a landlocked nation that occupies 207,600 sq km (83,040 sq mi), which makes it about as large as the U.S. state of Minnesota, or about three times as large as Belgium and the Netherlands combined.

The major cities of Belarus are the capital Minsk (also spelled Miensk), with a population of over 1,800,000 people in 1992; Homel (Gomel), 506,000; Mahilou (Mogilev), 363,000; Viciebsk (Vitebsk), 356,000; Brest, 269,000; and Hrodna (Grodno), 255,000. Other large cities include Pinsk, Sluck, Baranavichy, Orsha, Hlybokaje, and Salihorsk.

The terrain of Belarus is predominantly flat, with hilly areas occupying only 8% of its territory. The Belaruskaya Hrada is a range of elevated terrain that runs from the southwest to the northeast part of Belarus. The highest point is 346 m (1,135 ft) above sea level. The climate of Belarus is temperate continental with a mild and humid winter, a warm summer, and a wet autumn. Annual precipitation ranges from 55 cm to 70 cm (21–28 in). The mean temperature in January is  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $20^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and  $18^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $64^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in July, with high humidity. The climate of Belarus is favorable for agriculture. The territory of Belarus includes 3,000 streams and 4,000 lakes that are used for transportation and power generation. The largest lake is Naroch, which covers 80 sq km (31 sq mi) and has a maximum depth of about 25 m (82 ft). The principal rivers of Belarus are the Dneper, the Pripyat, the Berezina, the Western Dvina, and the Neman. The average density of river networks is 43.6 km for every 100 sq km of land (or about 70.1 mi of rivers per 100 sq mi of land). There are also sources of mineral water.

The inalienable part of the Belarusian landscape is bogs and swamps, which are of large climatic and hydrological significance. Their total number is about 7,000, and they occupy about 13.4% of Belarus's territory. Much of the swampland is in the south and is sparsely populated. The forests of



Belarus constitute over 33% of its territory, with a total area of 8,055,000 hectares (19,900,000 acres). The territory of the Republic of Belarus includes deposits of oil, oil shale, coal and lignite, iron ores, nonferrous metal ores, dolomites, potassium and rock salts, and phosphates. There are huge deposits of peat, fire and refractory clay, molding sand and sand for glass production, and different construction materials. The industry of Belarus has developed a number of deposits, making it possible not only to meet the requirements of the republic, but also to export natural resources.

About 25% of the population of Belarus was killed during World War II. Combined with the numbers killed in the Soviet purges, the population of Belarus in 1945 was only 67% as large as it was in the early 1930s. The population did not return to prewar levels until the mid-1970s. As of 2008, Belarus had 9.7 million inhabitants, of which 81% were ethnic Belarusians. The ratio of ethnic Belarusians to non-Belarusians has increased due to the emigration of ethnic Russians to Russia since independence. A law passed in 1992 made every inhabitant of Belarus a citizen, including all the ethnic Russians who had moved there over the years. Many of the Russians, however, declined to accept Belarusian citizenship but still live in Belarus.

There are also many ethnic Belarusians in Poland and in other parts of the former Soviet Union (such as Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), as well as large numbers living in the West (primarily in Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, the United States, Canada, and Argentina). The total population of Belarus has declined since

independence due to emigration in search of better economic opportunities.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The development of the Belarusian language was stifled by Polish and Russian dominion for centuries. For example, during the time of the Russian tsars, the public use of the Belarusian language was strongly discouraged. Baltic influences also have helped shape the Belarusian language. The Belarusian language of the 1500s was the same as that used throughout the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. These influences caused the language to remain in a somewhat dormant state throughout those centuries. Modern Belarusian, therefore, is still very close to the old Eastern Slavic language, with some words borrowed from modern Polish and Russian. There are three primary Belarusian dialects: southwestern, northeastern, and central. Written Belarusian is based on the central (Minsk) dialect. A person who knows the Belarusian language can understand Russian and Ukrainian very well and will also comprehend Polish, Czech, Slovak, Bulgarian, and Slovenian.

During the Soviet era, the Belarusian language suffered because of the dominating influence of Russian, which is similar. Belarusians came to know the Russian language through exposure, and the Soviet government tried to change the Belarusian language by making the words and grammar sound more like Russian. Many Belarusian children were taught their own tongue as a second or even a third language in school. By the early 1940s, there were no Belarusian-language schools operating. It was estimated that only 11% of the population in the early 1990s was fluent in Belarusian. The constitution of Belarus proclaimed Belarusian as the official language in 1991, but a new constitution was adopted in March 1994. The Russian language has become so much a part of everyday life for Belarusians that it was voted an official language in May 1995 by leaders sympathetic with Russia.

Since independence, Belarusian has become the primary language of instruction. Belarusian and Russian are both official state languages in Belarus, though the government plans to phase out the use of Russian gradually. However, pro-Russian officials in Belarus have recently slowed down or stalled the implementation of this policy. The population of Minsk is almost entirely composed of Russian-speakers. Metro and street signs are now posted in both Russian and Belarusian, more courses at the university are now being taught in Belarusian, and most local radio stations now broadcast in Belarusian.

Everyday terms in the Belarusian language include *dobraga zdarovyia* (hello), *tak* (yes), *nye* (no), *kali laska* (please), *dzyakooi* (thank you) and *da pabachenyia* (good-bye).

### 4 FOLKLORE

The image of the tragic Rahnieda has sunk deep into the memory of the Belarusian people. There are numerous tales of the heartbroken princess who wanders across her native land consoling those in grief, healing the wounds of injured soldiers, and helping the unfortunate. The story of Princess Rahnieda begins with Prince St. Vladimir.

In his younger pre-Christian days, the future Christianizer of Rus, Kievan Prince St. Vladimir, ruled Novgorod, which was given to him by his father Svyatoslav (d. 972), the warrior-builder of the Kievan empire. To Vladimir's dismay, his father gave the prestigious Kievan seat to another son, Yaropolk.

Knowing he would have to fight for Kiev, Vladimir decided to secure himself an ally by marrying Rahnieda, the daughter of the Belarusian prince Rahvalod from the city of Polacak. Rahnieda, however, preferred Yaropolk. Rahnieda not only pricked Vladimir's pride by her refusal but also injured his ego by calling him *rabynic* (born of a servant). Rumor had it that Vladimir's mother was a servant in the household of the grand prince Svyatoslav. This was sufficient pretext for Vladimir and his cunning uncle, Dobrynya, to descend on Polacak, kill Rahnieda's parents and two of her brothers, and force the princess to become his wife. Soon afterward, Vladimir gained the Kievan seat by killing his brother Yaropolk.

Rahnieda gave birth to a boy, whom she named Iziaslau. She continued to hate her husband. Rahnieda decided to kill Vladimir in his sleep, but the scheme did not work: Vladimir awoke in time and thwarted his wife's revenge. He wanted to punish Rahnieda by death, but, as the chronicler states, their young son, Iziaslau, made him change his mind. Iziaslau stood up for his mother. With a sword in his hand, he said, "Don't think that you are all by yourself here!" Impressed by the courage of his first-born, Vladimir decided merely to banish both Iziaslau and Rahnieda to their native Polacak and even ordered a city built for the two of them, appropriately named Iziaslau (today known as Zaslauje, located near Minsk). According to legend, Rahnieda became a nun, taking the name of Anastasia, and spent the rest of her life in a monastery near the newly built city of Iziaslau, where she died around the year 1000.

### 5 RELIGION

Christianity came to Belarus soon after Rahnieda's husband, Kievan grand prince Vladimir, baptized his subjects in 988. The Byzantine variant of Christianity became the state religion and was spread throughout the realm by force of decree. Some historians believe that Polacak's first bishopric emerged as early as 992, and that Turau's came in 1005. One of the most famous religious leaders was St. Euphrosyne of Polacak (c. 1120–1173). Christened Pradslava, the young princess chose to become a nun. She transcribed books, initiated the building of churches and monasteries, and founded schools, libraries, and orphanages. St. Euphrosyne is remarkable not only for her works, but also for her courage and devotion to Christian ideals. During the Second Crusade she visited the Holy Land on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where she died in 1173 and soon afterward was canonized.

Revered today by Orthodox and Catholics as the patron saint of Belarus, St. Euphrosyne symbolizes the civilizing power of Christianity. Her name was immortalized by (among other things) a splendid gem-studded cross created at Euphrosyne's behest by a Belarusian master, Lazar Bohsa. Of exquisite beauty, the relic survived centuries of turbulence until World War II, when it mysteriously disappeared.

The Belarusian people, Christianized originally in the Byzantine rite, became multiconfessional as a result of the advantages Catholicism enjoyed in the Grand Duchy, followed by the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and Polish as well as Russian counterpressures. Over the centuries, however, the peoples of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus, and Samogitia were able to work out a peaceful compromise marked by religious tolerance and interethnic cooperation between Orthodox and Catholic, Jew and Tatar. In 1622 King Sigismund III prohibited any public controversy against Catholics. A wave of takeovers



of Orthodox Church buildings and monasteries swept Belarus. Just as Protestants a century earlier had taken over Catholic churches, now the Uniates, instigated and supported by state authorities and the Vatican, did the same to Orthodox shrines. Catholicism, having lost much ground to the Reformation in Western Europe, found a small counterweight in the East.

When the Polish element began to dominate the political life of the Belarusian territory, the religious union inadvisably became a tool to make the Belarusian people more Polish. Many Belarusians, dissatisfied with social conditions and opposing the growing pressure to join the Uniate Church, fled south into the Ukrainian steppes to join the Cossack group. In 1696, by decision of the General Confederation in Warsaw, the Belarusian language in the Grand Duchy lost its official status and was replaced by Polish. Moreover, Catholicism became increasingly identified as the “Polish creed,” thus deepening and complicating the Russo-Polish antagonism.

In their geopolitical striving toward Western Europe, the tsars used the convenient pretext of “liberating” their co-religionists of the “Russian faith” from Polish Catholic domination. In 1839 the Uniate Church in Belarus, to which about 75% of the population adhered, was forcibly converted to Russian Orthodox. The name Belarus was officially banned, replaced either by the name of individual governorships or by the term West Russia, (with such variants as Northwest Russia and Northwestern Province).

Before 1917, Belarus had 2,466 religious congregations, including 1,650 Orthodox, 127 Roman Catholic, 657 Jewish, 32 Protestant, and several Muslim communities. Many congregations were destroyed during the early Soviet years, and religious leaders were typically exiled or executed. Congregations that were allowed to exist were often controlled by the government in order to advance a nationalist agenda. During the 1980s, the relaxation of controls against religious institutions (coupled with the celebration of the millennial anniversary of Christianity in Russia) initiated a small religious revival in Belarus.

The new constitution of Belarus guarantees religious freedoms; however, a 2002 law and 2003 concordat with the Belarus Orthodox Church (BOC) give the BOC a privileged status and effectively repress the practice of other religions. In 2008, about 80% of Belarusians identified themselves as Orthodox, 14% as Catholic, 2% as Protestant, and the remaining 4% as Jewish, Muslim, or other faiths. Those who are not members of the BOC, particularly Protestants and Jews, suffer harassment and discrimination.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

*Kolady* (Christmas) is one of the most prominent traditional holidays in Belarus. The holiday season starts with a solemn, elaborate supper on *Kootia* (Christmas Eve). Twelve or more dishes are prepared and served. The pot containing a dish called *Kootia* is placed on a stand in the corner under the icons. The head of the home starts by saying grace. The dishes are served in a specific order, with a portion of each put aside for the ancestors. *Kootia* is the last course of the supper.

The tradition of Christmas caroling dates back to the Middle Ages. Young people would travel from house to house. They carried a giant lighted star, representing the Star of Bethlehem, and sang carols called *Kaladki*; some would dress in animal and bird costumes. The goat was always the favorite—a re-

versed sheepskin coat and a goat’s head, complete with beard and horns, were used. They sang and entertained with humorous presentations and games. Along with the merrymaking, the carolers would praise the host and his family. In return, they received goodies, money, and small presents.

Another beautiful Christmas tradition was the *Batlejka* Show. This was a puppet show of the Nativity, performed with wooden puppets. This tradition has become popular again. Christmas tree decorating and the Christmas tree show are also very popular in Belarus. Young people usually decorate the tree with handmade toys. They also prepare grab bags for the Christmas Tree Show. The show is an elaborate presentation of singing and dramatic readings. After the show, *Dzied Maroz* (Father Frost) or *Sviaty Mikola* (St. Nicholas) distributes the presents.

Easter is one of the most joyous holidays in Belarus. The Easter festivities usually begin with Palm Sunday, which is called *Verbnica* in Belarusian (from the word *viarba*, “willows”). Each girl brings a bouquet of pussy willows, decorated with artificial flowers and evergreen twigs, to church. After the service, there is a contest to select the girl with the prettiest bouquet. After Mass and the blessing of eggs on Easter morning, a common brunch called a *razhaveny* is held in the church hall; *babkas* (Easter bread), *kaubasy* (sausage), and other traditional foods are served. The people then go home to take a brief nap because the Easter Mass lasts the entire night.

Easter Sunday is a day of enjoyment. People play games, crack eggs, and have contests to select the best painted eggs. It is also traditional to visit friends, relatives, and neighbors on Easter Sunday. The Easter celebrations in Belarus last for two or three days. This tradition is especially popular with young people.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Completion of high school and university are important moments that mark the passage into adulthood. Entrance into military service is also revered in the same way.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Belarusians typically shake hands upon greeting each other, but family members and close friends will often greet each other with a hug. Unlike Russians, the Belarusians do not use patronymics when addressing each other. Family ties among Belarusians are strong, and a traditional sense of kinship among families is still apparent in modern society. There is a custom among Belarusians that “no one should walk the street hungry,” and this tradition has led to an informal system where individuals respond to others in need. Belarusians do not have the custom of avoiding eye contact with those who appear destitute.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The health care system for Belarusians in the homeland today is in bad shape, as is common throughout the former Soviet Union. There is a lack of both trained personnel and adequate technology. The burden of the 1986 Chernobyl fiasco completely overwhelmed the health care system, and it has yet to fully recover. Various forms of cancer brought about by radioactive contamination have affected many adults and children, and birth defects and infant mortality rapidly increased after the accident. The most common causes of death are cardiovas-



Farmers in the village of Postrash, Belarus, load sugar beets into a cart. While Belarus once had to curtail food exports, food imports from Russia and Moldova have grown dramatically. (AP Images/Sergei Grits)

cular disease, cancer, accidents, and respiratory disease. There is mandatory HIV testing of all hospital inpatients.

About 75% of all the housing in cities and in many of the villages was destroyed during World War II. Many people lived in makeshift shacks after the war while massive urban housing projects were being constructed. Now, many of these same housing projects are in disrepair. A shortage of urban housing was common throughout much of the former Soviet Union, but the problem was made much worse in Belarus because of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which required the resettlement of thousands of people from the contaminated area. About three-fourths of the population lives in urban centers today. Most urban Belarusians have small apartments in multistory, prefabricated buildings. The process of privatizing housing has been slowly progressing.

Because of the flat terrain, an extensive railroad system has developed into the major method of transportation across Belarus. Minsk is an important railroad junction for lines that connect the Baltic states with Ukraine and for the line that links Moscow with Warsaw. The railroads have historically had an important role in the development of industry, as well as strategic military importance. Since there is such a reliance on railroads, cars are a secondary form of transportation for many Belarusians. As a result, many of the roads outside of urban areas are unpaved, making it hard to transport agricultural products to the cities. A vast system of canals and navigable rivers is also widely used to transport both freight and passengers within Belarus.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Marriage and family are very important to Belarusians. One traditional Belarusian wedding gift is a *rushnik*—a handcrafted towel. Wedding guests are traditionally greeted with round rye bread and salt on a *rushnik*.

## 11 CLOTHING

The male Belarusian folk costume consists of a long, embroidered white linen shirt, girdled with a wide embroidered belt (sash), white linen trousers, and black leather boots or bast sandals. Wide-brimmed straw hats are worn in summer and jerkins and sheepskin coats are worn in winter.

The typical female folk costume is a loose white dress. Occasionally, a blouse with embroidered shoulders was worn over a flounced skirt. An embroidered apron and kerchief completed the outfit.

National costumes are still worn in Belarus, especially in the southern areas. There are regional variations. Many modern clothes are now decorated with traditional embroidery.

## 12 FOOD

Belarusian cuisine includes dishes made with potatoes, beets, peas, plums, pears, and, particularly, apples. The dishes are relatively simple and healthy and vary with the seasons. The inclusion of a large variety of grains and mushrooms reflects the land and soil characteristics.

Potatoes are the most abundant and popular food. Belarusians boast of being able to prepare potatoes in over 100 different ways. Carrots and cabbage are also popular. Veal, pork, fowl, and venison are the most common meats. *Kaubasy* (sausages), pork chops, and other meats are often smoked. Belarusians also love freshwater fish. A small river lobster, *ugry*, is considered a Belarusian delicacy.

Many Belarusian dishes are similar to those of Slavic groups. Some typical Belarusian specialties are potato pancakes with bacon, *vireshchaka* (pork ribs with gravy and pancakes), *varlley kuccia* (hot barley cereal with bacon and fried onion), birch and honey *kvas* (a fermented drink), and *holodnik* (cold beet soup with cucumbers, dill, hard-boiled eggs, radishes, and sour cream). Belarusian cooks honor their guests with traditional greetings such as, “Guest into the house—God into the house.”

### 13 EDUCATION

Required public education lasts about nine years, after which students may attend two or three more years of secondary education. Many of the secondary schools are trade and professional schools. Most Belarusians who want to go to college in the homeland attend the University of Minsk or the Academy of Sciences. Several theological schools have also opened in recent years.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Belarusian culture was originally developed in the old principalities of the Belarusian cities of Polacak, Smolensk, Turau, etc. Belarusian culture reached its highest stage of development as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Belarusian was the official language. Francishak Skaryna, Vasil Tsiapinski, Symon Budny, Symon Polacki, Sciapan Zizani, and other scholars contributed to the development of Belarusian and other Slavic cultures. Cultural ties with the West were also maintained through the universities in Prague, Germany, Italy, and Krakow.

Dr. Francishak Skaryna printed the first book in Belarusian—the Bible—in 1517. The Belarusian Bible was the second Slavic Bible to be translated into a native language. Skaryna’s Bible also established the first printing press on Belarusian soil, and Belarusian printing owes its beginning to him. He published 23 books of the Bible between 1517 and 1519. After moving from Prague to Vilna (Vilnius), then the center of Belarusian political and cultural activities, Skaryna published several more books of the Bible, beginning in 1522. All his books have lengthy introductions and epilogues in Belarusian explaining the book’s content, meaning, and relation to everyday life. He also included comments on literature, history, geography, philosophy, and the sciences.

As stated in the draft of the new Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, modern Belarusians pride themselves on having a “centuries-long history of the development of Belarusian statehood,” as reflected in “the Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.” The Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (which, as codes of law, were promulgated in 1529, 1566, and 1588) stand as a monument to the role played by Belarusian culture in the early period of the Grand Duchy. Written in Belarusian, the official language of the ducal chancellery, these statutes contain local-custom laws as well as decisions of the administration and courts. The 15th and 16th centuries left behind a

wealth of documents, including historical chronicles, original literary works, translations of the classics, religious treatises, and biblical studies that attest to the fruitful development of Belarusian culture in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Belarusian literature developed most strongly in the 19th and 20th centuries. The most famous Belarusian writers are Maksim Bagdanovich (1891–1917), Janka Kupala (1882–1942), Jakub Kolas (1882–1956), Alojza Pashkevich (Ciotka) (1876–1916), Ryhor Baradulin (b.1935), Janka Bryl (b.1917), and Vasil Bykau (b.1924).

Folk dancing, which originated centuries ago, expresses the feelings, work habits, and lifestyle of the Belarusian people. Dances, such as *Bulba*, *Lanok*, and *Ruchniki*, reflect work processes; the *Miacelica* and *Charot* demonstrate humanity’s relationship to nature; and the *Liavonicha*, *Mikita*, and *Yurachka* express human feelings and folk tales. Belarusian folk dances are characterized by richness of composition, uncomplicated movements, and a small number of rapid steps. The dances can be adapted for varied groups and solos. Ethnographers have identified over 100 Belarusian folk dances. Belarusian dances are unique in that they are often accompanied by singing.

### 15 WORK

Underemployment was a problem during the Soviet years and is still present today, which accounts for the low official unemployment rates. Rather than just lay off workers, factories and businesses often will shorten the number of work hours, reduce wages, or force employees to take unpaid leave. In 2004 the government instituted a policy of short-term contracts for state employees (about 80% of Belarusian workers), effectively allowing them to fire workers by not renewing their contracts. Contracts may last up to five years, but most are only one year.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer and hockey are popular team spectator sports that Belarusians also enjoy playing. Sports societies and organizations were prominent in the Soviet years, and the government liberally advocated public participation in a wide variety of sports. Many of the former “sports palaces” built by the Soviet government have been converted to health clubs. International competitions, such as the Olympics, have become very important national rallying events for Belarusian athletes. Belarusians have become internationally prominent in gymnastics and acrobatic activities.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Until the 19th century, during the spring and summer it was common for Belarusian boys and girls to gather together outdoors in groups at twilight for singing. People would also traditionally gather around the fireplace in the winter for singing. Fishing in the rivers and streams of Belarus was formerly a popular activity, but irrigation projects and pollution of waterways during the Soviet era have greatly diminished sport fishing.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Ceramics and pottery are traditional Belarusian crafts. The most famous type of Belarusian ceramics is probably *charnazadymlenaya*—a type of black, smoked pottery developed centuries ago. Other famous styles of ceramics are named after the

Belarusan place of origin, such as *Garadnianskaya* (from Garadnaia village, in the Stolín region) and *Ivianetskaya* (from Ivianets, in the Valozhyn region).

Weaving and textiles are also popular traditional crafts. Different types and colors of straw are woven together to make contoured pictures for hanging on walls. Traditional Slavic color motifs make frequent use of red (which signifies goodness and joy) and white (which represents purity). Red and white are also the national colors of Belarus and are used in patriotic designs. Flowers and trees are often the objects depicted in Belarusian handicrafts. Textiles from the upper Dzvína River region often show a Baltic influence because of the historical connection between Baltic and Belarusian cultures.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Belarus has long been caught in the middle of Central European history, which has made it necessary for the Belarusians to get along with their neighbors. Ethnic tensions in Belarus are less substantial than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, and relations with Russians remain generally good. This situation must be maintained because, as a people in a landlocked nation, the Belarusians cannot economically afford to be unfriendly to their neighbors. The transition toward a market economy has been greatly slowed, however, by President Lukashenko's authoritarian policies.

Increased crime, particularly organized crime activities, such as drug and human trafficking, plagues Belarus given its geographic position as a transfer point between Eastern and Western Europe. The failure of Lukashenko's government to provide civil liberties has resulted in the isolation of Belarus from the international community, and Russia is beginning to exert pressure on Belarus to repay its debts, placing Belarus in a tight position politically and economically. These realities have caused a rise in conflicts between those who identify themselves as pro-Western versus those who are pro-Eastern, or European versus Slavic.

Belarusians also continue to suffer the economic and social costs of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power accident in Ukraine. About 70% of the radiation from that accident blew across Belarus, affecting over 2 million people, including about 600,000 children. The costs of this accident decades later include an increase in various forms of disease (such as leukemia and other cancers) and birth defects, which have risen by 40% since the accident. Much of the cropland was ruined with radiation, and contaminated water, livestock, produce, and soil are still widespread. Some marshlands in the south still retain high levels of radiation. In 2004, the government nevertheless introduced plans to reopen some of the contaminated land to agriculture.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Belarusian culture holds fast to its traditional patriarchal values, resulting in oppressive conditions for both women and homosexuals. Although women are guaranteed equal rights in the Belarusian constitution, they still struggle for equal representation in government and the workplace. Motherhood is considered more important than individual women's rights, making it difficult to institute reforms providing better treatment of women in the workplace. Women represent the highest percentage of the unemployed in Belarus, and about 12% have suffered sexual harassment at work. Many women work in unsanitary or unsafe conditions.

Life at home is no better. Nearly one in three women have experienced domestic violence, and rates of poverty among women continue to increase. All this leaves Belarusian women vulnerable to sexual trafficking. Promises of jobs or marriage in foreign countries lure disadvantaged women to place themselves in the hands of traffickers, who sell them into prostitution. The Belarusian government has been in the forefront of the eastern European efforts to combat human trafficking, establishing shelters and hotlines for women at risk.

Although homosexual activity is not illegal in Belarus, a strong stigma is still attached to homosexuality. The Belarusian Orthodox Church, to which the vast majority of Belarusians belong, views homosexuality as a sin. Most homosexuals remain closeted and keep their social life underground. Discrimination is widespread and there are no laws specifically against homophobic crimes.

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—revised by Dianne de Mott

# BELGIANS

**LOCATION:** Belgium

**POPULATION:** About 10.4 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dutch (called Flemish in its regional spoken version); French; German

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; smaller numbers of Muslims and Jews

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Centuries of foreign invasion and occupation—by the Romans, French, Burgundians, Spanish, Austrian, and Germans—have made the people of Belgium resilient and enterprising. When Rome invaded in 58 BC, Julius Caesar called the region's Belgae tribes the toughest opponents he had faced. Some of history's major battles have been fought in this small country, including the Battle of Waterloo that signified the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. Although it was recognized as a distinct region, Belgium did not become a nation until 1831. Today some of the world's most important international organizations, including the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), are headquartered in Brussels. But tensions between the Dutch-speaking Flemings of the north and the French-speaking Walloons of the south have led in recent years to constitutional amendments granting these regions formal recognition and autonomy. Belgium was locked in a political stalemate beginning in June 2007 when elections failed to produce a new government. The question arose as to whether or not Belgium should cease to exist as a country, and that the territory would be split into two—the mainly Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia regions. The crisis was temporarily resolved in March 2008 when a new government was formed, and major reforms of state were planned.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in northwestern Europe, Belgium is one of the “low countries,” so called because much of its land is at or below sea level. This small country, about as large as the state of Maryland, often serves as a crossroads between its larger neighbors. Belgium is often the point of departure or arrival for those crossing the English Channel, and it only takes about three hours or less to drive from its capital, Brussels, to the neighboring cities—Paris, Bonn, and The Hague. Belgium's major geographic divisions are the coastal lowlands, the central plain, and the high plateau of the Ardennes. Its principal rivers are the Scheldt and the Meuse.

Belgium is one of the world's most densely populated countries, but it is run so efficiently that overcrowding is not a problem. Belgian society is overwhelmingly urban: over 90% of the people live in one of 135 major cities. The Flemish and Walloon populations coexist but maintain sharply separate ethnic and linguistic identities. Traditionally, the Walloons were considered the dominant group because their region led the nation in industrial development and also because of the perceived superiority of their French cultural roots. However, since World War II, a shift in economic development from heavy industry toward commerce—much of it reliant on the port city of Antwerp—has favored the northern, Flemish region (also known

as Flanders). The Flemish have surpassed the Walloons in numbers as well.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Belgium has three official languages: Dutch (also called Flemish in its regional spoken version), French, and German. Approximately 60% of Belgians speak Flemish, 40% French, and less than 1% German. Flemish is the language of the northern provinces and French of the southern ones, while most German speakers live in eastern Liège along the German border. There have been longstanding conflicts between the Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons over language use in schools, courts, business, and government. Many visitors to Belgium will be surprised by the fact that signs on highways will indicate cities' names in two languages (e.g., Brussels/Bruxelles, Luik/Liège, Bergen/Mons). The 1970 constitution specifies four autonomous linguistic areas, one for each of the three languages plus Brussels, which is bilingual. (Most people in Brussels actually speak French, although the city itself is surrounded by a Flemish-speaking region.)

NUMBERS	FLEMISH
one	een
two	twee
three	drie
four	vier
five	vijf
six	zes
seven	zeven
eight	acht
nine	negen
ten	tien

DAYS OF THE WEEK	DUTCH
Sunday	zondag
Monday	maandag
Tuesday	dinsdag
Wednesday	woensdag
Thursday	donderdag
Friday	vrijdag
Saturday	zaterdag

## 4 FOLKLORE

Many of Belgium's colorful festivals are based on local myths, including the famous Cat Festival of Ypres. According to legend, cats were brought into medieval Ypres when the city was overrun by rats, but the cats multiplied so fast that they became a problem themselves and people took to throwing them off the tops of buildings (an act that is ritually repeated during the festival with toy cats). Other festivals with mythic origins include the pageant of the Golden Tree in Bruges and the Ommegang in Brussels. Folklore also surrounds Belgium's traditional puppet theater, whose marionettes are based on characters from the lore of their particular cities. These include Woltje in Brussels, Schele in Antwerp, Pierke in Ghent, and Tchantchès in Liège.

Another important festival in Bruges is the Procession of the Sacred Heart, held in summer. Originally a Catholic holiday, the celebration attracts many people both from Belgium and surrounding countries.



## 5 RELIGION

Belgium is a predominantly Catholic country; about 75% of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic. Muslims, mostly migratory workers from Turkey and North Africa, are the second-largest religious group, numbering 364,000 in 2005. Muslims outnumber Belgium's Protestants and Greek and Russian Orthodox. Belgium has a Jewish population of some 42,000, the fourth largest Jewish community in Europe in 2005. While Belgian Catholics are commonly baptized and receive a religious education, many do not otherwise actively practice their religion. Some are even outright nonbelievers who avoid leaving the church because of its link with many social services, at the parish and other levels. Beauraing and Banneaux in Wallonia are popular destinations for pilgrimages, as is Lourdes in France.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Belgium's legal holidays are New Year's Day, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (July 21), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas. Another important day is the Anniversary of the Battle of the Golden Spurs on July 11. However, in addition to these official holidays, the people of Belgium find many other occasions to celebrate. Belgians have a well-known fondness for festivals of all kinds, both sacred and secular.

One of the most famous is the Shrove Tuesday Carnival at Binche, from which the English word "binge" is thought to derive. It is known for the "March of the Gilles," a ritualized

dance thought either to symbolize or to have been learned during the 15th-century Spanish conquest of the Incas in Peru. Men dressed in bizarre padded and brightly colored costumes and white hats adorned with enormous ostrich plumes dance down the street in formation throwing oranges (symbolizing pieces of gold) at the spectators, who are also pelted with water-filled sheep's bladders. The occasional foreigner who throws oranges back at the men will risk being beaten up by other inhabitants of Binche. The Binche festival is so popular that the Belgian railways have extra trains run on that day.

Other festivals include Brussels' Ommegang, in which thousands of people parade in colorful costumes; the Cat Festival of Ypres (commemorating feline rat control during the Middle Ages); the Parade of the Giants in Ath; and the Nivelles carnival, graced by ritualized fights between people on stilts.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage include major Catholic ceremonies such as baptisms, first Communions, marriages and funerals. Although most Belgians do not really practice Catholicism, the important events in a person's life tend to be occasions of major family reunions stressing their religious heritage. Special gifts and wishes will be given for baptisms, first Communions, and marriages. Many young people do not get married, but live together; however, compared to the Netherlands where this is a common practice, Belgium seems to be a bit more conservative.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Belgian manners are generally formal and polite, and conversations are marked by frequent exchanges of compliments and repeated handshaking. Relatives shake hands, hug, or kiss each other on the cheek, while friends usually hug. Men and women or two female friends—but never two men—might exchange kisses on the cheek, and women can sometimes be seen walking down the street arm-in-arm. American-style "high fives" have become popular among Belgian youth.

Both official Dutch and official French have a polite form to be used when addressing another person, but both Flemish and Walloons tend to use the informal *jj* (Dutch) and *tu* (French) more often than the Dutch in Holland or the French in France.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Belgium has no significant housing shortage and few slums. Traditionally, many Flemings lived in walled cities, although villages and other types of settlements were common as well. Brick and limestone are the most popular materials for Belgian houses and public buildings—wooden structures are relatively rare due to the nation's scarce timber resources. The distinctive "stepped-gable" style seen in 17th- and 18th-century houses has influenced modern architectural styles. In a number of Belgian homes, a portion of the first floor is used for business activities: common terms for a dwelling that is used this way include *winkelhuis* ("shop house") and *handelshuis* (business residence). Many houses have large kitchens in which closely knit Belgian families can gather.

Belgians receive modern medical, psychological, and geriatric care in state-run hospitals and clinics, as well as from private doctors. Fully 99% of the people are covered by the na-



People cruising on a canal. Belgium is one of the so-called “low countries” of Europe because much of its land is at or below sea level. (Cory Langley)

tional health plan. In every Belgian city or town, a committee administers health and hospital services.

Belgium has an excellent waterway system—many of its cities are linked by a network of rivers and canals whose center is the port of Antwerp, which also handles the majority of foreign trade. The rail system, with its hub at Brussels, is also well developed. Helicopter service is available between Brussels and several other cities on the European continent.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Belgian family is traditionally an economic unit. Many couples work side by side in either business or farming, and traits considered desirable in a marriage partner often include those that will lead to a compatible working relationship. Instead of divorcing, couples who are in business together may remain legally married in order to protect the business, maintaining separate households with new partners. Among extended families involved in the same business or trade, several nuclear families may live in neighboring houses near their business. Men and women tend to marry young—in their teens and twenties—and begin their families early. Most families have between two and four children, and children generally live with their parents until they marry. The elderly are commonly cared for in homes run by religious orders, social or political organizations, or other types of groups. Women account for roughly 40% of the work force (but 90% of the part-time workforce), although salaried women earn about 15% less than men.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The traditional costumes of the Flemings and Walloons are a thing of the past—Belgians, especially in the city, wear modern Western-style clothes, with men expected to wear jackets to white-collar jobs (although it is often acceptable for women to wear slacks). The traditional dark-colored garb can still be seen on some farms, with women in aprons and men wearing caps.

## **12 FOOD**

Belgium is known for its rich, tasty food—the Belgians’ daily consumption of calories is among the world’s highest. They are great meat eaters and spend up to one-third of their food budget on various types of meat including pork (the most popular), beef, chicken, rabbit, and veal, which are all popular. Two of the best-known dishes are *carbonades* of beef (stewed in beer) and a chicken or fish chowder called *waterzooi*. Belgian cooking uses many rich sauces made with butter and cream, and mayonnaise is widely used as well. It is often eaten as a dip with the popular Belgian chips whose distinctive taste comes being cooked in two different kinds of fat, one of which is used only when the chips are nearly done. The plentiful North Sea and Atlantic Ocean catch includes many varieties of fish as well as eels, cockles, and mussels, all of which are considered delicacies. Other Belgian specialties include waffles, over 300 varieties of beer, and chocolate.



Locals and tourists linger at tables in Groenplaats (Green) Square in Belgium. (Paul Kenward/Getty Images)

### 13 EDUCATION

Education is compulsory from the ages of 6 through 15, and nearly all children start earlier with nursery school and kindergarten. Belgium has an unusually high literacy rate—adult illiteracy is virtually nonexistent. Depending on the region, classes may be taught in either French, Dutch, or German. Both the public, or “official,” schools and the private “free” schools (largely Catholic) are financed by the government, and historically there have been conflicts between secular and religious schools. Belgium has eight major universities, including institutions in Brussels, Ghent, Liège, and Antwerp.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Belgium has played a prominent role in European culture since the 15th century. Among the most famous elements of Belgium’s cultural heritage are the paintings of Pieter Breugel the Elder, Jan van Eyck, and Peter Paul Rubens and the compositions of Orlando di Lasso and César Franck. Belgium has literary traditions in both French and Flemish dating back to the Middle Ages, although French has been used by Flemish authors at various times since the 16th century. Modern Bel-

gians writing in French include the Nobel Prize-winning dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck and the popular detective novelist Georges Simenon, who was born in Liège. Prominent modern painters include expressionist James Ensor and surrealist René Magritte.

### 15 WORK

The Belgians—who are largely Catholic—demonstrate what Americans call the “Protestant work ethic.” Traditionally considering work something of a moral duty, they put in long hours: a businessman who arrives at the office at 9:00 is considered lazy. Small, family-run businesses were long the norm in Flanders, while industry was primarily the domain of the Walloons, especially in the Liège area. In recent years the north has undergone increased industrialization, and the service and tourist sectors have expanded rapidly. However, farmers still grow vegetables, fruit, and grains, and commercial fishing and fish processing dominate the North Sea cities.

### 16 SPORTS

The most popular participatory sport in Belgium is bicycling. Belgians use their bicycles to commute to work, take recreational cycling trips to the countryside, and participate in races. In the winter, some racers practice on indoor tracks, while others can be seen braving the elements on their cycles even in snowstorms. Belgians also participate in soccer in addition to watching it, and there are many regional teams. Other common sports popular in Belgium include tennis, horseback riding, hiking, and skiing.

One Belgian sport specific to western Europe is sand sailing, which is done on a sort of mini-car with sails called a “sand yacht” that is driven along the coast and powered by the wind. Also popular, especially in Wallonia, is pigeon racing. As many as 100,000 pigeons may be entered in a single race, with owners competing from other countries including France and Spain.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like many other Europeans, Belgians are avid soccer fans. There are 18 teams in the national league, although many of the players, unlike professional athletes in America, hold other jobs in addition to playing soccer. Concerts and theater are popular evening pastimes in the cities, and Brussels also has opera, ballet, and café cabarets. Traditional puppet theaters featuring wooden marionettes have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity following a period of decline after World War II.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Belgian crafts include lacemaking (for which Brussels is especially famous), tapestry, glass, and pottery. Other folk arts include folk opera, street singing, as well as both marionettes and hand puppetry. Antwerp has a particularly lively puppetry tradition that at times has been used as a vehicle for social and political dissent. Popular hobbies include stamp collecting, model trains, and gardening.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Traditionally, ethnic differences between Belgium’s Flemings and Walloons have been sources of social conflict, and even threatened to divide the country in 2007 and 2008. There are



also religious divisions within the country. In particular, the degree of separation between church and state has been a divisive issue both between Catholics and non-Catholics and within the Catholic community itself. Schools, hospitals, trade unions, and numerous other institutions can be divided into those that are “secular” and those with strong church involvement. Strong differences of opinion still exist about the government’s arrangement for the subsidization of Catholic-run schools. Another divisive issue—one which cuts across religious, class, and ethnic differences—is abortion. Social problems include unemployment, high rates of immigration, gradually increasing crime, and the high taxes needed to support Belgium’s wide-ranging system of social benefits.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women won the right to vote in Belgium in 1919, and restrictions on the suffrage were dropped in 1948. Abortion was only legalized in Belgium in 1990. As of 2000, women made up 24% of the lower house of parliament, and 28.8% of the upper house. Approximately 55.7% of Belgian women hold a secondary degree, 53.1% hold a bachelor’s degree, and 7.6% are in senior management. The government made a concerted effort in the 1990s to involve women in politics.

Belgium decriminalized homosexuality in 1843 and legalized same-sex marriages in 2003—it was only the second country to do so worldwide. Gay and lesbian couples have the same rights as heterosexual ones, including inheritance and adoption. In 2006 the country’s first gay church was inaugurated in Ghent.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# BOSNIANS

**LOCATION:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**POPULATION:** 3.9 million (2005)

**LANGUAGE:** Serbo-Croatian (Bosnian)

**RELIGION:** Islam; Eastern Orthodox Christianity; Roman Catholic Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Bosnia is the only republic of the former Yugoslavia that was established on a geographic/historical basis rather than on an ethnic one. “Bosnian” refers to someone who lives in the nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (usually referred to as Bosnia, for short), not to a particular religious or ethnic group. Throughout its history, Bosnia (and its companion, Herzegovina) has found itself on the frontier between empires. As part of the Balkans in AD 100, Bosnia was a territory of the Roman Empire. When the empire split into two halves, Bosnia, Slovenia, and Croatia were ruled by the western Roman Catholic empire, and Serbia by the eastern Orthodox Byzantines. During the 5th century AD, Slavic peoples from Central Europe occupied the region. It is from these peoples that modern-day Bosnians are descended.

The 12th century brought domination by Hungary and Austria, which would later join forces as the Hapsburg Empire. Parts of the region remained under Austro-Hungarian rule until the 20th century. From 1328 to 1878, Bosnia was occupied by the Ottoman Turks. During this time, many Bosnians converted to Islam, the religion of the Ottoman rulers. The Austro-Hungarian Empire once again took over Bosnia in 1878. Serbia had become independent in 1815, and Croatia had gained semi-independence in 1867. Most Bosnians wanted to unite with Serbia. By 1900, all Bosnians wanted to rid themselves of foreign rule, and tensions were mounting. In June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated by a Bosnian Serb nationalist named Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo. The Austro-Hungarians accused the Serbians of engineering the assassination; Serbia denied it and turned to Russia, and later France and Great Britain, for support. The Austro-Hungarians drew Germany to their side and declared war on Serbia and its allies—soon the world was involved in the worst war it had ever seen, World War I.

Following the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany in World War I, Serbia’s allies supported its bid for independence. The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, to be ruled by the royal family of Serbia, was established in December 1918. In 1929, King Alexander dissolved the Parliament and declared himself ruler of the kingdom, which he renamed Yugoslavia. Alexander was assassinated in 1934 by a Croatian nationalist. His successor granted Croatia limited self-rule in 1939, but conflicts continued within the kingdom. Then, the Axis powers (Germany and Italy) invaded in 1941, and Yugoslavia entered World War II. During this war, a leader named Josip Broz, known as Marshal Tito, took power.

The second Yugoslavia—Tito’s Yugoslavia—was declared in Bosnia (at a conference held in Jajce) in 1943. When the Axis powers were finally defeated in 1945, Tito took full command and created a communist state that attempted to find a mid-



dle ground between East and West. Following Tito's dramatic break with Russian dictator Joseph Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia's "self-management" model and the partial restoration of property rights led to rapid growth and relative prosperity from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. Until its breakup, Yugoslavia and its brand of communism were relatively progressive. As the country began to unravel after Tito's death in 1980, the Communist Party, especially in Serbia, became much more repressive, and the Serbians once again began to dominate. Slovenia and then Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia in 1991. Wars were waged by all parties, justified on nationalistic and religious grounds. As these wars spread from small sections of Slovenia (though its secession was peaceful) to Croatia, it became apparent that Bosnia would soon declare independence as well, and this would likely cause great anger in Serbia. The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence in 1992, with its capital at Sarajevo.

Another war began in 1992 as Serbia embarked on a campaign of "ethnic cleansing"—a form of genocide aimed at eradicating non-Serbs from large sections of Bosnia in order to achieve eventual political union with a greater Serbia. Conflicts with newly independent Croatia ensued as radical members of that state sought to create, from the multinational Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Croatian state called Herzeg-Bosna, with its capital at Mostar. By 1994–95, the international community finally began pressuring the warring sides to enter into serious negotiations. The Bosnians and the Croats were the first of the three combatants to sign a cease-fire, but they continued fighting the irregular Serbs, who remained determined to

create a greater Serbia in the majority Serb sections of Croatia and Bosnia. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), at the insistence of France and the United States, finally threw its considerable military resources behind ending the bloodiest war Europe had seen since World War II. A peace accord was negotiated at a military base in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995 and was formally signed by the combatants—Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia, Franjo Tudjman of Croatia, and Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia—in Paris on 14 December 1995.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Before the war began in 1992, Bosnia's population was 4.5 million—approximately 44% Muslim, 31% Serbian, and 17% Croatian, along with small numbers of Gypsies, Albanians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Italians. Bosnian Muslims have historically been more urban than their Christian counterparts. Bosnia's major cities are Sarajevo (the capital), Banja Luka, Zenica, Tuzla, and Mostar.

Bosnia is located in the west-central region of the former nation of Yugoslavia on the Balkan Peninsula. It is bounded by Croatia to the north, Serbia to the east, and Montenegro to the south. There is a very short coastline to the west on the Adriatic Sea. Bosnia comprises four distinct regions. Northern Bosnia contains more than 70% of the cultivated land in the former republic and is characterized by low-lying plains, changing to rolling hills and isolated mountains to the south. Central Bosnia, where Sarajevo is located, is a mountainous region with a number of peaks over 2,000 m (6,560 ft). The mountains are part of the Dinaric Alps range. There is low population density outside the cities. Western Bosnia and upland Herzegovina form a region of bare limestone ridges and barely fertile valleys. Lowland Herzegovina, cut through by the Neretva River, is home to the regional capital of Mostar. Bosnia's short stretch of coast on the Adriatic Sea lies along the rocky beaches of Neum.

The climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina ranges from humid summers and harsh winters in the north and central regions to a Mediterranean climate in lower Herzegovina. Strong winds are common, almost constant in some areas. The *jugo* wind brings rain; the *maestral* (or *mistral*) brings cooler air during the summer heat; and the *bura* brings bitter cold from the northeast during the winter. Earthquakes occur frequently. There is a wide variety of plant and animal life in Bosnia. Many wild animals, such as bears, wolves, lynx, and wild boars, still live in the mountains and forests.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official language of Bosnia is Serbo-Croatian, although many Bosnians refer to the dialect they speak as "Bosniac." Romanian dialects (Gypsy), Albanian, and Ukrainian are spoken by substantial minority groups, and most students are exposed to some English or German in school. Conflicts among the ethnic groups in Bosnia extend even to the alphabets they use. Though all speak Serbo-Croatian, the Croats and Muslims use the Roman alphabet, whereas the Serbs use the Cyrillic alphabet. The common form of the word "hello" is written *zdravo* by Croats and Muslims; for the same word, Serbs write *čȃđàâi*.

Serbo-Croatian belongs to the Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family—more specifically, to the group of South Slavic languages that includes Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Slovenian. Serbo-Croatian is a language that is rich in loan

words from other European languages, as well as from Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and, more recently, English. In the 19th century, folklorists and linguists standardized Serbo-Croatian to regularize spelling and phonetic correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. “Write as you speak and speak as you write” was the slogan of this movement. Thus, Serbo-Croatian has no silent letters (such as the *k* in “knife”) or diphthongs (such as the *oa* in boat), as English does.

“Please” is *molim* (pronounced MOU-leem) in Serbo-Croatian, and “thank you” is *hvala* (pronounced FA-la). “Yes” and “no” are *Da* (or *Jeste*) and *Ne*. The numbers 1 to 10 in Serbo-Croatian are *jedan* (*jedna*, *jedno*), *dva* (or *dvije* for feminine nouns), *tri*, *Āetiri*, *pet*, *šest*, *sedam*, *osam*, *devet*, and *deset*.

Women’s first names tend to end in *-a* and *-ica* (pronounced EET-sa). Almost all Bosnian family names end in *-ic* (which means “child of,” like John-son). Family names often indicate ethnicity. *Sulemanagic*, for example, is a Muslim name derived from the name of the Muslim hero Suleiman. Family names are passed down the male line from father to children.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Given the ethnic diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no particular folklore that can be said to be specifically Bosnian.

#### 5 RELIGION

Bosnia, like many isolated areas, developed a mixture of religious beliefs and practices that diverged from the mainstream. In the medieval era, Bosnian Christians embraced Bogomilism (an anticlerical, dualistic sect), which was considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church. In the Ottoman era, many Christians found reason to convert to Islam. Their motives for conversion ranged from a simple preference for Islam, to escaping Catholic persecution of the native Bogomil Christian sect, to retaining rank in the local nobility, to escaping taxes placed on the Christian peasantry. About 44% of Bosnians today are Muslim. Sufism (mystical Islam) also became established in Bosnia. Islam in modern Bosnia has evolved into a tolerant form, with some practices diverging sharply from what is considered orthodox in other Islamic countries. Many Bosnians treat their religion as many Americans do theirs—something that is observed only on holy days and on major religious holidays. Fundamentalism was discouraged both by the Yugoslavian government and by the religious community.

Serbians (31% of the population) are mostly Eastern Orthodox, and Croats (17%) are mostly Roman Catholic. The Eastern Orthodox Church broke from the Roman Catholic Church in AD 1054. Although the two faiths remain quite similar today, the chief difference is that the Eastern Orthodox Church has no pope. Questions of faith are instead decided by a consensus of all the bishops of the church. Other decisions, such as the placement of individual priests in parishes, are also made less hierarchically and more democratically in the Eastern Orthodox Church, in which congregations elect their priests. In the Roman Catholic Church, priests are appointed by bishops. Eastern Orthodoxy does not believe in purgatory, indulgences, the immaculate conception, or the assumption of Mary—it considers them all “innovations” made by the Roman Catholic Church. Mysticism also finds a more welcome home in the Eastern Orthodox Church than it does in the Roman Catholic Church.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Bosnians celebrate a number of religious, secular, and family holidays. Especially in the cities, where intermarriage is common, families might celebrate the state New Year holiday, both Orthodox and Catholic Christmases, and the traditional New Year’s Day, along with the secular holidays of Marshal Tito’s birthday on May 25 and the Day of the Republic on January 9. Eastern Orthodox Christian families also celebrate the *slava*, or saint’s name day of the family.

Muslim festivities center on *Ramadan*, the month of ritual fasting. Exchanging household visits and small gifts is a particular feature of the three days at the end of Ramadan, called *Bajram* (known as *Eid Al-Fitr* elsewhere). During this period, the minarets of all the mosques are illuminated with strings of electric lights.

The Bosanska Korrida festival, during which bulls are encouraged to fight one another, attracted large numbers of country folk before it was disrupted by war in the 1990s.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Weddings are a major time of celebration, is army induction day, when young men leave for their compulsory national service. Other major life transitions are marked by ceremonies that are appropriate to each Bosnian’s religious tradition.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

During the worst of the war years of the 1990s, the social fabric of Bosnian society, once a unique and successful example of multiculturalism, was very nearly destroyed, and it is still in the process of healing. There are still Serbian Orthodox churches in Sarajevo (though many of the mosques in the Serb-controlled Republika Srpska have been demolished), and more and more, young people are looking beyond the ethnic hatred. Though the bitterness has not disappeared entirely and the city of Sarajevo is filled with NATO peacekeepers, normalcy is nonetheless returning.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Much of the infrastructure of modern Bosnia—especially Sarajevo, the capital—was developed during the Austrian occupation (1878–1914). The first railroads, museums, public transport systems, and waterways for commercial transport were built then. Craft guilds were organized, and new systems of agriculture were developed. In the villages, most people were farmers and lived in small houses built of stone or wood. Some modernized farms existed, but the majority relied on traditional methods, using plows pulled by oxen and horse carts for transportation. Before the regional wars (1992–95), about three-fourths of village homes had electricity, and nearly all had running water. Since the war, nearly three-fourths of the population (more than 3 million people) have lost their homes; 150,000 Bosnians are dead or missing; and more than 2 million are refugees. There are more than 500,000 refugees in Croatia, 400,000 in Serbia, another 400,000 in Germany, and 350,000 in other European countries.

As the 20th century progressed, more and more people left their villages to find work in the cities. As a result of the fighting, many villages have been destroyed and their residents forced to leave. Cities have also been hard hit. In Sarajevo, many people have no electricity or running water and little



Two Bosnian refugee girls play at a refugee camp near Tuzla north of Sarajevo. (AP Images/Amel Emric)

food. For years, they lived in fear of being killed or wounded by the Serb paramilitaries that laid siege to the city. Before the war, life in the big cities had been modernized—people lived in apartments with televisions and modern appliances, they drove cars, and so on. The war left large parts of the city in rubble, though major internationally funded rebuilding plans were instituted beginning in the late 1990s, and Sarajevo is retaining its prewar Hapsburg feel. There are elegant pedestrian walkways, classically Central European sidewalk cafés filled with young, fairly affluent people, an internationally recognized film festival, and museums with quite modern collections, similar to those one might see in other mid-sized European cities.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Much of the social structure of Bosnia reflects European custom, with some Mediterranean cultural aspects. Emphasis is on the nuclear family, although there is still some evidence of the Slavic extended family social pattern of co-dwelling, called *zadruga*. Although women have been guaranteed full equality and entry into the workforce, this has come to mean that they often hold down two jobs—one at the office or factory and one at home. Men rarely do housework. The Muslim custom of polygamy was seen only in one isolated region of the country. Most marriages follow the modern custom of love matches. Arranged marriages have mostly disappeared. Family size has decreased as education and prosperity have increased.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Although only a generation ago, Bosnia was well known for its wide variety of folk costumes, little of this variety can be seen today, except in isolated mountain villages and in the stage costumes of amateur folklore ensembles. Most urban Bosnians dress in the Western style now; blue jeans are extremely popular. In large cities such as Sarajevo, older men can occasionally be seen wearing the urban Muslim costume of breeches, cummerbund, striped shirt, vest, and fez. The baggy trousers traditionally worn by women (called *dimija*) were adopted by all three ethnic groups as a folk costume. They are rarely seen on the streets of cities nowadays, but they are still common in rural districts. (Folk costume researchers say that one can tell the altitude of a woman's village by how high on the ankles she ties her *dimija* to keep her hems out of the snow.) Even the most devout Muslim women in Bosnia do not wear the *chador* (or *chadri*, as it is known elsewhere), a one-piece garment worn over the head that reaches to the ground, with a mesh insert over the eyes and nose. Headscarves and raincoats are more frequently worn instead, especially on religious holidays.

#### **12 FOOD**

The cuisine of Bosnia shows influences from Central Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East. Dishes based on a mixture of lamb, pork, and beef, especially in the form of sausages (called *ćevapčići*) or hamburger-like patties (called *pleskavica*), are grilled along with onions and served hot on fresh *somun* (a thick pita bread). Bosnian hotpot stew (*Bosnanki lonac*), a

slow-roasted mixture of layers of meat and vegetables, is the most typical regional specialty. It is usually served directly at the table in a distinctive vase-like ceramic pot. Turkish dishes, such as *kebabs* (marinated pieces of meat cooked on a skewer), *burek* (meat- or vegetable-filled pastry), and *baklava* (a sweet, layered dessert pastry) are common. Pizza is readily available, often served with a cooked egg in the middle. It is generally eaten with a fork rather than with the hands. Homemade plum brandy, called *rakija* in Bosnia and imported to the United States as *slivovitz*, is a popular drink for men; women tend to prefer fruit juices. Turkish coffee and a thin yogurt drink are also popular.

### 13 EDUCATION

Most Bosnians (96%) are literate. Since the country was restructured following the Dayton Accords, education systems have changed. A nine-year system of compulsory education for children ages 6–15 was implemented in 2003–04. Secondary schools offering various curricula exist throughout the nation, leading some students to vocational training and others to university. The Republika Srpska, the Serb-controlled section of Bosnia, maintains its own system of schooling, its own curricula, and an independent ministry of education. In 2003–04, it was reported that roughly 375,000 students were enrolled in 1,871 primary schools, and 160,000 students attended 304 secondary educational institutions in all of Bosnia. There were 72 institutions of higher education in Bosnia (excluding the Republika Srpska).

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The arts are highly developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. With three major ethnicities to draw on (Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim), a great wealth of song, dance, literature, and poetry is available. The Ottoman and Austrian occupations also left rich architectural legacies. Sculpture in Bosnia dates to the pre-Islamic era, evidenced by many carved figures of humans and animals. This tradition carried over into the Islamic period, although the usual Muslim prohibition against representing the human form did not take hold. Still, Islamic arts such as calligraphy and fine metalworking became features of Bosnian art. Before the war, much energy was devoted to religious and domestic architecture. Houses featured walled compounds with their distinctive gates, carved wooden ceilings and screens, and built-in seating covered with fine weavings. *Kilims* (handwoven carpets) and knotted rugs were common. The custom of giving a personally woven dowry rug, with the couple's initials and date of marriage, has only recently disappeared. Other textile arts, such as silk embroidery, were also common domestic arts.

Music and dance especially reflect Bosnia's great diversity. Bosnian music can be divided into rural and urban traditions. The rural tradition is characterized by such musical styles as *ravne pesme* (flat song) of limited scale; *ganga*, an almost shouted polyphonic style; and other types of songs that may be accompanied by the *šargija* (a simple long-necked lute), wooden flute, or the *diple* (a droneless bagpipe). The urban tradition shows a much heavier Turkish influence, with its melismatic singing (more than one note per syllable) and accompaniment on the *saz*, a larger and more elaborate version of the *šargija*. Epic poems, an ancient tradition, are still sung to the sound of the *gusle*, a single-string bowed fiddle. However, this rich

heritage of folk music is disappearing under the influence of Western pop music and new native pop music in a folk style played on the accordion. *Sevdalinka* songs (derived from the Turkish word *sevda*, "love") were traditionally the most widespread form of music in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These deeply emotional songs speak metaphorically and symbolically of love won and lost. They came to symbolize Bosnia to natives and foreigners alike.

Bosnian folk dance is probably the richest and yet least known of all the regional folk dances of the former Yugoslavia. Dances range from the silent *kolo* (accompanied only by the sound of stamping feet and the clash of silver coins on the women's aprons), to line dances in which the sexes are segregated, to Croatian and Serbian dances like those performed across the border in their native countries. Like music, however, these folk dances are rapidly being replaced by Western social dances and rock and roll.

### 15 WORK

Before the war, about 40% of Bosnians worked in industry. Major industries included textiles, food processing, coal and iron mining, automobile-related industries, and the manufacture of steel. Agriculture contributed 11.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2005; the major crops are now tobacco and fruit. The industrial sector contributed 27.8% of GDP in 2005. Before the communist era, almost all Bosnians were farmers. The communists changed Bosnia from a farming nation to an industrial nation during the 1960s to the 1980s. Bosnia still retains a substantial rural population, however, especially in the northern region of Bosanska Posavina, just south of the Sava River. This population lives in small towns and villages throughout the region, engaging in agriculture and its supporting or related industries. They are not poor peasants—their homes generally have electricity and indoor plumbing, and they may own a small tractor, an automobile, a television, and a DVD player and may have an Internet connection. Most have completed their primary education through the eighth grade. Some, especially those outside the primarily agricultural zones, are miners or factory workers. City dwellers have the same sorts of jobs as those in the Western world, such as teachers, bankers, engineers, truck drivers, merchants, and librarians.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the favorite sport of Bosnians. Official matches draw spectators from all over the country, and informal games spring up constantly in parks, on playgrounds, and in the streets. If actual goals are not available, makeshift ones are created from old netting, clothes, rags, and even plastic bags. Outdoor sports such as hiking, skiing, swimming, and fishing are also very popular in Bosnia. The 1984 Winter Olympic Games were hosted by Bosnia in Sarajevo. In 2002–03, the first soccer league in the country, featuring teams with players from all the main ethnic groups, began regular play. The national soccer team is currently ranked fifty-ninth by FIFA (International Federation of Association Football).

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Bosnians enjoy the same sorts of entertainment and recreation as Americans—they watch television, listen to pop music, read comics, go to movies, and play games. Outdoor activities such as hiking, hunting, mountain climbing, skiing, swimming,

and fishing are also popular. A traditional form of recreation is *korzo*—walking along the main street of the village, town, or city in the evening and stopping to chat with friends or have a cup of coffee in the *kafana*, or coffeehouse. (Kafanas are often restricted to men only.)

Folklore festivals and competitions between amateur performing groups were a major feature of contemporary Bosnian life before the war. Bosnian amateur folklore groups, called Cultural Art Societies, were found throughout the republic. They were required to perform the dances, music, and songs of the three major ethnicities in Bosnia, as well as the folklore of the other republics of Yugoslavia. Successful performances at local festivities could earn such a society the privilege of performing abroad.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The main folk art in Bosnia is carpet weaving. The cities of Mostar and Sarajevo are famous for their rugs, which are made from brightly colored wools in a variety of intricate designs.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The worst social problem for Bosnians is, of course, the effects of the war from 1992 to 1995. It is estimated that 150,000 Bosnians were killed (or remain missing) as a result of the war. In Sarajevo, more than 60% of the homes were destroyed. The environment suffered heavy damage from bombings, fires, and acid rain resulting from gases released into the air. Historic buildings and structures, including the 16th-century Stari Most (Old Bridge) in Mostar, were destroyed, although some have since been rebuilt.

Thirteen years after the signing of the Dayton Accords, normalcy has returned to much of Bosnia, but this does not mean there are no social problems. There is a significant marginalized population of Roma (Bosnia's largest ethnic minority) living on the outskirts of major cities in squalid conditions. There is also a continuing low-level hostility between the Bosnian-Croat entity and the Serb enclave living in Republika Srpska.

In recent years, Bosnia years become a transit point for both drug and human trafficking. Corruption is a significant problem.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

As a traditionally liberal, nearly secular, and partially modernized nation, Bosnia's gender issues mirror those of the former Warsaw Pact nations of Eastern Europe. Bosnia's founding documents and constitution define gender equality in slightly different ways. According to the United Nations Development Programme, the country has committed itself to achieving full gender equality in all legislative authorities of the state. It reported in 2006 that the country was making progress toward bringing its laws regarding gender equality in line with developed-world standards.

In terms of female health standards and reproductive rights, abortion is widely used as a form birth control; sex education is insufficient, and gynecological services are badly lacking.

Bosnia offers no legal recognition for unmarried couples, both heterosexual and homosexual. The traditional family forms the core of much of rural society, though this has fragmented a bit in the cities, where homosexuality and cohabitation are tolerated.

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—revised by J. Henry

# BRETONS

**LOCATION:** Brittany region of northwestern France

**POPULATION:** 2.9 million

**LANGUAGE:** French; Breton

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Located in the northwestern corner of France, Brittany is often compared to Wales because of the Celtic origins of its people, as well as their ruggedness and independence. The two regions—both located at the western edges of their respective countries—are about the same size, and the Bretons, like the Welsh, have historically shown a determination to preserve their cultural and linguistic traditions despite political control by a much larger ruling power. The Bretons have also been compared to the Irish because of their strong emphasis and love for tradition, their large and catholic families, and their history of poverty in comparison to their ruling powers. Although the past two centuries have brought about a dramatic decline in Brittany's isolation from the rest of France, its people still retain their identity as a distinct cultural and ethnic group.

The Bretons arrived in their current homeland in the 5th and 6th centuries AD, fleeing the Anglo-Saxons invading the British Isles. The coastal part of Brittany had long been called Armorica ("land by the sea") and the interior Argoat ("land of forest"). The arriving Celts, however, simply called the entire region Petite Bretagne ("little Britain"), sometimes shortened to Bretagne. The area was an independent duchy from the 9th century until 1532 when it was formally annexed to France. Until the French Revolution in the 18th century, however, it retained its own parliament and autonomous administration. After the Revolution (in which the Bretons had sided with the royalists), Brittany was split into separate administrative divisions called *départements* and ceased to exist as a political entity. (Since 1964, it has consisted of four départements: Finistère, Côtes-d'Armor, Ille-et-Vilaine, and Morbihan. The Loire-Atlantique département, which had traditionally belonged to Brittany, was transferred to another region, a move which angered many Bretons.)

The linguistic and cultural isolation that had been fostered by Brittany's political autonomy began to decline during the 19th century thanks to a number of developments, including the inauguration of a military draft, the beginnings of mandatory public education, improved transportation, and the development of industry. World War I further contributed to the Bretons' assimilation into the French mainstream, resulting in a strong (but ultimately unsuccessful) movement for the return of political autonomy to Brittany. The Front de Liberation de la Bretagne was much like a small scale Irish Republican Army (IRA) with their use of sporadic attacks in pursuit of a free Brittany. The group has largely disappeared today. The region suffered great losses in both world wars (Brittany lost 12% of its population in World War I, although the Bretons accounted for only 6.5% of France's total population). In the postwar period, Brittany has prospered. Agriculture has been modernized, and the growth of industry has decreased the region's traditional dependence on fishing (although fishing remains an important

source of income and employment). In recent years, Breton regionalism has focused on cultural and linguistic preservation and economic, rather than political, autonomy.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located at the westernmost edge of continental Europe, Brittany is virtually a peninsula, surrounded by water on three sides: to the west and south, the Atlantic Ocean and to the north, the English Channel. Slightly larger than Wales, it is 215 km (134 mi) long with 1,200 km (746 mi) of coastline. The coast is extremely jagged, with many islands, reefs, islets, and estuaries. Much of the interior is laid out in a checkerboard pattern of fields and pastures separated by stone walls and hedges called *bocages*. A traditional east-west division into Upper and Lower Brittany (Haute and Basse Bretagne) delineates cultural differences between the western half of the region, where both French and Breton are spoken and some of the old customs are still followed, and the east, which has more thoroughly assimilated the culture and language of the rest of France.

Most of Brittany's towns and cities are found along the coast. The area has a population density of 53.5 per sq. km. The largest include Vannes, Quimper, Concarneau, Brest, Morlaix, and St. Malo. Rennes is the only important city in the interior. Formerly the capital of Brittany, today it is home to one of two universities in the region and is an important industrial center. In the past 25 years, increasing numbers of Bretons have emigrated from rural areas, mostly to Paris and other French cities and, in lesser numbers, to other countries.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Breton is a Celtic language related to Welsh and Cornish. It was brought to the French coast in the 5th and 6th centuries AD by British Celts; flourished in the 9th century, when the duchy of Brittany was at the peak of its power historically; and declined after France's annexation of the region in the 15th century. Today, there are only a small number of people who speak Breton as their first language, while greater numbers speak both French and Breton. The modern nationalist movement has worked to revive the Breton language, as seen by the existence of the Union for the Defense of the Breton Language (UDB). Nevertheless, the use of Breton as a first language has declined rapidly, and there are few Bretons who do not also speak French. The Breton language has been effectively excluded from primary and secondary schools. By the beginning of the 21st century, the number of Breton speakers in Brittany was estimated at fewer than 600,000. Estimates of those who can read the language are far smaller (under 10,000).

There are four Breton dialects: Trégorrois, Léonard, Cornouaillais, and Vannetais. Many Breton surnames are derived from the word "ker" (which means house) plus another syllable based on a Christian name. Examples include Kerjean ("house of John"), Kerbol ("house of Paul"), and Kerber ("house of Peter"). Syllables commonly found in Breton place names include "plou," or "parish" (Ploudaniel); "lann," or "church" (Lannion); "ker," or "house" (Kermaria); and "gui," or "town" (Guimiliau). Other common words found in Breton place names are *bihan* (small), *braz* (large), *men* (stone), and *mor* (sea).

## 4 FOLKLORE

A Celtic aura of magic and mystery pervades Brittany, a land of legends and superstition. Many folk customs and legends cen-



ter on death, symbolized by a character named Ankou, who figures in a multitude of tales depicted as a skeleton carrying a scythe and often riding on a wooden cart. It is said that deaths are foreshadowed by the creaking of his cart. When a person dies, the doors and windows of the family house are traditionally left open so that the spirit of the deceased (commonly pictured as an insect) can easily fly out, and mirrors are turned to face the walls.

The medieval legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table are popular in Brittany, as is the tale of Tristan and Isolde. The town of Quimper is said to have been founded by King Gradlon after his former capital, the city of Is, was destroyed when his daughter, bewitched by the Devil, let in the floodwaters of the sea. Escaping with her on horseback, the king received an order from Heaven to throw her into the sea, where she turned into the mermaid Marie-Morgane. It is said that if mass is ever celebrated in one of the drowned city's churches on Good Friday, the city will be restored and the mermaid will become human again.

## 5 RELIGION

The Bretons—an overwhelmingly Catholic people—are known for the strength of their religious beliefs, especially their devotion to their hundreds of local saints whose painted wooden statues decorate the region's multitude of churches. Every town has its patron saint, and special saints are prayed to for specific ailments (for centuries, such prayers were the Bretons' most trusted form of medical intervention). Although religious

observance, even among this devout group, suffered a decline during the 20th century, Catholicism has remained stronger in Brittany than in many other parts of Western Europe, and most Bretons are still baptized, married, and buried within the Catholic tradition. Bretons are also noted for their religious monuments (including nine cathedrals), pilgrimages, and the traditional festivals known as *pardons*. According to tradition, every Breton is supposed to make a pilgrimage to all nine cathedrals in the course of his or her lifetime to avoid having to make this pilgrimage after death.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Bretons celebrate France's religious, historical, and patriotic holidays throughout the year. These include New Year's Day (January 1); Epiphany (January 6); Labor Day (May 1); Bastille Day (July 14), which is France's national holiday and the equivalent of Independence Day in the United States; the Feast of the Assumption (August 15); All Saints' Day (November 1); World War II Armistice Day (November 11); and Christmas (December 25). The French observe Christmas by attending a midnight mass.

The most famous and important of Brittany's regional holidays are the *pardons*, local religious festivals usually centering on a particular saint or legend. Pilgrims attend them to make or fulfill vows, seek miraculous cures, and, above all, to seek forgiveness for their sins. The main event of every pardon is a procession, usually in the afternoon. Men and women wearing traditional costumes carry multicolored banners, candles, and religious relics to a final destination, usually a church or chapel. Although the pardons are directed by priests, and sometimes even bishops, once the procession is over they assume the character of a secular fair or festival, with refreshments, dancing, and games. Pardons mostly take place between March and the end of October. The most famous is Le Folgoët's *Grand Pardon*, which begins at 4:00 PM and lasts until the following day. However, the traditional Breton customs and clothing are most prominent in the western half of the region.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Bretons live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are Roman Catholic rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In most ways, life for 21st-century Bretons differs little from life in the rest of France. Because the influence of the Catholic Church is so strong, church festivals are important social events for many Bretons.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Many of the houses found today in Brittany are built with the traditional pink, grey, and black stones of the area and have thatched or slate roofs. In older dwellings, the family's living area is composed of only one or two rooms, with additional structures, such as barns, attached to the house itself. Modern houses often retain the look of the older homes but are much more spacious inside, with an exterior of whitewashed cement.





Three young Breton women wear traditional lace headdresses during the Fete des Brodeuses (festival of lacemakers) in Brittany, France. The festival celebrates Breton culture. (Travel Ink/Getty Images)

The Bretons receive high-quality modern health care through France's comprehensive national health care system, which covers both private care and state-operated facilities. The average French life expectancy is 81 years. Traditional Breton folk medicine included homemade herbal remedies and the services of a healer called a *diskonter*, who practiced spells transmitted from one to generation to the next.

France's modern, efficient transportation system is centered on the city of Paris, which can make direct travel between provincial locations difficult. However, rural Bretons enjoy the advantage of quiet and relatively uncrowded roads, especially compared with the congested traffic that has become the norm in Paris and other parts of France. The state-owned railways are punctual, with clean, modern trains. Brittany has 600 km (373 mi) of navigable rivers and canals.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Most couples in Brittany have both civil and church weddings, although the civil wedding alone is legally acceptable. In spite of their strong Catholic religious tradition, many Bretons practice birth control, limiting the size of their families to two or three children in contrast to the larger families that were formerly the norm. Also, couples tend to have their children while they are young. Divorce, while legal, still carries a stigma for many Bretons. Most women in Brittany are part of the paid labor force at some time in their lives, and many have found employment in technical and professional fields.

## **11 CLOTHING**

For everyday casual, business, or formal wear, Bretons wear modern Western-style clothing like that of people elsewhere in France and Western Europe. However, their distinctive traditional costumes are still seen at *pardons* and other festivals, and may also be worn on special occasions such as baptisms and weddings. The men's costumes include broad-brimmed hats with ribbons, embroidered waistcoats, short jackets, and, in some areas, baggy homespun breeches called *bragoubras*. Women wear black or colored dresses, often with elaborate embroidered, brocaded, or lace-trimmed aprons of satin or velvet. The most distinctive feature of the women's costume is the elaborate lace headgear, which varies from region to region but is generally called a *coiffe*. The best-known coiffes are stiff white lace bonnets ranging from a modest-sized cap to the coiffe worn by the women of Bigoudènes, a stiff cylinder over a foot high with streamers in back. Younger women often modernize their costumes by wearing skirts that are shorter than ankle-length and fashionable footwear instead of the traditional black buckled shoes.

## **12 FOOD**

Much of the cuisine in Brittany is similar to that elsewhere in France, although the region is known for its excellent seafood, especially lobster, crawfish, cod, tunny, and sardines. Regional specialties include a fish soup known as *cotriade* (similar to the bouillabaisse eaten in other parts of France), a lobster dish known as lobster à l'armoricaine, a beef-and-vegetable dish

called *potée bretonne*, and wheat or buckwheat crêpes, with a range of fillings that include ham, cheese, eggs, jam, fresh fruit, and honey. Cider is the most popular local beverage in Brittany, which is not one of France's wine-producing regions.

### 13 EDUCATION

As elsewhere in France, education in Brittany is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Children attend school on Saturday mornings and have Wednesdays off. Secondary education begins with four years at a middle school called a *collège*, followed by three years spent either at a general *lycée* for those planning to go on to college or at a vocational *lycée*. After receiving their *baccalauréat* degrees, students may go on to a university or to a *grand école*, which offers preparation for careers in business or government service. In Lower Brittany, the Breton language is taught as an optional subject in secondary school and at teacher training schools.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Brittany has over 250 Celtic Clubs whose mission is the revival and preservation of Breton folk music and dance and other traditional customs. The traditional performance arts are also kept alive through regular gatherings such as the *Abadenn Veur* held every July in Quimper. The most popular Breton folk instruments are the *biniou* (a small bagpipe) and the *bombarde*, which is similar to an oboe. The accordion and the Celtic harp are also widely used for traditional music. Special folk dances traditionally performed at the religious festivals called *pardons* include the Ribbon Gavotte, the Tobacco and Handkerchief Gavotte, and the *Dérobée*, where a man "steals" a young woman from her escort. The folk art of Brittany is found in churches and on statues as well as in paintings and tapestries.

Famous Breton authors include the medieval poet and philosopher Peter Abelard; Alain-René Lesage, author of *Gil Blas*; the science-fiction writer Jules Verne; and the experimental novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who wrote the script for French director Alain Resnais's famous 1961 film *Last Year in Marienbad*. There has been a revival of writing in the Breton language since the 1920s, before which point Breton was suppressed by the French authorities.

### 15 WORK

Although many small farms have been abandoned with the rise in mechanization since World War II, Brittany is France's foremost agricultural producer. The region is responsible for about 30% of France's fishing industry. The major principal crops are artichokes and cauliflower. Other major employers are light industry and the service sector. Forty percent of France's telecommunications research and development is based in Brittany. The ferry industry is also significant, with 2.7 million annual passengers, mostly from the United Kingdom, and huge amounts of shipping. However, the ferry business has suffered with the increased usage of train travel and especially the Channel Tunnel to the UK. Brittany's unemployment rate is still low compared to the rest of France.

### 16 SPORTS

The Bretons, like people throughout France, love soccer ("football"). On the coast, popular water sports include sailing, windsurfing, skin-diving, and deep-sea fishing. Other favor-

ite pastimes include fishing on the river banks of inland areas, and hiking or cycling through Brittany's countryside.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Breton *pardons*, while primarily religious festivals, are also a popular source of entertainment. In some areas, the secular portion of the festival even includes performances by jazz and rock groups. Bretons, like the other people of France, have more leisure time over the weekend than they did before the 1960s, when factories were open on Saturday mornings. Domestic activities such as gardening, home improvement, and cooking have become popular leisure-time pursuits: about one-third of the French people spend some of their time gardening. Approximately 95% of the French people own television sets, and the average viewing time is three hours per day. Bretons, like people in other parts of France, like to use their long summer holidays to take vacation trips, either to the beach or to other destinations.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditionally the Bretons have been skilled woodworkers, known for their chests, sideboards, dressers, wardrobes, and clock cases. A unique regional feature is the old-fashioned box bed, which was something like a bunk bed with sliding doors on the sides. It provided both protection against the winter cold and privacy in the small, traditional houses of rural Brittany. Large chests for linen or grain and two-door wardrobes are other important pieces of traditional Breton furniture. Pottery is another important Breton craft.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There is concern among Bretons about the decline of their language and traditional way of life. The use of Breton as a first language is confined mostly to the elderly, and few children are learning it as they grow up. The teaching of Breton is limited to secondary and teacher training schools, and is only found in Basse Bretagne (Lower Brittany).

The creation of a single European economic market in 1992 provided new economic opportunities but also created challenges for the Breton economy. Traditional fishing practices, for example, have had to be modified to conform to the quotas and restrictions of the European Union and its member states. The transformation to larger farms has created pollution problems for the area.

Alcoholism is a significant social problem in Brittany. Alcoholism in France is less of a problem in the wine-growing regions than in the northern area of the country, and especially Brittany.

Brittany has a history of high levels of emigration. Most Bretons emigrate to Paris and other European regions.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

With Brittany's large Catholic population the issues of abortion and gay rights are somewhat contentious. The women's movement in Brittany was not as significant as those in other Western European countries and in other regions of France.

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—revised by C. Corrigan

## BULGARIANS

**LOCATION:** Bulgaria

**POPULATION:** 7.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Bulgarian

**RELIGION:** Bulgarian Orthodox Christian; Muslim; Protestant and Catholic minorities

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Like the republics of the former nation of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria has undergone a difficult period of political and economic change since the collapse of communism in 1989. However, this ethnically unified people has escaped the violence that has ravaged its Slavic neighbors to the west, even as it has faced the challenges of this latest chapter in a turbulent history that includes centuries of foreign domination.

In the 7th century AD, the Bulgars, an Asiatic people, migrated to the area that is now Bulgaria, mingling with Slavic tribes already living in the region. The Bulgarian state, formed in 681 and recognized by the Byzantine Empire, officially adopted the Christian religion in 865. After several centuries of autonomy under three different dynasties, interrupted by a period of Byzantine rule in the 11th century, the Bulgarians were conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1396 and remained under Ottoman rule for nearly 500 years. In 1878, the northern part of Bulgaria achieved independence from the Turks, with the rest of the area following in 1886.

The Bulgarians sided with Germany in both world wars. In 1944, Soviet troops entered the country, and the newly established communist government was consolidated. Unlike some of its neighbors, Bulgaria, headed by a single leader—Todor Zhivkov—remained steadfastly loyal to the Soviet government throughout the communist era. In 1989, Zhivkov was forced from office. Two years later, a new constitution was approved, and Bulgaria elected its first noncommunist, multiparty government, choosing philosophy professor and former dissident Zhelyu Zhelev as president. The parliamentary democracy elected the first monarch in postcommunist Eastern Europe (King Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha) to the position of prime minister in 2001. In 2004, Bulgaria joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and in 2007, the nation became a member of the European Union (EU).

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Bulgaria is located on the Balkan Peninsula of southeastern Europe, covering an area of 110,910 sq km (42,823 sq mi). The country's geographic areas and climatic zones are defined by the Balkan Mountains, which cut across its center from east to west and serve as its principal topographical feature. North of the Balkans is the Danubian Plain; to the south lie mountains and the Thracian Plain. The Black Sea coast to the east constitutes a third distinct geographic area.

Approximately 85% of Bulgaria's 7.7 million people are ethnic Bulgarians. Turks, who account for slightly less than 10% of the population, are the largest ethnic minority, followed by Roma (Gypsies), who make up about 5%. Other minority groups include Armenians, Macedonians, Tatars, and Circassians. As a result of the country's low birth rate (growth rate of -0.51%), Bulgaria's population has fallen since 1991.



### 3 LANGUAGE

Bulgarian is a Slavic language that is written using the Cyrillic alphabet. There are many regional dialects throughout the country, and the grammar and vocabulary of Bulgarian have been influenced by non-Slavic Balkan languages, notably Turkish. Bulgarian is the official language of Bulgaria; it is widely spoken by its residents, even among those who speak other languages as their primary tongue, such as Turkish, Armenian, Greek, or Romanian. Nearly 85% of the people in Bulgaria speak Bulgarian; the remaining 15% speak other languages.

These are some common Bulgarian words (transliterated into the Roman alphabet here):

hello	<i>zdraveyte</i>
good-bye	<i>dovizhdane</i> (informally, <i>ciao</i> )
yes	<i>da</i>
no	<i>ne</i>
right	<i>dyasno</i>
left	<i>lyavo</i>
today	<i>sot</i>
tomorrow	<i>nesër</i>

The days of the week in Bulgarian are as follows:

Monday	<i>e hënë</i>
Tuesday	<i>e martë</i>
Wednesday	<i>e mërkurë</i>
Thursday	<i>e enjte</i>
Friday	<i>e premte</i>
Saturday	<i>e shtunë</i>
Sunday	<i>e diel</i>

### 4 FOLKLORE

A favorite character of Bulgarian folktales for hundreds of years has been Sly Peter, with his many ways of outwitting others. Other popular folk figures are the freedom fighters known as *hajduks*, who resemble the English folk hero Robin Hood, and Marko Krabjevic, who rides a magic horse and carries an invincible sword. A more recent addition is Bai Ganyu, a character created at the turn of the 20th century by author Aleko Konstantinov. During the communist era, this blundering figure, originally conceived of as a peasant, metamorphosed into an engineer in stories mocking the government's emphasis on achievements in science and technology.

The tough-minded, pragmatic Bulgarian character is revealed in the following proverbs:

If evil does not come, worse may arrive.  
 The dog barks to guard itself, not the village.  
 When there's no work to be found, join the army.  
 Work left for later is finished by the Devil.

### 5 RELIGION

The Bulgarians are not a strongly religious people. The major organized religion in Bulgaria is Bulgarian Orthodox Christianity, which approximately 83% of Bulgarians identify as their religion, although many have a limited familiarity with its teachings. Bulgarians' religious observance is mostly a matter of tradition rather than deeply held personal beliefs. Approximately 12% of Bulgarians are Muslim, and there are small Protestant and Catholic minorities (less than 1% each).

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Official holidays include the New Year (January 1 and 2); Liberation Day (March 3), which commemorates Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878; Easter Monday (in March or April); Labor Day (May 1); the Day of Letters (May 24), which honors the Cyrillic alphabet and Bulgarian education and culture; and Christmas (December 25 and 26). Many Bulgarians also observe the holy days of the Eastern Orthodox calendar, including a number of saints' days. Until the collapse of communism in Bulgaria in 1989, the country's national patriotic holiday was observed on September 9, the day on which Soviet troops arrived in the capital city of Sofia in 1944. After the fall of Bulgaria's communist regime, this Soviet-style celebration (together with its date) was replaced by one that was judged more meaningful to Bulgaria's history and national aspirations.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Religious ceremonies marking important life events include christenings, weddings, the blessing of a new house, and funerals. Rural villagers still observe the tradition of refraining from any kind of singing, dancing, or music making for at least six months after the death of a relative or close friend.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Bulgarians greet each other by shaking hands; close female friends may exchange kisses on the cheek. The most common formal greetings are *Kak ste?* (How are you?) and *Zdraveite* (hello). More informal versions, used among friends, relatives, and coworkers, are *Kak si?* and *Zdrasti* or *Zdrave*. In formal situations, last names are used with the titles *Gospodin* (Mr.),

*Gospozha* (Mrs.), or *Gospozhitsa* (Miss) or with professional titles. It is common to say hello to strangers in rural but not in urban areas. Bulgarians observe a much smaller zone of personal privacy than in most Western European nations and the United States: People tend to stand or sit close together when conversing, speak in louder voices, and make physical contact more frequently.

The Bulgarian gestures for “yes” and “no” often confuse people from the West. “Yes” is indicated by shaking one’s head from side to side, while “no” is signaled by one or two nods up and down (often accompanied by clicking of the tongue). Pointing with one’s index finger and (for men) crossing an ankle over the opposite knee in public are considered rude.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Housing in Bulgaria is mostly privately owned. Two-story brick houses with a plaster finish resembling stucco have largely replaced the traditional single-story rural houses made of wood, mud bricks, or stone and plaster. Houses in most villages are built close together and surround a central village square. As protection against the cold winters on the Danubian Plains, some houses in that region are built virtually underground, with only the roof showing above ground level. Although brick and stucco houses are also found in urban areas, much residential construction since the 1950s has consisted of multi-story concrete apartment complexes, and most urban dwellers live in apartments rather than houses. Urban families often retain ownership of houses in the country, maintaining gardens on the property, using them as vacation cottages in the summer, or moving their elderly parents into them.

Bulgaria has a national health system that provides free medical assistance of all types, including an extensive network of pediatric facilities and special facilities for patients with tuberculosis. However, in some cases, public health care facilities are underequipped, and better care can be obtained at private facilities by those who can afford to pay for it. Life expectancy averages 68 to 76 years, and the infant mortality rate is 19.85 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Having long served as a connecting point between Europe, Asia, and Africa, Bulgaria has a well-developed, reliable transportation system. Both national and international express trains cross the country, and more than half the nation’s rail system is electrified. In the cities, transportation is available by bus, streetcar, trolley, taxi, and private automobile. Almost all families own cars, but many do not drive them on a regular basis because of the high price of gasoline, preferring to use public transportation instead. Bulgaria has three international airports and two major waterways, the Danube River and the Black Sea.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Family life is very important in Bulgaria. The three-generation extended family is common in rural areas, whereas the nuclear family predominates in cities. Single adults are generally expected to live with their parents until they marry, and children often care for their elderly parents. In addition, it is not unusual for young married couples to live with one set of parents until they can afford to own a home. In line with Bulgaria’s low birth rate, families tend to be small. In the cities, families usually have no more than two children; in the country, families are somewhat larger. Children are very close to their grandpar-

ents, who often care for them while their parents are working. The role of grandmothers is considered so special that there is a holiday dedicated to them—Grandmother’s Day on January 21.

Bulgarian women have traditionally enjoyed a relatively high degree of freedom and responsibility. Under socialism, the quality of their education improved, and they joined the workforce in greater numbers, partly because restrictions on men’s incomes made it necessary for many families to have two breadwinners. Today, women account for almost half the Bulgarian labor force and hold many of the same jobs as men. In urban areas, many women are employed in banking, finance, and insurance.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Bulgarians wear modern Western-style clothing. On the whole, they are very careful about their appearance, dressing up even for casual occasions and carefully ironing the natural fabrics they favor, such as cotton, wool, and silk. However, fashionable Western clothing is expensive, and many women take care of their families’ cold-weather needs by knitting sweaters themselves. Special care is lavished on the dressing of children, who often can be seen wearing imported clothing and lovingly hand-knit items.

The traditional colorful, richly ornamented Bulgarian costumes once worn are seen today only at festivals or dance performances. Styles vary from one region to another, but embroidered white shirts or blouses are common, worn with elaborately embroidered vests. Women may wear colorful aprons or jumpers over their skirts, and men often wear wide waistbands over their pants and shirts. Red is seen in almost all costumes, either as a background color or in the embroidery, and many costumes also feature some black.

## **12 FOOD**

Many Bulgarian dishes feature meat, especially pork and lamb. Favorites include *kufteta*, a fried patty made with meat and breadcrumbs; *moussaka*, a casserole of pork or lamb with potatoes, tomatoes, and yogurt; and *sarmi*, pepper or cabbage stuffed with pork and rice. Fresh fruits and vegetables are an important part of the Bulgarian diet, especially in the summertime. A popular vegetable dish is *shopska*, a salad made with cucumbers, tomatoes, and a Bulgarian cheese called *cerene*. *Tarator* is a cold soup made from cucumbers, yogurt, garlic, dill, and walnuts.

Yogurt—eaten by Bulgarians starting at the age of three months—is a dietary staple that is served at virtually every meal. Another important staple is bread, usually bought fresh every day. A popular snack is a slice of warm bread topped with feta cheese and tomato slices. Favorite desserts include *baklava* (layers of thin, flaky pastry dough filled with nuts and saturated with a sweet syrup) and *banitsa* (a layered pastry filled with cheese or pumpkin). Bulgarians enjoy espresso and Turkish coffee. A favorite wintertime drink is an aperitif called *greyana rakiya*, which is made from plum or grape brandy heated with honey.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Education is highly valued in Bulgarian society. The literacy rate is nearly 100%. Schooling is free and compulsory from the ages of 6 to 16, and it remains free at higher levels. A large ma-



A Bulgarian Muslim bride looks at her make-up during her two-day wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo, Bulgaria. The people of this mountain village are famous for performing their unique wedding ceremonies in winter time only. (AP Images/Petar Petrov)

jority of students complete high school. After the seventh or eighth grade, students decide which type of specialized high school they want to attend (there are as many as five types in urban areas), and they must take a qualifying examination to get into the school of their choice. Bulgaria has some 20 universities, as well as many three-year training facilities. University admission has traditionally been highly competitive, although in the past, students who were admitted did not have to pay tuition. Recent years have seen the introduction of private colleges that charge tuition, as well as the establishment of tuition charges for some students at public universities.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bulgarian culture underwent a resurgence when Ottoman rule ended. Leading literary figures included poets Hristo Botev, Dimcho Debelyanov, and Geo Milev, all of whom died violent deaths at a young age, either in battle or at the hands of the police. Ivan Vazov, a major Bulgarian literary figure, was a novelist, playwright, poet, and travel writer. Another 20th-century Bulgarian novelist was Dimitar Talev, author of *The Iron Candlestick* (1952). The visual arts were revived in Bulgaria during the 19th century, especially the tradition of realistic painting, which became evident in the works of such 20th-century painters as Vladimir Dimitrov, Zlatyo Boyadjiev, and Ilya Petrov.

Bulgaria's lively, rhythmically complex folk music is popular with international folk dancers the world over. Although different regions have their own characteristic sounds, there is an underlying unity to the music, with songs grouping themselves into two main categories. The first group consists of songs with a long line and free meter, such as harvest songs and ballads. The second group has strict meters and includes dance songs and Christmas carols. Bulgarian folk music is played on instruments such as the *gaida* (bagpipes), *kaval* (seven-hole reed pipe), *gadulka* (pear-shaped fiddle), *tambura* (fretted lute), and *tupan* (cylindrical drum). A relatively new offshoot of Bulgaria's folk music tradition is the extremely popular genre known as "wedding music," dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, which is an adaptation of folk tunes for an amplified band consisting of clarinet, saxophone, accordion or synthesizer, guitar, electric bass, drums, and vocalist.

The best-known Bulgarian folk dance is the *horo*, a fast, swirling circle dance. Another favorite is the *ruchenitza*, often featured in dance competitions.

#### 15 WORK

A significant problem confronting the country's labor force is the "brain drain" that has occurred since the 1990s as a result of immigration to the West in response to deteriorating economic conditions. More than 450,000 Bulgarians have left for

Germany, France, Canada, the United States, and other countries, many of them well-educated professionals, and most are not expected to return. Although the skills of these lost workers are sorely needed, Bulgaria cannot provide jobs for many of those who are still in the country, and unemployment during the mid-1990s rose above 10%, though it declined to about 8% in 2007. The workforce in 2007 was about 3.44 million, with 8.5% employed in agriculture, 33.6% in industry, and 57.9% in services. There are two major agricultural areas: The Danubian Plain specializes in the cultivation of roses, wheat, sunflowers, sugar beets, and potatoes, while in the Maritsa River Valley, rice, cotton, grapes, watermelon, and tobacco are grown. Bulgaria is known for its wines, and in 2002 it was the 13th largest wine producer in the world. Bulgaria's major industries are electricity, gas, and water; food, beverages, and tobacco; machinery and equipment; base metals; chemical products; coke; refined petroleum; and nuclear fuel.

## 16 SPORTS

The mountains of Bulgaria provide an excellent setting for its many ski enthusiasts, hikers, and tobogganers. Vacationers often head to Bulgaria's coastline to swim, fish, or boat. Soccer and basketball are also popular. There were countrywide celebrations when the Bulgarian soccer team defeated the Germans in the World Cup quarterfinals in 1994. As in other European countries, professional soccer players are celebrities, and almost all boys learn to play soccer at a young age. Basketball is more popular among young people in the cities than among those in rural areas. Volleyball, track, rowing, wrestling, and weightlifting are other favorite sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Bulgarians are an industrious people who like to spend their leisure time in productive pursuits, even just catching up on household chores. Women often sew or knit while they socialize. There is an old village tradition, called the *sedenka*, of gathering for an evening of sewing, embroidering, or knitting, and there are even special *sedenka* songs that form part of the country's folk music tradition. Wine making is a favorite leisure time pursuit among Bulgarian men, and gardening is another very popular hobby. Even sedentary time is more likely to be spent reading or socializing in a coffeehouse than watching television.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The skills of many fine but anonymous Bulgarian artisans can be seen in icons and other church art, which reached a high point in the 18th and 19th centuries. Prominent among contemporary crafts is the weaving of intricately patterned cloth and carpeting.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are some interethnic tensions between the Bulgarians and the minority Turks and Roma. The plight of the Roma has been a cause for concern, as they tend to live in substandard housing on the outskirts of cities and have very high unemployment rates and a relatively short life expectancy.

In the 1990s, the Bulgarians struggled, both politically and economically, to adapt to the realities of the postcommunist era. Living standards for all except the wealthiest segment of

the population declined, and political instability slowed the pace of economic reform. Since then, the Bulgarian government has focused on reversing the "brain drain" caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union prompted new regulations on industry and agriculture, and the country and government continue to focus greatly on Euro-Atlantic relations.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reduction of regulation, crime has been on the rise in Bulgaria. It is second only to Columbia in the production of counterfeit currency, and the country has a significant problem with the illegal sale of weapons to other governments.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The regulation of women's concerns has been and continues to be insufficient in Bulgaria. There are no laws against gender discrimination, and the workforce is replete with discriminatory hiring practices and sexual harassment. After the fall of communism, 65% of women were unemployed. One in every five women in Bulgaria has been the victim of spousal abuse, illegal trafficking, or enforced prostitution. However, many women's groups are forming, such as the Women's Alliance for Development. There are now far more women in politics. In 2008, 26% of the members of parliament were women; many high positions in business have been filled by women, and more and more women role models are emerging.

As a member of the European Union, Bulgaria has outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation, and homosexual acts were decriminalized in 2001. However, Bulgaria does not allow same-sex marriage and gives few rights, such as domestic partnership arrangements, for homosexual or heterosexual couples. The European Union has dictated that member states, including Bulgaria, take action to reduce violence based on discrimination; however, Bulgaria has been slow to prosecute cases in which homosexuals are the victims. Bulgaria has yet to remedy inequality in the age of consent for homosexuals. The age of consent remains higher for homosexual couples, whereas most European countries have changed this statute. Although Bulgaria lags the rest of Europe in its views on homosexuality, pressure and influence from the European Union is beginning to change the situation.

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—revised by C. Corrigan

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## BURIATS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Buryats; Buriiaad

**LOCATION:** Russia (mountains of Southeast Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 515,175 (445,175 in Russia, 2002), (70,000 in Mongolia)

**LANGUAGE:** Buriat, Russian

**RELIGION:** Tibetan Buddhism; native religious practices, Eastern Orthodox Christianity

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Buriats (sometimes spelled Buryats) are an Asiatic people who inhabit the steppes and mountains surrounding the southern half of Lake Baikal in Southeast Siberia and speak a language belonging to the Mongol branch of the Altaic language family. The Buriats' name for themselves is Buriiaad (or, less commonly, Buriiaad-Mongol). The origins of the Buriats and the exact time at which they arose are unclear, but anthropological, linguistic, and archaeological evidence suggests that the ancestors of the modern Buriats may have been formed sometime during the Bronze Age (between 2500 and 1300 BC) along the shores of Lake Baikal and the Selenga River from Mongol tribes who mixed with native Siberian groups who spoke Turkic, Tungus, and perhaps Samoyedic languages. Russian soldiers and explorers first encountered the Buriats in the late 1620s and conquered them over the course of the 17th century. Most Buriats fought fiercely against the Russian invaders, and uprisings and attacks on Russian forts continued for decades, although some groups submitted voluntarily to the Russians in order to stop paying tribute to the Mongol khans and to escape the wars that were occurring in Mongolia at that time between Mongols and Manchus and between rival Mongolian leaders.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Buriats in Russia numbered around 445,175 as of 2002. The main area of Buriat settlement is the Republic of Buriatia, which contains 249,500 Buriats and is part of the Russian Federation. Buriatia covers about 351,300 square kilometers (135,600 square miles) along Lake Baikal, making it 1.5 times larger than Great Britain. About 49,300 Buriats also live in the Ust'-Ordynsk Buriat Autonomous District to the west of Lake Baikal, and 42,400 more live in the Aga Buriat Autonomous District to the east. Altogether, 445,175 Buriats live inside the boundaries of the Russian Federation. Outside Russia, 70,000 Buriats live in Mongolia, and a few thousand live in northern China. Most of Buriat territory is mountainous taiga. Rolling steppes are to be found east and southeast of Lake Baikal, and in some places steppe valleys extend deep into the taiga. The highest parts of the Buriat Republic lie in the Eastern Sayan mountain range to the southwest of Lake Baikal. Buriatia's climate is harsh and continental. Because Buriatia is far from the moderating influence of the sea and high above sea level, temperatures are extreme and precipitation is sparse. Winters are long, dry, and very cold (the average January temperature ranges from  $-23^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-27^{\circ}\text{C}$  [ $-9^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $-17^{\circ}\text{F}$ ]). Summers are short, hot (the average July temperature is  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$  [ $68^{\circ}\text{F}$ ]), and relatively rainy. Most of the region's 300 mm (12 inches) of annual precipitation falls during the summer.



Wild animals found in forested areas of Buriatia include deer, reindeer, elk, boar, squirrel, bear, lynx, and wolverine. Hamsters and marmots also live in the steppe areas. There are numerous species of birds, including ducks, and fish in the Buriat lands. Freshwater seals can be found on the many islands that dot the shoreline of Lake Baikal. Lake Baikal is the deepest continental body of water in the world, reaching a depth of 5,700 feet (1,737 meters). The lake contains about 20% of the world's freshwater reserves.

### 3 LANGUAGE

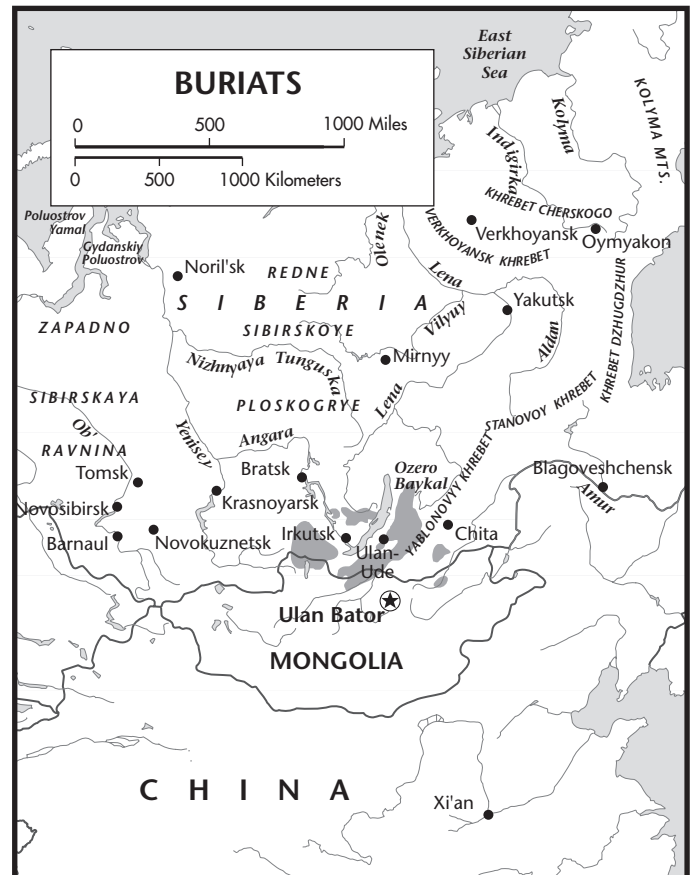
The Buriat language belongs to the Mongolian family and is divided into numerous dialects and subdialects. The Buriats did not have a written language until the early 17th century, when they began to write in Classical Mongolian, a literary language traditionally employed by most of the Mongol peoples. In this flowing vertical script, words are written from top to bottom in columns of text that read from left to right. After 1929, Buriat was written in the Latin alphabet, which was in turn replaced by the Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet in 1938. The Buriat literary language used today is based on the Khor dialect of the eastern Buriats and is written in the Cyrillic alphabet with extra letters for Buriat sounds that do not exist in Russian. Some common Buriat male names are *Baatar* ("hero") and *Mergen* ("wise"); common female names include *Gerelmaa* ("light") and *Erzhena* ("mother-of-pearl"). Because many Buriats practice the Tibetan form of Buddhism, names of Tibetan origin, such as *Sodnom* ("virtue"; male) and *Geleg* ("luck"; male) are also widely used. Some Buriats use Russian names such as *Mikhail* (male) and *Tania* (female).

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Buriats have a rich heritage of folklore that has accumulated over hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. The most remarkable genre of Buriat folklore is the *uliger*, or epic poem, which has been compared to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* epics of the ancient Greeks. The Buriat epic poems all describe the struggles of mythical heroes such as Geser, Alamzhi-Mergen ("Alamzhi the Wise"), and Shono-Bator against various enemies and monsters. (The Buriats' favorite hero, Geser, is actually of Tibetan origin.) All Buriat *uligers* are very long, ranging from 2,000–3,000 to 25,000 lines in length. Some have developed several versions in different regions of Buriatia. The *uligers* have been most faithfully preserved in western Buriatia, perhaps because Buddhism is much less widespread there than among the Buriats east of Baikal, so the *uligers* have not had to compete with Buddhist tales. Because most Buriats were illiterate until the 20th century, the *uligers* were passed down orally from generation to generation, memorized and publicly recited by *uligershens* (bards). The Soviet persecution of Buriat national culture almost destroyed the *uligershens*. The Geser epic was banned for several years after World War II because Russian Communists misinterpreted several lines as anti-Russian, and new *uligershens* were no longer trained to replace the older ones who were dying out. In the past decade, Buriat cultural institutions have begun the slow, difficult work of preparing new *uligershens*.

### 5 RELIGION

The traditional religion of the Buriats was shamanism. Mountains, rivers, forests, and the sky were all considered to have



their own spirits or gods that had to be respected. Animals, too, had their own spirits that had to be respected. For instance, it was forbidden to refer to certain animals directly by their usual Buriat names during the hunt lest they take offense at this impertinence. Thus, a *shono* (wolf) was called *tengeriin nokhoi* (heavenly dog). The Buriats also held fire to be sacred and sacrificed meat, milk, fat, liquor, and butter to it. A tribal priest, or shaman, was responsible for communicating with the gods. Like the Native American "medicine man," the shaman performed rituals at births, marriages, and burials and officiated at sacrifices, the most important of which was the horse sacrifice to the sky god Tengri. The shaman also prayed for and gave medicine to the sick and divined the future. There were both male shamans and female shamans, and the profession of shaman was hereditary.

Buriats east of Baikal adopted the Tibetan form of Buddhism in the 1600s. Most western Buriats remained shamanists, but some adopted Buddhism or Russian Orthodox Christianity. The Buddhism practiced by the Buriats has incorporated many shamanist beliefs and rituals. Buddhist *datsans* (monasteries) filled cultural and educational as well as religious needs, since they contained schools, libraries, and printing facilities. The Soviet government destroyed the monasteries and imprisoned or killed almost all of the Buriat lamas (Buddhist monks or priests) and shamans in the 1930s as part of its war against religion. Buriat religious practices had to go underground until the 1980s, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev abandoned the government's anti-religious policies. Now some of the pre-

viously destroyed *datsans* are being rebuilt, entirely new ones are being opened, *datsan* schools are again training lamas, and shamans can practice openly without fear of persecution.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The *Tsagaalgaan* (New Year's Festival) is the most popular Buriat holiday and is celebrated by feasting and drinking that, in theory at least, can last through the entire first month of the year (the *sagaan hara* or "white month"). Since the Buriats formerly used the lunar calendar, the Buriat New Year falls on a different day each year in the Gregorian calendar. Buriats also celebrate the Western New Year's Eve and New Year's Day (31 December and 1 January). Buddhist Buriats also attended *tsams*, festivals held at the *datsans* that featured dramatic dances by lamas in elaborate masks and costumes depicting gods and demons. Shamanist Buriats also celebrated holidays called *tailgans* that began with animal sacrifices to local deities and ended with feasts, horse races, wrestling matches, and archery contests. There were three major *tailgans*—spring, summer, and fall—every year as well as many minor ones. Christian Buriats and those who lived in areas with large Russian populations also observed Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Because all these holidays had religious aspects, they were banned by the Soviet regime, but in recent years Buriats have begun to observe them openly again. Of the Soviet-era secular holidays celebrated throughout Russia, the most popular among the Buriats are International Women's Day (8 March) and the anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany (9 May).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Buriats have traditionally called upon shamans or lamas to bless the birth of a child. Because childlessness is considered a great misfortune by the Buriats, and infant mortality rates were high before the spread of Western medicine, superstitious parents temporarily gave newborns unappealing names or names inappropriate to their sex in order to make them less attractive to evil spirits that might otherwise harm them. For this reason, it is still common to refer to infants in uncomplimentary terms. A mother, for example, might say that her baby is *muukhai* ("ugly") even though she considers him beautiful.

The Buriats have no special rites of passage for childhood, puberty, or adulthood. Buddhist Buriats consider children to be without sin until they are about eight years old, but attaining this age is not marked by any special ritual. Buriats traditionally disposed of their dead by exposing them in the open air on the ground or on a raised platform. Weapons, saddles, and other everyday items were sometimes buried with their owners, and the deceased's horse was sometimes killed. Shamans were cremated and their ashes placed in tree trunks; groves that contained these trees were considered sacred, and it was forbidden to take wood from them. Cremation was also common in traditional Buriat society, especially among Buddhist Buriats. Buriats now bury their dead in cemeteries or cremate them.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Upon receiving a guest in one's home for the first time, it is customary to present him or her with a *khadag*, a strip of silk approximately one yard long and a little less than one foot wide. The host places the *khadag* across his or her outstretched

arms and transfers it to the arms of the guest. This practice, along with the word *khadag*, is of Tibetan origin. It is considered poor manners to hand someone an item with one's left hand when in polite company.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The nomadic eastern Buriats' traditional form of housing was the yurt, or *ger*, which was covered with felt cloth and held in place by a wooden frame. The doorway of the *ger* always faced south. The *ger* could be quickly taken apart and reassembled when the family moved from pasture to pasture. Because most western Buriats lived in mountainous areas unsuitable for nomadism, they used eight-sided permanent wooden "yurts." As a result of Russian influence, some also adopted log cabins and houses. At the present time, rural Buriats live in wooden houses in collective farms and villages, and urban Buriats live in Soviet-type apartment buildings or private wooden houses. Because of the persistent shortage of desirable housing during the Soviet period, it was not uncommon for Buriats in Ulan-Ude and other Buriat cities to live for years or even decades in crowded apartments with relatives or in dilapidated wooden houses that lacked indoor plumbing while waiting for suitable apartments of their own.

Like all Mongol peoples, Buriats have traditionally been excellent horsemen, and horses are still widely used for transportation in the countryside. Buriats living in cities, on the other hand, use public trolleys and buses and, to a much lesser extent, private automobiles.

Before the Soviet period, Western medicine was virtually unknown among the Buriats; instead, they were treated by shamans who knew herbal folk medicine and lamas trained in Tibetan medical practices at Buddhist monasteries. Western medicine has become widespread since the October Revolution of 1917 and is provided by the government at low cost. Many Buriats combine Western medical treatment with traditional methods of healing. Buriatia contains numerous mineral springs that are used for medicinal purposes, the most famous of which are located at Arshaan, southwest of Lake Baikal and are used by people from all over Buriatia, and indeed, from all parts of the former Soviet Union.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Buriat society was made up of *esege zon* (large tribes) organized on a territorial basis and *otog* (clans) that were based on kinship rather than territory. Wealthy clan members were obligated to help poorer clan members and widows and orphans who belonged to their clan. Clans, in turn, were divided into families. There were two types of traditional Buriat families: small nuclear families consisting of the male head of a household, his wife, several children, and sometimes his parents; and extended patriarchal families that combined the households of several brothers into a single settlement under the leadership of their father or the eldest brother. The nuclear family has always been the more common type, and the large patriarchal families have now faded into the past. Nevertheless, ties between members of related nuclear families are still strong, and it is not uncommon for parents, grandparents, and unmarried adult grandchildren to live under the same roof. Buriat couples usually have two or three children, and families tend to be larger in the countryside, where housing is in greater supply than in the cities.



A Buriat man and his Russian wife with their three daughters in Maloye Goloustnoye, Siberia. (© Dean Conger/Corbis)

Traditionally, most marriages were arranged by the parents of the prospective pair. The groom's family was required to pay a "bride-price" to the family of his prospective wife; if they could not afford to pay the bride-price in money, livestock, or other property, the groom was required to work it off at the home of his future in-laws before the marriage could take place. The difficulties caused by this practice sometimes led a prospective groom or his family to kidnap a bride from another clan rather than pay for her. Families who wished to gain financially by a marriage sometimes arranged it long before their children were old enough to marry. The minimum age of marriage was 15 or 16, but in practice women usually married between the ages of 17 and 21, and men between 18 and 25. (Men married later since they had to provide the bride-price.) Marriage between clan members who shared an ancestor within the preceding nine generations was forbidden. Polygamy was permitted, but only wealthy men could afford to have more than one wife. During a traditional wedding ceremony, the bride was brought on horseback to the groom's home, where she bowed to the gods of the groom's clan and sacrificed food and drink to them. Among Buddhist Buriats, lamas performed additional rituals to ensure the marriage's success. Buriats are now married in civil ceremonies. During the 20th century, marriages for love have replaced arranged

marriages, although some parents still use unofficial "matchmakers" to help their children find suitable mates.

## <sup>11</sup> CLOTHING

The traditional Buriat garment for both men and women is the *degel*, an ankle-length robe of felt, fur, or cloth that is fastened on one side with buttons or hooks. A lighter version of the *degel* worn in summer was called a *terlig*. Men also wore hats of cloth or fur and belts to which were attached knives in sheaths and elaborately decorated pouches for tobacco, snuff, and fire-making flints. Women wore trousers and shirts under their *degels* and sometimes an embroidered vest on the outside. Both sexes wore boots, or *gatal*, with thick soles and toes that curled slightly upward. (Men carried their pipes in the tops of their boots). Women, especially wealthy ones, wore elaborate silver earrings, rings, headdresses, and trinkets. Today almost all Buriats wear Western clothing (suits, dresses, etc.). Few Buriats even own traditional clothing, which cannot be purchased in stores, and those who do wear it only on holidays or other special occasions. The Buriats in the Aga Buriat Autonomous District represent a major exception to this tendency, however. Almost all Buriats their own and wear traditional clothing.

**12 FOOD**

Because Buriats have traditionally been a livestock-breeding people, it is not surprising that most of their national dishes feature meat and dairy products. A particularly esteemed delicacy is sheep's tail, which consists of very fatty meat; it is given to the most honored guest as a sign of esteem. Customary foods include boiled mutton, *süsegei* (a type of sour cream), *eezgei* (a dish similar to cottage cheese), blood sausages, butter, *buuza* (steamed dumplings filled with ground mutton or beef), and various types of yogurt. A recipe for *buuza* follows.

**Buuza**  
(Buriat meat dumplings)

**Filling**

850 grams (1¾ pounds) lean mutton (Beef, pork, or horsemeat may be substituted)  
220 grams (8 ounces) pork or mutton fat  
3 onions  
130 milliliters (4½ ounces) water  
9 grams (1 tablespoon) flour  
3 grams (1 teaspoon) salt

**Dough**

350 grams (2½ cups) flour  
2 eggs  
60 grams (2 ounces) water  
dash of salt (optional)

Grind the meat in a meat grinder. Finely chop the fat and onions and mix them thoroughly with the meat, water, flour, and salt. Set aside.

Mix the dough ingredients together in a bowl. Roll the dough by hand into a tube about 2 centimeters (¾ inch) wide, then cut the tube into pieces (about 2 to 4 centimeters ¾ to 1½ inches) long. Use a rolling pin to shape the pieces into thin circles.

Place 50 grams (slightly less than ¼ cup) of the filling onto each of the dough circles. Pinch the edges of the circles together in tiny folds at the top of the meat, leaving a small hole in the center to let steam escape. Steam the dumplings over boiling water until the juice from inside is clear, 18 to 20 minutes. Serves 4 to 5.

(Translated and adapted from G. Tsydenzhapov and E. Badueva, *Buriatskaia kukhnia* (Buriat Cuisine), Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1991, 50–51.)

Buriats are fond of tea, which they sometimes drink in the Tibetan style with milk, salt, and barley. The Russian influence on Soviet food production has made cabbage, potatoes, and other vegetables, as well as bread, sugar, and canned goods staples of the Buriat diet. The wooden and leather containers and utensils formerly used to prepare, store, and consume food have been replaced with metal, glass, and enamel ones purchased in stores. Food and drink are preferably given to guests or respected persons with both hands, or, if this would be impossible or awkward, with the right hand (preferably supported symbolically at the elbow by the left). When vodka or *darasun* (a liqueur made from fermented milk) is drunk, the first drops

from a bottle are spilled into the fire (or, as is more common today, onto the electric or gas stove).

**13 EDUCATION**

Prior to the October Revolution, most Buriats were illiterate. Some Buriats attended local Russian elementary, and much more rarely, secondary schools. Most schools in the Buriat lands taught in Russian, not Buriat, because there were few Buriat teachers. Very few Russian teachers knew Buriat, and the Russian government opposed the use of Buriat and other non-Russian languages in the classroom. Russian Orthodox missionaries also established religiously oriented elementary schools, but these institutions were unpopular among the Buriats, who associated them with forced assimilation. Some Buddhist Buriats attended schools at the *datsans*, and there they learned Tibetan (the ritual language of Buriat Buddhism), Classical Mongolian, Buddhist theology and philosophy, and sometimes Tibetan medicine. Pre-revolutionary Buriats who did not attend school occasionally learned to read and write from relatives or tutors in Russian or Classical Mongolian.

The Soviet government made school attendance mandatory and universal. As a result, illiteracy has been practically eliminated among the Buriats. Most Buriats graduate from secondary school, and a sizeable proportion go on to attend colleges or trade schools. These advances have not come without a price, however. The Soviet regime attempted to use schooling as a tool of Russification (that is, replacing native cultures and languages with Russian), especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Teaching in the Buriat language was intentionally reduced, leading to a sharp decline in the number of young Buriats who knew their own language. Even those who spoke Buriat fluently could not read or write well in it. Since Gorbachev abandoned the policy of Russification in the 1990s, Buriat educators have increased the Buriat language's role in the classroom as both subject of study and means of instruction.

**14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Many aspects of the Buriat cultural heritage were represented in the Buddhist monasteries (*datsans*). *Datsans* contained libraries of religious and secular literature in Classical Mongolian and Tibetan and even printed books in these languages. Artist-monks painted icons and carved statues of Buddhist deities and copied scriptures onto lacquered wooden pages using inks made of precious stones. The lavishly decorated monasteries were in themselves unique architectural monuments.

In addition to epic poems and other forms of oral folk literature, the Buriats possess historical chronicles written in Classical Mongol in the 18th and 19th centuries. During the 20th century, Buriat writers have adopted Western literary modes such as the novel, short story, and play. The most famous modern Buriat author is Khotsa Namsaraev (1889–1959), whose works attack the real and alleged shortcomings of traditional Buriat ways of life and speak in glowing terms of the new Communist society. Although most Buriats find these propagandistic themes crude and distasteful, they still respect Namsaraev for his excellent literary style.

**15 WORK**

The Buriat economy traditionally centered around the breeding of cattle, sheep, horses, and goats. Some Buriats to the south and southwest of Lake Baikal also raised yaks. The Buri-

ats in the steppe lands to the east and southeast of Baikal were nomads, moving their flocks to new pastures after they had exhausted an area's grass and water. Most nomadic Buriats moved twice a year, but rich Buriats who owned large herds changed residences up to a dozen times a year. Buriats west of Baikal also raised livestock, but because they usually lived in rugged mountain areas where movement was difficult, they were more sedentary. Western Buriats traditionally raised barley, wheat, and other grains. Buriats on both sides of Baikal engaged in hunting, particularly squirrels, sables, bears, elk, and deer, and those who lived near lakes or rivers also fished. When the Soviet government collectivized agriculture and animal husbandry in the 1930s, the Buriats lost their herds and were forced to settle in collective farms. Because the issue of private land ownership has not yet been settled in the former Soviet Union, most Buriats still live and work in the collective farms.

### 16 SPORTS

The most widespread sports among Buriats of all ages have traditionally been archery, horse riding, and wrestling, sports that are common among other Mongol-speaking peoples as well. *Surkharbaan* (archery festivals) are held every year at the town, district, and all-Buriat level, and include horse races and wrestling matches in addition to the archery contests. Buriats also enjoy Western spectator sports common throughout the former USSR such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The traditional forms of Buriat entertainment—watching horse races and archery contests and listening to bards recite epic poetry—have been supplemented by modern ones. In addition to the Russian-language news and entertainment programming of the national stations in Moscow that broadcast by satellite to the entire Russian Federation, there are several hours each day of Buriat-language radio and television programs from stations in the Buriat capital, Ulan-Ude. Since the early 1990s, Buriat-language television broadcasts have been videotaped and sent to television stations in the city of Irkutsk west of Baikal to be rebroadcast to Buriats who live outside their republic. Buriats enjoy watching Russian and Western films; young Buriats especially like American action-adventure films and East Asian martial-arts movies. A Buriat-language theater in Ulan-Ude stages plays by Buriat authors and translations of works by Russians and other non-Buriats. There is also an opera house in Ulan-Ude that performs Buriat, Russian, and Western compositions.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Because many Buriats were traditionally nomads, Buriat craftsmen have tended to focus on portable and relatively small items of everyday use such as saddles, tools, chests, clothing, storage trunks, and religious statues (shamanist *ongons*, or representations of deities, and Buddhist figures). The techniques they employ include carving, embroidery, stamping, and embossing. Although Buriats have long worked in leather, wood, bone, felt, iron, and stone, they are especially talented at crafting silver and even today produce very detailed and beautiful silver knives, pipes, buckles, buttons, rings, earrings, bracelets, and other jewelry.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Modern Buriats face many of the same social problems that confront people in other parts of the former Soviet Union. A collapsing economy, rampant crime and corruption, alcoholism, and environmental degradation are foremost among these. In addition, they must confront threats to their cultural integrity that stem from specific historical circumstances. Although the Bolsheviks initially encouraged the formation of a multicultural state in which all cultures and languages would enjoy equal rights, Stalin and his successors considered Russian language and culture superior to those of the USSR's other peoples and pursued a policy of Russification aimed at wiping out non-Russian cultures and languages with a mixture of persecution and neglect. The Buriat language was almost entirely removed from schools, and Buriat book and newspaper publishing declined in quality and quantity. Even worse, propaganda subtly but unceasingly fed Buriats (especially young ones) the message that "Buriat-ness" was equal to "backwardness" and that there was nothing in their cultural heritage of which they could be proud. Only in the last decade has the end of censorship and official Russification allowed Buriats to criticize these policies and to begin to slowly repair, primarily through education and the press, the damage done.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The social position of women was somewhat inferior to that of men in traditional Buriat society. For example, a woman had to observe many taboos in dealing with her husband's family: she was forbidden to address her mother- and father-in-law by their names, to sleep in the same dwelling with them, to walk in front of them, or to appear before them without covering her head with a cap. Buriat women now have legal rights equal to those of men, but sexist attitudes are still common. Although most Buriat women are employed outside the home, many husbands refuse to help them with household tasks. Historically, collectivization and the Second World War brought profound changes to traditional Buriat gender roles. The integration of the Buriats into the Soviet economic system, and into Soviet society shifted gender roles to some degree, but also provided Buriat women with increased educational opportunities.

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—revised by A. Frank

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## CASTILIANS

**LOCATION:** Central Spain

**POPULATION:** Approximately 11 million

**LANGUAGE:** Castilian Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Castilians, who inhabit Spain's central tableland, have dominated Spain politically since the 16th century. The area traditionally referred to as "Castile" (meaning land of castles) comprises two present-day regions: Castile and León and Castile-La Mancha. Its original inhabitants were Iberians and Celts who were conquered by the Romans and the Moors. The *Reconquista*—the centuries-long crusade to drive the Moors from Spain that began in the 8th century—was centered in Castile, a region known for its religious devotion and fierce warriors, epitomized by the regional hero El Cid, who became the subject of epic poetry.

By 1492, when the Reconquista was finally completed with the expulsion of the Moors from Granada, Castile had become a center of political as well as military power, a result of the 1469 marriage of Isabella of Castile to Ferdinand of Aragon. The pair united the two territories 10 years later when Ferdinand succeeded to the throne of his kingdom. Ferdinand and Isabella made important governmental reforms, notably, reducing the influence of the nobles and crusading orders and consolidating power in the hands of a central authority with a regional seat in Castile. (Castile also became the center of authority for the Spanish Inquisition, beginning in 1478.) In the following centuries, the fortunes of Castile, located at the center of power, rose and fell with those of the Spanish Empire. The golden age of the 16th century was followed by wars that eroded Spain's power, and the Bourbon dynasty was installed at the close of the Wars of the Spanish Succession (1701–14).

Castile was caught up in the 19th- and 20th-century struggles between supporters of the monarchy and those who desired the formation of a republic. In the 20th century, Spain remained officially neutral in both world wars. Coming to power at the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the regime of Francisco Franco aided the Axis powers during World War II, with the result that Spain was left out of the Marshall Plan that aided in the postwar reconstruction of Europe. The nation did, however, become a member of the United Nations in 1955. Predominantly rural areas such as Castile—where the postwar period was referred to as the "years of hunger"—experienced large-scale emigration. Following Franco's death in 1975 and the installation of a democratic regime in 1978, Castile experienced greater opportunities for economic development. Spain became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1982 and joined the European Union (EU) in 1986.

### <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Castile is located within Spain's central tableland, or *meseta*. It is a region of hot, dry, windswept plains broken in places by chains of low mountains, with elevations varying from 600 m to 900 m (2,000–3,000 ft) above sea level. There are few trees, and much of the terrain is covered by *encinas*, which are simi-

lar to dwarf oaks, or by scrub. The main bodies of water are the Duero and Tagus rivers. The seasons are quite extreme, switching from very cold to very hot almost immediately, with little spring or fall. Castilians traditionally describe their climate with the following proverb: *Nueve meses de invierno y tres mese de infierno*, or “Nine months of winter and three months of hell.”

The Castile region represents one-third of the territory of Spain and about one-quarter of the population of approximately 45 million, mostly concentrated in major urban areas such as Madrid, Toledo, and Valladolid. The rural areas, by contrast, are much less densely populated, and their population continues to fall as residents relocate to the cities or immigrate abroad. Madrid has a population of 5.5 million.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Though several distinct languages are spoken throughout Spain, Castilian (*Castellano*) is the country’s national language, a status it garnered as a result of Castile’s long-standing political dominance. Used in government, education, and the media, Castilian is the language that people in other countries identify as “Spanish.” Two of the main regional languages—Catalan and Gallego—are Romance languages that bear some degree of similarity to Castilian. Euskera, a language spoken in the Basque Country, is very different not only from Spanish but from any other European language. Other Spanish dialects include Andalusian, Aragonese, Asturian, Leonese, and Valencian. Spain’s linguistic differences have been a source of political tension, and today, Catalan, Gallego, and Euskera (Basque) are also designated—together with Castilian—as official languages in their respective regions. They are taught in the schools and appear alongside Castilian on all street signs.

#### NUMBERS

one	un, uno
two	dos
three	tres
four	cuatro
five	cinco
six	seis
seven	siete
eight	ocho
nine	nueve
ten	diez

#### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	domingo
Monday	lunes
Tuesday	martes
Wednesday	miércoles
Thursday	jueves
Friday	viernes
Saturday	sábado

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Castilians’ great cultural hero is El Cid Campeador, an actual historical figure (Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar) of the 11th century whose life passed into legend with the composition of the Spanish national epic based on his life, *Cantar del Mio Cid* (*The Poem of the Cid*). This warrior of the *Reconquista* (the Christian reconquest of Spain from the Moors) is celebrated for qualities that still resonate with Castilians: a strong sense



of honor, devout Catholicism, pragmatism, devotion to family, and integrity.

### 5 RELIGION

The Castilians, like the Spanish population in general, are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. They are known for their adherence to church doctrine and high degree of religious observance. Many attend church every Sunday, and a number of women go to services every day. However, the traditionally strong influence of village priests over their parishioners’ lives has declined in recent years.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Besides New Year’s Day and the major holidays of the Christian calendar, Castilians celebrate the national holidays of Spain: Saint Joseph’s Day (March 19), the Day of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (June 29), Saint James’s Day (July 25), and National Day (October 12). The most important religious holidays in Castile are Easter and Christmas. In addition, every village observes the feast day of its patron saint with a gala celebration that includes many distinctly secular events, such as bullfights, soccer matches, and fireworks. Residents parade through the streets carrying huge papier-mâché figures called *gigants* (giants) and *cabezudos* (big heads or fat heads). The giants are effigies of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, while the *cabezudos* portray a variety of figures from history, legend, and fantasy. Madrid’s Festival of San Isidro comprises three weeks of parties, processions, and bullfights.



*Locals and tourists sit at a café in Segovia, Castilla y Leon, Spain, with the ruins of a Roman aqueduct in the background.*  
(© Alan Copson/JAI/Corbis)

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The sacraments of baptism, first communion, and marriage are occasions for large and expensive social gatherings at which families show their generosity and economic status. Military service is also considered a rite of passage for Castilians, as it is for most Spaniards. *Quintos*, young men from the same town or village who go into military service in the same year, form a closely knit group that collects money from neighbors to organize parties and serenade girls. The period of compulsory military service has been greatly reduced since the 1990s, and the government plans to replace compulsory military service with a voluntary army.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Tempered by the harsh, barren landscape of their homeland, Castilians are known for their toughness, frugality, and endurance. Isolated by Castile's vast expanses of arid land, rural inhabitants rely closely on their immediate neighbors, living in small clusters of houses. They tend to be suspicious of outsiders and new ideas.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Although Castile is home to large cities such as Madrid and Toledo, it remains a primarily rural region, and much of its population is dependent on agriculture. In rural villages, the traditional house combines the family's living quarters with a stable and barn that have a separate entrance. The kitchen is arranged around an open-hearth fireplace (*chimenea*). The most

common building material is stucco, although stone houses are common among wealthier inhabitants.

Castilians have access to the same level of modern medical care as their neighbors elsewhere in Spain, where the average life expectancy is 78 years. Despite their reliance on modern medicine, it is not unusual for Castilians to invoke the healing powers of a patron saint when a loved one is ill, and traditional folk medicine, including herbal remedies, is still practiced in some remote rural areas.

Castile is the hub of Spain's transportation network. All of the nation's highways, rail lines, and air routes pass through Madrid because of its central location. The city also has a modern subway system. In the country, dirt and gravel roads are common, and burros are still used for transportation in some small villages.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Castilians tend to delay marriage until the age of about 25, when the man has completed his military service and the couple has achieved a degree of financial independence. Courtships are carefully monitored, as scandal reflects not only on the couple themselves but also on the reputations of their respective families. During the marriage ceremony, members of the wedding party hold a white veil over the bride and groom to symbolize the future submissiveness of the wife to her husband. Newlyweds are expected to set up their own household, although it is common for the bride's parents to help the couple buy or build a house, which is often located in the parents' own neighborhood. Only church marriages were recognized



in Spain until 1968, when civil ceremonies were first allowed by law. Divorce has been legal since the 1980s. A man is much more likely to divorce his wife than vice versa. Because of the intensity of the divorce process and the strong Catholic influence in the country, Spain has the third lowest divorce rate on the European continent.

### **11 CLOTHING**

For everyday activities, both casual and formal, Castilians wear modern Western-style clothing, similar to that worn elsewhere in Western Europe and in the United States. Traditionally black clothing was worn to church, and the elderly in rural villages still observe this custom.

### **12 FOOD**

Pork and other pig products—ham, bacon, and sausages—are staples of the Castilian diet. The region's most famous dish is *cochinillo asado*, roast suckling pig, for which the city of Segovia is especially well known. The city of El Bierzo is known for another popular dish, *botillo*, composed of minced pork and sausages. Castile has a traditional soup—*sopa castellana*, containing pork, eggs, bread, garlic, and fat—but it is no longer widely eaten. Beans of all kinds are a regional staple, including red beans, white beans, chickpeas, and lentils. Tapas, the popular snacks eaten throughout Spain, are also popular in Castile. Tojuntos, beef or rabbit with tomatoes, is a typical dish of the area. Bizcochos borrachos are sponge cakes soaked in brandy. Serrano ham and olla podrida (rotten stew) are well known in León. Saffron is often used in cooking, and it is highly prized in the area. Like people in other parts of Spain, Castilians take an extended lunch break at midday, called a siesta. This tradition has waned as people have become busier; only about 25% of Spaniards still take a siesta. Castilians typically eat dinner late, between 9:00 pm and midnight.

### **13 EDUCATION**

For young Castilians, like other Spanish children, schooling is free and compulsory from the ages of 6 to 14, when many students begin the three-year *bachillerato* course of study. Subsequently, they may opt for one year of college preparatory study or vocational training. Castile is home to Spain's oldest university—the Pontifical University of Salamanca, founded in 1254—as well as the University of Madrid, which has the highest enrollment in the country.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Castile's literary tradition dates back to the 12th-century epic poem *Cantar del Mio Cid* (Poem of the Cid), which celebrates the life and exploits of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, a Castilian warrior who gained fame during the *Reconquista*. The fictional El Cid, embodying the ideal Castilian, has captured the popular imagination for generations, serving as the subject of a play by the French playwright Corneille and a Hollywood movie starring Charlton Heston. The most famous Castilian writer is Miguel de Cervantes, author of the 17th-century classic *Don Quixote*, a masterpiece of world literature and a milestone in the development of the modern novel. At the turn of the 20th century, the poet Antonio Machado, a member of a group of writers and artists called the "Generation of 1898," wrote of Castile's decline from its onetime position of power:

*Castilla miserable, ayer cominadora,  
envuelta en sus andrajos, desprecia cuanto ignora.*

Miserable Castile, yesterday lording it over everybody,  
now wrapped in her rags scorns all she does not know.

### **15 WORK**

Castilian agriculture consists of small family farms that raise barley, wheat, grapes, sugar beets, cork, tobacco, olives, and other crops. Many farms also raise poultry and livestock, and almost all farm families have at least one or two pigs. Income from the family farm is usually supplemented by a small business or by salaried jobs—often in government—held by one or more family members. Tourism is a major employer in the city of Burgos, and Valladolid is an industrial center and grain market. Food processing plants employ many workers in Salamanca.

### **16 SPORTS**

The most popular sports in Castile are soccer (called *fútbol*) and bullfighting. Bullfighting events are often conducted during fiestas. Spaniards have a love for sports and events that involve big crowds and loud cheering. Other favorite sports include cycling, fishing, hunting, golf, tennis, and horseback riding. Horse racing takes place in Madrid at Zarzuela Hippodrome.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Spaniards spend more time and money on collective celebrations than any other country in the world. Castile's warm climate fosters an active nightlife in its cities, much of it outdoors in streets, plazas, taverns, and restaurants. These are known as fiestas, and they are a strong part of the culture. After work, Castilians often go for a stroll (*paseo*), stopping to chat with neighbors along the way or meet friends at a local café. A dinner date in Madrid may take place as late as 10:00 or 11:00 pm, followed by a trip to a local club. Sunday afternoon is another traditional time for a stroll. Castilians, like people throughout Spain, also enjoy relaxing at home with their favorite television programs. The dance of Jota is known in Castile, and the bolero is a dance that has been performed in La Mancha since the 16th century.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Castilian pottery is typically decorated with brightly colored pictures of birds and other animals. Fine swords have been made of Toledo steel—famous for its strength and flexibility—since the Middle Ages. Craftspeople continue this tradition to the present day, inlaying the steel with gold and silver and crafting intricate designs on swords, jewelry, and other objects. The Spanish government has taken steps to ensure that traditional crafts, or *artenia*, survive against competition from mechanized industry.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

As in other rural areas of Spain, Castile has suffered from a high rate of emigration since World War II. Between 1960 and 1975, the population of Castile and León declined from 2.85 million to 2.55 million; that of Castile-La Mancha dropped from 1.38 to 1.04 million. The Castilian provinces of Avila,

Palencia, Segovia, Soria, and Zamora had smaller populations in 1975 than in 1900.

Because of its long coastline, Spain has had many problems with foreign parties in North Africa, Latin America, and Europe, trafficking drugs along the border. The country also has problems with alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, as do other modern nations.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

Spain has historically been a male-dominated society, and women have stood in the background for much longer than in other Western European countries. The women's movement began in 1976 with marches in Madrid. Spain's 1978 constitution included an equality clause for all Spaniards, thereby creating a legal basis for women's equality. The most offensive restrictions on women's rights took place during the Franco era. During the 1980s, women gained more rights to ownership and property. Laws allowing women to seek sanctuary from abuse were created at this time. Divorce laws were enacted in 1977.

Homosexuals were highly repressed under the Franco regime—more so than any where in modern Europe, with the exception of the Salazar regime in Portugal. The 1978 constitution, however, gave homosexuals equal rights. The 1960s and 1970s brought far more tourism to Spain, exposing urban areas to gay culture. In all, 80% of homosexuals in Spain live as couples, a reflection of the country's strong sense of family and the importance of relationships. As of 2008 Spain was one of five countries in the world that had legalized same-sex marriage.

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—revised by C. Corrigan

# CATALANS

**LOCATION:** Spain (Catalonia region in the northeast)

**POPULATION:** About 7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Catalan

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Catalan people live in an area of northeast Spain—Catalonia—that was officially declared an autonomous region in 1979. Historically, Catalonia also included Andorra, the Balearic Islands, and the French department (or province) called Pyrenees Orientales—areas where speakers of the Catalan language can still be found. Following centuries of foreign rule by the Romans, Visigoths, and Moors, Catalonia became an independent political entity in AD 988 and united with the kingdom of Aragon in 1137. Together, the two regions established an empire that eventually extended to Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, and Greece. After the marriage of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in the 15th century united the kingdoms of Aragon and Catalonia with those of Castile and León, the Catalans struggled for centuries to preserve their political and cultural identity. In the mid-17th century, part of their territory—called Roselló—was incorporated into France, and a bid for Catalan independence in the following century failed.

However, by the 19th century Catalonia had become a major economic power in Spain due to the growth of trade and the coming of industrialization, an area in which it was a pioneer. It has remained one of Spain's wealthiest and most developed regions, attracting large numbers of immigrants from the south throughout the 20th century. During the years of Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975), Catalan regionalism was suppressed and the local language outlawed. Following Franco's death and the installation of a democratic national government, Catalonia attained the status of an autonomous region—the Generalitat de Catalunya—with its capital at Barcelona.

In 1992 it gained the international spotlight as host to the summer Olympic games. The same year marked an economic milestone for the region, together with the rest of Spain, as the country was fully integrated into the European Community. Autonomous Catalan government has a Statut d'Autonomia; in August 2006 a reformed version of the Statut was approved.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Covering an area of roughly 32,000 sq km (1,236 sq mi)—about the size of Maryland—Catalonia is located in Spain's northeastern corner. It is bound to the north by the Pyrenees mountains, to the east and south by the Mediterranean Sea, to the southwest by Valencia, and to the west by Aragon. The region is dominated by the Pyrenees; its highest point is Pico de Aneto at 3,404 m (11,176 ft). Its coastline includes the cliffs and coves of the Costa Brava, and the Ebro river, flowing to the Mediterranean, marks its border with Valencia. Catalonia is divided into four administrative provinces: Lleida, Girona, Barcelona, and Tarragona. The Catalan-speaking co-principality of Andorra, in the Pyrenees, is an independent country.

As of 2006 Catalonia had a population of 7,134,697 million people, roughly 15% of Spain's total population. Much of

the region's population growth—up from barely 2 million in 1900—is due to immigration, as the Catalan people themselves have a relatively low birth rate. Over one-fourth of the region's inhabitants live in Barcelona, whose population numbers over 1.5 million.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Catalan, a Romance language like French, Italian, and Castilian Spanish, is the official language of Catalonia and is also spoken, with regional varieties, in Andorra, the Balearic Islands, and the French department (or province) of Pyrenees Orientales. Road signs in Catalonia are printed in both Catalan and the national language, Castilian. Catalan is similar to the Provençal language spoken in the south of France. From the 1930s to the mid-1970s, Catalan, like other regional languages in Spain, was suppressed by the Franco regime. Now that the language can be heard on television and radio and is taught in the schools, the number of Catalan speakers is rising by about 20,000 each year, although Catalan is still spoken by only half the population. However, most residents of Catalonia claim they can understand it even if they are not proficient speakers. The Institut d'Estudis Catalans deals with all elements of Catalan culture, and works on standardizing the Catalan language.

The most common Catalan names are Jordi (the equivalent of George) for men and Montserrat for women. Núria is also a popular woman's name. Catalan was the official host language for the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.

#### EXAMPLES

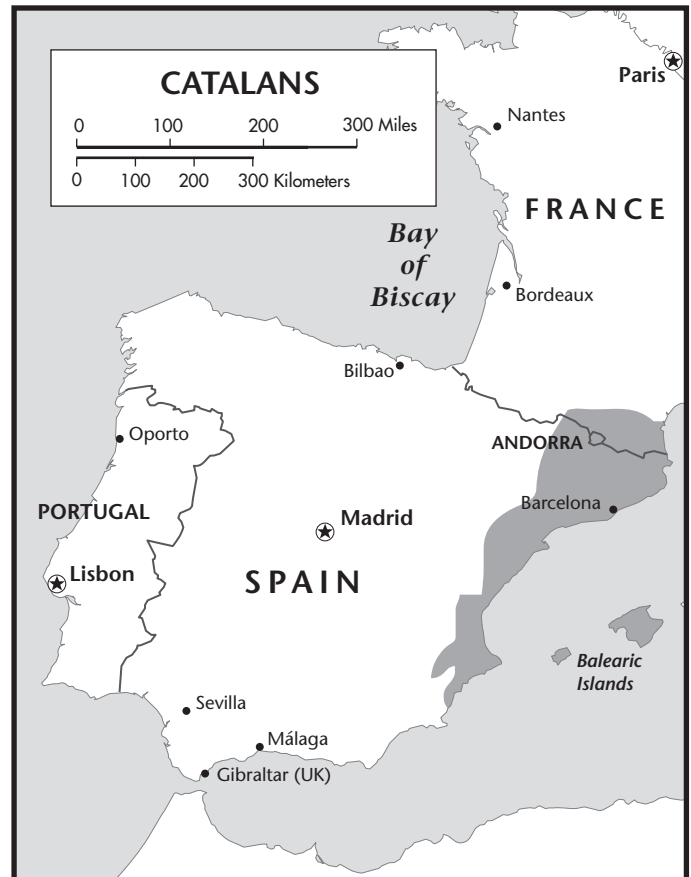
beach	platja
good day	bon dia
please	si us plau
welcome	benvinguts
common sense	seny

### 4 FOLKLORE

Catalan folkloric tradition is distinctive and very rich. A few examples are the *sardana*, a purely Catalan dance, and the *habaneras*, choral songs characteristic of the marine localities of the Costa Brava. Many of the religious festivities, like the Patron Saint Day (Festa Major) have a folkloric component, and it is customary to have civic processions in which *gegants* and *capgrossos* are paraded (Section 6, *Major Holidays*), or to have competitions of *colles* (teams) of *castellers*. A *castell* is a human tower built during festivities in many places in Catalonia, and its members usually come from the town of Valls, in the southern part of the country.

Fire has a predominant role in many festivals, and *correfocs* are amongst the most striking of them. The name comes from groups of men dressed as devils that dance in the streets and throw firecrackers and small rockets. The Feast of La Merced that takes place in Barcelona in September features an enormous *correfoc* that include fire-breathing dragons. Perhaps the most spectacular of the Catalan fire festivals is the nocturnal Patum of Berga in June, which incorporates dances featuring angels, demons, and mythic characters and animals.

Traditional male Catalan garb includes the distinctive *barretina*, a sock-shaped red woolen hat that can be seen at festivals, often worn with a white shirt and black slacks and vest.



Women's traditional festive costumes include much elaborate lacework in both black and white.

### 5 RELIGION

The majority of Catalans, like most other people in Spain, are Roman Catholics. However, the industrialization and modernization of Catalonia, as well as outside cultural influences, have decreased the role of religion in the lives of many people in the region. While most Catalans mark major events such as baptism and marriage with the appropriate religious ritual, many are not regular churchgoers. A 1967 law guarantees freedom of religion in Spain. The recent waves of immigration, especially during the 1990s, have led to an increasing number of Muslims, who have about a million members in Spain. Islam is today the second largest religion in the country, after Roman Catholicism. Other religious minorities include Protestants, evangelical Christians, and Jews. Due to its flourishing industry, Catalonia attracts a steady influx of immigrants, both from the south of Spain and from abroad.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to the standard holidays of the Christian calendar, other religious dates celebrated in Catalonia include Epiphany (*Reis*) on January 6; Pentecost; the Feast of St. George (*Sant Jordi*), Catalonia's patron saint, on April 23; and several summer festivals marked by fires and fireworks, including the feasts of St. Anthony on June 13 (in Balears), St. John, on June 24, and St. Peter on June 29. The Day of the Dead (*Dia dels Difunts*)

is celebrated on November 2. Instead of Maundy Thursday, which is observed elsewhere in Spain, the Catalans celebrate Easter Monday. Boxing Day, one day after Christmas, is also observed. The Catalan national holiday is *La Diada* on September 11. Towns and villages celebrate their individual saints' days every year in a "main festival," or *festa major*, climaxing in an all-night dance that begins as late as 11:00 PM and can last until dawn. All Catalan festivals are marked by the dancing of the *sardana*, the Catalan national dance. Another typical feature is the presence of ritual figures called giants (*gegants*), enormous papier-mâché forms up to 4.5 m (15 ft) high, and bigheads (*capgrossos*), big painted cardboard heads that men wear over their own. They go through the streets and dance accompanied by a group of musicians (*donzainers*). Each town has its own *gegants* and *capgrossos*, and they enter gatherings (*aplecs*) and competitions.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Besides baptism, first Communion and marriage could be considered rites of passage for Catalans, as with most Spaniards. These events are the occasion, in most cases, for large and expensive social gatherings in which the family shows its generosity and economic status. Compulsory military service, another rite of passage, was abolished in Spain in 2001. The armed forces are now all volunteer.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Catalans have a strong sense of national, cultural and linguistic identity, and generally have a reputation for being hard-working, ambitious, and conservative. Since the 1960s, there has been a steady improvement in the Spanish economy mainly due to industrial development and tourism, as well as an evolution in customs. The Catalans frequently travel abroad and have adopted customs from other cultures in the last 25 years or so. The economic prosperity has allowed many people to also have a vacation home in the country or an apartment at the beach.

In the cities, office hours begin at 9:00 AM and traditionally include an extended afternoon lunch break beginning at 2:00 PM. Workers then return to their offices from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. The day typically ends with a walk (*paseo*) with friends or family and/or visits to neighborhood bars for a few drinks, appetizers (*tapas*) and conversation. Dinner is often eaten as late as 10:30 PM. In some places, such as Barcelona, however, the traditional afternoon siesta is no longer the rule. Both blue and white collar workers have a paid month vacation which they usually spend by the sea, in the mountains, or travelling abroad. Travel to faraway or exotic places has become quite popular due to the affordable travel packages offered by travel agencies. Like other Spaniards, the Catalans are considered to be friendly and outgoing. It is customary to shake hands and in a social setting women usually kiss their friends on both cheeks. Young groups are formed by co-workers, fellow students or people from the same town that go together to discotheques, organize parties and excursions, and date among themselves. The average citizen spends a great deal of time out of the house. There is an active street life; many people live downtown, frequent bars and restaurants, and go to bed late. Spaniards move from place to place less frequently than Americans and, once they get a job, many aspire to return to their birthplace and settle there. Regional loyalties are usual-

ly strong and the new autonomous status of the old provinces has strengthened this feeling. It is not unusual to have lifelong friends known since kindergarten.

### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Catalonia today is a consumer society that relies on credit cards, loves to go shopping, and is interested in cars, gadgets, and entertainment. Cars are commonplace and have become a problem in big cities (parking, pollution, congested traffic, car theft). The public transportation system is excellent and thus many people who work in cities have moved to towns in the periphery that are now part of suburbia. Catalonia has an excellent system of highways and bus services, and RENFE, Spain's national rail network, connects all major cities and is developing a service of ultrarapid trains, called AVE. The first of this kind was the Madrid-Sevilla line started for the 1992 World Expo, and it was followed by the Madrid-Barcelona line. There is also a Catalan railway company that services Catalonia. It has bus links with most large European cities, and Barcelona has a clean, well-lighted, modern subway system. Major ports include Barcelona and Tarragona, on the Mediterranean. The region has three international airports; the principal airline serving Barcelona is *Iberia*, the major Spanish air carrier. In the years preceding the 1992 summer Olympics, a large-scale urban redevelopment program was undertaken in Barcelona. It included a new marina for pleasure cruisers housing Olympic visitors, as well as new highways and a new airport. In addition, 2,000 new apartments were created.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Economic interests have traditionally played an important role in rural, and even some urban, marriages. According to custom, the older son (*l'hereu*) inherited all the family property, which resulted in the creation of many wealthy estates but also in a high rate of emigration. In cities the nuclear family makes up the household, while in the country a family may include grandparents as well as aunts and uncles. The last three decades have seen a weakening of family ties among many Catalans. Today's Spanish families are much smaller than in the past and usually have two children, and the mother has most of the responsibility for rearing them. In general, when children reach adolescence, their relationship with their families diverges based on gender. A teenage male, while continuing to revere his mother, begins spending much of his time with other young men, while teenage daughters and their mothers grow closer than ever. Even after a daughter is grown and married, her mother continues to play a prominent role in her life. Yet these traditional patterns are also changing and young men and women are as independent as their economy allows it. Today people live longer lives, have fewer children than before—actually the birth-rate is one of the lowest in Europe—and fewer people live in their homes with extended family members. Spanish people usually marry within their own social class. Only church marriages were recognized in Spain until 1968, when civil ceremonies were first allowed by law. Divorce has been legal since the 1980s.

### 11 CLOTHING

Like in the rest of Spain, both in town and in the country, Catalans conform to the average European fashion standards, and boutiques and ready-to-wear shops can be found all over the

country. Although many young people wear sports clothes and blue jeans, the average Catalan pays more attention to personal appearance than his or her American counterpart. Businessmen wear a suit and tie, businesswomen dress fashionably in suits or dresses and high heels. The Catalan fashion industry has greatly developed, and it is an important source of income; it produces over 90% of Spain's textiles.

## 12 FOOD

Catalonia has a rich culinary tradition. The earliest Spanish cookbook in existence—the *Llibre de Sent Sovi*—was written in the Catalan language in the 14th century. Typically Mediterranean flavors predominate in Catalan cuisine: olive oil, garlic, onions, tomatoes, nuts, and dried fruits. A favorite Catalan dish is *escudella i carn d'olla*, a boiled meal-in-a-pot comparable to the French *pot-au-feu*. Meats and sausages are simmered with vegetables; the broth is then served with pasta as a first course, with the rest served as an entrée. Catalonia is known for its fish casseroles and for cured and smoked meats, such as *butifarra*, a type of sausage. Popular seafood includes squid, crab, shrimp, fresh sardines and tuna, salmon, trout, and dried and salted codfish.

A Catalan staple, eaten as a snack or a meal accompaniment, is *pa amb tomàquet*, bread smeared with tomato and sprinkled with oil and salt. *Coca* is the name given to a type of bread that can either be served with a meal in a style that resembles the *pa amb tomàquet* (with tomato or garlic, oil, salt, and other toppings such as anchovies) or as a dessert, topped with pine nuts and sugar or crystallized fruit. Other popular desserts include *crema catalana*, a custard dish topped with caramel; pine nut tarts over *cabell d'angel*, caramelized spaghetti squash; and *postre de músic*, or “musician's dessert,” the mixture of dried fruit and nuts traditionally given to traveling musicians. Catalan wine and champagne (*cava*), are excellent and are exported both to Europe and the Americas. Catalans are especially fond of mushrooms, of which about six dozen edible varieties grow in their homeland, and mushrooms often appear sautéed as an hors d'oeuvre (*tapas*) or as an ingredient in soups, sauces, and stews.

Today's Catalan avant-garde cuisine is well known all over the world: famous chefs are Carme Ruscalleda and Ferrán Adrià, who with his El Bulli Restaurant in the Costa Brava tops the *European Restaurant Ranking*.

## 13. EDUCATION

Catalan children, like other Spanish children, receive free, compulsory schooling from the ages of 6 to 16, when many students begin the three-year *bachillerato* course of study, after which they may opt for either one year of college preparatory study or vocational training. Schooling is both public and private. Today the study of the Catalan language is required in the region's schools. University education is general. Spain has 31 state-run universities and an increasing number of private ones. Students receive a diploma after three years of general study and a *Licenciatura* upon completing a program of specialized study lasting two or more years. Barcelona has three excellent universities; Universidad Central, Universidad Autónoma, and the most recent, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, a creation of the Catalan Government; there are several other universities, both public and private, in the rest of Cataluña.



A record-setting ten-story human pyramid in Tarassa, a Catalan town, Spain. Creating human pyramids, also known as “Castells,” is a tradition based in the Catalan region. (AP Images/EFE/Ignes)

The Biblioteca Nacional de Cataluña was one of the first libraries in Spain.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Catalonia has an impressive cultural heritage. Catalan art and architecture is especially prominent in connection with two widely separated periods in the history of art and architecture, Romanesque and modernist. The region contains some 2,000 buildings erected during the Romanesque period, which flourished from around AD 1000 to 1250 (as well as half a dozen impressive Gothic cathedrals). At the turn of the 19th century, the Modernist style was championed by architects like Antoni Gaudí, the builder of the Sagrada Família church (The Sacred Family), a Catalan shrine, Casa Milá and La Pedrera. Modernist painters are Ramón Casas and Santiago Rusiñol. Among the moderns, the great Catalan names are those of Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí, and Antoni Tàpies. Pablo Picasso, perhaps the single most powerful influence on 20th-century art, was not Catalan but spent his formative years in the city devoted to their work. Barcelona has a new Museum of Contemporary Art.

In the middle of the 19th century Cataluña enjoyed a literary revival, called the *Renaixença*, spearheaded by the poet and priest Jacint Verdaguer. Modernism followed, and then *Noucentisme*. Well-known 20th-century writers include Salvador Espriu, Mercé Rodoreda, Manuel de Pedrolo, and Llorenç

Villalonga. Cataluña is also well represented in the world of music by cellist Pablo Casals and opera singers Montserrat Caballé and Josep Carreras.

Catalan culture was a Guest of Honor at the 2007 Frankfurt Fair.

## 15 WORK

Catalonia—one of the top five industrialized regions of Europe—has been called “the factory of Spain.” Catalan industrialization began with textile production in the 19th century. Other important industries include chemicals, leather, construction materials, automobiles, and appliances. The region also has the greatest number of small high-tech companies in Spain. *La Caixa* savings bank is the most powerful of its kind in Europe. The *Fira* de Barcelona (the Industrial and Commercial Fair of Barcelona) organizes conventions and exhibits of international character in various sectors of the economy.

Since the early 1970s Spain has developed a prosperous tourism industry. Since the 1970s Spain has been the second most visited country in the world after France. In 2007 almost 60 million foreign visitors arrived in Spain. Among the preferred destinations are the Costa Brava beaches and the city of Barcelona. Parallel to summer tourism Catalonia offers cultural tours, international conventions and sports meetings, as well as cruises. There is ample hotel accommodation as well as bed-and-breakfast *Turismo rural* (Country tourism) places and a network of beautiful deluxe Spanish-government-sponsored hotels (*Paradores*) located in historical buildings.

About 10% of economically active Catalans are engaged in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry, 45% in industry, and 45% in the service sector. Seeking higher living standards, many people migrate from the countryside to the cities and to industrialized areas, like Barcelona and other parts of Cataluña. Spain's economic prosperity attracts a growing work force (some it enters the country illegally) coming from economically or politically unstable areas. It mainly comes from North- and Sub-Saharan Africa, Spanish America and the East of Europe. The majority work in agriculture and in construction.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular sport is soccer (called *fútbol*). League matches are played on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from September through May, with tournaments in the summer. Madrid has two teams in the top division, and Barcelona's team, known as *Barsa*, is world-famous. It forms the basis of a sporting club, with over 100,000 members, one of the oldest such clubs in Europe. Membership passes from father to son, and some 80,000 members, called *culés*, have permanent seats for matches in the Camp Nou stadium, the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world. The Futbol Club Barcelona is a Catalan institution, as they say, *Més que un club* (“More than a club”). The 1992 Olympics were hosted in Barcelona. Basketball and tennis are also gaining popularity as spectator sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Catalans generally vacation in their own region, although they also enjoy traveling abroad to other countries. Participant sports include *fútbol*, cycling, squash, hunting and fishing, sailing, tennis, golf, and horseback riding, hiking or climbing in the Pyrenees. Winter sports include Nordic and cross-coun-

try skiing, ice skating, and ice hockey. There are many excellent beaches in the Costa Brava and the Costa Daurada, and ski resorts in the Pyrenees.

Many, especially the young, prefer to go to the beach in summer and to the countryside and the mountains for hikes and picnics. In the evenings, they go dancing or have a drink with friends. The mild climate has fostered an active night life, much of it outdoors in the streets, plazas, taverns, and restaurants. A dinner date may take place as late as 10:00 or 11:00 pm and be followed by a trip to a local club.

The fine arts have played an important role in the Catalonian heritage, and according to their cultural level, Catalans enjoy frequenting the opera houses, theaters, and museums in Barcelona and other cities. Like other people in Spain, the Catalans enjoy go to concerts, to the theater, and to movies, and watching television; most TV stations in the region broadcast in the Catalan language.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Catalan national dance is the *sardana*, a circle dance universally performed at festivals and other special occasions throughout the country. The dancers form a circle, holding their clasped hands high in the air. Short, sedate steps alternate with longer, bouncy ones, and dancers must pay close attention to the music to know when it is time for each type of step. While the *sardana* only attained its present form in the 19th century, it is based on an older dance that was formerly held in the open air after certain church services. The bands that play music for the *sardana* are called *coblas* and consist of the *flabiol*, a three-holed flute that is played with one hand while the player beats a small elbow drum called a *tabal*; woodwind instruments called *tenoras* and *tibles*; the brass *trompeta*, *fiscorn*, and *trombó*; and the *contrabaix*, or double bass. A regular *sardana* session, or *audació*, consists of half a dozen dances, each lasting about 10 minutes. Marathon sessions called *aplecs*, however, include 24 dances played by three or four different *coblas* and last all day. Group singing is very popular among Catalans, and many belong to traditional Catalan choirs.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As Spain's most prosperous region, Catalonia has been spared many social problems, and Catalan efforts to maintain cultural identity and independence—unlike those of the Basques—have remained peaceful, centering largely on the Catalan language, whose use was forbidden during the Franco era and previously as well. The traditional Catalan family structure has been weakened in the postwar decades, and immigration to the region has resulted in social and cultural discrimination and sometimes violent conflict. With the rest of the developed countries of the world Spain shares a drug problem and crime in the big cities.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Like in the rest of Spain, Catalan women have an increasingly prominent role in society. Approximately 15% of Spain's armed forces are women and the Defense Secretary in 2008 was a woman. Many women hold municipal and government posts as councilwoman, mayor, university professor, or director general, and several have been, and are, ministers of the crown, employed or manage businesses, and a large percentage go to the university. Evidence of the secular nature of contemporary

Spain can be seen in the widespread support for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Spain; in June 2005 a bill was passed to allow gay marriage, making Spain the third country in the world to allow same-sex couples to marry.

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—revised by S. Garcia Castaneda

# CHECHENS

**LOCATION:** Chechnya territory between Russia and Georgia

**POPULATION:** Unknown

**LANGUAGE:** Chechen, Russian

**RELIGION:** Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Chechens (Nokhchii, singular Nokhchuo) inhabit a small territory in the Caucasus Mountains between the Russian and Georgian republics. Throughout their long history in the Caucasus Mountains, their strong sense of national pride has kept them prepared to fight to retain their homeland. The mountainous territory has protected them not only from enemies but from outside influences in general. Thus, the Chechens have retained many traditional customs and practices.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Chechen people and their territory have been threatened. In particular, the Chechens have struggled against Russian interference. During the 19th century, the Chechens joined other peoples of the North Caucasus to defend their territories from Russian attack. These struggles, known as the Caucasian Wars, lasted over 70 years. The Chechens gained a reputation for being the most determined, skillful, and aggressive fighters among the North Caucasian peoples. Ultimately, the Russian forces, which substantially outnumbered the North Caucasian fighters, were victorious. The Chechens and others who were involved in the wars were brutally repressed, and many were killed as the Russians attempted to consolidate their power in the territory. Large numbers of Chechens were forced to flee, with many emigrating to Turkey.

When the Russian monarchy collapsed in 1917 and Soviet power replaced the Tsarist regime, the Chechens experienced a brief period of relative freedom as part of the short-lived Republic of Mountain Peoples. In the 1920s, the early years after the imposition of Soviet government, the state granted the Chechens considerable opportunity to express and develop their national culture. The state even assisted the Chechens, providing linguists and other expert scholars to help the Chechens develop a standard national alphabet. This alphabet, based on Latin rather than Cyrillic characters (like English rather than Russian letters) bore some resemblance to modern Turkish.

This period of relaxation ended by the late 1920s, as Iosif Stalin (himself of Caucasian origin) emerged as the new Soviet leader. Chechen schools were forced to expand their Russian language curriculum, the publication of Chechen-language books and newspapers was curtailed, and the public practice of Chechen cultural and religious customs was restricted. This repression heightened throughout the 1930s. Many political and cultural leaders among the Chechens were arrested, exiled, or executed. This situation culminated in the late 1930s with the arrest of many local cultural leaders, whose activity was seen by the Soviet government as dangerous and subversive. In response, many Chechens participated in armed resistance. The Soviet government had difficulty containing the Chechens, as the Soviet Union was preparing to fight Nazi Germany in World War II.



Despite the difficult relations between the Chechens and the Soviet regime, however, the Chechens supported the struggle against Nazi Germany and contributed to the Soviet victory. Nevertheless, the Soviets continued to view the Chechens as a threat. Soviet suspicion of the Chechens led to the brutal deportation of the entire Chechen population in the winter of 1944. In the course of a few days, the people of Chechnya were rounded up by the Soviet army and secret police, loaded into boxcars, and transported to remote regions of Kazakhstan, Central Asia. Many died on the way, and many more died in their harsh, new living conditions. Those who survived were denounced as traitors and suffered severe discrimination. During this period, Chechens were often denied employment opportunities or entrance to schools and universities. They were not permitted to assemble in groups or to engage in their traditional cultural practices. Despite these brutal conditions, some Chechens were still able to publish and circulate a secret Chechen newspaper during the years of exile.

After Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev rose to power. Under this new leadership, the Soviet government began to reconsider the Stalinist decision to deport the Chechen people. In 1956, the Chechens were permitted to return to their homeland. Although they had spent over a decade in exile, the Chechens returned in massive numbers to their native territory. Conflicts arose when the returning Chechens discovered that, in their absence, new settlers—many of whom were ethnic Russians—had taken over their territories. Clashes and animosity between Chechens and Russians living within Chechen

territories have persisted down to the present. The difficult relations between the two groups heightened the long-standing Chechen resentment of Russia.

The Chechen people have, in general, adhered strongly to their cultural practices and customs, resisting active attempts by the Soviet government to stifle Chechen cultural self-expression. Soviet policies of Russification (Russianization) in Chechnya were not effective, and Chechen intellectuals attempted to strengthen Chechen culture from the 1960s to the early 1980s.

By the mid- to late 1980s, under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the state's policies toward freedom of expression grew more permissive. Thus, Chechens began to work energetically on their cultural development. However, this relatively free political climate provided the Chechens with opportunities to discuss the possibility of splitting from the Soviet Union and forming an independent, sovereign Chechen state. By August 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet system and rise of Russian president Boris Yeltsin, ideas of national independence gained widespread support in Chechnya.

In November 1991, the Chechens formed a government under leader Dzhokhar Dudaev and declared Chechnya an independent state. Boris Yeltsin immediately contested the declaration and refused to negotiate with Dudaev. Tensions between Russia and Chechnya continued to escalate and, in December 1994, Russia launched an air attack on Chechnya, precipitating a brutal war. Although severely outnumbered, the Chechens managed to prevent Russia from gaining control in Chechnya. The war lasted for nearly two years, with massive casualties on both the Chechen and Russian sides. Much of Chechnya was destroyed.

Fighting came to an end in 1996 when General Alexander Lebed successfully negotiated a cease-fire treaty between the two sides. However, the treaty did not resolve the issue of Chechnya's independence. Instead, the treaty postponed the issue until the year 2000, when a referendum of Chechen citizens was to be held on the question of independence from Russia. Chechnya continued to consider itself an independent state, and Russia continued to treat Chechnya as part of the Russian federation. Dissension, desperate economic conditions, and armed bands created a violent and chaotic period between August 1996, when a cease fire was signed, and October 1999, when Russia once again invaded Chechnya. During the interval between wars Chechnya grew to be dangerous, with numerous kidnappings and murders. In August 1999 the warlord, Shamil Basaev, invaded the Andi highlands of Dagestan. Russia was suddenly confronted with the prospect of losing Dagestan. Although Basaev retreated, Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, launched a second war in October 1999. Major fighting began to die down in 2006, after the death of Basaev, but sporadic fighting persists and the future of Chechnya remains an open question.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Chechen territory is located between Russia and Georgia in the Caucasus Mountains, between the Black and Caspian seas. The mountainous terrain has been strategically important for Chechnya. Chechen fighters have been able to withdraw into their familiar, mountainous territory, hiding and launching attacks from well-concealed bases. Thus, they have



fought successfully against opponents of greater strength and numbers.

The mountains also support sheep-farming, the traditional Chechen occupation. The flatter territories of Chechnya accommodate other industries. Until the destruction of Chechnya in the recent wars with Russia, Chechnya had a major oil-refining industry, as well as an important pipeline that transported oil to Russia.

From 1934 to 1992 Chechnya shared official boundaries with the neighboring Ingush people, in a republic called Checheno-Ingushetia. The 1989 Soviet census reflected conditions in the former Checheno-Ingushetian Republic. In 1989, 957,000 Chechens lived in Checheno-Ingushetia, comprising 57.8% of the population. Ingush and ethnic Russians accounted for 13% and 23%, respectively. Because the Chechens maintained a majority in the republic, they had greater opportunity than other groups to develop their cultural and political identity.

The breakup of Checheno-Ingushetia was precipitated by the Chechen decision to form an independent state and the Ingush decision to remain a part of the Russian Federation. The two nations had been long-standing allies, with similar languages and cultures. The split was remarkably peaceful and free of contention. Local ethnic Russians living in Checheno-Ingushetia did not play a prominent role in this process. Many Russians left the territory in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concerned about rising anti-Russian sentiment among Chechens and Ingush. Because of the devastating war with Russia, and the large number of Chechen casualties, it is difficult to know how many Chechens live in Chechnya. The 2002 census lists 1.1 million Chechens and 361,000 Ingush. During the wars many Chechens fled as refugees to other areas of the Caucasus, especially Ingushetia, which welcomed them. The capital city, Grozny, has been reduced to rubble by repeated shelling and air raids. During the present time of relative peace and stability, rebuilding is underway under the appointed governor, Ramazan Kadyrov, who has conscripted many former Chechen fighters into his security apparatus.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Chechen language is unique to the Caucasus region and not related to any languages outside of this region. Within the Caucasus, only the Ingush language (the language of the neighboring Ingushetians) and Batsby or Kisti of northern Georgia are closely related to Chechen. These three languages form a distinct branch of the Northeast Caucasian family, which includes the Dagestani languages.

Until 1991, Chechnya had two official languages, Chechen and Russian. Russian was taught in all schools, and many radio and television broadcasts were in Russian. A working knowledge of Russian was required for any prestigious or important job; consequently, most Chechens had a fluent command of Russian. One effect of the wars has been an interruption in education. Consequently, many young Chechens no longer have a command of Russian. After 1991, Chechen national identity and rising anti-Russian sentiment resulted in movements to purify the Chechen language and increase its use. Thus, a Chechen thesaurus prepared in the early 1990s replaced many words derived from Russian with new, Chechen equivalents. A new school curriculum to increase Chechen language teaching was developed, and Chechens tried to increase the number of publications and media broadcasting in the native language.

With the new president the situation with Russian language turned to the old times again and currently there is a bilingual system in Chechnya.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Because the Chechens did not develop a widely-used written language until the early 20th century, folklore was passed on orally from generation to generation. The traditional epic folk tale, which can be found in various forms throughout the Caucasus, was a traditional folkloric form. Such tales feature stories of heroism, hardship, and sacrifice, reinforcing values of bravery and personal or family honor. The Chechens used these folk tales to present historical events. Thus, events of the Caucasian Wars, the deportations, and the hardships suffered during the Soviet period are expressed in traditional form, passing stories of national survival to the next generation. The Chechens (and Ingush) also had a distinctive tradition of Nart lore, ancient and garbled tales about a race of heroes.

### 5 RELIGION

Islam is the traditional Chechen religion. Despite efforts of the atheistic Soviet regime to eradicate the practice of Islam, the Chechens continued to adhere strongly to their religion throughout the years of Soviet power. However, because the practice of Islam was not permitted during these years, many conventions of Islam, particularly public prayers, were not maintained. Instead, a sect of Islam called Sufism gained strength in Chechnya. Because Sufism emphasized secrecy and mysticism, it was well-suited to the need to observe religion in secrecy during the Soviet period.

Islam remained a strong force among Chechens. The weakening of Soviet repression during the late 1980s intensified the public expression of religion. The daily prayers (*namaz*) were heard again, religious publications became more widely available, and people began to make the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca. Traditional dress, featuring head-covering for both men and women, became more widespread. The public celebration of major Islamic festivals, such as Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr, also increased. However, like most cultural practices in Chechnya, the development and revival of organized, publicly-observed religion was disrupted by the wars with Russia.

As the second war has wound down, some Chechens have returned to Groznyj. Now, large groups of men are allowed to gather to perform the circle dance, the *zikr* (Arabic *dhikr*), a form of mystic prayer. The Chechen *zikr* is unique in the Muslim world. It is so intense that the chanting and rhythmic movement of the men can be heard blocks away.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

During the years of Soviet power, the celebration of religious or national Chechen holidays was discouraged. In particular, traditional celebrations were curtailed during the deportations in the 1940s, when the Chechen people were dispersed throughout various regions and harshly repressed. Even after their repatriation and return to their homeland, the Chechens were still restricted by Soviet authorities from celebrating their religious holidays.

The Soviet holiday of the Day of the Revolution (October 7) has been turned into the National Pride day of Russia and is celebrated in Chechnya, too. The Day of International Socialism (May 1) is still an official holiday. People are not required to

attend work on these days, and the holidays are often marked by state-sponsored fireworks and cultural displays. New Year's Day, another holiday acceptable to Soviet power, was widely celebrated.

After the collapse of Soviet power and the Chechen declaration of independence in 1991, the Chechen government tried to create new holidays. In particular, November 9 was declared a national holiday in celebration of Chechen independence. The Chechens also celebrate Deportation Day on February 23. Religious holidays have regained popularity. The 1994–96 war with Russia, however, interfered with the replacement of Soviet holidays by the new Chechen holidays. The social fabric now remains damaged, and holidays seem not to be particularly important.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When a baby is born, he or she is registered with the local authorities, giving the birth date and name. Even in contemporary Chechen society, the birth of a boy is viewed as an especially important occasion. Family and friends hold celebrations welcoming the new son. Boys are usually circumcised in a traditional ceremony, in adherence to Islamic requirements. The festivities surrounding the birth of a daughter are much more modest.

In contemporary society, a child's first day of school, which begins in the first grade at the age of seven, is viewed as an important transition toward greater maturity. For males, this process is completed when they leave school and choose careers.

Traditionally, Chechens married young. Men usually married by the time they were 16 or 17, and many girls married before they were 14. Marriage marked the end of childhood and the initiation into the responsibilities of adult life. Young Chechens did not have a distinct teenage period in which they could enjoy greater independence without yet assuming adult roles. In contemporary Chechen society, most young people spend some time in high school, and many go on to university, enabling them to enjoy some years of relative freedom before assuming adult roles. However, by North American standards, the teenage period for Chechens is brief. Even today, many young men are married by age 20, and many girls marry at age 17 or 18. Most young couples have children soon after marriage. Once their children marry, parents gain prestige and authority in the household.

Rituals surrounding death are generally religious, although deaths are always registered with local authorities. Even during the Soviet period, death was marked by a religious ceremony. In addition, the family of the deceased generally holds a large feast for mourners.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Chechen men, as do those in Western countries, greet one another with handshakes. In most other respects, however, interpersonal behavior follows Chechen tradition. Women are expected to behave modestly and deferentially in the company of men, keeping their eyes lowered. When a man enters the room, women stand in respect. At most social gatherings, men and women interact separately, with men congregated in one room (usually the living room), and women in another (usually the kitchen). Children remain with the women most of the time. Segregation by gender is not strictly observed in the

workplace, although there is a tendency for men and women to spend most of their time in the company of their own gender.

Chechens place great importance on displays of hospitality toward guests. In a Chechen home, guests can expect to receive the best food and the most pleasant accommodations that the hosts can afford. If a guest is not shown proper hospitality, this is regarded as shameful for the entire extended host family. This can cause some intergenerational friction, as the younger generation today tends to have a much more casual and relaxed attitude toward the treatment of guests. Visiting is an important part of Chechen social life, and guests are expected to return invitations and extend hospitality to those who have entertained them in the past.

Chechen clans, *teips*, serve, among other things, as exogamous social units. Dating is not usually part of Chechen social life. Premarital sexual relations among teenagers are strongly discouraged, and such relations between young men and women can even start feuds between their families. Marriages are sometimes arranged by families, as each family is seeking to marry into another family of at least equal, if not superior, wealth and social standing. Many young people choose whom they will marry, although they may ask for parental approval. Young men and women generally become acquainted in public settings and have little privacy during their courtships. Chechen parents exert considerable pressure on their children to marry other Chechens. This is particularly true for women, as married women are considered to belong to the culture of their husbands.

Chechens are among the few peoples of the Caucasus who continue to observe avoidance customs in everyday life. Avoidance customs limit the contact that an individual may have with his or her in-laws. For example, according to Chechen avoidance customs, a son-in-law is not allowed to speak to, or even see, his mother-in-law. Similarly, relations between daughters-in-law and fathers-in-law are limited by avoidance customs. Because the daughter-in-law often lives with her husband's parents, avoidance between daughter-in-law and father-in-law cannot be strictly observed. However, they will often limit their contact and may speak to one another only indirectly through a third party. Even if these customs are not practiced, young Chechen women are expected to show great deference and respect to their fathers-in-law.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, most Chechens lived in isolated mountain villages. Because extended families and clan groups lived in close proximity, traditional dwellings featured several large buildings in a courtyard enclosed by a wall. The buildings of the courtyard also housed farm animals, such as cows, chickens, and horses.

The rural population of Chechnya has remained large, but many Chechens, particularly the younger ones, have chosen to move to towns and cities. Most urban residents live in apartments. However, in contrast to many other cities in the former Soviet Union, most Chechen towns and cities also have a large number of small houses, set behind walls with their own small courtyards. Even in cities, people may keep some small livestock, such as chickens.

Living conditions in Chechnya deteriorated sharply after the first war with Russia in 1994–96. Many towns, cities, and rural areas were destroyed, and thousands of people were



*Chechen refugee Zula Uzuyeva looks on while holding her granddaughter Mata in the Duisi village, a remote region of Georgia near the border with Chechnya. The area was home to about 7,000 refugees from the war in Chechnya. (AP Images/Shakh Aivazov)*

forced to flee their homes. The supply of water and electricity became unreliable. Service has been partly restored as the second war tapers off.

Maintaining an adequate food supply has always been difficult in the former Soviet Union and, in Chechnya, food selection and variety were often poor. This problem has been particularly acute for urban dwellers, whereas rural people have been able to produce and store food more easily. Since the war, the food situation has deteriorated even more. Russia stopped importing food and Chechen farmland and reserves of food were destroyed. Other basic essentials, such as medical supplies, have become difficult to obtain since the war.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditionally, Chechens lived in large, extended family units. Parents lived with their sons and the sons' wives and children in several buildings in a single large courtyard. Many rural families still live in these large family units, as the additional labor provided by family members helps to bolster the economic welfare of the whole family.

In urban areas, few families live in the traditional, extended family groups. Sons are still encouraged to start their own families in their parents' house, moving out only after several years of marriage or after the birth of the first child. One son, usually the youngest, is expected to stay and raise his family in his parents' home. Sons and their families are expected to show great respect and deference toward the son's parents,

particularly to his father. Married couples rarely live with the wife's family. Chechen men consider living in the home of their wife's father to be dishonorable.

After marriage, when a young couple moves in with the husband's parents, a bride may have a difficult adjustment period learning to adhere to the practices and instructions of other household members. The youngest wife in the household is considered the lowest person in the family hierarchy. Therefore, she usually does the bulk of the work and unpleasant tasks. However, young wives can look forward to a time when their own sons will marry and bring a new wife into the household. Although young married people almost always spend a period of time living with the groom's parents, a couple who has married without the consent of their parents may choose to live in a different town or city for a few years, until the parents accept the marriage.

Traditionally, Chechen marriages were arranged by the families of the bride and groom. The bride and groom could not be related, even distantly. They had to come from separate *teips* (clans). Young women were expected to provide a dowry of household objects, linens, livestock, and, sometimes, money to the groom's family. In turn, the groom's family paid a bride-price to the woman's household. According to Islamic law, the woman was allowed to keep her dowry, or its cash value, in the event of divorce from or death of the husband. Dowries and bride-prices were declared illegal under Soviet law, but many

families, especially those in more isolated rural regions, continue to use them to negotiate the marriage of their children.

Occasionally, if a man could not obtain the consent of the woman's family, he would arrange a "kidnapping marriage." The woman was kidnapped by the groom and some of his friends and then taken immediately to be married. Sometimes, these marriages would be prearranged between the bride and groom. However, a man may choose to kidnap and marry a woman who may have refused to give consent. Although declared illegal under Soviet law, kidnapping marriages persist to the present day. If a woman is kidnapped and objects strenuously to the marriage, her family may try to have the marriage dissolved. If the man's family is of lower social standing than the woman's, the kidnapping marriage could result in a feud between his and her relatives.

Polygamy was traditionally practiced among Chechens according to the Quranic restrictions that a man could have no more than four wives and that he must provide each with a lifestyle of equal quality. During the years of Soviet power, polygamy was outlawed and the practice ceased. However, since the fall of Soviet power and the rise in Islamic consciousness, interest in such traditional institutions as polygamous marriage has grown. Although polygamy is not widely practiced, some Chechen men take a second wife. These are often men whose first wives have either been unable to produce children or who have not given birth to sons. Such men are generally older and must also have considerable financial means, as the second wife must be provided with the same lifestyle as the first. Typically, the man will obtain a second apartment or house for the new wife. Thus, a second marriage is not only a means of bringing more children into the family, but also of displaying prestige and wealth. Most women, especially first wives, object strongly to the practice of polygamy. However, for some women, becoming a second wife is one way to gain many of the social advantages of married life and yet retain some measure of independence.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional Chechen national costumes were elaborate and very similar to the costumes worn by other Caucasian peoples. Women wore long, flowing dresses with fitted bodices. Women wore long scarves over their heads but did not cover their faces. Men's clothing was more practical, with tall leather boots and loose-fitting trousers convenient for horseback riding. Men's pride in their fighting skill and bravery in battle was expressed in their clothing, wearing tightly-belted jackets decorated with loops into which bullets (originally, silver tubes with pre-measured musket charges) were inserted. The number of bullets increased with a man's age and battle experience. Men also covered their heads, wearing tall lamb's wool hats, usually in black or grey.

In modern times, men and women wear Western-style clothing, although some men, particularly those in rural regions, continue to wear boots and loose-fitting trousers. Women always wear skirts or dresses that fall below the knee. Especially in the cities, women wear jewelry and use cosmetics. Unlike their North American or European counterparts, Chechens of both genders continue to wear head coverings. Older women often wear wool head-scarves, usually in grey or black. The head-covering of younger women is often purely symbolic, usually consisting of a silk scarf, folded and wrapped

around the head to resemble a thick headband. According to the new State law established by president Ramzan Kadyrov women must cover their heads, especially the TV broadcasters and University students. Even the female manikins must have their heads covered in the stores. Men, especially middle-aged or elderly men, still wear traditional lamb's wool hats.

Recently, as Chechen nationalism has become a widespread and powerful force, more men have adopted the traditional head covering. Sometimes, a colored band of cloth is sewn around the hats, most commonly green, the Chechen national color. White cloth bands indicate men who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. With increasing awareness of their Islamic identity, some Chechens, especially young people, have adopted very conservative Islamic dress. Some Chechen women have chosen to wear a full head covering, although the practice is not traditionally Chechen. Efforts to impose Muslim norms of dress in the cities are meeting with resistance from Chechen women.

## 12 FOOD

Lamb and mutton are staples of the Chechen diet. These meats are served in a variety of ways—roasted, stewed, or ground and shaped into patties. The internal organs of the sheep are ground together and made into a sausage-like dish. Like all Muslims, Chechens do not eat pork or pork products. Thus, pigs are not raised in Chechen agriculture.

Tomatoes, red or green peppers, or eggplants are often stuffed with a ground lamb mixture and baked. Milk products, such as butter and cheese, are also an important part of the diet. Fruits, fresh in summer and dried in winter, are the most common dessert.

Traditionally, Chechen men and women dined separately. The men ate together in the dining room as the women cooked and served the food. Then the women and children ate in the kitchen. Larger, more traditional families, where many generations are dining together, often observe this segregation today. However, younger, more-modern families tend to eat together rather than in segregation. North American visitors to traditional households will usually be invited to eat in the living room with the men, even if the visitors are women.

## 13 EDUCATION

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, before the rise of Soviet power, formal education was not a traditional part of Chechen life. The exception was for boys who were interested in a clerical career. These boys went to special Muslim academies where they were taught to read and write Arabic. Those few who were interested in administrative careers had to leave Chechen territory to learn Russian. Until the 1920s, the Chechens did not have a written language.

The Soviet government took steps to ensure that all children, both boys and girls, would receive an education. In the 1920s a written Chechen language was created and a school curriculum in both official languages (Russian and Chechen) was instituted. Education until the tenth grade was mandatory for both boys and girls. At first, parents were reluctant to send their children to school but, by the 1930s, most children were receiving at least an elementary education. A university was opened in the capital city, Groznyj.

In contemporary times, children continue to attend school until tenth grade. Universities and trade institutes offer further

career training to high school graduates. Many high school graduates, particularly boys from cities and towns, choose to continue their education. Girls sometimes do not take advantage of higher education opportunities, choosing instead to marry and raise a family. People in rural areas often remain at home and work in the family farming business.

Unfortunately, the wars with Russia have interfered with formal education. Most schools were not able to remain open during 1994–96 and have only recently (2006) begun to function again. Many educational buildings and supplies were destroyed. Primary school children in the late 1990s and early 2000s often did not have the opportunity to learn the basic skills of mathematics and literacy.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

During the years of Soviet power, the central government exercised strict control over the publication of literature and the writing of national histories. Thus, Chechen authors and historians were forced to write according to the Soviet government's version of events. Many historical events, particularly the Caucasian Wars and the 1944 deportations, were distorted. However, after the relaxation of central authority in the late 1980s, Chechens began to publish works that presented more authentically Chechen versions.

Chechens express great pride in their culture and began in the late 1990s to publish collections of Chechen memoirs and folklore. Traditional music is very percussive and energetic, with drums and accordion as the main instruments. Although European and North American classical and rock music is available in Chechnya, Chechen music is still very popular, even among young people.

As in many areas of life, artistic and cultural activity has diminished as a consequence of the wars with Russia. These severely interrupted the development of cultural renewal by many talented and innovative Chechens.

#### **15 WORK**

Traditionally, Chechens were sheep farmers, with men living a seminomadic life accompanying the herds through mountain pastures. In the 20th century, opportunities for education and urban employment have grown, and many people chose to leave farming, obtain higher education, and work in the towns or cities. Oil refining has been an important part of the Chechen economy, drawing many workers. The process of urbanization was interrupted during the Soviet period by the deportations; in addition, many Chechens became unwilling to remain in agriculture.

After the collapse of Soviet power, many jobs that had formerly been funded by the government were no longer supported. The transition from a state-driven to a market-based economy was difficult for some, who were unable to find new areas of employment. For others, the transition opened up new fields of work, such as the import/export area. Because many Chechens have links with other countries, particularly Muslim countries such as Turkey, with its large (50,000) Chechen diaspora, import/export is a popular career choice. For the most part, Chechens have made a smooth career transition to new economic conditions. Extended families are often involved in a single family business.

However, as the Chechen economy was beginning to develop, war with Russia broke out. Much of the infrastructure,

including oil refineries and pipelines, was destroyed. Because of closed borders, the import/export business became difficult. Furthermore, the local market deteriorated greatly, as many Chechens were forced into hiding. However, the current reconstruction of the country is underway, with great likelihood of economic recovery.

#### **16 SPORTS**

A popular traditional Chechen sport is horseback-riding. Riding has always been part of the job of sheepherding, but is also enjoyed as a recreational sport. Many young boys from rural areas learn to ride as they help with the herding, and become more skilled as they grow older. Recreational riding features daring tricks on horseback, and is common among young people in the countryside.

Wrestling is another popular sport. Boys start to wrestle at a young age and, as they get older, are often encouraged to pursue the sport seriously. During the Soviet years, many coaches and wrestlers on the Soviet national team were from Chechnya. Recently Chechnya has a strong soccer team Terek, which with the financial support of the Chechen president Kadyrov became one of the most famous teams in Russia.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In Chechnya, entertainment centers are around the family and the home. There are few cafés, restaurants, or theaters. Thus, most people entertain at home. Home entertainment is quite lavish and guests are treated to elaborate and lengthy meals. Visits are reciprocated, as guests are expected to entertain their hosts in their own homes at a later date.

Some socializing also takes place at work or school. Often, people will invite the families of friends and coworkers to their homes. Young people, who may wish to get out of the family environment from time to time, may get together in groups and go for walks, especially in the early evenings.

Most Chechen homes have televisions, radios, and stereos, and watching television and listening to music are popular pastimes. Predictably, the wars with Russia have interrupted the leisure time of Chechens.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Weaving and knitting are traditional folk arts among Chechens. Even in the 1990s and 2000s, rural Chechen women continue to weave and knit, producing fine garments. Children may have opportunities to learn music and visual arts in school.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The most urgent social problems in Chechnya today are the consequences of war with Russia. Many people spent almost two years as refugees in neighboring territories, returning to disrupted lives and destroyed homes in their native region, only to flee a second time in 1999. Chechens have experienced massive destruction. Education was disrupted and opportunities for a normal social life and secure living environment have been delayed for young people of the late 1990s and 2000s. Furthermore, many youths were exposed to, and even involved as fighters in, great violence. Many were orphaned and some were badly injured. With all these deaths, those who were fighters or who lost loved ones must come to terms with the Chechen ob-

ligation of vengeance. The future consequences of these events are cause for concern.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In general, the status of Chechen women was lower than the status of women in Soviet society. However, the Soviet norms of equal education for girls and boys and equal access to health care and social security had made a positive impact on their lives. A set of cultural prejudices against women's public roles has been maintained and was reinforced by the recent militarization of society. The social infrastructure, health care, and insurance systems were practically ruined by the Chechnya authorities under the connivance of the federal government, and resources were allocated to the armed groups. Women became primarily responsible for the survival of their families. Girls in Chechnya nearly lost the possibility of going to school. It is almost impossible to get information about rapes and violence against women in armed conflicts in Chechnya because, in accordance with some traditions, a raped woman is expected to commit suicide or be murdered by her relatives.

The Chechen woman, like all women in the Caucasus, has always been defined by her humility, which is expressed through respect and deference towards members of the "stronger" sex. However, despite living in a patriarchal society, women have a genuine role in it; they do indeed have some rights and are far from being oppressed. Western culture has strongly influenced Chechnya within recent years. Chechen women have to work to help support their families. Because of the lack of jobs for men, the unsettled conditions in which they live, and the difficulties entailed in traveling within the republic, women are often compelled to be the sole breadwinners in the family.

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—by J. Ormrod, J. Colarusso, and F. Tlisova

# CHUKCHI

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Lygoraveltlat; Chukchee

**LOCATION:** Russia (Chukchi peninsula in northeastern Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 15,767 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Chukchi, Russian

**RELIGION:** Native form of Shamanism; Eastern Orthodox Christianity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Chukchi are an Arctic people who chiefly inhabit the Chukchi peninsula, or Chukotka, in the extreme northeastern section of Siberia that faces North America across the Bering Strait. Archeological and linguistic evidence suggests that their original homeland probably lay further to the south along the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, from which they migrated to their present area about six thousand years ago. The Chukchi who live in the interior of the Chukchi peninsula have traditionally been herdsman and hunters of reindeer; those who live along the coasts of the Arctic Ocean, the Chukchi Sea, and the Bering Sea have customarily hunted sea mammals such as seals, whales, walruses, and sea lions. The Chukchi call themselves the *Lygoraveltlat* (singular: *Lygoraveltlan*), which means "genuine people." The word "Chukchi"—sometimes spelled "Chukchee"—is itself a plural form of the Russian word *Chukcha* (feminine: *Chukchanka*), which is their word for an individual *Lygoraveltlan*. The reindeer Chukchi also call themselves *Chavchu* ("rich in reindeer"), whereas the coastal Chukchi call themselves the *Ankalit* ("sea people"). Interestingly, the reindeer breeders among the neighboring Koriak people have also been known to call themselves "Chavchu."

The Chukchi were one of the last Siberian peoples to fall under Russian rule. Russian Cossacks and adventurers in Siberia first learned of the Chukchi from the neighboring Yukagirs and Koriaks in the 1640s, but no serious attempt was made to conquer them at first. Russia was at that time occupied with subduing Siberia's other indigenous peoples, and in any event the harsh tundra lands inhabited by the Chukchi were relatively poor in sable and other valuable fur-bearing animals sought by the Russians. But Chukchi raids on nearby Cossack settlers, combined with a need to find new sources of furs after stocks in other parts of Siberia had been depleted, led Russia to launch a series of vigorous military campaigns against the Chukchi in 1729. The Chukchi put up a ferocious resistance and, when surrounded, they frequently committed mass suicide rather than surrender. By the 1760s, the Russian government decided that the cost of vanquishing the Chukchi was too high in terms of money and troops and ended the war on the condition that the Chukchi cease attacking Russian settlers and pay the *yasak* (the yearly tax that native Siberians paid in furs). Since Chukchi territory was quite isolated from the rest of the Russian empire and its cold, harsh climate was unattractive to outsiders, the Chukchi suffered much less than most other Siberian peoples from Russian colonization and exploitation and government interference into their way of life under the Czarist regime and the early Soviet period. Most Chukchi contact with the Russians came through trade, in which the Chukchi received knives, kettles, and other cooking utensils, vodka, tea, tobacco, and sugar in exchange for their fox furs and ivo-

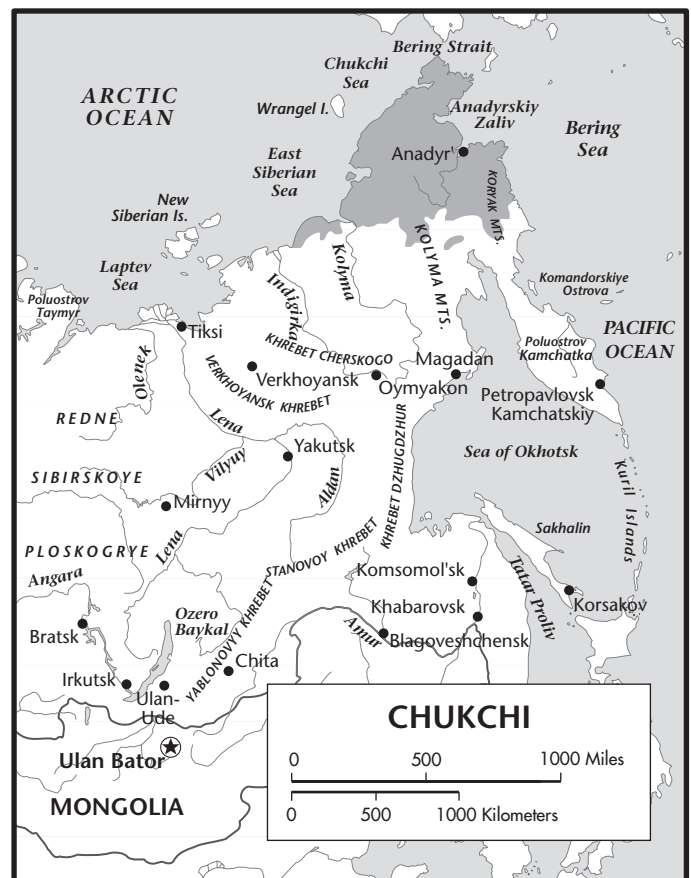
ry. American whaling ships also participated in this kind of barter with the Chukchi in the late 1800s. This relatively independent existence came to an end in the 1930s, however, when herdsmen and sea-mammal hunters were forced into state-supervised economic collectives. Chukotka became a region of mines and gulags (concentration camps) as Stalin's campaign to rapidly develop Soviet industry increased demands for the tin and gold that lay under Chukchi soil. Furthermore, the arrest of millions of Soviet citizens during that decade's waves of mass political repression created a need for isolated areas in which to build prison camps. Later in the Soviet era, the Chukchi were culturally afflicted as the frequent subjects of ethnic stereotype jokes told by Russians.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

The Chukchi presently number slightly over 15,000, all of whom live in the Russian Federation. About 11,900 Chukchi live in the Chukchi Autonomous *Okrug* (Russian for "district") within the Magadan *Oblast* (Russian for "region," but similar in structure to a province). Almost all of the remainder dwell in the northernmost reaches of the Koriak Autonomous District (1,500) and in the Nizhnekolymskii *Raion* (a Russian divisional term for "district") of the Sakha (also known as Yakut) Republic (1,300). Most of the territory inhabited by the Chukchi is tundra, with some taiga areas in the south. The climate is harsh, with winter temperatures sometimes dropping as low as  $-54^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-65^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). The cool summers average around  $10^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $50^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Coastal regions, especially along the coast of the Arctic Ocean, are damp and foggy; the climate is drier the further inland one goes. In the forested regions, larch, poplar, and birch trees are the most typical form of plant life; lichens and short, scrubby alders and cedar are common in the tundra. Reindeer, foxes, squirrels, and brown bears inhabit the inland regions, while walrus, white whales, killer whales, seals, and polar bears are found in coastal areas. Cod and fresh- and salt-water salmon are the most common fish.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Chukchi language belongs to the Paleoasiatic language family's Chukotka-Kamchatka (or Chukotic) group, which includes other languages spoken in far northeastern Siberia such as Itelmen (Kamchadal) and Koriak. The speech of women differs phonetically from that of men: for example, the sound "r" in male pronunciation becomes "ts" in female pronunciation. Thus, the word for "no" is pronounced *krym* by men and *ktsym* by women. Children of both sexes initially learn only the female forms of words from their mothers. There are several dialects and subdialects of Chukchi, but they differ only slightly from each other; the most widely spoken ones are the coastal Uelen dialect and the inland Pevek dialect. Although non-Chukchi linguists (the most famous of which was the Russian Vladimir Bogoraz, 1865–1936) used Latin and Cyrillic (Russian) letters and linguistic symbols to record Chukchi during their research, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a few native Chukchi speakers made isolated attempts to develop a sort of hieroglyphic writing. Consequently, the Chukchi did not have a written language until 1931, when they adopted the Latin alphabet. Since 1937, Chukchi has been written in a special form of the Cyrillic alphabet that includes extra letters for Chukchi sounds that do not exist in Russian. The Chukchi written language is based on the Uelen dialect. Around 75% of



the Chukchi claim to have a fluent command of their people's language, although the real percentage may actually be lower than this.

Until well into the 20th century, most Chukchi had only one given name. The practice of using a surname came only after an increased Russian presence led to pressure to adopt a family name (based on the father's given name) to facilitate school registration and other bureaucratic paperwork. Some Chukchi personal names reflect natural occurrences at the time of the person's birth—for example, *Tynga-gyrgyn* ("sunrise"; male) and *Gyrongav* ("Spring"; female). Other names, such as *Umgy* ("polar bear"; male) *Galgan-nga* ("duck"; female) are the names of animals native to Chukotka. Parents sometimes give their children names that reflect a quality that they hope the child will come to possess—for instance, *Omryn* ("robust fellow"; male) or *Gitingev* ("beautiful woman"; female). Some Chukchi use Russian first names such as *Yuri* (male) and *Nina* (female).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Chukchi folklore includes myths about the creation of the earth, moon, sun, and stars; tales about animals; anecdotes and jokes about foolish people; stories about evil spirits called *kelet*, which traditional Chukchi beliefs hold responsible for disease and other misfortunes; and stories about shamans with supernatural powers. Many Chukchi myths and stories have close equivalents among the neighboring Koriaks, Eskimos, Itelmen (Kamchadal), and even some Native American peoples. The Chukchi also possess numerous historical legends

about ancient battles between the Chukchi and the Koriaks and Eskimos.

In one Chukchi folktale, several shamans (tribal priests) and the storyteller are traveling on the ocean when their boat develops a leak. One shaman succeeds in stopping the leak with the aid of seaweed-spirits. When they approach land, he tells the seaweed-spirits to depart; the leak reappears, and he challenges the other shamans to stop it. Their powers are weaker than his, they are unsuccessful, and they drown. The shaman who was able to master the seaweed-spirits swims to safety together with the teller of the tale.

## 5 RELIGION

Chukchi religious beliefs and practices are often described as a form of shamanism. Animals, plants, heavenly bodies, rivers, forests, and other natural phenomena are considered to have their own spirits. Fire created by friction (instead of matches or lighters) and the tools used to make it are considered sacred.

Although both men and women can become shamans (tribal priests similar to Native American "medicine men") if chosen by the spirits, male shamans are considered more powerful since they do not have to undergo the exhaustion and stress of pregnancy and childbirth. Formerly, some shamans were homosexual men and women who assumed the clothing, speech, and mannerisms of the opposite sex and took "wives" or "husbands" of their own gender. Such shamans were very rare and considered the most powerful of all. Most shamans claim to have been trained in their profession by the spirits themselves, although some learn from older shamans. During their rituals, Chukchi shamans fall into trances (sometimes with the aid of hallucinogenic mushrooms), communicate with the spirits and allow them to speak through them, predict the future, and cast spells of various kinds. Not all religious activities require the aid of a shaman. Most are performed privately within the family and take the form of drumming and chanting, which along with the magic charms and amulets carried by some Chukchi, are intended to heal the sick, punish enemies, ensure good luck in herding and hunting, and obtain wealth and love. Chukchi shamanism (and shamanism in general) may be considered to have suffered less than other religions from the Soviet government's anti-religious policies. Since most shamanist activity took place in the home, there was no stable religious hierarchy to attack, and so it was relatively easy for shamanism to survive underground.

During the late 19th century Russian state-supported missionaries succeeded in spreading Orthodox Christianity among the Chukchi, and before 1917 the Chukchi formally were Russian Orthodox. During the Soviet era anti-religious policies and initiatives were directed against both the Russian Orthodox Church and Chukchi shamans. Both of these religious traditions have reemerged since 1991, although the Chukchis have also been exposed to increased missionary activity since 1991, this time primarily from Protestant missionaries.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important traditional Chukchi holidays were festivals in which sacrifices were made to the spirits the Chukchi depended upon for success in their livelihoods. Among the reindeer Chukchi, these sacrifices took place in autumn. After shouting and firing guns to frighten away *kelet* (evil spirits), participants slaughtered some reindeer and used their blood

to anoint themselves and their sleds. This ritual was followed by feasting (the sacrificial reindeer were eaten) and drumming. Similarly, coastal Chukchi households presented sacrifices to the sea-spirit. At some point during the summer or fall, the best hunter in the family walked down to the seashore, showed his harpoon and other weapons to the sea, and asked its spirit for success and safety in hunting during the coming year. One of the family's women gave a sacrifice of blood soup and reindeer-stomach sausage (considered a delicacy since it was not an ordinary part of the coastal Chukchi diet). Occasionally, a dog was killed and given to the sea in this ritual.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a Chukchi child has traditionally been surrounded by many rituals and rules, although the degree to which these are observed has probably lessened as a result of modernization. After a woman has discovered that she is pregnant, she must go outside every day as soon as she awakens, look at the rising sun, and circle her dwelling in the direction of the sun's movement. When the time comes for her to give birth, no men can enter the sleeping chamber where she is giving birth, as it is thought that bad luck may accompany them. The reindeer Chukchi anoint infants with reindeer blood several days after birth. Both the inland and coastal groups build a small tent for the afterbirth and place it in the tundra.

Death, too, has customarily been accompanied by a series of precise ceremonies. The deceased is placed naked, save for coverings over his or her face and genitals, in the sleeping chamber and is watched over for a day or so in case he or she comes back to life. At this time, it is forbidden to beat drums or make other loud noises. After the watch is completed, the corpse is washed, dressed in new clothing, given gifts of tobacco and a bow and arrow or spear (for men) or sewing and skin-dressing tools (for women). The corpse is then taken into the tundra for disposal either by cremation or exposure. (In the latter case, the body is dismembered to allow evil spirits to leave and is left to be devoured by wild animals. It is considered a bad sign if animals refuse to eat the corpse.) The inland Chukchi sacrifice reindeer in honor of the dead or present the dead with especially fine reindeer antlers; the coastal Chukchi sacrifice dogs.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Because of the harsh climate and difficulty of life in the tundra, hospitality and generosity are highly prized among the Chukchi. It is forbidden to refuse anyone, even a stranger, shelter and food. The community is expected to provide for orphans, widows, and the poor. In general, stinginess is considered the worst character defect a person can have. For example, it is unthinkable for a Chukchi to refuse to share his tobacco if asked. There is an anecdote about a man who was killed for this very reason.

The Chukchi have great respect for their elders. During the summer, when the frozen soil melts and travel by sleds becomes impossible, elderly people who cannot walk are carried by young men on their shoulders. In earlier times, when old people asked to be killed if they became sick or feeble, this request could not be refused. (Euthanasia was usually performed by stabbing through the heart or shooting, as these methods were the quickest and hence most merciful forms of death.)



## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Reindeer-herding Chukchi were nomadic and lived in settlements of two or three families. The traditional Chukchi form of housing was the *yaranga*, a conical or rounded reindeer-hide tent with a box-shaped inner sleeping chamber made of fur that was large enough for several people. Maritime Chukchi originally lived in semi-underground houses made of earth or sod with whalebone frames, but in the 19th century they too adopted the *yaranga*, which they considered more comfortable. *Yarangas* were lit by lamps that burned reindeer or sea-mammal fat. Some Chukchi still live in *yarangas*, but the one-story wooden houses common in the former Soviet Union's collective farms and the prefabricated concrete apartment buildings typical in its towns are now encountered far more frequently.

The coastal Chukchi traditionally used dogsleds and skin boats for transportation, while inland Chukchi rode in sleds pulled by reindeer. Both groups used snowshoes. These traditional methods of transportation still survive, but are increasingly supplemented by air travel, motorboats, and snowmobiles.

With the exception of shamanist chants and prayers, medical care was unknown among the Chukchi prior to Russian contact, most likely due to the lack of medicinal plants and minerals in the Chukchi lands. Not surprisingly, disease was widespread. Smallpox and influenza, brought by infected Russians or those who had been in contact with them, were especially deadly because the Chukchi had no immunity to them. Blindness and eye infections were common, particularly snowblindness and inflammation from sweat, dirt, and exhaustion (most common among herdsman who had to stand watch over their reindeer for long periods). Western medicine became much more widespread in the Soviet period. Treatment was provided either free of cost or for modest fees; nevertheless, its availability and quality were, and still are, insufficient to meet Chukchi needs. As a result, diseases such as tuberculosis and alcoholism are major problems in Chukchi communities.

One peculiar malady that is common among the Chukchi and other Arctic peoples is "Arctic hysteria." A person affected by Arctic hysteria is seized by sudden fits of rage, depression, or violence and often harms others or himself. Murder and suicide are sometimes committed in this state.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, Chukchi lived in encampments of several nuclear families who were usually related to each other and who shared reindeer herds or sea-mammal-hunting equipment. Polygamy was widespread, especially among wealthy Chukchi, until it was banned by the Bolshevik government. The nuclear family with one or two children living in its own dwelling is now typical of the Chukchi. Sexual attitudes have customarily been fairly tolerant (although incest, rape, and intercourse with girls who have not reached puberty are prohibited). Sexual activity usually begins before marriage, although there is little stigma attached to unwed motherhood.

One practice formerly common among the Chukchi was the "group marriage" in which two or more male friends had the right to occasionally sleep with each other's wives. Sometimes this privilege was granted to esteemed visitors as well. The children of women whose husbands formed part of a group marriage were considered relatives and were forbidden to marry each other.

In a traditional Chukchi wedding, a reindeer was sacrificed and the couple anointed with its blood. Red ocher was substituted for reindeer blood among the maritime Chukchi. If the bride was to become part of the groom's household, she traveled to his family's home for the ceremony. On the other hand, if the groom had agreed to join his father-in-law's family, the ceremony took place at the latter's home. The marriage partner who was joining the spouse's family gave up all of his or her property to it. Weddings of this type have now been largely replaced by civil ceremonies.

## 11 CLOTHING

Chukchi women traditionally wore a *kerker*, a knee-length coverall made from reindeer or seal hide and trimmed with fox, wolverine, wolf, or dog fur. In addition to the *kerker*, women also wore robe-like dresses of fawn skins beautifully decorated with beads, embroidery, and fur trimmings. Men wore loose shirts and trousers made of the same materials. Both sexes wore high boots and leather undergarments. Children's clothing consisted of a one-piece fur coverall with a flap between the legs to allow the moss that served as a diaper to be easily changed. Present-day Chukchi wear Western clothing (cloth dresses, shirts, trousers, and underclothes) except on holidays and other special occasions.

## 12 FOOD

The staple foods of the inland Chukchi diet are products of reindeer breeding: boiled venison, reindeer-blood soup, and reindeer brains and marrow. One dish, *rilkeil*, is made from semi-digested moss from a slaughtered reindeer's stomach mixed with blood, fat, and pieces of boiled reindeer intestine. Maritime Chukchi cuisine is based on boiled walrus, seal and whale meat and fat, as well as seaweed. Both groups eat frozen fish and edible leaves and roots. The Chukchi are very fond of tea, which they have drunk since they began trading with Russians in the 18th century. Traditional Chukchi cuisine is now augmented with canned vegetables and meats, bread, and other prepared foods purchased in stores. The Chukchi formerly boiled their food in wooden, bark, or metal kettles and ate with spoons or their hands from cups, bowls, and plates made of wood, bone, and ivory. Metal and ceramic vessels and knives, forks, and spoons are used today.

## 13 EDUCATION

Prior to the Soviet period, all Chukchi were illiterate, with the exception of a handful who had learned Russian from Russian settlers or at one of the few schools run by Russian Orthodox missionaries. Education only began to take root among the Chukchi in the 1920s and 1930s, when the Soviet government launched a campaign for universal education and literacy throughout the country. In 1926, the Institute of the North (now the Pedagogical Institute of the Peoples of the North) was established in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) to train native teachers for the Chukchi and other Siberian and Arctic peoples. Most Chukchi children study in primary and secondary boarding schools, because their settlements are too small and far apart to allow a school to be built in each one. Literacy in Russian is now virtually universal, but due to the Soviet government's policy of forced assimilation, this cannot be said of literacy in Chukchi.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In addition to their rich oral folklore tradition, the Chukchi have developed their own body of literature in the 20th century. Since the 1950s, the most famous Chukchi writer has been Yuri Rytkeu, whose poems, novels, and short stories are written in both Chukchi and Russian. Publishing in both languages has allowed Rytkeu to make a significant contribution to the development of the modern Chukchi literary language, while at the same time making his works on themes common to all of Russia's Arctic peoples accessible to them. Since the growth of freedom of speech and the press in the former USSR in the 1980s, Rytkeu has become a visible and outspoken critic of policies harmful to Russia's Arctic and Siberian peoples.

## 15 WORK

Although both sexes share responsibility for running the household, they have different tasks. Chukchi men drive their reindeer in search of vegetation and travel to the edge of the taiga to gather firewood, fish, and hunt sea mammals. Women's work in the household includes cleaning and repairing the *yaranga*, cooking food, sewing and repairing clothing, and preparing reindeer or walrus hides. It is considered unseemly for a man to perform work usually done by women.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditional Chukchi sports are reindeer- and dog-sled races, wrestling, and foot races. Competitions of these types are often performed following the reindeer sacrifices of the inland Chukchi and the sea-spirit sacrifices of the coastal Chukchi. The coastal Chukchi, like the neighboring Eskimo, enjoy tossing each other high into the air on walrus-skin blankets.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Among children, foot races and playing with dolls (girls) and lassos (boys) are the most typical pastimes. Chukchi of all ages have traditionally enjoyed listening to folk tales, reciting tongue-twisters, singing, and dancing. Ventriiloquism, besides being a staple of the shaman's repertoire, is a common amusement.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Sculpture and carving on bone and walrus tusk are the most highly developed forms of folk art among the Chukchi. Common traditional themes are landscapes and scenes from everyday life: hunting parties, reindeer herding, and animals native to Chukotka. Under the Soviet regime, Chukchi artists were "encouraged" to carve portraits of Lenin and representations of patriotic themes such as the May 9 holiday commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. In traditional Chukchi society, only men engaged in these arts, but there are now female sculptors and carvers as well. Chukchi women are also skilled at sewing and embroidering.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Pollution caused by Soviet-era mining and industry, poverty, poor diet and medical care, and widespread alcoholism have led to high rates of tuberculosis and other diseases among the modern Chukchi. Chukchi alcoholics, like those in other parts of the Soviet Union, sometimes die from drinking industrial fluids that contain alcohol. Moreover, pollution, weapons

testing, strip mining, and overuse of industrial and mining equipment and vehicles have greatly damaged Chukotka's environment and endangered its ability to support traditional Chukchi economic activities.

Although many of the early Bolsheviks advocated equal rights for the USSR's peoples and supported the preservation and development of their cultures and languages, Stalin and his successors adopted a policy of Russification intended to destroy non-Russian cultures through persecution and neglect (while, of course, denying this officially). For the Chukchi, like the other native Siberian peoples, the 1960s and 1970s were the most destructive period in this regard. The government abolished many native settlements, dispersed their former inhabitants, and made Russian the language of instruction in Chukchi schools. When the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev relaxed the USSR's policies towards censorship and the nationalities during the 1980s, writers, teachers, and other concerned Chukchi began to criticize these policies and to participate in native-rights organizations such as the Association of the Small Peoples of the North. They have also begun to expand Chukchi-language teaching and publishing.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women's status in traditional Chukchi society was clearly inferior to that of men. Women could not eat until the men in the household had been served, and females received the less desirable cuts of meat. Wife-beating was also common. Nevertheless, they could own property (such as reindeer herds) and were permitted to divorce abusive husbands. The status of Chukchi women has improved markedly in the 20th century as a result of Soviet policies of sexual equality, and women now serve as administrators, teachers, and doctors.

The severe economic collapse in the Russian north strongly affected Chukchi women, who faced additional burdens in the face of chronic unemployment and economic difficulties.

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—revised by A. Frank

## CHUVASH

**LOCATION:** Russia (Chuvash Republic in Middle Volga River region)

**POPULATION:** approximately 1.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** Chuvash

**RELIGION:** Christianity; some pagan rituals survive

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The Chuvash are Turkic-speaking people who have lived in the Middle Volga region of the Russian Federation for centuries. They are considered to be descendants of the ancient Bulgars, who maintained a state in the Middle Volga River valley from the 10th to 13th centuries. As an ethnic group, the Chuvash were formed chiefly on the basis of the Turkic-speaking Bulgars who came in large masses in the 7th century from the Caucasus region. The Bulgars and the subdued and partially assimilated indigenous Finno-Ugric tribes settled down on both sides of the Middle Volga and formed the Bulgar state. Great Bulgaria occupied a sizeable territory, in which the Samara and Ulyanovsk oblasts (regions), the Tatarstan, Chuvash, Mari, and Udmurt republics, as well as western regions of Bashkortostan are now situated. In the first half of the 13th century, further development of the Bulgar civilization through the ethnic integration of Turkic-speaking and Finnish-Ugric tribes was interrupted by the defeat of the Bulgar state in 1236 by hordes of the Mongol Tatars. The Bulgar state became an *ulus* (region) of the Golden Horde. The disintegration of the Golden Horde and the formation of the Kazan khanate gave rise to the formation of Chuvash, Tatar, and Bashkir groups.

There is no common opinion about the origin of the name *Chuvash*. This term is not found in written documents until early in the 16th century. It is believed that the names Savir, Suvar, and Suvaz, used by some classical and medieval writers, actually refer to Chuvash ancestors. These names belonged to tribes that were a part of the Bulgar tribal confederation during the latter part of the first millennium AD. It was the Suvars who moved along the left bank of the Volga and then crossed the river in the 13th century when fleeing the Mongol-Tatar invasion. Later, the Suvars mixed with indigenous inhabitants of the region, resulting in the formation of one of the Chuvash subgroups, the Anatri. The Chuvash had been under the sway of the Kazan khanate between 1445 and 1551. In the Kazan khanate, the term *Chuvash* meant mainly villagers (*yasak*) professing paganism. However, the urban Muslim population, chiefly people in service (*sluzhilye lyudi*) were called "Tatars" in official documents. Beginning in the 16th century, a small proportion of them—those living east of the Volga—were Islamized, adopted the Tatar language, and became integrated into the Tatar culture. Beginning in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Chuvash people came under the growing influence of the Russian people and their culture. In 1551 the majority of the Chuvash were subjugated by the Russian state. Chuvash villages were built in secluded places and away from roads to make it difficult for the czar's tax collectors to find them.

The Chuvash consist of three main ethnic subgroups: the Upper Chuvash, or *Viryal*, in north and northwestern Chuvashia; the Lower Chuvash, or *Anatri*, in south and southeastern Chuvashia; and an intermediate group, the *Anat Enchi*.



The Lower Chuvash preserved the ethnic features of the Bulgar Chuvash; in the culture of the Upper Chuvash, Mari elements are recognizable. The Chuvash have a number of stable ethnographic and linguistic parallels with Turkic peoples of the Altai and southern Siberia. This becomes apparent in common characteristics of their dwellings, utensils, food, clothing, ornaments, embroidery, as well as pagan religious beliefs, mythology, folklore, and the pentatonic basis of folk music. The physical appearance of the Chuvash indicates the complexity of their ethnogeny: 10.3% of the Chuvash have Mongol features, 21.1% have European features, and 68.6% have mixed Mongol-European features.

After the revolution of 1917, the Chuvash asserted a right to political autonomy, and in 1920 they were rewarded with the establishment of a Chuvash Autonomous Region, which was transformed into an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1925. The Chuvash ASSR became the Chuvash Soviet Socialist Republic at the end of the Soviet era in 1990 and was renamed the Chuvash Republic in 1992. Chuvashia is a presidential republic. It has its own constitution, national anthem, emblem, and flag.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The territory occupied by the Chuvash people was first named "Chuvashia" in the first quarter of the 16th century by a traveler named S. Gerberstein. The Chuvash inhabit mainly the right bank of the Volga and areas along some of its tributaries including the Sviyaga and Tsvil Rivers.

Up until 1920 (before the formation of the Chuvash Autonomous Region), the basic area of inhabitation of the Chuvash people was not officially localized. The pre-revolutionary period, the territory that makes up present-day Chuvashia, was divided among two or three provinces.

The Chuvash Republic established during the Soviet period contains 18,300 square kilometers (7,066 square miles). The territory consists of three vegetation zones: a forest zone in the north and forest-steppe and steppe zones in the south. Forests occupy 30% of the territory with pine, oak, fir, and birch, predominant. The republic is crossed by the Volga, Sura and Tsvil rivers and contains 400 lakes. Bears, wolves, foxes, lynxes, elks, muskrats, squirrels, and martens are widely distributed. The climate is temperate to continental with cold winters and warm summers. The average temperature in January is  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $9^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and in July is  $19^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $67^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). The Chuvash rank fourth among the peoples of the Russian Federation (after Russians, Ukrainians, and Tatars). According to the 1989 census, the Chuvash population in Russia was 1,773,645, including 906,992 people (49.2%) in the Chuvash Republic. In 1989, more than 50% of the Chuvash lived elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The largest pockets of settlement were in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and certain regions in Siberia. In Russia, there are large groups of Chuvash in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Samara Oblast, Ulyanovsk Oblast, Moscow Oblast, Tyumen Oblast, Krasnoyarsk Oblast, Kemerovo Oblast and Orenburg Oblast. Until quite recently, the population of the republic was mostly rural and agricultural. In 1926, 1.6% of the Chuvash lived in urban areas; in 1989, the percentage of urban Chuvash increased to 46.5%. According to the 1989 census the population of Chuvashia was 1,338,023 people, including: Chuvash, 906,922 (67.78%); Russian, 357,120 (26.7%); Tatar, 35,689 (2.7%); Mordvin, 18,686 (1.4%); Ukrainian, 7,300 (0.5%); Mari, 3,800 (0.3%); Belarusian, 2,200 (0.2%); and 0.4% other. Thus, 98.6% of the population of the Chuvash Republic consists of people representing four nationalities: Chuvash, Russian, Tatar, and Mordvin. They comprise to a certain extent the indigenous population of the Chuvash region.

The towns of Chuvashia are among the oldest in the Middle Volga region. The most ancient is Cheboksary, the capital of the republic, the first written record of which dates to 1469.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Chuvash speak Chuvash, one of the ancient languages of the Altai branch of the Turkic family. It has two dialects: upper (*viryal*) and lower (*anatri*). The Chuvash literary language has been formed on the basis of the lower dialect. The Chuvash language by virtue of a number of peculiarities differs more widely than others from the Turkic languages. There are many Chuvash words in Mari, Udmurt, Russian, and other languages. Likewise, the Chuvash language has borrowings from Arabic, Persian, Kypchak-Tatar, Finnish-Ugric, and Russian. In the early 20th century, the language of the tombstone epitaphs written by the ancient Bulgars was determined to be quite close to the Chuvash language, which was the most archaic in appearance among the Turkic languages. The epitaphs are evidence of an Old Chuvash writing system formed on the Arabic basis. In ancient times, the ancestors of the Chuvash used a runic written language. Elements in Chuvash embroidery and tribal signs that graphically correspond to the runes testify to this fact. Later, in the 11th through 13th centuries in

Great Bulgaria, Arabic script was established officially. Relics of the Chuvash language proper (the Old Chuvash written language) include books and manuscripts from the 18th and 19th centuries: dictionaries, grammar books, translations from Russian, and original texts. In these books, Chuvash words are written in Latin or Russian letters, without any additional signs for designation of specific Chuvash sounds. The “new” Chuvash written language in use today originated in 1871. The first Chuvash alphabet considering the basic peculiarities of the language was created by the Chuvash enlightener I. Y. Yakovlev on the basis of the Russian alphabet. Some changes in the Chuvash alphabet were made in 1872, 1973, 1933, and 1938. The modern Chuvash alphabet consists of 37 letters. All 33 letters of the Russian alphabet plus four additional letters with diacritical marks that designate specific sounds of the Chuvash language: *â*, *ê*, *ç*, and *ÿ*. The letters with superlinear diacritical marks convey vowels, and the letter *ç* with its underlinear diacritical sign conveys a consonant.

Among the Chuvash living in the republic, 15% don't speak their mother tongue, and old Chuvash names such as *Elem-bi*, *Atner*, *Narspi*, and *Setner* are no longer popular. However, there is an effort in recent years to revitalize the Chuvash language. It is being introduced into school curriculum in an effort to promote Chuvash culture.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

A great variety of genres and richness of content are characteristic features of the Chuvash oral tradition, which includes historical songs, fairy tales, myths, legends, charms, proverbs, sayings, and riddles. The most developed genres are songs, fairy tales, and calendar poetry. The Chuvash have a rich and original mythology about the beginning and structure of the universe. The Chuvash mythological system of the universe has three main stages: (1) the self-generation of the cosmos from chaos; (2) the activity of creators in the form of animals; and (3) the activity of anthropomorphous creators. Chaos in the Chuvash mythology is usually manifested in the form of water elements—the primeval ocean *talai*—or in the form of a fight between fire elements and water elements. In one popular version, chaos is described as non-existence, absolute zero.

Anthropomorphous characters appear in later Chuvash myths: Tura, who in earlier myths personified heaven, was considered Supreme God, and Shuittan the embodiment of evil, was later considered a master of the lower world. Tura is a creator, and Shuittan performs the duties of his opponent, clumsily imitating the actions of Tura. Earth and Heaven are interpreted as feminine and masculine components of a sacred matrimonial couple in the beginning of cosmogonical process. God created a man and all the most sophisticated elements of the universe: the earth, cosmic supports, the world mountain (*Amatu*), the world tree (*Ama yivashch*), inland waters, useful plants, and domestic and wild animals, used for food. Shuittan created spirits, who were hostile to man: water-sprites (*shyvri*), wood-goblins (*arshchuri*), fiery dragons (*vutli shchelen*), spooks (*vere shchelen*), werewolves, and so on.

In Chuvash folk tales, three characters often unite and act as a single whole—a main hero and his helpmates, for example. Basic actions are repeated thrice, heroes fight with three-headed or three-eyed creatures, and so on. To Chuvash ancestors, certain numbers had symbolic meanings, connected with a

mythical view of the universe. Numbers with symbolic or sacred meanings are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 12.

#### 5 RELIGION

The majority of the Chuvash were forcibly Christianized in the middle of the 18th century, thus becoming the only large Christian Turkic population in Russia and later the Soviet Union. Because the Chuvash were converted to Russian Orthodoxy early in their history, they do not feel closely related to the Muslim Turks. Islamization took place mostly among the urban populations—aristocrats, traders, and craftsmen—while the rural inhabitants maintained their animistic practices. Animistic mortuary rites were practiced by the great majority of Bulgars as late as 1400 AD, and the Chuvash continued to observe these rites until they were Christianized. The Chuvash believe themselves to be the victims of oppression by the Tatars; they are even proud of the participation of their ancestors in the subjugation of the Kazan khanate by the Russians. Because of the adoption of Christianity, they became highly Russified.

The majority of Chuvash profess Christianity, but some remnants of paganism survive in their religious idea of the universe. Wedding and funeral rites, worship of *kiremet* (a sacred tree, an offering place), and agricultural festivals such as *surkhuri* (solstice), *shchavarni* (Shrovetide), *shchumar chuk* (praying for rain), and *man chuk* (great offering) are all indicative of the vitality of paganism.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

During the last millennium, the Bulgars and later the Chuvash maintained close contact, economic cooperation, and cultural relations with many peoples who profoundly influenced the Chuvash calendar, festivals, and rites. Among these influences were Arab, Iranian, Mari, and Tatar. For more than four hundred years, the Chuvash have been governed by Russia, and this has affected the rites of the Chuvash. They adopted a number of Russian folk calendar holidays such as Shrovetide, *shchavarni*, *semik shchemik*, and others, although these holidays were enriched by traditional Chuvash rites and at times assumed quite a different form. After the conversion of the Chuvash to Christianity their ritual repertoire was considerably widened with such holidays as Christmas (*rashtav*), Palm Sunday (*verpanni*, *kachaka prashchnike*), Whitsuntide (*truiski*), and other Christian holidays. Chuvash traditional new year is called Surhuri. Previously celebrated around the fall and spring equinox, it is now celebrated on January 13, due to Russian influence as this is Orthodox new year. Surkhuri means sheep leg, as in the past on this day the legs and head of the sheep were offered. Today, it is celebrated in a fashion similar to Halloween, with children going from house to house to request nuts or pastry.

One of the most highly regarded holidays of the Chuvash calendar is *akatui* (*aka* means “plough,” and *tui* means “holiday” or “wedding”), a spring festival dedicated to agriculture. Although this holiday combines a number of rites and ceremonial rituals it is much more a secular holiday than a religious one. For the rituals of the *akatui*, beer is brewed, food is prepared, and eggs are colored. The celebration of *akatui* on different days in different homes begins and lasts a week. On a certain day a person who is prepared to celebrate, invites his relatives and neighbors, and a rich table is laid. At the head of the table, an *altar* (a keg) of beer is placed, and in the middle of

the table on a special embroidered towel, a dish with a round loaf of bread and cheese is placed. To complete the ritual part of the festival, all village people go out into the field, taking with them a round loaf of wheat bread, cheese, eggs, pies, beer, and a traditional dish called *sharttan*. Here songs, dances, and revelry begin. On the day of the *akatui*, a village becomes boisterous and busy. In the meadow on the outskirts of a village, various competitions take place: horse-races, running races, jumping, wrestling, archery, and so on. The most popular event is a type of wrestling in which a towel is used as a waistband. Each wrestler holds a towel in his hands and wraps it around the waist of his opponent. The undefeated wrestler is called *pattar*, the title given for the strongest hero, and he is usually rewarded with a ram. Another central event of the *akatui* contests is horse-racing. The winners are presented with embroidered towels, with the prizes usually tied to the horses' necks. Various amusing events, such as potato-sack races and three-legged races round out the festival. Strength and adroitness are demonstrated in such contests as weightlifting, fights with stuffed sacks on a balance beam (played like a pillow fight), and tug-of-war.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Active atheistic propaganda and the closing of churches in the Soviet period promoted the estrangement of the Chuvash population from religion, but the new civil rites (initiation as workers or growers, first salary day, full-age day, etc.) did not become popular. Traditional rites and rituals are most stable among rural families. In the country, one can see traditional wedding rites such as the bride on the day after the wedding going to the well to draw water. Funeral rites also combine elements of pagan, Orthodox, and modern civil rites.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Interpersonal relations of the Chuvash are shaped by traditions of hospitality and mutual aid. *Nime* (pronounced "ni'-me") is a type of collective assistance arranged by countrymen to carry out labor-intensive or troublesome tasks. This tradition has its roots in ancient times, when *nime* saved and guarded peoples. The life of a peasant included many moments that required collective efforts for the timely fulfillment of work. This custom is usually practiced when a villager wants to build a house or to gather in the harvest. The host invites one of the community's most respected individuals and appoints him *nime pushche*—the head of the team. The next morning, the *nime pushche* calls upon the villagers to volunteer to help their countryman. After the day's work, the host invites all participants of *nime* to share a meal. Before leaving, the guests seat the host at the head of the table, treat him to beer, sing a thanksgiving song, and go home saying "*tavssi*," which means "thank you for the meal."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Almost half of the Chuvash population lives in towns. Working at big factories or in service, the city mode of life affects the well-being, behavior, and spiritual interests of former villagers. Living in town dwellings with modern conveniences, wearing city clothes, consuming Russian food, and using manufactured utensils, urban Chuvash gradually deviate from Chuvash material culture. The majority of families can't afford a car, so they usually use public transportation, mainly buses and trolley buses. However, this is slowly changing, and

the numbers who own cars are much higher than in 2000. Although the well-being of Chuvash villagers is improving, cultural and welfare facilities in the countryside are not as readily available as in town. Many villages experience difficulties on account of bad roads.

The primary type of Chuvash settlement is a village called a *yal*. The most common Chuvash dwelling is a complex type of cottage with a passage and a storeroom. Nearby is the out-house, a barn, a bathhouse called a *muncha*, and a cattle-shed or a sheep-cot called a *vite*. A shed called a *sarai* or *karta* serves as a storage place for tools and firewood, a summer cook-house, and a cellar. The houses are built from wood or bricks, and house fronts are decorated with a style of carving that was known as far back as Volga Bulgaria. Ancient ornamental motifs have survived in the Chuvash art tradition to the present. Chuvash engravers borrowed and remade many elements of Russian and Tatar art tradition. In the interior of the house, a very significant place is occupied by a Russian-style stove. Beds are covered with embroidered sheets and laces or colored bedspreads.

Industry in Chuvashia is well developed and includes engineering, production of heavy machinery, and chemical industries. Lumber and forestry are also important industries. Agriculture also plays an important role, and important crops include hops and potatoes. The banking and communication systems in the republic are well developed.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

As a rule, Chuvash families are not large. In town, couples usually have one or two children, whereas in villages couples might have three or four. Men and women usually marry between the ages of 18 and 24. Very often newlyweds have to share an apartment or house with their parents as there is a shortage of affordable housing. Women as a rule work full-time and in addition have many household chores. It is not customary in Chuvash families for men to help their wives about the house. The divorce rate is much higher in towns than that in the countryside, but divorce rates have been declining. Favorite pets are cats and dogs.

## 11 CLOTHING

Nowadays traditional Chuvash clothes are worn mainly by women in the country. Such clothing (a woman's shirt in particular) can be subdivided in accordance with ethnographic groups—*turi*, *anat enchi*, and *anatri*. Although the clothing is basically the same from group to group, there are a number of local peculiarities in cut, ornamentation, composition, manufacturing methods, color combination, and ways of wearing. The ornamentation of the traditional costume also varies depending on sex, age, and season. Each piece of clothing has its own tracery of a distinct composition form and color combination. The Chuvash woman's costume and its ornamentation have much in common with the clothes of the peoples in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Some similarities can also be drawn with the clothing of the Finnish-Ugric peoples. Chuvash national clothing is closely connected with the agricultural tenor of life. The primary article of the traditional Chuvash costume is a shirt called a *kepe*, which is shaped like a tunic and belted with a girdle. A dress is worn with an apron or a pinafore called a *chershchitti* or a *sappun*, which is remarkable for its bright colors and abundance of ornament (embroidery

and laces). Women also wear a head band (*surpan*), a forehead decoration (*masmak*), a head dress (*khushpu*), a cap decorated with coins and beads, or a turban. Until recently, the Chuvash wore stitched shoes. Now they usually wear high leather boots or shoes.

## 12 FOOD

Vegetables are prevalent in the Chuvash diet. Bread grains include rye, barley, spelt, oat, millet, buckwheat, and wheat. Barley is used for brewing. Pulse products such as peas and lentils are also of great importance in the Chuvash diet. The major baked food is a rye bread, called *khura shchukar*, which women in the countryside sometimes still bake at home. Pies are common, and fillings include cabbage, carrots, beets, rutabagas, meat, potatoes, peas, cottage cheese, eggs, spring onions, berries, and apples. The most delicious, dainty, and festive dish is *khuplu*, a large round pie made of unleavened dough. The filling of *khuplu* is complex. The first layer is made of half-cooked porridge and finely chopped potatoes; the second layer is made of finely minced meat; and the third layer is made of a thin layer of fatty meat and fat.

Everyday soup is called *yashka*. *Shurpe*, a soup made from either meat or fish, is cooked mainly on high days and holidays. A particular soup gets its name from the seasoning used, such as *veltren yashki* (soup with stinging nettle) or *shchamakh yashki* (soup with a kind of dumplings). Other soup ingredients include flour, groats, fresh cabbage or sauerkraut, carrots, onions, and occasionally beets and wild herbs. Meat soups are cooked from mutton, beef, and pork. Of great importance in the Chuvash diet are different types of porridge: millet porridge, buckwheat porridge, and less often rice porridge.

Potatoes appeared in Chuvash cuisine in the 19th century, and the Chuvash prefer potatoes boiled in their jackets. These are served with vegetable oil and a relish of sauerkraut, pickled cucumbers, spring onions, garlic, turnip, cabbage, carrot, cucumbers, or pumpkins. Black radish and horseradish are used as appetizers and for medicinal purposes. Apples, currants (red, white, and black), raspberries, cherries, ashberries, and bird-cherries are widely used. Wild strawberries, bilberries, raspberries, and different kinds of mushrooms are also gathered in the forest and preserved for the winter and used as filling in pies.

National meat dishes are of ancient origin, as meat played an important role in Chuvash rituals. Meat was traditionally eaten during offerings in honor of pagan gods and spirits during ceremonial rites. Sacrificed animals (horses, bulls, or rams) were slaughtered in observance of special rituals. Pork became a part of the Chuvash diet only in the 19th century. Poultry (hens, geese, and ducks) are widely used. Hens' eggs are used for preparing various dishes, including *shchamarta ashalani* (scrambled eggs), *shchamarta khapartni* (a milk omelet), and *meserle shchamarta* (eggs that are first hard-boiled and then cut in half and fried).

The most famous national meat dishes are *sharttan*, *tultarmash*, *sukta*, *shchurme*, *yun*, and *shurpe*. The most prestigious dish is *sharttan*, which is prepared in both summer and winter after slaughtering a ram. The stomach of the slaughtered animal is thoroughly washed out and stuffed with boneless mutton. To avoid spoiling, the meat stuffing is salted down. The stuffed stomach is sewn up with a thick thread so that it resembles a round loaf of bread, then put on a frying pan and cooked

in the oven for three or four days. The cooked *sharttan* is kept cool. *Tultarmash* is prepared from the insides of a slaughtered animal. The animals' guts are stuffed with fat or small pieces of fat meat and groats, the ends of the guts are tied up with thick threads, then the *Tultarmash* is boiled in a copper cauldron and broiled in the oven. *Tultarmash* is eaten hot, often with *shurpe*. *Yun tultarmash* is prepared just like *tultarmash*; its ingredients are fresh blood, fat, and groats.

*Shurpe*, a popular meat dish of the Chuvash, is prepared from the heads, legs, and internal organs of cattle. On St. Peter's Day it is customary to slaughter a ram and invite relatives and neighbors to taste *shurpe*. From sheep's, cow's, and pig's heads and legs, meat jelly with onions and garlic is prepared. Fish is mainly used for the soup called *pula shurpe*.

Milk dishes are very diverse. *Turakh uirane* (sour milk diluted with water) is used in the summer as a wonderful thirst-quenching drink, and many dishes are prepared from cottage cheese. A highly popular folk drink is a type of beer called *sara*. Strong beer is not made for everyday use, but for holidays it is thick and heady. Grain alcohol was introduced to the Chuvash at the end of the 19th century. The beer produced in Chuvashia today is known throughout Russia for its excellence, and visitors make sure to try it. Cheboksary is home to a beer museum, illustrating the importance of this beverage in the republic.

The Chuvash diet resembles the diet of peoples living in different geographical zones. One group of Chuvash dishes (including *shchamakh*, *ash-kakai*, *shurpe*, *sharttan*, and *tultarmash*) has similarities to diet traditions of Turkic and Iranian-speaking peoples. Other dishes—starchy foods and porridges, pickled provisions, smoked foods, for example are the result of ethnocultural contacts with Finnish-Ugric peoples and Russians.

## 13 EDUCATION

Chuvashia is a republic of total literacy. All citizens of the Chuvash Republic have equal opportunities for education, which is provided free of charge. Educational ties with foreign schools have become popular, and include a Turkish boarding school, several German schools and a French school. The learning of English is also considered important. In Cheboksary, there are four very competitive higher educational institutions, with some 20,000 students: a University (where foreign students study as well), a Pedagogical Institute, an Agricultural Institute, and a Cooperative Institute. There is also an Academy of Sciences. The university also has exchanges and connections with 20 foreign institutions. Education in Chuvash families is considered to be very prestigious, and parents try to provide a good education for their children. Since 1993, the numbers of those who chose to study higher education increased from 134 per 10,000 of the population to 186 per 10,000 of the population by 2008.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

"My nation has preserved one hundred thousand words, one hundred thousand songs, one hundred thousand designs," said the enlightener of the Chuvash people, I. Y. Yakovlev, at the end of the 19th century. Chuvash folklore includes epic tales, everyday songs, fairy tales, and legends. The highest achievement of Chuvash poetry is the epic poem *Narspi* by Konstantin Ivanov, which is considered a masterpiece of world literature. Chuvashia is often called "Land of A Hundred Thousand



*Chuvash poet Gennady Aigi reads his poetry during his 70th anniversary celebration in Moscow, Russia.  
(Denis Sinyakov/AFP/Getty Images)*

Songs.” The Chuvash folk song is one-voiced and there are several different genres: everyday songs (lullabies, lyrical, comic), ritual songs, labor songs, and historical songs. Chuvash music is pentatonic (played on a five-note scale) and played on various folk musical instruments: *shakhlich* (a pipe), *shapar* (bagpipes made from a bull’s stomach), *sarnai* (bagpipes made of goatskin), *kesle* (a psaltery), and *parappan* (a drum). The cultural life of the Chuvash people now centers around professional literature, theater, cinema, and fine arts.

### **15 WORK**

The Chuvash are a very hard-working agricultural people, and they consider those who cannot till the land lazy. Even though about 50% of the population lives in towns, they go down to the country to work in their vegetable gardens or in the fields almost every weekend. They grow vegetables (particularly potatoes) and fruits and berries to store for the winter. A relatively high percentage of people, about 22%, engage in agriculture full time to make a living. The level of unemployment, at 2.2% in 2008, while lower than 10 years prior, remains higher than the Russian average of 1.6%.

### **16 SPORTS**

Chuvashia is home to 3,500 sports facilities, including stadiums, pools, sports halls, running tracks, ice skating facilities, and other winter sports facilities. Chuvash athletes have become Olympic champions in boxing, track and field events, cycling, weightlifting, wrestling, and fencing. However, most of the population is not involved in organized sports. The government of the republic, to remedy this, has since 2004 instituted programs to encourage sports and increased the numbers of hours spent on physical activities in schools. Both children and adults participate in soccer, volleyball, basketball, tennis, ice hockey, and field hockey. Swimming, track and field events, skiing, cycling, boxing, wrestling, weight lifting, and karate are among the most popular sports among youth, especially in big cities. Popular spectator games are soccer in the summer and ice hockey in the winter.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In towns, people are very fond of going to the movies or concert halls, and Cheboksary in particular offers opportunities for entertainment and recreation. People there can attend plays at the Chuvash Drama Theater (which is also very popular among villagers) or go to the National Opera and Ballet Theater to enjoy ballets, opera, and concerts. In the country-



side where there are not as many facilities and opportunities for recreation, people usually watch television or take part in amateur concerts. On winter evenings, farm people might get together, drink beer, dance, and sing Chuvash folk songs. Women sit by the fire spinning or knitting warm socks and sweaters, embroidering towels, shirts, napkins, etc.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Chuvash folk art is rich and various. Its main branches are embroidery, tracery weaving, sewing with beads and silver, woodcarving, ceramics, and wickerwork. The old Chuvash folk art has its own particular features, its specific national form. Its main characteristic distinction was unusual development of the geometric ornament and the absence of topical motifs. In such branches of folk art as woodcarving, ceramics, and wickerwork there are no marked distinctions between the different Chuvash ethnographic groups, although there are striking differences in embroidery. Viryal embroidery, with its miniature elements is sewn with black, red, green, yellow, and blue threads, frequently on a colored ground; Anatri embroidery is large and decorative. The tracery of the Anat Yenchi is close to that of the Anatri. Embroidery has always been the most developed branch of Chuvash art. In the past, Chuvash clothing as well as the interiors of houses were decorated with embroidery that contained complex images presenting certain ideas and notions about the universe. The technical devices of making tracteries vary, and embroiderers use more than thirty kinds of stitches. The decorative works of the factory Pakha Tere (Fine Embroidery) are widely known over the whole world. The masters borrow from the rich store of ancient folk art and apply it in creating modern works. There isn't a single settlement in the Republic that does not boast its own embroiderers. They embroider towels, curtains, bags, napkins, runners for tables and TV sets, bookmarks, and so on.

In the past, woodcarving reached a high level, and almost every Chuvash village had its own potters. The toy horses, whistles, and crockery they produced were well known for their delicate forms and lines. Wickerwork was also common and master weavers used with great skill the natural color of the birch bark, rod, and bass. Rod was used for the wickerwork of small baskets; bass for baskets, boxes, footwear, and toys; and birch bark for bags, plates, and dishes. In the modern period, crockery and wicker furniture are of particular interest. Cots, chairs, and rocking chairs are fine specimens of wickerwork. Souvenirs (pencilholders, powdercases, dolls, figures of people, animals, etc.) are displayed at exhibitions around the world. Jugs, plates, tureens, milkpots, and beermugs are known for the refinement of their forms. All of these items are closely connected with the folk traditions, characteristics with crockery of the past century.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Social problems in Chuvashia are similar to those in other republics and regions of the Volga basin and Russia in general. The rural areas of the republic, which are populated mostly by Chuvash, have the highest population density among the rural regions of Central Russia—more than 50 persons per square kilometer (130 persons per square mile). This concentration of population in the countryside has led to unemployment, and youth are forced to leave their villages and migrate to towns or other parts of Russia. Ecological problems threat-

en the plant, animal, and human populations of the republic. Children are especially vulnerable. Emissions from the Novocheboksarsk chemical plant, which is currently engaged in destroying chemical weapons, threaten all forms of life in the region. The Novocheboksarsk plant causes respiratory diseases that are far more prevalent in Chuvashia than elsewhere in the Russian Federation, as well as high infant mortality. Cultural and welfare facilities are much worse in the countryside than in town. The general commercialization and urbanization of life for the Chuvash have eroded many traditional values, such as diligence, hospitality, open-heartedness, chastity of women, strength of marriage bonds, and readiness to come to the aid of others. Crime, alcoholism (among both men and women), and drug abuse are on the rise. Domestic violence can be a problem. Families in which there is only one parent are particularly vulnerable to social problems.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Today, the situation of Chuvash women is similar to that of most other women in Russia. Chuvash women, as women of most ethnicities under the Soviet Union, were actively encouraged to join the workforce. Chuvash women are known to hold important positions within their community, obtaining success both in business and civil careers. Domestic violence is a social problem suffered by Chuvash women. Generally, women are responsible for household life with little assistance from men.

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—revised by M. Kerr

# CIRCASSIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Adyges, Cherkess

**LOCATION:** Russia; Turkey; Syria, Jordan, Israel, USA

**POPULATION:** 5.5 million (approx.)

**LANGUAGES:** Adyghe (Circassian, Kabardian; Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew, English)

**RELIGION:** Historically Muslim

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Adyghe (a-DEE-gay) is the self-designation for a group of Caucasian peoples who are commonly called “Circassians” by others. Today, three branches of Adyghes live in the Russian Federation: the Kabardins, the Cherkess, and the Adygheians. Few surviving ethnic groups are more ancient than the Adyghes. Their ancestors lived in roughly the same area of the Northwestern Caucasus for the past 6,000 or 7,000 years, since the earliest agriculture and the beginning of metal tool-making.

During much of their history, the Circassians existed independently. They had neither formal states nor towns. The main political units were clans and territorial communities similar to the ancient Greeks and Romans or the Iroquois confederation. Adyghe societies were elaborately subdivided into the ranks of princes, four degrees of nobles called *warqs*, the free commoners (*tfoquat'l*, *tkhwaquat'l*), and up to five different slave and serf statuses reserved for captives, aliens and conquered populations, and debtors. All Circassian communities were once ruled by princes, but in the 17th through 19th centuries the Shapsugh and Natukhay tribes along the Black Sea shore rebelled against their princes and expelled all aristocrats in a series of dramatic revolutions. These democratic Circassians were henceforth ruled by regular meetings of all citizens that usually took place in sacred groves. The meetings determined communal affairs and elected various magistrates. In wartime, Circassians elected temporary warlords and formed highly disciplined detachments of young men. All free commoners were expected to purchase arms and perfect their use. Defense of ancestral land and community was a sacred duty to Circassians, surpassed only by the obligation of the blood feud.

In the 1780s, the Russian empire expanded into the Black Sea basin, previously controlled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Neither the Turks nor the Russians had much interest in the poor and inaccessible mountains inhabited by fiercely independent highlanders, but the supply routes of Russian armies into the newly acquired provinces in Georgia and Armenia wound through the ridges of the Caucasus. This logistic fact made the mountain passes strategically important. The arrogance of Russian colonial governors and Cossack settlers soon provoked anti-Russian rebellions, which eventually led to a prolonged war. The outcome was the devastating Caucasian war, the longest war in Russian history that raged for more than 100 years and ended in 1864 with the defeat and ethnic cleansing of most Circassians from their homeland. The Circassian democratic societies (the Shapsighs, Natukhais, Abadzekh, and Ubykh) fought particularly fiercely. As a consequence the Ubykh, who had a distinct language, are now extinct as an ethnic group. Those who remained became Russian subjects and

later Soviet citizens. Most Circassians were resettled in the Ottoman Empire, with the majority of their descendants living today in Turkey. Only 3% of the Circassian population lives in their homeland, with 97% living in exile. Contemporary researchers studying the history of the Circassians regard it as an example of genocide.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Circassians and their kin, the Ubykhs and Abkhazians (Abazas), dwelt in a triangle running along the east coast of the Black Sea northwards to the Sea of Azov, then eastward along the south shore of the Kuban River to the center of the North Caucasus, and then southwards, over the Caucasus massif, back to the homeland of the Abkhazians. The region consists of temperate steppes and rolling foothills, leading up into the snow-capped Caucasus. The region south of the mountains is semi-tropical.

The stratified and militaristic society of the Circassians prevented them from being conquered for thousands of years. In the west, the lands of Circassians were washed by the extremely treacherous waters of the Black Sea, where sailing ships could navigate only for several months during the year. The coast had few good harbors and many malarial swamps. Only the ancient Greeks were interested in founding colonies or fortresses on such a coast. The mountains rising immediately from the seacoast and extending to the east almost until the Caspian Sea provided impregnable refuge against nomadic invasions from the Eurasian steppe, from the ancient Scythians to the Mongols of Chinggis Khan.

Only modern technology changed the situation, first bringing the Russian regular armies and navy, then European settlers of primarily Slavic origin. After ethnic cleansing the Circassians were reduced to a small native minority. The formerly inhospitable sea coast, not unlike Florida, became the prized vacation spot in Russia. Many mountain slopes became ski resorts. There is still considerable wilderness in the mountains, partly incorporated in the Caucasian Nature Preserve.

Today the Circassians have autonomy within three separated small republics (Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, and Adygheia) of the Russian Federation. The Kabardins number about 500,000, the Cherkess around 49,600, and the Adygheians about 116,000. Descendants of Circassians still live in Turkey (roughly 4.5 million, with estimates varying significantly) and Syria (35,000). Smaller groups are found in Jordan, Israel, and the United States (8,000 in and around Paterson, New Jersey).

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Circassian dialects (East and West) form, together with Abkhaz, Abaza, and the nearly extinct Ubykh, a separate language family, usually called North West Caucasian. These languages are unusual for their high degree of complexity. The most elaborate forms of Circassian—the Bzhedukh and Shapsigh varieties—have nearly 70 consonants and only three vowels. All forms of Circassian show a contrast between /k/ sounds and ones made farther back against the edge of the soft palate, usually represented /q/. Four kinds of s-like or sh-like sounds are made. These, as is the case with the /k/ and /q/ sounds, are further modified by rounding the lips. Sounds are made that are aspirated, much as with English /p/, /t/, /k/; voiceless unaspirated, as with Italian /p/, /t/, /k/; voiced, as with English

/b/, /d/, /g/; and with the vocal cords closed, written /p/, /t/, /k/. These contrasts also occur among the /s/ and /sh/ sounds. There are many fricatives made in the back of the mouth, where /k/ and /q/ are made. Clusters of up to three consonants can occur. The vowel systems are the simplest known: a neutral vowel, such as the 'a' in sofa, a slightly open vowel, close to the /e/ in English bet, and for most languages, an /a/.

Nouns are made up from a basic set of about 200 roots through elaborate processes of compounding, so that even words such as "face" consist of a compound, /na-pa/, which means eye-nose. The verb can apply to every noun in a sentence as well as adding various sorts of geometric information and expressing the speaker's attitude toward the object of the sentence. The syntax of the sentence is elaborate. The verb is always at the end. The syntax expresses whether or not an action has been accomplished. If the action is accomplished, then the object is marked by an "absolute case" in Adyghean, which is /-r/. If it is not accomplished, then the subject carries this case but the object is marked with an "oblique case," which is /-m/. Such a system is called "ergative."

The North West Caucasian languages may be distantly related to Hattic, an ancient language of Anatolia (modern Turkey). Hattic is found only in religious rituals within Hittite documents. In the early 21st century, recent research suggested an even more distant link with the Indo-European language family.

In the 1600s an Ottoman scholar, Evliya Çelebi, was sent by the Sultan to record the languages of the Caucasus. Some of his report has survived, along with a folktale about his return. When Çelebi entered the presence of the Sultan after his long and arduous journey, the Sultan asked him what the Cherkess (Circassian) language sounded like. Çelebi took out a sack of pebbles from the sleeve of his caftan and rattled it at the Sultan. "This, O Sultan, is how Cherkess sounds."

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The pride of the Circassians is the epic of the Narts, also called Nart sagas, which is an immense poetic narrative about the emergence, upbringing, and exploits of a warring band of mythical heroes called the Narts. The major Narts were Sosruquo, She Bardinuquo, Pataraz, and Warzameg. The chief heroine was Satanay, whose name means "mother of one hundred." She was the eternally youthful and all-knowing wife of Warzameg and mother to the mythical heroes. The Nart tradition also contains dance songs, humorous couplets, and even lullabies.

The Nart is found in varying forms among other North Caucasian peoples, some of whom, like the Ossetians, are totally unrelated to the Circassians. The more archaic Nart songs help scholars "read" pictures they find on artifacts from the excavations of Scythian and Sarmatian graves. The epic's many layers have been created over thousands of years. On the one hand, the Nart epic overlaps with Greek myths, with episodes such as the story of Prometheus. On the other hand, it includes sagas about the lives and deaths of the Circassian historical personalities known to have lived as recently as 400 years ago (such as the warrior Aidamyrgan). Several peoples have preserved and enriched the original epic in their languages, thereby making it part of their cultural heritage. As the epic has passed through different languages and epochs, unique transformations have



occurred to the ancient songs. The Circassian form is particularly archaic and mixed with local lore.

The Circassians also have fables reminiscent of those of Aesop. Circassian lore generally shows strong ties with that of ancient Greece, the steppe Iranians (Scythians and Sarmatians), and the Eastern Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians).

#### 5 RELIGION

The majority of Circassians today consider themselves Muslim, although few practice any religion in daily life. Their recent ancestors were Christians. Earlier ancestors were pagans who worshipped a varied pantheon of gods, including Tlepsh, the god of the forge (akin to the Greek Hephaestus or Roman Vulcan), as well as the spirits of sacred mountains, groves, and streams. Distant ancestors several thousand years ago used to build impressive stone megalith structures, similar to those found in Celtic Europe. In the Northwestern Caucasus, the megaliths usually had the shape of houses with enormous stone tops closing the round entrance. Scholars suspect that these "houses of giants," or *dolmens*, were designed to hold spirits. Later, Byzantine Greeks spread Christianity among the Circassians, but the conversion was very superficial. Circassians began gradually converting to Islam after Byzantium fell to the Muslim Turks in the 15th century. Islam took root in the North Western Caucasus when it became the religion of those seeking democracy and resisting the Russian advance. As late

as 1824, engravings of a Flemish trading expedition show Circassians making offerings to a cross in a sacred grove.

Religion fell into disuse during the Soviet period, but recently there has been some resurgence in reaction to the traumatic experiences of the post-Communist transition. In addition, *Jama'ats* (Islamic societies) have formed.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Circassians have begun commemorating 21 May—the day in 1864 when the last highlander warriors were defeated by the Russian troops and driven to the Black Sea. Despite being nominally Muslim, Circassians celebrate New Year's Eve (like the rest of the former Soviet peoples) with Christmas trees, gifts, and fireworks. The concept of a "World Tree," depicted as a woman, is still alive in the Nart sagas, so the Christmas tree has a natural interpretation in Circassian lore.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the past, little boys and sometimes girls were often given to foster families for upbringing. This custom was called *atalyk* (a Turkic word) or /p'wer zesh'tara/ (one taken as a student or fosterling) and was used to strengthen the bonds of kinship among the highlander clans and social levels, since the princes and nobles fostered their children to their servants and workers. Children were not to be returned to their biological parents until they were fully educated young adults, usually around eighteen. The moment of return was an occasion for great celebration. Most Circassians would thus have two sets of parents and brothers and sisters. Insult or murder of any relative, either biological or the foster *atalyk*, would be avenged by all men of both clans. Sometimes Circassians chose people of another language or even Christians, Armenians, or Russian or Ukrainian Cossacks to be their *atalyks*, which served to prevent conflicts. Sometimes a fosterling would continue to live with his foster parents. This was a great honor for the foster family and such a child was called a *qana* (one who stayed).

Historically, marriage was by abduction. In most cases, this abduction was a pre-arranged drama. The bride wore a leather corset with 48 knots. The corset with all its leather thongs intact had to be presented after the first nuptial night to show the groom's self-restraint and respect for his bride. Such weddings were the occasion for prolonged feasting. When a true abduction (one that had not been pre-arranged) took place, the brothers and male cousins of the abducted woman would launch a prolonged pursuit. Sometimes these ended tragically; sometimes they ended by the abducted bride's family becoming reconciled to their new son-in-law.

When a person was seriously or terminally ill, close friends or relatives would post a metal plate to the doorframe of the sick room and conduct *tschapsh*. They would come to the door, strike the metal plate loudly to frighten away any evil spirits and then enter in high spirits, making jokes, both as a sign of contempt for the same spirits and to lighten the mood of the ill person. They would then sing to the bedridden one. After death, close friends and relatives would speak to the corpse and reminisce about their lives together and how they would be reunited in the afterlife of beautiful meadows and hills.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Like other warrior peoples, ancestors of Circassians developed highly elaborate etiquette and a rigorous set of rules of behavior called *Adyghe khabze*, which can be translated as "the Adyghe way." The rules of *khabze* demanded very proud and noble conduct in every respect, from the very upright way one walks or rides a horse to civic attitudes toward community affairs. Respect of elders was paramount. For example, there is a story of a young man who lived with his foster *atalyk* parents and never saw his real father. Gravely wounded in battle, he asked to see his biological father once before he died. When the father came, the dying young Circassian stood to greet him according to the rules of *khabze*. The father embraced his son, making an effort not to cry, and left immediately, saying: "My son grew up truly a good Adyghe who must stand up when an elder person comes, but I cannot see him stand on his feet bleeding." Once the father left, the son dropped on the floor dead.

A husband's relations towards his wife were highly formalized in public, as was a father's signs of affection for his children. In contrast a woman's relations with her brother, or an uncle's to his nieces and nephews, were spontaneous and overtly affectionate. This peculiar pattern, which did not govern private feelings, is called the *Cherkess–Omaha* kinship system.

Formerly a young woman had her own room in which to receive suitors. The behavior of these suitors was overseen by the woman's brothers, who were responsible for maintaining her honor. Women nevertheless had wide latitude in matters of love and sex and even to this day retain considerable autonomy in these aspects of their lives.

These customs were observed in all social levels of their society.

*Adyghe khabze* is no longer fully observed in modern society but the rules of hospitality, protection of strangers, and respect to the elders are still very strong.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, Circassians were proud but poor. They lived in long adobe houses covered with reeds or straw that could be easily expanded if one of the sons married. The main house and its satellites were enclosed within a compound. All transportation was by foot, on horseback, or oxen-driven carts with huge wheels because the roads were no more than mountain paths. The people grew corn, millet, and fruit trees, and bred sheep and horses. Their houses had chairs and cots reminiscent of those seen on Greek urns, with carpets on the floor and sometimes on the walls. The poorer people are reported to have eaten without plates, putting thick corn meal with pieces of smoked cheese or meat straight onto the low tables. Native words for dish, pot, and drinking horn indicate that such utensils were known.

This way of life changed during the 20th century. Today, Circassians live in large brick houses or in city apartments. From the 1950s to the 1970s, when the Soviet economy was rapidly growing, many Circassians seized the opportunity to get a higher education, train for a skilled job, or make a small fortune by producing cash crops and selling them in Russia. During this period, many built spacious homes and bought cars or motorcycles. Young people became interested in Western jeans, sneakers, electronics, and DVDs. With the near-collapse of Soviet economy, after 1991 most Circassians experienced severe hardship like the rest of post-Soviet society.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Adyghe domestic life was characterized by an extended family, itself embedded within larger clan and blood lineage patterns. The eldest man was the arbiter in disputes and represented the family to the public. The eldest woman ran the household with the help of her daughters and daughters-in-law.

In the past, families that were extremely poor could even exchange their children for horses or sell them into slavery. Women were especially prized in the Turkish and Arab harems of the Middle East, and more than one Turkish sultan and powerful courtier was born to an Adyghe concubine mother. Adyghe men came to dominate the Janissary army of the Ottoman sultan and, for two centuries, ruled Egypt as the Circassian Mamlukes.

Today, in Russia the bulk of domestic work in the household still is done by women. Urbanization somewhat changed the traditional gender roles.

In the diaspora Adyghe household dynamics tend to retain certain traits that set them apart from the communities among which they live. Respect for elders and freedom of women are still apparent.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditionally, the most prized possessions of a man were his ornamented dagger; his *fascha* (Circassian suit) or *cherkesska* (from Turkish Cherkas), a robe-like jacket with bandoleers of cartridge-like measured musket charges sewn on the breasts; and his fur hat. Men wore a sort of peaked head-cloth that wrapped around the neck. Men also wore a sort of leather sock as a riding boot. Women wore long dresses with embroidered ornaments and (at least on festive occasions) silver or gold belts and necklaces. Women had no overcoats and in cold weather rarely ventured outside their homes. Noblewomen wore elevated platform shoes. Veiling of women, however, was never a part of Adyghe tradition. Men wore felt capes called *burkas* in winter and sharp-domed hoods called *bashlyk*.

Modern Circassians dress like Europeans except that old men in villages occasionally wear traditional hats made of *karakul* (dense, curly lamb's wool), which are expensive and thus are objects of ethnic pride. Women, especially in towns, use European-style makeup and perfume. They are often very stylish.

## 12 FOOD

Traditional food was very simple—corn meal, sheep's cheese, ground walnuts, fresh fruit, and dried or smoked meat. As life improved in the latter half of the 20th century, the Adyghe diet became much more varied due to numerous Russian and fellow Caucasian borrowings. The typically Adyghe dish is *shipsera pastera* (literally, gravy and pasta), in which wheat flour is slowly heated in a pan until it browns slightly; it is then added to chicken or turkey broth until it becomes dense like sour cream. Sometimes herbs (cilantro or parsley) and chopped leeks or onions are added to the broth just before the fried flour. Cooked chicken is chopped and served with this dish. This can be found in some cookbooks as "Circassian Chicken." Some Circassians use a lot of red pepper with *shipsera pastera*. All tend to use garlic extensively in their main dishes.

## 13 EDUCATION

Most Circassians are literate today, primarily in Russian or the language of their host nation (Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew, or English). Their native language has no traditional alphabet and is written with Russian letters plus special sign combinations for the numerous sounds not found in Russian or any other Indo-European language.

Traditionally, young men and women were taught dance. Young men were also taught horseback riding. The nobles had a special form of martial arts training. Various handicrafts were also taught, such as weapon-making, metal-working, leather-tooling, rug-making, cloth-making, and sewing.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

*Adigha kafa* (Circassians dances) are similar to the dances of all other North Caucasian peoples. The rhythm is provided by drums and wooden clackers, and the melody, once produced by national violin (*shichapshyna*) and flute (*c'amyl*), in recent times produced by either the Caucasian fiddle (*pshina*) or, more commonly, the accordion. There are both slow and incredibly fast dances, some resembling acrobatic tricks. For example, men sometimes dance with several daggers in their teeth, throwing one after another into the ground. Men dance in extremely upright postures, on their toes, with arms extended up and to the sides, facing their partners. There is also a dance where the men whirl about on their knees. Women make graceful circles with their arms, shyly looking down. In olden times a traditional round dance was conducted on horseback as a show of horsemanship.

Written literature and theater in the Circassian languages were created after 1917 as part of the Soviet policies of promoting and modernizing ethnic cultures. There is a great deal of poetry written and even some novels of high quality.

## 15 WORK

Until recently, with the exception of a few princes, all Circassians tilled the soil. Today, very few still farm or raise horses, but a sizable number work as high government authorities, managers, teachers, doctors, and technicians. There are also Adyghe businessmen, bankers, and traders—a previously unthinkable development because Adyghe *khabze*, the traditional code, deemed such occupations treacherous and unworthy of real men.

## 16 SPORTS

Equestrianism has always been very prestigious. In addition, Circassians are particularly fond of wrestling and martial arts, which is not surprising given their traditional values. Many Circassian men and women are extremely strong and athletic.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Television and movies have been very popular since they appeared several decades ago. Today, however, video is replacing them. Young men frequently visit dancing clubs and discos that exist in every village. Young women are free to attend, assuming they follow the norms of modesty. Violent confrontations between young men over female partners are commonplace and are often considered a form of entertainment in itself. Many older Adyghe are concerned, and the press and

cultural figures regularly express sorrow over the loss of ancient values.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk dance groups and circles of traditional musicians and craftsmen exist with state support wherever Circassians live in large enough numbers. Promotion of folk traditions is considered a healthy remedy to the social problems of modernity and is seen as important for the survival of the culture itself.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The sense of social and political dissatisfaction is one of the main problems of the Circassian society. Circassians are forced to live in conditions of discrimination at all levels. They fear that policies pursued by Russia will soon lead to the loss of Circassian language and assimilation. Fictitious autonomy in the three forcibly separated republics cannot compensate Circassian desire for political autonomy. Circassians are denied the right to elect leaders of their republics, who are appointed by the Russian government. Russia prevents the repatriation of descendants of Circassian exiles seeking to return to ancestral land. Even obtaining a tourist visa to visit Circassia in most cases meets a refusal. Repeated deportation of immigrants is not uncommon. Acute social dissatisfaction often forms protests and has even resulted in armed rebellion against Russia. The last uprising occurred in 2005. The situation is seriously aggravated by unemployment and underemployment and by the proximity of war zones in Chechnya and especially in Abkhazia, where many Circassian volunteers fought and then brought home their arms.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

According to statistics, the Circassian population is centered in the regions of Russia with the lowest rate of gender differences in income levels. Circassian women receive equal career opportunities and equal payment. However, in politics and in the corporate world, the percentage of the women in leadership positions is still relatively low, both in Russia and in the countries of the diaspora.

The historical and cultural traditions of Circassians held that women had a free and honorable position in society. In modern society, young women are free to choose a husband, and marriage follows the customs of modern European nations. Divorce and low birth rates are growing problems of Circassian society. For a modern Circassian woman there are no prohibited professions. Circassian women have followed many career paths, including performing arts, law, science, politics, business, and the fine arts.

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# CROATS

**LOCATION:** Croatia

**POPULATION:** 4,492,000 (est. 2008)

**LANGUAGE:** Croatian

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic vast majority; Eastern Orthodox, Muslim

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Croats are a people with a long and rich history who today live in their own independent, newly democratic country—Croatia, a land whose historical experience was heavily determined by its geographic location. Croatia has been the borderland between the Western Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox spheres of influence, the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe, and the Communist bloc countries and free Europe. Croatia is culturally and geographically in Central Europe but has bridged the Eastern and Western worlds throughout its history. This position as a borderland has had significant effects on Croatia's history and development.

In the 7th century AD, the Croats settled the regions of Dalmatia (a former Roman province on the coast of the Adriatic Sea), Pannonia (northern and northeastern Croatia), and Istria, as well as parts of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and southern Hungary. Local Croat lords began to emerge in the 9th century to lay the foundations for the medieval state. The first Croat king, Tomislav, assumed the title in AD 925. The Croats were Christianized in the early Middle Ages, entering the Roman Catholic community and the Western European cultural sphere from the beginning of their history.

The Croatian crown was incorporated into the Hungarian dynasty in 1102, thereby increasing Hungarian influence in the northern Croat provinces. In the early 1400s, the Dalmatian cities became part of Venice, a rising city-state and sea power with whom the Croat kings had long clashed. The rest of Croatia was governed under the feudal system, the standard in Western Europe at the time, by joint Croat-Hungarian kings and various powerful lords.

Following a century of invasions into southeastern Europe by the Ottoman Turks, the Croat nobles and knights fought an epic battle at Sisak in 1493. The "flower of Croat chivalry" fell on the battlefield, and a long period of Turkish ascendancy in this part of the world began. Croatia, unlike Serbia or Bosnia, was never entirely conquered.

In 1527, following another great Turkish military victory over the Hungarians the previous year, the Croat noblemen elected Ferdinand Habsburg of Austria as their new king. In the 16th century, Croatia was progressively reduced in size by Ottoman expansion. Croatia's political center was shifted to Zagreb, in the north, from the old Croat heartland in coastal Dalmatia. The visible symbols of Croatia's continued autonomy lay in the assembly of nobles—the Sabor—and the office of the Ban (the royal governor). From this time onward, foreign imperial powers had a decisive influence on Croat affairs.

The famous Croatian Military Border (Krajina) was established by Austria to hold the line against the Turks in the 16th and 17th centuries. Various Croat frontier regions, devastated by constant wars, were repopulated with Eastern Orthodox

settlers from the Balkans who served as colonists. This was the origin of the Serb community in Croatia. As the Ottoman Empire began to recede in the late 19th century, these areas reunited with the rest of Croatia.

Croatia became known as the "remnants of the remnants of the once-great kingdom" and as a "bulwark of Christendom" for preventing further advances by the Muslim Turks into Christian Europe.

During the 17th century, the present-day borders of Croatia were largely carved out in battles with the Turks. But, the power of the Croat aristocracy declined steadily in the face of Austrian military control over the border. As a result of this situation, together with Venetian dominance in Dalmatia and Hungarian demands on the rest of the country, Croatia's independence was reduced in the 18th century. A final imperial interlude came during the era of Napoleon. Dalmatia, Istria, and parts of northern Croatia and Slovenia entered the French empire from 1809 to 1813 as the Illyrian Provinces (finally reverting to Austrian rule in 1815).

The 19th century saw the development of modern Croatian nationalism in the various attempts by the Croats to reassert control over their own destiny. In the 1830s and 1840s, a Croat movement arose in opposition to rising Hungarian and German nationalism. The adherents of the Croat National Revival sought to unify the diverse Croat lands both culturally (through a standardized written language) and politically (by joining the divided provinces into one kingdom). The Illyrian Movement sounded the main themes of 19th-century Croatian history: linguistic unity with the Serbs and political unity with all South Slavs.

Croatia remained split into several distinct regions, even within the reformed Austro-Hungarian monarchy after 1867. As a result, many politicians desired Croat independence from Vienna and Budapest and agitated for an independent Croatia, rejecting ideas of South Slavic community or "Yugoslavism." Friction between Croat individuality and South Slavic unity has been another key feature of modern political history in Croatia.

Dissatisfaction with the situation in Austria-Hungary increased steadily in the three decades before 1914. The emerging idea of Yugoslav unity outside the Habsburg empire was gaining momentum, and some hoped to unite the South Slavs in one state and defend their territory from stronger, non-Slavic foreign powers like Austria, Hungary, and Italy.

At the end of World War I in 1918, as the Austro-Hungarian monarchy finally collapsed, the Croatian provinces proclaimed unity and independence and (along with Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Vojvodina) joined the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Ironically, while all the Croat lands were finally united, the new South Slavic union ruled by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty was never democratically approved or validated by the Croatian people.

In fact, the Croat political parties, soon dominated by Stjepan Radić's Croat Peasant Party, rejected the new order and remained opposed to the unfair and centralizing policies of the Serbian-dominated government. The constitution of 1921—the centralist foundation of the new royal regime—was adopted over the objections of the Croats and others. In 1928, Radić was killed on the floor of parliament in Belgrade by a Montenegrin deputy of the ruling party. Using this event as a pretext, King Aleksandar instituted a harsh dictatorship in 1929. He tried to



erase long-standing national differences by force and changed the official name of the state to Yugoslavia. There was stubborn resistance to this policy in Croatia, where integral Yugoslavism was seen as a mere cover for the old policy of Serbian expansion. In short, Serbia was considered a threatening foreign power trying to subordinate and assimilate Croatia.

By 1939, the government of the Yugoslav prince and the new Croat leader, Vladko Maček, agreed on a formula for Croatia's autonomy within Yugoslavia. However, this Croat-Serb Agreement was a flawed and short-lived solution. The new Banate of Croatia was opposed by the Communists, by right-wingers, and by influential circles in Serbia.

When Germany and Italy invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, the country quickly fell apart. An Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed by anti-Yugoslav nationalists (Ustasha) in Zagreb in collusion with German agents. Maček went into seclusion and his party—the most popular and powerful in Croatia—was banned. Most Croats were not sorry to see the end of the repressive royal Yugoslavia, but when Croatia's wartime rulers committed many crimes of their own, a vigorous resistance movement against the fascist order arose. During World War II, the pro-Axis government in Croatia was opposed by pro-Allied insurgent forces called partisans, who were directed by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The Communist Partisans achieved significant support from Croats in Dalmatia, much of which was annexed by Italy in 1941, and from Croatian Serbs.

At the end of World War II in 1945, the partisans, with Allied and Soviet support, emerged victorious. Their overall leader was Josip Broz Tito, who also became the postwar dictator of Yugoslavia (until his death in 1980). Croatia became a republic in a new, federated Yugoslavia. All power was in Communist hands and dissent was not tolerated. The Yugoslav political and economic power structure was at first centralized in Belgrade. The ruling Communist regime was particularly harsh on Croat opponents who desired more freedom for the people of Croatia. In 1971, Tito purged or imprisoned much of the liberal Croat Communist Party leadership and its supporters due to their excessive national (i.e. non-Yugoslav) loyalty. A new constitution in 1974 brought decentralization and inefficiency.

Like the first, monarchist Yugoslavia (1918–1941), the second, Communist Yugoslavia (1945–1991) was also founded on force and kept alive by threats of force. Neither state had genuine democratic legitimacy or achieved widespread popular support in Croatia. Many Croats believed that Communist Yugoslavia was exploiting Croatia's economic and natural wealth while reducing the Croats to second-class citizens in their own country. It came as little surprise, then, that when Croatia's first free elections in some 50 years were held in 1990, the Communists lost. When a referendum on independence was held in 1991, the vast majority of Croats (97%) voted for independence from Yugoslavia.

After centuries of foreign domination and unrepresentative rule, the Croats were finally given a historic opportunity to decide their fate for themselves. Croatia's independence (declared in June 1991) was recognized by the world beginning in January 1992.

Unfortunately, Croatia's transition to democracy and independence from Communist Yugoslavia was not accomplished peacefully. The Yugoslav central Communist government in Belgrade and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), both overwhelmingly controlled by the Serbs, were adamantly opposed to the secession of Croatia (and Slovenia) from Yugoslavia. This contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in 1990–91, as the Serb minority in certain parts of Croatia, supported by the Yugoslav government and the JNA, launched a rebellion against the democratically elected government of Croatia. By the time United Nations peacekeepers became involved in 1992, almost 30% of Croatia had been conquered and occupied by the Serb forces, with dozens of Croatian cities and towns damaged or destroyed, 20,000 people killed, and 250,000 people forced from their homes. Fighting continued off and on until August 1995, when the Croatian army and government regained control over most of the rebel Serb occupied territory.

Reintegration of the country and privatization went swiftly, beginning under the Catholic-dominated nationalist government of Dr. Franjo Tuđman. Since his death in 1999 power has shifted from right to left to right again in a multiparty system of changing coalitions. The country appears united in the drive to meet the requirements to become part of the European Union. Croatia applied for EU membership in 2003 and is likely to become a full member in 2010.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Croatia had an estimated population of 4,492,000 in 2008 living in the country, comparable to the population of Alabama. They included 89.6% ethnic Croats, 4.5% Serbs, and a mix of small groups, such as Hungarians, Italians, Slovenes, Bosniaks,



and Roma. Nearly as many ethnic Croats may live outside the country as in it.

Croatia has experienced extensive demographic changes since 1991. After Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia in June of 1991, armed local Serb rebels, supported by the Yugoslav Army, forcibly expelled hundreds of thousands of Croats and other non-Serb minorities from their homes and set up two Serb-run regions within Croatia's boundaries. In 1995, as Croatia reclaimed most of the territory occupied by Serb forces, tens of thousands of Serbs left Croatia to trek to Serbia, instigated by their own defeated leadership and fearing retaliation.

All citizens of Croatia are guaranteed extensive personal and civil rights under the constitution of 1990, which was amended in 2001. Minorities in Croatia have also been granted extensive rights to cultural and linguistic autonomy, in addition to all rights of every Croatian citizen.

Croatia is located in southeastern Europe, across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. It is shaped like a boomerang, bordered on the north by Hungary and Slovenia, on the south by Bosnia and Herzegovina with the southern tip touching Montenegro, on the east by the Vojvodina province of Serbia, and on the west by the Adriatic Sea.

Croatia has an area of 56,538 sq km (21,829 sq mi), which is about the size of West Virginia. Croatia's Adriatic coastline is 1,778 km (1,100 mi) long and dotted with over 1,000 islands, which add another 4,058 km (2,522 mi) of coast.

Croatia's capital is Zagreb, located in northern Croatia, with a metropolitan area population of over one million. Other major cities are Split (metropolitan area over 200,000) in Dalmatia; Rijeka (ca. 150,000), a major port at the very north end of the Adriatic Sea; and Osijek (over 100,000) in Slavonia.

Croatia's natural landscape varies widely from region to region. Rolling hills and fertile plains characterize the Pannonian region in north/northeastern Croatia. Rugged mountains stretch straight into the Adriatic Sea in the Croatian coastal region, with a mountainous hinterland whose land is rocky and less fertile. The Dinaric Alps region, in northwestern Croatia, is mountainous and heavily wooded.

Croatia's climate is Mediterranean and very mild along the coast and more continental and harsh in the interior. Along the Adriatic Coast, summers are sunny, dry and warm, and winters are mild and similar to those of southern California. In the interior, there are hot summers, cold winters, and four very distinct seasons, as in the U.S. Middle Atlantic.

The homeland of the Croats has in some historical periods also included areas of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina. Approximately 750,000 Croats lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the recent war there. Estimates of the number of Croats living outside Croatia range from 2.5 to 4 million. Most emigration occurred in the last 150 years, although Croats have been leaving their ancestral lands since the Turkish invasions (1400–1800), for both political and economic reasons. Countries with large numbers of Croats include the United States, Germany, Australia, Canada, and Argentina. The Burgenland Croats, a particularly tenacious community of Croats, have lived in eastern Austria for 500 years and still preserve their language. Interestingly, more people are now immigrating into Croatia than are leaving.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

The Croats speak Croatian, a South Slavic language of the Indo-European family. Croatian is written in the Latin alphabet. It has 30 letters, each of which is pronounced and has an independent sound. There are several regional dialects. Many words in the Croatian language reflect the foreign cultural influences on Croatia through the centuries. The Croatian language has German (*šrafčiger*, "screwdriver"), Hungarian (*čizme*, "boots"), Italian (*pršut*, "prosciutto;" *lancun*, "bedsheet") and Turkish (*šećer*, "sugar;" *jastuk*, "pillow") words, but language traditionalists seek to eliminate as many foreign words as possible.

Common Croatian words include *dobar dan* (good day), *kako ste?* (how are you?), *dobro* (well), and *hvala* (thank you).

### **4 FOLKLORE**

Croatia's traditional folk culture is enormously wealthy and diverse because of the many different cultural influences to which the different regions of Croatia were exposed at various points in history. The cultures that influenced Croatian folk culture through the centuries are Hungarian, Austrian, Venetian, Balkan, ancient Croatian, ancient Mediterranean, and Turkish. The Croats borrowed elements from these cultural influences and incorporated them into their own uniquely Croatian folk traditions. Croatian traditional folk culture is as varied as that of any other region of the same size in Europe.

Traditional Croatian folk culture is manifested in dances, songs, holiday traditions, folk tales, and other forms.

### **5 RELIGION**

The dominant religious tradition of the Croats has been Roman Catholicism since the early 7th century, when the Croats converted to Christianity. The Croats have steadfastly maintained their religion for 13 centuries, and Catholic tradition and values remain one of the defining factors of Croatian national and cultural identity.

Minority religions among the Croats include Eastern Orthodoxy. A smaller percentage of people in Croatia practice Islam. Some claim no religion.

Religion in Croatia during the Communist period (1945–1991) was relegated to the private sphere. Since the establishment of democracy in Croatia, religious freedom is guaranteed under the Croatian constitution, but the Catholic church is often able to dominate.

### **6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Croatia today has a number of official national holidays. Many of these are associated with Catholic holy days and traditions. These include Epiphany (January 6), Easter Monday, Corpus Christi on a Thursday typically in May, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas (December 25–26).

Other non-working holidays are New Year's Day, International Labor Day on May 1, Anti-Fascist Struggle Day on June 22, Croatian National Day on May 25, Victory and Thanksgiving Day on August 5, and Independence Day on October 8. In addition, Jews are excused from work or school to celebrate Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, Muslims to celebrate Ramadan Bairam and Kurban Bairam, and Orthodox Christians to celebrate Christmas on January 7.

Most of the notable holiday customs are associated with the church holidays. The day before the start of Lent (known as fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras to some) is celebrated by dressing in costumes and making special doughnuts. Easter is celebrated by coloring and sharing eggs, preparing and blessing food baskets, and attending church services. On All Saints' Day (November 1), people visit cemeteries, light candles and place chrysanthemums on the graves in remembrance of their deceased loved ones. On the eve of St. Nicholas Day, December 6, children leave their shoes out for St. Nicholas to leave them gifts. The family gets together on Christmas Eve to decorate the Christmas tree and attend midnight Mass. Christmas day is celebrated with family by exchanging presents and holiday greetings.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional rites of passage have declined in modern times and are not distinctive in Croatian society today. Three main rites of passage still observed are baptism, marriage, and death.

The birth of a child is observed, among Christians, through the rite of baptism, where a child is welcomed into the church through the pouring of water and symbolic acceptance of the faith through the godparents. Newborns generally receive gifts of gold jewelry on this occasion.

Marriage is conducted in city hall and/or in church, usually followed by a reception. Weddings in small towns and rural areas can be large affairs with the whole village attending, while urban weddings tend to be smaller. A wedding is often an all-day family affair. Wedding guests ride through the streets in a procession of decorated cars, honking horns and waving.

Like birth, death is usually marked with Roman Catholic rituals, including a funeral mass, graveside service, the laying of flowers, and the marking of grave sites with headstones. The wake takes place just hours before the burial in a facility on the cemetery grounds, and the people walk in procession behind the casket to the grave. After the funeral, family and friends attend a lunch called *karmine*. Death notices appear in newspapers but are also posted on trees and poles around the neighborhood.

High school graduation is a major milestone. The *maturalni ples* (senior prom) is a major event. There is also the graduation trip, which is a group trip, often abroad.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Croats are traditionally a warm, friendly, open, and sociable people who value family and friendships and like to make outsiders feel welcome. Croats greet one another openly and, in familiar circumstances, affectionately. Common greetings include saying good day, shaking hands, and hugging and kissing each other once on each cheek. Displays of affection, such as holding hands and modest kissing, are very acceptable in public.

The Croatian lifestyle lends itself to a great deal of social interaction. People generally walk or use public transportation, work in their gardens, sit on their balconies, shop daily in neighborhood stores, and frequent cafes. Croats get to know their neighbors well and have many friends and acquaintances.

Croats pride themselves on their hospitality, and food and drink are immediately offered when one enters a Croatian

home. It is considered impolite and can offend the hosts if the offer of food or drink is declined.

A major facet of interpersonal relations is the linguistic distinction between the formal *vi* and familiar *ti*, meaning you. Elders, professional peers, and professors are examples of groups one would address using the formal terms. Peers, friends, and family are usually addressed in the familiar.

Dating in Croatia today is similar to dating in the U.S., usually beginning informally in high school. Young men and women choose whom to date and whom to marry.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Croatian health care system is relatively well developed. Health care is provided by the government, and all citizens are entitled to it. Because of the quality and accessibility of health care, people in Croatia have a high life expectancy: 79.3 years for women and 72.5 years for men.

Croatian consumers have access to and purchase a wide variety of goods and services from small retailers, specialty stores and boutiques, department stores, and open-air markets. Although consumer prices are high in relation to salaries, the selection is large. Just about anything that is available in the United States can be purchased in Croatia.

Croats live in permanent dwellings including single-family homes, multi-family homes, and apartments. The interior layout of an average Croatian home includes separate rooms for a kitchen (usually with eating area), a bathroom or shower, a toilet, a living room, and bedrooms. In most Croatian homes, regardless of location and the economic status of the owners, one will find most of the amenities considered basic by an average American family. This includes television sets, refrigerators, stoves, telephones, washing machines, stereo systems, VCRs, and DVD players. In many homes one can find personal computers, satellite dishes, and video game systems. Cell phones are ubiquitous.

Many Croatian families own cars, but mass transportation is the most popular and efficient mode of travel in Croatia. Electric trams and extensive bus networks transport people within cities. Railroads and buses also transport people throughout the country and into other European destinations. Air transportation is also available. The driving age in Croatia is 18, and cars generally have manual transmission.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Croats are very family oriented. The basic Croatian family unit is the nuclear family of parents and children living in one home. It is not uncommon for extended families of parents, children, and grandparents to share a dwelling. Aunts, uncles, and cousins, godparents, a couple's best man and maid of honor, and longtime family friends are also considered as family and interact with each other often for family events, holidays, and informal visiting.

Family activities are very important. Weekends are considered family time, when families have a special dinner together, take strolls in town, go out for coffee, and visit friends and family. Families often vacation together on the Adriatic Coast during the summer, often in their own summer home, which may be the ancestral home.

Women have a very important role in Croatian society and generally have the same opportunities as men. It is common for women to work, but they are also the pillars of the home.



Croatians at Ban Jelacic square in Zagreb, Croatia. Weekends are considered family time, when families have a special lunch together, take strolls in town, go for coffee, and visit friends and family. (Embassy of the Republic of Croatia)

Croatian social policy recognizes the importance of this dual role of women. For example, women who work receive at least half a year paid maternity leave and six more months at partial pay, with a guaranteed job when they return.

The Croatian birth rate mirrors the general trend in developed countries: it has been declining in recent decades. It is common to have one to two children, and families with three or more children are considered large today. Marriage is the overwhelming lifestyle choice in Croatian society, and a mutually exclusive, monogamous relationship is the standard.

The Croatian family structure is still rather patriarchal. The man is considered head of the household, although the woman tends to have more household responsibility.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Croats today wear the same types of clothing found everywhere in the developed world. The styles and norms, especially for the younger generations, are very contemporary and parallel those in Croatia's trendsetting neighbor, Italy. U.S. urban styles are also popular, especially Levi's jeans and Nike tennis shoes. Young people are very particular about their appearance and dress stylishly. This is true for all income levels in both rural and urban settings and in all regions.

One would be hard pressed today to find evidence of the rich traditional folk dress of Croatia's recent past. Remaining fragments of traditional dress can be found mostly among the

older population as manifested by women wearing a headscarf or traditional hairstyle.

### **12 FOOD**

Croatian food and cooking are as diverse as Croatia's landscape and differ according to region. Regional cooking is shaped by the available food in each region, as well as by tradition and outside influences.

Adriatic cuisine is light and incorporates the bounties of the sea and sun, such as fish, squid, pasta, and fresh fruit and vegetables. The kitchen of the northeastern regions (Danubian) is hearty and spicy, characterized by pork dishes, smoked meats, stews and pickled vegetables, and rich desserts. The Alpine region boasts food that is rich and mild, such as fried veal, poultry, potatoes, and green vegetables. Grilling is very common, and a favorite is *ćevapčići*, small spicy sausages made from ground meat.

Some traditional Croatian dishes are *sarma* (stuffed cabbage), *bakalar* (cod), *purica i mlinci* (turkey and special pasta), *paštica* (a marinated beef dish), and *Zagrebački odrezak* (stuffed veal schnitzel). Soup is very common and is eaten with almost every main meal and throughout the year. Special traditional breads are made for celebrations, such as Easter. Fancy, rich pastries and cakes are also important to the Croatian kitchen.



*Croatian children attend class in the central Bosnian village of Gornji. Walls separate Croats and Muslims at the school.  
(AFP/Getty Images)*

Croats eat three to four meals a day. Breakfast is very important and may include bread, spreads, and yogurt. It is also common to eat *marenda* or *galebac*, a light snack at mid-morning, commonly fruit or baked goods. Dinner, usually between 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm, is the main meal of the day and can include soup, salad, and an entree. Supper is eaten in the late evening and is small and light.

Sunday dinner is the most important meal of the week. It is usually earlier, between noon and 1:00 pm, and more elaborate than weekday dinner. It is the big family meal, and guests are often invited.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Croatia possesses an excellent system of education that provides universal public education for all its children. The quality of education is generally uniform throughout the country, so that students in smaller urban and rural communities receive

the same quality of instruction as their urban counterparts. This excellence in education has produced an adult literacy rate of 98.7% among the Croatian population.

The curriculum and courses are rigorous, and students must study hard to pass. Students in elementary (and secondary) school typically take more than twelve classes, including chemistry, history, math, physics, a foreign language, and Croatian language and literature. Essentially, Croatian students must choose their general career path in eighth grade, when they choose a high school. The high school system is organized into two categories: trade schools and college preparatory (*gimnazija*). Trade schools prepare students for careers ranging from nursing to machining to construction to tourism, while the college preparatory program prepares students for university study.

In addition to polytechnic schools, Croatia has universities in Zagreb (established in 1669), Split, Rijeka, and Osijek, Zadar, Dubrovnik, and Pula.

Legally, only elementary school is compulsory, but most Croats today finish secondary school.

Croatia is in the process of changing its education to conform to the Bologna Process, so that standards will be compatible with those of the rest of Europe.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The Croats have a deep and rich cultural heritage that reflects Croatia's Western and Central European traditions as well as the diverse history of its regions. The Croatian cultural heritage is revealed in art, music, theater, sciences, architecture, literature, and the academic tradition. Remnants of ancient Rome found in Croatia include Emperor Diocletian's Palace in Split, the ruins of Salona near Split, and the Roman amphitheater in Pula. Churches in Dalmatia reflect beautiful and unique Gothic and Romanesque architecture and design, beautifully represented in Poreč, Trogir, Zadar, and Šibenik. Dubrovnik, a remarkably preserved medieval walled city, has been called the Jewel of the Adriatic. Dubrovnik served as the intellectual and cultural center for the Croats for centuries.

#### **15 WORK**

Both men and women in Croatia work and contribute to the support of their families. Croatia has about 1.8 million people in its work force. In 2008, the average monthly take-home salary in Croatia was about us\$1,050. The kuna is the Croatian currency (approximately 4.9 kuna per us\$1 as of 2008).

Social policy and tradition in Croatia are quite generous to the average worker. Croatian workers receive at least four weeks of vacation per year, in addition to national holidays. Employee benefits include universal health insurance, generous sick leave, accumulating seniority and pension benefits regardless of change of employers, maternity, paternity and family leaves, and bonuses for dependents. It is also common for employers to provide subsidized meals, transportation, and vacation packages for employees.

Students sometimes work, but the jobs are often seasonal and temporary. Typical jobs for young people are waiting tables in cafes or working in tourism during the summer. The types of jobs traditionally held by young people in America, such as retail, restaurant, and clerical work, are usually held by people with families to support.

Retirement age varies and is based on age and length of employment. Most Croatians can retire by 64. The pension system recently was changed to one partly based on fixed contributions to mandatory private funds.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Sports are extremely popular in Croatia. Team sports like soccer, basketball, volleyball, handball, and water polo are very popular, as are tennis, bocce, swimming, hiking, running, and aerobics. The hands-down winner for most popular sport is soccer, called *nogomet*.

Soccer is also the most popular spectator sport in Croatia, with professional and amateur teams throughout the country. The sport has a long tradition that has resulted in the formation of intense team loyalties and the erection of numerous stadiums. Watching soccer matches is a sport in itself, but fan

violence is a problem. Basketball is continually gaining popularity as well.

In proportion to its population, Croatia has produced an extraordinary number of world-class athletes across a wide range of sports. Today, some of the most famous Croatian sports stars are Goran Ivanišević and Iva Majoli in tennis, Toni Kukoč of the Chicago Bulls, Dino Rađa of the Boston Celtics, and the late Dražen Petrović of the New Jersey Nets in basketball.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Most Croats, especially young people, relax and socialize in the cafes that line the main streets of large cities and small towns alike. Even residential neighborhoods have numerous cafes. In the summer, outdoor tables are filled, and the streets are filled with people and activity.

Croats also like to go to the movies. The most popular movies are the major American productions that appear in theaters in Croatia quite soon after their release in the United States. Croatian theaters also regularly offer domestic and international films as well. Movies are in their original languages with subtitles in Croatian, occasionally dubbed.

Theater, including musicals, dramas, and comedies, is also very popular in Croatia; most cities boast their own theater. Also popular are classical music concerts, ballets, and modern dance performances.

Every Croatian household, from the largest urban center to the remotest village, possesses a television. Croatia has national state-sponsored channels, private networks, and local stations. Croatian television offers domestic programming for the whole family, such as children's educational shows, comedy series, documentaries, and specialty shows. Croatian television also regularly broadcasts American and other foreign shows and movies, including *Desperate Housewives* and *Grey's Anatomy*.

In addition, many homes have satellite dishes that can receive CNN, MTV, the Cartoon Channel, ESPN, British Sky Movies, and just about anything else available to the international satellite network.

American popular culture influences countries throughout the world through music, movies, television, and MTV, and Croatia is no exception. Croatian popular culture resembles American pop culture, with a bit of a European twist. Young Croats today are hip. Fashions are a sophisticated, cosmopolitan mix. Techno, rap, and international and domestic pop music are popular.

Croatia has a strong popular music tradition of its own and has dozens of music festivals in all the larger cities including Split, Vinkovci, Zagreb, and Pula. Croatia also has a number of magazines devoted to pop culture, and television programs featuring music videos and fashion.

Young Croats spend a great deal of their free time going out. Streets are very safe, even after dark. The most popular hang-outs are cafes, but discos (nightclubs) are also very popular and often stay open all night on the weekends.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Traditional Croatian crafts include folk dress and footwear, woven household textiles, musical instruments, lace, jewelry, and other ornaments. There is also a strong tradition of Croatian folk song and dance. Regions are highly differentiated. The inland plains are in the cultural sphere of neighboring Hungary, while the mountains of the northwest are more

like Slovenia. The coast has been influenced by Italy across the Adriatic, while the rugged Dinaric Mountains that rise up from the coast preserve archaic Balkan features. One distinctively Croatian art form is filigree jewelry. Earrings are found in medieval graves that are very similar in design to ones that craftspeople make today.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The most significant social problems in Croatia today are still related to the 1991 warfare between the Croats and the Serbs, who were joined by an insurgent Serbian minority in Croatia. The war left 16,000 Croats dead, over 5,000 still unaccounted for, 25,000 permanently disabled, and approximately 200,000 displaced from their homes. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that Croatia is in the process of transforming itself from a Communist country to a democracy and establishing a free-market economy.

Croatia's social safety net is stretched very thin in providing care and services to all the war victims and their families. In addition, the war caused over \$15 billion in material damage. Reconstruction is ongoing.

In addition to the extensive costs of reconstruction, Croatia is also denationalizing government-owned factories and businesses and restructuring the economy. An initially high unemployment rate has in 2008 come down to 12.4%. The cost of living is high, while the average salary is approximately \$12,700 per year, net, and people are dissatisfied and often pessimistic.

Croatia is currently experiencing increased drug use and abuse among its young people. Areas that are most vulnerable are those on the Adriatic coast, because of the ease with which drugs can be brought in by sea, and larger urban areas.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Patriarchy, under communism up to 1991, persisted but was not officially encouraged. With the transition to capitalism and a multiparty system, patriarchy reasserted itself as an ideology, attempting to curtail women's reproductive rights and push women back into the home. A smaller proportion of women are employed now than 20 years ago. Their salaries are not on par with those of men. Women suffer discrimination in employment and are disproportionately represented among the unemployed. A newly vociferous Catholic Church played a big role in this. Female members of parliament declined from 17% to 4.8%. Beginning in 1995, the government began to put principles of gender equality back on paper. In 2004 the Office of Ombudsperson for Sex Equality and the Government Office for Sex Equality became operational. However, it is still women who do the housework and caregiving. Schools that are still dominated by conservative and clerical voices are a major part of the problem. Nevertheless, women are reasserting their rights through nongovernmental organizations. The Center for Women's Studies has been operating in Zagreb since 1995. Domestic violence has been recognized as an issue, although there is but one inadequate shelter, and police have yet to learn to take it seriously.

Annual gay pride events have taken place in Zagreb since 2002.

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—revised by T. Alt and W. Browne

# CZECHS

**LOCATION:** Czech Republic

**POPULATION:** 10.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Czech

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Roman Catholic and Protestant)

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic (formerly known as Czechoslovakia) is a young nation: On 1 January 1993, it ended its union with Slovakia after more than three-quarters of a century of relatively calm coexistence.

The area now known as the Czech Republic has been inhabited since the earliest settlement of Europe. The first known settlers of the region were the Boii, a Celtic people from whom the name Bohemia is derived; they were followed by the Germanic Marcomanni tribe at the beginning of the Christian era. In the 5th to 7th centuries, Slavs began to settle in the region, and in the 9th century, Christianity was embraced by its inhabitants. During this period, the kingdom of Bohemia was founded. It reached its political and cultural height during the 14th century under King Charles I. The capital of the kingdom was Prague, where Charles constructed many buildings, including the Hradcany Castle, and, in 1348, founded Charles University, the first university in Central Europe.

During Charles's reign, the religious reformer Jan Hus (1369–1415) attacked the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the privileged position of the Germans in Bohemia, who had been immigrating to the country since the 11th century. Hus was eventually excommunicated for his views. Conditions in the region worsened when the Roman Catholic Habsburg dynasty of Austria ascended to the Bohemian throne in 1526. The Czechs rebelled against the Habsburgs but were defeated in 1620. Over the next three centuries, Bohemia was reduced to a mere province of the Habsburg Empire.

The Slovaks had no independent state of their own before 1918, having been absorbed by the Hungarians as early as the 10th century. During World War I, Czech and Slovak representatives abroad, including Tomas Masaryk, Eduard Benes, and Milan Stefanik, won support from the Allied powers for the creation of a Czech-Slovak republic. Thus, Czechoslovakia was established in Prague immediately after the war, uniting Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia as one nation. The Czech National Council seized power in Prague, the Habsburgs were deposed, and Masaryk was elected president. A Western-style democratic republic was established, enjoying stable government during the interwar period, only to be torn apart as Adolf Hitler exploited the Allies' appeasement policy in the infamous 1938 Munich agreement, under which the Czech territory was ceded to Germany. The following year, Hitler brutally annexed Bohemia and Moravia as a protectorate and turned Slovakia into an independent fascist state.

In 1945, the communists, with Soviet backing, gained political power. In February 1948, a communist overthrow brought the country under Soviet domination. After Stalin's death in 1953, there was a general loosening of political strictures in Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia, and a mild liberalization of conditions was permitted. However, it did not last long, and the traditional Stalinist system was reemployed.

The year 1968 is remembered as the "Prague Spring," when a new regime under President Ludvik Svoboda, a World War II hero, began to liberalize and democratize Czechoslovak life and loosen the country's association with the Soviet Union. This move was met with hostility by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies put an end to this wave of democratization, as some 650,000 Soviet, East German, Polish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian troops invaded and occupied the country. Though the intervention was condemned worldwide, Soviet troops remained in the country. President Alexander Dubcek was replaced by another Slovak, Gustav Husak, in 1975, and the reforms of the Prague Spring were almost entirely scrapped. There were repressions and arrests, and by 1982, the opposition had been successfully neutralized.

After the fall of the communism in Hungary and Poland, the so-called Velvet Revolution came to Czechoslovakia. The communist government resigned, and Vaclav Havel, a former dissident playwright, became the president of a free and democratic Czechoslovakia in 1990. He attempted to preserve the Czech-Slovak union, but three years of debate and popular votes resulted in the separation of the two nations on 1 January 1993.

The Czech Republic became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999. The nation, along with many other Eastern European countries, joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. It was set to host the EU presidency during the first half of 2009.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Czech Republic is bordered by its former federal partner, Slovakia, to the east; by Austria to the south; by Germany to the southwest and northwest; and by Poland to the north. The Czech Republic comprises the historic lands of Bohemia and Moravia (commonly called the Czech lands) and the southwestern portion of Silesia.

The country covers an area of 78,865 sq km (30,450 sq mi), approximately the size of South Carolina. Its landscape is made up mostly of wooded hills, valleys, and small, heavily farmed plateaus. The capital city is Prague, which has a population of 1.6 million.

The Czech Republic has a population of about 10.2 million, the majority of whom (90%) are Czech. Other minorities include Moravians (380,000), Slovaks (193,000), Poles (52,000), Roma/Gypsies (171,000), Germans (39,000), Silesians (11,000), Ukrainians (22,000), and Vietnamese (18,000).

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Czech is the official language of the republic. It belongs to a group of Slavic languages that use the Roman rather than the Cyrillic alphabet. The Czech language comprises two forms: formal, written Czech (*spisovna cestina*) and everyday conversational Czech (*hovorova*). Many regional dialects exist.

Russian is understood by many in the Czech Republic, but it is rarely used. English, French, and German are used in business dealings, but they are not spoken by the general population.

Common phrases in the Czech language are *dobry den* (hello or good day), *kde je?* (where is . . . ?), and *kolik to stoji?* (how much does it cost?).



#### 4 FOLKLORE

A major folklore festival is held each year in Strážnice, in eastern Moravia. During the communist era, the government encouraged the country's folkloric traditions but used them as an instrument of control within a larger framework of political activities, thus alienating a number of Czechs, especially young ones, from their heritage. Some artists, however, managed to express dissent in the form of folk songs and fairy tales.

#### 5 RELIGION

According to the country's 2001 census, 26.8% of Czechs are Roman Catholics and 2.1% are Protestant. Surprisingly, 59% of the people are not affiliated with any organized religion. The majority of those who claim a religion are Christian. Many Czechs turned to Protestantism following Jan Hus's campaign to reform the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th century. The communist regime used various methods to eliminate religion from the lives of the Czechs, but the Catholic Church maintained an underground presence. After the demonstrations and uprisings of 1989, those who had been forced to say mass in hideouts were able to pray openly. In April 1990, Pope John Paul II celebrated mass in Prague before a crowd of more than a half million Czechs.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to religious holidays, the Czechs celebrate several important national holidays. The end of World War II is commemorated on May 8. On July 5, Czechs celebrate the arrival

of Saints Cyril and Methodius, two Byzantine priests who introduced Christianity to the Slavs. July 6 is Jan Hus Memorial Day, the anniversary of the day when the religious leader was burned at the stake in 1415. October 28 marks Czechoslovak Independence Day. The Velvet Revolution is commemorated on November 17, but people do not take the day off work.

On the eve of December 5, Czech children wait for the arrival of Saint Nicholas. Usually a person dressed as Saint Nick and two people dressed as an angel and a devil walk the streets. Live carp is sold on the street for Christmas Eve dinner, and Christmas trees are set up in town squares. A fruit bread called *vanocka* is eaten during Lent and in the days before Christmas. On New Year's Day, people give each other small marzipan candies for good luck.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Czechs observe major life events, such as births, weddings, and deaths, within the Catholic or Protestant religious tradition.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A stranger who is meeting someone for the first time or a young person who is greeting an elder gives a firm handshake; both people say their last names, then they give a standard salutation, such as *teši mne* (pleased to meet you) or *dobrý den* (good day). When a man and woman meet, the man usually waits for the woman to extend her hand first. People address each other by their last names unless they are well acquainted. *Dobrou chut*, which means "bon appetit," is generally countered with *dekuji* (thank you). Failure to do so can be construed as a sign of ignorance or vulgarity. The terms for good-bye are *na chleďdanou* or the more informal *ciao*. When conversing, Czechs often gesture with their hands for emphasis.

At the beginning of a business meeting, it is customary to offer some sort of beverage to the attendees. Czechs do not do much entertaining at home, and they refrain from making unannounced visits to each other's houses. Inviting guests to dinner generally means taking them out to eat.

Using a person's title (which often corresponds to his or her educational level) is also customary among Czechs.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The health care system in the former Czechoslovakia was under strict state control. All people associated with the medical field were state employees. Health care standards were never high, and medical equipment was often outdated in clinics and hospitals throughout the country. The 1990s brought privatization in several sectors, including medicine. Private medical insurance companies have been established and health standards have improved. Life expectancy ranges from 72.3 to 78.5 years of age, and the death rate is relatively low (10.69 deaths per 1,000 live births). The infant mortality rate is 3.38 deaths per 1,000 live births. However, the birthrate is falling rapidly, thereby stunting the country's population growth.

Though many people have second homes in the country (called *chaty*), the Czech Republic has a serious housing shortage. Many city dwellers live in large apartment complexes. Young couples rarely begin married life in a home of their own and usually live with one set of parents for several years.

New railroads, highways, and airports were built after World War II. Today, the Czechs have a well-developed system



of highways and public transportation, and increasing numbers of people own cars, especially the domestically produced Skoda. The government is constantly upgrading transport technology, and tourism in the Czech Republic is booming.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Families in rural areas tend to be larger than urban families, which usually have no more than two children (childless urban couples are not uncommon). Although most mothers work outside the home, they still have primary domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. Grandparents often help with child care. Parents and adult children commonly maintain strong ties, often sharing a country house or a car, and adults routinely assume responsibility for aging parents. The incidence of divorce has risen sharply over time, reaching nearly 40% by the late 1980s and 67% by 2003. Czechs are opting to marry later and have fewer children than before.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Czech dress, characterized by white lace and embroidered materials, is worn on special occasions. For men, a holiday costume might consist of a white shirt with wide sleeves gathered at the wrists and white trousers. Both shirt and pants are frequently decorated with embroidery. A brightly colored vest decorated with embroidery and buttons is worn over the shirt. Women wear gathered skirts and blouses made of simple materials such as linen and cotton. These clothes are embroidered, however, to give them a rich appearance. To complete this costume, an apron, again heavily embroidered, may be worn. Both men and women complete their festive costumes with boots. In rural parts of southern Bohemia and southeastern Moravia, folk costumes are still worn. Otherwise, Czechs dress in modern, Western-style attire.

### **12 FOOD**

Czechs borrow many of their cooking traditions and dishes from neighboring countries. Goulash, a hearty Hungarian stew, is a staple dish in the Czech Republic. Lunch is the main meal for most Czechs, while breakfast and dinner are lighter meals. Czechs enjoy eating hearty dishes such as roasted meats, wild game, vegetables, dumplings, and pastries. One of the most popular Czech dishes, *vepro-knedlo-zelo*, includes roast pork, sauerkraut, and *knedliky* (dumplings), which are made by boiling or steaming a mixture of flour, eggs, milk, and dried bread crumbs. Often, dumplings are filled with fruit. Popular snack foods include ham on bread and sausages in buns, both widely available from sidewalk vendors. Czechs also enjoy smoked meats, herring, sardines, goose, duck, hare, and venison. In today's increasingly health-conscious climate, many Czechs have begun to favor lighter foods over the traditional fare, which is high in fat, laden with heavy sauces, and time-consuming to prepare. The current trend is toward leaner meats and more vegetables.

Czechs enjoy drinking beer with their meals. The best Czech beer comes from a town called Plzeň, where the first brewery was established in 1295. This is where the Pilsner was created, and it is also the home of Pilsner Urquell. The Czech Republic is the sixth largest beer-producing country in the world. Red wines from the many wineries of Moravia are also quite popular. Slivovitz, a plum brandy made in the region, is sometimes consumed after dinner.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Czech Republic has had a near 100% literacy level since the early 1990s.

Czech education has historically been influenced by politics. The Habsburgs, for example, forced students, teachers, and writers to use the German language. The communists' main requirement was that children master the principles of socialism, and under communist rule, religious and private schools were banned. (Under the new government of the Czech Republic, they have been reinstated.)

In 1994, the structure of the Czech educational system was reformed. Children now attend grade school for five years (from age 6 to 11) and then receive eight years of secondary schooling. Students may choose an academic or technical track, and there is a third track for aspiring teachers. School is mandatory for children between the ages of 6 and 15. The Czech Republic has 23 universities or university-level facilities. The oldest is Charles University, which was founded in 1348. Czech students pay one-fourth of their university expenses.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Prague is the center of Czech culture. Its many ancient churches and buildings withstood the fighting of World War II.

The Czechs have made great contributions to music and literature. Perhaps the most famous Czech writer was Franz Kafka. Kafka, a German who lived in Prague, influenced subsequent Czech authors such as Milan Kundera, Josef Skorecky, and Ivan Klima.

Vaclav Havel, a famous playwright whose sarcastic criticism of communism landed him in prison, became president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 and served as president of the Czech Republic from 1993–2003.

Czechs enjoy the writings of both modern and classical playwrights in hundreds of theaters throughout the country. Young children (and adults) find joy in watching puppet theaters and mimes.

Czech folk music has become world famous through its incorporation into the compositions of prominent Czech composers, notably Antonin Dvorak.

In the 1980s, rock music was closely tied to political opposition and an up-and-coming underground club scene. Czechs enjoy rock, jazz, and classical music, and they host one of Europe's biggest music events, the Prague Spring Music Festival.

### **15 WORK**

The Czech Republic is one of the most industrialized countries in the world. Rich, fertile soil allows for a major farming industry, and coal and other minerals have been mined for centuries.

During the communist era, workers earned fixed wages and had little desire to increase their productivity. Food shortages and lack of housing, fuel, and electricity became the norm.

In 1989, the Czech Republic shifted to a free-market economy, accompanied by higher wages and a better standard of living for workers. Although salaries remain low, the vast majority of the Czech population is employed. Private enterprise has created many new jobs for those laid off from the declining industrial sector. Jobs in tourism and other areas of the service sector are growing. As of 2007, unemployment stood at 6.6%.

The Czech workforce numbers 5.17 million. Industry, construction, and commerce make up 40% of the workforce, gov-



*Frantiska Polackova (l) and her granddaughter decorate Easter eggs in downtown Prague, Czech Republic. The eggs are a Czech Easter tradition that survived communism and today provides an authentic souvenir for tourists. (Michal Cizek/AFP/Getty Images)*

ernment and other services make up 56%, and agriculture makes up 4%. The country's natural resources include coal, coke, timber, lignite, uranium, and magnesite. The main agricultural goods are wheat, rye, oats, barley, hops, potatoes, sugar beets, hogs, cattle, and horses.

## **16 SPORTS**

Czechs are no strangers to outdoor recreation. The mountainous landscape provides an excellent setting for skiing, rock climbing, and hiking. Water sports are enjoyed in the lakes of southern Bohemia.

Perhaps the most popular sport played by young Czechs is tennis, made famous by international Czech greats Martina Navratilova, Ivan Lendl, and Jana Novotna. Soccer is the most popular team sport. Hockey, volleyball, and basketball are also popular. The sport with the longest tradition in the Czech Republic, however, is gymnastics.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Czechs spend much of their leisure time enjoying their native mountains, fields, and woodlands. Urban dwellers frequently spend weekends and vacations in their country homes, where many enjoy gardening, planting and tending to fruit trees, and working on home improvement projects. Camping is also a popular activity; numerous campgrounds can be found throughout the countryside. Other outdoor activities include hiking, swimming, and gathering berries and mushrooms.

There are a number of mineral springs and health spas in the Czech Republic, where for a fee visitors can soak their ailments away in mineral water, mud, or peat. Other leisure activities include movie- and concertgoing, watching television, and dancing (a traditionally popular dance is the polka, a lively folk dance). Gathering in bars or pubs is a traditional after-hours activity for men, while women enjoy visiting close friends at home. Czechs enjoy traveling by both car and bus, especially with the lifting of travel restrictions since the demise of communism in Eastern Europe.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Glass works and other decorative wares are among the folk arts of the Czech Republic. Bohemia in particular is known for its unusual crystal objects and deep red garnet stones.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Although the Czech Republic has significantly improved its economy and has established a democracy, social problems remain. Prices for energy and everyday items have increased significantly. As a result of rapid industrialization during the communist era, high levels of air, water, and soil pollution remain. Two distinct economic classes are now emerging from the single class formed by communism: a rich capitalist class and a lower class that is struggling with the new system.

Crime also became a major problem after the fall of communism. Organized crime in drug trafficking, money laun-

dering, and prostitution is significant. Hate crimes, especially against Gypsies (Roma), are a big problem in the country as well.

The health care system was left in shambles after the fall of communism and continues to struggle today.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Discrimination and sexual harassment remain important issues for women in the workplace in the Czech Republic. While the communist government made work compulsory for both men and women, today women performing the same jobs as men are often paid half the salary. However, Czech women do not seem to be in favor of American-style feminism, believing that it drives a wedge between men and women. Some women's groups have formed since 1992, but they have been slow to gather steam. As of the first decade of the 21st century, there were high female employment rates in both full- and part-time work, but women tended to have fewer support structures to combine a balance of work and life.

Abortion was legalized in 1957, but until 1986, a woman wanting an abortion had to appear before a committee that would decide whether she was eligible.

Czechs' attitudes toward homosexuality are mixed. More than half of Czech citizens claim they have never met a homosexual, and about one-third believe that homosexuality is a disease. From 1948 to 1961, homosexual behavior was illegal. However, in March 2006, the Czech Republic adopted a same-sex partnership law. Lesbian and gay families are now legally recognized.

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—revised by C. Corrigan

# DANES

**LOCATION:** Denmark

**POPULATION:** 5.4 million (2008)

**LANGUAGE:** Danish; English; German

**RELIGION:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark; small numbers of Roman Catholics, Muslims, Jews and others

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Denmark is the smallest Scandinavian country after Iceland. It has one of the world's highest standards of living, with an advanced system of government-supported social benefits supported by heavy taxes on its citizens. The country's principal port, the capital city of Copenhagen, is a leading center of international trade. The Danes were sailors and merchants by the era of the Vikings (AD 800–1050). The nation expanded its territory between the 14th and 18th centuries but had lost much of it, including Norway, to the Swedes by 1814. Denmark is a constitutional monarchy, ruled since 1972 by Queen Margrethe II.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Situated between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, Denmark consists of the peninsula of Jutland and over 400 nearby islands, of which about 100 are inhabited. The Kingdom of Denmark also exercises sovereignty over Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Denmark's capital city, Copenhagen, is located on the nation's largest island, Zealand (Sjælland). The Danish landscape is characterized by gently rolling hills and flat plains. The lowest points in the country, on the western coast, are below sea level, and dikes reclaim the land for agricultural use. The longest river is the Guden and many small lakes dot the land.

Denmark is a highly urbanized nation. About 85% of its 5.4 million people live in cities, with over one-third in the four largest cities of Copenhagen, Aalborg, Odense, and Aarhus. Descended from northern Germanic tribes, the Danes are among the most ethnically homogeneous people in Europe. One out of every 13 Danes has the last name of Jensen. A small German minority lives in southern Jutland.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Danish, a Germanic language, is the official language of Denmark and is universally spoken in Denmark proper. The people of Greenland and the Faroe Islands speak their own languages. (Greenlandic [Inuit] is a non-European language, related to certain indigenous Canadian languages; Faroese is a distant relative of Danish.) English and German are widely spoken.

### NUMBERS

one	en/et
two	to
three	tre
four	fire
five	fem
six	seks
seven	syv
eight	otte
nine	ni
ten	ti



#### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	søndag
Monday	mandag
Tuesday	tirsdag
Wednesday	onsdag
Thursday	torsdag
Friday	fredag
Saturday	lørdag

#### 4 FOLKLORE

In pre-Christian Scandinavian legend, the god Thor was said to cause thunder by wielding a hammer in the heavens; Viking warriors wore miniature hammers around their necks in his honor. Beautiful maidens called Valkyries were thought to transport Vikings killed in battle and transport them to the court of Odin—the leader of the gods—at Valhalla. (Much Viking mythology was later re-popularized in the operas of the 19th-century German composer Richard Wagner.)

Denmark was the first Nordic country to adopt Christianity as its official religion under King Harald Bluetooth in the 10th century.

During a later period of Danish history, the red and white national flag, the Dannebrog, was said to have descended from heaven on 15 June 1219, turning the tide in the Danes' battle against Estonia at Lindanaes.

According to legend, witches are thought to fly over Denmark on Midsummer's Eve, and on Midsummer's Day (June 24) firecrackers are traditionally set off all over the country to scare them off. The Danes traditionally believe that storks

bring good fortune and the beech tree is something of a national emblem.

#### 5 RELIGION

About 83% of the population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, the established religion of the country. It is headed by the Queen (who by law must be a member of the church) and supported by the state through subsidies and a tax levied on members. The Danish parliament is the legislative authority for the church. There is also a minister for church affairs in the prime minister's cabinet. While only about 3% of all church members attend services on a regular basis, nearly all members are baptized, confirmed, and married in the church. This is, in part, due to the fact that the church is the primary agency responsible for registering births, marriages, and deaths. Women make up a substantial percentage of the nation's ordained Lutheran ministers. Danish churches are known for the ship models that often hang from ceilings or archways.

The Danish constitution has guaranteed freedom of religion since 1849 and there are small numbers of Roman Catholics, Jews, and members of other faiths living in Denmark.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Besides the general Christian holidays of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, the Danes celebrate several other religious days as national holidays, including Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, *Store Bededag* (Common Prayer Day) on the fourth Friday after Easter, Ascension Thursday (the fortieth day after Easter), Whitmonday (Pentecost Monday), Christmas Eve, and Boxing Day. Queen Margrethe's birthday on April 16 is a school holiday, on which many children watch the parade of the royal guard at Amalienborg Square in Copenhagen. Another holiday for children—comparable to Halloween in the United States—is the Monday before Shrove Tuesday, when they dress up in traditional costumes and visit their neighbors asking for money to buy candy. Danes celebrate Liberation Day (May 5) and Constitution Day (June 5) as well.

The Danes also celebrate American Independence Day (July 4) in honor of Americans of Danish descent, who are invited to homecoming festivities including concerts, rallies, and lectures. Thousands attend this event every year.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Denmark, like most of its European neighbors, is a modern, industrialized country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are connected with their progress through the education system. Additionally, religious rituals such as baptism, confirmation, and marriage are important to those who observe them. The Danes place special emphasis on the birthdays that mark each decade of a person's life. One's sixtieth birthday in particular is considered an important occasion, to be celebrated by a gathering of relatives.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Danish manners are more formal than those in the United States. There is a great deal of polite handshaking and men raise their hats as a gesture of respect. The word *tak* ("thank you") is used often and can also mean "please" or "I beg your pardon." When drinking the national liqueur, aquavit, the



*Queen Margrethe II of Denmark waves to the crowd in Amalienborg Castle square. Queen Margrethe was in the city to thank Copenhagen for the thousands of tulips presented to her for her 60th birthday. (Francis Dean/Getty Images)*

Danes habitually offer up a courteous toast of “*Skol.*” Professional titles such as “Doctor” or “Master” are commonly used in addressing people, as well as titles that indicate one’s rank in business or government. Danes tend to be organized and punctual and can appear to be cool toward those they don’t know well.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

With its extensive system of social services, Denmark has one of the world’s highest standards of living. In spite of a shortage of housing, most Danes own their own houses or apartments. Danish homes are made of brick and wood or of stucco. Although they are usually small, they appear more spacious than they are due to the well-known Danish talent for domestic design. Homes typically have light furniture and few wall hangings. The spare, graceful Danish furniture popular throughout the world is made of beautifully finished wood and characterized by its gently curving lines. Denmark has virtually no slums and elderly Danes often live in retirement communities affiliated with a nearby hospital.

Denmark has an excellent health care system. Complete medical care is provided free of charge to all Danish citizens and each person has his or her own private physician; however, this system is supported by high taxes. There are several private health care facilities as well as those sponsored primarily

through the government. Life expectancy as of 2008 was about 78 years, with 76 years for men and 81 years for women. The major causes of death are heart disease and cancer.

Denmark’s network of roads, airports, railroads, and ports is modern and efficient. Its many islands are connected by tunnels, bridges, and ferry boats that can accommodate up to 2,000 passengers and 400 cars. The major cities are served by extensive public transportation networks. About one Dane in four owns a car and more than half the population uses bicycles for short trips. Danish railway ridership is increasing after years of decline.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Danes’ social lives tend to focus largely on the nuclear family, although to a somewhat lesser degree than those of their Scandinavian neighbors. It is generally considered permissible for couples to live together before marriage and most couples do so. In addition, many Danish marriages are “paperless” common-law unions with no formal ceremony. Children are shown a great deal of care and respect in families and by society as well. Working parents generally have no problems in taking time off from their jobs in order to care for children and most parents are allowed flexible work schedules that allow them extra time to pick up their children from school or attend school meetings and functions.



*Danes row a boat down the Fredriksborg Canal in Copenhagen, Denmark. (© Hans Strand/Corbis)*

At least half of all Danish marriages end in divorce and single-parent families are common. Since 1988 same-sex couples in a monogamous, long-term relationship have been entitled to the same rights as married heterosexual couples.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The Danes wear modern Western-style clothing, dressing carefully for business and casually for less formal activities. Among young people, casual dress typically includes leather jackets, T-shirts, and jeans. Traditional folk costumes, which may still be seen at festivals, are worn by folk dancers. Women wear blouses and jackets, layered petticoats, scarves, and bonnets, and their costumes are decorated with gold and silver stitching. Men's costumes consist of sweaters, jackets, and knickers (pants that come to just below the knee) worn with high, white woolen socks.

### **12 FOOD**

Danish food includes a wide variety of fish, meat, bread, cheese, and crispbreads. The Danes usually eat three meals a day. Breakfast usually includes cereal, bread with cheese, or yogurt. Lunches often include open-faced sandwiches called *smørrebrød*, consisting of thin slices of bread (especially rye) with such toppings as smoked salmon or eel, tongue, ham, shrimp, caviar, eggs, or cheese. Dinner typically includes some

type of meat with potatoes, rice, or pasta. One traditional Danish dish is roast duckling stuffed with apples or prunes and served with red cabbage and boiled potatoes. Popular pastries include almond cakes made with generous amounts of butter and coffee cakes called *kringle*. The average Danish annual beer consumption of 40 gallons per person is the highest in Scandinavia and aquavit (snaps), a spiced liqueur made flavored with caraway seeds, is a popular after-dinner drink. The Danes place great emphasis on arranging their food so it is visually attractive as well as tasty. The popular *smørrebrød* may be garnished with twists of cucumber, tomato, dill weed, beets, citrus fruit, or onion rings.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Virtually all Danish adults are literate. Free primary, secondary, and—in most cases—postsecondary education is funded by high taxes. Elementary education lasts nine years, followed by three years of schooling at either a technical or business school, or, for those preparing to enter a university, secondary school (called gymnasium). Students graduating from a gymnasium must pass an exam before going on to the university level. There are numerous afterschool programs and youth clubs offering educational opportunities for children and young adults. The oldest university in Denmark is the University of Copenhagen, founded in 1479. Most cities in Denmark have a wide variety of schools and institutions offering extra

educational opportunities for both children and adults. For instance, lecture series for adults are popular at many institutions, including libraries, museums, and churches. There is also a system of Folk High Schools that offer short- and long-term courses on special topics, such as music, art, religion, athletics, politics, and more.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Denmark has a distinguished ballet tradition; the Royal Danish Ballet was founded in 1829. The compositions of Carl Nielsen, Denmark's most renowned composer, are performed throughout the world. Dieterich Buxtehude is another classical musician and composer from Denmark. The pianist-comedian Victor Borge (d. 2000) delighted generations of international audiences. The state subsidizes the Royal Theater in Copenhagen, which presents dramas, ballet, opera, and modern dance. Amateur theater and musical groups are very popular.

Perhaps the most famous Dane connected with the arts is the prince whose story was dramatized by William Shakespeare. *Hamlet* is performed every year in the courtyard of Kronborg Castle, located in Helsingør, where the Hamlet of legend is said to have lived. Among Danish writers, the most famous is Hans Christian Andersen, the author of such beloved fairy tales as "The Ugly Duckling," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "The Red Shoes." In the 20th century, Karen Blixen, who wrote under the pen name of Isak Dinesen, has gained renown for her memoirs, *Out of Africa*, which were popularized by the release in the 1980s of the American movie based on them. Denmark has a successful film industry of its own.

The 19th century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is studied around the world. Niels Bohr won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922 for his work toward understanding atomic structures and quantum mechanics. His son Aage Niels Bohr won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1975 for his own studies in quantum mechanics.

#### **15 WORK**

Danes have the same variety of employment options that can be found in most other European nations. While work is important to the Danes, there is a somewhat better balance between work and personal life than might be found in countries such as the United States. The average workweek is about 37 hours. Most workers are given five weeks of paid vacation each year and are typically allowed to take up the three weeks consecutively during the summer months. Employers respect the importance of family life and are generally flexible when it comes to scheduling options so that their employees have the time they need to care for family members. There are generous options for maternity and paternity leave in relation to childbirth and adoption.

Most Danes work in businesses with fewer than 100 employees. Altogether, about 76% of the labor force is employed in the service sector, 21% in industry, and only 3% in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Unemployment is generally low. About 80% of all wage earners belong to a union.

#### **16 SPORTS**

In addition to its popularity as a spectator sport, soccer (*fodball*) is also a participant sport for players of all ages: it is estimated that as many as 300,000 Danes play. Children play it at school, after school, and on weekends and holidays. Volunteer-

run clubs throughout the country are dedicated to turning young players into pros. At least one out of every four Danes belongs to a sports club of some kind. The proximity of the sea has bred an interest in water sports including sailing, rowing, and swimming. Other popular activities include rugby, tennis, handball, archery, fencing, cycling, skiing, and rifle shooting. Every year, Athletics Awards (*Idraetsmaerket*) sponsored by Queen Margrethe are presented to men and women who have passed qualifying tests based on age.

#### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

The Danish people enjoy spending leisure time with their families, whether to attend a sporting event or to observe a holiday. The most popular spectator sport is soccer (called *fodball*), with the main national rival being Sweden. Danes often enjoy athletic activities such as jogging, cycling, or long-distance running purely for exercise rather than competition. Bridge and chess are also popular leisure-time pursuits. Large numbers of bridge fans attend national tournaments featuring the top players.

#### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Folk dancing is popular in Denmark; some 15,000 men and women participate in this activity on a regular basis. The Danish Country Dancing Society, one of the best-known folk dance troupes, has been in existence since 1901. Crafts include work in silver, glass, porcelain, and pewter, as well as textiles. Modern Danish furniture was pioneered in the 1930s. Denmark has an outstanding system of folk museums, including parks that contain relocated, renovated rural and urban buildings that are centuries old.

#### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

In the early 2000s discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, especially Muslims, was a problem. Such discrimination may be attributed both to stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists and to anti-immigration sentiments. There have also been reports of anti-Semitism. As more immigrants have arrived, particularly from Africa and the Middle East, there has been an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment, primarily based on the perception that immigrants are unwilling to integrate and that the increase in immigration might cause an increase in crime. The government does have antiracism and antidiscrimination laws in place and most cases of discrimination have been investigated and brought to trial.

However, an international uproar occurred in 2005 and 2006 with the publication in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of twelve editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the Muslim prophet Muhammad. The newspaper announced that it wished to contribute to the debate regarding criticism of Islam and self-censorship. Further examples of the cartoons were reprinted in newspapers in more than 50 other countries. This led to protests across the Muslim world, some of which escalated into violence, resulting in more than 100 deaths. While a number of Muslim leaders called for protesters to remain peaceful, other Muslim leaders issued death threats. Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen described the controversy as Denmark's worst international crisis since World War II.

Some religious minorities, particularly Catholics, have claimed discrimination based on the preferential treatment

allowed for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark (ELCD). While the constitution provides for religious freedom, religious equality is not guaranteed. The ELCD enjoys privileges and government financial support that are not offered to other religious organizations.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

About 75% of all women and 82% of all men are active in the workforce. In most families both the husband and wife work outside of the home. Although men and women have equal rights under the law, women's pay is not yet equal to that of men. In 2007 it was estimated that women in the private sector earned approximately 21% less than men. The Danish Women Citizen's Society, created in 1871, works to further women's rights on such issues as working outside the home. Housewives have their own association, Husmoderforeningen, whose activities parallel those of professional groups. Many of the rights currently enjoyed by women were won by the modern feminist movement that began in the 1970s. In Denmark it was spearheaded by a group of women calling themselves the Redstockings, who launched protests in cities throughout the nation wearing bright red hose.

While prostitution is legal in Denmark, trafficking in persons is not. There have been reports that the country is being used as both a destination and a transit point for the illegal trafficking of both women and children. Women who are forced into prostitution are generally foreigners lured to Denmark from their homes in Russia, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and West Africa with the promise of higher wages and a better life. There is a national task force in place to investigate and dismantle illegal trafficking operations. Several groups have formed to identify and assist trafficking victims.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# DOLGANY

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Dulgaan

**LOCATION:** Russia (Taimyr peninsula and along the Yenisei River)

**POPULATION:** 7,261 (2002 census)

**LANGUAGE:** Dolgan; Russian

**RELIGION:** Orthodox Christianity; native form of shamanism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Dolgans are one of approximately thirty "Numerically Small Peoples of the North" in Russia. The Numerically Small Peoples are indigenous groups who have lived in the Far North for thousands of years, relying on the land and its natural resources to provide food, clothing, and shelter. Their spiritual life is also rooted in the land and the animals with which they share the tundra and taiga. Although their lives have changed rapidly as industrialization has spread throughout the world over the course of the past one hundred years, the land and its resources continue to provide a livelihood and spiritual anchor for the Dolgans. The contemporary Dolgan people are officially recognized as an amalgam of Sakha, Evenki, Entsy, Russian, and Nganasany peoples. The name "Dolgan" is derived from one of the Tungus clans from whom the contemporary Dolgans originated. The ethnonym, or ethnic self-designation of the Dolgans is "Dulgaan," but this is a very recent (19th century) name. Prior to that, groups used names originating from their past ethnic identities or the territories in which they lived.

Indigenous peoples in both Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union were considered "primitive" because they lived in the harsh arctic environment and made their living off the land. In the Soviet Union, the government implemented policies designed to "modernize" indigenous peoples and thus bring them into the fold of socialist society, whether they wanted to be modernized or not. Collectivization, universal education, and assimilation were three primary focal points of government policy. Collectivization entailed confiscating people's property, including their reindeer herds, and organizing economic activities on the basis of collective (*kolkhozy*) and state farms (*sovkhoby*). Education is generally acknowledged as a positive development except when students are denied the right to learn in their Native languages, and their cultures are disparaged by teachers and administrators. This is a problem which is only today being addressed. The Dolgans were expected to assimilate into the dominant Soviet society—to stop thinking of themselves as Dulgaan and start thinking of themselves as Soviet. Their lives as nomadic reindeer herds and hunters would end as they adopted modern industrial occupations and lifestyles. Their distinctive way of life, culture and beliefs would merge and eventually disappear into the larger "Soviet people."

The 2002 Russian census recorded 7,261 Dolgans in the whole Russian Federation. The Dolgan people today are one of the most politically powerful groups in their territory, and many senior officials of the Taimyr Autonomous *Okrug* are Dolgans. Political activism is especially important for native peoples as they begin to address the social and economic prob-



lems which have resulted from discriminatory government policies.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Dolgan people live on the Taimyr peninsula and along the lower portions of the Yenisei River in the Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) Autonomous *Okrug* in Russia. The Taimyr Autonomous *Okrug* is an administrative unit within Krasnoïarsk *krai*, and has its administrative center in the port city of Dudinka. The total population of the *okrug* recorded in the 1989 Soviet census was 55,803. Of this total, 8,751 were members of indigenous groups (Dolgans, Nentsy, Evenki, Nganasans, and Entsy), and the Dolgans numbered 4,939. Although the Dolgans (along with the Nentsy) are the titular nation of this *okrug*, they are a numerical minority, the majority of the population is Russian. Some Russians have lived for generations in the region, but most are relatively recent immigrants who moved to the *okrug* to work in the large industrial centers, the shipping industry, and the mining complexes. The *okrug* occupies 862,100 square kilometers (332,900 square miles, or about twice the size of Sweden), and competition for land is a serious problem. The traditional economic activities of the Dolgans, Nenets, and other Native peoples require large tracts of land that are relatively free of human disruption. The industrial economy of the *okrug* is intensive, focused in large cities and settlements along the arctic coast and inland waterways. As industrial activities such as mining and processing minerals increase, they encompass land from surrounding rural areas, leaving fewer resources for native peoples.

The Taimyr Autonomous *Okrug* is located entirely north of the Arctic Circle. Winters are long and cold, with a mean January temperature in Dudinka of  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-22^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Summers are short and cool, with an average July temperature of  $2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $13^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $36^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $55^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Humidity is relatively high, and strong winds blow throughout the year. Precipitation totals 110 mm to 350 mm (4.3 in to 13.8 in) per year. Permafrost is widespread.

Arctic, tundra, and forest-tundra ecological zones are all represented in the Taimyr Autonomous *Okrug*. The arctic zone has almost no shrubs or lichen and only sparse mosses and liverworts. The tundra has willow and arctic birch trees, mosses, lichens, liverworts, and grasses. The forest-tundra zone has large expanses of lichen where reindeer graze, and the entire Khatanga River Valley north of  $68^{\circ}$  latitude is covered with forests of larch, spruce, and birch. The wildlife that inhabits this diverse environment includes seals, walrus, and beluga whales along the arctic coast; fish on the coast and inland waterways; and wild reindeer, bighorn sheep, arctic fox, lemmings, ermine, hares, and wolves throughout the *okrug*. Bird species are also varied, especially during summer migrations when ducks, geese, and wading birds join local residents such as the ptarmigan and willow ptarmigan. Polar bears live on the ice floes along the northern coast and arctic islands.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Dolgan language today is classified as a distinct language, although as late as the 1950s it was considered to be a dialect of Yakut, which is spoken by the Sakha. It is classified as a member of the Turkic language group, which is itself part of the Altaic language family. Most Dolgans speak both the Russian language and Dolgan. There was no written Dolgan language until quite recently. In 1973, the first Dolgan language book



was published using the Yakut alphabet. A Dolgan primer has been prepared to help teach the language in school. In 1991, the Dolgan language began to be taught in the lower grades.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Dolgan folklore is rich and varied. Historic legends tell of travel to faraway places. Epic tales are sung and describe ways of life totally foreign to the Dolgans in which heroes struggle against persons in league with the evil spirits. Most popular are short stories which tell of the everyday life of nomadic people, explain the origins of animals, and describe the metamorphosis of animals into people. Storytellers were considered to be chosen by the good spirits, and especially gifted storytellers might create their own schools and have young apprentices. Storytellers often worked with shamans to cure illnesses. The Dolgans believed that the images evoked by a storyteller could be made visible. A storyteller would be called to the bedside of the sick person and begin to tell an epic tale. As soon as the evil spirit making the person ill appeared to help defeat the story's hero, the shaman would cast a spell to remove the evil spirit from the sick person's body and thus effect a cure. The power of storytelling was believed to be so strong that stories were not told before a hunt in case the images brought forth might scare the game away.

## 5 RELIGION

Traditional Dolgan religion can be said to be Eastern Orthodox Christianity, since their adherence to Christianity was a factor

in their formation as a people from the 16th to the 19th century, and which distinguished them for their unbaptized neighbors, such as the Nganasan. At the same time Dolgan religious practice incorporated many aspects of Siberian shamanism. It is based on a respect for the land and animals which embody spirits that guide hunting, herding, birth, death, and the behavior of individuals and society. Their animistic beliefs divide spirits and gods into three categories: *ichchi*, *ayyy*, and *abaasy*. *Ichchi* are invisible spirits which can bring to life anything they enter. *Ayyy* are spirits which help humans in their daily lives, such as in the hunt and in domestic matters. *Abaasy* spirits are evil, causing sickness and death. Shamans serve as mediators between humans and the spirits. Storytellers often help shamans in identifying the cause of illness or misfortune. The Dolgans believe that after death they will live in another world with their kinfolk.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Dolgan people were said to have all been converted to Orthodox Christianity. Traditional beliefs never completely disappeared, however, but instead were practiced secretly or incorporated into Christian ritual and practice. Although religious practices were discouraged in the Soviet Union, Orthodoxy is still strong and the role of shamanism in traditional culture is being revived in some areas.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to the Soviet secular holidays celebrated by all peoples in the former Soviet Union, the Dolgans celebrate Russian Orthodox holidays such as Easter and Christmas.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional Dolgan beliefs held that death was caused by evil spirits who stole souls and carried them off to the underworld and then invaded a person's body and ate it. Some groups of Dolgans built log structures over their graves, while others felled a tree, which would be carved with various designs, over the gravesite.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Marriages were traditionally arranged by parents who used a matchmaker to negotiate the payment of "bridewealth" and assure that a sufficient dowry would be provided. Bridewealth, paid by the husband to his bride's family might include furs and reindeer. A bride's dowry would include household goods and clothing. The wedding would be held at the parents' home, and the newlyweds would live with the groom's family until they were able to establish their own home. Marriages today are arranged by individuals themselves (sometimes in consultation with elders), but they are still accompanied by celebrations with families and friends. Young married couples still often live with parents until a separate apartment can be found and furnished.

Social rules governing the activities of men and women and their behavior towards one another were stringently followed in traditional Dolgan society to ensure such things as successful hunting, and healthy births, and to ward off the attention of evil spirits. The world of men was outside the *chum* or tent, among the reindeer and in the forests. Women dominated the household and were responsible for its maintenance and internal harmony. Although the tasks of men and women might sometimes overlap (for example, men would help build a tent

or sled tent), each was primarily responsible for their own part of the Dolgan world. Within Dolgan society, there continue to be strong traditions of sharing among kinfolk and care of the elderly. In times of need, an individual's relatives can be counted upon to help. The elderly, regardless of whether or not they are one's immediate relatives, are always provided with assistance in the form of food, shelter, or whatever else might be needed.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Dolgans who live in the tundra, herding and hunting, tend to live in traditional types of dwellings—tents made of reindeer skins (or occasionally today canvas or tarpaulin) or small huts built of wooden frames covered with skins or fabric on sled runners. These sled tents can be pulled by reindeer and were adopted from Russian merchants. The families of herders and hunters might also have apartments in villages where they spend part of the year. Today many Dolgans live in small settlements (300–600 people) of wooden apartment buildings heated with coal. Plumbing is generally absent in these homes. Villages often have a medical clinic, a general store, and an elementary and/or middle school. Dolgans who live in large cities live in modern apartment buildings with plumbing and central heating. They shop in stores, attend school, and work in stores, hospitals, schools, factories, and so on.

Transportation in the tundra is often by reindeer-pulled sleds, although helicopters, airplanes, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles are used as well. Canoes purchased from the Sakha or from Russian merchants are used for river transport and fishing.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The nomadic life of Dolgans herders and hunters is rigorous and demanding. As families move their reindeer from pasture to pasture, they must also move their homes and possessions with them. Among the nomadic reindeer breeders, men are generally responsible for the animals, hunting, and fishing. Women in traditional households are responsible for making fur clothing; preparing food; maintaining the tent; sled tent, or house; and child care. Some herding families have both mobile sled tents and apartments in a small village associated with a *sovkhoz*, or state farm. Each family today has its own tent. In the past, extended families predominated, whereas today the nuclear family is more common. Orphans and children from poor families are often taken into families of relatives to be raised, a practice that was common in the past and continues to be important today. In towns and cities where Dolgans have nontraditional jobs, women are still primarily responsible for the home and child care in addition to working outside the home. Young married couples and single people often live with their parents because housing is generally in short supply.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional and manufactured clothing are often combined by the Dolgans, depending on their jobs and where they live. People in towns and cities tend to wear modern clothes made of manufactured cloth and perhaps fur coats and hats in winter. In rural villages and in the tundra, there are also manufactured clothes, but traditional types more suitable for hunting and herding activities are often seen. Russian-manufactured clothing was in use by the Dolgans by the early 20th century,

and household garments of this type were worn by many people. A cloth coat called a *sontap* was worn by men and women in both summer and winter. In the winter, a second coat of fox or rabbit fur was worn beneath the cloth coat. Sometimes in winter instead of a cloth coat a short deerskin parka was worn. Belts embroidered with beads were sewn onto the outside of both men's and women's garments. Men's shirts and women's aprons were almost always decorated with embroidery. Hats (*bergese*) shaped like hoods were also ornamented with embroidery and beadwork.

## 12 FOOD

Traditional foods include reindeer meat, fish, fowl, and other game animals. Meat and fish were traditionally eaten boiled, dried, or raw (frozen or fresh). Fish were also sometimes fermented in pits in the ground. Reindeer milk was used by the Dolgans. Plant foods such as tea and sugar were introduced into the Dolgan diet long ago and have become integral parts of every meal.

## 13 EDUCATION

Educating the children of reindeer herders, who spend most of the year away from any village, has always been a difficult task. When universal education was first introduced by the Soviets, it was proposed that traveling teachers would move with the herding groups until they could be settled in permanent villages. This solution to the problem was short-lived, however, and the decision was made to send the children of nomadic herders to boarding schools, often far from their parents and other relatives. This resulted in children who knew the Russian language but not their own Dolgan language. Children were also taught that traditional ways of living and working should be abandoned in favor of life in a modern industrial society; thus, they learned little about their own cultural traditions and the land on which their families depended. Settling families in permanent homes in villages was another means of educating children and today most villages have schools that include the eighth class and sometimes the tenth class. After this point, students must leave their village to receive a higher education, and such a journey for 15- and 16-year-olds can be daunting. Today attempts are being made to change the educational system to include studies of Dolgan traditions, the Dolgan language, reindeer herding, and land management in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic. Traveling teachers have again been proposed as one possible solution to the problem of combining education and a nomadic lifestyle, but even this system would have limitations, especially as children grow older and require more specialized instruction. Educational opportunities at all levels are available to the Dolgans Taimyr, other regional centers, and Moscow.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Archaeological evidence shows that Samoyedic peoples had settled the Taimyr area by the first millennium AD, and these people were ancestors of the present-day Dolgans, Nentsy, and other indigenous peoples. They too were nomadic hunters and reindeer herders (although on a smaller scale than today). In the mid-16th century, Russian traders, trappers, and government representatives began moving into the Taimyr region; thus, the Native peoples have a long history of contact with Europeans. Beginning in the 17th century, travelers

journeyed along the "Great Russian Road" across the Taimyr Peninsula from Lake Piasino east toward the Khatanga and on to the Anabar River and Sakha. Travelers on reindeer and dog sleds plied this route from one camp or settlement to the next. Peoples of diverse origins, languages, and cultures lived along this road, and it was along this route that the intermixing of peoples began which eventually led to the formation of the contemporary Dolgan people.

In the 1926/27 Soviet census, the Dolgans were said to be composed of people descended from several ethnographic groups: Dolgans proper, Sakha, Evenki, Russia old peasants, and some Nentsy and Entsy. The Dolgans proper consisted of four Tungusic clans, one of which was named "Dolgan" or "Dulgaan." Only in the 19th century was this name used by the government to refer to people who called themselves by other names. Today this ethnic designation is recognized by the government and by the people themselves as an ethnic self-designation or ethnonym. Dolgan culture is also an amalgam of elements taken from each of the original ethnic groups: riding reindeer from the Evenki, herd dogs from the Nentsy, women's fur coats from the Sakha, and so on.

## 15 WORK

Work is often difficult to separate from other aspects of life among indigenous peoples. Although the Dolgans were traditionally hunters of wild reindeer, today there are many laborers, doctors, teachers, and other professionals among this group, and some people combine traditional occupations with nontraditional work on a seasonal basis.

The traditional Dolgan economy was focused on hunting wild reindeer in the north and elk and mountain sheep in the south. Ptarmigan, ducks, geese, and small game animals such as rabbits as well as fish were also important in the diet. Trapping polar fox was a significant commercial activity which allowed the Dolgans to trade for manufactured foods and goods. Reindeer breeding was oriented toward transportation: reindeer were ridden and used as pack animals during parts of the summer, and in winter they pulled sleds. Reindeer breeding requires a nomadic lifestyle as reindeer must frequently be moved to new pastures. The Dolgans had regular seasonal routes of migration not only to take advantage of pasturage, but of hunting and fishing opportunities as well. All of these activities continue to be important today, although they are more formally organized and sometimes conducted in nontraditional ways.

During the Soviet period, the traditional economic activities were reorganized by the government within the system of state farms, or *sovkhozes*. Work brigades moved the reindeer along traditional migration routes, going north in the summer and south in the winter, and changing routes on a regular schedule to maximize the use of available pasturage for the reindeer. Additional activities such as fur farming (raising foxes in cages), dairy farming, and vegetable growing were added, and fishing has become an important commercial activity. The Dolgans worked as laborers on the state farms and in the fishing industry. Today these state farms are being reorganized again in official attempts to encourage privatization and stimulate production. Educational and employment opportunities have also led to substantial Dolgan participation in local government and nontraditional occupations in education, health care, construction, business, and so on.

## 16 SPORTS

There is little information available on sports among the Dolgans. Presumably, in the large industrial centers of Noril'sk and the like, the Dolgans have access to Russian sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Children in urban communities enjoy many of the same entertainments that children in the United States do: riding bicycles, watching movies and television, and playing with manufactured toys and games. In rural areas, and especially in the tundra, recreational opportunities are more limited. In villages there are bicycles, manufactured toys, televisions, VCRs, clubhouses (where movies might be shown), and radios. Although a trip to town might produce a store-bought toy, children in the tundra also depend on their imaginations and the games and traditional toys of their nomadic ancestors. The Dolgans have no musical instruments of their own, but at the end of the 19th century began to adopt the Sakha Jew's harp which has become common.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk arts are represented by the ornamentation of items of traditional material culture. Clothing is often embellished for special occasions with glass beads, metal buttons, embroidery, mosaic designs of fur, and appliqués of various colored skins and furs. Even everyday clothing is decorated with embroidery and beading. Skins are dyed red or black with natural dyes such as ochre, alder bark, and graphite. Reindeer harnesses are decorated with openwork embroidery made by women, and men carve the wooden cheek plates and saddles used for reindeer, inlaying them with tin and pewter. Traditional hunting and special household goods are sometimes inlaid with copper over steel. Wooden sculptures of religious significance were traditionally made in representation of animistic deities.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems among the Dolgans are generally related to environmental degradation and related problems as well as discriminatory practices in urban centers. Dolgans living in the Lower Yenisei Valley have experienced serious disruptions in their nomadic lifestyle and have lost most of their domestic reindeer herds due to dramatic changes in the migrations of wild reindeer. The normal movement of wild reindeer herds has been disrupted due to industrial development, and increased shipping traffic which have cut off migration routes. The wild herds steal domestic deer away during the fall breeding season, and they winter unpredictably on pastures previously only used by domestic herds. The industrial city of Noril'sk, where copper and nickel ores are refined, the port cities of Dudinka, Dikson, and Igarka, the mining settlements, and all of the smaller satellite communities of workers that ring these cities have produced pollution of unprecedented scale which expands outward into the rural tundra areas where Dolgans and other indigenous groups continue to practice traditional economic activities. The pollution has serious negative effects on human health, wild and domestic animal communities, and the plant life of Taimyr.

Unemployment, inadequate health care, alcoholism, and poorly developed infrastructure in small villages have all contributed to the serious situation in which the Dolgans and other

Native peoples in Russia find themselves today. Social welfare payments made by the government for unemployment, child care, and pensioners are important in helping support the indigenous population, but they are only short-term solutions to long-term problems. The Dolgans and other indigenous peoples in the Taimyr Autonomous *Okrug* have created an Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the Taimyr Autonomous *Okrug* through which they are demanding the rights to control their own destinies. The Association has declared that indigenous peoples in Taimyr have priority rights to the land and its subsurface resources and hopes to be able to use revenues from mineral exploitation and economic development to fund programs addressing the many social and economic problems facing indigenous peoples today.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues among the Dolgan in particular have been little studied. Traditional Dolgan descent groups were patrilineal, although at the same time there was a clear division of labor between the sexes, with women responsible primarily for child rearing and domestic chores. During and after the Second World War Soviet labor policies began to erode this division of labor, accelerated by the sedentarization of the Dolgans, and increasing integration into Soviet society. The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the economic collapse in the Russian Federation in the 1990s probably fell particularly heavily upon Dolgan women, who had to provide for households in the face of severe unemployment and other social problems.

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—revised by A. Frank

# ENGLISH

**LOCATION:** United Kingdom (England)

**POPULATION:** 50.7 million, out of a total UK population of 60.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** English

**RELIGION:** Church of England; Protestant; Jewish; Sikh; Hindu; and Muslim

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

While the English in large part share their national origins with the peoples of continental Europe, their outlook has always been colored by the fact that they live on an island. The surrounding seas have given England a security unknown to other European countries. No one has successfully invaded Britain since the Norman Conquest of 1066, although others have tried—notably the Spanish in 1588, the French in 1805, and the Germans in 1940—but English defenses were aided by the natural barrier formed by the English Channel and the North Sea.

The area that is now called England was first united by the Romans in the 1st century AD. When they withdrew (AD 410), the area was settled by Germanic tribes from continental Europe such as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. It is often said that the name “England” is a contraction of “Angle-Land.” England was converted to Christianity during the 6th and 7th centuries AD. During the early medieval period, coastal regions were regularly raided by the Vikings, who even came to rule most of the north and east of England. They were ejected by an alliance of nobles, led by the semi-legendary King Alfred.

In 1066, the Normans, from northwestern France, deposed the Anglo-Saxon dynasties, and the new rulers imposed a strong central government with their capital in London. At this point, England’s history of expansion into its neighboring countries began. Wales, conquered in the Middle Ages, was incorporated into England in the 16th century. Ireland was first invaded in the 12th century, although it took over 400 years to bring the whole island under English rule. There was recurrent war with Scotland until the time of Henry VIII, but the Scots remained independent until 1603 when the monarchies of the two kingdoms were united. In 1707 Scotland and England were joined politically. From the Middle Ages onward, then, it is difficult to talk about England alone, for its history is inextricably linked to these other nations.

In the 17th century, the first English colonies in America were established. By the mid-19th century, England had become the center of an empire that was eventually to cover a quarter of the globe—28.5 million sq km (11 million sq mi). It was said that the sun never set on the British Empire, because it was always daytime in some part of it. Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century, ensured that England was also the foremost economic, financial, and political power between the fall of Napoleon and the rise of Germany. At the height of the Empire’s power, during the reign of Queen Victoria, England controlled an overseas population that was nearly 100 times larger than its own.

World War I (1914–1918) took an enormous toll on the English in terms of lives, resources, and national confidence. Altogether, the nation suffered over a million casualties, and more

than 1 in 10 Englishmen under the age of 45 were killed. Soon after the war, the Empire started to disintegrate when Ireland became self-governing. Crippled economically by World War II (1939–1945), Britain withdrew from India and granted independence to most of the remaining colonies over the next 25 years, although almost all of them chose to remain part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. While England’s international role is reduced from what it once was, the country is still prominent in world affairs as a member of the United Nations (with a permanent seat on the Security Council), the Commonwealth, the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

England is the largest of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom. (The others are Scotland and Wales—located, like England, on the island of Britain—and Northern Ireland.) Wales lies to the west of England and Scotland to the north. England is roughly triangular in shape, with a long, irregular coastline. Its varied terrain consists of rugged highlands in the north, flat plains to the east, lowlands and low hills in the south, and moors in the southwest. England’s (and the United Kingdom’s) capital city is London.

England has a high population density, with 383 people/sq km (992/sq mi), compared with 114 people/sq km (295/sq mi) for France. About 90% of England’s people are city dwellers. Ethnically, the English are descended from a mixture of European groups, including Celts and Romans, various Germanic tribes, Vikings, the Norman French, and others. Immigrants from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland have settled in England, as have more recent arrivals from former British colonies in South Asia and the Caribbean.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It is spoken throughout the United Kingdom and, altogether, by an estimated 500 million to 1.8 billion people worldwide. (There are approximately 300–400 million people worldwide who speak English as a first language, and anywhere from 200 million to 1.4 billion people who speak English as a second language worldwide.) English is the international language of business and politics, too.

Derived from the Germanic tongue of Anglo-Saxon and modified by strong Latin, Greek and French influences, modern English has evolved from Old English—spoken until around AD 1100—and Middle English, which was in use from then until the late 1400s. Just as there are many types of English worldwide, so there are also many different dialects and regional accents throughout England itself; for instance, the speech of a person from Liverpool differs considerably from that of someone from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The “Queen’s English,” the kind of English that foreigners learn and which BBC newsreaders speak, is a sanitized form of that which is spoken in the southeast of England and London. Furthermore, differences in education and class background can show up between speakers who live in the same region. Class-based speech differences among Londoners were memorably dramatized in George Bernard Shaw’s play *Pygmalion* and its musical version, *My Fair Lady*.

Although Americans speak English, in addition to differences in pronunciation, Americans may have difficulty under-



standing the speech of the English because the people of their respective countries refer to many of the same things using different terms. Examples include:

UNITED STATES	ENGLAND
ballpoint pen	biro
car hood	bonnet
car trunk	boot
phone booth	call box
elevator	lift
truck	lorry
baby's diaper	nappy
gasoline	petrol
baby buggy	pushchair
flashlight	torch

#### 4 FOLKLORE

England's most famous body of folklore is that made up of the many different tales surrounding the legendary King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Particularly well-known are the stories of the disruption caused by the adultery between Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot, Arthur's favorite knight; Sir Gawain's meeting with the Green Knight; and the search for the Holy Grail. These stories have been retold many times. The earliest version is that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, composed in 1135, but Sir Thomas Malory's 15th-century book is probably the best-known. T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* is a very modern view of the legends, as are the many mo-

tion pictures (such as *Camelot*, *Excalibur*, and even *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*) that have been made.

Probably the next most famous legends are those of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. They were outlaws who lived in Sherwood Forest near the city of Nottingham during the reign of King John (12th century AD), and were renowned for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. Their arch-enemy was the Sheriff of Nottingham, who, like King John, got his comeuppance when the legitimate king, Richard I, was restored to the throne. These tales are full of memorable characters like Little John, Maid Marian, Friar Tuck, and Will Scarlet.

There are many other folk tales, legends, and ghost stories from different parts of England, but their popularity declined after the Industrial Revolution made England more urban than agricultural. However, recent years have seen a revival of interest. Especially noteworthy is the resurgence of the medieval mystery plays. These plays, based upon Biblical stories but incorporating many non-Biblical elements drawn from daily life, were originally performed by ordinary townspeople during religious festivals.

#### 5 RELIGION

Although there is almost complete freedom of worship in England, church and state are closely intertwined. The Church of England (or Anglican Church) is an established church. England was Roman Catholic until 1534, when Henry VIII broke with Rome and proclaimed himself supreme head of the Church of England. Today, the head of the church is still the reigning monarch who, upon ascending the throne, pledges to uphold the faith. Until the mid-19th century, a person had to be a church member in order to sit in Parliament or attend the prestigious universities of Oxford and Cambridge. There are approximately 13–17 million members of the Church of England, although only 1 million of those attend services each Sunday. Other Protestant sects, including Methodists and Baptists, are also active in England and are called free churches. The Roman Catholic church is still very strong, partly due to the large numbers of Irish immigrants and Polish or Italian refugees who have settled in England. The country also has one of Europe's largest Jewish populations, numbering 300,000, and many cities have recently become home to large Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim immigrant populations.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most of England's holidays are those found in the Christian calendar. Others include New Year's Day, May Day and the August Bank Holiday. There is also a great deal of pageantry related to the government and the monarchy. The Queen publicly reviews her regiments of Guards—one of the elite forces of the British Army—at the Trooping of the Colour, which celebrates her official birthday in June. The Guards are the soldiers who perform the daily changing of the guard at the Queen's London residence, Buckingham Palace.

The annual State Opening of Parliament has a lot of complex ceremony built into it. For example, the Queen invites members of the House of Commons to come and hear her speech in the chamber of the House of Lords, but her envoy (known as Black Rod) always has the door to the Commons slammed in his face. He is expected to knock on the door and humbly request that the members come to hear the monarch. On the night before the opening of Parliament, the Tower of

London guards search the basements of the Houses of Parliament for explosives (a ritual that harks back to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, a conspiracy to murder King James I as he opened Parliament).

The Gunpowder Plot is also commemorated on Guy Fawkes' Night (November 5) with bonfires, fireworks, and the burning of "guys" (cloth dummies) made from old clothes. Children go from door to door asking their neighbors to give them "a penny for the guy." Chestnuts are roasted in the same bonfire in which the guy is burning. Other historical events are recalled on Remembrance Sunday (the Sunday closest to November 11, the date of the armistice that ended World War I). On this date, the Queen leads a procession of retired soldiers to lay wreaths at the Cenotaph war memorial in Whitehall. At eleven o'clock, two minutes of silence are observed all over the country in honor of those who died in both world wars.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

England, like the rest of Britain, is a modern, industrialized country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are connected with the education system. Apart from that, getting one's first job, gaining promotion, getting married, having children and retiring in one's sixties are the main signals of change in one's station.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The English are known for their politeness and their respect for law and order. They wait patiently in lines (or, as they call them, "queues") at stores, bus stops, movie theaters, and elsewhere. Hardly anyone dreams of jostling or trying to push ahead of others. Those living in the south are generally more reserved than northerners, who are more likely to greet strangers. The English also pride themselves on their dry humor and are known for their tolerance of other people's views, as well as of eccentric behavior.

It is hard to overstate the importance of class in English society. It has been a long time since England was anything like an absolute monarchy, but the nobility and the landed gentry did enjoy undisputed preeminence in English society until the middle of the 20th century, although the middle classes of businesspeople and industrialists have, for a long time, been far richer. In the 19th and 20th centuries, in fact, middle-class values tended to become the unofficial yardstick by which people's worth was measured. From a different perspective, many of the great philanthropic and reform movements of that time appear to be attempts to make poor people act more like the bourgeoisie. After World War II, many class barriers weakened, as working-class people gained access to better education and hence to better jobs, and society in general became more mobile. In the 1970s and 1980s, the meritocratic views of Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Prime Minister, gained wide popularity, and a new class of "yuppies" was born. That said, the way in which one speaks, the school one attended, one's parents' occupations, and many other things, still tend to place one in some class or another.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In spite of England's high population density, there is less overcrowding than in most European countries. About half the population now lives in dwellings constructed after World War II, usually two-story houses with gardens. More than 80%

of England's population live in houses, while the rest occupy apartments (called "flats"). In the 1980s, many tenants were allowed to purchase the low-income housing in which they lived, resulting in a shortage of housing in the low-income rental market. Today, there are a growing number of homeless people in London and England's other major cities.

A comprehensive National Health Service provides health care free, or at reduced rates, to all England's residents. This includes general medical, dental, optical, pharmaceutical, hospital, home health care, and preventive medical services. Average life expectancy in 2007 was 78.7 years. Primary causes of death include cardiovascular disease and cancer. The Department of Health carries out health education campaigns to inform people of the dangers from smoking and the often rather unhealthy English diet. Since 1982, the government has funded measures to control HIV/AIDS, including blood testing and public education.

England's 321,800 km (200,000 mi) of road are its most important means of transportation. Its rail system carries passengers and freight between cities, and high-speed trains provide passenger transport all over the country. England's merchant marine is one of the world's largest and safest. The Channel Tunnel linking England and France boasts the longest tunnel system ever built under water. There are several international airports, and Heathrow in London leads the world in volume of international air traffic.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

England's families have gotten smaller over the years. The average household has 2.36 members, compared with 4 at the turn of the 20th century. As housing costs go up and families become more mobile, grandparents often live alone or in retirement homes rather than with the family. An increasing number of couples are living together without being married, and those who marry do so at a later age than previously—26 for men, 24 for women. Often, they try to establish themselves in an occupation or career before they marry and have children. In 2002, approximately 30% of those aged 16 and over were single, with 52% married, 9% per cent widowed, and 8% divorced. The traditional gender roles of men and women are changing both in the home and in the workplace. Equal pay for men and women performing the same work has been the law since 1975.

## 11 CLOTHING

There is no distinctive national costume for England. The one that is most readily associated with England—a man's dark jacket with striped trousers, bowler hat, and rolled umbrella—is in fact a rather old-fashioned and formal outfit for office-workers, particularly bankers and civil servants. For the most part, the English wear modern Western-style clothing similar to that of people in other industrialized nations. Blue jeans and T-shirts are very popular, heavy coats and mackintoshes (raincoats) and warm woolen clothes are required for the climate's cold, damp winters. Perhaps the best-known traditional costumes in England are the red uniforms and high black hats worn by the Queen's guard at Buckingham Palace. Ceremonial dress is worn by government troops and the royal family on such official occasions as Trooping the Colour. In rural areas, traditional folk costumes are worn for such festivals as May Day. On such occasions, men may appear in "motley"



*The Royal Guards are the soldiers who perform the daily changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, the queen's London residence. There is a great deal of pageantry related to the government and the monarchy. (Cory Langley)*

coats featuring swatches of many different colors, knee-length breeches and white hose, and have bells tied around their legs.

## **12 FOOD**

English cuisine, like that of other Northern European countries, does not usually include many herbs or spices, nor elaborate presentations of food. It can therefore seem bland and unimaginative to people from other countries. It seems that many English people agree, given the popularity of food from other countries, especially India and China. However, traditional English cooking relies for its effect upon either the freshness of the ingredients or the taste of the cooking media themselves (which explains the preoccupation with frying food that the English often seem to have).

The English are often believed to eat a large “English breakfast” of bacon, eggs, sausages, mushrooms, grilled tomatoes, fried bread, and, often, kipper, a popular type of smoked herring, every day—and, doubtlessly, some people do so. However, today most families eat a lighter, continental-type breakfast of cereal with milk and sugar, perhaps followed by toast and marmalade. The traditional breakfast, while still widespread, is far too time-consuming to make every morning, when people need to be at work or school on time.

The main meal of the day may be eaten either at midday or in the evening. In either case, it generally consists of a meat dish, vegetables, and dessert. Sunday lunch is the most important meal of the week. Traditional dishes for it include roast

beef, mutton, or lamb served with roast potatoes, peas, and other vegetables. Other traditional English fare includes steak and kidney pie; cottage (or “shepherd’s”) pie, consisting of minced beef with a mashed potato topping; and “toad-in-the-hole,” which is made out of skinned sausages baked in pancake batter. Puddings, including rice pudding and bread pudding, are the most common traditional dessert.

Tea is England’s national beverage, and the English consume about a third of the world’s tea exports. They are known for their custom of afternoon tea, accompanied by cakes and sandwiches. However, in the past, this was mainly a custom of the leisured classes, who were able to take a meal at 4:00 PM when most people were at work. These days, the custom is probably no more common than it ever was, except perhaps on weekends.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Nearly the entire English population is literate, and education is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16. The education system is divided between state-run schools (which the vast majority of pupils attend) and a much smaller private establishment. State primary education, divided into infant and junior stages, lasts until the age of 11. The state secondary education system is known as the “comprehensive” system, since the state schools—mainly founded in the years following World War II—are designed to give a wide education to those who could not otherwise afford it. There is less “tracking” of students



into certain schools, although recently the government has given parents a greater say in which schools their children attend. Students who attend private schools go to “preparatory” school between the ages of 7 and 13. Private secondary schools are known (confusingly to Americans) as “public schools.” The best-known of these schools are Eton, Harrow, and Marlborough. The state requires all pupils attempt certain examinations. At the age of 16, pupils sit for exams in several subjects in order to get the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Thereafter, one may either leave school to find a job, or continue one’s secondary education until the age of 18. At that age, pupils take more specialized, advanced level exams (“A”-Levels). These are usually a way of preparing to attend a university.

The university system is substantially (but not wholly) subsidized by the state. There are about 50 chartered universities in England, established in several historical stages. The “greystones” were founded in the medieval period. These include the world-famous universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which date from the 12th and 13th centuries, respectively. Next oldest are the “redbricks,” which were founded in the 19th century, often by philanthropists using money that they had made from industrial or commercial enterprises. During the mid-20th century, many new universities were set up by the government, and are usually called “modern” universities.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

England has a distinguished cultural heritage, particularly in literature, where it boasts one of the greatest writers of any time or place, the 16th-century playwright William Shakespeare. It is traditionally held that his birthday (and also the date of his death) is April 23, which is the feast day of St. George, the patron saint of England. Besides Shakespeare, England can claim great writers and literary works as far back as the Old English epic *Beowulf*, written around the 10th century AD, and Geoffrey Chaucer’s 14th-century *Canterbury Tales*. Modern readers are still moved by the works of great Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and John Keats. The 19th-century clergyman Gerard Manley Hopkins exploited the purely musical potential of the English language perhaps more than any other writer. The 19th century saw a sudden flourishing of the novel, connected with such names as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. Only a few of the many great English names in modern literature are D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, W. H. Auden, and George Orwell. Great English writers born abroad include the Polish-born Joseph Conrad and the American-born T. S. Eliot. The contemporary scene includes Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis, Nick Hornby, Ian McEwan, and Harold Pinter. J.K. Rowling (b.1965) is the author of the wildly famous Harry Potter books.

Great 19th-century English painters include Joseph Turner and John Constable, while Francis Bacon, David Hockney, and Graham Sutherland achieved renown in the 20th century, as did sculptor Henry Moore. From John Dowland, William Byrd and Henry Purcell in the 1500s and 1600s, through Gilbert and Sullivan’s popular 19th-century light operas, to the modern works of Ralph Vaughn Williams and Benjamin Britten, English composers have given the world much memorable music. The composer whose name is most inextricably linked to England is Sir Edward Elgar, whose “Pomp and Circumstance”

provides the melody for “Land of Hope and Glory,” which is something of an unofficial English national anthem. In the 1960s, England became a trend setter in popular music as the home of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, two of the most successful rock groups ever formed, as well as numerous other successful artists and groups in the 21st century.

#### 15 WORK

The average English work week is 35 to 40 hours long, spread out over five days—half the length of the work week a century ago. About half of England’s workers are employed in service sector jobs, a third in manufacturing and engineering, and the rest in agriculture, construction, mining, and energy production. The north is highly industrialized and contains over a third of the country’s manufacturing labor force. However, many of the older industries have declined, resulting in unemployment which has led to heavy emigration from the region. About half the workers in the Midlands region are employed in the automobile industry. In the southeast, more than 80% of the labor force works in the service sector, and dairy farming is an important source of employment in the southwest.

#### 16 SPORTS

The most popular spectator and participant sport in England is soccer (usually called “football”), which is played in professional and amateur leagues as well as in schools, colleges, and local boroughs. The ubiquity of the game is such that there are some 100 professional clubs alone. Other favorite sports include cricket and rugby (named for Rugby School, where it began). Soccer, cricket, and rugby all originated in England, and spread worldwide due to the influence of the British Empire. Gambling on sports—which is legal in England—is a popular pastime. Most betting is done on horse racing. Over 90% of the population has gambled at some point, and around half do it regularly. Other popular sports include hockey, cross-country running, tennis, swimming, and other water sports. A famous horse race takes place regularly at the Royal Ascot, in which horses owned by the Royal Family are often entered.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many people in England enjoy spending their leisure time relaxing at home with television or a video. The vast majority are regular newspaper readers, and nearly half read books on a regular basis as well. On weeknights, the hours between 7:00 and 11:00 PM are generally spent watching television or reading. More than 90% of English households own a television set and over half have a VCR or DVD. Until the mid-1980s, only four television stations were available. Since then, however, satellite broadcasting has considerably expanded the alternatives. Second to home recreations is visiting the local pub or club. There are many kinds of drinking establishments, but the most familiar is the quiet, traditional pub which serves not only alcohol but good traditional food.

Angling is the most popular pastime in the country. England has many miles of rivers and canals in which anglers fish for trout, carp, bream, and roach. The English are also very fond of games. Both snooker and darts are played by many people (the latter being especially popular in pubs), and, despite not being very visually exciting events, draw large audiences during televised professional tournaments. Among older people, bingo and cribbage are often taken very seriously.

The English are known for their love of gardening, and even apartment-dwellers without a plot of their own will often rent a piece of land on which to garden, or at least have a window box full of flowers. Fishing, hiking, and horseback riding are other popular outdoor leisure time pursuits. Many adults enjoy taking evening classes in every subject from basket weaving to yoga. Pets are very popular in England and half of its households have one—most often a dog, which is the national favorite.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

England has a history of fine furniture-making dating back to the 18th-century craftsmen Thomas Chippendale and George Hepplewhite, examples of whose art can still be seen today. Their contemporaries Josiah Wedgwood and Josiah Spode made England famous for its ceramics as well, especially the blue-and-white Wedgwood jasperware that England still exports today. The most famous English folk dance is the Morris dance, still seen at local festivals. Male dancers stomp and leap while waving pieces of cloth and jingling bells.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Class divisions and economic inequality are facts of life in present-day England. Approximately 25% of the nation's wealth is owned by 1% of the population, while unemployment was 5.4% in 2007 and 14% of the population lived below the poverty line. Many immigrants from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and other countries have settled in urban areas, where they are often subjected to housing and other types of discrimination and have a high rate of unemployment. Racial tension between the white English community and non-white immigrants has erupted into riots in London, Liverpool, Bristol, and Birmingham. As well, England has been a target of international Islamic terrorists, with bombings on the London public transit system carried out in July 2005, killing 52 and injuring 700. In 2006 controversial Egyptian-born Muslim cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri was jailed for seven years after being found guilty of inciting murder and race hate. Abu Hamza, who is being sought for extradition by U.S. authorities on terror-related matters, preached at the Finsbury Park Mosque, in north London.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in England have a long tradition of working for equal rights. The 19th century saw the rise of the suffragettes (the right to vote for English women was won in 1918), and Girton at Cambridge University was founded as England's first women's college in 1869. The number of women in paid work increased substantially after the two world wars, but they generally had low-paid, female-dominated occupations, such as teaching and clerical work. In the late 1980s women made up more than 40% of the workforce in England, and they increasingly took managerial and professional jobs. However, although equal pay for men and women performing the same work has been the law since 1975, few women enjoy parity with men in pay. In 2007 pro-choice British women celebrated 40 years of legalized abortion.

Homosexuality is increasingly being tolerated by a large portion of the British population. However, some gay people still find it difficult to admit their sexuality, especially while at school or university. It is becoming more common for gay men

to “come out” openly, but is not common to see gay men showing their sexuality in public (for example by holding hands or kissing). Many older British people still find it difficult to accept homosexuality. The official teachings of most churches in the UK remain hostile to homosexuality. Homosexuality was legalized in the United Kingdom in 1967, and the homosexual age of consent has been reduced since then from 21 to 18 and now to 16 (the same age as for sex between men and women). Since 2003 it is unlawful to discriminate in the workplace against someone on the grounds of his or her sexuality. Gay men and women have been allowed to serve in the military since 2000. Gay marriages are not legal in the UK. However, the Civil Partnership Act (in force as of 2005) created a new legal relationship of “civil partnership,” which two people of the same sex can form by signing a registration document.

London, Brighton, and Manchester all have large gay communities. Blackpool, Bournemouth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Newcastle also have significant gay communities. The most famous place for gay people to meet is in Old Compton Street in London's Soho area. Every summer (late June or early July) in London there is a Pride London parade and rally. There is an annual film festival in London showing gay and lesbian films.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# ESTONIANS

**LOCATION:** Estonia

**POPULATION:** 1.3 million total population of country, of which 68% are ethnic Estonians

**LANGUAGE:** Estonian

**RELIGION:** Lutheran; Russian Orthodox

## 1 INTRODUCTION

After the last Ice Age, the area now known as Estonia was inhabited by people whose ethnic origin was unknown. There are signs of human activity from the middle of the 8th millennium BC. In the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, Finno-Ugric tribes arrived from the east and became mixed with the forerunners of the Baltic people who had previously migrated there. Estonians have thereafter lived on their land for 5,000 years, being one of the longest-settled European peoples. The oldest written record of Estonia was made by an Arab geographer, al-Idrisi, in AD 1154. By the beginning of the 13th century AD, a state had not yet developed, a feudal system was unknown, there were no towns, and the effect of Christianity was minor. There was a population of approximately 100,000 people. Until the end of the 12th century, Estonians had been successful in repelling the attempts of Scandinavians and Old Russians to conquer and dominate the area.

At the end of the 12th century, the militant German religious expansion to the east increased. Warfare commenced at the beginning of the 13th century, when the pagan Estonian society fought against the more advanced European society. German, Danish, Swedish, and Russian conquerors encountered armed resistance. By the year 1227, Estonia had been conquered, tying Estonia's development to that of Europe.

After the conquest, small feudal states were formed. Estonia was divided between the Livonian Order, Denmark (who sold its territory to the Livonian Order in 1346), and the bishops of Tartu and Saare-Lääne. The economy of the towns was based on East–West transit trade. The legal status of peasants deteriorated: by the end of the 14th century, they were attached to the land and by the beginning of the 16th century, serfdom had developed.

In 1558 Prince IV of Moscow invaded Estonia and defeated the divided small states. The rulers sought foreign aid. In 1561 northern Estonia yielded to Sweden and southern Estonia to Poland. By the year 1583, the Russian armies were forced out of Estonia. As a result of the Swedish-Polish wars, all of Estonia became Swedish territory in 1625.

In 1721 Estonia became part of Russia. At the beginning of the 19th century, peasants were granted ownership of their movable property, as well as the right to cultivate their farms in perpetuity. Estonian county schools were established on the farm lands of the manors. Tartu University, which was reopened in 1802, became the most important scientific and cultural center in all of Russia. More peasants bought farms and became independent from the manors. Estonian language journalism began and an Estonian intelligentsia developed. In 1857 the national epic *Kalevipoeg* was published, an Estonian-language school for peasants was established shortly thereafter, the first Estonian national song festival was held in 1869, the collection of folklore began, and national theaters were found-

ed. This politically active period enabled Estonians to become organized, with increasing individualism and self-consciousness. In 1884 the Estonian University Students' Society's blue, black, and white tricolor flag was consecrated. Later, this became the Estonian national flag.

In the late 1800s, Russian nationalism was strengthened in order to tie the peripheral provinces to the center. Local authorities became increasingly under the control of the Russian center. Organizations in the national Estonian movement were closed down, censorship became stricter, and the Russification (Russianizing) of the indigenous population increased. However, Russification policies ended in 1897. Development began in the metal and machinery industries, and cotton and wood processing industries were established. Agricultural cooperatives flourished, and farmers' associations were formed. The towns became more Estonian. A new generation of educated people, including politicians, quickly restored the awareness of a national identity.

In 1918 Estonians finally had the opportunity to create their own state. The subsequent War of Independence was concluded by the Treaty of Tartu, signed in February 1920, whereby Russia recognized Estonia as an independent nation. Soon afterwards, Estonia became a full member of the League of Nations.

Between the two world wars, the Estonian economy grew rapidly. By 1939, national income per capita was approximately equal to that of Finland. At that time Estonia was mainly an agrarian and trading nation. It had also developed an industry well suited to its own needs and quite competitive in international trade.

After the collapse of Germany in November 1918, the Estonian Provisional Government assumed power. Soviet Russia attacked Estonia, and in an attempt to conceal the aggression, the Estonian Working People's Commune was set up in Narva. By the beginning of 1919, two-thirds of Estonia was under Soviet control. The Estonians counterattacked and freed the land in three weeks. In June and July 1919, successful battles were conducted against the Baltic-German Landeswehr army in northern Latvia. The victory at Vonnu on June 23 is commemorated by a national holiday, Victory Day. Military activity against Soviet Russia continued in the autumn, and on 2 February 1920, the Tartu Peace Treaty was concluded, wherein Soviet Russia recognized the Republic of Estonia.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty signed in 1939, however, consigned Estonia to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. In 1940 the country was occupied and incorporated into the USSR. The Estonian economy became a supplier to Moscow, and the whole society came under total Soviet control. In the period of July 1940–June 1941, an estimated 1,000 people were arrested and disappeared. On 14 June 1941, mass deportations began: over 10,000 people were sent to Siberia without any legal proceedings. Many went into hiding in forests to escape the terror.

On 5 July 1941, German troops crossed the Estonian border. Around 35,000 people joined the retreating Soviet forces, in addition to the 33,000 Estonian people who had been forcibly conscripted into the Red Army. Approximately 5,500 Estonians were killed in concentration camps. Germans also carried out forced conscription. In February 1944, when the Soviet forces again advanced on Estonia, 40,000 Estonians had joined the German Army and, together with German troops,



stopped the Red Army. On 22 September 1944, however, the Red Army entered Tallinn and the whole country was conquered again. Some 70,000–80,000 people fled the country by sea.

From 1944, the Sovietization of Estonia continued. Forced industrialization was accompanied by the immigration of more than 240,000 settlers, mainly Russians. Agriculture went through forced collectivization. On 25–26 March 1949, 20,700 Estonians were deported to Siberia. During the Soviet era, the economy became largely urbanized and industrialized. Despite the inefficiencies of the Soviet central planning system, Estonia enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the former Soviet Union.

In the second half of the 1980s, under the deepening economic and political crises in the Soviet Union, the Estonian Supreme Soviet proclaimed the Estonian Declaration of Sovereignty. This sent a signal of rebellion throughout the Soviet Empire, bringing about the beginning of its eventual collapse. On 20 August 1991, at the peak of the attempted coup in the Soviet Union, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia issued a decision on the reestablishment of independence on the basis of historical continuity of statehood.

On 17 September 1991, the Republic of Estonia was accepted as a full member of the United Nations. In 2004 Estonia officially entered both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Estonia is located in the northeastern region of Europe, on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. It has been inhabited for more than 5,000 years by the Estonians, who belong to the Balto-Finnic group of Finno-Ugric nations. The territory of Estonia is approximately 45,000 sq km (17,300 sq mi). The longest distance from east to west is 350 km (220 mi), and from north to south it is 240 km (150 mi). Estonia's nearest neighbors are Russia in the east, Latvia in the south, and Finland and Sweden across the Baltic Sea to the north and west.

The climate of Estonia is moderate. The mean daily temperature in Tallinn is  $-5.3^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $22^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in January and  $16.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $62^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in July; the annual average is  $4.9^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $41^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). The lowest temperature ( $-43.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $-46^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) was measured in Estonia in January 1941, but as a rule the temperature seldom drops below  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-13^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). The highest recorded temperature is  $35^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $95^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), but it is unusual for the temperature to exceed  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $86^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Usually, there is snow cover from December to March.

Estonia has more than 1,500 islands, the largest of which are Saaremaa (2,673 sq km/1,032 sq mi), Hiiu (989 sq km/382 sq mi), Muhu (200 sq km/77 sq mi) and Vormsi (92.9 sq km/35.9 sq mi). The length of the coastline is approximately 3,800 km (2,360 mi). There are over 1,400 lakes in Estonia. The largest of them are Lake Peipsi (3,555 sq km/1,373 sq mi), which is the border lake between Estonia and Russia and is therefore divided between the two countries, and Lake Võrtsjärv (270 sq km/104 sq mi). The deepest lake is Lake Rouge Suurjärv (38 m or 125 ft deep). The three largest rivers, in order of larger to smaller are the Narva, the Emajõgi, and the Pärnu.

There are extensive oil shale deposits in the northeast region of Estonia. These are mainly used for two purposes: production of electricity and as raw materials for the chemical industry. The electricity produced is partially consumed in Estonia and partially exported to the neighboring countries of Latvia and Russia. North Estonia and the islands have deposits of limestone and dolomite rocks used for architectural and building needs, as well as for decorative purposes. In the northern part of Estonia there are also deposits of phosphorite. Cambrian blue clay is used for manufacturing bricks, drainage pipes, and cement. Peat is mainly used for farmers' needs and for the production of pressed blocks that are used as heating material.

Many wild animals and birds live in Estonian woodlands and wetlands. Approximately 48% of Estonia's territory is covered by forests. These have importance not only as hunting areas, but also as a valuable national resource for the relatively well-developed woodworking industry. There are many companies in Estonia involved in fishing, fish processing, and the marketing of fish products.

The total population of Estonia is about 1.3 million, with a density of 30 inhabitants/sq km (78/sq mi). The breakdown of ethnic groups is as follows: Estonians, 68%; Russians, 26%; Ukrainians, 2%; Belarusians, 1%; Finns, 1%; and others, 2%. Some 70% of the population is urban, and 30% is rural. The capital of Estonia is Tallinn (population 395,000). The other largest cities are Tartu (102,000), Narva (66,000), Kohtla-Järve (45,000), and Pärnu (44,000).

In addition to those in the Estonian homeland, there are many Estonians living abroad who fled to the West because of the Soviet occupation in 1944. The largest expatriate Estonian communities are in Sweden, the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, and Finland.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Estonian language is related to Finnish in that it is in the Finnic branch of the Ural-Altai language family, along with Karelian, Komi, Mari, and Mordvin. Besides Finnish (and, to a lesser degree, Hungarian), no other prominent modern European language is related to Estonian. Although Estonian is a distinct language, it also uses words borrowed from Swedish, German, and Russian. Standard Estonian is based upon the Northern Estonian dialect.

The earliest example of written Estonian dates back to the 13th century, and the oldest known texts are from the 16th century. Estonian grammar was not standardized until the late 1800s, with many revisions taking place in the 1920s and 1930s to reduce the influence of German.

Written Estonian uses the Latin alphabet, with a few added characters: *ä*, *õ*, *ü*, *õ*, *š*, and *ž*. The added vowels are pronounced similarly to German, and the *õ* is a variant of the German *ö*. The *š* carries the “sh” sound, and *ž* has a “zh” sound. The letters *c*, *q*, *w*, *x*, and *y* only appear in words of foreign origin. Spelling is phonetic, so there are no silent letters or consonant clusters. However, there are durations of sounds in spoken Estonian that are not distinguished in written Estonian, as well as some words that are spelled the same but pronounced differently. Estonian uses no articles, noun genders, verb aspects, or prepositions. There is, however, a system of 14 cases, of which 10 act as “prepositions.” There is also no future tense, and word order is very flexible.

Estonian first names for males often end in the letter *o* (as in Finnish). Typical first names include Arno, Eino, Ivo, Jaak, Jaan, Peeter, Rein, and Ülo. Female first name examples include Aime, Ester, Krista, Leida, and Mari. Estonian spellings of many common Scandinavian first names are also typical.

Examples of everyday Estonian words include *Tere* (How do you do?), *palun* (please), *tänan* (thank you), and *head aega* (goodbye). Estonian tends to incorporate newer international words rather than inventing its own equivalents.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The runic folk song is the oldest form of Estonian folklore, originating some 2,000–3,000 years ago as an oral tradition. There are about 3,600 of these runic folk songs known to exist, with about 133,000 variations. The oldest songs are mythic themes and family ballads. When an agricultural society developed, many of the songs dealt with labor and rituals. Most of the songs that originated in the Middle Ages were sung by women and had female-oriented themes, but many of the more modern folk songs are male-centered. Many of the folk stories are legends associated with certain objects or places. As a result, most prominent physical features (large rocks and trees, bodies of water) in Estonia have some sort of legend associated with them.

The national epic *Kalevipoeg* utilizes themes from Estonian folklore. It describes the battles and adventures of Kalevipoeg (Kalev’s son), the mythical hero and ruler of ancient Estonia, and ends with his violent death and the country’s conquest by foreign invaders. According to Estonian folklore, Kalevipoeg created the Estonian landscape with his own two hands by cutting down the forests to form the plains, uprooting gardens to make the hills, and drawing water to fill in the lakes.

Two popular Estonian legends are based in Tallinn. One legend has it that when Tallinn is completely built, it will be

flooded. The flood will happen because Jarvevana, the legendary old man who lives at the bottom of Lake Ulemiste (which is the city’s water source), will pull out the plug of the lake. Another legend tells the story of a warrior-maiden who secretly brought in the building stones under cover of night.

### 5 RELIGION

Pagan and totem worship, along with shamanism, were widely practiced in ancient times. Christianity came to the Estonians in the 11th century AD. Over the next two centuries, the majority of Estonians gradually became Christian. During the period of Swedish rule (1629–1710), a state church was established that was based on Lutheran doctrine. Lutheranism is the most widely practiced faith among Estonians today, though there are also Russian Orthodox and Baptist communities within Estonia. From the 1740s until the 1840s, the immense political influence of imperial Russia on the Estonians resulted in a weakened role for the state Lutheran Church and an increase in conversion to the tsar’s religion—Russian Orthodoxy. By the early 1900s, however, greater religious tolerance of the Lutheran Church was shown by Russia.

During Estonia’s brief period of independence (1918–1940) before the Soviet invasion, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church had a leading role in society. When the Soviet occupation began in 1940, anti-Christian legislation was enacted, and policies were carried out immediately. These policies included banning church activities, shutting down churches and confiscating the property, and limiting religious services to a negligible level. Official antireligious bias and repression by the Soviet government continued to some extent until 1988, but all antireligious legislation was repealed in 1990. Since the end of Soviet rule in Estonia, many Estonians have become interested in religion.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The national holidays are New Year’s Day (January 1), Independence Day (February 24), Good Friday (late March or early April), Labor Day (May 1), St. John’s Night or Midsummer Day (June 23 and 24), and Christmas (December 25 and 26).

The most beautiful and long-awaited holiday among Estonians is probably Christmas. Winter is the time of the year when there is almost no sunshine, and it is light for only a couple of hours a day. So, people start decorating their homes and often begin lighting candles at the end of November. At the beginning of December there are Christmas decorations everywhere, and soon Christmas trees (fir) are brought into homes. They may be decorated in many ways. During recent years, however, Christmas decorations have become more commercialized. On Christmas Eve many people go to church. It is a tradition in every Estonian family to bake gingerbread. Children look forward to the arrival of Santa Claus, who brings presents. This is traditionally a quiet holiday, which is celebrated with family and close friends. A traditional Estonian Christmas dinner is oven-baked pork with sauerkraut, potatoes, and blood sausage, often served with lingonberry sauce or pickled pumpkin. During the Soviet occupation, celebrating Christmas was prohibited. At home, most Estonians did it secretly anyway.

Another important national holiday for Estonians is St. John’s Day. The 24th of June is the peak of summer and the lightest and warmest time of the year. In fact, it never gets com-



*Pedestrians pass the Town Hall Square in Tallinn, Estonia. (AP Images/Timur Nesametdinov, NIPA)*

pletely dark at night. On June 23, people everywhere light bonfires at night. They drink beer and bake sausages over the fire, sing, and have fun. In the cities people can make small fires in their gardens or in open fireplaces. Real bonfires are made mostly in the country. In times past, children and young people jumped over the bonfires and swung on big village swings.

Another reason to celebrate June 23 is because on that day in 1919, the Estonian national army won the battle of Vonnu, which was decisive in the War of Independence.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage for Estonians are related to family occurrences like births, deaths, and marriages. A child's first day at school and, especially, the day of graduation from high school are also celebrated. Graduation from university is an important event that may be celebrated for several days among the graduates, as well as with family members and relatives. High school and university reunions are also traditional.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Estonians are generally regarded as shy and withdrawn. They do not communicate with other people easily. However, among friends and family, they are quite friendly and hospitable.

In formal communications, men are referred to as *Härra* (Mr.) and women as *Proua* (Mrs.) or *Preili* (Miss). Usually people shake hands when meeting and departing, and it is polite to look into other people's eyes. The polite form of addressing someone in the Estonian language is *teie*, which is used when meeting someone for the first time or with those one does not know well.

Among good friends and business associates, the informal *sina* is used to address each other. Close friends also greet each other with a wave of the hand and use foreign expressions like *ciao*, "hi," or "bye."

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Estonian economy has been growing rapidly since entry into the European Union, resulting in an increased standard of living for many Estonians. Nearly all Estonians now have hot and cold running water, telephones (including land line and cellular), refrigerators, washing machines, and other mod-

ern conveniences. There are numerous television stations, and cable is becoming increasingly available, along with internet connections.

The bottom segment of society, however, has experienced a decline in standard of living with a resulting increase in the number of homeless in urban centers. The estimated total number of homeless people in Estonia in the past decade has risen from 100–150 to some 3,500 people.

The number of automobiles in Estonia is growing constantly. However, the importance of a car in the family is not as great as in the United States. Public transportation is quite well developed and covers all areas in major cities and throughout the country. For example, city transportation in Tallinn includes buses, trolleys, and streetcars. There is no subway in Estonia.

The mortality rate is 13.35 per 1,000 people, and the birth rate is 10.28 per 1,000 people.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Most Estonians get married for the first time when they are in their 20s. Usually, people are not engaged before they get married. More than 50% of these marriages end in divorce. In recent years, more couples are choosing to live together without marrying; in 2003 an estimated 58% of all children were born to unmarried couples. A law was proposed in 2008 to register domestic partnerships.

Among Estonians, it is common in that both the husband and wife work full-time. A typical work day ends between 5:00 and 6:00 pm. After that, people do their housework (cook, wash, tidy up, etc.). It is common to watch TV and read books. The role of women is important in Estonia as they are more active in the household than are men. Children normally get home from school earlier and have to spend hours at home alone. As people are not very mobile in Estonia, it is quite typical that several generations live together or close to one another. Grandparents often take care of their grandchildren and help in the household. It is also common that children take care of their parents when they are no longer able to live by themselves.

## 11 CLOTHING

Clothing in Estonia mostly depends on what type of work one does. As in many other countries, traditional office dress for men is a Western-style suit and tie. Women wear suits, skirts and blouses, or sometimes pantsuits. In some places, people may dress more casually. When not at work, Estonians often wear jeans and sweaters or tee-shirts. In general, however, Estonian people prefer to “dress up” rather than “dress down.” For example, Estonians rarely wear jeans and a sweater to the theater or a concert. Most people are quite style-conscious. Wearing gold and silver jewelry is also common. As the climate is rather cold, people need to wear warm and weather-proof clothes. On a cold winter day, women in fur coats are a common sight in the streets of Estonian cities. It has always been characteristic for Estonian women to make clothes for themselves instead of buying what is available at shops. Many women have sewing machines at home. They also knit woolen socks, mittens, and sweaters with traditional Estonian patterns that are admired by foreigners.

Estonian children are not required to wear uniforms to school. The most popular clothes among students are jeans and tee-shirts. On festive school occasions, girls have to wear

a white blouse and dark skirt, and boys must wear a dark suit and white shirt. For hygienic reasons, they also have to put on other shoes inside the school building.

## 12 FOOD

Over the centuries, Estonian cuisine has been influenced by Scandinavians, Germans, and Russians. Estonian eating habits are best characterized by the saying: “Eat your breakfast yourself, share your lunch with your friend, and give your dinner to your enemy.” The most typical breakfast would consist of a Scandinavian-style open-faced sandwich (a slice of black or white bread with butter and cheese or sausage, with some slices of fresh tomato, radish, cucumber, etc.) and a cup of rich, good coffee. Coffee is definitely the most popular drink in Estonia. It is served in offices in the morning and during lunch, as well as at home to guests. Children, though, prefer tea, milk, or juice. During recent years, yogurt and cornflakes have become more popular, especially among children.

In Estonia, lunch is the most substantial meal of the day. People try to get out of their offices for an hour between 12:00 and 3:00 pm and have their lunch in cafés, restaurants, bars, or canteens. A typical meal consists of meat and potatoes with gravy and a fresh salad. Some people may have soup, salad, and a light dessert only. Although pizza and hamburgers are becoming increasingly popular, the consumption of fast food is not characteristic of Estonians. Children are served lunch at school.

Dinner is usually eaten at home after work, seldom later than 8:00 pm. In families, dinner may be basically the same as lunch, depending on how much food they have had during the day. For convenience, many people prefer warmed sausages and/or bread and butter and soup. As Estonian people try to avoid heavy food in the evening, yogurt and cottage cheese of all varieties are popular. But, in most cases, women still try to provide warm dinners for their families after work. Going out for dinner is quite expensive and therefore not customary.

In general, Estonians are quite health-conscious and educated. Most people try to supplement their diet with fresh fruits and vegetables that are available throughout the year (mostly imported from Western countries), although they are quite expensive. Snacks like potato chips and popcorn are not popular.

Most Estonian women are skilled at cooking. At home parties (like birthdays), guests are served delicious salads and hors d'oeuvres, homemade pies, and cakes. People also pay attention to how nicely their food is served.

## 13 EDUCATION

Estonians start school when they are six or seven years old. Primary education lasts for four years. Secondary education, following primary, is divided into two parts: basic education (grades 5–9) and upper secondary education (grades 10–12). Primary and basic education (grades 1–9) is compulsory for all children of Estonia. There are two main options after basic school—upper secondary school or vocational school. Some vocational schools provide secondary education in addition to vocational education. The secondary school certificate gives a student the right to continue his or her education either in universities or in other institutions of higher education.

Estonia has one of the highest levels of education in the European Union, with literacy and school enrollment rates at or

near 100%. The rates are approximately equal for males and females.

Many of the graduates from secondary school continue their studies at institutions of higher education, and a large number attend vocational schools. The oldest university in Estonia is Tartu University, founded in 1632. Undergraduate academic studies in universities lasts 4–6 years. The secondary education certificate does not allow a student automatically to enter an institution of higher education or a university. Applicants must pass entrance exams. Most Estonians learn two languages in school, in addition to Estonian. The most common foreign language is English, and the second is usually Russian, German, or French.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional runic folk songs form the basis of Estonian folk music. Although the lyrics are often repetitive, the tunes associated with these folk songs are complex. Estonian folk musicians often play the zither, violin, or concertina when singing traditional songs. Song festivals are popular Estonian cultural events, dating back to 1869. The song festivals nowadays are a major event occurring every five years, with male, female, children's, and boys' choirs all giving performances.

Arvo Pärt, born in 1935, has become internationally renowned for his modern classical compositions based on a method he calls "tintinnabuli" (or "little bells"). Although he now lives in Germany, he is still celebrated in Estonia as a contemporary cultural icon.

The first book in the Estonian language was produced in 1525. Literacy was furthered by the establishment of a village school network. An Estonian edition of the New Testament was published in 1686, and a complete translation of the Bible appeared in 1739. The national epic, *Kalevipoeg* (The Son of Kalev), consists of 19,023 runic verses based on various themes from old Estonian folklore and was written during 1857–61 by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald. Estonian literature of the late 1800s and early 1900s experienced a romantic and then a naturalist phase. The five-volume epic *Tõde ja Õigus* (Truth and Justice) was finished by the revered Estonian novelist A. H. Tammsaare in 1933 and provides an historical overview of Estonian cultural development during the years 1870–1930.

In 1944, most of Estonia's prominent writers and poets fled the country because of the Soviet Union's invasion and occupation. Estonian literature was tightly censored during the Soviet era, and any material that was critical of the Soviet system was not published. Furthermore, some writers whose ideas were seen as threatening by the government were imprisoned. The Soviet government started to relax its control over Estonian literature in the 1960s. A common literary theme since the 1940s has been the injustices committed by the Soviet government against Estonians.

#### 15 WORK

Economic reform and the consequent structural changes have significantly affected the structure of labor demand. Employment in distribution services, catering, and financial services has increased, thanks to the growing number of small private business enterprises. The economy has grown rapidly since Estonia's entry into the European Union in 2004, resulting in one of the highest employment rates and highest per capita income levels in Central Europe.

Most people in Estonia work between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm or between 9:00 am and 6:00 pm. The lunch break usually lasts between 30 minutes to 1 hour and is between 12:00 and 3:00 pm, but most businesses do not close for lunch. Most people in Estonia receive a fixed monthly salary and are not paid for the work they do past 40 hours a week. People are entitled to a paid vacation after they have worked for one year. The length of the vacation varies, depending on the company, from 21 to 35 days. The retirement age is 65 for men and 60 for women.

#### 16 SPORTS

Estonians are especially fond of basketball. Skiing, volleyball, soccer, and motor sports are also popular. Joggers or runners are becoming a common sight in the suburbs, especially in summertime. For years, aerobics has been a popular way of keeping in shape for women. Also, public health clubs with their body-building facilities are widely used by both men and women. Public indoor swimming pools are open to everyone for a moderate fee, and there are swimming pools in some schools. People of all ages can take lessons in tennis, riding, etc., but they are quite expensive. During recent years, bowling, golf, and squash have become popular. As Estonia is a sea country, there are yachting clubs in many seaside places. Spectator sports are not greatly admired by Estonians. On TV, mostly basketball, ice hockey, soccer, and figure skating are watched.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

One of the most popular forms of entertainment in Estonia is the theater. Many people also go to motion pictures. The TV is still the most accessible form of entertainment at home, especially for elderly people. Nearly all Estonian homes have TV sets, and cable TV has become available for more and more TV fans. In most homes, the radio is nearly always turned on as well.

Many Estonians, especially women, enjoy gardening. Collecting things (like stamps, coins, beer bottles, postcards, etc.) is also widespread. Younger people, though, prefer going out. Discotheques and dancing are popular among young people of both sexes.

Traveling is an increasingly popular form of recreation—during the Soviet occupation the borders of Estonia were closed and it was impossible for the average person to travel abroad. Nowadays, even those who cannot afford more exotic and faraway places still try to make it to the close-by Scandinavian countries or Germany.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Estonian folk art traditions date back to ancient times when clothes, tools, footwear, utensils, toys, etc., were made by hand. During long and dark winter nights, Estonian women wove fabrics for national costumes. Striped, multicolored skirt fabrics were made of yarn that was colored with herbs. Blouses were made of linen and embroidered by hand. Woolen sweaters, cardigans, mittens, and socks were knitted with elaborate patterns. Each county had its own characteristic patterns. Traditional Estonian jewelry is made of silver. Estonian craftspersons were already known for their skills during the Middle Ages.

Nowadays Estonia is full of shops selling all kinds of national handicrafts. The Estonians excel at leather goods (espe-



cially leather-bound notebooks), ceramics, woolens, jewelry, and wrought ironwork. Wicker baskets and wooden beer mugs are also specialties, as are table implements of aromatic juniper wood from the Estonian islands. Also from the islands come tightly woven snowflake-design sweaters with red trim—real Estonian classics. Although most Baltic amber comes from Lithuania, amber jewelry and specimens are also widely sold in Estonia.

Even today, many Estonian women enjoy knitting and embroidering and prefer handmade craft items to those made by mass industry.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

All people living in Estonia are guaranteed human and civil rights by Estonian legislation. However, there are still some social problems in Estonia, most of which are related to the consequences of more than 50 years of Soviet occupation. During the Soviet occupation, there were tensions between Estonians and ethnic Russians living in Estonia. Although ethnic Russians have been allowed to become full citizens of Estonia since independence, they are required to learn the Estonian language in order to participate fully in society. Many ethnic Russians complain of discrimination and mistreatment.

One serious social problem in Estonia is the lack of financial resources for social guarantees, such as cash assistance for young families, single parents, families with many children, disabled persons, and retired people. In many cases, wages and salaries are very small and barely enable one to make ends meet. The same applies to health care. The rapid economic growth of the 21st century has not benefitted the lowest strata of society; in fact, the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth in Estonia has become a concern for the European Union, which is pushing Estonia to address the problem.

Alcoholism and crime are also major issues in Estonia and efforts are being made by the government to increase security and people's trust in the police. Estonia has become a major transporter of illegal drugs and drug use is increasing among Estonians as well.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Estonia is considerably more advanced than other former Soviet republics in its attitude toward homosexuality. Homosexual acts were legalized in 1992 and, in 2004, Estonia became the first Baltic country to have a gay pride parade. The 2006 parade was marred by violent protests, injuring 15 people, but the parades in other years have met with at least tolerance, if not enthusiastic support.

There are a number of gay clubs in Tallinn that operate openly and attract heterosexuals as well as gays and lesbians. The Gay and Lesbian Information Center (GLIC) opened in 2004 and began to be funded by the Estonian Institute for National Health in 2008. A law was proposed in 2008 to register domestic partnerships, including same-sex couples, granting them some legal rights, though stopping short of recognizing their union as a "marriage."

This is not to say that Estonia is free of homophobia. Physical violence against homosexuals is rare in Estonia, but verbal abuse and other forms of discrimination continue to occur. In 2005 the Estonian Ministry of Justice proposed a new Family Law stating that marriage is exclusive to heterosexual couples, sparking a spirited debate that remained unresolved in 2008.

The 2008 domestic partnership proposal was an attempt to find a middle ground. The Dutch ambassador to Estonia, Hans Glaubitz, resigned in 2006 after only a year in office because of homophobic and racist harassment; Glaubitz is gay and his partner is Afro-Cuban.

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—revised by Dianne De Mott

# EVENKI

**ALTERNATE NAME:** Evenks, Ewenki, Tungus

**LOCATION:** Russia (central and eastern Siberia), China (Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang Province), and northern Mongolia

**POPULATION:** Approximately 66,000 total—35,527 in Russia (2002), 30,505 in China (2000), 1,500 in Mongolia

**LANGUAGE:** Evenki, Russian, Chinese, Yakut

**RELIGION:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Tibetan Buddhism, native religious beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Evenki are an indigenous people of central and eastern Siberia, Mongolia, and Inner Mongolia. Although there has been a great deal of controversy among scholars regarding their original homeland, the most reliable anthropological, linguistic, and archaeological evidence indicates that the Evenki were formed to the east of Lake Baikal in southeastern Siberia around 1000 BC. They then spread throughout eastern and northern Siberia, mixing and intermarrying with other native Siberian peoples. In addition to the general name *Evenki* (which means simply “person” or “people”), they identify themselves by the names of their clans or tribes: Birat, Ile, Manegir, Mata, Orochen, and so on. Although the word *Evenki* is a singular term in the Evenki language itself, it is used as a plural in Russian, the Russian singular being *Evenk* for a male and *Evenkiika* for a female. In recent decades, the use of *Evenki* as both singular and plural has become common among most non-Russian writers, although one occasionally encounters the form *Evenk/Evenks*. In older Russian and Western ethnographic literature, the Evenki were formerly referred to by the term *Tungus*, which is derived from *Tongus*, the Yakut word for “Evenki.”

The Evenki have long been known for their skill at hunting reindeer, bear, moose, sable, squirrel, and other animals, and they rely on hunting for most of their food. The Evenki are divided into two main groups based on the economic activities they perform in addition to hunting. Those of central and northeastern Siberia, herd reindeer, and those of southeastern Siberia, Mongolia, and China, raise horses and cattle. A smaller, eastern group along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk—often called the “sitting Evenki” because they own no reindeer—has traditionally lived exclusively by hunting forest animals and seals and fishing.

The Evenki have been under Russian and Chinese rule since their conquest during the 17th century by the Romanov and Qing dynasties respectively. Much of the vast territory they originally occupied was gradually taken from them by the government and given to Russian settlers. Nevertheless, with the exception of tax collection (originally in the form of furs), sporadic campaigns by the Russian Orthodox Church to Christianize them, and occasional arrests and trials for theft and other crimes that directly affected the Russian settler community, significant official interference in the day-to-day life of the Evenki came only in the Soviet period. During the 1930s, Evenki hunters and herdsman were forced into collectives as part of the collectivization of agriculture. Stalin’s campaign to rapidly develop Soviet industry simultaneously led to an enor-

mous influx of Russians and other outsiders into Evenki territory to exploit its timber and mineral resources. This resulted in serious environmental damage to ancestral Evenki lands.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Russian Federation’s Evenki number slightly more than 30,000. The Evenki do not occupy a unified territory and are spread over a wider area than any other native Siberian group—from the Yenisei River in the west to the Sea of Okhotsk and the northern portion of Sakhalin in the east, and from the bottom of the Taimyr peninsula in the north to the Amur River to the south. Evenki settlements are thus scattered over almost 3,000,000 square kilometers (1,800,000 square miles)—an area about three times the size of Alaska. There is an Evenki Autonomous *Okrug* District—sometimes called Evenkia—with its capital at Tura in north central Siberia’s Krasnoiarsk Territory (*krai*), but only 3,500 Evenki live there. The rest reside in other parts of Siberia, mainly in the Yakut (Sakha) and Buriat Republics, the area of Krasnoiarsk Territory outside the Evenki Autonomous District, Khabarovsk Territory, and the Irkutsk, Amur and Chita Regions (*oblast*). Outside the Russian Federation, the populations of the northern Mongolian Republic and the People’s Republic of China’s Heilongjiang Province (formerly known as Manchuria) both contain approximately 30,000 Evenki.

Almost all of Evenki territory is mountainous taiga forest, with larch, birch, ash, fir, pine, and cedar as the most common vegetation. The sparse, scrubby cedar trees, moss, and patches of bare rock typical of the tundra are found at high altitudes and in the northernmost stretches of Evenki settlement, and there is occasionally meadowland in the taiga’s river valleys. The Evenki forests have traditionally been rich in fur- and meat-bearing game—wild reindeer, bear, elk, sable, squirrel—as well as wolves, ducks, and geese. Rivers hold salmon, perch, and pike. The climate of the Evenki lands is generally continental. Winters are long and often bitterly cold, with January temperatures averaging  $-36^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-33^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and sometimes falling as low as  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-112^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Summers are short and warm, with June temperatures averaging  $16^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $61^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and peaking at  $36^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $97^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Evenki language belongs to the Tungusic branch of the Altaic language family, which includes Siberian tongues such as Nanaï, Udegei, and Even, as well as the language of the Manchu who conquered China in the 17th century. There are numerous local dialects of Evenki whose pronunciation and vocabulary differ from each other to varying degrees. This is not surprising, as the Evenki have long lived in small groups divided by vast distances. The Evenki did not have a writing system until 1931, when they adopted the Latin alphabet. This was replaced in 1937 by the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet. The modern Evenki literary language is based on the southern Poligus dialect and is written in the Cyrillic alphabet with additional letters and diacritics used to represent specifically Evenki sounds.

Evenki given names often reflect a geographic feature of a person’s birthplace or some natural phenomenon or other event that occurred at the time of his or her birth. For example, a boy born near Lake Kayo might be named *Kayocha*. Girls born at sunrise or the first slushy snow of the year are given the names *Garpancha* and *Libgerik*, which are derived from the words *garpan* (“ray of sunshine”) and *libge* (“wet snow”), re-

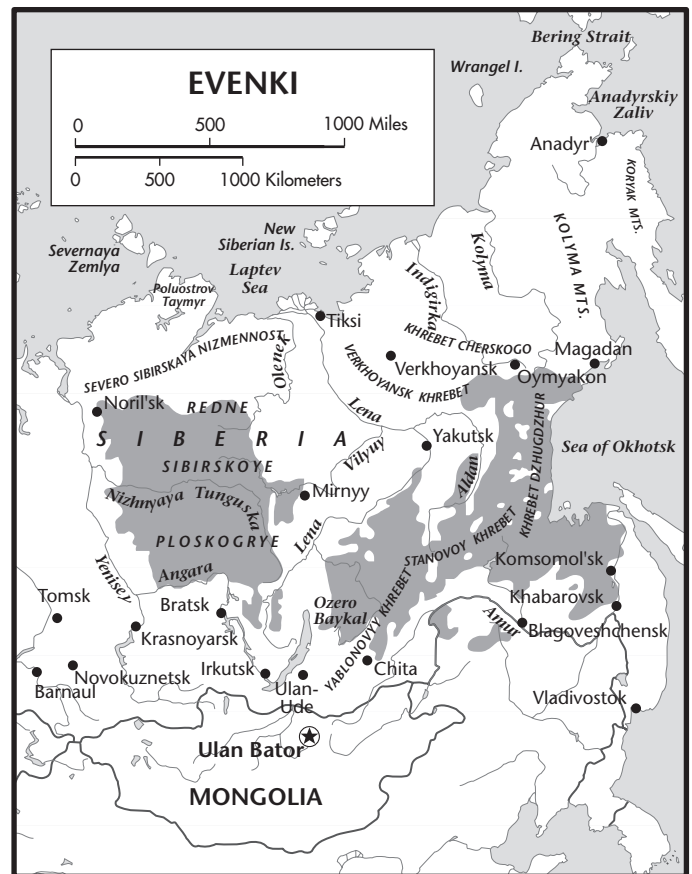
spectively. Alternatively, a child's behavior at the time of birth might influence the choice of name: *Songocho* (male) and *Songolik* (female) both translate literally as “crybaby.” Some Evenki names developed from Russian names that were significantly altered to suit the phonetic norms of the Evenki language. Examples of this type of name are *Ogdo* (female, from *Evdokia*) and *Kostoku* (male, from *Konstantin*). Russian given names in their original forms, such as *Vladimir* (male) and *Aleksandra* (female), as well as fixed surnames based upon the given name of a male ancestor, have become common in the 20th century.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Although the Evenki did not write in their language until the 20th century, they possess a wide repertoire of centuries-old folk tales and other forms of oral literature. The Evenki tell amusing stories about such human failings as greed, foolishness, and laziness. In addition, there are long epic tales—called in various dialects *nimngakan*, *nimkan*, or *ulgur*—that deal with the feats of mythical heroes. In one such tale, “All-Powerful Develchen in the Embroidered and Decorated Clothes,” the hero Develchen makes a long journey through the physical and spirit worlds and fights numerous human and supernatural enemies in order to rescue his betrothed, Kiladii. Develchen and Kiladii then marry, and their children are the ancestors of the Evenki people.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Evenki were largely converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity by the middle of the 19th century. Shamanism is one of the traditional religious practices of the Evenki. Animals, plants, the sun, the moon, the stars, rivers, forests, and mountains are believed to have spirits, which humans must respect and honor in order to survive and prosper. Animals and plants may be killed for human needs, but needless injury to animals or waste of the products of animal and plant life is forbidden. According to Evenki beliefs, there are three worlds: the upper world, which is inhabited by the spirits of nature and various other deities; the middle world, inhabited by humans; and the lower world, inhabited by the spirits of the dead. Shamans—tribal priests similar to Native American “medicine men”—are men and women who are most able to bridge the gap between the three worlds and communicate with these spirits. The profession of shaman is usually hereditary passed down on the father's side of the family. The rituals of Evenki shamans take the form of chanting, dancing, and beating on the *ungtuvun*, or *nimngangki*—a large, flat drum with a leather head, a cross-shaped handle attached to the back of the frame, and small iron rattles that produce a tambourine-like jingling sound when the instrument is struck. The stick (*gisu*) of the shaman's drum is made either from the wood of a tree that has been struck by lightning or from a bone or tusk from a mammoth preserved in the frozen soil. The deerskin and fur cloaks worn by Evenki shamans are elaborately and colorfully embroidered and festooned with ribbons, bone ornaments, and jingling bells. The rituals of shamans are intended to heal the sick, ease difficult childbirth, foretell the future, send the souls of the departed on their way to the world of the dead, and in general to ensure the people's well-being. The Evenki of Manchuria came under strong influence of Tibetan Buddhism during the Qing era, and many traditional beliefs were integrated into Evenki Buddhist practice.



#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Evenki festivals are essentially shamanist rituals performed to ensure success in hunting by honoring the spirits of the animals upon which the Evenki depend for survival. The timing of festivals is tied with the hunt itself, so unlike Western holidays, there is no set date for their observance. One of the most important Evenki festivals is the bear feast, which is held after a group of hunters has killed a bear. On the first day of the festival, the bear is brought back to the hunters' settlement and butchered. A whole series of rules must be observed during the butchering of the bear. For example, its bones must not be cut or broken; they must instead be separated at the tendons, laid on a bed of willow branches, and placed back into the shape of the original skeleton. The meat from the bear's neck is boiled in a cauldron while the young people sing and dance in its honor. At midnight, one of the hunters imitates a crow's call to indicate that the meat is ready. The settlement's inhabitants then walk quietly to each other's homes and wordlessly beckon each other to the feast, which is consumed in silence. On the second day, the bear's heart is cut into small pieces, mixed with bear fat, and boiled in one cauldron while some of the meat is boiled in separate vessels. Again, the young people sing and dance while the meal is cooking, and at midnight a crow's call summons the villagers to the second feast. To trick the bear's spirit into thinking that crows, not humans, have killed him and are eating his body, the participants also caw like crows and call each other *oli* (“crow”). The celebrants each receive a spoonful of the bear's-heart soup and retire with a portion of the meat, which they eat in their own homes. On the third

day, the bear's head is placed on a birch-bark mat, combed with a birch-wood comb and decorated with ribbons; earrings made of cedar needles are fastened to its ears. The head is then skinned and boiled, and its brain and flesh are communally eaten. Finally, the skull is taken out from the settlement into the forest and placed high upon a pole. Evenkis in the Russian Federation also observe the major Russian and Soviet holidays, particularly New Year's Day (January 1), Victory Day (May 9) and others.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In traditional Evenki society, there were many rules surrounding the birth of a child, and these had to be strictly observed in order to ensure the survival of mother and child. A pregnant woman was not allowed to touch the hook upon which a cooking pot was hung, lest her child be born retarded, or to hang a pot upon it, lest he or she be born mute. She could not step over an axe or saw, for this would lead to an especially painful childbirth. If she looked at a corpse, she would have a difficult delivery. There were taboos for her husband to obey as well. If he dug a grave, his wife would die in childbirth. If he brought a hare into the home, the child would be born with a harelip. If he or his male relatives entered the *khungkingat*—the temporary tent or hut used only for childbirth—the child would be deformed. Certain foods were also forbidden to an expectant mother. For example, she could not eat a bear's peritoneum (the transparent membrane that lines the abdominal cavity), for this would cause her to fall ill during the pregnancy. If she ate a bear's kidneys, liver, or meat from its head, she would suffer from convulsive neck spasms during childbirth. Eating the meat of an old reindeer would result in a long, difficult delivery. When an infant was old enough to eat solid foods but not to speak, its parents could not feed it the gristle from under a reindeer's knee, since this would cause knee injuries, or bear meat, since this would result in muteness. Today, childbirth usually takes place in the special hospitals for expectant mothers and infants that are used throughout the former Soviet Union, and the taboos surrounding childbirth have largely become a thing of the past.

Compared with the maze of taboos that surrounded an Evenki's birth, death was a relatively straightforward affair in traditional society. Immediately after death, the deceased's body was undressed and laid out straight with its arms at its sides and its face covered with a cloth. Depending on which animals were kept by the family, a reindeer, horse, or dog was killed, and the corpse was sprinkled with its blood. The deceased was then washed, laid on a newly dressed fur, and dressed in his or her best clothing (without, however, fastening any laces or buttons). If the person who had died had been married, the bereaved spouse cut off a lock of his or her own hair and laid it on the corpse. To the lock of hair were added items of everyday use—hunting knives or bows and arrows for the men, skin-dressing or sewing implements for women, and tobacco pipes and flints for both sexes. The deceased's family and friends held a feast in his or her honor, and the body was then buried or laid on a raised platform in the forest. Burial in the ground or cremation have become the usual means of disposing of the dead in the 20th century, but items used by the deceased are sometimes still interred with them.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When visiting an Evenki home, it is considered impolite to ride one's horse or reindeer directly up to the entrance of a dwelling and dismount there; one must rather dismount at the side of the home and from there walk to the entrance. It is customary to ask a visitor what he or she has seen on his way to the host's home. Although this is now often a pleasant formality, the original purpose of asking this was to determine whether game is to be found in the area traversed by the visitor. If a guest is older than his or her host, he hands his pipe to the host, who fills it with tobacco, lights it, and returns it to the guest. If the host is older than the guest, it is the host's pipe that is filled and lit by the guest. Guests are always given food and drink, which cannot be refused as this would be interpreted as an intentional insult. It is also customary to give a small gift to the guest, who is expected to reciprocate when possible.

Among the Evenki, dishonesty is considered an especially grievous character defect. Gossip or hypocrisy are seen as forms of deception and are likewise deemed unacceptable. According to the Russian anthropologist Sergei Shirokogorov, this revulsion for dishonesty stems from their traditional reliance on accurate information about the location of game animals and the friendliness or hostility of neighboring peoples. The distaste with which the Evenki view lying and cheating may be deduced from the following anecdote, which Shirokogorov recorded in the early 20th century. An Evenki man was watching some Russian prospectors, who were unaware of his presence, dig for gold. Upon finding a large gold nugget, they agreed to keep silent about it in order to avoid sharing it with their partners. They hid the nugget under a rock and departed. The Evenki emerged from his hiding place, uncovered the nugget, and took it home with him. The local Evenki community refused to tell the Russians what had happened: they considered their compatriot's action to be justified, since he had stolen the gold from men who had conspired to cheat their friends and had thus lost any right to it.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional Evenki dwelling is the *dyu*, a large conical tent that is similar in appearance to the tepee traditionally used by some indigenous peoples of the American West, and it is well-suited for the way of life of a people of nomadic hunters and herdsman. The *dyu* is supported by a framework of wooden poles and covered by reindeer hides or birch bark, which is steamed to increase its toughness and elasticity and then sewn into large sheets. (By the early 20th century, canvas cloth purchased from Russian traders became a common housing material as well.) Fires for cooking and light are built in the center of the floor, and a hole at the top of the *dyu* allows smoke to exit and light to enter. When a family moves from one hunting or herding area to another, they leave the frame of the *dyu* in place and take only the covering with them: it is easier to cut new poles than to drag the old ones along from encampment to encampment. Other types of traditional Evenki dwellings include rectangular log cabins with birch-bark roofs and Mongolian-style yurts, which the Evenki of the Lake Baikal area adopted from the local Buriat Mongols. Since the collectivization of Evenki economic activities in the 1930s, the single-story wooden houses typical of rural housing in the former Soviet Union have largely replaced traditional dwellings; however, the

*dyu* is still used by some Evenki, especially during hunting or herding trips.

The Evenki who herd reindeer use the animals for transport as well. Reindeer are saddled and ridden like horses, made to pull sleds, and used as pack animals. The horse- and cattle-breeding Evenki of southeastern Siberia ride horses instead of reindeer, and Evenki who live along the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk have traditionally walked and used birch bark boats or canoes made of hollow logs. Hunters used skis, which they covered with fur in order to muffle their sound and thus enable them to silently approach game. In recent decades, airplanes, helicopters, motorboats, and snowmobiles have supplemented traditional modes of transportation. Automobile and rail transport are not common, due to the vast distances between urban areas in Central and Eastern Siberia and the difficulty of constructing roads and railway lines atop the permafrost.

Prior to the 20th century, medical care among the Evenki was mostly limited to herbal remedies and the incantations of shamans, although pharmaceutical remedies purchased from Russian traders were also used on occasion. (According to traditional Evenki beliefs, illness is often caused by the abduction of the sick person's soul by a spirit, who can be persuaded by the shaman to return the soul to its rightful owner.) Western medicine became much more common than these older methods during the Soviet period, but in the rural Siberian areas inhabited by Evenki, clinics are often many miles away and most offer only the most rudimentary treatments. Health problems caused by the shortcomings of Soviet medical care are exacerbated by widespread alcohol abuse.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Evenki society was organized into clans that were reckoned on the basis of descent from a common male ancestor and contained from 10 to 100 nuclear families. Clans performed a variety of social functions. For example, they owned communal hunting and herding territory, shared shamans between settlements of clan families, and formed alliances by marriage between their members (it was forbidden to marry someone from the same clan). Clan councils headed by the clan's elder men and women decided on issues such as war with other Evenki clans, punishment of wrongdoers within the clan, and aid to poor clan members.

Within the traditional Evenki nuclear family, men and women performed distinct roles. Men hunted and butchered game and made weapons, tools, and other household items from metal and bone. Women cooked; gathered firewood; herbs, and berries; prepared skins and birch bark; raised children; and cleaned the *dyu* and its surroundings. Women had to observe a wide range of taboos specific to their sex, most of which had to do with menstruation. For example, a menstruating woman was forbidden to touch weapons or wash in running water, and she had to bury the cloth or fur that she used as a sanitary pad far away from the encampment lest misfortune befall the family's hunters. If she was a shaman, she could not practice her profession until her period had passed. To these taboos must be added those mentioned earlier in connection with pregnancy and childbirth. Moreover, an Evenki woman was expected to behave in a reserved and quiet manner around her elders, in-laws, and guests. On the other hand, women had certain rights that could not be violated. Wife-beating was extremely rare, and husbands and wives usually enjoyed har-

monious relations characterized practice by a high degree of equality. A woman could leave her husband if he abused her or even summon her male relatives (and sometimes those of her husband) to give him a thrashing. She could also leave her husband if he proved to be a neglectful provider or lover. The taboos restricting women's behavior have passed from observance in the past 50 years or so. The division of labor between the sexes persists in traditional occupations, but men and women interact on equal terms in teaching, administration, and certain other modern professions.

## 11 CLOTHING

The classic Evenki garment is a knee-length reindeer-skin robe that is fastened in the front by leather laces. The type of reindeer skin used depends on the season. The winter robe—*khegilme*—is sewn from the thick, warm, furry skins of reindeer slaughtered during the winter. The summer robe, or *sun*, on the other hand, is made of the skin of reindeer slaughtered during the summer, when the animals have shed their winter fur. Both sexes wear fur and skin hats and apron-like chest coverings (*khelmi* for men and *nelli* for women) and loincloths (*kherki*) made of cloth or reindeer skin under their coats. Winter boots (*kheveri* in some dialects, *bakari* in others) reach up to the thighs, while summer boots (*khomchura*) barely clear the ankles and are worn with leather or cloth leggings (*aramus* or *gurumi*). Men's and women's clothing is distinguished less by cut than by the degree of decoration: women's clothing is embellished with sophisticated embroidery and fur trimmings, and the clothing worn by shamans of both sexes is particularly elaborate. Traditional Evenki clothing is now worn primarily in the winter. During the summer, Western-style clothing (mass-produced shirts, pants, dresses, undergarments, and shoes) predominates.

## 12 FOOD

Evenki food has traditionally centered around the meat of the animals that they hunt and herd: reindeer, bear, elk, and in southeastern Siberia, cattle and horses. In the summer and fall, when geese and ducks are to be found in the Evenki lands, these are hunted as well. Blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, wild onions and garlic, edible herbs, cedar nuts, and reindeer or cow's milk are also commonly consumed. Fish also make up part of the Evenki diet, especially along the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, Lake Baikal, and the Amur River. (The Baikal and Okhotsk Evenki hunt seals as well.) Tea, sometimes mixed with reindeer milk, is the most common drink. Russian vodka is also popular. Traditional Evenki delicacies are *seven*, which is made by mixing roast ground bear meat with fried bear fat, and *meni* (mashed berries mixed with reindeer milk).

Boiling in cauldrons and roasting on spits are the most common methods of cooking Evenki food, which was formerly eaten with hands, knives, and spoons from wooden or birch bark plates. (Ceramics of Chinese manufacture were common among the Evenki of the Amur River basin.) Soup and tea were drunk from wooden cups. The modern Evenki prepare their food in factory-made metal and ceramic pots and pans and eat with metal knives, forks, and spoons. Meat and fish are dried in the sun to preserve them for use during the long, cold winters when the availability of game decreases. Sometimes dried meat is ground into a powder (*khulikta*), which is added to boiling water and the blood of reindeer or other game to make soup.

The heart, liver, and marrow of elk and reindeer are sometimes eaten raw immediately after slaughter. Reindeer blood is also drunk raw as a tonic or boiled as soup. The intestines of game animals are turned inside out, cleaned, boiled, and stuffed with meat to make sausage.

The Evenki have incorporated a variety of influences from neighboring peoples into their cuisine without abandoning their preference for the products of the hunt. Breadmaking was learned from Russian settlers and traders soon after the Russian conquest, and sourdough bread and pancakes have long been staples of Evenki cuisine. The Evenki who live in Buriatia have adopted *süsegei* (a type of sour cream), *eezgei* (a dish similar to cottage cheese), and other milk-based Buriat dishes. Canned vegetables, meat and fish, and other prepared foods purchased from stores entered the Evenki diet during the Soviet period.

### **13 EDUCATION**

During much of the Soviet period, Evenki children were taken from their parents at a very young age and sent to distant boarding schools where the teachers and the language of instruction were usually Russian. As a result, although all Evenki are literate in Russian, many have at best a dim understanding of their own people's history and traditions, and only 30% speak Evenki as their native language. The remainder speak Russian (or, less commonly, Yakut or Buriat) as their first language. Many Evenki in the second group can speak Evenki at levels ranging from the mere command of a few isolated words and phrases to near-total fluency, but the former is far more common. Since the 1980s, native teachers and scholars have had some success in expanding instruction in native folklore, language, and crafts in Evenki schools, but a shortage of personnel and funds (the latter being especially scarce due to the collapse of the post-Soviet economy) has made progress slow in this area.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The folk epics (called *nimngakan*, *nimkan*, or *ulgur*) are among the greatest treasures of the Evenki cultural heritage. Before the Evenki language had a written form, bards (called *nimngakachimni* or *ulguchemni*) learned these epics by heart and recited them aloud before rapt audiences. Some of the epics extend to several thousand lines. Because of their length, they are usually told in a series of sessions spread out over several evenings. A recent recording by Evenki scholars of the recitation of one *nimngakachimni* required 18 hours of tape, and the transcription of another filled 150 typed pages. Today, only a few Evenki bards are still alive. The Soviet practice of sending most native Siberian children to distant boarding schools has robbed young Evenki of the chance to learn the epics from their elders. Nevertheless, many epics have been written down and published in Evenki and Russian, so they will not be lost to future generations. Since the 1930s, oral literature has been supplemented with novels, poetry, and drama in the Evenki language. The best-known Evenki author, Alitet Nemtushkin, has become a passionate champion of Evenki language and culture and the ecology of the Evenki lands.

### **15 WORK**

Because hunting has long played such a central role in Evenki life, the Evenki have naturally become accomplished hunters.

Their main weapons have traditionally been the bow and arrow and, since the 18th century, the rifle. In recent decades, shotguns have become more common, particularly for bird hunting. The Evenki display remarkable skill in luring and catching animals. For example, they manufacture birch bark horns whose sound is similar to that of a male reindeer. When a male reindeer hears one of these horns, he mistakes it for the call of another male reindeer who has found a group of females. When he runs toward the sound of the horn, he is killed. Blinds have been used for centuries: wooden platforms are built in trees overlooking salt springs and surrounded with branches or birch bark walls to hide the hunter. When game animals come to the springs to lap up the salt, they are shot. In another method of luring reindeer, leather straps are attached to the antlers of a tame male reindeer, which is then set loose into a herd of wild reindeer. If it begins to fight another male, their antlers become tangled together in the straps, and hunters can easily approach the pair and shoot the wild reindeer.

### **16 SPORTS**

A number of traditional Evenki sports have survived to this day. Wrestling, tossing heavy stones, reindeer racing, and archery competitions are the most common spectator sports. Foot races are also popular, and sometimes competitors are made to run while holding weights. Kickball is played with leather balls stuffed with reindeer or elk hair.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Evenki of all ages have traditionally been fond of conversation and storytelling. Some Evenki stories and jokes are quite bawdy, but they may be told in polite company as long as certain rules are followed: older people may tell them in the presence of younger people, and men may tell them in the presence of women, but not the other way around. It is perfectly acceptable, however, for women and youth to tell these stories in each other's company. Evenki epic poems contain many sung passages, and the audience sings along with the narrator during their narration.

Evenki children's play activities often mimic the work done by adults. Boys are given toy bows and arrows, which provide them with archery practice as well as amusement. Girls typically play with dolls, for which they sew clothing and build cradles. Children of both sexes enjoy playing with puppies and birds. Human and animal figures are cut like paper dolls from birch bark and given to children as toys.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Evenki arts and crafts, like those of most Siberian peoples that have traditionally practiced nomadism, center around relatively small articles of everyday use that can be conveniently carried from place to place. Evenki men are skilled at engraving and carving wood, metal, and bone into saddle horns and other items relating to reindeer and horse riding, as well as knife handles and tobacco pipes. Women's crafts emphasize the decoration of clothing through embroidery, fur appliqué, and bead work, and common patterns are geometric designs, wave-like swirls, and plant and animal shapes.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The foremost social problems facing today's Evenki are ecological and economic. During the Soviet period, the government seized Evenki hunting and herding grounds in order to implement logging and mining projects and build hydroelectric dams. This was done without considering either the wishes of the Evenki or the impact on Siberia's fragile ecosystem. As a result, pollution, overforestry, and flooding have severely damaged the Evenki environment, exacerbating health problems and leading to a decline in the animal population upon which traditional Evenki economic activities depend. During the 1950s and 1960s, small, isolated Evenki settlements were abolished, and their inhabitants were moved into larger villages. The Soviet planners behind this policy hoped that it would improve economic efficiency. Instead, the resulting increased burden on the environment led to declining productivity in meat and fur production, a significant drop in the Evenki standard of living, and a corresponding rise in alcoholism. In the late 1980s, a group of Evenki activists managed to get back a small part of the land that the Soviet government had taken. The result was an improved standard of living and a dramatic drop in alcohol abuse among the Evenki who returned. At about the same time, Evenki ecological activists succeeded in blocking the construction of a dam that would have flooded much of the Evenki Autonomous District.

Cultural survival is another major struggle for the Evenki. Although the Soviet Union's political leaders paid lip service to the official ideal of ethnic and cultural equality, in reality non-Russian cultures and languages (especially those of the numerically small Siberian peoples) were often suppressed. Since Mikhail Gorbachev's liberalization of censorship and minority policies in the 1980s, native journalists, teachers and scholars have worked energetically to increase knowledge of and pride in their cultural heritage among younger Evenki.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

A strong division of labor between genders characterized traditional Evenki society. The effective integration of the Evenkis into the Soviet economy and Soviet society during and after the Second World War and the similar process among the Chinese Evenkis beginning in the 1960s had a particularly strong effect on Evenki women. Particularly in Russia women's increased access to education resulted in women forming a disproportionately large segment of the Evenki intelligentsia and Soviet elite. At the same time Evenki women in the Soviet Union, and later in the Russian Federation, were subject to Soviet gender stereotypes that limited their effectiveness in various ways. Nevertheless, since the collapse of the Soviet Union Evenki women, and particularly women members of the Evenki intelligentsia, have been at the forefront of the movement to revitalize Evenki society along traditional lines.

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—revised by A. Frank

# EVENS

**PRONUNCIATION:** EH-vens

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Ewen, Lamut

**LOCATION:** Russia (northeastern Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 19,071 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Even; Russian; Yakut

**RELIGION:** Russian Orthodox Christianity and native beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Evens are an indigenous people of Northeastern Siberia. Most Evens are nomadic hunters and reindeer herders, but some Evens along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk also engage in fishing and seal hunting. They are closely related in language, culture, and physical type to the Evenki (see separate entry). The Evens' name for themselves is *Even* (plural *Evesel*); the origin of this term is obscure. (Some Western scholars write Even as *Ewen*.) The Evens who dwell on northern Kamchatka and along the northernmost coastline of the Sea of Okhotsk also refer to themselves as the *Oroch* (plural *Orochel*) from *oroch* (reindeer). The adjective *Mene*, which means "settled," is sometimes used by the non-nomadic fishermen of the Sea of Okhotsk coast. (A different Tungusic-speaking people of the Amur River region—not to be confused with the Evens—also uses the self-appellation *Oroch*.) Some Evens also identify themselves by the names of their clans or tribes (*Huldacha*, *Dutki*, *Kukuin*, etc.). In older Russian and Western ethnographic literature, the Evens who occupied what is now northern Yakutia and Magadan Region (Russian *oblast*) were called *Lamut*: this term is of Evenki origin and is derived from *lamu* (sea). The remaining Evens were not differentiated from the Evenki in ethnographic writing until the Soviet period (when the anthropological and linguistic study of the peoples of Siberia greatly developed) and, like the Evenki, were called *Tungus* (from *Tongus*, the Yakut word for *Evenki*).

Although there is much that is uncertain in the origins of the Evens, it is clear that the Evens were formed over many centuries from Tungusic-speaking tribes that mixed with other native peoples of Siberia (particularly the Yukagir and Yakut) as they migrated through the taiga and tundra of Eastern and Northeastern Siberia. Russian Cossacks and explorers began to move into Even territory in the first half of the 17th century. The Evens put up a fierce resistance and frequently attacked and burned Russian forts. Nevertheless, Russia succeeded in subduing them by 1700. Thereafter, the Evens were required to pay the *yasak* (tax in furs). The Russian government's use of Evens as agents to collect the *yasak* from neighboring Chukchi, Koriak, and Yukagirs facilitated the Evens' expansion onto land previously settled by these peoples.

Russian contact brought diseases such as smallpox, mumps, chicken pox, and influenza, to which the Evens had no immunity. This, coupled with the loss of lands to Russian settlers, a decline in the animal population (caused by overhunting in order to pay the *yasak*), the rise of alcoholism, and economic exploitation by Russian officials and merchants, led to a reduction of the Evens' numbers and a steep decline in their standard of living. After the October Revolution, the Communist government attempted to shield the Evens and other northern groups from the negative effects of Russian contact. This effort

was influenced by Russian anthropologists who specialized in the study of the Siberian peoples and idealistic Bolsheviks who shared the anthropologists' concern. To aid them in developing economically and culturally within the framework of their own traditions, 10 Even National Districts (Russian *raion*) and one National Region (*krai*) were established in northern Yakutia and on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk. Taxes on the Evens were reduced, and Even debts to traders were canceled. State-run trading posts that offered fair prices for Even furs were established, and education and Western medical care began to be provided in at least some Even areas. This relatively humanitarian approach to ruling the Evens was abruptly abandoned upon Stalin's rise to power by the end of the 1920s. During the 1930s, Even hunters, fishermen, and reindeer herders were forced into collectives as part of the collectivization of agriculture. At the same time, Stalin's campaign to speedily raise Soviet industry to Western levels brought an enormous number of Russian miners and loggers into Even territory, particularly after the discovery of gold deposits in 1931 and 1932. The proportion of Evens in the population of the Even national areas dropped from 80% to 40%. The eastward evacuation of Soviet industry away from the front during World War II, and the further growth of extractive industries after the war, continued the ecological damage begun in the 1930s. Moreover, increasing official pressure against Even culture (particularly the Even language) from the Stalin years on placed the Evens' survival as a people in jeopardy. Like the other Siberian peoples, the Evens were powerless to criticize policies harmful to their economy and culture until the Gorbachev era.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the 2002 Russian census the Evens number 19,071, all of whom live in the Russian Federation. Although they do not form a compact mass and their settlements are located in areas in which members of other nationalities (mainly Russians and Yakuts) form a majority, they are scattered over a very wide territory—almost 3 million square kilometers (1,864,200 square miles). There are 8,700 Evens in the northernmost reaches of the Sakha (Yakut) Republic, particularly its Sarkyryrskii, Ust'-Yanskii, Oimiakonskii, Nizhne-Kolymskii, Sredne-Kolymskii, Verkhne-Kolymskii, Tomponskii, Momskii, Allaikhovskii, and Verkhoianskii districts (Russian *raion*); 1,900 in the Okhotskii and Verkhne-Bureinskii Districts of Khabarovsk Territory (Russian *krai*); 1,300 in the Chukchi Autonomous District (Russian *okrug*); 3,800 in the Ol'skii, Severo-Evenskii, and Sredne-Kanskii Districts of Magadan Region (Russian *oblast*); and 1,500 in the Bystrinskii District and Koriak Autonomous District of Kamchatka Region.

The climate of the Even lands is generally harsh and cold. In northern areas of Even settlement such as the Indigirka River valley, winters last up to nine or ten months, and average annual temperatures do not exceed  $-13.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $7.7^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Even territory is characterized by mountainous taiga forests of cedar, fir, pine, larch, and birch, and spruce, and in the northernmost regions barren or sparsely forested tundra. Reindeer, mountain sheep, squirrel, bear, elk, sable, fox, wolves, ducks, geese, and grouse are the most common animals. Grayling, cod, loach, and freshwater salmon are found in the rivers and streams of the Even lands, and saltwater salmon and seals inhabit the coastal waters of the Sea of Okhotsk.



### 3 LANGUAGE

The Even language belongs to the Tungusic branch of the Altaic language family, which includes tongues spoken in Siberia and the Far East (for example, Evenki, Nanai, Udegei, and Ul'chi), as well as the language of the Manchus who conquered China in the 17th century. The language most closely related to Even is Evenki. Even is divided into three dialect groups—western, central, and eastern. These three groups are in turn subdivided into 13 or so numerous local forms whose pronunciation and vocabulary differ from each other to varying degrees. The Even language was unwritten until 1931, when the Evens adopted the Latin alphabet. This was replaced in 1936 by the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet. As was the case among other Siberian peoples who had hitherto used the Latin alphabet, this change was not based on sound linguistic reasons; rather, it took place under pressure from chauvinistic Russian and pro-Russian officials who considered the Russian alphabet inherently superior and did not wish to encourage the use of a “foreign” alphabet by ethnic minorities. The modern Even literary language is based on the eastern Ola dialect and is written in the Cyrillic alphabet with extra letters and diacritical marks that represent Even sounds absent in Russian. Some 44% of the Even speak Even as their native tongue; Russian or Yakut are the first languages of the remainder.

Many Even given names take their origins from the names of animals in the Even environment. For example, the male names *Kabivchan*, *Giakan*, and *Hingerken* are based respectively on the Even words for “partridge,” “eagle,” and “little mouse.” Of similar derivation are the female names *Hulichan* (“fox”), *Sakla* (“owl”), and *Kachikan* (“puppy”). Some Even personal names were formed by adapting Russian names to the Even phonetic system, for example *N'evde* (female, from Russian *Evdokiia*) and *N'iuku* (male, from Russian *Nikolai*). Russian given names such as *Vasilii* (male) and *Agaf'ia* (female) are also common. In traditional society, Evens did not use family names unless they were baptized; in that case, they were assigned Russian surnames (e.g., *Lebedev*, *Nikulin*, *Trofimov*) by the Russian Orthodox Church. Surnames, usually created by adding Russian suffixes such as -ov and -in to clan names (*Bugach*, *Dutki*, *Huldacha*) became universal during the Soviet period, because all families were required to adopt a permanent surname for the sake of bureaucratic convenience.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Even have amassed a sizeable body of folklore over the centuries. Even folklore includes many genres: *nemkan* (folk tales) about people and animals, which sometimes borrow themes from Evenki, Russian, and Koriak folklore; *teleng* (long epic stories), which are often sung; *ike* (short songs), which often provide humorous glimpses at scenes from everyday life (such as the quarrels of cantankerous elderly couples); and *ne-nuken* (riddles). The *teleng* usually describe the feats of warrior heroes—for example, Chibdevel, who rescues his bride from enemies who have abducted her—or the Evens' historical conflicts with the Koriak, Chukchi, Russians, and other neighboring peoples.

In one *nemkan*, a young man goes out hunting with his faithful dog. He finds a wild duck but spares its life. On the way home, the dog suddenly becomes fatally ill and asks his master to cut his body up into six parts after he dies; the hunter is confused at this request, but nevertheless honors it. When



he returns to the dog's dismembered corpse the following day, two bears, two wolves, and two foxes are eating it; they greet him as their master and begin to follow him everywhere as his dog had done. Later, the hunter's evil sister takes up with an iron-toothed, one-eyed, one-legged, one-armed monster called Chölere. She conspires to feed her brother to Chölere, but his animal friends come to the rescue and slay and cremate the monster. The hunter's sister finds Chölere's iron teeth among his ashes and uses them to kill her brother. After his death, the six animals wash his wounds in magic water. He then comes back to life and kills his treacherous sister.

### 5 RELIGION

The Evens' religion is a unique mixture of shamanism and Russian Orthodox Christianity. The Evens were largely Christianized by the middle of the 19th century, and many Evens attend Orthodox church services, wear necklaces bearing crosses, undergo baptism and observe various Christian holidays. It is thought that during the Soviet era anti-religious efforts directed against the Orthodox Church resulted in a revival of traditional beliefs among the Evens. These practices are integrated into a very ancient form of shamanism, which is based on the belief that the forces of nature are ruled by spirits who must be ritually honored in order to ensure man's survival and prosperity. The *togh-muranni* (fire-spirit) is considered particularly powerful, and bits of food are thrown into the fire as an offering at mealtimes. A host of taboos surrounds the use of fire: it is forbidden to spit into a fire, quarrel in front of it, or stick a

knife into it. Reindeer are sometimes ceremonially sacrificed to the sun when a person falls ill. Like the shamans of other Siberian peoples, the Even *haman* (shaman) uses ritual prayers, dances, and drum-beating to communicate with the spirits in order to heal the sick, seek advice in personal matters, and foretell the future. The shaman is aided by helper spirits called *ibdiril*, who are described as resembling people, birds, fish, and other animals. The Evens' religious practices were forced underground as a result of the Soviet regime's antireligious policies from the 1930s on. They have begun to reemerge since the end of religious persecution in the 1980s, but the role of the Church and the shaman in everyday life has been much diminished.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important holidays in traditional Even society were clan gatherings that took place every year in either spring or summer (depending on the locality). These often coincided with annual trade fairs established by the Tsarist administration, at which Russian traders purchased furs gathered by Even hunters, and Russian officials collected taxes from the Evens. The most common name for these gatherings was *dalbu* (from the root *dal-*, meaning "friend" or "relative"), but other names were used as well: *khededek* ("the time and place of dancing"), *chakabak* or *sakabak* ("gathering, meeting"), and *munnak* ("the time of sport"). The *dalbu* were marked by reindeer, dog-sled, and foot races; dancing; singing; storytelling; wrestling; and feasting. These activities are now performed at occasional Even folklore festivals, which replaced clan- and trade-based holidays after the 1930s.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As was the case among many other native Siberian peoples, pregnancy and childbirth in traditional Even society were accompanied by many rules that the mother-to-be must follow in order to ensure a safe delivery. For example, she could not receive guests, visit other households, keep company with other pregnant women, go out of her home at night, hold broken dishes, touch fishnets, eat fatty foods, or drink strong tea. After the onset of labor, all items in the home that had ties or lids were unfastened or opened to ensure that the child had a clear path into the world. Above all, she was required to keep her home, person, and clothing absolutely clean at all times. Some of these taboos had a practical as well as superstitious aspect: the ban on socializing and the insistence on a particularly clean environment, for example, protected the expectant mother and her fetus from possible sources of infection. During pregnancy and birth, an older, experienced woman (*atykan*—"grandmother" or "old lady") lived with the expectant mother to help her with household tasks, instruct her in childbirth procedures and parenting skills, and ensure that she followed all relevant rules and taboos. During labor and delivery and for a week after birth, only the *atykan* and the *khevkenen* (midwife) were allowed to be with the mother, whose home was roped off to indicate that no one else could enter. The mother gave birth squatting over the bed while supporting herself on a sturdy wooden frame, which allowed gravity to help the infant through the birth canal; the *khevkenen* continually massaged the mother's belly to relieve pain and move the infant along. For this reason, Even women gave birth quickly and easily. If the child was a boy, its umbilical cord was cut

with the mother's knife; if a girl was born, the father's knife was used. Children were named after deceased relatives. Even birth taboos and procedures have largely vanished as a result of modernization.

Prior to Russian contact, the Evens interred their dead in wooden coffins, which they decorated with carvings of crows and raised on tall platforms. The belongings of the deceased were broken or torn (to allow them to be used in the world of the dead) and placed under the platform. Reindeer were sacrificed in the dead person's honor. Platform burial has been replaced by burial in the ground as a result of Russian influence, and graves are now marked with crosses. Yet elements of the Evens' pre-Christian practices remain: the crosses are generally decorated with bird carvings, and broken pieces of the deceased person's possessions, along with the poles of his tent, are scattered around the grave.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Among the Even, it has been customary since time immemorial to share the products of herding, fishing, or hunting with clan members, hunting partners and neighbors. In traditional society, this practice, called *nimat*, was crucial to the community's physical survival, so it was taken very seriously. If an Even repeatedly refused to share his game or fish or the reindeer he slaughtered, he could be put to death by members of his clan or settlement. *Nimat* is still observed by modern Evens, although violations no longer result in death.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There are several types of traditional Even housing. The *dyu* (*dyum* in some dialects), like the Evenki dwelling of the same name, is a large conical tent that closely resembles the teepee of nomadic Native American peoples of the Great Plains. The *dyu* consists of a frame of wooden poles covered with reindeer hides or sheets of birchbark made tough and flexible by steaming. A hearth in the center of the *dyu* is used for cooking, warmth, and illumination, and the *dyu* is ventilated by a hole at the top where the tent poles meet. Fur sleeping bags around the edges of the *dyu* serve as beds. The door is made of thick suede decorated with colorful appliqué patterns. Another dwelling, the *chorama-dyu*, is made of the same materials as the *dyu*, but its construction is slightly different. The base of the *chorama-dyu* consists of a set of 8–14 poles about one meter long. These are fastened in pairs into inverted V's, the V-shaped pairs are placed in a circle with the ends fastened to the ground, and horizontal planks are laid across the tops to create a sturdy circular frame. To the top of this frame is attached a conical framework of support poles similar to those of the *dyu*. The entire structure is then covered with deerskin or birchbark. (Travelers to the Even lands in the 17th century reported seeing *chorama-dyu* covered with tanned fish-skins as well). Undressed deer or other animal hides serve as carpets. The *dyu* and *chorama-dyu* were traditionally used by nomadic Evens, who found them convenient to disassemble and reassemble when moving to new grazing or hunting grounds. Settled Even fishermen along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk lived in *utan* (dugouts) covered with turf in previous centuries; after the 1700s, the dugouts began to be replaced by rectangular log cabins (called *uran*). Many Evens now live in the one-story wooden houses ubiquitous in rural areas of the former Soviet Union. Herdsmen and hunters still make use of the traditional

tent-type dwellings, but cloth coverings are often used in place of the former deerskin or birchbark ones.

The reindeer naturally forms the basis of most traditional Even modes of transport. Along with using reindeer as pack animals, the nomadic Evens ride them as well. Evens who live near Yakut, Chukchi, or Koriak settlements have adopted the use of reindeer-drawn sleighs from them. The settled Evens of the Sea of Okhotsk coast also use dogsleds, and less frequently horses, for transportation. Skis are another widespread traditional means of transport, especially among hunters, who use fur-covered skis in order to move silently when stalking game. Although airplanes, tractors, helicopters, and snowmobiles have become common in the 20th century, they have not displaced the traditional modes of transport, which are well-suited to the Evens' environment.

Western medicine was all but unknown among the Evens before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917; instead, they used a wide pharmacopia of medicinal herbs and barks. Animal substances such as bear's bile and fat and reindeer kidney and blood were also successfully employed as medicines. In the case of frostbite, a reindeer was killed and skinned and the patient was wrapped in its skin in order to warm him gradually. Because illness was traditionally considered to have a spiritual cause, shamans performed prayers and rituals to heal the sick. There has been a significant increase in the use of modern medicines and treatments since the Soviet period, but traditional Even medicine is still widely employed. Hospitals and clinics in Northeastern Siberia are often many miles away, and in some cases Even plant-based medicines are more effective than modern ones.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Prior to the 20th century, the Evens were organized into *ngun-min* (clans) whose members were related to each other by blood. It was forbidden for two members of the same clan to marry each other. Clan members shared hunting and herding grounds and were obligated to help each other in times of need. *Egdengen* (elders) gathered taxes from the clan communities and delivered them to Russian officials, distributed gunpowder from the clan's stores, and judged disputes between members. The clan system was weakened considerably by the Soviet-era forced resettlement of members of different Even clans into the same herding and hunting collectives, and the nuclear family has replaced the clan as the basic Even social unit. Nevertheless, some traits of the clan system—particularly mutual aid and the taboo on marriage between clan members—continue to be observed.

The clans were divided into nuclear families consisting of a man, a woman, and their children, who lived with their parents until marriage. In traditional society, marriages were usually arranged by the parents, sometimes when the pair in question were still minors. The parents of the groom were required to pay a *tori* (bride-price) of reindeer, deerskins, leather tobacco pouches decorated with beadwork, clothing, tea sets, cooking utensils, leather-working tools, knives, axes, or other useful items to the wife's parents, who reciprocated with gifts of their own. After the gifts were exchanged, the bride was taken to the groom's parents' home, which she circled three times on reindeer-back before entering. She then circled the hearth three times and cooked meat there in her own cauldron to signify her entry into the groom's household. Newlyweds usually lived

with the groom's parents until they were able to establish a new household. Wealthy Evens sometimes had two wives, but since polygamy was forbidden by the church, one of the wives had to pose as a servant or blood relative when non-Evens visited the household. Arranged marriages have disappeared during the 20th century. Now men and women marry for love, and polygamy has become a thing of the past.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Even garments are made of deerskin. Even men and women both wear loose, knee-length deerskin robes called *tety* that are fastened at the throat but otherwise left open in front. They also wear *nel* (leather aprons) that provide warmth for the front of the body, and *kherke* (loincloths) and leggings. The Even *tety* is very similar in form to the *khegilme* and *sun* of the Evenki, but the sides and hems of Even robes, unlike those of the Evenki, are trimmed with fur. *Merun* or *nugdu* (winter boots) are made from skins taken from the legs of reindeer or moose and are decorated with beads or fur strips; *olachik* and *aramra* (summer boots) are made from suede. The typical Even hat is the *avun*, a close-fitting deerskin cap that covers the ears. Women's clothing is of the same cut as that worn by Even men but tends to be more elaborately decorated. At present, traditional clothing is usually worn in winter, while western clothing (factory-made cloth dresses, shirts, trousers, and underclothes, and leather shoes) is worn in summer.

## 12 FOOD

Most traditional Even cuisine revolves around the meat of the reindeer and various game animals and birds (moose, mountain sheep, squirrel, elk, ducks, geese, and grouse). Meat is usually roasted over a fire or dried, but reindeer kidneys, livers, lungs, and eyes are eaten raw, as this is considered better for one's health. Reindeer blood is used as a tonic and is drunk warm as soon as the animal is butchered. The contents of slaughtered reindeers' stomachs are frozen or dried and mixed with berries. Fish (particularly salmon) and seal meat and fat form the central part of the diet of the sedentary Evens along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. Fish is roasted or dried. *Kam* or *niukola* (dried fish) is sometimes kept in special huts to prevent smoke from the hearth and other household odors from spoiling its flavor. Berries, nuts, and edible roots and herbs are also part of the traditional Even diet. During the 20th century, canned foods (vegetables, meat, and fish), bread, potatoes, and fruit have become staples of the Even diet.

## 13 EDUCATION

With the exception of a handful of missionary schools operated by the Russian Orthodox Church, education was unknown among the Evens prior to the Soviet period. Secular schools began to be established during the 1920s, and the first Even teachers were trained at the Institute of the North (now the Pedagogical Institute of the Peoples of the North) founded in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) in 1926. Now primary and secondary schooling are universal, and many Evens go on to attend universities in Yakutsk, Khabarovsk, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities of the Russian Federation. Alongside these gains, however, the Evens have experienced great cultural losses as the result of Soviet educational policies. Because of the official discouragement of the teaching of "primitive" peoples' languages and cultures during much of the Soviet period, and



*A child of the Evens stands with reindeer in Oimyakon, Russia. Reindeer breeding is the only source of income for these nomadic people. (Ziyah Gafic/Exclusive by Getty Images)*

the widespread use of Russian-speaking boarding schools that kept native pupils from their families for many years, many young and middle-aged Evens are ignorant of their own people's cultural heritage, language, and traditional occupations. During the 1980s, native activists and teachers managed to include Even history, language, and folklore, and vocational training in reindeer herding and hunting, in the curricula of some of the schools attended by Evens. Some boarding schools have been replaced by day schools closer to home, thus allowing children to spend more time with parents, and especially grandparents, who are able to teach them the ways of their people.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Besides the mouth organ used by almost all Tungusic-speaking peoples, the most widespread traditional Even musical instrument is a flat, oval-shaped drum called an *untun*, which is usually used by shamans in religious rituals. In appearance, the *untun* resembles the shamans' drums of many other Siberian peoples (as well as some Native American ones). The *untun* is beaten with a *gisun* (stick) whose striking end is padded with deer-hair and suede to protect the leather drum-head. Small

pieces of bone and iron fastened to the inside of the frame of the *untun* produce a tambourine-like sound when the drum is struck.

Even literature began to develop after the creation of an Even written language in the 1930s. Authors such as Nikolai Tarabukin, Platon Stepanov (who writes under the pen name Lamutskii), and Vasilii Lebedev have published poems, short stories, and novels on themes from traditional and modern Even life. Because these works are published in Russian and Yakut as well as Even, they are accessible to readers belonging to other native Siberian nationalities and to Evens who do not know Even but wish to learn about their people's culture.

#### **15 WORK**

Thanks to their many centuries of experience in herding reindeer, the Evens have become quite skilled at breeding reindeer. Because Even herdsman and hunters ride their reindeer like horses for long distances, they require animals with specific characteristics: physical stamina; ease of taming and training; and large, heavily muscled bodies. Even reindeer have long been prized among the peoples of Northeastern Siberia for their size, strength, and endurance. Koriak and Chukchi

traders traditionally gave two of their own reindeer for one of the Evens’.

## 16 SPORTS

The most popular Even traditional sports are reindeer and dogsled racing, wrestling, skiing, archery, and jumping contests. Foot races are also commonplace. Even runners have long been renowned among the peoples of Northeast Siberia for their endurance. This is probably a result of the persistence and tirelessness of Even hunters, who often track wounded animals on skis for several days.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Dancing is a favorite pastime of the Evens. In one traditional Even dance, the *hed'e*, the participants form a circle facing each other, link arms, and begin to move slowly from left to right. The circle grows to several dozen people as bystanders spontaneously join in. As the speed increases from a shuffle to a near-run, the dancers bend and unbend their knees and move their heads and torsos from right to left and backwards and forwards. At certain points in the *hed'e*, the participants leap high into the air in unison without breaking the rapidly whirling circle! Evens of both sexes and all ages enjoy the *hed'e*, and performances sometimes last for hours, until the dancers collapse from exhaustion.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Even arts and crafts tend to be similar to those of the Evenki, who also practice nomadic reindeer herding and hunting. Men carve and engrave wood, bone, metal, horn, and leather into saddles and saddle horns, tobacco pipes, knife and tool handles, and other items of everyday use. Women use beads, fur appliqué, and embroidery to embellish articles of clothing with a variety of geometric shapes. Because of the influence from the Yakut, who have long been accomplished metalworkers, the Evens have become skilled at casting iron purchased from Yakut and Russian traders and silver and copper obtained by melting coins into leather-working tools, knife blades, arrow- and spear-heads, and jewelry.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Contemporary Evens share a number of social problems with other peoples of Siberia: a low life expectancy due to inadequate medical care, alcoholism, and respiratory diseases; widespread poverty; the degradation of their native region’s environment; the prejudices of local Russians (and even some Yakuts, who consider the Evens “primitive”); and the threat to their cultural survival posed by Soviet-era policies aimed at eliminating “backward” non-Russian cultures. Representatives of the Evens are active in the Association of the Small Peoples of the North and other native-rights organizations, where they voice their concerns over these issues and fight government plans (for example, for the construction of dams and electric plants in ecologically fragile areas) that, if implemented, would damage their ancestral lands even further.

The Evens of the Sakha (Yakut) Republic have fared better than their compatriots in other administrative regions in recent attempts to gain official support for their cultural and economic needs. Because the Sakha are themselves an indigenous Siberian people who have faced both attacks by officialdom on

their culture and way of life and damage to their native environment by extractive industries, their political leaders are particularly sensitive to the problems of native Siberians in general. For example, the Sakha government has founded an Institute of the Problems of the Northern Minorities for the study, preservation, and teaching of the languages, arts, folklore, and history of the Evens and other native groups—that is, Yukagirs, Chukchi, Evenki, and Dolgans—who dwell in the northern reaches of the Sakha Republic. Moreover, in 1989 the Sakha administration established the Even-Bytantaisk District (Russian *raion*)—the first autonomous Even area since its predecessors were abolished in the 1930s.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Even society a sharp division of labor enforced gender norms. Some scholars have even suggested that women in traditional Even society held a relatively privileged position, especially in economic sector as property holders. During Collectivization, and particularly the period during and after the Second World War, the integration of the Evens into the Soviet economy and society blurred this division of labor, particularly as women gained access to education and industry and Russian migration came to the Even territories. At the same time the imposition of collective property and the abolition of private property had a direct impact on many Even women.

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—revised by A. Frank

## FINNS

**LOCATION:** Finland

**POPULATION:** 5.3 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Finnish; Swedish

**RELIGION:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Politically, Finland is less than 100 years old, having been under the domination of its neighbors, Sweden and Russia, for centuries. However, the Finns are an ancient people and Finland's oldest existing cities date back as far as 1220 (the capital city of Helsinki was founded in 1550). Known for their independence and resilience, the Finns are among the very few neighbors of the former Soviet Union who were not overpowered by it politically and militarily. They repulsed a Russian attack on the eve of World War II, while not actively supporting the Germans, whom they had to remove from their borders in a bitter struggle at the war's end. Relaxing somewhat its perennial concern with guarding its independence, Finland joined the European Union in 1995.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Finland is one of the world's two northernmost nations (the other is Iceland). It is a flat country slightly larger than the state of New Mexico and dotted with numerous lakes. Most of its terrain is covered by spruce, pine, and birch forests. About a quarter of the country lies above the Arctic Circle; this area is often covered with snow half the year while experiencing brief summers when the sun shines for up to 24 hours a day (giving it the nickname “the land of the midnight sun”).

With about 5.3 million people, Finland is one of the world's least densely populated countries. In 2008 the Finns accounted for about 93% of the country's total population. They are thought to be descended from Germanic tribes. About 6% of the population was Swedish. The country had small communities of Russians, Estonians, Roma (gypsy), and Sami (Lapps).

### 3 LANGUAGE

About 93% of Finns speak Finnish, while approximately 6% speak Swedish, both of which are official languages. Finnish belongs to the Finno-Ugric family of languages and is not related to any of the major European languages. It resembles Estonian and some other languages spoken south and east of Finland and also has a distant resemblance to Hungarian. Finnish is characterized by the use of many vowels and few consonants, and it does not have separate words for articles, prepositions, and pronouns, which are indicated by altered word endings. It is a completely phonetic language.

#### DAYS OF THE WEEK

maanantai	Monday
tiistai	Tuesday
keskiviikko	Wednesday
torstai	Thursday
perjantai	Friday
lauantai	Saturday
sunnuntai	Sunday

**NUMBERS**

yksi	one
kaksi	two
kolme	three
neljä	four
viisi	five
kuusi	six
seitsemän	seven
kahdeksan	eight
yhdeksän	nine
kymmenen	ten

**4 FOLKLORE**

Finnish folklore includes many tales tending toward the mysterious and melancholy, such as that of the abandoned founding Star-Eyes. Charms and superstitions are also plentiful. Someone desiring to find wealth without earning it was traditionally instructed to sit—at Midsummer—on top of a house whose roof had been replaced three times and watch for fires over a swamp or lake. Another Midsummer Night ritual involving the flowering of a fern was said to make a person invisible.

**5 RELIGION**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (Finnish Lutheran) and the Orthodox Church of Finland (Finnish Orthodox) are the state churches. In 2007 about 83% of the population was Finnish Lutheran. While rites such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, and funerals are still important for most Finnish Lutherans, it is estimated that as few as 2% attend church regularly. An estimated 1% of Finns belong to the Finnish Orthodox Church. As state churches, both are primary agencies responsible for birth, marriage, and death registrations. Non-members, however, may register at other state agencies. A church tax of up to 2% of personal income is required of members as part of their income tax. Those who are not members of these churches are not required to pay the tax.

Smaller communities of faiths include Roman Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, Jews, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is also a civil register of individuals not affiliated with any church.

**6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Most Finnish holidays are those of the Christian calendar. Christmas—a bright point of light in the dark of winter—is the most important holiday of the year for Finns. All regular activities come to a halt at noon on December 24 with the ringing of church bells proclaiming “the peace of Christmas,” and at sunset families place candles at the graves of their loved ones. Then there is a Christmas Eve sauna, followed by a festive meal. Some of the Finnish Christmas customs—such as the use of decorative straw goats—retain associations from the pre-Christian solstice celebrations that were later merged with the Christian holiday. New Year's Day, Epiphany (January 6), Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Ascension Day are all public holidays as well.

May 1 is actually several holidays rolled into one. It is a celebration of spring, a special day for student celebrations, and the Socialist Labor Day, marked by parades and speeches. Midsummer (*Juhannus*) is celebrated in late June with bonfires throughout the country. Independence Day is celebrated on December 6.

**7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Finland is a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties. At the ceremony for graduation from secondary school, students receive white caps and roses along with their matriculation certificates. Military service for young men could be viewed as a rite of passage. The period of service usually begins after graduation from secondary school and last for a period of 6 to 12 months. Young women have the option of volunteering for military service, but only about 1% actually do so.

**8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

A famous word used to describe the Finnish character is *sisu*, which connotes a spirit of perseverance and resilience. In addition to *sisu*, autonomy, independence, and respect for the independence of others are inculcated in Finns from childhood onward. Finns are also known for caution, reserve, and silence. According to a Finnish proverb “silence is a person's best friend, for it remains behind after the rest has gone.” When Finns do speak, their speech is usually quiet; loud conversa-

tion in public will tend to draw stares and interrupting the conversation of others is considered to be extremely impolite. They are typically undemonstrative in public and place great value on privacy. On the other hand, Finnish attitudes toward the body—like those in other parts of Western Europe—make American customs look puritanical by comparison. Small children routinely bathe nude in the sauna with their parents. There are over 1.5 million saunas.

A quick, firm handshake with direct eye contact and a brief nod of the head is customary when greeting a friend or a business associate. Surnames and titles of Mr. or Miss are generally used until one has been invited to use a person's first name.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

There are three basic types of dwellings in Finland: apartment complexes (*kerrostalo*), single-family homes (*omakotitalo*), and row-houses (*rivitalo*). The typical Finnish apartment is smaller than its American or British counterpart—usually only two or three rooms and a kitchen. In many detached homes, a shower and sauna take the place of a bath. Most Finnish homes have been built since World War II. Traditional pre-war homes were wooden and those in the country often constructed by the owner with the help of neighbors, an example of the custom of communal assistance called *talkoot*. In the cities, many of these older buildings have been demolished and replaced by apartment complexes. Many Finns enjoy the picturesque forests and lakes of their country in summer cottages, usually either rented or borrowed.

Finland has a high level of health care, and the entire population is covered by health insurance. While the nation has one of the world's lowest rates of infant mortality, its mortality rates for men over the age of 25 are somewhat higher than those in most other developed nations due to a high incidence of heart disease. Alcoholism and suicide are also leading causes of death. The sauna has traditionally been associated with medical care; women commonly gave birth in saunas before hospital birth delivery became the norm. In 2008 the average life expectancy was estimated at 78 years, with 75 years for men and 82 years for women.

Every part of the country is accessible by road and the highway system is undergoing constant expansion. However, winter driving is a challenge due to snow and ice. Over 8,850 km (5,500 mi) of rail cover the nation and provide links to Sweden and Russia. Finnair Oy, the national airline, provides both domestic and international service. Finland's merchant marine is one of its lifelines, and the nation is renowned for its shipbuilding.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

While family is important to Finns, the structure of family has changed quite a bit over the years. In 2006 only 32% of all families could be considered traditional, in that the family consisted of a married couple with children (usually two). Another 34% of families were married couples without children. Most couples will live together for a time before making a decision to marry. The percentage of couples opting for common-law marriage (sometimes referred to as a "trial marriage") has been increasing into the 21st century. In 2006 about 21% of all families were formed through common law marriage. While a pregnancy may have once inspired a couple to marry, it is not unusual for a couple to retain their common law marriage sta-

tus while signing a joint custody agreement for the child. Couples expecting a second or third child might be more likely to enter into a formal marriage. Two-income households are the norm whether or not the marriage is common law or legal.

Both mothers and fathers are offered paid leave packages from work in order to care for their newborns, and employers are typically generous in allowing time off to care for children who are ill. By law either parent may stay home to care for their infants (without losing their job) until the child is three years old. During this leave, the family receives an allowance through the Social Insurance program.

Reports indicate that almost half of all marriages end in divorce. Same-sex couples may be legally registered as a couple.

## 11 CLOTHING

Finns of both sexes sport modern Western-style clothes, including men's suits for work or formal occasions and jeans for casual wear. The traditional national costume has many regional variations but basically consists of a long, full, gathered skirt (often solid black with a red border), white blouse, vest, and cap for women, and a full-sleeved white shirt with stand-up collar, colorful waistcoat, and trousers for men (regional variations might include pointed shoes, a collarless shirt, or gold knife belt).

## 12 FOOD

The Finnish diet does not differ a great deal from other Western diets. Seafood plays a large role in the Finnish diet. Milk is also prominent both as a beverage and as a basic ingredient in various curdled, soured, or cultured dairy products. It is also used in soups, stews, and puddings. The Finns eat three meals a day: breakfast (*aamiainen*), hot lunch (*lounas*), and dinner (*päivällinen*), which is eaten at around 5:00 or 6:00 pm. As in other parts of Scandinavia, the "cold table" plays a central role in the Finnish diet. The typical buffet of fish, meat, cheeses, and fresh vegetables eaten with bread and butter—called *smørrebrød* in Denmark and *smörgäsbord* in Sweden—is known as *voileipäpöytä* in its Finnish incarnation. Hot dishes include *kalakukko*, a pie made with small fish and pork; Karelian rye pastries stuffed with potatoes or rice; and reindeer stew. Popular dishes from Finland's neighbor, Russia, include borscht, beet soup with sour cream, and *blini*, a type of pancake. A popular delicacy is *viili*, a cultured dairy product that resembles yogurt. A common breakfast consists of cereals, hot porridges, and cold cuts. Many Finns gather wild berries and mushrooms for meals.

The Finns have the world's highest rate of coffee consumption per person. Coffee drinking in Finland constitutes a ritual that has been compared to the tea ceremony of Japan. Coffee may mark a time of day (afternoon coffee, evening coffee), a place (sauna coffee), or a special occasion (name-day coffee, engagement coffee, funeral coffee). At its simplest, coffee is accompanied by a sweet bread called *pulla*; more elaborate coffees may include a salty dish as well as a pulla ring or buns, cookies, and cakes. The serving table is often adorned with fresh flowers.

## 13 EDUCATION

Practically all Finnish adults are literate and schooling is compulsory and free. All students complete a basic nine-year program. Formal schooling starts at the age of seven. The school





Finnish girls dressed as witches engage in the Finnish version of “trick-or-treat” on Palm Sunday in Helsinki, Finland. The children go door to door offering pussywillow branches as a token of goodwill in exchange for a small payment. (AP Images/Sari Gustafsson)

year lasts from mid-August to the end of May, with a long Christmas break and a one-week skiing holiday in the spring. The Finnish educational system places great emphasis on foreign languages. Two foreign languages are studied in the primary grades and a third added in the seventh grade. Languages studied commonly include English, Russian, French, and German. After the nine years of comprehensive schooling, students may opt for either vocational or secondary (college preparatory) school. In order to enter a university, students must receive their secondary school certificate and pass an exam. There are 20 universities in Finland and many vocational schools.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Due to its geographic location, Finland’s cultural heritage has been impacted by both Eastern and Western influences. Finland’s national epic, the *Kalevala*, has made an important contribution to its fine arts. Elias Lönnrot first collected and published the folk tales of the *Kalevala* in 1835. It has inspired numerous musical compositions, including several works by Finland’s greatest composer, Jean Sibelius, as well as many sculptures and paintings, notably those of Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Although the great 19th-century writer Johan Ludvig Runeberg wrote in Swedish, a portion of his *Tales of Ensign Stal* was adopted for the Finnish national anthem. The first major author to write in Finnish was Aleksis Kivi, who also lived and wrote in the 19th century. Prominent 20th-century writers include Frans Eemil Sillanpää, who won the Nobel Prize in 1939, Mika Waltari, and Väinö Linna.

Finland is especially known for its great singers and the art of opera has flourished in recent times. Large-scale works are produced at the Savonlinna opera festival held on the grounds of a 15th-century castle every summer. In the classical music world, the best-known Finnish name currently is that of the young composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Linus Torvalds, known worldwide as the man who developed the Linux operating system, was born in Finland, as was Sari Maritta Baldauf, the former head of Nokia Networks. Nokia was founded by Fredrik Idestam, who became known as the father of Finland’s paper industry after building his paper mill on the banks of the Nokianvirta River. Eric Tigerstedt was the first person to implement a working sound-on-film technology.

#### **15 WORK**

In 2007 roughly 66% of Finns between the ages of 15 and 74 participated in the labor force—a high percentage in proportion to the total population. As in most Western nations, the trade and service sectors accounted for the greatest number of jobs in 2007 at about 66%. Industry and construction accounted for another 27%. Young people may work at the age of 15 if they have completed the nine compulsory years of comprehensive schooling, but there are laws governing the number of hours and the times during which they may work.

#### **16 SPORTS**

Finns excel at individual rather than team sports, and particularly at activities that require stamina. The primary national

sport is skiing, which was invented by the Finns: Finnish skis have been found dating back 3,700 years. While Finns today ski for enjoyment, skiing used to be an important means of transportation, especially for traveling from one village to another. With more than 200 ski jumps in Finland, one can be found in most towns and villages. Long cross-country ski trips are organized on Sundays. Finnish children are introduced to winter sports at a young age, and even in school their classes are punctuated by a recess for outdoor activities every 45 minutes. Besides skiing, hockey is the favorite winter sport. In summer Finnish baseball is popular.

The Finns are also known for their great long-distance runners. Paavo Nurmi (1897–1973), known popularly as “The Flying Finn,” was a famous athlete and national hero who won nine Olympic gold medals between 1920 and 1928. Today many of Finland’s star athletes are race car drivers. Other popular sports include swimming, skating, and soccer.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Finland, with one of the highest literacy rates in the world, is a nation of readers. The libraries are used extensively, and most people are book buyers, even though books are expensive. Helsinki boasts one of the world’s largest bookstores, books are sold everywhere in the country, and serious literary works are serialized in popular magazines. For the size of its population, Finland has many newspapers and a high number of book titles published annually. Finns also enjoy the theater and are avid fans of soccer (called football).

Perhaps the favorite leisure-time activity in Finland is relaxing in the sauna. Most private homes have saunas and many city apartments are equipped with them. It is quite common for a Finn to invite a friend over for time in the sauna, which soothes tired muscles and melts away worries. This might be followed by a light meal and/or cool drinks. Finns enjoy entertaining at their homes, whether as dinner parties or simply casual gatherings of friends.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Finland’s tradition of folk poetry, also called rune song, has been preserved in the *Kalevala*, which was assembled and published by Elias Lönnrot in the 19th century. A traditional craft that is flourishing today is the production of the woolen *ryijy* rug, which dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries. Originally used to keep warm on boats or sleighs or to keep out drafts, they eventually evolved into decorative hangings which today may combine as many as 100 different colors. These rugs were traditionally produced by women, while men made furniture, harnesses, and the sheath knife (*puukko*) used for hunting and fishing. Other Finnish crafts include ceramics, woodworking, glassware, sculpture, and textiles.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Alcoholism is a pervasive problem in Finland, as it is in the neighboring countries of Norway, Sweden, and Russia. Some social tension exists between ethnic Finns and minority groups, particularly against Roma and immigrants. Trafficking in persons has been a problem as Finland has been seen as both a destination and a transit spot for trafficking operations that primarily involve women and children. While prostitution is legal in Finland, trafficking and pimping are not. Some foreign women are lured into prostitution rings with the

promise of higher wages and better working conditions, but are then forced to work longer hours for little pay under the fear of abuse or deportation. Both men and women have been brought into the country illegally to work in construction, restaurants, or domestic service. The government and various social organizations have taken measures to investigate and prosecute those involved in human trafficking, and to locate and assist victims.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In 1906 Finland became the first nation to give women the vote in national elections. In 2000 Tarja Halonen became the first woman president of Finland. Men and women are legally required to receive equal pay for equal work; however, in fact women receive 18% less pay than men on average. Within the family structure, men and women generally take on equal roles and both often work outside of the home. Both men and women are permitted to take up to three years of leave from work in order to care for their infant children; however, women most often take advantage of this right. Most women enjoy a high level of financial independence. Nearly two-thirds of young women leave their parents’ homes before the age of 20 to live independently or with a companion. Young men tend to remain in their parents’ home slightly longer, until they have completed their military service. Women and men have equal opportunities in education. Equality in both work and education seems to have resulted in a rising number of adults who choose to remain single or simply live together rather than marry. The average age for marriage is about 30 for both men and women.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Finland in 1971, but it remained illegal to promote it. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was prohibited by law in 1995. Same-sex unions were made legal in 2002. Finnish support for same-sex marriage stood at about 45% in 2008. There is a significant gay community in Helsinki.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# FLEMINGS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Flemish

**LOCATION:** Belgium (northern region, called Flanders)

**POPULATION:** 6.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Flemish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Protestant; small numbers of Jews and Muslims

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Flemings (or Flemish) are Belgium's ethnic majority. They inhabit the northern part of Belgium, which is called Flanders, and speak the Flemish language, which is closely related to Dutch. Present-day Belgium was originally inhabited by Celtic tribes and overrun by the Romans under Julius Caesar in 57 BC. Although Roman rule continued for 500 years, Roman culture was more strongly absorbed by the people in the southern part of the region, who would one day be known as Walloons and speak a dialect of French, a Latin-derived language. In the 5th century AD the Franks, a Germanic people, invaded the region and established control, although they maintained a stronger presence in its northern portion, where early forms of the Dutch language subsequently developed. Frankish settlements in the south were less extensive, allowing the Roman culture and Latin-based dialects already in existence to flourish.

Between the 9th and 12th centuries, both the northern and southern parts of the Belgian region fell under the control of feudal lords, and numerous duchies, principalities, and towns sprang up without any unifying center of power or culture, allowing the Germanic and Latin cultures of the two regions to continue developing along separate lines. Eventually the power of the nobles was challenged by the burghers of the cities, especially in Antwerp, Bruges, and Ghent. As Flemish cities began to play a vital role in European trade, the area entered a cultural golden age in both music and art. However, beginning in the 16th century, both the Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons to their south came under the rule of a succession of foreign powers: Spain, the Austrian Habsburgs, the French under Napoleon, and, finally, the Netherlands. In spite of the Flemings' cultural and linguistic ties to Holland, they joined with the Walloons in revolting against Dutch rule, and the new Kingdom of Belgium was established in 1830.

Throughout the 19th century, the Walloons were the dominant group in Belgium both politically and economically. Their French language and culture were regarded as superior to those of the Flemings, and they led the nation in industrialization, while Flanders remained a primarily agricultural area. Belgium suffered enormous losses in both world wars. After World War II, structural and social problems had a debilitating effect on Wallonia's industries. By the 1930s Flanders had gained sufficient political and economic clout to make Flemish its official language for education, legal proceedings, and government. In the 1960s, the Flemings and Walloons were given political, social, and cultural autonomy over their respective regions. The intervening years have been a period of decline for Wallonia's traditional heavy industries, especially steel and coal, while Flanders has risen in importance as a center for international trade, high-tech manufacturing, and tourism. In 1993, Belgium's constitution was amended, making Flanders

and Wallonia autonomous regions within the federal state of the Belgian kingdom, together with the nation's bilingual capital, Brussels, and another autonomous community composed of Belgium's German-speaking population. Belgium was locked in a political stalemate beginning in June 2007 when elections failed to produce a new government. The question arose as to whether or not Belgium should cease to exist as a country, and that the territory would be split into two—Flanders and Wallonia. The crisis was temporarily resolved in March 2008 when a new government was formed, and major reforms of state were planned.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Flemings live in the northern part of Belgium, above an east-west line dividing the country's Flemish- and French-speaking regions. The Flemish-speaking provinces are East and West Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg, and part of Brabant. One of Belgium's two main rivers, the Scheldt, flows through Antwerp and into the North Sea. The land is mostly low, some of it below sea level, with about 64 km (40 mi) of scenic beaches along the West Flanders coast. Silt deposits have created a rich soil excellent for farming, formerly the economic mainstay of the region and still an important source of income. The Flemings, who account for 58% of Belgium's 10.4 million people, are descended from Celts, who originally inhabited their region, and from the Romans and Frankish invaders who followed. "Vlaanderen," the name for Flanders, is taken from "Pagus Flandrensus," the name of an 8th-century district in the region during the Carolingian era.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Flemish (Vlaams) is a variant of Dutch that has been spoken for about 1,000 years north of a linguistic dividing line that runs from Aachen in the east to a point north of Lille in the west, skirting the Brussels area. Recognized in Belgium as an official state language, it is distinct from the Dutch spoken in the neighboring Netherlands. Even within Belgium, dialects vary from one region to another, distinguished by differences in pronunciation, individual words, and idiomatic expressions. Flemish does not have its own written language and uses standard Dutch modified by certain specifically Belgian features. The difference between Flemish and Dutch has been compared to that between English as spoken by people in Great Britain and in the United States. However, the difference between Flemish and Dutch may be even greater, as subtitles are sometimes used on Dutch television when Flemish movies are aired. Language differences between the Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons in the south have been Belgium's most divisive political issue.

### NUMBERS

one	een
two	twee
three	drie
four	vier
five	vijf
six	zes
seven	zeven
eight	acht
nine	negen
ten	tien



#### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	zondag
Monday	maandag
Tuesday	dinsdag
Wednesday	woensdag
Thursday	donderdag
Friday	vrijdag
Saturday	zaterdag

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The name of Antwerp—the major city in the Flemish part of Belgium—is derived from the name of a Roman hero who is said to have slain a malevolent giant and cut off his hand (the city's symbol is a red hand). Some of the Flemings' colorful pageants and festivals are based on local folklore, such as the Cat Festival of Ypres. This celebration is based on a legend, which exists in different versions, centering on the use of cats to control rodents in this historic city during the Middle Ages and the necessity of disposing of the cats when they became too numerous or were no longer needed. The festivals, held in their original form until 1817, used to involve throwing live cats out of windows. Since their revival in a more humane form in 1938, cloth cats have been used instead. In Belgium's famed marionette theaters, characters from folklore are associated with major cities. The Flemish ones include Schele (Antwerp) and Pierke (Ghent).

#### 5 RELIGION

The vast majority of Flemish are Catholics. While virtually all are baptized and receive a Catholic education, many do not actively practice their religion, and some are even nonbelievers who remain nominally Catholic in order to avoid being cut off from the many social services administered through the Church. Flanders also has a Protestant minority that includes Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and other denominations. There are also Jewish and Muslim communities among the Flemish.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Flemish observe Belgium's 10 public holidays: New Year's Day, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (July 21), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas. However, they also celebrate other dates on the Christian calendar (especially those that mark events in the life of Christ), as well as many folk holidays with origins in history and legend. Folk festivals and processions often involve the use of elaborate masks and papier-mâché "giants." The Flemings are especially well-known for their exuberant celebration of the pre-Lenten carnival season, which begins with the *bommelfeesten* in the East Flanders town of Ronse and continues for weeks. The famous Cat Festival takes place in Ypres on the second Sunday in May.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage include major Catholic ceremonies such as baptisms, first Communions, marriages and funerals. Although most Flemish do not really practice Catholicism, the important events in a person's life tend to be occasions of major family reunions and stress their religious heritage. Special gifts and wishes will be given for baptisms, first Communions, and marriages.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Flemish manners are generally formal and polite, and conversations are marked by frequent exchanges of compliments and repeated handshaking.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Flemish homes, like those in neighboring Wallonia, are built of red brick. The conservatively furnished interiors are generally crowded with oversized armchairs and other large pieces of furniture, including wall units, or breakfronts, containing dishes, glasses, and other household items. It is also common to see religious artifacts and mementos displayed. Often the house will have a combined living room and dining area; large kitchens are also common. A distinctive feature of Belgian housing, and one especially characteristic of the Flemish, is the location of a shop or other small business at the same site as the family residence (an arrangement referred to as a *winkelshuis* or *handelshuis*).

Like all Belgians, the Flemish have access to modern medical care through private doctors and at state-run hospitals and clinics. The vast majority have most of their medical expenses covered by national health insurance. However, they tend to be negligent about dental care and often lose teeth due to decay. Many believe in alternative medical treatments, especially Oriental ones such as acupuncture. The Flemish port of Antwerp,

the second largest in Europe (after Amsterdam), is the center of Belgium's water transport system, and the nation's railway network has its hub in Brussels.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Flemish generally have larger families than their Walloon neighbors to the south. Nuclear rather than extended families are the norm, and married couples often run small businesses together. Traditionally it was frowned upon for an adult to remain single past his or her mid-thirties, and single adults usually lived with their parents until they married, contributing their earnings to the household income. Today, many young people living at home keep their earnings, which they spend on clothes, cars, and recreation. Also, since the 1970s it has become increasingly common for unmarried couples to live together. The divorce rate among the Flemish, as elsewhere in Belgium and throughout the West, has also risen, not only among young couples married for a year or two, but also among middle-aged couples married for 20 years or longer. The growing gap between generations, as well as the high incidence of dual-career families, has made it increasingly difficult for married couples to care for aging parents at home. The elderly commonly live in retirement communities or homes for the aged, and such facilities often have long waiting lists.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Flemish, like all Belgians, wear modern Western-style clothing. However, in some rural areas, the traditional dark-colored farmer's garb can still be seen.

## 12 FOOD

While Flemish cooking does reflect Dutch cultural influences to a certain extent, it has generally developed along its own lines. For example, the Flemish meat-and-vegetable stew (*hochepot*) consists of vegetables and meat in a clear broth, while in the Dutch version (*hutspot*), the vegetables are pureed, and the chunks of meat larger. Fish and shellfish are central to Flemish cuisine, with staples including mussels and herring. Lobster, shrimp, and oysters are also popular. Rabbit cooked in brown beer with stewed prunes is a regional specialty, as is *waterzooi*, a chowder made from vegetables and either chicken or fish. Dinner, the main meal of the day, is eaten at midday. A typical dinner consists of homemade soup, a meat entrée with vegetables, and fruit and pastry. The Flemings are great beer drinkers and brew some of the best beers in the world.

## 13 EDUCATION

Many Flemish children go to Catholic private schools. Education for all Belgians is compulsory from age 6 through 15, and the national literacy rate is 99%. At the secondary level, students choose between trade-oriented, business, and college preparatory training. Some vocational schools maintain work-study apprenticeship programs, although students enrolled in them still live with their parents.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In the fine arts, the Flemish are particularly renowned for their painting. The works of Jan van Eyck and the other Flemish masters of the 15th century marked an important turning point in Western art by straying from the predominantly re-

ligious themes of the Middle Ages to reflect the lifestyles and concerns of the Flemish burghers who were their patrons. Other well-known Flemish painters of the Renaissance included Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Pieter Bruegel the Younger, Peter Paul Rubens, and Anthony van Dyck.

Flemish literature began in the Middle Ages with works by authors including Heinrich von Veldeke, Jacob van Maerlant, and a Brabant nun named Hadewijch who wrote mystical dramas. During the hundreds of years of foreign rule that began with the Spanish in the 16th century, Flemish letters fell into decline but were revived after independence was attained in 1830. Established 10 years later, the Flemish Movement advocated the advancement of the Flemish culture and language and was also involved in struggles for political autonomy. Prominent 19th-century Flemish writers include Hendrik Conscience, author of *The Lion of Flanders* (*De Leeuw van Vlaenderen*) and lyric poet Guido Gezelle.

Well-known modern Flemish authors include novelists Louis Paul Boon and Hugo Claus. In the 16th century, the works of Orlando di Lasso combined the musical traditions of the Netherlands and Italy.

## 15 WORK

The Flemish are hard workers, often spending long hours running family-owned businesses, sometimes in addition to another source of income. In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, Wallonia led Belgium in industrialization, while Flanders remained primarily involved in agriculture and trade. However, the lesser-developed Flemish region was able to obtain generous international aid in the years following World War II, and its large labor force and relatively low wages drew increasing foreign investment in the 1950s and 1960s. Its maritime advantages—the busy port city of Antwerp as well as the proximity of the North Sea—rounded out a picture of economic success. Major industries today include textiles, automobiles, and chemicals. Manufacturing in areas such as electronics and computer technology has grown, while the traditional heavy industries, including steelmaking and shipbuilding, have been on the decline.

The fertile, flat land in the Flemish region—of which three-fifths is suitable for farming—remains a source of agricultural income, supporting fruit, vegetables, animal feed, and grains. Today three out of four Belgians work in the service sector, and the Flemish regions have benefited from the growth of tourism to such cities as Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, and Brussels.

## 16 SPORTS

The Flemish are enthusiastic players and fans of soccer, Belgium's national sport, and cycling is another favorite sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Flemish people enjoy typical leisure time activities such as watching television and reading. Like many Belgians, they are avid gardeners, and nearly every home has a carefully tended garden. Other typical hobbies include stamp collecting and model trains. Popular cultural pastimes include concerts and the theater, and, in Brussels and other major cities, opera and ballet as well. The Flemish also share the general Belgian love of festivals, and their calendar is filled with celebrations of all kinds, both religious and secular.



School children wearing paper hats with the Belgian flag wait for the royal family outside Saint Michel's Cathedral to celebrate King's Day in Brussels, Belgium. King's Day is meant to honor the royal family. (AP Images/Thierry Charlier)

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

The Flemish are known for their lacemaking, and other crafts include glassblowing, tapestries, and pottery. In recent years there has been a movement to revive folk arts including street singing, folk opera, and the puppet and marionette theaters that once flourished throughout the region, particularly in Antwerp. In the 1970s, Antwerp also became known as a center of women's fashion.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

While the incidence of violent crime in public is relatively low among the Flemish, domestic violence—in which the Belgian police seldom intervene—remains a problem. Spousal and child abuse occur among all social classes, as well as abuse of elderly relatives in a household. Although the fertilizers and crop sprays used by Belgium's farmers result in agricultural yields that are among the world's highest, the country is paying a price in terms of increased levels of river pollution.

Traditionally, ethnic differences between the Flemings and Walloons have been sources of social conflict, and even threatened to divide the country in 2007 and 2008.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Flanders has an old tradition that could be called feminist. Beginning in the 12th century, certain Catholic women in the Low Countries chose to live neither under the care of a man

nor the vows of the church. They were called *beguines*—derived from the Flemish word *beghen* (to pray). *Beguines* were home to generations of religious women who sought to live a more independent life than that of women who married against their will. They made their homes, catered to the sick and poor, and sought to serve God without separating from the rest of the world. They lived simply and wore loose robes and headwear similar to nuns' habits. But they took no religious vows. They could leave and marry, own their own property, and took no alms. Women of all classes were welcomed. They carried on professions, often in the textile industry. They elected women to be leaders—Grand Dames—and each Grand Dame often was assisted by an elected council. Each *beguine* was expected to support herself and make a tangible contribution to the *beguinage*, either through labor or rent income. Eventually many *beguinages* were elevated to parish status and were assigned their own priest. In the 19th century some of the *beguines* retained possession of their homes, while others were taken over by religious orders or transformed into hospices and orphanages. However, many of Belgium's *beguinages* are intact today, as gated or walled communes. In 1998, 13 Flemish *beguinages* were listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Women won the right to vote in Belgium in 1919, and restrictions on the suffrage were dropped in 1948. Abortion was only legalized in Belgium in 1990. As of 2000, women made up 24% of the lower house of parliament, and 28.8% of the upper

house. Approximately 55.7% of Belgian women hold a secondary degree, 53.1% hold a bachelor's degree, and 7.6% are in senior management. The government made a concerted effort in the 1990s to involve women in politics.

Belgium decriminalized homosexuality in 1843 and legalized same-sex marriages in 2003—it was only the second country to do so worldwide. Gay and lesbian couples have the same rights as heterosexual ones, including inheritance and adoption. In 2006 the country's first gay church was inaugurated in Ghent.

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# FRENCH

**LOCATION:** France

**POPULATION:** About 60.8 million

**LANGUAGE:** French; also Breton, Flemish, Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Provençal, and English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Protestant; smaller numbers of Muslims and Jews

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

France, which has existed in its present form since the 15th century, is Europe's oldest nation. A leader in intellectual trends, the fine arts, fashion, and cuisine, it is also the world's sixth richest country, a major nuclear power, and Europe's leading agricultural producer.

Originally part of the Celtic region known as Gaul, France became part of the Roman Empire until it was overrun by a Germanic tribe—the Franks—from whom the country's present name is derived. Its greatest early ruler was Charlemagne in the 9th century AD. At the end of the 10th century, Hugh Capet founded the dynasty that was to rule over the French for the next 800 years. Other great figures in early French history include Joan of Arc, who inspired French national feeling during the Hundred Years War and was burned at the stake by the English in 1431, and Louis XIV, the so-called Sun King, who transformed France into an absolute monarchy in the 17th century.

The French Revolution in 1789 was followed by the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, who conquered much of Europe before his downfall in 1814. In the 20th century, France weathered two world wars and a worldwide economic depression in addition to its own political and social upheavals and the loss of a large colonial empire. However it has survived in the 21st century to become a major political and economic world power and a leader in the European Union (EU). However, in 2005 France's voters rejected the proposed EU constitution in a referendum, dooming the document. France nevertheless is looking to develop the EU's military capabilities to supplement progress toward an EU foreign policy.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The largest country in Western Europe (Ukraine is the largest country in Europe since the breakup of the Soviet Union), France is located on the extreme west coast of the continent. It is the only country except Spain to have both Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, as well as direct access to the North Sea. Lowlands make up about half of France's terrain; the other half consists of hills or mountains. The major geographic areas are the Northern Region, the Paris Basin, Normandy, Brittany, the Lower Loire, and the Southwestern Plains. France's principal mountain chains are the Pyrenees, which border Spain, and the Alps, bordering Italy and Switzerland. Its major rivers are the Rhône and the Seine.

France's native-born population has Celtic, Germanic, Latin, and Slavic origins. Its immigrant population of around five million lives primarily in the country's central, southern, and southeastern areas, and immigrants are especially numerous in Alsace. Those from the North African countries of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco are called Maghrébins. Other immi-



grants are from Portugal, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and immigrants from Russia and Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in the 1990s.

### 3 LANGUAGE

French, a Romance language with Latin roots, is the national language not only of France's people but also of some 300 million others throughout the world. It is the first or second language of more than 20 African countries, 6 in Asia and the South Pacific, and 5 in Europe. The original Latin-derived language was modified by the addition of words from Celtic, German, and Greek. Within France itself, other spoken languages include Breton, Flemish, Spanish, Catalan, Basque, and Provençal. English is also spoken by many in France, especially for business purposes.

#### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Monday	lundi
Tuesday	mardi
Wednesday	mercredi
Thursday	jeudi
Friday	vendredi
Saturday	samedi
Sunday	dimanche

#### NUMBERS

one	un, une
two	deux
three	trois

four	quatre
five	cinq
six	six
seven	sept
eight	huit
nine	neuf
ten	dix

### 4 FOLKLORE

Native folklore varies from region to region. Witches and cave dwellers with supernatural powers traditionally populated Basque legends, and some elderly Basques still fear the evil eye. Ancient Celtic religious sites can still be found in northern Auvergne, together with vestiges of ancient beliefs. The Bretons have many superstitions and rituals accompanying death. Death itself is envisioned as a legendary figure called Ankou, pictured as a skeleton with a scythe, and it is believed that the creaking of the cart he rides in portends the death of a person in the neighborhood. When a person dies, the doors and windows of the house are traditionally left open so that the soul can depart, and mirrors are turned to face the wall.

### 5 RELIGION

About 83–88% of the French population is Roman Catholic, although less than one-fifth of Catholics attend church regularly. Protestants account for roughly 2%, mostly Calvinist or Lutheran. Anywhere from 5–10% of the population is Muslim, mostly immigrants from North Africa, and Jews make up 1% of the population.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Religious, historical, and patriotic holidays are observed throughout the year. New Year's Eve is celebrated with a festive dinner; at midnight family and friends wish each other a good year by kissing under mistletoe. For Epiphany on January 6 the custom is to bake a large round pastry with a bean hidden in it; the person who finds the bean becomes "ruler" for the evening. Mardi Gras, on Shrove Tuesday in February, is marked by parades featuring flowers, floats, and giant cardboard figures. Labor Day on May 1 is celebrated by workers' parades. May 8 marks the end of World War II, and France's national holiday (the equivalent of July Fourth in the United States) is Bastille Day on July 14, which commemorates the storming of the Bastille in 1789. It is accompanied by parades, fireworks, and dancing in the streets. The French observe Christmas by attending a midnight mass. France's different regions also celebrate their own holidays and festivals. Many occur at Christmas and Easter, such as Strasbourg's Christmas market.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

France is a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The French have a formality and reserve that is often interpreted as rudeness by outsiders. In addition, their pride in their



taste and culture, which reveres artists and philosophers, is sometimes seen as haughtiness. Money is generally considered something of a taboo topic, and it is considered especially rude to ask the size of someone's salary. When invited to another person's home, a French person will invariably bring along a gift of wine or flowers. Both men and women often greet each other by kissing on the cheek.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Long, white-walled, red-tiled farm houses are a typical sight in the French countryside. Most city dwellers live in rented apartments, often a short distance from where they work. While the French like modern homes, many have a taste for antique furniture. Today it is becoming increasingly popular for urbanites to maintain a second home in the country that they can escape to on weekends. Immigrants from North Africa often live in large suburban housing developments called *cités*, which are generally run down and overcrowded.

French life expectancy averages 80.8 years, with heart disease and cancer the major causes of death. France has a comprehensive national health care system that covers both private care and state-operated facilities. Pregnant women receive free prenatal medical care, and infants receive three free checkups during their first two years. Since the 1980s, the trend has been toward outpatient and home care.

France's modern, efficient transportation system is centered in the city of Paris, which can make direct travel between provincial locations difficult. The state-owned railways are punctual, with clean, modern trains. France is known especially for its high-speed train, the TGV (Train de Grand Vitesse)—the fastest train in the world. Placed into service in 1981, it travels at speeds averaging 250 km/hr (150 mi/hr) and connects with the Channel Tunnel ("Chunnel") to England, making it possible to travel from London to Paris in three hours by land. The *Métro*, the Parisian subway, carries 4.5 million passengers per day. The highway system (*autoroute*), which is continually being expanded, is known for its clearly marked expressways and secondary routes. France has many navigable rivers and connecting canals, and its national airline, Air France, operates regularly scheduled flights to all parts of the world.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, French households were made up of extended families—grandparents, parents, and children. Today, however, a nuclear family with one or two children is the norm. However, family ties remain strong. College-age children usually attend local colleges and universities, and families get together on birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. France's divorce rate has doubled since the 1960s, and in 2002 38% of marriages ended in divorce.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional costumes are still worn at festivals and celebrations in regions such as Alsace, where women may be seen in white lace-trimmed blouses, dark bodices, and aprons decorated with colorful flowers, black bonnets, and even wooden shoes. Women's costumes in Normandy include gauzy, white, flared bonnets and dresses with wide elbow-length sleeves and varied types of colorful designs.

For their day-to-day activities, the French, both in the countryside and the cities, wear modern Western-style clothing, for

both casual and formal occasions. Perhaps the most typical item of clothing associated with the French is the black beret, which is still worn by some men, particularly in rural areas. French women have long been known for their style and elegance, and France is a leader in the fashion world. The first French *couture*, or fashion house, was founded in 1858, complete with models, fashion shows, salespeople, and designer labels. Today France is renowned for such designers as Coco Chanel, Yves Saint-Laurent, and Christian Dior, whose creations influence fashions around the world. Since the 1960s, French designers have branched out into more affordable ready-to-wear clothing lines, which have become very popular.

## 12 FOOD

The French are renowned for their elaborate, well-prepared cuisine (a term that comes from the French word for "kitchen"). The diversity of France's terrain and climate and its proximity to both the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea provide a wide variety of produce and seafood on which French cooks can hone their culinary skills. Each region of the country has its own specialties. The *choucroute* of Alsace consists of cabbage in white wine with pork and sausages. Central France is famous for *boeuf bourguignon*, beef in red wine sauce. *Saucissons* (dried sausages) are a specialty in the Rhône Valley, and southern France has a typical Mediterranean cuisine that depends heavily on garlic, vegetables, and herbs. One of its characteristic dishes is a vegetable stew called *ratatouille*.

The French typically eat a modest breakfast (*petit déjeuner*) of coffee with milk (*café au lait*) and croissants or bread and butter. In the country, this is often followed by a mid-morning snack of bread and sausages or *paté*. Lunch (*déjeuner*) is a substantial three- or four-course meal consisting of an appetizer, a main dish of meat, fish, or vegetables, a green salad, and a dessert of fruit or pastry. Dinner (*dîner*) is a light meal of soup, cheeses, and sometimes salad or leftovers. The French are famous for their wines, and wine—which plays an important role in French life and culture—is commonly served at both lunch and dinner.

## 13 EDUCATION

France's literacy rate is above 99%—one of the highest in the world. Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Public education is free, and the state also pays for textbooks used in private schools. The school day usually begins at 8:00 am. Between 12:00 and 2:00, the pupils take a long break to go home for lunch (the main meal of the day), and classes end at 4:00 pm. French students spend 936 hours per year in class, compared to an average of 800 in the rest of Europe. As of 2007 two-thirds of children at the primary level attended school on at least one in three Saturdays. However, in September of that year, the French government announced Saturday classes in primary schools would be discontinued in 2008 and that secondary schools could follow suit. After five years of primary school, students spend four years at a middle school called a *collège* for the first part of their secondary education. The next three years are spent either at a general *lycée* for those planning to go on to college or at a vocational *lycée*. After receiving their *baccalauréat* degrees, students may go on to a university or to a *grand école*, which offers preparation for careers in business or government service. France's oldest and most famous university is the Sorbonne, in Paris.



*Mounted Republican Guards parade on the Champs Elysees on Bastille Day in Paris, France. (AP Images/Jacques Brinon)*

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

France has made significant contributions in all of the fine arts, beginning with the great medieval cathedrals at Chartres, Reims, and Amiens, and Notre Dame in Paris. Painting was the dominant French art of the 19th century, particularly that of the Impressionists, including Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and Edouard Manet. The most famous French sculptor was Auguste Rodin. Postimpressionists Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Henri Matisse painted in new styles that influenced developments in 20th-century French art. France's great musicians include the 19th-century composer Hector Berlioz and the "Impressionistic" composers Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, whose new musical styles and harmonies provided a bridge between 19th- and 20th-century musical styles. Currently, Pierre Boulez is an internationally renowned composer and conductor. France is also known as an international center for ballet.

In a nation that places great value on its philosophers and writers, French literature has had a great influence on national opinion. The great 19th-century novelists Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, and Emile Zola wrote about the pressing social issues of their time. Marcel Proust is considered France's great-

est 20th-century writer. France also has a rich heritage in film, beginning with the early directors Jean Renoir and Jean Cocteau and continuing through the "New Wave" of the 1950s and 1960s, with award-winning directors including François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Éric Rohmer. Louis Malle and Luc Besson are also popular film directors. The prestigious Cannes film festival is held every year in May.

## **15 WORK**

About 72% of the French labor force is employed in service sector jobs, 24% in industry, and 4% in agriculture. The French work week is a maximum 35 hours, a result of legislation passed in 2000 to deal with the problem of unemployment. There is a lengthy break for lunch, the main meal of the day. Day care is partly funded by the government, and workers receive five weeks of paid vacation per year.

## **16 SPORTS**

The French are avid football (soccer) fans—there are nearly 8,000 organized soccer clubs in the country. The French national football team won the World Cup as the host nation in 1998 and placed second at the 2006 World Cup tournament.

Other well-attended spectator sports include rugby, horse racing, and auto racing. France's most famous annual sporting event is probably the Tour de France bicycle race, held since 1903. Thousands gather at roadsides to watch the racers cover the grueling 2,000-mile course in three weeks every July. Popular participant sports include fishing, shooting, swimming, skiing, and mountain climbing. In addition, increasing numbers of people are participating in tennis, horseback riding, sailing, and windsurfing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many people enjoy going out to meet friends at one of France's numerous cafés, but many simply stay home on weeknight evenings and watch television or read. There is now more leisure time over the weekend than there was before the 1960s, when factories were open on Saturday mornings. Domestic activities such as gardening, home improvement, and cooking have become popular leisure-time pursuits: about one-third of the French people spend some of their time gardening. France has one of the world's highest rates of movie attendance. Vacation trips have always been popular among the French, and it has become increasingly common for them to divide their five weeks of paid vacation into several breaks rather than spending the traditional holiday month at the beach (although great numbers of French still flock there in August).

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk arts are kept alive in the various regions of France. In Burgundy, artisans produce *sabots* (wooden shoes), *vielles* (stringed musical instruments), and other craft items. Many parts of France have rich traditions of folk music. The music of Brittany shows Celtic influences, with its popular wind instruments, the bagpipe-like *biniou* and the *bombarde*. Village festivals among the Basques feature performances on the drum and *txistu* (a type of flute), which are played simultaneously by a single performer. Traditional folk poets called *bertsolariak* improvise and sing rhymes on any subject. Folk dancing is also extremely popular among the Basques, with a dance troupe in almost every village, and similar groups in the Auvergne have revived the traditional dance of that region, called *la bourrée*.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Today's France is still a land of sharp class divisions and pronounced income disparity. France is affected by many of the major problems facing other European nations, such as unemployment, pollution, and inadequate housing. In addition, provisions must be made for immigrants and the elderly, whose numbers are increasing. In October and November 2005, France experienced its worst riots since May 1968, which were triggered by the accidental death of two teenagers, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, in Clichy-sous-Bois, a working-class commune in the eastern suburbs of Paris. The unrest spread to poor housing projects in various parts of France. The riots were fueled by the problems of youth unemployment and a lack of opportunities for France's poorest communities, but anti-immigrant and especially anti-Muslim sentiment also played a role. Islam is seen as the most serious challenge to the country's secular model in the last 100 years, and the growing numbers of African, North African, and other Arab immigrants has led to an increase in social and racial discrimination against those groups. In another indication of the growing immigrant popu-

lation and the government's attempt to deal with it, in 2004 France banned the wearing of Muslim headscarves in schools.

Work stoppages by unions seeking higher pay still occur, and public-sector strikes and protests are a source of instability. Illicit drug use is a problem, and France is a transshipment point for South American cocaine, Southwest Asian heroin, and European synthetics.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The lot of French women has gradually improved since World War II. Although they were granted the vote in 1944, their husbands could still prevent them from having jobs as recently as 1965, and married women were also not allowed to have their own bank accounts. Although many French women today have reached the highest executive and managerial positions in the workforce, women still face open discrimination in their professional lives, both in advancement and in salary levels. Although more than 56% of women have received higher education, they make up less than 5% of senior managers in the largest 200 French companies, and earn on average 20% less than men.

Domestic violence remains a serious problem in France, as was highlighted by the 2003 death of actress Marie Trintignant at the hands of her lover. Studies show that approximately 1 in 10 women are beaten at home.

In a positive development for women, on 28 June 1999 articles 3 and 4 of the French Constitution were amended to promote equal access for men and women to elected positions; the law was adopted on 6 June 2000. Political parties now have to endorse an equal number of men and women candidates in municipal, legislative, and European elections. Parties failing to meet this requirement either have their lists declared ineligible or, for legislative elections, face financial sanctions. France is now able to boast one of the most feminized political leaderships in the world.

A majority of the French are relatively tolerant on the issue of homosexuality: as of 2001, 55% of the population thought homosexuality was an "acceptable lifestyle." There are large gay and lesbian communities in Paris and in other major cities. As of 2008, Paris had a gay mayor, Bertrand Delanoë. Any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment or service, public or private, has been prohibited since 1985. Gay and lesbian people are free to serve in the armed forces. In 2004 the National Assembly approved legislation which made homophobic or sexist comments illegal. Civil Solidarity Pacts (PACS), a form of registered domestic partnership, were enacted in 1999 for both same-sex and unmarried opposite-sex couples. Couples who enter into a PACS contract are afforded most of the legal protections and responsibilities of marriage.

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—revised by J. Hobby

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## FRISIANS

**LOCATION:** The Netherlands (province of Friesland); Germany; Denmark; North America

**POPULATION:** 643,000 in Friesland; 50,000 in the North Frisians Islands

**LANGUAGE:** Dutch; Frisian; English; French; German

**RELIGION:** Protestant; Mennonite

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Frisians, who live in Friesland, a northern province of the Netherlands, value their independence as a unique ethnic group. The only Dutch province to retain its own language, Friesland resisted foreign domination for much of its history, and some Frisians still harbor dreams of regaining their political independence some day. They have their own flag, coat of arms, national anthem, and national drink. However, Friesland shares the basic Dutch struggle to protect its land from the sea. Like other low-lying parts of the Netherlands, it owes its existence to the resourcefulness of its people in fending off the perpetual threat of flooding. Frisians began building the “Golden Hoop” of dikes to extend the length of their coastline as long ago as AD 1000, draining their land with that most quintessential of Dutch symbols—the windmill.

There is archaeological evidence of Frisian culture as early as 400 to 200 BC. The Frisians traded hides to the Romans during the 1st century AD but successfully fended them off when they demanded tribute payments, forcing the Romans to retreat from the region by AD 70. The Frisians' political and territorial power peaked between AD 700 and 900, before the Franks—a Germanic tribe that had resided in Friesland since AD 350—consolidated their control of the region. The Franks brought Christianity to Friesland, although it took several centuries for the new religion to become well established, and even then a body of pre-Christian beliefs survived, intertwined with the symbols and observances of Christianity. During the Middle Ages, many of the scattered Frisian farms were consolidated into villages, and the region's 11 cities, independent of county control, were established.

Continuing their independent tradition, the Frisians resisted domination by the Saxons in the 14th and 15th centuries under the rallying cry, “Free and Frisian, without Tax or Excise.” Friesland was one of 17 provinces making up the Low Countries (the Netherlands together with present-day Belgium and Luxembourg) that rebelled against Spanish rule in the mid-16th century, acknowledging William of Orange as their leader. In 1579, under the Treaty of Utrecht, Friesland joined with six other northern provinces—Holland, Zeeland, Groningen, Overijssel, Gelderland, and Utrecht—to form the “Seven United Provinces,” the forerunner of the modern Netherlands. The Dutch became a leading commercial and colonial power in the 17th century, establishing settlements and colonies in both the Eastern and Western hemispheres. While Holland's strong economic position made it the dominant member of the union, Friesland maintained a high degree of regional autonomy.

Weakened by naval wars with Britain, the Dutch were defeated by the French revolutionary armies in 1795 and remained under French rule through the Napoleonic period. Supporting the House of Orange, led by King William I, Friesland became

part of the kingdom of the Netherlands, which was established at the Congress of Vienna in 1814. (The Netherlands originally included Belgium, which broke away in 1830 to establish its own kingdom.) In the 20th century, the Netherlands remained neutral in World War I and declared neutrality in World War II but was invaded by the German army. The Dutch resistance, in which the independent-minded Frisians played an active role, incurred heavy losses, and the country suffered severe repression until it was liberated by Allied forces in 1945.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Friesland is one of the northernmost provinces of the Netherlands. It is bounded on the west and north by the Wadden Sea (*Waddenzee*), on the east by the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe, on the south by the province of Overijssel, and on the southwest by the Zuider Zee (*Ijssel Meer*). The province has an area of 3,357 sq km (1,297 sq mi), most of which is below sea level. Four of the five Wadden Islands also belong to Friesland. The people of this land, which was reclaimed from the sea some 2,000 years ago, have waged a continuous struggle against storms and flooding. A landmark in that struggle is the 20-mile-long Friesland dike, built in 1934, which connects the province to Noord-Holland to the west and encloses the waters of the Ijssel Meer, essentially turning it into a lake. In addition to the waters of its long coastline, Friesland has some 30 other lakes. The region's soil is a mixture of sand, clay, and peat.

As of 2005, Friesland had a population of 643,000. Frisians are an insular, self-reliant people, proud of their ethnic heritage, which some claim is unique to the Netherlands. Most native Frisians remain in the province throughout their lives, and many can trace their ancestry 200 years or more.

Frisians live in other parts of the Netherlands, as well as in Germany, Denmark, and North America. In Germany, most Frisians live in Lower Saxony, which is near the Netherlands, or in Schleswig-Holstein, which is near Denmark. The Ostfriesland Islands are made up of seven islands (Borkum, Juist, Norderney, Baltrum, Langeoog, Spiekeroog, and Wangeroog). Located in the North Sea, they are popular vacation spots and are home to a national park. The Ostfriesland Peninsula is near the Netherlands border and the Jadebusen Bay. The capital is Emden. Off Schleswig-Holstein, the North Frisian Islands (Nörd Frisische Insel) are home to 50,000 Danes.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Although Dutch is the official language of Friesland, as elsewhere in the Netherlands, about half of Friesland's 643,000 residents speak both Dutch and Frisian. Frisian is a Germanic language that is similar to Dutch and English. There are three Frisian dialects: Northern, Eastern, and Western. Most Frisian speakers use the language at home but speak Dutch in the workplace and other public settings. It is common to combine the two languages into a hybrid called "Town Frisian." In addition, many Netherlands speak (or at least understand) English, French, and German, which are taught in the secondary schools. The fishing village of Hindelopen is unusual in that it has its own dialect. With a population of 900, it is believed to be the smallest town in the world to publish its own dictionary.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Friesland has a substantial body of Germanic folklore that has survived from pre-Christian times. Popular tales and supersti-



tions feature a variety of devils, ghosts, witches, elves, wizards, and trolls, as well as female spirits who may help or harm travelers. (The dangerous ones, said to live underground and kidnap travelers in the night, are called "white ladies.") According to a popular folk belief, funeral processions should follow a winding path to confuse the spirit of the deceased so that it will not be able to return and haunt the living. For the same reason, the coffin is traditionally carted around the cemetery three times before being interred.

"The Seven Wishes" is a traditional Frisian folktale set at a time when the land was believed to be populated by Little People. It is the story of an old fisherman named Jan and his wife, Tryn. One day Jan caught a magic silver fish that promised him seven wishes, on the condition that he choose wisely. The humble fisherman's only desire was for a new boat because his old one was about to fall apart. However, his wife got carried away by greed, demanding a new house, furnishings, servants, and other luxuries. Finally, she demanded absolute power, and the fish took away everything it had given them. The old woman learned her lesson, the couple realized that what truly mattered to each of them was the other, and they contentedly resumed their modest existence.

## 5 RELIGION

In the Netherlands, 31% of the population is Catholic and 41% have no religion; however, Protestantism is the majority religion in Friesland. About 85% of Frisians belong to one of two Calvinist churches, the Dutch Reformed Church (*Hervormde*

Kerk) or the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk), and 5% are Mennonites. Some Frisians still retain certain pre-Christian beliefs (called *byleauwe*) dating back to the 8th and 9th centuries.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Frisians observe the Dutch legal holidays—New Year’s Day (January 1), the Queen’s Birthday (April 30), Memorial Day (May 4), National Liberation Day (May 5), and Christmas (December 25–26)—as well as other standard holidays of the Christian calendar, including Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, Ascension, and Whitmonday. Easter is considered an especially important holiday. It is observed with a special dinner and an Easter egg hunt similar to those held in the United States. The Queen’s Birthday is another important occasion, marked by flag displays and parades. On this day, girls wear orange ribbons in their hair in honor of the royal family, the House of Orange. Frisians, like other Dutch people, observe Christmas by attending church services. In the Netherlands, the gift giving that people in other countries associate with Christmas takes place on December 6, the day devoted to Saint Nicholas (*Sinterklaes*, the Dutch equivalent of Santa Claus). According to tradition, Saint Nick and his helper, called Black Peter, sail to the Netherlands from Spain to give children candy and other gifts.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Frisians live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as the sacraments of baptism, first communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student’s progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Frisians, like the residents of the neighboring province of Groningen, are regarded as unsophisticated by Netherlanders living in the southern part of the country. Historically, their perpetual struggle against the sea has given them a strong sense of community, expressed in the concept of *buorreplicht*, or “neighbor’s duty.” Helping one’s neighbors in times of trouble was so crucial to survival that it was actually codified as law under Charlemagne during the Middle Ages. This sense of communal responsibility has survived as a tradition, and relations with one’s neighbors have an importance that surpasses even the ties of kinship in holding Frisian communities together.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional old-fashioned Frisian farmhouse consists of modest-sized living quarters connected to a barn by a narrow section containing a kitchen, milk cellar, and churning area. The living quarters are generally divided into an all-purpose family room and a formal parlor in which visitors are received. Tile roofs have largely replaced the older thatched roofs.

Like other people in the Netherlands, Frisians have access to modern, high-quality health care, and the costs are covered by a national health insurance system. In 2008 the average Dutch life expectancy was 79.25 years. The infant mortality rate was 4.81 deaths per 1,000 live births. Privately funded home nurs-

ing care is provided for children, the elderly, and pregnant women. Frisians enjoy the same extensive road network and state-owned railroad as people elsewhere in the Netherlands and share their passion for bicycling, a favorite form of transportation among the Dutch.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family—called the *gezin*—plays a central role in Dutch life, in spite of the postwar increase in the number of unmarried couples living together. This trend, known as “homing,” is as prevalent in Friesland as in other regions, and the divorce rate for Frisians is also on a par with that elsewhere in the Netherlands, as is the growing number of single-parent families. Instead of the elaborate church weddings of the past, many Frisians today opt for civil weddings. The average age at marriage has risen, as young people are choosing to complete their higher education before starting a family.

## 11 CLOTHING

Like other Dutch people, Frisians wear modern Western-style clothing for both casual and formal occasions. One distinguishing characteristic is their preference for wooden shoes—the modern variety, made of lightweight poplar and generally painted black with leather trim. They use them as functional footwear and not just for tourists or tradition.

## 12 FOOD

Like other Dutch people, Frisians prefer wholesome, simply prepared food, often cooked in butter. Dietary staples include seafood and dairy products, including the world-famous Dutch cheeses. Desserts are often served with whipped cream, and popular beverages include tea, coffee, and beer. The Frisian national drink is a potent, heartwarming Beerenburger, an herbal bitter. The Frisians eat a typical Dutch breakfast of sliced bread, meat, and cheese. Lunch generally consists of bread with jam and butter, cold meat, and buttermilk. A large dinner, served at about 6:00 pm, typically includes soup and a main dish containing meat and vegetables. French fries (*patat frites*)—typically served with mayonnaise or ketchup—are popular snacks, as are waffles smothered in whipped cream or caramel sauce.

## 13 EDUCATION

Students in Friesland, as in the rest of the Netherlands, must attend school from the ages of 6 to 16. The Frisian language is taught in public schools but not in Christian private schools. At the age of 12, all Dutch students take an exam that tracks them into a general, pre-university, or vocational school. At the age of 16, they take school certificate exams in a variety of subjects. There is a university in the capital city of Leeuwarden. Higher education is offered at 13 Dutch universities.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The relative autonomy enjoyed by Friesland for much of its history has given its people a strong sense of ethnic and cultural identity, reinforced by the preservation of their language, folklore, and folk art. The town of Franeker houses the world’s oldest planetarium, built in the 1770s by Eise Eisenga in his own home. Accurately demonstrating the movement of the planets (except for Uranus, which had not yet been discovered), Eisen-



Traditional vessels sail during the start of the annual Friese sailing race on the lake of Grou, Friesland, Netherlands.  
(© Jaap Schaaf/epa/Corbis)

ga's model, which incorporates 10,000 hand-forged nails, has needed only minor adjustments since it was built more than 200 years ago.

### 15 WORK

The economy of Friesland is based primarily on agriculture, and many Frisians living in inland areas work on small family farms, raising crops or dairy cattle. The dairy, construction, and tourist industries are important employers.

### 16 SPORTS

Popular sports in Friesland include cycling, sailing, canoeing, and ice skating. Friesland is home to the famous Elfstedentocht skating race, held every five or six years, when it is cold enough for all the region's canals to freeze over. As many as 20,000 people skate a 125-mile course over the frozen canals connecting Friesland's 11 medieval towns. It is a hypermarathon that began in 1909 and has been run only 13 times since then. Another traditional sport that is popular in Friesland is *fierljeppen*, pole-vaulting across the canals in the warmer months. Sailing is also very popular, and *skûtsje* sailing is a race conducted in July and August on 65-foot sailing barges.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like other Dutch people, the Frisians enjoy spending much of their leisure time partaking in outdoor activities, including camping, hiking, and a variety of sports. One pastime that is unique to Friesland is *wadlopen*, "mudwalking" across the salt flats and mud of the shallow Waddensee when the tides go out. This unusual activity is enjoyed both for the vigorous exercise that it entails and for the bird watching that it allows. *Wadlopen* is often undertaken in organized group outings.

Socializing at the weekly livestock market in Tjouwert serves as an informal source of recreation for many Frisians.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Frisian craftspeople are renowned for their tile work, pottery, and embroidery. Friesland is also noted for the unique folk art that goes into the creation of *ûlebuorden*, elaborately decorated barn gables that feature carved swans and holes through which owls can fly (*ûlebuorden* means "owl boards"). Once a functional creation, *ûlebuorden* are now considered decorative artifacts.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Frisians experience many of the social problems found in all modern, industrialized countries.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in the Netherlands, including Friesland, make up 44% of the workforce and 37% of the members of Parliament. They enjoy equal rights under Dutch law. Abortion has been legal since 1981, and it is allowed for most reasons. Since 1984, abortion procedures have been provided free of charge.

Homosexuality is very much accepted in the Netherlands. Since 2001, same-sex couples have been allowed to marry. Today, 2% of all marriages in the Netherlands are between same-sex couples.

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—revised by C. Corrigan.

# GALICIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Gallegos

**LOCATION:** Northern Spain

**POPULATION:** 2.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Gallego; Castilian Spanish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Galicia is one of three autonomous regions in Spain that have their own official languages in addition to Castilian Spanish, the national language. The language of the Galicians is called *gallego*, and the Galicians themselves are often referred to as Gallegos. (The other two regions with their own languages are Catalonia and the Basque region. Like Galicia, they are both in the northern part of the country.) The Galicians are descended from Spain's second wave of Celtic invaders, who crossed the Pyrenees mountains in about 400 BC and settled in the western and northwestern parts of present-day Spain. However, it was the Romans, arriving in the 2nd century BC, who gave the Galicians their name, derived from the Latin *gallaeci*.

Galicia was first unified as a kingdom by the Germanic Suevi tribe in the 5th century AD. The shrine of St. James (Santiago) was established at Compostela in 813, and Christians throughout Europe began flocking to the site, which has remained one of the world's major pilgrim shrines. The Moorish era that began in the 8th century had little effect on Galicia, as the kings of neighboring Asturias expelled the Moors from the region before their culture could gain a strong foothold there. After the unification of the Spanish provinces under Ferdinand and Isabella in the 15th century, Galicia existed on the margins of power as a poor region geographically isolated from the political center in Castile to the south. Prevented from expanding their territory by the proximity of the Portuguese border, the Galicians had to make do with their existing land, and their poverty was worsened by frequent famines. With the discovery of the New World in 1492, large numbers emigrated. Today, there are more Galicians in Argentina than in Galicia itself.

Although Francisco Franco was a Galician himself, his dictatorial regime suppressed the region's aspirations toward political and cultural autonomy. Since his death, however, a revival of Galician language and culture has taken place, and a growing tourism industry has improved the region's economic outlook.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Galicia occupies 29,434 sq km in the northwest corner of the Iberian peninsula. Squarish in shape, the region is bounded by the Bay of Biscay to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the River Miño to the south (marking the border with Portugal), and León and Asturias to the east. Galicia's coastline contains a number of scenic estuaries (*rias*), which are drawing increasing numbers of tourists to the region. The area's mild, rainy maritime climate is in sharp contrast to the dry, sunny lands of southern Spain.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Most Galicians speak both Castilian Spanish, the national language of Spain, and *gallego*, their own official language. The



percentage of Galicians who speak Gallego is greater than the percentage of Basques or Catalans who speak the languages of their respective regions: 88% of Galicians speak Gallego and 94% understand it. The language has come into much wider use since Galicia attained the status of an autonomous region. Like Catalan and Castilian, Gallego is a Romance language (one with Latin roots). Gallego and Portuguese were a single language until the 14th century, when they began to diverge. Today, they are still similar to each other.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Galician folkloric tradition is very rich and based in diverse ethnic and cultural components with a predominance of the Celtic and Roman civilizations. Most present-day Christian festivities have a Celtic origin; among them is Saint John's eve in which bonfires are lit, people jump over them and bathe in the sea, reenacting cleansing ceremonies of pagan ancestry. Towns and villages celebrate, usually in summer, their own Patron Saint's Day with different festivities, among them, *romerías*, that usually include Mass, a procession, dining in the open, and folkloric and modern dancing. Paramount among these religious celebrations is el Día de Santiago (Saint James' Day), on July 25, Galicia's Patron Saint, that attracts to the city of Compostela many Galicians living abroad. These are lavish and emotional celebrations with spectacular *fuegos artificiales* (fireworks) in front of the cathedral, religious ceremonies, and folkloric music and dancing.

The *rapa das bestas* takes place in summer and is a popular feast surrounding the cropping of the manes of the horses that had been living wild the rest of year. Galician Shrovetide celebrations (*carnavales*) have ancestral magic and pagan components that make it different from the ones in the rest of Spain.

Celtic culture manifests itself in a number of traditions and beliefs concerning the dead. Ghosts and spirits are believed to live in the forests and the water. Supernatural powers are attributed to a variety of beings, including *meigas* (witches), who provide potions for health and romance; clairvoyants, called *barajeras*; and *curandeiros* or *curandeiras* (healers). To ward off the evil-eye there are amulets made out of coral and *azabache* (jet-black).

Like in the rest of the Celtic world, traditional music has been played by bagpipes that accompany traditional dances like the *muñeira*. Today there is a modern cultural and musical movement, *celtismo*, which promotes cultural links among the peoples of Celtic ethnicity like musical encounters and festivals. There are quite a few bands of new-wave traditional Galician music, the most famous being "Milladoiro," that since the 1970s has led the revival in Galician music. The Ortigueira Festival has become an essential date on the European music calendar. As far as classical music goes Galicia has two orchestras, the Galician Symphonic and the Galician Royal Philharmonic. There is also the yearly Ourense Film Festival.

#### 5 RELIGION

Like their neighbors in other parts of Spain, the vast majority of Galicians are Roman Catholics, although, on the whole, the women tend to be more religious than the men. Galicia contains numerous churches, shrines, monasteries, and other sites of religious significance, most notably the famous cathedral at Santiago de Compostela in the La Coruña province.



Surpassed only by Rome and Jerusalem as spiritual centers of the Catholic Church, Santiago has been one of the world's great pilgrimage shrines since the Middle Ages. According to local legend, a shepherd discovered the remains of St. James here in the year AD 813, led to the site by a bright star (the name "Compostela" is derived from the Latin words for "bright star," and "Santiago" is Spanish for "St. James"). The trek across the Pyrenees that has drawn millions of people for over a thousand years attracts today a growing number of modern-day pilgrims from around the world. It was declared the first European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe in 1987, and one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in 1993.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

(See Section 4 Folklore)

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Besides baptism and marriage, the first Communion and military service could be considered rites of passage for Spaniards. The first three of these events are the occasion, in most cases, for big and expensive social gatherings in which the family shows its generosity and economic status. At times, families dig into their savings or borrow money in order to pay for these status shows. Spain abolished compulsory military service in 2001. The armed forces are now all volunteer.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The pervasive temperament associated with Galicia, a mountainous land of ever-present rain and mists and lush greenery, is one of Celtic dreaminess, melancholy, and belief in the supernatural. There is a special term—*morriña*—associated with the nostalgia that the many Galician emigrants have felt for their distant homeland. Galicians are fond of describing the four main towns of their region with the following saying: *Coruña se divierte, Pontevedra duerme, Vigo trabaja, Santiago reza* (“Coruña has fun, Pontevedra sleeps, Vigo works, and Santiago prays”).

Since the 1960s, there has been a steady improvement of the economy mainly due to industrial development and tourism, as well as an evolution in customs. Spaniards frequently travel abroad and have adopted customs from other cultures in the last 25 years or so. Although many people living in rural areas have moved to the city, the present generations have preserved the family house in the village and return there at the time of fiestas and for vacation and remain loyal to their community or pueblo. The economic prosperity enjoyed by Galicia has allowed many people to also have a vacation home in the country or an apartment at the beach.

In the cities, office hours begin at 9:00 AM and traditionally include an extended afternoon lunch break beginning at 2:00 PM. Workers then return to their offices from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. The day typically ends with a walk (*paseo*) with friends or family and/or visits to neighborhood bars for a few drinks, appetizers (*tapas*) and conversation. Dinner is often eaten as late as 10:30 PM. Both blue and white collar workers have a paid month vacation, which they usually spend by the sea, the mountains or travelling abroad. Galicians are considered to be friendly and outgoing. It is customary to shake hands and in a social setting women usually kiss their friends on both cheeks. Young groups are formed by co-workers, fellow students or people from the same town that go together to discotheques, organize parties and excursions, and date among themselves. The average citizen spends a great deal of time out of the house. There is an active street life; many people live downtown, frequent bars and restaurants, and go to bed late. Spaniards move from place to place less than Americans and, once they get a job, many aspire to return to their birthplace and settle there. Regional loyalties are usually strong and the new autonomous status of the old provinces has strengthened this feeling. It is not unusual to have lifelong friends known since kindergarten.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Like in the rest of Spain, Galicia today is a consumer society that relies on credit cards, loves to go shopping and is interested in cars, gadgets and entertainment. Vigo and A Coruña era both big cities, industrial centers and important Atlantic ports. Galicia has a large fishing fleet with modern boats that work in the African coast and the Northeastern Atlantic. It also has a well-established canning industry and a flourishing tourism industry. Galician towns and cities are linked by bus and rail to the rest of the country, and Santiago de Compostela has an airport with regular flights to Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, and other points in Spain as well as foreign cities including London, Paris, and Amsterdam. There is a National Health Service, cities have both general practitioners and specialists

in all medical fields, and the University of Santiago de Compostela has an excellent medical school.

City dwellers typically live either in old granite houses or newer brick or concrete multistory apartment buildings. Outside of the largest cities, most Galicians own their own homes, living in some 31,000 tiny settlements called *aldeas*, which number between 80 and 200 people each. They are usually made up of single-family homes of granite, with animals kept either on the ground floor or in a separate structure nearby. Hemmed in by Portugal, Galicia was historically unable to expand its territory, and its inhabitants were forced to continually divide up their land into ever smaller holdings. According to a popular saying, “Galicians never use handkerchiefs; they till them.” Because of these circumstances, Galicia traditionally was a land of emigrants to Spanish America, to Europe and to the industrial areas of Spain. Village farmhouses are distinguished by the presence of granaries, called *hórreos*, granite structures raised on stilts for protection from rodents and dampness. Crosses on their roofs invoke spiritual protection for the harvest.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The nuclear family is the basic domestic unit in Galicia—extended families account for only 10% of all households. Elderly grandparents generally live independently as long as both are alive, and even widows tend to remain on their own as long as they can, although widowers tend to move in with their children’s families. However, there are usually not many children one can move in with, as Galicians often relocate from their native villages or leave the region altogether. Galician women have a relatively high degree of autonomy and responsibility, often performing the same kinds of work as men in either agriculture or trade. Over three-fourths have paid jobs. Women also shoulder the bulk of responsibility for household chores and child-rearing, although men do assist in these areas.

Today’s Spanish families are much smaller than in the past and usually have two children. Actually the birth-rate is one of the lowest in Europe, and fewer people live in their homes with extended family. Traditional patterns are also changing; young men and women are as independent as the economy allows, and they frequently live together before getting married.

## 11 CLOTHING

Like people elsewhere in Spain, Galicians wear modern Western-style clothing, although their mild, rainy maritime climate requires somewhat heavier dress, especially in the wintertime, than that worn by their neighbors to the south. Before rubber boots and shoes were made, country people wore wool slippers inside wooden shoes; they are still used today and are also sold as folkloric souvenirs.

In the last decades the Galician fashion industry has greatly developed and some firms, like Zara and Adolfo Domínguez, are known the world over.

## 12 FOOD

Being a large country with different geographic and climatic areas, Spain also has a wide variety of regional dishes. Galician cuisine is highly regarded throughout Spain. Its most striking ingredient is a plentiful variety of high-quality seafood, including scallops, lobster, mussels, large and small shrimp, oysters, clams, squid, many types of crab, and goose barnacles



A pack of wild horses are gathered together during a round-up in the Galician region of Spain. The round-ups are a traditional event for Galicians during the summer months. (AP Images/Delmi Alvarez)

(*percebes*); octopus is also a favorite, seasoned with salt, paprika, and olive oil (*pulpo a feira*, or *pulpo a la gallega*); *empanadas*, a popular specialty, are large, flaky pies with meat, fish, or vegetable fillings; favorite fillings include eels, lamprey, sardines, pork, and veal; *caldo gallego*, a broth made with turnips, cabbage or greens, and white beans, is eaten throughout the region. A hearty dish popular in colder weather is *lacón con grelos*, pork shoulder prepared with greens and potatoes. Popular desserts include almond tarts (*tarta de Santiago*), a regional specialty, and the *churros* (fried pastry) eaten elsewhere in the country. The Galicians drink a strong liquor called *aguardiente*, burned (*queimada*) with lemon peel and sugar. On festive occasions, the *queimada* is prepared by night, or in the dark, and while the *aguardiente* burns and it is poured, a magical *conjuro* is recited usually by the person pouring it.

Popular snacks served at *tapas* bars in Galicia include grilled sardines, roasted small green peppers (*pimientos de Padrón*), and the *tetilla* cheese for which the region is famous. Galicia has refined and marketed its white and red wines and today Albariño and Ribeiro wines are highly appreciated.

### 13 EDUCATION

Schooling in Galicia, as in other parts of Spain, is free and compulsory from the ages of 6 to 14, when many students begin the *bachillerato* course. The adult literacy rate is estimated at 98%. University education is general. Spain has 31 state-run

universities and an increasing number of private ones. Students receive a diploma after three years of general study and a *Licenciatura* upon completing a program of specialized study lasting two or more years. Centralized public education depends on the Ministry of Education. Galicia has several universities, the one in Santiago de Compostela being one of the oldest in Europe; its medical school enjoys a well deserved reputation. The Galician language, Gallego, is taught at all levels, from grade school through university.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Compostela is considered a regional shrine. Her poetry has been compared to that of the American poet Emily Dickinson, who lived and wrote at approximately the same time as de Castro. Galician literature begins in 1196, the date of the first known lyric poem written in the Galician-Portuguese language. This lyric poetry, influenced by the troubadours that travelled the Camiño de Santiago (the Road to Santiago), flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries. Among these minstrels were Martin Codax and Pero Meogo. The most famous genres of composition are *cantigas de amigo*, love poems in the voice of a woman, and *cantigas* in praise of the Virgin Mary. Alphonso X, king of Castile and León, wrote the *Cantigas de Santa María* in Gallego, 427 poems to the Virgin, each set to its own music; they are a masterpiece of European medieval music that has been preserved in performances and compact

disc recordings up to the present day. Literary Galician was reduced to the oral tradition and a few written texts until the *Rexurdimento*, a cultural and literary revival in the second half of the 19th century to which the names of Rosalía de Castro, Eduardo Pondal, and Manuel Curros Enríquez are attached. Rosalía de Castro's grave is in Santiago. By the end of that century, Emilia Pardo Bazan emerged as one of the greatest fiction writers of the Naturalistic school. In the 20th century, great Galicians included the dramatist and novelist Ramón del Valle-Inclán; fiction writer, poet and playwright Rafael Dieste; and artist, painter, and novelist Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao. Other Galician writers include Alvaro Cunqueiro, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, and Manuel Rivas, who is the most widely translated Galician writer in history. Camilo José Cela was a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1989.

There are several archives, libraries and museums in Galicia, the most important being the Museo do Povo Galego (The Museum of the Galician People) in Santiago, an important research center and home to boats, clothing, furniture, tools, instruments, and artifacts of ethnographic relevance in the cultural ancestry of the Galician people; The Galician Center of Contemporary Art; and the Museum of the Pilgrimage.

## 15 WORK

Galicia used to be a land of emigrants, and the Galician economy was based mainly in agriculture and fishing. In a process that began in the 1980s it has steadily developed to the point that its economy is one of the best performing in Europe; local companies in sectors such as mining (tungsten, tin, zinc, and antimony), clothing and textiles, pharmaceuticals, canning, agriculture, wood products, and automobiles are well known. Services account for more than 62% of gross domestic product (GDP), industry for about 30% and agriculture and fishing for less than 8%. In 2004 there were 172,000 business located in Galicia from small, family owned enterprises to multinational corporations. One of the largest is the giant clothing company Inditex, a global success story, which owns the retail chain Zara. Other companies with an international scope are Group Copo, Pescanova, Zeitia, and Adolfo Domínguez. The infrastructure has also changed and Galicia now has a system of superhighways, and there is a project to bring the AVE (high velocity train) from Madrid.

The fishing industry is a major employer: Spain's fishing fleet is among the largest in the world, and a good part of it is located in Galicia. Spain's economic prosperity attracts a growing work force, some of it made up from people migrating from rural areas to the cities, seeking higher living standards, and others coming from economically or politically unstable foreign countries, mainly from North- and Sub-Saharan Africa, Spanish America and the Eastern Europe. The majority work in agriculture and in construction.

Since the early 1970s Spain has developed a prosperous tourism industry, which accounts for the majority of the country's income. Since the 1970s Spain has been the second most visited country in the world after France. In 2007 almost 60 million foreign visitors arrived in Spain. Along with summer tourism the country offers cultural tours, international conventions, and sports meetings as well as cruises. There is ample hotel space. A network of beautiful de-luxe government-sponsored hotels (*paradores*) have been located in historical buildings. Galicia has beautiful landscapes, beaches, and fjords

(*rias*), and its wonderful food and wines attract each year an increasing number of visitors.

## 16 SPORTS

As in other parts of Spain, the most popular sport is soccer (called *fútbol*). League matches are played on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from September through May, with tournaments in the summer. Galicia has two teams, Celta de Vigo and Deportivo de A Coruña, home teams of the cities of Vigo and A Coruña, whose rivalry is legendary. Basketball and tennis are also gaining popularity as spectator sports. Participant sports include hunting and fishing, sailing, cycling, and golf.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like people in other parts of Spain, Galicians enjoy socializing at the region's many *tapas* bars, where they can buy a light meal and a drink. The mountains, estuaries, and beaches of their beautiful countryside provide abundant resources for outdoor recreation. In the evenings, they go dancing or have a drink with friends. The mild Spanish climate has fostered an active night life, much of it outdoors in the streets, plazas, taverns, and restaurants. A dinner date may take place as late as 10:00 or 11:00 pm and be followed by a trip to a local club. According to their cultural level, Galicians go to concerts, to the theater, and to movies. People of all ages are fond of television, perhaps the main source of entertainment today.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Galician handicrafts include traditional silver and gold, coral and *azabache* (jet black) jewelry, as well as world-famous Sargadelos porcelain, besides popular artisanal pottery, musical instruments, and wood artwork.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Galicia used to be one of the poorest regions in Spain, and, historically, many of its inhabitants emigrated in search of a better life. In the years between 1911 and 1915 alone, an estimated 230,000 moved to Latin America. Galicians have found new homes in all of Spain's major cities, as well as in France, Germany, and Switzerland. So many emigrated to Buenos Aires in the past century that the Argentines call all immigrants from Spain *gallegos* (Galicians). In recent years, due to Galicia's extraordinary prosperity emigration has declined drastically.

This prosperity has attracted foreign emigrants to Galicia, many of them illegal. Because of the peculiar fjord coastal structure (*rias*) of Galicia there is a drug smuggling problem.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues in Galicia are not different as from the rest of Spain, and women have an ever-increasing role in society. Approximately 15% of Spain's Armed Forces are women and the Defense Secretary (as of 2008) was a woman. Many women hold municipal and government posts as councilwoman, mayor, university professor, and director general and several have been, and are, ministers of the crown or run their own businesses. Evidence of the secular nature of contemporary Spain can be seen in the widespread support for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Spain. In June 2005 a bill was passed to allow gay marriage, making Spain the third country in the world to allow same-sex couples to marry.

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—revised by S. Garcia Castaneda

**GEORGIANS**

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Kartveli; Gurji

**LOCATION:** Georgia

**POPULATION:** 4.3 million (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Georgian

**RELIGION:** Georgian Orthodoxy

**1 INTRODUCTION**

The people we know as Georgians call themselves *kartvelebi* and their country *Sa-kartvel-o*, literally, "the land of the *kartvelebi*." The word *Georgia* probably comes from the Turkish word *Gurji*, which is what Turks call Georgians. It is hard to pinpoint exactly where the Georgians came from, but proto-Georgian tribes, such as the Diauhi, the Tabali, and Muskhi, began to make their appearance at the end of the Bronze Age, splinters possibly from the ancient kingdoms of Urartu and the Vannic kingdoms of the first millennium BC. By the 6th century AD, the west Georgian kingdom of Colchis and the east Georgian kingdom of Iberia (unrelated to the Iberian Peninsula) were established.

The inhabitants of what is now Georgia were well known to the Greeks and Romans. The Georgians had a reputation for gold and metalworking, which explains why the Greeks set the myth of the Golden Fleece in the Georgian kingdom of Colchis. Until this century, many Georgians used a fleece to catch gold from mountain streams. Ancient Greeks also set the story of Prometheus in the Caucasus Mountains on Georgia's northern border. After Prometheus gave fire to humans, Zeus punished him by chaining him to one of the highest Caucasian mountains (some say Elbruz, others Kazbegi). An eagle ate his liver, but it rejuvenated overnight, and the eagle revisited to torture him the next day.

Throughout the centuries, because of its strategic location as a crossroads between Europe and Asia, Georgia was invaded and settled by Greeks, Romans, Persians, Turkic tribes, Arabs, Mongols, and Russians. Georgia was also on one of the many branches of the Silk Road, which carried trade from China and India to Europe and back. As a result, the Georgian population was influenced by a multiplicity of cultures both Oriental and European. This is reflected in the country's architecture, language, literature, and cuisine, which draw upon Persian, Arabic, Greek, and Russian sources. Such intermingling over many centuries resulted in a population with both dark and light skin and brown and blue eyes. Physically, Georgians resemble Greeks or Turks and think of themselves as part of Eastern Mediterranean culture.

Georgians probably developed a proto-national identity around the 10th century, when the Bagratid dynasty established an independent and powerful Georgian confederal state uniting both East and West Georgians, along with other ethnic groups including Turks, Armenians, and Persians. The dominant Kartlian tribe gave its name to the new state (*Sakartvelo*), although Georgian regional groupings, such as the Mingrelians, Khevsurs, and Svans, have retained separate identities to this day. Georgians share their country with other nations who have settled in the region over many centuries. Georgians number 3,661,173 and make up 83.8% of the population in Georgia. The largest ethnic minorities are Azeris (6.5%),



Armenians (5.7%), Russians (1.5%), Ossetians (0.9%), Greeks (0.3%), and Abkhazians (0.1%).

Until recently, most ethnic groups in Georgia lived peaceably together. Georgia was cosmopolitan in culture but, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country has been torn apart by secessionist wars. Both the Abkhazians (an indigenous Caucasian group related to the Adyghe and Cherkess nations of North Caucasia) and the South Ossetians (who speak an Iranian-based language) wish to secede from Georgia.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The total population of Georgia in 2002 was 4,371,535. In 2002 urban dwellers made up 52.4% of the population. The capital of Tbilisi had a population of 1,081,679 that year, with many people continuing to move there from the villages. This has led to a serious population decline in some rural regions. Fighting in Georgia since 1991 has displaced approximately 400,000 people from Abkhazia and former South Ossetia. Almost 300,000 people are registered as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). In 1995 approximately 70,000 of these IDPs (which some call refugees) lived in Tbilisi; the rest were scattered throughout Georgia.

Georgia is between 40°E and 47°E longitude and 41°07'N and 43°35'N latitude and occupies 27,657 square miles, approximately twice the area of Belgium. On its northern border lies the Russian Federation. To the south are Turkey and the Republic of Armenia and to the west and east are the Black Sea and the Republic of Azerbaijan, respectively. Georgia is dominated in the north by the Greater Caucasian Mountain range (Elbruz is Europe's highest mountain at 18,481 feet) and in the south by the Southern Georgian Highlands.

Two-thirds of Georgian territory is mountainous, and between the mountains lie fertile lowlands crisscrossed by some of Georgia's 25,000 rivers, which surge in the spring and summer when the snows melt. Here one finds orchards, vineyards, and in the west, subtropical plantations. Because of the mountains and forests, which make up two-thirds of Georgian terrain, arable land is in short supply, accounting for only about 18% of the total land area. This is made up by its fertility. Most of the population lives in the river valleys, and at least one-third earns its livelihood from the land.

The Georgian climate varies from semi-desert to alpine, but on the whole the climate is hospitable. The Black Sea coast, which forms Georgia's western border, is warm, subtropical,

and very rainy, perfect for growing citrus fruit, tobacco, and tea. In East Georgia, the climate is a drier Mediterranean type, similar to that of Greece, and wine, fruit, vegetables, and grain are the major crops.

Georgia is rich in fauna and flora with more than 5,000 types of wildflowers, 100 different mammals, 330 types of birds, and 160 kinds of fish. Indigenous species include Pitsunda pine, Caucasian spruce, Abkhazian hedgehog, Colchis lizard, Caucasian jay, and Caucasian wild goat (ibex), the horns of which are still used for toasting during feasts. The forests provide good cover for deer, boar, bears, and wolves (the latter have been reintroduced). Hyenas and wild leopard are increasingly rare despite hunting restrictions, and environmental degradation includes deforestation (leading to mudslides in the mountains) and serious pollution of the Black Sea.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Georgian is part of the southwest Caucasian group of languages: Zan (Mingrelo-Chan), Svan, and Georgian proper (Kartuli). It does not belong to any of the world's major language categories (Indo-European, Semitic, etc.) and is incomprehensible to all neighboring peoples. Mingrelians and Svans still speak their own languages at home, although all speak Georgian in public communications. Georgian has its own alphabet, which dates from at least the 5th century AD, influenced by Phoenician-Aramaic and Greek scripts. Since then, there have been two major modifications. The latest alphabet, called *mkhedruli*, has 33 characters and is written from left to right.

Some scholars have suggested Georgian is connected to Basque, but the similarities are superficial. Although there are many word borrowings from Arabic, Turkic, Persian, and Russian, Georgian is quite distinctive. In Georgian, “father” is *mama* and “mother” is *deda*, which can be quite confusing to foreigners. Georgian is particularly rich in indigenous words concerned with agriculture, winemaking, and metalworking—areas in which Georgians have long specialized. For example, all metals have indigenous words: gold is *okro*, silver is *vertskhli*, brass is *titberi*, and copper is *spilenzi*.

For Georgians, language is central to their identity. They are very protective of it. In 1978, when Georgia was still part of the USSR, students organized a major demonstration to defend their language when they felt it was threatened by Russification and diminished legal status. The earliest surviving Georgian literary works date from the 5th century AD. Currently, 98.2% of Georgians consider Georgian their native tongue, and business, political, and cultural activities within the state are conducted in Georgian. Everyday terms in Georgian include *gamarjorbat* (“hello”), *ki* (“yes”), *ara* (“no”), *gmadlobt* (“thank you”), and *nakhvamdis* (“good-bye”).

### 4 FOLKLORE

Folklore in Georgia is extremely popular. Its sources are Christian, Greek, Hindu, pagan, and Persian. The Georgian *Visramiani* (mid-12th century), for example, is based on a Persian and (maybe Indian) prose romance, and the “Wisdom of Balahvar” (10th–11th centuries) is a Georgian Christian version of the story of Buddha. *Amiran-darejaniani* (11th century) is a collection of myths based in part on the Greek tales of Prometheus, and the *Rusudaniani* (17th century) borrows extensively from Arab sources, in particular the Arabian Nights. Other sources of Georgian folklore are the tales of surrounding Caucasian

peoples such as the Ossetians and Cherkess, who share pagan Nart epics focused on the earth-goddess Satanei and her offspring. Georgian folklore includes stories of knights, heroes, fantastic battles, chimeras, monsters, and spirits. Many of these stories crossed over into Georgian folk tales where one commonly encounters anthropomorphic animals, *mzetunakhavi* (the most beautiful woman in the world), *modzalade devi* (a beast often with three heads), and *natsarkekia* (a layabout).

Georgian folklore is intertwined with all aspects of Georgian life, from literature and religion, to cuisine, dance, music, and architecture. One of the greatest early 20th century Georgian poets, Vazha Pshavela, depends heavily in his poetry on the semi-pagan world of the Georgian mountain peoples, such as the Pshavs, Khevsurs, and Svans. In his works, he incorporates their magical myths about demons, sorcerers, the underworld, and describes their local deities and demi-gods.

Folklore legends instill in Georgians fabulous versions of their history. One Georgian legend, known by every school child, concerns the location of the capital, Tbilisi. The legend states that the Georgian king, Vakhtang Gorgasali (AD 452–502), was hunting on the site of present-day Tbilisi when he wounded a deer. The deer, bleeding to death, fell into a warm sulfur spring. The spring water healed the wound. The king, impressed with the therapeutic qualities of the water, decided to establish his capital by the spring.

### 5 RELIGION

Georgia's multi-ethnicity is reflected in its multiplicity of religions. The religion of most Georgians is Georgian Orthodoxy, a branch of Eastern Orthodoxy. East Georgia under King Miriam was converted to Christianity by St. Nino of Cappadocia in 330 AD, the third state following Armenia and the Roman Empire to adopt Christianity as its official religion. St. Nino shares with St. George, the patron saint of Georgia, a special popularity among Georgians. She allegedly created the first Georgian cross out of vines tied together with her hair, a relic that is still preserved.

The early influence of Christianity in Georgia is evident from artifacts dating back to the 3rd and 4th centuries. Christianity was introduced to Georgia through contact with local Jews, as well as by Greek and Roman officials. Ancient Greek and Georgian historic sources suggest—though it is unlikely—that St. Andrew may have visited the area. King Rev of Kartli, who ruled during the middle of the 3rd century, was familiar with the scriptures and became a devout Christian. Historically, Georgians have shown a tolerance for other religions.

The adoption of Christianity helped unite Georgians. With a Christian monarchy in place, the state began to promote a separate identity that contrasted with the neighboring Muslim states of Persia and, after the 15th century, the Ottomans. Georgian Christianity was deeply influenced by Byzantium and when the split between the Roman (Catholic) and Constantinople (Orthodox) Churches occurred in 1054, the Georgian Church sided with Eastern Orthodoxy.

The church is a symbol of national unity to Georgians. It held the country together culturally when it was territorially divided in the late Middle Ages. Georgian churches, influenced by Byzantine style, were built in the most inaccessible places to prevent attack by Muslim armies. They date from the 5th century. Perhaps the most famous is *Svetiskhoveli* (“life-giving pillar”), which is located in the old capital of Mtskheta.



Georgians walk in central T'bilisi during a parade marking the Orthodox Christmas. (Karen Minasyan/AFP/Getty Images)

According to Georgians, the original church was constructed from a sacred wooden pillar that grew from the grave of Sidonia, a devout Christian who was buried clutching Christ's shirt brought to Georgia from Jerusalem. The Georgian Orthodox service is similar to that of most other Eastern churches; there are no pews or sermons, but a ritualized liturgy with a choir and much burning of incense. Women still cover their heads. In common with other churches in the USSR, the Georgian church was devastated by the Soviet state's atheist policies, and its more than 2,000 parishes in 1917 were reduced to 80 by the 1960s. The church began to recover with the arrival of Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy of the late 1980s, and since independence in 1991 the Georgian church has revived and played a prominent part in national life. Patriarch Ilia II was elected in 1977.

There are also a small number of Georgian Catholics and larger numbers of Georgian Muslims in Achara in southwest Georgia and along the state's southern periphery. The Ossetians and Abkhazians are mostly Eastern Orthodox; the Azeris, Assyrians, and Kurds are mostly Muslim; and the Armenians, Greeks, and Russians are Gregorian, Greek Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox, respectively. Georgia was noted for its religious tolerance—despite persecution of Western sects like the Jehovah Witnesses in the late 1990s—and the capital of Tbilisi

has two working synagogues, churches of different denominations, and at least one working mosque.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Georgians venerate tradition, and after the collapse of the USSR, the new government replaced the old communist-inspired holidays with patriotic or religious ones, such as Independence Day (May 26), the day of National Unity (April 9), St. George's Day (November 23), and Mariamoba (August 28). Many Georgians continue to celebrate Christmas and Easter according to the old-style calendar observed by the Georgian Orthodox church. In September and October, the *rtveli*, or grape harvest, is marked by festivals in the villages. Georgian cities also hold celebrations. In the autumn Tbilisi has a *Tbilisoba* festival, which celebrates the life and history of the city. Georgian regions, such as Svaneti and Khevsureti—and even small villages—have their own feast and saints' days.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Orthodox baptism and wedding ceremonies serve as important milestones in Georgian life. Since independence, almost all marriages are celebrated in church and almost every child is baptized. High school children consider graduation an important change and celebrate it with mutual congratulatory



writing on their school uniforms. Death and funerals are conducted in a highly formalized manner in Georgia. For three days before burial, there is a *panashvidi* (wake), during which people, often in their hundreds, visit the family. Forty days later, a *kelekhi*, or commemorative feast, is organized by the family. A one-year commemorative feast is also considered obligatory.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Georgians are both Middle Eastern and European in manner and share many social attitudes with neighboring Mediterranean cultures. Georgians are shaped by values of honor and shame, and view tradition, loyalty to friends and kin, and generosity toward guests as important values. The words *patiosnoba* (“honesty”), *sitskhvili* (“shame”), and *pativi* (“respect”) are commonly heard in Georgian conversation. In contrast to official American values, nepotism—the system by which kin help each other in their careers—is considered mandatory and honorable. This system of mutual help extends to friendships, which in Georgia last for a lifetime. The word for friend in Georgian is *megobari*, which literally means someone who has “shared your drinking bowl.” Important relationships might help a child reach university, secure a promotion for a family member, or give a close friend a new business opportunity. Being disloyal to family or friends or failing to provide sufficient help in time of financial and emotional need mark one as a dishonorable person. Neighborliness is highly valued and Georgians, who in the towns and cities traditionally shared common courtyards, often share food with neighbors.

Guests are held in great esteem. A Georgian proverb says that “a guest is sent by God.” When a guest visits a Georgian house, he or she is lavishly treated, even if the host cannot afford to do so. An offering of food is mandatory. According to Georgian tradition, an enemy who crosses your threshold must be treated well and not harmed. The best way to show respect for a guest is to honor him or her with a *keipi*, or feast. Feasts are opportunities to invite family and close friends, to exchange gossip, to praise Georgian traditions, and to remember the dead. The *keipi* is a central part of Georgian social life, and on formal occasions, such as marriages and deaths, one can expect hundreds of guests. Feasts are characterized by long toasts. A great deal of wine is drunk. During these feasts men should not get visibly drunk, and toastmasters compete eloquently to show their poetic talents. Guests have obligations too and should bring a symbolic gift, such as flowers or chocolates, when they visit. Relationships between friends and family are close. There are certain important rules of behavior that all Georgians remember: greet a person properly, stand up when someone enters a room, and never sit with your back to anyone.

Georgians are very superstitious, and many pagan customs and beliefs are preserved today. In the countryside you still see trees with ribbons attached to them, each symbolizing a wish (they are known as “wishing trees”). This is connected with the old Georgian belief in wood spirits. Before setting off on a journey, Georgians will sit on their suitcase for a few seconds to ensure a safe journey. If a knife falls off a table, Georgians expect a male guest. No female should sit at the corner of a table, which suggests she will not get married.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Sixteen percent of Georgians are 14 years of age and under; 16.6% are 65 and over. The median age is 38.3. Life expectancy in 2004 was 76.51 although there are significant regional and rural differences, and statistics are not reliable in Georgia. Although there are a large number of centenarians in Georgia, the Georgian reputation for longevity has been undermined by modern life. A major killer is heart disease. The infant mortality rate in 2006 was 28 per 1,000 live births, a high figure compared to West European rates. The average family size is 4.1. The percentage of family members living apart from their families (single persons) is 3.1%. The Georgian government is seriously worried about declining birthrates and migration patterns. Between 1989 and 2002, Georgia’s total population declined by 1,129,000, almost a quarter of the total population. This is in part because of the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and declining birth rates; however, the greatest factor is emigration due to poor living conditions and unemployment.

When Georgia was part of the USSR, from 1921 to 1991, the economy was state owned. The USSR transformed Georgia into an industrial country with hydroelectric power, coal and manganese mining, and truck and ship-building. Light industries, such as textile production (silk, cotton, and wool), and food processing (tea, fruit, vegetables, and mineral water) were supported by Georgia’s local agricultural economy. People lived reasonably well, although their incomes were small. Services, such as health care and education, were free, and people paid very little for rent and utilities. Transportation by metro, bus, or trolley was a few cents. Food was cheap and, if it could not be found in the state shops, (which was often the case) it could be bought at small private markets at a higher price. However, medicines were in short supply, and sophisticated medical equipment was only available for the elite (usually communist party officials). Service for plumbing, electrical repairs, and telephone installation was poor. Some people waited 15 years for a telephone or 10 years to buy a car. Televisions, refrigerators, and washing machines were of poor quality. Many times people had to go to the black market, which was illegal, and pay a high price for things, such as video or tape recorders. Housing was in poor condition, and most families in the cities lived in three- or four-room apartments (two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen).

When Georgians gained independence, they believed that things would get better, but switching to a market-based economy has proved very difficult, and for many, economic conditions have worsened. The subsidies for food and services are gone, and the state cannot afford to pay people proper salaries or pensions. Since the Rose Revolution in November 2003, which led to a change of government and major economic changes, macroeconomic figures have improved significantly. Government revenues have quadrupled due to tax reform and improved collection, and annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates averaged 8–9% by 2008. Per capita annual income was \$591 in 2008, but in reality, despite official figures of just 13.6% unemployment, poverty is widespread. Officially, 31% of the population lives on or below the poverty line, and the average pension is about \$30. Inflation is currently about 9.2% and increasing food prices are hurting the less well-off in particular. Higher education and medicine are no longer free, and transportation is increasingly expensive. Georgians now have to be more self reliant. Things are made worse in

the winter due to the high cost of oil and gas. Despite all this, most Georgians are aware they have gained important political freedoms, even though it has been at great economic cost, and do not want to return to the communist period. Georgia has great economic potential and is attracting significant foreign investment. When tourists return to Georgia's ski resorts and beaches, things may begin to improve for broader sections of the population.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Georgian society is patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal. Male culture is dominant, married couples usually move in with the husband's parents, and children adopt their father's name. However, women keep their own surnames when they marry, and there is no longer any real stigma attached to a husband living with his wife's parents. Young couples increasingly choose to live on their own. Social life centers on the family and children. Children are brought up in a structured environment, which inculcates strong respect for family values. Children are expected to respectfully greet older people in the polite form of the Georgian language. (The Georgians, like the French, have two forms of "you"—the familiar *shen*, which is used among friends, and the polite form *tkven*, which is used to address elders or strangers.) Young people are expected to get married and have children relatively quickly. Male children are preferred, although that attitude is changing. In the 1980s, 16% of women married before they were 20, and 55.2% before the age of 25. Divorce was frowned upon. In 1960, there were only 3 divorces per 100 marriages, but that figure rose to 18 in 1992, an indication of changing attitudes and greater pressures on the family. Now it is not unusual to meet divorced parents. Women now marry later than ever before at 25.9 years in 2004, compared to 24.7 in 1990. However, women in Georgia are still expected to do most of the domestic work and child rearing. Women, for example, will always prepare food for guests, clear up afterwards, and do most of the cleaning.

Families are increasingly nuclear (parents and children living in a single unit), with an average of two children, but relatives usually live close by. Grandparents often live physically close enough to take care of the grandchildren. For Georgians, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, and even godparents, are considered close family and should be seen frequently. A person is obligated to help relatives in times of crisis, and it is shameful to neglect family in any way. With unemployment being a major problem in Georgia, the extended family has become important once again as a means of economic survival.

## 11 CLOTHING

Georgians have always had a reputation for being stylish dressers, and this is still evident today as people stroll down the main boulevard, Rustaveli Prospect, in the capital city of Tbilisi. Although Georgians now wear casual clothes and follow the latest fashions, on special occasions they wear traditional costumes. Georgian men still wear different types of regional hats, such as the *svanuri kurdi*, a round brimless felt hat from the Svaneti mountain region, or the *tushuri kurdi*, a black brimless hat made of wool, which comes from Tusheti. In the mountains, shepherds occasionally wear the *nabadi*, a black felt cloak with stiff wide shoulders that can be used as shelter in winter weather, and the *papakhi*, a large shaggy woolen hat. At festive occasions, one can see other traditional costumes, such

as the *chokha*, a tunic that is usually magenta, black, or white and belted at the waist with decorative cartridge casings on the chest, or the *kartuli kaba*, the traditional female costume made up of a silk veil and an embroidered long dress gathered in at the waist and with wide sleeves. There are costumes associated with various regions and professions. The women in Khevsureti are well known for their *talavari* (intricately patterned, woven tunics) and *tsinda-pachichi* (knee-length, thick socks colored by natural dyes). Traditionally, Khevsur women also wear jewelry of silver and semi-precious stones. People dressed as *kintoebi*—tinkers and traders of the 19th century who wore flat, black peaked caps and baggy black trousers in the Persian style—appear at festivals. Women, particularly in the villages, wear black for a year after a death in the family.

## 12 FOOD

Food and wine are a vital part of Georgian culture, and feasting is central to Georgian social life. Georgians eat in abundance and will present guests with dish after dish. The Georgian table, known as the *supra*, is colorful and diverse. It is a mixture of Turkish, Greek, Arabic, and even Indian influences. Food is often spicy, particularly in Samegrelo and Western Georgia, with coriander, tarragon, and *khmeli suneli* (a mixture of spices) being the favorites. Hot and cold dishes are served with side dishes of tomatoes, cucumber, spring onions, *sulguni* (a soft cheese), and *puri* (unleavened bread baked in an open brick oven much like the tandoori). Dishes are brought to the table on small plates, which are often piled up one on top of another. Guests are expected to help themselves. As soon as a guest pauses or a plate is empty, someone will offer another dish.

A typical colorful *supra* might consist of puréed beet and spinach sprinkled with pomegranate seeds, *khachapuri* (a baked cheese bread), *satsivi* (a chicken dish in walnut sauce), *ghomi* (a Georgian version of grits), *chanakhi* (a lamb and vegetable stew), *tolma* (minced meat wrapped in vine or cabbage leaves), and *badrijani nivrit* (eggplant with garlic). Below is a simple *khachapuri* recipe.

### Khachapuri (Georgian cheese bread)

2 cups unbleached white flour  
 ½ teaspoon salt  
 12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) cold butter, cut into pieces  
 2 eggs, beaten separately  
 ¼ cup plain yogurt  
 1¼ pounds mixed Muenster and Havarti cheeses  
 1 egg yolk, beaten

Place flour and salt in a bowl and mix in butter pieces. Stir one beaten egg into the yogurt, and then add the liquid to the flour mixture. Shape the dough into a ball and refrigerate for one hour.

Grate the cheese and combine with the other beaten egg. Preheat oven to 350°F.

Roll out dough to form a 12" x 17" rectangle, trimming the edges. Put the cheese mixture on one half of the dough and fold the other half over the top, sealing the edges

Place cheese dough on a greased baking sheet, brush with egg yolk. Bake for about 30 minutes at 350 or until brown.

Makes 12 to 15 serving pieces. Best served warm.

Other popular Georgian items include *lobio* (beans with grated walnuts and chopped onion) and *chakhokhbili* (chicken stewed with tomatoes). A favorite ingredient in Georgian dishes is walnut, which grows abundantly alongside Georgian highways. Wine, which is sacred to Georgians and has been cultivated in the region longer than most places in the world, is an essential part of any meal. Georgians make a wide variety of both red wines, such as *mukuzani*, and white, such as *tsinandali*, and often store the wine in a *kvevri* (an amphora) buried deep in the ground to keep the wine cool. Regional differences in cuisine are pronounced in Georgia. In Western Georgia, one is more likely to eat *mchadi* (cornbread) and cheese bread, such as *acharuli*, which has an egg baked in the middle of the cheese and dough. Of course, such lavish meals are not a daily occurrence, and Georgians eating at home are more modest, especially in these days of declining standards of living. For sweets, Georgians love to eat extravagantly prepared cakes.

### 13 EDUCATION

Georgians have a long history of educational achievement. Monasteries and academies have been vital centers of learning from the Middle Ages onwards, preserving Georgia's national heritage in times of occupation. The Soviet period saw a rapid expansion of mass education and today, as a result of compulsory schooling, illiteracy has been largely eliminated. In 1979, 30.7% of Soviet Georgia's working population had completed higher or specialized middle education, which made it a highly educated population. However, the educational approach in the Soviet period was both conservative and narrow, and many subjects, such as sociology, could not be taught due to censorship. In the later Soviet years, higher education institutions were extremely corrupt. After independence, many educational reforms were introduced, but declining revenues and economic chaos led to a decline in school attendance, minimal budgetary support for schools, and increasing corruption. Between 1990 and 1997, total enrollments in educational institutions dropped from 1.242 million to 924,000. This decline affected all age groups. Preschool enrollments in public institutions declined most dramatically from about 200,000 to 83,000. Upper secondary enrollments (grades 10–11) fell from 105,000 to 70,000 and vocational education from 42,000 to 20,000. Some of these declines can be explained by emigration, but other indicators, including poverty, government insolvency, and corruption, are significant factors.

Since the Rose Revolution in November 2003, there has been significant reform of curricula (with more emphasis on a liberal arts approach), teacher training, management of schools (parent-teacher councils have been introduced), and the examination system. A universal entrance exam for higher educational institutions, which replaced university-set entrance exams, eliminated much of the corruption at university level. Investment has increased after a report in 1997 noted that 18% of school buildings were in dangerous or unusable condition, while a further 55% needed significant capital repairs. Under the present constitution, education is compulsory and free of charge up to grade 9, but fees have been introduced for students in grade 10 and 11 and almost all university students now have to pay tuition fees. Higher education is largely private. There are 117 accredited universities in Georgia.

Currently, primary school in Georgia includes grades 1–6, basic education goes up to grade 9, and upper secondary cov-

ers grades 10 and 11. The completion of 11 years of schooling in theory qualifies a student for higher education. University usually lasts five years. At the same time, teaching styles are still quite formal, with much learning in school done by rote. Children finish school knowing a great deal of poetry by heart. Final examinations in schools are oral and marked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best. An excellent student is known as a *khutosani* (a “fiver”). Children no longer wear uniforms but are generally respectful toward teachers.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Georgian cultural life draws upon European, Middle Eastern, and on its own indigenous traditions. Georgian singing, whether it is secular or ecclesiastical, dates back to the 5th century. Most folk and sacred songs are polyphonic (multiple harmonized voices) and a *cappella* (without accompaniment). Most performing choirs are male, although female choirs are becoming more popular, and women sing at church services. There are many regional singing styles; the Gurians in West Georgia are well known for their complex use of *krimanchuli* (yodeling). Many Georgians play the piano or guitar, favorite instruments for accompaniment of popular urban songs. Traditional instruments, such as the *duduk* (a double-reeded clarinet-like instrument) and the *panduri* (a three-stringed lute), are used to accompany urban folk songs.

Since the formation of the Georgian State Dance company in 1945, which has toured more than 80 countries, Georgian dance has become a favorite of foreign audiences. The *lezginika*, the *samaia* (a dance performed by three women), and the *mkhedruli* (the military dance), are particular favorites. The men are acrobatic, dancing on the knuckles of their feet, using swords in skillfully choreographed mock fights. The women, in long dresses, glide across the dance floor (on the balls of their feet) using their hands in a symbolic manner reminiscent of Indian and Middle Eastern dances.

Georgians love going to the theater and classical concerts. Georgia has many great classical performers, such as pianists Alexander Toradze and Eliso Virsaladze, violinist Leana Isakadze, bass Paata Buchuladze, *prima ballerina* Nino Ananiashvili, and composer Gia Khancheli. Georgia has its own symphony orchestra, dance, opera, and ballet companies, but the current political and economic crisis in Georgia has put enormous pressure on all arts companies and organizations, and fewer are performing. Under Soviet power, the arts were heavily subsidized, but now they have to be profitable to survive. The Rustaveli Theater Company is widely recognized as one of the most imaginative and talented theatrical groups in the contemporary theater world and continues to tour. Georgian film, with a history going back to the early 20th century (the first Georgian film was made in 1912) and that has produced famous filmmakers, such as Eldar Shengelaia, Giorgi Shengelaia, and Tengiz Abuladze, has been less fortunate. Today, for lack of money, the Georgian film industry has essentially collapsed.

The Georgian literary tradition began with ecclesiastical literature. Early Georgian scholars translated the Bible and other sacred works from Assyrian, Aramaic, Arabic, Armenian, and Greek. Early Georgian literature—hymnography, homilies, hagiography, chronicles—emerged in the 6th and 7th centuries in the Christian monasteries and academies of Greece, Georgia, Mount Sinai, Mount Athos and Jerusalem. An early chroni-

cle of Georgian history is *kartlis tskhovreba* (*The Life of Kartli*), a collection of histories and tales of Georgian kings originally compiled in the 12th century but continually expanded until the 18th century.

Poetry is considered one of the purest arts in Georgia and is frequently recited at the dinner table or among friends. The greatest classic of Georgian secular literature is a 12th-century epic titled *Vepkhistqaosani*, or “Knight in the Panther Skin,” by the poet Shota Rustaveli. Half pagan, half Christian, and influenced by Persian sources (particularly Firdousi’s *Shah-Nameh*), it is about friendship, infatuation, and the search for lost love. Aphorisms from Rustaveli’s epic are used like proverbs: “A lion cub is just as good, be it female or male” and “What you give is yours, what you keep is lost.” Georgian poetry continued throughout the Middle and late Middle Ages, often from the pens of Georgian kings, such as Teimuraz 1 and Archil, but it was the 19th century that witnessed a major Georgian literary renaissance. For the first time Georgian poets, novelists, and essayists, such as Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Galaktion Tabidze, Vazha Pshavela, and Ana Kalandadze, became popular national figures. In the 20th century, many Georgian poets and writers were executed in the purges of the 1930s. Despite brutal oppression and censorship, Georgian literature remained highly lyrical, being motivated by love of country and nostalgia for the past. Georgian literature has produced brilliant works of both prose and poetry, such as Konstantine Gamsakhurdia’s *The Hand of the Great Master*, or Galaktion Tabidze’s great poems “The Moon of Mtatsminda” and “The Wind Blows.” Georgia’s poets and writers have been translated by Russian poets, such as Boris Pasternak and Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

## 15 WORK

About 2.2 million Georgians are in the labor force. Approximately 35.5% work in services, 8.9% in industry, and 55.6% in agriculture. The self-employed account for about 65% of the workforce (mostly farmers). Most Georgians today survive by working two or three jobs, or, in many cases, rely on help from families and friends. The government is unable to pay living wages, stimulate employment, or pay proper social security benefits. The most vulnerable groups are the quarter million “internally displaced persons,” the 700,000–800,000 pensioners, and single mothers. Most of those in state employment receive no more than \$300 a month and are forced to seek extra income, usually by working in small commercial operations or by trading on the black market. A new business class, in many cases former communist party officials, has replaced the old communist elite as the most privileged in society. Income and wealth inequalities have increased considerably over the last 15 years. It is estimated the poorest 10% of Georgians share 2.4% of household income and consumption, while the top 10% share 27%.

## 16 SPORTS

Traditional Georgian sports include wrestling, archery, fencing, javelin throwing, horse riding, *tskhenburti* (a form of polo), and *leloburti* (a field game similar to rugby). Today, the most popular sport in Georgia is soccer, and the best Georgian team until the 1990s was Tbilisi Dynamo, which won the Soviet championship on two occasions and the European Cup Winners’ Cup in 1981. Georgian teams now have their own league

and have entered UEFA and FIFA (the international soccer association that handles the World Cup). Georgian footballers play on European teams, such as Kakhka Kaladze, Zurab Menteshashvili and Levan Kobiasvili. In addition, Georgians have achieved renown in basketball, rugby, mountain climbing, and skiing (a popular sport in the republic’s mountain resorts). As part of the USSR Olympic team, Georgians won 23 gold medals between 1952 and 1980. Since Georgia entered the Olympics in 1994 as an independent state, Georgian athletes have won many medals, mostly in judo and wrestling. In chess, women, such as Nona Gaprindishvili and Maia Chiburdanidze, kept the world championship in Georgian hands for more than 30 years between 1961 and 1991.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

A favorite Georgian pastime is feasting and singing with friends around a table or at a picnic in the countryside. Some of the most popular songs are “*suliko*,” “*mravalzhamier*” (“Be long living”), and “*shen khar venakhi*” (“You are the vine”) are heard at the table. The younger generations are keen followers of the Western rock scene, and there are many Georgian rock bands. Since the collapse of communism, bars and clubs have emerged alongside casinos.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Georgian folk crafts date back more than 2,500 years. The first examples of local pottery come from the 7th century BC. Pottery is still a village craft in Georgia and pots, plates, and all manner of drinking vessels can be bought at the market or even at the roadside. Most pottery is connected with drinking. Simple bowls, known as *pialebi*, are raised to the lips with both hands, and *dokebi* are long-necked pots from which wine is poured. Other crafts include rug making, either woven in traditional Georgian patterns or made from compressed felt with abstract patterns. The colors used most often are deep red, brown, blue, and yellow. Georgians are also very proud of their skills with metal, particularly gold and silver. Their reputation as skilled metalworkers has lasted since the time of ancient Greece. Metal chasing, which Georgians call *chiduroba*, is a treasured craft, as is enameling and jewelry making. Most Georgian women wear jewelry—bracelets, necklaces, and earrings—made of silver and set with semi-precious stones, such as *piruzi* (turquoise) and *dzotsi* (garnet).

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since independence and the breakdown of familiar economic patterns, Georgians have suffered enormous hardship, job insecurity, and poor health. Mutual support among friends and family is extremely important. In the past, housing, food, transportation, health care, and education were heavily subsidized or free. Women received partially paid maternity leave for a year and a half if they wanted to stay at home with a new baby and could retire at 55 (men at 60). Although the quality of support was poor by Western standards, this rudimentary welfare system has disappeared. The current health system, for example, is no longer free and all hospitals have been privatized. Attempts to introduce private insurance schemes have for the most part failed. Medicines are prohibitively expensive for ordinary people. Except in emergencies, people no longer go to the hospital. Deterioration in health care, poorer diets, greater stress, and inadequate immunization programs have led to a

decline in the Georgians' health. This is reflected in increasing death and child mortality rates.

In June 2003 the Georgian government introduced the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Program (EDPRP), the first comprehensive document outlining a strategy for economic recovery and employment. Poorly implemented, the Rose Revolution leadership quickly abandoned the EDPRP in favor of its own strategy—the Basic Data and Directions (BDD) document in 2006, which outlines its priorities as sustainable economic growth and increased private sector-fueled employment. However, at the same time, it cut back on state employment, and 30,000 civil servants lost their jobs between 2003 and 2008. By November 2007, when opposition-led demonstrations almost toppled the Georgian government, it was clear the new government strategy was failing politically. The population was angered by increasing joblessness (20–24 year olds are among the most seriously affected), rising prices, and declining services. Life was getting harder for the vast majority of the population and social problems, such as crime, drug abuse, AIDS and fuel costs, were, it seemed, intensifying.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In the Soviet period, women in Georgia made significant gains in gender equality but still remained unequal in many areas, such as in the home, where traditional patriarchal attitudes remained; at work, where women were paid smaller salaries and concentrated in certain professions, such as teaching and nursing; and in government, where women rarely gained significant posts or power. This situation has continued and worsened in the post-Soviet period. The majority of women employed in the formal sector work in the low-paying fields of agriculture, education, healthcare, and light industry. Vertical and horizontal gender segregation persists in the labor market. According to the State Department of Statistics, in 2004 the average nominal monthly salary of women in all fields of the economy and all sectors was 60% that of men's. Self-employed women in the trade sector earn an average monthly wage that is 68% of men's. As of 2008, women accounted for around 9.4% of members of parliament (MPs), which is indicative of the legislative and internal party barriers to support for women candidates. Women made up 6.4% and 7% of total MPs in the 1995 and 1999 parliaments. There are, however, successful women. In 2008 the foreign minister, Eka Tkeshelashvili, was female, as was the former parliamentary speaker, Nino Burjunadze. Women are well represented in the media, judiciary (44% of judges are women), and in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There were 200 women's NGOs registered in Georgia by 2008, but not all are active). Popular attitudes are very supportive of equal employment rights for men and women but the highly respected and influential Georgian Orthodox church supports traditional family values and the domestication of women. Gender equality is not a priority of the government. Despite signing onto the United Nations' *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* in 1994, there is little concern or focus on legislation on women's issues although two important steps were made in 2006, when legislation on human trafficking and domestic violence against women were introduced in parliament. There is also an Advisory Council on Gender Equality attached to the parliamentary speaker's office.

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—by S.F. Jones

# GERMANS

**LOCATION:** Germany

**POPULATION:** Over 82 million (ethnic German 91.5%, Turkish 2.4%, Italian 0.7%, Greek 0.4%, Polish 0.4%, other 4.6%)

**LANGUAGE:** Standard German (Hochdeutsch)

**RELIGION:** Protestant; Catholic; Methodist; Baptist; Mennonite; Society of Friends; Islam, small numbers of Jews; Unaffiliated or other

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Germany, an independent republic in north central Europe, is one of the continent's largest and most populous nations. Although it has played a pivotal role in European and world history, it has only been a single, unified nation for less than 100 years of its entire history. Originally settled by nomadic tribes, the area that now makes up Germany originally was part of what was called the Holy Roman Empire. It consisted of a cluster of partially independent cities and states. In 1871 the Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck succeeded in creating a unified Germany, which subsequently became involved in two world wars (1914–1918 and 1939–1945), both of which it lost. Following the defeat of Nazi-controlled Germany in World War II (1945) and its postwar occupation by the victorious allied powers, the American, French, and British zones were combined in 1949 to create the democratic Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), while in the same year the Soviet zone became the Communist-controlled German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

Since its inception in 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany has been a strong proponent for European unity. It has been an active supporter of the European parliament and of the various councils that have been formed to integrate the economies and political institutions of the member states. Because of its economic strength, Germany has often been referred to as the “locomotive of Europe.”

Both Germanys recovered from the devastation of the war with impressive speed. However, progress was faster and more dramatic in the west than in the east, and nearly three million East Germans fled to West Germany seeking improved living conditions and greater political freedom. Finally, in 1961, the East Germans put up the Berlin Wall and sealed off the nation's borders to prohibit all further emigration to the west. In the late 1980s, Germany became caught up in the changes sweeping over Communist Eastern Europe, and the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 became one of the most memorable symbols of the Communist system's ultimate collapse. In March 1990 the East Germans held their first free elections, and the two German nations were reunified on October 3 of that year. The German Democratic Republic went out of existence, and West Germany's constitution, laws, and currency were extended to the east, as well as its market-based economy.

Today, the Federal Republic of Germany is one of the largest countries in Europe. It is a prominent member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a powerful engine behind the European Union integration. Germany advocates for closer political, economic, and defense cooperation among the European countries and strongly supports the Organiza-

tion for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This modern cosmopolitan state actively supports the development of democratic institutions and propagates gender equality. In November 2005 a vote in the Bundestag (House of Representatives or lower house) made Angela Merkel Germany's first woman chancellor.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Germany's main regions are the Bavarian Alps (which form the boundaries with Austria and Switzerland); the South German Hill Region that contains the Black Forest; the Central Uplands (including the Harz Mountains and the Thuringian Forest); and the North German Plain. Major rivers include the Rhine in the west and the Danube, which flows from west to east. Reunified Germany has the largest population of any European Union (EU) state.

Since the 1950s, significant numbers of foreign workers have immigrated to Germany from countries including Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, Poland, and other Eastern European countries. By the end of 1991, Germany harbored a foreign population of close to 6 million. As of 2007, 91.5% of the German population were ethnic Germans, 2.4% Turks, Italians amount to 0.7%, Greeks to 0.4%, Polish comprise 0.4% and others account for 4.6%.

Germany consists of 16 federal states called *Bundesländer*. Federal states have designated governmental powers somewhat similar to those of the United States. Before the unification East Germany had 15 districts. However, they were reconstructed and reduced to five so-called “new states” (*die neuen Länder*). Hence, following unification, western Germany has 11 *Bundesländer* and eastern Germany has five.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Standard German, or *Hochdeutsch*, is the nation's official language, but many different dialects are spoken throughout the country and have a strong influence in most areas. Low German, spoken along the North and Baltic sea coasts and on Germany's offshore islands, is close to Dutch and even English (examples: Standard German *Wasser* is Low German *Water*, Standard German *Apfel* is Low German *Appel*). Sorbian is a Slavic language spoken by approximately 60,000 people, and a number of different languages, including Turkish, are spoken by Germany's immigrant populations.

Approximately half of all Germans are fluent in English. Many Germans from the former East Germany speak Russian. Also, many Russian Germans who recently returned to Germany speak Russian. About 3% of Germans are fluent in French.

### EXAMPLE OF A POEM IN STANDARD GERMAN

*Wanderers Nachtlied*  
by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe  
Über allen Gipfeln  
Ist Ruh,  
In allen Wipfeln  
Spürest du  
Kaum einen Hauch:  
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.  
Warte nur! Balde  
Ruhest du auch.

(Translation follows.)

Over the mountaintops  
 There is peace,  
 In all the treetops,  
 You feel  
 Barely a breath:  
 The little birds are silent in the woods.  
 But wait! Soon  
 You too will be at rest.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The most famous body of German lore is the *Nibelungenlied*, dating back to AD 1200. Its characters, such as Siegfried, Brunhilde, and Hagen, have become famous to millions through the operas of Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. During World War II, the Allies called the German fortifications along the French border the Siegfried Line. A prominent role in German folklore is played by a set of tales collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the 19th-century. The *Tales of the Brothers Grimm* is one of the most frequently translated books in the world.

Another legendary figure in German folklore is Till Eulenspiegel. He was a 14th century peasant, famous for his wit and irreverence. Impudent trickster, Till Eulenspiegel loved to play practical jokes on people in authority exposing their greed and folly, hypocrisy and foolishness. Till's story was first written down in the 16th century. It then became the inspiration for an orchestral work by Richard Strauss and a poem by Gerhardt Hauptmann.

#### 5 RELIGION

About 68% of the German population belongs to a Christian Church. An estimated 34% of Germans are Protestants and nearly 34% are Catholics. The Protestants live mainly in the north of the country and the Catholics in the south. Other denominations, some with increasing membership, include Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, and the Society of Friends. The social and charitable work of the churches is an integral part of German society. Churches provide formidable support for hospitals, assisted-living facilities, nursing homes, schools, and day-care centers. At the same time the German Basic Law guarantees freedom of faith and freedom of religion and declares that no one may be discriminated against due to their faith or religious opinions. Even though religion plays an important role in Germans' daily lives, there is no state church in Germany and no control of the churches by the state.

Before the 1930s, Germany had a Jewish population of around 530,000. However, the great majority fled or was killed in the Nazi Holocaust of World War II. As of 2008 there were approximately 100,000 Jews living in Germany, a number that is expected to increase. Many of them arrived from the countries of the former Soviet Union. The largest Jewish community in Germany exists in Berlin comprising more than 11,000 members. The inflow of workers from foreign countries and their families brought to Germany religious communities that were previously unrepresented. Hence, today approximately 3 million Muslims live in Germany, most of them coming from Turkey

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Germany's many holidays include New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Labor Day (May 1), and Christmas. St. Nicolas Day is the Children's most favorite holiday when they



find treats and gifts in their socks in the morning. Many different local festivals are celebrated depending on a region. Similarly, the observance of some religious holidays varies from one region to another. Catholic areas celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi (11 days after Pentecost) and All Saints' Day (November 1), while Lutheran regions observe Reformation Day (October 31) and Repentance and Prayer Day (the third Wednesday in November).

One of Germans' most favorite holidays without a doubt is Christmas. Many Germans decorate their homes with a Christmas tree. In fact, the Christmas tree tradition is believed to have originated in Germany in the 17th century. German Christmas trees are often decorated with real candles. Germans begin their Christmas festivities a month in advance with Christmas Markets or *Weihnachtsmarkte*. Open each weekend in December in many towns these unique markets sell candles, Christmas trees, seasonal goods, handmade crafts, art, delicious celebration food, warm spiced wine and more. The best Christmas Markets are believed to be in Rothenburg, Nürnberg, Bamberg, Ulm, Augsburg and Munich.

A famous regional German holiday is *Oktoberfest*. This beer drinking jamboree is held in several different cities in Germany, but the true *Oktoberfest* is the specialty of Munich. Traditionally this festival is celebrated in October, after the harvest is already gathered. This is the time to get together, relax, sing traditional songs and have lots of fun and drink beer.

Another spectacular local festival is *Fasching* or *Karneval* (depending on a region). Except for *Oktoberfest*, it is the one

time of year when many typically sedate Germans loosen up and go a little crazy. Fasching and Karneval celebrations vary from region to region and take place at different times of the year depending on the date of Easter. Some of Germany's best known celebrations are held in Cologne, Mainz, Munich, and Rottweil. But of course Cologne's Karneval is not really the same as Munich's Fasching. Today Fasching and Karneval involve elaborate parades. Marchers often would wear large cartoonish heads lampooning regional and national politicians. Another part of the celebration involves parade royalty (princes, princesses) and a sort of "counter-government" during the season. The highlight of the parade is masks and carnival costumes of all kinds of forest creatures, fairytale characters and such. Participants take great pride in their attire and sometimes spend a year or more to complete their garb. The jolly atmosphere accompanying the parades and intricately crafted masks and costumes with patterns rooted in medieval times, take the observer to the heart of German ancient traditions.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Germans live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, the rites of passage that many young people undergo are religious rituals. Both Catholics and Protestants have confirmation ceremonies symbolizing rites of passage from youth into adulthood when one is expected to be mature enough to voluntarily assume responsibility for one's religious faith. A secular rite of passage that marks for the German atheists the transition from childhood to adulthood is a specially-designed ceremony known as the *Jugendweihe*, or "youth consecration." This somewhat controversial 150-year-old ritual was mainly celebrated in eastern Germany during the past 50 years and is now introduced to all of the Germany's non-religious teenagers.

In addition, a student's progress through the education system considered to be a rite of passage and is celebrated by many families with graduation parties. Marriage signifies rite of passage in societal status. Moreover military or civil service marks passage from teenage years to responsible adulthood for men. German young men between the ages of 18 and 25 are subject to conscription into the *Bundeswehr*, Germany's armed forces. At present, the length of service is nine months. Training and garrison duty is usually near the young man's home town. Conscientious objectors can engage in substitute service in hospitals, nursing homes, and similar civil protection organizations. Civil service obligation extends to 100 hours each year for six years.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Popular stereotypes cast the Germans as diligent, industrious, efficient, and rather humorless. However, German humor does exist, but it tends toward the farcical and slapstick. Regional differences make it hard to pin down a national character or set of traits. The division between north and south is older and deeper than that between the formerly divided east and west so that the strong sense of regional pride is incorporated into the federal system of German government and often attributed to personal traits of people. The Rhinelanders of the north are said to be easygoing and good-natured, while the Bavarians of the south are characterized as lively and excitable. Frisians, who live between the North and Baltic Seas, have a reputation for being taciturn and tend to be the object of jokes based on

their perceived lack of sophistication. On the whole, however, Germans seem to be more serious and aloof than Americans.

In Germany, it is customary to shake hands when you greet another person. A man waits for a woman to extend her hand before shaking it and in mixed company men shake a woman's hand before a man's. The most common greetings (with regional differences) are *Guten Morgen* (good morning), *Guten Tag* (hello), and *Guten Abend* (good evening). You might also hear the basic hello said as "Hallo." Commonly used *Auf Wiedersehen* means goodbye and *Gute Nacht* means good night. Among friends, relatives, and with young people, the more familiar *Tschüss!* is used in place of *Auf Wiedersehen*.

As tradition has it, only family members and close friends can address each other by their first names. Others are expected to refer to each other using titles and surnames, although this trend is now changing. Pointing and wiggling the index finger to one's own head is an insult to another person. Instead of crossing one's fingers for luck as in America, Germans squeeze their thumbs. Germans greatly value punctuality. For example if guests are invited for dinner at 7:00 p.m., they will arrive sharply at 7:00 p.m. or just a few minutes later. Guests often bring a small gift with them—a box of candies or an odd number of flowers for the hosts.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Germans take great pride in their homes, spending about 10% of their income on home furnishings and decoration. The destruction wrought during World War II left Germany with a severe housing shortage, which was addressed more successfully in the former West Germany than in the east, although housing prices in the west were very high. In East Germany, families were often placed on housing waiting lists for years. Although the leaders of unified Germany initially promised that conditions in the east would match those in the west by the mid-1990s, housing conditions in the west are still superior. Throughout the country, families generally live in small houses or apartments with a kitchen, bathroom, living room, and one or two bedrooms. Young children often share a bedroom.

Germans receive high-quality medical care. Based on 2008 data, the average life expectancy is 76 years for men and 82 years for women. Although Germany has a comprehensive health care system, the government imposed spending limits for drugs, doctors' fees, and hospital costs in 1992 to offset rising health care costs. The German love of beer has taken its toll on the nation's health: alcoholism follows smoking as one of the nation's leading causes of death. Another social challenge faced by Germans is a negative population growth rate. Although improved over recent years, the population growth rate is -0.033%.

Germany's transportation system is one of the best developed in Europe. The country's highway system, called the *Autobahn*, begun in the 1930s, was one of the first in the world. Today it contains over 10,900 km (6,500 mi) of roads and, unlike highways in the United States, the *Autobahn* has no speed limits. However, to combat pollution and traffic congestion, Germans are encouraged to travel by public transportation rather than by car; railways and cross-country buses connect all parts of the country. In fact, most Germans take environmental issues seriously. Public recycling bins can easily be found throughout public spaces. Regular apartment buildings have at least six different garbage containers designated



for specific kinds of garbage ranging from glass and plastic to biodegradable garbage allowing people to recycle their waste.

In the past Germany was known to be a conservative state. Now, however, its society is shaped by a plurality of life styles and ethno-cultural diversity. In addition to traditional marriages other forms of coexistence are becoming prominent. Traditional gender roles have eroded. Yet, despite all these social changes, the family remains the most important social unit.

Although the unification of Germany took a toll on its affluent and technologically powerful economy, Germany remains one of the strongest economies in the European Union. After the post-unification period of stagnation with an average economic growth rate of 0.7% and chronically high unemployment reaching 14%, Germany attained stronger gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 2.6 % and a considerable fall in unemployment to about 8%. The modernization and integration of the eastern German economy is still an expansive affair, requiring roughly \$80 billion per year. However, a previous comprehensive set of reforms of labor market and welfare-related institutions in tandem with Chancellor Merkel's economic policies gradually improved and strengthened the German economy. Thus, in 2007, the German GDP amounted to an impressive \$2.833 trillion or \$34,400 per capita. At the same time, similarly to other EU states, the German economy faces long-term challenges of European economic integration and globalization, high oil prices, tighter credit markets, and slowing growth abroad.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Germans generally have small families with one or two children. Although the father is generally conceived to be the head of the family, both parents usually work. German children are taught to be polite and respectful to their elders, although as teenagers they tend to become somewhat rebellious. Most young people prefer to move out from their parents' house as soon as they enter university or become wage earners. Young people usually marry in their late twenties although it is increasingly common for people to live together before or instead of marriage. Some people prefer legal marriages while others favor religious ceremonies.

The Germans referred to the traditional role of women in terms of "three K's": *Kirche* (church), *Küche* (kitchen), and *Kinder* (children). Today, however, German women enjoy legal equality with men. Similarly to women in other countries German women are challenging the restrictions that have traditionally been placed on them. Because of recent laws protecting the rights of unwed mothers and their children, an increasing number of unmarried couples are living together, either with or without children.

## 11 CLOTHING

German clothing styles are similar to those in United States, but with a distinctively European flavor. It is difficult to designate a specific German fashion, yet it can be said that Germans are distinguished by a classic yet simple style. Cosmetics are worn but sparingly. Sloppy or untidy attire is considered inappropriate in public. Internationally known German clothing brands include Hugo Boss, Willy Bogner, and Strenesse. Among eminent German fashion designers are Karl Lagerfeld, Wolfgang Joop, and Jil Sander. Legendary model Claudia

Schiffer is yet another well-known figure in the world of fashion and design.

Traditional regional costumes are reserved for festivals and celebrations. At festivals such as the popular Oktoberfest in Munich, one still sees traditional outfits such as black feathered hats, white shirts, embroidered suspenders, and *Lederhosen* (leather shorts) for men, and white lacy peasant blouses, black embroidered bodices, and white aprons for women. Regional costumes are especially popular in southern Germany. The traditional journeyman's outfit of the carpenters' guild, for example, may still be seen in some areas. It consists of a felt hat, a black corduroy suit with pearl buttons, bell-bottomed trousers, and a red kerchief worn around the neck.

## 12 FOOD

The traditional German diet is high in starch (noodles and dumplings in the south, potatoes in the north). *Würste* (sausages)—in hundreds of varieties—are a staple throughout the country, as is bread, which many eat with every meal. While it may be delicious, the traditional German diet, with its cold meats, starches, sugary desserts, and beer, is high in calories and cholesterol, and many Germans are trying to modify their eating habits in order to improve their health.

Most Germans eat their main meal at noon and prefer a lighter, often cold supper. Germans keep knife and fork in their hands while eating. Hands should be kept above the table with wrists resting on the edge and it is considered bad manners to keep hands under the table.

Different regions have their own specialties with every region known for its own kind of *wurst* (sausage). *Weisswurst* and Black Forest cherry cake is a specialty of the south, and *Labskaus* (stew), seafood dishes, and bean soup with bacon (*Bohnensuppe mit Speck*) of the north. A few other renowned German dishes are *Kartoffelsalat* (German potato salad), herring salad, *Sauer und Suess Gedampfter Kohl* (steamed sweet and sour cabbage) and *Kartoffelpuffer* (potato pancakes). German luscious desserts include *Berliner Krapfen* (jelly doughnuts from Berlin), *Marzipankugeln* (marzipan balls), *Apfelfannkuchen* (apple pancakes) and of course *Lebkuchen* (gingerbread).

In addition, the Germans are famous for their love of beer. German beer gardens date back to the Middle Ages, when brewers planted chestnut trees around their storage areas to protect the beer from the sun. Multiple varieties range from a dark amber, hoppy *Altbier* and strong, dark *Weizenbock* to a pale, malty Bavarian *Helles*, a light, with more prominent hop character *Pilsener* and a full, bitter-sweet and delicately hopped *Spezial*. Furthermore, Germans take pride in their sparkling wine called *Sekt*. This delicious wine is made exclusively from grapes produced in Germany. *Sekt* is typically less austere and lower in alcohol than French sparkling wine.

Also, Germany produces the loveliest, lightest and most delicate white wines in the world. Low in alcohol and exquisitely balanced, German wines are known for their charm and subtle nuances. The wines made in Germany are extremely diverse, although they do have some commonalities. Especially acclaimed varieties are Riesling, Silvaner, Kerner, Scheurebe, Ruländer/Grauburgunder and Müller-Thurgau.



*A group of German schoolboys at Steuben Day Parade. The four years of primary school (Grundschule) may be followed by one of several different educational options. (Richard B. Levine, Levine & Roberts Stock Photography)*

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education in Germany is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 18. Although it is administered independently by each of Germany's 16 federal states, the basic pattern is the same throughout the country. The four years of primary school (*Grundschule*) are followed by several different options. Students may spend two years in "orientation grades" and then six years in a *Realschule* in preparation for technical college, or they may spend five years in a *Hauptschule*, followed by a three-year vocational apprenticeship. The other principal option is the nine-year gymnasium education that prepares students for a university. In addition, however, some states offer the comprehensive system (*Gesamtschulen*), a system that had also been used in the former East Germany, where all students attend a single school from the fifth year onward. University attendance is still almost free—students have to pay only a small fee, although this is changing.

Currently, the German education system is undergoing a profound transformation. In this manner, policymakers and university administrations initiated a series of reforms to adapt the university system to new international standards. These innovations involve the switch to staggered degrees such as bachelor's and master's degrees and the introduction of tuition fees and admission tests. Among other changes are the emergence of private facilities for academic training and the

development of the stronger strategic alliances between universities and institutes outside the higher education system.

Another important reform in the sphere of education is the "excellence initiative." This initiative is geared toward promoting post-graduate systems, outstanding centers in specific fields of research, and the research portfolios of nine top universities (the LMU and TU in Munich, TU Karlsruhe, RWTH Aachen and the universities of Konstanz, Göttingen, Heidelberg, Freiburg, and the FU Berlin). The goal of the reforms is to strengthen research facilities and to ensure excellence of faculty and high quality of tertiary education. The incentives aim to reestablish Germany's leading position in education on the international level.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Germany is famous for its great baroque, classical, and romantic composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, and Richard Wagner. Well-known 20th-century composers include Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Carl Orff, and Hans Werner Henze. The Bayreuth opera festival has been a national tradition since its founding by Richard Wagner. In literature, among the greatest German names stand Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich von Schiller, Heinrich Heine and Rainer Maria Rilke. Modern German writers include Georg Kaiser, Bertolt Brecht, Nobel Prize

winner Thomas Mann, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, Günter Grass, and Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll.

A distinguished name in German art is that of Albrecht Dürer, whose masterpieces embrace both paintings and woodcuts. In the 20th century, German artists have been associated with expressionism and an artistic movement known as *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), which advocated greater freedom in art. In 1919, German architect Walter Gropius founded the famous Bauhaus school of art and design, which stressed form based on function.

## 15 WORK

The total labor force of Germany numbered over 43 million people in 2006. Of these nearly 2 million were foreign workers, including Turks, citizens of the former Yugoslavia, and Italians. The German work day begins early. Many people employed in factories start work at 7:00 AM, and most stores and offices are open by 8:00. On average Germans work 40 hours per week, which is also the average work week for the European Union. German men and women retire around 61 years of age.

The largest proportion of Germans are employed in services (nearly 70% of the economy is composed of service industries), followed by traditional industry, with merely 3% employed in agriculture. Germany's top employer is Deutsche Post (German Postal Service). Employing over 500,000 people, its total revenue amounts to \$58.58 billion. The second largest employer is a world known electronics company: Siemens. With total revenue of \$90.68 billion Siemens provides employment for 461,000 people. Next in line are two of Germany's auto manufacturers, Volkswagen and Daimler AG. Operating on a worldwide scale, Volkswagen develops vehicles and engines, as well as produces and sells passenger cars, commercial vehicles, trucks and buses. Daimler AG is a producer of the Mercedes-Benz, Maybach (luxury automobiles), and Smart (micro hybrid cars) and is the world's 13th largest car manufacturer.

As the success of the Siemens and German auto-manufacturers demonstrates, Germans can boast superior engineering and technological advances. German inventors are credited with a remarkable number of important items. For example, Felix Hoffmann produced the first aspirin tablet, the creation of modern printing press is attributed to Johannes Gutenberg, and Hans Riegel introduced the world to Gummy Bears. Needless to say, German engineered cars have long been the standard for the auto industry worldwide.

The standard of living of Germans is comparatively high even after the economic challenges caused by unification. There is an extended social safety net that provides German citizens with considerable job security. Wages are reasonably high, making the German labor force one of the best paid in the world. However, there are more than 7 million foreigners living and working in Germany, 1.5 million foreigners who have taken German citizenship, and some 4.5 million repatriates. The integration of foreigners and provision of equitable work benefits and salaries have been an on-going challenge.

## 16 SPORTS

Most Germans greatly enjoy sports. In 2007 Germany could boast over 87,000 sport clubs, and approximately 27 million people—or one third of Germany's population—are members of sport clubs. In addition, nearly 12 million Germans engage in sports without belonging to any particular affiliation. Sports

are usually run by private regional organizations, but they are also supported by federal government.

Soccer (*Fussball*) is Germany's most popular sport. Some of its teams have international reputations, and its national soccer association boasts over 4 million members. There are thousands of amateur soccer clubs throughout Germany and more than 6.3 million Germans are members of the *Deutsche Fussballbund* (German Football Federation). In 2006 Germany proudly hosted the FIFA World Cup.

In addition to soccer, Germany has a tradition of world-class gymnasts. Other popular sports include shooting, handball, golf, horseback riding, and tennis (a sport in which the Germans can claim three of the world's top players: Steffi Graf, Boris Becker, and Tommy Haas). Swimming is very popular too and almost every town has a public *Schwimmbad* (swimming pool). American football and baseball are not very widespread, but are increasing in popularity.

Recreational sports include hiking, bicycling, camping, sailing, and swimming. The mountainous areas have hundreds of kilometers of picturesque hiking trails. In winter, skiers flock to the German Alps to enjoy both downhill and cross-country skiing. Generally, Germans excel at winter sports, and have won Olympic gold medals for luge, bobsled, and speed skating. Recently, Formula 1 race-car driving has become one of the most popular spectator sports in Germany. Particularly it rose in popularity when Michael Schumacher, the German racer for the Ferrari team, won the World Championship two years in a row.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many Germans enjoy relaxing around the television set; over 90% of the population owns one, and more than half of all Germans watch television on a daily basis. The use of television and radio is not free—people have to pay a small monthly fee. German teens, like those in other countries, like to buy and listen to the latest pop music recordings. The German people enjoy the scenic forest, mountain, and lake regions of their country while engaging in various outdoor activities, including hiking and jogging (special jogging trails are called *Trimmdich-Pfade*, or “keep-fit trails”). Cultural entertainment available in all major cities and many smaller ones include museums, concerts, exhibits, and historic sites.

Many Germans have as many as six weeks of paid vacation during the year. And Germans love to travel. Common vacation destinations include the beaches of the North and Baltic Seas, and the mountains, such as Bavarian Alps, the Black Forest, and the Harz Mountains. Since Germans love the sun, Italy, Greece, Spain, and even Egypt have become favorite vacation spots for many families. When vacations begin, the Autobahn, Germany's interstate highway system, is usually plugged up by the mass of cars moving south. The Germans call this “*Verkehrsstau*”—traffic jam.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In their homes or in small shops, German craftspeople still produce traditional works of art and souvenirs. As in many other countries, each German region has its own folk craft tradition. For example Bavarians are particularly known for their wood carvings. As a whole, however, German handwork is famous for its painstakingly crafted intricate decorations and colorful styles. In ancient times German craftsmen used to be

organized in guilds and the process of becoming a craftsman involved being a *Lehrling* (apprentice). Apprenticeship involved traveling from town to town getting employed temporarily by different *Meister* (masters). Through this process an apprentice gradually perfected and enriched his skills. The remnants of these practices still survive in some parts of Germany.

German Christmas markets are a perfect place to look for German handicrafts. Choice of crafts ranges from traditional German angels and nutcrackers to smoking men, with all kinds aromatic essences rising from their pipes. Handcrafted clocks (including the cuckoo clocks), beer steins, figurines, Christmas ornaments, wooden dolls, music boxes and other types of woodcarvings don't exhaust the list. The Crystal Road and the Porcelain Road in Bavaria are other important centers of centuries-old glassblowing tradition. Running through the Bavarian Forest they offer a wide variety of traditional glassworks and crystal figurines called Hummel figurines. Zwiesel is yet another great place for delicate glass sculptures.

There is no city in the world that manufactures finer cutlery than Solingen. The Solingen tradition perfected over many generations offers Puma's most prominent knives: Universal Jagdtaschenmesser and the famous Great White Hunter. Several other knife producers operating from Solingen include Kissing Cranes, Richartz, Hen and Rooster, Bulldog Brand, German Eye, Hubertus, Herbertz and others.

The Erzgebirge region in Southeast Germany offers its own tradition of craftsmanship. Working in generations-old, family-based workshops, men and women of Erzgebirge carry on a unique tradition of wood-carving, producing objects of singular beauty and universal appeal. Commonly these items reflect popular folk motifs, but no two craftsmen approach them in the same way. In addition to world-famous *Räuchermännchen* (hand-carved smoking figures), pyramids and nutcrackers and other local crafts, Erzgebirge is also known for ethnic events that include the *Bergparade*, a traditional once-yearly music parade and the Erzgebirge folklore festival.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The expenses of unification and a worldwide recession weakened the German economy in the early 1990s. The social, political and economic integration of East and West Germany remains an issue. Furthermore, Germany encounters a demographic challenge. The proportion of elderly people in the population mounts while growth rate is at negative 0.03%. Other challenges that Germany continues to confront entail cutting back pollution and resolving the shortage of affordable housing.

Moreover, Germany faces numerous problems caused by the increasing number of immigrants. Discrimination and even violence against immigrants from the Middle East and southern Europe are some of the most prevalent concerns. Returning from the former Soviet Union, repatriates of German descent deepen the problem. To address this challenge, the German government implemented a series of reforms to better integrate immigrants into German society. The reforms made it easier for immigrants to acquire German citizenship. Also, the new immigration law provided for the first time an all-embracing legal framework that considers all aspects of immigration policy.

In addition Germany confronts protracting unemployment at 8 % and inflation of 2%. Since the mid-2000s, the federal

government has implemented extensive economic reforms attempting to meet these challenges. Those reforms did address economic stagnation in the short term, but did not completely cure the existing problems. Germany takes a great pride in being a welfare state that considers the social protection of all its citizens to be a priority. However, this comprehensive system of health, pension, accident, long-term care, and unemployment benefits exhibits significant flaws and is in need of fundamental reforms.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

For the past several decades, traditional gender roles in Germany underwent significant transformation. If under Hitler, German women were expected to give up work and bear children and were reduced in their social activity to a purely biological purpose, the situation is completely changed now. There has been impressive progress with regard to equal rights for women stipulated in the Basic Law. Based on 2006 data, in the sphere of education girls have outnumbered boys: in elementary schools girls comprise 56% of graduates, and women account for 54% of students in degree courses at universities. Needless to say, more and more women are embarking on professional careers.

German women also established themselves in politics. There is considerable representation of female members in the SPD and CDU, the two main political parties in Germany. Furthermore, the proportion of women in the Bundestag (lower house of the German parliament) is constantly increasing. To compare, in 1980 women amounted to 8% of all members of parliament, while in 2005 this figure had risen to almost 32%. Besides, in 2005 Angela Merkel became the first female German chancellor. Today, Merkel is the leader of a wave of women public servants entering and transforming the local and national political scene.

As of 2008, 67% of women in Western Germany and 73% in Eastern Germany worked. At the same time, men generally have a full-time job, while women, especially those with small children, work only part-time. Although women account for approximately a third of the labor force, men earn higher salaries. Statistics indicate that female workers earn 74% of their male counterparts' pay and salaried staff only 71%. This means that even though women gained power in politics, a large number of women still work in lower-paid positions or are underpaid. And in certain instances women still encounter substantial obstacles. To illustrate, only 15% of university professors are female and only one third of female university students are research assistants.

Furthermore, in a majority of cases women do the prevailing share of housekeeping work. Many fathers enjoy spending time with their children but women, even though employed, dedicate at least twice as much time as their husbands to taking care of their children. In the recent past it was almost exclusively women who have taken parental leave. Yet in the first nine months after introduction of parental support, the proportion of fathers who took leave to concentrate on childcare almost trebled, to 9.6 %.

Although Germany still faces gender inequality issues, the traditional role of a housewife has been very much circumscribed. The German Law provides a firm foundation for German women on their way to true equality. Currently, German women direct their main efforts towards obtaining equality in

the workplace and towards achieving equal pay for equal work. And as past experience demonstrates, these efforts have every opportunity to succeed.

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—revised by A. Golovina Khadka

# GREEKS

**LOCATION:** Greece

**POPULATION:** 11 million

**LANGUAGE:** Greek

**RELIGION:** Eastern Orthodox Christian Church

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Of the earliest Greek societies, the most important was the Minoan civilization, which flourished in the Bronze Age on the island of Crete (c.2700–1450 BC). It reached its peak around 1600 BC, and was notable for its magnificent cities, extensive trade, and its use of writing. Second, the mainland Mycenaean civilization, which flourished between 1600 and 1100, imported from the Minoans the first Greek writing and is reflected in the Homeric epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Between the 8th and the 6th centuries BC, the Greek city-state, or *polis*, took shape, and the concepts of the rule of law and participatory democracy were conceived. By the 6th century the city-states of Athens and Sparta were rivals for dominance. The classical "golden age" of Athens in the 5th century encompassed great achievements in government, philosophy, drama, sculpture, and architecture. The influence of Greek civilization was expanded through the conquests of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) before Greece was conquered by the Romans in 146 BC.

After more than 1,000 years as part of the Byzantine (or Eastern Roman) Empire, Greece came under Turkish rule after Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, fell to the Ottomans in 1453. After a 10-year struggle for independence, Greek sovereignty was established in 1831, marking the beginning of modern Greece. Over the next century, the nation's boundaries expanded as it gradually acquired islands and mainland territories. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the two world wars as well as hostilities with Turkey, and a civil war between 1944 and 1949. Greece became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, and a full member of the European Community in 1981.

After seven years of totalitarian military rule from 1967 to 1974, Greece became democratically governed. Its international concerns since World War II have been dominated by the Cold War and its rivalry with Turkey over the status of Cyprus. Since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in 1991, Greece has vigorously opposed the use of the name "Republic of Macedonia" by the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), fearing an expansionist threat to the Greek part of Macedonia—a geographical territory divided among Greece, Bulgaria, and FYROM.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in the southernmost part of the Balkan peninsula, Greece includes over 6,000 islands in the Ionian and Aegean Seas, of which about 227 are inhabited. About 80% of the country is covered by mountains, which form part of the Alpine system. Mt. Olympus, the legendary home of the Greek gods, is the highest peak, rising to 9,573 feet in east central Greece. The nation's coastline—over 14,000 km in length—is one of the longest in the world.



The majority of Greece's 11 million people are of Greek ethnic descent. Minorities include Thrace Muslims, Slavs, Albanians, Armenians, and Vlachs, a people who lived semi-nomadically in the northern mountains in the 19th century. The massive emigration to North America, northern Europe, Australia, and other destinations in the first half of the 20th century has been offset by incoming immigration from the Balkans and Near Eastern countries at the end of the century. The Greeks travel extensively, and many live and work abroad.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The language is Modern Greek. Until 1976 a formal, if artificial, version called *katharevousa*, "pure," was used in official business. Originating in Byzantine scholarship, *katharevousa* attempted to imitate classical Greek, against the living language of the people (*demotiki*, "demotic"). *Katharevousa* received momentum in the 19th century, and the heated debate about which version should be used came down as "The Language Question."

#### NUMBERS

one	éna
two	dío
three	tría
four	téssera
five	pénde
six	éxi
seven	eptá
eight	októ
nine	enéa
ten	déka

#### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	Kyriakí
Monday	Deftéra
Tuesday	Tríti
Wednesday	Tetárti
Thursday	Pémpti
Friday	Paraskeví
Saturday	Sávato

### 4 FOLKLORE

The ancient Greeks believed that each person's fate was predetermined. People's lives were a sum of their individual actions and their destiny, from which not even gods could escape. Unlike monotheistic deities, Greek gods were not above human passions and fallibilities. There were priests and priestesses at shrines called oracles, of which the most important was Delphi in the south. The gods were honored publicly at great festivals (including the Olympics) and privately at altars in people's homes with offerings of food and wine. Greek mythology was a way to explain the world, with each god and goddess responsible for a specific aspect of life. It has been tremendously influential in the ways the Western world has configured key ideas, like religion and national identity.

### 5 RELIGION

The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church has played a central role in Greek life. During the 400 years of Ottoman rule, the Church was the main unifying force of the Greek people. Greek history, art, literature, and music were preserved and transmitted partly through the church. Over 98% of today's Greeks belong to the Orthodox Church, which is described in the 1975 constitution as the "established religion" of Greece. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed to all Greeks, the Orthodox Church enjoys a special relationship with the government. The president of Greece must be a member and is sworn into office with church rites. Major religious holidays are also considered civil holidays.

It is common for religious Greeks to keep icons in an area of their homes, together with holy oil, holy water, and a special lamp. Many pray to a particular saint or saints in times of trouble, and pilgrimages are made to shrines considered especially holy. Religious customs have incorporated earlier elements of pagan beliefs.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many of the major Greek holidays are those of the Orthodox Church. The most important are Easter and the Holy Week preceding it, which occur at a slightly different time from the Western calendar, and the Greeks emphasize the Resurrection rather than the Crucifixion. The New Year is dedicated to St. Basil and celebrated with gift giving and parties. Although Christmas trees have now dominated as the world's commonest festive decoration, the peculiar Greek equivalent was a ship to symbolize the ship that brought St. Basil to Greece. One New Year's tradition consists of hiding a coin in the dough of a special cake spiced with cinnamon, nutmeg, and orange peel. The person in whose piece the coin is found is thought to be blessed with prosperity and health for the year to come. Greeks celebrate both their birthdays and their name-days, the latter on the day dedicated to the saint for whom they are named.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Greece is a modern, industrialized country with a Christian tradition. Many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, and marriage. Unlike Roman Catholics, the first communion is not especially celebrated, and there is no confirmation.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Greeks are known for their lively, outgoing nature. Spending time in *parées*, or groups of friends, is a common form of entertainment in private houses and coffee shops, waterfront taverns, and village squares, with people gesturing energetically in conversation. It is acceptable for two heterosexual women, less so of men, to walk in public arm-in-arm as a sign of camaraderie.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The bigger the city the more people live in apartment blocks. This widespread European building arrangement is a compound of apartments in a single building. Usually floors vary from two to six. City dwellers comprise more than half the population, with Athens, the capital, approaching 5 million. In smaller towns and villages, the majority of the people live in family-owned one- and two-storey homes. Many Greeks have summer houses.

The sea has traditionally linked Greek cities and towns. As in all of Europe, Greeks rely heavily on public transportation. Athens has an efficient subway. Another one in Thessaloniki, the second largest city, is scheduled to operate in 2013. Nonetheless, the per capita ownership of cars ranks among the highest in Europe.

Health care is provided primarily by the state-run National Health Service. Private facilities are available. The number of doctors is very large (1 for every 450–500 residents), but the bulk of practitioners is concentrated in the bigger cities. However, most towns do have hospitals and/or clinics. Abortion is legal.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The average age at which Greek men normally marry is 28, and the average age for women is 26. Greece has a higher marriage rate and lower divorce rate than the countries of northern Europe. The basic family unit is the nuclear family—a husband, wife, and their children. The bond remains intact even after children marry. It is not considered improper for couples to live with one spouse's family until they are ready to buy their own house. Grown sons and daughters traditionally live with their parents until they marry, and aging parents often join the household when it becomes difficult for them to care for themselves. In January 1983 the Greek parliament legislated changes in the family laws that made divorce easier, abolished the dowry as a legal requirement for marriage, and guaranteed legal equality between marriage partners.

Nowadays rivalries between families and honor-related crimes survive only in a handful of specific rural areas. Westernization, urbanization, and industrialization have modified the traditional ideal of “honorable behavior.” Adultery ceased being a penal crime in 1983. Women gained the right to vote in the early 1950s and have dramatically increased their role in the Greek labor force. In the late 1980s women accounted for

one-fifth of all industrial jobs and one-third of all jobs in the service sector.

## 11 CLOTHING

It goes without saying that the traditional 19th-century costume of tunic, vest, and pleated kilt-like skirt is worn only by folk dancers at festivals in the 21st century.

## 12 FOOD

Greek cooking exemplifies the Mediterranean cuisine, where olive oil predominates. Staples include tomatoes, rice, yogurt, shish kebab, and feta cheese (made from goat's or sheep's milk). Bread is served with every meal. Lamb is used extensively, and so are seasonal vegetables, fruit, and an abundance of native herbs, such as thyme, basil, oregano, rosemary, rue, and sage. An example of a traditional dish is minced meat with spices, rice, and herbs, wrapped in grape leaves or stuffed into vegetables. Greek pastries—many of them extremely sweet and made from a paper-thin dough called *filo*—are eaten not as desserts but as afternoon or late-night snacks. Two typically Greek drinks are *ouzo*, the aniseed residue of winemaking, and *retsina*, a resinated white wine. A toast of “*Yiassas*” (“your health”) can often be heard, together with the clinking of glasses, wherever Greeks gather to enjoy food and drink.

## 13 EDUCATION

Approximately 20.6% of Greeks are high school graduates. One is considered to be illiterate if one has not finished the six-years of primary school (not simply if one cannot read and write). By this (more rigorous) standard, illiteracy is 7%. Education is compulsory for nine years until the age of 15. Students can choose between three more optional years in either high school or technical programs. There is a highly competitive university system, as well as postsecondary technical and vocational schools. The system is state-run and free of charge at all stages, although there exist private schools for those who wish to opt out of the state system.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Even before the great flowering of culture in Athens in the 5th century BC, Greece had already given the world the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. With the classical golden age of Athens came the philosophical teachings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the great tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, and the comedies of Aristophanes. Greek sculpture progressed from stylization to naturalism, while Greek architecture, which had already introduced the grid town plan and the temple, produced the Parthenon and gave the world the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian styles.

In the 20th century there was a renaissance of Greek literature that includes the writings of novelist Nikos Kazantzakis and the poetry of C. P. Cavafy, Nikos Gatsos, and Nobel laureates George Seferis and Odysseus Elytis. Modern Greek literature was strongly influenced by such political events as the Greco-Italian war of 1940–41, the German occupation, the civil war of 1944–49, and the military regime of 1967–75. Well-known composers include Mikis Theodorakis, who set Elytis's major work, *To Axion Esti*, to music, and Manos Hadjidakis, who wrote the film score for *Never on Sunday*. Contemporary composers often use the instruments and melodies of Greek



Greek fisherman working his nets from the deck of his boat. Aside from farming, the other major occupations of Greek villagers are fishing and sheep- or goat-herding. (Cory Langley)

folk music, especially the *bouzouki*, a mandolin-like stringed instrument, as well as the *santouri* (dulcimer), clarinet, lute, and drums.

### 15 WORK

Economic development has increased in services, international trade, shipping and tourism. Greece is among the least industrialized nations of Europe. Food, beverage, and tobacco processing are the foremost industries, followed by textiles and clothing, metallurgy, chemical manufacturing and shipbuilding. An important part of the economy has been family-owned small businesses; in 1990, 85% of Greek manufacturing concerns had fewer than 10 employees. The proportion of Greeks engaged in farming had declined to one-third by 1990. Important farm products include grain, olives, cotton, tobacco, fruits, and wheat. Aside from farming, the other major occupations of Greek villagers are fishing and sheep- or goat-herding.

### 16 SPORTS

In sports, Greece's Olympic tradition dates back to ancient times. Today, soccer and basketball are the most popular sports. Other favorite sports include volleyball, tennis, swimming and water skiing at the nation's many beaches, sailing, fishing, and mountain climbing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In the country, coffee shops—generally in the village square—are popular gathering places where people congregate after work to socialize. In urban areas, Greeks enjoy television, mov-

ies, theater, and concerts. Forms of traditional entertainment include folk dances performed by dance troupes wearing colorful costumes, with accompaniment led by the *bouzouki*, and *karagiozi*, a shadow puppet show that is performed live and can also be seen weekly on television. Operas, concerts, ballets and ancient Greek dramas are presented at the Athens Festival each summer. Classical drama is also performed in open-air theaters, the most famous of which is in Epidaurus.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Craftspeople throughout Greece practice weaving, knitting, embroidery, carving, metalworking, and pottery. Village women are known for their colorful fabrics and carpets and elaborate wall-hangings.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

HIV/AIDS and drug abuse are major problems. The proportion of drug users doubled in the 1980s, with the largest increase among women and the poor. Marijuana is the most frequently used drug. A major domestic problem in Greek society is illegal immigration from the Balkans and the Middle East. Homelessness is exceptionally low, due to strong family ties.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Equality of the sexes has been established by a 1983 law. As everywhere else in the Western world, discrimination on the base of one's sex is something of a thing of the past, although there is always room for improvement. One out of six Greek members of parliament is a woman. Around 60% of each year's college graduates are women. As of the late 2000s, there has been some debate about same-sex marriage, but this remains illegal.

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—revised by K. Yiavis



# HUNGARIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Magyars (Ethnic Hungarians)

**LOCATION:** Hungary

**POPULATION:** About 10 million

**LANGUAGE:** Hungarian (Magyar); German

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Reformed Calvinist; Lutheran; smaller numbers of Jews, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and other Protestant sects

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The western portion of present-day Hungary was conquered by the Romans in 9 BC. The Magyars, who had invaded the Carpathian basin in AD 896, were converted to Christianity at the beginning of the 11th century by King Stephen, who remains a national hero. Turkish rule, beginning in the 16th century, was followed by union with the Habsburgs, which lasted until modern times, although the Magyars gained some autonomy under the dual monarchy from 1867 to World War I.

After 40 years behind the “Iron Curtain,” Hungary held its first free elections in 1990 and began transforming its economy, applying for membership in the European Union (EU) in 1994. Hungary joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999 and the EU in 2004.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Hungary is a landlocked nation in central Europe. While other political boundaries in the region were redrawn in the early 1990s, Hungary’s territory remained unchanged: it is bordered by Austria and Slovenia in the w, Slovakia in the n, Ukraine in the ne, Romania in the e, and Croatia and Yugoslavia in the s. Geographically, Hungary consists of four major regions: the Danube River valley, the Great Plain, the Lake Balaton region, and the Northern Mountains. Its highest elevation is Keles Mountain, which rises to a height of 3,093 feet.

Ethnic Hungarians, or Magyars, make up the vast majority (some 92.3%) of Hungary’s population of 10 million. While their cultural ties have always been with the West, particularly Austria, the Magyars were originally a central Asian people who migrated to the Carpathian basin in the 9th century. Hungary’s ethnic minorities include Germans, Slovaks, Croats, and Romanians. Approximately 1.9% of the population is Roma.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Hungarian, or Magyar, language is universally spoken in Hungary. Since it is a Finno-Ugric rather than an Indo-European language, it has practically no resemblance to such commonly spoken Western languages as English, French, Spanish, or German. The only languages it resembles at all are Finnish, Estonian, and a few others spoken in remote parts of Russia and Siberia. Hungarian is notoriously difficult for non-native speakers to master, with its accent marks, double letters (*cs*, *gy*, *ny*), and lengthy words (due partly to the practice of adding prepositions to the ends of words). The most popular second language in Hungary is German, a legacy from the days of the Habsburgs. Despite years of mandatory classes, Hungarians never became comfortable with Russian, which was foreign to them linguistically, as it was not for the Slavic peoples

of other former communist “satellites” such as Poland and Czechoslovakia.

## NUMBERS

one	egy
two	kettő
three	három
four	négy
five	öt
six	hat
seven	hét
eight	nyolc
nine	kilenc
ten	tíz

## DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	vasárnap
Monday	hétfő
Tuesday	kedd
Wednesday	szerda
Thursday	csütörtök
Friday	péntek
Saturday	szombat

## 4 FOLKLORE

For the most part, the traditional folklore of Hungary is dying out. Even major life-cycle events such as births, weddings, and deaths are commemorated in modern, Western ways. However, some urban dwellers enjoy harking back to their peasant roots with the custom of *disnótor*, a feast that follows the slaughtering of a pig. In addition, the Christmas custom called *Betlehémzés*, in which men and boys perform a nativity play using a model church and manger that they carry with them from door to door, is still alive in some regions. Another religious tradition—revived in some rural areas—is the Eastertime fertility ritual of *locsolkodás*, in which boys and men sprinkle water or perfume on girls and receive a painted Easter egg in return. The traditional wine harvest festival is still held in wine-growing regions in September and October, but these days, as often as not, it includes a rock band and outdoor disco.

## 5 RELIGION

About 52% of Hungarians are Roman Catholic, 16% Reformed Calvinists, and 3% Lutherans, with smaller numbers of Jews, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and other Protestant sects. In general, the Hungarians are not a deeply religious people. Historically, the dominant religion of the country changed several times under different rulers, including a period under the Turks when thousands of Hungarians converted to Islam. Thus the Hungarians are known for being more pragmatic—and tolerant—about religion than many of their neighbors.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

New Year’s, or *Farsang*, begins a season of balls throughout the country that lasts until Ash Wednesday. The *Busójárás* carnival, one of the liveliest celebrations—comparable to the American Mardi Gras in New Orleans—is held in February, on the last weekend before Lent. On March 15, the 1848–49 Revolution is commemorated with speeches, flag-waving, and parades. Large crowds gather in the capital city of Budapest to



celebrate this event. Easter Monday is the most important religious holiday in Hungary.

Although the spirit of May Day celebrations has changed since the collapse of communism, the day is still celebrated as a workers' holiday. August 20, St. Stephen's Day, is Hungary's national day, celebrated with fireworks throughout the country; in Budapest, a million people gather on the banks of the Danube to watch the display. Proclamation of the Republic Day on October 23, commemorating the 1956 uprising against the communist regime, is marked by torch-lit processions. Christmas and Boxing Day are celebrated privately in family gatherings.

Instead of their own birthdays, Hungarians, like people in other primarily Catholic countries, tend to celebrate the feast day of the saint for whom they are named (special calendars even provide dates for those with purely secular names). The customary gifts are flowers, wine, or cake, all of which can be given any time in the week following the name day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Hungary is a relatively modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

Two special ceremonies mark students' graduation from high school. The first, known as *szalagavato* or the ribbon cer-

emony, takes place in February of the final school year. During a ceremony attended by parents, grandparents, and teachers, members of the junior class perform a solemn ritual of pinning ribbons on members of the senior class. Entertainment follows, and includes both contemporary dancers and traditional folk dancing in costume by members of the senior class. The second ritual, held in May just prior to final exams, involves marching or *ballagas*. The night before the ballagas, the school is decorated with garlands of fresh flowers by members of the junior class. The seniors dress specially for the occasion, often in black and white, and carry embroidered pouches containing some salt, money, and a *pagacs* or small roll, supplies to support them as they embark on the adventure of life beyond school. Singing, they march through every classroom single file, holding onto the shoulder of the person in front and gathering flowers from onlookers. Other students stand at attention, and family members crowd the halls. Many families continue the celebration with a party at home when the march is finished.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social interaction among Hungarians is formal and polite. A young woman will often have her hand kissed in greeting, especially by an older man, and this custom is referred to in the traditional greeting of young people toward their elders (*Csókolom*—"I kiss it"). Even close friends shake hands when greeting each other. However, at resort areas in the summer it is common for women to appear topless.

Dogs are especially beloved by Hungarians, and many own the popular *puli* or *komondor* breeds.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

After World War II, a severe housing shortage developed in Hungary as workers flocked to the cities from rural villages, attracted by the communist government's industrialization program. Most existing apartments had only one room and a kitchen area and many had been damaged in the war. Lacking resources to build enough low-rent apartments, the government encouraged private housing construction, which improved matters somewhat for higher-income individuals. However, those with less money continued to depend on government-subsidized housing, which had long waiting lists. Housing is still a problem in urban areas, one which has been cited as a prime cause of stress within families.

Work-related stress, smoking, and the heavy Hungarian diet contribute to a high rate of heart disease among Hungarians, who have had the world's highest suicide rate for most of the last century. Average life expectancy was 73 in 2008. Under the communist regime in the 1980s about 99% of the population was covered by national health insurance. Since the collapse of communism, Hungary's health care system became more decentralized and privatized. Employees pay 3% of their income to the social insurance fund, but the population also pays local and national income tax, which helps to finance the health care system. Patients also make co-payments on certain services, including pharmaceuticals, dental care, and rehabilitation. These out-of-pocket payments have increased substantially since 1990, and currently contribute 18% to health care financing.

Hungary's transportation facilities, whose hub is Budapest, have been improving steadily since the 1960s, and the larger



A boy holds a Hungarian flag in Budapest, Hungary. (Joe Klamar/AFP/Getty Images)

cities have good transport systems. The main waterway is the Danube River.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditionally, village households in Hungary were composed of either nuclear or extended families, a pattern which sometimes varied even within a single village. Today, the nuclear family is more prevalent in the country as well as in urban areas. In the past, it was frowned upon for a woman to remain unmarried beyond the age of 22 (27 for a man), but this is changing. The traditional Hungarian wedding is an elaborate and expensive affair. Patterns of family life shifted under the communists, the most notable change being the increased number of women working outside the home. By 1987 around 75% of women had jobs. Although they are still regarded as the head of the household, the traditional dominance of families by men has been reduced. In recent decades the divorce rate has risen; 37.5% of new marriages ended in divorce in 2002.

### **11 CLOTHING**

Hungarians generally wear modern Western-style clothing. Casual wear in the cities includes the jeans, T-shirts, and sweatshirts that might be seen in any industrialized nation. Pantsuits are popular with both men and women for casual and more formal occasions. In rural areas, one can still see women wearing the traditional peasant babushkas on their heads and men wearing hats with floppy brims. The traditional costumes worn for festivals sport much elaborate, brightly col-

ored embroidery. Women wear white embroidered aprons with lace trim, while men wear white plain or embroidered shirts and dark vests, which may also be embroidered.

### **12 FOOD**

Hungary has long been known for its rich, abundant food. The Hungarian diet is heavily meat-based, with pork the most commonly used ingredient. The most famous dish is probably goulash (*gulyás*), a soup or stew made with meat, onions, potatoes, and, often, other vegetables and seasoned with paprika. Stews with sour cream are called paprikash, and fish soups (called *levesek* or *halászlé*) are also popular. Stuffed cabbages and peppers (*töltött*) are prepared with meat and rice and commonly cooked in tomato sauce or sour cream. The prevalence of the spice paprika in Hungarian cooking has given it a reputation for spiciness, but paprika actually comes in several different strengths and the mildest form is the one used most often. The rich Hungarian desserts resemble those of Germany and Austria; commonly used ingredients include chocolate, various types of nuts, and rich sauces containing cream, more nuts, and more chocolate. Popular desserts include pancakes (*palacsinta*) with dessert fillings (a version of crêpes) and strudel.

### **13 EDUCATION**

The Hungarians are a well-educated people: 99.4% of adults are literate, and about 16% of the population have college degrees (approximately 31% of the population was enrolled in college in 2006). Schools provide eight years of primary and four years

of secondary education, and education is compulsory until the age of 16. The collapse of communism brought with it major changes in Hungary's educational system. A large percentage of primary and secondary schools are now run by various religious groups, and Russian, once compulsory, is rarely studied now. Hungary is also known for a method of music education devised by the composer Zoltán Kodály.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Hungary has a rich artistic heritage. The arts flourished during the days of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Dual Monarchy and into the 20th century, although following World War II serious limits were placed on artistic expression by the communist regime. One distinctive feature of Hungarian culture is the interchange between folk art and fine art. Two notable 20th-century examples can be found in the compositions of Béla Bartók and the ceramic sculptures of Margit Kovács.

Notable painters include Mihály Munkácsy in the 19th century and Szinyei Merse at the turn of the 20th. The famous 19th-century composer Franz Liszt spent most of his life abroad but eventually returned to the land of his birth to become the first president of the Hungarian Academy of Music. Other than Bartók, the most prominent 20th-century Hungarian composer was Zoltán Kodály. Much Hungarian literature has been politically inspired. *National Song*, written by the nation's most celebrated poet, Sándor Petöfi, became a rallying cry in the mid-19th-century War of Independence. *The Tragedy of Man*, a play written by Imre Madách after Hungary's defeat, is considered the nation's greatest classical drama. Famous 20th-century poets include Endre Ady and Attila József. The works of contemporary writers György Konrád and Péter Esterházy are available in English translation. Imre Kertész is a Hungarian Jewish author, Holocaust survivor, and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002.

#### 15 WORK

Employment patterns in Hungary shifted dramatically during the communist industrialization of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1949 only 19% of the labor force was employed in industry; by 2003 that figure had risen to 33.3%. (In the same year, about 5.5% were employed in agriculture, 61.2% in services.) It is not uncommon for Hungarians to hold second and even third jobs in addition to their primary one; in the late 1980s about three-fourths of Hungarian families had income from such economic "sidelines." After the downfall of communism, unemployment rose from about 2% to over 13% by 1993. Although Hungary saw the unemployment level fall to 7.1% by 2007, its labor force participation rate of 57% was one of the lowest in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The government implemented an austerity program of tax hikes and subsidy cuts to reduce the large budget deficit, but the reforms caused Hungarians to limit their spending, slowing economic growth to less than 2% in 2007.

#### 16 SPORTS

Soccer ("football") and water polo are both very popular participant sports. Most cities and towns have both indoor and outdoor public pools. Besides soccer, other spectator sports include tennis, skiing, and horse racing.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Hungarians like to relax during their leisure hours by reading, watching television and videos, and playing sports. The most popular spectator sport is soccer (called football). Chess is also popular; the young chess master Judit Polgár is a national celebrity. Polgár was the first woman ever to play for the World Chess Championship title, in 2005.

The arts play a substantial role in Hungarian life, especially music. Many cities have symphony or chamber orchestras, theaters, and cultural centers, and there are numerous festivals in the spring, summer, and autumn. Vacation trips are extremely popular among the Hungarians, most of whom head for the country in August. Many own or have access to summer cottages where they can spend time over weekends or during an extended holiday.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Hungary has a rich tradition of folk art dating back to the 18th century. One famous example is the beautiful, brightly colored embroidery that adorns the traditional costumes of both men and women. The weavers of the Sárköz region produce a distinctive red and black fabric, and simpler cloth is turned out by craftspeople in other parts of the country. The pottery of the Great Plain region is known for its exceptional craftsmanship, and items decorated with writing (usually to commemorate a wedding) are especially prized. Many households are graced by traditional wood carvings, and the art of ceiling and wall painting can be seen in certain parts of the country. Hungarian folk music is known for its pentatonic scale, adapted by such 20th-century composers as Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, and the *csárdás* is a popular folk dance.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The transition to a market economy caused considerable social disruption and hardship, including spiraling inflation, high rates of unemployment, and the failure of many businesses. In the early 1990s interest rates on loans were as high as 50%. A severe housing shortage continues to be a fact of life in urban areas. Air pollution resulting from industrialization instituted by the former communist regime is a serious problem; the incidence of lung cancer in Budapest has doubled over the past 20 years. Toxic waste dumped by the Soviet military threatens the soil and water supply. While the rights of ethnic minorities are generally respected, there is still widespread discrimination against the Roma in employment, housing, and other areas. Domestic violence is still a problem in Hungary today.

Hungary has an illicit drug problem, being as it is a transshipment point for Southwest Asian heroin and cannabis and for South American cocaine. Chemicals used to make amphetamines and methamphetamines are produced there, and although there are efforts to curb money laundering related to organized crime and drug trafficking, it remains a problem. Hungarians are significant consumers of the drug ecstasy.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Beginning in 1989, many women's and feminist organizations were formed. The Feminist Network, established in 1990, advocates women's equality. Until it turned conservative in the mid-1990s, the Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) was an important political party for liberal young women. The new

market economy has affected many women who both provide income and still care for the home and family. While Hungary's abortion laws are relatively liberal, such restrictions as mandated counseling sessions have come into effect in recent years.

Homosexual activity above the age of 20 was decriminalized in 1961, then above the age of 18 in 1978. The age of consent is 14 as of a 2002 Constitutional Court decision. Homosexuals may serve in the military. However, as of 2006, only 18% of Hungarians supported same-sex marriage compared to the EU-wide average of 44%. Budapest has a Gay Pride event every summer, which features a film festival and parade.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# ICELANDERS

**LOCATION:** Iceland

**POPULATION:** 304,367 (2008 est.)

**LANGUAGE:** Icelandic

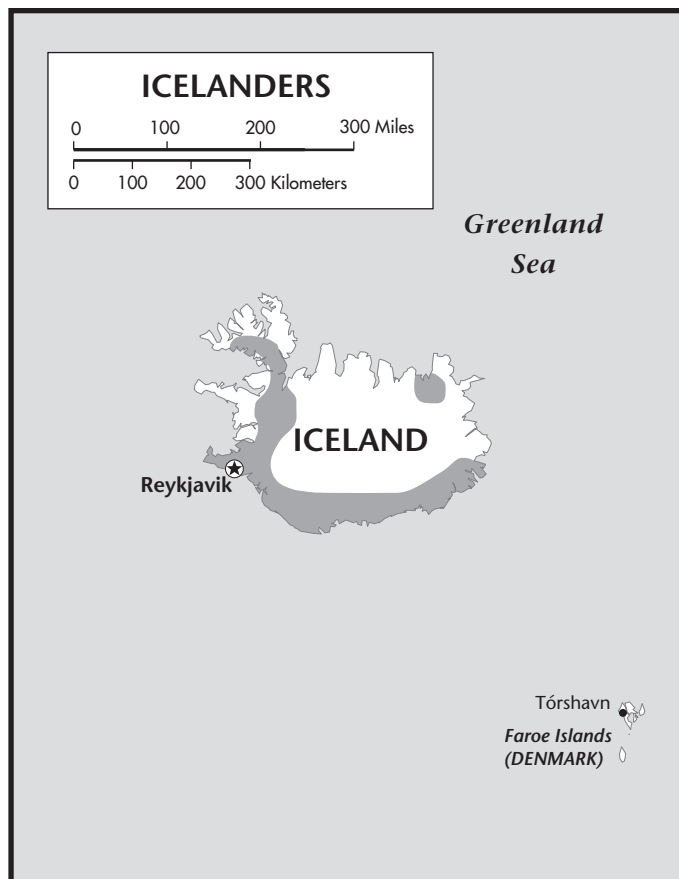
**RELIGION:** Evangelical Lutheran Church; other Lutheran denominations; Roman Catholic

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Republic of Iceland (*Lýðveldidh Ísland*) is a country of dramatic contrasts and contradictions. It is one of the world's most volcanically active regions but also the site of Europe's largest ice-cap—hence its nickname, "the land of fire and ice." An island nation just south of the Arctic Circle, it is considered part of Europe and is a member of NATO, the Nordic Council, and other European organizations. While Icelanders speak the oldest modern language in Europe, their country was the last habitable part of Europe to be settled.

Iceland's first permanent inhabitants were Norwegian settlers who arrived toward the end of the 9th century AD, beginning the Age of Settlement (AD 874–930), when the island's coastal regions were rapidly settled by Norwegians, as well as some Scottish and Irish immigrants. In 930 a central legislative body called the Althing was established and a body of laws created. Following Norway's example, Iceland's inhabitants replaced their pagan religions with Christianity in AD 1000. Following a period of internal strife, Iceland came first under Norwegian control (in 1242) and then—together with Norway—under the rule of the Danish in 1380.

Iceland's allegiance to Denmark lasted nearly 600 years. In 1550, following the Protestant Reformation, Lutheranism replaced Catholicism as the primary religion. From 1602 until 1787, Denmark had a total monopoly on trade with Iceland. In 1800, Denmark abolished the Althing, Iceland's parliament, but a strong nationalist movement later in the century resulted in the granting of home rule in 1903 and independence in 1918 (although Denmark retained control over Iceland's foreign affairs, and Iceland maintained its allegiance to the Danish monarch). In 1944 the people of Iceland voted overwhelmingly in favor of ending the island's union with Denmark, and Iceland became a fully independent republic on 17 June 1944. Iceland joined the United Nations in 1946 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) three years later. In 1970 the nation became a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and it concluded a trade agreement with the European Community (EC) in 1973. However, as of 2008 Iceland remained opposed to European Union (EU) membership. The country's Scandinavian-type economy is basically capitalistic, yet with an extensive welfare system (including generous housing subsidies), low unemployment, and remarkably even distribution of income. Literacy, longevity, income, and social cohesion are first-rate by world standards. In the absence of other natural resources (except for abundant geothermal power), the economy depends heavily on the fishing industry, which provides 70% of export earnings and employs 6% of the work force. However, Iceland has made efforts to diversify its economy in order to decrease its dependence on fishing; the economy remains sensitive to declining fish stocks as well as to



fluctuations in world prices for its main exports—among them fish and fish products, aluminum, and ferrosilicon.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in the North Atlantic Ocean between Greenland and Norway, Iceland is Europe's second-largest island (the largest is Greenland) and its westernmost nation. Its total area of 39,769 sq mi (103,000 sq km)—slightly smaller than the state of Kentucky—includes numerous smaller islands off its shores. The interior of the main island consists mostly of a central upland plateau ringed with mountains. Iceland has many active volcanoes (on average, there is an eruption about once every five years), and its terrain is characterized by other volcanic features, including geysers, thermal springs, fumaroles, and lava flows. None of its rivers are navigable (the longest is the Thjórsá in the southern part of the country). However, its coastal fjords provide excellent natural harbors.

Most of Iceland's population lives either near the harbors or in locations where there is sufficient flat land to allow for agriculture or industry. The country's estimated 2008 population was 304,367, of which 90% was urban and 10% rural. The major population centers are the capital city of Reykjavík, Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, and Akureyri. Ethnically, Iceland is a very homogeneous society. Almost all its inhabitants are descended from the Norwegians (and a smaller number of Irish and Scots) who settled the island in the Middle Ages. However, in 2006 there were more than 13,000 foreigners living in Iceland. Many men have come to Iceland from the new EU coun-

tries that joined in 2004. Despite the influx, unemployment in Iceland remains around 1%. Anyone from an EU country can come to Iceland without a work permit. They can live in the country for six months if they are looking for work. The majority of foreigners who arrived in the mid-2000s, roughly 64%, work in the construction industry. Polish workers have always been popular in Iceland, and still form the bulk of the foreign workforce. About 7,500 Poles now live in Iceland, 1,394 of them in Reydarfjörður where they make up 75% of the workforce building the Fjardaraal aluminum plant.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Icelandic is a Germanic language related to Norwegian, German, Dutch, and, most closely, Faroese (the language spoken on the Faroe Islands). Due to the country's isolation, its language has changed little since medieval times compared to other modern languages. The 13th-century Icelandic sagas, written in medieval Icelandic, or Old Norse, can still be read in their original versions by most Icelanders. Today, Icelanders preserve their linguistic heritage by refusing to borrow foreign words for contemporary idioms and modern technologies. A special committee is charged with creating new Icelandic terms for words like "computer" (*tölva*, literally "word prophet").

### COMMON WORDS AND PHRASES

men	karlar
women	konur
thank you	takk fyrir
today	í dag
tomorrow	á morgun
meat	kjót
fish	fiskur
milk	mjólk
water	vatn

### NUMBERS

zero	núll
one	einn
two	tveir
three	þrír
four	fjórir
five	fimm
six	sex
seven	sjö
eight	átta
nine	níu
ten	tíu

## 4 FOLKLORE

Icelandic folklore has preserved elements of Norse mythology, including the belief in the *Huldufolk*, or "hidden people," the descendants of children whom Eve hid from God in the Garden of Eden. Other common features of Icelandic folktales include ghosts, elves, mermaids, and sea monsters. Superstitious beliefs are common among Icelanders, especially in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

## 5 RELIGION

Over 85% of Icelanders belong to the official state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The entire country makes up a single diocese with 284 parishes. It is headed by a bishop based in the capital, Reykjavík. The church is government supported,

but people who do not want their taxes to go for its support may stipulate this on their returns, and their tax money is then used for other purposes. Under 4% of the population belongs to other Lutheran denominations, 2% are Roman Catholics, and about 3% describe themselves as atheists.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Iceland's legal holidays include New Year's Day (January 1), Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Monday, the First Day of Summer (celebrated on the third Thursday in April), Labor Day (May 1), Whitsunday and Whitmonday, National Day (June 17), Bank Holiday (first Monday in August), Independence Anniversary (December 1), and Christmas (celebrated December 24–26). Icelanders' Christmas customs combine Christianity with Norse mythology, the source of the 13 Santa Claus figures called Christmas Men (or Yuletide lads) who are said to visit every home in the land, leaving gifts but also causing mischief. The Door Slammer disturbs people's sleep by slamming doors, the Candle Beggar steals candles, and the Meat Hooker lowers a hook down the chimney in order to make off with the Christmas roast. The traditional First Day of Summer, celebrated in April, is based on a traditional calendar that divided the year into two seasons, summer and winter, each 26 weeks long. The occasion is still celebrated as a national holiday with parades and festivals.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Iceland is a modern, largely Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Icelanders customarily shake hands when greeting and taking leave of each other. Common greetings include *góðan daginn* (good day), *gott kvöld* (good evening), and *þess* (goodbye). It is considered good manners to take off one's shoes before entering a dwelling.

Icelanders' last names are based on the first names of their parents, with *son* (or *sson*) added for males, and *dóttir* for females. Thus, a boy named Karl, born to a father named Sigurd, will be named Karl Sigurdsson. Other types of surnames are very uncommon and generally belong to persons born outside the country. Icelanders generally call each other by their first names, even in formal situations, and they are listed in their country's telephone directories alphabetically by their first, rather than their last, names (i.e., all the Johanns, followed by all the Jons, and then all the Karls).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Icelanders enjoy a high standard of living. Traditionally, Icelanders in rural areas lived in dwellings built of stone and turf, while those in the cities had wooden houses. Today most Icelandic housing is built of reinforced concrete to withstand the country's harsh climatic conditions, which include high winds and earthquakes. Exteriors are generally painted in pastel colors. More and more people are buying condominiums. In

Reykjavík, it is common to heat one's house with water from hot springs.

Average life expectancy among Icelanders is among the world's highest: 78.43 years for men and 82.76 for women in 2008. They are physically hearty—among the world's tallest and heaviest people, both at birth and as adults, and they also have a very low rate of infant mortality. Known for their physical strength, Icelanders excel at sports such as weight-lifting, shot-putting, and javelin-throwing. Jon Pall Sigmarsson, an Icelander, won the "World's Strongest Man" title four times and was named "Strongest Man of All Time" in 1987. The robustness of Iceland's people is generally linked to a healthy diet rich in fish, fish oil, and fresh produce; vigorous exercise; clean air; and effective immunization measures.

With no railroads or navigable inland waters, Icelanders depend on road and air transportation. The country's harsh climate is hard on its numerous dirt and gravel roads. Many roads are rutted or filled with potholes, and high winds sometimes blow away entire sections of roadway. Road conditions are better in urban areas, where most main roads are paved. In recent years, domestic air travel has become increasingly popular and inexpensive.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Icelanders tend to have a relatively casual attitude toward marriage, and there are few barriers to divorce. A high percentage of the country's births—some 70% of firstborn children—are illegitimate, and illegitimacy carries no social stigma. It is common for couples to have their own children present at their weddings, often as bridesmaids or pageboys. Married women often keep their original names, and children's last names are commonly based on their fathers' first names, with different endings for a son (*son* or *sson*) and daughter (*dóttir*). Thus, it is possible for all the members of one family to have different surnames. (For example, if a couple named Katrin Magnúsdóttir and Hannes Sveinsson had a son and a daughter, the parents would keep their own surnames and their children might be named Guðrún Hannesdóttir and Gunnar Hannesson.) In Reykjavík daycare is readily available for working couples. In smaller towns and in rural areas, parents are more likely to rely on family and friends to assist with child care. In the 1970s, many Icelandic couples adopted Vietnamese orphans.

## 11 CLOTHING

Icelanders wear modern, Western-style clothing like that worn elsewhere in Europe and in developed countries in other parts of the world. The women's traditional costume that may be worn for festivals or other special occasions consists of a white blouse and ankle-length black skirt, black vest laced in front, long white apron, black shoes, and black cap.

## 12 FOOD

Fish, mutton, and lamb are staples of the Icelandic diet. Common varieties of fish—often eaten raw—include cod, salmon, trout, halibut, and redfish. Raw pickled salmon is a special favorite. *Hangikjöt* (smoked mutton) is a festive dish served at Christmas and New Year's and throughout the year as well; typically, it is accompanied by potatoes, white sauce, and peas. *Skyr* is a popular yogurt-like dairy food made from nonhomogenized milk and served either at breakfast or as a dessert, often with berries or other fresh fruit. Icelanders seldom



Locals and tourists swim in the Blue Lagoon thermal pool in Iceland. (Tim Graham/Getty Images)

eat salad, and often use sugar to flavor their food. Traditional dishes associated with the mid-winter Thorri feast include *svid* (a sheep's head singed to burn off the wool, boiled, and served with mashed turnips) and *hakarl* (cured shark's meat).

### **13 EDUCATION**

Practically all adult Icelanders are literate—the country's official literacy rate is 99.9%. All levels of education, including college, are free, and school is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Many five- and six-year-olds are enrolled in pre-primary education. Primary school covers all subjects, including vocational guidance, while secondary schools offer either general education, vocational education, or university preparatory study. In 2008 Iceland had eight universities and colleges, including the University of Iceland, located in Reykjavík.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Iceland's literary tradition dates back to the early Scandinavian Eddic and Skaldic poetry brought to the region by Norwegian settlers in the Middle Ages. The nation's most famous early literary works are the Viking sagas, which began in oral form ("saga" means "said") in around the 10th century AD and were then written down in the 12th and 13th centuries. These are mainly family sagas that describe both the important political and military events of their time and the daily lives of the early

Icelandic settlers. They also depict life in the foreign lands visited by the Vikings, including Norway and Scotland.

Iceland's contributions to modern literature include late-19th-century children's works by the priest Jón Sveinsson and *Eyvind of the Hills*, a biography of an 18th-century outlaw by Jóhann Sigurjónsson. Iceland's best-known 20th-century author is novelist Halldór Laxness, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1955. He is the author of *Independent People*, *The Fish Can Sing*, *The Atom Station*, *A Poet's Time*, and other works. Iceland's theater companies include the Reykjavík Theater and the National Theater. The repertoire of the Icelandic Dance Company includes both classical ballets and works by and about Icelanders. Iceland has a national orchestra and an opera company, and the world-famous classical pianist and conductor, Russian-born Vladimir Ashkenazy, is a naturalized citizen of Iceland. Well-known names in the visual arts include those of sculptor Asmundur Sveinsson, whose concrete statues are found in public places throughout the country, and artists Jon Stefansson, Kristin Jonsdóttir, and Juliana Sveinsdóttir.

### **15 WORK**

Icelanders are hard workers. They value work not only as a means of maintaining their high standard of living but also as a virtue in itself (a concept popularly known—in other countries as well as Iceland—as the "Protestant work ethic"). Their



average work week is one of Europe's longest, and many Icelanders hold two or even three jobs. It is common for children to work during their school vacations, and many also have evening jobs during the school year. Fish processing and other industries employ 6% of Iceland's work force, and the fishing industry provides 70% of export earnings. Other major employment sectors include commerce, construction, business services, transportation and communication, and agriculture. Some three-fourths of the work force is unionized, and unemployment is extremely low—at 1% in 2007.

## 16 SPORTS

Icelanders, who live surrounded by water, are, naturally, swimming enthusiasts, and heated swimming pools are available for use year round. Soccer is another favorite activity, and a number of top Icelandic players have signed full-time professional contracts with European teams abroad. Icelanders excel, in particular, at sports requiring physical strength, such as weightlifting. Once one of the world's top javelin throwers, Einar Vilhjálmsson, is an Icelander. The country also has a world-class handball team. Other popular sports include golf, basketball, badminton, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, and sailing. While boxing is illegal in Iceland, Icelanders have their own native form of wrestling called *glíma*.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

With their high rate of literacy, Icelanders are avid readers. Their country is said to have more bookstores relative to its population size than any other in the world, and most families own good-sized book collections. Writing is also a popular pastime; according to one estimate, one in every 10 Icelanders will have something published in the course of a lifetime. The country's dozen or so periodicals provide additional reading material, and Reykjavík alone has four newspapers. Iceland also has both public and private radio and television stations and an active film industry.

Chess is extremely popular in Iceland. The legendary 1972 world championship match between American Bobby Fischer and Russian Boris Spassky, held in Iceland's capital city of Reykjavík, further increased the nation's passion for the game. Many young Icelanders have won youth-division world championships in recent years. Bridge is another favorite form of recreation in Iceland.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Icelandic crafts include traditional hand-knitted woolen sweaters, ceramics, and jewelry.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Iceland has an extremely low crime rate, and crimes by Icelanders are often alcohol-related. With the exception of alcohol use, however, Iceland has fewer drug-related problems than most other European countries, and stiff penalties are imposed for drug trafficking. Reykjavík is one of the world's safest capital cities.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The position of women is generally a good one in Iceland, which is traditionally a matriarchal society. The egalitarian nature of Icelandic society with respect to gender is commonly attrib-

uted to the fact that the men have traditionally been fishermen who were required to spend long periods of time away from home, leaving their wives with a high degree of independence and responsibility. In 1980 Iceland became the first country in the world to choose a woman—President Vígdís Finnbogadóttir—as its democratically elected head of state. Three of the country's four most powerful positions—chief justice of the Supreme Court, president of the country's legislature (the Althing), and president of the country—have been simultaneously held by women. Almost 90% of Icelandic women work outside the home, although the average female wage is still lower than that of males. Iceland has the highest percentage of women in the labor market and also has the highest birth rate in Europe.

Iceland, like the Scandinavian countries, takes a liberal position concerning gay rights. The majority of the public is supportive of homosexuality, and gay pride parades are held every August. Laws protecting sexual orientation are in effect. Civil unions between same-sex couples became legal in 1996. There are also adoption laws, which include the right to adopt your partners' biological children. In 2006 same-sex couples became eligible for all adoption and insemination purposes.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# IRISH

**LOCATION:** Ireland

**POPULATION:** 4.3 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Irish Gaelic (official); English (primary)

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Protestant, and Jewish

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Ireland, which consists of 26 counties, covers five-sixths of the island of Ireland. The remaining portion is occupied by the six counties of Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. The division of the island into two political entities is the legacy of a long period of British rule, dating back as far as 1171, when King Henry II declared himself king of Ireland. Eventually the English controlled most of the island. With the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the division between the conquering and conquered peoples took on a religious dimension, as the Protestant English began the suppression of native Irish Catholicism, further aggravating the hostility between the two. When the Republic of Ireland won its independence in 1922, Northern Ireland became a separate political entity, remaining part of the United Kingdom. It was the site of violent conflict between Catholic nationalists and Protestant extremist groups until 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement was negotiated between the Irish and UK governments. The Republic of Ireland became a member of the European Community (now the European Union) in January of 1973. Ireland's economy began to grow rapidly in the 1990s, fueled by foreign investment: it became known as the "Celtic tiger." This attracted a wave of immigrants to a country where, traditionally, mass emigration was the norm. Today, Ireland has been transformed from a largely agricultural society into a modern, high-tech economy. Bertie Ahern, elected prime minister (taoiseach) in 1997, began a record third consecutive term in office in June 2007. However, Ahern in 2006 was criticized over controversial loans he received from friends when he was finance minister in the 1990s. In March 2008 he announced he would resign.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Ireland, which occupies an area smaller than the state of Maine, is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the south, west, and northwest, and by the Irish Sea on the east. The country's two main topographic regions are a fertile central lowland and the mountain ranges that surround it. Most of the country is less than 500 feet above sea level. Ireland's population of 4.3 million people is evenly distributed throughout the country. The Irish trace their ethnic origins to the various groups who inhabited and ruled their land over the course of history, including the Celts, Norsemen, French Normans, and English. The people living east of the Shannon River generally have a higher standard of living, with a more advanced level of industrialization and richer farmland. The *Gaeltacht* along the western coast is the nation's Gaelic-speaking region.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Irish Gaelic and English are the official languages of the Republic of Ireland, and English is more widely used. Only about 30% of the population knows Gaelic well enough to use it in

daily conversation, and only about 50,000 people living in the Gaelic-speaking or *Gaeltacht* area on the west coast use it as their primary language. The use and recognition of Gaelic has been taken up as a nationalist cause since the late 19th century. Today Gaelic is a compulsory subject in school, and signs throughout Ireland are written in both English and Gaelic. Irish Gaelic is a Celtic language closely related to Scottish Gaelic. Irish people speak English with an accent known as a brogue.

### COMMON GAELIC WORDS

Pronunciation: (æ = a in cat)

man	fear	fær
woman	bean	bæn
yes	sea	shæ
no	ní-hea	nee hæ
hand	lámh	awv
leg	cos	kuss
good-night	codladh sámh	kull-uh sawv

### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Monday	Luan	loo-un
Tuesday	Máirt	mawrt
Wednesday	Céadaoin	kay-deen
Thursday	Déardaoin	dayr-deen
Friday	Aoine	een-uh
Saturday	Satharn	sahurn
Sunday	Domhnach	do'-nukh

### NUMBERS

One	Aon	een
Two	Dó	do'
Three	Trí	tree
Four	Ceathair	kæhir
Five	Cúig	koo-ig
Six	Sé	shay
Seven	Seacht	shakht
Eight	Ocht	ukht
Nine	Naoi	nee
Ten	Deich	deh

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Irish are master storytellers, and their tales and legends date back to Druid priests and early Celtic poets who preserved the stories of Ireland's pre-Christian heroes and heroines. There are tales about the exploits of Cuchulainn, who defended Ulster single-handed, and tales from the era of Cormac Mac Art, Ireland's first king, including the love story of Diarmid and Grania and the exploits of Finn MacCool. Modern authors have helped keep these folk traditions alive: the poet William Butler Yeats wrote five plays based on the legendary adventures of Cuchulainn and James Joyce's final novel, *Finnegans Wake*—whose main character is identified with the mythic figure of Finn MacCool—is filled with Irish legends and mythology. Irish children today still learn tales about these legendary heroes, including MacCool and Saint Finnabar, who is said to have slain Ireland's last dragon.

## 5 RELIGION

Ireland is a staunchly Catholic country. Roman Catholics account for about 88% of Ireland's population, but only 48% of the Irish population in 2006 attended mass every week (down

from 81% in 1990). Pilgrimages to shrines and holy places at home and abroad attract tens of thousands annually. Catholicism is strongly woven into the fabric of Irish life, influencing its laws, education, architecture, and daily life. Divorce only became legal in 1997. Abortion is illegal according to the Irish constitution. Catholicism is also deeply intertwined with Irish nationalism: before Irish independence, the British attempted to eradicate Catholicism from Ireland, causing the Irish to cling even more tenaciously to their faith. The non-Catholic minority is mostly Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Jewish.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Ireland's legal holidays are New Year's Day, St. Patrick's Day (March 17), Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, bank holidays on the first Mondays of June and August, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (December 26). In addition to these holidays, a variety of customs and celebrations are associated with various saints' days. St. John's Day (June 24), for example, is traditionally the time to dig up and eat the first new potatoes and on the night before, bonfires are lit on hilltops throughout the west of Ireland. A dish called *colcannon*, made from cabbage, potatoes, and milk, was traditionally served on Halloween with a ring, coin, thimble, and button inserted into it. Whoever found the ring was supposed to be married within a year, while the coin symbolized wealth, the button, bachelorhood, and the thimble, spinsterhood.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

As in most west European countries, most births occur in hospitals. In Roman Catholic families the child is baptized within a week or so of birth. First Communion and confirmation are important events for Catholic children. Marriage generally takes place in church. Weddings are festive events and in the west may still be attended by "strawboys," uninvited guests dressed in straw disguises who crash the wedding and carouse about in good-humored fashion. Death is a solemn occasion and although the Irish were once known for their wild wakes these are quickly becoming a thing of the past.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Irish are renowned for their hospitality, which dates back to olden times when it was believed that turning away a stranger would bring bad luck and a bad name to the household. (According to one Christian belief, a stranger might be Christ in disguise coming to test the members of the household.) The front doors of houses were commonly left open at meal times so that anyone who passed by would feel free to enter and join in the meal. While many of the old superstitions are a thing of the past, Irish warmth and hospitality toward strangers remains. Hospitality is practiced not only at home, but also at the neighborhood pub, where anyone joining a group of drinkers immediately buys a round of drinks for everyone at the table. Until 2004 no one smoked a cigarette without first offering the pack to everyone present. But that year Ireland became the first country to have a nationwide ban on indoor smoking in all public spaces, including restaurants and pubs.



## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional rural home was narrow and rectangular, and built from a combination of stones and mortar (made from mud, lime, or whatever material was locally available), often with a thatched roof. Rural homes and those in some urban areas are commonly heated by fireplaces that burn peat (called "turf" in Ireland) instead of wood. Modern homes have replaced traditional dwellings both in the country and the city, where families generally live in brick or concrete houses or apartment buildings. The large numbers of people emigrating to Ireland's cities since the 1950s have created a great demand for new housing, and developments have gone up around most large towns and cities.

Health care in Ireland is based on a person's ability to pay for services, with low-income persons and those over the age of 66 receiving most services free of charge. Hospital care is free for all children through the age of 16, and the costs of medication are covered for people suffering from infectious or chronic illnesses. Both infant mortality (5.22 out of 1,000 live births) and average life expectancy (77.9 years) are close to the European average.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Irish have such a strong allegiance to the family that their constitution even recognizes it as "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable . . . rights" and guarantees to protect it as "indispensable to the welfare of the Nation." While the nu-



*An Irish woman and her daughter stand on top of Grianan of Aileach Fort in County Donegal, Ireland.  
(© The Irish Image Collection/Corbis)*

clear family is the primary family unit, it expands to include elderly relatives when they become infirm and may also include an unmarried aunt or uncle. Young people have traditionally lived at home with their parents until they married, often after the age of 25 or even 30. Bonds between siblings are unusually strong, especially in the western part of the country, and unmarried siblings often live together, sometimes joined by a widowed sibling later in life. While women are playing an increasingly active role in the work force, traditional gender roles still predominate at home, with the woman doing most of the household chores and child-rearing, and the men fulfilling the traditional role of breadwinner. Before 1972 married women could not be hired for professional positions in the public sector.

### **11 CLOTHING**

People in Ireland wear modern Western-style clothing, with an eye to durability, comfort, and protection from Ireland's often-wet weather. The Irish have been known for their fine cotton lace-making since the early 1800s. Handknitted sweaters are another famous Irish product, especially those made on the Aran Islands, with their high-quality yarn and distinctive patterns. Tweed—a thick cloth of woven wool used for pants, skirts, jackets, and hats—is another type of textile for which the Irish are known. The Irish have adorned (and fastened) their clothing with bronze and silver brooches since the 3rd century AD, and traditional designs have included detailed engravings, animal designs, and enamel inlays.

### **12 FOOD**

The Irish have hearty appetites. Potatoes are the main staple and, together with cabbage, the most popular vegetables in Ireland. Many rural dwellers grow their own potatoes and use them in their meals on a daily basis. Dairy products are a favorite, and milk and butter consumption are both heavy. Irish stew, one of the most common traditional dishes, consists of lamb or mutton, potatoes, onions, herbs, and stock. The main meals of the day are breakfast and lunch. The traditional Irish breakfast (which many have abandoned in favor of lighter fare) includes sausages, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, pudding, other meat dishes (such as liver or chops), and bread, all washed down by plentiful servings of tea. A typical lunch might include a hearty soup, a serving of chicken or beef, and vegetables. Supper usually consists of sandwiches, cold meats, or fish. Soda bread, made with baking soda and buttermilk, accompanies many meals, and popular desserts (called “sweets”) include scones, tarts, and cakes.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Adult literacy is nearly universal in Ireland. All children must attend school between the ages of 6 and 15, and most go to single-sex rather than coeducational schools. Both English and Gaelic are taught in primary school (called National School). Secondary school students receive an Intermediate Certificate at the age of 15 or 16 and, following an optional two more years of study, a Leaving Certificate, which is required for admission

to one of Ireland's seven universities. Ireland's oldest university is Trinity College, founded in 1591 and also known as the University of Dublin.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The value that the Irish place on the arts can be seen in Ireland's policy of exempting its writers, composers, painters, and sculptors from paying income taxes, as long as their work is recognized as having "artistic or cultural merit." Ireland's greatest contribution has been in the field of literature, and its great writers, include satirist Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, the playwrights Oliver Goldsmith and Oscar Wilde, and such giants of 20th-century literature as playwright George Bernard Shaw, poet William Butler Yeats, and novelist James Joyce. Although Joyce left his native land as a young man, Ireland and its people play a central role in all his works, which include the short story collection *Dubliners* and the novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, which traces the activities of its characters during the time span of one day in early-20th-century Dublin. Yeats won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923, as did his fellow Irishman, playwright Samuel Beckett in 1969. Contemporary Irish writers include poets Seamus Deane and Seamus Heaney, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1995, and novelist Roddy Doyle, winner of the Booker Prize in 1993. Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien) was an Irish novelist and satirist who wrote many satirical columns in the Irish Times under the name Myles na gCopaleen. There is also a considerable modern literature in Irish Gaelic, including poets Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Máirtín Ó Direáin.

#### 15 WORK

In 2006, 67% of Ireland's labor force was employed in service sector jobs, 27% worked in industry, and 6% were in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Primary industries include meat, dairy, and grain processing, electronics, machinery, beer, shoes, and glassware. Since the 1960s, many small foreign-owned factories have opened in Ireland. Farming takes place on both small subsistence farms where families raise just enough to support themselves, and on large sophisticated commercial farms that produce food for export. Tourism is a mainstay of the service sector, providing restaurant, hotel, and retail jobs as well as expanding the range of government employment. In the decade up to 2006, property values had risen more rapidly in Ireland than in any other developed world economy. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is 40% higher than that of the four largest European economies and the second highest in the European Union (EU) behind Luxembourg, and in 2007 surpassed that of the United States. The Irish government has implemented a series of national economic programs designed to cut back on price and wage inflation, invest in infrastructure, increase labor force skills, and promote foreign investment.

#### 16 SPORTS

Ireland's most popular sports are hurling and Gaelic football. Hurling, which is similar to field hockey, is played by two teams of 15 players who attempt to knock a leather ball through their opponents' goalposts with long sticks called *hurleys* or *camans*. The All-Ireland Hurling Championship, held in Dublin every September, is the Irish equivalent of the World Series in the United States. The women's version of hurling is called *camogie*. Gaelic football combines elements of soccer and rugby,

and also culminates in an All-Ireland match in the nation's capital. Another popular traditional Irish sport is road bowling (played mostly in County Cork); its object is to advance a metal ball, called a bullet, over a two- or three-mile course in as few throws as possible. Other widely played sports include soccer, rugby, cricket, boxing, and track and field. Horse racing is a favorite national pastime, and Ireland's famous races include the Irish Derby and the Grand National (the race featured in the movie *National Velvet*).

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Irish men spend many of their hours in pubs, drinking beer or ale, playing darts, and socializing with their friends. However, a typical rainy evening also finds many Irish people of both sexes at home reading or watching television. In recent years, it has become increasingly acceptable for women to frequent pubs, although the neighborhood pub still remains primarily male turf. Pubs are also the scene of traditional music sessions, which are associated with *craic* (pronounced "crack"), an all-around term for having a good time that can include playing and/ or listening to music, joking around, getting drunk, or flirting with members of the opposite sex. "The craic was mighty" means that someone had a good time. Other popular leisure-time pursuits include chess, bingo, and bridge.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional crafts include tweed and linen weaving, wool knitting, glass blowing, and wood carving. Belleek china and Waterford crystal are especially famous, and Rathborne, which has been producing candles for over 450 years, is Europe's oldest candle maker. The women of the Aran Islands are known for their distinctive woolen sweaters. (At one time, every family on the islands had its own sweater pattern, which aided in identifying drowned sailors.) Ireland has a rich folk music tradition, and age-old jigs and reels can be heard at local festivals and in informal performances at neighborhood pubs. Since the 1960s, groups like the Chieftains and Planxty have not only revived national interest in traditional tunes and instruments, they have also gained an international audience for Irish music, both live and recorded. Traditional instruments include the fiddle, flute, Celtic harp, accordion, bodhran (a hand-held drum), and uilleann pipes (a bagpipe-like instrument powered by a bellows).

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Ever since the great potato famine of 1845, Ireland has lost a large percentage of its population to emigration, as people leave in search of better opportunities abroad. At one point in the 19th century, the nation's population fell from 8 to 3 million within the space of a single generation. After a period of relative prosperity in the 1960s and 1970s, the worst economic crisis since independence led to a new wave of emigration beginning in the late 1980s, most of it to the United States. Over 100,000 of Ireland's young people left the country. In addition to inflation, high unemployment, and the highest taxes in Europe, the nation had to deal with one of the largest per capita foreign debts in the world. However, fueled by foreign investment, Ireland made a major turnaround in the 1990s, and was dubbed the "Celtic Tiger" for its fast growing economy. In recent years, Ireland has changed from being a country of emi-

gration to a country of immigration. Unemployment is very low and 9% of the labor force in Ireland is foreign born.

Politically, the difficulties in Northern Ireland led to violence that claimed nearly 2,000 civilian lives and injured some 40,000 among the competing Protestant and Catholic factions. However, in 1998 the Good Friday Agreement was signed, which sought to address relationships within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic; and between both parts of Ireland and England, Scotland, and Wales. In referenda, 71.2% of people in Northern Ireland and 94.39% in the Irish Republic voted “yes” to accepting the Agreement. An Assembly was elected in September that year, and there is an executive composed of a First Minister, Deputy First Minister and 10 further ministers.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

With abortion illegal and divorce only becoming legal under certain circumstances in 1997, the lives of Irish women in many respects are circumscribed. The Roman Catholic Church plays a major role in social and family relations. Irish law prohibits discrimination against women in the workplace and provides for protection and redress against discrimination based on gender and marital status. However, inequalities persist regarding pay and promotions. Women constitute approximately 47.5% of the labor force but are underrepresented in senior management positions. The earnings of women average 80% that of men and women work 10 hours a week less.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Ireland in 1993, and discrimination based on sexual orientation is now outlawed. Ireland also prohibits incitement to hatred based on sexual orientation. A survey conducted in 2008 showed that 84% of Irish people supported civil marriage or civil partnerships for gay and lesbian couples, with 58% supporting full marriage rights. Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, began recognizing same-sex civil partnerships in 2005.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# ITALIANS

**LOCATION:** Italy

**POPULATION:** About 58 million

**LANGUAGE:** Italian, French, Slovene, German, and Friulian

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; small numbers of Protestants, Jews, and Greek Orthodox

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Unified Italy is a latecomer among the nations of Europe: its 20 regions did not unify as a single country until 1870. However, its people have wielded great political and cultural influence since the days of ancient Rome. Each year millions of tourists come to view the country's cultural and historical legacy dating back to Rome's Colosseum and the Greek ruins of Sicily and its beautiful landscapes, which range from Alpine peaks to picturesque hill towns and sandy beaches. Today Italy is a modern industrial nation and a leading member of the European Union. In the 1950s economic growth was so rapid that it was called the “Italian miracle.” Continuing problems include illegal immigration, organized crime, corruption, high unemployment, slow economic growth, and the low incomes and technical standards of southern Italy compared with the prosperous north. Modern Italy has also had a turbulent political life: in 2008 it elected its 62nd government since World War II.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in southern Europe, Italy is geographically divided into three major regions: the north Italian Plain and the Italian Alps (“continental”); the peninsula south of the plain (“peninsular”); and Sardinia, Sicily, and numerous smaller islands (“insular”). Italy's only major river, the Po, flows from west to east before it empties into the Adriatic sea.

There is a sharp division in temperament, traditions, and socio-economic conditions between Italians living in northern and central regions, and those living in the south. The city of Rome marks the boundaries between the two parts of the country. The more prosperous northern and central regions are more “European,” while the poorer, historically neglected south (also called the Mezzogiorno) is more “Mediterranean.”

## 3 LANGUAGE

Italian is the official language and is spoken by the vast majority of the population. Nearly every region has its own dialect, but dialect speakers are rapidly declining—except in Naples and Sicily—due to social mobility, radio, television, and other mass media which use only the standard language. Present-day Italian originated as the regional language of Tuscany. Other languages spoken in Italy include French, Slovene, German, and Friulian, which is related to the Romansch spoken in Switzerland.

### NUMBERS

one	uno
two	due
three	tre
four	quattro
five	cinque

six	sei
seven	sette
eight	otto
nine	nove
ten	dieci

**DAYS OF THE WEEK**

Sunday	Domenica
Monday	Lunedì
Tuesday	Martedì
Wednesday	Mercoledì
Thursday	Giovedì
Friday	Venerdì
Saturday	Sabato

**4 FOLKLORE**

According to a myth that probably originated in the 4th century BC, Rome was founded by the twin brothers Romulus and Remus, born to Mars, the god of war. Set adrift to drown in the Tiber River, they came to rest at the future site of the city, where they were suckled by a wolf and later found by a herdsman. After the founding of Rome, Remus was killed by Romulus, who consolidated his power and after his death was worshipped as the god Quirinus.

**5 RELIGION**

Italy is an overwhelmingly Catholic country: 90% of Italians describe themselves as Roman Catholics, but it is estimated that only about one-third of Italian Catholics attend mass regularly. Catholicism is closely intertwined with many aspects of Italian life, from education to family life. Priests have traditionally taught in Italian schools, although fewer do so since a 1984 law abolishing compulsory religious education. The church's position on such matters as abortion and divorce has had a profound impact on marriage and the family. Italy is also the home of the Vatican, for centuries the international center of the Catholic Church and an independent political entity. In addition, nearly all the Popes through the centuries have been Italians; the current German-born Pope, Benedict XVI (b. Joseph Alois Ratzinger) is a notable exception.

There are about 500,000 Protestants living in Italy, about 30,000 of them belonging to the sect known as Waldensians. Concentrated in the Piemonte region, they practice a French-based Calvinism and, until the late 19th century, held most of their services in French. There are significant numbers of Eastern and Greek Orthodox Christians.

There are about 825,000 Muslims living in Italy, or 1.4% of the population. The Muslim population is diverse, the largest group coming from Morocco. Others are from elsewhere in North Africa, South Asia, Albania, and the Middle East. Most arrived from the 1980s onwards, many of them as students. Up to 160,000 Muslims are Italian born. Most Muslims have the right to reside and work in Italy, but are not citizens. Italy also has about 45,000 Jews.

**6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Aside from the standard holidays of the Christian calendar, legal holidays in Italy are New Year's Day, Liberation Day (April 25), and Labor Day (May 1). Cities and towns also celebrate the feast days of their patron saints. Colorful traditions mark many observances of religious holidays. In Florence, Easter is



the occasion for the reenactment of a medieval tradition called *scoppio del carro* and on Ascension Day children take part in a “cricket hunt” in the city’s largest park. A ritualized secular event is the *Palio*, a famous annual horse race in Siena with competing equestrian teams representing the 17 neighborhoods of that city.

**7 RITES OF PASSAGE**

Italy is a modern, industrialized, primarily Roman Catholic country. Many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student’s progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

American influence in Italian society is reflected most conspicuously on the lifestyle of young people, who share with American teenagers the same taste in clothing, music, and entertainment. The factors that motivate such influence are Hollywood films, American television programs dubbed and shown on Italian television, as well as the tens of thousands of students and young tourists who visit Italy every year.

**8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

The 19th-century French author Stendhal remarked that “one quickly reaches a note of intimacy in Italy, and speaks about personal matters.” Italians are characteristically open, friendly, outgoing, and easily engaged in conversation. Like the people

of other Mediterranean nations, they often use a variety of gestures to illustrate or emphasize what they are saying.

The standard form of greeting among acquaintances is the handshake. Italians have fewer inhibitions about personal space than people in some other parts of Western Europe or in the United States. It is common for two grown men to greet by kissing each other on both cheeks, or for either men or women to walk down the street arm in arm. This element of informality, however, is coupled with a traditional respect for the elderly, for instance, young persons often stand up when an older relative or friend enters a room.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In all Italian regions there is a marked difference in living conditions between large cities and the towns that dot the Italian landscape. In cities, people live in apartments and condominiums; in most towns, the average family lives in two-story homes. The standard of living is comparable to industrialized countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Homes in both north and south have such basic creature comforts as refrigerators, color television, and the like. In northern and central Italy, the standards of living tend to be higher than the south. Thousands of middle-class Italians living in large cities own summer homes in the countryside, in coastal areas, or in the mountains. They spend weekends there to avoid the hustle and bustle of city life, as well as the traditional two weeks of vacation in August called *ferragosto* (August holy days).

Italian cities are numerous, historical and attractive. Generally they have a *centro storico* (historical center) corresponding to the center of the town. Here one finds churches, museums, and buildings of esthetic and architectural significance. Southern towns are typically situated on a hilltop with a church, a square or *piazza*, at the center.

Most Italian hospitals are run by regional governments, some by Catholic religious orders. Since 1980 Italy has had a national health plan that covers health care costs for most of its citizens, but facilities in some rural areas are still inadequate. Average life expectancy is 80 years, and the infant mortality rate is below the European average.

Italy's highway system is one of the most modern in the world. The *Autostrada del Sole* (Highway of the Sun) links Milan, Rome, and Naples to the southernmost tip of the Italian "boot." High-speed modern train service is provided between major cities; bus service is generally regional, connecting towns to cities. However, public transportation is often halted by strikes. Italy's only natural inland water route is the Po River, and the national airline is Alitalia.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The family is the backbone of Italian society. The noted journalist Luigi Barzini has called family loyalty the true patriotism of the Italians. Marriage choices, employment, business relationships, and often political affiliations are all influenced by family ties.

Many aspects of Italian family life have been influenced by the Catholic Church, through both its own beliefs and the influence it has wielded on government policy. The sale and purchase of contraceptive devices was illegal until 1971, bolstering the traditional tendency toward large families, and abortion was not legalized until 1978. Divorce became legal in 1970 and

two-thirds of the voters upheld this policy four years later in a referendum. The divorce rate in Italy jumped 74% between 1995 and 2005, and separations increased 57% during the same decade. There were 82,291 separations in 2005 and 47,036 divorces. Marital break-ups and separations were more common in the industrialized and richer north versus the poorer south, which tends to be more religious and socially conservative. There were 6.2 separations and 4 divorces for every 1,000 marriages in the north in 2005, against 4.2 separations and 1.8 divorces in the south.

## 11 CLOTHING

Italian fashion had its beginnings more than 150 years ago, when the national hero, Giuseppe Garibaldi, bought up a surplus shipment of bright red butchers' tunics for his 1,000-man revolutionary army. From 1922 to 1942 the black shirt became the official uniform—and the symbol—of fascist forces headed by Benito Mussolini. Today, Italy earns more money from clothing, textiles, and footwear than from any other of its exports, and these industries are Italy's largest employers. Designers such as Versace, Armani, and Nino Cerruti are among the fashion industry's elite, and Benetton clothing is mass marketed throughout the world. Maintaining one's appearance is very important to the Italians. Even their casual clothing is generally of high quality; jeans are popular, but not if they are tattered or frayed. Dress wear includes fashionable silk ties and exquisitely cut suits for men, and elegant dresses or skirts and blouses for women.

## 12 FOOD

Italy's national food is pasta, in all its varieties: ravioli in the north of the country, lasagne and tortellini in Bologna, cannelloni in Sicily, spaghetti with tomato or clam sauce in Naples. In general northern Italians eat much less pasta, preferring rice, prepared in various ways, and polenta, a mush made with corn, barley, or chestnut flour. In the north, people tend to use more butter and margarine; in the south, more olive oil. Pasta has been manufactured in the south since the 19th century and pasta dishes are often prepared with such vegetables as zucchini and eggplants. Altogether, Italy has 20 regional cuisines, all at least partially determined by locally available produce. The range of typical dishes includes *fegato alla veneziana* (liver and onions) in Venice; *cotoletta alla milanese* (veal cutlets) in the Lombard city of Milan; *bagna cauda* (a garlic-anchovy sauce for dipping vegetables) in the Piedmont region; and pesto (a basil-and-garlic sauce now popular in the United States) in Genoa and throughout the Liguria region. The Emilia-Romagna region, in central Italy, and the city of Bologna are famous for their cuisine. One regional dish that has become particularly well known worldwide is pizza, which originated in Naples.

Espresso is a standard beverage throughout Italy. Customers at the country's numerous espresso bars can often be heard ordering customized versions such as *lungo* (diluted), *macchiato* (with milk), or *freddo* (iced). Italy is also the world's largest wine producer, and wine accompanies most meals.

## 13 EDUCATION

In 2001 Italy had a literacy rate of around 98%, a substantial improvement over the 1930s, when some 20% of the population was illiterate. However, schools in some rural areas, and in the south generally, lag behind those in the rest of the coun-





A woman hikes past vineyards on a trail near San Gimignano in the hills of Tuscany, Italy. (© Tom Bean/Corbis)

try. Elementary education in Italy is regarded as the most progressive and innovative in the world. Education is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14, and secondary education is offered in either the sciences or humanities, as well as in technical and teacher training schools. A small percentage of students follow their secondary education with study at one of Italy's 77 institutions of higher learning (63 state universities and 14 non-state universities). The university population in 2003 amounted to 1,800,000 individuals. The oldest is the University of Bologna, founded in the 11th century.

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

In the visual arts, Italy's cultural legacy dates back to the sculpture and architecture of ancient Rome. The Renaissance, beginning in 15th-century Florence, was the golden age of painting, which saw the production of such works as *The Last Supper* and the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. Other great Italian Renaissance artists included Donatello, Botticelli, Raphael, and Titian. In music, Italy is known for its glorious operatic tradition, from the early works of Monteverdi, the "father of opera," to the great 19th-century achievements of Rossini, Puccini, and Verdi, who is considered the greatest composer of opera. Italy is also known for the compositions of the baroque masters, including Vivaldi, and the makers of great violins such as the Stradivarius. In literature, Italy's great masterpieces

include the Aeneid of the Roman writer Virgil and the 14th-century works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, including Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the first great work in the Italian language. Since 1901, there have been six Italian authors who have received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

#### **15 WORK**

In recent years, employment in Italy's service sector has increased rapidly. In 2001, it accounted for 63% of the nation's work force, compared to about 32% for industry and 5% for agriculture. Italian industry expanded rapidly after World War II, especially between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s. The Piedmont region in the north is one of Europe's major auto manufacturing centers and figures in the "industrial triangle" of Turin, Milan, and Genoa, where most of the country's major industries are concentrated. Southern Italy is less developed economically and has a higher rate of unemployment (around 20% in 2008). Many Sicilians now work abroad, and their earnings figure significantly in the island's economy. Labor strikes are common among workers in many areas of the service sector, including the post office, railroads, hospitals, schools, banks, and the media. Italy's economy has approximately the same total and per capita output as France and the United Kingdom. Most raw materials needed by industry and more than 75% of energy requirements are imported.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer (“football,” called *calcio* in Italy) is by far Italy’s most popular sport. In 2006 the Italian national team won the World Cup—its fourth. Nearly all large and medium-size cities have a team in one of the three professional divisions. *Totocalcio* is a very popular betting pool connected with the scores of the soccer games in the three divisions. In addition to its popularity as a spectator sport, soccer is played by many Italians, and games at the village, city, and district level are accompanied by intense competition. Italians also enjoy bicycle and motorcycle racing, basketball, boxing, tennis, and downhill skiing in the Italian Alps. A type of bowling played on clay court called *bocce* is popular in small towns.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Like many Europeans, Italians are passionate soccer fans (called *tifosi*), watching games in stadiums and at home on television. The fanaticism surrounding this sport has caused major riots (in which people have died), as well as heart attacks during games (even by fans watching at home). Mammoth traffic jams are commonplace on Sunday afternoons, when games are played. Italians are also avid followers of auto and bicycle racing. Many bicycle races are sponsored by cities and corporations, and crowds congregate at the finish line regardless of the weather.

Many Italians like to spend their leisure hours with friends at a cafe, where they can stay as long as they like. Cafes are also popular spots for such solitary pursuits as reading or letter writing. Even daily meals are a form of recreation in Italy: Italians commonly spend up to two hours eating their midday meal, generally joining their families for food, wine, and conversation. On Sundays, the whole family may gather at an outdoor restaurant for this extended meal and spend the entire afternoon there. Even a night on the town in a sophisticated city like Rome generally means dining late at a *trattoria* (a small restaurant) and lingering over wine as the waiters are closing up for the night.

Beaches are popular recreational spots, especially with young people, who also enjoy “hanging out” at the local piazza, or square.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Italy’s handcrafted products include fine lace linens, glass, pottery, carved marble, and gold and silver filigree work. The sale of these products is important to the Italian economy, and the government provides assistance to the artisans who produce them.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Bureaucratic red tape and administrative inefficiency affect many aspects of daily life, including transportation, mail and telephone service, health care, and banking, among others. The resulting delays and inconveniences experienced regularly as a result are exacerbated by frequent service-sector strikes. Another traditional problem that still plagues Italy is organized crime, especially in the south of the country. Mafia violence may involve feuds between competing gangs, the kidnapping of wealthy persons or their relatives, or drug-related activities. Mob trafficking in narcotics and other drugs has given Italy a drug problem worse than that in most other European coun-

tries. Other problems in the 21st century include illegal immigration, high unemployment, and sluggish economic growth.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Officially, the father is the authority figure in the family, although women wield great power within the domestic sphere, especially in terms of the influence they exercise on their sons—Italian men are said to have an unusually strong lifetime attachment to their mothers. Although many Italian women continue to fulfill traditional roles, more and more work outside the home and pursue professional careers.

Italy, as the home of the Catholic Church, has negative attitudes towards homosexuality in general. Ironically, Italy is one of the few countries in the world that never enacted any specific anti-homosexual legislation. In the poorer south, gays are more stigmatized or discriminated against than in the more cosmopolitan north, especially in the larger cities of Milan and Bologna, where there is much more tolerance and acceptance. Rome and Naples are two exceptions to this rule and both cities have large gay communities. Italian attitudes toward homosexuals are changing, however. A survey taken in 2006 showed that 31% of Italians surveyed supported same-sex marriage and 24% recognized same-sex couples’ rights to adopt (compared to the EU-wide average of 44% and 33%, respectively). In February 2007 the Romano Prodi government proposed a new law allowing a restricted version of civil union, which would grant rights to unmarried couples in areas of labor law, inheritance, tax, and medical assistance. The law faced strong opposition from the Catholic church and from Christian members of parliament. The Prodi government fell in 2008, and it was unclear if the legislation would be revived under Silvio Berlusconi.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# KALMYKS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Khal'mg (Qal'mg)

**LOCATION:** Russia (Republic of Kalmykia in the southwest)

**POPULATION:** 518,500 total, 174,000 in Russia

**LANGUAGE:** Kalmyk

**RELIGION:** Tibetan sect of Mahayana Buddhism (Lamaism)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Kalmyks were originally members of the Oirat (Oyirad) people, a West Mongolian ethnic conglomerate living as nomadic pastoralists in the Dzungarian steppes of the Inner Asian heartland between the Altai and T'ien Shan Mountains. Dzungaria (Djungaria), in Sinkian (Xinjiang) Province of China, is the original homeland of a people known in the West as the Kalmyks (also spelled Kalmucks and Kalmuks), and in Central Asia, particularly among the closely related Mongolian nationalities, as *Idjil Monggol* (the Volga Mongols), *Öröd* (Oirats), or *Dörwn Öröd* (Four Oirat [Allies]). The latter are *Torgüüd*, *Dörböd*, *Khoshud* (*Qoshud*), and *Khöd* (*Qöd*) or *Qoyid*. The fourth member of this Oirat confederation has been variously referred to as *Qöd* (*Qoyid*), *Ölod*, *Dzungar* or *Djungar*, or *Tsoros*.

The self-appellation of the Kalmyks is *Khal'mg* (*Qal'mg*). Their Turkic-speaking neighboring peoples and tribes called them *qalmaq*, or *galmuq*, from which the Russian spelling *Kalmyk* has been derived. This name must have come into use at the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century, when the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and other Turkic peoples first came into direct contact with the vanguard of the ancestors of the Kalmyks, the Oirats (Oyirad). The name *Kalmyk* is not used in Central or Inner Asia. The Chinese historian Ch'ing-yü Wu reports that "throughout the entire Ch'ing Dynasty, in spite of the close relations between the Court and the Oirats, the name Kalmuk never made its appearance in any of either the official or personal works of the period and was not known until very recently, when some of the Western sources began to be used by Chinese scholars."

The ancestors of the Kalmyks initially came into direct contact with the Russians at about the same time. As a result of intertribal internecine dissension, as well as socio-economic and other factors, many of the component tribes of the Oirat confederation (*Torigüüd*, *Dörböd*, *Khoshud*) abandoned their ancestral nomadic encampments in Dzungaria and moved westward, finally occupying the steppes between the Ural and Lower Volga Rivers of South Russia in the 1620s. Other Oirat splinter groups joined them afterwards in the then-existing Kalmyk Khanate, and the entire group became known as the Kalmyks.

Under the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–96), Russia became a great European power. It was the policy of the imperial Russian authorities to limit the power and sovereignty of the Kalmyk khans and the Kalmyk fear of eventually being forced to convert to Christianity made them and their nobility discontented and agitated. In January 1771 approximately 169,000 people fled Russia to Dzungaria to avoid being completely subjugated to imperial Russian domination. They left behind, on the west bank of the Volga, one-fifth of their kinsmen, who were unable to join them because that winter

was unusually warm and the river did not freeze over, thereby making it impassable. The flight of the vast majority of the Kalmyks proved disastrous. Only a fraction reached Dzungaria in July 1771 after suffering great losses in human lives, livestock, and property. They became Chinese subjects, while those who remained behind were integrated into Great Russia. The Russians consolidated their rule over the Kalmyks and created three administrative divisions that were attached to the regional governments of Astrakhan, Stavropol, and Don. In the Civil War of 1917–20, most of the Kalmyks adopted a hostile attitude toward the atheist Bolsheviks and sided with the anti-Communist Russian armies. The defeat of these armies in 1920 led some of the Kalmyks to flee Russia. They dispersed into Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, France, and Czechoslovakia. The remaining Kalmyks in the Astrakhan steppe, like other non-Russian nationalities, were allowed to form their own autonomous *oblast'* (region) in November 1920. In October 1935, this region was elevated to the status of a republic and became the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (KASSR) with its capital at Elista. During World War II, the Kalmyks were drafted into the Red Army like all other peoples of the USSR. After the German invasion of the Kalmyk Republic in 1942 and their subsequent expulsion, the Kalmyks were unjustifiably accused of collaborating with the German army. The Soviets took punitive measures with regard to the Kalmyks, not bothering much about the validity of the rumors. They dissolved the Kalmyk Republic, and on 27 December 1943, deported the Kalmyks to Siberia and Soviet Central Asia. After the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party (1957), at the beginning of the year of the "liquidation of the cult of personality" (i.e., de-Stalinization), the Kalmyks were permitted to return to their former homeland, which on 29 July 1958 again became the KASSR. In 1991 the republic, now one of the 16 autonomous republics within the Russian Federation, changed its name to Kalmykia. It is headed by a popularly elected president for a term of seven years.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The population figures of the Kalmyk people in Russia for the period 1897–1989 present an interesting topic for demographic research. The official census figures of the Kalmyk population in Russia are: 1897, 190,648; 1926, 129,321; 1929, 134,866; 1959, 106,066 (only 64,822 in the KASSR); 1970, 137,194 (of whom 110,264 lived in their native land); 1979, 146,631 (of whom 122,167 lived in the KASSR); and 1989, 174,528 (of whom 146,275 resided in their native republic). In addition, there were 121,531 Russians and 54,773 inhabitants representing 41 different nationalities (i.e., 176,304 non-Kalmyks.) Thus, the total population of Kalmykia comprised 322,579, of whom there were 158,020 males and 164,559 females, and 147,176 urban and 175,403 rural inhabitants. Some 89.9% considered Kalmyk their mother tongue. The significant decreases in population figures between 1897 and 1926 and between 1939 and 1959 are striking. A comparison of the 1897 and 1926 census figures shows that the Kalmyks decreased in number from 190,648 to 134,866. These tremendous human losses should be attributed to the tragic events of the Civil War of 1917–1920 in Russia, the ensuing flight of a sizeable number of people to Turkey and points beyond, malnutrition, and terrible famine in the Volga region in the early 1920s. According to the censuses of 1939 and 1959, the number of Kalmyks declined



in 20 years by 28,800, or 21%, if all of these figures are at all trustworthy. There were 91,972 inhabitants in the capital city of Elista (called Steponi between 1944 and 1957) in 1990. The Kalmyk diaspora is made up of about 1,000 Kalmyks residing in the United States, who immigrated in 1951–52 and during the 1960s from various European countries, and between 700 and 750 in Europe, mostly in France, with small numbers in Germany and Bulgaria. A few Kalmyks can be found in Canada, Belgium, and the Czech Republic.

The Republic of Kalmykia is situated in the southwestern part of the Russian Federation, on the west bank of the lower Volga and the northwestern shore of the Caspian Sea. It extends approximately from 41°45' to 47°30' E. and from 48°20' to 44°50' N. The geographic center is at 45°30' E. and 46°30' N. Kalmykia borders on the Rostov-on-Don region in the west, the Astrakhan region in the east, the Volgograd region in the north, and the Stavropol *krai* (territory) and the Republic of Dagestan in the south. It is comprised essentially of a dry steppe or of the vast semidesert flat lowland of the northern Caspian Depression. The climate is markedly continental, with hot and dry summers and very cold winters but with little snow. The average temperature in July fluctuates between 23° and 26°C (73.6° to 78.8°F) and in January from minus 8° to minus 5°C (18° to 23°F).

### 3 LANGUAGE

Kalmyk is a West Mongolian language, closely affiliated with Khalkha (Qalqa) Mongolian (spoken in Mongolia), various

Mongolian dialects spoken in the Sinkiang (Hsin-chiang) Uighur Autonomous Region of China, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, and in the Buriat Republic in Russia. They all constitute the Mongolian language group, an important division of the Altaic family of languages. Kalmyk is spoken by the overwhelming majority (89.9%) of the population of Kalmykia and by the older generation of the Sart Kalmyks numbering 3,000 to 4,000 and dwelling in the area of Przhevalsk, near Lake Issyk Kul, in the northeastern part of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. The younger generation is now almost completely assimilated and speaks Turkic Kyrgyz. The Kalmyk language is divided into three dialects—Torgūd, Döböd dialect, and Buzâwa. The latter is quite close to Torgūd and is spoken by the Don Kalmyks, who before the 1920s resided in the Sal'sk District of the Don Cossack region. The Dörböd dialect, spoken by the Dörböd of Astrakhan (Lesser Dörböd) and Stavropol (Greater Dörböd) Provinces, varies in some rather insignificant ways from the Torgūd and Buzâwa dialects. A few of the characteristic features of the Kalmyk language are as follows: (1) two distinctive inventories of single (short) and geminate (long) vowel phonemes; (2) vocalic harmony, a common feature of the Altaic languages (i.e., in one and the same stem, only front or back vowels may occur, with *I* occurring in stems with any vowels); (3) the absence of any gender categories; (4) ten cases for the declension of nouns, nominal postpositions, pronouns, participles, etc., as well as a singular/plural distinction; (5) verbs having the categories of mood, tense, person, number, voice, and aspect; (6) lack of agreement in gender, case, and number between adjectives and nouns.

Until 1648, the Kalmyks and their kindred Oirates (Oyirad) used the old vertical Mongolian script. In 1648, the learned monk-scholar Zaya Pandiata (1599–662) invented the so-called “clear script” (*todo bichig*), an improved and phonetically more precise Mongolian script. It came somewhat closer to the actual pronunciation but was never a phonetic one, and thus remained always quite apart from the colloquial Kalmyk language.

The Zaya Pandiata script fell into disuse and was replaced in 1924 by the Cyrillic alphabet, popularly referred to as the Russian alphabet. This was abandoned in 1931, however, when the modified Latin alphabet was introduced in many non-Russian republics and regions, only to be replaced in 1938 once again by the Cyrillic alphabet. The latter has been in use up to this day.

Kalmyk is especially rich in kinship and livestock terminology, forms of polite address with respect to nobility and the secular clergy, and terms of respect when addressing elderly and senior people. The firstborn child is called *uugn* and the youngest one is *otxn*. An ordinary person's photo or picture is *zurg* but that of the ecclesiastic's is *günra*. To die or pass away is *ükx önggrx*, but *taal* or *burxn bolx* for lamas and high secular clergy. To arrive or sit solemnly as applied to princes and high lamas is *zalrx*; otherwise, it is *irx*. Domestic animals such as horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and camels have different names depending on their age, sex, color and, if applicable, whether or not they are castrated. Thus, a one year-old lamb is *xurgn* or *tölg*, a sheep aged two years is *zusz xön*, a ram aged three years is *gunn irg*, a female sheep aged four years or older is *xön*, a ram of the same age is *xuc*, but a castrated one of the same age is *irg*.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Kalmyk people can justifiably boast of one of the richest oral traditions not only among the Mongolian-speaking peoples but also among Asian peoples as a whole. From time immemorial this tradition has preserved rich and diverse specimens of folklore with loving care. Myths are the most archaic among the specimens of oral literature. Their oldest layer can be traced to the heroic tales and the heroic epic *Janggar*, which states that there are three levels of outer space: the Upper universe (*Tenggrin gazr*) inhabited by dragons, celestial beings, and gigantic birds; the Middle universe (*Zambtiv*), whose inhabitants are the epic heroes, demons, and ordinary mortals; and the Lower universe, which is the realm of various mythological creatures such as gigantic serpents, ghosts of the waters, mountains, and so on.

Legends did not originally differ from the myths either in content or form. The oldest legends reflected mythological and werewolf-like views of the phenomena of nature and primitive society. Quite a few folk legends tell about the origins and the ancestors of the tribes and clans—e.g., a well-known legend about the origin of the Dörböd princes of the Tsoros clan or another tale of Tundutov, the forefather of the Dörböd princes.

The paremiological folklore represented by the proverbs, proverbial phrases, and riddles is especially rich and widespread; these forms clearly reflect the succinct folk wisdom. Benedictions (*yöräl*), glorifications (*magtal*), damnations (*kh- aral*), incantations (*tarni*), and songs relate to the ancient forms of oral folk poetry. Benedictions are usually rhythmic in nature and are uttered on all kinds of occasions,—for example, weddings, the birth of a child, when greeting guests at the table, in proposing a toast to someone's health, or success, as congratulations, and so on. Damnation (*kh aral*) is the complete antithesis to benediction (*yöräl*) because it means misfortune, harm, or disaster to someone else. Glorifications (*magtal*) were an odic form exalting the heroic deeds of epic and war heroes. Incantations (*tarni*) were primarily spoken by women in order to pursue a determinate object producing a particular effect.

The genres of Kalmyk songs are diverse—heroic, historic, ritual, lullaby, drinking, satirical, songs of praise, and so on. They are either short (*axr dun*) or long and drawn-out (*ut dun*). The latter are considered the oldest in the song repertoire of the Mongolian peoples. The folktale is an especially rich and popular genre of Kalmyk oral tradition, and there are four such genres: fairy tales, heroic tales, animal tales, and everyday (morals and manners) tales.

The heroic epic *Janggar's* is the best-known specimen of Kalmyk and Oirate oral literature. It bears the name of the main hero who is surrounded and supported by a dozen of his closest and most trusted heroes. They courageously fight foreign and alien enemies at *Janggar's* side. Each of these heroes is endowed with a specific distinctive attribute. The events in this epic take place in the imaginary land of Bumba, a land of boundless happiness and prosperity, of eternal youth and immortality, a land where winter is unknown. Hero worship is an underlying element of this epic.

#### 5 RELIGION

The Kalmyks were faithful and fervent Buddhists, following the faith of their forebears. If Kalmykia is classified as a part of Europe, then the Kalmyks would be considered the only Buddhist

ethnic group inhabiting Europe. They belong to the Tibetan "Yellow Hat" or *Gelugpa* (Virtuous Way) sect of the Mahâyâna or Northern branch of Buddhism, which is also commonly referred to as Lamaism. It still contains an admixture of indigenous beliefs and shamanistic practices. The Kalmyks were converted from their earlier shamanistic beliefs to Tibetan Buddhism shortly before they reached the Lower Volga area in the early 17th century. Until the exodus in 1771, they were able to maintain direct contacts with Tibetan religious centers, thus enabling the importation of sacred Tibetan texts, religious images and thankas, church plates, and other articles. Many monks went to Tibet and Mongolia for advanced education at the lamaseries. The Dalai Lamas have always been recognized by the Kalmyks and other Mongolian-speaking peoples as the highest spiritual and religious authority.

During the existence of the Soviet Union, religion in the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic was completely suppressed. All Buddhist temples were either closed or destroyed. The last elected religious head of the Kalmyk people, Lama Lubsan Sharab Tepkin (born in 1875), was arrested in 1931, tried, condemned, and exiled to the region of Tashkent in present-day Uzbekistan for a period of 10 years. The date of his death and the place of his burial are unknown. The first sign of the revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia can be dated to January 1989, when the first (albeit small) *khurul* (Kalmyk Buddhist temple) began to function in Elista. In June of that year the first group of 10 Kalmyk boys was selected and sent to Ulan Bator in Mongolia to study Buddhist scriptures and prayers at the local Buddhist academy. In 1991 a Buddhist temple was opened in Buryatia in Siberia, and among its 60 pupils were several Kalmyks. On 5 October 1996 the first large-scale multistoried temple was opened and consecrated. Many other temples have been built throughout Kalmykia, totaling over 20. The Kalmyks in the United States have four functioning temples—three in Howell, New Jersey, and one in Philadelphia.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

All holidays celebrated by the Kalmyks are non-secular (i.e., strictly religious) and based on the lunar calendar. As a rule, being Buddhists, the Kalmyks do not observe Christmas, Easter, or other Christian and non-Christian holidays. Six major Buddhist holidays are celebrated and are marked by giving gifts to the temples and money and food for the lamas.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the days when doctors or hospitals were not available, Kalmyk women gave birth to their children in their traditional nomadic tents or houses. Midwives were usually unpaid elderly women without any formal training. A midwife (*baabk* in Kalmyk) was highly respected in the household concerned. The birth of a boy always brought joy because it secured the continuity of the patrilineal descent of the family. Childlessness or giving birth only to girls was considered the greatest misfortune that could occur. It was not unusual for a childless woman to return to her parents' home. The childhood and teenage years in Kalmyk families have no distinctive rites of passage. Death and burial are a family matter. It is customary to visit the deceased person's family to express one's condolences. Monks, who consult the sacred Buddhist scriptures, determine the dates of the funeral and the memorial services. During the funeral they let it be known that people born in

certain lunar years may not touch the deceased's coffin. At that time or at the requiem, both people present and not present donate money to the bereaved family as a token of their sympathy. It is believed that after death the spirit of a deceased person wanders about for 49 days. On the 49th day the invited monks offer special prayers at the home of the deceased in the presence of his/her family. On this day, the soul of the departed is supposed to leave his/her home and transmigrate into another body or being. In times past, it was customary to cremate the mortal remains of nobility and high ecclesiastics in full view of the people.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Buddhist clergy occupies a position of high esteem. When commoners meet ecclesiastics, they greet them by bowing and touching their heads against the monks' hands. Formerly, it was not customary to shake hands. Women, especially those who are middle-aged and elderly, usually abstain from handshakes with each other. It is considered to be a sign of piety and courtesy to bow before a host's Buddhist altar if it is within sight. The elderly are highly respected in Kalmyk culture. They are traditionally allowed entry to homes before the younger people and are given the right to lead conversations and not be interrupted. Kalmyks are known to be hospitable. Traditionally, the doors of one's home were always open to everyone, even complete strangers. It was acceptable to enter someone else's abode without ringing the door bell or knocking at the door. Visitors and guests are always served tea, food, and drinks. Refusal of the offer of drink and food is considered rude and pompous, insulting to the host or the hostess. In the past, young unmarried men and women met only at evening parties, as dating was not then socially acceptable. A formerly observed custom was for a bridegroom to meet his bride for the first time on their wedding day. Many customs have since changed, however, and dating, now commonplace, is not significantly different from dating in other countries.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Before the 1917 Bolshevik *coup d'état* in Russia, medical care in Kalmykia was virtually nonexistent. The people relied for their medical care on Buddhist monks (*emchi*) who had been trained in Tibetan medicine. The mortality rate was quite high, especially among children. The number of cases of smallpox was substantial because the Kalmyks were afraid of being vaccinated. The introduction of Western medicine in the 1920s significantly alleviated health problems in Kalmykia. At about the same time, the Soviet authorities started to combat the most widely spread diseases—tuberculosis and venereal diseases—just as they did in Mongolia. Tuberculosis was attributed to three causes: an occupational disease among the fishing population along the shores of the Caspian Sea; undernourishment; and the wearing of sleeveless camisoles by Kalmyk girls beginning as early as seven or eight years of age. The tight camisoles prevented normal chest development.

Even though tuberculosis is supposed to have been completely eradicated in Kalmykia, sporadic outbreaks of this contagious disease have been reported in recent years. The Kalmyks seem to be susceptible to tuberculosis. For example, a considerable number of people fell ill with it in prewar Yugoslavia and postwar Germany. Because of negligence on the part of the medical personnel of the Elista city hospital, a mass

outbreak of AIDS occurred in the spring of 1989. The total number of people infected by the AIDS virus in Kalmykia exceeded 100, the overwhelming majority of them children, and some have since died. Teams of medical specialists from New Jersey have visited Kalmykia on half a dozen occasions in order to render assistance and deliver needed medical equipment and instruments to hospitals in Elista.

The population of Kalmykia can be divided into urban and rural. The town dwellers are better off as far as employment opportunities, housing conditions, consumer goods, public education, and medical facilities are concerned. In Elista, for instance, most of the people live in tenement houses in their own multi-room apartments that meet minimum standards of sanitation, safety, and comfort and are usually located near bus stops. Taxicabs are also readily available. The living conditions in most of the rural areas, however, are inferior. Not all of the countryside communities have adequate basic services such as indoor water and sewer facilities, gas, proper housing, transportation, hospitals and clinics. For this reason, many Kalmyks living in villages have decided to migrate to urban areas, either in Kalmykia or further in another part of Russia. The standard of living of Kalmyks living in West European countries and in the United States is predictably higher.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women were traditionally regarded in Kalmyk society as of lesser standing. To be sure, the Kalmyk women were not blindly subject to their husbands as in India, nor were they strictly isolated as in Islamic tradition. Nonetheless, there was a patriarchal system of rules governing the conduct of women, particularly married women. The practice of taboos against saying men's names resulted in a special women's jargon. All clothing was sewn by women. A woman's daily household routine consisted of preparing food and *arrack* (a type of alcoholic beverage), milking cows and mares, gathering fuel, drying and salting meat, and caring for children. The change from a nomadic to a sedentary way of life alleviated the lives of Kalmyk women as fewer items were domestically manufactured and more were purchased. More women began to attend educational institutions and to receive higher education. Today, many women in Kalmykia hold advanced degrees in a wide range of fields. In the United States, quite a few Kalmyk women have received a college education.

The average family size in Kalmykia consists of about four to five individuals. The strained housing and economic conditions of a sizable proportion of the Kalmyk population significantly affect family size. Previously, it was not uncommon for a family to have six or more children.

Marriage is monogamous; polygamous marriages are unknown. In the past, the only polygamists were khans and high nobility. Until recently, marriages in both Kalmykia and abroad were for the most part endogamous (marrying within one's own ethnic group) unless there were no locally available Kalmyk girls. The number of marriages between Kalmyks of both sexes and non-Kalmyks has been progressively growing. This development has affected the Kalmyk family in many mostly unfavorable ways. Parents strive to have their sons and daughters marry their own kinsmen and co-religionists, but in Kalmyk tradition, marriage between young people of the same *yasun* (kin in the bone) and between distant cousins up to seven times removed is discouraged. This significantly lim-

its the possibilities for in-group marriage. Married sons are customarily expected to live with and care for aging parents. When there are no married sons, married daughters assume this responsibility.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional clothing for men and women was of the same design irrespective of region. Men wore rather long and baggy shirts with low collars made of canvas, coarse calico, or cotton. Trousers were tucked into boots of black goatskin leather. Over their shirts, men wore a Caucasian-type *besmet* (quilted coat) that fitted at the waist, with a stand-up collar. The preferred color of the *besmet* was blue. Worn underneath it was a waistcoat made of *nankeen* (cloth). The belt, made of silver, was considered the most valuable item of apparel and a required element of male and female garments. The headdresses of both men and women were diverse. The most widely worn cap was the *toorcg*, with a black lambskin cap band and a quadrangular top trimmed with otter. The top of the cap was made of bright broadcloth edged with white or colored lace. A distinctive red tassel jutted out in the middle. Many men liked to wear Russian-type service caps.

Starting at 14 years of age, girls wore over their underwear a peculiar, tight sleeveless canvas corset (called a *kamzol*) that prevented the natural growth of their breasts. On top of this they wore a special kind of *besmet* called a *biiz* with a tight waist made of silk, wool, satin or printed cotton. The lace or cloth belt was a required part of the girl's attire. The female headdress was of three main styles. As everyday clothing, married women wore long-sleeved dresses down to their heels. Over their white shirts, they wore a long sleeveless *tsegdeg* embellished with ornamental details sewn from wool or black cotton materials. These were adorned with rich embroidery. Unlike men and unmarried women, married women never girdled themselves. Today, traditional clothing is worn only on special occasions such as religious festivities, major national holidays, weddings, and so on. In the last 80 or so years, Kalmyks have worn clothing similar to that of other modern urbanites.

## **12 FOOD**

The Kalmyk diet is based primarily on meat. By far the favorite meat is lamb, followed by beef, chicken, and pork. In the past, camel and horseflesh were also eaten. Until very recently, the staple of the Kalmyk diet was so-called Kalmyk tea, which was made from crumbled pressed-brick tea, milk, salt, butter, nutmeg, and bay leaves. Brick tea was originally imported from China but in recent years it has been replaced by locally grown tea from Georgia and other southern regions of Russia. This tea is served always at rites and holidays, but regular tea or tea bags and evaporated milk are used for everyday purposes. On ceremonial occasions it is also customary to serve boiled lamb cut up into small pieces and mixed with finely cut fresh onions. Lamb stock is also served on those occasions, and it is believed to have medicinal properties.

A very popular Kalmyk dish is *dotur*. After a sheep is slaughtered, the thoroughly washed large and small intestines, tripe, and stomach are cut into pieces. The lung, liver, kidney, and heart are also washed. All the entrails are boiled and then served. Customarily, relatives and neighbors are invited to eat this *dotur*. An equally popular dish is *böreg*, a counterpart of

Chinese boiled dumplings and Russian *vareniki*. This is made of ground lamb or beef that is boiled and sometimes served with sour cream. This dish is also popular in Tibet, Mongolia, Buriatia, and Sinkiang (Xinjiang). Formerly, the common people consumed a soup, *budan*, almost daily. *Budan* consisted of dried lamb or beef with onions and was thickened by adding flour to the broth, and finally sour cream was added. *Kumiss* is a beverage made of fermented mare's or camel's milk. It is not readily available nowadays, but a similar drink prepared from fermented cow's milk is used for medicinal and dietetic purposes. *Chigän*—fermented cow's milk added to fresh milk—is a refreshing drink. *Bulmug*, a gravy-like dish of thick broth, flour, milk, sugar, raisins, and fresh apples and/or pears, is usually prepared in winter. *Borcog* are small flat whorl-shaped cakes made of flour, water, and yeast and fried in oil. These come in various shapes and forms and are served on festive occasions. There are no taboos of any kind insofar as food and drinks are concerned.

Kalmyks today are becoming accustomed to European and Russian food such as *borscht* (soup made of cabbage and beets), *bliny* (thin round pancakes), *xolodec* (jellied minced meat somewhat similar to headcheese), and *vinegret* (salad of cucumbers, potatoes, onions, etc., dressed with oil and vinegar). Kalmyks who have lived in countries outside of Russia (the Balkans, France, etc.) have adopted some of their popular dishes. In the United States, young Kalmyks do not differ from their American counterparts in what they eat and drink.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Until the 1930s, literacy among the Kalmyks was very low. Many parents chose not to send their children to Russian grammar schools out of fear that they might become Russianized and/or baptized. Other parents were unable to educate their offspring because they could not afford to pay the school dormitory expenses in distant locations. The Soviet authorities, realizing that only literate people could be reached by propaganda and be of use for agricultural and industrial development, began massive Soviet campaigns directed at the eradication of illiteracy. According to Soviet sources, by 1940 the literacy rate had risen to 91%, up from 3.8% in 1924. Today, the percentage of Kalmyks who can read and write must be even higher because of considerable progress in education.

Education was sorely neglected in the Kalmyk steppe by the Tsarist government. In 1917, there were only 14 Kalmyks with a higher education. The number of elementary schools was small, and they were far apart. The language of instruction was Russian. Recently, the Kalmyk language has experienced a revival. In 1993, 24 national classes were developed, and national classes and the teaching of Kalmyk language is a priority and continues to be expanded. Teaching of Kalmyk culture and history is also a priority. There are no longer shortages of schools (from grammar to senior high school) or of college-educated teachers. In 1964, the Kalmyk Pedagogical Institute was established in Elista. Six years later, it was reorganized into the Kalmyk State University. It has numerous departments offering undergraduate courses in Kalmyk language and literature, Russian, foreign languages, history, mathematics, agriculture, and so on. In recent years, new courses in marketing, business, and management have been introduced. The establishment of a graduate school is in the initial stages.



A Kalmyk doctor examines a patient at the Centre of Tibetan Medicine in the Kalmyk capital Elista. Tibetan culture is very popular in the small Russian Republic of Kalmykia. (Tatyana Makeyeva/AFP/Getty Images)

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Russian and other foreign travelers who visited the migratory Kalmyks in the 18th and 19th centuries took note of their musical ability. They reported that most of the musicians playing the *dombra*, a two-stringed, triangular-shaped musical instrument, were women. (The instrument's strings were made from sheep intestines.) One of the most prominent foreign visitors was Alexandre Dumas père (1802–1870), a famous French novelist and dramatist, who visited the Kalmyk steppe in October 1859. He was entertained at a dinner in his honor at the mansion of Prince Tseren-Djab Tumen' (1824–1864) by an orchestra of Kalmyk musicians who played overtures by Mozart and Rossini. The great Russian composer and director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov, immediately recognized the exceptional talent of a Kalmyk student, Dordji Mandjiev (1883–1909), a gifted cellist and violinist. Unfortunately, Mandjiev died of pulmonary tuberculosis in the prime of his life. In general, Kalmyk women are more involved in music and singing than men. Today they are familiar with the violin, cello, accordion, grand piano, and other instruments.

During formal and informal gatherings and various festive ceremonies, Kalmyk singing and dancing take place to the accompaniment of the *dombra*. Dancing involves the stamping and rapid movement of the feet more than the movement of the arms and hands. It is done by same-sex or opposite-sex, individually, in foursomes, or even in a group. Dance partners face each other, but when they turn around they dance back-to-back. Women dance more calmly, easily, and gracefully,

whereas the dancing of the men is notable for its occasional swift movements and for the loud stamping of feet.

Secular literature did not exist until the advent of the 20th century. The only known literary works are three historical chronicles written in the vertical *todo* script during the 18th and 19th centuries. The first Kalmyk writers made their appearance at the end of the 1920s with short stories and poems. The poets wrote their poems in the traditional alliterative metrical verses, which were either consonantal or vocalic—i.e., in a tetrastich (a stanza consisting of four lines) in which initial consonants or vowels were repeated either successively or alternately. In Kalmyk verses, the lines are non-rhyming. The first novels appeared in 1962. In 1957, a new generation of poets and prose writers made their appearance after their return from enforced exile in Siberia and Soviet Central Asia. Some younger writers write their works only in Russian. The works of Kalmyk writers and poets appeared also in Russian translation, particularly in Elista and Moscow. Needless to say, until about 1990, writers had to adhere to the canons of the Communist Party–controlled dominant style of Socialist Realism.

The breeding of horses was traditionally part of the Kalmyks heritage, due to their nomadic past. Today, there is a tendency to return to this tradition, as 28 stud farms operate in the republic. Likewise, the breeding of sheep has been important to the Kalmyks in the past and continues to be important to the Kalmyks.

While Kalmyks are Buddhist, some remnants of older religion and shamanism remain in practice. In some areas, shamans are reported to continue to hold a place of respect. Fire is believed to be sacred and to have cleansing properties. Smoke from juniper branches are also considered to have cleansing properties. Heaps of stones that are believed to have spiritual properties are found in the region.

#### 15 WORK

Until recently, few goods were purchased. Women, who bore the full brunt of domestic housekeeping and were busy from sunrise until late in the evening, made most goods. They sewed all the clothing and, in addition to the daily household work of preparing food and *arrack* (an alcoholic brandy distilled from fermented mare's milk, *kumiss*), they milked the cows and mares, gathered fuel, dried and salted meat, and cared for children. With the abandonment of the nomadic way of life and the rise of a settled agricultural existence, certain changes took place. The evolution of the Kalmyk economy also brought about changes in Kalmyk life. Fewer items were manufactured at home and more were purchased. During World War I and World War II, Kalmyk women had to bear the entire responsibility for the fields and their homes while the men were at the front. In the past, a favorite pastime for men was to visit to their relatives, comrades, or neighbors in order to chat, exchange news and gossip, enjoy some drinks, play cards, or simply lie down out-of-doors either smoking pipes or napping in a shady place. All of this has changed, however, with the radical departure from a nomadic way of life and the advent of secular education. Nowadays, there is no difference between the work habits of Kalmyks of either sex.

#### 16 SPORTS

In the past, Kalmyk-style wrestling, archery, and horse racing were very popular. These took place during folk and religious



holidays, weddings, and other festive occasions and attracted throngs of local people as well as guests. Young girls and women competed in archery and horse racing equally with young boys and men. Horse races were conducted over a distance of 6.5 miles to 16.5 miles and involved the participation of 10–20 riders of both sexes. The Kalmyks are very fond of chess and known to be good chess players. In fact, as of 2008 the president of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, was the leader of FIDE, the World Chess Federation. He oversaw the building of a multi-million dollar complex called Chess City, located on the outskirts of Elista. By far the most popular sport played and enjoyed by both children and adults is soccer. In the 1930s the Kalmyk soccer team in Prague (consisting of high school and college students) made it to the first Czechoslovak soccer league. In the 1960s a Kalmyk soccer player played for the French national team as its captain. His son also became a famous soccer player.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

There are theatres and concert halls in Elista and elsewhere in Kalmykia. The former have been experiencing difficult times due to a decline in attendance, a lack of state funding, and a shortage of suitable plays.

Virtually every Kalmyk household has a television, which is very popular among both the urban and rural population. The television station in Elista offers both local and national news and various programs of entertainment and culture. The latter are transmitted from Moscow. In Kalmyk homes in the United States, it is not surprising to find VCRs, DVD players, personal computers, fax machines, and stereo systems.

Teenagers and other young people are fond of American youth culture. American clothing (blue jeans), rock music, and movies are especially popular. Entertainment is usually provided at weddings, dance parties, and other occasions, and musicians perform western-style music. At such functions, native Kalmyk music is also provided for dancing. Elista is home to several discos, which are frequented by young people.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditionally, Kalmykia had a reputation for its bonesetters, who treated both cattle and people. They could set fractures, or broken or dislocated bones, usually quite successfully. Sometimes they resorted to removing certain small shattered bones and replacing them with the bones of a young camel.

The Kalmyks were skilled in almost every imaginable type of handcraft. From head hides they made distinctive large flasks (*bortxo*) for keeping *arrack* brandy, and from the hides of legs and bellies of cattle they made hunting bags, buckets, and other vessels, as well as straps for various purposes. From sheepskin women sewed fur coats. Wooden cups of different shapes, sizes, and grades were hollowed out from birch, maple, elm, or walnut wood. These are still used in households for drinking Kalmyk tea. Kalmyks were also skilled goldsmiths and silversmiths.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In December 1943 the Kalmyks were subjected to the most flagrant violation of their human and civil rights when the entire nation, including front-line soldiers and officers, was deported to Siberia and adjacent regions for alleged collaboration with the German army of occupation. Since their return

to their homeland in 1957, they have enjoyed equal rights in every respect. In Kalmykia, Russians enjoy the same rights as the Kalmyks, despite some evidence of tensions. The office of mayor in Elista, the capital city, has been held by a Russian, as has the representative from Kalmykia to the Russian State Duma (parliament).

Drug abuse has as of yet not been a major problem in Kalmykia. Alcoholism is a problem, although numbers of alcohol-related deaths are lower than the average for Russia. Kalmykia has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Russia, and life expectancy is lower.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

While in the past there may have been very little equality between the sexes among the Kalmyks, this is a trend that has changed. Today, the situation of Kalmyk women is similar to that of most other women in Russia. Kalmyk women, as women of most ethnicities under the Soviet Union, were actively encouraged to join the workforce. Kalmyk women are known to hold important positions within their community, obtaining success both in business and civil careers.

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—revised by M. Kerr

# KARACHAI

**LOCATION:** Caucasus mountains between Russia and Georgia (Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic)

**POPULATION:** 169,000 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Karachai; Cherkessian; Russian

**RELIGION:** Islam

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Karachai people live in the Caucasus Mountains. Throughout the history of the Karachai, the mountains have helped to protect them from outside forces. Thus, the Karachai have been able to preserve their language and culture remarkably well.

In 1917, the Karachai supported Soviet power and fought against the Tsarist forces, who had repressed them for decades. For the Karachai, the first 10 years of Soviet power were peaceful and productive. They were granted a shared state status with the Circassian people to form the Karachaevo-Cherkessian Autonomous Region. They were permitted to publish Karachai books and newspapers and to open schools that taught in the Karachai language. However, as Joseph Stalin rose to power in the late 1920s and 1930s, the rights of the Karachai to develop their language and culture were curtailed. The Karachai were pressured to use the Russian language.

During World War II, the Karachai joined the Soviet Army to defeat Nazi Germany. Despite this contribution to the Soviet war effort, Stalin's government suspected the Karachai of secretly supporting the Germans. As punishment, and also to prevent any future betrayal of the Soviet Union, the entire Karachai population was deported in the spring of 1944. In a few days, the Soviet army and secret police rounded up all Karachai citizens, loaded them into boxcars, and shipped them hundreds of miles away to Kazakhstan or Siberia. Families were often separated, and many never saw their relatives again. Many died in transit, and others died of exposure or starvation when they arrived in their new locations, as the government did not provide them with food or shelter. Those living in exile were treated as traitors and suffered severe discrimination. They were not allowed to assemble in groups, participate in local politics, nor engage in their traditional cultural practices. The tragedy of the deportation, combined with the destruction of the Caucasian Wars in the 19th century, fueled a Karachai distrust of Russia that is still evident.

After Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev's government reconsidered the decision to deport the Karachai. Thus, in 1956, the Karachai were permitted to return to their homeland in the Caucasus Mountains. They left their places of exile in massive numbers, usually returning to the villages where they had lived prior to 1944. The Karachai spent years rebuilding their local communities and economy, which had suffered during the years of deportation. Although the Soviet government under Khrushchev was considerably less repressive than the Stalinist regime, the Karachai were nevertheless pressured to adopt the Russian language and Soviet culture. Moscow frequently appointed Russians to important political positions in the Karachai territory, and this was resented by many Karachai.

In the last years of Soviet power, under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet ethnic groups were given greater freedom to express their language and culture. The Karachai seized this opportu-

nity eagerly. They expanded their publishing houses, developed a new Karachai education program and opened new mosques. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic achieved even greater cultural and economic autonomy from Moscow. The Karachai have continued their cultural development and assumed an active political role in the Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic. While they retain their own ethnic identity and practices, they are open to modernization, particularly in economic activities.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic is located to the south of Russia and north of the Republic of Georgia, in the Caucasus Mountain Range, between the Black and Caspian Seas. The Karachai live in mountainous terrain in the south of the republic with the capital city named Karachevsk. The traditional occupation of the Karachai is sheep farming, and the alpine meadows of the Caucasus provide ideal terrain for grazing. Sheep farming remains a source of employment for many Karachai. Many Karachai have now migrated to the towns and cities to seek modern amenities and work.

According to the 2002 census, the Karachai population was 169,198. They comprise 38.5% of the entire population of the Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic (Russians account for 33.6%, Circassians for 11.6%, and Abazas for 7.4%), the Karachai population is concentrated in the southern region of the Republic in conditions of relative ethnic homogeneity. Karachai Diaspora still remains in Kazakhstan about 21,000, approximately 10,000 live in Turkey, and 20,000 in the United States (primarily in New Jersey).

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The five official languages of the Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic are Karachai, Circassian (Kabardian), Russian, Nogai, and Abaza. Most Karachai use their own language and are also fluent speakers, readers, and writers of Russian. Some Karachai have a command of Circassian. The Karachai language is part of the Kipchak Turkic language group. Karachai bears a strong resemblance to Turkish, with a similar structure and many similar words. In the late 1920s, under Stalin, the Karachai were required to change their alphabet from Latin (similar to modern Turkish) to Cyrillic (similar to Russian), and the Karachai still use the Cyrillic alphabet. Since the collapse of Soviet power, Karachai linguists have been working to replace words adopted from Russian with Turkic Karachai variants.

Traditionally, Karachai names were often of Muslim origin, such as the male name Khasan or the female name Zara. During the Soviet period, pressures to assimilate into Russian culture resulted in the frequent use of Russian first names, such as Yuri or Irina. More recently, as the Karachai have been able to express their culture more actively, traditional names have regained popularity. All children take the surname of their father. Upon marriage, most women do change their last names.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The epic folktale is the central, traditional expression of Karachai folklore. Such tales are lengthy stories of a hero who encounters and defeats obstacles and enemies in order to restore personal or family honor. These tales were usually passed on orally from generation to generation. As the Karachai suffered tragic experiences during the deportations, the epic tales

incorporated details of these events. The traditional folktale has become a means of both preserving Karachai history and teaching Karachai values of honor, bravery, and family loyalty. The Karachai retain an ancient set of myths, the Nart sagas.

## 5 RELIGION

The Karachai are almost exclusively Muslim. For most of the 20th century, the Soviet government prohibited the Karachai from openly practicing Islam. Religious celebrations of weddings or funerals were often conducted secretly. Therefore, most Karachai do not adhere strictly to Islamic ritual. For example, most do not participate in prayers five times daily, and many women, especially younger ones, do not wear head coverings. In the late Soviet and post-Soviet years, Karachai began to open and attend mosques. Some Karachai observe major Islamic festivals, such as Ramadan and Eid. During Ramadan, adults fast during daylight hours. Eid marks the end of Ramadan and is celebrated with large feasts.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

During the Soviet period, the major holidays were October 7, in recognition of the 1917 revolution, and May 1, the day of international socialism. People did not work or attend school on these days, and local governments often organized displays of music, dancing, and fireworks. Although Soviet power has collapsed, these holidays continue to be observed, and local officials are trying to create non-religious holidays to replace the Soviet celebrations. New Year's Eve is widely celebrated, as people invite guests to their homes to dine.

One of the most respected holidays among the Karachai is the Day of National Resurgence, which the Karachai celebrate on May 3 in honor of the day in 1957 when the first train of Karachai repatriates came from Kazakhstan to Karachaevsk.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Shortly after birth, boys are circumcised according to Islamic requirements, and this ceremony introduces the baby into the community. Even in the Soviet period, the Karachai adhered to the practice of circumcision. There is no similar ceremony for girls. The birthdate and name of a baby is registered with local authorities.

Traditionally, children would spend time with their parents, learning the tasks that they would be expected to perform as adults. Alongside their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, girls learned to cook, spin, weave, knit, and run the household. Boys were gradually included in the sheep farming activities of adult males. Children moved quickly into adulthood, with no distinct teenage stage. By the time they entered puberty, most young people had assumed many adult responsibilities and were encouraged to marry by their mid-teens.

In the second half of the 20th century, however, the traditional activities of children and teenagers have changed greatly. Children are required to attend school beginning in grade one, and many also attend nursery school and kindergarten. While children may, occasionally, be kept home from school to help with chores, most parents want their children to receive a good education. Rather than moving straight from childhood to adulthood, teenagers attend high school, a huge percent of Karachai youths continue their education in universities. Although many marry by their late teens, most young people do



have years of relative freedom in their early and mid-teens before moving on to the responsibilities of adult life.

Death is almost always marked by a religious ceremony and burial, practices that were observed even during the Soviet period. The family of the deceased is expected to hold a large feast to which all members of the community are invited.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Men usually greet one another with a handshake, and women also often shake hands with one another. Men and women rarely shake hands. According to traditions, a woman is expected to stand respectfully when a man enters a room, even if the man is her brother. This custom, however, is no longer widespread, particularly in towns and cities.

Traditionally, men and women did not dine together. Instead, men ate together in the dining room, and women and children stayed in the kitchen. The women appeared in the dining room only to bring food or clear the table. Although most families no longer observe these formalities, many will observe this segregation on formal occasions when guests have been invited to the house. If all the adult males are absent, which can occur when the sheep are grazing high in the mountains, then the oldest son will sit in the dining room with the guests while the women and other children remain in the kitchen.

The Karachai take great pride in traditions of hospitality toward guests. When important guests arrive in a home, a lamb or sheep may be slaughtered in their honor. The traditional

dish with which to honor the guests is a grilled sheep's head. Female guests will usually join the other women in the kitchen, but, if a female guest is not Karachai and is unfamiliar with local customs, she may be invited to eat in the dining room with the men.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Until the mid 20th century, most Karachai lived in small mountain communities. Each family had its own enclosed square courtyard that housed a number of buildings, including a barn, a cooking house (for large-scale food preparation, storage, and cooking in the heat of the summer), and a main house for sleeping and daily living. The ideal Karachai house was at least two stories tall, with a long second-floor balcony that extended around the perimeter of the house. Outhouses were located outside the main house, in a discreet spot in the courtyard. Most Karachai now have indoor plumbing.

Over the past 50 years, the Karachai have gradually begun to move to the larger towns or cities to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities. In these urban areas, people generally live in apartment buildings or houses. Despite this migration of Karachai to urban settings, a large proportion of Karachai continue to live in the country, and almost every Karachai person has relatives in rural areas.

During the Soviet period, the Karachai were not permitted to build two-story private dwellings. Even in rural areas, the Karachai were limited to single-floor, bungalow-style homes. After the collapse of Soviet power, these restrictions were removed and a flurry of building activity began in the early 1990s, as Karachai families began to rebuild the traditional, two-story homes.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Among the Karachai, the extended family is the traditional social and economic unit, with grandparents, parents, and children living within a single courtyard or house. When sons married, they would bring their wives home, and the new couple would live together with the son's parents and other family members. When a daughter married, she would leave her home to live with her husband's family. This remains the dominant pattern of family life in rural areas. As urbanization trends continue, more and more young Karachai couples move out on their own. However, urban housing is always in short supply and young urban couples will frequently live with parents for many years. Even urban Karachai adhere to the tradition of living with the parents of the son, since it is considered shameful for a man to live under the support of his in-laws.

Entering the household of her in-laws, a young bride may encounter conflict and tension with her husband's mother and other female relatives. Traditionally, the newest female in the household performs most of the heavy, demanding, or unpleasant household chores, and her opinion carries the least weight in the household. However, young wives may look forward to the day when they are in charge of the household and can rely on daughters and daughters-in-law to help with chores.

Women are responsible for cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and tending vegetable gardens. If the family possesses livestock other than sheep, such as chickens or a milking cow, the care of these animals also falls to women. Karachai women take pride in hard work. In addition to the household and courtyard chores, many women contribute to the house-

hold economy through the cottage industries of spinning and knitting. Shawls, hats, and gloves knitted with the soft wool of Caucasian sheep often bring a good price in urban markets.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional Karachai male costume includes tall, black leather riding boots and loose-fitting trousers. High-collared, long-sleeved shirts are topped with a short-sleeved, vest-like jacket. The jacket is decorated with rows of fabric loops that hold bullets. The jacket is belted, and a highly decorated silver sword is worn at the belt. The outfit is completed with a tall sheepskin hat.

The female costume consisted of a long, wide-skirted, high-necked dress with a fitted bodice and long, flared sleeves. The head covering, which was always worn outside the privacy of the home, included a pill-box style hat, over which was draped a long veil. Although head covering was essential, women did not cover their faces.

Since the last half of the 20th century, the Karachai have adopted Western dress for both informal and formal occasions. Some Karachai women, especially the older ones, still choose to cover their heads with a simple scarf or kerchief, and many men still wear the traditional sheepskin hat.

## 12 FOOD

The Karachai observe Islamic dietary restrictions. Therefore, they do not eat pork or pork products. The staple meats of the Karachai diet are lamb and mutton, and these meats are always served to honor guests. Only men are permitted to slaughter sheep, while the women perform the tasks of cooking. The Karachai prepare roasted lamb and shish kebab (called *shashlik*). *Shorpa* is a traditional stew made from lamb, rice, and potatoes, and *tursha* are large potatoes that are stuffed with a mixture of ground lamb, garlic, and onion. The organ meats of sheep are ground together with onion and garlic, stuffed into intestinal casings, and served as sausages.

The Karachai also prepare various flatbreads and make their own cheese, which resembles cottage cheese. Tomatoes and green peppers are common vegetables, and such herbs as parsley and fresh coriander are often eaten raw as vegetables. Tea is a favorite Karachai beverage and is consumed in great quantities during celebrations. In the towns and cities, meat may be difficult to obtain. However, as most Karachai have relatives in the countryside, they can usually obtain meat for special occasions.

## 13 EDUCATION

Until the 1920s, few Karachai received formal education. In particular, girls seldom attended school. The Soviet government made primary education mandatory. Today, education is mandatory for 11 years and children are instructed in both the Karachai and Russian languages.

After graduating from high school, young people have a variety of options. Some choose to receive further education at a trade institute or university. Although the Karachai region has its own university and many institutes, students sometimes attend post-secondary institutions in one of the larger cities within the Russian Federation. Other young people may choose a traditional occupation, living and working on the family farm.



*A boy in traditional dress stands in front of the memorial to victims of political repression on the Day of Rebirth of the Karachai people. (© Newspaper Cherkessk/ITAR-TASS/Corbis)*

#### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The deportation and exile of the Karachai from 1944 to 1956, combined with years of cultural repression under the Soviet regime, have had a disastrous effect on the development of Karachai culture. While the Karachai participate in music, dance, and literature, they have been unable to develop these cultural forms fully. Since the late 1980s, liberalization and cultural reform have given the Karachai opportunities to express their cultural identity and record cultural achievements.

The history of the deportations have been of great interest to the Karachai people. Only recently have Karachai scholars been allowed access to the records of these events. They are now permitted to write their histories according to their own interpretation, rather than through the interpretation of the central government. Many projects are underway, including interviews with survivors of the deportations. Other scholars are working to collect and record folklore, as many of the people who know traditional Karachai folktales and practices are very old.

#### **15 WORK**

Traditionally, each Karachai family unit ran its own sheep-farming operation. The sheep were used for wool, milk, and meat. Karachai household income was supplemented by such cottage industries as spinning and knitting, and many families maintained gardens and various livestock for family consumption.

During the Soviet period, employment for each citizen was guaranteed, and urban employment opportunities grew throughout the 20th century. With the availability of higher education, Karachai began to move to towns and cities. However, most families retained ties to the countryside, as many people were still employed in agriculture. The collapse of the Soviet economy meant a decline in state-sponsored jobs. As a more Western-style, market economy has replaced the state-directed economy, people throughout the former Soviet Union have experienced the challenges of a changing work environment. The Karachai, who take pride in their willingness to work hard, have learned many strategies for surviving in new economic conditions. Rural Karachai sell produce and hand-knit garments in cities as far away as Moscow. Others

have begun import-export businesses, especially with countries such as Turkey, where many ethnic Karachai reside. Some Karachai have grown wealthy in the post-Soviet era and some have moved into politics.

## 16 SPORTS

Karachai children enjoy physical activity and informal contests of strength and skill in sports. Girls and boys play together until about age 10, when they begin to develop different interests and are encouraged to learn adult social roles. Soccer is an especially popular sport, both for players and spectators.

Horseback riding, especially jumping and trick riding, is popular among rural youths. Because horses are used to assist with the herding of sheep, youthful riding games help young people gain an important skill.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Even in urban areas, there are few restaurants, cafes, or clubs. Although there are theatres and cinemas in larger towns, even these are relatively few. Therefore, the Karachai do not usually go out for dining or entertainment in the evenings. Most entertainment takes place in the home, and neighbors and friends visit each other frequently. Because traditions of hospitality are important to the Karachai, visits are reciprocated.

When the weather is warm, many people take strolls in the early evenings. Along the way, they meet friends and chat. People of all ages enjoy strolling, as it is a way to get outdoors and meet people.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Many Karachai women are proficient spinners, knitters, and weavers. They produce creative, artistically finished products. Although such woolen goods are unique works of folk art, they are also a form of cottage industry. A proficient craftswoman can make high-quality woolen articles very quickly and receive a good price for each article.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One of the greatest challenges faced by the Karachai is coming to terms with the deportations of 1944. Many Karachai still bear resentment toward Moscow and Russia for this tragedy. Some Karachai groups feel that the Karachai people have not been fully compensated for the damages that deportation brought upon them. Some have even suggested that the Karachai region should demand autonomy from Russia. Such demands could result in aggressive exchanges between Russia and the Karachai. However, demands to separate from Russia seem to represent the opinion of only a minority of the Karachai population. The advantages of economic partnership with Russia appear to outweigh the difficulties of living within the republic of a historic enemy.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In recent years, Karachai women have received higher education and taken employment outside the home. Although these women may receive salaries equal to those of their husbands, most domestic and childrearing tasks continue to be performed by women. Traditionally, the Western Caucasian women have more freedom, compared to those in the eastern regions of the Caucasus. For example, you will never see

a woman driving a car in Dagestan, Chechnya, or Ingushetia. But among Ossetians, Circassians, and Karachai, women have their own cars and it is considered to be prestigious to know how to drive. Nevertheless, gender problems of the Western Caucasian women are in many ways similar to the overall situation of women in the Caucasus.

Karachai women, much like the women of Dagestan, face discrimination in mountain villages. They must perform heavy work at home and simultaneously earn a living by knitting and selling clothes. In mountain villages, girls at the age of five are taught to knit and, for the majority, knitting remains the main source of income during their lives. Each Karachai woman in a mountain village does up to 12 hours of knitting per day. Women bring knitwear things to the cities, where they are sold at the markets. These items are then exported to Siberia, Moscow, and other cold regions of Russia where they are in great demand.

About 86% of Karachai women refer to the lack of jobs as the largest problem that they face. The level of employment of Karachai men is about 40% higher than the level of employment for women. Karachai women are virtually unrepresented in politics. The traditions of Karachai society, where a woman plays the role of an obedient wife for her husband, remain relatively strong in rural areas, while in urban areas it is increasingly possible to observe signs of freer ideas. Some Karachai girls dress similar to like young people in Europe. Scarves and long skirts for women are not required even after marriage. However, the traditional requirements of a strict dress code are still at work for village and elderly women.

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—revised by J. Colarusso and F. Tlisova

# KHAKASS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Abakan Tatars, Minusa Tatars, Kachins,

Sagays, Beltirs, Kyzyls, and Koybals

**LOCATION:** Russia (Republic of Khakassia)

**POPULATION:** approximately 80,000

**LANGUAGE:** Khakass; Russian

**RELIGION:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity combined with native religious beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Khakass is an ethnonym used to refer to a number of South Siberian Turkic groups. The term *Khakass* came into use during the Soviet era to refer to a number of Turkic groups, the most numerous of which were the Abakan Tatars and Minusa Tatars, named after the river valleys they inhabited. In fact, the group today known as Khakass is composed of five historically and culturally distinct groups—the Kachins, Sagays, Beltirs, Kyzyls, and Koybals. The origins of these five groups are considerably complex, and although they are all Turkic-speaking, historically they were formed from a number of Turkic, Samoyedic, and Kettic groups.

The homeland of the Khakass, the right bank of the upper Yenisei River, was a central region of the medieval Yenisei Kirghiz Empire, which reached a peak in the middle of the 8th century after its conquest of the Uyghur Empire in Mongolia. The Yenisei Kirghiz state did not last long as an independent state, being conquered already in the 10th century by the Khitay, but Yenisei Kirghiz rulers remained established in Khakassia until the appearance of Russians in the area in the 17th century. By the time of the Russian annexation of the region in the 18th century, the Yenisei Kirghiz had disappeared as a political force and as an ethnic group, and the region remained populated by the five groups previously mentioned as the constituent elements of the modern-day Khakass.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The homeland of the Khakass is the Republic of Khakassia, located within the Russian Federation, and the capital of Khakassia is the city of Abakan. Khakassia encompasses 61,900 square kilometers (23,900 square miles) and consists of relatively fertile plains, low hills, and woodlands crossed by a series of mountain ranges originating in the Sayan Mountains. The January mean temperatures range from  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-8^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) to  $-16^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $0^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), and the July mean temperatures range from  $18^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $66^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) to  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $70^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Numbering around 71,000, the Khakass are a relatively small Russian minority nationality, although by Siberian standards the Khakass are a numerically substantial group. There is also a large Russian community within the Khakass's ethnic territory.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Khakass language is a literary language that was created during the Soviet period to facilitate the integration of the five constituent groups forming the Khakass. In fact, the groups spoke separate, albeit related, Turkic dialects. Linguists commonly classify the language of the Khakass as belonging to the Northeastern group of the Turkic language family, related to Northern Altay, Tuvan and, more distantly, to Yakut. It was

only by the beginning of the 19th century that the Khakass became completely Turkic-speaking. Before that time, certain groups, especially the Koybals, retained some degree of knowledge of their ancestral Samoyedic language. Russian is also widely spoken and used as a literary language among the Khakass, and bilingualism is widespread, although it is estimated that about 64,000 Khakass out of a population of 80,000 retains use of their native language.

The Khakass literary language was created in the 1920s and was based primarily on the Kachin and Sagay languages. The Khakass alphabet, however, has been written in numerous scripts. In 1924 the Soviet authorities introduced a Cyrillic alphabet, but switched to a Latin alphabet in 1929. The Latin Khakass alphabet remained in effect until 1939, when the Soviet authorities mandated yet another change back to a Cyrillic alphabet. This alphabet has remained in use to the present day.

Khakass typically have a first name, a patronymic (taken from the father's first name), and a surname. The Khakass were officially converted to Russian Orthodox Christianity during the 19th century, and as a result, Russian names and surnames became quite widespread, although these Russian names often were phonetically "Khakassized." At the same time, in part as a result of the strength of traditional Khakass culture, the use of Turkic names remained widespread.

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Khakass, like other South Siberian Turkic peoples, have retained a very rich folkloric tradition, the most prominent element of which is certainly oral epic poetry, much of which was recorded during the Soviet era. While the number of epics in the Khakass's repertoire is considerable, the best-known Khakass oral epic is entitled *Altin Arig*. Generally speaking, the Khakass epic tradition has many features in common with the epic traditions of the Northern Altays and the Tuvans. Epics were usually performed by bards who would typically sing in a guttural singing style called *khay*, which was followed by declamatory recitations. The bard would also accompany his recitation with a musical instrument called a *chattagan*. Khakass also play a sort of jaw harp called a *kobiz*. Early observers of the Khakass noted that the Khakass were more musically oriented than their neighbors.

## 5 RELIGION

Russian Orthodox missionaries converted the Khakass to Christianity in the second half of the 18th century. While the commitment of the Khakass to Christianity is an unresolved issue, there is no doubt that they remained firmly committed to their native religious beliefs and customs even during the Soviet period, when open manifestations of religious life were frequently suppressed. A partial result of the relatively late conversion of the Khakass to Christianity was that the Khakass retained many very archaic religious practices.

Native Khakass religion is characterized by the veneration of clan and family spirits. Likenesses of these spirits were commonly made of wood, fabric, and animal hair and placed within the household. Ritual offerings were made to these spirits in the form of milk and fat, both on a daily basis and during specific rituals.

The most prominent feature of Khakass native religion is the shaman (*qam*), who functioned as an intermediary between the community and the Upper and Lower Worlds. Shamans func-



tioned as healers of the sick, but they also performed important rituals. Shamans were generally respected as possessors of religious power and are also featured as heroes in Khakass folklore.

Since 1991 Western missionaries, primarily of Protestant denominations, have come to Khakassia, although it is unclear to what degree they have succeeded in attracting Khakass converts.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important traditional Khakass holiday was *Tyas Tuyi*, the greeting of spring. This festival usually took place in early June, when the inhabitants of nearby villages would gather to pray to the supreme God (*Quday*) and make offerings of fermented mare's milk. They would also bring sacrificial animals, usually horses, which would be festooned with ribbons. After the sacrifice of the horses and the performance of libations and prayers, the celebration would take on a more festive appearance, with participants taking part in feasting, drinking, contests, wrestling, and horse races.

Another major holiday was the annual Prayer to the Sky, held in early summer. This holiday involved prayers and sacrifices to the Sky to ensure a good harvest of hay and crops. Among the Beltirs, for example, it was performed on a high hill, not by a shaman, but by elders from within the community.

Modern-day Khakass celebrate the Soviet and Russian holidays, including May Day (May 1), Victory Day (May 9), and others.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

After the birth of a child, the head of the family would name the child after the first thing he laid eyes on. This name would be considered the native name, and six months after birth, the child would receive a Christian name which was in actuality never used in everyday life. Marriage typically involved negotiations between the families of the prospective bride and groom over the size of the dowry (*qalim*) and the conditions of its payment.

Traditionally, Khakass buried their dead on mountaintops and other elevated areas. The deceased was usually placed in a wooden coffin and oriented on an east-west axis. Shamans, however, were usually buried without coffins, and children were wrapped in birch bark. The dead were usually buried in their best clothes, and with various goods such as saddles, as well as cheese, meat, butter, and fermented mare's milk. On the 3rd and 20th days after a person's death the family gathered at the grave for memorial feasts, and on the 40th day, the deceased's favorite horse was sacrificed. The largest feast was typically held on the 100th day. Most Khakass would hold this feast at home, but the Koybals, for instance, held it at the graveside.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In traditional Khakass culture, women usually stayed at home, and they remained silent when men were present as guests. Men and women were often segregated in traditional Khakass dwellings. Khakass customs generally involved quiet, polite, and reserved relations.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Khakass traditional economy depended to a large degree on nomadic and semi-nomadic stock breeding, and stock breeding remains a major feature of the Khakass's economy. As a result, living conditions were closely tied to the well-being of the herds. Natural disasters, such as spring storms or epidemics among animals, could lead to the sudden impoverishment of entire communities.

Styles of traditional housing varied considerably among the five major Khakas groups. These styles included the *yurt*, the round felt tent characteristic of Inner Asian nomads. The yurt was typically divided into men's and women's halves, with a hearth located in the middle of the earthen floor. There were also numerous shelves and trunks located along the wall. Other common dwellings included teepee-shaped structures made of wood and bark typical of the hunter-gatherer peoples of the Siberian forests, and log structures whose design was borrowed to a large degree from Russian peasant colonists who settled in the Altay lands in the 19th century. There was also some blending between the styles. For example, the Kachins would build hexagon or octagon shaped houses out of logs that mimicked the shape of yurts. The felt and wood structures were usually used as summer dwellings, especially by the more nomadic communities, and the wooden structures were used as winter dwellings.

In general, the standard of living of the Khakass corresponded directly to the well-being and size of their herds. In traditional Khakass society, there was private property, and distinctions existed between rich and poor, but the fluid nature of the stock breeding economy made wealth transitory at best. However, over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, ag-





*Vyacheslav Kuchenov, a Khakass master of throat singing, performs during a festival of ethnic Khakass music in Abakan, Siberia.*  
(© Ilya Naymushin/Reuters/Corbis)

riculture—especially cereal agriculture—became increasingly widespread among certain groups of Khakass, especially the Kyzyls.

The primary mode of transportation among the Khakass was by horseback, and this continues to be an important mode of transportation today, especially in more remote or mountainous areas. In winter, the Khakass also made use of horse-drawn sleighs and skis.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The Khakass have retained a complex and archaic kinship structure. The five peoples forming the Khakass—the Kachins, Sagays, Beltirs, Kyzyls, and Koybals—are in effect tribal groupings, and each group is further subdivided into clans (*seok*). Traditionally, the clan was the social unit around which religious rituals were structured, and marriage within one's clan was usually forbidden.

Among many Khakass groups, such as the Beltirs, a father and his married sons held property, such as land and herds, jointly. A father and his married sons lived in separate dwellings but took their meals together. Financial matters were under the authority of the father or should he die, the eldest son. During the Soviet period, this system gradually disintegrated in favor of nuclear family units.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Traditional Khakass clothing varied among the various groups. The Kachins and Sagays, especially the women, retained much of the elaborate traditional dress that was usually reserved for festive occasions. Kachin festive clothing consisted of long robes embroidered with brightly-colored cotton and trimmed with fur. Winter clothes consisted of a sheepskin overcoat, sometimes trimmed with fur or lined with silk. Elaborate and tall fox-fur hats were also worn by women, especially for festivals. Russian-style clothing gradually became more widespread among the Khakass, especially among the more agricultural communities and among the Kyzyls. The clothing of the Koybals, on the other hand, reflected more Mongol influence as a result of their contacts with Tuvans. Modern-day Khakass clothing includes a mix of Westernized and traditional clothing, and completely Russian-style clothing in urban settings.

#### **12 FOOD**

The diet of the Khakass was naturally influenced by whether the given community's economy was primarily nomadic or agricultural. The basic sorts of food consumed by the Khakass were meat and dairy products, vegetables, and bread. The staple food was *ayran*, a sort of fermented yogurt made from mare's milk. This product could also be distilled into an al-

coholic beverage and the curd dried to be made into cheese. Other sorts of dairy products include cream, sour cream, and butter. Meat, particularly lamb and horsemeat, were made into various dishes, especially soup and sausage. Tea and herbal teas were also very popular among the Khakass. Among the more agricultural communities, who had more contact with Russian peasants, bread, pork, and chicken were more widely consumed (especially by the Kyzyls). The Sagays supplemented their diet with various forest plants as well as wild game.

### 13 EDUCATION

No formal educational apparatus existed for the Khakass until the establishment of Russian Orthodox Missionary schools in the middle of the 19th century. However, during the tsarist period, some Khakass were able to take advantage of these mission schools as a gateway to the larger Russian educational system. The best example of this was Nikolai Katanov, a Kachin who eventually became one of Russia's greatest Turcologists and ethnographers, as well as a professor at Kazan University.

With the advent of the 1917 Revolution in Russia, the Soviet government created a formal educational apparatus in the Khakass lands, including primary and secondary schools, as well as a Khakass research institute in the district center of Abakan. The goal of the Soviets was to increase literacy in both Russian and Khakass. The first such schools were opened in 1926, and the research institute opened in 1944. Khakass students can also study outside of the region, in larger institutions in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Novosibirsk.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Folklore, particularly the oral epic, remains the richest aspect of the Khakass cultural heritage. During the Soviet era, scholars made considerable efforts to record and publish these epics, both in the Khakass literary language and in Russian translation. In addition to preserving Khakass folklore, the Soviet authorities encouraged the creation of literature, especially fiction and poetry, in the Khakass literary language.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Khakass have been freer to express and preserve their religious traditions, which also form an especially rich aspect of their cultural heritage. Despite the conversion of their ancestors to Christianity in the 19th century, modern-day Khakass are expressing renewed interest in their traditional religious life, especially shamanism.

Like other South Siberian peoples, the Khakass have retained the practice of throat-singing, by which one singer can produce two notes in his or her throat at the same time. This tradition is best known among the Tuvans, but it has also been widely recorded among the Khakass, especially within the context of the performance of oral epic poetry.

### 15 WORK

Much of Khakass life consists of tending livestock and performing agricultural work. Today, most Khakass live on collective or state agricultural enterprises, whose prosperity depends on the enterprise's resources. Many Khakass are also engaged in hunting and trapping.

### 16 SPORTS

The most popular sport among the Khakass is wrestling, and it is widespread during the major holiday celebrations. Another common Khakass sport is horse racing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many elements of traditional Khakass life had entertainment and recreational aspects. Most notably, major religious holidays included feasting, drinking, and sports. The performance of oral epics also had a recreational function while at the same time educating the audience about the history of the community, its mythological and religious traditions, and its ethical and moral ideals. Shamanic seances, while intended primarily to heal the sick or to perform a ritualistic function, also served to some degree as a form of popular entertainment.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Khakass clothing is a particularly elaborate type of folk art. Women's festive dress is especially striking, and many objects intended for everyday use bear complex decorations as well. Traditionally, Khakass craftsmen were skilled blacksmiths. The production of religious articles, especially shaman's drums, not only demanded technical skill, but also an understanding of the complex religious ritual that accompanied the manufacture of a drum. Khakass also carved figures out of wood to serve as representations of tutelary spirits of the home or the clan.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Drinking has always been an important social and recreational pastime among Khakass men. Traditionally, the most popular alcoholic beverage was fermented mare's milk. Alcoholism became a debilitating social problem, however, with the introduction of distilled grain spirits (i.e. vodka), as a result of large-scale Russian penetration of the region in the 19th century. Today, the Khakass suffer from the general social and economic dislocation affecting all of Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Khakass society there was a sharp division of the sexes in social situations and in terms of the division of labor. Men generally monopolized hunting, warfare, and most aspects of stockbreeding. Women mainly monopolized child-rearing, food preparation, and clothing manufacturing.

According to Khakass customary law, women enjoyed certain rights, including the right to divorce, and divorce appears to have been more commonplace among the Khakass than among many of their neighbors. In such cases, the dowry or a portion thereof would be returned by the husband or his family. After the death of a husband, a common custom was for the widow to marry her late husband's brother, thereby ensuring a degree of material support for herself and her children. Monogamy was the rule among the Khakass, although before 1917 polygamy was occasionally practiced by some wealthier members of society.

Following the Second World War, with the expansion of industrial enterprises in Khakasia, women began entering the industrial workforce, and smaller numbers entered the professional workforce as a result of greater access to Soviet educa-

tion. Nevertheless, the Sovietization of Khakass society did not result in a revolution in Khakass gender roles, particularly within the rural majority of Khakass.

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—by A. J. Frank

# KORIAK

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Koryak; Nymylgu; Chavchyvav

**LOCATION:** Russia (Kamchatka, extreme northeastern Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 8,743 (2002)

**LANGUAGES:** Koriak; Russian

**RELIGION:** Native version of shamanism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Koriak (also spelled Koryak) are an Arctic people of extreme northeastern Siberia who inhabit the southern end of the Chukchi peninsula, or Chukotka, and the northern reaches of the Kamchatka peninsula across the Bering Sea from Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. The origins of the Koriak are obscure, but archeological evidence suggests that around 1000 AD they inhabited the west coast of Kamchatka along the Sea of Okhotsk, from which they gradually expanded into their present homeland over a period of several centuries. The Koriak who live along the coasts of the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk have traditionally fished and hunted seals, walrus, sea lions, and whales. Koriak in the interior herd and hunt reindeer. Some Koriak on the Kamchatka peninsula have traditionally both herded and hunted reindeer and hunted sea mammals.

The Koriak officially call themselves the *Nymylgu* (singular: *Nymylgyn*), which means "village-dwellers." This name originally referred only to the seacoast-dwelling Koriak. In addition to this general name, the reindeer Koriak also call themselves *Chavchyvav* (singular: *Chavchyv* or *Chavchu*), which means "rich in reindeer." (The reindeer breeders among the neighboring Chukchi people have also been known to call themselves "Chavchu." The word *Koriak* is probably derived from the Koriak root *kor-*, which means "reindeer.")

Russian Cossacks and adventurers first discovered the Koriak in the 1640s, but Russia was still occupied with vanquishing other native Siberian peoples, so it did not begin to conquer the Koriak until the 1690s, when armed parties of tax collectors were sent to demand furs from them. The Koriak fiercely resisted the Russians and, like the Chukchi to their north, often killed their animals, their families, and finally themselves in order to avoid capture. During the second half of the 18th century, the Russian government reduced the *yasak* (fur tax), and conflicts between the Koriak and the Russians came to an end.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Koriak number around 8,700. As of 1989 approximately 6,600 lived in the Koriak Autonomous District (Russian: *okrug*), or Koriakia, as it is sometimes called, in Kamchatka *oblast* (region). The capital of the Koriak Autonomous District is Palana. An additional 1,000 Koriak live in neighboring Magadan *oblast*. The remainder of the Koriak population lives in the Chukchi Autonomous District, in the portion of Kamchatka *oblast* outside the Koriak Autonomous District, and in various cities of the former USSR. The territory inhabited by the Koriak includes many different types of landscape—barren tundra, taiga forests, high forested mountains, low-lying swampland, rocky seacoasts, and meadowland—but all of it is characterized by a harsh, cold climate. The average yearly tem-



perature in Koriakia is approximately  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $23^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). During the winter, temperatures can fall as low as  $-59^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-74^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), and in the summer inland temperatures rarely rise above freezing. Temperatures are lowest in the interior of the Koriak Autonomous District, but they are only slightly higher along the damp, foggy coasts of the Sea of Okhotsk and the Bering Sea. Most of the Koriak Autonomous District is covered by tundra mixed with patches of taiga forest. Lichens, moss, grasses (along the coasts), and short, scrubby larches, alders, willows, and cedar are the most common plants here. The more heavily forested areas contain larch, cedar, and birch trees, blackberry bushes, nettles, and grasses. The animal life of the tundra includes polar fox, reindeer, mountain sheep, and more rarely, polar bear. Reindeer, brown bears, crows, foxes and squirrels inhabit the forested regions, and walrus, white whales, killer whales, seals, seagulls, and polar bears are to be found along Koriakia's coastline areas. The most common types of fish are cod, herring, and fresh- and salt-water salmon. Swans, ducks, and geese migrate to the Koriak lands in the summer.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Koriak language, along with Itelmen (Kamchadal) and Chukchi, belongs to the Chukotka-Kamchatka (or Chukotic) group of the Paleoasiatic language family. One notable feature of the Koriak language is incorporation. Incorporating languages such as Koriak, Chukchi, and certain Native American tongues have the ability to combine a series of prefixes, suffixes, word roots, and other linguistic units into a single word

to express a concept that would require a whole phrase or even sentence in most other languages. For example, *tymainykap-kantvyatyk* means "I set a large trap." There are nine dialects of Koriak, but with the exception of Kerek (now almost extinct, and considered by some linguists to be a separate but closely related language rather than a dialect), there are very few differences in grammar and vocabulary between them. Koriak was an unwritten language until 1931, when the Koriak adopted the Latin alphabet. Since 1937, the Koriak language has been written in the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet, with the addition of several extra letters for Koriak sounds that do not exist in Russian. The modern Koriak written language is based on the Chavchiv dialect of the reindeer breeders. Some 53% of the Koriak speak Koriak as their native language, with the remainder speaking Russian as their first language; all Koriak are fluent in Russian.

In traditional society, the Koriak, like the neighboring Chukchi, had only a given name. Surnames (based on the father's given name) were adopted only in the Communist period under pressure from bureaucrats who found the lack of a surname confusing when filling out school registrations, identification cards, and other official forms. Many Koriak have two given names, an "official" Russian one, such as *Konstantin* (male) or *Vassa* (female) used for birth certificates and other documents, and an "unofficial" Koriak one used among themselves. Some common Koriak male names are *Yoltygyingyn*, *Akktet*, *Talvavtyn*, *Otap*, and *Pepe*; female names include *Leqqi*, *Galgangav*, *Gylvangavyt*, and *Kokok*.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Although the Koriak did not have a written language until the early 1930s, there is a substantial body of Koriak oral literature. Much of it dates back to deepest antiquity, and many Koriak myths and stories have themes shared by the folklore of the Chukchi, Eskimos, Itelmen (Kamchadal), and even some Native American peoples. The characters of these tales are usually animals—bears, wolves, birds, foxes, and so on—who often change their shape and size and turn into other animals or humans. Koriak historical legends tell of ancient battles between the Koriak and their neighbors. The most widely known Koriak folk tales are about Raven (Quikinnaku), the ancestor of the Koriak who gave them reindeer and dogs, taught them how to domesticate animals, instructed them in the arts of hunting on land and sea, and used his magic powers to help them win battles. In these tales, Raven appears in both human and animal form; he often plays tricks on humans and on his family and has many entertaining adventures.

In one Koriak folk tale, Raven is searching for a suitable wife for his son Ememqt. He flies to a Koriak settlement, alights on a tall tree, and waits for the local maidens to pass by. The first girl to come along is annoyed to see him hanging around aimlessly and speaks rudely of him. The next girl to appear feels sorry for him and feeds him scraps of meat and pudding. Raven decides that the second girl would make a suitable wife for Ememqt. He returns home and tells his son what has happened. Ememqt himself flies to the settlement, repeats the experiment, and has the same experience. He then marries the second girl.

## 5 RELIGION

The traditional religion of the Koriak is a form of shamanism. The Koriak believe that animals, plants, heavenly bodies, rivers, forests, and other natural phenomena have their own spirits, which must be respected and honored. Fire made in the traditional way—that is, by using friction instead of matches or lighters—is considered sacred. In this method of fire-making, a wooden drill is placed into a groove filled with coal dust on a wooden fireboard, which is usually carved into a human shape. The drill is looped into the string of a small bow, which is rapidly turned to produce sparks, which ignite the coal dust. The fireboard is among the most revered possessions of a traditional Koriak family, and it is frequently anointed with the blood and fat of slaughtered animals.

Shamans (tribal priests similar to Native American “medicine men”) are men and women who are especially adept at communicating with the spirits. One does not choose to become a shaman; rather, a shaman is chosen by spirits who appear to the shaman-to-be in the guise of an animal—most commonly a wolf, bear, sea-gull, raven, or eagle—and command him or her to become their servant upon pain of death. The rituals of Koriak shamans take the form of chanting prayers and incantations and beating on a drum called a *yayai*. The *yayai*, like the drums of many Siberian and Native American peoples, is large and flat, held by a handle built into its reverse side, and has small iron rattles attached to it that produce a jingling sound similar to that of a tambourine.

During their rituals, Koriak shamans communicate with the spirits and allow them to “speak” through them (Koriak shamans are accomplished ventriloquists). The drums used by shamans are considered to be sacred, and the handling of them is surrounded by many rules and taboos. For example, it is forbidden to take the drum outdoors without its cover, for this will cause a blizzard; the drum belonging to one family may not be used for rituals in another family’s dwelling. Koriak shamans, like those of the neighboring Chukchi, sometimes use hallucinogenic mushrooms indigenous to the region to help them fall into the trances in which they perform their rituals.

In addition to the activities of professional shamans, Koriak religion involves ceremonies performed privately within the family. Each family possesses its own drum and various amulets and charms and knows some of the most important chants, which its members use to banish evil spirits and to obtain success in hunting, herding, health, and love. Koriak shamans were severely persecuted by the Communist government; during Stalin’s anti-religious campaigns in the 1930s, many of them were imprisoned and executed. Nevertheless, Koriak shamanism, like Soviet shamanism in general, may have suffered less than other religions. Since shamanism lacked the easily identified places of worship and the stable religious infrastructure of Christianity and other organized religions, it was harder for the government to attack it, and so it survived underground with relative ease.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important traditional festival of the coastal Koriak was the *Yanyaenacixtitgin* (whale festival), celebrated at the end of the fall hunting season and intended to honor the spirit of the whale so that more whales would return the following year. The dead whale was dragged onto the beach and greeted

with sacred fires (made by friction instead of with matches) from the community’s households. Branches and sedge-grass were placed into the dead whale’s mouth as a symbolic meal. The members of the community, dressed in their dancing costumes—elaborately embroidered coats, trousers, and boots—sang and danced around the whale in its honor, and occasionally sacrificed a dog to it. The whale was then butchered, and its head was taken inside one of the community’s homes and hung on a pole so its spirit could join the festivities. There it was “fed” with a pudding-like substance made of whale and seal oil, berries, and roots. After several days, the whale’s spirit was urged to return to the sea, tell the other whales of the hospitality it had received, and subsequently come back to the village bringing other whales with it. Seals were also thus honored in places where seals were more commonly hunted.

Reindeer-breeding Koriak celebrated the return of the herd from its summer pasture when the first snows fell in autumn. The returning reindeer were greeted with sacred fires. While drummers beat on their *yayais*, several fawns were sacrificed, and their blood was smeared onto the sacred fireboards as an offering to Gicholan (“The One on High”), the deity believed to have created reindeer from fire. The inland Koriak also honored Gicholan by holding reindeer races and sacrificing the winning animal to him.

The Soviet government banned these sacrifice festivals because of their religious aspects, but at least one traditional holiday, *Khololo*, managed to survive for reasons that are not clear. *Khololo* consists of several weeks of festivities marked by singing, feasting, drumming, and dancing. All the spirits the Koriak depend on for food, shelter, health, and success in childbirth, economic activities, and so on are thanked for their help in the past year and asked to continue this help in the next year. Since the fall of Communism, interest in traditional Koriak holidays and festivals has grown markedly as the Koriak find themselves free to celebrate their heritage without fear of punishment.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Koriak consider each infant born to them to be the reincarnation of a deceased ancestor, and the child is named after this ancestor. In order to properly name a child, it is necessary to discover which ancestor’s soul has entered its body. This is done by reciting the names of ancestors as soon as the child is born. When the infant smiles or ceases crying, it is believed that the right name has been spoken, and the child is given this name. Alternatively, a stone tied to a stick is held up by the father and allowed to swing back and forth while ancestors’ names are recited; the stone begins to move more rapidly when the correct ancestor’s name is mentioned.

In traditional Koriak society, when a person died he or she was dressed in special clothing worn only by the dead and made of the finest materials. Koriak funeral clothing consisted of coats, trousers, and boots sewn by the women of the family from white fawn skin and richly decorated with strips of black and white dog fur and reindeer and seal skin sewn into elaborate patterns. A whole series of rules and taboos surrounded the handling and preparation of these garments. Funeral clothing could not be sold or given away, and it could not be taken into another family’s home unless a family member had died there. Funeral clothing had to be prepared well in advance, since it took months to sew it and naturally no one could predict when

a person would die. But traditional belief held that once funeral garments were completed, their intended wearer would soon die. Therefore, the clothing was made ahead of time, but with certain stages of the preparation left undone. For example, the soles were not attached to the boots, the fur edge was left off the hood of the coat, and the belt was left without its buckle. After a death, men from the deceased's family and neighbors built a funeral pyre while the women put the last touches on the funeral garments. Some Koriak dissected the corpse to discover the cause of death; if disease was responsible, the corpse was stabbed through the abdomen to prevent the soul's next incarnation from dying of the same illness. When the clothing was ready, the body was dressed, taken out to the funeral pyre, and burned. The cremation was followed by several days of drumming in honor of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Like the neighboring Chukchi, who also live in harsh and sparsely populated lands, the Koriak prize hospitality and generosity and have customarily fed and housed strangers who appear among them. In ancient times, visitors to Koriak homes were greeted with fire from the family's hearth as a sign that they were being accepted into the family. Old people among the Koriak are held in great respect. Although the heads of households lose their formal authority over their families when they are no longer able to work, their advice is still highly prized. In the past, old people would have their younger relatives strangle or stab them to death when they became sick or feeble; this practice died out by the 19th century for reasons that are not clear.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The traditional dwelling of the nomadic Koriak reindeer herders was the *yayana* (called *rarana* in some dialects), a round reindeer-hide tent with a conical top that was large enough for several families. Each family lived in its own interior chamber separated from that of the other families by dividing walls made of reindeer-skin. Several such tents made up a village. The settlements of reindeer Koriak were limited to the number of families whose herds could be fed by the moss and other edible vegetation in a given area. The coastal Koriak lived in semi-underground houses (also called *yayana* or *rarana*) with walls and ceilings made of logs. A tall, funnel-shaped opening at the top allowed light to enter while preventing snow from drifting in. Each of these houses held two or three families, and the largest held up to forty people. Maritime settlements were much larger than those of the inland Koriak and often had populations of more than 100. Koriak houses were lit by fires or by lamps that burned reindeer or sea-mammal fat. Although traditional Koriak dwellings can still be found, they were largely replaced in the Soviet period by the one-story wooden houses common on collective farms. All Koriak settlements now have electricity, but running water and sewers are far from universal.

The coastal Koriak traditionally used dog-sleds for transportation, while the inland Koriak rode in reindeer-drawn sleds. Reindeer Koriak also occasionally used horses as pack animals in the summer. They made little effort to fully domesticate their horses, however, and left them to find their own food in the winter. Koriak horses were so wild that their owners frequently found it easier to carry heavy loads themselves than to

find and catch their horses. Koriak dog- and reindeer-sleds are still used along with airplanes, motorboats, and snowmobiles.

Because few plants or minerals with medicinal qualities are found in the Koriak lands, shamanist rituals were the only medical care available prior to Russian contact. Russians or other native peoples who had been in contact with the Koriak occasionally triggered epidemics of smallpox and measles, because the Koriak had no immunity. Western medicine became much more widespread in the Soviet period. Treatment was either free or inexpensive, but it was often unavailable or of poor quality, especially in rural areas. For this reason, tuberculosis, alcoholism, and other maladies are commonly encountered among the Koriak. The mental disorder known as Arctic hysteria—characterized by sudden fits of rage, depression, or violence that sometimes lead to murder or suicide—is less common among the Koriak than among the neighboring Chukchi and other circumpolar peoples.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The traditional Koriak family was patriarchal. The father had a great deal of authority and his word on important family matters such as choosing the area where the reindeer were to be pastured was final. He also had the right to banish his wife from the household for any reason and to choose his daughters' husbands. Women were allowed to eat only after the men of the family had finished, and men always received the best portions of food. Nevertheless, wife-beating was rare, and most fathers did not force their daughters to marry against their will. Men were generally protective rather than abusive of women. Relationships between spouses were warm and close, and some men were even known to commit suicide upon the death of their wives.

Strict sexual morals (at least as far as women were concerned) were characteristic of traditional Koriak society. Women were forbidden to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage, even with their fiancés. Engaged women were frequently sent off to live with relatives to prevent this, and feuds were sometimes started between families whose unwed children had slept together. Unwed motherhood was considered extremely shameful and was virtually unknown among the Koriak. Modernization has led to freer relations between the sexes over the course of the 20th century.

In order to gain a bride in traditional Koriak society, a man had to work for his future father-in-law for several months or years, herding reindeer or hunting. The groom was intentionally given hard living conditions—little food and sleep, long work hours, and an uncomfortable bed—in order to test his commitment to the bride. The bride was kept well away from the groom and usually moved into a separate tent after the betrothal. During the wedding ceremony, the groom had to chase the bride until he caught her, cut her clothes with a knife to expose her genitals, and then touch them with his hand. The bride was expected to resist as a sign of her chastity prior to marriage and her faithfulness to follow. If she particularly liked the groom, she might run into the bridal tent, since he could overcome her more easily there than outside, but she had to at least pretend to put up a struggle. When the wedding was over, the bride almost always went to live with the groom's family. These traditional Koriak betrothal and wedding practices were replaced by civil ceremonies in the 1920s.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional clothing of both inland and coastal Koriak is made of reindeer skin. Some Russian travelers reported seeing sealskin clothing worn by the coastal Koriak in the 18th century, but they seem to have abandoned it soon thereafter. Women's clothing consists of a *naukei*, a knee-length coverall made from fawn skin and trimmed with fox, wolverine, wolf, or dog fur; the trouser part of the coverall is sometimes made of vertical strips of dark and light fur. A long fawn-skin shirt decorated with beads, embroidery, and fur trimmings is often worn over the coverall. Men wear loose deerskin shirts and trousers. Both sexes wear suede boots and leather undergarments. In cold weather, they wear heavy hooded coats made of fawnskin. A child's *keikei* (coverall) is similar to that worn by women, except that it has a flap between the legs to allow diapers (formerly made of moss, but now made of cloth) to be easily changed. Traditional Koriak clothing is still worn in everyday life, especially during the cold winters for which it is best suited, but Western clothing (cloth dresses, shirts, trousers, as well as underclothes and leather shoes) has also become common in the 20th century.

## 12 FOOD

The traditional foods of the reindeer-breeding Koriak are venison and reindeer-blood soup. The liver, gristle, and marrow of the reindeer are eaten raw immediately after slaughtering. The inland Koriak also hunt bears and mountain goats and fish for river salmon. The most common customary foods of the coastal Koriak are fish (particularly salmon and herring); the meat and fat of white whale, seal, and walrus; mollusks; and seaweed. Both reindeer and coastal Koriak traditionally ate cloudberry, cedar nuts, sorrel and sedge-grass roots, and raw or boiled birds' eggs. Each cultural group considered the foods of the other to be great delicacies, and they often traded. The Koriak have drunk tea since they began trading with Russians in the 18th century. In addition to their traditional foods, the Koriak now eat canned vegetables and meats, bread, and other prepared foods purchased in stores. The Koriak formerly cooked meat and fish by boiling them in metal kettles purchased from Russian traders (prior to Russian contact, kettles were made of wood or bark) and ate with their hands and knives from wooden platters. Fish was also eaten frozen or dried. Soup was eaten straight from the kettle with wooden spoons. The modern Koriak prepare their food in mass-produced metal and ceramic pots and pans and eat with knives, forks, and spoons.

## 13 EDUCATION

Until the Soviet government began to establish schools in Koriakia in the 1920s and 1930s, virtually all Koriak were illiterate; only a few were literate in Russian, which they learned from Russian settlers or Russian Orthodox missionaries. Most Koriak teachers were trained at the Institute of the North founded in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1926, which is now called the Pedagogical Institute of the Peoples of the North. Because most Koriak settlements are too small and widely scattered to permit building schools in each of them, the majority of children receive their primary and secondary education in boarding schools. At first, Koriak teachers used Koriak as well as Russian in the classroom, but the Soviet prejudice against non-Russian cultures soon brought this practice

into official disfavor. In 1954, teaching in the Koriak language was prohibited, and this ban lasted for at least 20 years. Ethnic Russian teachers, many of whom displayed highly negative and racist attitudes toward Koriak schoolchildren, did not attempt to learn Koriak and punished their pupils for speaking the "savage" native language instead of "civilized" Russian on school grounds. For this reason, although all Koriak are now literate in Russian, many are illiterate in Koriak. The use of Koriak in native schools has slowly expanded, however, since the 1980s.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Koriak boast a wide repertoire of traditional dances, most of them originally performed in shamanist ceremonies. These dances, and the singing that accompanies them, imitate the reindeer, seals, bears, and other animals whose spirits the rituals were intended to honor. The musical instruments used to accompany these dances are the *yayai* (drum) and the *vaniyayayi* (jaw harp). Koriak songs and dances are usually performed by women. Traditional dance and music are still popular among the Koriak, and the Koriak national dance ensemble "Mengo" has toured throughout the former USSR and has also performed abroad.

## 15 WORK

Although ironworking was never a central part of the traditional Koriak economy, Koriak blacksmiths still managed to obtain remarkable results with the simplest tools and methods. Iron tongs and hammers purchased from other native Siberians or Russians were used to shape pieces of iron into knives, axes, spears, saws, and bracelets over fires fanned by sealskin bellows and fueled by homemade coal made from driftwood. The continued existence of native crafts notwithstanding, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 far-flung Koriak communities have suffered from severe unemployment rates, especially among men.

## 16 SPORTS

Dog- and reindeer-sled races and wrestling matches are the most common traditional sports among the Koriak. Another Koriak sport is a walking race in which contestants walk as fast as they can without running to a point up to two miles away and then back to the starting line. There, the winner pulls the prize—a pouch of tobacco—down from a pole upon which it has been hung.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Although the drum (*yayai*) used in shamanist rituals is considered sacred, it is often beaten for entertainment. Despite the subordinate status of women in traditional Koriak society, the best drummers have often been women. The typical plaything of Koriak boys is the lasso; that of girls is the wooden doll. Leather balls, wooden tops, and toy animals carved from wood or bone are enjoyed by children of both sexes.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Coastal Koriak craftsmen, like craftsmen among the neighboring Chukchi, have long been adept at carving and sculpting bone, reindeer antler, wood, and walrus tusk. These arts are less developed among the reindeer Koriak; because their way

of life demanded constant attention to the herds, they traditionally lacked the leisure time to become skilled carvers and sculptors. Common themes of Koriak art are human figures, particularly drummers and wrestlers; traditional everyday activities such as fire-drilling, sea-mammal and bear hunting, and dogsled riding; and seals, walrus, mountain sheep, shales, bears, fish, worms, birds, dogs, and other animals. The horns of the mountain sheep are carved into tiny human and animal figures. Koriak women are highly skilled at embroidery, and they use fur, beads, silk thread, and reindeer hair to sew detailed geometric patterns and pictures of animals and birds onto clothing and rugs.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems faced by the modern Koriak are those common to all of Russia's Arctic peoples. These include poor health caused by alcoholism, pollution, and inadequate medical care and diet; low living standards resulting from the inefficiency of the herding and hunting collectives into which the Koriak were forced during the 1930s and 1940s, and the meager selection of consumer goods available in local stores; racial prejudice (attacks by local Russian hooligans are common); and the lingering effects of policies intended by Stalin and his successors to force northern peoples to give up their "primitive" cultures in favor of the more "advanced" Russian one. All of these factors threaten the cultural survival of the Koriak people. As a result of the decades-long ban on speaking Koriak in boarding schools, many young Koriak do not know their own language. There are still few native teachers in Koriak schools, and they are now making great efforts to expand the use of Koriak in the classroom. Dedicated native scholars at the Pedagogical Institute of the Peoples of the North in St. Petersburg are training Koriak teachers and writing new Koriak textbooks, grammars, and dictionaries. Native schools have also begun to instruct their pupils in their people's ancestral art forms—sculpture, sewing, and traditional dance and music. Koriak activists now participate in the Association of the Small Peoples of the North and other organizations that defend the Siberian peoples' economic, political, and cultural interests.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Koriak women currently face many of the same social and economic problems faced by other indigenous women of the Russian Arctic and Subarctic. Koriak women, particularly in rural areas, suffered especially severely from the economic collapse that began in the Russian North in the late 1980s. By 2002 women's life expectancy in some Koriak communities had declined approximately from 64 in 1988 to 51 in 2002, according to some estimates. At the same time, Koriak women's educational levels remained relative high. While unemployment rates among women have been generally lower among women than men, this imbalance places additional burdens upon working-age Koriak women.

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—revised by A. Frank



# KOSOVARS

**PRONUNCIATION:** KOH-soh-vars

**LOCATION:** Kosovo; Serbia

**POPULATION:** 2.1 million

**LANGUAGE:** Albanian (majority), Serbian, Bosniak, Turkish, Roma

**RELIGION:** Muslim (Sunni and Bektashi), Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Vol. 5: Serbs; Roma; Bosnians

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Kosovars are a predominantly Muslim and Albanian people who come from the young Republic of Kosovo. Although Kosovo only declared its independence in 2008, the ancestors of today's Kosovars have been living in the region for millennia. One of the first peoples to inhabit what is now Kosovo were the Illyrians. Albanian Kosovars claim to be the direct descendants of the Illyrians, but Serbian Kosovars dispute this claim. The Illyrians were conquered by the Romans in the 2nd century BCE. By the 9th century, Kosovo was under the control of the Bulgarian Empire and had become thoroughly Slavicized and Christianized. The Serbs, Bulgarians, and Byzantines fought over Kosovo for the next several centuries, but the Serbs emerged victorious. The Serbian Orthodox Church was created in the 13th century. Many of the Church's most important monuments can be found in Kosovo, and Kosovo is still regarded by Serbs as an integral part of the Serbian homeland.

The armies of the Ottoman Empire moved into Kosovo between the 14th and 16th centuries. The Ottomans ruled Kosovo until the beginning of the 20th century. During the Ottoman period, most of the Albanians living in the Balkans converted to Islam. These Albanians moved into Kosovo in large numbers as Serbs moved out of the province. It was also during this period that Kosovo acquired its Turkish minority.

The province of Kosovo was transferred from the Ottoman Empire to Serbia in 1913. After World War I, Serbia became a province of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians. During World War II, Kosovo was briefly annexed into Italian-held Albania. After the defeat of the Axis Powers, Kosovo was returned to Yugoslavia. Communist Yugoslavia was ruled by Josip Broz Tito. Kosovo was one of the poorest regions of post-War Yugoslavia. It was also one of the most volatile, as Kosovo's Albanian population favored greater autonomy while the province's Serb population wished to remain part of Serbia. Over the next several years, the demographics of Kosovo changed greatly. Kosovo Albanians had much higher birth rates than their Serbian neighbors, and by 1960, Kosovo was 67% Albanian and about 23.5% Serbian. In 1968 Albanian Kosovars took to the streets to protest for more autonomy. In 1974 Kosovo was granted autonomous status under a new Yugoslav constitution.

The situation of Albanians in Kosovo became much worse in 1989. The new president of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, engineered the abolition of Kosovo's autonomous status. His government also purged over 100,000 Albanian Kosovars from their positions in the public sector and restricted the use of the Albanian language in public education and the media. In

response, Albanian Kosovars created their own parallel state institutions. Albanian Kosovars held their own elections and even set up their own underground universities. In 1996 the Kosovo Liberation Army—an ethnic Albanian organization that fought for Kosovo's independence—began a terrorist campaign against the Yugoslav state. The conflict escalated in March 1998 when Yugoslavia sent regular army troops into Kosovo to assist the Serbian police. Within a year, almost 500,000 Kosovars—mostly Albanian—had been displaced by fighting and ethnic cleansing.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened on the side of the Albanians in March 1999. NATO member countries carried out a bombing campaign over Kosovo and Serbia that lasted until June 1999, when President Milošević withdrew his troops from Kosovo. By November 1999, the vast majority of displaced Albanians had returned to their homes (over 800,000 had returned). As Albanians poured in, over 200,000 Serbs and Roma fled Kosovo in response to violence and threats leveled against them by angry ethnic Albanians.

Between 1999 and 2008, Kosovo was administered by the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK). Under UN administration, Kosovo saw little development in its infrastructure or economy. The Serb, Roma, and Ashkali communities have also faced violence and harassment. In 2004 interethnic violence displaced 3,600 non-Albanians in Kosovo. Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008. The declaration was recognized by a variety of countries, including the United States and many member states of the European Union. The declaration was not recognized by Serbia, which still claims Kosovo. In fact, the Serbian government continues to pay Serbian Kosovars who work in the education, health care, and other sectors in Kosovo. The constitution of the Albanian-led government entered into effect on 15 June 2008, marking the end of UN administration of Kosovo.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Approximately 2.1 million people inhabit the Republic of Kosovo. About 88% of Kosovars are ethnically Albanian, with Serbs making up the largest minority in the country (7% of the population). Other Muslim minority groups include the Turks, Bosniaks, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians. The number of Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo has declined significantly since 1999, when Serbia lost control over Kosovo. There are over 200,000 displaced Kosovars of Serbian and Roma background living in Serbia and other countries. There are also approximately 220,000 Albanian Kosovars living outside Kosovo. These ethnic Albanians are dispersed across the world, with especially high concentrations in Albania and Western Europe. Many emigrated during the 1998–1999 conflict in Kosovo, and others emigrated in order to find work. The Albanian share of Kosovo's population will likely increase in coming years due to high birth rates amongst Albanians and emigration of Serbian Kosovars to Serbia.

Kosovo is one of the smallest countries in Europe. The landlocked country covers just 10,887 sq km (4,203 sq mi), making it slightly larger than Delaware. The largest city in Kosovo is Pristina, which also serves as the capital. Prizren, Peć, and Kosovska Mitrovica are the next largest cities. Kosovo's neighbors are Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.



### 3 LANGUAGE

Kosovo has three official languages: Albanian, Serbian, and English. Most Kosovars speak Albanian. Albanian is an Indo-European language that is so different from other Indo-European languages that it belongs to its own linguistic family. Albanian is also spoken in Albania, Macedonia, Italy, Turkey, and a variety of other countries. The language is divided into two main dialects: Tosk and Gheg. Gheg is the dialect that is most commonly spoken amongst Kosovars. However, Standard Albanian, which is based on the Tosk dialect, is used in Kosovo's newspapers, television, and government institutions. There are a variety of Tosk and Gheg sub-dialects, many of which are mutually unintelligible.

Some basic Albanian phrases are listed below:

Hello: *Tungjatjeta*

Yes/No: *Po/Jo*

Good: *Mirë*

I only speak a little Albanian: *Flas vetëm pak Shqip*

Serbian is a South Slavic language also spoken in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other Balkan countries.

Albanian Kosovar children are usually given Muslim or Albanian names. Serbian Kosovar children are given Serbian or Christian names.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Albanians have a colorful myth that tells of the creation of the Albanian people. According to the myth, an eagle caught a snake in its beak and brought the snake to a nest that sat atop

a cliff on the edge of a mountain. A small eaglet began to play with the dead snake once the adult eagle flew off.

As this was happening, a young hunter was climbing that very mountain. He saw the eaglet playing with the snake, but noticed that the snake was not actually dead. The snake opened its mouth and looked as if it were about to strike the small eaglet. At that moment, the young man killed the snake with his bow and arrow. The hunter then took the eaglet and began to make his way down the mountain. The mother of the eaglet returned and approached the hunter. The eagle demanded that the hunter return the eaglet to her. The hunter agreed, but on the condition that the eagle grant him the vision and strength of an eagle. The hunter returned the eaglet, but once it grew, it flew over the hunter and protected him.

The Albanian people were amazed by the exploits of the hunter and made him their king. They named their new king "Son of the Eagle." Albanians refer to themselves as *Shqiptarët*, which is derived from the word "eagle." Although Kosovo's flag does not include an eagle, the flag flown by many Albanian nationalists in Kosovo—including the Kosovo Liberation Army—does have an eagle.

### 5 RELIGION

Islam is by far the largest religion in Kosovo, as it is the religion of the vast majority of Albanian Kosovars. Locally trained imams in Kosovo belong to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. Albanians tend to be lax in their practice of Islam. A 2001 survey found that only 12.2% of Albanian Kosovars attended religious ceremonies "several times a month." There are a number of reasons why Albanian Kosovars tend to be less devout than other Muslims. Religious piety was discouraged under the Tito regime. Furthermore, all aspects of Albanian national life were suppressed under Milošević, including Islam.

Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, has a long history in Kosovo. Before the 1998–1999 war, almost every town in Kosovo with a large Albanian population had a *teqe*, or Sufi meeting house. The largest and most famous Sufi group in Kosovo is the Bektashi Order. The Bektashis are affiliated with Shia Islam, although the Bektashi sect differs from Orthodox Shia Islam in a number of ways. For example, Bektashis are permitted to drink alcohol and Bektashi women often lead religious services.

Serbian Orthodox Christianity is the largest Christian sect in Kosovo, although their number has declined dramatically since 1999. Orthodox Christianity in Kosovo has a long history in Kosovo, which is evidenced by the presence of numerous ancient Serbian monasteries throughout Kosovo. Approximately 60,000 Kosovars (3% of the population) belong to the Roman Catholic Church. In Kosovo, the Church is made up of Albanians, Roma, and Croats.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Kosovars celebrate two major secular national holidays. Independence Day is February 17. It commemorates the date on which Kosovo officially declared its independence from Serbia. June 15 has also been designated a holiday. It marks the date in 2008 when Kosovo's new constitution came into effect.

Kosovars also celebrate a number of Muslim and Christian holidays. For Muslims, *Uraza Bayram* (also known as Eid al-Fitr) is one of the most important holidays. It marks the end of the month of Ramadan, during which Muslims are expected

to fast from sunrise until sunset. *Kurban Bayram* (the festival of the sacrifice) is a holiday when all Muslim families who are able are obliged to sacrifice a lamb and donate the meat to the poor. Muslim holidays are celebrated at a different time every year because they are determined by the lunar calendar.

In order to accommodate Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Christmas is celebrated on two dates in Kosovo. Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 17 and Catholic Christmas is celebrated on December 25. Easter is celebrated on March 23.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Circumcision, or *sunet*, is a rite of passage for Muslim Kosovars. Boys are usually circumcised before the age of seven. The *sunet* ceremony is a cause for great celebration in Muslim households. Boys are dressed in special gowns and showered with presents.

Since 1998 it has been difficult for many Muslim Kosovars to access affordable and qualified circumcision services. As a result, some boys have waited until after the age of seven to be circumcised.

Marriage is the principal rite of passage for most women in Kosovo society. In traditional Kosovar families, marriage is the time when women leave the home. Their identity changes from one of daughter and sister to *nusja* (bride). In fact, upon entering the home of a new husband, women are referred to by the term *nusja*, rather than by given names.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Much of social interaction in Kosovo is governed by a set of centuries-old customary law known as the Canon of Leke Dukagjin. Although few Kosovars have actually read the Canon, its tenets are still respected among Albanian Kosovars. The Canon defines honor as extremely important virtue.

Women are expected to maintain their honor through chastity and fidelity to their husbands. Blood feuds sometimes result over insults or attacks on a family's honor. The law also enshrines the value of hospitality, which is still very much alive among Kosovars.

Interethnic tension is a major problem for Kosovars. Human rights organizations have reported numerous instances in which ethnic Albanians have harassed and attacked minorities, especially Serbs and Roma. The homes of many displaced Serbian Kosovars and Roma Kosovars have been appropriated by Albanian Kosovars. The most serious outbreak of interethnic violence since 1999 occurred in 2004, after a clash between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs in the divided town of Mitrovica. At least 19 Kosovars were killed and thousands of Kosovars, most of Serbian and Roma ethnicity, were displaced as a result of the violence.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Kosovars face some of Europe's worst living conditions. The homes of many Albanian Kosovars were destroyed by Serbian forces between 1998 and 1999. Poverty has prevented many of these Albanians from rebuilding their homes. As a result, many Kosovars live in clay brick homes that lack insulation and windows. Furthermore, access to electricity is sporadic throughout Kosovo.

Over 200,000 Serbian and Roma Kosovars have been displaced from Kosovo. Most now live in Serbia. Their living con-

ditions vary greatly; many displaced Roma live in shacks built from scrap material, while other displaced persons live in government-run refugee camps.

Kosovo faces a severe shortage of qualified nurses and doctors because Albanians were excluded from higher education during the 1990s. Much of the medical infrastructure remaining from the Yugoslav era is in poor condition. Deficiencies in health care, nutrition and living conditions have caused Kosovo's infant mortality rate to reach 35–49 per 1,000 live births (the highest in Europe).

A parallel health care system exists for Serbian Kosovars. One hospital and a number of clinics are supported by the Serbian government, which does not recognize Kosovo's independence.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families in Kosovo tend to be large compared to the families of other Balkan and European peoples. The unavailability of contraceptives and the desire of fathers to have sons are the primary reasons for this phenomenon.

In Albanian Kosovar families, a bride leaves home to live with her husband after marriage. The couple may move to a new home or continue living with the husband's family.

Descent is traced patrilineally, and children are thought to derive their personality and "essence" from their fathers. Thus, when parents divorce, the father is usually given custody of the children. Furthermore, if the father of a child dies, the child sometimes goes to live with his father's extended family, even if the child's mother is still alive.

In traditional Kosovar homes, brothers will often share a single household with one another. Paternal uncles, or *axhas*, hold authority over all the children in the household. As many Kosovars have left the country to work, *axhas* provide an important source of parental authority in Kosovar society. On the other hand, the fathers and brothers of female members of the household wield little authority. This lack of responsibility allows maternal uncles, or *dajes*, to be much more warm and loving toward their nephews.

## 11 CLOTHING

Kosovars wear Western-style clothing. However, some women and girls wear the Muslim headscarf. The headscarf, which is banned in Kosovo's public education system, is a source of contention in the secular republic.

Although traditional attire is not worn on a daily basis in Kosovo, it can be seen during parades and some special occasions. Women wear colorful dresses and headgear that often features ornate flower prints. Men wear pants and shirts, both of which usually have two vertical stripes. Men also wear vests and traditional white Albanian skull caps, known as *plis*.

## 12 FOOD

The cuisine of Kosovo is similar to that of other Balkan and East Mediterranean peoples. *Qofte* (fried meatballs), *byrek* (filo dough pies filled with spinach, meat, or other vegetables), and grilled meat are all staples of Kosovo cooking.

In recent years a number of foreign cooking styles have been introduced into Kosovo. This is a result of the influx of aid workers and foreign peace keepers. The recipe for spinach *byrek* follows.

### Byrek me Spinaq

#### Ingredients:

25 leaves of filo pastry leaves  
 1 1/4 pounds spinach, chopped  
 2 eggs  
 1/4 teaspoon salt  
 1 cup olive oil  
 1 cup diced feta cheese  
 1/2 cup chopped green onions

#### Cooking Instructions:

Coat a baking pan with oil and then lay filo pastry leaves on the pan. Coat the leaves with oil and lay down additional leaves over the pan. Make sure the entire pan is covered.

Mix the eggs, onions, feta cheese, oil, and salt. Spread the mixture over the filo pastry leaves and then add spinach on top. Cover the mixture with the rest of the filo pastry leaves. Seal the edges of the pie. Bake at 340 degrees Fahrenheit 45–50 minutes or until light brown.

### 13 EDUCATION

School overcrowding is a significant problem in Kosovo. Many schools were destroyed during the 1999 conflict. Although many of these have been rebuilt, the lack of schools and teachers is still so severe that children often attend school in shifts. In Pristina children only received 2.5 hours per day of lessons. Education is also a problem in rural areas, because students often have to walk long distances to reach their schools.

There are two public universities in Kosovo. The University of Pristina is controlled by Albanians, while the University of Mitrovica is controlled by Serbs. In 1990 the Serbian government ended the practice of instruction in both Albanian and Serbian. It also removed nearly all Albanian professors and students from Kosovo's universities. During the 1990s Albanian students and professors held informal classes in houses and other private buildings. It was not until 2000 that Albanians gained control of the higher education system and made Albanian, along with Serbian, the languages of instruction.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Kosovo has a rich musical tradition. The *Ciftelia* is a traditional Albanian stringed instrument that originated in Central Asia. Different versions of the *Ciftelia* can be found throughout the Middle East, especially in Iran and in Turkey. The instrument is made of wood and only has two strings. The first string is used to play the melody and the second is used to create harmony.

Pjetër Bogdani is widely regarded as the father of Albanian literature. He lived in the 17th century and wrote the first work of long prose written in Albanian. Bogdani, like most of Kosovo's Albanians, spoke the Gheg dialect. In recent decades, the Socialist Realist literature of communist-era Albania has become popular in Kosovo. The most well known Albanian Socialist Realist writer is the former dissident author Ismail Kadaré. In recent years, Kosovo has produced a number of prominent writers, including novelist Iljaz Prokshi, children's writer Rifat Kukaj, Roma scholar Bajram Haliti, and poet and women's rights activist Flora Brovina.

Kosovo has a small but growing film industry. One of the most famous filmmakers in the country is Isa Qosja. In 2005

Qosja directed *Kukumi*, a politically-charged drama about three mental patients who try to make sense of post-war Kosovo.

### 15 WORK

In early 2008 the unemployment rate in Kosovo was estimated at 40%. It is difficult for Kosovars to find work within Kosovo because the economy is in such poor condition. The economic situation is aggravated by endemic corruption, poor infrastructure, and the destruction caused by the 1998–1999 war.

Approximately 60% of Kosovars support themselves through agriculture. Agricultural output declined after 1999, but has been increasing ever since. Much of the uptick in agriculture can be attributed to foreign donors who invested in the rebuilding of irrigation networks. Less than a quarter of Kosovars work in mining or industry. A large number of Kosovars work for the numerous international organizations that operate in the small republic. Finally, many Kosovars earn their living through participation in organized crime networks. UNMIK estimates that 15%–20% of the Kosovo economy comes from organized crime.

Many Kosovars leave the country in search of work. Over 200,000 Albanian Kosovars live and work abroad. Many live in Western Europe; Germany and Switzerland are two of the most common destinations. Kosovars of Roma and Serb ethnicity who have left Kosovo tend to live and work in Serbia.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer is the most popular sport in Kosovo. In 2008 the Soccer Federation of Kosovo applied to the international soccer association (FIFA) for recognition of Kosovo's soccer clubs. The Kosovo national soccer team played its first games against Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Albania.

Basketball is also quite popular in Kosovo, just as it is in the other former Yugoslav republics. Kosovo has a national basketball federation and a number of regional teams. Kosovo's basketball federation is still seeking recognition from the International Basketball Federation.

In addition to basketball and soccer, Kosovars sometimes play traditional sports dating from Ottoman times. Long jumping, tugs of war, and stone throwing are some of the games played. Turkish wrestling is also popular. The sport has Balkan, Persian, and Turkic influences. Turkish wrestlers grease themselves with oil and wear stitched leather pants called *kisbet*.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Kosovars spend a great deal of their leisure time in cafés. In the capital city, Pristina, there are hundreds of small coffee shops that serve Italian-style cappuccinos, Turkish coffee, and other drinks. The unemployment rate is very high and as a result many Kosovars have found that sitting in cafés is a cheap and enjoyable way to pass time.

Young people in Kosovo's larger cities also enjoy nightlife. Although some bars are only for men, many night spots serve both young men and young women. The influx of United Nations personnel and aid workers into Pristina has increased the number of bars, dancing clubs, and music venues in the city.

Satellite television is popular amongst Kosovars. Many watch foreign programs that are dubbed in Albanian or have Albanian subtitles.



*Kosovar Bosnian women arrive at a traditional wedding ceremony in the village of Donje Ljubicje. The traditional wedding is viewed by almost all residents with universal pride as a symbol of this village's special identity. (© Vadrin Xhemaj/epa/Corbis)*

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Kosovar artisans have a long history of producing ornate wood carvings. Artisans decorate furniture, roofs of buildings, and musical instruments.

Kosovo also has a variety of traditional dances. The performers of these dancers wear their traditional dress. The style of dress and dance varies according to the background of the performers. Albanian Kosovar dance resembles that of other Balkan and Anatolian peoples, although men and women often dance together in the Kosovan versions. Traditional dances are often accompanied by men playing *lodras*, or bass drums, and a variety of other instruments.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Many of the social problems faced by Kosovars stem from the country's poor economic situation. Industry has been on the decline in Kosovo since the 1990s. The lack of economic activity in Kosovo has contributed to high levels of unemployment and poverty. In 2007 approximately 45% of Kosovars lived below the poverty line.

Poverty contributes to the problem of organized crime. Human traffickers sometimes promise poor women and girls from Kosovo that they will find them legitimate employment in Western Europe. Instead, Kosovars are often trafficked into prostitution rings. Furthermore, Albanian criminal organizations use Kosovo as a distribution point for heroin from Afghanistan. Even Kosovo's prime minister in 2008, Hashim Thaçi, was accused of having once headed up a criminal network involved in a wide range of illicit activities.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Albanian Kosovars tend to be more traditional with regard to gender relations than many other Balkan peoples. In most families, women are expected to raise children and carry out housework. Men are expected to provide for their families financially. The belief that women's responsibilities are in the home often leads to girls leaving school early. Only half of Albanian girls aged 15–18 attend school. Furthermore, Albanian custom dictates that women have no inheritance rights and almost no property rights in the event of a divorce. While Kosovan law provides inheritance rights to Kosovar women, women

often come under strong family pressure to forego their legal rights.

Although homosexuality is not illegal, it is viewed as abhorrent in Kosovo's traditional society. Homosexual and transgender Kosovars routinely face violence and harassment. The Canon (Albanian customary law) does not mention homosexuality. However, it places a strong emphasis on honor and masculinity, and homosexuality is regarded as a serious breach of these values.

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—by B. Lazarus

# LATVIANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Letts

**LOCATION:** Latvia

**POPULATION:** 2,245,423 [2008 estimate; total population of country, of which 58% are ethnic Latvians]

**LANGUAGE:** Latvian (Lettish)

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Baptist, Old Believers, Pentecostal, Adventist); Judaism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In approximately 2000 BC, Baltic tribes came into the region that is now Latvia and are regarded as the ancestors of the modern Latvians and Lithuanians. These tribes, coming from the south, assimilated into the scattered peoples already living in present-day Latvia. The Baltic tribes first appear in the written records of the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus around 100 BC. During this period, the early Baltic peoples split up into several tribes. The Latvians, who are sometimes called the Letts (from the German word for “Latvian”), have the largest homeland of the three Baltic republics. Latvia has, like Estonia to the north and Lithuania to the south, been an important trading center and strategic area in the Baltic region.

The various Latvian tribes were loosely self-governing until the end of the 13th century AD when the territory was conquered by German Teutonic knights. The ruling classes during this era were ethnic Germans; and the middle class (mainly artisans and farmers) consisted of Latvians. Even wealthy Latvians were not permitted to integrate into German society. However, in the territory of Prussia to the west, farmers had the possibility of becoming Germans. This is probably the reason why the Baltic peoples, unlike the Prussians, did not lose their unique ethnic identity.

Latvians were subjected to occasional invasions by the Poles and the Swedes until the 18th century. The 1600s were a time of struggle between Poland and Sweden for control over the Baltics, with most of the battlegrounds in present-day Latvia. As a result of the Swedish-Polish war, the northern part of the country (Vidzeme or Livland) and Riga came under Swedish rule. The Swedish period brought new political and cultural changes, and the power of the German feudal lords decreased. The Latvian farmers of Vidzeme were granted the right to voice their concerns directly to the Swedish king, schools for peasants were established in the country, and the shipbuilding and metallurgy industries grew. Latvians also began operating a small colony on the island of Tobago and another inside present-day Gambia.

In 1700, the army of imperial Russia fought Sweden for the sole purpose of acquiring the ice-free harbors on the Baltic Sea. This prolonged war, which lasted for over 20 years, along with a series of plagues, devastated the Latvians. As a result, much of northern Latvia became unpopulated and came under Russian control. Russia gave power back to the local German aristocrats in Latvia. Throughout the 1700s, Latvians were unable to express themselves politically or culturally because of the authoritarian control of imperial Russia.

During the 1800s, an intellectual movement among Latvians began. Latvian scholars wanted political and social equal-

ity with the Germans. A sense of Latvian nationalism grew, as many wanted to live in an independent state that was not ruled by foreigners. This Latvian independence movement gained strength and peaked with a national uprising in 1905. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 marked the end of imperial Russian dominion. At the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia agreed to give up its Baltic territories. Although Soviet troops invaded Latvia in 1919, they were defeated and forced out. The Germans were also defeated and forced to leave, as formalized under the Treaty of Versailles. For the first time in six centuries, the Latvians were independent and free to control their own destiny. Politically, Latvia became a member of the League of Nations on 22 September 1921, thus formally joining the family of nations. In 1936, Latvia's minister of foreign affairs, V. Munters, was elected president of the League of Nations.

On 17 June 1940, the Russian Red Army occupied Latvia, in accordance with the secret deal made earlier between Hitler and Stalin to divide Eastern Europe between the two dictators. After the Soviets took over, Latvia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. Immediately after the occupation, the Soviet regime began liquidating the Latvian population. During the first year of the occupation, 35,000 ethnic Latvians and other Latvian citizens (including Jews) were arrested, murdered, or deported to the northern regions of the Soviet Union and Siberia. Some 16,000 alone were sent into exile on the night of 13–14 June 1941. As a result, there are still a few of these exile Latvian communities scattered in the Russian part of Central Asia and Siberia.

The Soviet purges explain why Latvians optimistically welcomed back the German army in 1941. The Latvians hoped that the Germans would get rid of the Soviets and help them reestablish their independent state. That did not happen. For the next three years, the Latvians lived under the Nazi regime as residents of the occupied "Ostland" territory. Many Latvian Jews left Latvia together with the retreating Red Army in July 1941. The loyal Latvian Jews were rounded up, used as laborers, and killed by starvation in the Salaspils concentration camp, or shot in the forest of Rumbula or elsewhere. Latvian men were recruited by both the Nazi and Soviet armed forces, so that they ended up fighting against each other. The Soviets finally regained full control on 8 May 1945, when Germany capitulated. However, many thousands of Latvian soldiers did not capitulate and continued a guerilla war for freedom against the Soviet invaders, hoping for help from the West. They did not get any. The deportation of more than 100,000 farmers on 25 March 1949 destroyed the food supply for the Latvian guerrillas and they had to surrender. Many of the soldiers were shot or hanged. The rest were deported to Siberian death camps.

In the mid-1950s, a plan of forced industrialization began, which involved the fusion of a generic "Soviet" culture (which favored things that were Russian) onto the Latvians. However, after Stalin's death, some Latvians were allowed to return from exile in Siberia but were not allowed to live in their own homes because they had been expropriated by ethnic Russians. Harassment of Latvians by Russians continued, and any dissidence was punished with long prison sentences in Siberian camps. Latvian campaigns for democracy and independence did not begin in earnest until October 1988, with the formation of the Popular Front of Latvia. Latvians finally reclaimed their independence in August 1991 after the collapse of Communism and the Soviet government in Moscow.



Latvia joined the United Nations in 1991 and the World Trade Organization in 1999. In 2004, Latvia cemented its ties to Europe and the West by joining both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

In 2008 the population of Latvia was estimated to be 2,245,423, of which 58% were ethnic Latvians. About 30% of the population of Latvia is ethnic Russian. At the close of World War II, thousands of Latvians fled their homeland to escape the returning Russian troops. As a result, there are now many ethnic Latvians and their descendants living in the United States, Australia, and elsewhere.

Latvia is on the Baltic coast and borders Estonia to the north, Lithuania to the south, the Russian Republic to the east, and Belarus (Poland before World War II) to the south-east. Latvia covers about 64,100 sq km (24,700 sq mi), making it slightly larger than the U.S. state of West Virginia. The coastline is mostly flat, but inland and eastward the topography becomes hilly, with more forests and lakes present. Reznas Lake is the largest of Latvia's 2,300 lakes. There are also about 12,000 rivers that crisscross Latvia, but only 17 are longer than 100 km (60 mi), the biggest being the River Daugava. The Latvian homeland is traditionally divided into four cultural and historical regions: Kurzeme (the west), Zemgale (the south), Vidzeme (middle and northern Latvia, including Riga—the capital of Latvia), and Latgale (the east).

The climate is generally temperate but with considerable temperature variations. Summer and winter can be intense, but spring and autumn are mild. Precipitation is distributed throughout the year, with the highest amount occurring in August.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Latvian language (also called Lettish), along with Lithuanian, belongs to the Letto-Lithuanian branch of Indo-European languages. Modern Latvian also shows the influences of former conquerors, with some words taken from Swedish, German, and Russian. There are three main Latvian dialects: Central (which is used as the basis for written Latvian), East, and Livonian.

Throughout the Soviet period, ethnic Russians settled in Latvia. This immigration caused a massive linguistic shift in the Latvian homeland and resulted in the spreading of Russian words, phrases, and slang into the Latvian language. Today, about 58% of the population in Latvia speaks Latvian. In 1989 the government made Latvian the official language, requiring it in governmental use. Anyone wishing to become a citizen of Latvia must also pass a basic competency test in the Latvian language.

Latvian first names for males always end in the letter “s” and include names such as Andris, Ivars, Jānis, Kārlis, Vilnis, and Visvaldis. Female first names usually end in the letter “a” and include names like Aina, Laima, Māra, Ausma, Ieva, Ināra, Maija, and Zinta. Examples of everyday Latvian words include *Sveicināti* (How do you do?), *lūdzu* (please), *paldies* (thank you), and *uz redzēšanos* (goodbye).

### 4 FOLKLORE

The Latvian language finds its most lyrical and expressive use in Latvian folk songs, or *dainas*. The *dainas* are beautiful and sensitive verses written over many centuries, rich in experience, feeling, and folk wisdom. They cover the total human experience: birth, childhood, love, marriage, death, nature, and the changing seasons; holidays and festivities; work in the fields, pastures, and home; mythology; and the struggle against foreign invaders and oppressors. However, they lose much of their meaning when translated. Here is one *daina* describing the dawn:

Sidrābina gailis dzied  
Zeltupītes maliņā,  
Lai cedās Saules meita  
Zīda diegu šīterčt.

A silver rooster crows  
Beside a golden stream,  
To make the Sun's daughter rise  
To twine her silken yarn.

Some people believe that the oldest *dainas* perhaps are remnants of ancient riddles and magic incantations, because of their form and structure. When the Latvians started living in villages and towns, a split developed between urban and rural *dainas*. Modern *dainas* are typically philosophical and are revered as Latvian lyric poetry. Efforts to preserve traditional Latvian folklore began late in the 19th century, and several volumes of traditional Latvian myths and folk songs were com-

plied and published. Modern scholars have catalogued more than 1.4 million traditional Latvian folk songs.

One of the most famous traditional figures of Latvian myth is Lacplēsis the Bear-Slayer. The legend of Lacplēsis tells about how he could break a bear's jaw with his fist and even get bears to pull his plow. Although Lacplēsis wanted to help others, he often did not know his own strength and would end up breaking peoples' tools. According to legend, Lacplēsis was finally defeated by a vicious three-headed ogre. The ogre's mother told her son that Lacplēsis would lose his great strength if his ears were cut off. The battling Lacplēsis and the ogre plunged into the Daugava River and were swept out to sea.

### 5 RELIGION

Christianity spread through Latvia during the 9th–12th centuries, with Russian Orthodoxy dominant in the east and Roman Catholicism in the west. While the Russian Orthodox Church among the Latvians was adaptive to local culture, the Roman Catholic Church was more rigidly structured. As a result, many Latvians became subordinate to local leaders who were connected with the Roman Catholic Church. By the 1520s, many of the Latvians living in areas of German or Swedish influence were unhappy with the Roman Catholic Church and became receptive to the ideas brought forth by the Protestant Reformation. Lutheranism developed primarily among urban Latvians, especially in Riga. The resulting religious diversity among Latvians meant that Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Russian Orthodoxy were each popular in different parts of the country during the independence years of 1918–40. In 1935, 55.1% of Latvians were Lutheran, 24.4% were Roman Catholic, 8.9% were Orthodox, 5.5% were Old Believers, 4.8% were Jewish, and the rest belonged to other religions. Before World War II, there was a strong Jewish presence in Latvia.

Religious tolerance ended when the Soviet Union annexed Latvia in 1940. All religious activities were discouraged, and the government closed many churches and seized the property. The Russian Orthodox Church was treated less harshly than the others, but only because the Soviet government had a pro-Russian cultural bias. For example, during much of the Soviet period, the identities of Latvians who attended church services on Christmas were recorded. These persons would then later be mocked, harassed, or punished at the workplace or at school. In spite of this psychological tactic, church attendance remained high.

Religious persecution formally came to an end in 1989. Latvians have begun to reopen churches, and attendance at various religious services has grown especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 2006, about two-thirds of Latvians remained “undeclared” religiously, about 20% of Latvians named themselves as Lutherans, 15% Orthodox, and 1% other Christian sects, with small numbers of Jews, Muslims, and other faiths.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are three Christian holidays that have become prominent in Latvian culture: Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide (the week of Pentecost). At Christmas, Latvians attend church services, decorate spruce trees with ornaments and lights, and exchange presents. Easter traditions include coloring eggs and making decorations from onion skins and herbs. Another popular activity at Easter is to build a swing and swing high,



from the traditional belief that such an activity will repel mosquitoes from biting in the summer. Many homes are decorated with birch branches for Whitsuntide. The national holiday of Latvia is on 18 November, to commemorate the proclamation of the republic.

*Līgo svētki* is a traditional midsummer festival that celebrates the summer solstice on June 23 and *Jāņi* (St John's Day) on June 24. This is one of Latvia's most popular holidays that has retained most of its pre-Christian flavor. The holiday marks the longest amount of daylight during the year and the shortest nights. The origin of the celebration stems from the time of year when the crops had been planted and farmers were looking forward to the upcoming harvest. The *Līgo svētki* activities encompass many old customs believed to enlist the aid of good spirits in the home, barn, field, and forest, and shield the crops from witches and devils. It is a night of singing, dancing, light-hearted merriment, and fortune telling. Men, women, and children dress in colorful folk costumes. Fields are weeded, beer is brewed, and a special cheese is made from cottage cheese, milk, cream, and caraway seeds. The *Jāņu* songs are a traditional part of the *Līgo svētki* celebration. These songs are short four-line verses from *dainas* with the typical refrain of "*līgo, līgo*" (an exclamation of joy). Women wear flower chaplets on their heads, while men (especially those named *Jānis*) wear wreaths made from oak branches. During the celebration, people go from farm to farm, gathering more flowers and sampling the quality of the cheese and beer. After dusk, fires are lit on hilltops. A wooden barrel is filled with firewood and tar and hoisted as a torch atop a tall pole. A big bonfire is often built alongside. There is much singing, dancing, eating, and drinking throughout the short night, ensuring that no one goes to sleep before sunrise. Similar celebrations also occur among Scandinavian cultures.

Other Latvian traditions include two All Fool's days—one on April 1 and the other on April 30. Every Latvian also celebrates not only a birthday but a namesake day. For an individual's namesake day, specific male and female first names are assigned to each day on the calendar. The *talka* (cooperative harvesting and threshing) is another occasion to celebrate after work is done. Special Harvest Day (Thanksgiving) is celebrated on the first Sunday in October. There are many other celebrations, among them some church festivals, district fairs, monthly market days, 4H Club exhibitions, gigantic open air performances of theater plays, dances, and choir songs, especially the popular *Dziesmu svētki* (Song Festival).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Latvian baptisms are marked by families getting together for a feast. Weddings are celebrated as the preeminent Latvian rite of passage—wedding festivities can go on for as long as three days. Personal autos were rare in Latvia throughout the Soviet years, so learning to drive as a teenager was not common. However, a youth in Latvia could legally only ride a bicycle in the cities with a bicycle driver's license, available at age 16. Universal suffrage is granted at age 18 and passports are issued at age 21.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Handshaking is customary, and most standard European courtesies are observed. Latvians are somewhat reserved and formal in public but are usually very hospitable in private.



A Latvian woman displaying her vegetables on a table at an outdoor market in Riga, Latvia. (Photo Edit)

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Many Latvians enjoy local mineral spas. One of the most famous is in Kemerī, near Riga. The local mineral water and mud have been used for medicinal therapy for almost 300 years. Since the winters are cold, housing is built accordingly, with firewood as the main source of heat. Government-operated railroads are the primary way for people to get around in Latvia.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Latvian culture has always emphasized strong familial ties. Men have the role of provider and women are homemakers in traditional Latvian culture. The typical family includes two to four children.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most Latvians dress in standard European clothes for everyday wear. During folk dances and traditional ceremonies, many women wear the traditional Latvian costume, which consists of a large, colorful, pleated skirt worn with a white blouse and a short, round hat.

## 12 FOOD

Appetizers are an important part of Latvian cuisine. Traditional Latvian soups include cabbage soup and buckwheat soup (with boiled pork, onions, potatoes, and barley). Traditional dishes include grilled pork ribs, smoked fish (including salmon and trout), gray peas with fried fat, and *piragi* (pas-

tries filled with bacon and onions). A popular sweet pastry is *Alexander Torte*, which is filled with raspberries or cranberries. Other popular national dishes include *zemnieku brokastis* (“peasant’s breakfast,” a large omelet with potatoes and mushrooms), *maizes zupe ar putukrejumu* (cornbread soup with whipped cream), *skābe putra* (a drink made in some regions from pearl barley or rye flour and whey), and *sidīe, biezpiens ar kartupeļiem un krejumi* (salt herring, cottage cheese, potatoes, and sour cream).

Different types of locally brewed beer are popular among Latvians in different parts of the homeland. One of the most famous is a black alcoholic beverage, *Rīgas Melnais Balzāms* (Riga Black Balsam), which has been produced in Riga since the 1700s. Its recipe includes many herbs, spices, and cognac as ingredients.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Latvians’ first educational system was operated in Riga by Roman Catholic clergy during the 13th century. Schooling for children began in the 16th century. Russification (Russianization) in the Latvians’ educational system was apparent as early as 1789, when instruction began in Russian. During the 1860s, many Latvian schools were prohibited from using Latvian as the language of instruction. During the Soviet era, Latvians had the same type of educational system that existed throughout much of the former Soviet Union, which was based on the Russian model.

During the Soviet years, when children were about 6 months old they started day nursery until age 3, attended kindergarten until age 6 or 7, and went to elementary school until age 10. From ages 10 to 14, children attended a type of school that was like a combination of middle school and junior high school. At the start of the middle school years, students typically studied history, geography, biology, and a foreign language. By the eighth and ninth grades, physics, chemistry, and electives were taught. After ninth grade, a student went either to a vocational school, professional technical school, or preparatory high school. In order to get into a high school, students had to pass an exam in language and mathematics at the end of ninth grade; otherwise, they went to vocational or trade school. Competition for a place at a university was rigorous.

Since 1990, the Latvians have thoroughly changed the organizational structure and curricula that were part of the Soviet system. Primary education still lasts for nine years, and secondary education lasts for three years. There are now private as well as public universities available for those who pass entrance exams. Literacy is 100%.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Latvian folk history preservation is a popular activity. Several folk dance troupes, such as *Ilgī*, *Skandinieki*, and *Dandari*, are well known for their performances that preserve Latvian heritage. Ballet is popular among Latvians, although ballet of Latvian origin dates back only to 1935.

Latvian teenagers outside of Latvia participate in cultural folk dance groups with a special zeal. The well-known *Saules Josta* (Sun Sash) dance troupe of Australia regularly performs world tours. The tradition of singing has no age barriers; Latvian choirs typically include preteens as well as septuagenarians in their ranks.

The *kokle* is the most celebrated of the Latvian folk instruments. A small board zither, the *kokle* is related to a larger family of similar stringed instruments found throughout the Baltic region and Finland: the *kankles* of the Lithuanians, the Estonians’ *kannel*, and the *kantele* of the Finno-Karelians. The *kokle* was usually played by men to accompany folk dances. It is now favored by young female ensembles and is also played in large modern orchestras—there are soprano, alto, tenor, and bass models available.

The popular *Dziesmu svētki* (Song Festival) is an event that occurs every four years. The first Song Festival took place in 1873 with 1,003 singers, but by 1938 the event had grown to 16,000 singers with an audience of over 100,000. During the Soviet occupation years, the tradition continued, but with Russian cultural overtones. Latvian Song Festivals are also held every four years in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe.

Latvian literature is comparatively new. During the last 100 years, the Latvians have repeatedly struggled against German and Russian invaders to regain their independence. So, Latvian writers during that time focused on describing the Latvian mentality, the history, the attitudes towards the oppressors, and the Latvian way of life in their works as a way of encouraging pride among their fellow Latvians.

Mark Rothko, internationally renowned abstract painter, was born in Latvia in 1903 and emigrated to the United States with his family at the age of 10.

### 15 WORK

Latvia is an agricultural region, and the Latvians have a very strong work ethic. It is emphasized in their centuries-old folk songs (*dainas*), and it served as a virtue during the independence years of 1918–40. However, the Soviet occupation left a negative imprint that has affected Latvia’s current working population.

The Soviet government controlled the economy for decades, during which time the Latvians worked with little incentive under a system of price controls and quotas. Since independence, the Latvian government has adopted a market-based economy to replace the inefficient socialist system. However, the transition toward a market economy was difficult on many workers, since the job market began changing with the economy. As a result, many Latvians (especially women) dealt with unemployment in the first years after independence. The economy has grown steadily since then, though, and unemployment had fallen to 5.7% in 2007. Latvia had the fastest growing economy in the European Union in 2004–2006.

Latvians not in school can begin working at age 16. Compulsory military service was abolished in 2007.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer, volleyball, and basketball are popular outdoor activities among Latvians. Latvia has many organized sports clubs and organizations for these and other sports. Bobsled and motor racing are popular spectator sports. Latvian athletes have occasionally won medals at the Olympic games.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In 1772 the Riga Opera-Theater house opened. Going to the theater is popular among Latvians. Many productions are dramas, but musicals have become popular in recent years. Cir-

cuses are also popular and Riga has had a permanent circus building since 1889.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Interest in folk arts and crafts is expressed through jewelry-making, intricate sewing, and embroidering of the traditional Latvian folk dress. Workshops in ceramics, woodworking, and leather craft are also common. *Dzintars* (amber)—fossilized pine resin from the Tertiary Period—washes up along the Baltic seashore and is used for making ethnic jewelry and in the manufacture of ornamental objects.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

As in many other places in the world, there is ethnic tension in the Baltics and especially in Latvia, between ethnic Latvians and Russians. In independent Latvia of 1918–40, there was no such ethnic tension, and at that time ethnic Latvians made up over 75% of the population. After 1945, many Latvians were forcefully deported to Siberia, with ethnic Russians settling in their place in confiscated properties in Latvia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Latvia's regained independence in 1991, ethnic Latvians accounted for only 52% of the population, and for only 35% of the population in the capital, Riga.

The new Latvian government reinstated Latvian as the official language and permitted Russians to live in the expropriated Latvian properties for seven more years, so that they could have time to find another place to live or to emigrate to Russia. Bitter complaining by the Russians in Latvia resulted, and tensions between the Russian and Latvian governments over the fate of these people have continued to be a source of conflict since then. Latvians feel overshadowed culturally and economically by their powerful Russian neighbors, who have historically dominated nearby ethnic groups. Latvians often consider the ethnic Russians in Latvia as unwanted colonists and part of a well-coordinated expansionist government waiting for the opportunity to reclaim Latvia yet again. The Russian government, however, wants to safeguard the rights of ethnic Russians living in former Soviet republics.

In Latvia there are also some acute environmental problems. In the Soviet era, environmental protection in Latvia did not exist. Air pollution became concentrated in industrialized areas (these were created during the Soviet years), and it is now regularly checked. The rivers and lakes were used as open sewers for sloppy industrial waste disposal methods. As a result, even the Baltic Sea was not safe for swimming. The collective farms (*kolkhozi*), in order to fulfill Moscow's imposed quotas, abused the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. In many places even the groundwater is contaminated. Measures are being taken to reverse the damage; Latvia participates in international efforts to reduce pollution.

Because of its geographical location, Latvia is a transit point for illegal drugs between Eastern and Western Europe. With the destabilization of the economy in 1991, Latvia also became vulnerable to money laundering ventures by organized crime syndicates, a common problem among former Soviet satellites.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Although homosexual activities were decriminalized in Latvia in 1992, homophobia still lingers among the population. The first gay pride parade was organized in 2005 and met with tremendous opposition, so much so that the parade was cancelled

in 2006. In 2005, the Latvian parliament approved a constitutional amendment to limit marriage to heterosexual couples by such a wide margin that then-President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga felt compelled to sign it into law despite her own disagreement with the legislation.

In contrast to these anti-gay measures, the Latvian government passed a law prohibiting housing and employment discrimination based on a number of factors, including gender and sexuality. In 2007, the gay pride parade was held without serious incident. Latvia's membership in the European Union requires it to recognize human rights and eliminate discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, creed, or sexuality, putting pressure on Latvians to overcome their prejudices, be they cultural, ethnic, or religious.

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—by Dianne de Mott

# LIECHTENSTEINERS

**LOCATION:** Liechtenstein

**POPULATION:** 35,200 (2008)

**LANGUAGE:** Standard German; Alemannic German; English, French

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Protestant

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Liechtenstein is a tiny, picturesque country located in the heart of Europe. The citizens of this politically neutral principality enjoy a peaceful and prosperous existence in the midst of a scenic Alpine landscape. The region now known as Liechtenstein has been continuously inhabited since 3000 BC. After successive periods of rule by the Rhaetians, Celts, and Romans, it was settled by the Alemanni, a Germanic people who arrived in the area in the 5th century AD. In the 8th century the region formed part of Charlemagne's empire, and it was later divided into two separate entities, the Lordship of Schellenberg and the County of Vaduz, both of which later belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. Prince Johann Adam of Liechtenstein acquired Schellenberg in 1699 and Vaduz in 1712, uniting the two domains as the Imperial Principality of Liechtenstein. Except for a brief period of French rule under Napoleon, the principality has been independent ever since that time.

For part of the 19th century, Liechtenstein was an autonomous unit of the German Confederation. Since the 1860s the country has been politically neutral, with no standing army. Under its 1921 constitution, Liechtenstein became a constitutional monarchy with a single-chamber parliament and a prime minister appointed by its prince. Maintaining its neutrality during the First and Second World Wars, Liechtenstein became one of the only areas of western Europe to remain free from warfare during the past two centuries. Economically, Liechtenstein joined with Switzerland to form a customs union in 1924, when it adopted the Swiss franc as its currency. The principality joined the United Nations in 1991. Crown Prince Hans Adam has been Liechtenstein's reigning monarch since 1984; however, on 15 August 2004, Hans Adam transferred the official duties of the ruling prince to his son Alois, retaining his status as head of state. Despite its small size and limited natural resources, Liechtenstein has developed into a prosperous, highly industrialized, free-enterprise economy with a thriving financial service sector and living standards on a par with its large European neighbors. Liechtenstein has been a member of the European Economic Area (an organization serving as a bridge between the European Free Trade Association [EFTA] and the European Union [EU]) since 1995. The government is working to harmonize its economic policies with those of an integrated Europe. Although Liechtenstein has recently adopted anti-money laundering legislation, there are still concerns about the use of financial institutions for money laundering.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Liechtenstein is a landlocked country located in the Rhine River valley between Switzerland and Austria. With an area of roughly 62 square miles (160 square kilometers)—slightly smaller than Washington, D.C.—it is Europe's fourth smallest country. The western part of Liechtenstein, situated on

the Rhine's eastern bank, is a flat region covering about 40% of the country, with mountains occupying much of the larger area to the east. A steep Alpine slope called the *Drei Schwestern* ("three sisters") extends across Liechtenstein's border with Austria. The highest point in the country is the *Grauspitz*, at 8,525 feet (2,599 meters).

Liechtenstein has a population of approximately 35,200 people, of whom roughly two-thirds are native-born residents of Alemannic descent. The rest are immigrants from Switzerland, Austria, and other countries. Liechtenstein's population is unevenly distributed among the principality's 11 administrative districts, which are called communes. Vaduz, the capital city, has a population of about 5,250.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Standard German is the official language of Liechtenstein, used for official purposes and taught in the schools. However, most people also speak a local Alemannic dialect that resembles the German spoken in Switzerland. The people in the mountain region of Triesenberg, whose forebears emigrated from southeastern Switzerland in the 13th century, speak a unique dialect called *Walser*. The principal languages taught in school are English and French.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Some of Liechtenstein's legends date back to the dark days of the 17th century, when a savage wave of witch hunts swept over the principality during the reign of the Count of Hohenems. One concerns a fiddler named Hans Jöri, who unknowingly plays at a party thrown by a group of witches. The witches vanish when he disobeys them by drinking a toast to his own health, after which he suddenly finds himself seated on a scaffold holding a bleeding ox's hoof—a symbol of witchcraft—in his hand. In another tale, a farmer suspects that a witch's spell is preventing his butter from thickening. After he thrusts a red-hot pitchfork into it, it thickens right away. The farmer's suspicions are borne out when he is then approached by a witch who has burn marks on her hands shaped exactly like the prongs of the pitchfork.

## 5 RELIGION

Roman Catholicism is the state religion of Liechtenstein, and as of the 2000 census about 78% of the people were Catholics, while approximately 8% were Protestants, 5% Muslims, and the rest belonged to other denominations. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. As of 2008, there were efforts ongoing to disentangle church and state. For instance, in a survey commissioned by the government in 2007, the overwhelming majority of the population was in favor of tolerance and respect toward other religions, called for equal treatment of the religious communities by the state, and tended to support the abolition of the constitutionally guaranteed privileges of the Roman Catholic Church.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many of Liechtenstein's holidays are holy days of the Christian calendar. These include Epiphany (January 6), Candlemas (February 2), the Feast of St. Joseph (March 19), Easter (observed from Good Friday through Easter Monday), Ascension, Whit Monday, Corpus Christi, the Nativity of Our Lady

(September 8), All Saints' Day (November 1), the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas, which is celebrated December 24–26. Christmas is the most important holiday of the year, celebrated by putting up Christmas trees, exchanging gifts, and visiting with friends and family. Other holidays include New Year's Day (January 1), Labor Day (May 1), and Liechtenstein's national day (August 15), which is celebrated with speeches and fireworks.

People in rural areas still observe some of the traditional holiday customs passed on by preceding generations. There is the annual Corpus Christi procession, an event for which the entire village turns out, carrying a variety of devotional objects and passing by homes adorned with candles, flowers, and religious paintings. On Bonfire Sunday, the first Sunday of Lent, boys walk through their villages collecting wood for a large bonfire, which they light in the evening. They then perform an age-old ceremony, tracing patterns in the air with torches they have lit from the flames of the bonfire. After the fire dies out, the boys return home to a traditional pancake supper. Another rural Lenten custom is "Dirty Thursday," also called "Sooty Thursday," which is observed on the last Thursday before Lent. On this occasion, boys arm themselves with chimney soot, which they rub into the faces and hair of unsuspecting victims. Another traditional prank carried out on this date is stealing a pot of soup from the kitchen of a village house. Some women have been known to even the score by hiding an old shoe in the soup pot.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Liechtensteiners live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Liechtensteiners commonly greet each other by shaking hands. Verbal greetings include *Gruezi* (also used in Switzerland) and the German *Grüss Gott*. *Hoi!* is a popular informal greeting used among friends.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Liechtenstein is a modern, industrialized country whose residents enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. Most Liechtensteiners live in single-family homes, although apartment living has become increasingly common for young families who cannot afford their own homes. There is sufficient housing for all of Liechtenstein's inhabitants, and dwellings range from wooden houses scattered across picturesque mountain villages to modern multi-story apartment buildings in the capital city of Vaduz.

Average life expectancy in Liechtenstein is 80 years, and the infant mortality rate is a very low 4.52 per 1,000 live births. Liechtenstein's health care system provides free regular examinations for children under the age of 10. The principality has one public hospital of its own and has also formed agreements with Switzerland and Austria that allow its residents access to hospital facilities in those countries when they are needed. A representative survey conducted in 2006 showed that near-



ly 90% of all respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with medical services in Liechtenstein.

Private automobiles are Liechtenstein's most important mode of transportation, and the principality has a well-developed system of roads and highways. Its main highway runs through the country, linking it with Austria and Switzerland. Low-cost public transportation is provided by postal buses, which carry passengers to destinations within Liechtenstein and also to Austria and Switzerland. Liechtenstein has one railway, operated by the Austrian Federal Railways. There is no airport within Liechtenstein's borders—the nearest one is Kloten Airport in Zurich, Switzerland.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The typical family in Liechtenstein, as in most of its western European neighbors, is the nuclear family, composed of parents and, on average, about two children. Most Liechtensteiners marry in their late twenties, preferring to complete their education before taking on the responsibilities of raising a family. It is not unusual for unmarried couples to live together before (or instead of) marrying. Several distinctive traditional customs are still practiced at weddings in rural villages. When the bride and groom leave the church following the marriage



*Sophie, the wife of Prince Alois of Liechtenstein (far right), and other wives of heads of state pose with children in traditional dress in Meersburg am Bodensee, Germany. The women came together for a photograph during an informal meeting of heads of state of German-speaking countries. (Johannes Simon/AFP/Getty Images)*

ceremony, they often find their way barred by a rope held by the village children, who must be “bribed” by the best man in order to let the couple pass. Further bribes may have to be paid later, at the wedding feast, if the children manage to make off with one of the bride’s shoes. Sometimes the groom’s friends even “kidnap” the bride herself, and it is then the groom’s turn to pay up. Yet another wedding custom is firing guns into the air, a practice that has been banned for safety reasons, but is still encountered occasionally. Women in Liechtenstein have only had the right to vote nationally since 1984. Many married women work outside the home.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The people of Liechtenstein wear modern, Western-style clothing for both casual and formal occasions. They dress neatly and, in many cases, rather conservatively in public. Their traditional costumes, or *Trachten*, are worn only rarely, for festivals and other special occasions. The women’s costume has a gathered waist, a full skirt, and an apron, while men wear knee-length breeches, a flat black hat, and a *loden* (woolen) jacket.

### **12 FOOD**

Liechtensteiners eat three meals a day. Coffee and bread with jam are commonly eaten for breakfast (called *Zmorga*). *Zmittag*, eaten at mid-day, is the main meal of the day and typically includes a main dish, soup, a salad, and dessert. A lighter meal (*Znacht*) is eaten at dinnertime, often consisting of an open-faced sandwich made with various kinds of meat and cheese. Although Liechtenstein is too small to have developed an extensive national cuisine, it does have some distinctive regional dishes. *Käsknöfle* consists of noodles made by squeezing a mixture of flour, water, and eggs through a perforated board. The noodles are then baked with grated cheese and a layer of fried onions and often served with applesauce or a salad. *Hafaläb*, another favorite, is a dish made with a corn- and wheat-flour dough formed into small loaves that are boiled, left out to dry, sliced, and then fried. Corn flour is the principal ingredient of *Törkarebl*, made from porridge that is then fried to create a dumpling-like dish often served with elderberry jam.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Virtually all adults in Liechtenstein are literate. Both primary and secondary education are administered by the central government, and all children must attend school from ages 6 to 15. In addition to government-run public schools, there are

also private schools sponsored by the Catholic Church. After completing their secondary school requirements, students either receive vocational training or prepare for the university entrance examination, known as the *Matura*. Liechtenstein has no universities of its own, so its young people go to college in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland (including those studying to be teachers themselves, who are generally trained in Switzerland). Liechtenstein does have an evening technical college that offers courses in engineering and architecture and a music school, as well as a variety of facilities for adult education.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Liechtenstein's great cultural treasure is the art collection of its prince, which dates back to the early 1600s. Housed in the capital city of Vaduz, it is the second largest private art collection in the world (surpassed in size only by that of Britain's royal family) and one of the finest. Its many masterpieces cover a wide range of periods and schools of art, and it includes sculptures, tapestries, silver, and porcelain, as well as paintings by Breughel the Elder, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Rubens, and other masters. Liechtenstein also has a strong musical tradition. Brass bands and vocal ensembles abound in rural areas, while the cities of Vaduz and Balzers both have highly regarded operetta companies.

#### 15 WORK

Since World War II, Liechtenstein has been transformed from an agrarian society into a modern industrial state. Agriculture, which once occupied a majority of the population, now employs 2.1% of the paid work force, and 54% of all employed adults work in service-sector jobs. Liechtensteiners put in a long work day—often from 8:00 am to 6:30 pm with a mid-day lunch break lasting an hour or longer. About 13,900 of Liechtenstein's labor force of 29,500 people commuted to work from Switzerland, Austria, or Germany in 2001. The greatest proportion of foreign workers are employed in industry. Liechtenstein's major industries include metal finishing, ceramics, pharmaceuticals, and electronic equipment.

#### 16 SPORTS

The majority of Liechtensteiners are sports enthusiasts—45% belong to sports clubs. The principality's downhill ski resorts are world famous, especially those at Malbun and Steg. The Steg resort also has a popular cross-country ski course with a 1-mile (1.7-kilometer) stretch that is floodlit, allowing for night-time skiing. Summer sports include hiking, bicycling, and soccer.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The people of Liechtenstein enjoy hiking and other outdoor activities. Cultural pursuits—such as performing in choirs and bands—are also popular, and many people belong to social clubs. Television is a common form of recreation. All television programming is received from abroad, as the principality does not have its own broadcast facilities. Radio broadcasts originating in Liechtenstein began in 1994.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Historically, Liechtenstein's major crafts included basket weaving, coopering (barrel making), clog carving, and the fashion-

ing of elaborate rakes. Today these activities have largely been replaced by the modern crafts of pottery, sculpture, and wood-carving, all areas in which Liechtenstein's artisans have a distinguished reputation throughout Europe.

Liechtenstein is world famous for its beautiful postage stamps, valuable collector's items that provide a significant source of government revenue. Many are based on paintings found in the prestigious art collection of Liechtenstein's prince.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Concern about the large number of foreign residents in Liechtenstein—over one-third of the population—has led to restrictive immigration policies, spurred by fears of endangering the cultural unity that distinguishes this tiny nation from its neighbors. However, increased numbers of foreign workers from neighboring German-speaking countries continue to commute to jobs in Liechtenstein, and foreigners still account for approximately 47% of the principality's work force. Some Liechtensteiners fear the growing Muslim population: the Muslim community has grown since the 1990s as a result of an influx of migrants primarily from Turkey and the Western Balkans (Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina), many of whom resettled from other Western European countries. The Muslim population increased from 689 in 1990 to 1,593 in 2000. The government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam, plus one short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government follows a policy of routinely granting visas to the imams in exchange for the agreement of both the Turkish Association and the Muslim community to prevent religious diatribes by the imams or the spread of religious extremism.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. The law prohibits all forms of domestic violence and provides for restraining orders against violent family members. Frauenhaus is a women's shelter providing both counseling and refuge for battered women (including nonresidents) and dependent children. Rape, including spousal rape, is a criminal offense. Spousal rape has the same penalties as rape under other circumstances. In 2007 a new provision of the penal code entered into force making stalking a criminal offense. Prostitution is illegal. Sexual harassment is illegal and punishable by up to six months in prison or a fine.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. The Equal Opportunity Office and the Commission on Equality between Women and Men works to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination. However, societal discrimination continues to limit opportunities for women in fields traditionally dominated by men. Men earn more than women, and women generally do not receive equal pay for equal work. Implementing a European Union directive, parliament in 2006 unanimously adopted amendments to the labor contract law and the equal opportunity law to combat gender discrimination in the workplace.

In 2007 there were six women in the parliament and one woman in the five seat cabinet.

A recent government-ordered study found evidence of discrimination based on sexual orientation in 2007. In a poll 71%

of homosexuals who responded said that discrimination was widespread in the country; 58% of the overall population expressed the view that homosexuality remained a taboo.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# LITHUANIANS

**LOCATION:** Lithuania

**POPULATION:** 3.4 million [total population of country; 85% are ethnic Lithuanians]

**LANGUAGE:** Lithuanian

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism; Old Believers; Russian Orthodox Church; Lutheranism; Judaism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

It was long thought that the Lithuanians were descendants of ancient Roman settlers, but it is more likely that the first people to live in the area now known as Lithuania came from Asia around 4,000–10,000 years ago. The modern Lithuanians are closely related in ethnicity and language to the Latvians, but their culture is closer to that of the Estonians because of the Scandinavian and German influences.

The early Lithuanians formed into small self-governing communities organized along family lines. By the 13th century AD, these communities were organized enough to be united by wealthy and powerful Lithuanian dukes. In 1236, these dukes elected Mindaugas as the first grand duke. He unified the Lithuanians into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a response to the encroaching Order of Teutonic Knights, a German military organization seeking conquest under the pretext of spreading Christianity. He also led in the defense against the Tatars, invaders from central Asia who conquered much of Eastern Europe during the 13th century.

Under the rule of Grand Duke Gediminas (r.1316–41), the Lithuanians were still trying to repel the Teutonic Knights. As part of this strategy, he invited other knights, as well as merchants and artisans, to come and settle in Lithuania. Many new trade centers were developed during this time, such as the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas. Merchants from across Europe came up the Nemunas River to Kaunas in order to buy amber, furs, and honey. In 1385, the grandson of Gediminas, Jogaila, became the grand duke. With his marriage to Queen Jadvyga of Poland, he converted to Roman Catholicism and decreed Lithuania a Christian nation. Lithuania and Poland then entered into a political and military partnership. Under the leadership of Vytautas the Great (r. 1392–1430), Lithuania's territory spread across present-day Belarus, Ukraine, and western Russia. Under Vytautas, Lithuania's political power reached a new height, and he is often considered Lithuania's most outstanding leader. The military was finally able to drive out the Teutonic Knights from the region. By the 15th century, however, the partnership with Poland was coming apart. Lithuania needed Poland more and more to help drive out invading Russians and became too weak to defend itself. As a result, Lithuania agreed to unite with Poland in 1569.

The union, however, did not prevent the continuing decline of the state over the next 200 years. The principal reason appears to have been a rise of nobility to power without a strong and united central policy. During the 1700s, constant Russian attacks caused famines that killed thousands of Lithuanians. By 1772, the union with Poland had crumbled and Russia began taking over the eastern parts of Lithuania. By 1795, all of Lithuania was under Russian control, and Poland had been taken over by the Prussians and Austrians. The Lithuanians



led failed revolts against the Russians in 1795, 1831, and 1863. In 1864, the Russian tsar Alexander II ordered a policy of Russification (Russianization) onto the Lithuanians. Russification involved the forcible imposition of the Russian language, the Russian Orthodox religion, and Russian laws onto the Lithuanian people. The policy was designed to end political unrest among Lithuanians by changing the Lithuanian culture itself. Many Lithuanians, however, refused to cooperate with the intrusive policy. By 1865, only a year after the policy was implemented, the Russian government had exiled or executed around 10,000 Lithuanian dissidents. The occupation of Lithuania by imperial Russia lasted until 1915.

During World War I, the German army occupied Lithuania. The war provided the Lithuanians with the opportunity to get rid of the Russian leadership. Therefore, on 16 February 1918, the Lithuanian National Council declared independence while German troops were still on Lithuanian soil and elected Antanas Smetona as president. The declaration had to be backed up by wars for independence fought against Soviet Russia, Poland, and remnant imperial German troops. Lithuania was recognized as a sovereign state and became a member of the League of Nations in 1922. However, after Smetona left office in 1920, the government became unstable. In 1926 Smetona returned to power in a military takeover. During the late 1920s, Smetona's administration became increasingly authoritarian—he dissolved the parliament in 1927 and banned all opposing political parties in 1930. Despite these actions, Lithuanian society improved. Land reforms made it possible for small farms to prosper. A comprehensive educational system was begun, and Lithuanian literature, arts, music, and theater developed.

In 1939, the Nazi leader Hitler and the Soviet leader Stalin signed a pact in which the two countries promised not to invade each other. A secret part of the agreement permitted the Soviet Union to take over the three Baltic States. On 15 June 1940, the Soviet Red Army invaded and occupied Lithuania, declaring that Lithuania was now Soviet territory. However, in 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union and occupied Lithuania. The Germans sent about 160,000 Lithuanians to die in concentration camps. About 130,000 of the victims were Jewish Lithuanians, whom the Nazis had targeted for extermination because of their ethnicity and religion. By 1944, the weakness of the German military gave the Soviet army an opportunity to return to Lithuania. At the close of World War II, many Lithuanians fled the homeland rather than live under Soviet rule, and thousands that remained in Lithuania fought against the Soviets. From 1944 to 1952, well-organized military units of the Lithuanian resistance movement waged a protracted guerilla war against the Soviet military occupants. About 50,000 lives were lost on each side.

A large Soviet military force and a massive deportation of 10% of the population held the resistance movement in check. The Soviet government sent Lithuanian rebels to labor camps in distant parts of Siberia. About 30,000 Lithuanian families were sent away by this process during 1941–52. By the early 1950s, the Soviet Union had firm control over the region and took over all private property. The late 1950s and 1960s were relatively quiet years when Soviet-type institutions were established and the collectivization of agriculture and industrialization were carried out. However, during the 1970s, a national and religious dissent emerged again and revealed deep-seated opposition to the Soviet system. The strict control continued



until the 1980s, when Soviet policy changed to allow peoples within the Soviet Union to speak out against the government without fear of being punished. In February 1990, the Lithuanian Communist party declared that the 1940 annexation into the Soviet Union had been illegal and, by March, there was an independent elected government. The Soviet Union initiated an embargo against Lithuania, to prevent fuel and supplies from reaching the people, but the Lithuanians bartered for goods by trading meat and dairy products. On 13 January 1991, Soviet tanks came into Vilnius, and Soviet troops seized the television and radio stations. When the Soviet Union fell apart in late 1991, Lithuania became the first of the Soviet-occupied republics to declare its independence. After difficult negotiations and a great deal of international pressure, the last foreign army units left Lithuania on 31 August 1993.

Lithuania became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2001 and a member of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union in 2004. Despite multiple turnovers in the government since independence, Lithuania's economy has grown steadily, and conditions in the country continue to improve.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

About 85% of Lithuania's 3.4 million people are ethnic Lithuanians. Unlike the other Baltic states, Lithuania did not experience massive immigration of ethnic Russians after World War II, because Lithuania was less industrialized than Estonia

or Latvia and did not have the factory jobs that the Russians preferred.

Lithuania is located in the western part of the Eastern European Plain, along the basin of the Nemunas River. The topography of Lithuania is primarily a mix of hilly uplands and lowland plains, with the uplands typically some 80–100 m (260–330 ft) above the plains. The lowest part of Lithuania is the Pajurio Lowland along the Baltic coast, and the highest is Juozapine Hill (294 m/965 ft) in the Medininku Upland near Belarus. Water travel has long been an important means of transportation. There are 758 rivers that are over 10 km (6 mi) long, of which 18 are over 100 km (60 mi) long. The 2,833 lakes in Lithuania occupy about 1.5% of the surface area of the nation. The rivers and lakes are usually frozen over for about three months each winter.

Prevailing winds from the North Atlantic Ocean create a moderate climate for Lithuania. Winter temperatures near the Baltic coast are around  $-3^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $27^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and drop to  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $21^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) inland. Summer temperatures are fairly uniform throughout Lithuania and typically reach around  $16^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $60^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Rainfall is highest near the coast and in the highlands east of Vilnius, with usually more than 80 cm (32 in) per year. The rest of Lithuania usually gets 60–80 cm (24–32 in) of rainfall annually. About 25% of the precipitation comes as snow. Since Lithuania lies so far north, daylight during the summer can last up to 18 hours per day. In the winter, however, the nights are just as long.

There are thousands of ethnic Lithuanians living outside Lithuania. The rest of Europe has a notable population of ethnic Lithuanians, with communities in London, Rome, Hamburg, Lampertheim-Huttenfeld (Germany), Pusk (Poland), and Paris. There are also small numbers of ethnic Lithuanians living in Switzerland, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Sweden. A smaller portion of Lithuanians live in Kaliningrad (Russia), Kiev (Ukraine), or Budapest. There are also some ethnic Lithuanians in Russian Siberia and Uzbekistan; these communities are a result of the deportation of Lithuanians from Lithuania during the 1940s.

In North America, there are over a million people claiming Lithuanian heritage living in the United States and Canada. In South America, there are Lithuanian communities in several large cities, including Buenos Aires (Argentina), Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Brazil), Montevideo (Uruguay), Caracas (Venezuela), and Medellín (Colombia). There are also Lithuanian communities in the Australian cities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The Lithuanian language, like Latvian, belongs to the Letto-Lithuanian branch of Indo-European languages. Some language scholars believe that Lithuanian is related to Sanskrit, the language of ancient India. The Lithuanian and Latvian languages became distinctly different during the 5th–7th centuries AD. Standard Lithuanian is based on the Western Aukštaičiai (High Lithuanian) dialect that was formalized at the end of the 19th century. In addition to the dialect of standard Lithuanian, there are many other dialects spoken throughout Lithuania, although through standardization some of the smaller dialects have vanished over the last 50 years. Although most Lithuanian speakers reside in Lithuania, there are also many living in other parts of Europe (primarily in Russia and Poland), North

and South America (in the United States, Brazil, Argentina, and Canada), and Australia.

Lithuanian first names for males end in the letter *s* (as in Latvian). Typical first names include Algimantas, Jonas, Darius, and Vytautas. Female first names often end in the letter *a* and include Rasa, Daiva, Laima, and Aldona. Examples of everyday Lithuanian words include *Sveiki* (How do you do?), *taip* (yes), *ne* (no), *prašom* (please), *aciu* (thank you), and *sudiev* (goodbye).

### 4 FOLKLORE

The rich folklore of Lithuania—songs, music, tales, and riddles, as well as traditional architecture and arts and crafts—reflects the life experience of its creators, mostly the tillers of the land. The old Lithuanian *dainos* (songs) are known to scholars of folklore worldwide for their lyric and melodic beauty and variety. The *dainos* were created by women doing farm work or celebrating festivals (e.g., weddings) or marking mournful occasions. Romantic love and leave-taking are important themes. Many folk songs have been harmonized or used in compositions by modern composers. Massive folk song festivals or performances by individual choral groups are an important part of cultural life. Folk music is played solo or by instrumental groups, using *kankles* (zither), *skuduciai* (panpipe), *lamzdelis* (recorder), *ragas* (horn), *smuikas* (fiddle), *birbyne* (folk clarinet), and *skrabalai* (cow bells).

Folk tales are also numerous and notably original. Some, of course, are based on foreign stories or reflect the influence of neighboring peoples. The first recorded Lithuanian folk tales date back to the 16th century. Lithuanian folklore has much in common with the historical and cultural aspects of Belarusan and Russian folk tales.

### 5 RELIGION

The ancient Lithuanians worshiped many gods and believed that forests and fires were sacred. The worship of fire may have become common because of the abundance of peat in the region. The most popular gods that they worshiped were Perkūnas (god of thunder), Velnias (the devil, the guardian of wizards), Medeina (goddess of forests), and Zvorūne (goddess of hunting).

In the mid 1200s, Lithuania's leaders began accepting Christianity, and Roman Catholicism soon became the faith of the people as well. Reformationist ideas spread in Lithuania during the first half of the 16th century, but Counter-Reformationist Jesuits in the late 17th century strengthened the position of Roman Catholicism among the Lithuanians. In the late 17th century, many Old Believers came from Russia to escape persecution. When the policy of Russification (Russianization) began after 1863, many Roman Catholic monasteries were closed and the churches handed over to the Russian Orthodox Church. During 1799–1915, Russian Orthodoxy was the official state religion in Lithuania. However, during the independent years of 1918–40, the Roman Catholic Church was revived.

During the half-century of Soviet rule, the government severely restricted all religious activities. Many churches were allowed to deteriorate or were used as museums or warehouses. Many churches and all Catholic monasteries were closed, and believers were often denied access to higher education, lost

their jobs, or were sent to prison. After 1988, religious persecution formally came to an end.

About 80% of Lithuanians who profess a religious belief are Roman Catholic. Most of the rest are Old Believers, Russian Orthodox, Lutherans, and Jews.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Independence Day is on February 16 and commemorates the declaration of independence adopted by the Council of Lithuania in 1918, when the country was still under the harsh occupation and oppressive rule of the German Empire. Restoring independence in reality required armed struggle (the War of Independence, 1918–20) against three enemies: the Red Army invading from the east, Polish troops encroaching from the south, and the Bermondts army (German units and remnants of Russian tsarist forces under German command) invading from the north. Independence Day was the most important civic celebration for Lithuanians until the Soviet occupation in June 1940, when any observance of the holiday was strictly forbidden and had grave consequences (including imprisonment) for anyone ignoring the ban. On the anniversary of the holiday in 1989, Sajudis, Lithuania's largest popular democratic movement, voiced its demand for independence. Before 1990, the February 16 holiday was publicly observed only by Lithuanians abroad.

The Day of Independence Restored is celebrated on March 11 and marks the date in 1990 when the Supreme Council of Soviet Lithuania declared the reestablishment of an independent Republic of Lithuania, formally severing all ties with the Soviet Union.

Easter is the most important religious holiday among Lithuanians. Until World War II, the traditional Easter observances extended over two days, and in some rural areas even longer. Easter Sunday, following attendance before sunrise at Resurrection services and a festive breakfast, was devoted to the immediate family, with even the children's visiting limited to their grandparents and godparents. Beginning in the late afternoon and on Easter Monday, groups of young men would call on their neighbors, singing and asking for *marguciai* (decorated Easter eggs). It was considered the height of inhospitality to refuse the carolers' requests, but that rarely happened. General merrymaking on the second day of Easter included the rolling of Easter eggs, testing one's strength, and swinging on swings "to help the flax grow faster." Adults traveled to visit relatives and friends. On the third day of Easter, the dead were remembered and cemeteries were visited.

*Kūčios* (Christmas Eve) on December 24 is a day of family reunion with religious significance, associated with the Christmas vigil and day-long fast. The fast is broken with a meatless and milkless evening meal of 12 courses, at which every family member tries to be present. Farm and household help, as well as any travelers, are welcome at the table, which is spread with hay (in memory of the manger at Bethlehem) and covered with a white linen cloth. The meal begins with a prayer for all those present and departed and with the breaking and sharing of blessed wafers of unleavened bread. The singing of a Christmas hymn concludes the meal. Christmas itself in earlier times was celebrated for three days. The first day was the most important but was observed by each family in seclusion at home. Visiting and entertaining were reserved for the second day of Christ-

mas. The popularity of Santa Claus and Christmas trees dates back only to the beginning of the 20th century.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

A couple who were to be married traditionally participated in a series of pre-wedding rituals and customs. Most of these place great emphasis upon the bride's leaving her parents and childhood home, relinquishing her girlhood by putting aside her carefree days and assuming the mantle of a young matron. Customary ceremonial songs, dances, and verse accompany each of these events, which include *vakarynos* (the last evening) when the bride's friends rebraid her hair for the last time and sing to her of past happiness and future worries. They remind her of the garden of rue (symbol of chastity) that she will soon abandon. *Jaunojo sutiktuves* (greeting the bridegroom) includes the exchange of gifts. Also customary is the *svocios pietūs* (dinner for the bride) during which the bride's wreath is exchanged for a married woman's headdress, and the *nuotakos išleistuves* (taking leave for the parental home) when the bride kisses the table, the crucifix, and a loaf of bread and bids farewell to her parents and other family.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

An archaic exchange of greetings still remembered in some rural areas of Lithuania is *Garbe Kristui* (Praise Christ), to which the other replies *per amžius amen* (forever amen). It was also customary to greet someone working in the fields or a garden with *Dieve padek* (may God help you). From long ago until today, Lithuanians have prided themselves on their hospitality. A visit to a Lithuanian home is sure to include a warm response, a richly laid table, and perhaps storytelling and singing.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

During the Soviet years, medical care was provided by the government. Inadequate treatment and scarcity of medicine and supplies were common, and hospitals were understaffed. The new independent Lithuanian government is developing a health care program to improve facilities and access to services. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Lithuania, and diseases related to alcoholism are also common. The average life expectancy for a Lithuanian born in 2008 was about 72 years.

During World War II, many Lithuanian towns and villages were utterly destroyed. After the war, many uniform and standardized housing projects were constructed, often built in large sections from prefabricated materials. Many of these units today are in poor condition.

The Lithuanian transport sector was isolated from the Western European transport system for decades during the Soviet years. Overall, Lithuania has a relatively good road system as well as maritime, railway, and aviation infrastructure.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Large families, with 10–12 children, were once commonplace in Lithuania. Though traditionally the father was the head of the family, the mother's role was far from diminished. She, too, commanded respect within the family structure. Christianity, more specifically Roman Catholicism, was the fundamental force in family life.

Soviet occupation drastically changed the makeup of the typical Lithuanian family. Because of severe economic crisis

throughout the years of occupation, modern Lithuanian families tend to be much smaller, with one or two children being the norm. The mortality rate is now higher than the birth rate.

For quite a few years now, women have outnumbered men in Lithuania, leaving more women unmarried than in the past. Young married couples face many obstacles in securing an ordinary family life. It typically takes a young couple several years to save enough money to buy a house or an apartment due to the difference between average salaries and the cost of living in post-Soviet Lithuania. A young couple must often turn to their parents for financial help. There is also a trend for young people now to wait longer before getting married, and the number of single-parent families is on the rise.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The traditional apparel made in the home and most frequently seen in Lithuania in the middle of the 19th century is now worn only as representative dress by women on major national holidays and by members of folk dance ensembles and choruses. Until the 19th century, all fabric for garments was woven in the home; each household had a spinning wheel and loom. During the second half of the 19th century, homemade clothes began to be replaced by manufactured garments that first appeared in the cities and manors. By the beginning of the 20th century, the wearing of the traditional dress became rare even in villages.

Archaeological excavations and historical sources provide some background for the more ancient fashions from which the now typical national costumes are derived. During the 9th–12th centuries AD, women wore linen tunics with high closed collars over long woolen skirts and somewhat shorter aprons, embellished near the hem with rows of bronze spirals. The main outer garment was a thick woolen shawl decorated with bronze ornaments, secured in the front with large brooches or pins. Jewelry included rings, necklaces, bracelets, chest ornaments with chains, and pendants. Brooches were made of bronze, silver, glass, enamel, and gold. Clothing in various regions differed in form, decorative techniques, color-coordination, and wearing method; distinctions were made not only by tradition and accessibility to materials, but also by the character of the people and their environment. The primary regional classifications of traditional clothing approximated the main dialectal regions of Lithuania.

Men's traditional clothing was similar throughout Lithuania, with regional differences noticeable in certain details. Their garments were generally plainer, grayer, less patterned, and more simply woven than women's clothes. Trousers were the only apparel that had more color, with patterns of stripes or checks. Their other articles of clothing were shirts with embroidered collars and fronts, vests, heavy linen tunics, coats, and fur capes.

### **12 FOOD**

Food has always been treated with great respect by Lithuanians because it is perceived as a gift from God that is essential to life. Until the early 1900s, eating was regarded as a serious and even holy act; the family dinner table was not the place for banter or children's merriment. In traditional Lithuanian culture, meals were presided over by the male head of the household, who led the family in a short prayer before dividing the bread and meat. Other dishes would then be served

by the wife. In recent times, however, meals have become more casual. Dairy products, bread, and potatoes remain mainstays of the diet, with meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables also playing an important part. Old Lithuanian names for beets, carrots, and onions indicate that they have been grown for a long time. Other vegetables such as cabbage, cucumbers, celery, leeks, parsnips, radishes, and turnips are mentioned in 16th-century documents. Potatoes appeared in the 17th century and became more popular among the peasantry than on the estates.

Sour cream is an important condiment or ingredient of Lithuanian dishes. *Varske* (curd or dry cottage cheese) is also important and is used as a filling in such dishes as *varskėciai* (rolled pancakes with sweetened curd), *cepelinai* (air-ship-shaped large dumplings of potato dough), and *virtinukai* (ravioli-like dumplings). The latter two dishes commonly feature a filling of meat and are topped by a large mound of sour cream or fried bacon bits. Sautéed mushrooms are often used as a filling or are served over boiled potatoes as a main dish. Butter is also important in Lithuanian cooking.

Marinated mushrooms, pickled herring, stuffed pike, a beet and bean salad called *vinigretas*, and Danish-style open-face sandwiches are common party appetizers. A very popular summer dish is the refreshing *saltibarsciai*, a cold soup of sour cream and buttermilk or sour milk, with sliced beets, cucumbers, green onions, boiled eggs, and parsley, eaten with a hot boiled potato. Among the large variety of pancakes, potato pancakes form a separate category. Roasts of pork, veal, beef, or poultry, as well as pork chops, are more common on Lithuanian home and restaurant tables than are beef steaks. Generally, the seasoning of Lithuanian dishes is mild.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Education is highly valued in Lithuania, and the literacy rate is nearly 100%. Educational instruction at Lithuanian schools starts at age six. There are three types of public schools: elementary (grades 1–4), nine-year (grades 1–9), and secondary (up to grade 12). There are also professional, technical, and specialized secondary schools. Higher education in Lithuania is available at numerous institutions. During the Soviet years, students had the choice of taking classes either in the Lithuanian language, or in Russian or Polish. Since independence, Lithuanian instruction has increased because of the increased importance the Lithuanian language now has in society. Much of the curriculum has been reformed as well—courses in military preparation and communism have been replaced with ones in psychology and sociology.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The oldest known folk songs are the *dainos*, which were sung during the Middle Ages by Lithuanian women. Traditional Lithuanian folk songs can have either a loose or rigid rhythm. Folk music is played either solo or with an instrumental group. The most popular instruments for playing Lithuanian folk songs are *skrabalai* (cow bells), *dambrelis* (jaw harp), *kankles* (zither), *smuikas* (fiddle), *skuduciai* (panpipe), *lamzdelis* (recorder), *ragas* (horn), *daudyte* (long trumpet), and the *birbyne* (folk clarinet). Musical elements of the traditional folk songs are often incorporated into modern compositions. Choral singing is an important part of cultural festivals in Lithuania. Every five years, Vingis Park in Vilnius is the site of a huge folk music festival, with a stage big enough to hold 20,000 perform-

ers. The performers are costumed musicians and dancers who demonstrate ancient Lithuanian folk songs and dances.

The first book in the Lithuanian language was a religious text, *Catechisma Prasty Szadei* (Simple Words of the Catechism), published in 1547. In 1706, Aesop's fables became the first secular work published in Lithuanian. Kristijonas Donelaitis was the first Lithuanian author, though his epic poem about the lives of struggling serfs was only published after his death. Antanas Baranaukas was a famous poet of the mid 19th century, whose lyrical romantic poem *Anykšciu šilelis* (The Forest of Anykščiai) is a milestone in Lithuanian literature. Lithuanian literature has long been linked with nationalism and the liberation movement, especially the literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was because during 1865–1904, the Russian administration banned the printing of Lithuanian books using the Latin alphabet.

### 15 WORK

During the decades of Soviet rule, the Lithuanians worked under a system of price controls and quotas, with the government controlling the economy. The independent Lithuanian government has successfully privatized most of Lithuania's industries since independence, and the economy is growing rapidly. After some initial difficulty during the transition, unemployment has fallen steadily while wages have increased.

### 16 SPORTS

Lithuanians are sports enthusiasts. Riding and hunting are traditional activities. A popular traditional game is *ripkos*, involving the throwing and hitting of a wooden disk. Over 50 types of sports are practiced and played in Lithuania, including rowing, boxing, basketball, track and field, swimming, handball, and table tennis.

Basketball is the most popular sport in Lithuania today, having been introduced by a Lithuanian American named Stasys Darius after World War I. The sport caught on rapidly, and the Lithuanian team won the European basketball championship twice before World War II. During the years of Soviet occupation following World War II until the dismantling of the USSR, Lithuanian players formed the core of the successful Soviet basketball team. Numerous Lithuanian players found success in the NBA. Among the more notable stars that found success playing in America are Arvydas Sabonis, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, and Sarunas Marciulionis. The Lithuanian men's national basketball team won Olympic bronze medals in 1992 and 1996.

Other popular sports in Lithuania include cycling and canoeing. Soccer is also very popular. Most recently, baseball and field hockey have entered the Lithuanian arena of sports as new favorites.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

From the ancient past until today, Lithuanians have maintained a love of traditional song and dance, often expressing this fondness by either attending or performing in various regional and national folk song and dance festivals, as well as in local folk ensembles. Many Lithuanians also enjoy and avidly support the arts: theater, opera, ballet, and museum and gallery exhibits. The arts are a permanent and varied fixture in all the cities but are especially supported in the capital city, Vilnius.



*A Lithuanian senior citizen sitting on a bench. Pensions are small in relation to the cost of living increases and are insufficient for maintaining even a minimal standard of living. For young and old alike, it is difficult to secure employment. (Cory Langley)*

Family celebrations focus around birthdays, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Easter. The national independence holidays on February 16 and March 11 are also observed in most households through participation in locally sponsored ceremonies and events.

The people of Lithuania greatly enjoy outdoor life. All summer long, beaches along the Baltic Sea, seaside resort towns, and lakes, forests, and campgrounds in the countryside are visited by vacationing Lithuanians. Health resorts specializing in therapeutic massage and hydrotherapy of all sorts are equally popular. As with many other Europeans, time spent in a sauna or steam bath is considered a necessary luxury by Lithuanians. World travel for the citizens of Lithuania, unheard of during Soviet rule, is briskly increasing in popularity.

Local cafés, movie theaters, and video arcades attract young people of all ages, as do nightclubs and rock concerts. Numerous aerobics studios and health clubs have opened their doors over the last several years and are gaining in popularity.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Lithuanian folk art frequently involves the decoration of a common household item. Bed and table linens, towels, window treatments, wooden trim, and ceramics are objects that are often decorated. Themes in paintings and sculptures typically focus on religion, work, and everyday life.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The aftermath of the 50-year Soviet occupation of Lithuania has had a tremendous impact on its people. There have been continual turnovers in the government since independence due to accusations of corruption and a feeling by voters that their needs are not being served quickly enough. However, despite this rocky start, Lithuania has maintained democratic elections and implemented effective economic policies. Unemployment has dropped significantly while wages have increased. A new middle class is beginning to have a strong voice in Lithuanian decision-making.

Because of the unstable government and initial economic stress during the transition to independence, the crime rate has increased in Lithuania. Mugging, robbery, car-jacking, and murder have become more commonplace. Prisons and juvenile detention centers are overcrowded.

Although health care is provided at no charge in Lithuania, the standard of care is often inadequate. Shortages of medicine and equipment are commonplace. Health insurance is available at an extra cost (as are theft and auto insurance), but due to the financial strain felt by most families, many citizens do not have policies. In a true medical emergency, Lithuanians seek care in one of the many new private medical or dental clinics opened since Lithuania regained independence. However, compared to the average salary, these clinics are considered expensive.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditional patriarchal Lithuanian culture, the legacy of homophobic Soviet beliefs during the occupation, and the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church all contribute to the oppression of women and homosexuals in Lithuania. Women constitute almost two-thirds of the unemployed (70% of the long-term unemployed) and are underrepresented in government and business positions. Despite the passage of laws in recent years guaranteeing equal treatment and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of age, gender, race or ethnicity, disability, religion, or sexual orientation, the actual state of affairs is still marked by deep-seated homophobia and gender inequality.

National programs are being instituted to address issues of discrimination through education and consciousness-raising. Although these programs have succeeded in bringing the issues into the public forum, attitudes and practices have yet to show much improvement. In recent surveys, two out of three Lithuanians stated they would rather live next to a drug dealer than a homosexual and five of seven members of parliament declared that homosexuality is a “perversion.” Women continue to be vulnerable to sexual trafficking due to limited economic opportunities in Lithuania, and women greatly outnumber men among the ranks of those in poverty.

Because of harassment or fears of harassment, homosexuals stay underground in Lithuania. No major public figure has come out openly as gay or lesbian and only one gay nightclub exists in the entire country—in the capital city, Vilnius. The Lithuanian Gay League, founded in 1993, continues to work to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons but has yet to receive much real support from the Lithuanian government or general population.

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—revised by D. de Mott

# LUXEMBOURGERS

**LOCATION:** Luxembourg

**POPULATION:** 467,000 (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Letzebürgesch, French, and German

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; small numbers of Protestants and Jews

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a tiny but prosperous nation in western Europe. While Luxembourg's culture has been strongly influenced by both its French- and German-speaking neighbors, the country retains a distinct identity of its own. The Luxembourgers' pride in this identity and in their national traditions is expressed in their motto: *Mir woelle bleiwe wat mir sin* ("We want to remain what we are").

Luxembourg has been a distinct political entity since AD 963, when Count Sigefroid of the Ardennes built a castle at the present-day site of its capital (also called Luxembourg) and laid claim to the surrounding lands. In 1443 King Philip of Burgundy claimed Luxembourg for France, beginning a 400-year period when Luxembourg was ruled by its powerful neighbors in western Europe, including (in addition to France) Spain and Austria. Luxembourg became an independent, neutral state in 1867 under the Treaty of London, and it has had its own ruling dynasty since 1890, when the crown of the Grand Duchy was transferred to the House of Nassau. With the discovery of iron ore around 1860, the duchy began the transition to a modern, industrialized, and prosperous nation.

In the 20th century, Luxembourg was occupied by the Germans during both world wars. Luxembourgers, who strenuously resisted the Nazi occupiers, suffered the third highest death toll of the war relative to the size of their population, surpassed only by the Soviet Union and Poland. The Battle of the Bulge (1944–45) was to a large extent fought on Luxembourgian soil. After World War II, Luxembourg's government agreed to create an economic union with Belgium and the Netherlands, and full economic union of the Benelux countries was achieved in February of 1958. In April 1963 Luxembourg observed its 1,000-year anniversary. In 2000 Grand Duke Henri became the country's monarch. In addition to the Benelux union, Luxembourg is also a member of NATO, the United Nations, and the European Union.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Luxembourg, with an area of only 998 square miles (2,586 square kilometers), is bordered by Germany on the east and northeast, France on the south, and Belgium on the north and west. The northern third of the country, known as the Oesling, forms part of the Ardennes Mountains, which extend into Germany and Belgium. This forested upland region is dotted with the ruins of many historic castles. Luxembourg's southern two-thirds, called "The Good Land" (*Gutland* in German and *Bon Pays* in French), is home to most of Luxembourg's population and contains its most fertile soil as well as its capital city. The Moselle River, to the south, forms Luxembourg's southeastern border.

Luxembourg's population of 467,000 is approximately three-fourths urban and one-fourth rural, and the rural-to-ur-

ban migratory trend is still continuing, especially toward the capital city. Native-born Luxembourgers are mostly of French, German, or Belgian descent. Of all the western European nations, Luxembourg has one of the highest percentage of foreign-born residents. They come mainly from Portugal, Italy, and other southern European countries but also from Luxembourg's neighbors, France, Germany, and Belgium. Many had come to work in the nation's iron and steel mills; others are drawn by jobs in its many international corporations and organizations. As of the 2000s, the industrial sector, initially dominated by steel, has become increasingly diversified to include chemicals, rubber, and other products. Growth in the financial sector accounts for about a third of the country's income, and has more than compensated for the decline in steel.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Luxembourg has three official languages: French, German, and Letzebürgesch, a national dialect based on German with French elements mixed in. The first language of all Luxembourgers, Letzebürgesch is learned in childhood and spoken at home. Although it is primarily an oral rather than a written language, a Letzebürgesch dictionary and grammar were created in 1950, and the language has been accorded official status since 1984. German, which is taught in primary school, is the language of business and the media, while French, taught at the secondary level, is the language of government, used in the civil service and the courts (although German is used in criminal proceedings). All three of the national languages are spoken in Luxembourg's parliament. In addition to their native languages, many Luxembourgers also speak English.

## 4 FOLKLORE

According to legend, Count Sigefroid, the founder of Luxembourg's walled capital city, married a maiden named Mélusine, ignorant of the fact that she was really a mermaid. She reverted to her natural form every Saturday, a time when she had forbidden her husband to look at her. After he broke his promise and saw her, she disappeared into the stone walls of the city, where she is said to remain, returning every seven years in the form of either a beautiful woman or a serpent with a golden key in its mouth. According to the legend, it would be possible to free her by either kissing the woman or removing the key from the serpent's mouth, but no one has ever accomplished either feat. Mélusine is also said to knit an ever-unfinished garment, completing one stitch every year. It is said that if she completes it before she is freed from the wall, all of Luxembourg will supposedly vanish into the rock with her.

## 5 RELIGION

About 87% of Luxembourg's population is Roman Catholic, although at least a third of these are non-practicing Catholics. Luxembourg's constitution guarantees religious freedom to its people. In spite of the country's overwhelming Catholic majority, the state supports the spiritual leaders of its Protestant and Jewish minorities—the Official Protestant Pastor and the Chief Rabbi—as well as the nation's Catholic priests. The Lutheran and Calvinist Churches are the largest Protestant denominations. There are an estimated 9,000 Muslims, including 900 refugees from Montenegro; 5,000 Orthodox Christians (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian); and 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses



are represented in smaller numbers. There is a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) community in Dommeldange, which has been growing since its establishment in 2000. The number of professed atheists is believed to be growing.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Luxembourg's legal holidays are New Year's Day, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Ascension Day, Whitmonday, National Day (June 23), Assumption Day (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), Christmas (December 25), and Boxing Day (December 26). National Day, a patriotic holiday observed with parades, fireworks, and church services, is also celebrated as the official birthday of the nation's monarch, Grand Duke Henri (although his actual birthday is April 16). Luxembourgers also observe a number of local and regional holidays, including St. Bartholomey's Day (August 24), when sheep are driven through the streets of the capital city, and the Broom Parade, held in the city of Wiltz every May when the broom (a bright yellow plant) blossoms. The pre-Lenten festival of Carnival is celebrated in a number of Luxembourg's cities.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Luxembourgers live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's

progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

A casual handshake is considered appropriate when greeting both old and new acquaintances. Close friends, particularly female friends, may hug or kiss each other on the cheek three times. Common greetings include *Moiien* ("Good morning"), *Gudden Owend* ("Good evening"), *Wéi geet et?* ("How are you?"), and *Bonjour* ("Good day" in French). On parting, the expression *Addi* ("Goodbye") and the more formal French *Au revoir* are used (as well as the casual *Salut* and *Ciao*, which are popular with younger Luxembourgers).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Luxembourg enjoys one of the highest standards of living of any nation in the European Community. Housing ranges from traditional rural cottages with thick walls and heavy beams to the modern apartments rented by many urban dwellers. Luxembourg's national health service covers most doctors' fees and hospital expenses. Average life expectancy is 79 years. The leading causes of death—cardiovascular disease, cancer, and automobile accidents—are typical of those in the world's other developed nations.

Luxembourg's small size spares its residents lengthy commutes to work. The country has an excellent transportation network both within its borders and connecting it to its neighbors. There are approximately 3,000 miles (5,108 kilometers) of state and local roads. In the 1990s its highways were linked to those of Belgium, France, and Germany. However, most travel to and from neighboring countries is by rail. The Moselle River provides water transport, and many international airlines provide service to Luxembourg's Findel airport.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The typical Luxembourg household is composed of a nuclear family with one or two children. The importance of family to Luxembourgers is reflected in a national law requiring adults to take a certain degree of financial responsibility for their aging parents. Families in Luxembourg enjoy a high standard of living. Because of their country's small size, parents generally live near their workplace, allowing them additional time to spend with their families enjoying leisure-time pursuits. The comfortable financial circumstances and cosmopolitan outlook of the country's residents have prompted a number of families to adopt orphaned Vietnamese children since the 1960s. Women account for roughly 44.7% of Luxembourg's labor force.

## 11 CLOTHING

The people of Luxembourg wear modern Western-style clothing like that worn elsewhere in western Europe and in the world's other developed countries. Luxembourgers are particularly influenced by fashion trends in the neighboring countries of France and Germany, and by Italian fashions as well. Women tend to wear skirts and dresses more often than slacks, and the men favor hats. In public, Luxembourgers are always neatly and carefully dressed, whether for formal or casual occasions. Old, worn clothing is reserved for at-home wear and sporting activities.





People sit outside bars enjoying the evening in the Rude de l'Eau, Luxembourg, Luxembourg. (© Franz-Marc Frei/Corbis)

## 12 FOOD

The cuisine of Luxembourg, influenced by the culinary traditions of its neighbors, has been called a marriage of French sophistication and German abundance. In Luxembourg, as in Germany, hearty appetites and large portions are the norm. Several of the most popular national dishes are made with ham or pork: Ardennes ham, ham stuffed with beans, smoked pork and beans or sauerkraut (*judd mat gaarde-bounen*), suckling pig in aspic (*cochon de lait en gelée*), and meat pies with minced-pork filling (*fleeschtaart*). Other favorites include liver dumplings (*quenelles de foie de veau*), rabbit served in a thick sauce (*civet de lièvre*), and black pudding (*treipen*) and sausages with mashed potatoes and horseradish. During the fishing season, popular entrees include crayfish, trout, pike, and other fish from the Moselle and the country's other rivers. Luxembourg is also known for its delicious pastries, which fill the counters of special pastry shops throughout the country. Plum tarts called *quetsch* are a seasonal treat in September, and a type of cake called *les penseés brouillées* is traditionally eaten on Shrove Tuesday.

## 13 EDUCATION

Luxembourg's literacy rate is virtually 100%. Education is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15. Students begin with six years of primary school followed by up to seven years of secondary education. Institutions of higher education include the Central University of Luxembourg, the Superior In-

stitute of Technology, the International University Institute of Luxembourg, and Sacred Heart University. Many secondary school graduates attend college in the neighboring countries of France, Belgium, and Germany.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The arts are supported by the Grand Ducal Institute. In the visual arts, well-known Luxembourgers include 17th-century sculptor Daniel Muller and 20th-century expressionist painter Joseph Kutter. The National Museum of History and Art exhibits both fine and industrial arts and also houses special collections on the nation's history. Luxembourg's literary figures have written in French (Felix Thyes and Marcel Noppeney), German (Nikolaus Welter and "Batty" Weber), and Letzebürgesch (Michael Rodange). Paul Palgen is the country's most famous poet. Luxembourg also has cultural agreements with several other nations, both in Europe and elsewhere, that bring the finest in music and theater to local stages. The Grand Orchestra of Radiotelevision Luxembourg is world famous. Internationally acclaimed photographer Edward Steichen was a native of Luxembourg.

## 15 WORK

About 86% of Luxembourg's labor force is employed in the service sector, which includes government, trade, tourism, and financial services. About 13% work in industry, construction, and transportation, and the remainder (about 1%) are en-

gaged in agriculture. In 2007, 121,6000 of the total work force of 205,000 were foreign cross-border workers commuting primarily from France, Belgium, and Germany. Most of them are employed in the banking and insurance industries or in the offices of the European Union. Many Portuguese have worked in the iron and steel industry. Unemployment, which was virtually nonexistent in Luxembourg until the mid-1980s, was around 4.4% in the 2007.

## 16 SPORTS

Popular sports in Luxembourg include jogging, tennis, volleyball, and soccer. Pursuits such as hunting, fishing, cycling, and boating allow Luxembourgers to spend their leisure time enjoying their country's scenic landscape. The route of the world's most famous bicycle race, the *Tour de France*, passes through Luxembourg. The country has 25 national hiking routes (5,000 km) as well as countless other paths and trails, and organized walking tours are a popular activity. Favorite winter sports include cross-country skiing and ice skating.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The people of Luxembourg enjoy socializing in their country's many cafés and pastry shops, and one can often find them engaged in informal chess matches in restaurants and cafés. Luxembourgers enjoy many types of music, including choral and band music and musical theater. The capital city has a folk club, a jazz club, and a society for new music. Virtually every household has a television, and movie theaters show foreign films—including American box office hits—with French or Dutch subtitles. Gardening, hiking, camping, and other outdoor activities are also very popular.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pottery and other traditional crafts are practiced in Luxembourg. In addition, the Fonderie de Mersch manufactures cast-iron wall plaques that portray local coats-of-arms, scenery, and historic castles. Luxembourg's scenic landscapes are also reproduced on porcelain plates.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Luxembourg is free from many of the social problems that plague other developed nations. In spite of its lack of natural resources, the country enjoys a healthy, stable economy and a high standard of living and has very low unemployment. It is also among the most generous nations in terms of social spending.

However, in the mid-1990s, the country received thousands of asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia, which made Luxembourg less welcoming to all immigrants. Although political integration—in the form of local voting rights for foreigners—has been rather successful, immigrant children generally perform poorly in school. Also, the country has yet to consider a broad integration program for new arrivals. In 2006, approximately 181,962 foreigners lived in Luxembourg—39.6% of the country's total population. Most of the foreigners are white, European, and Catholic, and of these, Portuguese constitute the majority. About 13% of foreigners are from the former Yugoslavia, the United States, and the former Portuguese colony Cape Verde. Among the foreigners there are about 5,000 Muslims, most of them from the former Yugoslavia. The tightening

of border controls since the attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States had effects in Luxembourg as well. On the eve of the attacks, Luxembourg's small Muslim community was close to obtaining both formal recognition and public financing—already granted to the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish communities—when the weekly magazine *Le Jeudi* accused the country's Muslims of being connected to radical Islamists. There were no openly anti-Islamic reactions, but suspicions developed concerning supposed links between the Luxembourgian Muslim community and radical Islamist organizations.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Luxembourg law prohibits domestic violence. The law is gender neutral and provides that a batterer will be removed from the house for 10 days; this can be extended an additional three months. There is a hot line for battered women. Government-sponsored nongovernmental organization (NGO) shelters provide refuge to women and children. In addition, the government provides financial assistance to domestic violence victims. The government funds organizations that provide shelter, counseling, and hot lines. The law specifically prohibits rape, including spousal rape. The penalties are five to 10 years' imprisonment. Prostitution is legal. The law prohibits sexual harassment.

Under the law, women enjoy the same rights as men, including rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. The law mandates equal pay for equal work; however, women are paid 20% to 30% less than men for comparable work. The Ministry of Equal Opportunity is responsible for protecting the legal and social rights of women; in 2005 it began a gender mainstreaming program, which is to assess all government policies in order to determine whether they result in any gender-based disparities. In 2006 the parliament introduced the principle of non-discrimination in the country's legislation. In 2006 there were 13 women in the 60-member Chamber of Deputies and 3 women in the 14-member Council of Ministers. There were 15 women in the 32-member Supreme Court.

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—revised by J. Hobby.

# MACEDONIANS

**LOCATION:** Macedonia

**POPULATION:** 2,050,000 [total population, of whom 65% are ethnic Macedonians, and 25% ethnic Albanians]

**LANGUAGES:** Macedonian and Albanian

**RELIGIONS:** Eastern Orthodox and Islam

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The following text attempts to delineate the cultural characteristics of the people of the Republic of Macedonia, also known as Vardar Macedonia, so-named after the principal river which originates in, and runs through practically the entire north-south length of, the country.

As a historical and geographical entity, Macedonia's name figures centrally in both European and world history from even pre-Biblical times. The region's early recorded past is inextricably connected with the names of Philip II, who ruled from 359 to 336 BC, and Alexander the Great, Philip's son, who ruled from 336 to 323 BC. Historians count Alexander among the most important and successful military conquerors of all time, insofar as his dominion stretched from central Europe to north Africa and all the way to India. Immediately following Alexander's death, in 323 BC, his territorial holdings were divided up by his most accomplished generals into four sections (with, ironically, the smallest of the four being comprised of Macedonia and Greece). Less than three centuries later, at the end of a series of wars against the emerging Roman Empire, Macedonia and the rest of the Balkan Peninsula were subdued and turned into a corridor for the Roman legions marching to the Near East.

Unaffected by the collapse of the western realm of the Roman Empire, including the city of Rome itself, Macedonia continued as part of Rome's eastern realm, or the resultant Byzantine Empire. By the end of the 6th century and throughout the 7th century AD, migrating Slavs from beyond the Carpathian Mountains began to settle in the Balkans. In the face of all the ethnic and linguistic differences, the Byzantine Empire eventually began to break down into various feudal kingdoms, and Macedonia came under the control of the Bulgarian crown. Later on, sensing that the days of Bulgaria's power were numbered, Samuil, a statesman and military leader, managed to free Macedonia and to have himself declared tsar by the Roman pope. But Samuil's state lasted only from 976 until 1018, when it was again subjugated by Byzantium and relegated to the level of a province.

During the latter half of the 14th century, the Byzantine Empire crumbled at the persistent attacks of the Ottoman Turks, and Macedonia was plunged into a lengthy struggle for the preservation of its Slavonic literacy and religious identity. This is, arguably, Macedonia's most traumatic historical period, for, though not enslaved, its population was considered and treated as *raja* (pronounced rah-yah), which in Turkish means "people without rights." Rather astonishingly, though challenged by numerous rebellions and insurrections, the Ottoman Empire's grip on Macedonia and all of southeastern Europe did not come to an end until as recently as the Balkan Wars, in 1912–1913. With the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, Macedonia was unequally divided among Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Alba-

nia. Following World War I, the Serbian section of Macedonia became the southernmost part of the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—later known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia—and remained as such until 1941. The socially and economically restless climate in Europe between about 1910 and 1940 prompted, among other historically seminal events, a large-scale emigration from all over Macedonia to North and South America, with the greatest number of newcomers finding their way to such industrial cities in the north as Detroit, Gary, Buffalo, and Toronto.

At the conclusion of World War II, the Kingdom's Macedonia was transformed into one of the six autonomous Republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, whose harsh economic and political conditions during the 1960s and 1970s incited a second, large wave of emigration from Macedonia to North America and Western Europe. Not surprisingly, when during the late 1980s it became increasingly evident that socialism throughout the world was largely on its way out, Macedonians seized the initiative and on 8 September 1991 approved a referendum on their country's independence. On 17 November 1991, the voters further adopted a new constitution which, for the first time ever, turned Macedonia into a parliamentary democracy with strictly defined executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Accordingly, Macedonians are today guaranteed religious, economic, and political freedoms similar to those of Western democracies. In April 1993, the Republic of Macedonia became a member of the United Nations, and in 2008 a majority of European Union member nations offered support for Macedonia's acceptance into the EU.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Macedonia is situated in the south-central area of the Balkan Peninsula in Europe, and its capital city is Skopje (pronounced skop-yeh). It covers an area of roughly 25,900 sq km (10,000 sq mi) and borders with Serbia and Kosovo to the north, Albania to the west, Bulgaria to the east, and Greece to the south. Its landlocked status notwithstanding, Macedonia holds a central geopolitical position, which makes it a crossroads linking Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is thus hardly surprising that various neighboring powers have during the past 2,000 years attempted to annex either the whole or at least a part of this largely mountainous region. Since most of its territory lies between latitudes 40° and 42° north, Macedonia's climate is a transition between temperate Mediterranean and moderate continental, with maximum summer temperatures climbing up to about 38°C (100°F), and lowest winter temperatures falling to about -23°C (-10°F).

According to its 2002 census, the Republic of Macedonia's total population stood at about 2,023,000, with a roughly even male/female ratio. Reflective of Macedonia's Western lifestyle, the life expectancy for the average citizen is about 75 years, or 73 years for males, and 77 years for females. The country's ethnic composition includes about 1,298,000 Macedonians, 509,000 Albanians, 78,000 Turks, 54,000 Roma (or Gypsies), and 36,000 Serbs. This census did not, of course, take into account the almost 400,000 (republican) Macedonians of all ethnicities who have settled as permanent residents mainly in North America, Australia, and Western Europe. It is pertinent to note here that the preceding figure is increasing daily, for—still dealing with publicly obvious lingering difficulties in the wake of its shift from socialism to a free market economy, dif-



faculties such as corruption on probably every social and governmental level, and underemployment for most of those who still work in federal government jobs—Macedonia is (as of this writing) experiencing a third wave of emigration.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Within the past decade, the Macedonian government has allowed the use of the Albanian language in Albanian minority-run schools, newspapers, and radio stations, especially in the north-west section of the country. Still, the prevalent and semi-official language in Macedonia is Macedonian, a distinct Indo-European language of the Slavonic family. While its modern codification occurred no earlier than 1944, the development of the Macedonian literary language dates back to the 9th century AD—the time when the educators (and brothers) Sts. Cyril and Methodius created the first Slavonic alphabet, the Glagolitic. As with most Slavonic languages, Macedonian is today written in the Cyrillic alphabet, named after Cyril but invented by St. Clement of Ohrid. As with all Western vocabularies, Macedonian is primarily a derivative of the Latin and Greek languages. Through historical and trans-cultural osmosis, the Macedonian language has also acquired thousands of Turkish, German, and, since the 1970s, even variations of American English words. Most of the last, however, are internationally recognized musical terms (“folk,” “hit,” “pop,” “rock and roll,” etc.) and expressions adopted by those who resort to a bit more urbane type of speech (“photo finish,” “controversy,” “polemics,” “business,” etc.).

Traditional Macedonian names are of two types: (1) Christian—such as, for males, Petar, Jovan, and Tomislav, or for females, Petranka, Jovanka, and Tomka; and (2) wish-based—such as, for males, Zdravko (Healthy), Stojan (Stay [Alive]), and Spase (Saved), or the female forms, Zdravka, Stojanka, and Spasija. Since World War II, many newborns have been given rather nondescript names like Zlatko (Golden), Tsveta (Blossom), and Blaga (Sweet); and since the 1960s, parents have been increasingly deciding on English-sounding names as, for example, Robert, Edvard, Meri, Suzana, etc. It is foreign (and especially English) linguistic encroachments such as these that have recently prompted many Macedonian academicians and members of parliament to call for the passage of legal measures that would protect their mother-tongue, and with it their culture itself.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Macedonia’s folk wisdom comprises a number of such legendary heroes as King Marko, whose larger-than-life deeds wreaked terror in the hearts of the occupying Turks, and whose horse could leap from one mountaintop to another, and satirical figures like Clever Pejo (pronounced Pe-yo), who exposed and ridiculed the vices and abuses of local Ottoman officials and Islamic religious leaders. It is, however, aphorisms and tales that stand as Macedonia’s most colorful treasure. The following several aphorisms formulate some of the more popular conceptions Macedonians have maintained for many generations: “Falsehoods have short legs”; “Children and dogs you should never trust much at all”; “Nothing is sweeter or more bitter than one’s own children”; and “Begin a task, but always have its conclusion in mind.”

Similarly, many (and particularly older) Macedonians frequently resort to telling folk tales and parables to emphasize some moral, didactic, or philosophical message that would likely not carry the same weight if communicated in any other manner. To illustrate, the maxim in the succeeding story encapsulates the essence of no less than existence itself: In ancient times, a tsar’s daughter fell ill, but none of the royal medical personnel could help her. At last, an old healer took on the persistent problem. He fashioned for the patient a ring on whose band he wrote the axiom: “Everything that ever was has passed, and everything that ever will be will pass.” One morning he took the ring to the princess, put it on her finger, and said that her illness would go away if she read aloud the ring’s axiom every night right before going to bed, and every morning immediately after waking up. And, eventually, she did indeed become well again, encouraged as she was by the hope that her illness would pass as does everything else in life.

### 5 RELIGION

The predominant religion in Macedonia is Eastern Orthodoxy, one of the three principal faiths comprising Christianity as a whole. Unlike Catholicism and Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy is an association of 15 nationalistic, autocephalous churches, each governed by its own head bishop, with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holding honorary primacy. This is why one frequently hears of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, etc. The Eastern Orthodox Church began its independent existence in 1054, when it irrevocably rejected the authority of the Roman See. Until this event, which historians

and theologians frequently refer to as the Great Schism, the nouns Catholicism and Christianity were, for all practical purposes, used interchangeably.

Since the Orthodox Church follows the Old Style (or Julian) Calendar, Macedonians normally celebrate the main holy days of Christianity several days—and, in the case of Easter, sometimes even several weeks—later than do Catholics and Protestants. For example, while both of the latter observe Christmas on December 25, Orthodox adherents celebrate it on January 7 according to the New Style (or Gregorian) Calendar. Correspondingly, New Year's Day falls on January 14. Moreover, aside from recognizing all principal Christian saints and martyrs, every nationalistic Orthodox church venerates its own, more "regional" saints and martyrs. Thus, the Macedonian Orthodox church pays homage to Sts. Cyril and Methodius; to their most important successor and founder of the Ohrid Literary School, St. Clement; his brother, Naum; and dozens of other less historically important canonized personages. Actually, Cyril and Methodius have come to be known as the "Apostles of the Slavs," which means that they are revered by Orthodox churches worldwide.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Aside from commemorating their national holidays, Macedonians honor the Day of the Woman, on March 8, which is in essence identical with Mother's Day in the US; the Day of the Laborer, on May 1, a remnant of the worldwide socialist observance of May Day, also referred to as the Day of the Proletariat; and the Ilinden (St. Elijah's Day) Uprising, on August 2. Whereas socialist Macedonia looked upon May 1 as a day of revolutionary rededication, punctuated by parades, demonstrations, and interminable political speeches, Macedonians today regard the same holiday as primarily a day of rest and recreation. In contrast, the Ilinden Uprising, on 2 August 1903, is widely seen as the beginning of the Macedonian national movement and, as such, the country's most noteworthy cultural and historical landmark. During this rebellion, the city of Kruševo (pronounced Khru-shevo) was liberated from Ottoman rule, and with that the first democratic republic on the Balkans was established. Ultimately, however, the Kruševo Republic lasted a mere 10 days, before Turkish armies recaptured the town and indiscriminately slaughtered a great number of its citizens alongside all of the Uprising's leaders.

Prior to Macedonia's cessation from Yugoslavia, public celebrations of religious holidays were invariably discouraged, and for the younger generation even proscribed. In keeping with Karl Marx's notion that religion of all stripes is simply "opium" of the people, dissuading the younger generation from attending church was thought of as essential, if the revolutionary spirit requisite for energizing the movement from socialism to communism was to remain vital and focused. Nowadays, following socialism's demise, Macedonia's churches tend to be filled to capacity with people of every age during Christmas, Easter, and other holidays honoring regional saints recognized by the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Insofar as most city and many village families in Macedonia own the latest instruments for mass communication, including cellular telephones and personal computers, some of the more-recently acquired cultural values and practices seem

identical to those of people in other Western nations. This is especially evident in the lifestyle of young adults, who wear the same style of clothes, listen and dance to the same music as do other Westerners, and have taken up the practice of piercing and tattooing their bodies. Still, there are two significant differences between Macedonian teenagers and their American counterparts. Though probably most Macedonians are sexually active well before getting married, childbearing out of wedlock is rare and socially frowned upon. Also, a large number of Macedonian teenagers speak rather fluently at least one other language, usually, but not only English.

Like people in so many other societies, Macedonians regard the birth of a boy as the most momentous familial event. While this tradition may be traced to the time when men were needed to work in the fields and vineyards, nowadays a male child simply continues his father's family name. Irrespective of gender, however, most babies, in accordance with the Eastern Orthodox faith, are baptized before their first birthday. A new mother is expected to stay at home and, except for her immediate relatives, receive no visitors for at least six weeks.

The ceremonies and rituals concerning death are no less important than are those concerning birth. While a deceased person's children and siblings are expected to wear dark clothes for at least a few months following his or her passing, the same individual's mother and (especially older) spouse might dress so for the rest of their lives. Memorial services are held on the ninth day, the fortieth day, six months, one year, and three years after one's death. On these anniversaries, family members go to church and/or to the deceased's graveside, and they distribute homemade bread, black olives, feta cheese, and small cups of wine to those attending. These are consumed in memory of the deceased's soul. To some of his or her surviving friends, many families also give such items as shirts, socks, and/or towels. Observing the first two anniversaries is particularly significant, since it is believed that the soul does not leave the terrestrial realm until or shortly after the fortieth day of its "release" from the body.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Macedonians usually greet one another with the customary *zdravo* (pronounced zdrah-vo), which is a variation of the word "health," and inquire about each other's family members' well-being and their more recent undertakings and achievements. The exchange is generally friendly, and one is rarely thought of as rude for asking personal questions. On the contrary, those who do not care for this type of conversation are often characterized as cold, distant, or arrogant. Children and teenagers refer to older men as *chichko* (pronounced tchitch-ko) or *striko*, meaning "uncle," and address almost all older women as *tetko* or *strino*, meaning "aunt." Men and women show their love for their nieces and nephews, and their approval and acceptance of the children of friends and acquaintances, by occasionally giving them modest sums of money. These little gifts are usually made during visits to someone's home.

Mostly a village custom, when passing by someone or a group of people engaged in harvesting or tending a large vegetable garden, one normally exclaims, *Ajrlija rabota!* (pronounced ayr-li-yah rah-bo-tah), translated "May your work meet with goodness and profit!" The recipients of this greeting normally respond with: *Ajr da imaš!* (pronounced ayr dah

ihmash), or “May you, also, have goodness and profit (in your life).”

Raised with the idea that an individual’s humaneness is partly revealed in the kind and number of people visiting his or her home, most Macedonians regard social calls as a sign of respect; and attending an open house on the host’s name day—traditionally held by males on the feast day of the saint after whom they are named—is a great honor to any man. Major patron saints’ days are so special that they are also celebrated on the communal level, with almost every village having one of its own. Accordingly, on the day of, say, St. George, the citizens of any village observing that day take off work and, usually the men, freely visit each others’ homes, wherein food and drinks of all sorts are served in abundance.

Dating in Macedonia normally begins somewhere between 14 and 16 years of age. In the villages, a young adult simply “throws an eye” on his or her intended one, and, providing the “look” is reciprocated, the lovers meet informally whenever and wherever they can. In the cities, teenagers and younger adults meet either at promenades or at the remarkably large number of coffeehouses and pubs one finds on most main streets. Importantly, any prolonged dating is seen by friends and families as a manifest signal of impending marriage.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living standards in Macedonia vary. The federal health care industry is barely adequate, which explains the sudden rise of private medical practitioners. Even so, whereas physicians are highly trained in medical theory, studying from translations of the latest books used in American and Western European medical schools, some medications and imaging instruments are in short supply. Macedonia’s bloodless secession from Yugoslavia (which caused the latter to take most of the government-owned instruments back to what is now the Republic of Serbia), its unfinished move toward privatization, and the high cost of medical care have all contributed to the country’s poor health conditions. Most Macedonians have come to expect that seriously ill friends or relatives would travel abroad in search of medical help, assuming such a trip is financially feasible.

Consumer goods, on the other hand—most of them imported from all over the globe—are readily available. Durable appliances such as automobiles, TVs, VCRs, refrigerators, washers, dryers, and personal computers may be found in virtually every household. Similarly, housing is no longer the major problem it used to be under socialism. Not only is it no longer difficult to find an apartment or a condominium anywhere in the country, but with the relatively easy loan terms from federal banks and remittances from abroad, many families have built villas in the country or in villages near resort areas.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The typical Macedonian family is nuclear in structure, with usually two children. Single-parent families are becoming more common, as divorce is on the rise even though it is still socially disapproved of, and especially so after a woman has given birth. However, the number of extended families in Macedonia is one of the highest in Europe. Taking up at least temporary residence with the husband’s parents is a widespread practice for newlyweds, while accepting into the household a widowed in-law of either side is expected. The majority

of older individuals live out their last years in such a familial arrangement.

The wife in any Macedonian family tends to wield an unusually strong influence. It is true that most older and some younger men still regard themselves as the “boss” of the family, but this is more of a traditional boast than fact. The wife’s influence is so pervasive that a husband often takes her attitude toward individuals or families in deciding who would qualify to become his friend(s). On the domestic front, few women ask their husbands to help with any but the most uninvolved household chores. Even younger professional women insist on preserving the kitchen as their virtually undisputed domain.

Relatively few families own pets, and those that do have either a cat or a dog but rarely both at the same time.

## 11 CLOTHING

Whether city- or village-dwellers, Macedonians wear clothes of the type and quality that are similar to those in the US; in fact, a host of styles designed and manufactured in Macedonia have been sold in the West. Macedonian businesspeople wear suits, sport jackets, and dresses, skirts, or pantsuits for women. Looking respectable is important, but a small but steadily growing number of younger professionals are beginning to dress in a more casual manner.

The traditional, intricately embroidered style of dressing, varying in design from region to region, includes garments made of coarse, tightly woven wool yarn. When dressing in the national costume, men wear caps, mostly of the type that resembles the fez often worn by older Muslim men, vests, white linen shirts, a *pojas* (pronounced poh-yahs), that is, a wide cloth belt long enough to wind several times around one’s waist, and tight-fitting pants closely resembling English riding breeches (wide around the hips and thighs but fitting snugly just below the knee). Women wear ankle-length, wide-hemmed dresses, a long and wide apron that ties just below one’s chest, a white linen shirt, a *pojas*, and a headscarf that covers not only the head but almost the entire back of a woman’s body. The predominant color in men’s traditional attire is black, while in women’s, red and white. Both men and women wear *opinci* (pronounced oh-pin-tsi), leather slippers that usually end in a hard, curved frontal tip.

## 12 FOOD

The principal as well as traditional food on the Macedonian menu is stew, a mixture of meat and vegetables cooked by simmering. To derive just the right flavor, however, this mixture must be a proper matching of the products. Thus, for example, beef is normally mixed with potatoes, pork with beans, and lamb with rice or spinach. Stews are prepared spicy, combined with roux (a cooked mixture of flour, red pepper, and fat, used as a thickening agent), and are practically always consumed with bread, which explains the surprisingly large, commercially produced variety of the latter. Other main staples are feta cheese, black olives, peppers of all types, which are usually either roasted, or stuffed, or pickled; *zelnik*, a flat pastry made of several layers of sheet dough, filled with cheese or leek or spinach; and its close culinary relative, burek (pronounced boo-rek). Because in most families both parents work outside the home, and children are expected to be at school by 8:00 am, supper is the most important meal of the day, often eaten less than two hours before retiring for the night.



Macedonians dressed in traditional costume celebrating the day of uprising against the Ottoman Empire in Meckin Kamen, Macedonia.  
(AP Images/Boris Grdanoski)

Many city-dwellers and almost all villagers make wine and brandy legally, with most of the brandy being distilled from leeks, or the sediment of wine which results from the fermentation and aging process. Both drinks are rather heavy in taste and high in alcohol content; indeed, the brandy is so strong that many people drink it boiled hot as a kind of medicine against the flu. Brandy is usually drunk at any time, but especially before a main meal or with a salad, while wine is primarily consumed during the winter months, with fried smoked *kolbasi* (homemade kielbasa), made mostly of pork mixed with some beef and a generous amount of leeks.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Having a good education is very important to Macedonians. The literacy rate in 2002 was 96%. Parental and cultural expectations encourage higher education. An individual with only a high school diploma often has a difficult time finding a decent job.

Since its independence from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Macedonia has allowed the establishment of dozens of privately run schools, including branches of US universities. The University American College Skopje offers undergraduate programs in business administration, political science, and foreign languages, while New York University Skopje makes available programs in language and literature, international relations, and politics and European studies. Still, the country's

main university is the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, founded in 1949, which has granted over 100,000 bachelor's degrees and over 10,000 masters and doctoral degrees.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Folk music and dance are two of the most valued and colorful aspects of the Macedonian culture. While music has in the preceding 20 years become modernized with the use of instruments like electric guitars and synthesizers, the traditional beat and the flavor of the melody remain. The traditional music group, once heard at village weddings and other social functions, is comprised of a clarinet, or *gajda* (pronounced gahy-dah)—a bagpipe made of lambskin; a bass-sized drum, which hangs from the player's shoulder; an accordion; and a violin. The tempo of the songs and dances ranges from slow to quite fast, depending on what the singer is describing or the mood the instrumentalists wish to capture. Most Macedonian folk songs are ballads concerning everyday problems and happy events, though many also depict the people's sufferings at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. Paralleling these compositions is the symbolism conveyed by a profusion of different dances, ranging from the slow *teškoto* (pronounced tesh-ko-to), or the "heavy" dance—performed generations ago by mournful bands of young village men on the day of their departure for foreign lands—to the exuberant *sitnoto*, or the "tiny-stepped dance."

Modern Macedonian literature made its appearance during the late 1800s with the poetry of the brothers Dimitar and Konstantin Miladinov, whose works are still recited by students from primary school through college. The growing literary collection grounded in the current standard of the Macedonian language marks its beginning with the 1939 publication of Kosta Racin's (pronounced Rah-tsin) programmatic collection of poems entitled *Beli Mugri* (*White Dawns*). While most of the distinguished 19th- and early 20th-century literary figures were poets, since World War II there has been an increase in the number of prose writers and playwrights. Compilations of Macedonian poetry and prose, including the novels and short stories of Meto Jovanovski, have been translated into dozens of foreign languages.

### 15 WORK

Macedonia has a fairly healthy manufacturing sector, but most of the currently available jobs are in the service industry. A major part of Macedonia's economy is sustained by small, family-owned businesses such as grocery stores, restaurants, cafés, service garages, clothing boutiques, etc. Unemployment and under-employment are problems. In fact, underemployment is even more of a problem today than it was during socialism, as often workers at many private businesses as well as government enterprises go home at the end of the month with only a promissory note instead of a paycheck.

On the other hand, a relatively small number of teenagers or college students in Macedonia hold summer jobs. Aside from the fact that such jobs are few and thus hard to find, it is culturally accepted that after nine months of studying, every student deserves a summer of relaxation and recreation. This is why within a few days after the end of every academic year, beaches, resorts, mountain retreats, and camps of all types—and for about two weeks between semesters, ski slopes—become primarily occupied by students.

### 16 SPORTS

Unquestionably, the most popular sport played by practically all Macedonian children is soccer. Of course, the number of players, the size of the playing field, and the width of the makeshift goals—usually two stones representing the goal posts—vary from pickup game to pickup game. Games are normally played with such energy and infectious enthusiasm that they often attract small audiences of all ages. Young adults also play soccer, though basketball, tennis, table tennis, and chess are also enjoyed. In fact, basketball in Macedonia is almost as well-liked as it is in the US., while American football and baseball are scarcely known at all. In 2008, hoping to cultivate a generation of tennis players who would duplicate the success of American, Russian, and Serbian tennis players, the Macedonian government authorized the building of over 100 tennis courts throughout the country.

Professional and semi-professional soccer and basketball organizations have abounded in Macedonia ever since World War II. Not only do such teams flourish in almost every city and sizable town, but prior to the large-scale emigration of the 1960s, many villages had their own regional or inter-village soccer leagues. Since most of the soccer and basketball players are either teen-agers or in their early twenties, these sports are commonly regarded as a young person's diversion.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Macedonia boasts 15 active professional theater groups that average over 1,700 total performances per year, a Philharmonic Orchestra (founded in 1944), 6 chamber ensembles, a host of annual folk music festivals held in different cities, hundreds of amateur rock and roll bands, and at least one professional pop group, *Leb i Sol* (Bread and Salt), which has been performing its own compositions throughout Europe and North America for over two decades. Since gaining independence, Macedonia has also produced some promising film directors whose pictures have acquired international recognition and praise. Most notably, in 1994 the American Academy of Motion Pictures nominated the film *Before the Rain*—which incorporated Macedonian dialogue and featured Macedonian actors in starring roles—for the Best Foreign Language Film Award. By then, the film had already won the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival.

Every year Macedonia hosts several world-renowned cultural events, such as the Struga Poetry Evenings, begun in 1961, which has bestowed its Golden Wreath upon such eminent poets as Allen Ginsberg (US), Pablo Neruda (Chile), and Ted Hughes (UK); the Skopje International Jazz festival; and the World Cartoon Gallery. Most Macedonians also love to visit the beaches of their two favorite lakes, namely, Prespa and Ohrid, while many of the younger generation crowd the ski slopes on Mount Pelister and Mount Šar.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The bulk of traditional Macedonian arts and crafts output comes from the hundreds of old-time master craftsmen's shops, normally found in the old commercial sections of larger cities such as Skopje, Bitola, and Ohrid. These sections are old literally and stylistically, in that most of the buildings and even the manner of production date back to the time of the Ottoman Empire. Serving as more than tourist attractions, these areas serve as shopping centers for the local populace. In the narrow and winding cobblestone streets of the old bazaars, one comes across an array of small goldsmith and silversmith shops selling intricate filigree rings, bracelets, and necklaces; tinsmith shops where one finds baking utensils of all sorts; *stomnari*, or jug-makers, who still produce glazed terra cotta vessels like jugs, urns, pitchers, cups, and bowls; and kilimari, or Oriental-style carpet shops. Villagers in Macedonia are famous for their weaving of colorful blankets, carpets, and traditional attire. However, village craft items are becoming increasingly difficult to find, since so many villagers have moved either to the city or abroad.

Aside from small establishments making jewelry and household implements, whether in bazaars or in other, more modern parts in cities and larger towns, one may step into any of the numerous *slatkarnitsi* (pronounced *slah-tkharnitsi*), or patisseries, which feature such delicacies as *tulumbi* (a ridge-surfaced, doughy pastry about three inches in length, ideally hollow inside, and soaked in syrup), *baklava* (made from layers of phyllo dough, filled with ground-up walnuts or pistachios and drenched in syrup), *kataifi* (thin-stranded pastry, filled with chopped nuts and served drenched in syrup), *boza* (a sweet, fermented drink made from wheat or millet), and *salep* (a similarly sweet drink made from salep flour).



## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

While it was part of Yugoslavia, Macedonia had a poor human and civil rights record. Because the Communist Party was the only legally recognized political organization, any known challenge or opposition to its authority met with swift imprisonment and even torture. Today, Macedonia has over a dozen political parties of various sizes—a sharp reduction from the 64 officially registered parties that cropped up within a year after the country's declaration of independence—and political prisoners are officially nonexistent. Party leaders are calling for further reductions in the number of parties, so the number is expected to be brought down in the future.

Alcoholism and nepotism are longstanding social problems, while spouse abuse appears to be on the decline. Since the early 1990s, the divorce rate has risen. Other problems such as truancy, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, and violence in general have arisen since the country's political and economic reconstruction. Drug addiction, rare prior to the early 1990s and punished by lengthy prison sentences, has now reached epidemic proportions. Ethnic relations between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority have been tense, and in the 1990s there was widespread fear that violence between the two might culminate in a civil war. However, following the government's concession to the minority's demands for the right to establish their own schools and a university, relations seem to have improved somewhat.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The treatment and status of women in Macedonia must be divided into two different periods, the pre-socialist and the socialist/post-socialist. In the former, women fared pretty much the same way they did in any patriarchal society. The husband stood as the head of the household, while the wife served as its caretaker. Since World War II, women in Macedonia have become equal to men in many respects. They are represented in every facet of the country's economy and political structure, from the factory floor to the halls of parliament. Many women are teachers and physicians and there are few women who do not work outside the home.

Spurred by the freedoms guaranteed by Macedonia's current constitution, the same kind of recognition has within the past two decades been extended to homosexuals and transsexuals. It is true that, whether gay or lesbian, one runs into an undercurrent of social resistance, if not hostility; yet it is also true that gay meeting places are becoming less of a novelty.

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—by T. Jovanovski

# MALTESE

**LOCATION:** Republic of Malta (short form: Malta; in Maltese: *Repubblika ta' Malta*)

**POPULATION:** 420,000 (2008 estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Maltese (or Malti) and English are official languages; Italian is widely spoken

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic (98%); small number of residents belong to other religious communities—Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Malta, officially known as the Republic of Malta, is a parliamentary republic, and a full member of the European Union since 1 May 2004. Its house of representatives is made up of 65 members of parliament. The president of the republic is elected every five years by the house of representatives. The main political parties are the National Party (a Christian democratic party) and the Malta Labor Party (a social democratic party). There are several smaller political parties with no current parliamentary representation. The country's de facto capital is Valletta, situated on the eastern shore of the island of Malta. Malta's currency is the euro; before 2008, and since independence from Great Britain, the currency was the Maltese lira. Since 1993, the country has been organized into 68 local councils, which represent the elementary form of local government.

The origin of the country's name is not certain. Some scholars argue that it derives from the Phoenician word for harbor or refuge, *malat*; others claim that its roots lie in *meli*, the Greek word for honey, and the fact that in antiquity the Maltese islands were known for this product (the island of Malta was called Melita or "land of honey"). Today, the name of Malta is used either in reference to the entire country or merely to the largest of its islands.

Malta's history reflects its crucial strategic position in the center of the Mediterranean, between the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia. Human life in Malta goes back to 5200 BC when the islands were settled by farmers from the nearby island of Sicily, although some archeological evidence points to the possibility that they were inhabited as early as 7200 BC. Between 3600 and 3000 BC, the early Maltese built a series of temples made out of large limestone slabs arranged in circular patterns. The economy of the islands at that time was based mainly on agriculture and stock-breeding, and some trade with other Mediterranean peoples; the population of Malta was peaceful. The temple period and the so-called civilization of the Temple Builders came to an abrupt end in 2000 BC, soon after it had reached its peak. Around that time, the islands were invaded by an unknown people known as The Destroyers, who dominated the islands until approximately 1400 BC, when another Bronze Age people, originating in Sicily, invaded the Maltese archipelago. They occupied it for five centuries, until the arrival of the Phoenicians, a Semitic-speaking people from the eastern Mediterranean. Lacking the population to establish large colonies in the Mediterranean, the Phoenicians used Malta's harbors as staging posts and anchorages on their trading routes.

By about 600 BC Greeks had established large settlements in southern Italy and Sicily and were looking for new territories

for their growing population. The Carthaginians, inhabitants of the prosperous city-state that the Phoenicians had founded in 814 BC on the coast of North Africa, fought as supporters of the Phoenicians in their conflicts against the Greeks for control of Sicily and the western Mediterranean and occupied Malta in 480 BC. Under the Carthaginian rule, the population of the islands increased and settlement moved inland on Malta and Gozo. In that same period, the northeastern port of Grand Harbor was developed. During the last Punic War between the Carthaginians and the Romans in 218 BC, the Maltese rebelled against Carthaginian rule and declared their loyalty to Rome. The islands, famous for honey and cloth production, prospered under Roman rule. The Romans called the main island Melita and used the same name for its inland capital (today's Mdina). In the year 117, under the Emperor Hadrian, Malta and Gozo were granted the official status of *Municipium* and were allowed to have an autonomous local government. In year 60, the Christian apostle Paul was shipwrecked on the northern coast of Malta, initiating Malta's long history of Christianity and eventually becoming the country's patron saint, with the Feast of the Shipwreck of St. Paul celebrated as a public holiday on February 10.

After the Roman Empire split in two in 395, Malta is believed to have been occupied by either the Goths or the Vandals, or perhaps even both of these tribes. In the 6th century, the islands fell under the control of the Byzantine Empire and its capital Constantinople. Byzantine rule of Malta lasted for the next four centuries. In 836, the Aghlabid Arabs of North Africa began to carry out raids into the Maltese islands. In 870 Malta succumbed to repeated Arab invasions, remaining under Arab rule for the next 220 years. The Arabs introduced new ways of irrigation, citrus fruits and cotton, and left an indelible mark on the culture of Malta by bringing with them their language, the Siculo-Arabic language spoken by the Arabs of Sicily, which became the foundation of modern Maltese.

In early 11th century, the Normans, returning from their pilgrimage to the Holy Land, passed through Calabria in southern Italy, many settling there. In 1061 they invaded Sicily, defeating Arab rulers of the island in 1090. That same year, they landed in Malta. While at the beginning the Muslim population was allowed to remain on the islands, in 1122, King Roger I of Sicily had all Arabs deported and established the feudal system in Malta, which marked the birth of Maltese nobility. Malta became part of the Kingdom of Sicily, which also included parts of southern Italy. Catholicism was reinstated as the religion of Malta, and King Tancred of Sicily made the islands of Malta and Gozo into a fief under the rule of the Count of Malta. Because of the great strategic importance of the islands, most early counts were Genoese corsairs. When in 1194 the rule of Malta passed from the Normans to the Swabian dynasty of Hohenstaufens, Malta became part of an immense empire stretching from the north to the south of Europe. The most prominent of Hohenstaufen rulers, Frederic II, was tolerant of Muslims, but did not hesitate to expel any Arabs seen as fomenting rebellion. In Malta, his most important act was to allow the people to elect local residents to help with the administration of the island. This group of Maltese, elected annually, was known as the Consiglio Popolare and represented the people of Malta to their ruler.

After 1266 and the end of the Hohenstaufen rule of Malta, the islands briefly passed on to the French House of d'Anjou,

which never became popular among the Maltese. Exorbitant taxes were imposed on the population of the islands, but the people never felt sufficiently protected by the garrison of French soldiers based in Malta. After the island of Gozo was sacked by the Genovese in 1275, there was a large revolt against French rule in Sicily, and the Kingdom of Sicily, including Malta, fell under the rule of the Spanish House of Aragon. The Aragonese ruled Malta from 1283 to 1412. Until 1350, the Aragonese kings of Sicily gave Malta, and the title of Count of Malta, as a feudal grant to highly-born individuals, who then frequently abused their privilege to tax the Maltese. When in 1350 the local population complained to King Louis, asking him to return the islands to his own direct rule, the request was granted, but this was reversed in the 1390s, and the practice of granting out Malta was resumed. Heavy taxes, failing crops, and raids of the islands by Arab corsairs all contributed to the dissatisfaction of the Maltese, who in 1425 rose in revolt against Count Gonsalvo Monroy. In 1428, King Alphonso decreed that the government of the islands should remain in the hands of its inhabitants, and that all government officials are to be elected from among the Maltese. An assembly, divided into nobles, clergy, and commoners, was founded, and it was decided that it should meet annually.

In 1530, in spite of the royal pledge made in 1507 not to cede Malta, Charles V of Spain granted the islands to the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of St. John (known during the Crusades as the Hospitallers) in perpetual fiefdom, in exchange for an annual fee of a single Maltese falcon. With the arrival of the Knights of St. John on the islands, the history of Malta took a different, independent course. The Knights Hospitaller was founded in Jerusalem in the 11th century to provide care for sick pilgrims to the Holy Land in an infirmary near the Church of Holy Sepulchre. It was a religious order divided into military brothers and those dedicated to the care of the sick. The Knights were required to show proof of noble birth. The Order was organized into national chapters called *Langues*. After the withdrawal of the Christian forces from the Holy Land in the late 13th century, the Knights Hospitaller were forced to look for a new home. They found it on Rhodes, where they became a more militarized Order, but in 1522 the Ottomans forced them to leave the island. After Charles V gave them the Maltese islands and the North African port of Tripoli, the Knights continued their actions against the Barbary corsairs and the Arabs. In 1565, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent sent a force of 40,000 to besiege the 500-700 knights and 8,000 soldiers in Malta and expel them from the Maltese islands. The Knights and the population of Malta endured one of the bloodiest and most difficult sieges in history, which lasted almost four months. The Ottoman defeat marked the turning point in the Turkish naval domination in the Mediterranean. After the siege, the Knights embarked on building a series of fortifications throughout Malta and built the new city of Valletta, named after their Grand Master Jean de la Valette.

The rule of the Knights Hospitaller (now also known as the Knights of Malta) on the islands remained strong until 1798 and brought prosperity to the islands, in spite of the numerous incidents demonstrating the discontent of the native Maltese with taxes, the Maltese nobles, and local clergy. Nevertheless, with the decline of the Ottoman threat in the Mediterranean, and the loss of many of its European holdings following the

rise of Protestantism in Europe, the Order saw its revenues and its prestige decline. Additional sources of the Order's revenue were lost during the French revolution of 1789. Finally, after Napoleon captured Malta in 1798, during his expedition to Egypt, the Knights were forced to leave Malta. When the Maltese rebelled against the French occupation of the islands, Great Britain blockaded the islands, and in 1814, as part of the Treaty of Paris, Malta was declared to be a part of the British Empire. Positioned mid-way between Gibraltar and the Suez Canal, the islands were valued as a British naval base. Malta became prosperous as a refueling and restocking station on the way to India, and in World War I it was used as a large hospital. In the 1930s, Great Britain's role in Malta came under scrutiny among the native Maltese population. During World War II, the islands became the most bombed place on earth, and in 1942 the people of Malta were awarded the George Cross for their heroism.

Malta was granted independence from Great Britain on 21 September 1964. Under the 1964 constitution, Queen Elizabeth II remained the queen of Malta, with a governor-general exercising authority on her behalf. On December 13, the country became a republic within the Commonwealth, with a president heading the state. Nevertheless, Maltese association with the British has had a long-term cultural impact: the Maltese are still a bilingual nation, where English continues to be one of the two official languages. Maltese politics continue to reflect the traditional historical and cultural affiliations of its population, generally divided between the supporters of pro-Italian and pro-British policies and cultural orientation.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Republic of Malta is an archipelago situated in the almost exact center of the Mediterranean, with the total area of only 316 sq km (122 sq mi) and consisting of three inhabited islands—Malta, Gozo (Għawdex) and Comino (Kemmuna)—and several small, uninhabited ones—Filfla, Cominotto (Kemmunnett), Fungus Rock (Il-Ġebbla tal-Ġeneral), Manoel Island, and the Islands of St. Paul. Malta is situated 93 km (60 mi) south from the Italian island of Sicily, 296 km (185 mi) east of Tunisia, and 320 km (200 mi) north of Tripoli in Libya. There are no permanent lakes or rivers on Malta. The country's population is estimated to be 420,000 (including approximately 30,000 residents of foreign origin), with a density of 1,282 inhabitants per square kilometer (or 3,339 per sq mi). The largest island in the archipelago is Malta, with an area of 246 sq km (95 sq mi). Most of the country's important harbors are on this island. The next largest island, Gozo, has a land area of 67 sq km (26 sq mi). It is predominantly rural and is probably the first of the Maltese islands to have been settled. The third inhabited island, Comino, has an area of only 2.5 sq km (1 sq mi) and less than ten residents. Its name derives from the herb cumin, introduced by the Romans and grown on the island. Small-scale farming and tourism are the main sources of income on Comino. While Malta is a member of the European Union, it has historically been strongly influenced by the cultures of North Africa.

The Maltese climate is Mediterranean, with two, rather than four seasons: hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. The rainiest time of the year is December, with the average temperature of 16°C or 61°F, and the hottest month is July (33.2°C or 92°F). Malta has low rainfall; some of its water is produced

by desalination, and some of it comes from wells. Malta's soil is quite fertile, but prone to erosion. Its terrain is mostly low and rocky, boasting many beautiful coastal cliffs. The Maltese islands are composed of sedimentary rock, with the western halves of the two largest islands higher than the eastern. The highest elevation in the country, Ta'Dmejrek, is only 253 m (83 ft) high.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Malta has two official languages: Maltese (or Malti) and English. While the ancient Maltese spoke Phoenician, this language was replaced in the 9th century by another Semitic tongue: Arabic. Modern Maltese is descended from Siculo-Arabic, a variant of Arabic spoken in Sicily and southern Italy. It is also strongly influenced by its centuries-long contact with various Romance languages (Sicilian, Italian, French and Spanish) and, starting from the early 19th century, English. Maltese is written in the Maltese alphabet, which has 29 letters and is based on the Latin alphabet, but uses several peculiar diacritically altered letters.

The Maltese islands have always been characterized by diglossia, a parallel use of one high-prestige language of the government and the elite (one of the Romance languages), and another, low-prestige language of the people, i.e. the spoken vernacular tongue (Maltese). The earliest known literary work in Maltese is *Cantilena*, a 15th-century poem composed by Pietro Caxaro. Other writings in Maltese date to the 17th century, but many more have been found from the 18th and 19th centuries. For many centuries, Malta's ruling classes, most often of foreign origin, preferred the use of Romance languages (Italian, French, and Spanish) or Latin. The members of the Order of the Knights of St. John, for example, many of whom were French, preferred to use French and Italian in their written records and correspondence. Italian, with its strong literary tradition, was for many centuries the recognized cultural language of Malta. Maltese writers living in the islands, but composing their work in Italian, constituted a literary movement that flourished until the second part of the 20th century; until the early 1900s, in fact, most literary works in Malta were written in Italian. The standardized written form of the Maltese language was established only under the influence of the Romantic movement in the early 19th century and particularly its emphasis on the national and the folkloric, when the celebrated Maltese linguist and writer, Mikiel Anton Vassalli composed a Maltese-Italian dictionary, a Maltese grammar, and a book of proverbs. After centuries of foreign domination and the successive use of Siculo-Arabic, Latin, Sicilian, Spanish, French, and Italian as languages of the administration and the educated classes, in the 1930s Maltese was recognized as an official language, alongside English, in an effort by the British to diminish the strong Italian influence in Malta.

Today, Maltese and English are both official languages of Malta. Virtually all native residents are bilingual and fluent in Maltese and English, and most of them understand or speak Italian. English and Maltese are languages of instruction in all public primary and secondary schools, while in the private schools all teaching is done in English. Most departments at the University of Malta also prefer to teach in English. The National Council for the Maltese language sets the usage standards for the Maltese language. There are approximately

500,000 speakers of the Maltese language in the world, including Maltese emigrants on all continents.

### 4 FOLKLORE

The most popular traditional Maltese folk instrument is a type of bagpipes known as *iz-żaqq*. Other known old Maltese musical instruments are: *iz-żummar* (reed pipe amplified with a cow's horn bell), *il-fifra* (cane whistle flute), *it-tanbur* (a frame drum made with a goatskin head), and *iz-żafżafa* (a friction drum made of ceramic and goatskin).

Maltese folksong, a form of oral poetry, is called *l-ghana*. It is sung by village bards, often accompanied by a guitar, and it has traditionally been the most popular form of folk entertainment. It is similar in its melancholy to Sicilian folk ballads and the traditional Arab wailing tunes, expressing the passion or the sadness of love. *L-ghana* has generally developed in these three styles: *Spirtu Pront* (quick wit), an improvised form of a song duel, traditionally sung by a group of two or more singers; *Tal-Fatt* (a story of an event), a narrative song based on tragic or humorous real events or fiction; and *Fil Gholi* (high-pitched), a high-register song also known as *il-Bormliża*, short in form, with repetitive and highly-allusive lyrics. Maltese country dance, locally known as *il-Kuntradanza*, and a dance known as *il-Parata* (sword-dance) are two well-known forms of traditional dance in Malta. Nursery rhymes are another traditional form of Maltese folk art transmitted through generations.

The most characteristic garment in the traditional dress for women used to be the long veil called *faldetta*, or *ghonnella*, a part of Maltese costume that has now completely disappeared in Malta. It was made of cotton or silk and was black or blue in color. This veil is thought to have its origin in the Arab veil or in an ancient Spanish form of traditional dress. Maltese folk costumes, now practically disappeared from everyday life, can still be seen at many local *festas* throughout Malta, when folk-dancing and singing is performed in traditional dress.

In the villages of Malta and Gozo, each family has their own nickname. The nickname or *laqam* identifies a person, a family, and even a social group or a town by what is perceived to be their most expressive characteristic ("giant," "hedgehog," etc.; occasionally nicknames refer to occupations). Nicknames given by inhabitants of Maltese and Gozoan villages to other towns and villages on the islands often reflect animosities that once existed between them (*Tar-Redus* or "manure" is, for example, a nickname for the town of Tarxien). Some towns or villages owe their names to legends.

The island of Gozo is considered by many to be the island of Ogygia Homer described in the *Odyssey* and where the poem's hero, Ulysses, spent seven years. According to this belief, Ramla Bay was the meeting place of Ulysses and the enchanting nymph Calypso, queen of the island.

*Luzzus* are the traditional brightly painted fishing boats, the design of which is said to go back to the times when the Phoenicians ruled the Maltese islands. The Eye of Osiris, an ancient symbol of protection against evil, is painted on every prow.

### 5 RELIGION

There are hundreds of churches in Malta, the majority of them Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism is the state religion in Malta, and it is estimated that 98% of the population is Roman Catholic. Most residents belonging to the Protestant church-

es are not native Maltese, but British and Northern European expatriates, retirees, and tourists. There are small Anglican, Church of Scotland, Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities in Malta.

Pre-Christian religious heritage in Malta includes some of the oldest surviving free-standing buildings in the world, built on Gozo of coralline limestone during the Ggantija and Tarxien eras (3600-3200 and 3150-2500 BC respectively): Haġar Qim and Mnajdra temples.

The patron saints of Malta are St. Paul, St. Agatha, and St. George. The most revered religious figure in Malta by far, St. Paul is thought to have been shipwrecked on the northern coast of Malta in AD 60 and to have converted the local population, and the Roman Governor Publius, to Christianity. According to a legend, St. Agatha hid from her Roman persecutors in a cave in Rabat.

In 870 Malta was occupied by the Sicilian Arabs. They exerted strong influence on every aspect of life on the islands, and Islam was a dominant religion in Malta for the next 220 years. Christians and Jews were not forced to convert, but they had to pay additional taxes and could not serve in the government or military. Muslims remained a strong presence in Maltese society until the 14th century, long after the conquest of the island by the Norman rulers of Sicily in 1090.

An important religious figure in Malta is St. John the Baptist, patron saint of the Knights Hospitaller (Knights of Saint John), who received the Maltese Islands and the North African port of Tripoli as a gift from Charles V in 1530.

The most important churches in Malta are St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, boasting a painting by Caravaggio of "The Beheading of John the Baptist" (1608), and a museum; St. Paul's Shipwreck Church in Valletta, containing a fragment of the pillar on which the saint was beheaded and a relic of his wrist bone; Church of St. Lawrence in Vittoriosa, where the Knights celebrated the end of the Great Siege of 1565; Our Lady of the Assumption in Mosta, and Xewkija Church in Gozo.

The Jewish population in Malta goes back to 1500 BC. It reached its greatest numbers in the Middle Ages, under Norman rule. Avraham Abulafia, a renowned Jewish mystic, lived on Comino from 1285 until his death in 1290. In 1492, shortly after the beginning of the Aragonese rule in Malta in 1479, all Jews were forced to leave the country, most of them eventually settling in the Levant. A number of Jews remained in Malta and converted to Christianity. Under the rule of the Knights of Malta, the position of the Jewish population was not significantly improved. Today's small Jewish community dates back to the French and British rule of Malta, and to the arrival of a number of Jewish refugees in the years preceding World War II, when Malta was one of the few countries not to require visas of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Malta is the country with the greatest number of holidays in the European Union. National holidays are: Freedom Day (March 31, the anniversary of the withdrawal of British troops from Malta in 1979), Sette Giugno or Maltese National Day (June 7, commemorating the anti-British riots of 1919, the forming of the national assembly and the demand for self-government), Victory Day (September 8, in remembrance of both the end of the Great Siege of 1565 and the 1943 withdrawal of the Italian troops), Independence Day (September 21, marking

Malta's 1964 independence from the Great Britain), and Republic Day (December 13, the anniversary of the substantial revision of Malta's Constitution in 1974, and its transformation from a Commonwealth Realm into a republic within the Commonwealth).

Public holidays are: New Year's Day (January 1), Saint Paul's Shipwreck (February 10), Feast of Saint Joseph (March 19), Good Friday, Worker's Day (May 1), Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (June 29), Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady (August 15), Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas Day (December 25).

Malta is a Catholic country, and many Maltese holidays and festivals are based on the holy days of the Christian calendar. One of the highlights of the Christmas season is carol singing in the Co-Cathedral of St. John, and in other, mostly Baroque, churches in Malta. Cribs (*presejju*), some very ornate in design, are placed everywhere, both in Maltese homes and churches, and a very popular pastime of the Christmas season is going around and visiting as many of them as possible. Another popular pastime of the season is visiting the Manoel theatre in Valletta, where the annual satirical pantomime can be seen.

Carnival is a tradition that came to Malta with the Knights of St. John in the 16th century. It takes place in a week preceding Ash Wednesday. It is celebrated across the Maltese islands with parades of outrageous, multi-colored floats, dressing up in fancy costumes, and late-night dancing and drinking in the clubs and bars of Paceville. While the biggest celebrations take place in Valletta, each town in the country has developed its own way of celebrating the Carnival. Nadur, on Gozo, for example, is known among the Maltese for its unusually macabre version of celebrating this tradition.

On Holy Friday, parades of scenes from the Passion of Christ can be seen on the streets. On Easter Sunday, a procession with the statue of the risen Christ takes place around and inside of churches. The Maltese celebrate Easter with a large family lunch, visits to relatives and friends, and the exchange of gifts: chocolate eggs and rabbits are common, as well as *figolla*, traditional almond-filled pastry covered with icing. The Maltese are fond of fireworks, and sometimes include them in the celebration of Easter.

The feast of San Grigor (or St. Gregory) takes place on the Wednesday following Easter Sunday. A religious procession, first held in the 17th century as a thanksgiving for the end of the bubonic plague, starts at the chapel of St. Clement on the outskirts of Zejtun. After the procession, the Maltese celebrate with picnics and family outings in the fishing village of Marsaxlokk on the south-east coast of Malta.

Another opportunity to celebrate with fireworks is the annual Maltese Fireworks Festival, taking place in the first four days of May, with spectacular fireworks organized for three consecutive nights in Valletta's Grand Harbor, along with many concerts, shows, colorful street entertainment, and a variety of food events.

L-Imnarja (a festival of light, from the Italian Luminara) is a summer folk festival, once considered (along with the feast of St. Gregory) as a central feast for the Maltese. It coincides with the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul on June 29 and goes back to the time before the arrival of the Knights of St. John on the islands. The main area of celebration is Buskett Gardens, Malta's largest area of natural woodland, where families can picnic all

day and night, drink wine and eat *fenkata* (rabbit feast), which is a traditional rabbit dish, and engage in the traditional singing called *l-ghana*. The following day the celebrations continue with bareback horse and donkey races organized near Mdina.

September 8 is a day dedicated to remembering three events: the birth of the Holy Virgin (Maria Bambina), the end of the Great Siege of 1565, and the capitulation of the Italian navy to the British forces in the Second World War. A rowing regatta competition is held in Valletta's Grand Harbor to commemorate the end of the Great Siege.

Festival Mediterranean takes place in the autumn on the island of Gozo and is a mix of local food and wine tastings, concerts, art exhibitions, plays, conferences, and lectures, with walks led by scholars around archeological sites.

Village parish *festas* are a Maltese tradition that is thought to go back to the 16th century. The *festas* offer the village inhabitants an opportunity for a community celebration and a spiritual renewal. The celebrations are usually preceded by three days of prayer, vespers and masses with special hymns dedicated to the patron saint of the village.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most of the rites of passage typical of Malta are linked to Catholic traditions and customs. Baptism and the first Holy Communion (around the age of seven or eight) are two important occasions followed by festive gatherings of extended family, with everyone bringing gifts for the child, including tokens of a religious nature or even monetary gifts. Following the christening of the child, hot chocolate and oval-shaped almond macaroons called *biskuttini tal-magħmudija* are served at the home of the child's parents. In the past, it was considered prudent to have the baby baptized as soon as possible, within only 24 hours after the birth. Such speedy christening, it was believed, freed the soul from purgatory. Traditionally, children were named after their grandparents, on the father's side if it was a boy, and on the mother's side if it was a girl. Today, little attention is paid to tradition in naming children.

The ceremony known as *quccija* (choosing) is a Maltese tradition linked to a child's first birthday. A basket is filled with various small objects representing different professions and trades; the first object that the child's hand touches is believed to be the sign of its future occupation.

Confirmation, which usually takes place in early adolescence, is the Catholic rite of initiation bestowing on a young person a full membership in the Church and represents another occasion for organizing festivities with the extended family. Maltese weddings are usually celebrated in churches, followed by large (300 guests are not an oddity at a Maltese wedding), lavish parties for extended family and friends. January, April, and August are traditionally considered to be the best months to get married. It is an old custom that the weddings are usually celebrated in the bride's parish. Instead of riding to church in a car, the more romantically-minded couple often chooses an *Il Karrozzin* (horse-drawn carriage), introduced in mid-19th century by the British. Wedding souvenirs wrapped in small boxes called *qoffini* (or souvenir baskets) are distributed to all guests. Most Maltese families have a particular place where the wedding souvenirs are displayed.

Some of the secular rites of passage for young Maltese include completing secondary education or receiving a university degree. Both occasions are marked with parties for family and

friends, with presents or money given to the graduate. Sometimes such occasions are celebrated with a trip abroad.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Malta is a country marked by contrasts, and the Maltese, easy to befriend, are often described as having a Mediterranean personality of extremes. They quickly and readily express their strong opinions in most political and personal matters and have little understanding for those who refrain from taking sides in an issue, or choose the middle ground. This passion in taking sides is reflected in the country's political life.

Strangers are quickly welcome as friends and are expected to voice their opinions as passionately as the Maltese. Family and friends are welcome for unannounced round-the-clock visits. Malta's hospitality to visitors is legendary and marked by great warmth, and the culture of friendship based on loyalty and sharing strong opinions has a long history in Malta.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most people in Malta live in the urban agglomeration of Valletta, the Grand Harbor, and Sliema, on the northeastern coast of the island of Malta. Marked differences exist in values, dress, and speech between city and village dwellers. With rare exceptions, most highly-educated Maltese professionals do not live in villages. This is one of the reasons why there are few social differences in Malta's villages, and why the church is still felt to be the center of the community life. The village priest is still seen as the religious leader, family counselor, and legal advisor. Exposure to international tourism and modern media has, nevertheless, already penetrated the fabric of the close-knit village life, and eroded the sense of unity and closeness that the villagers historically enjoyed.

Malta's urban population enjoys an excellent level of education and a lifestyle similar to that of urban dwellers throughout southern Europe. Many members of Malta's upper-middle classes and aristocracy have been educated abroad (often in Great Britain and Italy) and have a sophisticated, cosmopolitan outlook.

Malta has an excellent public health system, ranked by the World Health Organization as the fifth among the world's health systems, and every resident is entitled to free use of public health institutions. While real-estate prices have risen significantly in the recent decade, housing is still relatively affordable. Family ties are strong in Malta, and many young Maltese continue living with their parents for some time following the graduation from the university. At the same time, many new graduates rely on the strong extended family network when looking for suitable employment.

The Maltese are seen as enjoying a slower and more pleasant pace of life than that of their counterparts in other European countries, especially those of Northern Europe. The average life expectancy in Malta is 79.3 years, with 81.6 years for women and 77 years for men. Infant mortality rate is low at 3.79 deaths/1,000 live births.

There are approximately 130,000 Internet users in Malta, and 90% of all Maltese own a mobile phone.

Voluntary military service in Malta starts at the age of 17, and lasts 6 months. There is no conscription in Malta.



*A woman making lace in Malta. (© Michelle Chaplow/Corbis)*

## **<sup>10</sup> FAMILY LIFE**

Maltese culture is strongly family-oriented, and the degree of devotion the Maltese show to their immediate and extended family is remarkable. The traditional Maltese family is close-knit, extending into a network of relatives and in-laws, where family members rely on each other for material, social, and emotional support across the generations. The relatively traditional concept of Catholic family still prevails in Maltese society, although the long multicultural history of the islands has made the Maltese tolerant and open toward other kinds of communal values. In Maltese society the solidarity is strongest within the extended family, seen as the most important of all social networks in Malta. Rather than relying on friends and neighbors, the Maltese traditionally turn to close and distant relatives for support. This is why poverty in Malta is generally seen as being a consequence of the alienation of the individual from kin and family network.

The Maltese pay great attention to child-rearing and openly show their love for their children. Although the Mediterranean preference for the first-born male remains, Maltese families are as devoted to the education and rearing of female children as to that of the males. Young people in Malta usually live with their parents until graduation from university, and sometimes afterwards; often several generations of a family share a house. Such arrangements are less common than they used to be, but are not considered unusual. Ties between parents and children

continue to be strong throughout their lifetime, and grandparents are often directly involved in raising grandchildren. While Maltese families are thought to be led by the strong father figure, this belief only serves to obscure the crucial role of the mother of the family, seen as its true center and de facto decision-maker. While large families used to be the rule in this Catholic country, most Maltese couples today have one or two children and are as inclined to use modern contraception as their counterparts in other areas of European Union.

## **<sup>11</sup> CLOTHING**

Most Maltese dress similarly to their neighbors to the north, Italians, with some influences coming from the British style of dress, noticeable especially in formal clothing for men. Dress codes range from casual to traditionally elegant, and smart and fashionable. Casual beach-style clothing has recently gained in popularity.

Topless bathing is not allowed on public beaches, but it is often tolerated on private ones. Visitors to churches must dress respectfully (shorts or strappy tops are not allowed). Shoes with sharp, pointed heels are also not allowed in many churches, because they might damage the floors.

## 12 FOOD

Malta's cooking is typically Mediterranean, based on locally-grown fresh vegetables, herb cheese, fish, and game. It shares many traits with the cuisines of its neighbors in southern Italy and North Africa.

Slow-cooking, favored in Malta in the past because of the lack of fire-wood ovens, remains the preferred food-preparation technique. Throughout the centuries, food in Malta was placed in an earthenware pot over a small stone hearth, or *kenur*, and allowed to simmer for a long time. Maltese meals still traditionally begin with a soup, but a soup may also form a meal in itself. Some of the most popular Maltese soups are *minestra* (thick vegetable soup) and *gbejnġil-armla* (widow's soup), a lighter version of minestra with a piece of fresh *gbejniet* cheese melted in the soup and raw eggs added at the end. *Al-jotta* (fish and garlic soup), spiced with mint or marjoram and tomatoes and containing rice or fine pasta, is another favorite of the Maltese.

Maltese and Sicilian cuisines have a lot in common. *Ravjul* (Maltese ravioli) is often prepared at Maltese homes from scratch. It was originally eaten on Fridays, when eating meat was forbidden by the Church.

*Lampuka* (dolphin fish) is the preferred fish of the Maltese, eaten with typical Mediterranean spices, such as rosemary, garlic, marjoram, olives, tomatoes, lemon, and capers, or in a *lampuki* pie (*Torta Tal-lampuki*). Salt cod stew, *stuffat tal-Bakkaljaw*, combining cod with potatoes and other diced vegetables is a winter favorite. *Fenek* (rabbit) is the most popular meat in Malta, often eaten marinated and browned with herbs and garlic and then simmered in red wine or tomato sauce; sometimes roast rabbit is served with a bitter chocolate sauce.

Malta is famous for its many kinds of excellent bread, ranging from a crusty sourdough eaten with fresh tomatoes or tomato paste and *gbejniet*, to a less crusty bread called *ftira*, ring-shaped and resembling the Italian *ciabatta*. *Gbejniet* are small, round cheeses made from sheep's or goat's milk and produced in three varieties: fresh, sun-dried (traditionally eaten with Maltese biscuits, or *galletti*, and served with red wine), or peppered. *Hobz biz-zejt*, a thick slice of bread dipped in olive oil and rubbed with ripe tomatoes or tomato paste, then covered with tuna, capers and onions, is a favorite snack in Malta. Other traditional snacks favored by the Maltese are *pastizzi*, diamond-shaped flaky pastries filled with ricotta cheese or mushy pea mixture and sometimes meat and anchovies. They can be bought at *pastizzerias* (small neighborhood shops selling baked goods), or virtually everywhere, in countless variations. Quassat are somewhat lighter pastries, round in shape. Maltese pastries are often eaten with tea or weak coffee.

Favorite sweet dishes are *kannoli* (crispy, tube-shaped fried pastry filled with ricotta cheese), *imqaret* (pastries filled with date-mixture and deep-fried), *figolla* (an Easter-time biscuit, made with almonds, prepared in many different shapes), *helwa tat-tork* (Turk's Sweet, or locally made halva, made with sesame seeds, sugar, and almonds). *Qubbajt* is a nougat dating back to the time of the Arab domination, and it is traditionally bought at food stalls at *festas*.

Maltese wines are unjustly not as renowned as Italian or French wines, but they are inexpensive and of excellent quality. Some of indigenous wine varieties are *Gellewza* and *Ghirghentina*. Gozo wines tend to be stronger than the wines from the island of Malta. Excellent beers and ales, a British tradition, are

also produced in Malta. Maltese coffee is typically drunk weak and milky, and the influence of Great Britain in the islands has made tea drinking very popular. *Anisette*, a flavored liqueur, is a specialty of Gozo and an ingredient in many sweets. *Bajtra* liqueur is a sweet liqueur made of prickly pears, honey, and herbs. Most Maltese prefer bottled water to drinking tap water (mostly produced by desalination).

The Maltese eat their main meal of the day at lunchtime (around 1 p.m.). The lunch often has five to six courses and lasts several hours. Dinner is usually eaten around 7 p.m.

## 13 EDUCATION

About 92.8% of the population of Malta is considered literate (92% men and 93.6% women). Malta's public school system has been strongly influenced by the British system, and formal education is mandatory for all Maltese children between the ages of 5 and 16. Day care is free of charge for all children over three years of age. Mandatory education is divided into a six-year primary cycle (from the ages of 5 to 10) and secondary education (11 to 16). Children with special learning needs are integrated into mainstream classrooms. All primary schools are free of charge and co-educational, with textbooks and transportation to school free of charge. At the end of primary school, all children take the nationally standardized Junior Lyceum Examination. Students then enroll into Junior Lyceums, which offer a more challenging, academically-oriented curriculum; Area Secondary Schools, for students who failed the examination; or the so-called "opportunity schools" for low-achieving students. Students attend secondary schools between the ages of 11 and 16; most of the schools are single-sex and years (grades) are called "forms."

Upper secondary education can be received at the pre-university Junior College, which is part of the University of Malta, or in other secondary-education institutions, administered by the Church or a private organization. There students spend two years preparing for their future university studies. All students receive a monthly scholarship, with both State and Church educational institutions funded; private institutions charge tuition fees. An alternative to Junior College is Vocational Upper Secondary Education, where students enroll full-time, or part-time, in combination with an apprenticeship, acquiring professional and vocational education in the fields of electronics, business, art and design, agribusiness, etc., and preparing to enter the workforce early.

The University of Malta, which traces its origins to the Jesuit Collegium Melitense, was founded in 1592. It is organized into 11 schools (faculties) and several interdisciplinary institutes and centers, and offers undergraduate and graduate education to approximately 10,000 students, with 2,500 graduates annually. Students usually enroll into the university at the age of 17 or 18. Local students study tuition-free, and if they are below the age of thirty they also receive stipends. Foreign students pay tuition. Classes are normally held between October and May. At the end of three or four years, students receive a Bachelor's degree, with some courses of study (medicine, dentistry, engineering, law) lasting up to five or six years. Most instruction is based on credit system. Graduate degrees require between one to four years of part-time or full-time study (master's degrees); doctoral degrees are awarded based on research.



## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Malta's cultural heritage reflects its fascinating, multicultural history. Valletta, the country's capital, is home to numerous museums. Among them is the National Museum of Archeology, housed in the former Auberge de Provence, which once belonged to the Order of Knights Hospitaller. The National Museum of Fine Arts is home to a number of works by Mattia Preti (1613–1699), a Baroque painter from Calabria, who worked in Italy and Malta, and was a Knight in the Order of St. John. It also houses sculptures by the Maltese sculptor Antonio Sciortino (1879–1947) who studied and worked in Rome. Museum of St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta has on display many portraits of Grand Masters of the Order of St. John, as well as various treasures once belonging to the Knights. Lascaris War Room (located in the World War II military operation rooms in the bastions of the capital) and National War Museum are dedicated to preserving the memory of World War II in Malta. St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta hosts film performances, theatre and music events, and workshops.

Manoel Theatre in downtown Valletta is a jewel of 18th century architecture and one of the oldest surviving enclosed theatres in Europe. It was built in 1731 by António Manoel de Vilhena, Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, who commissioned and personally funded the building of the theatre, in order to satisfy the growing demand among the Maltese for opera and dramatic productions, and to provide the people of Malta with "honest entertainment." The first performance, in January of 1732, was a classic Italian tragedy, Scipione Maffei's *Merope*.

The Museum of Archeology in Rabat/Victoria on the island of Gozo is located in an old aristocratic mansion, and is home to ancient Gozitan artifacts. Cathedral Museum in Malta's ancient capital, Mdina, boasts a collection ranging from Roman tombstones to 16th century art and the works of Albrecht Dürer. The Folklore Museum in Rabat/Victoria is located in three houses. Its displays recreate the life in traditional rural houses of Malta and Gozo.

A unique example of Baroque architecture, Valletta was built by the Knights of St. John, following the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. The first major buildings in Valletta are works of the noted Italian architect from Lucca Francesco Buonamici (1490–1562). Francesco Laparelli da Cortona (1521–1571) was a prominent engineer in the employ of Pope Pius IV, who sent him to built Valletta as a fortress to defend Christendom. Laparelli was assisted in his work by the Maltese Gerolamo Cassar (1520–1592), who built the Grand Masters' Palace in Valletta and St. John's Co-Cathedral. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio (1547–1616) was an Italian painter from Lecce and pupil of Michelangelo who introduced Mannerism to Malta. He painted 13 frescoes in the Grand Masters' Palace showing the Great Siege of Malta, and the "Baptism of Christ," originally a titular painting of the Co-Cathedral of St. John.

Cathedrals in Mdina and Gozo were designed by Lorenzo Gafa (1638–1703), a noted Maltese baroque architect.

Perhaps the most well-known 18th century Maltese artist is Antoine de Favray (1706–1791), a French-born painter who came to live in Malta in 1744 and spent the rest of his life there, devoting himself to portraiture and genre painting. He enjoyed the patronage of two grand masters, which resulted in a number of historical portraits. His portraits and island scenes show native Maltese in their traditional costume, and they earned

him fame in France. Portraits made for his wealthy Maltese clientele were of a more conventional nature. His first picture painted in Malta is a "Portrait of Maltese Lady" (1745), now housed in the Louvre Museum.

Maltese literature, written mostly in Italian until the 20th century, has after 1900 been defined by two major literary movements: The Academy of Maltese Writers (founded in 1920 and still active) and The Movement for the Revival of Literature (founded in 1967, short-lived but radical in its esthetic orientation and very influential). Poetry and narrative have dominated the Maltese literature, while theatre in Maltese, in the modern sense of the word, represents a recent development. Its predecessor is a form of popular Maltese theatre called *tijatrin*. Anton Manwel Caruana's (1838–1907) historical novel *Inez Farrug* is widely considered to be the first novel in Maltese. Oliver Friggieri (1947– ), who writes in Maltese, English, and Italian, is renowned as Malta's best contemporary poet. Francis Ebeyer and Oreste Calleja are the most respected modern playwrights. Children's fiction is represented by Trevor Zahra. One of the most popular women poets are Maria Grech Ganao, and Simone Inguanez, while Clare Azzopardi is known for her innovative prose, where the protagonists are strong women who refuse to be dominated by anyone. The most popular author of the new generation is Immanuel Mifsud (1967–), author of short stories, poetry, and stories for children.

## 15 WORK

Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in Malta is estimated to be approximately \$23,000. The largest sector of Maltese economy is that of services (75% of GDP, with tourism as the most important source of revenue). Industry (22.5%) produces semi-conductors, pharmaceuticals, communications technology, rubber, and plastic products; shipbuilding and repair are also important sources of revenue in Malta. Agriculture accounts for 2.5% of Malta's GDP with products such as typical Mediterranean fruits and vegetables and potatoes. Malta's entry into the European Union also increased the emphasis on the outward orientation of its economy. Most of Maltese exports go to the European Union, Singapore, and the United States. Recently, Malta has been also showing great interest in developing medical tourism. An important source of revenue for the country's public and private sector is the international film industry, with many English-language, big-budget productions filmed in Malta every year.

Malta has a highly educated, multilingual workforce of 149,000, and the unemployment rate was at 5.8% in 2008, lower than the average EU unemployment rate of 6.8%. Services employ 47% of Malta's labor force, the public sector employs 29%, manufacturing 16%, and construction and quarrying 8%. In recent years, the government has been introducing a policy of gradual economic liberalization. Malta is one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world (1,160 inhabitants per sq km, or 3000 per sq mi), and finding work is not always easy. Since the country's entry into the European Union, any citizen of the Union is entitled to live and work in Malta. Australian citizens under 30 years of age are also entitled to work on Malta for a year (significantly, this country is also home to a very large Maltese immigrant community). Citizens of other countries generally find it difficult to obtain a work permit. Job vacancies are advertised, but most are filled by word of mouth, and go to Maltese citizens.

Malta's working day is traditionally divided in two by a long siesta, when many shops and small businesses remain closed.

## 16 SPORTS

Malta's Mediterranean climate makes many outdoor sports attractive year-round, and the country boasts a wide variety of land and water sports facilities. Horseback riding is a favorite Maltese recreational activity, and horse-racing, with races being held every Sunday between October and May, is Malta's preferred spectator sport. Other sports popular among the Maltese are lawn bowling (or bocci, played in almost every village), tenpin bowling, and clay pigeon shooting competitions, held every Sunday morning. The Maltese are also passionate about water polo and soccer, and soccer teams are numerous on the Maltese islands, with the regular season running between October and May, and most fans supporting either Italy or England in international competitions. Each February, the country hosts the Malta Marathon, a 42 km (26 mi) race from Rabat to Sliema, attracting runners from the entire world. In April the Malta Archery Federation holds the International Archery Tournament at the Marsa Sports Club.

Visitors will find some of the best opportunities for recreation available in the Marsa Sports Club, a large sporting complex with first-rate sports facilities and membership available on a daily or weekly basis. Water sports, such as scuba diving (with a full range of diving courses available on Malta and Gozo), water-skiing, windsurfing, and paragliding are popular among the locals and the tourists alike, and the clear waters of Malta are ideal for snorkeling. No fishing license is required in Malta. Sailing races are popular events between late spring and mid-fall. The most attractive are the Comino Regatta in June, the Malta-Syracuse (Italy) race in July, and the Rimini (Italy)-Malta-Rimini yacht race in August. September 8 is a day dedicated to remembering the end of the Great Siege of 1565, and a rowing regatta competition is held in Valletta's Grand Harbor.

Sports facilities are plentiful throughout Malta and available at most hotels. A number of hotels also have their own facilities for tennis and squash. Excellent boat and yacht rental facilities are also available on Malta.

The Maltese islands lie on the central bird migration route, and shooting and trapping birds for trophies and display is still one of Malta's favorite and most notorious pastimes. This has attracted much negative attention from the local Ornithological Society, the conservation group BirdLife Malta, bird-lovers, and animal protection agencies in Malta and internationally. Malta has more than 16,000 hunters, and despite the legislation to curtail hunting, they often ignore the rules governing hunting seasons and protected areas, killing around 30,000 birds in Malta each year, including those belonging to the endangered species.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

During the day, the capital of Malta, Valletta, offers a wide array of attractions, ranging from the numerous museums to shopping and people watching. A city bursting with locals and tourists during the day, Valletta shuts down early by European standards, and has few late-night bars and clubs. Entertainment can be found in its Mediterranean Conference Centre, which regularly hosts music and theatre events, and in Manoel Theatre, one the oldest surviving enclosed theatres in the world.

Northwest of Valletta is a coastal district of Paceville, considered to be Malta's nightlife capital. Paceville has a great number of pubs, bars, clubs, and restaurants, especially popular with young Maltese and tourists on Saturday nights. The nearby St. Julian's and Spinola Bay are more appealing to middle-aged and older residents and tourists.

On Sundays, a favorite outing for many Maltese families is a visit to the old fishing village of Marsaxlokk, on the southwestern coast of Malta. They visit the famous fish market, take a stroll, and then sit down for a long lunch in one of Marsaxlokk's seafront restaurants.

Maltese *festas* are the most widespread and traditional form of entertainment in Malta; in their present form, they date back to the 19th century, when they emerged as a fusion of several local traditions. Every village and town in Malta and Gozo celebrates the day dedicated to its patron saint with processions, colorful street decorations and lights, parades, food and wine, music, and fireworks. Folk dances are performed in traditional dress and traditional and modern-day foods are sold at market stalls. The *fiesta* season lasts from May and September, and approximately 90 *festas* are celebrated in this small country every year. *Festas* are popular among the young and the old alike, and the forms of entertainment available have been successfully adapted to modern times.

There are five major TV channels in Malta, and their funding is provided mostly by the state and political parties. Italian radio and TV stations enjoy wide popularity in Malta among all age groups. Newspapers are published in both English and Maltese. The most widely read English-language newspapers are *The Times* and *The Independent*. *In-Nazzjon* and *L-Orizzont* are main Maltese-language papers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Maltese art of lacemaking has been renowned since at least the 16th century, descending probably from the Genoese lacemaking tradition (which, in turn, came to Italy from the East, through Venice). It reached its peak in the 18th century. The craft of lacemaking became almost extinguished in the first years of the British rule, due to the economic crisis on the islands, but was revived in 1833 by the great demand for lace in England. At the same time, lacemaking spread throughout the island of Gozo. Malta's lace (*bizzilla*) is noted not only for its exceptional beauty, but also for its remarkable durability. It is made by women on the islands of Malta and Gozo, where lace-makers often practice their craft seated in front of their houses, attracting the attention of residents and visitors alike. One of the most recognizable characteristics of Malta and Gozo lace is its creamy or honey-colored thread, made of Spanish silk and used to make exquisite tea towels or table-cloths. Black silk was also widely used until the 20th century, when its popularity diminished. British missionaries spread the art of Maltese lacemaking by copying its patterns and introducing them in China and India. Modern-age boom in tourism and the related souvenir trade has been an important factor in the survival of this ancient art. Lacemaking is nowadays taught in public trade schools for girls in Malta, and its history and techniques are subject of regular exhibitions and academic studies of Maltese national heritage.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Malta is a very low-crime rate society (this is especially true of the island of Gozo), and many social problems typical of large, highly-urbanized countries are not present in Malta. At the same time, high population density and the small size of the country represent a challenge to the Maltese economy and job creation.

Malta has the highest traffic accident rate in Europe, and drivers often ignore speed limits and the rights of pedestrians. Drivers employed in public transportation are sometimes equally disrespectful of those sharing the roads with them. Parking space is very difficult to find in Valletta.

Malta is a melting point of cultures. This fact, together with a high density population and Malta's geographical position between Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, has made Malta a tolerant society, where the downside has been be a *laissez-faire* response to alcohol abuse. The medical profession and the government still do not feel sufficient urgency to call for effective laws and regulations, specialized treatment services, or educational programs related to alcohol abuse.

Illegal immigration from Africa, with approximately 2,000 persons arriving to Malta each year, mostly on fishing boats, is one of the biggest concerns of the Maltese. In spite of the rich, multi-cultural history of the Maltese islands, the arrival of growing numbers of illegal immigrants has resulted in open expressions of racism in the country, giving rise to concern among church officials, who continue to appeal for solidarity, and humanitarian organizations. Illegal immigration has also been perceived as placing a degree of strain on Malta's health and social services, and on its labor market. Around 45% of immigrants to Malta have been granted refugee or protected humanitarian status.

Malta is also home to a large hunting population, which openly disrespects legislation governing hunting seasons and protected natural areas. Maltese hunters regularly shoot and trap a great number of birds enjoying international protection as endangered species.

A serious problem in the Maltese islands is the lack of water resources. Water in Malta is scarce and much of the country's water is obtained by the process of desalination, bringing up the problem of fossil fuel use and pollution.

Drug trade and the related delinquency are not a significant problem in Malta; the country is considered to be only a minor point of hashish trade between North Africa and Western Europe. There are fewer than 500 people living with HIV/AIDS in the country.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Malta voted for the first time in the general elections of 1947. Women are present in many spheres of Malta's labor force, ranging from banking, media, and journalism, to academia, legal and medical professions, and small business ownership. Since 1992, Malta has adopted several laws intended to eliminate all sex-based discrimination. In January 2000, for example, the country promulgated a law on equal treatment, which entered into force in October of that year. However, a 2003 follow-up report stated that further progress was still needed in this area, and recommended that the Maltese government should reinforce the existing, and implement additional, regulations in the area of gender equality. The government of Malta has adopted a policy of having at least one

women member in each one of its committees, and in recent years made considerable efforts to help achieve gender equality in the workplace, such as the 2003 adoption of the Equality for Men and Women Act and the creation in 2004 of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women. Nevertheless, large-scale workplace equality between Maltese men and women still remains a goal to be achieved, and equality issues do not yet figure prominently in collective bargaining in Malta's labor market. While the past years have seen many legal and social achievements for Maltese women active in the work force, the employment rate of 37% for women is still low by European standards, and women's presence in the labor market remains concentrated in specific sectors and levels of occupation, while being noticeably absent in others. Moreover, most women often do not enjoy the same working conditions as men, and they tend to participate in continuous training and education at a significantly lower rate.

The National Council of Women of Malta, established in 1964, is a non-governmental and non-partisan organization whose objective it is to promote equal rights for women in every sphere of Maltese society. The Department for Women's Rights was established in 1989.

Divorce does not exist in Maltese legal system. A foreign divorce can be registered in Malta, after which both parties are free to remarry. The only other way to end a marriage in Malta is marriage annulment. Legal separation (consensual or contentious) releases both parties from the obligation to live together, but the obligations to fidelity and support continue. The complications associated with divorce and separation has prompted many modern Maltese to seek alternative living arrangements, such as co-habitation. Pre-nuptial agreements are also growing in popularity.

Female writers, such as Claire Azzopardi, focusing on non-traditional themes of lesbianism and oppressive patriarchy, are contributing to a shift in perception of woman's role in the Maltese society.

Male homosexuality has been legal in Malta since 1973, while laws against female homosexuality were never introduced. The overall attitude of the Maltese towards gay tourists is generous and open, but in spite of several gay bars, clubs, and a gay hotel, there is no strong gay scene in Malta. The Malta Gay Rights Movement is a non-governmental organization fighting for the social and legal equality of gay people in Malta, while the Maltese society remains fairly traditional.

In 1981 all abortions were banned in Malta. This represented a change from a prior law, which allowed for therapeutic abortions when the life of the mother was in danger. In spite of the United Nations' urging the Maltese government to review its legislation on abortion in cases of rape or incest, or in case of therapeutic abortions, the laws governing abortion had not changed as of 2008. Together with Ireland, Malta is the only EU member state that bans abortion in cases of rape or incest.

The age of consent for sexual activity in Malta is 18, and for civil marriage 16.

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—by K. von Wittelsbach

## MARIS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Cheremis (former)

**LOCATION:** Mari El Republic Volga-Ural region of Russia)

**POPULATION:** 660,000

**LANGUAGE:** Mari; Russian; Tatar

**RELIGION:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Mari Native Religion

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Maris, formerly known as the Cheremis, are a Finno-Ugric people who inhabit the Middle Volga region of the Russian Federation. They are divided into three groups—Highland, Lowland, and Eastern Maris. The origins of the Maris are disputed, but there is little doubt that they migrated to their current homeland from the west. In Jordanes' 6th-century chronicle, he mentions the "Sremniscans" as subjects of the Ostrogoths, and this is probably a reference to the Maris (i.e. Cheremis). In any case, the Maris are more positively identified in the Russian *Primary Chronicle* (a 12th-century collection of history). In the medieval period, the Maris were subjects to the Muslim Volga Bulgarians, and later they were subjects of the Golden Horde and the Kazan Khanate. During the time of Russia's conflicts with the Kazan Khanate, to which they were in close proximity, the Maris were divided in their loyalties. The Maris on the western bank of the Volga—the Highland Maris—provided troops to the Russians, while the Lowland Maris, in closer proximity to Kazan, supported the Tatars. Lowland Maris not only helped defend Kazan in 1552, but they were also involved in a series of revolts against Russian rule in the second half of the 16th century.

In response to the Russian policy of Christianization, many Maris fled their homeland, and in the 17th and 18th centuries migrated to the Ural Mountains and the trans-Kama lands in what is today northern Bashkortostan. These communities eventually came to be known as the Eastern Maris. In addition to migration, Maris would occasionally resist Russian policies more forcefully, and they were actively involved in the major Cossack and peasant revolts of the 18th century, most notably the Pugachev rebellion of the 1770s. During the late 19th century, the Maris were especially afflicted by poverty, and 98% of Maris were rural dwellers.

With the advent of the 1917 Revolution, a small Mari national movement emerged among the Eastern Maris, but it was soon crushed by the Bolsheviks. In the 1920s, however, the Soviets authorized the creation of a Mari autonomous region, which soon after became the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), a constituent part of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). However, this republic included only the Highland and Lowland Maris; the Eastern Maris were left in other jurisdictions.

During the Soviet era, Mari autonomy was in political terms a fiction, and it was not until the era of *perestroika* (1985–91) that the Mari republic began to test its autonomy. At this time, Mari intellectuals became especially active in calling for measures from the government to better protect Mari culture especially concerning the Mari language. Meanwhile, the name of the Mari ASSR was officially changed to Mari El, meaning the Mari land. However, no serious independence movement

emerged among the Maris as among some of their neighbors such as the Tatars.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to recent population estimates there are about 660,000 Maris in the Russian Federation about half of whom live in the Mari El proper. The largest concentration of Maris outside the Mari El are the Eastern Maris, who inhabit northern Bashkortostan as well as the districts of Perm and Ekaterinburg (formerly Sverdlovsk) in the Ural Mountains area. In addition, large communities of Maris are also found in jurisdictions adjacent to the Mari Republic, especially Vyatka (formerly Kirov) district, Nizhnii Novgorod (formerly Gorki) district, Tatarstan, and Udmurtia.

The Mari Republic is divided by the Volga River. The “highland” side, corresponding to the western bank, possesses the best agricultural land, and the population there is relatively dense. The opposite bank of the Volga, the “lowland” side, constitutes the lion’s share of the republic’s territory, but this area is covered by very dense evergreen and birch forest, and much of the land is swampy. The settlements there are much sparser, the land is poorer, and much of the traditional economy depended on hunting, trapping, and gathering forest products. The Mari republic itself consists of 23,200 square kilometers (about 8,960 square miles), and its capital is Ioshkar-Ola (previously known as Krasnokokshaisk, and in tsarist times, Tsar-evokokshaisk), located on the Kokshaga River. The climate is a cool continental one, with an average January temperature of  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and an average July temperature of  $19^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $68^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Mari language is part of the Volga Finnic branch of the Finno-Ugric language family. It is most closely related to the Mordvin languages, but Mari and Mordvin are not at all mutually intelligible; Mari is more distantly related to Finnish and Estonian. Mari is further divided into two separate literary languages, Highland Mari (*kuryk Mari*) and Lowland Mari (*olyk Mari*), and it would be more precise to speak of Mari languages, as these two languages are generally not mutually intelligible. Lowland Mari speakers account for approximately 90% of Mari speakers, while Highland Mari speakers, numbering only 66,000, account for about 10%. The Eastern Maris speak a form of the Lowland dialect, but their own dialect is distinguished by a large number of Tatar loan-words. According to the 1989 Soviet census, 80.9% of Maris considered themselves fluent in their native language. Nearly all Maris are fluent in Russian, often at the expense of Mari. Among the Eastern Maris, nearly all are very fluent in Tatar as well as Russian.

Mari names are rather varied, and they include native Mari names as well as Russian and Tatar names. In fact, native Mari names are relatively rare. Native Mari male names include *Kugerge* (meaning elder son) and *Shumbat* (Saturday), and female names include *Iziudir* (younger daughter) and *Unay*.

## 4 FOLKLORE

During the first half of the 18th century, most Maris became Eastern Orthodox Christians, although large communities of Maris, especially Eastern Maris, have never become Christians and have remained adherents of Mari native religion. As a result, native religious features remain important elements in Mari folklore, even among Christian Maris. The Maris have re-



tained numerous myths, especially concerning tutelary spirits such as Sultan Keremet, Akpatyr, and Kugu Jeng. Maris venerate shrines connected with these heroes, who are said to have been past leaders of the Mari people who protected them from foreign conquerors. Mari mythology, which in some cases displays strong CHRISTIAN influences and in others strong Muslim influences, includes not only native figures, such as Jumo, the supreme God, but also figures such as Shaytan (the Devil) and biblical and Koranic prophets. In addition, the Maris have retained a rich tradition of songs, historical legends, and other oral traditions.

## 5 RELIGION

Of all the peoples of the Middle Volga region, and arguably in all of Russia, the Maris have been the most successful at retaining their native religion while at the same time resisting the pressures of Islamization. Not only has the adherence to native religious traditions deeply influenced Mari folklore and cultural life in general, but it has also remained an important factor in Mari history and, in the current period, in Mari politics as well.

In any case, most Maris were converted to Eastern Orthodoxy during the first half of the 18th century, and today roughly two-thirds of religious Maris are Orthodox Christians. Christianity took especially deep roots among the Hill Mari, who were all Christians by the beginning of the 19th century. Similarly, the vast majority of Lowland Mari were also Christian by the beginning of the 19th century, although many

communities both formally and informally retained their native religion, which they termed *chi marla vera* (the genuine Mari faith), as opposed to the *rushla vera* (Russian faith) of the Christianized Maris. Finally, the vast majority of Eastern Maris, both in Bashkortostan and the Urals region, have remained staunch adherents of the *chi marla vera*. As a result of their long contact with Tatars, many Mari communities, especially Lowland Maris, became Muslim, but these groups became assimilated into Tatar society, and their descendants came to consider themselves Muslims and Tatars, rather than Maris.

Native Mari religion has been in a process of transformation since it was first described by European travelers in the 18th century. Nevertheless, certain fundamental features endure. The focus of Mari religion is the community, and the rituals and offerings characteristic of Mari religion are intended to preserve the health and prosperity of the community. As a result, rituals are closely bound with the agricultural calendar, especially since the majority of Maris today remain rural dwellers. Rituals include sacrifices of livestock at sacred groves to ensure that the spirits protect the community. In addition, special attention is devoted to ancestral spirits, who are considered among the most important supernatural guardians of the community.

In recent times, native Mari religion has become a political force through the creation of a political organization for the adherents of the *chi marla vera*. This organization, called *Osh Mari Chi Mari*, seeks to legitimize Mari native religion and, against the protests of the Russian Orthodox Church, revitalize it.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Among Christian Maris, the most important holidays are *Kugeche* (Easter), and *Shoryk Yol* (Christmas), which involve church services, prayers, and feasting. Many Maris also observe *Aga Pairem*, a festival usually held in June after the spring planting and celebrated with offerings to the field spirits as well as feasting, dancing, and sports, especially horse racing. Despite the religious origins of this festival, many Maris celebrate it simply as a national or ethnic festival. Among the Eastern Mari, the most important festival is *Küsoto Payrem*. This usually involves the gathering of a number of villages over a two- or three-day period, and each day a specific number of animals is offered to the spirits for the protection of the community. Maris, especially those in urban areas, also celebrate the secular holidays of the Russian state, including New Year's Day (January 1), May Day (May 1) and Victory Day (May 9).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The main life-cycle rituals are closely connected with native Mari religious traditions. Among Christian Maris, baptism is naturally an important moment in the life of a child, as it inaugurates the child into the Mari and Christian community. Traditional Mari weddings were typically complex affairs, and each community had its own traditions and its own variants in the rituals. Often the groom or his family would pay a bride-price to the bride's family, and the bride would move in with her husband or in-laws. Despite the difficulties for the bride of leaving her home, weddings were usually festive occasions and involved much feasting and drinking. Today, traditional wed-

dings have become scarce, in favor of simpler Soviet-style civil weddings.

Burial rituals and memorial feasts are perhaps the rites of passage that changed the least over the Soviet period, because they are so closely connected with the veneration of ancestors so central to Mari religious life. Traditionally, Mari burial ceremonies included the placing of grave goods (such as food, household goods, tools, and so forth) in the grave. This practice is rarely encountered among Christian Maris, but it is still encountered among non-Christian Maris. In addition to the burial ceremony, funeral repasts are commonly held for the dead, especially on the 3rd, 7th, and especially the 40th day after death. The 40th-day repast is called *nylle* in Mari. Eastern Maris believe that, on the 3rd day, the soul of the deceased goes from the house to the cemetery. On the 40th day, they lead the soul back to the house, offering it vodka, pancakes, and eggs, and the family offers prayers that the deceased should be released to the land of the ancestors. Among the Christian Highland Maris, the *nylle* is observed by the family reading prayers, lighting candles, and holding a feast for the soul of the deceased.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Maris typically greet one another with the words "*salam lijzhe*," and they commonly shake hands or embrace. Guests, especially those from far away, are generally respected and honored. Hospitality is considered an important obligation among Maris.

In traditional Mari life, young people socialized during specific festivals, and there was no dating in the modern sense of the term; rather, matches were usually arranged through matchmakers or parents. In modern times, these customs have been largely eroded, especially in urban areas.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, Mari standards of living were low. Mari communities were remote and often afflicted with poverty as well as periodic famines and epidemics, including throughout much of the Soviet period. Currently, Mari rural poverty continues to be a problem, and living conditions in rural areas are generally not good, while in urban areas they are somewhat better. In rural areas, Mari houses tend to be built out of wood, moss, and clay. The houses generally have two or three rooms, and around the house there are usually various outbuildings such as barns, storage sheds, and bath houses. Such Mari houses usually have electricity, but almost never running water. Water is usually obtained from wells, communal pumps, or nearby streams. Houses are heated with wood, and in the center of every house there is a large brick or clay stove that functions as a furnace, stove, and oven. Maris in rural areas usually have their own fowl, livestock, and gardens, and much of their food is derived from these sources. In urban areas Maris usually live in small apartments that have running water and electricity, but, as throughout the former Soviet Union, the shortage of apartments is a serious problem.

In urban areas, health care is usually available, although the quality can be extremely variable. In rural areas, especially in remote areas, health care can be difficult to access, if not lacking outright. In both rural and urban areas, Maris still make use of herbal medicine and traditional healers, and Mari folk medicine can at times be both effective and sophisticated.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Traditional Mari families were large and organized into extended families. There was no formal clan or tribal system as such, as there was among the Maris' neighbors, the Udmurts and the Bashkirs. However, the Maris did form groups of extended families descended from common ancestors. These "clans" and extended families maintained small shrines for their ancestral spirits where family members would go and pray either individually or collectively. Today Mari families are small and typically include only one or two children.

In traditional Mari society, much of the agricultural work fell on the shoulders of women, in addition to their child-rearing and domestic duties. Marriages were usually arranged by matchmakers acting as intermediaries for the parents, and the groom or his parents were obligated to pay a bride-price to the bride's family. After the wedding, the bride would move in with her husband, thus being forced to leave her family and village.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Maris traditionally wove their own cloth and made their own clothing. Mari clothing, especially in summer, was made of linen and was usually white. In winter, the Maris would wear garments made of wool and reversed sheep-skin. In the past, the Eastern Maris often dressed in the Tatar fashion, with longish buttoned gowns and Muslim skull-caps. Women's traditional clothing was elaborate, usually made of white linen with extensive embroideries. Traditional clothing is still worn to some degree, especially in the villages of the Eastern Maris, where women can still be seen wearing the traditional Mari headgear. Today, however, most Maris dress in clothes typical of modern Russian society as a whole.

## **12 FOOD**

The traditional Mari diet consisted of cereals and vegetables supplemented by meat (especially poultry and pork), fish, and forest products such as berries and honey. The main staples of the Maris diet are rye bread, groats, and milk. More recently, an important staple crop is potatoes, which are grown both in rural areas and in the suburban gardens of city dwellers. Beverages include tea and vodka, as well as home-made alcoholic beverages such as beer.

Mari cooking was traditionally done in iron pots on the large brick stove located in the middle of the house. Eating utensils (especially spoons, cups, and plates) were carved out of wood. There are usually three meals a day, with the main meal in the early afternoon.

## **13 EDUCATION**

Today, literacy among Maris is very high and nearly universal. Before World War II, and especially in pre-Soviet times, illiteracy among the Maris was high, especially among the Lowland and Eastern Maris and among Mari women in general. This high rate of illiteracy was the result of several factors, including the remoteness and isolation of many Mari settlements and the fact that a Mari literary language had only been marginally developed. The schools that did exist in pre-Soviet times were primarily administered by Russian Orthodox missionaries and were most numerous among the Highland Maris. The Eastern Maris, among whom the Russian missionary presence was very low, had only limited access to the Islamic education offered by

their Tatar neighbors, and in these areas it was not uncommon for Maris to make use of Tatar as a literary language.

During the Soviet period, and especially after World War II, education became more widely available among the Maris, although much of this education used Russian as the language of instruction, thereby accelerating the assimilation of the Maris into Russian society and Russian culture. At this time, higher education also became available to Maris, leading to the development of a small Mari intelligentsia.

## **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Before 1917, there was virtually no written Mari literature, with the exception of bible translations and other religious literature translated from Russian. The formal creation of a Soviet Mari intelligentsia led to the creation of Mari literature, which included both journalistic prose and fiction, as well as poetry and, to a limited extent, drama. Since the advent of *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mari writers have been able to openly discuss national and social issues.

## **15 WORK**

In traditional Mari life, labor was organized to some degree along the lines of the clan and extended family. However, with the violent collectivization of the Mari peasantry in the 1930s, this kinship-based labor structure was replaced with a government-organized collective system, which essentially remains in place today.

## **16 SPORTS**

In the past, Mari religious festivals included sporting events such as horse racing and wrestling, and to some extent this remains the case today. In addition to these traditional sports, hockey and soccer are the main recreational sports among young people and are the main spectator sports among the population in general.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

Religious festivals, weddings, and other gatherings were important sources for entertainment and recreation in traditional Mari life. Today, television and movies are important sources of entertainment.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES**

Since the Maris inhabit a densely forested region, they are especially skilled in woodworking, especially wood carving. A popular hobby in rural areas is beekeeping, which is also an important supplementary economic activity.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

One of the most serious social problems facing the Maris today is alcoholism, which is rampant, especially in rural areas, where recreational opportunities are few. Alcoholism is common among both men and women. Alcohol is readily available in shops and also prepared in homes. Mari society is also adversely affected by the unemployment and low wages characteristic of Russia's current overall economic crisis during the 1990's. Since 2000 economic conditions have improved to some degree, although rural poverty remains a significant problem.

## <sup>20</sup> GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Mari society, particularly up until World War II, women and men had sharply divided social, economic and religious roles. Women were mainly responsible for child-rearing, domestic duties, and a portion of agricultural production. Before the 1940's Mari women had only the most limited access to education, and as a result literacy was extremely rare among Mari women. World War II brought large numbers of Mari women into the industrial and urban workforce, and into the Soviet educational system, after which they largely remained in the workforce, while retaining their traditional roles in child-rearing and domestic duties. Their limited access to education also made Mari women particularly culturally conservative, especially in terms of native language use and religious activities. Certain religious ceremonies excluded either men or women, but more generally it was women who retained religious ceremonies and practices, despite official anti-religious pressure from the authorities during the Soviet era. Since 1991 Mari women have largely maintained their access to education.

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— by A. J. Frank

# MOLDOVANS

**LOCATION:** Moldova

**POPULATION:** 4.3 million, total population of country; 78% are ethnic Moldovans

**LANGUAGE:** Moldovan (Romanian); Russian

**RELIGION:** Russian Orthodox Church; Judaism

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The ancient Dacians are believed to be the first people to set up communities in the area now known as Moldova. The Dacians were farmers who organized themselves in family groups and settled in the land between the Dniester and Danube Rivers around 2000 BC. By the 7th century BC, the Dacians had established commercial trading posts on the coast of the Black Sea and were trading with the Greeks. In the first century BC, the Dacians were conquered by the Roman Empire, and their homeland became part of the province known as Dacia.

The Romans lost power in AD 271 because of the steady immigration of people into the region from the north and east, making the province too difficult to control. After the Romans left, a free-for-all began as Slavic invaders came from the east. The territory was divided, with the eastern part dominated by the Kievan Rus state. Several groups occupied the area over the next few centuries, including the Huns, Ostrogoths, Slavic Antes, the Bulgarian Empire, Magyars, and the Pechenegs. Mongol dominion lasted from the mid-13th to mid-14th centuries. Hungary was also moving into the area, building fortifications along the Siretul River. In 1349, Prince Bogdan established an independent Moldovan principality, which was under the power of Hungary. The new principality, originally called Bogdania, stretched from the Carpathian Mountains to the Nistru River. It was later renamed Moldova, after the Moldova River that flows through present-day Romania.

By the 15th century, there was enough unity among the people for the emergence of the Principality of Moldavia. This realm consisted of all of Bessarabia (the land between the Prut and Dniester rivers) and part of present-day Romania. It was during this time that Stephen the Great (Stefan cel Mare, 1457-1504) fought against the encroaching Ottoman Empire. Stephen the Great has become a revered national hero and a symbol of Moldovan unity and sovereignty. He built many churches and monasteries to commemorate his victories over the Turks. Most of them still exist and are visited by large numbers of people. A statue of Stephen the Great stands in the main square in Chisinau, and the main boulevard of the city bears his name.

Independence for the principality was fleeting, and Moldova fell to Ottoman control in 1512 and remained an Ottoman territory for the next three centuries. During the 1700s and 1800s, the Russian Empire battled against the Ottoman Turk Empire for control over the region. In 1711, imperial Russian troops under Peter the Great first occupied Bessarabia but eventually had to give up the territory to the Ottoman Turks. This pattern of conquest and retreat by the Russians happened three more times during the 1700s. In 1812, the Treaty of Bucharest finally forced the Turks to formally hand over Bessarabia to the Russians.



In 1856, after Russia lost the Crimean War, it had to give back Bessarabia to Moldavia, which at the time was operating as a self-governing principality within the Ottoman Empire. In 1858, a union of the Moldovan territory west of the Prut River with Walachia formed the foundation for the modern state of Romania. The de facto union of Romania was accomplished with the election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as single prince of Moldova and Walachia in January 1859. When Russia won the Turkish War in 1878, it again reclaimed the territory and held on to it until the collapse of the Russian imperial government in 1917.

When the Bolsheviks toppled the Russian imperial government in 1917, an independence movement sprang up in Bessarabia, and the National Moldavian Committee (NMC) was formed. The NMC sought to unite the region with Romania and implemented policies of land reform and official use of the Romanian language. On 9 December 1918 the Bessarabian independent government voted for a total union with Romania, which was recognized by the Treaty of Paris. The Soviet Union, however, never recognized Romania's sovereignty over Bessarabia. In 1924, the Soviet Union created the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic on the left bank of the Dniester River (which was Ukrainian territory), even though its population was only 30% ethnic Romanian.

In 1939, Hitler formally accepted that Bessarabia was Soviet territory as a concession to appease the Soviet dictator Stalin. The Soviet government formally created the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic on 2 August 1940. During World War II, Romania fought against the Soviet Union to regain control over the region. By 1944, however, Soviet troops were occupying Bessarabia and all of Romania as well. Since Romania had no allies, it had to submit to Soviet demands. As a result, the Soviet Union reestablished the territorial arrangements of 1940. One of the most detrimental consequences of the Soviet regime was the forced collectivization of agriculture (the transformation of private farming into state agricultural enterprises). The refusal of many farmers to give their land and cattle to the state resulted in mass deportations to Siberia. Only the strongest managed to survive the long trip and the rough conditions of the Siberian wilderness. The ones who stayed in Moldova had to cope with a wave of severe famine in 1945–47, caused by drought, crop failure, and poor government policies.

The Soviet authorities changed the name of the Romanian language, spoken by the majority of the population, into Moldavian and its alphabet from Latin to Cyrillic (the alphabet of Russia). For approximately 45 years, Moldovans had limited access to their history and culture.

At the end of the 1980s, a new independence movement called the Popular Front of Moldavia (PFM) arose. The PFM demanded the end of Communist rule, propagated the revival of the Romanian language and culture, and wanted to again unite the republic with Romania. In 1989, the government restored the use of the Latin alphabet, abolished the official use of the Cyrillic alphabet of Russian, and officially changed the name to the Republic of Moldova. In 1991 Moldova was one of the first republics of the former Soviet Union to declare its independence.

However, the Russian-speaking minorities felt threatened by a possible unification with Romania, even though a new Moldovan law guaranteed equal rights to all ethnic minorities. As a result, two self-proclaimed, breakaway republics, the



Trans-Dniester on the eastern bank of the Dniester River, and Gagauzia in the south, were formed in 1990. The situation in the Trans-Dniester erupted in violence in 1992. Eventually the Gagauz region obtained local administrative independence, while the Trans-Dniester has not yet been recognized either by the government of Moldova or by any other government or international organization.

In 2000, the Moldovan parliament passed a law making Moldova a parliamentary republic with its president elected by parliament rather than by popular vote. The people of Moldova voted the Communist Party into power in 2001, but in the years since the Communists have steadily lost ground to opposition parties. Most of the economy and agricultural land has been successfully privatized.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The tradition of the Moldovan homeland is really that of historic Bessarabia—the land between the Prut and Dniester rivers in the southwestern corner of the former Soviet Union. One of the smallest of the former Soviet republics, Moldova's entire landmass amounts to only about 33,670 sq km (13,000 sq mi), making it only slightly larger than the U.S. state of Maryland. Most of the terrain consists of hilly plains with many rivers and streams. In the west, the Prut River forms the boundary with

Romania, and the Dniester River marks part of the boundary with Ukraine in the east. The Stepa Balti (Balti Plain) is in northern Moldova. The highest point is Mount Balenesti (in the west-central part of Moldova), which rises to 430 m (1,400 ft) above sea level. About 75% of Moldova is covered by a highly rich type of fertile black soil known as *chernozem*. Much of the rich soil lies in the lower elevations and plains of the Budzak Steppe in the south. The climate is continental, with summer temperatures averaging around 20°C (68°F) and winter temperatures averaging -4°C (25°F). Annual precipitation can fluctuate widely in the north, averaging around 40–60 cm (16–24 in). Flash-flooding often occurs in summer because of the uneven topography.

Today, about 78% of Moldova's 4.3 million inhabitants are ethnic Moldovans. Moldova has historically been home to a large number of ethnic groups, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz (a Turkish group of the Christian faith), Gypsies, Jews, Poles, and Germans. Although Moldova was the most densely populated of all the former Soviet republics, its people are traditionally rural, and there are few large cities.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The language spoken in Moldova is Romanian, though it is called Moldovan by an amendment to the Moldovan Constitution. Romanian is similar to Italian, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, as a member of the eastern division of the Romance languages of the Indo-European family. Moldovan was written in the Cyrillic alphabet during the Soviet era in order to legitimize the claim that it was a separate language from Romanian. Many archaic and obsolete words that had Russian origins were reintroduced, along with modern Russian slang and phrases. Names of persons and places were also Russianized during the Soviet years. After independence, however, the Moldovans named the official language as "Moldovan," to be written in Latin script. The Russian language is still heard in Chisinau, the capital, almost as often as Romanian.

Mihai, Ion, Mircea, Octavian, and Andrei are common boys' names, and Elena, Angela, Diana, Christina, and Liliana are common girls' names. Examples of everyday Romanian words include *noroc* (hello), *buna ziua* (good afternoon), *da* (yes), *nu* (no), *poftim* (please), *multumesc* (thank you) and *la revedere* (goodbye).

### 4 FOLKLORE

Moldova has an extensive history of folklore, consisting of ballads, songs, tales, jokes, riddles, dances, and games. The ancient folk ballad "Miorita" is the most prominent of all in traditional Moldovan culture. It provides an insight into the philosophical and moral values of the Moldovan people. Its rhyme reveals the melodiousness and beauty of the Romanian language.

Ileana Cosinzeana and Fat Frumos are the romantic couple present in a number of fairy tales, in which the brave Fat Frumos frees the beautiful and kind Ileana Cosinzeana from the evil dragon and they live happily ever after. Pacala and Tindala are two funny men that are the characters of hundreds of jokes.

### 5 RELIGION

Because of the influence of Romanian culture, most Moldovans (98%) associate with the Orthodox Church, although there are also some Uniates. Before the Soviet era, most eth-

nic Romanians in Moldova belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church, but the Russian Orthodox Church maintains jurisdiction over the area today. The Orthodox Church in Moldova today conducts liturgies in Russian, Romanian, and Turkic (Gagauz). Moldova has over 1,000 Orthodox churches and dozens of Orthodox monasteries. There are also 15 Old Believers churches (a breakaway Orthodox sect dating from the 17th century). In 1992, the Moldovan government guaranteed freedom of religion but required that all religious groups be officially registered with the government. The registration process has prevented many groups from practicing freely, and the international community continues to urge the Moldovan government to reform the situation.

A pogrom (an organized persecution or massacre) against Moldovan Jews in 1903 severely reduced the urban Jewish population. Jews in Moldova were also harassed during the Soviet era. In the early 1990s, many Jewish newspapers were started, and a synagogue and Jewish high school opened in Chisinau. Also, the Chisinau State University created a Department of Jewish Studies. Current estimates place the Jewish population of Moldova at about 24,000.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays celebrated widely in Moldova are the traditional Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. Christmas is celebrated in much the same way as in Western countries, although it is less commercialized. Easter is a family holiday, when women bake a special kind of bread called *pasca* and paint eggs red.

Each village has its own holiday once a year, called *hram* (church). It celebrates the establishment of the village church. By now it has lost some of its religious character, becoming a special day when each family prepares a lot of delicious food and receives guests from other villages or towns. It is the day of family reunions, fun, and friendship.

Independence Day is on August 27, when Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union. It is a national holiday. *Sarbatoarea Limbii Noastre* (National Language Day) is on August 31 and marks the day when Romanian became the state language of Moldova and changed back to the Latin alphabet. During this day, people go out to attend outside concerts and book fairs.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Christian baptism is an important rite of passage for Moldovan children and their parents. High school graduation usually marks a turning point where a young Moldovan is faced with a dilemma: either to begin work or to continue school in preparation for the university. Many also begin to consider marriage after graduation, because the completion of high school marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. As with many other cultures, the wedding ceremony formally distinguishes the union of the couple and the joining of their families.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Social relations in urban and rural areas differ from each other. In villages, even people who do not know each other are supposed to say "Buna ziua" (Good day) to each other. In big towns and cities, only acquaintances greet each other. In formal settings, adults greet each other with "Buna ziua." Men

shake hands and may also kiss the women's hands. Kissing a woman's hand, when introduced to her or when meeting on formal and semiformal occasions, is an old custom that has survived in Romania and was reintroduced to Moldova after it became independent.

Young people usually greet each other with "Salut" or "No-roc," which are the Romanian equivalents of "Hi" and "Hello." Close friends may hug and kiss each other on the cheek. Family and relatives greet each other with hugs and kisses. It is very common for parents to kiss and hug their children.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The instability following the end of the Soviet Union has significantly affected public health in Moldova. The birth rate in 2008 was 11.01 per 1,000 people (down from 16.1 in 1992), and the death rate in 2008 was 10.8 per 1,000 people (up from 9.2 in 1992). Infant mortality was 13.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008. There is a lack of modern medical facilities and equipment. The leading causes of death among Moldovans are cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, and accidents. Major health problems include high levels of alcohol consumption and both respiratory and digestive illnesses related to the overuse of herbicides and pesticides.

The rural culture of Moldova has always placed a high value on private housing. During the Soviet years, much of the housing stock was in fact held by private citizens. Most of the urban housing units were built in the years immediately following World War II, because the cities had been heavily bombed. When Moldova became independent in 1991, there was a severe shortage of building materials and an unreliable delivery system. Private builders accounted for only 26% of construction in urban areas, but for 95% in rural places. During 1993–95, most state-owned housing was privatized through a system of vouchers in order to create an open housing market. Today, about 80% of housing units are privately owned.

Railroads are an important means of transportation for many Moldovans. Tracks link most of the cities within Moldova, and railroads also connect with Odessa (in Ukraine) on the Black Sea and with several Romanian cities. Highways link most of the cities and are the primary means of getting around Moldova. However, poor road maintenance and an unreliable gasoline supply often make it difficult to drive from one city to another. Most Moldovan towns have at least 1,000 inhabitants and are connected to public utilities. Chisinau offers an extensive public transport system, and the city is serviced by an international airport and train station. In Chisinau's older sections, narrow, winding streets and alleys are lined with bungalow-style houses that are more reminiscent of Bulgaria and Romania than of the former Soviet Union.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

At the beginning of the 20th century, families with 5–9 children were common in Moldova, but that is not the case anymore. Most couples decide to have only one or two children. This can be explained by economic insecurity and by the fact that usually both parents work full-time and are not able to take care of more children. Family connections are quite strong due to longstanding traditions, but also because of financial dependence. Children depend on the support of their parents for a long time, even after they get married. Parents



*A Moldovan man fishes on a frozen lake on the outskirts of Chisinau, Moldova. (AP Images/Vadim Ghirda)*

count on the help of their children when they retire. Quite often grandparents dedicate themselves to babysitting.

The distribution of family duties between men and women is uneven, as women have more responsibilities. Most women work full-time, take care of their children, and do most of the shopping, cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Men usually spend most of their time at work. It is not common for men to cook or do the dishes or the laundry. In spite of all difficulties, a lot of women manage to build careers by finding a balance between their jobs and household chores.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional national costume has become obsolete. It can only be found in museums, as well as in some families that passed the costumes from generation to generation. The female's traditional garment consists of a white embroidered blouse, a vest embroidered and furnished with sheep fleece on the edges and a white skirt with lace on the hem, usually covered by a black embroidered overskirt.

The male costume consists of a white embroidered shirt, a vest similar to the women's, white pants, a hat decorated with peacock feathers or flowers, or a sheep fleece cap, and a wide belt. The belt can be made of leather or cloth and is usually embroidered. Both men and women wear a special kind of shoes, called *opinici*. They are made of pieces of leather, wrapped around the feet, with leather laces tied around the ankles.

The costumes used to be entirely handmade. Every young girl was supposed to be able to weave cloth and to do elaborate embroidery. Now, only folk music and dance groups wear national costumes, but most of them are mass-produced. Some elements of the costume, such as the handmade embroidery, periodically come into fashion.

People who live in cities and towns dress like other Eastern or Western Europeans. Jeans and tee-shirts are popular with teenagers and young people. It is common to dress up when going out to the theater, or on other formal occasions.

The everyday clothes of people who live in villages are fit for farming work. Women wear flowery cotton or flannel dresses, depending on the season, and flowered kerchiefs on their heads. Men wear shirts and pants made of durable cloth, and caps or hats.

## 12 FOOD

To most former Soviet citizens, the mention of Moldova immediately brings to mind *Moldavskoe vino* (Moldavian wine). Moldova's mild climate and fertile land is home to many well-known vineyards in the hills. Moldovans take great pride in their tradition of wine-making, and homemade wines are common. Sparkling wines and brandies are also produced.

The local bazaar is the distribution method used for supplying fresh fruits and vegetables. The availability of fruit and vegetables depends on the season. Most of the ingredients used for typical meals grow in Moldova. A typical breakfast may consist of a sandwich, a piece of cake, an omelet, or porridge, with tea, coffee, or milk. Lunch is an important meal of the day, consisting of a starter, soup, and a hot dish. Dinner may also be a hot meal, or may be lighter than lunch.

Traditional Moldovan dishes resemble the cuisine of the neighboring countries. Stuffed cabbage or grape leaves are considered part of the national cuisine, as well as *placinte*, a special pastry filled with cheese, potatoes, cherries, cabbage, etc. *Coltunasi* resembles ravioli. *Mamaliga* is a hard corn porridge, eaten with sheep cheese, farm cheese, an omelet, fish, fried meat, sour cream, or milk.

## 13 EDUCATION

During the Soviet years, ethnic Russian and Ukrainian students were given educational preference, which meant that there were few Moldovans in higher education at that time. Since independence, the Moldovan government has put in place reforms to promote higher education for all citizens. Moldova has an extensive system of primary and secondary schools, and most children go to a preschool before entering the primary grades. Literacy is nearly universal (99%). Moldova's educational system requires students to complete 10 years of basic education. After that, students may choose from either a technical school or a university preparation track.

Since independence, the Moldovan government has restored the Romanian language as the language of instruction and has added classes in Romanian literature and history to the curriculum. There are also student exchange programs with Romania, and several thousand Moldovans are now enrolled in Romanian schools. The government has also replaced old Soviet textbooks with new ones donated by the Romanian government. Ethnic minorities have the right to education in their own languages, and there are many schools with instruction in Russian and other languages. Perhaps the most unique

educational institution in Moldova is the 150-year-old College of Wine Culture, which graduates about 300 students from all over Eastern Europe each year.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Moldovan music, dance, and arts share many traits with their Romanian counterparts. For example, Moldovans often play the *cobza*, a wooden stringed instrument similar to the lute that is common in traditional Romanian music.

The Moldovan government has a leading role in the promotion of folk culture through Joc, the national dance company, and Doina, the national folk choir. There are numerous semiprofessional and amateur dance and music groups that perform around the country as well. There are a number of professional theaters, most of which perform in Romanian.

During the Soviet era, Soviet authorities split Moldovan culture along urban and rural lines, with the urban culture influenced by ethnic Russians and the rural culture influenced by ethnic Romanians. The Soviet government encouraged the cultural arts in Moldova but sometimes distorted certain aspects to camouflage the Romanian heritage.

Moldova shares most of its literary heritage with Romania, and sometimes it is difficult to draw a dividing line between Romanian and Moldovan literature. The 19th century produced many outstanding Romanian authors, such as the poet Mihai Eminescu; the storyteller Ion Creanga; the linguist, writer, and historian Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu; the literary critic Titu Maiorescu; and many others. World-renowned Romanian writers and philosophers such as Mircea Eliade and Lucian Blaga are widely studied and respected by Moldovans.

## 15 WORK

Moldova remains largely an agricultural country, with over 40% of workers employed in agricultural jobs. Service jobs now account for almost 50% of the labor force, however, with industry employing only 12%. The official unemployment rate in 2007 was 2.1%, but 25% of the labor force was employed abroad.

In villages, children begin to help their parents around the house, or on the farm, at an early age. In the city, high school graduates start working when they are around 17 and college graduates at around 22. Many students, however, have part-time jobs.

During the Soviet regime, there was an extensive system of social welfare that provided good pensions for retirees. Because of inflation since independence, the pensions became insufficient for meeting basic needs. The Moldovan government has put programs in place to improve the situation.

A working day lasts 8–9 hours, and the work week is from Monday through Friday.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is popular with youths and adults, both for playing and watching as spectators.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Attending family and friends' reunions, the theater, concerts, movies, and discos are typical forms of recreation. The numerous public parks of Chisinau are wonderful recreation spots. On vacations many people travel to the Romanian or the

Ukrainian seaside or mountains. Traveling abroad, however, is affordable only to a small percentage of the population.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pottery, woodcarving, carpet-weaving, and metalwork are the most famous Moldovan handicrafts.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Moldovans face many of the same economic problems as the other former Soviet republics in the transition to a market-oriented economy. The economic transformations brought with them inflation, price deregulation, unemployment, and the weakening of the social welfare system. Wages could not keep up with the increase in prices, plunging many people of Moldova into poverty. Moldova is now one of the poorest countries in Europe, with almost one-third of the population falling beneath the poverty line in 2008. Retirees, single parents, and the unemployed have been the most vulnerable groups. Black-market activities brought fast wealth to some Moldovans, and caused a deep sense of unfairness about the present wealth distribution. The roads suffer from long-term neglect, and the telephone system is inadequate and unreliable.

There is still some tension with the two regions within the country that have declared their independence from Moldova. The Gagauz region in the south declared the "Gagauz Republic" as a separate nation in 1990. The Gagauz are Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christians who live mainly in and around the southern cities of Comrat, Ciadîr-Lunga, and Vulcanesti. The other region that broke away consists of a large number of Russian-speakers living on the eastern bank of the Nistru River who proclaimed the establishment of the "Dniester Republic" in 1990. In 1994, the Moldovan Constitution gave both groups more political freedom and granted them home-rule. This autonomy has eased tensions in the Gagauz region. However, the Trans-Dniester government is supported by the military presence of Russian troops, who agreed to withdraw but have yet to do so. Conflicts over the Trans-Dniester region continue to cause problems for Moldova.

Environmental problems in Moldova are a legacy of Soviet mismanagement. The liberal use of pesticides, herbicides, and artificial fertilizers was designed to increase crop output despite the ecological repercussions. Today, Moldova's groundwater and soil are contaminated with chemicals, some of which (such as DDT) were shown to be harmful long ago. In addition, deforestation has contributed to the ongoing soil erosion problem. Moldova has ratified a number of international agreements to address environmental problems, including the Kyoto Protocol.

As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, crime has become more frequent in Moldova. Crimes motivated by money or drugs have become the most prominent, and it is believed that many more of these crimes go unreported. Opium poppies and cannabis (marijuana) are grown illegally in Moldova and exported to other former Soviet republics through the black market. Moldova has also become an important transfer point for illegal drugs headed for Western Europe.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Because of its entrenched poverty, Moldova is a major source of sexual trafficking in women and children, as well as illegal trafficking in children and men for forced labor. Lack of

economic prospects makes Moldovans vulnerable to offers of jobs or marriage in other countries, only to find themselves sold into slavery of one form or another. Trafficking even occurs within Moldova's own boundaries, between the destitute rural areas and Chisinau, the capital city. In recent years, the Moldovan government has begun to put in place programs to confront and reduce illegal trafficking, but with the persistence of Moldova's economic woes, the root cause of trafficking will take some time to eradicate.

Although homosexual acts were legalized in Moldova in 1995, there are no laws specifically against discrimination or harassment of homosexuals. Homophobia remains rampant, and both verbal and physical abuse of homosexuals is not uncommon.

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—revised by Dianne de Mott

# MONÉGASQUES

**LOCATION:** Monaco

**POPULATION:** 34,000

**LANGUAGE:** French (official), also Monégasque, Italian and English

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; small number of Jewish and Church of England residents

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Next to Vatican City, the Principality of Monaco (*Principauté de Monaco* in French and *Principatu de Múnegu* in the native *Monégasque* tongue) is the world's smallest independent state. It is located on the northern coast of the Mediterranean, surrounded on three sides by France, and on the fourth side by the sea, only 8 km (5 mi) from the French-Italian border. Monaco is a Constitutional Monarchy and Principality with Prince Albert II as the head of state. Monaco's defense is the responsibility of France, and its foreign policy is aligned with that of the French Republic. The principality is the smallest of all French-speaking countries and the world's most densely populated state. Its climate is Mediterranean, with mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers.

There is ample evidence of Stone Age settlements on the territory of today's Monaco but its first known inhabitants were probably the ancient Ligurians. Throughout antiquity, this area was called "Port Herakles" for an ancient god known in Greek as "Herakles Monoikos" (or "Herakles of the Single House") and a temple that was dedicated to him there. The Greek geographer Strabo describes the place as "The Port of Monoikos." In the Roman Empire Monaco was part of the Province of the Maritime Alps and after the fall of the Empire it was invaded by various tribes of barbarians, among them the Saracens. In 1215 the Genoese Ghibellines, supporters of Emperor Henry VI, attracted by the strategic advantages of Monaco's harbor, lay the first stone of the fortress, the foundation of today's Prince's Palace. Eager to attract residents, they granted the new arrivals exemptions from taxes and important land privileges. In the next three centuries Monaco would become a site of continuous strife between the Ghibellines, supporters of the Emperor, and the Guelphs, supporters of the Pope. One of the most prominent Genoese Guelph families were the Grimaldis. In 1296 the family was expelled from Genoa and settled in Provence. From there, in 1297, with their small army, the Grimaldis seized the fortress and captured Monaco. They lost control over it in 1301 only to return in 1331. Charles Grimaldi, considered to be the real founder of the principality, then bought the neighboring lordships of Menton and Roquebrune; they would remain part of the principality until 1861. Yet, it took the Grimaldis nearly two centuries to establish their indisputable sovereignty over Monaco in 1489, when Charles VIII of France and the Duke of Savoy recognized its independence. In 1524 Monaco was placed under the protection of Spain, with grave financial consequences for the principality's treasury. The reign of Honoré II (1587–1662) marked the most brilliant period in Monaco's history. Honoré II firmly allied himself with France and in 1641 the French king Louis XIII signed a treaty placing Monaco under the friendly protection of France, but recognizing the independence of the country

with all its rights and privileges. The Spanish garrison was expelled and a French one installed in Monaco. In addition, the prince significantly enlarged and embellished the Palace and added art by the greatest European masters to its collections. Life at the court flowered, with numerous balls and ceremonies throughout the year.

After Honoré's death, the splendor of Monaco's courtly life greatly diminished and in 1731 the male line of the Grimaldis died out. Jacques-François-Léonor de Matignon, heir of one of the most illustrious families of Normandy, who had married into the Grimaldi family, was in 1731 named Prince of Monaco Jacques I, only to abdicate in 1733 in favor of his son, Honoré III. Honoré ruled Monaco until 1795, but spent more time in his Paris residence and in Normandy than in the principality. In 1789, after the outbreak of the French Revolution, Monaco's rulers, whose income largely depended on their fiefs in France, found themselves cut off from the considerable part of their financial resources. In February 1793 the principality was incorporated into France and the Palace—its works of art dispersed or sold—became a hospital and a home for the poor. Members of the prince's family were imprisoned and then freed; some even served in the French army. Following the abdication of Napoleon in 1814, sovereignty was restored in the principality. In 1815 the second Treaty of Paris placed it under the protection of the King of Sardinia, and the financial resources of the country were considerably diminished. In 1848 the communes of Menton and Roquebrune declared their independence and in 1861 Prince Charles III gave up his rights over these territories to France, reducing thus the principality to one-twentieth of its territory, in exchange for a large indemnity and guaranteed independence. Forced to find additional sources of revenue, in 1863 the prince established a gaming house under the name the *Société des Bains de Mer* (The Sea Baths Company). The revenue generated by the Company and the number of visitors exceeded even the most optimistic expectations, especially after 1868, following the construction of the railway line between Nice and Ventimiglia. It is indeed to Charles III and to his son Albert I that Monaco owes its most striking economic development. Albert I, who succeeded his father in 1889, was a world-famous oceanographer and paleontologist, one of the founders of modern oceanography, and a great pacifist. Arts prospered once again in the principality and in 1911 Albert I gave Monaco a constitution. His son, Louis II, succeeded him as the prince of Monaco in 1922. In 1943 the Italian army occupied Monaco, establishing a Fascist administration. After the fall of Mussolini's Italy, Germany occupied the principality and started to deport the resident Jewish population. Soon after the end of World War II, in 1949, Louis II was succeeded by his grandson Rainier III, issue of the marriage of Louis's only daughter Charlotte to Prince Pierre de Polignac, who adopted the name of Grimaldi upon his marriage.

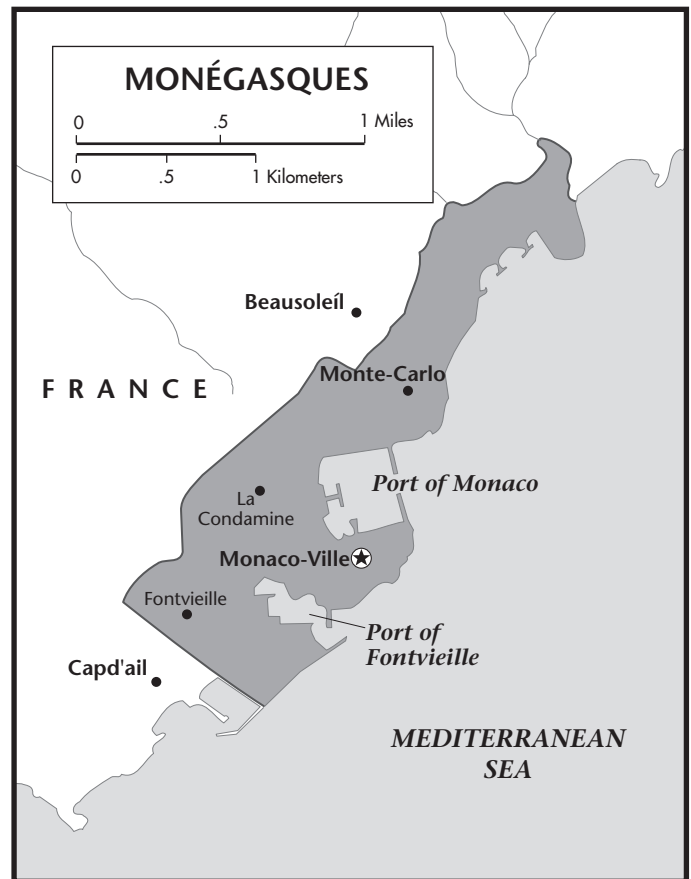
Rainier III (1923–2005) was to be, with his 56-year long reign, one of the longest ruling monarchs of the 20th century. He drew international attention by his 1956 marriage to the American motion picture actress Grace Kelly. After ascending the throne of a country with a practically empty treasury, Rainier III worked assiduously on promoting Monaco as a tax haven and a sophisticated commercial and international tourist center. In 1962 he introduced a new constitution that reduced the power of the sovereign, abolished capital punishment, and granted voting rights to women. He became popularly known

as “The Builder Prince,” working tirelessly to transform Monaco into a thriving international business, sports, tourism, and culture center, and launching in 1965 the land reclamation project to increase his country’s small territory. Rainier was equally dedicated to establishing Monaco’s status in the international community and in 1993 the principality became the 183rd member of the United Nations. With the contribution of Princess Grace, Monaco became an international cultural center, attracting visitors and celebrities from all over the world. After the princess was killed in a 1982 car accident, her eldest child, Princess Caroline, assumed her mother’s official duties. Rainier III died in April 2005 and the enthronement of Prince Albert II took place in July of the same year. Princess Caroline of Hanover (as she has been officially known after her 1999 marriage to Prince Ernst-August of Hanover, grandson of the last German Emperor) continues to represent Monaco in her country and abroad and is UNESCO’s goodwill ambassador for the education of young girls and women. Through AMADE (World Association of Children’s Friends), founded in 1963 by Princess Grace, she continues to promote children’s rights around the world, especially in Africa and Asia. Princess Stéphanie, the youngest of the three children of Rainier III and Princess Grace, after pursuing a career as a pop singer and fashion designer, became involved in the battle against AIDS as a UNAIDS ambassador. She is also the founding president of “Fight Aids Monaco,” an organization she established to help people living with HIV. The Foundation Prince Albert II of Monaco, created by Prince Albert II, has as its goal the protection of the environment and funding research on sustainable development at the international level.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Monaco is situated at France’s southeastern-most corner, near the Italian border. With an area of 1.97 sq km (0.76 sq mi) it is roughly the size of New York City’s Central Park. Its coastline is 4.1 km (2.5 mi) long. The principality is divided into four traditional quarters. Monaco-Ville, the oldest section, is the site of the prince’s palace, which is located on a promontory called *le Rocher* (the Rock), the gardens, Saint Nicholas Cathedral, and the Oceanographic museum. The Condamine is the second oldest area of Monaco, situated in the northwest corner of the principality. Monte-Carlo, created in 1866 and named by Prince Charles III, is the main luxury resort area and home to Monaco’s famous gambling casino. Fontvieille is the newest of the four traditional quarters and is built on the land reclaimed from the Mediterranean Sea since the 1970s. Its waterfront area features an industrial zone consisting mainly of light, non-polluting industries, the Louis II soccer stadium, a heliport with links to Nice airport in France, and the International University of Monaco. Administratively, Monaco is divided into 10 wards. They are: Monte-Carlo, Saint Roman, Larvotto, La Condamine, Monaco-Ville, Fontvieille, La Colle, Les Révoires, Moneghetti, Saint Michel. The 11th ward, Le Portier, is to be created from land reclamation and settled from 2014.

The people of Monaco are called Monégasques or Monegasques. Of Monaco’s estimated population of 34,000 only approximately 16% claim Monégasque descent. The remainder of its residents are foreigners (among which 47% are French, 16% Italian, and 21% Swiss, Belgian, British, and other, with some 125 countries represented), attracted by its glamorous lifestyle and—on a more practical level—its liberal tax policies. Non-



French residents pay no personal income, capital gains, housing, or real estate tax. With 15,000 residents per sq km (40,000 per sq mi), the tiny principality is one of the world’s most densely populated countries.

## 3 LANGUAGE

French is Monaco’s official language, but the language of daily communication among its Monégasque residents is often Monégasque (natively Munegascu or Munegu). It is a Romance language and a dialect of the modern Ligurian language, currently spoken in the Italian region of Liguria and parts of the Mediterranean coastal zone of France. Monégasque is most similar to the language spoken in the nearby Italian city of Genoa, and it has been strongly influenced by the Provençal (also known as Occitan), a Romance language very similar to modern Catalan, and spoken in Southern France and some parts of Italy and Spain. Because the Monégasques are a minority in Monaco, in the 1970s the Monégasque language was considered threatened. Strong efforts have been made since to prevent its disappearance. Monégasque is now taught in schools and its survival among the new generation of Monégasques is considered certain.

The most important literary work in Monégasque is widely considered to be the poem “The Legend of Saint Dévôte” (“A Legenda de Santa Devota”), sung in 1927 by the Monégasque poet Louis Notari (1879–1961). Before Notari, only oral literature existed in Monégasque. His writing, mostly religious in its inspiration, represents the starting point of the revival of the



Prince Albert II (third from left) and Princess Stephanie (center) pose with Monegasques at the Red Cross headquarters in Monaco. The Prince and Princess often attend several events before Monaco National Day on November 19. (Valery Hache/AFP/Getty Images)

Monégasque language in the principality and the flowering of its literature. Notari also wrote Monaco's national anthem.

Because of the large number of foreign nationals residing in the principality and many visitors, English is frequently used as a *lingua franca* (vehicular language). Italian is also widely spoken.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

A colorful legend surrounds Monaco's patron saint, St. Dévote, who was born in the island of Corsica in the 3rd century AD. Persecuted by the Romans for her religious beliefs, she died a martyr's death before reaching the age of 20. Obeying the instructions they had received in a vision, a priest and his deacon put the martyr's body in a boat and set out to sea. The boatman, following the dove that he saw flying out of the dead woman's mouth, landed in Monaco, where her body was buried at a chapel. St. Dévote's martyrdom is commemorated every year on January 27, a national holiday. As part of the observance, in the evening of January 26 the Grimaldi family and other government officials set fire to a wooden boat in front of the church of St. Dévote near the harbor. On January 27 a religious service at the Saint Nicholas Cathedral is held, and there is a procession of the relics and the blessing of the Palace, the town, and the sea. The service is followed by fireworks and receptions in the Monte Carlo Opera House.

National Day (November 19) festivities typically are: a Thanksgiving Mass, a conferring of honors and decorations at the Palace, a gala evening at the Opera House, gifts and treats for children and the elderly, and fireworks. Monégasque Christmas typically means a family meal consisting of *brandamincium*, a Monégasque dish of salt cod with garlic, oil and cream; *cardu*, cardoon in white sauce; *barbagiuan* (literally "Uncle John"), fritters stuffed with vegetables and cheese; and flat, crunchy biscuits called *fougasses*. A Christmas loaf (*u pan de Natale*), with an ornament in the shape of a cross, made of walnuts and olive twigs, decorates the table. Before Christmas dinner, the youngest or the oldest guest soaks an olive branch in a glass of old wine. He or she then approaches the fireplace, makes a sign of a cross with the branch, and pronounces a few words on the virtues of the olive tree.

On a darker note, another legend claims that a woman wronged by Rainier I, an ancestor of the current monarch, placed a curse on his family, casting a shadow on any happiness they might enjoy in marriage. The Grimaldi family has certainly had its share of unhappy events in the recent past. In 1982 Princess Grace was killed in a car accident and in 1990 Stefano Casiraghi, the first husband of Grace's eldest daughter Caroline, died while competing in a boating race, leaving his young wife a widow with three small children.



## 5 RELIGION

The official religion of the principality is Roman Catholicism (approximately 90% of residents are Roman Catholic), but freedom to practice other religions is guaranteed by the Constitution. There are five Catholic churches in Monaco and one cathedral. Monaco also belongs to the Church of England's Gibraltar diocese. There is one Anglican church, with membership of 135, but serving also a large number of visitors and tourists. The Jewish community numbers 1,500 and congregates in the Association Culturelle Israélite de Monaco, a house converted into a synagogue, Hebrew school, and a kosher shop.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most national holidays in Monaco are holy days of the Christian calendar, including Easter, Saint John's Day (June 24), the Day of Saint Roman (August 9), who is, after Saint Dévôte, the most venerated saint in the Principality, the feasts of the Assumption (August 15), and the Immaculate Conception (December 8), Ascension, Pentecost Monday, All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas. The martyrdom of Monaco's patron saint, St. Dévôte, is commemorated on January 27. Other holidays include New Year's Day and Labor Day (May 1) and the Monégasque National Holiday (or Saint Rainier's Day, November 19; before 1857, the Day of Saint Dévôte was celebrated as the National Holiday).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Monégasques live in a modern European country, where Roman Catholicism is nominally the faith of the majority, but where religion, like in the rest of Western Europe, is not widely practiced. Many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are based on religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage, but the emphasis is placed significantly less on the religious than on the social aspect of the ritual. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked in many families by graduation parties, culminating with the celebration of the successful passing of the *baccalauréat*, a demanding comprehensive examination taken at the end of the last year of high school.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The people of Monaco interact with each other in ways similar to those of people in sophisticated cities worldwide. Relationships between sexes are marked by complete equality and cohabitation (either before or, increasingly, instead of marriage) is common. The customary greeting is a handshake while the embrace and kisses on both cheeks are reserved for friends and relatives. The usual form of address is "Mr." or "Mrs." (*Madame*, used with all women except with very young girls), followed by the last name. Some of the more traditional ways of interaction and courtesy (opening a door for a woman or an elderly person, or offering them a better seat in a restaurant or in public transportation) are still widely observed. In daily interactions with strangers and casual acquaintances, great importance is attached to a courteous and cordial, but unintrusive mode of communication, where spirited remarks are exchanged and appreciated, but where questions of a more personal nature are generally discouraged until a much closer relationship has developed. In conversation, strong and straightforward opinions

about politics and culture are expected. Invitations to dinner are usually reciprocated by a small gift of chocolates for the hostess. In restaurants with friends, acquaintances or business partners, most Monégasques do not split the cost of a meal, instead taking turns in paying for meals on different occasions.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Monaco's residents enjoy a high standard of living that includes one of the greatest per capita incomes (\$70,670) in the world. The demand for residential space in the tiny principality is so great that lawns are built on the roofs of some new residential dwellings. Architectural styles range from the ornate grandeur of 19th-century villas to the modern lines of concrete high-rise apartment buildings. Meeting the high demand for luxury housing is a high priority for both the government and the construction industry. Apartments rent for as high as \$25,000 a month or more, and the cost of a square meter (10.7 sq ft) in a new building varies between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Nationals of any country may buy real estate in the principality.

Monaco's residents can afford the best in health care and enjoy excellent health. There is no governmental or societal discrimination against persons with disabilities. The average life expectancy is close to 78 years, and the country has a low infant mortality rate of 4 deaths for every 1,000 live births, with one physician and over 100 nurses for every 700 people. The principality has frequent bus service, and rail service is provided by the French national railroad system, which has about 1.6 km (1 mi) of track in the country. The international airport at Nice is only 10 km (6 mi) from Monaco, and the principality's harbor provides sea access.

Though not a member of the European Union, Monaco uses the single European currency of the euro. About 45.9 out of 100 residents are cellular phone users, and 49.4 are Internet users. The majority of Monaco's restaurants and hotels are pet-friendly. Public cleaning service employees keep Monaco's streets and green areas outstandingly clean and beautiful at all times of the year.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The typical family in Monaco is the nuclear family composed of parents and their children, where close relationships are maintained with grandparents, cousins and in-laws. Most Monégasque women have one or two children during the course of their childbearing years. Like in the neighboring France, cohabitation is increasingly replacing marriage, and the number of children born out of wedlock is consequently rising. Because of the small size of their country, the residents of Monaco have an unusually personal relationship with their ruling family, the Grimaldis. All adult Monégasques are invited to the palace to celebrate major events in the lives of the Grimaldi family, such as engagements, weddings, and christenings. All Monégasque children under the age of 12 are invited to an annual palace Christmas party that includes refreshments, entertainment, and a gift for every child.

## 11 CLOTHING

Monégasques wear modern, stylish clothing typical of Western and Mediterranean Europe, especially France and Italy. Monaco's residents can be seen sporting the best in fashion (formal or casual), especially in the evening, at Monaco's restaurants, casinos, and other entertainment spots. While topless bathing

is common and accepted in Monaco as in other parts of the French Riviera, multilingual signs posted throughout Monaco warn: "Apart from the immediate vicinity of the beaches and bathing facilities it is forbidden to walk around bare-chested, wearing only a swimming costume, or barefoot. Failure to comply with these regulations could result in prosecution." Visits to local churches require modesty in dress, banning bare shoulders for women and shorts for both sexes.

## 12 FOOD

Monaco's cuisine, like that of the neighboring cities on the French Riviera, is essentially Mediterranean in nature, with plenty of olive oil, fresh tomatoes, onions, garlic, black olives, and anchovies. Fresh fish—including sea bass, red mullet, and *daurade*—are, naturally, plentiful and popular, as is the famous fish stew, *bouillabaisse*. The region is also known for its abundance of fresh vegetables, savored both in salads and dishes such as *ratatouille*, a vegetable stew made from tomatoes, onions, peppers, and eggplant (called *aubergine* on the Mediterranean coast). A local favorite for a warm snack is *barbajuan* (or *barbagiuau*), a fried pastry filled with chard, spinach, leek, oregano, and cheese. Wine is drunk with lunch and dinner. The Hôtel de Paris has the world's deepest hotel wine cellar, with a special section boasting champagnes that are almost 200 years old.

## 13 EDUCATION

Education in Monaco is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16, and literacy is practically universal (99%). The school curriculum is based on that of France, but students are also taught the history of Monaco and, increasingly, there is formal instruction in Monégasque (natively *Munegasco* or *Munegu*), a small Romance language spoken in the principality. Students attend *école élémentaire* (primary school) between the ages of 6 and 11, *collège* (junior high or secondary school) and *lycée* (high school) between the ages of 11 and 15, and 15 and 18, respectively. Monaco has 10 public schools, among which seven are nursery (*école maternelle*) and primary schools, one *collège*, and two *lycées*, in addition to two denominational private schools and one international school. About 80% of students in public schools are not Monaco nationals, and one-third of these students are not domiciled in the principality.

The International University of Monaco is an English-language private institution founded in 1986. It offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in business.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The lively interest that the Grimaldi family has always demonstrated for the arts, and their continuously strong patronage of resident and visiting artists, set the tone for the principality's cultural life. The Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra is a permanent orchestra established in 1863. It found its home in the Salle Garnier Opera House in 1879, and in 1953 it was renamed the National Orchestra of the Monte-Carlo Opera, becoming finally in 1979 the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra. Among its past conductors are many great names, from Richard Strauss and Arturo Toscanini, to Leonard Bernstein, Lovro von Matacic and Lorin Maazel. Its Artistic Director and Conductor-in-Chief in 2008 was Marek Janowski, scheduled to step down in 2009. Another one of Monaco's cultural attractions is its opera. Since its creation, the Opera of

Monte-Carlo has attracted the world's best singers, and composers such as Bizet, Franck, or Massenet wrote some of their best works for the Opera. At one time the Opera was also home to the Ballets Russes, a ballet company of the famous Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev. Today, Monaco has its own ballet company. In 1985, following the wishes of her mother, the late Princess Grace, Princess Caroline of Hanover established the new Monte-Carlo Ballet, the official national company of the principality. The company is housed at The Princess Grace Academy of Classical Dance, a ballet school that the late Princess Grace established in 1975. The youngest Monégasques are represented by The Little Singers of Monaco, a world-renowned children's choir, established by Prince Antoine I in the early 18th century. Monaco's Music Academy was founded in 1956, under the patronage of Prince Rainier III. In memory of his father, in 1966 Prince Rainier also established the Foundation Prince Pierre, which assigns the Prince Pierre Literary Prize, the Musical Composition Prize, and the Contemporary Art International Prize. In 1964 the Princess Grace of Monaco Foundation was created to support the performing arts. The Foundation, now chaired by Princess Caroline of Hanover, has three permanent activities: The Princess Grace Academy of Classical Dance, the *Boutiques du Rocher*, and The Princess Grace Irish Library, established by Prince Rainier in 1984 as a tribute to the Irish heritage of his late wife. The library houses a collection of rare Irish books and music sheets, and its staff promotes Irish culture through conferences, readings, and fellowships.

The Oceanographic Museum and Aquarium, located at the water's edge and towering over a cliff, was inaugurated in 1910 by Prince Albert I, grandfather of Prince Rainier III, and an internationally recognized scientist and oceanographer. It houses an impressive aquarium and a display of whales' skeletons, as well as both historical and modern exhibits dealing with oceanographic study. In 1902 Prince Albert I founded Monaco's Museum of Prehistoric Anthropology, and in 1913 he established the basis for today's Exotic Garden, devoted to the preservation of the flora of the world's arid zones.

## 15 WORK

Monaco has practically no unemployment. It is the only country in the world in which the labor force exceeds the total population. Over two-thirds (28,000 French and 6,000 Italians) of its labor force of 44,200 commutes to work from France or Italy. All non-French citizens wishing to work in Monaco must obtain a work permit from the Department of Employment. Every employee in Monaco is entitled to 12 legal paid public holidays and a minimum of 30 days annual paid vacation days. Commerce represents 40% of all economic activity in the principality. Banking and financial sector account for 15% of its economy. Tourism is a major employer in this nation that welcomes over 6 million visitors from abroad every year, with 700,000 overnight stays and 700 conferences (2005), and it represents 13% of the economy. Monte-Carlo's casino enterprise, the Société des Bains de Mer (S.B.M.), provides numerous jobs in its restaurants and hotels, as well as in the casino itself. Industrial activity represents approximately 8% of the total economy in the principality. Many workers—especially those who commute from neighboring countries—are employed in new real-estate projects and in the low-polluting, but high-added-value light industries that have been established in Monaco

since the 1970s through the efforts of Prince Rainier III. Products include perfumes and cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, precision instruments, jewelry, leather goods, radio parts, textiles and garments, with the emphasis on high-tech production. The rest of Monaco's economy is based on real-estate development, shipping, transportation and other services. Most recently, discussions about the future of Monaco's economy have been directed toward attracting businesses based on information technology services. The total turnover of the private sector in 2005 was approximately €11 billion.

## 16 SPORTS

Monaco is connected with several world-famous sporting events. The first Monégasque sports association was founded in 1888, eleven years after the Tennis Master Series had begun in Monte-Carlo. 1904 saw the first speedboat meeting, and 1929 saw the first automobile Grand Prize race. Today the race is named Monaco Grand Prix and is widely considered to be the most challenging Formula One track in the world. The Grand Prix is a unique event whose circuit lies totally within Monaco's modest borders. Its 100 laps include both uphill and downhill stretches, hairpin turns, and passage through a tunnel. Residents gather at strategic spots throughout the principality to view the race, and some lucky ones can even see part of the route from their own houses. Other well-known sporting events include the Monte-Carlo Golf Open, which was held at Monte Carlo Golf Club at Mont Agel (France) between 1984 and 1992, and the prestigious Monte-Carlo Masters (until the early 1990s known as the Monte-Carlo Open), an annual tennis tournament for male professional players, held in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (France). The tournament is played on clay courts, every year in April/May, and is part of the ATP Masters Series. Additionally, a number of world's top professional tennis players have made Monaco their primary residence.

In addition to their status as top spectator sports, both golf and tennis are also popular participatory sports in Monaco. The Monte-Carlo Country Club's clay tennis courts overlooking the Mediterranean Ocean are some of the most scenically located in Europe. Monégasques also enjoy a variety of water sports. The Monaco Yacht Club runs a sailing school and also rents out boats for big-game fishing.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Monaco residents and visitors enjoy a variety of opera, ballet, and concert events all year round. In addition to high culture, Monaco hosts International Circus Festival, Monte-Carlo Television Festival and Market, Monte-Carlo Spring Arts Festival, Monaco International Dogs Show, International Fireworks Festival, Monaco Yacht Show, and International Fine Art and Antiques show.

Monaco has been known as a gambling mecca since the opening of the Casino at Monte-Carlo in 1863. Residents and visitors alike enjoy its beaches, its numerous museums and other cultural events, and its beautiful gardens, including the Princess Grace Rose Garden that boasts 150 different varieties of roses. The yearly Rose Ball and Monte-Carlo Red Cross Gala Ball are two of Europe's most glamorous charity events, bringing together many international celebrities, and benefiting the Princess Grace Foundation and the Red Cross. The annual film festival in nearby Cannes, France, is one of the most famous in the world of entertainment. Monaco's residents re-

ceive numerous foreign and locally produced radio and television programs.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

In 1964 the Princess Grace of Monaco Foundation was established to support local craftsmen and women. In 1960s, the princess opened shops in Monte Carlo and Monaco-Ville where potters and other local artisans could sell their work. The two shops, known as the *Boutiques du Rocher*, continue to sell Monégasque and Provençal hand-made wares, gifts made of porcelain, wood and textiles, toys and dolls. Their income benefits hospitalized children, and their entire costs of operation are underwritten by the Foundation.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

With its high level of per capita income (\$70,670 in 2007), high employment, and efficient government, Monaco is free of the social problems encountered in most countries. A watchful police force sees to it that street crime is virtually nonexistent. Some 500 police officers patrol the streets of the tiny principality, and close to 100 surveillance cameras allow the officers at police headquarters to further monitor any suspicious activity. Concern has been voiced in some quarters about the impact of the country's industrial development and residential construction boom on the quality of daily life for its residents.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Life expectancy for women in Monaco in 2007 is 83.85 years (compared to 75.99 for men). The median age of Monaco women residents is 47.5 (compared to 43.5 for males). The fertility rate for 2007 was 1.75 children born/woman; the birth rate is 9.12 births/1,000 residents. The literacy rate for women in Monaco is 99% (same as for men).

The new Constitution of Monaco was proclaimed on 17 December 1962, establishing the Supreme Court of Monaco, abolishing capital punishment, and providing for women's suffrage. The Constitution declares all Monaco nationals to be equal before the law. While the percentage of women in politics and government still does not correspond to their percentage of the population, women are very active in public service. Some remnants of legal discrimination are still present, particularly with regard to the transmission of citizenship: women who acquire Monégasque citizenship by naturalization cannot transmit it to their children, while naturalized male citizens can. Only male nationals between the ages of 16–49 are considered available for military service. On a historic note, a treaty between Monaco and France, signed in 1918, contained a clause providing that, should the Grimaldi dynasty become extinct, Monaco would become an autonomous state under French protection. A revision to the Constitution in 2002 added females and their legitimate children to the line of succession, making Princess Caroline second in line for the throne of the principality.

Women are generally represented well in the professions, although somewhat less well in the business. They receive equal pay for equal work. In 2008 the Dean of the International University of Monaco was a woman, as were two out of the seven members of Monaco's Physicians Association Council, and one of the three members of Monaco's Attorneys Association Council.

Reported occurrences of violence against women are rare, and there are no reports of sexual harassment. Domestic violence is illegal, and any wife who is a victim of marital violence may bring criminal charges against her husband. The Monaco government provides mandatory, free and universal education for children up to the age of 16.

Monaco shares very liberal French attitudes towards sexuality. Cohabitation is increasingly replacing marriage. Homosexuality, male and female, enjoys wide social acceptance, and is legal under the Monégasque Penal Code, all criminal penalties for homosexual behavior having been eliminated in 1973. The legal age of consent is set at 16 years. At present, Monaco provides no civil unions, or recognition of same-sex partners. There are, so far, no exclusively gay public clubs or gathering places in Monaco.

The Grimaldi family has demonstrated firm commitment to promoting equal rights for women and homosexuals. Princess Caroline of Hanover, appointed as UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for the education of young girls and women, is active in lending Monaco's financial support to women's welfare in developing countries, especially in Africa and Asia. Her younger sister Princess Stéphanie has dedicated considerable efforts to the fight against AIDS, and to removing the stigma surrounding the disease. She created the foundation "Fight Aids Monaco" in support of people living with HIV and is an UNAIDS (Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS) ambassador.

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—by K. von Wittelsbach.

# MONTENEGRINS

**LOCATION:** Montenegro

**POPULATION:** 620,000

**LANGUAGE:** Montenegrin or Serbian

**RELIGION:** Orthodox Christian, some Catholics and Muslims

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The name Montenegro is from the Italian phrase *monte nero*, or "black mountain." The native name *Crna Gora* has the same meaning, an apt name for a small, rugged, entirely mountainous country. While it is one of the most recent countries to gain independence, the national identity has a long history. The land reaching up into the mountains from the steep east coast of the Adriatic Sea was part of the ancient Roman Empire. Slavic speakers, the linguistic forebears of the present Montenegrin population, arrived from the 6th century AD on. These early medieval newcomers settled in small villages forming a patchwork pattern with those of the Romance speakers and those of the Albanian speakers, all engaged in shepherding and small-scale agriculture. This pattern persisted until a century ago with elements of it remaining to the present. In the medieval period the land was also dotted with small fortified towns, some of which were church centers.

In the early Middle Ages coastal cities, such as Ulcinj, Bar, and Kotor related to the culture of the Adriatic Sea and of Italy just across the sea, while they related politically to the inland, paying tribute to Serbian kings and feudal nobles there. Later, they were ruled by Venice.

From the late 10th through the 12th century the lands comprising much of Montenegro but extending farther south to include all of the environs of Lake Skadar was known as Doclea or Duklja. This was a period of swiftly shifting boundaries and allegiances.

The area then came to be known as Zeta and was ruled first by Serbian kings from the late 12th century until 1356. However, in the 14-15th centuries the larger shepherds' camps gave rise to tribes and clans that were the basis of society until a century ago. In 1356 Zeta became an independent entity under one of these clans or great families, the Balšić family. It was subsequently ruled by Serbian rulers called despots from 1421 to 1451. The Crnojević family took it over for the remainder of the 15th century.

In the 14th century mention of Crna Gora or Montenegro begins in historic sources, especially in reference to the area between Cetinje and Lake Skadar. The Turkish Ottoman Empire's conquest of Serbia in 1389 and Bosnia in 1463 was the defining moment for Montenegrin identity. Montenegro, for a time a smaller area than Duklja and Zeta, fell technically to the Turks in 1496 but was never fully conquered by them, although they took over the coastal cities of Ulcinj and Bar in 1571. From 1516 on the name Montenegro became official, and hereditary rule was consolidated in the bishops of Cetinje, who became the prince-bishops, gaining more power in the 17th century, consolidating it into an effective monarchy in the mid 19th century, and continuing until World War I. As the once seemingly unstoppable Ottoman Empire declined in the 19th century, neighboring Croatian Dalmatia, Herzegovina and Bosnia were taken over by Austria-Hungary; Serbia became an

independent kingdom. Montenegro was not conquered except for a brief surrender to the doomed Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I.

Throughout the five centuries of Ottoman rule over the Serbs, the Montenegrins prided themselves in being the only Serbs remaining independent. This was the essence of their identity. They might be impoverished, but their clan-dominated warrior culture of fighting and guns, united by the Orthodox Church, kept them free of outside domination. However, when Serbia gained full independence in 1878, the Montenegrins were faced by a contradiction. Which part of their identity was essential? The Serb aspect implied that they should unite with Serbia, de facto becoming subordinate to it. The independent aspect suggested that Montenegrins should stay apart, but that put them in opposition to the Serbs in Serbia.

After World War I, when the maps of Europe were redrawn and numerous nationalities became independent nations, Montenegro did not. It was swallowed up in the newly-created Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–1941).

During World War II, Italy, which had swiftly taken the length of the Croatian Adriatic coast to the northwest and Albania to the southeast, found separatist collaborators and took over inland Montenegro as well in 1941. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia led an uprising that left the Italians holding only the cities of Cetinje, Podgorica, and Nikšić, but in 1942 the Italian fascists took back the hinterland. Guerrilla partisans continued the struggle to drive them out. Italy surrendered in 1943 only to be replaced by German troops, and the resistance continued. After heavy fighting in late 1944, Montenegro was liberated on 6 January 1945.

Montenegro then became the smallest of the six republics of the Federal People's (later Socialist Federal) Republic of Yugoslavia. Typically called simply Yugoslavia, this was a maverick Communist country. Within three years it broke with the Soviet Union, soon opening its borders to the West and finding its place in the world as a leader among the non-aligned nations. While the government, dominated by the Communist Party, never allowed democracy, it did modify the economic system to one of worker self-management. It also granted the republics broad decentralized powers in economic affairs and administration, especially following the constitution of 1974.

In 1992, after Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia had broken away from the SFRY, the Republic of Montenegro joined together with the much larger Republic of Serbia to form the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 2003 the state was reorganized and renamed Serbia and Montenegro.

In 2006 the Montenegrin population voted to declare independence from Serbia, and Montenegro became a separate country. It is now working hard to become a member of the European Union.

Montenegrins are very aware that their old royal capital was Cetinje. In 1946 Yugoslavia moved the capital of the newly-formed Republic of Montenegro to newly-named Titograd. In 1992 the old name of this city, Podgorica, was restored, but it has remained the capital.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Montenegro is a small country in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula. It is roughly diamond shaped, with the east



coast of the Adriatic forming its southwestern edge, lying between Croatia in the north and Albania in the south. The border with Croatia extends northward from the sea for only about 20 km (12.4 mi); from there Bosnia and Herzegovina lie to the north and west of Montenegro. From the northernmost point of the Montenegrin diamond on, the land to the northeast of the border is Serbia. From the easternmost point, the land to the southeast for about 60 km (37 mi) is Kosovo, technically still a part of Serbia. Albania forms the southeastern border of Montenegro. The coastline is about 100 (60 mi) km long as the crow flies, but nearly 300 km (180 mi) if the deep indentations are counted.

Winters are harsh and snowy in the mountains, but the Mediterranean climate of the coast is very mild. Mimosas bloom in late January in Hercegnovi.

The country had a population of 620,000 according to the 2003 official census. There were an additional 50,000 people in the country, apparently refugee or immigrant Bosnians and Albanians. Among the population of citizens and permanent residents, self-declared Montenegrins are 43%, Serbs 32%, Bosniaks 8%, and Albanians 5%. However, Montenegrins have

a long tradition of considering themselves Serbs, so these are not two clearly distinct groups.

Thus, earlier Montenegrin emigrants to the United States organized and identified themselves as Montenegrin-Serbs; only since the late 1990s have they called themselves specifically Montenegrin. There are perhaps 260,000 Montenegrins in Serbia. There are also self-identified Montenegrins in Croatia, Canada, Australia, Cyprus, Argentina and other Latin American countries. Such emigrant populations number in the thousands.

It has been estimated that a few thousand Montenegrins live in Albania, not as immigrants but remaining since medieval times.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Most of the inhabitants of Montenegro speak one or the other of two dialects out of the many that make up Serbo-Croatian, a South Slavic language. In terms of the oldest and deepest dialect divisions, both fall within the Štokavski group that forms the basis of all the standard languages, and both fall within the Ijekavski group that was favored by Vuk Karadžić, the 19th century pioneer in the standardization of Serbo-Croatian, but was adopted as the Croatian standard, not the Serbian one. The dialect of the northern half of Montenegro is in essence that of Vuk Karadžić, while the dialect of the southern half including the coast and the past and present capitals has various archaic and less usual sound features and shares some changes in the case system with the southern Serbian dialects. Publishing in the past used the same Cyrillic alphabet as the Serbs of Serbia, but unlike them, they used the Ijekavski spelling system. However, Montenegrins called their language Serbian.

At present both the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabet are used.

The constitution adopted after Montenegro declared independence in 2006 states that the official language of Montenegro is Montenegrin. Its standard has not yet been defined, but the Latin alphabet in the form used by Croatians seems to be favored. A few scholars call for a more radical break with Serbian and Croatian and want to add three new letters to each alphabet. Some citizens declare their languages to be the mutually intelligible Serbian, Bosnian, or Croatian. Some citizens speak Albanian, which is a very different language.

Montenegrins typically have a first (given) name and a surname. Many typical first names are Orthodox saints' names, such as Aleksandar, Petar, Jelena (Helen), and Marija. Others are meaningful Slavic names, such as male Predrag, "most dear," or female Milena, "beloved." Names that originally were nicknames like Stanko can also be used as given names. Surnames were frequently derived with the suffix *-ić* 'son or daughter of' added to the root of a personal name, although now these surnames are passed on through the generations. Other surnames go back to old clan names. Some are of Romance or Albanian origin.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Industry, mass communications, and even widespread literacy came relatively late to Montenegro. A rich orally-transmitted folk tradition has remained alive until the recent past. It is famous for the heroic, often bloody epic poems that are performed to the accompaniment of the *gusle*, a one-stringed instrument played with a bow. They are not memorized but

improvised; the plot and the phrases are learned, but they are composed anew with each performance.

The small seaside town of Perast has a legend that in 1452 fishermen found a miraculous healing icon of the Virgin on a small offshore reef. A church was built on the spot. The "*fašinateda*" is now held annually on July 22. A procession of decorated boats row out to the church in the early evening bearing rocks that are dropped to shore up the church.

### 5 RELIGION

The coastal areas stretching inland to include Doclea (near today's Podgorica) were Christianized in Roman times, from Rome, not Byzantium, and Roman influence persisted into the Middle Ages. For centuries after the Great Schism divided Orthodox Christianity from Roman Catholicism, both coexisted in Montenegro or rather were not really distinguished from one another. Subsequently, the Orthodox Church, supported by Serbian princes, grew stronger, spread to the coast, and supplanted Roman Catholicism. In the era of the struggle against the Turks, and until recently, Montenegrins identified strongly with the Serbian Orthodox Church. With the impetus for national independence in recent years came the establishment of an independent Montenegrin Orthodox Church. It is controversial, for the Serbian Church still claims authority over all of Montenegro and discourages other Orthodox churches from recognizing that of Montenegro.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Public holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (May 21), and Statehood Day (July 13), each celebrated with two days off. Other important religious holidays are Christmas on January 7 and Good Friday, Easter, and Easter Monday, on whatever date they fall in the Orthodox Church calendar. The Montenegrin Church also honors the death of St. Peter of Cetinje, the prince-bishop credited with founding the modern state, on Lučindan, or St. Luke's Day.

There is also an important private holiday, the *slava*, or celebration of the family's patron saint. Relatives and friends are invited or drop in for a feast that includes a traditional cake *slavski kolač*.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The birth of a son was signaled with gunfire, while the birth of a daughter was not considered an occasion for rejoicing.

Marriage was a ritual reinforcing the patriarchal system. It was seen not as the union of the couple but rather the union of two families. Hitherto, the girl had been in the care of her paternal family; henceforth, she would be protected by her husband's family. On the wedding day a party consisting of the groom's brothers and a flag bearer and other males went from the groom's home to that of the bride. Lunch was at the bride's parents' home, with toasts, gifts and numerous rituals. Then, the groom's party took the bride with them. Both families fired guns in celebration. Dinner was at the groom's home, the future home of the couple. The marriage was performed in a church in the groom's village. People danced the *oro*. The new family saw to it that at first the bride did not sleep with her new husband, but rather with other members of his family—even the brothers-in-law, who, however, remained fully clothed and did not touch her. Only when the family judged it to be time,



Supporters of Montenegrin independence celebrate in Podgorica, Serbia, Montenegro, after an independent monitoring group said Montenegro voted for independence in a 2006 referendum. (© Koca Sulejamovic/epa/Corbis)

the new wife began sleeping with her husband. While many aspects of marriage and weddings were similar among Orthodox Montenegrins, Slavic Muslims, Albanian Muslims, and Albanian Catholics, all of whom live in Montenegro, the unusual custom of first sleeping with the in-laws rather than the groom was practiced only by Orthodox Montenegrins. Already on its way out in the early 20th century, it was sometimes still done as late as World War II.

Funerals traditionally included laments that commented on the life of the deceased and called for revenge if he had died violently. While laments in surrounding areas were performed by women, in Montenegro there was a special kind sung by men.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

When people meet for the first time, each person introduces himself or herself; as they shake hands in pairs, each repeats his or her own name.

Traditions of hospitality are strong. A host expects to treat a guest lavishly with food, coffee, and drink.

The two traditional virtues among Montenegrins are *čojstvo* and *junaštvo*. The second means “bravery” or “heroism” while the first, a local pronunciation of the word for “humanity,” implies magnanimity and self-restraint towards others—protecting others from oneself.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Long known as one of the most impoverished and backward areas of Europe, Montenegro has made breathtaking progress in recent decades. Thus, an unimpressive infant mortality index of 11 per 1,000 in 2006 must be compared with the 84.7 infant mortality in 1951. Life expectancy is 72 years for men and 77 years for women. The number of physicians per 100,000 population reached 191 in 2003, comparable to that of the United States and increasing yearly.

The consumer goods that are standard elsewhere, including electric ranges, refrigerators, and televisions, are standard here too. Estimates of Internet access range from 20% to over 40% of the population. The number of cell phones in the country exceeds the population.

### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

The traditional Montenegrin marriage was an arranged marriage. If the man and woman lived nearby, they might have known each other before, but in most cases they were strangers when they married. The groom's family scrutinized the bride's family more than the individual young woman for suitability. Then, the family asked the girl's father for her; if he agreed, the bride was asked for consent, but girls did not feel they had any option to refuse. A woman was taken from the family in which she grew up (*rod*) and brought to live with her husband's family (*dom*).

The household was an extended family in which all the brothers lived and brought in their wives.

It is only since World War II that people, particularly in urban areas, have begun to live as nuclear families. In the past half century household size has been decreasing, judging by figures in the Statistical Yearbook of Montenegro 2007.

The extended family still functions, even though they do not all live in the same household. People tend to know the names of even distant ancestors. They stay in touch with distant cousins and may ask them for help.

Many households in the countryside would move between the summer herding camp, or *katun*, and the winter home. In recent decades the *katun* has transformed seamlessly into the summer home, a popular feature of life throughout the countries of former Yugoslavia.

### **11 CLOTHING**

People dress as do any Europeans or Americans, whether it's suits for formal business, jeans, shorts, t-shirts, or sleeveless blouses on the street, or bikinis on the beach. The folk costumes are still an option for special occasions. Thus, a recent photo from a blueberry festival in Podgorica shows men in suits and ties but women in the long straight skirt, vest, and headscarf of the national costume.

The historic male costume had a characteristic cylindrical brimless cap with a flat top, white shirt, belt, blue pants down to the knees, sometimes baggy, white knee boots, and a red vest or jacket. The jacket might have a unique type of sleeves sewn on in the back but not the front, so that the arms could be withdrawn in warm weather while the vest was still on, leaving the sleeves to hang loose. Costumes were often surprisingly lavish considering the poverty of the people, adorned with gilded threads and silver plates called *toke*, themselves decorated with filigree work and gilt patches.

### **12 FOOD**

Traditional foods of Montenegro emphasize milk, buttermilk, cheese, *kajmak* (a rich soft cheese that has not aged), sheep cheese, meats, *pršut* or smoked dried ham, wheat, buckwheat, corn, potatoes, cabbage, and honey. These are the foods of a mountain region better suited to herding than extensive farming. There are regional wines and brandies, often made from grapes. In earlier times, especially in times of war, food was scarce. Now, the economy has improved to the point where

there is plenty to eat. Still, Montenegro is a net importer of food.

### **13 EDUCATION**

A country that was 77% illiterate in 1900 now has only about 2.3% illiteracy in those aged 10 years or over. Primary education lasts from four to nine years. Secondary education may be in academic schools or in specialized vocational schools. The University of Montenegro, founded in 1974, now has 14 faculties and one higher school, most located in Podgorica, but some in Nikšić, Cetinje, Kotor and Herceg Novi. By 2009 all education at the university will be conducted in accord with the Bologna Declaration, the European standard. Nearly half of university students have their education financed by the government, but a swiftly growing number are financing it privately.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Aside from the rich traditions of epic folk poetry and folk music and dance, which are still alive there, one author stands out as the embodiment of the spirit of Montenegro. Petar II Petrović Njegoš was born in 1813 (possibly 1811; records are sparse) in a family nearly as impoverished and illiterate as all the others in the country at that time. His uncle, Bishop Petar, saw to it that several nephews were educated as potential successors, and upon the uncle's death in 1830 seventeen-year-old Njegoš became bishop. The duties of the bishop also included rule of the secular affairs of the country, primarily mediation among the rival tribes. Over the years he became ever less the mediator and more the absolute monarch. A lifelong poet, Njegoš's greatest work is *The Mountain Wreath*, an apocryphal account of how the Montenegrins rose against the Ottoman Empire in the late 17th century and slaughtered all those compatriots who had opportunistically converted to Islam. The poem is in the form of a drama in the ten-syllable style of folk epic poetry. Scenes of discussion and depictions of folk life lead to the poet's conclusion that the massacre was inevitable and necessary.

An important World War II Partisan fighter and later government official, Milovan Djilas, got into trouble for his political writings in the early 1950s. He later turned to writing memoirs and historical and literary works about Montenegro and was widely published outside Yugoslavia.

### **15 WORK**

Out of 150,800 Montenegrins employed in 2008, nearly one fifth worked in retail and wholesale commerce, nearly as many in diverse manufacturing. Significant numbers also worked in transportation and communications as well as in hotels and restaurants.

There are bauxite mines and an aluminum plant, now in Russian hands, but the latter consumes half of the country's supply of electricity and may be closed down.

Tourism, especially on the coast, is a swiftly growing industry. Montenegro was one of Lonely Planet's seven Top-Pick countries to visit in 2008. Tourism was already well-developed in the Yugoslav years. Sveti Stefan, a tiny island city with traditional clustered red tile roofs, was renowned as a luxury resort. The tourist industry is now attracting extensive foreign investment.



Unemployment, which had reached a peak of 32.7% in 2000, has been steadily falling and was down to 10.81% as of the end of July 2008.

It is estimated that nearly 50,000 Montenegrins, mostly age 20 to 30, work illegally in the informal economy, especially in tourism and construction, which means that their employers do not pay into the social insurance system. Montenegro is inspecting workplaces and has been able to convert many such jobs into regular, legal ones.

## 16 SPORTS

Clearly football (soccer) is the leading sport for participation, followed by various martial arts (judo, karate, wrestling), basketball, and general fitness. Not only football but also water polo makes the headlines, thanks to a successful team. The women's handball team is on the front page when it is in an international match.

The old and dangerous economic activity of floating logs downriver to market has in recent decades been turned into a tourist attraction: rafting on the Tara.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Judging by the number of sports clubs and the specialized daily newspaper devoted to sports, both participation and watching are important parts of recreation. Television is in all households; many shows are from the U.S. or other countries. Young people follow the same movie and TV stars and popular music groups as elsewhere in Europe and North America.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The folk art belongs to the Dinaric Zone that encompasses not only Montenegro but also Bosnia, Herzegovina and the mountains of Croatia to the northwest and north, and western Serbia to the northeast. An isolated, mountainous region, it preserves forms rooted in Roman and even prehistoric times. Geometric motifs predominate in all media. Traditional unglazed pottery with simple patterns is archaic in style. Wool is woven, often in striped or geometric designs. Utilitarian wooden objects, such as chests, distaffs, water jugs, cradles, and one-stringed *gusle* may be elaborately carved and sometimes painted as well. Metal work was more highly developed, for daggers, swords and guns are prized possessions and can be lavishly decorated with beaten silver, filigree, and inset stones. Silver jewelry may be done in filigree shaped into balls for a necklace. A well-to-do woman could have a belt decorated with large silver plates, either embossed or covered with extensive and surprisingly intricate filigree.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Montenegro has a murder rate that is more like that of the United States than the much lower rate of surrounding European nations. One-third of killings are by guns. Some appear to have political motives, e.g. the assassination of prominent newspaper editor Duško Jovanović in 2004.

Poverty remains a problem despite some vigorous recent development. Per capita Gross Domestic Product is similar to that of other Balkan countries but far behind neighboring Croatia and even Serbia.

Violence against women is a tradition and now a recognized problem.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Traditional Montenegro was a warrior clan society, a patriarchy in the purest sense of the word. A woman was subordinated, first to her parents and then to her husband and his family. Her purpose was to bear sons, not daughters. However, with men frequently away at war, be it five hundred years of fighting against the Turks, blood feuding among clans, or the four wars of the twentieth century, women were in fact responsible for much of the agricultural and herding work as well as all household work and child rearing. They carried supplies to the fighters, buried the dead, and in some cases bore arms and participated in the fighting. Such women were celebrated in song.

Nowadays women have jobs and can put their children in daycare while they work. Typically, they still have the double duty of household work. As their economic independence has increased, particularly in the past two decades, some have begun to keep their own surnames when they marry or use both maiden and husband's surname.

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—By T. Alt and W. Browne

# MORDVINS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Erzias; Mokshas (self-references)

**LOCATION:** Russia (Moksha and Sura rivers region)

**POPULATION:** 1.15 million

**LANGUAGE:** Mordvin (Moksha and Erzia); Russian

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Mordvins are a Finno-Ugric nationality inhabiting the Russian Federation. The term *Mordvin*, however, is not used by the Mordvins themselves, who consider themselves to be two separate groups—the Erzias and the Mokshas. The first mention of the Mordvins in historical sources may reach back to the 6th century, when the historian Jordanes mentions the “Mordens” as subjects of the Ostrogoths, then inhabiting the South Russian steppe. The Mordvins are identified with more certainty in the Russian *Primary Chronicle* (a 12th-century collection of history) as inhabiting their present homeland in the 10th century. The Russian chronicles, our earliest sources for Mordvin history, relate that the Mordvins, before the Mongol conquest of the 13th century, lived under their own “princes.” Some Mordvin communities paid tribute to Russian princes, while others paid tribute to the Muslim rulers of Volga Bulgaria, centered to the east of the Mordvins at the confluence of the Volga and Kama Rivers. As a result of the Mongol conquest, the Mordvins found themselves subjects of the Golden Horde. In fact, the Mongols established a local administrative center known as Navrochat in the middle of Mordvin ethnic territory. After the collapse of the Golden Horde in the early 15th century, the Mordvins again found themselves straddling the border between the powerful Russian principality of Moscow and the Kazan khanate, a successor state of the Golden Horde roughly corresponding to the geographical location of Volga Bulgaria. With the Russian conquest of Kazan in 1552, the Mordvin ethnic territory as a whole fell under Muscovite control.

Under Russian rule, the Mordvin peasants were gradually enserfed (immobilized) and Christianized, although these processes only began in earnest at the beginning of the 18th century, during the reign of the Russian tsar Peter the Great. As a result of these pressures, the Mordvins took part in the periodic peasant and Cossack rebellions against Russian rule, most notably in the Pugachev uprising in the 1770s. During the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, many Mordvin communities migrated out of their traditional homeland along the Oka and Moksha Rivers to the newly conquered steppe lands on both the western and eastern banks of the Volga River. In the 19th century, Mordvin peasants also migrated to the more distant regions of the Transcaucasus, Siberia, Central Asia, and even California.

One result of these migrations was to disperse the Mordvin population, making them more susceptible to Russification, and many Russian observers of the Mordvins before 1917 noted that they were among the most Russified of all Russia’s minority nationalities. Although the Mordvins have defied, and continue to defy, the frequent predictions of their total Russification, this dispersal may be one among several reasons for the Mordvins’ failure to articulate any political demands as Mordvins during the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

The Mordvins’ apparent indifference to the political articulation of ethnic issues continued into the early Soviet periods, and it was only in 1936 (more than a decade after neighboring ethnic groups) that the Soviet authorities granted the Mordvins an autonomous region, which came to be known as the Mordvin Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), a constituent region of the Russian Soviet Federated Republic (RSFSR). However, most Mordvins lived outside of the republic. During the Soviet period, the Mordvin ASSR was closed to foreigners, largely because of the presence of numerous forced-labor camps in the territory of the republic. The republic’s Communist administration was notoriously severe, and during the Gorbachev era conservative.

During the era of *perestroika* (1985–91) and soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a small Mordvin national movement emerged called “Mastorava” after the pre-Christian Mordvin earth spirit. However, the Mordvin republic remained a notoriously conservative and pro-Communist region within the former Soviet Union, and by 1992 the Mastorava movement had ceased to function.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to recent estimates, there are approximately 1.15 million Mordvins in the Soviet Union, making the Mordvins one of the largest ethnic minorities in Russia. The traditional homeland of the Mordvins is the Moksha and Sura River Valleys and their tributaries (these rivers are themselves tributaries of the Oka River). This area corresponds in broad terms to the territory of the current Republic of Mordovia, which occupied 26,200 square kilometers (10,100 square miles) and whose capital is the city of Saransk. The Republic of Mordovia and the immediately adjacent regions are located within the forest-steppe zone, with broadleaf forests interspersed with isolated areas of grasslands and fields. The climate is very much continental, with January temperatures averaging  $-12$  to  $-11^{\circ}\text{C}$  (about 16 to  $18^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and July temperatures averaging  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$  (about  $70^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

Most Mordvins, however, live outside their titular republic, either in the neighboring districts of Penza, Nizhnii Novgorod (formerly Penza), or in areas further to the east, such as Tatarstan or the districts of Simbirsk (formerly Ul’ianovsk), Saratov, Samara (formerly Kuibyshev), and Orenburg, or even in the more distant region of Siberia. Outside of the Russian Federation, Mordvin communities can be found in Kazakhstan and Armenia.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Mordvin language actually consists of separate but closely related languages called Moksha and Erzia. Moksha and Erzia belong to the Volga Finnic branch of the Finno-Ugric language family. These languages are most closely related to Mari, another member of the Volga Finnic branch, and are more distantly related to Finnish and Estonian. Moksha and Erzia constitute two separate literary languages as well and, for the most part, these two languages are not mutually comprehensible, making Russian the language of communication between Erzias and Mokshas. Moksha speakers number approximately 300,000, and Erzia speakers approximately 500,000.

Virtually all Mordvins are fluent in Russian, often at the expense of their native language, and both Moksha and Erzia are heavily influenced by Russian, especially lexically. However,

there also exists a small community of Mordvins in Tatarstan, known as Karatais, who long since abandoned the use of Mordvin, and speak only Tatar while retaining a strong sense of Mordvin identity.

Mordvin names consist of a first name, a patronymic (the father's name), and a surname. Since their Christianization in the early 18th century, Mordvin first names, patronymics, and often surnames are identical to common Russian names. However, some Mordvin surnames are derived from Mordvin words, such as *Vergazov* (*vergaz* meaning wolf) and *Atiaksh* (*atiaksh* meaning rooster).

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Mordvins have retained a rich body of oral literature and music, much of which was recorded in the Soviet era. Of particular interest are Mordvin historical songs, which some scholars have tried to identify as the remnants of a now-lost Mordvin national epic. Whether or not this is the case, a number of Mordvin historical songs (which in fact, are extensive narrative poems), have been passed down. These include narratives of the Russian conquest of Kazan, as well as accounts of Christianization in the 18th century.

In addition to the many songs, riddles, folk tales, and fairy tales that constitute the body of Mordvin oral literature, the Mordvins, despite their conversion to Christianity, have retained much of the mythology describing the spirits of their native religion. To be sure, Christian motifs are evident in many of the narratives, but at the same time much of the native tradition was retained and recorded by ethnographers. This mythology includes accounts of the creation of the world. In these accounts, the Erzia supreme deity is *Paza*, or *Chama-Paz*, and the Moksha one is called *Shkai*.

#### 5 RELIGION

Mordvin communities as a whole were converted to Russian Orthodox Christianity in the first half of the 18th century, but some communities and individuals had adopted the new religion in the 17th and even 16th centuries. Although the Russian missionaries involved in the conversion of the Mordvins often made use of violence (and occasionally used troops to subdue Mordvin resistance), by the end of the 18th century, Russian observers often noted with satisfaction that the Mordvins were not only the most Russified of the region's minority nationalities, but also the most thoroughly Christianized. In fact, while Russian Orthodox Christianity as well as non-Orthodox sects sank deep roots in the Mordvin communities, the Mordvins retained much of their native religious orientation, which co-existed with Christian traditions. Not only did Mordvins retain their native mythology, but they continued to venerate native spirits, shrines, and their ancestors. Their activities included communal prayers and animal sacrifices for various field spirits, tutelary spirits known as *keremed'*, and ancestral spirits. This aspect of Mordvin religious life survived the Soviet period and is still evident today. Various Old Believer sects were also prevalent among Mordvins before 1917, and since 1991 many Mordvins have been attracted to Protestant sects that have been introduced.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major holidays of the Mordvins correspond to the Russian Orthodox calendar, with the chief religious holidays being



Easter, and Orthodox New Year (January 6, by the Gregorian calendar). Traditionally, however, Mordvins observed most other Christian holidays and festivals as coinciding with the agricultural calendar. Equally important, if not more important, among modern-day Mordvins are the secular holidays that were promoted during the Soviet period and that continue to be observed today. These include New Year's Day (January 1), May Day (May 1), and Victory Day (May 9).

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The major rites of passage among the Mordvins are closely connected with religious life. These include birth, baptism, marriage, and burial rituals. Birth rituals were typically performed by a religious specialist, usually an old woman, and included rituals to protect the newborn from harmful spirits. Baptism, although discouraged during the Soviet period, was nevertheless seen by many Mordvins not as a religious ritual, but rather as a Mordvin national custom. Mordvin weddings, at least in traditional society, were elaborate and complex rituals that differed widely from village to village. They included a specific repertoire of songs and other traditions and included feasting and other entertainments. Before the conversion to Christianity, Mordvin funeral rituals involved the inclusion of grave goods in the tomb of the deceased, but this tradition was largely abandoned by the late 18th century. However, the Mordvins did retain the tradition of funeral feasts for the dead, as well as the practice of holding communal prayers and making offerings at the tombs of ancestors.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Interpersonal relations among the Mordvins (such as greeting, body language, and gestures), do not differ substantially from those of Russians. In both Erzia and Moksha, the typical greeting upon seeing someone for the first time on a given day is “*Shumbrat.*”

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The bulk of the Mordvin population today continues to live in rural areas—that is, in villages. In Mordvin villages, the houses tend to be made out of wood. Typically, the house forms part of a courtyard, to which is attached sheds, barns, and other outbuildings. In addition, nearly every house has its own sauna or bathhouse. Most villages have electric power, but very few houses have any indoor plumbing, and water is usually obtained from a well or a communal pump. By American standards, the standard of living is rather low. Wages are usually very low, and there is little disposable income available for consumer goods. Similarly, health care in rural areas is of poor quality and not always available. However, Mordvins often make use of herbal medicines and other traditional remedies.

Very few Mordvins own their own cars, and most rely on public transportation. In urban areas, this includes buses and trains. In rural areas, bus transportation is not always reliable, and Mordvins, like others in Russia, must hitch rides with passing vehicles or rely on horse-drawn transportation.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Women have traditionally played a special role in Mordvin society as the preservers of Mordvin cultural tradition. Historically, women were more confined to the home and rarely traveled far from their village, so they were less likely to speak Russian or be exposed to Russian culture. As a result, Mordvin women played a large role in the preservation of not only the Mordvin languages, but also of oral traditions and customs. In traditional Mordvin society, when a girl married she would leave her home and move in with her husband’s family. As a result, a Mordvin family had an interest in delaying a daughter’s wedding as long as possible, so as not to lose her labor, and there was a corresponding interest in marrying a son as soon as possible so as to bring an extra worker into the family. As a result, Russian observers noted the frequency of marriages between 11- or 12-year-old Mordvin boys with 25-year-old (or older) Mordvin women. During the Soviet period, this custom gradually disappeared, and today Mordvin marriage patterns are similar to those for Russia as a whole. A typical couple today will have only one or two children, whereas before World War II, family sizes were much larger, and the infant mortality rate was also much higher.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Mordvin festive clothing was typically white and decorated with elaborate embroidery. The most elaborate and artistic clothing was worn by women. By the 19th century, Mordvin men were already dressing in the Russian manner. Summer clothes were often woven out of linen in winter, woollens and reversed sheepskin coats were common. Currently, everyday clothing is identical to the clothing typical of Russian society as a whole.

## 12 FOOD

The basis of the Mordvin economy was cereal agriculture, and the staples of the Mordvin diet were bread made from rye flour, as well as oats and barley. During the Soviet period, potatoes also came to form an important part of the Mordvins’ diet. The main vegetables include cabbages, carrots, beets, and onions. The main types of meat are pork, chicken, and mutton. Beverages include tea, beer, and vodka. Traditionally, Mordvin eating utensils, with the exception of knives, were made out of wood. Mordvins also carved elaborate ladles and spoons out of wood for religious rituals.

## 13 EDUCATION

Before the Soviet period, Mordvins had some access to religious schools established by church officials in their villages, and the most educated members of Mordvin society were often priests. However, access to higher education was extremely limited for Mordvins. Illiteracy rates were very high; among women, illiteracy was nearly universal.

In the Soviet period universal education was applied to Mordvins, as it was to the rest of Soviet society. The medium of instruction was often Russian, however, few Mordvins, especially in the later Soviet period, were educated in their native language. Typically, Mordvins achieve the equivalent of a high school education.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The creation of the Mordvin ASSR in 1936, in keeping with Leninist nationality policy, also necessitated the creation and sponsorship by the Soviet State of a Mordvin intelligentsia and a formal Mordvin national culture. Before the Soviet period, the only written Mordvin documents intended for Mordvins were prayer books and Bible translations published by the Russian Orthodox Church. By the 1920s, the standardization of the Mordvin languages into two separate literary languages, Erzia and Moksha, was already underway. Subsequently a Mordvin national literature emerged along Soviet lines, with poetry, prose, and drama being produced and performed in the two Mordvin literary languages, and published both in journals and as separate books. Similarly, the Mordvin intelligentsia created formal folk dance ensembles. Among the most well known Mordvin artists is the painter and sculptor Stepan Erzia (1876–1959), who was active before 1917, but is best known as a Soviet artist.

## 15 WORK

Throughout their history, Mordvins have been primarily engaged in agricultural labor, and this would traditionally involve the entire family. During the Soviet period and since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mordvin agriculture has been collectivized, with Mordvins either working as part of a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) or as paid employees on a state-owned farm (*sovkhoz*). Before the Soviet period, it was common for Mordvin laborers to belong to a cooperative organization, known as an *artel*, and during the Soviet period many Mordvin peasants moved into urban areas for industrial work.

## 16 SPORTS

Numerous sports and games are played at the religious festivals of the Mordvins, especially foot races and horse races, and

other contests. The most popular sports are soccer and hockey, which are not only spectator sports but played by children and young adults alike.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The lack of recreational outlets in rural areas has limited the recreational opportunities of rural Mordvins. In larger urban areas, however, common recreational activities include the theater, movies, sports events, and television.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Mordvins are skilled at woodcarving, and this forms an important element of their folk art. Another folk art which is especially well-developed is weaving. Beekeeping is an economic activity that is also common among the Mordvins, but it is not practiced by every household, and it is often approached as a hobby.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Among the most severe social problems of the Mordvins is alcoholism, which is endemic throughout the Russian Federation. The problem is especially severe in rural areas, where recreational opportunities are limited, if not entirely absent. In those areas, drinking alcohol is in effect the main form of recreation. In addition, the current economic crisis affecting all of the former Soviet Union is also a problem for Mordvins, who are suffering from low and erratic wages and a severely diminishing standard of living.

A different sort of problem facing the Mordvins is Russification. Historically, the Mordvins have managed to maintain some sense of separateness from Russians while being one of the most acculturated nationalities in Russia. The isolation of the Mordvins and their lack of access to Russian educational establishments ensured the survival of the Mordvin language, at least before 1917. However, the integration of the Mordvins into Soviet society and the access to Russian education coupled with limited access to Mordvin-language education has resulted in a rapid assimilation of Mordvins into Russian society. In fact, Russia's Mordvin population has gradually been declining.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Mordvin society, particularly up until World War II, women and men had sharply divided social, economic and religious roles. Women were mainly responsible for child-rearing, domestic duties, and a portion of agricultural production. Observers of Mordvin communities commonly reported on a common practice among Mordvins of delaying marriage for girls as long as possible, so as not to lose an important source of labor for agriculture. As a result it was common for young Mordvin men to take much older brides. Before the 1940's literacy was extremely rare among Mordvin women due to their limited access to education. World War II brought large numbers of Mordvin women into the industrial and urban workforce, and into the Soviet educational system, after which they largely remained in the workforce, while retaining their traditional roles in child-rearing and domestic duties. Their limited access to education also made Mordvin women particularly culturally conservative, especially in terms of native language retention and religious activities. Since 1991 Mordvin women

have largely maintained their access to education. Certain religious ceremonies excluded either men or women, but more generally it was women who retained religious ceremonies and practices, despite official anti-religious pressure from the authorities during the Soviet era.

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—by A. J. Frank

# NANAI S

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Hezhen, Goldy

**LOCATION:** Russia (extreme southeastern Siberia), China (Heilongjiang Province)

**POPULATION:** 12,160 in Russia (2002), 4,640 in China (2004)

**LANGUAGE:** Nanai, Russian, Chinese

**RELIGION:** Shamanism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Nanais are an indigenous people of extreme southeastern Siberia (also called the Russian Far East) who inhabit the shores of the Amur River and its tributaries. Anthropological, linguistic, and archaeological data suggest that people similar to the Nanais in ethnicity, language, and culture have continuously inhabited the Amur region and supported themselves by fishing and hunting since the Neolithic era (that is, for more than 3,000 years). The Nanais were formed from a mixture of these local groups with migrants who gradually arrived from the north, west, and south (i.e., from Siberia and Manchuria).

The Nanais' name for themselves is *Nanai* (plural: *Nanaisal*), which means "local dweller" and is derived from the words *na* (place, land) and *nai* (person). The Nanais were previously called *Gol'dy* in Russian ethnographic literature. This term is the word for "Nanai" in the language of the Ul'chi, another Amur people who are closely related ethnically and linguistically to the Nanais. (The name *Nani* has also been used by both the Nanais and the Ul'chi to refer to themselves.)

For several centuries prior to their absorption by the Russian empire in the mid-19th century, the Nanais maintained trade relations with the Russians, Chinese, and the Manchus who conquered China in 1644 and established the Qing Dynasty. They exchanged fur, ginseng, and reindeer antlers (used in a powdered form as an aphrodisiac by the Chinese) for guns, iron, tea, flour, tobacco, vodka, grain, and textiles. Russian explorers probably made contact with the Nanais as early as the 1640s, but the Manchus claimed the Amur region as their own because it was adjacent to their homeland. In any event, the border drawn between the Russian and Chinese empires in 1689 left the Nanais under the latter's control. The Manchus levied taxes upon the Nanais and the other Amur peoples, appointed elders for their villages, and formed marriage alliances between Manchu officials and local clan leaders; many Nanai village and clan leaders became very wealthy in this way. After Russia gained control of the Amur region from China in the 1858 Treaty of Aigun and the 1860 Treaty of Peking, the Nanais became Russian subjects. Tens of thousands of Russian colonists began to pour into Nanai territory; this process was encouraged by the tsarist government, which considered the Amur River basin to be a strategic area and feared Chinese encroachment on it if it were left sparsely populated by non-Russian aborigines. These colonists settled on Nanai hunting grounds, seized the best fishing areas, and used both dishonest commercial methods and the threat of violence to cheat the Nanais out of land and other property. The Nanais became a minority in their own land, and their standard of living greatly declined. By the early 20th century, the ratio of colonists and their descendents to Nanais was 90 to 1. The Amur peoples suffered greatly from the destruction and bloodshed of the Civil

War that followed the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917. The Amur River basin was the scene of intense fighting among the Communist Red Army, the anti-Communist White Army, and Japanese troops who hoped to take advantage of the chaos to extend Japan's influence in the region.

Conditions among the Nanais improved in the 1920s after the end of the Civil War. Bolshevik-sponsored cooperatives allowed Nanai fishermen and hunters to pool their scarce resources, and the new government took steps to develop education and Western medical care. The Nanais' fortunes worsened, however, after Stalin's rise to power in 1929. They were forced out of their widely scattered traditional villages and crowded into a smaller number of large settlements, which the government's economic planners considered more efficient. Moreover, Stalin and his successors intensively developed mining, logging, and industry in the Amur region without taking environmental consequences into account. This resulted in serious ecological damage to Nanai territory.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

As of 2002 there were slightly more than 12,640 Nanais in the Russian Federation, and almost all of them live in the Russian Far East near the Chinese border. As of 1989 about 11,600 Nanais resided in Khabarovsk Territory (Russian *krai*), chiefly in its Khabarkovsk, Nanai, and Komsomol'sk Districts (Russian *raion*). Some 400 more Nanai lived along the Ussuri River in the neighboring Primorskii (Maritime) Territory, and an additional 170 dwelt on the island of Sakhalin off the Russian Federation's eastern coast. In addition, as of 2004 there were about 4,600 Nanais in the northeastern reaches of the People's Republic of China, primarily in Manchuria, where they are known as the *Hezhen*.

The climate of the Nanais' territory is somewhat different from much of Siberia and the Russian Far East. For example, its summers are relatively warm, with July temperatures averaging between 16° and 20°C (60.8° and 68°F). Monsoon winds from the Pacific bring heavy rainfall in late summer and early fall and sometimes result in severe flooding. Winters are severe: heavy snows and high, chilly winds are typical, and January temperatures range between -28° and -20°C (-18.4° and -4°F). Most of the territory inhabited by the Nanais consists of low-lying valley lands along a 700-kilometer (420-mile) stretch of the Amur River. Marshlands, sometimes containing larch groves, are common at the lowest elevations, and the banks of the Amur and other rivers are dotted with small islands separated by rivulets. The northernmost reaches of Nanai settlement are more mountainous the further one goes from the Amur. Larch, yew, birch, maple, lilac, honeysuckle, and swamp grasses are the most typical forms of vegetation in low-lying areas. Mountains are mostly covered with mixed forests of larch, spruce, fir, ash, lime, maple, and walnut (with larch predominating in the foothills). At the highest elevations, cedar and lichens are the most common plants. Rivers have traditionally been rich in aquatic life, particularly salmon and otters, although overfishing has seriously reduced stocks in recent decades. Squirrels, foxes, bears, sables, hares, boars, Siberian tigers, elks, grouse, and deer are the most widespread fauna on dry land.

### 3 LANGUAGE

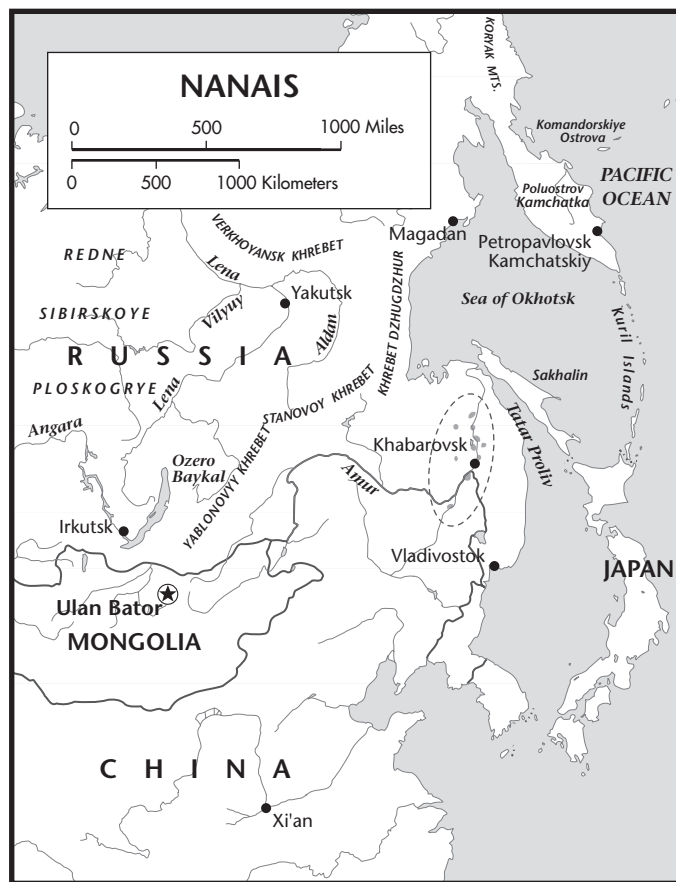
The Nanai language belongs to the Altaic language family's Tungusic, or Tungus-Manchu, branch. Its closest relatives are tongues spoken by other peoples of the Amur region (Oroch, Ul'chi, and Udegei), Manchu, and the language of the Xibei people of northwestern China's Xinjiang Province (who are the descendants of Manchu frontier troops). The languages of the Evenki and Evens of eastern and northeastern Siberia are also closely related to Nanai. In addition to borrowings from other Tungusic languages, the Nanai vocabulary includes loan words from Russian and Chinese as well as Nivkh (an unrelated language spoken in the Amur Region and on the island of Sakhalin). Nanai is divided into several regional forms that differ from each other to varying degrees. The classification of these forms of Nanai as dialects or subdialects (minor variants of dialects) has long been a matter of controversy among linguists specializing in the study of the Tungusic languages, and there is still no scholarly agreement on this issue. Prior to the Soviet period, the Nanai language did not have a written form except for the academic transcriptions of linguists. A Nanai writing system based on the Latin alphabet was adopted in 1931; five years later, it was replaced by the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet, which is still in use. The modern Nanai literary language is based on the Naikhin dialect (the most widely spoken form of Nanai). Diacritics and special letters are used to reflect Nanai sounds that are absent in Russian, but their use is not always consistent. For example, Nanai, like other Altaic languages, differentiates between "long" (stressed) and "short" (unstressed) vowels. In some writings, a diacritic shaped like a short line is written over a vowel letter to indicate that it is a long vowel, but in other books, double letters are used. (See the titles of the two Nanai dictionaries in the bibliography for examples of variant spellings.)

Some Nanai personal names are very ancient, and their sources and original meanings remain a mystery to ordinary Nanais and linguists alike. This is the case with the male names *Bamba* and *Gibi* and the female names *Dekhe* and *Iaota*. The etymologies of other traditional names are clearer. Some, such as *Orokto* ("grass," male) and *Sunke* ("beetle," female) are the words for plants and animals in the Nanai environment. Others—for example, the male name *Aka* ("strong or brave man") and the female name *Bulke* ("gentle")—refer to positive characteristics that parents wish a child to possess. During the 20th century, Russian personal names such as *Anna* (female) and *Fyodor* (male) have become widespread.

The use of surnames based upon the name of a given family's clan (*Kilen*, *Gair*, *Oninkan*, etc.) has been common since the 1930s. It is interesting to note that the spelling of many clan-based Nanai surnames often differs from the actual Nanai pronunciation of these names: this is most likely due to mistakes made by Russian bureaucrats while filling out personnel forms and other paperwork when the use of surnames was first required. Thus, the surname of the Nanai cultural anthropologist and native-rights activist Evdokiia Gair is written *Gaer*; the surnames of the linguists Sulungu Oninkan and Nikolai Kilen are spelled *Onenko* and *Kile*, respectively.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Nanai folklore includes legends and stories (*telungu* or *ningman*) about the origins of the universe, the earth, humans, animals, and local mountains, rocks, and lakes. Some *telungu* and



*ningman* narrate the feats of shamans and the exploits of hunters and warriors; others tell the histories of the various Nanai clans and the animals or plants (tigers, bears, hawks, birches, etc.) from which they descended. Generally speaking, a legend or story is called a *telungu* if its events are believed to have occurred in remote antiquity; otherwise, it is called a *ningman*. There are also numerous tongue twisters (*deuruen*), and riddles (*nambokan*).

In traditional Nanai society, folklore was not only a form of entertainment, but also an important tool of socialization. Many works of oral literature indirectly taught the young proper behavior, useful hunting and fishing techniques, and the mythology and religion of the community. Given Nanai folklore's didactic aspect, it is not surprising that many tales concern human shortcomings such as laziness and vanity. One *ningman* tells the story of Aioga, a beautiful but extremely vain girl. One day, Aioga's mother asked her to go fetch some water, but Aioga refused, preferring instead to sit admiring her own reflection in a shiny copper pan. A neighbor girl offered to go in Aioga's place, and Aioga's mother rewarded her with a scone, but did not give one to Aioga. Enraged, Aioga fled from her mother in a rage and sat down to pout on the bank of a nearby stream. Aioga stared at her reflection in the water, now and then glaring at the neighbor girl, who sat on the opposite bank eating her scone. Suddenly, Aioga's neck began to grow. Noticing this, she flapped her arms in anger, and they turned into wings. She then fell into the stream, where she turned into a swan. She forgot how to speak Nanai and could only remem-



A storyteller of the Siberian Nanai tribe.  
(© Viviane Moos/Corbis)

ber her name, which henceforth became the call of the swan: "Ai-oga-ga-ga! Ai-oga-ga-ga!"

## 5 RELIGION

Traditional Nanai religion includes shamanistic practices. Nanai shamanists believe that fire, mountains, stars, constellations, forests, and rivers have spirits (*endur*) that humans must respect in order to survive and prosper. The most revered nature-spirit is the sky-god, whose names are Sangiia and Boa-endurni. Certain animals, such as bears and Siberian tigers, are also considered spiritually powerful and are eaten only at ritual meals. Lesser spirits or ghosts, called *seven* or *busyu*, are capable of helping or harming humans. The Nanai shaman (*saman*), like the Native American "medicine man," is a man or woman skilled at communicating with all these spirits during rituals that involve chanting and singing prayers and beating an *ungchukhun* (a large, flat, round drum). Nanai shamans use their rituals to heal the sick, improve believers' fortunes, and foretell the future. The most powerful shamans, called *kasaty-saman*, accompany the deceased to Buni, the World of the Dead. (A *kasaty-saman* must always be a man.) Although the

profession of shamanism is hereditary, not all sons and daughters of shamans follow the path of their ancestors: they must be chosen by the spirits themselves. Each shaman is guided and protected by a personal helper-spirit, or *aiami*. If the shaman is a man, his *aiami* is a woman; the *aiami* of female shamans are always male. A shaman's *aiami* is considered his or her spouse, and the two have sexual intercourse during the shaman's dreams. The shaman is respected but never envied. It is believed that a shaman's life does not belong to him or her, but rather to the *aiami*. Therefore, no Nanai wishes to become a shaman, and a person chosen by the spirits often resists the call for years. After the Nanais' homeland passed under Russian control, missionaries from the Russian Orthodox Church effected their conversion to Christianity. Although many were formally baptized, they continued to practice their ancient religion along with Russian Orthodox practices. Nanai shamans, like those of other Siberian native peoples, suffered imprisonment and execution during Stalin's anti-religious campaigns and as a result shamanism was driven underground. Since Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev ended the Soviet government's persecution of religion during the 1980s, the Nanais have begun to practice shamanism more openly.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most traditional Nanai "holidays" are not celebrated at the same time every year, as they are essentially shamanist rites performed for specific purposes. Among these are the ritual blessings of hunting and fishing gear by shamans and the monthly wakes held by bereaved relatives and friends for several years after a person's death. Some holidays do, however, have a more or less set date. The most important of these is the *nengnemeni enei*, a spring gathering held in the last days of April and the first few days of May to celebrate the breaking up of the river ice and the beginning of the spring fishing season. During the *nengnemeni enei*, dozens of members of related families set up camp together on the riverbank and celebrate the end of winter with dancing, games, storytelling, singing, and feasting. Ritual offerings of food, drink, and tobacco are made to the water and fire spirits. Centuries-long contact with Chinese traders and settlers has led the Nanais to adopt the Chinese New Year, which is marked by family feasts. During the Soviet period, the Nanai celebrated communist holidays such as May Day (1 May), the anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany (9 May), International Women's Day (8 March), and the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution (7 November).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In traditional Nanai society, childbirth was surrounded by numerous rules that had to be observed to ensure the child's survival. As soon as a Nanai woman discovered that she was pregnant, she had to observe certain taboos. For instance, she could not sew or use glue in her housework during the last stages of pregnancy or the fetus would be "stuck" to the womb and the delivery would be difficult. She could not attend funerals or she would have a miscarriage. (If she could not avoid attending a funeral, she had to first gird her loins with a protective rope or net). Chopping tree branches could cause deformities or induce an expected boy to be born as a girl. A pregnant woman was also forbidden to eat certain foods. If she ate the hearts of large game animals, her heart would not withstand the de-



livery. Consuming the eyes of roast fish might cause the child to be born with a sore on its eye, while squirrel's brains could cause hyperactivity. Husbands of pregnant women also had to observe certain taboos. For example, they could not hunt on the eve of a birth or the child might be born with a hare-lip. Activities that required driving stakes into the ground (for example, building fences) were also to be avoided close to the expected date of birth, since they too could harm the fetus. Delivery took place in a temporary shelter near the house, access to which was forbidden to all save the birthing mother, a midwife, and female relatives or friends. After the child was born, special measures were taken to conceal its identity from malevolent spirits by confusing them in various ways. No public celebration was held, and family members spoke vaguely when informing others of the fact of the birth. Additionally, the child was ritually given to a couple from another clan or even another nationality, against whom the spirits were harmless; In addition, it was temporarily given a name intended either to disgust harmful spirits, such as *Polokto* ("moldiness") or *Lebe* ("vomit or trash"), or to frighten them—*Nekte* ("wild boar") or *Kachakta* ("prickly salmon"). For the last few decades, delivery has taken place in hospitals, and many traditional taboos relating to childbirth are no longer observed.

The most ancient means of disposing of the dead among the Nanais and other Amur peoples is internment in wooden or bark coffins raised on platforms. Infants who died before their first birthday have traditionally been wrapped in cloth or birch-bark and placed in the hollows of trees. As a result of Russian influence, burial in the ground has replaced platform and tree burial. After a person has died, he or she is placed on a flat board called a *dirkinche*. The corpse's face is covered with a cloth, and its feet are tied with a white braided string and held in place by a stone, lest the soul of the deceased kick the souls of his or her relatives. Food, drink, a pipe, and tobacco are placed next to the body. After several days have passed, the body is dressed in fine clothes that have been kept for the occasion, put into a coffin, and taken to a cemetery, where it is buried. (Personal possessions that have been broken or torn to allow their owner's spirit to escape from them are placed into the coffin along with the body. Men are buried with hunting and fishing tools, and women with sewing pouches containing needles and thread.) On the seventh day after death, a shaman performs a ritual to lead the soul of the deceased to the World of the Dead (*Buni*). Traditional Nanai burial practices have been preserved to a much higher degree than birth rituals.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Among Nanais who follow traditional rules of behavior, it is a sign of respect to bow upon meeting someone. There are certain protocols that must be observed when deciding whether or not to bow. For example, one never bows to a younger person or to a person of the same age. Men always bow to older men and older women, but women do not bow to older members of either sex. There are no special rules for bowing to shamans: one bows to them only if they are male and older than oneself.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The ancestors of the Nanais originally lived in dugouts with log frames and roofs, but for centuries the most typical Nanai dwelling has been the *dio*, a large, one-room rectangular house whose design shows strong Chinese and/or Manchu influence.

The walls of the *dio* are formed by a lattice-type frame of willow or alder branches; this frame is then covered on both sides with thick layers of clay. The *dio* is heated by several adobe stoves. Benches around the walls of the *dio* serve as both seats and beds, and a large platform in its center is used for storing hunting, cooking, and fishing tools and other items of everyday use. The windows were formerly covered with fish skin or Chinese wax paper, but now glass is more common. Wealthy Nanais furnished their homes with lacquered cupboards and chests-of-drawers manufactured in China. Although the *dio* has not entirely vanished, most rural Nanais now live in the one-story Russian-style wooden houses characteristic of collective farms throughout the former Soviet Union. Nanais in Komsomol'sk and other urban areas dwell in typical Soviet concrete apartment buildings.

Since fishing has long been the chief occupation of most Nanais, boats have naturally been the most important means of transport. Canoes are made either by hollowing out logs or by attaching panels of birch-bark or wood to a wooden frame. Nanai canoes are usually propelled by double-headed paddles (similar to those used with kayaks), although sometimes long poles are used to push the canoe along from the river bottom in shallow water. Skis and dogsleds are the most common means of traditional transport on dry land; certain groups of Nanais have also traditionally used horses for riding, carrying loads, and pulling sleds. Motorboats, trucks, bicycles, and motorcycles—along with buses and automobiles in urban areas—have become commonplace in recent decades, but they have not entirely crowded out customary Nanai means of transportation.

In traditional society, the Nanais relied almost exclusively on herbal remedies and the incantations of shamans, although they occasionally purchased pharmaceutical remedies from Russian or Chinese traders. Western medicine has become widespread during the 20th century, as the Soviet government provided free or low-cost universal health care to all its citizens. Still, Western medicine has not eliminated traditional Nanai forms of treatment. Clinics are sometimes too far away, and they usually offer only the most rudimentary forms of medical assistance. Moreover, Nanai herbal medicines are often quite effective, as they are the products of hundreds, (perhaps thousands), of years of investigation and practice.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Nanai society was based on small households consisting of a man, a woman, several children, and perhaps a few elderly parents. Wealthy Nanais often had more than one wife; this practice was abolished during the Communist period, although anthropologists encountered a few elderly polygamous families as late as the 1950s and 1960s. Each household belonged to one of 20 or so clans (*khala*) that varied considerably in size: the smallest clans had only a few dozen members, while the largest had more than 900 members. Marrying a member of the same clan was forbidden. Small clans sometimes formed inter-clan alliances by the marriage of a member of one clan to a member of another clan; these alliances were called *dokha*. Custom forbade marriage between members of the same *dokha*, although exceptions were occasionally made on grounds of economic hardship (for example, when a widow needed to remarry in order to survive and could not find a suitable partner outside her *dokha*). Members of the clans and inter-clan alliances aided each other in times of need,

held courts that judged members accused of wrongdoing, and took revenge upon other *khala* and *dokha* whose members had caused harm to their people. The social functions of the clans and *dokha* in everyday life have lessened in importance over the course of the 20th century, although certain features (for example, the ban on intermarriage) are still observed.

The work of men and women in traditional Nanai economic activities is strictly defined by custom, although the contributions of each are equally valued. Men's work includes fishing, hunting, and making and repairing the weapons and tools used in these activities. Women cure meat and fish, prepare animal and fish skins, sew, clean, care for children, and cook. Women also fish when their husbands are absent. Since the Soviet period, men have also worked in forestry, while medicine, teaching, and work in the service sector has largely been performed by women.

### 11 CLOTHING

The traditional Nanai garment for both men and women is the *tetue*, an ankle-length robe fastened on one side with buttons or hooks. Winter *tetue* are made of fish skin that when cured produces a soft, and light but warm leather; summer garments are made of boar skin. (In the prerevolutionary period, wealthy Nanai men and women also wore silk robes, hats, and shoes imported from China.) Both sexes wear the *tetue* with a belt (*omol*), short trousers (*peru*) and leggings (*garon*). Women wear a breastplate (*lele*) festooned with metal pendants. Low boots (*ota*) made of fish or boar skin lined with soft grasses are worn with cloth or leather stockings (*dokton*). The most distinctive type of Nanai headgear is the men's rounded cap (*korbochi*) worn with earflaps (*siapton*) and a white cloth veil (*garmaso*) that falls over the neck and shoulders from the back of the head. (This design was originally conceived to protect hunters from the gnats and mosquitoes common during the damp Amur summers.) Present-day Nanais usually wear Western clothing (cloth dresses, shirts, trousers, stockings, socks, and underclothes, and leather shoes), except on holidays and other special occasions.

### 12 FOOD

The most common food in traditional Nanai cuisine is fish, particularly salmon. The Nanais usually prepare fish by boiling, smoking, freezing, or drying. Salting fish and other meat was unknown prior to Russian contact but is now a common method of preparation. Fish is sometimes eaten raw as well. Favorite Nanai dishes include *boda*, a porridge made of salmon roe and millet; *taksan*, which is made by boiling a mass of fish in their own oil and fat; and *tala*, thin chips of frozen fish. Berries, mushrooms, and edible grasses are eaten fresh or preserved for later use by drying them in the sun and wind. Flour is used to make scones and pancakes. Squirrel, elk, venison, pork, and boar, although consumed less frequently than fish, are also part of the traditional Nanai diet. Prior to the 20th century, most Nanais ate with their hands or wooden spoons from bark, horn, or wood plates and bowls. (Wealthy Nanais used porcelain dishes of Chinese manufacture). Traditional dishware and utensils have largely been replaced with Russian mass-produced metal knives, forks, and spoons, enamel pots and pans, and porcelain dishes. Canned vegetables and meats, bread and pastries, vodka and other alcoholic beverages, and sweets have become established ingredients of the Nanai diet.

### 13 EDUCATION

After the Russian acquisition of the Amur region in the mid-19th century, Russian missionaries established schools that combined the teaching of the Russian language and general educational subjects with instruction in Russian Orthodox Christianity, but their influence on the Nanais was slight. The Soviet government began to establish public schools among the Nanais in the 1920s. These initially used only Russian textbooks, as linguists did not perfect a Nanai alphabet until 1931. Today all Nanais attend primary school and at least some secondary school, and many attend college. However, alongside these indisputable benefits, the manner in which education developed among the Nanai has threatened their cultural heritage, because Soviet policies toward minority peoples after the 1920s tended more and more to suppress their cultures and languages. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the use of Nanai in the classroom both as a means of instruction and as an academic subject was all but eliminated, and Nanai culture in general was disparaged in favor of Russian culture. As a result, although all Nanais are fluent in Russian (a prerequisite for higher education), many have at best a dim understanding of their own people's history and traditions, and only 44% speak Nanai as their native language. Since the 1980s, native teachers and scholars have achieved some success in expanding instruction in native folklore, language, and crafts in Nanai schools.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Although the Nanais did not possess a written language until the 20th century, oral literature has been a highly prized part of the Nanai cultural heritage since time immemorial. Folklore was customarily recited by male and female bards called *ningmanso* (*ningmasu* in some dialects). Men's performances (*khuse nai ningmani*) often included singing passages, but tradition forbade women to sing in the presence of men, so the female bards' performances (*ekte nai ningmani*) consisted entirely of spoken recitations. The *ningmanso* have all but disappeared from Nanai society, due not least to Soviet officialdom's policies aimed at suppressing non-Russian cultures, which it viewed as "backward" and "anti-Soviet." Nevertheless, scholars managed to collect and publish valuable folklore materials both in Nanai and in Russian translations during the Soviet period; this work has continued since the fall of communism, although in extremely difficult conditions. The growth of Nanai literacy has allowed a creative intellectual class to form during the 20th century. The poems, short stories, and novels of Grigorii Khodzher, Kisa Geiker, Vladimir Zaksor, Akim Samar, Andrei Passar, and Georgii Bel'dy have been published in both Nanai and Russian. On a worldwide level probably the best known Nanai figure is Dersu Uzala, the hero of the 1975 film of the same name by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. Kurosawa's film was based on the memoir by early 20th century Russian explorer Vladimir Arsen'ev, whose book *Dersu the Trapper* describes his Nanai guide who accompanied Arsen'ev during his explorations of the Maritime Province.

### 15 WORK

Fishing and, to a lesser degree, hunting have been the mainstays of the Nanai economy for thousands of years. The phenomenal richness of the Nanai language's vocabulary in terminology relating to fishing tools and techniques attests to the important place fishing has occupied in Nanai daily life.

The Nanais obtain fish by hooking, netting, trapping, and spearing. Most salmon fishing is done between July and September, when the salmon are spawning; carp, pike, and catfish are caught year-round. Otters, foxes, lynxes, and martens are hunted for their fur, which has traditionally been used in trade and clothing manufacture. These animals are caught by deadfalls, nets, and small self-firing bows and arrows called *den-gure* that are rigged to shoot animals that disturb them. Meat is obtained from elk, deer, and boars, while squirrels provide both meat and fur. Game animals are either trapped by the same methods used to catch fur-bearing animals or are killed with spears or bows and arrows. Traditional Nanai economic activities greatly changed during the Soviet period: individual hunters and small hunting groups were replaced by state-run fishing and hunting enterprises. The use of firearms, which became common after Russian colonization began in the 19th century, has become universal in the 20th century, although rifles and shotguns have not eliminated traditional weapons.

## 16 SPORTS

Many traditional Nanai sports are based on fishing and hunting. For example, boat and ski races not only provide entertainment, but also teach young Nanais the skills necessary to travel to fishing spots and to pursue game animals. (Such races also allow older Nanais to maintain and refresh these skills.)

In one children's winter sport, *khasigboan* ("catch"), a small boy chosen for his speed and cunning plays the role of "deer," while three to five older boys pursue him on skis in the capacity of "hunters." (If there are more than five "hunters," there must be two "deer.") The "deer" sets off from the starting point alone, and the "hunters" follow 15 or 20 minutes later. The "deer" must return to the starting point without being caught by the "hunters," who attempt to find him and "shoot" him by symbolically touching him with a ski pole. The first "hunter" to thus shoot the deer is declared the winner and receives the title of "*bongo khasigboan*" or "best pursuer."

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Nanai children of both sexes enjoy playing with dolls. Girls' dolls are made of birch-bark and paper and represent people; boys' dolls are made of animal bones and hair and birds' beaks and represent bears and other animals. A popular form of entertainment among adult Nanais is *arakap*, a board game similar to chess. *Arakap* uses a wooden board (*undene*) upon which are drawn five vertical and three horizontal "roads" (*pokto*) or lines. The game's two players move five "soldiers" (*pikte*) around the board in an attempt to outmaneuver each other. (Unlike chess, the "soldiers" in *arakap* are placed on the intersections between the "roads" rather than inside the squares formed by them.) If a "soldier" belonging to one player is backed into a corner and surrounded by two or more "soldiers" belonging to the other player, it is removed from the game. The player who loses all his "soldiers" first is the loser.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Nanai women are skilled at decorating items of clothing with appliqué and embroidery and fashioning containers from birch bark. Men carve decorations into knife handles, door posts, window sills, and other items of daily use. The clothing of shamans is particularly elaborate; it is usually decorated with pictures of trees, dragons, humans, birds, insects, snakes, and

other animals. Spirals and waves are the most common geometric designs in Nanai folk art. Dragons (a result of Chinese influence) are also quite common. Wood is carved into statues representing spirits and amulets intended to bring their bearer good fortune. During the 20th century, secular wood sculpture, usually of human and animal figures, has also become common.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The modern Nanais face a variety of social problems that are shared by all native Siberian peoples. For example, many Nanais suffer from poor health brought about by heavy drinking, inadequate medical care and diet, and air and water pollution caused by Soviet-era mining and industrial practices. Nanai living standards are often low, due not only to the Soviet system's economic inefficiency (particularly in the distribution of consumer goods), but also to ethnic and racial prejudice as well: indigenous Amur peoples are often either paid less than Russians for equivalent work (even in fishing and other traditional economic activities) or confined to the lowest-paid jobs. The wasteful harvesting of the Nanais' natural resources by Soviet industry has resulted in the depletion of fish and other animal stocks and the destruction of more than 30% of the Amur region's forests. Issues of Nanai cultural survival have also come to the fore in recent years as a result of the lingering effects of policies intended by Stalin and his successors to force the Nanais and other non-Russian peoples to give up their "primitive" cultures in favor of the more "advanced" Russian one. Since the Nanais' arts, oral literature, folkways, and language were excluded from the local mass media and Nanai schools for decades, many young Nanais have been robbed of their cultural heritage. Nanai scholars, both in local teachers' colleges and in St. Petersburg's Pedagogical Institute of the Peoples of the North, are now making great efforts to expand knowledge of the Nanai language by training Nanai teachers and writing new textbooks and dictionaries for Nanai children. The relaxation of Soviet nationality policy under Mikhail Gorbachev allowed the Nanais to express pride in their cultural heritage without fear of being labeled "anti-Soviet," and Nanai music and dance festivals began to be held more frequently during the late 1980s. Nanai political activists, led by the cultural anthropologist Evdokiia Gaer, now participate in the Association of the Small Peoples of the North and other organizations that defend the Siberian peoples' economic, political, and cultural interests before the Russian government and the public.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

A strong division of labor and defined gender roles characterized relations between the sexes in traditional Nanai society. During and after the Second World War Russian Nanai society became strongly integrated in Soviet society and the Soviet economy. Among the Chinese Nanais, or Hezhens, their integration into the People's Republic of China began already in 1945, as the Nanais were one of the first minority nationalities to come under Communist control. For Soviet Nanai women traditional gender roles eroded quickly, and many Nanai women were able to benefit from educational possibilities the Soviet integration afforded. As a result among the Nanais, as among several other small Siberian peoples, women constitute a particularly active force in the preservation of Nanai culture and in advocating for the interests of Nanai communities.

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—revised by A. Frank

# NENTSY

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Yurak, Samoyed

**LOCATION:** Russia (Northwestern Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 41,302 (2002 Census)

**LANGUAGE:** Nenets

**RELIGION:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Native beliefs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, people have lived in the harsh arctic environment in what is today Russia. In prehistory, people relied exclusively on what nature provided and on what their ingenuity allowed them to use and create. The seas provided seals, walrus, and whales, and the rivers provided fish. The tundra abounded with reindeer, fox, and other animals as well as edible plants and berries. The land and all of these resources provided human groups with food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and the basis for a rich spiritual life. Today the land and seas and their plant and animal life also provide food, shelter, clothing, and transportation to the Nentsy people. Although many aspects of their lives have changed, the Nentsy continue to respect the land, and they rely on their traditional livelihoods of hunting, reindeer herding, and fishing, as well as on employment in the industrial world.

In the years following the Russian revolution in 1917, the Nentsy went from being considered subjects of the Russian Czar to being an ethnic minority within the Soviet Union. As members of a socialist society, they were expected to participate in the social and economic policies of the new government. These policies began in the 1930s and included collectivization, universal education, and assimilation. Collectivization meant turning over rights to land and reindeer herds to the Soviet government, which reorganized them into collective (*kolkhoz*) or state farms (*sovkhos*). The Nentsy were expected to assimilate into the dominant Russian society, which meant changing the way they thought of themselves. They would no longer be an ethnic group called the “Nentsy” but instead would belong to a larger group, the “Soviet people,” a change in identity made through education, new jobs, and close contact with members of other (mainly Russian) ethnic groups.

The Nentsy are one of five Samoyedic peoples, which include the Nentsy (Yurak), Entsy (Yenisei), Nganasany (Tavgi), Sel’kups, and Kamass (who became extinct as a group in the years following World War I). None of the names generally cited in the literature for the Nentsy people (such as Samoyed or Yurak) are ethnonyms (names that they would use for themselves). As is true of many northern peoples, names based on territorial groupings were common among the Nentsy. For example, in the western tundra, the Tundra Nentsy traditionally referred to themselves as *nenei nenets’* (real men), and in the eastern regions they used *khasava* (person, or man). The Forest Nentsy used the ethnonym *neshcha’* (men).

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Nentsy are generally divided into two groups, the Forest Nentsy and the Tundra Nentsy. The Tundra Nentsy live in a territory that extends from the Kanin peninsula in the west to the western part of the Taimyr peninsula in the east. To the south, their territory covers the forest tundra zone along the northern

tree line. The northern boundary of the Tundra Nentsy territory is the arctic coastline, although some islands in the Kara and Barents seas are also included. Forest Nentsy territory lies within the taiga zone in the basins of the Pur and Nadym rivers and reaches the northern tributaries of the Vakh river. The Tundra Nentsy are found in three administrative areas. The Taimyr’ (Dolgano-Nenets) Autonomous *Okrug* covers 862,100 sq km (332,400 sq mi) in its Krasnoïarsk *krai*; its administrative center is Dudinka. The Nenets Autonomous *Okrug* covers 176,000 sq km (67,900 sq mi) in Archangel’sk *Oblast’*; its administrative center is Nar’ian-Mar. The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous *Okrug* covers 750,300 sq km (289,700 sq mi) in Tiumensk *Oblast’*; its administrative center is Salekhard. The territory of the Forest Nentsy is split between the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous *Okrug* and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous *Okrug*. In all of these administrative units, the Nentsy are a minority living among a majority immigrant (primarily Russian) population. The Russian census of 2002 recorded 41,302 Nentsy in the Russian Federation, the majority of whom (33,458) live in rural areas and follow a “traditional” way of life. When discussing Nenets lifestyles today, the Nentsy can be divided into three groups based on where they live: larger towns and cities, small rural villages, and the tundra and taiga.

A variety of animal and plant species are important to the traditional Nentsy economy because they provide food, clothing, building materials, transportation, and cash income. Seals (several species), walrus, and whales are all important along the arctic coast. Fish (saltwater and freshwater), polar fox, squirrel, wild reindeer, hare, ermine, bighorn sheep, geese, ducks, and other birds (such as ptarmigan) are also important resources found throughout the territory of the Nentsy. Many of these same resources are important in the contemporary Russian economy as well, where fish (Atlantic salmon, nelma, whitefish, herring, navaga) and furs, for example, have commercial value. The arctic zone has few lichens and shrubs and only sparse mosses and liverworts. The tundra area generally has willows and arctic birch trees, lichens, mosses, liverworts, and grasses. The northern boundary of the forest-tundra zone has forests of dahurian larch, spruce, and burch. Vast expanses of this area are covered with the lichens that both wild and domestic reindeer depend on for food.

Climatic conditions vary somewhat across the vast territory inhabited by the Nentsy. Winters are long and severe in the far north, with the mean January temperature ranging from  $-12^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $10^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the southwest of the Nenets Autonomous *Okrug* to  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-22^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in Dudinka. Summers are short and cool with frost. Temperatures in July range from a mean of  $2^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $36^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in Dudinka to  $15.3^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $60^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in southern parts of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous *Okrug*. Humidity is relatively high, strong winds blow throughout the year, and permafrost is widespread.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Nentsy is the language of the Nentsy people. It is part of the Samoyedic group of Uralic languages and has two main dialects: Forest and Tundra. Each of these main dialects is further divided into sub-dialects. In 1932, a Latin-based alphabet was created for the Nenets language, which had previously been unwritten. In 1937, the Latin alphabet was replaced by an alphabet based on the Russian language. In 1989, 77.7% of Nentsy said that Nenets was their native language; 17.6% considered



Russian their native language. People who live in rural areas and are engaged in traditional economic activities use the Nenets language at home and work and thus consider it their native language. People who have moved to towns and cities spend more time among Russians and thus tend to use Russian more and forget their native Nenets language.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Oral history is very important, not only as entertainment, but also as a means of preserving the world view of the Nentsy, their rules for behavior, their past glories, their knowledge of the natural world, and their place in it. The oral tradition also explains the roles of men and women in Nenets society. The Nentsy have a rich and varied folklore that includes many different forms. Long heroic epics (*siudbabts*) are told in the third person about giants and the heroes who battle them for control of reindeer or a woman. Short personal narratives (*yarabts*) are told in the first person about the trials and triumphs of individual heroes. Legends (*va'al*) relate the history of clans and the origin of the world and its people. In fairy tales (*vadako*), mythical events occur in which the physiological and behavioral characteristics of certain animals are explained. Riddles (*khobtsoko*) are told in the form of short tales. Some types of stories are spoken, others chanted, and still others sung by the Nentsy.

#### 5 RELIGION

Traditional Nentsy religion is a type of Siberian shamanism. The natural environment, animals, and plants were all viewed as having their own spirits. The earth and all living things were created by the god Num, whose son, Nga, was the god of evil. Num would help humans in their efforts to protect themselves against Nga only if they asked for help and made the appropriate sacrifices and gestures either directly to the spirits or to wooden idols made to give human forms to animals as gods. Shamans of different varieties acted as mediators between the spirit world and humans, conveying requests for help and the replies of Num to supplicants. Both men and women could be shamans. A second benevolent spirit, Ya-nebya (or "Mother Earth") was a special friend of women, aiding, for example, in childbirth. Worship of certain animals such as the bear was common. Reindeer were considered the embodiment of purity and accorded great respect. In some areas, elements of Christianity (especially from the Russian Orthodox church) were mixed with the traditional pantheon of gods. Although it was discouraged to conduct religious rituals during the Soviet period, the Nenets religion seems to have survived and is enjoying a strong revival today. Nenets religion stresses respect for the land and its resources. Spirits that protect and guide in both the household and the tundra are still provided with gifts of food and asked for aid and advice.

Another important religious tradition among the Nentsy is Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The Nentsy probably came into contact with Orthodox Christianity by means of Komi traders already before their incorporation into Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church began missionary activity among the Nentsy in the 18th century, but it was not until the 1820s that Russian missionaries succeeded in converting Nentsy communities in any lasting manner.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Traditional clothing worn on holidays is the same as daily wear, but much more ornate, with leather fringe, beads, and leather and metal ornaments.

Prior to the Socialist revolution, Nentsy who had been baptized into the Orthodox church celebrated such Christian holidays as Easter, but did not necessarily attach the same significance to these holidays as their Orthodox benefactors. After the Socialist revolution, religious beliefs and practices were forbidden by the Soviet government. Secular holidays were expected to completely replace those of both the Orthodox church and traditional Siberian shamanism. International holidays of special Soviet significance such as May Day and Victory in Europe Day were celebrated by Nentsy and all peoples throughout the Soviet Union.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth and death were always accompanied by special shamanic rituals. Births were accompanied by sacrifices, and the *chum* (tent) where the birth took place would be purified after the woman's confinement. Children were tended by their mothers until the age of 5 to 7 years, at which time gender roles began to be defined. Girls would then spend their time with their mothers, learning how to take care of the *chum*, prepare food, sew clothing, and so on. Boys would go with their fathers to learn how to tend reindeer, hunt, and fish.



*A young Nentsy boy stands in the sub-zero Arctic cold near his home in the Siberian Arctic, Russia.  
(Steven L. Raymer/National Geographic/Getty Images)*

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Marriages were traditionally arranged by the heads of clans and served to strengthen the relationship between two clans, who often depended on each other in times of need. Family size varied, with as many as 15 or more individuals living in one household. Herders with large herds were able to afford more than one wife. “Bride price” might include reindeer, furs, money, or other goods and was paid to clan leaders. A bride brought a dowry to the marriage, including such things as household goods, clothing, sleds, and her own reindeer. All of these things were her property (as was anything she herself produced during her marriage), and if she divorced, she kept them. Only men inherited goods and animals, however. Marriages today are generally personal matters between adults.

There are strict divisions between the activities of men and women in traditional Nenets society. Women have the power and ability to both give life (through childbirth) and assure death. For example, in some Nenets folklore, women are called upon not to actually fight enemies but to assure their death by breaking male/female taboos in their presence.

Taboos that governed the relationships between men and women were observed, especially with regard to childbirth and menstruation. Although women were generally considered subordinate, the strict division of labor between men and women in the arctic made relations more equal than not.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Reindeer herding is a nomadic occupation, requiring herders and their families to move with the reindeer across the tun-

dra to find new pastures throughout the year. Herding families live in tents made from reindeer hides or canvas and take their personal possessions with them as they travel, in some cases as many as 1000 kilometers in a year. Although official Soviet policy was to force people to settle in permanent, Russian-style homes in villages and towns, reindeer breeding makes this difficult, and many people still live nomadic lives. On the Yamal peninsula, for example, 51% of the indigenous population were nomadic in 1994, and more than half of this nomadic group was female, indicating that whole families, not just men, still lead somewhat traditional lives. These nomads are administratively attached to certain villages and towns, but they travel throughout the year with the reindeer herds. Nentsy engaged in non-traditional occupations live in Russian log houses or elevated apartment buildings, as do the non-Native residents of their territory. These Nentsy shop, attend school, and live in much the same way as non-Natives in their territory.

Transportation in the tundra is often by sleds pulled by reindeer, although helicopters, airplanes, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles are also used, especially by non-Natives. The Nentsy have different types of sleds for different purposes, including traveling sleds for men, traveling sleds for women, and freight sleds.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Patrilineal clans were traditionally the basic units of Nenets society. Each clan had its own specific pastures, hunting grounds, fishing grounds, burial places, and sacred sites. Today there are still approximately 100 Nenets clans, and the clan name is used as the surname of each of its members. Although most Nentsy

have Russian given (first) names, they are one of the few Native groups to have non-Russian surnames. Clan affiliation today is being used as the basis for legal claims to land and the protection of sacred sites. Kinship and family units continue to be the main organizing features of society in both urban and rural settings and often serve important functions in linking urban and rural Nentsy. Social behavior is focused on family and community, not on the individual. Rules regarding appropriate behavior are observed and often punished according to traditional guidelines handed down from elders to young.

### 11 CLOTHING

Clothing is most often a combination of traditional and modern. People in towns and cities tend to wear modern clothes made of manufactured cloth, perhaps with fur coats and hats in winter. There are also modern clothes in rural villages and in the tundra, but traditional clothes tend to predominate as they are more suitable for the lifestyles of people in these areas. In the tundra, traditional clothing is generally worn in layers. The *malitsa* is a hooded coat made of reindeer fur turned inside-out. A second fur coat, the *sovik*, with its fur turned to the outside, would be worn on top of the *malitsa* in extremely cold weather. Women in the tundra might wear the *yagushka*, a two-layered open coat made with reindeer fur on both the inside and the outside. It extends almost to the ankles, and has a hood that is often decorated with beads and small metal ornaments. Fur boots (*pimy*) were worn by all. Generally speaking, there are no special traditional summer clothes. Older winter garments that are wearing out are used, and today lighter-weight manufactured garments are often worn. Each woman also has a reindeer-skin purse uniquely decorated to carry her personal belongings. Reindeer skins are the primary source of traditional clothing, but domestic dog, polar fox, and seal are also used, especially in collars, hoods, and decorative elements. Today many manufactured items are also used.

### 12 FOOD

Reindeer are the most important source of food in the traditional Nenets diet. Russian bread, introduced to the Native peoples long ago, has become an essential part of their diet, as have other European foods. Tundra Nentsy rely on reindeer for food, whereas Forest Nentsy rely on reindeer primarily for transportation and rely instead on fishing and hunting for food and clothing. Nentsy hunt for wild reindeer, rabbits, squirrels, ermine, wolverine, and sometimes bears and wolves. Along the arctic coast, seal, walrus, and whales are hunted as well. Tea is a preferred beverage and is usually purchased on trips to villages, although traditionally it was made from cranberry leaves or the roots of various plants. Many foods are eaten in both raw and cooked forms. Fish, for example, can be eaten fresh, frozen, boiled, or dried. Meat is preserved by smoking and is also eaten fresh, frozen, or boiled. In the spring, reindeer antlers are soft and grisly and may be eaten raw or boiled. A type of pancake is made from frozen reindeer blood dissolved in hot water and mixed with flour and berries. Gathered plant foods were traditionally used to supplement the diet. Beginning in the late 1700s, imported foodstuffs such as flour, bread, sugar, and butter became important sources of additional food. Reindeer meat, antlers, and game are readily available in small villages, whereas non-traditional, imported foods are predominant in cities and towns.

### 13 EDUCATION

When the Soviets came to power, Nentsy children were sent to school, sometimes in their village, but often to boarding schools far from their parents and other relatives. The Soviet government believed that by separating children from parents, they could teach the children to live in more modern ways, which they would then teach their parents. Instead, many children grew up learning the Russian language rather than their own Nenets language and so had difficulty communicating with their parents and grandparents. Children were also taught that traditional ways of living and working were bad and should be abandoned in favor of life in a modern industrial society. Thus, they learned little about their cultural traditions and the land on which their families depended. Settling families in permanent homes in villages was another means of educating children, and today most small villages have nursery schools and "middle" schools that go up to eighth grade and sometimes tenth. After the eighth (or tenth) grade, students must leave their village to receive a higher education, and such a journey for 15- and 16-year-olds can be quite daunting. Today, attempts are being made to change the educational system to include studies of Nentsy traditions, language, reindeer herding, land management, and so on. Educating children of herders, who spend most of the year away from any village, is still a difficult task. Traveling teachers who could move with the herding groups are one possible solution to this problem, but even this system would have limitations, especially as children grow older and require more specialized instruction. Educational opportunities at all levels are available to the Nentsy, from major universities to special technical schools where they can learn modern veterinary practices regarding reindeer breeding.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The territory now inhabited by the Nentsy had long been inhabited by other non-Samoyedic people. These people hunted wild reindeer on the tundra, fished in the numerous lakes and rivers, and hunted seals, walrus, and whales along the arctic coast. Archaeological and linguistic evidence has shown that Samoyedic peoples and their languages came north, mixing with and eventually assimilating peoples who had been in those areas previously. The Nentsy seem to have first been concentrated around the mouth of the Ob' river, and from there they moved north approximately 1000 years ago. The first mention of Samoyedic people in Western sources is in the Nestor Chronicle, where they are mentioned in connection with events that took place in the year 1096. Samoyedic peoples, have, therefore, long had some contact with Europeans. The Nentsy and other Samoyedic peoples did not willingly accept the interference of either Czarist Russia or the Soviet government in their affairs, and beginning in at least the 14th century they often put up fierce resistance to attempts to conquer and control them. Today they continue to struggle for control of their own lives.

### 15 WORK

Nentsy have traditionally been reindeer herders, and today reindeer are still a very important part of their lives. Oral traditions from the early 1900s tell of Nentsy clans in Yamal whose livelihood focused on coastal sea-mammal hunting, and evidence exists of Nentsy involvement in commercial hunting



and fishing in the arctic seas in the 1700s. Today, sea-mammal hunting is secondary to reindeer herding in the overall economy of the Nentsy. In traditional Nentsy society, the basic social unit was the individual family; in reindeer herding, however, the basic unit was the herding camp, composed of two to five families, each related to the other by blood, marriage, or other partnership ties. Although collectivization and forced sedentarization often seriously disrupted this system, herding groups today continue to be formed around a family core or group of related people.

Reindeer herding among the northern Tundra Nentsy is characterized by the year-round pasturing of reindeer under supervision of herders and the use of herd dogs and reindeer-drawn sleighs. Herds are kept in well-defined pasture areas and moved at specific times of year. Seasonal migrations cover great distances, as much as 1000 kilometers (more than 600 miles). In winter, herds are grazed in the tundra and forest-tundra. In the spring, the Nentsy migrate north, some as far as the arctic coast; in the fall, they return south again. Herding dogs are important in helping herders control and move herds, which may number in the thousands of animals.

The Forest Nentsy who live to the south have smaller herds, which are grazed in the forest. Their winter pastures are only 40 to 100 kilometers (25 to 60 miles) from their summer pastures. In the summer, the Forest Nentsy turn their reindeer loose while they fish along the rivers. In the fall, the herds are gathered back together and moved to winter grounds. These herds usually number twenty or thirty animals. Reindeer-herding families among the Forest Nentsy also make extensive use of forest and river resources, including hunting and fishing, to supply food and other products for their families.

In addition to food and clothing, reindeer provide transportation (pulling sleds) and additional income (from the sale of antler velvet, or *panty*, which is used in Korea for medicinal purposes). Some families have herds large enough to support themselves independently of the state economy, but others combine work for the state with herding to make a living. Families with few reindeer often live close to rivers and lakes, where they can focus on fishing and hunting while giving their reindeer to a relative to tend. A fairly strict division of labor between men and women is characteristic of Nenets society. Men are primarily responsible for subsistence activities, and women are responsible for the dwelling, clothing, food preparation, and children. There are, of course, times when women gather plants foods and fish, and when men supervise children and cook. Nentsy living in urban areas work as: teachers, nurses, doctors, store clerks, and so on. In rural areas, most Nentsy are engaged in at least some aspects of traditional livelihood, although some are teachers, cooks, or store clerks as well. In villages or the city, women are still responsible for children and the home in addition to working outside the home.

## 16 SPORTS

There is little information on sports among the Nentsy. Recreational activities such as bicycle riding occur in the villages.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Children in urban communities can enjoy riding bicycles, watching movies, or television, and other modern forms of recreation, but children in rural settings are more limited. In villages, there are bicycles, manufactured toys, televisions,

radios, VCRs, and sometimes movie theaters. In the tundra, there might be radio and an occasional store-bought toy, but children also depend on their imaginations and the games and toys of their nomadic ancestors. Balls are made of reindeer or seal skin. Dolls made from felt with heads made from birds' beaks are not only toys but important items in Nentsy tradition. These dolls play the roles of: father and mother, host and guest, bride and groom, and in such play children learn the roles of males and females in their societies. The destiny of a doll is said to be the destiny of its owner, so a doll is a special part of a child's world.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

There is generally little spare time to devote to hobbies in Nentsy society. Folk arts are represented in the figurative art that adorns traditional clothing and some personal items. Other forms of expressive arts include carving on bone and wood, inlays of tin on wood, and wooden religious sculptures. Carvings are sometimes used to decorate sleds, smoking pipes, and *kolotushki* (scrapers to remove snow from fur), but this practice is not widespread. Among some Nentsy, tin and sometimes lead were used to decorate wooden objects such as the handles of knives and tobacco boxes. Wooden sculptures of animals or humans as representations of gods took two basic forms: wooden sticks of various sizes with one or more crudely carved faces on their upper portions and carefully carved and detailed figures of people, often dressed with real furs and skins. The ornamentation of women's clothing was especially widespread and continues to be important. Medallions and appliqués are made with furs and hair of different colors and then sewn on to the clothing.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The economic basis of Nentsy culture—the land and the reindeer herds—are threatened today by the development of natural gas and oil. Economic reforms and democratic processes in Russia today present both new opportunities and new problems for the Nentsy. Natural gas and oil are critical resources that Russia's economy desperately needs to develop. On the other hand, the reindeer pasture destroyed by resource development and the construction of pipelines is critical to the survival of the Nentsy culture. These two land use strategies compete with each other, and complex negotiations are needed to ensure that pasturage is protected and resource development is environmentally safe and not without limits.

Unemployment, inadequate health care, alcohol abuse, and discrimination all contribute to declining standards of living and increased morbidity and mortality among the Nentsy (and other northern indigenous groups). Social welfare payments for children, pensioners, and the disabled are essential to the well-being of many families unable to support themselves entirely through jobs or traditional means. Native peoples throughout the Russian North have begun to organize and discuss solutions to these problems and to assert their rights as distinctive ethnic groups in a multiethnic society. In Yamal, for example, the Nentsy have formed *Yamal Potomkan* ("Yamal for Future Generations"), an organization through which they can work with legislative and political bodies in their region to improve social, economic, and political conditions for the Nentsy.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Within the family, work is divided along gender lines. Women are responsible for the home, food preparation, shopping, and child care. Some men follow traditional occupations, and others choose professions such as medicine or education. They might also take jobs as laborers or serve in the military. In towns and villages, women may also have non-traditional jobs as teachers, doctors, or store clerks, but they are still primarily responsible for domestic chores and child care. Extended families often include some individuals engaged in traditional occupations and some engaged in non-traditional work. Communication and exchange in such families is important in helping to maintain cultural traditions in the villages and in ensuring that manufactured goods are sent to the tundra. Among the traditional Nentsy women had strong property rights with respect to reindeer. During the Soviet era, especially following Collectivization, women's property rights, together with private property as a whole, were strongly degraded. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union traditional women's property rights with respect to reindeer herds have begun to make somewhat of a comeback.

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—by D. L. Schindler; revised by A. Frank

# NETHERLANDERS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Dutch

**LOCATION:** The Netherlands

**POPULATION:** 16.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Dutch

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Protestant (including the Dutch Reformed Church); small populations of Muslims, Hindus, and Jews

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands is a small, flat country located on the shores of the North Sea in western Europe. The whole country is often referred to as Holland, although this term is actually the name for certain provinces in the northwestern part of the country. Over many centuries, the Dutch people literally built their nation by shoring up its lowlands against the sea with dikes, dunes, and windmills. Its coastal location has historically made it an important trading center. Through the efforts of the Dutch East India and Dutch West India companies in the 17th century, the Netherlands acquired colonial territories on every continent to become one of the world's most powerful nations.

In the 20th century, the Dutch recovered from the devastation of World War II and helped found the European Community (EC) in 1957. In the 1990s, this institution became the European Union, offering the Netherlands, like its fellow members, new opportunities as part of a single trading bloc with enhanced economic powers. Meanwhile, the nation's lowlands are sinking at the rate of 45 cm (1.5 ft) per century, and the North Sea is rising, meaning that the Dutch will have to continue waging their ongoing struggle against the sea.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The name "Netherlands," meaning "lowlands," derives from the fact that much of the western part of the country is low-lying land (called *polders*) that has been reclaimed from the sea by dikes and dunes. In addition, windmills, called polder mills, pump excess underground water to keep these areas dry and farmable. Other geographic areas include sand dunes along the western coast and higher land in the eastern and southeastern areas.

Most of the 16.6 million Dutch people belong to the same ethnic group, descended from Frankish, Saxon, and Frisian tribes. A measure of diversity has been added by the arrival of immigrants from the former Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Suriname and foreign workers from Turkey, Morocco, and southern Europe. Throughout history, the Dutch have been known for tolerance of different ethnic and religious groups. They welcomed Jews and Huguenots (French Protestants) in the 16th and 17th century, and played a role in aiding Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in World War II. The most famous of these Jewish refugees was Anne Frank, whose family hid for several years in a secret annex in Amsterdam, aided by their Dutch employees. Tragically, the Franks' hiding place was discovered in the final year of the war, and the whole family except for Anne's father, Otto, died in concentration camps. However, the famous *Diary of a Young Girl*, kept by Anne during the war years, bears witness to the courage of ordinary Dutch citizens

who risked their lives attempting to save this German Jewish family.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Dutch, a Germanic language, is the official language in all 12 provinces of the Netherlands and the language in everyday use everywhere but in Friesland, where ancient Frisian is spoken. Dutch dialects can vary enough to make it difficult for speakers from different regions to understand each other.

#### COMMON WORDS

Man	Man
Woman	Vrouw
Mother	Moeder
Father	Vader
Yes	Ja
No	Nee
Right	Rechts
Left	Links
Breakfast	Ontbijt
Lunch	Middageten
Dinner	Avondeten
Milk	Melk
Beer	Bier

### 4 FOLKLORE

Dutch mythology is strongly linked to the sea and characters associated with it, such as mermaids and pirates. There is also a tradition of tales about devils who tempt people with riches in order to gain their souls; one of the popular subjects of these tales is the devil Joost. Many popular Dutch tales, riddles, and rituals were suppressed over time by wealthy burghers promoting high culture in their stead, but some survived as part of the country's Christian traditions. The Dutch Father Christmas (named, like the American Santa Claus, for Saint Nicholas) is called *Sinterklaas* and has a dark-faced assistant called Black Peter who is said to carry disobedient children to Spain in a sack.

### 5 RELIGION

An estimated 31% of the Dutch people are Roman Catholics, while 20% belong to six major Protestant groups, of which the largest is the Dutch Reformed Church. There are smaller populations of Muslims, Hindus, and Jews. Approximately 40% of Netherlanders claim no religion. Traditionally, the northern and eastern parts of the country have been Protestant, while the south has been Catholic. Since the mid-19th century, the Dutch have practiced a kind of religious "apartheid" known as *verzuiling* (in English, "columnizing" or "pillaring"), that mandated the establishment of separate Protestant and Catholic schools, newspapers, political parties, radio stations, and other institutions. This system has weakened somewhat since the 1960s, but it still controls many facets of life in rural areas.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Legal holidays include New Year's Day, the Queen's birthday (April 30), Memorial Day (May 4)/Liberation of the Netherlands (May 5), and the Christmas holidays. In addition, many Dutch people observe the other standard holidays of the Christian calendar. The Dutch are great celebrators of birthdays. On their birthdays, the Dutch stay in bed late and family



members come into the bedroom singing "Lang Zal Hij Leven" ("Long May He Live"—for females, "Lang Zal Zij Leven"). Gifts are presented, and the festivities continue at school or work, and, in the evening, with a party for family and friends. The Queen's birthday is considered an especially important occasion, marked by flag displays, parades, and girls wearing orange ribbons in their hair in honor of the royal family, the House of Orange. The Memorial Day holiday in the spring has two contrasting parts. At eight o'clock on the evening of May 4, people throughout the country stop whatever they are doing to remember the Dutch war dead and pray for peace. The next day, May 5, is a time of festivals and celebrations.

### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Netherlands is a modern, industrialized, traditionally Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. Religious minorities observe their own rituals. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

On the whole, the Dutch are a reserved people who do not speak readily to strangers. Public interaction, usually marked by close eye contact, is direct but formal. (Close friends, however, do greet each other with a kiss on the cheek.) Restraint and moderation can be seen in many aspects of Dutch life,

from cars (medium-sized and -priced) to clothing (casual and unostentatious). The primary Dutch focus is on the family and on being *gezellig thuis*, or “cozy at home.”

Popular Dutch sayings include:

“You’ll face the wind” (Je krijgt de wind van voren)—comparable to the American phrase “face the music”

“I’ll row with the oars I have” (Ik roei met de riemen ik heb)—i.e., I’ll make the best of the situation

“God’s mills grind slowly” (Gods molens malen langzaam)

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, the Dutch have striven to make their homes *gezellig*, which means “homey” or “cozy.” They favor knick-knacks such as colorful tiles and blue-and-white Delft porcelain. Most homes have colorful flower gardens in front, typically featuring the tulip, the Dutch national flower. With the nation’s high population density, Dutch cities suffer from overcrowding and housing shortages. Many of the tall, gabled traditional houses in cities like Amsterdam have been divided into apartments. One popular response to the scarcity of dwellings is living in a houseboat, generally a converted barge. By 2008 there were approximately 2,400 such boats anchored on the canals in the center of Amsterdam.

The Dutch receive modern, high-quality health care. While most health-care facilities are privately operated, costs are covered by a national health insurance system. In 2008 the average life expectancy was 79.25 years, and the major causes of death were heart disease, cancer, and traffic accidents. Privately funded home nursing is provided for children, the elderly, and pregnant women. Home birth has always been popular in the Netherlands; the government finances a 16-month training program for midwives, who assist doctors with delivery and provide postnatal care for mother and infant.

The Netherlands has an extensive network of highways. Dutch cities and suburbs have good public transportation, although a major expansion is slated for completion by the year 2010 in order to reduce pollution. Bicycles are a favorite form of transportation, and the country has about 9,920 km (6,200 mi) of bicycle paths. A state-owned railway system links most Dutch cities and also offers daily express service to cities in Belgium and France. Rotterdam, in the heart of one of Europe’s major industrial centers, is one of the busiest ports in the world.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The Dutch place great value on family life. A traditional Dutch saying is “Your own hearth is worth gold” (*Eigen haard is goud waard*). The nuclear family—called the *gezin*—has traditionally been at the center of Dutch life, especially since the 19th century. Since World War II, there has been an increase in the incidence of unmarried people living together, and the divorce rate has risen as well. The Dutch tend to have small families and to lavish care and attention on their children. The concept of *deftig*, or respectability, is important to the Dutch family and is related to an age-old custom known as *schmeren*. At sundown, the Dutch traditionally leave their curtains open with the lights on low, leaving themselves visible to neighbors or passersby behind their large front windows. This practice is

often interpreted as a symbolic attempt to show their neighbors that all is *deftig* within, although some have attributed it to the desire to check up on what is going on outside, or even as a thrifty way to make use of all available daylight.

## 11 CLOTHING

In everyday life, the Dutch wear typical modern Western-style clothing for both formal and casual occasions, although people who work outdoors may still wear the wooden shoes (*klompen*) popularly associated with the Dutch. Due to the efforts of animal rights activists, fur coats have become unpopular. Traditional folk costumes vary from region to region, but most feature baggy black pants and wide-brimmed hats for men and full black dresses with embroidered bodices and lace bonnets for women. The popular image of the Dutch people often includes a woman wearing wooden shoes and the white cap of the Volendam region with its high peak and wing-like folds at the sides. Traditional costumes may still be seen in Volendam and Marken, where they are a tourist attraction.

## 12 FOOD

Dutch food is wholesome and simply prepared, often with butter but not thick sauces or strong spices (although the spicier Indonesian *rijsttafel* dishes have gained popularity in recent years). Seafood is widely eaten, especially herring, which are traditionally lifted by the tail and dropped head first into one’s upturned mouth. Dairy products are a dietary staple, and the Dutch are known worldwide for their cheeses, the most popular being Gouda, which is round and flat, and Edam, which is shaped like a ball. Many desserts come with whipped cream, and popular beverages include tea, coffee, beer, and *Jenever*, a Dutch gin made from juniper berries.

The Dutch breakfast is generally a cold meal of sliced bread, meat, and cheese. This is followed by a modest midday meal, also cold, and a large dinner, served at about 6 PM, which typically includes soup and a main dish containing meat and vegetables. Popular snacks include french fries—*patat frites*—often served with mayonnaise or ketchup, and waffles, smothered in whipped cream or caramel sauce.

## 13 EDUCATION

The Dutch are a well-educated people with virtually no illiteracy. Schooling is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16. At the age of 12, students take an exam which tracks them into either general, pre-university, or vocational school, although it is generally possible to change schools at a later time. At the age of 16, school certificate exams are taken in a variety of subjects. Students in the pre-university, or gymnasium, track can advance automatically to a university at the age of 18, while others must take an exam. Higher education is offered at nine universities and four technical institutes. The oldest university, which is at Leiden, dates back to 1575.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The 17th century was the golden age of Dutch painting, marked by the work of such masters as Rembrandt van Rijn, Jan Vermeer, and Jacob van Ruisdael. Supported by the rich burghers and merchants of the upper middle class, these works are known for their depiction of everyday scenes showing middle-class life. The great 19th-century painter Vincent van



Netherlanders selling cheese in a market in Alkmaar, The Netherlands. (© Benoit Roland/The Image Works)

Gogh was born and lived most of his life in the Netherlands before moving to Arles, France, two years before his death in 1890. The 20th-century *De Stijl* movement, which advocated simplicity, is represented in the works of Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. The Netherlands was home to two great philosophers, Desiderius Erasmus in the 15th century and Baruch Spinoza in the 17th. The 19th-century novel *Max Havelaar*, by Edouard Douwes Dekker, caused a public outcry over Dutch treatment of the people in its colonies and led to eventual government reforms. In music, the Renaissance composers Jan Sweelinck and Jacob Obrecht were renowned throughout Europe. Twenty-first century Dutch popular music has African and Middle Eastern influences.

### 15 WORK

The Dutch economy expanded from World War II until economic growth slowed in 1973 due to rising world oil prices. Over the next decade unemployment skyrocketed from 3% to 17%. In 2007 it stood at 4.1% of the work force. The main industry of the 20th century was the production of petrochemicals. Agriculture, which accounts for only 3% of workers, is still an important part of the national economy, with many Dutch specializing in dairy farming and flower-growing. Industrial activity in the 2000s is predominantly in food processing, chemicals, petroleum refining, and electrical machinery. Many people in the Netherlands go into the family business,

eventually taking it over from the older generation. Foreign workers, who first entered the country in large numbers in the 1960s, perform low-paying, unskilled work.

### 16 SPORTS

At least 4 million people belong to sports clubs. The largest is the Royal Netherlands Football (i.e., soccer) Association, which claims about a million members. The Dutch won the European soccer championship in 1988. Other popular sports are tennis, swimming, and hockey.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Dutch enjoy many forms of outdoor recreation. Fishing is extremely popular, as are boating, sailing, and camping. Throughout the country, bicycles are used for recreational outings and races, as well as transportation. Winter sports include skating, curling, ice boating, wind-assisted skating (performed wearing a kite-like triangular sail on one's back), and many kinds of races and endurance tests. As many as 16,000 people compete in the 200-km (124-mi) Elfstedentocht skating race over frozen canals connecting 11 towns in Friesland. (However, in many years temperatures do not drop low enough for this event to be held.) Another traditional sport popular in Friesland is *fierljeppen*, a form of pole-vaulting.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Dutch crafts include pottery, tile work, glassware, and silver. The famous Delft pottery has been produced in the city of that name since 1653. Plates, vases, pitchers, and a multitude of other decorative pieces are still made by workers who enter the trade at ages 16 or 17 and receive eight years of training. Over a thousand different types of objects are produced, and no two pieces are the same. The designs were originally copied from fine Chinese porcelain that entered Holland during the 17th century.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The generous Dutch program of social benefits has been abused by a multitude of persons claiming sickness or disability: in the early 1990s one-fourth of Amsterdam's population was living on welfare. Absenteeism at work is also a problem. Overcrowding in the cities has resulted in the illegal occupation of buildings by squatters. The position of Amsterdam as one of Europe's main entry points for illegal drugs has led to a drug problem, which the government has addressed with strong anti-drug laws. However, the number of addicts using hard drugs in the Netherlands is low compared with the rest of Europe and considerably lower than that in France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. Dutch rates of drug use are lower than US rates in every category.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Progress on women's rights issues has been realized in the Netherlands in the last 50 years. In the mid-20th century, women still needed their husbands' consent to enter into employment contracts. The percentage of women in the labor force jumped from 22% in 1960 to 56% in 2006; just 10% of women leave the workforce after having their first child. The Netherlands has a goal of having 65% of all women working at least 12 hours per week by 2010. Still much remains to be done to fully achieve gender equality in government and society. A Law on Child Care entered into force in January 2005. The Netherlands has invested considerably in child-care facilities. There were 200,000 child-care facilities in 2007 and all schools were required to provide child care from 7:30 AM to 6:30 PM. Child care has been made affordable for all income groups. Parents pay no more than one-third of child care costs. Working parents are entitled to parental leave and tax breaks during that leave.

The Netherlands is also taking steps to combat domestic violence, sexual violence, honor-related violence, and human trafficking. Prostitution in the Netherlands is legal. Eighty percent of women working as prostitutes are foreigners, and 20% are of Dutch origin. The Dutch Parliament, citizens, and Dutch non-governmental organizations broadly support the legalization of brothels. The government asserts that that policy protects sex workers, with the government having more control over the sex industry and combating human trafficking. Local authorities can issue work permits for brothels and can thus control safety, health, and working conditions.

The Netherlands is known for its liberal policies on gay rights. The public widely supports tolerance and equal rights for homosexuals, although conservative Christians and Muslim immigrants tend to be more conservative in their beliefs about gender and sexual norms. The 1993 Equal Rights Law prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sexual orienta-

tion. In 1998 the Dutch parliament granted same-sex couples domestic partnership benefits and in 2001 the government legalized same-sex marriages. The Netherlands was the first country in the world to do so. A 2006 European Union member poll showed the Dutch to be the strongest supporters of same-sex marriage at 82%.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# NIVKHS

**LOCATION:** Russia (Siberia, Sakhalin Island, Amur Estuary region)

**POPULATION:** 5,162 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Russian, Nivkh

**RELIGION:** Traditional form of shamanism, Eastern Orthodox Christianity

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Nivkhs are an indigenous people of extreme southeastern Siberia (also called the Russian Far East) who inhabit the island of Sakhalin and the Amur River Valley. Their traditional economic occupations are fishing and, to a lesser extent, hunting. It is believed on the basis of archaeological, anthropological, and linguistic evidence that they are the descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the region. Archaeologists have found evidence of ancient settlements on Sakhalin dating from the Neolithic era (5,000 BC–1,000 AD) and is quite possible that their inhabitants were the ancestors of the Nivkhs. The Nivkhs' affiliation, if any, to other ethnic groups of northeastern Asia has long been a matter of speculation. Some scholars have concluded that the Nivkhs may be ethnically and linguistically related to the Koriaks and Chukchi of far northeastern Siberia and perhaps some native peoples of Alaska. Other researchers have tentatively suggested possible links between the Nivkhs and the ancient inhabitants of Southeast Asia.

The Nivkhs call themselves *Nivkh* (plural *Nivkhgu*), which simply means “person.” The term *Nivkhi*, which is the Russian plural of *Nivkh*, is often used as both a singular and plural form in Western ethnographic literature. Russian and Western ethnographers formerly called the Nivkhs the *Gilyaks* or *Giliaks*. There has been considerable disagreement among scholars as to the origin of the name *Gilyak*. Some suggest that it is derived from *Kile*, the name of a nearby Tungusic-speaking group whom early Russian explorers may have mistaken for Nivkhs, while others believe that it may be an obsolete Tungusic name for Nivkh.

Although linguistically isolated from their neighbors, the Nivkhs maintained trade and marriage relations for centuries with the Nanais and other Tungus-speaking peoples of the Amur and the Ainu of southern Sakhalin. Contacts with the Ainu were sometimes hostile; the two groups occasionally raided each others' settlements and took slaves. Contacts between the Nivkhs along the Amur and the Chinese began as early as the 12th century AD: Nivkhs exchanged furs for Chinese cloth (mainly silk, cotton, and brocade), alcohol, tobacco, beads, and metal disks that were fashioned into jewelry. During the 18th century, Chinese officials claimed control over Nivkh territory and appointed headmen in the Nivkh village communities to serve as liaisons between the Nivkhs and the Chinese government and to collect taxes from their compatriots. These headmen had no real authority among the Nivkhs, however, as they merely served as ceremonial figureheads in dealings with Chinese officials. Nivkh-Japanese trade, which became extensive in the early 19th century, involved the exchange of sea-eagle feathers gathered by the Nivkhs and used by the Japanese in certain religious rituals for Japanese metal goods such as cooking pots and knives. Nivkh blacksmiths of-

ten melted down metal trade items into various tools, arrowheads, spear and harpoon points, hooks, and earrings.

The first Russian-Nivkh contacts began in the 17th century, when Russian explorers encountered Nivkh settlements along the Amur; these meetings were not always cordial, and the Nivkhs earned a reputation among the Russians as ferocious warriors. During the 19th century, the Nivkhs became Russian subjects: treaties between Russia and China in the late 1850s and early 1860s gave Russia control over the Amur River valley, and several decades of conflicts and negotiations between Russia and Japan resulted in Russia's acquisition of Sakhalin in 1876. (Russia ceded the southern half of Sakhalin to Japan in 1905, when it lost the Russo-Japanese War; southern Sakhalin did not return to Russian/Soviet control until Japan's defeat at the end of World War II.) Henceforth, Nivkh territory was flooded by tens of thousands of Russian colonists, and the Nivkhs became a minority in their own land. The Russian government encouraged the colonization of both areas of Nivkh settlement—the lower Amur and Sakhalin—but for different reasons. Since the Amur River basin bordered on China, it was considered an area of strategic significance, and the Russian government did not wish to leave it sparsely populated by non-Russian natives. Sakhalin's damp, cold climate and poor soil provided little attraction for colonists, but it was geographically isolated not only from Central Russia but also from the Far Eastern mainland, so it presented a suitable location for a prison colony. By the end of the 19th century, the Russian population of Sakhalin included almost twice as many prisoners and exiles as free colonists.

Both along the Amur and on Sakhalin, Russian newcomers seized Nivkh lands and cheated the Nivkh out of their furs and other goods; at the same time, extensive commercial fishing by Russian and Japanese firms caused fish stocks to decline. As a result, poverty and hunger became widespread in Nivkh communities. The Nivkhs on Sakhalin faced additional dangers from escaped prisoners and ex-convicts, who often robbed Nivkh households, beat or killed Nivkh men, and raped Nivkh women. Some Sakhalin Nivkhs were forced by economic necessity to work as prison guards or to track escaped prisoners for the Russian prison administration; this naturally caused friction between Nivkhs and local Russians, many of whom were themselves former prisoners. During the Civil War that followed the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917, the Nivkhs were drawn into bloody conflicts between supporters of the Communist Red Army and the anti-Communist White Army and Japanese forces who saw in the prevailing chaos an opportunity for Japan to gain territory and influence in Russia's eastern borderlands.

During the 1920s, the Nivkhs' situation improved somewhat. The Bolshevik government provided economic relief and basic Western medical care and established a few schools in Nivkh territory. (Nevertheless, the Nivkhs had little influence on local government, which was, as before, dominated by Russians.) Economic exploitation of Nivkh lands by Russians—particularly the overfishing that had led to Nivkh famines before the Revolution—lessened during the first decade of Soviet rule. Ethnographers and Bolsheviks sympathetic to the Nivkhs and other numerically small nationalities persuaded the central government to put native needs before the state's interest in developing the area economically. After Stalin's rise to power in 1929, however, this policy was abandoned. Many



Nivkhs were forced out of their widely scattered settlements and shipped to a handful of larger villages. The government's economic planners assumed that this form of centralization would render fishing and hunting more efficient and productive; instead, it resulted in the depletion of fish and other natural resources (besides disrupting Nivkh communities). The Nivkhs suffered, along with the other peoples of the USSR, from the widespread political hysteria and mass arrests of the Stalinist purges. Local agents of the NKVD (the forerunner to the KGB) filled their arrest quotas by seizing Nivkhs on false charges of espionage for Japan (particularly among the Sakhalin Nivkhs), anti-Soviet sentiments, and economic sabotage. Forestry, mining, oil-drilling, and industry were developed in the Amur region and on Sakhalin without considering the economic consequences, which caused serious environmental damage to Nivkh territory.

The 1930s policy of resettlement was resumed with increased vigor in the 1960s, when government officials embarked upon a campaign of closing settlements they considered lacking in economic potential. However, the towns to which the Nivkhs were relocated offered few economic opportunities; dispersed among Russian majorities and denied instruction in Nivkh language and culture in local schools, many young Nivkhs were robbed of their cultural heritage. The Nivkhs had to bear in silence the economic and cultural damages wrought by the resettlements until Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's relaxation of censorship allowed them to air their grievances.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the 1989 Soviet census, the Nivkhs numbered 4,631, practically all of whom live in the Russian Far East. There were 2,008 Nivkhs living on the island of Sakhalin, and an additional 2,368 Nivkhs inhabited the lower Amur River valley in the Nizhne-Amurskii and Takhtinskii Districts (Russian *raion*) of Khabarovsk Territory (Russian *krai*). The remaining 255 Nivkhs lived scattered throughout the Russian Federation. As of the 2002 Russian census, the number of Nivkhs topped 5,000.

In the territory of the Amur Nivkhs, winters are characterized by high winds and heavy snows. January temperatures usually range between  $-28^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-18.4^{\circ}$  and  $-4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Summers are damp and moderately warm, averaging between  $16^{\circ}$  and  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $60.8^{\circ}$  and  $68^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Rains are heavy in late summer and early fall, thanks to Pacific monsoon winds, and flooding along the Amur is common. Larch, yew, birch, maple, lilac, honeysuckle, and swamp grasses predominate in low-lying areas; at higher elevations, mixed forests of larch, spruce, fir, ash, lime, maple, and walnut are the most common forms of vegetation. (The tops of the highest mountains are covered by cedar and lichens). Rivers have traditionally teemed with fish (particularly salmon) and otters. Foxes, bears, squirrels, sables, hares, boars, Siberian tigers, elks, grouse, and deer are the most typical animals along the lower Amur.

The climate in which the Sakhalin Nivkhs live is quite harsh. Winters are long and cold, with average temperatures of  $-19.6^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-3.3^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the north and  $-13.2^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $8.2^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the south. Summers are much warmer—median temperatures are  $15.2^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $59.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the north and  $17.8^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $64^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the south—but the climate is unstable, so temperatures often drop significantly without warning. The northernmost part of the island consists of barren tundra with sparse stands of larch and birch trees and various grasses; rugged mountainous taiga forests of larch, birch, spruce, and fir predominate further to the south. Sakhalin is very damp and windy, and violent hurricanes and blizzards frequently lash the island. Bears, foxes, otters, lynx, and reindeer are Sakhalin's most typical forms of wildlife; its rivers, particularly the Tym' and Poronai, are rich in fish, especially salmon. Seals and sea lions are found along Sakhalin's coastline.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Nivkh language is sometimes classified together with Chukchi, Koriak, Kamchadal, and several other Siberian languages in the Palaeoasiatic language family, but in reality it shares few features in common with them. In fact, Nivkh is an isolate—a language that cannot be proven to be related to any other known tongue. The grammar of Nivkh is quite complex. For example, numerals can take more than 20 different forms depending on the characteristics of the items being counted. Small, round objects; long objects; large, round objects or objects with an indeterminate shape; thin, flat objects; animals and insects; humans and spirits with human-like forms; objects that occur in pairs; and so on—all of these use different words for the same number. Thus, one person (*nivkh*) is *nivkh nin*; one dog (*kan*) is *kan n'yn'*; and one tree (*tig'r*) is *tig'r nekh*. The Nivkh language is divided into two dialects: the Amur dialect, which is spoken along the Amur River and on northern Sakhalin; and the Eastern Sakhalin dialect, which is spoken by the remainder of the Sakhalin Nivkhs. The Nivkh language



was unwritten (except for the academic transcriptions of linguists and ethnographers) until 1931, when Soviet linguists created a Nivkh writing system based on the Amur dialect and written in the Latin alphabet. Publications in the new alphabet (chiefly schoolbooks) soon began to appear, and literacy in the native language began to spread. However, the new alphabet was banned five years later: the Russian chauvinism typical of the Stalinist regime had led the government to oppose the use of the “foreign” Latin alphabet. A new alphabet based on the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet was to have been adopted in 1936, but for reasons that are unclear, it does not seem to have come into widespread use until the 1940s or 1950s. (The Stalinist suspicion of non-Russian peoples and their cultures and languages may have in some way been behind this delay.) Nivkh is now written in the Cyrillic alphabet, with numerous extra letters and diacritics to represent specifically Nivkh sounds. Until 1979, only the Amur dialect of Nivkh had a written form. In that year, a separate writing system (also based on the Cyrillic alphabet augmented with special letters and diacritics) was developed for the Eastern Sakhalin dialect; this form of written Nivkh is used mainly in textbooks for Nivkh children.

Nivkh personal names are usually formed by adding special suffixes to nouns, verbs, and adjectives or their roots. Male personal names use suffixes ending in *-n*, while female names are formed by adding suffixes that end in *-k*. Many Nivkh personal names reflect the Nivkhs’ natural surroundings, such as the male names *Kharkhin* (derived from *khar*, “wasp”) and *Tutin* (from *tu*, “lake”), and the female names *Chryguk* (from *chry*, “river bank, beach”) and *Chngyruk* (from *chngyr*, “grass”). Some names refer to a pleasant item or reflect a physical or moral characteristic that the parents wish the child to have—e.g., the female names *Aisik* (from *ais*, “gold”) and *Iazruk* (from *iazrud*, “to respect”), and the male names *Pilgun* (from *pila*, “big”) and *Smedun* (from *smod*, “to love”). Other names refer to a person’s behavior or appearance in infancy: examples of this type of name are *Togun* (male) and *Toguk* (female), which are based on the verb *tod*, “to cry”; *Vadun* (male) and *Vaduk* (female), which are derived from *vad*, “to fight”; and *Ngokhtik* (female, from *ngokh*, “fat”). A child may be named in reference to an event that took place at the time of his or her birth. Thus, if a dogsled broke down when a girl was born, she might be named *Myiguk* (from *myid*, “to go to ruin, to fall down”). It is for this reason that there are many Nivkh names of otherwise inexplicable origins—for example *Taligun* (male, from *tali*, “bag, sack”) and *Chvark* (female, from *chvar*, “chain”). Russian personal names such as *Vladimir* (male) and *Zoya* have become common in the 20th century. The Nivkhs did not use surnames until the Soviet period, when the government demanded that they, along with the other Siberian and Far Eastern Peoples, adopt surnames in the interest of bureaucratic convenience: Nivkh surnames are based on the personal name of the male who was the head of the family at that time.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Nivkhs possess a rich heritage of oral literature that has been passed on from generation to generation since time immemorial. Besides riddles, songs, and short folk tales, there are longer, more elaborate forms of folklore, such as the *t’ylgund* and *ngastund*. *T’ylgund* (singular *t’ylgu*, *t’ylgursh*), or myths, describe the creation of the universe and man, the origins of

the Nivkh clans and ancient wars between them, and the adventures of fantastic heroes, spirits, and beasts. In traditional Nivkh society, the *t’ylgund* were considered to be true. The *t’ylgund* have a fixed form and are not subject to improvisation or embellishment. (Some scholars, such as the Russian ethnographer Lev Shternberg, have compared the Nivkh *t’ylgund* to the mythological stories of the ancient Greeks and Romans on these grounds.) The *ngastund* (singular, *ngyzit*), or mythological tales, also center on mythical heroes. In some of the *ngastund*, the protagonist is a hunter who defeats evil spirits, cold, and hunger to survive and prosper; in others, he is a warlike hero who avenges wrongs done to his relatives or rescues women taken as brides against their will. Unlike the *t’ylgund*, the *ngastund* were not considered to be accurate representations of prehistoric events, even in traditional Nivkh society. They were told for amusement, not enlightenment, and were consciously embellished and altered by adding and changing details and plots.

#### 5 RELIGION

The traditional Nivkh religion is a form of shamanism. Nivkh shamanists believe that fire, mountains, stars, constellations, forests, and rivers have spirits, and that man’s survival and prosperity require that these spirits be respected. Certain animals, such as bears, dogs, and whales, are also considered sacred and are eaten only at ritual meals. The Nivkhs divide the universe (*kurng*) into three parts: the Upper World (*Tly Vo*) is the domain of the Master of the Heavens (*Tly Nivukh*). Humans, animals, and various deities such as the Master of the Mountains and Forests (*Pal Ys*) and the Master of the Waters (*Tol Ys*) dwell in the Middle World (*Mif*, or “Earth”). The Lower World (*Mly Vo*) is inhabited by the dead and is believed to more or less exactly resemble the world of the living. The Nivkh shaman (*ch’am*) communicates with the spirits by chanting and singing prayers while dancing and beating a large, flat, round drum called a *k’as* during rituals intended to ward off bad fortune and heal the sick. Nivkh shamans can be either men or women, but they must be chosen by the spirits. Shamans are respected but feared, because they are believed to have the ability to use magical powers for evil purposes if they so choose. During the imperial Russian era Russian Orthodox missionaries were active among the Nivkhs, converting a portion of the population. However Orthodox Christianity continued to coexist with the older beliefs. Many Nivkh shamans were imprisoned and executed during Stalin’s anti-religious campaigns; as a result, shamanism was driven underground. The Nivkhs have practiced their religion more openly since Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev ended the Soviet government’s persecution of religion during the 1980s.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important Nivkh holiday is the Bear Festival (*Chkhyf-Lekherno*; literally, “bear game”), a shamanist ceremony held to honor the bear-spirit and the memories of departed ancestors. The Bear Festival does not have a fixed date, but in pre-Soviet society it was usually held in January or February and was celebrated separately by each clan. Preparations for a Bear Festival sometimes took several years. Each celebration required a live bear, which was sometimes captured or purchased while still a cub. The bear was held in captivity in a small log building and fed by the clan’s members. (Tradition-

al Nivkh villages usually had several such cages, each holding an animal to be used in future Bear Festivals). A few months before the festival was to take place, the participants gave the bear's master food and money to be used in preparing a feast. On the day of the ceremony, the bear was tied between several elaborately carved poles or trees, killed with a bow and arrow, and butchered in a lengthy and complex ceremony. Dogs were also sacrificed at this time. The clan feasted on the bear's meat and celebrated with games, music, and dancing. Observance of the Bear Festival sharply declined during the Soviet period as a result of anti-religious persecution and the dispersal of Nivkh communities, but it was revived in the 1980s. The Bear Festival is celebrated by modern Nivkhs less as a religious ceremony than as an expression of Nivkh cultural identity.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In the traditional societies of the Nivkh and other Amur-dwellers, all couples wished to have many children, since this was considered a sign of prestige, especially for men. At the same time, pregnancy and childbirth were viewed as dangerous. (This is understandable, given the absence of medical care beyond shamanist rituals and certain herbal medicines.) For this reason, there were a host of taboos intended to ensure a safe delivery. Pregnant women were forbidden to sew clothing and footwear, repair fish nets, set animal traps, or perform any other activity that involved "tying" or "closing." In the last few months of pregnancy, this prohibition extended to other members of the household. Childbirth took place in a small temporary lean-to called a *lanraf*, from which men were barred. (Menstruating and birthing women were considered to bring bad fortune; they were forbidden to touch fishing and hunting equipment, and their husbands were not allowed to hunt or fish). Upon delivery, mother and child remained in the birthing hut for several days before returning to the family household. Both parents were forbidden to work for the time it took the child's umbilical cord to wither and drop off.

Cremation is the traditional form of burial among the Nivkhs. (In pre-Soviet society, Nivkhs who died in infancy were not cremated; instead, they were placed in coffins in the forks of trees in the hope that their spirits might fly off, to return one day to the clan.) Soon after death, the deceased is dressed in fine clothing (usually white), and a white cloth band called a *niakh tiakh* was used to cover their eyes. Food, drink, and tobacco are placed next to the body and periodically consumed by the mourners. After several days have passed, the body is removed from the house and cremated outdoors. The ashes and remaining bones are collected and placed in a *raf*—a small raised house a few feet square—in the settlement's graveyard.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In view of the harsh environment of the territory occupied by the Nivkhs, it is not surprising that hospitality has long been an esteemed trait. In traditional society, it was expected that any Nivkh experiencing economic hardship could receive food and shelter at any home for an indefinite time and that the favor would be returned when needed. Travelers to the Nivkh lands in the 19th century reported that this practice was often extended to strangers as well, even though the Nivkhs regarded outsiders with a certain degree of suspicion. (Nivkhs who abused this system of mutual aid were, however, roundly

despised.) Elderly people, especially old men, were held in high esteem. Although they held no special positions in the community (there was no traditional post of "elder") and enjoyed no special privileges, their advice was often sought on important personal and community matters. The forced dispersal of most Nivkh communities in the Soviet period has undoubtedly done much to lessen the influence of these values on everyday behavior.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Because of the Nivkhs' reliance upon fish for most of their food, their settlements were traditionally established along rivers or seashores. High ground was chosen to provide protection from tides and floods. Most villages contained five or fewer extended-family households, although some had as many as 20. In addition to residential buildings, Nivkh villages contained doghouses; elevated sheds for storing weapons, tools, and preserved food; platforms and racks for drying fish; and raised log houses called *lezng* that held the skulls and bones of bears sacrificed during the Bear Festival. The Nivkh were semi-nomadic and had separate winter and summer settlements. Winter houses (*tulf tyf*) were built near hunting grounds and occupied from October until April or May. There were two basic types of winter dwelling. The most ancient was called a *to ryv* in the Amur dialect, and a *to* in the Eastern Sakhalin dialect. The *to ryv* was a round dugout about 23 feet in diameter shored up by wooden poles and covered with packed earth and grass. Wide, low benches along the walls also served as beds. A fireplace in the center of the *to ryv* provided heat and light, and a smokehole in the center allowed smoke to escape and light to enter. The other type of Nivkh winter house was the *chad ryv*. The *chad ryv*, like the Nanai *dio*, was modeled after Chinese or Manchu houses of the Amur region. It was a large, rectangular house of dried earth with wooden supports and a grass or bark roof. Adobe stoves on either side of the door provided warmth, and the inhabitants sat and slept on benches lining the walls. The windows of the *chad ryv* were covered with fishskin. Summer houses, or *ke ryv*, were built along fishing grounds and were occupied from May until September. The *ke ryv* were rectangular wooden buildings between 36 and 45 feet long that were raised several feet above the ground on poles. Entry was by way of a notched log used as a ladder. Virtually all Nivkhs now live in one-story Russian-style wooden houses or prefabricated concrete apartment buildings.

Prior to the 20th century, dogsleds and skis were the most common form of Nivkh winter transportation. In summer, journeys were made on foot, in light bark boats (*hivmu*), or in long, flat-bottomed wooden boats (*kylmr mu*). Dogsleds, skis, and traditional boats are now used much less frequently than motorboats, automobiles, trucks, and buses.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditional Nivkh society was divided into several dozen clans (*k'al*) of related nuclear families that took part in the Bear Festival and other religious rituals, avenged wrongs done to their members by members of other clans, and shared hunting and fishing grounds. Two clans often formed *pandf*, marriage alliances according to which each agreed to give wives to, or receive wives from, only the other clan. Because this practice resulted in a high degree of interrelatedness among the Nivkhs, there were strict and very complex rules on the degree



A Nivkh family rest at home in the village of Nogliki on Sakhalin Island, Russia. The main businesses of Sakhalin people are fishing and the oil industry. (Laski Diffusion/East News/Liaison/Getty Images)

and type of blood relationship permitted between marriage partners. Although the complex obligations and rules surrounding the clan system are no longer observed, the Nivkhs are still conscious of their clan affiliations and the locations of traditional clan territories. Since the Second World War Nivkh family life has generally followed the same patterns as Soviet and Russian family life.

## **11 CLOTHING**

The traditional Nivkh garments for both men and women were robes (*siky* for men, *hukht* for women) that fastened on the left side of the body with three buttons and were worn with trousers (*varsh*). Winter garments were made of fish-skin, seal-skin, sable, otter, lynx, fox, and dog furs; summer garments were sewn from cotton and silk cloth purchased from Japanese, Russian, and Chinese traders. (Only wealthy Nivkhs wore silk.) Women's *hukht* extended below the knee and were made of light or multicolored furs, skins, or cloth, while the *siky* worn by men were slightly shorter, used dark materials, and had pockets built into the sleeves. The collars, hems, and sleeve ends of women's robes were elaborately ornamented with beads, Chinese coins, or other metal disks, glass trade beads, embroidery, and appliqué. Men's robes were decorated more modestly and only on the sleeve ends and the left lapel. Boots (*myn'd'kh*) were made of fish-skin, seal-skin, or deer-skin; stockings (*kanyng kamys*) were made of dog fur. Fur hats

(*hak*) were worn in winter. Women were particularly fond of *tlyhi hak*, hats whose crown and back were decorated with, respectively, the ears and tail of the animal that had provided the fur. In summer, Nivkhs wore conical birch-bark hats called *hif hak*. Men always wore seal-skin belts from which hung knives, tools, amulets, and pouches for tobacco, flint, and tinder. (Although women also wore belts on occasion, belts were generally considered a sign of manhood.) Men's *siky* were protected from water damage while hunting and traveling by dog-sled by a loose kilt called a *kosk*. Underclothing consisted of skin loin-cloths or cloth undershorts and undershirts; in winter, women wore richly embroidered fur and cloth chest coverings for additional warmth. Today, the Nivkhs usually wear Western clothing (cloth dresses, shirts, trousers, stockings, socks, and underclothes, and leather shoes), but traditional clothing is worn on holidays and other special occasions. Modern Nivkh women sometimes sew traditional patterns onto store-bought cloth dresses.

## **12 FOOD**

Fish, particularly salmon, is the mainstay of the traditional Nivkh diet and is usually eaten raw, dried, or boiled. Dried fish (*ma*) is prepared by hanging fresh fish in the wind and sun. Seaweed, wild garlic and onions, caviar, wild apples, cedar nuts, hazel nuts, cranberries, cloudberries, whortleberries, and edible roots, fungi, and grasses add variety to Nivkh national

cuisine. In traditional society, meat was consumed much less frequently than fish and usually consisted of deer, elk, seal, sea lion, and dolphin; bears and dogs were almost never eaten outside of shamanist rituals. A favorite Nivkh dish is *mos'*, which is made by pulverizing dried fish and mixing it with fish skins, water, seal fat, and berries until the mixture has the consistency of sour cream. Salt, sugar, rice, millet, legumes, liquors, and tea entered the Nivkh diet within the last few centuries as a result of contacts with Chinese, Japanese, and Manchu traders; Russian/Soviet influence has led the Nivkhs to adopt bread and flour, vodka, potatoes, butter, and canned vegetables, fruits, and meats. Prior to the Soviet era, the Nivkhs stored food in birchbark or wooden containers, cooked in iron kettles of Chinese manufacture, and ate from wooden platters and bowls with wooden spoons; now, they use mass-produced metal, plastic, china, and enamel vessels, utensils, and plates.

### 13 EDUCATION

Education and literacy were unknown among the Nivkhs until the Soviet government began to establish public schools in the 1920s; these schools used Russian textbooks and teachers and operated in Russian until the creation of a Nivkh alphabet in 1931. Primary schooling is now universal among the Nivkhs; almost all attend at least some secondary school, and many go on to college. All Nivkhs are fluent in spoken and written Russian, knowledge of which is essential for entry into institutions of higher learning. Because teaching in native Siberian languages was neglected, and often officially discouraged, during much of the Soviet period, many young and middle-aged Nivkhs have little or no understanding of their own people's language. According to information from 2006 only 23.3% of the Nivkhs speak Nivkh as their mother tongue. (In some Nivkh communities, fewer than one in ten speak Nivkh as their first language). The remainder speak Russian as their first language, although at least some in this group know Nivkh at varying levels of fluency.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The cultural heritage of the Nivkhs includes thousands of songs, most of which have yet to be recorded or written down. Some Nivkh songs are of great antiquity and have been sung for centuries. The ability to improvise new songs is also highly valued among the Nivkhs. Nivkh women are considered especially talented at composing beautiful and poetic songs on a moment's notice. The most popular Nivkh songs are the *alkhtund* (singular: *alkhtursh*), or love songs. The *alkhtund* usually concern the tragic consequences of an ill-fated love: a typical theme is the suicide of two lovers who cannot marry either because they are members of the same clan or because the woman has been given in marriage to another man.

Nivkh songs are often accompanied on the *t'yngring*, a violin-like one-stringed instrument with a round, hollow birchbark body and a fish-skin soundboard. The *t'yngring* is played with a bow made of wood and horsehair. Another Nivkh instrument is the *kangga*, a copper, iron or wooden mouth instrument that resembles a jaw harp. A log was sometimes suspended between two trees and beaten like a drum during the Bear Festival. During the Soviet period, these instruments were largely replaced by European instruments (guitars, wind instruments, accordions, etc.), but they are still played at public performances by Nivkh folklore ensembles.

### 15 WORK

Fishing has traditionally been the Nivkhs' primary economic activity, and they have developed a variety of skillful methods of netting, hooking, and trapping fish, particularly salmon. Nets were formerly made by hand from nettle fiber but now mass-produced rope or plastic-filament nets are purchased in stores. Nets are sometimes used in conjunction with an L-shaped trap called a *myr*, or *chkhyl'*. The *myr* is placed in a river or stream at a right angle to the riverbank in such a manner as to force schools of fish to run into it; when they attempt to turn, they are caught in a net. By using this combination of trap and net, a fishing expedition of three to ten men can catch four or five thousand fish in the space of a few days.

### 16 SPORTS

Nivkhs have long enjoyed dogsled racing, boat racing, archery contests, and fencing with sticks. These sports are an integral part of Bear Festival celebrations. Children play tug-of-war and ball games (for example, one player tosses a grass ball to another player, who attempts to catch it on a stick). Curiously, although the Nivkh have traditionally lived near rivers and other bodies of water, swimming did not become popular in the Soviet period.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most Nivkh households now own televisions and radios with which they receive news and entertainment broadcasts in Russian from both Moscow and local stations. Nivkh cultural activists have recently begun to suggest that local studios also produce native-language programs on Nivkh cultural themes. Modern Nivkhs also enjoy attending concerts of classical, popular, and Nivkh traditional music and Russian and Nivkh plays.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Nivkh men have traditionally been skilled at engraving intricate decorations on wooden spoons, storage trunks, knife handles and sheaths, and metal knife blades and spear tips. Women's artistic skills find expression in embroidery and appliqué, with which they adorn clothing and blankets. Common themes of Nivkh engraving and sewing are symmetrical spirals and other abstract geometric designs, fish, dragons, deer, bears, birds, snakes, and turtles. Sculpture in wood and bone originally centered around the representation of shamanist spirits, such as the "Master of the House" (*Tyv ys*) that protected each family. In the 20th century, its repertoire has expanded to include animal and human figures as well as hunting scenes and other themes from traditional life.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The modern Nivkhs face a number of problems shared to one degree or another by all of Russia's Siberian and Far Eastern Peoples. Alcoholism, pollution, and a low standard of living exacerbated by late Soviet and post-Soviet economic upheavals have resulted in poor health and a low life expectancy. Nivkhs are sometimes subject to economic discrimination in the areas where they live; that is, they are paid less than Russians for equivalent work or find it more difficult to obtain well-paying employment. Overfishing and ecologically unsound fishing, logging, and industrial practices have caused

significant environmental damage to the Nivkh lands. Issues of cultural survival, too, present a formidable challenge. Soviet policies toward minority peoples after the 1920s tended more and more to suppress their cultures and languages in favor of Russian culture and language. The “small peoples” of Siberia and the Far East in particular saw their histories, cultural achievements, and languages steadily and inexorably removed from educational institutions and public life. By the 1970s, the Nivkh language was no longer even taught as an elective subject in local schools, as Soviet officials had decided that such a “backward” people’s language was not worthy of preservation. Since *perestroika*, Nivkh teachers, activists, journalists, and scholars have achieved some success in expanding knowledge of Nivkh history, language, folklore, and arts. A small but vigorous native rights movement led by Nivkh author Vladimir Sangi emerged during the *glasnost*’ era with the long-term goal of a Nivkh autonomous territory inside the Russian Federation; it has already obtained the return of some Nival lands to communities dispersed during the 1960s resettlements. Perhaps the most prominent Nivkh cultural figure today is the novelist Vladimir Sangi, who in the late 1990s was openly critical of Russian cultural and economic policies regarding the Nivkhs, including issuing a call for reparations from the Russian government to the Nivkh community.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Men and women had separate economic roles in the Nivkh community, and children were taught early on how to perform the activities suitable for their sex. Women processed skins and furs, cleaned fish and game, sewed clothes, and cleaned house; men hunted, fished, built homes, carved household items from wood, and made various weapons and tools. Boys and girls were considered of marriageable age at puberty. Young men and women were often sexually active before marriage, although this was often frowned upon (at least as far as the behavior of young women was concerned).

During the Soviet era, particularly following collectivization and during the Second World War, the full incorporation of Nivkh economic life into the Soviet system resulted in the gradual integration of Nivkh women into the Soviet workforce. In addition, Nivkh women were granted access to Soviet educational opportunities.

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—revised by A. Frank

# NORWEGIANS

**LOCATION:** Norway

**POPULATION:** 4.7 million

**LANGUAGE:** Norwegian in two forms: Bokmål and Nynorsk

**RELIGION:** Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway; small numbers of Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Muslims, and Jews.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Norway is part of Scandinavia in northern Europe, together with its neighbors Denmark and Sweden. Norway is bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean for most of the country's length, on the southwest by the North Sea, and directly to the south by the Skagerrak, an arm of the North Sea. To the east, Norway shares a long border with Sweden, and for a short distance in the north with Finland and the Russian federation.

Most Norwegians live within a few kilometers of the sea, which has played a pivotal role in their country's history. Norway's great Viking era took place during the 9th century AD, when the Vikings extended their territory as far afield as Dublin and Normandy. Their leader, Harald Fairhair, unified the country around the year 900, and King Olaf converted the Norwegians to Christianity. The Vikings were the first to cross the Atlantic Ocean, a feat accomplished with Erik the Red's voyages to Iceland and Greenland. According to tradition, Erik's son, Leif Erikson, landed on the coast of North America in the year 1001. The year 1380 began Norway's long period of union with Denmark, which lasted over 400 years, until 1814, when the Norwegians adopted their own constitution. Their short-lived independence ended as Norway was united with Sweden under one head of state until 1905. That year marked Norway's peaceful secession and installation of its own monarchy. Since Norway, long a subject people, had no royal family of its own, it chose Prince Carl of Denmark to become the new nation's first king, as Haakon VII, an ancient Viking name like that given to his son, Olav.

Norway remained neutral during World War I, but was invaded by Germany early in World War II. Norwegian resistance to German occupation resulted in severe reprisals as the Nazis attempted to destroy the underground movement. The Norwegian merchant fleet played a vital role in aiding the Allies. Although it lost half of its fleet, the country recovered quickly after the war. In 1957, King Haakon died and was succeeded by his son, Olav V, who died in January 1991. In June of that year, Olav's son was crowned king of Norway as Harald V. Although Norway joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960, it rejected membership in the European Community (EC) in 1972, and decided against joining the new European Union (EU) in 1994. In 1992, however, Norway became a member of the newly created European Economic Area (EEA), through which it participates in the European single market and contributes to the budget of the EU.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Norway stretches across the north and west of the Scandinavian peninsula. It is a long country with bulges at the north and south, while its mid-section is as narrow across as 6.28 km

(3.9 mi) at one point. It has an area of 323,882 sq km (125,051 sq mi)—roughly the same size as the state of New Mexico. Norway is the longest country in Europe and one of the most mountainous: only one-fifth of its total area is less than 152.4 m (500 ft) above sea level. Almost one-third of the country lies within the Arctic Circle. In this so-called “land of the midnight sun,” the sun shines almost continuously through every 24-hour period at the height of summer and never sets at all on Midsummer's Day (June 23), a date celebrated with bonfires throughout the country. Overseas territories claimed by Norway include: the Svalbard islands, the volcanic island of Jan Mayen Peter I Island and Queen Maud Land, both north of the Arctic Circle.

With 4.7 million people, Norway has the lowest population density of any country in Europe—15 people per sq km (38 people per sq mi). Ethnically, it has a largely homogeneous population of Nordic, Alpine, and Baltic origin. However, there are also minority populations of some 30,000 Sami (Lapps), some of whom still maintain the traditional reindeer-herding life of their people. Norway also has about 7,000 residents of Finnish origin, and, more recently, immigrants from southern Europe and a variety of Third World countries, many of whom first arrived as guest workers.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Norwegian is a Germanic language closely related to Swedish and Danish. There are actually two forms of Norwegian, both of which are considered official languages and can be understood by all Norwegians. *Bokmål*, the more common of the two, was developed from Danish during the nineteenth century, while *nynorsk* grew out of nationalistic impulses at the same time. *Nynorsk* is a combination of rural dialects intended to be a distinctly Norwegian language, one not influenced by Danish. Today, *bokmål* is mostly spoken by people living in cities and towns. A third form of Norwegian, *samnorsk*, which was earlier proposed as a way of simplifying language use in Norway by combining elements of *bokmål* and *nynorsk*, has now been abandoned.

### EXAMPLES

(B= bokmål; N= nynorsk)

one	en (B); ein (N)
two	to
three	tre
four	fire
five	fem
six	seks
seven	sju (N and B); syv (B)
eight	åtte
nine	ni
ten	ti
church	kirke (N); kyrkje (B)
breakfast	frukost (N); frokost (B)
open	open (N); åpen (B)
closed	stengd (N); stengt (B)

## 4 FOLKLORE

Norwegian mythology originated from the ancient religion of the region, whose chief god, Odin, lived in a walled city called Valhalla and was escorted into battle by nine warrior maidens called the Valkyries. Norway has a strong tradition of sto-

rytelling, and its folklore is full of odd, sometimes grotesque, creatures. The *hulder* is a woman with the tail of a cow which will only disappear if she marries; thus these beings are always chasing after men to marry. Others include the *fossegrimen*, a benign water spirit found at the base of waterfalls; the *nokken*, a mischievous water spirit who lures boys and men to their death; and the *nisse*, a small white-bearded man with a red cap and wooden shoes. Probably the most famous feature of Norwegian folklore are the trolls—large, powerful, grotesque creatures. Some trolls are considered friendly, while others delight in plaguing human beings. Trolls appear as mascots, in Norwegian place names, in folk art, and in many folk tales.

## 5 RELIGION

Norway's official religion is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. While 83% of the population are members, fewer than 10% are regular churchgoers. Norway also has small numbers of Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Muslims, and Jews.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Constitution Day on May 17 is the Norwegian equivalent of the Fourth of July in the United States. It is celebrated with parades and other gala events throughout the country, often with traditional folk costumes. In Oslo a parade of schoolchildren is greeted by the king. Midsummer's Eve on June 23 is another major holiday. It marks the longest day of the year and is celebrated with bonfires along the country's lakes, rivers, and fjords. Celebrants continue eating, drinking, and dancing throughout the night. All Saints' Day is celebrated on November 1, but Christmas is Norway's major winter holiday. On Christmas Eve, families celebrate with a traditional festive dinner that often includes pork and *surkål*, a cabbage dish. Afterwards they sing carols around the tree, which is decorated with white candles, and open the Christmas presents. Traditionally, the Norwegians perform a thorough housecleaning before Christmas, which actually extends until January 2, the end of the holiday season. Other religious holidays include Easter, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Ascension Day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Norwegian babies are born at hospitals or at special lying-in clinics (*fødestuer*). Although Norwegians are not particularly religious, the overwhelming majority of parents have their children christened as infants. Norwegian children engage in a lot of unsupervised play, as the crime rate is very low and even the larger cities are very safe environments. Most teenagers go through confirmation, the primary rite of passage for young men and women in Norway, at approximately age fifteen. Military service is compulsory for males starting at the age of nineteen.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Norwegians are a hard-working and self-reliant people, with an independence fostered by their harsh climate, with its long dark winters. Emotionally reserved, they avoid direct confrontations in their relationships with other people. They are courteous and polite, and their social encounters are marked by repeated handshaking, by both men and women. A common greeting when shaking hands is "*Takk for sist.*" Norwegians are



also known for their hospitality, especially during the Christmas season. Guests in a Norwegian home do not touch their drinks until the host offers a toast using the word "*skål.*"

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Norway has one of the highest standards of living in the world, enhanced by the discovery of petroleum and natural gas in the Norwegian section of the North Sea in the late 1960s. Norwegian houses are typically of stone or wood, with one or two stories. Many farm homes include a detached wooden building called a *stabbur*, a general storage facility, as well as the requisite barn.

Norway's state-supported health-care system covers most medical expenses for its residents. Average life expectancy in 2007 was 79 years, up from 56 years a century earlier. Like those in other industrialized nations, Norway's leading causes of death include cancer and heart disease. As the average life span of Norwegians has increased, a shortage of nursing and retirement homes has developed.

In spite of Norway's rugged terrain, the country has a modern, efficient transportation network. The best-developed roads are found in the southeast, where there are fewer natural barriers. Most of Norway's roads are paved. Although most Nor-

wegians own cars, good public transportation is available, with express service provided between large cities and towns. Shipping is a mainstay of the Norwegian economy.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The typical marriage age for men is 25–30, for women 20–25. Norwegian families are getting smaller, and it is not unusual for women to decide not to have any children. The parent or parents of one spouse generally live with the family, often in a separate suite of rooms in the house or a nearby separate apartment. Husbands and wives generally share decision-making responsibilities. The divorce rate, while low, is rising, with incompatibility and alcoholism cited as the primary causes.

### 11 CLOTHING

Norwegians wear modern Western-style clothes for casual, business, and formal wear. At festivals, one may still see traditional costumes. Women's costumes include high-collared white blouses with embroidered or plaid bodices and ankle-length skirts, often in blue or red. This outfit may be completed by a hat of lace or other fine cloth. Men wear broad-brimmed hats, white shirts, colorful embroidered vests with dressy buttons, and tight black knee-length breeches with white hose and silver-buckled shoes.

### 12 FOOD

Norwegians eat four meals a day, of which the main one is *middag*, a hot meal usually eaten between 4:00 and 6:00 PM. A typical *middag* meal would be fish served with boiled potatoes and vegetables. The remaining meals are cold meals featuring the typical Scandinavian open-faced sandwich, called *smørbrød* in Norway, and consisting of ingredients including cheese, jam, salmon spread, cucumber, boiled eggs, and sardines, served with bread and crackers. While fish is often served in mildly flavored forms such as fish loaf and fish balls, the more pungent smoked salmon (*røkelaks*) and aged trout (*rakørret*) are popular as well. Commonly eaten meats include mutton and meat balls. Lingonberry jam is a popular accompaniment to meals, and for dessert one may be served fresh berries, *rømmegrøt* (cream pudding), or fruit soup. Coffee is the most commonly served beverage. In recent years American-style fast food has become very popular.

### 13 EDUCATION

Literacy is nearly universal in Norway. School is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 16. After this point, students choose between vocational and college preparatory training. Higher education, which is free, is offered at seven universities and a number of other institutions. In 2007, 208,000 students were enrolled in higher education, which is equivalent to more than 4% of the population. Opportunities for vocational education also abound, and it is the policy of the government that all youth have the right to education up to the age of 18.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Norwegian literature begins with the Sagas and Eddas of the medieval Vikings, written in Old Norse and found mainly in Icelandic texts. Norway's most illustrious writer during the period of Danish rule was the 18th-century playwright Ludvig Holberg, whose comedies are still performed in Norway and

Denmark (and to whom the composer Edvard Grieg dedicated a suite of pieces). Norway's liberation from Danish rule in 1814 marked the beginning of the country's modern literary tradition. Its most famous author is the playwright Henrik Ibsen, whose works of realism and social criticism—including *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *Peer Gynt*—are known and performed throughout the world. Other prominent 19th-century authors included Henrik Wergeland and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (a 1903 Nobel laureate). In the 20th century, Knut Hamsun's novels have explored social problems, and Sigrid Undset—who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1928—portrayed the Norwegian past in sweeping historical novels, the most famous being the trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter*.

In the visual arts, the painter Edvard Munch—known worldwide for his famous painting *The Scream*—pioneered expressionism in Norway during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Gustav Vigeland is known for his sculptures. Norway's most famous composer is Edvard Grieg, who incorporated elements of Norwegian folk music, culture, and history into his compositions.

### 15 WORK

Much of Norway's formerly agricultural employment has shifted to both small industries (paper, textiles, and food and beverage processing) and larger ones, such as shipbuilding, shipping, as well as North Sea oil development. Today only about 4% of the workforce is engaged in farming, while industry employs 22% and the service sector 74%. Government regulations limit the work week to 38 hours, prohibit more than 200 hours of overtime in one year, and require employers to provide workers with job security.

### 16 SPORTS

Skiing—which was once a means of transport—is the Norwegian national sport. Children learn to ski at an early age; downhill, cross-country, and slalom skiing are all popular. Other winter sports include ice-skating and a game called bandy, which is similar to hockey. Soccer is the most popular summer sport, and tennis is widely played as well.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Norwegians enjoy watching televised competitive skiing and speed skating events. Hunting and fishing, including ice-fishing, are popular outdoor activities, as are hiking, boating, and white-water rafting. Many people take skiing vacations in the mountains during Easter week. Summer vacations are often spent either in cabins in the mountains or along the coast, especially in the south. Vacationers can enjoy swimming, sailing, relaxing on the sandy beaches, and viewing waterfalls. Many Norwegians also vacation in warmer climes, with Spain, Greece, and Thailand as popular destination.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Norwegian craftspeople turn out knitted and woven goods and wood products including utensils, bowls, and furniture. Another leading craft is the production of traditional Norwegian costumes. Folk dancing and singing are enjoying a revival, and are practiced at festivals throughout the country.



## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Traditionally, binge drinking and the resulting alcoholism have been Norway's most important social problem. Since the 1960s, drug use has been a significant problem as well. Drugs have not been legalized in Norway, and liquor and wine are only available through state-operated liquor stores. Human trafficking has become a problem as women from Eastern Europe and Africa have been forced into prostitution in many Western European countries, including Norway.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The struggle for women's rights has deep roots in Norway, going back to the 1850s. A number of women's organizations had been founded before 1900, and women were given the right to vote in 1913. The Equality Act, first passed in 1978 and revised in 2005, prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination. Compensation levels must be established according to the principle of comparable worth, governing boards must have at least 40% women and 40% men among its members, and both men and women have the right to paid leave to care for newborns. It is very common for women to serve in high government positions and as members of parliament. Abortions up to the end of the twelfth week of the pregnancy were made available on demand in 1978 and are paid for with public funds. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is illegal, and as of 2008 it seemed likely that the marriage law would be changed to remove any difference between the legal status of heterosexual and same-sex marriage.

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—revised by J. Sjåvik

# OSSETIANS

**LOCATION:** Caucasus Mountains between Russia and Georgia (Ossetian territory)

**POPULATION:** 680,000 (2001)

**LANGUAGES:** Ossetian; Russian; Georgian

**RELIGION:** Orthodox Christian; Muslim

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ossetians, who live in the Caucasus Mountains between the Russian and Georgian Republics, are the descendants of an ancient people, the Alans, who occupied this territory as early as the 5th century AD. This ancient people spoke a language belonging to the Iranian branch of Indo-European and were distantly related to today's Iranians and Afghans. Even during the 20th century, Ossetians have defended their right to live in the territories of Ossetia by tracing their roots in the region back to the ancient Alans. In the 1990s, to honor these origins Moscow renamed North Ossetia as North Ossetia–Alania.

Throughout the 20th century, the Ossetian nation has suffered from interference with its territorial boundaries. In 1918, following the collapse of the tsarist Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet regime, the Ossetian territory was divided into North and South Ossetia. North Ossetia was defined as part of the Russian state, while South Ossetia was considered to be part of the Georgian Republic. Ossetians still protest the division of their territory, preferring a single, united Ossetia. Some consider the division of Ossetia to have been an attempt on the part of the Soviet government to weaken the culture and national identity of Ossetians.

In 1989, the government of the Georgian Republic dissolved the separate territory of South Ossetia and declared the citizens of South Ossetia to be merely "settlers." The Georgian government urged Ossetians to leave South Ossetia and settle in the North. The Ossetians resisted the Georgian attempts to destroy South Ossetia. The resulting conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia lasted for almost four years, and erupted into war from 1991–92. North Ossetia assisted the South Ossetians in their struggle. During the war, more than 80,000 Ossetians were forced to flee South Ossetia and live as refugees in North Ossetia. Many young men from North Ossetia volunteered to fight on the Ossetian side in South Ossetia. Although the war ended formally in 1992 with a series of peace agreements, relations between South Ossetians and neighboring Georgians remain tense. Occasional armed clashes continue to break out.

North Ossetia had its own territorial difficulties. In 1944, the North Ossetian state was expanded, receiving territories that had formerly belonged to the Ingush, a neighboring people to the east. The Soviet regime had suspected the Ingush of betrayal during World War II. In the spring of 1944, the entire Ingush population was forcibly deported to areas of Central Asia and Siberia. North Ossetia was granted a portion of territory formerly occupied by the Ingush. When the Ingush were permitted to return in 1956, they received most of their former territories. However, a portion of the territories remained within North Ossetia, in the Prigorodnyi region. Thus, some Ingush families who returned to the Prigorodnyi region some-



times found that the land they had occupied prior to the deportation was now settled by Ossetians, who refused to leave.

The conflict between North Ossetians and neighboring Ingush was relatively quiet until the early 1990s. With the collapse of Soviet power, the Ingush became more vocal in their demands for the restoration of their former territories. The Ossetians continued to resist these demands. The dispute escalated into armed conflict in October–November 1992. Russia attempted to resolve the conflict, and the two sides reached an agreement in 1994. However, feelings of mutual hostility between the Ingush and Ossetians remain and occasional fighting continues to occur.

Historically, Ossetia's relationship with Russia has been peaceful. The South Ossetian government has declared its wish to leave the Georgian Republic and join North Ossetia in Russia. However, in 1994 the North Ossetian government threatened to separate from Russia because of Russian interference in the conflict between North Ossetians and the Ingush. North Ossetia also demanded greater autonomy in economic affairs. In 1995 Russia granted North Ossetia considerable autonomy, and the conflict between Russia and North Ossetia appears to be resolved.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Ossetian territory is located between the Black and Caspian Seas, in the Caucasus Mountains. The mountains have helped to isolate Ossetians from contact with others. Therefore, despite the small size of the population, the Ossetian language

and culture have been very well-preserved. The mountainous terrain and alpine meadows help to support sheep raising, the most common rural occupation. Most of the territory is mountainous, but the plains in the North of the Ossetian territory allow for farming of vegetable and fruit crops.

Although North and South Ossetia share a border, North Ossetia–Alania is a state within the Russian Republic, and South Ossetia lies within Georgia. In 1989, 164,000 Ossetians lived within the Georgian territory and approximately 400,000 in North Ossetia. As of 2007, there are 445,000 Ossetians in North Ossetia–Alania and perhaps 45,000 remaining in South Ossetia, the changes being due in part to refugees who have moved north.

The largest city in Ossetia is Vladikavkaz, in the North. Since the 19th century, Vladikavkaz has been an important administrative center for the entire North Caucasus region. Administrators and politicians from the central government in Moscow have been sent to Vladikavkaz. Therefore, most Ossetian residents of Vladikavkaz have a fluent command of Russian. A southern suburb of the capital has been reassigned its ancient Ossetian name of Dzauzhikau.

The capital of South Ossetia is Tskhinvali, and most residents speak both Ossetian and Georgian. The war with Georgia has resulted in the devastation of Tskhinvali. Many buildings remain destroyed, and many people fled to claim refugee status in North Ossetia. However, since the conflict has lessened, the former residents of Tskhinvali are returning to help rebuild the city.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Ossetian language is in the Iranian family of languages, although Ossetian and Iranian (Farsi or Persian) are not mutually comprehensible. There are three main dialects of Ossetian: Digor, Iron, and Tual. The Digor speakers live mainly in North Ossetia, the Tual in the South, and the Iron in both North and South Ossetia. The Iron is the largest dialect group, and many Digor and Tual speakers can also speak the Iron dialect.

In North Ossetia–Alania, the two official languages are Ossetian and Russian. Most North Ossetians can speak Russian competently, although often with a distinct accent. The two official languages of South Ossetia are Ossetian and Georgian. Both official languages are taught in school, as are Ossetian and Russian in North Ossetia. However, many South Ossetians also have a command of Russian.

Perhaps the most popular name for Ossetian males is Alan. This name honors the Alans, the ancient ancestors of the Ossetians. The name Ossetian itself reflects that of the ancient As, a group even older than the Alans.

## 4 FOLKLORE

For hundreds of years, Ossetians have told a series of epic folktales called Narty. The stories tell of the exploits of the giant heroes (the Narts) and also feature magical animals with mysterious powers. To this day, the Narty are popular and well-known among Ossetians. The Narty tales have been published in Ossetian and Russian editions for folklore specialists, in collections for interested adults, and also in illustrated children's versions.

## 5 RELIGION

Prior to the adoption of Christianity or Islam, Ossetians celebrated an active and ancient pagan faith. Khitsau, the God of Gods, can be traced back to the ancient Alan people. One of the most important gods, whose name is used even in the late 20th century, is Wastyrji. He is considered the patron of men and warriors. Aside from these gods, who were acknowledged throughout Ossetia, many families had totem animals, such as deer or wolf. Families would try to protect their totem animal and celebrate yearly feasts in the animal's honor. Ravens were significant animals for some families, and snakes were the totem animal of others. To this day, some rural families remember their totem animal and avoid killing such animals. Most of the totem animals also play roles in the Nart folk tales.

Contemporary religion was adopted by Ossetians relatively recently, in the mid-19th century. Most Ossetians adopted the Orthodox Christian faith. However, a significant minority, between 15% and 20%, adopted Islam, the faith of many neighboring ethnic groups. While both Christians and Muslims celebrate the major holidays of their religions, many pagan customs have remained part of the religious practices of both groups. Thus, Ossetian Christians and Muslims have similar, uniquely Ossetian celebrations surrounding the events of death and marriage.

Both Christians and Muslims celebrate St. George's Day on November 10. However, the Ossetians call St. George by the name of Wastyrji, the pagan god of men and warriors. Thus, the Ossetian religious culture transforms St. George into Wastyrji, a uniquely Ossetian figure who can be recognized by both Muslims and Christians. Roadside shrines, dedicated to the saint and bearing his picture, are found along the highways of North and South Ossetia. A large pile of stones marks the shrine, and the picture of Wastyrji is housed in a small lean-to or shack. Traditionally, passing motorists would stop at the shrine, throw a stone on the pile, remove their hats, pray for a successful journey, and leave some silver or money as a dedication to Wastyrji. It is considered bad luck to pass a shrine without stopping, and many Ossetians still pay their respects at the shrines. Sometimes, families will slaughter a lamb or sheep at the shrine in honor of Wastyrji. Most villages have similar shrines.

Sacred groves remain important. The trees therein are decorated with ribbons tied around their trunks.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

A traditional festival honoring Wastyrji takes place in July, at the site of a shrine. Because Wastyrji is the patron of men, women do not attend this celebration for fear of offending the saint. The men—Christians and Muslims alike—drink beer, which is the traditional celebratory drink of the Ossetians. They sing songs, dance around the shrine, and dine together. Although the women are prohibited from celebrating the holiday, they cook the food for the celebration and bring the food to the shrine. Although some Ossetians, especially those living in the city, have ceased to observe this holiday, the celebration is still held in many rural areas.

In the spring two clans, the Alægætæ and the Borætæ, stage a mock battle. The significance of this ritual warfare has been forgotten, but the ritual itself seems to be very ancient, since the first name reflects a form of the name Alan, while the sec-

ond is the same name as used in the ancient Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, or *Bharata*.

During the years of Soviet power, the major national holidays were the Day of the Revolution on October 7 and the Day of International Socialism on May 1. Since the collapse of Soviet power in 1991, the Ossetian governments have tried to create new holidays, with significance for Ossetians, to replace the Soviet holidays.

New Year's Day is celebrated throughout Ossetia, and most people receive a few days off from work and school at this time. Like North Americans, Ossetians have summer holidays, and schools are closed. Children may attend summer camp, vacation with their families, or work on the farm. Most adults, except for those working on their own farms, are able to take some weeks of vacation in the summer.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Many of the traditional Ossetian rites of passage are pagan in origin and were later incorporated into the Christian and Muslim faiths. When a child is born, families and friends will celebrate the baby's first time in the cradle and first haircut. Males are particularly valued, and special celebrations attend the birth of a boy. For instance, a celebration is held on the day that the boy's name is chosen, and another takes place on his first birthday. At one time, the entire village would have attended these celebrations. Many families still celebrate these occasions, but the festivities are more private and modest.

Males remain the focus of many rites of passage. A boy's initiation into adult male society was celebrated when he first went out to work in the pastures. More recently, the occasion of choosing a career is celebrated as an initiation.

In traditional Ossetian society, children moved quickly into adulthood without an interim teenage stage. As soon as children were old enough to work, they were initiated into adult responsibilities. Traditionally, girls were expected to marry at age 13 or 14, and boys at age 15 or 16. Now, because of mandatory high school education, young people have several years in their teens before they are expected to assume adult roles. Entry into adulthood is celebrated as the young person graduates and takes up a career, or when he or she marries.

Death is marked with a funeral rite and a series of wakes. Although funerals are conducted according to Christian or Muslim rites, some pagan practices are included in the funeral service. In mountain regions, Ossetians still celebrate the ritual of dedicating a horse to the deceased. In ancient times, the horse was sacrificed and buried with the dead man. In a contemporary version, the horse is decorated with a fancy bridle and saddle and led three times around the grave. Finally, a small cut is made on the horse's ear and the horse is led away. In the towns and cities, this custom is not practiced. However, it is common to bury some favorite personal belongings with the deceased.

A wake is held on the two days following the funeral. The family of the deceased holds a large feast. According to folklore, the food does not strengthen those who eat it, but the strength is transferred to the spirit of the dead person. Another wake is held a year later. This wake usually includes the lighting of a fire (either a candle or a bonfire), at the home of the deceased, as fire is associated with renewal and rebirth.



*A South Ossetian woman stands outside her home in the North Ossetian village of Kombilejevskoye, Georgia. Women fled the South Ossetian territory for North Ossetia which is within the borders of Russia. (Kazbek Basayev/AFP/G,etty Images)*

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Male friends and acquaintances greet one another with handshakes. Traditionally, women were expected to behave modestly and deferentially in the company of men, keeping their eyes lowered. They did not shake hands, either with each other or with men. In contemporary life, however, women will shake hands with co-workers in a professional setting and interact with men in a direct, professional manner.

Ossetians take pride in their customs of hospitality to guests. A guest in an Ossetian home can expect to receive good meals, friendly company, and comfortable accommodation. Ossetians frequently visit one another, and guests are expected to return invitations.

Dating became a traditional part of Ossetian social life. Marriages between young men and women were customarily arranged by the families, usually when the couple was quite young. In contemporary times, this has changed. Most young people choose whom they will marry, although many ask for parental approval. By North American standards, dating among Ossetians is very restrained and conservative. Young men and women will get to know each other in public settings, such as school or with friends, and may go out with groups of friends. Taking walks together is the most common dating sce-

nario, and young couples have little opportunity for privacy. Premarital sexual relations are discouraged.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Until recently, part of Ossetians lived in isolated mountain villages. They built large, three-story stone houses to accommodate large extended-family groups. In the North, on the plains, the villages were larger, people lived with fewer family members and, therefore, built smaller, single-story wooden dwellings. According to the last census data 225,500 Ossetians live in the villages and 454,500 live in cities. In particular, the populations of the larger cities, such as Vladikavkaz and Tskhinvali, have risen sharply since the mid-20th century. Most city dwellers live in small bungalows or apartment buildings.

Living conditions in Ossetian homes can be challenging, as they lack many of the conveniences that North Americans take for granted. Some rural dwellings do not have indoor plumbing. In the cities, the supply of hot water is not always guaranteed, and some homes may have hot water for only a few hours each day. Dryers and dishwashers are very rare. However, most homes have refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, and DVD players, and many people have cars. Fresh meat and vegetables are common at any time of a year.

Because of the war with Georgia, living conditions in South Ossetia have been extremely harsh. The dangers of war forced many people to flee to North Ossetia. Some South Ossetian refugees were able to live with friends or relatives, but others were housed in army barracks and summer-camp facilities. The destruction of much of South Ossetia meant that shelter was inadequate, and consumer goods were in short supply. Water, heat, and electricity were cut off in many areas. After 1992, the Ossetians began to repair the devastation of the war. However, the reconstruction process remains incomplete, as the economy is unable to support an efficient, large-scale effort and tensions with Georgia remain high.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In the mountainous regions, Ossetian families traditionally lived in large, extended family units. The sons, and their wives and families would often live with the parents in a single large home. The farming activities of a mountain family required much labor. If a family was not large enough to provide its own labor, it would be forced to hire workers. Thus, an Ossetian proverb states: "To live alone is to live poorly."

Since the mid-20th century, few families have lived in the traditional, large family groups. Sons are still encouraged to start their own families in their father's house, moving out only after several years of marriage or after the birth of the first child. One son, usually the youngest, is expected to remain at home and raise his family in the house of his parents. A couple will rarely live with the wife's family. Even now, Ossetian men consider living under the roof of the wife's father to be dishonorable.

According to traditional custom, marriages were arranged by extended families. Women were expected to provide a dowry, and men paid a bride price, of similar value to the dowry, to the bride's family. If two young people wished to marry but could not obtain parental consent, they would arrange with the friends of the groom to stage a mock "kidnapping" of the bride. The couple would be whisked off to be married. Sometimes, if a man wished to marry a woman, he would arrange to

kidnap her without her consent. If the man was of lower wealth or social standing than the woman, these marriages could result in a feud between his and her relatives.

In contemporary society, arranged marriages are rare, although most couples will obtain parental permission before marrying. If the parents will not give consent, a couple may resort to the traditional mock kidnapping. A couple who has married without parental consent will often choose to live in a different town or city for a few years until the parents accept the marriage.

In earlier times, relations between family members and in-laws were governed by “avoidance customs,” taboos that restricted contact between various family members. Avoidance customs were practiced as soon as a couple announced their engagement. Once engaged, a couple was not permitted to appear together publicly and was discouraged from meeting prior to the wedding. During the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom were separated. The bride would sit quietly in a corner, surrounded by other women. The groom would not be present for much of the festivity. On the wedding night, the groom would sneak into the bride’s bedroom. The next morning, the couple was considered officially married and was permitted to appear together. In contemporary conditions, couples rarely observe avoidance customs, although displays of intimacy prior to marriage are discouraged.

Other avoidance customs limited the relations of a son-in-law with his mother-in-law. A son-in-law was not allowed to speak to, or even see, his mother-in-law. Although this custom is no longer strictly observed, sons-in-law are not expected to have close relationships with their mothers-in-law. Similar customs restricted contact between a daughter-in-law and her father-in-law. Traditionally, a new wife, who would be living with her in-laws, was expected to veil her face and did not speak directly to her father-in-law. These restrictions were lifted after an unveiling ceremony. Although these customs are no longer observed, a woman is expected to behave respectfully and deferentially toward her father-in-law.

## 11 CLOTHING

The traditional costume of Ossetian women was modest but elaborate. Women wore a long dress with a flowing skirt and sleeves. The bodice was tight-fitting and high-necked, with elaborate embroidery. The head, but not the face, was covered with a long veil of fabric or lace. The veil was draped over top of a tall, pillbox-shaped hat. Gold or silver jewelry, with detailed metalwork, was worn for special occasions.

Men wore a jacket, tightly belted at the waist, with a flared hem and a high stand-up collar. The breast of the jacket was decorated with bullets, which were sewn on, and a silver sword was worn at the belt. For ease on horseback, men wore loose trousers tucked into black leather riding boots. The hat, which was made of Persian lambs’ wool and dyed black or dark grey, was worn almost all the time.

Contemporary everyday clothes bear little resemblance to the traditional national costume. Men dress in the North American style, wearing suits to office jobs and preferring jeans or work pants for casual occasions. Some old men in the villages continue to wear the woolen hats, and men who work on horseback wear traditional riding boots. Women have also adopted Western clothing, although women almost always wear skirts or dresses, rarely trousers or jeans. Few women

wear head coverings, and most women use make-up and wear contemporary Western hairstyles.

## 12 FOOD

The staples of the everyday Ossetian diet are bread, milk products, vegetables (particularly beans and tomatoes), and lamb or mutton. In the winter, pickled vegetables and preserved fruits are common. Dried fruits, especially prunes and apricots, are common throughout the year and are often used to make deserts. The Christian Ossetians have no food taboos. Ossetian Muslims, like all Muslims, do not eat pork or pork products.

Stuffed flatbread (*fidjin*) is a unique Ossetian dish. The bread may be stuffed with white cheese, cooked beans, or a mixture of lamb, garlic, and onion. Nearly every Ossetian homemaker is a proficient baker of these stuffed breads, and they are sold at most bakeries and cafeterias.

In traditional Ossetian families, men and women dined separately. The men would eat together in the dining room as the women cooked and served the food. Women and children ate in the kitchen. Most families no longer observe this segregation, although older women may refuse to eat in a room with the men.

Beer is the traditional drink of Ossetians. Even Muslims, who are prohibited from drinking alcoholic beverages, drink the traditional beer. Ossetians take great pride in their unique brewing methods, which are said to have been passed down from the 5th-century Alans.

## 13 EDUCATION

Under the Soviet regime, education to grade 10 was mandatory for both boys and girls. Universities and trade institutes throughout Ossetia, and in both Russia and Georgia, offer further career training to high school graduates. Because virtually all Ossetians receive an education, literacy is high. Most Ossetians graduate from high school, and many go on to post-secondary education.

Parental expectations vary according to the occupations of the parents. City dwellers usually want their children to receive the best education possible. Furthermore, most parents encourage their children to improve their career prospects by learning either Russian or Georgian. Rural parents may have entirely different aims for their children, as they will likely encourage at least one child to live and work on the family farm. In South Ossetia, education was interrupted by the war with Georgia. Many children did not attend school on a consistent basis for the four years of the war.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ossetians take great pride in the preservation of their culture. The national folk epic, the Nart epic, appears in various editions for both children and adults. During the years of Soviet power, the central government controlled both the educational curriculum and the writing of national histories. Ossetians were forced to teach the history of their nation according to the Soviet government’s version of events. Since the collapse of the Soviet government in 1991, Ossetians have developed a new school curriculum with greater instruction in the Ossetian language. History books describe the Ossetian, rather than Moscow’s, interpretation of national history.

Traditional Ossetian music and dance are still enjoyed by Ossetians. During dances, couples do not touch. They play out

a kind of courtship scene in which the man performs bold, athletic movements to display strength and honor while the woman keeps her eyes modestly lowered and sways gracefully. Occasionally, a street musician, often playing accordion in a city park, will attract a throng of passers-by who dance to the music.

### **15 WORK**

The traditional occupation of Ossetians was farming, particularly sheep farming. In the 20th century, opportunities for urban employment have grown, and many people choose to leave farming, obtain higher education, and work in towns or cities.

After the collapse of Soviet power, many jobs that had formerly been sponsored by the government were no longer funded. The post-Soviet years have been difficult for many, especially the elderly, who have had difficulty fitting into a market economy. However, there are many opportunities for new types of work, especially in business, computer technology, and import/export. Because most North Ossetians are comfortable speaking and working with Russians, they are able to take advantage of economic opportunities with Russia.

The employment situation in South Ossetia is difficult, however. Because of the war with Georgia, the destruction of South Ossetian cities and towns, and on-going tensions, many people can no longer return to their former occupations. South Ossetia has experienced financial problems as a consequence of the war. However, with reconstruction, the economic situation of South Ossetians is slowly improving, though problems persist. South Ossetia seeks unification with North Ossetia–Alania and hopes that this will provide security and better conditions.

### **16 SPORTS**

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in Ossetia. Children may play with teams organized at school, and teenagers and adults can join amateur teams. Ossetians also enjoy watching televised soccer or attending games.

Wrestling and contests of strength are popular with boys. Such activities are usually informal and incorporated into games. However, some Ossetians undertake rigorous training in sports, such as wrestling and weight-lifting, and Ossetia has produced a number of world-class athletes in these events.

### **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In towns and cities, cinemas and theatres offer evening entertainment. There are also a lot of cafes and restaurants. Spending time in the cafes in the early evening is a favorite pastime. In the summer, most people will go out for a walk after dinner, to meet friends and socialize.

Most Ossetian homes have television. Ossetians receive programs from their own local stations, as well as from national Russian or Georgian stations. DVDs are very common and a variety of videos, including North American and European movies, are available.

Most people have iPods and CD recorders, and classical, folk, and rock music are widely available. Young people enjoy Russian, European, and North American rock, as well as traditional Ossetian music.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES**

Traditional crafts and folk art include pottery, metalworking, weaving, and knitting. Because fashionable clothing was often difficult to obtain during the Soviet period, many women became proficient at sewing. In school, children have opportunities to learn music and visual arts.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The most pressing social problems in Ossetia have arisen because of Ossetian conflicts with neighboring peoples. Although the war between South Ossetia and Georgia and the clashes between the North Ossetians and the Ingush have subsided, tensions in these areas remain high. Especially for South Ossetians, many of whom lived as refugees in North Ossetia, the war brought instability, loss, and poverty. Lingering conflicts in both North and South Ossetia create difficult conditions for establishing a stable, secure way of life.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The traditional role of women was to maintain the household and raise the children. Few women attended school, and women rarely had their own careers. This has changed, however. The status of women in modern Ossetia is in many ways similar to the overall gender picture in the North Caucasus, but at the same time it has some significant differences, which are determined by objective factors. First, in the past decade Ossetia has experienced two wars: with Georgia for the independence of South Ossetia and with Ingushetia over the land border. The problems of refugees, poverty, unemployment, and depression, were the consequences of this war. Secondly, in Ossetia there is a religious division—83% of the Ossetian population is orthodox Christian, 17% is Sunni Muslim. Ossetian women must find a balance between religion, tradition, and the need to survive in the face of economic instability.

Many laws, that sometimes prescribe a woman to total isolation from public life, now cease to be relevant. Ossetian women have access to higher education and are on equal terms with men. They are officially unlimited in the choice of profession. However, they suffer discrimination in hiring and firing practices and, in general, women receive lower wages than men with the same qualifications. The involvement of women in politics and business remains miserable. In 2008, there was one female minister and two women in parliament.

The women's social activism movement was most evident in connection with the tragedy in Beslan, where hundreds of children became victims in a school seized by terrorists. Ossetian women were united in two human rights organizations: Beslan Mothers and Voice of Beslan. Women, who at the beginning were only trying to investigate the tragedy, soon found themselves in stiff opposition to the regime of the Kremlin. The women from Voice of Beslan may be remembered throughout history of Russia as citizens of the country who sued the ex-president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, for the murder of their children.

Permanent fear of war or terrorist attacks and the feeling of insecurity increased after Beslan. In the years after the tragedy, Ossetia has experienced the lowest number of births. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health in Ossetia, the idea of having children whom they are powerless to protect from the government or terrorists is frightening to many

women. This indicates that the overall social depression in the Caucasus is deeply felt by Ossetian women.

Working hard on building a career does not free women in Ossetia from their everyday routines. Even though many women spend as much time at work as do men, women are still expected to run their households and raise children with little help from their husbands.

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—revised by J. Colarusso and F. Tlisoa.

# PEOPLES OF DAGESTAN

**LOCATION:** Dagestan in the Caucasus Mountain region between Russia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia

**POPULATION:** 2,600,000 [total population; see Introduction for each ethnic group]

**LANGUAGE:** Languages of each ethnic group; Russian

**RELIGION:** Muslim (majority); Christian; Mountain Jews

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The name Dagestan refers only to the territory of Dagestan. The territory of Dagestan is shared by numerous ethnic groups, 14 of which are officially recognized ethnic groups. The mountainous terrain of Dagestan, in the Caucasus range, has isolated many of its ethnic groups from outside influences.

The most recent official census in Dagestan was taken in 2002. At that time, the list of officially recognized ethnic groups and their populations was as follows:

ETHNIC GROUP	POPULATION
Avar	758,000
Agul	23,000
Azeri	88,300
Chechens	92,200
Dargin	426,000
Kumyk	366,000
Lak	140,000
Lezgin	337,000
Mountain Jews	13,000
Nogai	38,000
Rutu	24,000
Russians	150,100
Tabasaran	101,000
Tsukhur	20,000

Many of these groups are quite small in population, yet they have been able to retain their distinct languages and cultures. The Agul, for instance, comprise only 21 villages. The Mountain Jews are a small group that has managed to preserve their distinct religion, although they are surrounded by Muslims.

The large Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union has a long history of conflict and bloodshed among its peoples. In this context of ethnic tension, Dagestan is remarkable for its stability. Although many ethnic groups live within one relatively small republic, the peoples of Dagestan have little history of fighting among themselves. This is especially striking in the late 20th century, when many ethnic groups throughout the world are trying to separate from larger, multiethnic state structures and form their own sovereign states. For the most part, separatist groups in Dagestan have attracted very little support, and most citizens seem content with a multiethnic state governed by a parliamentary system.

The peoples of Dagestan are drawn together by years of common history. During the 19th century, most of the peoples of Dagestan fought against Russia in the Caucasian Wars. Although badly outnumbered, the Caucasian mountaineers managed to engage Russia in a war that lasted nearly 100 years. Russia subdued the mountain people with great difficulty after years of violence. The Caucasian Wars are legendary in Dagestan and are the basis for many folk-tales and stories of heroism

and suffering. Shamil, the great leader of the Caucasian mountaineers, was an Avar, one of the peoples of Dagestan. He is still regarded as a national hero by many. One of the political parties in Dagestan, the Shamil Popular Front, is named after this leader. The main street in a capital city Makhachkala is named after Shamil.

When the Tsar fell from power in 1917, the Soviet government took over and began to make changes throughout the newly founded Soviet Union. In the 1920s, the Soviet government discouraged religious expression and ethnic identity and tried to encourage people to embrace communist ideas and join the party. Many of the peoples of Dagestan resented the intrusion of the Soviet regime and joined a large-scale, armed rebellion in the early 1920s. The Avars, known in Dagestan for their aggressive and militaristic values, led the rebellion. Although the rebellion was quelled by the mid 1920s, Dagestan groups continued to show resistance to Soviet power. Thus, Dagestan was the last area in the former Soviet Union to adopt the collectivized, socialized agricultural practices of the 1930s.

The peoples of Dagestan are predominantly Muslim. This religious unity has contributed to the peaceful coexistence of the various ethnic groups in Dagestan. Dagestan is an important center of Islam in the Caucasus and former Soviet Union. Makhachkala, the capital city of Dagestan, is the seat of the Muslim Spiritual Board of the North Caucasus and Dagestan. Since the 19th century, Dagestan has housed many religious schools for training new Muslim clergy. Religion is a strong force among most of the peoples of Dagestan, and multiethnic political movements and parties have attracted considerable support.

The few peoples of Dagestan who are not Muslim include the Mountain Jews, who follow Judaism rather than Islam, and the Cossacks, who are Christians. Cossacks are not identified in official census data but live as a distinct ethnic group in Dagestan. Despite their religious differences, the various groups appear loyal to Dagestan. Another basis for this loyalty is the common history and the large number of common customs shared by the various ethnic groups, such as clothing (both traditional and contemporary), social values, and economic activity.

As Soviet power weakened in the late 1980s, and eventually collapsed in 1991, the peoples of Dagestan became increasingly interested in their own cultural and religious self-expression. Although some independence movements sprung up in the early 1990s, most of these were short-lived as people remained loyal to the multiethnic state. Indeed, after the collapse of Soviet power, the peoples of Dagestan endeavored to create a state in which all native ethnic groups would be treated fairly. Thus, electoral districts were reorganized to ensure that no single ethnic group would be able to dominate. In 1993 citizens of Dagestan held a referendum opposing the creation of a presidency in Dagestan. Instead, the people expressed a strong preference for a parliamentary system to better reflect the special, multiethnic character of Dagestan.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Dagestan is located in the Caucasian mountain range. It is nestled between Russia to the north, Azerbaijan to the south, Georgia to the west, and the Caspian Sea to the east. For the most part, the terrain is very mountainous. The high mountain regions are cold, with alpine meadows, forests, and rocky

outcroppings. The spaces between the mountains are more temperate, consisting of wide basins and flat valleys. The coastal land on the Caspian sea is warm, with many resorts and beaches. Historically, the coastal border has given the peoples of Dagestan the opportunity to engage in trade with other countries, particularly Muslim neighbors.

The ethnic groups of Dagestan live in neighboring mountain villages, which are isolated and protected by the mountains. The mountains have also provided important military refuge so that the relatively small population of Dagestan has managed to mount tough resistance to Russian and Soviet encroachment.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Each officially recognized ethnic group in Dagestan has its own distinct language. While some of these languages belong to the same linguistic families (either Turkic or Caucasian), many are not mutually understandable. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Arabic was a common language spoken by educated peoples of Dagestan and was used to relay messages between various ethnic groups. In addition, Avar, the language of the largest and most powerful Dagestani ethnic group, was spoken by many other people.

Most of the peoples of Dagestan did not have an official written language until the 1920s, when the central Soviet government sponsored the creation of written national languages. Some of the smaller groups, however, still do not have their own written languages. The Agul language, for example, is closely related to the language of the Lezgins, a much larger group. Thus, Aguls used the Lezgin written language. Similarly, the Rutuls and the Tsakhurs used the written language of Azeri. In the late 1990s Agul, Rutul, and Tsakhur were elevated to literary status.

In the 1920s, when the Soviet government consolidated power throughout the territories of the former Soviet Union, Russian became another official language in Dagestan. Instruction in Russian became mandatory in schools, and a policy of Russification (Russianization) in Dagestan was pursued throughout the Soviet years. In the 20th century, Russian has replaced Arabic as a common language. Despite Soviet efforts to promote Russification and curtail education and publication in the native languages of Dagestan, the peoples of Dagestan have managed to retain and use their languages. The remoteness of their mountain villages has been a factor, and the relatively peaceful conditions in Dagestan have provoked little active interference from Russia in educational and cultural issues.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Each ethnic group has its own particular folkloric tradition. Folk tales are passed orally from generation to generation, and some themes common to the peoples of Dagestan emerge. The tales are usually epic in nature, emphasizing heroism in battle, bravery, and loyalty to clan, village or family. In particular, the history of the Caucasian Wars has captured the imagination of many ethnic groups, and the themes of the struggles with Russians often enter the folkloric narrative. Only in the late 1990s did much interest develop in gathering these folk tales into written collections. Also, biographies of national historical heroes, such as the Imam Shamil, have been published.

In addition to epic bravery and historical detail, religious themes find expression in folkloric form. The Muslim peoples



tell of events from the life of Muhammad and histories of local Muslim figures. Similarly, the Mountain Jews tell stories from their own religious tradition.

## 5 RELIGION

Aside from the Mountain Jews and the Christian Cossacks, the peoples of Dagestan are almost exclusively Muslim. Islam has an ancient history in Dagestan, some historical accounts suggesting that Islam was introduced to Dagestan in medieval times. Islam remains a very strong force in Dagestan, and state efforts throughout the Soviet years to curtail the practice of Islam and enforce atheist ideas were not successful. In the capital of Makhachkala, most demonstrations are of a religious, rather than ethnic, nature. Dagestanis of various ethnic groups will often join together to work toward a common goal related to Islam. For instance, the peoples of Dagestan have joined together to demonstrate in favor of diverse Islamic causes ranging from protesting Russian and American interference in the Middle East to objecting to the rising costs of airplane tickets for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Although the Mountain Jews and the Cossacks do not observe Islam, they have been treated respectfully by the Muslim majority. These two groups have been able to observe their religious beliefs relatively free from interference by Muslim peoples. In particular, the Mountain Jews have retained an ancient Jewish faith featuring a unique blending of Caucasian Mountain practices and Jewish religious traditions.

Fundamentalist Islam had made inroads, especially among some highlanders. Russia is seeking to discourage the spread of this form of Islam.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Many of the Muslim peoples celebrate the Muslim festivals of Eid al-Fitr and Ramadan. During Ramadan, adults fast during the daytime, abstaining from both food and water as long as the sun is up. Children, the sick, and pregnant women are not obliged to fast. The festival of Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan and is celebrated by sumptuous feasting.

During the Soviet period, official holidays were introduced. These included the celebration of the 1917 Revolution (November 7) and the Day of International Socialism (May 1). Schools and workplaces were closed on these days, and the state sponsored cultural events and fireworks displays. The officially atheist Soviet government also sponsored a New Year's holiday, which was acceptable because of the lack of religious significance. While the other Soviet holidays were not of great cultural significance to most Dagestan peoples, New Year's Day was, and still is, widely celebrated.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

For the peoples of Dagestan in general, the birth of a boy is celebrated with greater festivity and enthusiasm than that of a girl. For all ethnic groups but the Cossacks, the ceremony of circumcision marks the initiation of a baby boy into the family and community. There is no similar ceremony for girls. However, babies of both sexes are registered with local authorities, and relatives, friends, and neighbors visit and bring gifts of welcome for the baby. Traditionally, young boys and girls spent most of their time with their mothers, learning the basic expectations regarding social behavior. Girls would work alongside their mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives

to learn the skills of cooking, spinning, weaving, and household maintenance. Boys developed many skills by playing and rough-housing with each other. Once a boy was able, he would join his father and other male relatives to learn the farming skills of their mainly agricultural way of life. Many Dagestani peoples view a boy's first trip to the pastures as a rite of passage and mark this development with a celebration in recognition of the boy's approach to manhood. The start of formal schooling for both boys and girls at age seven marks another transition in a child's life.

Traditionally, Dagestani teenagers did not have the opportunity to enjoy a period of youthful freedom. Young men were expected to marry by their mid-teens, and girls even earlier, so that young people quickly assumed the responsibilities of adult life. Furthermore, as the youngest adults in the family group, they were expected to behave deferentially and respectfully toward parents and elders. Today, young people usually complete their education before marrying, and thus do not enter into adult life directly from childhood. However, by Western standards, young people in Dagestan marry young, usually by their late teens or early twenties. Young people are expected to treat their elders with great respect and live up to traditional expectations.

As young couples have children, and as their younger siblings marry, they acquire greater authority in the household. The couple gains even further status as elder members of a household when their children marry.

Particularly in the mountain villages, the death of a community member is observed by the entire community. Despite attempts of the Soviet regime to develop and encourage atheist funeral rites, religious observance of funerals and wakes is well-established and practiced throughout Dagestan. While the different peoples observe various customs surrounding death, burial, and remembrance, in almost all cases the family of the deceased holds a large feast, to which all extended family and community members are invited. Such feasts are usually very expensive undertakings because a skimpy funeral is regarded as a sign of disrespect to both the deceased and the guests.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Generally, men greet each other with handshakes. Women rarely shake hands, either with each other or with men. This is especially so in rural regions. In larger cities, women involved in professional careers will shake hands as a form of greeting and professional courtesy.

Social life in Dagestan follows traditional patterns, and children and young people are expected to assume responsibilities at home. Between household obligations and school, especially in families involved in agriculture, young people in Dagestan have relatively little time for leisure and socializing with peers. In the teenage years, young women and men are not encouraged to spend time in each other's company unless they are in a large group or accompanied by an adult. In formal circumstances, many families observe gender segregation, with women and men socializing and dining separately from one another. Young people tend to be more flexible, spending more time in groups with both genders.

Throughout the Caucasus, traditions of hospitality are firmly rooted and observed. This is true for the peoples of Dages-



*People unload items from a truck at a market in Kubachi, Dagestan, Russian Federation. Villagers enjoy life here with pure air, magnificent views, and plentiful jobs in silver handiwork. (Stephen Boykewich/AFP/Getty Images)*

tan, who are known for their hospitable reception of guests. Guests are expected to reciprocate any invitations, however.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditionally, the peoples of Dagestan lived in villages with others from the same ethnic group. The enclosed courtyard, which houses all the family buildings behind a high fence, is a traditionally Caucasian type of dwelling and is found throughout Dagestan. The family courtyard and living arrangement is almost always patrilocal, meaning that family members always lived under the roof of male, rather than female, relatives. Each family usually had its own plot of land, but pastures and meadows, where the sheep grazed, were considered the common property of the entire village.

In contemporary times, rural conditions remain fairly traditional, and people continue to live with their extended families in courtyards. While most villages have electricity, many homes lack central heating and running water. Some mountain villages are quite remote, and villagers may have a difficult time getting to the city for medical attention, supplies, or services, especially during the winter.

In the course of the 20th century, the Dagestani peoples have gradually begun to move into urban areas to take advantage of educational, economic, and professional opportunities.

In the cities, conditions more closely resemble European or North American life. Many people live in apartments. While newlyweds and young couples will often share the apartment of the groom's parents, most aspire to move into a place of their own.

After the collapse of Soviet power, many essential services in Dagestan declined. In the cities, water and electricity supply can be irregular and unreliable. In 1994, Dagestan faced a serious medical crisis during a cholera epidemic. The cholera was suspected to have originated in Saudi Arabia and carried back by Dagestani pilgrims returning from Mecca. A decaying water purification system allowed the cholera to spread quickly. The government lacked the medical and technical resources necessary to control the spread of the disease and was forced to apply to Moscow for assistance. Repairs of the decaying infrastructure are dependent on a strengthened Dagestani economy during the transition from a Soviet, state-run economy to a stable free-market system. Until such time as Dagestan can sustain a strong economy, it will rely on heavy subsidies from Moscow, as it did during most of the 20th century.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, for most of the peoples of Dagestan, the paternal extended family was the basic social and economic unit. Grandparents, parents, and children lived within a single courtyard, either in the same dwelling or in separate dwellings, depending upon the local customs of the particular village or ethnic group. Generally, the father of the household's sons was considered the elder of the household and had the ultimate decision-making power. The wife of the elder man presided over the running of the household and of the younger women. Rural families still organize their households according to these traditions, but many urban families live in nuclear family units, consisting only of parents and young, unmarried children.

In marriage, the wishes of the elders played a strong role in the choice of a spouse, although young people sometimes made their preferences known to their parents. A couple who wished to marry against the wishes of their parents might carry out a mock kidnapping, with the young man and his close male friends abducting the bride and taking her off to be married. Sometimes the mock kidnapping would be arranged in advance by the couple. Less frequently, a young man who was unable to obtain the consent of the girl he desired might kidnap her forcibly.

Most of the ethnic groups of Dagestan strongly encourage young people, particularly girls, to marry within their ethnic group. Young people have been willing to comply with this stipulation, and have thus helped to ensure the survival of their particular ethnic group. Traditionally, a woman would enter marriage with a dowry, which included household supplies, livestock, foodstuffs, and even land. The groom's family would pay a cash bride-price to the family of the bride. Dowries and bride prices were outlawed during the Soviet period, but continue to be part of the wedding arrangements of many peoples of Dagestan.

For most of the peoples of Dagestan, a bride would go to live in the household of her husband's parents. As the junior woman in the household, she could expect several years of hard work, until a younger woman or new bride joined the household and assumed the unfortunate role of junior female. In

the cities, however, conditions have changed, and most young couples try to move out on their own, especially after having children.

In cases of divorce, Muslim law held that the children of the marriage should remain in the custody of the father. The Mountain Jews are the exception to this, and children traditionally remain with the mother. In recent times, Soviet and state laws have favored maternal custody of children. Traditionally, women were allowed to retain the value of their dowries upon divorce.

Although urbanization and modernization have brought some changes to the structure of family life in Dagestan, most of the peoples of Dagestan, particularly those in remote mountain villages, have remained loyal to traditional values. Since the collapse of Soviet power, traditional values have grown more popular among young people, who are often even more conservative than their parents.

### **11 CLOTHING**

The traditional attire of men in Dagestan was similar to that worn by men throughout the Caucasus. High-collared shirts, usually white, with long, full sleeves were worn under a short-sleeved, tunic-like garment. Belted tightly at the waist, this tunic was otherwise full and flared, and usually made of black or dark grey cloth. The jacket was decorated with bullets, which were held in special fabric loops. The number of bullets traditionally increased with a man's battle experience, local prestige, age, and alleged bravery. Long, black leather boots and loose trousers tucked into the boots were suitable for horseback riding. Men usually wore a head covering—a tall, pillbox-shaped sheepskin hat.

The traditional female dress featured a fitted, lined bodice with full sleeves that could be cuffed at the wrists or left hanging loose, and a long wide skirt. For formal occasions, the dress featured a decorated insert sewn into the front of the bodice. Women wore slippers indoors and leather boots outdoors. The boots were similar to the men's, but were more highly decorated and made in brighter colors. Women also wore head coverings, usually kerchiefs or headscarves made of various fabrics, with woolen or simple cotton fabrics for everyday use, and silk for ceremonial occasions. Generally, older women wore darker colors like black, dark grey, or brown, while younger women wore brighter scarves. For funerals or somber occasions, darker scarves were worn. Women also wore gold or silver jewelry, often highly ornamented.

Today, both men and women have adopted conservative Western-style dress. Most women wear skirts and rarely wear jeans or trousers. Both men and women continue to wear head coverings, particularly older people in rural regions. Jewelry continues to be popular, and Dagestani metalworkers produce highly decorative gold and silver jewelry.

### **12 FOOD**

The Muslim peoples of Dagestan and the Mountain Jews observe similar traditional dietary restrictions. Meat is slaughtered according to a prescribed ritual that is common to both the Muslims and Mountain Jews. Pork is not consumed by either Muslims or Jews, and Muslims traditionally do not drink alcohol.

Throughout Dagestan, the staple meat is lamb or mutton. *Shashlik*, or shish-kabob, is one of the most popular ways of

preparing lamb. In addition to *shashlik*, popular lamb dishes include roast lamb, peppers or tomatoes stuffed with lamb, and lamb stew. Many of the peoples of Dagestan prepare a dish of boiled dumplings, stuffed with a mixture of lamb, garlic, and onions. Another traditional dish is made of grape or cabbage leaves rolled in cigar-like shapes, stuffed with a mixture of lamb, rice, and onions.

Rice or wheat porridge is a common breakfast food, as is bread and cheese. Side dishes for lunches and dinners include potatoes, rice pilaf, tomatoes, and stewed beans. Desserts are usually simple, featuring fresh fruits in season, jams and preserves, dried fruits, and sweet breads. Tea and coffee are imported and frequently served, especially after the evening meal.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Traditionally, most children did not receive formal education, but were educated at home in the tasks of running the household. Some boys were sent for religious training and received their education in clerical academies. After the Soviet government came to power, primary education became mandatory. Throughout the 1920s, schools were built in both rural and urban areas, and families were required to send their children to school. At first, many families were reluctant and did not see the value of formal education, especially for girls. However, this resistance was overcome.

Although some children in urban areas may attend nursery school or kindergarten, most children start school in the first grade at age seven. Children are educated in both Russian and their own ethnic language. Graduation from the eleventh grade, the highest grade of basic education, marks a point of transition as young people must decide whether to pursue further education, a trade, or, in many cases, to remain in the village to work on the family farm. For rural families, it is expected that at least one son will choose to remain on the farm. Although Dagestan has various institutes and a university, ambitious and exceptionally bright students may apply to prestigious universities in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Some young women may elect to marry and raise a family rather than pursuing a career or higher education.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The peoples of Dagestan take great pride in their ethnic and cultural identities and customs. They strongly resisted government attempts to promote the adoption of Russian and European culture and values during the Soviet period. Each particular ethnic group adheres to its own customs, encouraging each successive generation to marry and raise a family within the ethnic community. Since the collapse of Soviet power, the peoples of Dagestan have made efforts to improve education and popularization of traditional customs and practices.

The peoples of Dagestan are also loyal to the common, multiethnic state of Dagestan. Because each ethnic group is protective of its own customs and traditions, separatist movements have made little headway in Dagestan. The common experiences of war, repression by Russian and Soviet governments, and many common cultural values have created a harmonious multiethnic state.

## 15 WORK

Agriculture is the traditional occupation of the peoples of Dagestan. While most families kept gardens, and wheat was grown in some of the lowland areas, sheep farming was the main form of agriculture. The high mountain pastures and alpine meadows were well-suited for sheep farming, and men lived a seminomadic life, taking the sheep to various pastures and returning home on a regular basis.

Many rural families continue traditional agricultural employment. Although the Soviet government tried to nationalize agriculture, turning the farmers into land-users and state-farm workers, the nationalization of agriculture met with limited success. For the most part, traditional patterns of agricultural activity persisted, although farmers were obliged to give a quota of their produce to the state.

With urbanization and modernization, more career opportunities have become available for citizens of Dagestan. The Caspian coast offers opportunities to engage in import/export businesses with other countries.

## 16 SPORTS

Horse-racing and trick riding are traditional sports common to many Dagestani ethnic groups. Children learned to ride at a very young age and competed with peers. Aside from its function as recreational activity, the equestrian sports helped boys develop the riding skills that they would need later in life as herdsmen.

Boys in particular are encouraged to engage in sports. Displays of strength and speed are valued, making both wrestling and soccer popular. In rural areas, horseback riding continues to be a popular sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Home entertainment is one of the most common forms of recreation. Because there are few restaurants or cafés, people usually visit each other's homes. Hospitality is an important social value in the Caucasus, and hosts consider themselves responsible for a guest's pleasure.

Young people socialize at school or at work. They may visit each other's homes, although these are rather formal occasions presided over by parents. In warm weather, people of all ages enjoy going for strolls, especially in the early evening. For young people, this provides a welcome opportunity to get together free of parental company.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

A variety of arts and crafts are practiced among the peoples of Dagestan. Commonly practiced crafts include spinning, weaving, and knitting. Some men excel in woodworking and carpentry. While these crafts are common to peoples of the Caucasus Mountains generally, some other arts are unique to Dagestan.

Metalworking, especially the creation of ornaments and jewelry in silver and gold, is a traditional Dagestani craft. A certain ornate style, combining gold and silver with an oxidized black design and textured ornamentation, is unique to Dagestan and is sold throughout the former Soviet Union. Ceremonial daggers, ewers, rings (for both men and women), earrings, and bracelets are among the more commonly-produced items.

Another craft practiced in Dagestan is carpetmaking. Dagestani carpets are of unique design. They resemble Persian or Turkish carpets, except that the Dagestani artists tend to make greater use of earth-tone colors and animal shapes. Dagestani carpets rival the more famous Turkish and Persian carpets for quality of workmanship and artistry of design.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The most pressing social problems have been brought on by the transition from the state-run, Soviet system to the present, free-market system. While most people are pleased to have gained greater political and cultural freedom, many aspects of life have grown more difficult. Unemployment is high, especially in cities, and citizens have little knowledge of how to cope in such conditions. Many people who formerly held prestigious or powerful positions now find themselves out of work. The elderly are often impoverished, their pensions rendered nearly valueless by severe inflation. The general impoverishment and financial difficulties of Dagestan have resulted in declining maintenance of basic sanitation, water supply, electricity, and medical services. Thus, social anxiety, cynicism, and sense of hopelessness can be felt in many sectors of society. The new oil wealth that flows through Russia proper to the north and through the Azerbaijani south has yet to trickle through Dagestan.

Another social problem involves the rise in violence in the region. While Dagestan has been relatively free of conflict, wars and armed clashes in neighboring regions have resulted in the ready availability of weapons. Thus, in Dagestan, such crimes as armed robbery and vandalism are rising. With the increase of import/export opportunities, smuggling has also increased. Occasional political violence erupts as assassinations or bombings in Makhachkala.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The results of modern research suggest that, in Dagestan, there is discrimination of women and infringement of women's rights in all spheres of private and public life. The unemployment rate, the incidence of severe disease, and the mortality rate among women of Dagestan are traditionally higher than among men. About 92% of the women of Dagestan call unemployment their main problem. In cities, women have the opportunity to study and work, but take only minor jobs and service posts. Business and politics are closed spheres for the Dagestan women. According to Islam, which is practiced in Dagestan more strictly than in other parts of Northern Caucasus, a woman cannot be considered equal to a male business partner in a transaction and cannot even participate in the negotiations. In the mountains, women are deprived not only of work but also of basic necessities for life, such as health care.

The leader of a charitable fund for women, Ayshat Magomedova, describes the lives of modern women in the mountains of Dagestan: "In mountain villages there is no gas, light or water. A woman in a mountain village works for a full light day. She is the main instrument for carrying weights. During the day, one woman takes the brunt of all the needs for water, firewood to cook food and warm the house, and hay for the animals. To see a doctor, a woman must also undergo a long walk of 50 kilometers to get to a district centre, because the villages do not have a paved way, so they cannot travel by transporta-

tion. It often happens that a seriously ill or pregnant woman takes the road and simply dies halfway.”

The state is indifferent to the problems of Dagestani women. The only charity hospital in the capital of Dagestan, supported by foreign funds, has been closed in 2007 by the authorities after the tightening of a law in Russia on non-governmental organizations, banning foreign funds to carry out its activities on the Russian territory.

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—revised by J. Colarusso and F. Tlisova

# PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS

**LOCATION:** Caucasus Mountain region that includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia

**POPULATION:** See Location and homeland

**LANGUAGE:** Five language families, see Language

**RELIGION:** Christianity; Islam; Judaism; Sufism; traditional beliefs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Between the Black and Caspian Seas rise the Caucasus Mountains, stretching in a line 1,000 km (600 mi) long from the northeast corner of the Black Sea, near the Sea of Azov, south-eastward to Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, near northwestern Iran. The region has traditionally been considered the southeast corner of Europe. As such, it contains the highest mountains in that continent: Mount Elbruz, whose twin peaks rise to heights of 5,621 m (18,441 ft) and 5,642 m (18,510 ft), and Mount Kazbek at 5,047 m (16,512 ft), all of which are higher than Mount Blanc in the Alps, 4,810 m (15,781 ft). In the north, the region extends into the plains of southern Russia and is bordered by the Kuban and Terek rivers. In the south, it runs into the highlands of eastern Turkey and northern Iran, where it may be thought of as ending at the borders of these two nations, which in part follow the Aras River. The region is a meeting place for European, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern civilizations and exhibits a mixture of features from these cultures as well as some that are strictly its own.

There are roughly 50 languages indigenous to this region, and the ethnic complexity of the Caucasus is unequalled in Eurasia, with nearly sixty distinct peoples, including Russians and Ukrainians. The Trans or South Caucasus is home to three new nations that formed at the breakup of the Soviet Union: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Georgia has a history dating back to the 2nd century AD. It was annexed by Russia in 1801. Armenia is the sole surviving fragment of the Armenian nation, which at one time occupied most of eastern Anatolia (Turkey). It was annexed by Russia in 1828. Azerbaijan was once a part of Iran called “Aran.” It has emerged as a mixture of Turkic peoples who have mixed with and assimilated the earlier Caucasian Albanians or Alwanians. Azerbaijan was also annexed to Russia in 1828. The North (or Cis) Caucasus has seven republics, all part of the Soviet legacy and located within what is now the Russian Federation. From west to east, they are: Adygheya, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania, Ingushetia, Chechnya (Ichkeria), and Daghestan. In addition, the southern portion of Krasnodar *kray* (district) extends south of the Kuban. The central region of the North Caucasus traditionally looked to Moscow for protection against raids from the Krim Khans (Crimean Tatars) and formed political links early (1774 in the case of Ossetia). The northwest region traditionally turned to the Ottoman Empire for trade and hence saw Russia as an enemy. It was only annexed in 1864 after prolonged and bitter warfare. The northeastern region traditionally looked south to the Middle East and hence also saw Russia as an adversary. This area was annexed by Russia in 1859 after prolonged resistance led by the

famed Imam ShamyI. To some extent, this threefold west-to-east division crosses over into the south as well and in many ways rivals the customary north-south division in its social and political importance.

The region is potentially wealthy. Gold, iron, zinc, molybdenum, copper, lead, aluminum, tungsten, oil and coal deposits exist. Semi-precious stones, fine mineral springs, hot baths, and ski resorts also can be found. Agriculture is well developed. Tea, tobacco, cotton, walnuts, melons, apples, peaches, pears, and citrus fruit are grown; cattle, oxen, sheep, and fine horses are raised. Most important, however, are vast reserves of oil and natural gas; particularly, it was known to exist in Chechnya's case but during the last few years oil was found in Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia as well. The crude oil from the latter is the finest known, emerging from the earth nearly clear.

Political stability could bring prosperity, but the Caucasus is the most unstable region of the former Soviet Union. Since 1989, the region has witnessed six wars: Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia-Azerbaijan) (1989–1995), South Ossetian-Georgian (1991–1992), Abkhazian-Georgian (1992–1993), North Ossetian-Ingush (1992), and two Chechen-Russian (1994–1996, 1999-present). Not only have these wars been ruinous in terms of loss of lives and property, but also they have occurred in a region whose economic collapse was abrupt. Furthermore, nearly every area has some serious conflict over borders or land rights that stem from Communist patterns of abuse and manipulation. The two wars in Chechnya have been exceptionally destructive, with the second war still simmering as sporadic guerrilla action. Tensions have spread from Chechnya out across most of the North Caucasus. Uprisings and terrorist attacks erupt with tragic consequences, as with the school attack in Beslan, North Ossetia-Alania on 1–3 September 2004; the uprising in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, on 13 October 2005; or with ongoing turmoil in and around Nazran, Ingushetia, and tension in Karachay-Cherkessia. Further turmoil can be expected in what the West has only just begun to realize is a geopolitically crucial region.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Caucasus region is roughly the size of Spain (approximately 388,498 sq km/150,000 sq mi). The South Caucasus is arid in portions that constitute the eastern extremity of the Anatolian highlands, primarily Armenia. Azerbaijan is arid toward its Iranian border, but becomes lush as it rises into the foothills of the Caucasus. Georgia, by contrast with these two, is lush and well watered. Even in its highlands, it enjoys substantial rainfall from the winds off the Black Sea. This verdant landscape is semi-tropical along the Abkhazian coast of the Black Sea and becomes colder but still verdant across the mountains in the north. Only in the east, in Dagestan, does this pattern alter and the land become dry, all the rain having been taken by the high summits. The lowlands along the Caspian Sea coast are arable, but the Dagestani highlands can vary from alpine pastures to alpine deserts.

The ethnic makeup of two of the three southern states is relatively simple. Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are almost wholly Armenian (nearly 3 million), with a few enclaves of Kurdish speaking Yezidis (1.3%). Azerbaijan (8.1 million) consists almost wholly of Azeri Turks, close kin of the Turks of Turkey and the Turkmens of Central Asia. A few Dages-

tani peoples spill over into it, but these will be treated with the North Caucasians. At the extreme eastern end of the mountain chain (the Apsheron peninsula) are the Iranian-speaking Tats (10,900). Adjoining Iran at the extreme southeast is an Iranian-speaking people called the Talysh (400,000), most of whom (1 million) live across the border.

Georgia (4.6 million) is by far the most ethnically complex of the southern states. Recently 18 ethnic groups could be found there, but three have either been driven out or emigrated. In the southwest, there are Ajars, Mingrelians, and Laz, the last extending well across northern Turkey to the city of Trabzon. The Ajars are Muslim and inhabit the eastern tip of a large Georgian-speaking region in eastern Turkey. These Muslim Georgians and the Ajars form a cultural continuum, but the Laz and Mingrelians stand apart from the rest of Georgia both in language and customs. In this southwestern region dwelt a Turkish-speaking group called Meskhetians, who were deported to Central Asia in 1944. In 1989, following riots against them in Uzbekistan, most of them relocated to Azerbaijan. In addition, there are in the south large groups of Armenians, Greeks, and Azeris. In the center of Georgia are the Georgians proper (formed from four earlier groups: the Gurians, Imeretians, Kartlians, and Kakhetians). In the highlands are found Georgian-speaking peoples so distinctive as to form separate ethnic groups. These are the Khevsurs (who wore chain mail and fought with broad swords and bucklers until World War I), the Pshavis, and the Tushetis. A Georgian-speaking Shiite Muslim people, the Ingiloi, who wear Maltese crosses on their clothing, reside across the border in western Azerbaijan. Also located in the Georgian highlands is one village of people who speak a language related to Chechen and Ingush, the Batsby or Kists. A few Dagestanis (Avars) were driven from their highland villages in 1991. By contrast, only recently have the Udis found refuge from religious turmoil in Azerbaijan among their kin in the village of Oktomberi in eastern Georgia. The Udis, a Dagestani people, were the central ethnic group around which the old Christian kingdom of the Caucasian Albanians, or Alwanians, was formed. The central highlands are home to the South Ossetians, who fought a war of secession (1992-3) in an effort to unite with their kin in North Ossetia-Alania. To their west live the Svans, a people only distantly related to the Georgians but who are nevertheless content to be part of this nation. Along the northwest coast, however, live the Abkhaz, who fought a war (1992-3) to establish their own state. Finally, Georgia was once home to a distinctive community of Jews who now dwell in Israel.

The northwest Caucasus was home to five ethnic groups, the first three of which are related: Circassians, Abazas (northern Abkhaz), Ubykhs, Mountain Turks, and the distinctive Caucasianized Kuban Cossacks. In 1864, after more than 150 years of warfare, the Russians, aided by the Cossacks, expelled nearly all of these people into the Ottoman Empire. At most 10% remained, with the exception of the Ubykhs, who were all expelled. Today the remaining Circassians are scattered in and around three republics: Adygheya (116,000), Karachai-Cherkessia (49,600), and Kabardino-Balkaria (500,000). The 32,000 Abazas are located in Karachai-Cherkessia. Population figures are suspect, but a total of about 658,000 is possible if the numerous Circassian villages to the west of Adygheya are counted. This should be contrasted with roughly 3 million Circassians, 0.5 million Abazas, and 50,000 Ubykhs in Tur-

key. The tendency to distinguish the ethnic groups Adyghey, Cherkess, and Kabardian has some basis in dialect diversity and some political motivation (the Kabardians, being in the center of the North Caucasus, tended to have good relations with Moscow). Nevertheless, they themselves do not recognize these divisions, referring to themselves simply as Adyghey. A small population of Circassian-speaking Jews is also considered to be Adyghey. Similarly the Mountain Turks are now called Karachay (169,000) and Balkar or Malkar (105,000), but here, too, the latter are distinctive merely in their proclivity to see in Moscow an ally because they fall in the center of the North Caucasus as opposed to the Karachay.

Although one can speak of the Kabardian Circassians and the Balkar Mountain Turks as being Central North Caucasians, the North Ossetians (445,000) are the only people largely treated as such by the Russians. There is a distinctive western group, the Digoron, and an eastern, the Iron. The southern Ossetians are called *tuallaeg*, which simply means “mountain men.”

To their east are the Ingush, but this too is case of political proclivities splitting an ethnic group in two. Together with the Chechens (1.1 million) further east, the Ingush (361,000) form the Vai Nakh peoples (which include the 5,000 Kists or Batsby of Georgia) and are relatives of the Dagestanis of the Northeast Caucasus. Prior to the Chechen-Russian War, there was a small population of Chechen-speaking Jews, but these have fled to Israel. The northern reaches of Chechnya are also home to the distinctive Terek Cossacks, old Russian-speaking settlers who have adopted many local ways.

Dagestan (2.6 million) is unquestionably the most complex of the Caucasian republics, with 32 indigenous ethnic groups. Turkic nomads are found in the lowlands: Kumyks (366,000), Noghays (38,000), and a few displaced Turkomans (18,000). In the northern highlands are the Akhka Chechens (88,000), the Avars (758,000), and higher still are the Andis (9,000), Karatas (5,000), Chamalals (4,000), Bagwalals (4,000), Akhwakhs (5,000), Botlikhs (3,000), Godoberis (2,500), and Tindis (5,000). Still in the high valleys, but going south toward the Georgian border, are the Tsez ([Dido] 7,000), Hinukhs (200), Hunzibs (400), Khwarshis (1,000), and Bezhitas ([for Kapuchis] 3,000). South of the Avar are the Laks (140,000), Dargwas (426,000), Kubachis (3,000), and Khaidags (28,000), all forming a closely related group of peoples. In one high village, standing apart from them, are the Archis (1,000), whose links lie further south with the so-called Lezgian peoples, the Aghuls (23,000), Tabasarans (101,000), and Rutuls (24,000). A part of the Lezgis (337,000) and most of the Tsakhurs (8,000) spill over into Azerbaijan in the south. Other Dagestanis who are restricted to northern Azerbaijan are the Kryz (6,000) in one mountain village and three coastal ones, Budukhs (1,000), Udis (formerly 6,000), and Khinalugs (2,000). There is in Dagestan a group called “Mountain Jews” ([Givrij or Dagchifut] 13,000), who speak an Iranian language. They are sometimes called “Tats,” but are not to be confused with the Muslim Tats of Azerbaijan. In addition, there are a few Dagestani Cossacks who are strongly assimilated to indigenous patterns.

It must be emphasized that all of these groups are distinct peoples, however small they may be. Many are further subdivided by tribes, clans, and blood lines. Conversely, most traditionally form larger units for self-defense when threatened. This is particularly true of the smaller peoples of Dagestan. In

ethnographic, social, and political terms, the Caucasus is like a miniature continent.

In physical appearance, the people in the South Caucasus tend to be Mediterranean, with dark hair and olive complexions. The Dagestanis often have olive complexions that are suffused with a ruddy undertone, an adaptation to cold mountain air in the form of enhanced blood flow to the skin. The Armenians tend to have marked aquiline features, while the Azeris have features typical of Persians. The Georgians exhibit features also seen among the northern Caucasus. Georgians and North Caucasians often have dark hair with light skin, though individuals who are almost brown-skinned can be seen. Aquiline profiles are also common. Most Georgians and North Caucasians look much like central Europeans or northern Italians, with facial features that often have a fine, chiseled quality. The Ingush are the tallest people in the Caucasus, while the Circassians and Karachay-Balkars are famous for their beauty, tall stature, and graceful movement. Among the Ubykhs and Circassians are many individuals with blond or red hair and pink complexions. The variety of its people reflects the region's complex history.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Known as the Mother of Tongues, the Caucasus is home to five language families, three of which are indigenous. In the north, four Altaic languages are spoken: Karachay, Balkar, Noghay, and Kumyk. These belong to the Kipchak Turkic branch. In the south, two Turkic languages, Meskhetian and Azeri, are found, both belonging to the Ghuzz branch, to which Turkish and Turkoman belong. These Altaic languages show rich verbal inflection (person, tense, mood), and elaborate case systems (alternation of the nouns to reflect their roles in a sentences), but are very regular and transparent in their formation. They have a pleasant, mellifluous sound. Only Azeri is a written language, and it now uses a Latin-based script. Turkic Karachay and Malkar/Balkar use Cyrillic.

Of the Indo-European family, the Slavic branch is represented by Russian and Ukrainian. The Kuban and Terek Cossacks speak Russian. These complex languages have large case systems that extend both to their nouns and adjectives, with many irregularities. Further, nouns come in three categories, called genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. The Slavic verb is highly sensitive to “aspect,” the degree of completion of an action. There are more than a dozen verbs of motion that reflect subtle differences in movement. The languages are mellifluous, having unusual sustained intonation patterns that give them a song-like quality. One of their hallmarks is palatalization, raising of the tongue to produce a y-like sound along with the main consonant. The Iranian branch is represented by Tat, Talysh, and Kurdish in the South, and by Ossetian in the North. This last is the sole surviving form of the language of the ancient Alans, Sarmatians, and Scythians, nomadic horsemen of classical antiquity. While retaining verbal aspect, much as does Slavic, the grammars of these languages have lost most of their case systems and have leveled out most irregularity. Only Ossetian has kept an elaborate case system due to neighboring Ingush and Chechen influence. Iranian languages make abundant use of fricatives (s- sh- and kh-like sounds). Armenian forms a distinct branch of Indo-European in the south. In grammatical complexity, it stands midway between Iranian and Slavic. It is remarkable for its elaborate consonant clusters.

Russian, Ukrainian, Ossetian, and Armenian are written languages. The first three use a Cyrillic-based script, while Armenian has its own distinctive national writing.

The Southern Caucasian or Kartvelian language family consists of Georgian, Mingrelian, and Laz (collectively called Zan or Chan), and distantly related Svan. Only Georgian is written, using its own national alphabet. These languages have complex sentence formation (syntax), with Georgian and Svan being “ergative.” Ergative languages mark the person (or thing) undergoing an action by the absolutive case, whether it is done by the person alone (intransitive) or brought upon it by another (transitive). The person or thing that brings the action upon another is marked by a special case, the ergative. For example, (using English), a Georgian would say the boy (absolutive) sleeps, but the teacher (ergative) scolded the boy (absolutive). If the action is incomplete, then the case marking switches with the subject in the absolutive and the object in a sort of geometric role (dative case): the teacher (absolutive) is scolding/will scold at the boy (dative). Word formation is highly irregular and highly unusual in that material is added both to the front and end of a root (circumfixation). The noun exhibits a large number of cases, while the verb inflects not only for person, but also for intentions, distinguishing between accidental, purposive, direct, and self-serving actions. The sound systems show enormous and difficult consonant clusters, as in *mtskheta* (a place name), Tbilisi (the name of the capital, which means “of the warm spring”), *tqbili* (sweet), or *prtkhili* (careful). Long strings of vowels are also possible. A contrast between regular (k) and back (q) k-sounds occurs. Glottal ejectives, characteristic of the Caucasus, also occur. These are consonants made with a slight popping sound by shutting the vocal cords and causing a momentary smothering sensation.

The Northeast Caucasian languages are also ergative. Most word modification is by means of attaching material at the end of a root (suffixation). The verb is relatively simple, in most cases not even inflecting for person, though some, as in Archi or Chechen, can be elaborate. Most complexity resides in the noun system, where large numbers of cases are used to denote almost every conceivable grammatical role or spatial relationship. Cases even have cases and can express, for example, not only whether something crosses something else (the “translative”), but whether the crossing took place either horizontally, or from above to below, or from below to above. Some languages, such as Lak and Tabasaran, have nearly 50 cases, the largest such systems known anywhere. These systems are suited for the geometric complexity of their mountainous environment. The nouns further belong to class systems. These are gender systems like those found in Slavic, but with as many as nine categories: male, female, neuter, animal, plurals, mass objects (sand, water, etc.), long objects, edible objects, and so on. The sound systems have a profusion of fricatives (s-, sh-, or kh-like sounds), many of them gutturals (made in the back of the mouth or in the throat). One form of Aghul makes such sounds in more places than any other known language: at the soft palate (velars), at the back of the mouth (uvulars), at the back of the mouth with the throat contracted (pharyngealized uvulars), in the upper throat (pharyngeals), in the lower throat (epiglottals or adytals), and in the voice box (laryngeals). Prolonged consonants also occur, as do glottal ejectives, and rounded consonants (simultaneous kw or tw, for example). Many languages show a profusion of laterals (l-like) sounds,

(Archi has 11), some of which are made in the back of the mouth. Elaborate vowel systems occur, with ordinary vowels (oral), vowels made with the nose open (nasalized), with the throat constricted (pharyngealized), or with the epiglottis lowered (adytalized). Some languages, such as those of the Andi group (Andi, Botlikh, Godoberi, Chamalal, Bagawalal, Karata, Akhwakh, and Tindi), have tone (like Chinese), as well as breathy voiced vowels, and “stiff” vowels. Chechen and Ingush are written languages, as are Avar, Lak, Dargwa, Tabasaran, and Lezgi. In the 1990s, Aghul, Rutul, and Tsakhur were raised to literary status. All languages use a modified Cyrillic script.

As complex as the South and Northeast families are, the Northwest family is more complex still, approaching what may be some sort of maximum. The family consists of Circassian, Abkhaz, Abaza, and Ubykh. Their syntax is ergative, but shows a wide range of alternative patterns depending upon the exact relationship of actor and object. The verb inflects for every noun in the sentence, as well as expressing a plethora of geometric information by the unusual means of attaching material to the front of the root (prefixation). Some sentences have two objects (ditransitives), while others have two subjects (causatives). In fact, the verb is so expressive that conversations in these languages often turn into a series of verbs once the speakers know the nouns they are talking about. The case system on the noun is simple (Circassian, Ubykh) or absent (Abkhaz and Abaza). The vast majority of nouns are made up of simpler terms. For example, *na-pa* (literally “eye-nose”) means “face,” *sh’ha-pq* (“head-bone”) means “skull,” *wuna-pq* (“house-bone”) means “frame of a house,” and *woradi-pq* (“song-bone”) means “melody.” The sound systems, however, are the most unusual feature of the family. All the languages have enormous consonantal systems, with rounded, labialized (simultaneous p-, b-, f-, or v- made with the sound), palatalized (raised tongue), and pharyngealized (constricted throat) consonants made at almost every possible point in the mouth and throat. Kabardian has the fewest with 48 consonants, while Ubykh has the most with 81. (For example, Ubykh has 14 guttural fricatives and 27 s-, ts-, sh-, and ch-like sounds.) These sounds also occur in elaborate clusters, especially in Abkhaz and Abaza. As hard as the consonants are, the vowels are harder. This family is known for its “vertical vowel system,” in which vowels contrast only in degree of openness. By some analyses, these languages have four, three, or only two vowels. Some linguists have even argued that the vowels of Kabardian are all predictable and therefore not really part of its sound system (phoneme inventory). Two dialects of Circassian serve as written languages: Chemgwi (West Circassian) and Kabardian (East Circassian). Both Abkhaz and the closely related Abaza are literary languages, while Ubykh, still spoken by a handful of people in Turkey, has been extensively documented by linguists and folklorists. The literary languages use highly modified Cyrillic scripts, while Ubykh has been recorded in an elaborated Latin one. Many families across the North Caucasus have rune-like symbols, *tamghas*, as emblems of identity. Many of these reach back to old symbols used by nomadic hordes in antiquity.

In the Northwest, special membership in hunting bands carried with it knowledge of a special language for its male members. In old Circassian, this was *she-ko-bza* (“hunting-go-language”). In Abkhazia, a woodsman language is still used. There are spotty reports of a women’s language that seems to



have been spoken until recently across the entire North Caucasus. One old Ossetian related how his mother and sister would speak in a monosyllabic language with tone (like Sumerian of ancient Mesopotamia).

Scholars have tried to find links between various Caucasian languages and some of the languages of the Ancient Middle East and Anatolia, such as Hattic (with Northwest Caucasian), Sumerian (with Georgian or Dagestani), Urartean and Hurrian (with Dagestani). One such proposal that has attracted much interest and some support is that linking Proto-Indo-European with the Northwest Caucasian family.

Bilingualism is virtually universal among Caucasians. Nearly everyone speaks Russian in addition to his or her own language. The only people to be predominantly monolingual are the Russians, who tend to dominate in urban centers. The villages and countryside remain bastions of the native languages.

In the North as opposed to the South Caucasus, the family name comes first and then the given names. In Russian, practice this is reversed, but the original order is retained in the social practices of the individual peoples.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The Caucasus is rich in folklore. In the southern highlands, tales of a mountain sorceress, Dal, are widespread. Dal is beautiful and glowing and a protector of the alpine wildlife, but she can lure hunters to their doom. Other tales show strong Zoroastrian influences from ancient Iran. In the North, there are tales that recount battles with the ancient Goths, Huns, and Khazars, the last a Turkic people who ruled the Caucasus and adopted Judaism wholesale. One of the most noteworthy traditions is that of the Nart sagas, dramatic tales of a race of ancient heroes in which the figure of the all-wise and all-fertile Lady Satanaya is pivotal. Other figures include a villainous shape changer (Sosruquo), a mighty hero who is resurrected from the dead and returns to annihilate his enemies (Pataraz or Batradz), a giant or hero who, like the Greek Prometheus, is chained to a mountain top as a punishment for trying to return fire to humankind (Nasran), and a cyclopean giant (Yini-zh). There are numerous links to the myths of ancient Greece, ancient India, and Norse Scandinavia. There is even a sort of Christmas-tree figure, Lady Tree, and a "Forest Mother," Amazon, from which the Greeks took the figure of their women warriors, the Amazons.

There is widespread belief in the western Caucasus of wild men in the high mountain forests, especially among people who dwell in the upper villages. These hairy people are reputed to be about five feet tall and to travel in small family groups. Occasionally, they are said to come into the lowland fields at harvest time and feed on the ripening ears of corn. Men are said to be very brave if they can go into the high forests and trade with these wild men, because after having met with one or two of them in a clearing to offer trinkets, they run the risk of being ambushed by the whole band as they return through the high, dense rhododendron forests. It is worth noting that in 1991 and 1992 fossils of small early humans were found at Dmanisi in Georgia. Perhaps these Wildman tales are based on encounters with relic forms of *Homo georgicus*.

#### 5 RELIGION

The nation-states of Georgia (Georgian Orthodox Christian), Armenia (Armenian Orthodox Christian), and Azerbaijan

use religion as central components in their identity. The first two claim to be the oldest Christian nations and have nationalist churches. Azerbaijan is Shi'ite Muslim (Azeri Turks and Georgian-speaking Ingiloi), Sunni Muslim (southern Lezgi Dagestani peoples), and Alwanian Christian Orthodox Christian, now a branch of the Georgian patriarchate (the small Udi community). These nations-states feel a sense of privilege in comparison with the smaller peoples of the Caucasus and have used their religion as a part of their pride. The Nagorno-Karabakh war (1989–1995) involved serious ethnic clashes between Azeris and Armenians that resonated with religious and ethnic hatred.

By contrast, religious tolerance is one of the strongest features of the North Caucasus, where Christians (Orthodox), Muslims (Sunni), and Jews can be found living side by side. Even during the recent wars in the North, religious hatred never emerged as a motive. The highlands also had mystical traditions of meditation and martial arts that in the east have become Sufi practices. In Dagestan, holy men often have shrines, usually placed at the highest point of the village. Pagan elements persist throughout the Caucasus, and many Abkhaz are avowedly pagan. The Abkhaz even had women shamans. Religion is always socially and conceptually subordinated to ethnic identity throughout the Caucasus.

There are enigmatic relics of older beliefs. For example, Ossetia preserves "beehive" mortuaries made of flat stones, which must reflect an older, local religion of unknown character. Dagestan shows many old beliefs surrounding animals, such as snakes, horses, and especially bears. This last totemistic animal is associated with sacred rocks and even a half-bear/half-man creature. Sacred rocks of heaven are also mentioned in some of the Nart sagas of the Northwest Caucasian Abazas. These are considered the heaviest stones and might even have been nickel-iron meteorites.

Islamic societies, *jama'at*, are appearing across the North Caucasus. Many of these have fundamentalist Salafi leanings, unlike the usually Hanafi form of Sunni Islam. Given the turmoil and economic stress in the North Caucasus, Islam seems to be emerging once again, as it did in the 18th and 19th centuries, as a unifying principle.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Major holidays are those of the Orthodox Christian and Sunni Muslim faiths. The Northwest Caucasians (Circassians, Ubykhs, Abazas, and Abkhaz) in the diaspora mark deportation day (21 May 1864), the anniversary of their expulsion from the Caucasus. In Dagestan, the "first plowing" in the spring is widely celebrated with a ritual plowing of a furrow by a bull and with festivities, races, and tests of strength.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Apart from Muslim and Orthodox Christian rites of circumcision and christening, there are no rites of passage into adulthood. Both boys and girls are considered mature between the ages of 16 and 18. Marriage is the chief change in life for both men and women.

Funeral rites vary, but almost all groups set out a place setting at the table to mark the missing dead at feasts. After three months a monument is erected and a day of remembrance observed. In Abkhazia the next of kin gather when an elder lies dying and sing to her or him.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In all Caucasian societies, siblings were supposed to be married in order from oldest to youngest. In all cases, the bride went to live in the extended family of her husband (patrilocal marriage). Whether arranged or through love, marriage was viewed as the linking of two families. Accordingly, matters of social rank between them were always a concern.

Marriage was by abduction among the Northwest Caucasians. These were often prearranged by the couple in love, and mock abductions are still performed. A leather corset with many knots was worn by the bride for those prearranged abductions. After the first night, the man had to present this corset with its thongs intact to both families as a sign of his courtesy to his new wife and of his restraint. Marriages often took place when the couple was in their thirties, which is extraordinarily late for a traditional society. Premarital life was filled with decorous and discrete romance. Young girls had a room in their family homes in which they were free to entertain their suitors. Trysts were arranged for an amorous young couple by the youth's maternal uncle, while a young woman's well-being was the responsibility of her brothers. In Ossetia, marriage was generally for love, with couples marrying in their twenties, but family rank was still an important factor. In the Northeast Caucasus, marriages were usually arranged, with young people marrying in their teens. Among the Chechens actual abduction of a woman still takes place. Brides were subservient to their in-laws. In the South Caucasus, a similar pattern was followed in Armenia, where family negotiations and an engagement of their teenage children were begun as early as two years before the marriage. Brides were subservient to their mothers-in-law and had to observe a ritual silence in their new families, often for years. In public, their faces were veiled or even tightly wrapped until they had a child. Among the Georgians, young people marry by mutual consent in their twenties, with civic and church ceremonies. The bride is supposed to have an agreeable, but respectful relationship with her in-laws. Among the Azeris, couples marry in their twenties. Rural marriages are usually arranged, but even those urban marriages that are motivated by love are expected to take place between families who are known to one another or even related. The latter case is unique in the Caucasus, where strict exogamy (marriage outside a clan or lineage) is otherwise the rule.

Throughout the Caucasus, hospitality to strangers is one of the foremost social imperatives. Lavish feasts are given for guests and, in theory, a host would even give his life to defend a guest. In return, a guest is expected to act discretely and respectfully to his host and so bring honor to the host's family. Even a prisoner of war or an enemy could be treated hospitably if he had shown great valor. In the midst of a duel, it was possible for one adversary to seek a suspension of hostilities for a period of time as long as several days. The combatants would then resume their struggle at an agreed upon time and place. This chivalric code has been eroded by modern warfare, however.

People who are strongly attracted to one another or who admire one another can declare themselves to be "milk" sisters or brothers. Such a bond can cross gender lines. To be chosen as a milk sibling is one of the greatest honors that can be bestowed upon someone by a Caucasian. Such bonds last for life and have all the force of true kinship. Often a man and a wom-

an who cannot marry for some reason will instead form a life-long bond in this way.

Four other marked features are found throughout the Caucasus. First, elders are revered. The old are expected to have full and passionate lives, although women are cautioned that "a man past one hundred is no longer much of a man." The elderly also have economic roles in the community, sorting fruit or tending gardening, which permit them to contribute without taxing their powers. Young people are greatly honored to wait upon or care for an elderly member of their clan or their community. Many groups have choruses or dance troupes in which all the members are 100 or more years old. These have special dances and distinctive songs.

Second, almost all peoples have clan structures of one sort or another. These play a vital role in their societies. Social support, kinship bonds, economic support, socializing, and vengeance obligations are or were defined by clan affiliation. In some cases, as with the Chechen clans, called *teips*, war has weakened their role, and warlord-like allegiances have come to dominate. In other cases, as among the Circassians and their kin, expulsion has also weakened these old links, reducing them to matters of family pride rather than active social organizations.

Third, vengeance was a dominant theme in the Caucasus, especially the north. Even the accidental death of a clan member forced upon all its males an obligation to seek revenge from the offending clan, even by taking the life of someone who had no role in the incident. Only males were involved in such vendettas.

Fourth, dance was a central social activity of every people. Men and women entered into joint dances, although single gender dances, and solo performances, also existed. Dance is still important, even among Diaspora communities.

Two features found in the Northwest Caucasus, among the Circassians and their kin are the high social prestige and sexual freedom that women enjoy. Among these peoples women are seen as the sources of fertility, social grace, and intellectual knowledge. Until recently, a woman could halt the most vicious fight simply by tossing her scarf between the two men. Women have the right to initiate altruistic friendships with men or even embark upon sexual ones if they do so discreetly. Such overtures are difficult for a man to reject, because he would be rejecting her whole family, so women do not make such overtures lightly. One opener is for a woman to ask to borrow a pen or other small item even when it is obviously not needed. To comply is to show interest. In Dagestan, sexual prerogatives of women can be more circumscribed, with the prowess of men being important. This can be shown when the men set water buckets out on their porches in the evening for nocturnal ablutions after sexual intercourse: the bigger the bucket, the greater his presumed sexual prowess. Some men even set out two. The somewhat lower rank of women in Dagestan correlates with a greater economic burden of toil on their part. Women remain subservient in Dagestan. Efforts to promulgate traditional Muslim norms in Chechnya are met with resistance from women. As in Russia, older women in the Caucasus, especially in the North East and South, often cover their heads with scarves.



*A man drives his cattle across a snowy mountain outside of Vladikavkaz. This road through Russia's Caucasus Mountains has been shut down many times because of heavy snowfall. (Kazbek Basayev/Getty Images)*

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Living conditions are relatively good in the South and Northwest, where the land is verdant, but life is difficult in the Northeast where mountain deserts dominate. Life in the high reaches of Dagestan is especially harsh due to the prolonged winters and barren land. Men go on long outings to earn money in the lowlands, while the women remain behind to maintain the households through strenuous work. One advantage to living in the highlands is that every step is either up or down, and the resulting exercise contributes to many people being long-lived. Whatever their age, people are often extremely strong and youthful looking.

The typical Northwest Caucasian house is long with one floor, much like a ranch-style home. It is made of wattle covered in clay daub. Villages were formed of compounds containing a main house and several outbuildings, including guest housing, that were originally strung out like necklaces along riverbanks. Tower fort homes were common in the highlands of Svan territory (Svanetia), Ossetia, and the Circassian and Abkhazian highlands. These striking buildings, sitting within a walled yard, were made of stone, with a first floor for livestock, a second floor for humans, and a high tower in which all could take refuge when under siege from a blood feud. The Northeast Caucasian stone houses run on top of one another, the roof of the lower serving as the porch of the upper, as they cling to hillsides to form compact villages called *auls*. Andi aul of Muni is so compact that it forms one giant building with enclosed streets. Houses in such auls were usually made of local

stone and had two floors; the first for livestock, and the second for people (also to be above the snows).

The cities, many of which were founded as Cossack forts, have a blend of older 19th-century housing and modern Soviet high-rise apartments. Most of these cities are attractive, with large parks and tree-lined boulevards.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Extended patrilocal families are the norm across the Caucasus. In highlands, people often live to be very old, so great-grandparents or (even great-great-grandparents) are part of the family. Children must respect elders and older siblings. Brothers have very close, protective relationships with their sisters. Boys have very close ties with their maternal uncles, while they have relatively formal relationships with their fathers. This is part of the Circassian kinship system, where the husband's relationship to his wife is formal, and the wife's bond to her brother is spontaneous and deep. The eldest man is master of the extended family unit insofar as he rules over disputes or regulates social relationships with the outside world. Within the confines of the home, however, the eldest woman is supreme and runs the details of the household. Often she works hard to organize feasts, supervising her daughters-in-law or even poor female relations who may come to help, but she can be rewarded after the dinner by having her family and guests gather outside the kitchen to applaud her while she takes a bow.

Family life is further integrated into the community by tight networks of clans and blood lines. These are centered

around villages in Dagestan, where such clans will have their own tea houses for their members to gather. Clan houses are merely meeting houses among the Chechens and Ingush. With the Ossetians, Northwest Caucasians, Mountain Turks, and Armenians, clans are vital to social organization and have local “seats,” but clan houses do not exist. In Georgia, a loose network of noble families serves a similar function, with clans being absent. In Azerbaijan, clans and wider social structures are lacking. Even there, extended families are a social reality and define family matters, such as marriages.

The clans were also the basis for the blood feud or vendetta. Customary law, called *adat*, stipulated that if a member of one clan killed or even accidentally brought about the death of a member of another, then every man in the offended clan had the obligation to restore “the balance of life” by killing the man responsible or, if that was too difficult, another male from the killer’s clan. This obligation passed down the male line for seven generations. There were only four ways to stop the bloodshed. First, one clan eventually killed all the males of the other, which sometimes happened. Second, a blood price was stipulated, usually in livestock, and the offending clan was able to meet this demand. Third, an exalted social figure, an elder or an imam (Muslim cleric), forced the offended clan to renounce their obligation or risk taking the blame for humiliating him in turn. Sometimes this peacemaker would have to threaten suicide to force such a renunciation. Fourth, the killer could sneak up on a woman from the victim’s clan, seize her, tear off her blouse, and place his lips to her breast. Such an act, however fleeting, would suffice to create a kinship bond between the two clans that precluded further bloodshed. This was not an easy feat, because many Caucasian women will fight and are sometimes armed with small daggers. During war, vendetta was suspended so that men could form an army and fight beside their blood enemies. In recent decades, Soviet courts had begun to assume the role of arbiters of justice in such cases, but with the collapse of Soviet authority, vendetta has reemerged.

In the Northwest Caucasus, princely and noble families practiced fosterage: they would give their sons to trusted retainers to be reared. This was nearly the highest honor a retainer could know because it linked his family to that of the nobility by fictive kinship bonds. The highest honor was when the foster child refused to return to his natural family at 16 years of age, but chose instead to remain in the household of his foster parents.

## 11 CLOTHING

Distinctive to the Caucasus and borrowed by the Cossacks is a man’s garment called a *cherkesska*. This is a robe-like suit, tightly fitting on the upper torso, and flaring out from the waist, with long flaring sleeves. On either side of the chest cylindrical pockets were sewn on in a row for cartridges or to hold cases of measured powder charge for a musket. A long-sleeved, collarless shirt is worn under it, together with fitted trousers. In the Cossack variant, the trousers are baggy. As the name suggests, this dashing outfit originated among the Circassians (the “Cherkess” in Russian). Over it can be worn a heavy, rectangular sheepskin cape, the burka, which can even serve as a makeshift tent. In Dagestan, sheep’s wool leather coats with long sleeves dangling below the hands were common as well. Lamb’s wool hats are worn, some high and cylindrical, others shorter and flaring or shaggy and spherical,

depending upon the region. Footwear consisted of a boot that resembled a leather knee sock. No man was considered dressed without a long dagger, the *kinjal*, hanging from a narrow leather belt. The belt itself was adorned with hanging weighted straps that served to balance a dagger or sword.

In the Northwest and South Caucasus the traditional woman’s garment is a long, flowing gown with pendant sleeves and either a high, crown-like hat, or a pillbox hat with a trailing scarf attached to it. Shoes are pump-like slippers, but in older times noble women wore platform shoes. Northeast Caucasians had woolen sweater-like tunics and heavy socks and mittens to ward off the winter cold. Dagestani women often wore baggy trousers and tunics. Dagestani, Chechen, Ingush, and Karachai-Balkar women often wear head scarves, sometimes hanging far down their backs, but they did not wear veils. Women often wear pendant earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. Some Dagestani women wear large broach-like pieces of silver on their foreheads attached to their head scarves. Outside Dagestan modern dress is now the rule except for parties or festivals when the traditional costumes are worn.

## 12 FOOD

Outside Dagestan, food is relatively plentiful and varied in the Caucasus. Common foods include chicken, mutton, cornmeal, and millet mush, all seasoned with garlic or, in the South, with hot spices, as well as yogurt, a walnut paste, fruits, watermelons, wine, cognac, and millet beer. One popular dish that has spread beyond the Caucasus is “chicken Circassian,” which consists of cornbread served with ground chicken that has been mixed with onions and walnuts and topped with a cream garlic sauce. Traditional diets were low in fat, and people were slender. Now, the diet is high in fat and starch and people thicken with age. One item eaten nowadays that reflects such dietary changes is ground liver spread in a layer and then topped with a layer of lard. The whole thing is rolled up and sliced like a jelly roll. Even though feasting could last for days and drinking was heavy, overeating and drunkenness were considered disgraceful lapses in etiquette. The clan or community feast was an important affair and was run by the *tamada*, a Circassian word, *t’hamata*, that has spread across the Caucasus, up into Russia and down into Iran. Invariably a man was elected, and he determined seating and set the tempo for courses and drinks. A person was judged by the eloquence of his or her toasts; even women were permitted to offer them among many groups. Only the Aghuls of Dagestan stand apart in that no toasting takes place at their feasts. Dagestanis are noted for grinding grains that have begun to sprout, a practice that enhances the vitamin content of the flour.

## 13 EDUCATION

All children were reared from an early age to observe formal etiquette, to honor elders, and to dance. In the highlands, training in hunting and stalking was important. In lower lands, training in the details of horse breeding was often vital. Formal education is conducted in local languages up to high school, but then is usually in Russian. Up until the Russian conquest, the religious universities (Medrassas) of Dagestan were renowned throughout the Muslim world. The Russians discouraged such institutions, but they did introduce widespread literacy in both Russian and many of the native languages, and they opened up the Caucasus to modern urban culture and sci-

ence. In the South Caucasus and in parts of Chechnya, Russia is giving way to English and German as the preferred second language. The Caucasus region has a high percentage of scientists, intellectuals, and artists.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Caucasus is a refuge for many peoples who were driven from the steppes of Eurasia. The region has preserved many values and customs that seem ancient. Since the Russian conquest and with the advent of modernity, Caucasians have faced many challenges to their heritage and sense of identity. The issue of heritage is difficult for the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs because their expulsion from the Caucasus in the 19th century, when Circassians lost 90% of population during the war with Russia and deportation. Internal deportations play a similar vexing role for the Karachai-Malkar and for the Chechen-Ingush. These peoples were deported to Siberia and Central Asia by Stalin in 1944 and were allowed to return under Khrushchev only in 1956-7. Many died and much was lost. One dominant theme, however, emerges from the array of local concerns. All Caucasians wish to be a part of modern culture in some sense, even those who are otherwise staunchly Muslim. There is a desire to enter upon the stage of world culture as a respected and distinct form of civilization. They feel that they have much to offer, but they have trouble sorting out the details and finding new roles for old values.

Caucasians face a range of difficulties in finding a modern identity for their warrior heritage. They are still outstanding fighters, but urban culture offers them roles and goals that are new. Furthermore, the Diaspora and the home populations have differing needs. The former seek to retain or revive aspects of identity in their new homelands, chiefly Turkey, while the latter try to find viable roles for older customs in the new urban centers established by the Russians. Despite these challenges certain core traits still form part of the heritage of most Caucasians: honoring of elders, keeping of one's word, showing hospitality, showing restraint, feeling the imperatives of vendetta and vengeance if not often acting upon them, forming fictive kinship bonds (milk siblings), avoiding a mercenary attitude toward money, adhering to old home territory if in the Caucasus, observing proper conduct and etiquette, and cultivating good humor and a sharp wit.

Other aspects of Caucasian heritage are dance and music. Music was played at one time on violins and oboe-like instruments, but now clarinets and accordions are preferred. Drums, gourd rattles, and wooden clackers form the rhythm section. Long horns (like Swiss alp horns) were used in Ossetia to communicate between valleys. Poetry recitals are another important cultural element. Women as well as men can be bards in the Northwest. In times past, in Dagestan, bards (only males) would hold contests in eloquence, with the loser reputedly losing his head.

Another vital heritage that has been carried down to modern times is an elaborate tradition of herbal medicine. This is especially active in Dagestan among the men and in the Northwest highlands among the women. It has spread to Russia with Caucasian immigrants and is a highly valued service among the population at large. Its practice is open only to the initiated, and scholars or doctors have yet to study these remedies and techniques.

#### 15 WORK

Labor is specialized by gender across the Caucasus. Men work with livestock and in the open fields, whereas women tend gardens, thresh grain, do household chores, and tend to sewing. Men do metal working and leather tooling. In Dagestan, women both young and old can often be seen carrying enormous loads of hay or kindling on their backs or large jugs of water on their heads. Children and the elderly are also given tasks suitable to their abilities that contribute to the prosperity of the village. Despite the gender-based specialization, both sexes accord mutual respect to their roles.

Some Caucasians engage in careers that carry on older cultural specialties. For example, many diaspora Caucasians have become military leaders in Russia, Turkey, and the Middle East, following the earlier example of the Circassian Mamelukes (hired warriors) who ruled Egypt in the 13th to 15th centuries. The Mongols were finally defeated in their onslaught by the Circassian Sultan Kutuz. The same name was borne by General Kutuzov of the imperial Russian army who defeated Napoleon 500 years later. The name "Kutuz(ov)" is still common among the Chechens. One effect this warrior heritage has on modern society is that one cannot offer to help a Caucasian man without offending him, since such an offer implies that he is incapable of accomplishing his task. He must ask for help. Another effect is the heavy emphasis throughout the Caucasus on etiquette and proper conduct in order to curb the excesses of the warrior code in normal social life.

Other diaspora Caucasians have become skilled machinists, pharmacists, or physicians. The Ubykhs, for example, who were reputed for their healing skills back in the Caucasus, are frequently doctors in Turkey. Others raise horses, and others are merchants.

#### 16 SPORTS

A popular reworking of the old warrior ethic appears to be the sport of soccer, the most popular sport in the Caucasus. A close second is wrestling, which combines a kick-boxing-like manner of fighting, perhaps descended from the older martial traditions of hand-to-hand combat. Caucasian dance has the quality of a sport, demanding enormous strength in jumps and leaps and attended by a pervasive grace. The men twirl, strut, and leap with a proud bearing, while the women glide and swirl in a demure manner. Arm motions are an important part of the dance, with the arms often held straight upward and then brought downward while flexing the hands at the wrists. Chechen dance adds to these features one that exemplifies the Caucasian virtue of self-control. While the woman glides about, the man whirls around her, moving in and out. At unexpected moments, he will shout abruptly and loudly into her face or ear, and if she is a skilled dancer, she will neither flinch nor even bat an eye. Skill at horseback riding and horse racing are valued. One of the most spectacular feats on horseback is to lean over and cut through 21 oranges (the product of two magical numbers, 3 and 7) with a saber without moving even one of them. It is achieved by pulling the razor-sharp saber toward you while you sweep it through the lined up oranges. The nobles of the Circassians, Ubykhs, and Abkhaz still practice a martial art form. From the age of 12 they toughen their hands by thrusting them into huge bags of clay. In close combat, they were said to have been able to thrust their hands into an ene-

my's body and rip out his heart. The rule was "in a fight, don't get close to a noble."

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many of the cities have national museums, theatres, and dance troupes based upon local ethnic customs, and these are well attended. Music, dance, and bardic recitations are still popular forms of entertainment. The arrival of a guest is an opportunity for such entertaining, as well as for feasting with a *tamada*. In the highlands, hunting boars, badgers, stags, and bears is a popular pastime.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The peoples of Dagestan are famous for their woven rugs, tapestries, and textiles, with each ethnic group having its own distinctive repertoire of forms. The peoples of the Northwest Caucasus make felt rugs and folk costumes. Their favored decoration is a pleasing open exfoliate pattern (resembling leaves and vines). Poetry is an active folk art, with some groups, such as the Abaza, producing volumes of popular poetry by hundreds of amateurs. Some groups, such as the Kubachis of Dagestan, are famed for their metal working. Kubachi metal goods, including swords and daggers, are considered among the best examples of Islamic metal working in the world. Many Dagestani peoples supplement their meager incomes with home knitting of socks, mittens, and sweaters. These are often done by hand in a matter of hours or days by the women and then sold in Georgia or in Russia by the men.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The problems faced by Caucasians, both in the Caucasus and among the diaspora, are numerous and acute. In the Caucasus, endemic violence, dislocations in social structure, high youth unemployment, new and seemingly arbitrary borders, sharp ethnic rivalries, the recovery of lost practices and identities, and a coming to terms with the communist legacy are all problems that must in some sense be solved. In the damaged hierarchical Northwest Caucasian societies, where there were once princes, nobles, freemen, and slaves, there is now a chronic struggle for prestige and rank, as former princes and noble no longer command deference from former freemen or slaves. In North Ossetia–Alania, problems center around ethnic identity and union with the South Ossetians. North Ossetians are highly Russified, but have been brought up short in this evolution by the influx of conservative South Ossetian refugees. Northeast Caucasian societies are also hierarchical except for Chechen–Ingush and Lezgi. In this region, the major problem is balancing the competing claims of the numerous ethnic groups. The Chechens face the acute problem of rebuilding after the disastrous wars with Russia and of normalizing their relations with vastly more numerous former imperial masters. These tasks are made even more difficult by the horizontal organization of Chechen society in clans. Chechens are not accustomed to following a hierarchical authority, even when it is their own. Georgian society has endured acute economic collapse, which was exacerbated by South Ossetia and Abkhazia having fought wars of secession. The role of the old Georgian noble families are being revived and reappraised in an effort to enhance social cohesion. Armenia and Azerbaijan are locked in a stalemate over Nagorno-Karabakh, with Armenian forces holding more than one-third of what was Azerbaijani territo-

ry. Azerbaijan has embarked upon a strategy of ethnically and religiously homogeneous social identity that seems ill-suited to accommodate the Lezgi, Tsakhur, Kryz, Budukh, Khinalug, Ingiloi, or Udi peoples who live within its borders, not to mention the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Wars have devastated Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Preventing renewed or future hostilities and rebuilding in the aftermath of those past will be a major challenge for the future of the region. Russian policies under President Putin have aggravated many local problems. Chief among these irritants has been Moscow's policy of appointing regional governors and heads. Often such individuals are corrupt and indifferent to local needs. They have frequently failed to restore the confidence of their populaces.

These same wars have reawakened ethnic identity among the diaspora Caucasians in a vivid and abrupt way, and these people face their own array of social problems. The foremost problem is to find ways to accommodate their newly revived ethnic identities within their host countries, and to find tangible forms of expression for these identities after six generations in exile. Most recently younger members of the Caucasian diaspora have used the internet to establish electronic forms of identity, even going so far as to devise ways of writing their languages in Latin script. This is tied in with another problem among the diaspora: native language literacy. There is a renewed desire both to publish in the languages of their heritage and to learn and preserve those languages. The last few Ubykh speakers in Turkey, for example, are making an effort to revive this language. Ubykhs have emerged as visible components of most diaspora communities, having regained a sense of identity.

Turkey has shown political tolerance and innovation by permitting its large Caucasian minority to establish a North Caucasus Studies Center and to record the languages. A limited amount of publishing in the Caucasian languages is allowed. Jordan and Israel have long allowed their Caucasians language rights. The diaspora offers the promise of assisting other Caucasians through trade and investment.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The role and status of women in the traditions of the North Caucasus in the past and current times differs substantially from Islamic norms. Despite the fact that the peoples of the Caucasus profess Islam, the behavior of women, their status in the family and society is increasingly governed by ethnic laws, which are more liberal than Islamic laws. In the culture of Dagestan, Vai Nakh, (Chechen and Ingush) and others it is *adat*, for the Ossetians, *aeghdau*, and for the Circassians, *habze*.

Women of almost of any nation in the Caucasus have largely similar rights, responsibilities, and privileges. But, there are significant differences. For example, a woman of Dagestan, in the past, had the right to choose her husband. The selected man had no right to refuse, but had to marry, even if he did not like the woman. In the tradition of the Circassians, a woman submitted to the will of her father (or a senior in age) in the choice of a husband. On the other hand, a Dagestan woman was responsible for much manual labor, because it was a disgrace for a Dagestan man to carry anything on his back or shoulder. Often, women gather everything that is needed for the house-

hold, including wood and hay. This tradition is still observed in the mountains and in the cities of Dagestan, where you can observe a man and a woman walking together, while he is freely waving hands and she is carrying heavy bags. In Circassian and Ossetian societies, however, such things are not allowed. Traditions do not permit a woman to lift heavy weights if there is a man nearby.

In today's Caucasian society many of the most severe restrictions on women are not as urgent as in the past. There is a freer European style of dress. The ban on women visiting cafes, restaurants, and discotheques was removed. Family members are more or less equal, although the strict adherence to traditional primacy of men is still shown in public life. In Chechnya, a strong tradition of a father's privileges still remains. After a divorce, the children stay with their father and the mother is prohibited for life in seeing her children.

The ban on jobs is no longer widely practiced and modern Caucasian women have the opportunity to get an education and make a professional career in various fields. Nevertheless, the range of occupations remains fairly narrow. Feminine professions are considered school teachers, doctors, university professors, and government employees of average level. Rarely or never are Caucasian women in politics or leading positions in governments.

After Gorbachev's time the market became one of the ways of survival for many families in the Caucasus. Women are actively engaged in buying and reselling items and products. They go to various countries, mostly to Turkey, from where they import large quantities of clothing to the Caucasus. Many trade in the market themselves from 6 am to 4 pm outdoors in all seasons. That business, by local standards, is considered is very profitable, although it only helps families make ends meet, and women pay their health for it. Meanwhile, a major financial, constructional, and tourist or oil businesses remain a closed zone for women in the Caucasus.

In a region that was a hot spot for many years, human rights movements are one of the most dangerous political occupations and, strangely enough, it is women in the Caucasus who play a dominant role in these movements.

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—revised by F. Tliso

## POLES

**LOCATION:** Poland

**POPULATION:** 38.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Polish

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (94%)

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

In AD 966, under the reign of Duke Mieszko, the Poles embraced Christianity and formed their first state. During the first seven centuries of its history, Poland steadily expanded to become one of Europe's largest countries. After union with Lithuania in the 14th century, it was the center of a multiethnic commonwealth. The 16th and 17th centuries are considered the Golden Age of Polish history, when the nation pushed eastward to take over its Slavic neighbors, dreaming of a kingdom that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea. By the end of the 18th century, neighboring countries destroyed Poland, and its territories were divided among the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian empires in three successive partitions—1795 marked the disappearance of Poland as a political entity for more than a century. Although separated politically, the Poles held fast to their cultural unity and were able to preserve their national identity without the framework of a nation-state.

Reunited and restored to independence after World War I, the country was able to sustain a parliamentary democracy for only a few years before Marshal Józef Piłsudski, a figure of heroic proportions in modern Polish history, seized power in 1926 and introduced authoritarian rule. Overwhelmed by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, Poland entered into the darkest period of its long history, suffering the deaths of more than six million of its population during World War II.

After the war, Poland's fate was determined by the victorious Allies. Its borders were shifted westward and the Soviet Union transformed Poland into a satellite state, the Polish People's Republic, founded in 1948. Although they were forcibly integrated into the Communist system, the Poles retained a spirit of independence, strengthened by their deep-rooted ties to Roman Catholicism. Membership in the Warsaw Pact did not mean that all aspects of the Soviet system were implemented in Poland. Agriculture, for instance, was never collectivized; instead, all farms were small. Protests against economic conditions and against violations of human rights were mounted in the late 1970s by a coalition uniting workers and peasants, the intelligentsia, and the church.

In 1980 and 1981 the independent trade union movement *Solidarność* (Solidarity), under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, demanded recognition as an organization operating outside the control of the state or Communist party. In December 1981, however, Solidarity was disbanded, and its leaders were arrested. Martial rule was imposed by the prime minister and first secretary of the Communist Party, General Wojciech Jazurkowski, who assumed virtual dictatorial power as the head of a military junta. Personal freedoms were drastically curtailed, universities were closed, activities of all organizations (including Solidarity) were suspended, and over 5,000 activists, among them Wałęsa, were interned. In 1983 Wałęsa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



Renewed labor unrest in 1988 prompted Jaruzelski to begin negotiations with the outlawed Solidarity movement, which resulted in far-reaching reforms of the political system. In the June 1989 elections, Solidarity won the majority and formed a coalition government with the Communists. In 1990 Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa was elected president. The new government's radical plans to transform Poland's centrally planned economy into a free-enterprise economy —collectively known as “shock therapy”—quickly led to sharp price increases and high unemployment, creating discontent among the population and dissension within the government. Four different prime ministers held office in 1992 and 1993, and former Communists made impressive gains in the 1993 parliamentary elections. The government continued the transition to a free-market economy but at a slower pace. There are now multiple parties. More recently, conservative parties have regained the upper hand. Never apathetic, many Poles are opposed to siting U.S. missile defenses on their territory and are actively protesting rising food prices.

As early as 1989, Poland signed an agreement on trade and trade cooperation with the then European Community. On 1 May 2004 Poland became a member of the European Union. The currency is still the złoty, which is keeping up its value relative to the euro and thus gaining on the dollar. By 2012, however, Poland is slated to adopt the euro.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

Poland is bordered on the east and northeast by Ukraine and Belarus, on the northeast by Lithuania and Russia, on the south by the Czech Republic and Slovakia, on the west by Germany, and on the northwest by the Baltic Sea. The capital city is Warsaw.

Poland consists primarily of lowlands belonging to the North European Plain. The climate is transitional between maritime and continental, with cold, snowy winters and warm summers. There are mountains in the south. Forests occupy more than one-fourth of the total land area.

Poland's population of 38.2 million is highly homogenous, both ethnically and linguistically, although the country does have minority groups, including Ukrainians, Germans, Belarusians, and Roma.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Polish is a Slavic language that uses the Roman alphabet but has a number of extra characters and diacritical marks (ć, ł, ń, ś, ź, ż, ą, ę, ó). It also uses digraphs to express certain sounds; much as English uses the letter h to modify preceding consonants, Polish uses the letter z to do something similar in the combinations cz, rz, and sz. Spelling is a nearly-reliable guide to pronunciation, with the stress usually on the second-to-last syllable of a word.

Some common everyday words are: *tak* (yes), *nie* (no), *jak* (how), *dobrze* (OK), *dzień dobry* (good day), *cześć* (hello), and *proszę* (please).

## 4 FOLKLORE

There are many legends associated with Easter and Christmas, which are very important holidays in Poland. For example, a legend of the Christmas spiders tells of when Jesus was a little boy and came upon a poor farmhouse. He heard a family of spiders crying because there was not enough money to buy



decorations for the Christmas tree. The spiders let him in, and he blessed the tree. Within minutes it was decorated in silver and gold webs. This is why tinsel is used to decorate Christmas trees to this day.

A limestone cavern in the bluffs below the Wawel Castle in Cracow inspired the many legends of the Wawel Dragon. The dragon, it is said, was ravaging the countryside and, in particular, devouring young girls. Many knights failed to overcome it. Finally, a cobbler's apprentice stuffed a lamb with sulfur and laid it before the entrance to the dragon's cave. The dragon swallowed the lamb, began to burn inside, dashed down to the Vistula, drank half the river, and burst. The young hero went on to marry the king's daughter and founded the city of Cracow.

## 5 RELIGION

The Poles are a deeply religious people. Roman Catholicism is the religion of some 94% of Poles, and it exerts an important influence on many aspects of Polish life. Since the introduction of the Catholic Church in AD 966, it has remained a pillar of strength in Poland. The Polish church had a rather distant relationship with Rome until 1978, when a Pole, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, was chosen to become Pope John Paul II, the first Polish person to be so honored. Poland has 2,500 convents with 28,000 nuns and over 500 monasteries. The Catholic university in Lublin and the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw are the leading church-controlled institutions. Częstochowa, with its Black Madonna, is one of the most important pilgrim-

age centers in Europe. Other Christian denominations besides Catholicism include Russian Orthodox, the Uniate faith, which combines aspects of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and a variety of Protestant churches. There are a few Jews left from a community that was large before the Holocaust.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There is a famous Polish saying, "Every day is good for celebration," and this is certainly true in Polish culture.

Important public holidays in Poland include New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints Day (November 1), Corpus Christi Day, and Worker's Day (May 1). Once a constant reminder of Communist power, Worker's Day is now a commemoration of solidarity's triumph over communism. Constitution Day (May 3) and Independence Day (November 11) are also important holidays in Poland.

Polish Catholics have an interesting annual tradition of pledging their vows to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Mother of God, or Bogurodzica, is the patron of the Polish Crown. People usually come to Częstochowa, to the shrine of the Black Madonna, to renew their vows to her. The church calendar is based on two cycles, which culminate in the two biggest religious celebrations: Christmas (*Boże Narodzenie*) and Easter (*Wielkanoc*). There are also many saints' feast days, which are especially numerous for the Virgin Mary.

St. John's Eve, a few days after the summer solstice, is one of the most popular holidays. Originally a pagan celebration designed to drive out devils, it is now celebrated with great bonfires, around which young people dance and over which boys try to leap, carrying buckets of water with which to douse the girls.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Occasions such as baptism, first communion, and marriage are cause for festive celebrations.

A Polish wedding always promises a good time. Some traditional rituals associated with a Polish wedding included long blessings by the parents before the actual ceremony and greenery on the bride's headpiece symbolizing her virginity. Large weddings remain mainly in the countryside. Old customs are not always practiced today, and urban Poles have adopted Western-style wedding traditions, with generally smaller, simpler weddings. Wedding anniversaries are very special among Polish couples. The tenth wedding anniversary is the occasion for a major celebration.

Lively wakes are held after Polish funerals, with toasts and tributes to the deceased. In the past, Poles wore black for a year following the death of a family member; today, a black armband is worn instead.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Poles greet each other by shaking hands. Men and women often shake hands, but usually the man waits until the woman has extended her hand first. In general, Poles are more conservative and formal than Westerners, but they are known for their hospitality. When responding to a dinner invitation, it is considered polite to bring a bouquet of flowers for the lady of the house.

In any sort of business, tourist, or social situation outside the family, titles (i.e. *Pan* 'Mr.', *Pani* 'Mrs., Ms.', *Pan Doktor*

'Dr.')

 and occupational titles are used in greetings and in reference to others.

Poles often gesticulate enthusiastically when they talk. In rural areas, it is common to see women crossing themselves as a sign of faith when they come to a crossroads. The Polish good luck gesture (comparable to crossing one's fingers in the U.S.) is a thumb tucked into the palm of one's hand and covered with the other four fingers.

Common Polish civilities include *przepraszam* (excuse me), *Jest pan/pani bardzo uprzejmy/uprzejma* (Sir/madam you are very kind), and *dziękuję* (thank you).

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The average life expectancy for Poles is 75.3 years, and the infant mortality rate is 6.0 per 1,000 live births. Government-funded medical care is no longer available to all Poles. Reforms in 1999–2000 made the system more complex, with 17 insurance funds, and left some people uninsured. Facilities are poor by OECD standards, while spending on medical care is low for an OECD country but rising fast. The availability of modern diagnostic equipment like MRIs and CTs has been growing rapidly. There is one doctor for every 400 patients and one hospital bed for every 179 people. Private medical care is available but very expensive. People express great dissatisfaction with the reforms. The number of smokers has fallen, although it is still somewhat higher than in comparable countries. Obesity has risen, though not to the level of other OECD countries. Alcoholism is a major health problem in Poland.

Poland faces a serious housing shortage, and young couples often live with one or the other set of parents for the first years after they marry. The shift to a market economy led to slowed housing construction, although the pace has picked up in recent years. Housing may be in short supply, but rents are only a small part of living expenditures, since subsidies have not been altogether abolished. Still, the 1991–92 reforms brought a steep rise in housing costs for most families. In urban areas, large tracts of apartment buildings are the norm, but one-family homes are becoming fashionable. In the villages, masonry structures with fireproof roofs have replaced the traditional wooden houses with thatched roofs.

Nearly half of all households own cars, and car ownership has nearly doubled in a decade and is on the rise. The classic Polish Fiat has not been produced since 2000. Poles are now buying Toyotas and many other world brands. To cope with a scarcity of parking spaces, many Poles park half-on-half-off the sidewalk. Hitchhiking used to be not only legal but actually encouraged in Poland through coupons that hikers could buy and give to drivers. It is still popular; there are now internet ride boards. Warsaw has a subway. Most cities have efficient bus and streetcar systems, and there are air and rail links to major cities.

While refrigerators are nearly universal, dishwashers are rare. Virtually every home has a television set and, by 2006, 73% had mobile phones.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Families in this predominantly urban country typically (88%) have one child; a few have two children; even among rural families it is rare for a couple to have more than two children. Traditionally, the Polish father is a stern authority figure, with the mother mediating between him and the children. The nu-



Villagers wearing traditional dress in Lyse, Poland, participate in a Palm Sunday procession between old and new village churches. (Wojtek Laski/Getty Images)

clear family is the norm, although aged parents or unmarried brothers and sisters may be part of the household. Single-parent households are becoming more common. In most families, both parents work, and children assume considerable responsibility for themselves at an early age, helping cook, clean, and care for younger siblings. However, grandparents also play a significant role in childrearing. Mother's Day is a big occasion for Polish children, who often put on performances for their mothers at school.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Poles wear modern Western-style clothing and generally dress elegantly, but conservatively. Clothing is very expensive, so wardrobes tend to be small, and it is still common to wear handmade clothing. Young people favor jeans and sweatshirts with American slogans or logos. Jeans are also popular among academics and people in the arts. In rural areas, older women can still be seen wearing full skirts, thick stockings, and head scarves.

Traditional costumes are reserved for Sundays or special occasions in the villages. Costumes vary considerably in the different regions, but some features are typical everywhere. A woman's costume has a blouse, a full skirt (often brightly striped), an apron, and perhaps a vest or jacket. Unmarried women may wear elaborate and varied headdresses. Men too

may wear highly decorated headdresses. Pants vary regionally from wide in the north to narrow in the south and are tucked into boots. The southern mountaineers wear moccasins.

Polish women are very fond of amber from the Baltic and coral beads, which are believed to bring many healthy children.

## **12 FOOD**

Meat is integral to Polish cuisine. Beef, pork, ham, and sausage make up many national dishes, such as *bigos* (sauerkraut with spicy meat and mushrooms), *flaki* (tripe boiled or fried), *golonka* (pig's leg), and *pierogi* (dough filled with cheese, meat, or fruit). Common fish include pike, carp, cod, crayfish, and herring. The Poles are known for their thick, hearty soups. Soups such as *borsch* (beet soup), *botwinka*, *chlodnik* or *krupnik* are preludes to Polish main courses. Sour cream and bacon bits are condiments necessary for almost every dish. Typical desserts include stewed fruit, fruit dumplings, pancakes with fruit or cheese, and jam donuts called *paczki*.

Poland has several varieties of vodka—a favorite drink that Poland claims to have discovered. Local bottled beers are popular as well as soft drinks made of strawberry and apple. Pepsi and Coke are everywhere, and tea, especially, is consumed with everything.

### 13 EDUCATION

Poland has an over 99% adult literacy rate and a near-universal attendance level in its schools. In 1773 a national education commission was established. The system this commission set up lasted for over 200 years, although in periods of partition and occupation it operated underground. The system was reformed in 1999. Compulsory primary school starts at age six or seven and lasts six years, followed by three years of compulsory lower secondary school, called *gimnazjum*. For upper secondary school there are choices: three years of *liceum* or four years of *technikum* both ending in an equivalent examination that is the key to entering higher education, or else two or three years of vocational technical school. In addition to the traditional focus on Polish history and culture, today there is a strong emphasis on foreign languages and computer skills. Rural schools, however, are having a hard time attracting qualified teachers. Students who have good grades or pass an entrance exam may attend one of Poland's 18 universities or many more technical institutes or other types of postsecondary institution. Higher education is in theory free, but there are not enough scholarships to go around. Poland has 466 institutions of higher education. The Jagiellonian University in Cracow, founded in 1364, is the second-oldest university in Central Europe.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In the 19th century when Poland was split among three empires, art, literature, and theater were media through which Polish identity and protest against the state were voiced. Under Nazi Germany (1939–45), clandestine literature flourished and continued during Communist control, joined by theater and film as means of free expression of ideas. Polish movie posters became known internationally as a separate branch of graphic art.

Music is well represented in Poland. Such greats as composers Frederic Chopin and Witold Lutosławski, and pianists Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Artur Schnabel are known throughout the world.

Poland has over 20 symphony orchestras; even small cities have their own. Conservatories and music high schools make training for the talented publicly available. There are now also private music schools. In Warsaw, nightly operas, ballets, chamber concerts, and recitals are a popular recreational activity. Warsaw is also the home of the Jazz Jamboree festival—the oldest and biggest jazz show in Eastern Europe.

Village musicians often play at weddings and festivals. Their sound is a combination of the fiddle, wooden flutes, accordion, and a single-reed bagpipe.

The polka, known around the world, is not a real Polish folk dance, but the polonaise and mazurka are distinctively Polish.

Writers are considered important people in Poland. Adam Mickiewicz, a 19th-century poet, is the national bard. Many streets and squares are named after him. The following Polish-born writers have won Nobel Prizes for literature: Henryk Sienkiewicz for *Quo Vadis*, a story about the times of Roman emperor Nero; Władysław Reymont for *Chłopi* (*The Peasants*), an epic novel of Poland; and Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska for their poetry. Twentieth-century poets, such as Julian Przytycki and Julian Tuwim, have celebrated Polish uprisings and written both experimental verse and poetry with political messages.

The first Pole to win a Nobel Prize (1903 and again in 1911) was Maria Skłodowska (Madame Curie), who with her French husband studied radioactive elements. Poland was a world center in mathematics and logic before World War II. Jan Łukasiewicz found a way to write all logical formulas without using parentheses; it is now called “Polish notation” in his honor.

### 15 WORK

Poland has a long history as an industrial nation, beginning in the 19th century and intensively developed in the Communist period.

By 2004 most Polish industry was in private, overwhelmingly Polish hands. Manufacturing predominates with metal processing in first place, followed by clothing and fur, furniture, and other wood processing. In the past 15 years, the service sector has grown greatly. Industry has become a smaller part of the total economic output but, nevertheless, has been modernized and has grown at a far higher rate than in the rest of Europe. Electrical and machine products are important exports. Manufacturing accounts for 20% of employees, while agriculture has 16%.

There are large deposits of coal, including hard coal and lignite, which together provide most of the country's electricity. Copper and salt are also extracted.

Poland has been attracting foreign investment by offering a highly-skilled workforce at relatively low wages for Europe. Nevertheless, unemployment remains high at nearly 15%, and many Poles are working abroad, notably in Ireland.

Close to 4 million Poles belong to unions including a union of small farmers and farm workers that has been known to conduct militant protests.

### 16 SPORTS

For many years a big emphasis was placed on sports activities in Polish schools. Today, there is less funding for equipment, and parents often cannot afford to pay membership fees at private sports clubs.

Some popular sports include swimming, gymnastics, hockey, volleyball, and soccer. Streetball, similar to basketball, is played by children in the parks. On some Saturday mornings, part of a street may be closed off for a soccer game. Soccer, which is played at every school, is also the biggest spectator sport. Skiing is Poland's most popular winter sport. The beautiful ski resort of Zakopane (which means “a place buried in the ground”) is the most popular ski getaway for Poles. “When life gets unbearable, there is always Zakopane,” is a Polish saying.

Poles have taken new interest in Formula One automobile racing now that there is a Polish driver, Robert Kubica, in world competition. With cars ever more available, Poles have also become involved in typically illegal drag racing. The city of Łódź has taken this on by occasionally closing streets for legal drag racing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Popular family activities include traveling, watching TV, listening to Polish, European, and American pop music, and in recent years shopping. Poland's cities are famous for theater and cinemas, opera houses, jazz and classical concerts, and discos. Outdoor activities include hiking, motorcycle racing, horseback riding, and hunting. Poland's spas are also popular leisure-time venues. The largest is Ciechocinek.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Among folk art specialties from particular regions are paintings on glass by the Zakopane mountain folk; red sequined Cracow folk costumes; the black pottery of Kielce; lacework from Koniaków; rainbow-colored cloth from Łowicz; and paper cutouts from Kurpie. The small village of Zalipie is famous for the flower paintings on its wooden houses, wells, wagons, and chairs.

Highly decorated Easter eggs are a folk art that is still used in holiday celebrations. So are Christmas tree decorations, as well as traditional Christmas carols.

In 1948 the government initiated a company called Cepelia to buy Polish folk arts and crafts and sell both small souvenir items and more valuable goods in local stores and internationally. The selection is unusually tasteful, and the project has helped to keep folk art viable in a changing economy. The company continues to this day, making Polish craft items available to Poles, tourists, and on the world market.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social tensions are caused by the disparity in income between the poor and the wealthy, exacerbated by the fact that under the Communist regime wealth was associated with corruption. Inequality increased sharply between 1990 and 1993; since then the class lines have hardened. Other problems include housing shortages and inadequacies in the health care system.

Lustration is a Polish term for vetting or background checking. Specifically it means making former Communist officials, and anyone who collaborated with the Communist-era secret police, ineligible for responsible jobs in government, education, and media. How far such people should be kept out of public life continues to be highly controversial, even two decades after the end of communism. The surviving secret police files can contain false information accusing someone of having been an agent. Courts have declared several lustration laws unconstitutional.

While there are few speakers of minority languages in Poland, there are also few protections for their rights. Roma in particular face discrimination and violence.

A new social problem has been dubbed "Euro-orphanhood." Now that Poland is part of the European Union, Poles can leave freely to take work in other European countries. Some leave spouses and children behind; such marriages may be heading for divorce. In some cases children are left behind with no parents, and grandparents, siblings or neighbors care for them.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The advent of political democracy in Poland in 1989 actually reduced the rights of women. Previously, abortion had been readily available. With the influence of the Roman Catholic Church now dominant, an extremely restrictive law against abortion passed in 1993. In 1996 it was liberalized somewhat, then made somewhat more restrictive again in 1997. The present law allows abortion when the life or health of the woman is threatened, when the embryo is seriously and irreversibly damaged or incurably ill, or when the pregnancy is the result of an illegal act. However, practice has turned out to be more restrictive than the law, and many women whose pregnancies met the legal criteria have still been unable to get legal abortions. Most turn to illegal ones or, if they can afford it, go abroad. This is

exacerbated by a complete lack of sex education and by expensive contraceptives.

In addition, the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted in 2004 that women are paid less than men for their work and rarely promoted to senior positions. There is now little in the way of subsidized child care to help women who work. Domestic violence is another problem, with little training of police and inadequate shelter resources.

The Polish government has begun to address such issues by appointing the Government Plenipotentiary on the Equal Status of Women and Men.

The UN report also noted lack of protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

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—revised by T. Alt and W. Browne

# PORTUGUESE

**LOCATION:** Portugal

**POPULATION:** 10.6 million (2007)

**LANGUAGE:** Portuguese

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; small Muslim, Jewish, and Protestant populations

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Portugal is located in the southwestern portion of Europe. Due to colonization and emigration, there are Portuguese-speaking peoples living in North and South America, Asia, Africa, and Australia.

Portugal was among the first European nations to be unified into a single entity, gaining independence with the accession of Alfonso I in 1143. The Portuguese Age of Discovery began in the 15th century, marking the beginning of a vast overseas empire which expanded for over three centuries. Portugal's prosperity and influence declined after the loss of Brazil in 1822. In 1910 the monarchy was eliminated and a republic was declared, only to be replaced by the authoritarian rule of António Salazar in 1926. The Salazar regime was finally overthrown in 1974, a democratic government was established, and a new constitution was adopted in 1976. During this period Portugal granted independence to its remaining colonies, including Angola and Mozambique. In spite of continuing poverty, especially in rural areas, the nation has seen numerous advances, most notably the consolidation of the first successful democratic system of government in its history.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Portugal occupies about one-fifth—and most of the western coast—of the Iberian Peninsula, bounded on the south and west by the Atlantic Ocean and on the north and east by Spain, its only neighbor. The two principal geographic areas are the mountainous interior (*meseta*) and the plain that lies along the Atlantic coast. Portugal's four major rivers are the Minho, Tagus, Guadiana, and Douro. North of the Tagus, the land reaches elevations of 396.2 m (1,300 ft) or more, while it is lower to the south.

Portugal's population of 10.6 million people is ethnically homogeneous, as the country had virtually no ethnic, tribal, racial, or cultural minorities for much of its history. There is a small Muslim population of guest workers from North Africa and small Jewish and Protestant communities composed mainly of foreigners. There may also as many as 100,000 Roma, mostly in the Algarve region. About 200,000 immigrants are from Eastern Europe.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The official languages are Portuguese and Mirandese. Portuguese is a Romance language that is most closely related to the Spanish dialect Galician. Over time it was modified by the Mozarabic language of the Muslim Moors living in lands taken over by Portugal. Mirandese is also a Romance language most common in Mirando do Douro in northeast Portugal. Mirandese has been given official status for local use.

## COMMON WORDS AND PHRASES IN PORTUGUESE

Good morning	bom dia
Good afternoon	boa tarde
Good evening	boa noite
Yes	sim
No	não
Please	por favor
Thank you	men say obrigado; women say obrigada
Goodbye	adeus

## 4 FOLKLORE

The Portuguese are a deeply superstitious people whose formal Catholicism is profoundly intertwined with pre-Christian lore and beliefs. Votive offerings to saints—intended to promote healing—hang on strings near many church altars, with images depicting whatever is to be (or has been) healed, including hands, heads, breasts, babies, and animals. Popular superstitions involve the phases of the moon, the healing power of fountains, and the evil eye, which is feared in a number of situations. Ceremonies surrounding death and the occult abound. Portuguese widows are expected to wear black for about seven years and many wear it for the rest of their lives. The loss of a parent is mourned for up to three years.

## 5 RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of Portuguese (85%) are Roman Catholics and Catholicism is at the center of Portuguese life. Although church and state were formally separated in the 1976 constitution, Portugal's holidays, its moral and legal codes, health and educational systems, and even many aspects of the national character are intertwined with its Catholic heritage. By a special arrangement between the Church and the government, Roman Catholic citizens may designate that 0.5% of their income tax be allocated to the Catholic Church. While only about a third of the population attends church regularly, almost all Portuguese are baptized and married within the church and receive its last rites when they die. Religious observance is greater in the northern part of the country than in the south.

Churches occupy a prominent physical location in almost every Portuguese village. However, many religious folk practices and beliefs are centered outside the church itself. Many Portuguese make pilgrimages (*romarias*) to religious shrines, of which the most famous is the one at Fátima where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared before three children in 1917. The cult of the Virgin is very powerful in Portugal, and images of Mary and Christ are commonly seen even in such secular places as labor union offices. While the Virgin is the most popular religious mediator, belief in personal intercession by a variety of saints is also widespread, accompanied by direct offerings of gifts as well as alms for the poor.

Portuguese folk religion also contains elements of witchcraft, sorcery, and superstition, which are intertwined with Catholicism in the popular imagination, although frowned on by the church. In general, however, Catholicism in Portugal has the character of a benign and humanizing force: whereas saints and martyrs are depicted with agonized expressions in Spain, in Portugal their pictures are calm and peaceful.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most holidays celebrated in Portugal are those of the Roman Catholic calendar. Those with the status of national holidays are Shrove Tuesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day (November 1), the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas. Secular holidays include New Year's Day; Liberty Day (April 25), which commemorates the death of the national poet, Luiz Vaz de Camões, in 1580; Portugal Day (June 10), which celebrates the 1974 Revolution; Proclamation of the Republic Day (October 5), celebrating the founding of the Republic in 1910; and Restoration of Independence Day (December 1).

In rural areas, villagers honor their patron saint during the annual *feira*, a celebration that is both religious and secular. There is a procession, and people fulfill their religious vows (*promessas*) for the occasion. The festivities may last several days and often include such secular elements as picnics, dancing, fireworks, and bullfights.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Portugal is a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When the Portuguese greet each other, they generally expect to be kissed on both cheeks. Those who live in the northern part of the country, which has historically been isolated from foreign influences, are formal, conservative, and reserved among strangers, while attitudes in the south are generally more casual, relaxed, and friendly. In the north, many people are referred to by nicknames (*alcunhas*), which are an important part of their identities.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Over 60% of the Portuguese own their own homes. However, according to a 2001 census, over 70% of all families lived in substandard housing. Rural villagers often live without electricity or running water. Migration to the cities intensified an already existing shortage of urban housing, resulting in the growth of shantytowns (*bairros da lata*) with substandard housing that often lacks sewage systems. Government housing programs have not been able to keep up with the demand for adequate housing.

Almost all sectors of Portuguese society have access to modern medical care. Portugal's national health service was inaugurated in 1979. While infant mortality rates were cut nearly in half between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, the government program is still insufficient to meet the nation's health care needs and it is supplemented by church-supported services. While home birth was common as recently as the 1960s, as of 2008 almost all Portuguese women had their babies in hospitals. Life expectancy in 2008 was estimated at about 78 years (75 for men and 82 for women).

Bus service links all Portuguese cities, towns, and principal villages. Most road travel is on paved but winding roads. There are few highways, and many back roads are inaccessi-



ble to traffic. Like the roads, the state-owned rail system runs mainly north/south, branching eastward into Spain in places. The main ports are Lisbon, Setubal, and Porto.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

While the patriarchal nuclear family is the cultural ideal throughout Portugal, actual family dynamics vary considerably according to class and region. Middle- and upper-class Portuguese and those in the southern part of the country are more likely to adhere to the patriarchal model, with women staying home to raise children and to run the household while men engage in business or the professions. Among the peasantry, especially in the northwest, the relationship between marriage partners is a more equal one. Households are headed jointly by the husband and wife, referred to as *o patrão* and *a patroa*. In farming families, women may work the fields alongside their husbands; fishermen's wives may help repair nets or sell the day's catch. Due to high rates of male emigration, a relatively large number of women in the north never marry and many have traditionally managed their own farms, remaining financially independent, as women in Portugal can both inherit and bestow property.

Much political and economic influence in Portugal is wielded through networks of extended family, in what is essentially a system of patronage. Many marriages are still determined by what kinds of advantages—in terms of land, property, or prestige—will result for the families of the bride and groom. Especially among the country's elite, it is considered important to

have kinship connections in the government and the political parties. Low-income groups, by contrast, have few ties outside the nuclear family. Among all groups, the relationship between children and their godparents (*padrinhos*)—who may or may not be actual relatives—is especially important throughout one's lifetime.

### 11 CLOTHING

Western-style clothing is the norm, and people in the cities, especially Lisbon, dress well. However, vestiges of traditional garb—such as berets and loose-fitting shirts for men and black shawls for women—may still be seen in some rural areas, in addition to the *capucha*, a hooded cape, and the *patocas*, a rain cape of reeds.

### 12 FOOD

Fish is the main staple of the Portuguese diet. Cod (*bacalhau*) is universally popular—the average person in Portugal eats about 45 kg (100 lbs) of it every year. Over the years, dried and salted cod, nicknamed *o fiel amigo*—faithful friend—has saved the lives of thousands of poverty-stricken Portuguese. *Bacalhau* is prepared so many different ways in Portugal that there is said to be a different recipe for every day of the year. Other commonly eaten seafoods include sardines, salmon, sole, sea bass, and hake, as well as eel, squid, octopus, and lamprey. Practically every Portuguese meal is accompanied by soup. The most popular is *caldo verde* (green soup), made with *couve galega* (Galician cabbage), sausage, potatoes, and olive oil. Another popular soup is *sopa alentejana*, simmered with bread, garlic (another staple of the Portuguese diet), and other ingredients. *Caldeirada*, a fish stew, is another popular national dish.

Portugal's varieties of succulent fruit, which vary regionally, provide some of its best desserts, including peaches, strawberries, oranges, figs, plums, pineapples, and passionfruit. Of the sweet dessert offerings, the most common is *arroz doce*, a cinnamon-flavored rice pudding. Flan, a custard with caramel topping, also graces most dessert menus.

### 13 EDUCATION

Although education is free and compulsory to the age of 15, traditionally some children drop out after primary school to begin working. Enrollment and completion rates have been increasing since the 1990s. In 2006 primary school enrollment was at 98% for all children, while secondary school enrollment was at about 86% for girls and 78% for boys. Secondary education is completed either at state-run high schools or at a choice of technical and professional institutes. The twelfth grade (at age 18) consists of preparatory study for university or technical college. Portugal's main universities are located in Lisbon, Porto, Aveiro, Coimbra, and Braga. There is also a government-supported adult education program, as well as hundreds of private schools, most supported by the Catholic Church.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Portugal's most famous poet was Luiz Vaz de Camões (1524–1580), who wrote during Portugal's Age of Discovery and was also an explorer himself. His epic poem, *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusíadas*), is based on the life of Vasco da Gama. Gil Vicente, the "father of Portuguese theater," is known for *autos* (religious dramas) and farces. In modern times, Fernando Pessoa (1888–

1935) has been acclaimed for his poetry. Freedom of expression has thrived in the period since the 1974 Revolution, which has seen the publication of formerly censored works as well as new ones by women writers such as novelist Olga Gonçalves and Portuguese-Africans, including Angolan Jose Luandino Vieira.

The Age of Discovery also produced the Manueline style in architecture, which expressed the national passion for exploration and the sea through flamboyant ornamentation with marine motifs, such as mariners' knots. Famous examples of this style include the Tomar and Batalha convents. Also unique to Portugal are the decorative tiles known as *azulejos*. Adopted from Spain, they were modified by the Portuguese, who added a variety of colors, most notably the blue, or azure (*azul*), from which they get their name.

In music, Portugal is known for its *fado* songs, the plaintive popular art form said to reflect the fatalistic Portuguese spirit of melancholy and nostalgia known as *saudade*. Performers of *fado* (which, roughly translated, means "fate") are known as *fadistas*.

### 15 WORK

Portuguese workers are known for being adaptable, hard working, and frugal. Industry employs about a third of the country's labor force, while nearly 60% work in service jobs, a figure partially accounted for by the rapid growth in civil service employment since 1974. Employment varies by region. The main occupation in the Azores and Madeira is agriculture. Madeira's embroidery industry employs about 70,000 women. In the south, the people of the Algarve find employment in agriculture, fishing, and the tourist industry. Fishing predominates in the coastal villages and cash-crop agriculture (wheat, corn, rice) in the Alentejo. Heavy industry, including steel working, shipbuilding, and iron production, is concentrated in the Lisbon-Setubal region to the south. Other occupations include forestry, furniture making, food processing, winemaking, and pulp and paper production. In 2005 the minimum monthly salary was about \$450. In 2007 the unemployment rate was 8%.

### 16 SPORTS

Soccer ("football") is the foremost sport in Portugal, as in much of Europe. Golf has grown increasingly popular, and the country now boasts more than 20 world-class golf courses. Tennis is widely played as well and auto racing becomes the focus of attention during the annual Grand Prix of Portugal held in September.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

One of the most popular recreational activities in Portugal is bullfighting (*Tourada*), with *cavaleiros* dressed in 18th-century costumes that include tricornered hats, silk jackets, and riding breeches. In contrast to the violent bullfights in Spain and parts of Latin America, in Portugal the bull's horns are sheathed to avoid injuries, and bulls are not killed at the end of the event. Another well-known national pastime is dancing; the *fandango* and other popular folk dances are enjoyed throughout the country. Other forms of recreation include horseback riding, fishing, hunting, skiing, and water sports.





*Children play near Torre de Belem in Lisbon, Portugal. (© John and Lisa Merrill/Corbis)*

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Traditional craft industries can be found throughout Portugal. The people of Arraiolos in the south are renowned for their rug making, while fine embroidery is associated with Guimares, black pottery with Vila Real, and basket weaving with the Algarve. Characteristic folk art is also seen on floats carried in religious pageants.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Violent crime is rare in Portugal; murders generally occur in the context of personal conflicts rather than during the commission of other crimes, such as robbery. Emigration has served as a release for social tensions and discontent, helping to keep the crime rate low.

Poverty is a primary concern in Portugal. In 2006 about 18% of the population was below the poverty level. In 2006 unemployment was at about 8% of the labor force and minimum wages were not generally considered to be sufficient to support a family. Many families live in substandard housing. Approximately 30% of all youth drop out of school before completing high school, often for the purpose of seeking employment to help their families.

Portugal has a problem with illicit drug use. In facing such a challenge, the government passed a law in 2001 that essentially decriminalized the personal use and possession of many illicit drugs, including heroin and marijuana. Under the new

law, those found to be in possession of small amounts of drugs are not sent to prison but are referred to a panel consisting of a psychologist, a social worker, and a legal adviser who question the individual and decide upon sentences that include mandatory counseling or treatment, fines, and in some cases community service. While many have criticized the new approach, the government maintains that the move toward treatment instead of punishment should have a positive effect in the long run. Drug sales and trafficking are still considered criminal offenses.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

The position of women in Portugal improved greatly after the ouster of the military dictatorship in 1974 and the drafting of the 1976 constitution, which guaranteed women full legal equality. By the early 2000s, women accounted for 55% of all persons enrolled in higher education. In 2007 women made up about 62% of the work force; however, the average salary for women was estimated to be about 23% lower than that of men. A 2004 study estimated that one in three women in the work force have experienced sexual harassment on the job. While sexual harassment is considered to be a crime, most cases are not reported by women who fear losing their jobs. Pregnant women and new mothers have faced discrimination in the work force.

Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, has been a cause for concern. The government has issued a number of laws against rape and domestic violence and generally enforces the laws with strict penalties. Unfortunately, many women do not report incidents of violence and only about 10% of all domestic violence cases are ever brought to trial. A majority of cases are mediated by lawyers outside of the court system.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# ROMA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Self-ascriptive names: Roma, Rom, Romanichals, Cales, Kaale, Kawle, Sinti/Manouches. Also known as Gypsies.

**LOCATION:** Dispersed population in Europe; parts of Asia, North, Central and South America, Australia, New Zealand, North and South Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

**POPULATION:** 12–15 million (estimate)

**LANGUAGE:** Romani dialects; also the language of the host country

**RELIGION:** An underlay of Hinduism with an overlay of either Christianity or Islam (host country religion)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Roma people originated in India. By the 11th century AD they were located in the area called Gurjara, in what was then the Rajput Confederacy. The Rajputs were a group of clans. Each had its own ruler, a caste of military landowners, and a population belonging to the lower castes, composed of animal drovers, artisans, entertainers, blacksmiths, weapon smiths, and persons in other modest but necessary occupations. Among these supportive castes was a group called *Dom*, who belonged to the aboriginal peoples of India but had adopted the Hindu religion and an Indo-Aryan language derived from Sanskrit. Some groups of *Dom* were nomadic entertainers and artisans. The Hindus defined the word *Dom* as a lower-caste person who did jobs forbidden to higher-caste Hindus; however, to the *Dom* themselves, the word simply meant “man” and, in the plural, “the men,” or “the people.”

In the 10th century, a Muslim kingdom arose in what is now Afghanistan, with its capital at Ghasni. This was called the Ghaznavid Empire, and in 1017, its ruler, Mahmud Ghazni, launched a series of massive raids into India. He and successive rulers entered India, plundering and massacring the people, carrying off thousands of slaves, and laying waste to the countryside. The Rajputs contested these raids, and many battles took place, during which groups of people were displaced or forced to move out of desolated areas. At some point during the 11th century, the ancestors of the Roma made their way into the Upper Indus Valley from Gurjara and spent some time in this region, whose inhabitants spoke Dardic languages, which had an effect on their own.

The ancestors of the Roma then left India via the Shandur or Baroghil pass and entered Xinjiang in northwestern China. From there they followed the Silk Road, which led them to ancient Persia, then through Southern Georgia to an Armenian-speaking region around the city of Trebizond, and finally to the Byzantine Empire, borrowing words from these linguistic regions as they slowly migrated over many generations. From Constantinople (now Istanbul) they traveled up the Balkans and reached the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia by at least the 14th century. Some groups remained in the Balkans below Romania but many moved through Romania, traveling both west and east. By the end of the 15th century, Roma could be found as far west as the British Isles and Spain and as far east as Poland and Lithuania.



At some point during their migration from India, scholars believe, their original name, *Dom*, or *Domba* in the plural, was altered phonetically to *Rom* (singular) and *Roma* (plural), while the caste structure of the group gradually disintegrated until they intermingled and became one people culturally.

Millions of Roma now live in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The post-World War II communist governments of countries, such as Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, attempted to assimilate their Roma populations into economic and ethnic mainstreams. These efforts were, for the most part, unsuccessful. The political and economic turmoil that followed the fall of communism has harmed the position of millions of Roma in Eastern and Central European countries. Roma in Slovakia have faced forced residential segregation. Roma communities in Kosovo and other territories of the former Yugoslavia have faced ethnic cleansing from majority communities. In other countries, such as Bulgaria and Romania, Roma have been turned into scapegoats for the economic ills of the post-communist transition. The recent accession of many Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union has brought a new focus to issues of inclusion and human rights for European Roma communities.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Since the 15th century, Roma have been a dispersed ethnic population in Europe. Roma in the Romanian-speaking principalities, later including Transylvania, were enslaved. These Roma are known as Vlach Roma (the “ch” in Vlach is pronounced as *k*). After their emancipation in 1864, large numbers promptly departed and made their way into Central and Western Europe and the Balkans, eventually reaching North, Central, and South America by the 1890s. Today, they are the most numerous and most widespread group of Roma. In Western Europe, because of persecution in most countries, Roma were forced to become highly mobile nomadic groups, giving rise to the tradition in popular literature of the semi-mythological, footloose, vagabond “Gypsy.” In Spain, Roma were forcibly settled and their language and culture destroyed, surviving only in Flamenco music and in the Caló dialect. In Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Roma were tolerated but were considered to be outcasts at the bottom of the social ladder.

By now Roma from many groups have migrated from Europe into the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, North and South Africa, and elsewhere. They assume the nationality of their host countries and consider themselves American Roma, Canadian Roma, Australian Roma, or South African Roma,

depending on where they live. In the past, the colonial powers deported or transported Roma to their colonies in Africa, the West Indies, the Americas, and Australia, while Portugal even sent some to its colony in Goa, India, where they found people speaking a language closely related to their own. Since the fall of communism, hundreds of thousands of Roma have migrated from Central and Eastern Europe to Western European countries, such as France and Italy.

Accurately estimating the number of Roma is a difficult task, because official censuses often undercount Roma communities. Turkey is home to about 2 million Roma, making it the country with the largest Roma population. Current estimates put the number of Roma in Europe at approximately 10 million, making the ethnic group the largest minority in Europe. Of these 10 million, 1.8–2.5 million live in Romania, 600,000–800,000 live in Bulgaria, 500,000–1 million live in Hungary, 480,000–520,000 live in Slovakia, and 250,000–300,000 live in the Czech Republic. In Western Europe, France and Spain have the largest Roma communities. The French Roma population numbers between 500,000 and 1.2 million, while the Spain's Roma population is estimated to be about 700,000. The countries of the former Yugoslavia are home to over 750,000 Roma. The United States is home to approximately 1 million Roma.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The original language (proto Romani) spoken by the Roma when they arrived in Europe has evolved into numerous dialects. The speakers normally refer to the language as *Romani*, *Romani chib* (Romani language), or by the adverb *Romanes*, which means “like a Roma”; thus, they say *Vakiarel Romanes*, he speaks like a Roma (i.e. speaks Romani). The Romani dialects of some splinter groups have different names, such as Romnimus (in Wales), Kaale (in Finland), or Calo (in Spain). Most Romani speakers speak what is called inflected Romani, which has its own unique grammar, as opposed to adopting the grammar of the country in which they live. As an example, note the following comparative sentences:

#### ENGLISH

I am going into the village to buy a horse from the non-Roma man.

Inflected Romani

Jav ando gav te kinav grast katar o gadjo. (These are all words of Sanskrit/Indian origin)

#### ENGLISH ROMANI

I'm jall in' into the gav to kin a grai from the gorjo.

#### SPANISH ROMANI

Voy en el gao para quinelar un gras del gacho.

In the English and Spanish versions, the Romani grammar has disappeared and been replaced by the grammatical structure of English and Spanish, into which the original Romani vocabulary has been inserted. (How this happened is not clear and is disputed by scholars.) The inflected Romani example could belong to many different dialects, while the English and Spanish versions would be understood only by other people who spoke the same dialect.

While English makes use of prepositions, such as *with*, *from*, *to*, etc., inflected Romani dialects replace these by varying the endings of the words themselves (referred to as post-

positions). Below are examples of the inflection of the word *manush* (man).

Nominative	The man is coming	<i>O manush avel</i>
Accusative	I see the man	<i>Dikav le manushes</i>
Instrumental	I went with the man	<i>Gelem le manushesa</i>
Ablative	I heard from the man	<i>Ashundem le manushestar</i>
Genitive	It's the man's	<i>Le manushesko si</i>
Dative	I did it for the man	<i>Kerdem le manusheska</i>
Vocative	Listen, man!	<i>Ashun, manusha!</i>

There are only two genders in inflected Romani. Male persons and animals are masculine, female persons and animals are feminine, and inanimate objects are either masculine or feminine. A chair is feminine, while the house is masculine in Vlach Romani. As commonly spoken, Romani uses many idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and sayings, often with metaphorical qualities. For example, “He is retiring” in English would be expressed in Romani as: *Beshel lesko kam* (His sun is setting). This makes it difficult to write dictionaries of Romani with word-for-word equivalents, leading to the erroneous belief that Romani is not a complete language. For example, there is no verb for *to think*. All dialects employ a word borrowed from another language. However, in Romani itself, “What are you thinking?” is expressed as *So si tut ando shoro*, which means “What do you have in your head?”

Romani employs an English alphabet except for the letter *x* (pronounced like the Spanish *jota*) and *zh* (as in *azure*).

Roma in Christian countries usually take Christian names like those of the people around them, such as Milano, Yanko, or Zlatcho for men, and Mara, Tinka, or Pavlena for women. The last name is the genitive inflexion of the father's Christian name. Thus, a name is *O Milano le Yankosko*—the Milano, son of Yanko (Yanko's Milano), or *E Mara le Zlatchoski*—the Mary, daughter of Zlatcho (Zlatcho's Mary). When Vlach Roma meet they ask each other, *Kasko san tu*—“Whose son are you?” The Vlach Roma have no surnames. Other groups adopt last names similar to those of the people among whom they live. The Vlach Roma also do this for identity papers, driver's licenses, and other documents, but do not use these names among themselves. Many of these “non-official” Roma names are quite colorful. It is possible to find Roma named after famous politicians or celebrities from the entertainment industry. Some Roma names are also derived from distinguishing physical characteristics of the name's owner.

### 4 FOLKLORE

Roma have a rich folklore, which is contained in the *paramichia*, or folktales and legends. Stories would be told around the campfires at night while the adults, teenagers, and children sat around listening to their elders recite them. They later passed them on to the next generation. Like most other groups, the Roma have their ethnic hero. Among the Vlach Roma this is Mundro Salamon or Wise Solomon. Other Roma groups call this hero O Godjiaver Yanko. Among the Wels Kawle, he is Merlino (the Wizard), taken from Celtic folklore. Essentially, Mundro Salamon is the archetypal wise man who uses his mental powers and cunning to escape from those who would harm him or to save others from danger. Since the Roma always lived in small groups surrounded by strangers who out-

numbered them and had the law on their side, they were unable to resort to force of arms to defend themselves. Their defense mechanisms were wisdom and “the smarts,” which Mundro Salamon exhibits to the “nth degree.”

A typical Mundro Salamon story runs as follows: One day Mundro Salamon learned that the Martya, or Angel of Death, was about to come and claim the soul of the village miller who was his friend. He went to the Martya and asked her to spare the miller’s life because he had small children to support and the people of the village needed him to grind their corn. She refused, so Mundro Salamon tricked her. “How could you take his soul,” he asked her, “if he locked himself in a room?” “I would simply dissolve into smoke and slip under the door,” she told him. “Rubbish,” Salamon replied. “You mean you could slip inside this peashooter I am whittling for the miller’s son?” To prove it, the Martya dissolved into smoke and entered the peashooter. Salamon then plugged both ends of the peashooter, trapping the Martya inside. He locked the peashooter inside a metal box, rowed out to the sea in a boat, and dumped the box over the side. For seven years nobody died, until one day two fishermen casting their nets caught the metal box and retrieved it. They smashed it open, found the peashooter, and unplugged it, allowing the Martya to escape.

Now she began to search for Salamon to get her revenge. But Salamon had anticipated she might escape and had taken precautions. He had shod his horse backwards so that the prints of the horseshoes led the Martya to look for seven years in the wrong direction. She then realized her blunder and spent another seven years looking in the right direction. She finally found Salamon, now an elderly man. “Now I’m going to make you suffer,” she told him. “For seven years I will freeze you in ice. Then, for another seven years I will roast you in fire. Then, for seven years I will turn you into rotten pulpwood and you will be nibbled on by maggots. Only after this will I put you out of your misery and take your soul.” “Rubbish,” Salamon said mockingly. “How can you take my soul? You don’t have the power. You’re bluffing me.” “I’ll show you,” the Martya screamed, and blew three times on his face. Salamon died smiling. He had outwitted the Martya even in death!

Roma folklore often impacts the daily lives of ordinary Roma in very significant ways. For example, many Roma believe that diseases are caused by evil spirits (Hungarian Roma refer to these spirits as *beng*, or *bizuze*). According to some Roma traditions, these spirits can take the forms of a shepherd, a dog, a rabbit, or some other animal or human form.

## 5 RELIGION

As Roma tend to adhere to the religion of the country in which they reside, the vast majority of Roma are Christian. Roma in the United States tend to be either Protestant or Catholic Christians. In Europe, the majority of Roma are Catholic, although large numbers of Orthodox Roma live in Bulgaria, Greece, Ukraine and elsewhere. About 10–15% of the world’s Roma are Muslim. Most Muslim Roma live in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Albania. Evangelical Christianity is growing rapidly amongst Orthodox and Catholic Roma, as it allows for more accommodation of traditional Roma beliefs and practices.

Traditional Roma religious beliefs are rooted in Hinduism. Roma believe in a universal balance, called *kuntari*. Everything must have its natural place: birds fly and fish swim. Thus, hens, which do not fly, are considered to be out of balance (and

therefore bad luck), as are frogs, which can go into the water and also walk on land. For this reason, many Roma will not eat hens’ eggs and are afraid of frogs. The Roma also believe it is possible to become polluted in a variety of ways, including breaking taboos involving the upper and lower halves of the body. A Roma who becomes polluted is considered out of balance and must be restored to purity through a trial before the Roma tribunal of elders (called *Kris Romani* among the Vlach Roma). If declared guilty, he is usually given a period of isolation away from other Roma and then reinstated after a specified time. In severe cases of pollution, a Roma can be outlawed from the group forever, but this is rare today. Children are exempt from these rules and from pollution taboos until they reach puberty.

The surrounding host-culture religions are used for ceremonies like baptisms or funerals for which the Roma need a formal religious institution. Except for the elders who are the spiritual leaders, there are no Roma priests, churches, or Bibles except among the Pentecostal Roma, who are a growing minority. Despite a 1,000-year separation from India, Roma still practice shaktism, the worship of a god through his female consort. Thus, while most Roma worship the Christian God, they pray to Him through the Virgin Mary or St. Ann, his female consorts, just as they once prayed to one of the Hindu gods through his consort *Sat-Sara*, or *Kali/Durga/Sara*. In France, there is a shrine at the village of Les Saintes Maries de la Mer in the Camargue. Tradition says that the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Mary Jacobee landed there after the death of Jesus, having come from Palestine in a small boat with their Egyptian servant, Sara. The three Marys then preached the Gospel among the local people and converted them to Christianity. Every year, in May, large numbers of Roma from Spain, France, and other European countries take part in a pilgrimage to the shrine, where they pay homage, not to the three Marys but to the servant girl, Sara, who does not exist as an official saint in the Catholic Church. In Romani Saint Sara is called *Sara E Kali* and identified with the *Kali/Durga/Sara* of Hinduism. In France the Roma carry a statue of Saint Sara on a large platform into the nearby Mediterranean Sea.

In Canada, at Sainte Anne de Beauré in Québec, there is a shrine where Roma of the Vlach Roma group make annual pilgrimages late in July during the Novena. The Roma women offer flowers and rice cakes to the statue of Saint Anne, the men prepare a feast table with a roasted lamb, and the Roma celebrate Saint Anne, whose statue appears on the feast table. The ceremonies the Roma perform differ radically from those of non-Roma Catholics, who also attend in large numbers.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Roma in different countries celebrate different holidays, and different holidays are observed by different groups of Roma as well. The Vlach Roma and many other groups celebrate Christmas, Easter, and All Saints’ Day. They have no specific Roma holidays except in Romania, where there are holidays commemorating the emancipation of Roma slaves. In Muslim countries Roma often observe Muslim religious holidays. In some countries Roma take part in the national holidays and play an integral part in religious festivals. In Canada and the United States some families travel to Sainte Anne de Beauré for the annual pilgrimage just to see friends and relatives and to socialize. Others do the same thing in Europe at Les Saintes

Maries de la Mer. Here they can celebrate their group culture, playing music, dancing, singing, and socializing. It also gives the teenagers a chance to meet other young people from different groups and sometimes meet someone they want to marry.

Christmas and Easter among the Vlach Roma are always celebrated by feasts. The head of each extended family will prepare a lavish table and invite all the Roma in the community. Sometimes family heads will get together and pool their resources to hold one large feast for the entire community. There will be music, dancing, singing and socializing. At Easter, each family will dye Easter eggs a special color and place them in a large bowl. These are given, one each, to every guest. There is also a ceremony called *chognimos*, or egg-whipping, where the visitor or guest will bring one of his own eggs and hold it in the palm of his hand. The host will do the same, and they will slap their palms together, usually cracking or crushing both eggs. This is believed to bring *baxt*, or good karma. Many Balkan Roma also celebrate St. George's Day, which they call *Ederlezi*. The holiday celebrates the spring season and is usually observed with feasts and picnics. Some Roma believe that wishes come true on the night of *Ederlezi*. Many also believe that *Ederlezi* is a time when people receive cures for their ailments and good luck.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth is a happy event among the Roma. They believe in fecundity, and large families are the norm. When the baby is born, the mother and her baby are considered agents of pollution and are separated from the rest of the household and from other Roma for a predetermined period, which varies among clans and groups. Once this period is over, godparents are selected from the Roma community. They take the baby to a church for the actual baptism ceremony. They also give the baby a small gold cross. When the godparents return with the baptized baby there is a feast called *bolimos*.

Children are pampered and protected by the Roma. When they reach puberty, they become *shave* (boys) and *sheya* (girls) and are initiated into the world of adults. Boys are taught to drive and to work with their adult male family members at the family trade. Girls are instructed by female adults in women's work and strictly chaperoned when they go to movies or shopping. Teenagers enter adulthood when they marry, which is generally at 15 or 16 for girls and from 16 to 18 for boys. The young married person becomes a *Rom* (male adult Roma) or a *Romni* (female adult Roma). The bride, or *bori*, must serve a period of apprenticeship in the home of her in-laws until the mother-in-law is satisfied that she is following the laws of respect and pollution to the family's satisfaction.

When adults become middle aged, they graduate to the ranks of the elders: men become spiritual leaders of the community and sit as judges on the tribunal of elders. Women, once they pass through menopause, can no longer pollute men and are then "sanctified" among the Vlach Roma. They too become spiritual elders who advise the younger women. Some gain a reputation for white magic and herbal remedies.

Death among the Roma is a serious affair. There is a one-year mourning period called *pomana*, with feasts for the dead at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months, as well as the actual funeral feast. Deceased Roma join the ranks of the ancestral dead who watch over the actions of the living and are called as witnesses at solemn events like the swearing of oaths at the tribunal of elders,

where they are assumed to be spiritually present and able to send a *prekaza*, or jinx, to any Roma who perjures himself. Roma do not discuss their dead. They say simply *Mek les le Devleste*—"Leave him to God to be judged."

Roma traditions have proven remarkably durable. They have survived repeated cultural assimilation campaigns in many of the countries in which Roma live. Furthermore, the phenomenon of Roma conversion to Evangelical Christianity has done little to change the traditional rites of passage of the Roma.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Roma greetings are respectful. When a guest arrives, the host will say "Welcome! God has sent you!" The guest or guests must also be served food and drink. Not to do so would be a sign of disrespect. The usual greeting is a handshake, although Roma men often embrace relatives and close friends and kiss them on the cheek. Women also embrace and kiss when they meet. The guest or guests must be shown the utmost in politeness, served food on clean dishes, and offered whatever they might require. Family members and friends are usually received more casually than adults from another clan or an unrelated family group. When such people visit, the host will often provide entertainment and ask his sons to play music and his eldest daughter to dance. Women must appear modestly dressed before guests and at group gatherings. Roma girls do not go on dates and must be chaperoned outside the home. Boys have more freedom and are allowed to go to dances and socialize with non-Roma teenagers.

Roma body language varies in different countries but most Roma are very expressive and impulsive. They make use of gestures, use their hands when talking, wink, snap their fingers, and indulge in mimicry. When talking about somebody else, they will imitate his or her voice or mannerisms. Among the Vlach Roma, behavior toward other members of the group, including the beliefs that govern taboos, is codified in the *Romaniya*. Whereas most modern cultures have two concepts of cleanliness (clean and dirty), the Roma have three: *wuzho*, or clean; *melalo*, dirty with honest dirt; and *marime*, which means polluted or defiled among the Vlach Roma (other groups use different words). Where Westerners regard a person who showers twice a day, even if he is a plumber, as clean, a Roma man who worked as a plumber would be defiled or polluted no matter how many showers he took, while a man who sold horses for a living might not take any showers but would be considered unpolluted. While non-Roma are concerned with visible dirt, Roma are concerned with invisible pollution.

Another central belief regarding cleanliness involves the upper and lower halves of the body. Roma do not take baths but shower standing up, since the lower part of the body is considered an agent of pollution. The body above the waist is considered clean, and the head is the cleanest and purest area of all. Clothing worn above the waist must be washed separately from clothing worn below the waist (also, men's clothing cannot be washed with women's clothing). This demarcation between the halves of the body accounts for another Roma custom that often amazes outsiders. Since the female breast is above the waist, it is not seen as a sex object. Many Vlach Roma women carry money, cigarettes, and lighters in their brassieres. It is not unusual for the husband to reach over and help himself to a pack of cigarettes and lighter concealed in his wife's low-cut

blouse. Women's legs, however, can only be visible below the knees, hence the traditional long skirts of Roma women.

Sometimes a Vlach Rom man will experience a string of *bibaxt*, or bad luck, and will assume that he has inadvertently done something that has placed him out of balance. Believing that God is punishing him, he will throw a lavish feast, or *slava*, to some saint, usually Saint Mary or Saint Ann or, among some groups, Saint George. He will rent a hall and prepare a long table, inviting all the local Roma in the town or in his *kumpaniya* (an economic unit of Roma occupying a specific geographical area). He hopes that the saint he honors with his feast will intercede with God to change his bad karma (*bibaxt*) and remove the *prekaza*, or jinx, from him, and provide him with good karma (*baxt*). This belief in *baxt* is fundamental to most Roma groups. One gets *baxt* by being in balance and one stays in balance by following the *Romaniya* (cultural taboos) and adhering to the *potchiyaimos Romano* (Roma code of respect).

The *Romaniya* affect many aspects of Roma life. Dishes cannot be washed in the sink or in pans used to wash clothing. The floor is considered defiled, so food or anything connected with the intake of food, like dishes, cannot be placed on it. Anything that does has to be destroyed, because detergent cannot remove pollution. Roma wash their hands constantly—after touching their shoes or doorknobs, or doing anything considered necessary but potentially defiling. Menstruating women have the potential to pollute men.

If a Roma person is declared to be polluted, he or she may not socialize with other Roma nor have any dealings with them, since Roma believe that the pollution can spread from one person to another and contaminate the entire community.

The relationship between Roma communities and non-Roma communities is often strained. Since the fall of communism, the level of anti-Roma discrimination and violence has increased in Central and Eastern Europe. Discrimination and hostility towards Roma has fueled the social segregation of Roma from majority populations. Roma beliefs about cleanliness, along with a traditional aversion to *Gadje* (non-Roma people), also leads to the alienation of Roma from other communities.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of Roma vary enormously, from the wealthier, technologically advanced countries like the United States and Canada to poor Balkan countries. In any society, Roma usually live at a somewhat lower standard than the non-Roma—in Albania, where the non-Roma have next to nothing, the Roma have even less. Roma are usually industrious and are always able to earn enough to feed and clothe themselves except in circumstances where they are prevented from doing so, such as under the former Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, where free enterprise was a crime against the state.

Roma fit well into societies where there is a surplus of consumer goods that they can buy and sell, or where there is scrap they can collect to recycle. While many Roma are nomadic, especially in Europe, others are sedentary. They might settle in trailer camps, living in horse-drawn wagons or travel trailers, or in modern apartments. Others live in shantytowns or *bidonvilles* in France and Spain, which are often bulldozed into oblivion by the town councils while the occupants are at a local feast. Many Roma in Western Europe are squatters, occu-

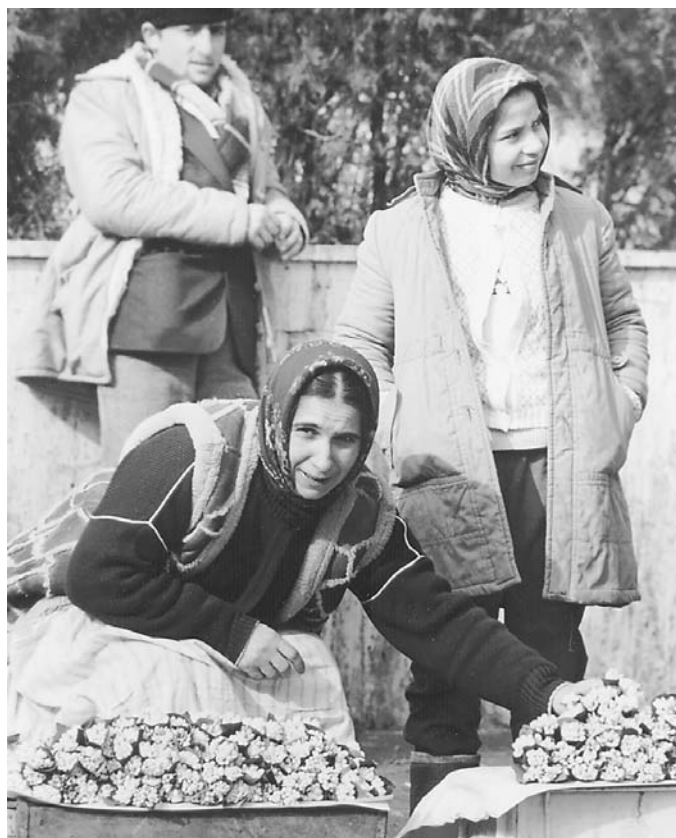
pying condemned buildings while trying to find more suitable accommodations. In the United States many Roma own their own homes or rent decent living accommodations. In Central and South America many are still nomadic and live in tents. In Portugal Roma travel with horses and wagons and sleep in tents.

The settled Roma of Eastern and Central Europe tend to live in ethnically homogenous villages or ghettos. In some cases, residential segregation is a choice of Roma families. In other cases, it is forced upon Roma. For example, in many Slovak towns, Roma have been forced from city centers and herded into crowded ghettos. In most of Europe, the infrastructure and social services available in Roma ghettos is of much lower quality than what is available to members of the majority-communities.

Nomadic Roma are often healthier than those who lead sedentary lives. The Roma diet was evolved for a nomadic and active people, and when they settle down and still eat the same types of foods, they often become overweight and suffer from health problems. Women generally live longer than men, who often pass away in middle age from heart attacks. Roma life can be stressful because of constant problems arising from their lifestyle, which is often misunderstood by the law enforcement agencies who move them on when they are traveling or, when they are sedentary, harass them over by-laws, work permits, and licenses. In Eastern Europe, there is a high mortality rate among Roma children and infants, and it has been reported that 80% of the orphans in Romania are Roma children suffering from diseases like AIDS (often caused by infected medical syringes).

Except in rural areas of the less developed countries, where they still use horses and wagons, most Roma have made the transition to cars, trucks, and travel trailers. In countries like the United States they fly to visit relatives or to attend weddings. In Europe they travel by train, bus, or in their own cars and trailers. The Roma in the United States and other developed nations see the car as a status symbol and try to own an impressive vehicle. Usually the interior sports torn upholstery and stains caused by children, but from the outside the vehicle reflects pride of ownership. The Roma have adopted the conspicuous consumption of their fellow Americans and love to show off their purchases to visitors. They often buy expensive jewelry, watches, home furnishings, and appliances as well as luxurious carpets and other furnishings. In Europe, Roma caravans are often full of expensive china dishes. They also buy tapestries and brass decorations. In general, Roma like to live in comfort. Even if they live in substandard housing, they will try to fill their homes with attractive furnishings and decorations.

Discrimination and poverty tend to the limit the access to health care of most Roma. One effect of poverty and lack of health care access has been an increase in the HIV rate amongst Roma. In Bulgaria one study found that Roma intravenous drug users were several times more likely than non-Roma intravenous drug users to contract HIV. Lack of information about safe sex and the increasing prevalence of sex work amongst impoverished Roma also leads to higher HIV rates.



Roma family selling flowers in Bucharest, Romania. (AP Images)

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Roma families are usually large and extended. The nuclear family is rare and unmarried adults are looked upon with suspicion. To be unmarried means to be out of balance according to the Roma beliefs. Among the Roma women are equal to men, but each sex has its own traditional role. The men go out to work and earn the larger sums of money, which tend to come in sporadically, while the women earn the day-to-day expenses needed to run the household. This is somewhat reversed in the United States, where the main income in many families comes from the reader/adviser parlors of the women. Here the husband acts as a manager/agent as well as working for himself in some trade or profession. This applies primarily to Vlach Roma, however. Other American Roma groups differ. Among the Bashalde, or Hungarian musician group, the men play music while the women generally remain at home and fulfill the role of wife and mother. Among the Romanichals the men earn most of the money, but the women also contribute by selling items or operating a tea room. The Roma woman, or Romani, is the absolute ruler of the home and plays a very matriarchal role. The eldest daughter, or *she bari*, also has a special role in the family. She replaces the mother in the role of housekeeper when the mother is sick or absent and is responsible for the meals, housecleaning, and the care of her younger siblings. Men do cook and do housework but their role is often limited to doing the dishes and cooking the lambs for a feast. Generally they clean the house only if their wives are unable to do so.

Pets are rare among the Roma since animals can pollute the Roma environment. Watchdogs are kept outside, while cats, which can jump and climb, are taboo. However, some groups are more relaxed toward pets. Horses are considered clean animals and many Roma like to own them even if they no longer need them to travel. Some families even own racehorses.

Since the fall of communism labor migration has become a common phenomenon for Roman males from Central and Eastern Europe. Labor migration often weakens familial ties in normally tight-knit Roma families, leading to higher divorce rates in Roma communities.

## 11 CLOTHING

There is no traditional male Roma costume. Women among the Roma wear a traditional costume composed of a voluminous ankle-length skirt tied on the left side at the waist, a loose, low-cut blouse, a bolero vest, and an apron. In the United States the bandanna of the married woman is often replaced by a thin strip of ribbon. In Europe the full traditional female costume is still in common use among the Vlach Roma and other more traditional groups. Roma men like to dress well and often adopt a particular style. In the United States during the 1980s the "J.R. look" from *Dallas* was popular: the Stetson, cowboy boots, and Western suit of the Texas oil tycoon. Roma men wear expensive suits but seldom wear ties, except for Western-style string ties. In Europe men in some groups, like the Romanichals of Britain and the Sinti of Western Europe, wear a *diklo*, a type of neckscarf, around the neck, often with an ornate ring that they slip over it to tighten it. Most Roma men like fancy belt buckles and lots of jewelry. Women also wear jewelry. Traditionally they wore gold coins, or *galbi*, on a gold chain around their necks. In modern societies too many have been mugged and their chains stolen. Nowadays they seldom wear them outdoors unless accompanied by men.

For everyday wear Roma dress casually. When working men wear a business suit without a tie, unless they are doing manual labor like sandblasting or spray painting, for which they will wear jeans and an old shirt. Hats are still popular among older Roma men and they also wear them indoors, at feasts and even just sitting in the living room. Teenagers and younger men adopt the local styles, such as baseball caps, sneakers, and windbreakers. Girls can wear jeans at home, but when guests arrive, they have to rush off and change into something more traditional. Miniskirts and other revealing garments are forbidden by the parents.

## 12 FOOD

Roma food differs from one country to another. The roasted lamb of American Roma feasts becomes the roasted pig at Hungarian Roma feasts. The Vlach Roma love stuffed cabbage rolls, which also appear among the foods eaten by Roma of some other groups. Stews are popular among most Roma groups and in the past nomadic Roma always kept a stewpot simmering in the camp, where the hungry members of the group could help themselves. Many items of small game were baked in clay in the fire, especially hedgehogs, which are a delicacy among some nomadic Roma.

The two basic dietary staples of the Roma are meat and unleavened bread, called *pogacha*, augmented by salads and fruit. Roma drink a lot of tea specially prepared their own way, not with milk, but with slices of fruit in glasses with sugar. Tea is



often made in a large silver samovar among the Vlach and Russian Roma. Most prefer cast-iron or copper pots for cooking and try to avoid modern aluminum pots and pans. Lambs are roasted outdoors on revolving spits and sprinkled with beer. The crusty skin of roasted lamb, called *chamb*, is considered a delicacy.

There are many taboos surrounding food. Certain foods like peanuts can only be eaten at a *pomana*, or funeral feast. Bread cannot be burned, and any food that falls on the floor is polluted and must be destroyed. Horsemeat is taboo to all Roma. Food served at a funeral feast must be eaten before sundown or given away to total strangers. Pregnant or menstruating women among the Vlach Roma and the other more traditionally minded groups cannot prepare food to be eaten by others, especially guests, and all foods must be washed and cooked in special containers used only for this purpose. Roma generally do not have set mealtimes. The biggest meal of the day is in the early evening when all the family is home. Food prepared by *Gadjes* is considered unclean. The inability of Roma to eat food prepared by non-Roma reinforces the cultural and social separateness of the Roma from majority-populations.

### 13 EDUCATION

Until the 20th century a formal education was virtually unheard of in the Roma community. Traditionally parents taught their children the skills they needed to survive as Roma. In the modern world, however, even the traditional Roma occupations, as well as the newer ones they are entering, require literacy. In Eastern Europe under Communism a fair number of Roma were educated and some have become doctors, journalists, teachers, nurses, and technicians. The Vlach Roma and other traditionalist groups tend to see education as assimilating their children, and the schools are viewed as dangerous places and agents of pollution. In Spain the illiteracy rate amongst Roma is 15%, and in Hungary the illiteracy rate amongst Roma is 23%. High Roma illiteracy rates are common in almost all countries where Roma live.

Once children of both sexes reach puberty, they are usually taken out of school and the boys begin to work with their male elders. The Roma would like schools where their children can be taught their own language, culture, and history, preferably by Roma teachers or non-Roma who are sympathetic to and familiar with Roma culture. In Europe most schools aim at assimilating Roma children into the dominant culture of their country. Today, the Roma have a flag, an anthem, and an educated elite that is growing among the younger generation. The concept of the Romani nations, rather than isolated groups of traditional Roma, is emerging. Many young Roma want to help educate their fellows but mass education for Roma belongs to the 21st century. Roma want the right to define themselves in education, not to be defined by outsiders.

In addition to cultural issues, discrimination often limits the access of Roma to educational opportunities. Many Roma children who live in post-communist European Union (EU) states are forced into remedial schools from an early age. These schools often serve as a means of segregating Roma children from the children of the dominant ethnicity. The combination of poverty, Roma culture, and outside discrimination has created a situation in which the number of Roma who complete higher education is miniscule.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Roma have a strong cultural heritage, which is expressed mainly in music and dance. The roots of Roma music go back to India and show traces of all the musical cultures to which the Roma have been exposed in their migrations. Roma music from certain countries has become world renowned. Foremost is the Flamenco of the Spanish Roma, who are called Cales. Developed in Andalusia, the former Moorish kingdom of Spain, Flamenco displays Roma, Moorish, and Spanish influences. The Roma Flamenco differs from the non-Roma Spanish Flamenco; it has always been performed and developed by a small number of interrelated families.

Equally well known is the Hungarian Roma music, played on violins and cimbaloms, which can be heard in many Hungarian restaurants, even in the United States and Canada. Russian Roma music has also become famous. Under the czars Roma choirs performed for the royal family and the nobility, while other musicians played for army officers and businessmen at restaurants and inns. In France the Sinti musician Django Reinhardt popularized Sinti swing, which became very popular worldwide. The tradition has been continued by other Sinti musicians. Roma music is also popular in Turkey. Roma musicians can be found serenading couples in many of the fashionable cafes of Istanbul. One import from Roma music is the Gypsy Kings, who play a mixture of traditional Flamenco and Salsa. More recently the rock group Gogol Bordello has gained international success. The group mixes traditional Roma melodies with punk rock, creating a new genre which is now known as Gypsy Punk.

Roma dancers are also world famous. Usually it is women like Carmen Amaya who are best known, but many male Flamenco dancers, such as Vicente Escudero, have also emerged on the popular scene. In the 1990s, Flamenco dancer Joaquin Cortes received wide acclaim in Europe and was labeled "the Demon of Dance." Music among the Roma has always been divided into the music of the professional musician class—clans and families whose vocation has always been entertainment—and the simpler folk music of the Roma in general, which until recently was never recorded or made available to outsiders. The songs are usually in Romani, and there are songs and dances for specific cultural events, like marriages, feasts, and other gatherings.

Among the Vlach Roma the fast step dance *baso* is performed by both men and women. It is a dance of respect, and at a feast, men will dance singly, calling out "I honor you (name of host)." Women can dance in groups or singly. There is also a folk dance called the *kolo* where Roma dance in a circle. Folk-songs are traditional and exist in many versions. The melodies can be ancient from now-forgotten sources or might be taken from modern popular music and given Romani words.

### 15 WORK

Since their arrival in Europe Roma have been self-employed artisans, entertainers, and middle men dealing in various commodities. There have always been Roma horse trainers, animal dealers, rat catchers, and other lines of work too numerous to list. The Roma economy has been built around self employment and the perpetuation of old skills, plus the acquisition of new skills to adapt to new technological developments. In the past, and to a large extent today, this involves commercial nomadism. Even in slavery, in the principalities that later became

modern Romania, each group of slaves had its own skill, from gold panners to ironsmiths, musicians, coppersmiths, brick makers, and bear trainers. Thus, work to the Roma not only served as a survival strategy but also defined to which group or class the individual Roma man belonged. Of course, musicians might trade a few horses and coppersmiths might temporarily switch to some other trade, as most Romas were multifaceted and able to turn their hand to different occupations as the economy demanded.

Roma men usually work in groups, either with relatives or with other Roma skilled in their profession. The profit from any work done is divided equally among all the partners who worked on the job, whether buying and selling automobiles or plating vats for a jam factory. Women also share the profits when they work in groups. An adult man or woman receives a full share of the profits, while unmarried members of the group receive half a share. Today, Roma have adapted to the modern marketplace and can be found dealing in real estate, selling diamonds, and buying and selling automobiles, trailers, antiques, clothing, and other items. Some are professional entertainers; others are scrap collectors. Wherever there is an economic niche, the Roma will find it and try to make a living as new work strategies become viable.

Since the early 1990s millions of Roma have migrated to Western Europe in search of work. Unemployment is a very serious problem amongst the Roma of Eastern and Central Europe; in Prague, one of the most prosperous cities of the post-communist world, the unemployment rate of Roma is estimated to be 70%. In contrast to previous movements of Roma, some of the current migration wave is made up of lone adult males. The destination of labor migrants often depended on which country they were leaving. For example, Roma labor migrants from Albania often moved to Greece. Roma from Romania often left for France or Italy in search of work. Roma men who work abroad often send home remittances to support their families.

## 16 SPORTS

While there are individual Roma who participate in mainstream athletic events, sports in general do not appeal to the Roma, although certain regional games can be found, such as Roma wrestling in Romania. Many Roma enjoy horse racing and will patronize local racetracks. Roma men and teenagers also like to play billiards, often for money with non-Roma. It is a status symbol among American Roma teenagers to be a good billiard player. Children play games, usually those of the surrounding culture. Nomadic Roma children make catapults and learn to hunt wild game. In Europe Roma participate in mainstream rather than Roma sports, and there are a few Roma soccer teams. Since they have always been a culture geared strongly toward survival, Roma have had little time or inclination to develop an ethnic sport.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Roma, especially children and teenagers, enjoy going to the movies. Roma do not care much for live theater, although some Romas have become actors, notably the late Yul Brynner, whose mother was Roma.

In a Roma home, the television, if there is one, is usually left on so that the children may watch it. Adults seldom have time for television. Roma are exposed to popular culture on televi-

sion but most adults take no part in it. Since Roma have little to do with non-Roma, except for business, many form their ideas of non-Roma culture from what they see on television. Teenagers may adopt the slang they hear from teenagers on television or copy their way of dressing, but for the most part the surrounding mainstream culture contravenes Roma taboos.

Some families, tired of the local routine, will decide to travel around for a while just to meet relatives, attend a social function in some other city, or camp out in a camper van like the Roma used to do when they were nomadic. Local fairs like Appleby Fair in Britain also attract many Roma, not only those who still deal in horses. Some will go to sell seconds of fine china or to hawk other wares. Some go just to be there and to socialize and perhaps turn a little business their way.

In recent years European Roma have begun to enjoy Romani-language television, radio, news and Internet publications. However, illiteracy and poverty have limited access to these media outlets. In addition most Romani media is produced by highly educated Roma elites, leading to a disconnect between ordinary Roma and the Romani media.

## 18 FOLK ARTS, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

While some individuals have excelled as painters or sculptors, and in other art forms, the majority of Roma practice few handicrafts. Some Roma men make belts or leather clothing and women may do elaborate embroidery work, while both sexes create artifacts, such as baskets, for sale.

The carving and fretwork designs seen on the Roma wagons in England became world famous and were later copied by European Roma in some countries. The original Romanichal caravans appeared around 1860 and were a Roma adaptation of the original English showman's wagon. These *vardos*, or caravans, were adorned with intricate carvings and fretwork designs, painted and even highlighted with gold leaf in some expensive versions. The last type to survive the automobile and the freeway was the bow top made from birch planks bent into a semicircle inside a wagon base, covered with canvas, and painted green to help hide it among the trees and away from the police. Today, some of the ornately carved versions are made for European collectors by Roma craftsmen, while some Romanichals build or buy one, not to travel with, but simply to own as a matter of nostalgia and prestige.

In Eastern Europe, Roma woodcarvers also make wooden bowls and trenchers. Others manufacture wooden flutes and other musical instruments. Among the Vlach Roma the *Kalderash*, or coppersmiths, make intricate copper objects of artistic merit, usually on order for some prestigious hotel or restaurant. Before the age of plastic, Roma also made wooden clothes pegs.

A new European Union push to foster Roma inclusion has led to renewed interest in traditional Roma crafts. Crafts are seen as a way of providing employment opportunities in Roma communities.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

European Roma today are survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in which Roma, like Jews, were singled out as an ethnic group to be completely exterminated. At least a million Roma died in Nazi Germany and in the occupied countries. Others were annihilated by Nazi collaborationist regimes, such as Croatia under the Ustashi. Postwar Communism in Eastern Europe tried

to assimilate the Roma into the general populations, and in all countries they became an unwanted, surplus population denied their identity as a people.

Since 1977 Roma have been recognized by the United Nations as a legitimate people with rights to their own identity, language, culture, lifestyle, and religion. The challenge now is to have the governments of the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe recognize these rights. In most of these countries, as reports by Helsinki Watch, Human Rights Watch, and other organizations have attested, the official government policy toward Roma is ethnocide—the destruction of their language, culture, and identity in order to assimilate them. In Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Hungary, Roma have become the new scapegoats and the target of skinheads and other lawless elements of society. In Slovakia Roma have been forcefully expelled from city centers and sent to squalid ghettos. In 2008 Roma communities in Naples, Italy were attacked by violent mobs and entire neighborhoods were burned to the ground. In other parts of Central and Eastern Europe Roma face routine violence and acts of discrimination. Part of the problem in Romania is that when Roma were slaves between the 15th and 19th centuries, they were stigmatized and regarded as inferior. The myth of the half-human, dangerous, dirty, uncivilized, and lazy Roma slave became part of the Romanian psyche, in much the same way that the myth of the racial inferiority of African Americans became part of the communal psyche in the southern United States. In other countries folk mythology reduced the Roma to the level of romantic misfits or backward savages who should be civilized and assimilated into the general population.

Large numbers of Roma have fled to Western Europe, where they have created a refugee problem. They are entitled to apply for asylum but many countries deport them for lack of documents or for false documents sold to them by underworld “people smugglers” who have helped them enter the country. The Roma in the Americas, Canada, and other countries outside Europe have much greater freedom and protection under the law, although still subject to ethnic stereotyping and discrimination and conflict with authorities over aspects of their lifestyle and economic practices.

Next to discrimination, poverty is the greatest challenge faced by most Roma. In 2006 the \$4.30/day poverty rate amongst Roma was over 45% in most countries of Southeast Europe. High unemployment rates, high levels of discrimination, and low levels of education attainment all create a vicious circle that leads to the continuation of poverty for Roma.

Alcoholism and drug abuse exist among Roma, although drugs are taboo under the pollution code of the Vlach Roma and other groups. While Roma used to drink only at feasts and on special occasions such as a betrothal ceremony or a funeral, today it is not uncommon for them to turn to alcohol as a temporary escape from their problems. The disease of alcoholism is not understood among the Roma. If a Roma gets drunk, the blame tends to fall on the alcohol, not on the person. The Roma say *Lya les e rakiya*—“The whiskey took hold of him”—as if it were some kind of malevolent spirit that entered and possessed him. Although forbidden, drug use has also taken hold amongst many young Roma. Intravenous drug use is increasing the spread of disease, such as HIV and hepatitis.

Traditionally Roma have not been dangerous criminals. Their crimes are generally of a petty nature, consisting of con-

fidence games, shoplifting, or other types of pilfering. Offenses like selling drugs, organized prostitution, arson, murder for hire, and loan sharking are all forbidden to them by their own code of laws. That said, abject poverty has led many Roma to commit such serious crimes. Crimes like these are thought to bring bad karma and place the criminal “out of balance.”

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Roma households the roles of men and women are strictly defined. The duty of men is to provide for the family. Women may also contribute to the household income but their primary duty is to cook, clean, and raise children. Many Roma girls leave school early to help their mothers with housework. This has led to an imbalance in the literacy rates and levels of educational attainment between many Roman males and females. Roma tradition dictates that girls remain virgins before marriage. The consequences for girls suspected of premarital sex can be quite severe. It is uncommon for males to be seriously punished for similar activity.

Most Roma view homosexuality as an extremely negative phenomenon; homosexuals are regarded as unclean. If outed, gay and lesbian Roma are usually banished from their community. In many Roma communities, women and young people are challenging traditional values that pertain to gender and sexuality. However, change is difficult, because most Roma are quite resistant to transforming their culture to conform to that of the *Gadje*.

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—revised by B. Lazarus

## ROMANIANS

**LOCATION:** Romania

**POPULATION:** 22 million, of whom 91% are ethnic Romanians

**LANGUAGE:** Romanian

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Romanian Orthodox Church; Greek Catholic Church; Protestantism)

### <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Romania has a long and heroic, but tragic history. The ancient historian Herodotus writes that the territory that comprises Romania today was inhabited by the Dacians and Getae as early as the 6th century BC. The ancestors of the Romanians organized a separate country known as Dacia, which developed and prospered to the time of King Decebalus (AD 87–106). Dacia increasingly became a menace to the expanding Roman Empire. After a few futile attempts to subdue the Dacians, the Roman emperor Trajan fought two fierce battles with them between AD 101–106 and finally conquered Dacia in AD 106. The victory over the Dacians was considered so important in Roman history that a monument was erected in the Forum at Rome to commemorate the event. Known as “Trajan’s Column,” it depicts battle scenes in bas-relief of Dacians in their native dress and habitat. It still exists today and is considered “the birth certificate of the Romanian nation.”

From 106 to 271, Dacia was a Roman province. Besides the indigenous Dacian population, a growing number of colonists from throughout the Roman Empire settled in this area. The province became one of the most prosperous in the Roman Empire and was known as “Dacia Felix” (happy and flourishing Dacia). As a border province, however, Dacia became increasingly difficult to defend against the barbaric invasions from the East. Therefore, Emperor Aurelian decided to retreat from Dacia with his armies in 271, ceding the country to the invading Goths. Most of the native population, which by this time was developing into a new nation, remained in Dacia. The use of the Latinized Daco-Roman language persisted in the region as a means of communication, commerce, and administration. This new language eventually evolved into the distinctive Romanian language. The language, religion, customs, dress, beliefs, behavior, techniques, tools, ideas, and many other vestiges of the early civilization prove without a doubt the Romanians’ Latin origin.

The drama of Romanian history is that of a people blessed with a beautiful and rich country, but also situated at the crossroads of invasion routes for the first millennium of its existence. Fortunately, most of the invaders came and left. After the Goths left in 375, and the Huns left in the 6th century, there was a slow but steady infiltration of Slavs among the Romanians. Though most of them proceeded on south of the Danube, some of them remained and were assimilated by the native Romanians, adding some of their linguistic, cultural, and social influences to the cultural mix.

Beginning in the 10th century, there was a gradual but steady penetration of Hungarians, especially among the Romanians of Transylvania, the cradle of the Romanian nation, which became a Hungarian province and remained so until it finally reverted to Greater Romania in 1918.

Romanian political units were formed in territories inhabited by them beginning in the 11th century, including Moldova and Wallachia. They eventually became principalities in the 13th century. Muslim Turks had a firm hold on Romanian territories. Nevertheless, Michael the Brave, after a number of victories, was able to unite briefly all the Romanians under one rule in 1601. Though short-lived, this unification contributed to the strengthening of Romanian identity.

The Ottoman Empire imposed its rule over the Romanian principalities for nearly 300 years. In the 18th century, the Turks sent Greek Phanariots to rule the Romanian principalities, from which they extracted considerable sums. To get back the money they had invested, the peasants were heavily taxed and harshly oppressed.

With the help of Russia, which defeated the Turks, the Romanians were given more freedom and granted a new constitution in 1829. Finally in 1859, Wallachia and Moldova were united into one country, with Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler. Antagonizing some of the Romanian leaders, he was forced to resign, and in 1866 Prince Carol of Hohenzollern was invited to head the country. In 1881 Romania became a monarchy, and the new King Carol I ruled for over 30 years. After his death in 1914, he was succeeded by his nephew, King Ferdinand, who married Princess Marie, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of Great Britain.

Romania fought on the side of the Allies during World War I and was rewarded the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Transylvania, Banat, and Bucovina in 1918, thus uniting most of the Romanians in one country for the first time in its history.

In 1940, General Ion Antonescu's government signed an alliance with Germany, which lasted until 23 August 1944 when the Romanians joined the Allies and the Russians entered the country. Two provinces (Bessarabia and present day Moldova) were taken by the Russians as spoils of war, and attached to the Russian Federation (the former USSR). With the forced abdication of King Michael, the few Romanian Communists gradually took control of the government, the educational system, and the economy. In 1965 a new constitution along communist lines was adopted and Nicolae Ceausescu became president of the country, which was known as the Socialist Republic of Romania. Under his harsh regime, the country faced a dramatic economic crisis with many shortages of foods and consumer goods.

With a single-party political system completely controlled by the Communist Party, the living standard of the average citizen eroded noticeably and the national debt rose abruptly. Citizens were summarily arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Many fled the country. It is believed that over 500,000 Romanians emigrated to Western Europe, the United States, and elsewhere throughout the free world. Most of the Jews and German-speaking citizens also left for Israel, Germany, the United States, and other countries.

Those who remained behind, especially the young people, showed their opposition by antigovernment demonstrations calling for changes. When the security forces opened fire on demonstrators in Timisoara on 16 December 1989, a state of emergency was declared, but the protests continued to spread and grow in Bucharest and throughout the country. As a result, Ceausescu was arrested, tried, summarily judged, and found guilty of genocide. He was hastily executed on 25 December 1989.



After the execution of Ceausescu and the ousting of many Communist officeholders, a hastily garnered government made up mostly of former Communists and headed by Ion Iliescu took over the reins. The situation did not improve much; in some respects, it even worsened. Inflation rose, living standards suffered, and corruption continued. Nevertheless, Ion Iliescu was reelected for a second term. He was finally voted out by a coalition of democratic parties in November 1996; Emil Constantinescu was elected as the first non-Communist president in over 50 years. The coalition government that took over power in 1996 was made up of former dissidents, intellectuals, and members of historical Romanian parties that survived Communist rule. While they were well intentioned, and openly tried to implement ambitious reforms, they were not seasoned politicians. Consequently, their four-year term was marked by internal power struggles, frequent cabinet changes, and a worsening of the economic, political, and social situation. Only towards the end of their rule, when Mugur Isarescu (president of the National Bank of Romania) was installed as prime minister did the situation improve slightly. In 2000 elections were held and power was won again by the former-Communists (christened under a new name—the Socialist Democratic Party). Ion Iliescu became president (for what some called an unlawful third term), and Adrian Nastase became prime minister. Although their rule was plagued by accusations of corruption, Romania enjoyed strong and sustained economic growth, and a general improvement of living conditions. In 2002 Romania was invited to join the North

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and finally did so in March 2004.

Following the 2004 elections, a coalition government (dominated by the Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party) took power, and Traian Basescu was elected president for a five-year term. This government was fraught with internal disputes, and split in 2007. As of 2008 Romania had a minority government headed by Calin Popescu Tariceanu of the National Liberal Party. Tariceanu and Traian Basescu (of the Democratic Party) openly criticized each other's policies, creating a tense political climate. Despite the contentious political situation, the Romanian economy continues to expand, and living standards are increasing rapidly. In January 2007, Romania joined the European Union (EU).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Romania is located in Eastern Europe at the mouth of the Danube River as it flows into the Black Sea. Situated west of Russia, east of Hungary, north of Serbia and Bulgaria, and south of Slovakia and Poland, it is slightly less than 238,000 sq km (92,000 sq mi), about the size of New York State and Pennsylvania combined.

The majestic Carpathian Mountains run from north to south through the middle of the country. Giving way to sub-Carpathian hills and finally to vast fertile fields, the mountains divide Transylvania, the largest province, from the Old Romanian Kingdom.

Romania has a population of about 22 million people with a density of 97 persons per sq km (252 persons per sq mi). Ethnic Romanians comprise 91% of the population. The remaining population includes Hungarians (6.7%) and various other minorities. Before World War II, Romania had a large Jewish population, most of whom have since emigrated to Israel, the United States, and Western Europe. It also had a sizeable German minority—mostly Saxons and Swabians—who had been in the country since the 13th century and who emigrated in large numbers to Germany, the United States, and elsewhere during and after World War II.

Romania is made up of about 200 cities and 15,000 villages, divided administratively into 42 counties. The capital is Bucharest, with a population of over 2 million people.

Romania is in the North Temperate Zone, with hot summers, cool autumns, and cold winters with snow and winds. It is primarily an agricultural country with 45% arable land. Among the natural resources are oil, gas, and coal, much of which has dwindled since Germany and the USSR siphoned them off during and after World War II. There is a growing industrial and commercial base, which employs about one-third of the labor force.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Romanian Orthodox Church helped to formulate and promote the Romanian language and culture. The first schools were opened and the first books written and published in Romanian Orthodox monasteries.

The Romanian language is one of the major modern Romance languages of the world, alongside Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and a few other minor ones. It is closest in structure to the Latin spoken in the first centuries AD by the average Roman citizen on the street. Romania's very name,

deriving from "Romanus," as the Roman colonizers of Dacia were known, is an indication of its Latin heritage.

In spite of attempts by foreign rulers—Turks, Greeks, and Hungarians—to impose their respective languages and cultures upon the Romanian people, its fundamental Latin origin emerged practically intact. Latin-derived Romanian is the language spoken and written by the overwhelming number of Romanians today.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Romanian culture is defined by a unique blend of folklore and learned culture. Up to World War II, Romania was a predominantly agrarian society, and even today, more than 40% of people still live in the country side. Folk creations were the main source of inspiration for early Romanian writers, and they remained the main literary genre until early 18th century. The best known folklore creation is the ballad *Miorița*, which describes Romanian spirituality.

Another popular folk tale is that of *Meșterul Manole* (roughly: The Master Builder Manole), which tells the story of a craftsman who was hired to build a monastery for the prince of Wallachia, Negru Vodă. The walls that Manole and his workers built during the day would crumble during the night. This caused Manole to pray to God for help and guidance. The response came in the form of a vision that showed Manole the only way he could finish his work: by walling his wife Ana inside the church walls. He reluctantly proceeded to do so and completed his masterpiece—the Curtea de Argeș Monastery. When he saw the finished work, Prince Negru Vodă became fearful that Manole might build another masterpiece that would be as—if not more—magnificent than his. He thus decided to leave Manole and his team stranded on top of the church. To escape, the workers built themselves wings out of shingles and attempted to fly to safety. All of them failed. The place where Manole fell to his death caused water to burst forth, and according to myth, the spot is marked by an actual fountain on one side of the church.

Many of the folk traditions have survived to this day in rural communities, and are carefully preserved by the Romanian Academy and the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Traditional folk arts include wood carving, ceramics, weaving and embroidery, household decorations, dance, and folk music. Constantin Brâncuși (one of the most well known modernist sculptors in the world) drew his inspiration from Romanian folk art, and many of his masterpieces are throw-backs to traditional Romanian wood carving. Professional and amateur dance groups are trying to keep alive the rich variety of dances encountered throughout Romania, and some of these dances (such as *Călușarii*) have been declared by UNESCO to be "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritages of Humanity."

Some of the Romanian folklore myths that have become part of international culture are the myth of the vampire (or *strigoi*—the undead), and the myth of the werewolf (*vârcolac*).

## 5 RELIGION

Religion has always played an important part in the life of the Romanians. Aside from the years during the Communist domination of Romania after World War II through 1989, there was a close relationship between the state and the church. The state funded the church, and religion was taught in schools.

After forsaking the pagan religion of their Dacian forbears, the new Daco-Romanians gradually adopted the Christian religion, establishing churches dependent upon the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. Even though there was a Slavonic influence in the Romanian Orthodox Church beginning in the 9th century when the two Greek missionary brothers, Cyril and Methodius, introduced the Cyrillic alphabet into the country, and later when the Greek Phanariots also exerted their influence, the Romanian Orthodox Church never lost its Latin character.

When Romania finally became one unified country in 1918, over 80% of Romanians belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church, while 10% belonged to the Greek Catholic Church (also known as the Uniate Church). The rest of the population belonged to various Roman Catholic or Protestant Churches.

The Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate was established in 1925 with metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops to oversee the 15 million members of over 15,000 churches, served by over 18,000 priests, thus making it the second-largest Orthodox Church in the world, after the Russian Orthodox Church. There are about 250 Romanian Orthodox churches (with about as many priests) outside of Romania proper in adjacent countries, as well as in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The major Church holy days, besides their religious aspects and significance, are also occasions for rest and relaxation. No doubt, Christmas has more customs and observances than any other Church holy day. Beginning on 15 November, when Advent begins, the villagers prepare not only spiritually, but also socially, for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ. Adults slaughter and dress the hog, and bake and prepare goodies for the season, while children learn carols and their roles in the pageant of Christ's birth. Dressed in their best clothes, groups of carolers go from home to home on Christmas Eve, spreading the news of the coming of Christ in word and song. There is no other form of popular poetry more prevalent than the traditional carols, which have been passed down from one generation to the next. Christmas celebrations last for two weeks until the Epiphany on 6 January and take on many variations, such as family gatherings, reunions, visiting friends, dances, and social events.

New Year's Day is a secular holiday, but also a Saint's Day—Saint Basil. As in the world over, Romanian revelers ring in the New Year with partying, singing, and drinking at restaurants, social establishments, and in their homes. It is customary among the Romanians to go to the homes of friends and acquaintances, wishing them a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year. Some New Year's Day customs have prevailed throughout the centuries, dating from pagan Roman times, such as the *plugusotul* (plow). Boys dressed in sheepskin outfits pull a small plow through the village, wishing everyone a prosperous new year. Likewise, there are groups leading a *capra* (goat) or beating drums, reciting New Year's greetings in rhythmic verse.

Easter is the greatest religious holiday. With its six-week Lenten preparatory season, solemn Holy Week rituals, and bright midnight resurrection service, everyone rejoices in the renewal of spiritual life and of the spring weather. The coloring of Easter eggs in decorative Romanian designs is an art in

itself and reveals the artistic talents of the Romanians. Households are cleaned, repainted, and refurbished. New clothes are made or purchased. Soup, roasts, and casseroles of lamb are prepared. Nut and raisin kuchen are baked. Merrymaking abounds after church services. After the Lenten restriction on dancing for six weeks, the village dances are resumed and a happier atmosphere prevails.

Secular holidays change according to the political regime in power. During the 50 years of Communist government control, some of the traditional national holidays were not observed, such as 10 May, when Romania gained its independence and eventually became a monarchy. Instead, 23 August became the most important holiday during the Communist reign. It commemorated the "liberation of Romania from the German fascists by the Romanian Communist troops." When Communist control ended in 1989, this holiday was discontinued and the Romanian people reverted to the traditional 10 May day. The Communists also introduced May Day, which is observed by all Communists throughout the world, and Labor Day, honoring all workers. Ceausescu's birthday was celebrated as his cult grew but celebrations were discontinued when he was overthrown.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

When an infant is baptized, there is always a celebration at the home of the child's parents, with godparents, relatives, and friends present. Godparents become spiritual parents to the newly baptized and maintain a special relationship with them throughout their lives. If anything should happen to the parents of the godchild, the godparents would usually take over some of the responsibilities to see that the child is brought up properly until maturity. At baptism, children are given the name of a saint, usually one whose feast day is nearest to the date of birth. In Romania, as in other Orthodox countries, the name-day of the person is often celebrated with more festivity than the birth date. It is an occasion of congratulations and socializing among friends and relatives.

Children are taken to Sunday church services from a young age and participate in the social life of the parish, such as parties, outings, and dances. Young people participate at village dances held on Sunday afternoons after Vespers. They are held in the church yard, school auditorium, village square, or in more spacious barns of prosperous peasants. They are occasions to socialize and meet other young people. Friendships are usually formed, which can result in dating and closer relationships, eventually leading to marriage.

Marriage is a very important time in a Romanian's life and is not to be entered into lightly. When young people decide to marry, they ask for the blessing of their parents. The girl usually has a dowry that her parents start when she is very young and to which she adds periodically. It consists of household linens, rugs, tablecloths, personal items, kitchen utensils, and family heirlooms.

After the marriage date is set and arrangements are made for the religious ceremony, the groom sends out emissaries to personally invite friends and relatives to the wedding. The invitation is sealed with a mutual sip of plum brandy, which means acceptance of the invitation. Weddings are held mostly on Sunday afternoons after church services. The male members of the bridal party, bedecked in their finest peasant clothes, usually come to church on horseback, while the bride

is brought in a carriage bedecked with flowers and peasant embroideries. After the nearly one-hour church ceremony, during which they declare their mutual love and exchange rings in token thereof, and after prayers asking for God's blessings, the bride and groom drink wine from the "common cup," signifying their sharing from now on, for better or for worse. Finally, they are crowned and encircle the front of the altar, venerating the icons as a symbol of their spirituality. With the joyous hymn wishing them many happy years, they leave the church and are accompanied by a band to the place where the festivities are to be held. The groom is very attentive to the new bride so that she will not be "abducted" by former buddies and have to be "redeemed" with a round of drinks.

The social celebration of the wedding lasts into very late hours of the night. It is probably one of the most lavish and generous events in the couple's life. Food is plentiful and drinks—usually wine, plum brandy, and beer—are available all evening, sometimes ending in overindulgence. Monetary gifts are given to the couple to start them off on their new conjugal life. Sometimes weddings last two or three days, with time out for some sleep and rest, but most are limited to a few hours.

Funerals also offer occasions for socializing in a more somber way and abound with many local customs and practices. When someone dies, he or she is properly "prepared" without being embalmed. After being washed and deodorized, the body is laid in a simple wooden coffin and is brought to his or her home, where there is a wake. Often "wailers" lament and in cadence review the life of the deceased. Two or three evenings before the funeral service in church, prayer services are held before the open coffin. On the day of the funeral, the coffin is brought to the church in a horse-drawn wagon and is carried inside on the shoulders of friends or relatives. After an hour-long ceremony, emphasizing the Resurrection and the positive aspects of death, the closed coffin is taken to the cemetery, which is usually next to the church, and is interred. The mourners return to the deceased's home, where a requiem meal is served. Food is provided by relatives and friends. After mourning, there is a period of relaxation and a return to the world, signifying the peasant's philosophy, "the living with the living, and the dead with the dead" and "life goes on."

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Romania's greatest asset is the people themselves. After centuries of foreign domination and corruption, Romanians emerged as a self-reliant and intelligent people. From their Church, they learned to be humble, loving, and forgiving. They are noted for being kind and caring, which is reflected in their warm greetings and willingness to be of service to others. When visiting a Romanian, he or she is likely to offer you the best bed in the house, and the best food they can provide. As Romania is becoming more westernized, so are the customs of the people—especially in large urban centers. City dwellers nowadays are always on the run, always pressed for time, and less likely to engage in extensive interpersonal relations the way they used to during Communist rule.

In rural areas, interpersonal relations are nurtured and centuries-old customs are respected. When visiting a village, people will greet you with a nod of the head and a smile, even if they do not know you. Women are respected. A man tips his hat, offers his seat, kisses the hand, and offers to help women. The elderly are also respected. When encountering an elderly

person or a woman, the greeting *sărut mâinile* (kiss hands) is customary.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Romania developed a distinctive architectural style, known as the Brâncoveanu style, in which many churches and public buildings were built. A specific Romanian style was developed in Transylvania with wooden churches, characterized by a steep shingled roof and tall, sleek spire. In northern Moldova and southern Bucovina, a distinctive church style developed in the time of Stephen the Great. The nave was in the shape of a ship, with an overhanging roof and frescoes on the inside and outside.

After their liberation from serfdom, the Romanian peasants were able to build modest homes, which they lavished with Romanian decorations and motifs. Peasant architecture throughout Romania varies from the impressive two-story houses (*cula*) of the more-prosperous Romanians to the simple thatched-roof cottage. The more elaborate houses were surrounded by a terrace with an overhanging roof.

The typical one-story Romanian house usually includes an anteroom with an oven for cooking. In the rear is a pantry. Some homes have a living room with a fireplace and at least one bedroom with a large bed and a wooden chest to store linens, clothes, and personal belongings. The room may have a wooden bench and beams across the ceiling. The more prosperous peasants have a large enclosed yard with a garden, hay barn, stable, pigsty, chicken coop, corncrib, and outhouse.

In 1935, representative houses, churches, and other buildings from all regions of the country were disassembled and then reassembled in a large area outside Bucharest for a permanent display known as the museum of the village.

Romania has undergone many changes in the last 50 years, especially during the Communist regime. There was a large migration from villages to cities. Because of political persecution, many Romanians fled the country. The population in villages has decreased considerably. There was a tendency at one time to reduce the number of villages and to house the population in public housing. During the Communist regime, some villages were obliterated as inhabitants moved to the cities, where nondescript high-rise apartments were built to accommodate them. They can be seen on the outskirts of most of the major cities, but they lack the comforts, facilities, and amenities for more gracious living. This trend has stopped.

With the collectivization of farmlands, even though modern equipment was used, production decreased because of the uncooperative attitude of the peasants.

Young people between the ages of 9 and 14 belonged to the Young Pioneers, while those over 14 were enrolled in the Union of Communist Youth. They were expected to help out in workshops and collective farms. Communist youth organizations have been done away with, and most youth activities take place in schools and voluntary organizations in urban areas. American films, music, social behavior, and dress have had a marked influence on the youth of Romania. In the villages, however, life is more sedate and still revolves to a great extent around the family and the Church, which teaches restraint and modesty.

Life expectancy is 68 years for males and 77 years for females. Infant mortality is 25 deaths per 1,000 births. There is 1 hospital bed per 100 persons, and 1 doctor per 559 persons.





*A father and child walk through a neighborhood in Bucharest, Romania. Romania still struggles with widespread poverty. Despite these problems, Romania has made headway in fighting corruption and modernizing infrastructure to meet stringent EU standards.  
(Spencer Platt/Getty Images)*

Though the state is supposed to offer free health care to the citizens, there is a scarcity of hospitals, clinics, and other facilities. Doctors are poorly paid and lack much of the necessary equipment and medicine to adequately meet the health needs of the population. Because of poverty, some children are abandoned and end up in orphanages, which have a difficult time caring for them. Some of the orphans are adopted locally and others by families abroad. Though there are medical schools, which graduate a number of doctors, many of the graduates try to emigrate elsewhere for higher pay and better facilities. With the end of Communist rule, there is more private practice and conditions have improved somewhat, but there are still many pressing needs. It will be some time before the health care system will reach western standards throughout the country.

Following the economic boom of the new century, living conditions for most Romanians have improved dramatically. People have higher wages and access to a large assortment of consumer and household goods. A real estate boom has been witnessed in most major urban centers, as developers try to cover the rising need for new housing. There are more than 2 million Romanians working outside the country and most of them send remittances back home. This money is usually used for purchasing a new home and household goods.

Significant investments in infrastructure and the public sector have also led to a betterment of living conditions.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Romanians are family-oriented and try to bring up their families in the highest moral Christian spirit. Traditionally, Romanians had large families. Many hands were needed to work the fields. The patriarchal system predominated. The elderly were respected and were usually the head of the extended family. Much of this tradition was done away with when peasants migrated to towns and were alienated from the more intimate village life.

Children are considered to be blessings from God and are brought up in the Romanian national tradition, greatly fostered by the Church. Respect for parents is a cornerstone of this philosophy. The family spirit is very strong, and relationships with relatives are quite close. Traditionally, promiscuity was rare, and abortion was frowned upon. One of the social problems was alcoholism among men, even though the average Romanian man could carry on his daily workload in spite of it. Divorce in the villages was at a minimum but was more prevalent in the cities.

Life in the villages is more tranquil and there are fewer social problems than in the city. The Church also has a greater influence over its believers in the village than in the city. Much of village social life revolves around the Church holy days and various religious events in the believer's life—at baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

City life is increasingly defined by western culture. Women are more mobile in the labor force and less likely to be dependent on a husband. Consequently, fertility rates are going down (1.38 children born to each woman in 2007), and divorce rates are going up. Many city dwellers are professionally oriented and family life often takes a secondary role.

### 11 CLOTHING

Among the most visible and attractive articles of clothing are the Romanian traditional costumes, especially the blouse, which varies greatly from one district to another. Each one is different and has its beauty, being lavished with intricate embroidery. They are much appreciated throughout the world.

The traditional Romanian male costumes were just as varied as the women's, but less elaborate. The trousers and the long shirt were mostly white. The men wore a leather belt. In cold weather, they wore sheepskin jackets. Footwear was usually leather moccasins, and the headgear was a rounded black hat with a narrow brim, or a lambskin cap in the winter.

In recent years, many new clothing stores have sprung up in most Romanian urban centers. Western fashion (especially Italian and American) defines the way people dress in cities. In rural areas, traditional costumes are seldom encountered any more. Peasants are more likely to wear second-hand clothes bought in the cities, or utilitarian clothes they take to the fields. Traditional garb is still worn for major celebrations.

### 12 FOOD

Romanian cooking was influenced by those nationalities living within the same areas, especially Hungarian and Serbian. Old Kingdom Romanians were influenced by Turkish, Russian, and other ethnic cooking. In all cases, the Romanians added their own touch and varied it to suit their taste. The more sophisticated Romanians availed themselves of French, Viennese, and other Western European ways of cooking.

*Mamaliga* (cornmeal mush) is one of the staples of the Romanian diet and, in a sense, is the national dish. It is easy to prepare, is very digestible, and is served in as many ways as the imagination can dream up. It is usually served as a side dish and sometimes in place of bread. Besides being used for cooking, corn is also used to feed the livestock.

Pork is the favorite meat of the Romanians. Almost every village household raises a few pigs for their own use and for sale. They are usually slaughtered before Christmas, smoked, made into sausage, and preserved for use throughout the year. Peasants working in the fields can make a meal out of a slab of smoked bacon, a generous portion of hard-crust black bread, and wine. Dishes using pork products, such as bacon or ham and eggs, stuffed cabbage, spare ribs, pork chops, sausage, and various cold cuts are favorites for the Romanians, much more so than beef.

For appetizers, Romanians prefer chopped chicken liver, eggplant spread, carp roe paste, and aspic. Soups include thick cream soups with sour cream, sauerkraut juice, lemon juice, or vinegar, to which are added various chunks of meats, vegeta-

bles, and potatoes. The Sunday meal is usually chicken soup with noodles or dumplings and roast chicken from the family's own back yard.

Romanians especially enjoy broiling meat. Aside from pork chops, spare ribs, flank steak, and lamb chops (especially during the Easter season), the undisputed favorites are the traditional *mititei*—small sausages made of ground pork, beef, and lamb, marinated and then broiled. Stews, roasts, and casseroles with vegetable, salads, sour pickles, and sauerkraut make up the usual main course.

Many Romanians observe the four Lenten seasons prescribed by the Orthodox Church and shy away from all meat and dairy products then. There is a whole array of foods that can be prepared to meet these Lenten requirements, such as Lenten bean, caraway seed, lettuce, mushroom, tomato, vegetable, and potato soups, to which are added vegetable dishes, such as mushroom stew, braised cabbage, Spanish rice, vegetable *ghiveciu*, and baked beans. Others are mashed beans, Lenten stuffed cabbage, potato stew, Lenten spaghetti, and fresh beans with tomato sauce.

Traditional Romanian desserts are made of raised dough, such as kuchen, Moldavian rolls, sweet dough, nut squares, *lichiu*, cheese cake, crescents, horns, strudel, water twists, and puff pastry, with crepes suzettes being the most common.

The art of Romanian cooking was passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and by example. Eventually recipes were collected and published, the most popular being the cookbook of Sanda Marin, which became a sort of standard. Today, there are many Romanian cookbooks, some of which are published in other languages, including English. Romanian cooking is appreciated in many parts of the world.

### 13 EDUCATION

A good education is prized by every Romanian. People with a high educational achievement and intellectuals are highly respected. The education sector itself went through several reform processes, the boldest of them being implemented by Andrei Marga—the former Minister of Education, and currently the rector of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Most of these reforms (which among others include curriculum changes, student assessment, teacher training, finance, and governance) need to be continued to improve education outcomes.

Now that Romania is part of the EU, its education sector needs to be revamped to satisfy the demand for a more skilled labor force. The most difficult challenge will be to bridge the divide between education in urban areas and education in rural areas. Without a centralized placement system, it is increasingly difficult to find teachers that are willing to work in remote villages.

As of 2008 the literacy rate was nearly 98%, with compulsory education for 10 years. The Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca is, at over 60,000 students, the largest multi-cultural university in Europe. It offers programs of study in Romanian, Hungarian, German, English, and Roma.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The first printing presses were brought to Romania and Transylvania by the Saxons in the 16th century. With the introduction of the printing press, Romanian books, still with Cyrillic letters, were published. The Romanian deacon Coresi published

the first book of the Gospels in Romanian at Bras, or in 1561. Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldova published the famous *Cazania* (explanation of the New Testament) in 1643, and Metropolitan Simeon Stefan published the New Testament in 1648.

Thereafter, a growing number of other Romanian books were published but still with Cyrillic letters. It was only after some Orthodox Churches in Transylvania united with the Roman Catholic Church in Rome (1698), and with the establishment of Romanian schools in the 19th century, that the Latin alphabet was reinstated officially. By the middle of the 19th century, a veritable educational and literary revival began. Romanian universities and other schools of higher learning were opened. Grade schools appeared in the villages, cultural organizations sprang up everywhere, and literary magazines and books started to be published in growing numbers.

Many poets, novelists, historians, essayists, and other writers flooded the market with their literary works. They enriched Romanian literature in all fields, and their number is legion, including such well-known poets as Vasile Alexandri, Grigorie Alexandrescu, George Cosbuc and Dului Zamfirescu; novelists such as Costache Negruzzi and Alexandru Odobescu; storytellers such as Ion Slavici, Liviu Rebreanu, Mihail Sasoveanu, and Ion Agarbiceanu; dramatists such as L. Caragiale, Barba Delavraucea, and Victor Eftimiu; historians such as Alexandra D. Xenopol, Nicolae Iorga, Titus Maiorescu, Sextil Prescariu; and many others too numerous to mention.

Music has always been a significant factor in the life of the Romanian peasant. Peasants sing when they are happy or sad, when they are spiritually moved, or when they want to express their patriotic, romantic, and pastoral feelings. There are different types of music for different moods.

Almost every village has at least one musical group to play at village dances and other occasions. The basic Romanian musical instrument is the violin. Others include the wooden saxophone and the cymbalon. Later, orchestras added the bass fiddle, the piano, the clarinet, and the accordion. Romanians are among the few people who have preserved the ancient "pipes of Pan."

Among the most popular styles of folk songs are the *doina*, love songs, and pastoral and patriotic songs. During the Christmas season, the Romanians sing a great variety of carols. There are many religious hymns and songs for various feast days, which are familiar to all Romanians. On special occasions, there are ballads, lamentations, wedding songs, and a variety of others.

One of the most common and generalized folk dances is the *hora* (circle dance), danced by men and women holding hands. A popular dance is the *Sârba*, with dancers holding each other by the shoulder in a semicircle. There is also the *Brâul* (straight line). The most popular dances in Transylvania are the *invârțita* and *hategana*.

## 15 WORK

Once Romania was known as the breadbasket of Eastern Europe, exporting large quantities of wheat and corn. Nearly half of Romania's arable land is given over to agriculture, but because it is divided into so many small plots, with a lack of fertilizers and modern farming equipment, the output is poor. At times not enough food is produced to meet domestic needs, much less to export.

Nevertheless, villagers with their small plots raise enough food for their own needs. Since there is not much of a surplus, they do not bother to sell any produce at markets in nearby cities. In this respect, villagers are more or less self-sufficient and not lacking in the bare necessities of life, whereas urban dwellers, who must buy all their food, have a more difficult time because of scarcities, inflation, and low salaries. The new democratic government is trying desperately to reverse this trend and to make agriculture once again one of the main sources of income for the Romanian people.

Romania, with its beautiful mountains, quaint towns with ancient architecture, picturesque villages, seaside resorts, and many other tourist attractions, always afforded vacations at reasonable prices. Foreigners flocked to Romania for good monetary exchange rates and the country's many attractions. Some of this luster wore off during the Communist regime, and the number of foreign tourists decreased considerably, but it is now picking up again. With new airlines, railroads, and other new services, Romania's tourism industry hopes to regain some of its former polish and sophistication offered by warm and friendly hosts.

With increased wealth, the work ethic of Romanians has improved. A profitable career is often the main goal of young urban dwellers. Enrollment levels within universities have increased substantially, and private and public investments have driven up salaries in most economic sectors. In addition, more than 2 million Romanians are working abroad. In 2007 they sent nearly \$7 billion to families and relatives back home. These remittances are an important source of economic growth, driving up consumption rates and development even in the most remote villages.

## 16 SPORTS

Romania is not especially known as a sports-minded nation, even though the people indulge in various kinds of sports. After working hard and long in the fields and factories, many are content to be mere spectators rather than participants. As in many European countries, the preferred sport is soccer. It is easy to lay out a playing field, and all one needs is a soccer ball. Aside from amateur teams and informal tournaments, Romania has a number of professional teams, which compete favorably with other countries. Each larger town has its own stadium, and some of them accommodate tens of thousands of spectators.

Besides soccer, Romanians also enjoy basketball, boxing, rugby, tennis, volleyball, and a few other sports imported from abroad. Sports such as hiking, swimming, mountain climbing, camping, hunting, and fishing are also popular.

Calisthenics, exercising, and other gymnastics are a part of the school curriculum. Some of the best students are specially trained to compete in international events. Nadia Comeneci is a world-renowned Romanian gymnast, and Ilie Nastase is a top-level tennis player. Some of the Romanian trainers who have produced Olympic winners have found more profitable employment abroad in their fields.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Most Romanians are addicted to *promenade* (or *corso*). On any Saturday or Sunday afternoon in good weather, one will meet most of the villagers and small townspeople out for a leisurely walk, stopping to chat with friends and acquaintances, win-

dow-shopping, and just relaxing, ending up in a restaurant or open-air eating place for a drink and snacks.

Romanians also enjoy folk dance groups, amateur theatrical groups, music ensembles, and a host of other entertainers. The entertainment business is bustling. There are movie houses galore for local productions, as well as imported films with Romanian subtitles. Solo entertainers and any number of groups tour the country and present all kinds of entertainment to enthusiastic audiences.

Romania has many radio stations, television stations, live theaters, opera houses, cabarets, and entertainment establishments. Western influence, especially American and Italian, is noticeable in the music, dancing, films, dress, and behavior of present-day Romanians.

### **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Before the age of industrialization and commercialism, peasants made most of their own apparel, textiles, and domestic and household articles by hand, using materials that they grew, raised, or happened to have on hand. They purchased very few manufactured commodities.

The handmade articles were not only utilitarian, but also decorative. The Romanian peasants embellished not only their clothing and domestic utensils with colorful and intricate designs, but also the interiors and exteriors of their homes, their yards, their churches, and their cemeteries.

The basic textiles used by the peasants were made of hemp and wool. Cotton goods, linen, and silk were purchased. The hemp was cut, soaked, dried, beaten to free the fibers, tied to a distaff, and finally twisted into yarn on a spindle. After being bleached or dyed with vegetable colors readily available in the garden or the fields, the yarn was woven into a rough fabric on a loom. A similar procedure was followed to prepare and weave woolen fabrics. From these fabrics, a variety of garments, household articles, and decorative pieces were made, such as bed sheets, blankets, pillowcases, tablecloths, towels, shawls, and doilies.

Most of the tedious and intricate needlework was done at "spinning bees" during the long winter evenings at the homes of villagers. While the women sewed, knitted, and crocheted, the men were busy carving geometric designs or painting wooden articles and ceramics. These spinning bees were veritable cultural events, when epic stories were told, traditional songs were learned and sung, new folk dances were rehearsed, poems were recited, and personal experiences were exchanged.

Besides crafting textiles and wooden articles, Romanian peasants also wove rugs with unusual designs and pleasing colorful schemes. The rugs of Oltenia and Moldova are especially appreciated by connoisseurs of folk art. The floor rug, bench rug, and the wall rug are variations. Rugs are one of Romania's most prized and expensive exports.

Besides beautifully embroidered native costumes, rugs, and scarves, the artistic talents of the Romanian peasant were manifested in ceramics. Most peasant households had a variety of decorated plates, pots, vases, and jugs. Unglazed red pottery was used mostly for cooking and glazed pottery mostly for storing and carrying liquids. The more decorative pieces, varying in design, color, and shape, were hung on the wall or displayed on carved wooden shelves. Pottery was usually decorated with circles, spirals, stylized flowers, and other imaginative patterns.

Romanian peasants usually carried around a pocket knife, which had many uses, such as whittling and carving. Chip-carving is a specific Romanian art. The handiwork of these chip-carvers can be seen in their homes, such as carved picture frames, walking canes, ornamented boxes, distaffs and spindles, ladles, ax handles, cupboards, shelves, hope chests, chairs, tables, beams, window frames, doors, and gates. Along the roadside are to be found wayside shrines and, in cemeteries, many carved crosses and monuments. Various pieces of furniture and wooden items used in church are also carved with folk designs. Besides chip-carving, in some parts of Romania, peasants were adept at the art of pyrography, the process of burning designs into wood or leather.

A most unusual form of Romanian folk art is that of icons painted on glass. This art came to Transylvania from Bohemia in the 17th century and flourished for over 150 years before it nearly died out. It has been lately revived. The icon was painted backwards on a piece of glass, so it could be seen correctly when viewed from the front side. Rather amateurish, but flashy and unique, they originally sold mostly at local marketplaces.

Secular painting in Romania grew out of ecclesiastical art in the beginning of the 19th century, especially through the efforts of George Tatarescu, Theodor Aman, and Constantin Lecca. Nicolae Gregorescu, who started as an iconographer, became one of Romania's greatest painters with his rural scenes and landscapes. Many others followed, and their works are to be found in various galleries, museums, and private collections throughout Romania.

### **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Though Romania had to endure barbaric invasions, foreign domination, political upheavals, serfdom, suppression, and persecution, the population remained optimistic and had a vision of a brighter future. Sadly, Romanians' hopes were darkened by the Communist philosophy that was imposed on the people in the 20th century.

The transition period that followed 1989 was not easy, and incidents of civil unrest (such as miners' strikes in 1990 and 1991, or the 1990 inter-ethnic clashes in Târgu Mureș) made headlines in the years to follow. However, with the advent of better economic conditions in 2000, most social problems have been resolved. Romania now has one of the lowest crime rates in Europe.

### **20 GENDER ISSUES**

In the 1950s, Romania's newly laid socialist foundations created a desire for more independence for women. In 1957, abortion was legalized and an increasing number of women started to join the work force, albeit in predominantly feminized sectors. However, in 1966 abortion became illegal, which was an attempt on the part of the Communist regime to raise birth rates and rapidly increase the size of the population. These pro-natalist measures were unique in the region.

In the 21st century, equal opportunity legislation has been enacted to protect the rights of women and of ethnic and sexual minorities. However, men continue to earn on average more than women do.

President Traian Basescu took a bold stance in favor of gay rights. Although much progress has been made in the area of gay rights, much remains to be done. The 2007 Gay Parade in

Bucharest was met with protests from religious and extremist groups.

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—revised by Marcel Ionescu-Heroiu.

# RUSSIANS

**LOCATION:** Russia

**POPULATION:** 142.9 million [Russian 79.8%, Tatar 3.8%, Ukrainian 2%, Bashkir 1.2%, Chuvash 1.1%, other or unspecified 12.1%]

**LANGUAGE:** Russian (official); more than 140 other languages and dialects.

**RELIGION:** Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholicism, other Christian, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, other

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Russians are a people of mixed origins. Although they are primarily eastern Slavs, many Russians have a Finnish, Siberian, Turkish, or Baltic heritage. Since the Russians' domain has historically covered such a large territory, many culturally distinct subgroups have developed. These subgroups formed because of ethnic mixing, cultural assimilation, or isolation and include the following: Meshcheryak, Kerzhak, Bukhtarman, Semeisk, Polyak, Starozhil, Russkoustin, Markov, Yakutyian, Kamchadal, Karym, Kolymchan, Zatundra Peasants, Pomor, Polekh, and Sayan groups. Many of these smaller groups are Russian Orthodox Old Believer communities or mixed Cossack-Siberian peoples.

The Slavic ancestors of the Russians are believed to have first settled in the area north of the Black Sea. The ancient Greeks and Romans made mention of these ancient Slavic tribes in their writings, but little was known about them. By the 7th century AD, there were many Slavic tribes in the region between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, living in autonomous villages that cooperated in areas such as defense. The "Varangians" (the old Slavonic term for Vikings) came to rule over the Russians in Novgorod, and the Rurik dynasty was established as the first ruling family of Russia as head of the Kievan Rus state. Trade between the Kievan Rus state and Constantinople exposed the Russians to Byzantine culture and religion. Eastern Orthodox Christianity was introduced during the mid-900s, but it was not until 988 that the largest conversion to Christianity happened.

An event that had a profound effect on the development of Russian culture was the Mongol occupation (c. 1240–1480). For over two centuries, the Mongols used threats and force to make the Russians pay them tribute and taxes, but the Mongols let the ruling princes and the Russian Orthodox Church remain in power. At that time a very strong Tatar/Mongol admixture began with the Russians. Some scholars think that the occupation helped unify local leaders against a common foe, which led to the strong tradition of autocracy in later centuries. Other historians believe that the period of Mongol rule disrupted cultural links with the rest of Byzantium and Eastern Europe and is part of the reason why Russia was not influenced by the Renaissance, Reformation, or Industrial Revolution when those events occurred in Western Europe. By the end of the occupation, the village of Moscow had positioned itself as an important political and religious center.

The Rurikovich dynasty that claimed its Viking origin ended in 1598 when Fedor died with no heir. Then, a period of tumultuous power struggles ensued, which the Russians call the "Time of Troubles." In 1613, order finally returned to the

throne as the nobility elected Michael Romanov as the new tsar (a term taken from the Roman title “Caesar,” meaning “emperor”). During the 1600s, the Russian conquest of Siberia began. Out of the Romanov dynasty came the man who is usually considered to have been the greatest tsar in Russian history, Peter I (1672–1725), called Peter the Great. Peter instituted many policies to change or modernize Russian culture so that it would be more like that of Western Europe. During the reign of Catherine II (r.1762–96) the Russian Empire added substantial territory through conquest, and there was a mass migration and heavy presence of Germans in Russia.

For centuries, serfdom was a way of life for most Russian peasants who did not own any land. Serfdom was a feudal form of bonded servitude similar to slavery, except that a serf belonged to the master’s land. Whenever land was sold, the serfs who worked on that land became the property of the new owner. The victory over Napoleon’s army in the War of 1812 was one of the most important events to consolidate the Russian people in the early 1800s. Throughout much of the 1800s, the Russians (especially the nobility) held a passion for French culture and language. After the French retreated, the tsar, Alexander I (r.1801–25), tried to return to business as usual but eventually abolished serfdom in a few small areas near the Baltic Sea.

In 1825, the first organized revolt against the imperial government was instigated by a group of army officers called the Decembrists, who wanted to abolish serfdom and set up a constitutional government. Although the revolt was small and unsuccessful, its memory served to rally the people in later years. In 1861 Alexander II (1855–81) emancipated the serfs. By the late 1870s, however, there were already revolutionary stirrings present within Russian society that grew out of the nihilist and populist movements. In 1881, Alexander II was assassinated by terrorists. Industrialization helped improve the economy, but a financial crisis in 1899, crop failures, and a humiliating defeat in a 1905 war with Japan led to more civil unrest and strikes by organized labor. Millions of Russian peasants were moving from the country into cities. The urbanization made it possible for Russians to mobilize. At the turn of the 20th century, many Russians had come to believe that the imperial government was incompetent.

Relations with Germany and Austria had been tense in the 1880s and 1890s, and problems flared up again in 1908. A complex system of treaties and alliances caused the unrest in the Balkans to inflame tensions throughout Europe, which led to World War I. By 1914, the Russians found themselves fighting in a useless war that plunged the nation into economic turmoil and chaos. Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) abdicated the throne. A provisional government was formed to be replaced by the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin (r. 1917–24). In 1918, Lenin had the entire royal family executed.

The Soviet era lasted from 1917 to 1991. During the Soviet years, there was a massive mixing of Russians with Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Finno-Ugric peoples, etc. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Communist Soviet government under Stalin (r.1924–53) instituted policies of terror and persecution to consolidate its power. The government tried to control all property and access to information in order to keep people in line. Millions of Russians were eventually imprisoned, exiled, or executed on fabricated charges and suspicion. It has been estimated that as many as 20 million Soviet citizens died during

the period of 1928–38 from Stalin’s reign of terror and a series of famines that Stalin could have prevented.

The most profound event to unite the Russian people during the Soviet years was World War II, which Russians call “the Great Patriotic War.” An estimated 27 million Soviet citizens died in the war, half of which were civilians or prisoners. After World War II, the Soviet Union quickly rebuilt its military and became a leading ideological and military rival of the United States. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev (r.1953–64), and the United States began stockpiling nuclear weapons to use against each other in the event of warfare. However, the horror of mutual destruction served to prevent either nation from starting such a war.

The losses from World War II and the focus on the military afterwards deeply affected modern Russian culture. During the 1970s, political and economic stagnation in the Soviet Union became rampant, and daily life for many Russians reflected the spirit of those times. In the mid-1980s, widespread reforms began under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev (r. 1985–91), and these reforms ushered in a new optimism among the Russian people that eventually challenged the very existence of the authoritarian Soviet government.

When the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991, the Russian people (as well as those from the other republics) were filled with hope for a glorious future. The Russian people now had their first chance in history to freely choose their own leadership through democratic elections. During the 1990s, however, the naive expectations for many Russians disappeared when it became apparent that the transition from central planning to a market economy would not be quick and painless.

President Boris Yeltsin’s era brought Russia a democratic constitution and economic reforms resulting in a deep financial crisis and regional disintegration. Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000 just in time to implement a series of liberal economic reforms that rescued a faltering economy and stopped the spiral of hyperinflation. Putin achieved wide popularity among the Russian population by stabilizing the government. The economy grew both due to Putin’s reforms in banking, taxation, labor, and private property and rising oil prices. Putin’s political and economic policies were predicted to continue with his successor, Russian president Dimitry Medvedev.

In 2002, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-Russia Council was established, giving Russia a voice in NATO discussions. Russia is also a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, the leading nation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a member of the Group of 8, and other international organizations as well. Recently, Russia moved closer politically to the United States, especially after the 11 September 2001 terror attacks. At the same time recent consolidation of presidential powers, certain nationalistic movements, and instances of violation of human rights and freedom of expression prompt the West to question Russian democracy.

## **2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND**

The Russian homeland traditionally extended from the easternmost parts of Europe to the Ural Mountains. Beginning in the 1500s, Russia experienced a massive acquisition of territory. By 1600, Russia was already larger than any other country in Europe and extended eastward all the way to the Pacific



Ocean. By 1800, Russia consisted of much of Eastern Europe, extended well into Central Asia, and even had territorial claims in North America.

As of 2008, Russia is the largest country in the world. It occupies about 17,075,000 sq km (6,592,700 sq mi), covering nearly 12% of the world's land surface. Russia shares land borders with Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia, and North Korea. It is in near proximity (by Russian standards) to the United States, Sweden and Japan. Stretching from Europe to Asia, Russia envelops 11 time zones.

Russia is divided into a complex system of 83 distinct administrative units. This includes 46 *oblasts* (provinces), 9 *krais* (territories), the metropolitan cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, 16 self-governing autonomous republics, 5 autonomous regions, 1 autonomous province (the Jewish Autonomous Oblast) and 4 autonomous *okrugs* (autonomous districts). Until recently, Russia had more units, but after several subsequent merges beginning in 2005 the number of units shrank to 83. Russia's population is about 140 million, and it has been estimated that about 80% of the population consists of ethnic Russians. There are also approximately 3 million people in the

United States who claim Russian ancestry. About 74% of the population lives in urban areas.

For many decades, most Russians were not permitted to freely emigrate from the Soviet Union. Many Russians did settle in the other republics of the Soviet Union, especially in urban or industrial areas. Since the end of the Soviet era, there has been a massive movement of Russians to and from the homeland. Many ethnic Russians in the other former Soviet republics chose to go back to Russia because some of those new governments were pressuring them to leave. At the same time, large number of Russians left and continue to leave Russia for the United States and Europe. Educated but unemployed or underpaid Russians (such as scientists) are now emigrating to the West in search of jobs to match their expertise.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Russian is the official language of Russia. In addition, Russia has more than 140 other languages and dialects. Modern Russian is an Eastern Slavic language. During the 10th century, two Orthodox monks, Cyril and Methodius, wanted to translate the Bible into the Russians' native language. This older language later came to be known as Old Slavonic, and it is

still used by the Russian Orthodox Church. Since the Russians had no written language, the monks created a new alphabet from parts of the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew alphabets to represent the sounds of Old Slavonic. The Cyrillic alphabet, as it is called, is used in Russian and some other Slavic languages (such as Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Serbian, etc.). During the Soviet era, many of the other languages used within the Soviet Union were changed to the Cyrillic alphabet (and now many have changed back), and so there are many other ethnic groups familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet.

Common male first names include Aleksander, Boris, Dmitri, Ivan, Leonid, Mikhail and Sergei. First names for women typically end with an “a” or “ya” sound and include Anastasia, Maria, Natalya, Olga, Sophia, Tatyana, and Valentina. Most of those names come to Russia with Christianity and therefore of Jewish, Greek or Roman origin. Furthermore, there are a few Slavic Russian names dating back to thousand years ago. Among them are Svetlana (of light), Lubov (love), Vera (hope, faith) and Ludmila (beloved by people) used by women and Vladimir (one who owns the world), Svyatoslav (holy glory), Vechelsav (eternal glory), Bogdan (given by God) used by men.

Examples of everyday Russian words include *Kak delah?* (How’s it going?), *da* (yes), *nyet* (no), *pozhaluistah* (please), *spaseebo* (thank you), and *do sveedanniya* (goodbye).

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Russian oral folklore fall into several categories: *bylinas*, legends, fairy tales, animal tales, and tales of everyday life.

Traditional Russian fairy tales are just as likely to have a sad ending as a happy one. A fairy tale hero is usually a prince such as Ivan Tsarevich or a simpleton, such as Emelya Durak (Emelya the Fool). Prominent evil figures include Baba Yaga, a witch who lives in a house on chicken legs; and Koshchey the Immortal, a dragon that can only be killed if the egg that holds the essence of its death is found. More often than not, Russian fairytale is a story about a young man’s or a young women’s venture into the outer world, often dangerous and unpredictable. As a quest, this venture may take spiritual, intellectual or physical forms. Along the way, the hero or heroine is required to perform various tasks ranging from the trivial to the breathtaking. Russian fairy tale heroes often overcome a dangerous quest through the help of magical animals or objects.

Russian heroic tales narrate the epic deeds of *bogatyrs* (mighty warriors). This genre consists of epic songs, known as *bylinas and legends*. *Bylinas* were sung by peasants and date back to before the 16th century. Some of the *bylinas* and legends such as those about Svyatogor the Giant or Volk Vseslavich (Wolf the Almighty) are probably over 1,000 years old. Many of heroic tales are set in an idealized vision of the Kievan Rus age or in Novgorod.

The heroes and heroines of *bylinas* and legends are diverse. Yet they have many commonalities in their goals including the main goal—to defeat the insidious and formidable adversary and liberate the homeland. As a rule, bogatyrs from their very birth demonstrate excessive physical strength and innate intelligence. Since their childhood they are local favorites and acclaimed community leaders admired by both men and women.

In the well-known story “Ivan Tsarevich and Storm Bogatyr” three identical heroes are born at the same moment

as a result of their three mothers drinking a fine soup made of golden-finned pike: Ivan Tsarevich, Ivan the Maid’s son, and Storm Bogatyr, who is also known as Ivan the Cow’s son. They have adventures, such as the mighty struggle on Kalinov Bridge with three Dragons who devastated the county side. All struggles are won by Storm Bogatyr. The dragons’ mothers and wives, powerful witches, try to work the ruin of bogatyrs, but Storm Bogatyr outsmarts them and destroys their plots.

Exaggeration of physical strength in Russian heroic tales is typical not only for male, but also for female personages. Thus, women-warriors, such as the sisters Polyanitsas, easily beat male bogatyrs in multiple contests. No bogatyr except for the main hero can withstand Polyanitsas. In addition to distinguished strength, the woman-bogatyrs are known for their loyalty, extraordinary beauty, and intelligence

Animal tales often deal with humorous interactions among animals that possess human qualities. Two of the most popular animal characters are Lisa Patrikeevna, a smooth-talking and cunning fox, and Mikhail Ivanych, a sometimes clumsy, sometimes wise bear. Through these anecdotes, Russian people convey absurdity of certain situations; laugh at foolishness; praise wisdom and kindness; and address other situations common in life.

More recent in folklore history are tales of everyday life. Such tales often incorporate practical jokes and satire. They illustrate people’s daily troubles and concerns and reveal their hopes and aspirations. It is common for these stories to see an underdog succeed despite great odds.

#### 5 RELIGION

Initially followers of paganism, Russians converted to Christianity in the 10th century. In AD 988, Prince Vladimir of the Kievan Rus state proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of the realm in order to ally his kingdom with the powerful Byzantine Empire. Although keeping close connection with Byzantine canons, Russian Orthodoxy developed its own distinct features and traditions. A typical Russian Orthodox Church is adorned with many icons (images of persons who are revered as holy). Most icons are of biblical characters or saints, but some are of prominent clergy or leaders. Large churches often display an iconostasis (a wall of arranged icons) between the sanctuary and the rest of the church.

Lavish ceremonies on holy days (such as Epiphany and Easter) are well incorporated into Russian Orthodox tradition. Russian Orthodox worship services follow a liturgical format with heavy usage of choirs. The congregation typically stands for the duration of the service (many churches have no pews) and move to various stations around the sanctuary. It is common to see a person of the Russian Orthodox faith cross himself or herself using three fingers, touching first the forehead, then the abdomen, followed by the right shoulder, and ending at the left shoulder (because it is closest to the heart).

During the Soviet era, religious intolerance became official policy. It has been estimated that 85% of all churches were shut down and the property seized. Communist leaders were atheists who perceived the Russian Orthodox Church as a player in the corrupt imperial system of the tsars. The tsars had claimed rule by divine right and were endorsed by the Russian Orthodox Church. To eradicate the Church’s influence, the Soviet government encouraged discrimination against Russians with religious beliefs, and some Russians were imprisoned or killed





*Nesting dolls in front of the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in St. Petersburg, Russia. (© Bo Zaunders/Corbis)*

for their faith. Ironically, the Soviet regime tried to establish its authority by manipulating and utilizing many of the traditional Russian religious symbols, customs, and beliefs to give them a new, Soviet-style meaning. For example, the people represented on icons changed from religious to ideological and political figures (such as Marx, Lenin, and Stalin).

However, the Soviet era did not eradicate religion completely. Many religious activities were conducted secretly. For many people religious and spiritual matters became a strictly personal rather than public affair. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union many of the closed churches reopened. Today, with nearly 5,000 religious organizations, the Russian Orthodox Church accounts for over half the total number of religious groups registered in Russia. Next in numbers come Muslim communities amounting to 3,000. Other religious organizations include Baptists, 450; Seventh Day Adventists, 120; Evangelicals, 120; Old Believers, over 200; Roman Catholics, 200; Krishnaites, 68; Buddhists, 80; Jews, 50; and Unified Evangelical Lutherans, 39.

Muslims are the second largest religious community in Russia. Current estimates indicate that Russia has over 19 million Muslims. They have over 800 parishes and mosques, mostly in Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Kabarda-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Tatarstan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya. Most prominent organizations include the Muslim Board for Central European region and the Moscow Muftiyat. Additionally, Russia has 42 Jewish

communities. Moscow alone accounts for over 10% of Russian Jews, and has three synagogues, one of which is Hasidic.

In recent decades, Buddhism has risen in popularity among Russians. Pockets of newly initiated Buddhists are spread across the whole country, while traditional Buddhism is re-establishing its prominence in Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva, and the Irkutsk and Chits regions. The Russian Federation currently has ten datsun monasteries and multiple Buddhist centers, with the total monastic body approaching 200. Another 10 monasteries are under construction.

Despite several decades of Soviet pragmatism and atheism, superstition and mysticism have long been an integral part of Russian spiritual culture. The Russians today are often more open than other people to the possibility of paranormal activities, such as psychic experiences, mental telepathy, and extra-terrestrial life.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

There are several religious holidays that have been celebrated in Russia for centuries. Among them are Orthodox Christmas, Epiphany and Easter. The origin of one of the world's most famous Christmas traditions began with St. Nicholas of Myra, a patron saint of Russia. For centuries, St. Nicholas was honored in the Russian Orthodox Church with dignity and devotion, playing a central role in Christmas festivities. On Christmas

Eve it was customary to fast until after the first service in the Russian Orthodox Church. With the appearance of the evening star on Christmas Eve, the fast was over. Following the meal, families would walk around the neighborhood singing carols, dressed as the stable animals present at Bethlehem. Meanwhile, St. Nicholas would reward good children with presents.

However, under the Soviet regime, many religious holidays were lessened in importance or forgotten, while new holidays were created. New Year's Day became a major holiday among Russians. It adopted the St. Nicholas tradition replacing St. Nicholas with Grandfather Frost. Marked with conviviality, wonderful meals with friends and family, and songs and fireworks, this holiday is equally loved by children and adults. On New Year's Eve children eagerly await for the Grandfather Frost and the Snow Maiden. The two weeks preceding January 1 and a few days after are full of festivals. Crowds flock to the city square to celebrate with each other the end of the year and to enjoy illuminations, ice sculptures, ice slides, New Year skits, free concerts, champagne, food, and everything else that the festival has to offer.

February 23 or the Day of the Protector of the Motherland honors Russian men. All men receive presents, cards and appreciation. Children make handmade gifts for their fathers and grandfathers. Women's Day, another holiday remaining from Soviet times, is celebrated on March 8. This holiday celebrates women. Mothers, daughters, girlfriends, wives—all women—receive gifts and flowers. Loving husbands and fathers try to grant any wish their wives and daughters might have. First of May is no longer International Workers' Solidarity Day as it was during the Soviet era, but is now a festival known as Labor and Spring Day. Victory Day on May 9 commemorates the end of World War II in Europe and is usually observed as a time to solemnly honor those who died during that war. During that day each city holds numerous parades. The highlight of the day is fireworks. November 4, the Day of National Unity, is the newest Russian holiday. It allows Russians to celebrate their country and pride in their culture and traditions.

Recently, church feasts also have been revived. The Orthodox Christmas is gaining in popularity. It occurs on January 7 (the Russian Orthodox Church still follows the old Julian calendar, which differs from the modern Gregorian calendar by 13 days). Involving church rituals, Christmas is especially honored by the Christian community, but being an inseparable part of Russian culture for centuries, it is currently recognized nationwide. Often a day off, Christmas became another holiday to spend with family and friends. The Russian Church of course honors this day with elaborate rituals and extravagance. Epiphany, which occurs 12 days after Christmas, is another major holy day in the Russian Orthodox Church and is celebrated with much pageantry and symbolism. Easter (in March or April) is the most popular religious holiday. It was celebrated even under the Soviet regime, but now people try to revive Easter customs and traditions that were abandoned after the revolution. Importantly, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists also celebrate their holidays without fear of secular authorities.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Completion of high school or university are important moments that mark the passage into independent life. Entrance into military service is regarded in the same way. Weddings

symbolize path into adulthood and are usually followed by a trip in a special black limousine (crowned with two large interlinked rings on the top) to pay homage and leave flowers at a local memorial. The birth of one's first child and one's first professional job are other events that indicate a change of social status.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Generations of authoritarian influence have helped form a distinct division between public and private behavior in Russian society. This contrast came about because, until recently, people were often hesitant to speak freely in public because of what the government might do to them. In public situations, Russians are often very reserved and formal. However, in private and informal settings, Russians are very cordial and sincere. They often openly show deep feelings of affection when guests arrive and depart.

In public, (i.e. in the street, on the bus), Russians might appear cold and reserved. However, once the ice is broken—for example when a passerby asks for directions, Russians instantly display friendliness and eagerness to help. Russians place a great value in friends. People enjoy visiting each other. It is common to drop by unannounced and share a meal with the host. It is customary for Russians to treat their guests with tea and pastries, cookies, preserves, jams etc. Russians are especially hospitable to the foreigners. For centuries, foreigners and travelers have been revered in Russia. Foreign guests are sure to get the best meal and best possible accommodations.

Russians use patronymics (where the father's first name forms the root of the child's middle name) in formal and business situations. For example, the patronymic for the son of Pavel (Paul) is "Pavlovich," and "Pavlovna" for a daughter. Among adult acquaintances, even casual friends will usually address each other using the first name combined with the patronymic. Among family and friends, many common first names are shortened. For example, a man named Aleksander is often called "Sasha" by his friends and family. Sasha's parents or wife may sometimes call him "Sashen'ka," which would be a term of endearment. However, if they called him "Sashka," it would indicate anger or disappointment with him.

When one Russian asks another "How are you?" there is a genuine and sincere interest; it is not done merely as a courtesy. When asked such a question, it is not customary for Russians to feel compelled to give a short and positive response. To ask someone how they are doing and then to ignore or trivialize their response is considered rude.

War veterans are extremely revered in Russia, particularly anyone who defended or aided Russia during World War II. Along with handicapped persons and expectant mothers, veterans are commonly given preferential seating on public transportation. It is not unusual to see elderly Russian women and men wearing their medals in public, especially on national holidays.

Flowers are an important token of admiration or affection. Flowers are often given as presents when visiting friends, either in a bouquet or as a single blossom. Visiting a local monument or memorial to leave flowers has become a tradition among newlyweds. After an opera or dance performance, Russians often shower the stage with flowers as a sign of delight.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

During the Soviet years, Russians received health care from a large state-run system that provided service free of charge. In theory, this socialist system supposedly served everyone equitably, made use of the most recent technology, promoted preventive medicine, and was open to recommendations from the population. In reality, however, resources were distributed unequally, with political elites receiving the best care and rural citizens served with the least adequate equipment and undertrained personnel. Although medical care was free, many health care professionals moonlighted to make some extra money because official health care usually involved long lines and waiting lists. Although the number of doctors doubled from the 1960s to the 1980s, health indicators such as illness rates, mortality rates, and life expectancy worsened during that time. After the 1990s the situation changed. Now people have to pay for almost all medical care and the system of medical insurance is being established. The visit to renowned specialist is the most expensive. There are still some free services offered for the poorest population, but those services are of inferior quality.

Pregnant Russian women go to special maternity homes for delivery. Newborns are wrapped in swaddling clothes because of the traditional belief that it will help the infant's fragile bones to grow straight. Russian women receive two months of paid maternity leave before delivery and two months of paid leave afterwards, in addition to another year of leave at half-pay.

The communal *banya* (bathhouse), where bathers soak and sweat together, has been a mainstay of Russian culture for centuries. The *banya* is like a large sauna and is especially popular in the winter. Some *banyas* may be open only to either men or women on certain days of the week, while others may have some separate and some combined facilities for both sexes. Russians often carry small birch brooms in the *banya* and will lightly swat themselves and others (if asked) with the birch because they believe that it helps improve circulation and draws out toxins from the body.

Standing in long lines to buy consumer goods was a fact of daily life during the Soviet era. Russians became used to the idea of on-the-go shopping, constantly keeping alert for anything they might need. Some families would even rotate the responsibility of a designated shopper—someone who spent the day standing in lines and looking for available items. Now things are changing. Many supermarkets and new stores are open. They operate 24 hours a day 7 days a week and carry all possible goods. However, not everyone can afford to shop in such stores. The average price for certain foods and other consumer items is higher than in the United States while the household income is much lower.

Today, Moscow is one of the most expensive cities in the world. In 2008, 7 out of the 25 wealthiest people in the world lived in Russia. Still 15% of the population lives below the subsistence level and very few have savings. The gap between rich and poor is rapidly growing and experts estimate that the middle class ranges from one-fifth to one-third of the population. That said, statistics indicate that in 2006 there were 112 fixed-line and mobile subscribers per 100 people in Russia. Purchase of clothes and footwear and other consumer goods has grown. In short, in contemporary Russia people put a lot of value in material things and work very hard to get them.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Russian women typically get married between the ages of 19 and 22, while men are usually between 20 and 24 years old at marriage. Marriages traditionally involved high ceremonies in the Russian Orthodox Church. During the Soviet era, celebration in the church was largely abandoned. Civil marriages became common, and new Soviet marriage customs developed. Couples who decided to marry would have to register at a local office, where they would be assigned a wedding date in advance with enough time to let them reconsider. These new marriage customs included a brief civil ceremony at a town "Wedding Palace," officiated by a woman from the local political council. Today many people include in their wedding a ceremony in the church. Although honeymoons are not a tradition among Russians, due to Western influence they have gained in popularity.

Despite the general lack of housing, Russian society highly reveres parenthood and large families. During the Soviet era, women who gave birth to five or more children were awarded medals and given special titles by the government. Although Russian society favors large families, the birth rate among Russians has been low since the 1970s, as a result of economic uncertainty and a high frequency of abortions among Russian women. This was especially true during the Soviet years, when contraceptive devices were often unavailable. Most urban Russian families have only one or two children, but rural families frequently have more. Recent governments have attempted to ameliorate the low birth rate by giving special rewards and privileges to parents with newly born babies. However, the birth rate is still low.

Russian society often focuses on children, who have a privileged role of honor. Russian adults typically do not hesitate to assist any child in need, and parents will often make tremendous personal sacrifices for their children. It is also common for Russian adults to scold any misbehaving child, regardless of relation.

## 11 CLOTHING

Most Russians wear European-style clothing on a daily basis and for special occasions. Jeans and other types of practical work clothes are often preferred as well. Russians usually try to appear as neatly groomed and dressed as possible when out in public. It is considered important, especially among women, to have clothes of the newest fashion. Many Russians cannot afford an extensive wardrobe, and demonstrate resourcefulness and creativity in getting and wearing garments of high quality. Well made, fashionable shoes are praised both by men and women.

During the winter, it is customary for Russian men and women wear the *ushanka* (fur hat), which has ear flaps that can be tied up or down depending on how cold it is. Many Russians wear fur in the winter—not as a status symbol but because of the harsh climate and the practicality of available fur. Today though, more and more Russians, especially teenagers, wear lighter sporty jackets and winter coats made of synthetic fabrics.

Traditional costumes are usually seen during cultural performances. For young girls costume items include colorful ribbons in the hair and for older women large kerchiefs. Other female garments comprise a long, loose, usually white robe and a bright colored *tsarafan* (dress) worn over the robe. Often



An older Russian woman sells hand-knit goods in an open-air market in Zaraysk, Russia. (Melanie Stetson Freeman/The Christian Science Monitor/Getty Images)

times robe and dress would have elaborate embroidery or lace on them. For men, a traditional outfit consists of a white or red spacious hip-long robe tied on the waist with rope and voluminous pants. Today, traditional headscarves are still widely worn by elderly women. Ethnic patterns are becoming increasingly incorporated into modern clothes. Also, in a recent Miss Russia beauty pageant, there was a traditional dress contest, for which the women had to appear in ethnic attire.

## <sup>12</sup> FOOD

Russians greatly enjoy drinking *chai* (hot tea). A typical Russian meal consists of *pervoye* (first), *vtoroye* (second), *zakuski* (side dishes), and *sladkoe* (dessert). *Zakuski* usually include salads, fish, cold cuts and pickles. Bread is an essential ingredient of every meal. “No dinner without bread,” goes the Russian saying. There are multiple varieties of wheat loaves, rye bread, and other types of bread. Also, Russians eat more rye bread than any nation in the world—a peculiarity of the Russian diet. *Kartoshka* (potatoes) are often served at meals, either boiled, mashed, as pancakes, or as a *kugel* (baked pudding).

Russians can boast an extensive list of traditional soups. *Borshch* is just one of the everyday Russian soups, made with red beets and beef, usually served with a dollop of sour cream. *Shchee* is another popular Russian soup, made from cabbage and meat stock. Another favorite soup is *solyanka*, which is tomato-based and has pieces of fish or meat, olives, and lemon. *Okroshka* is an exquisite cold soup with chopped-up meat, vegetables and broth made of *kvass* (traditional Russian drink made from rye).

*Bliny*, also a part of the national cuisine, are thin crepes served plain or with different types of fillings, and *pirozhki* are fried or baked pasties that usually have a meat or vegetable filling. Russians are great lovers of *pel'meni*—small Siberian meat pies boiled in broth and many enjoy *varenniki*—pot stickers with vegetable filling. Often times *pel'meni* and *varenniki* are served with mustard, horseradish, and/or sour cream. *Ikra* (caviar), a famous Russian appetizer made from harvested sturgeon eggs, is also a part of formal Russian cuisine. *Morozhenoye* (ice cream) is a popular year-round treat.

As the Russian custom has it, a festive table is not worth much without a bottle of good vodka. It is considered that Russian wheat vodka is the world's best. Vodka varieties range from the clear, colorless *Moskovskaya* and *Stolichnaya* to all imaginable flavored kinds with herbs and spices. Of ethnic Russian soft drinks, *kvass* is the best-known. Made of brown bread or malted rye flour, it is particularly appreciated on a sultry summer day.

## <sup>13</sup> EDUCATION

After Russian children are about 1 year old, they go to a day nursery called a *yasli* until they are about 3 years old. From ages 3 to 6 or 7, Russians attend *detski sad* (kindergarten). Elementary school (grades 1–4) is called *nachalnaya shkola*. At age 11, Russian children enter the fifth grade and stay in *srednaya shkola* (high school) through the tenth grade, usually at age 17. At the start of the middle school years, students typically study history, geography, biology, and begin a foreign language. In the eighth and ninth grades, physics, chemistry, and electives are taught. After the ninth grade, a student may follow one of three educational paths: vocational school, professional training at a *tekhnikum* (secondary specialized school), or two years of general high school as preparation for university studies. In order to go to a high school, students need to pass an exam in language and mathematics at the end of the ninth grade. In addition to advanced studies of subjects taught in the middle-school years, Russian high school students study information systems and computer technology, social studies, and astronomy.

Attending a university or science institute is difficult because there is much competition just to get in. There are a series of special examinations, and many students will spend an entire year studying for those tests. A college program takes five years for a masters degree (there is no equivalent to a bachelor's degree in Russian universities) or six years for a medical degree.

Children are often exposed at an early age to systems that stress or value collective efforts. For example, young children in nurseries are typically toilet-trained in large groups. Students in schools often perform in groups and are graded as a team rather than as individuals. Oral and written examinations are given frequently. Teachers will often tell students

their grades out loud, so that each person knows what grade the others received. Schools are often open 12 hours per day, but classes only take up about half of that time. The rest of the time, the school acts as a community youth and recreation center. Russian education emphasizes history, science, and math, and frequent homework assignments usually keep students busy in the evenings. Students are responsible for keeping the classrooms and hallways clean. Extracurricular activities that are not sports (such as clubs, bands, and drama groups) are usually sponsored by the community and not by the school.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Russian cultural heritage goes back over 1,500 years. One of the typical Yuletide observances by Russians is the singing of *kolyadi*, carols that have their roots in pagan culture. The verses usually have no connection to the Nativity but come from old sacrificial songs to the sun, moon, and stars. The themes relate to various gods and goddesses, and typically express the hope for abundant crops. When Russians converted to Christianity, some of the *kolyadi* incorporated Christmas words.

Russian folk music is often played with a variety of instruments. The most well-known folk instruments are probably the *balalaika* (a triangular guitar with three strings) and the *garmón'* (concertina). Some instruments, such as the *gusli* (psaltery), *gudok* (similar to a *rebec*, a primitive violin), *rog* (horn), wooden spoons and *treshchotka* (rattle) have been a part of Russian folk music for centuries.

During the Soviet years, the government tried to control and direct the types of music available. Popular Soviet music featured hundreds of ideological songs for youths, workers, and soldiers. In the 1970s and 1980s, official control over popular Soviet culture began to decrease and some imports of Western music were allowed. Jazz, which had been officially denounced in the past, saw a revival and is very popular among today's Russians. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a surge in the amount of shocking and provocative music in Russian popular culture. This trend is probably a consequence of the decades of censorship that suppressed erotic, religious, and nonconformist artistic expressions.

Classical Russian literature plays a significant role in Russian culture. Poetry recitals, going to plays, and discussing novels are all popular activities for Russians. These activities are enjoyed by Russians of all social levels, not just by an educated elite. Russians usually refer to Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) as the single most influential poet of the Classical era. Other important writers of the Classical era include Ivan Turgenev (1818–81), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–81), Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), and Anton Chekov (1860–1904). Russians revere their poets, playwrights, and authors as popular celebrities.

Each city and town has an impressive array of theaters and cultural centers. The country's most renowned theaters are of course located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Thus, the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow and the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg are two centers that have always been and remain the major cultural symbols of the Russian nation. Being centers of the Russian and international traditions of opera and ballet, the Mariinsky and Bolshoi bring the Russian classical heritage into the context of changing cultural demands of Russian society.

St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum and Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery are among the world's greatest art centers. While

the Hermitage offers an impressive collection of world art, the State Tretyakov Gallery is the national treasury of Russian fine art. The Tretyakov's collection consists entirely of Russian art and artists who have made a contribution to the history of Russian art or have been closely connected with it. The Gallery is home to over 130 000 works of painting, sculpture, and graphics, created throughout the centuries by successive generations of Russian artists.

#### 15 WORK

During the Soviet years, the government controlled the labor market by setting wages and conditions of employment. Individuals, however, did have the freedom of choosing where they wanted to work in later years. The Soviet labor market in the early years was focused on the rapid growth of heavy industries (such as coal mining and steel production) and the collectivization of agricultural production into *kolkhozy* (huge collective farms). Most workers were members of trade unions. The problems that came with bureaucratic control over the labor market, however, were immense. The system was such that workers had no incentive to be productive, while factory managers had little motivation to operate efficiently. A popular saying by workers during the Soviet years that summarizes the situation was, "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us." If there was one good thing about the Soviet system it was that it gave almost equal employment opportunities for women and men.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many workers found themselves without an employer. As a result, unemployment and destitution became visible in post-Soviet society. However, private business and entrepreneurial enterprises blossomed. The transition to a market-oriented economy greatly impacted the work ethic and working style of the Russian population. If before Russians would often work inefficiently and sluggishly, now many employers require their staff to be efficient, detail-oriented, punctual, and hardworking.

Since 2000 the Russian economy has undergone continuing expansion and growth with the annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaging at 6.4% per year. However, this growth is mainly due to the development of the oil and gas sectors. Construction is the fastest growing sector of the economy, expanding by 14%. The main private sector services, including wholesale and retail trade, banking and insurance, and transportation and communications, amount to about 10% of economic growth. In contrast, public sector services such as education, health care, and public administration suffer low investment and low growth.

In general the Russian population is highly educated and skilled. Yet it is largely mismatched to the rapidly changing needs of the Russian economy. Official unemployment has dropped in recent years to 6.9%. At the same time, unemployment remains high with many Russian workers being underemployed. Unemployment is particularly felt among women and young people.

#### 16 SPORTS

About one-fourth of all Russians participate in some kind of sport. Soccer and hockey are popular team sports that Russians (primarily men) enjoy playing as well as watching. Russians usually do not have to look very hard to find a soccer or hockey match on television. Sports societies and organizations

were prominent in the Soviet years, and the government liberally advocated public participation in a wide variety of sports. Many of the former “sports palaces” built by the Soviet government have been converted to health clubs. The role of sports in Russian life makes international competitions, such as the Olympics, very important social rallying events.

Skiing and ice skating are popular recreational activities. Tennis has become increasingly more popular since the mid-1950s. Gymnastics and acrobatics are also prominent, perhaps due to the influence of ballet and the circus on popular culture. Baseball, basketball, and golf have been growing in popularity as well. Women’s boxing has attracted its share of fans in recent years.

Physical activity is stressed as a part of education. When a student is about 11 years old and shows special ability in a particular sport, he or she is often encouraged to switch over to a “sports school.” This type of school has regular academic classes in the mornings and special sports classes in the afternoons.

Russian society is known for its penchant for *shakhmahty* (chess), qualifying it as a sport. The Soviet government began promoting chess in the 1920s as a way to emphasize discipline and training. As its popularity grew, chess masters became highly respected members of society and often received special privileges and honors. Chess instruction starts in kindergarten, and children study the strategies and techniques of champions before they begin serious competition at around age 10. There are thousands of Russian children who have achieved the International Chess Federation’s rank of chess master.

Although Russians are in general avid sport lovers and strive to participate and win gold medals in all possible world contests, such as the Olympics and World Cup, in recent years there has been a shortage of funds for sport clubs and other athletic activities. As a result, many of the best Russian hockey and soccer players take contracts with professional teams abroad.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Russians are fond of outdoor activities. It is not unusual to see people outdoors playing chess or musical instruments and singing, even during the cold winters. The circus is traditionally a popular form of entertainment enjoyed by Russian families. Russia has hundreds of circus schools, where performers train for up to four years to develop and perfect their acts.

Russians also have a strong ballet tradition, which started in 1738. During the reign of the tsars, ballet schools became prominent and were patterned after the classical French style. During the 1800s, many new ballets were choreographed using traditional Russian themes and compositions. Russian ballet is known for its elaborate choreography and stages.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional Russian folk art often utilizes elaborate designs on everyday objects such as wooden spoons, bowls, magazine tables, plates, cutting boards, jewelry boxes, brooches—the list goes on. Ornate designs placed on wooden objects are typically covered with lacquer to ensure the longevity of colors. The patterns sometimes resemble whimsical spirals or other nonrepresentational shapes from fantasy land, but they might also be scenes from fairy tales or of famous people or places.

Some regions and villages in Russia developed their distinct craft tradition. Over the centuries, a given location would perfect the craftsmanship it is known for. Thus, the most popular handcrafts in present-day Russia are named after the region they originated from. For example, the vivid and fanciful gold and red drawings on wood (spoons, bowls, jars etc.) are called Golden *Khokhloma* (after the village of *Khokhloma*). *Gzhel* village gave its name to artistic ceramics of blue and soft pink patterns on white surfaces. Ethnic clay toys are called *Dymkovo* and *Filimonovo* after their respective towns.

Perhaps the best-known lacquered Russian folk art piece is the *matryoshka*, a series of wooden dolls that nest inside each other. The dolls usually depict a woman in traditional dress, but in recent years other themes have become popular, such as political figures and holiday motifs.

Lacquer painting on jewelry boxes and chests portraying various scenes from Russian fairytales and legends is known as *Palekh*, *Mstera* and *Kholui*. The colors employed by *Palekh* artists are so vivid and drawings are so elegant and magical that one can easily perceive the centuries of Russian soul invested in this art. The harmony of colors, cheerfulness, and creative patterns found their way into the decorative tray painting of *Zhostovo* and *Troitskoe*. Then there are of course some regions, including Vologda, Vyatka, and Yelets, that are renowned for their lace making and some that are acknowledged for their imaginative embroidery, golden thread needlework, pattern weaving, and rug making.

Russians also take pride in their artistic metalworking. The most famous metal crafts include *Veliky Ustiug* silver, *Rostov* enamel and *Kazakovo* filigree. Mountain regions in Russia have first-class masters in stone work. Tyva is recognized for carved sculpture while the Ural region can boast its jewelry, sculptures and other articles made of malachite, garnet, and other semiprecious stones. The Ural stonework impresses with its grace and lightness. When one looks at this sculpture long enough, it seems that it is coming to life.

In sum, the expanses of land and centuries of history allowed Russia’s regions to create and master their unique craft traditions, whether they be wood carving, earthenware, artistic ceramics, metalwork, stonework, or lace making. Whatever kind of folk art is regarded, it reflects the richness and diversity of Russia’s soul and the splendor of the works crafted by Russian hands.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians have been forced to confront many of the old social problems that existed during the Soviet era, as well as a new set of problems brought about by the rapid changes in opening up the society. Privatization across Russia has created new opportunities but has also resulted in high unemployment in many areas. Because of high inflation and economic instability, many elderly persons who live off of a government pension are now impoverished. Life expectancy and health rates have plunged as well. Reduced funding for road maintenance and rehabilitation over the last few years and the poor quality of roads and bridges have caused deterioration in Russia’s road network and a growing backlog of needed repairs.

Ethnic hostilities have begun flaring up in some parts of Russia that were either taken over by the Soviet government or conquered during the imperial Russian era. When the So-

viet government collapsed, it provided the instability for some areas to distance themselves or even try to break away from the Russian government. The fiercest fighting of this type so far has occurred in Chechnya, a region in the Caucasus Mountains near Georgia. Thousands of Russian troops have been sent into the area, and many people on both sides have been killed.

Alcohol abuse has traditionally been a problem for the Russians. Temperance movements were not prominent in Russia's history. Family violence in households is often a consequence of alcoholism. Crime rates have risen rapidly in Russia since the end of the Soviet Union, which has made the economic situation even worse. Much of the crime problem is due to the extortion and violence caused by organized crime, which has considerable power in some areas. Organized crime is also aided in some places because of corruption among local politicians and officials. Decades of socialism have encouraged a manner of thinking where class envy is common. Russians, therefore, often scorn the "new rich," who are assumed to be racketeers. Vladimir Putin put significant constraints on oligarchs and the "new rich," but organized crime and corruption remain significant problems.

Right after the breakdown of the Soviet Union prostitution became a popular way for women to make money. Many teenage girls believe that a career in prostitution will pay more than most legitimate professions ever would, regardless of education. About one-fourth of Russia's prostitutes have received some sort of higher education. Although since 2000 the economic situation has improved, female unemployment is still high. The number of girls going into the hospitality business is gradually decreasing, but not very significantly.

Furthermore, currently Russia faces a serious demographic crisis. Russia's population of 142.9 million is rapidly falling. Births lag far behind deaths, the population is aging, and the average male hardly lives to age 60. Cardiovascular disease, cancer, traffic injuries, suicide, alcohol poisoning, and violence are some of the major causes of death. In 2007 life expectancy at birth was only 59 years for men and 73 years for women. In the past 20 years, lower birth rates and higher death rates have reduced Russia's population at nearly 0.5% per year. A substantial increase in HIV/AIDS infections and tuberculosis worsens the problem. Some reports indicate that Russia has one of the highest growth rates of HIV infection in the world, with the estimated number of HIV-infected persons at approximately 3 million.

The Russian government acknowledged that Russia is facing a demographic crisis. President Putin initiated a series of reforms attempting to improve the situation. Reforms included measures to improve birth and mortality rates and increase population through immigration, primarily the return of Russian-speaking foreigners.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

The Soviet ideology promoted equal rights for all, opening the doors for women to enter higher education and professional careers. Continuing this trend, in the period from 1992 to 2000, the number of female students at higher educational establishments rose by 50%. In fact, in 2008 approximately 57% of university students were women and 43% men.

However, despite possessing a higher average level of education, women in Russia earn less than men, averaging 60–70%

of men's wages. Women are underrepresented in legislative bodies and are not represented in the government at all. Female workers face discrimination in employment-related matters, including promotion. Furthermore, most women have to combine professional work with the lion's share of work at home.

At the same time, the unemployment rates of women and men have been roughly equal, standing at 6.7% and 6.5% respectively in 2006. In 2006 women comprised over 48% of the economically active population. In the face of recent political and economic change, men have retained their economic advantage, but women have maintained their presence in the labor market. In fact, some men were experiencing greater problems in adapting to the new Russia than women. Meanwhile, the gender restructuring of employment during transition favors men in a sense that men increased their presence in the now-lucrative, but once female-dominated, spheres of banking and commerce, while women continue to make up the overwhelming majority of employees in the poorly-paid "budget sector" areas of health care and education.

Although women are in a disadvantaged economic position, they appear to be healthier and emotionally happier than men. Data indicate that in 1989 male life expectancy was at 64.3 years of age while in 2008 it barely reached 59. However, female life expectancy proved to be more constant, declining from 74.4 years in 1989 to 73 in 2007. Bearing the main responsibility for the well-being of a family binds women to a web of on-going relations with family members and female acquaintances. By contrast, men's social networks tend to revolve around their workplace. While this undoubtedly has positive effects in terms of job search and promotion prospects, it entails that men's safety networks can be endangered in the face of changes in employment status. Men who become unemployed or marginalized at work can find themselves cut off from their contacts causing men great mental distress. Distressed men often turn to drinking which further intensifies the problem. *Alcohol consumption in Russia is 10 times higher among men than among women.*

In sum, women in Russia are more likely to live in poverty, but it seems that men are more vulnerable to its effects. Women have to cope with the double burden of work and household management, but this has turned out to have hidden benefits in a period of economic crisis, while men's freedom from domestic responsibilities and license to drink have proved very dangerous to their health. Women and men have almost equal opportunities for education, and women have increasingly higher prospects of career advancement, yet men still earn more and dominate in certain positions, including positions in administration and government. Women still have to confront negative gender stereotyping. However those trends are gradually changing. While competition for top jobs and other opportunities is always fierce, the right mindset combined with an excellent education and good contacts can be and is the hammer in women's hands that shatters the foundation of a traditionally patriarchal society.

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—revised by A. Golovina Khadka

## SAKHA

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Yakut

**LOCATION:** Russia (Eastern Siberia)

**POPULATION:** 443,852 (2002 census)

**LANGUAGE:** Sakha (Yakut), Russian

**RELIGION:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity and native religious practices

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The people who call themselves Sakha are termed *Yakut* in some European literature. An older term derived from legends is *Urangkhai Sakha*. The Sakha are the farthest north of the Turkic language speakers. They live in the Sakha Republic of the Russian Federation, in the far east of Siberia. Their territory was called Yakutia, or the Yakut Autonomous Republic, when it was part of the former Soviet Union.

The Sakha claim that their ancestors once lived farther south, and ethnographic and archeological data confirm an area near Lake Baikal for an aboriginal homeland where Sakha predecessors, identified in some theories with the Kuriakon people, may have been part of the Uighur state bordering China. By the 14th century, Sakha ancestors came north, perhaps in small refugee groups, with herds of horses and cattle. After arrival in the Lena valley, they fought and intermarried with the indigenous Evenk and Yukagir nomads.

When the first parties of Russian Cossacks arrived at the Lena River in the 1620s, the Sakha received them with hospitality but also wariness. Several skirmishes and revolts followed, led by the legendary hero Tygyn. By 1642, the Lena Valley was under tribute to the czar. Peace was won only after a long siege of a formidable Sakha fortress. By 1700, the fort settlement of Yakutsk (founded in 1632) was a bustling Russian administrative, commercial, and religious center and a launching point for further exploration into Kamchatka and Chukotka. Some Sakha moved northeast into territories they had previously not dominated, further assimilating indigenous neighbors. Most Sakha, however, remained in the central meadowlands, sometimes assimilating Russians. Sakha leaders cooperated with Russian commanders and governors, becoming active in trade, fur tax collection, transport, and the postal system. Fighting among Sakha communities decreased, although horse rustling and occasional anti-Russian violence continued. For example, in the 19th century, a Sakha Robin Hood named Manchaari led a band that stole from the rich (usually Russians) to give to the poor (usually Sakha).

By 1900, a literate Sakha ("Yakut") intelligentsia was influenced by Russian merchants and political exiles. A party called the Yakut Union resulted. Leaders such as Oiunsky and Amosov led the revolution and civil war, along with Bolsheviks such as the Georgian Ordzhonikidze. The 1917 revolution took several bloody years to consolidate, with extensive opposition to Red forces by Whites (czarists) under Kolchak lasting until 1920, and unrest until 1923. After relative calm during Lenin's New Economic Policy, a harsh collectivization and anti-nationalist campaign under Stalin ensued. Intellectuals such as Oiunsky (founder of the Institute of Languages, Literature and History) and Kulakovsky (an ethnographer) were persecuted in the 1920s and 1930s.



Traditionally, kinship and politics were mixed in a hierarchical council system that guided various levels of Sakha social organization. Sakha ideas of themselves as a people were conveyed by their word *dzhon*, which means “community” or “tribe” in a territorial sense. Councils were composed of ranked circles of elders, usually men, whose leaders, *toyons*, were called nobles by the Russians. Lineage councils decided major economic issues, inter-family disputes, and questions of “blood revenge” for violence committed against the group. Full tribal councils were infrequent, dealing with issues of security, revenge, alliance, and (before Russian control) war. In war, prisoners were captured to serve as slaves in the wealthiest households.

By the 20th century, councils were rare, although the demise of the Soviet Union has led some Sakha to argue for a return of community councils. Under a Sakha constitution passed in 1991, an elected Sakha parliament, called *Il Tumen* (“meeting for solidarity”) has become influential, in addition to an elected Sakha president. A bilateral treaty with Russian Federation leaders signed in 1995 outlined the terms of the republic’s political and economic relationship to the central government.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Sakha Republic covers 3,100,000 square kilometers (1,200,000 square miles), or more than four times the area of Texas, in eastern Siberia. Located at approximately 56°–71°N latitude and 107°–152°E longitude, it is bounded by Chukotka to the northeast, Buriatia in the south, and the Evenk region to the west. Its northern coast stretches far above the Arctic Circle, along the East Siberian Sea, and its southern rim includes the Stanovoi mountains and the Aldan plateau. Its most majestic river, the Lena, flows north along cavernous cliffs into a long valley, and past the capital, Yakutsk. Other key river systems, where major towns have developed, include the Aldan, Viliui, and Kolyma. About 700,000 named rivers and streams cross the territory, which has some agricultural land, but is primarily non-agricultural taiga with vast resources of gold, minerals, gas, and oil. Tundra rims the north, except for forests along the rivers.

Notorious for extremes of long, cold winters and hot, dry summers, the republic has two locations residents claim to be the “coldest on earth”—Verkhoiansk and Oimiakon, where temperatures have dipped to -79°C (-110°F). More typical are winters of 0° to -40°C (32° to -40°F) and summers of 10° to 30°C (50° to 86°F).

Spread throughout the republic, the Sakha are no longer a minority in their own republic. The 2002 Russian census recorded a total population of 949,280 for the Sakha Republic. The Sakha totaled 443,852 (432,290 in the republic) in 2002. The proportion of Sakha in their republic has been gradually increasing. In 1989 they made up 35%, and by 1996 they made up approximately 40%. In 2002 they constituted the single largest ethnic group in the Sakha Republic, making to 45.5% of its population. By contrast in the 1920s, Sakha constituted about 82% of their republic’s population. Sakha outside their republic are mostly in the Far East and the major cities of Russia.

The Sakha have become increasingly urban over the past 20 years, although at a slower rate than the majority Slavic population. Whole villages in central and northern regions remain solidly Sakha, while the major cities of the republic are heavily Russian. The republic population was 65% urban in 1989. In-

terethnic marriages between the Sakha and other groups were as high as 10% in the 1970s, but this percentage had halved by the 1990s. As of 2002 Sakhas were approximately 65% rural dwellers and 35% urban dwellers.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Sakha, more than 90% of whom speak Sakha (or Yakut) as their mother tongue, call their language *Sakha-tyla*. A North-east Turkic language of the Altaic branch of Ural-Altaic, it is divergent from most other Turkic languages, although related to Dolgan. The current Sakha written language, developed in the 1930s, uses a modified Cyrillic script. Before this, several written forms were tried, including a Latin script developed in the 1920s and a Cyrillic script introduced by missionaries in the 19th century. The first books in the Sakha language were published in 1862.

Many Sakha names are variations on Russian, for example, *Iuban* (Ivan). Names sometimes derive from folklore—for girls, for example, *Tuiaarima* (a heroine), *Aisa* (a good spirit), and *Sardana* (a kind of lily), and for boys, *Niurgun* (a hero), *Aisin* (a good spirit), and *Ellei* (an ancestor).

## 4 FOLKLORE

Sakha folklore includes legends of a written language lost after they traveled north to the Lena valley. Oral histories begin well before first contact with Russians in the 17th century. *Olonkho* (epics) date at least to the 10th century, a period of inter-ethnic mixing, tensions, and upheaval that may have been a formative period for Sakha tribal affiliations. Today, few young people memorize the sung epics, which rival in size the Greek *Iliad* or Finnish *Kalevala*, but parts of the epics are performed in contests. Other folklore includes stories of benevolent or malicious animal spirits and the feats of traditional spiritual leaders or shamans.

## 5 RELIGION

Sakha religion derives from Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic, and Russian ideas. Labels such as “animist,” “shamanist,” or “Russian Orthodox” do not suffice. Ideas of sin are syncretized with concepts of contamination and taboo. Saints are seen as shamanic spirit-helpers, as are bears. Christ is identified with the Bright Creator Elder God Aiyy-toyon. A pantheon of gods, believed to live in nine hierarchical eastern heavens, was only one aspect of a complex traditional cosmology that still has meaning for some Sakha. Sakha also believed in the spiritual power of blacksmiths, because iron-working was an important part of traditional Sakha culture.

A crux of belief is the *ichchi* (spirit-soul) of living beings, rocks, trees, natural forces, and objects crafted by humans. Most honored is the hearth spirit, *yot ichchite*, and it is fed morsels of food and drink by believers. Deep in the forest, *al lukh mas* (giant trees) are especially sacred; their *ichchi* are given small offerings of coins, scarves, and ribbons. Belief in *ichchi* is related to ancient ideas of harmony and equilibrium with nature and to shamanism.

Sakha shamanism is a Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic blend of belief in the supernatural with emphasis on the ability of “white,” or benign, shamans to intercede through prayers and séances with eastern spirits for the sake of humans. “Black” shamans, communing with evil spirits, can both benefit and harm humans. Shamans can be male (*oiuun*) or female



(*udagan*), with debate over which gender is more powerful. Shamans use drumming to enter into a trance during séances to ascertain the cause of illness or other problems.

In the 19th century, Russian Orthodox priests spread through Siberia, but their followers were mainly in the major towns. A few Sakha leaders financed the building of Russian Orthodox churches, and many Sakha declared themselves Christian, but this did not mean they viewed Christianity and shamanism as mutually exclusive.

Although shamans with full powers are rare, in the 1990s, urban as well as rural Sakha have adapted shamanic rituals. Current Sakha shamans combine medical and spiritual practice. Despite centuries of Russian Orthodox and Soviet discrediting of shamans as greedy charlatans, some Sakha maintain belief in shamans and supernatural powers. Others, struggling to recover spirituality after rejecting Marxist-Leninist materialism, accept aspects of shamanic philosophy. Still others, influenced by Soviet education and science, reject all religion as superstition.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most important Sakha ceremony, associated with founding ancestor Ellei, is the annual summer *yhyak* festival, a celebration of seasonal change, of *kumys* (fermented mare's milk), and of kin solidarity. It was declared a national republic holiday in 1990. Once religious, and led by a shaman, the ceremony has become a mostly secular celebration of Sakha traditions. Practiced in villages and towns, it features opening prayers (*algys*)

and libations of *kumys* to the earth. Although some debate its "authenticity," the festival still includes feasting, horse racing, wrestling, and all-night line dancing to improvised chants. It lasts three joyous days in Suntar, where it is especially famed. Other major holidays include New Year's, (1 January) and World War II Victory Day (8 May).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional rituals of birth that involved supplicating the goddess of fertility (*Aiyyghyt*) are rarely observed today, and some Sakha women mock the restrictions once associated with beliefs about female impurity. New rituals marking weddings, anniversaries, and graduations at all educational levels involve *serge*, or sacred marker posts, on which names of those honored are carved.

Sakha beliefs accord each person three souls. Before burial, the deceased's spirit is thought to visit every place traveled in life. Family members dress the deceased in finery. On the third day, bearers take the body to the graveyard, where a grave is prepared deep enough to touch permafrost yet shallow enough to be seen by escort spirits. A horse, steer, or reindeer is sacrificed, to help the deceased travel to the land of the dead and to provide food for family and grave preparers. One of the deceased's three souls is believed to travel skyward for life in a lush greenery-filled heaven until possible return in reincarnation. Some Sakha fear that souls, especially those of shamans, can stay on earth and haunt kin. Burial symbolism is observed more in villages than cities and a combination of shamanic and Russian Orthodox ritual prevails.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Travelers from afar once greeted each other with the request "Tell me what is new" and with a discussion of kin connections if the people did not know each other. Variations of this occur today, although most Sakha greetings have become Russified, with handshakes and kissing on both cheeks. To show a more traditional style of affection, people greet and part with a small sniff to the cheek. Couples are restrained in public, but warm and considerate at home. Visiting across considerable distances is common for special family and seasonal occasions. Couples usually meet through friendships of their families or through school, and dating takes place both in groups and more privately.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

With the decline of shamans, most Sakha rely on Western medicine administered in hospitals and clinics. Folk medicine, however, including extensive use of herbal knowledge, is also prevalent. Traditional healers have long periods of apprenticeship and are specialized. There are herbal experts, bone setters, shaman's assistants, as well as various grades of shamanic power.

Housing is Russian in style, often rough-hewn log huts with broad, raised stoves. Many families, even in large towns, rely on outhouses and outdoor water pumps. Some collectives, however, let workers build more substantial individual family homes with modern amenities. Another style of housing is low concrete apartment buildings with indoor plumbing. The largest city is Yakutsk (187,000 in 1989), and the towns of Viliusk, Olekminsk, Neriungri, and Mirny are growing rapidly.

As horse and cattle breeders, the Sakha had a transhumant pattern of summer and winter settlements. Winter settlements comprised as few as 20 people, members of several closely related families who shared pasture land and lived in nearby yurts (*balagan*) with surrounding storehouses and corrals. The yurts were oblong huts with slanted earth walls, low ceilings, sod roofs, and dirt floors. Most had an adjoining room for cattle. They had substantial hearths and fur-covered benches lining the walls, with sleeping arrangements made according to social protocol. Yurts faced east, toward benevolent deities. In summer, families moved with their animals to larger encampments. The most ancient summer homes, *urasy*, were elegant conical birchbark tents, some of which could hold one hundred people. Their ceilings soared above a circular hearth at the center point and around the sides were wide benches placed in compartments that served as ranked seating and sleeping areas. Every pole or eave was carved with symbolic designs of animals, fertility, and lineage identities. By 1900, however, *urasy* were rare; summer homes became yurts or combination yurt-log cabins. By 1950, yurts too were obsolete, found only in a few museums. In the 1990s, new versions of collectives still send workers to summer sites to graze cattle away from large villages, and some families are returning to homestead-style cattle breeding.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Key kin relations are based on a patrilineage (*aga-usa*) that traces membership back as far as nine generations. Within this, children born to a specific mother are distinguished as a group (*ye-usa*) and may form the basis for different households (*korgon*). Historically, more distant kin were recognized on two levels, the *aimak* (or territorial *nasleg*), with 1 to 30 lineages, and the *dzhon* (or territorial *ulus*), composed of several *aimak*. These larger units were united by common defense alliances and economic relations and reinforced by councils and festivals. A lineage head was *bis-usa-toyon*, while respected warriors and hunters were *batyr*. Kin terms reflect gender and age distinctions, marking senior paternal lines from junior ones. All relations are called *uru*, which is also the term for wedding.

Wedding rituals, pared down from previous eras, center around carved memorial posts, with couples honored by blessings, special food, and dancing. Earlier (and sometimes today), a dual celebration would go from the bride's household to the groom's, where the couple traditionally lived. Since the 1970s, interest in aspects of ritual and gift exchange has been revived, although few couples are paired through matchmakers as previously. Multi-generational families often live together, although the movement of young families to cities has made smaller, less-extended families a more recent norm.

Traditionally marriage could be polygamous for wealthy Sakha. Monogamy was more common, however, with occasional remarriage after the death of a spouse. Arranged marriages were sometimes politically motivated. Patrilineage exogamy (marriage of a Sakha man to a non-Sakha woman) was reckoned with strictly; those one could marry were called *sygan*. Until the 1920s, marriages had many stages involving financial, emotional, and symbolic resources of the bride's and groom's extended families. This included a matchmaking ritual; several formal payments of animals, furs, and meat to the bride's family; informal gifts; and extensive dowries. Some

families allowed poor grooms to work in their households as replacement for "bride wealth." Occasionally bride capture occurred and may have been more common in pre-Russian times.

By customary law, land, cattle and horses were controlled by the patrilineage although used by households. Inheritance or the sale of animals or land had to be approved by elders. Men owned most of the wealth, and passed it down to sons, especially elder sons, although the youngest son often inherited the family yurt. Mothers could pass on dowries to daughters, unless the dowry had been forfeited by bad behavior. In theory, dowries included land as well as goods, jewelry, and animals, although in practice elders rarely gave land to another lineage. Soviet law limited inheritance, but new land laws have made families with small plots more secure. In addition, most apartments and summer houses are kept in families.

Children were reared to be good workers, with boys racing, hunting, playing games of strength while girls learned domestic tasks. Girls were expected to be shy, learning taboos that would become important in a husband's household. With education, however, youth, especially girls, have more freedom. After training, many opt to live away from their rural homes. Even so, the values of Sakha pride, language fluency, and the advisability of endogamy (marriage to other Sakha) are strongly instilled.

## 11 CLOTHING

Sakha women are fashion conscious, with a strong sense of style and access to European magazines. However, for weddings and the annual *yhyakh* holiday, women are returning to versions of traditional flowing gowns with ribbons and appliqué. Fur appliqué on coats and strong colorful designs on vests (especially with green and red) merge old and new styles. Long silver and gold earrings and elaborately carved breast and headdress jewelry are popular, especially since the resurgence of traditional Sakha crafts in the republic. Men usually wear European-style casual and more formal clothing. Both genders prefer beautifully made fur hats, coats, and boots during the cold winters.

## 12 FOOD

Dairy products and meat from cattle and horses are especially valued. Diet is augmented by hunting (deer, elk, squirrel, hare, bear, ferret, and fowl) and fishing (salmon, carp, *muk-sun*, and *mundu*). Because of Russian influence, agricultural products (cereals and vegetables) are grown or bought in stores and markets. Mildly alcoholic fermented mare's milk, *kumys*, varies in processing and taste, with one bubbly style considered the "champagne" of this traditional Turkic drink. A heavy whipped cream with berries called, *kerchek*, is labor-intensive and therefore a special treat. Horse-meat kabobs cooked over an open fire are served at holidays, and when the horses have been raised for their meat, the kabobs are tender. Bread and waffles have become popular through Russian influence.

Utensils are store-bought and European-style, although traditional carved wooden bowls and spoons are valued as serving implements. Carved wooden *kumys* cups, called *choron*, come in many sizes. With a single stem or three carved legs, they are said to be the shape of a woman's breast and symbolize fertility.



*Klaudia and German Khatylaeva are a husband and wife team of professional performers from the Sakha Republic. They performed at the Tibet House in New York, New York, on this their first visit to the United States. (© Viviane Moos/Corbis)*

### 13 EDUCATION

Before the Russian Revolution, a few Sakha children attended missionary schools, but most were illiterate. Literacy campaigns for both children and adults in the 1920s and 1930s improved basic education. The turmoil of Stalinist policies and World War II left many Sakha without their traditional homesteads and unused to salaried industrial or urban work. Education improved their chances of adaptation and also stimulated interest in the Sakha past.

By the 1980s, the intelligentsia of the republic was dominated by indigenous men and women in prestigious cultural, scientific, and political jobs. A Sakha man was director of the gold ministry, and a Sakha woman was head of the republic legislature. The Yakutsk State University was a main mechanism for advancement, as were various Russian Academy of Sciences institutes. In the 1990s, not every Sakha child who wants higher education can obtain it, but most Sakha have a high school education and know Russian. Technical schools and on-the-job training improve career chances, but republic leaders recognize that educational reform is needed. There are debates over the goals of education and the level to which training should continue in the Sakha language.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sakha linguists proclaim that the Sakha language, in oral and written form, has metaphoric flexibility that lends itself to poetry. Continuity of folk arts is strongest in exuberant improvisational poetry that accompanies a type of line dancing, called *ohuokhai*. A leader sings out a line of verse, which other dancers repeat in unison, giving the leader a chance to think of the next line. This rhythmic dance goes on for hours, traditionally during weddings and the seasonal summer celebration, but recently also at clubs. Similarly, a revival of the twanging mouth harp, *khomus*, has spread beyond its original familial and shamanic ritual context onto the Sakha stage.

Filmmakers, theater groups, opera, and dance companies enrich Sakha cultural life with performances that build on traditional themes in new ways. Tension between Russian influence and pride in Sakha identity is clear in many works. Sakha novelists and playwrights, such as Suoron Ommolon, have adopted Sakha pseudonyms, though their readers usually know their Russian family names. Sakha ethnographers explore their roots in widely read works.

## 15 WORK

In such a harsh climate, pastoralism requires homestead self-reliance, with intense devotion to calves and foals. Before 1917, rich families owned hundreds of horses and cattle while poor ones raised a few cattle or herded for others. Wealthy Sakha hunted on horseback using dogs. The poorest Sakha, without cattle, relied on fishing with horsehair nets and, in the north, herding reindeer like their Evenk and Yukagir neighbors. Sakha also engaged in the fur trade, relying on squirrel by the 20th century when luxury furs (ermine, sable, and fox) were depleted. Sakha merchants and transporters spread throughout the entire Northeast, easing communications and trade for natives and Russians. Staples such as butter, meat, and hay, plus luxuries such as silver and gold jewelry, carved bone, ivory, and wood crafts, were sold. Barter, Russian money, and furs formed the media of exchange. Guns were imported, as was iron for local blacksmiths.

Although occupations within a household were divided by gender and status, the atmosphere was usually one of productive group activity. Haymaking, cattle herding, and milking were done by all, although horses were more a male preserve and cattle a female responsibility. Women tended children and fires, prepared food, carried water, and made clothing and pottery. Men handled firewood preparation, house building, sled making, hunting, fishing, and mowing. Ivory carving and wood and metalworking were male tasks.

## 16 SPORTS

Horse racing is one of the most popular sports, and it is featured at the annual summer *hyakh* festival. Traditional male sports of wrestling, balancing across poles, rock lifting, hurdles and foot racing hone important skills and remain popular at festivals. Victors are awarded legs of cooked meat as well as more modern commercial prizes.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

On dark winter nights, long epics were the most valued form of entertainment. A single traveling tale singer would take the parts of all the characters in a given drama, and families would cluster around a hearth for several nights running. Traditional tales have recently been transformed onto the stage and into movies by skilled Sakha artists. Other traditional entertainment included songs (*lada*), riddles, and comic, fast-paced tongue-twister dialogues.

There is television in nearly every Sakha home, introducing Sakha viewers to international films, news, and soap operas. But a Sakha language channel also offers home-grown popular songs and comedy, programs on nature, and critical commentary on issues of the day.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Iron-working from marsh ore preceded imported iron, just as ceramics from local clay preceded Russian pottery. Most home-made crafts are for household use, and include birchbark containers, leather bags, dairy-processing equipment, horsehair blankets, fur clothing, benches, hitching posts, and elaborately carved wooden containers. Sakha art takes many forms, sometimes rooted in ritual life, although since the Soviet period, it is often secular and commercial. Silver and gold jewelry, once considered talismanic, is now enjoyed for its aesthetic value.

The Sakha were once famous for their bone carvings, which included boxes, pipes, chess pieces, and dagger hilts. The most famous carvings were made from ancient mammoth bones and tusks that had been found in ice. Famed for ivory and wood carving, Sakha artists have recently branched out into graphic art, painting, and sculpture. A group of young artists called Flagiston brings traditional shamanic themes into new mediums.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

During most of the Soviet period, crime was covered up with false statistics by Soviet officials engaged in corruption. In addition, elite Sakha helped kin obtain jobs and political positions that built on traditional obligations and were not defined by locals as corrupt. Bad Soviet management, nuclear testing, and disastrous mining practices have left the republic with serious social and economic problems. An environmental movement has formed in response, as well as some political reform agitation. Demonstrations erupted on Yakutsk streets several times in the 1980s, mostly by young Sakha protesting police inaction over violent incidents involving Russians and Sakha. Tensions exist between newcomers and natives, developers and environmental activists, and "internationalists" and "nationalists." Alcoholism and unemployment rates have increased since the Soviet collapse, thus aggravating already existing problems.

Non-Sakha indigenous minorities, such as the Evenk, Even, and Yukagir, have demanded greater cultural and political rights. In response, a national district, Eveno-Bytantaisk, was established in 1989 in the republic, and local self-rule councils are developing.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In traditional Sakha society the subsistence economy and its division of labor strongly affected gender roles. With the establishment of collective and state farms during the Soviet era women were integrated into the Soviet labor force and the Soviet workplace, particularly during and after the Second World War. While child-rearing and household duties generally remained the realm of women, Soviet Sakha women also gained access to educational opportunities. Divisions of labor continued through the 20th century in households of rural collectives, although possibilities for both sexes have expanded. Women now hunt, fish, and engage in crafts once associated with men. They have become doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, bookkeepers, and politicians, and some work in the growing industrial sector. Men are engineers, tractor drivers, geologists, teachers, doctors, managers, and workers in the lucrative energy, metallurgy, gold, diamond, and building industries.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in some rural Sakha communities the lines between division of labor have blurred to some degree, with men sharing household duties and also being involved in herding activities that beforehand had largely been the realm of women.

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—revised by A. Frank

## SAMI

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Lapps, Samer

**LOCATION:** Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia

**POPULATION:** About 100,000

**LANGUAGE:** Sami language in many dialects; also language of country in which they live

**RELIGION:** Lutheran

### 1 INTRODUCTION

While the Sami (also spelled Saami), or Lapps (as they were formerly called), are commonly thought of as the inhabitants of Lapland, they have never had a country of their own. They are the original inhabitants of northern Scandinavia and most of Finland. Their neighbors have called them Lapps, but they prefer to be called *Samer* or *Sami* (pronounced "Sa-mee"). (They refer to their land as *Sapmi* or *Same eatnam*.)

The Sami first appear in written history in the works of the Roman author Tacitus in about AD 98. Nearly 900 years later, a Norwegian chieftain visiting King Alfred the Great of England spoke of these reindeer herders, who were paying taxes to him in the form of furs, feathers, and whale bones. Over the centuries many armed nations, including the Karelians, Swedes, Danes, Finns, and Russians, demanded their allegiance and taxes. In some cases, the Sami had to pay taxes to two or three governments, as well as fines imposed by one country for paying taxes to another.

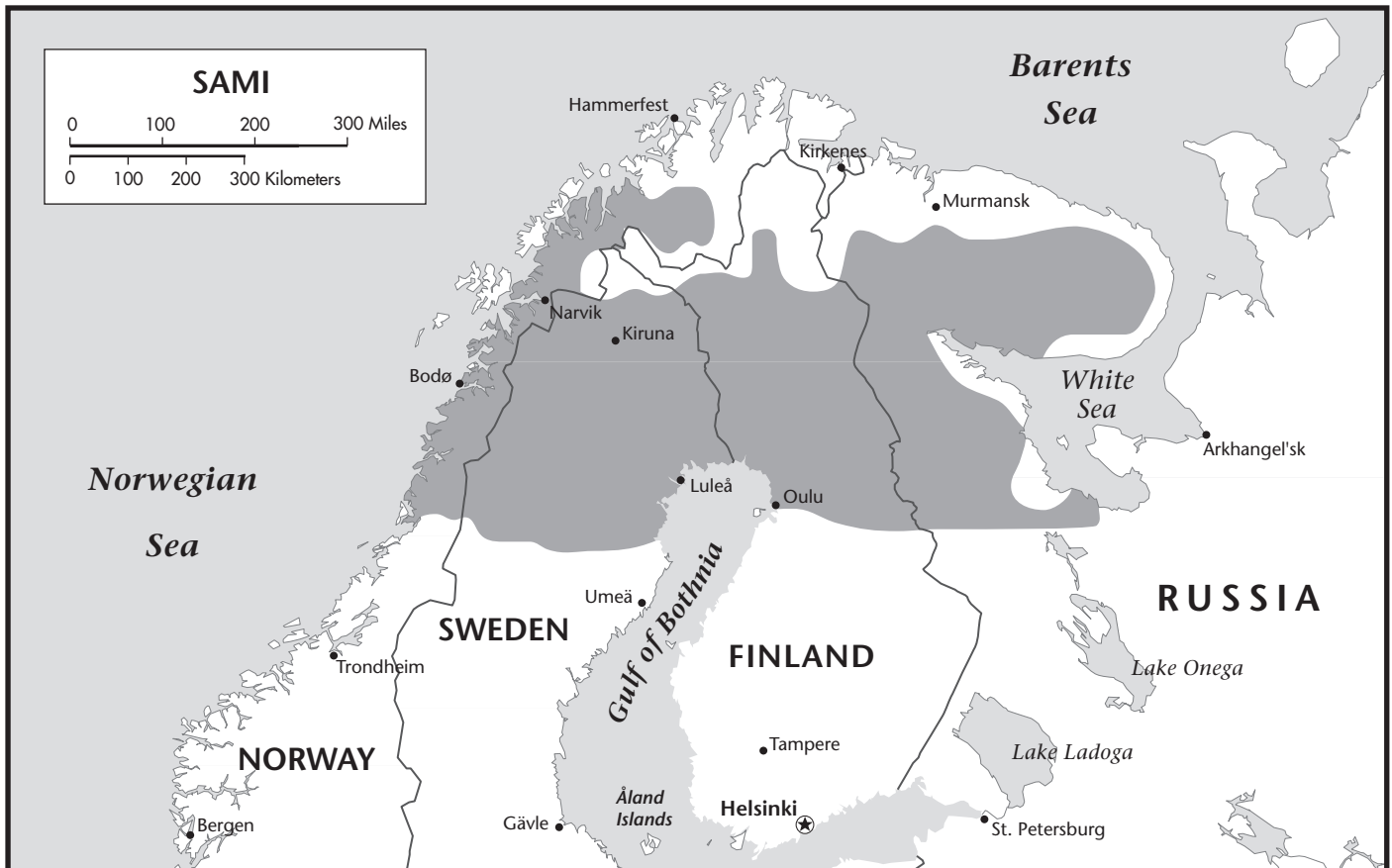
The Sami are now citizens of the countries within whose borders they live, with full rights to education, social services, religious freedom, and participation in the political process. At the same time, however, they continue to preserve and defend their ethnic identity and traditional cultural values. Until the liberalization instituted by the Gorbachev government in the late 1980s, the Russian Sami had almost no contact with those in other areas. Sami living in Finland, Sweden, and Norway formed the Nordic Sami Council (Nordisk Samerad) in 1956 to promote cooperation between their three populations. In 1992, the Russian Sami joined the organization, which then changed its name to the Sami Council (Sameradet). The Sami Council secretariat, based in Utsjoki, Finland, has had advisory status within the United Nations since 1989.

In 1973 the Nordic Sami Institute at Kautokeino, Norway, was founded to promote the study of the Sami language and culture and, in 1989, a Sami College was established there as well. The universities of Tromsø in Norway, Umeå in Sweden, and Oulu in Finland have Sami departments in which Sami topics are taught, both separately and as part of established disciplines.

### 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Sami live in tundra, taiga, and coastal zones in the far north of Europe, spread out over four different countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula in Russia. They live on coasts and islands warmed by the Gulf Stream, on plateaus dotted by lakes and streams, and on forested mountains. This land area inhabited by the Sami is referred to as the *Sapmi*.

Sami territory lies at latitudes above 62° north, and much of it is above the Arctic Circle, with dark, cold winters and warm,



light summers. It is often called the land of the midnight sun, which, depending on the latitude, may be visible for up to 70 days in the summer. The far north sees almost three months of continuous daylight. Balancing this out, however, is an equally long period of darkness in the winter, which may last from October to March. Beginning in November, the sun disappears for weeks. Much of the Samis' land is at high altitudes, rising to over 1,829 m (6,000 ft) above sea level. The highest point is Kebnekajse, at 2,121 m (6,960 feet).

Traditionally, the Sami lived in a community of families called a *siida*, whose members cooperated in hunting, trapping, and fishing. While exact numbers are not available, the Sami population in the four major countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia has been estimated at 70,000 and 100,000 (or more). It is thought that between 60,000 and 100,000 live in Norway, 15,000 to 25,000 live in Sweden, over 6,000 live in Finland, and about 2,000 live in Russia. However, some think the actual number is considerably higher, perhaps up to 200,000. For many years, the Sami culture and way of life were disparaged by their neighbors, causing many to conceal their true identity. Thus, it is difficult to know how many Sami there actually are.

### **3 LANGUAGE**

Sami is a Finno-Ugric language that is most closely related to Finnish, Estonian, Livonian, Votic, and several other little-known tongues. While it varies from region to region, it does so based on the lifestyle of the Sami people rather than on the

national boundaries of the lands in which they live. In fact, the present official definition of a Sami is primarily a linguistic one. There are several distinct dialects; however, the language is usually grouped into three main categories: Eastern Sami, Central Sami, and Southern Sami. Today, almost all Sami also speak the language of their native country.

Sami is rich in words describing reindeer, with words for different colors, sizes, antler spreads, and fur textures. Other words indicate how tame a reindeer is or how good at pulling sleds. There is actually a separate word describing a male reindeer in each year of his life. A poem by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, recipient of the Nordic Council prize, consists mainly of different Sami words for different kinds of reindeer. There are also hundreds of words that differentiate snow according to its age, depth, density, and hardness; terms exist for powdery snow, snow that fell yesterday, and snow that is soft underneath with a hard crust.

The availability of schooling in the Sami language has become an important issue to those concerned with the preservation of the Sami culture and way of life. In 1995, the Norwegian government issued the Sami Language Act, allowing for the use of Sami as an official language in several municipalities. Finland and Sweden have since passed similar acts. Sami may be used as the language of instruction throughout primary and secondary school. Sami is taught and studied at the university level as well.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Traditionally, the Sami believed that specific spirits were associated with certain places and with the deceased. Many of their myths and legends concern the underworld. Others involve the Stallos, a race of troll-like giants who ate humans or sucked out their strength through an iron pipe. Many tales involve Sami outwitting the Stallos.

Some of the Sami epics trace Sami ancestry to the sun. In the mid-19th century, a Sami minister, Anders Fjellner, recorded epic mythical poems in which the Daughter of the Sun favored the Sami and brought the reindeer to them. In a related myth, the Son of the Sun had three sons who became the ancestors of the Sami. At their deaths they became stars in the heavens, and can be seen today in the belt of the constellation Orion.

#### 5 RELIGION

The traditional Sami faith contained elements of animism, shamanism, and polytheism. The Sami believed that both living beings and inanimate objects, such as trees, had souls. A priest or shaman, called a *noaidi*, acted as an intermediary between the spiritual and material worlds. He would consult with the dead while in a trance, induced by beating on a magic drum and performing a special kind of chanting called *yoik*.

Over the course of time, all of the Sami were converted to Christianity, either by choice or by force of assimilation through the governments of the countries in they live. One major move toward Christianity was brought about through the efforts of Lars Levi Laestadius, an evangelical Congregationalist who was the founder of the Laestadian Lutheran Church in the 19th century. Today, most Sami practice the dominant Lutheran religion of the Nordic countries in which they live.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Sami observe the major holidays of the Christian calendar. Every Easter, a big festival is held at Kautokeino in northern Norway, complete with typical Sami entertainments, including sledge races and *yoik* singing. Many couples choose this setting for their weddings. Many Sami observe Finland's "little Christmas" (*Pikkujoulu*) early in December, marking the beginning of festivities that last through the twenty-sixth of the month. On Christmas Eve, special "midday trees" are adorned with candles, silver, and gold ribbons, and other decorations. After readings from the Gospels, a festive meal is eaten, typically consisting of salmon, ham, vegetables, and rice pudding. Boxing Day on December 26 is marked by sledge rides, lasso throwing, and other traditional games.

Secular holidays include the large spring celebrations held by the Sami every year, occasions on which they don their best clothes and gather with friends to mark the end of winter. Since 2004, Sami National Day has been celebrated on February 6 in Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Finland. The day commemorates the establishment of the first Sami congress in Norway in 1917. In Norway, Sami National Day is observed as a flag day by the government, meaning that both the Norwegian flag and the Sami flag are flown from the Government Administration Complex and the Storting (parliament building) on that day.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Sami observe major life cycle events within the Christian tradition.

Sami weddings are festive affairs and are primarily the responsibility of the bride's parents. In one traditional secular courtship ritual, a man circled the *lavvo* (tent) of his lover with his reindeer and sledge; if the woman regarded his suit favorably, she came out and unharnessed the reindeer.

Sami funerals and burials are generally conducted according to Lutheran customs. The Sami have little interest in an afterlife.

#### 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Sami society is traditionally open and egalitarian, and the Sami are known for their courtesy and hospitality to outsiders. They willingly accept other Sami who may not be full-blooded; a person's attitude toward the treasured Sami language and traditions are more important than bloodlines. A knowledge of the Sami language is considered one of the main ways of identifying someone as a Sami.

#### 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

As a nomadic people, the reindeer-herding Sami traditionally maintained permanent dwellings, sometimes more than one, and spent part of their time living in tents. The permanent homes were either frame buildings or sod huts. The Sami tent, called a *lavvo*, has a circular framework of poles leaning inward like the teepee or wigwam of Native Americans and a floor of birch twigs covered with layers of reindeer fur. Both tents and huts are arranged around a central fire. Today, most Sami, who are no longer reindeer herders, live in typical Scandinavian houses with central heating and running water. Family life typically centers on the kitchen.

The Sami receive the same level of health care as other citizens of the countries in which they live. Like their Scandinavian neighbors, they have a high rate of heart disease. However, Sami are often active and well into their 80s. They sometimes supplement Western-style medical care with home remedies or treatment derived from old beliefs in the curing power of the word of the shaman, or medicine man.

#### 10 FAMILY LIFE

Traditionally, the Sami lived in a group of families called a *siida*. Today, the nuclear family is the basic social unit among the Sami, and families are close-knit with lavish attention paid to the children. The Sami language contains an unusually large number of words that refer to family relationships. Traditionally, the males of the family were occupied with herding, hunting, and making boats, sleds, and tools, while the women cooked, made clothing and thread, and cured the meat. Each family had its own mark (and children had their own marks as well). Herding families use these marks to distinguish their reindeer from those of other families.

#### 11 CLOTHING

Some Sami still wear the group's brightly colored traditional costume, known as a *kolt*. It is most easily recognizable by the distinctive bands of bright red and yellow patterns against a deep blue background of wool or felt. These bands appear as decorations on men's tunics (*gaktis*), as borders on the wom-



en's skirts, and on the hats of both sexes. Men's hats vary from region to region; some are cone-shaped while others have four corners. Women and girls may drape fringed scarves around their shoulders. Warm reindeer-skin coats are worn by both sexes. The traditional Sami might wear moccasins of reindeer skin with turned-up toes, fastened with ribbons. However, they wear no socks. Instead, they stuff their moccasins with soft sedge grass to protect their feet against the cold and dampness. Today, many Sami wear the styles of clothing typical to their home country, saving the kolt for special ceremonies.

## 12 FOOD

Reindeer meat has been a traditional dietary staple. Even the reindeer's blood is used for sausages. Fish caught in the many lakes of the Sami's homelands are eaten boiled, grilled, dried, smoked, or salted. Wild berries are another mainstay of the Sami diet, especially the vitamin C-rich cloudberry. To help them stay warm and alert in their cold environment, the Sami drink coffee throughout the day. Supper is the main meal of the day.

## 13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, Sami children learned what they would need to know as adults by observing and helping their parents. The goal of education was not simply to acquire more knowledge but to become a better citizen. In modern society, many Sami still maintain this attitude toward education and prefer an experiential approach to learning. Sami often attend the schools in the countries in which they live. However, there are now schools within Norway and Sweden where most of the subjects are taught in the Sami language. Sámi Allaskuvla, a Sami university, was established in Norway in 1989.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Sami have a rich tradition of oral storytelling. A Sami tradition that has recently been revived is the singing or expression of the *yoik*. The *yoik* might be considered as both a form of poetry and of song; however, the melody is based on non-Western scales and what might be considered as non-melodic vocalizations. Traditional *yoiks* are typically unaccompanied. They do not generally tell a narrative story, as the typical Western song might. Instead, a *yoik* presents an idea, a memory, or an emotion through the use of melody, rhythm, facial expressions, and gestures, as well as words. The *yoik* resembles the Native American practice of "melodizing" a feeling or mood. As new generations of Sami and their European neighbors have rediscovered the *yoik*, they have added to and reshaped the tradition. Musicians of pop, rock, and folk music have added *yoik* techniques and melodies to their music. An annual Sami Music festival is held in Kafjord, Norway.

The earliest Sami literature dates back to about the 17th century, with the earliest texts relating to religion and the Sami language, such as alphabet books. In 1991, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää of Finland became the first Sami writer to win the Nordic Council prize for literature with his book *Beaivi, Áhcázan* (*The Sun, My Father*).

The revival of the Sami language in recent years has also opened the door for the creation of Sami language theater productions, films, and newspapers.

## 15 WORK

About 10% of the Sami population in Sweden is still nomadic reindeer herders, making treks of up to 220 miles to provide pasture for their herds, which average about 500 animals. In 1947, Sami reindeer breeders formed the National Association of Norwegian Reindeer Breeders, which today plays an important role in the development of modern reindeer breeding. Handicrafts are a major source of income for some Sami, who find eager markets among tourists. While some Sami still work in the traditional occupations of fishing and hunting, a growing number of Sami live in urban areas and work in a wide variety of common occupations.

## 16 SPORTS

Outdoor recreation for the Sami is closely linked to the activities that provide their sustenance. They enjoy competing to see who can throw their reindeer lassos the farthest and with the greatest precision. Reindeer-drawn sledge races are another popular leisure-time activity, especially at the Easter festivals in the heart of Sapmi, which many tourists also frequent. Skiing is a popular sport among the Sami, who believe that their own ancestors were the inventors of skis. Soccer has also become a popular sport among the Sami.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Sami entertainment is provided both by expressive activities, including storytelling and *yoiking*, and physical contests such as sledge racing, skiing, lasso throwing, and soccer matches. The Sami also participate in the wide variety of entertainment options enjoyed by their fellow Scandinavian citizens.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The traditional style of Sami arts and crafts is known as *duodji*. Sami crafts usually had a very practical purpose in daily living, such as tools and utensils that are made from bone, wood, and reindeer antlers. However, these items are often highly decoration, designed to be pleasing to the eye as well as useful. *Duodji* has a spiritual aspect as well as a material one. Items are usually made from natural materials, with the expectation that they will be worn down and even destroyed through repeated use, perhaps to remind the user that all natural life is only temporary. Modern art in the Sami tradition is known as *Dáidda*, and includes items that are generally meant for display, rather than use. The Sami have also perfected a special kind of ribbon weaving. Their crafts are popular tourist purchases, although the Sami save many of their creations for their own use, and much of their artistic talent goes into the elaborate braided designs of their costumes.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In recent years, the Sami homelands have been affected by the encroachment of mining and logging concerns, hydroelectric power projects, communication networks, and tourism. A controversy that received particular attention was the building of the Alta hydroelectric dam in Norway, which flooded reindeer pastures important to the region's Sami herders. A group of Sami protesters traveled to the capital city of Oslo, where they set up *lavvos* (tents) in front of the Norwegian parliament and began a hunger strike. While their cause was unsuccessful,

their actions drew worldwide attention to their threatened way of life.

Since 1968, the National Association of Norwegian Sami (NSR) has been working actively for Sami political rights, as well as improvements in cultural, social, and economic conditions. Norway, Sweden, and Finland all have separate Sami parliaments addressing issues of concern for the Sami.

The Sami were also affected by the 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl in Ukraine, which contaminated some of their grazing areas, making their reindeer potentially unsafe for them to market or eat themselves. Fish, berries, and drinking water in the affected areas were poisoned as well. Another problem for the Sami has been the increase of tourists from the south, who deplete important Sami resources, such as gamebirds, fish, and berries, without actually bringing much money into their community.

Besides displacement by roads and other forms of development, the livelihood of the Sami herders is also threatened by overgrazing and uncontrolled breeding, which results in smaller, less healthy animals, and it is hard for the migrant Sami to find alternative forms of employment.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

There has been some evidence to indicate that the traditional Sami embraced a matriarchal culture, in which women held a high level of authority in both the community and in the family. The tasks of raising children and providing food and clothing for the family were considered to be of great importance. Since women were the ones trained in accomplishing these tasks, women were held in high esteem. Traditional Sami religion, which included a number of female deities, may have also supported a culture in which men and women were viewed as equals. However, the introduction of Christianity and the influence of more dominant cultures resulted in a loss of authority to women. New Christian men and women were taught that women should be submissive to men. Assimilation into other Scandinavian societies also inspired a shift toward a more patriarchal attitude.

A Sami feminist movement began in the 1970s at the initiation of female reindeer herders who expected equality with their male herders. In 1988, Sami women formed the organization known as Sarahkka, which works to resolve issues important to Sami women. The group became a central force in the formation of the World Council for Aboriginal Women in 1989. Sarahkka continues to focus on projects that lead to greater education and social development among women.

Many Sami women still consider raising children and passing along the traditions and beliefs of their culture as their most important roles. These roles are also generally respected within Sami society. The creation and sale of *duodji*, traditional Sami handicrafts, has been taken up by some women as a primary or secondary source of income. Some Sami women, particularly in urban areas, have taken jobs typical of their female counterparts from their home countries. Sami women have also been elected to seats in the Sami parliament.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# SAMMARINESE

**LOCATION:** San Marino  
**POPULATION:** 29,973 (2008 est.)  
**LANGUAGE:** Italian; Romagna  
**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The tiny nation of San Marino, located completely within the borders of Italy, is Europe's third-smallest country and its oldest independent republic. The people of San Marino are called Sammarinese. For hundreds of years, their country's mountaintop fortifications helped it maintain some distance from the recurrent power struggles that engulfed their region until the unification of Italy in the 19th century. Since then, a mutual defense treaty has guaranteed San Marino's continuing political independence from Italy, and the two nations have also formed a customs union. Today San Marino's primary sources of income are tourism, light manufacturing, and the sale of postage stamps to collectors throughout the world.

The only one of Italy's historic city-states to survive as an independent nation, San Marino had its beginnings in AD 301 when a Christian stonecutter named Marinus, fleeing persecution by the Roman Emperor Diocletian, founded a monastery atop Mount Titano. He was later canonized as Saint Marinus (San Marino in Italian). In the succeeding centuries, the population of the region grew, and its people remained independent of any outside civil or religious authority, eventually erecting fortifications consisting of walls and towers. A document from AD 885 called the *Placito Feretrano* establishes the existence of San Marino as an independent political entity prior to AD 1000. By the 11th century, it had developed a system of government that still survives today in a modified form, and by the 13th century, it had formed a militia to keep its territory free of foreign domination.

For hundreds of years, the tiny state fended off attempts by a succession of popes and ruling families to seize control of its territory. As part of a power struggle involving one of its popes, the Catholic Church excommunicated all the Sammarinese between 1247 and 1249, and tensions in the region erupted into open warfare in the 14th and 15th centuries. For a time San Marino allied itself with the Duke of Urbino, but eventually faced new threats when the surrounding states formed a papal union. In 1739, Cardinal Giulio Alberoni from the neighboring province of Romagna seized control of San Marino using troops under the church's command, but he was eventually forced out by the religious authorities. San Marino, as a political entity, remained separate from the 19th-century struggle for unification of the Italian states, although it provided a haven for many of the combatants, including the national hero, Giuseppe Garibaldi. In 1862, the new Kingdom of Italy signed an agreement recognizing the sovereignty of its tiny neighbor, finally ensuring San Marino's independence.

At the beginning of the 20th century, San Marino underwent a governmental reform that resulted in the establishment of an elected parliament, the Grand and General Council. The country's first democratic election took place in 1906. Although San Marino remained neutral in both world wars, it couldn't avoid being affected by the turmoil of the era. Be-

tween the wars, the Fascism that was sweeping Italy also gained a number of converts within the borders of its smaller neighbor. However, the government of San Marino remained neutral, and the country harbored thousands of refugees during the war, putting an enormous strain on its resources. However, the greatest suffering inflicted by the war occurred on 26 June 1944, when 63 people were killed and hundreds of others injured by the "friendly fire" of an ally: The British Royal Air Force inexplicably dropped 243 bombs on San Marino, although there were no enemy troops present at the time. The country later received financial compensation for the incident from the British government. During the postwar period, political control of San Marino has alternated between right- and left-wing parties. The nation established diplomatic ties with the European Community in 1983 and became a member of the United Nations in 1992. Before then, it had maintained permanent observer missions in various U.N. organizations. San Marino's foreign policy and social and political trends track closely with those of Italy. In 2006 more than 2.1 million tourists visited San Marino.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

San Marino lies completely within the country of Italy, in the central Apennines about 22 km (13 mi) southwest of the city of Rimini on the Adriatic coast. Located on the summit and lower slopes of Mt. Titano, San Marino has an area of 60 sq km (23 sq mi) and a total boundary length of 39 km (24 mi). About one-third the size of Washington, D.C., the tiny republic is only 13 km (8 mi) long, and 9 km (5.5 mi) wide at its widest point. Mt. Titano, whose three main peaks—with fortresses atop each one—are pictured in the San Marino coat of arms, has an elevation of 750 m (2,460 ft). Two rivers, the Marano and the Ausa, flow through San Marino.

In 2008 San Marino had a population of nearly 30,000, making it one of the world's most densely populated countries. The capital city, also called San Marino, had a population of 4,500. Other population centers include the town of Dogana and the following locales, each with its own castle: Serravalle, Borgo Maggiore, Faetano, Domagnano, Chiesanuova, Acquaviva, Fiorentino, and Montegiardino. The Sammarinese are mostly of Italian ancestry, and most new immigration to the country is from Italy. The main destinations for those emigrating from San Marino are Italy, the United States, France, and Belgium.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

Italian, the official language of San Marino, is spoken by all its people, although many also speak the regional dialect of Romagna, the part of Italy where San Marino is located. Even the standard, or Florentine, Italian of the Sammarinese contains certain words and idioms unique to San Marino.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Mt. Titano, on which San Marino is located, is named for the Titans, characters from Roman mythology who tried to dethrone Jupiter by piling one mountain on top of another in order to reach the sky.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Roman Catholicism is both San Marino's official religion and the faith of almost all its residents. Ceremonies marking many



state occasions are held in the country's churches. San Marino has nine parishes, all belonging to a single diocese. Some areas that are actually in Italy, such as the town of Rimini, belong to the diocese of San Marino.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to the standard holidays of the Christian calendar (including Epiphany, Assumption, Easter Monday, Ascension, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas), legal holidays in San Marino include New Year's Day (January 1), Labor Day (May 1), August Bank Holiday (August 14–16), and All Saints' Day and Commemoration of the Dead (November 1 and 2).

San Marino also has five national holidays that commemorate important historical or political events. February 5 is celebrated both as the Anniversary of St. Agatha, the republic's second patron saint, and as the date on which San Marino was liberated from occupation by Cardinal Alberoni in 1740. The Anniversary of the Arengo, observed on March 25, marks the date in 1906 on which the first democratic elections to the Grand and General Council were held. April 1 and October 1, the two days of the year when San Marino's Captains Regent, its joint chief executives, are installed, are also celebrated as national holidays. Finally, on September 3, the feast day of its patron saint (Saint Marino), the republic celebrates the anniversary of its founding.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

San Marino is a relatively modern Roman Catholic country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Sammarinese show the same basic openness and friendliness found among the neighboring Italians, a quality that has been important in the success of their nation's busy tourist industry. Respect toward the elderly is an important social tradition.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Nearly all dwellings in San Marino have electricity and indoor plumbing. All Sammarinese are covered by a comprehensive national health care plan, which pays for both private treatment and care at the public state hospital. In 2008 the average life expectancy was 81.9 years. Although it is near the Adriatic Sea, San Marino is a landlocked nation and accessible only by motor vehicle or helicopter. The railway that once connected it to Rimini has been inoperable since being badly damaged by bombing in World War II, but there is regular bus service between the two locations.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

San Marino's government provides family supplement payments to families with children. Until 1982, Sammarinese women who married citizens of other countries lost their San Marino citizenship. In 1973 women won the right to be elected to any political office in the land, including the highest one—Captain Regent.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Sammarinese wear modern Western-style clothing like that worn in the other countries of Western Europe. However, colorful ceremonial costumes are connected with some of their traditions. The corps of young flag-bearers, who continue a tradition that dates back to ancient times, wear brightly colored tights, black boots, and loosely fitting colored shirts with black belts. The honor guards for the Captains Regent—the nation's chief executives—wear black uniforms with gold trim, including a gold stripe down the trousers, and high plumed hats with blue and white feathers.

## 12 FOOD

Homemade pasta is one of the most popular foods prepared by the Sammarinese. *Fagioli con le cotiche*—a hearty bacon soup with bacon rind—is a special holiday dish traditionally eaten at Christmastime. *Nidi di rondine* (literally, "swallow's nest") consists of hollow pasta filled with smoked ham, cheese, and a meat-and-tomato sauce and baked in a white sauce. Other favorites include *pasta e cece*, a chickpea soup seasoned with garlic and rosemary and served with noodles; snails cooked with tomatoes, red wine, and fennel; and roast rabbit. Popular cuisine from the Italian province of Romagna, which surrounds San Marino, includes *tagliatelli* (a type of pasta that consists of

thin strips), as well as *ravioli* and *lasagna*, two dishes popularized in the United States by Italian-Americans.

Favorite desserts include *zuppa di ciliege* (cherries soaked in red wine and sugar and served with a special bread); *bus-trengo* (a traditional carnival dish made with milk, eggs, sugar, raisins, corn flour, and bread crumbs); and *cacciattello* (a milk-and-egg dessert served cold). San Marino is known for its local wines, especially a red wine called *Sangiovese*.

### 13 EDUCATION

San Marino has a literacy rate of about 96%. Its educational system is based on that of Italy, and school is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. High school graduates, after taking a qualifying examination, may attend colleges and universities in Italy, or at the Università degli Studi della Repubblica di San Marino which offers graduate and postgraduate studies.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

San Marino's long history has produced an impressive heritage of visual art, showcased in the republic's museums and churches, as well as in its outdoor public sculptures. The Valloni Palace, rebuilt after falling victim to "friendly fire" from the British in World War II, houses many of the nation's cultural treasures (although many others were destroyed by the bombing). Famous paintings kept there include *Saint Philip Neri* and *Saint Marino Lifting Up the Republic*, both by Guercino, and *Saint John* by Strozzi. The 14th-century Church of St. Francis, itself an architectural treasure, houses more historic paintings.

San Marino's national anthem is probably the oldest of any country in the world. Derived from a medieval chorale, it is unusual in that it is a purely instrumental composition with no words. San Marino has a military band, which performs at ceremonial and other events.

### 15 WORK

While agriculture provides a smaller percentage of San Marino's income than it did in the past, many Sammarinese are still farmers, growing barley, corn, vegetables, grapes, and other fruits, and raising livestock. The main agricultural products are wine and cheeses. Most of the wage labor force is employed by the tourist sector or in manufacturing, which includes textiles, ceramics, leather goods, and metalworking. The per capita level of output and standard of living are comparable to those of the most prosperous regions of Italy, which supplies much of its food. San Marino has a very low level of unemployment. In 2004 the unemployment rate was 3.8%.

### 16 SPORTS

The traditional national sport of San Marino is archery, practiced as an art of warfare in the distant past and as a recreational pursuit today. The tiny republic is known for the strength and skill of its champion crossbowmen, demonstrated every September in a competition in the palace square. Marksmanship also figures in two other favorite sports, pistol- and rifle-shooting. San Marino's location near Italy's Adriatic coast—at some points the distance is as short as 10 km (6 mi)—allows its residents to enjoy such water sports as swimming, sailing, and deep-sea diving. The Italian sport of *bocce*, lawn bowling with heavy metal balls, is a popular pastime that can be

played on almost any moderately flat surface. The Sammarinese also enjoy soccer, baseball, tennis, and basketball. In addition, their country sponsors a Grand Prix Formula One auto racing event, although it must be held over the border in Italy due to the lack of a suitable racetrack within San Marino's own borders. San Marino's National Olympic Committee manages all the nation's sports facilities.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In addition to a variety of sports and other outdoor activities, the Sammarinese enjoy socializing at cafés (including outdoor cafés in summertime) and attending movies, concerts, and plays. In addition, those with a taste for the visual arts may view fine art and sculpture in their museums and churches.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

San Marino's tourist industry has created a thriving market for its craftspeople, whose work is sold in a number of shops. A special association monitors the quality of all crafts sold in the country. The work of San Marino's potters encompasses both medieval designs and contemporary styles, and the region's white sandstone has been quarried and carved into statues, building stones, friezes, and other objects since ancient times. Other traditional crafts include painting, jewelry, wood carving, tilework, leather goods, and textiles.

Like Liechtenstein, another tiny European country, San Marino is famous for its stamps, internationally prized collectors' items that provide the republic with an important source of income. Designed by respected artists, they are known for their wide variety of themes, which has even included a Walt Disney series with such cartoon characters as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy. San Marino's Philatelic and Numismatic Museum houses all stamps issued by San Marino since it began to produce them in 1877 under a postal agreement with Italy. San Marino's coins show the same artistic creativity as its stamps, and few circulate because, like the republic's stamps, they are usually snapped up by collectors. A series of coins minted in 1985 had as its theme the war on drugs, and the coins—ranging in value from 1 to 500 lira—depict nine stages of drug addiction. (Today most money circulating in San Marino is the euro).

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

With its small size, low rate of unemployment, and extensive social programs, San Marino has relatively few of the social problems that affect other modern nations.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women enjoy the same rights as men, including rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. In 2007 there were eight women in the 60-seat Great and General Council and two women in the 10-member Congress of State.

Rape, including spousal rape, is a criminal offense. The penalty for rape is two to six years' imprisonment. In the case of aggravating circumstances, the penalty is 4 to 10 years' imprisonment. The law also prohibits violence against women. The penalty for spousal abuse is two to six years' imprisonment. In the case of aggravating circumstances, the penalty is 4 to 10 years' imprisonment. Prostitution is illegal and is not common. Sexual harassment is prohibited.

In 2001 San Marino's parliament voted for the repeal of part of its criminal code. Until this time homosexual contacts could be punished with imprisonment from three months up to one year, if they had been engaged in "habitually" and thereby caused "public scandal." A conviction under this law resulted in loss of political rights and removal from public office for a period from nine months to two years.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# SCOTS

**LOCATION:** United Kingdom (Scotland)

**POPULATION:** Over 5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Scottish dialect of English (also called Scots); Gaelic

**RELIGION:** Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian sect; Roman Catholic; small numbers of Baptists, Anglicans, and Methodists

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Scotland is one of four nations that make up the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the other three are England, Wales, and Northern Ireland). A small country—only 442 km (275 mi) long—it covers the northern portion of the island of Great Britain, which it shares with England and Wales. The name Scotland, first used during the 11th century, is derived from the name of a Celtic tribe from Ireland, the Scotti, who settled western Scotland during the 6th century. The Romans called the area Caledonia.

For centuries, social and political life in the northern (Highland) area of Scotland was organized around clans, communities of people with strong family ties, whose powerful chieftains commanded their loyalty in exchange for protecting them from invasion. (Today, the cultural tradition of clans such as MacGregor or MacDonald survives at ceremonial gatherings such as weddings.) The southern areas of the country were much more affected by English patterns of organization. Repeated disputes with the English sometimes led to war, and before the early 14th century, the Scottish were dominated by English monarchs. In 1603 a new era of cooperation began when James VI of Scotland became James I, King of Great Britain. In 1707 the Act of Union made Scotland, together with England and Wales, part of the United Kingdom, sharing a single parliament.

Scotland saw difficult times in the 20th century. The depression of the 1930s wrought havoc on its economy and began an era of unemployment which forced thousands to emigrate in search of a better life. However, the discovery of North Sea oil in the 1960s created as many as 100,000 new jobs, and emigration slowed. As a part of Britain, Scotland joined the European Community (now European Union—EU) in 1973. Since the late 1980s there has been a resurgence of Scottish national sentiment in favor of separation from England. In September 1997 Scotland voted in favor of establishing its own parliament. The 129-seat Scottish Parliament, which saw its first elections in 1999, has the power to increase or cut income taxes by up to 3%. The vote marked the most profound change in Scotland's relationship with the rest of Great Britain since the Act of Union in 1707. As of 2007 there were calls for television production and broadcasting to be devolved to the Scottish parliament, as some saw Scotland as being marginalized by the British broadcasting industry. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had decreased its investment in Scotland by £30 million.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Located in the northern part of the island of Great Britain, Scotland can be divided into three principal areas: the South-

ern Uplands, a hilly region noted for its sheep-raising industry; the more densely populated Central Lowlands, consisting of flatter, more fertile land; and the Highlands, which account for the northern two-thirds of the country and include lochs (lakes), glens, mountains, and numerous small islands.

Scotland has a population of over 5 million, about three-fourths of whom live in the central Lowland area. Two hundred years ago, almost half the Scottish population lived in the Highlands. Ethnically, most Scots are descended from Celtic tribes that were the original inhabitants of their lands, as well as the Viking, Norman, and English invaders who followed each other in succession. There are fundamental population divisions between Highland and Lowland Scots, as well as between mainland dwellers and those living on the small islands off the coast, such as the Shetlanders and Hebrideans.

**3 LANGUAGE**

Scotland’s official language is English, but it is spoken in distinctive dialects and with a unique Scottish accent, or “burr,” that is especially prominent in words containing “r” sounds. Scottish English (also called Scots) contains words borrowed from Gaelic, French, Dutch, and Scandinavian languages, and its grammar sometimes differs from that of standard English, as in expressions like “Are you no going?” and “I’m away to bed.” Some examples of Scots dialects are Doric, spoken in the northeast, and Lallans, spoken in the southwest (and the dialect of poet Robert Burns). Gaelic is spoken as a second language by less than 2% of the population, mostly in the Highlands and Hebridean islands, although all Scots recognize at least a few words of Gaelic.

**COMMONLY USED SCOTS TERMS**

dinnae, cannae, willnae	don’t, can’t, won’t
wee	small
aye	yes
ken	know
greet	weep
kirk	church
breeks	pants
lassie	girl
bairn	child
bonny	pretty
bide	stay

**TYPICAL SCOTS PHRASES**

Ah’m fair farfochen.	I’m exhausted.
The bairn’s a wee bit wabbit.	The child’s a little tired.

**4 FOLKLORE**

The oldest Gaelic songs recount legends of warrior heroes battling Norsemen, magic rowan trees, and monstrous old women living in the sea. There is also a rich folk tradition revolving around belief in fairies and other supernatural forces. The most famous character in Scottish folklore is the dinosaur-like Loch Ness monster. Although this creature has supposedly been seen swimming in the deep by hundreds of people, no scientific evidence of its existence has ever been produced.

The “border ballads” of the southern regions and a wealth of urban folk songs, especially in the Glasgow region, comprise another segment of Scottish folklore.



**5 RELIGION**

With about 587,000 members, the Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian sect founded in the 16th century by John Knox, is the country’s dominant religion. Commonly known as “the Kirk,” it has been Scotland’s official religion since 1690. The Roman Catholic Church has about 212,500 members and other trinitarian churches have about 164,000 members. Catholics live mainly on the west coast. Scotland also has smaller populations of Baptists, Anglicans, and Methodists, as well as more modern evangelical sects. Church attendance in Scotland is very low with less than 10% of the population attending regularly.

**6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS**

Aside from the major holidays of the Christian calendar, the Scots celebrate the commemoration of Saint Andrew, patron saint of Scotland, on November 30.

Another unique holiday is the Hogmanay (New Year’s Eve) celebration. Until the 1960s, this holiday far outpaced Christmas as the major winter celebration. It involves the ceremony of “first footing,” the custom of visiting the homes of friends, neighbors, and even strangers, in the “wee sma’ hours” of New Year’s Day. Christmas, which was formerly frowned on by the Scottish church and only became a public holiday in 1967, resembles a modern Christmas in England or the U.S., with fir trees, carols, and gift-giving. Scots gather for dinner on Burns Night, January 25, to honor the Scottish poet Robert Burns. Traditionally, the Scottish national dish, haggis, is served as Burns’s poem, “Address to a Haggis,” is recited. Scottish Quar-

ter Day (40 days after Christmas) was a holiday celebrated widely until the 1950s; it is rarely celebrated today.

Interestingly, one of the most important celebrations of the Scottish year is Halloween, on October 31. Like “trick-or-treaters” in the United States, Scottish “guisers” go from door to door in costumes asking for candy or money. However, unlike their counterparts in the United States, they must perform a song or poem before receiving their treat. Another possible feature of the Halloween celebration is a party with supernatural themes and decorations such as the Scottish version of the American “jack-o’-lantern”: a scooped-out rutabaga called a “neep lantern.”

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Scots live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Although Scots are relatively casual about the practice of religion, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student’s progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Scottish are known for their taciturn and reserved manner. It is unusual for Scots to be seen holding hands, kissing, or touching in public. Within the household, however, family members maintain close relationships that include many “inside jokes.” The humor of the Scots tends toward the deadpan and ironic, and they tend to minimize direct expressions of enthusiasm. However, it is also considered unacceptable to criticize others in public, or to discuss personal problems with anyone other than close associates. As a form of greeting, the handshake is less common than in other parts of Britain.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Scottish houses have a small garden, and many are built in rows called terraces. Homes built before World War I were generally made of stone (single-story cottages of this type can still be found in some highland areas as well as urban areas), while most newer dwellings are built of brick or concrete blocks. Slate roofs are common, and many houses are covered by a painted coating of cement. Many Scottish houses are protected from harsh winters by the traditional “double door” arrangement: a heavy outer door, a vestibule, and a lighter inner door. Over half of all Scots live in “council houses,” low-cost housing built by local authorities. These generally consist of high-rise apartment complexes with small rental units. In the late 20th century, complexes of this type began to give way to terraced housing.

Scotland’s National Health Service has significantly raised the country’s level of medical care since it was instituted following World War II. However, as of 2007 Scotland was the worst performing small country in Western Europe in terms of health and other factors. The Federation of Small Businesses’ annual Index of Wealth compared 10 countries on economic performance, employment rates, health and education. Scotland also fell by one place, to 17th, in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s table of the world’s 24 most developed countries. Scotland had the lowest life expectancy in the UK for both men and women in 2007. The figures were 74.2 for men and 79.3 for women, compared

to the UK average of 76.6 and 81 years. As well, the gap between rich and poor is widening. In 2007 Glasgow City was the worst performing local authority area in Scotland, with the poorest record in three of the four indicators: mortality, education, and employment. The leading causes of death in Scotland are heart disease, strokes, and cancer. The Scots smoke more and eat more sugar and fats than any other nationality in Europe.

Scotland has a modern system of highways and two-lane roads totaling some 88,500 km (55,000 mi) of paved roads altogether. In the western Highlands, however, many of the roads are single lanes with periodic passing places. Double-decker buses with an extra passenger level above the normal one are a common sight in cities and towns. The government-run railway system operates both diesel and electric trains and serves all major cities, linking Glasgow and Edinburgh to each other and to London. The mainland and the islands are linked by ferries and air service. Glasgow has a major international airport and Edinburgh and Aberdeen are served by both national and international air services.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The traditional role of women as laborers in the textile, jute, and fish-processing industries can be traced as early as the 19th century—and the economic independence it brought them has given them a relatively high degree of authority within the family. While traditionally male skilled trades like steelmaking and mining still do not hire female employees, increasing numbers of women are entering the professions, and there are nearly as many women as men at Scotland’s colleges and universities. Scots are legally allowed to marry by the age of 16, and many do marry as teenagers, although the early 20s are still the most typical marriage age. Although the divorce rate has risen in Scotland, it is still low relative to the American rate of divorce.

## 11 CLOTHING

When people throughout the world think of the Scots, most probably picture them in their famous traditional costume, the kilt. However, this skirtlike garment is only worn on ceremonial occasions by Scottish regiments of the British army, by ordinary citizens on formal occasions such as weddings and black-tie dinners, and for traditional festive events such as the Highland Games. Otherwise, the Scots wear standard Western-style clothing. Because of the climate, Scottish clothing tends to be made of heavier fabrics such as wool, including the native *tweed*. Each of Scotland’s clans has its own tartan (or plaid) developed over the centuries—there are at least 300 different designs in all. Women’s ceremonial costumes include tartan skirts and white blouses worn under snug black button-down bodices. Between 7 and 10 m (7–10 yds) of wool tartan are required for the average kilt.

## 12 FOOD

The Scottish national dish is *haggis*, a sausage-like food made from chopped organ meat of a sheep or calf mixed with oatmeal and spices and traditionally boiled in the casing of a sheep’s stomach (although today a plastic bag is often used). Dietary staples include oats (in porridge, oatcakes, and other forms) and potatoes, or “tatties.” These are commonly eaten as french fries (“chips”), as well as boiled, baked, or mashed. A





Scottish pipers take to the parade ground at Redford Barracks in Edinburgh, Scotland. Military bands braved the Scottish rain and gathered for a final rehearsal of the 55th Edinburgh Military Tattoo. (Chris Furlong/Getty Images)

side dish of mashed potatoes and rutabaga, called “clapshott,” is sometimes served with haggis. The main meal of the day is tea, served at dinnertime, usually around 6:00 PM (the midday meal is called “dinner”). However, in rural areas, the midday meal is still the main one. Besides oatcakes, typical Scottish desserts include shortbread, a rich fruitcake called “Dundee cake,” and a New Year’s specialty called “black bun.”

### **13 EDUCATION**

Despite the information seen in “Living Conditions” above, the Scots remain a well-educated people. Universal education has been an institution in their country for centuries, and Scots read more newspapers than any other European people. About 95% of adult Scots are literate. Their educational system is operated separately from England’s. After seven years of primary school, Scottish children attend secondary school for six years. The school day generally ends at 4:00 PM. Many private schools require students to wear uniforms, but they are optional at most other institutions. After secondary school, students can attend one of Scotland’s 20 institutions of higher learning, including universities and vocational schools. A great value is placed on higher education, and the universities of St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow are especially prestigious.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Of all the arts, the Scots have particularly distinguished themselves in the realm of literature, especially poetry and novels. Scotland’s most famous poet, Robert Burns, lived and wrote at the end of the 18th century, dying at the age of 37. Writing both poems and songs, he popularized the dialect of his homeland both at home and in England. The poet Lord Byron was born and educated in Aberdeen. Scotland produced the famous philosophers Thomas Carlyle and David Hume, as well as the renowned economist Adam Smith, who became famous for his work, *The Wealth of Nations*. Scotland’s other important writers include two authors of adventure novels, Sir Walter Scott, whose romantic tales often dealt with Scottish history, and Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Arthur Conan Doyle, another Scot, created the famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, and his countryman J. M. Barrie authored the play *Peter Pan*, which has delighted generations of audiences throughout the 20th century. A contemporary Scottish author is fiction writer A.L. Kennedy (born in Dundee, 1965), who is also a stand-up comedienne and an Associate Professor with the Warwick University Creative Writing Program.

### **15 WORK**

Since the 1960s there has been a marked shift in the economy from manufacturing to service industries—including tour-

ism, with the service sector accounting for nearly four times the number of jobs as the manufacturing sector. Private services contribute about two-fifths of Scotland's gross domestic product (GDP), while public services account for more than one-fifth. Retail trade also creates many jobs in Scotland. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing make up a very small percentage of the economy. However, Scotland has a unique agricultural tradition, primarily in the Highlands, called crofting. Farmers living on crofts (a term that refers to both their land and to the family home) raise grains or vegetables individually on their own plots of land, and animals communally on a larger grazing area. Today, crofting rarely serves as a primary source of income or food, although some still rely on it for supplementary income. Most manufacturing is concentrated in the Central Lowlands. Important industries include textiles, chemicals, steel, electronics, whiskey, and petroleum products.

## 16 SPORTS

The Scottish national sport, soccer (called football), is associated with fierce rivalries between Catholic and Protestant teams that sometimes erupt into violence. The most famous pair of rival teams both belong to Glasgow: Celtic and Rangers, collectively referred to as the "Old Firm." Competition between the Scottish and English teams also arouses a high level of national feeling. The nation's second most popular sport (which it claims to have invented) is golf, which is on record as having been banned by the Scottish king, James II, in 1457. Present-day Scotland boasts over 400 golf courses. Scotland's third favorite sport is rugby, which is similar to American football. Tennis, lawn bowling, skiing, and curling are other popular sports.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many Scots relax after work by watching television programs broadcast by Great Britain's government-owned broadcasting service, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). Others visit local bars called pubs (short for public houses), where they can eat, drink, and socialize with friends. Popular outdoor recreation includes fishing, hunting, hiking, and mountain-climbing.

Scottish teenagers have many interests in common with other Western teenagers, such as popular music, clothes, and dating (according to local customs). The presence of fast food restaurants and U.S. television shows and movies are helping to narrow the gap between Scottish teens and their American peers.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Crafts such as pottery (especially in the Celtic tradition), hand-knitting, jewelry-making, and weaving are widely practiced.

Scotland has two main traditions of folk song, Gaelic and Lowland Scots. Traditionally, each clan had a bard (a sort of poet/composer) to sing its praises and preserve its musical traditions. Bards commonly memorized as many as 350 different stories and poems. Many Gaelic work songs that were sung as accompaniment to such tasks as milking and harvesting have survived up to modern times. Women cloth-makers traditionally sang "waulking songs" around a narrow table, providing a steady beat for the music by thumping on the table. The most famous feature of Scotland's traditional music is its national

instrument, the bagpipe, which is played at weddings and other celebrations, in military marching bands, and as a hobby.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Scotland has a high rate of alcoholism, particularly on the islands of Lewis and Harris. Scots also have the United Kingdom's highest rate of hospitalization for depression. Another problem confronting Scotland is its dwindling population. Unemployment has traditionally been well above the British average, and thousands of people have emigrated to England and other countries in search of better job opportunities. As a result, the birthrate has fallen. In an effort to stem the tide of emigration and its attendant "brain drain" of many of the country's best and brightest, government and industry are cooperating to create new industries.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women in Scotland have made great gains in equality with men since the 1960s. However, as of 2008 Scotland had one of the highest rates of unwanted pregnancies in Europe. Women made up 89% of single parent families in Scotland and 53% of single parent households are in poverty. In Scotland women in full-time employment still earn on average 75% of the average of their male counterparts.

Regarding homosexuality, the first International Gay Rights Conference was held in Edinburgh in 1974. In 1980 male homosexuality was decriminalized in Scotland (female homosexuality had not previously been criminalized in Scotland). In 2004 the UK passed the Civil Partnership Act, giving same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples. The first civil partnerships took place in Northern Ireland on 19 December 2005, followed by Scotland on 20 December and then England and Wales on 21 December 2005. Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh have large gay communities.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# SERBS

**LOCATION:** central and western part of the Balkan Peninsula (Southeastern Europe), Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo

**POPULATION:** 12.5 million (est.); 6.7 million in Serbia

**LANGUAGE:** Serbian

**RELIGION:** Serbian Orthodox (85%), Catholic (5.5%), Muslim (3.2%), Protestant (1.1%), Other (5.2%)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Bosnians, Montenegrins, Croats, Kosovars

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Serbs are a South Slavic people primarily inhabiting Southeastern Europe (commonly referred to as the Balkans) and Central Europe. Present day Serbs are said to have descended from Slavic tribes who migrated to the Balkans from the area of present day Poland, called White Serbia. Their movement to the area began in the 6th century through raids, but by the beginning of the 7th, century they began to settle. The point at which the Serbs emerged as an ethnic group distinctive from other neighboring Slav tribes, such as Croats, is disputed. Although the area on which future Serbs settled in the Balkans was Christianized by Byzantine missionaries before their arrival, the Slavic ruling class was converted to Christianity in the late 9th century, at which point there was still no distinction between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The rest of the population slowly converted from paganism to Christianity from that point on. Until the 11th century, Serbs were largely dominated by the Byzantines and neighboring Bulgarians. After the Great Schism in 1054, Serbs remained largely under Byzantine influence, resulting in the strengthening and consolidation of Orthodoxy among Serbs.

Serbia reached the height of its power during the Nemanjić dynasty, which ruled for 200 years and significantly expanded the Serbian state, achieving both political and religious independence from Byzantium. Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty, came to power in the mid-12th century in the area of present-day Montenegro. The Serbian Kingdom was established in 1217 and the Serbian Orthodox church became autocephalous in 1219. For the first time in history, the Serbs became a unified people. The Serbian state steadily declined from this point, and with the death of Stefan Uroš Dušan in 1355, it began to disintegrate.

By the late 14th century, Serb territory began to be invaded by the Ottoman Empire. Their first major defeat of the Serbs occurred in 1371 at the Maritsa River. In 1389 the Serbs were defeated in the Battle of Kosovo, which marked a turning point in the war, ensuring the eventual ultimate defeat of the Serbs. By 1459 Serbia was overrun by the Turks. Serbia was ruled by the Ottoman Empire for the next three centuries. During this period, thousands of Serbs were enslaved through the Ottoman practice of *Devşirme*, in which non-Muslim children were taken from their families and converted to Islam in order to later join the janissary corps—the Sultan's personal soldiers—in the Ottoman army. Under the Ottoman Empire, the Serbian Orthodox church was the only independently functioning Serbian institution. This contributed to the close relationship between the Serbian Orthodox religion and Serbian national identity that still exists today.

Serbian territory was also subsequently invaded by Hungarians, Venetians, and Habsburgs. It was not until the Serbian Revolution, which lasted from 1804 to 1815, that Serbs were able to establish an independent Serbian principality.

In 1914, Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb and member of the pan-Slavist secret society the Black Hand, assassinated Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Austria then declared war on Serbia, which marked the beginning of World War I. By the end of World War I, both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had collapsed, paving the way for the creation in 1918 of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Its name was changed to Yugoslavia (literally “land of the Southern Slavs”) in 1929.

Yugoslavia experienced great turbulence during World War II, for while some factions fought against Nazi occupation and division of Yugoslavia, interethnic violence raged throughout the duration of the war. In 1945, the partisans, lead by Josip Broz Tito, defeated the Nazis and the Croatian fascist separatists known as Ustaše, taking complete control of Yugoslavia and establishing a Communist government. Throughout its Communist period, Yugoslavia remained independent from the influence of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact nations.

In 1991, the dissolution of Yugoslavia began when Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia declared independence. In 1992 Bosnia followed suit. Later that year, under the leadership of Slobodon Milošević, Serbia and Montenegro declared a new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and began several military programs aimed at uniting the ethnic Serbs left on the territories of Yugoslavia's now independent neighbors. Serbs in Croatia formed the state of Republika Srpska Krajina. During “Operation Storm,” the Croatian government expelled more than 250,000 of these Serbs, resulting in thousands of deaths. Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina formed the state of Republika Srpska, which still exists today as an official political entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Territorial disputes over sections along the Drina River still exist between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

As a result of the Milošević government's military campaigns, Yugoslavia was dismissed from the United Nations (UN), and violence continued until the ratification of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995. Violence resumed in 1998, however, when Yugoslavia began a counterinsurgency campaign in the autonomous Serbian province of Kosovo against the ethnic Albanian majority. Western powers responded in 1999 with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) bombing of Serbia. Serbian military and police forces withdrew from Kosovo in June 1999 and the UN, in conjunction with NATO forces, created a secure environment and established various self-governing institutions for the inhabitants of Kosovo. After the war, more than 200,000 Serbs left Kosovo. These and the other Serb refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina settled primarily in central Serbia and in the autonomous Serbian province of Vojvodina. In 2000 Milošević was replaced as president by Vojislav Kostunica, a democratic reformist representing the coalition known as the Democratic Opposition of Serbia. Milošević was arrested in 2001 and tried at an international criminal tribunal for crimes against humanity. He died in 2006 before his trial was completed.

In 2001 Yugoslavia rejoined the UN and, in 2003, its name was officially changed to Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006 Montenegro peacefully seceded from Serbia. In 2008 Kosovo declared

independence from Serbia. As of mid-2008, Serbia, along with several other states, such as Russia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and more, had either officially refused to recognize Kosovo as an independent state or remained silent. Kosovo was officially recognized as independent by the United States and 45 other UN member states. Ethnic Serbs still inhabit areas along Kosovo's northern borders, although Serbs make up less than 5% of the population of Kosovo. Several thousand NATO peacekeepers, known as Kosovo Force (KFOR), continued to keep peace between the ethnic Albanian majority and the Serb minority within Kosovo as of 2008.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The majority of Serbs inhabit Serbia, which was settled by Serbs in the 7th century. Serbia is located in Southeastern Europe, on the southeastern section of the Balkan Peninsula. It is bordered by Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia. It covers an area slightly smaller than South Carolina. Its terrain is extremely varied, with rich fertile plains in the north, limestone ranges and basins in the east, and ancient mountains and hills in the southeast. Its winters are cold, with heavy snowfall in some places, and its summers are hot, humid in some areas and dry towards the south.

In total, there are over 12.5 million Serbs in the world. The population of Serbia is approximately 8 million, of which ethnic Serbs comprise roughly 83%. The rest of the population of Serbia is made up of Hungarians, Romany, or Gypsies, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Albanians, Bulgarians, Germans, Russians, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Ukrainians, Croats, and Czechs. Roughly 1% of Serbia's population still identifies itself as "Yugoslav." Its two largest cities are Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, and Novi Sad, the capital of the Serbian autonomous province of Vojvodina. Although the historic core of the Serbian homeland was originally located further south, the domination of the Ottoman Empire in the south prompted mass movements of Serbs in the 17th and 18th centuries towards the more Christian north. These population movements are known as the Great Serbian Migrations. They resulted in the permanent relocation of the Serbian center in the north.

The majority of Serbs who live outside Serbia live in Montenegro and Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Until the exodus of August 1995, caused by the Croatian government's "Operation Storm," a large number of Serbs also lived in Republika Srpska Krajina in Croatia. Smaller numbers of Serbs can be found in Macedonia, Slovenia, Romania, Hungary, Kosovo, and Italy. Many capital cities of the former Yugoslav Republics, such as Zagreb, Skopje, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Podgorica, contain large Serbian minorities.

Large Serbian Diaspora communities also exist outside of Southeastern Europe, although exact numbers cannot be determined since census takers use varying criteria to identify Serbs abroad. Some counts reflect numbers of individuals who either still possess Serbian citizenship or have emigrated from Serbia, while other counts include individuals of Serbian descent. The most notable Serbian Diaspora communities can be found in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Sweden, Brazil, Canada, the United States, and Australia. Many of the Serbs inhabiting regions in Central Europe today, such as Romania, and Hungary, and other former territories of the Habsburg Empire,

are descendants of Serbs who migrated there to escape the Ottomans. Several thousand also immigrated to Russia and settled the areas now known as Nova Serbia and Slavo-Serbia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Serbian language is a member of the South Slavic group of languages. Like other Southern Slavic languages, Serbian received a number of formative characteristics from the Glagolitic alphabet and other standardizing initiatives developed by Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius during their efforts to Christianize the Slavs. The oldest documents written in the Serbian language date from the 11th century. Largely due to the work of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the Serbian language was standardized in the 19th century based on its vernacular form. In addition to its other variants—Old Serbian and Russo-Serbian, a type of Church Slavonic—the Serbian language has three dialects that are distinguished by the pronunciation of the Old Slavonic sound "yat."

Serbian names derive primarily from the Christian tradition, but many also have meanings in the Serbian language. Names often reflect character traits, such as *Miro*ljub from *mir*, peace, and *ljubav*, love. Many names are also nature-inspired and have origins in words for animals, flowers, and other natural phenomena. Most Serbian surnames contain the suffix *-ić*, which originally functioned to designate paternal lineage, much like "son" or "sen" in Nordic languages. The suffixes *-ov* and *-in* are also common and tend to correspond with certain regions. They derive from Slavic possessive case endings, thus also originally functioning to form patronymics. Combinations of these endings in one surname often occur as well.

Serbian is written using both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, and in spoken form, it is mutually intelligible to standard Croatian and Bosnian. Before the breakup of Yugoslavia, these languages were considered to be one, Serbo-Croatian. Since then, however, the differentiation of these languages has become a highly contentious issue, in part due to the historic role that language has played in the formation of identity for the peoples of the former Yugoslavia. In the 19th century, the Balkan intelligentsia argued that Serbs, Croats, Balkan Muslims, and Montenegrins were the same people since they spoke a very similar language to one another. Beginning in 1878 with the invasion of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this sense of unity through sameness of language was consolidated against the dominant languages of the occupying forces. The notion that a shared language indicated a shared ethnicity and identity eventually became one of the central pillars of the argument for the creation of a southern Slavic State, Yugoslavia. This notion still exists in the former Yugoslavia today. As a result, as groups have broken off from one another, they have made concerted efforts to differentiate themselves through systematic language reform efforts. Embracing existing linguistic differences, or creating new ones, has become a way for groups to distinguish themselves as nations separate from their fellow former Yugoslavs. The Croats made the greatest efforts to do so under Franjo Tuđman, the first president of Croatia after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Croats drew from pre-Yugoslav Croatian dictionaries to introduce new, distinctly Croat words for use by their population. As such, Serbian and Croatian are considered to be separate languages today, although some Croats are still learning a new, distinctive Croat vocabulary.



**4 FOLKLORE**

Much of Serbian folklore is rooted in pre-Christian, pagan belief and practice but was adapted into a Christian framework with the conversion of Slavs to Christianity. For example, the pagan belief in household gods was recast into the custom of *slava*, by which each family has its own saint that it celebrates

and passes down from generation to generation. Similarly, the pagan notion of a cult of ancestors today takes the form of the custom of *zadusnice*, in which families hold feasts at the graves of their deceased, lighting candles for them and making offerings of food and drink. This practice now largely follows the Orthodox religious calendar and corresponds to larger Christian events, such as Easter, Christmas, and various saints' feast

days. Many religious processions, such as *lazarice*, a procession of virgins and *koledari*, a masked procession at Christmas, originate from pagan rituals. Many of the rituals surrounding Serbian religious icons, such as special veneration, processions, and belief in their healing powers or animation, also originate from paganism.

Superstition and belief in magical powers still persists among some groups. Some still believe in the power of the evil eye—that an individual can be harmed by the envious look of another—and take various precautions to ward it off. Serbian folk beliefs about magical beings, such as witches, vampires, fairies and dragons, have been largely relegated to children's games and fairytales, but have left marks on Serbian culture in various ways. Dragons, for example, were believed to have protected people from evil and misfortune. Many of the heroes of Serbian folktales and poetry were said to have gotten their extraordinary powers from being part dragon. During the wars that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia, the trauma caused a resurgence of superstitious belief among some Serbs, who turned to modern-day commercial psychics for relief.

One of the most popular stories in the Serbian folk tradition is that of their defeat by the Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo Polje (field) in 1389. Folk tales and poetry cast this event in Christian language, giving it a religious meaning for the Serbs, who it portrayed as martyrs. This event, and the stories surrounding it, proved to still resonate widely with Serbs over 600 years later when it was used by Slobodan Milošević and others after the breakup of Yugoslavia to mobilize Serbian nationalism with regard to events surrounding the then autonomous province of Kosovo.

## 5 RELIGION

The majority of Serbs are Serbian Orthodox. They were converted to Christianity from paganism beginning in the late 9th century, before Serbs had emerged as a distinct group from the southern Slavic tribes. Their conversion took place before the break between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in 1054, but because Serbs were largely aligned with the Byzantine Empire, they developed into an Orthodox people. The Serbian Orthodox Church became autocephalous in 1219. After the invasion of the Ottoman Empire in the 14th and 15th centuries, some southern Slavs converted to Islam.

Under communism, religion was largely repressed. Religion in Serbia today faces different problems. Because the Communist legislation on religion from Yugoslavia has been repealed but not been fully replaced, many religious communities face a great deal of institutional limitations. Attempts to adopt an Act on Religious Freedom failed because many critics opposed the fact that it named seven specific historical, traditional religious communities of Serbia, the most important being the Serbian Orthodox Church. Many believed that despite the law's intention to guarantee freedom of religion and separation of church and state, its recognition of the traditional religions of Serbia gave those religions special legal advantages over others. Although the law was never passed, for many reasons the Serbian Orthodox church nevertheless occupies a privileged position in Serbia.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

National holidays in Serbia include New Year's Day (Nova Godina, January 1 and 2); Christmas (Božić, January 7, celebrated

by the Orthodox, or Julian, calendar); Day of Saint Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox church (Savidan, January 27), also commonly known today as the Day of Spirituality (Dan Duhovnosti); Day of Statehood (Dan Državnosti, February 15), to mark the First Serbian Uprising in 1804; May Day, or Labor Day (Dan Rada, May 1 and 2); Victory Day (Dan Pobede, May 9); and St. Vitus' Day (Vidovdan, June 28), which functions as a sort of memorial day, specifically in relation to the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Polje (field). Other national holidays include Good Friday (Veliki Petak), Holy Saturday (Velika Subota), Easter (Vaskrs), and Easter Monday (Veliki Ponedjeljak), but their dates are tied to the Orthodox calendar and are determined by the movable Pascal Cycle each year. Other Christian religious feasts occurring on the holidays, such as Epiphany, Visitation, Palm Sunday, Ascension, and more, also play a large role in Serbian society.

Christmas in Serbia is surrounded by many traditions, most with Slavic pagan roots. Customarily, on the morning of Christmas Eve, the head of the house would cut down a young, dry oak tree, called a *badnjak*, and bring it to church for a blessing. Churches at this time of year will still cover their floors with hay on Christmas Eve in reference to the manger where Jesus Christ was born. Later, the blessed piece of oak would be stripped of its branches and burned as a sacrifice to God along with various grains in the hopes that the coming year would bring prosperity. Today, Serbs still receive small pieces of oak trees bundled with grains at church to be taken home and burned on Christmas Eve. Serb families prepare large meals of Lenten foods, avoiding certain animal products, on Christmas Eve. The traditional Christmas Eve meal includes beans, walnuts, and a special Christmas Eve cake. Christmas Day also has its own special feast, comprised usually of roasted pork, *koljivo*, a sweet wheat cake, and *česnica*, a special traditional bread with a coin hidden in it. The family member that finds the coin is thought to have a fortunate year ahead of them. Serbs traditionally exchange presents not on Christmas but on New Year's Day, although this is changing due to Western influences.

In addition to these general Christian feasts, Serbs also have their own particular religious celebrations, such as *slava*, the celebration of the patron saint of an individual family, *zavetine/litije*, a procession on the day of a particular community's saint, and *zanatlijske slave*, the celebration of the patron saint of a professional guild. There are approximately 150 patron saints in the *slava* tradition, the most popular of which include St. Dmitri, St. George, St. John, St. Michael, St. Nicholas, and more. Families celebrate the day before, *navece*, and the day after, *okrilje* or *sutradan*, the saint's feast day, as well as the feast day itself. Ritual objects involved in the celebration include icons of the saint, candles, and dried basil. Ritual dishes include *Slavsko Zito*, a sort of boiled wheat, and *Slavski Kolac*, a specially blessed bread. Family elders, friends, relatives, and neighbors are all invited to *slava*, and during the celebrations, guests sing folksongs and tell folktales.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Serbs observe major life events, such as birth, marriage, and death, according to the religious traditions of the Serbian Orthodox Church, although some of the traditions surrounding these events have their roots in pre-Christian practices. For example, many rituals are carried out during weddings,

such as sprinkling the couple with grains, are meant to ensure the couple's fertility and prosperity.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Shaking hands and kissing cheeks (most commonly three kisses) are standard forms of greeting among Serbs, depending on closeness. Standard salutations include *dobro jutro* (good morning), *dobar dan* (good day), and *dobro vece* (good evening). *Dovidjenja* means "good bye," and *daku noc* means "good night." When leaving for a journey, travelers are told *drečan put* (lucky journey). In rural areas, some older residents still greet each other with *pomaze Bog* (God helps). The traditional response is *Bog ti pomogao* (may God help you).

As in many other languages, modes of expressing respect and courtesy are built into Serbian grammar. Serbian has a second, more formal case for the second person. For example, in addressing a close or familiar acquaintance, Serbs use the word *ti* for "you." When addressing someone unfamiliar, or to convey a more formal, respectful relationship, Serbs use the word *vi* for "you."

Serbs enjoy entertaining at home. It is customary for guests to bring to their hosts a gift, such as a bottle of wine or some sort of alcohol, coffee, or flowers. The gesture for wishing someone good luck (the equivalent of crossing one's fingers in the U.S.) is to squeeze the thumb between the index and third finger. Hitting the bent elbow of the left arm with the right hand is a very offensive gesture.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Since the mid 20th century, Serbs have steadily migrated from rural areas to industrial and cultural centers within the former Yugoslav Republics and today within Serbia. Wars have also contributed to the flux of migrants into cities. This has resulted in the general depopulation and aging of the Serbian countryside. Many Serbs, especially those that live in cities, keep small weekend and vacation houses in the country. Historically, lodging in Serbia varied greatly—ranging from stone to mud to wood—because of the country's extremely varied terrain and because of the varied historical experiences of different areas, but now, lodging is much more uniform and is made primarily of brick and concrete.

During the early 1980s, Serbs enjoyed a generally adequate standard of living and productive agricultural and mineral resources. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Serbia's economy began to worsen. This general trend was largely exacerbated by the economic sanctions imposed on Serbia by the West because of its actions during the breakup of Yugoslavia. Subsequently, a great deal of damage was done to Serbia's infrastructure during the 1999 NATO bombings. This, in addition to the problems Serbia has experienced in transitioning from a state-run, centrally planned economy has also set back modernization and the standard of living in Serbia significantly. The impact on daily life, levels of pay, and employment opportunities has been catastrophic. Educational, cultural, and scientific exchange with the rest of the world ceased for several years. As medical, educational and other professionals were either recruited into the military or fled from war, the quality of medical care, education, and other public goods suffered greatly.

Since 2000 living conditions in Serbia have begun to improve. Serbia is still struggling to modernize, as its growing telecommunications network still ranks below those of

its neighbors. In 2006 it was estimated that only 1.4 million inhabitants of Serbia had internet connection, although this number too, is rapidly growing. Roughly 6.5% of Serbia's population lives below the poverty line. Life expectancy for Serbs averages 75 years. Healthcare has greatly improved in the past decade, and immunization and other forms of preventative medicine are common practices. Medication, however, still remains unaffordable for many families.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Serbian society is very family-oriented. The most common family unit in Serbia is the nuclear family, although extended family is also very important and remains in close relation. Historically, Serbs lived in a large extended family community called a *Zadruga*. The Serbian language reflects this importance, for it has a number of specific terms for various familial relationships. For example, the word used to denote an uncle who is a father's brother is *Stric*, whereas the word used to denote an uncle who is a mother's brother is *Ujak*.

## 11 CLOTHING

Serbs wear modern Western-style clothing, including business attire for work, and jeans and T-shirts for casual wear. Until the end of the 19th century, clothes were largely homemade. On special occasions, or during festivals or holidays, some Serbs still wear traditional dress. For women, this includes embroidered wool knee socks, gathered, linen, embroidered skirts, aprons decorated with floral motifs, and shirts decorated with silver thread and other kinds of cording. In some areas, the female Serbian national dress consists of either a red or blue sleeveless, knee-length dress that was richly decorated and buttoned in the front. The traditional costume also includes a headdress of scarves and caps trimmed with cording and often decorated with metal coins or flowers. Women would also wear gold coin necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. For men, traditional Serbian dress includes leather shoes, upturned at the toes and decorated with leather strips that fasten the shoes to the legs, knitted, decorative socks, pants that stop and gather at the calf, a wide, woven, decorative sash around the waist, an embroidered white linen or silk shirt, and either a short, sleeveless vest or a long-sleeved jacket with ornate cording. The traditional Serbian men's costume also includes either a fur cap or a military cap from a later period, which became known as the Serbian national cap. Such costumes are usually very colorfully embroidered with thread and cord and adorned with silver and gold buttons and other ornaments. Traditionally, they were made of homespun cloth and sheepskin, but this is rarer today. Styles, colors, and accessories historically varied depending on region.

## 12 FOOD

Typical Serbian cuisine has been greatly influenced by Turkish, Mediterranean, and Austro-Hungarian traditions. Serbs generally eat three meals a day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The traditional main meal of the day in Serbia is lunch, but more Serbs are increasingly making dinner their main meal rather than lunch. Traditionally, Serbian families produce various foods and beverages in their own homes. They distill alcoholic beverages, preserve jams, and pickle peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, and more. Some even make their own sausages. Serbian cuisine is rich in spices and herbs, such as pepper, paprika, co-



A Serbian folk dancer wearing traditional clothing at the Edmonton Heritage Festival in Alberta, Canada. (© Richard Cummins/Corbis)

riander, cloves and more. *Ćevapčići*, seasoned, grilled meat, is the Serbian national dish, although Serbs also eat meat of all kinds, prepared a variety of ways. *Podvarak*, roasted meat with cabbage, is also a very popular dish. Fish is popular in communities near the Danube River. Serbian cuisine includes cheeses, such as *Kajmak*, boiled eggs, smoked or cured ham, soups, such as *Backa*—a four meat soup, potatoes, cabbage, and beans. Peppers or cabbage leaves are often stuffed with ground meat, rice, and various spices. These are called *Sarma*. Peppers can be filled with cheese and yogurt. Serbian salad usually consists of tomatoes, peppers, onions, oil and vinegar, and a soft white cheese. *Pita* is a Serbian dish that comes from Turkish influence. Pita dough is light, flaky and crispy and can be filled with both savory and sweet fillings. The most common kind of *pita* among Serbs is *Gibanica*, which consists of a cheese, cream, and egg filling.

Bread is one of the most pivotal elements of Serbian food culture and is tied to many traditions and rituals. Serbs welcome guests by offering them bread and salt. Some breads, such as *Koljivo* and *Moussaka Česnica*, are used in religious rituals on various Christian feasts. Because of bread's connection to ritual, in the past, Serbian households were wary of discarding old

bread. Serbian bread is mostly made of wheat, both with and without yeast, but it is also sometimes made of barley and rye. *Pogaca*, for example, is a bread without yeast that is prepared for special occasions.

The Serbian national drink is *Slivovitz*, a plum brandy. It is also often served warm in colder months. *Slivovitz* is a type of *Rakia*, or distilled fruit brandy. Many other types of *Rakia* exist as well, such as pear and grape. Many Serbs distill their own *Rakia*. Domestic wines are also widely drunk, mainly from the famous wine region of *Vrsac*. Beer is also popular. Popular non-alcoholic beverages include homemade fruit juices, *Boza*, a corn-based drink, and *Kvas*, a fermented drink made from rye or black bread. Turkish coffee (*Turska Kafa* or *Crna Kafa*) is very popular and drunk very often. It is served when guests make visits and also at the end of large meals.

### **13 EDUCATION**

Serbia has a literacy rate of 96.4%. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, Serbia's poor economic situation has decreased investments in culture and in education in general. When Yugoslavia began to dissolve in the early 1990s, 10% of its population had no education, 50% had either an incomplete or a full primary education, 32% had a secondary education, 4% had a college degree, and only 5% had a university diploma. Today, roughly 6% of the population have had no schooling, 16% have an incomplete primary education, only 24% have a full primary education, 41% a secondary education, 24.5% a college degree, and 6.5% a university diploma.

In recent years, with the resurgence of the Serbian Orthodox church, religious instruction in public schools has become a central issue in education. The push to have religious instruction in public schools began immediately after the fall of Milošević in 2000. The issue was highly debated due to the implications it had for larger church-state relations. Today, legislation makes religious instruction in public schools an alternative subject that is taught for one hour per week. Religious instruction is not compulsory, and students have the option to attend civic education classes instead. The Serbian government provides finances for religious instruction on the seven recognized religious communities of Serbia (Serbian Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Slovak Lutheranism, Serbian Lutheranism, and Hungarian Reformed Protestantism), but other religious communities are allowed to organize and fund their own religious instruction in public schools if students request it. The content of religious instruction is decided by the Minister of Education and Sports, who works with members of the various religious communities.

While lack of investment in education harms Serbian society as a whole, children with special needs, as well as children of refugees, migrants, and returning nationals have suffered disproportionately. Economic constraints have increased the level of educational exclusion these groups experience. Many Serbs believe that future economic improvement, combined with the government's drive to meet standards for accession into the European Union, will improve this situation and education in general. In the meantime, however, Serbian higher education suffers as well. As the world trend continues to favor knowledge and innovation-based economies more strongly, there is a need in higher education to develop new, modern research areas and to provide more interdisciplinary and more topical programs, such as management and computer sciences,



for students. The number of students interested in these areas has increased, however study programs cannot respond to these societal and market needs because they still reflect the traditional background of higher education staff. Higher education institutions are financed by the Serbian government and by private funds granted for various research projects. Both of these sources have been stifled by the economic situation of Serbia, and as a result, institutions of higher education cannot provide high enough salaries to attract qualified scholars of newly emerging research areas. Consequently, Serbian students of higher education can only choose from professions with increasingly slim employment prospects.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Orthodox Christianity has played a significant role in formation of the Serbian culture. Medieval Serbia was under the Byzantine sphere of influence, and when it emerged as a strong, independent kingdom under the Nemanjić dynasty, the Serbian Orthodox Church was its central institution. This cultural heritage can be most strongly seen in Serbia's rich medieval church architecture, icon painting, and manuscript illumination, which were directed largely by state patronage. Serbian churches boast domed ceilings, Byzantine-style frescoes, extensive sculptures, and numerous icons. Serbian church art benefited greatly from the Fourth Crusade on Constantinople in 1204, when many Byzantine artists sought refuge in Serbia and brought their artistic influence with them. Serbian epic poetry also flourished during the medieval period. Much of it was based on historic events, such as the battle of Kosovo in 1389. Although Orthodoxy has had the most extensive influence on Serbian culture, elements of Catholic and Ottoman culture are also perceptible, in some areas more than others. Throughout the history of the Serbs, Catholic influence penetrated Serbian culture through Austrians and Venetians, primarily in Vojvodina and along the coast of the Former Yugoslavia. Once Serbia gained autonomy and eventually independence in the 19th century, there was an increase in Serbian cultural activity, which included a resurgence of Serbian epic poetry and songs.

Despite the resurgence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the primary capsule of Serbia's cultural heritage, Serbian culture experienced a decline during the Milošević era, when traditional Serbian culture was recast and used to bolster Milošević's power. This phenomenon became most widespread in the form of widely popular "Turbo-Folk" music—pop music inspired by traditional Serbian folk songs (with Russian, Turkish and Greek influences) but set to a techno beat, most often by scantily dressed women. Just as Serbs in the 1980s embraced Belgrade Rock in their attempt to break from Communism and open to the West, Turbo-Folk functioned as the soundtrack for the aggressive nationalistic politics of the 1990s. Its lyrics both glorified traditional Serbian culture and promoted the glamorous lifestyle of the new Serbian elite, consisting of powerful politicians, businessmen, war-profiteers, and individuals involved in organized crime. This manipulation of traditional Serbian culture undermined the morality and civil order of Serbian society by spreading a problematic system of values, lifestyle, and emotional nationalism. Turbo-Folk's popularity spread throughout Serbia contemporaneously with crime, disorder, and fear, offering to Serbs the government's official façade of wealth, glamour, power, and attractiveness during a time of poverty, war, chaos, international isolation, and de-

spair in Serbia. The occurrence and spread of Turbo-Folk was initiated by the changes in social conditions in Serbia as Yugoslavia dissolved. These social changes were precipitated by the long-lasting economic crisis, the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, the great numbers of war victims and refugees, Serbia's isolation from the world community, and later, the 1999 NATO bombings. To aid in the spreading of this new interpretation of Serbian culture, the government harnessed television programming. Television stations specializing in "folk" music and dance emerged in the early 1990s, bringing considerable changes to Serbia's cultural climate. These trends coincided with expansion of mass media in Serbia. It was in this period that television began exerting a growing influence on Serbian society. This spread of television and its use by the government combined with the economic hardships being experienced by rock and pop producers, and a shortage of material for television left an empty space for Turbo-Folk. Following the cultural isolation of the Milošević era, new musical styles, such as rap, have gained popularity in Serbia. Influences from the West are increasing. Serbian rappers and punk bands are now widespread. The Serbian city of Novi Sad hosts the annual Exit Festival of alternative music, which draws crowds from all over Europe. Turbo-Folk today is widely associated with the brutal nationalism of the 1990s, yet, it is still played in popular clubs and on radio and television.

#### 15 WORK

Serbs were traditionally very heavily involved in agriculture. Like other Eastern European countries, Serbia became more industrialized during the Communist era, creating manufacturing jobs in the production of agricultural machinery, electrical and communication equipment, paper and pulp, and transportation equipment. Since the end of the Communist era, the Serbian economy has undergone a major shift in composition. Today, over 63% of Serbia's GDP comes from the service industry, as compared to industry at 24% and agriculture at 12%. The majority of Serbia's workforce, however, is still employed in the industry sector. Only 24% of Serbia's labor force works in services, and 30% works in agriculture. Serbs grow wheat, corn, sugar beets, sunflowers, and raspberries, and raise livestock such as cows and pigs. The unemployment rate in Serbia in 2007 was almost 19%. It has consistently increased since the dissolution of Yugoslavia for a number of reasons. Economic activity and capital investment decreased as a result of war and instability, and the skills of the labor force do not meet the needs of the new market economy. Serbia's education system has not been adapted to train workers to respond to these changes, and as a result, the majority of people who are unemployed are under the age of 30. Alternately, Serbia has compulsory military service for men ages 19 to 35. During wartime, conscription can begin at age 16. Conscription is set to be abolished in 2010.

As a result of the high unemployment rate, many Serbs choose to move abroad in search of better work opportunities. Serbia is also experiencing a phenomenon known as the "internal brain drain," whereby trained professionals remain in the country but chose not to utilize their skills in formal careers. This occurs because of very low wages, slow career promotion, poor research facilities, lack of project funding, and restricted communication with professionals in other countries. A social element is also involved, for in Serbia's transitioning society,

businessmen and politicians who earn more money tend to be perceived as having a higher social standing than scientists or academics.

## 16 SPORTS

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in Serbia. It came to Serbia at the end of the 19th century via students who had studied in Switzerland. The first soccer clubs of Serbia, such as Soko (the Falcon), Srpski Mac (the Serbian Sword) were founded in the early 1900s. In 1991, a Serbian team won both the European and the World championships in soccer. In addition to team sports, Serbs also like wrestling, boxing, and judo. Serbs are also known throughout the world for being excellent tennis players. Some Serbian tennis players include Novak Djokovic, Ana Ivanovic, Jelena Jankovic, and more. Monica Seles is ethnically Hungarian but from the Serbian autonomous province of Vojvodina.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Television has become the main source of entertainment for Serbs, exercising enormous influence on Serbian family and social life. Serbs also often go to the cinema. More traditional forms of entertainment include folk festivals, which every town has each year over several days. Serbs also like to visit family and friends in their homes. Musical concerts are also a popular sort of entertainment. Younger Serbs often go to dance clubs.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Serbian folk music dates from the medieval period and has been strongly influenced by Serbian Orthodoxy. During the Ottoman period, Serbian Christian peasants developed a small, single-string instrument, called a *Gusle*, so that they could play religious music easily and undetected. Traditional Serbian folk music, as well and more modern forms like the Turbo-Folk mentioned previously, remains popular today, especially in rural areas.

Serbian culture also has a strong tradition of folk dance. The most common folk dance is a *Kolo*, in which dancers form a ring by holding on to each others hands, waists, arms, or shoulders. Such dances have various rhythms and steps. Depending on which direction dancers move in, the dance can take on different meaning. A reverse circle is made when the dance is being performed in memory of the dead, called a *Mrtvacko Kolo*. The *Kolo* is still danced at parties today. Several other folk dances, once ritualistic, still exist in various forms, but primarily for entertainment.

Serbs also have a strong tradition in various kinds of handicrafts, such as pottery and other ceramics, rug weaving, jewelry making, metalwork, leatherwork, hand-knitting of clothing, embroidery, wood carving, and stonemasonry. Traditional Serbian folk art decorates items used in everyday life, such as gravestones, ceilings and doors of homes, furniture, musical instruments, and other household objects.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems that Serbs currently face are a reflection of Serbia's long-lasting economic crisis due to the Milošević administration's mismanagement of the economy, the civil wars endured at the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the great numbers of war victims, refugees, and internationally displaced persons,

Serbia's economic and cultural isolation from the rest of the world during war, and the damage done to its infrastructure by the 1999 NATO bombings. All of these factors have led to the general impoverishment of the population and to widespread crime.

As Yugoslavia has continued to dissolve, Serbia has taken in more than half a million refugees, primarily from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo. This has aggravated the ongoing problems of unemployment and lack of housing and has led in many cases to the destabilization of familial relationships. In search of relief from these conditions many Serb refugees have attempted to return to their homes in surrounding countries, but all ex-Yugoslav republics, especially those, such as Croatia and Bosnia, that were involved in war, went through similar processes of social disintegration and have fallen into similar impoverished and chaotic conditions. Despite government directed programs that are meant to aid in the process of returning, returnees often face many obstacles. Many of their homes have been destroyed or occupied by others, unemployment is high, and there is little infrastructure in the rural areas where most Serbs lived. Additionally, the majority of Serbs who attempt to return are older, and thus the youth and reproduction needed to regenerate these areas are largely absent. Moreover, ethnic tensions still linger and Serbs are largely discriminated against by titular nationalities.

Other Serbs have sought relief by emigrating to foreign countries, leading ultimately to what experts call a "brain drain," or the loss of intellectual and professional capital that society has developed over several years, through education, training and development of its young population. Because of a shortage of jobs in Serbia, the best Serbian professionals are moving mainly to Canada, the United States, and Australia. Previously, the outflow of Serbs with a university education was not very significant. Most Serbs who left went to Western Europe and were skilled workers, craftsmen, and technicians. This movement of population initially had a positive effect on the economy, for it decreased the rate of unemployment within Serbia and provided a steady inflow of remittances, or funds sent back by workers to their family members remaining in Serbia. As more educated Serbs leave, and as these movements become permanent rather than temporary, Serbian society as a whole is being negatively impacted.

This trend of emigration contributes to Serbia's extremely low population growth rate, which was actually registered to have been negative in 2001. The fertility rate in Serbia is 1.69 children per woman. The population of Serbia is growing older and the demographic and educational distributions will probably worsen as the small number of young university-educated individuals continues to leave. In the coming years, this will not only negatively impact Serbia's economy, but as work force and age distributions of the population change, Serbia's already weak social security system, infrastructure, educational system, and other systems will face even greater pressures and become more unsustainable. These trends comprise the greatest long-term social threat to Serbs.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Some of the main social and economic problems of the post-Communist transition of Serbia have had a disproportionately negative impact on female Serbs. During the Second World War and the Serbian fight for national liberation, Serb women

experienced a sort of emancipation themselves. Through their involvement in the national effort of supporting Serb partisan fighters, women emerged from their closed, traditional, patriarchal families. After the war, it became more common for women to move to cities, get jobs in factories, and receive an education. During the Communist period, women were no longer limited to simply getting married, having children, and remaining in the domestic sphere. In retrospect, however, scholars believe that the advancements made in gender equality during this period have been exaggerated, much to the detriment of the feminist movement today. On a practical level, despite the rights and liberties attained under Communism, Serb women remained largely subordinate to men and segregated as a group in society. On a theoretical level, the declaration that women and men were made equal under the Communist system produced in Serbian society a false comfort that the problem of gender inequality was solved. This general belief continues to diffuse and undermine the feminist movement by making gender equality a non-issue for society, which is problematic today since women's rights have continued to erode in Serbia with the fall of the Communist system for a number of reasons.

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, war has proven to be the single most detrimental force to the female gender. In war-torn Yugoslavia, interpersonal and familial relationships were destabilized, and domestic violence grew substantially. The effects of economic hardships of war on Serb women were two-fold. First, unemployment, economic instability, and impoverishment made conditions within families very tense, causing domestic abuse to be more prevalent and more readily accepted by society. Additionally, the bad economy did not afford women who were being abused the chance to escape their situations and become monetarily self-sufficient, forcing them to remain reliant on their existing domestic relationship for economic security. Domestic abuse spiked in wartime Yugoslavia for other practical reasons as well. In addition to the tense family conditions it created, war also increased the number of weapons available. This did not necessarily increase instances of domestic abuse, but accessibility of dangerous weapons made it more brutal and deadlier than usual. Finally, institutional help for women experiencing domestic abuse was generally absent during this time, since attention and resources were allocated to more immediately pressing dangers. All of these factors made women the unseen victims of the civil wars of Yugoslavia.

The refugee crisis in Serbia caused by the wars of the 1990s has also had an extremely negative impact on women. Serbia's refugees in general went largely unacknowledged by the rest of the world, and as such suffered from insufficient international aid and received fewer chances for asylum or emigration. Many of the refugee women are from broken homes; some were widowed during the war or were separated from their husbands by various other social pressures. Many of the refugee women either act as single mothers or as the sole provider for their families. Possessing no valid citizenship, protection of rights, or secure employment opportunities, many refugee women began practicing prostitution, for it became one of the only possibilities for earning money. Others also work in smuggling. Some women have been able to get jobs outside of the shadow economy, but since they still do not have citizenship, their rights are not guaranteed and they receive no welfare, no healthcare, and no pension plan. Because they have not been fully integrated

into society, and because they are often single, refugee women also experience widespread sexual harassment.

Finally, the dissolution of Yugoslavia was accompanied by a strong surge in nationalism, and while such periods tend to effect ethnic minorities most greatly, recent nationalist efforts in Serbia have also translated into the restoration of traditional expectations about the role of women in society in general. This has resulted in gender discrimination against women both socially and civically. Increasing numbers of women choose to remain in the domestic sphere and not to venture into business or politics, and the gender gap in Serbia is becoming more visible. Regardless, the feminist movement among Serbs remains quite weak. The number of women's organizations in Serbia has grown since the beginning of the new democratic regime in 2000, but there are still very few. The concept of feminism is still generally rejected by mainstream Serbian society. Men tend to stereotype feminists and women's organizations, viewing them as enemies of the Serbian society and nation. Women largely distrust women's organizations and hesitate to become involved. Thus, while women's organizations are legal in Serbia, they still encounter both institutional and social hurdles.

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—by Sarah Dixon Klump

## SLOVAKS

**LOCATION:** Slovakia, United States, Czech Republic, Serbia, Canada, United Kingdom, Hungary

**POPULATION:** 6 million (4.7 million in Slovakia)

**LANGUAGE:** Slovak

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholicism (69%); Protestantism (11%); Other (20%)

**RELATED ARTICLES:** Czechs, Hungarians

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Slavic peoples first settled on the territory of present-day Slovakia in the 5th century AD. The original territory inhabited by proto-Slovaks also included parts of present-day southeastern Moravia and approximately the entire northern half of present-day Hungary. A Slavic state was formed there under Samo, a Frankish merchant, in the 7th century. At this point, Slovaks were still indistinguishable from other Slavs. In the 8th century, the group of Slavs that would later become the Slovaks inhabited the Principality of Nitra, which eventually became a part of the Moravian Empire in the 9th and 10th centuries. It was during this period that the Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius traveled to this region to convert pagan proto-Slovaks to Christianity. To aid in conversions, Cyril and Methodius developed Glagolitic, a precursor to Cyrillic, and provided Slavs with their first written alphabet. Great Moravia reached its peak during the reign of King Svatopluk between 870 and 894. In 907, Great Moravia was defeated by the Magyars, or Hungarians, in the Battle of Bratislava. Slovakia would continue to be under Magyar rule of some form until the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1526, Hungarians came under the rule of the Habsburg Empire. In 1867, Hungarians and Austrians struck a compromise and transformed the empire into a dual monarchy, but this changed very little for Slovaks. In the wake of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I, Czechs and Slovaks united in 1919 to create the independent state of Czechoslovakia. Throughout the union of the two ethnic groups, the more numerous and powerful Czechs exercised greater political power than the Slovaks, and tensions between the two groups finally resulted in the dissolution of Czechoslovakia by 1939, when Slovakia declared its independence and allied itself with Hitler's Germany. The Slovak puppet government operated under German control during World War II. However, in 1944 Slovaks from the central and eastern parts of the country rebelled against the Nazis, but their revolt was quickly put down and an estimated 30,000 Slovaks were killed.

After the war, Czechoslovakia was reunited, and the Communists seized control of the country in 1948. Under Communist rule, as in the post-World War I era, the Slovaks were once again subordinate to the Czechs. In the 1960s, President Alexander Dubček, a Slovak, attempted to combine Communist ideology with democracy, an effort that culminated in the "Prague Spring" of 1968, which was crushed by military intervention from the Soviet Union, which occupied the entire country and abolished the democratic reforms of the preceding years. Twenty-one years later, through the peaceful "Velvet Revolution" led by dissident playwright Vaclav Havel and the Civic Forum party, the old order collapsed and Commu-

nism was overthrown. After the first democratic elections and the departure of the Soviet troops, old ethnic enmities resurfaced, with the Slovaks demanding separation from the Czechs. Prime Minister Havel and Slovak leader Vladimir Mečiar agreed to dissolve the union of the two peoples, and on 1 January 1993, in an event known as the “Velvet Divorce,” the Slovaks declared their independence, establishing their own parliament in Bratislava. In 1991, Slovakia joined the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia in the Visegrad Group, an alliance for the integration of these countries into greater Europe. In 1992, Slovakia joined the United Nations. Since 2004, Slovakia has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

Slovakia is a small, landlocked country located in Central Europe. It is about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. Slovakia’s neighbors are Poland (to the north); the Czech Republic (to the northwest); Austria (to the southwest); and Hungary (to the south). It also shares a short eastern border with Ukraine. Much of Slovakia consists of unspoiled mountains and forests. The High Tatras, a part of the Carpathian Mountains, are the second-highest mountain ranges in Europe after the Alps. The Kriváň mountain peak, a Slovak national symbol, is located in the High Tatras. The land of the Slovaks slopes down from this high mountain range into lakes and fertile river valleys, which are traversed by several tributaries that drain into the Danube River. The Danube forms part of the southern boundary of the country. Other rivers that flow through Slovak territory include the Váh and the Hron. Slovakia has fertile farmland. Its winters are cold, cloudy, and snowy, and its summers warm.

In total, there are over six million Slovaks in the world. The population of Slovakia is approximately five and a half million, of which ethnic Slovaks comprise roughly 86%. The rest of the population of Slovakia is made up of Hungarians, Czechs, Ukrainians, Carpatho-Rusyns, and Romany, or Gypsies. Just under half of Slovakia’s population lives in rural areas, although significant migration from rural to urban areas is steady. The two largest cities in Slovakia are Bratislava, its capital, and Košice, in the east.

It is estimated that between 1.5 and 2 million Slovaks live outside of the Slovak homeland. Exact numbers cannot be determined since census takers use varying criteria to identify Slovaks abroad. Some counts reflect numbers of individuals who either still possess Slovakian citizenship or have emigrated from Slovakia, while other counts include individuals of Slovak ethnic descent. The largest numbers of Slovaks outside of Slovakia can be found in the United States, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Hungary. Hundreds of thousands of Slovaks emigrated to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, making the number of Slovaks and those of Slovak descent range today between 800,000 and 1.2 million in the United States and 50,000 and 100,000 in Canada. An estimated 200,000 to 375,000 Slovaks live within the borders of the Czech Republic. Because of centuries of Magyar rule, a sizeable Slovak population could be found in Hungary until the beginning of the 20th century. Since the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the number of Slovaks living in Hungary has steadily declined. Currently, roughly 20,000 Slovaks can be found in Hungary.



Historically, a considerable number of Slovaks could be found in the Balkans, primarily in Serbia and Bulgaria. After World War II, thousands of Slovaks left Bulgaria for Czechoslovakia in a state-run initiative to repopulate the Czech and Slovak lands. As such, a very small number of Slovaks remain in Bulgaria today. Roughly 60,000 ethnic Slovaks remain in northern Serbia today, primarily in the autonomous province of Vojvodina. Slovaks are the third largest of over 26 ethnic groups in Vojvodina. Slovak is one of the province’s six official languages. Most Slovaks in Vojvodina are the descendants of the late 18th and early 19th century Slovaks who settled in the region when it was still under Hungarian rule, after the retreat of the Ottoman Empire from the area. Since religion was a primary stimulant for many of the original Slovaks who immigrated to Vojvodina, one of the distinguishing factors of the Slovaks of Vojvodina today is that the majority of them are Protestant rather than Roman Catholic.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Slovak is a member of the Western Slavic language group. Of all other languages, Slovak is most similar to Czech. Although the two languages are clearly distinct from one another, they are mutually intelligible. Like other Western Slavic languages, Slovak received a number of formative characteristics from the Glagolitic alphabet and other standardizing initiatives developed by Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius during their efforts to Christianize the Slavs. The present Slovak alphabet has 43 letters and is written using Roman characters.

This reflects the early change in religious orientation from the Greek Orthodox East to the Latin Catholic West and remains a distinguishing factor between the Western Slavic language group and the Eastern Slavic language group, which uses Cyrillic characters. There are three major Slovak dialects: Eastern, Central, and Western. The Western dialects of Slovak shade onto the Moravian dialects of the Czech language. Slovak words have an accented first syllable, and words with more than three syllables have a secondary accent as well. Like those of other East European languages, Slovak words feature many clusters of consonants. Some Slovak words, such as *smrt'* (death), *srdce* (heart), *slnko* (sun), and *yrt* (to drill, or bore), have practically no vowels at all.

Efforts to standardize the Slovak language began as early as the 17th century, primarily in the form of literature. The two main individuals credited with contributing the most to the standardization of the Slovak language were Anton Bernolák in the 18th century and Ľudovít Štúr in the 19th century. While Bernolák worked with the western Slovakian dialect, Štúr's use of the central dialect has become the basis of standardized Slovak today. The Slovak political experience, however, has proven to curtail the development and standardization of Slovak during the last three centuries. Under the Hungarian Empire, the Hungarian language was privileged over Slovak and Slovaks experienced heavy Magyarization efforts in education and other public spheres. During the existence of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak language was considered an official language of the country, but Czech was privileged over Slovak in politics, professions, education, and other public spheres. As a result, the Slovak language was heavily influenced by Czech and took on many Czech borrowings.

The Slovak Language is the official language of Slovakia, but both Czech and Hungarian are also widely spoken. Those who speak Hungarian primarily populate the southern region of Slovakia. Because of the rapid pace of globalization, borrowing from both Czech and other languages still occurs.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Slovaks possess a very rich oral history that deals, like most peoples' folklore, with all aspects of life and nature. Because of Slovakia's predominantly agrarian history, however, themes of love, marriage, health, and agricultural bounty are particularly common.

Almost every ruined castle in the Slovak Republic has its legend. Sometimes these legends are extremely violent, like the story of Csejte, a ruthless countess who murders three young girls and bathes in their blood in an effort to renew her youthfulness. There are also many stories about Janosik, a well-known folk hero whose adventures date back to the Turkish invasions of the 16th and 17th centuries. These kinds of folk tales provided a great deal of inspiration for later Slovak literature. In the mid 19th century, Pavol Dobšinský worked to collect and publish anthologies of Slovak folk fairy tales like these. Such activities were closely related with the Slovak National Awakening.

Belief in witches, ghosts, and other supernatural beings persists as a remnant of pre-Christian paganism. One such figure is Morena, a goddess of death who is the object of a springtime custom by which young girls ritually "drown" a straw doll in waters that flow from the first thaw. In rural areas, some Slovaks still believe that illness and misfortune can be caused by

witches, demons, or the "evil eye" and seek the services of traditional healers who use folk remedies and rituals to protect or exorcise villages and homes.

Slovak folklore also includes a number of means by which individuals can determine and try to control their futures, most occurring around Christmas and the New Year. On November 30, lead is poured into boiling water, and the shape it takes is used to make predictions about the coming year. Young women have many ways of trying to discover who their husbands might be, such as peering upside-down at the water's surface in a well. On Christmas Eve, nuts are cracked and their contents are examined to determine what the coming year will bring. Additionally, food from the Christmas Eve feast is given to livestock in hopes that they be granted good health.

#### 5 RELIGION

Most Slovaks (about 70% of the population) belong to the Roman Catholic Church and are closely affiliated with their church communities. Slovak Catholicism is generally more traditional than the more liberal Czech version. The next largest group, 13% of the population, consists of those who claim either atheism or no religious affiliation. This is quite small compared to the 59% of neighboring Czechs in this category. Roughly 11% of the population identifies itself as Protestant and roughly 4% as Greek Catholic, a Christian religion that acknowledges the Catholic Pope but whose liturgical traditions follow those of Eastern Orthodoxy. Others include Calvinist Reformed, Eastern Orthodox, and Baptist. Slovakia's once populous Jewish community was destroyed in the Nazi Holocaust.

Churches and religion presented a strong obstacle to the Communists after World War II. The government banned religious activity and closed all private religious schools. In 1989, with the fall of Communism, churches were restored and religious schools reopened. Although most Slovaks have returned to the traditional Slovak religion of Roman Catholicism, the Protestant Evangelical movement in Slovakia, as in other former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, continues to grow in order to fill the religious vacuum created by the Communist ban on organized religion.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

National holidays in Slovakia include New Year's Day (January 1), Liberation Day (May 8), Cyril and Methodius Day (July 5), Slovak National Uprising Day (August 29), Constitution Day (September 1), Independence Day (October 28), and Day of the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy (November 17), which simultaneously commemorates Slovak demonstrations against the Nazis in 1939 as well as the demonstrations in 1989 that are said to have triggered the Velvet Revolution.

In late October, Slovakia hosts the Bratislava music festival, which attracts national and international performers. Many towns and villages host annual folk festivals in the late summer or fall, with plentiful singing, dancing, and drinking.

Most Slovaks also observe the major feast days and holidays of Roman Catholicism, such as Easter and Christmas. The Slovak celebration of Easter extends to the Monday after Easter Sunday as well. September 15, the Day of Our Lady of Sorrows, is an important holiday for Slovaks since the Virgin Mary is considered to be the patron saint of Slovakia. The largest of Slovak celebrations culminates around Christmas, over a period of three days. On Christmas Eve, Slovaks attend church ser-

vices. Christmas trees are decorated, gifts are exchanged, and there is a traditional Christmas Eve dinner called *vilija*, consisting of mushroom soup, fish, peas, prunes, and pastries. December 26 is the Feast of Saint Stephen and is called “Second Christmas Day” by Slovaks. Slovaks usually celebrate birthdays with their families, and name days, days dedicated to the saint for which one is named, with friends and co-workers.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Most Slovaks observe major life events, such as birth, marriage, and death, according to the religious traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Shaking hands is a standard form of greeting; men generally wait for women to extend their hands first. Upon parting, a man may hug a woman or kiss her on both cheeks. Standard salutations include *Dobrý den* (good day), *Velmi ma tesí* (pleased to meet you), and the more informal *Ahoj* (the equivalent of “hi”). *Dovidenia* means “good-bye,” and the more casual terms *Ciao* and *Servus* mean either “hello” or “good-bye.” In rural areas, some older residents still greet each other with *S Bohom* (“God be with you”).

When not among family or close friends, Slovak forms of address are very formal and courteous, including both *Pán* (Mr.) or *Pani* (Mrs.) and any professional title, such as doctor, professor, or engineer. As in many other languages, modes of expressing respect and courtesy are built into Slovak grammar. Slovak has a second, more formal case for the second person. For example, in addressing a close or familiar acquaintance, Slovaks use the word *ty* for “you.” When addressing someone unfamiliar, or to convey a more formal, respectful relationship, Slovaks use the word *vy* for “you.”

Slovaks enjoy entertaining at home. It is customary for guests to bring to their hosts a bottle of wine or some sort of alcohol. Upon entering a Slovak home, guests generally remove their shoes; their hosts often provide them with slippers. Fresh flowers are often given, and when they are presented, they are always unwrapped and in odd numbers, since it is the custom to bring even numbers of flowers to funerals. The gesture for wishing someone good luck (the equivalent of crossing one’s fingers in the United States) is to fold the thumb inward and close the other fingers around it.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Roughly 21% of Slovakia’s population lives below the poverty line. Life expectancy for Slovaks averages 75 years of age, and the rate of infant mortality is 7 deaths for every 1,000 live births. The adult prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS is less than 0.1%, and it is estimated that fewer than 200 people in Slovakia are HIV positive. There is virtually universal access to medical care and a high rate of immunization for infants in the first year of life. Slovakia’s health spas are known around the world and have many international visitors.

Most city dwellers live in modest-sized apartments built during the Communist era. Varied types of housing are found in rural Slovakia, ranging from two-room detached dwellings to two-story apartment buildings with up to six units. Indoor plumbing has been standard in rural areas for the past 40 years. Common building materials are cinder blocks and fired bricks. In the wake of the fall of Communism, Slovakia

experienced a serious housing shortage as housing units were recovered from state control. The privatization of state housing units resulted not only in the slowing of new construction, but also in the increase in the amount of owner-occupied housing. Both of these trends have affected the rental market, causing the creation of a rental black market and making housing unaffordable for many. Additionally, the shift of maintenance responsibility from public to private has caused repair and upkeep of lower income rental properties to be neglected. The Slovakian government is addressing these problems by building new rental properties. Now, approximately two million housing units exist in Slovakia, but it is estimated that over 150,000 units are still needed.

Most Slovak families own a car, but public transportation, including buses, trolleys, and trains, is widely used due to the high price of gasoline. There are rail links and highways between major cities. Because of the growth in cellular services and access to the internet, communication technology in Slovakia has expanded dramatically in recent years and is widely accessible.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The most common family unit in Slovakia is the nuclear family, although extended families can still be found in rural areas, where houses may have extra rooms to accommodate the family of a grown son or daughter. The average Slovak family has one to two children. Women receive paid maternity leave and a cash allowance when each child is born. Most women work outside the home (women account for 47% of the Slovak labor force.) Women and men have equal rights under the law, including property and inheritance rights.

## 11 CLOTHING

Slovaks wear modern Western-style clothing, including business attire for work, and jeans and T-shirts for casual wear. On special occasions, or during festivals or holidays, some Slovaks still wear traditional dress. For women, this includes puffed-sleeve blouses, vests, full skirts, aprons, boots, and a bonnet or headscarf depending on marital status. For men, this includes hats, shirts, vests, boots, and either form-fitting or flared pants. Such costumes are usually very colorfully embroidered. Traditionally, they were made of homespun cloth and sheepskin, but this is rarer today. Styles, colors, and accessories historically varied depending on region.

## 12 FOOD

Pork is the most common meat consumed in Slovakia, although beef, poultry, fish, and game, such as boar, rabbit, and venison, are also regularly eaten. Slovaks also make various types of spiced sausages, primarily from pork. The Slovak national dish is *bryndzové halušky*, dumplings made with potatoes, flour, water, eggs, and salt and served with processed sheep’s cheese, and occasionally, bits of pork. In some regions, *halušky* is also served with cabbage and onions. Other Slovak favorites include *Kapustnics*, or cabbage soup, and *rezen*, or breaded steak. Fresh fish and wild game are often served in Slovak homes, and fresh-baked bread and soup are dinnertime staples. Favorite desserts include *tortes*, frosted, multilayered cakes, and *koláč*, or rolls with a nut or poppy seed filling.

Pilsner beer and dry, white wine are both produced and regularly consumed in Slovakia. The vineyards of Slovakia are



A Detva bride. On special occasions, people in the hill country still wear traditional dress, including dark woolen suits and knitted hats for men and full skirts, aprons, blouses, and scarves for women. (Helen Cincebeaux)

primarily located in the southern part of the country, in the Male Karpaty region near Hungary. As in the Czech Republic, *slivovice* (plum brandy) is also very popular.

The traditional main meal of the day in Slovakia is lunch, but more Slovaks are increasingly making dinner their main meal.

### 13 EDUCATION

Slovakia has a literacy rate of over 99%. Schooling is compulsory for 10 years, from ages 6 through 16. As in the United States, students go to school for five days a week, Monday through Friday. There are many secondary schools in Slovakia that prepare children for a higher education, as well as a variety of vocational schools. Most schools are still owned by the state, although since the fall of Communism there has been an increase in church-run schools and other types of private schools. There are over 30 schools of higher education in Slovakia, several of which opened after the fall of Communism. The oldest Slovak university is Comenius University in Bratislava, founded in 1919. Despite pending plans to implement tuition fees, there is still no charge to attend a university. Admission,

however, is limited and highly competitive. The grading system in Slovakia uses a scale ranging from one to five, with one being the highest grade and five being the lowest.

Since the fall of Communism, public schools and universities have struggled to overcome a lack of adequate funding. Instructors are underpaid and a great deal of the teaching material is outdated. As a result, corruption has become widespread as educational administrators and instructors are more prone to turning to illegal bribes in exchange for giving students entrance to schools, better grades, and more. Additionally, the quality of teachers has diminished since schools cannot compensate better qualified professionals and experts.

Regardless, Slovakia's secondary education is ranked as thirtieth in the world, just behind the United States, which is ranked twenty-ninth.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Folk music is one of the most important elements of Slovakian culture. Slovakian national music was greatly strengthened and popularized in the early 19th century, although the origins of traditional Slovakian music are located in early Christian liturgical music. The Slovaks' pride in their musical tradition is expressed in the saying *Kde Slovák, tam spev* ("Wherever there is a Slovak, there is a song"). Villages have amateur musical groups that perform at school graduations and harvest festivals. Characteristic Slovak folk instruments include the bagpipes (*gajdy*), pipes (*píst'ala*), the *fujara*, a large shepherd's flute held vertically in front of the body, and native instruments similar to the fiddle and dulcimer. One popular series of folk songs, *Janosik* songs, are based on the exploits of a well-known folk hero. A common theme in many Slovak folk songs is Slovak subjugation to other national groups, such as Hungarians and Turks. Immigrants from Romania, Germany, and Hungary have also brought varying music styles to Slovakia. More recently, contemporary composers have begun to incorporate Slovak folk melodies into their works. Slovaks also have a strong folk-dance tradition, with dances such as the *Kolo*, *Hajdúch*, *Verbunk*, *Czardas*, polka, waltz, a shepherd's dance called the *Odzemok*, and the *Chorodový*, a communal women's dance. Although popular music began to replace folk music after World War II, folk music remains an important element of Slovak culture and is celebrated, along with other folk arts, at a major folk festival every year in July.

Slovak literature began to experience great vibrancy in the early 19th century, when talented poets, such as Andrej Sladkovic and Jano Kral, produced some of the most original Slavic Romanticism. Such writing was heavily inspired by Slovak folk tales. Slovak literature came of age after World War II, but during the four decades of Communist rule after World War II, Slovak writing underwent a general decline.

### 15 WORK

Slovakia has more or less completed its transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. Like other Eastern European countries, Slovakia became highly industrialized during the Communist era, creating manufacturing jobs in steel, chemicals, glass, cement, and textiles. Since the end of the Communist era, the Slovakian economy has undergone a major shift in composition. In 1991, for example, 43% of the labor force was employed in heavy industry. In 2003, however, 56% of the labor force was employed in the service





*A woman in Bratislava, Slovakia, displays her needlework. (AP Images/Rudi Blaha)*

industry, with 29% in heavy industry, 9% in construction, and 6% in agriculture. Workers in Slovakia have benefited from the country's sustained, strong economic growth, which has occurred even during a more general European slowdown. In the midst of privatization, the rate of unemployment went as high as 19.2% (in 2001). By the beginning of 2008, it had dropped to 8%. Despite its generally successful transition to a market economy, however, Slovakia is still in need of greater investment in research and development in order to cultivate a modern knowledge-based economy and remain competitive with the rest of Europe and the world.

## **16 SPORTS**

Popular sports among Slovaks include soccer, tennis, and skiing, although Slovakia is known best around the world for ice hockey. Ice Hockey became popular in Slovakia in 1925 when the European Ice Hockey Championship was held in the High Tatras in 1925. This established the beginning of the Tatra Cup, which is now the second oldest tournament in Europe. In 2002, Slovakia won the world hockey championship.

## **17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION**

In their leisure time, Slovaks enjoy attending movies, local festivals, and cultural events and participating in outdoor activities including hiking, swimming, and camping. Slovakia also has over 1,000 mineral and hot springs. In rural villages, men meet after work at the local bar to drink, play cards, and socialize.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Folk arts and crafts, which include pottery, porcelain sculpting, woodcarving, metalworking, toy making, and glass painting, have a long and popular tradition in Slovakia, especially in rural areas. Many women knit, sew, embroider, and make lace. Popular patterns are handed down from generation to generation. Slovakia also possesses very rich folk architecture in the forms of wooden churches, brightly painted houses, and more.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Despite the large improvements in the economy over the last several years, Slovakia still has the highest unemployment rate of any country in the European Union. Many Slovaks have

moved abroad in search of employment, and Slovakia's accession to the European Union has aided in such movement. This trend of emigration contributes to Slovakia's extremely low population growth rate of 0.14%. The fertility rate in Slovakia, 1.33 children per woman, is one of the lowest in the European Union. In the coming years, this may not only negatively impact Slovakia's economy, but as work force and age distributions of the population change, Slovakia's social security system, infrastructure, educational system, and other systems may become unsustainable. These trends comprise the greatest long-term social threat to Slovaks.

Two of the larger immediate social problems facing Slovaks are drugs and prostitution. Both drugs and humans are trafficked through Slovakia. Synthetic drugs are produced in Slovakia and distributed throughout Eastern and Central Europe. The drug ecstasy is also used in Slovakia.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Women and men in Slovakia are roughly equal when it comes to literacy, education levels, employment, and civic and political rights. Some of the main social and economic problems of the post-Communist transition, however, have had a disproportionately negative impact on the female gender. Generally, the Communist period is thought by experts to have had a negative impact on the feminist movement. Under Communism, women and men in Czechoslovakia were officially declared equal by law, but this did not translate into practice beyond the most visible public spheres. The Communist government's version of equal rights was simply ensuring that women were employed at a comparable rate to men. They did little to address the other domestic and societal conditions, expectations, and stereotypes of women. Often, gaining employment outside the home actually worsened conditions for women, who were still largely expected to perform all of their domestic tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, in addition to their work outside the home. Many experts argue that the Communist rhetoric of equality among men and women produced a false comfort among Slovaks, as among other peoples under Communism, that the gender imbalance had been solved. This sense diffused and undermined the feminist movement by making women's rights a non-issue in society.

The feminist movement in Slovakia does not have much strength and it is not a part of mainstream Slovak culture. Inequality, at least in societal expectations of women, still exists when it comes to reproductive issues, family life, work, political affairs, and public life. Slovak women themselves, however, do not consider their situation to be inappropriate or in need of being changed. Studies show that only 30% of women in Slovakia have positive or neutral views on the idea of feminism, while 24% have a negative view and 46% are not even familiar with the concept. Even more Slovak men are ignorant or possess a negative view of feminism. In both men and women, social demographics seem to affect awareness levels of feminist issues, but not attitudes. The more highly educated men in Slovakia are actually more negative toward the feminist movement, which poses problems for educated Slovak women attempting to pursue women's rights.

The post-Communist period has also taken its toll on certain groups of women in a very concrete way. High unemployment, the rising cost of living, and increased contact with larger markets since the fall of Communism have caused an

increase in prostitution activities of Slovak women, both in Slovakia and abroad. Within Slovakia, authorities have done little to regulate prostitution, which has been detrimental to both women practicing prostitution and inhabitants of areas where prostitution activities occur. Before the fall of Communism, prostitution was prohibited in the streets, making many of these problems new to Slovak society. The lack of regulation or restriction leaves women who practice prostitution with no rights or protection and has led to the increase in other problems connected to prostitution, such as violence and drug abuse. These problems penetrate broader portions of Slovak society because they occur in residential areas. Since no official laws exist to regulate prostitution, police are often not able to respond until other crimes surrounding the activity, such as pimping, drug distribution, and theft, are committed. Often, it is the female prostitutes who are punished by law enforcement rather than the male perpetrators. Official regulations have still yet to be put into place, leaving only non-governmental organizations to address the issue. Such organizations focus on health education, social and legal issues, the provision of contraceptives, and widespread preventative activities in an effort to alleviate the problem. Such organizations are few and lack sufficient state support for their activities. Additionally, due to the nature of prostitution, many of the women who need to access these services cannot since they are outside of the mainstream social system. Prostitution is highly stigmatized in Slovak society, making it even harder for these women to break away from their situations.

Prostitution is equally, if not more dangerous for Slovak women outside of Slovakia's borders. Since the fall of Communism, the illegal trafficking and prostitution of women from former Eastern Bloc countries in Western Europe has grown immensely. The European Commission estimates that over 2,000 Slovaks per year are trafficked as prostitutes to France, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Germany. Young Slovak women are most often told by traffickers that they will be employed in high-paying jobs as waitresses and au pairs in their new country of residence. Upon arrival, their personal identification and travel documents are stolen and they are forced to work as prostitutes on streets or in brothels against their will. Such women are not only limited by not knowing the local language, but are also beaten and threatened. These women become susceptible not only to heavy drug use, but to murder as well. Contrary to the call for regulation of prostitution at home, some experts believe that legalization and toleration of prostitution in Western Europe has only aided human traffickers in seeming more legitimate. Police and various non-governmental organizations are working to create a system for locating and retrieving victims, but due to widespread Slovak social attitudes toward prostitution, many of the victims who do make it back to Slovakia are ostracized from their communities.

Legitimate agencies that seek to employ young Slovak women abroad as au pairs do exist, but when Slovak women arrive in foreign countries, they are often treated not as au pairs on a cultural exchange but as live-in migrant domestic workers, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Both forms of exploitation are made possible by the unemployment rate in Slovakia and by the economic disparity between Slovakia and its richer western neighbors.

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—by Sarah Dixon Klump

# SLOVENES

- ALTERNATE NAMES:** Slovenci; Slovenians [both forms, Slovene and Slovenian, are used as noun and adjective]
- LOCATION:** Slovenia and regions of Austria, Italy, and Hungary along their Slovenian borders
- POPULATION:** 2,003,358 million, of whom 83.1% are Slovenes (2007 census)
- LANGUAGE:** Slovenian; in nationally mixed areas, also Italian and Hungarian and others
- RELIGION:** Roman Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox, other Christian, other or unspecified, none

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Slovenes, a distinct South Slav people, originally located in the area northeast of the Carpathian Mountains, settled in the eastern Alpine region of Central Europe in the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Although they established a short-lived political entity, Karantania, in the 8th century, they obtained their own independent state only in 1991. For over 1,000 years, Slovenes lived under mostly German rule as part of the Holy Roman (962–1806), Austrian (1804–1867), and Austro-Hungarian (1867–1918) empires. During centuries of foreign rule, the Slovenes preserved their language and, in the last 200 years, formed a modern nation with a rich culture and aspirations for political independence.

In 1918, following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Slovenes joined with other South Slavs to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (in 1929 renamed Yugoslavia, meaning "the land of South Slavs"), but one-third of Slovene ethnic territory remained outside its borders. Within this new state, the Slovenes acquired institutions crucial for national development, among them a university and the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts.

World War II (1941–1945) was a traumatic experience for the Slovenes. Their territory was divided among three occupying powers: Germany, Italy, and Hungary. Many Slovenes died during the wartime liberation struggle, but many more—thousands—were killed in a bloody civil war, fought during World War II. Victorious Communists massacred over 10,000 anti-Communists in the spring of 1945. The Communist takeover triggered massive emigration from Slovenia and left deep political divisions, which persist to this day. In federally organized Communist Yugoslavia (after 1945), Slovenia, as a constituent republic, acquired its own constitution, as well as cultural and some political autonomy. With the demise of Communism in Europe, Yugoslavia fell apart in June 1991, after two of its constituent republics, Croatia and Slovenia, proclaimed their independence.

Since then, Slovenia has been an independent state and a republic with a parliamentary democracy. Slovenia joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) in 2004. In January 2008 Slovenia became the first of the ten 2004 EU newcomers to hold the EU's rotating presidency.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Republic of Slovenia borders on four countries: Austria in the north, Hungary in the northeast, Italy in the west, and



Croatia in the east and south. It occupies a small (20,256 sq km or 7,821 sq mi, about the size of the US state of New Jersey) but geographically diverse area: the Alpine region in the west and north, the Subpannonian hilly terrain with large fertile basins in the northeast and east, the Dinaric Karst in the south and southeast and the fertile Slovene Littoral, with 46 km (29 mi) of Adriatic coast, in the southwest. Also, despite its small size, this eastern Alpine country controls some of Europe's major transit routes.

Slovenia's climate varies with its geographical makeup. The Alpine region has long, cold winters and short, cool summers; the Subpannonian area has a continental climate with cold winters, hot summers, and fluctuating daily temperatures; while a Mediterranean climate, with mild winters, is characteristic of the Slovene Littoral. Slovenia, half of its land covered with forests and enhanced by sufficient rainfall, is considered "green country on the sunny side of the Alps." Although mountains and karst areas are poorly suited for agriculture, they are beautiful, unique regions, which offer wonderful possibilities for tourism and sports. In fact, tourism is one of the most important branches of the Slovene economy.

Additionally, Slovenia can boast over 26 000 km of permanent and torrential water courses, about 6,500 karstic caves, thousands of springs, waterfalls and gorges, and its natural and artificial lakes. There are the karst-limestone regions with their reservoirs of subterranean water, as well as the remains of once formidable glaciers below the peaks of Triglav and Skuta. Triglav is the highest mountain in Slovenia. Its name means "three-heads." The mountain is 2,864 m high and is a true na-

tional symbol, featured on the national coat of arms and the flag.

Slovene archeological sites attest to several prehistoric and Roman settlements and to the strategic importance of the Slovene ethnic territory as a crossroads between northern and western Europe, and Europe's east and the south. The land originally settled by the Slovenes, south of today's Vienna, Austria, and east of Venice, Italy, was three times the size of the present Slovene ethnic territory. Not all Slovenes live within the boundaries of the Republic of Slovenia: Slovene minorities exist in neighboring Austria, Italy, and Hungary. Also, an estimated 2.5 million Slovene emigrants and their descendants live throughout the world, around 300,000 of them in the United States. Slovenes emigrated for various historic reasons. Poverty was the most prevalent reason before World War I, and fear of political persecution after World War II.

About 50% of Slovenes live in cities: in Ljubljana, the capital, with approximately 276,000 inhabitants; in Maribor, with 106,000 inhabitants; and in several smaller cities, each with under 50,000 inhabitants. Ljubljana is a unique city that maintains the friendliness of a small town, while possessing all the characteristics of a metropolis. It is considered to be a meeting point of the cultures of the east and the west, where the old interlaces in harmony with the new.

In the past, the Slovenes were mostly peasants and, before World War II, over 50% of Slovenes made their living from farming; in the 1990s, however, the number of peasant farmers had dwindled to 7%. After World War II, Slovenia rapidly industrialized, but did not become urbanized. Many Slovenes still live in the country while commuting to work in the cities. Preserving the countryside helps people to maintain close bonds with nature, Slovenian culture, customs, and habits. While being a very modern society, Slovenes place a great value in delicious home cooked meals, homemade wines and brandies, the traditional ceramic heating stove, and the captivating scent of new-mown hay. Both in the city and in the countryside people are hospitable and welcoming.

### 3 LANGUAGE

The language of Slovenes is Slovenian, which is the official language of the Republic of Slovenia. However, Hungarian and Italian are spoken in the border regions, and German fluency is common near the Austrian border. Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian are spoken by a sizable (6% of the population) minority.

Slovenian is a South Slavic language, closely related to Croatian and similar to other Slavic languages, e.g., Czech. Similarly to many other Slavic languages, it uses the Latin alphabet. It is spoken by approximately 2 million people in the Slovene ethnic territory, and by emigrants around the world. Natural boundaries (mountains and rivers) and the proximity of other language groups (Croatian, German, Hungarian, Italian) influenced the development of Slovenian and its division into several distinct dialects. In the past, spoken Slovenian, particularly that of uneducated people, borrowed many words from German, such as *štumfi* (from the German *Strumpf*) for *nogavice* (stockings). At present, slang, especially of youth, and technical language of professional groups are heavily influenced by English. In teenagers' talk, the English words "full" and "cool" are staple expressions of emphasis, e.g., *To je ful dober!* (This is very good!). Another often-used English expression is "OK".

Slovenes are proud of their language, but at the same time they are aware of the need to learn foreign languages to be able to communicate with their neighbors and the rest of the world. Thus, the majority of Slovenes speak at least one foreign language. In elementary school, all children begin to learn a foreign language in the fifth grade; in secondary school, students often study two or even three languages. The most-frequently taught foreign language is English, followed by German. In the border areas, with Italian and Hungarian and other minorities, those respective languages are also taught.

People are most often named after Catholic saints (Ana, Andrej, Joxe, Marija, Matevx). Also popular are old Slavic names, such as Iztok (source) or Vesna (spring). Family names are derived from people's occupations, e.g., Kmet (farmer), or Kovaĉh (blacksmith); from locations where they live, e.g., Dolinar (one who lives in a valley), or Hribar (one who lives on a mountain); and from animals, e.g., Medved (bear), Petelin (rooster), or Volk (wolf).

Impressively, statistics indicate that over the centuries Slovenians accumulated 42,889 different first names (20,366 male names and 22,523 female names) and 88,157 different last names. Although some names are disappearing (such as Karol, Vilko, Radoslav, Hilda, Leopoldina, Fanika), other first and last names are being created or acquired from other countries.

Despite the extensive list of names to choose from, half of the population of Slovenia has one of the top 50 names. Two female and five male names are so popular that more than 20,000 people have one of these seven names. Thus, every eighth person in Slovenia (about 12% of the population) has one of the following names: Franc, Janez, Anton, Ivan, Joĝef, Marija, or Ana.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Many Slovene folk traditions are associated with seasonal celebrations, dating to pre-Christian times. They were adopted, modified, and perpetuated by the Catholic Church. Slovene Carnival celebrations with parades, carnivals, and masquerade balls vary from region to region. Among them, *kurentovanje* in Ptuj is the most famous tourist attraction. The central figure is the *kurent*, whose fur clothing and unusual masks with horns, representing human and animal traits, evoke images of another planet. Always happy, the *kurent* is considered a harbinger of spring, fertility, and new life. Accompanied by a ceremonial plowman, he visits farms and wishes their owners a prosperous year. Adults and children enjoy the spring Carnival season, called *pust* (Mardi gras). The traditional pastries *krofi* and *flancati* (similar to doughnuts) are prepared. Costumed children, wearing masks, go from house to house, asking: "Do you have anything for Pusta, Hrusta?" People give them sweets and fruits. Adults attend masquerade balls. This tradition is similar to Halloween in the United States.

Slovene heroes are usually optimistic, wise, and cheerful. Stories about Kralj Matjax (King Mathias), Martin Krpan, and Miklova Zala, for example, are introduced to children early in their lives. The story about Kralj Matjax goes back to the difficult times of the bubonic plagues, Turkish invasions, and famine in the 16th and 17th centuries. People elected a good king who would protect them from danger and never die. However, he and his army are said to be sleeping under Mt. Peca. When needed, they will awaken and protect their people. Another popular hero is Martin Krpan, a common Slovene person from

a small village who is strong, wise, and cunning, who saved Vienna and the Austrian emperor from a Turkish ogre.

One of the most beautiful stories is of a Slovene woman, Miklova Zala, and also dates from the time of Turkish invasions. She epitomizes love and fidelity. Captured by the Turks, she was taken to Constantinople where she was sold to a pasha who wanted to marry her. Refusing to abandon her Christian beliefs and her husband, she succeeded in escaping. After long and challenging travels that lasted seven years, she was reunited with her husband. This story celebrates true love, the faith and beauty of Slovene women, love for homeland, courage, and strength.

#### 5 RELIGION

Slovenes are mostly Roman Catholic. In the 8th century AD, Slovene worshipers of Slavic gods were Christianized by Irish missionaries. Since then, the Catholic Church has played a major role in preserving and cultivating Slovene language and culture. Although 90% of Slovenes claim to be nominally Catholic, considerably fewer practice their religion (go to mass regularly and receive the sacraments). But Slovene culture is inseparable from Catholicism.

Small numbers of people belong to other religious groups. The Evangelical Protestant Church (Lutheran), established during the 16th-century Reformation movement, is the oldest. Of recent groups, some are non-Christian, such as Hare Rama Hare Krishna. In the last decade, there has been more interest, especially among young people, in various spiritual movements. As of 2008, 38 other religious communities, spiritual groups, societies and associations were registered in Slovenia.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Religious holidays, such as Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, Assumption Day (August 15) and All Saints Day (November 1) are recognized as national holidays. A few secular holidays are also observed. Since gaining independence in 1991, Slovenes celebrate Statehood Day (June 25), and Independence Day (December 26). Besides official celebrations with political speeches, cultural programs, fireworks, and receptions for diplomats, families and friends gather, light bonfires, picnic, and sing.

Since 1945, Preĝeren Day (February 8) has been celebrated as a Slovene cultural holiday honoring the great Romantic poet France Preĝeren. Cultural programs of all kinds (concerts, poetry readings, theater performances, and the presentation of the most prestigious national award for artists) take place in schools, cultural institutions, and the media.

Although the majority of Slovenes are Catholic, Reformation Day is also observed as a national holiday on October 31 to recognize the important role the Protestants played in establishing the identity of the Slovene nation. In 1550, they published the first book, *Cathechismus*, in the Slovene language, followed by other books, among them a translation of the Bible.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life transitions are marked with religious ceremonies and celebrations appropriate to the Roman Catholic tradition followed by the majority of Slovenes. Such events as baptism, First Communion, and confirmation are considered important rites of passage in a child's life.



Slovenes wear traditional costumes of fur and bells during the Pust or Carnival parade. The carnival dates back to old Europe when people would celebrate spring and the end of winter's dark and cold. (Melissa Farlow/National Geographic/Getty Images)

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

When meeting, Slovenes exchange various greetings, depending on the time of day. Until approximately 10:00 am it is customary to use “*dobro jutro!*”; during the day, *dober dan* (good day); and after dark, *dober vecer* (good evening); to all of which the traditional reply is “*Bogda!*” (May God grant you). Slovenes, especially the young, often greet each other with “*zivijo!*” (long life). At parting, various expressions are used. The most common are “*nasvidenje!*” (so long), “*adijo!*” (goodbye) and, in the evening, *lahko noc* (good night). When Slovenes meet or part, they often shake hands.

In addressing a person, Slovenes use either the informal or the formal form. A friend or a close relative would be addressed with *ti* (informal for “you”) and the verb in corresponding form; an older person, a teacher, or a stranger would be addressed with *Vi* (formal for “you”). Teachers in school are never addressed by their first name but rather with *Gospod* (Mr.) and *Gospa* (Mrs.). For example one would refer to a teacher as *Gospod Kovac* (or *Mr. Smith*). Students in elementary schools are addressed informally with *ti*, while in high schools and universities they are addressed formally with *Vi*.

Slovenes are courteous visitors and when invited to dinner will always bring small gifts: flowers for the hostess, a bottle of wine for the host, or candy for the children. It is considered rude to refuse what is offered, but, usually, it is good manners to decline politely once or twice before taking it. *Hvala* (thanks) is the word used to express gratitude, to which *prosim* (please) is the polite response. *Prosim* is also used when a request is put forward, or when a listener did not hear or understand what was said.

Slovenes tend to appear reserved at first, but are very friendly on acquaintance. Slovenes, usually friendly and hospitable, are eager to help a foreigner with information. They are quick to invite him or her home to share a meal. Among themselves, they value friendship, spend time together, and help each other build houses, move, or bring in the harvest.

It is not unusual to see Slovenes express their emotions, especially affection, in public places. This is especially true of teenagers, who can be seen in the streets and parks holding hands and kissing. Many old courting and dating customs, once popular particularly in villages, have died out, but a few are still observed. Just before young people marry, they organize pre-wedding parties: the *deklišTina* (maiden party) is organized by a bride for her women friends, and the *fantovšTina* (bachelor party) by a groom for his men friends.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Statistics show that the quality of life in Slovenia is relatively good. Life expectancy for men is 72 years and for women 80 years. Mothers are entitled to one year's maternity leave so that they can stay with their babies and nurse them. Maternity leave could also be a “parental” leave, since half of it can be used by fathers.

With recent improvements in medicine, only 5 out of 1,000 newborn infants die. All children are vaccinated against the most common diseases and undergo regular medical check-ups. Infectious diseases have been practically eradicated. Most Slovenes have public health insurance and reasonable pension plans. Slovenes die primarily of cancer and heart diseases; the latter account for 50% of all deaths. Cigarette smoking is

less popular than in the past, however it remains a little below 30% of the population. Consequently, respiratory illnesses and problems associated with smoking and air pollution are common.

Public transportation (train and bus service) is well organized. Also, many families own a car. Young people can obtain a driving license when they turn 18. Owning a car in Slovenia is a status symbol. Hence, people spend a lot of money on cars. According to survey results from 2006, only 5% of households were not able to afford a car. Poor roads and inclement weather conditions contribute to fatal traffic accidents, which are commonplace.

Historically, there is a shortage of housing in cities; apartments are small and modest. Very few children have their own rooms and are bound to share them with other siblings, sometimes even with parents. However, many people living in cities have small cottages, called *vikendi*, in the countryside or resort areas where they spend their weekends.

Although statistics indicate longevity and the general good health of population, many Slovene families still face economic and financial constraints. Approximately 13% of households cannot afford decent meal every second day and 34% of households cannot afford a week of annual holiday away from home. At the same time every family owns at least one television. Computers are somewhat less common but over one million people possess mobile phones (2001 census).

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The majority of young people get married in their 20s and establish a family with one or two children. Families with three or more children are rare. Because of the shortage and relatively high cost of housing, newlyweds often live with their parents for years before they are able to acquire their own home. Slovenes maintain close relations with their parents, siblings, and extended families. Even though Slovenes love their family, many marriages end in divorce, and most children are left with their mothers. In general, divorce is easily obtained.

According to the 2007 census, there were approximately 670,000 mothers in Slovenia. About 10% of women over 40 have never given birth. Throughout the years the role of mothers has changed significantly. If 50 years ago more than half of Slovenian women stayed home and took care of the family and household, today typical Slovenian mothers pursue professional careers. In fact, mothers in Slovenia are more active in their professional pursuits than mothers in other EU member states. At the same time employed mothers still perform the lion's share of the household chores. Recently, husbands began to share with their wives responsibility for housework and education of children. Yet credit for the family well-being is mainly due to Slovene women. A Slovene proverb says, "The wife supports three corners of the house."

Traditionally, women had their first child soon after getting married. However, today the average age of a woman at the first childbirth is 28 years. Women increasingly try to finish their education, get a good job, and purchase a place to live before they have a child. Thus, the tendency to have a first child after 30 is growing. Furthermore, more and more mothers give birth outside marriage. The share of children born to unmarried women has grown by significantly. The number of unmarried couples is growing too. If 50 years ago consensual unions were socially unacceptable, now they are commonplace, so that

as many as 38% of second children are born to unmarried parents (2006 census).

On weekends, especially on Sundays, and in the evenings, families spend their time together. There are no shopping malls, and only a very few stores are open on Sundays. Thus, families go to church, take trips, hike, ski, collect mushrooms, visit each other, and enjoy long conversations. Many families visit relatives in the countryside on weekends and help them with work in the fields, orchards, and vineyards. This is especially true at harvest time. An increasing number of families own pets: dogs, cats, or birds are the most common.

## 11 CLOTHING

Similar to other Europeans, Slovenes wear contemporary Western clothing. Young people prefer jeans and tee-shirts. Women like to dress up and especially favor Italian fashion, while men dress informally, even at the office: short-sleeved shirts in summer and woolen sweaters in winter. Recently it has become very popular to wear jewelry. Extreme body-piercing and tattooing are rare.

In the past, people wore hand-sewn garments. They were made from linen or wool and varied from region to region. Roughly, there were Alpine, Pannonian, and Mediterranean styles of clothing. However, regional differences in everyday attire disappeared in the late 19th century. At the same time, the Slovenes adopted the modified traditional costume of the Gorenjska region as their national costume. Since then, this traditional outfit was worn at public events and celebrations to emphasize national identity. Today, Slovenes wear the national costume only at folk festivals or traditional celebrations.

A woman's apparel consists of a long, dark brocade skirt, a white petticoat and underclothes, a bodice, a richly decorated headdress, colorful silk scarves, hand knit socks, and an ornate metal belt. A man's costume consists of a dark velvet vest, often embroidered, suede shorts worn over long white underwear, boots, a silk scarf, and a hat.

## 12 FOOD

Most of the Slovene land is not suited for agriculture, thus not enough food is produced at home. While there is sufficient production of poultry, dairy products, and potatoes (the staple food since the 19th century), Slovenes import many basic foods such as oil, wheat, sugar, and meat. Food is expensive, costing most Slovenes at least half of the family budget.

In the past, *mocnik*, a dish similar to porridge made from wheat, buckwheat, or corn flour, was the most popular staple food among farmers, eaten twice a day. Meat was available rarely, the major source of protein being legumes. Vegetables and fruits varied with the season; sauerkraut and dried fruits were the source of vitamin C during the long winters. With the rise in the standard of living and new technologies (refrigeration, quick transport), Slovenes began to change their eating habits: meat became an everyday food, and regional and seasonal differences were no longer as distinct.

Slovene cooking has three major influences: Alpine, Mediterranean, and Pannonian. There are 30 recognized regional cuisines, each for example, serving its own type of bread. Famous regional foods include Primorska's fish and seafood and Karst's *pršut* (cured ham). Slovenes everywhere enjoy bread and potatoes. Potatoes are served boiled, sautéed, deep-fried, or roasted, and are used in various dishes including dump-

lings, soups, and stews. Breakfast consists of coffee, tea, or hot chocolate, and rolls with butter and jam. *Zemlja*, a special kind of hard roll, is especially popular. Salami, cheese, and soft-boiled or fried eggs are also served for breakfast. Some people do not take breakfast and drink only strong coffee.

The main meal in the Slovenian diet is lunch. A typical Slovenian lunch begins with soup before moving on to the main course. The most popular Slovenian soup is *Goveja juha z rezanci*, a beef or chicken broth with noodles. Some other soups are *Grahova juha* (pea soup), *Gobova kremna juha* (creamed mushroom soup) and *Zelenjavna juha* (vegetable soup). The main course, accompanied by a side dish and salad, is followed by a dessert. Lunch is usually prepared by working mothers and is eaten in the mid-afternoon. Supper is a light meal with salads, yogurt, and leftovers from lunch.

One recent eating trend in Slovenia is the “slow food movement.” A typical “slow food” meal takes place in a restaurant or at a private home among a group of family members or close friends. There are usually eight or more courses, the emphasis being on local produce, old-style recipes and a relaxed pace, with a different wine to accompany each course.

Slovenes have many delicious traditional dishes that they cook for holidays. One of the most genuine festive Slovene foods is a rolled yeast cake, called *potica*, with sweet (walnuts, tarragon, raisins) or salty (cracklings) fillings. *Potica* is usually made for Christmas and Easter. Among traditional meat dishes, *kranjske klobase* (sausages, similar to Polish kielbasa) are well known, as are pork dishes (*koline*) in winter.

Many restaurants offer a wide range of traditional national dishes, as well as international dishes like pizza, pasta, and oriental dishes. The coast offers excellent seafood, including shellfish and the Adriatic bluefish. Although eating out is expensive, Slovene *gostilnas*, traditional taverns, serve as popular gathering places, particularly in the country. They offer homemade dishes and pastries. The typical Sunday lunch menu in a Slovene *gostilna* includes beef or chicken soup with homemade noodles, pork or veal roast, sautéed or roasted potatoes, salad, and *potica* or strudel for dessert. Young people like pizza and adore eating in a newly opened American McDonald’s.

Of alcoholic drinks beer and fruit brandies (e.g., *sadjevec*, *slivovka*—plum brandy) are served today, while in the past, *medica* (mead) was a common alcoholic drink. Above all, Slovenia is known for its great red and white wines. Winemaking has a long history in Slovenia. Its origins can be traced back to the 6th century BC. Popular nonalcoholic beverages are fruit juices and drinks made with fruit syrups (*malinovec*—with raspberry syrup), herbal teas, and, lately, Coca-Cola, especially among young people.

### 13 EDUCATION

The Slovene literacy rate is almost 100%. Compulsory eight-year elementary education has been a legal requirement since 1869. All school-age children (6-14 years old) attend elementary school. At age 14, students take a lower-level comprehensive exam (*mala matura*), whose results influence students’ further schooling. Some 90% of students who finish elementary school continue their education at the secondary level. Some go to four-year schools to prepare for higher studies, but many enter two- and three-year vocational schools. A school year lasts 190 days. Not all students graduate. Those who finish take the upper-level comprehensive exam (*velika matura*),

which enables them to enroll in the university. About 33% of them continue their studies, but only 9% graduate. Social studies, e.g., law, business, and economics, are more popular than natural sciences. There is no tuition in the public school system at any level for full-time students, but parents have to pay for the students’ textbooks and other supplies. Since 1991, the law allows home-schooling and private schools, which are few in number.

Education has long been the only channel of social promotion for Slovenes and is highly valued by parents, who expect their children to do well in school. Many students follow in their parents’ profession. School attendance and studying are the major responsibilities for most students, and almost no elementary or high school students work during the school year. They do have summer jobs, some out of need, and others just to earn pocket money.

The educational system in Slovenia is almost fully financed by the state budget. The Slovene school system has undergone a number of changes in recent years. In light of the reforms, children enter elementary school at the age of six. Beginning in 1999, the length of elementary education has been increased from eight to nine years. Thus primary or elementary school now consists of nine-year program, and is divided into three three-year periods.

Upon completion of their elementary education children are expected to pursue secondary education, either in vocational schools, technical schools, or in gimnazija. Gimnazija is a four-year general education program designed to prepare students for university. Children of foreign residents can also receive education at all levels. Approximately 84% of secondary school graduates pursue further studies. In fact, the profile of Slovenia’s population enrolled in higher education is improving. The number of students in vocational colleges and higher education institutions is increasing. In the academic year 2007/08, 115,445 students were enrolled in post-secondary vocational and higher education studies. This means that in the 2007/08 academic year 50% of all persons aged 19 to 23 were enrolled in post-secondary vocational and higher education institutions, while 10 years ago the share was below 30%. Large numbers of female students major in commerce, business administration, and accounting while the majority of men study mechanical engineering, electronics, computer science, and civil engineering. More than 85% of all university students are enrolled in the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music has always been an important part of the Slovene culture. Vocal and instrumental music has ritual and entertainment functions. Folk songs, usually sung in three- or four-part harmony, are simple in form, lyrics, and music, and deal with love, patriotism, war, work traditions, changes of season, and religious and family holidays. In the past, folk singing was part of everyday life, closely associated with group work, e.g., harvesting or spinning. Today, it plays an important role in churches, in traditional celebrations, and at social gatherings. For centuries, Slovenes have spent their free time singing in choirs, and choral singing has been an important hobby. At present, there are hundreds of choirs established in schools, organizations, and churches, wherever Slovenes live. Choral singing is also alive in Slovene emigrant communities, for ex-



ample in Cleveland, Ohio. Choral performances include folk songs as well as works of Slovene classical and contemporary composers.

Instrumental music was traditionally performed on simple wind, string, and percussion instruments, made by local craftspeople employing materials at hand. The accordion, introduced in Slovenia in the late 19th century, quickly replaced more traditional instruments and became the most popular folk instrument of the 20th century. Today, the electric guitar is a popular instrument among young people. Music education is part of the elementary school curriculum.

Slovene history and culture are reflected in folk arts and literature. Many folk poems, fairy tales, short stories, proverbs, and riddles have been recorded and preserved for future generations. Old fairy tales (such as *The Golden Bird*), stories, and poems are still very popular among children and adults. Motifs in folk literature are often used by poets and writers as the inspiration for their literary work.

France Prešeren is considered Slovenia's most celebrated writer and poet. He is regarded to be a great leader of Slovenian culture, nationality and independence. His poetry modernized the Slovenian language. A portion of his poem "The Toast" is used as the national anthem. February 8, the day of Prešeren's death, is a national holiday celebrated by the entire country.

Slovenes have built hundreds of churches, wayside shrines, and towns with numerous art galleries, which speak of a rich and high-quality arts tradition throughout history. Although influenced by specific Slovene cultural characteristics, literature, music, visual arts, architecture, and theater have been part of Central European art movements, appearing approximately at the same time as anywhere else in that part of Europe. Slovene artists worked in the European art centers, and European masters came to Slovenia. The same is true today. Slovenes have had many important artists, some of whom they have honored by putting their likenesses on the new bank notes in 1992.

In short, modern Slovenia has a rich cultural life bustling with a myriad of theatres, cinemas, libraries, and educational facilities, and is well known abroad for its cultural exports.

## 15 WORK

Most employed people in Europe work a 40-hour week. Industrious Slovenes usually work much longer. Besides holding jobs in factories and offices, many moonlight, run their own businesses, and/or work on small family-owned farms. Under socialism, everybody had the right to work; hence, the state created jobs even if they were not needed. These policies were a double-edged blessing. While they provided some social security and minimal means for living, they also brought about economic conditions incompatible with a market economy, such as a lack of competition, inefficiency, and the high cost of goods. After 1990, several industrial plants were scaled down or closed, and thus unemployment became a serious social problem.

Post-independence economic reforms were implemented to mend unemployment and economic instability. Current data indicates that in December 2007 there were 864,361 employed persons, 43.3% of whom were women. The Employment Service of Slovenia reported 68,411 unemployed persons, 53.7% of whom were women. At the end of 2007 the unemployment rate was 7.3%: 8.9% for women and 6.1% for men.

## 16 SPORTS

Slovenes enjoy sports: hiking, mountain climbing, biking, swimming, rafting and rowing, tennis, horseback riding, fishing—the list goes on. In winter people ski and skate. Almost every child and adult owns a bike, and many ride it to school or the office every day. Skiing has a long history in Slovenia, and is probably the most popular sport. Skis were invented in Slovenia independently at the same time as in Scandinavia and were once a major means of transportation. Today, there are a few hundred thousand recreational skiers, from whose ranks competitive skiers are recruited. They compete internationally in all skiing disciplines: downhill, slalom, jumping, and cross-country, and have won medals at Winter Olympic Games.

Davo Karničar is one of the most renowned alpine skiers in Slovenia. In 2000 he became the first person to ski nonstop down Mount Everest. He has also skied Mont Blanc and Annapurna in the Himalayas. Another famous Slovenian athlete is a marathon swimmer Martin Strel. Strel's records include swimming the entire length of the Danube River in 2000, and swimming the length of the Mississippi River in 2002.

International athletic events held in Slovenia include World Cup downhill skiing in Kranjska Gora and Pohorje, World Cup ski jumping in Planica, and biathlon competitions in Pokljuka.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many schools organize dances for their students on weekends. Proms (*maturitetni plesi*) are traditional in elementary and secondary schools and are organized for graduates every year in the spring. Adults dance on various occasions: weddings, traditional celebrations such as *Martinovanje* (Celebration of New Wine) in the fall, and masquerade balls (*pustovanje*—Mardi gras) in the Carnival season. The polka and waltz are very popular, but Slovenes dance all major known dances from the tango to the macarena.

Slovenes enjoy strolling, often in attractive old town centers, meeting people, chatting with them, and having a coffee or a drink in small coffee shops, or *kavarnas*. Trips on weekends to neighboring mountains are also very popular. Slovenes enjoy walking in the woods and picking mushrooms to prepare them as culinary specialties.

Movies, concerts, and theater performances are enjoyed by many people. In Slovenia, concerts are attended by more people than are soccer games. Young people enjoy listening to various jazz, rock, and techno groups. Although there are several local rock groups, young people listen mostly to popular American, English, and German groups. The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Bob Marley are known to every Slovene teenager. Television-viewing has increased in the last decade. Besides Slovene TV programs, Slovenes can also watch Italian, Austrian, English, and American TV shows, including news on CNN.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Folk arts were mostly associated with crafts and decorating peasants' or, later, workers' homes. Painters often decorated furniture (e.g., chests, bed headboards, and cribs). Painting on glass was popular in the 19th century. Talented but unschooled folk artists often portrayed religious motifs, motifs from popular folk stories, and events from everyday life. Geometric patterns were also popular.

Many traditional Slovene crafts are unique and deserve attention, among them pottery, woodenware, embroidery, and lace-making, and crafts related to candle-making, gingerbread pastries, glass-making, wrought iron, and clock-making, to name a few. As the conditions of life vary from region to region, so do the crafts. With the development of industrial production after World War II, many crafts almost died out. Some were kept alive, and others have been revived in the last few decades to preserve Slovene cultural traditions.

Pottery-making, among the oldest of traditional crafts, has developed in various Slovene regions. In some of them potters are still active today. Potters produce many useful objects: pots, baking and roasting dishes, jars, pitchers and goblets for wine and drinks, whistles, toys, musical instruments, and ceramic tiles for stoves. Beautifully shaped and decorated, they are still popular in Slovenia today. Woodenware (spoons, various kitchen utensils, toothpicks, and sieves) was produced in several centers, the best-known of which, the Ribnica valley, is still active. In the past, Ribnica artisans traveled throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, selling their handmade products.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Alcoholism is an old, persistent, and serious problem among Slovenes of all ages and both genders. It is disturbing that the consumption of alcohol increased by about 25% during the 2000s. Yearly, the average Slovene drinks 11 liters (3 gallons) of hard liquor and 60 liters (16 gallons) of wine. Drug abuse has also increased, especially among young people. The number of smokers has decreased for the past decade, but still a sizable 29% of the population smokes.

Except for the 50 years under Communist rule, unemployment has always been a problem for Slovenes. Usually it was solved by emigration. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, thousands of Slovenes emigrated to industrialized Europe and the United States. Economic emigration continued after World War II. Due to the world recession in the 1980s, many emigrants returned home. With the change in the economic and social systems in Slovenia in the early 1990s, unemployment began to rise, reaching 14% of Slovenes out of work in 1996. In 2008 unemployment had been reduced to 7%, but still remains a major social problem.

Although since the 1990s the standard of living improved, 12% of the population in Slovenia remains below the poverty threshold. The share for young people aged 16–24 amounts to 12.4%: 11.4% for men and 13.6% for women. The unemployment rate is the highest among young people aged 15 to 24.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Today the position of women in Slovenia is not ideal, but it is better than in some other European countries. The majority of young women choose to postpone getting married and having children, focusing instead on education and professional careers. The share of women in vocational colleges and higher education institutions is continually growing, amounting to 58.3% of tertiary students in 2008. Furthermore, in Slovenia the female employment rate is 61.8%, while in the EU it is 57.2%. In the past, prestigious universities clearly favored male applicants. Now this trend is changing. It is true that among doctoral candidates men still prevail, but probably not for long. Although men and women have equal opportunities for

education, certain disciplines are particularly popular among women, while others are reserved for men. Thus in 2006, 68.7% of student enrolled in the fields of social science, business, and law were women. Yet, the fields of natural science, mathematics, and computer technology are dominated by men, with women representing only 2.6% of graduates. Similarly, the fields of engineering, manufacturing, and construction are dominated by male students, while women represent the highest share of graduates (80%) in the fields of education, health care, and social work.

According to EU data, since 2000 women took 7.5 million new jobs out of the total of 12 million available. Since 2000 there has been a steady increase in female employment. Male employment increased as well but at a significantly lower rate.

At the same time, even though the majority of women have a university education and are often better educated than men, their employment rate is on average 10 percentage points lower than that of men. Women earn 15% less per hour than men do and it is quite challenging for them to achieve high positions in administration, management, and government. The share of women managers is growing very slowly; in 2008 they accounted only for 33% of managers. In sum, while the Slovenian constitution includes provisions for anti-discrimination laws, women and minorities regularly face inequality and bias. Though laws exist to protect women from harassment and violence, women are still subject to abuse due to the remnants of the patriarchal nature of Slovenian society.

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—revised by A. Golovina Khadka

# SPANIARDS

**LOCATION:** Spain

**POPULATION:** 40 million

**LANGUAGE:** Castilian Spanish; Catalan; Galician; Basque

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Spain, the second-largest nation in Europe (after France) is a country of large geographical and cultural diversity, a land of contrasts and extremes. Its terrain includes Mediterranean beaches and snow-capped Pyrenees, dry plains and coastal rice paddies, volcanic islands and rolling hills. Its people have strong regional identities forged by this diverse geography and by the events of their history. After colonization by the Greeks and Romans and invasion by Germanic tribes, Spain was conquered by the Muslim Moors, who seized control in the 8th century AD and maintained it for nearly 800 years, introducing many cultural innovations. Isabel and Ferdinand, called the Catholic monarchs, conquered Granada, the last city held by the Moslems. They sponsored the discovery of America (1492) by Christopher Columbus. Spain became the greatest world power during Europe's Age of Discovery, reaping tremendous wealth for an empire that extended to virtually all areas of the globe.

After becoming a republic in 1931, the nation was torn apart by a Civil War (1936–1939), the end of which marked the beginning of General Francisco Franco's repressive 36-year regime, until his death in 1975. Since then, Spain has been a parliamentary monarchy under King Juan Carlos, joining the European Community (now European Union) in 1986. For administrative purposes, Spain is divided into seventeen Autonomous Regions (Autonomías), and two autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla) on the Northern Moroccan coast; each one of these regions is made of one or several provinces (Provincias). In 1992 Spain hosted the Olympic Games in Barcelona and the International Exposition in Seville.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Spain comprises approximately four-fifths of the Iberian peninsula (with Portugal accounting for the remainder). Its most outstanding geographic feature is its average elevation of 660 m (2,165 ft), the second-highest in Europe after Switzerland. In addition to its portion of the Iberian mainland, Spain also includes the Canary Islands in the Atlantic and the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean. Altogether, its total area of 504,739 sq km (194,880 sq mi) is slightly less than the combined area of Utah and Nevada. Three-fifths of the Spanish mainland is a broad plateau, or tableland, called the Meseta, located in the center of the country. Spain's other topographical regions are the northern coastal belt, Andalucía in the south, the Mediterranean coastal belt, and Catalonia and the Ebro Valley in the northeast.

Spain has a population of 44,708,964 people (as of January 2006), with a much lower population density than most other European countries. Geographic barriers have helped preserve a keen sense of identity in all six of Spain's major ethnic and local groupings. The Castilians, who live in the central meseta, are the nation's ethnically dominant group, and Castil-

ian Spanish is Spain's national language. The other groups are the Galicians, who inhabit the northwest region of the country; the independent-minded Basques, their neighbors to the east; the Catalans, known for both commerce and in connection with artists such as Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali; the Levante, known for its oranges and paella; and the southern region of Andalucía, famous for its flamenco music and Moorish architecture.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

According to the 1978 Constitution, Castilian Spanish is the national language. It is spoken by a majority of Spaniards and used in the schools and courts. Castilian derives from Latin as well as the regional languages which include Catalan and Galician, which is similar to Portuguese. Basque is a pre-Roman language whose origin has not been clearly determined. Together with Castilian, Catalan, Galician, and Basque are co-official languages in these autonomous regions.

### NUMBERS

one	un, uno
two	dos
three	tres
four	cuatro
five	cinco
six	seis
seven	siete
eight	ocho
nine	nueve
ten	diez

### DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	domingo
Monday	lunes
Tuesday	martes
Wednesday	miércoles
Thursday	jueves
Friday	viernes
Saturday	sábado

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

Spanish folkloric tradition is very rich and one finds elements with origins as diverse as Celtic, Roman, Germanic, Jewish and Moorish. Spain's ancient musical heritage is diversified with bagpipe music in Galicia and Asturias, *sardanas* in Catalonia, flamenco dancing accompanied by the guitar in Andalucía, or the lively Aragonese dance called the *jota*. Bullfighting is the most widely known Spanish tradition and some historians trace it to a cult of bull worship.

## <sup>5</sup> RELIGION

Historically, Spain has been one of Europe's most staunchly Catholic countries. Currently, about 76% of Spaniards are Roman Catholics and Catholicism is the country's established religion, although about 19% do not declare any religion. While observing baptism and other important Catholic rites many Spaniards do not participate regularly in religious services. Religious Spaniards, like the Catholics in other countries, believe strongly in intercession by the saints and especially by the Virgin Mary. *Cofradías*, Catholic lay societies devoted to particular saints, play an important role in religious life in many areas of the country. A 1967 law guarantees freedom of reli-



gion. The recent waves of immigration, especially during the 1990s, have led to an increasing number of Muslims—currently there are approximately one million Muslims living in Spain. Islam is today the second largest religion in Spain, after Roman Catholicism.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

In addition to New Year's day and the major holidays of the Christian calendar, Spain's other national holidays include St. Joseph's Day (March 19), the Day of St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29), St. James's Day (July 25), and a National Day on October 12. Every city or town also celebrates its local saint's days with processions, dancing, and bullfights. Joseph, the patron saint of Valencia, is commemorated with fireworks and the burning of wood and cardboard figures of satirical character and monumental size called *fallas*. Bonfires are lit on the Night of Saint John's Day, following ancestral pagan traditions. Pamplona is known for its celebration of San Fermin, when bulls are turned loose in the streets. Barcelona's town fiesta, the Feast of La Merced, is marked by a week of celebrations that include fire-breathing dragons. Madrid's Festival of San Isidro involves three weeks of parties, processions, and bullfights. The celebrations of Holy Week in many cities and towns of Spain include floats with scenes of the Passion and Death of Christ, and likenesses of the Madonna, each one sponsored by a different religious society. Among the civilian holidays are the celebrations of Carnival, that begins a week before Lent; Fiesta del Trabajo, equivalent to Labor Day, on May 1; Hispanidad Day or Día de

la Raza on October 12; Constitution Day on December 6; and each autonomous community celebrates its own Autonomy Day at different dates.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditionally, besides baptism and marriage, the first Communion and military service were considered rites of passage for Spaniards. The first three of these events are the occasion, in most cases, for big and expensive social gatherings in which the family shows its generosity and economic status. At times, families dig into their savings or borrow money in order to pay for these status shows. Spain abolished compulsory military service in 2001. The armed forces are now all volunteer.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Since the 1960s there has been a steady improvement of the economy mainly due to industrial development and tourism, as well as an evolution in customs. Spaniards frequently travel abroad and have adopted customs from other cultures in the last 30 years or so. Although many people living in rural areas have moved to the city, the present generations have preserved the family house in the village and return there at the time of fiestas and for vacation and remain loyal to their community or pueblo. The economic prosperity enjoyed by Spain has allowed many people to also have a vacation home in the country or an apartment at the beach.

In the cities, office hours begin at 9:00 AM and traditionally include an extended afternoon lunch break beginning at 2:00 PM. Workers then return to their offices from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. The day typically ends with a walk (*paseo*) with friends or family and/or visits to neighborhood bars for a few drinks, appetizers (*tapas*) and conversation. Dinner is often eaten as late as 10:30 PM. In some locales, such as Barcelona, however, the traditional afternoon siesta is no longer the rule. Both blue and white collar workers have a paid month vacation which they usually spend by the sea, the mountains or travelling abroad. Travel to faraway or exotic places has become quite popular due to the affordable travel packages offered by travel agencies. Spaniards are considered to be friendly and outgoing. It is customary to shake hands and in a social setting women usually kiss their friends on both cheeks. Young groups are formed by co-workers, fellow students or people from the same town that go together to discotheques, organize parties and excursions, and date among themselves. The average citizen spends a great deal of time out of the house. There is an active street life; many people live downtown, frequent bars and restaurants, and go to bed late. Spaniards move from place to place less than Americans and, once they get a job, many aspire to return to their birthplace and settle there. Regional loyalties are usually strong and the new autonomous status of the old provinces has strengthened this feeling. It is not unusual to have lifelong friends known since kindergarten.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Spain today is a consumer society that relies on credit cards, loves to go shopping, and is interested in cars, gadgets and entertainment. Cars are commonplace and have become a problem in big cities (parking, pollution, congested traffic, car theft). The public transportation system in Spain is excellent and thus many people who work in cities have moved to towns in the periphery that are now part of suburbia. In the 1970s



*An elevated view of La Boqueria fish and vegetable market off Las Ramblas Boulevard in Barcelona, Spain. Las Ramblas is full of activity day and night. (AP Images/Denis Doyle)*

and 1980s there was a building boom and although rents and the price of apartments are high, there is no housing problem.

The average life expectancy in Spain is 78 years. There is a National Health Service and cities have both general practitioners and specialists in all medical fields. Madrid and Barcelona have modern subway systems. Today, Spain has an excellent system of highways. RENFE, Spain's national rail network, provides service between all major cities and is developing a service of ultrarapid trains, called AVE. The first of this kind was the Madrid-Sevilla line started for the 1992 World Expo, followed by the Madrid-Barcelona. Major ports include Barcelona, Tarragona, and Cartagena on the Mediterranean, Algeciras on the Strait of Gibraltar, and Cádiz, La Coruña, Santander, and Bilbao on the Atlantic.

#### **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Today's Spanish families are much smaller than in the past and usually have two children. The mother has most of the responsibility for rearing them, while a father's relationship with his children can be formal and remote. In general, when children reach adolescence, their relationship with their families diverges based on gender. A teenage male, while continuing to revere his mother, begins spending much of his time with other young men, while teenage daughters and their mothers grow closer than ever. Even after a daughter is grown and married, her mother continues to play a prominent role in her

life. Yet these traditional patterns are also changing and young men and women are as independent as their economy allows it. Today people live longer lives, have fewer children than before (actually the birth rate is one of the lowest in Europe), and fewer people live in their homes with extended family. Spanish people usually marry within their own social class. Only church marriages were recognized in Spain until 1968, when civil ceremonies were first allowed by law. Divorce has been legal since the 1980s.

#### **11 CLOTHING**

Both in town and in the country, Spaniards conform to the average European fashion standards, and boutiques and ready-to-wear shops can be found all over the country. Although many young people wear sports clothes and blue jeans, the average Spaniard pays more attention to personal appearance than his or her American counterpart. Businessmen wear a suit and tie, businesswomen dress fashionably in suits or dresses and high heels. The Spanish fashion industry has greatly developed and some firms, like Zara, Mango, and Camper, are known the world over. Children who attend some private schools wear school uniforms.

#### **12 FOOD**

Being a large country with different geographic and climatic areas, Spain also has a wide variety of regional dishes. As in

other Mediterranean countries, they make liberal use of olive oil, fresh vegetables, and garlic. Originally from the South, gazpacho is a cold soup made from tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and onions. Galicia is known for its seafood and stews, Catalonia for its fish casseroles and for cured and smoked meats, such as *butifarra*, a type of sausage. The regional dish *paella*, which originated in Valencia, has become a national delicacy. It consists of a rice-and-saffron base and commonly it can include mostly seafood (*a la marinera*), or several kinds of meats (*mixta*). Spaniards love cured ham (*jamón serrano*), several kinds of sausage, including *chorizo* and *salchichón*, and cheese, especially the variety called *queso manchego*. Popular seafood includes squid, crab, shrimp, fresh sardines and tuna, salmon, trout and dried and salted codfish. Spanish wine and champagne (*cava*), sherry and brandy are excellent and are exported both to Europe and the Americas. There are several areas in the country where different varieties of wine are produced like la Rioja, la Mancha, Rivera del Duero, and several zones in Andalucía. Spanish-made beer is also very good. Both wine and beer are drunk together with *tapas* or at mealtimes. For breakfast Spaniards usually take coffee with sweet rolls, and sometimes hot chocolate with strips of dried dough called *churros*. Fruit juice and a bowl of cereal are becoming popular for breakfast among young people.

Lunch in Spain, eaten between about 2:00 and 4:00 PM is a leisurely meal comparable to dinner in the U.S. *Tapas*, appetizer-like snacks, are served in bars together with drinks, and are usually eaten before lunch and dinner. Popular *tapas* include seafood such as small fried fish, *boquerones* (pickled fish), *berberechos* (cockles), *calamares* (squid), olives and almonds, in addition to cheese, ham and sausage. A tortilla in Spain is an egg omelette and not, like in Mexico, a flat and thin piece of corn bread.

### 13 EDUCATION

School is free and compulsory from the ages of 6 to 16, with secondary education or vocational training available for students aged 14 to 16. Private schools, mostly run by the Roman Catholic church and subsidized by the government educate nearly one-third of Spain's children. The adult literacy rate is estimated at 98%. University education is general and students must sit for an entrance examination (*selectividad*) to enter the university system. Spain has 31 state-run universities and an increasing number of private ones. Students receive a diploma after three years of general study and a *Licenciatura* upon completing a program of specialized study lasting two or more years. Centralized public education is administered by the Ministry of Education.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Spain enjoyed a Golden Age of literature in the 16th and 17th centuries. Widely regarded as the first great novel, *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes eventually became the most widely translated work other than the Bible. In modern times, poet and dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca won international acclaim. Several Spanish authors including playwright José Echegaray, poet Vicente Aleixandre and novelist Camilo José Cela have been recipients of the Nobel Prize. Musically, Spain gave the world the guitar, developed from a four-stringed instrument of the 12th-century Moors. Great Spanish composers have included Isaac Albéniz, Enrique Granados, Manuel

de Falla and Joaquín Rodrigo and virtuoso performers such as Pablo Casals and Andrés Segovia.

Spain is particularly known for its contribution to painting, which can be said to have begun with the prehistoric cave paintings at Altamira. El Greco and Diego Velázquez were among the artists of Spain's Golden Age, and the passionate works of Francisco Goya communicated an intensely personal vision at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In the 20th century innovators in painting include Pablo Picasso, perhaps the single most powerful influence on 20th-century art, as well as Joan Miró, Salvador Dali, Antoni Tapies, Antonio Saura and others. Some of the best architects internationally are Spanish, such as Rafael Moneo, Ricardo Bofill, and Santiago Calatrava. Spanish films are at the avant-garde of the film industry. Movie director Pedro Almodovar is internationally known, as are Spanish actors Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem.

### 15 WORK

In the past, agriculture, livestock, and mining were the mainstays of the Spanish economy. Under the regime of General Franco industrial expansion was emphasized, and the bulk of Spanish employment shifted to industry. More recently, the service sector has expanded greatly. Farmers may work on large estates or small farms. Typical crops in the north are potatoes, beans, corn and vegetables; in the central areas, wheat, soybeans, sunflowers, lentils, chickpeas, grapes and other fruits. In the Mediterranean area, vegetables, rice and fruits, especially citrus, are grown. The fishing industry is also a major employer: Spain's fishing fleet is the largest in the world. Seeking higher living standards, many people migrate from rural areas to the cities. Spain's economic prosperity attracts a growing work force (some workers enter the country illegally) coming from economically or politically unstable areas. The new immigrant workers come mainly from North- and Sub-Saharan Africa, Spanish America, and Eastern Europe. The majority work in agriculture and in construction.

Since the early 1970s Spain has developed a prosperous tourism industry. Since the 1970s Spain has been the second most visited country in the world after France. In 2007 almost 60 million foreign visitors arrived in Spain. Parallel to summer tourism the country offers cultural tours, international conventions, and sports meetings as well as cruises. There is ample hotel accommodation and a network of beautiful de-luxe government-sponsored hotels (*paradores*) located in historical buildings.

### 16 SPORTS

The most popular sport is soccer (called *fútbol*). League matches are played on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from September through May, with tournaments in the summer. Madrid has two teams in the top division, and Barcelona's team, known as Barsa, is world-famous. It forms the basis of a sporting club with over 100,000 members, one of the oldest such clubs in Europe. Membership passes from father to son, and some 80,000 members have permanent seats for matches in the Camp Nou stadium, the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world. The 1992 Olympics were hosted in Barcelona. Basketball and tennis are also gaining popularity as spectator sports. Spanish world class champions today are cyclist Miguel Induráin, winner of the Tour de France five times, golfer Steve

Ballesteros, tennis players Arancha Sánchez Vicario and Conchita Martínez, and motorcycle champions Sito Pons and Angel Nieto. In September 2007 Spain won Europe's Volleyball Championship in Moscow. Participant sports include hunting and fishing, sailing, *fútbol*, cycling, golf, horseback riding, and skiing.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The most characteristically Spanish form of entertainment is the bullfight (*fiesta brava*), whose history can be traced back to the Middle Ages. Popular throughout the country, this ritualized fiesta involves grace, courage, and spectacle. Bullfights take place in three stages, called *tercios*, or thirds. First comes the *tercio de capa*, when the matador tests the bull with his cape, becoming familiar with the animal. In the next part, the *tercio de varas*, the picadores and banderilleros weaken the bull with lances and brightly colored darts. Last comes the *tercio de muleta*, the final life-and-death confrontation between matador and bull. In an afternoon of bullfighting, six bulls are usually killed by three different matadors.

However, not all Spaniards today are fond of bullfighting. Many, especially the young, prefer to go to the beach in summer and to the countryside and the mountains for hikes and picnics. In the evenings, they go dancing or have a drink with friends. The mild Spanish climate has fostered an active night life, much of it outdoors in the streets, plazas, taverns, and restaurants. A dinner date may take place as late as 10:00 or 11:00 pm and be followed by a trip to a local club.

According to their cultural level, Spaniards go to concerts, to the theater, and to movies. People of all ages are fond of television, perhaps the main source of entertainment today.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Spanish handicrafts include lace and leather goods, gloves, basketry, tapestries, carpets, wrought iron, ceramics, and products of gold and silver. Each region has specialties, including leather in Cordoba, lace and carpets in Granada, pearls in the Balearic Islands, jewelry, swords and knives in Toledo and ceramics and pottery. The Spanish government has taken steps to assure that traditional crafts, or *artesanía*, survive against competition from mechanized industry. Spain is also known for its handmade musical instruments, especially guitars.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Terrorism by separatist groups, particularly the Basque ETA, has plagued Spain in recent years. On 11 March 2004 Spain suffered its most horrific terrorist attack: 191 people were killed and 1,400 were injured in bombings at Madrid's railway station; al Qaeda was responsible. A few days later, Prime Minister José María Aznar's Popular Party experienced a stinging defeat, and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of the Socialist Party became the new prime minister. After four decades of violence, responsible for more than 800 deaths and for terrorizing Spanish society with its bombings, ETA announced a permanent ceasefire on 24 March 2006; however, in June 2007, it renounced the ceasefire and vowed to begin a new offensive.

Another growing social problem is caused by illegal immigration (see **Section 15 Work**). Finally, like the rest of the developed countries, Spain has an illicit drug problem and a high rate of crime in the big cities.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women are playing ever-increasingly important roles in Spanish society. Approximately 15% of Spain's armed forces are women. For the first time, Spain's prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, upon being reelected in 2008, announced a 17-member cabinet that had more women than men. One of them was Spain's first female defense minister, Carme Chacón, who was also seven months pregnant when she was appointed. Many other women hold municipal and government posts as councilwoman, mayor, university professor, director general. Several Spanish women are ministers of the crown, manage businesses, and a large percentage go to the university.

Evidence of the secular nature of contemporary Spain can be seen in the widespread support for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Spain. In June 2005 a bill was passed to allow gay marriage, making Spain the third country in the European Union to allow same-sex couples to marry.

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—revised by S. Garcia Castañeda

# SWEDES

**LOCATION:** Sweden

**POPULATION:** 9.2 million

**LANGUAGE:** Swedish; Sami; Finnish

**RELIGION:** Church of Sweden (Lutheran)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Sweden is part of the Scandinavian Peninsula in northwestern Europe. With an abundance of natural resources, it is a leading industrial nation, and its people enjoy one of the highest living standards in the world. The first written reference to Sweden is by the Roman historian Tacitus, who called the Swedes “mighty in ships and arms” in AD 98. Sweden represented a major European power during the 17th century, with its territories including Finland (1000–1805), parts of Germany, the Baltic States, and even an American colony. Christianity was introduced from the 9th through the 11th centuries. An age of territorial expansion during the 1500s and 1600s ended in defeat by Russia in 1709 and the loss of most overseas possessions by the early 19th century. Norway was united with Sweden from 1814 to 1905.

In the 20th century Sweden remained neutral in both world wars, serving as a haven for refugees in World War II. The country joined the United Nations in 1946, although it did not join the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO). In 1953 it joined with Denmark, Norway, and Iceland (and, later, Finland), to form the Nordic Council. Carl XVI Gustaf has been king since 1973, though his sphere of power is limited to only ceremonial practices today. In 1986 the nation was shaken by the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme, a crime that has never been satisfactorily solved. In 1991, Sweden applied for membership in the European Community, although many in the nation remained opposed to this move. However, Sweden became a member of the European Union in 1995.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Sweden is the largest country in Scandinavia and the fourth largest in Europe. With a total area of 449,966 sq km (173,732 sq mi), it is close in size to the state of California and is one of the more sparsely populated countries, with a mere 21 persons per sq km (55 persons per sq mi). It is bounded by Norway on the north and west, Denmark on the southeast, and the Gulf of Bothnia, the Baltic Sea, and Finland on the east. One-seventh of Sweden lies within the Arctic Circle, the “land of the midnight sun,” where the sun never really sets for three months during the summer, beginning with the Summer Solstice on June 20. The country has about 100,000 lakes and many rivers, and more than half its terrain is forested. Most of its 9.2 million people live in the south of the country.

The Swedes are a Scandinavian people descended from Germanic tribes who emigrated to the region in ancient times. Ethnic minorities include about 200,000–300,000 Swedish Finns living in the northeastern section of the country and approximately 35,000 Sami, a traditionally nomadic group of reindeer herders who live in northern portions of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. Since World War II, Sweden has also accepted immigrant workers from Greece, Germany, Turkey, Great Britain, Poland, Italy, and the former Yugoslavia, as

well as political refugees, mostly from the Middle East, Asia, and the Latin American countries of Chile and Argentina.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Swedish is a Germanic language closely related to Norwegian and Danish. There are also similarities between Swedish and English, and most Swedes speak English as a second language. The Sami have their own language, and there is also a large Finnish-speaking population in the country.

### EVERYDAY IDIOMS INCLUDE

Hello	Hej/ Hej då
Goodbye	Adjö
Yes/ No	Ja/ Nej
Please	Var Snäll Och or Varsagod
Thank you	Tack
Breakfast	Frukost
Lunch	Lunch
Dinner	Middag
One	Ett
Two	Två
Three	Tre
Four	Fyra
Five	Fem
Six	Sex
Seven	Sju
Eight	Atta
Nine	Nio
Ten	Tio

Popular boys' names which are distinctly Swedish are Anders, Hans, Gunnar, Ake, and Lars, while girls are commonly named Margareta, Karin, Birgitta, Kerstin, and Ingrid.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Rural dwellers have traditionally believed in the existence of a variety of supernatural beings. Every province of Sweden has its own customs and local lore. For example, there is a legend about the difference between the lush, fertile land of Skåne in the south and the neighboring northern province of Småland, which is rocky and barren. While God was making Skåne so beautiful, the devil supposedly sneaked past him and turned Småland into a harsh and desolate place. It was too late for God to change the land, but he was able to create its people, and he made them tough and resourceful enough to survive successfully in their difficult environment.

## 5 RELIGION

Until 2000, Sweden's state religion was Lutheranism, and about 76% of the population belongs to the Church of Sweden, the country's Lutheran church. In the past, all Swedes automatically became members of the church at birth but had the right to withdraw from it. Church membership until 2000 was only achieved through baptism, but then Sweden enacted reforms of church and state. Although most people mark major life-cycle events such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial within the church, the majority do not attend services regularly. Of the 87% Lutheran population, only 2% of these Swedes attend church. Minority religions include Roman Catholicism, the Pentecostal church, the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden, and the Greek Orthodox Church. In addition, there is a solid concentration of Jews in Sweden, as well as a tremendous



growth in the Islamic population, which has spurred much racial tension.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Sweden's legal holidays are New Year's Day, Epiphany (January 6), Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Day (May 1), Ascension Day (May 31), Whit Monday, Midsummer (June 23), All Souls' Day (November 3), and Christmas. At midnight on New Year's Eve, ship horns and factory sirens usher in the New Year and, following a century-old tradition, Alfred Tennyson's poem, "Ring Out, Wild Bells," is read at an open-air museum in Stockholm and broadcast throughout the country. The feast of St. Knut on January 13 is the time when Christmas decorations are taken down. Shrove Tuesday, the last day before Lent begins, is traditionally observed by eating a bun filled with cream and marzipan. As Easter approaches, Swedes decorate twigs with colored feathers and place them in water to sprout new leaves in time for the holiday. Young boys and girls dress up as the Easter Hag and visit their neighbors, from whom they receive small gifts similar to the Halloween festivities observed in the United States.

Among the most important secular holidays, *Valborgsmassöafton*, observed on April 30, celebrates the coming of spring with bonfires and other festivities which are performed both publicly and privately. The Swedish flag is honored on June 6, a day on which all cities and towns fly flags and hold ceremonies in the flag's commemoration. Finally, the Summer Solstice is observed on June 21 and June 22 through the raising of the Maypole, around which celebrants dance, sing traditional songs, and eat.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Sweden is a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The most common Swedish greeting is *hej!*, to which the response is usually *hej, hej!* The usual farewell is *hej då!* A handshake with either a *hej* or the more formal *god dag* is used between businessmen and acquaintances. Greetings among family depends on how close the family is, and Swedes, in contrast to Americans, are much more reserved in their interpersonal relationships. Therefore, they are not very demonstrative in their gestures, and refrain from touching others when communicating, as it is considered poor manners.

A very common practice among Swedes, when they are invited to another's home, is to bring flowers which are of an odd number (usually a single flower, or three or five). When hosting a group of less than 12 guests, the Swedish host demonstrates his or her etiquette in the art of toasting, which is performed according to a rigid, complex set of rules. For example, the host will lift his glass close to the third button of his shirt as he separately acknowledges each guest with a glance and a nod of the head; the glass is then sipped and returned to the third button position.



## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Except for brick-and-clay farm houses in southern Sweden, most dwellings were traditionally built of wood. In the past, the style of rural dwellings varied by region, with five main types. Contemporary housing is basically similar throughout the country, and it features building materials and styles similar to those in the United States. Many empty country houses are now used as summer homes.

Sweden's extensive system of social insurance pays for medical and dental care. The nation's infant mortality rate—2.75 deaths for every 1,000 live births—is one of the lowest in the world. Maternity leave with 80% pay begins from 60 days before the expected birth of a child until 6 weeks after birth, and lasts until the child is 18 months old. This legitimate leave of absence is termed "parental leave," as it can be chosen by either mother or father. The average life expectancy in Sweden is 78.5 years for men and 83 years for women.

Sweden has over 96,000 km (60,000 mi) of highways and more than 11,200 km (7,000 mi) of nationalized railroads. In 1967 the country changed from the left-hand traffic common to most European countries to a right-hand system like the one in the United States. Shipping has always been important to Sweden; its three largest ports are Göteborg, Stockholm, and



*Sofia Lillemae (l) and Maja Hansson pick flowers in preparation for the annual Midsummer holidays in Hassleholm, Sweden. Swedes traditionally celebrate Midsummer with dancing and feasting. (AP Images/Pressens Bild/Patric Berg)*

Malmö. Sweden operates the Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) jointly with Denmark and Norway.

## **10 FAMILY LIFE**

Most Swedish families have only one or two children. During the past 30 years, it has become so common for unmarried couples to live together that the people have coined a name for this arrangement: *sambo* (*sam* means together; *bo* means live). In 1988 legislation extended the legal rights of persons involved in such relationships, making them almost the legal equal of spouses. Nevertheless, *sambo* relationships often lead to marriage. Sweden's divorce rate has doubled since 1960. The older Swedish generation views the husband's role as that of the breadwinner, and still relegates the wife to domestic tasks within the home. However, as in the United States, the younger Swedish generation considers marriage more as a partnership with shared responsibilities extended to the children family members, since both spouses work. Swedish women are guaranteed equal rights under the law, and the vast majority work outside the home. Because Swedish women today feel an acute need to be in the work force, and excellent day care services are available, about 75% of mothers with preschoolers work. Four times as many women hold upper-level government positions than U.S. women, jobs which include parliament and the governing cabinet. Almost half of all working women have children under the age of 16.

## **11 CLOTHING**

Modern, Western-style clothing is worn in Sweden and, as in the United States, the Swedes' casual wear is typically slacks, shorts, and T-shirts. Likewise, suits are worn by both men and women in the typical place of business, and tuxedos and evening gowns appear at formal affairs. All clothing is costly in comparison to the standard prices of the United States. Swedish folk costumes, which were introduced as late as the 1890s as a means of glorifying the cultural richness of the nation, are worn for special festivals such as Midsummer's Eve, and consist of white blouses, vests, and long dark skirts (often worn with aprons) for women and white shirts, vests, dark knee-length breeches, and white hose for men. Only a small segment of the population even owns such a costume, and the costumes vary dramatically from region to region.

## **12 FOOD**

Swedes typically wake up to a breakfast of hard or soft ryebread smothered with butter and cheese, sandwich meat, or *filmjolk*, which is similar to yogurt, with a soup-like consistency. Because lunches interrupt the work day, they are light in Sweden. In contrast, dinners almost always abound in fish, sausage, and meat, though the latter is less often purchased because of its high cost. This main course is typically accompanied by potatoes and vegetables—the most common being peas, carrots, or salad. While the Swedish main meal was traditionally

earlier in the day as a result of the wife's confinement within the home, dinner is now largely extended to the hours of early evening.

The Swedes savor rich sauces in their food, which is heavily influenced by the French. The Swedish name for the open-faced sandwich meal universal throughout Scandinavia—*smörgåsbord*—is the one by which this buffet meal is known in the United States. In Sweden it commonly includes herring, smoked eel, roast beef, tongue, jellied fish, boiled potatoes, and cheese. Favorite hot dishes include meatballs (*köttbullar*) served with lingonberry jam (*lingonsylt*); *pitty panna*, fried meat, potatoes, and egg; and *Janssons frestelse* (“Jansson’s temptation”), a layered potato dish with onions and cream, topped with anchovies. The Swedes love fish, especially salmon, which is typically smoked, marinated, or cured with dill and salt. Fresh fruits and vegetables, including all kinds of berries, are also very popular. Favorite beverages include milk, *lättöl* (a type of beer with almost no alcohol), and strong coffee.

### 13 EDUCATION

Sweden has a literacy rate of virtually 100%. School is mandatory between the ages of 7 and 16. During the first nine years, students attend a “comprehensive school,” where they study a variety of subjects. Grades one through three are called the junior grades, four through six the middle grades, and seven through nine the senior grades. There is a three-week Christmas vacation and a summer vacation that extends from early June to late August. Free hot lunches are provided to all students. English is taught as a second language from the third grade on, and crafts such as woodworking and textile-making are also part of the curriculum. While immigrant children receive education in their own language a few hours each day, there are also special English classes for these students from countries such as Germany and Turkey.

Beginning in the seventh year, instruction varies based on students’ interests and abilities; about 30% choose the college-preparatory curriculum, while others opt for more vocationally-oriented training. Swedes maintain the Scandinavian tradition of giving ceremonial white hats to secondary school graduates. Sweden has a number of universities, including those in Stockholm, Linköping, Göteborg, Uppsala, Lund, Umeå, Växjö, Karlstad, Luleå, and Örebro.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The arts receive strong support from the government in Sweden. The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs approves subsidies for theater, dance and musical groups, literature, public libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions. It also helps inaugurate new artistic activities and educate the public about the arts. County councils, under the authority of the national council, oversee regional activities. Performers in Sweden enjoy a level of job security unknown in most other countries, including the United States. They are hired by the year, drawing a regular salary and receiving pension, insurance, and vacation benefits. However, even the most successful Swedish performers do not receive the astronomical levels of pay accorded to “superstars” in some other countries, particularly the US.

Sweden’s best known writer was August Strindberg, who wrote novels, short stories, essays, and plays that influenced the course of modern drama. Selma Lagerlöf, the first Swede

to win the Nobel Prize, is known for both her novels and her children’s classic *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. Another world-famous Swedish children’s author is Astrid Lindgren, creator of the Pippi Longstocking books. In the visual arts, prominent Swedish names include the sculptor Carl Milles and the jewelry maker Sigurd Persson. The Swedish film industry has gained a worldwide audience for its films, notably those of its world-famous director Ingmar Bergman. Famous Swedish film stars include Ingrid Bergman and Max von Sydow. The creator of the Nobel prize itself was a Swede—Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite.

### 15 WORK

Sweden has achieved an enviable standard of living under a mixed system of high-tech capitalism and extensive welfare benefits. Sweden’s labor force is divided almost equally between men and women. About 74% are employed in the service sector, 24% in industry, and 2% in agriculture. Unemployment in Sweden has been low compared to other European countries (under 4.5% in 2007). About 85% of the Swedish work force is unionized. The minimum age for employment is 16; persons under that age may be hired during school vacations for easy jobs that last five days or less.

Though Sweden has some of the highest taxes in the world, it generously pays a pension which is two-thirds of the worker’s pre-retirement salary. Swedish retirees enjoy other benefits, such as instant health insurance and price reductions on prescriptions.

In September 2003 Swedish voters turned down entry into the European Union’s euro system, concerned about the impact on the economy and sovereignty.

### 16 SPORTS

There are about 40,000 sports clubs throughout Sweden. The most popular sport is soccer (called  *fotboll*). Favorite winter sports include cross-country and downhill skiing and long-distance skating. Popular water sports include swimming, rowing, and sailing, and many Swedes also enjoy cycling. Major annual events for amateur athletes include the Vasa cross-country ski race, the Vättern Circuit two-day bicycle race, the Vansbro swim meet, and the Lidingö cross-country running race. In 1987, the Swedish tennis team won the Davis Cup for the fourth time. Outstanding Swedish athletes include alpine skier Ingemar Stenmark, tennis great Björn Borg, and golfer Annika Sörenstam.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Many of the Swedes’ leisure hours are devoted to outdoor activities that enable them to enjoy their country’s beautiful natural scenery. It is common to retreat to rural areas during weekends and vacations. The summer cottage by the lake is a common sight; altogether there are about 600,000 summer homes in Sweden, many in abandoned rural areas. The islands near Stockholm are especially popular sites for these retreats. In recent years, it has also become popular to take winter vacations in Mediterranean resort areas. Walking is a favorite pastime in Sweden, and marked walking paths can be found throughout the country. Sailing on Sweden’s rivers and lakes is also very popular.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The Swedes are known for their high-quality handicrafts. Handmade utensils have been produced since the beginning of the 19th century; the primary textiles are wool and flax. Swedish crystal and glass—of which 90% is produced at the Orrefors factory—are famous worldwide and half of the country's production is exported, much of it to the United States. The Dalarna region is known for its distinctive wooden horses with their brightly painted designs. Folk influences are evident in modern Swedish ceramics, woodwork, textiles, furniture, silver, and other products.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Like several neighboring countries, Sweden has a high rate of alcoholism, and organizations devoted to helping people deal with this problem have around 6,000 local chapters altogether. Another—and possibly related—problem is absenteeism from work, which rose sharply in the late 1980s. One of out every four workers called in sick on any given day. There has also been some discontent with the high taxes necessary to fund Sweden's extensive network of social services.

A relatively new and sweeping social problem in Sweden is that of racism. A neo-Nazi group similar to the “skinheads” of the United States is the “VAM” (“Vit Ariskt Motstånd”—or, “White Aryan Resistance”), which in the 1990s experienced an increase in membership. In the 2000s the Svensk Hednisk Front (Swedish Heathen Front—SHF) is an emerging Nazi organization of increasing importance.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender equality issues in Sweden are dealt with at the Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality, where the Division for Gender Equality has among its tasks the processing of gender equality matters. Governmental policy is to ensure that “women and men shall have equal power to shape society and their own lives.” Women and men are to enjoy the same opportunities, rights, and obligations in all spheres of life. The government promotes equal pay between women and men, an equal distribution of unpaid care and household work, and an end to men's violence against women. Sweden has done much to accomplish these goals.

Sweden is considered to be one of the most liberal countries in Europe and indeed the world when it comes to laws pertaining to homosexuality. A 2006 European Union member poll showed 71% of Swedes support same-sex marriage, although as of early 2008 it was not legal in Sweden. However, civil unions are considered to be marriage according to Swedish law. Homosexuality was legalized in 1944. In 1987 a law against sex in gay saunas and prostitution was created to prohibit the spread of HIV, but this was repealed in 2004. Homosexuals are not banned from military service. The Swedish constitution bans discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

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—revised by J. Hobby.

# SWISS

**LOCATION:** Switzerland

**POPULATION:** About 7.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** Schwyzerdütsch (Swiss-German dialect), French, Italian, Romansh, English

**RELIGION:** Protestant; Roman Catholic

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Switzerland is located at a crossroads in Europe and is known for its stability, multiculturalism, neutrality, and prosperity. The country's central location in the heart of Europe and the right mix of features has helped to link Switzerland with the rest of Europe in many ways—culturally, economically and politically. Although a small country, it is the meeting point for three of Europe's major cultures—German, French and Italian. This, along with a unique history and political institutions, contributes to the belief that Switzerland is a special case (*Sonderfall*), incomparably different from other countries.

The area that is now Switzerland was inhabited as early as 40,000 BC as shown by archeological evidence. Various Celtic tribes—among them the Helvetii and Rhaetians—settled in the region around 1,000 BC. For almost 500 years—from 58 BC to AD 400—Switzerland was part of the Roman Empire. Starting in AD 260 a number of Germanic tribes—the Alemanii and the Burgundians being the most important—started to make their way onto the scene.

The development of modern Switzerland can be traced back to a confederation of several Alpine valley communities and a number of city-states in the Middle Ages. These original communities have given their names to the present cantons (provinces) of Switzerland of which there are 26 (20 full cantons and 6 half cantons). The official (Latin) name of the country—*Confoederatio Helvetica*—bears witness to its old confederate past and can be seen in the “CH” decal on cars in Switzerland. Swiss history is unique in Europe since the Swiss never had a monarchy. Instead, the different members of the confederation governed political affairs. Today, the Swiss political system is federal, with many powers left in the hands of the cantons.

Switzerland's present boundaries were fixed and its neutrality guaranteed in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna. In the 20th century, its neutral stance kept it out of both world wars and dictated its refusal to join the United Nations, although it houses such UN agencies as the International Labor Organization and the World Health Organization (as well as the International Red Cross).

The Swiss live in a democracy where the average citizen can have greater influence than in other countries. This is accomplished through two institutions—the referendum and the initiative. A referendum allows the Swiss electorate to vote on laws passed by parliament, constitutional amendments and important international treaties. An initiative lets Swiss citizens make suggestions for either constitutional amendments at the national level or regular laws at the local level. A truly fascinating example of direct democracy is also found in parts of Switzerland—the *Landsgemeinde* (People's Assembly) where the electorate gathers under the open sky on a Sunday in spring to pass laws and elect officials with a show of hands.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

One of Europe's smallest countries in terms of both territory and population, Switzerland is roughly equal in size to the combined area of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. It is also a place of contrasts—of plains, lakes, rivers and mountains. Still when one thinks of Switzerland, one thinks of mountains, since approximately 70% of the country is covered by them.

Switzerland's three natural geographic regions are: the Jura Mountains in the northwest, making up 10% of the Swiss landscape; the Alps—which cover three-fifths of the country—in the south; and the central plateau, or Mittelland, which comprises 30% of the country. This central plateau contains all larger towns and most major cities, the most highly developed agriculture area and three-fourths of the total population of Switzerland. This last condition leads to a very high population density since three-fourths of the population is forced to live in only one-third of the country's entire geographical space.

The Alps have inspired poets and artists across Europe. It was this attraction of the mountains for sport and nature enthusiasts which originated the modern tourism industry. Sometimes called “a nation of hotel keepers,” the Swiss welcome some 20 million international visitors annually, many of whom continue to be drawn to the Alps. The most famous of the Swiss Alps is the Matterhorn, rising 4,478 m (14,692 ft) above sea level. Two of Europe's principal rivers, the Rhine and the Rhone, have their sources in the Swiss Alps.

A unique feature of the Alpine climate is the *föhn*, a special Alpine wind. This occurs mainly in spring and autumn, when a depression north of the Alps draws air from south of the Alps. This air falls into the northern valleys as warm, dry and cloud-free wind. Its effects are many: average temperatures rise, fruit ripens faster, and a number of ailments occur in humans, such as migraine attacks, blood circulation problems, and mood swings.

Switzerland's population of almost 7.5 million people is very diverse, being composed of four major ethnic groups: German (65%), French (18%), Italian (10%), and Romansh (1%). There are also over a million foreigners, accounting for about 22% of the total population. The country is becoming increasingly urban, with significant internal migration from the mountains to the cities of the plateau. This is particularly intense in the five largest Swiss cities—Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, and Zurich—which combined account for one-third of the total Swiss population.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Switzerland has four national languages. In 2008 speakers of *Schwyzerdütsch*, a Swiss-German dialect, accounted for about two-thirds of all Switzerland's people. Another 20% spoke French, about 6.5%—mostly in the Ticino region—spoke Italian, and less than 1% spoke Romansh, a Rhaeto-Roman dialect that is found mostly in the Grison region. The remainder of the population consisted of foreigners who spoke the languages of their homelands, particularly Albanian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Serbo-Croatian. Most native Swiss are bi- or multi-lingual and many speak English. While *Schwyzerdütsch* is clearly distinct from ordinary German (which is used in formal contexts such as books and newspapers), the French and Italian spoken by the Swiss are basically similar to those languages as spoken in their home countries.



*Schwyzerdütsch* is itself not a single language, but a term used to describe the various German dialects spoken in Switzerland. In other words, the dialects spoken in Basel, Bern, and Zurich, while mutually intelligible, have their differences. In contrast, people in a couple of places in Switzerland speak a dialect that most other Swiss-German speakers have difficulty understanding. Likewise, Romansh consists of five major dialects. Attempts have been made to preserve Romansh, while other efforts to create a single Romansh language from the five dialects have met with resistance. The balance of languages in Switzerland is reflected in its political system, with each canton bearing the responsibility of language policy.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

The national hero of Swiss legend is William Tell, supposed to have lived in the early 1300s shortly after the Habsburgs came to dominate Switzerland. Forced to shoot an apple off his son's head as punishment for insubordination toward the Habsburg governor Gessler, Tell later escaped from his Austrian captors to slay the foreign tyrant. This legend, which inspired popular ballads during the 15th century, provided the subject for a drama by the German poet Friedrich Schiller in 1804 and has been made even more famous by the overture to Gioachino Rossini's opera *Guillaume Tell*. In 1970 Swiss author and social critic Max Frisch wrote an essay entitled, "William Tell for the School." In this essay Frisch questioned the truth of this legend and portrayed a less heroic Tell. Frisch's purpose was to force

the Swiss to reevaluate their past in the hope of helping them think more about the present.

The *Rütli Schwur* (Rutli Oath) is another powerful symbol in Swiss folklore. This oath refers to an agreement made on the Rutli meadow between several Swiss valley communities in the Middle Ages to create an alliance for common protection and defense. Popular opinion sees this oath as the founding of Swiss freedom and democracy—in other words, the founding of Switzerland itself. Historians question whether or not this event ever took place. Still, the story of the *Rütli Schwur* is a powerful illustration of the role that national myths can have. For example, during World War II when Switzerland was surrounded by Nazi Germany, the Swiss army commander, General Guisan, gathered his officers on the Rutli meadow as a symbol of Swiss determination to fight for their freedom. People today still remember this act by General Guisan as a sign of the special position of the Rutli legend in Switzerland.

The traditional folk beliefs of German-speaking Alpine dwellers invested natural forces such as avalanches, landslides, and storms with malevolent qualities. More important has been the key position that the mountains have played in shaping the beliefs the Swiss have about themselves. For a long time the Swiss saw themselves linked to the mountains, with special qualities that made them different from other people. The mountains were associated with simple living, self-reliance and innocence. An example of this is the story of Heidi, written by Swiss author Johanna Spyri. Heidi and her grandfather represent the simple and wholesome qualities the Swiss saw in themselves.

#### 5 RELIGION

At the 2000 Swiss Census, about 42% of the population was Roman Catholic and 35% Protestant. The predominantly German-speaking cantons are divided nearly equally between the two religious affiliations. Catholicism is the predominant religion of the French-speaking cantons and the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino is mostly Catholic as well. Religious tensions have historically been a source of unrest and even today Switzerland's religious division between Protestant and Catholic remains significant. This can be seen in all aspects of life. There are both Protestant and Catholic youth organizations, labor unions, and women's associations and the Swiss political parties have been shaped by the religious differences of the past.

In the history of Swiss Protestantism, two figures stand out—Huldrych Zwingli and Jean Calvin. Zwingli began the Reformation in Switzerland from his pulpit in Zurich's main cathedral. He helped spread the new faith throughout Switzerland and debated Martin Luther on a number of issues in a famous debate that almost turned violent. Calvin is responsible for bringing Geneva into the Protestant fold. Calvin formalized Protestant thought into a more systematic doctrine and governed Geneva with a strict moral code. Other parts of Switzerland maintained close ties with the Catholic Church, which can still be seen today in the Swiss Guards at the Vatican. They once protected the Pope but now serve as an honor guard with their colorful uniforms and shiny helmets.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Switzerland's legal holidays are New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whitmonday, *Bundesfeier* (which resembles the American Fourth of July) on August 1,

and Christmas. The German-speaking Swiss mark the seasons and many religious days with festivals, which vary with each canton (province) and commune (locality). Altogether, over 100 different festivals—pagan, Christian, and patriotic—are celebrated in Switzerland. The most famous celebration is Basel's *Fastnacht*, or carnival, marking the final days before Lent (and similar to the Mardi Gras festivities held in New Orleans). For three days, masked and costumed revelers parade through streets filled with decorative floats to the strains of pipe-and-drum bands.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In Switzerland many rites of passage are similar to those found in the United States. These include religious rituals such as baptism and first communion and events in the family such as births, deaths, and marriages.

For men, one of the most important aspects of life in Switzerland is military service. The Swiss army is a militia army, which means there is no professional military force. Instead, all male citizens serve a compulsory period of military duty throughout their lives, keeping all of their equipment, including weapon and ammunition, at home. Until recently, conscientious objectors were subject to imprisonment. Nevertheless, military service is required of all Swiss males between the ages of 20 and 50. Military training is conducted regularly throughout one's lifetime until age 50. First is a four-month basic training program. Then between the ages of 21 and 32 there are eight refresher courses which are each three weeks long. Between the ages of 33 and 42, three additional training courses of two weeks each are required. Finally after age 42, two more weeks are necessary before the age of 50. This adds up to one full year of service. Swiss military duty is a rite of passage because serving in the army is seen as a sign of true citizenship. An individual is seen as a full citizen through defending the country. The Swiss army is also called a citizen army to reflect the ideal that the Swiss citizens protect and defend their rights and freedom themselves. This equation of military service with the values of citizenship has been challenged by both women and the younger generation. Women are not required to perform military service and many women criticize their exclusion from the army and the consequences this has for them in society. Many younger Swiss citizens are also questioning the need of mandatory military service for everyone—they see it no longer as a patriotic obligation but as a nuisance and inconvenience.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

With its combination of ethnic, linguistic, and religious affiliations, Switzerland has historically fostered tolerance, politeness, independence, and reserve in its people. Relationships between the Swiss reflect these differences of language, religion and region. In a country with four languages, communication between people can lead to problems and a number of stereotypes exist between the various regions. An example of this is the tension between the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland, referred to as the *röstigraben*—or hash brown chasm. The German-speaking Swiss see themselves as hard working and efficient, while they see their French-speaking countrymen as easy-going, friendly, and open. The French-speaking Swiss see the German speakers as arrogant, pushy, and too serious. According to recent polls, the German speak-

ers tend to like the French speakers more than the other way around.

In a social setting between individuals, a handshake is normal between men and women unless you are familiar with the person. In this case, a triple-kiss on the cheeks—first one kiss on one cheek, then the next cheek and finally back to the first cheek—is appropriate between men and women and among women. Men continue to shake hands. Another feature of social interaction that may seem unfamiliar to many Americans is the use of a person's name and formal speech. In Switzerland it is customary to greet and say goodbye to a person using their name. This makes it important to pay attention when meeting people for the first time, since you will be expected to remember names. Formal speech refers to the use of special forms of addressing people in the languages spoken in Switzerland (e.g. in German: *Sie* versus *Du*; in French: *vous* versus *tu*). Formal speech is used in less intimate situations, such as in business settings.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The Swiss enjoy one of the highest per capita incomes in the world and a correspondingly impressive standard of living. The Swiss, especially those living in the Alpine or forest regions, have traditionally lived in wooden houses with shingled or tiled roofs and carved gables. Corners and roofs have often been reinforced with stone, and kitchens encased in stone or masonry to prevent fires. Fewer and fewer houses of this type are constructed. Even in remote rural areas, newer houses are commonly of brick or block. However, mountain chalets built by urbanites as vacation homes often imitate the older rustic styles. In general, most Swiss live in apartments while fewer live in houses that they own.

Switzerland's standards of health and medical care are excellent. Over 84% of men and women consider their health to be good or very good. In 2008 the average life expectancy was estimated at about 79 years for men and 84 years for women. A law providing medical insurance to most citizens has been in effect since 1911. The nation's pharmaceuticals industry is a world leader in the production of specialized pharmaceutical products.

Situated at the center of Europe, Switzerland is both a center for international air traffic and a crossroads for road and rail travel. The renowned Swiss efficiency is evident in the nation's excellent transportation network. Within each community, there are excellent bus and metro-train systems. The government-run Swiss Federal Railways is one of Europe's best rail systems, connecting all of the country's major cities. Cog railways, cable cars, and chairlifts transport people to popular resort towns and Alpine summits, including the Jungfrau near Interlaken. A network of expressways includes several tunnels through the Alps, such as the Great Saint Bernard and Saint Gotthard tunnels. Inland waterways are also an important means of transportation. The Rhine river is navigable to Basel, the only river port, by barge traffic.

Due to this extensive transportation system, many people can get around quite easily without an automobile—it takes only three to four hours to get from one end of the country to the other by train. Also in order to get a driver's license, an individual must be 18 years old and pass an expensive driver education course. Thus, many choose to rely on public transportation.

Switzerland, with its high standard of living, is a consumer society like many others. There is an increasing enthusiasm for American products in Switzerland. Items like Levi's jeans, Coca-Cola, pop music, and Marlboro cigarettes are popular. McDonald's and other American fast-food restaurants, like Subway and Pizza Hut, are becoming more widespread. Not only are American brands popular with Swiss consumers, but Swiss companies use the image of America and the American way of life to sell their own products. As a result, "American" theme restaurants are becoming more common, as is the use of English in advertising.

### 10 FAMILY LIFE

The traditional family household—a married couple with children—is still the predominant lifestyle among the Swiss. At the 2000 Swiss Census, about 63% of all households were family households, with about 48% of family households consisting of a married couple with children and another 24% consisting of a married couple without children.

Traditionally, the family structure has been male-dominated, with the husband working outside of the home and the wife taking care of the home and the children. However, more and more women are finding greater opportunities in the workforce and a greater number of men and women are choosing to remain single or to marry later in life. In 2000 approximately 35% of all households were single person households. The size of the average Swiss household dropped from 3.3 people in 1960 to 2.3 in 2000. The number of marriages has decreased from 7.6 for every 1,000 people in 1970 to 5.4 per 1,000 in 2005. It has also been estimated that about 53% of all the marriages that took place in 2005 will end in divorce. In general, the German-speaking Swiss tend to marry among themselves.

### 11 CLOTHING

Western-style clothing is the norm, although traditional costumes, many displaying the Swiss art of fine embroidery, can still be seen at local festivities and parades. Herdsmen in the Gruyère region wear a short blue jacket of cloth or canvas called a *bredzon* with sleeves gathered at the shoulders. On special occasions, women in this region wear silk aprons, long-sleeved jackets, and straw hats with crocheted ribbons hanging from the brim. Other traditional women's costumes include gold lace caps in St. Gallen and dresses with silver ornaments in Unterwalden. Traditional male dress common to many Alpine Swiss includes the leather shorts called *lederhosen*, often worn with sturdy leather boots.

### 12 FOOD

Swiss cuisine combines the culinary traditions of Germany, France, and Italy and varies from region to region. Throughout the land, however, cheese is king. The Swiss have been making cheese for at least 2,000 years and today produce hundreds of varieties (of which the hole-filled Emmentaler popularly dubbed "Swiss cheese" is only one). Switzerland's most characteristic national dish is fondue, melted Emmentaler or Gruyère cheese—or a combination of both—in which pieces of bread are dipped, using long forks. The cheese is often melted in white wine and commonly seasoned with garlic, lemon juice, pepper, and other ingredients. Also popular is another melted-cheese dish called *raclette*, traditionally made of cheese from the Valais region, although other varieties are also used. A

quarter or half a wheel of cheese is melted in front of an open fire and scraped off into onto the diners' plates using a special knife. The cheese is traditionally eaten with potatoes, pickled onions or other vegetables, and dark bread.

A popular dish in German-speaking regions is *rösti*, hash-browned potatoes mixed with herbs, bacon, or cheese. Typical dishes in the Italian-speaking Ticino region are a potato pasta called *gnocchi*; *risotto*, a rice dish; and *polenta*, which is made from cornmeal and is something like American grits. Gallic specialties such as steaks, organ meats, and wine-flavored meat stews are prevalent in French-speaking parts of the country. Besides cheese, the other principal food for which the Swiss are known is chocolate.

### 13 EDUCATION

Education at all levels is the responsibility of the cantons, so Switzerland actually has 26 different educational systems, with varying types of schools, curricula, length of study, and teachers' salaries. However, all require either eight or nine years of schooling beginning at age six or seven and track students into either academic or vocational programs in secondary school. At this point those students entering an academic track take a course of instruction to prepare them for university study. Other students in a vocational program continue to take classes while also entering into an apprenticeship—after which students receive certification in a specific trade and are ready to enter the work force. Post-secondary education is offered at nine cantonal universities and two federal institutes of technology at Zurich and Lausanne. In 2004 about 30% of all persons between the ages of 25 and 34 had obtained a higher education degree.

Swiss schools tend to be more oriented toward academics and less toward extra-curricular activities. Activities such as sports—like in the United States with football and basketball teams, pep rallies, homecoming, etc.—are found more in a private club setting rather than in the schools. Besides the cantonal schools mentioned above, there are many private boarding schools in Switzerland. Swiss boarding schools attract students from abroad and many of these schools have a well-known reputation.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

From 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to psychologist Carl Jung and child psychologist Jean Piaget in the 20th century, Switzerland's cultural achievements have been wide-ranging and profound. In addition to a number of native intellectual and artistic figures, Switzerland has made a unique contribution to world culture by providing a neutral haven for leading intellectuals from Voltaire to Lenin. Significant Swiss artistic personages include playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt, novelists Gottfried Keller and Max Frisch, sculptors Alberto Giacometti and Jean Tinguely, architects Le Corbusier and Mario Botta, and painter Paul Klee. The International Committee of the Red Cross owes its founding to Swiss humanitarian Henri Dunant from Geneva, where today many other international organizations have their offices.

The number of foreign intellectuals and artists that have called Switzerland home at one time or another is many. Fleeing the communist regime of the former USSR, Alexander Solzhenitsyn first emigrated to Switzerland where, appropriately, he wrote a novel about Lenin. Other distinguished emi-





*A yodel club from Thun sings at the 24th federal yodeling festival in Frauenfeld, Switzerland. (AP Images/Walter Bieri)*

grés welcomed by the Swiss include authors Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, and Erich Maria Remarque, film star Charlie Chaplin, scientist Albert Einstein, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and composer Richard Wagner.

## **15 WORK**

The percentage of Swiss people engaged in agriculture has declined sharply since the 19th century, when 60% were farmers. This figure had dropped to 22% by World War II and fell to about 4% in 2005. Almost 23% of Switzerland's labor force is employed in industries, particularly machinery, electronics, and metallurgical industries. The chemical, pharmaceutical, and textile industries are also major employers. In 2005 about 73% of the labor force was employed in services. One traditional type of labor for which the Swiss are famous is watchmaking, begun by French refugees in the 16th century. Mass production had begun by 1845, and today Switzerland produces over 70 million watches and watch parts annually. The quartz watch was developed by the Swiss in the 1960s, and the most recent advances in the industry include a watch that is responsive to the human voice. More than half of those employed work in the expanding service sector. In this area, tourism and banking are important providers of employment.

Switzerland and the Swiss economy benefit from a comparatively low level of strikes due to what are popularly called "industrial peace treaties"—special collective bargaining ar-

rangements—between labor and management. Employers and employees agree to cooperate with each other and strikes and lockouts are forbidden. The first of these no-strike agreements was signed in 1937 in the watch and metal industry and has been renewed over the years and copied in practically all other Swiss industries as well.

Many young Swiss spend a period of apprenticeship outside the country before entering the labor force. A unique Swiss practice is the *Welschlandjahr*, in which young Swiss from the German-speaking part spend time in the French-speaking part in order to learn French and become familiar with the way of life in this part of Switzerland.

## **16 SPORTS**

Both summer and winter sports are extremely popular among the Swiss. The country's Alpine peaks provide a setting for skiing, bobsledding, tobogganing, mountain walking, and climbing. After skiing, ice skating is Switzerland's favorite winter sport, and the team sport of curling is gaining increasing popularity. Summer activities include tennis, hiking, golf, cycling, fishing, and a variety of water sports.

Two popular sports are handball and soccer. Handball in Switzerland is played with two teams and a ball slightly smaller than a volleyball that is easily held in the hand. Each team attempts to score against the other team by trying to get the ball into a guarded goal smaller than a soccer goal but larger than

a hockey goal. The ball can be thrown directly into the goal or can be bounced in to get around the goalie. Soccer enjoys even greater popularity, especially as a spectator sport. In 1994 the Swiss National Team qualified for the World Cup Soccer Championship. This created a wave of enthusiasm and support across Switzerland.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Relaxing after hours is important for the Swiss, who have one of the longest work days in Europe—usually 8:00 am to 5:00 pm—and average between 2,000 and 2,300 hours of work per year. Much of their recreation is family oriented and they often entertain at home rather than going out. One of the most universal leisure-time activities is simply reading the newspaper, either at home or at a cafe, over a cup of coffee or glass of wine. Extremely popular is a card game—*Jass*—played with 36 cards and a variety of rules which vary from region to region. Concerts and the theater are also enjoyed by many Swiss. The youth scene is dominated by parties and music.

At their many festivals, the Swiss still enjoy traditional activities, including dancing and yodeling, and local sports such as the baseball-like *Hornussen*, or farmer's tennis, stone-putting (*Steinstossen*) where the object is to throw a stone weighing 80 kg (184 lbs) as far as possible, and Swiss wrestling (*Schwingen*) in which each wrestler wears a pair of canvas-like shorts over his pants and tries to throw his opponent to the ground by grabbing hold of these shorts.

Each region of Switzerland has its own festivals and special events. Some important ones include the *Tellspiel* at Interlaken and Altdorf where the heroic story of William Tell is reenacted for audiences; the world famous Montreux Jazz Festival which hosts jazz performers from around world; and the well-known and popular Locarno Open Air Film Festival. Across all of Switzerland, shooting dubs and tournaments are very popular, even among teenagers.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Switzerland's traditional decorative arts include weaving, embroidery, dressmaking (*Frauentracht*), wood carving, and painting. A unique form of Swiss folk art is *Senntumsmaler- ei*, or herd-painting, which originated among Alpine dairy farmers as far back as the early 18th century with carved and painted farm implements. Characteristic forms include *Fahreimebödeli*, wooden pails with decorated bases, *Sennenstreifen*, long boards or strips of paper picturing cattle drives to the high Alpine pastures (traditionally hung in the living room or above the door to the cowshed), and *Wächterbild*, large-scale paintings of cow herders traditionally found on window shutters. *Senntum-Tafelbilder*, small, brightly colored, stylized paintings of cattle drives and other pastoral scenes, were especially popular in Eastern Switzerland from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries and can be seen in the many Swiss folk museums today.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The influx of foreign, or "guest" workers (*Gastarbeiter*) from southern Europe and North Africa since World War II—who made up a quarter of the labor force in 2006—has produced a backlash and a fear of *Überfremdung* (over-foreignization). The Swiss have voted three times on the question of expelling much of the foreign work force, defeating such a measure all

three times, although immigration laws have been tightened. Many foreign workers also returned to their home countries in the 1970s due to recession. However, anti-immigrant feeling persists against some *Ausländer*s (foreigners), who are subject to discrimination and social isolation.

Drug use and alcoholism are the biggest challenges facing Swiss youth. Many view this as a rejection of society or as a sign of youth's inability to cope with social pressures. Therefore, there is a need, which is slowly being met, to provide youth with positive outlets—such as cultural centers, or movements to get the younger generation interested in social issues.

A very important area of consideration is the issue of European integration. Switzerland is not a member of the European Union and in December 1992 voted not to join the European Economic Area—a step towards joining the European Union. The vote was very close, 50.3% against membership and 49.7% in favor. This has sparked what many have referred to as an identity crisis within Switzerland. Since the majority of those in favor of integration with Europe lived in the French-speaking part, questions were raised over whether or not the division between French- and German-speaking Swiss—the *Röstigraben*—was widening. Fears over European integration focus on the consequences for Swiss neutrality, federalism, and democratic institutions. Many believe that these will be done away with membership in the EU. Still, a good portion of the Swiss populace favors greater links with Europe.

There are a range of other problems which, like other countries, Switzerland is now facing—air pollution from trucks and automobiles resulting in the government encouraging greater reliance on rail travel; unemployment and economic restructuring; and political reform in order to make government more efficient and responsive to the needs of people.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The status of Swiss women, who were only granted suffrage in 1971, is below that of women in most other European countries. By law they have traditionally needed their husbands' permission to get a job, open a bank account, or run for political office (although they were allowed to volunteer for military service). Husbands have also had the last word on such important matters as where a family would live and, in case of a disagreement, what they would name their children. In 1981 a constitutional amendment was passed giving women equal rights, especially in the areas of work, education, and family matters, and in 1985 a law mandating equal rights in marriage was passed by a slim majority of the voters (54.7%). In situations of divorce, women are more likely than men to end up as single parents relying on public assistance. This is a result of a divorce law dictating that the primary wage earner in a divorce must be left with finances sufficient enough to remain above the poverty level. Since the primary wage earner is generally a man, a divorced woman is not always entitled to spousal support or sufficient child support and is more likely to fall below the poverty level.

Swiss women in general must still overcome attitudes that their place is in the home or only in certain kinds of jobs—like salesclerk, office worker, waitress, teacher, or nurse. The difficulties Swiss women must confront include the belief that working women neglect their children, find self-fulfillment at the expense of the family, and steal jobs from men who have to support families. Thus, women in Switzerland continue to

meet the challenge of combining roles—in the workplace and at home.

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—revised by K. Ellicott

# TATARS

**LOCATION:** Russia

**POPULATION:** 6.6 million

**LANGUAGE:** Tatar; Russian; Ukrainian

**RELIGIONS:** Islam (Sunni Muslims, majority); Christianity; Sufism; Old Believers; Protestantism; Judaism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Of all the Turkic ethnic groups living within the former Soviet Union, the Tatars historically lived farther west than any other Turkic nationality. It is believed that the name *Tatar* came either from a term of contempt applied by the Chinese to the Mongols or from the Mongol term for “conquered.” Later, the name *Tatar* itself became synonymous with Mongol.

After the death of Atilla the Hun in the middle of the 5th century, the Great Hun Empire started disintegrating into several smaller Turkic kingdoms, out of which the Kingdom of Great Bulgaria emerged in the 7th century. This kingdom did not last long and split into two nations upon the death of its ruler, Kubrat Han. His youngest son, Asparuh Han, moved into present-day Bulgaria, allied with the Slavic people already there, and established the Bulgarian Kingdom in AD 681. The two older sons, Batbay and Kutrag, favored an alliance with the Khazar and Alan tribes and remained in the eastern part of the European Plains. By the 8th century, some of these people had moved to what is now Tatarstan and Bashkortistan, began to accustom themselves with other Turkic and Finno-Ugric peoples, and formed the Bulgar realm in the 9th and 10th centuries.

The Bulgars traded goods with the peoples of Central Asia and China and converted to Islam in 922. They established an urban culture and became skilled in agriculture and commerce. Bulgar society had potters, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, carpenters, stonemasons, jewelers, and tanners. However, in 1236 the Bulgars were conquered by the Mongolian ruler Batu, and they were made provincial subjects of the new Bulgar Khanate. Power struggles within the Bulgar Khanate prompted many people to move west to the more stable area of Kazan. As Mongolian control dissipated in the 1430s and 1440s, several Tatar states emerged, including the Kazan, Crimean, Kasym, Siberian, and Astrakhan Khanates. During the 15th and early 16th centuries, the Kazan Khanate became the most prominent, and its people became known as the Tatars (named for the Turkic tribes forced to fight in the vanguard of Genghis Khan's armies).

The Kazan Tatars were conquered by imperial Russian forces during the reign of Tsar Ivan IV in 1552, thus giving Russia control over the middle part of the Volga River. In 1556, Russian troops conquered the Astrakhan Tatars, thus securing control over all the Volga River and access to the Caspian Sea. To celebrate the victory of Russia over the Tatars, the tsar ordered the construction of St. Basil's Cathedral in what is now Red Square in Moscow. The Tatars became the first Muslim subjects of the Russian Empire. In 1593 Tsar Fedor ordered the destruction of all Kazan Tatar mosques. In 1708 the region was officially organized by the Russian Empire as the Kazan Province, and the construction of mosques was allowed in 1766.



During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a renewal in Tatar national identity began. This cultural awakening included increased interest in religion, education, publishing, and political activity. When the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917, the Tatars were encouraged by the Bolsheviks to pursue their ethnic identity within a communist setting. The Tatars took advantage of the chaos and formed the Idil-Ural State in November 1917. This territory encompassed about 220,000 square kilometers (85,000 square miles), an area about as large as Utah, in what is now Tatarstan and Bashkortistan. The Soviet government, however, did not tolerate the independence movement and declared the formation of the Bashkir Autonomous Republic in 1919 and the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920. When the Soviet government annexed these regions, it redrew the boundaries to give neighboring Russian provinces preferential treatment. By altering those boundaries, about 75% of the Tatar population found itself living outside the borders of Tatarstan.

In the 1920s, members of the independent Tatar government and most of the educated Tatar population were eliminated through execution or exile. This policy against the Tatars continued to some extent until the early 1950s. Tatar culture was also affected until the 1970s through the policy of Russification, where the Russian language, alphabet, and culture were legally imposed on the Tatars and other ethnic groups. During the Soviet era, economic hardship and job preference given to Russians in industrial areas caused many Tatars to leave their homeland.

A distinct group of Tatars known as the Krym (Crimean Tatars) once inhabited a certain part of the Crimean peninsula (during the Soviet era, the region was called the Crimean Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and was located within Soviet Ukraine). The Crimean Tatars had occupied the peninsula for more than 1,000 years as a result of intermarriage and mixing with other peoples present. The independent Crimean Khanate was abolished in 1783 when the Crimea was annexed by the Russian empire. Afterward, the Crimean Tatars suffered from repressive policies that limited their control over political, economic, cultural, and religious affairs; violence was often used to enforce imperial policy. The Crimean Tatar population declined from around 2.5 million in 1783 to 130,000 in 1921 while its territory was thoroughly settled by colonists. In 1944–45, the Soviet government forced them to leave, because Crimean Tatars had been accused of supporting the Germans during World War II. As scapegoats, the Crimean Tatars were deported to various regions of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, the Urals, and Siberia. The deportation served as a type of genocide, because 194,000 (about 46% of all Crimean Tatars) died in the process due to violence, starvation, and destitution. Their property and lands were confiscated as well. In 1989 the Soviet government began a repatriation program that allowed for the return of some 50,000 persons per year. Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has administered this program, and over 200,000 of the estimated 550,000 Crimean Tatar population have returned, but many have suffered from discrimination and poverty. The Crimea is officially an autonomous region within Ukraine, but the government is controlled by ethnic Russians. Many Tatars want more political power, but not necessarily autonomy.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, many Tatars agitated for an independent Tatar nation-state. In August 1990, the Tatar parliament declared Tatarstan's sovereignty and in April 1991 declared that Tatar law had dominance over Russian law whenever the two were in conflict. Tatarstan functioned as an independent state until 1994, when the leaders of Tatarstan and Russia signed a treaty bringing Tatarstan into the Russian Federation. Since the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, Tatarstan has lost even more of its autonomy. That said, Tatars have maintained their linguistic and cultural rights within Tatarstan.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Tatars are a very diverse group, both ethnically and geographically. The Tatars formed the second largest non-Slavic group (after the Uzbeks) in the former Soviet Union. There are more than 6.6 million Tatars, of whom about 26% live in Tatarstan, an ethnic homeland of the former Soviet Union that is located in present-day Russia. Tatarstan, with about 3.8 million inhabitants, is about the size of Ireland or Portugal and considered the most northern frontier between Muslim and Orthodox Christian cultures. The capital of Tatarstan is Kazan (sometimes referred to as “the port of five seas”), a city of more than a million people and the largest port on the Volga River. Tatarstan is a secular republic with political stability, official support for two languages, and a high percentage of mixed marriages.

After Russians and Ukrainians, the Tatars are the most populous ethnic group in the Russian Federation. About 15% of all Tatars live in Bashkiria, another ethnic homeland that

lies to the east of Tatarstan. There are also smaller Tatar populations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Romani and in the regions to the north and west of Tatarstan. Small Tatar communities are also scattered all across Russia. A unique group of Tatars are the Krym (also called the Crimean Tatars), with a population of around 550,000. The Krym are from the Crimean peninsula of present-day Ukraine. Along with the Russians, Armenians, Estonians, and Latvians, the Tatars were the most urbanized ethnic group of the former Soviet Union, especially among those who lived outside of Tatarstan.

There are numerous subgroups within the Tatar population. The Bukharlyk Tatars are descended from 15th- and 16th-century fur traders who lived in Central Asia and western Siberia. The Kasymov Tatars are descended from the refugees of the Kazan Khanate who settled in Riazan in the 15th century. Lithuanian Tatars (also called Polish or Belarusian Tatars) are the Polish-speaking Muslim descendants of the Nogai Horde warriors who helped the Lithuanians fight against the Teutonic Order. The Volga Tatars (also called the Kazan Tatars) are the largest of all the Tatar groups and are descended from Turkic-influenced Eastern Finns, and range from Scandinavian to Mongol in appearance. The Mishars are also Turkic-influenced Eastern Finns who are Finnish in appearance. The Teptiars are Volga Tatars who fled to the east after the Russian Empire took over the Kazan Khanate. The Kryashans are Volga Tatars who converted to Christianity during the 16th and 18th centuries.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, over 200,000 Crimean Tatars have returned to Ukraine. In addition, thousands of Crimean Tatars have immigrated to Russia and the European Union in search of work.

### 3 LANGUAGE

Tatar is a Turkic language. Like other Turkish languages, it is agglutinative, meaning suffixes are added to the ends of words to form sentences. Tatar is closely related to Kazakh and Kyrgyz. It is a more distant relative of the Turkic languages spoken in Azerbaijan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Tatar has three main dialects. Western Tatar is spoken by the small Tatar minority in Finland. Middle Tatar, by far the most widely spoken dialect of the language, is spoken in Russia and Ukraine. Finally, Siberian Tatar is spoken by the Tatar ethnic groups of Siberia. Tatar borrows a large number of words from Russian and incorporates some English words as well.

In 922, the Bulgars converted to Islam, and the old Turkic script was replaced by the Arabic alphabet. Tatar is now written using the Cyrillic alphabet.

A famous old Tatar saying is “*Kilächägem nurlı bulsın öchen, utkännärdän härchak ut alam,*” which means “To make my future bright, I reach for the fire of the past.” Another well-known Tatar proverb is “*Tuzga yazmaganni soıläme,*” which means, roughly, “If it’s not written on salt, it’s wrong to even mention it.” The proverb refers to the ancient method of keeping records on plaques made of wood and salt and commends the practicality of keeping written records.

### 4 FOLKLORE

There are many Tatar legends about how the new city of Kazan (which means “cauldron”) was built. The origin of the city’s name goes back to Tudai-Menghe, who ruled the city in the late 13th century. One of his servants was said to have dropped

a golden cauldron into the river, and the town was later founded nearby.

Another Tatar legend about Kazan tells of a rich man who was a beekeeper and would often take along his daughter to visit his hives in the woods near Jilan-Tau (“snake hill”). When the daughter got married, she lived in the old part of Kazan, where it took a long walk to get water. She complained about the poor planning of the town to Ali-Bei, the ruler of Kazan. She suggested that Jilan-Tau would be a better place for the city, because it was at the mouth of the Kazanka River. The khan ordered two nobles to take 100 warriors to the site and to then open his sealed orders. According to the orders, they were to cast lots and bury the loser alive in the ground on the spot where the new city was to be built. However, when the khan’s son lost, they buried a dog in his place. When the khan heard the news, he was happy for his son but said that it was an omen that the new city would one day be overtaken by the “unholy dogs”—a term referring to those of a different religion.

Waterfowl are an important symbol of life in Tatar culture. Ducks especially are significant because, according to ancient Bulgar mythology, the Earth was formed when a duck dove to the bottom of an ancient sea, brought up a piece of mud, and set it afloat on the water’s surface.

### 5 RELIGION

Most Tatars are Sunni Muslims, with the exception of the Kryashan Tatars, who are Christian. In Tatarstan, along with Islam and Orthodoxy there are some other religious communities such as Old Believers, Protestants, Seventh-Day Adventists, Lutherans, and Jews. Islam has played an important role in solidifying the Tatar culture, because the imperial Russian government repeatedly tried to limit the spread of Islam from the Tatars to other peoples. This approach, however, usually pushed Tatar Muslims closer to their faith, and there is generally a devout observance of rituals and ceremonies among Muslim Tatars. Sufism (Islamic mysticism) also has a long history with the Tatars and is appealing for many because of its emphasis on ascetics. While observance of some Islamic rituals was common, it was very uncommon for Tatars to have a deep knowledge of their faith or to practice all the tenets of Islam. For example, Islamic clergymen would often preside over Tatar weddings. After the clergyman would leave, family and friends would celebrate the wedding by drinking vodka (alcohol is forbidden to Muslims).

Islam has enjoyed a resurgence among Tatars since the fall of the Soviet Union. In 1990, there was only one mosque in Kazan. Now there are dozens. A number of *madrasas*, or religious schools, have also been established in order to educate Tatar Muslims about their faith.

### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Tatars typically observe some of the Soviet-era holidays and also Muslim holidays that, to a large degree, are the same as those elsewhere in the Muslim world. The Soviet celebrations include New Year’s Day (January 1), International Women’s Day (March 8), Labor Day (May 1), and Victory Day (May 9—commemorates the end of World War II). Since the Tatars are widely scattered across Russia and Central Asia, different communities may observe regional holidays as well. Many Tatars celebrate the new year holiday of Nowruz, which is celebrated throughout the Persian and Turkic world.



Russian singers of the Tatarstan capital Kazan perform during a celebration of the capital's 1,000 anniversary. Tens of thousands of Tatar, Russians, and others packed in Kazan to celebrate the millennial anniversary. (Maxim Marmur/AFP/Getty Images)

The Islamic holidays include *Milad al-Nabi* (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad), *Id al-Adha* (celebrating the ancient account of Abraham offering his son for sacrifice), and *Id al-Fitr* (celebrating the end of the Ramadan fast). The dates of these holidays are not fixed due to the rotating nature of the lunar calendar. Russian influence has led many Tatars to incorporate the drinking of alcohol into their traditional celebration. The Kryashan Tatars celebrate Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas. These religious celebrations were observed in secret during the Soviet era but are now held in the open. As a result, the number of Tatars who celebrate Islamic and Christian holidays has increased considerably since the fall of the Soviet Union.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Circumcision and other rituals associated with birth, death, and marriage are practiced by many Tatars today.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the number of Tatars performing the Hajj—pilgrimage to Mecca—has increased greatly. Every Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during his or her lifetime.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

For centuries, there was tension between ethnic Russians and Tatars. As a result, the Tatars suffered from discrimination, which affected how they came to interact with Russian society.

The Tatars of today typically live in small communities and often utilize a network of friends and business contacts from within the Tatar community.

In the early 1990s, the hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tatars who returned to Ukraine faced hostility from their Russian and Ukrainian neighbors. Over time, these tensions have eased considerably.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Health care is provided by the state, although not all Tatars have adequate access to it. The government of Tatarstan is in the process of moving to an insurance-based health care delivery system. The high rate of new HIV infections affects Tatars, just as it affects the other peoples of the Russian Federation.

Most Tatars live in the Soviet-style apartment blocks found throughout Russia. Tatars live relatively well, as Tatarstan is one of the most prosperous republics in the Russian Federation.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Urban Tatars often promote endogamy (marriage to other Tatars) out of the belief that it will help keep the Tatar identity from being assimilated. However, since the 1960s, intermarriage with Russians and other ethnic groups has become more common. Family size is usually larger than that of neighboring populations. Traditional Tatar households are comprised of three or more generations.

## 11 CLOTHING

Tatars, as one of the most urbanized minorities, wear European-style clothing, and occasionally, mostly in rural areas, include fragments of traditional clothing such as the headscarf for women and skullcaps for men. In 2003 Muslim Tatar women won the right to wear headscarves in their passport photographs.

## 12 FOOD

Lamb and rice play a prominent role in the traditional Tatar diet, as in those of many other central Asian peoples. The Tatars are known in particular for their wide array of pastries, especially their meat pies, which, besides beef or lamb and onions, may include ingredients such as hard-boiled eggs, rice, and raisins. Another traditional dish is *chebureki*, or deep-fried lamb dumplings. Following is the recipe for the basic Tatar meat pie called *peremech*.

### Peremech

Dough ingredients:

2 eggs  
 ½ cup sour cream  
 6 tablespoons of light cream or half-and-half  
 a pinch of salt  
 2½ cups flour

Filling ingredients:

1 pound slightly fatty boneless beef chuck  
 1 onion  
 1 clove garlic  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 vegetable oil for frying

Dough: Beat eggs, then add sour cream, light cream, sugar, salt, and flour. Knead until smooth and pliable. Wrap the dough in wax paper and chill overnight before making into pies.

Filling: Add salt and garlic to meat and grind together with onion in a meat grinder or food processor.

To make the pies: Take only a quarter of the dough out of the refrigerator at a time. Roll each quarter of dough into a 12-inch cord. Slice each cord into six pieces, rolling these smaller pieces between the palms of the hands to form balls, then flatten the balls slightly. On a surface dusted with flour, roll each into a 3½ to 4 inch round disk. Spread 1 tablespoon of the meat mixture on each disk, leaving a 1 inch border around the edge. Gather the dough upward all the way around each patty, forming a round, flat pastry and leave a hole about 1 inch across on top. As each pie is made, cover with a cloth to prevent uncooked dough from drying. Heat the pies in ½ inch of vegetable oil in a large skillet, a few at a time, with the hole side down. Cook for approximately 15 minutes, or until golden brown. Makes 24 pies.

## 13 EDUCATION

During the Soviet era, the prerequisite Russian language examination served to keep many Tatar youths out of institutions of higher learning.

Since the end of the Soviet period, Tatar-language education has increased in popularity. In 1998 there were 38 Tatar language schools in Kazan alone. Tatar-language schools differ from Russian-language schools in that the purpose of the Tatar schools is to inculcate students with a sense of Tatar national identity. Many of these schools actively seek to create a new Tatar intelligentsia.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

It is believed that Tatar prose dates back to the 12th century, but scholars disagree about its origin. Jakub ibn-Nogman, who wrote "The History of Bulgaria," lived in the first half of the 12th century. The scholar Burchan ibn-Bulgari wrote about rhetoric and medicine. The 13th-century poem by Kol-Gali called "A Tale about Yusuf" was well-known far from Bulgar lands and greatly influenced the development of Bulgarian and Tatar literature.

Professional Tatar theatre began in December 1906 with the premiere of Galiaskar Kamal's play, *Wretched Child*. Modern Tatar literature began around the same time period. The poet Gabdulla Tukay is credited with founding modern literary Tatar. During the early part of the Soviet era and immediately after World War II, Tatar literature was largely confined to praising communist ideology. Since the 1960s, however, Tatar literature has often emphasized the role of the artist in voicing the ideals of the Tatar people. Prominent modern Tatar writers include R. Faizullin, R. Gäray, R. Mingalimov, R. Kharisov, F. Shafigullin, M. Agliamov, and Zöl'fat. Famous Tatar artists include actress Chulphan Khamatova, ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev, and composer Farit Yarullin.

## 15 WORK

Traditional occupations of the Tatars include agriculture, hunting, fishing, crafts, and trade. Under Soviet rule, many jobs were based on collectivized agriculture and industrialization. The Tatars have held an increasing number of white-collar and professional jobs since World War II.

Heavy industry makes up a large share of employment in Tatarstan. Many Tatars work in mining, automobile manufacturing, chemical production, and oil refining.

## 16 SPORTS

The Tatars enjoy many traditional and Western-style sports. Soccer became popular during the Soviet years and is perhaps the most widely played sport among young men. Horse racing is also very popular, as the horse has long been a prominent part of traditional Tatar culture.

A traditional form of wrestling known as *koresh* is still practiced by Tatars. *Koresh* wrestlers wrestle standing up and attempt to throw their opponent to the ground. The most points are awarded to wrestlers who can throw their opponents on their backs. Wrestlers who throw their opponents on their sides or buttocks receive fewer points. The recent Tatar national revival in Russia has led to greater interest in *Koresh*.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Tatars enjoy many of the same leisure activities as neighboring populations in the former Soviet Union, such as watching television and visiting with friends and neighbors. Prominent among the traditional entertainments in rural areas is the

week-long Festival of the Plow, or *Sabantui*, held in spring, which ends with a day of singing, dancing, and sporting events.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The ancestors of the modern Tatars were skilled in crafting jewelry of gold, silver, bronze, and copper. They also were known for making pottery with engraved ornaments, metal decorations, and bronze locks in the shape of animals.

The Tatars who have returned to the Crimean Peninsula are fueling a resurgence in traditional Tatar crafts. Traditional Tatar embroidery is now practiced in Ukraine. Traditional Tatar craftsmen use gold thread to embroider images of fruits and grains.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Tatar suffered discrimination under the imperial Russian dominion as well as during the Soviet era. Massive deportations of Tatars fragmented the culture, and the loss of lives and property from those days still has an impact on contemporary Tatar society.

Problems with Crimean Tatars are much more complicated because of forced deportation from the Crimean peninsula. Now that almost half of the Crimean Tatars have returned from Central Asia, they are facing problems with employment, housing, and schooling.

Social problems that affect many communities in the Russian Federation affect the Tatars. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of sex workers and drug users in Russia has risen drastically. These dynamics have led to an increase in the number of HIV cases in Tatar communities. Although the Russian economy in the 2000s was growing at a fast pace, many Tatars still face poverty and unemployment.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Tatar women who live in the countries of the former Soviet Union have legal equality with men. However, Tatar women, like women in nearly every country around the world, still face disadvantages because of their gender. Women's participation in politics has decreased drastically since the fall of the Soviet Union. Wage discrimination is a particularly acute problem for Tatars in Russia; in 1998, women in Russia earned only 70% of what men earned, even though women tended to have higher levels of education. At the same time, gender discrimination may be less prevalent among Tartars than among ethnic Russians. A 2004 study found that 44% of Tatar men believed that women should work outside the home, while only 25% of ethnic Russians held the same opinion.

Until the 1980s, it had been common for homosexual Tatars, along with every other ethnic group of the Russian SFSR, to be sent to mental hospitals. Homosexuality was decriminalized in Russia in 1993. Leaders of the Tatar Muslim community are staunchly anti-gay, and there is little public acceptance of sexual minorities amongst ordinary Tatars.

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—revised by B. Lazarus



# TUVANS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Tuvinians, Tyva; Uriangkhaïs; Urianghais; Tannu-Uriankhais; Soyots

**LOCATION:** Russia (southern Siberia), China (northern Xinjiang province), northwestern Mongolia

**POPULATION:** 243,442 (2002, in Russia), 70,000 in Mongolia, 2,400 in China

**LANGUAGES:** Tuvan; Russian, Mongol

**RELIGIONS:** Native religious practices; Tibetan Buddhism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Tuvans are a native people of southern Siberia mainly found in the Tuvan Republic (also known as Tuva) of the Russian Federation. Substantial Tuvan communities are also found in western Mongolia and in the Altai Mountain region of western China. The Tuvans' name for themselves is *Tyva*. They have also been referred to in ethnographic writings as the Uriangkhaïs, Urianghais, Tannu-Uriankhais, and Soyots. Archeological, linguistic, anthropological, and historical evidence indicates that the ancestors of the modern Tuvans were formed during the first millennium AD from a mixture of Turkic-, Mongol-, Ket-, and Samoyedic-speaking tribes. Most Tuvans have traditionally been nomads who raise cattle, horses, sheep, yaks, and goats, although some Tuvans in the mountainous forests of northern and eastern Tuva have customarily bred reindeer instead. Tuva was conquered by the Mongol armies of Chinggis Khan around AD 1207 and was subsequently administered by a series of Mongol rulers. In the 1750s, Tuva's Mongol rulers were defeated by the Manchu Qing dynasty that had conquered China during the previous century, and the area passed under Manchu rule until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. The Russian Empire declared Tuva its protectorate in 1914 and allowed Russian settlers to move into Tuva, much to the dismay of the Tuvans, who occasionally attacked them. In 1921, Russia's new communist government proclaimed that the protectorate declared earlier by the Russian monarchy was illegal and that, henceforth, Tuva was to be independent. In reality, the "Tannu-Tuva People's Republic" that existed from 1921 to 1944 was a Soviet puppet state. During the 1930s, its government engaged in policies identical to those of the Soviet government—for example, religious persecution and the imprisonment and execution of suspected political opponents. At this time, steps were also taken toward the collectivization of animal husbandry. In 1944, the Soviet Union annexed Tuva; soon thereafter, thousands of Russian settlers arrived to work the land and construct factories and coal and gold mines. The Tuvans were forced into herding collectives similar to agricultural collective farms. Many Tuvans slaughtered their animals in protest and engaged in anti-Soviet uprisings.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The total Tuvan population is about 310,000, slightly more than 200,000 of whom dwell in the Russian Federation's Tuvan Republic. The geographical center of the Asian continent has been calculated to lie just outside the Tuvan capital Kyzyl, and this spot is marked by an obelisk. The Tuvan Republic borders on the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region (Russian, *avtonomnaia oblast*) to the west, the Khakass Autonomous Region to

the northwest, Krasnoyarsk Territory (Russian *krai*) to the north, Irkutsk Region (Russian *oblast*) to the northeast, the Buriat Republic to the northeast, and Mongolia to the south and southeast. About 9,000 Tuvans live scattered throughout the rest of the former Soviet Union's territory. An additional 70,000 Tuvans dwell in the northwest of the Mongolian Republic, and 2,400 more are to be found in the People's Republic of China's Xinjiang Province. The Tuvans are divided into two distinct ethnographic groups. The first are the western Tuvans, or Tuvans proper, numbering about 305,000. The second is a much smaller group, the Tuja Tuvans (Tuvintsy-todzhintsy in Russia), who live in Tuva numbering 4,442 in 2002. In 2002 approximately 55% of Tuvans were rural dwellers, and 45% were urban.

Because more than 80% of the Republic of Tuva is covered by mountains (even the lowest points are 500 meters [1640.4 feet] above sea level), the most typical landforms are naturally alpine ones—mountain meadows and taiga forest—although valleys contain some steppe and semi-desert areas as well as a limited amount of arable farmland. The climate is dry and sharply continental: winters are long and very cold, with January temperatures sometimes dropping as low as  $-61^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-78^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Summers are short and hot, with June temperatures reaching  $43^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $109^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Tuva is rich in wildlife, particularly bear, fox, mountain goat, snow leopard, wild reindeer, wolf, squirrel and antelope. Vegetation varies widely. Grasses and wormwood trees are common in the mountain meadows and steppe valleys inhabited by cattle-breeders. Larch, cedar, fir, and birch forests appear in the northern and eastern areas occupied by hunters and reindeer herders. Sparse grasses and shrubs are found in the semi-desert areas south of the Tannu-Ola mountain range.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The Tuvan language belongs to the Turkic family; its closest living relative is the language of the Tofalars (also called the "Karagas" or "Toba") who live to the north of Tuva. The four dialects of Tuvan are classified according to the parts of Tuva in which they are spoken: Central, Western, Northeastern, and Southeastern. The modern Tuvan literary language is based on the Central dialect. The Tuvan dialects differ from each other mainly in vocabulary and pronunciation, and the differences between them are not significant enough to prevent speakers of different dialects from understanding each other. Until the 20th century, the few Tuvans who could read and write did so in Classical Mongolian, a literary language that uses a flowing vertical script in which words are written from top to bottom in columns of text read from left to right. The use of Classical Mongolian, along with centuries of continual contacts between Tuvans and Mongols, has had a significant influence upon the development of the Tuvan language, especially its vocabulary. Many Tuvan words are identical to Mongolian words with the same meaning: for example, *mal* means "cattle" or "livestock," and *nom* means "book" in both Tuvan and Mongolian. *Chet-tirdim* means "thank you."

The Tuvan language did not have a written form until the late 1920s, when Soviet linguists created a Tuvan writing system based on the Latin alphabet. This alphabet was replaced by the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet in 1941. Although the form of the Cyrillic alphabet used to write Tuvan includes several extra letters for Tuvan sounds that do not exist in Russian, many



Tuvan scholars feel that the present writing system is still inadequate for representing the sounds of spoken Tuvan and is in need of reform. Because Tuva was not formally annexed by the Soviet Union until 1944 and the Tuvans make up a larger percentage (70%) of their officially recognized homeland's population than any other native Siberian people, and they tend to live in compact groups separate from the local Russians, they have a higher degree of native-language retention than any other indigenous Siberian group. A full 99% of Tuvans speak Tuvan as their mother tongue, and only 1% speak Russian as their first language. Young and middle-aged Tuvans are also proficient in Russian, which is taught in all Tuvan schools.

Many Tuvan personal names are based on common Tuvan words that have a pleasant meaning. *Chechek* (female) means "flower," *Maadyr* (male) means "hero," and *Belek* (both sexes) means "gift." Suffixes are often added to such words to specify male or female names: the male ending *-ool* and the female ending *-kys* are added to words such as *chechen* ("eloquent"), *mergen* ("wise"), and *aldyn* ("golden") to produce the male names *Chechen-ool*, *Mergen-ool* and *Aldyn-ool* and the female names *Chechen-kys*, *Mergen-kys*, and *Aldyn-kys*. Because most Tuvans practice the Tibetan form of Buddhism, many Tibetan names have been adopted, including *Seren-Chimit* (male) and *Dolgarzhaa* (female).

A child might even be called by the Tibetan word for the day of the week on which he or she was born: *Baazang* ("Friday"), *Davaa* ("Monday"), and so on. Russian names such as *Nikolai* (male) and *Maria* (female) have also become common in the

last few decades. Family names are based on the surname of a male ancestor; for that reason, many surnames end in the suffix *-ool*.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Although the Tuvan language was unwritten until this century (except for the scholarly transcriptions of linguists and ethnographers), the Tuvans have long possessed a rich heritage of oral literature. Tuvan folklore contains a variety of genres—fairytales, stories about animals, riddles, songs, folk sayings, and long epic tales about the battles and exploits of heroic warriors that are very similar to the epics of the Mongols. There are also myths about the origins of the constellations. For example, *Chedi khan* (The Seven Khans), a myth of the reindeer-breeding Tuvans, tells how the constellation Ursa Major was formed. According to the myth, Ursa Major's seven stars are actually seven khans. They were journeying separately through the Upper World where the spirits dwell when they happened to meet. The seven khans decided to have a meal together, but none of them knew how to cook. To this day, they are standing there deciding how to prepare the meal. Tuvan folklore was formerly passed down orally from generation to generation and recited by *toolchus* (bards). Scholars at the Tuvan Scientific Research Institute of Language, Literature and History (*Tyvanyn Dyl, Literatura, Bolgash Töögünün Ertem Shinchilel Institutudu*) in Kyzyl have worked together with the *toolchus* to collect and publish Tuvan folklore to ensure that it will be available to future generations of Tuvans.

#### 5 RELIGION

The ancient religion of the Tuvans is shamanism. According to Tuvan shamanism, mountains, forests, rivers, animals, and the sky all possess their own spirits that must be honored in order for man to survive and flourish. Most Tuvan shamans believe that the universe is divided into three worlds: the Upper, or Heavenly World (*Üsütüü-oran*), where the spirits of nature and various other deities dwell; the Lower, or Earthly World (*Ortaa-oran*), which is inhabited by humans; and the Subterranean, or Dark World (*Aldyy-oran*), which is inhabited by the spirits of the dead. (Some Tuvans believe that there are only two worlds—the Upper and Lower—and that the dwelling place of the dead is located at the edge of the Lower World.) The shaman, a tribal priest similar to the Native American "medicine man," is a man or woman who is adept at traveling between the worlds and communicating with spirits through rituals that involve dancing, chanting, and beating on a large, flat round drum called a *dünggür*. The shaman's prayers are believed to heal the sick and improve the luck of those who have lost cattle to disease or experienced other misfortunes. The shaman also foretells the future and presides at sacrifices (*ydyk-kylyr*) during which young bulls are killed in honor of holy mountains. The profession of shamanism is usually hereditary. Most shamans are therefore the sons and daughters of shamans, although men and women without shamans as ancestors may also become shamans if they feel that they have been chosen by the spirits.

The Tuvans' belief that animals have spirits that must be respected has led to the development of many taboos concerning hunting. For example, Tuvan hunters may not refer to certain animals directly by their usual Tuvan names, but must instead allude to them by a host of elaborate euphemisms. (This cus-

tom is shared by some other Siberian peoples—for example, the Buriats.) Thus, a bear is not spoken of using the ordinary Tuvan word for “bear” (*adyg*) during the hunt, but is instead referred to as *khaiyrakan* (“the sovereign”), *kara chüve* (“the black thing”), *choorganyg* (“the one who has a blanket [i.e., fur]”), *irei* (“grandfather”), or *daai* (“uncle”). The Tuvans consider trees with oddly twisted trunks or other unusual features to contain spirits; they call such trees “shaman-trees” (*kham-yiash*), and when passing by them, they leave bits of food, brightly colored ribbons, drops of milk, tea, or vodka, and strands of horsehair as offerings.

The Tibetan variety of Buddhism was brought to Tuva by Mongolian lamas (Buddhist monks or priests) during the 18th century and soon claimed many converts. Instead of abandoning shamanism, however, the Tuvans continued to practice it along with the new religion. Besides filling religious needs, the Buddhist monasteries (*khürees*) of Tuva served important cultural functions as well. They provided literacy in Mongolian and Tibetan and contained libraries of religious and secular works in these languages. During the 1930s, the Tuvan government, in imitation of its Soviet model, destroyed the monasteries and imprisoned or killed many Tuvan lamas and shamans. Tuvan religious practices emerged from underground in the 1980s when the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev put an end to the Soviet government’s war on religion. Since then, several young Tuvans have gone to Mongolia’s Buddhist monasteries for religious training, and Tuvan Buddhists have made plans to rebuild some of the destroyed monasteries.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The most popular Tuvan holiday is *Shagaa*, the New Year’s Festival. Because the Tuvans formerly used the lunar calendar, *Shagaa* falls on a different day each year in the Gregorian calendar. Tuvans also celebrate the Western New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day on 31 December and 1 January. In Tuva, the new year is welcomed by saying “*Chaa Chyl-bile*” (“happy new year”). *Shagaa* is celebrated by feasting, wrestling matches, archery contests, and horse racing. While under Soviet rule, Tuvans celebrated Soviet holidays such as May Day (1 May), the anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany (9 May), International Women’s Day (8 March), and the anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 (7 November). Most Tuvans undoubtedly stopped observing these Soviet holidays after the collapse of the communist regime.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

In traditional society, childbirth took place at home and was assisted by a midwife. As soon as the infant emerged from the womb, the midwife washed it with strong tea in order to strengthen it. The afterbirth was wrapped up in the sheepskin upon which the mother had given birth and buried. The umbilical cord was tied with string; when it fell off, it too was buried. The practice of burying the afterbirth seems to have passed down from observance, although the umbilical cord is still buried.

A Tuvan child is given his or her first haircut at three years of age. This is an occasion for celebration by the child’s family and relatives, because he or she has now survived infancy. The parents take the boy or girl to the homes of relatives, who each cut off a small lock of hair and present the child with gifts. Before the Soviet ban on arranged marriages, girls underwent an additional rite of passage involving hair. Young girls’ hair was

kept short like that of small boys until they reached eight or nine years of age, at which time the hair was allowed to grow out. When a girl’s hair had grown long enough for it to be woven into a braid, she was considered old enough for her parents to choose a husband for her.

The oldest son held a privileged position in traditional Tuvan society. According to the Buddhist patriarchal social organization of the Tuvans, the oldest son was always given to the temple to become a lama (Buddhist monk). Also, the flocks (animal breeding was the basis of the economy) were not divided among surviving children, but always inherited entirely by the oldest son. Needless to say, this privileged group never worked, and this situation limited the society’s economic opportunities because a large number of potential workers remained idle. It was also hard on younger sons, who often resented their subordinate role in society. With Soviet support, these younger sons formed the core of a revolutionary organization that overthrew the power of the lamas in 1926.

In traditional Tuvan society, the dead were either buried in the ground or placed in a wooden casket that was then raised on poles or placed in a tree. Food and drink or items of everyday use were placed in the casket along with the corpse. Shamans were laid to rest with their drums. Sometimes, corpses were wrapped in cloth and laid on the ground to be devoured by vultures. This practice is similar to a traditional Tibetan method of disposing of the dead and was especially widespread among Buddhist Tuvans, although some Buddhist clergymen chose to be cremated instead. Tuvans now bury their dead in the ground in caskets or cremate them.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Over the centuries, the Tuvans have adopted the Tibetan and Mongolian practice of presenting respected guests with a *khadag*—a band of silk that is about one yard long and a little under a foot wide. When presenting the *khadag* to a guest, a Tuvan host lays the *khadag* across his or her outstretched arms, which are bent at the elbow. The guest also places his arms in this position, and the host transfers the *khadag* from his or her arms to those of the guest.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The most common traditional dwelling of the Tuvans is the *ög*, or yurt, which is covered with felt cloth stretched over a wooden frame. The frames of Tuvan *ögs* have customarily been imported from Mongolia. An iron stove in the center of the *ög* is used to cook food and provide warmth. A flap in the center of the roof is opened to allow light to enter, and an iron stovepipe removes smoke. The *ög* is well-suited for a nomadic way of life, because it can be quickly taken apart and reassembled when a family drives its herds from pasture to pasture. Tuvans of the mountainous northern Todzh region, who herd reindeer and hunt instead of raising livestock, have traditionally lived in *chadyrs*, conical tents similar to the teepees of some Native American peoples of the Great Plains. The wooden frame of the *chadyr* is covered with reindeer skins in the winter and birch-bark in the summer. In traditional Tuvan society, the homes of two or three related families that shared herding and hunting grounds were grouped into a small settlement called an *aal*. After Tuva’s annexation by the Soviet Union, *aals* were abolished and their members moved to large collective farms. Since the 1950s, traditional Tuvan dwellings have largely been replaced

by the one-story wooden houses common on Soviet collective farms. Tuvans in Kyzyl and other cities live in prefabricated concrete apartment buildings that are indistinguishable from those in urban areas of the former Soviet Union.

Tuvans have ridden horses and used them as pack animals for as long as there has been recorded information about them. Because of Russian influence, Tuvans have begun to use horses to pull carts and sleighs as well in recent decades. Reindeer-breeding Tuvans ride domesticated reindeers and use them to carry loads. Yaks and oxen are also occasionally ridden in the southern areas of Tuva where they are bred, although they are used for transport far less frequently than horses. Automobiles, bicycles, taxis, and buses are common in cities and towns, but Tuva's rugged mountainous terrain has severely limited road construction between cities. For the same reason, there are no railways in Tuva. There are still many rural areas that can be reached only by airplane, horse, or reindeer.

Herbal medicine and the incantations of shamans were the chief forms of medical treatment in traditional Tuvan society. Lamas trained in Tibetan medical practices at Buddhist monasteries also served as doctors before the anti-religious campaign of the 1930s. Western medicine first became available to Tuvans in the first decade of the 20th century when Russian doctors moved into Tuva to serve Russian farmers who had settled in the region. It has become much more common since Tuva's incorporation into the Soviet Union (a large modern hospital was constructed in Kyzyl during the first years of direct Soviet rule). The Soviet government provided medical care either free or at low cost, but it was not always available in remote areas, and most rural clinics provided only the most basic care. To these existing problems must be added the dire economic conditions in which post-Soviet medical facilities now find themselves.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

For many centuries, related Tuvan families were grouped into clans (*sööks*) that shared hunting lands and helped each other in time of need. Members of a *söök* were forbidden to marry each other. Although the clan system's rules (such as the prohibition on marriage among members) have passed from observance during this century (and in some places even earlier), many Tuvans are still aware of their clan affiliation and feel a vague sort of kinship with other members of the same clan. The Tuvan language has also preserved elements of the clan system. The word *aky* means both one's own elder brother and the younger brother of one's father (uncle), and the word *ugba* refers to both one's own elder sister and the younger sister of one's father (aunt).

The small nuclear family consisting of a man and woman and their unmarried children has been typical among modern Tuvans throughout the 20th century. Wealthy Tuvans formerly had two or more wives, but polygamy was relatively rare and there have apparently been no cases of it since the 1920s. In traditional Tuvan society, marriages were arranged, with the average age of marriage 15 or 16 for girls and between 18 and 20 for boys (although marriages sometimes took place with one partner as young as 13). The legal age for marriage in Tuva is now 18, and marriages are no longer arranged.

## 11 CLOTHING

Tuvan traditional clothing is very similar to that worn by Khalkhas, Buriats, and other Mongolian-speaking peoples. The typical garment for men and women is the *ton*, an ankle-length robe fastened on the right side with buttons or hooks. Light cloth shirts and trousers are worn under the *ton*. Summer *tons* are made of calico, silk, velvet, thin felt, or deerskin. Those worn in winter are made either from sheepskin or from felt lined with the thick skins of reindeer slaughtered in the winter. Both sexes wear fur and cloth hats of various cuts and boots. Stiff boots with thick, multilayered soles, felt linings, and toes that curl upward are called *kadyg idiks*. High, soft boots made of thin leather, reindeer, or goatskin are called *chymchak idiks*. There is little difference between the traditional clothing of men, women, and children, although men usually wear a belt over their *tons* to hold pouches for tobacco, fire-lighting flints, and various small tools used in herding and hunting work. Underclothing for both sexes was formerly limited to undershirts and underpants made of cloth in the summer and leather in the winter, but these have been replaced by cloth shorts and undershirts for men and cloth bras and panties for women since the mid-20th century. Mass-produced items of Western outer clothing—cloth dresses, shirts, trousers and suits, and leather shoes—have also become common, especially in urban areas. Traditional clothing is still widely used in daily life in the countryside, however, and it is worn on holidays and other festive occasions by both rural and urban Tuvans.

## 12 FOOD

Many traditional dishes of the cattle-breeding Tuvans are made from milk and are identical to those of the Mongols. Curds (*arazhy*) are dried during the summer and eaten year-round. Sour milk (*khoitpak*) is either drunk, whipped into a sweet, creamy substance called *eezhegei*, or pressed into a sour, hard cheese (*kurut*). Mare's milk is fermented to make a drink called *khymys* (called *kumys* by other Turkic-speaking peoples) and distilled into *arak*, a vodka-like alcoholic beverage.

There are a number of taboos regarding the handling of milk. For instance, it is forbidden to spill milk on the ground. If one does inadvertently spill it, one must cover it with a sprinkling of soil. One may not take milk outside after dark. It is generally considered amiss to take milk away from one's household; if someone cannot avoid giving another person milk to take away, he must pour the first few drops into one of his own containers before giving away the remainder.

In addition to beef, the cattle-breeding Tuvans consume mutton, camel, yak, and goat meat. Boiling is the usual method of preparation. The traditional fare of reindeer-breeding Tuvans centers on reindeer meat and milk. Reindeer milk is drunk fresh and added to tea; it is also dried and stored in leather bags for later use, or else made into cheese. In the fall, reindeer meat and milk are frozen in the open air to be thawed and boiled during the long, bitter winters. Hunting is a common occupation for both cattle- and reindeer-breeding Tuvans, so the meat of wild reindeer, bear, and squirrel often graces Tuvan tables. Millet, barley, oats, and wheat are grown in the fertile river valleys. Common traditional dishes from these ingredients include millet soup, noodles, and pancakes. Russian influence has made fruit, vegetables, pork, bread, and various canned goods an integral part of the Tuvan diet in the last 50 years.

### 13 EDUCATION

Before the 20th century, the Tuvans' only educational institutions were Buddhist monasteries. The languages of the religious rituals students were made to memorize and the texts they used were Mongolian and Tibetan. Because these languages (especially Tibetan) are very different from Tuvan, some students memorized their lessons without understanding their content. During the 1920s, a few secular schools were founded by the Tuvan government. Buddhist monks, who were practically the only literate Tuvans, were employed as teachers, and textbooks and homework were written in Classical Mongolian. In the 1930s, the creation of a Tuvan written language and the return of young Tuvans who had studied to become teachers in the Soviet Union significantly aided the growth of education. Still, only half of Tuvan school-age children attended school until Tuva's annexation by the USSR in 1944, when funds from the Soviet government allowed the development of a modern educational system. All Tuvans now attend primary and secondary schools, and many go on to study at technical institutes, teachers' colleges, and universities in both Tuva and the rest of the Russian Federation.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The aspect of the Tuvan cultural heritage best known outside Tuva is its music. Tuvan singers are famous for a special type of singing called *khöömei*, known in English as "overtone," "throat," or "harmonic" singing. A *khöömei* singer produces two tones at once: a low, droning tone that produces the melody and a higher "overtone" that has been compared to the sound of a flute. The "overtone" is produced by vibrations in the throat and mouth caused by the lower tone. *Khöömei* is a very difficult art that requires years of training to coordinate the muscles of the vocal cords, throat, soft palate, tongue, and lips. There are several styles of *khöömei* singing: *sygyt* has a whistling overtone, whereas *kargyraa* has a very deep lower tone and hoarse overtone and is similar to the harmonic chanting of Tibetan Buddhist monks. The *ezengileer* and *borbannadir* styles use overtones that have a pulsing rhythm similar to a galloping horse. *Khöömei* singers such as Kaigal-ool Khovalyg have performed in many countries, including the United States.

### 15 WORK

Tuvans have long been skilled metalworkers. The profession of blacksmith is a highly respected one, and in traditional society only the sons of blacksmiths could enter it. Tuvan blacksmiths produce items of everyday use, such as knives, ploughshares, arrowheads, locks, trivets, axes, nails, and even rifles from scrap iron. Another type of metalwork widespread among the Tuvans is casting. Copper, bronze, lead, and a silver-tin alloy called *khola* are poured into stone or clay molds to make bridles, stirrups, chains, chess pieces, and decorative plaques that were fastened to saddles. Mass-produced metal goods have become more common since the 1950s, but items custom-made by Tuvan metalworkers are still highly sought for their attractiveness and durability.

### 16 SPORTS

The Tuvans' favorite sports are horse racing, archery, and wrestling. Tuvan wrestling (*khüresh*) is very similar to Mon-

gol wrestling. The rules are the same, and Tuvan and Mongol wrestlers even wear the same type of uniform. The uniform of a Tuvan wrestler (*mögö*) consists of heavy, knee-high leather boots; a leather or silk "shirt" that covers only the shoulders, upper back, and arms; and leather or silk shorts similar in cut to men's briefs. During a traditional Tuvan wrestling match, the two competitors square off and grab each other by the shoulders. They grapple with each other in a standing position until one of them is forced to touch the ground (usually with his knee or elbow). The wrestler who forces the other to the ground is declared the winner.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Tuvans have enjoyed chess for centuries. Some scholars believe that chess was brought to Tuva by Chinese settlers after the Manchu conquest of Tuva. The chess pieces used by Tuvans have more or less the same functions as those in other cultures, but they have been modified to depict camels, kings and princes in traditional dress, and other themes from traditional Tuvan daily life. *Daaly*, a game similar to dominoes, is another favorite pastime.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Stone carving has long been practiced by Tuvan craftsmen. Pyrophyllite, a substance similar to soapstone, is carved into chess pieces and small sculptures. Common themes are wild and domesticated animals, Tuvans in traditional dress, and everyday activities such as hunting. Wild animals are often depicted in complicated poses that show them hunting or fighting each other.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Some of the most pressing issues facing modern Tuvans are ecological ones. The ecology of Tuva, like that of the other native Siberian peoples' homelands, has been damaged by Soviet economic projects that did not take into account their effects on the environment. Hydroelectric dams have flooded river valleys traditionally used for agriculture. The replacement of the small *aals* by collective farms has concentrated livestock into excessively large herds that overtax Tuva's grass and water resources. Gold, uranium, and coal mines have scarred the landscape and polluted Tuva's once-pristine air and water, and the absence of environmental safeguards at the open-pit asbestos mines dug since the 1970s has led to fears that cancer rates will soon rise sharply.

Ethnic conflicts between Tuvans and Russians have increased sharply since the relaxation of censorship in the 1980s. All Tuvans are now keenly aware that their annexation by the Soviet Union took place without their consent, and they blame the Russian-led Soviet government, the native political leaders whom they view as traitors, and the uninvited Russian settlers for the present damage to their homeland's environment and economy and the destruction of Tuvan religious and secular traditions. There have been interethnic fights and even murders. In 1990, three Russian fishermen were murdered at an isolated mountain lake, and many local residents suspect that Tuvans killed them for fishing at a place sacred to Tuvan shamanists. The result has been the flight of thousands of Russian colonists: between 1989 and 1992, the proportion of Russians and other non-Tuvans in Tuva's population dropped from 36% to 30%. Some Tuvan nationalists have advocated the forma-

tion of an independent Tuvan state. Although it is very unlikely that the government of the Russian Federation will allow Tuva to secede, Tuvan political leaders have managed to gain greater autonomy in economic matters and have succeeded in increasing the use of the Tuvan language in education and government.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Tuvan women and men now have equal legal rights, but this has not always been the case. A woman's role in the family was in some ways subordinate to that of men in traditional society. A woman was forbidden to speak the names of her father-in-law or mother-in-law and could not appear before them with her head or feet uncovered. She could not inherit property from her husband, as this was a privilege reserved for male family members. Still, a woman possessed that property (including the family dwelling) which she had brought to the marriage and to which neither her husband nor her in-laws had any right. Although men and women performed different economic tasks—men usually herded and hunted, while women milked the cattle or reindeer, cooked the family's meals, and cleaned house—a woman's work was highly valued, and her husband often sought her advice on matters affecting the running of the household. Tuvan gender roles changed considerably after Tuva's annexation into the Soviet Union, with the integration of the Tuvans into the Soviet economy and Soviet society, and with the increased educational opportunities from which many women were able to benefit.

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—revised by A. Frank

# TYROLESE

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Tyroleans

**LOCATION:** Tyrol (Tirol); western Austria and northern Italy

**POPULATION:** 1,708,000

**LANGUAGE:** German, Italian, Ladin (or Ladinian)

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tyrol (or Tirol) is a name for a historical region in Western Central Europe, covering the area in the eastern Alps in western Austria and northern Italy. It includes the Austrian state (Bundesland) of Tyrol, which is divided into North Tyrol and East Tyrol; the Italian region known as Trentino–Alto Adige; and three communes in the Italian region of Veneto (Livinalongo del Col di Lana, Colle Santa Lucia, and Cortina d'Ampezzo). The name of the region derives from a family name linked to a castle near Meran (now Merano in Italy).

In prehistoric times (the late Bronze Age and the Iron Age), the most prominent cultures of the region were the Laugen-Melaun (Luco-Meluno) and the Urnfield, succeeded by the Fritzens-Sanzeno (also known as the Rhaetics). In 15 BC the region was conquered by the Romans and incorporated into the Roman Empire. From the 6th to the 9th century, the region was settled by the invading tribes of Bavarians, whose southernmost territory was the area of today's Bolzano (Bolzen) and the Longobards (who ruled in the area of today's Trentino). After it became part of the Frankish Empire and later the Holy Roman Empire, the region was considered to be of great strategic importance as a bridge between Italy and Bavaria. Tyrol became part of the Duchy of Bavaria in the Early Middle Ages. Its territory consisted predominantly of properties belonging to the bishops of Brixen (Bressanone) and Trento. In 1248 the scions of the Tyrol family, residing in a castle near Merano, acquired extensive lands from the bishop of Brixen. By 1271 the Tyrol family had effectively replaced the ecclesiastical power in the region. In 1342, Margaret Maultasch, heiress to the Tyrol, married the son of the Holy Roman Emperor, Louis IV. When she died childless in 1363, the Tyrol came under the rule of the Habsburgs, which lasted until 1918 (with the exception of the time period between 1805 and 1814, when Austria was forced to cede it to the Kingdom of Bavaria and later Italy). In the 16th century, Tyrol prospered largely because of its mines and the production of weapons. It adopted the Reformation movement, but it then reverted to Catholicism after a large peasant revolt of 1525 had been crushed. In 1867, Tyrol was declared the Crown Land of Cisleithania, the western half of Austria-Hungary. After World War I, and following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Treaty of Saint-Germain, northern Tyrol became part of the First Austrian Republic. Today, it is one of Austria's nine federal states, with Innsbruck as its capital. The state of Tirol is divided into eight districts (*bezirke*) and one statutory city (Innsbruck). The southern Tyrol region, in spite of the region's overwhelmingly German-speaking population, became part of Italy and was known, until 1947, under the name of Venetia Tridentina. In 1948 it was granted a special regional autonomy within the Republic of Italy. The provincial capitals in Trentino–Alto Adige alternate biennially as the site of the regional parliament.

In addition to denoting a historical region, the name of Tyrol is sometimes also used simply to refer to the Austrian federal state of Tirol.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

The Austrian part of the historic region of Tyrol, known in Austria as Tirol, is bordered by Germany to the north, by the Austrian federal states of Salzburg and Carinthia (Kärnten) to the east, by Vorarlberg to the west, and by Italy to the south. Its area covers 12,647 sq km (4,883 sq mi). The region is entirely Alpine in character. The highest peak, the Wildspitze, is 3,744 m (12,382 ft) high. The largest rivers in North and East Tyrol, respectively, are the Inn River and the Drava (Drau).

The Italian part of the historic Tyrol is known as Trentino–Alto Adige (in Italian), Trentino–Südtirol (in German), or as Trentin–Adesc Aut and Trentin–Sudtiroi (in Ladinian). It is bounded by Austria (and its federal state of Tirol) to the north, by Switzerland (the canton of Graubünden) to the northwest, and by the Italian regions of Lombardy (Lombardia) and Veneto to the west and south, respectively. Its area covers 13,619 sq km (5,256 sq mi). The entire region is extremely mountainous, with most regions over 900 m (3,000 ft); the mountain peak called Palla Bianca (Weisskogel) reaches 3,738 m (12,264 ft). The main rivers in this region are the upper Adige (Etsch), the Isarco (Eisack), the Noce, and the Avisio, all of which are tributaries of the Adige River, flowing south through the cities of Bolzano and Trento to the Italian city of Verona in the Veneto region.

Winters in the Austrian part of Tyrol are cold and snowy, but summers are moderately warm, despite much precipitation. Average temperatures for December range from -4°C to 2°C (25°F–36°F), and average June temperatures range between 11°C and 24°C (52°F–75°F). The climate in the province of Bolzano is very similar to the climate in Austrian Tyrol and significantly colder than Trentino's climate.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Three languages have traditionally coexisted in Tyrol: German, Italian, and Ladin (or Ladinian), a Rhaeto-Romance language. While German prevails in North, Eastern, and West Tyrol, in South Tyrol the Italian and German languages have been spoken side-by-side since the Early Middle Ages. Ladin is spoken in the Dolomite Mountains of Italy between Trentino–Alto Adige (Südtirol) and Veneto. This regional language is related to the Swiss Romansh, Surselvan, and Friulan. It is officially recognized in Italy and has official rights in the region of Trentino–Alto Adige but not in the region of Veneto.

The agglomerations around the towns of Bolzano and Merano have always attracted speakers of all three language groups, but for a long time they lived side-by-side, with only a limited interest in multilingualism and communication beyond their linguistic community. In the feudal system, the ruling elites were not preoccupied with the languages spoken by their subjects; their own languages of communication were French and Latin. The predominantly rural way of life in the region did not promote contact between the language groups, especially in the case of German- and Ladin-speaking populations living in the alpine valleys. This linguistic situation changed at the beginning of the 19th century, when cultural and national movements equating language with national identity created an interest in the vernaculars. After World War I, when South

Tyrol became part of Italy, and following the rise of fascism in the peninsula, the use of the German dialects and of German was banned in South Tyrol. Many German-language speakers left Italy at that time, some returning only after World War II. The conditions for the peaceful coexistence of the Italian and the German language groups in the region were not promising at that time, and their mutual unease culminated in political clashes and even bomb attacks. In 1969 a set of laws was passed between the Italian and the Austrian governments that made possible the intensive program of protecting the German language in the region of Trentino–Alto Adige, where the German language prevails in the cities of Bolzano and Trento. The debate on the future of minorities in Europe, opened in the 1960s, gradually led to the implementation of a set of protective measures for the members of German- and Ladin-speaking minorities in the region. Moreover, interethnic relations improved significantly in the 1980s, during the years of the economic boom in the region. All this has led to an important degree of bilingualism, especially in the area of Bolzano. With the appearance of a new model of open, multilingual European identity, the privilege of bilingualism has been especially attractive to the young South Tyrolese.

#### 4 FOLKLORE

Some folklore and traditions among the Tyrolese vary by region, but there are traditions that all parts of the Tyrol share.

According to an old courtship tradition, for example, if a young woman presents a young man with a bottle of spirits, she intends to say that he has found favor with her and may visit her at home. If her parents look upon the young man with disfavor, she might lower the bottle at night from her bedroom window. In parts of Eastern Tyrol, invitations to a wedding are conveyed by a best man or “wedding-inviter,” about a fortnight before the event. He goes around the village inviting the people in each house; if he is offered food, it is taken to be an acceptance of the invitation; if he is denied food, the likelihood is that the invited will not attend the wedding. In the Unter Innthal, the bride is often stolen away by a few wedding guests after the ceremony and sometimes taken to the next village or to an inn where the group eats and drinks until the groom appears to pay the bill. In South Tyrol (Ampezzo), weddings usually take place about a fortnight after the betrothal. During this time, the bride is guarded by a chaperon known as “the growling bear” (*brontola*). In West Tyrol, the parents inspect each other’s houses shortly before the betrothal, in order to evaluate the property of the other family. Today, these customs are largely symbolic.

The traditional Christmas market takes place in most German-speaking towns in Tyrol every year, typically from the last Friday of November to December 23. Visitors can buy traditional food and mulled wine and walk along stands selling Christmas wares, inexpensive toys, and souvenirs.

The emblem of Tyrol is edelweiss (“noble white”), a simple flower that grows spontaneously only at high altitudes. Its image is often embroidered or pinned on clothing produced in Tyrol, as a symbol of regional pride.

#### 5 RELIGION

Tyrol is a region where Roman Catholicism, the dominant religion of the Habsburg Empire, prevails among all three language groups. Although in the early 16th century a large part

of Tyrol accepted the teachings of the Reformation, the region reverted to Catholicism following the crushing of the large peasant revolt in 1525. Roman Catholic churches can be found in even the smallest Tyrolese hamlets. Wooden outdoor sanctuaries adorned with images of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, or different saints are a common sight on Tyrolese roads.

The presence of Jews in Tyrol was documented as early as the beginning of the 14th century; in 1520 a decree was issued expelling all Jews from the region. Some returned, numbering by the end of the 18th century only eight families, living in Innsbruck and Bolzano. The center of Jewish life in today’s Tyrol is the city of Innsbruck.

#### 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most major holidays in Tyrol are based on the Catholic calendar. The feast day of St. Nicholas on December 6 is the traditional beginning of the Christmas season. Christmas and Easter, mark the high points of the Tyrolean year. In Tyrol, Christmas is celebrated on December 24, with a large family dinner. A midnight mass on December 24 is an age-old custom, followed in all parts of Tyrol. December 26 is celebrated in Tyrol as St. Stephen’s Day. New Year’s Day is celebrated. Epiphany (January 6), also known as Three King’s Day, is the day that closes the Christmas season.

Other holidays include All Saints’ Day on November 1, a religious holiday during which Tyrolese typically bring flowers to the graves of deceased family members. The time preceding Lent is marked in Tyrol by Carnival festivities. On Easter Monday, many Italian-speaking Tyrolese traditionally have a picnic in the countryside to celebrate the beginning of spring. *Festa della Liberazione* (April 25) marks the end of World War II in the Italian part of Tyrol. Another spring holiday is Labor Day on May 1, celebrating the international workers’ movement. Whit Monday, the day following Pentecost, is a Catholic holiday celebrated at the end of May or the beginning of June. In the Italian part of Tyrol, June 2 marks the day of the Italian Republic. A holiday marking the height of the summer vacation season is the feast of the Assumption of Mary on August 15, when many Tyrolese take time to relax with family and friends during a long weekend. In the Austrian parts of Tyrol, October 26 is celebrated as the Austrian National Day (marking Austria’s Declaration of Neutrality made in 1955).

In addition to these national holidays, towns and villages throughout Tyrol celebrate the feast day of their patron saint.

#### 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage in the traditionally Roman Catholic region of Tyrol have generally coincided with the rites of passage in the Catholic Church: baptism, first Holy Communion, and confirmation are some of the steps in the life of young Tyrolese that are celebrated by a gathering of a large extended family. In the rural areas of Tyrol, traditional marriages still form the basis of communal living; in the urban areas, marriages have often been replaced by cohabitation, although this is still a more common phenomenon in the Austrian part of Tyrol than it is in the Italian part. Another important rite of passage in the life of young Tyrolese is completing secondary school; passing the secondary-school leaving examination called *Matura* (or *Maturità*) is often a reason for a large celebration with family and friends, marking the entry of a young person into the adult world.



## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

From the times of the Habsburgs, the Tyrolese inherited a respect for authority. This has included respect for the traditional family, based on the principles of the Roman Catholic faith. Large rural families were, in the past, an essential source of labor on the family's farmstead. While the trend of large families continues in the most isolated areas of Tyrol, families with more than two children have become rare in urban areas and among the population employed in economic sectors other than farming. In a relatively harsh climate, a sense of community and a feeling of solidarity among members are valued very highly and cherished across the generations. Considering that, in many areas of Tyrol, geographical mobility was traditionally low, it is not surprising that the feelings of neighborly common interest and friendship that have bound families to one another for decades, if not centuries, are still attributed great importance. Increased demographic mobility in more urban areas has weakened such attachments, but lasting friendships are still valued very highly in all of Tyrol.

Honesty and directness are highly valued in all personal relationships among the Tyrolese. In family life, older generations are typically shown great respect and afforded deferential treatment.

There are many interethnic marriages in Tyrol now, a phenomenon that was not always approved of in the past.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

In the Italian part of Tyrol, the cities of Trento and Bolzano have enjoyed a reputation as being among the best cities in Italy in which to live. In the entire region of Tyrol, the absence of crime, the general neatness, the efficiency and reliability of public services, the high quality of education, and the pleasant pace of life, have all contributed to making the area very attractive, among both travelers and those looking for a permanent home.

Strict regulations protect the wildlife and vegetation in the region, and they seem to be very effective. Cleanliness of public and private spaces is a tradition and a norm in Tyrol, and recycling is both highly diversified and efficient. Both private gardens and public parks are maintained lovingly and carefully. Public transportation in the region is excellent, with trains and buses connecting cities with the many valleys of the region.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

In rural areas of Tyrol, families tend to be more traditional, cultivating a division of labor that runs along gender lines. Fathers are still seen as heads of the family, and traditional marriages prevail, with a very low divorce rate. Childcare and housekeeping are typically women's duties, but the work on the farm is often shared between women and men. In urban areas, a different family model prevails, with single-parent families and cohabitations on the rise.

In keeping with an old tradition, the names that are recorded in the parish registers of births, deaths, and marriages by Tyrolean peasants often differ from the names by which these people are known in the community. The appellation given to the owner of a farmstead is often transferred from one owner to the next, so that whoever acquires the land, also acquires a nickname for the rest of his life.

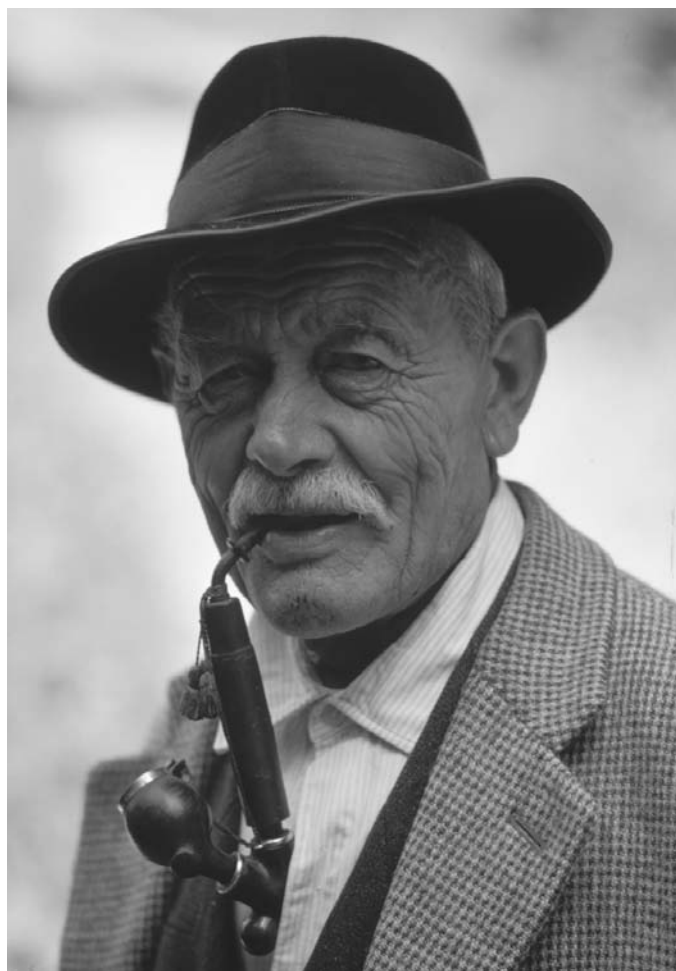
## 11 CLOTHING

Although traditional Tyrolese clothing is still displayed at tourist venues and folk festivals, in daily life it is mostly a thing of the past. In urban areas, the Tyrolese are wearing clothing similar to many urban Western Europeans, incorporating traditional pieces of clothing such as *loden* coats, hats, and jackets for women, men, and children. *Lederhosen* (leather knickerbockers) are a traditional outfit for men; however, they are no longer seen in everyday life very often but remain a symbol of regional pride. *Dirndl*, a simplified version of the traditional Alpine dress for women, consisting of a colorful bodice, blouse, full skirt, and apron, can still be seen in Tyrolese cities, worn by young urban settlers as a wink to their local traditions. Showing pride in one's region and one's origins by wearing a *dirndl* at formal occasions has also been a favorite among the noble women in the Austrian part of Tyrol.

## 12 FOOD

Tyrolese food, similarly to other cuisines of cold mountainous areas in Europe, is high in calories derived from fat. *Crafun-cins da ula verde*, or *schlutzkrapfen* (also known as "lean Tyrolese ravioli") is a type of pasta filled with spinach, parsley, and onion, and eaten during Lent, when meatless dishes prevail. Another traditional meatless dish is *nioch da patac* (potato gnocchi), dumplings made with barley flour, potatoes, and eggs. *Speckknoedel* (bacon dumplings) and *spinatknoedel* (spinach dumplings) are an important part of local cuisine that started out as a way to use stale bread. They are a mixture of dried bread soaked in milk, chopped onion sauteed with bacon, parsley, and eggs, slowly cooked in boiling water, and served with a stew or in hot broth. Similarly prepared are *bales de furmenton* (buckwheat dumplings) and *bales da fuia* (liver dumplings). *Schüttelbrot* is a type of Tyrolese crispbread typically eaten with cheese, ham, or cold cuts, and a favorite in local ski resorts. The spices used in the dish vary, but it can consist of fennel seeds, caraway, fenugreek, coriander, dill, or anise, according to local or individual preferences. *Grosti* are deep-fried pastries that can be prepared savory or sweet and dusted with sugar. They are typically served at Carnival time. Sometimes they are prepared with mashed potatoes and served with sauerkraut in the winter or boiled vegetables in the summer.

Traditional Tyrolese soups include *panicia cun cern sfumida y bales* (barley soup with smoked pork and dumplings), *panicia da venderdi* ("Friday soup" made with dried beans), and *tiroler suppe* (Tyrolean split-pea soup with onion). *Golasc* is a Tyrolean-style goulash, a heavy beef stew spiced with marjoram, caraway, cloves, and paprika. The Tyrol *gröstl* is a traditional food containing potatoes and pieces of cut pork, onion, and butter browned in a pan, and spiced with marjoram, caraway, salt, pepper, and parsley. It is often served with fried eggs or beetroot salad. Another traditional meat dish is *herrengröstl*, or *herrengroschl* (sauteed veal ragout with crunchy potatoes, often served with a side dish of green salad). *Tiroler Leber* (calf liver Tyrolean style) is sliced and fried liver, served with fried chopped onions, capers, lemon, and heavy cream. Polenta is a cornmeal dish traditionally eaten in the rural areas of South Tyrol for breakfast, lunch and dinner; in today's restaurants it has become a side dish served with meat, fish or other dishes, but not as flavorful as the slowly-cooked traditional polenta. Tyrol is also rich in edible mushrooms, and its cuisine reflects that.



A gentleman wearing a Tyrolean hat in Vaduz, Liechtenstein.  
(© Jim Sugar/Corbis)

Some of the popular sweet dishes are: *crafons* (poppyseed doughnuts traditionally made in Val Gardena), *fanzieutes da leva* (another traditional fried doughnut), and *fanzieutes da meiles* (apple-fritters).

South Tyrol is a region renowned for its production of Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Grigio wines. The best known Tyrolean wine is *Kalterersee (Lago di Caldaro)*, which should be drunk no later than a couple of years after harvesting.

### **13 EDUCATION**

In the Austrian parts of the Tyrol, all public schools are subject to the educational laws and regulations governing education in the Republic of Austria. Austria has a free and public school system, with nine years of mandatory education. The Federal Ministry of Education funds all primary, secondary, and tertiary (higher) education. Primary and secondary educations are administered on the state level. Private primary and secondary schools (approximately 10% of all primary and secondary educational institutions) are mostly run by the Roman Catholic Church. *Gymnasium* is a secondary school that focuses on general education, as opposed to the specialized education students receive in vocational or professional secondary schools. The series of demanding final written and oral examinations in the last year of *Gymnasium* is called *matura*;

it gives students who successfully pass it access to university. Austria has no tradition of private universities, but this has been changing since 2001, with the law on accreditation of private universities (11 existed in Austria in 2008). Until recently, the only degree in the Austrian university system was a *magister* (a four- to five-year degree with a substantial thesis), but recently, in keeping with the Bologna process of educational reform, some universities have introduced a bachelor's degree. The University of Innsbruck was founded in 1669 and remains one of the best universities in Austria and in Europe. Innsbruck is also home to an important and prestigious Medical University, one of the three medical schools in Austria, and a world center for treatment of ski-injuries.

Educational institutions in South Tyrol are governed by general rules and regulations pertaining to the Italian educational system, with a significant bilingual component (German-Italian, especially in the area of Bolzano), and they are granted a considerably greater degree of regional autonomy than their counterparts in other regions of Italy. The Italian school system starts with primary (five years) and continues with secondary school (divided into two stages: middle school, lasting three years, and secondary school, lasting between three and five years). Any secondary school that lasts five years grants access to the final exam called *maturità*, which grants students who pass it access to university education. Most Italian universities, and the best, are public; they grant university degrees called *laurea* (after three years of study), or *laurea specialistica* (also known as *laurea magistrale*) after 5 years of study and a thesis. The University of Trento (founded in 1962) is considered to be among the very best in Italy (and consistently top ranked in science) and among the most open to international exchange of students and researchers and scientific collaboration. The Free University of Bolzano (founded in 1997) is a private university, and offers free, practice-oriented, multilingual education, oriented towards the local labor market.

### **14 CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The region of Tyrol has traditionally been a mediator between two great European literary traditions: the German-language and the Italian-language literature. An abundance of literature in Latin (clerical texts, inscriptions, letters, scientific writings, and a variety of texts used in daily life) has been found in Tyrol dating from the beginning of its existence as a political unit in the 13th century, until the late 17th century. The birth of literature in Italian and German has generally followed the gradual decline of writing in Latin and started to flourish in the 18th century.

Goswin von Marienburg (14th century), a Benedictine monk and a historian, is particularly known for his chronicles in Latin. Another important representative of the German-speaking group in Tyrol was 15th century theologian and philosopher Nicolaus de Cusa (1401–1464), the bishop of Brixen and one of the most renowned personalities of early Renaissance, a lover of literature from antiquity, and a promoter of religious tolerance. While de Cusa's writings were in Latin, his native German was in his time in Tyrol mostly a vehicle for the oral tradition, folktales, and legends. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405–1464), later Pope Pius II, was of central-Italian origin, but he spent a significant part of his life in Trento and northeastern Italy and is widely seen as one of the most important representatives of Humanism in Europe. Astronomer

Christoph Scheiner (1573 or 1575- 1650) was a Jesuit, physicist and astronomer famous for discovering sunspots. Jakob Balde (1604–1668), also a Jesuit, was a poet and author of many epic, satiric, dramatic, and lyric verses in Latin and, less famously, German. His contemporary Diego Tafuri de Lequile (1604–1673), Italian court chaplain at Innsbruck, wrote treatises in Italian and Latin, ranging from a noted study on the happy disposition of Austrians to the chronicle of Queen Christina of Sweden's visit to Innsbruck.

With the decline of writing in Latin in the 17th century, Tyrolese intellectuals began to show a more pronounced interest in the vernacular. Simon Pietro de Bartolomei (1709–1763), born near Trento, wrote with particular interest about the many dialects of all language groups of Tyrol and about their history. Karl von Güntherode (1740–1795) dedicated his life to the study of theology and metaphysics and wrote verses and satiric dramas. Yet, only the 18th century saw renewed cultural vitality in the region, for the first time since the advent of Humanism. In the mid-century, poet Bianca Laura Sailente and her husband Giuseppe Valeriano Vannetti found the *Accademia degli Agiati*, where Italian-speaking Tyrolese secular intellectuals and writers could gather, converse, and read their works. Sailente's and Vannetti's son, Clementino Vannetti (1754–1795), never attended university but spent his relatively short life writing and translating from Latin into Italian, writing essays, poems and satirical works, studying different national literatures of his time, and writing treatises on education and the regionalist sentiment in Trentino. Girolamo Tartarotti (1706–1761) from Rovereto, an important center of Italian-language culture in Tyrol, was another representative of the new Tyrolese literature in Italian, and composed works ranging from verses to essays on history and philosophy. Among German-speaking Tyrolese writers of the time, Ignaz Weitenauer (1709–1783) was a philologist and Orientalist, who also wrote lyric and dramatic works, and is widely considered to be one of the best Jesuit dramatists of the 18th century. He also wrote one of the first scientifically based manuals of German orthography. A poet associated with the Romantic movement and the movement for the unification of Italy is Giovanni Prati (1814–1884). In the last hundred years, Tyrolese literatures in Italian and Ladin have been marked by both regional and ethnic themes and the strong interest in the revival of the dialectal. Among the best known modern Tyrolese writers in German are: Anita Pichler (the first South Tyrolean postwar author to become known outside her country, and whose writings mark a formal breakthrough in Tyrolese literature), Helene Flöss, Sabine Gruber, Joseph Zoderer, Norbert Conrad Kaser (who was strongly influenced by Italian poetry, and wrote both in German and Italian), and Gerhard Kofler (also a bilingual writer of essays and poetry).

## 15 WORK

The estimated population in the Austrian part of Tyrol is 700,000, but its distribution is uneven, with the highest concentrations in the Inn and Drava river valleys and around the cities of Innsbruck, Schwaz and Kufstein. Most inhabitants of the rural areas are engaged in pasture farming, dairy farming, forestry, and cattle and livestock raising. Wheat and rye are grown in the Inn valley, while the city of Innsbruck is a traditional center of textile industry. The size of industries is relatively limited; goods include pharmaceutical and chemi-

cal production and electrical appliances. The population in the Italian part of Tyrol is estimated to be 1,008,000, with the highest concentration around the city of Trento, and in the area between the cities of Bolzano and Merano. Italian speakers constitute a majority with about 60% of the total population, German around 35%, and 5% speak Ladin.

The economy of the region is based on tourism (especially in winter and summer), excellent wine production, dairy products, timber, and fruit. Its industries are concentrated around the production of metals, chemicals, and paper. The region is also a major producer and exporter of hydroelectric power.

Tourism is a major source of employment and revenue in the region. Medical University in Innsbruck and the University of Trento are internationally renowned for their innovative scientific work and consistently attract a highly educated international workforce to the region.

The Tyrolese are renowned for being honest and loyal business partners and for cultivating high ethical standards in all professions; in international collaboration, they expect to find the same qualities in their counterparts from other countries.

## 16 SPORTS

Tyrol is known for some of the best ski slopes in the world. Famous ski resorts in the region are Cortina d'Ampezzo, Kitzbühel, Ischgl, Wilder Kaiser, and St. Anton (where the world's first ski school was founded). Skiing represents not only a popular pastime, but is also a significant source of income in the highly developed Tyrolese tourist industry. The skiing season at the famous five glaciers (Kauertaler, Pitztaler, Stubai, Hintertuxer and Sölden-Ötztal) starts as early as mid-October and is open-ended, with excellent powder-snow. More than 30 ski areas feature monoskiing facilities, ski lifts, and expert service, with a wide range of slopes for monoskiers and the disabled. Mountain guides and mountaineering instructors provide instruction in winter sports, such as snowshoe hiking, icefall climbing, glacier crossing, and ski mountaineering. Tyrol is renowned for its excellent and highly skilled ski guides. In the summertime, mountain trekking and climbing are the most popular sports, both among the Tyrolese and the tourists.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Alpinism and winter sports are a favorite pastime of both the Tyrolese and the visitors to the area. Tyrol's many mountain shelters are generally open from May/June to October. Visitors may obtain temporary hunting and fishing licenses. Mushroom-picking is allowed in some parts of Tyrol and not in others because fungi are considered to be an integral part of the Alpine biosphere and essential nourishment for the animals. Merano was a popular 19th century spa town, and today the town of Brixen is known for its weight-loss clinics, hydrotherapy, and fashionable health tourism.

## 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The tradition of woodcarving is old in Tyrol, largely thanks to the abundance of forests in the region, and the need for the Tyrolese to while away the many long winter evenings, while talking and telling legends and tales to one another. The artwork produced includes statues of biblical figures and saints, toy animals, pretty household objects, ornaments for crèches, and picture frames. In some areas of the region, woodcarving has become a real industry, with carvings sold all over Europe.

## 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many social problems developing in other, highly urbanized areas of Europe and the world are almost absent in Tyrol. Overdevelopment in recent decades, along with the greatly increased traffic and large tourist population year-round are widely seen as the biggest threats to Tyrol today. The heavy traffic on the highway through the mountain pass of Brenner (Brennero) has been at the center of environmentalists' concerns. Many local families now own several cars, and commercial traffic between northern Europe and the Italian peninsula continues to increase. Environmentalists in Tyrol have lately gained strength, denouncing air and water pollution, projects that include more asphalt and concrete roads, as well as golf courses and other large sports installations.

The crime rate is very low in all parts of Tyrol, making it a very attractive residential area for people of all ages.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Laws and regulations pertaining to women's and gay rights differ in the parts of Tyrol belonging to Austria from those in the parts belonging to Italy.

In 1918, women were given the right to vote in the newly founded First Austrian Republic. The University of Vienna first started accepting women in 1900. In 1976 a law established the principle of equal rights and responsibilities for married men and women, and equal rights and responsibilities in caring for children. The Equal Treatment Law of 1979 made various forms of discrimination against women illegal, establishing the principle of equal pay, and making it possible for women to receive compensation if they have been victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. Another goal of this law was to increase the number of women employed in government agencies. In 1925 Italy granted limited, and in 1945, full voting rights to women. Strong Italian feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s stressed the demand for the complete equality of women in the workplace and other areas of public life, mobilizing both women and men in the issues of equal pay, reproductive rights and violence against women. When it comes to university education, the number of women in Italy who attend university now exceeds the number of men. Women in northern Italy (e.g. Tyrol) have a higher rate of employment than women in southern Italian regions. In spite of these legislative improvements, traditional roles prevail in the homes of many rural Tyrolese, with men still considering the majority of household and child-rearing tasks to be "women's work." This situation is different in urban areas, where more progressive attitudes towards sharing household tasks are the norm.

Abortion in the Austrian part of Tyrol is available upon request up to 14–15 weeks of pregnancy. Beyond that time, and up to 24 weeks of pregnancy, the abortion is possible only if the mother can show that there is risk to her mental or physical health, or to the health of the fetus. In the Italian part of Tyrol, Italian abortion laws govern reproductive rights. There, abortion became legal in 1978, and is performed free-of-charge in public hospitals and private clinics authorized by public health authorities. Surrogacy and egg donation are banned in Austria. In 2003, Italy banned use of donor sperm, eggs, or surrogate mothers, and restricted assisted fertilization to heterosexual couples in long-term relationships.

Gay rights are slowly gaining strength in Austria, a country generally seen as moderate when dealing with gay rights. Ho-

mosexuality in Austria was legalized in 1971, and homosexuals are not excluded from military service. While the first parliamentary debates on the issue took place in the mid-1990s, at the federal level, anti-discrimination laws pertaining to sexual orientation were introduced in 2004, and there is now discussion in Austria to provide a possibility for gay couples to register their partnership. Austria recognizes the right of the person not to testify against their same-sex partner. In 2006 the first legal same-sex marriage came into being when a transsexual who became a female was allowed to switch gender while remaining married to his wife. 49% of Austrians support gay marriage. The gay scene is particularly strong in Innsbruck, with numerous gay-friendly cafés and clubs, while rural areas remain generally more conservative. In the Italian-speaking part of Tyrol, public support for gay rights remains somewhat more subdued (only 31% of all Italians support same-sex marriages). Since the late 19th century, there have been no laws against homosexual practices in Italy, although homosexuals were often persecuted by the Fascist regime and during World War II. Homosexuals are not excluded from serving in the Italian military forces. Since 2003, discrimination based on sexual orientation has been illegal, but same-sex couples still have no shared rights regarding property, inheritance or social benefits. Although many Italian regions have since 2005 passed resolutions in support of same-sex civil unions, Trentino–Alto Adige is not among them. The gay scene in Trento and Bolzano is relatively strong, while in the countryside more traditional attitudes prevail.

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—by K. von Wittelsbach

# UDMURTS

**ALTERNATE NAMES:** Votyaks (former)

**LOCATION:** Russia

**POPULATION:** 637,000 (2002)

**LANGUAGE:** Udmurt; Russian, Tatar

**RELIGIONS:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity; native Udmurt religion

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

The Udmurts are a Finno-Ugric people inhabiting the Russian Federation. In many sources, especially those dating from before 1917, the Udmurts are commonly referred to as *Votyaks*. The traditional homeland of the Udmurts is bordered to the south and east by the Kama River, a major tributary of the Volga River, and to the west by the Vyatka river, a tributary of the Kama. It is unclear when the ancestors of the Udmurts migrated into this area, but it appears that the Udmurts preceded not only Turkic and Slavic groups in the area, but even other Finno-Ugric groups such as the Maris.

The Udmurts have never lived within their own state, and throughout history they have been the subjects of numerous empires and other states. It is likely that the Udmurts became the subjects of the Volga Bulgarians, a Turkic group who in the early 8th century formed the first state in the Volga region to appear in historical sources. Udmurts first appear in historical sources only in the 12th century, in a travel account of the Arab traveler Abu Hamid al-Gharnati. With the conquest of Volga Bulgaria by the Mongols in the 1230s, the Udmurts found themselves subjects of the Mongol empire, and later the Golden Horde. After the collapse of the Golden Horde in the early 15th century, the Middle Volga region came under the domination of the Kazan Khanate, a Tatar and Muslim state. It was during the late 14th and early 15th centuries that groups of northern Udmurts came under Russian rule, first under the rule of Vyatka, and later under Muscovite rule. It was only in 1552, after the Russian conquest of Kazan, that the entire Udmurt ethnic territory came under Russian domination, and the Udmurts have remained under Russian rule to the present day. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Soviet authorities, in keeping with the policy of granting at least the appearance of cultural and territorial autonomy to the national minorities of the former Russian empire, created the Udmurt Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (UdASSR), which was subordinate to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of the former RSFSR as the newly independent Russian Federation, the former Udmurt ASSR remains dependent upon Russia but was renamed the Republic of Udmurtia.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

According to the Russian census of 2002, there were 647,000 Udmurts in the Russian Federation, of whom 460,500 inhabited the Republic of Udmurtia. Some 120,000 Udmurts inhabit the neighboring regions of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the Mari Republic, as well as the Russian *oblasts* of Kirov, Perm', and Sverdlovsk. In addition, smaller Udmurt communities are located in Siberia (Krasnoirsksk *krai*), Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the Ukraine. In the Republic of Udmurtia, Udmurts actu-

ally form a minority, numbering about 30% of the population. Russians account for about 60% of the population, and Tatars for 7%.

The Republic of Udmurtia covers a territory of 42,100 square kilometers (16,250 square miles). Before World War II, most of Udmurtia was covered in evergreen and deciduous forests. As a result of severe deforestation that took place in the later Soviet period, Udmurtia's forests have greatly diminished, yet they still cover much of the republic. The average temperature in January is  $-15^{\circ}$  to  $-14^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $0^{\circ}$  to  $2^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and the average July temperature is  $17^{\circ}$  to  $18^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $64^{\circ}$  to  $66^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Udmurtia can be categorized as having a cool continental climate.

The capital of Udmurtia is the city of Izhevsk, with a population of around 700,000. Izhevsk was and continues to be a predominantly Russian city and an important center for the Russian armaments industry.

The Udmurts' traditional economy consists of cereal agriculture, supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering forest products. Cereal and other agriculture continue to be the mainstays of the economy in rural Udmurt communities, although manufacturing plays an important role in the overall economy of Udmurtia.

## <sup>3</sup> LANGUAGE

The Udmurt language belongs to the Permian subgroup of the Finno-Ugric language family. It is closely related to the Komi language spoken in the Russian Federation's Komi Republic and more distantly related to Finnish and Estonian. Udmurt is divided into northern, central, and southern dialect groupings, but all dialects are mutually comprehensible, with the exception of the so-called Besermian dialect spoken in northern Udmurtia by approximately 3,000 people as of 2002. This dialect, which some linguists consider a separate language, differs substantially from the other Udmurt dialects. The origins of the Besermians themselves, like their dialect, is also puzzling. They do not consider themselves Udmurts, and it appears that they are descended from Turkic Muslims who settled the region both before and after the Mongol conquests of the 13th century.

Most Udmurts are fluent in their native language, and nearly all are fluent in Russian as well, if not actually native speakers of Russian. Fluency in Tatar is also common in the Udmurt communities located in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

Udmurts typically have a first name, a patronymic (the father's first name), and a surname. Since the imposition of Christianity on the Udmurts in the 18th century, most Udmurts have Russian names such as *Ivan*, *Grigorii* and *Sergei*. However, especially among the southern Udmurts, who remain "unbaptized" to the present day, Muslim and Turkic surnames (such as *Gabdulla*, and *Mukhammed*) and given names are frequently encountered, as well as Udmurt "pagan" names.

## <sup>4</sup> FOLKLORE

The Udmurts have a rich folklore tradition consisting of heroic legends, folktales, and an especially rich body of songs. A significant part of Udmurt folklore consists of specifically religious genres such as incantations, spells, and prayers. Similarly, many Udmurt songs are associated with specific religious ceremonies as well as specific festivals and other events such as weddings and funerals.



Of particular interest is the cycle of legends surrounding the heroic figure Eshterek, who typically appears as an Udmurt hero who defends his people from the Tatars. An older layer of historical legends also describes the battles of Udmurt heroes against Mari invaders. Udmurt folklore has retained many mythological features, and many spirits and deities from Udmurt native religion appear in the folklore of both “unbaptized” and Christian Udmurts.

## 5 RELIGION

Today the majority of Udmurts professing religious belief are Eastern Orthodox Christians, although a significant minority of Udmurts, especially those inhabiting southern Udmurtia, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan, have retained their formal adherence to native Udmurt religion and commonly refer to themselves as “unbaptized” Udmurts. Over the centuries Udmurt native religion has by no means remained static, and in fact has proven itself to be rather dynamic. Nevertheless, certain fundamental features can be identified as permanent features of Udmurt native religion. Udmurt native religion had and continues to have a communal orientation, and many of the ritual prayers and sacrifices are held in conjunction with the gathering of the village. Furthermore, Udmurt beliefs and rights are closely connected with both agriculture and the agricultural calendar and the veneration of the spirits of the community’s ancestors.

At the summit of the Udmurt pantheon is Inmar, the supreme god. Today, the Christian Udmurts use this term to refer

to the Christian God as well. Traditionally, Inmar is conceived of as inhabiting the sky. Inmar’s counterpart for the earth is Mu Kyldysyn. Similarly, there are a host of other spirits associated with numerous natural features and phenomena, such as wind, water, forests, and so forth.

Traditionally, Udmurt society itself was structured along religious lines. Udmurt society was divided into approximately 70 clans, and a clan was united not only by kinship but also by the veneration of tutelary spirits known as *vorshuds*. A *vorshud* was both a spirit and a shrine at which the members of the clan performed ceremonies and offered sacrifices.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Traditional Udmurt holidays were closely tied to the agricultural calendar and involved feasting, singing, and dancing, as well as prayers and offerings to the ancestors and other spirits. This characterization is equally valid for “unbaptized” Udmurts, and the Christianized ones, because the Eastern Orthodox holidays were themselves closely connected to the agricultural calendar; on that level, the transition from native to Christian holidays did not significantly alter their celebration by the Udmurts. Similarly, Udmurts in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan continue to celebrate the agricultural festivals of their Turkic and Muslim neighbors, such as the Tatar festival of *Sabantuy*. In Udmurtia, an especially important Udmurt festival is *Gerber*, the plow festival, which takes place in late June. Among “unbaptized” Udmurts, this festival, involves a sacrifice of a sheep to the field spirits, as well as feasting, dancing, and games, especially horse racing.

During the Soviet era, authorities discouraged the Udmurts’ traditional religious holidays, both Christian and native, and the observation of the sanctioned Soviet holidays became widespread among the Udmurts. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Udmurts have continued to celebrate some of these holidays, especially New Year’s Day (January 1) and Victory Day (May 9).

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Udmurt rites of passage and life-cycle rituals were closely bound with native religious beliefs. These rituals and rites continue to be widely observed among both Christian and “unbaptized” Udmurts. In villages, childbirth usually took place in the family’s bathhouse and was attended by a midwife. When the childbirth was successful for both mother and child, the midwife performed a prayer of thanks and gave the child a provisional name, which was changed as the child grew older. Udmurts typically used amulets to protect the child, which was believed especially prone to illnesses borne by harmful spirits.

The most elaborate of the Udmurt rites of passage is the wedding ceremony, which traditionally involved very complex rituals and extensive feasting and other festivities. Of all the native rites of passage, wedding rituals continue to be the most widely observed, especially in rural areas, although civil ceremonies of Soviet origin, especially in urban areas, are also widely observed. Traditional Udmurt wedding rituals varied considerably from region to region. Not only was there specific clothing and specific foods for the rituals, but also a rich repertoire of songs reserved specifically for weddings.

Udmurt burial rituals involved not only the burial of the deceased, but also a series of memorial feasts to ensure the secure transition of the deceased from the realm of the living to the

realm of the ancestral spirits. Among “unbaptized” Udmurts, and to a lesser degree among Orthodox Udmurts, the deceased was buried with grave goods, such as food, drink, household articles, and tools.

In addition to these major life-cycle rituals, another important rite of passage for males were ceremonies relating to military conscription. These ceremonies involved prayers for the health and safety of the young man about to be inducted into the Russian or Soviet army, and they obviously took on special significance in wartime.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Udmurt interpersonal relations, including greetings, body language, and gestures, do not substantially differ from those of Russian society as a whole. Both in traditional Udmurt society and in modern times, Udmurts place a strong emphasis on showing hospitality to guests, and between Udmurt guests and hosts there was even a repertoire of songs to be sung.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Traditional Udmurt society was both isolated and relatively impoverished, and during both the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, Udmurt communities were periodically affected by famine and epidemics. Northern Udmurt were traditionally poor and continue to be so today as a result of the shorter growing season and poor soil of northern Udmurtia. In urban areas, especially in Izhevsk, living standards approximate those of Russian society in general. Very few Udmurts own their own automobiles, and salaries remain low. In rural areas, the standard of living is especially low, and consumer items are both expensive and often inaccessible.

In Udmurt villages, the inhabitants typically live in one- or two-room wooden houses and to a large degree depend on their gardens and family livestock for food. Nearly all villages have electric power, but almost no houses have indoor plumbing. As a rule, water is obtained from wells or streams.

Because very few Udmurts possess their own automobiles, they depend on public transportation. Larger cities are served by an extensive rail and bus system, but in rural areas bus service is very erratic, and many small or remote villages are not served by any sort of public transportation. In these cases, villagers hitch rides with passing trucks or cars, ride horses or horse-drawn wagons, or simply walk from one village to another. All travel in rural areas is exceedingly difficult in winter.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Before World War II, family size was large. Although infant mortality was very high, a woman could frequently have six or more children survive into childhood. In rural areas, child-rearing was to a large degree a communal matter, and children usually found themselves in a large extended family. Beginning in the later Soviet period continuing to the present day, the birth rate among Udmurts has been relatively low, averaging less than two children per family. In modern society, marriage and divorce involve simple civil procedures, and both are easily obtainable. First marriages occur around the age of 20, but there is also a high divorce rate.

Traditionally, and in many rural areas today religious rites, including sacrificial rites, remain an important element in both family cohesion and religious tradition. Families in rural

areas retain their own family shrines and ceremonies, which exist alongside larger communal and even regional shrines.

## 11 CLOTHING

Traditional Udmurt clothing was functional and designed for both agricultural work and harsh winters. Summer clothes were usually made of linen, but wool garments were also worn year-round. In winter, woolen garments, as well as reversed sheepskin coats were worn. Udmurt folk costumes were worn on festive and ceremonial occasions, and these varied considerably from region to region. Typically, the folk costumes of the northern Udmurts were mostly white in color, and featured intricate embroidery. The southern Udmurts wore more colorful clothing and, in terms of fabric and design, their clothing was influenced to a degree by Tatar folk dress. One interesting feature of Udmurt folk costumes was the use of silver coins, which were fastened together as chest ornaments and on headgear, to display the wealth of a woman's family. Elements of traditional clothing are still occasionally worn, especially by older women in rural areas, but the clothing of most Udmurts today differs in no way from that of Russian society as a whole.

## 12 FOOD

The main staples of the Udmurt diet were, and continue to be, cereals such as rye, oats, barley, and to a lesser extent, wheat, all of which were usually baked into bread. In addition, during the Soviet era, potatoes became an important feature of the Udmurt diet. Vegetables such as cabbage, carrots, and onions also played an important role in their diet. The most common types of meat are pork, chicken, mutton, and to a lesser extent, beef. Furthermore, the famous Russian dumpling dish, *pelmeni*, is said by Udmurts to be of Udmurt origin, coming from the Udmurt words *pel'* (ear) and *nian'* (bread). Among common beverages are tea, beer, vodka, and a home-made liquor called *kumyshka*, which is a necessary element in festive occasions.

Modern-day eating utensils differ in no way from those used in Russia as a whole. Traditional utensils were typically made of wood, and of special note were large spoons, or ladles, which were elaborately and artistically carved, and which were also used in religious libation rituals.

There are usually three meals a day, with the mid-day meal being the heaviest.

## 13 EDUCATION

Before the Soviet era, the only kind of education afforded Udmurts was what was offered in Russian Orthodox religious institutions; there was no formal educational apparatus for “unbaptized” Udmurts, although there is evidence that some Islamized Udmurts in the 19th century were studying in *madrasas* of Bukhara. As a result, illiteracy was widespread in Udmurt communities. During the Soviet period, literacy increased substantially, and Udmurts were granted access to Soviet education institutions. Instruction in the Udmurt language, however, was limited to primary schools. In the later Soviet period, Udmurt was dropped as a medium of instruction in Udmurtia itself, and it came to be taught only as a separate subject in an otherwise Russian curriculum; however, Udmurt was retained as a medium of instruction in the Udmurt villages of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Most Udmurts have the equivalent of a high school education. As Russian citizens Udmurts study in

the larger universities outside of the republic in Kazan, Ufa, St. Petersburg, and Moscow. More recently Udmurt scholars have been able to study in Finland and Estonia as well.

#### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The richest element of the Udmurts' cultural heritage is their folk culture, which has an amazingly rich collection of music, songs, and other oral traditions. However, in keeping with Soviet nationality policies, after 1917 the Soviet government encouraged and funded the creation of a formal "cultural" apparatus, which included the creation of formal literature, including poetry, prose, and drama, as well as music and visual arts. Thus, in Izhevsk there is an Udmurt theater as well as substantial publishing in the Udmurt language.

#### 15 WORK

In rural areas, the vast majority of Udmurts are engaged in agricultural work, which tends to be organized along the collective system. These collectives are known by the Soviet term *kolkhoz*. However, because of the limited access to consumer goods, much energy is expended on private plots, where families grow their own potatoes, fruits, and vegetables. Much of the summer is spent preserving fruits, vegetables, and meat for the winter. Urban Udmurts commonly have smaller plots located in the suburbs or in nearby rural communities and likewise expend considerable energy growing and preparing food for the winter and spring.

#### 16 SPORTS

Traditionally, sports such as wrestling and horse racing took place during festivities. Today spectator sports such as soccer and hockey are popular among Udmurts.

#### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In rural areas, religious festivals and weddings not only fulfilled religious requirements, but they were also important sources of entertainment and recreation. Winter sports such as skating and cross-country skiing are popular recreational activities today, and in urban areas movies, theater, and concerts are also popular forms of entertainment.

#### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Udmurts are especially renowned for their skill in woodworking and in weaving. Although most examples of woodworking and weaving are of a functional nature, the artistic level evident in many works remains very high.

#### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Many of the social problems that plague Russian society as a whole are especially severe in Udmurtia. One of the main social problems is alcoholism, which is endemic throughout Russia, but which is exacerbated in the rural areas of Udmurtia by poverty and the lack of recreational diversions. In addition, Udmurtia's suicide rate is one of the highest in the Russian Federation. Besides these social pathologies, the economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union has affected Udmurts no less than the rest of Russian society, resulting in high unemployment and wages that are both low and erratically paid.

Another problem facing the Udmurts collectively is the issue of population decline; the population declined from 746,000 in 1989 to an estimate of 637,000 in 2002. While cultural assimilation is certainly a factor, it appears likely that collectively Udmurts are affected particularly severely by the same sorts of social and health problems causing population decline in the Russian population as a whole.

#### 20 GENDER ISSUES

The role of women in Udmurt society differs in certain ways from the role of women in the neighboring Russian and Tatar communities. Udmurt clans are matrilineal, and therefore some observers of Udmurt family life have suggested that this in some way elevates the status of women. In any case, in both rural and in urban settings, Udmurt women bear the double burden of both agricultural or wage work and child-rearing and domestic duties. In this respect, the position of Udmurt women is equivalent to that of women in Russian society as a whole.

The role of women in Udmurt society changed most drastically after World War II when a large proportion of Udmurt women were mobilized into the industrial workforce. At the same time, Udmurt women began to gain better access to educational opportunities.

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—by A. J. Frank



# UKRAINIANS

**LOCATION:** Ukraine

**POPULATION:** Over 45 million [total population of country; 77.8% ethnic Ukrainians, 17.3% Russian, 0.6% Byelorussians, 4.3% others]

**LANGUAGE:** Ukrainian

**RELIGION:** Ukrainian Orthodox – Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian Orthodox—Kiev Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox, Ukrainian Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, others

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Ukraine has had three periods of national statehood. The first period existed from the 9th to 14th centuries AD and was known as Kievan Rus', with its capital in Kiev. The second was the Cossack period, lasting from the middle of the 17th to the end of the 18th centuries. The third period began with the fall of tsarist Russia and the establishment of a sovereign Ukrainian state in the form of the Ukrainian National Republic on 22 January 1918; this state lasted only a few years before it was partitioned among Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania. During the German occupation in June 1941, the Ukrainian people made an unsuccessful attempt to reclaim their sovereignty in Lviv, the capital of Western Ukraine. As a result of peace treaties signed at the end of World War II, all the Ukrainian territories were integrated into the multinational Soviet Union in the form of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

With the spread of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies across the Soviet Union in the 1980s, people in Ukraine and other republics began demanding more freedom and ultimately independence. In August 1991 Ukraine became independent; elected Leonid Kravchuk (a former Communist) as its president; and began implementing democratic, free enterprise policies as well as gradual economic reforms and nuclear disarmament. In 1994 Leonid D. Kuchma, former director of the world's largest rocket factory and prime minister under President Kravchuk was elected president. President Kuchma developed friendly political and economic relations with the West and enacted economic reforms to improve the country's growth prospects. On 29 June 1996, the Ukrainian Parliament approved the first Constitution of Ukraine, just a few weeks before the fifth anniversary of its independence.

Tensions between ethnic Ukrainian and Russian populations in Ukraine compounded by political pressures from Russia and the United States reached a peak during the campaign leading up to the 2004 presidential elections. Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, supported by Russia, and opposition leader and former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko, supported by the West, came out in a tie. The ensuing runoff election on November 21 designated Yanukovich as the winner. However, many Ukrainian citizens felt that this result was fraudulent. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Kiev and other cities to protest the election of Yanukovich and to express their support for Yushchenko. As a result of these demonstrations, now called the "Orange Revolution," a re-vote took place in which Yushchenko received a majority of votes and took presidential office on 23 January 2005.

Following his inauguration, the country's new president appointed Yulia Tymoshenko as his prime minister. One of the major figures in the Orange Revolution, Tymoshenko brought strong leadership into the heart of Ukrainian government. Opposed to some of the Yushchenko's reforms and incentives, Tymoshenko left the government. However she returned for the 2006 parliamentary elections. Although the Party of Regions won a plurality of the vote, President Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine—People's Self Defense Bloc and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc formed a coalition and established a government with Tymoshenko as the prime minister. Prime Minister Tymoshenko is considered a possible candidate for president of Ukraine in 2010.

Today Ukraine enjoys a wide range of active political parties and blocs, from leftist to center and center-right to ultra-nationalist. Occupying a strategic position at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and possessing rich farmlands, a highly trained labor force, and a good education system, Ukraine has the potential to become a major European economy.

## <sup>2</sup> LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Ukraine, commonly referred to as the "breadbasket of Europe," covers about 604,000 sq km (233,000 sq mi) of land in Eastern Europe. Territorially, Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe after France. It is bordered by the Black Sea to the south; Moldova and Romania to the southwest; Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland to the west; Belarus to the north; and Russia to the north and northeast. Approximately 65% of the soil is *chornozem* (*chornozem* in Ukrainian simply means *fertile, black soil*). Traditionally an agricultural area, Ukraine grows wheat, maize, buckwheat, all kinds of vegetables, fruit, melons, and berries. Ukraine is also known for its plentiful mineral resources.

Almost the entire country of Ukraine is a vast flat plain, bounded by the Carpathian mountains in the southwest, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov in the south, and the Crimean Mountains on the southern end of the Crimean Peninsula. The highest point in Ukraine is Mt. Hoverla in the Carpathians, with an elevation of 2,061 meters. The Dnieper is the main river that runs through Ukraine. One of the longest European rivers, the Dnieper is the republic's most important source of hydroelectric power.

In general, the country's climate is temperate continental, except for the southern Crimea, which has a sub-tropical climate. The typical Ukrainian winter is rather mild, with no severe frosts but with regular snowfalls everywhere except in the south. The average winter temperature reaches  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the north and  $-3^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the south. Summers tend to be hot and dry with occasional showers and thunderstorms.

Kiev, with over 2 million inhabitants, is the capital of Ukraine. It boasts numerous beautiful churches and is known as the Golden Domed City. The Monastery of the Caves (*Pecherska Lavra*) is one of the brightest of Kiev's gems. The Lavra was founded in 1051 and is now part museum and part functioning monastery. Its 40 buildings represent eight centuries of art and architecture. Other major cities in Ukraine include Zaporozhye, Dnepropetrovsk, Dnyeprodzerzhinsk, Odessa, Kharkiv, Lviv and Nikolayev. Crimea is an autonomous republic within Ukraine. It was annexed by Russia in 1783 and transferred to Ukraine in 1954.



### 3 LANGUAGE

Ukrainian is the official state language of Ukraine. Belonging to the East Slavic subgroup of the Slavic languages, Ukrainian employs its version of the Cyrillic alphabet with 33 characters. It shares some vocabulary with the languages of the neighboring Slavic nations, including Russia, Byelorussia and Poland. Ukrainian is the most ancient living Slavic language, as it is the most closely related to Old Slavonic, the common language of the ancestors of modern Slavs. It is also the language that was spoken in the medieval Kievan Rus' kingdom.

Ukrainian is the native language of nearly 40 million people, which makes it the second most widely spoken in the Slavic group of Indo-European languages. It is used particularly widely in central and western Ukraine. In cities such as Odessa and in eastern Ukraine, where there are large concentrations of ethnic Russians, both Ukrainian and Russian are widely spoken. In areas of eastern Ukraine located near the border with Russia, Russian often dominates.

Although during the Soviet regime the Ukrainian language underwent some Russification, there were no profound changes. Ukrainian is presently undergoing a revival and has become the language of choice for television shows, films, science, newspapers, computers, and the Internet in Ukraine.

At present, Ukrainian has nine distinct dialects: Volhynian, Podillya (Podole), Galician, Kiev-Poltava, Southern, two Carpathian dialects (Hursul and Boyko), and two Pokuttya (Bokovynian) dialects. Examples of everyday Ukrainian words include *dobryj den* (hello), *tak* (yes), *nee* (no), *bood laska*

(please), *dyakooyoo* (I thank you), *dyakooyemo* (we thank you) and *do pobachenya* (goodbye). Other useful expressions of everyday speech are: *vybachte* (excuse me), *pereproshuyu* (pardon me!), *neobkhd'no* (it is necessary), *skil'ky?* (how many/much?) and *pravyl'no* (right).

Among most commonly used exclamations (or *vyhuky*) by Ukrainians are the following:

*Os'!*—Here you are!

*Hey!*—Hey!

*Hayda'!*—Let's go! Come on!

*Oy! Oy-yoy!*—expression of surprise

*Okh!*—expression of being tired

*Harazd'!*—Okay! Deal!

### 4 FOLKLORE

Ukrainian culture is rich with beliefs and rituals stemming from pre-Christian times. Folk beliefs are primarily associated with major life events such as birth, marriage, and death and are also connected with nature (clouds, earth, fire, water, etc.). Through the centuries, these ritual and verbal customs have been incorporated into Christian rites.

Legends passed on from generation to generation include tales of the founding of the city of Kiev by the three brothers Kyi, Scheck, and Khoryv and their sister Lybed. A monument in their honor can be found in the capital city of Kiev. Other legends tell of the magical steppe plant called *yevshan zillia* that has the power of bringing lost souls back to their homeland. Children are often reminded of the mythical dragon-slayer Kyrylo Kozhumiaka, who was endowed with tremendous strength and ultimately freed the people of Kiev from the vicious grasp of a dragon. There is also the tale of Oleksa Dovbush. This Ukrainian Robin Hood lived in the Carpathian Mountains, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. A number of different sites in the Carpathians are named after him.

Furthermore, Ukraine has a rich folk music tradition. Ukrainian folk songs reflect its people's spirit, philosophy, perspective on life, historical events, and regional diversity. Some of the songs were created thousands of years ago. These ancient songs are often dedicated to peasant rituals and agricultural cycles.

Moreover, Ukrainians can boast their own musical instruments, including the *bandura*, *tsympaly* (hammer dulcimer), and *trembita*. The *bandura*, a lutelike instrument with 50 or more strings, is Ukraine's national instrument. The origin of the *bandura* dates back to the 7th century AD, when it was used mainly to accompany epic ballads and folk dances. Beginning in the 15th century and lasting until the 18th century, *Kobzars* (traveling musicians) made the *bandura* into one of the most popular folk instruments. Wandering from village to village, *Kobzars* used the *bandura* to accompany their songs about Cossack (Ukrainian warrior) exploits. Over the centuries, the *bandura* acquired more and more strings and became a fully chromatic instrument with switches for changing tonalities. The *tsympaly* is a Ukrainian hammer dulcimer that originated in the Middle East. It was first brought to Ukraine during the Crusades by wandering Gypsy and Jewish musicians. The earliest mention of the Ukrainian term *tsympaly* dates back to the 17th century.

Another folk instrument called the *trembita* is the Ukrainian version of the alpine horn. It is typically made of spruce that has been split, with a central bore dug out and then glued together and bound with birch bark. Its length ranges from three meters (10 feet) to half a meter. Traditionally, the *trembita* was used to signal events such as the coming of visitors, enemies, or death in the mountain regions of Ukraine. Consequently, a system of elaborate signals was devised. Over time, the *trembita* was adapted to play Christmas carols.

Modern Ukrainian music has come a long way since the *Kobzars*, and Kolomiya rap and Polissia pop enjoy great popularity among Ukrainian youth. Nevertheless, Ukrainian music embedded in ancient traditions is still appreciated. There also has been a revival of Cossack songs and poetry.

In addition to oral folklore, Ukrainians have preserved various forms of folk dances and dancing games. Many dances originated in rural Cossack villages while some of them are rooted farther back in ancient cults. In one of the most popular folk dances called the *hopak*, male dancers compete against each other in performing acrobatic leaps. Although initially many of the folk dances were performed solely by males or females, today more often than not men and women perform these dances together. It is customary for dancers to wear colorful costumes. Folk dancing is performed for special occasions, such as weddings, festivals, and other functions. Folk dance ensembles can be found not just in Ukraine, but in Ukrainian communities throughout the world.

## 5 RELIGION

Because of the geographical proximity of Ukraine to the Black Sea and the Near East, Christianity was found in the present territory of Ukraine as early as the 1st century AD. The Primary Chronicles mention the missionary St. Andrew, who preached the gospel in Kievan Rus' and blessed the hills on which the Lavra Monastery was later built. In the 9th century, the missionary brothers Sts. Cyril and Methodius came from the West and spread Christianity throughout the region. However, Ukrainian Orthodox Christianity came from Byzantium due to the strong ties between Kievan Rus' and Greece. In 954 Olga, the grand princess of Kievan Rus', was baptized, becoming the first Christian ruler of the region. Because of her efforts in spreading Christianity, she was canonized after her death. Her grandson, Prince Vladimir, believing that the new faith would strengthen the state and increase its prestige among its Christian neighbors, adopted Christianity and converted all of his people to the Christian faith in 988. Thereafter, Christian writings and culture spread throughout Kievan Rus'. Vladimir established religious schools and built churches, where the liturgy was given in the Slavonic tongue.

Ukraine's years spent under a communist regime dealt a substantial blow to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In the 1930s, the Ukrainian church lost three metropolitans, over 30 archbishops and bishops, and many thousands of priests due to imprisonment and persecution. Finally, the Church was forcibly incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church. The Ukrainian Catholic Church met a similar fate soon after its abolition by the Soviet government in 1946. There were mass arrests and assassinations, and many priests were exiled to Siberia. Although in 1974 a Council on Religious Affairs was created by the Soviets to abolish religious activity, underground Catholic churches continued to operate. The future cardinal of

the Vatican, Yosyf Slipyj, spent 18 years incarcerated in Siberia. Because of the intervention of U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Pope John XXIII, Cardinal Slipyj was allowed to emigrate to the West. He died in Rome in 1984.

Despite such hardships, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church survived communism. In 1988 Ukrainians throughout the world celebrated the 1,000-year anniversary of Ukrainian Christianity. Famous religious sites in Ukraine include the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, built in 1037 by Prince Yaroslav the Wise; the Pecherska Lavra Monastery, an underground labyrinth of monastic caves in Kiev dating back to the 11th century; St. George's Cathedral in Lviv, a notable baroque monument; a 17th-century wooden church in Yaremcha (Lviv district), and the Pochaiv Lavra Monastery in the Volyn district of western Ukraine, one of the most revered holy sites in Ukraine.

At present the dominant religions in Ukraine are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (which practices Orthodox rites but recognizes the Roman Catholic Pope as head of the Church). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is further divided between a Moscow Patriarchate and an independent Kiev Patriarchate.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Ukrainians enjoy celebrating a number of holidays. Christmas, Easter, New Year's, and festival of Ivana Kupala are among the most favorite holidays. The most important holiday in the Ukrainian church is Easter, followed by Christmas. Easter Sunday does not have a set date but changes every year to fall on the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs on or right after the spring equinox. Both Christmas and Easter are celebrated in accordance with the Julian (old style) calendar, resulting in Christmas Day being celebrated on January 7. Some Ukrainian communities abroad, however, celebrate these holidays according to the newer Gregorian calendar.

Many of the Ukrainian holiday traditions can be traced back thousands of years. New Year's carols or *shchedrivky*, spring songs and dances (*vesnianky*, *hahilky*), the old pagan midsummer festival of Ivana Kupala, marriage rites with their ritualized dramas, and celebrations of birth involving godparents and christening linen all stem from pagan beliefs, symbols, and images. Even the Easter egg dyeing that has its roots in Ukraine is a thousand-year-old tradition that predates the arrival of Christianity in the country.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Traditional Ukrainian rites of passage mark significant life transitions or celebrate milestones in the lives of a group of people. Marriage is one of the most important events in one's life and symbolizes a transition from one social status to the next. Rooted in folk customs, Ukrainian wedding traditions are rich and elaborate. An important component of the marriage ceremony is the special nuptial service in the church. Bearing a child (especially the first one) is another event that marks a significant change in a family's life. There are special puerperal ceremonies that accompany the delivery of a child. Families in some parts of Ukraine consider the one-year anniversary of a child's birth to be a rite of passage. This ancient custom, called *postryshyny*, revolves around cutting the child's hair. Family members and friends gather together to celebrate the child's life. This custom is primarily preserved and practiced in the territory of Ukraine's central lands.



*Ukrainians attend a rally to mark the Day of Unity in Kiev, which is the day the Union of Ukrainian People's Republic and West-Ukrainian Republic happened in 1919. (Sergei Supinsky/AFP/Getty Images)*

Ukrainians also consider funerals to be important rites of passage. Funeral rites ensure not only the easy transition of the souls of deceased persons into the world of ancestors but also the protection of the living from the negative influences of dead spirits. These rituals include burial ceremonies and commemorative gatherings in honor of the deceased person.

One Ukrainian custom that celebrates young people's wish to find true love is the Ivan Kupalo festival. In pagan mythology, Kupalo was the god of love and fertility. In his honor, young men and women gather around streams and ponds, where they build fires and sing songs. Some of them jump over the fire and braid field flowers into wreaths that they send floating on the water. If the wreath floats, they will be lucky in love; if it sinks, they will be unhappy.

## **8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

Ukrainians are very warm and affectionate people. It is common to greet visitors with three kisses on the cheek. Hugging is another way Ukrainians greet one another, often followed by a hearty handshake. During the early 1990s a popular salutation among Ukrainians was "*Slava Ukraini*" (Glory to Ukraine). Toasting is also a popular custom among Ukrainians. Often in a group, one person will announce a toast, followed by the

words "*na zdorovia*" (to your health), or "*day Bozhe*" (glory to God).

Ukrainians often put their heart and soul into enjoying a hearty meal, a fine drink, and a good laugh. They love having company, often turning a simple visit into a large party, and even outsiders easily become part of the family. It is not unusual for friends at such gatherings to get into heated debates over politics and to openly express their feelings. Ukrainians are also known for their legendary hospitality. Ukrainian hosts will go out of their way to treat their guests to delicious and elaborate meals. When invited to a Ukrainian home, one must be prepared to stay for several courses. It is expected that the guest will at least try every dish offered. Refusing food is considered an insult to the host's generosity. It is common for guests to compliment food and the company. Often times parties, celebrations, and other informal gatherings involve singing. Even in mixed company there are a few songs that everyone knows how to sing.

## **9 LIVING CONDITIONS**

Health is a major issue being discussed in Ukraine since its independence. It was always very difficult for people in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics to get proper medical care.

Soviet-era hospitals lacked funding and equipment, and often even simple procedures like cataract surgeries were impossible, and basic medicines such as aspirin were not available. Doctors would take bribes from families desperate to help their loved ones in the hospital. Today, the health industry is undergoing scrutiny in Ukraine. With the help of Western physicians and pharmaceutical companies, Ukrainians are learning about advanced medicine and surgical procedures.

Another great concern for many people in Ukraine is environmental pollution. Fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in conjunction with continuous industrial pollution has had a damaging effect on air quality and drinking water. During the 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant near Kiev, Ukraine and other Eastern European countries were saturated with radioactivity. Once known as the “breadbasket of Europe,” some of Ukraine’s regions are still radioactive and will remain so for decades. At the same time, an environmental movement known as “Green World” has made major progress in fighting pollution and has spread awareness of the problem of Chernobyl throughout Europe. Furthermore, in accordance with its agreement with the Group of 7 and European Commission in 1995, Ukraine permanently closed the Chernobyl plant in 2000. Also, in 2007 Western nations provided the Ukrainian government with funds for construction of a new shelter to be built around the closed plant.

In addition to challenges in the environmental arena, Ukraine since independence has faced major problems with its transportation system. The lack of diversified energy sources, due partly to Ukraine’s disagreements with Russia over oil, has caused numerous delays and inconveniences. Ukraine’s highways consist of about 146,000 km (91,000 mi) of paved road; however, many roads, especially in rural areas, are unpaved or in need of repairs. Only about a third of people in Ukraine own cars, in part because gasoline prices have skyrocketed. Buses and trolleys can be seen in cities but they are not very punctual. However, the subway systems in Kiev, Kharkiv and other major cities are relatively good, and major cities and industrial centers are well connected by railway. Ukraine’s major ports—Kerch, Kherson, Lviv, Odessa, Sevastopol, and Yalta—are also connected by water.

Approximately two-thirds of Ukraine’s population (68%) lives in cities, where high-rise apartments (“*Khrushchovki*”) built during the Soviet era are dominant. Many of these buildings are poorly constructed and overcrowded. About one-third of Ukraine’s population (32%) still lives in rural areas, where there are small villages and homesteads, and the primary occupation is farming. Here the standard of living is lower than in the cities, which is why Ukrainians from rural areas continue to leave their villages to go to the cities.

Ukraine’s annual economic growth rate in 2007 was 6.9%, and its real gross domestic product (GDP) growth amounted to 5.68%. Personal incomes are rising and the level of unemployment is lower than in many other European countries. Yet Ukraine’s economy remains burdened by excessive governmental regulation, corruption, lack of law enforcement, and mounting inflation. In 2006 the inflation rate was 9.08%; in 2007 it reached 12.8%; and in the first part of 2008 it has jumped to 21.9%. The Ukrainian government has taken measures against corruption, and small and medium enterprises have been largely privatized; however, key sectors such as energy and telecommunications remain under governmental con-

trol and require restructuring and partial privatization to be able to compete in world markets.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Matriarchy was dominant in prehistoric times in the territory of Ukraine, and women enjoyed full authority in historic times during the rule of Ukrainian princes and Cossacks. Over the centuries the position of women deteriorated, with women becoming inferior to men. However this trend is gradually changing.

Traditional Ukrainian families are large and familial ties are strong, although now most city families can only afford to support one or two children. It is common for family members to help each other so that people place great value in family networks. Young people generally respect their parents and grandparents and are expected to take care of the older folk in the family. Weddings are grand affairs in Ukrainian society, with many associated customs and beliefs. Even though many marriages in recent years suffered divorce, family remains the most important unit in Ukrainian society.

## 11 CLOTHING

Ukrainians generally wear Western-style clothing. Young Ukrainians enjoy following Western trends and fashions and especially like to wear clothing with popular labels like Nike, Levi’s, Guess, Reebok, Adidas, etc. However, on special occasions or holidays, many people dress in national costume.

The earliest known dress worn in the territory of Ukraine dates back to the Scythian and Sarmatian tribes, with men wearing cloth or fur trousers, jackets, and pointed caps. Women dressed in loose shirts, coats with armhole slits, and caps similar to a man’s cap but covered by wraps. As evidenced by archaeological finds, embroidery was used as a Scythian art as far back as the 5th century BC. Learning the art of embroidery from Scythians, Ukrainians made it into a fundamental element of folk costume.

Today, Ukrainian folk costumes come in many varieties depending on a region of Ukraine and could be roughly divided into five regional styles: that of the Middle Dnieper Region, originating in the Hetman period; Polisia; Podilia; central Galicia and Volhynia; and the Carpathian Mountains and Subcarpathia, including Pokutia, Bukovyna, Hutsul, Boiko, and Lemko. In addition to regional differences, costumes differ according to sex, with women’s dress more elaborate and colorful than men’s dress. Time of the year also influences the dress. Despite these differences each costume demonstrates a high degree of sophistication, elegance, and artistry.

## 12 FOOD

Ukrainian cuisine is varied and rich in taste and is an integral part of Ukrainian customs and religious rituals. The ritual breads baked for Christmas and Easter, weddings, and funerals have special meanings and uses. The Easter *paska* bread, wedding *korovai*, delicious *pyrohy* (baked pies with fillings) and *intricate holubtsi* (stuffed cabbage rolls) are all part of the Ukrainian cuisine. *Varenyky* (dumplings) is another quintessential Ukrainian food. They are considered a Ukrainian specialty and have many fillings such as potatoes, meat, cottage cheese, and berries.

Among everyday dishes are soups, stews, sausages, smoked meats, and rye bread. Meals made with beef, lamb, pork, poul-

try, and fish dishes are usually eaten with vegetables and salads. One of the most preferred Ukrainian soups is *borshch*. This red beet soup made with vegetable and meat is usually served for lunch. Ukrainians also eat large amounts of potatoes, cooked buckwheat (*kasha*), and varieties of rye and wheat bread. Dairy products, such as cream, cottage cheese, and eggs, have their prominent place in the Ukrainian diet as well.

The most popular meat is pork and its products, such as ham, sausage (*kovbasa*) and blood sausage (*kyshka*). *Salo*, salted pig's fat, is a traditional food and is used in Ukrainian cooking in a variety of ways. Other authentic Ukrainian dishes include herring a la Kiev and jellied veal roll.

Some popular drinks are tea, coffee, honey liqueur, *kvas*—a special sour drink, and vodka, or *horilka* in Ukrainian. Favorite desserts include pancakes, cakes and fruit dishes with blueberries, cherries, plums, and strawberries. More elaborate desserts that are typically prepared for festive occasions include torts (such as Kyivsky torte) and all sorts of sweet rolls. Ukraine is also known for its high quality honey.

Ukrainians abroad have preserved Ukrainian cooking as part of their cultural heritage. This is particularly true of their festive or ritual foods.

### 13 EDUCATION

Ukrainian children are required to attend school for 11 years, from about the age of 7 to the age of 15. After grade nine, students can continue a general academic program, or they can enroll in technical or trade schools to further their education. In Ukraine there are around 150 schools of higher education, including 9 universities. There are about 80 research institutes. The largest and most popular universities are the Kiev State University, Lviv State University, and Kharkiv State University. Ukrainian parental expectations are no different from those of parents in the West. Education was always considered a vital part of Ukrainian life, and children are encouraged to excel and achieve a higher education. Many young people in Ukraine enroll in medical universities, while other popular practices are law, engineering, and communications.

Education is free and universal; however, the public education system continues to suffer from chronic under-funding. Teachers are paid relatively low salaries. Children from poor families tend to drop out of school. Over 3% of school-aged children are not able to attend school for various reasons. Additionally, a lack of schooling remains a significant problem among the rural population.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Ukrainian music is firmly rooted in the rich, mystical folklore of the country. Of the prominent composers or classical music, Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912) is regarded as the first to infuse the genre with a distinct national character. During the 1860s Lysenko collected an impressive assortment of Ukrainian folk songs, many of which he later arranged and published. His original classical compositions are instilled with Ukrainian folk themes and motives. Although Lysenko introduced a Ukrainian flavor in classical compositions, it is Borys Lyatoshynsky (1895–1968) who is considered to be the “father” of modern Ukrainian classical music. His works are strikingly original, conceptually profound, and technically sophisticated. A highly regarded professor at the Kiev and Moscow Conservatories, Lyatoshynsky taught some of the leading Ukrainian

composers of his time. His influence stimulated a progressivism in Ukrainian music, which culminated in the early 1960s with the “Kiev avant-garde,” a movement spearheaded by Valentin Silvestrov and Leonid Hrabovsky. Today, Ukraine is blessed with a sizable group of first-rate composers, including (along with Silvestrov and Hrabovsky) Volodymyr Huba, Ivan Karabyts, Oleh Kyva, Myroslav Skoryk, Yevhen Stankovych, and many others.

Ukrainian pop music also traces its origins to folk music. In particular, its folklore roots are evident in the predominantly strophic structure and propensity of minor mode in pop melodies. The most important Ukrainian pop composer of the late 1960s, 70s, and 80s was Volodymyr Ivasiuk (1949–1979), whose songs were characterized by impulsive rhythmic patterns, rapidly changing harmonies, and sweeping vocal lines tinged with Bukovinian folk motifs. Ivasiuk's compositions were recorded and performed by leading Ukrainian pop artists such as Sofia Rotaru, Kobza, and Smeritchka.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukrainian pop songs became one of the primary vehicles of social consciousness and expression. Independence spawned a number of new pop genres in Ukraine, ranging from rap to jazz and beyond, many of them highly imitative of Western models. At present, the freeing of the Communist grip on the popular music industry has been something of a double-edged sword. What has been gained from the resulting freedom of expression has been offset by lower production standards, the disintegration of marketing mechanisms for recorded music, piracy, and rampant copyright violation.

Beside rich musical traditions, Ukrainians take pride in their literature. The earliest Ukrainian literature was composed in Church Slavonic and dates back to Kievan Rus' (11th–13th centuries). After the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, Ukrainian literature was in decline until the 16th century, when it experienced a revival. Ukrainian literature in the 19th century reflected the rapid development of national consciousness under Russian rule.

At the heart of modern Ukrainian literature lies Ivan Kotliarevsky. His creative *Eneida* (1798), a travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid*, transformed the *Aeneid*'s heroes into Ukrainian Cossacks. Following Kotliarevsky's lead, in 1830 the city of Kharkiv became the center of Ukrainian Romanticism. Meanwhile, western Ukraine gave birth to the “Ruthenian Triad” of Shashkevych, Holovatsky, and Vahylevych, who became the leading writers of Kiev Romanticism. Romanticism found its highest expression among the literary circle, the Writers' Brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius (1846).

Without a doubt, the most famous Ukrainian poet is Taras Shevchenko. A bard of Ukrainian literature, this 19th century poet portrayed in his works Ukraine's history and satirized Russia's oppression of Ukraine. Next to Shevchenko stands the greatest realist of the late 1800s, Ivan Franko. A poet and novelist whose naturalistic novels chronicled contemporary Galician society, Franko is particularly appreciated for his long narrative poem, “Moses,” that marks the height of his literary achievement. Lesia Ukrainka is a female poet and dramatist who made her unique imprint on Ukrainian literature of the late 19th century, with her poetic dramas and dialogues.

In the first three decades of the 20th century, Ukrainian literature experienced such literary movements as realism, symbolism, neoclassicism, and futurism. After the Russian

Revolution, during a short period of relative freedom, a host of talented writers became critical of Soviet policies, but in 1932 the Communist Party began enforcing socialist realism as the required literary style. During Stalin's great purges of 1933–38, many talented writers were imprisoned or executed, or fled into exile. The post-Stalinist period saw the emergence of a new generation that rejected socialist realism, but they were silenced in the 1970s by repressive measures from the Soviet government. With Ukraine's independence in 1991, many young talented writers have emerged, beginning a new chapter in the history of Ukrainian literature.

## 15 WORK

Ukraine is now in the process of transitioning to a market economy, a move that has been socially and politically difficult due to inflation, unemployment, and general economic uncertainty. Most of Ukraine's population is employed in the agricultural and metalwork industries, machine building, construction, chemical, food, and light industries.

Typically Ukrainians work 40 hours per week and enjoy at least 24 days of paid vacation per year. There are also 10 official holidays in Ukraine. That means that each employee has a minimum of 31 days of paid holidays per year. In accordance with the Labor Law, the minimum employment age is 17 years. Although a monthly wage minimum has increased, as of 2007 it was only \$90 (460 *hryvnia*). Evidently, the minimum wage does not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and his or her family. Consequently, many people have a second job or are engaged in some kind of entrepreneurial activity, such as small family business. This is where family networking and family support plays an important role.

The Constitution of Ukraine in conjunction with the Labor Law both preclude discrimination based on race, color of skin, political, religious and other beliefs, sex, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence or other characteristics. In practice, however, men do have more opportunities than women. Very few women in Ukraine hold top managerial positions in the government or private industry. Ukraine has only 8.7% female representation in parliament. Yet, Ukrainian women are present in politics and these women politicians are often extremely powerful—for example Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who currently heads her own parliamentary bloc.

Additionally, women are granted generous maternity leave. Women enjoy up to 70 calendar days of paid leave before childbirth and up to 56 calendar days after. The payment is provided by the Social Security Fund and is based on levels of income used for social security contribution purposes. To encourage families to have more children, additional paid leaves are granted to women who have two or more children under the age of 15 or a disabled or adopted child and to single parents. Workers who are engaged in part-time studies may also be considered for additional vacation leave.

## 16 SPORTS

Ukrainians play many sports, including soccer, volleyball, track and field, basketball, hockey, skating, and swimming. Soccer is undeniably the most popular sport in Ukraine, with the most popular team being Dynamo Kiev. It is common to see youngsters playing soccer and rugby in the streets of Ukraine. Impressively, the Ukrainian team was the first soccer team to

qualify for the 2006 World Cup Finals in Germany. In addition to soccer and rugby, many Ukrainians play cricket. Numerous cricket clubs include Kiev Cricket Club, Kharkiv Cricket Club, Crimea Cricket Club, Vinnytsya Cricket Club, Ternopil Cricket Club, Donetsk Cricket Club, and Luhansk Cricket Club.

Ukrainian athletes do very well in the summer and winter Olympic Games and have participated in the Olympic Games since the 1950s. Famous Ukrainian medalists include Larysa Latynina, the gymnast awarded a record 18 medals (nine gold), swimmer Yana Klochkova (two gold medals, 2000), and pole-vaulter Sergey Bubka (gold, 1988). At the 2004 summer Olympic Games in Athens, Ukrainian competitors won a total of 23 medals (nine gold medals, five silver, and nine bronze), finishing 12th in overall team standings. Ukrainian athletes also compete in the Winter Olympics. The 1994 Winter Olympics brought Ukraine two medals; in the 1998 Winter Games, Ukrainians won one medal, and in the 2006 Winter Olympics Ukrainian athletes took bronze medals in ice-dancing and the women's 7.5 kilometer biathlon sprint.

Recently, outdoor sports and activities such as diving, mountain climbing, mountain biking, swimming, trekking, and horse riding have become increasingly popular. Skiing is another sport enjoyed by many. Mountain skiing and snowboarding are rapidly gaining popularity among young people. The Carpathian Mountains are especially good for winter sports. Spectacular all year round, the Carpathians are particularly picturesque in winter, offering families and professional athletes a range of winter sports facilities. The Ukrainian government is supportive of professional winter sports and is bidding for Ukraine's popular Bukovel ski and snowboard resort to host the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

Chess is another popular sport in Ukraine. The 2002 World Chess Championship tournament in Moscow started with 128 of the best chess players in the world and came down to a head-to-head eight-game match between two Ukrainians, Vasily Ivanchuk and Ruslan Ponomarev. Ponomarev (who at 14 had become the youngest grandmaster in history, although the record is now held by Bu Xiangzi of China) won the title in seven games, winning two games and drawing the other five. On his way to victory Ponomarev defeated a chess player from China, one from Bulgaria, one from the Netherlands, and three from Russia.

## 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The liberating policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* relieved previously existing constraints inspiring artists for creative expression. Since then the arts movement gained momentum. However, the new democratic government lacks funds to support the arts, and many well-known artists, performers, and composers are trying their luck in the West, where they continue to perform and gain prominence. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, one can find numerous art exhibits, concerts, literary evenings, and plays being performed in most Ukrainian cities.

Kiev is the vibrant national and cultural capital of Ukraine and boasts the National Fine Arts Museum, Taras Shevchenko Museum, National Museum of Decorative Arts, and other galleries that host new and exciting exhibitions. The Shevchenko National Opera Company, Ivan Franko National Theater, and State Operetta add to the wealth of the Ukrainian cultural palette. Life in large cities and smaller towns bustles with opera

and ballet performances, philharmonic concerts, and other cultural events. Lviv's Ivan Franko Opera and Ballet Theater, Ukrainian Drama Theater, the Kharkiv Opera and Ballet Theatre, the Odessa State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, the Symphony Orchestra of the National Philharmonic Society of Ukraine, and scores of anthropological and history museums ensure that Ukrainian culture continues to flourish.

## **18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES**

Ukrainian folk art is an integral part of Ukrainian culture, reflecting the spiritual and artistic values of Ukrainians. The art forms that were developed in ancient times still exist today, both in Ukraine and in Ukrainian communities around the world. Ukrainian folk art is primarily known for its ceramics, decorated Easter eggs (*pysanky*), embroidery, woodcarving, weaving, tapestry, carpeting, and leatherwork. *Pysanky*, or Ukrainian Easter eggs, date back to pre-Christian times, when they were believed to have magical powers. With Christianity the *pysanka* took on a spiritual, religious meaning, and the eggs began to be decorated with crosses, geometric designs, and miniature churches.

Over the centuries, Ukrainians have developed a unique pottery tradition. Pottery flourished in all regions of Ukraine, utilizing plant and animal designs and other patterns. The Hutsul region of the Carpathians is particularly known for its ceramics. In this region ceramic decoration took a variety of forms, including plates, pitchers, pots, and toys.

The art of embroidery (*vyshyvannia*) is yet another popular Ukrainian folk art and hobby. Through a variety of thread colors, complex stitches, and design intricacies, the Ukrainian *vyshyvka* is applied to all items of folk dress, as well as to pillows, aprons, towels, and other household articles. Many of the oldest *vyshyvkas* can be viewed in museums around Ukraine.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

As a newly independent country Ukraine faces a number of growing social problems including alcoholism, unemployment, prostitution, the spread of the AIDS epidemic, and negative population growth. A growing crime rate adds to Ukraine's woes, with 149,000 convicts serving their sentences in 2008.

Similarly to many European countries, Ukraine is challenged by a serious demographic crisis. As estimated in 2006, the population growth rate stood at  $-0.6\%$  and in 2008 had declined further to  $-0.651\%$ . Not only is the birth rate declining, but life expectancy at birth for the total population is only 68.06 years, with 62.24 years for men and 74.24 years for women (2008 est.). Each year since 1990 the United Nations has published a Human Development Index (HDI), which looks beyond GDP to a broader definition of well-being in a given country. In 2007 the HDI for Ukraine was 0.788, which gives the country a ranking of 76th out of 177 countries. To compare, Ukraine's ranking places it behind all of the European Union (EU) member-countries, including its closest neighbors (and former Soviet satellites), Hungary (36), Poland (37), Slovakia (42), Bulgaria (53), and Romania (60), which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. Some of the factors that HDI takes into account include the fact that Ukraine has the lowest birthrate in Europe. With deaths currently almost twice the number of births, the population of 47.4 million people (as of 1 October 2004) is projected to decrease by up to 40% by 2050.

Deaths caused by HIV/AIDS are another grave problem confronting the Ukrainian population. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS infection has already crossed the 1% threshold and has surpassed levels across all countries of Europe and Central Asia as well as India and China. Sadly, the scale of the crisis is so extensive that the current budget of both domestic and international donor-supported programs is not sufficient to reverse the present trend. The Ukrainian government is well aware of the situation but is concentrating on economic transformation and has not allocated enough attention and funds to the socio-demographic sphere. As a result, the HIV/AIDS problem becomes increasingly daunting every day.

To exacerbate these social problems even further, a great number of Ukrainian women have recently fallen victim to international sex traders. A chain of "employment" and "marriage" agencies recruit young women and girls for work abroad in photo modeling or domestic service. "Marriage," "employment," and "visa" agencies capitalizing on the difficult economic situation in Ukraine promise their recruits secure employment, good working conditions, and reasonable benefits. Often women who struggle to find an adequate job in Ukraine are attracted to newspaper ads advertising jobs in foreign countries. However, once these women accept the jobs and arrive in the foreign countries, they are often forced to work in the local sex industry. The UN Office in Ukraine has been publishing these findings, attempting to draw the attention of the country's policy-makers and civil society to the issue. Since the publication of a recent National Human Development Report (NHDR), Ukrainian civil organizations have put forward several initiatives to alleviate this problem, which still remains largely unresolved.

## **20 GENDER ISSUES**

Today, Ukraine is a modern nation that strives for gender equity. Yet gender relations in Ukraine are complex. Historically, during the Soviet period, Ukrainian men and women enjoyed equal access to education and employment. Women were granted generous maternity leave and other child-related benefits and rights to early retirement and pension. For the most part, legislation treated women and men equally; however, protective labor legislation excluded women from "dangerous" but also highly paid positions with good benefits, and widespread conservatism pressured women to continue to bear primary responsibility for the family and housework. A number of women took high positions in government, but their representation in politics remained limited, with men clearly dominating in the higher echelons of power.

Although since 2000 there has been some improvement in gender issues, strongly entrenched stereotypes of men as leaders, managers, and primary breadwinners, and stereotypes of women as wives and mothers first, workers second, continue to limit actual gender equality in Ukrainian society. Women still face gender-based job discrimination in certain areas of employment. Some employers flatly refuse to hire younger women likely to become pregnant or women over 35. Loss of state support for child care, poor maternal health, limited political representation, gender-based violence, incidents of rape and a dramatic increase in prostitution and trafficking have also emerged as serious issues. According to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, spousal abuse is illegal but common. Based on 2006 data provided by Amnesty Interna-



tional 50% to 70% of all women have been subjected to physical violence or psychological abuse at home. To deal with this problem, the law requires the regional governments to operate shelters for victims of domestic violence and crisis centers in every major city, but in practice, they do not.

At the same time, male underemployment and unemployment have undermined men's traditional role, thereby affecting the structure of authority and relative bargaining power of men and women within the household. Greater opportunities in the areas of education and employment for females have prompted women to become more independent. There has been an increase in the numbers of female-headed households and number of women focusing on their careers. Also, recent labor laws establish the legal equality of men and women, including equal pay for equal work. A burgeoning civil society sector and the emergence of many organizations addressing gender issues (whose existence was formerly ignored or denied) provide a strong platform for addressing and promoting all aspects of gender equality.

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—revised by A. Golovina Khadka

# VLACHS

**LOCATION:** Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Hungary

**POPULATION:** 23.5 million Romanians, 500,000 Aromanians, 20,000 Megleno-Romanians, 1,200 Istro-Romanians

**LANGUAGE:** Romanian and Romanian dialects (Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian)

**RELIGION:** Christianity (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the Vlachs is inexorably linked to the history of the Romanians, although some specialists think that they more generally represent the descendants of romanized Dacians, Thracians, and Illyrians. Throughout history, the term Vlach was used both to describe all people of Romanian origin, and particular groups scattered throughout the Central and Western Balkans. Nowadays it is used mainly to describe people of Romanian origin living outside Romania.

At the start of the 2nd century AD, the Roman emperor Trajan conquered and colonized Dacia (roughly the territory of present day Romania), expanding the Roman Empire territory to its largest size in history. The Roman legions that were sent there mingled with the local population, and by the time the Roman army retreated in 271 AD, the seeds of a new people were laid.

In the 11th century AD, the population living on the territory of present day Romania formed political units, which became principalities in the 13th century—Moldova and Wallachia. People from Wallachia, Moldova, and Transylvania have migrated and settled in different parts of the Balkans throughout the years, bringing their customs and language with them. The main Vlach groups outside Romania are the Aromanians, the Megleno-Romanians, and the Istro-Romanians.

There are only a few remnants of the Vlach populations today (an estimated 500,000), and their numbers are dwindling. The spread of universal education in even the most remote villages and the effects of modern civilization have often blended them together with the surrounding populations. Between the two World Wars, some Vlachs have migrated into Romania and they have been rapidly assimilated. Despite their relatively small numbers, Vlachs have played an important historic role in all of the Balkan states where they were found. Prominent Vlachs include Ioannis Kolettis (prime minister of Greece), Georgios Averoff (Greek magnate), Andrei Şaguna (Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan of Transylvania), and the Ghica family (Romanian prime ministers and *voivodes*).

The words Vlach and Romanian have been used interchangeably throughout history, and the principality of Wallachia was also known as *Țara Românească* (The Romanian Country). In Greek, the word Blachos means shepherd. More commonly, it is assumed that the word Vlach is derived, via the Slavic medium, from the Germanic. A similar root is used in Welsh and Walloon and it is used to denominate a stranger.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Vlachs are for the most part found in the Balkans, although small groups can be found further north, in countries like Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

Romanians and Moldovans constitute the largest Vlach populations, and they are concentrated in their respective countries. Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians can be found in Romania, Macedonia, northern Greece, Albania, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Istro-Romanians constitute a particular and fairly small group (around 1,200 people), concentrated in the northwestern part of Croatia.

In 1941, when Greece was under Nazi occupation, a group of Aromanian nationalists established, for a short time, an autonomous Vlach state under the control of Fascist Italy—The Principality of Pindus and Voivodship of Macedonia.

## 3 LANGUAGE

What distinguishes Vlachs living outside Romania today is not as much their culture, religion, or their consciousness of a separate identity. Their defining feature is the language they speak. One of the reasons why the Vlach language has survived this long is the remoteness of the areas where it is spoken, and the fact that it was often in competition with more than one language. All the Vlach languages are Latin-based, and could be considered as being Romanian dialects. The most distinct dialect (different in morphology and phonology from all other Romanian dialects) is spoken by the Megleno-Romanians.

Aromanians have a representative in the European Bureau for Lesser Spoken Languages, in Greece.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Many Vlachs that are now encountered through the Central and Western Balkans are the descendants of shepherds that migrated there in medieval times. As such, the folklores of all these disparate groups share pastoral influences. One of the most important folklore creations in Romania is the ballad *Miorița* (The Little Ewe). The ballad tells the story of three shepherds (one from Moldova, one from Wallachia, and one from Transylvania) that meet while attending to their flocks. The Moldovan shepherd finds from an enchanted ewe that the other two shepherds have connived to kill him and steal his flock. The shepherd accepts his fate, and tells the ewe that should he be slain, it should ask his killers to bury his body by the sheep's pen. Furthermore, the ewe is to tell the flock and his mother that he married a princess, and that the moment was marked by the falling of a star.

## 5 RELIGION

Many Vlachs are adherents of the Eastern Orthodox religion, usually the dominant religion in the area (e.g. Greek Orthodox). Istro-Romanians are Roman Catholic. Religious practices and customs are similar to those found among the dominant populations in the area.

A very small percentage of Vlachs are Muslims. They represent the Megleno-Romanians from Greece that have been living in Turkey since the exchange of populations in 1923.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most Vlachs follow the major holidays of the country and region where they are located. Of significant importance are the religious holidays—especially Christmas and Easter. For a short time, at the start of the 20th century, the Aromanians were recognized as a separate nation (*millet*) by the Ottoman Empire. The day when the so-called Aromania Iradeo (or

Turkish Irade) was signed, 23 May 1905, is celebrated by Aromanians all over the world as their National Day. In Macedonia, it is considered an official holiday.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Major life events, like birth, marriage, and death, are marked and celebrated within the Christian tradition—Eastern Orthodox for most Vlachs, Roman Catholic for the Istro-Romanians. Children are taught from a young age to attend church, and they participate in the social life of the parish. Social events organized by individual, or groups of villages are often the preferred medium for young people to meet, date, and potentially marry. Marriage represents an important moment in a Vlach's life, and the union between two young people is usually done after receiving the parent's blessings. If a husband dies, the wife will wear black for a full year. Often widows wear black for the rest of their lives.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Since Vlachs have been for the most part migratory people, they have often been treated with resentment and distrust. In Greece, the term *Koutzovlachs* is used in a derogatory way to refer to people of a lower class. Vlachs however, are good-natured people, and in their respective countries they are nowadays respected as ardent patriots and supporters of national ideals. A traveler through Greece after the end of the Second World War describes Vlachs as being kind and “patriarchally hospitable.”

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions vary depending on where the Vlach communities are located. In Romania, most of the Aromanians live in urban centers. As such, they enjoy the benefits and challenges of post-communist cities. Outside Romania, Vlachs live for the most part in rural communities. Traditionally, Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians respected a pastoral seasonal cycle (transhumance)—tending to their sheep herds in mountain villages in the summer, and leaving for the milder climates of the plains in the winter. As more and more young Vlachs get lured by the mirage of large cities, many small mountain villages are left to be tended to by older people, or are used solely for vacation purposes.

In Greece, the largest Vlach community, and the unofficial Vlach capital, is Metsovo—a town of around 4,500 located in northern Greece, in the mountains of Pindus. It is an important tourist destination and a popular ski resort.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Vlachs are family-oriented and the patriarchal system defines the family unit. Elderly are respected, and advice is sought from them in communal matters. Village life is more tranquil and sheltered from many of the ills that city life presupposes. The social life in the village revolves around major religious holidays, and families mark major moments (such as birth, marriage, and death) with complex ceremonies. In many ways, these moments have a deeper and more profound meaning than they do in cities.



## 11 CLOTHING

Traditionally, the clothing of Vlach shepherds was simple and comfortable. Clothing was designed to endure long migratory walks. The trousers and the shirt were for the most part white. Thick leather belts adorned the waist, and in the winter men would wear heavy sheepskin jackets. The garb worn by women was much more intricate and elaborate. Skirts and shirts were embroidered with lively patterns, and young women would wear complexly designed headgear. Older women usually wore simpler gear, and they covered their heads with a plain black scarf.

The Vlachs living in urban centers adopt urban attire, which is usually of Western influence. Even in remote villages, traditional clothing is rarely worn anymore. Shepherds continue to fabricate clothing out of sheep's skin, but they are more likely to be encountered wearing jeans and rubber boots, rather than white trousers and leather moccasins.

## 12 FOOD

Being for the most part shepherds, Vlachs rarely engaged in farming. They would trade wool, cheese, and leather for agricultural produce, but they would not grow them themselves. As such, the Vlach diet is fairly basic. Cheese and meat dishes are the staple in most Vlach villages. The liquid that is left over after producing cheese (*zăr*) is used to turn a Romanian staple—*mămăligă* (cornmeal mush), into a shepherd's delicacy—*balmoș*. Metsovo (Greece), the unofficial Vlach capital, is known for its cheeses and wines.

The art of cooking in Vlach villages was passed down from generation to generation, by word of mouth and by example. Nowadays, cooking in Vlach villages borrows a lot from the culinary art in their respective area.

### 13 EDUCATION

Vlach schools that taught in pupils in Aromanians were established through Albania and Macedonia as early as 1860, with the help of the Aromanian diaspora in Romania. In Greece, the attempts of Vlachs to upkeep their culture were viewed with distrust and were often met with resentment and anger. Even in modern times, Greece refused to recognize Vlachs as a distinct minority.

When Aromanians were recognized as a millet of the Ottoman Empire, in 1905, they were affirmed the rights to maintain their own schools and perform liturgies in the Aromanian language. Before schools were institutionalized, education took place in churches, which also maintained local culture and identity.

Following the fall of communism, there have been attempts made by the Romanian government to support Vlach communities throughout the Balkans. Thus, in the town of Divjaka, Albania, education in Romanian and Aromanian is offered at the kindergarten, primary, and secondary level. Financial help was also offered to the only Aromanian language church—Schimbarea la față' of Korçë. In Macedonia, pupils can study in Aromanian at the primary level, and several educational and cultural Vlach institutions are supported by the Romanian government.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

With the fall of communism throughout the Balkans, Aromanians grouped together and formed cultural and political societies, sparking the beginning of a national re-awakening. In Macedonia, Aromanians are recognized as an ethnic minority and are represented in the parliament. They enjoy the right to education in their own language, as well as ethnic, cultural, and religious rights. The Romanian government offers financial support to the Macedonian Vlach community, and it conditioned the recognition of Macedonia's independence on its granting of minority rights to the Vlachs. Several cultural societies and associations are present in Macedonia. Some of these include: the Union for Aromanian Culture from Macedonia, the Aromanian League of Macedonia, the International League of Aromanians, the Aromanian Community Manachia Brothers in Bitola, the Party of the Aromanians from Macedonia, and the Democratic Union of the Aromanians from Macedonia. The Macedonian government provides generous support for Aromanian cultural enterprises, such as the publication of magazines and books. Thus it is hoped that Aromanian culture, language, and history will be preserved.

Vlachs also have contributed greatly to the culture of the countries where they lived. Some of the most prominent writers in the Balkans are of Vlach origin. Constantin Noica is one of Romania's most prominent philosophers, and his works have been distributed worldwide. George Zalokostas is an important Greek writer. Mitrush Kuteli and Lasgush Poradeci are two Albanian poets. Jovan Sterija Popovic is a well-known Serbian novelist.

### 15 WORK

The term Vlach (*Blachos* or *Koutzovlachs*) is often used in a derogatory way in Greece, to refer to lower class people (shepherds in particular). As a consequence, most Vlach groups don't use this word when they refer to themselves. However, apart from shepherding, Vlachs have also established themselves as industrious craftsmen and merchants. Many of them have risen to positions of wealth and rank in their respective countries. George Averoff, Apostolos Arsakis, and George Stavrou are well-known 19th century Greek benefactors of Vlach origin. Gigi Becali is one of the most prominent business-men in Romania. Sotirios Bulgaris founded the Bulgari jewelry house. The Darvari and Dumba families are famous philanthropists and Austrian Imperial bankers.

### 16 SPORTS

Vlachs are not particularly known to be sports-minded people, even though numerous Vlachs have risen to prominence in several sports activities. Thus, Romania's best football player of all times, Gheorghe Hagi, is an Aromanian (or *Machedon*). Gigi Becali is a well known entrepreneur in Romania, and the owner of one of the largest Romanian football clubs—FC Steaua Bucharest. Before the Romanian revolution of 1989, he used to be a shepherd. His cousins, Victor and Ioan Becali, are prominent and prosperous football impresarios.

Joshko Milenkovski is a Macedonian volleyball champion and the manager of the Macedonian Volleyball team. Dominique Moceanu (born in Tampa, Florida) is a famous US gymnast, and a Macedonian Vlach by origin.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In rural areas, entertainment and recreation find an outlet in folk dances, amateur theatrical groups, music ensembles, and social gatherings. There are a number of Vlachs that have made a name for themselves in the entertainment business. Herbert von Karajan is a world famous conductor, and a Vlach from Kozani, Greece. Apostolos Kaldaras is a well-know Greek composer. Kaliopi Bukle is a popular singer in the Republic of Macedonia. In Romania, there is a large number of gifted and prominent Aromanian actors (Toma Caragiu, Alexandru Arșinel, Ion Caramitru, Sebastian Papaiani) and film makers (Dan Pița, Sergiu Nicolaescu).

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Traditional folk art and crafts were for Vlachs both a method of survival and a way of adorning their household. Before modern civilization reached their villages, they used to make their own household articles (e.g. plates, spoons, furnaces, tables, and chairs) and weave their own clothes and wall decorations. Wood and other materials they happened to have at hand would be used for crafting decorative objects. Very few manufactured commodities were purchased directly. Their colorful and intricate designs were also used to lavish the interiors and exteriors of their churches, cemeteries, and social gathering spots.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In an area where regional and national pride and patriotism are very strong (often leading to state fragmentations along ethnic lines), the Vlachs have been content with their position

in the countries where they were located. Except for a short period during the First World War (when Romania pressed for a separate Vlach church), there have been no separatist movements pursued by the Vlach populations. A Vlach specialist considers them to be the perfect Balkan citizens, as they have never resorted to war, politics, violence, or dishonesty to preserve their culture.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

Gender issues among the Vlach populations are congruent with the issues faced by the general population in the countries where they are located. The Vlachs living in remote villages across the Balkans still have a traditionalist view of gender relations, and homosexuality is usually scorned.

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—M. Ionescu-Heroiu

# WALLOONS

**LOCATION:** Belgium (southern region, called Wallonia)

**POPULATION:** 3.5 million

**LANGUAGE:** French

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic; Muslim; Protestant; Jewish; Russian Orthodox; and Greek Orthodox

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Walloons, who reside in Belgium's southern provinces, comprise the country's French-speaking population. Their language and history have given them a cultural identity distinct from that of the Flemings in the northern part of the country, whose language (Flemish) is similar to Dutch. While the Flemings are culturally closer to the Netherlands and Germany, the Walloons' cultural affinity is with France in particular and, in general, other countries in which Romance languages are spoken.

The historical forces dividing the two language groups date back to the 5th century AD, when the Franks, a Germanic people, invaded the territory of present-day Belgium, routing the Romans, who had ruled the region for 500 years after wresting it from its original Celtic inhabitants in 57 BC. The Franks were able to establish a stronger presence in the northern area, in which early forms of the Dutch language subsequently developed. Frankish settlements in the south were less extensive, allowing the Roman culture and Latin-based dialects already in existence to flourish. ("Walloon," a term that did not come into use until the 19th century, is derived from "Walha," the Frankish designation for the Romanized people of the south.)

Between the 9th and 12th centuries, both the northern and southern parts of the region fell under the control of feudal lords, and numerous duchies, principalities, and towns sprang up without any unifying center of power or culture, allowing the Germanic and Latin cultures of the two regions to continue developing along separate lines. In the east, Liège became a large and powerful prince-bishopric within the Holy Roman Empire. Eventually the power of the nobles was challenged by the burghers of the cities, especially those of the north, who had begun to play a vital role in European trade. There was a period of Burgundian rule in the 15th century, when French—the language of the court—first became associated with power and privilege. Beginning in the 16th century, the entire region came under the rule of a succession of foreign powers: Spain, the Austrian Habsburgs, the French under Napoleon, and, finally, the Netherlands. In spite of the Flemings' cultural and linguistic ties to Holland, they joined with the Walloons in revolting against Dutch rule, and Belgium gained its independence in 1830 as a constitutional monarchy.

Throughout the 19th century, the Walloons were the dominant group in Belgium both politically and economically, even though the Flemings accounted for a majority of the population. Independence did nothing to change the tradition of French as the language of government and culture, and the richer natural resources of the south brought the mines, mills, and factories of the Industrial Revolution to that region early, while Flanders remained a poorer, primarily agricultural area. Belgium suffered enormous losses in both world wars, but was most devastated during World War I. After World War



II, structural and social problems had a debilitating effect on Wallonia's industries. By the 1930s Flanders had gained sufficient political and economic clout to make Flemish its official language for education, legal proceedings, and government.

In the post-World War II period, Wallonia's traditional heavy industries (notably steelmaking) have continued to decline, and its coal mines have closed. In the 1960s, the Flemings and Walloons were given increased control over their respective regions, and in 1993 Belgium's constitution was amended, making Flanders and Wallonia autonomous regions within the federal state of the Belgian Kingdom, together with the nation's bilingual capital, Brussels, and another autonomous community composed of Belgium's German-speaking population. Belgium was locked in a political stalemate beginning in June 2007 when elections failed to produce a new government. The question arose as to whether or not Belgium should cease to exist as a country, and that the territory would be split into two—Flanders and Wallonia. The crisis was temporarily resolved in March 2008 when a new government was formed, and major reforms of state were planned.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMETLAND

The Walloons live south of an east-west line running from Aachen to a point north of Lille that divides the country's Flemish- and French-speaking regions. With an area of 17,094 km (6,600 sq mi), Wallonia covers 55% of Belgium's territory and includes the provinces of southern Brabant, Hainaut, Namur, Liège, and Luxembourg. The region's terrain rises from the

Meuse valley to the wooded hills of the Ardennes, which reach their highest elevations at 694 m (2,277 ft). Its two major rivers are the Meuse and the Escaut. Wallonia has a population of 3.5 million, or some 175 people per sq km (450 people per sq mi), making it a densely populated area. There is a growing immigrant population from southern Europe and North Africa.

## 3 LANGUAGE

The language of Wallonia is French, as well as various regional dialects, whose main divisions are Eastern (Liège), Central (Namur), and Western (Charleroi, La Louvière, Nivelles). There are two additional dialects called Picard and Gaumais, although all dialects in Wallonia are commonly referred to collectively as "Walloon." Dialects are spoken mainly by rural and working-class Walloons, and more often with one's family than in more formal situations, such as at work. Immigrant workers have introduced a variety of new languages into Wallonia in recent decades.

Historically, French has been the most prestigious language in Belgium since the late medieval period of Burgundian rule, when it was spoken by aristocrats at court. It remained an elite language during the periods of Spanish, Austrian, and French rule from the 16th through 18th centuries, and maintained its privileged position with the Belgian bourgeoisie even after independence in the 19th century. It was the language of government, law, the church, and education. By comparison, the Dutch-based Flemish language of northern Belgium was associated with provincialism, poverty, and a lower level of education. This language division was dramatized by the inability of French-speaking Belgian officers in World War I to communicate with their Flemish-speaking troops. Although Flemish has gained increased respectability in this century as Flanders has become more powerful economically and politically, Flemings on the whole are still more familiar with French than Walloons are with Flemish.

## 4 FOLKLORE

Traditionally, the spirits of the departed were thought to return to earth on All Saints' Day (November 1), and families still visit the cemetery to clean the tombs of their deceased relatives on that date. Walloon folklore includes many tales involving the devil, remnants of the pre-Christian Druid religion of the region. Inhabitants of some rural villages still believe in the powers of folk healers, whose methods include *toucher*, healing by touch. There is a marionette in Belgium's traditional puppet theaters called *Woltje*, which means "little Walloon," and others who personify particular regions or cities. *Tchantchès*, who is identified with the city of Liège, wears patched trousers and a floppy hat with tassels.

## 5 RELIGION

While Catholicism is the traditional religion of Wallonia, as it is throughout Belgium, the Walloons are generally less religious than the Flemings to their north, a difference that has become even more pronounced in recent years, with parish churches closing due to lack of attendance. Even the elderly who keep statues of the Virgin Mary in their windows often are not regular churchgoers. However, southern Europeans who have emigrated to the region maintain stronger religious ties than do native Walloons. Immigrants from Turkey and North Africa make up a growing Islamic community that is

beginning to call for increased public recognition. Other religious minorities include Protestants, Jews, Russian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox. Wallonia is the site of two popular pilgrimage shrines, at Beauraing and Banneaux, and Lourdes in southwestern France has traditionally drawn many pilgrims from the region.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

The Walloons observe Belgium's public holidays (New Year's Day, Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (July 21), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas. However, they also celebrate other dates on the Christian calendar as well as many folk holidays with origins in history and legend. Binche is notorious for its carnival festivities in the weeks before Lent. The best-known feature of the annual celebration is the dance of the Gilles, with over 1,000 people dressed in brightly colored, padded costumes throwing oranges at the spectators. Malmédy is also known for its carnival celebration, which actually continues into the Lent period, as do those in Fosses and Tilff.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Walloons live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Although less religious than some of their fellow Belgians, most Walloon young people undergo religious rituals such as baptism and first Communion. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Walloon manners are generally formal and polite, and conversations are marked by frequent exchanges of compliments and repeated handshaking. Relatives shake hands, hug, or kiss each other on the cheek, while friends usually hug. Men and women or two female friends—but never two men—might exchange kisses on the cheek, and women can sometimes be seen walking down the street arm-in-arm.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The majority of Walloons are city dwellers, and most live in multistory brick row houses with large kitchens and gardens. Walloon houses, like those of other Belgians, often include (or are attached to) an area used for a family business. Walloons enjoy Belgium's high level of modern medical care by private doctors and at state-run hospitals and clinics, and the vast majority have most of their medical expenses covered by national health insurance. Located in Wallonia, the Meuse River, one of Belgium's two major waterways, is part of a network of rivers and canals whose center is the port of Antwerp, on the Scheldt River (Escaut in French), which is linked to the North Sea. Antwerp is the second largest port of Europe (after Amsterdam). Historically the connection of the Walloon city of Charleroi with Brussels and Antwerp has formed one of Belgium's major transport links.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

The main type of family in Wallonia is the modern nuclear family, although it is not uncommon for an elderly grandparent to join the household. Men and women generally marry when they are in their mid- to late twenties. Wallonia's divorce

rate is rising, and divorce and remarriage are considered socially acceptable.

## 11 CLOTHING

The Walloons, like all Belgians, wear modern Western-style clothing.

## 12 FOOD

While Walloon cuisine is derived from that of France, it tends to be spicier, richer, and higher in calories than modern-day French food. The most popular meats are pork and local Ardennes hams, a delicacy for which the region is famous. The main meal of the day, which is eaten at noon, might typically consist of a pork dish, potatoes, and salad with mayonnaise. Both breakfast and supper are light meals, which may include the popular regional cheese, *makèye*, served on slices of bread. Soup is a staple of the Walloon diet, as it is throughout Belgium, and it is often served as a first course for the mid-day and evening meals. Walloons drink a lot of coffee, and the common custom is to take a four o'clock coffee break called a *gôûter*, often consisting of coffee and a piece of pie. Like their Flemish neighbors to the north, the Walloons like and brew beer; even the monks, for instance, in Chimay and Orval abbeys, have their own breweries. Another popular drink is straight gin, called *pèkèt*.

Local specialties in Wallonia range from venison chops and stuffed goose forestière in Luxembourg province to simple fried eggs and bacon in the area around Verviers. A favorite dish in south Belgium, adjoining the French border, is ragout of lamb with chicory. Mussels and chips (tasty Belgian french fries) are as popular in Wallonia as they are throughout the country. In fact, when the French want to distance themselves from their Walloon neighbors across the border, they refer to them as *moules-frites* (the French term for mussels and chips).

## 13 EDUCATION

Education for all Belgians is compulsory from age 6 through 15, and the national literacy rate is 99%. At the secondary level, students choose between trade-oriented, business, and college-preparatory training. Wallonia has approximately 30 research centers and 300 research labs. Wallonia attracts researchers from all over the world with a high percentage of foreign researchers (15% to 20%) in Walloon universities and companies. It particularly welcomes researchers from Western and Eastern Europe.

## 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among Belgium's early painters, the most renowned were the Flemish "Old Masters," including Van Eyck, Memling, and Rubens, although Walloons made contributions to the visual arts during all periods. In modern art, however, they came into their own with the work of surrealists René Magritte and Paul Delvaux. The best-known Walloon author is mystery writer Georges Simenon, creator of the police commissioner Maigret. There are many "French" writers who are, indeed, of Walloon origin, such as the famous poet Henri Michaux. Marguerite Yourcenar also had an international reputation; in 1980 she became the first woman elected to the Académie Française. Wallonia's most famous composer was César Franck, and the violin virtuoso Eugène Ysaye was famous for his perform-



*Walloons and Flemish marched against the possible separation of Belgium in late 2007. Belgium, which had no federal government since June of 2007, was in a state of political limbo as differing factions were unable to form a coalition government.*

*(Mark Renders/Getty Images)*

ing career and also as the founder of the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Music Competition, one of the most prestigious international music contests. The saxophone was invented by a Belgian, Adolphe Sax, who was born in Dinant in 1814.

### 15 WORK

Due to Wallonia's coal reserves and access to river transportation, the region underwent industrialization early. With its steel, glass, and textiles industries, it became one of Europe's leading manufacturing centers in the 19th century. However, since World War II, its coal mines have closed and its traditional heavy industries have fallen into decline. At the same time, Flanders, historically a less developed agricultural area, has caught up economically, with booming international trade through the port city of Antwerp, new industries supported by foreign aid and private investment, and a burgeoning service sector. During the 1960s, Wallonia received 50% less government aid than Flanders, with its larger work force. The Walloons were also hit harder by Belgium's high unemployment of the late 1980s and early 1990s than their neighbor to the north, where more new jobs were available. In the 21st century, Wallonia's economic future lies in high technology, the region

encourages the development of a diversified fabric of small and medium-sized enterprises.

### 16 SPORTS

Walloons share in Belgium's national passion for soccer ("football"). Thousands of fiercely partisan fans turn out for games, and many also play the sport on local or regional teams. Another favorite national pastime that the Walloons share is bicycling, either as a relaxed form of recreation or in organized races. Pigeon racing, practiced throughout Belgium, is especially popular in Wallonia.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

The Walloons enjoy typical leisure-time activities such as watching television and reading. Like many Belgians, they are avid gardeners, and maintain well-tended gardens. Other typical hobbies include playing cards, stamp collecting and model trains. Popular cultural pastimes include concerts and the theater. Residents of Wallonia's towns and villages enjoy gathering with friends after hours in neighborhood cafés and discussing work, politics, sports, and other topics. The Walloons also share the general Belgian love of festivals, and their calendars are filled with celebrations of all kinds, both religious and secular.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

The talents of traditional artists can be seen in the elaborate costumes and giant figures used in festivals and processions, and also in the popular puppet and marionette theaters that have enjoyed a revival in recent years.

### 19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Wallonia was hit particularly hard by Belgium's high rate of unemployment in the 1990s, and some of its inhabitants find themselves forced to commute to jobs in Brussels or Flanders. The most lingering controversy for Walloons, as for all Belgians, has been the country's cultural, linguistic, and political division between its French- and Flemish-speaking populations. In spite of a 1993 constitution granting autonomy to both Flanders and Wallonia, separatist elements are still active on both sides. The divisiveness between the two cultural groups even threatened to divide the country in 2007 and 2008.

### 20 GENDER ISSUES

Women make up 51.3% of Wallonia's population. As of 2008 women had a lower employment rate (48.3%) than men (63.5%), but this figure was growing, whereas the male employment rate is tending to decrease slightly. Women won the right to vote in Belgium in 1919, and restrictions on the suffrage were dropped in 1948. Abortion was only legalized in Belgium in 1990. As of 2000, women made up 24% of the lower house of parliament, and 28.8% of the upper house. Approximately 55.7% of Belgian women hold a secondary degree, 53.1% hold a bachelor's degree, and 7.6% are in senior management. The government made a concerted effort in the 1990s to involve women in politics.

Belgium decriminalized homosexuality in 1843 and legalized same-sex marriages in 2003—it was only the second country to do so worldwide. Gay and lesbian couples have the



same rights as heterosexual ones, including inheritance and adoption.

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—revised by J. Hobby

# WELSH

**LOCATION:** United Kingdom (Wales)

**POPULATION:** 2.97 million (2006)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Welsh

**RELIGION:** Methodist; Anglican; Presbyterian; Roman Catholic; small numbers of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs

## <sup>1</sup> INTRODUCTION

Occupying the western portion of the island of Great Britain, Wales is one of the four countries of the United Kingdom (the others are England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland). Its people, of Celtic origin, form a distinctive group with their own language and cultural heritage. After a Roman occupation that lasted from about AD 100 to 400, Wales was divided into tribal kingdoms which were gradually converted to the Christian religion. The southern part of Wales was colonized by Normans during the 11th century, and the last independent principality—that of Gwynedd, which had united most of North and Central Wales—was conquered by Edward I of England in 1284. Edward’s oldest son was given the title Prince of Wales, and that title has been held by the oldest son of England’s reigning monarch ever since. The rebellion of Owain Glyn Dwr in the 14th century briefly created a Welsh state with both a parliament in Machynlleth and recognition from the Pope, but Glyn Dwr was vanquished after a ten-year struggle. In 1536, during the reign of Henry VII of England, whose House of Tudor had Welsh ancestry and Welsh support (at least initially), Wales was officially joined with England by the Act of Union.

With the development of coal and iron mining in the 18th and 19th centuries, South Wales became heavily industrialized and many people emigrated there from the north. During the same period, the Wesleyan religious revival drew many away from the established Anglican Church, contributing to the Welsh sense of ethnic identity. In the 20th century, Wales lost much of its population—some 20% in the 1920s alone—through emigration to England and other countries, fueled by the search for better job opportunities. (During the depression of the 1930s, unemployment in some areas reached nearly 40%.) In recent decades there has been a resurgence of Welsh nationalism. The nationalist party Plaid Cymru, founded in the 1920s, had its first member elected to Parliament in 1966. That period also saw the founding of the Welsh Language Society, which has advocated the increased use and official recognition of the Welsh language and organized support for other nationalist issues.

Plans for devolution in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have long been debated in the UK, and in 1997 a referendum was held in Wales approving the introduction of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) by a very slim margin (50.3% to 49.7%). However, support for devolution has strengthened since 1997: in 2003 more than 65% of Welsh voters supported devolution. Among those supporters there has emerged a marked preference for a more powerful form of devolution—a Parliament as in Scotland, with legislative and taxation powers—rather than the type of Assembly introduced in Wales, which has only limited legislative powers. Most Welsh think their Assembly has made no great difference on matters



such as health, education, and the economy. Many Welsh believe that the UK government still has too much influence on the way Wales is run, while the NAW has too little influence and should have more.

In the 21st century Wales has shown a growth in population due in large measure to inward migration from England. Birth rates have increased in recent years, and in 2005/06 Wales experienced more births than deaths for the first time in around a decade. Population projections for Wales show a growing population, but also an increase in the number of dependents per person of working age.

## 2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND

Altogether, Wales covers an area of 20,766 sq km (8,018 sq mi), making it slightly smaller than the state of Massachusetts. It has farmland, mountains, valleys, and rivers of such scenic beauty that one-fifth of the country is classified as national parkland, yet it also has coal mining regions in which the air itself seems gray and drab.

Wales is divided into six main regions, each further divided into counties or shires. Gwynedd and Clwyd are located in the north, Powys and Dyfed in the center, and Glamorgan and Gwent in the south. The country's vegetation is mostly grasslands and forests. The rugged Cambrian mountains dominate the northern two-thirds of the country, while the terrain in the central and southern parts of the country forms plateaus and valleys. Mount Snowdon, in the northwest, is the country's highest point, at 1,085 m (3,560 ft). Of Wales's 2.97 million

people, 80% live in cities and 20% in the country. The most populous area is the south, an industrial region containing the cities of Swansea, Cardiff, and Newport.

## 3 LANGUAGE

Both English and Welsh are the official languages of Wales, although the use of Welsh has declined gradually over the past two centuries, while almost all Welsh people speak English. About 50% of the population spoke Welsh at the turn of the 20th century, compared with about 21% in 2001. Welsh is a Celtic language, closest to the Breton language that is spoken in a part of France. Since the 1960s there has been a movement to increase the use and recognition of Welsh, initially spearheaded by the Welsh Language Society. Welsh was recognized as an official language in 1966, and its use expanded in government forms and publications. Today the language is taught in the schools, and there are Welsh radio and television broadcasting facilities.

Welsh is known for its long words, double consonants, and scarce vowels, which often appear in unusual combinations that English speakers find quite difficult to pronounce. The Welsh language contains what is probably the longest place name in the world:

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch,

a town name that means "Church of St. Mary in the Hollow by the White Aspen near the Rapid Whirlpool and Church of St. Tysilio by the Red Cave." (It is usually referred to as Llanfair P.G.) In 1992 the government introduced a Welsh Language Bill, which is designed to guarantee equal status for the Welsh and English languages in Wales.

### SAMPLE WORDS

llan	church
fach	small
fawr	big
blaen	head
craig	rock
cwm	valley
llyn	lake
mynydd	mountain
bach	little (one)

## 4 FOLKLORE

Welsh culture is steeped in myths and legends—even the country's national symbol, the dragon, is a mythical beast. Almost every mountain, river, and lake, as well as many farms and villages, are associated with some legend of *tylwyth teg* (fairies), magical properties or fearful beasts. The Welsh claim the legendary British hero King Arthur—who is said to be buried on the Isle of Afallon—as well as the magician Merlin and other characters who people the *Mabinogion*, the famous collection of medieval Welsh tales from which English authors from Sir Thomas Malory to Lord Tennyson took the material for their versions of the Arthurian legend. Another popular subject of Welsh legend is the prince Madog ab Owain (said to have discovered America in the 12th century). In the 16th and 18th centuries, the English actually used this legend as the basis for claims to territory in the New World.

## 5 RELIGION

The Methodism of evangelist John Wesley had a strong influence on the Welsh beginning in the 18th century, and many Welsh Christians today are Methodists (also called Nonconformists). In Wales, the Church of Wales is the leading church with about 80,900 members, followed by the Presbyterian/Reformed Churches (44,300), the Roman Catholic Church (39,500) and a few other trinitarian churches (85,600). The Welsh generally observe religious practices quite strictly, and few people work on Sundays. Wales also has small numbers of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other religious minorities, concentrated mainly in the large cities of South Wales, such as Cardiff and Swansea.

## 6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Legal holidays in Wales include New Year's Day, St. David's Day (March 1), Good Friday, Easter Monday, a Spring Bank holiday (the last Monday in May or the first Monday in June), a Summer Bank Holiday (the last Monday in August or the first Monday in September), Christmas, and Boxing Day (December 26). St. David's Day, commemorating Wales's patron saint, is celebrated as a national holiday. Daffodils are sold everywhere, to be worn on the lapel or brought home to adorn houses throughout the country. Every January, the Festival of St Dwyhwn, the Welsh patron saint of lovers, takes place, but it is gradually being replaced by St Valentine's Day.

## 7 RITES OF PASSAGE

The Welsh live in a modern, industrialized, Christian country. Hence, many of the rites of passage that young people undergo are religious rituals, such as baptism, first Communion, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, a student's progress through the education system is marked by many families with graduation parties.

## 8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Welsh are known for their warmth and hospitality. People are friendly with their neighbors and acquaintances always stop to chat, however briefly, when they encounter each other. Invitations to tea are readily extended and accepted.

## 9 LIVING CONDITIONS

Rural dwellers have traditionally lived in whitewashed stone cottages and farmhouses. In the past, many cottages consisted of only one or two rooms and a sleeping loft accessible by a ladder from the kitchen or an outside stairway. Another type of traditional dwelling was the longhouse, a single-story structure that housed the family at one end and livestock at the other. Today, many picturesque old cottages have been turned into vacation homes. Housing in the coalmining areas generally consists of row houses with slate roofs and stone walls and outside bathrooms, mostly built in the 19th century. Much of the older housing lacks amenities that people in the United States take for granted, such as central heating. As recently as the 1970s, it was common for people living in older housing to use coal-fired stoves for heat, with fireplaces or electric heaters used to heat rooms other than the kitchen. Many families renovate their older houses, adding rooms, porches, and modern conveniences. Semidetached houses shared by two families (similar to duplexes in the United States) are common.

Britain's comprehensive National Health Service has provided Wales with free, modern health care by physicians, surgeons, clinics, and hospitals since 1948. While there are roads linking southern Wales with London, Bristol, the West Midlands, and northwestern regions of England, many small villages in Wales itself lack an integrated transportation network, and unpaved roads are found in rural coal mining villages and agricultural areas, especially in remote mountain regions. The railroads generally run east-west, and some of the old-fashioned narrow gauge variety can still be found in more rural areas. Most major international airlines do not provide direct intercontinental service to Wales. However, Cardiff Wales Airport has regular flights to most major European cities and holiday destinations.

## 10 FAMILY LIFE

Family and kinship are extremely important in Wales. The Welsh dote on their children, and special occasions are spent with members of one's extended family. While the English tend to identify themselves by social class, Welsh loyalty is first and foremost to the family. When Welsh people meet, they often ask each other questions to find out if they have relatives in common. The Welsh traditionally married late and sustained lengthy courtships. In farming communities, adult sons generally remain at home working on their parents' farms until they marry, and a younger son usually inherits the farm.

Most families today have between one and three children. Welsh families spend a lot of time at home. Life in rural areas tends to be very insular, and a 32-km (20-mi) trip to a neighboring village is considered a major undertaking. On Sunday, many attend church, which is followed by Sunday dinner, the most important meal of the week. After dinner, men often meet their friends at a pub. In working class families, few women have traditionally been employed outside the home.

## 11 CLOTHING

For ordinary casual and formal occasions, the Welsh wear typical Western style clothing. However, at festivals one can still see women wearing their traditional national costumes, consisting of checked aprons worn over long dresses, white collars similar to those of the Puritans, and tall black hats (something like witches' hats but less pointy and with a wider brim) worn over white kerchiefs. On such occasions, men may wear striped vests over white shirts and knee-length breeches with high white socks.

## 12 FOOD

Traditional Welsh cuisine is unpretentious, down-to-earth farmhouse cooking using plain, everyday ingredients, such as Wales's national vegetable, the leek. Leeks are used in soups, stews, and in a popular dish known as Anglesey Eggs that also contains eggs, cheese, and potatoes. The well-known Welsh Rarebit is actually a genuine Welsh dish (although it has nothing to do with rabbit, as some mistakenly think). It consists of toast coated with a mixture of milk, eggs, cheese, and Worcestershire sauce—the original toasted cheese sandwich. Soups and stews are popular dishes, and the Welsh are known for the excellent quality of their lamb, fish, and seafood. One dish that some visitors prefer to avoid is *laverbread*, a type of seaweed, sold washed and boiled and traditionally prepared with oatmeal and bacon. The Welsh bake a variety of hearty desserts

including *bara brith*, a popular bread made with raisins and currants that have been soaked in tea overnight, and Welsh gingerbread (made without ginger!). The most important meal of the week is traditionally Sunday dinner, which may include a chicken or a rolled cut of meat called a joint of beef.

### 13 EDUCATION

Welsh education follows the same pattern as that in England, with schooling compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16. Students take an exam at age 11, after which they attend either middle schools that prepare them for admission to college, comprehensive schools that provide a general education, or technical schools, which offer vocational training. Accredited institutions of higher learning include Cardiff University; Aberystwyth University; Bangor University; Swansea University; University of Wales, Newport; North East Wales Institute of Higher Education; University of Wales Institute, Cardiff; University of Wales, Lampeter; Swansea Institute of Higher Education; Trinity College, Carmarthen; the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama; and the University of Glamorgan.

### 14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Welsh-language literature is among the oldest continuous literary traditions in Europe, with some of its earliest masterpieces (such as “Y Gododdin” by Aneirin, and the anonymous “Canu Llywarch Her”) dating from the sixth century AD. The patronage of medieval princes and later noblemen fostered the development of a unique and complex form of strict meter poetry, known as *cynghanedd*. The acknowledged master of Welsh poetry in the 16th century was Dafydd ap Gwylim, who left a great body of work. Welsh poets have gained recognition in the English-speaking world since the days of George Herbert, Thomas Vaughan, and Henry Vaughan in the 17th century. In the 20th century, W. H. Davies was known for his *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, Wilfred Owen for his poetry about the horrors of World War I, and R. S. Thomas for his uncompromising reflections upon Wales and the Welsh. Wales’s most illustrious modern poet was Dylan Thomas, author of the beloved “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” the radio play “Under Milk Wood,” and many well-known poems.

The Welsh are often regarded by their neighbors in Britain and Ireland to be a very musical people, and there is a great deal of justification for this. The Welsh choral tradition includes celebrated male choirs, soloists such as Margaret Price, Geraint Evans, and Bryn Terfel, as well as pop vocalists like Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey, and Bonnie Tyler. Rock bands like the Alarm, the Manic Street Preachers, the Lostprophets, Funeral For A Friend, and Bullet For My Valentine also hail from Wales. Important cultural institutions include the Welsh Arts Council, the Welsh National Opera Company, and the National Museum of Wales. Several well-known actors are Welsh, probably the best-known being the late Richard Burton, and Sir Anthony Hopkins, who both were born in the South Welsh harbor town of Port Talbot.

### 15 WORK

In the century between the mid-1800s and the mid-1900s, coal mining and iron and steel production flourished in Wales. However, workers endured deprivation and harsh working conditions, and much of the wealth went to industrialists based outside the country. Other major Welsh industries included

textiles and slate quarrying. The Great Depression of the 1930s left a fifth of the population unemployed by 1932, resulting in mass emigration to England. After a temporary recovery during World War II, the traditional Welsh industries declined and were replaced by light industry, plastics, chemicals, and electronics. Many people are employed in service industries including construction and power production. Tourism is also a large service industry. Dairy, cattle, and sheep farming still thrive, and the Welsh still fish in their traditional craft—called *coracles*—constructed from willow and hazel branches covered with hide. Workers in Wales’s industries have a high level of unionization. Programs coordinated by the Welsh Development Agency in the late 1980s and the 1990s succeeded in attracting high levels of foreign investment in Wales. In proportion to its population, Wales gained the highest concentration of Japanese companies in Europe. The ageing of the population has affected the work force and the economy: from 1971–2006, Wales experienced a 30% increase in the number of people of retirement age. The number of people of pensionable age was expected to increase another 30% between 2006 and 2031. In 2031 (as in 2006) the UK country with the projected largest proportion of the population of pensionable age is Wales (24%).

### 16 SPORTS

Rugby is the most popular Welsh sport. Created at the exclusive English school whose name it bears, it was introduced to Wales about a century ago and quickly picked up by the working class as a national pastime. International matches, especially those against England, generate great national spirit and are accorded the same status as the World Series or the Super Bowl in the United States. Soccer (called football) and cricket are also widely played, and dog racing and pony racing are popular as well.

### 17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

In their spare time, Welsh people enjoy movies and television. Wales has its own branch of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), as well as other networks that produce high-quality programming. Many people participate in some type of music-making (choral singing is especially popular). Men commonly spend many of their leisure hours socializing in neighborhood pubs. Women’s circles with weekly meetings are widespread in rural Wales, as are young farmers’ clubs, and in Welsh-speaking areas the youth organization “*Urdd gobaith Cymru*” (“The Order of Hope of Wales”) organizes summer camps, recreational outings, musical and dramatic productions for the under-25s, and as a message of peace to world youth. Popular outdoor activities include hunting, fishing, mountain climbing, pony trekking, golf, swimming, rock climbing, and hang gliding.

On their one-to two-week annual vacation, Welsh families enjoy traveling to seaside resort towns in various parts of the United Kingdom; Cornwall is a particularly popular destination. Travel to seaside resorts and other areas of continental Europe have also become increasingly popular in recent times, with favorite destinations being Brittany, Spain, and Greece.

### 18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Such traditional crafts as blacksmithing, tanning, clog making, and copper-working had virtually disappeared by the



*Welsh girls show their support during the U18 Six Nations Festival game between England and Wales at Sixways Stadium, Worcester, England. (John Gichigi/Getty Images)*

1950s. Woodwork, metalwork and pottery remain strong, however, especially with the revived use of ancient Celtic design by many craftsmen. The old Welsh tradition of making love-spoons—intricately-carved wooden spoons bearing symbols of what a man desired of the relationship with the woman to whom he gave the spoon as a gift—also survives, although in a much-commercialized form.

The Welsh have a great tradition of choral singing that began with 18th-century Methodist hymns which entire congregations learned by heart. The Welsh musical and poetic traditions are preserved through a series of competitive folk festivals throughout the nation that culminate in the Royal National *Eisteddfod*, an annual contest for poets and musicians attended by tens of thousands of people every August. At the end of the nine-day event, awards are presented for free and metered verse in a ceremony based on ancient Druid traditions. The festival also includes folk dancing and all types of music, from brass bands to Welsh rock groups. Competitions also take place in the fields of literature, drama, theater, and the visual arts. Many see the *Eisteddfod*—whose events are conducted in Welsh with instantaneous English translation—as a major force for the preservation of Welsh cultural identity. The traditions of the *Eisteddfod* are also shaping the way Wales presents itself to the world. The International *Eisteddfod* at Llangollen—a five-day festival held each July—in-

vites competitors from all over the world to vie for prizes in traditional singing and dancing. Each year, the event attracts a huge diversity of participants, with vastly different styles such as dance troupes from India, throat singers from Tannu Tura, female choirs from Japan, instrumental soloists from Eastern Europe, and so on. Another aspect of this tradition is found in the Cardiff Singer of the Year, a competition that attracts some of the brightest young talent in the opera world, and whose prestige has launched a number of highly successful careers.

## **19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Unemployment, especially in rural areas, accentuates concern about Wales's marginal position within the British economy. Until recently, Wales, like Scotland, had had a high level of emigration by people seeking better employment opportunities abroad. However, that trend is turning around. Some Welsh are concerned that an overemphasis on tourism promotes middleclass English interests while failing to improve the lot of the Welsh people themselves. While the movement to promote the preservation and everyday use of the Welsh language has been largely successful in gaining legal and public recognition of bilingualism and the equal status of the language in Wales, traditionalists are currently worried about the survival of rural communities in which the language thrives, and of the traditional values of the communities. Concern focuses espe-

cially upon the migration of English-speaking people from Welsh cities into the countryside, a tide which rose during the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, the influence exerted by the London-based mass media, whose broadcasts and circulations penetrate into rural Wales, has given reason to believe that the surreptitious adulteration of Welsh life by English influences is carried on by many means other than promoting English over Welsh. Conflicts of interest between monolingual English-speakers and bilingual Welsh-speakers are becoming important issues in many areas.

## 20 GENDER ISSUES

In 2006 females represented 51.3% of the population of Wales and males 48.7%. The fertility rate dropped from 2.40 births per woman in 1971 to 1.86 in 2006. In 1971, 93% of all births took place within marriage, while the figure in 2006 was 47%.

Gwenllian Morgan became Wales's first female mayor in 1910, in Brecon. Until 1918, only British males over the age of 21 were allowed to vote in elections, or to stand for election to Parliament. The leading Welsh suffragette was Margaret Haig Mackworth (née Thomas). She later became Lady Rhondda and was a successful business woman and journalist. Great Britain's Women's Freedom League was established in Swansea in 1909, and was formed as a non-violent campaigning body for women's votes. There was a large following for women's suffrage within Wales. The Cardiff branch of the National Women's Union of Suffrage Societies was the largest outside London. After years of campaigning and protesting, women over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote in 1918. In 1928 the voting age was brought into line with that for men—21.

In the 1960s and 1970s women's liberation groups in Wales campaigned for equal rights with men. Pressure from the women's movement saw the introduction of two new laws; the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Welsh feminist writer Elaine Morgan's book, *The Descent Of Woman*, caused outrage when it was first published in 1972. Morgan questioned what she saw as the sexist angle of the theory of evolution. In the latter half of the 20th century, jobs traditionally seen as men's work (such as mining) were disappearing, while many jobs for women (especially in service industries) were being created. Nevertheless, even at the start of the 21st century full-time working women in Wales still earned on average 12% less per hour than their male counterparts.

Although homosexuality is increasingly being tolerated in Western societies, including the UK, many modern Welsh do not accept it. In 2008 a television documentary called *The Only Gay in the Village* looked at changing attitudes to homosexuality in Wales. It featured singer Ian "H" Watkins returning to his home area of Cwmparc to speak about his life growing up gay in the Welsh valleys, which he called "a complete nightmare." Nevertheless, there is a thriving gay community in Cardiff and other Welsh urban areas.

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—revised by J. Hobby

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# GLOSSARY

- a capella:** singing without musical accompaniment.
- aboriginal:** the first inhabitants of a country. A species of animals or plants which originated within a given area.
- acupuncture:** ancient practice of treating disease or relieving pain by inserting needles into pressure points on the body. The Chinese are associated with this medical treatment.
- adobe:** a clay from which bricks are made for use in making houses.
- adult literacy:** the capacity of adults to read and write.
- agglutinative tongue:** a language in which the suffixes and prefixes to words retain a certain independence of one another and of the stem to which they are added. Turkish is an example of an agglutinative tongue.
- agrarian economy:** an economy where agriculture is the dominant form of economic activity.
- active volcano:** a large rock mass formed by the expulsion of molten rock, or lava, which periodically erupts.
- acute accent:** a mark (´) used to denote accentual stress of a single sound.
- agglutinative tongue:** a language in which the suffixes and prefixes to words retain a certain independence of one another and of the stem to which they are added. Turkish is an example of an agglutinative tongue.
- agrarian economy:** an economy where agriculture is the dominant form of economic activity.
- agrarian society:** a society where agriculture dominates the day-to-day activities of the population.
- All Saints' Day:** a Christian holiday on 1 November (a public holiday in many countries). Saints and martyrs who have no special festival are commemorated. In the Middle Ages, it was known as All Hallows' Day; the evening of the previous day, October 31, was called All Hallow Even, from which the secular holiday Halloween is derived.
- All Souls' Day:** a Christian holiday. This day, 2 November, is dedicated to prayer for the repose of the souls of the dead.
- allies:** groups or persons who are united in a common purpose. Typically used to describe nations that have joined together to fight a common enemy in war.
- Altaic language family:** a family of languages spoken by people in portions of northern and eastern Europe, and nearly the whole of northern and central Asia, together with some other regions, and divided into five branches, the Ugrian or Finno-Hungarian, Samoyed, Turkish, Mongolian, and Tungus.
- altiplano:** refers to the high plains of South American mountain ranges on the Pacific coast.
- Amerindian:** a contraction of the two words, American Indian. It describes native peoples of North, South, or Central America.
- Amerindian language group:** the language groups of the American Indians.
- Amish:** Anabaptist Protestants originally from Germany. Settled in Pennsylvania and the American Midwest.
- Anabaptist:** Christian sect that was founded in Switzerland during the 16th century. Rejected infant baptism as invalid.
- ancestor worship:** the worship of one's ancestors.
- Anglican:** pertaining to or connected with the Church of England.
- animism:** the belief that natural objects and phenomena have souls or innate spiritual powers.
- anthropologist:** one who studies the characteristics, customs, and development of mankind.
- anti-miscegenation laws:** prohibition of marriage or sexual relations between men and women of different races.
- anti-Semitism:** agitation, persecution, or discrimination (physical, emotional, economic, political, or otherwise) directed against the Jews.
- apartheid:** the past governmental policy in the Republic of South Africa of separating the races in society.
- appliqué:** a trimming made from one cloth and sewn onto another cloth.
- aquaculture:** the culture or "farming" of aquatic plants or animals.
- arable land:** land which can be cultivated by plowing, as distinguished from grassland, woodland, common pasture, and wasteland.
- archipelago:** any body of water having many islands, or the islands themselves collectively.
- arctic climate:** cold, frigid weather similar to that experienced at or near the North Pole.
- arid:** dry; without moisture; parched with heat.
- aristocracy:** a small minority that controls the government of a nation, typically on the basis of inherited wealth. Political power is restricted to its members. Also may be referred to any privileged elite of a country.
- artifacts:** objects or tools that date back to an ancient period of human history.
- Ash Wednesday:** a Christian holiday. The first day of Lent, observed 46 days before Easter, is so called from the practice of placing ashes on the forehead of the worshipper as a sign of penitence. In the Roman Catholic Church, these ashes are obtained from burning palm branches used in the previous year's Palm Sunday observation. (Palm Sunday commemorates the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem a week before Easter Sunday, and it begins Holy Week.) On Ash Wednesday, the ashes are placed on the forehead of the communicant during Mass. The recipient is told, "Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return" or "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel."
- Ashura:** a Muslim holiday. This fast day was instituted by Muhammad as the equivalent of the Jewish Yom Kippur but later became voluntary when Ramadan replaced it as a holiday of penance. It also commemorates Noah's leaving the ark on Mt. Ararat after the waters of the Great Flood had subsided. In Iran, the martyrdom of Husayn, grandson of Muhammad, is commemorated with passion plays on this day.
- assembly:** in government, a body of legislators that meets together regularly.
- Assumption:** a Christian holiday. This holiday, observed on 15 August in many countries, celebrates the Roman Catholic

and Eastern Orthodox dogma that, following Mary's death, her body was taken into heaven and reunited with her soul.

**atheist:** a person who denies the existence of God, or of a supreme intelligent being.

**atherosclerosis:** a disease of the arteries. Characterized by blockages that prevent blood flow from the heart to the brain and other parts of the body.

**atoll:** a coral island, consisting of a strip or ring of coral surrounding a central lagoon. Such islands are common in the Pacific Ocean and are often very picturesque.

**aurora borealis:** the northern lights, consisting of bands of light across the night sky seen in northern geographical locations.

**Australoid:** pertains to the type of aborigines of Australia.

**Austronesian language:** a family of languages which includes Indonesian, Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian sub-families.

## B

**Babushka:** a head scarf worn by women.

**Baltic States:** the three formerly communist countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania that border on the Baltic Sea.

**Bantu language group:** a name applied to the south African family of tongues. The most marked peculiarity of these languages is their prevailing use of prefixes instead of suffixes in derivation and inflection. Some employ clicks and clucks as alphabetic elements.

**baptism:** any ceremonial bathing intended as a sign of purification, dedication, etc. Baptisms are performed by immersion of the person in water, or by sprinkling the water on the person.

**Baptist:** a member of a Protestant denomination which practices adult baptism by immersion.

**barren land:** unproductive land, partly or entirely treeless.

**barter:** Trade in which merchandise is exchanged directly for other merchandise or services without use of money.

**bilingual:** able to speak two languages. Also used to describe anything that contains or is expressed in two languages, such as directions written in both English and Spanish.

**boat people:** a term used to describe individuals (refugees) who attempt to flee their country by boat.

**Bolshevik Revolution:** pertaining to the Russian revolution of 1917. Russian communists overthrew Tsar Nicholas II and ended the feudal Russian empire.

**borscht:** cold beet soup, topped with sour cream.

**Brahman:** a member of the sacred caste among the Hindus. There are many subdivisions of the caste, often remaining in isolation from one another.

**bratwurst:** seasoned fresh German sausage. Made from pork or veal.

**bride price:** the price paid to the family of the bride by the young man who seeks to marry her.

**bride wealth:** the money or property or livestock a bride brings to her marriage. *See dowry.*

**Buddhism:** the religious system common in India and eastern Asia. Founded by and based upon the teachings of Gautama Buddha, Buddhism asserts that suffering is an inescapable part of life. Deliverance can only be achieved through the practice of charity, temperance, justice, honesty, and truth.

**bureaucracy:** a system of government which is characterized by division into bureaus of administration with their own

divisional heads. Also refers to the institutional inflexibility and red tape of such a system.

**bush country:** a large area of land which is wild with low, bushlike vegetation.

**Byzantine Empire:** an empire centered in the city of Byzantium, now Istanbul in present-day Turkey.

## C

**Cajun:** name given to Canadians who emigrated to Louisiana from Acadia, the old name for Nova Scotia. Contraction of the name Accadian.

**Calvinist:** a follower of the theological system of John Calvin.

**Candlemas:** a Christian holiday. A national holiday on 2 February in Liechtenstein, this observation is now called the Presentation of the Lord, commemorating the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem. Before a 1969 Vatican reform, it commemorated the Purification of Mary 40 days after giving birth to a male child in accordance with a Jewish practice of the time.

**capital punishment:** the ultimate act of punishment for a crime; the death penalty.

**capitalism:** an economic system in which goods and services and the means to produce and sell them are privately owned, and prices and wages are determined by market forces.

**cash crop:** a crop that is grown to be sold, rather than kept for private use.

**caste system:** one of the artificial divisions or social classes into which the Hindus are rigidly separated according to the religious law of Brahmanism. The privileges and disabilities of a caste are passed on to each succeeding generation.

**Caucasian:** the "white" race of human beings, as determined by genealogy and physical features.

**Caucasoid:** belonging to the racial group characterized by light skin pigmentation. Commonly called the "white race," although it can refer to peoples of darker skin color.

**celibate:** a person who voluntarily abstains from marriage. In some religious practices, the person will often take a vow of abstention from sexual intercourse as well.

**ensorship:** the practice of withholding certain items of news that may cast a country in an unfavorable light or give away secrets to the enemy.

**census:** an official counting of the inhabitants of a state or country with details of sex and age, family, occupation, possessions, etc.

**Central Powers:** in World War I, Germany and Austria-Hungary, and their allies, Turkey and Bulgaria.

**centrally planned economy:** an economic system in which all aspects are supervised and regulated by the government.

**cerebrovascular:** pertains to the brain and the blood vessels leading to and from the brain.

**chancellery:** the office of an embassy or consulate.

**chaperone:** an older married person, usually female, who supervises the activities of young, unmarried couples.

**chattel:** refers to the movable personal property of an individual or group. It cannot refer to real estate or buildings.

**cholera:** an acute infectious disease characterized by severe diarrhea, vomiting, and often, death.

**Christianity:** the religion founded by Jesus Christ.

**Christmas:** a Christian holiday. The annual commemoration of the nativity of Jesus is held on 25 December. A midnight Mass ushers in this joyous celebration in many Roman



- Catholic churches. The custom of distributing gifts to children on Christmas Eve derives from a Dutch custom originally observed on the evening before St. Nicholas' Day (6 December). The day after Christmas—often called Boxing Day, for the boxed gifts customarily given—is a public holiday in many countries.
- Church of England:** the national and established church in England. The Church of England claims continuity with the branch of the Catholic Church which existed in England before the Reformation. Under Henry VIII, the spiritual supremacy and jurisdiction of the Pope were abolished, and the sovereign was declared head of the church.
- chaplet:** a wreath or garland of flowers placed on a woman's head.
- cistern:** a natural or artificial receptacle or reservoir for holding water or other fluids.
- city-state:** an independent state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory.
- civil law:** the law developed by a nation or state for the conduct of daily life of its own people.
- civil rights:** the privileges of all individuals to be treated as equals under the laws of their country; specifically, the rights given by certain amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- civil unrest:** the feeling of uneasiness due to an unstable political climate or actions taken as a result of it.
- civil war:** a war between groups of citizens of the same country who have different opinions or agendas. The Civil War of the United States was the conflict between the states of the North and South from 1861 to 1865.
- coca:** a shrub native to South America, the leaves of which produce alkaloids which are used in the production of cocaine.
- cohabitation:** living together as husband and wife without being legally married.
- cold war:** refers to conflict over ideological differences that is carried on by words and diplomatic actions, not by military action. The term is usually used to refer to the tension that existed between the United States and the USSR from the 1950s until the breakup of the USSR in 1991.
- collard greens:** a hearty, leafy green vegetable. Popular part of southern American and West Indian cuisine.
- collective farm:** a large farm formed from many small farms and supervised by the government; usually found in communist countries.
- collective farming:** the system of farming on a collective where all workers share in the income of the farm.
- colloquial:** belonging to the language of common or familiar conversation, or ordinary, everyday speech; often especially applied to common words and phrases which are not used in formal speech.
- colonial period:** in the United States, the period of time when the original thirteen colonies were being formed.
- colonist:** any member of a colony or one who helps settle a new colony.
- colony:** a group of people who settle in a new area far from their original country, but still under the jurisdiction of that country. Also refers to the newly settled area itself.
- commerce:** the trading of goods (buying and selling), especially on a large scale, between cities, states, and countries.
- commodity:** any items, such as goods or services, that are bought or sold, or agricultural products that are traded or marketed.
- common law:** a legal system based on custom and legal precedent. The basic system of law of the United States.
- common law spouse:** a husband or wife in a marriage that, although not legally formalized through a religious or state-sanctioned ceremony, is legally acknowledged based on the agreement of the two people to consider themselves married.
- communicable disease:** referring to infectious or contagious diseases.
- communion:** 1. The act of partaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist; the celebration of the Lord's Supper. 2. A body of Christians who have one common faith, but not necessarily ecclesiastical union; a religious denomination. 3. Union in religious worship, or in doctrine and discipline.
- communism:** a form of government whose system requires common ownership of property for the use of all citizens. All profits are to be equally distributed and prices on goods and services are usually set by the state. Also, communism refers directly to the official doctrine of the former USSR.
- compulsory education:** the mandatory requirement for children to attend school until they have reached a certain age or grade level.
- condolence:** expression of sympathy.
- Condoblé:** American name for the Yoruba pantheon of 401 gods and goddesses.
- Confucianism:** the ethical system taught by the Chinese philosopher Confucius. It was enlarged upon by his contemporary Mencius so that political systems would be tested with the same ethical standards. (See **Taoism**)
- constitution:** the written laws and basic rights of citizens of a country or members of an organized group.
- consumer goods:** items that are bought to satisfy personal needs or wants of individuals.
- Coptic Christians:** members of the Coptic Church of Egypt, formerly of Ethiopia.
- Corpus Christi:** a Christian holiday. This holiday in honor of the Eucharist is observed on the Thursday or Sunday after Trinity Sunday, which is the Sunday after Pentecost. In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Eucharist is a sacrament in which the consecrated bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ, a belief stemming from New Testament accounts of the Last Supper.
- corrugated steel:** galvanized metal with furrows that give added strength. This metal is often used as roofing materials on houses in tropical countries because of its strength.
- coup d'état:** a sudden, violent overthrow of a government or its leader.
- covert action:** secret, concealed activities carried out without public knowledge.
- cricket (sport):** a game played by two teams with a ball and bat, with two wickets being defended by a batsman.
- criminal law:** the branch of law that deals primarily with crimes and their punishments.
- crown colony:** a colony established by a commonwealth over which the monarch has some control, as in colonies established by the British Commonwealth.
- Crowning of Our Lady of Altigracia:** a Christian holiday in honor of Mary, this day is celebrated in the Dominican Republic on 15 August with a pilgrimage to her shrine. (Altigracia Day, 21 January, is also a holiday in the Dominican Republic.)

**Crusades:** military expeditions by European Christian armies in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries to win land controlled by the Muslims in the Middle East.

**cuisine:** a particular style of preparing food, especially when referring to the cooking of a particular country or ethnic group.

**cultivable land:** land that can be prepared for the production of crops.

**cursive script:** a style of writing in which the letters are joined together in a flowing manner.

**Cushitic language group:** a group of Hamitic languages which are spoken in Ethiopia and other areas of eastern Africa.

**cyclone:** any atmospheric movement, general or local, in which the wind blows spirally around and in towards a center. In the northern hemisphere, the cyclonic movement is usually counter-clockwise, and in the southern hemisphere, it is clockwise.

**Cyrillic alphabet:** an alphabet adopted by the Slavic people and invented by Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century as an alphabet that was easier for the copyist to write. The Russian alphabet is a slight modification of it.

## D

**Day of Our Lady of Mercy (Las Mercedes):** a Christian holiday in honor of Mary, this observance on 24 September is a holiday in the Dominican Republic.

**Day of Santa Rosa of Lima:** a Christian holiday. The feast day in honor of the first native-born saint of the New World, declared patron saint of South America by Pope Clement X in 1671, is 23 August, but in Peru, she is commemorated by a national holiday on 30 August.

**Day of St. Peter and St. Paul:** a Christian holiday. This observance, on 29 June, commemorates the martyrdom of the two apostles traditionally believed to have been executed in Rome on the same day (c. AD 67) during the persecution of Christians ordered by Emperor Nero.

**deforestation:** the removal of a forest ecosystem.

**deity:** a being with the attributes, nature, and essence of a god; a divinity.

**delta:** triangular-shaped deposits of soil formed at the mouths of large rivers.

**democracy:** a form of government in which the power lies in the hands of the people, who can govern directly, or indirectly by electing representatives.

**demography:** that department of anthropology which relates to vital and social statistics and their application to the comparative study of races and nations.

**desegregation:** the act of removing restrictions on people of a particular race that keep them separate from other groups, socially, economically, and, sometimes, physically.

**détente:** the official lessening of tension between countries in conflict.

**developed countries:** countries which have a high standard of living and a well-developed industrial base.

**diacritics:** as in diacritical marks, a dot, line, or other mark added or put adjacent to a letter or sign in order to give it a different sound or to indicate some particular accent, tone, stress, or emphasis. An example of diacritical marks would be those used in dictionaries to aid in pronunciation of words.

**dialect:** One of a number of related forms of speech regarded as descending from a common origin. The speech pattern of

a locality or social class as distinguished from the generally accepted literary language.

**dictatorship:** a form of government in which all the power is retained by an absolute leader or tyrant. There are no rights granted to the people to elect their own representatives.

**direct descendant:** the offspring in an unbroken line of ancestors.

**divine origin:** having originated directly, or by direct descendant, from a divine being.

**dogma:** a principle, maxim, or tenet held as being firmly established.

**domicile:** a place of residence of an individual or family; a place of habitual abode.

**dowry:** the sum of the property or money that a bride brings to her groom at their marriage.

**druid:** a member of a Celtic religion practiced in ancient Britain, Ireland, and France.

**Druze:** a member of a religious sect of Syria, living chiefly in the mountain regions of Lebanon.

**ducal:** Referring to a duke or a dukedom.

**dysentery:** painful inflammation of the large intestine.

## E

**Easter:** the chief Christian holiday is Easter, the annual celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like Passover, the Jewish feast from which it is derived, the date of observation is linked to the phases of the moon. Since the Christian calendar is a solar one rather than a lunar one, the date of Easter changes from year to year. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox; in the Gregorian calendar, it can occur as early as 22 March or as late as 25 April. The Easter date determines the date of many other Roman Catholic holidays, such as Ash Wednesday, Ascension, and Pentecost.

**Easter Monday:** a Christian holiday. The day after Easter is a public holiday in many countries.

**empire:** a group of territories ruled by one sovereign, or supreme ruler.

**Epiphany of Our Lord:** a Christian holiday. Traditionally observed on 6 January but now observable on the Sunday falling between 2 January and 7 January, this feast commemorates the adoration of the Magi, who journeyed to the place of Jesus' birth. In the Orthodox churches, however, it is the feast celebrating Jesus' baptism.

**episcopal:** belonging to or vested in bishops or prelates; characteristic of or pertaining to a bishop or bishops.

**equestrian culture:** a culture that depends on horses for its livelihood. Mastery of the horse is an essential part of the culture's identity.

**escarpment:** a steep cliff formed from a geological fault or erosion.

**ethnographic:** referring to the division of anthropology which studies primitive cultures.

**ethnolinguistic group:** a classification of related languages based on common ethnic origin.

**exodus:** the departure or migration of a large body of people or animals from one country or region to another.

**extinction:** dying out of a species of animals or a culture of people.

## F

- fauna:** referring to species of animals found in a specific region.
- Feast of Our Lady of Angels:** a Christian holiday. This feast, on 2 August, is celebrated as a national holiday in Costa Rica in honor of the Virgin Mary. Pilgrimage is made to the basilica in Cartago, which houses a black stone statue of the Virgin.
- fetishism:** the practice of worshipping a material object which one believes has mysterious powers residing in it or is the representation of a deity to which worship may be paid and from which supernatural aid is expected.
- feudal society:** In medieval times, an economic and social structure in which persons could hold land given to them by a lord (nobleman) in return for service to that lord.
- Finno-Ugric language group:** a subfamily of languages spoken in northeastern Europe, including Finnish, Hungarian (Ugric, Magyar), Estonian, Lapp, and others.
- flora:** referring to native plant life in a specific region.
- folk religion:** a religion with origins and traditions among the common people of a nation or region; relevant to their particular lifestyle.
- folk tale:** an oral story that is passed from generation to generation. Folktales are cultural records of the history and progress of different ethnic groups.
- free-market economy:** an economic system that relies on the market, as opposed to government planners, to set the prices for wages and products.
- fundamentalist:** a person who holds religious beliefs based on the complete acceptance of the words of the Bible or other holy scripture as the truth. For instance, a fundamentalist would believe the story of creation exactly as it is told in the Bible and would reject the idea of evolution.

## G

- gastroenteritis:** inflammation of the stomach and small intestines.
- geometric pattern:** a design of circles, triangles, or lines on cloth.
- geriatrics:** the study and treatment of diseases of old age.
- Germanic language group:** a large branch of the Indo-European family of languages including German itself, the Scandinavian languages, Dutch, Yiddish, Modern English, Modern Scottish, Afrikaans and others. The group also includes extinct languages such as Gothic, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old English, Middle English and the like.
- glottal stop:** a sound formed in speech by a brief but complete closure of the glottis, the opening between the vocal cords. It is a typical sound in certain British dialects.
- godparent:** a male or female adult who is asked by the parents of a newborn child to assume responsibility for the care and rearing of the child in the event of the death of the parents. Godparents sometimes contribute school tuition, gifts on birthdays and holidays, as well as take an active part in the child's life.
- Good Friday:** a Christian holiday. The day after Holy Thursday, it is devoted to remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus and is given to penance and prayer.
- Greek Catholic:** a person who is a member of an Orthodox Eastern Church.
- Greek Orthodox:** the official church of Greece, a self-governing branch of the Orthodox Eastern Church.

## H

- haiku:** a form of Japanese poetry, consisting of three lines. Each line has a specific measurement of syllables.
- Hanukkah:** a Jewish holiday. The Festival of Lights, corresponding roughly to the winter solstice, is celebrated over an eight-day period beginning on 25 Kislev, the third month. Also known as the Feast of Dedication and Feast of the Maccabees, Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple at Jerusalem in 164 BC. According to tradition, the one ritually pure container of olive oil, sufficient to illuminate the Temple for one day, miraculously burned for eight days, until new oil could be prepared. A feature of the Hanukkah celebration is the lighting in each Jewish home of an eight-branched candelabrum, the menorah. This festival, though not a public holiday in Israel, is widely observed with the lighting of giant menorahs in public places.
- harem:** in a Muslim household, refers to the women (wives, concubines, and servants in ancient times) who live there and also to the area of the home they live in.
- harmattan:** an intensely dry, dusty wind felt along the coast of Africa between Cape Verde and Cape Lopez. It prevails at intervals during the months of December, January, and February.
- Hinduism:** the religion professed by a large part of the inhabitants of India. It is a development of the ancient Brahmanism, influenced by Buddhist and other elements. Its forms are varied and numerous.
- Holi:** a Hindu holiday. A festival lasting 3 to 10 days, Holi closes the old year with processions and merriment. It terminates on the full moon of Phalguna, the last month, corresponding to February or March.
- Holocaust:** the mass slaughter of European civilians, the vast majority Jews, by the Nazis during World War II.
- Holy (Maundy) Thursday:** a Christian holiday. The Thursday preceding Easter commemorates the Last Supper, the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, and the arrest and arraignment of Jesus. In Rome, the pope customarily performs a ceremony in remembrance of Jesus' washing of his apostles' feet (John 13:5–20).
- Holy Roman Empire:** a kingdom consisting of a loose union of German and Italian territories that existed from around the ninth century until 1806.
- Holy Saturday:** a Christian holiday. This day commemorates the time during which Jesus was buried and, like Good Friday, is given to solemn prayer.
- homeland:** a region or area set aside to be a state for a people of a particular national, cultural, or racial origin.
- homogeneous:** of the same kind or nature, often used in reference to a whole.
- homophonic:** music that has a single part with no harmonies.
- Horn of Africa:** the Horn of Africa comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan.
- human rights issues:** any matters involving people's basic rights which are in question or thought to be abused.
- humanist:** a person who centers on human needs and values, and stresses dignity of the individual.
- hydrology:** the science of dealing with the earth's waters and their distribution above and below ground.

## I

**Id al-Adha:** a Muslim holiday. The Great Festival, or Sacrificial Feast, celebrates the end of the special pilgrimage season, or Hajj, to Mecca and Medina, an obligation for Muslims once in their lifetime if physically and economically feasible. The slaughter of animals pays tribute to Abraham's obedience to God in offering his son to the Lord for sacrifice; a portion of the meat is supposed to be donated to the poor. The feast begins on 10 Dhu'l-Hijja and continues to 13 Dhu'l-Hijja (14 Dhu'l-Hijja in a leap year). In Malaysia and Singapore, this festival is celebrated as Hari Raya Haji; in Indonesia, Lebaran Haji; in Turkey, Kurban Bayrami.

**Id al-Fitr:** a Muslim holiday. The Little Festival, or Breaking-Fast-Festival, which begins just after Ramadan, on 1 Shawwal, the 10th month, is the occasion for three or four days of feasting. In Malaysia and Singapore, this festival is called Hari Raya Puasa; in Turkey, Seker Bayrami.

**Iemanja:** Brazilian name for Yoruba river goddess, Yemoja. Represented as a mermaid.

**Immaculate Conception:** a Christian holiday. This day, 8 December, celebrates the Roman Catholic dogma asserting that Mary's conception, as the future mother of God, was uniquely free from original sin. In Paraguay, it is observed as the Day of Our Lady of Caacupé.

**incursion:** a sudden or brief invasion or raid.

**indigenous:** born or originating in a particular place or country; native to a particular region or area.

**indigent:** person without any means of economic support.

**indigo:** a blue dye that is extracted from plants.

**Indo-Aryan language group:** the group that includes the languages of India; within a branch of the Indo-European language family.

**Indo-European language family:** the large family of languages that includes those of India, much of Europe, and southwestern Asia.

**indulgence:** a Catholic blessing given for a person's soul after death.

**infant mortality:** infant deaths.

**infant mortality rate:** the number of deaths of children less than one year old per 1,000 live births in a given year.

**infanticide:** the act of murdering a baby.

**infidel:** one who is without faith, or unbelieving; particularly, one who rejects the distinctive doctrines of a particular religion, while perhaps remaining an adherent to another religion.

**inflective:** refers to a language in which differences in tone and pitch give meaning to words and indicate grammatical constructions.

**interferon:** a drug used in the treatment of cancer in Mexico.

**Inuit:** an indigenous people of northwestern Canada. They are sometimes mistakenly called Eskimos.

**Islam:** the religious system of Mohammed, practiced by Muslims and based on a belief in Allah as the supreme being and Mohammed as his prophet. The term also refers to those nations in which it is the primary religion.

**isthmus:** a narrow strip of land with connecting large bodies of water on either side.

## J

**Jehovah's Witness:** a member of a Christian sect that believes that the end of the world is near and that God should establish a theocracy on earth.

**Judaism:** the religious system of the Jews, based on the Old Testament as revealed to Moses and characterized by a belief in one God and adherence to the laws of scripture and rabbinic traditions.

**Judeo-Christian:** the dominant traditional religious makeup of the United States and other countries based on the worship of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

**Juneteenth:** an African American holiday that celebrates the freeing of slaves in America. It is thought to coincide with the surrender of the Confederacy to the Union armies.

**Junkanoo:** a holiday celebrated around December in the Caribbean and South America. It also has been observed in the United States in Alabama. The holiday has West African origins. Also known as John Canoe and Yancanu.

## K

**kale:** Another hearty, green leafy vegetable that is sometimes mixed with spinach and collard greens to vary the flavor of these vegetables.

**khan:** a title given Genghis Khan and his successors who ruled over Turkey and Mongolia in the Middle Ages.

**kielbasa:** seasoned Polish sausage. Made from beef or pork.

## L

**lagoon:** a shallow body of water connected to a larger body of water. It is sometimes separated from the larger body by reefs.

**lama:** a celebrated priest or ecclesiastic belonging to that variety of Buddhism known as Lamaism. The Dalai-Lama and the tesho- or bogdo-lama are regarded as supreme pontiffs.

**land reforms:** steps taken to create a fair distribution of farm land, especially by governmental action.

**latke:** potato pancake.

**Leeward Islands:** northern islands of the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean that stretch from Puerto Rico southward.

**leprosy:** an infectious disease of the skin or nerves which can cause ulcers of the skin, loss of feeling, or loss of fingers and toes.

**life expectancy:** an individual's expected lifespan, calculated as an average.

**lingua franca:** Originally, a mixed language or jargon of Mediterranean ports, consisting of Italian mixed with Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and Spanish. Nowadays, the phrase is used to denote any hybrid tongue used similarly in other parts of the world; an international dialect.

**linguist:** a person skilled in the use of languages.

**linguistic group:** a group of related languages.

**literacy:** the ability to read and write.

**lox:** kosher smoked salmon.

**Lutheran:** of or pertaining to Martin Luther (1483–1546), the reformer, to the Evangelical Protestant Church of Germany which bears his name, or to the doctrines taught by Luther or held by the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

## M

**macron:** a horizontal mark placed over a vowel to indicate its pronunciation as long.

**maize:** another name (Spanish or British) for corn or the color of ripe corn.

- Malayo-Polynesian language group:** also referred to as the Austronesian language group, which includes the Indonesian, Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian subfamilies.
- mangrove:** a kind of evergreen shrub growing along tropical coasts.
- marimba:** a type of xylophone found in Central and South America.
- massif:** a central mountain-mass or the dominant part of a range of mountains. A part of a range which appears, from the position of the depression by which it is more or less isolated, to form an independent whole.
- matriarchy:** a society in which women are recognized as the leaders of the family or tribe.
- matrifocal:** a society in which women are the focus of activity or attention.
- matrilineal (descent):** descending from, or tracing descent through, the maternal line.
- Mayan language family:** the languages of the Central American Indians, further divided into two subgroups: the Maya and the Huastek.
- Mecca (Mekkah):** a city in Saudi Arabia; a destination of pilgrims in the Islamic world.
- Mennonite:** a member of the Christian denomination which originated in Friesland, Holland in the early part of the 16th century and upholds the doctrine of which Menno Simons (1492–1559) was the chief exponent.
- mestizo:** the offspring of a person of mixed blood; especially, a person of mixed Spanish and American Indian parentage.
- metamorphosis:** referring to the shamanic practice of changing from a person to an animal.
- Methodist:** a member of the Christian denomination founded by John Wesley (1703–1791). The name was first applied to Wesley and his companions on account of their methodical habits in study and in religious life.
- millennium:** any one-thousand-year period, but also refers to a real or imagined period of peace and happiness.
- missionary:** a person sent by ecclesiastical authority to work to spread his religious faith in a community where his church has no self-supporting organization.
- Mohammed (or Muhammed or Mahomet):** an Arabian prophet, known as the “Prophet of Allah” who founded the religion of Islam in 622, and wrote The Koran, the scripture of Islam. Also commonly spelled Muhammed, especially by Islamic people.
- Mongol:** one of an Asiatic race chiefly resident in Mongolia, a region north of China proper and south of Siberia.
- Mongoloid:** having physical characteristics like those of the typical Mongols (Chinese, Japanese, Turks, Eskimos, etc.).
- monogamy:** the practice of marrying one spouse.
- monolingual:** speaking one language only.
- monsoon:** a wind occurring in the alternation of the trade-winds in India and the north Indian Ocean. They occur between April and October when the regular northeast trade-winds are reversed and, with occasional interruptions, the wind blows at almost a steady gale from the southwest. In some areas, as in China, the change of the monsoons is followed with storms and much rain.
- Moors:** one of the Arab tribes that conquered Spain in the 8th century.
- Mormon:** an adherent of the religious body the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith.
- Moslem:** a follower of Mohammed (spelled Muhammed by many Islamic people), in the religion of Islam.
- mosque:** a Mohammedan place of worship and the ecclesiastical organization with which it is connected.
- mother tongue:** a tongue or language to which other languages owe their origin. One’s native language.
- Motown:** nickname for Detroit. A contraction of Motor City Town.
- mujahideen or mujahedeen:** *see* **mujahidin**.
- mujahidin:** rebel fighters in Islamic countries, especially those supporting the cause of Islam.
- mulatto:** one who is the offspring of parents of whom one is white and the other is black.
- multicultural:** awareness of the effect and existence of more than one cultural viewpoint within one’s value system and world view.
- multilingual:** having the ability to speak several languages. Also used to describe anything that contains or is expressed in several languages, such as directions written in English, Spanish, and French.
- mummify:** ancient method used to preserve the dead. Associated with ancient Egyptian culture.
- Muslim:** same as Moslem.
- Muslim New Year:** a Muslim holiday. Although in some countries 1 Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic year, is observed as a holiday, in other places the new year is observed on Sha’ban, the eighth month of the year. This practice apparently stems from pagan Arab times. Shab-i-Bharat, a national holiday in Bangladesh on this day, is held by many to be the occasion when God ordains all actions in the coming year.

## N

- native tongue:** one’s natural language. The language that is indigenous to an area.
- Nobel Laureate:** a person awarded a prize for lifetime achievement in literature, sciences, economics, or peace. Prize founded by Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel, inventor of dynamite.
- nomad:** a wanderer; member of a tribe of people who have no fixed place or abode, but move about from place to place depending on the availability of food sources.
- novena:** a series of prayers in honor of a saint for a specific reason.

## O

- obsidian:** a black, shiny volcanic rock, resembling glass.
- official language:** the language in which the business of a country and its government is conducted.
- Ottoman Empire:** a Turkish empire founded by Osman I in about 1603, that variously controlled large areas of land around the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian Seas until it was dissolved in 1918.
- outback region:** the rural interior region of the continent of Australia. It is sparsely populated, mainly by aboriginal peoples.
- overgrazing:** allowing animals to graze in an area to the point that the ground vegetation is damaged or destroyed.

## P

**pagan:** a person who worships more than one deity. Sometimes refers to non-Christians.

**pagoda:** in the Far East, a sacred tower, usually pyramidal in outline, richly carved, painted, or otherwise adorned, and of several stories. They can be, but are not always, connected to a temple.

**Paleoasiatic languages:** languages that date back to a prehistoric or unwritten era in linguistic history.

**parochial:** an institution supported by a church or parish.

**parody:** dance or song ridiculing a serious subject in a silly manner. Usually focuses on the person or people who dominate another cultural group.

**Parsi:** one of the descendants of those Persians who settled in India about the end of the seventh century in order to escape Mohammedan persecution, and who still retain their ancient religion. Also Parsee.

**Passover (Pesach):** a Jewish holiday. Pesach, lasting seven days in Israel and eight outside it, begins on 15 Nisan, at roughly the spring equinox, and recalls the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt and their delivery from bondage. The chief festival of Judaism, Pesach begins with a ceremonial family meal, or seder, at which special foods (including unleavened bread, or matzoh) are eaten and the Passover story (Haggadah) is read.

**pastoralist:** a nomadic people who move with their herds of sheep or cattle, searching for pasture and water.

**patois:** a dialect peculiar to a district or locality, in use especially among the peasantry or uneducated classes; hence, a rustic, provincial, or barbarous form of speech.

**patriarchal system:** a social system in which the head of the family or tribe is the father or oldest male. Kinship is determined and traced through the male members of the tribe.

**patrilineal (descent):** Descending from, or tracing descent through, the paternal line.

**patrilocal:** a society in which men take the larger role in activities and receive greater attention.

**peccary:** a pig-like animal native to North and South America and the Caribbean Islands. Noted for its musky smell, sharp tusks, and gray color.

**pentatonic:** music consisting of a five tone scale.

**Pentecost Monday (Whitmonday):** a Christian holiday. This public holiday observed in many countries occurs the day after Pentecost (derived from the ancient Greek pentekostos, "fiftieth"), or Whitsunday, which commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' apostles on the seventh Sunday after Easter and is derived from the Jewish feast of Shavuot. It was an important occasion for baptism in the early church, and the name "Whitsunday" originated from the white robes worn by the newly baptized.

**Pentecostal:** having to do with Pentecost, a Christian holiday celebrated the seventh Sunday after Easter, marking the day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles.

**peyote:** the tops of the small spineless mescal cactus. Native to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.

**phoneme:** slightly different sounds in a language that are heard as the same by a native speaker.

**pierogie:** a Polish dumpling made from pastry dough. It contains various fillings, such as meat and potatoes.

**pilgrimage:** a journey to a sacred place in order to perform some religious vow or duty, or to obtain some spiritual or miraculous benefit.

**polygamy:** the practice of having two or more spouses at the same time.

**polygyny:** the practice of having two or more wives and/or mistresses.

**polyphonic:** combining a number of harmonic sounds. Music that has more than one sound.

**polytheism:** belief and worship of many gods.

**post traumatic stress disorder:** psychological disorder that accompanies violent or tragic experiences. Known as shell-shock during World War I.

**Prayer Day:** a Christian holiday. This Danish public holiday is observed on the fourth Friday after Easter.

**Presbyterian:** of or pertaining to ecclesiastical government by elders or by presbyteries.

**Prophet Muhammed:** *see* Mohammed.

**proselytizing:** inducing or persuading someone to become the adherent of some religion, doctrine, sect, or party. To convert.

**Protestant:** a member or an adherent of one of those Christian bodies which descended from the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Originally applied to those who opposed or protested the Roman Catholic Church.

**province:** an administrative territory of a country.

**Purim:** a Jewish holiday. This holiday, celebrated on 14 Adar (Adar Sheni in a leap year), commemorates the delivery of the Jews from potential annihilation at the hands of Haman, viceroy of Persia, as described in the Book of Esther, which is read from a scroll (megillah). The day, though not a public holiday in Israel, is widely marked by charity, exchange of edible gifts, and feasting.

## R

**rabbi:** a Jewish religious leader; head of a congregation.

**racial integration:** to remove all restrictions and barriers preventing complete access to society to persons of all races.

**racially homogeneous:** composed of persons all of the same race.

**rain forest:** a tropical vegetation in the equatorial region of the world which consists of a dense growth of a wide variety of broadleaf evergreen trees and vines.

**Raksha Bandhan:** a Hindu holiday. During this festival, which usually falls in August, bracelets of colored thread and tinsel are tied by women to the wrists of their menfolk, thus binding the men to guard and protect them during the year. It is celebrated on the full moon of Sravana.

**Ramadan:** a Muslim holiday. The first day of Ramadan (the ninth month) is a public holiday in many countries, although the religious festival does not officially begin until the new moon is sighted from the Naval Observatory in Cairo, Egypt. The entire month commemorates the period in which the Prophet received divine revelation and is observed by a strict fast from sunrise to sundown. This observance is one of Islam's five main duties for believers.

**Rastafarian:** a member of a Jamaican cult begun in 1930 as a semi-religious, semi-political movement. Rastafarians are usually lower class men who are anti-white and advocate the return of blacks to Africa.

**refugee:** one who flees to a refuge, shelter or place of safety. One who in times of persecution or political commotion flees to a foreign country for safety.

**respiratory:** pertaining to the lungs and other breathing passages.

**Roman alphabet:** the alphabet of the ancient Romans from which the alphabets of most modern western European languages, including English, are derived.

**Roman Catholic Church:** the designation of the church of which the pope or bishop of Rome is the head, and which holds him, as the successor of St. Peter and heir of his spiritual authority, privileges, and gifts, as its supreme ruler, pastor, and teacher.

**Romance language:** the group of languages derived from Latin: French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and other related languages.

**Rosh Hashanah:** a Jewish holiday. The Jewish New Year is celebrated on 1 Tishri, the first month. In synagogues, the sounding of the shofar (ram's horn) heralds the new year. Rosh Hashanah begins the observance of the Ten Penitential Days, which culminate in Yom Kippur. Orthodox and Conservative Jews outside Israel celebrate 2 Tishri, the next day, as well.

**runic music:** music that is ancient, obscure, and mystical.

**Russian Orthodox:** the arm of the Orthodox Eastern Church which was the official church of czarist Russia.

## S

**Sacred Heart:** a Christian holiday. The Friday of the week after Corpus Christi is a holiday in Colombia. The object of devotion is the divine person of Jesus, whose heart is the symbol of his love for mankind.

**Samaritans:** a native or an inhabitant of Samaria; specifically, one of a race settled in the cities of Samaria by the king of Assyria after the removal of the Israelites from the country.

**samba:** a Brazilian dance and musical tradition based on two beats to the measure.

**sambo:** indicates a person of visible African ancestry. Familiar form of address for an uncle from the Foulah language of West Africa.

**Santer'a:** Christian religion with West African origins. It merges Christian saints with Yoruban deities.

**savanna:** a treeless or near treeless plain of a tropical or subtropical region dominated by drought-resistant grasses.

**schistosomiasis:** a tropical disease that is chronic and characterized by disorders of the liver, urinary bladder, lungs, or central nervous system.

**sect:** a religious denomination or group, often a dissenting one with extreme views.

**self-determination:** the desire of a culture to control its economic and social development.

**Semitic tongue:** an important family of languages distinguished by trilateral verbal roots and vowel inflections.

**Seventh-day Adventist:** one who believes in the second coming of Christ to establish a personal reign upon the earth. They observe the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath and believe in the existence of the spirit of prophecy among them.

**shaman:** holy man or woman said to have the power to heal diseases. Also thought to have magical powers.

**shamanism:** a religion centered on a belief in good and evil spirits that can be influenced only by shamans.

**Shavuot:** a Jewish holiday. This festival, on 6 Sivan, celebrates the presentation of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt.

Sinai and the offering of the first harvest fruits at the temple in Jerusalem. The precursor of the Christian Pentecost, Shavuot takes place on the 50th day after the first day of Passover.

**Shia Muslim:** member of one of two great sects of Islam. Shia Muslims believe that Ali and the Imams are the rightful successors of Mohammed (also commonly spelled Muhammed). They also believe that the last recognized Imam will return as a messiah. Also known as Shiites. (*Also see Sunni Muslim.*)

**Shiites:** *see Shia Muslim.*

**Shintoism:** the system of nature- and hero-worship which forms the indigenous religion of Japan.

**Shivarati (Mahashivarati):** a Hindu holiday. Dedicated to the god Shiva, this holiday is observed on the 13th day of the dark half of Magha, corresponding to January or February.

**Shrove Monday and Shrove Tuesday:** a Christian holiday. These two days occur just prior to the beginning of Lent (a term which derives from the Middle English *lente*, "spring"), the Christian season of penitence that ends with Easter Sunday. These are days of Carnival, public holidays of feasting, and merriment in many lands. Shrove Tuesday is also known as Mardi Gras.

**shunning:** Amish practice of not interacting in any way with a person who has been cast out by the church and the community.

**sierra:** a chain of hills or mountains.

**Sikh:** a member of a politico-religious community of India, founded as a sect around 1500 and based on the principles of monotheism and human brotherhood.

**Sino-Tibetan language family:** the family of languages spoken in Eastern Asia, including China, Thailand, Tibet, and Burma.

**slash-and-burn agriculture:** a hasty and sometimes temporary way of clearing land to make it available for agriculture by cutting down trees and burning them.

**slave trade:** the transportation of black Africans beginning in the 1700s to other countries to be sold as slaves-people owned as property and compelled to work for their owners at no pay.

**Slavic languages:** a major subgroup of the Indo-European language family. It is further subdivided into West Slavic (including Polish, Czech, Slovak and Sorbian), South Slavic (including Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, and Old Church Slavonic), and East Slavic (including Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian).

**Society of Friends:** a religious sect founded about 1650 whose members shun military service and believe in plain dress, behavior and worship. Also referred to as the Quaker religion by those outside it.

**Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God:** a Christian holiday. Observed on 1 January, this celebration was, before a 1969 Vatican reform, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**sorghum:** a type of tropical grass that is grown for grain, syrup, and livestock feed.

**St. Agatha's Day:** a Christian holiday. Celebrated on 5 February, it is the feast day of the patron saint of San Marino. St. Agatha is also the patron saint of nurses, firefighters, and jewelers.

**St. Dévôte Day:** a Christian holiday. Observed on 27 January in Monaco in honor of the principality's patron saint, this day

- celebrates her safe landing after a perilous voyage, thanks to a dove who directed her ship to the Monaco shore.
- St. James's Day:** a Christian holiday. Observed on 25 July, this day commemorates St. James the Greater, one of Jesus' 12 apostles. St. James is the patron saint of Spain.
- St. Joseph's Day:** a Christian holiday. The feast day in honor of Mary's husband is observed on 19 March as a public holiday in several countries.
- St. Patrick's Day:** a Christian holiday. This holiday, observed on 17 March, is celebrated in Ireland to honor its patron saint.
- St. Stephen's Day:** a Christian holiday. The feast day in honor of the first martyred Christian saint is 26 December, the day after Christmas. St. Stephen is the patron saint of Hungary.
- steppe:** a level tract of land more or less devoid of trees. It is a name given to certain parts of European and Asiatic Russia, of which the most characteristic feature is the absence of forests.
- stigmatize:** branding someone as a disgrace because of his or her behavior.
- straits:** a narrow passage of water connecting two bodies of water.
- stroganoff:** Russian beef stew. Sauce made from sour cream and wine.
- subcontinent:** a landmass of great size, but smaller than any of the continents; a large subdivision of a continent.
- subsistence farming:** farming that provides the minimum food goods necessary for the continuation of the farm family.
- Sudanic language group:** a related group of languages spoken in various areas of northern Africa, including Yoruba, Mandingo and Tshi.
- Sufi:** a Mohammedan mystic who believes (a) that God alone exists, and all visible and invisible beings are mere emanations from Him; (b) that, as God is the real author of all the acts of mankind, man is not a free agent, and there can be no real difference between good and evil; (c) that, as the soul existed before the body, and is confined within the latter as in a cage, death should be the chief object of desire, for only then does the soul return to the bosom of the divinity; and (d) that religions are matters of indifference, though some are more advantageous than others, and Sufism is the only true philosophy.
- Sukkot:** a Jewish holiday. This ancient Jewish harvest festival, which begins on 15 Tishri, recalls the period in which harvesters left their homes to dwell in the fields in sukkot, or booths—small outdoor shelters of boards, leaves, and branches—in order to facilitate gathering the crops before the seasonal rains began. In religious terms, it commemorates the 40 years of wandering in the desert by the ancient Hebrews after their exodus from Egypt. The 8th day of Sukkot (and the 22d day of Tishri) is Shmini Azeret/Simhat Torah, a joyous holiday in which the annual cycle of reading the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) is completed and begun anew. Outside of Israel, Simhat Torah and the beginning of a new reading cycle are celebrated on the next day, 23 Tishri.
- sultan:** a king of a Muslim state.
- Sunni Muslim:** Member of one of two major sects of the religion of Islam. Sunni Muslims adhere to strict orthodox traditions and believe that the four caliphs are the rightful successors to Mohammed, founder of Islam. (Mohammed is commonly spelled Muhammed, especially by Islamic people.) (*Also see Shia Muslim.*)
- surname:** a person's last name. Generally different from his or her first name.
- ## T
- taboo:** a system, practice, or act whereby persons, things, places, actions, or words are placed under ban, curse, or prohibition, or set apart as sacred or privileged in some specific manner.
- taiga:** a coniferous forest in the far northern areas of Canada, Alaska, and Eurasia.
- Taoism:** the doctrine of Lao-Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher (about 500 BC) as laid down by him in the Tao-te-ching.
- Thaipusam:** a Hindu holiday. A holiday in Malaysia, Thaipusam honors Subrimaya, son of Shiva and an important deity in southern India. The three-day festival is held in the month of Magha according to when Pusam, a section of the lunar zodiac, is on the ascendant.
- Tibeto-Burman language group:** a subgroup of the Sino-Tibetan language family which includes Tibetan and Burmese.
- Tishah b'Av:** a Jewish holiday. This holiday, which takes place on 9 Av, commemorates the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians (Chaldeans) in 586 BC and of the Second Temple by the Romans in AD 70. It is observed by fasting.
- toboggan:** a kind of sled without runners or a steering mechanism.
- topography:** an accurate drawing representing the surface of a region on maps and charts.
- toucan:** a brightly colored, fruit-eating bird of tropical America with a distinctive beak.
- trachoma:** contagious, viral infection of the cornea. Causes scarring in the eye.
- tribal society:** a society based on tribal consciousness and loyalties.
- tribal system:** a social community in which people are organized into groups or clans descended from common ancestors and sharing customs and languages.
- tsetse fly:** any of the several African insects which can transmit a variety of parasitic organisms through its bite. Some of these organisms can prove fatal to both human and animal victims.
- tundra:** a nearly level treeless area whose climate and vegetation are more characteristically arctic due to its northern position. Although the region attains seasonal temperatures warm enough to allow a thin layer of soil on the surface to unthaw enough to support the growth of various species of plants, the subsoil is permanently frozen.
- tutelary:** a god or spirit who acts a guardian that watches over a person or group of people.
- typhoon:** a violent hurricane occurring in the China Sea or Philippine region, principally between the months of July and October.
- ## U
- unemployment rate:** the overall unemployment rate is the percentage of the work force (both employed and unemployed) who claim to be unemployed. The natural unemployment rate is the lowest level at which unemployment in an economy can be maintained and still reflect a balance of the labor market and the product market.
- untouchables:** in 19th century India, members of the lowest caste in the caste system, a hereditary social class system.



They were considered unworthy to touch members of higher castes.

**urban center:** a city.

**USSR:** an abbreviation of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

## V

**veldt:** in South Africa, an unforested or thinly forested tract of land or region, a grassland.

**Vesak:** this last full moon day of Visakha highlights a three-day celebration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. It falls in April or May.

**voodoo:** a belief system which is based on sorcery and other primitive rites and the power of charms and fetishes, originating in Africa.

## W

**wadi(s):** the channel of a watercourse which is dry except in the rainy season. Also called wady.

**Windward Islands:** a southern group of islands stretching south to Trinidad. Part of the Lesser Antilles, but does not include Barbados.

## Y

**Yom Kippur:** a Jewish holiday. The Day of Atonement, spent in fasting, penitence, and prayer, is the most solemn day in Judaism. It takes place on 10 Tishri.

**yucca:** a plant native to Mexico, Central and South America, and the southwestern United States. Can grow to the 12 feet in height.

**yurt:** a framework tent of stretched felt or skins. Associated with Siberia and Mongolia.

## Z

**Zoroastrianism:** the system of religious doctrine taught by Zoroaster and his followers in the Avesta; the religion prevalent in Persia until its overthrow by the Muslims in the 7th century.



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